Australians at War Film Archive

Kerry Lampard (Lumpy) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:30 **So Kerry could you take us through your life in brief please?**

Sure. I was born in Adelaide and we lived in Curry Street in the city in some row cottages near

01:00 Colonel Light Square. And my first school when I started school was Sturt Street Primary. And we went to school there for a little while and then we moved over to Perth where I went to Wembley Primary School. We lived in Perth for four or five years and then came back to Adelaide after my parents separated.

01:30 And then I went to primary school. and then I left school at fourteen and I went to work for a couple of firms here in Adelaide and then decided that I wanted to take a path in the military and I was interested in joining the navy but I get rejected from the navy so I joined the army. I joined the army when I was

02:00 seventeen. From there I went to Kapooka and, do you want me to sort of continue on?

Yeah continue on.

We went to Kapooka for basic training, this was in 1963 and I signed up

02:30 in the army for six years. And I spent I think three months at Kapooka training and then to Ingleburn Infantry Centre where we trained in infantry school I was a regular solider, I had volunteered. At that stage in my life I thought the army was pretty adventurous if you like,

03:00 there was lots of thing happening, people to see places to go that sort of thing. And after Ingleburn I was posted to 1 RAR [1st Battalion The Royal Australian Regiment] in 1964 I think, and we did some training there and then I think early in 1965 we

03:30 were warned to have, at the battalion parade we were warned that we were going to Vietnam as a battalion in defence of an air base. That was our commitment to SEATO [South East Asian Treaty Organisation] at the time and as a private solider I was in Signals Platoon attached to Assault Pioneers [platoon]. And my job was to make sure that the platoon had radio

04:00 contact with other sub-elements of the units and so on. And we consequently sailed to Vietnam on the HMAS Sydney and I thought that was a terrific trip through the tropics. One of the highlights of the trip, we managed to avoid the local RPs [Regimental Police, i.e., police integral to the battalion]

04:30 and run a Crown and Anchor game and an under and overs game [group gambling activities]. And on the way through the Indonesian islands we were actually buzzed by some Indonesian jets because I think at that stage the Australians were still in confrontation with the Indonesians and they weren't too happy about us going through there. We arrived at Vung Tau with a pocket full of ammunition and a bigger pocket full of money so

05:00 the gambling side of it went very well. We then transferred from the HMAS Sydney to landing barges and landed at Vung Tau somewhere. And from there we flew up to Bien Hoa airbase, just north of Saigon, and our job was to defend the northern section of the airbase. We had a fairly big tactical area of responsibility.

05:30 And we set about basing ourselves and making ourselves as comfortable as possible. The equipment we had, most of it was Second World War issue, it wasn't very good. We had Owen guns, which were left over from the Second World War; they weren't particularly effective in close jungle warfare, although the guys in New Guinea used them

06:00 in the Second World War to good effect. They just didn't have a lot of hitting power. And (UNCLEAR) equipment and TS [Tropical Studded] boots and all of that were just absolutely wrong for the tropical warfare we were fighting in Vietnam. Our radio equipment was pretty archaic compared with the Americans but we managed to use the equipment.

06:30 The battalion when it went up, a lot of the junior NCOs [Non-commissioned Officers] and senior NCOs were all well experienced soldiers. They were, a lot of them were Korean War veterans and Malaysia/Borneo veterans or experience and that stood us in very good stead for the tour of Vietnam, which was about thirteen months.

07:00 So we were well led at that level, and I think our CO [Commanding Officer], [Lieutenant-Colonel] Lou Brumfield at the time was very well liked, also a very good CO. And the battalion operated as part of the 173rd Airborne Brigade [US Army] and the 173rd Brigade was made up of 1 RAR, 1/503rd Battalion, 2/503rd Battalion

07:30 and supporting arms. And our role was to generally seek out the VC [Viet Cong] and the communists, and take them apart so to speak. I remember first arriving in the country was the overwhelming smell of the tropics, quite a powerful smell which you just don't

08:00 smell down here. And as an eighteen year old, I was pretty wide-eyed and bushy-tailed [inexperienced] so to speak. And the smell was just, that was the main thing that hit you, and the heat. The heat was just oppressive day in and day out. The poverty was another thing that struck me as very bad.

08:30 The people were going through garbage tips, all sorts of stuff like that. I don't think you're going to get enough information out of me for a four-hour interview.

Don't worry about that.

09:00 **Would you like a drink?**

Yeah I might have a drink of water.

Okay well we might stop for a moment.

The poverty struck me; it was a major… I hadn't seen poverty of this sort before, people crawling over garbage tips and looking for food. It was very bad at that stage.

09:30 We then went into operational modes after a few shakedown operations around War Zone D and so on. We travelled quite a bit throughout Vietnam, mainly through the central regions and the southern regions and up around Cambodia. We did numerous operations into areas that were VC strongholds and

10:00 in fact we, one operation I think was Operation Crimp, Hobo Woods, where we landed on top of a complete VC southern headquarters and we stayed and we knew that this was a big catch. But for some unknown reason, the commander of the 173 Airborne Brigade which was an American colonel or

10:30 brigadier decided after a couple of weeks we wouldn't stay there, that there was no value there. But at the local level, from the private soldiers to section commanders, we all knew that this was a major find. And history will show that if we had stuck around that, the war could have been shortened quite a bit because it was the headquarters of the southern command for the whole Viet Cong. So it was a big find, but we

11:00 didn't exploit it properly in my view. The CO of the 173rd obviously had his reasons for moving the battalion and moving the brigade. So we spent a whole year in Vietnam through different provinces, through Tay Ninh, Long An Province, Bien Hoa province and down through the Mekong Delta in the Plain of Reeds. So we covered quite a bit of ground as a battalion and a brigade.

11:30 And the contacts and the action we had in 1 RAR were varied from small contacts to quite large ones, and we witnessed a night attack on an engineer battalion, luckily for us our battalion was sitting alongside

12:00 and we were dug in during the night., and it was a whole regimental attack on some American engineers and we were protecting them as infantry protection for building a road.

I will get you to stop there, if we can jump ahead to you leaving because we will both go into this and go into lots of detail about it and we don't want to cover too much now.

Of the operational side?

12:30 **Yes. So if we could have bare bones at this stage that would be fantastic.**

All right. So we did lots of operations around the southern and central part of the country and we thought there was some pretty successful operations in terms of military execution, and having an influence around the place and

13:00 slowing down the VC. Then I had four or five days R and R [Rest and Recreation leave] in Hong Kong, that's about halfway through our tour. And then the next six months were fairly intense because we were operating around Phuoc Tuy Province getting that ready for the Australian task force [1st Australian Task Force (1 ATF)] to come up later. And then six months went fairly quickly and we came home and

13:30 marched through Sydney in April/May 65. And we had a fairly big welcome home thing marching in the

street and a young lady come out with red paint and threw it all over the troops. We couldn't sort of work out what was going on but obviously there was quite a few people by then objected to what we were doing up there.

14:00 And then I came home on leave and enjoyed a few months at home on leave and then went back to 1 Battalion, we started to regroup and retrain and so on. And then I decided - a couple of mates of mine had gone over to a unit in Perth called the SAS [Special Air Service (Regiment)], and they wrote me a letter, in fact it was Norm Bainbridge, and Bruce Absolom and Mick Krassovski.

14:30 And they said, "This is a good unit, it is a professional unit, why don't you come over?" and at that stage in my army career I still wanted to serve in a regular unit, professional unit. And the national service was off and running, and so I applied to the SAS. I completed the cadre course, the selection course and then the cadre course and then

15:00 my second tour to Vietnam was with 2 SAS Squadron in 1968, and we trained up in New Guinea in the Owen Stanleys [mountain ranges] and then spent a year in Vietnam in 1968 and my job was forward scout in the patrol. I stayed forward scout for the whole tour. By the end of the tour, I was pretty fractured mentally, I had had enough It was a pretty intense year

15:30 because the Tet Offensive [from 1 February 1968, named for the Vietnamese lunar new year holiday] was on and the VC and the North Vietnamese were serious full-on for that period. After my tour in Vietnam with 2 Squadron, I decided that I needed a break and I transferred from the SAS back to 1 Battalion, which at this stage were

16:00 being moved to Malacca [southwest coast of Malaysia] and Singapore where I spent the next two and a half years in the army and I did a total of nine years in the army. And I was training as an AATTV [Australian Army Training Team Vietnam] advisor to go back to Vietnam for my third tour and I passed the course but unfortunately in 1972

16:30 Whitlam pulled the plug on the war, which some people say was a good thing, some people say was a bad thing. I think it was a bad thing because once the communists took over in 1975, we let the Vietnamese people down, I thought so, we let them down big time. And the retribution that was put upon the

17:00 Vietnamese population, I think probably a couple of million people were executed. Because we pulled out and I think we should have been there for the long haul. I think the political interference was just mind-boggling and the politicians of the day just didn't understand that we needed to be in there for the long haul.

17:30 And I felt badly that we let the Vietnamese population down. And at the same time our military, we were struggling with poor equipment and by then poor leadership at the senior level, and by then the leadership at the senior level was prone to political influence. For instance, Phuoc Tuy province, the commander of the task force laid a minefield,

18:00 which later turned out to be absolutely wrong and most of the casualties in the later part of the conflict were as a result of our own people stepping on our own mines, which the VC had lifted through the night and re-laid them, so we took most of our own casualties from our own mines, which was absolutely bloody stupid. So that's the sort of leadership we were dealing with.

18:30 By this stage I had started to mature and think about things and read things and obviously had some influence about what was happening at home about Vietnam and I started to question a lot of things in my mind about why we were there. We would get information that we thought was valuable information to the task force from our four-man patrol and sometimes the information was not

19:00 acted on. And we also felt that the task force commanders used the SAS as a bit of a whipping boy because it is easier to deploy four people or ten people on a patrol than it is to deploy a battalion. And political interference for casualties at that stage, particularly national service casualties, was the senior officers were very aware of it.

19:30 And we felt we were being thrashed to death as SAS soldiers. So my attitude started to change towards the end of my second tour in Vietnam. And the more I questioned things, and the more I read and the more I looked into it, I felt we were going about it the wrong way. So it more or less left a sour

20:00 taste in my mouth and I was reasonably disillusioned but not totally. And anyway we came home and I spent three months at the end of my second tour in 1969 on leave. And then I came back and was posted to 1 RAR in Malacca and also

20:30 Selerang barracks, or what we call Changi [in Singapore]. The battalion moved up there for a bit of rest and regrouping and retraining. So I was glad to spend two and a half years up there essentially enjoying myself, playing tennis and rugby and what have you.

So after your time in the army?

I left the army in mid 1972

21:00 and I found it very difficult to settle down into any sort of job. And I had a very, I guess, bad attitude in

terms of what the anti-war protestors were doing here and so on, and I really had my mind set to leave Australia for good. I was pretty disgusted with what was going on.

21:30 I left after five months and went to England and Europe on a working holiday; I guess I was doing that mainly to get it out of my system. And I had numerous jobs when I was in Europe. I spent three years there. And then I came back from Europe, came back to Adelaide and had various jobs, still had trouble settling down.

22:00 And but essentially I stayed in Adelaide and worked, found different jobs to do and then I settled in real estate for about twelve or fifteen years, then I left that and worked in corrections for ten or twelve years. Got married when I was forty. I had been single up to that time enjoying myself.

22:30 And I got a bit crook a few years ago. I was in the repat [repatriation hospital] with a chest infection and I retired from work about three years ago and just taking life easy at the moment as TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated (pension)], that's about it. Brings you up to speed to where we are.

Thanks Kerry.

23:00 **Now we'll be jumping back in time. Can you tell me about your family life and what Adelaide was like when you were in Sturt Street?**

Yes. In Sturt Street in the row cottages I thoroughly enjoyed it if a five year old can. I don't have any bad memories or anything like that. Everything was big,

23:30 you know, it was there was lots of people around. And the row cottages we shared with other families, and I remember a family in particular were Italians, this was not long after the Second World War, my stepfather was a tail gunner in England with Bomber Command. And there was an Italian

24:00 family living one or two doors down . Dad made it clear in no uncertain terms that we weren't to associate with these guys. And I forget the guy's name but when I first started school at Sturt Street Primary we used to go to school together and we became best mates, and it was this young Italian lad, and so my Dad found out that I was walking to school with him. And he said, "No, you can't do that."

24:30 And I didn't understand what the Second World War was all about, being four or five years old. So we worked a way around it and we used to meet each other around the corner so that our parents couldn't see that we were walking to school together. I remember Sturt Street Primary as my first school; that was most enjoyable, we used to have pipes and drum band, and pretty well walked to school and walked back.

25:00 At that stage we still had ice delivered by a horse and cart on the weekends, and we would put it in an ice chest. The bread was delivered by horse and cart. There was lots of people coming and going in the house. So it was more or less an open house, I guess, people in and out of the house all of the time.

25:30 I think they were more friends of my stepfather's than my friends so to speak. But I enjoyed living in Adelaide. We were just down from Colonel Light Square and I guess we used to go into the parklands and dig holes and stuff like that with my brother and sister and generally get up to mischief, what kids do. And then

26:00 I think about, well, the early 50s, we moved over to Perth and we lived in a house in Wembley and I went to Wembley Primary School there and then I started playing cricket and made a few good mates. Starting to play a bit of football. And from Wembley we moved across to another place, Towong Street, Bayswater.

26:30 I think by this stage I was eight or nine or something, and then my parents spilt up because Dad was a pretty heavy drinker. And we came back to Adelaide, jumped on a train and that was a bit of a shock because I came straight out of school one day and next thing we were heading to the train station. And I said, "Where are we going?" Mum said, "Back to Adelaide."

27:00 And I wasn't very happy about the whole thing because I had good mates at school and I was settled and I think that unsettled me a fair bit, and we came back to Adelaide and we lived in rental accommodation and so on, and there wasn't much support around for single mums at that stage and we probably

27:30 rented half a dozen houses and Mum wasn't too well. She was a fairly heavy drinker at that stage, so I thought to myself at an early age that as soon as I could leave school I would head off and join the navy and or the army because I wasn't too happy with

28:00 my child life at that stage.

So the Sturt Street days were happier days?

They were good days and I thoroughly enjoyed them as far as I can remember.

And your stepfather's attitude towards your Italian friend at the end of the street, was that a common attitude in Adelaide at the time?

From what I can gather it was because when we came back to Adelaide from Perth, we lived at

28:30 Goodwood for a while, and I had a German mate at Goodwood Primary School. His parents were German and that attitude was still prevalent and I guess you can understand it because we were only talking ten years, maybe fifteen years after the Second World War, they weren't the flavour of the month at that stage. We didn't know whether they were immigrants, misplaced

29:00 people or military people so. I think it was a common attitude.

Were his family as far as you can remember cautious about you or?

Yeah it was a bit of both I think. I never went inside their house; I don't think we were ever invited. We used to play out the front yard or in the back yard. And vice-versa so. That was the attitude that was

29:30 around.

And what was your stepfather doing for a job?

Well, Dad had plenty of I think, mainly sales, plenty of jobs. And when I met up with him after the Vietnam War - and after my parents had split up, I didn't catch up with Dad until probably ten years later and I was probably

30:00 twenty-three, twenty-four - and he told me a bit more what he did during the war. And then I could sort of understand he was a tail gunner in Lancaster or Halifax bombers, Bomber Command. And he did his full tour of missions so, you know, he probably had a form of PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder], which he

30:30 didn't understand that he had. So I could sympathise with him down the track, but at that stage he was pretty violent towards my mother and he had numerous jobs and couldn't settle down. And when I got out of the army, I had the same sort of things, and I think people that have intense military experiences tend to have these

31:00 problems, can't settle into a job easily. And I had plenty of jobs and I think my Dad had plenty of jobs as well. They were all selling and that type of work.

But you weren't struggling financially, you can remember the bread came and the ice came, it wasn't a huge burden?

I think we had plenty of ice and food but financially we weren't well off at all. My Mum

31:30 was always struggling for money. And food was on the table but it was pretty basic sort of stuff. My brother was out selling newspapers to earn a quid at that stage, earn some pocket money because he was seven years older. And my younger sister, she was younger than me by eighteen months, so we weren't able

32:00 to do that sort of thing. But we ate okay but we weren't eating crayfish and stuff like that. I know Dad's money used to go on horses and booze and women and the rest he used to waste. But I can't remember ever being too hungry.

32:30 **Was it hard in that time to be in a stepfamily?**

Yeah because I never knew my real father and I really, you know, at that sort of age if there was any pressures around I wasn't aware of it. Maybe my brother was who was seven years older. We, I was very fond of my

33:00 nana and she used to spend a lot of time at the house babysitting and helping out. My Mum used to work. She worked as, I remember different stages she was working as a barmaid in some of the hotels around Adelaide, cleaning work and that sort of thing. But yeah, I don't have any adverse memories of fitting into that sort of situation.

33:30 **How did you feel towards your stepfather when you were old enough to realise where his money was going, that he was violent?**

34:00 Well I guess I was pretty upset with it but there was nothing I could do about it and I guess that was one of the reasons I looked to get away, join the army or the navy and get away from that environment and the idea of joining the army or navy started when I was nine or ten. I was interested in military things then.

34:30 I didn't know about my stepfather's military background because he didn't say a lot about it to me. It was only when I turned twenty-three, twenty-five that I got to know him a bit better. But I suppose in that period I wasn't happy with what he did but I could understand that there wasn't much I could do about it. And when Mum decided to split up, that was it; she made that decision.

35:00 As a five or six year old, you don't get a say in what is going on. And then later I was pretty upset with Dad, and then I suppose it went the whole circle, when I met him years later and spoke to him about his military service and I found out, it probably shed a bit of light on why he did this. And I guess in hindsight, if there had have

35:30 been a thing around called PTSD back then, it was something else, they called it shell shock from the First World War, nowadays they call it PTSD. So my attitude changed back to having some respect for the guy for what he had done during the war and understanding his position when he came out of the air force. He had no…he wasn't on a pension

36:00 or anything like that. He didn't go and seek help so he probably wasn't aware of his condition either, it was only when we started to talk when I was twenty-five or something that we found out a bit more about each other and we stayed good mates until he died in early 80s. I think he

36:30 had cancer and didn't last too long after that., died when he was about sixty-two I think.

How was your mother, when she had obviously decided she had had enough of the beating and so on and to come back to Adelaide, how had that affected her? Was she a strong person?

37:00 Mum was a strong person in her own way and stubborn, but from what I can remember she was doing it tough, because the late 50s early 60s there wasn't much help around for single mums or any sort of relief I guess, like what you get now. So she did it pretty tough and I think she used to drink a fair

37:30 bit because it was her way of relief, and then she was taking lots of pills and like that to cope I guess. It wasn't a pretty sight. She had a big alcohol problem. Unfortunately, while I was away in the army that was the worst phase that she went through

38:00 and my older bother and younger sister were here in Adelaide and spent a lot of time looking after her. And then she sort of came out of that - I think she was an alcoholic for a long time and came out of that as she got older. And things started to come together and we sort of pitched in and helped her out a bit, and my brother did a pretty good job, so did my sister.

38:30 And I spent nine years in the army away from Adelaide plus another three or four years overseas, so I didn't have a big hand in what Mum was up to. She got herself back on track and she was as good as gold in her later years. But I think it was a pretty tough call for her to come back with two kids in tow across the Nullarbor.

39:00 **Do you think that was a brave decision?**

Yes, I think it was on her part. Dad was pretty wild about the whole thing. Imagine coming home from work and there is no furniture in the house and the kids are gone, so he wasn't too happy. He was very upset and I found out about that years later. Mum did it tough

39:30 and she worked stacks of jobs back here. It wasn't always easy to get a job and she was unskilled; it was a tough period in her life and as I said she was strong in some ways and sometimes weak in others.

It must have been tough on you that she has come back here and you are in age terms are starting to be a bit more aware of what is going on. You know that dad is no

40:00 **longer around, you know that you are back in Adelaide which isn't what you wanted to do and mum is drinking a bit, how are you going at school? How is this affecting you this?**

Well it did affect me but I guess I got involved in playing football and cricket and tennis and the more time I spent away from the house we were renting

40:30 the better because it wasn't a pleasant environment. But having said that, I knew right from wrong, I didn't go off the rails I just focussed on, as I said, when I was nine or ten I started to think about military and I was focussed on that. I got a job after school delivering groceries around

41:00 King Road, Hyde Park. I used to earn pocket money.

Tape 2

00:30 **So Kerry, you had a brother seven years older and a younger sister. You said earlier that you didn't know your father, did your brother know him?**

Yes. He was from what I gather, Mum didn't speak too much of him but my

01:00 brother spoke occasionally, he was a gold prospector and he spent a lot of time out in the bush living in tents and Mum would be living in the tent as well so you know my brother recently went to Perth where he was buried to do

01:30 some background on that. I don't recall speaking in detail about him and my brother certainly didn't speak a lot about him either. I think what happened, he found some gold and took off and Mum never ever saw him again so. She was stuck out in the scrub with, I think, at that stage I had only just been born and my brother was around, so she had to get back to Adelaide.

02:00 I don't know where she was living at that stage. It would have been some gold mining camp somewhere out in the scrub somewhere.

Where did your mum come from; did you know much about her background?

Mum was born I think in Adelaide or Port Adelaide and her nana, Nana Lee Lou which are French and Mum's brother

02:30 lived down here at Ridleyton; he was in Tobruk in the Second World. And Mum's father was a wharfie at Port Adelaide. And they used to live in a cottage down in Port. So from what I can gather there is a French-Scottish connection when you go back further. We were only talking about it the other day, I think

03:00 Nana Lee Lou she married, her parents were from Scotland and they go back a long way and I think when Bonnie Prince Charlie was over there in England trying to overthrow the Poms [English], there is some connection there, but I haven't gone back that far.

Do you know how mum and dad met?

03:30 No not really, I think he had just come back from, he was still in uniform and he had just come back from Europe after the war, so I imagine it was some social occasion.

When you say dad, you're talking about your step?

Stepdad yeah.

Who was obviously there from the time that you can remember?

That's right, I never ever could remember my real father.

You don't know how your mum met your biological dad?

No idea.

And did your brother have many memories of your gold mining dad?

I think Rosco has,

04:00 he has never, he was probably four or five at the time so I don't think there is a lot there. If there is, we haven't spoke about it. It is not a subject we bring up all of the time.

And your mum and biological dad weren't married?

I am not sure. I think they were because on my certificate it is Gregory,

04:30 and then we got it changed to Lampard when Mum remarried later. So I think they were married.

Despite what you said earlier, you seem to speak about your stepfather with some affection? So it wasn't all bad?

