

Australians at War Film Archive

Robert Bettany (Angry Ant) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1377>

Tape 1

00:41 **Can you give us an introduction to your life, please?**

Thus far, well I suppose it all began in 1945. On the 13th of May I was born in the Cairns Base Hospital and

01:00 jokingly my father used to say that I was an air raid shelter baby, but that's not really true. Get it off to a joking start, won't we. Yeah and, I had a sister who was two years older than me and spent the first couple of years of my life in Cairns. Mum and Dad, and then Dad worked for the Department of Civil Aviation, and so we up stakes and jumped on a ship

01:30 and went to Horn Island which is the airport for Thursday Island and in those days was extremely primitive. Going on photos that the family had, we lived in an old tin shed on the edge of the, which was an old air base during the war and all the old war relics were still around and the vehicles in fact were old discarded army vehicles. We're talking

02:00 1949, and, anyway, according to my father's diaries, and he never kept a lot of diaries, but he had altercations with the fellow, the head men of the DPA [Darwin Port Authority] and the DCA [Department of Civil Aviation] and found that there were some untoward things happening up there and so thought it best that he got out of it and he went and joined a fellow called E. K. Thorpe,

02:30 who ran the ferry service from Thursday Island to Horn Island for the aircraft passengers. And he was the launch driver for them and we then lived on Thursday Island for another 12 months or so and I think late 1950 we returned to Cairns and we lived initially at Freshwater and then we moved to Stratford.

03:00 I started my first year at school at Redlands State School, and then we moved to Stratford which is a suburb of Cairns and we, my sister and I went to school at North Cairns School, which meant that we had to catch the rail motor and I think I'm one of the only blokes who ever had to repeat grade one,

03:30 because my sister pointed me in the wrong direction and I went into the wrong classroom and didn't know any different. So anyway, yeah, so I repeated grade one and then I went, actually my uncle was the headmaster of Freshwater State School so I went to Freshwater State School and got put on the right track. Then, in about '55 or

04:00 '56, it must have been '55, we moved into Cairns itself and of all places lived in Cairns Street, Cairns, and I went to the Marist Brothers College and in '56 of course we had that big cyclone. My claim to fame that year was that I was the first boy in my class to get the cane after the cyclone because I went to school with my socks rolled down and I didn't have shoes on, I had sandals on.

04:30 We had very strict disciplinarians, but I never ever regret going to that school, it was a marvellous school, but the fact was I had to go and get the cane from the black board in the demolished building, and I can still remember today all the workers who were cleaning up as I came out with the cane in my hand, they all cheered me and clapped. Anyway, yeah so that was just a side issue and of course the school, we were in, our class was put into the chapel

05:00 at the time and we had 72 in our class, in grade five, big classes in those days. Yeah, pushed on, stayed in, my brother was born in '54, yeah, 1954, he's nine years younger than me. And then, where are we, '54, '56, '57, I joined the school cadets,

05:30 at around about this time and, I vaguely remember at the age of 13 wanting to join the navy as a mid shipman. They used to have to go to Cape Leeuwin in Western Australia and it's, you know like a boy officer and anyway, my father just ignored it and thought it was a load of garbage and wouldn't let me go anyway, wouldn't sign the paper. And thinking

06:00 back I suppose it was the reason for this was my grandfather was an old soldier in the First World War and although he never ever spoke about it, I knew that he'd had an extensive army career during the wars and he was, he never went to Gallipoli but he was in Palestine and then went onto France in the

trenches in France and he was in a pioneer battalion. So, and of course his two sons,

- 06:30 who were my uncles on my mother's side, they, one was a prisoner of war in Changi and he was a constant visitor to us in Cairns. And he worked for Massey Ferguson Harvesters and he was an extroverted sort of a fellow. And the other fellow the other son, my uncle was Arthur, he had a bit of a chequered career, when
- 07:00 the Second World War was on, he put his age up, he was 16 and put his age up and appeared in the Middle East and my grandfather at that stage was a, not sure whether he was an officer or a warrant officer, but eventually he became a captain and he was in charge of a RAEME [Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers] recovery unit, because of his age and also because of his experience because he was actually a rep for Caterpillar
- 07:30 in Hastings, dealer, so he knew tractors and track vehicles and that sort of stuff and that's obviously why he got the job. Anyway, Arthur my uncle turns up in some unit or other and his Dad finds out and grabs him and made him his batman for a period of time. How on earth he swung that I don't know, but my grandfather was that sort of a bloke. And then he was returned to Australia, this is my uncle I'm talking about, went AWOL [absent without leave] in Australia,
- 08:00 was captured, recaptured whatever you want to call it or handed himself in and he was one of the bad boys that jumped at Nadzab. They must have put together a motley crew of people who had been in all sorts of trouble and said well we'll waive the offence if you jump at Nadzab, and this is only hearsay of course, and so he jumped in the Markham Valley at Nadzab, which
- 08:30 I thought was quite a feat seeing they didn't do much training. Anyway, but just going back, my grandfather, in between the wars stayed in the militia, and he had the rank of a warrant officer class two in the 51st Battalion the Far North Queensland regiment in Cairns, and in 1937, I think that makes it the crowning of Edward, of King Edward, the in between fellow, who abdicated.
- 09:00 My grandfather it appears from his diaries, relinquished his rank and became a gunner, he was in infantry so he changed corps as well and became a gunner and he went on the Coronation contingent, once again how he swung that I do not know. I've got his medals and I've got his diary from that trip. It's just incredible what he, how he did it I don't know.
- 09:30 Anyway, and around about that time also, he was President of the Cairns RSL [Returned and Services League] for a couple of years, and then of course went off to the war as soon as it started, in his role with this RAEME recovery detachment. Where were we, who's lost their spot, yeah cadets. Back to the cadets.

So you were 13 when you joined the cadets?

No, no we were 14 in those days I think and, I became a drummer in the

- 10:00 school band and not very exciting but lots of fun and we had, in those days cadets were very, very prominent and it was a very popular thing and if you were, at our school if you weren't in the cadets people looked at you and said, what, you know, what's wrong with that bloke, you know, how come he's not in the cadets, that wasn't in the script. Anyway so I did,
- 10:30 so that was, I think that was a scholarship, which was in grade eight in those days, and then sub junior and junior, or it may only been sub junior, junior, anyway, by the time I did my junior I realised that I wasn't going to go onto to senior.

Sorry why was that?

I wasn't real clever. They didn't, and I didn't apply myself either, you know I, it was all too hard

- 11:00 and lots of reasons. I met girls and you know and got distracted and in those days it was quite common to leave at, in junior. You know you went out and got an apprenticeship or you went and worked somewhere and so this is 1961. I couldn't wait to get away from school and then of course I left school and I only got a mediocre sort of a pass and
- 11:30 and I was out of work for three months. That was devastating for me, people talk about being on the dole now but in those days oh my God, it was a big cross to bear. Eventually I got a job at a mob called Adbanks Tyre and Motor Service, as a bowser boy and, which is lowly beginnings, and the idea of the bowser boy was that you had to pump petrol but at the same time you're on the bottom rung
- 12:00 of the level to learn how to be a spare parts assistant. So a spare parts sales person is what you'd probably call it today. And so that's what it was all about and you also did messages and I always remember one of the most shameful things, you had to ride the bloomin' shop bike. It was a specially built bike with a great big massive basket on the front with a small wheel and it was a dead give away who you were you know, you were the messenger boy, how disgusting. So anyway,
- 12:30 that's where I started and I progressed from there. Well by that stage I was 16 and as soon as I turned 17, I'd only been at this place for a couple of months and I turned 17 in May, as soon as I turned 17. Oh sorry I'll go back. While I was still at school, it must have been while I was still at school, I applied to

- 13:00 join the army apprentices school and it never actually went out of Cairns because I discovered I was too short and so I thought oh well, so much for the army I'll try the navy, so I applied to join the navy apprentices school. So they sent me down to Brisbane and I did all the tests and everything and I passed the academic
- 13:30 side of it, but I failed the medical because of the fact that I'm colour blind. So back to Cairns again and then I thought oh bugger you, I'll apply for the air force, so I applied for the air force, I was determined, this is only the beginning. I applied for the air force went down to Townsville, did all the stuff, they didn't seem to be too bothered about the fact that I was colour blind. It was the fact that I wasn't real smart, they decided that I wasn't clever enough to join the air force.
- 14:00 So back home to Cairns again, you can imagine how dispirited I was, how am I going to get on. So anyway, so eventually I get to the age of 17, and I'm working so just up and applied, for the regular army, just normal regular army so down to Brisbane again and I passed the psych [psychological test] and all of that sort of stuff, and they really weren't worried if you weren't smart.
- 14:30 And this of course is 1962. And anyway they failed my medical, and because I had flat feet, and in those days I was seven stone wringing wet, and skinny and so I was rejected on medical grounds, now that's 1962. I went back home
- 15:00 nearly got sacked because I had sort of only had just upped and gone sort of thing and the firm wasn't real happy that I'd applied to join the army anyway. So I stuck it out a couple of years there and then I got, sometimes classed as a third, the best job in Cairns, working for the Main Roads Department, as it was called in those days. They had a big workshop at Stratford and the job was the spare parts assistant there and also the storeman.
- 15:30 Assistant storeman but the thing was you got this car to drive, this ute to drive and the bloke I took it over from he said mate you got to do 90 miles a day otherwise you're going to make me look bad. 90 miles a day and you had to go into town from Stratford, pick up parts, and part of the ritual was - have you ever been to Cairns?
- Yes once.**
- Well there used to be a main block, bounded by Shield, Lake Street, Spence Street,
- 16:00 and I can't remember the other one, but Lake, anyway, and it was called the block, and you had to do blockies. So at lunch time, you always made sure you were in town at lunchtime so you could perve on all the girls you see, so around and around the block at lunch time. Anyway I found I was found wanting because I could not do 90 miles a day and I said to this bloke I said, "Mate, what did you do?" "Oh," he said, "sometimes I just go out to Gordonvale for a run," and you know, all this sort of stuff. Anyway, that's one of the reasons it was such a good job supposedly.
- 16:30 Then of course Australia went to war in '65, all of this time - sorry, by the way, back again in October of '63 I joined the CMF [Citizens Military Force] as it was called in those days, and it was in that stage it was the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Queensland Regiment, which was a Pentropic battalion which probably means nothing to a lot of people but and it was very big and it was, it was
- 17:00 headquartered in Townsville, and then not long after that they changed their rules again and went to tropic, which meant that Cairns then had it's own battalion in it's own right, and we became the 51st Battalion and in Townsville they had the 31st Battalion, right. So I was in B Company and I had a wonderful time and I had a great bunch of mates and we all sort of joined up together. There was 10 of us I suppose who all sort of joined
- 17:30 up after school and we had a great time. Not real soldiering of course, as the CMF is renowned for and then of course in '65, 1RAR [Royal Australian Regiment], no, early '65 1RAR was warned to go to Vietnam, and then of course national service happened and it just so happened that I turned 20 that year, and the papers came out and I ticked the box as
- 18:00 a volunteer. And imagine my disgust when they didn't acknowledge the fact that I was a volunteer, they did, I didn't get called up, my marble didn't drop but they didn't say come on Bob, we notice you want to volunteer. I thought heavens above how am I going to get into this regular army. So, I said, damn it, so I took the bit between the teeth and I applied again. And of course different situation now, they were, as the saying goes,
- 18:30 they were needing them not feeding them. So I was accepted immediately for the regular army and I joined for three years. When my application, I was actually in the infantry in the CMF and on my application I put transport and a couple of other silly choices, because I thought well it's so hard to get into infantry and anyway. So I was, by the time I got
- 19:00 to Kapooka I was three weeks behind the first intake of national servicemen. I had a very, very difficult time at Kapooka. A couple of reasons, it was the middle of winter in July, and freezing cold and I'd come straight from Cairns, via Brisbane and I got bronchitis and one of the big shame things about
- 19:30 the army and I suppose in any sort of situation, is if you get back squadded or you get put down a class, I still carry the stigma from grade one see, and my pride is always been a problem, so therefore I had bronchitis but I refused to let it put me off duty so I - I,

20:00 well, easiest way to say this I soldiered on, I just accepted it and kept going, even though I was bloody near dead. And it's funny how things happen, the bloke, we were in an igloo, the old igloo type lines that the nasho's were up, most of the nasho's were up in the new buildings and we were in the old buildings, because we were only regs and we, in a hut, I think there was 12 of us in this hut, and the bloke next door to me, we'd never met each other before, he was from Victoria.

20:30 And I was up half the night coughing and spluttering, anyway he said, "Look why don't you get some Vick's?" And he said, "I'll rub your back and pound your back a bit and try and loosen it up." You know, because it wouldn't break. Anyway you know you can imagine doing that today, it would just, people would start pointing fingers, anyway he would, of a night time, so that I could get to sleep, probably so the rest of the hut could get to sleep, he would rub my back and pound my back and try to loosen the bloody phlegm up you know. But you know,

21:00 and he and I are, I haven't seen him for years but I could pick up the phone and our lives would be back to where they were you know.

Did it work?

No. But I survived, you know I kept going, I had to. I just did not want to be back squadded. It was, it's, I don't know, just me being stupid I suppose.

But it obviously had nothing to do with your ability, rather that you were sick.

Yeah, that's fine, yeah, but when

21:30 you're sick and you can't do things you have to, you know, you have to go to bed or whatever. I think also I've always had the small man syndrome, I mean, especially in those days I had to, if somebody else could do it I had to be able to do it and, you know, in those days I was very, I suppose I had a

22:00 chip on my shoulder and that I wanted to be as good as everybody else and just because I'm short doesn't mean I'm not. Anyway I'm glad I've got that off my chest, and of course years later, I mean, it's just the way I was in those days I needed to prove myself I guess. But I found Kapooka very, very hard. Anyway out of Kapooka off to infantry centre, oh sorry, yeah, to get out of Kapooka and

22:30 go to infantry you had to be top 10 in your platoon, and I can't recall now how many we had in our platoon, 60 something I think, massive platoon, anyway, so that was another reason, I worked really, really hard and of course with my CMF background which was a double edged weapon, because I can remember my corporal section commander he made a mistake one day and I made the stupid error of

23:00 pointing out the fact that he made a mistake. And, oh God, we're still friends today, but we weren't friends then, that day, because he tore strips off me anyway, so it became a double edged weapon, so I knew then to keep my mouth shut and just get on with it. Yeah that's right, you had to be in the first 10 to get infantry so I reapplied, you know I changed my choice and said I wanted to

23:30 go to infantry and I got in the first 10 so I got into infantry. Off to infantry centre at Ingleburn. And, I'm just trying to, well infantry centre was a bit daunting. We were there for about two or three weeks before we actually formed a platoon because being regs, we used to come through in dribs and drabs,

24:00 so anyway we formed a platoon, I think before Christmas of that year, and then we started out, we were finished our infantry training by March, now by this stage 1RAR is already in Vietnam at Bien Hoa and, and they formed a bunch called reinforcement wing at infantry centre so that

24:30 those who were old enough to go, and fit enough and everything would then be sent to Canungra for what was called a battle efficiency course and my group, we did the third one through Canungra as a BE course, battle efficiency course, came back, you know had all our needles all that sort of stuff and then they sent us on seven days pre embarkation leave.

25:00 And somewhere along the line here, I stupidly got engaged to a girl in home in Cairns. I mean it was the classic stupid situation, you never get engaged before you go to war, you know, crazy, anyway. And that happened on, I'd been home at Christmas and I went home on my pre embarkation and got engaged on the pre embarkation leave, which was stupid. Back to

25:30 infantry centre to the reinforcement wing, and I guess there was probably about 30 or 40 of us there, getting ready to go and they called for a draft of, I can't remember how many, about 15 or something to go to Malaya because there was a battalion in Malaya at the time and I can't recall, but it would have been 3 or 4, 3 Battalion or 4 Battalion, I can't remember which, also

26:00 having that little stoush in Borneo which may have been over by then, but anyway it's interesting to know that there was no, absolutely nobody volunteered to go to Malaya. Because we were all so pumped up and, nobody wanted to go to Malaya, everyone put their hand up to go to Vietnam, that's just the way it is. I mean you're young and silly and, and also you're all together

26:30 as a group and like some of us had been through Kapooka together, off to infantry centre together and you've trained for it and you're all geared up for it, and then all of a sudden someone says oh we want you to go to Malaya you think oh no, no, no that's, I don't want to go to Malaya. Anyway, so I think the date was the eighth of May, the eighth of May, 11 of us boarded a Qantas flight, and we

- 27:00 flew to the Philippines and we spent 22 hours in the Philippines, in Manila, changed to an Air France aircraft because Qantas didn't fly into Vietnam, and we, I think, we arrived on the eighth at Tan Son Nhut, which was a really, a real eye opener, they threw us onto a truck and we were posted to 1RAR and
- 27:30 we stayed at least one night in Saigon in a sort of a billet hostel type of thing called the Duk Tan, and I could never, I wouldn't know where it was, I could never find it again and I have been back recently. And off we went up the road to Bien Hoa, and Bien Hoa was an experience on its own. Constant explosions of
- 28:00 all sorts, and aircraft sitting on the end of the airstrip playing with their after burners, it was just you couldn't sleep, and of course 1RAR was part of the 173rd Airborne Brigade, there were two battalions of Americans and 1RAR made up the third battalion of the brigade. All very daunting, the first thing that the regs
- 28:30 that were there said to us, "Are you blokes nashos?" Because all they got fed was all the garbage from the papers back home and how there were draft dodgers and all of this sort of stuff and they thought we were nasho's and of course we were very upset, we were regs. And, on the 13th of May, I celebrated my 21st birthday at Bien Hoa. We didn't do anything really
- 29:00 exciting at Bien Hoa. We did patrolling outside the wire and I found that really scary because the blokes in 1RAR had been there for nearly 12 months and they were ready to go home and they were pretty well switched off and here was I switched on thinking something was going to happen at any moment. I didn't get a rifle for four days which annoyed, I thought how the hell am I supposed to look after myself if something happened, you know, and of course nothing did. There was a bit of sniper fire in one of
- 29:30 the other companies, but not where we were. I guess my claim to fame in Bien Hoa was that I was charged for being AWOL. I was still a baby faced sort of a bloke and when there was, I think there was about eight of us who went out and they had what was called Sunday leave you were allowed to go and socialise with the Americans
- 30:00 on the 1RAR side of the airbase but you were never allowed, it was AWOL to go across to the other side of the airbase where there was some clubs and one was called the Gun Slingers Club and there was mixed company and there was bands playing and lots of booze and all that sort of stuff. And anyway, there was myself and a mate of mine who was one four double one, double one four, and I'm one four, double one double one zero, and anyway he was
- 30:30 an older man, he was 31, I was 21, you know, or thereabouts anyway, and he and I were sort of mates in a team, so we all went of there, we'll be right we won't get caught. And of course, you were supposed to be back by six o'clock or thereabouts which was stand to because everyone in 1RAR at six o'clock at night went and stood to the pits, and all of that sort of stuff, and we were late. So they chose me because I was the youngest and the most baby faced to represent the
- 31:00 group who were AWOL so I reported to the CP [corporal] and said, poked my head down the vent and said this is Private Bettany letting you know that those members who were late are all back. And the CSM [company sergeant major] was a bloke called Ron Pincock, and he was called 'the grey ghost' and I actually got his Sam Brown
- 31:30 belt, another issue, because I became a warrant officer class one many years later of course. Anyway the grey ghost his remark was something rather irate and he said, "Yes and you're all on open arrest." So. And the charge was remanded to the CO [commanding officer] and when we fronted the CO they said, "You be the spokesman," this is all these old hands you know, give it to the baby faced bloke and so I had to explain the story
- 32:00 about how we got bogged and how we couldn't get back and all this sort of stuff. So you know, in the army it always worked on the system that if you had a good enough story and you could convince the RSM [regimental sergeant major] who would then convince the CO then they would sort of lay, be fairly lenient on you. So apparently the story was alright so we all got admonished bar one bloke who actually stayed behind and lost his rifle so, because you had to carry your rifle with you wherever you went.
- 32:30 Anyway, and the Americans were so accommodating they used to have a locker, a special locker for Australian rifles, because they were expecting blokes you know, anyway so we got admonishment which went on your record but it really meant nothing it was just a smack on the wrist so I never did CB [confined to barracks] or anything out of that. The next part of the deal that 1RAR then packed up and went home and all of their stores were taken over by
- 33:00 an advance party from 6RAR and they had arrived at Bien Hoa and they were taking over the stores, so we interestingly enough came down the Saigon River to Vung Tau on an LSM [Landing Ship Medium], I think it was, the [UNCLEAR] and sturdy, an LSM, landing ship medium, which the army used to run, the crew were army blokes and they belonged to engineers.
- 33:30 No, transport, I think they belonged to, RACT [Royal Australian Corps of Transport], that's right. And of course we got to Vung Tau and we got choppered up to Nui Dat and introduced to our RSM who was a very heroic soldier called George Chin and were allocated to our platoons and I chose to swap with a bloke who was going to B company.

- 34:00 Wrong I was sent to B company, but all my mates that I knew of were in the anti tank platoon, so I said, they offered the chance to swap and I said yeah I'll swap. So this bloke went to B company I went to anti tank he got wounded some time later and I didn't, anyway that's by the by. So my memories of this area are mud and slush. And we were sent down to
- 34:30 protect the cavalry the armoured personnel carriers and we were down in their area at that particular time when I joined them and then we went up on top to Nui Dat hill which is where the SAS [Special Air Service] ended up being most of the time. And we did protection sort of stuff on the top of the hill and interestingly enough got sent into a bunker with a 50 calibre machine gun and nobody knew
- 35:00 how to work the bloody thing. It was a typical situation where you had on the job training. And okay the first thing you do it clean it so you can find out how the damn thing works you know. So then we went into, back into 6RAR's area and into BHQ [Battalion Headquarters]. And then of course we did the first operation which is out in Long Phuoc, and I knew about Long Phuoc because
- 35:30 when I was in 1RAR, the 173rd were down there and got belted up pretty badly by the VC [Viet Cong] and we actually got called to give blood so we got taken across to 33 Evac [Evacuation Hospital] I think it was called, and had to give blood because they had so many wounded and what not, so their - Long Phuoc was actually cleared by the Americans and then of course the
- 36:00 Australians arrive and they decided that the village of Long Phuoc had to be relocated and so they moved everybody out of the village into another place called Hoa Long which was easier to control. Long Phuoc was riddled with tunnels, and although I don't believe that they were extensively used at that period of time but the engineers were used to
- 36:30 clean out the tunnels, I didn't envy them. But Long Phuoc was very much of a sit down and wait, a boring sort of an operation. And what we virtually did was we had to destroy the buildings, pull them down so that the people wouldn't come back and live in them and, clean out the place to make sure nobody was there and it was right beside Nui Dat which was where the Australian Task Force set itself up.
- 37:00 We got back off that and they, this is, memory, I guess the next important thing was that around the 11th of August they moved our platoon down onto the front line which was the front perimeter and they put us between Delta Company, the Pioneer and Engineers, beside a little creek and, they decided that they would dig our heavy weapons in. We had 106
- 37:30 millimetre coreless rifles passed onto us by 1RAR and unfortunately the penny pinching army only had one jeep at that time that I can recall and these weapons were, they were able to be carried by hand but however you wouldn't go very far, you know, you'd be lucky if you make 500 metres so they were carried around by especially
- 38:00 modified Land Rovers, little tiny short wheel based Land Rovers that were cut back to suit the 106 rifle. Anyway we only had one of them so they decided to dig them in, so we dug the pits, and put them down on the perimeter and we did a bit of test firing and carrying on, and, what we would have to do is we couldn't leave them out there overnight in case the enemy came and knocked them off because that area of the perimeter wasn't
- 38:30 all that well manned so it used to get stored most of the time in a tent. Anyway, it's relevant that we moved into Delta company's lines and we became part of Delta company at that particular time and jokingly referred to as 13 platoon D company. And D company was 10, 10 platoon, 11 platoon, 12 platoon, and we were the extra platoon so we became 13 platoon D company. D company, wrong, let's go back a little bit, fractionally.
- 39:00 **Can I interrupt there for a sec Bob, so where did you really belong, I mean what was, where did you belong in the army, it seems a bit of a higgledy piggledy.**
- Infantry.
- I mean I know it's infantry, but who did you belong to?**
- At this stage I'm in 6RAR. I'm in the corps of infantry, and originally I was posted as a reinforcement to the first battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment, which is infantry, right. And then I was transferred to the sixth battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment,
- 39:30 **Anti, anti -**
- Anti tank platoon, anti tank platoon, right, now there was no tanks. In our area there were in the north but there were no tanks for us to fight, so we were just used as a normal rifle platoon but with these great big long barrelled recoilless rifles which had two types of explosives, one was HEAT, which is high explosive anti tank,
- 40:00 which is okay for piercing a bunker or a building, it's the type that drills a little hole and then gets in and spreads molten stuff inside, cooks anything inside it.

Sorry Bob we'll have to stop there.

Tape 2

00:31 **Okay Bob we'll just continue on with your life story. You were talking about being in an anti tank platoon.**

I was about to tell you about the other type of round that we had, which was, HEPT, high explosive plastic tracer - I think - that long ago!

01:00 And it was, it had a different effect, it was like a splat on the side of a building or a tank which then made everything sort of disintegrate inside, it was a different effect, and it was like a slap against it, but an explosive slap, whereas the other one, the HEAT would drill a hole through and then create it's havoc inside. So not a lot of use in normal

01:30 infantry warfare but however a nice weapon to have available for a commanding officer if he had to attack a bunker system. But as I mentioned before, if we didn't have the vehicles to transport the damn things, so they were just too heavy to carry them, you could carry them, they are man portable, but anyway. And of course the annoying thing was that the Americans would give the Australians anything they asked for and the Americans had these weapons in abundance in Vietnam, even though they were antiquated,

02:00 and they were and they were sort of left over from the Korean War. The Yanks had the jeeps to put them on so all we would have had to do is through the system ask the Yanks for a couple of jeeps and we would have been laughing, anyway that didn't happen. So as I said we became part of Delta company, I think around about the 11th then they took us, they sent

02:30 half a platoon down to Vung Tau on what they called R and C which was Rest and Convalescence and that was I think, one or two nights, overnight so we're getting around about, we're getting around about the 14th of August, and the rest of the platoon, the other half of the platoon was sent out with B company to look for a radio which was transmitting,

03:00 this damn radio, everyone seemed to be sent out to find the damn thing and it was out, and I can't remember the name of the river but it was out between Nui Dat and what was called the Wolverton Mountains, which was a big range of mountains which was a very, very scary place to be. Anyway, and it's raining and it's muddy and I was the number two, at this stage I was the number two on the machine gun, and

03:30 my big mate Bluey Blaskett was a machine gunner. However Blue was sent down on R and C so I had to carry this damn machine gun and, as I've said before, I was seven stone wringing wet and traditionally the machine gun, the machine gunner was a big bloke and the number two was the little guy, but the number two didn't necessarily want to carry the machine gun and so anyway I got lumbered

04:00 with this damn machine gun. I hated every minute of it because you had to carry the rounds and they were in the machine gun at the time and I'm left handed, and you don't like carrying the machine gun left handed, anyway. This is a particularly relevant story because I thought I was going to die, we went out, and also there was a section or two of pioneers with us, so there was B company, plus pioneers plus half a platoon of anti tank.

04:30 We were at the end, the back, one of the worst things about soldiering is if you move as a company, the front man leaves Nui Dat for example, and we're going on foot, so he leaves the rest of the mob, the last man doesn't leave, if they're going in single file and this is what the case was at this particular time until an hour later. Because it's like a big snake, it's a winding snake and so the front bloke is out at

05:00 the river and we're still at Nui Dat and we haven't left yet sort of thing, so it was a stupid way to travel but, in that on our first tour of Vietnam that was one of the stupid things we used to do, we used to travel in single file as a company. It's so frustrating and then you get, stop and start, so you got your pack on your back and you go so far, and then it's stop. So you got

05:30 to wait, so you think will I get in or will I lie down or will I get up, anyway, eventually we get across this damn river, no, it's wrong the forward element, get across, the pioneers were taking along because they had to ford the rivers, so the pioneers had to create a way of getting across the river, so they took a line across and they put a big heavy rope across, between two trees and of course this is jungle in this particular area so it's fairly thick.

