

Australians at War Film Archive

Norman Cooper (Coops) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:36 **Right Norman, can we just start with an overview, a general overview of your life.**

I was born in Surry Hills in the Women's Hospital in 1936 10th April 100th day of the year.

01:00 Lived in the western suburbs at Strathfield and Five Dock although at Five Dock I was living with and Aunt and uncle actually while my parents went up into the country for work...Hotels. Dad was a manager of hotels. High school was Hurlstone Agricultural High School out west of Ingleburn.

01:30 I wanted to go on the land, beef cattle. I was a very poor student and left school at 15. Wanted to go Jackerooing, wasn't allowed, I was too young according to my parents. And had to wait until I was 18, at 18 my number came out of the barrel, national service and I ended up at

02:00 Ingleburn in the army, in the infantry for 3 years. Prior to that I have, between leaving school and going into, I worked with KG Murray Publishing Company in the lay out, I was the sort of go between, between the compositors and the editor and that's where my interest in photography began.

02:30 After 3 years in the army I woke up to myself and transferred over to the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force], and my next 35 years I spent at air force photographic then retired and been living on the Sunshine Coast. I currently am the office manager of the Vietnam

03:00 veteran's drop in centre that's about a quick overview.

What are your first memories of your childhood?

I can remember a big hole in the back yard which was our air raid shelter, I can remember the night the Japanese flew over

03:30 because we lived and overlooked Enfield marshalling yards, railway yards, and even though the sirens went and the search lights on the golf course below us went on every so often that particular night was the only night the marshalling lights went out, we went down to the shelter

04:00 I remember also when my parents were up country, I remember very clearly my uncle, who was quite a strict disciplinarian. Every time I left the house I had to stand in front of him and be checked out, shoes, fingernails, hair. Shoes especially, no one was to clean my shoes and I'm not to clean anyone's shoes and this was laid down very strict

04:30 and I went through the scouts. Sporting teams, soccer and things. I can remember Wing and a Prayer a song that was very popular and just a brown slouch hat, I can remember those very clearly. I can remember my first day on dairy at school

05:00 I was the only boy that had never been closer to a cow than, than sitting in a car looking on a Sunday drive. I was put on bailing up and the dairy foremen, he was a full time dairy man took me out the back and said, "The cows will come out of these doors and come down here

05:30 put there head through here and I just want you to push this bar across and put this pin in, make sure you put it in properly because I don't want 60 odd head of cattle roaming around the bailing up yard." So this was all right and I struggled through the first 3 or 4 because I had never been close to a cow before, and after about a dozen, a cow came out who was called Felicity and she took one look at me

06:00 took after me and I went straight up the silo and stayed there. And I learnt a lot of new words that afternoon when the dairy foreman came out afterwards and saw 40 or 50 head of cattle strolling around the yard.

Which school did you go to?

Hurlstone Agricultural School in Glenfield just out of Ingleburn. Went back a couple of years ago for a reunion and it's changed a lot

06:30 I think they only have half a dozen cows now and they don't have big herds, because has grown all around it, a lot of the yards and the paddocks where we used to grow our own crops and everything, I don't think they have them any more.

At the time was it normal for there to be agricultural high schools or was it a special sort of thing?

Yeah one of the subjects was agriculture,

07:00 you did both practical and theory, you took turns you were rostered onto vegetables, piggery, stables, foul run, dairy. You didn't touch beef cattle or sheep until 4th or 5th year; unfortunately I never made that, finished at the end of 3rd year and left school,

07:30 but yeah we did everything, it was completely self sufficient, all boys in those days, it's now co-ed and a lot of kinds came down from the country and boarded their, I was a day-go, a day boy come in every day by steam train and

08:00 I did want to go on the land but as soon as I ended up in Nasho [National Service], service life was what I wanted.

Can you tell us what it was like for a kid growing up in Australia when the war was on, was it exciting or was it scary, can you remember feeling anything?

No I can't, like I say I can remember some things, I can remember some of the songs that were popular at the time

08:30 my uncle that I was with for several years he was the secretary of the S [Service] legion of Anzacs for Jim Burnie for a number of years, as I say he was a S veteran and he took me to my first dawn service and I never missed an Anzac Day march

09:00 with my aunt, we always went down but their daughter who was a number of years older than me, grown up, I remember meeting various military people but I can't just remember various occasions where somebody came home for dinner, there were people in the S club

09:30 So not a great deal, to be truthful.

Can you recall your uncle telling you any stories?

Never spoke about them, I don't know a lot of history about him actually, his military history...he was very reluctant to talk about it.

Did you find that peculiar?

Not then.

10:00 I can understand it now but not then, I'd read a number of books on World War I and II, I'm quite interested in military history and I can understand the reason now and I can understand the way they get together and I can see that with the Vietnam guys as well.

10:30 That's about all I can think of in that regard.

So what did you think of school in general?

I liked the practical work, once I'd got over Felicity...yeah I wasn't a good student, I was lazy...got through the main subjects,

11:00 English, Maths, got through those all right, passed farm mechanics once I got the forge alight, I could build up a horseshoe or something but I failed the intermediate and I couldn't carry on so I left school and went to work.

Before we get onto working what did you get up to in your spare time

11:30 **as a kid outside of school hours?**

Scouts, senior scouts, soccer, my Dad was a keen soccer man I grew up to like soccer and play it and played until I was 52 actually. Liked the dirt track speed way solos, I used to go 2 or 3 nights a week in those days in there were three tracks operating

12:00 was a skid kid.

What's that?

We were kids that used to race pushbikes around a couple of rubber tyres on the main speedway track at interval, enjoyed that.

Can you remember the three tracks by any chance?

Yeah show ground sports ground and Parramatta

12:30 Sports ground is gone of course it's football oval now, show ground is the old show ground and Parramatta is still Parramatta oval I think, I haven't been to Parramatta for ages

How do you explain to me post war life in Australia at that time?

13:00 45 that would make me 9 wouldn't it...my father was in a reserved occupation he was a master electrician rewiring the radar and the search lights and things, and after the war they went into the

13:30 hotel business and I went to my uncle...and it was mainly scouting and things... for those immediate years afterwards I didn't have a lot of people, my uncle lived in Five Dock and there weren't a lot of people around, a lot of youngsters in that area

14:00 and I was pretty much a loner there but I was there for 4 or 5 years I think so I was sort of in my teens when I left there I think, I can't really remember so...don't really have any strong recollections of that period

14:30 **Before National Service had been muted had you ever thought about joining the services?**

No I hadn't but I was impressed with the Anzac Day and my uncle's club and that sort of thing but no I had never thought about it

15:00 I had a liking for the air force but I gave no thought to the matter.

What was the liking for the air force based on?

I liked the colour blue, and I don't know I think it was just the glory of a wing and a prayer that sort of thing.

15:30 in my younger age group sort of growing up they were the things that impressed me...I think.

Can you tell me what Anzac Day was like going to Anzac Day with your uncle, what was that like?

Pretty impressive for a young fella, the dawn service

16:00 was always at Martin Place, I don't think I really understood it that much, I was taken with how solemn it was and how it was run. And then after that we would go down to the club and have breakfast

16:30 and then my aunt would come into town pick me up and go up to George Street or somewhere and get a spot and watch all these hundreds and hundreds of men march past in groups with banners and things...yeah it was impressive. I think it came on me, you know

17:00 impressed me in my subconscious I'd say.

Can you tell me what the crowds were like back then?

Crowds? Yeah they were very deep and well back I couldn't put a figure on them but being a little fella I was sitting on the barrier or near the front but yeah they were

17:30 4, 5 or 6 deep down both sides of the street...after the march my Aunt and I would go home and my uncle would be back down the club, as he was secretary manager he had to be there anyway.

What time did he stumble out?

I couldn't tell you I don't know.

18:00 **To jump forward how do you compare it to today's marches?**

I've only marched here in Brisbane, I've been to dawn services in Melbourne, again, most impressed with and Brisbane... But I

18:30 always attended the march but I didn't march until about '97 somewhere around then...I know the dawn services are getting bigger and I'm pleased to see all the young people coming in you know the youths and even smaller,

19:00 I'm quite impressed and I think it's something we should continue to sort of keep going in whatever way we can, I've been to schools here to talk to schools.

19:30 I didn't march mainly because mainly because my trade didn't have a squadron, photographers usually were on a base squadron and base squadrons didn't march...the odd time I was in a squadron, that squadron no longer exists anyway...I found it difficult and it was

20:00 Vietnam and two squadron that I march with now because I flew with them and they've sort of accepted me cause I worked with them in Malaya as well

How did that make you feel there was no way to represent yourself?

I didn't necessarily want to march I was quite happy standing on the sides waving a flag or something.

20:30 I wore my medals but I didn't march...that's not true I did march when I was in the service in a couple of country towns I was appointed as the officer in charge of the march the armed party in couple Victorian towns.

21:00 Marching since I retired I haven't done until a couple of years back.

Going back now before your number came up can you tell me what you knew about the National Service?

All I knew was that I had to register and you could put down a choice

21:30 of which service you went into, I put down the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force], my number came out and I ended up in the army in the infantry, which was good as I was young and single and silly I enjoyed service life, the first morning was a bit horrendous...I went in early in advance of the main body

22:00 and I was the only person in my hut and having been issued all the clothing etcetera, etcetera, we were told we had to do fire pickets keep the fires alight this is at the Ingleburn camp keep the fires alight for the hot water for the messes and the cooks and things like that...and the showers.

22:30 I drew the 10 till 12 shift, lights go out at ten so I sort of finished the day without going to bed went round kept all the fires alight, crashed into bed just after midnight and the next thing I remember was the duty corporal, a regular army guy giving me a shake saying, "Out on parade."

23:00 I said, "What do I wear?" and, "Just put your grey coat on, lets go!" So I put my grey coat on and went to the door, opened the door and the moons out and stars are shining, and the corporal was out there with a book and a torch ready to call the name, there was about 8 or 9 of us and I thought, "Wow!" but three days later I was walking around like an old digger when all the new boys came in.

23:30 **Can you actually remember the day when your number came out?**

Not the day, no I went in May so it was just after my 18th birthday but I don't know when my number came out.

So how were you informed?

By letter...a little note, 'you will report such and such, such and such', which I did.

24:00 **Can you recall what you thought when you got there?**

No but I would say it was a mixture of apprehension and looking forward to an adventure sort of thing... a little disappointed I didn't get the RAAF.

So can you talk me through what basic training was like?

24:30 Yeah, well it was drill spit polishing firing compasses, it was what '55. So it was ten years after the war had finished so it was still pretty military,

25:00 lots of needles, got lots of needle I remember that, they were hard times, they were fun times yeah I enjoyed it I really did, but I ended up

25:30 a Bren gunner and I was a marksman with a Bren and I could only just qualify on a .303 and I put that down to the difference in sights because the .303 was a lever sight and the Bren gun was a peep sight... pretty good shot on the Bren

26:00 just managed to survive on the .303...so yeah I enjoyed it, there was a lot of little things duty corporal marching us up this hill, we never got to the top and never got to the bottom because some idiot in the platoon called out, "You can't break us corporal," and we just went up and down up and down all morning

26:30 about turn, almost get to the top about turn down.

What was the general attitude amongst young gents at the time about National Service, was there an apprehension about it, what was the feeling towards it?

There was a lot of conscientious objectors.

27:00 I don't know, I've heard a lot of stories about what they did to them and what they did to try and convert them, my best mate also got called up in the same intake, he ended up an ambulance driver, he was over at Holsworthy another camp...we both,

27:30 I had no fears about it, I was sort of not sure what was going to happen or how or anything...I grew to like it...the discipline and everything being sort of regimented sort of suited my character I suppose.

What was the general feeling amongst your platoon, were they all happy to be there?

- 28:00 You always get grumblers but we didn't lose anyone...we didn't have any conscientious objectors in our platoon but I think most of them thought, "Oh well its only three and a half months," or something,
- 28:30 get it over and done with and go back to whatever they were doing, because after 3 or 4 months it was CMF [Citizens' Military Forces] and most of them had to attend a fortnight camp and one night a month or something you could if you wanted and I did, go every week
- 29:00 and you could even do full time duty, which I did because I liked the service.

So did they do basic training and then do corps training or employment training?

Yeah you get appointed to a unit, basic training was how to salute and march that sort of thing

- 29:30 and your unit did the core training...yeah I went to 17/18 Infantry Battalion and I did NCO [Non Commissioned Officer] cadres and all that...and I enjoyed it.

Where were they based at?

- 30:00 17 18? There was a depot in Chatswood, Hornsby it was the sort of North Shore Regiment I think they called it...and they also came from Gosford as well I think...there was a company at Gosford, but they were spread out and we only got together,
- 30:30 all together sort of at the annual camp once a year.

So how did you get about from home to camp and that sort of thing in those days?

Train, tram, feet...didn't have cars in those days, not many people anyway.

Wearing your uniform?

Oh yes, starched (UNCLEAR) boots, gaiters, real digger I was.

- 31:00 **Did you impress the ladies?**

No, I had a lady, didn't score on that count.

So what did you do then after basic training, still going once a week what was your first job then?

- 31:30 Military or civil?

Both.

Well civil I was still working with KG Murray publishing company...military I went every week to the depot and went on a couple of NCO courses, went on a couple of courses, went down to Seymour to the school of infantry to do a junior all arms course,

- 32:00 got a couple of hooks, it was in me at that stage that I liked the service and wanted to stay with it sort of thing, went up to Singleton a number of times, did a lot of our exercises up in the Barrington Top Ranges.
- 32:30 Was all very gung-ho sort of attitude for an 18, 19 year old sort of thing.

What level of cooperation did your civilian employer have to have in regards to your (UNCLEAR)

They had to release me for the annual camp, the owner

- 33:00 KG Murray himself was my uncle and godfather so I had no trouble getting off to go to Seymour for two or three weeks or whatever it was, so I had no trouble personally but the law was they had to release you for the annual camp and I think there was a couple of weekend bivouacs they had to release you for otherwise they were in strife.
- 33:30 But yeah I had no trouble.

Do you have an opinion of that sort of thing today about National Service today?

My word, I think it was the best thing that happened to me and took me away from my mothers apron strings sort of thing, it made me stand on my own two feet and think for myself.

- 34:00 It taught me discipline both military and personal discipline, I would like to see it in, I don't agree with the later National Service in the '60s, because they stopped it for a couple of years and brought it back in for Vietnam where Nasho were conscripted and sent into combat, I don't agree with going into combat.
- 34:30 If they want to volunteer then fair enough, but I would like to see it in these days and whether its military

or some form of civil National Service where they can be trained as SAS [Special Air Service] or fire reserve fireman or

35:00 ambulance, something like that, coast guard I think they should bring it in I think it would be a lot harder these days with the civil libertarians and the mind of 18, 19, 20 year olds these days compared to when I was 18 or 19

35:30 I think they'd have a hard time but I would like to see it.

Back when you were a national serviceman if I imagine at that time there was a fairly relaxed feeling that there was no major conflicts, was that the feeling?

No the reason they brought them in was Korea, as I understand it the services had been run down and Korea was on and they didn't really have

36:00 a lot of regular servicemen and I believe it was brought in for that reason so if things had got worse or things had escalated maybe we would have been used.

Was the thought of that ever in your mind?

No.

And if they had of said, "Norman you are off to Korea..."

I'd have gone

36:30 simple as that.

So you are doing your CMF and your working what happens then, where do you go from there?

Well I went for three years and tried for RAAF and tried for air crew

37:00 couldn't make it because I didn't have a high enough education, mainly the science side of things that cruelled me. Had become interested in photography I went to night school my best mate and I actually made our own film company, Cameron Films, registered business,

37:30 made a couple of little films, made a bit of money filming golfers, you know how golfers like to...can always see what your doing wrong so we my mate was a keen golfer. And he organised the club pro [professional] we would go out and film them in slow motion which as you realise is film rushing through the camera. And then go back on the night and stop frame it

38:00 so that they could see themselves doing what was wrong, we got them to say when they were ready and of course we would start the camera and they'd wiggle and shake and line things up. And we could see the 2 and 6's [money] running through the camera. So yeah we made a little bit of money there and when I went to the RAAF and

38:30 failed for air crew they tried to make me a motor mechanic, suggested I'd be a good motor mechanic. I knew that wouldn't be on as I knew that I had no mechanical skills or knowledge or interest in anything mechanical. And I said what about photography and they sent me out to Richmond were I did a trade test both practical and theory.

39:00 Got through that and I was in the air force. I was very lucky to get in as a direct entry. I didn't go to the photographic school in Sale, would have been better had I, but I passed the exam and went in as an aircraftsmen provisional and six months later another test, a B test which was all air force photography

39:30 passed that and that was the start of my career.

Can you tell me in your consideration what the difference was between the level that you were at as a photographer and the level they came out of after doing the RAAF photography training?

Yeah it was a big difference, like I said it would have been better had I gone through the training, not practically but theory wise I was.

40:00 Sensitometer and densitometry were just words to me, I had no idea what they meant but I could look at a it and say that's under or over, whereas it's nine months to teach an air force photographer and pass out I would have been better off doing that.

Tape 2

00:18 And you had to get 60 % and the education officer said if you make a mistake put a circle around it and put the cross in the one you want.