As I said, I think I understood what Dad went through, then I could understand

05:00 his position in terms of drinking and violent behaviour. Because you know my first tour of Vietnam I never drank, never had a beer. But by my second tour, I was starting to drink, and it just got out of hand and I used to drink a fair bit. And I could see similarities and so I guess once I

05:30 sat down and spoke to my stepfather about it and quite a few years had passed, we became reasonably close and I could understand a bit more why he was frustrated about things. Because there were some conditions, especially PTSD, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. One of the conditions is you become frustrated and short tempered if things don't happen.

06:00 Being a tail gunner for twenty-three missions, well, you would be pretty short with everyone.

What did he tell you of his memories of his wartime experience?

Well not really a lot, he just spoke briefly about the night bombing over Germany was terrifying and he lost

06:30 a lot of close friends. He didn't go into much detail but I know that his logbook and what he has written in his logbook is fairly detailed. We didn't really go into a lot of detail and by the same token he didn't ask me too much detail about Vietnam. So I guess there were similarities there

07:00 that we don't sort of push the issue too much. I could see we both had similar problems. At the end of the day, in my military career I had the same sort of problems my Dad had. Luckily for me, I got some help, went to the repat [repatriation] or DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs] who done a good job, they have

07:30 been very good. And it is a shame that my stepfather didn't go to the repat earlier in his days, it might have had an influence on settling things down. That was his call. He didn't have anything to do with any

RSL [Returned and Services League] organizations, I can't remember him being a member of an RSL or going to an Anzac march or anything. He was probably a bit

08:00 anti-establishment I guess. And having said that, my stepfather introduced me to someone over in Sydney who was a mate of his, name of Frankie Marsden who was a World War I soldier. Frankie Marsden was in Gallipoli and France and he was a signaller. So he used to carry messages in envelopes and run up and down the trenches.

08:30 And Frank came back from three or four years over in Europe of fighting as well. And Frank had the same attitude as my Dad. And then another generation on, I have got the same attitude that they had. A bit anti-establishment, don't trust the politicians, that sort of thing, devil-may-care attitude.

09:00 And I used to call him Uncle Frank, but he wasn't my uncle, and I used to speak to him but he had the same attitude as Dad.

Did he speak about his memories?

A couple of times. He told me he was in Gallipoli and France.

09:30 He didn't want to come home. He actually bought into a wine bar in France. He had a half share in that and he was making good money and he took his discharge, I think, or maybe left the army and stayed in France, then he moved to England and bought a half share in a hotel near Manchester or something. And about three years after the war had finished, the Great War,

10:00 he was arrested for being AWOL [Absent Without Leave], he left the army without authority, but the war was over anyway. So the police went and arrested him three years later, brought him back to Australia and discharged him. But in the meantime, his business went caput [failed]. Frank didn't speak specifically about battles. He survived, so you know. He survived a very intense period

10:30 and he was a good mate of my stepfather's. So between the two of them, I used to get bits of information, but we all used to have the same sort of attitudes, and to a degree I think we all had the same PTSD condition. So and the three of us used to drink in a hotel in Sydney occasionally, in Darlinghurst there, I don't know if it is still there, and we would

11:00 occasionally swap yarns about things, but not a lot of details.

Why do you think that is?

Not a lot of detail? Well I think if you're talking to soldiers who have been in battle or airmen or navy guys, and you are talking to another guy who has done something similar, there is no need for a lot of details.

11:30 For instance, if I am talking to another infantry soldier now and I know that he has been in one of the battalions or an SAS trooper been in a sabre [operational, frontline] squadron and he has been in action, I know what it is like so we get this vibe that we know each other, if you know what I mean. And I think that follows through to First World War guys, Second World War guys, Korean War

12:00 vets, Vietnam vets, more recently any vets that have been involved in action. When you get on the two-way firing range, everything changes, so you don't need to go into specifics.

12:30 Sorry.

You don't have to be sorry. I wonder if your uncle and your dad had told you stories, whether you would have gone at all if you knew what it was really like?

Well I guess I have thought of that myself, but when you're a young guy sixteen or seventeen you can't be told

13:00 much and you think you're invincible, you're looking for a bit of adventure and it is a chance to see another country even though it's a tough way to do it.

And you wanted to get away from home didn't you?

So I guess if they said anything to dampen my spirits it went right over my head. And the same could be said for

13:30 each generation that has been to a conflict. The World War I guys all volunteered, "Lets get into them, go and see the rest of the world" and so on. The Second World War guys that was similar and there was a major urgency with dealing with Hitler and his stooges. I guess if you're sixteen, seventeen, eighteen,

14:00 you are looking for adventure, you aren't going to be told, you find out the hard way. I mean I can talk to young guys now about joining the army, navy, or air force but if they have got it in their mind that that's what they want to do, become a professional warrior so to speak, but you pay a price at the end of the day.

That's the bit that teenagers wont hear?

That's right.

14:30 and I think that true of today. I know some young guys over in Perth at the moment, young professional warriors. They're enjoying it but their times in Iraq just at the moment have been pretty tough, each conflict has its own idiosyncrasies, but there is a common thread with the whole lot.

15:00 **So you left school at fourteen? And joined up with them, you had been thinking about the military since you were twelve and you joined up when you were seventeen, what were you doing in those interim years?**

Well I left school, I only went to primary school, I left school as soon as I could get a job because we needed some money coming into the house to help Mum. And

15:30 from those three years, I guess I just focussed on playing footy and tennis and working and really preparing to get into the army or the navy. I really wanted to get an apprenticeship in the navy. So I was busy working there and focussed on that. So I really didn't get out of line. I had an opportunity to get a bit wayward but it wouldn't have got me in the services.

16:00 And I think I was fairly set on what I wanted to do. But from fourteen through to seventeen I didn't join the cadets or anything, I just focussed on getting into the military. I just played football and tennis and knocked around with a few mates here in Adelaide.

How were you earning your money?

Well, my first job was with a company on

16:30 Unley Road timber trading, just as a general rat around the hardware store, gopher ['go for', general hand]. And then my second job was with Dame Marjory Jackson Nelson [Australian Olympic runner] and her husband had a sports store on Unley Road so I was working as a salesman for them in the store. In fact

17:00 Marjory Jackson tried to talk me out of joining the army because she wanted me to keep working for them in the sports shop. Maybe I should have.

You weren't going to listen.

No.

So at this stage, where were the family living?

We were renting a house in Weller Street, Goodwood, and we were sharing that with a Dutch family, it was a two storey place.

17:30 They had just come out from Europe after the war, and then across the road was a German family so we lived and worked and played around Goodwood I guess. I played for Goodwood Colts football team, Aussie Rules, and played tennis at the local club here. My interests were local. A little bit of fishing and stuff like that.

18:00 Generally we didn't move too far from the Goodwood area, and it was easy to ride my bike to work. After, we spent a little bit of time at Rose Park, we rented a small house there just before I joined the army. I think we were only there for six months. Most of my time was here at Goodwood. And I went to Goodwood Primary since I had come back from Perth.

18:30 **And how were things with mum at that stage?**

Still pretty fractured, she was still a bit wayward. And I guess as teenagers we weren't probably helping that much but I used to pay board and earn money and bring it into the house so I did a share of small responsibility I

19:00 guess.

Did your sister often take over mum's role in the house?

On occasions she did if Mum had periods where she was too ill to get out of bed, or go to work or for whatever reason. My sister and I used to do jobs, but Elizabeth

19:30 occasionally took over, but because I was eighteen months older I didn't listen to her that much. She did a bit of housework around the place and what small wages I was earning we were paying towards the house anyway. But one good thing that Mum taught me was to save money so I was pretty frugal with saving things and that carried me through when I was in the army, used to save a bit of money and still do today

20:00 to a degree.

Are you close to your siblings?

Yeah we're pretty close. We're not in each other's hip pockets of course: my brother lives at Fulham Gardens and my sister is at Lockleys. So I guess you could say that. Although we don't spend a lot of

time

20:30 together, we are close. We help one another out. But they're still busy working so I don't see a lot of them. My sister works in the city full time, she has got a fairly high-up job and my brother has got his own business. My brother has got three children - my sister never married - he has got three good kids,

21:00 and two of them are married and have got grandchildren. So we get together, it gets pretty rowdy when they're all together. Not good for my tinnitus [ringing in the ears] or PTSD.

You have got tinnitus have you?

Yeah.

From wartime?

Drives me frigging mad.

It is a very irritating condition.

Shocking, but you can't do anything about it. I can hear the noise over the talking

21:30 it is that loud. Only time I get any peace is when I go to sleep. I have had that from, it was more evident just when I left the army. I had it but I didn't know what it was at that stage. As you get older, it gets worse.

It is damage to the ears through noise?

22:00 Yeah, explosions and gun fire and so on close by, plus I think I have got about forty percent hearing loss in my right ear.

Are you hearing me okay now?

My wife says 'selective hearing,' but never mind.

Not everybody knows what tinnitus is. Can you just explain what the noises that you hear?

22:30 Very high-pitched squeal, in my case mine is up at the top end of the frequency of the human ear I guess, and sometimes the pressure changes, like being in an aeroplane, and sometimes it is more intense than other times and there is no relief. It is a dreadful bloody thing actually.

23:00 But they can't fix it, and it is just damage to the inner ear from excessive loud noise and being exposed to it for long periods of time.

A lot in common with rock stars then?

I don't sing like they do or earn the money that they do.

So Kerry, you were working in those years and bringing money into the house and finally at seventeen you get

23:30 **to join up, what were your first impressions?**

I went to Keswick Barrack here on Anzac Highway and I was really pleased with myself that I was finally in the army. The navy knocked me back because my education wasn't high enough, but it was ironic because I wanted to join the navy to travel

24:00 but in fact I spent more time travelling in the army than I would have in the navy at that stage, because the army had things going on in Borneo, confrontation with Indonesia at that time. There was postings to New Guinea, Vietnam cranked up [started]. Then there was Singapore for two or three years. So the nine years I spent in the army, I probably spent six and a half or seven of those out of the country anyway.

24:30 But I was very happy to be in the army; I thought this was going to be a long-term career and that's how I approached it. At Keswick, we were issued with some old khaki uniforms and we hung around there for a few days to get the paperwork all set and we went off to Kapooka, and I was thoroughly pleased with myself to be heading

25:00 off to another state, to do our training at Kapooka. And we got to Kapooka on a Wednesday afternoon, which was pretty cagey because Wednesday afternoon is a sports afternoon. And as we drove in the main gate, a bus full of recruits myself included, and all of these blokes playing rugby and football and so on, I thought, "This is all right," and didn't realise what was in store for us

25:30 when we got off the bus. The sergeant we had was an absolute terror and he tortured us for three months. And I wasn't ready for this sort of abuse and physical toughness if you like, and I decided as soon as I got off the bus, I grabbed my bag and started heading for the main gate and the guy let me walk all of the way to the main gate and Kapooka is a long way to the main gate, and I got down there and I said to the

26:00 guard on the main gate, "This is not for me, I am not putting up with this." Anyway they picked me up

and took me back up to the company lines and I got appropriately served up. Anyway, I survived and I quite enjoyed Kapooka because it was physical. I was fit, I never drank or smoked, and I thought “Well I am here. I have signed a contract for six years and I have got to do it.”

26:30 So after three months, I came home in my uniform, we had a four-day break and I was pretty pleased with myself.

Just going back a bit, you said you were tortured for three months?

Metaphorically speaking.

Can you describe the daily routine?

Well we were living in tin huts,

27:00 old things and it was very cold. We were up at five in the morning, paraded; you had to have a cold shower. You were verbally abused all of the time and you had to do everything at the double, but you were learning new things, every hour you would be doing something different, and

27:30 I guess it was a big culture shock. We were fed three meals every day, we were exhausted, everyone went to sleep at eight o’clock, nine o’clock at night. So it was physically tough. We learned about drill and hygiene and weapons, ironing clothes and washing clothes, which I had never done before.

28:00 Everything was new to me, and I was like, “Wow, look at this”. I wanted to get through my recruit training because you could be failed and kicked out if they thought you were a bit of a no-hoper. Anyway, I got through it okay and we got four days’ leave after three months.

Was it a bit like a boys’ club?

No I don’t think so. I didn’t make a lot of close friends at Kapooka

28:30 because you are just so busy getting yourself organised you know, because you had to have…you’re up early, did your PT [Physical Training] then had a shower, got changed and went for breakfast, and then you came back to your huts and you had to have your bed absolutely made properly, and your locker had to be spotless, boots polished.

29:00 You were just spending too much time on all of these things to worry about whether it was a boys’ club or not. I don’t think it was, because there was no time for it. We had one day a week off, sort of. You didn’t have time lounge around much. A boys’ club would have been nice but it wasn’t to be. We were just busy staying on top of things. We would march off and go to a lesson,

29:30 and the lesson might be on weapons, and that would be over in forty minutes and we would march off and do a lesson on map reading. Things that I had never as a teenager…you didn’t know map reading. There was all new subjects that I was learning about, reading a compass, hygiene, keeping yourself neat and tidy to avoid sickness,

30:00 generally cleaning of webbing and equipment and general military skills. Although basic you still needed to have those military skills. So the three months went quickly.

Were you a little concerned that because you hadn’t had any schooling past primary school that you might not be able to keep up?

No, it wasn’t evident then. It was evident down the track. Because I thought if I

30:30 am going to stay in the army as a career, well, I woke up six or seven years later, “Well, the only way I can do this is to become an officer”. Go to OCS [Officer Cadet School] and make it a long-term career, and then I needed education so then I started to go to night school and you needed the army equivalent of the intermediate to become an officer. And so I started to do that on my

31:00 own but at that stage the education, a simple grunt [infantry] job is a pretty uneducated sort of job. Having said that, there are a lot of good grunts out there. Education wasn’t really an issue even in corps training. But education is an issue, that’s something that I overlooked, but never mind.

31:30 **Well it was the circumstances and choices that were available to you at the time wasn’t it? So then you came back to Adelaide on leave?**

Yeah, came back for four days , I think there was four or five of us came back in a little mini-bus. We were in our uniform and I had a pocketful of money. I can’t remember what we did on leave; I didn’t do much I think I just hung around home. And I couldn’t wait to get back

32:00 because we were being transferred to Ingleburn, the Infantry Centre for infantry skills. And from Kapooka they then allocate you out to military units that they think will be suitable for you. So the Infantry Centre was another step I had to get through to become an infantryman. That was a bit more skilled, you still had to qualify.

32:30 So there were standards that you had to reach. But for the four days in Adelaide I think I went to the local football club, Goodwood Colts, met a few guys there and had a bit of a gathering, reception if you

like, and I caught up with a few mates I used to go to school with. It was pretty low key I think.

What did your mum think of you joining the army?

33:00 At that stage, I don't think she was too happy but you know I don't think it mattered. At that stage of my life, her opinion of whether I should join the army or not didn't sort of come into it. But I think she was happy that I got a permanent job and that I was being looked after from that point of view. She certainly wasn't happy when Vietnam

33:30 cranked up, but then most mothers wouldn't be.

Well how did she let you know she wasn't happy?

Well, probably later when I came home on leave after my first trip. But at Kapooka and Ingleburn 1963, Vietnam nobody even knew how to spell the word, it was a bit early, there was no war. But when I came home after

34:00 1 Battalion's first tour, she wasn't happy about me having to go there, and also she wasn't happy about me, because I was talking about going back for another tour. I was living in Sydney at that stage, we were based in Sydney and Mum was living in Adelaide, so it wasn't really relevant what she thought.

34:30 **She was worried for you?**

Oh yes. Most mothers' natural reaction.

And she had seen the effect of war, hadn't she?

Correct.

So you ended up going to the other, doing infantry training?

Yeah that was at Ingleburn in Sydney and that was for three months and the training there was a lot more intense and a lot more specialist and our instructors there were again

35:00 sort of torturous type characters, but that's what they were paid to be. The three months there was very hard work. I don't remember any of it there fondly as being fond work. Again we were living in huts, it was all hard physical work, marching and becoming physically fit, and

35:30 learning more infantry skills, using weapons and so on. It became more specialist. Again I got through that okay and then the end of the three months there I was transferred to 1 RAR at Holsworthy in Sydney.

Where does 'Mighty Mouse' Broughton come into it?

He was our warrant officer platoon commander at Ingleburn. And because he was such a short guy

36:00 and he had a tremendous voice - I think he was a Korean Vet - he was our platoon commander, and when he roared he absolutely roared. And he was a ferocious looking character but not real tall so we nicknamed him 'Mighty Mouse' [comic book character], but not to his face.

36:30 **All of the training which sounds quite brutalising, how was it helpful when you got to Vietnam?**

I think it was very helpful because you learnt o be uncomfortable. In the training you would be hot and sweaty, and be physically knackered and sleeping hard on the ground or digging weapon pits, and so on.

37:00 I think it was an essential part, not to be brutalised but to be toughed up, if you like, physically because you slept on the ground or dug weapon pits, you moved through the jungle or through the swamp. It was an essential part of your training, and to be tough, not necessarily tough, but just to be able to put up with things like sleeping on the ground,

37:30 those sorts of uncomfortable things that you and I wouldn't do now. So it is an essential part of it, I think, of the training. Stood us in pretty good stead, I don't think, you couldn't just go to Vietnam with a uniform on and expect to survive, the training was physically tough and mentally tough and I think that's how it should be.

And all of the yelling?

Well the yelling was to me

38:00 a lot of bullshit but it was a way to get you moving, to frighten you into doing things at double quick time. So, and I guess it still goes on today, but after a while it becomes unnecessary. A lot of the instructors now would disagree with me, they still yell, but once you have been through it,

38:30 you only need to do it once, that's all. I went through it three times, because I went through SAS cadre course, which was a lot of yelling, physical work as well. As I am a bit thick, I have done it three times: Kapooka, Ingleburn, and SAS cadre in Perth.

And the huge emphasis on cleanliness and having creases in your trousers in the right place, I mean what is the point of that when you're in Vietnam and you might have the same dirty socks on

39:00 **for three weeks at a time? Can you explain why that was necessary?**

Well, I think it was more discipline than, the hygiene was certainly an issue to ensure that you keep your clothes clean and you kept your hygiene to a very high standard. I guess there is two parts to the military, ceremonial type discipline and then there is the operational type

39:30 where you are lying in the mud and you have got stuff all over you, have been in the same clothes for three weeks. I think you break it up into two sections, the discipline, making your bed and ironing and doing things right I think is an essential part of it.

Tape 3

00:30 **Kerry what was your relationship with your superiors like during this training period? You said Mighty Mouse was a bit of a yeller, but other superiors?**

I found that the corporals were experienced

01:00 blokes and pretty tough guys, they were helpful but they were pretty aloof too, they didn't mix with us socially or anything like that. And they did their job, they trained us up and I think that sort of goes with the territory. They don't really get too close to the recruits; there are so many coming through. I mean Mighty Mouse would come in and do the inspections of a morning

01:30 and that's all we would see of him through the day, the corporals we were more involved with on a personal basis. We weren't afraid of them but we weren't close to them either. Professional arms distance. We all knew we were only going to be at Ingleburn or Kapooka for three months anyway so there was no use in making close ties then,

02:00 because of the intensity of the training and moving around and so on.

So you mentioned that you didn't have a lot of mates at Kapooka, you didn't have any time, did you end up going on with any of the guys that were from Ingleburn?

02:30 Probably only maybe one that I keep in touch with now; fellow called Norm Bainbridge we see him from time to time, he is over in Perth. And maybe one other but not many, out of a platoon of say thirty or forty guys, you knew you were being posted off to other areas so you didn't worry about it too much.

03:00 But when I got to 1 Battalion, when we were transferred to our unit, well then we made more permanent friends, which I did. Same as when I went to the SAS and they're still guys that I stay in touch with now.

So can you tell us about when you left Ingleburn, what happened then?

Well we went from Ingleburn over to Holsworthy, which is not a long physical trip, only a couple of suburbs away.

03:30 And then I was transferred into Signals Platoon in Support Company for 1 RAR .and we started training with infantry radio equipment, and learning signals work. As well as exercises, we were doing more training and so on, so the days were still pretty busy but they were a lot more relaxed because the

04:00 section commanders or the platoon commanders were permanent. So every day you had a parade, you're dealing with the same people all of the time so. For the twelve months I was in 1 Battalion, I got pretty close to a lot of the guys. We did various types of training, more specialist infantry work again,

04:30 and larger exercises, battalion exercises and so on. And that continued until I think late 64, early 65, and I think in May we left Australia for Vietnam, so we were training right up until January,

05:00 February 65 before we got wind of what was happening in Vietnam. And at that stage, in 1962 Australia had some advisory team up there but they were only a small number of people, so not many guys had even heard about Vietnam. And it happened fairly quickly, we had a company parade and the

05:30 company commander come and addressed us and we were packing our gear ready to go in a month's time. So we had to get our leave over with and all of our needles and shots and bits and pieces ready to sail on the HMAS Sydney from Woolloomooloo.

What did you do during that period that you had to take your leave and?

I think we just generally

06:00 sharpened up our infantry skills. I remember we used the range a fair bit, the rifle range. We did small

signals exercises, tidied up our personal affairs. I don't think we had much leave to take because we were always taking leave, so there wasn't much leave to take before we went away.

06:30 So it was generally just a fairly intense period of getting ready. It is a fairly big exercise to move a thousand-odd guys to another country, I can't remember any one thing that sticks out. I remember it was a busy period.

Did you get to go home and see your mum, brother and sister before you left?

I think we had a few days off

07:00 but I honestly can't remember what transpired, we did take some leave and I saw my brother and sister and mother. I stayed at my brother's place when I came back from Sydney. Again nothing sticks out that I can remember, we were all enthusiastic to get going so I guess everyone was

07:30 focussed on the imminent move. It was just a busy period for the battalion. Previous to that, we were doing a lot of bushfire fighting down in Mittagong, New South Wales, they had a lot of fires they still get today. But the army was used, we used to go down and help the emergency services people fight bushfires, we did that a lot ion the summer

08:00 leading up to our trip away. There was a lot of picket duty on the range, artillery firing range, they were pain in the arse jobs but you had to do them.

What's picket duty?

Well they would post a sentry out on the perimeters of the firing range, by yourself all day out in the scrub and you would just be there to make sure nobody came into prohibited areas, they

08:30 didn't get injured, but it was a pretty boring sort of a lonely job in the heat, used to get a fair bit of that. Mess duties, washing dishes, and hygiene duties, you know, cleaning toilets and showers. They were generally just mundane sort of jobs that we did interspersed with intense training periods.

