

Australians at War Film Archive

Geoffrey Morgan - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 18th September 2003

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/948>

Tape 1

00:37 **Tell us where you were born and start from there.**

I was born in Warwick in a private hospital there which no longer exists, on 3am on the 19th of May 1945. My parents were living at Killarney which is about thirty two kilometres east of there,

01:00 so that's where I lived for my primary years. So I started school in 1950 when I was four and a half years old in prep one and then went on to grade eight scholarship class, as it was then, in 1958. In '59 to '62 I went to Toowoomba Grammar in Toowoomba. And then to teachers' college, Kedron Park Teachers' College in Brisbane and then

01:30 started teaching in '65 in Killarney, where I was there for that twelve months and about a week or two of '66, when I went to Maryvale State School and I was there until a week before or the first week of '67 before I went into national service. And so that was '67 to '68 and I came back to teaching in 1969, at Serviceton South, I was there until 1972.

02:00 '73 to '80, I was at Bardon State School. In 1980 - no till, yeah in 1981 I was then a maths advisory teacher for a while and then Acting Deputy at Jindalee for that second semester. '82 I was at Jamboree Heights and Algester and then as teacher, grade seven teacher of Inala for the rest of that year. And in 19 - where are we up to?

02:30 '83 I was appointed Deputy of Strathpine State School and I was there later at Lawnton and then at Dayboro near Kallangur until I retired in July 2001 and now I'm just simply working part time on contract at, mainly at ACU [Australian Catholic University] but also QUT [Queensland University of Technology] and at the moment Griffiths University which brings us up to date.

Good. Tell us

03:00 **also about your national service and your time in Vietnam. What happened?**

I was called up in the seventh intake. I was actually, my marble actually came up in the first intake in 1965, and but I had this letter that because I was teaching they would, no, because I was studying for that year, they were doing Education One I think

03:30 it was, externally, and they said you can continue to study that until the end of the year. But when the end of the year came, they deferred us for another year saying another year of teaching. And I don't think there were too many who were actually deferred for two years although, of my age, because in my class, as I was one of the younger ones, you know when I was ten most of the kids were eleven, and so there were very few of my age group, that is born in '45 who were actually called up. They were mainly 1946 on.

04:00 So I think that was one of the reasons why I got the two years extension. Then I came to Enoggera on 31st January and that's when we were sworn in and flown to Williamtown and then bussed to Singleton where we had our, however long it was, ten weeks or whatever it was, basic training, then went to Ingleburn. I'd applied for Signals. And then went to Ingleburn

04:30 where they sorted us out as to whether we'd just be radio operators or operator keyboard and radio, as I ended up doing. And from there some stayed and did their course in Sydney, most of us went to Balcombe on the Mornington Peninsula and we had six months training there, which was a pretty long time really for a national service. I think we were the first, the first group who did the six months training. The first, those who trained as operator keyboard and radios. And for those,

05:00 then, at the end of that time we had options, what did we want to do? Those of us who put down, volunteered for Vietnam went there. Those who didn't, didn't. And like I didn't put it first, I put it third. I was keen to go, but I didn't want to extend my chances too much you know. So I was transferred to - we did battle efficiency at Puckapunyal

05:30 of all places, and then came to Brisbane to 139 Signal Squadron and I spent from late November to the beginning of March there, and then I went to 104 in, 104 Signal Squadron in Nui Dat. And there I spent, I arrived there on the 10th of March and left on the 10th of December. And then we were out of the army as soon as we got off the plane in Sydney effectively. And only went back for a day as a discharge at the end

06:00 of, when was that? 31st of January I suppose, '69. At this point do you want any more detail? Or just a potted history.

Okay, so that was it. Alright good. Well tell you what, we may as well just go into detail now. Okay, we'll start with where you grew up, tell us about where you grew up.

Small country town. As I said it was Killarney,

06:30 which is population then and still is of about seven hundred. My father ran the garage for a while then another one opened during the 50s so I spent much of my time working in the garage later on, or sweeping up or hanging out down there, serving petrol, odd jobs, delivering the bills around town each month. And spent a fair bit of time

07:00 out in the bush. That was looking back, that was a great childhood where in summer we'd go down the pool and spend much of the time there. Other times we'd be bushwalking even ride, take our bikes through the bush across the mountain, no tracks, and fight our way across until we found another road. Or we'd ride our bikes up to Queen Mary Falls, well push them up but it was fun riding them down a gravel road.

07:30 Quite a bit of skin off at times, so they were good times. And I suppose the other good memory from childhood is when Dad was called out on breakdowns; he was the RACQ [Royal Automobile Club Queensland] person for the town, so he went out for people whose car had broke down and in the middle of nowhere or accidents. Or the other was going to various properties,

08:00 where particularly, lighting plants that had failed and there were a few people out in the bush who, visitors weren't very common, so you were always welcome. I remember one place we went to where there was an old lady who lived there, she was a great cook, won all the cooking at the Killarney Show every year but she'd trot out these great afternoon teas. And that was after I'd been sitting under a tree with a couple of bricks cracking walnuts

08:30 all afternoon, or some other - macadamia nuts. So it was a great place to go to, good feeds.

What was the Killarney Show like?

The Killarney Show in those days was your real traditional show in that there was all the ring events with the camp drafts and bullock riding and calf riding for kids and that sort of thing. Great number of sideshows

09:00 but then also was all the motor dealers and furniture dealers from Warwick would bring out their gear. And so that was the other good thing at the time, because the showgrounds was on one side of town and we lived on the other. We had a spare paddock when we had a chance, we used to ride on the tractors as they were bringing them across to the house where they kept them overnight for security. Got to the stage where I used to

09:30 steer it across anyway, as I did with Dad in the car as we drove around. You know, a country town in the 50s and I'd be sitting in the passenger seat and me Dad would have his feet on the pedals and so forth, but I'd be steering the car. Wasn't actually driving it, although I used to drive around the garage, in and out from the garage. And that's where I learnt to drive, getting cars off the hoist or into the shed and out of the shed, when I was twelve, thirteen, I suppose.

10:00 So when I went for my licence, I actually drove the car to get my licence. It was quite odd when you think back how casual it was. And the policeman, the local policeman, he knew I could drive. He said, he was about to write it out and I said to him, "Aren't you going to take me for a test?" He said, "Do you want to go for a test?" I said, "Oh yeah." So, you know,

10:30 it was - those days are long gone of course. The casual way of approaching those legal type aspects.

And with the show too, was it something you looked forward too?

Oh yes. Yes. It was a main, probably the major function in the town every year. And it probably still is to a degree, not that I've been to one for every year, but there still is a Killarney Show every February.

11:00 But I don't think, it's a bit like the Ekka [Royal Queensland Show] I suppose, where they don't, I think some of the impact is taken away because you have these other specialist shows. Whereas at that time that's where, if you wanted to see the new cars you went to the Show, if you wanted to see some new furniture, you went to the Show, if you wanted to buy a new piano you went to the Show, you know that style of thing besides the country events. I think, yeah polo cross

11:30 had started by then. And I think there were polo cross games as part of the show, if not there were demonstrations probably. But certainly the usual horse and cattle type events.

What were some of the side shows?

Usual merry-go-rounds, the clowns, it was more obviously the traditional ones. I don't really have too much memory of those, except they were playing, I mean in the 50s what

- 12:00 rock 'n' roll had started really about '55, '56 and so I do have this sort of vague auditory memory of going to the show and hearing these songs blaring out. Don't ask me what they were, but Neil Sedaka or whatever it was at the time. Yeah, that captures the memory I suppose.

Tell us about some of your friends.

- 12:30 Being in a country town, and our class in '52, the new, the Education Department was restructured and there were a lot of us, as I say I started when I was four and a half in 1950 and a lot of us had started, that was Prep 1, but there was Prep 1, 2 and 3, and others had started their Prep 1 in '51, and when this change came about in '52, they had to sort of - the Preps had gone
- 13:00 but there had to be a reshuffling of classes, and there ended up being that there was only thirteen in my class and about thirty in the other class that was notionally then a year behind us. And I think that's one reason why I was always a bit younger. There were a couple of others the same, but I was a little bit younger because of that reshuffle. So I had a couple of good friends, I mean, I'd largely lost touch with them all
- 13:30 except one and that's still a distant relationship these days, as you do. But there was, as friends as kids, you fall in and out, but there was some boys further up the street who I played with and we'd have shanghai fights and mud fights and go down the pool together or go through the bush. It was particularly one
- 14:00 Bill Dunnegan who I used to go to the bush with. And as we got a bit older, take a rifle with us or a shanghai or something and think about all these birds we killed, which we shouldn't have done but that was the nature of the time. And then others where a couple of other fellows I was with, one was particularly keen in catching water rats. So we had some traps down the creek
- 14:30 and we'd catch these water rats and they'd be skinned and the skins would be sold. So that was pocket money for him, I never saw any of it.

How did you catch them?

With a trap. Yeah, something like a rabbit trap, you know with the jaws. But I didn't take too much notice of that, I just used to go down with them. And of course bike riding, I got a push bike when I was about ten

- 15:00 I think and used to, as I said, we used to go up into the mountains but also go away for the day. We'd ride twenty, thirty miles away, sit by the side of a creek and find some watercress or something and put that on our sandwiches. It was a good time. Looking back. But at that time I couldn't wait to get out of the place. I just wanted to go, get away somewhere else.
- 15:30 And I think that was the, that was the most within country towns. Of those that I went to school with, there's only one living in town, and has been for the last forty years. He left for a while but came back when his father died, much to his mother's disappointment. She didn't want him to come back, because she saw that by coming back to the town that his outlook could well be restricted. I was only talking to her a few months ago and
- 16:00 she was saying, "Yeah he shouldn't have come back. He had a good job in the Post Office, he could've gone on and done whatever, but he's come back." And he's just worked around the town, owned a few trucks and things like that, so he's happy with his life obviously. Everybody makes their own life. A few of the girls stayed in town, they married local people, but pretty well everybody else has gone. There's probably only, as I say,
- 16:30 one boy I went to school with and probably one, maybe two girls. One that comes to mind. So you just drift apart.

What exactly is it that makes everyone leave?

I think its opportunity. There was the prospect for work and I know one, well I was always keen to go to boarding school, for some reason.

- 17:00 But in time since then, my mother has said that she saw it as a way of just broadening my horizons. Broadening the opportunities. I don't know that that was correctly true, really, because there are other fellows I went to school with who went to year twelve and have other things, so I don't necessarily think that would have restricted it, but that was they thought at the time. And I'm appreciative of that.

17:30 What boarding school?

Toowoomba Grammar.

What was that like?

- I enjoyed it, it was good. It was fairly rigidly controlled so we weren't allowed out at much. We could go down the town if we were dressed up Saturday morning, go to the shops be back by lunch, Sunday afternoon, we could go for a walk around the range at Toowoomba, or down the range as we used to go
- 18:00 through the bush down there, as long as we didn't go down the town. And on occasions really maybe once a term, we were let go to the movies at night. So most of the time was school work and then it was sport. And sport was the big thing. Everybody was expected to play and the ethos of the place was well, if you didn't play sport well there was something wrong. And I was never much good at sport.
- 18:30 And I did play rugby union and when I went to Teacher's College I played rugby union for the first year, but playing in an under nineteen competition when I was physically smaller than the others and I realised hang on, this is not for me. But I can remember it being a real, it was a real sort of watershed I suppose, in a sense to realise I didn't have to play if I didn't want to.
- 19:00 And I think that the fact that I had to go through that and think ok, if I don't want to play I don't have to, really shows just, not the pressure, but just the culture of the place as far as importance sport was. Not that the academic wasn't emphasised, it was and there were some good teachers, some so-so, but there were some good teachers. And those of us who were there
- 19:30 many went back to the, most of the people - it's a country oriented school and most of their students come from the far flung regions of Western Queensland and these days Northern New South Wales as they market themselves further. So many went back and worked on properties, but others went to university, I never went to university my parents couldn't afford it, but because you had to pay in those days
- 20:00 or get a scholarship. So it did give a good rounding for the future.

What was the uniform like there?

The uniform was fine as far as the day to day wear because it was just navy blue shorts and shirt so it was pretty casual in that sense. I think we had to wear a tie, I think, I can't really remember to be truthful.

- 20:30 Just in the everyday dress, because being boarders you didn't have to get dressed up like you see some of the private schools around Brisbane where they're travelling. But when we went out of course, then we had to wear long trousers and a blazer and so forth and a hat. Hat was essential. The other time we were allowed out was to go to church on a Sunday morning, but we used to work a little ruse, we'd either go to the park or there was a pine forest at the bottom of the drive to
- 21:00 the school. There was a... in my first and second year there, junior and sub-junior, me and one of the fellows from New Guinea, we used to go down and lie in the pine needles down there until we saw them walking back and then we'd duck out and walk back to school and check in and say we'd been to church. Or if we did go to church, we'd go to, what would it have been then - Presbyterian Church because we didn't have to kneel down. So we worked all these
- 21:30 little ruses. Because we didn't really want to go. Even though it was a non-denominational school, we were encouraged to go, particularly if your parents said that you were of a particular denomination, as mine had done.

Did you get caught?

No we didn't. No. We were lucky in that sense. We were lucky and one day,

- 22:00 I'd done something during the week, and you got gated on a Saturday and you were not allowed to go to town and it happened to be the week I'd saved up enough pocket money to buy my first camera. And Mike and I says, "We'll go, we'll sneak down." And we bought this camera and luckily we got back and didn't get caught and that was the camera I ended up taking to Vietnam with us.

What was it like to board there, what were the quarters like?

- 22:30 I think what I liked about it and I think why I found the transition to the army a lot easier than some, was because I was used to institutionalised living if you like. So I think it was, has its advantages in that you're with people your own age. I don't have any brothers and sisters, so I was largely by myself in
- 23:00 Killarney and maybe why that was one reason why I thought that this boarding idea mightn't be bad, you're getting into a bigger family situation if you like. So there was that aspect to it and we lived in dormitories. As the new buildings were being built as one was while we were there, then that came down and we had smaller cubicles and one or two to a little cubicle, but mostly
- 23:30 it was a large dormitory with ten plus people, sometimes up to twenty or thirty in some of the bigger ones. And so it was fairly regimented in that you had to get up at a certain time, you went down to the dining room for breakfast and half an hour later or so, class started. So you had your classes during the day. School finished at
- 24:00 I don't know exactly what time, 3.30 or something like that, but then it was straight into sports practise, whether it be cricket or football, depending on the season, until about 5. Then a shower and then dinner and then it was prep so you had one or two hours where you had to sit down and do your homework.

And then it was bedtime. So it was very regimented, not unlike a military situation where you'd have the masters come through and make sure you were in bed, switch the lights out,

- 24:30 no having a pillow fight or whatever it might've been. So the days were fairly regimented. But there was you know, Sundays particularly, they were days to yourself, so you'd laze around the swimming pool or lie in the grass listening to some music or play games. I mean there was one game,
- 25:00 there was some Indian brothers who'd come across from Fiji and they'd brought one of their games which I've forgotten what it was called, but it was on a square board with a slide edge around it and the aim was to have little Perspex discs and you had to flick these and you had to knock each other off the board. And then that became all the rage. Table tennis we played a lot, particularly used to play the same, this young fellow from New Guinea who was with us in sub-junior and junior.
- 25:30 And so that time was our own and, as I said, we could go out on a Sunday afternoon if we wanted to. We couldn't go up into the dormitories, they were out of bounds once we were finished, so we were down in the grounds, and with what facilities, and I suppose when you look back now to what was there, it was fairly sparse, but every school was the same then I imagine.
- 26:00 So it was nothing particularly unusual. And I suppose one of the other factors, particularly of being a boarder, was the old British ethos of bastardisation I suppose. Which was right at the tail end when I arrived, and it was the juniors who used to get into the first year kids. Who used to be known as squirts.
- 26:30 And it'd be things like, I mean it wasn't totally over the top but you did feel some pressure, it was that, "Well you've got to wash my football jersey." Or "wash my shoelaces." Or at times you'd walk through the juniors dormitory and you'd get a few pillows at you. Or at times you'd be, they'd make a concoction of various sauces and drink that, you know. But it was
- 27:00 yeah, it was a sort of bastardisation, but it wasn't I don't think totally over the top. But it was to the extent that the end of that first year '59, that the Principal had told his staff, hey, we're going to squash this. And so it was. Which, a little bit to our disappointment, we thought oh well next year, we'll be juniors and we can get our turn. But it really didn't happen.
- 27:30 And there was another, what would you call it, a tradition I suppose, that again was squashed in my first year, it was a, there was a day known as bodgey day. And it was a day when students could come to school dressed as they want, they could smoke in class, you know, do these sort of outlandish things, and I'm told the year before, that one bloke came just with a nappy and they wheeled him around in a
- 28:00 pram all day. But when it came to that day, the Principal had told us that, Puddy Heenan, that it's not on, it won't happen, apparently he'd had a staff meeting with the staff and said, "No, none of this, they're working on that day." And so we were prepared to do the right thing. And the first lesson of that day I remember was book keeping and it was in a small room, not much
- 28:30 bigger than these two rooms here, known as the dog box. So you can imagine it was an enclosed room and the teacher started to do some work and only after about ten minutes, he says, "Well, who knows a joke?" So somebody told a joke, a clean joke and I thought, that's a trigger, so out come the cigarettes. And so a few lit up and he says, "Oh no, no, only one. Only one. Only one."
- 29:00 So one bloke had a big long cigarette holder and put the cigarette in and so that was passed around and it got to one person, and apparently there were little tablets that you put on a cigarette, they'd emit great clouds of smoke. So that occurred and you can imagine this room, windows closed, doors shut, very quickly this room was full of smoke and the noise was getting a bit high as people were telling jokes and whatever, and the Principal heard it and opened the door and
- 29:30 walked in. Well, I mean he didn't go for us, he went for the teacher and got him outside and as it - I think it happens, and I don't quite know how, how he wouldn't have picked it up but apparently the teacher wasn't at the staff meeting where this was sort of laid down, but I tend to think he must've heard it. He must've heard somehow, because we knew. Anyway we ended up lining outside the bosses office and getting four cuts each.
- 30:00 And you could see by the end of the thirty people, his arm was getting a bit tired. So you know, that was a day to remember. And then we went to the next class and there were no cigarettes or anything but the teacher, the French teacher there, told us all about the blue light district in Paris. So it was quite a good day. You know, one thing that has always fascinated me about life, is how you meet up with people, you know somebody at one point and then
- 30:30 later on a few years time, you're suddenly working with them or have some closer relationship or paths cross. Well as it happens, the teacher who was in the dog box, the book keeping teacher, he ended up being a parent of one of the kids I taught at Serviceton South when I went there. Because then he'd left teaching and became the, I think it was Uniting Church by then, Minister, or Presbyterian, one of the Ministers anyway. So paths can cross. So there,
- 31:00 there were some good times. There were times too where you were sick of it all and wanted to go home, you certainly looked forward to holidays. Used to really enjoy the train trip from Toowoomba to Warwick. And then with the carriages that had the outside landing, we used to stand on the landing the whole time and cop the coal dust in the face. But it was good.

31:30 But when I got back to town, Killarney, that's when I started to really feel that you were the odd one out. Because you'd lost, you'd lost contact, your lives were going in different directions and to a degree I think there was some animosity on the part of a couple at least, 'why did you leave town and go to school in Toowoomba instead of going to Warwick?' and so there were those little divisions. But there was another bloke in that class of thirteen that I did scholarship with

32:00 who also went to a private school, he went to Slade in Warwick, so at least I had somebody to mix with. And then after a couple of years, there was another lad who came to town who was the son of the new Church of England Minister. So then there were sort of three of us. He went to Warwick High, I have to say, but he was new to the town. So we sort of made that link since my parents

32:30 were involved in the Church of England and the churches goings on. So that made the link there. So you had that link but much to my embarrassment I suppose, I recall going down to the shops and talking to other people I went to school with who were now working in the shops, saying you know, "What a place to live, we want to get out of here." Whereas looking back on it, it really did give a great life.

33:00 But I suppose all of us go through that stage where, where we are, it's greener over the other side of the hill, let's try it. So now I've had the contact with the town, well up until this year, my father died this year. But up until I'd been going back every month. And really enjoying the time up there and the care and attention that the hospital was giving my father. It's quite

33:30 a vibrant town, although it's a little bit of economic difficulty now I think. But it was one of the few country towns that had no unemployment all through the early 90s. And mainly because the potato processing factory and abattoirs and saw mill, well the abattoir and saw mill are still going - abattoir and potato processing thing are still going, but the saw mill's closed so I think that's creating a little bit of difficulty now.

34:00 **Your father was in the garage there, did he stay with that?**

Yes. Yes he retired at seventy-five out of the garage. He started the garage in 1930 during the Depression. He'd lost his job in Sydney, he was a fitter and turner and rode his motorbike to Killarney where he'd lived previously, because my aunt and his mother had lived there. By that time

34:30 his father had died. And he started the garage, knew nothing about it but sort of self taught I think really. But got his qualifications very quickly. He was away a little bit. He went to Cunnamulla - no to Quilpie in the middle '30s and worked in Warwick, but came back in the late 30s and then was there until, when did he retire?

35:00 '75, must've been '84 somewhere round about there when he retired. But he sold the garage. There was a credit squeeze in the early '60s and so he sold the garage to the other person in town who'd started a garage, but Dad stayed as manager. Then the other person started a large, he's now the Mayor of Warwick, Ronnie Ballingham, started his business in Warwick but kept the Killarney one

35:30 going. And I think in the last few years, I think Ron only kept it going because it was making a loss I think and I suspect it was work for him, because Dad by that time, I mean, Dad was spending a lot of time down in the garage and his mates would turn up and they'd sit around and talk. He'd do a bit of work. So I don't know that that much work was done in the last few years, it was just a good place to gather.

36:00 But in the end, it just wasn't economically viable to keep it going, so when that stopped, Dad finished. But he was seventy-five then. And that's probably one of the sad things, is that he worked all his life and only then started to do a bit of travelling and spend his money that he'd scrimped and saved. And like all people that came through the Depression, I mean that's, you always had something for the rainy day and you didn't do it because you might need it. And then when

36:30 he started to do those things, he ended up getting a stroke when he was eighty-four. But he lived till ninety-six. But he was a very, he was a very clever guy. He wasn't somebody who actually thought of something original from scratch, but he could see something and, "Oh, I can make that myself." And would make it.

37:00 So he made his own metal lathe for example. When the Victa mower first came out in the 50s, he looked at that and thought I can do that and so built his own. Much more cumbersome, but it served the family for a good number of years. I mean, all the farm machinery, all the farmers around town, he was forever making parts. But he wasn't a good businessman in the sense that the farmer would come in wanting something and he'd either give it to him or he'd charge him

37:30 less that cost, much to Mum's disappointment at times, because she was doing the books. But he was just a fellow with a great heart, he just loved helping people, as well as using the skills he had to manufacture the various items.

What did you learn from him?

How to repair a car. Which when you think about it, saved me a lot of money

38:00 over the years because, while he still had the garage and I was living here, then I would service the car

when I went home. Or after that, I'd do my service under the house here. It got to the stage where when I was about sixteen I was actually doing, doing a lot of grease and oil change mainly, but I got to the stage where I was pulling heads off and doing valve grinds and things like that, with his guidance. Not that I ever done that far with a car of my own. And it quickly got to the

38:30 point anyway, where I thought blow it, I'm earning reasonable money, I'll pay somebody else to do it rather than crawling under the car. So yeah, there was those sorts of things, but I think what rubbed off, I think the idea of helping others. Because you'd see that in everything he did. Nothing was ever too much trouble for him. And I think that sort of thing has probably rubbed off on to us.

Tape 2

00:36 **Just interested in what your family's involvement in things like World War II were.**

Dad, as I said, was in the garage and he was called up around about 1942 I think it was, and I've just given

01:00 a petition that the town then drew up, to the Killarney Historical Society, that I found amongst his gear, because the towns people said, "No he can't go." So you had truck drivers and farmers and bus drivers and whoever else, I think there was about 50 or 60 names on the petition in the local area, pointing out to the Department of

01:30 whatever the department was anyway, that controlled people getting called up, I forget what it was called, saying well if he goes, there's nobody here to service the farming machinery which is needed to produce the food for the war effort, so, and the people who lived there. So he ended up not being called up. Although he did go in to, if you look at the World War II website, you know that the National War Memorial has, then you'll see his

02:00 name there because he actually then did the part-time service for a couple of years. So in other words he didn't go away.

Was there anyone else in your family that was involved in the war?

We've got a very small family, as I said, I'm an only child, there was four in Dad's, there was three in Mum's but our family is very much, this is a long way giving you the answer, our family is very

02:30 much out of sync. I mean, Dad was thirty-eight and Mum was forty when I was born, which was very unusual for that time. So when I went to family situations where I might've been ten, then my cousins were in their twenties and very quickly married, and their kids if they had any, were around about one or two. So I was always out of their sync, and Dad was sixteen years younger than his elder brother.

03:00 His elder brother was actually a Gallipoli veteran, which is, it's only when I, during the eulogy at his funeral, it really hit me just how unusual that is, for somebody that's being buried today, his brother was at Gallipoli. Particularly a father of somebody of my age. My parent's family's friends parents, are probably only in their 70s or maybe 80s.

03:30 So the only other connection really then to the military was with his brother, who served at Gallipoli, served at the trenches in France at the Somme and so forth, and in World War II was a colonel, half colonel in charge of Sydney's defences I'm told. I don't know whether it's true, but I think he might have been the officer in charge of the defences at the time when the midget submarines went into Sydney Harbour.

04:00 But he was discharged before the end of the war, so I assume his age was getting to him, even though he lived to be ninety - he died at ninety-six as well. From lung cancer, which is a bit unusual at that age to then die of lung cancer. So that was the connection.

Would he ever talk to you about Gallipoli or anything like that?

I didn't -

04:30 he lived in Sydney and we lived up here. So I didn't see him very often. But I only have one recollection where he just simply commented on the trench - I don't recall him ever saying anything about Gallipoli, but the trenches in France, he was at one time talking about the mud and the stench and just, the images that we now know from documentaries, he was really trying to express, but didn't say much.

05:00 It was probably only a sentence or two really, but it was certainly, in the way it was said, it was enough for me as, and I would've been a teenager probably at the time, at the oldest, but it was the way he said it that stood out to me, this image of just living in water and mud and not having a change of clothes, that your feet would rot with the boots as the boots were wet and all that

05:30 sort of thing. And the only other connection to the military is that towards the end of the Second World War a cousin, Dad's sister's son, he was at that time at Duntroon. But he then served in the Korean War and he ended up as, when I was in Vietnam in '68, he was a Brigadier attached to the, I think he was the

Australian Military Attaché in London.

06:00 So at the rank of brigadier I assume he was. I don't think there would've been any there of a higher rank. So that's the connection to the family, and while I was at school at Toowoomba Grammar, I recall that he, when he was a major, he visited one day, and that caused a bit of a comment around the school, 'who's this army officer walking through the grounds, going to talk to me?' Because at that time we were in the cadets.

06:30 The cadets at Toowoomba Grammar was another big thing.

What were the cadets?

That was the military where I didn't in the first year, I was too young, so I must've been, you must've had to have been thirteen or fully thirteen or something because I couldn't join the first year. But I did in junior and I was fourteen, no fifteen in that year. So it must have been fifteen you had to be.

07:00 And that was where, it was just like you had with the military, you had the uniform, you were issued with a rifle, an old 303 that you didn't keep of course, you just picked it up from the store every day that you were doing it. But you did your military drill, rifle drill, marching drill, went on - the great thing though was going on camp each year. Say one year we went to Murphy's Creek just at the foot of the Toowoomba Range.

