Australians at War Film Archive

Ronald Nolan (Ron) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:52 **So take me through where you were born?**

I was born in Toogoolawah, a small country town in the Brisbane Valley.

01:00 My father was a policeman, a mounted policeman. He was injured off a horse and had a kidney removed and as we came from a dairy farmer family he went back to that and started as a share farmer in Toogoolawah. From there he bought a farm further down towards Esk

01:30 at Mount Esk pocket and that's where I started school for a brief time. Just after the outbreak of war in nineteen thirty nine he sold that farm and bought a large dairy farm outside of Kingaroy at a place called Brooklands and that's where we spent the war years.

02:00 I went to school - sometimes - at a school called Silverleaf between Brooklands and Cumbria. It was about a seven mile horse ride each way and sometimes the school seemed to be short of students and it might have closed down for a period. I just can't remember exactly. But I did go to school there during World War Two.

02:30 About a week after the end of World War Two my Dad sold that farm and bought another one in near Mergin[?] and I went to school there for a year and then I was the only one in the class - in my class - I was there on my own. I actually didn't go back to school after twelve.

03:00 My mother had spent a lot of time getting me some education. She used to get me to read books - very good books, Charles Dickens etcetera. For which I've been grateful. From about age thirteen I either worked on the farm or I worked on other farms around

03:30 for money. Got paid for it. I think I was about fourteen when my mother's brother, who owned a droving rig, and worked out from Longreach to Windorah in that area took me with him and I spent the next three or four years on and off working for him. Firstly

04:00 as a gofer and then as a drover. In nineteen fifty there was a very severe drought and work dried up. Two or three young guys that I got to know around the Longreach area, we were talking and we decided that we'd join the army. That was in nineteen fifty one. So I joined the army on the sixteenth of April nineteen

04:30 fifty one. When we first went to enquire, the Korean War was going. And national service was about to begin. That was the three month national service that came in. And that was about to start. So we figured, well we were going to get caught up in that anyway, we needed a job. And they were advertising for people to go to Korea and we thought, "Oh

05:00 that sounds a bit of adventure". Initially, we went to join the air force. We wanted to be fighter pilots. The air force wasn't really interested. They said, "How would you like to be an air steward?" We thought, "No". So we went across to where Holsworthy army recruiting was. I particularly asked them - because I could drive a tractor. I used to drive tractors. I

05:30 could drive a tractor before I went to school. I said I'd like to be in the armoured corps. They said, "Oh sure, that's no problem. Sign here". They neglected to tell me that the Australian Army basically didn't have any tanks at that time. But anyway, four of us from the Longreach area joined the army on the same day. We did our recruit training at the recruit training company at Enoggera in Brisbane.

06:00 Finished it in August. Went to Sydney. Going back a bit - when we joined we asked about going to Korea and they said, "Oh no we're only taking people with World War Two experience to Korea, but you can join the Regular Army for six years". Which we did. Well in August I went to 1 Battalion in Ingleburn near Sydney. In October I was in Japan

06:30 heading for the battle school at Haramura prior to going to Korea. And I arrived there I think five days

before my nineteenth birthday on the sixteenth of December, I think it was. That was the 3 Battalion [3RAR Royal Australian Regiment], A Company, 1 Platoon. Spent the next twelve months with 3 Battalion. After that

07:00 I went back to Japan. Because I had done some work with the medical people in Korea - in fact, what I did - when the battalion was on rest periods - the first time we were on rest after I got there they came looking for anyone who could drive a four wheel drive blitz vehicle, which was the old Chev [Chevrolet] four wheel drives

07:30 that we used during World War Two. Because we'd had one on the farm at Kingaroy I could drive one. They said, "Well they need someone to drive the four wheel drive ambulance". So I went down and during rest periods I used to drive that. Actually I did it for an extended period of a couple of months at one stage when the battalion was out on rest. So when I went back to Japan

08:00 the doctor that had been at 3 Battalion had written to the senior Australian medical officer in Japan and he must have mentioned me because I expected to go Korea, Japan, Australia - heading for home. But I was asked to go up to the large general hospital in Kure to see an Australian

08:30 Army officer named Major Buck Rogers. He asked me would I like to stay on in Japan and work at the hospital. Which I did until September fifty three when I had to come home urgently. My mother had cancer from which she died in nineteen fifty four. Breast cancer. But in the meantime, without me actually initiating the change

09:00 my corps was changed from Royal Australian Infantry to Royal Australian Army Medical Corps. So that's where my change took place. I went to the Army Medical School which was in Victoria a number of times doing different courses - firstly a medical assistant's course and then an instructor's course.

09:30 And then I was fortunate enough to be selected to do one full year civil schooling to get a diploma in public health which normally takes three years, but we managed to get it in twelve months. So then I was with medical type postings from then on. But I was fortunate that certainly in the early years

10:00 I was back with the battalions as their health inspector. The public health officer with the infantry battalion. So I was back home. In nineteen sixty two I was commissioned and at the graduation interview I was offered the opportunity for a commission in the corps.

10:30 And I took the medical corps. I was thirty two years of age then and I thought I would have a better career prospect in the medical corps at that age. Nineteen sixty eight I went to Vietnam as the adjutant of the First Australian Field Hospital. To me, that was a plum job because that was the first field hospital that the Australian Army

11:00 had after World War Two. I really wanted the job as the adjutant and I got it. I was there for twelve months. Following on from that when I came home I was staff officer, personnel at Army Headquarters in Melbourne. Then I was made Commanding Officer at the School of Army Health at Healesville in Victoria

11:30 for four years. Then I was getting close to my thirty years service. I decided that I had done basically all I could do for the army. So I resigned my commission and got a job in civvie street [civilian life].

What did you do in Civvie Street?

I was fortunate.

12:00 I got a job as the general manager of a large medical service company here in Brisbane. It's the after hours' medical service, also called the Family Care Medical Service and I worked there from nineteen eighty two until nineteen ninety six. Then I retired, aged

12:30 sixty four.

Excellent. We'll now go right back to the beginning and talk about your childhood and growing up in World War Two. Tell me a bit about your father. What are your memories of him as a policeman?

None. Only the stories that he told me. I have no recollection of him being a policeman in

13:00 my lifetime. I think he may have been out of the police force before I was born. But just before I think. He came from a large family on a small property near Esk. There were nine children in his family. The name Nolan has a history of people either being policemen or priests.

13:30 He and his brother joined the police force. His brother's name was Gary. It was my ambition to be a policeman from when I can first remember. Mainly because I loved horses and he'd been in the mounted police. I went to join the police when I was sixteen to see if I could join the police cadets. And I passed

14:00 every exam and then probably the senior people at Petrie Terrace here in Brisbane where the barracks were then discussing between themselves whether or not I would grow to be five foot nine by the time I was nineteen - which was the minimum height. And they decided that they didn't think I would. And of course, they were right. I never did.

14:30 But that was a disappointment because I really did want to join the police force. When I thought of joining the army I thought that was similar. But I remember my father initially as a very strong hardworking farmer. Excellent horseman.

15:00 Loved breaking in horses. Taught the children to ride. I could ride long before I went to school. We all had our own horse. When we moved to the big farm outside of Kingaroy in nineteen thirty nine I remember those years growing up very fondly

15:30 - but I also remember World War Two was on. I can remember nineteen thirty nine when we were making the move up there. I can remember the Melbourne Cup being run that year and we were still at Esk at that stage. I think a horse named Rivett probably won the Melbourne Cup. But I also remember that the war started and we moved to Kingaroy. It was

16:00 a large farm - over a thousand acres. And we used to milk by hand more than a hundred milking cows twice a day. There was my father and my mother and the children did the milking. I suppose initially I don't remember how many - maybe I used to struggle through one or two - but I know my mother would milk twenty

16:30 each time round and my father probably twenty. But they shared them out anyway. As I can remember the war becoming serious from about nineteen forty two. And some of the things that stand out in my memory related to the war - well one of them - there was a meeting of the farmers in the area. Now the farmers, when I

17:00 say they were in the area - the nearest neighbour to us was probably two miles away and another one three miles away. A group of probably about ten from memory came to our place for a meeting one night. They worked out an alarm system for air raids. We were twenty miles from Kingaroy on a very poor bush road and we

17:30 did have an old twenty eight Chev [two wheel drive vehicle] that went sometimes. But they worked out a system that one of them had a phone and if he got a phone call to say that there was a likelihood of air raids they would each have a round plough disc hanging conspicuously somewhere near the house and they would bang it with a hammer.

18:00 And that sound would travel to the next farmer who would bang his. That was - now I don't recall it ever being used although there were air raids and air raid warnings in the Kingaroy area, I don't actually remember it. But they used to test it periodically. You'd listen and you'd hear the thing come down. I remember also something that I had overlooked until I was thinking about this the other day.

18:30 We awoke one morning and it must have been early nineteen forty three. In the background there was a strange noise. It was a deep growling sort of noise. My father says, "What's that?" And everyone said "Don't know what that is". But as the day went on this noise got louder and louder. And then we could see

19:00 huge clouds of dust. What it was, it was a convoy of American soldiers moving from south to north and they were on the road passing our property. It took all day for that convoy of vehicles to grind their way past our property. I remember my sister, Bernice, she was my younger sister and I

19:30 we were going to school. We rode our horses past this convoy of American soldiers. There were trucks loaded with American soldiers. There were Bren gun carriers. There were all sorts of things. By the time we got to school our school bags were full of chewing gum thrown from the back of the trucks. I suppose the trucks were moving at about

20:00 certainly no more than ten to twelve miles per hour because it was quite a steep range they were going up. I remember that. And it happened again probably about a month later, a second convoy. From what I've read since, there were two American divisions that were moving north to the Atherton Tablelands and that must have been the route that they chose to take.

20:30 **Was there ever any talk on the farm or amongst the other farmers about an evacuation plan if the Japanese …?**

There was some talk, but I think deliberately the children were kept in the dark about it although later my mother told me that there was a plan that we would be taken somewhere inland. She thought probably Charleville.

21:00 My father, who was on a pension from the police force - a disability pension having lost a kidney in the accident - he was called up to be prepared to go back to the police force to enable fit policemen to go into the army. That was never activated but he had his uniform and everything and he was ready to go at a moment's notice.

21:30 Thinking about it, that would have left my mother to run the farm and if the evacuation had happened I'm not sure what the plans were.

How closely would the family follow news of the war?

We had a radio operated by a car battery. When that car battery was fully charged the radio worked.

Though there would be times when

22:00 the battery would run flat and it would be sent on the milk truck - no the cream truck, we didn't sell milk, we sold cream. The cream truck came from Kingaroy three times a week to pick up all the cream from the farms around our area. So when the battery went flat it was sent on the cream truck into Kingaroy to be recharged. So we might be three days or six days without the radio. So we

22:30 wouldn't really have any news. Although I can remember we used to get the Courier Mail. I think we got it each time the cream truck came. That would have been three times a week. We must have got it because I can remember when the first bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. I can remember my father holding the Courier Mail and pointing to this

23:00 half page photo of Hiroshima after the bomb. I didn't really know what an atomic bomb was. How old I was then? Probably twelve I think. I know he said "The war's over, you know, that's it." We didn't hear a lot about

23:30 the war. It certainly didn't concern me. It didn't worry me. I was not worried about the war at that time. It wasn't something that was worrying me that much. American planes, they had a big airbase at Kingaroy. They used to fly very low over our property. They had a favourite trick of going over on their side and flying down the creek which was quite exciting. There was one had a crash landing about eight or nine miles away. So that was an outing

24:00 for the weekend for us all to go up and have a look at this plane.

What did it look like?

It wasn't damaged. It wasn't a very big plane - single wings. It had landed in a farmer's field on ploughed ground actually. After about a week they had it repaired and flew it off and went back to Kingaroy. There were some people who

24:30 acquired a few souvenirs off it though. Little bits of metal. Fortunately they weren't too big or it may not have been a good idea. No, I had what I thought was an ideal growing up on that farm. I loved it. The war was a sideline. It wasn't a serious thing to me. At that time.

Were there any ways that people would prepare for things?

25:00 I think we had stockpiled tinned food. Another interesting thing that I remember about the wartime - and I thought it was amusing then and now of course I realise it was serious. Italian prisoners of war came to Australia to work on farms. And they came to that area to work on the peanut farms. Kingaroy was and still is a major peanut growing area. We did not grow

25:30 peanuts. We were dairying, pigs and some fat cattle. But not far from the school that I went to, no I think before I said it was the Silverleaf school - it was Elsinmere[?] school and the school building is still there, but it's not a school now. Not far from there, where us children could see from the school,

26:00 Italian prisoners of war - and they all wore red jackets so as they stood out - working in the fields picking peanuts or cultivating the fields etcetera. Quite a lot of them.

What do you remember thinking about seeing them?

I remember asking, "Who are they? Why are they wearing red?" I think the school teacher or my parents told me that they were prisoners of war and had

26:30 been captured and that they'd been sent out here until the war was over. That was interesting. We never had any on our property.

Do you ever remember the war influencing things like games that you'd play as kids?

I don't really remember

27:00 playing games as kids. At school - this was a small school, one teacher and probably no more than about fifteen or eighteen children. That was spread across all classes and boys and girls. There was a tennis court at the school and we played a bit of tennis. I don't remember playing

27:30 war games. I remember probably we might have played some cowboys and Indians at school. But I don't remember war games and I don't remember children actually talking about the war very much. Except there were two or three families where the father was away at the war. I don't remember any of them being killed.

28:00 And two of them I certainly remember them returning and taking up to work on the farm again.

And how about - we were talking about rations off-camera before - can you tell me the way they worked in your family - the rations coupons?

28:30 Clothing was rationed. Petrol was rationed. And I think I mentioned we had an old twenty eight Chev. Petrol was a problem. It was virtually unobtainable. And we had fitted to that old twenty eight Chev something called a charcoal burner.

29:00 It was fitted on the back and it was like a large forty four gallon drum fitted onto the back of the car. It was fuelled from charcoal taken from where logs had burnt in bushfires etcetera or for any other purpose on the property. Us kids used to have the job of taking empty bags and shovels and collecting this stuff

29:30 and carting it home on our horses to fuel the charcoal burner for the car. It never worked very efficiently but it did drive the car. So it was obviously the gas that was generated. But it was also a fire hazard. It started a couple of bushfires, I know that. So petrol was a problem. I remember that.

30:00 After we'd been on the farm a couple of years - I think it was a couple of years - my father had milking machines installed. So the hand milking finished. That's when the number of cows milked went up to well over a hundred. And that was during the war. There were four milking bays. They could be put - the cows could be

30:30 milked much more quickly that way. I know that cream and butter was at a premium. They wanted as much as they could for the war effort. Cause the soldiers … and after the war of course a lot of butter was sent to the UK [United Kingdom] to assist with family food packs. I can remember that clothes were rationed and my mother used to get so many coupons for clothing.

31:00 I think that was always more than enough for us because clothing was always pretty basic - a pair of shorts and a shirt was what you wore to school, was what you wore on the farm. You didn't have a suit or a tie and you didn't need them. I never wore shoes until I was probably twelve and I got a pair of riding boots. But

31:30 prior to that I don't think I ever wore shoes at all. And I've got photos actually of myself and my brothers and two sisters and none of us had shoes on. The third rationing I can remember sugar was rationed, butter was rationed - that was not a problem to us because we produced it. And when I say we produced it, we

32:00 milked the cow, we separated the milk from the cream, and then some of that cream my mother took off and turned into butter. Her method was, a seven pound syrup billy with the lid on, put the cream in it and a half hour or three hours depending on various factors. I think the weather must have had some effect – 'cause sometimes it'd turn into butter and sometimes she'd be there for hours shaking this

32:30 cream which would eventually solidify and turn into butter. The separated milk which was separated from the cream was fed to the pigs. Of course, they were also fed on grain and pumpkin and things that we grew on the property. We had no problem with food and really the rationing of it didn't seem to cause us any

33:00 problems.

And so at what age did you start working as a drover?

I think I was fifteen. I'm pretty sure I was fifteen when that happened. I can remember my uncle, my mother's brother, coming to visit and he discovered that I

33:30 could ride reasonably well and that I loved horses. He convinced my mother that I should go with him for a couple of trips, which I did.

What was your first trip like?

I thought it was wonderful. I can remember the first trip. Some of the trips after

34:00 that I don't remember them all that clearly, but I know where we were. We took a mob of cattle from north of Longreach down to Stonehenge which was down near Windorah. I think it was about a six week trip sleeping out under the stars. I loved the outback and still do. Spend all my spare time out there. I think it goes back to that.

Can you just explain to me I guess what the

34:30 **basic job of a drover really is?**

It was to move a head of cattle from A to B. Without losing any preferably. And taking them via the stock routes and judging how much food there is for them on the stock route, where the water points are, watching for floods if the

35:00 rains come. Because in that country - the channel country - when it floods it might be ten miles of water. That's what the job is. You're up at night keeping them calm so they don't rush at night. Some people call it a stampede but we used to call it a rush in those times. And the days

35:30 were long and the saddle was a pillow. But it was a happy time. Everybody enjoyed it and worked together.

Can you tell me about how you'd try and keep them under control?

The cattle? Yeah. Someone would be - part of the driving - in our team I think

36:00 there were always about nine of us. Normally the head drover, who was my uncle, would take the lead and he might be a day or two days in the lead sourcing which way to go for the best food, where the water was etcetera. Sometimes he may only be a half a day in front. But sometimes he would camp out away out in front. Then there would be probably one or two on each

36:30 side of the mob depending how big it was. Say it was five hundred cattle - although we did have much larger mobs - one or two would ride out on the wings basically to keep them going in the right direction. Probably two at the back and the others would be bringing up the wagon with the supplies and the spare horses and sometimes someone might be

37:00 sort of idle depending on just what sort of country you were going over.

And how do you keep them - like if you're on the edges - how do you keep the cattle in line?

With dogs and whips, and a horse knows what it's doing. Generally speaking, after the first two or three days the cattle - they tend to herd anyway and if you can pick out

37:30 which are the leaders and they'll get up the front and if you can keep them going in the direction you want them to go the rest follow. It isn't a really demanding job most of the time. As long as you take care to see they're not startled of a night time. That's the scary bit.

And you mention these feed points that your uncle would go ahead

38:00 **to find. How did these work?**

Not feed points, but the actual - the route that we were going to follow. There are and still are designated stock routes. But there are alternative routes and if there'd been several mobs through a stock route it'd be eaten out and there'd be no food. He would have to arrange with one of the property owners to be allowed to go through maybe to get

38:30 around the area where there was no food. The food was as they went. There was no delivery of food to a food point as such. And the water was important - to know that there was water where we were anticipating there would be water.

And how would he communicate with you if he was ahead?

He would wait for us to catch up or he would come back. The

39:00 communication was all by hand and by messengers by horseback.

And how well did you enjoy this sort of work?

I loved it. Yes. I was quite happy doing it. And it wasn't day after day, three hundred and sixty five days a year. Because you'd deliver the mob and then depending on whether he had arranged another mob and where it was etcetera there might be

39:30 weeks where you didn't have anything to do other than repairing saddles and looking after the horses and maybe breaking in some new stock horses and things like that. And then heading to wherever the next mob was to be picked up. It was not usual work as some people think - that you'd take a mob from north of Longreach down to Windorah and pick up another mob and take it back. It didn't really work that way.

40:00 The mobs of cattle in the channel country move more in a circular motion. Whereas they may have come from the south but they could quite often come from the east and the north, be fattened somewhere. Normally they were going north to south. They were ready for the market. They were the ones that we were moving, the ones that were ready for market.

We'll just change tapes at that point.

Tape 2

00:36 **Tell us about what you thought of the lifestyle of a drover. How did you find it?**

Well it was really what I - it wasn't a change from my memories as a child. I grew up in the country; I grew up with horses and cattle. And a father who was an excellent horseman

01:00 and rider. It was just a natural progression. Even around the farm at Kingaroy there was always something to do assisting neighbours' branding or earmarking their cattle or moving some to the saleyard or bringing them back and it was really just a progression onto something that I

01:30 got paid for.

What about living out away from your parents at that stage?

It never concerned me. It was because I think that it was with my mother's brother - my uncle, Uncle

Jack - who was a really, really good man and excellent drover. Didn't drink, didn't smoke, didn't swear. Looked after

02:00 his men and his horses. He was - I was just fortunate that I was with him, I guess. I always enjoyed it. I do not ever remember any turmoil, any arguments or fights - which did occur in other droving rigs. He had his droving rig - the men in it virtually never left it. He

02:30 used to just contact them when he had a mob ready to move and they'd be there. So I never had any problems with it. It was probably I suppose it was a period in my life that formed my character for later years and I'm still the same. I have no fear of being alone.

03:00 I love to be in the bush on my own. I love bushwalking and travelling in the outback and I always figure that I can look after myself. That's probably due to that.

What areas were you droving exactly?

Mainly in the channel country which is south west Queensland from south of Winton down as far as Windorah. And

03:30 the stock route that we used to travel is still there and I've recently been out there - well, in the last couple of years - and driven most of it by vehicle now.

Did you come across any indigenous people?

Yes. We had two indigenous Australians and I'd like a chance later actually to speak about indigenous people in the army too. But yeah we had two indigenous people in the rig.

04:00 Excellent, excellent fellows. Friends of mine. And one of them in fact joined the army shortly after and went to Korea. Just after I got there he arrived as well.

Did you see him very much?

Yes.

And how did they get along with the rest of the crew?

With us they were just another member. I think it was unusual from what I've heard since that

04:30 they were paid the same as we were. But that wasn't always the case I suspect.

What about outside of the drovers? Would you come across aboriginal people?

Oh yes quite often there would be groups of aboriginals that we would come across. They were always - they were generally friendly and we never had any problem with them.

05:00 Once again, I would say that might be in part due to the fact that Jack never caused them any problems either. I think he was so well respected and they knew him and when he passed through where they were there was never any problem. They had wonderful information about where the water was though and

05:30 we went through in the really dry time - nineteen fifty, in the early fifties. Before the drought got to its really worst, but water was a major worry and we had a mob of over a thousand. And I think if it wasn't for the aboriginals' information we might have had trouble getting water. Cause we went to waterholes that we didn't know about.