09:00 **So what did you pack for where you were leaving? Did you take anything personal or was it entirely military?**

It was, the only personal thing I took away was my Crown and Anchor set, and unders and overs set. It was a set of dice. I think that was the only personal thing I took. The rest was military: sleeping bag, poncho, change of clothes,

09:30 change of military clothes, socks and shaving gear, etcetera. We were actually, I am not sure when we were actually issued ammunition, I think it was on the Sydney that we were issued ammunition. So the only civilian thing was my dice. That was it.

10:00 **And do you remember the atmosphere on board the Sydney?**

Yeah, I think because we had a lot of professional soldiers in the unit, 1 Battalion at the time was all regular soldiers and a lot of the guys as I said earlier were Korean War vets, Malayan emergency vets and so on. They had done it all before so they helped settle down new blokes like myself who were all excited, off to see a new country and so on.

10:30 So they kept it fairly steady. I guess there was an air of excitement as well as one of professionalism as well, and I think that stood us in pretty good stead. The trip itself, it was just exciting to get on a boat and go through the tropics, people pay thousands of dollars to get on a cruise ship and I was doing it for nothing.

11:00 Slightly different level of accommodation, of course, but the deck that we were on if I remember correctly, we had hammocks slung down on the fore cargo deck, which is very low in the ships bilges. It was stinking hot and you just couldn't sleep, it was just dreadful to sleep, so we ended up sleeping up on the deck sometimes, but that could end up being a bit dodgy because

11:30 the monsoons, you would get wet in the middle of the night so it was a real issue to find somewhere comfortable to sleep. During the day we would be firing weapons off the back of the boat, test firing weapons and practicing our shooting skills and PT, of course, and briefings on the enemy and what we were likely to face and so on.

12:00 So the trip was an eventful one. And during our break periods the issue per soldier or sailor was one twenty-six ounce can of beer per day. And that was at two shillings, and I never drank so I used to auction my beer off to the other blokes so I made a bit of money that way. And we run Crown and Anchor a couple of times on the boat. The regimental

12:30 police were running around looking for the guy running Crown and Anchor but they never caught us. So I got off at the other end with a pocket full of money and a pocket full of ammunition. That was quite an eventful trip, and up around the islands where the Indonesian air force sent down a couple of ace Sky Hawks, I think they were Sky Hawks, looked very similar. They buzzed us. They weren't firing

13:00 or anything. And I think the trip was about fourteen days. We went up inside the Barrier Reef, around

the top of New Guinea and through the Indonesian islands, South China Sea, so it was a bit of a trip and then we transferred from the boat. The food was okay on the Sydney, nothing flash but nutritious tucker.

13:30 **What sort of briefings were you getting about the enemy?**

Well we saw, just before we left Holsworthy we had a film on Dien Bien Phu, which was probably not the best film to show. The film was about the French defeat in a place called Dien Bien Phu. The footage was all

14:00 original footage and they took a bit of a hammering so to me that was probably not a good film to see. But we had some of the advisors who had just come back and the company was in a big hall, and I remember the advisors dressed up a couple of Chinese blokes in black pyjamas and AK 47s [Kalashnikov 5.56mm rifles, Russian or Chinese made] and all of the stuff they used and they came bursting through the side of the hall

14:30 and it looked a pretty fearsome sight. And then they went on to give us lectures on how these guys eat, how they operate, how they are committed, so we had quite a few briefings on the enemy and what to expect, how they operated. So a lot of time was spent studying Vietnamese culture, getting lectures on what they see as important

15:00 to their culture, etcetera, and I guess just trying to familiarise ourselves with the job at hand. But we weren't ready for a base at Bien Hoa because we were just put in the middle of open rubber, cut down rubber trees, and it was all open and it was very exposed to the elements as well as enemy. But it was just training and general briefing for the fourteen days on the boat.

15:30 **Had that been sufficient do you think?**

Yeah I think so; I don't think you could sort of measure it, just a familiarisation with what we were going to deal with. The trip up from Vung Tau, I think we flew up in C123, 'baby Hercs' they call them [C123 transport aircraft - 'baby Hercules' C130 transport aircraft], to Bien Hoa airbase.

16:00 When we landed there that really sort of opened our eyes because Bien Hoa airbase at that stage was the biggest airbase in South East Asia and they were operating a lot of aeroplanes out of there, military aircraft and civilian. And it was a big base and we were given a large slice of it at the top end of it to protect. But to dig in and set up the camp where we were going

16:30 to live for the next twelve months was bloody hard work because it was just exposed. The heat, there was just no trees. They had all been cut down. It was an old rubber plantation.

When you were buzzed by the Indonesian jets, do you remember that experience?

Yeah, in fact we had three alerts on the boat. Red, yellow and green I think they were, orange or something like that.

17:00 Orange we had to go to our stations, we took no part in the firing of any weapons or like that but we had to be in a special station where the life rafts were, and I remember when the alarm went I went down with another chap, Alan Brant, and I went to my locker and grabbed my camera and all of the money

17:30 that I had earned and I forgot about my life jacket and other stuff. So I went up on deck on a life station position, because I wanted to a get a photo of the jets, bit stupid on my part really, wanted to get some photos. I think they did one or two they just buzzed us and then went on their way. They didn't actually fire anything. We had a couple of destroyer escorts, and one other boat, the HMAS Melbourne.

18:00 So I think they either left or were chased off.

Did you get your photo?

No I can't remember, I don't think I took a photo. The jets were on the other side of the boat, so I didn't get any photos. That's the only time we had anything happen on this trip up.

So you landed, can you tell us about that?

18:30 Yeah we transferred from the HMAS Sydney onto these landing barges and it was a bit precarious because we had to go down these cargo nets and then climb onto the, we weren't being fired at or anything, it was a relatively simple exercise but dangerous in itself because the boat was bobbing around and so on.

19:00 And you were loaded up with a lot of equipment. And we landed at Vung Tau somewhere, just on the beach there. And I remember we were walking up the beach, myself and Bill Clifton, a corporal from Pioneer battalion, and General [William C.] Westmoreland [Commanding General, Military Assistance Command Vietnam] was standing on the beach, and Billy O'Shea was another corporal. And Westmoreland was

19:30 greeting the Australian soldiers as we got off. And he made a comment to Bill, I can't remember what the comment was, but he thought it was important enough to be down at the beach when we landed, so I guess at that stage Australia was a major ally. And then we transferred from the landing craft onto

some trucks, which then took us to an air base at

20:00 Vung Tau where we flew up to Bien Hoa. And then we deplaned from Bien Hoa and started to dig in around the airbase and set up our battalion TAOR, which is a tactical area of responsibility. We started to patrol out and do out to the Dong Nai River, outside of the Dong Nai River was War Zone D which had been - allied troops had

20:30 been in there for a long time so that was considered a nasty piece of real estate. Later on we went in there and sorted it out. Setting up the camp was a tough job, because the equipment that we had was all Second World War stuff, we were under-resourced and it was just hard work setting it up but we got there.

21:00 **How many Australians had been there before you at this stage? Do you know a rough number?**

I think the only Australians that had been there before us were the advisors. And I think the Australian Army only had a couple of dozen advisors up there and they were spread right throughout the provinces so they weren't all in Bien Hoa, they were spread around the place. They weren't big in numbers. So I don't think there were any Australians in Bien Hoa province at that stage but I could be wrong.

21:30 **So you guys were sort of the first lot there?**

Yeah. We were the first Australian battalion and the two American battalions were next door to us so to speak. We looked after the perimeter of Bien Hoa airbase.

So setting up your command centre and the area that was designated to look after,

22:00 **can you tell us about what's involved in doing that?**

Well, we had to dig latrines, because this was going to be our base; it had to be a semi-permanent camp if you like, so we had to make it as comfortable as possible. During the monsoon season, it was just a bloody quagmire with red

22:30 mud everywhere. And then during the dry season it was just red dust and it was so hot. So we had to dig weapon pits with overhead protection, firing positions and so on, site machine guns, put out barbed wire out the front and trip flares, Claymore mines [directional anti-personnel mine], that sort of thing. And then try to make the tents that we were living in as

23:00 comfortable as possible. So there was a lot of labour-intensive work, digging holes, filling sandbags, getting water to the appropriate areas, setting up the mess tent, battalion headquarters, and then patrolling out from there to secure the perimeter. So the first couple of months there was quite a lot of labour-intensive work in setting up the camp

23:30 and in setting it up the way the CO wanted it. So there was a busy period.

Who were you sharing a tent with?

I was sharing a tent initially with just our own little plastic hoochies with a couple of signals guys. And then I moved over to Pioneer Platoon to the platoon commander's tent. Vaguely I remember he was a Duntroon captain.

24:00 So there was just myself and him in the tent and I think maybe a batman [officer's assistant], but I cant remember his name. The platoon commander didn't stay with us very long, I think he went home after the first operation in War Zone D or something, and then Col Evans the platoon sergeant took over the running of the whole platoon for the rest of the year. So our platoon commander in pioneers really only lasted a month or two,

24:30 so I didn't get to know him well at all. But I knew quite a few of the blokes in Pioneer Platoon quite well because obviously we worked together for the whole year.

What was your first operation?

The first one I can remember was going across into War Zone D and we did a couple of small acclimatisation operations around the end of our perimeter.

25:00 But the first major operation was into War Zone D, which was across the Dong Nai River, and I guess the main thing that sticks out in my mind is at nighttime just the blackness of the jungle. You can't see your hand in front of you; it is just pitch black. And the noises of the jungle, all the bird life and insect

25:30 life and animal life, which later became user friendly because we learned to distinguish when things were right and when things weren't quite right. It was just the blackness of the place at nighttime. The jungle I quite liked because during the day it was quite dark and primary jungle was nice and soft under the feet,

26:00 and you could see through primary jungle for a while. Secondary jungle was a bit dirtier so you couldn't see through. That was very close. I quite enjoyed the jungle itself. I didn't like to be out in the paddy fields or open areas for obvious reasons. Some operations we did were in open areas. We had our first contact in War Zone D,

26:30 the battalion had a contact and I think knocked off a few local guerrillas. And that first night we bivouacked out there, I think there was maybe some mortar fire that came in on us or something like that. Just the blackness of the jungle at night you couldn't see anything. To move around, to get to a weapon pit at night to do your two hour shift on the gun

27:00 was just so difficult. Just minor things like that, to get from one place to another at nighttime was a major problem. And you generally had to crawl along or hang onto a bit of Don 10 wire [telephone cable] so you knew where to go where the weapon pit was, because as soon as the sun went down that was it, she was as black as hell.

So you engaged enemy in that first?

27:30 Not me personally but the battalion had a few contacts and I think it was one of the rifle companies. But when we came out of that operation after - I don't know how long the operation was for - a couple of weeks, we all thought, "Well, what's the fuss of War Zone D?" Everyone had been frightened by War Zone D, you know, you don't go in there, that's the enemy territory.

28:00 But in fact, we went in there and there was quite a lot of camps and stuff like that, but it didn't hold any fear for us after that.

Did you lose any of your guys on that first operation?

Not that I can remember. Everyone was pretty alert. When we went up to Hobo Woods and the tunnels of Cu Chi and Hobo Woods that was a bit of a shock to the system because we took a lot of casualties from booby traps.

28:30 And we hadn't struck booby traps before, it was all brand new for us, and the battalion, we learnt the hard way on that and took a lot of casualties there. The first night we bivouacked at Hobo Woods was in some old rubber and just on dusk three Vietnamese or VC walked into our position

29:00 and we shot them or the machine gunners shot them and it was a bit of bad luck because they took all night to die because they, they took a long time to die and they kept us awake all night with their

29:30 yelling and screaming. And it was just unfortunate that they died in the morning. Wasn't very pleasant. That was the first time I guess that we suddenly realised we were doing for real here, and then

30:00 taking quite a few casualties in the Hobo Woods areas with the booby traps.

So how many operations were in the Hobo Woods?

Well, I think the Bearcat area and the tunnels of Cu Chi and Hobo Woods was a bit of a triangle up around

30:30 north of Saigon. It was an area that we went into probably three or four times I think in twelve months because it was an important base for the Viet Cong, where they run their operations from for the whole of southern Vietnam. So we were in and out of there probably three or four times in the year from what I can remember.

31:00 **Was it too dangerous at night to have found the men who were yelling and finished them off?**

Yeah it was, as I said, once it gets dark even in the rubber it gets pretty black and because there was VC in the area there was nothing we could do about it and these poor guys took a long time to die.

31:30 And there was no point in risking any of our lives to go out and help them out and put them out of their misery, that sort of sticks in my mind.

What's the feeling among the battalion now?

I think once the battalion had a

32:00 couple of contacts and a couple of kills under its belt, the feeling was that we could pretty well handle most of the operations given to us with a degree of professionalism. And I think the battalion did do a very good job for the year it was there as part of the 173rd Airborne Brigade. I guess it built our confidence up a bit that we could tackle the enemy

32:30 efficiently and ruthlessly if we needed to and I think we did on a number of occasions, it wasn't always easy and it wasn't always one-sided. We lost quite a few guys on the tour. It was a tough tour because we were all new to the game so to speak and new to the terrain and learning new tactics on the spot,

33:00 and having to deal with booby traps and panji stakes [sharpened bamboo stakes, set in the ground at an angle] and panji pits [pit with an array of panji stakes] and all sorts of things as well as having to deal with a hostile jungle. You need to remember there are scorpions and deadly snakes and all sorts of things that are not user-friendly. So it was just a matter of coming to grips with all of that, which made the job

33:30 tough. I don't think any of the operations that we did, you couldn't put them down as being

unsuccessful, they were successful but we paid a price.

What did you do with the VC in the morning?

We sent out a burial party and buried the three of them in the morning in a shallow

34:00 grave. They were local guerrillas, local Viet Cong. We retrieved the weapons and buried them. They didn't know how we operated, they walked right into us at stand to on dusk, which is when at stand to battalion sits quietly ready for an attack. And you do that in the morning before dawn and half an hour after dusk and the whole

34:30 battalion is on alert. These three guys walked in, they didn't know our procedures, so unfortunately for them.

Did the machine gunner feel more comfortable now that he had done what he was supposed?

I don't know about comfortable, I think it was a sigh of relief that he knew the weapon was going to work and these machine guns were good. And the M60 [M60 General Purpose Machine Gun (GPMG)], when that started to bark everyone took notice. So I think it was more a sigh of relief that.

35:00 I mean he had to shoot them; they walked straight in on top of him. I don't think the distance was much more than ten yards or something.

When you had to cross the river and go into War Zone D, how did you cross the river and what were you taking? What did a signals man carry?

35:30 Well, I carried at that stage an AMPRC-10 radio set, which is a VHF [Very High Frequency] radio that you put on your back, strapped on your personal gear plus your radio plus a spare battery. So we actually took quite a lot, the weight we were carrying was extremely heavy. And the AMPCR-10

36:00 was a line-of-sight VHF radio, which was a bit useless in the jungle, which was later replaced by an AMPRC-25, which was a bit more compact, powerful and better to tune. The problem with the AMPRC-10 it used to be very difficult to tune and keep on the frequency, it used to float off the frequency occasionally. And if you didn't have lines of sight,

36:30 they would very rarely work. They were just a useless radio. However, they did work when you had line of sight. But in the jungle or hills it is unlikely to get line of sight every time. And then I carried a little handset radio, telephone with some Don 10 wire. That used to go into a semi-permanent position, we would run Don 10 out and then we would use

37:00 that handset hand generated just for a local reference between the platoons or the section. And the VHF radio was for relaying messages back to, or receiving messages. And I had frequencies and callsigns. Had to listen to the radio almost twenty-four hours a day and have it handy for the platoon commander if he wanted to transmit. It was good

37:30 in one way because most signallers knew what was going on. We could listen to traffic and if there was a contact or something somewhere, we were the first to hear about it, so I guess in that respect that made up for the extra weight you were carrying.

You were informed?

Yeah we were always first to know what was happening around the place. But the equipment itself was not particularly

38:00 good. There is far better stuff around now, but at the time it was the best we had. The batteries on them weighed a bloody ton, so everyone in the section carried a spare battery because not only did they weigh a lot, they didn't last very long. In the jungle they get wet and trodden on or they just rot. They didn't last long

38:30 at all.

So after an operation you would go back to the air base?

Yeah we would generally go back to Bien Hoa and have a hot shower, put our equipment away and relax, get ready for the next operation or re-equip or whatever we need to do. The main role I think of the 173rd Airborne

39:00 was to plonk us around all over the country to go into a certain area and confront the VC or search and destroy, whatever the operations were. And we would always come back to Bien Hoa after maybe thirty days in the scrub or jungle. We would come back to Bien Hoa and relax and put our feet up, whatever. That was our home base so to speak. Even at Bien Hoa we had to mount gun pickets, sentry patrols,

39:30 clearing patrols, standing patrols, so you were still working and you were still required to mount standing patrols and so on. And I remember one standing patrol we actually went out to a little village, a hamlet in front of us, 1 Battalion TAOR and it was an old French lookout post and I actually stayed up there with an intelligence corporal,

40:00 we stayed up there for a couple of nights because our job was to OP [observe – Observation Post] the area and we had the radio set up there and we stayed maybe one or two nights. So there were always commitments around the place even when we went to Bien Hoa.

Tape 4

00:30 **Kerry, you were talking about how your responsibility was to guard the perimeter of the air base, can you talk a little bit more about how you had to do that?**

Well each company had

01:00 an allocated piece of real estate, if you like, out front and their job was to put out standing patrols at night, which was an early warning: you might put three or four guys out the front of your perimeter, maybe two or three hundred metres out and those guys would take a radio and two riflemen and a corporal. And the standing patrol was to stay there all night not necessarily standing.

01:30 And if there was any enemy moving in, the idea was that they would bump into the standing patrol first. Standing patrol would then withdraw and alert the battalion and they would come through the wire and then we would be ready, so it was an early warning. I remember one standing patrol we actually went out through the wire through our company support Pioneer Platoon's perimeter and we set up our standing patrol.

02:00 And then I think it was A or B Company sent out a standing patrol as well but we got our wires crossed and the other patrol walked in on us, so it was very lucky, there was quite a heated exchange, fire, no one got hurt. Sometimes these things happen. Generally the area we had of responsibility was to our immediate front.

02:30 And we had, as I said earlier, we had barbed wire and trip flares and so on and we used to send out patrols every night, so it was your turn tonight, my turn tomorrow etcetera. And there was always a radio operator and two riflemen and a commander and the object of them was, as I said, early warning; they weren't there to fight anyone, they were there to withdraw straightaway.

03:00 And then we would patrol out through the day, say in platoon strength, to clear the river, clear the front area. So you would have patrolling methods and then your standing patrols and then your perimeter. And then inside the perimeter you might have a machine gun post, which would be manned all day and night. So you had a lot of picket duties, what we used to call picket duties. And so you would rotate through the platoon with those,

03:30 one section would be looking after the machine gun, another section would be looking after the standing patrol, another section would be out patrolling through the day, and then you would rest and so on. The workload was pretty high in terms of physically and mentally. A lot of the work, you were working twenty-four hours a day seven days a week. You didn't get a lot of sleep, it was always broken sleep.

04:00 So you always felt exhausted and as the year went on, you got more and more run down, so the guys who were spending a lot of time in…infantry work is hard work at the best of times and the guys at the end of the tour were getting tired and coming down with sicknesses and so on. It was pretty tough work looking after the perimeter. Although it sounds easy, it was not. So, and then you had to dig your weapon pits or replenish sand bags. You

04:30 could be dixie bashing [scrubbing pots, kitchen duty] down on the mess, cleaning up in the kitchen. And then you might do a run to the garbage tip to get rid of all of the food slops. I think we used to get one day a month off where we go down to an assembly point and jump on a truck and go into Saigon,

05:00 and probably get drunk, but I wasn't drinking at that stage. Later on in the tour, I think I started to have a beer. One day a month I think it was when you had a break. You had to put civilian clothes on to go into Saigon. And then of course there was four days R and R somewhere in that year, you got four days off.

You said it may sound easy guarding the perimeter,

05:30 **it doesn't sound easy at all ,and added to that the fatigue, and the heat. You then wonder well how the hell did the standing patrol not get edgy, how did they deal with the tension under those conditions?**

Well I guess soldiers need a good sense of humour and you have got to be able to let off a bit of steam and I think coming off standing patrol in the morning you have still got your

06:00 normal duties to do during the day, although they would try and give the standing patrol some time to rest. But you still had this constant rotation of duties that had to be done. The latrines had to be cleaned; you had to feed the guys so you had to work in the mess. It was virtually never-ending because there was always something to do. And then if we got a warning order for an operation

06:30 then the activity would double again because we would all be starting to load up ammunition and test-fire weapons and look at briefings, where we were going and what we were doing and so on. So even though you came in off an operation and threw your clothes off, had a shower and so on, put some fresh clothes on, you were still required to do certain obligations that were laid down for the battalion to do.

07:00 And a lot of that was standing patrols, picket duty and so on.

And you said the standing patrols were there to warn and retreat? What warning did they get?

Well, the idea of a standing patrol was so that if a large enemy force was probing our perimeter then they might bump into our standing patrol and we had artillery

07:30 coordinates to support the standing patrol, so they could call in artillery back up if they felt threatened. But the general idea of a standing patrol was that as soon as you got bumped [contacted] by a large force, you were to withdraw, and that way you had already alerted the battalion commander that something is happening on the perimeter, so these standing patrols were out in front of all company areas, they were early warning.

08:00 **You say bumped by a large force, what do you mean by that?**

Well, say that if there was a platoon of Viet Cong sappers [field engineers] coming in to look at the perimeter to blow up the wire or get inside for a specific reason, anything larger than the standing patrol they would withdraw. So if there was ten, a platoon of VC, maybe

08:30 thirty VC, their job was not to stand and fight, their job was alert the battalion and withdraw. So a large force could be anything from ten-fifteen guys to two or three hundred to a regiment of a thousand, so throughout the year standing patrols of certain operations were bumped by large numbers of the enemy. But they did their job.

09:00 Their job was to withdraw and get back to the perimeter as quickly as possible and get back into the perimeter and they were relatively safe. Standing patrols are standard infantry work, same as fighting patrols, same as recce [reconnaissance] patrols, different patrols with different outcomes.

I imagine the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army would have been keen to get rid of that base?