07:30 Another year we went to Maroochydore, so Cotton Tree, so where the caravan park, that was just, from memory that was just an empty sandy space and we pitched our tents there, and then we walked down to where, about where Buddina is now, all that development, that was all bush, and had exercises there. And walked out on the road towards Nambour another time, or towards the highway, down on to the river, Maroochy River and did whatever there.

08:00 They were a week at a time. So that was good.

Was it optional to join or did most guys join up?

There wasn't, again, it was one of these things, there was an expectation, but if you objected then that was okay. So, and I stayed in my junior and sub-senior years, but in senior I decided no I don't really want to do it, so - it was, it wasn't received that well but they accepted my decision.

Why did you decide you didn't want to do it?

08:30 I'm not really sure thinking back. It might've been a bit of pique in the sense that I didn't get selected to go to, there used to at the end of the year, get selected to go either as Under officer which was a sort of notional officer, or particularly a sergeant's course, and I didn't get selected to that, so I might've had my nose out of joint about that. I'm not really sure. I suspect that had something to do with it.

09:00 I could see that my friends were there and not all my friends, some other friends had pulled out as well. So that - when I said to the person in charge, "Look I don't really want to be in here." He looked at me, but you know, that's the way it was.

What sort of skills do you think it taught you I guess at that stage, going through school?

I think in some senses, I mean

09:30 the military aspects aside, as far as being able to shoot a rifle and that sort of thing, I suppose I mean if you think about it, a lot of us was from the country, most had rifles, I didn't but friends did, so it certainly tied - taught us safe handling of weapons which was useful skill for people living on properties and so forth. But other than that I think the skills probably parallel now.

10:00 People having the opportunity at school to be in orchestras in the sense of doing things, working together. You can only march properly if you're all in time working together. An orchestra can only play well if all the instrumentalists are working together. So I think there's that sort of thing, and really it might seem strange to say, but that does give great satisfaction.

10:30 And it was a bit like two years ago, it may have been last year, yeah last year's Anzac Parade, where usually it's a bit of a slouch and a bit of a walk and partly for that reason is that you can't hear the music. But we just happened to be in a position last year where there were bands close by and we really heard it. So when we walked down Adelaide St, past the dais for the salute, everybody was in step. And at the end of it more than one person commented "wasn't that great."

11:00 And I think it was just the fact that you were doing something together. So it's that working together camaraderie that's, I mean that was coming from boarding school anyway, there was great camaraderie there. But it just sort of added to that feeling. So I think they were the benefits. I don't think, taking it in a narrow sense anyway, I don't think there were any negatives. In fact I'm sure there wasn't. If you want to come back to

11:30 'well is it appropriate for kids to be doing such things before the moulding of minds into military attitudes,' is that appropriate? But that's a whole different ball game.

Is it appropriate?

I'm a bit ambivalent. I've got some reservations. I think I'd prefer it discreet until students are a little bit older and can make their own decisions. If they want to they can join

12:00 the ready reserve or whatever it's called these days, have that opportunity. But I think that that's probably not a common view. And not too many schools I don't think. Some schools have chosen to still have cadets but now that it's not supported officially I don't think by the federal government, so in... Then you had regular soldiers whose jobs it was to co-ordinate it, you had equipment supplied and so forth. Well I think now,

12:30 where it continues, then I think there's, I'm not quite sure how they fund it. You know, where you still have your, I think your air force units and so forth. And some schools still have cadet units, but I don't think too many do.

In - it kind of relates to this in a round about way. You were born in 1945, what as you were growing up, I suppose essentially I just mean during your childhood and schooling years,

13:00 **what would you hear about the Second World War?**

Yeah, that's an interesting thing. Now we look back it's sixty years, it's dim, it's in the past. But when I was growing up in the 50s, it still really was a topic of discussion. I can still remember as kids, I mean, as I said Dad didn't go away, but the parents of my friends did. And of course, they were picking up things within the family and

13:30 I can still remember at school having a discussion between ourselves about who it would have been better to be a prisoner of war with, the Japanese or the Germans. Because we'd picked up what happens to both and we said well it was better to be a prisoner of the Germans than the Japanese. So those were the sorts of discussions we had. And the time that I spent down the garage, one of the things I really used to like as, just

14:00 as a kid, from probably seven or eight on, just hanging about standing about listening to the blokes who'd come in and talk, about whatever. But quite often the conversation was about their war experiences. But it tended to be those experiences they talked about that didn't involve action. So they didn't talk about what happened when they were in Milne Bay or wherever, rather they spoke about what might've happened back in Australia.

14:30 And so I can recall, the fellow who worked for Dad, he was in the air force during the war and he was a mechanic. I'm not sure that he went overseas but that's beside the point. But I remember he was based at Amberley for a time and I remember him telling a story about a pilot one day just taking a plane out and just flying it into the ground. You know, just committing suicide. So there were stories like that. I mean I don't remember the details now. So the answer to your question is yes, there was a lot of discussion

15:00 about the Second World War. And then of course, Korea following straight afterwards, then that continued it, besides my cousin I don't remember knowing anybody who went to the Korean War but it was obviously in the news and Dad was always one to listen to the news. I mean the radio was for the news, it wasn't for anything else. Admittedly I could listen to the kids serials they

15:30 used to have on in the afternoons, but otherwise no, it wasn't there for music or anything like that. It was for the news, so in that sense I kept up to date. And I think also, Mum was a great reader and I think following from their experience, I became a reader of newspapers from a very young age. In fact during the holidays I'd read everything and everything in the Courier Mail, so I think there was an awareness of what was going on. And then the close proximity of the times

16:00 then it was only natural that those sorts of discussions would come up.

What sort of awareness was there, I mean maybe through school, was there anything taught about the details of the Second World War that was political or...?

Anzac Day was always a big thing within the town. So Dad always took us down to the Anzac Day parade, which, thinking back now, I often wonder how he was feeling. Because I think it would

16:30 be very difficult, knowing parents of some friends, who were in the army or the air force or whatever but didn't serve overseas, and I think they felt as though they'd been short changed. And I just wonder how Dad felt knowing that he'd been exempted and seeing these others who'd been through all sorts of hell coming back. And I often wonder just how he felt. I had no way of knowing of course, by the time I had these thoughts, he'd had

17:00 his stroke and couldn't talk. But then as far as school goes, I mean the history, the social studies we did at school was very much based on the hero type thing. So you had, now names are escaping me and they shouldn't do should they, but the VC [Victoria Cross] winners. So, who's the guy from Crows Nest? I can't think, names are not coming to me at the moment. So it was very much about

17:30 VC winners. Putting them as examples of people to look up to, if you like. Whether that's true or not that's open to debate but that's the way it was put up. It wasn't about this campaign or that campaign or anything like that. In fact there was probably very little direct teaching about the war as such, rather than the

18:00 general politics that there was a war and these countries were on that side, and the other countries were on the other side. That Pearl Harbor occurred, you know, those sorts of big events were mentioned, but if you look at the social studies books, they're not there explicitly. John French, that's the fellow, the VC winner. So it was those sorts of things were brought, were moral lessons if you like. So yeah, which is quite different to now.

18:30 Most people never heard of, I'm struggling to think who they were because it was so long ago. So the emphasis is naturally different.

When your dad took you down to those Anzac Day parades when you were a kid, what did they mean to you? What was your understanding of it?

Very difficult to say. I really don't know except that I knew that they'd obviously been overseas and because we knew about the war and so forth.

19:00 And there were a heck of a lot of them. I don't know what the numbers were but it was always a reasonable sized parade. And I don't imagine too many of them even then would've been First World War veterans. They mainly would've been Second World War and probably the odd Korean person came in after that. But I think we would've been taught and no doubt Dad would've said, you know about the

19:30 purpose of it, the reverence of it and so forth, but I really can't remember just what my feelings really were, except it was a day off school on the day and some sort of an event.

What about just thinking sort of education wise of what you were taught at school and that sort of thing, what were your impressions of things like Communism at the time?

20:00 My politics as I grew up, I mean when children grow up, they tend to follow their parents politics at least initially. So yeah I'd have to say at that point in time I took the conservative view and I suppose yes, Communism was a bad thing, I'm not saying now it was a good thing, but yeah, we believed that. I suppose. I suppose there's a certain fear that had

20:30 been engendered in the population. I mean Australians have always been afraid of something, whether it was the French or the Russians or the Japanese, or to a degree the Germans since they had New Guinea, or part of New Guinea in the First World War. But there was always something. And given the prominence because in the 50s, the McCarthyism in the US, those things must have been, the fact that [Prime Minister] Menzies tried to ban the

21:00 Communist Party in '51 and '52, so I think all those things probably added up that yes, there was a certain hatred if you like, certainly some fear, because that was the year of 'reds under the beds' type thing. All that I think, added up to these evil Chinese and these evil Russians and so forth. Not that I don't think at that point

21:30 I was really concerned myself really, but that was colouring your attitudes because that was what was being said.

How about at that time either in Toowoomba or back home, was there any sort of, I guess with the influx of refugees into Australia, do you have any memories?

Not of refugees, the only...there was two things and I think one great positive thing going to boarding school,

22:00 was that you had New Guinea natives, we had Chinese from New Guinea, we had Chinese from Singapore, we had a student from Thailand, we had Indians from Fiji, we had an Indian prince from India, I think he came from India, or maybe it was Malaya or Singapore he came from, but he was an Indian Prince. So we, that experience gave us a feeling for other cultures and I'd have to say that

22:30 the New Guineans were extremely well accepted, there was no evidence of racism at all as far as they were concerned. There was no evidence of racism with the Chinese from New Guinea. There was, to those from Singapore, not racism as such but there was a dislike. And the reason I think it was is that they tended not to mix quite as much. I mean the people from New Guinea came in and they

23:00 just were another student. The other thing going for it I was talking about the culture of the sport culture. The New Guinean natives in particular were brilliant sportsmen and so that was always something. The people I think from and they were coming, they were the usual people from villages, I mean the Chinese who were coming from New Guinea, their parents owned shops I think to a large degree, but they saw themselves just as

23:30 average sort of people. I think the students who came from Singapore, were from very wealthy families. So they were coming from a strata in society with a different view, and then I think their English probably wasn't quite as good, maybe wrong but I have a recollection it may not have been quite as good, and I think that added up to their staying a little bit aloof. And of course, if you have a group that stays a little bit aloof, then you just,

24:00 you start to get some animosity. So there was. But that doesn't say that applied to everybody. I mean you can get yourself trapped in the sense that I remember one Sunday, there was one day boy at the school whose parents used to invite these Chinese people out and I was in the locker room, and I just

happened to say, "Oh it's really good of that guy to invite the chinks home." Well there was one of them there and he really took exception to 'chink'. I had a knife at my throat,

24:30 literally a knife at my throat straight away. And I had to really talk my way out of that one and say, "Hey they call Aussies, Aussies," and so forth. But again I think it's language and you can understand why they reacted that way, with hindsight. And as far as - that's in a narrow sense at school, so I had that upbringing and I think that's stood me in good stead. I think I've always been

25:00 tolerant of people from other cultures. Out in the community, no, no I don't recall any refugees or anything like that as such. But I do recall where you'd walk into a fish and chip shop where it was run by say a Greek family, and naturally enough the Greek family was talking in Greek. And I distinctly, to my embarrassment now, saying things like, "Well, you know, they're in Australia why don't they talk English?"

25:30 So there was that aspect, because there wasn't the acceptance that people could retain their cultures when they'd come from another country. That's changed thank goodness. My wife's Dutch. So, although she doesn't keep in contact with the Dutch community and that's come out of the family, her father - because when a lot of people did come as migrants, then some of them intentionally

26:00 shut themselves off from the other cultures, from their home culture. Which I think is a bit sad. And I think Australian society has changed where now we realise that if people are going to be good members of our society then they can't lose contact with their previous society that's bringing a richness to Australia, as long as then they start to take on the values and the beliefs and

26:30 whatever of you know, adapt to Australian life as well. So they become Australian Italians, or Australian Greeks or Australian Iraqis or whatever. So yes, I didn't know any personally, I mean the family that ran the milk shop, paper shop in town in Killarney from the 1930s was Greek. So yeah, we had that sort of contact and they were well respected people in the town. But where, it was

27:00 mainly where you were visiting other places, you'd go to Warwick or Toowoomba or wherever and you'd hear somebody talking in another language and that really was the Australian English European, English Anglo-Saxon background, well you know, if you're here you've got to talk English, which you need to do to fit into the culture, but that's not to say you don't speak in your own language so that's a real change.

27:30 **When you were at high school in Toowoomba, what sort of things were you considering as a career I guess before you made your final decision?**

I didn't really know what I wanted to do. Because high schools in those days were very academic oriented, even if you didn't, I mean the whole school, while I say it was sporting culture it was still very academic oriented. And for most of us the

28:00 aim was, whether we were capable or not, to end up at university. Now some people, and in my year there were, as most years probably, there were two drafts and one was a bit more academic than the other. So I'm thinking of my class which was a class of about twenty-eight or twenty-nine or something, then most of us saw ourselves at some point, if we could, going to university. But I really didn't know what I wanted to do and by the time I was in sub-senior,

28:30 grade eleven, I'd had enough of school. I just wanted to leave and I'd applied to get in to the, as it was then, the PMG, Post Master General's as a telephone technician. So I sat for the exams and I think I came fortieth in Queensland, yeah fortieth in Queensland but they were taking ten. So I went back to school for senior, by that time,

29:00 I'd lost interest in the PMG, back at school, back yep thinking of something more advanced, and I wanted to be an industrial chemist is what came up then. And you could go to university and become an industrial chemist, which my parents couldn't afford to, or you could get employed and do it part time. So that's what I looked at. I still applied for all, you know during, around about this time of year, all the big companies like Conzinc, Rio Tinto and Mt Isa Mines and

29:30 all these other big companies would have their application forms so I filled out every application form for engineer and scientists and whatever else it might have been including industrial chemist and including teacher's scholarship. There were some students who I went to school with who were on teacher's scholarships from junior, which I hadn't heard of, but there was a couple who'd come

30:00 to the school for sub-senior and they'd come with scholarships they'd won at the end of junior. So I applied for all of these things, the only one I got was a teacher's scholarship. But I still wanted to be an industrial chemist so I can remember the day the senior results came out in the paper I got a letter in the mail saying 'You have been granted a teacher's scholarship'. I immediately put it in the envelope and sent it back. In the meantime,

30:30 I came to Brisbane and went to some interviews at the Butter Board and Provincial Traders at Murarrie, or Industrial Chemist. I missed out the one at the Butter Board, and industrial chemist at Provincial Traders it came down to me and one other person. The other person got it and I was told the reason was because I wasn't in the first eleven, first cricket team and I wasn't

31:00 Roman Catholic. They could be the only two reasons it came down to, they said we were equal

academically but he was a better cricketer than I was and so that was it. So it got to the end of the school holidays I thought well hang on, I haven't got a job, I'd better ask for my teacher's scholarship back. So I wrote back to them and says hey, can I have it back and of course where we're heading now is the real shortage of teachers, it was a

- 31:30 real shortage in the mid 60's, and they immediately gave it back to us but said you've got to go to Kedron Park, before you would've had a choice as to whether you went to Kedron Park or to Kelvin Grove. So that's how I became a teacher. But the naivety, I was naïve, I suppose we all were, but I was real naïve, I can still remember standing in the backyard, remember that I mentioned that the Church of England Minister had a son my age as well, he also
- 32:00 got a teacher's scholarship, and I can remember standing in the backyard and he was saying to me, "Well you go out to schools one day a week and teach." And I said to him, "Why would you go out to schools and teach?" You know, here we were going to teacher's college, I was thinking we were going to, like a university you were simply sitting there doing lectures all day. No practical work. So that came as a bit of a shock.

What did you think about teaching? What were your impressions

32:30 of I guess, your teachers, and then having a career like them?

I think I was a bit of a fish out of water because by nature I'm a pretty quiet person, pretty reserved, not socially you know, at ease, and that was very much so then. And so it's a real people thing. And I remember my mother saying to me once, "Hey is this really for you? Because you're not really a people person."

- 33:00 And it was probably part of the reason why I just really hated it for the first couple of years. But then times change and I was at a conference in the mid '90s and we had to do one of these socio-grams, scale things you do, and I came out somewhere on it, and somebody said to me, "Hey, that's not you, you're a real people person."
- 33:30 So it just shows how things change. So yeah, when I look back to the teachers I had, I can think of some shockers, I think over all the teachers I had for primary school, except for the women I had in grade one and two, I think were only average, and one was particular, that is one of the males I had was quite weird,

- 34:00 and he actually lost his job during the year that he taught me. You know, he had things like, you had to have your books under the desk in a particular order. And he'd say, "Ready, English books out." And you had to dive under your desk and grab the English book. By having it in order it was supposed to be efficient you see. But if you didn't get it out in time, you had your hands on the desk and you were hit with a big blackboard ruler on the fingers. But he lost his job. And then at

- 34:30 secondary school, Toowoomba Grammar, they were on average pretty good teachers. Some had been there since the year dot, but they had the interest of the boys at heart and they really could teach. And there was one who really stood out to me though, and I think it was a lesson for me as a person and a teacher, in that a, he was a good teacher, he taught history,

- 35:00 but b, he also for a few years, took us as a football coach. And the reason we looked up to him was because if he got us to run around the oval, he ran around the oval. In other words, whatever he asked us as kids to do, he did it himself. And he was very well respected for that and plus his personality and skills and everything else. But that was a lesson to me that if you're going to work with kids, then you've got to be prepared

- 35:30 to get in and do what they do. You can't stand back and be the teacher out here and the kids there, whether it be in class or when it be football. So that I think coloured and I think it was that, when I started to really let that sink in and influence the way that I worked then I think things started to click. There was other reasons too, but that was one of them.

And so tell me about that first, I guess the first little while

36:00 at teacher's college when you hated it.

Well I didn't mind going to college, that was good, so going to college was fine and then we had, you couldn't have boys and girls mixed you see, so you had a male group and a female group. And so I suppose that was then a transition, something in common with a boy's boarding school again, so you've got this little group with has its own little culture.

- 36:30 And I remember once we were showing, being a bit sexist I suppose, making comments as the women were walking down the stairs until one of the lecturers came up and gave us a serve, told us to clear out and not hang around there. So things like that.

Was there a good relationship between the male and female groups? Sort of a rivalry or a bit of a...?

Yeah, to a degree, but we didn't really know each other because we had - the only time we came together

37:00 was when we had to have folk dancing lessons. Otherwise it was near totally segregated and you had some people who may have known some of them or it may have been where they were living or there may be some social but there wasn't that much mixing surprisingly.

Why did you have to have folk dancing lessons?

So we could teach it. So you know, did you do folk dancing at school? So when we came, it made it

37:30 a bit more realistic. I suppose it was more realistic than it was at boarding school where for a period there, we had the opportunity to take dancing lessons on a Saturday morning, but who did you dance with? You danced with one of the other blokes. There was this guy Ian Keilor and I, he was the girl and I was the boy, and we could do the Rhumba and the Samba and the Cha Cha Cha, we could do all these dances. And then you'd go to a dance and you'd find none of the girls could.

38:00 So we thought why do you bother to learn to dance. And that was another thing again, where I just absolutely hated dancing. Absolutely hated it. Wouldn't go to a dance until I went in the army, that changed things, but up until then, just wouldn't go. Because I'd had this experience, why go? Girls are not learning to dance, I could do it. All I can do now is the Australian Crawl, I can't do anything. So we really needed the folk dancing lessons

38:30 at teachers' college.

Where did you live while you were at teacher's college?

First lived in a boarding house in Wooloowin, in Lisson Grove, which was a big old house, it's still there, it's actually a motel now. And there were something like probably nearly ten people, ten blokes there, and that wasn't bad. Got on well together.

39:00 But the woman who ran it kept putting new people in, shoving an extra bed in the room, so it got to the point half way through the year, four of us said 'enough's enough.' So we went and got a flat near the Wooloowin railway station which we lived in that year for the rest of the year. And then the next year, this fellow again from Killarney I mentioned, he and I got board in Clayfield but we got kicked out of there, the people were Seventh Day Adventists,

39:30 and so Saturday was, you know, their Sabbath, so we couldn't play, couldn't run in the backyard, couldn't run in the front yard, we couldn't play cricket as we used to hit a ball around, and certainly couldn't have any alcohol. And it turned out one of the other blokes there went to a party on a Saturday night and it used to be Asti Spumante, I think it was, that was the drink of the time, and he brought home half a bottle that wasn't drunk, so on the Sunday

40:00 afternoon we thought we'll get stuck into that. So we finished it off. We got back from college on Monday afternoon, she says, "I'll give you a week to get out." So anyway, that was probably the best thing that happened because I ended up then boarding with a fellow and his wife who, he worked with an uncle of mine who worked at McLeod's menswear in town and so that was really good. It was really a home away from home. Just the two of us again, we went there, but

40:30 they, if I'm right, they didn't have any children so we were sort of considered their family, so that become real good.

Tape 3

00:33 **So tell us what you were learning at this college.**

Obviously teaching but yes it was a very structured course and different to university where you have a choice of subjects. It was a fixed course as it was, right up until say Brisbane College, QUT [Queensland University of Technology]

01:00 became QUT, up until then. Teaching then moved to a flexible university style where up until then it was, as for me, it was a fixed course. So you were doing things like English method, how to teach reading, spelling and so forth; Maths method, how to teach maths; Art; Music; Phys Ed [Physical Education]. So you learnt about not only the - and there was the health aspect of that, but as far as the Phys Ed goes

01:30 then you learnt well, how do you play baseball, how do you play softball, how do you play rugby league, how do you play rugby union, the rules of the game. We had periods where you'd meet, I played hockey for the first time in my life and that sort of thing, haven't played it since. So it was that sort of thing, those skills, if you think across the primary curriculum, what you did, then there was a subject in those areas. In music we were allowed, we were expected to play

02:00 the recorder, we all had to learn that, and we had a brilliant music lecturer who was very conscious of the fact that most of us really didn't know much about music, weren't necessarily interested in music, but he had the knack and I think he's really encouraged, or was the initiator of my interest in classical music. Simply by the way he presented it and made it interesting, which really

- 02:30 again was a demonstration to me as coming down to how you approach things as an individual. Art, that wasn't my cup of tea, I'm not a creative person. And so things, when it came to the practical sorts of things were fairly structured. Like craft, you've got to make a box or something like that, then yeah, I can do that. But when it came to painting,
- 03:00 we used to have two hours on a Friday morning and the task would be to draw a picture about something or other. And I'd sit there, I just couldn't start. And then it became a bit of a, I used to work a bit of a system then because I realised if I sat there long enough, the lecturer would come up and sketch some sort of drawing on the page and I'd spend the next hour just filling in the pieces. So that worked quite well. And just
- 03:30 talking about before, about how paths cross, well it turned out about twenty years later I arrived at a school and it was only after being there for a couple of months that I realised that the remedial teacher at that school was actually the lecturer of art that I'd had at college. And I raised this with her and she really didn't have any recollection, which was interesting. There was drama as well, that was not really my scene either,
- 04:00 and had a lecturer we didn't particularly warm to which didn't help. And then there was the part of the Phys Ed, there was gymnastics as well and there was, I think one afternoon a week, maybe Thursday afternoon there was various clubs you could join. I joined the gymnastics club because that actually was one thing I did achieve something at at secondary school, mainly because nobody else was interested.
- 04:30 Another lesson in life, you find a little niche that nobody's really involved with and maybe you can succeed. So that's the only way I got my colours at secondary school for gymnastics, because it was an area where not too many were interested. I mean I wasn't good at it by any means, I wasn't good at it, I was really hopeless when you think about it but better than average, enough to get into the team. It was really
- 05:00 like a high school. The best description would be teachers college then was on a high school model. So you worked from nine to four, whatever the time was, with morning tea and afternoon tea. There were no times where you had time to just sit in the library or no times where you had a spare, they were unknown. So quite different to what it is now.

And were you in classes with female students?

No, they were segregated classes.

05:30 **Did you come across paths? How did you come across paths?**

As I was saying, the only structured part you came together was for folk dancing or dancing, teaching, whether it be some folk dance which I've forgotten, or whether it became more formal, you know Gypsy Tap, Pride of Erin, those sorts of - ballroom dancing,

- 06:00 a little bit of that as well. But other than that no, you were separate, and because you were in different groups, there wasn't that much, you didn't find at lunchtimes for example, that people sat together very much. You just had your own - some did obviously, who knew each other who managed to get a boyfriend or girlfriend, but most of us didn't.

So how was it then,

06:30 **where would you meet women and stuff at the time?**

If you went out to dances I suppose. Things like that. I ended up not having a girlfriend during the time I was at teachers college. As I think I said, I wasn't, I sort of lost interest in dances so I didn't go to those. Where we boarded there were no females, and some of the places where you boarded there was, they were mixed places which

- 07:00 would have been another avenue. I mean as you were walking backwards and forwards from college, obviously you'd see other people and talk to them, do things like that. But yeah, it was a bit narrow in that sense.

So tell us what happened towards the end of teachers college. You got a posting or what happened?

A difference then to what now, what it is now, at that time

- 07:30 you were guaranteed a posting to your home town. Or if you came from the city, then it would be a school pretty close to where you lived. But that couldn't happen in every case, so there was some that were, but we still had, I still remember that they had a big assembly. I'm not sure how many there must have been, probably two hundred plus of us but most were females,

- 08:00 in this room and they just read a list in alphabetical order. So and so, you're there, so and so, Morgan - Killarney. You know, so at least you knew what was going on. And I don't, it's possible we probably did put in preferences, I really don't recall. I suspect there must've been some sort of process because there would be some people, well I know there were some people who really, for whatever reason, family

08:30 reasons or otherwise, didn't really want to go back and teach in the town that they grew up in. But I was quite happy to go back and so that's what happened from the beginning of '65.

And so you started in Killarney, tell us what that was like.

Well I worked in the garage, yeah I was working in the garage over the holidays and the previous couple of years

09:00 I'd actually worked in the Post Office during the Christmas holidays, in the Christmas rush, but I was, I went back to the garage and I hadn't seen the principal of the school and it must've been a time I wasn't at the garage, because Dad came home one day and said, "Peter Jackson, the principal called in to get some petrol and he said go over and see him." So I went over and saw him in the middle of the holidays and he said to me,

09:30 "What was teacher's college like?" And I said to him, "That's the biggest waste of time I've ever been through." And it happens it was the best thing I could've said because that's what his belief was too. So I think his view was now I'll teach you how to teach, which he did. He's probably the best principal I could've had as a first year teacher, where he really, he was not of the old school where 'I'm the principal and you will call me Mr Jackson',

10:00 type thing. It was, even as a beginning teacher, which would have been fairly rare I think for that time, where he says, "Call me Peter." So there was that sort of social, obviously he's the principal, but there was that sort of social levelling a little bit, if you like. But he was a pretty hard task master in the way, very much a disciplinarian in the way he ran the school. And he would come into the classroom and

10:30 he would have the kids eating out of his hand. Even though he'd walk around the school grounds and you'd know he'd have the cane up his sleeve, because it used to poke up on his shoulder a little bit if he saw somebody misbehaving, whack, around the playground. But when you spoke to the kids, they spoke very highly of him. And as far as I'm concerned, then as far as getting me to go, once a week he had me doing a full plan for a lesson and I had to teach it to another class and he'd critique it.

11:00 Which at the time was a bit of a drag having to do the preparation but it was good experience, and I think I learnt a lot from him. And he would come into the class and do, and take lessons which I observed and so forth. So it really was a good apprenticeship in some sense. Mentoring. He had high expectations,

11:30 of what you could do. I mean there was another first year out with me, and it came to sports day and he said to the other guy, "Well you're organising sports day." That's a pretty big ask for a first year teacher. But he just knew that he would have the confidence to do it, which he did. And so I remember one time there was a...the high school had a football team, rugby union team as it happens

12:00 and Warwick High was playing, and he just said to me, "You're refereeing." No ifs or buts, 'can you'. "You're refereeing." And I did. But it was that, that he, and I think it wasn't just he as a person in power saying you will do it, rather he was really saying 'hey, I know you can do it, I'm giving you the chance.'