00:30 **Could you tell me when you first started doing photography what sort of cameras you were**

using?

My first camera was a Kodak Retina 1A, little 35 mm camera I was quite happy taking

- 01:00 pictures of anything, you know I went to night school and a number of competitions and things like that, I was more interested in movie, cine and my mate and I bought some camera equipment and
- 01:30 we made up a couple of stories from the magazines Murray produced, first camera was a Kodak Retina 1A and I did a lot of
- 02:00 photography while I was going through the night school. And we had set subjects and all that sort of thing which I complied with but I was more interested in cine and we bought this 8mm movie camera and got some stories from,
- 02:30 both Kerry and I worked at K G Murray publishing company. And we got approval to use some of the stories that they printed and we ran off a couple of short stories I mentioned about the golfers and we had a couple of interesting moments with them making the films.
- 03:00 Police arrived once because one of the films we had a short war scene in and this bloke in the story sort of thought back to how he got injured because he was in a wheelchair, how he got injured and we drifted into this scene near the Narrabeen Lakes in a jungle type area
- 03:30 and I had borrowed a couple of .303s from the army cause I was still in there and some blanks and we were firing these blanks and the police arrived wandering what was going on. So it was all explained, we had some funny moments with that, there was another one where we had people dancing through Hyde Park
- 04:00 and the police arrived there and my mate told them to keep the crowd back, ended up helping us keep the crowd back while people danced up and down the pathway in Hyde Park, so we had a lot of fun, it didn't go anywhere especially when I went into the air force, just sort of fell apart from then
- 04:30 but still got the business name certificate and some cards, and we called it Cameron which is my name and Kerry's name backwards, spells Cameron. That was how we came up with it, then I was in the air force learning all the air force cameras and techniques
- 05:00 and all that sort of thing and even though I passed and got in as a direct entry I was what they call aircraft provisional which was lower than the lowest and it meant 6 months I had to learn all the air force procedures forms and routines and then do another test and if I passed that test then I
- 05:30 became an aircraftsmen which is the lowest rank in the air force, and I was sort of going back to school there for a while but we wrote, Kerry wrote a reference from Cameron Films for my application to transfer to the RAAF and when I went into the RAAF
- 06:00 after going through recruits again I suddenly found myself in the cine section of the air force doing training films because it was noted on my file that I had been working for a film company.

Had you and Kerry had serious ambitions for your film company or was it something that you were just playing?

- 06:30 Yeah, we were playing but I think we would have liked to have gone a lot further, this was middle '50s. I mean television wasn't even in at this stage so maybe another ten years later we might have been able to do something and get involved in television or you know go further in the business
- 07:00 as is Kerry remained working and I went into the air force.

So did he keep working in the company?

Yes, yes for quite a while and then he went into a business of his own, he's a stamp dealer, had his own shop and everything.

And was there a bit of a network of filmmakers at the time that you used to hang out with?

- 07:30 No, I was a member of IMPT, Institute of Motion Picture Technicians, and the air force put me through the Melbourne Institute of Technology and Rod Power who was the top man with the Victorian Film.
- 08:00 I'm not sure what it was now, but he was the top man in Victoria, he was the senior lecturer and the air force put me through that and through him and that course was a 12 month course I joined the IMPT and I was quite interested and applied what I had learnt with the training with the air force cine unit although I was the low rank there
- 08:30 more or less a gofer most of the time but an in wasn't until I got posted to Malaya that I let it all lapse as far as being in a group or club or association.

Where did you get all your performers from?

Well they were training films and they were service personnel

- 09:00 doing what they would normally do, some of them some of the films I worked on was Gary Burns who was a national serviceman who did get into the air force but he crashed a Tiger Moth and was badly burnt and was rushed from Sale up to [UNCLEAR] and he ended up having his legs amputated
- 09:30 and the film, all the operations were filmed, it was a training film for medical personnel and it took several years because he it was from the day he brought into the hospital right through until he walked out on tin legs and met, I think it was Douglas Bader
- 10:00 who was out in Australia or something and that was more or less the final scene of it him walking out and meeting Bader outside the hospital so. But those sort of things there was another one about the dropping of a torpedo, the making of Darwin air strip all those sort of things, the people that did the thing they were training films and they were showing what was going on.
- 10:30 **Can you talk me through how one of those training films came about, what brief you got and procedures you'd go through?**
- No I can't really because I was the low boy, it would have gone through from the CO [Commanding Officer] down to the flight sergeant who was in charge of the cine unit and we'd all put in
- 11:00 ideas. And things we'd have somebody from the trade or the unit or whoever had requested the film that would give us an outline of what was wanted and we'd sort of work it up from there but it was I was more or less
- 11:30 the low boy, I didn't really do a great deal of filming, a lot of editing that sort of thing, copying and things so I don't really know how or where it came down from sort of appeared in the cine unit and I was working on it, or assisting on it.
- When you say editing, do you mean film editing?**
- Film editing.
- 12:00 **Can you talk us through what type of gear you used and what it was like if someone came into look at it?**
- It was fairly basic actually nothing like they have these days, I mean the unit only consisted of three or four people, it wasn't a big deal at all, we had Arriflex cameras and a big Mitchell camera
- 12:30 and a couple of cine special 2's hand held cine special 2's. But it was just the basic editing cut and splice sort of thing, a rack where you put each shot on all numbered and you followed the script sort of thing and the shot list and that's the way it was done, it was
- 13:00 nothing like they get these days big machines and automatics everything else its all hand done the old lift, splice, scrape, drop sort of thing that was the way it was done...talking late '50s...'58 or '59.
- Were they Steenbecks [film editing machine], 4 plates, 6 plates [reels of film sit on plates]?**
- No they were 4,
- 13:30 I think that's all.
- So did you have a mentor that taught you how to edit?**
- Yeah, I had sergeants, flight sergeants looking over my shoulder making sure I was doing it right plus I learnt in the course at the tech [technical] course that was the reason I went
- 14:00 to night school for 12 months so that's how I learnt it. Plus I had a couple of small hand splicer things at home, 12 inch ones with a reel on each end that was all.
- 14:30 **What about putting the actual film together, were you making the decisions was there a director there or did you have a shot list?**
- I had a shot list and I had to follow that, I would put it in and one of the others would go through it afterwards and do the final editing. Like I say
- 15:00 I'd been in the air force 6 months and I was the low boy and was still learning if you understand me.
- What was some of the other jobs that you did?**
- In the RAAF at CPE [Central Photographic Establishment] which was the HQ [headquarters] of photography a lot of air film printing
- 15:30 that was the main reason, the main role of photographers in the air force is aerial reconnaissance, bomb damage films, surveillance, intelligence. That's the primary role all the other work defects all that sort of thing that's what they called domestic work, you could be sent out on anything
- 16:00 but being the HQ we stored all the aerial films going back to World War II in a huge vault air conditioned, humidity you know...it was like a big jail, big heavy metal doors on each side sort of thing

- 16:30 but we produced films for the survey corps for mapping all of the maps that are printed by the army, we filmed New Guinea and parts of Indonesia and things making maps and there was a lot of printing in that, 10 inch by 10 inch negatives.
- 17:00 And you would spend all day in a dark room just printing, then there was a colour section which I didn't have very much to do with, and there was a copy section where a lot of things that were required were copied. And there was the domestic section where there was a parade or something was broken or they needed something,
- 17:30 still section would do that with the normal hand cameras.

Can you just talk me through the map making and how that happens?

No, the army do that.

From your POV [point of view]?

Well, we flew the films

- 18:00 they would come to CPE and be processed, generally sometimes they would be processed on site but not very often, depends where they were and then they would be printed, duplicated printed and all marked in runs, titled on each
- 18:30 frame could be hundreds in one run, 60 %. They used to overlap them so that they could use 3D [three dimensional] and they would be packed up and despatched to Bendigo to Fortuna which is where the army survey corps used them to make the maps. I had been to Bendigo and seen all the equipment they used but
- 19:00 I couldn't tell you anything about them just an interesting day so that we sort of knew what they did with them we saw them actually using the prints, making the maps basically but it was really quite simple, we flew the films, they were sent to CPE we processed them duplicated them printed them and despatched them
- 19:30 we had 2 or 3 dark rooms working flat out all day long in those days I think. A lot of photographers I can't tell you what the manning was 60, 70, 80, just in the one place
- 20:00 doing all various things but the ESI [Educational Services International] printing up was the basic primary role.

What sort of cameras would use for that job, map making?

We used F52s and F24s they were cameras that were put in the aircraft controlled by the

- 20:30 navigator in the [UNCLEAR] he actually operated the camera, the nav would work out the runs and areas that they would have to fly and they'd come over the start point he'd turn the camera's on, it could be just a short run it could be a long run they flew key runs all sorts of different things that they ran. And they overlapped 60%
- 21:00 and 40 I think was the side overlap, I think it was 40 yeah I think it was 40 but they were the 2 primary cameras I think the F24s were used in World War I or just after the World War I they were certainly used in World War II so they were Williamson camera
- 21:30 5 inch square negative area on the F24 and 6 and a half by 8 I think it was on the F52. Now days they use another camera and they give 10 inch square negs [negatives], can't think of the name of it now.
- 22:00 **So what would the photographer be doing, would they be changing the film?**
- The photographer would set the exposure and things because in the camera bay was in the tale and couldn't be got to in flight so all that would be set before take off, the photographer would test run the film make sure it was running
- 22:30 in some places, in the tropics we had to put some paper so the film didn't stick to the pressure pad because that did occur at times which meant that nothing was gained and then when the air craft returned we would take the magazines
- 23:00 take the camera out if it wasn't going on another run and whip them up to the processors and the whole procedure started there we just sat and waited there while they flew them.

So what was the turn around time

- 23:30 **from shooting it to processing it?**

Well, it would depend, the film had to get to CPE so there'd be a time lapse there unless they in some areas where we had a processor they could do them as soon as the aircraft landed. Otherwise they would have to

- 24:00 bring them down to CPE and process them, sometimes we would receive several films and they could be 125 and 250 exposures, they were quite big roles of film and a lot of exposures on each role, or could have a lot of exposures on each role
- 24:30 it could be same day or a week or so later. It just depends, and some of the bigger operations would go over months the actual flying and processing and things. It would be months before we could be finished
- 25:00 Skypixa and Sendawasi were two big mapping ones that took several months.
- Can you tell me a bit more about them?**
- No not really they were New Guinea and some part of Indonesia which was all approved and everything else. I didn't actually
- 25:30 go on, I was at CPE at that stage and I didn't do a lot of air film printing because I was in the cine unit.
- Did you spend much time in the darkroom?**
- Yes, after I left CPE I did because I was an ordinary photographer then and we were all responsible, if you were given a job
- 26:00 you would follow it right through to the finish so you'd do the photography and the exposure, process, printing and everything else.
- But were there some people that just worked in the darkroom as well?**
- There was no specialisation so you had to be able to do everything.
- 26:30 **When you said there was a vault of the films from World War I did you ever get to watch many of those films?**
- Well they were all aerial reconnaissance sort of things, yeah we get requests the mining bureau of mining resources in, often wanted stuff. There were often a lot of
- 27:00 unclassified material could be bought by graziers because they were also mapping Australia so quite often we'd get a request and you would have to go down and pull one of these films take them up and print them, I don't think
- 27:30 I saw a couple of old World War II ones but these were done for open days and displays, things that were meant for public viewing sort of thing.
- Can you talk about how you progressed through the ranks as a photographer?**
- Yeah very slowly,
- 28:00 again my lack of theory and sensitometry and densitometer held me back, I was aircraftsman went up to leading aircraftsman in the standard time but I was seven years an LAC [Leading Aircraftsman]
- 28:30 because I had trouble with the theory trade tests but I been to Malaya for three years and Thailand and was back in Newcastle before I finally made corporal. And I'd more or less just scraped through, never had any problem with practical work it was converting
- 29:00 practical into the theory side that screwed me up and you still had to get 60%. And I didn't have that nice flight sergeant around I was telling you about earlier.
- So was there a lot of knowledge sharing between the photographers?**
- Yep, there was one chap who
- 29:30 took me under his wing early in the piece in Malaya and I owe a great deal to him and him helping me, he was a World War II, Rat of Tobruk who'd come across into the air force after returning to Australia. And he literally took me under his wing and guided me and made sure I didn't make any silly mistakes or got into trouble helped me out a hell of a lot
- 30:00 and I owe a lot to him, he's dead now but if you had any problems or weren't sure there was always the flight sergeant, or the sergeant or someone around you could ask and help you didn't make too many
- 30:30 mistakes, if you did it was your own fault because you didn't ask.
- What are some of the tricks of the trade that he taught you that helped you?**
- Tricks of the trade! We followed the book, there were no real tricks of the trade
- 31:00 it was a laid down procedure and you had to sort of, you learnt little things but there were no tricks of the trade I would call them.
- 31:30 **What sort of film stock, film speeds did you use at the time?**

It was all black and white for domestic, well it was all black and white, there was a colour section at CPE but in Malaya and Williamtown the fighter base, it was all black and white.

32:00 Trie and Pluse were the films in those days, 200 ASA [American Standards Association - speed calibration] was the general film speed that was used, but we used all the chromatic films as well as panchromatic for certain jobs. I'm not sure what the film speeds

32:30 we also did 16 mm gun cameras at Newcastle, all the fighter aircraft carried gun camera's and we used to have to load the Mirages and the Sabre guns cameras, process those. They had to be done straight away because it was all training films as far as they were concerned in those days.

33:00 So that the crews could assess their air to air gunnery or their air to ground targets to see if they were on target or missed them, if you watch World War II stuff you see aircraft getting shot down and you see the shells and bullets going into them and things. That's what are for, to confirm the targets and the kills

33:30 that sort of thing and that was another role at Butterworth and Williamtown in Newcastle.

Where would you mount the gun cameras, was there a fixed position?

Yes, it's loaded onto the aircraft and all we did was jump up onto the wings and load them into the cameras

34:00 and set the exposures and things like that, they were both up in the cockpit via shooting through the windscreen. The old Vampires had them in the nose I think but I never worked on those.

34:30 So I'm not sure.

Are there any other training, exercise type filming you would do on a regular basis?

At Williamtown these would, they used to have the parachute school there and the army would come through

35:00 you'd go up and quite often film the exits of the paratroopers, there was also with the bombers the Canberras, but again I didn't work on those they were up here at Queensland at Evans Head bombing range. And we'd photograph those

35:30 or film those just as training, mainly for the people that were doing it not training for us.

How valued were the training films in terms of improving operations?

I think very important, it showed the pilot whether he turned in or turned out too late

36:00 or was too high too low and could adjust and all these sort of things, I don't know about the paratroopers, they all hoped all the parachutes opened, but they obviously had procedures, I don't know. It was really you just filmed it

36:30 because they used it as the training aid and not us they were training films, training shots but for the people that were doing it not us. We had training but it was courses back at the School of Photo [Photography] which I didn't go to until a lot later.

Did you film some of these exercises at different speeds so they could see more

37:00 **accurately what some people were doing?**

Cine [film work] yes, there were some, there was once at Williamtown, a Mirage had an under carriage problem and filmed that they had to put down foam and film the aircraft landing to see what happened

37:30 make sure everything, well it was just in case it went bad.

How many training films would you make a month?

38:00 Films as in proper training films or gun camera films and those sort of things? Gun cameras would have maybe 3 or 4 sorties each 6 or 8 or more pilots and they all flew the same mission, going off in say 3 or 4 aircraft on a sorties.

38:30 We would have a lot in a day there were as the training films made at CPE might take months or years to do, so not a lot we didn't make a great deal of training films at CPE we had a unit and it did a lot of filming

39:00 but it wasn't like one a month or three a month or something it was as required, and not everybody knew about them so.

Was the photographic unit run off their feet or did you have enough personnel to do what was required?

With the air cameras and

- 39:30 survey work, always a lot of work there, thousands and thousands of prints going out all the time, the domestic work the still section had 3 or 4 photographers who'd be doing a number of jobs a day. It varied apart from the air film printing, that was pretty constant all the time.
- 40:00 Because in those days it took a lot longer, the films the prints the papers and things they used in those days were a lot different to the papers they use today, you'd have to wash for 40 minutes or an hour and we used to air dry them because we didn't want any shrinkage
- 40:30 by putting them through heat. So it took a long while from exposing through to actually being dry enough to pack, took quite a while, and we'd be processing maybe ten sheets of paper at a time, like your deal cards flipping them one over the top of the other all the time.