06:00 The rest of it, some of it was paddy, paddy fields, by the time we get there the rope has tended to sag a heck of a lot, and I have to describe this to you. It's up high in the tree like there and I'm still the short bloke that, with the chip on his shoulder, anyway, for me to get onto the rope I had to throw myself up and grab the rope like this. You weren't allowed to carry a machine gun

06:30 with a sling on it, because that was a bad move because of, you know, tendency to sling the weapon and all of that sort of stuff, so, but however I had my toggle rope so I tied my toggle rope around the

machine gun like that and like that. So I had the machine gun across my neck and under my arm like that but I had to jump up to get the rope. I jumped up and I got the rope, having to let go of the machine gun, which luckily I had unloaded, anyway it immediately dropped

- 07:00 down and hung off my neck like this. So once I'm there I'm committed, and I've got to go that way to get across see, so hand over hand, hand over hand, by the time I got to the centre, or roughly the centre, my weight, the machine gun's weight and everything rope had become, slack forced me under, so I'm still trying to get to the other side, and in difficulties because of this bloody machine gun pulling me down,
- 07:30 plus it's, this river is running a banker and this guy on this side sees me in difficulty so he comes down the rope, to try and help me. The rope goes down into the water more and I thought I was gone, I really did, I'm out of breath trying to get to the, anyhow to cut a long story short I got out and, I thought well that's one life gone, because there was just no way I was going to let go of that rope but then I was running out of strength to get myself across. Anyway,
- 08:00 I got out. We had a couple of contacts or we didn't actually have a contact but B company did, but they never found the radio. We then came back off that, we had the overnight, we stayed out overnight and we came back next day, so here we are, we're about the 16th of August, and immediately they say, "Okay clean your weapons and get ready you're going on R and C, the others are coming back and you're taking their place." Oh ripper, so
- 08:30 you know, anyway I've got the machine gun, I've laid it out on the ground and I've dried it because it was raining the whole time, and I've dried the machine gun, cleaned it all up, I've oiled it and then they come and told us we're going on R and C, "Hurry up, get your gear on, you've got to go." Oh alright so I rolled up the machine gun, didn't put it back together, this is relevant, and put it into my mate's trunk and anyway that was the 16th
- 09:00 I think. He never looked for it, because he, the machine gunner also carried a pistol, so he also had a pistol as a personal weapon and you had to carry your personal weapon with you all the time so, anyway the next day which then becomes the 17th, the task force got mortared, I forget how many rounds because I wasn't there, was I, I was on the grog in Vung Tau having a wonderful time. Fantastic and of course the word comes down to Vung Tau and, "Oh,
- 09:30 task force got mortared." "Oh did they, isn't that sad." Because if you're not there you don't care. Anyway I get back to Nui Dat in the afternoon of the 18th, on the afternoon of the 18th very, very inebriated, hung over as well, and we rolled out of the trucks, staggered into the lines and my mate is fair into me, he is as mad as a hatter,
- 10:00 he said, "You rotten mongrel." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "What did you do with the machine gun?" I said, "Oh, ooh, ah, ooh." "Yeah," he said, "me scratching around in the bloody dark trying to find the bloody machine gun, trying to put it back together." I said, "Well that's what you're trained for aren't you, you're supposed to be able to do it in the dark?" You know because you were, you were supposed to be able to you know, but there it is thrown into a trunk, anyway he wasn't very happy because they had to go and man the perimeter and he had to take the machine gun
- 10:30 and man the perimeter of course nobody attacked so, but anyway, I wasn't too popular. Anyway right at this stage the Battle of Long Tan happened, and of course Delta company was where we lived, and they were in the thick of it so we actually went up to the boozer and they put an angra [?], which is a, like a loud speaker radio type set up on the bar,
- 11:00 and we listened to what was happening, safely drinking booze and while the rest of the company was out at the Battle of Long Tan getting shot up. Which is all pretty sad but anyway, you know, I wasn't at the battle but however because we lived with that company for the rest of the 21 months, they invited us to become members of the Long Tan Association
- 11:30 and we have been ever since, and we go, we have a dinner once a year usually and all get together and talk garbage, but the thing was that, you can imagine being in their company, I lived, ate, breathed and drank the Battle of Long Tan for the next remaining months because it was all around me. Everybody that we lived with was
- 12:00 part of it you know. Anyway we sort of, incidents, oh, what do we talk about.

Don't be too worried because we can come back -

Oh yeah, I just don't want to put shit on people but there's a story to be told. There was senior NCO [non commissioned officer] in the company,

- 12:30 who was very, very unpopular, and our platoon sergeant was an old Korean veteran, who is still alive and lives in the Glasshouse Mountains not far away and he was our hero and he was a very, very popular fellow, and a very efficient sergeant, very firm but friendly you know, and did his job properly but wouldn't take any nonsense. Whereas this other fellow was a bombastic bully,
- 13:00 and he got an MM [Military Medal] at Long Tan and there's been fingers pointed over the years and unfortunately he's not a modest sort of a fellow and he brings a lot of trouble on himself. Anyway, my

story here is, and I'll come back to another one, but we were just within days and within a week or so of actually coming home from Vietnam and my platoon

- 13:30 was ready reaction platoon, and by this stage of the game you get very scared and you're very worried about whether you're going to get home and you start to count the days and count the eggs you're going to have and all of this sort of nonsense and wakies and whatever you call it. Anyway, we're on stand by so there's section of APCs [armoured personnel carrier] down in our lines with the ramps down and all our gear's in there, ready to go in case something happens. Anyway we were allowed two cans a man so we went up to the boozer to have a beer, and we're
- 14:00 sitting in the boozer having a beer and all of a sudden the croaker phone rings which is an army phone and, me mate who's now a lance corporal, actually we both were, this is the machine gunner guy, he takes the call and he says, "Oh right, okay," so he hangs up and he yells out, "Righto, anti tank down to the APCs. We've been reacted, we'll get our orders as we go." Oh, so immediately your heart starts to pound, you think oh no,
- 14:30 no not now after all this. I don't want to get bloody shot now. Anyway so you race down we get in the APC's and they throw up the ramps and we start to drive off, and anyway all of a sudden this bloke comes running out of the boozer and of all people it's a bloke called Terry Birstall, and Terry Birstall is the bloke who wrote the book, A Soldier's Story, about Long Tan. And Terry and I joined up together and he's one of those blokes that came to 1RAR as a reinforcement, and
- 15:00 so we know each other well, anyway so Terry runs down, "Stop, stop, stop!" It's all a so and so joke and he mentions the name of this particular platoon sergeant so this guy had, it's like the boy who called wolf you know, he had reacted our platoon, just a shit stir. And you know, you wonder why the man was hated, and so, immediately
- 15:30 the APC's turn around we go back to the lines and down the ramps and out we get, and my section commander and I was the 2IC [second in command] at this stage and he was a very fiery fellow, and anyway he, he led the push and the senior NCOs and the officers lived over there, in a separate area and there's a little gully in between with a little bridge across it. Anyway we, head off, irate
- 16:00 as anything, all the NCOs, corporals, very old corporals you know, senior corporals and my mate and I, we're only junior, we're only lance corporals, but anyway, and it's on, and everyone's heading over towards the sergeant's mess, mad as hatters and we got as far as the bridge and our platoon sergeant came out and stopped us, and said, "Okay fellows, look, have a think about what you're going to do before, you know, be silly to do something stupid now,
- 16:30 before we all get home. I know what you're thinking, I know what you, what's happened and I'd like you to let me handle it." Anyway the corporal gave him a gob full, and you know, and of course we're all, and he said, "But look behind you." And I've looked around and the whole of the company had left the boozer because the word had travelled and this bloke is so badly you know, so disliked, everybody is there and it's like a mutiny.
- 17:00 And, oh the hair on the back of my neck is standing up, and so it was a situation which could have just fallen over so easily because of the things that had happened over the 12 months with this particular bloke. Anyway, our platoon sergeant, stood everybody back and diffused the whole situation, and made us all go back otherwise it just would have been, it would have
- 17:30 been mutiny because everybody was so upset it would have been a fight, a you know, weapons wouldn't have been involved because we weren't like that, you know, you don't in those days you didn't shoot officers or frag them or that sort of stuff. Anyway, it, and it still upsets me today but our platoon sergeant diffused the situation. And the company commander was a bloke called Harry the Rat Catcher, and that was his nickname, Harry the Rat Catcher and,
- 18:00 Harry Smith his name was, and a pretty good officer in the field but it was sort of a them and us situation that was created along the line and there were other incidents out throughout the year which you know didn't go over very well, and anyway before I leave there I've got to tell you about our CSM, who at that stage was dead.
- 18:30 In February, I think February the sixth or thereabouts we were doing one of these stupid bloody operations and it may have only been a company sized op and we were out in an area and what Harry the Rat Catcher used to do was, he would use a platoon for other activities, there was always something else that had to be done, that a spare platoon would go do, like wiring around Hoa Long or
- 19:00 wiring at the place called the Horseshoe or, or patrolling or whatever, so that he could relieve a platoon and so he would take out platoon instead of one of his others. Anyway so this particular operation we were out and Harry the Rat Catcher wasn't there, he was crook I think, might have even been in hospital, anyway, and the CSM was a hero of Long Tan, a bloke called Jack Kirby, and he got a DCM [Distinguished Conduct Medal] at Long Tan. Jack was a great man
- 19:30 and we were patrolling again in single file and we stopped for lunch, and there was ten platoon, company headquarters, my platoon and then 11 platoon and we'd been followed by somebody who would just fire a shot at us. At the last people and so they decided that while lunch was on we would drop some rounds back there and see if we could flush him out

- 20:00 or get rid of him or whatever, anyway, I was, sent out on sentry out to the flank, we were on the edge of a paddy field and anyway sent out to sentry and the next thing, I think it was five rounds of artillery from the kiwis dropped on us, and the CSM was killed instantly and we lost two,
- 20:30 two blokes, one was our sig and our radio operator and another young bloke called Dougie Powder, he'd only, not long arrived, he was in the back, the rear section and he got killed and, Barry Calley was the sig and he just had the little hole in his chest that's all there was. But Jack, Jack Kirby, and don't know whether 10 platoon last any, but I think there was five killed altogether.
- 21:00 And I think really that day the heart went out of the company, because he was really what kept the company together, he was such a good man. Anyway, what else happened? The big incident of course, was that after Long Tan, instead of the due deserves, the due desserts going to the right people
- 21:30 invariably they go to the wrong people and, the Australian medal system, I don't know whether you know about it, is a, an allocation of numbers, there's five, or there might be three DCMs allowed for 12 months or, it's a stupid system, it's not on the way it's deserved. Anyway so, and also the Vietnamese government because of the Battle
- 22:00 of Long Tan being such a big battle and a turning point as far as the province was concerned, the Vietnamese government was extremely grateful and therefore wanted to be involved and there was a big parade and they had medals to issue to these blokes who had acquitted themselves quite well at Long Tan and all of a sudden the Australian government said no, no you can't do that, we can't accept that so they were given Vietnamese dolls
- 22:30 and cigar cases, you know, ornate cigar cases, that's what they were given instead of medals, except for the ones that were given by the army, you know, the Australian Army. And that was a DCM to Jack Kirby an MM for the other bloke that I spoke about several MIDs [Mention in Dispatches] and of course the company commander got a MC [Military Cross]. And that's -

And did the fellows know this at the time that they were getting dolls and cigar cases

- 23:00 **instead of medals?**

Well I don't know whether they actually knew at the time but they certainly knew straight after, there was a big parade, I wasn't on the parade, I was off to the side and it was a sort of a joke, there they are being presented with dolls by I think Nguyen Cau Ky, at the time, I'm not entirely sure of that, and he was the Prime Minister of Vietnam. Yeah, oh, and that still raises it's ugly head today. Harry Smith has re raised

- 23:30 it because you know, they reissued medals just recently, a year or a couple of years ago and said, these are the one's we didn't give, but we're giving them now and Delta company never got a mention, you know so, it's a very sore point at the moment and that, but that was the day they got the dolls, a pretty sad sort of a situation.

No wonder they were upset.

Yeah, anyway,

- 24:00 I have to say that my most hostile action of the whole of that tour of Vietnam was that I shot a cow. This cow was in a creek and we were on another operation and anyway this cow had been hit with shrapnel but it was still standing and still walking anyway, and I said to my section commander,
- 24:30 I said, "Look at that poor bloody cow," I said, "it's going to fall down dead, it's going to pollute the water and the villages are going to get their water polluted and you know, I'm bored, you know, one of us should put that cow down." So, going on the radio, so, "Yeah okay, yeah put it down, right oh." So I carried an Armorlite, I was a forward scout at that stage and I carried an Armorlite which is, in those days you know, in those days they all talked about this tumbling bullet, it hits and it explodes it pushes
- 25:00 the back out of a person, all this sort of stuff, all rot. And I thought oh well, this will be interesting, and I thought, now how do you kill a cow, oh through the ear, no, no you got to get him right there, and oh right, so anyway eventually I decided, oh well, I'll go for the centre of the forehead, you know, so I'm only about, I don't know 20 metres away I suppose and I'm, and we'd put a rope around it, so we could pull the carcass out, we didn't want it floating away.
- 25:30 Anyway, it took me something like five rounds to put this cow down and I thought I'm a bloody failure, you know, it would not die and I kept, you know, head shots there straight through the centre, see the hole yeah, the old cow goes. Anyway I've put one through the ear and the only thing that happened is a bit of blood started to come out and I thought hmm, anyway, so I pumped another couple into it and eventually
- 26:00 it flopped and hey, we're supposed to be tactical, and everyone's hey, so I was definitely not called 'One Shot Bettany'. Yeah that was my claim to fame, Vietnam first tour. Righto, we came home on the, how did we come home? We came home on the Sydney, came home on the Sydney, and we were relieved, not that it matters, yeah, we were relieved by 2RAR, second battalion.

- 26:30 And we pulled up at somewhere, I think it was Princess Charlotte Bay, off the Queensland coast, and because we were too early, and because there was a parade organised in Brisbane, and it was all a bit dubious really because when 1RAR had come home, 12 months prior, the CO had been splashed with paint and there was you know, protestors and that was the first battalion to ever come home. So we weren't sure
- 27:00 what to expect. Anyway but they pulled up and they anchored in Princess Charlotte Bay while they painted one side of the ship. Now that was the side that would front the dock, they didn't paint the other side they just painted the side that would hit the dock you know so, it was a cosmetic job. And we got towards Moreton Bay and choppered out customs people and customs blokes were pretty lenient as far as you know,
- 27:30 stereos and whatever, you could, cameras and that sort of stuff and they were pretty good. We got into Brisbane and of course my people still lived in Cairns, but my grandfather lived down here at that stage and I think my sister was there, she lived in Southport and we berthed at Newstead I think, anyway wherever, and the joke was that don't slam your foot down when you stand to attention on the deck of the Sydney in case you fall through.
- 28:00 Anyway we were on parade on the deck of the ship and then we went straight from there, we were taken down to the Botanical Gardens, how I found my grandfather I don't know, or how he found me I don't know, but my grandfather was there and he found me. Which was a very big moment for me, you know, and I guess for him too.
- Do you remember what he said to you?**
- No, no I don't.
- 28:30 No it was just such an important moment that he was the first one that, to actually greet me you know. Then we marched through the city of Brisbane with no protestors, and Brisbane has always pretty well much been, well in those days, a non protesting, and it was one of my proudest moments, marching through the streets, welcome home, that sort of stuff.
- 29:00 We got out to Enoggera and the army produced a magnificent feat. They discharged the national servicemen on the day, how they, I still shake my head, because the army is not always that well organised, but, they gave them their dentals, their medicals, they paid everybody, they did the whole administrative thing in one day for all of those national servicemen so by that stage we had first intake, second intake and I don't know about the third, but we
- 29:30 certainly had first and second intake blokes and it just happened, and they, and the rest of us too, like I was a regular soldier, so I was given 72 days leave, paid 72 days worth of leave, given my plane ticket and see you later, and it just happened, it was just incredible organisation. And anyway, so on a bus, had a few beers out at
- 30:00 Enoggera naturally. Drinking was part of a culture in those days and it was done with great gusto and we applied ourselves diligently to the task unfortunately and of course we all smoked. Straight out to the airport and in uniform, in those days we all still wore uniform, proudly, and, few more beers and there was a couple of matelots there, navy blokes, and,
- 30:30 next thing there's a table full of us and we're all yahooing and I didn't hear the call for the aircraft, and anyway Brisbane wasn't all that big in those days and anyway I get this tap on the shoulder and it's an air hostess and, "Excuse me, are you Mr Bettany?" And I said, "Yeah, that's me." "Would you mind boarding the aircraft please, we're about to leave for Cairns." "Oh right yeah." So away I go, three sheets into the wind, I thought it doesn't matter, a few hours before I get on,
- 31:00 I can sober up and all because the family's going to meet me see, so I'm going to be right, I won't be tripping and falling over or anything and, anyway I get into the plane and the hostie says, "Now we've put you up the front because you know is your family going to meet you?" And yes, yes, oh lovely. "Yes, so we've got you up the front so you can be first off the plane." "Oh," I said, "thank you very much." Anyway here's your seat so I sit down and I said oh, and this woman
- 31:30 beside me with a baby, I said, "I know you don't I?" "Oh," she said, "Bob Bettany, how are you?" And so, "Oh Joan, that's right." Oh you know, oh, like old home week see, so oh, "Would you like a drink?" So Joan and I had a couple of drinks and of course I really needed another drink like a hole in the head. Anyway we get into Cairns and, Cairns in the old terminal there, and I think it was a Fokker Friendship so anyway,
- 32:00 hostie comes and sees me, "Are you ready? Are you all organised?" "Yeah, yeah I'm right." So I get out and I'm standing there waiting at the door, for the door to open, she comes flying back, "Oh," she said, "I'm sorry Mr Bettany, but there's no front steps." So you've got to go out the back, so instead of being first off the plane I was last. Anyway I said to Joan, I said, "Here give me the baby, you got all these bags you got to carry." I said, "Give me the baby, I'll take the baby." See,
- 32:30 so, you can imagine the look on the faces of my family who are all waiting there at the side and I come off, last off the plane with a baby in my arms. So I said to Joan, "I don't think we better take this too far, there's your baby." Yeah, so that was welcome back to Cairns. In the mean time, in the 12 months, my

fiancé and I had a parting of the ways and I had

- 33:00 created a relationship with a girl in Melbourne who I had actually met on a train going to Canungra and before I left to go to Vietnam and so I spent some time in Cairns and then I flew down to Melbourne. And I had arranged with her to go to the Railway Institute ball. You know, when you think back how stupid a man was in those days you know. I
- 33:30 didn't think ahead, you know getting engaged for a start, anyway, and she was a lovely lady and she insisted that I stay at her house. Now I had other places I could have stayed in Melbourne with blokes from the platoon but no she insisted that I stay at the house and I had, when I was in Thailand on R and R [rest and recuperation], I didn't talk about R and R, did I, when I was on R and R in Thailand I actually bought a bolt of Thai silk which ladies love and
- 34:00 I had sent that home to her and I said now you make it into a dress for the ball. And I bought myself a suit, also in Bangkok and of course it was a stove pipe [tight and straight legged] pants and it had an iridescent sort of a fleck through it, it sort of shone in the dark, you know, as you did in those days. I wouldn't be seen dead in one now. And anyway, so and we had arranged that she would have some of her friends and then I had
- 34:30 a couple of army blokes who lived in Melbourne who were going to be at the ball and we had booked a table and everything. And of course, the trouble was what I hadn't accounted for, you come straight out of the jungle, you have a bit of acclimatisation on the Sydney but you get home and you're still not orientated to civilian life, and this culture of drinking that I spoke about, and also
- 35:00 I had a tummy bug and I couldn't, you know, I had berry belly or whatever you call it, and I had a sort of a problem with diarrhoea and dysentery or whatever you want to call it, which most of us did, getting adjusted to the food and that. Anyway, so the night was a disaster, it was an absolute disaster, because my mates got drunk, I tried not to, and I thought I succeeded, but I may not have, I don't know.
- 35:30 Anyway and so it was really a disaster, we'd started off so romantically. Oh by the way her old man was a copper, a police sergeant at Moonee Ponds, her mother was a lovely person and so was she and he, he was just a copper you know, anyway. And so, almost immediately after the debacle of the ball, because my mates, so called mates, did all sorts of nasty things,
- 36:00 like you know, asked me if I'd managed to get rid of my venereal disease you know, all sorts of terrible stuff you know. And did, oh isn't that terrible I can't think of her name, Shirl, yeah Shirley, did Shirley know that I'd fathered a child in Vietnam, all this sort of sick stuff you know. And this girl had led a fairly sheltered life and not used to this garbage you know, the army culture is something terrible.
- 36:30 Anyway so, so it was a disaster, so she said I think you should go, that was that night. Next morning he said I think you should go and I'll take you down to the car yard this morning and you can buy a car. He said I'll take you down to the car yard and I'll introduce you to somebody who will do you a good deal and look after you, so I went and bought this H, no an FB, EK, an EK Holden sedan, a white one.
- 37:00 It was apparently owned by a doctor and I believed the copper, I wasn't going to argue with him. So anyway I spent a fortune on this car and waved goodbye and never saw them again, never spoke to her again. Yeah very sad, wandered onto Ingleburn and caught up with my mate who hadn't left for Vietnam at that stage, he'd been held back because he had dermatitis and couldn't go and he eventually went with
- 37:30 9RAR, and my mate Terry was there at infantry centre and so I stayed with him a couple of days and all of a sudden I realised I was running out of money. So I thought hmm, and I'm not even halfway through my leave, 72 days leave was just gi-normous, hard to cope with you know. So I came on back to Queensland and stayed with my sister for a few days and I thought this is no good, I'm almost out of money. So I reported back to Enoggera .
- 38:00 And I said, "Look I'm broke," and they said, "Oh great, okay come back here and we'll put you on a restricted drawing rate of ten dollars, ten dollars a fortnight." Which you know wasn't good money but it was enough to, I could live you know. Anyway, I was welcomed back into what was called the Aust Component, and in the Aust Component with blokes that had been sent home wounded and different fellows. Anyway there was a bloke called Buddy Leigh
- 38:30 and Buddy was from Long Tan and Buddy's a black fellow and in those days, was a great bloke, anyway so, but he didn't have a car and nor did this other fellow, another corporal and I was a lance corporal so I'd drive the car. We'd go to the pub, they could shout me a couple of beers and then I would drive them home and I would be the scapegoat, you know. We
- 39:00 would get home and the wife would say, "You been down the bloomin' pub again." And they'd say, "Yeah, well we couldn't get home, Bob was the only one with a car and he didn't want to leave." So I just took it on the chin you know, and I used to get a feed, and they used to feed me. So I survived on my restricted drawing through, I guess through hand outs and hiring myself out with my car and at being the scapegoat, and -

Switch tapes.

Tape 3

00:31 **Okay Bob what were you saying?**

We used to drink at the Brook, the Brook Hotel, as you can imagine there wasn't a lot of soldiering happening in those days because there's only a skeleton crew there and everything and, on one of the particular nights, I ended up pretty inebriated and the others must have went home on their own accord, or maybe their wives had woken up or whatever. Anyway, I stayed there drinking, and of course DUI [drinking under the influence of alcohol] was only

01:00 just in it's infancy and all of that sort of stuff in those days. Luckily for me, well yes maybe, I went to the car and the car wouldn't start, had a flat battery and I thought well, no problem, curl up in the back have a snooze, and I'll get a lift or I'll walk back to the base in the morning, I'm not going to go now. So I curl up in the back and next thing there's a tap, tap, tap on the window.

01:30 And I thought what the hell's going on, so I push open the door and this, this lovely constable is there, "What are you up to young fellow?" "Oh just bloody got a flat battery mate." "Oh have you got your keys?" "Yeah I got my keys." "Good on you, come with us." Because, you know, in possession of your keys meant drunk driving. Drink driving, so, locked up the car,

02:00 away we go into Raymond Street to the drunk tank, and I never want to go back there again, it was, luckily for me the sergeant on the desk, I was in uniform and I had my ribbons on, luckily for me the sergeant on the desk must have been an old soldier from somewhere, anyway he said to me, "Mate," he said, "I guess you don't want to go to court in the morning or anything, you happy to just pay the fine and go?" "Yes," I said, "that's fine with me." Because I'm very sober

02:30 at this stage and of course he secured all my values, and he said, valuables, and he said, "Righto," he said, "it's going to get cold in there," and he said, "here's what I suggest you do." And he said, "I'll give you a couple of blankets, you know, lay on one and wrap yourself in the other, and get into a corner." And he said, "About half past three, four o'clock," he said, "I'll come and wake you, and, and then you can catch a cab home and back to camp so you can be there on parade before they mark you AWOL."

03:00 And, the things I remember about that drunk tank are the screaming women, mostly, unfortunately aboriginal, in the female side of it, yelling and screaming obscenities to everybody and then being thrown onto this, well not thrown in, but put in this, like a great big walled room, with a big steel door with a bucket in the corner to go and a pee you know, and I went in the opposite corner,

03:30 snuggled up in my blanket and curled up there. He comes and wakes me at what ever time it was, and I'm at the desk at the same time as this other bloke, George I think his name was, an old bloke, an old derro [derelict, homeless person]. Well anyway the derro didn't want to go. He wanted to stay for breakfast, he wanted a free breakfast, and the old sergeant was saying, "You got to go George, you can't stay, we don't want you to stay, go on off you go." "Oh but Sarge, I don't want to go yet, I want to stay."

04:00 And there's me trying to get out of the place and the other guy's trying to stay. Anyway I got my stuff and got away and thanks to that sergeant I never, it never got reported that you know, because drunkenness in those days you could, it went against you on your records you know, so many fines of drunkenness and all that sort of stuff. Anyway, yeah, the next thing that happened to me was, the battalion was going to Townsville, Lavarack Barracks were being constructed, and I

04:30 was finding it very, very difficult to live, and I thought well if I get close to home and I get a bit of leave, I'll sneak home to Mum and Dad, so I put up my hand for a draft to go up there in, I think it was about November, no it would have been earlier, gosh I don't know, anyway, it might have been a bit earlier. But anyway I went to Townsville, and I was one of, I think there was about 60 of us there,

05:00 there was skeleton crew of people who were just occupying the lines and doing sort of general duties while they waited for the battalion to come up and also as the lines became available. Anyway I bumped into a bloke, and I was a lance corporal and this bloke had been a corporal when I was at Kapooka and he was in a different platoon to me and he'd been around a few years and he had been in A company and his name was Roy

05:30 and he was a really good bloke and Roy was, he was actually a private, because he'd done something wrong in Vietnam and got busted. And I think he even, I think he got home or he might have even been wounded and sent home. Anyway, poor old Roy's a private and I'm a lance corporal and so we became our own little work party and our job was to go through the buildings and with a clue board, which is a board with paper on it you know, anyway, and we had to make notation of all the damage to the buildings, or all the things that were wrong with the building.

06:00 You know, like doors that wouldn't close, or louvres that wouldn't close, you know all this sort of stuff, and marks on walls, you know, like taking over something, so that was our job and we had to go through the whole battalion, so we worked on the principle, there's this naughtiness coming out of me again, isn't it. We worked on the principle that if we did one floor each day we could sort of make it spin out pretty well, so we'd work till lunch time so, we'd get up in the morning and we'd go through and,

- 06:30 and we'd do one floor of the building, then we'd knock off for lunch and we'd go down the Mount Stewart Pub which wasn't far away, so we'd have a few beers and then take the rest of the afternoon off, and put that paperwork on and then and so on, so that went on, that was a great little lurk. And the battalion arrived with the rest of the battalion and as you can imagine, when you took out the national servicemen there wasn't a lot left and we did an exercise in Puckapunyal which
- 07:00 was what was called an infantry tank cooperation, so that see they decided to send the tanks to Vietnam so that so they sent the remnants of the battalion, they formed a company out of what was left and sent us down there to do the infantry tank cooperation. So there were sergeants who actually were section commanders and there were corporals who were actually diggers, because there just weren't enough soldiers to go around, we didn't have enough.
- 07:30 The thing I remember about that of course was my first trip to Puckapunyal, first of many and it was hot, windy, cold, typical Victorian weather and it's the only place I can recall being where I ate my lunch underneath the mosquito net because of the flies. The flies were so bad, if you didn't you were eating flies. And then we came back and that Christmas, I think, my big mate and I, took my young brother and we went up to Cooktown,
- 08:00 and we did a trip up to Cooktown, supposedly to do some fishing and shooting. Got as far as Cooktown in the caravan park and put up a tent and went to the pub, much to my brother's disgust. As I say, our culture was surrounded by the social atmosphere of a drink, which is pretty sad when you think about it, I guess I'm lucky I haven't got cirrhosis of the liver. Are you putting your hand up?
- 08:30 **I was just going to say do you think that's still the case in Australia?**
- With the young blokes of today, or with us?
- Both, that alcohol is still very much of our social make up?**
- Oh I don't know about the young blokes of today. I can't answer that, I started to mix with young soldiers recently through the Trackers association and I would tend to say no, I'd say most of them live out and
- 09:00 are in relationships, so I would tend to think there isn't that old culture of the single living [UNCLEAR] who goes to the boozier in the night time and then you know, staggers home when it closes. But as for us old fellows, I think it still is a problem for some blokes, but I've, when I've, we won't get through today.
- 09:30 **Yeah, we've got all day.**
- Yeah but I mean we won't get through it the rate I'm going. I learnt, I guess when my first wife died of cancer that it was probably when I come to grips with the grog, realised that the grog was a problem and I think, yeah, it was a turning point for me as far as grog was concerned. Where are we, we're in Townsville, we went to Puckapunyal.
- 10:00 **You went to Puckapunyal.**
- And we came back and I went on leave and my young brother and my mate, machine gunner mate and then we came back and we did an interesting exercise or two in Shoalwater Bay and one of which I'll tell you about. I don't know which battalion was going through but we were the enemy, and we were extremely under strength, but we went to Rockhampton, things about Rockhampton and Yeppoon and Shoalwater Bay, the beer was terrible, it was Mac's,
- 10:30 it always goes back to grog doesn't it. Mac's was the name of the beer and it was absolutely shocking, but it was all we could get so we drank it and, this particular exercise, we were taken out of the scrub, by helicopter to the Byfield State School, dropped at the Byfield State School, after the chopper left. Got onto a truck we're taken by truck to Yeppoon, we got to Yeppoon, and
- 11:00 dumped at the railway station and put onto an old Queensland passenger train. You remember them at all, the really, really old ones?
- The one with the seats facing each other like that?**
- Brown, brown wood work and black upholstery and little luggage racks and that, when I was in the school cadets I used to be able, I was small enough to sleep on one of those little luggage racks up the top, because we used to go from Cairns to [UNCLEAR] in, for our school cadet camps.
- 11:30 What are you doing, you behave yourself. And, oh that's right, we got put onto this train and we sat, for ages and ages at this, Yeppoon, we had no food, we'd run out of food, and someone was organising food for us, someone, and ah, anyway there was a pineapple train parked beside us, so, we decided that we weren't going to starve
- 12:00 so we, we lived off the land and borrowed some pineapples of the pineapple train so that we wouldn't starve. Anyway the relevance of this story is the modes of transport that it took for us to get back to Townsville. So this train was the old diesel train you know, so the diesel train took us to I think it was Proserpine, so we're leaving Yeppoon, and we went, I think it was Proserpine.
- 12:30 As far as Proserpine and because what, that was raining, typical North Queensland weather at that time

of the year and it was cacking down and the rivers were up and everything the diesel train could not go any further because of whatever, mechanical reasons, so they sent down a locomotive an old steam locomotive from Bowen, and it picked us up, dropped the diesel and picked us up and took us then to Bowen and,

13:00 that was as far as we got. And they said you can't get any further, you can't sleep on the train, so, you're going to have to spend a couple of nights in Bowen. So there's about, I guess 100 plus of us here in Bowen, so they paid us. Because we had no money and so they did a drawing on the bank and they paid us, and

13:30 And then they billeted us in every hall they could find, because we had our packs you know, we could sleep in the scrub and we had our sleeping gear and all of that sort of stuff, and our cooking utensils and all stuff. And by this stage we had something to eat but most of us went and ate in the cafes, and we had, I think we had two nights there and the locals said, well if you're going to be here another night, we'll have a dance for you, we'll put on a dance, you know Bowen country town, Queensland country town,

14:00 there's all these soldiers, let's get their money, you know. And of course, oh we're all looking forward to that and we all got on the wallop that night of course, got on the grog and, next thing, next morning very early we all get woken up and they say, right, okay, we're heading back to Townsville. Oh, how we getting there, we got a go down to, march down to the wharf, so we had to march down to the wharf and there's a Hale's magnetic

14:30 boat. You know what they are, you know the, Cairns, you know Cairns had one you know, Cairns had the ones that run out to the reef, they're round bottomed tourist boats, you know they're it's relevant that they're round bottomed and they just, they usually just travel as a ferry like from Townsville to Magnetic Island or from Cairns to Green Island. Well the Townsville company sent this boat down to

15:00 pick us up, to get us back, to get us back to, to get us back, we weren't worried, we were happy to stay in Bowen, but they sent this boat down to take us back. And it was absolutely terrible, it rolled and pitched, and rolled, see it, round bottom. It rolled and pitched, all the way back to Townsville, cacking down rain, everybody sick, vomiting everywhere, and I remembered something my father told me, because my father was a sort of a seaman, he was the bosun on the

15:30 Trinity Bay dredge in Cairns and then at this stage of the game he was the launch driver for the pilot service from Cairns. They used to take the pilots out to the big ships, anyway, and he'd always told me that if you ever get seasick, you go to the centre of the [UNCLEAR] mass and as low down as possible, so there I was as sick as a dog, huddled in the centre of the ship, the centre of the boat, feeling sorry for myself, but at least I wasn't sick, over the side that is.

