S805
Tape 1: pp1-15
Tape 2: pp 15-23

PETER TARR

J.R First of all, just a bit of background, where you grew up and how you came to be in the army?

P.T I was born in Townsville/and my father was in the army, with the family I travelled most of the east coast of Australia. In the early 60's my father left the army due to injuries and we moved to New Guinea, I spent a few years living in the New Guinea Islands before leaving there and coming to Australia to join the army.

J.R That's unusual.

P.T Oh well.

J.R Yeah. And so where did you join up?

P.T I came down from Rabaul to Cairns and made my application there, they took me from Cairns down to Townsville and I made the, filled out the paper work there/and was formally enlisted into the army in Brisbane, in 1969.

J.R Right. And was the fact that the army was involved in Vietnam did that influence you joining the army?

P.T I don't think so. I had wanted to be a soldier for some years.

J.R Your father, obviously he was quite happy with army life?

P.T Oh yeah, yes.

J.R That influenced you?

P.T I suppose it had an influence on the decision yeah.

J.R So where did you do your recruit training?

P.T At Kapooka. From there I, I left there and did my infantry corps training at Ingleburn, near Sydney.

J.R Was infantry what you wanted to be in?

P.T Yeah.

J.R Right. And were you asked at some point whether you wanted to go to Vietnam?

P.T Oh, I don't think so, no. Can't remember being asked if I wanted to go.

J.R After you did the training at Ingleburn, were you sent to a Battalion then?

P.T From there I went straight into the reinforcement wing at the infantry Centre, it was at Ingleburn in those days, and I waited instructions to depart to Vietnam.

J.R Right.

P.T But for some reason we just waited and waited there for a couple of months and there was no call forward to go, so with some friends we knew that 7 RAR was leaving at the end of the year, so we made application to go from the reinforcement wing to 7 RAR. And we went over with them.

J.R Where abouts were they stationed at home, in Australia?

P.T At Holsworthy, near Sydney, near Liverpool.

J.R Right, right. So you were successful in that, you got into 7 RAR, and when did you go to Vietnam?

P.T In 1970, early 1970.

J.R And how did you travel up there?

P.T We left on the HMAS Sydney and travelled around the southern part of Australia, up through the Indian Ocean.

J.R Was that the, the Battalions were still going by boat?

P.T That's right yeah.

J.R And the reinforcements went by plane, was that it?

P.T Yes, that's basically it, yeah.

J.R So when you got there, what happened? You arrived at Vung Tau?

P.T Yes, we got off at Vung Tau, and moved by convoy, by truck convoy through to Nui Dat.

J.R Right. And were you then based at Nui Dat?

P.T Well, we didn't see a lot of Nui Dat. We'd come back there, we were only in Nui Dat between operations, and in the latter half of the year the operations centre moved to the horseshoe feature from Nui Dat, for 7 RAR at least.

J.R Right. And what were your first impressions of Vietnam, can you remember?

P.T Oh I thought it looked fairly exotic, I suppose, if you like, on first impressions of Vung Tau but we were whipped out of there fairly smartly, and put in Nui Dat, well Nui Dat, well there's not a great deal to say about that, just buildings and rubber plantations I suppose.

J.R Did you feel apprehensive going up there?

P.T No,

J.R Just interested to see what it was like?

P.T Yes, I was interested, We felt secure, they had, the convoy had an escort of helicopter gunships and things like that so we were sort of told, well "They must know what they're doing!'

J.R Yes, yes. Did you feel you were, and other people feel you were well trained?

P.T Oh yeah, yeah.

J.R And well led, I mean ...

P.T Yeah, we were confident.

J.R Confident, yeah.

P.T Knew what we were doing.

J.R Right, did you know what sort of things you would be doing once you got there?

P.T Oh, just... Basically we understood, yeah, it was just basic patrolling) advance to contact, operations...

J.R So how did it work, you were actually based at Nui Dat, but you went out on patrols most of the time?.

P.T Yes, an operation would last, average out about 6 weeks.

J.R Right.

P.T We'd then come back, we'd have one day at Nui Dat to clean up, and 2 days, we'd go down to Vung Tau for 2 days for "REST", and back to Nui Dat for another day to clean up and go out again, you know, to gear up to go out again.

J.R So you didn't really have much of a break in-between..

P.T No...

J.R ...your time out in the bush ..

P.T No, no, about 4 days.

J.R Right. And what was it like? Describe it, describe it

P.T Sweeping statement .. what was what like?

J.R Well what did, describe a typical day. A typical day in a grunt's life.

P.T I suppose, mostly walking, ah...

J.R Well when you went out on 6 weeks, did you, did you go to fire support bases and ... or you kept on the move?