12:30 So that was good experience.

You mentioned before, it was a waste of time, why exactly?

I think it was probably because we didn't necessarily see the relevance of a lot we did. I mean it probably was, and remember you're talking about it as of a seventeen year old, at a time when you probably think you know

13:00 everything anyway. So it may not be, it may not have been in reality a fair comment, but that was certainly a feeling. Another interesting thing though which might run against that, is that very early in our first year, it was pointed, we were always called Mister, which was different, we were always called Mr Morgan or Mr Jones, or whatever it might be, it was never by the first name.

13:30 Which again, I think was their way of moving us from a student perspective to a teacher's perspective. I think that possibly had something to do with that. But they said to us very early in the piece, I remember one of the lecturers saying, "Well you are men and women, and we will treat you as men and women." And our response was "Hey, we're only kids." You know? So I suspect what they were trying to do was to move us

14:00 from being a student to being a teacher, as part of that process. So that was a positive thing obviously. It was more to do with the work we did. I mean, there's two examples. In the second year, I worked, I put a fair bit of effort in the first year and then I realised hey, I didn't have to work that hard to pass. So then in the second year I backed right off, and when it came to say the English course, and you had

14:30 to do all, read all these novels, I just used to read the classic comics, I never read the novels, but still passed. And I think it was that, it was seeing that well maybe the standards are not quite high. I remember in the social studies exam in second year, I did, I hadn't read anything and I read it all about the night before or something and still passed. Which was unusual for me because I've got a, usually got to

- 15:00 start early and work for a while. So I think it was possibly those sorts of things that added up to it.
- Tell us about, you mentioned in your run up about your marble coming up. Tell us what you mean by that.**
- Well when national service was announced, it must have been late '64 or early '65, then it was a ballot,
- 15:30 it went by birthdays and it was when you were twenty. So in '65, I was twenty so I was eligible and in the first round on the 19th May, it came up, which I was very happy about, very pleased about, because despite what I said about the cadets, I didn't want to be, I didn't want to join it in my last year of high school. I do recall being rather disappointed
- 16:00 about national service being cancelled in the late 50s when they had the three months lot. And I suppose it, I don't know, I don't know why I had that interest. I know when I was in my teenage years, I'd said to my parents that I wanted to join the air force. And they said, "No, no, no, that's not for you." And I think it was from a parent's perspective if you join an air force you go to war and you get injured or killed.
- 16:30 I think probably that was Mum's direction she was coming from. So that quickly died. But I just had this interest in the military and I think it was probably because the uncle was, the cousin was in the army at that time, had the uncle who was at Gallipoli and so forth so I... And then at secondary school when it came to say speech days, then the principal, particularly the first principal, Puddy Heanan, always trotted out the list of generals
- 17:00 who were old boys of the school. So I think there was this sort of culture that you sort of grew up with, ethos that you grew up with. So I was quite happy when my marble came out. But then I, very shortly afterwards I got a letter saying I was deferred. Now as it happened I was studying, yeah it was Education One externally. And I just couldn't be bothered. Here I was, you know, why am
- 17:30 I studying? And I think what, the straw that broke the camel's back was, we went away for Easter down to Brunswick Heads and I had an assignment to do. So I sat in the caravan down there writing an assignment rather than going out with me mate and these couple of girls we knew. So I thought I could do without this. So I'd written a letter to cancel my enrolment, but before I posted it, this letter came saying you've been deferred because you are studying.
- 18:00 So I thought well, I'd better keep my enrolment up. And each week you got an envelope, a big brown, A4 or foolscap envelope it might have been then, of lecture notes. They came each week. Well I never opened one for the rest of the year, so I had this pile of brown envelopes sitting in the table. And then when it came to the exam which was two three hours of exam, six hours of exams, I thought
- 18:30 they'll probably check to see if you sit for the exam, being my suspicious nature. Well maybe it was just my attitude to authority. I thought well I'd better go and sit for the exam. So I went into Warwick and I sat for the six hour exam. I actually wrote for six hours, must've been absolute rubbish, because I hadn't opened the book, or opened the lecture and of course I failed. And then during the Christmas holidays I got a letter saying well you've been deferred for another
- 19:00 twelve months because you're teaching. And I had a week or two at Killarney in the beginning of '66 and the class I had, it was a Grade Five in '65, an absolute brilliant class, really great kids. And the other at the end of '65, a couple of other teachers or at least one other teacher, wanted that class as well. So Peter Jackson, the principal says, "The easiest way is to toss
- 19:30 a coin." And I lost the toss and I got another class which was a fairly small one, but then when they took a teacher away at the beginning of '66, who got transferred? The person with the smallest class. Which makes sense administratively, so I went to Maryvale out near Cunningham's Gap. Which was a two teacher school. So then I was deferred to teach for that twelve months, but
- 20:00 I decided that I'd study again. I really wanted to do more mathematics in the second year of college. I'd done Pure Maths One at UQ [University of Queensland] which was a bit of a no-no in the sense that they didn't like you studying other stuff. But as I said, I mean the course was such that there were three four of us who went out and did pure maths one. But I realised I needed assistance to do that and there were no tutorials offered externally, so I did English One instead. Worked like hell but failed.
- 20:30 And I was living in this little pink room in a pub in Maryvale trying to learn these hundred and three poems, and went into Warwick I think it was, once a month or once a fortnight or something for tutorials. Which were quite good, taken by one of the teachers from Scots College in Warwick. But I thought I'd passed but I didn't.
- 21:00 So then when the end of '66 came, or towards the end, about November, I got a letter saying turn up for a medical. So there were fourteen if I remember, thirteen or fourteen turned up this day, afternoon in Warwick where we had to be medicalled by the local Government Medical officer and of those fourteen only two of us ended up going in.
- 21:30 And some, I mean it was, my mother used to get very upset when she heard of farmer's kids, sons of farmers who were using that as an excuse not to go, use to upset her. But I think the bulk people of the people failed on medical. So there was two out of the fourteen of us who went in.

Why did so many fail?

I think it could've been something simple like flat feet or something like that. I don't really know.

- 22:00 But that's my assumption that there was some, you know. So you really had to be pretty fit to go in. I must admit I failed the medical on that day because my blood pressure was up. Which they put down to, it was about the time of the exam and things like that. So it was at the beginning of the school holidays, I went back for a supplementary one, and of course when they tested the blood pressure then it was fine. The Government Medical Officer was
- 22:30 really apologetic about the fact that he'd have to say 'well I'm fit enough to go in.' Which pleased me no end because I saw it as a way - as I said, I wasn't happy in teaching. I absolutely hated being at Maryvale, mainly because, I just saw it as a means of escape. A chance to do something different. And so that really was, and then a watershed,
- 23:00 if you like, of my life, for the future.

What exact time is this?

This was the end of 1966.

So you were aware of the Vietnam War being on.

Yeah. And as I said, you know, the politics follows your parents to start with and so you know, it was conservative politics coming from the country, naturally enough. And I think we were talking about views of Communism and so forth before then, I would

- 23:30 have to say that yeah, I thought Australia should be involved. At that time the anti-Vietnam movement really hadn't got a go on. There was only rumblings beginning at that time. It was, what was it, was it the '66 election? The Federal Election before that anyway, which was whenever it was, I can't remember what date but it was in the mid 60s before '66, or
- 24:00 even if it was during '66 then it was won quite easily because the population at that time was in favour. I mean my attitudes have changed dramatically very quickly, but at that point then, yeah, I was in favour of it. But I think, to be honest though, it was the personal things that were to the fore though. I saw it as an escape
- 24:30 from a job I didn't particularly like. I saw it as a way to see a bit more of Australia or maybe further a field. I really hadn't thought about that, it was more just getting and doing something different. And maybe learning, when I went in, I sort of went into national service with the aim, well I don't like teaching and I don't really want to go back to it, so let's take the opportunity to try and learn a new skill I could use back in civilian
- 25:00 life. And that was one of the reasons I picked signals, because I saw that, well in my naivety I suppose, I saw that well, maybe they can train me back to being a radio technician which could lead into TV technicians and so forth, at a later stage. So I saw that as a possible avenue. But of course that didn't work out because it takes longer than six months to train a technician. And national service, well they just didn't train national servicemen as technicians.
- 25:30 At that time anyway, I don't know whether they did later on.

Why did the doctor apologise for passing you?

Oh I think he just,

- 26:00 was working under the assumption that you were going under protest. And so he was apologetic that he's now recording that you were medically fit, therefore automatically you would go and that may be not what you want. But as I said to him, "I didn't mind at all."

Okay, well tell us about your enlistment.

So we officially started on, I think it was January 31st.

- 26:30 So either on the 30th or the 31st we'd got a train pass to come to Brisbane, and so I suppose in many ways, obviously this was a start to do something different. And one of the things I've always wanted to do was to come by train from Toowoomba, down the Toowoomba range to Brisbane. Never done it, always wanted to do it. Here's the first thing that I wanted to do that I could do. So I boarded the train in Warwick and came to Central Station, no to Roma St, in Brisbane.
- 27:00 On the train there were other people who were called up. There were two blokes from Stanthorpe who I got to know and with one, as it happens, while we didn't serve together during the time in national service, I ended up sharing a room with him in a boarding house when we got out. We arrived at Central Station, we were met by a bus and army NCOs [Non Commissioned Officer] and taken to
- 27:30 Enoggera where there were tents, camped in tents. That night a lot of people went into town, particularly those I think who were from the country and hadn't been in Brisbane. But I'd been in Brisbane often so I thought no, I'm not interested in going out, as a few others, stayed there. They got

back in the middle of the night and there was one guy just dry-retching all night. He was sick as a dog.

- 28:00 And the following morning we were, the official bit, sworn in, officially enlisted and taken out to Eagle Farm and put on a Fokker Friendship and again, the first time that I'd ever been in an aeroplane, so another sort of first that was allowing. So that's the sort of level that you're operating at this point in time. There was no big picture about the rights or wrongs of national service or anything like that, it was rather at a personal level, this is the effect it's having on me,
- 28:30 and it's doing some things, opportunity to do some things I want to do. So it was positive. So on the, as it happens, on the flight down to Williamstown, it happens I got on the plane and this guy who'd been dry-retching all night was sitting opposite me. And when I looked at him I realised, and I only picked it because he was coughing a bit and it was the same voice, and I realised hey, I know him. He was a fellow who was a year behind me at Toowoomba Grammar. So anyway
- 29:00 he ended up coming to Balcombe with us down the track a bit too. So that's another story which we will no doubt get into. But the flight to Williamstown and then it was bus to Singleton and it was really, I'm not quite sure whether they actually got us in alphabetical order or some, whatever order we were taken, I'm unsure now, but I know when we arrived at Balcombe, I was to be in one platoon and then they looked at the numbers and said,
- 29:30 "No you, you wait for the next one." So was, I think there were probably two of us who were waiting there for an hour or more before the next bus load came which was going to be our platoon that we were in. Which I think was 7 Platoon. I think it was. We were the seventh intake definitely, I think it was 7 Platoon, B Company of the 3rd Training Battalion. And from that moment we knew we were in the army in that the
- 30:00 NCOs there, the corporal in particular who was taking our particular section and the sergeants of the platoon, and the thumb was down right from the beginning in that you are now in the military, you will do what we say and so forth. And I'm not sure whether it was that day or the next that we were all taken up for a haircut and got a haircut. So we all went for the shortest one possible, which was
- 30:30 all but a shaved head, which for me personally was an opportunity for another change in life. Men traditionally part, if they do have a part, it's on the left but because of my mother, I'd always parted my hair on the right. So that was another, it was an opportunity for a little break. Even though I'd been away from home for all those years at boarding school and two years at teachers college and two years of teaching, there was still this feeling that you hadn't really made the break from the family.
- 31:00 And at this, this just was an opportunity to do so, that you were gaining, really gaining your independence if you like. And one of the little things was, once my hair grew, I parted it on the left as it is now. So they're little trivial things but they're part of changing if you like. Just maturing if you like, or becoming your own person. What I do recall of the first night
- 31:30 that we were there, after mess, after dinner, we assembled again in the mess and I can distinctly remember the officer commanding B Company, although I don't remember what his name was, saying, "You are here to be trained as killers." Bluntly like that, which I suppose was good. I suppose we were going into the military, that's ultimately what in reality you're trained for. And the other thing that stands out was
- 32:00 started the whole series of injections, inoculations that you get and they had some tables lined up with medics from the RAP [Regimental Aid Post], with the needles and everything else there and a queue and we walked up and our attention was attracted by the table on the left hand side, little be known that a person had walked behind, another medic had walked behind with a syringe on the right hand side and so we had one in the left arm and right arm at the same time.
- 32:30 Well we were expecting the left, we weren't expecting the right, which came as a little bit of a surprise. And I think after that we said, "Well we're not going to be afraid of needles again." So there was that experience, and then from the next day then it was starting military training, rifle drill, marching drill, fitness activities, forced marches of a few kilometres,
- 33:00 rifle, grenade throwing, rifle shooting, so the range of things that you would do. I think that it had a bit of a uniqueness at the time in the sense that the Commanding officer of the 3rd Training Battalion, Colonel Oxley was actually a fanatic on lions. And he had two big stone concrete lions outside his headquarters. And the story was, I suspect it wasn't true, but the rumour was that he
- 33:30 had this interest in lions and he'd actually asked for approval to have a couple of real lions in cages. But you know, I think that probably was a bit of a story, but when it came to full battalion parades, and even company parades and he was there, then for some reason you had to give three cheers. It was never three cheers, it was always three roars. So there were these strange eccentricities that I think helped to lighten it up.
- 34:00 **How did they go? The roars?**

We were right into it. We thought it was a great joke.

Give us an example.

- Roar. But he was, there was a time later towards the end of recruit training where we'd been down to Greta, a bus down or a truck down to Greta and we camped down there for a few days. I think we were
- 34:30 doing some rifle shooting and some bush craft exercises and so forth, but we had to march back, which I think is something like twenty or thirty kilometres, something like that. And of course you were pretty well had it by the time you got back and when we hit the gates he had the regimental band there, playing and then marched in, which give us a bit of a lift to the spirits. So there were things like that, that you realised that he was interested in the troops.
- 35:00 I think the other thing, the memory was that, the interesting thing was, in that seventh intake from Queensland, there was something a little over two hundred people, blokes who were called up, over a hundred of them were teachers. So about half were teachers. And there was an expectation because we were teachers and a little bit better educated I suppose that the average
- 35:30 recruit, that there was an expectation therefore that we would all apply for, to go to Scheyville to Officer Training Unit. And I think there was a perception from the officers that teachers were a little bit up the social scale therefore, you would want automatically to join the officer class. I think there was that sort of attitude as well as quite a reasonable one
- 36:00 'well okay, you're better educated, you're a bit older,' because many of us had been deferred that 'maybe you are ones who would make good officers.' But in the lead up to the time when we had to apply, we were having discussions between ourselves, and it was interesting that many of us, if not most in our section, our platoon, chose not to. And I chose not to for two reasons - one, I think
- 36:30 was a self confidence thing, I don't really think I was, you know, my personality, my self confidence as an individual would be what was required. The other thing was, as I said, I wanted to develop some skills that were useful for outside and I saw that as getting some trade. So I thought well if I went to officer, and was accepted, yes you'd certainly get skills that would help, but it wouldn't give you a trade necessarily. So they're the reasons I didn't. But because so
- 37:00 many in our platoon chose not to apply, I recall that the sergeant, the platoon sergeant was actually called up and carpeted because he was accused of actually, it was Sergeant Jago, who was a real nice guy, he was accused of influencing us, influencing our decision. Which wasn't the case at all and in fact we were then called up for an interview
- 37:30 with the Officer Commanding B Company, to give our side of it, so we said, "No, it was our decision. He had nothing to do with it." So that was a little bit of dissension there. And there were some who were, a few were selected, I don't now how many, but obviously only a few of those who did apply and went through the screening process actually were accepted. And of course they left fairly quickly, early in the peace, and unless they had personal friends that
- 38:00 happened to be in the bed next door, or next door in the section, then you didn't get to know them. So who they were I really don't know, except to say that one of the people I met on the train from Stanthorpe, whose name I've long forgotten, he's one that was accepted. And he actually stayed in the army and made a career out of it, as some national servicemen did. So that was a bit of an issue at the time.

That's a good point to stop anyway.

Tape 4

- 00:37 **Just in the first couple of weeks or in the first bit of time in training, was there any sort of I guess issues or anything that you were in national service, or was there a difference that you saw?**
- Yes. I mean it's the only time when
- 01:00 there was any sort of, you felt I'm a national serviceman and there are regular soldiers. I mean after basic training then from my experience, that just wasn't an issue, you were just soldiers together. But I think, and the only regular soldiers at basic training were the instructors, the corporals, the sergeants and the officers obviously, although there were some, by the end when we were finished there were some national service, in rotation,
- 01:30 national service officers coming in to the training battalion as well. The NCOs, our corporal for example, was not long returned from Vietnam. I think, I mean it's hard to distinguish because obviously if you are trying to convert civilians into soldiers, then there are certain attitudes that are expressed. Now those attitudes may just be being
- 02:00 regimental, getting people working together, not taking any nonsense. Even to the degree where in some of the movies, documentaries you've seen NCOs shouting at troops as they do something, well some of that occurred, yeah. But I think also there, I think there was an issue from the regular soldiers, particularly the ones like the corporal, whose name I've

02:30 long forgotten, who was a very spit and polish, very proud of the fact that he was in the army and I think understandably like a lot of regular soldiers who saw that the professionalism was being reduced a bit by bringing people off the street so to speak.

How would he make that attitude apparent?

Probably, well we were known as dickheads

03:00 and that's the first time I heard the word. And it was, dickhead was the word that was used to describe national servicemen by NCOs and that was the word in a very narrow sense. And for a long time I had believed that it was their, it was a word that they had thought up. But I think really it wasn't, I think really it came out of the US via the troops in Vietnam and they brought it back to Australia.

03:30 That's my assumption of how the word got here. But what we very quickly did was adopt the word, and we adopted it to the way that it's now used generally, that is, you're an idiot. And when we started, when they heard us starting to use the word dickhead, they used to get very upset, because they saw us again of taking something of theirs if you like, and that word was theirs. But like anything else, you make the best of it, hey you're calling us that, we'll use it in the way we want to.

04:00 So I think there was an element of that devaluing or reducing the professionalism which I think was in the minds of many professional soldiers and I think probably in some ways, they had grounds to think that way. Perfectly understandable. So that relationship with those NCOs was very much instructor, Senior officer if you like, one of the troops. There was no,

04:30 no connection, camaraderie there, it was very much professional, which you would expect I think and I think if we were regular soldiers and recruit training, probably you wouldn't have seen that much difference, I'm not sure, but I suspect you wouldn't have done. So there were a lot of issues that could have coloured things there. The other thing was that one of the other corporals, his brother had not long been killed in Vietnam - Swanton.

05:00 I think he'd been killed in '65 or '66 and I think, yes and Dasher Wheatley got a VC out of trying to save him, I think that was the story. So there was, Vietnam was very much to the forefront of talking about, because these guys had just returned and the Corporal Swanton I think wanted to go but they wouldn't send him because his brother had already been killed. I think that was the story. So there was some issues

05:30 or colouring attitudes and discussions at the time, because it was obvious that we were there because of the Vietnam War. It was said, "You'll all end up over there." Well we didn't all end up over there. I think only eighteen thousand out of the fifty thousand that were called up actually ended up there. Now I'm stuck.

What you were saying about the regimented side of things, how did

06:00 **you respond to that initially?**

I think, I was brought up to be you know, my mother was a pretty hard task master, great mother but still a pretty hard task master. As a kid she said, "You'll be home by five o'clock." And I was in strife if I wasn't home by five o'clock. Then going to boarding school which was an institution, that sort of thing, into the military, which is another institution and regimentation

06:30 so, because of my attitude to authority which was a little bit sort of cowed by authority I suppose, then I just followed along. I know, and I was probably a little more accepting of some of the nonsense supposedly that went on. For example, when we went out on one exercise, this was during corps training rather than - but it gives the example, where one bloke pulled out

07:00 a battery razor and started to use that and was stood on. You can't use that, if you were really out in the bush, you have to use a razor. And he got really upset about that. But I could see their point of view, so that didn't worry me that much.

Was there anything like you'd been teaching for the past little while, where you sort of, it was you who was in charge and you know, keeping things in order, was that a strange turn around to being the one...?

Yes I was,

07:30 and I think it was, what really hit me was the language that was used. I think there must have been a fair, I can't remember exactly what it was, but it was a much tougher language than what you'd use in the classroom. I suspect there was a lot of swearing. And I found that level of language quite different. That was the most obvious thing that struck me. I always swore a bit myself, so that was nothing

08:00 new, but it was just the use of it everyday in the context it was, because I came from an environment where you didn't swear during your working life. Here you were in an environment where you did swear as part of your working life, so there was that sort of difference. Which translated actually, to jump ahead a couple of years, when I went back to teaching, I'd say I swore in front of the class every day for quite a few months. Just through, you know, just talking normally and it'd just became

08:30 part of the, it might have only been bloody that you said, but bloody in the early 70s, late 60s was still a

bit of a no-no. And you wouldn't say it now, today really, if you said it today people probably wouldn't take that much notice. But then it would have been potentially rather awkward. Nothing ever happened because it just sort of slipped by. I didn't stop and pause and draw attention to it, I just kept going. But I think that was one of the affects of it. It took me a while to

09:00 learn to talk without swearing, put it that way. But that's ahead of the time we were talking about.

What sort of lessons had you, or did you think back to the time in the cadets that helped you?

Well I suppose yeah, it was while we had a different rifle so that, there was a SLR [Self Loading Rifle] when we went in which was a different rifle to the old 303s, so the drill was a little bit different,

09:30 but the idea of rifle drill was basically the same. I mean marching, and turning and those sorts of things were all the same so I had those sorts of skills which I'd known something about. And there was some of the recruits who had great difficulty marching in step, they simply could not march in step. One guy in particular stands out and, of course, he started to get stick obviously from the instructors and probably some from us as well because

10:00 he ended up treading on our heels or whatever, if he was behind you. So that probably eased the transition somewhat. But as I said, I wasn't a sportsman, even when I was playing football and doing the training, I ran out of puff for some reason. I just wasn't one of these who could run forever. So I found a lot of the physical activity fairly demanding.

10:30 And in fact, I think one of the great, it was one of the great experiences, you know where you need to extend yourself, can I do this? There was one point when we had to do, I've forgotten how far, it might've been about ten kilometres, fifteen kilometres forced march or something like that, a fair distance and I remember thinking beforehand, can I do it? Am I capable of doing it? And then when you

11:00 find that when you do a forced march, you really are marching fairly close together and in essence you're pulling each other along, it's quite amazing the unified action that comes about. So even if you're really puffed and out of - you know, we were getting fairly in condition by then, but really tired and out of puff, just the atmosphere, the feeling between people just keeps you moving. And I can still remember at the end of that sitting in the mess,

11:30 feeling absolutely elated that I'd done it. And so that again was another experience, just another one of life's experiences that just extends, in this case your physical ability if you like. Just extends what you think you're capable of.

What sort of pace do you move at in one of those marches?

I think it's about, what a walk is about three miles an hour I think. I don't know what it is in kilometres an hour.

12:00 It's about, it's a fast, what would you call, if you see, probably the best analogy is, if you see people going for their walks with their weights in their hands and they're striding out. Well really when that became in vogue I thought well that's really something just taking a military forced march and decided to market it. Well it's about that pace you know. I think it's about seven or eight kilometres an hour.

And what sort of gear would you carry?

For that one, we had a rifle

12:30 I don't think we had a pack; sometimes you'll have a pack. When we were doing our battle efficiency [course] before we went to Vietnam, then we were doing that in full pack and rifle. Which was an added weight to carry. But yeah, that varied, sometimes it would be without rifle. I think the one I was talking about we were carrying a rifle, but I don't think there was a pack on our back, which made it a little bit easier.

At that basic training

13:00 **what would I guess a typical day have been like. What time would you get up, what would sort of general stuff would you have to go through in a day?**

I think we got up about, I'm really not sure, but I think we got up about six. And I suppose that was the other thing and I suppose a bit like boarding school, was that when the bell went, or in this case reveille was played, then you were expected to get out. No options, you didn't have a sleep in. Mess for breakfast.

13:30 Make our beds, then there would've been a room inspection where things, the bed would have to be perfectly made, everything in our cupboards had to be tidy with all our clothes on the shelves neatly folded, in order, without anything out of place. And obviously clean, because we were responsible for cleaning the place. And then we started on whatever activities for the day with a break for morning tea. And if we were out in the bush then usually

14:00 the Red Cross, Mr Everyman would come out, is it Red Cross, Mr Everyman anyway he was, would come out in his Land Rover with his coffee and tea and later on the cooks would come out with the food in hot boxes and so forth. And we'd go until I don't know, four, four o'clock, half past four something like

that. We probably, we may have had some time to ourselves and then usually, if I remember, the nights were free. Occasionally we would have

- 14:30 lectures of one sort or another. But most of the nights I think we spent up in the boozier [bar]. And we had a game where we each had to have two glasses of beer in front of us and we had a penny or something like that, some sort of, no it wouldn't have been a penny because the metric system was in, some coin anyway, and no there was a full glass and an empty glass,
- 15:00 if I threw it across and hit the empty glass, then I could have your beer. If I threw it across and it fell in the full glass of beer, then the person whose glass it was had to scull it. And so yes, we weren't too flash after playing that game for a few hours, a couple of hours or so. But it was a good game though, we enjoyed that. And thinking of games along that line, in the huts we lived in, each section was to a hut, so I think there was about twelve
- 15:30 people in a section, so there were about twelve beds, divided into two parts, without a door, not a door in the middle but just a bit of a partition beside the beds. But another game we played was with darts in that one person would stand in the doorway with their legs astride and then another person would throw the dart and get it as close as they could to the person. I played that until one day I threw it and hit a guy's calf and it sank the full shaft of the dart into his leg and I thought
- 16:00 no, no that's not on. You do stupid things though. We were not as I say, we flew down and were bussed to Singleton so we didn't have our cars down there and we weren't allowed out of the camp until after Easter, so that would've been probably a couple of months towards the end of the time. We came home for Easter and we were able to take our vehicles back and after that, then we would
- 16:30 go into Maitland or Singleton. Usually Maitland to the RSL [Returned and Services League]. I think it was Maitland. So that's where we first came across playing the pokies and things like that. And at that time, some of them eventually got girlfriends as well, started to move out and do other things. So it sort of, you can understand why they want to keep you in camp for the time being just to make that conversion from civilian life to military life.
- 17:00 And then it started to lift off a bit as far as time and flexibility so we could go out, probably Saturday nights or things like that, I've just forgotten. But obviously with the leave pass it had to be authorised. We just couldn't walk out.

And what would you wear when you went out?

I think we wore civilian clothes. I don't think we wore a uniform. I'm pretty sure we didn't. I'm pretty sure we wore civilian clothes.

What sort of,

- 17:30 **you mentioned earlier that you had a room inspection, if something wasn't right, or I guess if you did make a mistake at any time, what sort of punishment would be metered out?**

Probably, I'm really not sure exactly. That's something that escapes me. Certainly would've been a rocket at the time. It may well be that the whole, probably the usual thing was that there would be another inspection

- 18:00 later that day, maybe lunch time or something line that. I don't think there was any serious consequences like getting on CB [Confined to Barracks] which was, you know, marching around a parade ground with a pack and rifle for 'x' amount of time. I don't think there was that for that sort of thing. It was more that there was another inspection or you couldn't go to the pub, you had to stay back in your room and clean it up, or something like that, you know. But whichever way it was, they got their way.