Yeah, they were, they put in a few

09:30 rocket attacks on the base but I think it was just too big for them. I can remember a few rocket attacks against Bien Hoa and mortar attacks, but they didn't mount any large infantry offensive against the base, not that I can recall. So maybe they looked at it and said, "This is too hard, this is too big, too well protected". But they did

10:00 land a few rockets in there. The VC and the North Vietnamese, apart from a few big confrontations, they weren't looking to have a stand-up fight with the Americans because of the Americans' overwhelming firepower and history has shown that the firepower just decimated the North Vietnamese. In fact, I think there is a generation gap of North Vietnamese. There is no one around from my age; there is just a huge generation gap of

10:30 no male guys around my age in North Vietnam, they're just gone.

In the standing patrol situation, would you have had some signal between each other or were you too far apart?

No, we were fairly close, it was just a matter of signals wouldn't have been seen at night because it was too dark.

11:00 But occasionally we would tie string around each other's wrist and we would just give a little tug on the wrist to alert someone to be alert, something happening. We used to use this in ambush patrols when I was in the SAS as well, we would tie a piece of string or a piece of Don 10 to each others wrist, because you might not see the next guy, he might be five feet away but you might not see him for jungle or whatever. That was one way of

11:30 communicating. Once a firefight started, well, there is no need for you to be quiet once the shooting started but up until then you just used signal.

Loud yelling, was that how the two Australian patrols in that circumstance bumped into each other? Was that when everyone figured out that they had got the wrong?

That particular night I remember Billy O'Shea

12:00 was the section commander and I was on the radio and I think these guys ,we were sitting down or lying down in the scrub and we saw the guys walking towards us. They were silhouetted. We had been told that anyone out there of a night time was fair game so I think Billy let fly with a few rounds and I threw a hand grenade, and they

12:30 fired back. They had all dived for cover at that stage because at nighttime, it is hard to get an accurate

fire on someone. And then there was a lot of yelling and swearing on the other side and we recognised a few swear words and we realised what we had done so we all stopped firing and luckily for us nobody got hurt. But it was a fairly tense few minutes.

13:00 But we still stayed there for the rest of the night so. But the standing patrols were just one part of it, as soon as the battalion harboured up [took up a night position] or a company harboured up, they would always put out standing patrols as a matter of security.

You said before about the blackness, everything was so black and you learnt to distinguish when something was okay and something wasn't okay, can

13:30 **you talk about what you learnt?**

I think you sort of learn to tune into the nature if you like, insects, animals, bird noises, monkey noises, trees, dead fall - a lot of trees would fall to the floor in the jungle, they would just rot and fall to the jungle floor. Ants,

14:00 chomper ants used to make a hell of a noise coming through the bush of a night and the reason they call them chomper ants is that they just used to eat everything in their path. And so you become attuned to the jungle and its noises and when those noises stop, it is generally because of human intervention, whether it be us or the North Vietnamese or the VC. So then you would be on alert because if the surrounding noises stop suddenly,

14:30 well, there was a good reason it stopped and generally they were good signals. If you read the jungle properly, it was very helpful. There is numerous examples of that, that would be if all of the insects stopped making a hell of a din, which they did of a night time, then something or somebody has disturbed them and there is a good reason

15:00 they have stopped and you would be doubly alert in case someone was moving around or might have been occasionally might have been a tiger or a bear or something, large monkey or something, whatever. There was quite a bit of animal life up there in the jungle. We followed a tiger, tiger followed us in our patrol for about three or four days and we never ever saw him but we heard him and smelt him and we

15:30 saw his footprints, huge, and there was a very heavy urine smell. We could hear him breathing occasionally, grunting and so on, but he was smart enough to stay away from us. We would have brassed him anyway. So there are lots of things in the jungle that will help you and if you ignore them you are in peril so.

16:00 **Was part of your training not to wear aftershave that kind of thing?**

Oh yeah that was, you didn't need a lot of training not to wear aftershave, the deal was that you didn't make yourself obvious and if we were going on an operation for a few days beforehand we might not shave or shower. And you wouldn't take anything. I used to clean my teeth with salt, because toothpaste, you can smell that.

16:30 Aftershave, things like that, you just wouldn't take to the jungle with you. The only problem we had was some of the guys in the platoon or the patrol might smoke. And cigarette smoke can be picked up quite a long way away and a lot of the noggies [Vietnamese] used to smoke too so we could smell them and I guess they could smell us. You would do simple things like not

17:00 shave or shower for a couple of days before you went out on operation. And you wouldn't wear fresh greens; you might wear greens that are clean but are a bit old and that sort of thing. There was no obvious, apart from trying to blend in with the jungle as best you could, that was probably the best way to go.

What did the Viet Cong

17:30 **and the NVA [North Vietnamese Army] smell like?**

Very musky smell, very BO-ey [body odourish] smell; I guess musky would be the word. When I was forward scout, my sense of smell was pretty good and I could quite often smell people before I could see them so,

18:00 a couple of the guys in our patrol, our patrol commander smoked. I didn't smoke, our 2IC [second in command] didn't smoke, so we had a pretty keen sense of smell, which helped a lot and stopped us from stumbling into people. I guess you would have to say a musky, they lived in the jungle all of the time, they didn't have showers so they were really smelly type of characters.

18:30 **And if you were attuned to the jungle, they must have been doubly so?**

Yeah, they were to a degree, I don't think they were attuned, their navigation skills weren't very good at the soldier level, at the grunt level, because they didn't have a lot of maps and compasses, and a lot of them weren't trained to read maps and use compasses, only their officers

19:00 or their senior NCOs, whereas all of the soldiers in the Australian Army are taught to read a map and

use a compass. So our skill level I thought was better than theirs. However, they lived in the jungle and they knew local areas, so I guess they had a bit of an edge there. If they got off their beaten tracks, they were a bit lost. They didn't know which way was north, southeast or west, so they

19:30 tended to stick to their local areas. But when the North Vietnamese started to come into the war a bit later, they were more efficient because they moved in larger groups and their skills were probably commensurate with ours. The local VC were local guys, so they were born and bred in the area and they knew most of the tracks, and most of the jungle around I guess. Take them out of that environment then they would be a bit lost.

20:00 That's how we saw it. I don't think too many of them had skill to read or write and use a compass and so on.

What were your personal feelings about the enemy? Or the perceived enemy?

On my first tour I think I thought

20:30 they were nasty bits of work because we had seen some of what they had done to villages that were pro-government. We would come into villages on our way to Hobo Wood in fact and there was some heads stuck on a stake, these were the village chief and his family because the VC had come in that night and executed them. So we didn't like them if you like,

21:00 we needed to kill as many as we could and get the job done. So having said that, they were soldiers and I guess they believed what they were doing was right. But they were fairly brutal people and brutal to their own kind. The

21:30 second tour I started to have a bit more of respect, but we started to identify a bit more what we were up against. The VC local guerrilla was not a very well skilled soldier, the main force guerrilla who was a bit more skilled and determined and then the North Vietnamese who were main force regulars. They were very determined and very skilful and well armed. So we had

22:00 three levels of enemy, so if we were going into an area that we knew was occupied by say 275 Regiment or D445 or one of the local enemy units, then they were main force, so we knew we were in for a bit of a fight. If it was local guerrillas, then we thought we had the upper hand on them because we had superior skills and so on. North Vietnamese were a different kettle of fish again; they were well armed, well organised and happy to have a go.

22:30 So, you know, so intelligence-gathering we knew, and I think that also stood us in good stead. But that was the essence of it.

So what was the fear factor like when you knew you were being approached by the NVA?

Pretty high because the night that there was a large attack organised by the NVA,

23:00 up on Operation Marauder I think it was, we were building a road. These guys jogged twenty-two Ks [kilometres] to get to the battle site and at two o'clock in the morning they launched a regimental attack on the engineer battalion, American engineer battalion, and we were right beside them so we had front row seats if you like .and they were very determined, they blew whistles, bugles

23:30 they had, they were well organised, so the fear factor was quite high. Not to the point where you would say, "Well, I am out of here". I mean, they were fearful of us and we were fearful of them, it cut both ways, but I guess we had a lot of respect for the main force units and the North Vietnamese.

24:00 But they launched this attack and we couldn't believe it because there was no enemy in the area in the afternoon and we dug our weapon pits and set-up all right for a night bivouac. We had seen a couple of NVA recce patrols earlier in the day so we knew that they were around but when they interviewed some captured prisoners, they had jogged twenty-two kilometres

24:30 to put in a regimental attack, which is no mean feat, in pitch black. So you have got to take your hat off to them, they were pretty motivated.

And you were next to the Americans?

Alongside, yeah. Our job was to protect the engineer battalion building a road. So we were the infantry protection for them and they got on with building a road. Because there was a bit of enemy activity during the day, they decided to harbour up themselves and they brought in some tanks and

25:00 some heavy armour, and we actually harboured up alongside them. or perhaps a hundred metres away, whatever. And we elected to dig four foot six [inches] weapon pits and so on, which turned out to be a very good move because the attack, they actually bumped the side of our harbour position but their main focus was on the American tanks and the engineer battalion so

25:30 they really gave them a caning. We had a front row seat to all of this and we were as quiet as a little church mouse. We didn't want to interfere because we didn't want the focus to turn onto us.

And yet you were in a protecting role there?

Well during the day we were but at nighttime, we harboured up by ourselves, and we elected to harbour up just away from the American engineer battalion because they made such a lot of noise and they were an easy target.

26:00 It wasn't our role to protect them at nighttime and the VC didn't know we were there, so they focussed their attack on the American engineers. They could see the target, the Americans made a lot of noise with tanks and trucks and generators, and God knows what else, whereas we sat alongside of them, and I guess we were there as back up anyway.

26:30 Thankfully it didn't happen that way. We were a battalion, this was three battalions attacking the engineers, it was a big blue. So I was quite glad to stay out of that one.

What was the make up of the America engineers?

They had APCs [Armoured Personnel Carriers] and tanks, M48 tanks I think, protecting their bulldozers that were making the road.

27:00 They were well armed in terms of weaponry but not well dug in or anything like that. The VC actually overran the tanks and APCs and caused them a lot of heartache the next morning. But the next morning, we went out ahead of the Americans and secured the road further up and there was a lot of blood trails, a lot of dead bodies.

27:30 We actually got a prisoner out of under a bush and dragged him out and he was shot in the stomach. We actually rang up on the radio to get an ambulance for him to get him out of there and some American bloke came along and shot him, which I thought was a bit weak. The bloke was already out of the game and we could have got some valuable information out of him. But after what happened the night before,

28:00 you know the American saying, he was probably pretty pissed [upset ('pissed off')].

Did they have the right of way in that circumstance?

I think all prisoners we took at that time were sent back for interrogation and they were entitled to medical treatment. But in light of what happened with the big attack the night before, the Americans weren't too sympathetic to any

28:30 of them. This particular bloke happened to be lying on the side of the road while we were waiting for an ambulance for him. Poor guy was a bit unlucky but that's not something I would do.

You were there when that happened?

Yeah.

That must have been a very hard thing to see?

I mean the guy was already down and out you know so.

With a stomach injury?

Yeah.

29:00 **And had the Americans suffered quite a few casualties?**

They had taken a pretty big hit that night. I think they lost twenty or thirty guys.

Not a lot of reason and logic in war is there?

No.

And how old were you at this stage?

Well my first tour, I was eighteen

29:30 going on nineteen maybe. Then I came home and went over to the SAS and we trained over in New Guinea for six months, the SAS, before we went back in 1968. So when I went back on my second tour I was twenty-two, maybe twenty-one.

That's a lot for such a young age isn't it?

30:00 Yes. But as a professional soldier at that stage, I was still thinking professional infantryman got to go where the action is. Not only me, a lot of other guys had the same attitude, but that changed as you get older and more mature. Yeah, I had just turned eighteen,

30:30 because you had to be eighteen to go away on active service. So I spent a year at home so I would have been twenty when I was going back for my second tour. We went back in January 68 I think. We spent about a month in New Guinea training in jungles up there, toughening up so to speak.

31:00 **Coming back to that American different way of doing things, what was your perception of the way the Americans approached things?**

Well, the little that I had to do with them, they were very can do, “Get the job done, it doesn’t matter what it takes, what it costs”. Their firepower was awesome and still is, so it was handy to have that behind us.

31:30 But I didn’t always approve of the way they did things, for instance, the morning after the guy was shot we went out as lead section of the Pioneer Platoon and for protection for the bulldozer tanks and some of the tanks they had had bulldozer blades on the front. And we actually run into a bunker, some enemy machine gun fire

32:00 and we went to ground and engaged the enemy and they were in a small bunker beside a little hut I think. And the platoon sergeant called up the three section commanders and we were discussing how we were going to take out this bunker, machine gun in it, and while we were discussing this, we were going to hook a section around behind and then assault a front section and keep a section in reserve and all

32:30 of this sort of stuff. An American tank come up behind us and said, “What’s the hold up?” and we said, “Well, we have got a machine gun in front of us.” And he just dropped the blade and pushed it forward and filled it in. So they got on with building the road because that was their objective, to get the road built as quickly as possible. So our way of doing it would have been more methodical and I guess more to the infantryman’s way of doing this.

33:00 Whereas this particular guy said, “Well, lets just fill the bloody thing in” and he just drove up to them and filled them in so. Its not funny but that’s what happened. So I guess they took a sledgehammer role to everything, where we would be a bit more precise and I think it is the same way today. We look to do things minimum of human cost to our end

33:30 to the enemy, but the Americans, I mean, they got lots of things done but they had lots of firepower too. They weren’t always successful.

Did that difference in approach to fighting, did that also apply to, were there differences in the way the Australians treated the enemy and the

34:00 **Americans treated the enemy, I mean with respect to human life?**

I mean, you could say yes and no, I think yes they treated some of the enemy badly and I was a witness to one of them, but in most cases they treated the enemy as you would under

34:30 the Geneva Convention. I was only witness to the one case. I mean there have been other cases that are well documented where the Americans haven’t treated the enemy with a lot of respect. I think we were always taught in the army that once a guy has been taken out of the action, there is no need for any more, he is out of the game, provided he is not trying to do anything silly.

35:00 I guess from that perspective we had a different angle on it. The wounded soldier should have been taken back for medical treatment, maybe we would have got some genuine information out of him, most of them were pretty happy to talk once they had been captured. But I guess if you were the sergeant involved and you were attacked the night before and you had lost three or four good buddies, then one nog is not going to make any difference. So I guess from that respect

35:30 I suppose there is two different angles. On the whole, I think most of the Americans treated most of the prisoners with respect, but there are a few instances, and that happens in all wars, you can go back to World War I, Boer War, Korean War any of those.

And it is an insane situation?

Well that’s right, you’re there for twelve months in an absolutely, we used to call it ‘funny farm’ because it was

36:00 just a nut place, full of nutcases, us included. And twelve-months tour of duty over there is far too long. You just started to lose it. You start to take things for granted that normal human beings wouldn’t do, so it was a tough call.

Well you were doing longer tours than what they did in World War II.

Which was crazy when you think about it,

36:30 and it was a political decision, not a military decision. The politicians said, “Well, we can’t have these guys doing six-month tours and we call up national servicemen who do a twelve-month tour.” So everyone had to do a twelve-month tour, which in that situation was just madness because you can’t hack twelve months tour of duty full-on all of the time. Even though you have a few days off here and there, you

37:00 can still get killed at any stage. Even on a day off, you can be bombed or mortared, someone throws a hand grenade off the back of a truck or something. It was a political decision, which was ridiculous, that our senior officers in the army accepted such a stupid decision but at that level there was a lot of politics involved.

Do you know who was involved in making those decisions?

37:30 Well, it was a [Sir Robert] Menzies government who was in at the time who made the decision that we would support SEATO [South East Asian Treaty Organisation] and send a battalion up there, so I guess it was the politicians at the time. If I remember correctly, it was Malcolm Fraser was the Minister for Defence [Minister for the Army then] at some stage. The [Andrew] Peacock was another one, and

38:00 well, [Harold] Holt replaced Menzies. [John] Gorton there was a few, the decisions were just wrong decisions, political decisions, which affected senior officers to say, “Right you will all do twelve-month tours” when in fact six months would have been plenty. Without being too political myself, I suppose they were just stupid decisions

38:30 in hindsight. At the time in Vietnam, I just didn’t realise how intense things were going to get. And we were there for ten years it was a ten-year war, 1962 to 1972, it was the longest war we had been involved in.

Nobody could have foreseen that though. And we will leave it there.

Tape 5

00:30 **It sounds like the Vietnamese made use and improvised with what they had, the ones that weren’t the more skilled fighters that weren’t well equipped,**

01:00 **can you tell us how they equipped themselves and those situations, what they used?**

Well the local guerrilla guys had some assorted weapons, old French rifles or German sniper rifles or occasionally a sub-machine gun. They weren’t really well equipped.

01:30 For instance the rice that they carried was carried in a long sock sort of thing tied at both ends and they sling it over their backs. They would have maybe a little bit of black plastic to keep the rain off them, which was generally folded on their belt. They only carried or appeared to carry one or two water bottles on their belt at the most, because they appeared to know where all of the local creeks were and rivers and so on,

02:00 and the local wells in the villages. But they didn’t need a lot the local guys because they all came from the area they lived in so they knew all of the villages and where to get equipment. And they improvised with bamboo stakes for making booby traps. And they improvised with old French hand grenades, Russian grenades for making booby traps, they were good in that respect.

02:30 But I don’t think I ever saw one of their local units with a radio at, say, section level like we had. But the D445 Battalion and 275, 274 Regiments they were a bit better equipped. They had webbing, radio, compasses, they had structured formula.

03:00 And then of course the North Vietnamese were full-time regular army. Regular in the fact that they were full-time guys, they had a lot of conscripts in their army as well. Their level of equipment if you like was pretty good. They had heavy weapons, 12.7 millimetre anti-aircraft guns, wheel-drawn, heavy machine

03:30 guns. They had quite good equipment. Hand held rocket launchers, RPG-7s [Rocket Propelled Grenades], and they were fairly well equipped and well dressed and well fed. The local guys made do with what they had in the local village area, their area, and they travelled pretty light. For example, they made sandals out of used car tyres,

04:00 they cut the tyre up and called them sandals, we used to call them ‘Ho Chi Minh sandals’ [after Ho Chi Minh, President of North Vietnam]. So their footwear wasn’t like ours, we had boots, GP [General Purpose] boots in the end. The locals, most of them wore shorts, a lot of them didn’t have shirts, maybe a hat every now and then. Then some of them had tiger suits, camouflage suits, black pyjamas,

04:30 they had an assortment. And then the main force unit and the North Vietnamese regulars, well of course they wore structured uniforms.

So with these bamboo stakes and things and the booby traps they were making, can you tell us about them?

Yeah, well, apart from the obvious panji pits,

05:00 which were holes dug in the ground with stakes a couple of feet down, designed to inflict nasty wounds. Some of the others that they had that I came across personally were a trip-wire tied to a bamboo stake at one end and the metal trip-wire going across the

05:30 track to protect something, maybe the perimeter of a camp, with an explosive device on the end of it. Most times it is an instantaneous grenade. The other type I saw in War Zone D was a lump of wood with sharp bamboo sticks sticking out of it and that

06:00 was raised up in a tree. If you flicked the wire or broke the branch it was designed to swing down and hit you somewhere in the chest, so there were some nasty things. But the VC used them mostly in obvious areas, and because we patrolled a lot off the tracks and not in the obvious areas, we didn't run into

06:30 them a lot, because we were aware of them and so on. But in the camp up at the May Tao Mountains there was some bamboo stakes put in the ground in the shape of a pyramid tied together, which indicated a mine field or booby trap or a mine was present in that area, and they generally used them around the perimeters of their camps, similar to our trip flares and stuff, as an early warning device for their people living in their camps.

07:00 So we had to be very careful when we were reconnoitring the edge of a camp that we didn't trip any of these things off.

Did you ever do those kind of recces at night?

No nighttime is just impossible to see, you might blunder into anything, we just didn't move at night. I think we did probably one move at night and that was

07:30 a mess and that was a battalion thing and that was difficult enough just to move around at nighttime, just too dangerous. Once the sun set, that was it, you just stayed put, unless you were in the base you could wander around, but on operations or patrol once the sun set you stayed put, that was it, for that very reason you could blunder into anything.

08:00 It was hard enough identifying these things in the jungle with other trees and with other trees and bushes in the daytime let alone at nighttime so.

Did you see any of your guys fall prey to any of these traps?

At Hobo Woods, we took a lot of casualties to these sorts of booby traps. I guess we learnt the hard way. Once we identified where the obvious places were for these

08:30 things, the guys through just sheer tough experience learned where to look for these things. And after Hobo Woods, I think we were a bit more inclined to be aware of it. Personally I didn't see, most of the casualties were taken in the rifle companies and personally I didn't see any of them, but I saw the results of these things and they are pretty nasty.

09:00 Later in the second tour, one of our officers was blown up by a land mine, that was one of our own land mines that had been dug up and replanted.

We have talked about the first time your battalion came into conflict and your machine gunner had to

09:30 **take care of a few VC coming through. When was the first time that you engaged the VC personally?**

Probably on the Plain of Reeds, or it was actually in the tunnels of Cu Chi up around Bearcat,

10:00 in fact everyone had a go at that. The first time I engaged the enemy, we were on top of their camp, or on top of the tunnels, and there had been a lot of firefights during the day and the enemy were actually coming out of the tunnels at nighttime. Some of them couldn't hack it and they just wanted some fresh air because they were stuck down in these tunnels, which weren't nice places. And I was on picket

10:30 duty, another guy on the machine gun and a noggie came out of the tunnel and was coming down the trenches, there was a zigzag trench and he walked into the machine gun. We challenged him but he kept coming so we shot him. That was at nighttime so there wasn't anything personal, he just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

11:00 Another period we were down on the Plain of Reeds where we had a firefight with some Vietnamese who were probing our perimeter. I returned fire but it was only a fleeting period. A couple of other contacts were on Operation Marauder when we were leading with

11:30 Assault Pioneers out in front of the battalion to clear the road for them. The contacts that I personally had were light ones because our role in Assault Pioneers was not as infantry, we were assisting the infantry and it was the rifleman in the rifle companies that did the hard yards. We still had a job to do and were still in the front line so to speak but

12:00 the riflemen took the brunt of it.

What does that do to you having faced the enemy and having a 'you or him' situation, what does that do to you as a soldier?

Well, I guess it is a case of kill or be killed, you're trained to that particular type of work

12:30 and it then becomes a matter of survival. You have to be sharper and faster and more accurate than the enemy. And I think in all conflicts the same. When you're on the two-way firing range, you need to be

better at it than he is. And I guess in the ambushing we did later and the fire fighting we did later when I was with the SAS,

13:00 it became not a personal thing, it was just that we had a job to do and the coming off patrol you maybe think about it later of the repercussions of what had just happened or what had preceded the previous twenty-four hours. It didn't make me hate the enemy; it didn't make me respect them any more or less. Probably in my second tour with SAS, I was

13:30 more intent on surviving the madness of Vietnam as it evolved over ten years. And, you know, so you had to be on the ball, we were patrolling four-man patrols a long way from any support so we had to be very careful and we had to be much faster and sharper in our reaction time. And so on.