Tape 3

- 00:25 I think people think of the pilot or the gunner as far as the air force is concerned, and they don't know the carryings on.
- 00:30 **I want to ask you about, when you got into the RAAF did you have to do basic training again?**
- Yes I did, I went through recruits at Rathmines on Lake Macquarie, it was an old Catalina base during World War II. And yes,
- 01:00 I had to go through the whole thing again, the only difference was in the army I was using the, was instructed in the Owen gun where as in the air force it was a Thompson gun. I couldn't believe the difference I really had a bit of a laugh at the Thompson compared to the Owen.
- 01:30 Yeah, I had to go through the whole thing again and I had no trouble I breezed through that, the only difference was learning the different ranks and things.
- And how could you compare the training to one another?**
- Pretty similar, quite similar at that stage, it was
- 02:00 it was over three months basic training, same as the Nasho were, now'days I think it's only four weeks or something, but we did pretty well everything that I was taught in the army, night compass marches and I've never used them in the air force, but we did all that sort of thing,
- 02:30 night compass marches and all the qualifying and the drill was all exactly the same or very minor differences if there were any differences.
- Can you tell me the difference between army life and RAAF life, was there a marked difference in the two, can you think of things that make one different to the other?**
- Yes.
- 03:00 It seemed more...it wasn't so strict in the RAAF I mean the discipline was there but nothing like the army and it's deteriorated over the years that I was in it, when I first went into
- 03:30 the air force you more or less stood to attention when a corporal spoke to you and that's been broken down I've seen LAC speaking to sergeants using Christian names and things but it's a lot easier in the RAAF than in the army, I did the right thing I'm pretty sure.
- 04:00 **Other than that can you explain why it was so different?**
- No I think the air force has always been regarded as being, not soft, but
- 04:30 things are a lot easier and not so tough, plus a lot of different jobs and I was infantry and everyone was infantry sort of thing, sure there were radio and there was rifle group and
- 05:00 HQ platoon with some mortars and things like that but in the air force you are in a trade. And my trade is different to the engine fitter or the instrument fitter or that sort of thing and the tasks are -
- 05:30 get myself into trouble here...the tasks are not sort of automatic as though you got to know what you are about, in both the army and the air force it as more sort of deeper, if you know what I mean, trying to keep myself out of trouble here.
- 06:00 **Can you tell me what you and your other workers would get up to sort of (UNCLEAR) how did you bond and what was it that bonded you as RAAF personnel?**
- Well the unit, the CPE was an enclosed unit, a security area because of the films and the intelligence

side of things

06:30 and we had our own club I suppose you would call it and they used to have motor car rallies evenings out we had our own little smoko room and things. And we were inside a closed wire fence and nobody could get in or out without a pass

07:00 we were pretty well good little knit group there but they'd have a social side of things and organise things so...sergeants, at Laverton there was a corporal club so all the corporals all disappeared up there and the sergeants and the officers had their own messes so this is when I was first at

07:30 CPE I did three tours over my time and had been in all three messes you know the sergeants and officers had their balls and different nights that the mess committee would organise. And also I was married at that stage

08:00 or was married shortly after joining the RAAF married a WAAAF [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force] and we sort of lived in married quarters, married quarters has a group of people all together, so there were parties and things.

Was that on base or off base?

08:30 Of base in Laverton itself.

Can you explain the set up of married quarters?

You apply and depending on your family size and things you could be allocated a married quarter, in the early years they were mainly housing commission places, some of them were pretty rough

09:00 as far as having things. They were very, very basic and you would get a choice if you didn't like one you could knock that one back and get another one. They wouldn't let you go past 2 or 3 though, and you'd move in

09:30 they'd organise your furniture from one place to another. If you moved into an area where they had nothing you could find a place yourself and they would pay the difference between the rent and what you had to pay for rent. They had a scale that you had to pay for your rent of the place and if they couldn't supply you with a place.

10:00 They would make up the difference.

Can you remember what you were paying back then for that sort accommodation?

No but it wasn't very much because we weren't being paid very much...so no I can't.

Can you recall having been in the army and the RAAF can you recall the food being any different?

10:30 No It was pretty good in both of them, hard rations are hard rations in both they are all the same. The best food in the air force was in the sergeant's mess because all the chefs were sergeants or warrant officers. So no I never had any complaints about the food.

11:00 I learnt that you always sit at the end of the table, the tables were six, eight or ten to a table, big long tables so you always sat at the end because if you sat in the middle you were always passing things up or down so if you sat at the end everyone had to pass up to you that was one trick I learnt early.

What sort of numbers are we talking about, how many people could these

11:30 **messes accommodate can you recall?**

No, because guys that were married quite often lived out in married quarters.

I just meant how many people had to come in?

Oh it depended on the base, some bases were bigger than others and the numbers would vary

12:00 if it was a flying base or a training base or people going through it all the time, some are on attachments others had been permanently posted there, so no I would be guessing at numbers.

The airmen's being the biggest naturally would it?

Yes.

12:30 **Were you surprised in a way when you joined the RAAF that they didn't try to make you an air defence guard with your army experience, infantry experience?**

Actually, I thought about that before saying I wanted to be a photographer but I steered away from it because I sat, when I was in the army

13:00 on an exercise in an ambush. And we had the enemy in our sights for quite some time and was just moving the sights just a fraction of an inch and I thought that could be me down there. So I was one of

the reasons I decided to

- 13:30 try for the RAAF because I'd done 3 years and almost finished my obligation, National Service obligation and I liked service life and I couldn't see any reason not to go on but I wanted to have a go at the RAAF.

Can you just continue on for us then...from sort of life as a....working in the photographic department in the RAAF?

- 14:00 Ok after coming back from Malaya where I was just an ordinary photographer doing whatever job came in I went to Williamstown just North of Newcastle and there I was again just a normal ground photographer doing the usual domestic
- 14:30 and aerial work. Whatever the boss decided to assign me, and I was there for 3 years and then in '63 I got the opportunity to go either back to Malaya
- 15:00 or go to PR [Public Relations] so that would be '63. I went to Williamstown and '67. I had the opportunity to go back to Malaya or go into PR, and I plumped for PR and I went down there. I'd attained corporal rank at that stage.
- 15:30 I had had a couple of years as corporal and I went down there and I got acting sergeant rank in for PR, the reason for that was if you went and arrived on a job at some base and arrived late at night you didn't want to go opening the equipment people up and opening up the store to get your
- 16:00 bed linen and a room and all that sort of thing. As a sergeant you can walk into the mess and see the mess manager and be allocated a room, and that was reason the service personnel in PR were NCO rank, so I was an acting sergeant for a short period and then made substantive a little while later and I really did well in PR
- 16:30 because I sort of people person in preference to the technical side of photography. I preferred working with people and I did well there and in fact spent 7 years in as PR and travelled all over the place and thoroughly enjoyed it.

- 17:00 **You were privy to information about what was happening in Malaya, what was your perspective on what was happening up there?**

I went to Malaya in '61, the emergency had just finished...the Canberras were flying film the Sabres were still flying gun cameras.

- 17:30 I don't really understand what was going on up there at that stage because it had virtually all finished and I was still three years in the air force at that stage and was still on a learning curve, a big learning curve. That's where this other chap took me under his wing up there, no as a lower rank I didn't get a great deal of knowledge in those days

- 18:00 of what was going on.

Besides what they were doing with gun cameras and things like that, were they doing happy in the job kind of things?

The PR people were yeah, the PR people were, that was sort of one area the normal photography section didn't touch, you'd get the odd job

- 18:30 like maybe the sergeant's mess would raise money for the local orphanage or something. And they'd present the cheque and the base photographer would do that sort of thing, but you didn't do great deal of PR as a base photographer.

So when the choice came up between Malaya and PR, what was the one thing that pulled you in that direction?

No idea I just said no.

- 19:00 I was in a squadron, 481 Maintenance Squadron, I wasn't a base photographer I was a squadron photographer which was the only time I ever was posted to a squadron and the wing was going up to Malaya, they were changing over and the flying squadron and the maintenance squadron, the CO called me down and said,

- 19:30 "You got a posting to Malaya with 75 Squadron," because it was that was an internal posting within the wing and which upset a couple of guys in base squadron because they hadn't been to Malaya and here I was three years after coming back going back again and then on virtually the same day the posting came out for me to go to PR.

- 20:00 And he said to me, "I suppose you want to go back to Malaya?" and I said no. I don't know why I said it but I'm glad I did because it was the turning point in my air force career.

What was the feeling the first time you were told, the first time you went to Malaya, what was the feeling when you were first told you were going to go over?

Oh I was excited, very excited, we had

20:30 our first child who was about one I think, he'd be 18 months or so, and we were going by ship, we had 16 days on a ship between Melbourne and Penang.

Can you recall what ship was called?

Yeah, the TV Flotolara Line

21:00 and there was lot of air force personnel on it and it was a big adventure and we, when I told my mother she got all upset. I told her I had been posted overseas and she immediately said Korea, Korea had finished but she said, "Korea." And I said, "No, Malaya,"

21:30 and that was just as bad as far as she was concerned. But she ended up coming up at one stage because it was a duty free port, lived on the island of Penang duty free port and white man was still vastly superior in those days. That's not right white man was more or less

22:00 think we'd better wipe that, it was a good place to be it was tax free and all that.

And did you get a chance to do much outside of work as regards being in a new country?

No we were very much...there was a big hostel it was an air force base Butterworth at that stage

22:30 there were 3 Squadron there, base squadron...quite a reasonable size base, big control and reporting unit and radar place 114 and we had a big Hostel that held dances every week and all the ladies played netball or tennis or softball, it was a good posting in those days, the emergency had finished you could travel anywhere

23:00 free port lots of things cheap tax-free so yeah it was...amahs to look after the house and the baby so it was...

Can you recall or did you have any impressions on what Australian attitude of the general populations was towards the Malayan emergency?

23:30 No, no I was very naive in those days, like I say was on a learning curve as far as the service and what was going on and it was a big adventure and a popular one as far as we were concerned, my wife was a WAAAFi she had to get out in those days when you got married she knew and understood the service.

24:00 It was a good period.

What was the explanation for why WAAAF personnel had to resign from their positions?

No idea but I used to have ask the Madam, which was the senior female officer, I had to go and ask her if I could take out Shirley my first wife

24:30 if I could take her out to the pictures because at we went to the pictures in Melbourne. And you back to after ten and the WAAAFs had to be all in for a bed check at ten o'clock for the night, so you had to get special permission to keep her out after ten, so

25:00 once you got married you had to get out of the air force in those days, the ladies, the WAAAFs.

Was it fairly common for RAAF gents to court WAAAF women?

Yeah, because all the ladies had cars, yeah most of them had cars but I don't know.

25:30 It would be a fair percentage, especially in those days because was out in the scrub, there was very little between Melbourne and, but tigersnakes, I remember those quite closely.

So generally what would the blokes get up to on the weekend?

It was automatic leave so you didn't have to get leave passes or anything, once you got to stand down

26:00 if you wanted to go off somewhere for the weekend, or go home as some of the guys were from Melbourne and things, you just moved off the base and did what you wanted to do at the weekend, if you wanted to do sport you'd have to get the OK. I played senior soccer in Melbourne and I had to get approval in case I got injured

26:30 which in those days in soccer was quite a possibility, but it was pretty free and open. Monday night was closed the base was closed and you couldn't go out on a Monday night because that was what we called panic night, where everything had to be cleaned and changed. The garden weeded and all that sort of thing and then Tuesday mornings were the inspections.

27:00 So Monday night was closed camp but after you were stood down of an afternoon if you wanted to go into town, the guys could go but the WAAAFi's had to get permission to stay out after ten, different air force these days.

Can you tell me about the single men's quarters before you got married?

Yeah, it was a 2 storey block, mine was 481,

- 27:30 four guys to a room, it was 2 storey joined in the middle with another block by the showers and toilets, wasn't air conditioned but it was...you had a four drawer cabinet,
- 28:00 a big wardrobe, each guy had a wardrobe and four drawer side table kind of thing plus all your bedding was all the same, yeah that was about it.

How full on were the inspections?

In those days you were supposed to

- 28:30 live out of your kit bag virtually the idea being you could be moved at any stage anywhere. And you had to have a your blankets in a bed roll at the top all your drawers, had to be stepped out downwards so they could see into the drawers and your socks had to be rolled it was all laid down.
- 29:00 They'd walk along and check that everything had been dusted and open up your cupboard to make sure was ironed and neat and tidy, all that sort of thing.

OK moving forward to you accepting the posting to PR can you just continue on from there?

PR, yes

- 29:30 I was with the RAAF senior PR photographer who used to be a sergeant photographer but had got out and taken up the post as the chief photographer and he was given an honorary commission for when he went onto a base or a unit, but he was a public servant basically
- 30:00 he and I are good mates still, he's still alive living in and we just hit it off and I got into the swing of things very quickly. He taught me a lot of things as far as PR and what to look for and do
- 30:30 in we had photographers in Melbourne and later on in Brisbane, but in we didn't do very much real PR accept for the air board and VIPs [Very important Persons] that would fly into from other countries and things because a man in uniform could walk out
- 31:00 to the guard of honour or whatever, whereas the civilian photographers had to be kept behind the barrier so we could go out. And quite often we'd do pool photography for guys that would go right out to the aircraft for the hand shake or stand at the end of the ranks to get the inspection or something, could be the queen or it could be a president or anyone from anywhere as quite often was
- 31:30 and we did a lot of that sort of work and the rest of it was we'd do released for TV [television], photographs that...Vietnam was underway at this stage, stuff coming back from Vietnam and if we put out a national distribution all the television stations would get
- 32:00 a photograph of the person or whatever it was, if it was cine they'd all get the 30 seconds or 60 seconds of whatever it was, of silent film because we had journalist and they would write the commentary over the top of it. And this would go out and this was partly my job, if it was a still photograph, a home towner
- 32:30 then I would print them and they'd all be distributed, we were more or less a distributing thing at that stage but we often went away on jobs as well maybe over to Pearce or up to Darwin on exercises or things like that. And it was a good job and I liked it and I know I did well there.

- 33:00 **The gentleman you were mentioning there that had the honorary rank of sergeant when he came onto a base did he have to wear a uniform when he was in that role?**

Yep, although it depends were it was, sometimes he didn't if it was...but on exercises, we went to Vietnam together in '67

- 33:30 he wore them then you know.

And was it the standard airmen's uniform?

Yeah.

Was there any particular insignia for the PR corps?

No, the army wore a flash PR flash army PR.

- 34:00 The navy photographers wore a camera on their sleeve, RAAF had nothing.

And did that make you feel?

I didn't really think about it although I did acquire the navy cameras and I put them on my peek go faster type of baseball cap at one stage.

- 34:30 I think it would give a little bit of esprit de corps type of thing, if they had some sort of thing for the different mustering. The name badge we had CPE often had a camera on the name badge that we wore

and the school of photography had one and that sort of thing, but on the official uniform

35:00 they were on work dress, but on your official service uniforms we had nothing.

So can you tell some of the jobs you did in that department before you went over in '67?

Yes, I filmed a graduation parade over in Pearce of new pilots and things

35:30 and did some air to air stuff of fly pasts and things over there. I did another job on 5 Squadron on the helicopters when they were practising rescues in the snow, including a hoist which I went down which was interesting.

Can you tell us about that?

I wanted a shot on the ground

36:00 of people getting out and we only had the one chopper so they let me down on the hoist which was good it was an experience, I got the shot I wanted and I was happy, the chopper had landed at his point and people were jumping out of it so I'd got the photograph I wanted and just climbed back in the chopper [helicopter]. I didn't go up I came down, we also did a sound

36:30 on film interview with a chopper pilot who had one the DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross] in Vietnam that was now back in Australia and didn't know about it and we set this up and I filmed it. And it went out as a sound on film release

37:00 of this guy and he didn't know anything about it, we just asked him about his experiences in Vietnam and the guy that was asking the questions, he said, "Oh there was one occasion you had a bit of luck and did this," this bloke said, "Oh yes," gave the story

37:30 about what he did. And he didn't know it but he'd been awarded the DFC for this particular action and the first he knew it was later that, when it came out, because we did it a couple of days before we knew that he was going to get it in preparation for the release. I believe he had to buy a few beers

38:00 all his mates spotted him on TV talking about it, but that was our first sound on film PR job that we'd tried and it worked well.

Was that a big deal when the first sound on film was done?

For PR yes because we used to use Bell and Howell 16 mm hand held cameras for most for the work.

38:30 I actually made a little film of my boss and I going camping and he knew my history as far as the cine side went and we ended up buying 4 for each of the PR people to use

39:00 and some Nagra tape recorders. And we hooked them up and that's how we filmed it with the Nagra and the Arriflex. I don't think some of the other guys were all that keen on doing that sort of work but I was and we did a couple like that.

Was that a major undertaking to buy equipment for the RAAF?

39:30 Well I assume so, Arriflexes and Nagras weren't sort of things you go the local camera shop and buy.

But like what was the process you had to go through did you jump through hoops?

The PR department had a group captain, 3 squadron leaders, journos [journalists] and an admin officer.

40:00 My boss was a flight lieutenant and I was a sergeant so again I was on the bottom rung so it just arrived and I was very happy when it arrived.

Tape 4

01:11 **What were some of the other more successful sound on film PR exercises that stands out for you?**

There weren't a great many of them but they were all similar sort of interview things, they knew they were going to be interviewed the first one was a little bit special in that the guy didn't know

01:30 we didn't do a lot, not in Canberra anyway. They were just interviews about somebody getting something or some new equipment talking or something about it, and they were usually only very short for TV...30 seconds or 60 seconds or something, that's all,

02:00 nothing in particular that I can recall actually.

So did you use the television medium much, did you have idea of the impact that it had?

Yeah we used it quite a bit especially with Vietnam, the photographer in Vietnam had a cine camera and he was always sending it back.

02:30 We'd use cine and still on the exercises pitch black and rum keg were 2 regular exercises used up in the territory in Darwin. And we'd put it out to all the television stations or the major newspapers depending on what it was.