- 18:30 **Were you much of a drinker before the army?**

No. No I came from a family where Mum was totally anti-alcohol because her father was an alcoholic and Dad only had, the only time Dad had a beer was Christmas Eve when he invited, there were those who worked for him and any customers who happened to be in the garage at that time, up to the house for a beer. And maybe on the odd other occasion, but no.

- 19:00 So I didn't grow up where alcohol was in the house. And when I did start to drink, like I say, I lived in Maryvale in the pub and I only occasionally went into the bar. It does seem a bit strange doesn't it? I mean, I only occasionally went into the bar and had a beer even though the publican and his wife were real good as far as living with them goes. And then I found anyway that, I found that I could only drink one glass of beer, I used to get really bloated.

- 19:30 It wasn't so much drunk, but just bloated and I just didn't like it. So I used to go on to scotch, which became a bit more expensive. But no, I didn't drink much before hand. And I suppose I only drank moderately except on the few occasions where I totally wiped myself out and drove at the same time. So, because I'd have a couple of beers and I'd feel bloated I'd

- 20:00 either stop drinking or go onto spirits or something like that. Which was the way it went, and people knew that so, they understood that so that wasn't a problem as far as socialising would go, not at all.

What was the tradition of drinking in the army like? Was it essentially linked in with social...?

I mean the fact that you were probably in a camp and the only entertainment really was

20:30 to go to the canteen, which was the bar, so you'd drink. And now in recent years, catching up with those regular soldiers who we know, who were in for a long time, then it became apparent for some of them that the culture and the alcohol became a problem to them. To the extent that it affected their health. Which I think was probably part of the culture.

21:00 There is a culture there of drinking. But we were coming in as national servicemen too, so in a sense I suppose we were making our own culture to a degree. What we wanted to do, even though a lot of them obviously were used to going to the pub before they get in, even though in those days the legal age was twenty-one. I mean I went into the pub when I was under twenty-one, in Killarney.

21:30 At times, yeah.

How was the friendships formed in that kind of training? In that first time of basic training, was it a different way of forming friendships from you'd experienced before?

Not really. And again it may well be the fact that I'd been

22:00 to boarding school, so again where you're used to living with other boys, men. And the fact that you were doing things together as a group, I think that welds you together and makes the friendship. So when you went up to the boozier at night, you were generally mixing with those people in your section, unless you knew somebody from another section previously, it's unlikely

22:30 that you actually went to the boozier and spoke to anybody else. So in our section, in the platoon there was three or four sections whatever it was. I can remember one Sunday it was a wet Sunday, and they said, "Okay you can have the day off." It mightn't have been a Sunday, whatever day it was, it was wet, they said, "Stay in your huts, have a relaxing day." And I remember going to the hut next door to try and find magazines to read and I remember going in as though it was a total stranger, these guys were strangers even though they were walking

23:00 in the next line to us in the platoon. You just tend to - because a lot of the training was not done at platoon level, it was done at section level. So you were doing rifle drill, you were doing it with the corporal in that section or if you were doing some other thing you were doing it in that section, and occasionally for a full platoon, when it was coming together, say for marching practise or something like that, then that's the only time you're really together. So then the fact that you were working then living in the same hut with these people, then yeah,

23:30 then you started to make connections. And given that most of us were teachers anyway, gave us some sort of link as well. Half of us were teachers. And that became a little bit of an issue to a degree I think. I think the instructors had to get used to that fact, because I remember at times, "Oh not another bloody teacher." You know? When they started to discover how many of us there was. So the friendships made, I mean they weren't lasting friendships

24:00 there. I mean I didn't have any lasting friendships there. Those for me were formed at corps training and continued to this day. Still my closest friends are those who I went to corps training with. Which we'll talk about no doubt shortly.

What was the process towards selective preferences for corps training?

24:30 We were given an option, you had three preferences. What drove me was trade, I wanted to see if I could get another trade while doing the actual service. So as I might have mentioned I thought about radio technician, that's a skill that's going to develop from there in civvy street. So that's the reason why I applied for signals.

Did you have any other interest?

25:00 Well, you had to give reasons why you picked. I think I put signals first, artillery second, if there was a third choice, I don't know what it was, it certainly wasn't infantry. I know the last thing I wanted to do was to go to infantry. And I put down one reason for wanting signals, I think about the only reason I wrote was because I made a crystal set when I was a kid. I thought that sounds a bit mickey mouse but I'll stick it down anyway. Anyway for whatever reason, I was chosen with a quite a

25:30 number of others to go to signals.

What was your awareness of what was involved in signals?

Probably not a great awareness, except that you knew that it was to do with communications, you knew it had to do with radios. You probably knew it had to do with using teleprinters to communicate. Probably knew it had to do with switchboards because you'd seen people around, you'd seen radio operators, you'd seen - go to the headquarters you'd see

26:00 soldiers at switchboards, so you knew it probably had something to do with it but it was still a probably naïve understanding of it really.

Just speaking of understanding at this point, you'd just finished your basic training and had a bit of a taste of army life, what were your expectations? Like you mentioned this naivety there, what were your expectations of war at that point, initially, had it changed at all?

No.

26:30 No, I was, I enjoyed it. Yeah, while parts were tough, while you got shouted at, while you were feeling as though, hang on I don't really feel part of the military yet, it was still overall positive. But underlying all that though, yeah you wanted to get called up, you were called up, you were still saying, still thinking

27:00 well gee, it'll be good when the two years are over. You still had that feeling. At no time did I see it, hey I want to stay on. It was not something that I wanted to do for the rest of my professional career. I didn't see it as a, didn't see that I'd sign on or anything like that. So there was this little bit of reservation about it all at the same time, and a growing over time, a little bit of antipathy

27:30 towards the military. So it's very involved and confused sort of feelings that you have. But the overriding one though, really was, okay we're here, we make the best of it and that we're going to enjoy it and as a time you know, when you made good friends and were with people who you liked being with, then that really made it much easier.

28:00 **On those expectations, you mentioned before that one of the instructors had said, "We're going to train you to be killers," did they, the instructors, ever talk to you about what it was like to be in action? What conflict was like?**

They may have said, during basic training, probably something was said, I don't know. It's not something that stands out about talking about that in particular.

28:30 I suppose one thing I should mention at basic training, I mean, the instructors used to play games with us. I'm sure it was games, where you'd go down to the area where you'd throw grenades. So you would be standing behind a wooden wall which was about probably chest high and you'd throw it into a big pit, which would've been an area a bit bigger than what this room is, twice as big as the room.

29:00 The instructors were up behind you, high up, and they would tell you when to throw it and then tell you when to duck down. And you couldn't duck down before they told you. And I have a feeling they used to leave it, maybe a bit of a game even between instructors of how long can I leave this person standing before I tell him to go down. And sometimes you'd duck down and the grenade would go off, you know, a real grenade, live grenade. So I think there was a little bit of game playing there.

29:30 Which again, put myself in their position, I can understand that, I'd probably do the same thing myself. So you know, there they played games with you at times. And I'll tell you about another game played when we come to corps training, which was a really good one.

Just one final question. Not just in basic training, but I guess all the way through training, what was the talk about Vietnam, about the war, the 'politicalness'?

I suppose we, yes, yes we did talk, particularly during corps training and there was a mixed view. I mean I'd have to say at that point that I

30:00 believed we should be there, as probably most of the others did. But there were some and even one at least, who's a good friend, who actually volunteered to go, was not in favour of the war. So yes, we did have those discussions. But to say more than there was a mixed view, I really don't recall. Because I think most of us quite honestly, were approaching it all in a personal view, rather than an overall

30:30 political view. Taking the selfish, the self centred attitude to it all at that point in time at least anyway.

What were people feeling about an allegiance to America?

That was something of great discussion. Again, one of my best friends, still my best friend, and we have been having the same discussions in recent times. He was very much a fan of the US, very much a

31:00 fan, I mean his... [President] Lyndon Johnson came to Australia in '66 I think it was, came to Brisbane and a bit like when the Queen had come out, people would say, "Well I got to see her, she drove past, I nearly touched her." Well he was the same with Lyndon Johnson you see. But I think he was the only one out - this was at corps training - out of about what twenty or so others, who had that view. Most of us were very

31:30 circumspect about America's involvement in things. We weren't, I don't think we were anti-American, but we weren't gung-ho followers, put it that way, whereas this guy was and I remember we had a lot of arguments, a lot of discussions. But one of the things during corps training that really worked, I mean we really were, when you think about it, a disparate group of people. Again there were a lot of teachers from other states, but there was

32:00 telecom technicians, there was a train driver, there was a mixture of national servicemen and regular soldiers, so you had nineteen year olds, you had thirty year olds who were returning to the army and being retrained, you had people who were very, very religious, to those who were no religion at all. So

there was a great mix, but by the nature of the group and this is what made the six months at Balcombe so good, is that

32:30 we really got on well, we automatically accepted that there was a range of opinion, that there was a range of lifestyles in a sense that they guy who was very religious just didn't come up to the boozier drinking and so forth. If he did come up he didn't drink alcohol. I mean that was accepted, it wasn't a problem, and that's what makes it really good. Or made it really good.

What is it that bonds this disparate group of people together?

Doing something

33:00 the same thing together. And I think it was helped by the instructors. We had two instructors who were absolutely brilliant guys. And in fact I was talking to the sergeant instructor, who was a... there was parallel courses, who took the other one, last year, and he was saying, we were just having a comment on what a great time, it was the first time we'd actually spoken to him and we said, "What a great time we had." And he says, "Well so did I." As it turns out that was his

33:30 first course he took and he said he absolutely raved about that, our course in years to come. Which really just emphasised how we all fitted together, we gelled together, we mixed socially, not with the instructors of course, or even with one instructor we did. Our instructor was an alcoholic, severe alcoholic, in fact he died a few years later and I suspect it was something to do with that but I'm not sure.

34:00 But he was such that one of my mates had a bottle of beer down the lines in his cupboard. First thing in the morning, the instructor, Norm Harris says, said "Cops, I hear you've got a bottle of beer in your lines." And Ken was absolutely floored, how did he know? I'm in strife here, because it was totally against army regulations. And he takes him, "Come down, we're going down to your room now."

34:30 Marched him down, where's that bottle of beer? He just got the bottle of beer the instructor, knocked the top, broke the top off and had a drink. So he was. But it was such that at times we used to cover for him, we knew he was a bit under the weather and he'd be a bit late arriving and one of the officers would come around and we'd tell him, "Oh he's just gone out to get something." That was the way we sort of worked together. I think we sort of went around in circles a bit there.

35:00 **No, that's where we wanted to come. You mentioned earlier that there was a, the bloke that was on the train who'd been ill, who was the year below you at school, you said there was a story of him at Balcombe?**

Yes, he was in my course at Balcombe, so that's where the friendship really grew. He and I sort of lost touch. I email him occasionally but

35:30 as I said, when I discovered his email, but haven't seen him for years, but others who were there I'm in regular contact with. And have been right since the army, we've never lost contact, even if they have lived in Singapore or Sydney or wherever. He was a teacher as well, but he was one of the many who didn't come back teaching. I often would've thought I'd be interested to - if there was a bit of a study done to see what happened.

36:00 And I suspect a lot didn't come back to teaching, but he went into air traffic control, others went into the Bureau of Meteorology and so on. Because I think they saw that it was a time for change and they saw something else they could do.

So what was the difference in the kind of things you were learning in the corps training? Can you just take me through some of them?

Corps training is, there was

36:30 a classroom and in the classroom you each had a desk and on the desk there was a teleprinter and Morse key. So we spent a lot of the day learning to touch type with Norm Harris out there, the corporal with the big stick, time on the floor. Old Burl Ives songs, "A Little Bitty Tear Gets Me Down" and so forth. Which was a song of the time. Burl Ives,

37:00 American country singer I think you'd call him.

How's it go?

"A little bitty tear gets me down." That's all I can remember.

And what was the music for?

That was the timing to type with you know, whatever it was. And so we spent a lot of time doing that. We spent a lot of time learning Morse code and in fact, before we arrived at Balcombe, once we'd left Singleton, those of us who were going to Signals Corps, went to Ingleburn, to 1 Sig Regiment in Sydney.

37:30 And there we spent a week or ten days, somewhere about there, doing all these sorts of tests. A lot of them was, they were playing Morse code and we had to write down whether they were dots or dashes. And I think it was our ear for the Morse code then, those who did well in that, you were allocated as a

radio operator. But some of us, for whatever reason were allocated to this course, which was 15 and the other half was 15 Alpha, OKR, [Operator Keyboard and Radio] Operator

- 38:00 Keyboard and Radio, '67, for 1967. And we were the first national servicemen who'd ever gone through that six months course. And I think that came about because of the shortage of keyboard operators and radio operators. They wanted multi-skilled people because with the increasing commitment to Vietnam, they must've been getting a little bit short, so that was one way of doing it. So we spent at Balcombe then, in the classroom for the bulk of the day,
- 38:30 Morse code typing and then obviously we learnt to operate radios and I can't remember whether that, I think a lot of that was done outside out in the field. The old, I think it was they were called 110 sets where they were old British sets of two parts which were very quickly superseded once involved in Vietnam. And there was certain codes, codings you used for sending signals
- 39:00 by teleprinter, then there are three letter codes to indicate how the message should go. So we were learning, I don't remember the details but we were learning that sort of thing as well. And towards, particularly in the latter half of the six months, as we were building up our speed, then we would be having a test every day or so, and we had to pass a certain speed. And then it was the aim for all of us, and some got there much sooner than I did,
- 39:30 to get your, I think it was forty words a minute or thirty words a minute typing with no mistakes or very few, and a speed on the Morse code key which I've forgotten how fast it was.

We've just reached the end of that tape.

Tape 5

- 00:40 **You were just telling us about one of the...**

Yes, I mentioned Norm Harris who did have an alcohol problem. Some days it was obvious, he was really hung over, shaking a bit. But the interesting thing was, as soon as he hit a Morse code key it was crystal clear. You would think that it was somebody stone sober

- 01:00 who was keying the Morse. It was quite amazing and I suppose you hear of other people who, like actors who are very, very nervous or maybe they're hung over, as soon as they hit the stage, the audience wouldn't know. And I think in some ways, it was the same sort of thing.

And so you were taking us through some of the things that you learnt, how well trained did you feel?

I think we were quite well trained. Quite well trained given it was six months and it

- 01:30 was constant, five days a week from nine till four, five, whatever it was, most days. And the fact that you had standards to meet, I think it was thirty or forty words a minute for typing and so many Morse sent and received at a particular speed, I've forgotten what and with a certain degree of accuracy. So you had to meet standards.

- 02:00 I think that stood us in good stead. And then we did have some exercises in the bush where we were put in, our voice procedure, that was another thing, learning voice procedure with a radio, learning the phonetic alphabet they use - alpha, beta, charlie and so forth for A, B, C. And you always turned that into a game, you turned the Morse into a game so, we had our cars down there, we'd be driving along and

- 02:30 sending each other messages on the horn in Morse. You'd make it work for yourself. Like anything you'd learn, you always take what you learn and you adapt it to make your own humour, your own fun and so on. Or we'd talk to each other in alphabetic language when we were just first learning it. Instead of saying hello we'd say, "Hotel, echo, Lima, Lima, Oscar." So we'd do those sorts of things.

- 03:00 **What about leave during this time?**

Leave, we worked during the day, Tuesday nights if I remember, there was only one night, I think it was only Thursday night I think we were actually allowed out of the camp. Tuesday nights was clean up night, that's when we had to clean our rooms, give it a vacuum and a polish, whatever it was, polish I think it was too, for the week. The other nights

- 03:30 we were, we didn't necessarily have work to do but we had to stay in camp, so we'd go up to the canteen on camp. On Thursday night, most of us used to go into Mornington to do our laundry, we'd go into the laundromat there, then do that and go into the Mornington pub and have a few beers before we came back. I think we had to be back by ten or something like that, there would've been a curfew on us. Weekends,

- 04:00 we could leave the camp, but we were supposed to stay within, I think it was sixty miles or something like that. So you could go to Melbourne, you might've got as far as I think Phillip Island would probably

have been too far, but we tended to ignore that. We'd drive on, we'd go to Phillip Island, go up into the Dandenongs, we'd drive down to Geelong, which I'm sure was beyond what we were supposed to go.

04:30 But we had that freedom, it was only the odd weekend that we might've had some rostered exercise or something like that. I think that was pretty rare. And by this time anyway, there were some married people who actually, in fact one at least in our course got married and so he then lived off site. They lived in a flat in Frankston and we would go over there at times as well for tea and a few drinks and whatever.

05:00 So, in that sense, it started to become a much more ordinary sort of life even though there still were barriers and restrictions on what we could do. Or there were times when we'd stuffed up during the week and had extra CB or drill of a Saturday and Saturday morning, and as I say, instructors playing games

05:30 the sergeant major in charge of the courses, Block Howe, some warmed to him and some didn't. I didn't mind him because I could always see there was a bit of a twinkle in his eye and he was always playing games, and one of the games he played, wasn't just marching around the playground. We'd be slow marching which means you'd have to lift your leg up and he'd say, "Hold it." And you'd hold it for ages before he let it go down and you could see him just playing games.

06:00 And I think the fact that he saw through that, even though it was a punishment for whatever. I think it was one morning I got it for not getting out of bed quick enough, so something pretty mundane. You actually enjoyed it because it turned into a bit of fun, you made the best of it.

And so, what about dances or meeting girls?

06:30 That's where it really started, when we first arrived at Balcombe, it must've been on a Thursday night when we went in to do... we worked out we got to go to Frankston to do our laundry and we went into the pub, and I think that's where we got talking to a few of the locals drinking and say, "Well where do you go?" And they said, "You've got to go to Melbourne." So what we started to do was go to, you know in Melbourne with their broken up into the various cities, Maribyrnong

07:00 and Hawthorn, wherever else, they each have their town hall and each of them have a dance. And so we used to drive into that on a Saturday night and go to those dances. Or we'd go to the Maribyrnong pub, there used to be a good floorshow, we'd go there. I think we started doing that, driving into the Maribyrnong pub for the floorshow, and I can remember one night I was driving, and all I remember about the drive home was

07:30 winding my way through fire engines, a house must've been on fire on the highway. Totally over the limit but the things you did. And then as time went on and we're going to these dances, I mean there were one, two, three, three at least of our group, and I'm one, that's where we met our wives. And so then socially, whereas once we were going out

08:00 as groups, then we started to go out obviously in our own directions. But that still didn't, it really didn't break up the camaraderie and the feeling within the group, even though some of us then were going our own ways. Because there were times, other times, we'd just go for a drive down into down to Portsea or Cape Shank or somewhere and have a look around down there. Walk around, go down the beach. Not to swim, I can remember we

08:30 did go to Cape Shank in the middle of winter because we were there from May to November, and here were people swimming and I just couldn't believe it, people swimming in winter time. And other little things that sort of stand out in your mind, I mean, the water's got to be warm for me to go swimming, let alone the temperatures it is down there.

You mention meeting your wife, tell us about that, where did you meet her?

That was at Hawthorn Town Hall and as it happens I was with

09:00 the bloke who I said had the rough night on the first night at Enoggera, which we became good friends and I'd driven him that night and we'd been to... On Albert Park Lake, there was a disco called The Powerhouse. And I think it must've been mainly uni students who were there because we walked in, there were quite a number of us, probably about

09:30 ten of us, and it quickly became apparent, you were dancing. It was sixty-forty even though it was a disco type thing, it was sixty-forty dancing as well and you'd say, "We'll what do you do?" And they should've picked it from the haircut but, "What do you do?" "Oh, I'm in the army." And you just got this literal pace back. And whether that was because, well someone in the military is not of our social standing, or whether it was because

10:00 the politics, even though it was unsaid, whether that was an issue, I don't know. Anyway it quickly became apparent that wasn't a real friendly place, we won't go there again, so we said, "Well what'll we do?" It was only about eight o'clock at night I think, half past eight at night, Hawthorn's not far away, so we'll go to Hawthorn. And I walked into Hawthorn and this woman went by, 'gee she doesn't look too bad, must be with a, must be with somebody, can't be by herself.' Sort of followed her with my eyes around the room.

10:30 Yes she was. So that was it. So we had a couple of dances and then spent the rest of the night dancing. I drove her home, so everything sort of started from there. So we'd go out, she was a nurse and in many ways I think she had a more restricted life than what I did. Nurses in those days were very, very regimented. They had to live at the hospital, they were used for meaningful tasks, they could go out but they really had a sharp deadline on them.

11:00 And I think hers was eleven o'clock at night or something. And I remember getting her back at about two or three o'clock in the morning a couple of nights. We had to jump the fence and hopefully get in without being seen. And so there was that sort of thing. But yes, most Sundays we used to go somewhere and that sort of continued while I was down there.

So tell us,

11:30 **at the end of the course.**

End of the course, again we had a choice. We were given options. You put down where you want to go. These are where the signal regiments are throughout Australia and overseas for that matter, put down where you want to go. And I wanted to go to Vietnam; it had nothing to do with Queen and country or the flag, or fighting

12:00 Communism. Had nothing to do with that at all, it was totally selfish in that okay, I'm in the army, let's make the most of it. Where can I go? One place to go to, Vietnam. Why would I want to go there? Well I'd prefer to go to Vietnam and use the skills I've learnt for a reason, rather than stay in Australia and just do exercises and just play at it. So that was an issue. The other issue was at that time, to get a War Service Home Loan,

12:30 you had to be a returned serviceman. It's not the case now, it hasn't been since the early 70s, but it was then, so there was that monetary aspect. And the other monetary aspect was the extra pay you got. So it was for those sorts of reasons, and a bit of adventure. I mean that was certainly an element. As a mate of mine keeps saying war was the greatest adventure, despite everything else. So it was those sorts of reasons, but I didn't want to tempt fate too

13:00 much, so I put down that as third place. I think I put Darwin first, Hobart second, and Vietnam third. And the reason I put Hobart and Darwin is simply I'd never been to those places, let's get somewhere I hadn't seen. Because I've always been somebody and I suppose it's again how you grow up. I mean we always went on holidays to a different place. I liked travelling and in fact that's one thing I did during while I was teaching, is that a mate of mine

13:30 while I went to Grammar School was living in Gatton but we'd meet up and we'd drive to Newcastle or Goondiwindi or somewhere fairly regularly. Just travel about. So those of us who had put Vietnam down of course got the guernsey. And I think I'm pretty safe in saying that the only ones who went to Vietnam from our course at least, were those who volunteered. Which goes a little bit against

14:00 what the public view might be, that you were called up for national service, therefore you were compelled to go. You had an option. I mean if you went to the battalions or to a unit that went as a unit across, then you wouldn't have an option. So if you were with, say 4 Battalion and when they were going across, you would've gone, no options. But we did have an option and what worked for us I think was that we were pointed to 139 Signal Squadron in Brisbane

14:30 which was the holding, the transition regiment if you like, squadron if you like, for 104 in Nui Dat. So, but we went over as individuals, not as a unit, which has its pros and cons. What's lacking if you don't go as a unit you don't feel as though, that big unit feeling wasn't there. It was more down to the section you're in but we'll talk more about that later no doubt.

15:00 So yes, so then it was the medical inspections and so forth that we went through. I then, now this is where some differences came. There was one or two at least who were on the course with us, came straight to Brisbane in November and then did their Battle Efficiency at Canungra and then went overseas. They were overseas by December, early December, even late November.

15:30 Whereas we were still in Balcombe and we went from there to Watsonia in Melbourne for a couple of days until we were taken to Puckapunyal where we did our Battle Efficiency. Which was a bit strange because I think they used to call it Jungle Training and Puckapunyal was just a desert you might say, with clouds of dust everywhere, which really fitted Nui Dat in the dry season anyway. So we spent,

16:00 I think it was about a fortnight there. And then I went back to Watsonia for a night and then to 139 and that's where I spent. I got up here late November early, yeah late November and stayed there until March, until I went over to Nui Dat.

What year sorry?

This was 1968 now. The end of '67, beginning of '68.

What news were you hearing from Vietnam?

16:30 I can't remember anything specifically. I would imagine back in '66 we would've heard of Long Tan and so forth but it wasn't, it wasn't really foremost in my mind. You'd heard that obviously there was fighting going on and some Australians were getting killed and so forth, I think it was just something

that you heard about

- 17:00 and you accepted and you took the view well even if I go, I'm going to be okay, nothing's going to happen to me. You know. One thing I should say to back track a little bit. The other thing, because many of us were teachers, when we were at corps training, the army while we were there, it would've been about August I think, August, September, wanted us to go to - to give away signals
- 17:30 and to go to New Guinea as sergeant instructors. And I recall saying when I was told we had to go in to Vic Barracks in Melbourne, St Kilda for the interview. I said, "Tell them I'm not interested. I don't want to go. I want to stay in signals." They says, "Nup, you've got to go for the interview." So I went to the interview and I think there was something like a major and a colonel, there were fairly senior officers there, three or four of them, saying
- 18:00 yes you'd go to New Guinea as a sergeant instructor and you'd be teaching the Pacific Island Regiment and I said to them, "I don't want to go, I'm not convinced I want to go back to teaching so I don't want to teach while I'm in the army." And they to my surprise, they accepted that, but the thing was the comment, "Well you'll probably go to Vietnam and get killed." And I said, "Well that's a chance I'll take." There's actually
- 18:30 a book, some guy starting, trying to do some research and write a book about that, those troops going. And again, the fellow who I mentioned first, who was from Grammar, I mentioned that on the first night, who was with me on the night that I met Lena, then he did go to New Guinea, as probably five or six I think ended up going to New Guinea as sergeant instructors. I think they finished the course, I'm not sure now whether they actually finished the course,
- 19:00 I think they did, but I can't really remember. So we went to, we did our Battle Efficiency at Puckapunyal and that I found pretty tough. I think we had good preparation just from the lectures we were getting from servicemen who had been over there and told us what to expect. Then we didn't go into it with blinkers on our eyes.
- 19:30 I seem to recall we had a good impression, no holds barred discussion about the realities of the place. The dangers that there are, the things that you can get trapped in villages where you don't know who is Viet Cong, who's not for example. A whole range of things. And something about the culture of the Vietnamese too, was said to us. Particular things really don't stand out
- 20:00 but I do remember that we were given a fair bit of information. The physical aspects I found hard. I used to find, we had to climb up ropes, I found rope, I suppose because my upper muscle strength, body strength wasn't what it should have been, but I found that hard. I did it but with a struggle and again it was part of I think of what this, becoming aware of what you could actually do physically
- 20:30 and therefore mentally because doing things physically is as much a mental process as anything, so it was another good learning curve.

And then you were waiting in Enoggera to go. What was that period like?