And where

06:00 **were they living exactly?**

Some of them lived on the outskirts of the towns. Others lived further out in small communities around waterholes. They weren't self sufficient. They did get rations handed to them I think from stations, but it must have channelled down from a government source I guess and that was their pick up point. But they

06:30 did their hunting and fishing with traps in the rivers and that.

Who was owning this land officially that they were in?

The stock route - when you talk about a stock route some people get the idea that it's like a road, but of course it isn't. It might be fifty kilometres wide.

07:00 That's certainly crown land and still is. The other land was grazing lease. I don't know about all of it. Some of it could still have been crown land that we were travelling across. But generally it was grazing lease at that stage.

And do you have any examples where aboriginal people were stopped

07:30 **from using some of their traditional lands?**

No. No. No. I never thought of it, never was aware of it.

Would they share any of their cultural stories with you, the guys you worked with?

Yeah. One that I last

08:00 spoke to probably about ten years ago now - he died since so I won't be speaking to him again, but he was from near Augathella and I met him on one of our droving trips and I also met him later in the towards the end of the fifties when I was on holidays

08:30 when we went out that way because I was visiting some friends of mine from being in the army. And he told me a couple of stories that I've remembered. One in particular - his mother - it was about droughts. I've told people this recently actually and they're starting to believe me I think. His mother had passed down to her a

09:00 story and the tradition certainly in his group or tribe was that all the history was passed down through the female side of it. And it was about the weather patterns and droughts. And she said that there had been recorded periods - and she knew how to transfer their time into our time - there had been periods of

09:30 fifty years in that area when it had not rained. So that the droughts that we have now are pretty dreadful, but the worst one that I know of went for ten years out there. They believed that we could easily have a fifty year drought. In fact we're working towards one out there now. Cause it's dreadful out there now. We've just come back, my wife and I, from out in the south east corner.

10:00 And it's bad.

Well speaking of droughts, describe for me how the area changed in your time there as the drought started to come.

Well after the wet season and when the channels flood it can be ten miles of water across. My wife and I had travelled from Windorah to Birdsville and out onto the Simpson Desert

10:30 after a wet season and it's like a garden of Eden. There are flowers everywhere. The trees are all green. And even more so now that there are no rabbits. That has happened since the rabbits disappeared. But then when the rain doesn't come all that disappears and dies. If it goes for year

11:00 after year, as the area from Thargurminda to Quilpie is at the moment, there are no emus, there are no kangaroos, there are no birds, any very few trees alive.

What about when you were droving?

It was green. There was food for the cattle. There was oodles [great quantity] of water. And now it's bordering on desert country.

Did it

11:30 **change - back then, before you went to war, you said that the drought was coming on, did you notice this change?**

Shortage of water and food. But not to the desolation that's there now. It's worse now than I ever saw. But I was only there for three years approximately on and off.

So what made you decide to join?

12:00 **join the armed services?**

Well the drought. My uncle had no jobs lined up because there was no cattle being moved. And I - three of us got together and got talking and someone produced a Courier Mail that had a recruiting ad and earned some huge amount of money like six dollars a day or something.

12:30 "Live an adventurous life". "Career" was mentioned in that ad, I'm sure. But I haven't got the ad now. But I feel career was mentioned. So we decided - there was four of us - that we caught a train from Longreach - we hitched … We didn't hitch a ride. How did we get from Muttaburra to Longreach? We might have gone to Barcaldine and caught the train. Anyway we came to

13:00 Brisbane on the train and visited the air force recruiting first. That wasn't successful. So we went across the corridor to the army and we joined the army. There was myself, Len Fitzgerald, Doug Langden and Archie Wilson. Archie Wilson died suddenly way back in the sixties. Len Fitzgerald is still my best mate, lives in Barcaldine.

13:30 Doug Langden is my other best mate and he lives in Muttaburra. And he's the man who found the Muttaburrasaurus which is at the museum on the south bank of the Muttaburrasuarus Langdonia. Yes. We were young. We had no ties and we had no work lined up, although Doug's parents owned a property and a butcher shop in

14:00 Muttaburra. There was a history of army in his family. There wasn't in mine. He wanted to join the army

so we all joined the army.

You mentioned the air force first. Why didn't you get in the air force?

Oh I had never had any education at that stage. I had been to school on and off and I had some correspondence with my mum. But the basic education in Queensland those days was scholarship.

14:30 I never even went to - it was scholarship, junior and senior. Well I never even took the scholarship exam. For a very good reason - that I didn't turn up the day the exam was on I think. And I was speaking earlier on about growing up on the property at Kingaroy and I really hope that there are children who'll have the opportunity to grow up like I did there. I had a horse. I had two greyhound dogs.

15:00 Kangaroo dogs, we used to call them. And a cattle dog. They were mine. If I didn't make it to school, there was kangaroos to chase and dingos to chase. There were lots of things to do. And I had some indigenous friends there too which I neglected to mention earlier on. I'd like to call them aboriginal rather than indigenous. They were

15:30 aboriginals and they were my friends. They used to appear - now this was twenty miles from Kingaroy and we're talking about nineteen thirty nine, nineteen forty, forty one - they used to appear, a family of them. There was a man, woman, three children and a couple of others that were probably aunties I think.

16:00 And they would camp on our property for a few weeks at a time and then they'd disappear again. One of them was my age or thereabouts and we became friends. His name was Jimmy. I just lost contact with him as the years went by. He was a friend of mine growing up.

Did your father or mother ever have any concerns about …?

No. My mother,

16:30 no never. Jimmy used to come to the house and come into the house just like any other child. If it was dinner time he had his meal with us. Mum knew that if I was with him we were looking up a hollow log or chasing a goanna or down at the creek trying to catch a fish.

Would you go down to their camp at this stage?

Yes. But I

17:00 never spent much time there. No.

So you mentioned joining up. How'd you feel when you joined up?

Well I thought it was an adventure. And there's a couple of interesting things - probably I don't know whether you want to know about the light-hearted part of things but anyway, we joined up in Brisbane down in Eagle Street and we

17:30 were sworn in. My number is nineteen thirty one. And the others, they were all around about that number. And we were then taken out to Yeronga where there was a left-over military facility from World War Two. There were some huts and what have you. They were going to commence recruit training there. The army was about to be built up.

18:00 Korean War was going, the army had been allowed to run down. Now it's April fifty one and they decided they're going to build the army up and they're going to do the recruit training at Yeronga which had been a hospital during World War Two. It was then decided that it would be better to use it as a hospital and they moved the recruit training over to Inogra which where we did our

18:30 recruit training in three months - give or take a week or two - recruit training. But the first night at Yeronga okay, here's a bushie, I joined the army and we called in before we - we must have signed up and my parents had moved and they had a farm outside of Ipswich at Mudapili[?].

19:00 I must have spent the night there before I actually went into the army at Yeronga because my mother insisted on giving me a lovely double breasted grey suit that my elder brother, Frank who was then a police cadet, had outgrown. "You take this with you, Ron" my Mum said "You never know when you might need this".

19:30 Okay, so I took it and put it on the hanger and we went to Yeronga and there were a couple of steel wardrobes in this big barrack room and there were probably a dozen of us - myself and my three friends - and there was an aboriginal boy from Darwin and his name was Peter. He was what every aboriginal boy would like to be I'm sure. He was tall, well built, really good looking,

20:00 nice curly black hair and a really nice guy to talk to and he was about our age. I figured he might have been a year or two older than us. So the first night there I'm lying on my bed and we've had our evening meal and he said, "I'm going out tonight". I said, "Oh. Where are you going?" He said, "I'm going in to the city. I'm going to meet some friends

20:30 in there." He said, "I haven't got much to wear". And he didn't either. His clothes were pretty tatty. Mine weren't brilliant either, but anyway. I said, "Well you're welcome to borrow that suit hanging in

that cupboard there if you want to". And he put it on and it fitted him perfectly. It wouldn't fit me. It was about that much too long in the legs to start with. He put it on and he looked a million dollars. And away he went. Well I haven't seen him or the

21:00 suit since. But anyway, we spent a few days out at Yeronga and then over to Enoggera to join the recruit training company and three months of recruit training.

What do you do in recruit training?

Well you learn to march and you learn to fire guns, fire rifles, which I'd been doing from age five. And my friends had been kangaroo shooters etcetera.

21:30 But we were taught about the army. All the basic things you need to know. How to wear the uniform and how to march from A to B. How to read a map. Who to call "sir" and who not to.

Being a drover, what did you think of this kind of structure?

It took a little while to fit into it. But

22:00 I never found it really difficult. I found it amusing sometimes to see some of the city types that really did have a problem. The discipline - some of them had trouble accepting the discipline. I'm not aware that we had any problems.

What were the city types like?

There were some - there was a little boy of Italian descent

22:30 whose parents' had a fruit stall and he had never been away from home overnight and the first night he was in tears. But on the other extreme there were the real toughies who had knocked around.

23:00 But also of course there were some who were World War Two soldiers who had rejoined at the same time. We were held together until we had a group of about thirty which formed a platoon and then our training commenced. There was a mixture of people in that platoon.

Were they telling you about where you were going to be going?

No. At the end of the recruit training

23:30 we were interviewed and we were asked our preference. My preference was the armoured corps. I could drive a tractor - I thought, "Driving a tank, that should be pretty easy". I had told them that at recruiting, but they said, "Yes alright, but that'll have to come later because we haven't any vacancies

24:00 in the armoured corps at the moment, but we're sending you to 1 Battalion Royal Australian Regiment in Sydney at Ingleburn". "Oh okay good". And they told, fortunately they told my three mates the same thing so we all ended up at Ingleburn. Now that was an interesting plane trip too from Brisbane to Sydney. There was thirty odd soldiers that got

24:30 on the train at South Brisbane. Now there's a variety of people become soldiers. Some are good and some are bad. Some are alcoholics. We had one in our platoon who was an alcoholic. I was talking to my friends about this recently. I think at least three times I was picked by the platoon corporal; "Private

25:00 Nolan, go up to the orderly room, draw some tram tickets, go into the city to the watch house [police cells] at this address and collect this soldier". He'd been in the night before, got drunk, got arrested and he was in the watch house. So away I'd go. Three times I remember doing that. And he was a hopeless alcoholic. But there were some who were

25:30 bad. There was one who was caught thieving during our training. We set a trap because people were losing their money and he was caught and thrown out.

What was the trap?

Well it was some money planted and people just watched to see who went into the room and he was the only

26:00 one that went in there. And he was an A-grade footballer in Brisbane at the time. So they're not all good. But anyway, this train trip from Brisbane to Sydney - for some reason we were at South Brisbane station for about three hours before the train actually got mobile and a group of about eight

26:30 of them who were friends before they joined the army and they actually came from the Brisbane area, they got into the bar. There was a bar at South Brisbane Station. And they had quite a bit to drink. Then they carted some on with them onto the train. And I'll never forget as we're going through the Kyogle area where the train goes, does a switchback over the ranges there -

27:00 two of them are up on the coal tender because these were coal driven trains then, throwing lumps of coal at the driver. And when we pull into the platform at Casino of course there's the police waiting there to cart off three or four of us. Just different types. They were basically good people too. Good soldiers. But

27:30 they were bits of larrikins.

So you arrive in Sydney?

Yeah and out to 1 Battalion at Ingleburn where we were separated. My friends went off doing a driving course I think. Because I could already drive I only had to do a test and got a driver's licence. And I got a driver's

28:00 licence I think for every sort of vehicle that the army had just because I demonstrated that I could drive them. And I've still got that licence. But that separated us. I then was sent out to Greenbank - no to Greenhills to do some advanced infantry training which was

28:30 night patrolling and ambushing and a lot of range firing. Which I thought was pretty interesting. And then I got the posting order to Japan on my way to Korea. And I was still eighteen at that stage by the way. I was in Korea before I turned nineteen.

You mentioned before that you were interested in driving tanks.

29:00 **Did they tell you anything about that?**

No. And I still haven't driven a tank. No. That faded into the background. I don't think I ever raised it again after I left the recruit training.

Did you ever see any tanks?

Oh yes. In Korea I saw a tank that I could have done without I can tell you.

29:30 **I mean Australian tanks?**

Yes

What did you know of Korea at the time?

Nothing. I knew because someone must have shown me an atlas I guess, but I knew it was up there somewhere. And I knew they were baddies because they were Communists and we were Catholics. I came up in a very strict Catholic family.

30:00 I can remember when - I had to get my parents' consent to join the army. That was the reason I went out that night - went home before - I had to get the form signed by my parents cause I was only eighteen. And my mother had no hesitation. Oh no. "That's a good thing, son, we've got to have an army because the communists are trying to take over the world and they want to wipe out the

30:30 Catholic Church".

So what was it about communism exactly?

I think that it was either communism or Catholicism. I think that's basically what the argument was. You couldn't practice your religion if there

31:00 was a communist government. So the communists were all bad.

When you say strict Catholic, what did this involve for you personally?

Well growing up every night the rosary was said as a family group. There used to be a mass at Nanango - this was when we were on the farm

31:30 outside of Kingaroy. Kingaroy and Nanango are about twenty miles apart and we were out towards Cumbria. There would be a mass at Cumbria once a month at probably ten in the morning. We would go to that. If the car was going we would go in the car. If it wasn't going we'd go by horseback. I remember twice while we lived on

32:00 that farm a mission. We went every night to hear the missionary priests speak in Nanango which was twenty miles away.

How long would that trip take you?

Hours. Four hours. Four, probably five, hours.

32:30 Actually maybe the mission came to us - there was a church in Brooklyn which was only about five miles from home. Maybe the missionary may have come there. That's probably what it was, it was five miles. But while we lived in Kingaroy - I was telling you about my mother's brother - Cumbria was about ten miles - Cumbria is a nice little country town now too - but it was about ten miles from where our farm was.

33:00 When my uncle was visiting us when I first met him they used to have movies in Cumbria. We rode our horses to Cumbria to go to the movies, see Hopalong Cassidy. My uncle and myself. We became good friends.

Sorry. With the communism, was that enough of a reason -

33:30 **the Catholicism - for you?**

I really don't recall it being a matter of any importance to me really. This was an adventure. Everything I was doing was new and this looked like I was going to Japan which I thought it had to be interesting to see Japan. You know, those horrible Japanese in World War Two - this is where they lived.

34:00 And religion wasn't really a problem, but as I say it was a good enough reason for my parents for me to be in the army. They had no hesitation to sign the form.

When you mentioned the Japanese, what kind of expectations were you having of Japan?

I can't recall what my expectations were. I honestly can't. But I have some recollections

34:30 of - I can recollect my arrival in Japan and what my thoughts were then. We flew to Japan via Singapore, no, via Manus, Hong Kong and Japan and Iwakuni Airport in south Japan. And then we went by

35:00 vehicle to Hiro which is close to Kure. Kure was a big port, a big naval place during the war. But I can remember the first thing - driving along the road and seeing Japanese women, some of them quite old, working on the road repairing the road, repairing the tram lines. Some might have a baby on their back. They were

35:30 carrying huge baskets of stone. That's what they were doing. I can remember that quite clearly.

What did you think of this?

I felt sorry for them. But I don't know why because the women in Australia worked pretty hard on the farms and that too. But this looked to me as if it was pretty heavy work they were doing.

36:00 Little children, some of them who were at that stage malnourished, in the streets. There was an overpowering smell of garbage and it wasn't a nice place in nineteen fifty one - parts of it anyway. It was an introduction to me of the sort of thing which I later came across in Vietnam and places like that. Can I stop for a minute?

36:30 **Oh yes.**

And what kind of sights were you seeing in Japan?

Bombed-out buildings. Lots of damage. Lots of bombed-out buildings. The roads were very poor. And that's what these people were working on trying to repair them.

37:00 As we got towards Kure, coming from Iwakuni you passed through Kure to get to Hiro and Hiro was where the big Australian base was although Kure was actually joined to Hiro and that's where the shopping centres was and where the big naval base and the big naval hospital was

37:30 here I ended up working later. There were lots of damaged buildings, but once you got into Kure and I started seeing lots of British and American forces and their vehicles and their influence in the form of bars with European

38:00 writing like Flamingo Bar, Pink Pussycat Bar. I thought, that's not Japanese. But then you soon realised you're in with the occupation forces.

What was your impression of this kind of scene?

I don't know. I just remember recording it coming into the area where the occupation forces

38:30 were and they'd been for six years. And there were a lot of Australians in Japan – British [and] Commonwealth Occupation Forces. 'Cause three battalions were started at - it was the first battalion to go across to Korea. It was still under basically military rule.

39:00 **What was the Australian base like?**

At Hiro? Well the accommodation was in tents and these are the old-type tents, canvas tents with a fly over the top. I got there in October. It was just starting to get cold. It got colder and colder.

39:30 But the camp itself was well run. Good facilities, good kitchen, good mess halls, good canteen and everything we needed there.

I think we might have to stop there.

Tape 3

00:37 **So the training in Japan, we talked a little about the way the camp was set up, but what were the general day-to-day things that they had you doing?**

Training. Physical fitness. Sport. I'll elaborate on the training - and the sport's combined with it - and the sport was rugby union.

01:00 We were trying to get as fit as possible before tackling the British-controlled battle school at Haramura which is in the mountains about forty kilometres north of Hiro. So we did a lot of running and sport and

01:30 generally physical training, physical fitness. And then we went to the battle school at Haramura. Now the training in the lead up might be a forty kilometre route march followed by a game of rugby union in the afternoon and then on guard duty

02:00 at night. The guard duty being more a tokenism really, but teaching soldiers to be able to get by with two hours sleep, two hours awake, or one hour asleep, one hour awake. I now know of course that this was good training leading up to where we were going. So we then went to the battle school at

02:30 Haramura. That went for I think eighteen days. It was meant to be three weeks but actually I think it was probably eighteen days. That was a battle school with all conditions as close as possible as the real thing. All live ammunition, all live firing and living in the field.

03:00 An example of some of the training - and not everyone survived the battle school - we would be given the task as a group of say eight or ten to launch an attack on a hill. We had to requisition our supplies, our ammunition and arrange for resupply

03:30 of ammunition, arrange for evacuation of casualties that were likely and prepare a fire plan. A fire plan is the co-ordination of all the supporting fire elements - tanks, artillery, machine guns - so as they all did the right thing at the right time, hopefully without shooting us.

04:00 It was as realistic as this - that to attack the hill the section would form up on what's called the start line - somewhere a start line would be designated on the map - and then it'd be reconnoitred and then the soldiers that were going to put in the attack - regardless of how many of them were involved - would form up on the start line

04:30 which quite often would be a creek bed or some physical feature on the ground. Then the fire plan would commence with artillery fire onto the top of the hill to neutralise the enemy that were there - in theory. At the start time fire and movement

05:00 would be something you're familiar with - a third of the troops would move while the others provided covering fire. And then another third would move and then another third and work our way up the hill with the artillery firing as close over our head as possible without causing casualties. In other words, depending on the grade of the hill how

05:30 far in front of the leading troops the rounds would land. The first time this happened it was fortunate that it was at a battle school because probably half of us would have run away. The sound is frightening, it's dreadful. There's this like a freight train approaching from the rear. And then this awful scream as the shell hits the ground and you can

06:00 see maybe thirty metres in front of you a great cloud of dirt and dust and smoke that goes up. Simultaneously you hear the shrapnel zipping through the air, hopefully over your head. This is the critical thing that the artillery people have got it right and they've got the right distance

06:30 taking in account the grade that we're going up etcetera. Now, this was a battle school.

Did anyone on that first time when the artillery went over run away?

No. I don't think so in our group, but they were a bit hesitant to get up. The first group went up and the fire and movement and the second group, I think might have had second thoughts, "Do I go?" you know, but they all went.

07:00 And this is still tactics that we employ today in the Australian Army - when we get to within maybe twenty metres from the crescent of the hill the fire would lift, obviously, because we'd be getting into the danger area from our own artillery. The machine guns would start from the flanks. And they would be firing with chasers as well so we could see where

07:30 they were coming in. Then we would form up in line, fix bayonets and charge over the hill. Now that was a typical exercise at the battle school. But then having in theory captured the hill it had to be cleared of booby traps and mines that were there - they'd been placed there. There were

08:00 enemy who would then re-attack the hill from some other direction and we would have to go into defensive positions, dig fox holes etcetera. Come night there were enemy and there were real enemy forces - staff obviously - who would harass us during the night. You had to pick them up before they got close enough or you were considered out of the

08:30 picture. It snowed several times when we were doing things like this and it was bitterly cold. And the food - we were on twenty four hour ration packs which is the basic infantry soldiers' ration pack. You had to make do with that. Somehow or other managed to make up a brew.

How would you do that?

A little

09:00 hexamine cooker [solid fuel burner] that comes with your pack. They're like a little metal stove and you put a couple of tablets in it and light it up and if you're lucky you can boil up your pannikin [drinking bottle contents] and put some tea or coffee or soup in it. But everything had to be - and it was, this was a brilliant battle school and the Brits are excellent at doing this -

09:30 the commander of the battle school was a colonel and I forget his name, I think it was Ferguson but I wouldn't be sure. He was an eccentric. He was crazy. He was known as the mad colonel, but he ran a brilliant battle school. I can see that now.

Why?

He used to get around with a huge stick that he used as a walking stick or he'd clobber someone whose head was too high and he was likely to get it taken off with a tracer round -

10:00 he'd get whacked with the stick. Crawling under barbed wire, over barbed wire, laying barbed wire in defence - it was all done at the battle school.

What other things would he do that made him eccentric or mad?

He would think up exercises - you'd take the hill, the enemy would attack and you'd beat them off. You'd think, right, a bit of peace and quiet. But the next thing

10:30 the enemy would appear in the midst. They'd been left there in the first place but hid until the middle of the night. Things would just caught you off your guard. And he was eccentric.

In what ways?

He'd walk in to a lecture and he'd pull a grenade out of his pocket and he'd throw it to someone with the pin

11:00 removed. The first time he did it, it was terrifying because you really thought it was a live grenade. It wasn't. It was a dummy grenade. So those were the sort of things.

What was the reaction the first time he did that?

People hit the ground. Because they thought he'd completely flipped his lid. Actually

11:30 I would say we were as prepared as was possible to be for what happened once we really did get to Korea.

