

Australians at War Film Archive

Marvin Musgrave (Vin) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:41 **So, like I said, we're going back to Ormond, is it?**

Ormond I was born in, yes.

So can you tell me about those early days being a kid growing up in Ormond?

Yes, well Ormond was about eight miles from the GPO [General Post Office] but it was like being in the bush really. It was...

01:00 Railway line ran along the eastern border of Ormond, the Frankston-Melbourne railway line and all the other side of it on the east were all market gardens, yeah, they were all great open spaces all over the place and my grandfather and father were horse trainers and we had stables there and it was quite a large area and several blocks. If we went there today there'd be

01:30 probably 20 or 30 houses built there now where the stables used to be, that area. And it was really a lot like being on a farm and naturally we had horses and well they had a cow and chickens and turkeys and ducks and you name it, dogs and cats and so my early years I was surrounded by animals really. But I think I was first put on a horse when I was about three, and so I got a, early acquaintanceship

02:00 with a lot of different animals and there was always something happening and just after I started school, of course World War 11 started. So, that used to be quite interesting for a young boy to follow that and my brothers went off into the services so we'd see them every now and then.

So how many brothers did you have, how many kids in the family?

Oh there were four boys, a girl.

02:30 I was, it was boy, girl, boy, boy and then me. I was eight years after the next eldest boy, I think I was a bit of an accident actually, I was by far the youngest, eldest brother was killed in the air force, he was 21, he was considerably older than me, my sister was next, she's still live, she just celebrated her 80th birthday. My next brother unfortunately

03:00 died when he was 18 months, there was a flu epidemic or something like that and he died. My next youngest brother was eight years older than I was and he ran away when he was 14 and he had five discharge certificates during World War II because they kept catching him and bringing him back home again. He finally got away, he was in the Middle East with the 2/24th Infantry Battalion in the 9th division.

03:30 Then he came home and I'm not sure, I'm still trying to research that, whether they, he was still under-aged then, and they caught him again, but I'm not sure what happened exactly after that, but I'm pretty sure he got back to New Guinea twice with 9th division and by that time he'd turned 18 anyhow so he was, by the time he got to Tarakan he was all right apparently. Then he was, he had quite an interesting war

04:00 for a young fellow like that, and there was my sister. She was a typical elder sister, she used to give me a hard time but that was only to be expected. So they were all my siblings.

So I just, what's the name of the brother who went to war?

Oh in the army?

Yeah.

Roy. He went to Korea later also, he

04:30 missed his education of course, because of war, he used to wander around and do all sorts of things, it really, it ruined his life really it turned out, he was like lots of them when they called for the K Force to

go to Korea, he was one of the first in the queue and he went over and was in the 3rd Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment in Korea. So he was wounded rather badly and he survived that, but it caught up on him, he died in

05:00 his 30s so, some time ago.

And so how old were you when you, you were a young teenager?

Yes I was born in 1934, so when the war started I was about five or six I was about nine or ten when finished.

So can you recall what it was like for the family or what your impressions of Roy were for example?

Oh yes as a young boy I can, I remember

05:30 when he came home we were all up in the front of the house. Everyone used to listen to the radio in those days, pre-television I think it was a better world actually, but so we'd all listen to the radio, we'd be in the lounge room listening to the radio and we heard the back door open because nobody locked their houses in those days at all and clump, clump of boots coming up the passageway and it was Roy coming home from the Middle East. I certainly remember that day. I remember

06:00 we were up in the Dandenongs on a holiday, and one of my aunties appeared from nowhere, and my mother just looked at her face and said, "It's Allan, isn't it?" That was my other brother. And she was coming to tell us that he'd been killed. But Roy, I was king of the kids, Roy brought me home a German helmet which was a very big time in those days, a German helmet, then he went off again and every now and then he'd be back

06:30 depending on what battalion was doing and what he was doing. The only other thing I remember is he brought home a mate, they'd been back from New Guinea, it must have been the first time I suppose, they had a bit of leave and the fellow was called Bill, I apologise to Bill, I can't remember his second name now but he came from Western Australia. So I don't think he could get all the way home on leave so he came down here to Melbourne and I think he spent

07:00 all his leave having a malaria attack in our house, I was incredibly impressed by the effect of this malaria on Bill. No, apart from that it was, we used to have air raid precaution demonstrations and all those sort of things and they, we had trenches dug alongside the school. And we used to do air raid precaution practices and that sort of things. It quietened down after the first couple of years I think, everybody relaxed a little bit,

07:30 as the perceived danger receded.

That's really fascinating, so this was all part of school drill, this is what they had you doing...

In primary school yes, yes. I went to Caulfield South Primary School which wasn't too far away from where I lived. We went on with life pretty normally, played cricket, football and all those things. Sometimes it wasn't what the teachers told us to do, but that was quite, yeah I remember the end of the war, where they gave us the rest

08:00 of the day off. We all marched home down the street screaming out, "We won the war," we didn't know what it was all about of course, but chanting, "We won the war," all the way home.

So you would have been expecting Roy back I guess?

Oh yes, yes. He came home, as I said, he was very unsettled, and used to wander off and come back home again and then within a few years Korea came along and he was off again.

And you lived by the railway line?

08:30 No some distance from the railway line. But the railway line was a big feature, it was down near the football and cricket ground, and we were often down there of course mucking around. But no it was, it was a different sort of life in those days, and nobody was bored, I laugh now when I hear children say, "I'm bored." But we, because of the war, particularly we didn't have many material things and not many toys and what have you

09:00 but we still made a lot of fun. Later on when we got a bit older we had pushbikes which were quite an achievement, we used to ride over to Tooradin from Ormond and go fishing, at the Western Port. I wouldn't like to do it today, I think you'd only go, wouldn't make half a kilometre you'd get run over by a truck or a motorist or something. Oh no, we had lots of fun, we played a lot of sport of course, we had plenty to do.

09:30 In addition I had all the horses and stables and things that there would have been at the stables about, apprentices and stable boys, there were no stable girls in those days or female apprentices, it wasn't on apparently, there would have been about 20 of them, always plenty of people around to watch and muck around with sort of thing, so it was good fun really.

10:00 **So where did you ride the horses?**

We had a fair area around the stable. They used to ride them up every morning at the Caulfield Racecourse, lead them up to train and sometimes they'd take them down North Road, down to North Road beach for swimming. But I wasn't allowed to get involved in that, that was all the work part. But I could ride them around, I had a little pony, well he was really a family pony called Mickey and every,

- 10:30 as I said, every young child was put on his back when he was about three. We had boot stirrups, they're not stirrups, they're carved out of wood, so you can fit a child's foot into them, with shoes on of course and it's harder for them to fall off the horse, to lose the stirrups. So, it helps you when you're that age to get started and we had a huge sandpit area, to me it was something like the Sahara Desert,
- 11:00 to me it was something like the Sahara Desert, it was immense, but you know things are a lot bigger when you are younger, but it's still a pretty good size, it was, bigger than an average, far bigger than average suburban backyard and it had a big wide, big high wooden wall around it and they let the horses in and they'd one at a time sort of roll around in the sand and what have you and relax in the sand. And
- 11:30 we had one horse called Ajax, who was pretty good, pretty good horse and he won a lot of races. And my grandfather had known him, he'd only trained him but he was such a good tempered horse, I was allowed in the sandpit with him, that was quite interesting on occasion, he was quite a character Ajax is. You'd literally play with him he was quite a magnificent horse. Probably why he was a champion, most good race horses have got a very good temperament, that's why they're champions
- 12:00 really. But I used to trot around on Mickey in the sandpit and my grandfather wait until I got started and I'd be sitting there thinking I'm great, I'm very good and my grandfather would, what we call the big house, the main house, the wall ran along the wooden wall of the sandpit and you could overlook it from a window and he'd wait until I completely
- 12:30 thought I was in control of everything and he'd whistle. And Mickey would take off for the window because he liked my grandfather anyhow, but he also thought he'd probably get a bit of carrot, a sugar lump, and first couple of times he did it, Mickey would just take off regardless of the boot stirrups, I'd end up on the sand anyhow, but it was part of the lesson, I'd get up and get back on again, but no it was good fun you know in those days. And I had plenty of mates around the place.
- 13:00 We had a sort of a little gang really and we get all around together and get into trouble together and muck around a bit. So they were good days, really I've got very happy memories of my childhood. Apart from the war of course, but even then you didn't fully realise what it was all about at that age.

We've spoken to some people who were at Caulfield Racecourse, the training, do you remember the

- 13:30 **soldiers coming?**

Yes, they used to march down to see Ajax, they'd come down and I think they were just groups of soldiers to me at that stage, but they, thinking back on it now they were probably company groups. And they'd come down and they'd come through and they'd go on route marches around the area and you'd get a company group appear about every half hour for most of the day sometimes. And they'd pull up and Ajax would be, they'd relax and Ajax would be brought out and

- 14:00 they'd all look at Ajax, and they'd march off again and Ajax would be taken inside, he loved it. He was quite an actor he really did. So yes, so that was, I think the air force were at Caulfield Racecourse for a while too. I just can't remember exactly somebody mentioned it once.

So where was Ajax running, racing during that time?

Oh in Sydney and Melbourne. Melbourne mainly of course we

- 14:30 were based in Melbourne, he won quite a few races in Sydney and he won the Sires Produce Stakes. I think they had them in Sydney both in Melbourne and Sydney they had that race. He won the Futurity [Stakes] which I don't think is raced under that name any more. He ran in weight for age races, he never ran in cups,
- 15:00 because they would have put too much weight on him so, they didn't run him in the cups. So he broke quite a few track records, and he, he won 18 races in a row, which is, I think was the same as Phar Lap and another horse. And he got beaten in the 19th race, it would have, these are metropolitan races, and he he's got I think it's still the world record, for a favourite being
- 15:30 beaten, he was 40-to-one on and he came second, that's all people remember him for, which is quit stupid really, because was, he was one of the greatest horses to race in Australia and I think he had ran about 46, 47 races, I think he won 36, he was only ever misplaced once and he had a bad day and came eighth once but apart from that he was never any lower than third
- 16:00 in any race he ran in, he was quite a horse.

So you would have been racing at Flemington?

Caulfield and Flemington yes in those days, yes. Mooney Valley, but grandfather went back into the 19th century with his horse training. He started off in the country and my great grandfather had a farm and

they're all horsemen from way back

- 16:30 anyhow and so grandfather rode in the Melbourne Cup when he was 16. That was his, that would have been about the 1876 Melbourne cup from memory, he was born in 1860 so, then when he got older and heavier he became a trainer. He won, or he trained the horse that won the Caulfield Cup in 1904, Murmur.
- 17:00 That was owned by the well-known John Wren [Melbourne businessman], but there was a bit of controversy about, my family think that John Wren wasn't such a bad fellow after all, but you know, they had quite an association with him, in fact he got people that they trained horses for and ones they didn't own from the Baillieus, for many, many years, in fact the Baillieus were part owners of Ajax.
- 17:30 I go back quite a way in racing.

Do you recall those people being around in your childhood?

No not really, no I've got an only surviving male cousin I think he's about 80 something now, he's telling me he can remember at the big house, watching my grandfather and John Wren playing billiards, but I was too young for that, I can't remember that at all.

- 18:00 But there's not all that much that I remember, now, but except for a roundabout from the war time and then my grandfather died in '44 and my grandfather wasn't all that healthy at that stage and the stables were closed down, so anyway, it was a shame really. I think one of my grandfather's greatest disappointments in life is that none of his grandsons were interested in horses, you know carrying on.
- 18:30 Frankly I was far too young so I didn't get in the equation at all, but the others, well Allan got killed but prior to enlisting in the air force he hadn't been involved in racing. And Roy of course, as I say he was 14 see. But none of us showed much interest, so it was probably a shame that one, perhaps it could have gone on. But my father died when I was 15 anyhow so, I sort of ran out of people
- 19:00 who knew much about horses.

So you never thought about being a jockey?

Oh no I was too big to be a jockey. You know, I might have been light enough I suppose, when I was very young. Even Roy who was shorter than I was, he was still a bit too heavy for a jockey. But my father was never a jockey, or my uncle, they were always

- 19:30 a bit too big. And Alan for his generation is quite tall, he was about six foot, which is a reasonable size for his generation, in this day and age he'd be about six foot five I suppose, six foot six, something like that, so none of us no we, we liked riding horses we just didn't have any ideas on, anything in the racing game really.

What about high school, your high school days, where did you go to high school?

I went to,

- 20:00 from Caulfield South I went to Gardenvale Central School for years used to have a system of central schools and if you were good you went onto a high school. And I went to Melbourne High School for four years. That's a privilege to be there. I didn't completely understand at the time, but you do later on. And of course lots of my mates,
- 20:30 we went through primary school, then Gardenvale Central School and then onto Melbourne High together. Don't know if you've caught up with some in Gardenvale and somewhat, when you got to Melbourne, but they're lifelong friends now some of those friends. So that was a, so as I said, we didn't properly appreciate it at the time, but they were very good years.

So can you tell me a bit more about those years,

- 21:00 **what it was, were there exceptional teachers there?**

Oh yeah they were brilliant yes, they were very good. The headmaster was Brigadier George Langley, and of course what you must realise is that in those days most of them had been in the services in World War II some of them had been in World War I and World War I. We had one teacher there who had been in the flying corps in World War I

- 21:30 I can remember that much but all the younger ones had been in World War II and there was the very strong cadet corps, we had about 11 hundred boys in what they'd now call what years, nine to 12, we used to call third form to sixth form, and well there would have been 450 to 500 in the cadet corps which was a volunteer organisation, it wasn't compulsory,
- 22:00 it was part of what they called clubs, every Friday afternoon you had two, the last two periods just for clubs and the cadets was just another club, they had photography clubs and biology clubs and stamp clubs and all sorts of clubs, and cadets was just another club. We had an air training course flight there to, and it's still there, might be the only one ever based on a school. So,
- 22:30 there was the cadets, sport was good, we had very strong inter-house competition and very good school

teams in just about every thing on a very wide range of sport, which was good. The, I said the teaching standard was very good, they didn't just teach you, they took a great interest in you all the way though,

- 23:00 old Brigadier George used to stand in front of the school hall and we had three levels in the school so he saw a fair degree of the school population flow past, particularly if we were changing over in between periods and he knew just about everybody, in fact I think he did know everybody, it was unbelievable, he could stand there and watch everything that went past, and yeah, I didn't realise that until my first year at Duntroon
- 23:30 and first year we finally got leave in August, and just about everybody, what you did is you headed back to school mainly to show off and see your friends and what have you and I entered the school up near the river end and there's a huge long corridor and the school hall entrance, assembly entrances down in the middle down where Brigadier Langley's office is.
- 24:00 And I came into the building looking into this long corridor there he was, standing outside the Seymour, standing outside the assembly hall, so I walked along the hall towards him and got up there and said, "Good morning sir, you probably won't remember my name," but he said, "I remember you Musgrave, I know that walk anywhere," that was old George. He was something else, the Vice Principal was Bill Woodfall who had been the Australian
- 24:30 cricket captain of course, and opening batsman. He was also an incredible man, he would, mainly responsible for teaching, sorry not for, for administration not teaching, vice principal and he only took one class a year, there was some requirement to do that I don't know, but
- 25:00 with the lolling around, it started with a maths class in fifth form and I'd failed maths before so not all that, no matter with mathematics and we were wondering who we were going to get for mathematics and in walk Bill, and there was just dead silence, everybody sort of they'd change sheets and shut off and Bill walked up to the lectern put down his notes, looked around us, and everybody sort of thought
- 25:30 he's looking at them, but in fact he's looking at them, in fact he's looking at all of us, but suddenly he'd looking at me and he said, "Musgrave you will pass this year, all of you open your books at page 17," and boy were we off from there, and not only did I pass, but based on what he taught me I passed my first year's maths at Duntroon. But he was quite an incredible fellow, he would appear out at the main entrance of or the school which was up on, a,
- 26:00 if you've seen it at all it's up on a hill, Forest Hill. The school oval's down below in between the school and the railway line and for senior inter-house matches they used to divide the main oval into two halves so there'd be two games going on, one at one end and one at the other. And old Bill would walk out at the main entrance up at the top and stand at the top
- 26:30 of the stairs and look down and the standard of play would go up about 500 per cent. But oh there were others, all the form masters were, in fact they were all a great bunch and they took an interest in you and they talk about having discipline problems in schools these days, it's, there was no mucking about, you did what you were told, we used to still have a bit of fun, get away with a bit every now and again, but there was no corporal punishment
- 27:00 at Melbourne High which there was at schools in those days, but you still didn't stray off the straight and narrow too much, you got sorted out, you got detentions and all sorts of other things, to bring you back again, a great way of doing that. But no it was good, lots of fun, lots of other activities, excursions and all sorts of things. Old George took us down once to, there used to be a
- 27:30 theatre in Toorak Road South Yarra and he had the whole school made, it took about two trips to get the whole school in, but we all marched down Toorak Road to this theatre and the film was called The Oxbow Incident, it was a western of all things. And the basic story was there was a group of drifters passing through an area and they were grabbed by the local vigilantes who accused them of being rustlers and hanged them.
- 28:00 And George showed us and the lesson was prejudice, and you can easily get prejudiced against people you don't know and you don't understand. And so, George took us all down to see The Oxbow Incident and I've never forgotten that. He usually get carried away at assemblies, he'd pound this table which he stood up behind, he'd get excited about something and start pounding the table and to grab out attention, but.
- 28:30 It was very good, and Freddy Brown who's MCC [Melbourne Cricket Club] Team was out here, they played a test series, I forget what year it was, probably about 1950 or '52 I can't remember exactly, either of those two years. Bill Woodford got them along for assembly, we thought that was the greatest thing that had happened for a long time.
- 29:00 Then, Freddy Brown sandbagged [thwarted] George and gave us a half day off and George just had to sit there. They were playing Victoria that day and the game started later in the day so, I think about half the school went to the Victoria MCC match that day. Quite good fun. But no it was a good school, still is of course, always has been.

So when did you decide you were going

29:30 **to have a military career, or did you decide that, and how did that all happen?**

I think it was always in my mind that I would join the army one day, it was probably because of the age I was when World War II was going on. It just, attracted me I suppose, many years later I was required to fill in a psychology course, did a study on officers and one of the questions was,

30:00 "Why did you decide to join the army?" and they posed some alternatives you could select one out of a group of four or five and I think I selected for, for some explained feeling or something like that and that's the closest I've ever got to it. But and of course I was in the cadets, so that was a bit

30:30 of an incentive I suppose. And sort of developed that way I think and then I decided that I'd apply for Duntroon. Korea was going full blast round about, I went to Melbourne High in 1949 and Korea started in 1950 and at one stage I had the idea that I would leave school and join up and

31:00 go to Korea and I thought about it and the alternative was to stay longer and try to go to Duntroon, so I chose the latter, I don't know whether I did the right thing or not, but that's what I went for, and no it was just something I thought I'd always do and I ended up doing it. My mother wanted me to do law. I wish I had now I'd be a lot richer, but my form master wanted me

31:30 to do medicine, I thought that was a bit of a giggle, but he seemed to think I could handle it. Anyhow I ended up going into the army and that was it after Duntroon with George's blessing and form masters' blessings and everybody else's blessings.

So when was that, when did you go into Duntroon?

1953, February 1953.

32:00 And Duntroon in those days was a four year course, if you survived you graduated four years later. The office of cadet school hadn't opened, sorry it had opened just before I went to Duntroon so that was, that was also producing officers. That initially was a six month course and then it went to 12 months.

32:30 **So that, can you explain to me what that four year training was for, that was to turn you, make you into a...?**

To a, an acceptable platoon commander. And you did four years on the military side, physical, personal skills, the first year you're expected to be an efficient well-trained soldier at the end of the first year,

33:00 the second year you were expected to be a section commander. Then at the end of the third year you're expected to be, to know a little bit about how to be a platoon sergeant and at the end of the fourth year you're expected to be, know how to be a platoon commander. It's all based on like Royal Australian [Infantry] training, which I hope still is, it was all based on infantry training with regards to what corps you were going into when you graduated.

33:30 Of course there was a lot more to it than that, there were all sorts of officer-type subjects, military history and things like that and then there was the academic side as well which was quite a significant proportion of the four years, there were three divisions, classes, there was the engineering class, the science class and the arts class. My mathematical prowess I went straight into the arts class, thankfully,

34:00 and we had, we did, or we had to do physics and mathematics in the first year but once we got past that we were out of all that sort of stuff and our main subjects were economics and English, economic geography as well, economic history. We did, subject called, Government

34:30 and Recent Political History, GPH, and that was really the start, I think from memory, the start of politics and government courses in universities. And that was introduced by Professor Sid Hodges, who was our economics professor, and Sid had come from the London School of Economics which was

35:00 interesting to say, they were a fairly radical centre of education, a very good one but they were sort of rebels and revolutionaries from all over the world that attended the London School of Economics, and Sid came from there to the Royal Military College at Duntroon which was quite a change. And it straight, he was one of the most conservative fellows I ever met in my life, he was a classic Brit. And anyhow, he started up this GPH, and

35:30 I'm pretty sure he was the first to do it, it was a very interesting subject, but we only, academics, so we had very good professors and extractors and Professor Brian the English Professor, was renowned all around the country. They didn't really take us seriously much in our first year of physics and mathematics. The professors

36:00 and the teachers on that side, like they just wanted to get rid of us, so we, get into third class and get out of their way and they could go back to the serious stuff of the engineering and science classes but they were also very good to, but they weren't quite as heavy handed with us as they were with the other classes. So we did a lot there.

The political history subject sounds fascinating, given the current, or the recent politics.

36:30 Yeah well it was a very good background for a young army officer, because it carried on later with, you had to study current affairs for the promotion exams and particularly with the build up of communist

ideology around the world you had to understand it if you were going to fight it. And leading into that, not just communism, but we studied lots of ideologies

37:00 and it was a good lead-in for what you had to study, understand later on it was quite good. But no they, we had a fair bit of that academic stuff, the main disappointment was when we finished, we came out with about at the most two or three university credits each. I don't know why that was so. Duntroon was always regarded as something

37:30 weird I think by the universities at the time, they controlled sort of what topics and subjects were taught and what credits were given and that type of thing, that's eased up, of course now they've got the Defence Force Academy now, which I hope is free of the shackles of other universities, I don't know whether it is or not or...

So is what you're saying is you actually deserve more credits?

We did, we did a lot of

38:00 quite solid work on the academic side, you could gauge because when you went on leave, at Christmas leave you went to parties and you ran into people who were university students and we were generally way ahead of them in the subjects we were doing. But we didn't get sort of credit for it at the end result, so, lots of people went on with those credits and did degrees later on, the engineering people were, some of them went straight to what was now RMIT [Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology],

38:30 Now RMIT University in Melbourne and did diplomas, but there was, you couldn't sort of have people for four years at Duntroon and then go for another three years or so at university. Three or four years at university, because the army wanted them once they'd earned a commission so they had to strike a balance. But lots of people completed degrees in one way or another, later on.

So what was the lifestyle like at Duntroon?

39:00 Oh a bit like a military, well a military monastery I suppose, population of Canberra was about 23,000 it was just a great big sheep paddock really, a few buildings scattered around. And a rather bedraggled river running through the middle of it. And Duntroon itself was sort of isolated over to one side, it was completely self-contained, we used to have go out and play sport

39:30 because we used to have to find other people to play sport against, but there was a bit around town, but your first year was, deliberately made fairly hard, mainly in the amount of time you had and the physical activity. After you got fit enough and got used to the physical activity, they still managed to make sure you didn't have much spare time and it was fairly rigid program from the

40:00 time you got up and it was governed with different things that happened throughout the day and then at night, you might have been out in the night if you were, might have been out in the field or something, but more often that not you were in your room studying and it was, tattoo, where you had to be back in your room, that was 10 o'clock at night then it was lights out for everyone at half past ten and then, it was at six thirty in the morning and off you went again so, it was a fairly

40:30 controlled sort of life, it had to be, of course there was a lot to do, but the weekends weren't much different to the days really, the Saturday morning's usually drill. Couple of hours of drill and then we did some company administration, that sort of thing and then sport in the afternoon. Two hours of drill really toned you up for a football game.

Then Saturday night we usually had off, the fourth class cadets weren't allowed to go out for several months until around about August. No sorry, we were allowed to go out after May, that's right, you could out on local leave, but you had to wear uniform, after August leave, when you first went interstate on leave, home again you could wear civilian clothes. So you could get out on a Saturday night, there were two picture theatres in Canberra in those days and there was a pictures at the college as well at the hall there, a picture theatre there as well, which was also used as a lecture theatre. The... Sundays...

Tape 2

00:31 **Go into Canberra to the Blue Moon.**

Oh that's right yes. In Canberra really had two shopping centres I supposed we used to call them. There was Civic and Manuka in Kingston they each had a picture theatre and the only café I remember was the Blue Moon at Civic, if everybody went there at one stage or other. There was a

01:00 theory, there was a nightclub called the Hayden, a mate and I snuck in there once and had a bottle of beer when we were in fourth class, which was terribly risqué behaviour at, we snuck out again as quickly as we could. There were probably about five or six hotels. There was the Hotel Canberra of course which was, that's where all the politicians stayed

01:30 and all the VIPs stayed when they were in town. There were other types of hotels which were more user-friendly, the Ainslie which is still there and there was the Wellington which was sort of down the

bottom of the scale and we used to sneak over there sometimes and it used to be quite funny at times at the Wellington on occasion, particularly when one of the officers turned up to check the place out. There'd be a mass exodus

02:00 out windows and through gardens and all sorts of things, but oh no it was, there wasn't a huge amount of social life in Canberra.

Were you not supposed to be in the pubs?

Oh no we weren't allowed to drink. It was, we were only in our last year they put in a bar, they had an annex to the officers' mess, Duntroon House and in first class

02:30 we were allowed to go there a couple of nights a week, weekends mainly, and have a drink or two. You could never have drink in our rooms of course which, that was frowned upon, some of us did on occasions. But no as people were caught drinking even after the Quarter Bar, it was called, for the cadets first, the senior cadets, even after that was installed towards

03:00 the end of the year, I think we had, several of our class reduced to their ranks in about their last two weeks of their four years for being caught drinking elsewhere or having alcohol in their possession or all sorts of things. So...

So what do you mean they got the sack?

Beg your pardon?

They got the sack?

Oh no, no, they, if you were reduced in the ranks you got reduced in seniority. In some instances not necessarily all the time, but sometimes but and the worst

03:30 aspect of being reduced in the ranks, you were shifted usually from your company to another company, that, the ones later in the year, it had stopped by then, I think I was the first one to be reduced in the ranks and never shifted from the company but I was reduced in the middle of the year, around about August. But the, it was a

04:00 horrible feeling to have to go back into another company, they were sort of the enemy anyhow, the other company, and as a staff cadet, not as a sergeant or a corporal and it gets pretty annoying, it was just the administrative nonsense, having to shift everything for a start. But live in another area, but people did get shifted around for administrative and organisational reasons, with promotions and what have you at the start of a new year. But

04:30 there were a few of us clung in, there was myself and two of my classmates, we spent four years in the same platoon, let alone the same company, so. So that was nice comfortable existence, I left them in the fourth year or during the fourth year. But no there wasn't a huge amount to social life in Canberra, there was a lot of, or comparative amount of social life at the college, they had balls and dances and what have you.