P.T Kept on the move most of it. I can remember probably 3 fire

support bases that we called into, from memory, most of the time we worked along the Song Rai River, that was in the ...

J.R That's in the sort of east of the province?

P.T Yes, of the province yes. The Song Rai. I only did 9 months of that, and they then changed the eye ruling, saying that anyone that wears glasses was withdrawn from the field.

J.R You wore glasses when you first went there did you?

P.T Mm Mm

J.R And there wasn't any problem with that?

P.T Oh, I had problems with them fogging up, ah, usually at the wrong moment (Big laugh) and I just did as best as I could to counteract it with a heavy scarf around my neck to stop the steam from my chest fogging them up, but it was a problem.

J.R Then they changed the regulations?

P.T Yes, from what I can remember there was a young man was killed. and I think his father wrote a ministerial or something and, saying that had he not been in the field with, if he'd not been forced into the field wearing glasses, he may have seen something and avoided his death.

J.R Right right.

P.T It was very sad I suppose, but then they, the repercussions from that came down the line to, and we were withdrawn, from there we went to the mortar platoon, for about the last 3 months I suppose.

J.R And that was more within Nui Dat?

P.T No, we worked at 2 places, one was on the eastern coast, there's a fire base there, Bridget, Fire Base Bridget, there was a mini fire base there and we worked out of there and then we moved over to the Fire Base Isa at, I may have these mixed up, the names.

J.R I've got a map somewhere that's got the fire bases on it.

P.T I may have them round the wrong way, but the second one was based at Long Hois, near Long Hai township itself, and we worked out there.

J.R Tell me about the patrolling, when you were out did you get resupplied by the choppers?

P.T Yeah, we were resupplied every 5 days.

J.R So you were carrying a fair bit of stuff?

P.T Yeah, yeah, there was 5 days rations, but all I did, I stripped everything down and carried what I'd need to keep me going and burned the rest. I'd skimp on food to carry more water.

J.R Fairly hot.

P.T Yeah, I was happy enough to go without food if I could carry the extra water.

J.R And what did you do, on a day's patrolling?

P.T Just, I suppose you'd go on your morning routine, of, you'd clean yourself up and eat.

J.R What at dawn or?

P.T Yeah, well you'd clean your weapons - I was a machine gunner so I'd clean the gun first, ah then eat, ah shave and after about 6 weeks you'd get incredibly filthy, (laugh) but, you get really fastidious about your nails and things like that, you know sit there preening yourself in the morning.

J.R You don't take a dip in the river or anything?

P.T No, no.

J.R Why, for security reasons?

P.T Oh yes, for security reasons.

J.R So you just all got filthy?

P.T Yeah, very filthy as a matter of fact, as I remember it. (laugh) And our Platoon Commander would give us the orders, you know where we were going that day, what we'd expect to find, enemy strengths, that sort of thing, what we'd expect to encounter by way of heavy weapons or anything like that, and we'd just move off. Depending on the task you might keep the platoon in a single unit or he might split the sections.

J.R Right, and was there usually a specific thing you were supposed to be doing on each day, or looking for or was it a lot of the time just ..

P.T I was in the Reconnaissance platoon and we worked away, usually apart from the rifle companies, we weren't doing any reconnaissance as such, it was just a, more or less an independent platoon, but we'd usually just advance to contact and..

J.R And did you come across evidence of Viet Cong a lot of the time?

P.T Ah, a lot of the time, it's hard to say what's a lot of the time.

J.R I mean, well, not every day?

P.T No, definitely not every day. Ah, perhaps in a 6 week operation you might be looking at 3 to 4 contacts I suppose with the enemy itself, but there was a lot of evidence, physical evidence, like old bunker systems and things like that we came across, and you could judge by the sign whether they were around or, usually you'd be sent into a known area where they operated anyway.

J.R Right, right. So were you involved in many contacts?

P.T Um, yes a few, the largest one we, we were sent to reinforce,... first we were sent with another rifle company because a Hoi Chan had indicated a bunker system there, and it was part of his conditions of surrender I suppose, if you'd like to call it that, that he'd shop all his mates, he took us to a bunker system, we went with, I think it was about 3 Centurions and we mounted on, the company, and Recce platoon were mounted on carriers; and we went to the bunker system, but it hadn't been occupied for some months, and I think this Hoi Chan produced an old SKS rifle that had been lying in the mud for 6 years by the look of it, as his weapon, and surrendered that and the Battalion CO, he was a crazy man, used to get around in a helicopter looking for trouble, saw a bunker system about a couple of miles away, and he saw evidence of about 5 people there, and he sort of, over the radio said "Move fast before they get away'! There was, so we moved in, there was, they estimated there was 52 of them, dug in with heavy weapons and…that was the biggest ones that I was involved in.