This is with the SAS?

Yeah.

14:00 So the ambushes we did and the firefights we got into, we just made sure we had to come out on top, and our patrol came home in one piece and the end of the second tour, which was what we wanted to do.

You talked about the tunnels. Can you tell us about them?

Well the tunnels were, I actually stuck my head down a tunnel, sort of down a few feet, when we were at Cu Chi and they

14:30 were not very pleasant. They were built for an Asian man so they were very small, the tunnels were very well hidden and trapped, so you could hardly pick up the trap door. When you did find one, they were very well constructed, they had reinforcing and air vents and all sorts of little mechanisms, booby traps inside of them. The

15:00 tunnels were, once you started to find one or two then you started to know what to look for so it became, not obvious, but you became more skilfully aware of where a tunnel might be or what it looked like to be an entrance to a tunnel. For instance, it may be only two feet square with a fairly heavy lid on it, which you pick up,

15:30 covered in, probably had growth on it, small trees and grass and stuff. We actually learnt fairly quick when we were on the tunnels of Cu Chi because the VC, the guys were popping out of them at nighttime and they would come up inside our perimeter and take shots at anyone they saw or whatever. And we evolved a process

16:00 whereby as soon as it became nighttime nobody moved. Anybody who moved was considered enemy and shot at. And this was pretty tough because you had people shooting inside a perimeter, and if the enemy popped up you took a shot at him if he was close by. We developed another way to work out where the tunnels were was to pump a combination of smoke and CS gas down a tunnel and we

16:30 would watch through the undergrowth where the smoke was coming out in other areas to give us an idea where there might be another tunnel entrance or there might be an air vent or might be a gun firing port, or some other escape hatch. And that was fairly successful but only at the shallow level of tunnels.

17:00 These tunnels went down three floors, or three storeys if you like. So there was quite a lot of soldiers hiding down there, I think there was something like two thousand, three thousand soldiers hiding in these tunnels. And the VC commander at the time really was pushed, if we had stayed on the tunnels another week or two they would have all suffocated, they would have all died. We would have shortened the war by five years.

17:30 **Why didn't you stay there?**

Well, as I said earlier, I think the commander of the 173rd Airborne Brigade had other obligations that he needed to fulfil in the bigger picture I guess. But this was a pretty big picture which I reckon was a dropped catch, we should have stayed there until the job was done.

Did others feel like you?

Yeah, all of the grunts at my level knew we had stumbled across something very big because

18:00 VC normally, with a big force coming in, they would break contact and get away and pick a time of their own choosing to have a go. But these guys didn't go away so we knew we were onto something different, and history shows it was the headquarters for the whole VC Southern Vietnam and it was a huge dropped catch by senior management if you like.

18:30 **How were you feeling at this time about the hierarchy?**

Well I think we were, in Vietnam apart from one or two good officers that I worked with and still know today, I think a lot of our senior officers were very poor standard in their management and I think that is reflected

19:00 in what happened with our own land mines. So at the grunt level, we knew what was happening but at the senior level sometimes information just wasn't getting through or was being ignored. It just wasn't leaving a very good taste in our mouths because we thought, "Well, what the hell are we here for if they are not taking any notice of the information we're finding".

I can imagine.

19:30 **So you're there and you have discovered a network of tunnels and…**

It was a major complex.

The other guys are just like, "Yep this is it", why were grenades not just being thrown down?

I think initially there might have been a couple thrown down but the VC disappeared down the tunnel. The tunnels were built in such a way, they were

20:00 tiered so they were at different levels, so if you threw a grenade here and had a blast here, and sometimes the tunnels went through a water trap so that smoke and anything could get through the water trap. So the tunnel would be full of water, so whoever was in the water would have to take a deep breath, dive down and come up the other side, and that was a water trap, which stopped chemicals or smoke or any other blasts from a hand grenade

20:30 getting through to the other side or whatever. Sometimes the tunnels had stakes in them, panji stakes. Sometimes they were booby-trapped. Some of our engineers went down the tunnels, in fact I think one of our engineers was killed down a tunnel and it took quite a while to get him back out. Get the body back out. They were just difficult tunnel complex in the jungle, it was just difficult to

21:00 comprehend. It is not like you can get a map, like street fighting, where you have got a directory. These things were underground and for all intents and purposes you could walk across the top and not know they were there and there was quite a number of people living under ground. They were difficult to come to grips with militarily.

It sounds like a very sophisticated system?

Well the tunnel of Cu Chi had been there for twenty, twenty-five years, so the VC had plenty of time to build them.

21:30 They were building them during rhe French occupation and I would probably say they were even there when the Japanese were there during the Second World War. So they were already well established and reinforced and equipped. And I believe the tunnels, the Americans never ever went in and flattened the tunnels so to speak. They bombed them and pumped chemicals down and

22:00 but there is ways of stopping all of that.

You said it too ka little while to get the body of your engineer back. Were the VC and the NVA and the guerrillas fairly respectful of reclaiming the dead?

I think the case of the engineer guy was, the VC commander who was in the tunnels at the time

22:30 didn't want to interfere in us getting the body back because he knew if we couldn't get the body back, we couldn't go away. So I guess he was laying 'doggo' so to speak. So when we recovered the engineer's body, it was only a matter of a few days that it took us to get it back and then we were already talking about moving out, so the VC commander underground

23:00 obviously thought, "Well, we wont interfere in this one". The battalion lost two guys killed in action, well, missing in action, on a place called Hill 82 up near the Cambodian border and we never got those bodies back because the commander of the VC stayed in the area and was dug in with heavy weapons and it. Hill 82 was pretty well fortified

23:30 and we bumped into those guys ,well, the rifle company bumped into them later in the afternoon and it was getting dark so we never recovered those two bodies. And I don't know, for some reason the Americans wouldn't allow us to go back in there to get them, I don't know why that was, and the two guys from 1 Battalion were never recovered. So I don't know whether the Vietnamese buried them or whatever unit

24:00 was responsible or whether they just left them. The battalion felt pretty bad about leaving these two guys and not recovering their bodies, in fact it caused a big problem with the battalion with morale because we felt we should have went back in there and given the enemy a bloody nose. In turn, we appeared to have left these two guys hanging in the trees and we pulled out and left them, never went back for them.

24:30 To me as a private soldier that was a big issue, but obviously I wasn't party to the big picture, there might have been other military commitments somewhere else and I think that still sticks in a lot of guys craw to this day.

25:00 **How does that affect morale?**

Well, at the time, it had a big effect on the morale of the battalion, we felt that we were running away

and leaving a couple of our guys still out on the battlefield, we should have got them back the next day. Or we should have gone in there with more firepower or whatever. And I remember the guys in the battalion were pretty pissed

25:30 about it, but I can't remember the reason the CO gave for not coming back the next day. And I am sure there was some reason but to leave a dead comrade is just, you try not to do, it is something you don't do. And we couldn't figure out. So it did knock the battalion around for a while and then because we were under the command of the

26:00 Americans we really had to do what the American commander wanted us to do. For them a couple of bodies was not a big issue, the Americans. To us it was a big issue, but of course I was only a private so my sphere of influence if you like was pretty small.

What were you doing with the dead when you did manage to retrieve them? Did you have to bury them there?

26:30 If it was a VC, we would bury them as close to possible to where we were operating at the time. We would dig a hole, shallow shell scrape or something for them, cover them over. It was pretty rudimentary. If it was our guys, well then obviously we would call in the Dustoff [Medical Evacuation (codeword)] helicopters and take them up to the helicopter pad

27:00 and lay them out and the medics would take them from there. Load them onto the helicopters and take them away.

Would they come home?

Yeah. A couple of our guys were buried at Terendak [large former British military base near Malacca, housed 28th Commonwealth Brigade until about 1970] in Malaysia for some reason, I don't know why, but some didn't come back. Some didn't come back to Australia, some of the bodies got buried in the nearest Commonwealth cemetery, so one got buried in Terendak somewhere. But most of them came home.

27:30 **What was the most stand-out memory for you in terms of engagement in that first tour?**

Probably the regimental attack on the engineers. As I said, we had ringside seats but we were told not to fire, not to engage or draw attention to ourselves.

28:00 And that was just the awesome firepower that was going on probably a hundred metres for us and we had front row seats. Although we weren't involved in the conflict directly that night, we couldn't believe that these guys had jogged all of this way, put in a regimental attack and then jogged home the next morning.

28:30 A lot of the comrades who were dead and wounded left blood trials everywhere, it was a huge battle that started at two o'clock, we copped a few mortar shells here and there but nothing outstanding, I don't think they were directed at us anyway. The order came that we weren't to fire at any of these guys otherwise we may draw the main attack onto us so it was a bit cagey on our part I guess.

29:00 **How did that feel for you?**

I think at that stage we were well into our tour so I felt sorry for the Americans because they were copping the full frontal assault but I felt reasonably relaxed because I was in my four foot six weapon pit, well camouflaged, relatively protected. So I felt, well it is better them than us. Probably a bit mercenary

29:30 to say that, but I was glad that we weren't taking the brunt of the attack and they were. That's about all I felt and I just kept my head down and made sure I didn't take anything between the eyes.

Did the VC recover any of their dead or?

The VC, about four o'clock, we could hear the ox carts carting away all of the bodies because they were organised to take all of their dead and wounded off the battlefield

30:00 and they were very good at that, and we could hear, about four o'clock in the morning the battle died down and then we could hear the squeak of ox cart wheels and we couldn't work out what it was initially and then we worked out what they were doing; they were loading all of their dead and wounded onto the ox carts, and then taking them away through the jungle to wherever their regimental aid posts were or hospitals.

30:30 But they were pretty well organised in that respect and that's a pretty big logistic exercise when you think about it. And they only had a small timeframe to do it in, between four and six in the morning when the sun came up, otherwise they were vulnerable seen out in daylight. So they did it all in the dark. And the only guy we found was the one I mentioned earlier, the one wounded in the stomach he was hiding in a bush, and he was the only, there

31:00 was lots of blood trails, fresh blood, lots of bits and pieces and things but he was the only one we found and he was wounded in the stomach, so they did a pretty good job of cleaning up the battlefield and they did that throughout the whole war. Any of the big battles, they tended to come back and pick up

their dead and wounded.

And they wouldn't be fired upon at that point?

I wouldn't say that.

31:30 If they had been seen as military combatants, they would have been fired upon. But I don't think we ever found or saw one of their ox carts. Some of the guys may have down the track but I certainly didn't.

How would you have told the difference? I mean the battle dies down at four and then there are guys all over the battlefield picking up people, you probably cant see them but you must be able to hear some things, how

32:00 **are people knowing whether or not they are enemy?**

Well I guess it is a bit of common sense. If the guys at the end of the battle and is threatening, in other words he has got a weapon and its pointed at you, well, you shoot him. If the guy is running an ox cart full of dead guys or wounded people and he is not

32:30 threatening and unarmed, well then, you think twice about it. He is cleaning up his, same as us. Although I know a couple of our medics were killed tending our wounded, the VC made no distinction in shooting medics and soldiers, there was no distinction on their part. But I would be hesitant to fire on someone collecting bodies, especially if he is in a non-threatening position.

33:00 But it never came to that. My second tour was slightly different. But with the tour with 1 Battalion, after the big battle there wasn't too many ox carts found but we knew that they were using them to take away their dead and wounded.

Did you ever have to participate in the cleaning up after a battle?

Not really, because we had other jobs as infantry to do,

33:30 the cleaning up was done by, I guess other people I suppose, I don't know. Medics [medical assistants] maybe or stretcher-bearers, I don't know. Our job as infantry was to get on with the fight and just keep going, whatever the task was for that day. So I didn't participate in any of that. I mean you helped lift a wounded guy into a helicopter, anything like that, but

34:00 that might be a spur of the moment thing. It wasn't our job to clean up the battle so to speak.

Were you in the first tour involved in any of these rice paddy sort of fights or patrols?

I think one side of War Zone D there was quite a few rice paddies that we patrolled in and around. From my recollection, we never stayed in them long because we were very vulnerable

34:30 to sniper fire and mortar fire and underwater booby traps, trip wires underwater and that sort of thing. So my recollection is that if we had to patrol anywhere near a rice paddy or anything like that, we would do it reasonably quickly. And the ground could be cleared quickly too, because it was open, where the jungle took a long time to clear so

35:00 if we had to move through a rice paddy we did so gingerly and quickly. And they were bloody hot and smelly places.

How do you move through a rice paddy?

Well, occasionally you might just go straight through the rice paddy if you're designated a specific task to do, you might have to move straight through the middle of it. You generally up to about calf deep in water and mud and stuff.

35:30 They were considered dangerous places by most of us but because they were out in the open so you were very vulnerable. The Plain of Reeds that was different, that wasn't rice paddies, that was chest high water and you spent a long time in and around the water and we were down there on operations trying to hustle the VC out of the area.

36:00 **This was your first tour?**

And the Plain of Reeds was not rice paddies but that was more swamp, and it was bloody hard work working in and around that stuff because it is very difficult to work in water.

Can you tell us about that? I mean where were you putting your gear at this point, what are you meant to be doing at this point?

The idea was to flush out, I think the order was to flush out VC elements on the

36:30 Plain of Reeds and we went down there on a helicopter flight and I don't think, first time we had ever come across it and suddenly we were working in, well there were dry areas, but most of it was under water. And it was very difficult because the VC had underwater tunnels and entrances in the riverbanks and so on, so it was not an easy job to flush them out and in fact I don't think we had

37:00 too many big contacts down there, but just the sheer physics in working in knee-deep water or chest height water is just bloody hard work and I don't think we achieved a lot to be honest.

How long were you standing in that kind of water for?

Well from what I can remember, the Plain of Reeds was mostly all swamp so you would probably be

37:30 there most of the day in some sort of water and then you would probably harbour up for the night on some sort of dry patch but you just couldn't, in an operational sense, you just couldn't pick where you wanted to spend the night. And if you were out on a standing patrol on an ambush for that night you would be in the water all of the time.

38:00 It was bloody uncomfortable. There were leeches and mosquitoes and water snakes and Christ knows what else there. So it is just not a pleasant environment to work in unless you are a frog.

Did any of the guys get sick?

As a direct result of working in the water, there were skin complaints and rashes and skin falling off, rotting and stuff like that. But that's general of any jungle tropical environment.

38:30 I wasn't in the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] at the time so I couldn't say whether the guys got sick from working in the water, but I imagine there would be, there is things like ringworm and hookworm they all like, they're all waterborne diseases. And of course, you have got other diseases, which are more, what's the

39:00 word I am looking for, exotic waterborne diseases. So it just comes from the territory.

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about that first tour before we move on?

No not really, I think the twelve months went pretty quick because of the number of operations

39:30 we did. We did quite a few, spent a lot of time out in the bush and I think the time went quick and I think we were effective as a unit against the enemy. And I think every one of us that came home thought we did a pretty good job given the tools and resources and screw-ups that happened. So and I think it stood me in good stead for the next tour.

40:00 **Okay we'll end there.**

Tape 6

00:30 **So Kerry that first tour, did you think at the time that you were a much different man when you arrived than when you had finished that tour and if so what had changed?**

No I

01:00 didn't think I was any different. I think I thought I was a bit more experienced in infantry work and jungle warfare and sussing out [detecting] the enemy. I appeared to be, or may have in other peoples eyes. Well I was glad to get through the twelve months

01:30 without getting brassed [shot], and I was also glad that we did our tour was over and we did a good job. That was the general feeling of the battalion. I may have been different in some way but I didn't know it.

So you're saying you had a sense of pride in that you felt that you knew what you were doing and had achieved what you set out to?

Yeah. And you have to remember we were still obliged under

02:00 SEATO, South East Asian Treaty Organisation, to look after South East nations and democracy and so on. So we felt that we had done the right thing and we didn't see much of a problem. Obviously there was a problem with the attitudes of people back home, and so on, which seemed to develop more and more as Vietnam went on.

02:30 I don't think I noticed anything major.

So you weren't jumping at loud noises?

Well I might have done a little bit of that to start with and been a bit more circumspect around loud noises and that. I don't think I was that much different after the first tour because I was also not a front line rifleman or a forward scout.

03:00 So that had a bit to do with it too, I wasn't up the sharp end all of the time.

It sounded pretty sharp to me.

Well the sharp end could be ten feet away but it wasn't my job, I was a signalman.

You said that when you were in training there wasn't a great sense of camaraderie because things were moving quickly. But in that 1 RAR did you develop a sense of camaraderie having spent all of that time together?

03:30 Yeah I think so. I still keep in touch with some of the guys, not all of them, even to this day. We used to live together in tents and drink together and go on leave together and all of those things. So yeah, we had a sense of purpose when we came home, a sense of camaraderie that we had been through operational service for a year

04:00 in Vietnam and came out the other end reasonably well.

And what was that like coming home at that stage?

Well I was pretty pumped [proud], we thought we had done a good job. We marched through Sydney on a tickertape welcome was marred by one of the protestors who threw red paint over the CO and some of the other soldiers. We weren't very happy about that as soldiers but we

04:30 couldn't do much about it anyway. No, I was proud to march through Sydney and come home to Adelaide and I met my brother and Mum and sister at the airport. I think they were all pretty pleased that I was home safely. Then I think we had a month's leave or something.

05:00 I didn't catch up with any of the guys, because most of the guys from 1 Battalion were from Sydney, not many from Adelaide so I sort of spent the month here, just doing things around the house, looking forward, after a few weeks looking forward to getting back to the battalion and some more soldiering.

05:30 And then I think at some stage I got a letter from my mate in Perth, Norm Bainbridge. And he said, "Why don't you apply for selection for SAS?" So when I got back to Sydney, I was the CO signaller and as a battalion we were regrouping and retraining and I put in an application to do the psych course [psychological test] and the CO helped me with that

06:00 and subsequently I became selected to do the cadre course and went across to Perth.

Just going back, you were a signaller in your first tour and you said you were up with all of the information, were there things that you heard that you wished you hadn't heard?

Probably on one occasion, I think

06:30 it was Hobo Woods again, and for some reason the landing zone was changed in mid air when we were flying. One of the LZs [Landing Zones] was occupied by VC so the plan was to go to another LZ and land the battalion there and fan out from there. And we had been given a code for a pre-arranged artillery barrage on the

07:00 other LZ, which we weren't going to use. But on the way out in flight because of the enemy activity on the first LZ, the battalion flew into the second LZ, which had the pre-arranged artillery. I think the artillery was to come in at midday or something. And we landed on this thing and Pioneer Platoon we fanned out to one side and we were protecting one

07:30 side of the LZ and then I heard this bloody code come over the radio. And I thought, "Something's wrong here", and it was the regimental fire mission, a regimental fire mission is three batteries, so a lot of guns. I think there is three guns to a troop, nine guns to a battery whatever, and these 105s came screaming in, 105 howitzers [105 millimetre field artillery].

08:00 So I guess I heard that on the radio and then I got on the radio because we were on the LZ, someone had forgotten to cancel the fire mission. So the artillery came right through the whole battalion, the elements of the battalion that had landed, including our platoon. And it is some pretty frightening sort of shit that comes down on top of you.

08:30 Luckily I don't think any of our guys got hurt, but the artillery was just horrifying.

How did you avoid it? You wouldn't have had time to?

Couldn't.

Couldn't? Just ran for cover?

Just laid flat on the ground and hope that one wasn't going to hit you on the head that's all.

What do you think at times like that, what on earth is going through your mind?

Just hoping that it wasn't going to hit.

09:00 That was probably the worst thing on the radio. Probably the best thing I heard on the radio was when we did our last operation and we handed the radio set in, that we were going to the LZ to fly out from our last operation so. The radio was good in a sense that you heard about everything going on. That was the worst. Other things on the radio were of course casualties being taken out, Dustoffs being called

and enemy activity.

09:30 So it had its blessings and so on. And of course the first thing the platoon commander or company commander calls for is the radio, so no matter what time of the day or night it is, you have got to be ready to go. So it is a tough job in its own way, carrying extra weight. But it has some rewards. But it can be bloody dangerous, I mean with a big aerial sticking up on your back.

10:00 The VC would normally look for a radio operator to try and put it out of action, you had to be careful where you stood and where you went.

Did you have a bit of extra coverage from the other soldiers because you were carrying the radio?

No, not that I was aware of, because the other guys were all carrying extra ammunition or explosives

10:30 or shovels. Because Assault Pioneer Platoon we do a lot of jobs in terms of blowing up things and digging command posts or putting up bridges, building small bridge, dismantling bridges, blowing up huts or bunkers. So the other guys carried all of their own, I mean I had the radio, which was heavy, but the other guys had other packs with equally heavy gear besides the radio.

11:00 So I guess you just had to put up with it and carry it.

Finally before we leave this, Kerry, were you privy to classified information?

Not really ,as I said earlier, at that level my sphere of influence was pretty small.

11:30 Private radio operator or signalman. Occasionally you might get a classified message but it really didn't mean a lot to me or the other guys concerned. We would send the odd message in code if it was a Locstat [location statement], where we were, we wouldn't broadcast that over the radio in plain English, we would use codes.

12:00 We had different codes for different things, but it was a fairly rudimentary radio procedure. The important thing was to make sure we had radio communication when we needed artillery support or air support or medical evacuations, if we needed to talk to the CO to do something or get some mortars. At that level there was nothing classified.

Were you in a position where you could be in radio communication with someone at the sharp end?

Oh yes,

12:30 I would be, if we were operating with A Company then I would be on A Company's frequency so I would be listening to the rifle platoons of A Company or whatever it might be. And they might call for assistance from Pioneers to blow up a bunker or help them out with digging a weapons pit or something like that.

13:00 But when the contact started, you keep your radio traffic to a minimum so that you keep the airwaves free for blokes that need to call for backup. And if you have got too many people gathered on the radio, well, it jams the radio. It might be vital that that information get through in the next ten seconds. So there were certain rules and procedures we did to minimise

13:30 traffic on the radio. And of course the VC also had direction finders, direction-finding equipment, as did we. So they could pinpoint your position by direction-finding equipment and they might lob a few mortar rounds on you or something like that if they found out. So although you listen to the radio, you tend to keep off the airwaves as much as you possibly can.

Did they require a certain amount of time for you to be on the radio to pinpoint you?