05:00 They had a, in fact they probably had too many, they had an Autumn Ball, a Winter Ball, a Spring Ball and then really a graduation ball was really the Summer Ball and it was the last night after graduation parade. And then they had company dances, recreational dances they were called. The, none of these occasions were much by way of recreation for fourth class, you had to do all the, that's the first year cadets, you had to do all the work setting them up.

05:30 A pain in the neck really, but my company once a year had a woolshed dance, it was a recreational dance and that became quite famous or notorious or both I think, they were good fun the El Alamein Barn Dance was something that people used to fight to get invited to if they weren't in the company. So, they were quite good.

That's what they were called, the El Alamein?

It was the El Alamein.

06:00 But we used to go out of the college, we get special permission and we used to go down to a woolshed down on a farm and down the, couple of miles away and it was, of course if you were off the college premises and you were on private property the owner of the property could have as much alcohol as they wanted to see, they usually have a keg or two, so that was why everybody wanted to get to the El Alamein Barn Dances, but they were quite good fun.

And where would the women come from for these balls and dances?

06:30 Oh well there were some in Canberra, they used to have this horrible thing called the fourth class tennis party, after you'd been there about six weeks or so, something like that. And they had a system, depending on your regimental number, in the corps, your corps number, the fellow who was 100 numbers ahead of you was your

07:00 father and if there was one 100 ahead of him he was your grandfather and so on and the one 100 after you was your son, and when you were in fourth class, your father was the only person, or the

grandfather were the only people allowed to be kind to you. And they'd sort of, it was a good system really, because if somebody was really hurting about something or you know getting a bit twisted about things so, they could always go and see their father or their father would come and see them

07:30 every now and then, it might be different companies, but it was a good system. I don't think it exists any more, it's a bit more confusing now, you'd have mothers and grandmothers and aunts and all sorts of things now, with the way it is, but they've changed the numbers anyhow, the numbering system. But anyhow it was the job of a father to provide a partner for the son for the fourth class tennis party and oh god that was a pain

08:00 in the backside being the son and having this female you didn't know inflicted on you. Although sometimes it was pleasantly surprising for a few, a very few. And also it was a pain in the backside for the father to have to hunt around and find somebody, that was worse in fact, finding one, rather than being presented with one. And that was, they were local girls, some girls came from

08:30 elsewhere, usually Melbourne or Sydney for these sort of thing, particularly Sydney which was a lot closer of course, to Canberra. So, oh they had those sort of functions, and from that a few people ended up in marriage later on from those meetings, but not many, not many. And yeah the fourth class tennis parties...

09:00 **So did you actually play tennis?**

Yeah a few people did, I don't remember playing tennis, but wandering around, I got a bad heel or something at that stage. We used to get knocked around a bit so just with the training, particularly in the early months, till you got used to it. I thought I was fit when I went in there, I was nowhere near fit enough for it. But I think that suited the

09:30 college's purpose because they wanted you a bit distressed and a bit distracted as well as not feeling all that fit at the time and this whole system of, approach of breaking people down and rebuilding them.

You better run us through the physical training and the weapons training.

Well on the military side, yes, the later years it got more sophisticated, you studied tactics and war administration, peace administration,

10:00 military history there were lots of lectures but in fourth class, I guess it was actually virtually recruit training, there was a lot of physical training, and weapon training and field work and field craft and that sort of stuff. The physical training, first of all it was straight out to get us all fit. It was fairly exacting but it was okay.

10:30 After about three months or so we got into boxing training and I don't know whether they lost the syllabus or not but it seemed to go on forever, you'd train week after week and I had a funny nose, every time I got hit in the nose it bled profusely. And I used to spend the evenings washing out gym singlets all the time and this was starting to get a bit, you know annoying after a while but the boxing went

11:00 on and on and in round about June you had the fourth class boxing tournament, everybody in fourth class had to go in the boxing tournament. Most of the bouts consisted of people weaving around and trying to miss hitting each other but eventually bouts were won or lost and they progressed through and somebody won the particular weight titles. The weights from memory were, fourth

11:30 class and the inter-company one which followed at around about July, the inter-company boxing there was, I think it was featherweight, no it was something below light, no there was lightweight, I think that was the lowest weight we had. Lightweight, welterweight, middleweight,

12:00 I think there was light heavyweight and then heavyweight, something, those sort of range or weights. And so in your first year you went through that boxing requirement and then, we did a lot of gymnastics, probably because it was good for us, but I think a lot of it was because our PT [physical training] instructor at the time was Norwegian and he

12:30 was a mad keen gymnast, he was very good. And the physical training staff were all gymnasts, they had to be to become qualified, and then that went on and on and on and I am a terrible gymnast and we had what was known as the awkward squad and I was a foundation member of that and I just come out of being knocked about in both the fourth class and the inter-company boxing,

13:00 and then I spent nearly the rest of the year knocking myself around the gymnasium equipment and falling off parallel bars and these sort of things. So I didn't really enjoy PT in fourth class but you had to put up with it, but certainly you were fit by the end of the year. I used to do a bit of weight lifting, things like that, and you had to do that in your spare time, if you had any spare time, and that

13:30 sort of fed into the sport which we played. Summer sports were mainly cricket and tennis, we had about five cricket teams, there was a lot of tennis played. Cricket we played in the local Canberra competition and we played inter-company, no we didn't play inter-company cricket, from what I can remember. I played a lot of inter-company tennis.

14:00 There was an annual swimming competition, I'm a pretty hopeless swimmer so I didn't get me too involved in that. Then we had football, rugby union was the big army game, had all the classic sort of

appeal, there was a heavy sort of contingent from Queensland and Brisbane and Sydney public schools who were very good rugby union players,

- 14:30 so we had a very strong ruby union team. Australian rules we played in the local Canberra league, we had three teams, first, second and thirds, I think. Rugby had about five or six and they played in the different grades in the local competitions in both those sports. Hockey, we had a couple of hockey teams and they played in the local competitions, as well
- 15:00 as the local stuff, every now and then a sort of a first 18 or the first 15 or what have you would go off and play somewhere else for a while. The rugby people used to go off and play in Sydney, every year, they played the GPS [Great Public Schools], the public school association in, well the premier one in Sydney. I think that was, cut out towards the end of my time there,
- 15:30 because we were winning too much I think. And it was fair enough too, our fellows were pretty good by the time they got to, second class and first class, they has some pretty big school boys of course, playing football but they even played Australian Rules the first year against APS [Australian Public Service] in Melbourne. But that was the only time I remember we ever played down in Melbourne. We played
- 16:00 some games first and second up in Sydney, we went up there and played various clubs and that type of thing.

So when were you doing the other training, the stuff that you'd probably have to use on a battlefield?

Well, we had a sort of a program, it would be PT, weapon training, drill, map reading, we did map reading in Fourth Class, we did an exotic subject, it was

- 16:30 called map reading, photo reading and field sketching, and we actually did one field sketch, which I don't think, most of us mucked up, some people got a pat on the back over it and they didn't bother us for field sketching after that, it was getting a bit out of date I think with air photography and that sort of thing was taking over so, we did, photo interpretation, with the map reading, we used
- 17:00 an incredible number of compass marches and navigation exercise. They'd set you out at night somewhere, jump out of a truck didn't know where you were, middle of winter somewhere out in the bush, then you had to go around in a circuit, reporting, or, find these, they used to have these little tins hidden away, certain grid reference and of course this ended up with people spread all over the place and some people took about a, all the next day
- 17:30 to recover, some people. There was one fellow in our class who invariably ended up at the Mildura Post Office so when we all got back and he was still missing, they just send a vehicle to Mildura Post Office and bring him back. And he was unbelievable, I only ever went out with him once, thank god, we were in pairs, just two, and I said, "You're not going to get us lost this time, I'm going to kill you," he said, "Righto, righto,
- 18:00 okay, we'll get it right," so off we went and we were out, would have been most of the night and we got, we had several check points and we got four or five check points, and suddenly we were lost, we ended up at the Mildura Post Office, we walked in and they said, "Oh John back again," gave us breakfast, rang up, and a vehicle came out and got us, you couldn't beat him, he always ended up at the Mildura Post Office.

What was going on at the Mildura Post Office that was..

Nothing,

- 18:30 nothing, breakfast was all right, in fact I was, I realised I would have gone with him on every occasion. It was far better breakfast than the college. So we did a lot of map reading, we did, a lot of field work, infantry minor tactics, we did a lot of range practices and grenade throwing and bayonet fighting and all the things you do when you're a recruit. Those type of things. Apart from that we
- 19:00 weren't allowed to do in the military career, because we were considered not well trained enough. There was a lot of drill, hell of program work. The place is renowned for its drill of course. And towards the end of our first year there was the 1954 Royal Visit coming up early the next year and we had been chosen to put on the big parade because we were getting our new colours, only, they were
- 19:30 the first new colours the college had got, the ones we had were the original ones, and so that was quite a big parade, big event. And we trained and trained and trained and what happened at the end of each year we went out for three weeks out into the field after you finished your civil exam, academic exams, they would go out for three weeks, it's called camp training.
- 20:00 And it was mainly to practise the senior cadets in you know, controlling and commanding, but we were sort of the ones who had to be controlled and commanded, and we weren't considered fit for that initially, we sort of did a week on our own doing all, lots of map reading, and navigation exercises again and then we got into a series of exercises and we were split up amongst all the classes and actually formed up into platoons and companies but not in your normal
- 20:30 Duntroon administrative company. So when you came back after that, you're pretty hairy after three

weeks in the bush but they immediately started training of course for the preparation for the graduation parade. Which was usually a week and a half after you got back from camp training and in our first year of course, that was used for a run-in for the colours parade which was coming

- 21:00 about two months after that, six or seven weeks after that. And our regimental sergeant major was a fellow called Fango Watson, F Watson, and he's quite a legend in the army and Fango was very keen that we put on the best parade ever seen in the world and whatever Fango wanted he got, so we did a lot of drill, particularly leading up to the end of the year and into the next year.
- 21:30 The, once we'd finished the first six weeks which is solid military training, we then went to one day's military training during the week and the rest was academic. Civil studies but of course you did a lot of, as well as any day of the week you could do PT or drill, fit it into your academic program as well. So,
- 22:00 you did a lot of drill, you did a lot of PT, so, as you went through the college, as your academic level progressed, I mentioned all the straight out field skills building up from recruit to a platoon commander, they also added other subjects, we started doing military history in third class which was second year and then other subjects and then when you got to your last year
- 22:30 or first class, I think we did one academic subject that year, it was GPH I think, that was the only one we did, and all the rest of it military. And by that time, also, you were specialising in what corps you were going into the, I think it's second class, your third year at the end of that you had prior to that put in your preferences
- 23:00 for what corps you wanted to go into and just before the end of the year they announced what corps you were allocated to. And the final year you spent quite a lot of time in your corps groups doing specialist training. Sometimes you went off to army schools and that type of thing. The other thing we did in our last year is we went to, regardless of what corps you were going to, we went to some of the other army schools,
- 23:30 there was the school of artillery the school of military engineering, and two of us were sent to the intelligence centre which was quite hilarious. But it was, you know, gradually took over an emphasis from military, took over from the academic but there was a lot of, sorry you were going to ask a question.

Yeah, well I'm what we need to know now is what corps you were in

- 24:00 **your company we haven't, we don't...**

Well I was a cadet, we had a, when I went in we had a four company structure: A, B, C and D. After we got the new colours, the Queen granted us titles for companies instead of the letters. And they were usually, well they were always named after battles. And my company was El Alamein, B company became El Alamein

- 24:30 Company, the same time they split us from four companies into five. So we had these five named companies, most of B company stayed where they were and became El Alamein Company, and as I said, I was in the same company for four years. And sorry the rest of the question.

Well what corps?

Ah yes the corps, I'm sorry. Well the...

- 25:00 I wanted to go into infantry but I got a bit too clever for myself, I thought I might have been what do they call, do well in the artillery exams and I thought I might have ended up in artillery. The most vacancies were always for infantry but in our year, we had about, five or six more wanting to be in infantry than there were vacancies for. So I thought I'd be smart and I put down intelligence first.
- 25:30 It was the year that they said, that the first time ever in the history of the college there was one vacancy in the intelligence corps, it was the first one ever to go to the intelligence corps and I thought I'll never get that so I put it down first, and infantry second and I put down, trades see, you had to put down electrical or mechanical engineers, list every corps, there was no way I was going to any of those corps, so I put artillery last and anyhow
- 26:00 when the list came out they'd changed it and they'd made two intelligence corps vacancies and I got one of them and I was pretty well shocked by that. And then they softened the blow a bit was the intelligence graduates were going to be seconded to infantry for two years immediately and I thought well that wasn't too bad, can go along with this, so, we did our specialist
- 26:30 training with the infantry, except for one week they sent us down to the school of military intelligence. Which was at Kapooka in those days and so we went down there and spent an interesting week but the rest of the time we did the infantry specialist training. That's when you did more work on mortars and medium machine guns and that sort of thing so you knew about them when you got into an infantry battalion.
- 27:00 **So tell us about the intelligence training.**

Well it was only one week. And strangely enough we started off with photographic interpretation and

we'd been going for about 15 minutes and I lost my whatever it is, vision you need it to read through the instrument to look at the photos, and that caused a bit of a stir so

- 27:30 we knocked off and went and had morning tea and had a thought about that one, and we were still thinking about it when lunch time came up so that was the first half of day one. Then we went through all the organisations and responsibilities and the way they collect, collate and disseminate information all this type of thing, it was pretty interesting stuff, but it was compared to Duntroon it was a pretty relaxed program, we sort of started about 9.30 in the morning and
- 28:00 after an incredibly good breakfast and then we'd knock off for afternoon, for morning tea and for lunch and then the bar was open at lunchtime, we thought it was rather strange, and then, afternoon tea and about four o'clock everybody thought that was enough for one day and we'd go back into the mess then, so it was a pretty good week compared to being a cadet at Duntroon.
- 28:30 So, that was the sum total of my intelligence training because later on before my two years was up, secondment, I applied to transfer to infantry. It wasn't accepted initially but it was, finally, so I never served in the intelligence corps. In fact I was, theoretically I was in the intelligence corps for eight hours. We graduated, and the
- 29:00 ball they had this big ceremony and pinning badges and rank and what on you and you wore the badge of the corps you were going into so, I had intelligence corps badges on my blues and what have you and next morning got dressed to go to breakfast with infantry flashes on, so they were my eight hours in the intelligence corp.

So you did two years of specialist infantry training did you say after you graduated?

- 29:30 Oh no we all graduated, we were seconded for two years and really we pretty annoyed the infantry graduates because they all went to national service training battalions, this was when the first national service system was under way. It was on a far larger scale than the second one and everybody when they graduated, virtually everybody certainly infantry went to national service training battalions for 18 months or two years, as platoon commanders.
- 30:00 It was a good idea, it was to get to know that would be the troops which we would have mobilised for another large scale war, so, it was, in fact in our last year in our, we were given one pip each and sent to national service in May for two weeks, the national service battalions. I was sent to Puckapunyal and that was part of the overall preparation and then after that most of us were posted after all. but the
- 30:30 two intelligence graduates were posted straight to regular infantry battalions. Which made us fairly unpopular with our comrades for a while, but the other chap went to the third battalion in the Royal Australian Regiment and they were up at Enoggera in Queensland. And later that year after 1957 they went to Malaya and I went to the Pacific Island Regiment in
- 31:00 New Guinea, Papua New Guinea and I was there until the next year and then ended up in a national service battalion, back at Puckapunyal in fact.

We just got to get some dates at this point, I'm getting a little bit lost. So what year did you graduate?

1956. 1957 I went to the Pacific Island regiment and then in some stage in 1958, I came back and went to the 20th National Service

- 31:30 Training Battalion in Puckapunyal and I was there for the balance of '58 and '59. And I think I'd probably still be there except they closed down that national service system. So they, had to do something with us so they posted us all out, I was one of the last posted out, because of this hiccup with the transferring from intelligence to infantry. And gained the impression that the intelligence corps
- 32:00 thought that infantry were, the Director of Intelligence, the DMI [Department of Military Intelligence] thought that the Director of Infantry was looking after my records and progress and I think the director of infantry thought the other way, so, there was no progress or interest. So the battalion closing down, the system shutting down, that brought it to a head and to add the confusion, while they were waiting they
- 32:30 detached us to another unit across the road, which was an engineer construction squadron, so I was a lieutenant in the intelligence corps, seconded to infantry detached to engineers. Story getting a bit complicated, but I was having a great old time over there, they made me the OC [Officer Commanding] of the plant troop. I didn't know anything about it but I had a very good sergeant major who did and I just used to drive bulldozers and graders and things around, angle dozers, what have you. It's a...
- 33:00 I had a great... I played with their cricket team too which was, and they had lots of parties, so it was a pretty good time. Eventually that came to an end and the CO [Commanding Officer] was from 20th Battalion was still over at the plant, it was still being closed down and he called me over and said, "I got your posting order. What do you think of it?" And I had a look at it and I was posted as, promoted to a temporary captain and posted as adjutant of the 38th Battalion in Bendigo which was a
- 33:30 reserve battalion, CMF [Citizens' Military Force] battalion. And he said, "What do you think of that?" and I said, "It's getting complicated, isn't it?" and he said, "Yes." And army headquarters was still in

Melbourne at that stage, because they just posted me, there was nothing about being transferred. And so he explained to them that they'd posted an intelligence lieutenant to an infantry captain's posting and did they realise that and they came back the next day and said transfer to the infantry posting to the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment, so off I went.

34:00 And then I got to 2RAR [2nd Royal Australian Regiment] and I was there for... It was Holsworthy in New South Wales that started 1960, middle of 1961, 2RAR went to Malaya, some sort of battle, which annoyed me at the time, because I'd been to New Guinea, I didn't go to Malaya, so I stayed behind

34:30 and 1RAR came back from Malaya and I was in 1RAR.

Okay we covered briefly a lot of ground there, we need to go back. One of the things I'm curious about is in your training, I'm not quite sure how to put the question, but it's to do with what they'd learnt from the Second World War I guess even the First World War

35:00 **too but particularly the Second World War which hadn't been that long ago in terms of training and operations and sort of reality of warfare?**

Well all the war administration and logistics certainly anything we studied in strategic studies all flowed on from World War II and a lot of management practices too which later went onto civilian life.

35:30 From World War II but the tactics, was pretty much Korea, and I think that was a very good thing too because if you could survive training tactics for war in Korea you could survive just about anything. And all around us at Duntroon were all these hills and mountains which were very similar to Korea and we spent a lot of the four years running up and down those mountains. No we didn't enjoy it at the time, but I think

36:00 for infantrymen later on it had quite a benefit. Towards the end of our time, because of the Malaya emergency which had been going since 1948 but we first sent a unit there in 1955, they, because of that, they looked at, what's commonly called jungle warfare and operations in close country,

36:30 was, they looked at that again and they opened the jungle training centre at Canungra and fortunately they hadn't forgotten a lot of the lessons learnt in World War II against the Japanese, and some had been forgotten had to be re-learnt, but that became quite a good area, a developing tactics and doctrine for that, for those type of operations. So we were just getting to that.

37:00 In fact the last, our last year before we did this camp training I mentioned before, that stage within about two months of gradating, we went to Canungra for about three weeks and went through a very interesting course there with, particularly good instructors. Lieutenant colonel he was then, he became a colonel, George Warfe he's a legend in the army. He'd been a commander

37:30 of a commando unit in World War II and also an infantry team and he really put us through our hoops there, he was very good, very good trainer, so we, no we were sort of getting a bit of balance there at that stage.

But tell me about the training, what was it?

At Canungra.

Yeah Canungra, the jungle training.

Well the first thing they got us and everybody got in amongst these trees, what's all this, you know we're used

38:00 to sort of eucalypt type trees, but this was real rain forest they got us into and the whole theme of it was that the jungle was friendly. There was a famous book written in World War II, British author, The Jungle is Neutral. Because earlier in the war the Japanese, the Japanese utilised the jungle and everybody else thought the jungle was impenetrable. You'd go into the jungle and never come out again and all these sort of things you know. So this book was written about the jungle being neutral, both particularly when they were fighting in Burma, and

38:30 George Warfe went one better than that, he's opening gambit to us was the jungle is friendly. And so, a lot of it was how to just extend our normal field craft skills of living in the field which we'd had drummed into us for four years at Duntroon, but this was sort of we're now in a specialised area which is rainforest, which was a bit different, so that was the main emphasis. The tactics all changed, because you haven't got the vision,

39:00 the visual distance you can get in open country and you know sometimes the employment of weapons changes and there's more reliance on rules, which lead up to the start of the contact with the enemy and then lead to the formulation of the tactics you're going to use to deal with a situation but stop everyone getting killed while you're thinking about it, you had these drills, and everybody done something which is things that had been learnt by experience. And the

39:30 Drills will sort of get you out of most trouble that you've sort of got into at short notice. Or if you've got the drop on the enemy it'll give you an advantage straight away, and you can get on with the main job of working out you're going to do with him in a tactical sense. Drills aren't tactics, they're just immediate actions that you out like a, stoppage with a weapon, a stops you from immediate action that you go to

find out what's wrong to get it firing again. So we

40:00 spent most of our time and navigation is different, and in, in rainforest and not fundamentally different but you use different techniques. You, actually you can do it in open country too but usually you just go by bearing and distances but in close country you work out navigational data sheets which give you more information and you have people pacing

40:30 far more carefully than you would elsewhere. People checking your pacing and believe it or not you got to practice pacing to get it right and all these sort of things.

Pacing through a rainforest for distances?

Yes, up and down hills, and across crossing creeks and sort of things you tend to lose track of these sorts of things after a while if you're measuring distances, in close country it's very important. Out in open country you can look around, you can take a bearing, three hilltops

41:00 and get a cross-section, you know where you are, but you can't in close country.

What about communication between the you know the men when they're sort of out in the jungle?

Oh the contact, well the field signals, yeah, well they're different yet again, because you don't want to make too much noise no matter where you are but in the rainforest of course it's preferable that you don't make any noise at all. The CTs,

41:30 the Communist Terrorists in Malaya, could smell cigarette smoke from a long way away. They can smell having cream and all those sort of things, so if they're that sensitive, you can imagine, they're pretty sensitive to sound. And so were the VC [Viet Cong] and the NVA [North Vietnamese Army] in Vietnam, some where, some were absolutely idiots, but some were reasonably sensitive to these things. So you certainly don't want to make any noise at all so that's when field signals come into it.

Tape 3

00:32 **So at the end of the four years at Duntroon you were a, you were commissioned?**

That's correct, yes, yes.

So what rank?

Lieutenant.

So what was next once you had graduated?

I was posted to the Pacific Islands Regiment. I went to Port Moresby first to where their main barracks was, Tirana Barracks. I was allocated to one platoon A company which was easy to remember,

01:00 so that was a good start and off I went from there and we were there at the main barracks for about three months or so then we went to an out station at Manus Island actually it was a little island at the tip of Manus Island called Los Negros Island but everybody referred to it as Manus and there was a small navy base there and a small air force unit there, an airfield.

01:30 We had a rifle company there and we were supposed to be there to protect them. And we also did patrols on the main island that type of thing. So, I was there for a few, several months and then unfortunately I got called back, there weren't too many officers in the battalion in those days in the regiment, a lot the platoon commanders were warrant officers, that wasn't a good or a bad thing, it was, it worked

02:00 quite well. but I was called back because they needed somebody to be the company commander of the administration company at the main barracks. And I unfortunately scored that as a lieutenant, which I thought was a bit much. I'd have happily stayed as a, as a platoon commander, I spent a couple of interesting months as, acting OC of

02:30 what they called command administration company and about 193 or us and I was the only one that could read and write English, so that was in a way anyhow, so, that was a bit of a challenge administratively, but we got by. Troops were very good of course, and the, excellent troops once you got to know them.

So these were all local?

These are indigenous troops, yes, Pacific Islanders. Yes the first platoon of course was

03:00 interesting to get to know but once they accepted you it was a magnificent relationship. So, then I escaped from that and the meantime my company had come back to the main barracks, and it was decided to send a composite platoon from my company and the other company was it the barracks, D Company to Canungra for six weeks. They sit

03:30 individual NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] a couple of times before but it was the first time they'd sent a platoon so, I got the job as platoon commander. So we went off to Canungra the year before so I was back again and I, that was a very good trip too.

Can I just stop you there. Manus Island that sounds quite fascinating, you said it, you well accepted, what did it take to gain acceptance there amongst the indigenous troops?

We had, like any troops we had

04:00 to know what we were doing you had to have the knowledge and you had to not sort of go over the top applying the knowledge don't over do things and once that they knew that you knew your job and that you were reasonably trustworthy, they'd be ready all the way. It's not just Pacific Islands is it, it applies to any troops. It applies to Australian, Vietnamese, whatever.

You said you were defending the island

04:30 **from what?**

Nothing we fervently hoped. It was just having a presence there of a rifle company, to, if necessary to support the navy and the air force, there was not threat at all whatsoever. They told there were still some loose Japanese running around Manus Island but we never ever saw any signs of them at all. There were rumours and

05:00 the locals used to talk about every now and again. But it had been a fairly important area during World War II, there was, suitable Japanese base there and then and a, very large American presence there, I'd say taken off the Japanese installations and buildings and the squadron leader at, in charge

05:30 of the air force detachment, unit there had heard somewhere there was an oil tank far in the area, but nobody could find it, and he chewed the ear of our company commander and promptly gave me the job of going to look for it and we thrashed around the bush for a couple of days we found it, it was quite interesting, there were about seven huge oil installations there, pipes and what have you so we mapped it all and plotted it all, and handed it back, I don't know what became with it though.

06:00 **And that was an...**

American installations from World War II. There was, wreckage everywhere all over the place and at the end of the war, just loaded landing barges up full of equipment and vehicles and just towed them out and sunk them in shallow water, and some places they push vehicles out of the water, and then moved other vehicles over them sort of continued

06:30 building on out to see for some reason, incredible.

So that was pretty much your first experience of leading men I guess.

Yes it was.

And how well do you think you fared with that first shot at a?

Oh I think I did all right. The main thing was the, not the main thing but one of the things was the language requirement because some of them, a few of them could speak English but most of them only spoke pidgin English.

