

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Robert Dawson (Bob) - Transcript of interview

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**Some parts of this interview  
have been embargoed.**

The embargoed portions are  
noted in the transcript and video.

### Tape 1

- 00:31 Right my name is Robert Francis Dawson, I usually answer to Bob. I was born in Brisbane on the 11th of July 1938 in Brisbane General Hospital.
- 01:00 My natural mother was not married and my natural father's sister had two children both of which had died at birth or soon after and she couldn't have any more, and there was an arrangement whereby I was adopted.
- 01:30 And my natural mother lived in the home of my uncle and aunt, then to become my foster parents, during the pregnancy and when she went to have me, I came out of the hospital with my foster parents and that was it. I will come back to that later on. I grew up in Brisbane, Hamilton, until the age of about six.
- 02:00 Started school in a convent there. And when I was seven, just after the war my foster parents leased a hotel in Pittsworth, just west of Toowoomba. They had only about twelve months there,
- 02:30 and I went to a convent there and Mum, I will call her Mum, had a nervous breakdown because the old fellow was getting into the grog a little bit. I am sorry I have got out of sequence. They moved from Hamilton to Strathpine where they had a shop, a general store, post office and confectionary.
- 03:00 Three shops in one. And the old fellow, the pub was a couple of doors up the road, and he got into the grog a little bit there too and Mum had a nervous breakdown, and he wanted to lease a hotel and that's when they went to Pittsworth and they had just a year there. Same problem. So they moved from there.
- 03:30 I am not sure what their relationship might have been like at that time where the old fellow joined the air force. During the war he had been in the Middle East, with my natural father in fact, they were both in the same unit, both Rats of Tobruk. Anyway they both went through Tobruk together. Anyway once we moved to Adelaide, he joined the air force
- 04:00 and I had a year there. Not quite a year with them, they moved off to Wagga to a RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] base there and left me there with people who had been next-door neighbours, so I boarded with them for the best part of a year I think. Then I came back to Brisbane to live with my grandparents, that is, my natural
- 04:30 father's mother and father. And I went to school in Brisbane while they stayed in Wagga and went from Wagga then to Ballarat in the air force. And I went down to join them after I had been at school for a year or so up here, going to St James Catholic Boys' School. I went to Ballarat and spent three years in Ballarat, the old fellow
- 05:00 was in the air force at Ballarat there. He was a canteen steward, ran the canteen on base. And my mother was a pretty energetic type; she sold insurance, pedalled around on a bicycle during the war and sold insurance while the old fellow was away at war. So she was, not a go-getter, but a very energetic type. And she

- 05:30 managed a frock salon or something in Ballarat, Rockman's or something I think it was. And I started out at St Patrick's College there. And with the different educational systems, Adelaide, Brisbane, I started out at school pretty bright and topped the class for the first couple of years
- 06:00 I was in school, and by the time I had gone to three different states and by the time I hit Ballarat I had sort of lost the plot a little bit, and it was hard to fit in. So I wasn't a terribly happy little person at that time. And I got in with a group of young fellows who were roughnecks, a roughneck sort of family, and ended up playing the wag [truant] for three months
- 06:30 and ended up getting a letter from St Pat's saying, "Take this child elsewhere." I remember on one occasion, at that stage I was about ten or eleven, I rang up the school to say that I, my son was sick, with a handkerchief over the telephone. And I said, "My son won't be at school today." And they said, "Is that Mrs Dawson?"
- 07:00 Voice hadn't broken. "No, no, it's Mr Dawson." Anyway by the time I got to the school the following week, it was all over the school that I had rung up and that was the last that they would take of me. So I was then taken to Ballarat High School and loved it. Didn't miss a, I missed one week when I had pneumonia I think. During the time that
- 07:30 I was playing the wag, we used to carry on Scouts 'Bob a Job' week. Every week was Scouts 'Bob a Job' week, we would go around to people's houses offering to chop wood, mow lawns, etcetera, and as soon as we got enough money we would go down to the local riding school and get a horse out for a half of a day. And that was fun. Anyway, from Ballarat I moved back to Brisbane and
- 08:00 back to St James and finished scholarship there and then moved on to Shorncliffe, St Patrick's College at Shorncliffe, because the folks had moved down to Sandgate to live. And I had two years there, sub-junior and junior, and really was going through those early adolescent
- 08:30 years where you get off the rails and didn't work very hard and got failed a couple of subjects in junior, and desperately by the time I had completed junior felt that it was time to put my head down and do some work and desperately wanted to go onto senior. But my folks said, "Sorry, we can't afford it.
- 09:00 you got to work." So I was sixteen then and I had six jobs in six months and couldn't wait until I was old enough to join the air force at seventeen. I had been in the Air Training Corps for some time and I guess the air force influence was there going back to my foster father's time.
- 09:30 And I joined the air force as soon as I turned seventeen. I didn't know what I should go in as, so I asked my father's advice and he said, "Well, trades are pretty good." And I said, "Well, what's a good trade?" And he said, "Oh electrician?" So I went in as a trainee electrical mechanic and did the boot camp training and then onto
- 10:00 Wagga and the technical school and did the electrical mechanic's course, I was then posted to Williamtown, 75 Fighter Squadron. It had Meteors and Vampires and I wasn't terribly happy down there, managed to get a compassionate posting back to Queensland to Amberley.
- 10:30 The old fellow was at Amberley then too. So I went to the 82 Bomber Wing, which was Canberras in those days, and spent four years at Amberley and did not enjoy the job much. I was not cut out to be an electrician; was not a very good one.
- 11:00 I did the job all right, I was pretty responsible in doing the job but it was just not my bag. I loved sport. There was one incident that I was not terribly proud of as far as the work was concerned. I was doing a servicing on an aircraft, a Canberra, and this armourer came up to me and said he wanted to cut off all power to the aircraft because they have explosive bolts in the canopy, and he wanted,
- 11:30 they're electrically operated, and he wanted to check those. So I said, "Well yeah." He said, "If I pull out the battery tray, will that cut off all power?" and I said, "Yeah, but you don't have to do that because there is an inertia switch. If the aircraft crashes then its inertia switch activates and it just cuts off power to the whole aircraft except to the fire bottles." And you had fire bottle in the bomb bay and the engine themselves.
- 12:00 And there are people all over the aircraft working away. And I said, "Come and I'll show you. There is the inertia switch and you just trip the inertia switch and it cuts off all power except to your fire bottles." And as soon as I tripped it, of course fire bottles blew all over the aircraft. People were climbing out of bomb bays coughing and spluttering. Had to go back and sign up the servicing book saying that the fire bottles were inadvertently discharged.
- 12:30 **What did they discharge: CO2?**
- No, not CO2, a chemical, not a powder, was a carbon tetra-chloride was it? Probably. So I was into sport a lot there, played football, athletics; represented the air force in football and athletics,
- 13:00 generally enjoyed life. I used to do a bit of singing at that time too and in fact teamed up with one of the WAAAFs [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force] who was about six foot two in her socks and quite a character and we teamed up with a comedy routine and sang at a pub down the Gold Coast and a couple of pubs around Ipswich and one in Brisbane. But we really needed

- 13:30 some guidance, so it didn't go very far. Bit I had a fairly good voice in those days. I went to Wagga to do an electrical fitters course and passed that all right and posted back to Amberley but was bored silly. It was just not my bag. And then they were calling for
- 14:00 people to apply for language training and I had been pretty good with languages at school, French and Latin, and seemed to do it with not much effort, so there were three languages on offer: Indonesian, Vietnamese and Chinese. And I thought Indonesian was a bit of a boring language, not terribly interested in that,
- 14:30 Vietnamese I had never heard of, I had no idea where Vietnam was, and Chinese I thought would be far too difficult. So I applied for Vietnamese and did the battery of language aptitude test and in 1961 was on the first Vietnamese course. And I was an LAC, Leading Aircraftsman, at that time and graduated as a sergeant. I was very lucky to graduate too actually, because about a week
- 15:00 before graduation another guy on the course and myself, he was an army private, I was an LAC, we got together with a couple of WAAAFs and we had a party at some guy's place down at Geelong on a Friday night .And this guy's mother was in hospital and the neighbours told her and she came, dressing gown and pyjamas,
- 15:30 and kicked us all out of there. And so there was a vacant room, one of the other RAAF guys involved had a key to this room behind the RAAF Academy library, which was vacant. So we went off down there with blankets and booze and mattresses and
- 16:00 we spent the night in this place. And the next day - we had blankets over the windows - and as light broke, there were people out on the parade ground, there were people moving around, so we had to get out of there as quietly as we could and leave all of the gear there. Anyway, some idiot who was working on his car knew that this room was there and he went along to the librarian to ask if he could put parts of his car in this room.
- 16:30 So of course "Yes", opened up the room and they found this little nest. So we went back Sunday evening to retrieve the mattresses and all the rest of it and there were big bolts on the door, you know, we couldn't get in. So they knew it must have been somebody from the library who had been involved and this WAAF blurted out everything.
- 17:00 So the army guy involved, he was on the Vietnamese course with me, he was not charged because he was army. I was called up before the CO [Commanding Officer] of the language school [RAAF School of Languages] and confined me to barracks and to base for the duration of the course, a week or so. And I was getting married a week after the course finished anyway in Rockhampton
- 17:30 and I thought, "I am not going to make this wedding." Anyway, the CO of the Base Squadron, another unit separate from the language school, well, they charged me too, so I was mated to be charged, to answer the charge of the CO of the base squadron. I was advised by the
- 18:00 Director of Studies of the language school that there was not a lot of love lost between the two units. What to say? So I just said, "Yes, all this happened," pleaded guilty and he said, "Well, what do you have to say for yourself?" And I said, "I have already been punished for this offence in that the CO of the language school has awarded me this and this." So they called that CO down who took great delight I think in saying, "Well yes, I have punished him"
- 18:30 and as I say the relationship between the two COs was not good, and he couldn't have done anything else but let me go, let me off. But that would have probably meant that I wouldn't have been home for the wedding had he charged me; and a couple of weeks confined to barracks or something. That was lucky, anyway I graduated as a sergeant and moved into, well, became a linguist, that was my
- 19:00 mustering. I was supposed to go to the embassy in Saigon once I had finished the course, but at that time the post of Air Attaché had not been established and the Military Attaché there, there was a lot of inter-service rivalry, said, "There is no need for an air attaché."
- 19:30 So there was no decision made at that time. So I stayed at the language school to assist with teaching the second group that came in and the third group; I was there for two years. And I married at the end of 1961, so by the end of 1962 we had our first child. And it
- 20:00 was not really convenient to go to Saigon then, so the fellow from the second course went and I moved off to Canberra. And we were on the bones, when we married I think we had about a hundred pounds, and we had a little bed-sit accommodation in Melbourne.
- 20:30 And I was not entitled to rental assistance in those days, because I had been at the one unit. You had to move to another unit in another location before you could get any rental assistance, so I was paying about a third of my pay out on accommodation and we just couldn't keep going that way. Then a second child was on the way, and so I had to send my wife
- 21:00 back up to Rockhampton with her relatives and I lived on base, cutting hair to try to get a few bob together. Anyway, they posted me to Canberra to Director of Air Force Intelligence, and that's when I started getting into intelligence work, and I stayed there in fact from 1963 to 66 when I went to Vietnam.

- 21:30 At that time, I was on the Indonesian desk, Indonesia was very prominent in the intelligence world at that time, because we had Konfrontasi, confrontation with Malaysia, we had troops up there.
- 22:00 And I knew more about the Indonesian air force then and its personnel than I did about our own by the time I left there after three years. Anyway then I was posted to Vietnam as administrative assistant to the Air Attaché. And I hadn't been there very long when I felt that I was not
- 22:30 being used the way I should have been, I mean I had done a lot of training with language and the Air Attaché had no real use for me as a linguist. I was certainly involved in intelligence gathering, but it was generally low-grade intelligence information. I had liaison with the Vietnamese air force and the US
- 23:00 Air Force at Ton San Nhut, which was the air base for Saigon, and I would spend a couple of days out there every week gathering intelligence to write up reports every week and send back to Canberra. But I was not a happy chappie there because I felt that my language skills were not being used and that's what I had been trained to do.

**Can I just ask you there, when you signed up for the language courses, did you know where that would take you?**

- 23:30 I had no idea. For me, getting into a language course was a way out of being an aircraft electrician and that was foremost in my mind. I had no idea, as I said before, I didn't know where Vietnam was, I had never heard of it, had no knowledge whatsoever of Vietnam.
- 24:00 It is noteworthy too that I was on the first course in 1961; we didn't send a training team there until 1962. They did their recruiting for this first Vietnamese course in 1960, so it must have been planned probably 1959 or so to start up a Vietnamese language program.
- 24:30 **So when you started moving from your language course into intelligence, what did you think about that?**
- Well as you, there were other people on the course, there was an air force navigator, I don't know what the hell he was doing there; another LAC who was in love with languages, he was a Scottish guy originally,
- 25:00 he loved to play with languages. There was two army warrant officers, one of whom had already done a Russian course and Indonesian as well I think. And he was already working in Defence Signals Branch at that time, DSB. And the other army warrant officer was in signals and they were also associated with that.
- 25:30 So we gleaned some information in what you might be getting up to in a very vague general sense before the course was through. And so it sounded exciting and what I would be happy doing. And once I got into it, I really enjoyed it. While I was still at the language school, I had to teach myself to
- 26:00 touch type, because I was going up as an administrative assistant, and drive a jeep and a four-wheel drive vehicle. But I also had a job, which was very, very quiet at that time; it was connected with intelligence and it was required by
- 26:30 one of our intelligence agencies, not DSD [Defence Signals Directorate] or DSB. And I had to go to Canberra to do some work on this and where I did the work was at the government printer's office. Now at the government printers, they have an inner sanctum where there is very restricted access. And I went in
- 27:00 there and none of the people in that area had any idea what I was doing, because they put me in a vault together with the about-to-be-released budget papers for the year, and a telephone. And that's where I did my work. So it was, well I suppose I can talk about it now, it is certainly long after the event.
- 27:30 It was getting together see warfare material that might be used, leaflets and this sort of thing.

**This section of transcript is embargoed until 1 January 2034.**

- 28:00 **I just want to stop for a minute.**

Yes, so from RAAF Base Point Cook and the language school, I was moved to Canberra and it was more or less a compassionate posting because my wife was about to have the second child, and she was on her own in Rockhampton and by moving to Canberra, I was able to get rent assistance

- 28:30 and get a Department of the Interior house. But that's when I moved into the intelligence world and

really enjoyed the work and was doing something fruitful, something useful, something interesting. And I never looked back as far as job satisfaction was concerned.

### **Your pay cheque is still RAAF?**

- 29:00 Oh yes, I was working in the Directorate of Air Force Intelligence and all of the other guys that I was working with were air force and we were primarily, the area that I was working in was, gathering military intelligence, not just air force but military intelligence. And of course you have got other types of intelligence to gather as well.
- 29:30 Anyway Vietnam. I was not satisfied that, because the intelligence gathering that I was doing at that time was pretty low-grade stuff. And I started to go down to, one of my colleagues that had been at the
- 30:00 Director of Air Force Intelligence with me had gone to Nui Dat as the RAAF Intelligence Officer - and so got in touch with him and arranged to go down there to spend some time. So I would finish work on a Friday and had said nothing to the Air Attaché - I was a warrant officer by that time, acting warrant officer. So I would jump on a chopper or a Caribou
- 30:30 on a Friday afternoon, head down to the task force and do some work with this intelligence officer or with 1 Div Int [1st Divisional Intelligence Unit], which was the intelligence sector attached to the task force, with the major, and I can't remember his name, they used to call him 'Mad Mike'. I generally worked with him interpreting and liaison work with local Vietnamese authorities.
- 31:00 And that was what I should have been doing. And I together with the help of the RAAF Intel O [Intelligence Officer] and with the support of the deputy commander of the task force; the group captain who was also at Nui Dat, he supported it. I was trying to engineer a move out of Saigon, away from the embassy to Nui Dat, where
- 31:30 I felt that I would be put to much better use. This went on for some time, my weekends down at Nui Dat. Then I raised it with the Air Attaché, said that I wanted to get a transfer. And we didn't have a terribly good relationship though we sat side by side in an office probably twice this size,
- 32:00 and if you did something, a typing error, he would walk over and he would shut the door and he would get into you. And he would bring up every incident that had occurred previously and raise it again. And when I said I was looking for this transfer, he said, "I will never
- 32:30 approve any transfer because I need you here. And if I have any more trouble with you, I am going to adverse report you and send you back to Australia." In fact the only time that he ever used me as an interpreter was to take his wife shopping or when there was a visiting dignitary like the
- 33:00 Officer Commanding Butterworth would visit with his wife, I would take the ladies out. One other time he was interviewing a new driver, and he needed the interpretation for that. So I was pretty unhappy working with this guy, it was very frustrating. I was a bit of a brash
- 33:30 young bugger too, you know, chip on the shoulder, so it was not all one-sided I guess. When he was replaced about half way through my time, I got on extremely well with the new Air Attaché who gave me pretty much full rein and I had the opportunity to do some real intelligence work.
- 34:00 There was a friend of mine who was a CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] operative, an Australian, and he was at a place called Cu Chi, west of Saigon, about forty or fifty kilometres, and it was a pretty hot area. And he would call in to Ton San Nhut and pick me up in a chopper and took me out there, and I had interviews with the province chief and also the US [United States of America] counterpart of the province chief.
- 34:30 And I got some pretty meaty stuff out of that. And I also had a tour, went through a prison that they had there, and the memory of that doesn't leave me. They had about three hundred and fifty prisoners, all Viet Cong.
- 35:00 They had seven cells, so there were about fifty in each cell, and each cell would be not much more than twice this room size. They were all sitting, squatting position, noggie squat. And they were so lousy that they were scratching each other like monkeys do, you know, de-flea each other, with one little toilet hole in the corner of the room, and each of the three hundred and fifty, seven cells.
- 35:30 And they also had a cell with women and children. There was one woman with a baby on the breast. And there were two little boys, one eight and one ten; they had been caught laying mines on the road just outside the village. And that was
- 36:00 pretty terrible stuff. The Province Chief there was a flamboyant sort of a guy. A movie star that comes to mind is Anthony Quinn, that type, you know? And on one occasion he had a VC [Viet Cong] prisoner in front of him
- 36:30 and was trying to extract the information and he hit him and knocked him to the ground and as he got up on his knees, he pulled his pistol out and put it to his head. And the look in his eye, he was going to pull the bloody trigger. He got the information that he wanted. And on another occasion he, there was a

tunnel system

- 37:00 and the men on the ground were not going down there. So he kicked this guy in the backside and took a weapon from him and went down there himself. He was that sort of a leader. Back to the prison, the whole thing was surrounded by a moat, and the whole thing, which was not very big, probably not a lot bigger
- 37:30 than this whole house, was covered with barbed wire, all over the roof everywhere. And he said - and this was a very bad area for the Viet Cong, in fact you have probably heard of Cu Chi and the tunnel systems there. These tunnel systems went for kilometres and you could house thousands of troops in the tunnel system, so it was a pretty hot area.
- 38:00 And he said that if they are attacked by the VC, the first place that is going up is the prison, and I know he meant it. And that is something I have thought about too, because I don't know if in the Tet offensive or sometime later it might have.
- So who would have had operational command of that area?**
- 38:30 He was the Province Chief. He had operational command of the area. Yeah, the other meaty little bit of intelligence gathering that I did while I was at the embassy there I took a trip. I made friends with this guy who was a Brit [British]. He had gone to Vietnam straight after the Second World War.
- 39:00 He was a commando, Brit Commando, when they were taking over from the Japanese. And he went back there and married a Vietnamese woman and lived there with three children. And he had a finger on the pulse pretty well, and he had a friend who was a Frenchman, manager of a Michelin rubber plantation at a place called Binh Ba, which is about five or six
- 39:30 kilometres north of Nui Dat. And it was a no-no to travel by road, certainly as far as the embassy was concerned, from Saigon down to the task force area through Baria, and we drove down in his car and I posed as a Frenchman, and in fact we went through the task force area, the check
- 40:00 point, and I as a Frenchman didn't have to say anything. They just let us through and drove through to the plantation at Binh Ba and this guy, the Frenchman, had a lot of useful information on a local Viet Cong unit. An incident occurred there.
- 40:30 Once we arrived, it was late mid-afternoon, and I went for a stroll down to the village. And all of the people that work on the plantation have a village on the plantation. And I went for a stroll and ran into some kids who were just on their way home from school, so we had a bit of a yak [talk]; it was all in Vietnamese.
- 41:00 Suddenly the French manager turns up looking not happy and motioned for me to get in the car because he didn't speak English. So I got in the car and he took me to the homestead and dropped me off and went, so I didn't take too much into that.