14:00 Yeah. The important thing was if they got your frequency then their locators could tune in, and once they knew a company was on a certain VHF frequency, well, they made a note of that and they could scan it every few hours, and then when there was traffic on the air they could just, it might take them a while to locate you, I don't think they had that many locating

14:30 stations but you never know. There were some in Laos, Cambodia, over the border. You don't know what effect that could have on an attack coming. I mean we used to listen to their guys, our counter-intelligence would listen to the enemy's frequencies and we would do the same to them so we would have to assume they would do the same to us.

Well code-breaking was a big thing in World War II?

15:00 **Were your codes very elaborate?**

Well at the platoon level they were pretty basic. At the battalion level and brigade level they were more elaborate. I had no part in those. Platoon level we were pretty straightforward in our codes, there was nothing elaborate about our codes. The important thing at that level was I don't think it had a big effect

15:30 on the bearing of the contact or the battle for either side because things were happening so quick at

that level. But at brigade level or battalion level, there might be information passing regarding an operation coming up next month, so it was inclined to be more elaborate at that level because you are talking about the future. Whereas at platoon level radios I am talking now because we are in contact with the enemy and we need help, or we need Dustoff or resupply

16:00 or whatever, it is more of an immediate effect. So the further back you go the more elaborate the codes are.

In that twelve months of tour you saw, well it sounds to me like you saw, a lot of dreadful and difficult things, and Australians are famous for throwing humour into difficult circumstances, and so I wonder,

16:30 **there must have been good times in those twelve months as well? Can you recall any of those? When you had a laugh?**

Because I didn't drink in my early stages of my career in the army, the guys would all jump on the trucks and go to Saigon for the day and come back and I used to take great delight in watching them when they came back, because they would be drunk, falling

17:00 about the place making a nuisance of themselves. So there was humour there. There is no one thing that stands out. There is one thing, it is pretty brutal, it is humour. On Christmas Day I think, we were all having a drink at Bien Hoa airbase and an A3 Sky Raider came flying in and it was

17:30 full of holes and it had smoke trailing out of the back. And there was an American guy flying it. And the planes used to come in and do one parallel to the runway and do a big circuit and land, and they would come in at about a thousand feet. And we heard this plane come in from a mission, he had obviously been shot up and the plane was coughing and spluttering and we saw him come in and he was a bit wobbly. And we all come out of the boozer, and

18:00 we're saying, "Get out of the plane, it is on fire!" And we were sort of willing this guy to get out of the plane and next thing the canopy slid back and he stood on the wing and we're all saying, "Jump, the plane is going to crash and burn." And so he jumped and we all cheered and the parachute didn't open. So it wasn't very nice, but I guess we were all absolutely stunned,

18:30 but the cheering and the laughing, saying, "Jump, go for it!" and then all of a sudden it just turned to shit, so. I guess it's a bit of a funny humour if you like, but it is a not very nice humour.

Gallows humour.

Gallows humour, yeah. That's what happened anyway and that sticks in my mind because that was such a powerful melodrama if you like. But a lot of the guys in the Pioneer Platoon we had

19:00 pretty good sense of humour under the worst circumstances. I can't remember too many things that stood out. I mean the characters of the guys I served with stood out more, because you knew that Billy Clifton was a big sure-footed corporal and he was going to walk onto something, or tread on something, because he was such a big guy,

19:30 but he was a funny guy. You had all different types of guys throughout the platoon. You had guys who drank to excess, you had guys who were funny to excess, blokes who were introverted, extroverted and all of the rest. You always had one clown in a platoon, which goes for a school football team or anything; there is always one or two guys that stand out.

What were you?

I don't think I was anything.

20:00 I mean I was just a fairly average 'baggy arse' [soldier] in those days.

Don't sound average to me.

You know what a baggy arse is, don't you?

Go on.

Well it is a nickname for a private soldier and the reason they call it baggy arse is because the jungle greens that they issued you with were so baggy in the arse they never fitted properly and that's where the terminology comes from.

20:30 **And you reckon that's all that you amounted to, a baggy arse? So you went through all of that for twelve months and you get back to Australia for a month and you're itching to get back into it again?**

Well I guess it is, a man has got to be a bit silly, but I figure if I was going back to Vietnam, and there was a good chance we were all going to do a few years there, well I wanted to go

21:00 with the best professional unit that there was available in the army at the time. As I said, a couple of my friends wrote to me and said, "This is a good unit, professional, a different type of work." And I wanted to - if I was going to go back and put my neck on the line again - I wanted to go with a good unit of good

professional soldiers. I was still thinking as a professional soldier at that stage.

21:30 I put in an application, got through the psych test and I was selected to do the cadre course down in southwest Western Australia down near Collie. We spent a fair bit of time down in the bush down there. The cadre course for the SAS is different, it is more physical and mental. Again, it is mentally tough and physically tough.

22:00 What I found different from infantry work was that in an infantry section as a private you don't have any input on what's happening around you, apart from your immediate vicinity, where in the SAS they call for your input, they want your opinion. Even though you're a private or a trooper, they still respect your opinion on doing an operation, how were you going to do it? What weapons do we need? What are we going to do?

22:30 So I found that different and I found that to be very good actually, because you felt involved in the decision making at that level.

That would have had wider implications, to make sure the SAS worked together as a tight unit, would that have been a part of that?

Yeah if the patrol knows what its got

23:00 to do and everyone is aware of everyone else's capabilities and weaknesses, the SAS is very good at bringing that out and making sure that everyone has some input into how something is going to be done. And the nature of the SAS is that it does a lot of specialist roles and they are not straight-up-front infantry work. For instance, you might have a

23:30 patrol doing a job, special recce patrol, therefore you want input from your members how you're going to do it, which way you approach the target, what's your escape route, what's your communication plan? Do you take sketches, photos, do this or that? So I found suddenly I was getting involved in the process of how we were going

24:00 to do things, whereas for my first tour I wasn't even involved in anything apart from handing the handset over to the platoon commander or sergeant and passing on messages and so on. So it was a whole new ball game in terms of professional soldiering.

And probably pushed you to a whole new level of excellence?

Yeah. The physical side, I kept myself physically fit anyway, some guys found it hard because they weren't physically fit anyway.

24:30 I already had a tour under my belt whereas a lot of guys on the course, I think I was the only one on the course that had been to Vietnam at that stage. So I was well ahead of the game. And the mental side I didn't find too tough. Some of the training was specialist training and tough, but I got through it.

25:00 **What were the mental requirements, what kind of character was the SAS looking for?**

Well I don't know what the standard requirement is, only the psych [psychology] doctors know that. I think they wanted a guy that was physically fit, mentally tough and perhaps you could use the phrase, think on your feet. Not afraid of criticism.

25:30 The unit back then was big on self-criticism - critiques everything it does - and that's a good thing. And infantry skills were at another level. For instance, you had to be a first class shot in all infantry weapons. I specialised in firing weapons, small arms. And languages,

26:00 I ended up doing a Vietnamese language before I went back, colloquial language, just enough to get by. So they had a lot of other skills developed. Forward scouts skills were developed further in the west [Western Australia] than in the infantry platoons. Training is different in as much as unconventional training but it is not written down in the safety rule

26:30 books and what have you. A bit scary sometimes.

When you say unconventional training, can you expand a bit on that?

Well I guess thirty-year rule doesn't apply to me, so, some of our training, we would draw a circle maybe six feet circumference and three or four of us would stand in the circle

27:00 and the instructors would fire weapons around our feet, and we would have to identify the type of weapon and which direction it was coming from. Not hard if you can see the rounds [bullets], the muzzle at the time. And also getting us used to rounds flying around close by, because when a round comes close it breaks the sound barrier and it makes a totally different

27:30 noise to what you see on the movies so.

Well I don't know what it sounds like?

Well, if a round is coming close to you it goes 'zip, crack,' it makes two sounds, one is breaking the sound barrier. And it sets up this funny, sounds like angry bees or hornets, so they make quite a

different sound. If a round has been fired

28:00 twenty feet away you won't hear the 'zip, crack,' you just hear the round impact or you might hear it ricochet, but if a round comes close then you know the round is close because of the sound it makes and it is like a 'zip, crack' as it goes past. That's, so you learn, that was one of our training methods, to fire all different kinds of Russian weapons,

28:30 Chinese weapons, captured weapons close to us. Another training we did, which I thought was very good training, was to sneak up on kangaroos in the bush without them being aware of us which we did successfully plenty of times. It taught you to move quietly through the scrub.

Did you have indigenous people teaching you that?

No.

29:00 We had a couple of aboriginal guys in the squadron when we went away and we had a couple of Thursday Islanders in the platoon, Pioneer Platoon. They weren't trackers or anything like that. I don't know where it came from but one of the instructors developed the method and they still use it today and it was a good method in the jungle of moving quietly. Because our role in the jungle the first six months

29:30 of our tour was just to recce everything, get a layout of the province and then go back later and cause a bit of havoc, and we needed to get in quietly and out quietly, so practicing on kangaroos was ideal.

So what was the method that you could get up behind a kangaroo without them knowing?

Well first move very slowly and quietly and just put your foot down where it didn't crack on any leaves or branches.

30:00 Secondly, stay down wind of them a little bit. And that was essentially about it. Move slowly, very slowly so they didn't - kangaroos during the hot weather sleep, they have a bit of a siesta in the middle of the day so they're half dozy, so you can spot them having a lie down and you sneak up on them. Of course when they get a fright well they can

30:30 take off at a hundred mile an hour or sometimes they used to stand up and have a go at you. But it was good training and it was different. The training in New Guinea was different. That was very tough training up there. In fact, we were training up in the Owen Stanleys where they fought in the Second World War, we were using that as training ground so that also helped us in Vietnam.

Helped you in what sense?

31:00 Again just to toughen us up and expect tough terrain but again when we went into Phuoc Tuy Province most of it was flat so we figured it was fairly easy terrain but some of the jungle in Vietnam was terrible stuff to get through . Again it was to toughen us up mentally and physically for jungle warfare and it was a big navigation exercise and team-building exercise as well.

31:30 Some of the other exercises we did in Western Australia were to get into a prison and get out again without being detected, and map out an area that may be a target later or something like that. And these were just basic infantry skills to get in and out quietly so that no one knows you are there. Because a recce is no good if you are spotted, you're compromised.

32:00 The idea is to get in and out so the enemy doesn't know you have been there, so when you come back you can surprise them.

So while you were training with the SAS with the idea of being with a professional group and therefore in a sense after, at the same time the missions you were expected to perform would be more dangerous, putting yourself more in the line of fire?

32:30 That's right, I guess at this stage I am still fairly young. Testosterone has kicked in and stayed in. You know you're a professional soldier and the more hairy [dangerous] the mission the better. In fact the 2 Squadron's [2 SAS Squadron] attitude was exactly that. The guys wanted to get up to Vietnam and mix it, and that's what we did.

33:00 Yeah. But at that stage in my life and military career I was very much gung ho, "Lets get up there and win the war! Lets stitch it up properly."

Were you getting a little bit addicted to the adrenalin rush as well?

May well have been. You know it was, it turned out to be a lot of adrenalin,

33:30 but a lot of adrenalin for a sustained period of time is no good for you. I guess there was some of that. Parachuting, I didn't like parachuting at all. I was terrified of that but you had to do it to qualify. So we sort of sharpened up basic infantry skills that were required at the time for that particular war. So you needed to be an accurate shot, needed to identify all sorts of weapons and be able to use them,

34:00 needed to be able to be good trackers, good recce work followed up by ambushing and so on.

It must have been, well I imagine it is quite an elite group and to firstly be accepted and then

to get through the training, there is a sense of great achievement there. Did you feel a sense of pride to be a part of that?

Yes there was a great sense of pride for me and a couple of other guys that I went

34:30 through with, because we figured that that was the toughest unit to get into, and to achieve that was terrific. And then subsequently the patrol that I went away with, we came home and our patrol worked very well for twelve months and we did a lot of what I consider good professional soldiering up there.

35:00 **Was there a different set of ethics that went along with being in the SAS?**

No, I don't think so, it was certainly a higher standard of training and operations, but the ethics I don't think they were much different in my opinion.

I am going to put it a different way. Was there a different value set on human life?

35:30 No, I don't think so. In terms of operations we were much more careful, however if it came to a crunch we were heavily armed and we would fight like a thrashing machine so, and that was because we were only small numbers.

36:00 Unlike the battalion you would go out as eight hundred men in a battalion operation, the SAS patrol would go out as four. And we would be a long way from home. So you had to have a different set of criteria to work with. But if all of that turned to shit, well then, you know you're fighting for your life and there is only four of you. You really had to be on the ball, I guess

36:30 the criteria was different but it is still, 1 Battalion was a regular battalion that I went away with, 2 Squadron was an SAS squadron, so the ethics were in both but perhaps in different proportions if that makes sense.

Trust would be a huge thing within the four-man team?

Yeah, I think mainly to trust the guys,

37:00 that he was going to cover your rear or I was covering his rear. For instance, our operational patrol would move through the jungle very slowly if we were on a recce patrol. I would be maybe three or four metres in front of the patrol commander, or maybe five metres tops. In other words, I would be in grabbing distance so if I got shot he could just grab me and drag me back. And then we would have the signaller would be behind the patrol commander

37:30 and he might be slightly further back. And then tail-end Charlie would be at the back, five metres behind the signaller. And the reason that we split that way was that it was easy to retrieve, forward scout was the guy that was going to wear it first. So the deal was that if I got brassed then I would fall within grabbing distance of the patrol commander.

38:00 **And did you choose to be forward scout?**

Yeah, I thought, "Well, I had a year of carrying a radio" and I thought, "Well, if I am forward scout, I don't have to carry the bloody radio." The other thing with a forward scout was that you were at the sharp end and that's where I wanted to be.

Think there was some deal with the devil?

I think I did.

38:30 **We'll leave it there.**

Tape 7

00:30 **Something that's interested me about your training that I hadn't ever heard about before was interrogation training, could you tell us about that?**

We did some training at

01:00 Middle Head in Sydney and the idea was to give you a bit of a taste of what it would be like to be caught by the enemy. And the terminology for it was, it escapes me at the moment [it is the Code of Conduct course], but that was run by the intelligence corps at Middle Head. And we were put through a course, I think a forty-eight hour period where we were treated as prisoners,

01:30 slapped around the head and denied sleep and food and water and so on. And the idea was to give us a bit of a taste of what we might expect if we got caught. Thankfully we never got caught but the training for that code of conduct course, that's what it was called. And it was fairly intense and thankfully I never had to use it.

02:00 And I think it was just to give you a taste of what might happen: to be without sleep for forty-eight hours, endure a bit of pain and lack of food and water or so on. That's about all it was. I don't know whether there is any more courses you can do it on that sort of thing. You learn it as you go along if you get caught. Thankfully none of our guys ever got caught

02:30 so we didn't need to use it or put it to good use.

Did they tell you what information you were and weren't allowed to give to the enemy in case of capture?

Well, the general rule was rank, serial number, unit, or just name, rank, serial number. I would have given them anything they wanted if the pain was bad enough so, you know, we didn't have to so.

03:00 The general rule of thumb I think was just rank, name, serial number.

Did they do any psychological side of…?

Well, just denied sleep is really tough. A bit of water treatment or wet towel treatment, bright lights, loud noise, just so that you don't sleep. And after you have gone without sleep for a long time it is really hard to focus on anything, so

03:30 they just keep you awake. Eventually there is not much need for physical torture. The Orientals we knew were pretty big on some physical torture.

Were you warned about the kinds of torture?

Yeah, at the beginning of the course they said, "Look this is, although it is only a short course, Code of Conduct course.

04:00 It was run by the people at Middle Head, so we did have a little bit of warning about it, but it was just the experience of going through the course and I found the toughest thing was without sleep, your mind goes mad.

What was it like

04:30 **when you finished this course and you got your sandy beret? Can you remember that day?**

Yeah, we had a parade over in Perth and the berets were handed out to those that qualified and I think still the same case today. I don't know the numbers on our course were maybe fifty guys on the course and I think probably less than half passed,

05:00 and I think probably still the same today, probably still a high standard of selection. Not everyone fits the bill and the SAS don't always want everybody. So we were building up a squadron to go to Vietnam so I guess they were looking for, I think they were running two or three cadre courses a year to

05:30 build up the numbers and, if I remember correctly, there wasn't that many that passed, maybe ten or fifteen that passed the course out of fifty. So its not everyone's cup of tea, the training or the type of work, and the SAS looked for a particular type of person; if you don't fit the bill, well, you get the flick [removed from course]. And at any stage you knew you had failed

06:00 when your gear was packed on your bed and a plane ticket was on the, or train ticket, on top of your pack. That meant that you were no longer required. So you might come in off a five-kilometre run or a ten-kilometre run or something and there is your gear packed on the end of your bed with a train ticket. Most of the time no reason was given, you just didn't fit in. That could

06:30 happen at any time in the cadre course when we were training. Once the cadre course was completed then we did a parachute course, which was at Williamstown, New South Wales. Then I went down to Healesville for three months in Victoria, medical aid course, and then I did twelve weeks language course, and then came back to the unit and

07:00 proceeded to specialise in weapons and ambushing and tracking, general infantry skills that we needed at that level. So the training was pretty intense for another year between tours. It was very intense because the courses that were available over in the SAS, you could put your name down for any course

07:30 associated with military. There was always something to do and it was interesting work from that point of view. In the battalion, you very rarely got to do a course unless you were selected for something, simply the numbers and the vacancies didn't exist in the battalions, whereas in the SAS the list of courses is tremendous and you can learn a lot of skills: language skills, weapons,

08:00 unarmed combat, ambushing, tracking, explosives, patrol commanders courses, sniper courses; the whole lot were available and it was something I wasn't used to in the battalion, you didn't get that range of courses.

So the day that's that all over and you do pass?

08:30 Well, I felt very privileged to get the sandy beret, we thought we had arrived in pretty good shape in a good unit. And still do today. I still stay in touch with a few of the guys I served with. And I have got a

lot of long-term friends over there. A lot of the work is very intense and that draws you close to these guys. Some guys you strike up relations that you are friends with

09:00 forever, some guys you don't bother with. That goes for all types of walks of life. So we were pretty pleased to get our beret and belong to what we knew was a pretty good unit. History speaks for itself on the unit now.

Were you put in your groups of four before you left?

No. The patrol commanders in the troops were generally sergeants

09:30 and they would select who they wanted for their patrols from new recruits, such as myself. And they would pick and choose who they wanted in the patrol, and then you would fit in with that patrol and train with that patrol and then if that didn't work, well, if personalities clashed or you didn't fit in for any reason then they

10:00 might move you to another patrol or troop, which happened quite a lot. Our patrol started off in training before Vietnam, we actually started with another guy and he didn't make the cut so to speak. And so we ended up with the four. Our patrol was pretty steady from the time we went into 2 Squadron,

10:30 Mick Honinger, Ramsay, myself, and Mick Ruffin.

So you have gone through a year of intensive training, you have all of these new skills from language and interrogation and a higher level of excellence in weaponry and so on. You're going back to Vietnam. What are your feelings?

11:00 **How are you getting there? And what was going through your head at the time?**

We were keen to get overseas, I remember the squadron was keen to get overseas and get stuck into the jobs it was going to be allocated. I remember all of the guys were very keen, they were all professional soldiers and of a very high standard.

11:30 I went up with 2 Squadron with the advance party. We flew out from Perth in the C130 up to Butterworth Air Base [Malaysia] and from there we transferred into a civilian aircraft, I could be wrong there, but we flew into Tan Son Nhut airport [Saigon international airport] and from there we went to Nui Dat where the task force [1 ATF] was based out of Phuoc Tuy Province,

12:00 and that was southeast of Saigon. The advance party was maybe twenty people, headquarters and a few other guys, and I was part of the advance party for our troop, G Troop. And as soon as we got acclimatised we were up there and within about a week or so I went out on a

12:30 patrol with the squadron we were taking over from. And because I was going to be forward scout, I went out as forward scout to start with. It was a relatively safe patrol, in the TAOR, probably only five of six clicks [kilometres] out from Nui Dat. So it was a bit of settling in period there. On the whole, the squadron was keen to do well

13:00 and get in and mix it, but we didn't realise what was coming up. In 1968 was the Tet Offensive, you know, things got very intense.

Were any of the guys in the SAS national servicemen?

National servicemen could apply to join the SAS but they had to go through the same selection process and cadre and so on, but they also had to sign on as regular soldiers

13:30 because by the time they had spent a year training they were ready for discharge so we had a smattering of national servicemen who signed on to go onto SAS. So yes and no - they could be selected but only if they were prepared to sign on for a minimum of three years.

In which case they were no longer national servicemen, they were…?

Correct.

Did that affect your choice at all?

14:00 Not really. Once they had signed to be regular soldiers they were as good as anybody else. Once they passed the selection course and cadre course, they were as good as anybody else.

I mean did it affect your choice of the SAS as somewhere you wanted to be?

No. We were pretty happy with it and we knew what the criteria were for national servicemen to get in.

14:30 But my attitude towards national servicemen was one of, if they don't want to be there we don't really need them, however all national servicemen had a choice of going to Vietnam despite what the media says, you were called up, but you had a choice for whether you went to Vietnam or not. You could do your national service at Woodside if you so desired. No one was forced to go to Vietnam.

15:00 But a lot of the national servicemen took the attitude, "Well, I am here, I may as well go" and some of

them turned out to be very good soldiers. I would rather be fighting alongside a guy that I know has got his heart and soul in it than someone who I know has got three months to go and might not want to put his neck out, so to speak.

Did you find a high level of professionalism in the national servicemen?

15:30 Oh yeah, well the first tour there was no national servicemen in 1 Battalion, they were all regulars, and then the national service started to kick in after 1 Battalion came home and that's when they started to build up the other battalions. But the guys that were national servicemen that went on to become [SAS] were all pretty good soldiers,

16:00 otherwise they wouldn't have got through the selection course, and their attitude was they are professional now. "We're here to do a job, lets do it."

So what is it like to be back in Vietnam? Are you getting a sense of 'here we go again'?

No the sense was, in fact, I was more comfortable to be back there than back in Australia because of the policies antics going on,

16:30 the demonstrations, I was glad to be out of the country. To get to Phuoc Tuy Province and Nui Dat in particular, it was a relief in one way and trepidation in another. Phuoc Tuy Province hadn't been occupied by the Australians very long and there still had to be a lot of work done to pacify the province and we had a lot of

17:00 hard work ahead of us. And I think every one of us was keen to get stuck into it and get the job done with the minimum of fuss.

Can you tell us about your first memorable patrol?