Was this training specifically geared for Korea?

Yes. The instructors were - most of our instructors were either Brits or Australians who had been to Korea and completed their first twelve months. The war had been going for over twelve months at this stage.

12:00 They were back there as instructors. They were really good.

During this training, how had actually being exposed to what a real combat situation might be like, had your expectations about war changed at all from when you first ….?

Yes. I think so. This is getting serious. And it got exceptionally serious the day we took the casualties. It wasn't in my

12:30 platoon. It was really a few hundred metres away. What happened was, a two inch mortar was being used by the instructors and they had - the mortar has a base plate that you set it on a firm footing to drop the mortar bomb down. They sat it on a sand bank which gave way and therefore the mortar fell forward.

13:00 I think we lost three killed from that mortar bomb. And this is in Japan. We were still training for war at that time. So suddenly it became very serious.

What was your reaction when this happened?

There was a fair bit of disquiet amongst the people who were being trained. But there was no outward sort of revolt or anything but I

13:30 think we became more introspective and serious. This is a serious business. People are getting killed. And I certainly I can consciously remember making some decisions on that battle school. One was that I would from that point on attempt to be a hundred percent alert,

14:00 a hundred percent of the time. And that I would attempt to learn everything I could about this business of war. We were introduced to weapons we had never seen. One was a bazooka which is a rocket designed to disable or destroy

14:30 tanks or fortifications. It was almost left optional. “Do you fellows want to fire the bazooka?” Well some didn’t bother firing it. And to me that was a basic mistake and they shouldn’t have been given a choice. I certainly took the chance. We were firing at a given target. It appeared a simple process to me. You lay down

15:00 and you had to be two people, one fired and one loaded. And you got the cross hairs on the target and providing you had the range set properly you hit the target. Well it wasn’t quite that simple, but the opportunity was there to practice until you did hit the target every time. And yet some soldiers went to Korea never having fired one. There are some dangers with it.

15:30 The back blast is quite serious. You’ve got to be careful it’s not up against a wall or something at the back or it’ll, it’s likely to blow your head off.

What other things about the training made you change your attitude about being prepared - what other lessons were you learning?

16:00 The importance of being able to have complete trust in your fellow soldiers and the importance of understanding them, of getting to know them, know how they felt and how they would react under a certain set of circumstances. And that’s not easy. And it takes some time to build that up.

What was teaching you this?

16:30 I don’t know. Process of osmosis I think as you went along. You could see it growing in other soldiers too, that as the days went by they did begin to work as a team. If you expected Private

17:00 Smith to be somewhere, he was there. And if you expected him to be somewhere else, he was there. Or if you thought he’d be there and something happened, he’d go there - and he did go there. These are the sort of things that built up as the training went on.

What other sorts of things would you learn about the other men - their reactions and this sort of thing?

Yes. We all react differently to different circumstances

17:30 and different sets of circumstances. But the downside of this is, there’s thirty of us doing this battle school and at the end of it we were a pretty well trained group of soldiers. But then of course they take us to Korea and put three of us in that company and put three in that company.

18:00 So we never ever operate as a group of thirty. Probably the good thing is that the people that you go into have been operating in the real thing. So it isn’t so much of an integration or lack of integration factor. You very quickly get over that and you know what you’re looking for.

And how long did this training go for?

18:30 Three weeks. Eighteen days I think, but it was supposed to be three weeks. But we did go back to Hiro. At least twice during that eighteen days - force route march. Depart at midnight, five kilometres an hour, eight am was our breakfast at Hiro, play a game of rugby union and head back to Haramura in the afternoon. If

19:00 you can do that you’re pretty fit. We used to do that. There were some who didn’t do it, didn’t pass. I don’t know what happened to them really. I’ve never heard of them since. But I guess they either stayed on in Japan or they went home to Australia and went into an easier corps. Cause infantry’s the hardest corps.

And we talked a little about your expectations of actual

19:30 **warfare, but how were you feeling about the fact that you’d be going soon?**

I never felt any - I never had the feeling that anything bad was going to happen to me - not me, it might be him. I really didn’t think it would happen to me - at that stage I didn’t think that. Later in

20:00 Korea I rationalised that, but I had no hesitation in going. That didn’t scare me off, that battle school. I thought, “I can manage this”.

Was there any sort of anticipation?

Yes. Because while we were at the battle school a major operation had taken place in Korea with major casualties which really

20:30 was a major setback for 3 Battalion - the Battle of Maryang Sang- and when I arrived in Korea it had just finished and the battalion was out on rest. Each day we used to hear - because there was really good communication channels through these instructors that were there at Haramura - we knew what the casualties were. And there were a lot.

21:00 I think they lost something like seventeen killed. It was a victory for 3 Battalion, but it was a victory at a high price.

And how did hearing this news affect you?

I don’t recall it ever crossing my mind that I wouldn’t go or I didn’t want to go. But I knew that there was danger there.

21:30 **What sort of things were the instructors telling you - I mean aside from the tactics and battle things that they were teaching you. Were they giving you any other hints or tips about things you might come across in Korea?**

Yes. This was the thing that I referred to earlier about being alert a hundred percent of the time. If there’s a soldier, a corporal or a sergeant, who’s been there and survived I immediately thought,

22:00 “He’s got to have something to say worth listening to”. When you’d be having a rest period or you’d be waiting for something to happen and they were around, they would talk. There was a lot to be learnt. How to prevent getting frostbite.

How?

There are all sorts of ways. And …

22:30 **What sorts?**

When we actually got - well a lot of this is not possible, but if you can manage these things - don’t get your clothes wet with sweat because the sweat freezes. Always wear two pairs of socks. Always have a spare pair of socks. Keep moving your feet and your toes when you’re on picket. You can’t move around, but you can wriggle your toes.

23:00 Those sort of basic things. Don’t touch your weapon with your bare hands because if it’s frozen you lose all your skin off your hands and it sticks to your weapon. And it wasn’t quite that cold at Haramura - it wasn’t anywhere near as cold, we thought it was bloody awfully cold, but that was nothing compared to when we actually got to Korea and it was freezing.

What other sorts of things

23:30 **would they tell you?**

Thinking back on it - I hadn’t thought about this before - I don’t recall any of them telling us any war risks – “I did that” or “I did this” or “We did this or that”. They were all trying to help. They wanted to pass on the knowledge that they had.

24:00 I suppose general things like the New Zealand artillery, for example, which always supported 3 Battalion, 16th Field Regiment, how great they were and how reliable they were and how they would basically do anything to try and save the day for anyone in

24:30 3 Battalion and they often did. Things like that. How the Americans operated quite differently to us. I’d like to speak more about that when I’m actually talking about Korea, but they alerted us to that. Where Australia relied on fire and movement

25:00 I think most people probably from TV programmes - Band of Brothers or something - would know what fire and movement is now. That is, a limited number of men employing fire and movement with skill can do as much as a large number of men not doing it. The Americans didn’t employ fire and movement very well and didn’t try to.

25:30 Volume of fire was the Americans answer and it still is. The amount of ammunition that they would use in a week, 3 Battalion wouldn’t use it in two months. And yet we would probably gain more ground with less casualties and kill more enemies. And these were the sorts of things we were alerted to by these guys who’d been there. And the other advantage of these instructors,

26:00 and this carried through to Korea too, was that they were all ex-World War Two soldiers. So that was the other reason for listening to what they had to say.

What kind of information would you gain from the World War Two experience?

How soldiers react under fire and the odd one that goes troppo [mentally affected by war experience] and what signs to look out for.

26:30 And just their general demeanour. They know you can get killed. They’ve been through it.

How does this affect their demeanour?

They’re generally quiet, self possessed and don’t panic. Confident.

27:00 They instil confidence in people that they’re instructing.

How did this help you to deal with issues of death and things like that?

I think it was one of the factors that helped me deal with it. Not long ago,

27:30 actually, one of my children - my daughter whom I love dearly - got to asking me some questions. She

said, cause she'd watched Band Of Brothers. She said, "It always intrigues me, Dad, how

28:00 can you bring yourself to get up and go forward when you know that there's every likelihood that you'll be killed?" I thought about it and my answer was, and I think it's right, "I didn't really think I'd be killed. But I realised that I might be injured, might be wounded". I didn't

28:30 worry too much about that because firstly I had complete faith in the medical people behind me that they would look after me if I was wounded. And that I just didn't think that I'd get killed. I don't know why.

29:00 I just didn't think. I knew it possible. And the one thing and I've spoken to other infantry soldiers about this, there's one thing that stops an infantry soldier from not getting up and going forward - he doesn't want to be a coward.

29:30 Can I stop?

Yeah sure. Shall we I guess take it from the point where you travelled to Korea. Can you tell me about the ship that you travelled on?

You must have checked your notes that I went on a ship. Yes. Empire Longford. An old

30:00 British troop carrier. Huge flakes of rust falling off it. It was a funny old ship. I'm not sure now - I get confused - about how many were on board. There were Australians, Canadians and British on that Empire Longford. And I was speaking to my mate, Lennie Fitzgerald when I called him the other night on the phone and I said, "How many of us

30:30 were on the Empire Longford?" and he said, "I don't know. I reckon about two hundred and fifty". And I think he's probably right. It was about two hundred and fifty.

How well did the ship accommodate this many people?

Not very well. But we weren't on it all that long. I can't remember how many nights we spent on it. It might have been three or four. I remember there were some

31:00 hammock-type beds in tiers down below. It was too cold on deck. You certainly couldn't sleep on deck and in fact the waves broke over the deck quite often. Some of the railing was missing. There was a rumour that a couple of Canadians actually disappeared overboard, but I don't know whether that was true or not. But it certainly could

31:30 happen. I remember we left from Yokohama and the first night meal after I don't know I think we must have left in the morning, anyway the first night meal - no must have left

32:00 in the evening because at breakfast the next morning there were two hundred and fifty breakfasts and about six of us rolled up to eat. The rest were hanging over the rail because it was rough.

So were you a good sailor?

Yes. I'd never been on a boat so I didn't know you were supposed to get seasick. So we all had a big breakfast, the few of us that turned up. And that was the case most of the way across. It was a pretty

32:30 rough old boat.

What would you do to entertain yourselves?

I don't recall doing anything other than we were allowed to fire our weapons over the stern once on the trip. Obviously you cleaned them daily. There were no card games that I'm aware of. It was just too

33:00 rough. It was a rough trip. And we went around to Inchon.

On that ship, what was the interaction like between the British, Australians and Canadians?

I remember speaking to some Canadians in the mess hall. They were quite decent. They'd been to the battle school too. It was a Commonwealth battle school.

33:30 But I can't place their faces. I can't call their faces into view. I can remember speaking with some British who were young national servicemen. I don't have any contact with them. It's not there.

34:00 I suspect when I wasn't queuing up to eat I was sitting quietly somewhere. Talking with my friends or something. There was nothing special about it.

Were there any stereotypes that were upheld about the British troops and ...?

No. But there were some Canadian military police on the Empire Langford which I think they kept pretty well out of sight.

34:30 The rumour was that two of them disappeared overboard, but I have no confirmation of that. It's something I'd forgotten about until actually Lennie mentioned it to me. He said, "I wonder if it was

true?" I said, "I have no idea".

Was there rumours that they ...?

Had been given a shove? Yes. And there are things like that that happen in wartime. But I can't confirm that one.

35:00 When we got to Inchon I recall that we got there in the morning - maybe eight or something like that. And we landed over the side on cargo nets, scrambled down cargo nets into little lighter type boats.

What's a cargo net?

A mesh net that they hang over the sides.

35:30 And we scrambled down that. And the British officer who was supervising this - I remember him saying - and I couldn't swim. I still can't swim by the way. He said, "If any of you guys" (no, guys wasn't a word in those days) "If any of you

36:00 chaps can't swim, don't worry because as soon as you hit the water it's that cold you're dead anyway".

Did this reassure you?

I hung on tight, but I had no trouble. I went down the cargo and into the boat and into the shore. We landed at Inchon without any mishap.

What's Inchon like?

It was a port city.

36:30 Very few buildings that were above about two storeys high as I recall. Pretty flat country. I remember Japanese seamen type men watching us come ashore. I think they were waiting to service the boat or something like this. But we got fairly quickly onto a train.

Was there any war damage at

37:00 **Inchon that you observed?**

Yes. There was some war damage. I remember some of the buildings obviously had been shelled and damaged. I think it had been pretty well damaged in the first phase of the war when they went out and then came back through. That became much more obvious very quickly

37:30 after we got on the train. Because we got on the train and the train really was a cattle truck. They were what we would call cattle trucks. No seats. So you sat on the floor. And for the evening meal I remember quite clearly a British staff sergeant coming along with a carton of what's called C rations. They're not your twenty four hour ration packs.

38:00 They're meant for a section of men. We would get one of these packs and that would be a meal for the whole section. You need to have facilities to heat it up - large cans of potatoes and couple of cans of Spam-type bully beef [corned beef]. I can remember him throwing one of these cartons in, which a group of us said,

38:30 "Well that's ours".

Were these American rations?

No. The C rations were British. I don't know, and I've looked through my books, and I cannot find who was running the train - whether it was British or American or Korean. I just remember that this cattle truck that we were sitting in through the night.

These C rations, was it just food or

39:00 **like the Americans was there cigarettes or ...?**

I don't think there was any cigarettes came with them but there was a few tissues and matches and things like that. But of course we had no way of heating them. So what we ate that night, we ate cold.

So you didn't have the ...?

No. There was no - they don't come with any cooking facility. Not like the twenty four hour combat pack.

39:30 Which I lived on for the next year more or less anyway. No. That was not a very comfortable night on that train.

Did you get to see any of Korea as you were travelling?

Yes. We must have left Inchon early afternoon. Yes, I saw it all. Flattened. We went through villages completely flattened.

40:00 And we didn't go through any major towns. Inchon isn't that far from where the Australian area,

responsibility, was. That's almost on the extreme left of the peninsula on the western side. Probably maybe a hundred and fifty kilometres we travelled by train. Because the battalion was out on rest

40:30 I think we got off at Pak Chon and were picked up in Chukch'on-ni and taken to the Australian area. I don't remember a lot about that train trip other than I could see a lot of war damage. And we could see a lot of war-type vehicles. American vehicles, British vehicles travelling to and fro.

We'll just change tapes there.

Tape 4

00:37 **Okay so where did you go after you got off the train?**

We were picked up in trucks and taken to the 3 Battalion area - battalion headquarters. Our battalion was out of the line on rest after Operation Commando or Maryang San as it's been called of late.

01:00 We were allocated there. The RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] was there and I forget who else. But we were basically allocated to various companies. I was sent to A Company. There was an escort there.

01:30 There were I think probably about nine or ten of us who went to A Company. A larger group went to C Company because they had suffered the bulk of the casualties in think in Maryang San. The escort or the guide took us to the company area where we met the OC [Officer Commanding] of the company, Major [Jefferey] "Jim" Shelton, who I still know quite well.

02:00 And had the pleasure speaking to him recently on Anzac Day. We were then allocated to our sections. That was it. The battalion was out of the line for a couple of weeks after that. In that time we got to know other people in the section. We were briefed on what happened and what was likely to happen.

02:30 From that day on we were on twenty four hour ration packs. Which are the combat packs. Each soldier gets a pack once a day and that's his food. Got cigarettes - these were American rations. Got enough food and it also comes with a pack of Lucky Strike cigarettes - it used to be Lucky Strike. I didn't smoke so I thought I better start.

03:00 And also there was some training going on. This was the opportunity to integrate us reos [reinforcements] into the section. We were issued with new weapons. We didn't bring our weapons from Japan with us. We were issued with new weapons.

03:30 I was in C section 1 Platoon. The Bren gunner from my section - the Bren gtunner is the light machine gunner that each infantry section has - I think he'd been severely wounded and evacuated, so I inherited the Bren gun, which suited me because I loved it. I thought it was - and I still do -

04:00 thought it was a great, one of the best infantry weapons we've had. And we tried these weapons. We made sure that we understood them and other section people knew us and who we were and what we could do. The section commander, he needed to get to know us and we got to know him.

04:30 The platoon sergeant who was an excellent fellow took us in hand and showed us all round the company and introduced us to people. And around about I think it was sixteenth of December I think I arrived in the battalion

05:00 and I think we weren't in line till after Christmas. I think we moved in and took over from the Canadians probably in the first week in January.

Before we get there, where were you exactly? Behind the lines, you mentioned, but what area were you?

05:30 We were north of Uijongbu. We were east of Panmujon and we were west of Hill 355e or Kowang San as it's called. And that area is the area that from that time

06:00 until the end of the war the Australian forces were in that triangle.

I also mean, behind the front lines, but how far behind?

How far behind? Well not far enough that we didn't need to be on ticket duty of a night. Not far enough that the occasional mortar or shell didn't find it's way down our way.

06:30 But that wasn't normal. We were dug in, but not anywhere near as extensively as if we were in the actual front line. We couldn't see the hills where the enemy were from where we were. Probably five hundred metres to a thousand metres I suppose.

And how did you settle in?

07:00 Quite well. No real problem. Bitterly cold. Cold cold cold. Christmas Day the Minister for the Army, Josh Francis paid a visit to 3 Battalion. I'm not sure where the parade for him took place, but I do know that

07:30 had to march about probably a kilometre over these snow clad, slippery, icy, tracks to get to where this parade was to hear him say repeatedly, how he had come a long way to be with us. And some lad down the back whom I can only guess who it may have been

08:00 called out to him, “I suppose you think we took a shortcut”. So we weren’t really impressed by traipsing all that way in the ice and the cold just to hear Mister Josh Francis. I remember it quite clearly. Not long after that we moved into the line to replace the Canadian battalion. Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry.

Tell us about that changeover.

08:30 That changeover has unpleasant memories because firstly one person from each section went up and actually did a reconnaissance on where that section would be. When they came back, the next night was when the changeover took place. It took place

09:00 overnight. So in theory the Chinese wouldn’t know that this was happening. And I might add there that I now know that we were never faced with any North Korean units as the enemy. In my time there or until the end of the war. We were always faced with Chinese

09:30 soldiers. They were a much different kettle of fish when you’re talking about infantry soldiers. They are pretty top notch. But that changeover took place. I don’t know how the Canadians could allow this to happen, but the line had been settled after Operation Commando and it didn’t change much for the next eighteen months.

10:00 Right across Korea that disk was the set line where the trench warfare came in. They had taken over a position that had been developed by I think the Americans and the Kings Own Scottish Borderers. But there were well-defined trenches. Their idea of going to the toilet was to use an empty ration box and throw it over the top.

10:30 The food cans when they were empty got thrown. So there was absolutely no problem for the Chinese observers who - where my section was, the nearest Chinese soldier was two hundred metres away. We could see one another. He only had to pick out where the cans were to know where the fighting pits were. The flies and the smell - it was

11:00 awful. In fact it was a major clean-up effort for the first week or so that we were there. Trying to fit that in with patrols and listening posts was fairly arduous.

So the Canadians would go to the toilet …

In a ration box and throw it over the top.

What would the Australians do?

We had proper latrines dug,

11:30 holes dug with covers for them. That sort of leads me to a story about probably the real introduction to the war. If not the first day, it was the second day; there I was in a group that was digging a latrine. And our position was on a ridge line

12:00 to the south west of “Little Gibraltar” or Hill 355 or Kowang San- same place - a huge rock mass of hill. We were on the south west slope of that. Behind us there was a depression, a re-entrant which led down into a valley. We were digging the latrine

12:30 on the northern side of the re-entrant and I suppose we were down about three feet. The first eighteen inches was solid ice so it wasn’t an easy job, but we worked away at it. Mid afternoon and I heard this noise and I didn’t know what it was. I should have known from the battle school.

13:00 It was an incoming shell. But it started off sounding like a freight train and then the screech and it hit the other side of the re-entrant. We were digging this side, so it hit the other side of the road there and there was a hollow in between - two of them, one after the other. And we thought that they couldn’t get artillery into that re-entrant because of the topographical features. But

13:30 unbeknownst to us they had brought a new type of artillery into use - a Howitzer-type weapon which sent the projectile on a much steeper parabola. In other words it went much higher which brought it - in fact I think they could have got to where we were digging the latrine, but anyway, fortunately it didn’t. But those two shells, they were the frightening introduction

14:00 to, “Somebody’s trying to kill me”. And when I looked down all the old soldiers were in the bottom of the hole. And the new soldiers were looking for somewhere to go. When the second shell came in we were in there with them. From there on - this was where the trench warfare started and the line was static and it

14:30 was a battle to hold the line, occasionally to undertake actions to try and straighten pieces of it and to dominate no man’s land - the area between us and the Chinese. And that’s what we did for the next

twelve months, that was what we were involved in. And of course the Chinese from their point of view were doing the same thing.

So describe for me

15:00 **the feelings of that first day or first night.**

I certainly - I was going to say I was frightened. I don't know that I was frightened, but I was apprehensive. And I was apprehensive as it got dark. Because the way the picket system was arranged - the night sentries -

15:30 as soon as we came anywhere near last light the whole battalion would have a stand to period for maybe an hour. That meant you were in your fighting pit and the weapons had the magazines on and probably cocked. And you waited. Because that was one of the favourite times that the Chinese would try to attack.

16:00 Or they would send some mortar bombs in or something. Then from that time through the night as I recall it was one on - one hour on, one hour off. So you were on picket for an hour, then you slept for an hour, then you were back on. So there were two of you in the fighting pit. In my fighting pit - when we took it over from the Canadians

16:30 all, it really consisted of was the square trench with the communication trenches running the full length of the feature and calling into other fighting pits. And on the left hand end there was an area that had been dug out in a platform large enough for two people to lie side-by-side.

17:00 Although normally there was only ever one anyway and that was to keep your equipment in there as well. It had very little overhead cover. I had the Bren gun and the other soldier with me was armed with a 303 rifle. We had as many grenades as we wanted to stockpile in the pit.