## Tape 2

- 00:31 **Okay, the Frenchman has just ordered you into the car.**
- So that evening after dinner we sat down and he, through the Brit as an interpreter, gave me all of the information that he could. And it wasn't until we left the following morning or midday that the Brit told me that this guy
- 01:00 had been very angry when I had gone down to the village because, had they known that I was an Australian, the VC would have been in that night and I would have been gone, and put him in a great deal of danger as well. As it turned out, some time later, and this sort of disturbed me a little bit too,
- 01:30 he was killed, he was murdered by the VC, and I am not sure whether it had anything to do with me being there, because he seemed to have a fairly reasonable relationship with the villagers there, so that sort of plays on your mind a bit. So the information that he gave was pretty useful and it wasn't
- 02:00 something that he could readily pass on to, the Australians were in and around the plantation area constantly. But had he been seen in any involved discussion with officers of the task force then it might have been very tricky for him, and that's why I did the Frenchman bit, and why he was pretty
- 02:30 upset when I went for the stroll. It would have placed them in danger. His wife was Vietnamese, North Vietnamese. Back to Saigon, while I was there, I had a couple of lucky escapes I guess.
- 03:00 I had just left a BEQ, which is a bachelor enlisted men's quarters, American. They used to have large forty-four gallon drums full of concrete as a barricade around the front. And it was quite a regular occurrence for Claymore mines to be timed and set off, and I had stood outside this place with a friend having a chat

- 03:30 and then I went off, and it was a couple of minutes after I left the place when there was a Claymore mine on a bicycle positioned across the road. It went off. And there was one American only was injured, he wasn't killed. Bits of bicycle were sticking out of him.
- 04:00 They dragged him off to hospital. So that was one lucky escape that I had. Another was, on national day they had a parade in the main boulevard that led up to the presidential palace. I was going along to watch this parade and the parade was to start about nine o'clock and about eight o'clock I was almost there.
- 04:30 There was this big Catholic Cathedral and they had set up a dais behind this cathedral right on the boulevard and I was approaching this cathedral and next minute there is 'woomp woomp' going off all around. And I looked at my watch and thought, "What the hell are they doing now, letting off Claymores?" It's an hour before the parade.
- 05:00 And there was a Yank [American] just in front of me, a naval officer and he was just walking along in front of me, and I just got to this corner and he turned the corner, and this white mice, Vietnamese policeman, grabbed me by the arm and pulled me into this doorway and said, "Mortar." And next minute it just hit right in front of this Yank
- 05:30 and he was killed outright. So this guy saved my life. Yeah. And it was interesting too, well for one thing, maybe they were just trying to find their range - because they had the mortar set up, they found out later it was on the other side of the river - trying to find their range for when the parade was on, because they hit it again just towards the end of the parade. And right at the end of the
- 06:00 parade was a bunch of Chieu Hoi, this is open arms VC who had given themselves up under this Chieu Hoi program and there must have been three or four hundred of them at the tail end of this parade, of course you just stayed on and watched the parade once the mortaring was over.
- 06:30 And they hit it again and a few landed in close proximity and only a handful of people at the end of this, in the last few ranks, started to move off, broke formation, and somebody said something and next minute they were back in.
- 07:00 And while this bloody mortaring was going on, they just stayed in file and pressed on. It was an amazing thing to watch. Nobody was killed then; it was lucky. Incidents in Saigon, on one occasion, I was dressed in a suit - I was going to some embassy function -
- 07:30 and taxi drivers, as taxi drivers tend to do in other parts of the world, tend to rip off people and if you weren't aware you would tend to pay three times, four times what you should pay. Because I spoke the language, I used to always insist they used the meter and I would know how much I had to pay so I paid them
- 08:00 when I got out of the vehicle, no arguments, just walk away. Anyway this particular time, I told this guy where I wanted to go in Vietnamese and as usual they said, "Vietnamese is very good. Where did you learn? Where are you from?" And I thought eh, so I said, "I'm a Russian." And he looked at me and he said, "What the hell is a Russian doing here in Vietnam?" I said, "I am a correspondent." He said, "How did you get here?"
- 08:30 "Oh, I came through Poland and" you know. But his tone changed to one of the utmost respect and it was really interesting that he took on this very formal, using a lot of honorifics, very respectful. That was interesting.
- 09:00 What else in Saigon?
- In your time there, how many different nationalities did you come across in your time in Vietnam? And were there any that really surprised you?**
- No. I had a bit to do with the ICC, the International Control Commission, and they were Indians, not very much to do with them. French of course. In fact, I had a game of Rugby with a mob called
- 09:30 the Social Sportif, which is the social elite club of the French, and we played a Frenchman from Cambodia. I had a little bit to do with the Australian correspondents, Pat Burgess. They used to all drink in the
- 10:00 Caravel Hotel, which is where the embassy was. No, Americans stand out. I left Vietnam and my experience with Americans was quite a lot different to the guys who would have been with the task force. You would probably get the opinion from them
- 10:30 that we had a pretty good relationship with the Yanks, and they gave us support when we needed it, and blah, blah, but they didn't want to go out on patrols with them because the Yanks were something else. It was too bloody dangerous to go out on patrols with Americans: radios, noisy and all the rest of it. But my experience was somewhat
- 11:00 different. I had contact with them every week and you see a different side of it being in Saigon. Those people at the air base were not required to live on base. They could hire digs [quarters] off base and they could rent houses, get their girlfriends in, and they did so much, these military

- 11:30 people, to disrupt the economy and for that reason the Vietnamese didn't want them there. There was one guy who I helped to come to Australia to teach at the RAAF School of Languages at Point Cook. Now this guy was friends with the then head of Vietnamese language department at Point Cook
- 12:00 and both of them had been with the Viet Minh fighting against the French, both northerners. And both had come south when they divided the country in 1954; there were about a million refugees that came south and he was one of them. He was fairly high up in the education department.
- 12:30 And the night, well a couple of nights before he left to come to Australia, and I was fairly well involved in organising getting him out and to Australia, he took me to dinner, just the two of us. And we got into the turps [turpentine - cheap spirits] and when he was pretty well in his cups drinking whisky, he said something about Americans and how he didn't want them here. And I
- 13:00 said, "Hell, you have got about six hundred thousand of them here now. And if they weren't here, the North would overrun you, you wouldn't have a hope in hell." And he said, "Even knowing that, I wish that they had never set foot in Vietnam because they treat us as second class citizens even in our own country." And that was pretty much the attitude.
- 13:30 "We are here fighting this fight for you." But there are a lot of brave Vietnamese military people who fought hard and well and gave their lives for their own country, and I have got a lot of respect for Vietnamese and their military competency.
- 14:00 **Do you think the Americans might have been living under the belief that them being there was actually helping the economy?**
- No, I don't think they gave a damn about the economy or what they might be doing to it. They were just doing the American thing, "I want this and I will pay", and the other embassy people were not terribly happy about them being there either. Because before where
- 14:30 they could get a house for their staff for, say, five hundred Australian dollars a month, the Yanks would come in and offer twice that much, so everything just went crazy. It hurt the Vietnamese and others didn't like it too. When Australia was going to become an R and R [Rest and Recreation] offering,
- 15:00 it was on again, off again. And I was out at the air base with this American unit, and this white fellow American, he said to me, "Hey Aussie, is it true that they are not going to open up Australia
- 15:30 for R and R because you won't let niggers in?" And he was sitting right next to one. He was, say, an E5 [Enlisted grade 5], 5-stripe sergeant, and the Negro sitting next to him was an E4 just one rank below. And that really annoyed the hell out of me I can tell you, and I said, "No, that is not true. He would be more welcome than you would be."
- 16:00 But there was a lot of that. The PX [Post Exchange - American canteen unit], the military store, the people who had access to that were all military people from all nationalities: they had Taiwanese, Filipinos, Thais, Koreans. So Australians and New Zealanders of course, all had a PX card and a ration card.
- 16:30 You could get so much booze or cigarettes and whatever else was available, refrigerators or whatever. But the locals didn't have access to it. And later on when I would be going in and out of China a lot, in China they used to have what they called Friendship Stores, similar thing,
- 17:00 the only people that had access to these Friendship Stores were foreigners, foreign experts in China. But when I first went to China, high ranking cadres also walked in and out, they had access. But drawing a comparison between the two, the Friendship Stores in China and the PX in Vietnam, the effect on the locals was the same
- 17:30 because they didn't have access. The goodies were there and they wanted them, so if they couldn't get somebody they knew to go in and buy it for them, they would buy it from them on the black market. And the most notorious group in flogging stuff on the black markets were the Koreans and because the people who ran the PX didn't have a clue about Korean names, a Korean would have about five PX
- 18:00 cards, and they knew, I don't know how, when something good was coming in, because you would walk into the PX and there would be a bunch of them just mingling around, wandering around. And then suddenly either a TV set or a refrigerator or something worthwhile would hit the floor, stacks of them, and they would be sold out
- 18:30 within the hour. All the Koreans and you could buy them half an hour later around the corner on the black market. Money, there was quite thing going on with money exchange, because you had the Vietnamese piastre,
- 19:00 the American US dollar and the American US Payment Certificate, which was the only thing you could use in the PX. Incidentally, that comparison with the Friendship Store in China and the PX in Vietnam, you would have people in China standing outside the store looking at all of the goodies in the window and not having access to it, and it breeds the same sort of emotion amongst local people as it did in the Vietnamese.

19:30 What did I just say a minute ago?

**About the money.**

The exchange rate was about eleven hundred piastres to a dollar US but you were crazy if you took that, because on the black market you would probably get double that in piastres, if you wanted piastres.

20:00 In MPC, if you had a green [US] dollar, you could buy MPC [Military Payment Certificate] on the street and they would give you a hundred and seventy or a hundred and eighty MPC, which in the PX was the same value as the dollar. But you could get one and three quarters times the value for each dollar green. I remember when the new

20:30 Air Attaché arrived. He only had US dollars and he was going to go to the bank to change it. So I said, "Hey, you don't do that. Give me what you want to change" and I walked across the road to the Continental Hotel and brought him back twice as much as he would have got if he had gone to the bank. And I knew of one guy, an Australian,

21:00 now when people left Vung Tau or Nui Dat, they all used MPC the Australian troops over there, this guy would, when a group of diggers was leaving to go home, they could change their MPC into green dollars down there at Vung Tau or Nui Dat with the American exchange office.

21:30 And this guy would accompany them to that office and he would pick out some guys and say, "Hey, change a hundred for me will you?" So he would change his MPC into green dollars there, and then he would accompany the same group up to Ton San Nhut to get the same flight out, and they had an exchange

22:00 office there too, and so he would double up again there too. Between Vung Tau and Saigon, he would change his say it is a hundred dollars MPC, he would change it to a hundred dollars green, and then sell it on the black market to a hundred and eighty MPC, come up to Saigon, give the hundred and eighty MPC to the same guy who would change it into green dollars, so he was making heaps of money.

22:30 **When you first signed up for your Vietnamese language course, you had no idea of where Vietnam was, how did that knowledge of Vietnam grow for you?**

You can't learn a language without learning something about the culture and it is an integral component in any

23:00 language course that you learn something about the culture as you go, something of the history, something of the culture, something of the geography of the country. And that was the case and once I had completed the course then you read on, and you just pick up more knowledge as you go. In country, in one respect it was better for me as far as

23:30 my acquisition of language skills goes to be where I was for nearly a year in Saigon, as opposed to spending a year with the task force, because I had access to the people all the time. Virtually twenty-four hours a day. And I had, well, access culturally as well. I went to

24:00 one home, which was called a dam do, it's a commemoration celebration for a dead person, say the grandfather had died or the father had died, so anniversary of the death they would have a meal. And the way that would work, all of the men would gather in the sitting room and

24:30 whip into the scotch, and we were drinking seven-ounce Johnny Walker scotch. And they get roaring drunk and all of the ladies are out in the back in the kitchen cooking the meal for them. Terribly much a male-dominated society. And I came away from there with the utmost respect for Vietnamese women

25:00 and their resilience, they're really gutsy people compared with the men. There was one occasion that really struck me too. After about twelve months, I moved to Vung Tau with the RAAF Support Group there and I had a cheque to

25:30 present to a fisherman, he had been run over by an Australian Land Rover, and this guy was in his fifties, he had a family, a number of kids, no means of support, he was being supported by his other fisherman friends but no possibility of earning any income. And I had a cheque for a half a million piastres, which is about

26:00 five thousand Aust [Australian dollars] in those days, which was a bit of money. He had no idea why I was there, I was in uniform, and he had no reason at all to love Australians. And I went to his home, earthen floor, thatch roof, you know, and he invited me in and sat me down and he sent one of his kids out to a lychee tree in the backyard,

26:30 which was the only tree they had and they had all of their bunches of lychees covered up so the birds wouldn't get them. Took off a bunch of lychees, put them on the table, with water, boiled water. And that was the best that he could offer me. So hospitality is such a great thing with Vietnamese.

27:00 And he wept when I gave him the cheque and it was really, that is something that sticks with you, you know.

27:30 **When they first said 'Saigon' to you what did you think?**

Well, I was not terribly excited about leaving wife and two little kids, who were two and a half and three and a half, but there was an excitement there at the same time in going to do a job which I had been trained for.

28:00 At that stage we didn't have, the task force had only just a few months prior been set up. We didn't have an opportunity for a RAAF linguist to go there, so the embassy was the first position available for a RAAF linguist, RAAF linguist intelligence person/

28:30 administrative assistant. So yeah, I was very much looking forward to going there. One other funny incident, I suppose, a young fellow arrived at the embassy, he was green, you know, nineteen, fresh out of high school into

29:00 DFAT [Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade], straight over to Vietnam, hadn't been anywhere, hadn't seen much of life at all. And I used to frequent a couple of bars - Australians were known as 'Cheap Charlies', didn't buy drinks - I would just go along for the conversation. And I took this fellow along with me and so we are sitting at the bar and I am talking to this girl, lady behind the bar.

29:30 And a bar girl came up and she wrapped herself around this young fellow, and before very long he was pretty aroused and before very long she drags him down to a dark area down the back where they had these little booths and I am sitting there having a beer and talking to this girl behind the bar. And the next thing, this guy comes out at a fair rate, says, "I have got to go back to the embassy. I'm off."

30:00 So he is gone; he is out the door. And his girlfriend comes up to me and says, "What is the matter with your friend, he tells me he loves me, why did he run off like that?" And I say, "I am sorry, I don't know." And then the girl wanders off, and the girl behind the bar says to me, "It's a he." Yeah the girl was a boy. So I found out from this guy when I got back to his digs that this female had groped

30:30 him, so he groped back and got a surprise.

**So what was your appreciation of what the situation in Vietnam was at that early stage?**

Well it is a gradual process.

31:00 Initially, I didn't have the awareness that the Americans were in there in such strength and doing things to the economy that they were. I was probably more intent on language acquisition at every opportunity, apart from doing the job and working on gathering the intelligence,

31:30 which again I stress was pretty low-grade stuff. There was this cultural awareness was very gradual. With daily encounters, you would strike different situations and you would learn something more about the culture, but there were cultural shocks. You would see a policeman on point duty walk over to a tree at the side of the road

32:00 and pee. I remember walking along one of the streets in Saigon where this lovely, beautifully dressed Vietnamese girl, long flowing black hair in the ao dai, the national dress, walking along in front of me probably about twenty metres or so, and suddenly she came to a tree, and she stopped and squatted and she did her business

32:30 in the street, so these, perhaps a lot of that is the French influence. My trip out to the airport took me sometimes past the railway track, the road ran alongside the railway track. And there was no trains there any more, the VC had blown them all up, but you would see people perched on the railway line, paper in hand, squatting doing their business, just like birds on a fence you know.

33:00 I had an invite to a Catholic home on Christmas Eve and the whole family was there and I was more or less the guest of honour sitting between the grandfather, the head of the family, and the grandmother either side of me, and they had a, it was traditional with them in a

33:30 lot of the Catholic families over there that they had this Christmas Eve dinner. And they had a little grotto thing set up in the corner with the Virgin Mary and all of that, and that was touching and enlightening to be a part of that. Generally Australians treated Vietnamese,

34:00 because we are such an egalitarian mob, as equals. There were however instances where they're 'noggies', you know, 'slopes' [derogatory terms for Vietnamese], and Australians felt much the same as the Americans did, "We're over here fighting their war for them." It would have helped tremendously I think

34:30 for the whole war effort and for interpersonal relationships between both Americans, more so Americans, and Vietnamese, and Australians and Vietnamese, had our people received some sort of pre-embarkation briefing on the culture, some aspects of the culture, how to treat the Vietnamese people.

35:00 Because it was so obvious: this animosity from the Vietnamese towards Americans in particular.