The first one was when I was on the advance party; I went out with a patrol as a forward scout

17:30 and I was elected, the other guys were all coming home so they didn't want to go up the sharp end to speak of. So I was elected for that, which I duly did. And I think we had been out in the jungle for a while, four or five days, and this chap come walking through the jungle and he was in the free fire zone, which means there was a big free fire zone around Nui Dat base and anyone

18:00 who was in that could be shot on sight. This bloke was inside that and I saw him coming down the track and I gave the signal for the enemy and I crouched down behind a bush. And he came walking towards me and I had my weapon ready and I could see he was carrying a sickle, and he was an older guy, had a beard and he had a whitish-grey top on. And he didn't see me and he was non-threatening,

18:30 he didn't have a weapon and he had this big sickle, he must be out cutting wood or something. So he walked right up to me and he didn't know I was there. So I reached up and grabbed him on the chest and stuck my rifle in his face and I think that poor guy nearly had a heart attack, he was just out cutting wood, he was a farmer. So we brought him in and the other patrol members said I should have shot him. And I said, "Look, he was non threatening,

19:00 and he is probably more use to us as an interrogated and as a prisoner." That was my first patrol and it was a memorable patrol for that reason. I was pleased because he didn't see me from such close proximity that I was able to reach up and grab him on the chest on the front of his shirt. So I was happy that we were well camouflaged.

19:30 I wasn't happy with the attitude of the other guys because they were quite happy to shoot him. That wasn't my attitude so, but I can understand their attitude: at the end of their tour, they wanted to play it safe. The guy was frightened, he dropped his sickle, I think he nearly had a heart attack anyway. That was my first patrol.

20:00 And I think about thirty days after the rest of the squadron came up and we changed over. And I remember on the changeover, the guys that were leaving to fly home put a CS gas [O-chlorobenzal malononitrile, type of nerve gas] grenade under our tent with a timer attached to go off five hours after they left. And we were all asleep in the tent and the next thing this bloody CS gas went off,

20:30 and CS is nerve gas and it is not very pleasant stuff. No long term affects but short term it is bloody terrible. And this thing went off, well it caused a nice little havoc about midnight, all running around stark naked and this bloody CS gas over us trying to get away from it. It was their idea of a joke.

Was it your idea of a joke?

No it was a waste of a good CS grenade,

21:00 so, but anyway they thought it was funny.

What were the effects?

We were all coughing and sneezing for about eight hours afterwards and spluttering. Nerve gas is not pleasant at the best of times but by breakfast it wore off. That was their idea of a joke. So that was our settling in at Nui Dat.

Next patrol memory for you?

21:30 I think probably the first six months of our operations up there were all recce patrols. The idea of that was to map out the enemy camps in the province so they were all sort of nerve-racking patrols; even though you don't have any contact, you're mapping out

22:00 camps or coming across enemy camps or your observing a camp and people coming and going. So they're all nerve-racking but they weren't ambush patrols or fighting patrols or catching prisoner patrols or whatever. They all sort of, at this time they all sort of blur into one. We did a lot of recce patrols as a four-man

22:30 patrol and one patrol that stands out, we were a long way away up in the May Tao mountains, which is up near Long Khanh Province and we actually got off the helicopter, it was in the dry season, and we made a run for the jungle and we didn't realise that we had been spotted by the enemy, and the May Tao

23:00 mountains were home to 274, 275 Regiment. And for the next four or five days, they were looking for us and we actually patrolled off into the jungle and we actually patrolled into their camp, we didn't realise it at the time. And the camps were quite large and some areas were used, some areas weren't and so they moved around a bit, and we actually stayed in their camp for two or three days while they were looking for us.

23:30 And they never thought to look in their camp, which was where we were hiding. We thought, "Well if we get sprung we're all going to die" so. We had to get out because we were running out of water, we only carried water bottles and in the dry season you go through a lot of water. And I remember distinctly because the patrol commander gathered us in and said, "If we get caught there is no way out

24:00 because we are a long way away from any support." And he said, "The bottom line is we're all going to die and we can work on from there." So we all knew what the bottom line was, so it was a matter of getting it in perspective and keeping it together to get out. Anyway after three days or something like that, we got out of there and we got away from them. But they knew we were there and if we had have been caught in the camp we would have been history, we were

24:30 some forty-five minutes flying time from Nui Dat. And I think we were out of artillery range and I think, although we had air support if we needed it, to get caught in a camp in the May Tao mountains was a big; during the night the enemy were running generators and lights and music, they had underground hospitals and test firing weapons,

25:00 making a hell of a noise, so they weren't concerned about their security because they thought they were so far away. But we sat up there for three nights, no sleep, wide-eyed and bushy- tailed [alert and anxious (like a possum caught in a light)], for the whole three nights. It was a recce patrol but it got compromised because they knew we were around the place, but they didn't think to look in their camp so thank Christ.

What does that do to your nerves?

25:30 Probably at the time you're concentrating on not getting caught, not making any noise or any. We could actually see them walking through the other side of the camp. When we got back to Nui Dat, I think we were all a bit frazzled because the enormity of getting caught sort of came home to us. And it only needed one

26:00 North Vietnamese or one regular army soldier just to wander in our direction or something simple like a cough or a sneeze, a movement or something. So our nerves at the end of that patrol were pretty fractured and we were all pretty tired. That was a pretty memorable patrol, not because we had a big fight but because the potential for death was enormous.

26:30 **So when you got back to camp, were you able to unload any of that or was it, "Okay, we're over that, lets got on with it"?**

Yeah I think initially that was our cavalier attitude if you like, "Lets get on with the next patrol". But then after six months of intensive patrolling you just can't do that.

27:00 The warning orders were coming thick and fast and a warning order was your next patrol. You might fly in today, have a rest tonight and you get a warning order tomorrow to go and do another one. So your system can only put up with so much intense adrenalin type work for so long and then after a while you start to breakdown in other ways. Some blokes got sick.

27:30 Some blokes couldn't go on patrols, they couldn't hack it. Some blokes used to get drunk as skunks to go to sleep, me included. So there was various ways to try and deal with it, but because you were in this category where you weren't encouraged to show weakness, you tended to keep it to yourself and get on with the next patrol. Or if you did discuss it,

28:00 you might discuss it with one other guy but if there was any sign of weakness you might be moved out of the patrol, so you keep it to yourself. But eventually it has its toll. I did twenty-four operational patrols as forward scour, which is one a fortnight of five to ten days duration. It is a lot of work,

28:30 a lot of physical, mental degradation if you like and it catches up with you eventually. The first six months we were all pretty keen and fit and then after that, the workload started to build up and it reflected in some of the attitudes.

What did it do to the other three guys you were working with?

Well, they handled it in various ways.

29:00 Some of the guys were quiet; Mick Honinger was quiet, he never drank. I used to have a few beers to go to sleep and then it became a few more and a few more. Mick Ruffin, the patrol commander, was a heavy smoker but he never overtly showed

29:30 any signs of nerves and I know he was pretty tired at the end of the tour, we were all pretty tired at the end of the tour. We tried not to show it too much because if you went to the CO or the SSM [Squadron Sergeant-Major] and said, “Look, I am knackered. I can’t patrol anymore, I am tired, I need a break.” Well, they would ship you out of the unit; it was a pretty ruthless sort of way to go about it,

30:00 that’s why you kept it to yourself and you wanted to get on with the job at hand.

So this six months of a blur essentially, of doing recces and constant patrolling, has come to an end, can you tell us what sort of phase you went into next?

30:30 I think the phase we went into after six months of recce work to establish a pattern around the province of where things were in terms of enemy camps and so on, enemy movement, what units were in and out of the province, so that the commander could build up a picture of what he was up against. We then turned to what we call ambushing,

31:00 fighting patrol for the last six months. And even though the recce patrols, we still had quite a few contacts in the recce patrol, you might bump into an enemy unit unaware if you moving through the jungle or something and you would have a contact so that patrol was compromised, so there was some contact with the enemy in that six month period, but in fact quite a few.

31:30 Then we went into an ambushing harassment role of the enemy’s supply lines and enemy camps if you like. And we were given specific targets, and we might be out, for instance, on a five-day or seven-day patrol, we might be on recce for two days and we would recce a target, watch the track and the camp for two or three days, and then set up a claymore ambush [an ambush using one or more Claymore anti-personnel mines].

32:00 We might use Claymores only, which is an anti-personnel mine, occasionally we might use small arms, we might use silent weapons. So we had varying degrees of what we need and what sort of hardware we needed and depending on the area we went into, you might take a whole heap of heavy weapons, or another area you might know that might be a bit more user-friendly so you might take some lighter type weapons.

32:30 It depended, but we went into that operational phase of ambushing and patrolling and that was pretty intense because there was a lot of confrontation with the enemy. During patrolling periods, there was a period where the enemy would stop between about eleven and two when it got super hot.

33:00 So he never moved so we wouldn’t move. And the reason for that is that if they were sitting on the ground sleeping or snoozing, we could blunder into them and we would be in bigger trouble. Someone moving through the jungle is easier to pick up. So we would stop between eleven and two as well, we would continue on after two o’clock or before eleven.

33:30 One incident we had, we had been patrolling for probably four or five days through some dense jungle and we hadn’t seen anything apart from a couple of dead bodies that were decomposing and we stopped because it was pouring rain, right on eleven o’clock or something and we stayed put for a couple of hours for siesta. And we stood up to move and

34:00 the rain stopped; and if it rains in the jungle the noise is deafening, you just can’t hear anything apart from the downpour. And I stood up to put my pack on and I heard someone cough and I thought it was one of our guys that coughed so I turned around to tell them to keep quiet and I got a blank look from everybody. And I looked up and there was a main force VC bloke walking straight at me, maybe ten yards away and he had

34:30 not seen me and it was him that coughed. So I levelled my rifle and stood there and I realised that he hadn’t seen me, and the amount of guys that walked past I remember to this day: forty-one, I counted every one of them. They were heading up to the May Tao mountains from the coast. And that was

35:00 terrifying because I thought if they spot me, with a superior force, only four of us, we are going to be in trouble. And I thought my heart was racing, I thought they’re going to hear my heart. And I levelled my rifle at the guys’ chest and I counted them as they went past, probably no more than ten, twenty feet away.

35:30 And I was terrified. I didn’t look them in the eye because if you ever look at someone in the eye or at the back of their head, you will get a feeling someone is looking at you. So I purposely looked at their chest

so there was no eye contact, because that's where I was going to shoot anyway. And I was hoping that none of them would spot me and sure enough I counted forty-one guys through with their equipment and we got out of gaol on that one so.

36:00 We slowly turned around and moved back. That was, probably not the most terrified time but close to it. The ambushing and that went on for the next six months,

36:30 we did a couple of successful ambushes around Nui Nghe, which was a known VC area and we had been patrolling for a while and we stopped, picked our spot on a nice little foot track, which was nice and clean. No leaves and a few

37:00 recent footprints, and we looked for a suitable ambush site, which was a small fallen tree across the track .and we decided to set up a claymore ambush there and we waited. And while we were looking at the track I could smell Brillcream [brand name] hair oil and none of our guys used Brillcream hair oil or anything in the scrub. And so we moved off the track and there was a group of four North Vietnamese came down the track

37:30 and the first three guys were pretty casual and the last guy was a bit behind and he had a light machine gun at the ready. So we were going to pop the first three guns with the silencer, just as well we didn't because the weapon he had would have cleaned us up. So we decided we would set the ambush there for the next day. So we let them walk through and we set the claymore ambush up. And we sat in this one spot for a whole day

38:00 and nobody came down the track. Anyway later on we heard a signal shot, which later became an SKS [rifle] signal shot, which we identified, and we thought these same four guys were coming down the track, but they sent a supply party ahead of them. It consisted of two women, a couple of kids, another old guy,

38:30 two armed soldiers. And they were carrying rice or something. So we let them go through the ambush, through the killing ground and they got to the other end wherever they were going and fired a signal shot, which meant the track was clear. So these four soldiers came walking back the other direction a day or two later and we sprung the ambush on them. So we set up a successful ambush there where we didn't fire any weapons and it was just

39:00 a Claymore mine. The reason I say that is because if the local VC hear an explosion then they think it is either a mine or a booby trap or an artillery round. If they hear small arms fire then they know there is a patrol in there so we try not to use our weapons. Rifles only if we have to, and we used a silenced Stirling [British sub-machine gun] to finish someone off. So that was a successful ambush.

39:30 And we netted I think three soldiers there. The fourth guy got away but I think he would have had a bit of a headache. And we searched the soldiers and got a bit of equipment off them and subsequently got into a fire fight later but we broke the ambush clean and in terms of military operation it was a good small unit ambush.

40:00 So we were pleased with that.

All right.

Tape 8

00:30 But they had a lot of blokes killed by mines and booby traps around villages so they would have said.

So Kerry just for a bit of clarification, you laid the Claymore mines, you're waiting for the four soldiers and then you realise that women and children are coming down the track. How

01:00 **did the Claymore mines end up not killing them? And how did you come to the decision?**

Well the decision was discussed between myself and Mick Ruffin the patrol commander and we elected not to, they were only supply carriers, they weren't soldiers. So even though they were VC sympathisers, they weren't a legitimate military target, so it was

01:30 in the end I guess it was pretty easy, it was the right decision. So we let them go through the killing ground and the ambush stayed as it was, we stayed there I think maybe two days, same spot, waiting for the four soldiers to return. And when they got the signal shot, they knew the track was clear. I don't think they came back that night they came back the next day and we were waiting for them.

02:00 I think it was the right decision and it was just something, they weren't our target; in other circumstances they might have been. But they weren't that morning so.

Is there a way you can stop the Claymore mines going off? I don't understand how you laid them and let these people walk on them and they haven't [because the Claymore mine can be command detonated – i.e., set off remotely by the operator]?

Well if you can imagine you have got a track, well, you lay the Claymore mines parallel to

02:30 the track facing across the track because they have an after fire, which comes out of a triangle. So the Claymore mines were probably four or five feet back from the track in the jungle so they wouldn't have seen them. And then behind the Claymore mine is the detonator and you run the cable, the electrical cord back maybe thirty or forty yards or shorter or longer if the

03:00 jungle permits. We were quite close to the Claymore's back blast, which can be dangerous when they go off. You have got to keep your head down when they go off. And we were close enough to the track to see that they were women and kids coming down the track. And so at nighttime, we would pull up the Claymores, they were stuck in the ground so we would pull them up just before last light.

03:30 Roll them up, put them in our packs, go away and sleep, have something to eat and sleep on the ground and then put them out early in the morning, wait for a target to come along, and we did quite a few claymore ambushes throughout the last six months of the tour. The Claymores were very effective in the jungle, not many people survived them and

04:00 they are an easy weapon to set up. So in my opinion, they are a good weapon. Not very humane if you like but then no weapons are, so that ambush we were particularly pleased with because it was executed perfectly, from a military point of view we were happy with the results. And we got out of there the next day after

04:30 a firefight. The local VC weren't very happy with what we had done and they came looking for us and we had to get out by helicopter the next day. They are pretty effective weapons.

You said that after you detonated the bomb, you took effects from the body?

05:00 My job was to, once the mines had been blown or the ambush sprung, the procedure was one of our guys would go to the right, another to the left and look down the track or up the track. Patrol commander would cover me and I would search the body for any weapons, maps or equipment. And we also had a silenced Stirling so that if anyone needed to be put out of their misery, so to

05:30 speak. We didn't have to use that. I remember rolling the guy over and he was in black pyjamas and had a webbing belt on and a pack and a weapon. The other two guys either side of him I didn't get to search but as I rolled the guy over, I jumped about six feet, he frightened the hell out of me because all of the air was escaping, and he groaned.

06:00 I thought he was dead and subsequently I told the patrol commander to shoot him because I thought he was still alive, but it was just the air escaping from his lung. So I managed to take his webbing off him and his weapons and web belt and a few other things, which we took back to headquarters and looked over. But it just gave me a hell of a fright because

06:30 you know he was well and truly dead but I didn't expect to hear anything come out of his lungs, it gave me a hell of a fright.

Did they carry any personal effects?

No this particular guy only had tactical stuff. Later on in another patrol, we got a tax collector from North Vietnam and he had a few personal effects on him.

07:00 Some of the soldiers carried some photos and stuff. Generally if they were local, if they were main force units they didn't carry much. If they were North Vietnamese they might have something on. They obviously have got families as well you know. But this particular guy didn't have too much in the way of personal gear; it was all military stuff. The other two I didn't get a chance to search because

07:30 there was some movement down the track so we hightailed it out of there as quick as we could. They might have had some personal effects, I don't know.

What happened in the ensuing firefight?

Well there must have been some more VC close by and they must have seen some movement, i.e., me moving on the track or one of the other guys, so they decided to follow it up and we had to lay down some fire to break contact and get away but they followed us up

08:00 for an hour or two and then they dropped off. Some of our methods was to what we used to call 'shoot and scoot', lay down some fire and then make a break and each guy had to go to one side or the other side so when you break you come down the middle and that way you don't get shot, anybody outside that, you run down the middle so

08:30 everyone knew where you were, it was a good contact drill to have. So we always had two weapons pointing at the enemy and two guys breaking contact might move twenty or thirty yards back and then they would come down and it was so on and so on. The other method we had for contact, if we accidentally bumped into the enemy and had contact, my job was to

09:00 straight to ground lay down fire, patrol commander would come to my left and the signalman would

come to my right and the fourth bloke would stay where he was so that we would have three-man front of automatic fire, which was pretty high-powered stuff. And that would generally stop any VC for a few seconds to think about what they were up against, in which case by the time they got themselves organised we were gone. So we had certain

09:30 contact drills, and we had break contact drills, ambush drills and escape and evasion drills and they worked to good effect. And the training we did at Collie, we did all of that in semi-open so that we could see each other and how it was going to work in close jungle. And the escape drills, and contact drills and break contact drills worked very well.

10:00 **You were thankful that they didn't have to use the Stirling silencer, other times you did?**

I think on one occasion we used it, the idea was if someone worked down the track by themselves and you didn't want to waste the Claymore mines on one soldier the idea was to take him out with a silenced Stirling and still not compromise the position of the patrol. We never ever used the Stirling in that

10:30 capacity. A couple of our patrol members did and they actually shot a bloke in the back and he kept walking so the things weren't very good. Two rounds hit him in the back in the pack and he staggered and fell forward and kept walking. He thought he had tripped over or something. Incredible as it may sound but the silenced Stirling was only nine-millimetre and when you put a Stirling silencer on it

11:00 you take forty percent of its hitting power off, so it is like someone hitting you with a shanghai with a ball bearing. It doesn't really, you need to get a clean shot to kill a guy; one of the sergeants I think used it and then didn't bother again because they weren't strong enough or powerful enough but they were a weapon that we carried just in case. But I can't remember any of our guys using them, our patrols. And the other part of it was that if

11:30 there were anyone left alive in the ambush and you didn't want to show your hand then you could use them then. But they're not a…they're more a cumbersome thing than a useful thing.

Were you ever in a position where you had to kill enemy when in other situation you may have been able to take them prisoner? Were you

12:00 **in a situation where it was just impossible for you to take them back?**

Personally no, none of our patrols members were in that situation. There may have been some instances of that. If we needed a prisoner, we had a special method of capturing prisoners. We tried a couple of new methods but they didn't work.

12:30 Essentially we just rugby tackled a bloke, flattened him, and took him home kicking and screaming. I think we only captured maybe one or two prisoners. But to the other part of your question, no we didn't, I mean once a soldier is injured he is out of the game. So, I don't,

13:00 I can't recall anyone having to do that in the squadron.

You said that you had been utterly terrified counting those men's chests, but that it wasn't your most terrifying experience?

Well on a scale of one to ten it would be nine or nine and a half.

What do you call ten Kerry?

13:30 Probably one ambush went a bit wrong. One of our guys got injured but when we were coming out

14:00 after the bad ambush… We had one of our guys injured and we had a fairly strong firefight afterwards.

14:30 We got him on a helicopter, it was a ten-man patrol so his patrol he was critically wounded. Anyway the helicopter came in to pick him up, and we were between the helicopter and the enemy and we were keeping them back with a bit of suppressing fire.

15:00 And the door gunner on the helicopter thought we were the enemy and we were probably fifty, sixty yards from the helicopter and I was watching them load this guy on

15:30 and this bloke cut loose with twin M60s at us. And thankfully his aim wasn't very good. That was a ten out of ten. He was shooting at us and that was pretty frightening.

So you had twin machine guns from behind

16:00 **and enemy in front of you and nowhere to go?**

Yeah. There was a bit of a communications failure; he thought there was only a five-man patrol but in fact there was a ten-man patrol. Helicopters can only take five guys at a time and one of those guys on the first patrol was wounded so nobody told the door gunner that we were still on the ground waiting for the second helicopter and I saw his eyes light up

16:30 when he saw us and I thought, "Well, he has spotted us". And then all I could see was this green tracer coming at us and it frightened the shit out of us. Luckily no one got hit.

So he wasn't SAS?

No he was air force [door] gunner.

17:00 And I don't think he had been briefed that it was a ten-man patrol not five.

You're lucky he wasn't SAS. He wasn't so good a shot.

That was absolutely terrifying, you know, I don't mind getting killed by the enemy but killed by your own people? That's a bit much. I would call that a ten out of ten that one.

How do you wind down after that how are you meant to go to sleep that night?

17:30 Well, I think from just sheer exhaustion, we got back and we were pretty pissed about the ambush because it had gone wrong and I had had an altercation with the patrol commander about how these Claymore mines were going to be sited and we were in the killing ground ourselves and I wasn't happy about that. So there was a lot of small

18:00 things that went wrong, which then built up into a big picture, and when the enemy were in the killing ground things didn't go according to plan. And there was ten, twelve, maybe fourteen enemy. One of our guys stood up and he got shot in the stomach and

18:30 we found out later what it was, it was a claymore pellet that hit him in the stomach so it vindicated my argument about sighting the Claymores properly . We opened fire into the killing ground and once we stopped firing - we had a different routine for a ten-man patrol - once we stopped firing we followed two guys up the track but they got away.

19:00 And I went into my usual routine of searching bodies and when I went out onto the killing ground to search the body and get the pack off the guy and webbing, one of the guys threw a bloody hand grenade and it landed just here, so I had to tell him in no uncertain terms not to throw any more hand grenades. And then we started taking fire from the VC who had regrouped.

19:30 **Sorry was this one of your own that threw a hand grenade?**

Yeah, he didn't realise that I was out there because he wasn't a normal patrol member, each patrol had a different routine. Anyway, I let him know in no uncertain terms not to throw the bloody things anymore and the guy that was hit, we were very lucky, was a tax-man and an agent for a lot of communists in Saigon.