07:00 Neo-Melanesian it's called these days, get more sophisticated. We were supposed to take lessons from the Battalion Education Officer, but you were always too busy, so you, sort of picked it up on the job. And I was, first patrol out I was just sort of waking up in the morning and thinking about what was happening that next day and get things moving. I suddenly realised

07:30 That I was thinking in pidgin English, not in English. But I reckon I got a grip on it by that stage. So we were away but the, you had to communicate with them, and the only one that could do that with the pidgin's, as quickly as you could. The, you had to be there, all the time virtually that's not too difficult in a barrack situation, we're only 20 metres

08:00 away at nut point which was out base at Mount Manus and pretty much everybody was looking in each other's pockets you know, so you would have them confidently during the day and some in the night if you were a duty or an orderly officer or something like that. We all used to go fishing and hunting together too. That was good fun, we used to bomb fish which was highly illegal but we still did it, it was, it became quite an art after a while, you wouldn't think

08:30 bombing fish was too scientific but it is.

Well tell us about that science please?

Well there were different types of fish, there'd be, there's a fish if you throw something, a bit like a mullet, if you throw something in the water it'll go straight away from it, so if you throw a rock in the water and throw the grenade the other way. And there were others that, will turn in and concentrate on anything you throw in the water, so corowa, I think were the first ones and along the second

- 09:00 ones from memory, something like that. So what you do, the old grenade we had, you could screw the two of them together at the base plate and where the fuse went I, you take the cap of and screw them together, so you knew there were a lot of them going to gather around so you'd throw two grenades near them, you'd get quite a good collection of them. So, we used to do that, we went crocodile shooting, crocodiles are a lot harder to shoot than lots
- 09:30 of people think. I stopped after a while couldn't see much, much gain in it really, and I, crocodiles were well ahead, one jumped over us once, so, over the top of the canoe and under a sandbank and he, he took off over the top and that made me concentrate on fishing again for a couple of days after that, forget crocodiles, they're very, very commendable creatures crocodiles.
- 10:00 I think the main thing we should do with them is leave them alone. But there were a lot of them around of course. Probably more now they've stopped shooting them in New Guinea as well as here. So there was that and we used to go along the reefs and checking things and spear fishing and all that sort of stuff, so, I didn't get into swimming too much, I didn't like the look of some of the things we saw in the water,
- 10:30 but it was fascinating. But we spent a lot of time in canoes. We had a pinnacle, which when the adjutant came up to visit us, I took him out in it fishing and we ran into a storm and just got back and it literally sank as we tied up, so I don't think it ever sailed again that pinnacle so that was the end of that one. So there were all sorts of things we did and as I said, we were living with our troops pretty much all the time.
- 11:00 And once they accepted you, the answer to anything at all that bothered them, you were the answer, it didn't matter you could be, sitting on a chair outside the officers hut having a beer at ten o'clock at night and suddenly this had would come out of the bushes and tug at you and it'd be somebody with a problem, I want to talk about something so you had to be available 24 hours a day really, but they were good troops, excellent troops.
- 11:30 **And how well looked after do you think they were just in terms of pay and supply and?**
- By the standards of the country at the time and the society at the time they were regarded pretty much as an elite really. They were comparatively well paid, and in fact as well paid as anybody. It was controlled, it was pretty, you can imagine the policy for that would have come down through the administration.
- 12:00 And the Australian of Papua New Guinea, of what I saw it did a very good job, so they were well paid, they were well fed, some of the food was interesting, but if you were an orderly officer and present when the meals were being served, and that sort of thing, if you went on patrol you all pretty much ate the same sort of stuff. They, they had
- 12:30 considerable amount of prestige, they were more highly thought of throughout the populous than the police. Which was good in one way but unfortunate in one way it caused a little bit of unnecessary rivalry on occasion. But they, they had a pretty good life if you could be a PIR [Pacific Island Regiment] soldier, pretty good life.
- And how would that rivalry between the police and the soldiers**
- 13:00 **display itself?**
- Oh there's be a bit of an altercation every now and then, Port Moresby I suppose was typical of just like any garrison, town anywhere in the world. You have the troops on leave, when they weren't on duty, particularly the weekends or something like that and some of the police might get a bit more officious, this was before, of course, Pacific Islanders were permitted to drink.
- 13:30 The whole place was totally teetotal as far as they were concerned, but there were still ways of getting into trouble, women and things like that, and the police might overreact on occasion. So, that, the police generally were pretty good, they used to play us in sport that sort of thing, but no they weren't too bad. But the standard of leadership in the police I don't think
- 14:00 was up to that in the army, which you probably expect I suppose. But no they were okay, they. Port Moresby wasn't none of the towns at that stage were plagued with the problems they have today, as I say there was not drink, well there was no drink and they didn't have the numbers of people from the other areas, from other provinces coming in and hanging around town and getting into trouble,
- 14:30 there were some groups, we had, the first year I was there we had some riots, once again it appeared to be a leave, a weekend leave incident related to female or females and a particular tribe of people called Carimans. They were Papuans,
- 15:00 Carimans, from memory I think they came from fairly close hand of Port Moresby, I don't think they came from there precisely, but they had quite a number in Port Moresby in the native section in Hanoi Bata, and there was a bit of trouble there on a Saturday night, it was developed, sorry a Friday night it started, but it got really big on a Saturday night because the Carimans got all organised
- 15:30 and they found one or two of our fellows in small groups around the place, well they'd have to be small groups, wouldn't they one or two of them, so they'd, they'd have at them and we took a few casualties,

and it was my luck I was orderly officer that weekend, so, police contacted me and we, had an interesting weekend trying to sort it out and we thought we'd got it under control,

- 16:00 Sunday morning I was marching them all down to church parade and they all kept marching instead of turning right towards the church, they just kept going into town to beat up Carimans. And there weren't many of us around and another officer came out from the mess and we couldn't stop them, the main group of officers had married quarters on the way it was, there was another barracks on the way into Port Moresby. They, we couldn't really stop them, it was quite a dust up for a few hours really,
- 16:30 all you could was take their belts off them, they had these leather belts, bit like boy scout belt with a big heavy metal badge and if you wrapped that around your wrist that's a pretty nasty sort of weapon, so I had a huge armful of them and I came around a corner of a building and someone threw a rock, he didn't throw it at me he threw it at a duck I think, one of the Cariman's ducks or something I don't know but the duck got away fortunately, the rock ricocheted and got me and fortunately it got me right where my belt was the brass on the belt, brass.
- 17:00 So it didn't do much damage, but it winded me, and for the rest of that particular riot or whatever it was, the fellow who threw the rock became my belt bearer, he just followed me around, I just get another belt and handed it to him so there was nothing vicious or savage about it, they were, they were just going to, get it back on the Carimans that was all. But we rounded them, there were a few missing after the first night but we finally
- 17:30 rounded them up and we had a, a regimental police sergeant, it was Sergeant Perry, he'd won a military medal in World War II. And Arnie was a very good soldier he was a very brave fellow he had some spiritual connections, he was on the tribal side of it and he, not even the Carimans would have a go at him and he went into large groups and rounded up and then I'd come along in a
- 18:00 truck and he'd hand them over to me so we got them all back eventually. Then unfortunately they went in and started the second riot and we got them all back again and then I think rather foolishly it was decided to hold a court case about it all, magistrates court and sort it all out and I really think they should have just forgotten it, but the police had been upset at a couple of stages,
- 18:30 they'd thrown a police vehicle into a ditch and a few other things, somebody in administration obviously got a bit concerned about it and decided they'd put their foot down and teach everybody a lesson and they foolishly held the magistrates court out at our barracks, and they literally passed everybody through the court, both the companies that were in the barracks were involved. And that was stupid and then they,
- 19:00 apparently found enough evidence to, implicate one of our soldiers out of all these dozens that passed through and they stupidly marched him out towards the police vehicle, the P and C police, that started what probably some people would call a mutiny. Because they just and they were all lined up outside, the company, three ranks companies, five companies and so they just charged into the court, the court was held in the house low to,
- 19:30 the church which had low walls around it and a thatched roof, so they just all burst into the house low to and broke the court up and once, I was the only officer with the company at that stage, and there wasn't much you could do about it, to stop them, there were a couple of ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] reporters inside there and I managed to grab them, they were quite safe really because they wouldn't hit you,
- 20:00 they wouldn't touch an officer and once I'd got my arms around these two reporters they wouldn't hit them either so I managed to get them out and they thanked us the next day by reporting in the media that all the Pacific Island officers were cowards or something, I never caught up with them again, I wish I had. But that was my first experience with the media, so, anyhow as a result of that there was a
- 20:30 bit of a fray and it ended up in a supreme court case which you know is a great waste of time and money as far as I'm concerned, but I was on leave in Australia when they were getting ready for the supreme court case and I was called back early from leave which is a good old nuisance seeing as it was my honeymoon, but back I went, short notice at great haste, and sat around for two weeks doing nothing.
- 21:00 That's pretty normal I suppose. And so I had the court case and they managed to convict three or four fellows, and they were gaoled, one of them was my Lance Corporals, it was a shame he was a good soldier and there was no need to gaol him, that finished him in the army though unfortunately. I even, I got a lot of them off in fact because I was able to name them, to say that they helped me
- 21:30 they were over there doing this that and the other and which was more than the police could do there were two big semi trailers sitting there, sitting there to attention and no officers sitting around so one stage I commandeered them and set them to work and it was a bit of a muck up all round really, but however these things happen.

So that court case was held?

No in Port Moresby, yes. New Guinea Supreme Court,

22:00 it became quite a production the army flew up people, flew up legal people from Brisbane and Northern Command - we belong to Northern Command in those days - and it was, it went on for quite a while.

Now you said there was a honeymoon in the middle there, softly, so, when did you meet your wife, this is just so we get a sense of?

Just before I left school. Another fellow

22:30 who followed me to Duntroon two years after me, he introduced me to her at a railway station or a tram stop or somewhere I think it was, I just can't remember, so I knew her before I went to Duntroon and we kept up some sort of a relationship while I was at Duntroon and see we got engaged on graduation night and then I was off to New Guinea straight after that, so, I planned a

23:00 head a bit and got clearance for leave after I'd been there 12 months and came back and got married, and the night before the wedding I got separated from the bucks party somehow or other, I always have this luck and I got back home to my mother's place and there was no one else there and there was a knock on the door and I thought here's someone or other, and it was a military police corporal looking for me and

23:30 he said 'you got to go back to New Guinea,' and I said, 'What, right now, I'm getting married tomorrow,' and he said well you better ring the Captain. Stuart, Stuey Bendall, was a long-serving officer and he'd caught us up in (UNCLEAR). Ended up as a colonel. He was a very experienced, wise fellow, and so I contacted him. In fact I think I went in and saw him. I can't remember time was getting very short and explain everything. And he said, 'Oh we'll have to do something like this.' He said,

24:00 'Now listen, can you give me your itinerary of where you're going after the wedding?' And I said, 'Yeah, so-and-so,' gave it all to him. He said, 'Right off you go, I'll stall them for as long as I can.' And he held them off for about a week, but finally a couple of Tasmanian detectives caught up with me in Hobart, so. We had to cut the last week of the honeymoon and we came back to Melbourne and I went back to New Guinea, it was quite ironic really, because later on I was posted to Tasmania for two and a half years anyhow.

24:30 So, but I didn't know that at the time. So they had the court case and things went on for a while and after, a bit after that I was re posted to 20 NS training team at Puckapunyal where I'd spent a fortnight when I was in first class two years before that when I was still a cadet. And I was there for, just under two years.

25:00 I had three, they used to have three intakes a year of these trainees. And I had three intakes, or two and a half intakes as a platoon commander, and then I had, the last year three intakes as a company admin [administration] officer, company 2IC [Second in Command] and sort of did all the administration for the company commander. And then they closed it down, fortunately, so I was...

Fortunately

25:30 There was still all this business of being in the intelligence corps or the infantry corps and that came to a head and I was, transferred to infantry and went to the 2nd Battalion Royal Australian Regiment.

So just to give the time line thing, you were how long in New Guinea?

Oh about 16 months something like that.

And then it was Puckapunyal for about two...

Yep, 18, 20 months.

Was there anything, before

26:00 **we move on is there anything about the time in New Guinea and Manus Island that might be worth discussing here?**

Not all that much. Patrolling's pretty limited, the island is only about 70 miles in length, a bit over 100 kilometres. You can still get lost there, I got lost on my first patrol, so, mainly we were using old maps and they weren't all that accurate and the only other thing we had to go by were previous

26:30 patrol reports, which were kept on a file and we found it at least one individual had conducted his patrol by going a few miles out of site of the company barracks and camping there and then coming back and fabricated, this was long before my time, but this was all we had to go on, and they'd fabricate these reports and

27:00 so if you relied on wonky maps and wonky reports, you were sure to get into trouble or you could get into trouble. Plus we had a new radio set which I thought I knew all about, but I didn't know the system for aerials for it, and we went off the air for about three days which upset the company commander no end. But he was a pretty understanding type of person. So when we got everything sorted out,

27:30 I had to hire some canoes at one stage to get across a fair expanse of water which suddenly appeared, I knew it was coming, but to get where we wanted to go to we had to cross it, so, that wasn't part of the original plan, so I hired the canoes and off we went. We carried, or I carried, they had these shilling

pieces with the hole punched in the middle which was the currency at the time and I carried this incredible heavy bag full of them and you

28:00 paid for your food as you went around and anything else including hiring canoes, so, we sorted that out and got back and I think I only did an extra weeks orderly's office for that one, something like that. Pretty understanding company commander but no Manus was interesting. The big Japanese base there, a bit of a hobby when we had a bit of spare time, myself and another platoon commander

28:30 had become a very good friend of mine, and in fact he came up, and in fact him as the 2IC of the company, we used to spend out spare time looking, there was supposed to be a Japanese hospital somewhere dug into the cliffs, and tunnels and what have you. And we searched and searched and searched but we never found it. So we did things like that, but the navy was,

29:00 well they were typical navy, there was a party nearly every second night. And they used to look after us pretty well, and we played sport, or I played sport with the navy the NOIC, the Naval Officer In Command was a captain and about his first sentence to me was, "My boy you must play with the stokers," now they're broken up into all these watches, whatever they're called and so

29:30 I ended up with the stokers playing cricket and softball and all sorts of things that was okay. But the navy and the air force in my experience tend not to get on, there's no huge deal in it, but it was little niggle between them I think, they don't get on very well together. And the army often

30:00 is the meat in the sandwich and we certainly were, the navy would throw a party and invite us but wouldn't invite the air force. the air force would hear about this so they'd throw a party and invite us and wouldn't invite the navy and it just gets a bit wearing after a while, it was a relief to get out on patrol really. It was..

You could sweat it out?

Yes. And of course, by way of returning hospitality we'd have to throw a party for both the navy and the air force, and there were three of

30:30 us and it did get very wearing after a while.

And did you find that, even in Vietnam, was that?

No I was way out of our system in Vietnam so I can't say I can do a hints of it during training in Australia from time to time, but I didn't really get, I always got on very well with both the other services actually. They navy especially,

31:00 the patrol boats up in Cairns used to come down to Townsville every now and then, I was in Townsville, and terrorise us and we had some good times on them, but by the same token, there was an RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] base in Townsville and we had some good times with them too. They played in the local football competition same as we did.

It sounds like you realised fairly early on that being based overseas, you needed to sort of, when in Rome I guess, that

31:30 **sort of thing, in order to succeed you had to adapt to...**

Well yes, it was, I didn't have to force myself to do anything it came naturally, I found it just fascinating, you know being in a strange country. Dealing with strange people who became less strange as time went on, no I found it fascinating, as I said they were good soldiers. Good people, all around the place as well.

32:00 **Do you think you could still manage a conversation in pidgin?**

I'd be battling I think these days, but a few words come back. Years later when I was in the Staff College we went up to New Guinea for a trip, we were up there for about two weeks I think and just as we were leaving, from we were leaving from up near Walimo, which is the other base on the mainland near the border and

32:30 my platoon orderly, batman, appeared from nowhere his village was about a day and a half's walk away and he'd heard we were there, and he'd come walking down so I had to brush up a bit of pidgin then to have a yarn with him. But he, haven't used pidgin for years really.

Are there any particular phrases that do stay in your memory? It's not an exam.

Oh there's

33:00 a classic on the telephone if you don't get it right, you can, it's a very round-about language pidgin English, you can take a fair while to say something which in English you'd say it much more quickly and one of the funniest things is if you didn't get it right, and it wasn't good pidgin, and you'd be talking be somebody up in the platoon orderly room or somewhere or in

33:30 from the mess somewhere, and so you'd carry on for a few minutes and the other end, the orderly's and at the other end the orderly sergeant or something would feign he was listening and he'd just go,

"Huh," and hang up that was the end of the conversation. So you had to get with it pretty much.,
"Probably something - nothing," is a phrase that comes to mind, it means it doesn't matter, it's pidgin English for she'll be right or,

34:00 talking about George Langley before he had a saying from World War 1, in Arabic, I might get it wrong, right, roughly right, I think it was 'Bukra fel mish mish' or something like that and it's translated 'there'll be apricots in the morning' and that's the same in English as 'she'll be apples' or something like that, so you'll get these same expressions, right throughout any language. But I just can't think of a Vietnamese one now, but

34:30 I think there was one, oh 'choi oi', oh no that was an exclamation of it was a different one, yeah. But oh no, there, lots of people thought that pidgin English that by just adding I N G to English words you were getting there but there was a lot more to it than that, there was quite a reasonable vocabulary really. But

35:00 'barluce' was a plane but it was also a pigeon, and all sorts of different derivations and meanings came into it. but yeah, I think nothing something summed it all up pretty much.

So let's talk about the next little phase and that's when you're in Pucka [Puckapunyal], and tell us exactly what you were doing there?

Well I was platoon commander

35:30 and it was just straight out recruit training really, they came in fresh off the streets and you put them through their basic recruit training, and got them up to standards of being a trained rifleman, without any corps training at all, we were, having said that we then did a bit of corps training at the end, of the recruit training. But 20 battalion, it had been scaled down,

36:00 from all around the country, at Puckapunyal there's been a brigade, three battalions, down to one battalion, so all the different corps were in the one battalion and different companies on different corps, there were two infantry companies and the others were broken up to various other types of corps, or mixtures of corps. The infantry of course we just did the basic training and then we did a bit of infantry, extra infantry stuff. So it was pretty straight

36:30 forward, it got very monotonous after a while with three intakes a year it was repetitive, but like everything else in the army the people changed all the time, so you, that made it quite interesting. The first platoon of the year was always university students because they could get most of the intake completed before the start of the university year. like they missed about two weeks

37:00 in March something like that, the second intake were all from Melbourne and the infantry units we got there were mainly from the inner suburbs as they were in those days so once again you got a different type of person than you did in the first one, and the third intake were all from the infantry battalions in the country areas, so they were yet again different, it was, so it was quite an experience for a young officer. They, when they got leave,

37:30 I think they got leave once or twice during an intake, they have draft conducting officers to take them all over these destinations and that was quite a hazardous duty because you'd end up in Nhill or Mildura or somewhere or other and it seemed that the aim of the whole town was to keep you drunk for the whole weekend and

38:00 I think it got pretty, pretty savage on some occasions. But eventually you got them all back onto the train and came back. The other one was being put in charge of a train to come, bring them all down to Melbourne from Puckapunyal, or from Seymour, Lysaght Siding. That could be quite a job because you had to make sure you get proper control on the train or you'd get to other end and there'd be damage or something and that would hold everyone up and you get around by that you just tell them that when you started

38:30 if there was any damage everybody stayed until it was sorted out, so they policed that themselves and there was no problems. They were all pretty well disciplined anyhow.

So these were men joining the regular army not the national service?

No, no these were national servicemen. They were in for 14, or 10 or 12 or whatever weeks, then they finished their time in the balance of five years in their local CMF unit. Depending on where they lived

39:00 and what unit and what corps, usually allocated to a corps when they registered because of where they lived, and that was, if they were in an artillery area they went to artillery, if they were in a, armoured corps or cavalry area, they went to that unit, that type of thing.

And what was their attitude generally when they first came in?

Mixed. Some of them were quite keen, that could be the dangerous ones, most of them were

39:30 pretty reserved, you know wait and see sort of attitude. A few were anti, but they came around, most of them, there'd be very few two years, I can only think of one or two really, any problems, and. They, even the one's as I said the police could come along and collect one every now and then, that was a shame

really, because if we'd been able to keep them

40:00 they might have been better than the police dragging them off, however, the law must have its way I suppose, wanted for something or other. The, no they just, they were just a sample of Australian society at the time, I guess. Particularly coming through in those three groups that I described to you. But...

The ones that were anti, I mean, what was it that made them anti and then how did you sort of turn them around?

I think they were anti because it was inconvenient. And they were ignorant, of what was ahead of them, they probably feared what was ahead of them, so we turned that around, by just running proper training, running a good system, maintaining discipline, looking after people the old, army saying of fair, firm and friendly. Kick it along from there and most of them

41:00 came around. Only one I can remember remained rather twisted right till the end, but I think he was twisted before and well after not much you could do about him unless you were a psychiatrist I suppose. But no they were good. They... Some of them gave another slant on life really. One young bloke

41:30 he came in, came from Richmond, they got a form they got to fill in before they arrived and it was the start of their record and it had a part on it for hobbies and interests. And this all seems a bit innocent these days when you think about how society is now, but it, had milk bar gatherings. And most of them had football, cricket, and boxing and all this stuff and milk bar. I thought, "This will be interesting," so...

Tape 4

00:33 **You were telling us about the milk bar...**

Oh yes, the milk bar gatherings, yes. So we were all, myself and the platoon sergeant and all the corporals were anxiously awaiting his arrival just for a look and he turned up and his hair was down over his eyes and almost covering his mouth, couldn't quite see him for a while, so of course that was shortly fixed, they used to be marched

01:00 into the barber pretty smartly and have most of their hair cut off in the most barbaric fashion and out he came and he was slightly little bloke and he was this horrible ghastly white colour, I don't think he'd ever been outside, or done anything. So anyhow we let them get over the first settling in times a day or two and I got a chance to have a yarn with him and I said, "Interested you said milk bar gatherings." I said, "What's that all about?"

01:30 and he said, "Oh my mother gives me 10 shillings and I'm allowed to go down to the milk bar and spend it." And I said, "Oh yeah?" I said, "Do you do anything else?" He said, "No," so I said, "Okay, righto." So anyhow later on we had the inter-company cross-country running and I used to run that or coach that for our company. And so he volunteered for this and along he came and we did all the training and he was a hell of a lot fitter by this stage and anyhow, came

02:00 the day of the cross country, at Puckapunyal there is about a succession, or there used to be, may be still be I don't know, parade grounds, they go on forever, over the horizon, there's about six of them or more. And there used to be and they finish way over on the western side and run all across the parade grounds to the finish line right back where the battalion was on the eastern side so. The people were finishing and people were doing calculations and we needed to get a couple in

02:30 to win and over the horizon came this little bloke and he'd absolutely had it and I think between the time he came over the horizon, and through the parade grounds he must have fallen over about four times and got up again and he kept coming and he'd get onto the final parade ground, fell, retched all over the place, got up again and got over the line and he was the one that went in juts gave us enough points to win the thing.

03:00 So after that I don't think there'd be any more milk bar gathering, he was a, his nickname was Tiger in his platoon. So, old Tiger I hope he's still out there, somewhere. So, yes you had this very wide variety of people that made it interesting.

Did you find, you said there was the uni intake then there were the city boys then the country guys, was

03:30 **there a difference in terms of how they adapted and coped with?**

Yes, giving a lecture to the uni guys was completely different to theory of the group, which was interconnected with range practises and rifles, rifle shooting. The uni students would all sit back and then all come up with the most difficult questions they could think of at the end of a lecture

04:00 you know and then want to debate and finally get kicked out by the platoon sergeant or something but they were always keeping on your toes intellectually. Physically they were pretty good, they were pretty fit blokes. The inner city blokes had more social problems than the other groups.

04:30 That's where we, we get the police or the, through army welfare, through normal channel of command we get trouble with families and other things. the country fellows were different yet again, they were a bit more inclined to be on the larrikin side, but once you calmed them down they were excellent soldiers, very good soldiers, they all were good soldiers.

05:00 But the country blokes were probably a bit more free spirited about it all, it was all a bit of a joke really but they tackled it in the right way, so yes you did get a variety.

So once every 12-15 weeks?

At the end it was 10 weeks.

And what do you think they took away from that experience?

05:30 It's pretty hard for me to say but the general impression was that they were pretty well pleased with themselves at having gone through it, and all achieved what they achieved. Whether or not they then moved onto the next stage of success or not varied of course, once again they, it was a fairly close sort of environment. There were corporals

06:00 breathing down their necks all the time, we, the last few weeks they had their own lance corporals appointed. It was always that system there were bugles blowing and whistles blowing and times when you ate and you did this and you did that and it was all very programmed for them. Some of them I ran into later ran into problems on some of the reserve units they went to where it wasn't quite as programmed, you couldn't adjust as well. They,

06:30 one bloke came up from, Mildura way and he was a big of a lair when he first marched in and we got him on side and he was good, in fact he was good NCO material this fellow. And he did well when he marched out, so the next intake the way into it, I was inspecting the kitchens

07:00 or something or other, and I wandered around the corner and there he is sitting there peeling potatoes, the classic, you know, army pose, peeling, and I said, "What are you doing here?" and he said, "Oh boss, it got too much, mucking me around too much," because if they didn't perform effectively in the CMF unit they could be, and fail to parade, they could be actually arrested and charged with and committed to what's called the commanding officer's full-time duty at a

07:30 National Service training battalion and they literally worked out their day cleaning out latrines and peeling potatoes and that sort of thing, so X days they had to do. He said, "I thought I'd come and get it out the way get it over and done with." So that was a loss. He could have kicked on in the CMF. But a lot of them did kick on of course. Ran into some of them later. They'd been commissioned. They were NCOs. So

08:00 with that respect it had some value for the army.

And what about you personally what did you gain from that experience, what were you learning?

Oh I got, I had four years in the military monastery, I'd gone straight from school to the military monastery where we were all very similar types, sort alike and not to the degree that some people would make out, but to a fair degree, then I went up and suddenly there were all these black people around me and

08:30 that was a completely different situation and I got to know them, and realised what great people they were. And then I got to 20 ENS battalion and there are all these people, if we ever had World War 111, they were going to do all the fighting and probably while I sat in an office and signed paper, or if I ever did have to command them at all in at any time, peace or war, I got to know them what they were like.

09:00 And actually it, it wasn't all that much different to what I remember everybody else at school, but it didn't hurt to be reminded.

So you said your duties changed, you ended up doing taking on an admin sort of.

Oh that came a lot later, but no from there I went, I was posted to a regular infantry battalion. And I was a rifle

09:30 platoon commander first, once again one platoon A company, I always seemed to end up in one platoon A company then I was put in a special group because we were changing the structure of the battalion from that they called pentropic. It was a new idea where they were greatly increased in strength the infantry battalion was and to start with plenty of officers and NCOs and not enough soldiers. So, the more senior lieutenants,

10:00 which unfortunately I was becoming at that stage, we dragged out the one side to be, pooled so we could be helped for training requirements, the umpires for exercises that sort of thing and so we belonged to the E company which never existed in that battalion forever and was never flashed out. So yeah, we were used to help other companies to do things. And some bright spark

10:30 there was a serial in the newspaper, on one of the Sydney Newspapers at that time called Level Seven.