**You were mentioning before that when you went out to present the cheque to the farmer you went out in uniform, what was the norm for going out in public?**

- 35:30 Oh, this was close to Vung Tau; it was not Saigon. During working hours, I wore uniform all of the time at the embassy, Vung Tau, anywhere. Of an evening, you would wear casual dress, shirt and slacks, as would the Americans.
- 36:00 **What was the general feeling as far as safety and that was concerned when you went out?**
- Well, it was I guess, the danger was there all of the time, but you become used to it. You become a little bit blasé, and it takes you back to reality when, we would have a courier come through once a week with the diplomatic bag, and this task would be shared around the army, navy, air force
- 36:30 Intelligence people back in Australia, in Canberra, doing the diplomatic bag thing. And when there was a RAAF or officers involved, up to squadron leader, you would take them down town. They wanted to do the bars and everything.
- 37:00 And it wasn't until then and you see their behaviour, looking like this and looking over their shoulder the whole time and waiting for a hand grenade to come rolling in, you think, "Hell." You just get used to it and you don't even think about it. If a hand grenade comes in, so you dive for cover. Talking about hand grenades, when I was seven and we were at
- 37:30 Strathpine, there was an air force base not far away and I got mixed up with this kid who was about fourteen, his name was John Lugg. And he said to me, "You pinch some cigarettes and lollies from your old man's shop and I will take you fishing." Well, that sounded pretty attractive to me so I did. And he doubled me on his bike; he had an army
- 38:00 knapsack, haversack, and we went up through the bush to the perimeter of this air force base on the far side of the strip, away from where all of the buildings were. You could see little figures walking around, and we went under the barbed wire on our bellies and there was a shed there,
- 38:30 and he got into the shed, he had pliers with him, and inside the shed were boxes and boxes stacked up. Hand grenades. So he used the pliers, got into the box, a dozen hand grenades and all like an egg container holding, takes the hand grenades out, puts them in the haversack. In the middle was a tin of fuses, takes the fuses out sticks them in the haversack. And we went down to the Pine River - that's between Strathpine and Boar Hill, well, you know the area.
- 39:00 And he unscrewed the base plate, insert the fuse, screw it up, go over to the river, pull the pin, into the river, 'whoom', up come the fish and snakes and frogs. I went along the bank with a sugar bag and he is tossing these things out. Yeah, well, he went to reform school and because I was so young I got out of it.

### Tape 3

- 00:30 While I was in Vietnam, and I said before it is a gradual thing this cultural awareness, and with the progress of language acquisition .The Vietnamese language is very strongly influenced by Chinese because China dominated Vietnam for a thousand years.
- 01:00 So seventy or as much as eighty per cent of their vocabulary, lexicon, derives from Chinese and so then I developed a bit of an interest in the connection, the Vietnamese and Chinese language connection. The very first written language the Vietnamese had was Chinese and only about five per cent, the
- 01:30 elite class, were educated. And the Vietnamese then adopted, made up, created their own characters so this language, written language, they call Chu Nom was their own brand of Chinese-type characters, mixed with original Chinese characters, and I
- 02:00 thought that was pretty interesting too. I picked up a book while I was there in this Nom language and thought it would be really interesting to do some historical research into this. While I was in Vietnam, I took R and R in Hong Kong and a friend of mine Kev Lawless,
- 02:30 who had studied Chinese in 61 when I had studied Vietnamese, was in Hong Kong. So I contacted him and stayed with him while I was there. And he was pretty well set up: he was a single guy with a three-bedroom apartment with his maid. And Hong Kong looked a bit like fairyland after Vietnam, and I thought, "Gee, this would be a great
- 03:00 place to be, to work." And he was working with the British military intelligence and JSIS, which is Joint Services Intelligence Service. So that did more to develop this interest I had in perhaps learning Chinese. Anyway when I returned to Australia -
- 03:30 I spent about twelve months in Saigon at the embassy and then I went down to Vung Tau to the RAAF Support Unit and spent about three months there. I spent about fifteen months over there all together. I had spent, I had been down to Vung Tau a couple of times, on one occasion I had amoebic dysentery so I went down to Vung Tau
- 04:00 to convalesce for a couple of weeks. How I picked up this amoebic dysentery was interesting too, part of

Saigon is called Cholon, Cholon Luc literally means big market, but that is the Chinese quarter of Saigon and one of my CIA friends was

04:30 going back to the States. And this was this large Chinese restaurant complex, it was four-storey with restaurants and nightclubs, and the son of the owner of this threw a party in a private room for this CIA guy and other CIA guys. There were eleven of us at the table altogether and we had a traditional Chinese-Vietnamese meal,

05:00 which included everybody had a shot glass, and we were drinking neat whisky, and they had a waiter there with a tumbler full of scotch ready to fill up. And we had to go around the table to propose a toast, and with each toast that was proposed and drunk,

05:30 you had to drain the glass. And they filled it up again, so by the time you got to the eleventh we were all pretty whacked. And that's when they brought on the steamboat. You know, you have the raw ingredients and you cook them yourself in the steamboat in the middle of the table and eat it. Well, by that time you are so whacked you dip it in with the chopsticks and eat it,

06:00 and you don't eat anything that is uncooked, you shouldn't, and that's where I picked up my amoebic dysentery. Incidentally, the guy that was hosting it, this Chinese son of the restaurant owner, he looks something like you would see in a cartoon, the ones that come to mind are where the wolf slides down and

06:30 follows the contour of the chair and just slides off the chair. This is what he did and disappeared under the table. He was really full. Anyway, where did we get up to? I moved down to Vung Tau to finish my tour there.

**I was wondering if you could tell me about your first impressions when you got to Vietnam, like you had learnt a bit in training,**

07:00 **but what did you actually see when you got there?**

The first thing I saw when I got off the aeroplane, I was busting for a pee and I hit the toilet at the airport and I am standing at the urinal and here is this Vietnamese lady on her hands and knees scrubbing the floor about two urinals up from me. So I am doing my job and I glanced over there and she

07:30 glanced up at me and a big smile, "Hello, how are you?" while you are in the middle of the toilet. Well I guess it was pretty much a cultural shock; I mentioned before it was quite a cultural shock. And from a language point of view, at Point Cook, the language school they teach you

08:00 the North Vietnamese dialect. There are three distinct dialects, northern, central and southern. And the southern can almost be compared with Mandarin and Cantonese, compared with a northern dialect. So it was like hitting a brick wall when you first get out amongst the people because they are talking this gibberish and you really don't understand a hell of a lot of it. And that's another reason why it was good for me, as far as language acquisition

08:30 is concerned, to be in Saigon and have the access I did to the southern language. I never at any stage lost my northern accent, and I have a pretty good northern accent. But my ear by the time I left there was well tuned to the southern accent. And it sounded, it was easier to listen to a

09:00 southerner then it was to a Northerner because you didn't strike a lot of northern accents there.

**In terms of language acquisition, did you set yourself personal goals to accelerate that?**

No I didn't. I bought Vietnamese language books

09:30 and I had some assistance, with one particular Vietnamese air force captain who I used to visit frequently, I have got one of his books in there that he signed for me. No, I didn't set any goals, it was just a day-to-day pick it up as you go.

10:00 **Can you talk about communicating with different classes of Vietnamese people, how the communication altered?**

Language was pretty universal. You don't have your differences in the language used among the elite compared with the peasant.

10:30 Peasants will use, all Vietnamese are trained from an early age to show respect to elders, and they use honorific, well, not so much honorific, but relationship terms like 'uncle' and 'aunty' and 'grandfather', as terms of respect for older people. It's very much a pecking order in Vietnam, once you

11:00 establish your position as opposed to the person that you're talking to in a formal situation, so you reach the level of honorifics, what language to use, but that extends from the very humble, the very lowly peasant to wherever up the scale.

**Did you have any funny incidents where you got that wrong as a beginner?**

- 11:30 None that come to mind at the moment. I had a funny one in Chinese later. This was one of the teachers at the university here, we were at her home at a party and I was walking around with a tray of chicken pieces; it was not misinterpretation of language,
- 12:00 just wrong usage in a situation and I went to offer this lady some chicken. And I said in Mandarin, "Ni chir ji ba." 'Chir' means to eat, 'ji' means chicken and 'ba' is an ending, which means suggestion, right? So, 'have a bit of chicken' I am saying.
- 12:30 But 'ba' can also mean tail, and if you are talking about chicken tail that's a slang word for penis. So I was inviting her to have oral sex. She wised me up pretty quickly.

**What about in Vietnam, did you have to learn slang for certain things or from certain people that you spoke to? Was that difficult?**

- 13:00 Yes. Well, it is an enjoyable experience picking up new things. Little songs too, like Vietnamese folksongs, situations where you start up with one of their songs it really breaks the ice when you use either colloquial expressions.
- 13:30 It's like a Chinese or Vietnamese walk into this room and saying, "G'day mate, how the hell are you?" in English with no foreign accent. And you think, "Hey, this guy will do me, he is one of us." regardless of colour creed or whatever. Speak the language with the right accent and that is accepted. So it was certainly a great tool
- 14:00 for being accepted to learn and to use colloquial expressions. And they have got a great sense of humour Vietnamese, and dirty minds too. They regard somebody who is a lecher - they have animals - as a goat, if they
- 14:30 say 'Mr Goat' then they are talking about some dirty old man. Or 'Mr Thirty-Five' is a tiger, which is also regarded as some sort of a lecher.

**Can you talk much about the non-verbal things that you observed when you first got there? In terms of culturally how people interacted and whether you sometimes**

- 15:00 **picked up hidden meanings that might be useful for your job, more that angle?**

Well, non-verbal.

- 15:30 **Well maybe, how would you get information out of someone? Would there be a certain way to get it rather than being direct or anything like that?**

Yes there is, the non-direct approach is the way to go. It is not the Vietnamese way to go, it is not the Chinese way to go, to get to a point. You work around something to get to the point.

- 16:00 A couple of incidents that come to mind, one evening, there was a ten or eleven o'clock curfew, but I had an after-curfew pass and me and a friend of mine were walking down the main street in Saigon and there was nobody on the street because it was after curfew, and there was some street urchins, little kids who
- 16:30 carry a shoe box around and polish shoes and this sort of thing, asleep on the street. And as we walked along, a couple of them came and they put an arm around your waist and grab a hold of your other arm and look up at you and say you know, "You give me five piastres", whatever, give me something. And as we were walking along, my friend who was walking beside me,
- 17:00 another RAAF type, this kid was fiddling with his watch and he had the extendable band, and before he knew this kid had his watch off. So he said, "You little bastard." and he just turned and he cuffed him over the ear. And the two kids - there was a group of them - they ran off. And things were pretty dark and as we came to this corner I just happened to glance up and saw this half a brick
- 17:30 fly through the air. One of these kids had hoyed a brick at us, and it would have done some serious damage if it had hit. Anyway, I chased this little fellow and I caught up with him and I sat in the gutter and I patted his bum [spanked him] to let him know that this was not what you do and I suddenly heard a click, and I looked up and I am looking down the barrel of a gun; a plain-clothed policeman who wasn't happy about me
- 18:00 giving this kid a bit of a padding [spanking]. So I explained in my best Vietnamese very quickly what had happened and how it had come to that situation. And he put the gun away and told the kid to go. One other occasion on how Vietnamese regard authority and how they use authority, the army base at front beach down
- 18:30 at Vung Tau, there was one guy who had been stealing and I took him along to the local police station to report this and I was standing alongside him in front of this sergeant who was sitting behind the desk. And I gave my version of what had happened, and this young fellow who was a bit of a cheeky young bloke,
- 19:00 probably about eighteen, he got his five bob's worth in [saying his piece], started too, and the sergeant just got up out of his chair, leaned across and belted him. Dropped him back on his backside on the floor

and told him, "Shut up and don't talk until I tell you to talk." That's the way they operate and that's what they understand. And

19:30 later when I was at the University of Griffith here, I had a call from a Queensland Fisheries officer, they were having a major problem with Vietnamese fisherman taking small undersized fish and creating a bit of havoc in the bay and he sought my advice

20:00 on what they should do about it. Because once the Vietnamese came out here and particularly someone like fishermen, it was open slather; it was open slather back there, they took what they wanted to take, and they were doing the same thing here. But they just got a slap on the wrist, a talking-to, and they regarded this as ridiculous and just went ahead and did whatever they wanted.

20:30 I suggested to this guy was that what they needed to do was have a few uniformed people show up to this fellow's home, take him back to their office, mat him, and tell him very sternly that if this happened again that there would be serious consequences. That's what the Vietnamese would have respected

21:00 and listened to. But with our leniency in court sentencing for offences, it is just a joke as far as the Vietnamese are concerned.

**Can you give me any specific examples, going back to before, where you needed to get some information and how you would go about doing that?**

21:30 Well, unless you were, apart from in an interrogation situation, and I did not conduct any interrogations, I sat in one some. If I were looking to extract information from an individual, I would need to first establish some sort of rapport with that person for them to

22:00 feel confident to tell me this information, give me this information in confidence. So it's very much a process of establishing rapport, building up confidence, trust, by the individual that you are trying to get the information from. And that's very much a personal thing. You will get some people

22:30 will never be successful with it, and it's a personality thing too.

**So would that take place over a long period of time, I mean would you have people that you were told to try and be friends?**

Cultivate? Nobody told me; nobody was there to tell me what to do, it was all my initiative.

23:00 So this was a general trend, if I felt that somebody could be useful to me then you become friendly with that person and if they feel that it is a genuine friendship, and it is not easy, then they're likely to talk to you. In the case of

23:30 an interrogation situation, it is not so.

**What would drive someone to offer you information, just because they like you?**

Well, they're not going to tell you something that's going to place them in any sort of, if they feel that by telling you it will place them in some sort of danger.

24:00 They are not going to tell you something that will have any detrimental effect on any of their personal family and friends. But if they feel that something will be useful for you in the general war effort, something that doesn't really concern them, then they'll talk to you. But again it is very much

24:30 establishing a good rapport with people. They either like you or they don't like you. But if you speak their language then it helps a lot.

**Would you reward people for giving you information?**

Like monetary reward?

**Anything.**

No.

25:00 Well, yes and no. You might in some cases, yes, you might give them a bottle of scotch or you might buy a watch, which was very cheapo in the PX, for their wife or which I did for this Vietnamese captain that I had a lot to do with. I cant recall them ever asking for anything.

25:30 **Would you ever drop hints that you might want to know about something to open a door or?**

Well its, once you've already established a good relationship with a person then you could do it freely and, like I said before, if it is not going to effect them personally or their family then they would be happy enough to

26:00 talk.

**Was it more the men that did the talking?**

Yes. As I said before, Vietnamese society and culture is very much male dominated. You will never find, I have never seen a

26:30 female in a prominent position in whatever field. It's always a male on top. Teaching profession, they never get beyond a certain level, politics it seems the same. Incidentally, I met a very prominent former political person in North Vietnam. This guy had

27:00 been, he was the first Minister for Justice in Ho Chi Minh's government, and I set up the language program when I was at Griffith and visited Hanoi, once the war was finished in the 90s, each year; the guy I was using as the coordinator up there was the son of this fellow.

27:30 So I got to meet him and his wife, and his wife was not much taller than you are sitting down. And they had had ten kids, and most of the time they had spent out in the boondies [boondocks, the bush] when they were fighting the French, gutsy people, particularly the women.

28:00 **You have said that a couple of times, that the women were very strong, can you give us some more examples?**

Okay. One that comes to mind immediately was a woman who was a worker at the RAAF Support Unit in Vung Tau and I said to her one day, "How many kids have you got?" just socialising. And she told me. And I said, "What about your husband, is he in the military?"

28:30 "Oh", she said, "He is in the military but he is gone; he is with another wife now." I said, "What do you mean?" She said, "He just left and he is living in the country somewhere with his new wife." And he had walked out on five or six kids and just leaves the whole burden to the wife and the thing is that they accept it as their lot, and they will bring the kids up as best they can and accept it.

29:00 "This is my lot, he's gone and I am not likely to see him again." And just the acceptance is another example of the strength they have, the inner strength, and this I noticed on a few occasions.

**Can you make any comments about the Vietnamese work ethic that you saw at the time?**

29:30 Not terribly good. They would do it seemed as little as possible, only what they had to do. And people, labourers, people with very mundane jobs were not over energetic, in fact lacking in

30:00 drive or energy. Whether they would have been drivers of embassy vehicles or guards at home or people working on the street in whatever occupation, you got the impression that, hey, they would just do what they had to do and nothing more.

30:30 **What was your impression of the Vietnamese military personnel that you dealt with?**

I was impressed with them, they were mainly air force people that I had contact with. Pretty professional in their approach and several of them

31:00 had had some form of training overseas in the US.

**That's all?**

31:30 **How were they treated by the Americans?**

Well that's something that I had in the back of my mind to mention but had forgotten. Where I used to go to the airport, Ton San Nhut air base, in one particular situation you had in the same hut Vietnamese at one end and Americans at the other and there was absolutely no contact

32:00 between the two. They were both basically doing much the same sort of job, and there was no, not that was obvious to me, and in the time that I spent with each group there was no contact between, no liaison, no contact between them. The Americans, the Vietnamese

32:30 if anything I guess shunned the Americans because, as I said before, there was this underlying feeling of animosity; they knew they had to have them there but they didn't really want them there. They were, you had some units, not so much in the air force but in the military, that were not terribly effective or efficient in a military role. In fact there was, "You leave me alone and I'll leave you

33:00 alone" between them and the enemy. But the air force was a bit different, they were pretty gung-ho, the pilots.

**Is that because they were made to feel like second-class citizens? And, you don't really want our help so you just do it?**

This regarding them, or feeling that they had been regarded as second-class citizens was more in the social context within

33:30 the city. There was no real social contact, apart from girly bars and this sort of thing. But the resentment was pretty widespread throughout the community. In the military situation, it was more obvious in the military role that the Americans had

- 34:00 an attitude of superiority: that they were over there to fight this war for the Vietnamese who were pretty useless anyway. In fact, there were a lot of Vietnamese who fought very bravely and very well and were very effective in what they did.
- 34:30 So from the point of view of the military, they shunned the Americans, from my point of view anyway, didn't want to have much to do with them at all because the Americans tended to look down on the Vietnamese as a fighting force, so there was nothing there.
- 35:00 And at unit level too I don't believe that there was much interaction between the two, for that very reason, that the Americans considered they just weren't up to scratch.
- It seems like a terrible waste of a resource there? Surely they could have used those military personnel a lot better to gather information?**
- 35:30 Yeah. And I guess the basis of it was American attitude towards the Vietnamese. Now, you've heard of Colonel Ted Sarong, have you? He was the guy that set up the Australian training team [Australian Army Training Team Vietnam]
- 36:00 and spent a couple of years there running the training team as a colonel, and he went back there, he was there in all thirteen years but working as a civvy [civilian] with the CIA. I just lost
- 36:30 my track - back on track now. He was asked to, when he was setting things up, to have liaison, asked by Vietnamese military hierarchy to work together with them.
- 37:00 But he was pretty well entrenched and too much answerable in a way to the American military system that he was not in a position to move sideways like that or to have those two relationships separated. So he had to come within the
- 37:30 American hierarchy, the system and ignore the request from the Vietnamese to work with them. So that was pretty sad. This was as far as the training team was concerned.
- Did you have a sense that this was a source of frustration for a lot of Australian personnel, having to work within the Americans system and not have that flexibility?**
- 38:00 No, because we didn't work under the American system. We worked with them but not under them. The task force was an Australian military unit independent of the Americans; of course, we drew on American support, air support and artillery support on some occasions
- 38:30 but we made our own decisions. And another interesting thing is that we paid our own way. Australia and New Zealand were totally independent of the Americans; whatever resources we put into Vietnam, the Australian taxpayer paid for it. In the case of other foreign forces in Vietnam, the Filipinos, the Taiwanese, the Thais, the Koreans,
- 39:00 were all paid for by the Americans.