It was very casual. That was very casual. Because it was just a holding squadron, then the bulk of the time I seem to recall spending it down the

- 21:00 motor pool cleaning Land Rovers or doing something down there. There was one time, one morning I remember we went across to a stores unit over in Bulimba and taught the troops there how to use a radio, but the other great skill I learnt was that in the military if you walk around during the day and you have nothing in your hand, you'll get nailed for a job, if you walk around with a piece of paper in your hand even
- 21:30 though it might be blank, nobody will touch you. Now that's something I've kept over the years, even as an administrator in school, I always walked around with a clipboard in my hand, there was something in my hand. I think it came from that, just to show people I was doing something, not just walking around. But at 139 there was menial stuff. I remember another job we had was vinyl floors; actually the whole vinyl floor in an office block, cleaning it with steel wool.
- 22:00 Scrubbing the whole thing down, trivial stuff like that. It was fairly casual though, in that there was a parade but there wasn't a rifle inspection or anything like that each day. I don't think they even had bed inspections and so forth, unlike when we were and later on in Vietnam, back in Ingleburn where it was very regimental. So it was casual in that way. The other thing we had a
- 22:30 chance to is to again, we were allotted some of the NCOs there, corporals and sergeants were ex-Vietnam, so again just talking to them just allowed us to gather a bit more picture. And I remember one of the corporals was there during Long Tan and telling how everybody was called out to carry artillery shells. Just keep the fire up while that particular battle was on. So we learnt a little bit more.
- 23:00 **How did their conversations affect you? What did they make you think about the place?**

It certainly didn't give me second thoughts. Because again I think, I was twenty-two going on twenty-three, still pretty young, you're indestructible when you're young, you don't really think of those things, you know, there's a chance obviously. You don't go

23:30 in to a battle thinking well I'm going to walk out absolutely. There's a hundred per cent chance I'm going to get through it, you don't think that. But at the same time, you don't dwell on those things either. Even chance, here's something different, here's something to be involved in. Here's something to work with your mates about the place. It's those sorts of things and it's still just seeing something new, the adventure of it all, it's still, was still to the forefront.

24:00 **So tell us about getting the news that you would go.**

I was at that point down at Forest Top, down at Wiangaree in the Wiangaree State Forest, Northern New South Wales, near Kyogle. During the time with 139, largely it was just trivial things around, but there was a big exercise around Rockhampton, up at Shoalwater Bay that some people,

24:30 some of those I was with went to. But I and a lance corporal, whose name I've long forgotten, our job, we were sent down to Canungra and then to Forest Top because 4 Battalion was doing their final shake down preparation before going to Vietnam. And it was our job to provide the communication link between the exercise and back to Canungra. So we were there for, I think,

25:00 two or three weeks, I think, and then it was a message over the radio, "Hey, you're dates, your date is the 10th of March, get back here for your pre-embarkation leave." And it was interesting how again in the 4 Battalion, people were dealing with, it was mainly, it was either the regimental sergeant [Sergeant] major or one of the senior NCOs, another sergeant major, might've been a WO2 [Warrant Officer 2] or something, and he was

25:30 always very dismissive of the corporal and I, because we weren't infantry. And it was amazing how when he heard, and he was in the room when I got the message, how his attitude changed like that. Absolutely different. Ah, he's going as well. So you're one of us type thing, I think was the sort of attitude. And it may have been, the corporal I was with was a regular soldier and I was a nasho [national serviceman]

26:00 maybe that had something to do with it to. I don't know, but that particular thing wasn't a great issue. And so it was a matter of then getting a vehicle back to Canungra and then to Brisbane and home for a week, before pre-embarkation.

And then take us through what happened then.

Lena came up from Melbourne, so that was and that was something I suppose

26:30 when I left Melbourne, I think we both thought we'd never see each other again. And while I was on holidays in December of 1967, while I was at 139, was just before or just after Christmas, she wrote a letter and said, "I've got this weekend off." And I immediately got in my car and drove to Melbourne. And that's one of those, you know, instantaneous decisions you made which should've changed the direction of your life. So she

27:00 came up during pre-embarkation leave, and then I dropped her back to Brisbane but went back home again to leave my car there. And my parents drove me to Warwick to get on the bus to come back. And that was a little bit hard. I don't remember the detail but in a letter that I'd written to Lena I'd sort of said that they'd taken it pretty hard, which is understandable. At that point they didn't know that I'd volunteered, it was only years

27:30 later, years later that Mum said to me, "Did you volunteer to go?" I said, "Yeah." She said, "I thought you might've done." So yeah, so we came, the bus to Brisbane and then we got, and another thing, another little adventure, we got the train to Sydney overnight to 1 Sig Regiment at Ingleburn, and there it's the hurry up and wait.

28:00 You get there, we don't necessarily go the time you're expected to go. It was believed, one disappointment I suppose was that we flew, even though I'd never flown internationally before, whereas others had gone on [HMAS] Sydney, and I thought well that'd be a good way to go. Particularly to go over, since you gradually make that mental change rather than the sudden change you do with flying. So we spent the week there, cleaning, very regimental,

28:30 inspection every day, parades every day, gardening every day. They had a official gardening time in the afternoon, but it also gave us the opportunity to catch up with a couple of the people who we were at Balcombe with who'd been posted to Ingleburn, and so their, of the one anyway, their home become a second home to us while we were there. And there was rumours about whether we were going via Manila,

29:00 and then it was going via Darwin, and then we found it was Darwin and Singapore, and then we were going the next couple of days, and were going in a day's time and so it took a while to shake down that it was actually going on the 10th of March. But ultimately we did.

What other rumours were going about, about when you'd get off the plane?

Well, if you remember that was just, the Tet Offensive was just finishing at that point. And so

29:30 we were very well aware of that. We were well aware that Saigon particularly was attacked. We knew that there was increased activity around Nui Dat but the rumour was that we'd have to fight our way off

the plane, which was a lot of nonsense really I suppose, but that was the rumour. All our, and we thought how are we going to do that when our rifles are in the hold, because we were issued with a rifle in Sydney and taking that with us.

30:00 But that was in the hold naturally enough, not up in the cabin. So we did go, well we thought it was a bit of nonsense but rumours go around like they do in any institution. And then, a brief stop in Darwin and a longer stop about four hours I think it was, three hours in Singapore, and then as we were, you know it was very jovial between Sydney and Singapore,

30:30 but the plane was very quiet, understandably, once we took off from Singapore we knew well, next stop is Vietnam and despite all our bravado, there was a thought well, what's going to happen? And things started to liven up when we hit the Vietnamese coast around the Mekong Delta and you start to look out and see another country, see the great rivers and paddy fields which I think were pretty dry at the time,

31:00 because it was the dry season. You know, people started to get a little animated then about what can we see out the window? But then as we were coming into land, knowing that it was the end of the Tet Offensive, the rumour that we might have to fight our way off the plane, as we were coming in to land, there was this massive bang. And the plane accelerated, the pilot no doubt pulls the stick back and away we go around. What the bang was I don't know to this day, but it sort of gave us all a bit of a fright,

31:30 but we landed normally, no hassles at all.

What were you saying to each other when you were landing?

Probably "what was that?" I don't know. "Was it a rocket?" Or some such thing. I don't know really but I imagine that sort of thing went through our minds. And then we just, on the next circuit we landed quite normally.

What were you seeing at this airport, what was it like?

Well, I mean,

32:00 I suppose the thing that hit us was just what a massive airport it was with lines of planes of all sorts. Whether they'd be C130s for transport, or whether they'd be Phantom Fighters or whether they'd be helicopters. I mean it was just so large, that was the obvious thing. And I suppose it hit us with the American (UNCLEAR) because it was pretty well all American

32:30 equipment obviously. You know, in sand bag bunkers where the fighters were and the planes were, between sandbag bunkers to protect them from mortars and so forth. So it was the sheer size of the place, but then you realised it was just, I think a plane was taking off and landing every minute, so it was a fantastically busy airport as well. So when you walk out of the plane, it was the dry season but so the humidity was not as high as what it normally is,

33:00 but the heat hit you, because it was about I think about midday or early afternoon, that hit you, and then just the noise of aircraft everywhere, helicopters, planes taking off and landing. And then you're out on the tarmac waiting for the - I think we must've got our rifles back there I would've thought. I can't really remember but I imagine we would've done because we got our kit bags and stuff like that. And so some are going to Saigon, some were going to Vung Tau,

33:30 the rest of us were going to Nui Dat. So I think we were there about half an hour, an hour before we boarded a Caribou and flew to Nui Dat. Which was twenty minutes, half an hour, that's about all. I mean, you tended, I tended to think that these places were a long way away, and I think the fact that you had to fly and not drive, because it wasn't safe to drive, you get the impression the natural impression is you've got to fly, it must be a fair way away.

34:00 But it sort of comes as a bit of a shock, or did come as a bit of a shock when you look at a map and see how close these places are together, and then see what a very small proportion of Vietnam you were going to see anyway. It's a bit like going to Sydney and saying you've seen Australia. So there were those sorts of things that gradually dawned on you as far as the country goes. We landed at Nui Dat and as the plane pulled out the guy next door

34:30 to me, next door, sitting next to me, heaved all over me. He was air sick. Turned out to be one of the regular corporals. I've held that against him all the time, which I keep reminding him about. He doesn't remember but I keep reminding him. These things happen, not to worry. And then we were taken, we were met by truck I imagine and taken to the 104, given a tent, and taken down to fire

35:00 our rifle to make sure it worked. And that's the only time I fired it in Vietnam, into that weapons pit. And when we were down there, the squadron sergeant major took us down, Bluey Still, and he tossed after we tested our weapons, he tossed a matchbox into the pit and said, "Here's my pistol," I think there might've

35:30 been six or seven of us there, "If anybody can hit that I'll buy them a case of beer." And I'd never fired a pistol in my life. And I hit it first go. But he never bought the case of beer though. Which I reminded him about when I met him at the reunion in Canberra in '92. But, and he doesn't remember that either, I don't think. But yeah, so that was the introduction.

Describe what the scene looked like,

36:00 **at Nui Dat.**

First I suppose was the dust. And I don't think, no I don't think I'd seen so many, no I'd never seen rubber trees before and it was built in a rubber plantation. Dusty roads, I think there was at that time, there might've been only a tiny strip of bitumen. Most of it all was just gravel roads, so dust as we drove

36:30 around and when we got to the unit, as with most other units, amongst the rubber trees, then there were tents which held four people, canvas tents, square tents with sandbags around them just in case of mortar attack. There were, there was by the time we got there, there was a building for the mess, there was a building for the canteen, there was a building for the kitchen.

37:00 There was a building for where the teleprinters were for the communications. I assume that's where they were working to Saigon and back to Australia. But the rest was tents. So under the rubber trees, it was shady, the unit backed on to what was known as Kanga Pad, which was a great bitumen area between our unit and Nui Dat Hill. The airstrip we landed

37:30 on, Luscombe Field was on the other side of Nui Dat Hill, so that was a normal fixed wing runway, whereas the Kanga Pad was purely for helicopters. And so being in our unit, I mean the one thing that you might've heard Vietnam veterans talking about is just the sound of the Iroquois helicopter, it's the sound that's attached to Vietnam. And like we lived with it for the time we were there. And it's still nostalgic, it still reminds me, I mean there's not

38:00 too many Iroquois [helicopter] left flying these days, but when the odd one does come over, there's the odd commercial one or the army's still flying them, coming to Enoggera occasionally you hear them, and it still is a very nostalgic sound. Very much so.

What's it sound like?

It's the pitch of the, it's just a different pitch of a helicopter. It's as much the pitch as anything. I mean a helicopter's a helicopter probably to most people, but if you hear say the

38:30 Squirrels that the, I think it's the Squirrels that the TV [television] channels used, then the pitch is just different. You know it's not an Iroquois. We're so used to that sound and so it's the pitch of the, and I mean had it been another model helicopter, it would've been to that sound which is nostalgic there was nothing about it itself, it's just the fact that that was the ubiquitous helicopter that was about.

Tape 6

00:34 Yeah, the stop in Singapore, because of the legality I suppose, international legality of foreign troops landing in a foreign

01:00 country, even though the Singapore government and everybody else knew that we were troops on the way to Vietnam, when we got off the plane, we still had our uniform boots on and our - or shoes and trousers on, long trousers on but we had to put a civilian shirt on and that was, I think a symbolic act to say that we weren't invading troops. So you know, that was a bit odd and a bit - caused a few jokes amongst us.

What kind of jokes?

01:30 Oh, you know, I think it was just the, "why?" sort of thing, I suppose, we didn't at that point understand all the political ins and outs. Although I think we were aware also, probably we had Indonesia more in mind than - because we were overflying Indonesia and that was just at the end of confrontation when Australian troops were in Borneo, so I think we were aware of it from that point of view. But probably not from the fact from Singapore itself, I suspect.

02:00 So yes, and that was interesting because that - well I say, most if not all of us, that was the first time we've actually landed on foreign soil, and I remember writing, I sat in the airport and wrote a postcard to Lena and having read the postcard since, then I know what I wrote and it was that, "Hey, I'm sitting here," and even forty years ago, sitting there, my comment was, "Well you wouldn't know you were anywhere else,

02:30 except that you see the Asian faces around." Which is the same sort of comment you make now, go to a hotel anywhere in the world, for all intents and purposes you could be anywhere. So it was that sort of thing and I think it was the obviously just being somewhere new. We were able to walk around parts of the airport and just had a drink of some sort. I've no doubt we had something to eat and hung about for a while and then we walked

03:00 back because in those days, I think there was actually a bus to take us from where the - because they had shuttle buses, rather than, you know, as we do now, with the way the terminals are structured, walking out. I've got photos of all of us walking back to the plane, so we must have walked back at least

anyway. One way. Yeah, and that was the point I think, that we started to get a bit quieter, we realised, hey, this is it, we are going to the war,

03:30 so to speak.

We'll go forward to Nui Dat, we were talking about first impressions, and pretty much covered. I'm interested the way the signals squadron worked where you were replacements for..

Yes and I think there was,

04:00 I think a couple of artillery units might have been like that as well, but most units, certainly the infantry battalions which was most of the people they went over as a battalion where - and then so you had 1 RAR [Royal Australian Regiment] replaced by another battalion, 4 RAR. I don't think they replaced each other but say they did, whereas we went over as individuals, it was that there were troops already over there and

04:30 as we finished corps training that our name was matched up to somebody over there and so we went over when that person was due to come back, which may well have been the end of their time, or if they got injured or sick or some other family problem they might come home early and then we would go straight away. And that's the reason some of us got over there first. They happened to be matched with soldiers who - with sigs who were due to come back.

05:00 So they may have, if they were National Service, it was probably an earlier intake, maybe about the third or fourth intake and it was their turn to come home. Whereas I would have known once, but I don't remember now, who I replaced, but it was obvious that person there - he was no rush to get home, in the sense that he served out his full time.

So how was the hand over managed?

Well because we were arriving in

05:30 small groups and that's - the one advantage is that there was always a body of people there who'd been initiated into the running of the squadron, what was involved and being in country, so when we arrived in small groups, and I think there was about, I'm not sure but probably about ten of us, who arrived in the day I did, so it was a relatively simple matter to give us a briefing, test our weapons, be allocated to a tent

06:00 and so then we slept in and were working with those who'd been there for some weeks, months maybe others who were close to being there a year. So you know, you settled in much more easily.

What were the main differences being in an army camp in country as in training?

In some ways, there wasn't too much difference. In the sense you still ended up doing menial jobs, like raking leaves in a rubber plantation of all places,

06:30 which I can recall happened when the Prime Minister John Gorton was due to come over, the place was supposed to be beautified, I didn't see him, but he did go over, I know, whether he ended up in 104 I somehow don't think he did, but I'm not sure. But anyway we had a clean up duty before hand. I mean, there are significant differences too, in the sense that you're living in tents, there's the noise of helicopters going in and out.

07:00 There's the - particularly the American artillery and the big 175s used to fire particularly of an afternoon and the whole ground used to shake. And you'd wonder what was going on until it happened a couple of times and then you were aware of it and you didn't - took no notice of it. The fact that you - in our squadron anyway, not in all units, within Nui Dat, but in our squadron we were expected to carry our rifle with us

07:30 at all times. And on the rifle butt then there was a first aid bandage, so that was a reminder that some point you could get injured of some sort. You know. Whether it be shrapnel or the mortar or whatever but it was there if you needed it and I think that was somehow a reminder. The fact that then as we settled in, then there were people going in and out of the unit all the time. You know, going out on operations as a task force, moving out or others

08:00 were going across to the battalions. So that's something I should say that's quite different, in that the people who went there, there were some assigned to radio troop, who was going to be radio operators. So I was assigned to radio troop, so even though I'd spent six months learning how to operate a teleprinter, learning how to do Morse code, I never used a teleprinter and I never used Morse code, while I was over there except very late in the time, they were experimenting with, I think because

08:30 they had nothing to do they decided that - can we get communications with some people who are out of fire support base line? But it really wasn't done in an operational sense, all our operational work was with radios. And others were assigned to the keyboard section, so they largely stayed in 104 and worked in a building which ultimately during - I think during the year was air conditioned or was air conditioned sometimes so the equipment would operate

- 09:00 properly before that it was just getting dust into it all the time. Then you had others who were linesmen, who laid the telephone lines and whatever other lines needed to be laid. And then you had others who were just general duties people around the place and you had the headquarters staff, so you had office staff there. Who do much like in any office back there, doing the pay, doing the administration as people move in and out and so forth. But our section was radio
- 09:30 troop and I think there was about eighty of us in the troop during the twelve months that I was there, but by the way that we worked, I suppose if I knew a dozen, well I'd be lucky. And the reason for that is, is that we moved around in twos, threes and fours, so when we went out somewhere or to, you know, sometimes we'll no doubt talk about, I was on Nui Dat hill and there was four of up there, I was
- 10:00 at the time with one of the field squadron the engineers and there was four of us over there. I went out with the, Thais? later on and there were two of us there so we moved around in small groups and these small groups were going in and out, so you'd be out for, could be a week, could be six weeks, could be a month, you'd come back and you might spend a few days in the unit and then you'd go somewhere else.

Did this feel isolating at all?

No. We

- 10:30 it didn't appear that way at the time. I think it's only with hindsight that probably where our camaraderie is, is within the troop. And so those - we have a reunion every couple of years and so I've got to know - many I didn't know since then, in the last few years, because that's only started in the last six years or so, five years. But at the time, I mean, once you hit the country,
- 11:00 I suppose at the back of the mind, "Jeez, when am I going home?" You know, that was the sort of thing. Because it was always, well how many have I got to go? And you always liked it when new replacements or new arrivals arrived because then you knew that you weren't the person who had the longest to go, somebody else had longer than you had to go. So one of the other sigs with us was always talking about the light at the end of the tunnel and I can't see it yet. You know, so you had that view of wanting to get out of the place, but
- 11:30 while we were there, there were probably two things that we wanted most: one, was to get out of Nui Dat, certainly get out of the squadron, out of 104, to go and do something different and the other thing, was to ride a helicopter. So we took every opportunity, if it became available, to take a helicopter ride somewhere, you know, or to get out of the unit in some way. So you'd volunteer if they wanted somebody to ride shotgun on a convoy going
- 12:00 to Vung Tau, then you'd volunteer. So that was the aim, was to get out and do something.

We were talking earlier about, was there any sort of stigma attached to being National Service person, once you'd arrived in Vietnam was there any of that?

No, no. Never felt it at any time, or if there was a comment, and there were comments, "Oh, you're only a bloody reg [regular]," or

- 12:30 "You're only a nasho." But it was always done in jest. There was no conflict whatever, because in each of the detachments I was with there was a mixture of, to a large degree, there was - except for a couple, there was a mixture of regular soldiers and nashos and there was really no difference at all, not from our unit anyway. Maybe others have spoken about it, but I have not - didn't see that at all. We got on well, we're just there to do - we'd been trained to do a job and well, then we do it.

- 13:00 **We talked about it briefly, but tell me about those first couple of days with the 104 when you - in that hand over time.**

Spent it sandbagging. Filling bags of sand, and then you fill the bag of sand, which was what? About half a metre long or not quite, a third of a metre long, about ten or fifteen centimetres wide and you'd fill

- 13:30 it with sand, just fold over the end, stack it on top of the other one and then you'd have a wooden mallet, and then you'd bash it down flat. So just trying to weld the two together. I had my first trip out, I think, in about the second day there. Just next door, there was an American signals unit, and really didn't have anything to do with them except it just happened to be that one of their trucks, was the one that took myself and others down to
- 14:00 the sandpit which was a few kilometres outside of the perimeter, through the village of Hua Long and that was the first time on the way there that I'd actually seen a Vietnamese village up close and you know, as you, as one would expect it was far different to what we'd been used to, or seen here, just by the nature of the buildings, by - you know, fairly ramshackle and I remember
- 14:30 writing home they hadn't had a coat of paint, you know, so typical Asian village I suppose, really. But that was a little bit of an eye opener.

What was the sandpit?

The sandpit was just a little quarry where there was sand available and we'd go down there and the Vietnamese would fill the sandbags, they were paid to do that and then we'd toss 'em on the truck. And

- 15:00 think the interesting time there is cos their kids'd always come round and they were real wheeler dealers these kids who'd sell you bottles of coke and you know, fooling around with them as we were filling the sandbags, from, you know, pretty young age too, they were there. And I think the thing that stood out to us very quickly is how much and not unsurprisingly, was how worldly they were at a very young age.
- 15:30 And you know, all their life there'd been a war around them so you know, the nature of their family life, I think is, they'd seen a lot more of life than probably what we had in many ways. And that came apparent, their English was good enough to get by.

What sort of things in the way they acted would demonstrate this?

Oh, I think I'm talking more as a - using that as an example, but talking generally as I'd seen other kids, later on when I'd been up to

- 16:00 trying to think of the name of the place, is a - was an ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] outpost north of Nui Dat, Phuoc Le - no it wasn't Phuoc Le, I can't think of the name of it off the top of my head. But just seeing how the kids interact with each other, the things they say, the things they - the way they interact with the younger kids, you'd see them, you know, quite different to what we were used to. To be
- 16:30 specific, I can't really be specific it was just a sense you got, just by the way they behaved and the way they said things, you know.

What was your general impression of the relationship between the Australians and Vietnamese at an early stage?

Oh, I think you've got to say that the Vietnamese were looked down on. I mean they were referred to as, 'noggies', as you probably know, and 'gooks', by the Americans. And as you know, one of the things

- 17:00 when any country goes to war, they try to demonise the enemy and I think that's one way of it. And I don't think our views were changed that much because we didn't really have a high regard for the Vietnamese ARVN soldier. You know, like towards the end of my tour, there I actually - I went out with the engineers where they went down to - that was the village of Phuoc Le which is
- 17:30 near Long Tan, which had been a relocated village but it was just a mass of tunnels underneath and we were blowing the tunnels up. I was just providing communications for them, but we were supposed to be protected by a company of ARVN soldiers. Now we were there for the day, but they had a - had enough by lunchtime and they went home and so we were left there. Luckily, you know there was no - nothing happened, but it was just that sort of - "Hey, we're over here fighting with you, but you've got a half - hearted effort."
- 18:00 That was our perception. Which may or may not have been true in reality, but you know, when you're there as a sig or a private soldier then you've got a very narrow view of - you only see what's going on what you see. I mean, you don't really get the bigger picture, necessarily. So that view may not have been an accurate one but I think it was
- 18:30 fair to say, that was the view we had from the experiences we had.

What about when you headed into that village, that we just talked about, what were the fears or rumours in villages like that, there might be either VC [Viet Cong] sympathisers or members?

Yeah, well that was an empty village that had been flattened, there was only the stumps, well the outlines of houses that were left. But when we went, there was another job, that we used to like or longer term

- 19:00 to go on, when we were back in the squadron before we'd get another permanent - or you know, longer term attachment, then we would go out for an afternoon or a day with divisional intelligence. So I went on one where they had got the names of VC sympathisers and so we went in a number of Land Rovers and a few APCs [Armoured Personnel Carrier] as well, Army Personnel Carriers, as well, just in case there was any problem. So
- 19:30 you were wondering what's going on and so it really was a swoop on a village, they knew which houses, the group, we broke up into groups, the group I was with, my job was to stand guard at the gate. I had my radio with me obviously and my rifle, the others went into the house and arrested people but I remember I spent the time talking to the kids. You know, while you went in and you were prepared, when it started to go on,
- 20:00 I mean, there was, even though you were grabbing VC it was during the day, there was no retaliation, people seemed to go about their business, it just seemed to be like a normal thing. And maybe, it's hard to say, but maybe the villagers were happy to see these people go. Because it may well be that being VC sympathisers, the VC would come in and well, we know while we were there that
- 20:30 village heads were executed by the VC and so forth, you know. And why some villagers are actually - when they were relocated we actually put barbed wire around to help protect them. And then on that

particular incidence after they'd arrested the people, we took them to the ARVN compound, the jail if you like, outside Ba Ria, which was the main capital of Phuoc Tuy province. And whatever happened to them, goodness knows.

21:00 And you often wonder what did happen. You know, but that was just part of the job and we were happy to get out for the afternoon. And then it still came down to that. You've got to separate it, I mean it really comes down to the individual situation. And yes, they were the only real experiences I had, with the Vietnamese. Oh there was another one we

21:30 went to, there was a little village of Binh Ba, north of Nui Dat and I went with... the aim there was to find some hidden arms that they thought the VC had, you see, each house had a cellar. And that one was a - we were a little bit more apprehensive, because we remembered we were going to see a village where we were actually looking for weapons. So you know, it was possible that they might grab one and have a pot shot. They didn't and we didn't find any

22:00 weapons as it happens. But then amongst all that, there are other things, like it's the only time - the first time and only time I saw how charcoal was made, you know, because they - part of the village, the villagers were making charcoal, in the traditional way with - they have a mound and burn the logs and then cover them over with dirt so it just smoulder slowly and end up with charcoal. So I found that interesting.

22:30 So you know, you're learning something all the time.

Were there any Vietnamese people working in Nui Dat?

No, no. That was the big difference between the Australians and the Americans, where Australians did not have Vietnamese working, it was - every job was done by soldiers or if the Vietnamese were to be involved it was done outside the camp. So as I say, they employed them to fill the sandbags, or our

23:00 laundry was done in Ba Ria, by the - contracted to be Vietnamese and so, and that's another job I had at some point during the time, is worked on the laundry. We'd go down at six o'clock in the morning and pick up the - take down the dirty laundry and pick up the clean laundry and bring it back. So it was all done, any Vietnamese work was done outside, whereas the Americans employed Vietnamese on their bases. So at the point that I spent some time

23:30 with the Americans at Blackhorse then it really struck me how there were Vietnamese everywhere and you often wondered whether they were you know, whether they were VC sympathisers and whether they were using their knowledge to spread out as to where particular things were within the grounds. And even while I was there, that was during September, there was the Chieu Hoi ['open arms'] program which was a program

24:00 that the Americans had devised and I suppose Australians were part of it, where with VC if they made it known that a VC surrendered and came over to the side they would be treated well and so on and so on. So while I was there, there were a few Chieu Hois who'd - Viet Cong, who'd given themselves up who were in the Blackhorse complex and I remember thinking, "Well, how dangerous is that potentially?"

24:30 Again, I don't know, whether it was, what the outcome was, but it was something that was totally foreign to the way Australians operated and I think it was right that we didn't do it that way, where we kept it to ourselves and contracted out, it just makes the place more secure.

Was there much of an atmosphere of fear around?

I don't think there was, to any large

25:00 degree. Because you think where we were, there was the Kanga Pad as I mentioned, then there was Nui Dat hill and there was a road and then there was the boundary to it. But between us and that, as well there was artillery units, so we weren't right on the edge. I remember when I was working on Nui Dat hill, not long after I got there, one night there was a probe with a wire down below and a few

25:30 shots fired and I think there could have been a couple of mortars fired or something like that. And I'm only making this recollection because I'd written a letter home to Lena, is that you know, I'd written and said, yeah, "Hey, this really pulled us up." We were a little apprehensive, we're actually quite exposed on the top of this hill if they wanted to start to lob things at us, which they never did. But no, at that point it was probably always in the back of your mind but it

26:00 was not something that was really to the fore. It was still, hey, we were there, we want to get out and see something somewhere, we'll worry about the - any dangers when we get there. That's not to say that you're totally blasé by any means, but you weren't - I think the reason for your question, thinking we were round Nui Dat, were we worried about it all the time, then we'd have to say, no.

26:30 Can you just go through for me, exactly was required of you in your role in the radio area?