16:00 But that was our trip back to Townsville. Where are we, '68, now it's, oh we got our colours presented to us on a big parade and we started to form up as a battalion, ready to go back to Vietnam.

What do you mean by colours presented to you? Your medals?

No, no the British system,

16:30 each battalion, it's like a flag, it's not a flag they're colours and the old British tradition is that you defend your colours, so you get the Queen's colour, which is like a direct presentation from the Queen and it's traditionally the, you know, the Jack. You know what the Jack is?

Yes.

17:00 And then you get the regimental colour, so you have two colours. I wish I had a photo, and they are used on ceremonial occasions, they are not taken into battle, or like in the old days, in the old days at Rorke's Drift in South Africa and when they started to lose their colours and the enemy would capture the colour, it was a big thing to capture the colours, like Waterloo and that sort of thing they always had their colours and they were defended. In Waterloo,

17:30 they were in the hollow square, you know, and last man standing defended the colours, and of course all of that, you don't take your colours to battle but they're presented as a form of tradition. And on your regimental colour are your battle honours, and so we, I think there was actually two parades, we were presented with our colours and then it was decreed I think, that Long Tan became a battle honour and then of course, Delta company got awarded the

18:00 United States Presidential Unit Citation, no you don't know do you? It's a streamer which goes on the colour and it's presented by the President of the United States to Delta company, for the battle of Long Tan and they get to wear what's called the 'blue swimming pool', which is a little blue rectangular brooch up there I suppose you'd call it, I actually wear a red one

18:30 because of my service with 1RAR, that's another, an American award. But I don't wear the blue one because I wasn't there, and that was a separate parade I think, presentation of the streamer. And the citation was given to the unit and all of that sort of stuff. A lot of controversy over that, because of the fact that it wasn't only Delta company that fought the battle of Long Tan, Delta company bore the brunt of it but there were elements of

- 19:00 B company and of course they got saved by A company. A company, actually after much buggerising around – do you want to turn that off. I'll tell you about that later. After a lot of hurrying around by the other APC, that's the Armoured Personnel Carriers, they used to carry the soldiers inside, out to the battle, well they were bringing A company out from Nui Dat to relieve
- 19:30 Delta company at Long Tan who were under siege virtually and there was a lot of procrastinating by the commander of the APC's, and eventually he was encouraged to join battle with the enemy and they got close and they dismounted A company and A company swept in around Delta company, and A company often felt that they were hard done by in that they
- 20:00 never got the recognition they deserved, and it goes on to this day, in fact more books were written just recently I believe, and one at least from the A company side of why they, you know, what they did, how they got involved and what they actually did. Right, moving right along, where are we, '68. Right oh, '68, they decided that
- 20:30 the anti tank platoon, this is the army, and I already knew about the fact that there was a tracker wing at infantry centre, because when I went through infantry centre before I went to 1RAR in 1965, we lived next door to the dog kennels, where the dogs were so they used to keep us awake. What they used to do was, you're probably not aware but you had to be 19 before you could serve overseas in an operational zone, hence the song, I Was Only Nineteen,
- 21:00 isn't it amazing that so many people, when they hear that song, they think of a national serviceman, he wasn't a national serviceman, he was a regular soldier because he was only 19, because all the nashos were 20. You don't see the irony?

Actually I didn't know that, I thought it was a nasho as well.

Yeah, it's and everybody thinks poor old servicemen, sent to Vietnam and holding back communist

- 21:30 aggression and all that sort of garbage and he wasn't a nasho, because he was only 19 and he was a regular soldier. Anyway, digressing, back to, now regular soldiers can join at 17. I was actually 20 when I joined, of course, but a soldier who joined at 17, like 17th birthday like I tried to do when I first tried to join, they would then go through say, Kapooka and then infantry centre, so that's
- 22:00 six months, so they could still be 17 and so still a young lad, and therefore they weren't allowed to go overseas, so there was a tendency, sometimes in the early days to send them to a battalion that wasn't going anywhere. Right, or maybe send them to Malaya. What they did in infantry centre was they kept the young blokes there for demonstration platoon, which was part of training, they had people give you demonstrations on how to do things.
- 22:30 Or they sent them to the tracking wing to become a dog handler, hence most of the dog handlers, as soon as they became 19, they were eligible then to come to Vietnam and that's the way it worked, they had all that training before hand and as soon as they were 19 they joined a battalion and then went to Vietnam. So in '68, some stage in '68, I can't remember when, it was decided that the platoon,
- 23:00 this is already happening in Vietnam by the way, it had been put together in '66 that tracking would become a part of a battalion's capabilities and they would take dogs, so in '67, 7RAR were the first battalion on the ground with dogs in Vietnam from Australia, and they had two dogs, Cassius –
- 23:30 oh come on Bob, I used to know this. Cassius I think, and Janus, not sure. Anyway, not long after they got into the country, Cassius died of head exhaustion, and Cassius was replaced by a dog called Tiber, which I'd love to tell you about later, can you make a note about that we come back go Tiber. And then 2RAR, sorry.

Bob I was just going to ask you what kind of dogs they were?

Labrador, kelpie cross, or

- 24:00 or pure lab, black and come golden but they never took golden one's to Vietnam.

Can I ask you why they were Labradors?

Can you come back, this is me, sorry don't get me started on dogs. Sorry what was the question?

But so, Labradors, I mean we know Labradors are guide dogs, for the blind is that why they were chosen, they had very good visual skills?

I'd

- 24:30 have to get somebody else to answer that question. They experimented with a lot of dogs, they took them straight out of the pounds in Sydney and donated by people, they tried several sorts of dogs. The common dog that was mainly used in the military was the German Shepherd because everybody thought that way you know, but when they started this tracking wing, they tried all sorts of mixtures and they took what they could get, but they found that the best tracking dog,
- 25:00 in those days they found that the Labrador, the full Labrador was the best tracking dog. However that

the pure Labrador was so exuberant and so head down, bum up and would not stop until it was over. So aggressive, not aggressive as in biting, but aggressive as in I want to do this job, I'm here, I'm going to do it you know, so they, they tended to a

- 25:30 Labrador Kelpie cross and the Kelpie was probably more intelligent as well, so you get the intelligence and the skills but didn't go like a bull at a gate and just plodded along carefully and ask me about Trojan. Trojan was my section dog in Vietnam, and on the second tour and, so they found that the Labrador Kelpie cross was best.
- 26:00 But they weren't all crosses. Marcus, Marcus went with, Marcus and, and Caesar, notice they're all Roman names. Some people think they're Roman General's names, but they're not, they're just Roman names from Roman history. Caesar and Marcus went with 2RAR, they went just after, seven in May, I think seven went in April, and 2RAR went in
- 26:30 May and relieved us and we come home in June. And Marcus and Caesar, and Peter Harran's dog was Caesar, and Marcus' handler was a bloke called Dennis Ferguson. And so they had done their tracking course in infantry centre before they went overseas, so in '68 with our turn coming up, we were going in '69, we were sent, some of us were sent down to infantry centre to the tracking wing to learn how to be visual
- 27:00 trackers. So I was taught how to be a visual tracker and I, by this stage of the game I was a corporal. And, then several other blokes from the platoon were taught visual tracking, and we were then introduced to our dogs. And the two dogs that we got were, a golden Labrador called Tago and he was my section dog and the other dog was Titus, and Titus was a black,
- 27:30 almost pure lab, from memory. And then we learnt how to work with the dogs, and we were trained in those skills. Now we already had our ordinary infantry skills, like an ordinary soldier, but we also had our anti tank skills which were still trained in and we kept working at that and you know, firing anti tank weapons and everything, and we had a secondary weapon to the 106 millimetre recoilless rifle, that I told you
- 28:00 about before, and it was called a Carl Gustav. And it came from Sweden, and it was a smaller, you know the old 3.5 rocket launcher, that you saw in the movies in Korea, you know up on the shoulder and bang and it all went out the back and the projectile out the front, well it's like one of those, with the same sort of rounds as I explained before, similar to that. Only on a smaller scale, only 84 millimetre, whereas
- 28:30 the 106, is 106 millimetre. So we were still trained in those skills, we were dual trained. We went back to Townsville and we also got trained in another skill, long range patrolling, which is a form of SAS, not as, obviously not as skilled as SAS but being able to operate away from the battalion and recce [reconnaissance] things and be independent of
- 29:00 the battalion.

How many of you were there at one time?

In the platoon?

The trackers, the men that were trained to deal with the dogs?

With a dog section you would have a maximum of seven. Including the handler, usually a maximum of seven because they had, we had four, unlike normal rifle platoons, normal rifle platoons had three sections,

- 29:30 in theory three sections of ten men, with a platoon headquarters of an officer and a platoon sergeant, a radio officer and a batman. So, platoon headquarters had four in it, and so the saying was you had one and 33, so you had 30 men, plus platoon headquarters of three men plus the officer. So one and 33 was the way, was the terminology. In our platoon, we were different in that we had
- 30:00 four sections, and they were four small sections, so our sections could either operate with a dog or with the 106, or if necessary we could be taken away from those and placed on a long range patrol of say four men, five men, a tiny little patrol. That's what we were trained to do, thank God we didn't do it, it was, they tried it a couple of times, but I'm glad it never ever eventuated.
- 30:30 It's just, we weren't skilled enough to be like SAS, you know they expected different things. Anyway, okay, so we trained up in '68 and we did long range patrol courses we also kept our skills of the 106 and I met, you don't want to know about my social life do you?

All about it.

Oh God. I met up with a

- 31:00 school teacher, a friend of mine in my early days in Cairns wrote to me and said, "Bob, I've got this friend who's coming to Townsville, her name is Val, Valerie, and she's just left teachers college and she's coming to Townsville and looking for a friend, and maybe you'd like to meet her." And anyway, so I did and
- 31:30 and we, she was staying with a family, you know, she was billeted out with a family in Townsville, and

I'm sometimes not very proud of the things I've done, anyway, she and I had a relationship. I was, we were flat out all the time, we were training all the time and we got time off and if we got time off well we would, I would try

32:00 and go home to Cairns for the weekend, I would usually take a bunch of blokes with me. And, anyway then all of a sudden I've got this lady friend who is extremely naïve, and away from home, comes from Toowoomba, and I wrongly suggested to her that she should move out of the clutches of this family and rent a flat, and -

32:30 I'm not improving my image at all, look at the body language.

Well how old were you, 22?

Oh, 23, 22, 23. Anyway, Val would have been, probably 19 or something like that, I don't know. Anyway and I took her home to meet Mum and my mother is the most wonderful person in the world and never dislikes anybody.

33:00 Never, hasn't got a bad word for anybody at all, my mother, she took me aside and said, "Where did you get her?" Because she used to nag me, you know, she was one of these girls that, but we were having a relationship for a reason and I was being entirely selfish about my reasons, but anyway. So she moved into a flat and as we got closer and closer

33:30 to 1969, Heather [interviewer], you're bad -

I just worked it out.

I'm trying to be nice, anyway, she moved into the flat and on her own and I promised to help with the rent and I did help with the rent. But the trouble was I was, we were training so hard, we was always away, we were always in the bush, and we'd get back and the first thing I'd want is a beer and afterwards, after I'd had the beer then I wanted something else.

34:00 So, it was all relevant, but I kept paying the rent, anyway, then all of a sudden we sort of had a parting of the ways and I dropped out of her life and she still had the flat of course, still teaching, and strangely enough, phoning somebody in the army in those days was extremely difficult, it's even difficult now. But

34:30 I got a message, at the guard room at [UNCLEAR] "You're wanted on the phone." Oh, so, wow I go down the guard room, get on, "Hello." "I'm pregnant." "Oh, okay, yeah." She said, "Come and see me." Right, okay, no argument about who the father was, I never even thought about it at the time, you know because she

35:00 wasn't that sort of a person, she wouldn't do that, anyway so obviously it's mine. Oh God what am I going to do, so I stagger out of the guard room, by this stage me mate's there, the big fellow, says, "What are you doing?" "Oh," I said, "Val's pregnant." "So?" Anyway he said, "Look, get in the car," he said, "come on, we'll go down Wacky Langs, to the pub and we'll think about it and we'll talk about it." Needless to say I never

35:30 went back and saw her. She got in touch with me again and I said, "Look, whatever has to be done I'm happy. If you want to have the baby, we have the baby, whatever you want to do, okay by me." And we got together a couple of more times but I said, "Look I'm going to Vietnam. I'm not staying home because you're pregnant, you know. I'll be the father, I'm not going to marry you, but you know, I will look after you.

36:00 Whatever you want me to do, I will do but you can't keep me back from Vietnam, it's just unheard of." You know, because by this stage of the game people are starting to get gang plank fever, you know thinking of reasons why they can't go. I mean I didn't have to go, my time was up after three years, I could have got out, but I elected to stay on because all my mates were still around me, and I couldn't live with myself if I had got out or stayed home and they went to Vietnam and they got

36:30 killed and I didn't, stuff, you know. And I know that sounds very dramatic, or melodramatic, it's not heroic, it's not heroic, it's just the way it was. That's what mateship was all about you know, so I said to her "Look I'm not, I'm not going to get out of Vietnam because you're pregnant. I could create the circumstances, but I'm not, but," I said, "I'll, you know whatever you want to do." So she took it on the chin and she quit her job and went back to Brisbane,

37:00 her family dumped her, which was all very sad, very, you know, they didn't look after her. I didn't know this till later, so she was taken into a Catholic home and she had the baby and she kept the baby and then there's more to that story. Are you sure you want to hear that?

Well I'm curious, with the Catholic home that they didn't try to get her to give up the baby since she didn't have the father around.

Yeah,

37:30 yes I know, and I know that for another reason, nothing, it wasn't me, it was somebody else close to me, who had to give up the baby and I think it was the same home. Anyway she kept the baby. I went to Vietnam, the baby was born in on my second operation in July, I think it was. Yeah, anyway, enough, she comes back into my life later.

38:00 **The little girl, had a little girl?**

Yeah.

Are you in touch with her now?

Only because she doesn't want to be, she has been, her name is Deirdre. She's, she must be 30, born in '69, how old -

34.

Is it? 34.

Ah yes, 35 this year. Yes. Anyway, before you for your second tour now, this is just before you go back to Vietnam on your second tour.

38:30 Yes, right there's a crossing of relationships, it seems to happen with me, I had, there's a crossing of relationships. New Year's day, New Years day in '69, you're getting the wrong idea about me, I'm not really like, it's just the way things happen.

No I'm just interested, tell me.

I'd gone home for Christmas and we'd had a parting of the ways her and I, Val and I, and I went to a birthday party, an old

39:00 civvy mate of mine, because I maintained touch with civvies, you know and on New Years day and there was this good looking bird there and I thought, "Gee I know her from somewhere." Anyway, so I chatted her up. I had my car there parked down the street and she had her car there. And anyway we got talking and

39:30 had a couple of drinks and anyway eventually she said, "Do you know who I am?" And I said, "Oh I think so, I'm not real sure you know." And she said, "I'm Tony Galloway's sister," "Oh fair dinkum, oh right." Because I'd been in the CMF with this fellow and this was his sister. "Oh right," anyway, one thing led to another. I said, "Look is there any chance of giving me a lift home, you know I haven't got my wheels with me."

40:00 Well you got to, a man's got to use whatever means he can. Anyway so, "Oh," she said, "you sure?" You know right, "I said yeah, right." Anyway so after the party -

Change tapes.

40:30 **End of tape**

Tape 4

00:33 Anyway so, we went and we parked under a tree on the Esplanade in Cairns beside the tennis courts. And it, from that day on, in our relationship and throughout our life, that tree was the beginning of our relationship. Anyway, and of course I, eventually I said to her, "Okay, look you can take me back now to me car, I've parked it

01:00 outside the house at what's his name's place." You know, so I said, "Oh sorry I lied to you but I knew that the only way I was going to get to meet you was like this." And that was what, anyway, Alice and I, we continued our relationship and I told her about Val, I got that off my chest very early in the piece and the circumstances. And, alright, Vietnam, that's right,

01:30 we had a tremendous build up to our departure, and so much so that when we marched through the city of Townsville. The university, the James Cook University had already cranked up at this stage and, there was expected trouble, you know there was going to be protests and all of this sort of garbage and there was and there was a banner, strung across the street, 'We're with you all the way, 6RAR', you know, and it was just, and it was from the uni, you know and

02:00 they were, you know, there was none of that nonsense. But that was then, that was '69, ah what did we do, that's right, we had a series of parties and we had a big battalion ball and it was fantastic and you know, Alice came and stayed in Townsville that period of time and all the wives were there and girlfriends and the whole works. Anyway and I think

02:30 it must have been just the morning after the bloomin' ball. Because I remember being terribly, terribly hung over, and, and it's, this is only 19 coming in now, that song, and we did, we marched down the quay and we were dressed in number one greens, with our SLRs [self loading rifle] our rifles, and greens of course and slouch hats, we all had a number on our hat and that was our boarding number you know, like boarding

- 03:00 a cruise liner, only it wasn't like that. Once again we get on this Hale's launch, you know, this round bottomed launch and we're all sick as dogs and we're, and everybody's sad and we're waving goodbye and you know, hugs and kisses and farewell at the wharf stuff. And we get on board this Hale's launch and out we go to the Sydney because the Sydney was too big to come into Townsville harbour so it's anchored off near Magnetic Island and we get to the side of the Sydney and this thing is bobbing up and down
- 03:30 like a cork in a bottle and we had to climb up, with our packs and our webbing and everything, and our rifle and climb up this cargo net, onto the deck of the Sydney you know. And, ten we had a lovely trip over of course and then I think we went, I'm not exactly sure whether we went by landing ship or, probably Chinook up to Nui Dat, and we, the anti plank platoon had been,
- 04:00 another battalion had arrived in, so there's three, three battalions in Vietnam, so where we used to be, there's another battalion had moved into that area, and forward of it, into Long Phuoc in fact and that was, at that time it was 9RAR, because my mate Terry, was there, the bloke, he used to rub my back. Ah, and we moved into Nui Dat and we had a great bunch of blokes called the
- 04:30 tenth intake, national servicemen and they sort of had been with us from the tracking course in '68 and that sort of stuff so they'd did all their training with us and that was, I think we had four of them, and they were, their esprit de corps [camaraderie] was just incredible, they were so close knit you know, very good, in fact almost as good as the first intake. It's very hard to imagine that intakes were different but they were, the first was the best,
- 05:00 and they, you know different blokes used to say cream of the crop, and they were really, really good, and that's purely by accident. But the tenth were also very, very good. Anyway, and by this stage we also have I think, people as many, as far down as the 14th, so we would have roughly half regulars and half nashos, rough. And, oh can I go back?
- 05:30 **Yeah.**
- In Townsville, on an exercise up at high range, we lost Titus. Titus got bitten by a snake and rushed to back to Townsville but died and after he got there the vet couldn't save him and bitten by a snake and buried somewhere which I can't find, I can't find, but somewhere in Lavarack Barracks and the golden Labrador we had, Tago, was sent back to infantry centre and re
- 06:00 allocated to 1RAR and went to, no I think it might have been 8 RAR and then 1RAR to Singapore.
- Would the dedicated handlers go with the dogs?**
- No. No, they did originally, where possible, like Cassius and Janus and then Marcus and Caesar, they took their handlers with them. But these dogs, like we arrived now, we're in Nui Dat,
- 06:30 and the battalion before us was had, was 4RAR, 4RAR came home and left one handler behind with Marcus, and we had three dogs. There was Marcus and Milo and Trojan and so my, our two handlers like who had Marcus and Tago they then took these other dogs. My handler was a bloke called Mooka McDonald and he had Trojan and the other one was
- 07:00 Bruce Williams and he had Milo. Just side-tracking, there's a monument in Gawler in South Australia and etched into the marble on the monument is the figures of Mooka and Trojan looking at each other. Incredible and they didn't know that, the ones that chose that photograph didn't know at the
- 07:30 time that Mooka was actually from South Australia and born in South Australia and still lived in South Australia and yeah, very touching. Anyway, so second tour was very, very different from the first. We started off our time working in fire support base defence, went out on our first operation and it was a very, very hectic operation. We never had any heavy contacts, couple of incidents,
- 08:00 and it was raining, it was typical for that time of the year, it was terrible, everything was wet and mildew and mud everywhere, and we did a lot of, close patrolling. And, the rifle companies, the worst part about being a tracker, and having tracker dogs was the fact that you had to rely on somebody else to use you, unless you had a contact yourself which you wanted to follow up on, they had to
- 08:30 call for you to come out and quite often they wouldn't bother because, maybe they really didn't want to follow up. Or it was just too much trouble, because it was a case of getting a helicopter and taking it out, taking us out and putting us on the ground with them so the helicopter gives away their position for a start, all sorts of associated problems, so we weren't used as well as we should have been. We only had the three
- 09:00 dogs, therefore we couldn't actually go with the companies. Things were tried, like one occasion they sent Mooka and Trojan out to Delta company, they'd had a contact, the rifle section, the rifle platoon didn't understand how it worked. Mooka put Trojan on the track and Trojan started to track and all of a sudden in no time at all, he was fired on, he was pinned down and they then had to
- 09:30 to get him out and they had to assault forward and pull him back out and because he can't, he's only got an M16 and he's got to protect the dog and all sorts of associated problems. So we devised a system, that the dog would never be allowed to go anywhere without the machine gunner cover man, that's the

smallest, that's the least we would allow was that, ideally there would be the section, which usually invariably was only about

- 10:00 between five and seven because of sickness and leave and all sorts of things, you're never, you're never ever up to strength and you got to survive with the numbers that you got. My role as a team commander was also as a visual tracker, you know I had to look for signs and find out, locate the sign to put the dog onto. If we were doing any tracking ourselves.
- 10:30 Then we went to, that was the first operation, it was very successful for the battalion, we had 99 kills, with very few of our own, but also at the time we had two kiwi rifle companies with us so we in effect had five rifle companies, on the ground at the time so we had Victor and Whisky company and the enemy was badly knocked around in Bin Bah, by 5RAR, they got,
- 11:00 we had them boxed in and they were in Bin Bah which was a village, north of, which comes back later when I went back to Vietnam and, and it was very close to Nui Dat and it was a feather in the enemy's cap if they could hold that village for a while and be a thorn in our side. But they, didn't do their
- 11:30 homework too well because we were on the northern, no wrong, we were on the western side of this in an area there, and they had come in I think from the south and they had a new battalion, 'Bah Bah', that's Vietnamese for 33, yeah, bah bah. Anyway I can't remember and they had walked down, from North Vietnam and this was and I've spoken to a bloke that was there
- 12:00 and he and the battalion and he and the regiment walked down into our province and they were given the job of cleaning out our, you know of being the enemy in our province. Anyway they got into Bin Bah and they got stuck in there, they weren't moving, so they put 5RAR, the fifth battalion in there and they cleaned them out. With us in support, the battalion that is, so it was a very successful operation. Because the enemy then,
- 12:30 disorientated had to try and get their wounded back to the nearest hospital for the enemy which was up in a place called Nui Mai Chau, which we went to later on and in the process they didn't know the way and they were led by guides across, along a track or along an area where the only way they knew to get to Nui Mai Chau and we, Delta company ambushed it. And so successfully, they would
- 13:00 set up the ambush activate the ambush and then clear the battle area and then reset the claymores, reset more claymores, and the next lot would come along, it was like a shooting gallery you know, but very successful. Rodney Chandler was actually the platoon commander and he got an MC [Military Cross] and deservedly so, they did really well. Anyway, that was the first op, the second op we employed, and this is what I was saying about our anti tank role,
- 13:30 we couldn't take the Carl Gustav to Vietnam because Sweden wouldn't give us the ammunition and wouldn't allow us to take the Carl Gustav there because they were protesting against the Vietnam war, and so we got issued with American, similar weapons called 9 millimetre RCL [Recoilless Launcher], Rocket launchers. Same sort of thing, better to carry, lighter better ammunition, they had a splintex, what's called a splintex ammunition,
- 14:00 so you can imagine a shell that long, it's 90 millimetres and at the end of it, it's got a canister and in that canister is packed, you seen a nail gun and how a nail gun works, and, well this is in a cloth belt, wound into a circle and there's nails in, or like, barbs with flights on the end. Instead of having a nail head, it had a flight, for stability.
- 14:30 So the propellant charge is here, the propellant charge forces the canister out and open, and then it spreads these little nails out in a cone of fire, immediately to the front of the weapon. Absolutely wonderful in an ambush, and we never, but one of the rifle companies did and quite successfully, and wonderful weapon. And of course the 106, the 106 had been -
- 15:00 They had devised more ammunition for the 106, a similar type of round but this one was conical in shape like an artillery piece, like the normal big artillery piece you see. The difference with the 106 was that the shell case was perforated and the shell case was about that long, and it was perforated and the explosive propellant was all wrapped in plastic inside that.
- 15:30 The war head had a setting on it for down range functioning so we could, we could fire this round and it had the same sort of barbs in a similar sort of set up and it could go out and I could set it for say 1000 metres and at 1000 metres in a straight trajectory it would explode and whatever was in front of it for X amount of metres would be shattered with all these barbs. So it was
- 16:00 a tremendous weapon, and, we never ever got to use it properly unfortunately, well we don't know we never went out and explored, but we used to, second operation we were down in the Long Hai area which is, the Long Hai hills are renowned because of mines and 8RAR actually went into the hills and cleared it and lots of casualties. Ah, I have to talk about the mines, someone else will at great length along the line, but after the second,
- 16:30 after the first tour, some brilliant fellow, I think he was task force commander decided to put a barrier mine field from the coast of the province into a village called Dat Doh. To deny the enemy access into the rice area and the fish area and to keep him out. The only trouble is with a mine field, you have to protect a mine field, otherwise the enemy can take the mines, and so therefore they had, we had