## Tape 4

- 00:30 **I was just wondering why Australia wasn't an R and R destination?**
- I am not sure that it might not have been distance and I am not sure of the reasons why there was the toing and froing about making an R and R destination. It was certainly
- 01:00 to be a very popular one with the Americans. But the options open to them were to go back to the States, before Australia, or Thailand, Singapore, Hong Kong, other locations around South East Asia, and Australia offered something different. 'Round eyes' [white, European people], I guess. You had, to put it into slang, you had the slopes and the noggies and the round eyes,
- 01:30 and they were looking for to meet other than Asian people as a break. And when you get somebody out of the front line, they need a break.
- How much contact did you have with fellows coming back from the front line? Did you meet many?**
- 02:00 I didn't have a lot of contact with our blokes who were infantry guys. It was mainly intelligence work. It was funny, you have heard of Long Tan and the Battle of Long Tan? One of the platoon leaders who was there, and I was there at that time, I was at the task force two days, I think, after
- 02:30 Long Tan. This guy was one of the platoon leaders in D Company of 6 Platoon, which was heavily involved, and he lost some of his men. He later after Vietnam went to Point Cook and learnt Chinese and we met up for the first time in Hong Kong together,
- 03:00 because I had studied Chinese too and we both finished up in Hong Kong and we have been great mates

ever since. Audie Moldre, who has already been interviewed, was with the SAS [Special Air Service]. He was on the last Chinese course that I taught at Point Cook before

03:30 I left, and I talked him into joining the air force, applying for a commission in the air force, and then I went to air force intelligence headquarters and told them that they had a pretty good one there, and told them what they ought to do with him: send him to Hong Kong for continuation training and bring him back to teach.

04:00 And that's exactly what happened. And he later left the air force, reached squadron leader, and then went to the AFP, Australian Federal Police, spent some time and then went to Foreign Affairs [Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade], finished up number three in the embassy at Beijing. He is retired now; we keep up regular contact.

04:30 **Can you describe a typical day for yourself in the job?**

Two or three days of the week I would spend out at the air base. I would arrive there in the morning, do any

05:00 paperwork that needed to be done.

**What sort of paperwork would you do?**

Well generally, it was compiling reports that were sent off back to Canberra and the base Ton San Nhut was the primary

05:30 source of that information. Where I would pick up the intelligence, which I again say was pretty low grade stuff with one exception where I also had access to top secret codeword material, and fed some of the information which was to do with

06:00 the North Vietnamese having surface-to-air missiles in the DMZ [Demilitarised Zone. And the air and the military attachés briefed the ambassador on a weekly basis and I fed this information to the Air Attaché. He said it was 'bloody rubbish.'

**What did you think when you read it?**

Well I was given it verbally.

06:30 And he said it was nonsense. And later on, they lost an aircraft in that area. Later on, it came out as unclassified news release that they had surface-to-air missiles in the DMZ, which made the Air Attaché look a little bit foolish.

07:00 But in those days, those sorts of posts generally were regarded as 'swannies' [easy posting as a reward] for people approaching retirement; general duties, pilots or other aircrew, generally pilots, to fill this role just prior to leaving the service on retirement. And this was one of those cases,

07:30 he had no background in intelligence. Neither did the Military Attaché. The Assistant Military Attaché at that time was an Intel O Army, and a very good one. So things changed

08:00 later on where people now who go to such posts have a background in intelligence, particularly in the countries where we have a very strong interest, China and elsewhere.

**With this paperwork that you were doing, the reports and so forth, can you give us a picture of where this information filters in from?**

08:30 **Is it from the front line troops?**

It's from the air force units that I would visit. They would be talking about their air activities and targets that they hit, damage assessment, this sort of thing.

09:00 **Would there be photographs as well?**

Rarely photographs. It was not very meaty stuff because the people sitting back at a desk in Canberra were getting the high-grade intelligence through the system,

09:30 electronic intelligence gathering and this sort of thing. Because it is also very useful at times to get low-grade stuff because you can then give it a wider distribution at a lower level. Say, the surface-to-air missile situation that the North Vietnamese had close to the DMZ.

10:00 You know what I mean, DMZ? It was very restricted access to that information, until it came out as a news release, which wouldn't have reached our people back home immediately, but then you can downgrade the stuff and give it wider distribution and so on.

10:30 **So apart from doing reports and so on, what else would be part of your typical day or week?**

Well, that took up most of my week. I would get out and about on the street and have visits with locals. It was not terribly taxing, it was interesting and it was working on building the language acquisition process.

- 11:00 That's one of the two main reasons why I wanted to get out of the embassy and down to where all of the action was: one was that I was delivering pretty low-grade stuff, and secondly I felt that I had been trained to do a job as a linguist
- 11:30 and I was not doing that. I was there for about ten months or something before the ambassador knew that he had a linguist on staff, and I went on a tour with the ambassador. We covered, we went up to a place called Qui Nhon, which is two thirds of the way up country, and other places in between. We went to the highlands; we went down to the bottom of Vietnam,
- 12:00 Kien Giang Province; wherever we went, we would receive briefings from province chiefs, Vietnamese province chiefs. This was normally done through an interpreter and my job was as a passive interpreter, a passive linguist. They did not know
- 12:30 that I spoke or could understand Vietnamese. And we had a couple of interesting situations where we arrived, it was either Pleiku or Kontum up in the highlands, and the province chief had no idea that we were coming, he thought it was an American senator and his entourage. And I passed this on to the ambassador and eventually got the message through that it was the
- 13:00 Australian ambassador. And on another occasion, the province chief is giving a briefing on the situation in the province: number of VC killed, wounded, damage, collateral damage - they didn't use that term in those days -
- 13:30 number of VC who had come over to the government side, he said, "In the last month, we have had three thousand Chieu Hoi", that was the open arms policy, VC come over to the government. He says, "No, no, tell him four thousand." It was bullshit. There was one interesting thing there; that
- 14:00 there was obviously a lot of coating on top, a lot of cream on top with figures. But when you scraped off all of the nonsense on top and got to hard figures, before Tet in 1968 with the US getting into North Vietnam and bombing the hell out of it, and interdicting the Ho Chi Minh trail
- 14:30 and generally their war effort in the North, and putting together that with the number of VC and some main force Vietnamese who were coming over to the government side, my impression at that time was that they were making a lot of valuable ground, and if they had kept it up
- 15:00 for another six months it might have forced the North Vietnamese to downgrade their effort, take it back. And that's when Nixon announced a halt to the bombing of North Vietnam and the whole thing went down the chute. That's just looking at it as a military observation at that time. Not saying that it was right. I don't think we
- 15:30 should have been there in the first place. I don't think the Americans should have been there in the first place. But just as an observation, the North Vietnamese were hurting pretty well, in the north and in the South, so who knows what might have happened? After the war, should we talk about that now?
- Wherever you want to go is fine.**
- 16:00 I was first asked, I went to work at Griffith University in 1976 teaching Chinese and in 1979, because of the influx of Vietnamese refugees that were coming to Australia, I was asked to run an intensive Chinese language program for people in the field who were in contact with these people, like police, like
- 16:30 nursing staff, educators, welfare workers and so on. And I put on an intensive language course at Griffith University and it was funded by Commonwealth Education [Department] and that was pretty useful. But it wasn't until 1994 when they asked me if I would set up a Vietnamese language program for Griffith, for
- 17:00 students, our students. And it had to be pretty economical costing-wise because we didn't have the funds to hire a lot of people and so on. So I came up with the idea that we would start them off at Griffith with intensive language training over one semester, summer semester, and then have an arrangement with a Vietnamese university and then send the students over for intensive study for
- 17:30 a year. This was, the university could afford it. So I went to Vietnam to suss out [investigate] universities and a couple of factors, some factors needed to be considered: safety of students, cost of living, quality of education at the university, and how they would fit in with us,
- 18:00 with me running the program from here. Hanoi on all counts outstripped Saigon and I was very happy to set up a relationship with the Foreign Studies University in Hanoi and send our students there. I have lost track.
- 18:30 **Going back to the briefings of the province chiefs, can you describe the protocol surrounding that, when you arrived, the cultural kind of aspect?**

It varied, from a low where we went into, I think it was, Kontum and we were standing at the airport, got off the plane, which was a Dakota from Butterworth that was used by the Ambassador when he did his tours,

- 19:00 with nobody there to meet, no fanfare, nothing. And eventually some vehicle turned up and took us to the office of the province chief and that's when he said, "Who is this lot, senators from the US? I haven't got any paperwork on this, where the hell are they coming from?" to
- 19:30 a very good reception and I think it was down in the [Mekong] Delta, Delta province somewhere, Kien Giang probably, where they had a guard of honour at the airport to meet us and flotilla of cars to wheel us away to the office of the province
- 20:00 chief, where you would receive tea and bickies [biscuits] and sit down arm-chair briefing. There weren't a lot of people involved, probably five or six, and that evening dinner with the province chief, well accommodated that evening, and then guard of honour when you left the next morning.
- 20:30 So there was from that to that; all in between.

**While you were giving the province chief information about certain things, how much information would the province chief give you about?**

We weren't giving the province chief anything; we were on the receiving end.

**Oh, it was just before you said, how many VC had...**

This was a province chief, through an interpreter, giving a briefing to the ambassador, the entourage.

**Sorry.**

- 21:00 **I misunderstood. When you spoke earlier about the compensation that was given to the fisherman, was that an unusual kind of event?**

It's the only one that I know about. This poor fellow was, as I said, was run over by one of our military vehicles and it was felt that they should have been compensated because he couldn't

- 21:30 earn a living any more and it was just a once-off payment, I don't know of any others.

**Was it surprising the amount of money they gave him?**

No. Going back to that time, half a million piastres is about five thousand [dollars] Australian, and five thousand Australian, you could

- 22:00 buy a house in Australia for that. So it was not a small amount.

**Was that surprising that they gave him such a large amount?**

I didn't think so, because his legs were no good to him any more and he had to provide for his family. I thought it was adequate compensation.

**Did you know the details of the accident?**

No, only that he was hit

- 22:30 by one of our military Land Rovers that's all.

**When you had Christmas with the Catholic Vietnamese family, what were some of the cross-cultural things that you witnessed?**

Pecking order as you go down the table, the grandfather as the head of the family and as you go down there's sons and daughters and

- 23:00 their spouses and down to the children at the other end of the table. And nobody said a word during the meal unless they were spoken to. It was very much the old fellow in control. There was one very funny incident towards the end of the meal, I was sitting right next to him there, and he cocked one leg up like this and he is sitting there with

- 23:30 a toothpick picking his teeth, and he coughed and as he coughed, he broke wind. And I just looked down the table and eyes were down, nobody looked up, and he didn't turn a hair of course and neither did I.

**How visible was the fact that they were Catholic on Christmas Day, was there prayer? Was there...?**

- 24:00 Yes, they said a prayer before the meal and that was it. But it was celebration of Christmas in their way and probably Europeans do the same thing and, I am not sure, on Christmas Eve they have dinner not Christmas Day. Can I, while I think of it?

**Please.**

- 24:30 One of the teachers that I used at Griffith he was Vietnamese, originally from North Vietnam from Hanoi, he had a good clear accent and he was a good teacher. And he had been in an internment camp, concentration camp, after 1975 when the North took over. So he had spent four years in this concentration camp out in the

- 25:00 boondies somewhere. They would just grab a bunch of people and take them to some desolate spot, nothing there, and they would have to cut timber to build their accommodation and all facilities and that was it. They used re-education: they were re-education centres. His brother had been in artillery. He
- 25:30 was an educator but during the war he spent some time in the military in artillery. His brother had been in psy [psychological] warfare, and these are the bad guys as far as the enemy was concerned. Anybody in psy warfare, they are out to win the hearts and minds of your people, or the enemy. And these were considered bad guys and after the war such people, either high ranking people or people like this, people
- 26:00 in intelligence, were taken back to North Vietnam, and I had used this guy when he first came out from Vietnam in 1979 when I taught that course for people in contact with Vietnamese refugees. And I used him again when we started up this language program for Griffith.
- 26:30 And he told me that his brother had died in a concentration camp in the North a couple of years beforehand. And he was the eldest son of the family and it is the responsibility of the eldest son in the family to take charge. And it was the normal cultural thing in Vietnam after a person had been
- 27:00 dead for, I think it is three years, they would dig up the remains, clean off the bones and either rebury them or cremate them. And he really wanted to go to the North to retrieve his brother's remains but he wasn't game to go. So I said,
- 27:30 "You come with me. Stay in my hotel room and we'll be okay." So I took him over there and he found some of his extended family, and they took him out to where this concentration camp was. And not long before that, there was a United Nations team went in looking at the American missing persons
- 28:00 and missing persons situation, and it was termed that there was no such thing as concentration camps in the North any more. Well, this guy's family took him out to this place, which was about a hundred kilometres west of Hanoi, and he met a local captain of police out there
- 28:30 and gave him the details. And this captain said, "Well, if you can produce a death certificate", which had been sent to him in Australia, his mother, "then he is buried in this plot over here, and we'll dig him up for you and bring a hundred dollars US with you." So they went back a couple of days later after he had the death certificate sent up and paid
- 29:00 this money and they put a couple of workers to work and retrieved the body, well, the remains, brought them back to the hotel in a plastic shopping bag to our room. And then we were working out how we were going to get them back to Australia and they could only be brought back if the remains were cremated. So we got that organised
- 29:30 and he managed to get them back. But the significance in this whole story is that they have still got people in these concentration camps, and that was four years ago.

**Looking back now, how would you describe yourself as a young man when you first got to Vietnam?**

- 30:00 I was pretty enthusiastic and energetic and wanted to get into it, wanted to put into use the specialist training I had received, full of enthusiasm. And
- 30:30 certainly with the language, day one I got into the street and get into the black market and try to beat them down, because that's the name of the game, you never pay what they ask for. You always come to an arranged price. So it was, I was full of expectation of doing something useful
- 31:00 and was very frustrated in a lot of respects at not being where the action was, and that's why I wanted to get down to Nui Dat and be transferred to Nui Dat. As a matter of interest, they didn't send another linguist to the embassy after me. They sent a person with some intelligence training
- 31:30 for the compilation of reports and so on and administrative skills.

**Apart from enthusiasm, what were your values or idea about the world at the time?**

At that time, I didn't have much of a view of the war beyond Australia and Australians' part in Vietnam.

- 32:00 I didn't take much notice of the world situation far removed from Asia anyway. It was quite a transformation when I moved from electrical fitter to linguist and it was a gradual process of
- 32:30 acquiring knowledge and gaining experience in the intelligence field and worldly knowledge. It was a gradual process. At the time that I went to Vietnam, I was still pretty green, even though I had had three-years experience in intelligence
- 33:00 work back home. Most of that had been sitting alongside the desk officer who was responsible for Vietnam and South East Asia; I was working on the Indonesia desk so I had built up quite a knowledge of that area, but didn't know a hell of a lot still at that time about Vietnam.

**You said you were full of enthusiasm and expectations, what did you expect that you would be doing up there?**

- 33:30 Well I expected that, because before I went to Vietnam I was involved in the collating of high-grade top secret codeword intelligence material, so I guess my expectation was that I was going to be,
- 34:00 I knew that there wouldn't be much in the way of this top secret high-grade intelligence stuff there, but it was a bit of a letdown to be doing something that was pretty mundane and low grade. So the expectation was that I would be doing something more useful then I felt that I was doing.
- 34:30 And there was such frustration in that, particularly when I was able to get down to the task force and see that they were short of people with language skills.

**So you were wanting to do more practical kind of work?**

Yeah.

**Were there people who did do more practical work, linguists?**

Yes.

- 35:00 We didn't train nearly enough linguists to a level where they could function adequately in a wide range of situations as a linguist. We trained a lot of people, gave them three months basic training, infantrymen out on patrol so if they went into a village they could say, "Hello, how are you? How many kids have you got? Where is your old man?" You know.
- 35:30 Simple stuff, but for, we lacked a significant number of people, army people with the skills that they would have needed to do a lot of interesting effective work
- 36:00 with the task force. We had situations there where our SAS patrols would be out and they would be so close to the enemy in their bivouac, in their overnight stay, wherever they were, that you could pick up the Vietnamese voices
- 36:30 on the radio, and we didn't have people down there on the ground to listen to things like that with the language skills.

**While you said that you never did any interrogations yourself, you said you did witness some. What do you remember if you can look back at yourself at the**

- 37:00 **not so much now what you can ascertain from it, but what were your impressions at the time?**

It was pretty gruelling stuff.

- 37:30 These were Vietnamese interrogating Vietnamese.

**Why did they get the Vietnamese to interrogate the Vietnamese?**

They were taken, captured by Vietnamese and they were in Vietnamese prisons.

- 38:00 Detention situation, sometimes small cells - you have been in Melbourne and seen the Old Melbourne Gaol? The size of the cells there, which are probably about this wide and as long as this room? Well, they were smaller than that. They were rough conditions. For the ones, ones people
- 38:30 singled out, the ones I mentioned before, you know, there was fifty in a cell. These were ones that they expected to get something out of.

**And were you asked to be present or you just went?**

Invited and didn't stay for the whole thing. Briefly.

**Did you have to report back to anyone what you had learned?**

- 39:00 No.

**Was there ever any time where maybe other people used your language skills to get something on the black market or something? Any funny instances where your language skills came in handy?**

- 39:30 Oh yeah. Numerous situations where you would interpret for another Australian guy in a bar situation or maybe he wanted to have a liaison with one of the local ladies.
- 40:00 Or an American too, American Civil Engineer I had stay with me for a while, he had a thing going with this lady who was in a bar. I did a lot of interpreting for them.

**I suppose you could have had a bit of fun with what you said?**

- 40:30 There was one what you would call a funny incident, which was not so much language, but one of my mates back from the old elec [electrical] fitter days, he was in Vietnam at the same time and down at Vung Tau living in a tent, and he got a few days leave and came up to Saigon and camped with me.

- 41:00 Of course, I went to work every day and he was off doing whatever. And I got home about his second day there and he had been out to one of these BQs [Bachelor Quarters] grogging on and as he staggered out, he walked straight out on the road and was nearly run over by an American MP [Military Police] jeep.
- 41:30 And this American MP officer got out and fronted him and my mate was a ballsy sort of a fellow and he clocked him, dropped him [knocked him down] this American MP officer and whistles blew and he was off. And he got down to this corner and whilst he was at this corner and a white mice, Vietnamese Police, was there at the corner who pulled out his weapon.
- 42:00 This friend of mine grabbed his weapon as he had it half-cocked, hit...