03:00 **So would you basically make up a package there in Canberra and it would be your version that would go out to all the TV stations?**

Yes, sometimes I'd go up to Sydney where we had the films copied

03:30 for dispatch there might be something I'd shot and it needed to be distributed. So I'd go up to Sydney and we'd have it run off and the journalist would do the voice over, commentary and wrap them up send them out

04:00 to all the major TV networks. If it was a still print I would print several hundred and it would go out to all the different newspapers and things, if it was a hometowner it might only be 2 pikkies [pictures], like prints of the same picture go out to say Canberra and Cooma that sort of thing.

04:30 **So you were posted to Vietnam in '67 was it?**

No, I went in '67 for a few weeks to fill in a gap between the photographers up there because PR hired newspaper photographers gave them an honorary commission and sent them up there for 12 months. When they came back they were discharged but there became some gaps because they could

05:00 necessarily get someone at the time they wanted or overlap them so I went up in 67 for 4 or 5 weeks or something but I was posted in '69 to Vietnam. By that stage they didn't have anyone interested in going up and I went up as a fill in

05:30 and ended up staying 10, 11 months.

Can you describe your first impressions the first time you went up there?

Hot humid smelly, I was with my boss at that stage, he came up as well to work out things and we did a

06:00 number of jobs...at that stage we lived, the air force lived in a hotel down in Vung Tau and the officers lived in another place in Vung Tau. And it was a typical Asian area that I'd seen in Thailand and Malaya.

06:30 I'd been in Thailand in '63 as well and it was just the same as those areas and it didn't surprise me as I had previous experience in Thailand and Malaya so later on in '69.

07:00 The air force had their own compound on the base and that was totally different set up all together.

And what sort of cameras were you using then?

Hasselblads, Cine special two's Nikons, they were the particular cameras we used on that particular trip

07:30 in '69 I had a Linhof 54 plate camera, Nikon 35mm and a 16 mm Bell & Howell movie camera. I also had some photographic equipment in 69 and enlarger and trays and things I proofed

08:00 everything I shot and sent back, and made sure that everything was as good as I could get it sort of thing.

Did photographers have their own dedicated cameras or was there a store room where you'd go and check out whatever camera you needed for a particular job?

On bases there was a store room and you took what camera

08:30 you required for the job, you might need a plate camera that had movements if you had something technical. And you had some fine crack or something in an aircraft or piece of equipment and you needed movements for depth of field and things or it might be a 35 mm, you picked the camera for the job

09:00 in Vietnam they were my cameras, I was the only person that used those three cameras, I was literally on my own up there, at one stage I didn't even have the journalist and I was writing my own captions and notes and things to send back.

Was that something that you enjoyed?

Oh yes, in

09:30 '67 I was...just... a trip up there to organised things and get them out of the way plus the Canberra bombers had just gone up there so we filmed and we went up there and filmed and did some shots of personnel up there, I was on a medevac [medical evacuation] in '67 which was a very interesting experience.

- 10:00 I filmed this army patrol in contact from this chopper looking down and this guy had been hit across the legs with an automatic and we had to lift him out and we didn't have a proper litter because we weren't a proper medevac aircraft, we were a slick [helicopter used to carry troops or cargo].
- 10:30 They had this jacket type thing which they sent down and the guys weren't sure how to put it on this injured soldier so the gunner went down on the hoist, because we were below the tree level hovering, he went down on the hoist and we raised him up, and I'm filming all this.
- 11:00 And he got to level with the skids and the winch jammed and he had to be lifted in, was a dead weight and I'm filming it and the crewmen couldn't do it on his own. The pilot and co pilot told me very impolitely to put the 'so and so' camera down and help him in which I did and we got him inside and
- 11:30 we had to leave the gunner on the ground with the patrol because we couldn't get him and we flew off and I had to sit on the other gun and we flew the guy straight back to the hospital and I filmed that as well flying back.
- 12:00 It was just like the TV show MASH [US comedy based on Mobile Army Surgical Hospital in Korean War] were they run out, grab the guy and load him onto a trolley thing and rush him inside. I filmed that, somebody else went and got the gunner out, when I was coming back a couple of weeks later he was on the medevac Herc [Hercules] that I came home on.
- 12:30 And I filmed him on the Herc back in Sydney being lifted into the army ambulance being taken away. So I literally filmed him right through and that went out as a story took 6 minutes or something, it was quite long but they ran it which was good. But the rest of the time there in '67 it was just normal
- 13:00 PR type stuff about the new squadron and that type of thing.

What would be a typical angle for some of those typical stories that you say?

The hometown type things? Yeah well I firmly believe that when people think of a war or combat and the air force its usually the pilots the gunners and the

- 13:30 bombardiers and bombers things. The guy behind them that gets them there is not often thought about I mean the engine mechanic or instrument fitter, the cook, the armourer all these guys there all working to get that air craft to where its supposed to go and
- 14:00 one of my charters in '69 was to try and get as many 'hometowners' we used to call them, photographs of the ordinary guys behind the scenes, happy smiling faces happy in the job doing there supposed to sort of thing. I would go round and set up some PR photograph
- 14:30 of safety equipment guy that looks after the helmets and the all the flying gear and things or the cook that gets all the meals and find out where they came from what, there home town was, a little bit of their history, get a nice happy smiling face, send it home. And it appears in the local newspaper, a hometown newspaper,
- 15:00 mum and the family are all proud and happy that he's there smiling and appears happy.

Was it ever a challenge to get a happy smiling face?

Never, no I had a little thing, I asked them what they thought of the air force and straight away wether they liked it or not they started to grin, or if it was an outside job and

- 15:30 it was hot and humid I'd say just think about a nice long tall cold beer or cold drink or something, and a smile would come across the face and...click I've got him but you set it up and get everything right before you say that, most of them were big smiling happy faces.

Were there nicknames that were given to the photographers at all?

- 16:00 Yeah, but none I could repeat...no not anything really often called a nasty name sometimes but no we didn't have any, we had individual nicknames. I mean I had a camera on the back of my helmet with.
- 16:30 The flashlight forming one of the 2 O's in 'Coops' and I had Coops across the back and the flashlight was in the middle of the O, but that was just my own personal nickname and it stuck over the years as well... most of the guys had some sort of name
- 17:00 or badge or something on the back of the helmet.

Did you have nicknames for different units at all?

No...35 Squadron were known as the Wallaby airlines, they were the Caribous...2 Squadron were always known as 2 Squadron...the aircraft had call signs

- 17:30 35 Squadron even there call sign was Wallabies I think...2 Squadron were known as Magpies that was because of the Magpie shrike on their squadron crest and a sortie would go out and it would be Magpie one or whatever it

18:00 happened to be, but they weren't nicknames they were call signs, I don't know of any unit that has a nickname.

Were most units happy to accommodate a photographer but was it often a hassle they didn't need?

18:30 No they usually put up with us, the hassle occurred if you wanted to do something and they didn't want you there, or they weren't sure if you knew what to do, or they were concerned over you. I flew in a couple of bombing sorties and I had to convince them.

19:00 I knew what was on about and I knew what to do...the same when I did some patrols outside the wire, my national service infantry training came good there and I was allowed to actually go out on the sweeps and the patrol...didn't have much problem with the choppers because they always had the room and seemed...and the Caribous

19:30 never any problem but you had to convince the commander of either the aircraft or the patrol or whatever it was that you knew what it was about and you could handle yourself properly sort of thing you weren't going to take flash light photographs out in the jungle or something

20:00 but I didn't really have much trouble.

Would you come up with ideas of things to shoot or would you be directed by somebody else?

No, you'd have to come up with them, there was no one there to tell you, I might get jobs I was posted and on strength at H

20:30 **AFV [Australian Force Vietnam] which was in Saigon but I lived and worked out of Vung Tau. I made sure I got up to Phan Rang where 2 Squadron were at least once a fortnight every ten days or so. And I covered all three services because the head PR man in the country**

21:00 **was an army, lieutenant colonel I think he was who I never actually met. But if a particular task came up we had a particular VIP visiting Nui Dat or somewhere and the army couldn't handle it and I would do it if an air force thing we had several politicians or country newspaper editors**

21:30 **who I had to escort around. If they came quite often the job would come down from Saigon that I had to do it, the entertainers that came down from Saigon and I had to accompany Johnny O'Keefe for instance for a number of days.**

22:00 **And they had all army people escorting him and doing things and I was attached to the show, or attached to go with him but for the hometowners and anything the RAAF did from Vung Tau was up to me. I could I'd attend the morning briefings find out what was going on, what was had happened the previous day**

22:30 **on things that I didn't attend or go to and pick out was the most interesting for me to cover and I'd get on that insertion or re supply or whatever it might be and do that if there wasn't anything I wanted to do**

23:00 **or was interesting on it. Because I was my own boss I had my own jeep and everything then I could go up and do the navy, the divers. I did a few jobs with them and if I couldn't do anything real interesting then I'd fall back on the hometowners and go around and find the people stuck in little offices and**

23:30 **in the motor pool or something to do the hometowners.**

Did you have an assistant or was it just you?

There was a journalist when I first got there and there was a journalist at the finish but for a period in the middle of my tour for a number of months I was totally on my own...there was another photographer at Vung Tau but he was the base photographer

24:00 and he didn't do any of this. He used my dark room occasionally but he didn't have a great deal to do up there.

When there was a journalist attached was it the journalist that directed the story?

Yes, well we'd talk it out...I was a sergeant by this time, he was an officer,

24:30 the journalists were also honorary they weren't full time air force, they were public service with honorary commissions and they came from the Melbourne, Sydney or Canberra PR sections or units. And we'd talk it out

25:00 there wasn't any yes sir no sir three bags full sort of thing, it was a team working together to get what we could...the best.

Was there any adjustments that, say people coming from commercial newspapers who were

contracted, was there any adjustments they had to make in terms of how covered things, were they briefed in certain ways?

25:30 They were briefed before going over there...I wasn't privy to the brief, the group captain and squadron leaders and journo would brief them on what was required and there would be a journo over there PR journo over there. So I would assume it was pretty much the same as when I was over there

26:00 the co-operation working together sort of thing.

In terms of how far you could go with a particular story or angle or something that you saw, was there self-censorship or were you just told to shoot it as it is, worry about that later?

There was a bit of both actually, yeah I knew what I should and

26:30 shouldn't photograph in most cases pretty much all the cases, but if I missed something it would be picked up in Canberra before anything was distributed.

What sort of things couldn't you show?

The entertainers when they came up we always

27:00 put on a feed or get some of the young guys and girls handing them drinks or plates of goodies. But I had to make sure the guy wasn't married or anything like that so you had to be careful on that sort of thing, some of the shots I did in the hospital you had to be careful

27:30 of course.

In what sense?

Oh well, when some VIPs came through and visited the hospital over at Back Beach [Vung Tau]. You just had to be careful who or what was wrong with the guy so you didn't upset people back home as far as showing him distressed or showing something you shouldn't.

28:00 In that regard briefings, they were intelligence briefings and things of where they were going to bomb or what was going on just had to be careful that you didn't show something in the background or something they didn't want distributed around Australia that's all.

28:30 I didn't see a lot of bodies or anything like that, I saw some I didn't see a great deal and I saw quite a number of POWs [Prisoners of War] and things but there was nothing PR wise as far as I was concerned, not the type of work I wanted

29:00 as far as that goes it was a fairly easy job as to what to take and what not to take.

So when you found yourself on the medevac story shoot how did you know at the time that it was going to be a PR story and nothing else?

Well it was just opportunity, I was in the crew room at Nui Dat when

29:30 we heard about it and the Americans who were the medevac choppers couldn't make it or couldn't get in there or weren't available for some reason. So the pilot of the chopper who had taken us up there said, "I'll do it," you know and he started running for the aircraft and I said, "Can I come?"

30:00 And he said, "Yes, stay out of the way," and I ran into and jumped on the chopper. I had my cine camera with me so I filmed it and I just filmed it as it happened. I was looking through the lens...it's a job, it's a story but I'm not thinking that I'm just filming things as they occur and it wasn't until we got back to Australia. And

30:30 I had the footage and got it all together and actually edited it and formed the story that showed the soldier being winched out, transported to the hospital, coming back in the Herc and being off loaded and going into the RAP [Regimental Aid Post]

31:00 Don't know his name and I don't know what happened to him, I mean he was alive and well, but he'd been badly shot up in his legs. I don't know what eventually happened to him but it was a good story but I didn't think that at the time, it was afterwards when we put it all together.

Some of the stories like that obviously there were three parts to it with the fella coming home

31:30 **and so forth, was it tricky for you, being a one man band, staying on top of you know. I've got to get a shot of him somewhere but I've got another job to?**

No, because I only found out when I got on the aircraft to come home that he was on the same aircraft. I'd filmed him up to the army hospital at Back Beach and it was just

32:00 a medevac lift out as far as I was concerned and as we were going back a week or so later, I forget...10 days or something later the film hadn't been sent back so I took it back with me and I discovered him on the aircraft so it was just pure luck.

32:30 **Was there a difference when you were working, a difference between PR and news?**

How do you mean?

Was there hard stories and soft stories?

Oh yes I mean there was civil action where the RAAF took care an orphanage up at Phan Rang.

33:00 We managed to repair a local's house, the woman, call it a house anyway, the woman was one of the few locals that we let into our compound, very few locals were allowed into the compound.

33:30 And she was one and something had happened to the house anyway, and the works guys like the carpenters and a couple of the other guys would go out and repair the damage to the place so there was civil aid. There were guys who pilots and things who after hours would go and teach English at the local school

34:00 these were the sort of things I'd photograph or film that I suppose you could call soft, this compared to bombing missions, gun ship missions, resupply missions and all that sort of thing.

Did you get any kind of directive like x percentage of these kind of stories or these type of stories?

No, it was purely left up to me.

34:30 I know...back in Canberra I got a note back from the boss saying they were very pleased at what I was sending back and they were very happy and keep up the good work sort of thing, and I kept it.

I imagine when you got onto a story about the RAAF helping an orphanage or something...a good news story that that's very good for moral did the men actually get to see any of those stories. Did

35:00 **they get any newspapers sent or anything like that to give them a boost?**

Well I don't know, I dare say they would but it would come from the family, if it appeared in the paper the family would send it up or something, Johnny O'Keefe wherever we went wanted to go to an

35:30 orphanage and see the oldest nun and the kids. And those shots would go out and it would be the RAAF Padre and some of the local guys from the base that would be with him, you'd get those of sort jobs, or opportunities more so than jobs

36:00 and they were good, although some of the kids without arms and legs...they weren't real happy shots if you know what I mean, you could put people in them and that sort of thing you only had to look at the kid and...

What about, say out of hours?

36:30 **Socially was there a good rapport between all the different journalists and so forth internationally that were working?**

Yeah there'd be the odd occasion when I went up to Saigon they'd have the 5 O'clock follies which was the US [United States] big PR show they all stood up and there were hundreds of international journo's and camera people there.

37:00 But I didn't attend those very often, the two main Australian guys that I dealt with Dennis Gibbons and Robin Strathdey they would come down to Vung Tau and they'd stay in the mess and they'd get on all right with the guys,

37:30 the navy guys especially. The navy guys lived in an old fort up on a hill and they lived in the magazine and I escorted Dennis and Robin out, these guys used to swim down anchor chains at night and all this sort of thing, looking for make shift mines and things, and I escort Dennis and

38:00 have a few drinks afterwards and before. And we all got on pretty well, they were all easy going and had no problems...I met a couple of the international camera people but it was all Australian newspaper editors and

38:30 photo journalists that I had dealings with.

Tape 5

00:34 **Now just when you were telling us about the story you shot with the injured infantry men, you said that you went on the guns, was that normal practice?**

I don't believe so, the reason the captain said get in the gunner's position

01:00 because he was left on the ground and they were still in contact. We were down in amongst the trees and we had to get down and come out over the tops of the trees and I suppose there was the chance that we could be fired upon and he wanted someone on that gun if it was necessary. But as it turned out it wasn't and I was sitting there and had no instructions and that particular

01:30 twin end 60 thing that they worked on but he sort of came up and came out at an angle so that the crew men on the other side was on the hot side and I didn't really have to worry about it. He just said, "You sit where gunner sits and be prepared," to us.

And if required you were quite prepared to...

Well I would have had a go

02:00 I don't know...I was in a gun ship mission once and I was filming, they work in threes, one going across the top, one going down and one pulling up. And we were in support of an ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] patrol and the gunners were going 'Brup Brup Brup' because they fired the rockets and mini guns

02:30 then they sort of flattened out the door gunners were firing. And then they climbed out while the next one is coming down and the door gunners were going 'brup brup brup' picking their shots sort of thing and after we'd spied all our ammunition. We were going back to Nui Dat, I said to one of the crewies,

03:00 "What were you firing at, could you see them?" because to me standing behind him looking through the viewfinder outside was a blur because we were coming to down fast and going along fairly low and fast. And he said, "oh yeah it was pretty close," and I said, "If you could see them that easily why weren't they having shots at us?" and the captain/pilot said,

03:30 "They were and we may have been hit, have a look and see when we get back," it was an interesting exercise.

So had you been in aircraft that had been hit by ground fire and things like that?