We had radios called 25 sets, which were American radios which were small, relatively small, relatively light, so they were carried on your back. That was the main radio we used, at times, we

27:00 operated Retrans [retransmission] units. So if we had somebody in this position, say our troops were in

this position but headquarters was so far away or there was a hill or a mountain, they couldn't talk directly, then a detachment of sigs would go out and establish a Retrans [retransmission] unit, so we'd have two radios, two aerials, but those two radios connected so when they used a frequency out in the field, one radio would pick it up and automatically transferred it onto the

27:30 frequency that the headquarters could pick it up. And they used 125s. AMPGRC [?], something like that 125s I've forgotten the exact terminology. So our main function was to use those radios. In some instances it was out in the field carrying them on our backs, making communications from the field, at other times, we'd have them mounted in a tent somewhere or in a building somewhere

28:00 or a bunker under the ground, in some cases. So we didn't always work in that way. When I was on Nui Dat hill I was up there for a couple of months, may have been three months actually, then we had twelve radios, about twelve radios, nine to twelve radios, it varied. And what happened was, that we - there was all the aerials on the hill - so an aerial farm, as we called it,

28:30 they were connected each to a radio and then by landline they went down to the various units so one would have gone down to the task force headquarters, one went down to the engineers, one went down to each of the battalions and so forth. And then our job was to ensure that those radios kept working. Now, that meant keeping the generator charged, the generators going to charge the batteries, to make sure that they were working, that when frequencies had to be

29:00 changed, we changed those frequencies. So at times, it was a very quiet time but other times it was an absolute madhouse. Particularly at the odd time when we had to - all radios were changing frequencies for security reasons, because it never worked out, it was supposed to be done by some code word, all units were supposed to change at the same time so when we changed our radio frequencies

29:30 in the - just by turning a knob, in the bunker, then all the other units should have changed theirs. But it never quite worked that way, but we had telephone links as well. So we started to - you know, it took awhile to phone them up and tell them to switch it over and so on.

What are the codes like that were used? How are they..?

The codes - well we didn't use the codes there, but the codes we used in the field when we had to send messages back were known as CAC [Channel Access Control] codes,

30:00 if I remember, CAC. Which was really combinations of letters, and I think they were groups of five letters which we then, they were changed each month and they had to when we had a message then they were each letter in the word was coded for a particular five letter group. I think it was a five letter group. And then it was the five letter group that we sent and then it was changed back,

30:30 whoever received it. Exactly how they worked, we've forgotten, we were only talking about it some time, you know, not so long ago, trying to remember exactly how it was, but you know, memory dims. But at the end of each month we have to get rid of those codes, they had to be burnt and when I was with a detachment at Blackhorse, which is - that was the home of the 11th Armoured Cav, the cavalry regiment, the US one, but we were just there

31:00 as a place to be for a Retrans unit. I had filled the generator and spilt some petrol on my trousers and so I knew, I've got to burn the codes, I'd better wait a while until I light the match. Well, I waited a while, I don't know how long, but I waited a while and when I lit the match, my trousers went up and I rolled on the ground and the fire wouldn't go out. And I think that's

31:30 the point that I felt fear the most in my life, when I realised I couldn't put out this fire and I really started to feel the skin burning. And I thought, well the only thing I can do is run for the tent and grab a blanket. And I ran for the tent but by the time I got there, being petrol, it had all burnt away and it was out. But I'd had second degree burns on my legs. So luckily we were next to the American first aid post and the

32:00 sergeant on duty there had actually worked in a burns hospital in the US, so that helped and my legs were bandaged. They put this great yellow goo over my legs and bandaged them up, both legs, they thought I'd have to have a skin graft, for one spot but it didn't work out that way, thank goodness. But you know, here I was, two bandaged legs, supposed to be on active duty, but we were middle of this great unit

32:30 so the corporal agreed not to let the squadron know so they didn't know, because had they known, they probably would have recalled us and that was the last thing we wanted, was to go back. So I spent six weeks getting these legs bandaged each day and didn't prevent me from doing the job, because all it was, was sitting on the radios working those when we were on shift. So it worked out I was

33:00 there six weeks and I think I had one visit to the RAP back at Nui Dat and then the legs were fine. And I don't think there's a mark there now, but there was a scar for a few years. And that was the second time I was burnt actually. There must be something with me, with fire. Prior to that, when I was on Nui Dat hill, I was filling, again the generators with a jerry can, and

33:30 the jerry can still had petrol in it and I put it down on the ground and there happened to be - the wires going from the generator to the batteries happened to be bare and where I put the jerry can, metal jerry can short circuited and the petrol caught on fire, the jerry can didn't explode but I threw it away and it

was on fire on the outside, the fuel came out of it and where I threw it was near a big switch box where out of the bunker came all the

- 34:00 landlines and then went down to the various units, well that burnt that up and put all communications out. It took us quite some time to get the fire extinguisher to work. So it was quite a battle for a while because we thought - our tent was next door, we thought, well that might go up, well it nearly did probably. We eventually got it out and of course there was an inquiry and I got a serve for having - wearing
- 34:30 thongs on duty rather than boots, because I was sort of burnt on the foot, singed on the foot, not badly. But as I say, but the person I think who did get a rocket was the officer in charge of the fire fighting equipment because obviously it hadn't been kept up to scratch. And I think with hindsight we said, "Well it probably wasn't such a bad thing." Because over time, over the couple of years that communications had been there
- 35:00 there's been wires changed and added, and merged, it was a bit of a mess, so it was a reason to improve the system if you like and put a new board in. So yeah, that was just a little minor adventure you might say.

On the radios, what sort of messages would you be communicating?

To a large degree, they'd be situation reports. So if people were out in the field then they would be sending messages back to task force headquarters

- 35:30 saying, where they were and what was occurring, if they were under attack, if they weren't under attack, if they were under attack, what injuries they had, were any killed. And that was one of the great advantages of working up there, because you were on top of a hill, you could see just about right down to Vung Tau, you could see to the west and east, you could see to the -not quite so much to the north because there were trees. But you looked over Luscombe Field, which was the main airfield,
- 36:00 you could see around over 104, if you moved up the hill a bit, so not only could you had a position where you could actually see what was going on, see the air strikes and the hills around the place, but being in the bunker, you heard all the messages coming from - so you really had a fair idea what was occurring with Australians out in the bush, during that time, so we were pretty aware of, in a narrow sense, of what was going on
- 36:30 we weren't aware by any means, of what was going on in Vietnam in a broad sense. The only way we learnt that, even though we had a - when you're in the squadron, it had a briefing each afternoon as to what was going on, mainly what the Australians were doing, but then we knew a fair bit of that from being on the radio, if that's where we were, but we got most of our knowledge when we got the Courier Mail or an Australian paper. Or to some degree, listening to American armed forces radio and
- 37:00 television networks. So they had AFVN [American Forces Radio Viet Nam], they had their radio broadcasts, we became very used to listening to American music and American disc jockeys who were, you know, soldiers, in that particular job and while we were there after a while they then had an Australian section, with an Australian taking it.

What sort of music did they play?

Mainly pop music, country music, bit of

- 37:30 jazz I think. It was mainly the more modern style of the time. I don't think there was any classical music, if there was, it would have only been a minor program. But they had their ads, you know, you'd have an ad, if you had a pet monkey, to make sure you got - and we weren't allowed to have those but Americans had pet monkeys and things, making sure he gets a rabies you know, whatever injections or inoculations they had to have. And so forth and, "Make sure you take your malaria pill."
- 38:00 So there was that health type thing, with the main sorts of ads, or maybe if there was a show, touring show coming around, they'd advertise that. So it was really, in many ways, just like a normal radio station, except that it was an American voice and with their own style. You know if you listen to a - even American radio these days, they have their own sort of style, different to our presenters and disc jockeys.
- 38:30 **Where would you listen to this radio - on your..?**
- We listened to that where we'd end up buying a transistor. Yeah, so it was - I think it was based in Saigon but it was - that is the transmitter or maybe Vung - might have been an aerial at Vung Tau as well, I'm not sure. But we listened to it on you know, radios we bought from the PX [Postal Exchange - American Canteen Unit], not on the
- 39:00 radios we were using, because they were different frequencies.

00:35 **Tell us about your first detachment.**

The first detachment, I think I was there about a week. And then the first detachment was Nui Dat Hill, which was a group of four of us, sometimes five, but for most of the time it was

01:00 four. The hill was relatively flat on top, it would have been probably a couple of hundred metres I suppose, long little plateau type thing, although it was obviously bulldozers that helped flatten, level off the top. So there was our bunker up there, which was a bunker of about the size of these two rooms, probably a bit narrower, so it was reasonably sized. Benches down both sides, radios along

01:30 and room for the dart board and whatever else we wanted there to keep us occupied, that was obviously sandbagged, and I'm not sure of the number but I think there was probably something like, you know, well over ten thousand sandbags around it. So quite a bit and that was re-sandbagged, I helped re-sandbag it just before I left to come home. There was also an artillery spotter up there. They had a tent, there was three or four of them and they had a lookout

02:00 and I think they were - I'm not quite sure what their job was from memory, but I think it largely was, that if there was to be any action in front of that area, because when we looked down to the west, I think it would have been, down from the hill and that's where both the American and Australian artillery was, and so if there was any reason to fire out in that direction then these guys, I would assume, would be guiding

02:30 the direction of the rounds fired. There was also an American radio relay outfit there and that had one or two Americans there. There was the 110 signal squadron from Vung Tau also had some sort of complex there, I've forgotten what. So there were quite a number of us from a number of different units, on the side of the hill, down on the airfield side

03:00 then there was the - that's where the SAS [Special Air Service] unit was and that's where we went every night, walked down through the bush, through a steep track, down to their canteen, that's where we - when we weren't on duty, go down to the boozier there and later on at the base of the hill. Then there was a company of infantry I think, from 7 Battalion from memory were put there as just extra caution because when, as I think I mentioned, when we first went up there, there was a bit of probing

03:30 on a couple of nights at the wire and there was the rumour going around that there could be some greater attack on Nui Dat, there wasn't in my time. But they had those precautions. They also brought two centurion tanks up and parked them beside our tent, which was interesting to see these great monstrous things trying to get up this narrow road. And certainly when they had

04:00 their practise shots, it was - if you were asleep in bed after having worked all night, you certainly woke up with a start. And there was the wildlife. There were a number of monkeys there as a big baboon, there was the odd snake. And the bird life. And one day one of the blokes had gone down to the unit and we heard him coming back, a Land Rover coming up the hill, it seemed to be roaring and revving

04:30 much louder than normally until we realised he was getting chased up the hill by a baboon. He was trying to get away from it. So there was a little adventures, you might say. And then after being up there for a few months, it was back to the squadron for, again for a week or something like that, while I was up on the hill, was the time of the Battle of Coral, during the Operation Toan Thang. So I - that's where

05:00 during that operation, during the Coral and you know, they did take some casualties and deaths, then we heard about that through the radio so we were aware of what was going on. And that was a pretty sobering time. I have to say, very sobering.

What were you hearing?

Oh, just the reports that so many, or so and so had been injured and that there'd been so many casualties, so many killed.

05:30 I forget what numbers but they're - you know, there were a number of them on the first night when the major attack came. So, yeah, and then two of the people from our squadron were wounded, one who I didn't know, but one I did sort of know. So when that - like that - his name wasn't given over the radio, but when we found out who it was, we heard there was casualties but when there was

06:00 through the grapevine who it was, then yeah, okay, it has an effect on you. Yeah.

What about the tone of the voice that you were hearing?

Always very calm. Yeah. There was always matter of fact when the sigs were communicating back. I mean some of it obviously were coded messages but others was in clear. But it was always calm, no matter what was going on. Or you could assume was

06:30 going on. Then the voices were calm. I think it just an indication of the professionalism and the way they were - you know, the way we were trained.

How many radios were there, what were you doing during a shift?

About nine radios, which I think increased at times, the number sort of fluctuated a bit depending on

needs.

- 07:00 We were there, probably the most common if I remember correctly, the most common request was for a radio check. So they'd ring in, or radio in, saying, "Radio check." And then you'd give a response saying whether it was clear or whatever, I must admit I forget the exact words we used, but that was the main thing. They were checking to make sure the link was still there
- 07:30 and if it was obvious that things weren't working for whatever reason, that's one reason we had to keep the generators going, to keep the batteries charged. And at other times, when the communication or the link from the hill down to the unit was broken for some reason and then we'd have to take the message and then phone through the landline to pass the message onto headquarters and so forth. So we were there just to make sure
- 08:00 that, that supposedly automatic link was always working. And sometimes it did and sometimes it didn't. And sometimes it took at least a couple of us to keep on top of it, where we - if something's gone on that you've got a number of radios out or a number of radios that aren't on the right frequency then it takes a while to actually get the communications by landline and get people to switch to the particular frequency. And then
- 08:30 check that it's working. And if I remember too, there are times when we were actually getting calls from American units as well. I can't remember in what context but I know we had difficulty understanding them. Because it's not always a clear signal and so if you've got a strange accent and on top of poor signal then it does take, at times, a little bit to understand what's actually occurring.
- 09:00 **Any particular words or phrases that you..?**
- No I can't give any examples, no it was just a sort of a recollection if you like.
- Where was your next detachment?**
- Next detachment, after a few days back in the unit, and much to my disappointment I suppose in that I wanted to get out of Nui Dat but I was sent over to 1 Field Squadron at the engineers.
- 09:30 And our job there was to - they had one or two radios and that was only used when part of their squadron was out in the field somewhere so at one point, they had a lot of their bulldozers and graders go out to - a land clearing team. They were bulldozing some scrub, jungle somewhere, and so there would have been another couple of sigs, two or three sigs from 104 who went with them, and then they
- 10:00 were providing the communications back to the headquarters, where I was, so it was at the radio communications but the day to day communications there was operating a switch board. So a switch board operator and I think there were 27 phones, I think from memory on the switch board. Now, that was the first time we'd ever seen a switch board that wasn't part of the training. So for the first little while and when you were there as a sig, "Hang on, I'm here, I've got to get these phone connections,
- 10:30 but I don't really know how these work, but I know the brigadier could be on the other end of the line talking to the OC [Officer Commanding] of the squadron." You're thinking, "Okay, there's some important people talking, no doubt about important things." And that was a little bit of pressure I suppose till you got the hang of it. But after, I think a day or so, I got the hang of it. And there, there were four of us, over there and
- 11:00 what we really liked about there was we didn't have to go to parades and that was one advantage in the way that we operated, when we went to other units even though we were with other units, we were still separate from them. So for example, we were meant to go - you know, at 104, we had a parade in the morning and a parade in the afternoon which you had to go to, there was a rifle inspection to make sure it was clean and in the morning you had your malaria tablet, your Malarone, in the afternoon you had it. But when we were over at
- 11:30 1 Field, then we did our rosters and once we weren't rosters, time was our own. We weren't involved, we didn't have to go to their parades, except on the odd occasion there was special parades, where information was to be given. And in the morning for our tablet - when we'd got out of bed, if we'd been on doggy, as we called, it from about you know, from about one o'clock in the morning through to six, we'd go to bed and when we'd wake up we'd chase up the officer and get our tablet.
- 12:00 So it was much more casual in that sense. The only curious thing was that because we were sigs, it was automatically thought that therefore we knew how our radio worked, or how something else worked, you know, something electronic worked. And we'd have to keep explaining, "No, we're only operators, we're not technicians." But we did get involved with trying to fix TV aerials and that sort of thing, because they had a
- 12:30 TV set there, which was a little bit unusual. They actually had hot showers as well, which was extremely unusual. You know, you think of engineers they've got their expertise, they've got the materials, so they had rigged up a sort of a donkey boiler which was good, you had hot showers. The only way we got hot showers otherwise was to leave the jerry can of water out in the sun all day, and then when we tipped it into the bush shower, at least it wasn't
- 13:00 totally cold. But that was a bit of a luxury over there.

So donkey boiler?

Donkey boiler. That was - I think it was a type of boiler, probably goes back a few years, I don't know whether they still make them. But it was a - well from the ones that we had when I was at school for example there, it was an oil fired one initially they used to put timber into it, you know, so you have a burner which was heating the water which was making the

13:30 just the water pressure then would flow through the system.

What kind of work were you doing which was different from the engineers?

Mainly the switchboard. That's just operating the switchboard.

Anything else?

No, except - well I think the big difference in outlook was, we were under the ground, whereas going from the top of the hill, you were seeing everything, you were hearing the radios, communications

14:00 so you knew what was going on, both from what you could see and what you would hear, to working in an underground bunker which was totally isolating. That took a little bit of getting used to. But I think the other thing we remember was that the officers at 1 Field just seemed to be more human if you like. If that's the right word to use. They just related as a person rather than as officer and soldier. And one example

14:30 early in the piece was that I was on duty and the officer brought us in a soft drink. You know, something as trivial as that. Just sort of gave a different sort of feeling, if you like. And made it quite a pleasant place to work. The other thing, of course was, you know, what do you do at night? There's the canteen, for much of the time it was one can per man, per day. I think that changed, it might have been two, I'm not quite

15:00 sure of the exact figure, but then if you didn't want something you gave your share to somebody else, you know. But there wasn't a great lot so the movies were a big thing, every unit had their movie show. For much of the time I was at 1 Field, their projector was broken until one of the officers came back from R and R [Rest and Recreation] to Sydney and brought a new one back. So we just used to walk around Nui Dat at night, you know, we'd go okay, we'll go to that unit tonight or this unit tomorrow night,

15:30 could be pouring rain. We'd sit there in the pouring rain and watch a movie, which were quite often first release. So we used to enjoy that, but that was something you couldn't do at 104, you couldn't, you know, it would have - it was a no no to walk outside the squadron boundaries at night. So that was another freedom we had. Whether - I'm unsure now, whether the freedom to do that was open to the engineers there, I'm not sure, or maybe it was just us.

16:00 Because we weren't coming into that tight control, we had that choice.

What movies were you watching?

Names aren't coming to me. I can picture some of them. I think it might have been round about the time of Charade, or something like that, there was one with Audrey Hepburn in, I remember.

16:30 No, I really can't remember. You know, first release of '68, anyway, '67. They're the ones that we were watching. And the other thing I think with the movies though, is they used to have packaged American football highlights and I must admit that used to get us in, with packaged highlights, it was. I know a couple of us used to follow the Green Bay Packers, you know so again, you weren't seeing Australian newsreels, you were seeing American stuff.

17:00 But that was it.

Were there any concerts or ..?

Yeah, yeah, well I think I saw one or two concerts while I was there, don't ask me who they were. Except I think the second one I saw, was 'Zig and Zag'. Who I think were from a West Australian group, I think. And then there were a couple of others that I missed out on because I was working. I was on shift.

17:30 But they were great times. I mean, it was about the only time we saw females, for one thing. But it was just good entertainment and it was also entertaining just to look around the crowd and see how people reacting, see how they got there. I mean, I remember the first one I went to, it absolutely struck me that people had arrived in, not just in Land Rovers, but

18:00 graders and bulldozers and you name it, trucks, whatever they were driving at the time of the concert, I think, that's what they turned up in. And at that point, it was extremely - still in a dry season, so extremely dusty but it was great entertainment there, cheering on whatever was going on, on stage.

What kind of things were going on, on stage?

Mainly pop groups, you know, Little Pattie [pop singer], I don't think - no she wasn't there when I was there.

18:30 But you know, that style of the Australian pop singers at the time. They were Australian not American entertainers that I saw. Some - most of them were probably like this, Zig and Zag, who I think were well known, West Australian, maybe not in the eastern states, but then you had other singers who were known nationally. The 'Big Pretzel' [a Go-Go dancer] and so forth and whoever she might have been I've long forgotten, but

19:00 yeah, just the pop stars of the time who, I think to a large degree, volunteered their time or paid expenses or something to get there. So that was real great times.

You mentioned that it was one of the only times you could see women, how did you deal with that, women not being there?

I think you're in many ways, you were so busy that it

19:30 and you didn't expect to see them. So I think that was taken for granted. But opportunities were taken when you went to Vung Tau or somewhere and had the time. Particularly if you did rest and recuperation leave down there which for whatever reason, I never got rostered to go. Or if you were on a detachment down there, so for example two or three others out of radio troop were on a detachment

20:00 on the top of VC Hill, which was a big hill, by its name, overlooking Vung Tau, and they were there for about six weeks, so when they went on, they had a lot of opportunities to go into Vung Tau and see Vung Tau as a town rather than, you know, as the trips that I had down was going to - driving through the town, a little bit of a walk around but mainly at the Badcoe Club. You know, which was the Australian rest place, if you like on the surf beach.

20:30 **Did guys talk about women?**

Oh God, all the time. Yes, in all ways you could name it. Yes. And it was always important. We had a photo of our girlfriends, like I had a photo of Lena up in the bunker when I - on top of Nui Dat Hill and so forth you know, that was very much to the fore. Yeah, like any males together that certainly

21:00 was a topic one way or another.

What kind of things did they say?

Oh, imagination can read that one I think.

With the job with the engineers, what kind of messages were you relaying?

Well, I was only on occasions as far as relaying messages. Well, that wasn't so much relaying I suppose in that the - when the

21:30 land clearing team, for example was out, then we were receiving the radio message and there was always an officer on duty - duty officer in the bunker as well. So if there was any coded message come back, our job would be to decode it and that would be something like about, "We've cleared so much space." I don't remember exactly I don't remember any of the messages at all but I imagine it had something to do, about you know, they've arrived and that they've started clearing or whatever it might be or

22:00 if there's any breakdowns, then there's any further gear sent out, you know, that sort of thing. And then with the switchboard, well that was really just putting plugs in slots so that one telephone connects to another one.

What happened at the end of this..?

At the end of that time I went back to Nui Dat and then I went on R and R to Hong Kong. For a week, I think it was. And after R and R in Hong Kong

22:30 came back to Nui Dat for a few days and that's when I went to - yes that's when I went to, yes, that's when I went to Fire Support Base Gray, which was near a little village called Binh Son which was near Bearcat, which was originally an American base, what would it be? North east of Saigon I suppose, not that far, probably twenty or thirty kilometres, even though it seemed like a hundred

23:00 miles to us, or more. But that, by that time had been taken over by the Thai army and so myself and another sig and a officer, Captain Sprolls, who was a survey corps officer, the three of us went up to - he was the liaison officer with the Thai army and the sig and I, Peter Monare and I, we provided communications then back to Nui Dat.

23:30 And the reason for being there is that the Australian - one of the battalions of Australians was out, but the Thais were out on operation as well. And our job was to plot both groups of soldiers and make sure that they stayed two clicks, two kilometres apart. So you know, we had a map of the area and we plotted the Australians and the Thai position at regular intervals. I imagine every couple of hours, I'm not quite sure, every half a day at least I'd say. To make sure that they weren't

24:00 within two kilometres of each other and that was just for safety so they didn't end up shooting each other. So I think, well Captain Sprolls as we were flying up by helicopter, and that was the great thing

about that particular time, as I said, one thing we all wanted to do, was get up in a helicopter and we wanted to get out of Nui Dat. And so that was the opportunity so there's a couple of things there, particularly flying well, less than tree height

- 24:30 and then coming up above the trees. Helicopters always flew either at ground level or very high. Because they're out of rifle range high up and low down they're moving quickly, relative to any spot on the ground and less chance of a shot getting shot. Although it doesn't always apply as I'll say later. So we flew to - yeah, we flew to Bearcat, we landed at Blackhorse first if I remember,
- 25:00 and then flew to Bearcat. And we stayed overnight there, with the American liaisons, because there was American - well they called them liaison officers, I think in reality they were advisors to the Thais, but that was politically incorrect, even at that time, I think. So they called them liaison officers, but they were there to advise the Thais on tactics and so forth.
- 25:30 And then next day, we flew with the colonel, Colonel Pin, who was the officer commanding the - commanding officer of the Thai Army in Vietnam out to Fire Support Base Gray, and that was a support base that in the centre was an old French planter's house so it had walls, you know, about a foot thick or more. Quite solidly built, tile roof, but around that, then there was a perimeter with
- 26:00 there was a landing pad for helicopters but then there were a number of APCs, no tanks, but fairly heavily armed mobile vehicles. The only place that I saw things called, "dusters," which was really a mobile vehicle but on it were mounted a couple of Bofors guns, which were the anti-aircraft guns used on ships during the Second World War. So they were quite spectacular to watch when they were fired.
- 26:30 And then the Thai soldiers lived in tents and bunkers where their particular vehicle was. Scattered around. But we lived in the - or we set up in the French planter's house. And we're talking about lack of women, while we were there, around lunchtime one day, a helicopter arrives and some
- 27:00 journalists got out and we knew they were journalists. These journalists got out and there was this one person, from a distance, long hair. And I remember racing inside to the others, Captain and the other sigs, saying, "Hey, come out here! There's a woman out here!" And it turned out to be a - I think it was a journalist from the London Times, but he had hair to the shoulders. So that was a bit of a disappointment.

What were your interactions like with the Thai Army?

- 27:30 Yeah, that was, with hindsight, in some ways, a little curious because we didn't really make connection with the Thai soldiers. I mean, Peter or probably only one of us, maybe at times, two of us, because one of us was largely on the radio all the time, so really doing twelve hour shifts. When we walked around, you know, we were nodding, "Hello," and that sort of thing, but no real connection was made and I think it was
- 28:00 probably the language thing, more than anything. But I think probably the other factor is, we were just relatively busy, doing what we were doing. We did within that house, then that's where the Thai headquarters was, and Captain Sproll spent most of his time with you know, Colonel Pin and the other Thai senior officers. But we often, on a number of nights, had dinner with them and so
- 28:30 that was my first experience of Asian food. That was extremely hot, that we used to have to wash down with water, but Captain Sprolls and the Thai staff - Colonel Pin really liked his cognac so he got stuck into the cognac. But there was a Thai officer who used to bring us chocolate quite regularly when Peter and I were on the radio.
- 29:00 But I think one of us ended up insulting him I think. And again, it's from not knowing a culture. And from what we could gather and I think it's true, that to a Thai - to a Buddhist - the head is a sacred. Is a sacred thing and it's my understanding that if a Thai officer wants to really admonish a Thai soldier, which probably equates to a parent
- 29:30 to a child, if they were to touch them on the head, then that's a great insult. And I think being you know, laid back Aussies and a little bit physically taller, that I think one of us in thanking him, sort of touched him on the head, on the back of the head, you know. Aiming for the shoulder, hit the head. And we think that, and it was only with talking to other people at a later date, talking to Captain Sprolls and we weren't getting
- 30:00 chocolate any more, we wondered whether that was the reason. So you know, just not knowing about other, you know other cultures. What we realised and there was no showers or anything there, it was the wet season by then, so when it rains you took the opportunity to have a shower, but we noticed that the Thais never stripped off, they always had a loin cloth of some sort, when they had a shower so you know that's what we ended up doing too. Get a downpour of rain, two o'clock it'd easily
- 30:30 in the tropics, the monsoons, it rained pretty predictably, and when we'd rush out, well we naturally followed their custom and didn't strip right off, as we probably would have done otherwise. But as far as - and I think we were there, seven, ten days, as far as learning anything about the Thai culture to any degree, no.
- 31:00 We probably learnt more about the Americans because there was a group of Americans there who were

the advisers. And so we spent much of our time with the sigs, because they were sigs as well, talking to them or at least some of them were sigs, and what surprised us, was that there was one soldier who came from Guam, who'd never been to mainland United States, but yet he was part of the American Army, you know. That was a... we had a bit of trouble coming to grips with that one, but till you realised that well,

31:30 he did his training in Hawaii and so he fought for the - and Guam has got some connection with the US and so forth. But I think it was the case of just showing how the US Army and still today I think, is a way where those people see the army as a way of getting an advance in life, getting an education, getting some experience and then using that when they get out and I think that probably applied to this bloke.