17:30 So we always had at least two boxes - probably forty, fifty grenades. All ready with the fuses in and all primed. Our days we spent enlarging the dug out area on the left and improving - we got it to where we could stand up and then

18:00 developing the overhead cover, finding trees - and we had to go a fair way afield. But of course everyone is doing this in 3 Battalion at this stage, remember that. But finding the biggest tree we could to put on the top and then to put some steel pickets the other way and try and scrounge or

18:30 steal or something, cardboard cartons or something which would stop the dirt falling through and then pile the dirt back on top to make it impervious to mortar bombs coming in. I don't know how long that took us. It took us no longer than the twenty fifth of January. By then we had a good somewhere you could reasonably expect to wake up if you went to sleep in there

19:00 while the other guy was in the fighting pit. That's how it was. Nighttimes when you're on pickets, the activity's there. What would happen at night, there would be in each platoon at least one listening post sent out into

19:30 no man's land. We were two hundred metres, I said, from Hill 227 - which had been occupied by the Chinese, it had been occupied by us, it had been occupied by Chinese, it had been occupied by the Americans, it had been occupied by the Chinese, it had been occupied by the second UK battalion, light infantry battalion. At this stage

20:00 no-one actually occupied it during the day. At night time it changed hands. The Chinese would come on it or we would be on it. Our listening posts were always trying to keep check on what the Chinese were doing about –227. We were looking to see if they were digging, listening for digging, watching for any movement of work parties,

20:30 watching for their fighting patrols heading our way. That's what the listening posts were for. Leading on from what you might find out from the listening post there would be other patrols sent out. That could be a fighting patrol sent out with the objective, maybe in the extreme,

21:00 of occupying 227. Or it could be a patrol of three men sent out to reconnoitre, see if they could find a route up there. Or it could be an ambush patrol. A listening post may have observed Chinese soldiers moving on a set pattern so an ambush would be set up.

21:30 They were what the nights were made up of.

What about yourself? What was the first patrol that you went on?

First night out in front of the line was listening post. We went out as I recall - I thought we went about three hundred plus metres - may not have been that far, might have only seemed that far. It was dark,

22:00 cold, raining, and windy. But there was I think there was seven of us and the section commander at that stage had been out to that spot before and at least one of the others had been so we didn't get lost going to where we were supposed to go. We had a radio with us.

22:30 And when we arrived the section commander positioned the people - quiet, you know, “There, there, there”. I had which I’ve often wondered about the wisdom of this, but I had the Bren gun with me which is not really a suitable weapon for that type of … However I had the Bren gun I’m sure.

23:00 And he positioned me and I got down behind the Bren gun facing what was the obvious choice way if someone wanted to come up to where we were. And then all went quiet and I was feeling around and I felt what I thought would be a better position - just a slight movement because it was a log. I thought, “If I just kept behind that log it’ll give me ….”. So I shuffled over behind

23:30 the log. But as the night went on I’m feeling this log I realised it was actually a dead Chinese soldier who was frozen stiff. So that curled my hair a bit for a while. But I didn’t let move. I just waited. Now whether it was that listening post or another one, but I clearly recall being on a listening post one night. All was quiet. One a.m. in the morning and as clear as a bell

24:00 we all heard a rifle being cocked and it wasn’t one of ours. We never found out what that was. But obviously there was a Chinese soldier somewhere within fifty metres of us and he’d cocked his rifle. Now on those nights in front of the line I should make mention of something that - the Americans had what they called “artificial moonlight”.

24:30 They had huge searchlights set up behind the line on high features and if the cloud pattern was appropriate they would bounce the light off those clouds which actually lit up no man’s land. So sometimes you had it and sometimes you didn’t. Sometimes it was very bright. It made it almost like day. And sometimes it was a real pain in the bum. Because you’d go to a lot of trouble

25:00 going out quietly under cover of darkness to a position and then about time to come back, three a.m. in the morning or something they’d turn the search lights on and the place’d be lit up like day and you’re trying to creep back in this light. It had its downside.

What did it feel like going on patrol? What would go through you mind?

25:30 I adopted a procedure that I don’t think I ever changed. It’s probably most soldiers would do the same. I had a standing arrangement with - I don’t want to use his name so - he worked around in the trench with me in our fighting pit together, because were great friends.

26:00 Whichever one - generally you wouldn’t both go out from the one fighting pit because that would leave a hole in the line and the Chinese are probably probing as well. The one that went would make sure the other one knew where all his personal effects were. I had left instructions with Les what to do if I didn’t come back. There was a letter to my Mum

26:30 which he would post. And he had done the same. Depending on what we were going out for, the other preparations would fall into place. If it’s a fighting patrol, well you take your ammunition etcetera and grenades. It’d be different too if it was just the listening post. The listening post you’d travel fairly lightly and you don’t really look for trouble.

27:00 If there’s a large group forming up to attack you radio back and skedaddle [get] out of there. If possible. If it’s an ambush patrol you rehearse it before and do it on the ground. Find somewhere that’s similar to the spot where you’re going to set the ambush and rehearse it. Put each soldier in a position in a quiet spot over the hill where no-one can see you and

27:30 when they come up this track, “This is where I want you to go”, and “This is where the Bren gun goes”. There are, and I don’t think they’ve changed much, there are some standard procedures that if you’re ambushed each soldier knows what to do without any order. The machine gun goes to the high ground or to the right, whichever.

28:00 And everyone has their place to go.

So what did you have written in your letter to your Mum?

Not much. Just something not to be too upset and she’d only get it if something unfortunate had happened.

28:30 **And with your operation of the Bren gun what would you have to do in an ambush situation if it happened?**

If we were ambushed on our way out, as we were one night, and if the ground was even - if it was flat, if there were no specific features, I would go round to the right, take up a position so that the section commander knew where I was. He would then give me an order of what to do if he

29:00 wanted me to bring fire to there somewhere. If there was high ground I’d go straight to the high ground.

And what if you were ambushing someone else?

Well that would depend on the topography. That’s why it’s so important to rehearse it before you go out. Get the map and try and talk to people who’ve been out there.

29:30 “Is there actually a hill there?” “Does the ground rise or does it fall?” “Is there water in the creek?” Try and find out everything that you can about the ground where you’re going to set the ambush. Then the leader would pick where he wants to put the men.

Tell us about that time you were ambushed coming out.

30:00 It didn’t lead to any casualties. It certainly led to something I’ll never forget though. Cause Len was with me - Len Fitzgerald. Len had a 303 and he always refused to carry anything other than a 303 rifle. The artificial

30:30 moonlight was on so it was a fairly bright night. We were going to find out if a bunker on the north western slope of 227 had been occupied. “Were the Chinese using us?” That’s what they wanted us to know. And we knew that we were going into an area that was patrolled

31:00 frequently by Chinese patrols at night. We set off just after last light, went right up as far as we could until we thought it was pretty dark. Then the artificial moonlight came on, but we went ahead. We got up. Had a look at the bunker, checked it for booby traps, couldn’t find any. This took us probably four, five hours although we’d only gone

31:30 two hundred metres. Just called back on the radio and were called back in. “Come back out.” The Chinese had obviously become aware that we were up there and were waiting. But they only had a small group - we believe now they had only a small group of maybe about three to five soldiers set the ambush. They probably triggered it too soon. They missed our

32:00 leading man, which put him - he was in amongst them. They expected to kill him of course and they missed. He was in amongst them. On my left I - I went to the left because that was the high ground. But there was a small depression. It was a small gully.

32:30 Now the ground was frozen and had been covered in snow. It had melted and then refroze. Therefore it was ice. As I put my foot down I slipped and I dropped the Bren gun and the mag [magazine] fell off. To me, at the same time, I looked up and there was a Chinese soldier

33:00 on the skyline with a rifle that looked to be about four metres long to me. And he was putting it up to his shoulder. And I thought, “This is it”. Next minute he just fell backwards down the hill. Len Fitzgerald had seen him. He’d been second in the group. He’d seen him.

33:30 And shot him. When I saw the Chinese soldier fall, what I should have been doing was getting the magazine back on the Bren gun. But I glanced to where I thought the shot had come from. And there was Len in a classical infantry soldier’s stance. Down on one knee and the rifle like this.

34:00 He’d blown his head off. If he’d have been a second later, might have been me. So that was a scare. We proceeded on our way. There was no more. Nothing else happened that night.

Did you head straight down?

Yes we did. They sent another patrol out actually to meet us

34:30 because - and we infiltrated back through them because we felt that we were being followed, but they didn’t follow us back. They didn’t follow us back to where the others were waiting anyway. Because we were going to reverse the tables and ambush the people that were following us. That was a common practice. They’d follow you back in. When you came back into the defended area there had to be a check.

35:00 And you had to be counted in. Nine went out, you didn’t want ten coming back in. They used to try and do it. Never happened to me, but it certainly did happen.

So what did you say to Len when you got a chance?

Yeah well Len’s still my best friend. He said, “Oh I didn’t know you were in trouble. I just saw him there so I shot him.” He makes as

35:30 if it was nothing. I make sure he knows that I think otherwise. Yes. He won’t talk about it and he’s never told anyone else to my knowledge. He says, “No I didn’t do anything special”.

Why do you think he acts like that?

He’s just that sort of fellow. He’s

36:00 just a wonderful guy. He really is.

So what would you talk about with the guys when you’re back in the trenches?

Straight after something like that?

Yes. Straight afterwards.

Firstly, the platoon sergeant would be there waiting for you and he would be gently doing a debrief. And

getting it fresh while it was still fresh in your mind.

36:30 What you saw, what you heard, what you thought. “Did you find out the information you went out for and what is it, what is the answer?” And then when he was happy with that he’d pass that on to platoon commander. If need be the platoon commander might send for one or other or all of them. He might come and talk himself. The rest of you would make a brew or someone would be making one when you

37:00 came back. You’d sit around and maybe talk a little bit about it. But everyone knew what had happened. But if there was something that you didn’t know, you might ask. “What happened over that side where that one disappeared?”, or if something unusual happened you’d ask, “Did you see what happened there?” I suppose

37:30 the other thing superimposed over all that is the fire support from both sides. Now the Chinese, they relied a lot at night time on mortars. If you made a contact you could expect mortars. They would not only mortar where they thought your patrol was, they would mortar where they thought they came from. The company area.

38:00 They figure out, “There’s got to be something happening down there, they’re trying to get back in.” So they’d mortar that for an hour or so after. And we had on call the Kiwi artillery and our own mortars that we could - very dangerous that kind of call mortar fire at night time in a restricted area. They’ve only got to get it wrong by ten metres and they’ll hit you.

38:30 **I was going to ask about use of the radio in that situation.**

Generally we had two types of radio. One was the small hand held set. The nomenclature of them escapes me now. But the small one had a facility for silent operation. You could press a switch, then you could have an agreement

39:00 that if you pressed it once you wanted mortar shell or some pre-arranged signal. Or you could of course override that and speak on it too. Once the firing started you could use your voice because there would be bugles blowing and Chinese yelling to one another. The need for quiet had gone by then. But if nothing was happening, well, you didn’t want to be making a noise. Or if you were up on 227, while you were up there

39:30 you would try and avoid using the radio because the moment you did they knew you were there and they’d bring the artillery in.

Tape 5

00:43 We can take it from where we were in the line there because this is where this happened. I told you about Hill 355 or “Little Gibraltar” as it was called on our right way up above us occupied at this time

01:00 by the Americans. I remember quite clearly one morning my mate, Len, wandering past my section and I said, “Where are you going?” He said, “I’m going up to see the Yanks”. About three hours later he wandered back without a hat. He’d had his slouch hat on when he was going. But he in place of his hat he had a nine millimetre pistol. He had two bottles of Bourbon,

01:30 a carton of Lucky Strike cigarettes. They were valuable. Slouch hats were very valuable.

Why?

All of my section was under strict instructions when they went on five days R& R [rest and recreation] to Japan to go get some slouch hats and bring them back.

Do you know why?

They were different. They were unique I suppose. The Americans had plenty of one thing and

02:00 we had the slouch hats. There were plenty of these things and we had the slouch hats. It wasn’t hard to get things from the Americans really. The other thing we used to do is, when we were in the line in these fixed positions and there was a ceasefire which didn’t expire until the middle of January and when it had expired

02:30 the war more or less started up again. But prior to that it was well known that the Kiwi artillery had access to cartons of Japanese beer, ‘cause when they used to ship over the shells for their guns in a pallet load of Japanese beer might slip its way in somewhere. We used to take it in turns

03:00 section by section in our company to take a day off - two fellows take a day off, hitch a ride back down to the Kiwis and see if they could scrounge a carton of beer from them. Most times successfully. I certainly did a couple of times. Hitched our way back and carted it back up the hill and passed it around.

How would you get the beer from them?

Paid for it with - we used to have a

03:30 monetary system. British Commonwealth Occupation Forces publish their own currency. We'd just pay for it with that.

Were the Kiwis interested in the slouch hats?

No. Because Kiwis have a peaked hat based on a slouch hat anyway. No. They would sell us the beer for what it cost them.

04:00 They weren't making a profit out of Australians or anything like that.

Other things that I've heard is that sometimes there were patrols or things to collect bodies by the Chinese and the Australians. Did this happen?

Yes. Well yes and no. Most memorable occasion that I haven't covered

04:30 yet was the twenty fifth, twenty sixth, twenty seventh of January nineteen fifty two when 3 Battalion launched a major assault on hill 227 with a view to re-occupying it permanently and making it able to support two infantry companies up there. And the attack was launched by D Company

05:00 with support from A and C Company. It went in after last light I think on the twenty sixth - some history books say the twenty fifth. And it turned into almost a mini disaster. The Chinese acted ferociously when they saw what was happening and probably threw a couple of battalions

05:30 in against this company that had attacked there. The other company approached it from the south or the south west - that was their way up. It had been reconnoitred by C Company which was on our right, and us in A Company were sort of in the middle looking straight at it. Then when they got into

06:00 trouble and they started taking casualties - it bogged down into ferocious artillery barrages spread right along the feature. We got heavily shelled and mortared. And there were casualties in A Company from the shelling and the mortaring. But the other companies suffered - I think seven killed in the first hour or so and

06:30 about thirteen wounded. It went on all night until probably about four in the morning when it started to quieten down a bit and a section from A Company - two members from my section helped to make this section up, I was one of them - and we went in through

07:00 C Company up onto 227 to get some bodies of Australians killed. Now when the Chinese heard us coming I think they assumed that we were trying to re-occupy the position again because they attacked savagely and we had two stretcher bearers killed instantly, but we did find the bodies that we were looking for. They were Australian bodies.

07:30 The first one that I found or that I was involved with - I tripped on him. And I reached down to feel what it was and trying to find his dog tags to see who it was if that was possible. But I'd put - I remember distinctly my hand going right down through the top of his head into his brain because the top of his head had been completely blown off. I know who that was, but I wouldn't like to mention the

08:00 name. We then had to somehow get the bodies that were still there and I think there were three or four of them plus the two that had been killed coming up with us. We had to get them back through C Company to A Company, which was probably more secure than C Company was. Right at first light we got back into our position.

08:30 That was a pretty horrible night that. 227 claimed a lot of casualties and neither side owned it by the end of nineteen fifty three.

That morning when you got back at first light, what were your reactions?

That's interesting because the company commander came to the section that had been out

09:00 trying to retrieve the bodies and spent quite a bit of time talking to us. I think he realised that we'd been pretty exposed. We were up in an area where two platoons had been holding and we'd gone in there to get bodies and then got attacked. Quite frankly there was a time when I thought that we mightn't get back either. Because they got

09:30 around behind us. We were cut off trying to get back into the line. We got back into A Company area as I said just on first light. They launched a company-size attack on A Company almost at that instant which went on for a couple of hours. It wasn't until it got really daylight that we could direct the New Zealand artillery adequately to disperse them.

10:00 They left the area and went back.

So what did this man say to you who spoke to you that morning?

Soothing words. I know it was the company commander and he was nearing the end of his twelve months and he had a lot of combat experience in that twelve months. He was the OC of A Company during the big Operation Commando and he just spoke quietly

10:30 and said, “I know you’ve had a rough night”. But he didn’t dwell so much on it as to try and get each of us to talk about what we’d seen and how we felt about it and what was the worst part about it.

What were your answers? Well what did you say to him?

I was more concerned really

11:00 on the way back because there were two - I was on one end of a stretcher and someone on the other and we’re trying to carry this body down a slope that’s ice. And it kept rolling off. And it was horrendous. It’d roll off. If we slipped it’d roll off. And then we tried to tie it on with a rifle sling. And you could actually hear the

11:30 bullets going over our heads. We were just low enough down that they couldn’t quite get down to us. And mortar bombs were landing all around us. And then we realised that they were between us and the company lines. So we had to take a detour down a re-entrant and come back up where there may or may not have been an unmarked minefield. Yes, it was scary. 227

12:00 had lots of scary things happen up there.

Was there any sort of protocol or anything that went along with collecting bodies? Was there a time when it … ?

There are recorded instances of mutual ceasefires while Australians and Chinese came and got their bodies. I didn’t experience it in my time.

Was there any particular way that you’d

12:30 **let the Chinese know that’s what you were doing rather than … ?**

Certainly I’ve read that - at 355 later after I left there was a big attack on 355and something like three hundred Chinese soldiers were killed over night trying to get up onto 355 and when they finally stopped and withdrew they came out with a

13:00 white flag to see if they could pick up their bodies and the Australians never fired on them, just let them come and pick up their bodies then.

That morning when - was it your company commander who’d spoken to you?

Yes.

What sort of reactions were you having to the night?

There had to be a

13:30 tremendous adrenalin flow and I think it took a while to subside, but in the lines when we got back there were soldiers who hadn’t been out there that night, but they’d been under shellfire and mortar fire all night. But they went out of their way to have a brew ready for us when we came back in. And to take our weapons if they needed cleaning

14:00 and replace them with their clean one and then they’d go and clean them. Just little things like that. But nobody dwelt on it that much because the day was coming and we had things to do. There were people who’d been killed and injured and they had to be transported back out to where they could get further medical treatment. Carrying parties had to be organised to move them down. The Chinese of course

14:30 were dropping mortar bombs between us and battalion headquarters because they knew that’s what we had to do. It wound down slowly over the day. By the night time we were back into doing what we did - night picket, standing patrol.

You mentioned that one of the bodies that you’d come across, you knew who it was.

Mmm.

15:00 **How did you in that circumstance and also at other times deal with losing?**

Well at that time I didn’t know the person personally but I knew who it was because I’d heard on the radio that the section commander of such and such a section had been killed and I knew who that was. So as soon as I realised and I looked at the dog tag I knew who it was anyway, but I knew before that

15:30 that that’s who it was. So that really wasn’t an intimate personal loss. But I did have, later, a much closer - joining the army at the same time as Len and myself and Doug was an English lad named Ken Clark, came from Northern England. He’d been a boy soldier in the British Army. He was a couple of years older than us.

16:00 But an excellent soldier. He knew about army. And English soldiers or British soldiers at that time were - if they’d been in the services for a while - were good soldiers as far as discipline, looking after the equipment and uniform and understanding army routine and Ken straight away we looked to him for

16:30 “This is how soldiers behave”. Because we’d been in the army a few weeks and here was someone who’d been - and he was an excellent driller, he could do his drill perfectly. I suppose a lot of people initially don’t like Poms, but we took to him and he took to us, so he became one of our group, Ken. My army number is nineteen thirty one, his is nineteen eighty

17:00 eight. So he was pretty close to us. In July of nineteen fifty two I had been given the task - this relates a bit to the changeover system that operated in 3 Battalion. It didn’t operate in 1 and 2 Battalions which arrived in Korea later.

17:30 During nineteen fifty two they arrived, but they changed over as a battalion. The whole battalion arrived, the whole battalion left. With 3 Battalion it was a trickle feed system and there were three times every twelve months when the battalion went through the crises of having a whole heap of old hands leave and new ones arrived, that was the anniversary of their

18:00 arrival in Korea which was September, the anniversary of Kapyong, because they lost so many soldiers at Kapyong, the anniversary of Maryang San because they lost so many there. Then there was the trickle business of as each soldier finished his twelve months he’d leave and a replacement would come in. So there were these times when the battalion was not quite at its top.

18:30 Therefore, after you’d been there six months you were an old soldier and you could do anything. So I was given the task of taking I think about eight soldiers from a couple of different sections back to a defensive line called the Kansas Line. This was a fallback position should there be a major attack and we had to retreat. The Kansas Line was where we would make the next stand. We were sent

19:00 back there for about three weeks to dig positions in preparation for this if it ever happened. The day I finished that and I was heading back to A Company I called into battalion headquarters - a vehicle dropped us off there. I called in to see the RSM for some reason. I forget what it was. Maybe I got a message that he wanted to see me. Because when I saw him and he called me he said,

19:30 “Oh Ron, I think you’d better come over here. I’ve got some bad news for you”. He said, “Ken Clark was killed last night”. And what happened with Ken and there’s his body lying on the ground. It was covered with a poncho. And he just lifted it back and this huge piece of shrapnel had just gone straight in there. His

20:00 section had gone out on a fighting patrol. It was more than a section actually. It was nearly a platoon size. And there was a lieutenant took them out and an unmarked mine field they somehow wandered into it and one of the mines was tipped. Killed three of them. Wounded eight or nine. That really upset me. I had seen him before I went back to Kansas Line. I came back and he was killed.

20:30 The other close friend that touched me was an Aboriginal boy from Cloncurry. He joined the army in the same time that the rest of us did. He did his recruit training with us. We knew that he was only sixteen years of age.

21:00 Somehow or other he’d got in anyway. But he didn’t come to Sydney with us when we left here and I can remember Doug and Len and I talking about it at some stage when we were in Sydney and saying, “Oh maybe they caught up with him”. We just didn’t know what happened to him. But were in Korea and

21:30 had only been there a week or so when who should arrived but this soldier. We said, “Oh you silly bugger, what are you doing here?” “Oh, it’s not hard to work your way around the system”. That evening he stood up on the ridge line - which was a silly thing to do - but stood up on the ridge line and was shot through the head.

22:00 That was really unfortunate. Sixteen year old boy.

Personally, how did you deal with losing these people? Were there any particular ways?

I don’t know. I honestly don’t know. I never thought that it affected me and when I came back to Japan and came home and

22:30 shortly after that met Evelyn for the first time, if Evelyn had said to me that I had been affected by the war I would have said, “No, that’s nonsense”. But now I know I was.