It was about this, something connected to nuclear warfare and the people who were the real boffins and can never ever be done without the bottom of this protective bunker system at level seven. And so the gathering of officers in E Company became known as Level Seven, apparently. And some wag got onto that but

11:00 that was a pretty miserable existence, particularly when you had to go back to your old company and do something or other. But after a while, it was getting on time, in my seniority to go to support company. System used to be that, in a battalion, you spent time initially with a rifle, in a rifle platoon, but later on as you became more

11:30 senior you went to other positions in the battalion and most of them were I support company which had all the support weapons and the signals platoon and these type of things, so eventually I was posted to support company and I became platoon commander of the assault pioneer platoon. And that was as good a job as platoon in PIR. It was one of the better jobs they had in the army; it was good.

Sorry where were you based at that point?

12:00 This was at Holsworthy. We were the reaction force or whatever they called it in those days I forget now. At once stage we were all actually we used to go through these exercises of packing and unpacking, and everything was numbered and we were supposed to be able to leave within 48 hours, and the first company group's supposed to be able to leave within 24 hours.

12:30 And once stage we were on our way to Laos in fact and the first company were all packed, I'd attached a section to my pioneers to them to go with them and we were all packed and couldn't leave the barracks or anything and they were standing by their vehicles about to go to the airport and it was called off. Which was just as well apparently because it was all a bit of a farce, it was an entirely false situation in Laos

13:00 at the time, so, it would have been fun to go there and find out the hard way I suppose.

What was supposed to be happening in Laos?

Oh there was supposed to be some movement against the government or which happened eventually, the Communists took over the whole area of course, but it flowed through the SEATO [South East Asian Treaty Organisation] organisation. And the Americans had sounded the alarm bell, and I think some miscalculation on the part of CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] or someone and years later it

13:30 was revealed that it wasn't really that way, that situation at all so we didn't go to Laos, but we did some very good training, I didn't know very much about self pioneer work. They were incredibly experienced platoon, they were, these were they days when you'd have a private soldier stay in a specialist platoon for 10 or 12 years. And most of these fellows had been in Korea as Assault Pioneers, they knew it back to front.

14:00 But they weren't renowned for their discipline around the place, Assault Pioneers were always sort of a, wildest element in an infantry battalion and they were,, they were renowned for being good assault pioneers and that was about it, so I, got there, I had a broken leg from parachuting, which put me in, I didn't look terribly athletic, and

14:30 company commander took me out the field firing range, where they were doing demolitions. And I got out on crutches, was introduced to my platoon sergeant a veteran of World War II and Korea, had quite a reputation in the army. Company commander had cheerfully told me on the way out that he'd been in the habit of calling his previous platoon commander a so-and-so idiot in front of the whole platoon and I'd have to get that sorted out soon.

15:00 And so he introduced me and this fellow's sort of looking at me and I'm looking at him and company commander who is a very good man actually, great soldier, I thought he was a bit of a rat at the time, looked at these, I had these distance markers across the range and he turned around to the platoon sergeant and said, "How far's that? How far is that one out there?" It was some broken up tank or something, and he said, "Sir, that'll be about

15:30 400 metres, oh yeah," and he swung to me and said, "What do you think?" and oh boy and like an idiot, I said, "It's nearer to 300 metres, sir." And he said, "Yeah, 300 metres," got in his jeep and drove off and just left me standing there, that was my introduction to my new platoon. And couple of days I thought about all this and the only way to get these blokes is to give them hell,

16:00 the Assault Pioneers also had to perform as a rifle platoon whenever it was required and often did. So I thought I'll give them hell, they've obviously been slack for years and haven't much rifle, I'll give them hell, so we got stuck into a lot of rifle platoon work as well and in the meantime I was picking up as much Assault Pioneer stuff as much as I could and while we reorganised the storeroom, the Assault Pioneer storeroom and I found all the explosives up in the ceiling they'd stored up there and illicit stuff and including

16:30 a great long thing called a Bangalore torpedo you use to blow wire fences and obstacles and so. At this stage, there was a reasonable amount of mutual respect, so I agreed that we should keep it, because it was stuff that was hard to get for training, so, I said, "But we can't really keep it in the ceiling, if it goes off in the ceiling, it'll take out

17:00 half the company." So we dug a new flower bed outside the store and buried them all, so whenever we wanted it we just dug up what we wanted. So, we,

Did the company commander know about this?

Oh I think he did, he never said anything, we, did, and we had the Battalion Commander's inspection a couple of weeks later and the CO looked at it and said, "Oh new flower bed Vin," and I said, "Yes sir, yes sir, we just thought we'd break the area up a bit," I think our CO might have

17:30 known too and he just looked at the OC and the OC looked at me and they both moved on, nothing was said, but the fact that they remarked on the flower bed is, a, yeah so, it was that one.

Can you just sort of explain to us, obviously you're learning what assault pioneer work is, can you tell us please?

Yes well they're infantry engineers. They do mine warfare, and demolitions, booby trapping which is part of mine warfare.

18:00 Construction of any, they were the water supply for the battalion, if we ever went into an area where we had to get our own water, we had canvas water tanks and stuff as part of our equipment and we could, we could set up a water point to give water for the battalion would come up and draw it in company lots and what have you. Field defences, if you're in a defensive position, if a company

18:30 was digging in, in lots of phases of war, not just defence, often you would detach a section of pioneers to rifle company to support them in all these things. For example in defence if they were digging a defensive position, if they were laying wire, something like that you could have one pioneer in a section of riflemen and the pioneer could sort of be able to give the guidance and help them and make sure sort of everything went in according to how it should be in the pamphlet.

19:00 And how it'd work. Digging in, we had drill and breaker sets as part of our equipment each section had one, so if they ran into some hard going you could dig in there with that. if you had to go further and it was a bad position all around, which they frequently were, they seemed to pick them that way, we used to use explosives for digging in.

19:30 We also had to defend the battalion headquarters, and they weren't deployed elsewhere, and and dig the battalion CP and prepare that and all that sort of thing, field works and all that sort of stuff. So it was quite a long, quite a wide variety of things to do. And as long as it didn't get overly technical I enjoyed that it was good.

So how were you learning these things, or had you already learnt?

20:00 Oh I just pick it up, I'd sit down with my sergeant and we'd work out the program for the you know X weeks ahead for training and when we were going to be out the field we had plenty of flexibility, go out as a platoon in the training area and do field training when we wanted to. That's when I'd get them stuck into patrolling and that sort of thing, and maintain a bit of ascendancy, a bit of moral ascendancy. And we, we just, figured it out as we were going along. They knew that, if they were doing booby trapping,

20:30 some of them were very good at is they'd say come out of skipper and have a look at this we'd go through it with them plus, study it all, and platoon sergeant was constantly advising me, he was the wizard on flame throwers. Most people avoid flame throwing training, for good reasons too, but I think it was just, he had a thing about flame throwers, we often did flame thrower training. So

21:00 I became a bit of a flame thrower expert as well, not as good as him but it was very good.

Why would people avoid that, what was?

Well it was incredible, you got to prepare the stuff, it's probably more dangerous than having ammunition around. Once you now how to handle it, it's no problems. It's, quite easy, in Vietnam we had it, we had it in drums in the ground with explosive charges and that sort of thing,

21:30 because they used to drop it from the air sometimes, which could worry you if you were in the area. But it was the physical fact of having to front up with this tank of it on your back and point this trigger at a target and fire it and it, you just have to practice that until you got used to it. Of course they had, you know I had plenty of instances in action where people a fellow with the flame thrower get hit and up he'd go in a ball of flame and that'd be the end. But no,

22:00 and it made a lot of noise and it smelt and it's like any of those things, you had to get used to them, once you got used to them they were all right. But no they were, a very good platoon, all the section commanders the corporals all became warrant officers later on, the whole lot of them they were that good. They, around the barracks and that, that was another place I could attack them and maintain a bit of balance.

22:30 So, with inspections and what have you, suddenly they got their standards up and we actually won the battalion competition a couple of weeks running, which absolutely, some people refused to believe that but it was true. And then we, with are a duty company, the platoon's in turn had to put on a quarter

guard, which was mounted for 24 hours and we, no we even had the

23:00 RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] saying how good the pioneer were with their drill and all this sort of thing, so we changed all of this, the old, they were still a pretty rough bunch sometimes, but when they went out on the town they went out in groups which was good, they never went out as individuals, so they, I didn't have to tell them that, they knew that. so yeah, the platoon sergeant was a very aggressive fellow in a lot of ways it took a while to get his trust,

23:30 he had known my brother in Korea, so that helped. In fact when the battalion left for Malaya, it was only myself and a lance corporal left behind which was, probably one of the worst days and times of my life. And a couple of days before the battalion left the Sergeant got special permission from the RSM for me to visit the sergeants' mess, and I had to get permission from our PMC [President of the Mess Committee] to do it. And

24:00 so I went in there for lunch with him and we had a few beers before lunch then we had lunch and all the other sergeants were there, we were talking to them and then they all started to leave to go back to what they were doing, and we still had a few more beers and my sergeant got the RSM's permission to keep the bar open and I think I left about seven o'clock that night or something. And went out and was standing on the verandah with him and he looked at me and said, "Well skipper," he said, "You

24:30 came bloody close to commanding that platoon didn't you?" His nickname was Gunner. Well, he was an infantryman. I said, "Yes Gunner, bloody close, didn't I?" Yeah and then I had to let them all go then unfortunately.

Yeah tell us about that, how...?

Oh well the battalion as I said, the battalion expanded to go to Malaya it had to contract again back onto another establishment, a tropical warfare establishment and

25:00 the numbers were reduced. And so, some went and the ones that didn't waited at Holsworthy and the 1st Battalion came back and then they were built up into the pentropical the bigger establishment, and we were part of that, so some went and some didn't, but there was a theory screw up somewhere, one person I think in battalion headquarters, that all the people who had been to the Pacific Islands Regiment really didn't need to go to Malaya, well they'd already had a go or something.

25:30 And there were several of us in the battalion in that category, so we were just wiped off the list, unfortunately, it's a shame.

But men from your platoon ended up in Malaya?

Oh they all, all except myself and one lance corporal who went back to Tasmania. He wasn't going to re-engage. He left the army. And that was the only. He would have gone too if he'd still been, you know, going to re-engage. So, yeah, we saw them off and that was it,

26:00 ship sailed and old Tassie went back to Tassie and I went into the 1st Battalion.

And did men from your platoon and other s from that battalion end up in Vietnam or...?

Yes in various ways the sergeant ended up in the, not at the same time as me but later on, he was a warrant officer and he ended up in the Australian Army Training Team in Vietnam and so did one of the corporals also. And the others all ended up in Battalions.

26:30 Once or twice some of them back in Vietnam. The privates as I said some of them were pretty long in the tooth they'd been in the platoon for a long time, you know, some of them were discharged for various reasons later on, on age or some stayed on. Later on when I was up in Townsville later on back with the battalion as the 2IC at that stage,

27:00 and after we'd been in Townsville for a couple of months, at once stage there I was worried, I hadn't seen this particular soldier at that stage and I went to have a look around the Q-store [Quartermaster's Store] with the quartermaster, just to check things and at this stage, this bloke Billy had progressed from being a private, professional private for umpteen years and he'd become a lance corporal in the Q-store

27:30 and he had one lot of records that he looked after and that was about it and so I came around the corner and here's Billy sitting here, working away in his records. He said, "Oh Skipper, how you going what are you doing here?" I said, "I'm the 2IC, you bloody idiot." He said, "Oh I didn't know that." The sort of characters they were they, they'd sort of work their way and at night they'd go to the soldiers' canteen

28:00 drink beer for several hours, then go back to bed get up in the morning, that was, that was their week. They were great blokes, they were great soldiers. But Billy, when he finally retired later a classmate of mine was the CO of the battalion at that stage, years later, a few years later and so the day before Billy retired they let him inspect the quarter guard when it mounted that afternoon. He was, he had a grin. He's had close on 30 years' service;

28:30 he was a lance corporal. Incredible blokes - that was all they wanted to do.

So, once the battalion had been broken up and the majority had gone to Malaya, what happened with you?

Well the other battalion came back and we were the, we were helped them settle back in and rebuild. All sorts of problems barrack order problems, and accommodation problems, all the sort of things that happen.

29:00 But finally it settled down the company commander of support company was kept over there because they had some Q investigations or something and he was, stayed another five or six months I think over there. And so I became acting company commander of support company, of 1st Battalion. And you talk about things being broken down and built up again, we started with three men, and

29:30 because they'd brigaded all the mortars in support company and taken out the rifle company's mortars, by the time we'd finished building up we had about 190 men in the company. So, that was the way it went when you changed establishments from one to another. Then he came back shortly after that and then I went back to being, platoon commander of the assault pioneer platoon only this time in the 1st Battalion and they were a good bunch of fellows too.

So these were blokes that'd just

30:00 **come back from Malaya?**

From Malaya yes.

Which was a sort of a guerrilla war wasn't it really?

Yes, yes it was pretty, pretty quietened down pretty much by then. There was a flare up after that when the Indonesians got active again, but this was sort of in between. But these chaps had been there before, most of them twice, the 2nd Battalion went there first then the 1st Battalion, so that'd be, most of them had a couple of goes except younger soldiers.

30:30 The, what happened after that was a build up, we went on with the normal what you call training for war, based on Holsworthy and round about a couple of months before I left the battalion, they sent me on an assault pioneers platoon commanders course. Which I duly completed

31:00 and then marched down to Tasmania.

We hear a lot of that, people in the field for three year then they go and do a course to learn how to do what they've been doing all their life.

Yeah, so that was that, and I never served with the 1st Battalion again, I served with the 2nd Battalion later on, but then I went to Tasmania to the Royal Tasmanian... I'd been promoted to captain. The assault pioneer platoon commander

31:30 in the pentropic battalion was a captain, not a lieutenant, and I was due to be promoted at the end of 1960, apart from the year before that they wanted to promote me and send me to Bendigo when I wasn't even in the infantry then. The next year there were four of us, they lost our paperwork I think and

32:00 we got to the day where we were actually, we're fully qualified, we've passed our promotion exams and been recommended for promotion which you had to be. I was the only one in our battalion I think there were one or two in the 1st Battalion; these were all classmates of mine. And one or two in the third battalion and we were the only acting lieutenants and substandard captains left in the army at that stage. So that was, our CO just

32:30 said, put your badges a rank up and don't muck about so I did that and so that was about 18 months after that I finally left Holsworthy. And I went to the Royal Tasmania Regiment in Tasmania and the idea of that was, that when you were a junior captain, sometimes when you were a temporary captain, you go and do two years with a CMF unit, once again so that you got

33:00 used to what the bulk of the army would be come mobilisation so I didn't actually go to the rifle company side of it, I went on the staff area, it was a strange sort of set up, the, it was called headquarters of the Royal Tasmanian Regiment but it actually ran the whole island. But it wasn't a separate command. It was under Victoria, under Southern Command where it had always been

33:30 Tasmania command prior to this reorganisation. So, I had a job there which if I'd been in a bigger headquarters I would have had a more narrow specialised area to work in but in Tasmania I had everything to do, and it didn't happen on the scale perhaps it did in, Sydney or Melbourne but it all happened sooner or later, and it was a far wider, it was a very good job to learn the staff

34:00 duties and how to operate as a staff officer. And there was still a bit of the physical side to it. We had to run the regular academy training. They all had training requirements to complete each year, range practices, fitness tests and all this sort of stuff. So that was, that managed to get you out of the office a fair bit. You also, you went and visited units that was interesting and

34:30 we had field exercises of course as well. And I usually ended up the OC for the enemy for those and chased around the hills, all over the place but it was better than sitting in an office. But some of the

staff were, it was very interesting, we had a first commander there he was a particularly gifted intellect, had a particularly gifted intellect, one of the best intellects I've ever met in my life

35:00 and he managed to combine officer training with the University of Tasmania and little tricks like this and they'd do, we'd do a study of China or something like that and their experts would come along and they'd prepare and give their presentations on the economy, the geography and what have you and we'd come along and give out presentations on the Chinese Communist Army, and would mesh it all in, it was very good stuff, he was.

35:30 But was there for two and half years, it was case of once you got on the island it was hard to get off. But I thought two and a half years was a pretty good term there. The, I was very arrogant when I first got there, I just come straight out of regular infantry battalions and I should have known better, having served a national service battalion but

36:00 I was, there I'd seen the soldiers I hadn't run into the hierarchy the officers in the system in the CMF and I ran into the pretty well head on, I fought with them like cat and dog for about six months but that was all sorted out and then next two years were great, and I've made a lot of good friends in Tasmania.

So was that a matter of you toeing the line, or was there differences of where you?

Oh no, we were, me being educated

36:30 really, starting to learn things and it was, that's why young regular infantry officers were sent to those jobs. Or young regular officers, I should say other corps sent them as well, for the... oh no, it was good. In fact some of the people I fought with the most initially I got on very well with later on. But it was, a good job there apart from the learning curve,

37:00 and the experiences, I controlled the vote for the air, reconnaissance which consisted of a light aircraft out of the Royal Hobart Aero club so if I wanted to go and fly and have a look around the South West Coast, I can go and do things like that and. And I think for all there was a lot of variety. If they found a UXB [unexploded bomb] on a farm, left over from

37:30 World War II and you couldn't call out a squadron of engineers to go and get it sorted out, you had to virtually call out every regular soldier on the island and get them all together. Down from Launceston or wherever, it was up to Launceston if it was up in the north, and carry that operation out. So everything's a bit different.

What sort of things were there that you were felt were not right in the beginning, but you felt weren't right at the beginning but later felt that this was the way it had to be?

38:00 Well it was mainly my attitude to the CMF. That's, you know sometimes people might seem a little bit slack, whereas they're not. It's just that they've got so much time to devote to something, in the meantime they're trying to make a living with a civilian job. These sort of things or they mightn't get to a parade on a certain night. You know not getting to a parade, that would gets a regular really angry but there would be 50,000 good reasons why a member of the

38:30 CMF mightn't get to a parade on a particular night, and only at short notice and not even get time to let you know before hand so we sorted all these things out.

So how many of you were full time, how many on the staff there?

Oh on the entire island probably 100 or so, probably about 150, he was the commander, see we had the headquarters, he was the commander

39:00 about three of four majors, different guises, different course responsibilities. There would have been about half a dozen captains of which I was one, and then there were the reserve units of course had adjutants, regular adjutants or regular OCs, our signals squadron was a funny one, because they had to handle all the secret signals

39:30 from the, for Tasmania, came into Tasmania so they had a regular component a small one, but they were also the rest of the squadron were CMF. But they because of that they, security requirement, they had and because of he expertise required, they had a regular squadron commander. Who in fact had his married quarter next door to mine, we became great mates and still are. And there was another bloke, there were three of us really, he

40:00 was the 2IC of a transport company, he was, RAASC [Royal Australian Army Service Corps], at the time, which now of course is the corps of transport. But the three of us managed to have a bit of fun from time to time we were known as the rat pack apparently. But no the other fellows were all pretty good a lot of them were a lot older than us but once we got to know then that was pretty good.

So you were married, your wife was with you?

Yep.

40:30 So, and I had two children at that stage. Son was born while I was out on the demolition range at Holsworthy with the assault pioneers and they just fired a cratering charge and we got word over the radio and old gunner, the sergeant, came up to me, "We got to do something about this skipper." I said,

"Righto, we'll fire a 21-pound salute," and on that particular demolition range there was a five pound limit. He said, "Yeah," so we

- 41:00 put 21 pounds in and we let it go and they're still looking for the person who broke the windows at East Hills. But when, my daughter was born I was in Tasmania but my wife wasn't. She'd come down to Melbourne, so I didn't see my daughter for about a month. Until they all got over there, we got a married quarters and they joined me there. So it was it was small married quarters area, up the river at Dowsing Point.
- 41:30 There was some married quarters in the Anglesea Barracks they were mainly for more senior people but out at Dowsing was the ordinance depot and also the RAMI, Electrical Mechanical engineers depot as well. So that's where there were more married quarters. So that was okay too, I had a two good sergeant clerks. They were service corps...

Tape 5

- 00:48 **I was thinking though when the conflict in Vietnam began to escalate and Australia started to get involved**

- 01:00 **which was in the early '60s, or '63?**

'62.

So you would have been looking at the possibility of going over there?

Oh yes, we, the training's pretty constant really throughout your career, and quite often for promotion requirements. As a captain I had to a tactics course, to get

- 01:30 promoted and also as a infantryman I had to do a company commanders course to get promoted. But specific to Vietnam because of the unit that I applied to go in I had to do a special course once again at Canungra I always ended up back at Canungra somehow or other throughout my career, and that was called the Tropical Warfare Advisers Course. Now that was a special course for people who are going over there in the Australian Army Training Team

- 02:00 as advisers to the South Vietnamese. And then we completed that course we had to do a quick briefing at the School of Military Intelligence, so I wound up back there again also after a long, oh no, I went there once before, that's another story. The rest of the training really was in relation to normal career progress and normal professional training anyhow which was required for that time in your rank and what you were doing.

- 02:30 Really what we were doing in Vietnam was based on everything we'd been training for, for many years anyhow, so that wasn't a huge change in what we were focused on or anything like that.

So tell me about the circumstances leading up to your posting in Vietnam?

I was in Tasmania, and the first time we only had one unit in Vietnam and that was a training team,

- 03:00 it was only a small unit I think about 30 of them went away the first time in 19, round about July 1962 and a couple of my mates were in the Team and when they came back I was talking to them and it sounded like a very interesting sort of unit to be in. I think round about that time, I volunteered to, no applied to do the course, you had to do the course and qualify before you could go away anyhow.

- 03:30 So being in Tasmania, it wasn't, it was probably harder to get on the course, or get off the island but I was finally allocated to a course, in the end of 1964. And once again because I was in Tasmania, I didn't go anywhere for a year. but finally when they posted out to me, the next posting was to the Training Team, so I just had to wait for a while, that's was all. It was,

- 04:00 probably for the best really, because I think it was a bit more interesting when I got there in 1965 than it would have been if I'd been sent in 1964. Because things had changed a bit.

So you went in, so tell me what month in '65 did you go?

Late or early February, late January, late February I think. No sorry late, I'll get it right in a minute, early February. And

- 04:30 I, had a briefing in Saigon for a couple of days it wasn't of great interest for some of us, some of it was quite interesting about the weapons and what have you but most of it was a bit boring, so I didn't got myself up North where I was posted to anyhow, and that was, an ARVN Training centre, now by ARVN I mean Army of the Republic of South Vietnam.

- 05:00 This was the irregular army and it was a big recruit training centre and there were I think four of them in the country. The one I went to was the northern most one which was near Hue. Why that was so was because our people had been sent, had been operating in that area since they first went there. The concept of working at training centres, and there were other types of training centres that our people

worked at too, was,

05:30 sound in 1962, by 1965 it wasn't, as valid it could have been because the American system had built up, and the training centres had built up in size and complexity I suppose, and all the training was basically straight out on the normal American training system. So the recruits that came into the Dong Da training centre where I was...

06:00 were pretty well training under the American system. Now that was fine except it was basic training. Our warrant officers were there. There was no trouble with them because they just went on with what they were doing about making sure people could handle weapons and fire weapons properly. But from my side of it, operations and tactics, they weren't our type of tactics, and it wasn't what I'd been sent up there to advise on, on

06:30 American tactics. So, it was pretty much a waste of time for me, yes. Some people they weren't wasting their time in training centres, but certainly at that type of training centre, in my job, particularly for officers we'd had out time in Australian centres, and we should have been out doing other things. By that time, a fair proportion of warrant officers in the Team

07:00 had in fact moved on and gone on to advise Vietnam units, mainly infantry battalions. Some other units but mainly infantry battalions, so at that level they were able to influence the battalion commander they were able to instil quite a bit of our approach to warfare or that type of warfare, whereas in the training centre you got, you're stuck in the system.

07:30 **So you, now, I'd like to know more detail of how it was different. How the Australian...**

What, the tactics?

Yeah, to the American approach.

Well the tactics are just different. The American tactics that they were teaching the Vietnamese at that stage were more suitable for fighting in open terrain, in what you'd call limited warfare, which is something

08:00 a bit short of a world war, Not the full thing, but an example would be, today, would be Iraq, something like that. So there was conventional forces fighting we'd be fighting each other, now where we were that wasn't the case, at that stage in, when I got there in 1965, there were, the enemy were using Communist revolutionary warfare techniques as adapted for

08:30 Asia by Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh and his crew. And the way to counter that, the British advice also and that's why our people were first sent there, was to, apply counter revolutionary tactics and techniques. Not limited warfare, conventional limited warfare techniques and at the training centres they weren't getting much of the counter revolutionary stuff, they were getting some

09:00 but it was, I think a lot of the effort and time was misdirected really, so, the Americans were starting to grasp this concept, like some of them had many years before but it really wasn't being applied the way it should have been and what we were doing, we were starting to develop the ARVN or the South Vietnamese Army, pretty much on the lines of a European army, conventionally equipped the same

09:30 way, whereas we could have done it a lot more quickly and cost effectively and more efficiently if we'd concentrated on the counter revolutionary part of it. Then of course, what happened in, mid-1965 the Communists had almost cut the South in half in the areas of Pleiku and [(UNCLEAR)], where it narrows in a bit, and

10:00 the Vietnamese were taking a lot of casualties, the South Vietnamese were taking a lot of casualties and things were pretty bad actually and that started to develop around about the time I got there and sort of was continuing for the first months I was there and that's when it was decided to actually bring in US forces and shortly after that the first Australian unit arrived there, the 1st Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment. Now this was bringing in conventional

10:30 regular forces. At that stage I don't think it could have been avoided, or it might have been all over in a year or so. Then as the war developed, I think there was too much emphasis put on forces from outside and not enough emphasis on training the South Vietnamese forces properly for their role. Quite a bit of effort went into it but there was this

11:00 other emphasis: you ended up having two wars, sort of a limited war that was fought between the North Vietnamese regulars, the NVA, the North Vietnamese Army, and more of a civil war; it was fought between perhaps the lower echelons of the Viet Cong and some of the, or the South Vietnamese paramilitary forces. And if that had been developed, some more energy put into that type of, the civil war,

11:30 within the war, it might have been a better result there mightn't have been so much waste.

So do you mean the difference between the guerrilla style of warfare when you talk about counter revolutionary warfare, is that what you're talking about?

Well guerrilla warfare is just one aspect of revolutionary warfare, it's the start then their technique, or their doctrine is if they build up in stages, that's what they did in China

12:00 and they gradually develop larger forces, but they still maintain a lot of flexibility, don't have big bases, don't have PXs [Post Exchanges - American canteen units], don't you know, have huge structures around the place. You know even when they build up the regimental and divisional level they still think that way. But by that stage it's a matter of weaponry, really. They've got the weapons to maintain far more heavier operations than before and they build up to the final stage

12:30 where it's all about limited warfare and they're ready to take over. That in fact is what they did, they had tanks rumbling down the streets of Saigon. So, now they had, they had quite well equipped, well trained conventional forces. But they still have this revolutionary warfare approach, we were supposed to have a counter revolutionary warfare approach; I think it got lost somewhere along the line.