- 17:00 these pill boxes, bunkers strategically placed all the way along. And instead of having regular Australian soldiers to man them, efficiently, or Americans less efficiently but you know, well we all know what the American's were like. They put the lowest class of Vietnamese soldier, South Vietnamese soldier in to man these bunkers and they didn't man them properly, they you know, go to sleep at night and so the VC devised a way of lifting the mines
- 17:30 without killing themselves and they knew, somehow or other they got a diagram of how we lay our mines and we lay our mines to a pattern and so they just had to get a start point, and once they got the start point they could find out where every mine was, so they lifted them and then proceeded to place them wherever they wanted to and we were getting killed by our own mines. And in particular in Long Hai. Anyway and the worst area was, they had two areas down in that
- 18:00 part of the province called the Long Green and the Light Green. They were very, very close to where this mine field was so it wasn't too far to take the mines to replant them. Now, once again I told you we took our 106s down to this point and we were in the sand and we were in the fire support base and we had the 106s dug in but we had jeeps, heavens above, we had jeeps. So we were able to mount the 106s on the jeep, which I told you is a cut down land rover, and,
- 18:30 we would carry with us a splintex, which was and there was two types of splintex, you had the down range one which you could explode out there, or one that would explode immediately out the front. So you could, you could use it both ways. And so we would just take those, and we actually had two teams that went out, I wasn't one of them, because of the dogs. We sort of had two teams with the dogs and another team with a dog but could be anti tank you know, and then the other one was anti tank.
- 19:00 And they were sent out into a village and to help train the local Vietnamese soldiers, and they had, you know, it was a great experience to be, a bit scary because you never knew when they were going to get knocked off, and, and then you had to really realise that you had to defend yourself, within the compounds, you know, even though the so called friendly soldiers were there with you, you didn't know whether they would change sides. Anyway, but we also used
- 19:30 these 106s, we took them out and we protected the land clearing teams, they had great big D nine dozers and they, I can't remember how many whether there was three or four or something, and in staggered formation, and they were armed protected bulldozers, you know. They had armoured plate all over them you know, to protect the driver, and would have been terribly hot to drive, and we would go in support of them and we would load with this splintex and
- 20:00 we would, just for practice virtually, we would just keep firing in front of the land clearing team, so that we would clear by fire the scrub in front of them to give them a bit of protection you know, and it was interesting. And yeah, there's a place called the Din Coh monastery and we had a shoot out one day and we had a shoot out the first tour too, I must remember.
- 20:30 **I'll make a note.**
- Yeah, and highly accurate if you got a good gunner with the 106, I think the range is 17 hundred metres something like that, the trouble was it was in yards, the Americans, it was an American weapon and everything was yards, and we used to have to convert it because of maps and everything. And we used to like to boast about our accuracy with the 106 and there was a monastery called the Din Coh monastery
- 21:00 and we had a shoot out there one day, one gun against the other and I lost, but it was always good for your own expertise, you know to be able to shoot long distance, because it has a spotter rifle, it had a 50 calibre spotter rifle with it, and it was so accurate, if you could, if you had a bore match and align, your 50 calibre to your 106, so that's where your spotter round landed, and
- 21:30 it was a tracer round so you could see it, where it landed that's where your main armament would land, so when you got efficient at it, you could, you know you could, you know you could one two spotters and you, if you were good, and of course the section commander, which was me, was calling the shot on, right 50, up 200 whatever, you know, and bang. So it was all good experience plus the fact we had the tracker dog.
- Just to clarify Bob, who was the shoot out?**
- Oh another section.
- 22:00 The other section. I even think we had four 106s out there, we did have four 106s on the second tour. So I think we had two dug in and the other two were mobile, with the two MAT [military advisor team] teams out in the villages. Yeah, and I was there actually when Deirdre was born, because I got the letter from Val to say that I was now a father.
- 22:30 **So you were actually out there in the middle of the bush?**
- Yeah, in the, yeah mail was periodical. You know, mail, if the posties weren't on strike we would get mail fairly regularly you know. Right, next operation was up in a place up towards Bien Hoa, right in the top side of our province beside

- 23:00 a very big river and on the other side of the river was the Royal Thai Army, there was Thai forces and this was a very, very scary area. We were, they used to make these trails through the jungle so they could monitor access, you know, and they would fly over them all the time keep an eye, to see, and the enemy had to cross these trails to get to the next area. Didn't work, but anyway we were astride
- 23:30 this place and it was called Diggers Rest. And we had two 106s, one of which was mine, plus I had the dog and we had I think, one section, by this stage of the game our numbers were so bad because of a lack of replacements. I think we were down to three sections and my mate, the big fellow, who was still with the platoon, he was seconded to a MAT team like
- 24:00 the AATTV, do you know what that is? Australian Army Training Team Vietnam.
- Oh yes.**
- Okay well, they were supplemented by that they call MAT teams. I can't remember what MAT stands for, anyway. So he had the rank of corporal, and he was out there somewhere in the a village training, in a training position. And so therefore I think we were reduced to three sections, so we had one section in the scrub, sorry, two sections in the scrub.
- 24:30 Start again, we had two sections out on the trail and we had one section in the scrub that's right, and I was of the sections out on the trail. We had another shoot out while we were out there and we had the artillery beside us. The artillery, they're 105s, and they're mainly designed for you know, ten mile snipers they're called, you know they fire out on a high trajectory and the round drops. Our weapon was straight
- 25:00 almost flat trajectory, bang eye contact, I didn't realise that the artillery were very, very efficient also with firing with the barrel straight the same as what we did. I didn't realise they were very efficient, but when I think back, the reason they became efficient was they got overran, the battle of Coral in Balmoral, with 1RAR and 3RAR, see, and the artillery got overrun and they got forced into a situation where they had to drop the barrel and had to fire, you know and so
- 25:30 they had a different sort of a round to us, they had a canister round, which I think is, you know, lumps of metal. Anyway I challenged, they were next door to us, and I challenged the next door gun one day to a shoot out, well I don't think I've ever won a shoot out. Terrible, there's another shoot out we'll go back to from the first tour, anyway. So, that was just a bit of a highlight.
- 26:00 Diggers Rest, a lot of things happened, at Diggers Rest, we were sitting there one day and a Chinook come in and you know, you invariably look up and anyway we looked up and the Chinook missed it's first pass, normally they would come in and it had a slung load, and the slung load as it turned out was mortar ammunition and it's on a pallet in a sling, hanging off the bottom
- 26:30 of the Chinook. Anyway it came in and decided it, the sue might have been on the pad or something, you know that was the CO's chopper, a little Bell thing. Anyway, and so it did a loop and as it came around on it's loop, all of a sudden the load underneath slipped and it flipped upside down and it just went straight into the deck like that and this twin bladed Chinook helicopter.
- 27:00 Disastrous, anyway so, we are the ground troops there, so on with our gear and they sent us straight out to see if we could do something, it was a raging inferno. There was rounds going off everywhere, exploding from the chopper it was obviously on fire, everything was exploding, we couldn't get close to it, and the five crewmen would have been dead straight away anyway.
- 27:30 And, they brought in the fire fighting team, the same as they do here, you know, they have choppers with a bucket underneath, and then our job was to direct the bucket to as near as we could get it to drop the water and it was a waste of time, because by the time the water dropped, the wind would blow it away, anyway, it was a useless exercise in, and it burnt itself out and of course there was,
- 28:00 American investigators came out, and looked at it all that sort of stuff. Other thing that happened at Diggers Rest was that we used to, I used to get, the section commander would get issued with a strobe light, a strobe light is like, dance floor. A little tiny battery operated thing that flicks like that, a little tiny light which a helicopter can see from the air, so that it pin points your location so that
- 28:30 they don't shoot you up. Anyway there was this intelligence reports, there was forever intelligence reports saying that things that were absolutely stupid, anyway we were about to be attacked by, supposedly a regiment, so everybody's nervous and we're all in our bloody holes in the ground another reminder, hole in the ground, remember that. And we'd, we were actually dug in, in your fire support base we were always dug in to protect ourselves
- 29:00 and, and of course I've got this blood strobe light which is flicking at night and I'm trying to keep it as far away from me as possible because I didn't want that bloke out there to shoot me. Anyway so we're up all night waiting for these people to turn up and they didn't, which was quite often what happened, that you know, was false alarms. So during the night, they had a Spooky and Puff the Magic Dragon, they were names of DC 3's, aircraft,
- 29:30 that would come around with a spotlight or flares and just keep dropping flares, so it was like daytime, you know. But, I think it was Puff the Magic Dragon had this mini gun and it had the ability to place one

round of, I don't, probably 30 cal, one round every square foot of a football field on the ground, so this thing would go,

- 30:00 pardon me, it sounded like someone farting, and that would be one round on a football ground every square foot. So they did this thing they surrounded the base and they kept firing this thing, you know and artillery, artillery had their muzzles down and oh, it was all, and nothing happened, nobody fired at us. Anyway next morning, who's got to go out and look, us.
- 30:30 So out we get on with our gear, and it brings back another memory, and out we go and we sweep, we do a complete clearing patrol of the whole base. Right around, because it was jungle on either side and in the centre was the fire trail, and we found two dead scrub fowls, was the result of, you can imagine the amount of money that was wasted on that, you know and there's nobody there, nobody there.
- 31:00 Anyway the next thing I have to tell you about Diggers Rest, there's two more things. We did a lot of patrolling on our own, usually about a half platoon patrol and leave the other section behind, take two sections out and the platoon commander who was a young nasho, a pretty good sort of a bloke and he's still a very good friend, the platoon sergeant was a very efficient
- 31:30 bloke from the first tour, and once again a good friend. A bit of a mother, platoon sergeants tend to be like that, and anyway and there was us three section commanders, me and my mate, Len not the big fellow, another guy, we had the two main dogs and the other bloke, Ben Hall he had the, Marcus, the third dog who was hardly ever used because he was older.
- 32:00 Anyway so our we go and we've got the two dogs and we bump into a little bunker system. Now bunker systems are frightening, because you, don't see them till you're right on them and usually you're dead before you see them. Anyway we stumbled onto this thing and it was recently used, and, and it was only a small system, anyway we had a track leading off it on a foot trail and the platoon commander said, "Oh well,
- 32:30 this is as good a time as any to put the dog on." And so we all agreed and you know, make it him, you know, don't make it me. Who me? Oh okay, so anyway Mooka and I have a look and there's an obvious sign of somebody there, you know, ahead of us on this track, so let's go, so away we go. Anyway, we didn't go very far and Mooka stops, so the section order of march would be the dog, Mooka the handler,
- 33:00 then the machine gunner as his cover man and then me, so he calls me up, he says the dog's pointed. And the point means that the dog said the enemy's up there, and we, you know we had taken over this dog, he wasn't our original dog and I doubted, I said, "Oh are you sure?" You know, didn't seem to be anything, you know, whisper, whisper, whisper. Oh you know, go on,
- 33:30 I don't think he's pointed. Anyway off he goes, Trojan leads off go down a bit further and he stops again. They used to call me the angry ant, so I'm getting a bit cranky see, "What the bloody hell are you doing, there's nothing there is there? I can't see anything, no one's shooting at us, what's wrong?" "The dog is pointing," he said, "he's definitely pointed." So okay, I'll give you an idea, this is
- 34:00 150 metres, I think the next point is about 100, metres, anyway I said, "Just come on, just be wary but you know, but let's push on." We pushed on a little bit more and we come to a little creek, and it was sort of a little bit of open area anyway he said, "He's pointed again." And I said, "Oh I don't know whether this dog's bull shitting or not." So righto,
- 34:30 deploy the section. So I put the machine gun down, got Mooka to go down and I said, "Look for God's sake cover me, I'm going down into the creek and I'll see if I've got a sign going on." The platoon commander is up the bum, and I've deployed my section and I said, "I'm just going into the creek to have a look, the dog's keeping on pointing and I don't believe it." I got down to the creek, and one of the basic things you learn about visual tracking is that if somebody walks in a creek that has silt in it,
- 35:00 it's silty and leaves a footprint in the creek and it's a flowing creek, then if the footprint is still cloudy, that tells you that somebody's not far away. So I tippy-toe down to the creek, have a look, "Oh shit!" Back up the bloody bank, "Hang on a minute I think we've got something here." Oh anyway,
- 35:30 luckily, luckily, anyway so, instead of pushing the other section through me, no, no their platoon commander says, "Oh you go ahead." So he deploys the other section here, and he says, "Oh hang on, the way this should work." "No," he said, "it's your track, anyway." Oh so anyway we went down across the creek and the footprints are still there, and going up that way. Anyway cut a long story short, Trojan decides he's had enough, he's sick of this bull shit, he sits down
- 36:00 he's not going nowhere. Mooka says he's pointed again, I said, "Oh bull shit, just go, look, Bill just go." And Bill was my machine gunner. Anyway, next thing I hear Bill yelling out, "Dung loi! Dung loi!" "What are you bunging on, what do you mean, 'dung loi'?" Dung loi in Vietnamese means stop. I said shoot the bastard, there's no bloody, this is a free fire zone, anyone who's there is enemy, you know, we're nowhere near villages.
- 36:30 Anyway, shoot him, so we did. Anyway and luckily for us there was only one, but there were signs of others, anyway, that was really our first kill for the tour I think. And, so it was quite an event but the interesting thing was I was at fault, I didn't trust the dog, I didn't trust my handler, you know, all I was, and I guess not having had him

37:00 track to a contact, was the problem, you know, and. But anyway, I blamed myself, I should have been more aware you know, and that was a lesson really well learnt.

Did you reflect at the time that you could have been shot because of this?

Oh, you always think you're going to get shot, oh no, you do, You just, but you become fatalistic, you say, it's you could get run over by a bus. You know, if you're going to go you're going to go.

37:30 But you, I personally was second tour, I didn't want to die, I wanted to come home to Alice. And so I was very, very cautious and I tried not to put myself in danger, or my men, in danger, I never lost a bloke, never lost a bloke. In fact we never lost a bloke killed, ever, the whole platoon. Oh no, that's common, not unheard of.

38:00 Many rifle platoons, not so much rifle platoons but tracker platoons could get through a tour without losing anyone killed. Where was I, lessons learnt, what was I saying reflections, and having all that aside, it's still luck of the draw, you can bloody stand on a mine or you know you could, anything could happen, but you do the best you can to stay alive and dying, you tend to become

38:30 blasé about it, as a form of bravado. Oh so and so's dead, oh well it wasn't me, you got to get on with your life, you can't dwell on it, you know. The next part of Diggers Rest, Diggers Rest was a very eventful place.

Stop tape.

Tape 5

00:30 So what are we going to do?

There were two more things at Diggers Rest.

Oh alright okay. We'll do the humorous one first. Also just behind my pit, was a section of mortars, you know what mortars are, they're a tube which points up in the air and the infantry battalions have a mortar platoon, so you have your own light artillery in other words, anyway they were right behind us.

01:00 Noisy things, and my pit was there, traditionally when you're in the hole in the ground and you've got Armco steel over the top and then sandbags and dirt and everything, but you left an airhole, and we used to use our, 106 cases which were cardboard, which the round came in, the outer protective case they arrived in you know, or the 90 mills.

01:30 And used that as an air vent, and you take the cap off at the end, and bust the end out and bury it in the ground so you've got ventilation you know. But, those same pieces of equipment were quite often used as a urinal, so you know, somewhere around the platoon area you would dig a urinal and you would have that site with lying around it, you know, for hygiene reasons and everything, but that would be the urinal. Anyway this section of mortars moved in,

02:00 and that night, I've got the cap of my bloody my vent shaft and I'm lying in my bed, trying to sleep in my hammock, cos I strung my hammock inside it, and all of a sudden, I, "What's that? Hey you rotten mongrel!" Some mortar man had come over and had a pee, and of course by the time I got out, and without yelling and screaming, I'm chasing around trying to find out who this mongrel was that had peed

02:30 down my vent hole, you know. Oh you know, you can imagine it, I had to wash my bloody mozzie net and my bloody hammock, anyway that was then a humorous one. Righto, another day out of Diggers Rest, platoon commander in charge, platoon sergeant wasn't there, there was my self and Len the other dog,

03:00 dog section handler, section commander, so we had two dogs, we had Titus and Trojan with us and, we didn't have the dog on track so I was leading and we bumped into this bloody four lane highway, it was, there was a footpad about I suppose, oh memory, that wide I suppose. And the NVA, the North Vietnamese Army, had sandals, like these, but the old

03:30 Woolworth's ones with the whole moulded sandal with the little lugs, the pattern for original tracker, you know you look at them and you know straight away what they were anyway there's heaps of these, so many in fact that they used to teach us that you get a meter, and you plot a meter and you look at the footprints in there and you had a formula where you could tell how many people had gone past, you know, in that meter.

04:00 And you didn't even have to do that, you know, there was heaps. Too many, anyway and my scout, Davey Wagner, he calls me up and I, and he just knew, you just knew they were there, you could smell them and you know the hair on the back of your neck rises and, anyway. He called my attention to these bamboo shoots, the nogs - the Vietnamese - love

04:30 bamboo shoots, cooked up with their rice and that sort of stuff, and somebody had just recently cut

these bamboo shoots and there was left overs on the ground, you know. So immediately he and I know, he knows and I know that they're there somewhere, somewhere in there ahead of us, and you know they teach us never to use a track, but however if you get a track like that, you know the enemy's used it so they haven't booby trapped it

- 05:00 and also you do, you still look for the booby trap signs because they always left an indication somewhere to tell themselves that there was a booby trap ahead, anyway. So he and I are on this, and of course I've got this machine gunner right behind me and the rest of the platoon back further. Call the platoon commander. Oh yes, right hmm. So he says, "Push on." So I pushed on, I don't know 30, 50 meters and we're going at snail's pace because we wanted to get the drop on them not
- 05:30 them get the drop on us. Anyway we come to a junction, one track went that way, and then, and the other kept going this way, so I deliberately overshot, and went down the left hand track, still sign on both tracks, and I stopped and I went back to the platoon commander and I said, "Take you pick, you know, what do you want to do?" And he said,
- 06:00 "Well I think we should put the dog on." Right so he put the dog on. Right, so he put Titus in , the dog travelled loose on a lead, but when he was going to work he was, I'll show you a harness, and as soon as you put the harness on he was a working dog. You know whole system changed and he became a working dog, anyway, not Titus, Milo, put the harness on Milo and I was still up this track here and the other
- 06:30 section come up and they just started to head off, and the dog handler, I think, I think this is the way it happened, the dog handler bumped a sentry. Before we were even on our way, the sentry must have been asleep or something or, anyway, Bruce Williams, bumped the sentry, shot the sentry, and the immediate drill in a situation like that is I get my section and I take, I swing back
- 07:00 up the track where we've been and then I form up in extended line and I assault through, so I did that and assaulted into the bunker system and of course with only, I forget, I think there was only about 12 of us there, so we haven't got a lot of men, so I've gone into the bunker system and immediately seen that there's been people there, and, I said to the skipper, "We'll have to leap frog, we'll have to go one by one." And the section by section, so
- 07:30 he brought Len's section through me and we started to do this through this bunker system, and then we, bunkers everywhere, and anyway as I'm going, I notice that it's lunch time and there's rice bowls all laid out, that's where the bamboo shoots were going. And anyway, I don't recollect the actual figure, but I think it was 18 rice bowls in this particular spot where they were cooking and there's documentation and we've grabbed the documentation,
- 08:00 you know maps and stuff, and anyway we've sort of over extended ourselves so I yelled out you know, "Skipper stop, stop. Let's just organise ourselves and make sure we're not biting off more than we can chew." Anyway, straight away he decided, we've got a blood trail, so we've hit one and missed somebody else, or wounded him anyway so,
- 08:30 he decides it'll be a great idea if we put the dog on the blood trail. And I said, "No, no, no." I said, "I counted 18 rice bowls back there and there's only 12 of us, right and we're in his home, you know and we don't know how many more bunkers there are. So," I said, "no we're not going anywhere." Oh okay, I want to go think about it, be reasonable you know and young and gung ho, you know and here's his, here's his Military Cross coming up, see, not with me, I'm not getting any bloody
- 09:00 officer or Military Cross, so in the nicest way I indicated to him that it wouldn't be appropriate to do what we were going to do and I said to the other guy, Len, and I said, "Think about it, you can't do it. We're in a bunker system, it's their system and we haven't even been anywhere near the end of it." And anyway I said, "Why don't we all just stop here a second and listen?" So we did, and I could hear them and they were moving around and they were starting to outflank us.
- 09:30 You know they were, wherever they had gone to hide they were starting to come around. And I said, "I'm out of here." I said, "I'm setting my compass on a back bearing and I'm taking my section and I'm going. Do whatever you like, charge me, do whatever." Anyway that was it, I put my compass on a back bearing and we ran like crazy cats out of the place. And all of that sounds very, very simple, but at
- 10:00 this stage of the tour, I guess my mind was pretty well strung out and it affected me a heck of a lot more than I realised, and there's more to that, but we ran, I virtually ran all the way back to the fire support base. With the information that we'd gathered, on the information that we'd gathered, they redeployed Delta company the whole company back into that area, and Delta company got the shit belted out of them not, I don't know whether it
- 10:30 was that day or the next day afterwards, because the bunker system extended for bloody ages and Delta company, in fact talk about number two on the gun. Number two on the gun from, 12th platoon in Long Tan was a bloke called Shorty Brown, he's famous fellow, Shorty Brown, his machine gun fellow was a big tall fellow too called Dan O'Detman, and it was the long and short of it all. Shorty Brown was the section commander and
- 11:00 Shorty Brown and I had done the same long range patrolling course and we all knew each other well. Anyway Shorty got an MM [Military Medal], a military medal in there, in that bunker system that we

had vacated the day before with 12 men and they had a company which is anywhere up to 100. So, it was particularly traumatic for me, it just hung with me, the fact that I'd done, I'd done a runner, which okay, alright, I'm still alive and nobody really got

11:30 affected by it, we did our job, we found out information and passed it on, but I went, not long afterwards, I went on R and R, to a Taipei and I went with the other section commander who was there that day, and another mate of ours, they call Louie the Pig. And Lou was the RAP [regimental aid post] corporal at that stage, anyway the three of us went on R and R together and I didn't realise it, I had a breakdown

12:00 in Taipei and I ended up in my room distraught, crying and being chased by these blokes, you know, these Asian people and it was obviously a hang up from the bunker system. Where they -

Were you being chased or were you just imagining?

Oh no in my mind, I was hallucinating. I was out of it, I was completely out of my tree and I'd been drinking rum, and I,

12:30 always blamed it on the rum, "Oh jeez I won't drink rum again look at what it did to me." But what happened was, but I couldn't stay in my room and I didn't have a sheila because I'd got too pie eyed, which is customary by the way Heather, and the bouncer from the, the bar where we were at, the others had gone home with women and I had stayed and drank, he'd brought me home. And, but I couldn't stay in the room.

13:00 I was just crying my eyes out, and so distraught because every time I closed my eyes they were there, they were up me and they were chasing me you know, and it's this hallucination thing. Anyway, so I bit the bullet, went around to Louie the Pig's room and knocked on his bloody door, and of course, he's romantically involved with his lady and didn't want to talk to me but I beat the bloody door down. I said, "You've got to let me in. I can't stay on my own. I'm just, I can't cope. I'm not, you know I won't annoy you. I'll

13:30 stay in a corner." He used to talk about this years later so I did, I went and hid in a corner, and just sobbed, you know sobbed, and sobbed and sobbed and that became my nightmare, for want of a better word, you know, you hear about, how we dream and we'll wake up. Well that ended up being mine but I always thought it was just the booze, you know, but anyway I've since -

14:00 A shrink has explained it all to me, and since that, it -

And did that keep recurring during the rest of your tour?

I don't know, I imagine it did, although, no probably not. Because apparently the break down occurs and doesn't come back for years later. I don't recall actually waking up in the same, being in the same state again,

14:30 having that actual total break down. Yeah, anyway that was that, if you want to have a break for lunch -

Yeah, October, October '69 and I'll explain something here, MIA means 'missing in action'. Australia has, right now six servicemen who are missing in action in Vietnam. That means their bodies

15:00 were never recovered, so therefore it's never been proved that they actually, it's like the Yanks, that they were never actually captured, there's always a doubt. Righto, so that's the lead in, there are six and there's a site actually and I'm involved on the sidelines of the search for the six. In October, an SAS patrol which would have been about four or five, six

15:30 at the most, SAS troopers were under heavy fire and had to be extracted from the jungle rather quickly. So the helicopter came in, they dropped the ropes and they dropped the ropes down out of the helicopter, the troopers tied themselves to the rope and then the chopper goes straight up. And then goes helter skelter, as quickly as possible

16:00 and the theory is to get to a pad, then it drops down, lets the troopers off they move to the side, the helicopter gets down and they get inside it and they go home, to Nui Dat, that's the principle. It got to the stage, the ropes are down, they're still under fire, they lashed themselves in and way they go on the end of the rope. One trooper, lost his first name, his last name's Fisher.

16:30 He fell off the rope, back down into the jungle, either wounded or dead, nobody really knows to this day and his body was therefore left in that location, they kept going, they couldn't tell the helicopter that he was off, they had no communication with them until they got on the ground and then they got into the chopper and they went and looked for him and they couldn't find him.

17:00 They didn't, no way of spotting the actual spot he went down to the ground. Anyway, sometime later, a week, I'm not sure, they did all sorts of aerial searches and that sort of stuff but couldn't find him. About a week later they decided to send a rifle company out from 6RAR, my battalion, and they said you have to take a dog with you or dogs, we took two dogs. To search for the body, and these days of course

17:30 there's cadaver dogs and, you know dogs that search rubble for bodies and all that sort of stuff. In those days all our dogs could do was what we showed them to do, so in other words, there had to be something for that dog to track. Fisher fell out of the sky and never left a trail, so, and there was no way

of finding the beginning of his trail either, because he would have been dead on impact, or if not he wouldn't be able to move anyway, so his body was on the ground and they're thinking,

18:00 they're narrow minded thinking of them, them, other people, hierarchy, they could not understand that my dog could find him, there's no way because there's nothing to start with, the dog has to have a start point. Anyway, the angry ant beat his head against the wall, because I didn't want to go out, any time spent out of Nui Dat was less, or was more chance of getting shot at or not coming home, so I didn't want to go and

18:30 anyway they made me go, made me take a section. And as it turns out, I was with a half platoon patrol of B company, under the platoon commander of Steve Sainsbury. And, we were sort of, it was drizzling rain and it was a terrible sort of a, rainforest undergrowth area, and thumb in bum and mind in neutral and

19:00 I just happened to look out and I see this Asian chappie. Sort of, meandering along, we were stationary at this stage because Steve Sainsbury had gone forward to have a look at something. Which was actually turned out to be a track and this guy was on the track, and this guy was on the track, we weren't on the track we were parallelling it. Anyway so, we joke about it, I know we shouldn't so I said, tapped my scout and said [UNCLEAR] in other words,

19:30 shoot him, and he went, and I thought hang on a minute, I thought somebody's got to do this. So I, you know I, this is all and you talk you know, it happened over a period of time. It's all seconds, you know, and this all happened in a matter of seconds, somebody's got to shoot him. So I shot him, and there was another fellow with him, we he got away, we didn't see him. Anyway

20:00 we sort of joke about the fact that he didn't want to shoot him, he reckons it was because he called him the smiling nog because he had a beatific smile on his face and he couldn't shoot him because he was smiling, and my story was he didn't want to dirty his rifle, cos I was the one that who had to dirty the rifle and clean the rifle. But anyway, so that was as a result of that, that was just an incident.

20:30 **Was Fisher's body every found?**

No, not to this day and, there's more information on the website about it, in fact I was just recently contacted by the bloke who runs the website, a fellow called Jim Bourke, and the government is dragging the chain and it's got to be a closure thing and it's all to do with DNA [deoxyribonucleic acid, genetic testing],

21:00 the Yanks have whole shed full of or whole resource full of pieces, body parts and DNA samples and it's a matter of getting DNA off family and then getting the search conducted through the myriads of DNA stuff the Yanks have got. It's a process of elimination and the government is dragging their feet with it a bit apparently, and it's a bit of a sore point.

So is he one of

21:30 **the six listed as MIA?**

Yes, there's two from 1RAR, first tour and then there's Fisher, there's one, not sure one air force medic I think and two, no there's two out of a Canberra bomber. Somewhere up further north, okay, MIA's finished. The Yanks, around about this period of time,

22:00 the Americans had a unit in Long Binh which was a ranger, an airborne ranger squadron or whatever they called them, and they decided that, well the old squadron was going home and the new replacements were coming in and they decided it would be a good idea to get somebody from the Australian army to come up there and teach them about tracking, visual tracking.

22:30 The old hands were actually a bunch of national guardsmen. They were on their way home and I spent a fair amount of time, anyway I was the bloke, one of the blokes that was chosen to go up to Long Binh to teach these fellows tracking, total waste of time, but I didn't tell them that. They would send a helicopter down, they had their own helicopters this unit, they were self contained, they would send one of their helicopters down there, they would pick me, they would take me up to Long Binh

23:00 which was out of Saigon near Bien Hoa, and I would spend whatever time, three days or whatever, teaching the new reinforcements how to visual track. You know it's something you just don't teach overnight, you know it's impossible, but anyway we did it, and but it was a great thing for me because I got three days I Long Binh and they, this unit had their own bar

23:30 with a resident Filipino band there all the time, oh it was just, like a home away from home and that's what Long Binh was all about, it was just like a big city and of course they lived in proper huts, whereas we lived in tents. They had all the mod cons, anything you wanted, you know local village down the road with ladies. Numerous grog places, a PX [American duty-free canteen], there you go, there's a side issue.

24:00 Massive big PX, PX was a bit, like a bit department store type of thing, you know. So I, while I was there I went to the PX wandering around, oh diamond rings, engagement ring. So I bought Alice's engagement ring, and it's a double ring set, they interlocked, and I'll continue on that and so when I

went back to Nui Dat I

24:30 put the box in an envelope or something. I forget how I did this but I took the rings out because I didn't want to pay duty on them, old scab, and one of the blokes going home to Australia on R and R, one of our platoon, I got him to tape the rings to his dog tags, because we all wore dog tags, and so he taped the rings to his dog tags, and when he got to Australia, that's right he took the box with him and when he got to Australia, he put them in the box and posted them to Alice. So I get this letter,

25:00 and it says, "Does this mean we're engaged?" God I'm a romantic aren't I. So anyway, yeah, so.

Can I just interrupt for a second, was that real diamond ring?

Yeah.

In the PX?

Oh look, they had everything, you could buy, a car. And then pick it up in the States when you got home, it was American stuff, oh yeah, American's, look American's never do without.

Why would they be selling beautiful diamond rings in a PX?

Because, because for clowns like me to

25:30 get engaged, like romantically, of course.

Was it gold and diamonds?

It was silver and, it wasn't gold, it was, white gold.

Oh white gold. That's my favourite, that's nice. So did it cost you heaps?

Oh I don't know, I can't remember. It wouldn't have, it wouldn't have because you know, you -

You pay the tax.

No it was -

26:00 No anyway, so where were we?

So she wrote back saying does this mean we're engaged and what did you write back, yes?