20:00 And we took his pack and he had letters being delivered and money and addresses of communists in Saigon. So it was good in terms of gathering information.

Valuable.

But the execution was pretty piss poor in my opinion. And then we found that the patrol commander had been wounded, not my patrol commander but the other patrol commander.

20:30 And then we got him on the helicopter and we had to put up with this idiot on the machine guns. So the whole thing was a shit fight from start to finish. We were just so exhausted; we just collapsed and slept for a day afterwards. We had been out in the scrub for four or five days and even though you are just laying in the bush not moving, you don't even get up to go for a crap or a piss, you do it there

21:00 and it is just exhausting work. And when it all went wrong it was even worse because that dented our professional pride. But I guess sooner or later we were going to get enemy reaction or something was going to go wrong. For sleep I can't remember, I think we just crashed, had a couple of beers. And I think within another couple of days we were out on another warning order.

21:30 So it was some of it was pretty intense work.

Did the patrol commander survive?

Yeah. It turned out he had a claymore pellet in his stomach. He is still alive. I have spoken to him a couple of times in Perth, he is going all right.

22:00 We don't speak about the ambush.

Have you spoken to any of the other men about that ambush?

Yeah, Mick Ruffin, my patrol commander, and one or two of the other guys, we knew it was a cock-up so there is not much point in bringing it up again. At the time we knew it was bad but we were overruled by the senior sergeant and that was it.

22:30 **Was he reprimanded for that?**

No, but he got the pellet in his stomach so I think that was poetic justice.

So that was his decision?

In fact he told me to, “Shut up and get on with the job” and I complained bitterly because we were laying in the killing ground, because Claymores were not facing across the track they were facing down the track. We were actually laying here; it was just a bad way to site the Claymores,

23:00 they’re nasty weapons. And I guess I spoke my mind and that was that. We got out of that by the skin of our teeth.

23:30 **After that badly organised Claymores did most of your patrols tend to go according to plan?**

Yeah, well I think that was our one bad operation in twelve months including recces and ambushes and so on. So, as professional soldiers, we prided ourselves on making sure our ambushes were good

24:00 because it was a matter of life and death. And if you didn’t plan them right, not only would the enemy get you, you could get killed from your own bad planning. There were a lot of arguments about this particular ambush later on and some of it is recorded, some of it is not. But it was just a bad,

24:30 miss the tackle on the rugby fields, just a bad preparation, setting yourself up for the tackle.

How do you lie there in the killing area knowing that your commanding officer has made a bad decision to put you there and follow those orders knowing that?

25:00 Well, we didn’t have a lot of choice; I was only a corporal at that stage. We were on the left flank of the ambush, myself and Mick Honinger, with a machine gun. And I guess we thought, “Well, this is not good”, but there was little we could do. We couldn’t get up and move things around because at any stage the enemy could walk into the ambush. We weren’t happy about the way it was laid out and we made

25:30 that quite clear. But we weren’t in a position to change it, so we laid there for two or three days, I forget how long it was, and stewed about it I guess. And when we heard the signal shot from not far away, we identified it as an SKS, that was a more common weapon, and we were ready on the left flank; we weren’t quite ready on the right flank,

26:00 because the combination of not being ready, Claymores in the wrong position when we sprung the ambush, it went pretty bad. There wasn’t much we could do about it, just our own little space to protect and look after. And when I fired the Claymores, I kept my head down and I think I buried my head in the ground to make sure nothing hit me.

26:30 Just one of those things. And I felt sorry for the patrol commander that got hit, just bad luck, but at the time we weren’t very forgiving about what happened. He came home to Australia after that. He is okay now; he is fine.

Any other memorable patrols that you feel you did well or that stick out in your mind from the rest of your time there?

27:00 Well I did a patrol with the local popular force unit, which was like the local guys, and I guess that was another major blunder coming up that I could see, and I was sent up there as an observer on the back of the patrol to observe their bushcraft.

27:30 And these were local soldiers who were being trained up by a couple of American Special Forces and they wanted one of our guys to go up there and assess them and I got the job. So I went along and I think there was nine of us in the patrol and the idea was, we were going out on a patrol to assess these guys’ bush skills and we actually ended up bumping into an enemy camp

28:00 and having a hell of a firefight. And it went pretty bad so that sort of sticks in my mind. That wasn’t a very good patrol because it was badly planned and executed, compared to our standards, it was just a terrible patrol. And I spoke to the major in charge that we shouldn’t be doing this, we found the camp, we recced [reconnoitred] the camp, they

28:30 didn’t know we were there, we should have pulled out and called in an air strike or artillery. Left it at that and gone in after and picked up the pieces, but he wanted to attack the camp there and then.

Who was he?

He was a major from the Special Forces up at Binh Ba, and he had a top sergeant as his number two, and so I was the third white man if you like.

So he was an American?

He was American Special Forces major.

29:00 Their Special Forces they had three groups, one group was to train, one group was covert operations and another group was to work with Vietnamese units. And I thought he was a bit of an idiot.

It sounded like MO [modus operandi] of the Americans you spoke of before though, they didn’t seem to be into tactical

29:30 **recces like you were used to, they thought superior gun power, well just, was that an example**

of the difference in MO between the Australians and Americans?

There was a big difference. We in fact took on a couple of SEAL team [Sea Air Land team, US Navy special forces] guys who wanted to come out on a patrol with us and I think we took them out maybe once and we got rid of them because they were too noisy and they

30:00 just weren't aware of their surroundings. We steered clear from the Americans as much as we could. Having said that, they don't lack courage and they don't lack firepower. So it was good to have their firepower there if we needed it and occasionally we called in fire missions from the USS Missouri, we called in B52 bombers, we called in Phantom [F4]

30:30 jets. So we had a lot of firepower on the radio that we could use. But we steered clear of working with them on the ground out on patrols because they just weren't at the same level that we were. And when it becomes life and death, you become very short tempered about things; things have got to happen properly otherwise you don't come home. It is pretty simple,

31:00 you have got to keep that attitude that you have got to get it right.

Can that also hinder the reintegration into society, part of that life or death feeling in situations that they're not life or death but you still have that residual fight?

I think it does, I think all infantry-type work, whether it be World War I soldiers, Korea, Second World War, Vietnam, East Timor, Iraq,

31:30 wherever, has those consequences. Because you're so intense on getting things, there is no…it is not like a game of football where you come second, coming second in a war is death. There is no comparison. So when you leave the army or the services it does have an effect on you.

32:00 And I think I used to get pretty hot-tempered with things outside the army in civvie street [civilian life] and occasionally I do now, but I think I am getting a bit more relaxed but for a long time it was there and it is what we call PTSD. I think it applies to infantry, artillery, tankies [armoured corps], any of the units in the front line so to speak.

32:30 **How does that sort of stuff affect you today?**

It affects me today because I am talking about it in front of a camera, which I have never ever done. I guess it is, they're memories that you have there but you tend to forget them or suppress them

33:00 and you don't bring them up very often. I guess that's how you deal with it. After I got out of the army, I think part of my problem was settling down and having relationships. I just couldn't have long-term relationships with females, for instance. I had four or five good mates that got killed in Vietnam that I was close to,

33:30 so I found it hard to get close to anybody. So therefore I found it hard to have a long-term relationship. Some of the guys were okay, some of the guys were married up there, came away were married, had relationships already formed. I just couldn't and I found it difficult to cope.

34:00 I cope much better now because I am heading towards sixty and I have had treatment for PTSD and I know what I have had treatment for PTSD and I know how it turns on and how it turns off, so I have got a better idea to cope, whereas say five or six years after I got out of the army I didn't know what it was or how to deal with it

34:30 more importantly. These days I have got more of an idea how to deal with it and what it is, so it is I guess all soldiers get it at some stage.

The guys you went through with, your patrol, how are they faring?

Well, Mick Honinger, I think he is going okay; he has turned very religious.

35:00 Previous to that he was not religious at all; he was a very aggressive guy in a firefight and a very good man to have around in a firefight. Mick Ruffin is going along nicely, he is my old patrol commander. I don't know about Ian Ramsay the other guy. And I don't know about Bill Bailey another bloke that replaced Ian. I guess out of

35:30 our squadron that went away, out of a hundred and ten guys I think there is thirty guys dead since Vietnam, there is quite a few fallen off the perch for whatever reason. I think we only lost one or two guys up there, maybe three I think on the whole tour. I don't keep in contact with everybody, having said that, I do meet

36:00 people from time to time at reunions. Somewhere like that. We catch up. Some cope in their own way better than others I think. Hopefully I am coping all right. Some of the guys don't.

Would you tell the other guys if you weren't coping all right?

I guess so, nowadays I would.

36:30 There is a couple of lads here in Adelaide that I know pretty well and I might have a chat with them. We

generally talk a bit more about things now, how we get on with things, and then we get similar ideas and say, “Well, that happens to me.” So you don’t feel that you’re the only one that has got this condition or problem. And by and large everyday

37:00 life now is pretty good. We opened a war memorial in Adelaide in June last year, at Torrens Parade Ground, and that was pretty emotional for me because I had to give a speech. It is the first SAS Memorial in Adelaide, in South Australia, and that was a pretty tough week because everything had to be done properly and it all came to a head when we gave the talk. We do talk occasionally amongst the guys and try to help each other now.

37:30 Well, point them in the right direction, I guess we cope in our own way.

Can you reflect on the course of your life as a civilian and ways these experiences affected what you have seen, heard, felt?

38:00 **How that has impacted on civilian life for you?**

I think I can; I don’t know if I would be accurate. I am grateful for every day, that I have got pretty good health. I am grateful that I am still around. And

38:30 in other ways, I am probably a bit short-tempered about some things. I guess in civilian life now, I look back now and say, “Did I do that?” And think, “Jesus”, you know, but I am here, whereas a lot of guys don’t cope.

39:00 And, you know, so a lot of guys commit suicide when they came home. That’s pretty sad because it means they weren’t able to cope or seek or sought help.

Can you understand those feelings?

Yeah I think you get feelings of hopelessness and think nothing is working

39:30 and that. But really you have got to get on with life; you’re only here for a short period of time. And I talk to a lot of guys that I served with now and you have just got to get on day to day and get on with it. I mean, some blokes do it better than others, I guess, hopefully I do it better than some of the others.

40:00 So it has an impact on my life but it is getting less and less now, I think that might a better way to answer it. For the ten, fifteen years after Vietnam, I never went near anybody, never had anything to do with any of the guys in the army. The reason I went overseas when I got out of the army was to get away from all of this stuff that was going on about the war.

40:30 And I had no intentions of coming back to Australia. I ended up coming back after three years and, you know, probably for fifteen years I never spoke to anyone about it or had anything to do with the army or ex-soldiers or ex-blokes that I served with. And it is probably only the last ten years that I have just started to talk to other guys.

41:00 I have coped in my own way.

Tape 9

00:30 **Kerry can you tell us how and why the SAS were so successful at what they did, the Australian SAS, what makes them as good as they are?**

Well

01:00 I think it is a combination of things: professional soldiering, accurate with weapons, knowledge of weapons, good small unit tactics, attitude to get the job done and, like I said, a sense of professionalism, and I think if you put them all together then you have got a pretty good unit.

01:30 Our unit was all of those things and very enthusiastic to get in and mix it. And we considered towards the end of our tour and after the Tet Offensive and all of the big offensives that went on, we considered Phuoc Tuy Province pretty well ours by the end of ‘69, early ‘70, we considered that our piece of territory.

02:00 We knew every square inch of it and we did a lot of homework on the enemy, so rehearsing ambushes, talking through things and getting input from everybody on the patrol on how to do things. It was a combination of things, not just one specific thing. You could be the biggest strongest guy on the patrol and

02:30 if you have got a heart like a caraway seed then you don’t go far, it is a combination of a lot of things.

You mentioned the United States SEALs force and they are supposedly highly trained as well, but you didn’t find that you wanted to be around them too much?

No, well, we actually did a couple of exchange programs and they were a

03:00 totally different way of operating to us, and I personally thought that they were noisy and not particularly good operators but courageous guys, they wouldn't shy away from a fight. Sometimes discretion is the better part of valour; sometimes you don't need to get in a fight. We took one or two SEALs out on a patrol with us but then we never invited them out again.

03:30 Some of the other patrols had regular SEAL guys go out with them and we exchanged patrols in the Mekong Delta with them occasionally on different jobs. But the SAS were very effective in Phuoc Tuy province and in fact we went to the CO with a proposal to go up on the Laotian border and get some intelligence on the Ho Chi Minh Trail [resupply/infiltration route from North Vietnam south through Laos and Cambodia into South Vietnam] and because that was outside,

04:00 I think a few of the lads spoke to the CO about doing that but it was knocked on the head because of political reasons. We weren't to be outside Phuoc Tuy province. We wanted to win the war and we weren't far away. Again we could see that if we could interdict the supplies coming down the Ho Chi Minh Trail then the troops in the front line would wither and die on the vine, but we were not allowed to.

04:30 Probably that's a good thing anyway. But there were areas when we could see as soldiers that we could win the war or push it to its limits that weren't being exploited by our senior officers. And after a while you think, "What are we really doing this for if we are not in it to win?" And as a consequence, I mentioned earlier, after 1975 when the communists took over, they murdered something like two million civilians,

05:00 and I feel terrible about that because we told them we would look after them and we didn't. But our own area we looked after and we did as much as we could.

I guess the reality was that you are answerable to your superiors and to the Australian government?

That's right.

05:30 As a professional soldier you do what you're told. Sometimes it may be a stupid order or a stupid direction or a stupid statement from a politician, but you're a professional soldier. Your job is not to worry about that; your job is to get on with it. When you see some stupid things that cost lives, well then you start to question. "Are we really fair dinkum about what we're doing here?" And I think that was going through

06:00 a lot of guys' minds towards the end of the tour, towards the end of ten years fighting in Vietnam.

Did you start to feel any affinity for the enemy; I mean you were in close proximity quite a few times?

No not really. I knew they were doing it pretty tough. But as I said earlier that wasn't in my thinking or anybody else's thinking.

06:30 Our job was to make it extremely uncomfortable for them in Phuoc Tuy Province and towards the end there, that's what we achieved.

So when did you finish your tour of Vietnam?

I came home in around February/March 1969.

07:00 And I came home, had some leave for about a month and then went straight to Sydney and there we flew to Terendak camp with 1 Battalion [1 RAR], because I transferred out of the SAS back to 1 Battalion. And I knew I was pretty fractured so I wanted to go back to 1 Battalion to have a nice easy posting for a

07:30 couple of years in Malaysia and Singapore. And when I spoke to a couple of the 1 Battalion blokes that I knew beforehand, I mentioned that I was pretty knackered mentally and that I wanted to have a break, so I think I still had three years in the army to go and I stayed with 1 Battalion for a couple of years and

08:00 then I applied for the training team course to go back as an advisor in the training team for another tour, but that didn't actually happen. But my time in Terendak and Singapore was terrific; we were pretty relaxed. 1 Battalion had just come back from its second tour as well and so we sort of wound down if you like. And I think that was a saving grace for a lot of us.

08:30 A lot of the national service blokes came home, discharged and expected to walk back into a civvie job straightaway, and if they were a rifleman it was very hard for them to adjust and still some of them haven't adjusted to this day. Where I was a bit lucky, we had a regular unit in Terendak, in Singapore and we had the opportunity to relax and take thinks easy, maybe get some semblance of saneness back in your life,

09:00 and I think that went a long way to helping me and stop me from being a nut case.

I remember when you were saying earlier that when you first went in as an SAS man and the guys heading out were going to shoot somebody that you felt was non-threatening. Were you ever worried that you might come to a point where you might start thinking like that?

09:30 Yes and no, it wasn't foremost in my mind. I guess there could have been a circumstance where it happened but it didn't happen. The enemy that we did bump into all had weapons, they were all nasty pieces of work so. But you had to be mindful of civilians in the area

10:00 because the small farmer in Vietnam, his whole life revolved around a small plot of land and he had to go out and cut firewood and so on. Even though there was a war going on, he still had to go out and live. So you had to be mindful of civilians in Phuoc Tuy Province and some areas were 'no go areas' for civilians and if anyone went in there they were to be shot, but you still have to use a degree of common sense.

10:30 It is different in a full-on battle: everyone has got weapons. That was part of the problem of Vietnam, not everyone had weapons, you had to have a hair trigger ready to go but you also had to have some control and it was difficult. I can't remember ever, apart from the first one, he is a pretty lucky man. I don't think it was

11:00 an issue that was foremost in my mind.

From an observer's position, in an inhuman situation you seemed to have maintained your humanity?

Well, I think you have to, because you need to have some sanity prevail otherwise you just spiral into a quagmire

11:30 and it is detrimental to your health mentally and physically. So although we fought the war hard, we also took the attitude that we still had to carry on responsibly and act responsibly which I think we did. And certainly no one in our patrol or our squadron that I can remember did anything

12:00 untoward or callous. We would have certainly known about it. So it was difficult but you just had to train and you trained and you were ready for it.

And then you left the army on coming back to Australia?

I completed my training team course and then in 1972 Whitlam got in and that was the end of the war,

12:30 I was packed and ready to go back to the war, in fact I was at Richmond air base waiting to go back, and I think it was early January, and then when the war stopped I didn't want to stay in Australia, I wanted to go overseas. There was no overseas posting so I decided that I would take my discharge. So after nine years, I got out of the army in June 1972.

13:00 And I came back to Adelaide after a few months and I decided I would head off to Europe for a working holiday so to speak. And I think that went part -way in rehabilitating me as well, because I was out of Australia so I wasn't involved in the politics side of it, which was sometimes quite nasty. Over in London and France,

13:30 some French guys had heard of Vietnam, but it really wasn't a war that they were concerned about although they did have some big demonstrations there. In London, everyone was busy and Vietnam was on the other side of the world, so for the three years I was over there, it wasn't something I spoke about.

Must have been quite a culture shock leaving the army?

14:00 Well it was. I was disappointed because I was disappointed with the army towards the end of the nine years, I was disappointed we pulled out of Vietnam; we left the Vietnamese hung out to dry. I was disappointed in some of the senior officers that led us; I think we were poorly led in the end. I was disappointed in the political aspects of it. I really wanted to become an officer and stay in the army and I got some education to do

14:30 that but I never went on with that. I wasn't given the opportunity to go on with that. I guess I could have stayed in the army as a sergeant or a warrant officer. Eventually I would have made that rank because I was qualified by then. But I elected, I thought, "Well, there has got to be something more to life than the army", and after nine years I felt I had enough.

15:00 And I think a lot of that was my nerves were pretty shot, I had had enough infantry work, and I had spent, out of that nine years, I spent nearly six and a half years overseas; that was quite a bit packed into nine years. Having said that, some of my friends stayed on and did twenty years and they are good guys, it was just a decision I made personally.

15:30 And I spent three years overseas and when I came back, as I said earlier, I found it hard to settle down and have a relationship. And I was conscious of the fact that I had probably had a double dose of Agent Orange. And I really was very conscious of the fact that if I brought children into the world and they were deformed as a result of Agent Orange in some way, how would I cope?

16:00 So that sort of made a conscious decision to not have kids. (UNCLEAR).

(UNCLEAR) How did you end up meeting Trisha?

16:30 Well, Trish and I worked in real estate, I guess, not side by side but together, we would cross paths on a professional level and I suppose at around about the age of forty I was thinking of settling down and it went on from there.

17:00 We met through a business deal and through another mutual friend and then it kicked on from there. We got married in 1987.

Did that change your life?

Yeah. I was still a bit of a ratbag but it settled things down for me.

17:30 I think it has - I guess what I am trying to say is - helped me cope with a lot of things and Trish puts up with a fair bit of my antics as a result of having PTSD, and she copes with that fairly well.

18:00 We have also got a pretty good relationship too; we're very close. And she is not able to have children anyway so I guess that was a bit of a blessing. And we were both in the same industry and both single about the same age and we got on pretty well.

18:30 **Did she know about all what had happened to you before you decided to get married?**

No, not really, because I wasn't diagnosed with PTSD until somewhere around 1990, 92, and I didn't speak, I still hadn't mixed in a circle of ex-army guys; she didn't know much about it all. But she knows more about it now

19:00 and she understands that if I get cranky or have mood swings or can't sleep at night, different things. She knows how to cope better than she did before.

How do you cope?

Well, I try not to stress about anything or get upset about anything, but you know sometimes I do.

19:30 I don't take medication for it but I do things that help me wind down. I try not to get in stressful situations. A few years ago, I had a chest infection and an anxiety attack and ended up in repat [hospital] and that was pretty bad because that was an infection I picked up in Vietnam thirty years ago.

20:00 **So you went off as such a young, teenage boy, if you knew what you know now, would you have sent that teenager off to Vietnam?**

I would have to say no, but of course there has been conflicts before mine and there will be conflicts after Vietnam, and before Vietnam. So I guess

20:30 one of the big things I regret is not having a good education and probably if you have got a good education then you can think things through probably a bit more. And if I had the opportunity to stay at school, go to university, I might have done things differently. But I never had that opportunity. So I guess if I had a son of my own,

21:00 would you talk him into it or wouldn't you? I don't know how I would do it. I think it would be difficult. So, you know, that s a bit of a tough question for me to answer.

Do you think war is ever justified, seeing what you've seen?

In the final analysis I think not

21:30 but if you have got hawks and doves [those favouring war and peace respectively], and you have got too many doves, you're in trouble, there needs to be a balance. And occasionally, you know, if you look at the Second World War and Hitler, he had to be dealt with, he was a threat to world peace and so was Japan. So you can argue whether Vietnam was a threat to world peace; it was a local war.

22:00 In fact, when you read the history of Ho Chi Minh, he actually went to the Americans early in the piece and asked for some help and they told him to piss off. It turned out to be a big headache for them. So I guess there is going to be conflicts while you have got two men on the face of the planet; I think you need to exhaust everything before you commit people to war.

22:30 And there is going to be times when we're going to have to do that. And there is going to be times when we don't need to do it. And really, when you think about Vietnam and the whole ten years we spent there, the communist regime collapsed by themselves anyway. But there were seven million people killed in Vietnam: five million civilians, two million soldiers. We didn't really achieve anything I don't think.

23:00 So in a regional conflict like that, I think you need to think hard and fast about whether you commit people. But if it is a world threat then obviously you do. I hope that answers the question.

I think it answers it perfectly. Is there anything more that you would like to add Kerry

anything else you would like to say?

No I don’t think so.

23:30 **I would like to thank you for the honour of listening to your story.**