Retrospectively, how do you realise how it affected you?

Thing I used to do that I didn’t do before.

23:00 I basically didn’t drink or smoke before I went to Korea. And I never - although I did try the Lucky Strikes - I never became a smoker. But I probably drank too much for a couple of years after I came home. The memories used to come back at night time.

23:30 They still do occasionally. But not very often.

What would you dream?

About the various patrols or people’s faces would appear. There’s one in particular where I used to live through one action in particular. I’d wake of a night having heard someone say, “Move the Bren gun higher up” or

24:00 “Move it lower down”.

Was there anything particularly remarkable about this action that you would always dream about?

I don’t think so. It wasn’t particularly bad or lots got killed or anything. It was just one that for some reason seemed to haunt me for a few years. Then I went through a stage after I came back to Australia, met Evelyn, got married, had children,

24:30 got on with my life and career in the army when Korea didn’t exist. No-one wanted to know about it here in Australia anyway. And I managed to block it out and moved on. And it started coming back to me I suppose six seven years ago.

How did it start coming back?

25:00 When they built the memorial to the Korean War in Canberra and invited us all down for the opening. People used to say to me - you know I’d meet someone who had been there and he’d say, “You remember so and so”. And I’d say, “No”. But then I would remember it. And then I’d remember something else. And since this

25:30 came up I’ve remembered lots of other things that I thought were long forgotten.

Is, overall, is that a negative or a positive experience?

That I’ve remembered it now? I think it’s a positive, yeah. Better to face it.

How do you face it?

Just accept it for what it was, the good and the bad.

26:00 I’m not one of a kind. There’s plenty of others.

Have you spoken to others?

Yeah.

What do you speak about?

How they were affected and - I’ve never made a big thing about it and I don’t now either. To me it was, when I think about it,

26:30 it was horrible at times, but the actual soldiering is still an adventure to me. I enjoyed being in Korea sometimes. Not killing people. Nobody enjoys that. Should be locked up if they do.

27:00 But I was self-sufficient. I was capable of looking after myself and sometimes had a section to look after. Knew that I could rely on them. If I wanted to go down to the Kiwis for a day I’d tell them where I was going - this is when we were on rest - I’d go. Tell the company commander, “Yeah alright”, when you’d be back. There was a sense of

27:30 adventure in that. A sense that was missing in Vietnam, I might add.

You were in the army for quite a while after Korea. How was it possible to be in the army and yet not think about the army in Korea?

Well it wasn’t for some

28:00 time. I did have some fairly - some emotional problems I suppose when I came back - for a couple of years. But I met Evelyn and we got married and we had children and it faded. There were other things to think about. A corporal with two children and a wife

28:30 had to start thinking seriously about life. There were never a group of people like myself because the people who went to Korea at that time were from all over Australia and there was this trickle feed system. They didn’t

29:00 all come back together. So you never came back with your mates. They went their way, you went yours. For example, Lennie and I never caught up to one another for probably another twenty years after that. He went off driving trucks and set up a trucking business. I stayed in the army. Doug went back to the property.

29:30 I opted to make a career out of the army because I had signed on for six years initially and when the six years was up I had two children and a wife and I thought I’d served my apprenticeship.

In those couple of years when you did have problems thinking about

30:00 **Korea what sort of thoughts would cause you the most … ?**

I suppose things like

30:30 night time. You know that the Chinese are probing the wire in front of your fighting pit and they may be no more than ten metres from you. So you hear something. You very quietly get a hand grenade and take the pin out and roll it down the hill.

31:00 After seven seconds - sometimes a four second tube - there's an explosion and a scream and then nothing more the rest of the night. But you look down in the morning and there's a dead body lying there. You know that you've done it. And at the time it was the right thing to do. But as time

31:30 goes by you start to wish you hadn't had to do that. It's easy for you to say, "If I hadn't done that he'd have done this". But … so those sort of thoughts, if you can get rid of them and don't let them come to the surface they don't bother you.

Did anyone

32:00 **at the time or later ever try and talk to you? For example, you said your company commander …**

No. No that company commander was - he went home. A new one who didn't know what had happened. As nineteen fifty two wore on things started to quieten down. 3 Battalion went out for a long period in reserve.

32:30 From April to June fifty two we were in reserve. This was when I went driving the ambulance for the field ambulance. A because I liked doing it and B because it filled in time because I was getting bored and not much was happening.

I guess we'll talk about the ambulance very soon. But just - this might seem like a strange question - but the army trained people

33:00 **so intensively in some areas - did the army ever approach the issue with you about what it's like to have to kill someone or to deal with that?**

They certainly - I don't believe they did with me. If they did it passed over my head and I didn't take it on board. That's probably not likely. I don't think they did for

33:30 Vietnam. In fact I'm sure they didn't. And when they came home they were scattered to the four winds and to look after yourself, mate. The real man, you have to look after yourself.

What about padres?

Father Joe Phillips was our padre in Korea and believe it or not I used to serve Mass for him.

34:00 When I was able. He was wonderful. There were two wonderful religious type people. Father Phillips and the Salvation Army man. He was known as Mac. His name was probably McCabe I think. They were wonderful. They went out of their way to talk to the soldiers. But I never went to

34:30 Father Phillips to tell him any of my inner thoughts about things like that.

Why is that?

Didn't feel the need.

Would he ever come and talk to the men?

Yeah. He was always talking to them, but he didn't do it in the way he was coming to talk to them about that. He came to bring the footy scores from the weekend footy or the race results or something else.

35:00 They'd be looking forward to his coming. He was wonderful. Wonderful fellow, Father Phillips. And so was the Salvation Army man.

Was faith important?

Yes. What is the saying? "Everybody believes in God when the shells are falling".

35:30 **Is that true?**

Yes.

How?

Because you think "This might be it", this might be your last day. I guess something sort of takes over. You're asking some almighty power to get you through it. That's got to be faith, hasn't it?

36:00 I know a lot of people who said they relearnt the Hail Mary in Korea.

You mentioned that you'd started wanting to drive the ambulances because you were bored - not bored, but there wasn't much - can you tell me about what was going on that time?

We were out

36:30 in - that was one of the theories when 3 Battalion was on this extended rest period and rebuilding after new replacements had arrived and word came around, “Is there anyone that can drive a four wheel drive Chev Blitz?” I said, “Oh yeah I can drive one”. So they said “The ambulance driver got sick

37:00 and had to be evacuated and the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] needs someone to drive it for a while, are you happy to do that for a while?” So I said, “Yes”. ‘Cause I had a driving licence that I collected in Sydney before I ever went to Japan. So I went up and drove the ambulance. I did that on and off for the rest of my time. Sometimes I’d go back to the company. When we come out on rest I’d go out and work for the RAP. If it wasn’t driving

37:30 around, the doctor would ask could I come out and work, because they were teaching me. They were teaching me to be a medical assistant - hands on teaching. How to suture, how to do this, do that. I used to enjoy that.

If you hadn’t have gone and started driving the ambulances, what sort of things would you have been doing to pass the time with the rest of the … ?

Oh probably

38:00 training or back at the Kansas line doing more digging in and probably reading books.

What sort of books?

Well the only books that ever passed through my area always seemed to be sex books. They got worn out the further they went around.

38:30 Playboy magazines and …

Do you remember any of the titles of the books?

No I really don’t. I mentioned this on the phone when I was doing that phone interview. I’ve tried since to think of titles, but I really can’t. But they were fairly descriptive. You pretty well knew what was going to …

How were the story lines?

39:00 Pretty pathetic. But people used to - I used to read them too. The Playboy magazine used to have some good articles as well as the pretty girls.

I find it interesting that you’ve mentioned a couple of times that you’d head off to see the Americans or head down to see the New Zealanders. Were you allowed to just?

Yeah.

39:30 **How did that work?**

You weren’t - obviously the whole battalion couldn’t say you were going down to see them, or the whole company, or the whole section. But if nothing was happening and there was no requirement for your presence, a reasonable request to the company commander or the CSM [Company Sergeant Major] or the platoon sergeant, someone like that and they’d say, “Yeah okay, as long as you’re back here before last light” or something “and we know where you are”.

40:00 **And you’d just wander down?**

Yeah. Hitch a ride. There’s heaps of traffic on the road going back and forth to a division in the line.

Was there any protocol about - could you just walk in and visit or did you have to … ?

No. You had to report. When you got there. Units that weren’t in the line operated on a more army controlled system.

40:30 They’d have a ticket at the front at the entrance. You’d just tell them who you were and where you were going. They’d have a radio. Normally you’d be looking for someone you knew that you’d meet somehow. You got to know the artillery people. There was always artillery with the infantry as fire control officers and their radio operators etcetera. So you’d get to know them. They might be living in your trench and you’d be having your morning

41:00 coffee with them. So you’d go and visit them or if there was a canteen there, well. And the British had what they call NAAFI [Navy, Army, Air Force Institute]. I forget what NAAFI stands for now, but it’s a canteen system anyway.

We’ve just reached the end of the tape.

Tape 6

00:30 **You were just telling us off camera about Ken Clarke, after he died?**

When Ken was killed and we put his personal effects together he had a nine millimetre pistol which we in the company raffled off and I forget how much we raised, but we

01:00 sent the money to his mother in Scotland. The funny thing was that Ken's sister and I were pen pals. Thanks to Ken. He'd given me her name and address in Scotland and we exchanged a few letters, but that died out before I left Korea, so I don't - it wasn't a major thing.

What was it like to be able to write to someone?

Yeah.

01:30 It was great. I had no girlfriend in Australia. I just didn't see a lot of girls to get attached to. And it was good.

How important was it to receive mail?

It was very important. You're important if you've got a letter. I remember that.

What would you do with the letters?

I suppose you

02:00 carried them for a while. But like all things, if you were moving everything was brought back to a minimum because you had to carry it. And the winter was so cold in Korea and I was never warm. I think I probably felt it worse than most people for some reason. And I still do feel the cold. I used to carry double sleeping bags.

02:30 It was the only way I could get warm of a night time. That increased the load that I had to carry anyway. So anything else that was surplus - and some of the ways to lighten the weight - cut the handle off the toothbrush - anything that you could do away with, don't carry it. Leave it, bury it, burn it. So that's probably what happened.

How did you get warm at night?

That's something

03:00 interesting. There is a system in this trench warfare stage of the war where someone had invented or copied or designed a heater. It was possible to get range fuel and ultimately it was officially supplied to the forward troops - drums of range fuel. And

03:30 things called choofers were built. They were designed by an empty range fuel can lying on its side, a full range fuel can elevated with a pipe coming down and a tap to drip feed on the bottom of the one lying on its side with a chimney made out of shell casing fitted into the back

04:00 of the horizontal one and going up through the roof of the overhead cover on your dugout. So if you looked along the company lines you would see all these things sticking up through the cover. As it got colder you'd turn the range fuel on and light it. A series of ventilation holes had to be put

04:30 into them, knocked in with your pick or something. Then it would burn and throw out great heat. That was a choofer. They were wonderful for getting some warmth into the dugout. But before they came into vogue the clothing that we were issued with just before I arrived in Korea - Australians got the issue of new UK cold weather

05:00 gear. And it was good. It was good stuff. Topped off by this great parka with woolly hood. And we got issued with mittens and nice woollen socks. Fibreglass mesh insoles in our boots. All of this was going towards trying to keep us warm, trying to stop us getting frostbite on the

05:30 feet and the fingers. It still happened, but not as much as the first winter. The winter before that was pretty terrible because they were in Australian mainland-type greatcoats - the old army greatcoats that were like felt, and when they got wet they weighed five ton and they were horrible things in the wet and the cold. But when we got that new equipment it went a long way to helping us keep warm.

06:00 But when you're out on patrol and it was snowing and it was sitting on ice and trying to keep warm, then it wasn't easy.

And what about your equipment, your guns?

If you went on picket in the fighting pit at night - in mine, for example, would be the Bren gun and my partner had an Owen gun most of the time through the winter months. It was

06:30 necessary for whoever was on picket about every ten minutes to move the working parts manually or they would freeze up and seize and you couldn't fire the weapon. You daren't touch them with bare hands or your fingers and that would stick to them and you'd just pull all the skin off. I nearly was involved in a

07:00 tragic incident and it probably would have been the end of me. One morning, first light, I was the last

picket on. I worked the Bren gun, put the mag back on, picked the Owen gun up. Normally with an Owen gun, because it's short, you just point it down and work the moving parts back. Owen guns are treacherous

07:30 weapons and if you worked the moving part to the rear, not quite back, and let it go, it fires. And it'll be firing on automatic. There's a twenty eight round mag on it which should have been taken off. But I let it go. And it went and it sprayed bullets in a great arc, missing my mate by about that

08:00 much. No-one ever knew about it. Only he and I. It frightened the daylights out of me I can tell you. I could have killed him.

Didn't anyone hear the firing?

No. If they did, nobody ever commented on it. Occasionally there would be accidental discharges. Not many though. But someone might fire something off to clear the breach or something.

What did your mate say to you?

08:30 When he'd recovered it was something like, "Gee, that was close".

Did you receive any advice from the old World War Two vets?

Oh yes. Well when I arrived in Korea there was still a good sprinkling of World War Two - Korean Force, they were called K Force. They were all excellent soldiers. Very experienced. And they'd also had the

09:00 Korean experience. They were more than happy to take us under their wing and point us in the right direction and kick us up the bum when we needed it. Some of them were excellent. Two that stand out are aboriginals. One was Charlie Nemy who was the best machine gunner the Australian army's ever had. Another one was a man named Jimmy Diedrich

09:30 who now lives in Rockhampton. Jimmy Diedrich was probably not an aboriginal, he may have been of Indian extraction, but he was dark skinned. He was a fantastic soldier. I was able to do something for him in Vietnam actually later on. He was with the training team [AATTV Australian Army Training Team Vietnam].

And what kind of advice would they give you?

All the things that you need to know. Like, "Don't walk

10:00 about on the skyline". "Don't light cigarettes." "Don't throw any rubbish, bits of silver paper that they can see from up on top of hills". So they know where the weapon pits are. That's one of the things that you're looking for is, where is the enemy's weapon pit. You know where the trenches are, but where is the weapon pit? And just all those little day-to-day things

10:30 that help to keep you alive.

You mentioned these aboriginal soldiers, did they get same treatment?

Exactly. It's only now that I think of Charlie Nemy and Jimmy Diedrich as not being white. Yeah, all the same.

And they received the same treatment from officers?

Yes. We had an aboriginal officer. I forget what his name is.

11:00 Reg Saunders. But he was there before me. He wasn't there in my time. He was in A Company, but he was gone home before I got there. I did meet him years later actually.

And you mentioned New Zealand artillery, how did you get along with these guys?

Fairly well. I don't recall ever having any ill feeling or cross words with any New Zealand artillery.

11:30 Or New Zealand drivers that had to transport the platoon too. Now there were occasions and certainly in my time I can remember too where artillery fire was called in to help a patrol out of trouble and the shells landed on the patrol. But it was later in both cases clearly established that the person who called the

12:00 fire in gave the wrong map reference. He thought he was here and he was there. But at the time, "Oh those bloody Kiwis", you'd hear this sort of rumblings, but when it was all sorted out it was … and clearly they were incredibly fast in their support. If a patrol was in trouble and the call went back providing the reference was right the shells were coming

12:30 in there in next to no time. Many's the patrol's been saved by having that happen.

Tell us about that relationship of relying on your artillery. How do you team up together? How do you feel about each other?

I think probably in all armies there is some sort of relationship like that.

13:00 It’s probably special in the Australian army because of ANZAC [Australian and New Zealand Army Corps]. Really, we’re interchangeable, Australians and Kiwis. In the rifle company there’s always an artillery officer and his staff, being a signaller and one other at least to co-ordinate the fire control. They always -

13:30 each of them, the New Zealand artillery and the Australian infantry go out of their way to integrate and work together.

And tell us about the Americans. What did you think of the Americans as a fighting force?

Now in Korea the Americans - you know it became obvious that they operated differently to us.

14:00 We could send a patrol of twenty men out into no man’s land and you could almost defy anybody to know that they’d gone out. You wouldn’t hear them. There’d be no noise. There’d be no accidental firing. The Americans, if they were sending a patrol out seemed to want to broadcast it. We could hear them going out from 355, from our position. And other things, so they would go

14:30 at the same time, follow the same route. The noise would be awful. But to compensate for that they had this weight and firepower capacity. The number of thirty Kell machine guns and thirty Kell Brownings and heavy machine guns and automatic rifles

15:00 and grenade launchers. They just relied on firepower. Rather than infantry skills. I saw nothing to indicate that they weren’t brave. It’s just that they operated differently.

What kind of noises would they make?

Well you could hear them talking,

15:30 singing and whistling. Almost as if they worked on the theory, “They’ll think there’s more of us”. But I think there would be plenty of other Australians who would tell the same story. They were noisy buggers.

Well what would you comment with the other Australians about this? What would you say?

“They’re off on patrol again.” But that was -

16:00 nothing else you could do. That was their way of operating. Maybe they didn’t all do it. Maybe it was the one noisy patrol or a dozen that did it properly. Certainly they were different to us. Their soldiers I suppose you could say were better treated in that lots of hot meals were carted right forward into the trenches and this “Little

16:30 Gibraltar” was a major climb to get up to the top of it. But the hot meals used to be carted up there by Korean porters. And I was up there on one occasion when it became meal time and I was offered a meal. They gave me a stainless steel tray with compartments on it and I got a piece of steak and vegetables and ice-cream. It was a

17:00 bit of a change from the twenty four hour ration pack that we lived on.

What did you think of this meal?

It was alright. They had a funny way of serving it. The ice-cream went on top of your vegies and steak.

We might move on to the time when you said that you decided to volunteer

17:30 **for the Blitz ambulance driving. What was the work like initially?**

If there was a major operation going on the doctor would try and position himself and this Blitz ambulance as far forward as he could do safely on what was

18:00 thought to be the likely evacuation move for any casualties. So that would be my job, to get it up there and if we got any patients to get them back to the RAP at battalion headquarters. That was one of the things. That didn’t happen very often because the size of the operations was generally not large enough to warrant it. You couldn’t have the

18:30 doctor up there on the off chance that there might be a casualty. The doctor’s best place is always in the Regimental Aid Post where he’s got all of his equipment and all of his trained staff there to help. There would be routine runs of - you not only have battle casualties, but you have the normal sicknesses. People get ill, they get appendicitis, they get tonsillitis. They still get it.

19:00 There would be a run to cart them down to the field ambulance. The 60th Indian Field Ambulance was our support medical unit. A couple of times a week, maybe every second day at least there would be a run to take them back down there and then bring others back who’d been down there. That’s mainly what it was. When I wasn’t actually behind the wheel apart from doing

19:30 the maintenance on the vehicle and making sure it was ready to go at a moment’s notice, I worked in the RAP helping to treat patients. Starting off doing exactly what I was told and learning how to do this and to do that. I can remember them teaching me how to suture using an orange and putting sutures in.

You'd do that would you? How do you do that?

It's easy.

Describe it for me.

20:00 The needle holder with a needle in it and a thread in it and you just get the orange and that's the same as your arm. You just put it in, pull it out, tie the knot, cut it off. But they trained me to do that. They trained me to do a lot of things that I enjoyed doing and it was a help to them. I always had the feeling I didn't have to do it. I could have sat in the ambulance and read Playboy magazine again I suppose.

20:30 But I enjoyed it. I found I was learning something.

And what about immediate casualties from the front line? Did you apply first aid, or … yourself?

Okay. In the front line, someone's wounded the first thing that would happen is that his mate - everyone carried a field dressing or more than one, but he'd have a field dressing.

21:00 But you always used the patient's field dressing, not your own. Take that and apply it over the wound. Do the best you can to stop the bleeding. Then each company has a medic and in each platoon there are stretcher bearers. They take over and take them back to the company headquarters and from there to the battalion headquarter, hopefully by vehicle but not necessarily. They might have to be carried back. Depending on

21:30 what stage the war's at, what sort of action's going on. If you're advancing or retreating or static. In my time there, generally they were picked up at company headquarters in one of the ambulances. We had the Blitz and a jeep that had stretcher frames built onto it which could be used for carrying two stretcher patients as well.

22:00 **What was the Blitz like as a vehicle?**

Excellent. Go anywhere. Climb a tree if necessary. Put in four wheel drive - it had big heavy road grip type tyres - big lugs on the tyres. To change a tyre on it needed two men to lift a tyre up to put it back on. And it was built like a sort of a caravan at the back.

22:30 All enclosed, waterproof. It was an old one though. It wasn't new by any means. It had done a lot of work. But that didn't make a difference. It was reliable. Easy to drive providing you knew how to drive a non-synchronised gearbox. Double the clutch and all that.

23:00 I did put chains on it a few times because of the snow and the slush. Difficult to put them on and I had my doubts as to whether they made a lot of difference because the tyres had such big lugs on them and I think they were adequate without the chains on.

Tell us about some of the stories, your most urgent

23:30 **for want of a better word, deliveries - your evacuating people from the front line.**

I was in the RAP one day and a few mortar bombs came in and landed in the battalion headquarters area. That was always where the RAP was, close to

24:00 battalion headquarters. And a soldier was really severely wounded by shrapnel in the head. They applied rapid first aid and brought him quickly to the RAP where the doctor worked on him for about two hours and basically all he was doing was trying to keep him alive, because he kept wanting to die.

24:30 After about two hours he thought he had him stabilised and we loaded him into the ambulance, heading for the field ambulance where they could operate etcetera. The doctor decided to do something unusual. He decided he'd come in the ambulance and brought a medical orderly with him and I was the

25:00 driver. He wanted to get there as quickly as possible, but without any bumps. And that was a very difficult thing to do. I think it took about two hours to get to the field ambulance which was probably maybe five or six miles back. When they got there the patient had died. That was a pretty disappointing sort

25:30 of an end. There were patients who died in the RAP. They'd manage to get them back to the RAP and then they'd die there before we could move them. I think I was involved in one of the first helicopter evacuations. We evacuated a patient from the battalion who from the battalion headquarters in one of the old Sikorsky helicopters and from then on the

26:00 Americans developed this helicopter evacuation. By the end of the war if you've seen M*A*S*H [television series about the Korean War] on TV that type of helicopter was one of the first ones that did regular evacuations.