## Tape 5

00:30 **Start with that if that's okay with you, we're going.**

- Well when I was ten in Ballarat I knocked around with these kids and they were pretty rough and their father had been in the army. And one of these days, this kid
- 01:00 said to me, "Hey, you're a bastard." And they laughed at me and I didn't understand and he said, "Your mother wasn't married." So I went home and told my foster mother about it and she sat me down and told me that I was adopted and the circumstances, that my natural father was her younger brother and he was killed in Buna, New Guinea, in World War II after he came back from the Middle East.
- 01:30 And she gave me the name of my natural mother and said, well, she didn't say it, but I heard one story that she had become a nun and the other story was that she had married and gone down south somewhere. So after reaching a low point in my life and after my foster mother was dead, because I didn't want to hurt her, I decided to see if I could find her.
- 02:00 And I first rang all of the nunneries around the east coast of Australia and spoke to the mother superior, east coast, and asked if they could help me out because I had heard that my mother had become a nun. So where I expected that they would probably close ranks and not want to know about it, being
- 02:30 nuns and cloistered, I was overwhelmed by the response, they were extremely helpful and searched their archives and came up with nothing. So then I decided to try the other avenue, I knew that my grandfather, my natural mother's father, had been a baker and he lived over at Deagon, over near Sandgate. So I went to the Australian
- 03:00 electoral role, went back to the 1920s and just kept looking for the name Bliss and Deagon and finally turned him up, and I followed them through the archives, through the electoral role, until the grandmother dropped off [dropped off the perch - died], and the grandfather dropped off and there was a son that had lived with them and he had dropped off in about 1984, 89 or 8 or something.
- 03:30 So I went to that last address that I got from the electoral role, and it was over at Clayfield, a boarding-house affair where individuals lived in their own rooms, and I spoke to the bloke that owned it and he said yeah he knew this guy, died in 88, cancer. Lady in the room next to him used to look after him, they had a good relationship. Her name was something like Joan Smith, so I went to the
- 04:00 phone book looking for a Smith, a J Smith in Clayfield, turned one up and it happened to be her. And she had met my real mother who was living in New Zealand, had married, had six kids. Anyway, to cut a long story short I sent a birthday card over to her and got no response. And then I wrote a letter to her and said, "I would
- 04:30 like to meet up with you but I don't want to hurt you or cause you any embarrassment and either I'll come over there or I will pay for you to come over here." Nothing. Then about a month later, I had given up, I get a phone call out of the blue and this Kiwi female voice says, "Hey, you don't know me but I am your sister." And she had taken my mother to her place, to her mother's place,
- 05:00 and she was looking for a pension card and she turned up this card and this letter and photo I had sent. And she said, "Who is this guy Bob Dawson who says he is your son?" "Don't know him. Lots of people say they're my son." Total denial. Anyway, I had an invite to go over there and I met all the siblings and eventually got to meet my mother, and it wasn't until...the night before she was still in denial.
- 05:30 And then they gave me the keys to the car and they said, "That's where she lives, you're on your own", and they worded her up that I was coming, and I got there and I knocked on the door. The door opens and this little lady throws her arms open and says, "It's good," and that was quite an experience. And it was a couple of years later that she went off the air [ceased radio transmission - died], finished up in a nursing home, and died
- 06:00 about three years ago. So I have got half a dozen brothers and sisters that I didn't know about.

**Your uncle, your father, did he give you stories about his war service?**

I can't remember him because lets see, I was born in 38, he died in December 42, so I was just four and a bit.

06:30 I can just vaguely remember a face but I don't have any recollection of talking to him.

**So your uncle that raised you, did he ever talk about anything?**

Oh, he used to talk a lot about their experience in the Middle East. They used to look out for each other. On one particular occasion when they were in Tobruk, he was at one end

07:00 of the, wherever the camp was, and my natural father was at the other. And there had been artillery bombardment and my foster father had just had his first wash for about a month and of course he got all dirtied up after this artillery bombardment and my natural father wrote back that he didn't have to go looking for him,

07:30 he could hear him cursing for getting cleaned up and then these people came over and dirtied him up again. My foster father used to talk about the war quite a bit, usually only funny anecdotes, nothing serious or life threatening.

08:00 But I am sure he suffered post-traumatic stress disorder, and I didn't realise that until I found out I had it too, which was only in recent times. When you find out you've got it and what the symptoms are, you have an awareness and appreciation of other people having it, and behaviour patterns

08:30 that, like he used to get into the grog, that's one symptom, used to have nightmares constantly, that's another one, fits of anger and this sort of thing. So at times when you were intolerant of behaviour, it is all too late now because he is dead. But it is sad that you don't realise these things until it is

09:00 too late.

**Can you tell us about how your recognition of it came along?**

Well, it was about the end of 2000 I had developed chest pain and dizziness and went to the local doctor who sent me to a cardiologist and

09:30 that checked out, I just did stress tests or whatever. And then they sent me to an ENT [Ear, Nose and Throat] specialist because of the dizziness thing, MRI [Magnetic Resonance Imaging] scan, vertigo tests, everything checked out. So then they sent me to a respiratory specialist because there was some asthmatic condition there too. He checked it out, certainly

10:00 some chronic asthma there but couldn't figure out the chest pain. Tightness. And then he said, "Well, try a psych [psychiatrist or psychologist]", so I went to a local psych and I had an hour and a half with him. And he took me back and back to Vietnam and at the end of an hour and a half he said, "You have got post traumatic stress disorder that goes back to Vietnam", because they look for stressors, things that cause stress.

10:30 And there were a couple of instances there, particularly the mortar attack, just missing out on being cleaned up at that time, attending this American guy who copped it. Anyway, it turned out to be useful too, when I was over in

11:00 New Zealand there is a nephew of mine twelve years beforehand he had been in a car accident, a bunch of guys and the driver sitting next to him had been decapitated. And he had carried that, and he married, and he and this girl had a child and a month later they decided to marry, and a month later he cleared out and was having anger

11:30 bouts and grog, you know. And then knowing what all the symptoms of PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder] were, I felt certain that that's what he had. So I contacted their equivalent of the RSL [Returned and Services League] and asked if they could put me onto a psych who specialised in PTSD and they eventually found one for me, so I got the name and phone number and then I had lunch with this guy,

12:00 my nephew, and told him what I thought he had. I said, "You have got two choices, either you keep going the way you are and destroy your own and a lot of other peoples lives, or you try to do something about it. Here is the phone number" and he did, so that was pretty useful. I tried to,

12:30 well, I did tell my sons when I found out about it, and they rejected it out of hand, you know, "This psych is having a bloody lend of you. You're a strong person. There is no way you could have this Post Traumatic Stress Disorder." That rocked me, because I was looking for some support I guess. So I said,

13:00 "Right, we don't discuss this ever again", and we haven't.

**Thinking back when the psychologist...psychologist or psychiatrist?**

Psychiatrist.

**When the psychiatrist discovered that it was that mortar attack that was probably the cause of that, does it surprise you now looking back that after that initial mortar attack you stayed and watched the parade and the rest of the procession?**

- 13:30 Well, the first thing you do is you get pissed [drunk]. And it doesn't seem, as I said before you get a bit blasé and you get the feeling that if a grenade falls next to you and you cop it, well that's it. So you sort of lose any sense of anxiety that you might have had before
- 14:00 you got there and you just take a day as it comes. I suppose, looking back in retrospect, one would have been forgiven for retreating into a shell and heading straight home and locking yourself in a room or something. But hey, you know, they missed.
- 14:30 And I don't recall that it caused me any grief or concern for the rest of the time that I was there. In fact, this is something that may not manifest itself for some years. I had some symptoms that went all the way back, but you don't realise it,
- 15:00 you know, nightmares. But one thing I couldn't work out after I left the service and for twenty years at university, I would go into a meeting and there is no confrontation there, you are just going in there to discuss something, and I would pick up a cup of coffee and my hand would be going like that and I just couldn't
- 15:30 understand why. And that was part of it. So it is helpful knowing what it is, and it's no big deal.
- When you returned from Vietnam, in what sort of capacity did you speak of your experiences there to other people?**
- Didn't really.
- 16:00 Well, before I came back, I felt very strongly about our presence in Vietnam. I felt that we shouldn't have been there and I was particularly angry I think about our young blokes being killed over there, particularly national servicemen and the ballot system.
- 16:30 It was a toss of the coin whether you went, whether you didn't, whether you might have been killed or not. And I was angry about that because a) I felt that we shouldn't have been there and b) it was a waste of young Australian lives. And everybody that I knew over there, Australians, were very professional in what they did. They were - you felt proud to
- 17:00 be a part of it. So when I came back, I never wanted to see another American again, and I saw another side of them, I didn't see them as our infanteers saw them, I felt that they had stuffed up a country and they shouldn't have been there either.
- 17:30 Most Vietnamese I am sure didn't want them there. And coming back, I think the hardest thing to take in coming back to Australia, when that aircraft took off from Ton San Nhut, when the brakes were on and the engines were roaring you were just so full of anticipation, "Get this bloody thing off the ground, lets get the hell out of here."
- 18:00 So when the wheels left the strip and tucked up there was just one big roar, "We're going home." But to get home into a climate where you were told, "Don't wear uniform off base, you have got Vietnam ribbons up" - you couldn't wear uniform off base with ribbons. There were paint-throwing incidents with troops.
- 18:30 The anti-war demonstrators would single out vets [veterans] who were either on their own or whatever, and it was just. So there was no opportunity to get out to mix it with others. You just shut it out; shut it off. The RSL weren't terribly interested in having anything to do with Vietnam vets or
- 19:00 having association with them .That's why they formed a Vietnam Veterans Association separate from the RSL. Me personally I would march on Anzac Day with my father and wear my natural father's ribbon with the Rats [of Tobruk], I would march with the Rats. I didn't march with the Vietnam Vets
- 19:30 and in fact it wasn't until about two years ago that I marched with the Vietnam Vets here in Cleveland. After this, because I was pretty much a loner, when I was in Vietnam I worked alone pretty well away from other Australians. I didn't have any association
- 20:00 with the diggers that came back, we didn't have anything in common we could talk about, so I felt a bit of an outsider, and one of two psychs that I have been to started up a yoga program for Vietnam Vets with PTSD and I thought that yoga might be useful, helpful, but I didn't think that I would be able to fit into a group.
- 20:30 But I went along anyway, within a couple of weeks the camaraderie that developed within that group was outstanding, and you just felt part of it, you know. So that was really a great experience and I keep up the yoga now, I am no longer with the group, but I have joined the
- 21:00 Vietnam Vets Redlands, Vietnam Vets group. The reason that I didn't want to have anything really to do with the Vietnam Vets Association in the past was that I felt that, and I had heard people say that, they just want to hash over old ground and relive Vietnam days, and I just wanted to get on with it.
- 21:30 But in fact a lot of guys think very positively. They are forward-looking people too, so it has worked out pretty well.

**Do you think that working on your own in Vietnam affected you at the time?**

Not really. I didn't feel so anyway.

- 22:00 In one way it was very liberating to be doing your own thing, nobody there telling you what to do, how to do it, when to do it. So from that point of view, it was okay. When you do come back,
- 22:30 before I came back I was asked by Air Force Intelligence what I wanted to do. We were pretty small group and because I had had experience of going to Hong Kong and seeing my former colleague up there doing a good job in what he was doing, it would seem, and enjoying life, and feeling too that I would like to do something about this association with Vietnamese and Chinese language,
- 23:00 I said, "Put me on a Chinese course." So they did and they would select one RAAF person from each course for continuation training in Hong Kong. So I was selected and they give you the continuation training with a view to bringing you back to teach at the air force language school.
- 23:30 So I was selected and I did eighteen months at the University of Hong Kong, their Mandarin centre, and it's all one on one the teaching bit. And following the first eighteen months, and you had your family with you too, I then went to work in Joint Service Intelligence Service, the Brits,
- 24:00 and where I was working I was the only Australian. Although we have passed the thirty-year mark, I don't know whether this little time ought to be, what's the word we use? Embargoed. But I was working
- 24:30 undercover as a Hong Kong government immigration official and we were involved in interviewing refugees from the mainland. And there were - at that time China was pretty much a closed book, the big
- 25:00 'bamboo curtain' was down and it was very difficult to get information out, so this was one source of, a very useful source of information. And we would oversee local Chinese interviewers, interview all of the refugees, and when one looked like he or she might have an interesting background,
- 25:30 we would take them out the back room and carry on and extract whatever we could. And I would have been the first person to know that the Chinese were producing their own nuclear submarines from one of these sources. Later on, of course, and this, at that level,
- 26:00 it may have been that they from a higher source of intelligence gathering, electronic intelligence gathering, that they might have had some information on this, but I doubt it at that stage. And the funny thing about it was the Brits clamped a classification on this of 'UK Eyes Only', and here was I an Australian
- 26:30 in the middle of it. And I did the right thing I thought and passed it on to my superiors. There were a few very useful bits of information gathered in this way. It was an interesting experience working for the Brits; they had high
- 27:00 regard for Australian linguists because we were much better trained than theirs were. How did we get onto that?

**You said about how when you left Vietnam they put you on the Chinese course.**

Yeah right, I had three years in Hong Kong,

- 27:30 and when I came back, I came back to teach at the air force language school, and I taught there for the best part of two years and then finally took over the Chinese language department. I was commissioned after I got back and after four years of teaching there, I was posted to Richmond
- 28:00 air force base as the base intelligence officer and for a number of reasons I decided to leave the RAAF. Griffith University had just started up, I really enjoyed teaching Chinese, there were no good, no suitable accommodation prospects around Richmond. There were bad stories
- 28:30 of schools, drugs and so on. So for a variety of reasons, and I wanted to come back to Brisbane to live, so for a variety of reasons, a guy who had been Director of Studies at Point Cook was running the language centre at Griffith and he encouraged me to apply for a position, which I did. And
- 29:00 that was '76 and started off twenty years of teaching first Chinese and then Chinese and Vietnamese at Griffith. I was approached soon after I got to Griffith by one of our intelligence agencies and asked if I would assist them, and then later by two others,
- 29:30 and I did that, which at times was very difficult. Stressful. And again you're in a situation of being a loner and you can't discuss it with anybody, so I guess pressure mounts there, and I felt anyway a bit of an outsider; I didn't regard myself as
- 30:00 a true blue academic. I was an interloper and probably seen as such by a lot of the academics around the place. And it was probably only because this guy had been Director of Language Studies at the air force language school that I got a position in the first place. So I never really felt part of,

- 30:30 a brother, a colleague in the full sense of the word; I just felt I was a bit of an outsider there. I left Griffith University, I took early retirement in '97 intending to retire, but at that time I was running a Vietnamese language program and still teaching Chinese.
- 31:00 I was quite happy to give the Chinese away, I had had enough of that, and the Vietnamese they had no one to take over, so I carried on as a consultant. And I had no sooner retired than QUT [Queensland University of Technology] asked me if I would set up a Chinese program for them. That was structured the same as the Vietnamese one so I decided that I would.
- 31:30 And for a time there I was running the Vietnamese, and this is summer semester, intensive stuff, for Griffith and summer intensive stuff for QUT. So it was in the morning running the Vietnamese program and teaching it at Griffith and then racing over to QUT and running and teaching the Chinese program,
- 32:00 which was pretty stressful, draining.

**When you talk about the Vietnamese language coming from Chinese and them being very close, how did you find switching off one and switching on the other?**

Difficult at times and on one occasion I was doing a one on one oral test in Chinese with one of our second year students and you had prepared a number of questions to ask them, and it was all recorded so that you

- 32:30 could mark it later on. And I asked a few questions, got a response, another question, no response just a blank look, so I asked the question again. Nothing, so I thought, "Okay, zero", on to the next question, and it wasn't until after I listened to the tape later that that question she couldn't answer was in Vietnamese. Occasionally I would stuff up in class and come out with Chinese in
- 33:00 a Vietnamese class or vice versa.

**When you said you were approached by some agencies to do freelance work so to speak, how do you get paid in that regard?**

I wasn't paid.

**For love of country was it?**

For love of country, yeah. This first agency that approached me in fact funded my

- 33:30 first trip to China in 1980 and that was the only, when I say funded, paid the airfares. It was for love of country.

**Is that the norm do you think?**

I can't tell you about, I don't know of any other instance of it. I don't know if anybody else was asked. But I was asked by this agency

- 34:00 a couple of years later whether I would consider joining them and in fact I went to Melbourne and I did a battery of tests, psych tests, and they wanted me, but they wanted me for a particular job and one of the guys who I had an association with in the agency said, "Don't sell yourself short.", and it was taking a big step
- 34:30 to cut myself off from the university, and I said I would do the job for them but I would give them two years, I could get two years leave of absence from the university. And they wanted me to join and I didn't, so nothing happened.

**When you initially left for Vietnam, did you have any idea how long you were going for?**

Twelve months but it turned out to be fifteen.

- 35:00 **And when you left Vietnam, was it home, then to Hong Kong, what was the timeframe?**

I arrived back in September 67 and I had a couple of months leave so that carried me through almost to the end of the year. Then I was posted to Point Cook onto staff

- 35:30 to await the following year's Chinese course so I went through straight onto the next Chinese course and following that in March 1969 over to Hong Kong.

**If it is not too personal, how did your Vietnam experience affect your first marriage?**

- 36:00 It was doomed virtually from the time I got back. My wife was, we had put a deposit on the Department of the Interior home and she was pretty happy in the little house and I arrive home and say, "We're off to Point Cook." And she says, "But I don't want to go, I want to stay here." And I say, "You will go."
- 36:30 A bit domineering in those days in that relationship. So that was an initial cause of a breakdown in the relationship. I had changed, I didn't realise it but I had changed, looking back, and she was still pretty much the same person.
- 37:00 But she was fast learning to stand on her hind legs and toe-to-toe it with me. So we didn't have a happy

relationship from the time I was back and it deteriorated as time went on. While I was in the service still, I was still in that protected environment,

37:30 not protected ,what is the word I am looking for, comfort zone of being surrounded by your mates and in the service. But when I left the service to go to the university, it was a strange new environment, no support from anywhere and the relationship continued to fall in a heap.

38:00 Long before, six months before I met my wife now, I had made a decision that as soon as the kids were old enough, I was out of there. When we met, my second wife and I, there was nothing intended in it, it just happened. And it was just one of those things.

38:30 I had to make a decision whether or not I was going to risk losing this new-found situation and stay in a marriage that was ready for destruction anyway, or make the move and see it through.

39:00 So I did. Initially one of my two sons was, and I didn't think it would affect him that much because he was a real little rebel, young adolescent and in his own little world and angry at the whole world, and I didn't think it would affect him. But he is underneath it all very sensitive and it affected him most.

39:30 But it took a couple of years, probably about three years, and everything turned around and I have a pretty close warm relationship with both sons and their families, so everything is sort of, and a friendly relationship with my first wife as well.

**Has she accepted that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder was probably a factor in the marriage breakdown?**

40:00 She didn't know about it until last Friday when I went over there to collect an album. I was looking for some old photos and asked if she had some and she had an album full of photos and I explained the situation to her then and asked her not to tell the boys.

## Tape 6

00:30 There is another area of interest after I got out, are we away?

**Yeah.**

After I got to the university, you might have heard of Taiwanese clam boats coming down and pinching clams? Well, that activity started in the mid-60s, about 1964.

01:00 And because Mandarin interpreters were sought, needed, and there were none around in the civilian world, they turned to the air force and we usually had one Chinese interpreter/linguist in Townsville with the Orions as an intelligence officer and that person in the early 60s to late 60s did the job.

01:30 They would call him at late notice and he was available because he was in the services, and he would go off whenever a boat was caught. They would bring it into port somewhere, the navy would catch it or the Fisheries would commandeer an Australian fishing vessel and bring them into port and they had to be processed. There was immigration, customs, fisheries.