So what about, the

13:00 **Tonkin Gulf incident with the two American destroyers, which happened late, or August '64. And by the time you got there in February, things would have been pretty serious because they Americans had a, were doing a lot of raids over Vietnam by then weren't they?**

Well they were starting up, mainly from aircraft carriers; they were also starting a land build up.

13:30 The first people who came, I think were the 173rd Airborne Brigade, and our battalion, the battalion 1RAR, was attached to them and actually worked as part of that brigade in its first months in Vietnam. Where I was up in the north were people who came, perhaps... Had the structure in Vietnam described to you at all?

Which structure?

Well the basic layout of the place, for the war. See normally

14:00 South Vietnam and North Vietnam for that matter were consisted of provinces the same as we have states, and they have a lot more provinces than we have states, and smaller. When the war developed or started the province system was adapted and South Vietnam was divided up into four areas, and they were called corps areas and two or more regular divisions were allocated to each area.

14:30 And there was a demilitarised zone of course, you're aware of that which divided north and south and the top five provinces, the northern five provinces in South Vietnam were allocated to the first corps, which for some reason or another called I ['eye'] Corps, which I never come to, everybody called it I Corps. So I did. And in below that there was second corps area then the third corps then the fourth corps that went right down to the delta and that area there,

15:00 to the south. Now within a corps area we had two divisions. We had the 1st ARVN Division and the 2nd ARVN Division, so the corps area was divided into two divisional areas, 11 DTA [Divisional Tactical Area] was ours why it was 11, I don't know, these people come up with these things, but the fact it was the first division tactical area, and that consisted of the two northern-most provinces of South Vietnam,

15:30 Quang Tri and Thua Thien [Hue]. Now south of that there were the remaining three provinces of the I Corps region, and they were the responsibility of the 2nd ARVN Division. Now there were other units flitting in and out from time to time, but they were the people who had the basic responsibility. Below that there was, as I said there were the other corps areas that had the same divisions. There were a lot more provinces in the south than there were in the north. Now, in...

16:00 Oh, sorry, there was one exception to all this structure, or some exceptions and they were some of the bigger towns and cities and they were especial zones. We had the Hue Special Zone, which was sort of just on the perimeter - it went just around Hue - and that was controlled independently of any of the provinces. Now the provinces were divided up into districts. This is based on the normal administrative system of the country,

16:30 and there are a number of districts in each province, just to add to the complexity they then applied military terms to provinces and called the sectors, and they called the districts sub-sectors. So that's how I ended up as a sub section adviser. It was, system was pretty good for political and military control of the whole country and it worked pretty well but it depended on the calibre of the people involved, that varied considerably throughout the

17:00 country as it would in any country during that type of war. So that was the structure so when I'm talking about I Corps and sub-sectors and ARVN that's what it all got to. Now the provinces and sorry the, use the military terms, the sectors and sub-sectors had their own forces and they were called the paramilitary, they were called the paramilitary and they were called the regional forces and the popular forces.

17:30 The regional forces were fairly local to the area they worked in, wouldn't be taken too long to go home to where their family was or something like that or if they went on leave or something. And the popular forces that was the actual village or hamlet they were in, they were part of that area, their main requirement was to defend that particular hamlet of village. The regional

18:00 forces were usually based on sub-sector headquarters, district headquarters. And they were, their size, they had companies. Other people, the popular forces - I hope it's not getting too confusing - they were

platoon size. To add to the confusion, they were the equivalent of the communist forces in the area.

- 18:30 The ARVN battalions were opposed, or not everybody was opposed by them, but the main structure of the Viet Cong, the allegedly local communists was the, what they call a main force battalion and it was about the size of an ARVN battalion about 450 odd people, they never got the full strength of them but no military analysts do. So there'd be about 450 in a battalion and about the same in
- 19:00 an ARVN battalion, so you're sort of looking at the equal weight in that sort of thing and handicap so they'd be the ones that would oppose themselves. Then there was, I mentioned the regional force companies, they were district companies, they were numbered D something or other, D 45 whatever to confuse the innocent they changed the number every so often. But usually
- 19:30 it was a district company hung around in the one area. In theory it was composed of people like the people from the regular force companies, that was pretty much close to the area where they lived. Even by 1965, a lot of the district companies were mainly constituted by North Vietnamese army personnel, NVA personnel because they'd taken so many casualties.
- 20:00 In 1965, I was talking about the war within the war, the one you never hear about the regional forces and the popular forces inflicted 80 per cent of the casualties inflicted on the communist forces and sustained 70 per cent of the casualties sustained by our side. That changed after that with the build up but that was the way it was in 1965 and people had never even heard of the RF [Regional Force], PF [Popular Force] and they were the ones taking the
- 20:30 brunt of it all the time. Getting back to the structure of the thing the popular forces, the people in the platoons in their own village, their equivalent were the village guerrillas who sometimes lived in the same village and were even sometimes members of the same family so we're talking about a civil war here which once again you never hear much about elsewhere, in any other histories of that war. So, that was the structure
- 21:00 imposed on this was that it built up was the American presence and the rest of the allied presence, the South Koreans, the Thais, Filipinos, all sorts of units there, and in quite some strength too, the Republic of South Korea had a full infantry division there, they were all mainly to the south of us. Where we were we had the United States Marine Corps who came in and they
- 21:30 virtually were responsible I Corps, these two northern most divisional areas. And when they started to build up in numbers they would come in and be given a base area that they were responsible for and then they would conduct operations out of that base area. So, we had all sorts of people going in all different directions and it could be a bit complicated on occasions. So, when I escaped from the training centre
- 22:00 I was sent, I was in advisory team five there which was specific to that particular job, I went to advisory team three which were the advisers who handled the first ARVN division and also the other two sectors, the northern most sectors and sub-sectors, I think, we were in those sectors. The team was based on Hue.
- 22:30 It had its headquarters, an advisers' headquarters on Hue, which we could go to when we were off operations. You could go and get a shower and a beer and what have you. I shared a room there with a divisional intelligence adviser. His main hobby was stealing my beer when I wasn't there to defend it. He was a good bloke though, good man. But...

Was he an ARVN man?

No he was an American United States Army. All the advisers were either American or Australian.

- 23:00 So, that's sort of the structure of how we worked. The advisory structure they had a counter part at every level of command so there was for the divisional commander, the ARVN divisional commander, there was a divisional senior adviser, in our case it was an American colonel and then the province chiefs had advisers, the province chiefs and district chiefs were all army officers.
- 23:30 And so they had as advisers, there was a major, American Army major, was the senior province adviser for the province I was in which was Thua Thien. And then, the district, the district chiefs were all army captains. And there may have been a few exceptions around the country, but this is pretty much the case, and I was an adviser to two district chiefs.
- 24:00 I was a bit over ranked because I was a major by that stage. But I suppose they had to do something with me and I'd talked the province senior adviser into the fact that I could really do something at these sub-sectors so he grabbed me and that was it. I had two of them, and I had an American captain as 2IC and an Australian warrant officer and an American sergeant. And we used to break up into two sometimes if we had to go to either
- 24:30 sub-sector depending on what was happening. But the idea of the sub-sectors was that you supported the district chief in any way you could. Both military I kept out of the politics part of it, which was interesting because my district chief at Nam Hoa was a North Vietnamese and the province chief hated him and was trying to get him killed, which didn't make me feel happy because I was usually with him most of the time anyhow,

25:00 a lot of the time anyhow, so I kept out of that. The province senior adviser used to keep an eye on things when things got a bit too hairy.

So he was a North Vietnamese but he was with ARVN?

Yes when the Communists took over from the French they had a big purge, and their original title of course was Viet Minh when they were fighting the French. And they went

25:30 through these stages as I told you of building up for revolutionary warfare, and they were able to launch the final assaults of mainly a political decision, really. The French weren't beaten militarily, no more than the Americans were. Anyhow, the French left and that was the aim of the game. Once the French left they conducted a big purge. Viet Minh means nationalist, doesn't mean Communist. And lots of people who had fought with the Viet Minh against the French were not Communists, they were nationalists.

26:00 And my district chief's father was one of those. And he was an officer in the Viet Minh so he was purged once the French left and the Communists took over. He was garrotted in the main square in Hanoi. And round about that time of course there was all sorts of people being rounded up and horrible things happening and about a million and a half North Vietnamese left and went south. And

26:30 my district chief's mother left and took him and his younger brother with him and then as a few years went by they both got a bit older and they both ended up in the ARVN fighting the Viet Cong in the NVA. But people think most of, or all the people that went south after the partition were Catholics. They weren't all. My district chief in Nam Hoa in fact was a Buddhist. They just left because it wouldn't have been safe to stay there

27:00 the way things were. So you had all this political stuff going on but we also had the civil affairs side of it where you had to get out and do good works and win the hearts and minds and that, and strangely enough some of the things we did really helped people. The two sub-sectors I had, Huong Thuy was the one along the coast, both my sub-sectors bordered on the Hue special zone, to the west,

27:30 one to the south west and one to the north west. And Huong Thuy was a lot smaller than Nam Hoa but it was, about 120,000 people and it was mainly along the relatively thin coastal strip that ran from the north down to the south. Highway One, the main highway in the country of course ran along side just inside the boundary of Huong Thuy and also the only railway

28:00 line in the country ran along opposite, parallel to the highway. Just on the other side of that and the couple of villages along that was the boundary and then it was Nam Hoa sub-sector. Nam Hoa sub-sector's boundary went out to, well the ocean border, it was a huge sub-sector, and we didn't know, didn't control very much of it anyhow of it, it was there, there was a lot of it and in Huong Thuy

28:30 it, it was coastal it was where most of the rice paddies were, and that part of the world they got about two crops a year usually and it was comparatively quite a rich area. Nam Hoa sub-sector had a total of about 8000 people in all that area and it was a lot poorer. Because it went inland you got into this, what the French called the Piedmont area, which was not overly good farming land.

29:00 You couldn't get good rice crops compared to... They're not all that far away, but nearer the coast. And then you got in and it was all sort of scrubby hilly type stuff, and then you got into rainforest which went right through and off into Laos, and just forever almost. And there were clear patches every now and then where there'd be, would have been some form of habitation there, the...

29:30 Over near the border you got some of the Hmong tribal people. They'd been all brought in and been resettled. And there had been some US Special Forces outpost that way they'd all been overrun by that stage. They were reoccupied at various stages during operations. In fact the first Australian killed in Vietnam was killed at one of them. So they were two quite different

30:00 sub-sectors but right along side each other and the district chiefs were quite different too. The, as I said, the district chief, Captain Dutt[?] at Nam Hoa, was a North Vietnamese, and Captain Dai We Tung at Huong Thuy was a Central Vietnamese. And Central Vietnam Hue was where the old imperial capital was,

30:30 so that was sort of the historic headquarters of the Mandarin type society of Vietnam. The rulers and the... He was represented at... They even had the extra long fingernail to prove that he'd never had to use that hand for anything grubby or anything like that. So, they were quite different types of people. Lots of people don't realise there are three types of Vietnamese. People talk about

31:00 North Vietnamese, and South Vietnamese. There's the Central in the middle and they all hate each other, pretty much, so these two used to eye each other off, and finally I got them going okay and we ran some very good joint operations together. And so Dutt was murdered in 1968 Tet Offensive, apparently, when they took Hue, and his mother and his wife and two little boys were killed.

31:30 I don't know what happened to Tung. I hope he got away all right. I hope he even changed sides if it kept him alive. They were both good men.

Right.

So that was sort of the background.

There's a lot there. Just to create more of a background I'm curious to explore a little bit more about the US situation over there,

32:00 **we sort of skirted over it a bit with the training in the training base. There's that but there's also what the Americans were doing and how, you know how kind of hot it was over there with their operations, the American operations.**

Yeah, well they, they, they got sucked into trying to win the war on their own I think was the best way. Not all of them, some of them are very good, they excellent men, they knew what was going on.

32:30 Lots of units were excellent too, most of the units. The United States Marines had a different approach they were more like us, they used to get a rifle squad and send it out into hamlet for a week or two with the RF, sorry with the PF and they got round the area and they got a good group of things. I managed to suggest to them, suggested, I managed to get them to agree that the best way

33:00 to sort out our problem between the two sub-sectors, because their boundary was on my two sub-sectors boundary, was we had a lot of passage through the area, going from out where they had cover in the jungle the rainforest, through Nam Hoa into Huong Thuy where all the rice and the money was to collect that, so, and there was a lot of moving around, they'd move intelligence groups through reconnaissance and what have you and so I managed to convince the marines that

33:30 we should put in saturation ambushing, and we did and it was very successful and it was just starting to really work and they pulled that battalion out and sent them south down near Da Nang somewhere and the next battalion came in it'd come from Da Nang and they were all fired up about the fact that how many helicopters they'd had shot down in the last operation, and things like this so...

So the saturation ambushing was that American Marine Corps?

34:00 Yes and RF/PF. We used to combine, we'd have certain groups move out at night and take up positions. And then if the ambush was sprung then fine, and then we'd RV [rendezvous], just at dawn, first light, that used to be the hairy bit, shooting each other up and then, we'd be positioned then so we could do what was called a cordon and search or a search and destroy of a hamlet of a given area.

34:30 and we sort of used combined forces to do that. And the beauty of that, really good part with the marines, apart from their excellent attitude, was the fact that we got on with them very well. They had, this was a marine infantry battalion it was called reinforced and it had a complete artillery battalion, with it, it had some helicopters, and

35:00 no it was pretty well equipped and the good part about the artillery they were medium artillery they were 55 millimetre, they had a longer range and suddenly we had artillery that could reach us at Nam Hoa and go beyond, we were on a river, go beyond the river. It was very, if you attacked, we usually attacked at night, it was hard to get fire support, the air support was almost a dream something like Christmas if you ever got it.

35:30 Casualty evacuation was hard to get, we were told that the reaction force would never be sent toward Nam Hoa during darkness. So if it was night you were on your own, they always attacked at night. And if there were no ARVN units operating within range of the field guns, one oh five millimetres, then you didn't have any artillery support either so, and the RF/PF were more, a lot more lightly armed than the

36:00 the main force battalion's district company that usually attacked you, so, suddenly we had these medium guns in range and it was like Christmas, it was great. And they were very good.

Can you just describe for me, I know you did it before but just what area are we talking about, you talked about that sort of a corridor, was it, is that, that this, these ambushes were going?

Well this is, they had part or tracks or routes they would move

36:30 through Nam. They would come out of the head of the thick country over towards Laos, and come out through the Piedmont and through Nam Hoa, and then weave across, they were just routes, they'd worked out where they'd, as often is the case in military operations, they knew where the boundaries of the two sub-sectors were and if you were ever going to have a muck in coordination or both sides ignore an area, they'll ignore their boundaries, that's why it's a very firm principle in tactics to always you know

37:00 coordinate your boundaries properly, so they would often move down the boundaries, or they'd have other routes depending on the cover that was available and what the going was like at night, and so from our intelligence of where they were moving and we would ambush those areas. And if you had about half a dozen ambushes out at one night you'd had a fair chance you'd hit a couple of their groups.

How did they know where the boundaries were?

Quite easily marked on maps all over the place.

37:30 They were administrative areas before the war. So and they weren't altered, so, I think when they Communists took over, from what they tell me, they changed everything. They must be expecting

another war, I don't know. Oh no plus they'd keep away from where we had outposts or where they knew we'd been patrolling. It wasn't a fixed thing but it was, just a normal intelligence battle.

38:00 They were doing things, we had to find out, they had to try and stop us, if we found out they'd do something else or we found out and we'd do something to counter what they were doing.

So could you trust the people you were working with in the ARVN?

Well I was, yes. I wouldn't be alive now if I couldn't have trusted them, I know some people had bad experiences, I understand that down where our main people were down in the south, the RF/PF were not all that efficient,

38:30 and perhaps infiltrated, it was always in the back of your mind but I never had any trouble at all in that regard. We always kept one fellow awake all the time, nobody slept at night much anyhow, because that's when everything happened, but you tried to sleep during the daytime when you could and we always had one fellow awake, and at night we always, we had our own radio network

39:00 advisory one, so we'd have somebody on our advisers' radio, which helped the district chiefs of course, because if their radio bunker got knocked out, you know we had another radio and our radios, we could get wounded evacuated. The RF/PF, just wouldn't be evacuated for days and they'd probably die, not all the time but sometimes, but marines were good they landed a big

39:30 helicopter right in the middle of the district headquarters one night, to evacuate one of our wounded which was very good. Fire support, or aerial fire support, we really didn't expect to get much, in RF/PF, unless there was a big build up and there had been a fairly prolonged battle and it never happened, out in one of the district headquarters, because,

40:00 that then it became political if a district headquarters fell, this is why they made a big song and dance about the Tet Offensive, they didn't hold any of those places for very long at all, but they didn't intend to but it was just to make the song and dance and get the world reaction and propaganda. And even they took a hell of a belting in the Tet offensive. They were really wiped out after that, particularly the Viet Cong. They were nearly annihilated because they were used up by the North Vietnamese.

40:30 But despite all that they got the propaganda victory and that led to the eventual victory, that was the start of it. It was like... Have you ever heard of Dien Bien Phu in the French war? The same thing. They... The French lost that battle but by God they, the Communist casualties were unbelievable, but it was just a lost battle, everywhere else the French were winning but they lost the war because of the publicity and the lack of result that affects politicians. And public opinion at home, so the Tet Offensive was really

41:00 a (UNCLEAR). But even though it was a stirring victory for the allies at the time. I'm digressing, what was I on about?

Tape 6

00:32 There are three types of operations, really the basic task of course was to stop district headquarters being overrun that was a no, no you lost lots of brownie points if your district headquarters got taken out. So we were limited really in what we could do, we mainly had to concentrate on that. I seem to be favouring Nam Hoa a bit in what I'm saying but it really was

01:00 the most notorious sub-sector in the area, and it could get pretty hectic at Huong Thuy every now and again but Nam Hoa was really the one that was, used to be top of what we call the hit list in intelligence report, it was always the one they were trying to attack and manoeuvring around and attacking. So, realising that the basic requirement was to defend the sub-sector headquarters, it meant that we really

01:30 couldn't go too far away some nights, depending on intelligence reports otherwise they'd move in as we moved out and that was caused, to a degree, by our resources, we had two regional force companies in Nam Hoa scattered around the various villages and hamlets were the RF platoons but they were pretty well stacked, they really had to defend those villages and hamlets at night, so

02:00 you could pull them out sometimes but not very often. But the regional force companies, if you were going to manoeuvre at all and move around, you virtually had to use them, we had two, their standard strength on their establishment was about 110, to 120 men, about the same as one of our rifle companies and in infantry battalion. In December of 1965 we had 23 men left in one company and

02:30 about 50 something in another, so, we only had two companies but really we only had two companies, but we really didn't have that many men. So we had to be careful, but however with that in mind there would be big operations when the ARVN would come into out area in great strength, at least a regiment that's three infantry battalions, sometimes more they might bring a ranger battalion in or a parachute team as well or a marine battalion.

03:00 They would have the divisional armoured cavalry division which had tanks and armoured personnel carriers, they'd be involved. The divisional reaction company called the Hak Bau[?] company, would

usually be involved, they had more fire power than a battalion did they had a lot of heavy weapons, so you could get quite a few people involved in these bigger operations.

- 03:30 Then when the marines were there they'd get involved too so we had those as well, this is the United States Marines. So I've forgot to mention, the United States Marines also had tanks, the battalion had tanks, coming from an Australian infantry battalion I was just goggle eyed by all of this. So you could get a lot of troops deployed for the bigger operations. Our role, because we, the basic requirement was to look after the district headquarters,
- 04:00 our main role in those big operations, was, because of our lack of weapons, and numbers really we'd usually be put out in what they called blocking forces. Sometimes we were put out to observe, so we might get the first contact or something like that, or observe movement and report it, or if they tried to move down a valley we were on a hill above the valley and call in artillery fire, and that type of thing. Other times
- 04:30 I got the distinct impression we were put out there as bait. Sort of get the battle started, let the NVA find us and they certainly, well the main force battalions did find us and the thing would develop from there, which worried you a bit but it never actually happened to us at any stage. The nearest we got was an NVA battalion went down a valley we were just too short small ridgelines away
- 05:00 from it and they were observed from the air. And I asked permission to attack them, they were, moving non tactically, four abreast, walking along, all their weapons slung, these are the ten foot tall monsters from the north. Some of them were all right some weren't, but the regimental commander, the ARVN regimental commander was commanding the operation wouldn't let us attack them,
- 05:30 I should have disobeyed him, I should have done it. He wanted to get his regiment to get all the glory and they came further down, and he muffed it and I think the battalion from another regiment killed about 30 of them and the rest of them got away. So, I really should have, I've been kicking myself ever since over that one.

What if you had defied him, what would have happened, apart from doing the attack?

What fighting the NVA battalion?

Yes but if you'd defied the high...

- 06:00 Oh it would have been glossed over if we'd have cleaned them up, I couldn't have complained really, I didn't expect to clean them up with our regional force company fire power, but we got them by surprise and they weren't prepared, we might have been able to panic them but we could have called in this massive United States marine corps artillery support. We really could have knocked them. Got most of them I reckon.

So who are you taking your orders from?

- 06:30 My district chief was taking or he wasn't on the operation the little second lieutenant was commanding the second RF company, was taking his orders from a regimental commander. And we were just advising, I wasn't commanding anything, yes, a bit annoying really when you spent all those years, and he would have gone, they would have gone with me if I had said go. And my American captain looked at me and he was an artillery man, an excellent controller of artillery and we had it all there, and
- 07:00 like an idiot I bit my lip and said righto we'll stay here. We missed that one, but anyhow enough about my personal muck ups. So anyhow they were the big operations, and they'd usually be based on intelligence that indicated there'd be at least a main force or even a NVA battalions in the area, and they were, that was a good target, or they just decided to go out and clean up an area because it might have
- 07:30 suspected base areas in it. So, that was that, that'd be a big operation. If it developed there'd be air support, Vietnamese Air Force had propeller driven ground support aircraft. Then you could call in American they had Phantoms and you name it for bigger operations they had B52s but of course we never got to, we didn't want any of them anyhow, but
- 08:00 a couple of occasions we just heard them firing away, it was like an earthquake really I wouldn't have liked being around when it landed. There was also naval gunfire support. We only used that a couple of times and that would sort of make a hell of a noise like an express train and then the next thing I think it landed in Laos somewhere if it didn't hit something on the way through, so, we didn't really rely on that sort of stuff.

Whose ships were they?

United States Navy.

- 08:30 They had cruisers and battle ships out there. I don't think they, they hadn't reactivated the battleships. When I was there, but the cruisers, some of the cruisers had eight-inch guns, and an eight-inch shell is something else when it goes past it's quite impressive. But we didn't get into much of that we, you did get pretty good air support if you got into a fight. If you were in one of these big operations and
- 09:00 we'd usually be on the fringe of that anyhow.

You had an emergency situation or a situation where you had a couple of battalions, North Vietnamese battalions within striking distance of you at one point is that right?

Our main force, some of the NVA used to go little bit further inland. I can't remember in my time any of them

- 09:30 being reported that they were being deployed against us. But usually we had one or two and sometimes three main force battalions deploying in our area, it's, they really wanted to get to Nam Hoa, probably because it would have been the easiest to get. There was, up in Quang Tri sector, Cam Lo was a bad one too, and Nam Hoa was the bad one in Thua Thien. But
- 10:00 they did a lot of manoeuvring, we had one attack was two, possibly three battalions and a district company, the local district company. And they had to take out a little outpost we had across a river. No more than a listening, three men and an old shrine and they attacked that but they'd done a faulty reconnaissance two nights
- 10:30 before and we knew they'd carried it out because there was a bit of yahooing, huffing and puffing going on, but they, from the time they did their reconnaissance we put in some low wire entanglement on the other side of the river and we'd also been given about half a dozen Claymore mines, have you ever heard of them? Directional mines you set them on the ground and they fire stuff like canister and they've got a
- 11:00 very lethal effect for a very reasonable range for about 50, 80 metres, 100 metres something like that with a reasonable arc. And advising that part of the deal was to not to try to tell, as I said before we didn't command anyone, so you had to try and avoid telling people what to do. And I don't know I must have been half asleep or something and bit too tired or something and I got these Claymores and we put four across the river
- 11:30 near this outpost, because we knew they were, they'd done the reconnaissance they were going to attack us within the next couple of nights. So we put the wire over there and we used low wire which I always preferred because you couldn't see it. And rather foolishly, I sort of, made a offhand comment to the rear district chief, and said, yeah we'll bury the wires won't we and because I said that, he didn't bury the wires, making a point you got to be very careful
- 12:00 when you're giving advice, so when they attacked they were throwing concussion grenades which were just blocks of TNT, which means it makes a lot of noise and stuns people but there's no shrapnel, so they could run in very close behind it without getting their own casualties. And as a result the wires on three of the Claymores were cut. But the fourth one fired and that was the end of the argument
- 12:30 it took out, 30 odd of them I think something like that. And they'd also started, the main force battalions or one of them had started firing with 57 millimetre recoil-less rifles and mortars and they aimed at the radio bunker, the advisers' room at the district chief's office and missed the lot. Not that there was anybody in the district chief's office or the advisers' room
- 13:00 I can assure you at that time of night, but they made a, there's a technique called bore sighting, where they line them up a bit like zeroing a rifle, and they all fired low left. And they were, one went through a wall but it was aimed out the door but it went through my all instead, there was no one there, it didn't matter, but the other one hit the left edge of the radio bunker and the other one hit a small shrine in front of the district chief's office
- 13:30 and so their mortars were falling, and we also managed to acquire another 30 millimetre machine gun, we only had one and we got a second they didn't know about that either and the 30 millimetre machine guns go onto the recoilless rifles and dusted them up a bit and that stopped that fire. And they're very inflexible; something went wrong so they just didn't go ahead with the rest of the attack
- 14:00 but at that stage they had us they were going to blow two bridges and put an ambush on the main road to Hue and they'd done all these things and they'd done all that but they pulled out and went away. So I've forgotten what the original question was but that was the answer, it was an example I think.