Yeah. What do you think, yeah, and then we decided then to get married in May when I come home, yeah. So Long Binh, Long Binh was a, it was an interesting experience, the Americans are, some can be so, well I suppose it's the same with every

26:30 bunch of people, you get good Australians, you get bad Australians but I think I met some of the worst Americans and some of the best Americans in the short period of time I was there. I think I went there about three or four times. And, it was quite an experience in more ways than one, but we never achieved anything, I discovered, amazing how these things come back. I discovered a body, we were doing this tracking beside

27:00 a river, a creek whatever it was, and the American I was with said, "Oh, we lost a man in there." I forget when he said, "We never found him." "Oh that's right." Anyway, "Yeah," he said, "somewhere in here." And anyway we're standing on these old logs and a whole heap of debris there and I just happened to look down in the water, and I said, "You never ever found him, what about his gear?" "No, no never found him."

27:30 And I said, "Well there seems to be something just down in there." And sure enough it was his remains. He'd gone down to the bottom, and this is a matter of I think, weeks, and the rushing water, eventually, I think, I never saw the body, all I could see was something down there, you know. And yeah, and it was, it was him and yeah, amazing, moving right along.

So he'd drowned?

28:00 Oh yeah, he, they were doing watermanship or something, you know part of your training and they'd lost him, he'd got lost in the flood because it was all flooded water, and he must have gone down to the bottom and either got pinned down there or gradually floated back or whatever, but because they had searched high and low for him. And here we are standing on these logs and I said, "Oh you know could that be something of his equipment?" I didn't know it was him, I just saw something down there, and it turned out to be him.

28:30 Yeah, Long Binh, yeah, so after Long Binh, let's go to the Mai Chau. Remember I said before the Vietnamese the NVA [North Vietnamese Army] would get their wounded back up to the hospital, well the hospital was in the Nui Mai Chau, Nui means hill or mountain and the Mai Chau was up on the border of the province almost, not ours and not somebody else's sort of thing, so it never sort of got

29:00 looked at so it was sort of a safe haven for the Northern Vietnamese. Until we got there, we actually cleaned them out and I did it the easy way and the best way. They needed to establish a mortar base

plate on the top of the mountain, right on the very peak of the mountain, and was a very, very steep mountain with very, very sharp ridges, and very hard to, establish anything on it.

29:30 And the, NVA were in the ground, they were dug in tunnels and all of that sort of stuff. So the rifle companies sort of surrounded the mountain and then started to walk up but they needed to put a mortar base plate on the top of the mountain, so they took us and mortars, blew the top of the mountain sort of thing and cleared the trees and dropped us in, and, and we worked from the top of the mountain down,

30:00 and also provided protection for the mortars, we spent Christmas on the Mai Chau. It wasn't a very nice place, it was a very scary place because there's so many nooks and crannies where they can hide, and you always looking for the unexpected and you could smell death. Because so many I guess had not made it,

30:30 the enemy that is, and got there and died, and they had, sometimes not buried them properly, anyway there was the smell of death and decay, is one of the things I remember about the place.

Bob, what does it, what, can you try to tell us what it smells like?

No.

Can't liken it to anything?

No, oh no, the worst smell, I can't even describe it was.

31:00 Oh, my section 2IC was probably my nemesis, the thorn in my side the whole time, he was a pain in the bum. He wasn't a good soldier he was a reg, his father, here we go, side tracking. His father was a lieutenant colonel in the Kiwi army, and got an MC in Bahia in the Second World War, in Greece and Crete and was somewhat of a hero and this clown wanted to emulate his father and be a hero

31:30 and, but he was a bad soldier, so he was never going to be a hero unless something stupid happened his way you know, and he was my section 2IC, and he was, a total problem for me, you just never knew what he was up to, you know. But anyway, why did I sidetrack to him, oh that's right, we were in a re-entrant in the Mai Chau and the smell was around and all of a sudden

32:00 We figured that there was something there, just below the surface of the ground so we cleared a bit of the top and we found plastic, and of course I said, "Don't, don't touch it, because we know what it is." So what does he do, he gets his bayonet and goes and he, broke the plastic, oh well we were retching, you know, just, I can't describe it, it's just the worst stink in the world, you know, anyway.

32:30 What else did we, oh well me mate the other section commander, he actually found a full tropical medical kit, doctors medical kit in a full box which they must have been trying to evacuate and left behind. And, another incident, we had once again, in a re-entrant, not far from where that body was, and in their haste

33:00 to leave they left wounded behind and I can't recall whether there was five or seven, it wasn't my section that bumped them but the other section, bumped them and luckily they were poor shots because they missed them and didn't shoot them because your first reaction is to, when you're in a place like that your first reaction, that's like I say, "Dong lai - don't." You got to shoot them because it's your life or theirs, and you can't take the risk. You're in those areas you have to shoot them, that's why

33:30 they automatically, the first thing you do, if there's a movement you shoot it, and hope like hell it wasn't one of your own and that it's enemy you know. Anyway, they took a couple of shots at these blokes and realised then there was no return fire so we sort of snuck up on them and there they were, and I just can't remember whether there was five or seven, but it was about that many and once again you could smell them because of the, had gangrene

34:00 and old wounds that you know. Anyway, so we radioed into battalion headquarters and said we've got these fellows and we're in the deepest bloody jungle you can imagine, and in a deep, deep re-entrant, so we decided that the best, nearest, the best thing to do was to try and get up onto the spur line, and get them up onto the spur line and we called in a chopper with what they call a jungle penetrator, you ever heard of that? Imagine a big ship's anchor.

34:30 The thing, that part of the anchor is folded in to make just one big solid drop effect, so it's like a great big massive bolt, imagine a great big massive bolt or massive anchor being dropped down from the helicopter, straight through the jungle and that's why it's called the jungle penetrator. And it drops through onto the ground and when you get it on the ground you unwrap it, you can unwrap the legs and there's a cargo net

35:00 with it. So what we had to do, the only way we could get these wounded enemy out was to tie them to the jungle penetrator, and I can't remember if it was three at a time or two at a time, or whatever, anyway, but that's how we got them out we tied them to that, poor buggers they must have been, they were sick as it was, they were dying you know, in some cases and all we could do was get them out to hospital and so we did.

So they didn't have their weapons on them?

35:30 No.

And had they had their weapons, they would have had to have been killed?

No, no, if they didn't fire at us, you know, we would have, we saw them, we shot at them, they didn't return our fire, so we did fire, not fire and remove them, but that's what you call a fire and movement, but we didn't fire, we just got up to them by using one leg on the ground which protects you while the other one moves.

36:00 That's why it's called fire and movement right, and anyway, if they had have fired back, well then we would have shot them, but seeing they didn't fire back and if they had have had weapons, well they wouldn't have held them they would have put their hands up. That's the international signal for surrender, and we wouldn't have, pointless, you know.

So did you see that happen, people surrendering and then being shot?

No, no. I'm sure it probably did, but no.

36:30 The only other thing about the Mai Chau that I didn't like, we had Christmas on the Mai Chau. Santa came in, quite humorous event was the fact that we raised the flag, we raised the flag on Nui Mai Chau. By the time the top of the mountain had been knocked around with explosives and levelled and all that sort of stuff, it was only a postage stamp, it was only a small area. In fact it was very hard to find somewhere to sleep,

37:00 because it was so steep and the mortars had to have the flat area, yeah, anyway, they had the pipe major come in, we had a pipe band, and they flew the pipe major in, they flew a camera crew in and everybody's all organised for the raising of the flag on the Nui Mai Chau. But, it was very, very difficult to find a piece of timber long enough. So they had some bamboo, so they got two pieces of bamboo and they strapped two pieces of bamboo together. And then there were two

37:30 blokes like Iwojima, you've seen the Iwojima, one you know with the marine, and so they, and they only just got it up there and just as the camera rolled the flag pole broke, so they said, woo cut. So they had to re-shoot that until they got it right. The other thing about the Mai Chau that I didn't like was, the Phantoms. Having been in an artillery barrage on the first tour, I was always

38:00 wary of friendly fire and, we, I can't remember whether we called the air strike in or somebody else did, but anyway we were warned that there was going to be an air strike on the grid reference just next door to where we were and the re-entrants were so close together, it's hard to describe but they're like a whole lot of fingers running down, ridge lines running down, and they are so close together like they might be only 200 metres apart. Now a Phantom

38:30 is not known for it's accuracy, not like a Canberra bomber. And so these, these Phantoms were coming in over the top of us and dropping their bombs in the next re-entrant and I had nowhere to hide. But anyway, they didn't get us, we didn't have any dropped shots. What else, okay that's the Mai Chau.

Did you have any idea there, though at the time Bob, at the particular Christmas time that the war was being lost by the Americans and the Australians and

39:00 **New Zealanders?**

No, I never thought about it then, no.

Have any - ?

No, we were winning.

At that time?

Oh, we were, oh look, we had, between us and 5RAR and 9RAR and then 8RAR came about November, or December of '69 we were running out of enemy and that's why we were in the Mai Chau at Christmas, because, 33 got

39:30 knocked out of the race and anything that was happening was only at, at lower levels. It all happened in our first operation really, virtually, and of course D company in, what's her name, Diggers Rest. And the rest of the stuff was sporadic stuff, they were virtually cleaned out, but that was our province. And that's why, no it was before that,

40:00 it happened before too, I imagine 2RAR pretty well had it all cleaned up after 6RAR in Long Tan, because Long Tan made, put them back a long, long way and that's when they went out of the province and got belted in up near Bien Hoa in Coral and Balmoral.

Okay alright.

But the province was pretty much ours.

Tape 6

00:32 The American involvement as far as the Australians were concerned was that they virtually left us with that province, that whole province, the Phuoc Tuy province was given to the Australians to look after. Including the training of the Vietnamese and all of that sort of stuff, all the infrastructure, all the big infrastructure came from them in the form of, we had our own hospital down at Vung Tau and our own R and C centre and things like that, our own stores.

01:00 But, they were the, like for a vet, for our dogs we had to go to Vung Tau or up to Bien Hoa to have the dogs seen to. But they had massive number of dogs in country at that stage. And they in fact were getting their dogs from the Brits, a lot of their dogs were coming through the Brits centre at Kota Tinggi in Malaya.

Did they use the same type of dogs though?

No, they varied, mainly Shepherds. The Yanks loved the Shepherds. But they did have Labradors, in fact

01:30 the combat tracker teams of America that we were affiliated with, their, logo is a Lab, yeah. Where were we, oh the Americans, that's right, the one five, five, they had a 155 battery, a 175 battery and numerous other support, back up things, you know like if, if you needed to shift a battalion, you needed to get a battalion's worth of helicopters,

02:00 so they would supply a big group of helicopters if you needed to shift a battalion at one time, or something like that but a lot of the time it was ninth squadron that looked after us. The next part of the tour is a bit of a blur. I for the life of me, can't recall, except, fire support base Tiger, I suppose, which was

02:30 back down from the Mai Chau, it was very, very hot, dry and typical Vietnam, you know it was wet when it was wet and dry when it was dry but the dogs used to love to swim in the bomb craters, the big B-52 bombs would drop a bomb and the crater would be, oh 20 or 30 metres wide, you know and full of water, from the wet season and muddy, red mud you know and the dogs used to love to

03:00 swim in it you know, and it was terrible because they'd come back all dirty and they'd want to shake all over you and that sort of stuff. Ah, I'm running out things for the second tour, I, all of a sudden, maybe we'll come back to it.

Got a bunch of questions on it so we can come back and that might jog you.

03:30 **I was just curious about getting attached to the dogs. I mean..**

The saddest thing of all, I could go on forever here, the saddest part is that, so by the end of May or I don't know, I actually came out of Vietnam on the advance party, and I think that was, first week in May, no it must have been the last week in April.

04:00 And, oh hang on, I just thought of something, before I come out of Vietnam, let's go to, there was a place, remember I told you about this route that went up through the province and up to the Mai Chau and they, the enemy all knew it or that's where they all gravitated to. It was a place and it was a place called the bottle neck and somewhere in the bottle neck if you set up an ambush and you stayed there a week, you

04:30 would get something, then something would happen, some action, anyway the CO the commanding officer had begun to use our platoon quite frequently for a lone platoon, you know, like the reconnaissance thing I was telling you about and so we were out on our own in the bottle neck, and we had, one of the advantages that we had had over other platoons was that because we originally started with four sections, we had four machine guns, so we had a spare machine gun floating, so

05:00 anyway, we had four machine guns. At this stage of the game, for several months, probably six months, and this was late in the tour, we had a bushman scout with us, a bushman scout was an ex enemy soldier who probably got wounded and decided to change sides, and he was sort of re-indoctrinated and then farmed into the battalion and some were good, and some were terrible.

05:30 Some, I've heard rumours that one or two may not have died naturally. Because they were actually VC in disguise, anyway we won't go into that because I don't have any proof of that. I know one of them, I would have, wouldn't have liked to have had him beside me in a contact.

Why, what did you know about him?

Oh, he was untrustworthy.

06:00 He wasn't in my section, and I used to tell the other section commander, you know, don't let him have access to any information or anything. I didn't trust him, however, my bushman scout, was a, an NVA warrant officer who you know, got wounded by the Americans and rehabilitated and he ended up with us and his name was Huan Tin, and Tin and I got off to a bad start, because

06:30 I made the stupid mistake of you know, why should I put my forward scout up there scrub bashing. Some of the hardest things about soldiering in the jungle is scrub bashing 'cos you got to fight your way

through it. And, so I put him up front, it wasn't a clever move, because you know, I became a warrant officer many years later and it's very degrading, anyway. Once we got over that and his, he didn't have English see, and so it

- 07:00 was a lot of hand and sign language and phrase books and stuff like that to get the message across and then I found, I realised this bloke was a wealth of knowledge and he was a very, very efficient soldier and he and I got on very well, eventually. We got off to a bad start and anyway, and Tin unfortunately, stood on a mine, he went over to the next battalion, in 2RAR and stood on a mine.
- 07:30 Yeah, but he, I think he was only wounded, but I think he, the rumour was that he took his own life, discharged himself from hospital and couldn't live, didn't want to live any more, was the way I heard it. Anyway we had our, my last contact was, and I was very, very upset, because as you can imagine, you know,
- 08:00 the fear of, at this stage of the game, the last, or one of the last operations and you wanted to get home and you want everybody to be careful, you want everybody to do everything right. No mistakes, let's you know, let's all get home, no one dead. And we had a reinforcement, called Kiwi, Kiwi McKay. And, latrine facilities in a short stop were always
- 08:30 emergency stuff, take your shovel go and dig a hole, and you usually went out in front of machine gun which was always manned and, but modesty quite often makes you go that little bit further and out of sight and unfortunately out of sight also means out of protection. So anyway, Kiwi goes out, I think it was in the morning, I can't remember and he goes out for his morning routine and dug his hole and anyway, while he's got his pants down
- 09:00 this bunch of enemy came upon him, and anyway Kiwi grabs his rifle and opens fire and nobody else could see these people, this is what I got so mad about. And he yelled out, "They're bugging out to the left." Or something, and within five seconds we had declared our whole perimeter, one of the biggest no no's of infantry.
- 09:30 Never declare your perimeter, don't show the enemy where you are, you know, if you only need to fire one weapon, you only fire one weapon. We had four machine guns and every machine gun opened up, at nothing, at nothing. Just like the American's you know, a yippee shoot you know, and I hear a lot of Australians platoons doing it all the time but I mean, this was my platoon you know, and I thought - anyway, so I chucked a wobbly [protested], I got up my machine gunner and I got up Tin.
- 10:00 Even Tin fired. I was the only one, I reckon I was the only one that never fired out of about, I guess 25, 26 blokes I suppose. And then I proceeded to berate the platoon commander and then I berated the platoon sergeant, and anyway, in the mean time it was discovered that there was something like 20 of these people but that they had bugged out through the rubber, so the platoon sergeant said, "Come on, we'll leave half behind, the rest of us go and we'll chase them." And this
- 10:30 was big rubber, we were actually in the jungle, a piece of jungle but just outside of it was rubber. And, big rubber, you know, they're big trees like this and very tall and very open on the ground and sure enough way out there we could see this, right down the line of rubber trees we could see these people running. So, not far away was a section of APCs, so they sent the APCs over and what the enemy did was they left a couple behind to slow us down.
- 11:00 It's a terrible bunch to be with, you know, if you're a bit slow, you stay behind and hold them back you know and so that's what happened and it worked, the rest got away and I just forget how many, two or three or whatever it was and one poor beggar was hiding behind a tree and firing from behind a tree and the APC's had 50 calibres, which went straight through the tree and got him through the tree, you know
- 11:30 and that was our last contact. But I was just so mad that we had become so inefficient, you know, that we'd given our whole position away just like that, anyway, that was all. Out of there, out of there, home, how did we come home, that's right I come home on the plane. Alice and I had been trying to plan our wedding in Cairns for the end of the month which was the 30th
- 12:00 and my best man was my mate section commander and, and we had, we had even ordered our proper army service dresses, through the Q store, ordered them in Australia and anyway I got home. Oh yeah that's right. Not a very pretty episode of the previous time, there was an advance party of us and we got in, snuck in like mongrel dogs, this is what I was saying before, here we are coming back and they used to
- 12:30 bring us in at midnight when no one was around. They'd fly, they flew us home and then what we did, a couple of us got together we got paid and we had already pre planned this, we said we'll go to the best hotel in Sydney so we got in a cab, and said, "Take us to the Wentworth, I believe it's the best." He said, "Yes it is." We got to the Wentworth and we were in our polyester uniforms which had been in Vietnam for 12 months and we didn't look our best.
- 13:00 I had no underpants, I had no shoelaces and I had green nylon chord, you know, army nylon chord for shoelaces and I didn't have a bag, all I really had was a plastic bag of bits and pieces, what a dag. Anyway, and we arrive at the Wentworth and the man on the door, you know, he welcomes us with open arms, he could, you know

- 13:30 by this stage it's one o'clock in the morning, or something you know, "Good evening gentlemen." You would swear we were part of the mayor's party or something you know the way he treated us. "Welcome and what can I do for you?" Anyway a couple of the other blokes said, can you, and I said, "Mate look, I'm really in a bad way. I've got no undies, and," I said, "I take small men's, and," I said, "I need a pair of shoe laces." He never batted an eye, he said, "Sir I will do my very best and I
- 14:00 will be back soon." So of course we, up to the room, ordered a couple of bottles of beer and Flag ale and ordered a steak eggs and chips a big feed and knock, knock on the door, open the door, there he is. "Sir, I really do regret that I could not find your first request tonight but I do have the shoelaces though, I'm sorry I wasn't able to help out."
- 14:30 Anyway, so off early the next morning, on a plane to Townsville. Alice said, come down, taken time off work and come down from Cairns and I didn't know but, while she was waiting and most of the other blokes were from Townsville as well, the local TV station had spoke to her and said, "Are you expecting someone?" And she said, "Oh yes, my fiancée's coming home and blah, blah." And you know,
- 15:00 and of course, off the aircraft I got and there's Alice standing out there, and and dah, dah, dah, you know, the old horny lover come home, you know, all over her like a rash and all of a sudden I could feel that there's somebody there, it's a bloody camera crew like this. Yeah and I got a camera in my face and ah, what's going on, what's going on. So then of course I got interviewed which I
- 15:30 can't remember a damn word but, yeah, so I was home. So we got married when the others came back, they came, when did they come back, they must have come back, I'm not sure when they come back on the Sydney.

So how did the TV crew pick you out of the crowd,?

They just picked Alice. I mean it was nothing to do with me, they must have just went along the families that were waiting you know and I don't

- 16:00 know why they picked Alice. But, so that, and everything was friendly, you know, the whole airport was, and Townsville seemed to be like that, there was no ill feeling or anything. But yeah, so we got married a month later, I went through all the dramas again of, being sick and, struggling to come to grips with civilian, or not civilian life but coming to grips with being home
- 16:30 in Australia, it's a very traumatic thing.

What are the main problems you face?

Being uncouth, swearing, you know, I mean people today swear all the time, but those days, it wasn't, you didn't use the F word in front of women and all that sort of stuff and I still don't, it was just very, very difficult to get back into society, you know. There's

- 17:00 poems written about this where you know, if a tyre blows or something happens, you know, you throw yourself on the ground and all of that sort of stuff, well it's not quite that bad, but there are things that you find hard to adapt to after being 12 months away. And food's one of them and in fact I was so crook I had to go to the doctor. And I, before I got married, and
- 17:30 he said, "Oh you're anaemic," or something, I forget what he actually, and he said, "Are you drinking?" And I said, "Oh yeah, just a little bit." And he said, "Right, I want you to take all the scotch out of the ginger ale, and just drink ginger ale." He said, "I don't want -" he said, "I know you're in a sociable world at the moment, but," he said, "just drink ginger ale." So I did that for a couple of days till I thought I was better, and then, yeah anyway. Right, that's the end
- 18:00 of Vietnam, oh had some leave, had a honeymoon on Brampton Island, went back to the army and had a married quarter, got a married quarter in Townsville, and of course the battalion reformed again and almost immediately we were told we were going to Singapore. And then they kept putting the date back so we didn't actually go to Singapore till 12 months, actually 12 months later.
- 18:30 By that stage, Alice was pregnant and we were being harassed by Deirdre's mother.

In what way?

Oh well, she always, I always said to her look just tell me what you want me to do, you know. You want me to send you a fortnightly allotment or what. Anyway, she never ever did that, she just kept harassing me and saying, "Oh, when are you going to do something?" "When you tell me." And it just went on and on like this garbage you know.

- 19:00 And eventually we went to Singapore. Alice was, we went to Singapore in July, and my daughter, my first daughter was born in November in Singapore, in Changi Hospital and Alice got sick of these letters from - Oh that's right, I went, that Christmas, '70, Alice and I had a holiday down here in Brisbane and, so I said, "While I'm down here, I'll go
- 19:30 and see Deirdre." And, so I went and saw Deirdre and her mother, and I said, "Well I never knocked you back, what do you want?" And all she could do was whinge and yarp, yarp, yarp so I thought, alright

okay, well just let me know when you want to formalise it, and I'll do whatever you want me to do.

What was she yarping about, did she want to get back together?

No, she didn't want to get back together, but it was always

20:00 pointing the finger at me, it was always my fault, you know. I left her, she had to fend for herself, her family dumped her, and it was all my fault and it was all my fault and it was all my fault. And she, I don't think she wanted the money it was just to harass me. It got that bad that when we were in Singapore, Alice said, "I think we should adopt Deirdre. Because it's obviously too hard for her, she's not coping,

20:30 she's - " And we discussed it and we said, "Well she won't let us but that's what we should do, we should offer to take Deirdre and bring Deirdre up." So Alice wrote her a letter, never heard from her again, I don't know what Alice wrote in the letter, but, woman to woman you know. Anyway, never heard, and '75, in '75 I was back here in Enoggera and I was the intelligence sergeant of the battalion and

21:00 the phone rang this day and it's Val, and she said, "I'm getting married and I want to, I want to change Deirdre's name." And I said, "That's fine, how are you going?" "What do you care?" "Oh righto, alright, things haven't changed, have a nice time, congratulations on your coming marriage, bye." That was '75. Do you want me to end that story?

Yes please.

Okay,

21:30 1990, oh we, pluck a year, say '91, I, left the army in '85 I did several things, but at this particular time Julie and I ran a caravan hire business on the south side of Brisbane. And the phone rings this day and this voice says, "I'm thinking of hiring a caravan, is it alright if I come out and have a look?" So I said, "Yeah sure,

22:00 I'll be home, what time?" Blah, blah, blah. Anyway this person came and it was a young woman wearing sunglasses. And, so I took her around and I said, "What would you like, about this one here blah, blah, blah." And showed her these vans. And, anyway, and she said, "Oh well, thank you very much I'll get back to you." So, a couple of days later, the phone rings again and she said, "Hello, is that Bob Bettany?" and I said, "Yeah." She said,

22:30 "I'm Deirdre, I'm your daughter." And I've said, "At last, you've turned up. I've been waiting for you all my life." You know and I had, I was going to do the jigsaw thing and all the things that you do, and just never ever got around to it and I was quite happy to meet with her and I said, "This is wonderful, when can I see you? What do you want to do?" Anyway so, there's more to this story, there's always more to my stories.

23:00 Okay so she came out to the house and she's, we got talking and she met Julie and there was a sort of a sense of familiarity. Anyway I'll cut the story short, as it turns out, Deirdre and my stepdaughter, Deborah, went to school together at the Catholic girls school over here at Redcliffe,

23:30 or Kipperring or wherever the hell it is and, hated each other's guts. Deborah was a bit of a rebel and Deirdre was a goody two shoes apparently. So they say and they really hated each other with a vengeance.

They didn't know?

They didn't know, no, oh gosh no, no. Did not have a clue so that immediately made the reconciliation or whatever you want to call it, the meeting, very, very

24:00 tense. But Deborah wasn't there I don't think at the time, she might have been in Sydney but, so and my Mum lived with me at the time, so my Mum was just so thrilled and she was out of her tree and of course my two natural daughters, were just stoked to find this other sister that they didn't know about and of course Deirdre had a, she was secretary to the manager of the Westpac Business Bank

24:30 I think, at the time, so she had a good, a really, really good job and making good money and lived in Riverside apartments or whatever it is on the river. You know, so the girls, all thought it was marvellous to have a sister who lived in a unit like this.

So was it Deirdre the one who came out to see you with the -

Yes, oh yeah that's what she did, sorry. Yeah that's what she did, she went and she found out where I was and I don't remember how, but it was easy,

25:00 once she found out my name, she probably went to births, deaths and marriages. And anyway, and then she decided that she would come out and see me and suss me out first, because she'd heard what her mother had to say of course. And so she was sneaky devil, a bit like her father I think. And yeah, then but the other link too was that,

25:30 she, how do I say it, Deborah's aunt, on her father's side, natural father's side, worked with Deirdre at

the Westpac Bank and they knew each other and we actually had a family party at her house, on another occasion and Deirdre came along as a friend of hers, you know, after she'd found out that, who I was.

26:00 Anyway, then she rang me up one day and said, "I think we should have dinner together." And I said, "Yeah fine." So I went and picked her up and we went down to Southbank and we had dinner and she just asked me all the why's and wherefores and, you know why did her mother fall pregnant, not so much why but how come we were so stupid in those days as to fall pregnant and why didn't I stay

26:30 and you know, all the questions that a daughter would ask and so I answered them all truthfully and then I said to her, I said, "Well," I said, "if you were in my position, would you have stayed with your mother?" Because she and her mother weren't getting along, she said, "No." And then, I never saw her again, I never saw her again, no she, last I heard she went to Toowoomba, she'd done what she wanted to do you know. And I said to her, "My door's always open."

27:00 It's always been open, and I said, "And if you want to come and see me, or you know you need to talk to me, I'm here." And she hasn't, one day she'll probably come back, I don't know, although the Deborah thing sort of put a dampener on it. That sort of, made things a bit strained, yeah. Singapore.

Singapore story.

Oh gosh, it's endless. Singapore, we were the garrison battalion in Singapore and at that stage when we first went to there, I was still with the anti tank tracker team,

27:30 so we still had dogs. We took one dog with us, his name was Hadrian and we had another dog over there and it came from the British war dog school at Kota Tinggi and it's name was Timothy. And then not long after we got there, we were actually in a very historic place, garrisoned in a historic place called Selarang Garrison. And if you ever read your military history on Singapore, on the occupation of Singapore,

28:00 or the surrender of Singapore, the prisoners were originally housed in Selarang Garrison in the early days and they had a formal hunger strike, because of atrocious conditions or whatever, and there's famous photos of the Selarang Garrison where they were imprisoned which was just down the road from Changi, Changi prison. And we had a lovely time we were a

28:30 garrison battalion, at, as part of the 28th Anzac Brigade, which had previously been called which had previously been called the Commonwealth Brigade. The Brits were pulling out and they vacated Changi while we were there, Changi airstrip used to be theirs, and, and they moved what other resources they had over to an airbase called Tengah on the other side of the island and we originally started at Selarang and the Singaporeans took Selarang off us.

29:00 And we then joined the Kiwi battalion over at Kalang at the other side of the island, which meant that we had to travel there every day by bus or our own cars. And my daughter was born on the 19th of November at Changi Hospital, and I was there for the birth and I was promoted to sergeant on the 18th of August which is Long Tan day that year. And I became the

29:30 platoon sergeant and it's interesting that one of my early goals was that I thought if I can make it to sergeant in 20 years in the army, this is early days, before you know, before I actually went to Vietnam, I thought to myself if I can actually make sergeant in 20 years I'll be really, really happy. And this is five years after I'd joined, obviously because of all the attrition of Vietnam and the extra raising of battalions, there wasn't any particular skills on my part. But

30:00 here I was as a sergeant and in a platoon in A company, in a rifle company, so I'd left, at this stage now I've gone from trackers and I've gone onto the a rifle platoon. The big, the big event of, well we used to go up to Butterworth and we used to do a protection of Butterworth

30:30 airbase and the interesting part about that was that we used to, wives and children used to go up and; they could be billeted with an air force family, so six weeks after my daughter Terri was born, she was on a Dakota on her way to Butterworth. And stayed, they stayed with an RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] family up there. The biggest event I suppose would have to be the fact that the commander of the force was an Australian navy rear admiral, I think he was a rear admiral.