No not that I know of, there was one close shave but

04:00 that wasn't enemy fire, we were fired on but I understand I don't think we were hit, I certainly don't know of it anyway.

Did you have a personal weapon, and if so what was it?

Yes I carried a 9 mm pistol, when I arrived up there all the NCOs [Non Commissioned Officer] carried

04:30 sub machine-guns...F1s and things. The airmen carried the normal rifle and the officers carried a pistol and I said I can't carry an F1 because I'll have my film and my camera and my bags. When I say bags I had a couple of satchels which were

05:00 clay mine satchels which I carried my films plates in because I always preferred the plate camera in preference to the 35mm so I convinced them that I couldn't carry that and if anything was going on I wouldn't be using the gun anyway because I would be trying to get shots of what was going on so they

05:30 took me out to a 25 yard range and gave me a ten minute lesson on firing a 9 mm pistol and that's what I wore all the time, never came out of the holster.

How did the plate camera hold up to the riggers of Vietnam?

Very well I had no trouble with it, it was a Linhof, was a 5 x 4, not a quarter plate or anything, it was quite strong I didn't have any trouble with it

06:00 fairly robust camera and of course I paid particular care to dust and the humidity etcetera and made sure I cleaned it at the end of each day things like so I didn't have any trouble with any of the equipment actually, oh a flash I did at one stage but got that repaired.

Was there any problem with back up parts or anything like that?

06:30 No well I didn't have any problems with the cameras so it would have just been a signal down to Canberra and there would have been one on the next air craft coming up.

And you also carried your own personal camera didn't you?

No, I had carried the 35 mm camera which was the camera that was also up there for the PR guy,

07:00 most of the work I did on 5 x 4 I could use the 35 mm for my own personal use and take hots that way, when I went out on patrols or something that was I couldn't use or shouldn't use the quarter plate then I'd use the air force Nikon that I carried.

Can you tell us about the detachment that they talk about

07:30 **some camera men or photographers experienced in war time situations when they are looking**

through the viewfinder and they feel detachment, and can you explain that?

I don't know if I can explain it, I was told by qualified psychologists and things that the reason I didn't suffer some of the

08:00 same traumas that a lot of the other Vietnam vets is that I was looking through the viewfinder at things instead of in real life so to speak and it was part of the job and it didn't effect me the way it would the guy standing beside me, and I quite believe that because I

08:30 had no fears or worries while I was working and they seemed to think that this was the reason. I was looking through the viewfinder and what I was seeing was a picture not real life and that's one of the reasons.

Can you tell us the importance of the

09:00 **happy in their jobs for the hometown newspaper things, can you tell us how you feel about that?**

Well I felt pretty good and I believe that it was a real worth while task, having a son myself who has served in Timor and Iraq I can understand my parents now

09:30 and therefore the parents of these other guys wether they be cooks or tailors or whatever they were, they were in a combat zone and we got rocketed and mortared and things, in fact I've got a plaque hanging on the wall over there made out to Red Alert Cooper because whenever I went to Phan Rang where 2 Squadron were they had a red alert and we were mortared and shelled

10:00 and it got so bad that towards the finish that there were two guys that didn't like to be in the mess when I walked in because they were superstitious I believe. But it happened every time and used to go up there every ten days or fortnight and the only time it didn't happen was when they presented me, it was my last night up there and they presented me with the plaque and its sitting up there on the wall.

10:30 **Can you tell me what its like to be in a base that's being attacked like that, what happens?**

Well we make a B line for the bunkers, or I did, the alert goes off and we head for, usually at night although what cruelled it at Phan Rang I'd flown up on a midday Caribou with a couple of newspaper editors from the Hunter Valley

11:00 and they were to have lunch with the CO and find out a little bit about what was going on up there. And then fly back a couple of hours later back to Vung Tau and in those couple of hours on the ground we had an alert and we were mortared and that cruelled it for, that's where the nickname came from

11:30 up until that stage it was a bit of a coincidence sort of thing but it happened every time I went there so I sort of first time I was a bit apprehensive, didn't really know what was happening got into the bunkers and just sat there while things come down, Phan Rang was a US air force base, the buildings were set wide apart

12:00 there was lots of open space. The incoming rockets and mortars and things were normally fell on open ground or somewhere that it didn't really matter on the taxi or something, but Vung Tau was totally different, it was a US army base and everything was cluttered and close together we didn't get to many attacks there

12:30 two I think, the first one I went out and took photographs of the star shells and things. But we didn't get attacked by mortars and rockets very often because Vung Tau was a also a R & R [Rest & Recreation] for the enemy, they used to come into town to relax and things so they didn't attack us very often.

13:00 **What was the mind set of the troops knowing that the enemy used the same area for R & R as well?**

Think it was all a bit of a joke really, I don't think they were to worried about it...they were pretty sure that

13:30 Charlie [Viet Cong] didn't want to muck that place up. The fact that there was an air base at the outskirts of it, didn't seem to make much difference.

You just mentioned how you went out and took pictures of star bursts and that, was there any times when you thought that having that detachment placed you in serious danger?

14:00 No because I wasn't thinking of that I was thinking the shots and what I wanted and what I could see and try to get, there were times though when I knew there was danger. I was apprehensive I once had a task put onto me to accompany the navy divers and the army in an operation

14:30 and it was going to be a bit hairy to say the least, I actually wrote a letter to my wife and left it sealed it and left it, as it turned out the operation was cancelled and the letter is still amongst my personal items still unopened, in fact I've forgotten what I put in it now. There was another time

15:00 just before I came home the clearance divers had changed over the team I was with most of the time

had gone back to Australia and the new team was in and the officer came down. He wanted a loan of a camera he said that he knew I was going home in 7 or 8 days

- 15:30 and he had to go and photograph this blockage in a canal down in the delta that had been mined and booby trapped and was a major water way and he wanted some photographs to study before he put the team in and I said it'll be all right I'll come with you and take the shots.
- 16:00 So we flew down in an American helicopter, American Iroquois, landed at a Vietnamese navy outpost where we spoke to the US Navy liaison officer there and he briefed the Australian diver/captain or officer and said that this is
- 16:30 X number of yards up this canal it's X number of rocks and things in the canal and X number of this and that and gave us all the details and he said, "I can guarantee you'll get brassed up because every time we've been up there they've opened up on us it's a very hot area," so we went back to the chopper and I put my helmet on and plugged in
- 17:00 in time to hear the pilot say to his door gunner, "Arm up it's a hot area," and they said we didn't bring any ammunition we just thought it was milk run a delivery sort of thing. So the pilot looked at the navy officer and he said, "Well I've got to see it," so he said, "All right I used to fly 105s before this he said we'll do a fighter approach,"
- 17:30 and we took off and climbed up to a small arms fire safety limit and flew to the area and he just dropped it like stone flattened out we went up the river, I was leaning out taking pictures with the 35 mm 'click, click, click', and the navy officer was looking, we went several yards past the objects.
- 18:00 And I swear blind the aircraft turned on the rota, the rota wasn't turning when we turned and we came back down along... 'click, click, click', climbed up and there wasn't shot fired, we then flew to a US army post and landed refuelled and the gunners armed up and we flew back.

Can you recall what the height was that was safe for small arms fire?

- 18:30 3 thousand feet or 3 thousand meters I'm not sure, three something, I can't remember now.

Did you end up getting what you needed?

Yes yeah, I can show you the photos, a nice photo of logs and stick sticking out of the water, not very wide it was quite narrow waterway it was a delta

- 19:00 a lot of material.

When you did deal with soldiers that were more in the front line infantry soldiers or defence guards or anyone like that, did they give you any stick about photographing people that they regarded as being in the rear?

No, well they didn't know what else I did.

- 19:30 I photographed the aerodrome, 'adges' we'd call them photographed the adges in Vung Tau on the compound. You know pretty arty shots, silhouettes against wipes and the barbed wire and guns and things.
- 20:00 I also photographed them on sweeps and patrols at Nui Dat and Phan Rang and apart from ensuring I knew what to do on a patrol like that I had no trouble and I got some quite reasonable shots
- 20:30 coming through the padi fields or crossing creeks and all that sort, coming out of the jungle...and then after we came back through the wire where they had their first smoke and I stood back with the tele lens and they didn't know I was taking their photos, got some quite far away looks in their eyes.

- 21:00 **Can you explain to us why that sort of photography with the long lens is more appropriate than doing it up close?**

They can't get angry [upset] at you, they don't know it's being taken, there was one occasion I was going in on a chopper that was dropping an SAS patrol that

- 21:30 was being inserted, it was the joint battalion and this particular SAS guys that were getting on our chopper were Kiwis [New Zealander]. And I was sitting in the chopper and looking through the viewfinder and focussing on these guys coming up and this big black Maori said, "You take my photo and you're dead," so I didn't
- 22:00 because he could see me taking them, so I didn't. I got some shots later but he didn't know about it so, plus they're more natural, if anyone is a bit up tight and they can see you lining up that's when they'll say something or have a shot at you or something so partly safety first

- 22:30 stand back and get them that way.

You must have had other instances when you've turned up to take photos and someone is naturally camera shy, have you ever engaged in that sort of thing how do you get around that?

Not very often, like I said I liked working with people and I'd talk to them and generally got around them quite ok and I'd

23:00 99 times out a 100 I got a good grin out of them a good smile but sometimes I was told, "We are busy I can't do it now, I don't want to do it right now," and I'd back off and come back later, I didn't really have any problems in that regard, I never forced anyone and there was the odd one who didn't want to be

23:30 photographed but they were mainly the hometowners kind of shots. And I would just say OK fair enough, where's your offside or something and go and do someone else, because we also had some, forget what we call them now, but they were for

24:00 the air crew, the gunners, the pilots, the navs [navigators] and things like that, in case they were lost or crashed or shot down or killed. They were all on file back at PRHQ [Public Relation Headquarters] to so that they could just dig them out and release them to the news media

24:30 so it was a standard shot, the navs and pilots of 2 Squadron I just stood, all the Canberra's had a small Australian flag on the nose and I just stood them there with the helmet under their arm and got the head and shoulders shot like that. The gunners sitting in the doorway behind their guns nice big smiling face, visors up and they were all well received

25:00 the boss was very pleased when I started those, in fact he said try and get everyone. I didn't but I got most of them which was good.

Being in such close working contact with all these airmen how did you get along and what was your opinion of them and did they enjoy the work they did?

There was always a few grumblers but most of them I think enjoyed the work, there was one guy who was a photographer,

25:30 we were short of, we had crew men with the helicopters and then when they went to Vietnam they had to have a gun on the other side, so they allowed people from other musterings to retrain as a gunner as an air crew gunner, they wore a gunners beret and not a crew men beret and

26:00 one of these guys was a mate of mine a photographer and he was serving their at the same time as I was actually, he'd won an MID [Mentioned in Despatches] and yeah I think they all enjoyed their work, we had a WOD [Warrant Officer Discipline] which is the equivalent of an army RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major], Harry Lavean, he didn't have a great deal

26:30 to do in that sort of work that you would do back in Australia. And he convinced them and he did a lot of flying and gunner work that sort of thing, so you could do it plus at that stage I was still an airman myself, I'd got to the rank of sergeant at this stage and I didn't have any problems really.

27:00 I enjoyed the work and I enjoyed being on my own, I had a pass which meant I could, the American played a lot of, they believed in public information they called themselves, they beloved in PR and I was issued with a pass which meant if I wanted to go somewhere I could just walk up to movement control and say I want to go to Da Lat

27:30 or I want to go to Pleiku or wherever, show them my pass and I would move straight to the head of the queue for the next aircraft and I had this thing. I had my own jeep I was my own boss, I always made sure I was back in Vung Tau on Saturday nights if I was away somewhere because unless you were actually in operations on the Sunday

28:00 the motor transport guys and the clerks, the non operation type people could have the Sunday off and I always made sure I was back in Vung Tau on the Saturday night so I could have Sunday off, go over to Back Beach [Peter Badcoe Club] and have a swim. Back Beach was a big army, 1 Australian

28:30 Logistics Company I think, they had all the engineers and they also had the Badcoe Club, he was a VC [Victoria Cross] I think, which had motel accommodation and guys from Nui Dat would come down have a couple of days break and go back. And there was a bar and all the concert parties would go through there as well, it had a big swimming pool

29:00 and a beach and a surf club thing there, and you could go and lay on the beach and, there's a good story there too, all the round eyes, which were the non Asian females which were mainly nurses and women like that

29:30 all American's, doughnut girls [Red Cross girls] and things anyway. It always seemed to be the officers that walked down the beach with them, all the diggers, we'd be lying on the beach watching them go past and not very happy you see, so one of the clerks out of the 9 Squadron orderly room

30:00 came up to me and said, "My sister works in the PX [Postal Exchange - American Canteen Unit] up at Pleiku she's coming down to see me, can you take a picture so I can send it home to Mum," I said, "Yeah I can do that," because here was a PR opportunity. So she came in the next day and he brought her over to me and I took the two of them out to a chopper, put her in the pilot seat

30:30 and he stood in the doorway pointing at the dials and things, and I shot through the aircraft and got this

picture of her and him. Got all the details and he went back to work and I said, "What are you going to do?" and she said, "I'm going for a swim down at the water," I said, "Well I've got a jeep and nothing more to do today we can go over to Back Beach, it's a safe area,"

31:00 anyway I drove her back to the hotel and got her swimmers and things. And off we went to Back Beach and I walked down that beach beside that girl in a yellow bikini and walked back and I knew every guys' eye was on me, it was a good day that day.

31:30 **When you say it was a safe area did it really feel safe or was that a little trick you told yourself?**

No Vung Tau was a safe an area as you could get, but Back Beach was all military and it was all barbed wire and compounds and I assumed that they had patrols things going around

32:00 sentries and watchtowers all around the place but it was quite a big area, the hospital was there and the engineer and the cigs all sort of other people were in that area. It was a big logistics area and we just called it Back Beach and that was the Badcoe club, I went once or twice to one of the messes over there

32:30 not sure who it was now. They'd come over to our sergeant's mess and we'd go over there occasionally but yeah it was pretty safe we never had any real thoughts of anything like that happening there. Even though there were the odd alert came in and as I said

33:00 it was believed that that's where they went anyway for themselves didn't want to make a mess of the area.

The co-operation between the RAAF and the army, because I don't know how many people realise that the Iroquois were operated by the RAAF and they were doing the insertion of the troops, the soldiers can you tell me how that co-operation worked?

33:30 Well at the time it worked pretty well as far as I was concerned. I didn't know or hear of any real problems, however since then reading the history of various people and units and things I found that there was quite a bit of discord between the services and the senior

34:00 members, officers about co-operation. I've heard a number of stories the RAAF wouldn't do this and this was one of the reasons that the army got all of the helicopters, how true they are I don't know, in the history of the, official history so there is mention of some unrest between

34:30 various senior people and various times when people didn't seem to go as they should but at the time it all seemed to go well as far as I was concerned and the diggers and what we were doing.

Can you tell me from the time you take a photo or a couple of minutes of footage, what is the process that that

35:00 **goes through in getting back to Australia?**

In Vietnam I'd process them, as soon as they were dry I'd contact print and proof them, that was not necessary but I did it for my own reasons to make sure everything was OK

35:30 that I could line up the right captions with the right photos that sort of thing. And then I would package them up with all the details of dates and things and I would send them back on the Hercs. The Hercs would come in on a regular basis and I would send them back to Canberra to PR or

36:00 if I went up to Saigon I could put it the official bag or give it to the movement control officer who would put it on the 707s that used to bring the troops in and it would get back that way, and that's the way I'd do it. On exercises in the Philippines and other places we relied on Qantas and I would get out to the airport and send it back.

36:30 **And what about personal mail, did you correspond with anyone back home or did you receive mail from back home?**

Oh yes I was still married at that stage and I wrote regularly home and kept a small diary as well. I got letters from my parents and from my sisters so yeah always look forward to it.

37:00 **Can you explain how important it is for someone serving overseas to receive mail like that?**

Yeah very important, you don't think that you are forgotten, I mean you know your not forgotten its still good to get the mail and know what's happening at home,

37:30 "Uncle Ken's done this or Aunt so and so's done that, business is going well," and home news never goes astray, its always good. Which I suppose was the reverse of what I was doing sending the photos home, the hometowners home. I think it's all good for morale and when my son was in Iraq I wrote to him

38:00 but I told him not to write to me, you know, write to his mother and his kids and things and do it that way because I knew what he was going through and you may not necessarily have the time to write to

everyone, so it's a very important thing.

Was all the news from home good or was news of things

38:30 **happening, peace marches and things like that, did any of that filter through to the guys out there?**

No I didn't have any problems with the peace marches and the moratoriums and things because I knew about them before I went but I suppose I was a bit sheltered in Canberra.

39:00 I mean I was in defence, Russell Offices in Defence PR were in there and you sort of a bit sheltered, you could see things on the news, but it didn't affect me personally, after getting back I never took my ribbons off, I had my ribbons on my uniform. I never took my ribbons off. I know people who did

39:30 and when I came back both times I came back on a Herc and flew in direct into the RAAF base so again I wasn't out front looking like a target. I know a lot of people who did have problems

40:00 and both RAAF and army since I've been with the Vietnam vets here in Sunshine Coast. I've heard stories of guys getting into fights and things.