02:00 So they had to be interviewed, the captain and crew and so on, and interviewed. And if they had to go to court then a court interpreter, you would act as court interpreter too. Well, when I got to Griffith, the guy that they had used previously, this guy was no longer at Townsville. They grabbed a bloke from Brisbane who had been formerly one of my students from Point Cook and he found the

02:30 situation beyond him, he couldn't do it. So he asked me if I could, and that started me off. And that was probably about 1977 or 78. So I would get a ring from DPI [Department of Primary Industry] Fisheries and they would say, "Hey, we have got a boat and it will be coming into Thursday Island later today, can you get up there?"

03:00 I had a lot of cooperation from the director of the Language Centre, the old air force mate. So I would rearrange classes and hoof off for a week, on the first plane up to TI [Thursday Island] in time for the boat to come in, do the interpreting, a bit for the various agencies, go to court with them,

03:30 go through the court proceedings and then back home. And I did jobs with the boats from Gladstone all the way around to Weipa, up the coast and around to Weipa, which was pretty interesting. There was one particular case in Weipa where it was not clam boats but

04:00 pair trawlers. You have two trawlers working side by side and they drag a net between them, go through the Gulf of Carpentaria. And at that time we had a twelve-mile limit. And usually the way they would work was to have a slave boat and a master boat and the master boat would sit just outside the twelve-mile limit and the other bloke on the inside. And

04:30 if one of them got caught it would be the slave boat and the other boat would nick off. Anyway, they brought in this boat and interviewed the crew and I did the interviewing. Anyway, the fisheries officer

- has an interview with him and it is a recorded interview, and we then took him - the magistrate in
- 05:00 Weipa, Thursday Island was the closest, and he had shut down for a couple of days or something - so they decided to fly this guy down to Mount Isa, so we grab a light plane and we fly this guy down to a hanging job to Mount Isa. And we get down there in time
- 05:30 to find out, oh no, we went to court in TI first and this fellow was asked how he pleaded, was he guilty or not guilty, and he said, "Well, I don't know if I was inside or outside the Australian fishing zone. I am guilty but I really don't know whether I was in or not" and the magistrate said, "Well, I cannot accept your
- 06:00 guilty plea if you are not sure if you have committed an offence. So I will defer this and we will hear it again in three months time." "What? What?" this guy says, and so I told him what he said, he had to sit in a boat here for three months and he said, "No, no, no, I am guilty, guilty." So the magistrate said, "It is too late now, sport." So that's when we looked for the closest hanging judge
- 06:30 to get him down to Mount Isa and into court and 'bang'. So we get down to Mount Isa and by this time there was this shyster lawyer from Western Australia who was Chinese-Taiwanese connected who used to get in on the act whenever we could. Anyway by the time we got down to Mount Isa, there was a telegram waiting for this lawyer from Western Australia saying, "You are to plead not guilty.
- 07:00 Don't say anything", and oh hell, so it was to go back to Thursday Island. Anyway, this poor devil was sitting on his boat for three months before the hearing up there and he was a very unhappy person. But that was interesting, all together there was sixty boats. Eventually I had been so involved, I decided it would be interesting to write up a history of the
- 07:30 activity, which spanned twenty years in all. And there was some very interesting stories, these guys had raped every reef of clam between Taiwan and the Great Barrier Reef. They had come down the Philippines, Palau, which is east of the Philippines, through Micronesia, Tuvalu, the Solomons, down as
- 08:00 far as New Caledonia and even out to Fiji. And then the word was out that the Great Barrier Reef was the place to be. They gave Indonesia a pretty wide berth because they treated them pretty badly if they got caught. So it was a happy hunting ground for them on the Great Barrier Reef for quite a while because initially magistrates were quite lenient on them,
- 08:30 they were the last bastion of freedom in a communist Asia, Taiwan, and they would give them a smack on the wrist and let them go. And a couple of weeks later they would be caught again, they would just go straight back out clamming. So gradually over the years the magistrates tightened up and gave them harsher penalties and eventually gaol. But it was interesting.
- 09:00 In doing the research and writing up this history, I went to New Caledonia and I went to Palau and the Philippines and Taiwan to get their side of the story.

#### **How taxing was that kind of interpreting work?**

- It could get pretty taxing and there is one time only I did the wrong thing
- 09:30 and got found out. I had had a bad night's sleep the night before and I suddenly get a phone call the next morning, "There is a boat coming into so and so, can you get up there?" "Yes." So I am on the first available aircraft and get there just in time for the boat to get in, and then it is processing, first of all immigration and then customs, and you are in this little cabin. It was stinking hot
- 10:00 and I was sitting in there for about three and a half, four hours, one after the other, processing these guys, and finally it was the fisheries guy with the captain. And this guy was an alcoholic, he had a really gravelly voice and a thick accent and was really hard to understand. And I'm knackered by that time, and the fisheries guy is asking questions and I am interpreting that.
- 10:30 On a few occasions, have to get a repeat, and one question he asked was, "Why did you send divers over the side looking for clam?" Now this was one of the earlier boats that I did, now the word that I used for clam was a technical term, and they use a colloquial term, which in English means dried scallop.
- 11:00 But it was like two different words completely. So in answer to my question using the technical word he said, "We were sending divers over the side, blah, blah, searching for clam." I hadn't heard this term for clam any more. So rather than carry this thing on any further, I just made something up, I said, 'Oh, they were just going over the side and they were checking out the bottom of the hull.'
- 11:30 And this was recorded and it went aback to their headquarters and there was a person in there who had a pretty good grip on Taiwanese accents and heard the word 'clam'. And he said, you know, "He has just admitted they search for clam, you know." And the fisheries guy got back to me and they were pretty upset about that, but that was the one and only time I have ever done it.
- 12:00 And to get caught, it taught me a lesson and it is something that I have passed on to every group of students every year after that. "This is what I did, don't you ever do it, if you don't understand something, make sure you find out, don't just give an off-the-cuff inaccurate interpretation."

- 12:30 So the very last boat that was caught in the Great Barrier Reef was 1984 and by that time I had been to Taiwan and I was hosted by the Kaohsiung, which is a major fishing port in the south of Taiwan, the Kaohsiung Commercial Fishing Boat Guild, and they were responsible for hosting me. They had a licensed fishing agreement with the Australian government through a mob called KKFC in Western Australia, the Kaillis Kaohsiung Fishing Cooperative. Anyway I went to Taiwan to get their side of the story and they hosted me and were open and gave me all of the assistance that they could.

**Did you have that paper published or was it a book?**

- 13:30 Yes, by Griffith University. And subsequent to that publication, and it went out as a handbook to all of our Fisheries branches in Queensland anyway, I had a call from the South Pacific Forum Fisheries Agency, their fisheries officer, who asked me whether

- 14:00 I would be interested in doing a market study of giant clams in Asia. Isn't it funny how one thing leads to another? And I said, "Yeah okay." So I put in a proposal and it was funded by the Commonwealth Secretariat, the British government. So I ended up doing this survey of giant clam products in Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore and was then invited to give papers as a so-called expert

- 14:30 on clam fishing and clam products; funny to go from aircraft electrician to the other side of the world.

**That was one of my next questions, besides the obvious, what are some of the other ways that language has enriched your life I guess? Having that gift?**

- 15:00 Well it has certainly broadened my horizons. When I was a young blinkered elec fitter at Amberley, I was pretty racist I think.

- 15:30 Had the attitude that, "we don't want any of those people over here, they live on the smell of an oily rag and they will bring our economy down." That was my attitude, and it was pretty much par for the course among all of the guys that I had worked with, who had had experience being in Asia: Butterworth, Malaysia.

- 16:00 So it broadened my horizons and it broadened my scope of tolerance but also understanding of different cultures and acceptance. When the Vietnamese refugees started coming out here, I put my hand up to assist with English tuition.

- 16:30 on a one-to-one basis through the Department of Immigration. So I got into that for a while until one of them did the dirty on me, he was a tailor and to help him out I said, "Yeah, do you want to make me a couple of shirts." He didn't have a job, so he said, "Yeah sure" and this is back in the early seventies, and he charged me twenty-five bucks a shirt, I mean I don't pay twenty-five bucks for a shirt today.

- 17:00 So he really ripped me off and I thought, "I am not giving you any more English tutorials." Some time after that in 1979, '78, this Nancy Vivianni, Professor, retired now, in Asian studies, asked if I would collaborate with her on a book on resettlement of Vietnamese in Australia.

- 17:30 So I said, "Yes" and my job was to set up the fieldwork in Brisbane where we conducted a survey, and in Sydney and Melbourne. And it was when I went to Sydney that I met Beronese and it threw everything into chaos. My personal life and professional life suffered for it too, the

- 18:00 marriage break-up that followed. I set up everything as far as the survey was concerned but I didn't do the right thing by Nancy Vivianni and she ended up writing the book on her own. I had some contribution there but I, she has forgiven me and we are good mates now.

- 18:30 And Beronese at that time was doing welfare work: helping refugees in Sydney resettle. And then we got together up here, interested people, and I ran that Vietnamese course for professionals in the field working with refugees and it was decided to set up a branch of the Indo-China Refugee Association, which she worked for in Sydney, and I became the

- 19:00 founding president on that association and got it off the ground here in Brisbane. And from there and in the work that I was doing with Nancy Vivianni, had a lot more contact with Vietnamese, and Beronese became involved in the social welfare works here. And we have developed

- 19:30 friendships through that, with Vietnamese here, that have carried on today. One family in particular we see occasionally, not a lot of, but this fellow was a lecturer in Saigon and he came out here. And once adults, parents

- 20:00 leave there to bring their children out, they write their generation off, their life is finished, they are doing it only for the sake of their kids. So he took on a job as a gardener at the Darra Cement Works and was quite happy to have a job. He finished up at the SGIO [State Government Insurance Office] as a clerk or something; he has retired now.

- 20:30 But he was at one time the president of the local Vietnamese Association, high-flyer in the local community at one time. But his daughter, I taught his daughter Chinese and she is like a niece to me. And Chinese people too. My experience in Hong Kong, in the role that I had over

- 21:00 there in interviewing refugees from China, and some of the locals, particularly Cantonese, did not endear. Some of the aspects of the personalities and culture, well, it was not very endearing so I came away not altogether,
- 21:30 from Hong Kong, not altogether feeling affectionate towards Chinese people and Cantonese in particular. And a good mate of mine now is John at the Chinese restaurant here. We play golf occasionally; he is Cantonese, a colleague from the university, we have been
- 22:00 friends for twenty-five years. So to answer your question, the move into languages has really opened me up to other cultures and has given me a greater appreciation of other cultures and has formed lasting friendships with people from those cultures, particularly from China and Vietnam.
- 22:30 This little plaque you see on the wall here, it says (speaks Chinese) which means 'The old steed or thoroughbred lies in his stable, which has the will to run a thousand miles' and this was presented to me by a professor who runs the International Exchange Centre where we send our students, at Ching Dao University.
- 23:00 It says presented to Mr Dawson and the date and so on. And so I regard her with great affection and she likewise I am sure too, we had a good relationship.

**On a personal level what was it that made you want to get involved with the refugees from Vietnam?**

Initially, that's a good question, I am glad you asked that.

- 23:30 Because I suppose there was still a little bit of the old elec fitter in me, and I wanted to - and I still feel this way to some extent today - I wanted to make sure that these people coming from a different cultural background had a chance to be able to fit into the Australian community, and their
- 24:00 knowledge of English is one of the basic requirements to be able to do it effectively. That was my motivation in becoming involved with the tutoring in English initially. Later on when we set-up the Indo-China Refugee Association, that was still my primary motivation: to help them settle into the Australian community so that they were not regarded
- 24:30 as an ethnic, what I didn't want to see was an Australia as a patchwork quilt of ethnic groups. I just wanted to see everybody regarding themselves as Australian, very proud of their heritage and their cultural background, but first and foremost let them think of themselves as Australian.
- 25:00 And that's why I got myself involved to try and help that process.

**What do you feel is the case in Australia today?**

I think we're heading that way particularly; the critical word is numbers. For the host community to tolerate newcomers, they have to be within numbers

- 25:30 with which the host community feels comfortable. If the host community feels in some way threatened by numbers that are in excess of that critical number, it could lead to racial tension and violence, and a big worry as far as multiculturalism is concerned, and I
- 26:00 stood on my hind legs in about 1984 and said that I was, somebody from Channel 7 rang looking for some expert on Vietnamese and by this time I had been founding president of the
- 26:30 Indo-China Refugee Association and so on - looking for some comment. And this was on national TV [television] and they asked how I thought Vietnamese would settle into Australia. And at that time, I can't remember the year,
- 27:00 initially when refugees starting leaving Vietnam they were Vietnamese Vietnamese, ethnic Vietnamese, Chinese from Vietnam were relatively unaffected by the takeover after 1975, they did their own thing and they didn't disturb anybody and they were left alone. But in 1978,
- 27:30 the new government nationalised all property and then the Chinese left in droves. So much so that probably from about 1979, seventy per cent of the refugees that were coming from Vietnam were ethnic Chinese. And it was convenient for them to wear the cloak of Vietnamese refugee but as soon as
- 28:00 they hit the shores of Australia or wherever their newfound country was, off goes the cloak and they're Chinese and finding other Chinese for a Chinese community. And I said that I thought that Vietnamese within a generation or so would fit in very well
- 28:30 into the host community, and in fact third-generation kids would be Australians, and that is pretty much the way it has worked out. But I said, "With Chinese it is different, because they are so proud of their ethnicity and their 'Chineseness' that they tend, even after four or five generations in a new country, they still regard themselves as Chinese." And I stand by that today.
- 29:00 But it was not the thing to say on national television because I was then branded as anti-Chinese and racist. Particularly being at the university, I became a bit of a black sheep. Not too many people would

talk to me, and every Chinese that I saw and particularly my colleagues that I worked with, they weren't sure about me at all.

- 29:30 But one of those, a couple, husband and wife and their kids, we're like family all of us now. These same people are now whinging about the people that are coming from the mainland: a) there is too many of them; and b) they're different. So they're whinging about Chinese. I think a critical
- 30:00 time as far as numbers are concerned and Chinese, I think a critical time came when Bob Hawke allowed all of the students who were here at the time of the Tiananmen massacre to stay. Now that created a snowball effect when they brought their families out and suddenly the numbers increased many-fold. Over to what would have been
- 30:30 an expectation of the Immigration Department, you know, "How many of this ethnicity will we have?" And this is a problem and this is what I was talking about in the first place, that they were talking about Vietnamese refugees where in fact they were Chinese, but the Immigration Department does not look at people by ethnicity, it is country of origin. So, not only at that time were we having Chinese coming from Vietnam,
- 31:00 but they were coming from Malaysia, they were coming from Hong Kong, from the Solomon Islands, from Fiji - and they were either Solomon Islanders, Fijians or Malaysians or Vietnamese, so Chinese as an ethnic group within our annual immigration intake became a hidden statistic. So they were well favoured in numbers
- 31:30 if you have a look at intake from other sources of migration around the world and I wanted to make that point.

**For the actual Vietnamese refugees that came from Vietnam, what were some of the problems they had assimilating into Australian society?**

Well, it is not just Vietnamese, it is people of any non-English type culture.

- 32:00 What they need when they first arrive, and particularly with refugees because they have nothing, they need community support, that is, support from within their own community, because they're alien to everything outside their little nuclear family or their own little community is alien to them. So initially they need that support
- 32:30 from within their own community and they look for that support. And so they tend to stay together in the same area. And also you will find that, whether it is in Sydney, Melbourne or here, when people, ethnic groups of whatever origin, of non-English speaking background, a) they are factory fodder because they don't have English or skills that we need,
- 33:00 b) these Wacol and the other ones in Sydney, three of them I can't remember the names of, East Hills, are in areas where there are a lot of factories, industrial areas. So it is relatively easy for them to move out of the Wacol Migrant Centre,
- 33:30 as it used to be called, into these industrial estates and find work and so they buy their houses and become a community within that local area, and so you get Cabramatta in Sydney. But you have problems there because a previous wave of migration, whether it be Yugoslavs or wherever they come from, are ensconced in
- 34:00 that area, they have got their jobs and when a new wave comes in looking for jobs, it is not old Australians who live in Sandgate or Wellington Point who are effected by this new wave coming, it is the people in the immediate area who are affected, where the new people are coming looking for jobs. They feel threatened and that's where you find there are tensions, racial tensions, and this has been the case
- 34:30 in Wacol area. I can recall a situation where Polish people, and we had a number of Poles come in at one stage, refused when they were in the Wacol Migrant Centre, to sit at the same table as Vietnamese because they were Asians. And it is on a much more pronounced scale when you get to Sydney because the numbers are far greater.
- 35:00 Over time it works out, but initially, and this is why numbers are so important and so critical as to whether you are going to have harmony within the Australian community. And where in the 80s, everybody was saying multiculturalism this and multiculturalism that, and in fact I was criticised
- 35:30 for my approach. And now one of the people, this Nancy Vивиanni who was Emeritus Professor, retired, was one of the people who was advocating strongly multiculturalism, she said to me a couple of years ago, "Bob, you were right, multiculturalism is bullshit. Lets move away from it" And this is the one who wrote the book.
- 36:00 So you know, things turn around, but it can be very hurtful if you are out of league or step with the general thought trend.

**Are you optimistic for harmony within Australia?**

Yes I am. We've still got it, but it needs to be

- 36:30 well controlled. You can't let it get out of hand. Now if the government - whether you feel if they did the right thing with the Tampa business and having people put into camps on Nauru and all around the place - if they hadn't taken that action, it would be an open invitation to people smugglers. And there
- 37:00 are multitudes out there who would love to come to Australia and would pay the money to the people smugglers and we would be inundated. And if that happened, that would really strain things beyond the elasticity limit, I think, as far as Australians and the host community is concerned. So you have got to be really careful I think.
- 37:30 **How important do you think is education for new migrants so that they are not forced into those factory jobs in terms of harmony?**
- Its very difficult for people who come here as adults to attain the English language skills that are going to get them into professions
- 38:00 and worthwhile jobs, other than factories, labouring jobs. But as far as people like the Vietnamese are concerned, they accept that. Another very good friend of mine, Vietnamese, was one of the leading magistrates in Vietnam, he was a socialist, he was against the old regime and he stayed on, because he wanted to help play a role in
- 38:30 helping to rebuild his country. But he found after, by 1978, that it was impossible and there was no future whatsoever for his kids. Now he had the opportunity to go to France, which has a similar legal system, and he could have very well fitted in there, but he doesn't like the French. And so he took the hard road and came to Australia
- 39:00 and he thought, well, that he writes himself off, and he did. And he is a very proud man and he would not accept the dole, he is on a pension now, he is older. But he started up a small business making boomerangs and doing what do you call it, painting, putting stuff on T-shirts, that sort of thing.
- 39:30 But his son - first of all, he sent two of his teenage children out, across the Gulf of Thailand, no sight, disappeared, either pirate sank the boat or whatever, typhoon, so he has lost two of his children. He and his wife brought their youngest son out, who in his first year at
- 40:00 school here, he was only a little fellow, he was probably six or seven, got the prize in English at his school. And each year subsequent to that, he got the prize in English. And he is now a civil engineer with Telecom and he is as Australian as you and I. And these
- 40:30 are good people and they'll do us proud as Australians.