31:00 Rear Admiral David Wells, and the HMAS Voyager was it the Voyager? When did the [HMAS] Melbourne go down, why did I say the Voyager, anyway it doesn't matter. A destroyer, there was a big, Sembawang is a big naval base where they repaired ships. And anyway this Australian destroyer blew a boiler and,

31:30 or whatever, and had go into Sembawang to be re-kitted so to keep the navy people occupied, they sent them on exercise with us in Malaya and the commander being a navy man, said, "Well if it's good enough for my sailors to go to the jungle I will go to the jungle and see what's it's like." So my platoon got the admiral and we had

32:00 to host the admiral in the jungle. They flew him in with his aid, and his aid was a British squadron leader, air force, very pukka sahib and anyway, I said to the platoon commander I said, "You look after the batman, or the aid, I'll look after the boss, and get him bedded down for the night." And of course they got there late and everything, so we're in a,

- 32:30 in a tactical, supposedly tactical harbour in the jungle and he's got his gear which they've sent him out with which is of course all new and nothing, you know, everything's all stuck together, and anyway I get his hootchie [tent] up and everything, and I get his blow up's in and, you had these blow up mattresses you know, we never used to use them because they're so bloody noisy, but for him we, anyway, I blew up his mattress, got him organised for bed. And anyway the platoon commander called me over and said, "Hey, Bob."
- 33:00 "What?" He said, "Do you know that the squadron leader's got polka dot pyjamas?" Anyway the squadron leader, of course the admiral knew better than that not to wear bloody pyjamas, this is in the jungle, the squadron leader says to, Don McNaught, he says, "When do we put our pyjamas on?" and the Skipper says "You can put yours on anytime you want to." So you know, of course
- 33:30 I've got them outside the time pocket, as you know, so whisper, whisper, whisper, round the whole perimeter goes the word, you know giggle, giggle, you know, stupid Pom. Anyway, the big thing about this is, next day, he could only spend a bit of time with us, so next day, the skipper said, "Look, I'll take him for half a day you take him the other half the day." So said, "Righto, okay." So I said, "Well I'll, the simplest thing for me to do is just take a, let's take a walk through the jungle and I'll
- 34:00 show you, show you how we navigate." Because I mean he navigates by the stars and all of that sort of stuff, being a sailor. And I said, "All we do is we get our map and we take our grid reference of where we want to go and we draw a line blah, blah blah." "Oh yeah, right, yeah." Anyway, so I did a box search, I cleverly made sure there was a creek so that I couldn't get lost. Anyway I cross the creek and we meander up and I'm pointing out different things, you know, in the J [jungle], don't touch that whatever.
- 34:30 Anyway we come back down and on this leg we picked up a track, and there's only four of us and I had a radio operator with me for safety, and there was the admiral and the squadron leader and myself. Anyway I was up front and the admiral had to wear glasses for anything he wanted to look at, in the mean time they're in his pocket see. So I look up ahead says, "Oh there's a snake, oh just hang on and I'll -
- 35:00 Oh," I said, "shit it's a cobra." And of course, all these stories immediately come to mind about cobras, you know, they leap three times their length, and all this sort of, they spit you you're gone, anyway, all of these things are going through my head and he decided, the admiral decides he wants to have a look, so he grabs his glasses on and he's heading off. And the other thing I didn't tell you was that there was only one person allowed to carry live rounds in Malaya and that was the platoon sergeant and luckily that's me, see, but
- 35:30 for safety reasons it was kept in my left hand basic pouch, it was painted red and it was taped up so that it could not be inadvertently put onto the weapon and used in the dark, right if you were on exercise, so I wouldn't mix, so I wouldn't mix it up. So here I am, unwrap the tape, get the bloody thing off, get the magazine on the rifle, cock it, chamber a round and by this time, thank God, the admiral has decided that
- 36:00 he's not going any further, and the snake is standing there like this, this bloody cobra and the snake decides it's going to go, it's going this way see, of course, but all of this once again is this frozen amount of time and I've got this vision of this admiral dead at my feet, these three stripes that I've really worked hard for, all gone, you know and this is the thing that's flashed through my mind, right. And he's whingeing because he never got a good look at this snake and, oh God.
- 36:30 Anyway we got, we spent the night out, somewhere away from the platoon, I said, "Let's get away from the platoon." It's too disruptive or whatever. So we get back to Singapore and of course he tells his wife, about how you know, I supposedly saved his life. So we used to have, quite social occasions where there'd be presentation of prizes or trophies or something like that and the admiral would turn up with his wife,
- 37:00 oh and the first thing, she'd say, "Where's that man who saved your life David?" So, I'd get dragged to court you know, sort of thing, wonderful people though, wonderful people. Singapore, loved Singapore, we had a maid, you know, she was called an amah, and who absolutely doted on my daughter Terri and we could have a gardener if we wanted one but I didn't bother because it was only a
- 37:30 small patch and we all shared the one. What else, what else, Singapore, so many stories, elephants, possible tiger sighting, enemy. Now you know that Malaya was full of supposedly communist terrorists. It wasn't my platoon, it was two platoon, two platoon,
- 38:00 we were on an exercise, once again the only people with live rounds were the platoon sergeant.

Change tapes.

Tape 7

- 00:36 **So we're talking about in Singapore, how you were doing an exercise?**

Actually up in Malaya, we lived in Singapore.

Up in Malaya.

On Singapore Island but because it's so small any exercises we did we had to go up to Malaya. And quite often the Malays, just like they are these days, would deliberately withdraw permission at the last minute, or something and

01:00 just to, just to harass the white man, just like they do sometimes these days. So they're very politically motivated against the, you know the Brits and so on anyway. But this particular time we're up in three different platoon locations, there wasn't my platoon it was two platoon but they also had with them, the company 2IC, who was a fellow called Captain Barry Ryan. And, they set up an ambush that night and they're

01:30 at some stage during the night, this group of people wandered through the ambush on the road, we always ambushed a road and they were dressed in khaki and they were carrying shotguns and to our knowledge there's not supposed to be any enemy left in Malaya. So it was quite scary and luckily nobody in that platoon fired because they all carried blanks, and whereas these blokes are obviously carrying proper weapons with live rounds you know.

02:00 So it was an interesting thing and nobody ever found who they were or what they were or anything. One of life's little mysteries.

A little kind of surreal dream walked past.

Another little surreal thing, just came to mind then. You could be on an exercise in Malaya and usually worked, they were operating off jungle verges or plantations or anything so quite often they were bounded by roads, and you could come out of nowhere, you could have been patrolling or something, as a platoon and

02:30 you would come out onto a road and you'd radio into headquarters and say, "Oh we're at point alpha." Or whatever. And next thing you'd hear this tinkle, tinkle, tinkle, tinkle, tinkle, tinkle, tinkle and it'd be the ice cream man on a bike who would appear out of nowhere and just know you were there and you'd just come out of the jungle. And the magnolia man, his name was, magnolia ice creams, and this man

03:00 pushing a bike with an ice box thingo on it with his ice creams in it, the magnolia man would appear out of nowhere, oh incredible.

Did you buy one?

Oh yeah, if there was nothing going, if the platoon commander was a good guy, you know, you'd deploy and just call everything off for a little while, while you had an ice cream. Oh yeah, Asians are very, enterprising. Oh you can go back to Vietnam and

03:30 in Vietnam they would, they, we did a big operation, I forget which battalion, I think it might have been the 25th Battalion from Hawaii, no 25th division, whatever, an American mob were arriving and they were being brought in through Vung Tau. And they were going into country via Saigon and they must have arrived by ship, landed at Vung Tau, and they had to be brought up route 15 to Saigon.

04:00 So they deployed battalion, to protect the road so that the convoys of all these Americans would not be ambushed. So this went on for many days and the nearest village, the nearest big place was Baria, which was one of the biggest towns in the province and the enterprising Asian gentlemen would, knowing that we were all deployed by the side of the road

04:30 would come down the road on their bikes, once again ice creams or whatever they could peddle, beer, girls. Whatever you needed it was there. As long as, as long as, once again the hierarchy didn't get to know about it and, it's like they always say in the army, you only get hung for the things you get caught at.

Can I ask you a bit about the night life

05:00 **the social life in Vietnam though, because you've alluded to it a few times when you went on R and I, was it R and I?**

R and C.

R and C.

R and C was rest and convalescence [rest in country] and that was in Vung Tau.

In Vung Tau, now of course we've heard about the brothels and the girls what they would do, but I love to hear your side of things, what happened with you, did you, did you go and have?

You've been reading my mind. Because I'd been there once before, and I knew the

05:30 set up, I did not particularly spend a lot of money, a bit cagey. And I was lucky enough to find a girl that I liked in a bar, and that particular bar, there's another link to that, oh God there's links everywhere, I

went back in 2001 to Vietnam.

Did you see her?

- 06:00 Oh no, no, oh God know, I wouldn't have recognised her. But anyway, where her bar was, I know where it was and where she used to work, but anyway, what I used to do was, I befriended her and I used, there used to be a curfew, so you used to have to be back at the [Peter] Badcoe Club which was the resort centre thing they had, what they called back beach and it was where you went for your R and C and you were supposed to stay there and you weren't supposed to
- 06:30 go and shack up and do all of those sorts of nasty things. You were allowed in the town but there was a curfew and you had to be off the street and you know, and so on. Anyway I befriended this girl, and I had an arrangement with her that whenever I got into Vung Tau, as soon as she saw me, I would pay her, you know obviously that was how she lived. But as soon as she saw me,
- 07:00 we would acknowledge each other and then I would have a couple of drinks and then maybe I would buy her a drink, because that was part of the deal, you know, buy her a Saigon tea, but then I would go away and then in an hours time I would meet her at her house, because I knew where she lives. See, and so we had this deal so she would go to mama-san and she'd say, "Oh mama-san, I don't feel very well. I am very, very sick, I think I have to go home, I think I have to go home."
- 07:30 So we'd go home to her place and we'd spend the night together. I would have, I would have had my beers and had a, had a fun day with the boys and then I'd go home with her. The trouble was, next morning, you had to be back at the Badcoe Club. So I had fortunately
- 08:00 found out that just around the corner from her place was another Australian Army rest centre, not for us but for the pogos. And pogos, pogos are, pogos are non combatants, people who don't fight. Don't fire a weapon and you know, they keep us in the field, you know, there's five of them to put me in the field, for us, Australians,
- 08:30 or so the story goes and seven for the Americans, seven pogos to put one man in the field. Anyway, yeah so I happen to find out that they sent a courier vehicle, a Kombi van out from back beach over to this R and C centre first thing in the morning for some reason or another, a courier run. It's just the palm leaves, so this is fantastic, oh I said, "This is great." So I get up in the morning and I'd go over to the R and C centre
- 09:00 or this rest centre, and I would catch the courier back, it would get me there in time to report in for parade or whatever see. It was a great little lurk and of course I used to bring her a couple of cartons of Salaam cigarettes, and some soap, and whatever goodies I could get together, I would bring into her, so it was a great little set up. Except one morning, one morning I, the courier was late and,
- 09:30 I'm sitting there, not knowing what to do, I thought oh, oh, I'm AWOL I've been sprung, I'm gone. Anyway, vehicle eventually arrives and I'm about an hour late and I get back and here's a convoy of trucks all lined up ready to go to take the company back to Nui Dat but luckily, and I'm in civvies, because you had to wear civvies, luckily my mates had all grabbed my gear, drew my weapon put it on the back of the truck. So here I am there on the back of the truck,
- 10:00 off with my gear, on with the uniform. Innocent as the day I was born, so another one I got away with it. Yeah so it was -

So, the set up, she didn't have to pay mama-san or papa-san any money then, their cut.

That's right, yeah, but I looked after her. I would have given her some money.

Yeah but she would have got the same deal but -

Oh she was better off oh yeah, and she didn't have to put up with the garbage of being in the bar you know.

- 10:30 And yeah, oh yeah we had a great little set up there, she was lovely.

So did that happen from the first tour.

No, no.

I mean I know you were talking about the second tour then but did you meet her on the first tour?

No, no.

You just worked out how the system works because of your friends would tell you.

No, no. Sorry? That went over the top of my head. No, no I knew I didn't want to do it the old way.

Yeah sure, but that's from experience.

Oh yeah,

- 11:00 from my first trip, oh yeah, yes. And on my first trip too, I forgot to mention, I had two R and R's,

because I'd got there so early. I went to Singapore first time and Bangkok the second time on R and R.

So how, how was that then for you, but like, so obviously this was the first kind of time that this deal was happening with women,

11:30 **I mean you had been with Val and you had met Alice, and you know you'd had girlfriends and -**

You're not going, what sort of a question are you going to ask next?

Well I guess what I'm asking is that you'd sort of played the usual bloke thing with women, you know what I mean, and then when you were in Vietnam it was a very different relationship, very different transaction.

Oh yeah, and same on R and R.

And did that, how did that, affect do you think?

12:00 **You know.**

I enjoyed the hell out of it, Heather. I'm only human you know. Look I, you want to talk sex, I had five days in Bangkok and fair dinkum by the time I came home, by the time I got back home, by the time I got back to Vietnam, I thought I was going to die. I honestly thought I was just suffering so, I was so weak.

12:30 I don't know whether I hadn't eaten enough or what. No that, it used to cost 11 American dollars, this was then in Bangkok, it'd cost 11 American dollars, and to find a girl it was a different set up. You went to a club or bar, and this is quite common in other places as well, especially these days apparently, anyway you went

13:00 there and every girl had a number on them, there were girls everywhere, and there's servicemen, you know, you can tell they're all out of Vietnam, you know, glassy eyes and everything. Anyway, and so you had a couple of drinks and you'd say, you'd get the waiter and say, "Look can I talk to number 55?" So number 55, she might have been eyeing you off, you know, or you'd been looking and they do, you know, because that's how they make their money, you know. So anyway, say 55, so 55 comes over

13:30 and she's an extrovert, and her name is, she says, "My name Lucky, me no dance, me die." And, oh, her talking about, oh she was incredible and quite honestly what you used to do was screw and bath, as soon as you had sex, you were taken straight away and put in a bath and you had a bath straight away.

Who took you to the bath?

The girls.

14:00 And you were, you took the girl to your room, and you had her, for 11 dollars you had her for 24 hours and there was a contract, signed a contract. And then, you know, if you wanted to you could stay in your room all day and go to the restaurant and then go back, but anyway Lucky used to like to dance as well, and so, we would go dancing, we went bowling, ten pin bowling. And she took me to her family and she introduced her family out on the kampong [village].

14:30 As well as, making use of my body.

So they, the family knew?

Oh yes it's not a, it's an accepted thing. It's accepted part of life.

Because she was feeding the family, helping the family.

Yeah, it's part of life, yeah. And, you know, most of those girls in Vung Tau, were the same, I can't recall

15:00 whether, I can't even remember this girl's name. I can't remember whether she was with her parents or what but there was always older people around, you know. And yeah, oh.

So that's very interesting, it didn't have the same morality as prostitution in Australia which is like all prostitutes are hopeless and down and outers and, you now druggies and that kind of thing, like they're bad girls, whereas here

15:30 **they're just making a living in Vietnam.**

Oh yeah, that's not, Singapore was different, there was no obvious prostitution in Singapore. It was there but we didn't chase it because it was such a tighter system in Singapore. I'm not talking about when I went back as a married man, I'm talking about when I went there on R and R, it was more, it was more undercover. It was

16:00 under like a British system, it was hidden you know, whereas in Bangkok, Vietnam it was all open and in Vietnam it still is today. You know, I could have, I could have had a wonderful time in Vietnam for 20 bucks a night. If I wanted, and in the same areas, you know, in the same situation.

So the brothels are in the same areas?

16:30 No they're not brothels any more, no they're, and they weren't brothels in those days either.

They were bars.

They were bars.

But where were the rooms, above the bars?

No, no you went to her house. Or her, to her room wherever that might be. And the only other, the only other sex available not that I ever partook of it in those days was, you know, in the steam bath,

17:00 because invariably the first thing you would do when you got into Vungers [Vung Tau], I don't know whether you heard about this but the first thing you want to do is have a steam bath, just open the pores of your skin and sweat it all out and then of course you'd have a massage, and, and if you wanted to the massage could lead to some form of sex, not necessarily the whole thing.

Steam and cream?

Something like that yes, you've had this interview before haven't you?

17:30 **I've heard steam and cream before, and at first I was trying to work it out, what shave the face. But now I've had too many interviews, now I get it.**

Yeah but it was very interesting to go back, and as I say, I could have quite freely, it was there, again, but, yeah, and I would have, if I wasn't married, I would have partaken of the flesh,

18:00 because they are lovely women and really nice women, and I spent a lot of time with this enemy bloke that I met in..

Tin?

No, who's Tim? Oh Tin, no he's dead, he's long gone, no one's ever been able to find him. No, no this bloke's name was Mr Chu. Mr Chu I mentioned in the bar, works for the

18:30 government, he's a communist and he, his role in Vung Tau is he's the cultural affairs director or something or other in tourism and so, oh, these stories always end up long winded.

That's alright.

I went to, I was in Cairns, right, we'd already planned our trip to Vietnam, we're going to go to Vietnam and I went up to Cairns for something. I'm from Cairns as you know.

19:00 Oh, I know, and I called in and saw a bloke called George Mansford. Now there's an interview, did you do Cairns?

Yes we did, we did five days in Cairns.

Did you, or you're not allowed to tell me?

What was his name?

George Manford.

I don't think we saw him.

The greatest, one of the greatest soldiers of all time. You should write his name down, he should be interviewed.

We will, we'll take his name down later.

Anyway, George, he and I, he was a major and I was the in sergeant, ops [operations] sergeant and

19:30 he wrote a book and on the front cover of the book is me. And him and a few others and anyway I asked him if I could get a copy of the book off him and so I met him at the RSL and he wasn't travelling too well and so his wife came in and picked him up and he went home and he said, "Before I go home I'll introduce you to the President." So I got introduced around and anyway and they said, "Oh lovely to have you. You want to have dinner with us, we're all having dinner." So anyway, we're having dinner

20:00 and across from me was this Vietnamese girl and I introduced myself and she said, she was there doing five months of a cultural exchange, sponsored by the RSL and to help her with her English and I said, "I'm coming to Vung Tau and I'll be there around about this time and do you have a way for me to - " Anyway I wrote her a letter, told her when I'd be in Vung Tau, roughly, you know I said, "I'll call and see you when I get there." "Oh," she said,

20:30 "that will be lovely. I will make sure that I show you around." By the time we get to Vungers, we'd, by the way we'd, oh this is another day, we went to Dien Bien Phu, do you know where Dien Bien Phu is? There's only two memorials to foreign soldiers in Vietnam, one is a memorial at a place called Dien Bien Phu to the French when they Vietnamese belted the French, annihilated the French in

21:00 '54 or whatever it was. And, I went back to Vietnam with, to Vietnam with my machine gunner from the

second tour, Bill and another bloke, a hanger on. Anyway we hired a four wheel drive and we went right up to the Laotian border which is where Dien Bien Phu is, and visited the war site. You know oh, and I read the book before I went and there was just, there they go again. It was just so exciting, so thrilling so we worked our way back to Hanoi

- 21:30 and then worked our way south down to Vung Tau and were running a bit late and, anyway we knew of this ex battalion fellow who was married to a local and owned a little café and so we went and spent a day or two with him and he showed us around and then the day, I think it was the day we were about to leave to go back to Saigon, I said to him, "Look I've got the address of this girl and I meant to see her."
- 22:00 I said, "Look at this. That must be pretty close to you." "Oh, it's just here." So he grabbed his wife, and he said, "Take Bob." Go around a corner, down a laneway, turn left 20 metres, ring the bell and there she is. And she immediately gets up me, she says, "Where have you been? I have been waiting three days and looking for you. My uncle, my uncle wants to take you, he wants to show you around." So anyway, so oh gosh,
- 22:30 so they both talk and we get invited in for a cup of tea, you always get invited in for a cup of tea, and Vietnamese tea is an acquired taste. It's a very, very bland, herby sort of tea and you only drink it out of little things, thank God. Anyway so I find out that yes sure, her uncle has been waiting to take us touring, sight seeing, so we've already seen all these things see, so
- 23:00 we had to go through the motions and pretend. Anyway she immediately rings the uncle, "Oh everybody meet in town." So into town we go and I look, oh my God, this guy's got his office above the bar where the bar used to be where that girl and I used to shack up from. Anyway I thought I've been here before and of course it's not a bar any more it's a, I think it was, I'm not sure a pharmacy or something downstairs and his office was upstairs.
- 23:30 Well, it turns out that he's from 33 NVA, which is the enemy you know, and he was in Bin Bah at the time and got wounded at Bin Bah and managed to get back to Mai Chau and recovered and all of that sort of stuff, and he's part of a group of Vietnamese ex soldiers who are creating friendships with the Australian RSL and all that sort of stuff, and it was very, very good. He couldn't speak English,
- 24:00 I couldn't speak Vietnamese but I had my phrase book and some of the phrases were coming back so we were managing. And, so many things, probably the next most interesting part about it was that we then, oh that's right, he's married and he's got two young sons. And I think one was at uni and one was still at high school sort of thing, but anyway. Lovely wife and
- 24:30 they only live just down the road and across the street from his office but he's also got a girlfriend who is a, a very up market Vietnamese woman who's very well educated, who works for a Russian oil company. The Russians are getting oil off the coast of Vung Tau and she worked for this Russian company. Anyway, so she speaks English, so she was the immediate go between,
- 25:00 so we go and we get her and we all meet for lunch. She takes over, immediately and says, "You must stay with Mr Chu. Mr Chu is going to take you. You can't go to Saigon now, you have to stay." "Oh," I said, "but what about - " "Oh," she said, "give me that." Ring, ring, ring, mobile phone, "They're not coming, they may be there or the next day. Bye."
- 25:30 You know, sort of stuff, so she immediately cancelled all of our reservations, and so I thought, oh well what will we do, so back to where we're staying because we'd already had our gear packed and everything and he frowned on the hotel that we were staying at you know, we were doing budget accommodation and you know, and I found out later that there's a massage parlour and a sort of a, sort of a brothel there you know. Anyway, so he was frowning at that, this is this guy with his own mistress and everything you know.

Is that normal

- 26:00 **though in Vietnam?**

Yeah, yeah. I mean she knew, the wife must have known you know, because he plays tennis with the mistress, and the wife, you know she's, I was, get back to that. What happened next was we did all that the touristy stuff, and then we went, then the other two, the three of us went back to Saigon and my mate Bill, had actually met a woman when we first got to Saigon, fate.

- 26:30 An act of fate you know, accident, he met her by accident and they're now married and she's here with her two kids and it's lovely you know, happy ever after stuff. Anyway, so he decides he's going to court her and the other bloke was a bit of a problem and I sort of didn't want to be stuck with him, so I said I'm going to go it alone. So I said I'm going to go back to Vungers. So I went back to Vung Tau, and I rocked in and same hotel

- 27:00 and I went over to the office this blokes office and said, "Here I am, I'm back." And he just, he was out of his tree you know, he thought this was so great. And I said just me and, I said, I wonder if you would like to take me up to the Long Tan cross. Because the Long Tan cross is the only other memorial to foreign soldiers in Vietnam, I don't know whether you knew that. Anyway, and I said, "I wonder if you and I might go together to look at the cross?" Oh once again, fantastic. And,

- 27:30 and he said, in his broken English, he said, "We won't worry about an interpreter, you know, we will manage, you know, you and I can get by." So we did. He didn't bring the it was his niece, Hoa her name was, he didn't bring Hoa, so, I notice as we, sort of getting in the car, he tossed in about a dozen Heineken beers and bottle of red wine. And I thought I wonder what we're doing.
- 28:00 Anyway and he made a phone call or two and away we went, and we got to Nui Dat, which is all overgrown and everything's changed and just inside the gates, the old gates of Nui Dat and off to the side, here's this little farm see, and we'd passed it before on, when we'd, we had actually been up there ourselves before in a tour bus. Anyway and we get out at this little tiny farm house and
- 28:30 there's chickens running everywhere and kids and anyway, and he says, I introduce my Dai We. Dai We meaning captain, his old boss from when he was in the army. And this fellow, Vinh, I think his name was, anyway there was him and another bloke, so this guy was a captain in the NVA, and this bloke Chu was a corporal and this other guy was a VC, you know he was a lesser, a lesser life
- 29:00 you know. Anyway, we had a cup of tea and then they gibber gibbered, and they said alright let's go, so the VC stayed behind and the captain and Chu and I, we then went to the Long Tan cross and we had photos and taken at the Long Tan cross and all of that sort of thing, which is a memorial to our fallen soldiers in that battle, see. Then we went back to, back to the house,
- 29:30 and by this stage, one of those WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s is no longer alive, or maybe more and they've cooked lunch, the ladies have cooked lunch. Very, very chauvinistic these men, you know, the women and the children are made to stay over there, out of sight out of mind you know, and so, and so it becomes a festive occasion and it's you know, come on eat up, eat up, you know,
- 30:00 eat, eat, eat, eat, and, anyway, before we'd left, that's right, before we'd left to go there, the mistress had said to me, we'd called in at her place, the mistress had said to me you must taste my Vietnamese wine. What did she say, no Vietnamese whisky, Vietnamese whisky you must taste it before you go, I thought jeez it's a bit bloody early in the day to be drinking. Anyway she drags out this great big jar, fair dinkum, in it, in the bottom of this jar,
- 30:30 are seahorses and all sorts of dead fermenting creatures see. So she dips a little ladle thing in and drags it out, and pours it and, and she said, yours, you drink, so I thought oh go, here we go okay, I thought God, here we go, no wonder my guts is crook. So I sip it see and she said, "Do you like it?" And I thought oh yeah, it just tastes a bit like brandy,
- 31:00 okay yeah, thank you. Thank you very much okay she said, very nice, yes, yes. Righto we get to the captains place and the captain, he's got some Vietnamese whisky see, and out comes the bottle, this was the ordinary every day bottle and there's geckos and all sorts of things, that used to live, and they're now dead in this bloody bottle. Anyway out comes this little thimble glass, righto
- 31:30 and he goes, brrm, brrm chimber chop, and I thought what the hell's going on here, anyway, Mr Chu didn't have one because he was driving and he was drinking beer anyway. So he says, "Now your turn," oh that's right and I said, "No, no, hey, the VC's got to have his first." Because we called him 'the VC' you know, he's got to have his first, and
- 32:00 he didn't want to be in this, anyway so, brrm, brrm chimber chop. I thought okay, what's going on, there's something in this right, anyway, okay round to me I thought oh well I've got a driver, I'm right, I can get home and so I imitated it, brrm, brrm chimber chop, and I held it up and a drip dropped out of it, and they all went hysterical,
- 32:30 oh you, and I realised that you had to drink it all, if there was a drop left in it, then you got penalised and you had to drink again, right because you had, there was a drop left in it, it's a typical drunk's game you know, and I thought oh, I know what's going on here. So, okay, alright, brrm, brrm chimber chop.
- 33:00 Alright so anyway, his turn now, so back to him, he gets oh brrm, brrm chimber chop and as he went like that, I grabbed his hand and held his hand and of course there had to be a drip in it, what he was doing was turning it back real quick before the drip could get down, see, and which is what I did and I twigged. Anyway I held his hand well the, the kids, the kids and the women and of course me mate, and the VC,
- 33:30 I'd caught him at his own game see, and oh everyone thought this was so fantastic and this bloke, he just loved it so much that I'd caught him. Oh he said, oh I got to do one better than this, so he, he went in, out the back and he come back with another bottle, which is his special bottle, which had a great big creature in it and he said, he said, "Tonight you stay, you stay here tonight and you and me
- 34:00 we drink." And I said, "No, no, no." And I looked at Mr Chu and I said, "Oh for God - " I thought, "Please don't leave me here!" But he got very drunk actually very quickly, you know, and they do apparently it affects them different to us for some reason. And oh, it was just such a lovely day, you know, they'd gone out of their way to look after me and anyway, we then hopped into the car to go back to Vungers and I said to Chu, I said, "Listen mate," I said, "listen mate, do you want to go back to Bin Bah?"
- 34:30 Because I knew he'd been wounded there and I knew he'd lost some mates there, and, "Oh yeah, oh would you?" I said, "Oh please." You know, because it wasn't far down the road, so back down the road

we go, we go to Bin Bah, and wherever there was a battle in Vietnam relative to the Vietnamese there's a monument, they got monuments all over the country, they lost a lot of people. Anyway there's this monument in the centre of this square, the town square, but there's bits of concrete all

- 35:00 fabricated concrete laid out all over the place and it was pretty sad actually so we get out of the car to take the photos and all of that sort of stuff, and next thing, over here on the right, bloody school comes out and the kids are just come out of school, released from school, whatever time it was. Oh, and they just, swamped me and it was like being the Pied Piper from Hamelin you know, and of course I'm pretty
- 35:30 chirped at this stage. I'm really happy anyway it destroyed the nostalgia of the occasion for him because of these kids, they just took over you know, and of course they want to know from him, who the hell's this bloke, what's he doing here you know. So they mustn't have seen an Australian for some time. Anyway, I started to sing. I sang something, I don't know, they were all so happy, I don't know,
- 36:00 Advance Australia Fair or something, or Waltzing Matilda or something. Because I, the reason I did that was the kids at the Nui Dat school, had been taught how to sing Advance Australia Fair or Waltzing Matilda, or one of the two, I can't remember now, because that is right on the base where it was and it's funded by donations from Australia and one of the things we did, we also, this, it's never ending, I'm sorry, it just goes on and on.
- 36:30 We called in at the orphanage, in Baria, not that day but another day and visited the kids and there's photos of us actually visiting the kids. The mistake made there we took lollies instead of pens and paper and that sort of stuff. But yeah, and that is sponsored by the Australian veterans, Vietnam Veterans Reconstruction Group, which is civilians in Vietnam as well as in

- 37:00 Australia. They look after the cross too.

Can I ask you something Bob, you're a wonderful story teller, so I'm actually mesmerised. But I was wondering, the way that you got on with Chu and some of the

- 37:30 **those Vietnamese men, do you think there was a respect also when you were in Vietnam for the Australians and the Australians for the Vietnamese fighters?**

Yes.

So even then there was respect, because now it seems like there's definitely respect between each other.