Maybe that's the one I read about, I just read about one operation where you had

- 14:30 **very short notice about it you received notice by radio that there were a couple of battalions, a North Vietnamese battalion very close by...**
- Oh no, that was one night where we actually we thought it was all right to venture out of the district headquarters and it was a big operation and we were moving out to be a blocking force. And of course if you moved out during the daylight, they knew, and so we had to cross a river, so,
- 15:00 we moved out about, one o'clock in the morning, nearer midnight I can't remember exactly and we headed off, we had a fair way to go up to the north to get to our blocking position. So we headed off, yeah that was the night, so we went along, we were getting radio reports or the district chief was and he'd come back, he always had a long face during operations, and his face was getting longer and he'd come back and he'd say eight oh two battalion
- 15:30 there, two tar, and we'd say where, and he'd say 2000 metres and so, righto we'd sneak, we didn't mind about that because they could get clobbered the next day when the big boys got hold of them if they

were still there, see. And twice during the night we got another report, and it's 804th Battalion, 2000, at the third report I get the distinct impression that we were surrounded. And but

- 16:00 we were getting, starting to worry a bit and we had a field police chief. He was a great fellow but he was a very bumptious sort of bloke and he was always... in fact once in daylight he wandered out in a track in the village where we had an ambush set and wrecked the ambush, I nearly wanted to shoot him myself that day, but he, he was with us this night, he was brilliant at getting intelligence and a very brave man. One of his men once was across a river while a battalion was moving, with a radio,
- 16:30 and while they were moving past him, he was saying two mortars, two medium mortars, two medium machine guns, one 75 millimetre RCL [recoil-less gun], two 57 millimetre RCLs, you know they were walking on a track about five metres from him. These are the sort of fellows they were so, anyhow the old national, the field police chief, we halted we come to quite a deep creek, it was almost a river.
- 17:00 And there was a single log crossing over it and we put a couple of scouts over to check the other side, because you didn't want to get sort of stuck on that thing if something happens, so, they were giving it a very thorough check out and I don't blame them and we were waiting and the old police chief was down the back of the column and he got all excited and bit anxious and he basically came up and he hustled past me, and in the dark he must have missed the district chief and he walked straight past him. Saw
- 17:30 this log in the gloom, and thought oh they've crossed the river, stepped on the log and fell off. It was a bit like a cartoon you heard this, "Ahh!" and he hit the water, and everybody was thinking we were surrounded and I started to laugh it was shocking it was totally unprofessional and I just laughed and then people started to, the whole column started laughing. And I think if they were around we probably
- 18:00 scared them off they would reckon we were mad or something, I don't know, but after a couple of moments we all calmed down, fished the police chief out of the river and proceeded on. I don't know what happened to those battalions but we went to our blocking positions and it was a particularly dull operation. Yeah so that would have been that one I think. The medium size operations were where we, we didn't have ARVN regiments and people charging around and a huge weight of troops but it's
- 18:30 like the saturation ambushing one I mentioned that we, but the operations we put on with the United States marine battalion, it's reinforcements. And they were very effective, it was saturation ambushing as I said and then we'd do a, cordon and search and search and destroy operations, search, you were searching an area if you thought were there and you had elements and ways in reserve you
- 19:00 could surround them and destroy them not let them get away. That never happens, it's all right in theory but people always get away, it depends on how many get away. But the cordon and search is more a administrative thing really, if some of them were hiding in a village you surrounded it and searched it and tried to drag them out from wherever they were hiding, see if you could catch some, that type of thing. So they were the medium type operations, and.

So what exactly is saturation ambushing? Why is it called saturation?

- 19:30 Because we just saturated the area with ambushes. It's not in the training manuals, it's something I dreamt up, there were different types of ambushes, but I just sold them this plot for, you know let's have ambushes all over the place. And it worked, we got a lot of them, and then unfortunately they pulled a battalion out, we ran it over Christmas too, we started about a week before Christmas
- 20:00 and then ran it over, because they thought we'd all knock off over Christmas. But then as it turns out we were ordered to knock off Christmas Eve, the marines had been pulled out, so the whole thing fell apart, it wasn't another one of my great successes I'm afraid. No they called a truce on Christmas Eve and well, we were back at our district headquarters and saw all this movement across the river and all these lights bobbing up and down.
- 20:30 And I thought boy it really is Christmas, get the artillery, come on we'll get this lot; it was at least a battalion. As it turned out it was a battalion we had one of our police over at the river watching and they were all holding candles, these were these ten foot tall invincible fighters from the north, because they couldn't see very well at night. And they wanted to move a bit more quickly, plus they knew it was a truce and we didn't know so I rang up for, didn't ring up, got on the radio for the artillery,
- 21:00 to shoot them up and we were told there was no fire available because of the truce, and I said, "What truce?" And they said there's been a truce been declared for the next 72 hours or something and "Didn't you know?" and I said, "You should tell those bastards across the river too." Because they used to use truces to move around, they did at Tet, they'd manoeuvre and then get ready to attack.

So truce means no movement?

Yeah, you stop fighting.

- 21:30 Stop, you don't do anything. In fact all the Vietnamese went whoopee, and they all went home. Except for the VC so it was the district chief, I don't blame him his family lived in Hue, he went back into Hue and then I went, I got annoyed on Christmas morning, I went around to the other sub-sector and the other district chief had gone home too, so I had a bad Christmas Day, blasted truce.

22:00 **I read something about the advisers being having their living quarters at HQ [Headquarters] and that that was sort of a sign to the North Vietnamese when they saw the advisers out?**

Oh yeah, when I got here, my team was, because we had two sub-sectors, unless you wanted to walk overland which we did a couple of times to confuse everybody,

22:30 but it was pretty slow, if you wanted to do that you had, we had two jeeps you had to go down the road and along the river and out to Hue and out through Hue back up highway one to the other sub-sector headquarters which was right on Highway One. And we, I've lost the whole point of that, what were we...

The advisers

23:00 **having to move out of headquarters.**

Oh I'm sorry, because of that reason, the other advisory team, when I got there actually lived in the compound in Hue, and we'd travel out to both sub-sectors okay, well we were out there most of the time but they'd come back into Hue when there wasn't an operation so, once again our police chief out at Nam Hoa wrote a letter which I've got a copy of in fact, I think I might even have the original letter,

23:30 to the district chief, saying that he'd noticed this and he's also quite concerned now and convinced that he'd be able to prove that the VC were watching. If they saw the advisers going out there, if they'd been away from the district headquarters and returning late in the afternoon they knew there was an operation on that night. And it could have been one of these bigger ones, you know one we were just looking but they knew there was going to be movement that night.

24:00 So, he said, this was a bit of a chink in our security network, he's quite right of course, so I had a thought about this and so we shifted out to Nam Hoa sub-sector, I thought that was the more critical one. and the main point being that something happened, the advisers' radio network as I said was the best sometimes the only way you could get some fire support or some medical evacuation, so

24:30 I thought probably Nam Hoa was the one that really should have got it. They were always on top of this hit list I mentioned and Huong Thuy usually came in about equal third or something like that. And it had its moments but it wasn't sort of as dramatic as Nam Hoa, they couldn't manoeuvre as well without being detected, because there just too many people around, unless they were doing something definite they kept out of the populated areas. So, we shifted out to Nam Hoa and the

25:00 next thing I'm told that any time we moved on the road anyhow, they were planning to ambush us, and they just take out another outpost we had downstream, Galloy[?] outpost, we didn't have enough people to, we chased them off, but in fact the 3rd Battalion didn't know they, and the 3rd got stuck into them but we didn't have enough

25:30 people to re-man the outpost at that stage, so and it was a nasty little hill that overlooked the river and the road, so we were told that they were next, cheerful news from the police chief was the advisers were going to be ambushed near the Galloy outpost. So, then the district chief came up with this ploy and he said, and this really cheered it up, he said, "And if you're driving along and you see broken green branches on the road," he said, "Go back.

26:00 I've told all the children in all the hamlets, if they see VC to put broken green branches on the road." We nearly wore our eyes out looking for broken green branches for the next month it was, but there were never any fortunately.

That brings me to the next thing I want to talk about, which is communications and intelligence gathering, and how that worked. You said the advisers had the best radio network?

Well it was, well in terms of working, they were all reliable,

26:30 but we could get on, mainly through the marines, we were the ones who could get fire support quickly and get casualties evacuated. If you used the RF/PF radio network for that, you just didn't get the support. The fellow would die or they just didn't have the resources and they certainly wouldn't bring an aircraft out there, a helicopter out at night. They had very few helicopters anyhow so it was,

27:00 as far as the district chiefs were concerned, it was the advisers' radio network really was their lifeline that was the main thing, in getting them support, the people have often said why didn't you go on R and R [rest and recuperation] and if people were sick why didn't they report sick, if you, if you went way they were on their own, you couldn't really look them in the eye when you went back.

27:30 We used to get a bit of a break every now and then. I went down to Saigon once, while I was there at that stage. I sent Bart Fury, my American 2IC, down there was some logistics course on, and I knew nothing about American logistics he handled all that and he looked as though he needed a break and I said, "Well go down and do that two day course Bart." and his eyes lit up and he took off for Saigon.

28:00 So, he was down doing that and our sergeant, Lord Simpson, unfortunately had been wounded and he'd been evacuated so we were down to three and I very cunningly, I don't know how I did it, but I very cunningly sent Trevor Barrett, the Australian sapper, warrant officer, down to Da Nang to steal sandbags. That was the only way we could ever get sandbags was to borrow a truck and go down to Da

Nang and steal them. And

- 28:30 that's why I'd sent, one of the reasons I'd sent Bart to Saigon to see if he could come up with some honest way of getting sandbags. He couldn't, it was a waste of time, so on one occasion I found myself there on my own and that was a bit, I was what in the hell have I don't, you know, I'm stupid, but we had, down in Da Nang there was a Captain Graham Belleville, who was a good friend of mine before we went to Vietnam, and he had a pretty lacklustre job somewhere in Da Nang, and he used
- 29:00 to escape from that whenever he could and he loved coming up and being up with us. And he'd just become a member of the team so he was around and so there were two of us there I wasn't on my own for a night or two, it wasn't too bad. But so Graham was killed about two weeks after I came home, unfortunately, he was a good soldier.
- 29:30 Yeah, so the little operations were just when we took some RF and a PF platoon or two and went and did a quick cordon and search of one of the hamlets where they'd heard that something had happened that night or might be happening the next night, that type of thing. The annoying part of the, a lot of the localised stuff was that we were, they had the initiative and we were reacting all the time and if they wanted to conduct
- 30:00 propaganda or terror operations, really we couldn't stop them most of the time, apart from the ambushes we'd get them, but they'd, they got through an ambush they'd pick their spot very carefully they were very smart at that, and if they wanted to kill somebody or get the whole hamlet out and harangue them and hand out leaflets and all this sort of thing they'd get away with it and
- 30:30 by the time we got there they'd taken off again, you might be able to follow up and do a search and destroy or something like that but it was very difficult to do, to catch them, that was the frustrating part of it.

So with the popular forces, these are the very sort of local village forces.

Yeah. they actually lived in that village. And as I said they're equivalent on the other side the village guerrillas lived in the same village. There was, people think,

- 31:00 all they can think about in Vietnam is the Americans and the big battles and the shocking waste and the unwinnable war and all that sort of thing and the real war was being fought in the villages and it was being won. It was thrown away, it's very annoying.

So how much did you know about what was going on in the villages, the popular forces?

Oh a lot. Yeah we, the intelligence was good, now I'm not saying that was the same all over Vietnam I've heard shocking examples of the opposite.

- 31:30 But no we, even though he was a bit bumptious and fell in the river, the old field police chief was good and the RF/PF officers were good they had a good grip on things and the people were generally on side, the, some people were pro VC mainly through family connections, they were a minority most of them who ever did anything for the VC they were coerced into it, terrorised into it on occasions.
- 32:00 The bulk of the population in the villages and the hamlets were not apathetic, they just wanted to be left alone but you couldn't say they were apathetic because in general terms they favoured the South Vietnamese Government. They didn't think it was the greatest thing since sliced bread, but they tended to prefer it to, to the Communist alternative and
- 32:30 they were very keen to see some degree of material progress, things that we wouldn't get too excited about, now if they had a village school they were very incredibly keen on education. That's why the Communists closed the schools down to discredit the government and killed the schoolteachers. And terrorised the kids who went back to school when they were told not to by chopping a little girl's hand off and this sort of thing.
- 33:00 So, it was, you know interesting moving through them, most of them were quite friendly, and they got the message that the Americans had everything that opened and shut, it was a bit like the cargo cult in New Guinea. And the Americans were good in that way, part of our operations these medium operations, when we finished a cordon and search or a search and destroy, particularly a cordon and search around a
- 33:30 village, they'd fly in a medical team in helicopters and set up and do what we called a MEDCAP, Medical Civil Assistance Program or something I think was, one of the numerous American abbreviations that they used, and the medical people in our area were all United States Navy, well the ones with the United States Marines were because they always provided
- 34:00 the marines medical services and they had, just across Highway One, near Dong Da Training Centre and just the other side was the marine base area they had what they called an AMED [army medical department] team, it was a bit like one of the MASHs [Mobile Army Surgical Hospital] that you see on television. Only it was the real thing it was, four or five
- 34:30 tents, dirt floors, one of them incredibly, thanks to American logistics, air conditioned. So that badly wounded could recover in it if they had to. And a team of eight magnificent surgeons, a marine, a young

marine was shot through the heart one night and they saved him. They operated on him for eight hours, six of them, saved him. I took in a fellow once, hit in the neck and the

35:00 the head and I thought he was gone and they saved him so they were pretty good blokes, and they used to come out on these MEDCAPs and the whole village would line up no matter whether they were sick or not because they never see much of this and even when they'd had medical orderlies in villages, government people too, because once again they were one of the first the Communists eliminated, so there'd been no, for several years sometimes before

35:30 there was anything there at all, and so they let everybody go through the line and treat the ones that needed it as much as possible and give the other ones sort of sugar coated pills and what have you and everybody was happy. But no they were very good the United States Navy doctors and their crews. We had lots of, well we didn't have lots, we had all the war tombs in our area,

36:00 and that's where all the emperors were buried and wives and concubines and mothers and what have you and they were quite big structures, huge structures. And the Communists used to use a couple of them for meetings and base areas and this sort of thing, and we didn't have enough people to patrol them to stop it so every now and then we do a, we just did a search and destroy or a cordon and search the same as you do with a village or a hamlet you're doing a tomb.

36:30 And the leader, the commander of the AMED team was a lieutenant navy lieutenant commander and he expressed a desire to see one of these tombs, they were quite spectacular so we put on a special little operation and cleared it and secured it and then marines flew them in and we gave them a good look around they spent about an hour taking photographs and what have you and

37:00 they hopped in their choppers and went back and we went back to district headquarters, so that was part of the sort of the civic actin, civil action part of it. We used to do other things, I was given an amount of money that I could spend for good works, for the, like petty cash, only pretty big petty cash and well we bought generators and things so they could have light at night and those sort of things. But overall they were

37:30 very stoic sort of people they had to be and they just wanted the war to finish and go away.

So when you did a search and destroy, a cordon and destroy...

Cordon and search.

Cordon and search of a village, and you did, you did find VC in a village or they were revealed for you, what would you do with them?

Well if they were VC you took them away,

38:00 our intelligence people and the field police usually knew who they were after anyhow, sometimes you'd find equipment or weapons, those sort of things. A cordon and search was usually a reasonably relaxed sort of thing, you had to watch out because it wasn't like sort of going into an area that was booby trapped and mined, because all the people were living there anyhow and everybody knew everybody else. We had one once, a bloke got up on a roof and dropped a grenade

38:30 in amongst us which caused a bit of a stir for a while but he was cleaned up and that was the end of that but mainly it was a matter, you'd find documents quite often or where they'd stashed rice or money and these sort of things, or they might have one person there with the money and the rice. Once we got a school teacher from Hue and he was a cadre member, Communist cadre member and his job, main job at the time was to guide

39:00 small parties through that were infiltrating up to about you know a squad, or a section in strength. And we got him and we knew this blasted squad was hiding somewhere close by, and so that we had to try to get him to tell us, and only a week before they'd belted a prisoner, and I mentioned that, spoke to the district chief,

39:30 "There's no point in doing that, you saw." He's the village guerrilla. He wouldn't say much anyhow, and he... But like most people, if you hit them they get angry and it makes it harder, and they just won't say anything. And I said, "He didn't tell us anything, did he?" District chief said, "No>" so I said, "Well, you know, perhaps next time we catch someone you sit him down, you give him a cigarette and a drink of water and he might tell you." And they shocked this poor bugger too, when I went down the track when they'd finished beating him. But

40:00 anyhow I said, "Next time we'll try it another way." So, we got this bloke and he was a different one altogether he was a schoolteacher and probably had a uni degree from Hue and so he just sat there and drank the district chief's cigarettes and drank water and didn't tell us a thing, I could have shot him I think at the end of it I reckon. The district chief just looked at me and shook his head. And grinned, but you had to, had to try them

40:30 stop them hurting people when it wasn't necessary. It was a civil war and that's the worst sort of war you can get, they were just paying back old scores and that's when it gets nasty. On the Communist side quite often it was just tactical, beastliness, it was part of their tactics to be like that with our people it was to get information or to just get revenge most of the time. Most prisoners

41:00 we sent them into Hue Citadel, citadel used to be the imperial palace and it was the headquarters of the first division and also other sector and I never saw them, I'm told they had a room in there that anybody that went into they always told them everything they wanted to know. They were all done with electricity apparently and after we caught them, all we could do was pass them on, couldn't control that. So it was pretty savage at times.

Tape 7

00:33 **So yes we'll see what more there is to say about your time in Vietnam. Listening to the last tape or two, I was just fascinated by obviously you were there as an adviser, yet there were those times when you were treading a line between advising and commanding, you know, not commanding as it were. That struck me as the hardest aspect of the job almost.**

It was yes, because

01:00 sometimes you could see things not going the way you thought would they could go they could be better, things could be done in a better fashion and really a lot of the time you really couldn't interfere, either in the time frame you could probably say something about it later on and get it changed, but there were occasions you just couldn't do anything you just had to go along with it really. Otherwise if you ranted and raved and jumped up and down and shook your fists,

01:30 you didn't have much influence after that, it wasn't the way of doing things. And that's fair enough I think I'd be like that too if I was a commander somewhere and had a Mongolian adviser or somebody telling me what to do, it's human nature.

So in general relations then between you and your counterpart, would have been pretty good then, there would be those times when urgency sort of made it tempting I guess,

02:00 **but how were relations generally, was there that respect both ways?**

Well the two district chiefs are excellent, I had an advantage of course because Australians had been in that area and well known for a few years before I got there, two and a half, three years. My district chief at Nam Hoa, he'd been an instructor at the RF/PF Training Centre which is downstream towards Hue from where we were and he had worked with

02:30 one of my classmates from Duntroon who was a good friend of mine, so we could chat about him and he knew all about him and tell him the latest news and what have you and the district chief at Huong Thuy was a bit more reserved, I'll explain the difference between the different approaches. But even then he was well aware of Australians and he accepted me straight away, but I think the main thing was you didn't bounce in and try to turn

03:00 everything upside down. And they went along with most things, it had to be constructive. It had to be something they hadn't thought of or something they hadn't experienced before. And they'd experienced a lot of things that I hadn't experienced, the district chief at Nam Hoa was the best controller of close artillery fire support that I have ever seen. Because he'd spent years down in the delta,

03:30 as an infantryman, company commander down there so he knew what he was doing. They all knew what they were doing. I've heard people telling these horror stories from elsewhere and I don't think I'm an eternal optimist, known to be a bit of a cynic in my time, but no, I never had that trouble at all. The province senior adviser was almost ecstatic one day, for some reason or another

04:00 I wasn't at Nam Hoa and I wasn't at Huong Thuy, I can't remember what it was, it might have been gone off to acquire those Claymores or something, I just can't remember what it was, and both the district chiefs turned up looking for me and apparently this was unheard of you know for district chiefs to come, they usually, in lots of cases, or some cases, Vietnamese officers were quite glad to see

04:30 the end of their counterparts for a few days and probably quite rightly so in some instances. But they came in looking for us, not just me but for Bart and the team and everybody was deeply impressed by this, except the province chief from what I could gather, but not very much was going to impress him anyhow. I didn't really have much to do with him. He didn't bother me.

05:00 **So how did you know how to draw the line, was there doctrine there or you know was it a question of you when it came to operations you didn't have a say there it was only after the fact and before the fact or, was there tactical involvement, or...**

If you thought there was something really urgently necessary you had to say it but then it was a question of how you said it. You had to get it over without annoying everybody and once again not appearing to step over this

05:30 thin line between advice and command. The other occasions you'd often be asked for advice so you gave it of course, to the best of your ability. So it wasn't all sitting on a tight wire at all it was, once you developed a bit of trust for each other it went pretty well really. I was probably

06:00 just lucky with the people I was involved with, I've said I've heard horror stories from elsewhere but I was lucky.

But where there problems though in terms of just giving face I guess?

Oh face was always a concern, when we were training, face was an aspect that was laboured at great length and impressed upon us and you could look back and find all sorts of examples of face, the Claymore mines is a

06:30 good example of face, but my experience has been I really think we are probably as much face conscious as Vietnamese are or any other race for that matter, I think it all gets back to individuals. As a culture, yes there's far more awareness of face then you would be here, but I don't think you can pin it to particular individuals, you might get extreme cases, I never ran into them at all.

07:00 They were all very reasonable, competent, good professional soldiers and the younger fellows they were all prepared to shut up and watch and learn and they were all in they were all in their various levels competent also. I said even the police, the field police chief had his moments, I had a great lot of admiration for him.

07:30 **So once you were, originally were based in Hue and it was deemed unsafe because once you moved out of HQ?**

That was after about two weeks.

Oh okay, that short a period. So once you were, based in your sub-sectors, how often would you be back in Hue back in touch with HQ?

Well it would depend, sometimes it was for administrative reasons, it's just that when you all stank that much you wouldn't talk to each other any more so you had to go back and have a shave.

08:00 Or there was nothing happening and you went back and had a beer, and perhaps stayed overnight, it depended on what was going on. Other occasions of course you had to go back for briefings for orders prior to operations, all the normal things. There were logistic reasons, we had two jeeps and whenever we had a problem with them we had to

08:30 give them to the RF/PF logistics company as part of the system in Hue. In 1965 the RF/PF weren't part of the ARVN they came under ARVN control a few years later as I understand it but they were a separate entity, you know we'll work together in operations, but no, they were separate, so we had a separate logistics system, which, you had to, blink your eye for a minute and you'd miss

09:00 seeing it was there, but it was there and we had to use it and what used to annoy us we'd send a jeep back in for some minor defect and we'd lose it for about a week and once we were bowling along highway one and one going to Huong Thuy or coming back from Huong Thuy, and our other jeep passed us in the other direction and two young bucks driving their girlfriends around. So we pursued it and sorted out that situation, but you had your moments sometimes on the administrative side of it.

09:30 **Sound like a tricky sort of a situation, you've got the RF/PF the ARVN, you've got like what you called the limited war, the civil war, various layers, fairly subtle connections it seems. Are you able to explain how it all sort of tied in together, how you know the ARVN worked with the regional...**

Well the ARVN virtually ran the show through the divisional and corps commanders.

10:00 The corps commanders were very powerful people. When they started having all those stupid coups and things that broke out you notice it was the senior military sort of running the show there, there wasn't enough politicians around to get involved very much. If, they were they weren't powerful enough. Because the generals had the troops, but no, the ARVN definitely ran the show there's no doubt about that, and the RF/PF were just an adjunct to the ARVN,

10:30 although it wasn't formalised as I said, till some years later. There were other elements too, mainly through CIA initiatives. Some areas there were, there was an organisation called People's Action Teams, PATs, PAT platoons, and they were incredibly well trained and some Australians were involved in this, good friend, classmate of mine is one of them and well equipped.

11:00 And we got a PAT platoon at Nam Hoa and that boosted our resources quite a bit, you know the weapons and the bodies; there were about 28 of them, that's quite a significant reinforcement. And later on we got one at Huong Thuy also, so they were sort of these various different little groups and armies and I don't know much about the Special Forces but they had,

11:30 Mike Force and they had other types of forces, and there were all sorts of strange, well not strange but different groups and units prowling around the area. It could get, in fact it was far more complicated than you've just suggested really. But as far as I was concerned I just ignored most of it and got on with what we had to do at the districts with the RF/PF.

So who made up the PATs you just mentioned that was...?

I don't know where they recruited

12:00 them from to be quite honest, they were probably people who didn't go into the ARVN were diverted into the PATs, People's Action Teams, I don't know. there again they might have been paid more, and all these sort of things I don't know what happened but then of course you got the added complication of the allied forces coming into the country and in my case once again that was pretty straightforward, we only had the marines and the marines aren't much different to our army really.

12:30 So that wasn't a problem, they thought the same way and so that was good.

You mentioned they came in roughly the same time.

Yes they, they came in I think it would have been around about April, '65. So April, May they were well established before I went to the sub-sector in late August. And no we'd met them they were just across the road from Dong Da Training Centre, where their base was,

13:00 TAOR [tactical area of responsibility], but I certainly got to know them a lot better when I went to Nam Hoa and Huong Thuy. I was lucky, I was lucky with the people I ran into I don't know, the S2-S3 who was sort of the operations intelligence staff officer on the battalion headquarters was an exceptional fellow, the first time I met him

13:30 I said, "Gday, how are you?" and we just hit it off straight away and once either of us got some intelligence, as soon as we got to the other one, we could put on an operation in about two hours, we could plan it and it would probably start that night or the next day sometimes. No, he was great to work with, I've got this Australian fixation of not calling people just by their surname. On a couple of occasions I had to say to Americans, "Look, you can call me 'major', you can call me 'Major Musgrave',

14:00 you can call me 'Vin', but you don't call me 'Musgrave'. Got it?" Rothhaser[?] never ever called me anything but 'Musgrave' and I never called him anything but 'Rothhaser'. And we got on like clockwork it was great, and he had the right attitude, they were all very good officers, and good men the marines too. They just had the right attitude, straight away they sent their snipers out to where we could deploy them from Nam Hoa and they had some

14:30 good success too. Particularly before operations and sometimes just because they wanted to be out there, they'd send out their... From the artillery they'd sent out the second lieutenants as forward observers. They used to fight each other to come out to where we were and we used to think of fighting each other to get back from where we were. There was a young bloke, Richard E Covernall, second lieutenant, he was a big boy, about six foot something and built accordingly,

15:00 that size. I think he won most of the fights because he was our FO [Forward Observer] on at least half our operations and he was as pleased as punch about that. Their helicopters were good, could land an old chopper near a flagpole at district head quarters at two o'clock in the morning you're doing a pretty good job. The United States Army helicopter pilots were good too, but we just had two

15:30 Hueys and one was destroyed on the ground, then one was sent south to join a VIP escort flight or something, so that was the end of our two Hueys, but we had the old chop doors were older and more lumbering but they still did the job you can certainly use them for casualty evacuation which is good, so, yeah I think I started off talking about the Vietnamese officers qualities didn't I

16:00 and then lapsed into allies.

It doesn't matter, it's all important. But just following on, I mean you've talked about the American choppers and the artillery and how they were, how you coordinated things. How about troops on the ground and when you were on patrols or the ARVN teams you were working with, would they be working side by side with marines or would they still...?