## Tape 7

- 00:33 **You gave us that story about when you were a kid, going fishing with the grenades, was there any other experiences you can recall any other experiences as a kid here in Brisbane with all the service personnel in World War II?**
- Yes, when we were living at Hamilton I was only say five or six and
- 01:00 do you know Racecourse Road? Goes up to Eagle Farm racecourse? Well, we lived just off there. I can recall going up to the shop on the corner of Racecourse Road with truckloads of Americans and Japanese prisoners as well, going past and the Yanks throwing lollies off the truck to you.
- 01:30 Incidentally, I nearly got cleaned up there when I was two. My uncle used to ride some track work, he was a budding jockey, and he used to walk horses, exercise horses around the streets there at Hamilton. Sit me on the front of this horse, when I was two. And I got up one morning and I decided I was going to the races and as a two year old and I walked up to the street corner, the
- 02:00 corner of Racecourse Road, and my uncle was just on the other side of the road, he had just gotten off a tram. So I saw him and I just took off straight across the road, right in front of this big truck. He slammed the skids on, very nearly got me, wrote me off there. But we used to sell mangoes to the Yanks. Climb up the mango tree, peel a few off, grab a cardboard box, and go and sit on the
- 02:30 corner of Racecourse Road. You'd ask for a penny or threepence or something, and as soon as you got it, you'd slip over to the shop and get some lollies.
- Hope you didn't give them turpentine mangoes. How keen were you actually to go to high school and did you have any ideas at that stage of what you wanted to do?**
- No idea whatsoever. As I said,
- 03:00 I left after junior but, as I said, I did want to go on at that time because I felt I had a brain that could be worked and I had stuffed around too much and it was time to do some work and serious study, but it was too late. And I got a job first up at the Olympic Tyre and Rubber Company

- 03:30 as a clerk and I was looking to do some sort of course and I thought drafting might be all right. So the Olympic Tyre and Rubber Company offered to pay for my night classes, which didn't last very long because I just didn't have the real motivation to do it.
- 04:00 And I had another couple of jobs; one was in the Valley at a foundry as the assistant to the paymaster. Another job, which lasted about a week, was for a jeweller down on Eagle Street. He was an ex air force man too, officer,
- 04:30 and I 'd turn up, eight o'clock start or whatever it was, and other staff would turn up and immediately get to work at half past seven or whatever it was. I would read the paper until eight o'clock because that's when I started. And he noted this and he got me out the front, he was full of story, you know, "You'll become a jeweller
- 05:00 one day and work your way up." And he had me cleaning with Brasso the sign out the front and I felt that was a bit beneath me so I told him that I was not really interested in working there any more. And he said, "Well, you have got to change your attitude, son. Like when you get here, you start work." I said, "But I think you treat your people like slaves,
- 05:30 you know. They are not supposed to start until eight o'clock and you expect them." Big chip on the shoulder at that stage. So he advised that I had to change my attitude. But I had no direction in life, in wanting to join the air force, I just wanted to get away and experience life. And I had had a taste of it in the Air Training Corps and having had my father
- 06:00 in the air force, so I thought that was the way to go.

**Do you recall the day where you actually went and signed up?**

Yes 1st of August 1955 in Brisbane and jumped on a train down to Richmond where I did my rookie course.

**Can you tell us about your rookie course?**

Yes, I think we probably had about thirty

- 06:30 guys on it. I enjoyed that. It was learning to march and learning how to handle a weapon; a bit of time on the rifle range. Some things that didn't please me were duties in the cookhouse or somewhere else. If they
- 07:00 didn't have something organised for you, they would say, "You two, cookhouse", or, "You two, somewhere else." And I remember one day I was into pot bashing, you know, where they cleaned all of the dishes and the pots, and I was getting a little bit annoyed with being there, and this plate came and it had a big crack down the middle,
- 07:30 and I had my sleeves rolled up when I got it and I just snapped it. And it opened up my left arm, which got me out of the pots and pans anyway. I enjoyed it anyway. At one stage it looked like we might have had measles so they quarantined the whole course. Myself and another guy broke camp and we went into the local dance and ran face to face into the
- 08:00 drill instructor. But from there, I went to Wagga to the technical training school.

**As part of learning to speak Vietnamese do you learn to write?**

Yes.

**And was one harder than the other do you think, speaking as opposed to writing?**

- 08:30 Speaking is, you have four skills that you learn, listening, speaking, reading and writing. The hardest is speaking, the easiest is reading. There is a bit of a difference in reading and writing because in writing you have to compose things but in reading it is already there just for you
- 09:00 to translate. It is a toss up as speaking or listening as being the more difficult. We used to do a lot of what we call extemporators or listening comprehension pieces where they would tell a story on tape and you had to listen to it and write down in English for it. One I remember was a particular tough one,
- 09:30 it was the composition - and numbers are very difficult because you can't connect something with something else - they gave us the composition of the United Nations, and it was; Europe X number of hundred million people, two hundred and forty eight thousand, four hundred and thirty-two. And you are just trying to hang onto numbers as you go and then they would go onto individual countries and the population of each country.
- 10:00 And oh, at the end of that you felt washed out. So listening can be difficult, speaking probably as the longer term that you spend with it becomes a little bit easier than the listening bit, particularly when people have accents.

**How long does it take to get to a stage where it is practically second nature?**

- 10:30 That's difficult to say. I suppose it would be better to ask how many hours do you need? Because you can't say it takes one year or three years, you have to know at what intensity you are learning. In the case of Point Cook, we would do a full year,
- 11:00 that's forty-four weeks of thirty hours a week, which is about as intensive as you get it, and at the end of that time you're on the first rung. You can communicate and you can make yourself understood and you can listen and understand, but as you get out of there
- 11:30 and into the real world, which is not just an instructor articulating carefully, but you hear it like it is spoken and it becomes more difficult. And the more you get into it, the more you realise how little you know. So it is hard to say at what stage you feel as though it is second nature. I don't think I have ever reached a stage,
- 12:00 even with Chinese and I have been doing that since 1969. You certainly feel comfortable with it and I suppose that is more the question you are asking. I reached the stage when I felt comfortable with Vietnamese probably half way through the tour over there. But again there
- 12:30 is just so much you don't know.

**Would you be able to humour us and tell us something in Vietnamese?**

(Speaks Vietnamese) What would you like me to tell you? I will give you some details. (Speaks Vietnamese)

13:00 (Speaks Vietnamese)

13:30 (Speaks Vietnamese) What else would you like?

**That's fantastic.**

I was just telling you I grew up here in Brisbane and went to Point Cook and where Point Cook was located.

**And do you think,**

14:00 **when you spoke to those children on the French plantation you spoke Vietnamese, would you sound Australian, is there any way that they would have been able to guess from your speaking to them that you were Australian?**

No. I think that they would have, because I was there in civilian dress casually walking around and because the manager of the place was a Frenchman and because I spoke Vietnamese, they would have accepted me I think as a French person.

14:30 It wouldn't have entered their head I don't think that I was Australian, hopefully.

**Did you have any interesting encounters on the Indonesian desk when you were stationed there?**

Well, it was a very interesting time to be on the Indonesian desk because that was the time of confrontation.

15:00 And it was when they launched a, you wouldn't really call it an attack, but they sent three Hercules aircraft with paratroopers from Sumatra to Malaysia. Didn't come off.

15:30 But that was a very tense moment and I saw my first 'Flash' [highest level of signal priority] come up on a signal there, and I am not sure now, but I think it was in relation to an Australian ship passing through the Sunda Strait between Sumatra and Java. And it was also at the time

16:00 when they had a coup, Sukarno was deposed and the generals who were massacred, it was interesting times.

**Can you tell me about the sort of pressure that exists in those intelligence rooms in Canberra?**

Generally pretty relaxed

16:30 because its where you collect information, collate it and disseminate it, so there is no real pressure on you there. The only pressure is if you are the desk officer for Indonesia and something untoward happens and you have to give a briefing to the Chief of Staff or somebody.

17:00 But generally, its okay. I was in a situation in Hong Kong where suddenly everything shut down in China and this was 1970. And this was when their number two man next to Mao, Lin Biao [or Piao], who was head of the PLA [People's Liberation Army], attempted to stage a coup, but we had no idea what the hell was going on.

17:30 One of my jobs at that time was we were recording TV from the mainland and I used to watch it every day to see whether there was anything new coming up and send all of the information back to

- 18:00 the Ministry of Defence in London. When this situation occurred where everything closed down and nobody knew what the hell was going on in China, I was, I think it was a Monday, I had just arrived at work and on the following Friday I was heading off to the UK on leave with my family.
- 18:30 And I arrived at work and the colonel, who was a bit of a pig, sent word down that Dawson would go up to the New Territories to a listening post we had up there at a place called Tai Mo Shan and do, what would happen was this location would
- 19:00 record the TV production channel, send the tape down to me, and the next morning I would process it and send the details off to the Ministry of Defence. And he wanted to know if something was going on as soon as possible, so Dawson had to go up to Tai Mo Shan, spend the night up there doing the TV bit,
- 19:30 so that if something came up I could ring the colonel straight away and they could send something to MOD [Ministry of Defence]. And when my RAF [Royal Air Force] squadron leader said to me, my boss, that night I had a party on at my place and invited a few of my Australian mates and their wives. And he came in and said, "You have got to go up to Tai Mo tonight." And I said, "What for?"
- 20:00 And he said, "Well, we have got to have this thing and the colonel said you have got to go." And I said, "Stuff the colonel, I have got this party on." Anyway I went, I jumped in a chopper, out to the New Territories to Tai Mo and spent a night up there and then back on the job the next morning, processed the tape for it to go on, briefed the colonel in the afternoon, raced home, had a shower and by that time my wife had a job, she was working, the kids were at school.
- 20:30 And back up to Tai Mo Shan again, so I spent the whole week, I didn't see my family from the Monday morning when I left for work to the Friday morning when we were supposed to get together and get on a plane to the UK. And nothing came out of it; we didn't get any information out of that. It came out later on that there had been a coup attempt and Lin Biao had tried
- 21:00 to flee to Russia and they shot him down.

**Can you tell me in Vietnam about the sharing of intelligence between the Americans, the Australians and the South Vietnamese?**

I am not aware of any sharing, direct sharing of intelligence between the Vietnamese and the Yanks.

- 21:30 The sharing with us through me, as I said, was pretty low-grade stuff. So anything of high value they would keep to themselves. There were two armies, two military commands working independently of each other. There was some support at
- 22:00 ground level, in the field certainly there was. But, as far as command structure and collaboration goes, to my knowledge anyway, there was nothing much of that.

**What about within the Australian framework, inter-service sharing of intelligence?**

Yes. At where our

- 22:30 RAAF intelligence officer was at Nui Dat and our deputy commissioner of the task force was there too [added later by interviewee - Group Captain Rowe was in fact head of the RAAF contingent at Nui Dat], Group Captain Rowe. So they were right in it; it was not a case of tri-service, they were all in together.

- 23:00 **Was there any sharing of Australian intelligence with the South Vietnamese?**

Not to my knowledge.

**Do you know what the organization was within the South Vietnamese government that was in charge of intelligence?**

No.

**Was there an organization as such?**

Well, they had their intelligence,

- 23:30 but I couldn't tell you what the structure of that was.

**Can you tell me a bit about the grading system of intelligence?**

Well, unclassified, classified, confidential, secret, then top secret and then top secret codeword. So they're the gradings.

- 24:00 For people who have access to top secret codeword stuff, access is very, very limited, but there is certainly sharing at that level amongst Australians and Americans and Brits.

**Was there also a grading on say information received back from an SAS troop say given a higher grading**

- 24:30 **then something that is maybe picked up a bar in Saigon, was there a rating in that regard?**

Well, there is quite a difference there. Certainly, you would have a different rating if you picked up something in a bar that could be unclassified and could have wide distribution, but the value of the intelligence would be very dubious

25:00 and the credibility of the source. Whereas if it were an SAS patrol, as in the situation I mentioned where they were so close to the enemy base camp they could hear the voices and back at Nui Dat they could hear the voices over the radio; that would

25:30 be certainly a higher category of grading.

**Can you recall you ever having to swear an oath of secrecy or anything like that?**

Of course. You have to sign it.

**Where was that one?**

In Canberra.

**And was there just the one?**

For anybody who has access to top secret material

26:00 or top secret codeword material, you sign on and when you leave you sign off. And you are committed for a thirty-year period not to disclose.

**You also spoke earlier about the SAMs [Surface-to-Air missiles] and the DMZ and that information when published made it de-classified and allowed more people to know that probably should have known. Were there**

26:30 **any occasions where information that was thought to be important enough to get out was leaked so that it could get out?**

As far as I am aware, at a low level source, people like bar girls, the other side had people in all walks of life.

27:00 But the quality of the intelligence and the credibility of the intelligence would be suspect, well yeah anything that is leaked like that you'd suspect.

**When you went to Vietnam post-war, how were you treated?**

27:30 That's interesting, I did not try to hide the fact that I had been in the Australian military nor did I deny the fact that I had been in intelligence. And I didn't know when I went to the North, I didn't know what sort of reception that would get, but the attitude there was,

28:00 "Hey, that's twenty-five years ago. Its all gone, this is today." And I had one interesting evening there. The professor that I dealt with at the Foreign Studies University invited me one night - we became good friends; he is a very nice fellow. One night at a party at his place, there was myself

28:30 and him and two Americans who were with an NGO, a Non-Government Organisation, providing aid to Vietnam. And we are sitting around this table drinking whisky and enjoying ourselves. And it came up, "What were you doing? Were you involved in the war?" "Yeah." And it turned out that

29:00 both of these Americans had been with the marines and they were at Da Nang in the far north of the South. And the professor had been a captain in the infantry in the hills outside Da Nang and at about the same time. So they are blowing the hell out of each other twenty-five years beforehand and here they are sitting around a table, imbibing and

29:30 enjoying each others company.

**I was going to ask you, you have mentioned how all of the Vietnamese gents like a tippie, a drink or two, was that a handy way of getting intelligence?**

Oh yeah. They loosen up quite a bit when they're

30:00 whacked [intoxicated]. There is a bit of a problem because you're usually whacked too by that time so you have to remember to try and recall what went on. But it would usually be in a convivial situation, like a party or a get together over a meal. And they

30:30 love to have a drink and carry on.

**You just talked about how the reception had changed when you went back to Vietnam later on, how much did you see that Vietnam had changed?**

Saigon is pretty much a concrete jungle and I didn't like it at all, it didn't appeal to me at all, and the people are a little bit different.

31:00 When I went to the North, I wasn't sure what to expect but there's, its probably much like Saigon used to be in the early 60s before the war, beautiful tree lined streets, old French colonial buildings, badly in

- need of painting and repair. The old city of Hanoi is a very small area and it must
- 31:30 have the largest population density in the world. Its really very narrow streets, crowded, but the people are lovely, I really enjoy the northerners, they're friendly, hospitable. We, Beronese came with me, I spent about six weeks there initially and when I was going over to set up this arrangement for the university, I first went
- 32:00 to do that and also language refresher. So I spent as much time as I could just working with the language and so Beronese was left to her own resources. And she would get out and do a lot of photographing, photographs that I could use for teaching back here, you know, all sorts of real life situations.
- 32:30 And she had this one cyclo [3-wheeler bicycle carriage with passenger in front, driver behind] driver that she found and she continued to use him all of the time. And they became quite attached and she felt totally comfortable with him and she was totally honest and reliable. She would get out of the cyclo to go into a market or somewhere and he would get her purse and put it under his arm and guard it with his life.
- 33:00 And after six weeks we were wondering whether we should do anything and if we were going to do something what we should do, because we wanted to help this guy. He had a wife and two little boys, and the family lived on ten dollars US a month. So we decided,
- 33:30 we first thought about, because now in the North they have to pay school fees for children. He used to rent this cyclo by the way so he cleared about ten dollars US a month and lived on that. So we first looked at whether or not we might be able to pay the school fees for the kids, but that really wasn't a practical
- 34:00 option, so we decided just to give them money. So we gave them fifty US, which was like, "Wow, that's six months pay." and each time that we went over there, we always found him and used him. We went back to his home, his home which I think was two thousand US dollars what he was paying for it, how he was paying for it I don't know.
- 34:30 But was probably not as wide, certainly wasn't as wide as this room, was as wide from that wall to this door here wide, and two rooms. And the four of them, the family, lived there. The front section of it was sitting room, they had a cupboard there with cups and pots - no toilet, they had to go outside somewhere for that - and the back part was big enough
- 35:00 for a double bed and the four of them slept there. Poor as church mice and each time we went there we would slip them the same amount of money. And he would call both of us Mum and Dad in Vietnamese and was extremely grateful and eventually he used one of these fifty bucks to buy his own cyclo.
- 35:30 And he also bought another old one; this was a brand new one. And he also bought another old one to rent out himself, so he has got his head screwed on heading the right way. One time that I went there, Beronese wasn't with me. I used to stay at this hotel, which is a little bit out of the centre of town and a little bit away from where he was, but I found him and I said, "You come back and have dinner with me at the hotel" which is a four-star hotel and you have got your doorman out the front and
- 36:00 so on. Up she rolls in his brand new cyclo with his family in the cyclo and the doorman went to hunt him off and I said, "No, they are my guests." So they came in and would never have anything like this experience in his life. Came in and we sat at this big table and we ordered all of this stuff and we couldn't eat half of it and they took it away in dilly bags and
- 36:30 and I think he was a little bit shocked at the lavishness of it and the cost. He had been in the army, spent his time in the army, he was probably about forty this fellow and he had been in the South as a digger on the other side, but real good man. Didn't smoke, didn't drink, good family man.
- 37:00 And a driver that I had there I became very friendly with too. The hotel driver who had also been ex-military, almost everybody had been. And we went past a street just near the Hanoi railway station and he said, "Do you see that street down there?" I said, "Yeah." He said, 'B52 American strategic bomber] raid
- 37:30 wiped out just about everything in the street." And I was shocked because I hadn't been aware that there had been a B52 raid in the city. As you fly into it, there are bomb craters everywhere still. But no B52 raid, B52 raid would have knocked out more than that street. So it might have been a bombing raid, but by a few smaller ground attack jets.
- 38:00 But there was a lot of people killed right in the middle of Hanoi. And a lot of people during the bombing campaign by the Americans were leaving Hanoi, fleeing Hanoi, and in the middle of winter it gets pretty cold and there are a lot of stories of hardship.
- 38:30 Yeah, they had it pretty rough; the ordinary people had it pretty rough. There is a big lake in Hanoi, West Lake, and around this lake there are a lot of real big villas, you would be proud to have it on one of the canals on the Gold Coast, any of them. Bigger probably. And when I first
- 39:00 went there, I hired this tutor because I just wanted to pick up speed with the language, and I

commented on these villas and I said, "Who owns these?" And he said, "Cadres, high ranking cadres." They're the government people. And I said, "How the hell can they afford them?" And he said, "Oh, no worries, and on the Riviera too there is a lot more of them."