Respect for their expertise, didn't particularly like them. When someone's shooting at you, you don't like them, but a respect for their soldiering capabilities I guess, and

- 38:00 we were never ever going to, I didn't know that then, we were never ever going to win that war, they were going to fight till the last man and they are just so tenacious and so indoctrinated, you know. They, political cadres that kept them pumped up all the time, and you know, yeah, incredible, yes amazing. And I spoke to Chu about

- 38:30 why he was so friendly with Australians and that was because we respected their dead he said. You know and I guess it's like us with those wounded you know, we could have shot them, they probably wished we did, you know, they probably wished we had, I don't know how they survived or what but anyway but that's the way it was. And it wasn't always and you know what I mean I'm not exonerating all Australians because there would have been war crimes, in fact I, yeah, there would have been.

- 39:00 **Was the feeling the same towards the Americans from the Vietnamese?**

No, no, even to this day, they don't like the Americans. The only, the only reason that America, Americans are back there is because, if you want to get on with the world you got to like the Americans or you got to use the Americans for the capitalism, you know. Australia is incredibly strong in Vietnam at the moment.

- 39:30 I was lucky enough to spend a bit of time with the Defence Attaché who I knew when he was a young platoon commander and I was a warrant officer, many years later. And he in fact picked us up from the airport, sent his vehicle out to Hanoi airport to pick us up and had his driver make sure we were established in a hotel and all of that sort of stuff. And they are even on exchange here in Australia, learning Australian military,

- 40:00 Australian military establishments, there's an officer in Hanoi who interviews them, and prepares them to come to Australia for training. Oh and another big field that we're, of course is Telstra, and also the power industry. Because most of Vietnam is without power, in the country areas, and power stations. We did a lot of drinking and eating in a bar called the Spotted Cow,

- 40:30 in Hanoi.

Hang on.

- 41:00 **End of tape**

Tape 8

- 00:40 **I wanted to take you back to your first tour of Vietnam you mentioned that when the Battle of Long Tan happened that you were back at base but they set up loud speakers so that you could hear, what was going on.**
- Yeah it's not a loud speaker, it's a, it's very hard to describe you know a speaker phone. You've got a phone,
- 01:00 which if you push a button you can speak on it, right, well if you can imagine the speaker part but you can't talk back to it unless you pick up the handset and press the pressure switch. They were called an angler 39 and it was like a rebro [?], and mainly often used in a command post which I had a lot to do with later on in my career.
- 01:30 Where, somebody has to take down what's said, write down what's said and, and say what the CO did was he brought it over to the bar and set it up on the bar so we could hear what was going on and that's what that was about, it wasn't on a loud speaker as such, it was just a bunch of drunks who'd been, just come back from Vung Tau, and ooh and ahing and saying thank God I'm not there.
- 02:00 Yeah. Is that enough?
- That clarifies it.**
- So if you picture a speaker phone, similar to that but it's an army thing.
- So you were in the bar listening to that ?**
- Yes. While it was happening, yeah.
- So what could you actually hear?**
- Oh all you hear is, all you hear is, when someone pushed the pressure switch which opens the line,
- 02:30 and then talks and he might have been calling artillery or, you know saying whatever I can't remember the words that were said, but it's just what's going on at the time where the radio operator or the OC [officer commanding], Harry the Rat, talking to the CO the commanding officer or, most likely that's who it was, and that's called the command net, the OC of a company talking direct to the CO,
- 03:00 yeah. And telling him what's going on, you know like, 11 Platoon have made it into the perimeter and they've only got 10 men left or whatever.
- Was that, I mean were you happy to be back at base while - ?**
- I didn't want to be out there.
- It's an obvious question but - .**
- I know I was a professional soldier but no, I didn't want to be there.
- 03:30 **Was there a difference in the fellows that came back from Long Tan just in terms of I guess, experiencing the battle of that scale and some of the things that actually went on there?**
- I was never conscious of it because everybody has their bravado and has their screen, I guess. The only time it really affected me was on another one of these times when we were sent out,
- 04:00 instead of a platoon of Delta company we were on Operation Bribie. Operation Bribie, the whole battalion was inserted into an area, on a paddy field an open area with a neck of, of jungle and, rainforest on the other side of it. We were back at Nui Dat at the airstrip,
- 04:30 waiting to be choppered, this is one of those times they get the Yanks, but they probably could only lift a company at a time, so a company at a time would be put in. So, for example, A company got dropped in first, and all of a sudden the radio operator for the company, our company, says, A companies in contact, that's the thing you dread most of all, the fact that forward elements, they get off the chopper and they push into the scrub line and they get a contact, so
- 05:00 of course the CO's got to get everyone on the ground as soon as possible, so the next company in is B company. A company pushes, B company goes around to the flank and B company gets really into it and we were next and so we get dumped on the helipad, on the paddy field, and paddy bunds are around about, they vary but they're probably about that high in some cases, sometimes
- 05:30 they're a bit higher, and that's all you got to hide behind so you go for the nearest paddy bund and you drop behind the nearest paddy bund and you get, we were getting the overshoots, which is harmless you know, because they're just, they're too high and they're going over you. But it was a nice little welcome to Operation Bribie, total disorganisation as per usual, and oh no, that's wrong I shouldn't say that. It was disorganised, nobody really knew what was going on, A company's in contact, B company's getting belted.

- 06:00 And so eventually they decided, oh look Delta company's in the middle of the paddy, we better get rid of them because we've got Charlie company coming next. See so, so they pushed us off to the flank and the pushed us into the scrub over to the left and we didn't know who was where or what was where, we did not have a clue. Anyway and I, somehow or another ended up, because it was a jumbled mess,
- 06:30 I wasn't with my section. I was with another group and the bloke next to me was a bloke called Harry, Harry Essler, and I didn't realise it, I looked across and Harry's got his, we're lying down in the prone position, and Harry is a mess. Harry is, Harry's not coping, Harry's crying and can't do, he's out of it, out of this bloody
- 07:00 fight altogether. So I'm trying to comfort him you know, and that was the first instance I had of it affecting somebody else in that way and probably the only one that I can recall, but you know, he was a mess, he was just, if something had have happened he would have probably snapped into gear or whatever and you know, whatever, but the interesting thing was that not, around about that time I saw somebody to my front. But I couldn't shoot because
- 07:30 I didn't know whether it was us or them, you know, because I knew A company was out there somewhere, and it just didn't know here, so I don't know to this day whether it was enemy or not, I certainly didn't open up, I didn't want to draw the crabs. You got the impression that I'm a coward, don't you. Well it's true. I didn't want to die.

Did you get Harry to come around?

To come good?

Yeah.

No, he just, until we had to move, and

- 08:00 eventually they moved us in the dark, they moved us around the side of the whole thing and decided they were going to use us for the assault in the morning. They bombed the living daylight out of the place and there were still blokes in there that wounded, one bloke, hid in an APC, and survived the night in the APC, because they, the nogs pulled out, they just left a delaying force and got the rest of them out before we could do anything about it.
- 08:30 And the other thing about it was, it was handled very, very badly and I've always said to this day that, there was an election due any day and they didn't want to have any casualties, they already had some but they didn't want a heap. You don't believe me do you?

Election back here?

Yeah. An election back here, you know, you get 20 or 30 dead, it doesn't look good in an election you know, and I believe that's why we didn't go in, you see, we had them,

- 09:00 we had them boxed, but they didn't push the issue, they let them get away rather than have them stay and fight and us force them out. They let them go and we went in next day, we didn't know they were gone, we went in next day and it's a terrible way to assault, you know, there was nobody there,
- 09:30 but it was our job to assault in, and clear it out you know, and you know there's positions there where you could see five empty SLR magazines where one of our blokes had got to one of their pits and secured themselves in there and had five magazines he'd fired off in there. And you know, it makes you think, oh God it was a bit of a battle there yesterday afternoon and B company there was a couple
- 10:00 of MMs there, one Spike Jones and Jock Richardson, it was a good little battle when it was on, but with no end result, which is very, soul destroying for the blokes in the battle you know.

At the time.

I guess so, I didn't have a lot to do with B company, couple of mates later on in years, but we never talked about, it comes up every now and again.

Speaking to a lot of fellows in World War II

- 10:30 **who were in the islands, talked a lot about, I guess, with the atrocities up there, just the hatred of the Japanese they had during World War II, I'm just wondering if there was a similar sort of feeling for the VC and NVA, amongst the troops?**
- No, not hatred. I don't know about any atrocities to us by the VC or the NVA.
- 11:00 No, I don't know of any, never heard of any. Themselves, their own people, oh, yeah, you know, what they did to the village chiefs and things like that.

What did you know about that, I mean I've heard some horror stories, but what did you know about that stuff at the time?

Oh only grapevine stuff or 'int sums', intelligence summaries would come out and in the intelligence summary there might be something about oh, the village chief of

11:30 Bin Ja was assassinated day before yesterday whatever, no, only hearsay stuff. I mean I've got no evidence, no proof of what the VC actually did, but you read lots of things.

But I guess hearsay and stories within the place you're in at the time -

Is probably more than the truth. Well it's hard to say you know, they do get, things do get blown out of proportion.

12:00 But yeah, but as far as I, I imagine there were atrocities committed by Australians, I have heard of atrocities committed by Australians and I don't want to comment on that because once again that's hearsay. And, best left alone as far as I'm concerned. And yeah, am I being good.

12:30 **I mean I would love to extract stories out of you without names, but, let's see. Oh, this is just a small question actually, your nickname, Angry Ant.**

Oh it's a fairly common nickname.

Oh is it, that's the first time I've actually heard it.

Yeah, for a short person who usually

13:00 is agro and, it's just a short person who gets cranky. Ant being small, and angry, it's just, yeah, why, I'm not going to elaborate more than that, other people call me that. I guess more so when I became a sergeant, I suppose, I

13:30 I might have been, oh I don't know, Louie the Pig called me the Angry Ant, and Louie the Pig was my platoon sergeant for a while, maybe it was the incident in the rub up, on the edge of the rubber and everybody fired and I chucked my wobbly, maybe that's why it was. Or it could have been other things, I don't know. I mean angry ant has to be very, very careful, otherwise an angry ant gets punched up every now and then.

Did that ever happen?

14:00 I got king hit once, yeah. And there was nothing I could do about it, I just had to, had to cop it on the chin but that was my problem I had the 2IC and I didn't get - anyway, I don't want to talk about it.

Now you'd mentioned earlier that I think it was at Long Binh that you had some contact with the Americans, and you'd mentioned that in your time in Vietnam you'd seen both the

14:30 **best and worst of Americans. And I'm just wondering if you can expand on that?**

Heather, you may not like this, I was befriended when I was there by a, I don't know what rank he was, he would have been a, oh an E4 or an E5, so three up, one down or three up, I don't know, anyway, he was a sergeant, but most Yanks are sergeants.

15:00 If they'd been around for a while they are, you know. This unit, this unit, the 151st Airborne Rangers, I'm sure they were national guard and they, were absolutely incredible they were very, very professional, their to sergeant was a real professional soldier, but they were national guard, which is CMF you know. And they were all obviously ranger qualified and all of

15:30 those highly skilled things that the Yanks do, do seriously when they do, the ordinary soldier's not much good but the serious guy is. Anyway, this guy had been restricted from going out into the field and he was sort of managing the bar and usually, and that alone tells you there's something wrong you know, that the guy, that something happened to him. Anyway, I got the impression that he'd had a psych problem, but anyway he also had access to grog,

16:00 and so obviously I befriended him, you know, because he ran the boozier. Oh but, oh he, when he had been out in the field he had mutilated a body and cut off a blokes penis and put it in a bottle. And I, you know, he displayed this to me as a trophy, and I mean I didn't even recognise it for what it was, it was just a hunk of flesh in a bottle,

16:30 and all of a sudden he tells me that he cut the blokes dick off and put in a bottle, and I thought you sick bastard. I felt like shooting him then and there you know, and our relationship sort of ceased to exist after that, you know, and just, you know, and that's what I mean about atrocities and, yeah. But and then, you get the other Yank

17:00 that said to me, "Come on, Oz [Australian], it's time you and I went out." We went out to the local village and this bloke, he was an old soldier, he was an old sergeant and he was going out for a nookie and he was taking me, he decided to take me with him. This is Long Binh, mind you the place is crawling with military police, he goes and steals a vehicle out of the compound, he just goes and takes it.

17:30 No lights, it's dark, knows the way like the back of his hand and we go out, away we go and it was a protected area this base but he knew of a little gap in the wire, so we go through this gap and into the back of this village and oh, thump, thump, thump and it wasn't through sexual excitement I can assure you, and we'd had drinks obviously, we'd had a few boozers,

18:00 beers otherwise we wouldn't be doing it, and every now and again you'd see a military police vehicle cruise down along the wire, you know. Anyway, we get into this bloody, this village, so he turns his parking lights on, drives into the village and toots the horn in front of this place, and then, next thing, out comes two sheilas, up comes, lifts the tarp, we drive in underneath this tarp, down comes the tarp and we

18:30 socialised with a couple of the ladies. I have to tell you that wasn't my best night.

Why was that?

I don't think I performed at my best. I kept looking over my shoulder. I thought oh God, anything could happen here. Anyway, oh, dark, hundred in the morning, before daylight, we sneak back into camp, I thought oh, how stupid can you be. And of course you know the booze had worn off by then and you know, oh dear oh dear. The things we did.

19:00 So yes, and he was a great bloke, and very professional, they, a couple of them tried to con me into coming out with them, their patrols were serious stuff, like SAS, very much like SAS, except SAS had a tendency to sneak out there and sneak around and look and not be found. These blokes, there'd only be about six of them a chopper load, which at maximum is seven in those days. You could get more sometimes but I think

19:30 they only had about seven in their squad and they'd go out looking for a fight, only six or seven eh. I don't need to do that, I don't need to go out looking for a fight. You know, with you blokes, they were, they were a bit over the top, yeah, but yeah, and then they got replaced by these young green horns, untrained, unskilled dudes. I think they were called the 73rd Airborne Rangers.

20:00 And, but that's, that always appears to any old soldier who's been in country, for a while, the new people, oh no, how are they going to survive you know and these were the one's I had to teach. Not the old blokes, I didn't have to teach them, I was teaching these young blokes you know. And yeah.

Did you see any evidence of the drugs and things that you hear a lot about in terms of the Americans?

No I didn't, no, I didn't

20:30 but I never mixed with them, only then, but I didn't see any drug, but I was in the sergeants mess, see, the sergeants lines. Because even though I was only a corporal, in equivalent rank I was an E5 I think. And, I posed, passed my myself off as a sergeant anyway. And they accepted that and they took me as a sergeant, and we went out drinking one day and

21:00 to a boozier, a Yank boozier and the reason we went there was because sometimes, the round eyes used to get there and the reason they took me there was because of the round eyes you know, that's Europeans, you know, the American female soldiers, which we didn't have any of course, in Vietnam. We had a couple of Red Cross sheilas and nurses in Vung Tau but you very, very seldom saw them up at the Dat, and the only other ones were the entertainers who came to the Dat, so they, they took me there, these blokes.

21:30 And so, and this place is packed, packed full of these American soldiers and me, you know and, so we, we wiggle our way through to these sheilas, and you could imagine that there's only about half a dozen women in the whole place and every bloke wants to talk to them. But these blokes formed a screen and then pushed me forward, "Hey girls, meet this Oz." So, so

22:00 I, you know, and of course I was never short of words so I'm attempting to chat up these lovely American ladies, and I'm the boy from Oz, you know.

How'd you go?

Oh yeah, real good, yeah. And the head whatever she was, WRAAC [Women's Royal Australian Army Corps] or whatever they call them rounded them up like a bunch of WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s, and whizzed them off out of the place as quickly as she could. I don't know whether it was anything to do with me or what, but anyhow. Yeah, but that was a little bit of fun. But yeah, Long Binh was good.

22:30 Right cut that short. See I'm being good aren't I.

Were there any times in operations where it got too close and you thought you might not make it back?

Every day. No, oh.

I could rephrase it.

Oh yes, the crossing of the creek first tour, the shelling

23:00 when Jack got killed. Oh, the day the bloody Chinook went down, I didn't want to go too close to that. And, no not a one on one, where I was looking at a nog and he was looking at me. [Interruption] No I, I mean there

23:30 were many occasions, where I, look one, when I come back from, Long Binh one time, it was probably the grog, I was probably a bit DT's [delirium tremens], "Oh Max, Maxy needs a cuddle." But I was so jittery this particular night and there was nobody out there and you know, you get nights, times when there is somebody there you know and you, it's imagination but it gets the better of you, but I wasn't game to ask any of the diggers to sit with me,

24:00 so I went and woke the platoon commander and I said, "Skip can you come and sit with me for a bit?" And he did you know, 'cos, you know, I was one of his corporals, and I was having a bad night so he come and sat with me through my picket and then the poor bugger had CP [command post] duty that night, you know in the command post, but anyway. But you know, you just go through little phases of that sort of stuff I suppose, you know.

24:30 Yeah I, I can't say, I wasn't sort of eye to eye with a nog that was going to shoot me or anything like that, no.

Mateship, I've talked to a lot of fellows, who say that's pretty much the central thing that helps get them through their experience during war. Was that similar case for you?

Mateship? Yeah, oh yeah. Yes, and

25:00 the support that you get from your mates, that's why this particular section 2IC that I had was such a pain in the backside that nobody really liked him. Well that's not really true, the real soldiers didn't like him because he was what's called a jack man, a jack man, he wouldn't work, he wouldn't help other people. It's the way he was, you know, but your normal blokes like

25:30 Bill my machine gunner, he and I are mates to this day, we went back to Vietnam together, we know our failings and all of that sort of stuff and we accept each other for what we are and we've always been close. And my forward scout that I got late in the trip, he lives in Renmark in South Australia and he, he's another really, really close friend.

26:00 I got to tell another story, can you just reach around this corner, there should be a little tin on a wooden thing. Can you read it, do you want to read out the inscription?

'Six RAR anti tank platoon stove competition 1970, winner by default'.

26:30 **'Corporal R. J. Bettany'.**

Alright now that is a typical food tin made into a stove right, and in here you put your block of hexamine, see the hexamine in there. It's left over, you put your hexamine in there after you've created the wind, wind tunnel effect right, and you light the hexamine and you put your coffee mug or your dixie [mess tin] on top of it to heat your food. We were in a

27:00 particular, it was a boring day and we were doing just sweet bugger all and I had sentries out and all of that sort of stuff and anyway, we're discussing the good design of stoves and each, each bloke you know, listed a little work of art, you know you get a can opener and you create a different sort of stove. Anyway we had three versions there was Bill and Tony and me, and we all argued the pros and cons about what would boil a mug of water fastest.

27:30 So anyway we decided we'd have a competition so we all get everything organised and we put our mugs on and we're, these are the lighter moments, and okay, ready set go and away it goes. Anyway, anyway as a joke I started getting some grass and shoving some grass in underneath mine and encouraging it to go faster you know, and that's how they reckon, I won. I won, because my water boiled first, but they reckon I won by default because I was shoving grass in.

28:00 Anyway, now Tony, Tony was a reinforcement right, so he didn't actually come home with us, apparently he could have but he decided to you know, he was a nasho, so he said, "No I've got to do 12 months." So, he stayed there and he stayed with 8RAR. He and Bill came from the same area so this is about 19, oh at a guess, say 1995,

28:30 and, Tony got Bill, Bill was a builder and Tony got Bill to come and build him a shed. So Bill is staying there and they're talking about old times and they talked about this and Bill said, "Why don't we play a trick on that mongrel Bettany and we will create this trophy." Anyway Bill arrives back and he says, "Mate, you never guess what happened. Tony was going through some old army stuff that he had there and he found this old stove

29:00 that he had found in that same area when he went back there with eight RAR three months later." And of course this is just so out of the blue, I said, "Oh fair dinkum." So he said, "Yeah. So we made up this trophy for you and that's the original stove." And of course, yeah come in sucker, and I find out later that it was all garbage but that they had concocted that story and that was the, that's mates.

29:30 That's enough, that's mates. Someone's going to look at this in years to come and say look at that clown with his dog.

What was the most, I guess grisly experience you came across in Vietnam?

Oh I suppose the wounded, the wounded and the bloody dead body that

30:00 stunk to bloody high heaven and yeah, I, yeah.

No that's fair enough you've told us about that. You mentioned to Heather, actually on the last tape that there was a bit of a healthy respect between you and the VC, NVA and that you'd found out that part of

30:30 **that was because Australian soldiers respected their dead.**

We respected their dead. Yes, they, wherever possible, not always, we would try to bury their dead, and that's, that was the thing that Mr Chu was emphatic about that, that we used to do that, and we tried to, well we did, we respected them, their dead, you know. And,

31:00 luckily they never got many of us, in fact they only, well there's six and they wouldn't have got them. Two of them they did, there's two of them they definitely got, I'm sure, from 1RAR, but Fisher I doubt whether they ever got him. Fisher would have been too hard to find, even for them, and I don't think that he would have fallen on top of them. They even suspected that he fell into a bomb crater and drowned, that was one thought.

31:30 But he's never been found.

In terms of burying the dead, I mean was there a, I mean I don't imagine there was any ritual to it, but is it just, would you sign post it in any way?

No.

So it's just basically a shallow hole. Cover them up.

As quickly as possible and move on.

Would you actually have to do that or would you have burial parties backing you up?

32:00 No, they may have, they may have choppered them out, for identification, especially if they were VC. VC were mainly related to the villagers and they're normally the ones that wore the black pyjamas, and, whereas the NVA were the regular soldiers, with proper uniforms and that sort of stuff. There could have been occasions where they would, or with APC's, pick them up with an APC and bring them in and

32:30 identify them and leave them with the villagers to bury. There was a habit of doing that, displaying them in the market place, as a naughty boy type thing, you know this is what happens to the family members who go to the VC. So they would display the bodies, quite openly in the market place. And then leave them for the families to bury but they would be close to the villages, see a lot of these time we were too far away from habitation, right the way up the province,

33:00 Mai Chau, it's, no way there was no villages anywhere near it.

And how about just dealing with enemy on a regular basis, in terms of not knowing who was friend or foe in terms of the VC versus the South Vietnamese?

There was always a problem of being, of identification, of both the

33:30 civilians and the enemy and ourselves. 5RAR who were the next ones in country after 1RAR had something like seven of their own, killed seven of their own, I might be wrong there might have only been five before they killed one enemy. They killed Nowak themselves, the first national serviceman to die. He was shot by one of their own. Very, very poor soldiering,

34:00 very poor discipline. And I know it would have happened in 6RAR but not to that extent, and I, actually I can't actually recall any friendly fire incidents but I know it would have happened, and we got shelled by artillery and that was the Kiwis, the 161Battery. And typical, typical way of patching up friendships, we got

34:30 back to Nui Dat and they came over from their unit and we had a 'hungi'. You know, we had a party to show there was no ill feelings, seeing you killed five of us, and wounded x amount but we still like you, we didn't have any choice did we, we had to call on them again and again and again. But anyway that was one man's mistake and, you know, that's the unfortunate thing about it, yeah.

35:00 I got side tracked, where were we?

Dealing with not knowing who was friend of foe in?

Oh yeah, by the time we got back ready to come back the second time it would, it had become such a big drama, shooting of civilians, and it became such a big drama that they devised an exercise called Exercise Safety Belt. And it taught every person, every person who went to Vietnam then had to do Exercise Safety Belt and it had to be written

35:30 into their records I think, that they had done it. It was such an issue, that involved all sorts of friendly fire issues, identification of the enemy, identification of civilians, understanding where a, what was a free fire zone and what wasn't a free fire zone. Respecting curfews and remembering that, you know, quite often they didn't have a watch and you know, all these things, pertaining

- 36:00 to not shooting innocent people. So badly that we had a couple of incidences on the first operation where people were seen and not shot, and we got a couple of shots over our head and they got away because we didn't, we were scared of shooting a civilian. It went the other way in other words, we were over cautious, over protective and,
- 36:30 which became a pain in the backside, and so, like so Bill, "Dong loi, dong loi," and we're in the middle of nowhere, you know, there's no civilians. But it was so ingrained in us that even Bill, who was a good soldier, he didn't want to shoot him, you know, but he, you know. And that's the way, and same with Tony. We called him a smiling, what did we call him, a Smiling Bandit or something or other. And, cos we just
- 37:00 regurgitated this because of the MIA thing, they wanted to know what had happened and 6RAR is, has just rewritten it's second tour, history and the RSM at the time asked me for that story and that's why I know it so well.
- But in support of the soldier in the field, though, I mean how could you even in that exercise really distinguish between friend or foe?**
- 37:30 You can't until they shoot you. It's a terrible situation and the same happened in Timor, you know, we got our, some of our members of our association in Timor, and the same thing. You had to almost be fired upon before they could shoot anybody, oh a terrible situation now, oh, yeah. It wasn't so bad in those days because nobody was really, well that's not true. We, not I,
- 38:00 were out of Bin Bah in the rubber plantation which was owned by a Frenchman who was used to sit on the fence, and was, fairly common knowledge that he was, he paid the VC to leave him alone. You know, and that used to occur, cos he never got harmed by the VC at all. Anyway we were in an ambush and we were ambushing a T junction
- 38:30 and luckily I guess, my section was, like you imagine a triangle, with a one flat side of the triangle facing up the leg of the T. And then the other two sides sort of like protection in the rear, so there's only one section up. And luckily it wasn't mine so I can't point the finger, but however we're in this position for a couple of days
- 39:00 and laying low and ambushing it because it's an obvious access route in and out of Bin Bah. And this particular morning, we always used to stand to, I forget now, half an hour before daylight and then you'd go half an hour afterwards and then the next thing you'd do was a sweeping patrol around your position to make sure that, you know, nothing happened during the night or whatever. Anyway, everybody's very
- 39:30 dozy and not really awake and next thing down the long leg of the T junction come an old lady on a bike and she hit the trip wire, which is what we used to do, you know, put a trip wire out and something hits it and ignites the flare, illuminates whatever it is and then you can see to shoot it or whatever. Anyway, unfortunately the section 2IC of that section
- 40:00 must have been half asleep or whatever and as soon as the flare went, he hit the clacker on the claymores, and the bank of claymores blew her up. So I suppose that's another gruesome sight that I don't particularly remember, but yeah, a little old lady on a bike going out early to get vegies or whatever or cut rubber sap. I don't know. Very big hullabaloo over that,
- 40:30 but she was in the wrong, because it was dark and it was curfew and she shouldn't have been there, that doesn't exonerate us, but it happened and that is one of the unfortunate things of war. And the Frenchman was very upset and I imagine the Australian probably had to pay him money.

Because she worked for him?

Probably and also to keep her family, but that would only have lasted until '71.

Tape 9

00:30 What happened on coming home to Australia from Vietnam, on your second tour, did you count down day by day, did you have a calendar, girly calendars?

Me a girly calendar, what makes you think I'd have a girly calendar? No, I suppose so. I don't know. I can't recall. I suppose so, yeah, we would have been counting the days, we used to call them a wakey. You know a wakey, meaning you wake up so

01:00 you'd have five and a wakey, so you got five days to go and one morning to wake up and that's the morning you go. You wake up on the morning and you go, but I don't honestly recall the way I went about it. I don't recall much about my tent, we didn't spend a lot of time in our tent because you were out a fair amount and, out in the bush I mean, you know, the longest time we were out was 30 days.

01:30 Sorry, no that's wrong, that's wrong, it was longer than that, the longest time I went without a shower was 30 days. Without a shower, yeah, oh, but mind you, I think it was in between, I don't think it was

the wet, so it was the dry, so it wasn't a nice, but what they'd do, they'd send out, you'd get a re supply every third or fourth day and they would send out a new set of clothes, and if you needed,

02:00 you could order them you know. So you'd get a new set of greens so you'd just throw the others in a bag and throw them in a chopper and you get a new set of greens on. And I have to tell you too, I never wore socks or jocks, you knew I didn't wear jocks of course, anyone who wore jocks was crazy because you got a rash, a crotch rash was, I got it in Bien Hoa on the

02:30 first tour and it took me months to get rid of it and they paint you with purple stuff.

Mercurochrome?

Castelanix rings a bell, and you're bald from that day on, in that area, and not a nice subject to talk about but it, and very, so painful. And anyway, so I didn't wear didn't wear jocks, and I didn't wear socks, because my old favourite platoon sergeant Vic Gray, first tour, said to me, he said, "First operation will be the hardest."

03:00 Because he'd been to Malaya and to Korea and he said, "But if you can get through that first one and break in that pair of boots, try and hang onto them as long as you can. Your feet get all callused and that's, and you don't need socks." And he's right, and I never had anything wrong with my feet the whole of the second tour. The first tour I got tinea and all sorts things, second tour, no problem, mind you Bill Cromlech my mate the machine gunner who used to share the hootchie with me,

03:30 he didn't sort of like sleeping with me when I took my boots off. He used to wash his socks, he used to carry a spare pair of socks all the time and every chance he got, a bit of water, he'd rinse his socks, hang them out of a night time. Still the same today, a very meticulous fellow.

But I mean the reason why you thought you'd break your boots in was you didn't want any more the foot problems that were caused by your socks in the first tour, is that right?

04:00 Yeah, socks, because your feet don't dry out, the toe jam in my feet sometimes after I'd, you know, because see, the trouble is you can never get a boot that keeps your feet dry, in that sort of an environment, your feet are wet, water gets in the top of your boots, you know. The Americans had a pair of boots, had an eyelet in the side here, two eyelets in the side, and so that, and part of the

04:30 sides of the boots were canvas so it was a canvas and leather boot and when you got into the water which you invariably did, as you walked along, you pumped out the water and it gradually dried out. But our boots were sealed completely up to about here, so they would fill with water. So you, you can imagine, it's like walking in a pair of gumboots walking along with a gumboot full of water. And it was terrible and the way, the way to get the water out

05:00 without taking your boot off was when you stopped, you put your, you ran your feet up a tree laid on your back, put your feet up against a tree and tipped you know, your legs upside down so that all of the water would run down to your bum and get out of your boots, it was the only way you could do it. Yeah, we didn't always have the best equipment in the world. Still haven't apparently from what they say, but anyway, yep.