Tape 6

00:34 **What were some of the perks of the job?**

Walking down Back Beach with a girl in a yellow bikini was a good one...of the job in general everyone wanted a photograph of something or other, some aircraft of something we were doing.

01:00 And you could usually use them as a bartering tool if you wanted something from them you could do it that way, that was always good both over in Vietnam and back home foreigners were always, a couple of good aeroplane pikkies always went down well in some section if you wanted a plaque made,

01:30 something chrome plated for the coffee room or something you could always get something dome like that in those days, it has since altered quite a bit I believe but the fact that I was my own boss, I would have gone back again

02:00 because I thoroughly enjoyed doing what I was doing, because I couldn't take a lot of the type of work I did up there, couldn't do it back home here, so I enjoyed it and would have gone back and was in an area of the photography world that I enjoyed and

02:30 it also got me in a lot of areas that I wouldn't normally get in because I was following Mr Barnard was one, a politician, there was some Bishop came up from Australia. I could go around with these people and get in to areas that I wouldn't normally get into

03:00 any formal parade or anything like that, photographers never went on the parade you were always wandering around taking photographs and things, and I still do that. Last week was Vietnam Veterans Day and I was wandering around taking photographs for that so you don't have to stand still in line for hours on end so yeah there were a few perks like that.

03:30 **What was the most glamorous job that you photographed, would it have been Johnny O'Keefe coming up?**

In Vietnam?

Yes

That was an eye opener for me, I wasn't into rock and roll and I had

04:00 the wrong, he showed me a side I didn't know he had, I didn't know him he was known as the wild one, there were all these stories about him, but he was a real softie in my eyes because he always asked after the orphanage, go and see the kids, he always wanted see the oldest Nun.

04:30 He was very spontaneous on two occasions that I remember when I met him and he said, "are there any orphanages around?" I'd just met him at the hotel and I said, "Yeah, there is one around the corner that we visit and do things for."

05:00 He said, "Lets go," and the major who was in charge of the party was responsible for security and everything else was concerned but anyway we went. We just walked in and it was tea time and the major went off to try and find the director of the orphanage and

05:30 in the meantime Johnny O'Keefe just bowled into the dinning room and within seconds he had the kids laughing and singing and dancing and the nuns and everything else. We were there for quite some time and then we just left as quickly as we went, up in Phan Rang it was the same thing he got down on the

floor with the two year olds who didn't have arms and legs and played with them for a while. I've got photographs of that but when we were walking out

- 06:00 to go back to the air base we walked past the little chapel, it would be quite small about the size of this room we are in now and he glanced in and there was this little 6 year old kneeling at the alter rail. It was a Catholic orphanage she was kneeling at the alter rail praying and he just wheeled straight in
- 06:30 and walked the few steps down to the alter rail and knelt down beside the young girl, we all armed and throwing things off and I wanted to get a photograph. And I got one of him from the door, as I say it was quite small and I got quite a good shot of him kneeling beside this girl praying but she finished first and she stood up and
- 07:00 went into the aisle and stood there looking at him. And then Johnny got up and this kid held her hand out to him and he took it and the two of them walked back up the isle and went click and got this magic shot of this rock and roll star with this little 6 year old Vietnamese girl both praying together and walking up the aisle together.
- 07:30 The photographs went back to Australia but I've never seen any of them printed, I don't know whatever happened to those lot, I don't know wether they'd be in the War Memorial, because they're not a military type thing. It was a PR thing for the concert party so I don't know what happened to them I've never seen any of them but yeah he cried when he sang one particular song, he put on a show for the Koreans.
- 08:00 I got a completely different view of the man and all the stories I'd heard didn't seem right, he was a bit of a softie in that regard, specially with the kids and old nuns and that sort of thing.

Did he have much of and entourage that travelled around with him and was it hard to deal with all those different...

No he

- 08:30 had some supporting acts I think the hardest things was up at Phan Rang he wanted to see a native village and we went out to this village and they were all old men and very young boys. And he was siting down
- 09:00 drinking their wine and smoking their cigarettes and the hardest thing was, the army guys ensuring he didn't eat betel nut. And he wanted to try the betel nut because that stains your mouth red and all sorts of things, he was quite active.
- 09:30 He wandered through this village and the padi fields and I don't think the major was to pleased actually but he had a good time anyway.

Did you know many of the guys from the concert parties?

No, we had Johnny O'Keefe of course we had a couple of ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] concert parties and things like that,

- 10:00 there was a show that would come around I forget the name of the woman who was the star act. She called herself Australia's Diana Shaw but she was quite an older woman she wasn't very young at all and she had a very rough mouth on her but she would come and out her shows on at Vung Tau free of charge.
- 10:30 She was on the American circuit not ours but when she came to Vung Tau she'd do the American show then she'd come round to our compound and put her show on there. Sometimes she didn't arrive until 11.30 at night but they'd all be waiting for her, because...perhaps
- 11:00 the language was a draw card I don't know what it was but it was a good show and she good heartedly did it for nothing for us. I didn't know them other than to the take the names, The Deltones was the first one they came through that was the first concert party I covered.
- 11:30 It was a vast range of things and types of concert parties to, some would have comedian some would have singing, all sorts of things, can't think of anything more on them, as I say I'd take photographs of the stars and things
- 12:00 with our people but I didn't take a lot just of them for that reason than them being the concert party, I think that's about as far as the concert parties went, I didn't see Little Pattie or
- 12:30 Bert Newton's wife, I didn't see her...apart from Johnny O'Keefe and the Deltones I don't think I knew any of them really.

How long were you up there in Vietnam for?

I didn't do a 12 month tour I think it was about 10 months from memory, I went up

- 13:00 early '69 came back almost at the end of it I think, yeah.

So your last week or so up there was it hard knowing that you were going back were you going to miss certain aspects of the job do you think?

Well yes as I said earlier I enjoyed the work because it was different to what I would normally be doing back here In Australia.

- 13:30 I'd have gone back again in the same roll doing the same job but I worked right up to the end...we all had Figma, do you know what a Figma is? It's a drawing of a voluptuous female divided into
- 14:00 how ever many days you had to serve in country, and you crossed out one each day and you finally got down to one and that's when you went home. So we all had a Figma [Calendar girl poster] on the sideboard or on the wall somewhere so you could cross it off every day. I was still working right up to the day before, doing stuff
- 14:30 and I took stuff back with me when I went, the bloke that replaced me was a newspaper guy, he'd been up there a week or so, so I could show him the ropes and things. Didn't believe in wearing caps, couldn't understand why I couldn't go and have a drink with him in the officers mess, had no idea of
- 15:00 military procedures or discipline and things. Would have been quite interesting he hardly ever wore his cap or hat helmet or anything so it would have been interesting to have been a fly on the wall while he was up there. But he did a good job just the same. I haven't spoken to him since
- 15:30 although I know he lives somewhere down on the Gold Coast now but he had a good time I gathered from the week I was with him, open to everything and anything.

In your opinion what makes a good photographer?

Patience, acting

- 16:00 on an opportunity quickly, taking advantage of an opportunity, knowing your gear and equipment that so you can work in the dark, that's no pun, in those days we worked in the dark a lot, knowing what was wanted and
- 16:30 being able to handle your equipment without a second thought, knowing exactly what you had what it was, what you had to do to change things, where your light meter or your spare flash and all these bits and pieces you carried in those days, where they were and you grab them immediately, put them up and on
- 17:00 in the reverse of that, patience sit for ages just waiting for the right moment to go 'click'. That's also a very important part, but I feel that still photography is recording an event or time whereas cinematography you are creating something
- 17:30 your actually creating an event or story or something by what you take, how its edited and how it tells the story whereas stills don't do that they just more or less record an instant in time. My way of thinking anyway
- 18:00 although I spent most of my time taking stills I really did enjoy doing cine and documentaries and things.

Seems to me that capturing that one still that will tell the story though is probably or possibly more difficult?

- 18:30 Yes...I'll grant you that but in cine you can make something out of nothing, you can actually create it, you've got to be able to
- 19:00 tell the story in the camera and not rely on audio or anything like that, if you can do that, when I did the documentary motion picture course with RMIT back in the '60s. one of the practical exams was a 5 minute film
- 19:30 without sound where you have to tell a complete story and when the lights went back on the instructor didn't have to ask a question. And I chose a day at the beach you had to actually tell it right from 'go to woe' [start to finish] without one sound
- 20:00 on the film, and that's what I mean about creating something in the camera, I mean you can create stills to with...in black and white with different filters and depth of field and all sorts of other things, to me I always tended to prefer cine to stills, stills were more like
- 20:30 a job whereas the cine was a love I suppose I just enjoyed doing them a bit more.

You just mentioned filters, did you use filters a lot to enhance images?

In the early days yes, depending on the job of course

- 21:00 quite often used filters on the black and white photography it wasn't necessary but if you could do it we used them, things like big thunder storms or big cloud banks up in Malaya could be made quite dramatic;

21:30 line of aircraft on the flight line these big thunder clouds by putting an orange filter or something over the thing could make quite dramatic photographs if you wanted to. But nowadays I don't think they use them at all, everything is colour and digital, the art of photography is disappearing.

22:00 **So talk me through when you got back to Australia, was it difficult to settle or did things go back to normal quite easily?**

No it was a bit difficult to settle, I came back and I stayed in PR until '73 before I went back into the normal photographic

22:30 posting circle, and I went to Sale for the first time and I went as an instructor, no I didn't I went in an advanced NCO course first. I went back to CPE I was there for a number of year before going up to

23:00 Richmond and from Richmond I went back to Sale as an instructor. I had a marriage break up in that period, didn't really know what I wanted, I had 4 kids at that stage.

23:30 I'd got the rank of warrant officer. I really didn't know what I wanted and we sort of broke up. I'd just been commissioned, I'd only had one posting as a warrant officer, which was the school of photography at Sale

24:00 and central photographic at Laverton and the warrant officers at each post at this stage. There were more earlier in the mustering but I wasn't a real lover of Victoria and I'd been to Laverton several times and I didn't want

24:30 to get out for the sake of getting out because I had done well in the service and I enjoyed the life and the job. And I didn't want to bounce between Sale and Laverton for the rest of my career and I couldn't see any reason to get out just to get another job. So I went for a commission in '78 so things seemed to go all right for a while and then

25:00 things broke down and things became difficult and we parted and I eventually married again and that didn't last either. This is a fairly common thing with Vietnam vets.

25:30 I don't know why, I can't put my finger on it but I know a lot of guys who have been through two or three marriages after coming back from Vietnam, none of my kids have had any problems, they've all done well and grown up, all got jobs and

26:00 behave themselves so there's no problems there. Some of the guys' offspring there are but I've been lucky in that regard and instead of going to Sale and Laverton I went from Sale to Canberra to Laverton

26:30 wasn't a lot of difference actually. I enjoyed the years at school teaching, again I'm with people and I like working with people. I was a bit apprehensive being an instructor but it worked out all right and I enjoyed the teaching.

27:00 I taught air photography and I taught PR and sports action and a couple of other things and the school takes 9 months to put out a basic photographer from go to woe and we covered every known branch of photography apart from figure photography which was the only one we didn't do officially, every defect in the air force has to be photographed

27:30 to go with the report, any modification. All the buildings are on an assets register they had to be photographed inside and out, portraiture is another area. All these things had to be taught and there were always the pretty, pretty pictures that the bosses wanted on their office walls and

28:00 aircraft air to air things like that, there was police work medical work, you name it we did it. There was no specialisation you had to be able whatever the job gave you, go out and do it, this is what took so long, all the copy work all the paper work had to be

28:30 had to be taught.

So were you just teaching stills photography or were you teaching video and cine as well?

No the cine unit had disbanded quite some time before hand they did have a video unit in CPE they were starting that

29:00 we didn't teach that, there were courses that were run at RMIT and a number of the guys at CPE including some of the female photographers. Because we had female photographers at this time

29:30 they all went through, those that went on the video team did a short course at RMIT and they did those. But no it was all aerial photography and stills photography at the photographic school, we taught the navy as well, all navy photographers went through the RAAF school

30:00 army photographers didn't, they ran their own course a short course. It didn't last any where near as long as ours and didn't go into it as deeply, accept for the graphic arts photographers at Canberra and they'd do our course, they'd do one or two courses

30:30 there was one or two on our course and then they'd go back into the graphics art course that the army unit had up in Canberra somewhere. So it was a well recognised and comprehensive god course and when you turned them out you knew that they could handle just about anything.

It must have been quite gratifying for you, earlier you said that you wanted to get a bit more theory

31:00 **training and stuff and you ended up being a teacher that must have been a bit ironic?**

Yes it was, I had one dread and that was that they would get me to teach densitometry and sensitometry and I had a horrible fear of that. I didn't teach it but as it turned out I was put on a quality control course. This is before I went to Sale.

31:30 It was only a 3 week course I think and it was all sensitometry and densitometry and as I said I never had any problems looking at a neg and saying this that and the other but at the end of this course. I came second and had a credit so, but I still dreaded teaching it

32:00 when I went there initially I was a flight sergeant. I got promoted at Sale and as a flight sergeant I wasn't given sensitometry when I became the warrant officer I was the senior airmen instructor and was able

32:30 to speak to the chief instructor who was an officer and it was my job to delegate which subjects went to each instructor so I made sure I never had to teach it and later on. On my second tour at the photo school I was the chief instructor when I was commissioned, so I had no problems with sensi-densi [sensitometry and densitometer] after that.

33:00 It was interesting, the hard part was putting people of course, we had progress tests all the way through and if they couldn't make it they got a supp [supplementary exam]. And if they couldn't make the sup I had to tell them to go back to what they were doing beforehand.

33:30 Some people had remustered from one job in the air force to photo and some were people coming in off the street, had to convince them that because they'd signed they had to stay in but couldn't be a photographer, this was all right for a while and then the ladies came into it and there were one or two that ended up with tears in their eyes in the office at one stage or another

34:00 but we got through it all, I enjoyed the time actually, I didn't think I would, I actually thought at one stage of doing some TAFE [Technical & Further Education College] work when I got up here but the TAFE wanted me to write the program

34:30 and the précis and things. And I said no I'm not doing that and as it turned out there are two ex air force photographers running it. One of them was a student of mine and the other went through when I wasn't there, but they are running the Nambour TAFE photographic courses which apparently is doing very well because they have got people coming in from overseas.

35:00 That's pretty good.

During your career did you notice a difference in how the RAAF photographs things like whether there's been a change in image or anything like that?

35:30 Yes to a degree

36:00 there's a lot more, well I know for a fact that its all digital and computer and everything these days that they do and PR the still sections, at CPE we were doing a lot of recruiting work and we had a number of guys who were doing the

36:30 photography for the recruiting, both video and stills and it was really high quality work. We had them the advertising agency was very impressed with the standard of work that the put out and the guys that were on it really had

37:00 free range of whatever they did or came up with and some of the results were absolutely outstanding they really were. I would say it was as good as anything the commercial people could put out, but they spent a lot of time a lot of effort, a lot hours

37:30 working on these things and the ordinary work I think hasn't changed at all, normal domestic work. It's much the same I'd say, the equipment changes and the results improving but the basic format

38:00 standard requirement is pretty much the same. CPE has now closed, they disbanded it, the number of photographers we had in the air force when I joined was up in the hundred something, 120 or something in 1958 when I first went into the RAAF. I believe that its down to about 30 or something now and they don't

38:30 do any domestic work any more. All that work has got to go out to commercial photographers, this was a plan by the government at the time, reducing the size of the services and putting the work out to, any work that could be done by a civilian had to go to by a civilian rather than a man in uniform. And the only work the photographic

- 39:00 people were doing was purely operational work and I believe it's very low but I think they are getting more people in now. And its not just photographic its right across the whole board but I'm getting on my soap box now.
- It's a pretty glamorous job in the forces, I'm sure a lot of people kind of get into that area, is it quite competitive?**
- 39:30 Yeah I think it was. I know a lot of people came directly out of school year 12 and we ran it in stages we were running two courses a year,
- 40:00 overlapping courses because it was 9 months a course. And we were flat out pushing people through the courses and a lot of them carried on after they had done their time and got out are still in the trade in civilian life so it
- 40:30 was quite competitive I believe.