What did you think of this new system?

It's obviously good. The effectiveness or otherwise of a medical

26:30 evacuation plan has got to be gauged on the percentage of casualties who survive. That's governed by the time from when they become a casualty and they get to skilled treatment. So getting from wounding to the surgeon is the critical time. And in Vietnam

27:00 with the Australian soldiers sometimes that would be as short as twenty minutes which was fantastic. If they got to the hospital we rarely lost them after that. But in Korea it was nowhere near as good. Trying to get them down off an ice covered hill in the snow and the rain and someone shooting at you is going to take a long time.

Did you have people shoot at

27:30 **you while you were driving?**

Not while I was driving, no. I had a mine go off, I think beside the road, but not under the ambulance. And blew us sideways once, but no no-one ever shot at the ambulance.

What about talking to the patients? Would you talk to them while you were driving them?

No. There wasn't - there was always someone in the back with them. But my time was fully occupied in keeping the

28:00 vehicle on the road and going.

And did you learn anything other than suturing?

Oh a probably learnt a lot of things, but I generally learnt what a medical assistant would do in an RAP. Taking temperatures, taking pulses, recording them on the chart. Minor sutures, that would be all. Generally only minor suturing is done in an RAP anyway.

28:30 Irrigating eyes to get gravel and stuff out of shells that had exploded nearby. Learning anatomy and physiology as I went along.

Did you see any innovative ideas or methods used in the field?

In Korea?

29:00 I can't really answer that because I hadn't been involved in it before. So I don't really know how to compare to World War Two. I suspect there wasn't a lot, if any. All World War Two equipment was being used and the Australian Army was using it for quite a while after Korea. There were certainly some innovations in Vietnam, but I can't talk about others.

What about, also, the back of your ambulance?

29:30 **What was contained in it?**

It could carry four stretcher patients. Or it could carry two probably six sitting patients. I certainly carried four patients in it at times. I think once I might have had about twelve sitting patients in it. There was just that many that we wanted to clear them out.

30:00 **So tell us how the rest of your time panned out in Korea?**

In Korea. It became repetitive. That's what it was. I think what I've been over is what the year was comprised of. I don't really remember any other outstanding aspects of it.

30:30 The cold, it was horrendous. It tapered down and became quieter as the year went on until near the end of fifty two there was an upsurge in activity. And then in fifty three not long before the ceasefire once again there was an upsurge of activity. I don't really

31:00 have much recollection of any other … the patrols went out. Most of them had no contact. I think the Chinese went through the same procedure from what I've read. They felt that they were tapering down too, this war's going to end. We'll just hold the line.

What about yourself? When did you finish? Did you finish before the war ended?

I finished after twelve months.

31:30 I think the fifteenth of December fifty two. I got there on the sixteenth of December fifty one. Left on the fifteenth of December fifty two.

How did you feel to finish up your service?

I was really pleased after I got back to Japan when I realised "I'm back here in one piece and it finished".

32:00 And I was exceptionally pleased when I realised - and I now know, I've had confirmed what had happened - the doctor that was with the battalion at the time when I left, he wrote me a reference which I still have. I've never used it, but I'm really proud of it. In which he said that "Private Nolan is not only,

32:30 oh excellent infantry" or something like that, but had learnt a lot and "shows a great aptitude for medical work" was basically what he said. But he had sent a letter to the senior Australian medical officer in Japan unbeknownst to me. When I got back to Japan and went to Hiro I expected within a week to be on a plane heading for Australia because that was the routine.

33:00 There were a lot of Australian soldiers who wanted to stay on in Japan and applied for it. Most of them didn't get it because they didn't need them. They said, "No. No job here for you, mate". But I was called up to see Major Buck Rogers at the big hospital at Kure which used to be the Japanese Naval Hospital. He asked me "Would I like to stay in Japan and work at the hospital?"

33:30 And then with time I did a serious of jobs and I was there until September fifty three when my mother got cancer and I had to come home. But I worked in the canteen, worked in a pack store, worked in Q [Quartermaster] store, worked in the operating theatre, worked in the pathology lab and worked in the hospital office. So I really got a good

34:00 understanding of how a general military hospital operated. Which I didn't realise that that's what I had gained until years later when I thought "I remember all this".

Were you happy to stay on in Japan?

Yes. I was a nineteen year old with no ties. Who wouldn't be?

So you did all these different roles. What were you learning at the time?

In Japan?

34:30 **Yeah.**

I didn't realise that I was learning anything. I just thought that I was helping out as a member of the staff. I didn't know that it had been put in train, but while I was there my corps was changed from infantry to medical corps. And when I arrived back in Australia

35:00 the medical corps came looking for me. This was because of some reports that had come back from Japan. That they thought I might have some potential in the medical corps.

How did you enjoy the work?

I loved it. It was good. The hospital was staffed by Australians, Brits, Canadians, might have been the odd Kiwi and a whole heap of Japanese civilians.

35:30 And it ran like clockwork. Brilliant hospital.

Why do you think it was so well run?

Japanese efficiency initially. It was a naval hospital, well built. And then during the occupation of Japan money wasn't really a problem and the hospital was kept well maintained.

36:00 Good buildings. Well heated for the winter. It was a change after coming out of Korea and a week later being in a fully heated building.

How did you get along with the Japanese?

I got on really well with them. The ones that I came in contact with were good people.

36:30 No problems at all ever.

What kind of wounded were coming in these hospitals?

They were coming from the battalions. From the Canadians, the British and the Australians - there were three divisions in Korea. 28th, 29th and 25th. That's right, there

37:00 were three brigades, one whole division of Commonwealth forces. And they all ended up - any casualty or sick that had to be evacuated ended up in the Kure Military Hospital. (UNCLEAR) Military Hospital in Kure. And they were evacuated either by air to (UNCLEAR) where they were brought by hospital train to Kure. Or they came by boat and hospital train.

37:30 Or I think sometimes later in the piece the hospital boat brought them up into Kure Harbour. And I used to go sometimes - not every time - but I used to take my turn on the unloading party. Go down on the troop train and unload them and come up with them. That was good.

Would you talk with them?

Yes.

What sort of things would you talk about?

38:00 I'd first establish who they were, what company and what section and "What about so and so, have you seen so and so?" Providing they were up to it and generally they were by that time. They'd been

resuscitated and started on any drips (UNCLEAR).

And what was it like to see women again?

It's a funny thing. In Korea, for twelve months

38:30 I didn't see many women. There were a couple of concert parties there were women in, which we made a huge effort to go and see. They couldn't sing, but who cares? We went - when you travel back to - well I went to Seoul once, took the doctor down to Seoul. He had a conference to go to. From 3 Battalion.

39:00 His driver was on R & R I think. So I got the job of driving him down and stayed a couple of nights in Seoul. So I saw some Korean women. But I never went out after dark. Because I didn't know where I was. When I came back to Japan I met up with some Australian women because there were some Australian nurses at the hospital.

39:30 Some people made a big deal about this. It wasn't a big deal to me. I mean, I kept writing to my mum and a couple of my cousins. So I still had contact with women and it wasn't anything special to me.

Tape 7

00:37 **So can you tell me about the time when you found out in Japan that you'd be coming back or that you had to come back for your mother?**

Very distressing I suppose. I was called up by Major Rogers and said he had some bad news for me, that my mother was ill. He didn't know what the problem was but they wanted me back in

01:00 Australia urgently. That was in the afternoon. The next morning I was on a plane out of Iwakuni heading for Sydney. I arrived in Sydney and the system worked perfectly. I was on another plane to Brisbane which if you think about nineteen fifty three - you know you didn't fly from Sydney to Brisbane at the drop of a hat.

01:30 But I discovered when my father and brother met me at the airport that Mum had been diagnosed with breast cancer and had one breast removed and was recovering in hospital - in the Mater. That was a blow. It'd be a blow to anyone. Because I thought my mother was a saint.

02:00 That's how I came to come home then.

What was it like to be back in Australia again, aside from the personal?

I realise now that most people in Australia didn't know that there was a war going on in Korea. They didn't know where Korea was, the same as I didn't know where it was really when it started. And no-one at all was interested

02:30 in soldiers who'd been to Korea. "Just get on with it". I was posted - I was given about a month's leave which was owing to me. I was posted to a camp hospital at Yeronga which was in the same buildings as

03:00 my first night in the army. They had set up one camp hospital there. And I was posted there I was told as a holding posting until they worked out what was going to happen to me. During my time there I worked in the Q store, in the linen store for a few weeks and met my future wife.

How did you meet her?

03:30 My brother was going out with a girl and lived with that family. Frank assured me, "Oh I know this nice girl that'll just suit you". And that's where it started. Still going. So we arranged to get married in the following April, nineteen fifty four.

04:00 I was then sent down to the medical stores at Meeandah as a storeman. I was there for I don't know for how long. After we were married, anyway. So I came home September, some leave, worked out the hospital, went down to Meeandah, got married in April. In August fifty four

04:30 was posted to Townsville as ARA [Australian Regular Army] cadre into a corporal's posting at a CMF [Citizen's Military Force] - be called an Army Reserve today - field ambulance in Townsville. That field ambulance - the headquarters were in Townsville. A company in Rockhampton. With a section in Mackay. And there were three

05:00 ARA looking after - three regular army people looking after that field ambulance. A captain who was based in Townsville, two corporals and I was one of them. We were based in Townsville but had to travel to Rockhampton and Mackay quite regularly. I had that for four years. During that time two boys arrived on the scene.

05:30 Geoff and Sean. But while I was there - I'd been there about eight months I think because Geoff had arrived and word came through that I was to attend a school at the School of Army Health at Healesville in Victoria. A medical assistants' course. Because at this stage

06:00 my army qualifications were Bren gunner, rifleman, nothing to do with medical. So I was sent to a six week medical assistants' course and it was then I realised a number of things. At the end of that course I realised. There were thirty students on the course and the army system then was - and it's probably still similar - you were graded at the end of the course.

06:30 You either got an A pass, a B pass, a C pass or you failed. At that time there had only ever been one person who had been to the school that got an A pass. I was the second. And I couldn't figure out why, how come I got an A pass. To me it was easy. And it was. It wasn't until

07:00 a number of years later that I realised some of the reasons it was easy. But one of the things was what I was taught in Korea and in Japan. Because it all came back to me. I could almost tell what the instructors - some of them were nursing sisters - were going to say in their lectures. So I did that course. Went back to Townsville, back doing

07:30 the same job. And then I was sent down again in about a years' time to do an instructors' course at the School of Army Health. And once again got an A pass. And I did not find it difficult. I was proud that I got it. I then thought, "Maybe I should be looking

08:00 a little higher and see what I can do in the army". And I talked it over with Ev and she supported me obviously. We got to four years we'd been in Townsville. I had done a number of other courses - not medical. One was a fire support at the School of Infantry.

08:30 One was a battle commanders' course at jungle training centre in Canungra. Both of which I found very interesting and satisfying because I didn't find them very hard. But the four years were up in Townsville. You were only allowed four years in Townsville in those days and you had to move. I was posted to - I was a corporal there - I was posted to

09:00 the headquarters here in Brisbane as a sergeant running the RAP at Victoria Barracks in Brisbane. But I then thought I wanted to try and get something higher up than that and I wanted to become a public health inspector or

09:30 a public health officer as they're now called. And when I enquired about that I struck a stumbling block that I hadn't foreseen - education. "What is your education?" "Oh well I went to school." And obviously there was no way that I could get on one of those courses without some education - a piece of paper that said I was educated.

10:00 So I found out about the Army Education Corps and it was a wonderful and I still say it's a wonderful thing. I went and saw them. They started me on correspondence course to firstly the Victorian Intermediate [Certificate]. I think they said it normally takes two years. Well I started it in June and passed it

10:30 in the end of the year. Five subjects. And they immediately said to me, "You've got to do your Victorian Leaving [Certificate]. If you can do Intermediate in that time, do the Victorian Leaving this year". Well I did and of course I had no problem passing that. I then applied - the Australian Army was training its own public health officers.

11:00 I applied and it was a year's civil schooling based in Melbourne. I managed to get on that course. So all of nineteen sixty I was in Melbourne. Evelyn was in Brisbane with two little boys. But I got an A pass on that course too.

How often would you see Evelyn?

I didn't see her from day one till I came back. We didn't have the money. I couldn't afford

11:30 the air fare. We had little to no money when we got married. We had bought a home at Newmarket here with a war service loan and any money that we had had to go into the deposit. And with the two boys. And I was only talking to Ev about this recently -

12:00 to even consider making a phone call from Melbourne - we didn't have a phone in Brisbane, that's right - but to even think of making a phone call to Brisbane, you didn't just sit down and do it. You thought about what it was going to cost. It was a trunk call. And the army had a system then which - I don't know whether they still have it or not - which certainly was applied the whole time I was in the army, that you were obliged to allocate a

12:30 a good lump out of your pay to your wife if you were married and it automatically went to her. I think it was eighty five percent. Well I used to - but you could allocate more - I used to allocate about ninety percent of my salary to her. So it came straight to her bank. So that's what she had to bring up the two children on and I was left with the rest. And if I could accumulate any I would sent it to her. So I was

13:00 there for a year, completed the course and got my diploma in public health. Then I let it be known that I really wanted to go back to the infantry battalion and that I was thinking of transferring back to infantry.

Why were you so interested in going back to infantry?

Because that was the real army. It was soldiers.

13:30 I just felt that what would I be doing in the medical corps? I would be sitting in an office at a headquarters like Victoria Barracks maybe going to see a unit here and a unit there, writing bits of paper. I didn't think I really wanted to do that. But this problem resolved itself easily because the medical corps posted me to 1 Battalion at Enoggera as

14:00 their public health officer - as their health inspector as they were called in those days.

What does that job, public health officer or health inspector, involve?

You are responsible for the health and workplace safety and related issues of fifteen hundred men and the families etcetera. It varies from place to place, but that's what it involves. And I was posted there and promoted to staff

14:30 sergeant. 1 Battalion was there then. It moved to Malaysia. I didn't go. Because they didn't have such a posting for the battalion that went to Malaysia, it was scaled down. But 2 Battalion came back to there so I changed from 1 Battalion to 2 and then the same thing happened to 2, it went somewhere and 4 Battalion moved in. So I

15:00 had time in 3 Battalion, 1 Battalion, 2 Battalion, then 4 Battalion. Nineteen sixty two my daughter was born and in nineteen sixty three the CO [Commanding Offficer] of 4 Battalion, who was Colonel Jackson, called me into the office and said he – "He'd been talking to someone who had told him that they thought I had some

15:30 officer potential". He was running a fire support course to try and teach his battalion NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] how to prepare and execute fire plans for operations, "Would I be interested in joining his staff to do that?" I said, "Yeah. But my experience with fire support plans is

16:00 from Korea as a section commander and seeing company commanders do it, but not …". "Yes" he said "I know". Anyway I did it and the next thing was that he had nominated me for an officer qualifying course at Canungra and I was commissioned. And when I completed that course there was a board came up from army headquarters and interviewed the successful students. I think there

16:30 were twenty three of us and thirteen qualified. The head of this board just happened to be a colonel who I had known when he was OC of A Company in Korea. Jim Shelton. But he never let on. We met him in the mess the night before.

17:00 We lived in the officers' mess for this course. I was introduced to him and he never let on in front of anybody that he knew me. And I didn't say anything. And the next day during the interview he said, "Now, Ron, we're going to offer you a choice. Infantry commission, either in the medical corps or the infantry. They've both put in a claim for you".

17:30 He said, "You can have the next half hour or so to think it over". So I thought it over for half an hour. I chose medical corps because I thought, "My specialist degree, I've got a diploma in public health, I ought to use it. I'm now thirty two years of age. I would be competing with Duntroon graduates

18:00 who are also lieutenants and they're twenty four. I'll take the easy way out". So I took medical corps. And then he said, "It's great to see you Ron." etcetera etcetera.

What was it like to hear that from him?

Great.

Did seeing him bring back any … ?

Yeah. But we didn't - we met that night again in the mess and had a drink, but we didn't reminisce and relive the

18:30 old days. We (UNCLEAR) respect to one another. And I still do. I saw him for the dedication of the memorial in Canberra. And I saw him on Anzac Day because he came up and marched with the Korean Veterans here in Brisbane. And I had the pleasure of introducing Ev to him. But of course I put a proviso on. I said, "I'd like to be commissioned in the medical

19:00 corps, but I would like one posting with the battalion. One more". And I got that. I was posted to 1 Battalion as a platoon commander. They were based in Sydney and I went there. While I was there then I went to, I did some courses - an adjutants' course and a quartermasters' course - and was posted in nineteen sixty

19:30 four, June sixty four as the adjutant quartermaster of a camp hospital at Kapooka near Wagga Wagga. Was there for a couple of years - three years. Promoted captain there. Then of course Vietnam was well under way. National Service commenced while I was at Kapooka and that was a recruit training base.

20:00 So all the national servicemen came in there. I had contact with them all in there on the staff.

What was your opinion of national service at this stage?

At that stage I thought it was a good idea. I always had misgivings about the lottery system of getting them in.

20:30 **Why was that?**

I could understand why they did it, but from a soldier's point of view I would have preferred it that they all register and that the army pick who they want. So we don't end up with a soldier because he was born on the tenth of June. We end up with a soldier because he's highly intelligent, motivated and

21:00 physically fit , and psychologically sound. But anyway it commenced there and then in nineteen sixty seven I was posted to Wakehall in Brisbane to raise a field ambulance from scratch. And that was 11 Field Ambulance. I did have a nominal doctor, commanding officer as lieutenant

21:30 colonel, but he was a practising doctor and that was nominal really. So I raised 11 Field Ambulance and during that period there was a field ambulance in Vietnam at Vung Tau that had been there since I don't know probably from nineteen sixty five it might have been. Sixty six.

22:00 2 field ambulance any way went there first to support the battalion that was in Vietnam and then they were replaced by 8 Field Ambulance after twelve months. And then while I was raising 11 Field Ambulance which was originally going to be the replacement for 8 Field Ambulance, they decided we didn't need a field ambulance we actually needed a field hospital in Vietnam.

22:30 So 1 Australian Field Hospital was established. I wanted to be the first adjutant and I got that posting and went to Vietnam in March nineteen sixty eight as the adjutant of 1 (Aust) Field Hospital.

What were you hearing about the Vietnam War?

I was hearing some things which scared me. The -

23:00 to read in the paper a company of infantry had been ambushed and wiped out. South Vietnamese infantry. Almost the equivalent of an American company of US soldiers ambushed and wiped out. This is scary stuff. Because if that happened to an Australian I'm not sure even

23:30 now how the Australian public would react. That sort of thing - and there were things happening which were not real nice. We decided to send an infantry battalion and then we put the medical and some other supporting units in. But before that we had quite a

24:00 large team in Vietnam - training team. And they were - some of them were in a terrible situation. Danger and ill-treated and not looked after and no support. So when I arrived in Vietnam in nineteen sixty eight as adjutant of the Field Hospital I didn't realise, but it pleased me when it happened, I

24:30 was asked to carry out several other roles. One because of my diploma of public health. The CO of the hospital who was a friend of mine - Dr Bill Watkins - he said "If you can spare the time, do you think you can spare the time to look after the public health matters in the Vung Tau area?" which was the logistic support base.

25:00 So I said, "Yes, I'll do my best there". I was able to do that. There were some glaring anomalies there that needed fixing. The water supply and things like that.

Just a quick question, I guess it backtracks a little bit but relates to something else, when the armistice for the Korean War was sorted out ...

Fifty three, the middle of fifty three.

25:30 **What was your reaction to that politically, I guess?**

It didn't register. I was in Japan. I thought it was great that it's over. In a joking or a derisive manner sometimes people say to me, "Oh you were in the army were you? What did

26:00 you do?" I said, "Oh I fought in two wars, one was a draw and one was a loss".

Did you think that the war in Korea was worthwhile?

At the time I did, yes. I thought it was important to stop communist expansion.

Did you still think this in fifty three?

In fifty three yeah I did.

26:30 And I thought, "Okay, so we've got back to square one and peace will reign again. Everything will be alright".

So by the sixties when Vietnam was starting to happen, what was your opinion of Communism?

I still felt the same, I felt that the major danger was communist expansionism

27:00 and that the Chinese were becoming a major problem. And that they would use Vietnam as a stepping

stone to come through the rest of South East Asia.

And early in the Vietnam War what feelings did you have about the way the war was?

I didn't have any bad feelings about it.

27:30 I hadn't bothered to read a lot about its background. I've remedied that since, but I didn't have any bad feelings about it and I thought, "Yeah well the Australian government knows what they're doing". And I always had a feeling which I probably still have that we needed

28:00 to, for want of a better word keep, on the good side of the United States of America.

Why did you feel that?

Because of their power and potential power. If we ever needed help and they didn't come we might be in trouble.

28:30 **We were just talking before we went on to that little area about the time in Vung Tau. But just before that can you take me through how - were you appointed to Vietnam or was it a volunteer …?**

It was volunteer in the sense that there were a number of other officers who were more than happy to go to Vietnam as the adjutant

29:00 of 1 (Aust) Field Hospital. And I had indicated that I would love to go. Well, Bill Watson, who's a doctor obviously but I had known him different times, different exercises etcetera in the army - he said he wanted me and that was all that was involved.

What was your wife's reaction?

29:30 It was as I expected it would be. She gave me her full support. And I think sincerely - I'm sure sincerely. Now this then of course left her with two boys at Marist College at Ashgrove. My daughter just aged seven - when was she born? in sixty two.

30:00 And this was what? We're talking about sixty eight. Six years of age. We were living in a rented house at Kelvin Grove. She had her hands full for a year. Looking after those two boys who were growing up. Jeff was born in, what, nineteen fifty five, so he was thirteen. But she coped admirably.

30:30 Yeah.

Did she have any worries about you going to war?

Yeah.

What sort of worries?

She never spoke about them. And she still hasn't. But clearly stamped in my memory - her face when I was at the airport leaving Brisbane.

31:00 **Why do you remember?**

Because it was - she had aged overnight and I could see that she was concerned.