Yeah, sometimes we joined up, sometimes

16:30 it'd be separate and then we'd RV somewhere. As I said they put a squad out in a village with a PF platoon and leave them there for a week or so and that was really good. When we started the saturation patrolling and ambushing, prior to that, on several of the exercises

17:00 we had conducted, they came up with a list of names for then, this was Rothhaser really dreaming these up I think or his CO and all we had 'gun smoke' and 'rawhide' and 'wagon wheel' and all of the western type titles and they got onto me and they said, we really should have an Australian title for the next operation and I said righto if I don't do anything they'll forget it. So this went on for a little while, another western or two

17:30 and then, after promising them and then managing to avoid the next one and I was confronted with Operation Tuckerbag and I, thought, "Oh God, how corny." so they'd got me with that. So the next one, I said, "Righto, I'll give you a name." and I gave them Operation Bodyline and they said, "What's this Bodyline business?" and I said, "That's a rotten thing you do in cricket when you hit the batsman on the head."

18:00 They said, "That sounds good." So the first saturation, well the only saturation ambushing operation was Operation Bodyline. And the CO wrote down to his commander down in Da Nang and I've got a

copy of the operation order in fact and in the end of it he wrote the letter to the commander that the name of Operation Bodyline is the product of the imagination of the Australian

- 18:30 adviser at Nam Hoa and in beautiful American wording, he said, "We're in. Which he tells us, this is a term wherein the game of cricket, that the ball is aimed to bounce at the batsman's head. We hope this will have the same effect on the enemy."

That's great.

Well they were great people to work with and they pulled them out unfortunately, however.

- 19:00 The marines eventually lost I Corps to the army. I think that was couple of years later. It was politics I think, service politics, what have you. It's a shame. I know the United States Army did very well in many areas but the marines were doing really well, or certainly up where we were in the first division area, no doubt about it.

So at that point was the American involvement, were they

- 19:30 **taking their initiative themselves in terms of what patrols and what movements they were undertaking or were they still like you, you know pretty much aligned tactically with ...**

They had a designated area, a tactical area of operations, sorry tactical area of responsibility, TAOR. And they could do anything they wanted to do inside of that area. And memory's faded a bit on this.

- 20:00 I think it was in relation to a standard Vietnamese sub-sector. It would be a, you know, a reasonable size. It wasn't as big as, if there was such a thing, an average sub-sector, but it was still a reasonable piece of country to work in. Now when they went out of that it was on operations. They could go out independently but it had to be cleared

- 20:30 through the ARVN, the TAC [Tactical Commander] in the Hue Citadel and that was so it could be all coordinated what the ARVN were up to, they, because they were all over the place in operations and you had to balance security with just letting people know what was going on. It could be difficult, in Huong Thuy once in the wet season, we were in sampans,

- 21:00 we used to do ambushes in sampans believe it or not which was a new one for me, however always prepared to learn, and we were mortared by our own side one night by in fact my favourite ARVN battalion, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Regiment got stuck into us and it didn't last for long and they didn't know we were in the area and we were more importantly we didn't know they were in the area, because they were operating into our sub-sector. And we were just putting out you know standard patrols which we

- 21:30 we didn't have to clear with anybody unless we had to coordinate with other people coming in the areas so, you got a few hiccups like that every now and then but overall it was pretty good.

So you said sampans, or...?

Sampans, yeah.

Which are?

Well sort of like a long canoe. Yeah, more elegant than a canoe really. Huong Thuy in the wet season was pretty well almost underwater the whole lot of it.

- 22:00 And we had a base near a village of Tun Thuy Chan which was between Highway One and the coast, and we'd just really won it back recently that area and to consolidate it, they had to, we put in an RF company there and a base. And the only problem was in the wet season, the only bit above ground apart from the hamlets and villages was

- 22:30 a graveyard, so they had to clean out the graveyard before they put the base in that was a tricky sort of, a messy operation, but it was sorted out. There was the local mandarin or major landowners' tombs left there so that became our CP [Command Post]. It was like a big vault really, and incredibly thick walls. You felt quite safe. Very clammy and cold in the wet season but you felt pretty safe at night in it.

- 23:00 And it was a good area to operate from. Graham Belleville christened it 'Uncle's Tomb' I think was the term we referred to the CP at that base, Uncle's Tomb.

And from there that you were conducting on sampans, tell me about...?

Yeah well used to go out. Well = I don't think we had an engagement I can remember, probably just as well because I was a rotten swimmer but we went out and you had to move around you couldn't just sit back because it was wet and

- 23:30 there was a lot of water around, because they would move around and they could, actually I don't think they moved that much after all when it was really wet. There'd be a few pathways above water tracks, but not totally above water and it's incredible how tactically important things like that become when everything else is covered by water, and everywhere you went you sort of walked in the water anyhow, usually up to your waist.

24:00 And they were paddy fields and they just flooded, it was pretty normal, it was the way things happened. So any feature you could see was very handy for map reading it was also important tactically if you could be there before the enemy was there. And it was two quite contrasting sub-sectors both of them; we never got flooding of course inland it got wet, very heavy rain, the wet

24:30 season there was the... funny it was the wrong time, the opposite to other parts of Vietnam, we got it in November/December, so it was, just one of those quirks of nature I think the weather.

How else did the terrain and the weather come into play and effect what you needed to do?

Well in Huong Thuy we were dictated by the canals,

25:00 which had been flooded in the wet season and restricted us even more, you had to be, you know they were all obstacles if you were manoeuvring or moving in any way at all. so you had to plan that and that predicted where you were going to go it more so predicted where they were going to go of course. If you ambushed you ambushed at a junction of tracks above water, or, a junction of a big canal. Perhaps one almost as big what have you.

25:30 A lot of Huong Thuy was just buildings and people, there were, as I said about 120,000 of them and lots of paddy fields of course. Nam Hoa was a lot less paddy fields and more scrub type areas you know and not many people. And

26:00 it got, it started to get quite hilly of course as you went it, it was very sandy in Huong Thuy a lot of the area, a lot of sand and you had sand hills down on the coast. We never got into the coast area much, we didn't have the resources, you know right onto the beaches, the ARVN operated along there frequently, and the Vietnamese marines were involved there also and they had another force called the junk force and they actually operated armed junks

26:30 along the coast, but we didn't get involved, we went and had a look at them once, but that was about all. But the ground did dictate, once you got out in the Nam Hoa area, ground was ground, there was dead ground, high ground and low ground, and observation and things, and sometimes you can't see things and so you just treat it as you're trained to treat ground anyhow.

27:00 **What about sort of jungle terrain was there much of that where you were?**

Once you got in a bit, probably be about, roughly about 20 kilometres and you started to get into that, it might have been a bit further and then it became quite thick and way through and to most of Laos I think once, wandered over the border I think once or twice by mistake, we rarely went in that deep we

27:30 just didn't have the people and the fire power. We got involved in a couple of bigger operations, and you couldn't really tell where the border was actually it was, once you got into that thick stuff. But the ARVN generally were better operating more out in the open stuff. Once again if we'd been able to influence things a bit, and get enough units trained in good close country

28:00 tactics and confidence, going back to Colonel George Warfe and the friendly jungle. We could have done a lot more damage along that area. The Ho Chi Minh Trail you know just wasn't, to use our terminology, one track running around with lots of people milling around and surging the track every night. It was a very wide area, lots of tracks and roads and it shifted when they

28:30 were bombed they'd shift the bridges and all sorts of, and they were running trucks down there and there were people on bicycles, cargo bicycles and all sorts of things. If we could have got into some of that we could have caused more damage. I thought our task force was wrongly deployed, in the south; it should have been up in that area. It could have had an impact far out of

29:00 all relation to its numbers and it could have had very strong United States air and artillery support and in fact our taskforce could have worked very well the United States Marine Corps and I Corps. But I think there was some politics involved.

And these were opinions that you held were they not?

Oh yes it was obvious, you could see it. You went in the country and see the way things should have gone but didn't,

29:30 just before, a couple of days before I left the training centre they had a briefing from visitors from Saigon, and when they had visitors from Saigon, there's be about two aircraft land at Phu Bai airstrip which wasn't too far away in fact right next door. This great cavalcade of vehicles crammed with all visitors would come surging into this place and leap out and go into this hall area they had and put on a very slick presentation and

30:00 the presentations were way ahead of the training and then they'd have their presentation and then all come out and leap into their vehicles, and go back and leap on the plane back to Saigon and got the impression that they knew all about what was happening. So, this last, I never went to them after a while they were a waste of time, I was walking past the hall and they were dispersing from one and they all poured out and so I just stepped out of the way

30:30 and off they went and just at the tail end an American brigadier came out and so I saluted him and he

saluted me back and he said, "How are you young fellow?" I said, "Not too bad Sir." And he said, "Oh I see you're an Australian." and I said, "Yeah that's right Sir." And he said, "What do you think of all this?" And I told him what I said already in this interview, that I thought we'd got into a messy area of training an Asian army along European lines, and equipment to fight counter-revolutionary warfare

31:00 against an Asian army using revolutionary army tactics. And he looked me and he said, "Yeah, you know something else young fellow?" and I said, "What's that, Sir?" He said, "We've gone too far down the trail to come back." And he got in his vehicle and drove off, so there was obviously other people thinking along those lines.

That's quite telling isn't it, it's too far down the track and yet it went on for another....

Yeah,

31:30 well, he thought it was. I think he must have been pretty disillusioned with his job in Saigon I think. I had heard that he'd been relieved a couple of weeks later, whether that was just a suitable rumour that fitted in with it all or not, I don't know. But I think he was right, it probably could have been turned around at various stages but I really think there was just too many people having a say about it and forgetting the fact

32:00 that they were there to advise and help, and probably the most dangerous ones were the ones that were really high flying American politicians or their advisers and aides who would come over and visit. And then go back and give the President their opinion you know two weeks or a week in the place and then the next one would come back and give a different opinion and it was,

32:30 what a way to fight a war.

Can I ask, obviously when Australia and the US first got involved, it was quite a popular war, I mean the domino theory really did hold sway. Did you feel that was legitimate theory, the domino theory?

Oh, in fact I was talking to a Thai who was living as a child a young teenager in Thailand at that time,

33:00 talked to her about two or three weeks ago, and she said to me, I said to her, "Now I don't know if you've heard of the domino theory?" and she said, "Oh yes we believed in that." So if the Thais believed in it, there was something in it. All our training and background as officers in the army was aimed ultimately at opposing Communist revolutionary warfare. I actually studied Communism.

33:30 All these pundits carry on in the media wouldn't have a clue about theory and practice of Communism they were just seizing on clichés because it suited their purpose and likewise, lots of the politicians and agitators. I have been told by a friend of mine from the intelligence corps that the enemy propaganda campaign was run by a Swiss firm in Switzerland. I don't know whether that's true or not, but

34:00 it could be so. Because all of the western media certainly went out of their way to back the enemy. And it lives on, every week I see something in the paper or somebody makes a statement. About the Vietnam War where the truth is now gone, it's all fantasy and legend. There was a travel writer writing last week in one of the papers and referred to where he'd sat down and had tea with the Viet Cong

34:30 commander who planned the Tet Offensive, from a little shop in Saigon, he didn't go on to say that about eighty per cent of the VC got used up or wiped out and the NVA and the big boys running it from Hanoi did that quite deliberately, just used them up and I don't think there was very much planned from a little shop in Saigon for that, somehow or other. But these sort of things build up over the years and there are a lot of people

35:00 from that era who have since move onto positions of power in this country both in politics and administration and business and they are still trying to justify the stand they took at the time and hence we have this, almost an industry that's grown up about the poor Vietnam veteran. You'll run into some of them in your other interviews,

35:30 these poor misunderstood people in this horrible, dirty, unwinnable war. Some of my warrant officers in the Training Team, served in World War II, Korea and Vietnam and at a reunion about three of them all swigging beers around me and plying me with strong drink, and we got talking and I asked them and I said, "What was the worst war?" and they all said, "Korea." So much for the Vietnam dirty, unwinnable war.

36:00 People you know like to believe these things. I don't know whether it's a sop to their conscience or not I don't know but the end result is 19 million South Vietnamese went down the drain. It's as simple as that some of them still in concentration camps, even yet. I think it was winnable, it was badly mismanaged.

36:30 There was a Canadian journalist, I've got his book in there somewhere, his book was created into a television show, it's one of the few documentaries I've ever seen about Vietnam worth watching, the same as this book was one of the few books I've ever seen about Vietnam worth reading and I quote him, he said, "In relation to the American effort and it applies to us too, we were just a

37:00 little appendage to it, they blundered around and they blundered out," and that pretty well sums it up I think. It wasn't very well managed, it could have been but it wasn't. So it was very wasteful, incredibly

wasteful. It's very moving to go to the United States Vietnam Memorial in Washington and walk along that wall, I went along looking for a couple of names I wanted to see, but

37:30 the whole war gets to you, it's quite incredible.

You obviously had a very strong sense of how the way the war should have been waged and how things could have been better. Talking about the counter revolutionary tactics should have been employed.

Yeah, I think we should have relied on the Vietnamese to fight it, and instead of you know towards the end, they had a term the Vietnamese

38:00 The Vietnamization of the war, where they were swinging it back prior to that it had been Americanised, which should never have happened, sufficient fire support and troops for reaction purposes could have been kept in a relatively small number of bases in Vietnam, or off shore, particularly the air support

38:30 could have been kept off shore. And that would have eliminated the requirement for the majority of the vast sprawling American bases that grew up and became targets themselves then and added to the overall security problem in the conduct of the war, there were too many allied troops in the country and a lot of them were in the wrong places and they got to the stage where they were just relying on going

39:00 out and you know killing the enemy, and that wasn't the aim of the game, the aim of the game was to contain the enemy, certainly make him pay for anything he tried to do and bolster the civilians and so they would resist them. The other factor of course was time. We didn't have the patience to stay there, I wouldn't put a time on it, we could still be there now, still going,

39:30 but could you imagine the western world accepting that, no way in the world would they accept that. A story I was told once, when the communists were about to take over China, they were just closing in on Shanghai and the last British warship to leave there was a destroyer and one of the officers was just about to go, to board the ship and depart, and the Chinese friend was there to see him off and so they said their farewells and

40:00 just as he was leaving he said to the Chinese chap, "How long do you think the Communists will be in power here?" and the Chinese chap said, "Oh not very long, probably only a hundred years." And that's the way you got to think. That's why Communists, or revolutionary warfare, but particularly Communist revolutionary warfare can be so successful. They weren't interested in casualties or time. They just

40:30 kept going until they got there and other people gave up. Mao Zedong referred to his own countrymen and women as the manure of progress, so when you got that attitude, can you imagine John Howard standing up and saying, "Fellow citizens, you are the manure of progress and we're going to do this that and the other." So, completely different mindset. But I don't think it was a complete waste of time.

41:00 The dominos stopped dropping, I think they got hammered that much, they suffered such horrendous casualties, and I think the Chinese and the Russians were just as worried as the Americans of it escalating into unlimited war and then perhaps nuclear war that everybody was glad to see it fizzled out and their side was happy that they'd dragged the south but the Thai domino didn't drop so it might have been something there, I don't know, but what could have happened in the other direction it's all right to say we should have pushed on but there again we might have got World War Three and a nuclear war, and it's hard to say, we'll never know. We'll never know.

Tape 8

00:35 **So Vin you were going to tell us about saturation ambushing, the origins of the concept and how that basically worked.**

Yes, well it's been really ambushing is an aspect of patrolling; it's long been enshrined in Australian Army doctrine, and tactical techniques.

01:00 The idea is that if you've got people moving in an area, and you've got enough information on it, you go out, usually at night, depending on the close country; you can go out at any time if you can't go at night you go in daytime. And you try and knock them over, when you had people moving around our area the way they were, as I said before, if you covered all possibilities, you were bound to get some of them.

01:30 So that's the way we went about it, instead of just sending out an ambush patrol to a certain point that night, which we did sometimes of course, because we were pretty restricted in numbers, but when it was a combined operation with the marines, we had a big boost in resources and numbers, we could ambush between us about six locations every night. And that was the way to do it so we covered a wider area and it's as simple as that really.

02:00 The more you got out the more chance of getting them and the ambush itself was usually simple what they called linear ambushes, straight line type ambush. The country we were ambushing in was just Piedmont type country I mentioned there was some scrub and stuff around, it certainly wasn't close country, so you could detect movement from way away and that of course helps in ambushes.

- 02:30 We ran into an interesting enemy counter ambush drill, when we had our ambush drills as well or counter ambush drills and I hadn't run into before, they would all just wherever they were all just throw one grenade in the direction of where the fire was coming from and then run, turn around and run. And of course you get all these grenades going off and
- 03:00 that distracts people a fair bit. Rothhaser went out on one of these ambushes one night and we linked up with them at first light and when I got to him he was sitting there and there was a body there as well and he was pretty distraught and one of his clerks had talked him into going out with him, and they'd run in, they'd actioned an ambush and they run into this enemy counter ambush drill and this young bloke got
- 03:30 hit by a grenade and killed. So, it went both ways but their casualties were a hell of a lot higher than ours for that week. As I said it was a very successful, yes, it went quite well. Has that explained it all in anything you want tidied up. It was very simple really we just go out and ambush them, but you know in several locations.

And those locations were chosen how, by intelligence?

Through knowledge

- 04:00 of the enemy's movements, the big success thing about it was the fact that we got the RF/PF to do it, and we were able to combine with the marines, so that just you know, enlarged the concept and of course there were a couple of occasions in an ambush you need artillery fire to follow up and we had that laid on too with the marines,
- 04:30 so it was a very good set up.

So conceptually I understand it, I'm just wondering if, you can explain to us from the ground level what those ambushes, what the patrol, what a regular ambush or patrol, or search and destroy or whatever, was like from the ground level, just the actual experience of it as opposed to tactically.

Right usually around about a company group.

- 05:00 Our companies of course were way under strength; marine company for the actual operation would have 80 men or so, something like that 80 or 90 men. And both from their TAOR, or their base and from our district headquarters we'd head off around about 10 o'clock at night, providing we were sure that
- 05:30 we were pretty secure for that night, and you just move out to, select an ambush position, at night you didn't want to get too tricky so they were pretty simple, what you call a linear ambush, just in one long line, along a track or a known route, but utilising the ground or the cover that was there, and just take up your positions and you'd wait.
- 06:00 The marine ambushes were split on most occasions, they then split up into platoons then there'd be a platoon ambush. So once again, instead of having one, you'd have three in that area. So that added to the saturation aspect of it. And if somebody came along you had the right procedure, agreed procedure for triggering the ambush, somebody was designated to open fire.
- 06:30 It was usually somebody close to the ambush commander, and so you opened up then you could use illumination, you could throw illuminating grenades and then it depended on how the enemy reacted what happened after that, and hopefully they didn't all throw a grenade at you. So usually they were pretty shocked and they endeavoured to get away.
- 07:00 And quite a lot of them get away of course and it'd be difficult in that situation putting in blocking parties or cut off groups and that sort of thing, which you would do if you were putting in an area ambush over a more prolonged period. So they were pretty simple sort of ambushes, then after an ambush was sprung or it wasn't, you moved on, according to where you had to be for
- 07:30 an RV at first light and that was the tricky bit because everybody was pretty toey. And the district chief had this little knack of whenever we were approaching for an RV, he would motion for me, would I go forward and find the Americans. I'd have to sneak ahead and be confronted by a large marine with a rifle,
- 08:00 and convince him I wasn't a Russian. They were all pretty used to me I think by that stage I think anyhow. So I'd go back and find where the platoon commander was and I'd crawl back to where the platoon commander was say, 'Righto I'll go and get my bloke and we'll move through now.' And they just lie all around then and I move my people through. And then our district chief, whoever it was, would take command again. And we'd move through to where the RV was, and
- 08:30 the others can track back to where we were. And then we'd compare notes and see what had happened during the night. And because you might get, that RV, four or five ambush parties going back in varying strength or platoon something like that. So that was pretty much it. Then we were all on the ground at first light, and we'd reconstitute into, they reconstituted their company formations -
- 09:00 they'd moved tactically by platoons - and we'd take up our area of that, where we had to move and a

smaller group usually because there were less of us then we would move and somewhere from where another company had been doing the same thing over night, they'd have moved into a position so we would have virtually surrounded a village or a hamlet, the one we wanted to have a look at, and

- 09:30 sometimes you'd get them trying to get away from there as you moved into positions that of course, small fire fights and some of them would get away invariably. So, you'd put in your blocking positions, which were virtually more ambushes really, if anybody tried to use that exit, and then you'd move in with your main force usually the whole US marine company
- 10:00 that were involved at the act, it might have been more than one and just sweep into the village and search it, start searching. That was all divided up into areas to do that. And you either ran into something or you didn't. Quite often you didn't, and when the village was secured and everything had been searched and checked that you wanted to,
- 10:30 then sometimes they'd have these MEDCAPs fly in the medical team then there'd be a bit of leaflets handed out on the psywar [psychological warfare] and stuff and go on propaganda and what have you, so the poor old villagers just had the VC in, or at least on the propaganda side the night before and then they'd have us the next day.

Do you think any of that was effective?

Yes I think it was, yes. The MEDCAPs were very effective, the VC couldn't put it on MEDCAPs.

- 11:00 Not at the scale that US marines go, and that impressed people. They said you know that what the VC told us last night can't be right, here are these people and giving them pills, this sort of thing. We had an old man come up to Bart Fury once and somewhere another he'd got a crumpled old copy of one of those glossy American magazines. He said to Bart, he said, "The VC tell us that
- 11:30 you Americans have come here to take all our possessions and our land and everything, and I look at this and I see all these motor cars and I," and he said, "look, I see a refrigerator," and he says, "I don't think you really need to come here to take anything off us have you?" So Bart assured him that they hadn't, so propaganda can be a double-edged weapon on occasions. But overall they tend to go along with the side who happen to
- 12:00 be standing there with the guns at the time. But you can't blame them for that.

You said before that, generally there were no surprises; there was one earlier where you mentioned that a guy threw a grenade from, one of the villages...

Yeah that was a cordon and search that was way on the outskirts of Hue and they were mixed up, they were quite considerable buildings. And stone and brick buildings, it's like a, you know it's like a

- 12:30 allies around a city area. Don't know why he did that, he could stay up on the roof and did nothing, we probably would have missed him I think, I don't know, but he might have been very keen I don't know. but it didn't do him much good he didn't get any of us and the people further back saw him on the reef and he was shot pretty much as soon as he released, thrown the grenade really.
- 13:00 That didn't stop our excitement down when the grenade landed over here we managed to get out of the way of that.

What other surprised might there be or difficulties in those situations where any of those situations, cordon and search or...

Oh if you get somebody in a hide, you get somebody to go and look I think they, lot of talk about tunnels and there were some incredibly complex tunnel systems in some areas, down

- 13:30 where 1 RAR went they went to the Binh Hoa area, they went to first, they got into a massive tunnel, fire layers, levels of tunnel, the bottom was a cemetery, hospitals all sorts of things. The only tunnel we ever saw in our area pretty much like rat holes really. There wasn't places a few people could hide and that was about it, so, tunnels weren't all that sophisticated.
- 14:00 When they had their base areas further out they had, you know very sophisticated systems. They had to be because they were under the constant threat of air attack. So, they had to, that's why they developed all those complexes. In training and in manuals you saw punji pits [concealed pits lined with sharpened bamboo] and big beams with spikes on them that swung down and collected you when you went along a track and all this stuff and most of that
- 14:30 was in training pamphlets I think we saw some punji pits and you'd have to be really incompetent to get yourself hurt, to first of all fall into one, and then secondly get yourself hurt with any one. Although I must say most of the ones we saw weren't covered up because we'd go there and surprised them and they used to have people nominated in the villages to rush out and cover all these things up when government troops were approaching, but they,
- 15:00 which we ran into a few that were covered up but we detected them pretty easy. The main concern was, they give children grenades, they'd say throw that into that group of ARVN around the corner or something or throw it to the chief or something like that, that could be a bit of a worry, it depended on

just how good the security, the overall security was in the sub-sector. And ours was good, or the North Vietnamese was good and

15:30 the police and the district chief, and intelligence people they were very good.

And in those situations where you confronted Viet Cong were there times when obviously you had the upper hand and there would be, the army would surrender. Would come out with their hands up type of thing.

Oh yes we took prisoners, but mainly because it would be a fire fight

16:00 and they may be a bit stunned or shocked or what have you and some wounded, so there'd be a few caught that way. Some of them would be caught, as I said hiding and we'd catch them in then cordon and search or search and destroy.

Yes, so taking prisoners, now would, so when men surrendered what would the process e?

Oh they'd just be curbed so they couldn't

16:30 cause any more harm and passed back and go to the district headquarters. The classic way the district court had confining people is a pit in the ground with a grille over it sort of a bit basic but they couldn't, no they didn't stay there for very long, they were sent back to Hue usually the next day. And didn't have any facilities for... to really hold a large number of prisoners, we didn't really take a large number of prisoners.

17:00 But we got some every now and then, but. The only time I interceded on the prisoner side of it, apart from the bloke I tried to stop them beating and they shot him anyhow, was they caught a female once, and a couple of people were paying a bit too much attention to her, so I said a few words to the district chief and we had her put in a separate room and a guard on her so that sorted that out. But she went back to Hue with the rest of them anyhow

17:30 so, what happened to her, she...

So, just curious, obviously you, know you, your training had been as good as it can get in Duntroon and so on, and you had those experiences in Papua New Guinea or New Guinea, I'm just wondering when you got to Vietnam and you actually are thrown into the thick of it, even

18:00 **with all that training, how is it suddenly being in that situation where you are up against the enemy, it's not...**

Oh I thought it was pretty much how I'd been trained. You just took it as it came, you said it, our training was superb really, I hope it still is. The results they've been getting lately, it seems to be pretty good training, for them, before they're committed to action, so we've always had high training standards

18:30 except for, we might have got caught short a bit at the start of the two World Wars. In Korea they were a bit slow getting a battle school going, we were in Vietnam, when I came back I was an instructor at Canungra and we tried to get a battle school going there but there are so many safety measures introduced, mainly for political correctness I think,

19:00 you know, it was very difficult to get any real, start again, it was difficult to get any realism into training, you could make it pretty hard but they had Haramura Battle School in Japan for Korea and that was, that was people told me it was a rest away from Korea to get away from Haramura Battle School, and Canungra in World War II was

19:30 it was pretty rough too, you had a small percentage of people it was acceptable to be killed in training. Sounds very callous, the pay off is you then get less people killed accidentally or for stupid reasons in action and that's been proven time and time again. In this day and age you can never get back to that we're too politically correct now it's, too much drama in the media and all sorts of politicians falling over themselves.

20:00 It's a pity because some young people in the future are going to get killed because they weren't perhaps trained or acclimatised before the battle school before they went into action. However that's airing my own thoughts now, it could be all well under control, I don't know.