Tape 7

- 00:34 **Can you tell us a bit about how the photographs you take are credited?**
- They weren't really, all the neg envelopes registered had the name on, date, captions and things on the outside of the envelope.
- 01:00 You didn't get credits, the air force didn't give credits in those days, if any credit was given it was usually RAAF official and I've seen a number of my photographs in publications and books and things on Vietnam. And that's always Australian War Memorial and the current
- 01:30 PR newspapers now tri service unit, it's not individual services any more now. You'll pick up the air force paper, 'able seamen photographer so and so has taken group captain such' and such in some form or other and the army newspaper has got a RAAF photographer that I know. His name has got a credit
- 02:00 under a photograph. So they get credits now but it be any of the joint PR unit members who could be of any service, but in my day it was very rare to get a credit. Did get the occasional one I got a full page of pictures in the RAAF news with a credit line but that was a very rare thing, that was all Vietnam stuff
- 02:30 that I shot back that the boss was very pleased with. I've had more credits in private publications now for my own personal work than I ever got while I was 35 years in the service.
- What do you think of the tri service organization of PR now**
- 03:00 **and do you think you would have enjoyed doing that yourself?**
- Yeah I do actually I think, having experienced 2 of the 3 services I think I would have enjoyed it. You would have never got me in the navy no way in the world but If had to do a job on the navy I would do it of course. But yeah I think I would have enjoyed it
- 03:30 the one area I think is a little bit dangerous is, able seamen so and so photographer, would not necessarily know the way the air force works or the way the army or infantry would work. And I don't think that's a good thing.
- 04:00 I think you've got to know your services inside out as best you can because if you were doing something in another service and didn't quite understand how it worked or why it worked or what it was for you could run into problems but I think I would have still enjoyed it.
- 04:30 **While on service in Vietnam did it ever occur that the camera you had was in a way a weapon for PR or to use a harsher word, propaganda?**
- Well I didn't consciously think that way but I know doing hometowners is a form of propaganda, the happy smiling face
- 05:00 of Jo Bloggs in a combat zone. That's a form of propaganda and it could be used quite effectively if the powers who ran the system wanted it to but
- 05:30 I don't think it was real problem, I don't think it was a problem anyway.
- You must have seen things that didn't fall into your charter, did you ever think that I should take a photo of that but I won't because its not my job, was there ever anything hovered on the peripheral**
- 06:00 **on what you did?**
- No not really, I can't think of anything anyway, most of the work was pretty straight forward whether it

be the hometowners

06:30 or some sort of mission or sortie, they were pretty well straight forward and it was a matter of recording and filming it making sure I got the names and things and the action, I didn't really see anything in that regard, I saw POWs, saw bodies.

07:00 I didn't have to photograph them, had to photograph them back home, bodies, fatal air craft crashes and things but not up there no.

You told me a story earlier that was very interesting about the photograph of the Canberra bomber, doing a bombing run, can you tell us all about that?

Yes I approached 2 Squadron to go

07:30 on a mission and get a shot of a Canberra bomber dropping its bombs and I got approval. They are only 2 seater aircraft and there's a jump seat which is more or less a couple of bars that go across the very small aisle, its about 4 or 5 foot long if that.

08:00 I got approval and went off on the first one it was 31st March 1969 and it was Magpie 1 was the aircraft call sign and we went off and dropped our bombs on the target that we had. And it had been organised in the briefing to marry up with

08:30 another aircraft who was bombing a target down in the delta and I had expressed the desire to get the bombs actually clear of the aircraft if possible. And we had dropped our bombs at air ground safety limit and when we married up or rendezvoused with the other aircraft it was overcast

09:00 and the cloud cover was a lot lower than the safety limit I can't tell you what the height was now. I was told at the time but I can't recall it, and of course we had to be behind and slightly below. Well, not directly behind but to the side and behind and below that aircraft that was over the target

09:30 and because of the low altitude. And the cloud cover etcetera my pilot said to me, "As soon as I see that first bomb well clear the aircraft I'm pulling out of here," otherwise we could wear fragments from his own bombs, they were 750 pounds from memory. Anyway

10:00 I had everything set up I didn't actually use the button on the camera I had my finger actually on the shutter and the aircraft came over and I was on headsets of course and I could hear them talking, because any time you do air to air stuff you're on air and you can speak and talk to the pilots and things. And the first one was

10:30 clear of the aircraft and I thought now and I thought no, and the second one was clear then the third and the fourth was clear of the bomb bay and we had one on each wing tip. And I thought I better go now and by this time the fifth one had actually dropped and the sixth one

11:00 one of the hooks had been released and the bomb was just starting to come off. And I went 'click' and the pilot just pulled and we pulled it up to up 4 or 4 and a half G's [G Force - gravitational force] or something and pulled up out of it, high scream and we felt everyone of the bombs, the percussion came back and that photograph I have been told by

11:30 the RAAF PR people and the War Memorial is the only official. And I stress official photograph of the Canberra dropping bombs in action. There are many similar shots but they have all been taken by air crew on private cameras so apparently as I understand it that's now the official of the Canberra on a sortie dropping bombs

12:00 which is quite an honour. And in 1971 when the 50th Anniversary was on for the air force the War Memorial blew that particular shot up several feet wide 5 or 6 feet wide and used it as a back drop when Prince Phillip was at the war memorial to

12:30 open up a special section of Vietnam. And I was there to take his photograph in front of him so I was quite happy with that.

Did you have a favourite aircraft and why?

Iroquois I just loved the Iroquois, go anywhere in an Iroquois.

13:00 I've flown in 30 or 40 different air craft both civil and military and I'd go anywhere in an Iroquois at any time, flew a lot, I kept a book, flew a lot of hours in Vietnam my son joined the army and he became an Iroquois pilot and I have flown with him.

13:30 Unfortunately he's no longer alive but I flew with him just before I got out of the air force and I don't know why I think its just, I can't tell you why, I just like them. I've flown in jets I've flown in bombers I've flown in transports I've flown in all sorts of aircraft,

14:00 I've flown in formations, I've flown in aerobatics, but the Iroquois will always be my favourite.

Can you tell us when you were teaching all the different types photography can you just

quickly explain what all the different types of photography are, because there's quite a few isn't there?

Oh yes, you're really making it hard now!

14:30 I had 7 or 8 subjects and I think we had 6 instructors and we all about the same number of subjects, some of them were split up, some of them were purely theory like aerial calculations.

15:00 You had to be able to know the height, or work out from the height of the aircraft and the shutter speed how much ground was covered when doing a survey or reconnaissance work or what you would get on an overlap and aerial calcs [calculations] and mathematics played a big roll in air photography. And the time interval between the frames and all that sort of thing

15:30 we covered all sorts of things.

Things like architectural photography and police photography and things like that, what are they?

Well police work anything that happened on a base service police would come and ask for

16:00 photographs to be taken. Some of the special section of the police would get surveillance worked we'd done or use as they do now they do their own photography now

16:30 but they were watching someone that was involved in drugs or something they would take surveillance pictures. And they would be classified of course and one of the senior NCOs or officers would have to process and print them and destroy all the waste all the spares or test prints that sort of thing.

17:00 **Did that include forensic photography as well?**

I never did any but yeah I think it did, the school always took the courses down to Melbourne and we visited the police forensic labs as part of our week in Melbourne go we'd go through Kodak. We'd go through 2 or 3 of the better known photographic studios and people

17:30 one of the colour labs and that sort of thing, but yeah we'd go through the police forensics laboratory but I never did any of that but any of the normal on base crimes and things. That was covered and of course occasional surveillance one, one of my other sons is in the air force police and they do all their own surveillance and photography so

18:00 that's changed since my days. Hospital, quite often we would film some injury or operation or something dentists, in my very early years when the course would come down on

18:30 tours around Melbourne they would also tour CPE and the cine section had a film called the Annunciation of a Dental Cyst which we would always have on the projector to show the course. And the door opened several times as people left the room, that was a favourite one but yeah we'd do something for that and there was a famous case

19:00 for the medical fraternity. So there was that police side of things, every defect, every modification had pictures, portraiture PR was all taught, sport, action, aircraft crashes there was a set procedure for aircraft crashes, photographers were on first call out with the police and the fires [fire fighters]

19:30 and that's sort of thing. We would go with the first response and we would have to photograph everything with a ruler because there were bits and pieces broken off and all that and bodies and for the investigation the air safety guys and you would do all that sort of work. Yeah, I just can't think of all the subjects but there was

20:00 a hell of a lot of subjects that were taught and we went from the basic how to load your camera right through to all the top stuff and that would turn out the basic photographer. We also had another course at the school an advanced photo course which was called a refresher course because we put all the NCOs through the basics

20:30 and made sure they knew what they were on about. And there were other small courses as well so it was a pretty full on thing, you name a particular type of photography and at some stage we would have been covering it, even glamour, a couple of times they had Miss RAAF or

21:00 some girl some WAAAFi had to be photographed for a glamour type shot. But figure photography was the only one we didn't do officially, and I state officially.

Back during your service in Vietnam, did you have any interaction with American troops at all?

Yes,

21:30 I told you the story of my trip down the delta,...didn't have a lot of work contact but socially we were on Yank [American] bases army at Vung Tau, air force at Phan Rang. And

22:00 I was a sergeant and the sergeants mess hosted members of the other services and squadrons and

groups on the base at times and they would host us at times yeah we had a social contact with them...I found them, I found 2 distinct type of American.

- 22:30 They had brilliant people, minds that were quite brilliant and their intellect was sort of well above the average Aussie [Australian] servicemen. And they had a lot of grown up kids that sort of look at and say,
- 23:00 how come they are in the service sort of thing, they didn't seem to have the middle men. I mean we've got, our grown up kids and very brilliant people, not as many as the American seem to have, maybe they are more Americans maybe that's the reason but most of our guys were roughly the same average, in a range that is sort of a middle man, but I got on all right with them.
- 23:30 I wanted to take some cine colour for my own use but my stores would only give me black and white you see and I had to go up to Bien Hoa, which was a big American supply base, pick up some jeeps one day
- 24:00 it was a job as well I was photographing. But I went down to the photographic supply store there and asked for a couple of boxes of 16 mm Kodachrome because I had my own 16 mm camera. And the guy said, "Yeah, no worries." I told him who I was and where I was from and he went out the back and he came back with
- 24:30 a box of I don't know 2 dozen or something 16 mm Kodachrome. He said, "Here's one box I'll get you the other," now all I wanted was 200 foot and here I had a box of 24 or something and I said, "Oh no one box will do for now I'll get another when I come back." so I whipped out there quick smart
- 25:00 but I mean they were quite generous. My helmet which I still have I got that through the Americans, I wasn't really air crew so I didn't have one or entitled to one of ours. But the Yanks gave me one and seeing as it was a Yank one I've still got it, got it locked away inside, but they were quite generous.
- 25:30 They enjoyed coming over to our place they liked our beer in our mess and we had many a good night in the mess with them.

Did you see a lot of difference between the type of equipment and the amount of equipment in comparison to ours?

Photographically I didn't see much of their photographic in

- 26:00 Vietnam, I saw a fair bit in the Philippines but we had 4 I think or maybe 5 but we had a number of photographers at Phan Rang. The sole reason was the air cameras for bomb damage and reconnaissance and that sort of thing and they were there purely for that
- 26:30 and I think they had a still camera, and they worked in the American photo labs on the base there. And I did go down there once but they were purely air photo and I didn't really see what they had, however I know the American system. A couple of years earlier I was on an exercise in the Philippines
- 27:00 and I took some, I was still with PR. I took some photographs of some Australian guys with the Americans and I took them up to the photo lab to have them processed and they came out and said yeah, Jo Bloggs
- 27:30 will process them for you and Pete Smith will process and print them. And I said, "Oh no, I'll do them if I can use your dark rooms," and they said do you want to do the lot. And I said, "Yes, they're my shots and I want to follow it right through." He said, "Oh we don't we have specialists processors specialists printers, nobody goes right through and does the lot."
- 28:00 And I assume that was the way it was in Vietnam as well but as it turned out I let them do it and went back for another beer.

Were the labs air conditioned, did they need to be air conditioned?

Yes, in Vietnam no I had a small cupboard

- 28:30 which was filled with an enlarger and a bench and that was all, back home here all the labs are air conditioned all the photo sections are all air conditioned, in Thailand we worked out of a packing crate. I had no equipment other than buckets
- 29:00 and I was doing gun cameras which were 60 foot of 16mm film which I just put my finger in the spool and let run into a bucket of developer, it was that hot. The temperature was well above what it should have been it was more or less dunk it in the developer grab it by the handful, dunk it the water, out of the water and into the fixer and then
- 29:30 take it outside, hang it on the line outside to dry. And that was because they were gun cameras and they wanted to see them before they went off on the next sortie...we were still living in tents up there at that stage so that was a real experience. That was when I was still young and naïve, I didn't really know what I was doing
- 30:00 but it worked out all right, they were all quite happy. There were scratches and marks but we couldn't, you had no equipment that was the only way to process it in buckets and just let it run in and do it that

way. But we finished up at Sale with a brand new photo school, all singing all dancing had everything

30:30 and now its been handed over to someone else because the school doesn't work like it used to any more, because they don't need the number of photographers they want.

You said you had your own 16 mm camera, how often did you get opportunities to shoot your own footage or take your own photo's?

I'd got my own 16 mm camera but that was at home, when I said I wanted a couple of rolls of film for myself

31:00 I was going to use the Bell and Howell I had in Vietnam. And that's why I only wanted a couple of rolls, I left my cameras at home.

Did you take any photos for you and not for work?

Yes I always carried the 2 cameras and that was primarily

31:30 the 35mm which was always loaded with colour transparency was purely for me bring home things to show the family and the kids and things. I took buildings I took people in national dress, just general photographs around the base in the town

32:00 and if I was on some mission like when we went to Vietnam I was taking. We went in a convoy to pick up jeeps and coming back we had a horrific rainstorm but I took those sort of things as well for myself. Quite often I'd take a shot of something that was occurring

32:30 and then I'd pick up the 35mm and go click for myself and I came home with a lot of transparencies for private, because all the other ones were official, Crown copyright and their in the War Memorial. So I couldn't do anything with them anyway.

When you came home did you talk much with your kids about your experiences?

33:00 I can't really recall, the younger two were too young, they were still in prams the twins, but the other two were...no I don't think I did actually.

Because you've got 2 boys that have ended up in the armed services, do you think having served has been an influence on them?

33:30 Well I know the eldest boy...I had 3 qualified pilots in the family and the one that is in the air force is not a pilot, not qualified either. Matthew was an army pilot, his brother has a private pilots license and the oldest boy

34:00 he went solo at 17 in a glider at Richmond. I managed to get him a ride in the Herc simulators, which he flew with the group captain and landed perfectly after I put it through the earth, crashed dived into the earth so he went solo at 17 in the gliders and he's done very well.

34:30 He's won an award, Golden Wings down in Victoria he's got some sort of commercial, or semi commercial licence. He's building his own aircraft, he's an engineer, he's built his own aircraft...yeah it's certainly been an influence and I think the military bearing and

35:00 discipline that we were in married quarters on the base and things, I think that's also had an influence because the lad that was, the lad that's in the air force is in the air force police. The one that became a helicopter pilot for the army was a motor cycle copper in the federal police and his twin brother is a

35:30 computer programmer for the federal police so there's some sort of theme running through the military police I think.

In your role as a RAAF photographer in Vietnam did you see yourself as a technician, an artist, a historian, anything in between, could you put it in a nutshell what you saw yourself as?

36:00 I wasn't conscious of thinking any of those things but certainly it's a historian type of business that I was in up there, I've always said a photographer is an artist

36:30 because I've got no technical or mechanical qualities. So I've always claimed the artist side of things, I think there is an art in photography, a definite art, an art within itself...so yeah I wasn't conscious of it, I won't say it was an adventure. Well, it was an adventure but I didn't look on like that either

37:00 it was something I wanted to do and I was pleased to be there and I know it sounds strange but I enjoyed doing the job and I think I brought a lot of things home to people. The best thing about Vietnam was the fact that

37:30 all the training that had been done to me and that I was teaching, worked, and worked well, that was a plus and....but a technician no, I'm not a technician.

Was there any photographers then or now that you

38:00 **hold up as being a bit of an idol for yourself?**

Well Damian Parer [Australian war photographer of World War II] was one, I've seen a lot of his material...Due Payne and there was a guy Larue Legay

38:30 when I worked at the magazine company before I went into Nasho. I saw a lot of his work which was it was impressive. He did a lot of work for Murray's, so though I think that got my interest....Due Payne and Legay, there work which I saw at Murray's got me sort of interested in photography initially

39:00 and I think that possibly started me on my career, even though I wanted to punch cows, I'm glad I didn't.

Do you look back on you're post RAAF years, do you think your experiences as a photographer or as a Vietnam veteran have played an important role in your post RAAF years?

39:30 Yes I'm involved with the Vietnam vets, we have a drop in centre here, there's 315 members I think this year on out Sunshine Coast sub branch and I sort of look after the office and all that.

40:00 There's always tea and coffee and we've got a big library on the military and Vietnam and things, videos and I enjoy being down there with them even though the RAAF are the least number in the group. But I give as much as I get, because they can't say too much because I had a shot in the army

40:30 but yeah I've come out a lot, I march now which I didn't for any years. And not having any family in this area its sort of a family within a family sort of thing, we have monthly socials and outings and those sort of things and

41:00 we always attend them and I'm quite happy to stick with it at the moment.

Tape 8

00:34 **You were telling me a story earlier about the Philippines?**

The Philippines yes we did, this was the guy with the medals, it was a PR exercise and the Orions where there and I wanted an American sailor in a gob cap to put in all the hometown pictures because there were no real national shots

01:00 on the exercise, the plan was to get as many troops as possible for hometown newspapers so I wasn't worried about the same bloke appearing in every photo so to speak, so I got this guy sent to me from the US Navy PR people and he had 2 ribbons on his chest in his whites,

01:30 and one of them was this Vietnam green and white Vietnam medal that the South Vietnam government presented to the troops. And I said, "Oh you've been to Vietnam?" and he said, "Yes" and I said, "When were you there?" and he gave me a date, I can't recall it but it was the 24th Feb or something like that. I said,

02:00 "All right when did you come back, when did you finish up?" He said, "Oh I was only there overnight. I was on my way here to Sandley Point and we flew to via Saigon, and we stayed overnight in Saigon before coming here," and I said, "You only had one night and you got the medal?" and he said, "Yeah that's right" and I said, "Well what's the other one?" and he said,

02:30 "Oh that's because I was a volunteer enlistment, I enlisted in the navy so that I wouldn't get drafted into the army and have to serve in Vietnam, that was issued when I joined up"...so he had 2 ribbons and I asked him how long he had been in the service. He said 6 months and I had 2 ribbons, one of which was the same as one of his and I'd been in almost 20 years.