How did this make you feel?

Not good. She's probably still got the letter which I wrote to her on the plane going to Sydney.

31:30 But, yeah. It wasn't going to stop me. So I was going.

Why is that?

If you asked Evelyn she would tell you "Because if the army called, he went".

And why do you think that is?

I don't know. Just the way I'm

32:00 made I suppose.

What is it about the army?

I don't know. I don't know. I think it's a very important institution. It's a huge part of my life, almost my whole life.

And how did you travel to Vietnam?

32:30 By plane, obviously. I didn't mean trying to be funny. A lot of soldiers went to Vietnam on boats on the [HMAS] Sydney and that. No, I flew. And it was Qantas.

What's the experience of going to war on a Qantas jet?

And wearing civilian clothes.

33:00 Those were the orders. You had to wear civilian clothes onto the plane and when you landed at Saigon as it was then.

Why is that?

It had to be politically motivated and I'm not really sure to this day why that was, but that was the rule. Actually

33:30 didn't get into uniform until I arrived at Vung Tau. I think we left Sydney in the morning, we arrived up there late in the afternoon and at night time we got to Vung Tau.

What are your first impressions of Saigon?

Busy, bustling, noisy, smelly. Typical smell of the East. Urine, human urine. Soldiers everywhere. Americans

34:00 everywhere. Planes everywhere of every possible description. Helicopters, aeroplanes coming and going. And noise. Non-stop noise. Aeroplanes roaring in and roaring out. All typical America.

Loud and noisy.

Yeah.

34:30 **It just seems strange being in Sydney in the morning and …**

Vung Tau late late that night.

How did you assimilate this?

Well it was a bit surreal. I travelled in pants like this and white shirt. Arrived in Vung Tau after dark but was then issued with my uniform and a

35:00 sidearm which everyone wore in Vietnam. Why I don't know. Even a Salvation Army man visiting for a week was issued with a sidearm. God, how dangerous that was. So I arrived there. I was met by staff. The staff that were there then were the remnants of 8 Field Ambulance which had moved from Vung Tau to Nui Dat where the

35:30 taskforce was. Of course, as soon as I arrived there and the other soldiers that travelled with me, the next day the rest of 8 Field Ambulance, more or less the next day, they moved up to Nui Dat. But I was shown a room in a wooden hut that had been built on the sand dune that had a bed and it was a mosquito net and a

36:00 mattress on it. A metal bed. So I unpacked my bag and what have you. I think there was a meal provided. And basically lay down to go to sleep. During the night - the wind blows every night in Vung Tau and it blows in off the sea and it carries with it sand, buckets of sand. So very shortly

36:30 after going to bed you're covered with sand and you're lying in sand and it's stinking hot. And you're sweating. That was my introduction to Vietnam. It was even worse than the cold in Korea.

I haven't heard very much about Vung Tau. Can you tell me a bit about what the environment's like?

Vung Tau used to be known as

37:00 the - where's Monaco - anyway, as the Mediterranean of the East. It was the French holiday centre for the French colonialists in Vietnam. Beautiful. Some beautiful buildings and lovely beaches. But where the hospital was built, where one ALSG [Australian Logistic Support Company]

37:30 was established - and far be it from me to criticise whoever sited them, they probably had good reason - but right on the sand dunes. They had obviously never spent a night there. Because every night this happened. But it was a logistic support group commanded by a colonel and 1 (Aust) Field Hospital was probably one of the larger units in

38:00 that area. But not under command of the logistic support group commander. He was a colonel but he did not command this field hospital. It was commanded from headquarters AFE [?] in Saigon. He commanded it for local administration only which had the potential for some conflict. There were workshops units, engineer units

38:30 postal units, pay office units and also in the Vung Tau area, not very far from us, was 36 EvacHospital, an American evacuation hospital which I became very familiar with - the staff and the operations of it, as did Bill Watson. There was a civilian surgical team

39:00 based in Vung Tau as well at that time. It was a fishing industry was the main Vietnamese industry of Vung Tau.

What was the situation in Vung Tau - I don't know, security ... ?

Enemy-wise.

Yeah.

This was the question I immediately sprung to my mind when I arrived there.

39:30 I didn't see any. I thought, this is strange. This is supposed to be a war zone. It's generally accepted now by people who write the books and who should know that there was an unwritten agreement that the VC [Viet Cong] would leave Vung Tau alone to be used as a recreational

40:00 centre for our troops from Nui Dat. And to leave our support units - because the hospital was there etcetera - alone. And we would leave them alone when their troops came down for recreation. Now nobody will admit that was the case, but that was the appearance given. In my twelve months there never

40:30 really saw an enemy activity in the Vung Tau area other than a few rockets fired from well up the peninsula into the oil tanks at the airstrip a couple of times.

Tape 8

00:38 **Did you have any more to say about that?**

I don't think so. In Vung Tau the Americans had a huge logistic establishment there. They had an officers' club with bargirls and pianos.

01:00 After I'd been in Vietnam for a couple of weeks someone said, oh it might have been Colonel Watson, the CO, "We're invited down to the officers' club for a drink, do you want to come?" And I said, "Oh yeah why not". Well as soon as I walked in there I thought, there's something wrong here because there is no security. Anyone could have thrown a grenade

01:30 into that crowded bar where there were three star American generals, two star American generals, all sorts of officers cavorting and dancing and singing and drinking. There was nothing to prevent the satchel bombers - they used to operate in Saigon on a little putt putt machine and a sandbag over the top and would have blown it to pieces. That

02:00 never happened. I don't know why. But I didn't go there very often, because I didn't like it. I could not reconcile them living like that, eating T-bone steaks and drinking and dancing and almost within earshot B52 bombers blasting parts of Vietnam. It was within earshot. It was in the Long Hai hills which you could see

02:30 across the bay.

How did you feel about the Americans in general?

The medical side of the American army I was most impressed with. The Americans in general I was not terribly impressed with in Vietnam. Now I suppose I better try and clarify that. The American medical set up

03:00 was excellent. But the outstanding American unit in my opinion in that war was their medical evacuation helicopters who operated under the code name of Dustoff. Now these were Iroquois helicopters solely designated to casualty evacuation and they were painted with huge red crosses which meant nothing to the Viet Cong.

03:30 They would fly those helicopters anywhere any time to pick up casualties. The pilots of them, they at one time had a life expectancy of thirty days. They had that many blown out of the sky going in to try and pick up casualties but they never folded. They were always on the job.

04:00 The medical support from all the other units was also great. They had specialised eye hospitals, specialised burns units, specialised orthopaedic hospitals. Very quickly, in my time, I suppose I built a job for myself, but someone had to do it. I established

04:30 contact with as many American hospital units, medical units as possible. Where possible, visit them, became known, got them to come and visit us. Because the way it had to work was this. The chopper picks up the casualty in the jungle and it's obvious to the medic on board that he's got major damage to his eyes.

05:00 We're wasting time bringing him to our hospital at Vung Tau when he should be going to a specialised eye hospital. So we had to put in place for that something mechanism to allow that to happen. We had to put in place something that if we were going to take him there they weren't overcrowded, they were able to fit him in and look after him.

05:30 I became unofficially what was called the casualty clearing officer. In other words, me and my staff had to know which hospital could take patients and which hospital they should go to depending on what type of wound, or whether they should come to our hospital. And then built in on top of that was the training team

06:00 which was spread throughout South Vietnam. And some of them were in some really scary places right up on the border where they were rocketed and mortared and shelled every night. And some of them got wounded - some of them got killed - but the wounded, they also they were Australian soldiers and we didn't want them getting lost in the system. So I used to do my best to

06:30 try and keep in contact with their administrators from Saigon to know where they were. And they would let me know if someone was wounded and needed evacuating. They would say, "Look, officer Jones has been severely wounded, we think he's in the American Hospital at Cam Ranh Bay", for example, "but we can't establish clearly what his situation is".

07:00 I might have had contact with that hospital in Cam Ranh Bay. And the Americans had a really good trunk phone system established throughout Vietnam by this stage. With a fair bit of jiggling and coercing and cajoling you could establish a phone connection anywhere. And I would find out what the score was on the patient and eventually or as quickly as possible,

07:30 but it might take some time, get that patient transferred back down into our hospital to be evacuated back to Australia. I always thought, and I handed over to my replacement three jobs. The adjutant of the field hospital - which was all of the administration, personnel administration in particular. Which really was only a matter of supervision because I had excellent staff. I had warrant officers, staff sergeants,

08:00 sergeants who'd do the work. Public health officer for the ALSG area. And then the casualty collecting officer for the Australians in Vietnam. And that's how I kept myself occupied for twelve months.

Sounds pretty busy.

It was busy and satisfying. I enjoyed that job. I didn't enjoy Vietnam, but I enjoyed that job. Because I felt I was doing something worthwhile.

08:30 And I was always maybe driven by or at least had at the back of my mind what I think I might have mentioned earlier this morning, that one of the reasons that as an infantry soldier I was prepared to get up and go forward was that I believed I had an excellent medical support system behind me. Whether that was true or not I don't know

09:00 in Korea. But I thought it was. And I wanted to try and make sure that the infantry soldiers in Vietnam had an excellent medical support system behind them.

You were talking about the Americans. How were they with your requests?

Excellent. The medical system. Yeah. I'll give some examples of that.

09:30 They would never say no if for any reason we wanted to evacuate a patient to an American hospital. As soon as you could make contact with them you knew the answer would be yes. And even if they were arrived there unannounced they were admitted and looked after. And they were well looked after. And they would bend over backwards

10:00 to help Australians. The example of that that I'll use is, at Nui Dat the soldiers lived in tents when they were back in base. Sandbag tents, but they were tents nevertheless. There was a fire in a tent and a soldier was very very severely burnt and was not going to survive. According to the doctors. They said, "No. He will not

10:30 survive, Ron. He will die". But then they threw in a "But". If he were to get to a specialised burns unit he might have some chance. I thought, alright. So I immediately contacted - as soon as I heard of it and he was on his way down from Nui Dat in the chopper heading for our hospital - spoke to the CO obviously

11:00 and the doctors. Contacted our Vietnam headquarter doctor in Saigon who contacted the Americans who arranged a hospital plane which was the equivalent of a 727 set out as a hospital to fly to Vung Tau to pick up this patient and fly him to a special burns hospital

11:30 in Tokyo, taking an Australian doctor and an Australian sister to look after him. And he died a day later. But that's the sort of support that they would provide. They would do anything within their power to help with a medical evacuation and treatment.

And what about your own staff at the Australian hospital?

In what way?

How did you find

12:00 **them, what were they like?**

The hospital staff? Wonderful. There was a system in Vietnam that specialists from Australia came for

three months. CMF. Some of them had never been in the army, but they put them in the CMF to put a uniform on them. But most of them did have some CMF training here. Surgeons, anaesthetists, physicians, psychiatrists, pathologists.

12:30 Top eminent people in their field in Australia came up on three month turnover to provide care for the soldiers at our hospital at Vung Tau. Plus of course the regular army doctors who most of them had come into the army through the undergraduate scheme where the army put them through medical school in return for a return of service.

13:00 A year for a year, plus a year. Some of them had stayed on in the army. Some excellent - they were all excellent doctors.

How did they cope with being in this situation?

They were proud of it. They were proud of the hospital.

You briefly went over some of your roles - you did the casualty clearing officer, but as the ...

Adjutant.

13:30 **Adjutant. I've never heard of that before.**

Administration officer really under another name.

What kind of work would you do in this role?

You're responsible for all personnel matters. In other words getting the right staff there to fill all the positions on the establishment, looking after their pay, rations, leave. The rations probably come under the

14:00 Q department but you had to co-ordinate with them. And all the welfare matters relating to all the staff - male, female. And I would like to say a word about the female staff before long - now.

Go for it now.

Okay. It was only just before I arrived there that the first female nursing sisters from Australian arrived in Vietnam. They came too -

14:30 they staffed - 8 Field Ambulance was the second one there. During its terms some of them were sent up. And then we got a full complement for 1 (Aust) Field Hospital and we set it up. We had a major rebuilding program of course to fit a field hospital in where the ambulance had been. These were all Vietnamese contractors who built all these buildings - operating theatres and accommodation blocks etcetera on the sand dunes.

15:00 But the presence of female nursing staff was something that had to be seen - the effect of it had to be seen to be believed. The effect that it had on a wounded soldier to see a female nursing staff -

15:30 they just thought it was wonderful. They did an excellent job under difficult conditions. And the soldiers gained such benefit. There were people in Australian who did not want these nursing sisters to go to Vietnam because they thought it was too dangerous. It ought to have been dangerous, but it never was. It just never happened. So that was good.

16:00 It could have been dangerous. Certainly. Tet - during the Tet Offensive I certainly had a few sleepless nights because I was worried about the patients and the sisters. If there was some awful business like we were over run it could have been terrible, but it didn't happen.

Well tell us about this time during the Tet Offensive.

The major uprising which

16:30 was eventually was defeated, but whole bases were over run.

What about from your point of view?

And in Vung Tau what happened - there was no extra activity in Vung Tau from the Communists, from the VC. There were some major restrictions applied - sensibly - to all unnecessary traffic was

17:00 stopped and movement between units was stopped. There were road blocks put up outside the peninsula to control entry into our area. But there were a lot of casualties. It was a very busy time. Our airport in Vung Tau where the RAAF [Royal Australian Airforce] was based - and that's where our casualty evacuation was arranged from. The Hercs [Hercules aircraft]

17:30 flew in and out of there. Routinely a Hercules flew in once a week to evacuate casualties from 1 Ausfield Hospital back to Australia via Butterworth in Malaysia. We had a lot of casualties during Tet. And shortly thereafter we had a major outbreak of malaria which stretched our resources greatly too.

18:00 But the Tet - I actually spent one night away from Vung Tau during Tet. I was in Saigon. I stayed overnight at an officers' billet in Saigon. We sat on the roof and watched the war. It was a major battle

going on around the racecourse area - chasers and fighter bombers being called in. It was major war, the Tet Offensive.

18:30 **What was this like, watching a war?**

Surreal. It was. The whole thing was surreal. Sometimes you had to pinch yourself to think, “Is this really happening?” In the Vung Tau area as I alluded to earlier on, there was no military reason why the VC couldn’t have caused

19:00 extreme damage in that area, but they never did. And people sometimes almost lived as if they were at a posting in Australia. They had happy hours at the officers’ mess in Vung Tau on Friday afternoon. We had our own officers’ mess at the field hospital

19:30 with some fairly large parties that went late at night sometimes. These were during you could say quiet periods, but you never knew what was a quiet period and what wasn’t. It was like fire support base Coral was overrun sort of unexpectedly. It was important

20:00 never to let our guard down too far as far as I was concerned. I used to always be against these parties that went into the night and people - I think all the doctors were realistic, they didn’t drink if they thought there was any chance they were going to be operating, but you never knew. We had a system. If there was some

20:30 enemy contact with any of the battalions and casualties were taken, we were notified from Nui Dat, we sounded a siren at the hospital which immediately called back all of our staff whatever they were doing or wherever they were. Some of them might be down the beach having a swim, ‘cause you could walk out the back gate of the hospital

21:00 and you were on the South China Sea, lovely beach. Some might be visiting the canteen. They had a canteen. So this siren sounded and of course what that also did was it alerted every unit in 1 ALSG that there’s casualties coming in. Then they’d be wondering who it was and how many and what was happening.

Would you talk to patients?

21:30 Yeah. Every one. When I was there I made it my business to try and talk to every patient. If I was present in the unit I would be at the landing zone when the chopper landed to see them unloaded, to try and establish who they were, where they came from and to make sure that the records

22:00 were commenced accurately, that we didn’t have Private Smith down as Private Jones at that stage. Because that would never change. It’d cause dramatic problems. I would then follow them through with my clerks through the operating theatre making sure that we got all of the information - regimental number, rank, name, unit, got it correct, next

22:30 of kin was known - we didn’t have to get that. Our records office had that. We would then wait until the attending doctor was able to give us a brief description of the casualty’s wounds and condition. Then a signal was sent to headquarters in Saigon who forwarded it on to Australia for the purposes of notifying next

23:00 of kin etcetera. And then later when the patient was stabilised and was in a ward - it may be a day or two or three before I would get around to it - but I would try and call on each one and say hello and see that everything was okay, if they had any problems at home. And I always liked to know - because I had

23:30 friends from Korea who were company commanders and battalion commanders at Nui Dat who would ring me and say, sergeant so and so’s down there, how do you think he’s going? And I’d say, “Well you know I’m not the doctor but I was talking to him this morning and he’s fine”.

What kind of stories would they tell you when you talked to them sometimes?

Not a lot. Not a lot.

24:00 I didn’t feel that they wanted me to be asking them really. But what impressed me or depressed me I suppose was the number of times the chopper would land and it would unload six, eight, ten wounded Australian soldiers, all nineteen years of age. They were all wet, dirty

24:30 shocked, frightened and it was horrible. I really think that that had a greater effect on me than things that happened to me in Korea. Was just to see so many young soldiers coming into the hospital I think. It wasn’t pleasant.

25:00 But I think the percentage was ninety eight percent if they made it to the hospital made it.

How were these boys coping?

They were scared, frightened and shocked and they weren’t coping. Generally when the chopper landed they weren’t coping. No. They

25:30 were in shock, incoherent and it was no good asking them what had happened or where they’d been

because twenty minutes before they were in contact with the enemy. They were shooting at them and they were being shot at. Or they'd been blown up by a Claymore Mine or been hit with an RPG [Rocket Propelled Grenade].

Is there

26:00 **anything that you could say to them that would help?**

Not at that time, no. The objective - there were a number of things that had to be done, things that in the early days might have been overlooked. They had to be disarmed. You had to be sure that they - probably the second week I was there, chopper lands, there'd been contact, wounded soldiers on it.

26:30 One is unloaded and he's got a primed Claymore Mine on his back. And suddenly dawned on me, "Okay we get it off". There was an engineer on our staff who was able to disarm the bloody thing. "What do we do with it now?" There was no provision. Which we took care of. We dug a bloody great hole beside the landing pad so

27:00 anything that even looked remotely dangerous was thrown down there. But we had experience with grenades hanging off their belt and a pin almost out. So you had to take all this into account while you're trying to look after this wounded, shot, incoherent patient, but as quickly as possible get them into triage where the doctors are waiting for them.

27:30 **And how would you establish who they were and stuff if they were incoherent?**

Well their dog tags [identity tags] was the prime source. I only - I think I can remember once there was a soldier came in didn't have them. They always had their dog tags and that's where we would make a start. But we wouldn't do it in the chopper, we'd do it in triage [sorting and allocating aid on the basis of need]. Having made sure they had no live ammunition

28:00 or weapons, took the weapons off them, into triage, cut their clothes off and the doctors would start work immediately deciding which one was first, and second and third.

Would you try to get establish their stories just for purposes of knowing what kind of wound they received or ... ?

No. The doctor would know that by looking at them. They were either a gunshot wound or a shell fragment.

28:30 Or burns.

And what did their faces look like in this situation twenty minutes out of ... ?

White. And sweating. They're in shock and they're pale, sweating, cold, clammy. Anyone who ever saw one would mistake someone being in shock when they were because it was the classic. Everyone was classically

29:00 severely shocked.

You mentioned earlier that Korea had some good times, but with Vietnam, how would you describe that as a war?

It was dirty, obscene, and I

29:30 certainly never had any fun there. I could not bring myself to have fun with what I saw - not every day because we didn't get casualties every day thank goodness. But it was terrible. And then the chopper occasionally would come in and it would have some Vietnamese civilians on it. Children

30:00 burnt with napalm [jellied petrol used in bombs]. It was horrible.

What was it like seeing napalm victims?

Well I'd seen them in Korea, but yeah it was pretty horrible. It's awful to see people burnt. The pain was horrendous. And they get burnt so severely - it's the shock that kills them.

30:30 I know, I've spoken to other people who have been to Korea and Vietnam - there aren't a lot actually who went to both, who went to both wars. Mainly your Korean veterans who were in Vietnam - not all of them, but ninety nine percent of them were in the training camp. And they had a different war again. They'd tell you about their war. That was pretty horrendous too.

31:00 But ones I have spoken to, and whether it was the fact that we grew older or that it was a different war I don't know, but we all agree there was no fun in being in Vietnam.

How would being older affect you?

I don't know. That was about the only other change that we

31:30 could think of, that we'd grown older. Maybe it was a cumulative thing. The horrors affected you as you got older.

When Vietnamese civilians would arrive, would you have to check them somehow?

Yes. We had South Vietnamese interpreters. They were there

32:00 to find out who they were and that they weren't VC, but if they were VC that didn't mean put them in the chopper and send them off. They were still treated and looked after the same as everyone else, but we needed to know that they were and they didn't have any ulterior motive in being there. We had VC patients there for probably a couple of weeks some of them because they weren't fit to move before then. And they didn't cause us a problem.

32:30 (UNCLEAR) would put a guard on the ward, but they never caused any problem.

Did you ever communicate with any of them?

I don't think directly, no, I don't think so. The ward staff and the MPs [Military Police] and the Vietnamese interpreters, they looked after them. If they wanted anything they would have let me know, but they didn't. I can't speak Vietnamese although I can speak some

33:00 Indonesian. But I could not communicate with the Vietnamese.

What kind of feeling would you have when you hear the radio go or hear a chopper?

For years after I came home a Huey chopper [Iroquois helicopter model number HU II] in the background startled me. Because I immediately thought -

33:30 it brought into my mind, oh casualties are coming. Just like for an instant. In fact it still happens. And I always look up if I hear a helicopter. And it could come at any time. Eleven o'clock at night the siren would go off. You would see people appearing out of their sleeping quarters heading for the triage.

34:00 Hopefully within twenty minutes the chopper would be there. And sometimes it wasn't only one of course; there would be another one circling waiting to land. Some of the choppers were Dustoff with American pilots and sometimes they were RAAF Iroquois that were set up to bring patients.

How did you support each other as staff at the hospital?

34:30 Support each other? Making allowances for everyone's shortcomings. If you saw someone having a problem, helping them out. We did lose some patients through stress and have to be sent home, depression, indigenous [?] depression.