Obviously when you went to Vietnam you were working alongside

20:30 **ARVN and the regional popular forces who I take it were quite battle hardened, had to you know been there done that, and you're coming in to, an advisory role. It sounds like a that time a little bit earlier when you were with the assault pioneers where they'd been involved in some scrapes and were pretty hardened and knew that, knew their stuff and again you were thrown into that position you had to deal with that and adjust, was there**

21:00 **a similar thing happening in Vietnam when you go there?**

No not really because my unit had been there for about three years and the majority of the warrant

officers were very battle hardened, experienced fellows and they'd proven it in battle with the Vietnamese, so it was a bit of a thing to live up to really, if you were an Australian you were just expected to be good, so you had to be good or you let the unit down.

- 21:30 We had incredibly experienced people in the Training Team. Particularly the warrant officers, the officers were obviously younger, mainly younger than the warrant officers, but the overall experience level was pretty good really. And it was just a matter of applying what you learnt, and in your training, and off you went.
- 22:00 Then you obviously picked up a bit as you went along, the, main thing was not to rush into things and create a lot of turbulence, there was enough turbulence as it was so you just had to fit in quietly and see what was going on and when you had something to say, say it and not get an ulcer if it was ignored. And try again later, repeat it next week and eventually after a
- 22:30 month or two you find things actually started to happen. So no it wasn't a problem overall.
- So obviously you come from a very professional background, a professional soldier, I'm just wondering though perhaps those first, without, I'm not meaning to probe too deeply here, but those first experiences when you're out in the field when you're in Vietnam and you are trained for these situations where you are**
- 23:00 **it is life and death, there are casualties and you've seen stuff before but this is, you know this is everything you have been trained for. I'm just wondering behind the professionalism is there an adjustment that had to go on there as well, just mentally and psychologically to what you're experiencing, what's happening there?**
- No I think the professional side of it takes over and maintains control, you
- 23:30 certainly get frightened, there's no doubt about that, anybody who doesn't get frightened is either a liar or mad. But no the things you've got to do and you've been trained to do them so you get on with it, the training is the key to it, the training for war that's the key to it and if we ever stop doing that we're in bad trouble. There's a fairly famous quote that, if you're in the army you can spend about
- 24:00 98 per cent of the time is absolute boredom and two per cent is sheer terror, well a lot of the 98 per cent boredom is training for war and if you train properly and you accept that training, and really there's not much that can come up in combat that can bother you at all too much, so it's just a matter of getting on with what your training tells you to do
- 24:30 and what your thought processes tell you to do. And it certainly helped, having as you mentioned very experienced Vietnamese people around the place, so yeah.
- So is it the instincts you have when you're in the field when you're in action, have they already been honed do you think in the training, or is something that is always...**
- Yes but well it gets back to what I was talking about battle skills and realistic training. In our earlier years
- 25:00 I think when we were cadets at Duntroon and our instructors were people who had been in Korea, there was a lot more realistic training, the use of firearms and live firing and that sort of thing, and you could probably get away with today, I don't know, so it was, certainly an asset to have that. At Canungra, there were, you know
- 25:30 there were a few little rounds loosed here from time to time and Colonel Warfe was a master in the art of battle simulation, we used explosives and training grenades and all these sort of things. And if you spent a couple of nights in a position that he was organising a demonstration platoon to attack and providing all the background for it, it wasn't any worse than action I don't think. So
- 26:00 the training was pretty good in that regard.
- Can I ask you about R and R.? You didn't get out of country, it was all in country, wasn't it, you went to Saigon?**
- Well you could go to, Bangkok, or, Hong Kong, and Japan I think you could go to. I never took R and R; I didn't, never got around to having any time to do it.
- 26:30 My CO, that's the CO of AATTV [Australian Army Training Team Vietnam], he used to get very annoyed with me and say, "Nobody is indispensable." and I'd just quote this business about a few advisers with radio sets and the old RF/PF slugging on forever without any R and R and he would accept that. I went down to Da Nang a couple of times. One was an administrative reason,
- 27:00 they had a added responsibility for the administration and command for the Australians in my area, well the others so, and then, we sort of reported to Da Nang who then reported to Saigon, so I think I had to go to Da Nang a couple of times, and that was mainly for administrative, or once we all went down for Anzac Day
- 27:30 they arranged one of those Caribou aircraft and people came in from regiments up north of Hue, up

near Quang Tri, they picked us up first all the advisers down the Hue area and then we flew up to, an airstrip near Quang Tri and collected the others, not everybody made it but the majority did and then we went down to Da Nang for the day. They had a

- 28:00 house at Da Nang called Australia House and that was the headquarters of our unit, really. And we took some American guests down with us and we had a pretty standard sort of Anzac Day and we all got in a plane and went back again. So that was one occasion and a couple of times I went to Da Nang that was for administrative things,
- 28:30 it was either Australian or, because they would have combined them, any Australian requirement. Or, we had to down there and steal sandbags, and barbed wire and things and we couldn't get any through the Vietnamese system so we did, a huge base around Da Nang airstrip, in fact it was Da Nang Airport. And we found a site there. It was three or four acres,
- 29:00 a huge big barbed wire fence all around it, and it was just stacked with these great stacks of sandbags, so we borrowed a truck from the marines, our own marines up near Hue and so we just drove the truck up to the gate and there was a marine guard on the gate and he helped us load the truck so that's how we got our sandbags, but Saigon,
- 29:30 went down there twice I think during the year. I think I went down to see, the first occasion one of my warrant officers was leaving, he'd been wounded and I just wanted to make sure he was on the plane all right. And he recovered from the wounds, and we go and see him off and another occasion,
- 30:00 I was there to see one of my captains off I think. He wasn't in the sub-sector with me, an Australian captain but he was doing another job at the training centre. So, that was about it, I went to Conh Tum and Pleiku, when I was at the training centre, they started adding fourth battalions to the ARVN regiments
- 30:30 and we got a battalion, 4th Battalion of the 40th Regiment sent up but they came up from 2 Corps, but they must have been full up at their training centre so they sent them up to the I Corps training centre and they were marched in the whole lot, fresh from scratch, two fresh US advisers and they, they were there for
- 31:00 in fact that was a worthwhile part of their training centre which I'd forgotten, I shouldn't have. I got heavily involved in their training of this battalion from scratch, I sort of did their recruit training and then a little bit of what we call corps training and advance training. Then for most of the Vietnamese the training was on the job really, we talk about battles, they didn't have battle skills. They were sent to a unit and if they survived they got the experience. And then this
- 31:30 battalion went back to its area and it was based at Conh Tum and I got a chance to get down and go on some operations with them down there so, that was better than being at the training centre.

So that was in the first six months that you were there?

Yes, yes.

So one of the, so it was a battalion you trained or?

Yes, yes 4th Battalion of the 40th Regiment.

And so there was follow up in that you actually joined them on some operations?

Yes, we went down, we tried to reopen

- 32:00 Highway 19 I think it was. Bit of a fiasco really but we got out of it relatively unscathed, we had, one of the few battalions still had a major battalion commander, usually they were captains and he predicted what could happen to us on the way back quite accurately and we left some troops and sort of watching possible ambush areas, and sure enough they moved into one of them
- 32:30 and our fellows got stuck into them, so that wrecked their plans for any ambushes so we, we got out of that one fairly well. Unfortunately the battalion senior adviser who I'd got to know quite well, was, he was killed a few weeks after I went back up north. At that stage I'd gone to my sub-sector and only been there about a week and I got the news that he'd been killed unfortunately.
- 33:00 But the other chap had finished his term and gone home so he was out of it, but old Nick got killed unfortunately. But that was about it for trips, oh Easter I managed, one of my warrant officers was having trouble, he was with a battalion, a 3rd Battalion 3rd Regiment, and he was having a personality clash
- 33:30 with the battalion senior adviser who was an American Army captain. He wasn't a bad bloke really so, I was able to get out of, escape from the training centre at Easter, and went out with them they were on an operation just to check things and that went pretty well that was quite a good operation no big dramas and we managed to improve the relationship
- 34:00 between the two advisers. That was a plus, the battalion commander he was one of the best officers I ever met, the battalion commander of the 3rd Battalion 3rd Regiment, Captain Hai, he was very good. But he was killed unfortunately before the Tet Offensive, at the start of it I think which was unfortunate.

But

34:30 his wife ran the Green Door Brothel in Hue, which was quite hilarious really, when... The Tet Offensive. It was the centre of the exit and advance of the NVA and the VC units that took Hue, and it was flattened, apparently. But prior to that it used to be quite an institution. And I used to go there to see old Dai Wei Hue and we'd sit in the back room and talk tactics and one of the warrant officers and one of the captains, "Hey, the boss is at the Green Door." so they'd all gather as many as they could come

35:00 whizzing into the Green Door. Embarrass the boss and in the back and they'd all sort of look into the back room and old Dai Wei and I would be sitting there drawing diagrams in beer puddles and things and they'd all go away disgusted again. So, I don't know what happened to Dai Wei, his wife, I hope she survived. Hard to say really, but he was very good, very good tactician, he knew what he was on about, so...

So,

35:30 **were you using English, Vietnamese, combinations of the above?**

Oh generally I was lazy and didn't learn as much Vietnamese as I could have, I had some basic words and things, the district chiefs and battalion commanders were generally pretty, they spoke English that you could get along with, with reasonable facility. Bart Fury, my 2IC, had done a Vietnamese language course in the

36:00 States and he was good, so we had him. The thing is if we had something technical or something difficult and my limited Vietnamese went very quickly then the district chief's English got worn out Bart was always there anyhow, so we, technically we had people with us, translators, they usually had the rank of sergeant in the ARVN.

36:30 Some of them were very good, some of them were quite useless in fact they'd get in the way if something was happening so we dispensed with having translators at the sub-sectors because we had Bart Fury anyhow and both the district chiefs had pretty good grasp of English, and even at two o'clock in the morning and something's happening, it's incredible how you can communicate, it's unbelievable how everything suddenly becomes

37:00 crystal clear and you, even if you just wave your arms around and shout at each other, one in Vietnamese and the other in English, you, still manage to pass on the, whatever you're trying to convey, so, you know. The language problem wasn't a great barrier of course.

And how much contact did you have with home, with your wife and your family?

We could write, there were sometimes there were hiccups in the mail system.

37:30 When I first got there, there were people advocating that... should use the Vietnamese normal postal system was the best to use. It was fairly quick, but stuff went missing, I don't think through dishonesty overly much but just through but I just think through enemy action, the fact that there was a war on, whole swags of mail would get misplaced and burnt and what have you.

38:00 So it was unreliable in that regard, we used the American Army system, our mail went to California in fact and then back to Australia, we used an American Army post office. And that was pretty good it probably took about two or three weeks from memory. But so it wasn't too bad. Americans used to send tapes backwards and forwards.

38:30 I tried that but once, but it didn't work very satisfactorily so I went back to writing letters but sometimes you just couldn't write a letter for a while and you did when you got the chance.

What was wrong with the tape technique?

Oh I think I got impatient with it and every time I went to tape something, something else happened and damn, at least you can sit down and write something it's there and then you eventually you get a chance to post it, you post it and that's it.

39:00 But no overall the, that part of logistics was very good really, mail. We had a couple of periods where we didn't get any for three or four weeks but overall it wasn't too bad. Christmas in '65 we got this incredible stack of Christmas cards from Americans,

39:30 they had children all around America sit down and write Christmas cards to people in Vietnam and of course they were distributed all around the place, and must have been a ton or more of them arrived in Hue, so they just split them up between all the advisers didn't matter whether you were an Australian or an American, you still got this stack of Christmas cards and I took the trouble to answer a couple of them from schoolchildren, just to thank them, explain that it didn't really get to an American but I'm pretty close to an American.

40:00 And so that system certainly worked, and they had entertainers would appear from time to time. And they actually had Hello Dolly the stage show, it came into the country and started down in the south and started moving up north after giving concerts in various bases on the way up and

- 40:30 we kept, "Hello Dolly's coming, Hello Dolly's coming," and "Where is it now?" "It's at Da Trang." "Oh that's good." And then it finally got to Da Nang and we said, "Da Nang, boy, us next," and they said, "No, it's not going any further north of Da Nang." We all refer to it as 'Goodbye Dolly' but we got some people up, there was a, fellow who was a star in westerns came up there, he was twirling pistols and things and
- 41:00 lots of the Americans were interested in this but I just sort of said hello to him, I can't remember his name now, he was a nice fellow. And Raymond Burr [American actor] came and visited us at one stage. And I had a long talk with him we just happened to get a stage where there only a couple of us around. So, had a long talk with him, he was a very nice person, his manager was with him, he was a Canadian
- 41:30 and he'd served in the Royal Canadian Artillery. So, he was well and truly into it all as well in the conversation. But apart from that we didn't get much up in the north, we had the, they had the United Nations observers in the demilitarised zone so, Indians, Poles and Canadians and whenever the Canadians got a chance they'd come down to Hue and look for Australians so they could get beer.

Tape 9

00:35 **So, tell us when your tour of duty ended and you left Vietnam?**

- Well I had considered extending, you could do that for up to six months, but I thought of family requirements and what have you. I wish I had now because about two months after I left, we knocked over the 802nd battalion, the RF/PF,
- 01:00 with the marines and it was quite a good win really, so I missed that and they were the ones that used to annoy us a lot the 802nd. Anyhow I was reposted; well I didn't know what my posting was until I got down to Saigon. But overall I think 12 months postings there were too short, you were really just starting to get a grip on it and you were on your way again.
- 01:30 The main feeling was, of a job not fully done, but I fully expected to go back there again anyhow because I thought things would go on for a lot longer. And I didn't think I'd get trapped into some of the jobs I got trapped to when I got home, and so but that's the way it worked out but overall the military side of me was reluctant to leave
- 02:00 really, it's stupid really, but. I had a bit of a feeling I was letting the district chiefs down a bit, however when the time came up and I went, and when I got to Saigon I was told my posting which was to instructor at the jungle training centre, so I came home and I had a lot of leave to take,
- 02:30 and I really, after about two and half three weeks I'd had enough leave anyhow. So, when I was on leave, Graham Belleville and two of my warrant officers were killed, all three of them in separate incidents, all over a period of about a fortnight, and I'd sort of hear that in the morning when I was having my breakfast. So, I thought to hell with it, let me get back up to Canungra and contribute to it, got to do something.
- 03:00 So I went off to Canungra where I was told off for being late. So - in a jocular sort of way - the chief instructor on battle wing had in fact been the CO at one stage at 2RAR. So, I then spent two years at Canungra as an instructor, I was on battle to start with but after a while, because they were short of people I got shifted to tactics wing.
- 03:30 And so I finished off there and then I got posted to Staff College. Which, I didn't really want to go to Staff College at that stage, I was told it's best not to rock the boat and annoy the system and go along. So I went to the Staff College and I got posted back to 2RAR as second in command.
- 04:00 It was unfortunate, it was one of these ANZAC [Australia and New Zealand Army Corps] battalions that have New Zealand companies added to them. And that wasn't unfortunate - having some Kiwis in the battalion, that was good - but the part of the deal was the 2IC was also a Kiwi [New Zealander]. So, I was out of it. It was a bit like the Malaya situation being repeated. The CO kept saying I'll get you away don't worry, but the only way I could see of going is if they sacked one of the company commanders.
- 04:30 And I didn't want to be in that at all, they were all friends. And one of them was fairly vulnerable, and probably because of his, his overall sort of behaviour he actually ran the best company in the battalion but he drew attention to himself in other ways unfortunately and so then I was, we were down at Shoalwater Bay
- 05:00 running support battalion and I was OC enemy for 6RAR before they were doing their final exercise before they went and I was offered a job in the Directorate of Military Training in Canberra and I thought about it and we went back to Townsville and like an idiot I accepted it, and then, so I left the battalion. When the
- 05:30 battalion in its turn went to Canungra to do its pre Vietnam final assessment, they sacked that company commander anyhow, so I really could have gone as a company commander, and I probably might have had a clear conscience, because I wouldn't have had any part of that thing, of sacking of course. And I

got trapped in Canberra for five years. And by that stage

06:00 I'd pretty well at the stage where I was going to be in staff jobs for the rest of my service, and I missed out getting command of the 2nd Battalion, which was the only real thing I was interested in after that, I'd served as a lieutenant, a captain and a major, and didn't get the ultimate one. One of my classmates got it in fact and did a very good job. He was a very good soldier. But I

06:30 thought about it for a while. Then I asked to get out of Canberra, and put in a list of choices and got about third choice I think, back to Melbourne, which I'd never been posted to in my whole service. So that was reasonably acceptable and after I'd been in Melbourne for a few years, back in fact, I was working in the 3rd Training Group, which was an Army Reserve, a CMF formation. I,

07:00 retired from the regular army and transferred from the regular commission to the CMF commission, active CMF commission. And then I went on serving on, on the 3rd Training Group for another four years as a tactics instructor and then I got posted as the SO1 [Staff Officer 1st Class] Infantry Headquarters of the 3rd Division and I was there for three years. And my retirement age was coming up anyhow so I got out a bit earlier and went on inactive reserve.

07:30 And that was that.

So, you said Canungra you were doing jungle?

I was on battle wing to start with and then tactics yeah. I was the SI of what they call sub unit training, when a unit was, say a battalion was going to Vietnam, a rifle company would appear one week, the second week the next rifle company would come along and the third, then battalion headquarters, and support, they'd put the whole battalion

08:00 through progressively over a period of about four weeks and so we put them through in sub unit groups, but sort of at one stage you almost had the whole battalion there. So, and of course, artillery units, and sub units went through too and cavalry and engineers and all that.

It's the obvious question, but why did they put you there?

Oh they probably had a spot they needed to fill and I

08:30 was ready to be posted and it was probably because of the Vietnam experience I suppose, to pass you know lessons learnt onto others. It was a bit strange in a way because I'd been an adviser; I hadn't been down in, with the battalion which was down there. I raised this point with the operations officer of the battalion who became a good friend later when he turned up at Canungra as an instructor. And he said, "Oh don't worry about that.

09:00 You know the basics..." And he was right too; I didn't have any problem with it at all. And a lot of the course was concerned with our own close country warfare tactics at Canungra anyhow. So, but it helped to have a little bit of Vietnam background sometimes. The first thing that struck me when I got there, there were a dozen or more of my warrant officers all lined up there with ugly grins on their faces,

09:30 waiting for me, they'd all been posted back there too as instructors so, it was a like old home week. And they say, at that stage in Canungra, they say if you stay there for about three years the whole army went through at that time because of the Vietnam War. So I was there for two years, so I saw a fair bit of the army go through.

So that means you were there till the late '60s, is that right?

End of '67.

10:00 I went to the Staff College in 1968. That's a course that starts in January and ends in December so it takes pretty much the whole year and then you're back in the posting circuit again after that.

But you were promoted obviously at the end of that?

No I was a major still, and I was, later on when I was in Canberra I was promoted and that's as far as I went.

10:30 Before I got out, it was almost time to get out anyhow, so that was it.

So it seems there was that that urge to get back to Vietnam and continue the work you'd been...

I thought I'd get back as a rifle company commander. It just turned out with the way postings went, before the war started to be scaled down unfortunately. I hadn't gone to Staff College, I probably would have got away but they

11:00 you know it was probably another wrong decision going to Staff College I don't know. But it was probably a prerequisite to getting a battalion. But also unfortunately, a prerequisite to getting a battalion, it was never stated but I was pretty convinced that the commanding a rifle company in Vietnam so I think they tended to discount advisers a bit. When they were

11:30 considering a background for promotion or not for promotion, for appointment to the team. And a lot more people available than there were battalions I would say. So that was that, and so couldn't do much about that.

Now Vin you've told us a lot about what you thought of the war and how it should have been fought, you know you have some theories there. and you told us that great story about how you met the American, I can't remember what,

12:00 The Brigadier?

Brigadier, the war was conducted in that same vein that you saw as wrong until the end. What was your take as the war progressed and popular opinion sort of turned against it a bit. What was your, what did you feel at that time as that was happening?

I felt pretty angry, because I knew that, or I believed it was,

12:30 it was not a dirty unjust war, I thought it was a war that had to be fought. It just wasn't being fought properly and that's what got me even angrier. And if you're going to go and fight you should do it properly, and so I didn't enjoy the way things went, a lot of us got angry but we still had our job to do and we just got on with it. I was never bothered by any incidents or anything of that nature, I wasn't conscious of any

13:00 of that, there was a lot of rubbish written and published in the newspapers, particularly and on the television, but you just ignored that and read the sports pages anyhow so that didn't bother me too much. Later, in my reserve service in fact, in a completely civilian capacity, at a couple of social functions, about the only time people tried to upset me about that sort

13:30 of thing, one was, one particularly stupid young woman and the other occasion was parents of a chap who was in the national service, you could go into a reserve unit and there was nothing wrong with that and this bloke had chosen this path and I just made a comment, yeah that was a good unit and it was a good unit, it'd been part of our training group for a while I knew it very well indeed, and I think they were ultra sensitive about this and they took it

14:00 the wrong way and performed for a while and I just ignored that too but they were the only two incidents I can remember. The people who probably had more put on them were the national servicemen when they returned back into civilian life, because they were quite often just plucked out of units there when their time was up as individuals,

14:30 put into a mixed gaggle on an aircraft, flown back to Australia arrive about two o'clock in the morning, given pretty short shrift by people who should have been trying to look after them better. Some of them didn't have any money, eventually they would be put on, the ones going back into the country areas, where they lived, put on a train and back home and that was it, no farewell, no bands, no, all their mates were still in Vietnam. So I don't think I would have liked

15:00 to have been a national serviceman who was sent to Vietnam and came back home in those conditions. But as far as the regulars are concerned, any comment that was made, or anything it was just like water off a duck's back really we'd seen worse than that so, it wasn't any big deal. There was anger at the way it was obviously building up in a big propaganda campaign, so, effect the conduct of the war. And in the long run

15:30 let the South Vietnamese down rather badly. It was a shame really. That was the, in the process the other thing that really got me really mad was the denigration of the South Vietnamese and the picture that was painted that they were all corrupt cowards and you know our fellows and the Americans were all over there dying for them it was a load of rubbish. The majority of them were very good people and those in the armed services and the paramilitary,

16:00 the majority of them are good people too. During the Tet Offensive, north of Hue Highway One where it runs up from Hue to Quang Tri, is, you might have heard the term the Street Without Joy, it was a famous book written by Bernard Fall about the French experiences in that part of the world and so the Street Without Joy was a pretty hairy sort of area. But a place called Hoi An, up along the street of without joy and during

16:30 the Tet Offensive the local ARVN company defeated an NVA battalion, so, they certainly weren't all cowards and wimps and incompetents, there's no doubt about it, a lot of them were very good. Because a lot of the good ones got killed of course too over the years a matter of attrition. So that was about it really, it was a winnable war, it was

17:00 fought in a wasteful way, to win it we would have had to spend a long, long time there which with our western mentalities we weren't prepared to do. And so we, we departed and they won, and so a lot of lives lost and wasted unnecessarily. Particularly my comrades and the civilians that got knocked about, I'm not too concerned about how many of the enemy got killed, they had it coming to them

17:30 being stupid enough to espouse that sort of system but overall it was an incredible waste, it really was, and it could have been handled so much more differently than it was. However that's life and at least the domino stopped dropping.

Have you been back to that part of the world?

No, I couldn't go back there, I'm a bad loser; I'd end up punching a guide or something like that.

- 18:00 Nam Hoa along the river was a very beautiful place; it's where the two tributaries of the Perfume River that runs through Hue behind district headquarters was right on that junction. And old dai wei Dutt, I had a longstanding joking agreement that one day I would come back and we would create a tourist hotel there instead of a sub-sector. But it never happened,
- 18:30 but apparently tourism is pretty big there now, but if I went back into that area now and listened to the continuing propaganda and rubbish, and I'd probably lose my temper, I think I don't know, it's best to keep away from it. Lots of people do go back, a good friend of mine been back about eight times I think. And he was a member of the Training Team, and he flits about, and it's interesting to talk to him about his observations
- 19:00 of what it's like now. But I think overall it wouldn't be that much different. Vietnamese are Vietnamese regardless of any system and I think if you've got an authoritarian regime running a place, a certain amount of pain, but I think they can, they often work their way around these things, they struck me as being pretty good at that. But it was a shame it happened in the first place. It could have been avoided.
- 19:30 The government they had was not all that brilliant of course you know but I think it's better than what they got. I think most of them would agree with that but regardless of what the western media and all the apologists, have said in subsequent years. I think a lot of them have got very guilty consciences in there, pretty desperate to make it sound as though even today they were
- 20:00 right and in fact they weren't wrong, wrong, wrong.

Do you want to finish it there; have you got anything else you want to say?

No, I think I've said everything I wanted to say big political statements, strategies, tactics and sorted out the world. I found one aspect of this exercise interesting and it gives a chance to talk a bit about sub-sectors. And what went on in them and what the advisers

- 20:30 there had to do and what the Vietnamese there had to do. The official history of the Australian Army Training Team doesn't say much about it, what I can gather the quick glance the official war history that's been published doesn't seem to say very much about it at all. It seems to be a forgotten area. When I was there one of my warrant officers, Warrant Officer Bob Kennedy,
- 21:00 he was at that other sub-sector, up in Quang Tri Province, Cam Lo. And he had some very exciting times there. He was armoured corps, he wasn't infantry. Phu Loc further south from there was Warrant Officer John Fugue, who's unfortunately now deceased; he was Royal Australian Army Service Corps. When our headquarters in Saigon wanted to move him the Americans went into a flap,
- 21:30 he was indispensable there he was that good. I was one of the first majors to escape out of the training centre, the other one was Major Don Robinson, he was up at Quang Tri sector and there were others that followed but they were the ones that I know there were some in second division area as well, but they were the ones I was aware of. As far as the Training Team was concerned,
- 22:00 one of the things I remember about them most was the incredible capacity, regardless of the corps they belonged to, to do the job, and I think it went back to the basic Australian approach that everybody should be a trained infantryman, in his initial training before he's anything else and it was just amazing, it didn't matter what corps they were in, medical corps, intelligence corps,
- 22:30 any of those went in and Warrant Officer Bruce Firth who now unfortunately is also dead, was put by me quite reluctantly, mainly because I thought it was a bit dangerous for him, was put with the divisional reaction company, this Hac Bau company for eight or nine months of 12-month tour there and performed brilliantly. And Bruce later transferred to infantry and was promoted I think he was a captain
- 23:00 when he retired, it just showed no matter who they were, that didn't mean that the Team was any particularly elite unit, I don't like the term elite, it's overdone these days. Everybody's elite, that's what's crazy, people are either well trained or they're not well trained and they do a job or they can't do it, as simple as that. But that was the big factor in why the Training Team was so successful I think, everybody
- 23:30 was so well trained. And I think that reflects credit on the overall system that produced them and produced the unit. It's a pity the unit wasn't kept on the order of battle, unfortunately. It could have been deployed elsewhere in other countries that I've noticed since, with reasonable effect that... I think that's an opportunity that's been lost. And that's about it, I think.

- 24:00 **You sure?**

Positive.

INTERVIEW ENDS