- 39:30 And I said, "Well, how do you feel about this? These guys looking after themselves?" And he said, "Oh lucky. They're lucky buggers." And the attitude, not just with him but with others over there too, is that if you manage to get there, you look after yourself, sport.
- 40:00 Students that I sent over there would be accommodated in private home, and one of these was the home of a retired general, no, I think it must have been colonel. It was a big home, about four floors, and the students had their own room up above. And this guy, I went along to inspect it and have a look and make sure everything was okay.
- 40:30 And this guy was retired then. But when he found out I spoke Mandarin, we moved into Mandarin. He had spent ten years in China while he was in the military and we became pretty good mates in a short time. Had something in common. But in the following year, another group of students went up there, and one of the students
- 41:00 elected to stay somewhere else. They would show them a range of options for accommodation. And this guy sent somebody around to his new digs and confronted him and said, "Mr Dawson wants you to live in my place." And the student said, "No he doesn't, he said that we can live wherever we like."
- 41:30 And a couple of nights later, police came around and demanded his passport and he refused to hand over his passport. He said, "My passport doesn't leave me. If you want me to go to the police station to show you whatever is in my passport that you want to see, fine. But I don't give you my passport." It was intimidation, trying to make him move.
- 42:00 From then on we...

## Tape 8

00:34 **Just pick it up from the intimidation.**

Yes, he tried very hard using local police to intimidate this student to get him to move to his place so that he could have the income. And the student refused, stood on his dig [dignity] and he won. But the people that he was staying with, the family,

01:00 they were terrified because this guy had a lot of weight to throw around and they were terrified that they were going to be, something might happen. Anyway it didn't luckily, and in the following year, we sent the students off to another area to find accommodation.

01:30 And a person from the university would take them, like the head teacher would take them and show some accommodation for them to look at and they settled on a very nice place where they had the place to themselves. So four students, each with their own room,

02:00 and this place was also owned by an ex-army colonel. And so was the next one and so was the next one. There was a whole row of houses in the street that were owned by retired military people or current military people.

**In your time serving with the RAAF in Vietnam,**

02:30 **what was your impression of the white mice?**

They seemed pretty non-effectual. They were probably, and this is only a guess, on the take. There was one occasion where I certainly tested them, a couple of us were having

03:00 a party. Now I had an American mate down at the docks and if we were going to have a party I would go down to him with a case of Australian beer and say, "Hey Charlie," what was his name, it wasn't Charlie, anyway, "Hey Fred, I've got a case of Australian beer for you." "Right Smokey, what can I do for you?" "I'd like a case of steak. Rib eye."

03:30 "Hey Charlie," he'd say and call one of the locals, "toss a crate of that steak out." And this is fifty-odd pound of stuff that you gently sink your knife into and it just melts, you know, it was beautiful stuff. And you could get fifty pound of steak for a case of grog. Anyway, I got a hold of this large ice box for keeping beer cold, actually borrowed it from

04:00 the head of the Australian task force, the general, and I went down to the ice works, this was on a Saturday or a Sunday to pick up the ice. And you would get fifty-kilo blocks and they should have been fifty piastres, which is nothing, and

04:30 you'd go into the ice works to get it, well, they had some outside under bags and I pulled up and said, "I want four of these blocks." And they said, "They're two hundred [piastres] a block." And I said, "That's

nonsense." I knew how much it was and they insisted, "No, no, its this price." And I said, "Inside, I'll get it inside." And they had a sign up saying the place was

05:00 open but a guy at the front door waved me away and said, "We're closed." So I didn't accept this, I jumped in my car and went around to the nearest police station and brought the copper back with me and argued the toss to get this stuff. I just hated being done. Eventually he came good and we got the ice for the right price.

**Speaking of white mice**

05:30 **do you know if there was any nicknames for intelligence people?**

No, you mean by our blokes? No.

**I have heard, I am not sure if it is Australian intelligence, I have heard it called the 'head shed'.**

I haven't heard that. That could be a

06:00 later entry into the vocabulary.

**There is a lot of talk about the RAAF being in charge of the Iroquois, they flew the Iroquois, how they worked with the army, some say got along fine, some people say not so, your role in intelligence did you have any?**

No, it is out of my field. I have heard what you heard. And the

06:30 army as I understand it had no problem at all with RAAF pilots, they showed as much guts as any pilot on the ground and to extract people under hot fire is no easy task, so particularly from guys that were extracted they were extremely happy to have the RAAF pilots there.

07:00 But administratively there was some conflict between the RAAF who were reluctant to commit their aircraft and say place them at Nui Dat itself where they could have been hit by a mortar or something. Where they were much safer down where they were, but it increased the call time, you know. If you had the call and

07:30 people needed to be extracted, then you needed to have people there on the spot to react quickly. And I think that was probably the main reason why the army wanted Iroquois under their control, quick reaction time. But as I say that's outside my field.

**Before you went to Vietnam, can you recall the first time**

08:00 **aware of the conflict there, was it gradual or did it suddenly rear its head?**

Well I got into the Vietnamese language before the conflict, 1961. It wasn't until 62 that we sent the training team, the initial training team, and I think that was about thirty guys, spread all over. We didn't have

08:30 a battalion go in there until must have been, I have forgotten. So I was certainly aware of Vietnam, having done the language course, and not only do you learn something about the country,

09:00 before that I had no knowledge of it whatsoever. But you have an interest in it too, that what you are training to do if something is going to happen over there, then that's where you are going.

**So was it a part of your training at all that you were brought up to speed on the situation?**

No. There was no set training format for me, but I was in air force

09:30 headquarters, intelligence headquarters, and the guy that was running the desk for South- East Asia and Vietnam, so whatever came in I had access to because we were all cleared to the same level and I sat in on briefings.

**When you are just out and about and you hear the word 'Vietnam' what is the first thing that comes to mind?**

10:00 It would depend on the context that it comes up in. It could be, my initial thought about it could be refugees coming to Australia, it could be the war itself, it could be Vietnam today. I have had a fairly long exposure to it,

10:30 so it is, like you might find a digger who was there for twelve months and came back and no more contact and as soon as you ask him about Vietnam then he goes straight back to when he was there. But my experience covers a lot of years and a lot of contact so.

**Can you tell us again what you told us before about when you hear a Huey fly over?**

11:00 It brings back Vietnam straight away, that is, the war situation. I didn't spend a lot of time on Huey but I did spend some time on Hueys and that's the one thing that brings Vietnam, the war period, to you immediately. Brings back thoughts straight away.

11:30 **And my last question is a very soft one, what music were you into before you went?**

Oh, you mean as far as just listening to? Modern stuff, the Top of the Pops, the Beatles,

12:00 Col Joy and the Joy Boys; I think the Everly Brothers were around that time.

**Some vets have even said sometimes they hear a song and that takes them back, do you have anything like that?**

Yep. We All Live in a Yellow Submarine takes me back to Vietnam straight away.

12:30 That's the first one that comes to mind anyway.

**Do you know why that is?**

I think it takes you to a set situation, that one I associate Yellow Submarine with a beer party on Front Beach at Vung Tau. We were all screaming, thinking you're singing,

13:00 "We all live in a yellow submarine." Yeah. That was a pretty popular one.

**Did you ever get to see any of the entertainment units that came to Vietnam?**

I didn't no. I saw a few American shows but missed out on the Australians.

13:30 **Can you just talk about the difference like when you entered the intelligence field there was no training, it was on the job training, now it is a highly skilled very much taught science?**

You must consider that I left the service in 1976 so most of what has come into place now occurred after that time.

14:00 I have some knowledge of training because my son followed in my footsteps and I have some knowledge of what he went through. But I really can't, it is an outsider trying to give details of a system now in place that I am not really familiar with.

**Can you talk about your training the fact that it was on the job it wasn't so much sitting down and being taught how?**

14:30 I learned my skills initially on the desk in air force intelligence headquarters, DAFI, Directorate of Air Force Intelligence. This, in answer to your question Michelle [interviewer], is where you learn to sift through intelligence that is brought

15:00 to you, either in written form or orally, and determine whether it has got a place in the scheme of things as you organise them: the skills of sifting through raw material and making an assessment of what is the value of this. If it isn't of any value, discard it, or if it is of some value,

15:30 give it a degree of worth. And in gathering it, you are thinking in terms of what the end product is going to be when it gets to a dissemination stage. So you're-gathering it, collating it, and then you're disseminating it.

16:00 Most things that you get orally generally would be fairly low-grade stuff anyway. That's in the case of Vietnam. In the case of the work I was doing in Hong Kong - that was like the sharp end -

16:30 Hong Kong was the sharp end for intelligence-gathering from China and you were much more alert and using your assessing skills in hanging onto whatever you received orally, and assessing if this has got worth and

17:00 pursuing it. So if you get into something, something is mentioned, it might be a location or a unit or whatever, so you close in. You focus in on what you are looking for, where this might lead you. I am not sure if that is a suitable answer for what you want.

17:30 **You talked about how when you first got to Vietnam, you really wanted to get along the cutting edge, in the thick of it. In that regard, where do you place Vietnam compared to what you did in Hong Kong?**

18:00 They were totally different situations. In Hong Kong, you had a very well structured, well-organised, intelligence-gathering set-up and you just slotted into it without being fully aware of all of the bits around you, but you had a particular role to play and it was very easy to slot in. As far as Vietnam was concerned, we were

18:30 breaking new ground. The sending somebody there was to get a toe in the door as far as the RAAF was concerned. Just play it by ear as it unfolded there, so you were left pretty much to your own devices and initiative in how you did things.

19:00 There was some, the process of reporting, gathering of stuff and reporting it back to Canberra, the low-grade stuff, was bread and butter. And there was a set format in how you carried that through but anything outside that

19:30 in looking for anything unusual or spur of the moment or any promising possibilities. So its just initiative and again flying by the seat of your pants, I am sure that it is much better organised today.

**At the end of that eighteen-month tour that you did...**

Fifteen months.

**Fifteen-months tour that you did, considering that it was ground breaking work, did you ever receive feedback? What was the feedback that you received back from the RAAF as to what you did there?**

20:00 None. I did get some feedback for work that I did in Hong Kong. One particular project that I was on, I mentioned it about the submarines, the Yanks wrote a letter of commendation to my CO,

20:30 which gave me a bit of a boost, but as far as Vietnam was concerned no feedback whatsoever. And all you did when you left the place was just try to forget about it, move on. Another reason why I elected to do something else, that is, the Chinese course

21:00 on my return, was that it was quite likely, given the small number of interpreters we had, that you could spend twelve months at home and get up there again. And I felt pretty strongly that we shouldn't have been there and I didn't want to see any more waste of Australian lives.

**When you first went to Vietnam how did you actually get there?**

21:30 I flew Qantas [Australian airline] via the Philippines, overnight in the Philippines and I hit Saigon on the 4th of July.

**Did you go in uniform?**

No, civvies [civilian clothes].

**And where did you leave from?**

Same place, Saigon.

**Sorry, where did you leave from in Australia?**

From Sydney. Canberra flew to Sydney, overnight Sydney and

22:00 and then Sydney, Philippines, Manila, and then Saigon. On that way back, QANTAS charter flight straight back to Sydney.

**And do you know what time of the day you arrived back in Sydney?**

Early in the morning. We left Saigon, it should have been around about midday but that added to the anxiety I think because we were about an hour and a

22:30 half late getting off the ground. And I think we got back early morning.

**You spoke of a cheer as you left the ground in Saigon.**

As one voice, there was one hell of a roar.

**What was it like when you arrived back?**

It was wonderful to be back in Australia, then you have got to plane it back from Sydney to Canberra to be with the family.

23:00 But it was wonderful to be back with the family and to see how much your boys have grown in fifteen months. They went from babies, toddlers, to young boys. It is a big part of your life to miss out on, the kids growing up.

**In the toing and froing from Vietnam, did you ever feel like you were treated in a way that you shouldn't be treated?**

By whom?

23:30 **By the government in regards to getting there and getting back.**

There was one situation there; it wasn't all that long after I went. You received an allowance for being there and my pay and allowances were going, I think I was getting some allowances paid directly to me there, but my pay was being paid into a bank account back in Canberra and there was a

24:00 stuff up at the Department of Air by the people in the finance office. Now, my wife was doing some part-time work a couple of days, three or four hours at the TAB [Totalizator Agency Board] and when she did that, she sent the boys to be babysat by this old lady,

24:30 not an old lady, probably middle-aged, while she was at work. Now she went to pay a bill and it

bounced, the cheque bounced from the ANZ [Australia and New Zealand Banking Corporation], and she got a terse letter from the ANZ with two or three cheques that were returned to her, which meant the money wasn't coming in. And when I got the letter from her to tell me about this, with the notices from the bank,

25:00 it just happened that the Minister for Air was visiting Saigon and he had a squadron leader who was his aide with him. And the Air Attaché said to him, "Will you please look after this when you get back?" which he did, and there was a ministerial enquiry came out of it. And the husband of this woman, who was looking after my kids,

25:30 he was in the same office, in the finance office, and it was a friend of his who was in the gun for messing up this thing. And this guy rang my wife and abused her because I had gotten his mate into trouble. Now, she didn't tell me that until a year or so after I had got back and we had left Canberra, because I would have been on his doorstep in a flash.

26:00 That's disgusting.

**One of the chaps that we spoke to that went there said he saw all of the Air America aircraft there, the CIA, did you ever see or hear anything about their exploits over there?**

26:30 I had a little bit of contact with a couple of CIA people but we didn't get into what they were up to, so no.

**I know your Vietnam experience has been**

27:00 **far greater than just your Vietnam War experience, but how do you see your Vietnam War experience influencing the rest of your life?**

Well, for one thing, on a personal side, I think it caused the break-up of my first marriage.

27:30 We had just, we were so far apart by the time I came back, and I think my first wife put up with a lot from me afterwards, I had changed considerably. So my personal life was very much affected by it. It also led to me meeting my second wife, and

28:00 while it is no consolation to my first wife, I am extremely thankful that that happened because we are one, you know, we have a very rare sort of relationship where we're totally in tune. So from that point of view, again on a

28:30 personal side, it had again changed my life dramatically. It caused a lot of heartache with my sons initially but that mended itself. Professionally it, the training for Vietnam, the experience in Vietnam, really set me on a new path.

29:00 And from what I have been able to tell you over the last couple of hours, you can see for yourself. I probably would have been a retired electrical fitter and never gone outside of Australia had it not been for the Vietnamese. So professionally I have really enjoyed my

29:30 professional working life both within the service and post service in university academic life. Intelligence work has been a great experience, and the other spin-offs, the clam business, doing the interpreting, and moving into another area there and the field of expertise that developed

30:00 for me, with the survey that I did for the clam products, I mean nobody else in the world would have done it, would have had the background that led to doing something like that. So it is an incredible change in my life.

30:30 Friendships, I think probably the circle of friends that I had and would have continued to have as an elec fitter in the air force, if I had stayed in the air force forever and just done that, would have been quite different, quite different to the circle of friends I have now. The people who

31:00 both in language, in the military language field regardless of which ever service they come from, one of my good friends is navy, and army, and so regardless of service, mateship is really very strong because we are a small community, a small group, the intelligence field and there's not much

31:30 you can talk about that has occurred in the field that you can talk about to outsiders. And I felt that they might be looking a lot at this tape too, not this particular tape but what I have given you today, to do a bit of sifting.

**To what degree did you talk about your experiences to your sons because they have followed,**

32:00 **well, one has followed in your footsteps?**

The son who went into Maritime, airborne electronics officer, he was in the CMF [Citizens' Military Force], he joined the military reserve before he went into the air force. He just wanted, like me I suppose, he was a bit older,

32:30 he was about nineteen, he has just turned forty, he just wanted to get away and experience life and seemed very much service oriented. The second son, the one that followed in my footsteps, I had no

idea that he ever considered service. He was a bank Johnnie [clerk] for starters. And suddenly a year after his elder brother had gone in,

33:00 he announced that he had done the battery of language aptitude tests and he was away. Chinese course.

**So had you spoken to them much about your experiences?**

No. Not really.

**Does it surprise you? How he came about to follow in your footsteps?**

Well, it certainly did surprise me yeah.

33:30 And he is extremely bright, he did extremely well with language, he is certainly brighter than me. He is now with Foreign Affairs and doing very well: A grade Chinese and A grade Indonesian linguist. Very proud of the pair of them.

**In regard to PTSD, you spoke of being introduced to yoga, and it**

34:00 **wasn't only the circle of friends you got there but yoga itself, can you tell me how you think that helps?**

Well, you have got the mental and the physical side. I have got a lower back problem and both shoulders problems and restricted movement, which really affects your golf swing.

34:30 Since about two months after I started yoga and really started to get into it, my handicap dropped from seventeen to thirteen. Now you have got more mobility, more flexibility, more suppleness physically. Mentally, because of the meditation aspect of it, you have got much better focus on what you're about. Every time you

35:00 stand over that ball you're concentrating a hell of a lot more than you would have done otherwise. Without exception, there were probably about twenty blokes, all Vietnam vets, all with different experiences and we never talked about those experiences. You are just another bunch of guys doing something together and the camaraderie,

35:30 the psych said on occasion, "I have had a few groups go through but none like you guys, in that you have developed this camaraderie that doesn't exist with other groups." I am pretty sure it was the common background, the service background. You muck in and help each other and

36:00 it just happens and without exception, and she would ask us at say the end of a six-week session, "How is it going? What have you gotten out of it?" And all of us had very positive things to say about our own circumstances. Some wives went along too and the wives were saying, "He has improved out of sight." And my hat goes off,

36:30 my cap goes off to the wives of people who have the disorder much more seriously than I have. And the long suffering wives who have really put up with so much for so long with their husbands and the

37:00 symptoms that don't just affect the person himself or herself but wives and children as well. So I take my hat off to the ones that have stuck it out with their husbands.

**What is the hardest thing you find today having to deal with in regard to the Vietnam War?**

37:30 You have flashbacks. You have flashbacks of two things in particular that constantly come to mind for me, and one was the mortar attack and the outcome of that, and the prison where they had three hundred people in five, six, seven little cells,

38:00 fifty to a cell, and just the, you would often see, and I have never seen it on any other race, Vietnamese black eyes that stare at nothing. You have seen it, you see it with individuals when they are in deep trouble or totally spaced out. All of these people were in the same boat.

38:30 And it haunts me.

**Do you find that it is getting easier, like do you think you are dealing with it better now than you did before you were diagnosed?**

Yeah I think it helps. Yoga also had a calming effect and the meditation helps tremendously, and it also helps to know.

39:00 You may not know that you're angry, you may not know why you keep having these dreams or why you can't sleep but knowing why helps. Knowing why you have got chest tightness or shakes, it all helps to know.

39:30 Makes it easier to manage it.

**Now I know you haven't spoken about it much before, like a lot of vets they don't speak about it, but when they do they have told us that it feels like a weight has been lifted of their shoulders, do you find anything like that at all?**

Today before we got together, I couldn't see myself talking beyond about an hour because I didn't think that I had much to say, so I

40:00 feel something has been lifted after our session today and I am glad it happened. I don't know whether it is worth much.

**It is. An interesting question for you, do you dream in Vietnamese?**

Have done. Not often, but I have done

40:30 and I have dreamed in Chinese as well, probably more so in Chinese because that has been more of my life in the last thirty years.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**