So what about Alice, you came home after the second tour,

05:30 **and you married Alice, what made you decide to stay in the army?**

Oh, I was always going to stay in the army. I was never going to get out.

Why was that, can we talk about that for a second because you had such determination in your teens to get in the army, what made you, what was the army?

I don't know, why does someone become a doctor, why does someone become a lawyer? I just wanted to be a soldier.

06:00 If I had have gone into the navy, that was a second or third choice and same with airforce. No, it was something I wanted to do, it was my career plan and in those days, superannuation wise and money wise you got out at 20 unless it suited you to soldier on because you commuted your pension so I, once I'd gone past, well I was always going to go on,

06:30 but I just signed up for three years at a time because I, once again, my mindset when I applied joined, I didn't want to be knocked back again, and I thought they might take me for three years, but they might not want to take me for six. Why I don't know but I thought the lesser, I'll go for the lesser time because they might take me because I was so demoralised about being knocked back. You know, all those times when I wanted to join, but anyway. But,

07:00 and I was always going to stay in and Alice knew that, Alice knew that I was going to be a career soldier and of course, once I became a sergeant, especially as a sergeant, you become locked into the stream and you know, you're going to go places unless you aren't good enough and it seemed that I was good enough, I'd been a platoon sergeant and then they moved me into battalion headquarters, as

07:30 what is called the intelligence sergeant. And I had, I was in charge of the intelligence section and which was very, very interesting because you got to know things that other people didn't know, you know,

secrets and, what you could expect and that sort of stuff, even in Singapore, which was where I was the int [intelligence] sergeant, and in particular in Darwin when the Timor thing, the Balibo thing was on, the Balibo Five [journalists killed during the Indonesian invasion of East Timor in 1975] and that sort of stuff. And,

08:00 I guess I don't care who finds out. I went to a party and I met this lady there that, we were quite friendly and that's all I'm going to tell you, and her husband worked for the local newspaper and here I am at this party and I got introduced to this woman and this fellow who's name was Jose Ramos Horta, and

08:30 I thought oh, I know that name, you don't know who Jose Ramos Horta was?

The writer?

No, no from Timor, he was the FRETILIN [Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor] bloke who became sort of 2IC, or whatever it is now, and he had an Australian girlfriend and apparently he used to work out of Darwin. But I had seen something on a secret document where his name was and he was identified as what

09:00 he was doing at that time, you know, and that was interesting to be at a party with this bloke that I knew who he was and what he was doing on the side and here he was socialising and carrying on, but anyway yeah. Oh there goes the official secrets act.

I wouldn't worry. So what about becoming a career soldier, then what sort of effect did that have on Alice or your family life,

09:30 **or was she okay about that from the very beginning?**

When she married me, she knew that's what I was going to do, and of course even in those days there was an inkling that we were going to Singapore and, other than the fact that sometimes she wanted to come home because I wasn't a very nice husband, and I very naughtily reach up on top of the cupboard and grab the pots and throw them on the bed and say, well go home. It wasn't easy to go home

10:00 from Singapore, that was a nasty thing to do. No she, she accepted her lot and she was quite a good army wife and her, her ashes are in Mount Thompson.

10:30 And the little plaque I put on them was 'Alice was a true soldier's wife'. Because she did, she stuck by me all the way through, you know, she totally supported me and, and I had some very, very difficult postings where it wasn't always easy to be a soldier, and, and when the time came and she, well some of my postings were,

11:00 that I went from 6RAR in 1975, after nine years in the battalion I went to Canungra for 18 months, didn't like it, hated every moment of it, got myself posted out of there, back to a battalion, which was the eight ninth battalion, back to Enoggera and did 12 months there as a platoon sergeant of, once again, anti armour, and or changed it's name then it became anti armour instead of anti tank.

11:30 I did all my courses and I was promoted to warrant officer and I was sent to Portsea in Victoria as a warrant officer instructor. Which was a very, very rewarding posting, very, very hard, and then my old platoon sergeant who just happened to be the operations warrant officer there that sort of made the place run, he got very sick and nearly died, so I had to step into his chair and take his place. And I did 21 months of

12:00 a really, really difficult job of actually making Portsea run through programming and forecasting and all of that sort of stuff. And of course Alice was there beside me and by that time we had our second daughter. [interruption] Do you want me to?

Yes.

I did two and a half years at Portsea, loved every minute of it, after I did the 12 months they brought in another

12:30 bloke to learn the job and then I went back out as an instructor again which I loved. And because you taught young men how to become officers you know, and it was such a rewarding position. Then I got posted as company sergeant major as a warrant officer class two, still the same rank and to 57 RAR which was a mechanised battalion, part mechanised and hated every moment of it, it was a terrible posting. There I saw drugs, there I had soldiers on drugs, there I

13:00 had a pusher [drug dealer], I never actually caught him. I did a drug raid one night and I knew they had marijuana and they had their, we had these tubular steel chairs in the accommodation and that's where they hid the marijuana, up the tube of the bloody chair. And we didn't have any sniffer dogs unfortunately.

13:30 I knew they had it and I knew it was there because my corporal had sweated on it. I got my corporals aside and I said we got to nip it in the bud, we got to get it out of the company. Anyway, I never, I couldn't prove it, it made me so cranky. That was the angry ant again. And although it was a very, very difficult time, I was fortunate enough to, through a lot of good luck, through more good luck than good

management, to have the champion company of the battalion two years in a row.

- 14:00 Which happened to be D company, then I got, warning of, I went and did my RSM's course, regimental sergeant major's course, then I, got sidestepped to two training group and worked with the army reserve, which was the first time I ever worked with female soldiers. What a scary world it became. My highlight there was, I was only there for a few months waiting to be transferred to,
- 14:30 as RSM of the University of New South Wales regiment, which is a Army Reserve unit, CMF, as the regular army RSM, and anyway I, had, I'd worked with a lot of army reserve women and they used to all whinge to me that they always wanted to be real soldiers and wanted to go out into the bush and learn what real soldiers did so I said alright okay. So I grabbed another warrant officer and I said come on, "Let's you and I write a short
- 15:00 training program and we'll take all of the sheilas out into the bush and show them what it's really like." So we did, and they loved every minute of it. And the exercise, I called it, I called it exercise Dashing Damsel. Yeah, it was great and all I was doing was marking time there and then I got posted to UNSW RSM, University of New South Wales, Sydney, at Kensington in Sydney and I loved every minute of that, it was a very,
- 15:30 very difficult job in that the army reserve doesn't really play soldiers properly and if you're too hard on them they run away and come back when you're gone, because they know you're only going to be there two years, you know. Anyway it was very enjoyable, I had 80, 80 women on strength and I put the cleaners through that and got that down to about 40 I think of real people but I did the same with the blokes we cleaned them out as well. Then in '84,
- 16:00 1984, I gave up smoking actually in 1983, I think it was, yeah '83 I gave up smoking which I was very proud of, I didn't give up drinking. And in 1984, Alice discovered that she had a lump in her left breast which she let go because she didn't want to do anything about it because we were having a
- 16:30 planned camping holiday. We used to go camping of all things, you know, army blokes going camping and I used to go with the RSM of the rival unit which was the Sydney University and an old mate of mine and we used to take our families up into the Kangaroo Valley and go camping and everything. Anyway we had this thing planned and she put it off before she did anything about it and we got back and she told me about it and, so, you don't want to hear the gory details, but
- 17:00 Alice, she had a mastectomy, a biopsy and then a mastectomy and then radio therapy and then that was in May and she got told that she was going to die. So she gradually got all her affairs in order and she decided that she wanted to die back here in Brisbane, because we had a home at that stage at Acacia Ridge which we'd got when we come back from Singapore.
- 17:30 And she decided that she wanted to come home to Brisbane, and spend some time in her own home and then die. So much trauma. She was in Westmead Hospital, they wouldn't let her out again, and she faded away and she was bald and you know, I got her a wig and was able to, she threw in the towel at one stage and she was going to die, earlier, she wanted to go
- 18:00 and I asked her to stay a bit longer because the grand final for the children's netball was coming up and I got some of her netball friends to come in to talk to her and to encourage her and to eat, and so we'd take it in turns and we'd feed her and we got her going again. And she decided alright, well I'll do that, I'll go to the grand final. So I took her out in the wheelchair to the grand final for the kids. And then
- 18:30 eventually we got organised and we left Sydney and I bought the kids up via car and they wouldn't release her out of hospital care so they flew her up by air ambulance to Coolangatta, and they weren't allowed for some stupid reason to bring her into Archerfield or to Brisbane and so they had to transport her by Queensland Ambulance to the Mater. I
- 19:00 had been waiting for some hours for her to turn up at the Mater and I was more than an angry ant, I was a cantankerous, kill somebody, angry person who wanted to know why his wife was lost. They had lost her. Nobody knew where she was, and all of a sudden they find out, oh she's already here,
- 19:30 this is in the Mater, she's already here, she's upstairs in the ward and I was downstairs in the oncology department. And I went upstairs and nobody took me to see her, they said oh she's bed such and such. So stormed down there and here she is hanging onto the side of the bed, looking like a Biafran bloody
- 20:00 kid, no wig on and she's split her forehead, she's fallen and hit her head. And nobody's with her, oh, you could imagine how I felt. I stripped back the bed, I picked her up, put her into bed, tucked her in, put the sides up and then I went looking for people. And there was a change of shift and the culprits went off duty and
- 20:30 the new people came on and anyway, this woman says to me, this sister says, "Bob don't you remember me?" And, as it turns out she, I knew her many, many years ago, both our families were came from the same district in Mowbray in North Queensland. Anyway, and she introduced herself again and I said, "Well I certainly hope you're going to be more proficient than bloody the rest of them." And I said, "You know, for God's sake, you know why has this happened?"
- 21:00 Anyway so she took over and she looked after - Anyway, so once again I got Alice to rally because she

wanted to come home to see the house and luckily our tenants had only just moved in and I was able to ask them. I rang them from Sydney and I said, "Look, I'm sorry but my wife is dying and she wants to come home. I need to come home. Can you find another place to live, you know. I'll repay your bond or whatever you want, you know." Anyway they did, they moved out and so I was

- 21:30 able to move straight into the house. And she rallied again and on two occasions I took her home and we had a family barbecue with friends around and that sort of stuff and then, and it was like well, she said to herself, I can do all I can do. I'm not going to do it again. I've been back, I've seen my house, my daughters are going to be right, so she went.
- 22:00 So she decided to die. Thanks, and so I had two kids I had to raise and the army, the whole of this time the army was excellent, you know. The army just let me do my own thing and they posted me because I was a warrant officer class one, and it's not easy to find a job
- 22:30 for a warrant officer class one in infantry, so they posted me out to Wacol which is a army reserve unit, something like I was in Sydney in Two training group and with nothing to do and all day to do it in, which was very, very soul destroying for me. I had been a workaholic before in Sydney and now, all of a sudden, I didn't have anything to do and all day to do it in, and it was, it didn't do me a lot of good.
- 23:00 So I tried to get the army to, there was, I wanted to swap with another bloke who was a complete failure, and the army decided that they would persevere with this bloke that was useless and a trouble maker, and I wanted his job of RSM of 49 RQR [Royal Queensland Regiment] and there was no money changing hands, you know, no movement involved, you know, all he had to do was
- 23:30 step out of that chair and I stepped in and he stepped into a nothing chair, you know. And that's when I got disillusioned with the army because he was a stuff up and I was a gung ho keen RSM ready to take over this wonderful unit that would have brought me back from my mental problems, you know. Anyway, it didn't happen, they just wouldn't do it, much to my disgust, so I said well okay.
- 24:00 And by this stage it's October, and I'm not, my 20 years isn't up until the following July, so I said to them, "Well alright, where's my next posting? What are you going to do with me?" So they said, "Alright you can be the RSM of the Queensland University Regiment in July." And I said, "It's now October, what am I going to do between now and then?" "Oh you'll be right, you'll find something." So they paid me, the system paid me and I had nothing to do, no job. And
- 24:30 so I looked at the fact that I had to get out in July to commute my pension and I wasn't going to pull the pin any earlier and lose out on getting lump sum, so I decided to plan accordingly, looked at how much leave I had. I could have taken furlough, but I didn't, I wanted the money. And I looked at the fact that it was going to be Christmas very soon and so I put in for what's called a resettlement seminar which allowed
- 25:00 you a period of, you went and did a resettlement training, I think it was about a week and then you were allowed to go and work for somebody for a month while you retrained yourself and got yourself ready for civilian life. So I decided I wanted to get a cab license and buy a cab and, this is 1985. So I did all that and I did the,
- 25:30 then I went and worked for a bloke in Coopers Plains and he said, "Mate how would you like to do the night shift?" And I said, "Oh, couple of little girls that may not like that." But by this stage I'd moved out of the house, because I couldn't live in the house. Alice was still in the house. And that was getting to me, so I sold that house and moved out onto a small acreage to a place called Pallara, and just out of Acacia Ridge.
- 26:00 Anyway I had this lovely four acre place with a lovely five bedroom house and two daughters and a housekeeper who was the mother of the girl who worked at Wacol and you know, it was just fantastic but I needed someone to look after them at night. So I convinced my mother to move in with me who had been living with my sister and they weren't getting on, so I convinced her to move in with me.
- 26:30 And so Mum came to live with me and as well as the housekeeper, because Mum, you know, it was still even a bit beyond it in those days. And so, I was able then to do this cab thing of a night time, so I would do a 12 hour shift. At six o'clock I would start and then I'd work until six in the morning and then I'd come home and get the kids off to school and then go to sleep, because I didn't have to report into the army, all I had to do was know that I was alive, because they had nothing for me to do.
- 27:00 And so this went on virtually until I got out of the army, where I was moonlighting as a cab driver and reporting in periodically to the army to get paid, every Thursday, and I had no guilt feelings at all. I had done everything I could to make the army employ me properly and I thought, well if you, you know if you don't want to look after me I'm not going to worry about you so I didn't. Anyway so
- 27:30 so I got out, and at that stage at that time cab licenses had kicked about 10,000 dollars in price. And being a single parent I was too scared to borrow money, so I frantically, I got out of the army, and I didn't have enough, I had to pay off a bridging loan for the house, and I didn't have a lot of money so I went looking to buy a job. So I bought a Tip Top bread run contract, which included a truck
- 28:00 and I proceeded to get my mind back into gear. I had to, there was no other choice. I worked so hard.

Bob can I ask you , when you get your mind back into gear, so I mean obviously most of it was the grieving you had for Alice but did a lot of it have to do with your war experience as well?

Not consciously no. I wasn't aware of that, it may have been part of it,

- 28:30 I don't know. They say that it possibly was because of my, all my props being taken away and not having the army to prop me up, there's been lots of shrinky things about it, but I wasn't terribly conscious of it at the time. And that's 1985 and I wasn't really conscious of any problems till around about, oh, '90, or thereabouts.
- 29:00 And then I didn't even associate that with the army, I didn't think of it as being, or I didn't think of it as being war related and thought that was just something that we all, some of us just had and we just got on with our lives. And anyway, back to the bread run. The bread run was great. I had to get up, oh I had to get up at something like one o'clock in the morning, because I was new at it and had to teach myself how to do it.
- 29:30 And even though there was a hand over, and everything, it was, you had to improve your times you know to get the job done and so I'd be up at one o'clock in the morning, go out to, to where the bakery is at near Logan [UNCLEAR] , wherever it is, can't remember now. Anyway out there to the bakery, load the bread, sort it, load it, and then away I'd go to deliver the bread and most of the time didn't have a clue what I was doing.
- 30:00 But eventually got it down to a fine art where I was actually, and of course it made my brain think. I became better at it and I had responsibilities with the kids and I started to channel my thoughts better, desperately looking for a woman to look after me and to fall in love with, and, and anyway. Where were we? And then all of a sudden
- 30:30 I busted, I got tennis elbow from lifting the crates and I couldn't lift the blooming crates any more. Anyway I knew of a young bloke that had been with me in Sydney with the army reserve and he had moved up to Brisbane and I said, "Do you want to do a job?" And so while my arm recovers you know, anyway I brow beat him into doing it. So I taught him how to do the bread run so therefore I paid him a wage and I did, I did the Sunday run you know, and he did five days
- 31:00 and I did Sunday and I did other things like merchandising and back up stuff and that. Anyway, and so that happened, that went alright for a while and around about this time I met Julie and Julie lived in Nerang Bar and I used to have to come courting up to Nerang Bar to take Julie out and all of that sort of stuff, and eventually, eventually we decided to shack up together and meld the families and
- 31:30 we went through all the dramas of being step families, which God bless them they, they all played a part in, and how I survived I'm damned if I know. And that was, and then, oh that's right, the bloke who did the bread run told me to stick it up my bum, he had, he had actually seduced, he was married, he was married to a terrible woman, she was ex army reserve too. They had,
- 32:00 she had a couple of kids and they had one together. And it was a disastrous terrible relationship, she was a screamer. And anyway, my bread run man had an affair with Deborah. And, and oh, and they moved, they moved into a house, not far away and he still did the bread run for me. So you can imagine Julie is ropeable and
- 32:30 hates his guts and of course, Deborah, very, very strong willed, Deborah, instead of letting it run it's course, Julie fought it and created issues and everything and so she said, "Well I'm in love with this bloke and I'm going." So, away they went, and they went to Sydney and he said stick your job up your bum. So I took the run back and then Julie used to work at Jacaranda Wiley, and I had a small,
- 33:00 Mitsubishi van I used to use at the weekends, and so she said well come on, we'll make this bread run work and so we teamed up. And by that stage of the game I used only get up about three o'clock to go to the bakery, you know, and then she would meet me at six or whatever, and I would unload small deliveries into the van and away we'd go and she'd deliver the bread, and then we'd meet back at this pie shop for a pie for breakfast, and coffee you know, and then we'd finish the bread run and go home.
- 33:30 Oh it was great you know. And I think back to the days when I used to have to cut the bread run to go and take the kids to school, you know, and I'd send them off to school with cream buns.

Tops.

Oh yeah they loved it, oh they thought it was great. Yeah, and then anyway, one morning we're just about on daylight and we're in Woolworth's in Moorooka and this bloke appeared out of nowhere and said, "Mate, do you want to sell your bread run?" I said, "Thank you, God, and

- 34:00 I'm sorry I was so naughty in the past." Anyway, so he was an ex butcher and decided he wanted to have a change of life, and he wanted to buy my bread run and I said well it's all yours. I made the price so good that he wouldn't knock it back. I didn't lose any money but I didn't make a profit. And I walked away and he walked in and this was, this was November, oh that's right, I haven't told you the other part. I also did,
- 34:30 while the other guy was looking after the bread run, I got into real estate and decided I'd have a change

of career and I would become a real estate principal, so I went to TAFE [tertiary and further education], and, I did two subjects at TAFE and became a partner in a real estate, a four way partnership. How stupid could you be, a four way partnership in a real estate office, Nationwide in Acacia Ridge. And didn't

- 35:00 do real good, not a real good salesman. And that, once, oh that's right, when he left, I was stuck, still being in real estate, still being a partner, and therefore still having a commitment to the office, and having to, do the bread run, go to TAFE, to complete my TAFE course and still be in the real estate office. And it was just, oh, you know,
- 35:30 eyes were hanging out and working my bum off and eventually we realised that I had to get out of it. So I did, you know. I had to get out of the real estate and buy my way back out. And so we finished the bread run, we'd sold it, oh in between also, sorry another thing. I had a courier run. I also did a courier run for six months. I bought a courier run and I had my
- 36:00 little van and I used to do parcel runs and courier runs and it was terrible, there was no money in it and you were at the beck and call of the bloke at the end of a radio, so I didn't like that. So I had diversified my skills a little bit by that stage, so then I got out and we took a month off. We sold it in November, December we had a lazy Christmas, we went to Moreton Island, my mate the machine gunner and his kids. And our kids and, and we had a lovely eight days on Moreton Island,
- 36:30 camping and carrying on. We come back and I thought well I've got to do something, I can't just sit here and twiddle my thumbs, so I went back into real estate and I worked as a salesperson for the same mob where I used to be before but at a different office, at Sunny Bank Hills. I was there for a month. I sold one block of land and played, and made no money, so we're living on the smell of an oily rag at this stage and I had a - The reason I quit
- 37:00 was I had two Chinese families had come from Taipei and when they come into the country they had to bring half a million dollars with them and they automatically bought a house straight up. And then they, the idea was that he was here on a business thing, they were going to establish a business of some sort. And I could not find them a house, it was just, there was just hardly anything for sale, it was coming into 1988, Expo '88 year, and there was nothing that they wanted.
- 37:30 And buying, selling real estate to Chinese is very difficult, no number fours in the number, no T junctions, no archways, it must face north south and they always have their compass with them. And it was just, in the end I thought I can't do this and I'm not going to be a real estate person obviously, so I walked away from it. We decided that we had to buy a business and I couldn't work for somebody else and so on so, we almost bought an up and running caravan hire business,
- 38:00 but by this stage of the game, I'm getting fairly clever and we talk about things a lot. And I went to my accountant and he said well let's talk about it, let's get a, another caravan bloke to talk to us. So we talked to this bloke who sells caravans and he was going to, I was going to pay him 200 bucks to evaluate the vans and he said, "But why do that? Why don't you just start your own?" And he said, "You know nothing about caravans." And he said, and of course he's feathering his own nest, he said, "I'll sell you the caravans as fast as I can get them and you build up your business,
- 38:30 that way." He said, "If it falls on it's bum, you can cut your losses and sell them, you know, before your overcommitted." Whereas buying the existing business, even though you're buying a business that's already running, it's not worth it. So, alright, okay so we did. We owned half a caravan at that stage with Julie's sister, so we bought her out. I picked it up on the Thursday, we brought it home, we advertised on the Saturday and it was rented on the Sunday. In the meantime I had the old blue thing out there.
- 39:00 I had just recently bought that, so I had something to tow it with, and I'd broken a jockey wheel and didn't know what the hell I was doing and it's great new learning curve but there we were. And we started Brisbane Caravan Hire and Towing service in February of 1988, we had one caravan. We eventually, I had to pass it onto Julie when I got sick, and I think,
- 39:30 I'm just trying to recall I think, 1988, 1998, the end of 1998 we had approximately 45 caravans and 40 of those would have been rentable and we closed it down. Because in, '95 or '96 it all caught up with me after soldiering on for a couple of years, not knowing what was
- 40:00 going on, having panic attacks, and not able to sleep and I'd go out there to do something and run around like an old WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK for an hour and do nothing and Julie would get out there and say, "What the bloody hell you been doing? Why isn't that van ready to go? We got to deliver it now." "Oh is that what I was supposed to do, oh I must have got side tracked." You know, and so I was starting to lose the plot.

Change tapes.

00:30 Stupid pride of mine again and I would not accept the fact that I had a problem.

No I just want to clarify something. You talking about going off doing things for an hour when you're supposed to do something and you couldn't remember what it was, and this became obviously noticeable to your wife and obviously to you.

But I couldn't talk about it. I wasn't able to tell her why, what was happening.

01:00 **So what was physically happening and mentally happening?**

Just disorientated I guess.

Closed down?

And I would have a panic attack, oh my God this has got to happen and I've got to do it, oh what am I going to do? And it just overcome me.

And you said you went to go and see your GP [general practitioner] and he referred you to somebody and called it generalised anxiety disorder.

Yeah but that was before I ever mentioned the incident in Taipei.

01:30 And I don't know whether he changed that diagnosis after that but Louie the Pig who was the guy who was there that night, and who's room I hid, he was at this stage an advocate and he had told me in 1990, that I had a problem and I wouldn't accept that I had a problem. And I sometimes think I don't, I'm not on, look at me, nothing wrong with me.

02:00 I'm not on medication at the moment, probably will be after today but, and that, I'm prepared to accept that, but I go on my own medication. I don't, look I've got lots of theories about PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder]. Those who wallow in it and build it up, create their own problems and if you can get on with your bloody life and do something and you know.

02:30 My payback is I'm TPI [totally and permanently incapacitated] and I feel guilty because I'm TPI. Oh no, I have some days when I'm, well really good days, most of my days are good days. My back is gone and one of my shoulders is gone and all of that sort of stuff, but you know, I still feel that I've got use in the community, so that's why I actually created the Australian Army Trackers and War Dogs Association.

03:00 I was looking for a challenge. It was there, nobody knew who was in another battalion as a tracker, so I formed this organisation which is now, something like a mailing list of 500 and possibly list of something like 650 or something, you know. And it's nearly broken my marriage because of that, that's why Julie has gone out to work. And also on top of that I

03:30 also was a volunteer at Burpengary Gardens at the old persons home, because I feel you got to give something back, too many people just, just take it for granted that they're TPI and they think the system owes them and it doesn't, especially somebody like me. I joined the regular army, I knew what I was doing and what's happened has happened, but anyway, sorry, there I go on my soap box. Do you want to ask any questions?

I want to ask you tonnes of questions, but I don't

04:00 **think I can stay all night and tomorrow but, I guess I'm curious to know what happened in seeking help and then pin pointing it as, the effects of the trauma that you'd witnessed in Vietnam?**

Well you see, the unfortunate, oh that's a long story.

04:30 The unfortunate thing about this, all this PTSD and TPI stuff, it all raised it's ugly head way back in the '80's, with Agent Orange and they, they sent, I think it was the DVA, the Department of Veterans Affairs, they sent out this pro forma, this questionnaire, and asked us to fill it out, to see whether we were affected by Agent Orange. Alice nearly lost my first daughter, which was a common

05:00 fault from, it's one of the common effects, miscarrying. And she nearly lost Terri several times and you know and I didn't bother to put that in. And do you have headaches? Of course I have bloody headaches, you know, I get migraines, you know, all these psych type questions, you know. Do you avoid crowds? Well of course I avoid crowds. I hate bloody crowds, but I didn't associate that with

05:30 Vietnam, you know. Do you hate shopping centres? Of course I hate shopping, I don't want to bloody shop, but I didn't associate that with Vietnam, and this is all these stupid questions that they asked. Are you cranky, do you get upset easily? I'm an RSM, I'm an angry ant, I get upset, you know. So I threw the bloody thing in the bin, and in hindsight, they were all the symptoms that, as I gradually got older and less able to cope, and possibly kicked along by Alice's death,

06:00 I don't know, and they came to the fore later on and, I got side tracked there I don't know where I am. But I still question whether I've got a real problem, but then all of a sudden, like I'm good at the moment, that's why you're able to talk to me I guess. And I had a bit of a hairy moment at lunchtime where it all, that business came back to me.

06:30 But I like to stay off my tablets because I find that it's sometimes it's just a placebo thing. You take the tablets because the stress has a level, it's got too much so you go on them and then, you think you're travelling alright and really nothing's changed, you're still have the same problems. They still get up your nose and you still don't cope with them well and you want to run away. I've got a hideaway by the way. I own a 40 acre block of land

07:00 up at Seventeen Seventy and, and I have a shed up on it, and I've got power, I've got water, I've got the internet. I and I run away. That's why Julie works.

What's Seventeen Seventy?

Seventeen Seventy is the town of Seventeen Seventy, it's a beachside place up in central Queensland, near Miriamvale. Between Gladstone and Bundaberg, Agneswater. I bought this block of land years and years ago,

07:30 and much to Julies disgust, she wanted me to sell it. Anyway I've, the last couple of years I've developed it and I've put this shed on it and I've got enough for me to be able to run away and hide and that's what I do. I like my own company and I find I'm better for it. Doesn't make it an easy life for Julie, but anyway.

But she understands that you just need to rack off sometimes?

She probably wants it, probably wants me to rack off sometimes.

08:00 Yeah we are having, we are having difficulties over this and other things, and - But, so she made the choice to go to work, to go back to work.

Do you take the dogs with you too?

Yes, those two, that one and that one outside. This one he stays, he's a house dog. You couldn't handle the bush, could you Max? Yeah they love it and I love it and I take my grandson. Every school holidays my grandson and I go up there and we usually spend a week, at least a week together.

08:30 And, he's eight years old, loves it.

And what about your grandfather, you mentioned him in the first tape and, I just got a sense that you had a very profound relationship with him.

Yes, yes we did. I got on really well with him and yet we never spent all that much time together as such, but - when I, when I was at Enoggera in '70,

09:00 he died in '80, when I was in Enoggera in, after Singapore, when we built the bridge at Acacia Ridge, he used to work, this is a bloke who was the head, one of the head salesmen for Caterpillar in Queensland. He, to keep himself occupied, he worked as a cleaner sweeping floors at a furniture factory in Acacia Ridge, so consequently he would drive past, still drove his car,

09:30 and he'd call in for smoko or something to say hello to Alice and then he'd drive on. When we came back from Singapore, actually we stayed with him and his wife, was his second wife, my grandmother was, elsewhere, and, yeah, but it's, strangely enough we didn't spend all that much time together but what we did was quality time and I actually got him to write down his career, he never spoke about it.

10:00 But I got him to write down everything that he'd done. And you know, that's when I, he gave me his diary from the coronation you know.

Do you have any regrets about joining up and going to Vietnam?

No, no.

What would you say to your grandson in ten years if he wanted to join the army?

Oh he probably will, yeah. He's very, very keen along those lines and, as a young boy

10:30 often is, and yeah. I just gave him my two pair of boots, old army boots the other day which are monstrously big for him, but anyway. He's going to grow into them. This is my wife Julie.

Hi. Well thank you very much Bob, thanks for participating.

INTERVIEW ENDS