Were you in any danger at this time?

32:00 Yeah, that's really the only period during the nine months that I was there, that you did feel pretty apprehensive. I mean, I think it was the first night we were there, about twenty rockets and mortars landed around near the perimeter and then seven o'clock in the morning about, then a couple of mortars came through the roof, and some Thai soldiers were seriously injured and one or two of

32:30 them died subsequently. So that was the first time, that I'd experienced anything like that. The three of us were lying side by side, I was in the middle, Peter Monare was there, Captain Sprolls was there, we were lying on our lilos, the mortar goes off in the roof and bits of shrapnel and bits of rubbish came down and it let both their air beds down.

33:00 Mine was okay. And Captain Sprolls got a fine sliver of steel in his leg. Which was no bigger than a pin if that. And he just pulled it out, threw it away, thought no more about it. And an officer came up from the task force, a day or so later and just happened to say, "Oh, I got a bit of steel in my leg and nothing, just tossed it away, it was only a little sliver." He got a rocket for that. "You

33:30 should have reported it." And then we got a - you know, a few weeks later we got a Courier Mail from home, where used to publish the wounded in action and here his name is, down there as wounded in action. Which I think he was - I suspect he was pretty - rather embarrassed about because it was really nothing at all, you know. And during that time, there was another night or early morning where we were rocketed. And

34:00 at that first night, it sort of destroyed our aerial and we had to get that replaced and move it around, so we had to set up the gear again; we couldn't stay in that room because the roof was not the best. So we moved to another place, which still had a hole in the roof and the water came in, but it had high concrete walls around it. And I remember the strangest feeling out, I was lying on the ground in a very thin

34:30 lilo. And a mortar goes off, I yelled out, "Down!" And then I tried to get on the floor. But I was already on the floor. And that was a bit of a strange feeling. And then when further went off, there was a sandbag shelter out on the verandah so we ran out to that and as I dived into that another one went off and it was probably, it was better than cracker night, I mean, it was the most

35:00 spectacular thing, the bright flashes of light. So that was the only time really, I mean, that's pretty minor to what's others have experienced, I mean that's fairly trivial really, although at the time, it's enough to shake you up and be fairly circumspect about what's going on. Particularly when we find that the villages were - there was a village just down the road and

35:30 the villagers were leaving, there'd been an attack during the day - a Thai convoy had come in to deliver some supplies and it was attacked just up the road in the day and there was quite a few killed there and trucks destroyed if I remember. The VC blew up the bridge just down the road. And then the villagers leave and the rumour through the villages from what the Thais had picked up was that there was a "buku buku come." A big, big gun,

36:00 coming so we were on edge and we were expecting something to occur and with the Thai soldiers who were out in the field. Then yes they did have a big contact and I think there were 30 or 40 VC killed so it was fairly big action. But for us, it was just those few mortars and rockets, which was interesting. One of those things you go through but as far as war experience, I mean you can't compare that to

36:30 somebody who's actually been in a fire fight at Long Tan or something like that. I mean, it just doesn't compare. Or an ambush, if you're an infantry platoon out in the scrub, I mean that sort of thing, it just - or even up at Coral and their experience where, you know the fire support base, was overrun, or just about overrun, I mean, you really can't compare it to that.

How did you complete this role of keeping the Thais and the Australians apart, how would you manage that?

Simply

37:00 where - I'm not sure now, whether we contacted the Australians or they contacted us at prearranged times or intervals. But we would be talking to the Thai command and they would give us, through Captain Sprolls, if I remember, none of us could speak Thai, but the Thai officers could speak good English. And it was just a matter of finding out where the grid

- 37:30 references were, putting it on the map, checking where the Australians were and then letting each other know where each other was. So that they could keep the - make sure that the didn't go close and get in danger of firing on each other. So it was just a simple matter of finding out where they were and tracking it on the map. But that meant, but then we had to man the radio, you know, twenty-four - I think it was twenty-four hours a day, so it means we were sitting there for a long
- 38:00 long time. And with only two of us, if you're working through the night then you're sleeping for a fair bit during the day, so it was a matter of reading a book and smoking many cigarettes and filling in the time that way.

What would you think about?

- I'm not really sure. I mean, something I did every day was write to Lena every day. So that always took
- 38:30 a fair bit of time. Although when you read the letters, you'll know, I'll say, "I started well, it's the next day." Or, "It's now a few hours, because I had a few radio problems." So it didn't always flow. But that was a task that filled the - filled a bit of time each day and to be honest, it got - sometimes what I write about today. Because you didn't want - when you're writing home, you didn't want to say things that were going to make things more difficult
- 39:00 for them. So there was things you missed out. Like I never told her that I'd burnt myself, for example. I did tell them about the action at Fire Support Base Gray, though. But there were other things, you know, you just picked and choosed what you said, because you're thinking about well, it's tough enough being at home as it is, let alone if you're saying things that going to make them more worried. But that filled the time - crossword puzzles. There was nothing much else to do.

Tape 8

- 00:31 The interesting story was, in the last week that I was in country before I came home, there was another operation on. And those of us who were going home, we stayed in 104 and the others went out. But Peter Monare, the guy with us, he went back up to Binh Son, up to Fire Support Base Gray [Coral]. And he tells me the story that
- 01:00 he didn't tell the other sig he was with, nor the liaison officer that he'd been there before. So if you picture it, they land in the helicopter and walk off, Colonel Pin who was there, they didn't fly up with him that time, I gather, came down to meet them, the colonel sees Peter and immediately rushes up and greets him like a long lost friend and shakes his hand and whatever else. And apparently the jaws of the other two people are dropping, "How does this guy know this bloke?"
- 01:30 You know. So they were very friendly people. And we were made to feel very welcome there. But it was quite obvious that, as far as tactics go, that they were fairly laissez faire, which used to upset the American advisers., For instance, one afternoon around lunchtime there were some shots fired into the support base. But the Thais didn't
- 02:00 sent out any patrol. They just, "Oh yeah, they've shot us, well let's leave it at that." You know. And it was only when that happened another day, if I remember that the American advisers convinced them that they should send out patrols at night, just to make sure that there weren't any VC coming up close. So they had to be, you know, they were a bit laid back in that sense. But again, we were only, well I was only looking at it from a sig's position.
- 02:30 Not with any real deep knowledge as to the discussion that was actually occurring it was only what we were picking up from the other American sigs that we were talking to. You know, so yeah, so was just a difference in operation, a way of managing things.

Might go back to the R and R time that you spent in Hong Kong.

03:00 How long did you have?

- I think it was five days, I think it was five days. So we flew obviously flew with Pan Am [Pan American World Airways] so it was a commercial - well it was a chartered commercial flight, I suppose you might say. Chartered flight it would have been. To Kai Tak [Hong Kong international airport]. And then to get allocated to a hotel you're actually then taken to a big room somewhere, I suppose it was at the airport I can't remember where, and there were very few Australians, there was only a handful of Australians
- 03:30 amongst all these a hundred or so Americans and they allocated hotels from the highest quality hotel to the lowest quality, by rank. So Australians, I mean it got down to you know, it was getting on and on and on, and we were still sitting there so the - Richard Christensen, who I was with, we says, "Oh, we'll get up with the sergeants." So we got up when they called the sergeants, we thought the Americans wouldn't know the difference
- 04:00 and nobody did quiz us when we got up there with the American sergeants and so we ended up getting the Park Hotel, which was one of the mid range hotels, as I think it still is. So you know, we got reasonable digs, and there was two things to do, you know, there was to see what's about, see what's

there, but also take advantage of the cheap purchases you could get from the navy store. So I bought a

04:30 you know, in those days, there was only reel to reel, big tape recorder with big external speakers, and a camera and a light meter and so on. And I dropped the light meter the day I bought it, you know, I think I paid something like thirty dollars for it, which was in a PX at that time, so it was an expensive light meter, but the attitude you had, say, "I'm here to blow the money I've got." And so I immediately walked across the road from the hotel to a photographic store

05:00 and bought another one. So thought nothing about it. But I posted it home. I took the tape recorder back to Vietnam but I posted the speakers home and they arrived safely, no import duty was charged, so I suppose, because I had my Vietnam address on it that is, the postal address, so I suppose that worked in my favour. But I just kept the tape recorder with the camera in a tin trunk for the rest of the time I was there. So to keep it away from the dust and the moisture and so forth and didn't use it -

05:30 didn't use them till I got home. But we spent the days on the town at night, going from one bar to another.

What were the bars like?

Was only through an alcoholic haze that I sort of remember them, but you know, it was your usual bar with - well different to the bars we have here because, you know, obviously there were prostitutes there and bar girls there and you were expected to buy them a

06:00 drink at some exorbitant price. And we'd met up and as we went around we ended up stumbling on the bar that the British soldiers who were based in Hong Kong so you know, that was interesting, we got talking to them and we'd go to another one. We connected with some Phantom pilots and so we did a few bars with them and that ended up to be a fairly large group on one night and by the end of the night I think I ended up buying myself, I was in a bar I was buying

06:30 this girl some - well in Vietnam, you'd call them Saigon Teas, goodness knows, Hong Kong Teas, or something, but I started to feel as sick as a dog. And when I walked out of the bar, I didn't have a clue where I was. The bar had a little business card type thing, and there was a map and it had where the bar was and where the hotel was and I didn't - then didn't know which way was left and right, so I didn't know how to orient it and I asked a policeman and he

07:00 pointed me in that direction so I've got back to the hotel and I spent the rest of the night heaving my heart up. I was the sickest I've been for ages. And then I came down with a real heavy cold. So that put a bit of a dampener on the process.

What were the girls like, what was the protocol that you went through, buying them a drink and that sort of thing?

As much if you... I think they...

07:30 trying to remember. Whether you went to sit with them or they come to sit with you. Whichever way it was, when they did, you were expected to buy them something, you know, at an exorbitant price and that's how the bar made its money. And whether the girl got a cut, I don't know. And if you wanted to go off with the girl, you did. But I happened not to.

And what did the girls talk to you about, when they came and sat with you?

Well, they're obviously aware of where we're from. I don't really

08:00 remember, what the conversation was. Probably wasn't in a state to remember, I don't think. But it was probably inanities. You know, probably was. Probably was males talking, it was more check the scene if - you might say. I don't - I can't remember really.

Did many of the guys go for the girls?

Oh yes. Yes.

Did the army have any sort of -

08:30 **educational films that they would show?**

Yeah, yeah. We didn't have so much of that, but rather we would have a talking to, and if you're having a medical you'd be asked, "Have you had VD [Venereal Disease] lately?" Or something like that, you know. So yeah, I mean that did - that obviously did go on and a lot of people got venereal disease. And some people stayed there, they didn't come home as soon as they

09:00 had planned to because they had to stay until they'd finished the course of injections or tablets or whatever it was there, to get rid of it. Yeah, so you know, those things went on, but it didn't happen to me, I'd have to say. And I - you know, for a number of reasons, a) I got sick that night and b) in the back of my mind always was that I've made a - I wasn't engaged but that was a commitment that I wasn't going to dishonour,

09:30 you might say. So I saw what was going on and then stood back.

You mentioned you ran into a group of British soldiers, what did you talk to them about?

I think we probably compared notes about their life in Hong Kong and what they were involved in and what we were doing over there, so it was probably at a military level as well as I think a bit of English

- 10:00 Australian banter. No doubt about cricket, or whatever it might have been, so you know that sort of thing. They certainly made us feel welcome at least the night I was there, we were made welcome there, it wasn't as though, "Hey, you're Australians get out of here." Sort of thing. But that was only probably, I don't know how long we were there and it was something that occurred that really besides knowing it occurred, I don't really remember the detail of it. But I
- 10:30 suspect it was about our different lives if you like in the military. Their role there, because in 1967, was the Hong Kong riots and so there were some tensions. And when we arrived at the airport, I think we had a full body search, I think we had - we were strip searched, if I remember, before they'd let us through, just to make sure, understandably, that we weren't
- 11:00 you know, bringing any contraband or weapons or drugs or even, whatever I suppose. But other than that - the other thing in Hong Kong was obviously everywhere you went there were Americans and in the hotel there were a couple of Americans who - there was two sergeants, one African American and one white and they were good friends, it seemed and
- 11:30 I spent a bit of time going around with them both, mainly at night. Or at least start out, you seemed to split off and go in different directions or get left behind. But we, Richard Christensen and I, we took the advantage to do a lot of touring, you know, we did the tour around Hong Kong Island and to the Tiger Balm Gardens and through the new territories and when, I think it was a trip through the new territories, it must have been the trip through the new territories
- 12:00 where you get to the point where a lookout was overlooking communist China. Now, to us, it was, "Okay, we're in Vietnam, fighting the communist, VC and the North Vietnamese are around somewhere." But when we got over there and looking across, "Oh yeah, that's communist China. That's interesting." It was sort of at that level. But the Americans, I remember we were surprised at the reaction of the Americans, it was absolute awe that they were actually looking at the
- 12:30 evil empire, you know, to use Reagan's expression on the Soviet Union. But it was just so much more dramatic to them. And I think that's probably, I mean, they'd grown up through the McCarthy era and so forth and the fear of Communism, and while there was certainly a fear of Communism within Australian society, it certainly wasn't as strong as what it was in the US. So that was interesting perceptions that we had.

13:00 The Phantom pilots that you met up with? Were they Australian?

No, they were American, they were American. And what intrigued us was that you know, when we told them what rank there was, and they were officers, being pilots, I mean, that seemed to make no difference, which was real pleasing. Because we just related you know, as both people from some part of the war in Vietnam who

- 13:30 were here in Hong Kong to escape it and back off for a while. So it was very much a - sort of a camaraderie feeling actually, and again, who they were, goodness knows, but we just met up with them and at the first bar we went to one night and stayed with them for two or three bars and then we lost each other bit by bit.

Did you talk about the politics of the war at all? Or any sort of..?

I don't know that we talked about the politics

- 14:00 with them. I don't recall that. We certainly spoke about it between ourselves back in Nui Dat. Or out on detachment somewhere. And I think the feeling was that, this war's futile. We're wasting our time. Coming from the point of view that we knew that areas would be cleared of VC but then overnight or a few days later they
- 14:30 would be back, you know, so it was trying to push back the tide, you might say. So we were saying that it was, I think my reaction while I was there was, yeah, I supported the war before I went, while I was there, I think I still felt that we should be there. But it's a futile effort. And again, it must have been something I wrote in a letter to Lena
- 15:00 that, you know, the only way I see it is if we're going to cut Vietnam - North Vietnam off because we must have been aware of the equipment coming down the Ho Chi Minh trail and it was that, that would have to be stopped and how do you stop that? And I mean, in our naivety we'd say, "Should be bombed." But we know that doesn't work so that's probably where we were, at that time, it was more talking about the seeming
- 15:30 futility of it. Even though we know, Phuoc Tuy province was largely cleared of VC to a large degree, it was probably pretty successful I think you know, the Australian Army, then as of now, is very professional, it does a - they're good at what they do. But taking the bigger picture, well we know it was like trying to push water up hill. But it was only when I returned

- 16:00 that you know, I really started to get very cynical and was quite negative towards it. So my attitude now is totally different to what it was then. And you've always got to talk about it at two levels. One, the personal level. So you're probably picking up the picture that at a personal level, given that I wasn't - you know, totally threatened or had any real horrible experiences, that it was an interesting time.
- 16:30 On a personal level and you were a different person when you came home, then probably in many ways, I'd say, a better person, from the experience. But you've got to separate that from, should we have been there in the first place? The political issues and my opinion now, is we should never have been there. The country should have been allowed after the French left, to take its course. Where, you know, they should have been allowed to have their elections and then you hear that
- 17:00 and know that we got there on a lie, as the Americans got there on a lie. Where Menzies actually engineered our way there, by telling untruths to parliament and Johnson, President Johnson saying or telling congress that the Tonking incident when an American ship was supposed to be attacked and therefore we should go, well we now know that those things didn't happen. That
- 17:30 makes you question the political reasons for being there. But as - but you don't really think of those things when you're a soldier, to any degree. I think it was in the movie, the one that's set in Somalia, what was that, that came out [Blackhawk Down]? There was a comment by the Eric Bana character that said, "When the first bullet's fired, then you forget the politics, it's just you and your comrades doing
- 18:00 your job." And I think that's probably a good statement. Soldiers - you know, you've got your views, but if you're there in a situation then you've got to do the job that's given you, because if you don't then those with you, may well end up getting killed or wounded or something so you have to do the job. So there's a whole lot of conflicting emotions and beliefs
- 18:30 and views that are tied up with it, that has always been a fairly soul searching thing that you go through to work out what your own position is. And you always then, now I suppose most people do and there would be still people who say, "Yes we should have been there, we did the right thing, blah-blah-blah." And they've got the right to that opinion. But because of that experience you always view current situations
- 19:00 through that prism. So any involvement with Iraq, for me, you're looking at through from past experience. You know, what were the political things of the time are there any parallels to now and so forth. Will it work, getting involved in other campaigns, you know, that might parallel that and so forth?

What is your opinion, given that?

We should never have been there. Quite flatly, I argue that

- 19:30 all the time and haven't changed my opinion. But again, that can be a contentious one too, in the sense that, yes, you can say Saddam Hussein was somebody who shouldn't have been there and to get rid of him's a great thing, but I simply come back to, well if that was the reason, why didn't they say so? If you're going to have politicians sending people to war, then let's be up front and be honest about the reasons for going, that it is on good intelligence
- 20:00 that it hasn't been massaged and if we do go, fine but let's be honest with the people of the country, whose politicians are sending their troops.

Would you draw any comparisons about Australian troops supporting America in Vietnam and supporting American troops in Iraq?

I think there are some parallels, we had [Prime Minister] Harold Holt's - was it - statement about, "All the way with LBJ [Lyndon Baines Johnson - US President during Vietnam War]."

- 20:30 And I think rightly or wrongly, you can draw parallels to the way that Australians has seem to lead up the war to automatically follow without too much real considered - consideration, seem to have followed what the Americans decided. So in some sense there's some parallels. And maybe, sad to say, Americans got bogged down in Vietnam, they appear to be getting
- 21:00 bogged down in Iraq. So maybe there are some parallels there. And I think there's some lessons and there are some people, both Britain, America, here, who are people with influence, are starting to say, "Well let's look at what the process was. Is it a process that was perfect? If not, let's see why things occurred, so it doesn't happen in the future." So yeah, so I must admit I've sort of been fairly upset if you like,
- 21:30 about how things have gone in the last twelve months or so. The converse of that though, I was talking about a friend who was a great American fan when we were at (Balcombe) talking. He still is a great supporter of going there, you know. So we've had some great debates in recent times and we've been through basically the same experience. So you know it comes down to what philosophic, if you like, what positions you take.
- 22:00 And I suppose mine come about partly, not just with experience but then I had the opportunity to study history at uni and going into and reading about what actually occurred historically during the '50s and early '60s and that sort of confirmed my disillusionment. But my - the mate I was talking about, he would also say, he'd became very, even probably more anti Vietnam than I was, once we returned and that was something we just kept to ourselves we didn't join the anti Vietnam movement.

22:30 I didn't go to any moratorium marches, I don't think he did. He might have done. So you know, there's a great lot of debate and personal issues that come to these things.

What lessons do you think that Australian government or army should have learnt from Vietnam? Or that they haven't learnt?

23:00 I think probably, it's a basic one, about simply going into another country and trying to change the political regime is not a smooth process. So one would have thought and I think it comes back to the Americans - that if you were going to go into Iraq as they have, then they should have had, knowing that it's not necessarily going to be smooth, how smooth it is will depend on

23:30 what plans you've got in train, for the peace and - because we know they'd win the war. But it's winning the peace that's the hard thing and that's where it's falling down. And I think because they just didn't put enough effort into it and I think that in a sense, was Vietnam's message, where you just can't bomb a country into submission, it doesn't work. If you've got people fighting for their own country, then their incentive to

24:00 fight is much stronger than anybody who's there invading if you like. Or they're helping the other side. So that we were there helping the South Vietnamese but the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong saw it as their country, they were fighting for their country as I suppose the South Vietnamese fought for theirs too, but I think the strength of the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese came from that feeling, the feeling of nationalism. It's their country

24:30 and similarly you could argue, it's potentially an Iraq. I mean, it's hard to say what's going on there, at the moment and I don't think we really know, but that may have some effect, and there's always hidden agendas that people there have. So you have, you know, obviously you have differences of opinion and particularly as you had against the most obvious to us, was the South Vietnam administration. Where some were on the take, some were corrupt, some were

25:00 you know, there to get the power. And similarly you'll have in a place like Iraq, which is going to make it much more difficult to win the peace so to speak. So yeah, I mean, what I'd like to see is that I think the real parallel between now and then to me is, it seems as though troops have been sent, luckily no Australians were killed this time, by half truths at best, by politicians. Seems to me that if you're going to go

25:30 you're going to take the evidence that's there that you've got and be honest with people. And if the decision then is to go, then fine. If that's the appropriate thing to do. Cos, I'm not a pacifist but you know, I'm just not a real fan of using military might, just for the sake of it.

What was your reaction when you heard about the fall of Saigon?

That was probably,

26:00 I don't know. What would it have been? It was probably just, well the inevitable has happened, I suspect. When was that? It was '75, wasn't it? So yeah, when I came out of the army in '69, I was still very positive, I mean, I can even remember in the boarding house I was living at, I mentioned that I'd met a fellow on the train from Stanthorpe on the way to enlist. And he and I shared a room and I can remember

26:30 as at the time when the My Lai Massacre broke, where we were living in a boarding house, there were a couple of older people but there were some uni students there as well, and I can remember that we were trying to justify that action, to these guys. You know. So that's where we were then. But disillusionment I think was, you know, it was there but because they were soldiers we sort of defended them I suppose, when they can't be defended. And it was only just then that in the

27:00 early '70s I think that as we became a bit more aware of the political situation, of what went on, and I suspect that newspaper reports of what was said at moratoriums, speeches and so forth, allowed to that, because I don't think I actually had an opportunity to study it, formally until after '75. I think it was the late '70s. But that change was coming and by '75, I was very much of the belief, nup, we should never have been there. So it was more the inevitable

27:30 I think that was happening. But there was probably sort of, just trying to think of the right word, but seeing if you were - if you've seen the footage where they were leaving - the Americans were leaving the compound, there were Vietnamese trying to get on the choppers and then when they got out to the aircraft carriers or whatever they just pushed the helicopters over the side because there was no room for them to be on - for the next one to arrive with those escaping and so

28:00 you know, I think that was the thing, you know, ending like that is a pretty disastrous and well, defeat, if you like. To see that footage after all the might and power of the American war machine. You know which must have had a great effect on Americans I'm sure. But I think it was - to a degree it was like an outsider looking in, I mean, I'd never been to Saigon except to the airport,

28:30 didn't really recognise past, didn't relate to it, it'd been six years, it had been out, my attitudes had changed so, you know, it wasn't as though I was - felt defeated myself, if you like. Don't think I felt that. But I really don't recall. I mean, I can remember times, as I say, the day President Kennedy was killed, I

don't really remember hearing about the fall of Saigon. Except you saw the footage on the news and then so many times

29:00 since then on documentaries. So I don't relate it to a particular time, like you can do other events, which might sound a bit strange but I think life had moved on by then too, you know. Labour had come to power and was about to leave power if it hadn't already left power so there'd been changes in government and the issue of conscription had been settled at that time, so from the Australian point of view, I think there was a few things that had been with

29:30 the Labour government, with all its faults, I think it sort of acted as a bit of a brick wall, a watershed, a catharsis if you like. And then it was a new era then, you know, when the Liberals got back into power again.

What was your response when the decision was made by our government to bring the Australian troops home from Vietnam?

I imagine it was one that, yes it should be done. Yes. I mean, when I came home

30:00 we left Nui Dat in the morning, I think at about something like eight o'clock in the morning, ten o'clock that night we're back in Australia and we're back on the ground. And we knew that time was ours, I'd booked a flight to Brisbane the next day. As it happened, unexpectedly, Lena flew up from Melbourne and met us, so we just stayed in a motel overnight but others who just went into Kings Cross, and filled

30:30 in the time. And you'll hear, if you've interviewed others or do interview then no doubt, some will say that they you know, felt ostracised and all that sort of thing. I never felt any of that. And I think for two reasons. One, I just went home to see the parents at Killarney, by that time I was, well I was - took all the time I wanted. You had about I think, seven or eight weeks before you went back to your job, employers were supposed to hold your job,

31:00 well I took that whole time and went to Melbourne and came to Brisbane and organised, you know, getting back in teaching and then the local RSL [returned and Services League] in Killarney actually had a welcome home. And there were two others of us who were over there at the same time. And so we had a welcome home by the town. You know, so that was one thing for us. Even though we were just left stranded, which I really criticise and still do, the way that we were just left at the

31:30 end of the war, you know. You're home, that's it, go home. With no thanks. And because I kept in very close contact with two other blokes who I'd gone - I didn't know them at recruit training, but I met them at corps training, we were at - did our battle efficiency together we were at Enoggera together, we were at Vietnam together, three of us in radio troop, even though we never did an attachment together. And then we kept in touch

32:00 I mean, every week we were together, we'd go down the coast, down the coast one week, up the coast the next week. And so that was our, that was our, if we needed any counselling and adjustments, that was it. You were still talking to people and that was the insulation around us, if you like. So that made it much easier for us. And I think, yes, when the troops were pulled out, by that time we're saying, "Yes, it's pointless."

32:30 Come home. Yeah.

What was it like getting on the plane in Saigon and then so quickly getting off again in Sydney?

Yeah, it did come as a bit of a shock. One of the things was, I suppose the immediate thing was freedom, hey, I can do what I like. I can go when I like. And that actually took a little bit of - even though we were in a job in the army where we

33:00 had a fair bit of flexibility, there were still obviously, restrictions. Very much so. And I found it, in some ways, having to think for yourself totally, you know, I can choose to go here, I can choose to do that, I've got to go and organise my own tea, or whatever, you know. Little trivial things, that sort of thing came to - things weren't done for you any more you had to think for yourself more than probably

33:30 what you did. So I can understand why, there were people who we knew or met or served with, who just loved the army, they tried to go out but they couldn't handle it and went back in, you know. Because of the environment that it is. But just those friends, that was our insulation. And I took no interest, no interest in

34:00 I mean we were very anti military, I think. When we got out, you know, we'd had enough of the army. It works but it works in a funny sort of a way, that you couldn't always see the reasons for decisions and so forth. And I think just that, hang on, the military's not for us but that

34:30 view has softened. I mean, it's not to say that I go and join the army again tomorrow but I think with time you modify your views and then in recent years, where I've had the opportunity to talk to the SSM, the squadron sergeant major who was in control of us while we were over there, who ran a pretty tight ship, very tight ship, and then we're talking to him, he was saying, you know, he had to, his

35:00 one aim in life was to get us home safe. So when you start to talk, and you - now when you're in your

fifties, then when you're talking to him, to a bloke who - he's probably now in his seventies, trying to get his perspective. So he would have been well in his thirties, late thirties maybe even early forties at that time and we were in our -you know, nineteen through to about twenty-three, totally different views of life, you can see where he was coming from.

35:30 And that I think, helps to change your attitude with hindsight and so forth. And so within radio troop then, it was just a - it was nothing to do with any association or anything but a couple of blokes were going to get together about 1998 and they said, "Oh, wonder if others will come?" So we ended up getting together in Brisbane two

36:00 years later, we went to Adelaide, last year we went to Charleville and had the best weekend of our - for a long time. Next year it's Sydney. So and it's just basically those who are in radio troop who want to go in '68, if anybody else wants to go they're welcome and so we've developed that camaraderie and the interesting thing is, we can - we've come from totally different walks of life, we can get together for a weekend and it now, doesn't rely on -

36:30 I mean you've got that common experience in the forty years ago, well thirty-five years ago, but it doesn't rely on that now. I think last year, over four days, if I said more than ten sentences about Vietnam I would have been lucky. Where you've come together, you've got that past experience but now it's, okay what have you been doing this year? You know. What are you going to do next year? It was the present and that's

37:00 why it works I think. If it totally relied on the past, I don't think it would work, because you only can tell the same stories so many times.