35:00 Everyone tried to help everyone else, to be as forgiving as possible. But also we maintained probably the strictest discipline in any unit in ALSG because both the CO and myself felt that without that they would not be able to do the job.

35:30 If they were rostered on at a certain time they were expected to be there. And they were expected to do what they were trained to do and do it properly. We didn't tolerate someone not being able to work because he had a hangover. It cost him in his pay books.

Would you ever have to communicate with families in Australia?

36:00 **of wounded?**

Yeah. There was a system and it was implemented where next of kin - if a soldier was wounded or ill and it was considered by the senior doctor that his chances of recovery could be helped

36:30 by a next of kin visiting there was a system, I just forget the name now - it had a code name - if that was implemented a signal was sent to Australia and the welfare people in Australia went into action and contacted the next of kin and arranged to bring one - generally one but they could be accompanied - to Vietnam flying

37:00 Qantas into Saigon over to Nui Dat and we would provide accommodation and an escort and a guide and someone to assist. There was - I know there were two cases of this happening. One happened while I was in Australia on my three weeks R & R and there was one other. And the

37:30 details of it I can't fully recall. I've been trying to contact someone who was my ward master there at the time who I'm sure would remember it. I'm sure that this lady came and I have a feeling that her son had meningitis or cerebral malaria - something to do with the brain.

38:00 And she was brought up and I can remember escorting her around the unit and meeting her at the plane and things like that - can't remember the name.

Why would they be brought all the way to Vietnam?

To be with their next of kin because the doctor felt that would help with their recovery. Not because they were going to die. Because he felt that this might assist them. They might be in a

38:30 coma or something and this might be the thing, that type of thing.

Were there situations where people knew someone was going to die, but they were kept alive?

I don't know. B. the doctors probably wouldn't tell anyone other than another doctor if that was the case. And they wouldn't tell anyone else.

39:00 No I don't know of that happening.

What would happen if someone was about to die? Would there be a priest brought in or ... ?

Yes. A priest. Priests were - padres were based in our hospital area and the chapel was in our hospital area. (UNCLEAR) The priest and the Church of England or the OPD [other Protestant denominations]

39:30 one or the other, two of them lived at the chapel. They headed for the theatre when the siren went off. They were there. Not being obtrusive, but they were always a big help because they knew what the system was and they would always ask, "Is there anything I can do to help?" They might write out the signal. They might be cleaning up the clothes that had been cut off the patient. They were never a pest. They were always a help.

Tape 9

00:38 I thought that the Americans had a major problem and I think everyone agrees now they had a drug problem and a discipline problem with their army in Vietnam.

What were your observations of this?

We sent some of our soldiers to an American Hospital for some specialised training.

01:00 Some of them came back - it was a month later - addicted and had to be sent home.

How had they become ... ?

Pot was readily available and you could smell it in some of the units when you went to visit. Then cocaine became

01:30 available and the American units, particularly the combat units, their discipline began to break down. That lead to this terrible business called fragging where the soldier would pull the pin on the grenade and roll it into his officers' hoochie [makeshift tent]. They lost their fighting efficiency, a lot of the American units.

Would you visit the American

02:00 **camps?**

Yeah. I visited quite a few American camps, yeah.

And what are your personal observations?

Some of them were good. Their discipline was good. Some of them were terrible. There was no discipline at all.

What happens to an army or a battalion or a section when they lose their discipline?

They generally get wiped out. If there's an enemy in the area.

02:30 Discipline is all that keeps - I heard someone say this on TV, I think it was last night – "Discipline is the only thing that stops an army becoming a rabble". It is. The American soldiers - I travelled through Vietnam a little because of a number of reasons - one was a system,

03:00 and a good system, that the headquarters in Saigon had trying to look after these training team soldiers - set up what they called a mail run. They wanted some senior warrant officer or an officer to go around to everywhere these training team fellows were. They were generally on their own or in twos at the most with South Vietnamese

03:30 units or civilian areas. To deliver their mail to them, but to also establish contact with what their problems were and to keep in touch. They used to detail from headquarters in Saigon who would do it. I think it was fortnightly. I volunteered to do it. I told them, "Just leave my name on the list because I will go

04:00 if the CO of the hospital can release me at any time". Because it was great - some of these, a good percentage of them were Korean veterans that I knew and I really enjoyed being able to talk to them. The way I travelled was with American transport. A pad of movement orders signed by an American officer. If I wanted to fly from A

04:30 to B I'd just produce one of these at the airport and the next plane that was going that way, I would get on it. So I saw a fair bit of Vietnam doing the mail run. As did other Australian officers who woke up to

"Here's a way to see what the war is doing and what's happening".

What are some of the impressions that you take away from those?

Some American infantry units may not as well have been there. We'd have been better off without them.

05:00 They really had no concept of how to fight there.

What were they doing?

They had no security. Their hygiene was non-existent. You'd find rubbish littered all over the place. You would ask for advice as to "Where is the CO?" - they may or may not know and they may or may not care.

Why

05:30 **do you think this had happened?**

The American people had lost interest or lost the enthusiasm for the war. A lot of the soldiers came off civvie street and were sent over there. The training wasn't adequate. They didn't want to be there. Their sole objective was to serve their time and go home. Probably at the back of every soldiers' mind that was the case, that they wanted to serve their time and go

06:00 home. But the majority of the Australian soldiers wanted to do their job properly while they were there. It did become a problem in Vietnam, though, adopting American clichés and silly systems. Whereas from about a month on they would start to wind down. In a base unit maybe you can have a percentage of your soldiers

06:30 winding down at a time. But you sure can't in an infantry battalion because the moment you wind down you get killed.

So what were the clichés that ... ?

A soldier'll be walking along a road and you meet another soldier. "How many?" "Oh seven days and a wakie" [last day of a soldier's service in Vietnam]. Now everyone knows what that means. He had seven days to go and he'd wake up and he'd be going home. And it flowed over into the Australians.

07:00 We used to try and discourage it. It wasn't a good thing for discipline.

Why do you think that this was starting to exist in Vietnam and you hadn't observed it in Korea?

The unpopularity of the war in Vietnam, the riots in America, the colleges. And that was developing in Australia of course with the peace marches.

07:30 **During your travels around Vietnam, what was your impression I guess of the effects of the war on the Vietnamese people?**

It had to be devastating. The evidence was there but then,

08:00 surprisingly, they seemed to bounce back very quickly after nineteen seventy five with the fiasco of the Americans leaving. I have spoken to friends of mine who have been back to Vietnam. They say they appear now to be well-adjusted and happy. That surprises me because I thought we were there saving them from oppression.

08:30 I don't know.

Do you think that the devastation you said was happening to the Vietnamese people had an effect on the morale of the American and maybe Australian ... ?

Yes.

In what sort of way?

Some of the things that were done

09:00 were morally, militarily wrong. Relocation of villages. All the population of the village picked up and moved from A to B and then the village put to the torch. For what reason? In most cases no-one could produce a good reason other than to create a free fire zone where any movement in there

09:30 copped it. But the flow on effect is horrendous for those Vietnamese villages. Their ancestors had grown up there and farmed there and then to see all this burnt. How could - on the one had we would talk about hearts and minds and on the other hand we'd relocate a village. It worried me when I knew

10:00 it was happening and it still worries me. And unfortunately I know that Australians were involved in it. We did it. We did it around Vung Tau. We relocated Kapyong Village.

You mentioned that the discipline was falling apart in the American

10:30 **would this have been a reaction to orders that may involve things like you were talking about - relocation of villages and stuff like that?**

Indirectly, certainly because it was what was said back to the American public who were disgusted by it and that's what led to the college riots and the peace movements. This was obscene what was being done.

11:00 People couldn't understand – "Why is it necessary to do this?" We weren't winning the war. We appeared to be getting deeper and deeper into a mire. The general soldier's not stupid. He hears about these things. And then they grab him and put him in uniform and send him over there. He doesn't want to be part of it.

11:30 **I guess also a part of that question is, you've been in the army for a long time, is there a point where discipline or orders aren't correct and is there ever a point where you don't … ?**

I know what you're asking me, but

12:00 I think my answer is no. Because without discipline there's nothing in a fighting unit. That doesn't mean that people can't be held to account at a later time if they've stepped outside the boundaries. Now a term that you'll hear frequently in relation to the recent war in

12:30 Iraq and East Timor is the "rules of engagement". What are the rules of engagement for Australian soldiers in East Timor at the moment? They are clearly written down and enunciated to the soldiers. Nobody ever mentioned rules of engagement to me in Korea. If he's out there and he's shooting at you

13:00 kill him. That applied in Vietnam. There was no rules of engagement in Vietnam - I don't care what anybody says. Civilians were killed in large numbers that should never have been killed. The war was won twice and lost again which is the really sad story. They had the war won after the first Tet Offensive

13:30 and didn't take advantage of it. They had the war won after the horrible bombing of North Vietnam and they had them really on their knees when they stopped the bombing. And it all goes back to - from America's point of view why they lost in Vietnam was quite simple - they never had a clear aim as

14:00 to what they were trying to achieve. And they never knew how to tell when they had achieved it. So it just went on and on.

We could keep talking about the politics forever.

Yes. And I suppose that's not what we're here to argue. We should argue that at a different time.

No no.

I

14:30 wouldn't argue about it anyway, but I do have my feelings about it now. There were things that were done in Vietnam that ought not to have been done.

Can you relate that back to any of your personal experiences? Are there things that you saw or experienced personally which have … ?

In Vietnam?

In Vietnam.

No. No I don't think so. I did what I thought

15:00 I wanted to do and that was to, in my way. assist to provide an excellent medical evacuation system for Australians who were wounded anywhere in Vietnam. And I did my best to do that. Other things that I saw I had no control over or influence on, things that I thought were wrong, subjective

15:30 judgement.

I guess leading on from that, if your opinion changed from …

One other thing if I can interrupt.

Yes.

It's too early yet to write the history on Vietnam and may even be too early to write the history on Korea.

Why's that?

The world changes slowly. And it's not all that - nineteen seventy five -

16:00 it's not all that long ago that the Vietnam war finished. May be more to come. I don't know. History generally changes as time goes by.

I guess if your opinion on Vietnam changed from when you first went to when you came home,

what are the things that you saw which influenced

16:30 **that change in opinion?**

The Americans continued to pour troops in without achieving any - there's a good book written called The Great White Shining Lie or The Great Shining Lie [A Bright Shining Lie] which just highlights this fact that

17:00 Westmoreland [Commander of the US forces, General William Westmoreland] kept asking for "More boots on the ground" I think was the term and they still use that in Iraq without any real objective, any aim, that they were trying - they didn't seem to have a co-ordinated plan. And no outboard.

17:30 **Just a question about the hospitals, we were going to talk about the evacuation back home, but just a question about - you were talking to Kiernan about when troops died - what was the process with A. notifying family and B. bodies?**

The procedure for notifying the families was almost

18:00 identical to notifying them about the casualty. The details were sent by signal as a KIA, killed in action or death otherwise to the headquarters in Saigon who sent it to Australia. The body was transferred from 1 Ausfield Hospital to an American embalming unit in

18:30 Vung Tau and then to Saigon for return to Australia. One of my Australian orderlies sort of became a qualified embalmer through his contact with the American unit through doing …

And the evacuation …

Yeah. The evacuation

19:00 procedure was that they flew out on Fridays. The RAAF "big silver bird" as it was called arrived at the RAAF station at Vung Tau airport always on Friday morning having flown from Butterworth in Malaysia. And flew out again loaded with patients at about two

19:30 in the afternoon. So on Monday morning the procedure would start preparing. The chief surgeon, the chief physician, would have a list of patients that they wanted evacuated, signals would be sent to Australia. My staff would do this. And a manifest would be prepared for the Friday flight

20:00 so the next of kin in Australia would know they were coming home flying into Richmond. And that their gear would all be packed and labelled and inventoried, carefully identified so it wasn't misplaced. Great stress on trying to get the patients' luggage home

20:30 with him. It's always a problem. The slightest little hitch and the luggage goes the wrong way or gets misplaced and it's a drama because sometimes they have personal effects in their luggage - it's terrible if they get lost. They might have the letters from their wife or something that they've packed in their bag and if it goes astray it's dreadful.

21:00 So a lot of stress was put on that. But that was the preparation. At about one p.m. Friday afternoon the RAAF bus that was set up to carry seating and walking and lying patients would appear at our hospital. The patients would be loaded, taken to the airport, loaded on the aircraft.

21:30 From the moment the bus pulled in at our hospital it was an RAAF matter. They did supervise the loading and the unloading of the plane and flew home. I flew home on one to see how it worked. Land in Butterworth, met by the RAAF nursing sisters and medical staff, overnight in the hospital at Penang and

22:00 then flew on to Australia the next day. The greatest memory I have of that flight was sitting up in the co-pilots seat of the Hercules while the co-pilot was wandering around doing something else. He said, "You want to sit here for an hour or so". And we came up to where the coastline of Australia came up on the radar.

22:30 I'll never forget that. It was clear. Arnhemland, Cape York, there it was all laid out. And so we were just about home. That's just about it.

And what was it like coming home to Australia to stay from Vietnam?

To stay? Whether it was deliberate or couldn't care, no-one really wanted to know

23:00 that you'd been to Vietnam. I didn't have any overt hostility displayed to me as some did, but I was always aware - no, not always, but for some time after you might go to a party and someone might say, "And what do you do for a living" or something. "I'm in the army". "Oh, been to Vietnam?"

23:30 And there would be a cooling if you said yes. And that didn't happen at every party, but sometimes I could pick it.

How had this anti war sentiment affected your wife?

She has never told me that it affected her, but my two boys have told me that it affected them at the college, at Marist Brothers' College.

In what way?

24:00 Oh, “Your father kills babies, Vietnamese babies”. Yeah.

Did they tell you that at the time?

No. They didn’t tell their mother either. But they told me not that long after I came back.

Did they tell you how they responded?

Yeah.

24:30 **What did they do?**

Oh I think a few bloody noses and I think a few visits to the Brothers’ office. They tried to stop it happening. I don’t think it was a huge deal. But it was a bit upsetting to think of that happening.

Did this make it hard to be home?

25:00 No. It didn’t. Took me a while to settle at home though. I don’t know. I had a nagging feeling that the end was going to be the way it actually did end. I thought,

25:30 “Oh I hope it’s soon because I didn’t want to see any more of these young nineteen year old Australian men being killed like that for no reason”.

Did coming home from Vietnam or even being in Vietnam bring up any memories, hard memories from Korea

26:00 **or coming home from Korea?**

No. I don’t recall that it did. And I think once again I had to move on. I had another posting to go to. I was posted as the administration officer of a military hospital here in Queensland and promoted to major. I had a job to do.

26:30 And I was still involved because a lot of the patients ended up in that military hospital.

Would you have anything to do with visiting families?

This is another thing that’s exactly - I’m unable to give exact information on this because what I thought was right

27:00 I’m not sure about. I know the system. The system was if there was an Australian soldier killed the headquarters at Victoria Barracks in Brisbane had a list of army officers in Brisbane who they rotated to call on the next of kin. So they provided them with all the information and organised for a chaplain to go with them. And they called on the next of kin.

27:30 And I know that I did it, and I can’t remember where it was. And when the chaplain who was with me that night - he’s away at the moment - I will go and ask him because it annoys me that I can’t remember. I remember that we went to a house and the people weren’t home. I think Brad [Archive researcher] asked me on the

28:00 interview, “Were they aware of what you were going to tell them before you tell them?” And I think I said, “Oh yeah I’m sure they would have been told”. I’m now not sure that was the case. I think we were going to do the telling. And I remember that that house that we went to, we then reported back to headquarters northern command that there was no-one home

28:30 and that the neighbours said they were away and would be back in a few days. And the officer that we spoke to at headquarters northern command said, “Leave it to me”. And I don’t know what happened about that which is strange because it’s a wonder I didn’t follow it up just for my own curiosity.

So you never had to deliver … ?

No. I don’t recall ever having done it now. I thought I might have and I don’t recall having done it.

29:00 And I’m not sorry about that. Obviously I would do it if it was required but it’s something that I don’t mind not having done.

Do you remember hearing about the fall of Saigon?

Yeah. Saw it on TV. Saw the tank crashing through the gate and getting jammed

29:30 there and the Americans pushing the helicopters into the sea.

What was your reaction?

I think I was both disgusted and depressed. I was depressed. I really was. I was shattered. I couldn’t - I had trouble grasping that it had actually happened. And yet I knew it was happening. I

30:00 had thought it was going to happen for a long time and I had progressively saw it getting closer. And then it happened quickly in the end. And when you read these different history books and the lies that were told by the Nixon administration and others. Terrible.

Would you talk to people

30:30 **within the army about it?**

No. I don't think so. I don't think I've ever had an in depth discussion with another Vietnam veteran about it.

Why's that?

I don't know. I honestly don't know. I don't know.

Obviously your time in Vietnam was very different to your time in Korea, but did you experience

31:00 **any of the similar wanting to put it behind you and block it out of your mind?**

Not until I saw what happened in Saigon and I think I decided then that I didn't want to know any more about it and kept it out of my mind for some years. Probably what was that?

31:30 Seventy five, eighty five, about nineteen ninety I started reading the history books again.

How do you keep something out of your mind?

Just well I suppose don't follow up on it. If it comes to mind, don't start following a lead to see, "I wonder what happens here or what happened there".

32:00 Just get another book and read about the war in Europe or something like that.

We were talking off camera before about your involvement in Operation Long Nook?

Yes. Exercise Long Nook..

Can you tell me about this?

In nineteen seventy eight took a hundred Australian soldiers,

32:30 all ranks from major to private - I was the commander - and it was a yearly exercise at that stage that was conducted by the Australian Army. It was an exchange. A hundred went over there to the UK, a hundred came here. My job was to get them there, get them together, get them there, get them positioned in the units they were meant to go to. At the end of them time get them back together hopefully all in one piece

33:00 and get them back to Australia. That was my job. I was designated commander of Exercise Long Nook [?] nineteen seventy eight. Fortunate choice of word because the term commander means something different in the UK British Army to what it means in Australia.

What does it mean?

It's really restricted to the navy in Australia as a commander. It's a rank in the navy.

33:30 Commanding officer in Australia, officer commanding. But the term commander is not generally used. But it worked wonders for me in the UK because I really was treated as if I was a general. We flew in and landed in Gloucestershire.

34:00 The arrangements that had been made were typically British Army. They were immaculate. And they worked like clockwork. Every one of the soldiers I had with me had two or three people there to meet him and to take him off to his unit. And I'm left. They're all gone. Course, I've got with me a major who has been appointed to look after me

34:30 for the five months that I'm over there. And to see that anything I want I get. You wouldn't believe it, but his name was Don Churchill. Took me that night to London into the officers' quarters at Milbank on the Thames River. That's where I stayed any time that I was in the London area.

35:00 That was my room there. But he said, "Now we haven't got a lot of time. You'll be there tonight, tomorrow morning" at I think it was ten hundred hours which is very early for British people because they're normally getting out of bed at ten hundred hours. "We've got to catch a plane at Briars and Houghton" I think it was "to Edinburgh". I said, "Oh what for?" "Oh" he said "Somewhere you've said to someone

35:30 that you would like to see the Edinburgh Tattoo and it starts tomorrow night". So I was flown to Edinburgh. Had a seat in the general's box for the Edinburgh Tattoo. That's the sort of thing that they did for me. And after I'd been in the UK a few days and I knew that everyone was well settled, they said, "What do you want to do and see while you are in the UK?"

36:00 And I said, “I want to see an armoured division field ambulance in action in Europe”. They said, “Good. The NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organisation] exercises are starting in a week or so. We’ll take you over to 3 Armoured Division and position you with them and you can observe the field ambulance from the headquarters of the armoured division”. Which I did. I spent

36:30 the NATO exercise for two weeks with three armoured division which is something I never believed would happen. And just something about that, all the pre-positioning for the exercise had taken place, I was in a tank with the squadron commander. He had three other tanks under his command and we were pre-position under in darkness

37:00 in a farmer’s barn - a really big barn - one tank in each corner pointing outwards. And when the word “Go” was given these four tanks just took straight off and the barn collapsed. But they have a unit that follows around arranging compensation for the farmers. But I’ll never forget that. That was a very interesting exercise. And that was

37:30 getting near the end of my career too, because in nineteen eighty I had been CO of the Army School at Healesville where I had gone to do my first medical assistants’ course in nineteen fifty five or fifty six whenever it was. I’d been CO for there four years and obviously had to be moved. And the only likely move was to Canberra as a colonel and I knew that

38:00 in Canberra the colonels were allowed to make the coffee sometimes. I thought, “I think I’ve done enough”. I really did not want to do that. And I thought I’d had wonderful times and I wanted to finish, so I did.

We’ve got a bit, couple of minutes left on that tape. Is there anything you want to add? Final words I guess for the record?

38:30 No. The army to me was wonderful. I realise - I meant to mention it before - you may choose not to put this, can you wipe it off if you put it on? I realised in nineteen fifty six or fifty seven because I had an interview with a psychologist - when I applied, it might have been a bit later, nineteen fifty nine. I had to

39:00 be interviewed by a psychologist when I applied for the civil schooling. Because there were a lot of candidates looking for that course. And he told me, he said to me at the end when he was talking to me, “Do you realise that you have an iditic memory?” And I said, “I don’t realise. I don’t even know what it is”. He said,

39:30 “I believe you probably have an iditic memory”, and I now know I do have. In other words I have the power of total recall. And doing military exams, for example, promotion exams from captain to major the workings of an infantry division make up a huge part of that exam. I was able to memorise that down to

40:00 the fifteen thousand men, where they were, their units, how many vehicles, how many guns, how many weapons and reproduce it on an examination paper. And I can still do that. So that’s what helped me, I think, pass the exams.

Having that type of a memory, how hard is it to block out memories that you don’t want?

Yeah. I’m not sure about that. But the

40:30 way my memory works is that if I want to remember I can force myself to remember it. And when I no longer need it, it’ll go away. It’s of no advantage to me now to know how many Bren guns there are in an infantry division so I don’t remember that any more. But I do remember what the specific

41:00 gravity is of sapphire because that’s my hobby - collecting them.

That’s pretty much the end. That’s it.