03:00 **How does that make you feel?**

I was a bit astounded, I knew the Yanks would get a medal for anything you know, their system is totally different to ours. They get a medal for so many hours of flying and this that and the other.

03:30 They're like good conduct proficiency and something like that, you look at American senior officers and they've got 4, 5 or 6 rows of ribbons all the way down it's a wonder their not walking lopsided! It just sort of astounded me he was in their one night and he got a medal and he got another one just for putting

04:00 his name on a piece of paper...but his photo went through all the hometowners. I had him for 3 or 4 days and we got on pretty well.

Can you tell me about red chino graph pencils?

Yeah red china graphs, as an instructor and especially with PR,

- 04:30 having spent 7 years in the job I was teaching PR and after I would set assignments, practical assignments and they would take them and print them up. I'd mark them and they'd go up on a board in a big room and I would give them a critique and I would always have a red china graph.
- 05:00 I would make a cross on it or here where there was something wrong or a big squiggle if there was open space between people and another instructor who had also been in PR. He and I would set up things and do things deliberately wrong to make them thing like, quite often a VIP would get out of a car and hold his hand out for the
- 05:30 person that was greeting him who would be saluting. And then the officer would bring the hand down and put it out but by that time the guy has taken his hand back. So we'd do little things like that, or get out of the wrong side of the car and make them be aware and think rather than...but the red china graph became a bit of a joke among the courses because I was the only instructor that did it.
- 06:00 And I still have a china graph in the drawer actually, but it turned in to be a bit of a joke but it also was a good teaching tool. I could say, "Why didn't you drop his hand here and make a mark where I think the hand should be or what about this shadow and there would be a big squiggle," so that was the red china graph story and it worked well.
- 06:30 **You also had a fairly unique start and end to your RAAF crew didn't you?**
- Yes I started as an aircraftsman provisional at my first posting at Central Photographic and 35 years later I left the service my last posting was the same as the commanding officer
- 07:00 I'd come right through the ranks to warrant officer, been commissioned and gone right through to squadron leader and had in fact had an extra 2 years because of redundancies. And when I turned 55, which was the retirement age there was know one to step into the seat I was occupying at the time in Canberra.
- 07:30 I suggested to the air force that they might like to keep me on and they said yes, no postings, no promotions but circumstances suddenly came up and I spent 18 months at Laverton on HDA, Higher Duty Allowance for a wing commander. But I was a squadron leader and I was the CO, it's a unique honour being the first and the last and the highest and the lowest. I'm pretty proud of that as well.
- 08:00 **On your first trip to Vietnam in 1967 how did you go and return?**
- By Hercules via Butterworth in Malaya and Ubon in Thailand, we went to both actually. We went up specifically to fill a gap and because the Canberra bombers had just been put into Vietnam and
- 08:30 2 Squadron was settling in up at Phan Rang. They were still building bunkers and all sorts of things and we went up to cover that and fill the gap for a couple of weeks. The boss and I both went up so when that was just about completed and the new guy was ready to come up we flew back on the Herc which is where the injured soldier was on
- 09:00 and we came back by Herc as well.
- At that stage having had a bit of a taste of what it was like in Vietnam were you happy to be home or were you keen to stay in Vietnam, what was the feeling there?**
- Didn't really have any feelings in that regard it was too short to really assess anything
- 09:30 apart from the medevac one that I was on it was all 2 Squadron settling in and, hometowners of guys filling sand bags and things like that, it was just like another PR trip to Darwin, Perth, Amberley or something like that.
- 10:00 It wasn't like, I didn't qualify for any medals or anything.
- Did you find going back there in '69 was it easier having been there?**
- Yes I did because I knew where I was going and what, my first job
- 10:30 was a bit of a shock, I had a journalist, who was a World War II pilot and flew Wellingtons in World War II in Europe. He and I were given permission to do a story on the navy divers, the clearance divers, the EOB [Engineering Officer Basic] boys. And they had a system where
- 11:00 any captured ammunition, shells mortars or anything or anything that wasn't going to be used...they had this big American truck and it was stacked high with ammunition and the plan was to take it up the river
- 11:30 to an island that was known to be a VC [Viet Cong] stronghold or held by the V [Viet Cong] and stuck it all on the beach. And stuck a time detonator in it somewhere and then go, the divers were classified and this was the first story that was going to be released of them.
- 12:00 So we went down and we went to a place called Catlo and got on this large landing craft and a squad of American marines clambered aboard and of we went up the river. We came to this island and it was just like a John Wayne movie, the ramp went down, the marines rushed into the

- 12:30 water and up the beach and fanned out. And the plan was that they would make a safe area of about 4 or 500 yard or something. Then they would drive the truck down the ramp and the divers would offload all this ammunition and pile it up and I got about taking the shots and
- 13:00 we were there for quite some time and I'm standing alongside this pile which is almost as high as me. If you can imagine a big truck load all piled up and standing there with Frank the journo, all of a sudden a weapon opened up...'boom boom boom boom boom'.
- 13:30 This was my first day in the country, my first job and I literally nearly dirtied myself, but what had happened was that some local idly paddling down the river coming very close to us and the boson on the barge which was called Dixie Bell by the way and flew a confederate flag. The boson on the
- 14:00 barge opened up with a 50 cal machine gun and sprayed bullets all around this poor fella in this canoe thing in an effort to warn him off, which he did because the bloke was last hastily beating a retreat back up the river from where he had come. Once everything had been finished on the beach we climbed back onto the barge and the marines came in
- 14:30 the ramp went up and we went down the river back towards Catlo...the aim was that Charlie would come out of the bushes and try and get some of the ammunition back but he doesn't know when it was going to go up. Hopefully it would take, some of them would be unpacking it when it went up and boom there it goes and I got a great shot of the 50 cal pointing skywards,
- 15:00 side of the barge, landing craft and smoke rising into the air from the explosion. So yeah, that was a moment to remember too, didn't have too many moments where I was scared out of my wits, but that scared me because it was the last thing I was expecting, hearing something going 'bang, bang, bang'
- 15:30 when I'm standing next to all this high explosive.

Speaking of scared you went out on patrols, can you tell me what that was like?

Yeah, it was much the same as I had done in the army, pretty identical, the terrain was certainly different, up to my shoulders in water at one stage,

- 16:00 going through padi fields and things. But I was in the middle of the patrol, I only had my 35 mm, no flash of course and we went out pre dawn on one particularly I was thinking about and we were doing a sweep around
- 16:30 the base, right out, several kilometres out. Doing a sweep about the base and we were to com in at a certain time through another gate and we had to go through a place called the strip which was just outside the base, a kilometre or so which was nothing but bars and brothels that had grown
- 17:00 outside the base. And we had to come in through there but while we were out in the padi field we heard a couple of cracks go off, a couple of weapons and on investigation it was the local farmer shooting off some bird or something, some crows or something attacking his rice or something, I don't know.
- 17:30 That was a moment I was like Hello what' on here but it was much the same as when I was doing patrols in the army, Nasho up in Barrington Tops Ranges, it was just the terrain that was totally...

How would you explain Vietnamese

- 18:00 **geography and climate to someone that hadn't been there?**

terrain varied of course, Vung Tau and Phan Rang were on the coast, Vung Tau was a coastal town and Phan Rang was pretty close to the coast. And that was pretty flat but

- 18:30 there was a mountain range right behind Phan Rang, that's where Charlie used to send the rockets and mortars in from there. There was a Caribou flight 007 or 005 I think it was which would go around a lot of bases which I went on a number of occasions and there is some quite
- 19:00 rough high terrain, some dirt airstrips and that sort of thing. You didn't want a second attempt at take off. If you didn't take off first time you wouldn't get a second chance sort of thing, then there was the delta of course which was a mass of
- 19:30 creeks and streams and canals and rivers that you flew over for some time, just full of water and reeds and that was the mouth of the river so it varied. I saw most of the country from the air of course
- 20:00 except around Vung Tau and Nui Dat but it was like this area here. You had a reasonable flat around the coast and then not far of the coast you had the mountain ranges and there were hills around the long highs around Nui Dat and Vung Tau but behind Phan Rang there was a mountain range
- 20:30 like along the Black Hawk range just around here.

So when you here the word Vietnam mentioned, what's the first image that flashes into your mind?

Choppers yeah, the Iroquois I still hear them going over here, they have a distinctive sound

21:00 you ask a lot of the army guys and they can tell the Iroquois chopper, they had a very distinctive sound, I loved them I would get on them to go for a ride up there, I thoroughly enjoyed them.

So when you hear them fly now it's generally a good memory?

Oh yeah, I don't really have any bad memories of Vietnam

21:30 because it was a job I wanted a job I liked I didn't have any real traumas because I was looking through viewfinder. And as I said, under the same conditions and job I would have gone back again.

There's actually an interesting epilogue to that Canberra bomber story, can you tell us about that?

22:00 The aircraft that I photographed was actually one of the ones that we lost up there, 321 I think it was. It was one of the 2 aircraft that we lost in Vietnam which I wasn't fully aware of until many years later, is that what you're looking for?

22:30 did I tell you that did I? Oh!

Did the pilot of that Canberra bomber that dropped the bombs, did he ever see that photograph to your knowledge?

Well I assume because I printed the photo you saw in Vietnam at the time when I was proofing them there was some shots I

23:00 enlarged for my own personal use. But as I explained earlier we sometimes traded things, but as a thank you sort of thing I sent half a dozen prints up to Phan Rang and I assume the pilots of my aircraft and the other aircraft got them but I've no idea whether they did or not

23:30 or what happened to the prints. But I sent them up to Phan Rang so that was a good one I was very pleased with that, its not the best photograph. Its not as clean and clear a I would like because of the overcast conditions

24:00 and the fact that the aircraft was painted a dark grey and camouflaged, but you can see the important things. You can see the and read the number you can see bombs, you know what sort of aircraft it is and I was very pleased that it worked out as well as it did. I had one other excellent photograph with the Canberra but it wasn't in Vietnam, it was in Malaya where they had seven Canberras

24:30 they were white and silver in those days on a line and there was going to be a mass start up and the CO of the mass start up. And they started them with cartridge that they put into the engines, and there was three in each engine and seven aircraft, that's 42 cartridges going

25:00 at once. And they usually sent out a bit of black smoke out the sides and it was all on the CO's, 3, 2, 1, go sort of thing of which I was able to get plugged into and I had everything ready and was up on a ridge and had all seven aircraft visible, all the engines...and the 3, 2, 1, go

25:30 and the bang, which I had heard millions of times. But usually only one or two aircraft but with 7 of them going both engines at once and for whatever it was cartridges going bang with all this back smoke coming out. I literally jumped and exposed the shot and got a perfect shot, so that was another case where my photograph was

26:00 very pleasing for me.

Do you have any idea on the ratio you were shooting for the shots you would take to the ones you were actually using?

PR wise?

Yes.

I couldn't say for Vietnam I assume all the shots went out on the hometowners, I know I got a lot of

26:30 clippings sent back, the PR had a news service that would go through all the papers and clip them out and put the dates on the and things when they were on. And I got a lot of those back in the end, not all of them but I'm pretty sure most of them would have gone out to the hometowners

27:00 the national distributions cine and still shots. I can't remember the number. I know the still shots were in hundreds and the cine things there'd be 80 TV stations would get the news clip. I have no idea who used what. I'm pretty sure most of the hometowners would have been used.

27:30 **If you were on a job, you had to take a picture of Johnny Smith from Ballarat waving from his door gun position. How many photos would you take of him and then go back and decide ok that's the one we are going to use?**

Well I used a plate camera so I usually only took one, two at the most, the thing was, if I wasn't happy with it I could always go back and get him the next day or something

- 28:00 but I used film packs and slides and that's more or less one shot. It's not like 35mm where you can rattle off half a dozen shots like photographers do, run off a motor drive and pick the best one.
- 28:30 I had to make sure that the one shot I had in the slide was going to be the shot and if I wasn't happy with it I'd turn it over, or if it was a film back move it around the back, and take a second one. But I very rarely went over two, but generally it was just the one. I was usually happy with the one, and the quality was
- 29:00 being a 5x 4 inch negative the quality was far better than 35 mm.
- When you came back to Vietnam in 1969, did you know you were only going to be there for 10 or 11 months?**
- No I wasn't posted for any time my posting was to be advised, I've still got a copy of it.
- 29:30 I was posted to HQAFE [Headquarters Armed Forces Entertainment] and my cessation date was to be notified, which virtually meant that I could have been there for a couple of months. And they'd got someone or as it turned out 9 months ten months that I was there, and they got someone when I was there, but no I didn't know when I was coming back.
- 30:00 **Was that easier or harder to live with, not knowing that?**
- It was no easier it was no harder, I was there to do a job and was doing it and enjoying it. I qualified for war service that sort of thing after 28 days and it didn't really worry me.
- And you said that you enjoyed it and you would have stayed**
- 30:30 **did you ever make any inquiries into staying or going back?**
- No after 9 months I was happy to go back, or ten months whatever it was I was happy to go back, I'd seen a lot, done a lot. I would have come back if necessary I would have been quite happy to do it but 9 months away from home, kids and family it was long enough.
- 31:00 Most of the guys did 12 months so I was lucky on that regard, and if I could still be in the service I would. I enjoyed it I did well in it...I'd still be in if I could, I'm not sure if they still have a compulsory retiring age, I think it's been dropped now.
- 31:30 **You said that when you returned from that tour in 69 you said you returned in a Hercules is that right?**
- Yes I went up both times by Herc and came back both times by Herc, Richmond to Darwin, overnight Darwin to Butterworth, overnight Butterworth into Vung Tau, direct into Vung Tau and back the same way.
- 32:00 **Have you been back to Vietnam since?**
- No.
- Do you have nay desire to go?**
- No, a lot of the guys do but I have no wish to go back, in total I spent 9 years in Malaya, Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines putting all the exercises and things together,
- 32:30 nearly nine years. And I went back to Malaya because my son was posted there, I went back 4 or 5 years ago, he was at Butterworth. I went back to see him but I wouldn't have gone back there even unless he had been there, no I reckon you should never go back and see these places. Its been interesting...
- 33:07 ... aircraft accidents were a thing which I didn't really enjoy but you had to do them, but my first one was interesting. It was RAAF helicopter pilot who literally
- 33:30 chopped his tail off I believe and crashed and burnt in a plantation in Malaya, a rubber plantation, some several miles down the road to Taiping. We went down and I did all the photographs for the safety people there and then, there is a smell of death
- 34:00 definite smell of death, especially if there's a fire. And I took all the shots I had to and went back, now the RAAF sent out some boffins they called them to investigate the accident and there was always RAAF regiment which was virtually
- 34:30 infantry in air force uniform stationed at Butterworth. And as I took the initial photographs, what they did, they took the RAAF regiment down and stood them in a line shoulder to shoulder and made them move forward one step at a time. And they logged every piece of material that
- 35:00 was on the ground on a big map sort of thing, they logged it all down, where it was, what it was and they went right through the whole area step by step. And all these pieces were picked up then and itemised and tagged and they took them back to hangar, and these guys literally put the helicopter together again

- 35:30 and that's how they worked out that somehow or other he had. And the rotors were like match wood, they were there for months putting this aircraft back together and I had to go down every so often and photograph their progression on it and they finally worked out what happened and how he had come to prang [crash].
- 36:00 And he told me, interesting one about a V [Vickers Valiant] bomber that he'd done, and the V bomber had crashed in the Irish Sea and they'd managed to recover the aircraft. And they found some sand in the petrol tube that can only be found in one place on the earth and that was in the Middle East where it had been stationed some time before
- 36:30 it had slowly built up. And the air crew were getting the wrong air speed reading and they literally flew into the sea, it was fatal as well but this was the sort of thing that they did, and it was very interesting watching these guys work, watching them work putting everything back together. And literally reassembling this helicopter that had crashed and burnt, that was a real interesting set up.
- 37:00 **Can you guesstimate how many times during your career you have had to take photographs of that nature?**
- I think 4, yeah 4 which wereI could handle them they weren't any real gory
- 37:30 messy things to photograph, another one was a Sabre at Butterworth who had a bird strike and he crashed into the padi field at the end of the runway. So yeah there was several, well four in total actually.
- Going back to the sound of Iroquois taking you back, is there anything else, sights or sounds or smells that remind you**
- 38:00 **of Vietnam?**
- Lot of smells, not around here, not back home, yeah Vietnam was very much like Thailand very much like Malaya. It was Malaya when I was there not Malaysia, even the Philippines
- 38:30 some of the areas outside of the base in the Philippines. They are all very similar...hot humid and a lot of cases of dried fish smelt very bad, didn't like that at all.

INTERVIEW ENDS