What about when you first arrived back and for example when you first saw Lena, in Sydney, did she ask you about your experiences? What did you tell her about Vietnam?

I really don't know. But I suspect that the fact that I wrote to her every day, pretty well, she had a

37:30 good flavour of what was going on. I mean it was something though that I didn't talk about, to people that I didn't know, or even people that I worked with.

Why is that?

I don't really know. I don't really know. I suspect that the anti war movement would have had something to do with it. And you probably thought to yourself, well why tell somebody to get some sort of negative reaction, you know.

38:00 So I suspect there was that element of it, but there was still - I don't know, there's a certain naivety, is the right word? But I can remember, I was at one school in the '80s and it came around about Anzac Day or something like that, and somehow I must have said, or she came to know that I was a returned serviceman, and she looked at me, "How could you be a returned serviceman? You're not old enough."

38:30 And I'm sure what she was thinking of, I wasn't old enough to be in the Second World War. And so we know that Korean people had been largely forgotten until recently, Korean veterans, and I suspect that for some reason, people then don't see somebody who's just a teacher or that time I was a deputy on a staff, was served in Vietnam. I don't know what it is, but they're little mismatches. And I still, I have found in recent times

39:00 with some people, where I'm more likely if it's appropriate, comes up, but I still find some people just back off, are quiet once you say so. But I interpret it, now, maybe I'm reading too much into it but I interpret it as that these people are a little embarrassed because they know that the way that we were treated when we returned you know, we were sort of put on the scrap heap, if you like, if that's

39:30 the right word, and I think there's a certain embarrassment about that, is my assumption.

Do you think that there's a stigma attached to..?

No I don't think there's a stigma, I don't think there's a stigma by any means. Those people you know, who were in the - those who were very much, I know in the anti Vietnam War movement and I think there's an acceptance I think at this stage, yes, there's an acceptance, we each came

40:00 from different backgrounds, different perspectives, we accept that. And maybe we would have, had I been going to uni or something, a student, I might have been out on the streets as well. I don't know. You can't say these things for sure. So no, I don't think there's a stigma. But I think if you remember in the lead up to Iraq, what the tricky bit for the Labour Party was, to argue against the war but support

40:30 the troops. That tricky one and that was very much coming from Vietnam. Where you know, it was an issue while we were over there. We didn't know about the anti Vietnam. They sort of annoyed us a bit, what really annoyed us was when the wharfie strike or the postal strike and so we didn't get our mail and the mail was the all important thing. It was those things that really got us upset more, I think than hearing about that there'd been a moratorium somewhere about -

41:00 demonstration somewhere. It was more, I suppose we had some antipathy towards those who evaded getting called up into National Service in every way. I think there was probably some antipathy against them. Rightly or wrongly. But there certainly was against the unionists who did, you know, pulled the

pin on the - and to the extent that, you know it was round about this time of year there was big posters: "Punch a Postie." On

41:30 RTA, Returned to Australia. I've still got a copy in there. That you know, these pamphlets went round and that was just showing, just what the soldiers felt because the most important thing was the mail.

Tape 9

00:36 **Tell us about that, the 11th (UNCLEAR)**

That occurred after I got back from Binh Song, from Fire Support Base Grey. I think it was only about back of two days, and then we were told, well there were two or three of us teams going out and it was a bit uncertain where we were going, but we ended up going to Blackhorse

01:00 at the last minute which was a rather large US base with airport, helicopter base, Australian Navy pilots were there actually as well attached to an American Navy Unit. But 11th Armoured Cav [Cavalry] as it speaks, it was a Cavalry Regiment, which also worked in Phuoc Tuy Province, well they were in Long Tan Province actually which was the province north of Phuoc Tuy and they worked

01:30 in that area. We were there just as a place to be, so we pitched a tent and put some radios in there, a couple of radios for a Retrans unit, but we were living in a hut with the Americans, sharing that. And I suppose the interesting thing there from an Australian perspective is, it was well and truly in the wet season, very high

02:00 humidity and even though it was only about twenty or so kilometres, north of, maybe thirty kilometres north of Nui Dat and really not on a mountain range, but it was higher and the climate was totally different. It was much wetter, and it was red mud and it was just like glue and you know, every where you went there were duck boards or if there were no duck boards, you just, the red mud just clung to you, which was a bit of a problem. Particularly when I said

02:30 I'd burnt myself and trying to get through the mud and get to the shower and keep the bandages clean, was a bit of an issue but it did work that way. So we had this tent with these two radios, 125 sets which were used for the re-trans. There was Australian troops out who couldn't work directly back to Nui Dat so we theoretically, it worked automatically, they were out in the field and they would

03:00 radio Task Force Headquarters and it should have just gone straight through. So it would have gone through our Retrans unit to Nui Dat Hill to the aerials there, through the bunker, landlines down to the taskforce. The only problem was, is I think largely because of the high humidity that the radios just kept breaking down. In the first three days we were there, I think we went through about three radios that we took up a couple of spares, but then had to get spares sent up.

03:30 Equipment kept collapsing on us. We'd usually have one radio working which meant we had to you know, we could hear the troops out in the field, but then we'd have to change frequencies and then relay a message back down to, back to Nui Dat or something like that. So that became a bit of a problem. Living with the Americans it very much became apparent just their different attitude to equipment. I mean where we had to count,

04:00 account very rigidly for every little thing, it seemed to be that they could get things and not worry about it. For example when we were having this radio problems, we had what was known as eleven by eleven tent, eleven foot by eleven foot which had an internal frame which if you think of modern camping gear, it was probably at the beginning of the modern easy put up camping gear. Where the Americans were still with poles and ropes to hold up their tents.

04:30 So this eleven by eleven tent was a great attraction. So we'd got to know some of the signals of people and for that matter part of the medics, who they were nearby to where we were staying, within 11th ACR [Armoured Cavalry Regiment] and our corporal with us, Bob Parkins, ended up organising for an eleven by eleven tent with a radio. Now the radio would have been worth, I don't know, ten fifteen

05:00 thousand dollars or something, the tent would've been worth a couple of hundred dollars probably. And it wasn't a problem to the Americans. Where Bob I think, had to negotiate pretty hard, and it wasn't an easy, hard to convince the people back in Nui Dat that it was a swap in our favour and that's what went ahead. And the other thing, things Australians wanted, one thing they wanted was an American poncho liner.

05:30 The Americans had these ponchos that go over raincoats, but inside them there was a liner which was a camouflaged nylon cotton filled, warm liner, which looked pretty good and we all wanted one to bring home to stick on the parcel tray of the car. And one night the duty sergeant who we know, when he was on duty just walked through the Q [Quartermaster] store pulling stuff from the shelf, and walked over and gave us them. Now that sort of thing

06:00 could never have happened in an Australian, out of an Australian Q store. It's too rigidly controlled, so again that's just showing the way they, their attitude to equipment. The sad thing while we were there,

there was one close friend who was killed. There was three of us who went up, Dennis Abraham and if you look at the list of those killed in Vietnam, then his is the first, the first name.

- 06:30 And I'd said earlier that one thing all of us wanted to do was to take every opportunity to go up in a helicopter. And it was probably only our second or third night there, we were down at the boozier [bar], the American boozier, and we got talking with some helicopter crew and they said, "We've just had a helicopter serviced, we're taking it up for a test flight tomorrow, and just check the
- 07:00 weapons and whatever, only a short flight. Do you want to come?" And we jumped at the chance until we realised that okay, one of us has got to work. Initially we thought it was Dennis, Dennis Abe as we called him, so he said, "I'll go." And I said, "I'll go." And then we worked out no, I was on shift, it was him. So he went for the flight and didn't return. And what
- 07:30 was, the helicopter was flying low and a lucky shot shot the pilot. And it was so low that the co-pilot didn't have time to take control so it ploughed into a bank. And it was a day or so before they found, before they found it. And so, that really knocked us, because he was a good friend. He and I, he was up the top of Nui Dat Hill with us the second detachment I'd done with him and Bob had,
- 08:00 he waited most of that day and didn't tell just in the hope, oh it's only, you know, landed for some reason somewhere and it'll be back. But it never was and he eventually had to. And he had the job of identifying the body when it was found. Luckily I didn't have to go through that as I initially thought I would. So that really set us back and then
- 08:30 interesting when in the last few years, in fact a couple of Anzac Days ago, after Anzac Day parade in wherever we were having a few drinks and talking to the same Major Munro. Maybe it was that Canberra reunion and we got talking about it, and he said, "You know, he shouldn't have been in that helicopter." Which was right. But as we say, that's a chance we took. We all took every opportunity
- 09:00 to get a flight somewhere. And so, as it happened and I only found out in recent times, there were a couple of other Australians from our unit up there as well, that I'd forgotten about. And after I'd been talking with Abe to the Americans, this other guy had come as well. And again it turned out this other bloke was on duty. So it was Abe who went. Yeah he was the second one. There was one soldier, who I said, who I didn't know was killed
- 09:30 at Coral as well. And so on the website, for 104s website in you know, those names are there as to remember them.

What was your feeling, reaction when you heard the news?

Probably a certain numbness I suppose. Knowing you'd potentially lost a good friend. I think that the other thing, the thing

- 10:00 that used to go through my mind when we were flying from place to place was, the last thing you'd want was to crash, to be alive and get captured. That was the last thing, and that sort of thing fleetingly went through your mind. It was never dwelled on but it certainly went through my mind as something you wouldn't like to have happened. I think that was one of the fears we had, that he was out there injured and may well have been captured, because no doubt once it was shot down,
- 10:30 the VC went and had a look at their handiwork so to speak. But when it was found and the bodies of the pilot and co-pilots and the American crew, and Abe were there, so that was one good thing in a sense, that they were able to retrieve them and go through whatever processes you go through after that. But it's something that it's always remembered every time we get together and it really
- 11:00 sort of starts to hit now, when you think that, well that was now in 1968, what's that, thirty-five years ago and all we've experienced in life, and that's where his life finished. As with so many others. And I often wonder about the parents of these people, particularly when they find that the political situation is not black and white, that there's shades of grey, there's arguments as to whether we should have been there.
- 11:30 And you just wonder, has that made it harder for the parents over the years? I suspect it probably has. But that, Abe was a damn good sig, he was one of these characters, one of these rare characters who was full of life. He was a character. I wasn't with him at the time, but the story's told, that after the Hill, he was on a detachment to
- 12:00 a Vietnamese outpost and the people there were afraid to leave to go down to the market, wherever it was, nearby, to buy things. So he said, "Don't worry." So he grabbed his SLR and led the women out and took them down. So that's the sort of person he was. So there was a great gap. A great gap. But then
- 12:30 we had to continue our jobs till a replacement comes up, and as it was if I recall, his replacement was his best friend. He was a South Australian, I think worked from the railways and it was somebody he knew from South Australia who came up. And in some ways it was probably good for him to come up and get out and do something. But he's somebody I haven't seen since the army so I haven't had the opportunity to catch up with his perceptions.
- 13:00 **What was the American camp like? What was the atmosphere like there?**

It was a big bustling camp with tanks rolling along the ground and APCs as naturally enough for a cavalry regiment, but it was very, it was mainly buildings not tents. It was much more permanent. What got us, if we go to the PX at Nui Dat, that was a little tin shed with

- 13:30 mainly electronic gear, radios and watches and that sort of thing. We went to the PX there it was an absolute supermarket. You'd walk in and you'd have your basket to walk around the shelves and grab the things off the shelf besides your electronic - plenty of groceries and that sort of thing. Which was probably a good thing because their food was shocking. It really was. But I got a great attachment to things called 'beanie weanies' which were
- 14:00 was frankfurter chunks and Lima beans. I mean it sounds shocking but it wasn't too bad. And they used to come with tins, it must've been made for the camping and the bushwalking market in the US but it actually came with their own burner on it. And they were also in the ration packs. And pecan pie was the other thing that I really liked. Never tasted pecan pie before. So that was interesting. The other thing was the environment
- 14:30 there. By that time, then there was what was known as fragging where soldiers, American soldiers who had a grievance with an American officer would either punch him, attack him or throw a grenade in his bunker or whatever, so American soldiers then when on camp, didn't carry weapons. And the only people who had weapons was us. We still had our weapons and those who
- 15:00 were on duty, there were watch towers around the perimeter and they had their weapons while on duty. Nobody else did. And I think, I think I wrote a comment in a letter, and I didn't see it but I heard about it, that there was some fights if you like, some attacks by Negro soldiers or African American soldiers on white officers who thought, who they thought were giving them a hard time. But I didn't see, I never saw anything explicit.
- 15:30 But rather it was obvious hey, nobody's walking around here carrying weapons as we do, but then I said when we were at 1 Field, the Engineer Squadron, when you walked around there, little squadron area, we didn't have to carry our weapons either, but up there it was to do with the fragging and officers who had been shot. So it was quite different. I mean I think while we may have certainly criticised them and did, soldiers do, they'll criticise their senior NCOs and officers,
- 16:00 there was still respect for them. It hadn't deteriorated to the extent that it obviously had in some American Units. So that was different.

The living quarters, how were they set up?

I don't really remember much except that they were large huts much like we had when we were doing recruit training. And at Balcombe for that matter, at Balcombe they were very old Second World War huts.

- 16:30 But these had been built in recent times, so they had beds and not lilos, which was a... we had beds at Nui Dat for that matter too.

I guess I'm talking about, were there evidence of not getting along in the way they lived?

No, no, we didn't see that specifically. Most of our contact with the Americans we got to know, were some of the Sig senior NCOs, the sergeants,

- 17:00 who had an interest in what we were doing. But also, we got to know, there was a medical unit nearby, and they were the ones we had most to do with. So we didn't see any animosity in that sense. But we knew, we just heard if it occurred, I mean it was a large base, I mean it took you probably half an hour, twenty minutes to walk from one end to the other.
- 17:30 So it was probably Nui Dat size or something like it. But we got on quite well with these medics. And they were going out in operations while we were there and they'd come under attack and they were telling us none of them were injured but some of the other, they went out in APCs and their, one of their jobs was going out to Vietnamese villages and doing to medical, a bit like the flying doctor
- 18:00 goes out to remote towns. They were doing that sort of thing for much of the time. Occasionally they were actually in combat. But the thing that struck us was just how little they knew about the world. Admittedly they were younger than what we were, they were, most of them were nineteen or twenty and I suppose we had the advantage where certainly I was a teacher, so I had some sort
- 18:30 of further education. So I've got to give, allow for that. But at the same time though it was the first time it became apparent that the American view of the world is a fairly restricted one, and I think to - largely it still is, to do with their education system and now the nature of their media. And I remember we were having quizzes, a geography quiz and we were asking questions about the United States that they couldn't answer that we could.
- 19:00 "Where's Houston?" for example. Things like that, where's a place where's a river, that type of thing and so that was a little bit surprising to us. Other times we played cards or whatever.

And where'd you go from here?

From there, from Blackhorse went back to Nui Dat and it was while I, time I was back there I did those

liaison officer jobs we used to call them, you know the ones where we went out with the intelligence and the engineers to the tunnels

- 19:30 and so forth. So I was back for, probably back in the unit for maybe two or three weeks and by that time, the end of the, it was early November, time was getting short, I'd actually signed my discharge papers by that time so I knew that I was going home on the 10th of December. But at the same time, from the letters I was writing to Lena, I still, I want to get out, I don't want to stay here for the rest of the time.
- 20:00 And so there was an operation towards the end, they went out to Fire Support Base Lion, just how far that out I was I don't know. But I just kept asking the Squadron sergeant or the Troop sergeant a few times, "Hey can I get out?" They eventually relented and sent us out. It was mainly to help them pack up and come home because I don't think they had any contacts at all while they were out there. But it was interesting though
- 20:30 that when I got out there, they had a fridge for their drinks and it was quite, everything was laid on. I think much to the annoyance of the Brigadier when he came out, I gather. I was told much later, but yeah, the first thing you packed when you went anywhere was your camera. That's the first thing that went in your bag. You always took your camera. To see what you
- 21:00 just in case there was a good shot of something. So that was a quite time, I was there for five nights and about all I did was a couple hours picket duty each night, then helped them pack up and flew back.. By which time it was time to come home.

Did you come across any VC prisoners??

Yeah, very

- 21:30 probably my first or second day. I, where was it? It must've been as we were driving around Nui Dat, we saw some prisoners sitting, I think they were sitting in the back of a vehicle and I think the reaction was, "Oh, is that what they look like?" And they were physically smaller. They were there, hands tied behind their back,
- 22:00 just sitting there very quietly, morosely I suppose. And you thought, are they, are they a threat? It's not as though that you saw a physically large person in uniform that seeing them you know, the way you first saw them was quite different. And over time yes, I mean, yes I saw a few prisoners of one way or another.
- 22:30 That, when we went down and got those the VC sympathisers supposedly, but another time then VC were captured and brought back in and then sent to probably down to the installation down at Ba Ria, the ARVN installation. But not in a position where you were in a position to talk to them, as such. And I think, when we were with the Thais, that they had some as well.
- 23:00 I'm not sure now. No. The memory dims.

But they just seemed so unthreatening to you.

Yes, and that really is one of the great difficulties of that sort of war, is that you largely can't tell who's a civilian and who's, in this case, the Viet Cong. The North Vietnamese I never saw any but I gather they would've been in uniform, but the Viet Cong, no. And that's what makes that sort of a guerrilla war so difficult to fight because you really don't know who you're

- 23:30 fighting. And they don't have to be old people and they don't have to be males, they could equally be women. It could be the person that you see at the shop during the day who's the VC at night. You've no way of knowing. And thinking of the shops, in the times we did go down to Ba Ria, and walking through the shops, you were always welcome because they need the, they knew you'd spend some money, but I remember one time I
- 24:00 put my rifle down to buy something and pay and I put my wallet back in my pocket and walked out. And I got a couple of shops down before I realised, hey I haven't got my rifle. And that was an absolute no-no to lose a rifle. Absolute no-no, quite understandably. And I got back to the shop, and of course it was still there, but you could see that the shop owners, the Vietnamese husband and wife with their little daughter, were
- 24:30 absolutely pleased I was back to get it because the last thing they wanted was a weapon to go missing in their shop, because they would see that then they would come under great pressure as well. So I didn't forget to take it with me in future. Luckily I didn't get too far.

You mentioned earlier you went out with the engineers, did you talk about details of what you saw there or blowing (UNCLEAR)?

- 25:00 A little. Well yes that's right, I mentioned that, the day the company of South Vietnamese was supposed to keep guard for us, but they had enough by lunchtime and went home and left us there. So there was myself, I'm not sure, there was probably another Sig with us, usually went out at least in twos. And our job really was just to provide communications back to task force headquarters. And it was the village of Long Phuoc that had been

25:30 demolished early in the piece, and I think it was a case where what they did when the Australians first went to Nui Dat in those villages that they felt were VC sympathisers, then the village was flattened and it was, those people were moved to enclosures. And up the highway from Nui Dat there were, I've forgotten the names of them but there were a couple of purpose built villages that had barbed wire around and so forth to make them secure.

26:00 I suspect the theory was well if we get those who were sympathetic to the south inside, then the VC are not going to get in because there was, while we were there, there were some village heads who were executed by the VC and so forth. But back to Long Phuoc, I mean the village, the houses had been demolished but there were tunnels going a multiplicity of tunnels, but it had been a couple of years, the undergrowth, you wouldn't call it

26:30 jungle but the vegetation had grown back. And so it was a search for where the entrances of the tunnels were and then the engineers go down and check what was there. They never found anything down there. Then put the charges down and blow them up. And that's where I missed out on a great souvenir is that while I was there, when we arrived and when we went through the, what was the front yard of this house, and I saw there was a lot of pottery around and most of it was broken and there was a perfect cup

27:00 of Vietnamese pottery. And I went to pick that up and an ARVN guy beat me to it. I was most disappointed about that, I thought that'd make a great souvenir.

Did you bring any souvenirs back?

The only sorts of souvenirs I brought back was a poncho liner the Americans gave us, an American jacket that I got from Terry Pfeifer who was the, one of the Americans we got to know,

27:30 so he was open just to give us a jacket. I must've given him, I think I gave him a gigilo, you know just an Australian hat which is easy to lose and say you lost it. Little things like that, 11th Armoured Cav badge, shoulder patch. That's about all, there were too many, and just hundreds of photos.

What kind of photos did you take?

Slides.

28:00 Which looking now, if I look at them now I'm a little disappointed in that I didn't take enough people. I took more of landscape, of machinery and so forth and I didn't take enough photos of the people. I've got some of those I served with, I've got some in the shops down in Ba Ria and so forth, but not as much as I would've, I now would've taken. I would've liked to have taken. And I'm just in the process of eventually

28:30 I just recently got a scanner, I'll scan them all and see if I can't get them on to CD [Compact Disc] because they're starting to deteriorate rapidly I think. So there's mementos that way. I haven't looked at them for probably seven or eight years until just recently, which happened to coincide with when I heard about this. So one didn't trigger the other, it just happened to be a happy coincidence.

There was one thing that was mentioned in our

29:00 **...Vung Tau, what was that place?**

Cape St Jacques was the French name for it. And that was south of Ba Ria and again it seemed like a long long drive but it was probably only about 30kms south. But to get to it, once you left Ba Ria then it was really, as you left Ba Ria then there were paddy fields on either side, but then it largely

29:30 became swamp land. So it was a bit like a peninsula, at the end of an isthmus, that's you know, very low lying and swampy in the wet season in particular. And so that was an interesting drive. It was a bitumen road but very narrow bitumen and just plenty of local traffic whether it be drays getting pulled by water buffalo and the Vietnamese farmer there plodding along with

30:00 whatever he's got on the back, or the Lambrettas, little three wheeled Italian motor scooter type things which used to have little cabins on the back and which if you sat comfortably might sit about four. But they'd have about 11 hanging off. You see photos particularly of India on the trains where they're hanging on the outside of the trains, then on the buses that were on the running, then you'd have people hanging on the outside of buses or

30:30 the outside of trucks. So it was a very, very busy road and as you approached Vung Tau then you were coming, there was water, I suppose rivers or some sort of backwash and the house would just be a house that was on stilts and then it was down into the water. And they'd have some fishing nets and so forth, off the back. And for western noses, then the smell was different

31:00 obviously. Not just because the hygiene wasn't real flash but just different cooking and so forth. Just as you get in any, today in any South East Asian country you might go or India for example. And then in Vung Tau itself then the Australians were set up in one part, the Americans had a complex there. All the supplies used to come through Vung Tau, so that

- 31:30 was a sort of the big stores area. 110 Signals was there. What their, they weren't a force field regiment like 104 was, that is they didn't send people out with, you know, in the same way that we went out. I think theirs was, although at times they did have people out, but I think theirs was more major communication, to Saigon, to Australia and so forth, linking through. I never went to their unit, I really don't know what they
- 32:00 were doing. When we went down, when I went down, it was never on rest and recuperation leave, it was only on a trip. Sometimes the trips, in the early stages when we first arrived, they started to get a practice of just going down on the Sunday for a Sunday swim, sort of get out of the place, but that didn't last too long. I think we had a couple and then they sort of died away. And the other times we went down was largely for a job, where we were escorted, part of an escort.
- 32:30 We were sitting in a land rover with a rifle as part of a convoy to go down. Because the vehicles always travelled in convoy, never went down by themselves.

Who were you escorting?

Just part of a guard if you like, you had people driving vehicles but then you'd have some people who were just there that if anything happened, you were there to use your rifle if you had to. And one, not long before I finished there, I mean one trip down was

- 33:00 the unit was allocated some new land rovers so a few of us went down in the convoy in two or three old land rovers and then we had enough spare drivers who drove the new ones home. And it was chalk and cheese, we had new, they actually didn't rattle and shake and rode the bumps better. Because by that time, over those roads, the vehicles were rapidly deteriorating. And when we went down, then we'd spend the time, when we had free time at the
- 33:30 Peter Badcoe Club which initially was just the club, and they'd have Vietnamese pop groups singing. And they were pretty good actually. I remember writing home saying hey this pop group would do well in Australia. They were good singers, but they were Vietnamese singers. And then in the surf beach, there was a surf beach to have a swim and during the year, they built a swimming pool there, so in the latter part of the time when we went down there was somewhere to swim.
- 34:00 When you were down for the day you really didn't get into the town that much, but there was a couple of times that somehow I got to walk around the town and see who was about. And I remember waiting on the side of the road to get picked up, but what we were doing, why we were there I've long forgotten. And I did on one trip get a trip up to VC Hill so there you got a good over view of Vung Tau itself and could look down on the
- 34:30 what was his name? Good old Kow Kee [Nguyen Van Thieu] who was the President of Vietnam at the time. He had his mansion if you like on the hill. Because traditionally Vung Tau was the resort. It was a resort place where the wealthier Vietnamese and the French went. That was there seaside place. Which was only, it's only about two hours drive today from Saigon. There's a ferry goes from Saigon to Vung Tau today.
- 35:00 Passenger ferry. So that was interesting and of course on top of that hill have large communication towers that the Americans had for their communications.

Better get to telling us about when the war ended for you, what were your feelings, what were you told?

Well the flight home. We knew how it was going to end. We knew that

- 35:30 we were coming home and were out in the street. We knew that there was no welcome home parade, which probably left a bit of a sour taste in the mouth. What I think really gripped with me anyway was that on the plane back, General MacDonald, Commanding officer for all Australians in Vietnam was on the plane, and one might've thought that he'd know that most of us, this was our last, we were certainly coming home from Vietnam so we'd done a job.
- 36:00 For many of us, he would've known we were national service, affectively our last few hours in the army, one could've expected him to say something, get on the PA [Public Address] system and say something. He didn't. All he did was send his NCOs through the plane to give us a rocket for me and the others, for wearing our GP[General Purpose] boots and not our shoes with our dress uniform. That didn't go down real well actually. And then to get home, I mean the fact of seeing Lena
- 36:30 as others did, where they were met by family members, you know that softened the return a bit. But for those who 'what do I do, I'm out in the street, I'll just go to Kings Cross' as much fun as that might've been, then I think it really made, you were left with the feeling okay, you've had your two years, now clear out. There was no, there was no
- 37:00 sort of finish to it, if you like. It was just, you were there in the morning, you were on the street at night. Yes it helped by going, being, seeing Lena and then the next day going home. I mean okay, that was great. But it was only, I think as I said before, the fact that I had these close friends who we kept in touch regularly, that sort of - any things we needed to talk about, we spoke to each other. And obviously in the

37:30 early days, then Vietnam was a topic. We still see each other regularly but it's barely a topic these days. It probably shouldn't be. But that link is there.

Do you have any final words about your service?

I suppose in a summary, it's not something I regret at all at a personal level.

38:00 It really was a great adventure, and the fact that you came home in one piece, both mentally and physically, then that makes that easier to say. But you've always got to separate the personal from the political, and it's the political that you start to run into problems because there's no way I can sit here and justify our involvement. But from a personal point of view it was a great experience, so that

38:30 that's the real conundrum and how you work through that is not easy. And you can't use the fact that it was a good experience for me personally therefore that makes it politically correct. You can't use that argument so that's, you've always got that mental conflict if you like or rational conflict as you try to sort it out in your mind. But at the same time you've really got

39:00 to look at it at two levels, but one can't be used to justify the other necessarily. I think that's about it, I think.

INTERVIEW ENDS