J.R Right. And was that out in the jungle or in rubber or .

P.T They were just in the bush. And that took us about an hour I suppose to do any good with it.

J.R So what did you do with it?

P.T Oh we couldn't, the armour, most of the armour was knocked out, and they, they were very hard to dig out of there, and we were taking a lot of casualties, so we withdrew, and put up a smoke screen, and called in artillery and aircraft on the position, and

J.R And did that work?

P.T Oh yes (laugh).

J.R Well you hear sometimes that even when bunker systems were bombed a lot directly, that they were so deep and earth so hard to move (?)

P.T Well, yeah these weren't exceptionally deep ones, but they, they're finished, the bunker system anyway, there was a lot of people that, a lotta the enemy withdrew, but um they left quite a, I can't remember how many they left behind, from memory, but there was quite a few.

J.R And what was the feeling when you had an action like that, was it sort of a relief to do something..?

P.T Oh, it was very exciting, I think, yes.

J.R Was it scary, or do you sort of forget about ..?

P.T No, no, I don't think it was scary, you'd be, you'd tighten up a bit beforehand, and then as soon as the first shot went off you'd sort of, you were right. And, depending on the length of the engagement, you'd get a bit sick of it after a while. (laugh)

After an hour or so.

J.R Was it noisy?

P.T Yeah, very noisy.

J.R Yeah, and what about people nearby being hit, was that, did that happen to you?

P.T Ah, no, I can’t say I ever saw an Australian soldier get shot, not sort of boots and all, right there in front of me, which I'm fortunate, I think.

J.R You weren't involved in any mine accidents?

P.T Yes, the Platoon had I think 3 mine incidents, and ...

J.R Were they from the Dat Do mine field, that area ?

P.T No, no, yes, they were just, they were all MI6's that had been lifted and replanted.

J.R What did the soldiers think about the Dat Do mine field?

P.T Oh, they weren't very impressed. (laugh)

J.R No. I think a lot of people weren’t very impressed. No, I was just wondering, because it was sort of taken up and finally removed in the middle of 1970.

P.T Yeah, yeah.

J.R Was that your Battalion that was operating in that area?

P.T Dat Do, yeah, we were around Dat Do most of the time. Ah, they were coming and going, you know I knew where it was, I don't, I don't think I ever, I might have gone into the town, past physically through the town a couple of times.

J.R And was your Battalion involved at all in going into villages?

P.T No, no, oh the Battalion may have been, but the Reconnaissance Platoon, we never did any cordon and search.

J.R What about ambushing their villages, any of that?

P.T Oh yes, we used to lay a lot of ambushes around the villages, ah, Dat Do, we did ambush Dat Do at some time, stage of the game, ah...

J.R What exactly was involved in doing one of these ambushes?

P.T Not a lot! (laugh) mostly just staying awake!

J.R Right, and you'd just wait and see if somebody walked by, and if you did you grabbed them?

P.T Shot them, yeah.

J.R Shot them

P.T But, you might do.

J.R You could be sure that if they came past they were not innocent ..

P.T Yes.

J.R . villagers?

P.T Yes, that's right. (amused?)

J.R Right. And were they usually armed?

P.T Yeah, they'd be armed, armed or carriers carrying ammunition, food or papers or something.

J.R Right, so did you take them prisoner ever?

P.T Ah, no, I don't, had the odd bloke come in as a Hoi Chan, but come in and chieu hoi, but we never took any battlefield prisoners as I remember it.

J.R And how did you feel about the local people?

P.T I didn't, I didn't mind them, they just seemed normal sort of people going about their day to day existence.

J.R How did they feel about you? Do you think?

P.T It would depend on, depend on the village, some were very,—hostility was there.

J.R What you could feel that if you...

P.T Yeah, yeah

J.R if you walked through sort of thing or, what people spit at you or anything?

P.T Oh no, just an atmosphere, you could feel it. Like a resentment you know?

J.R Yeah. Did that make you think that they were Viet Cong supporters, or just didn't like foreigners or?

P.T (laugh) Yeah.

J.R So how did you think the war was going? Did you talk about it much in the?

P.T The war was going alright for us, we didn't lose any war.

J.R No.

P.T We never lost anything. The Yanks might have bummed things up a bit, but…

J.R If you felt that some of the locals were not on your side, did that, didn't affect how you felt about it?

P.T Oh no, no, everyone had their place and their job I suppose, never bothered me unduly.

J.R Right, right. So could you see any difference do you think when your first went there to when you left, was it more secure later on?

P.T Ah, yeah, things were, I think things were, changes were in the wind, as early as that when I left, they were, I heard the rumours of ah buildups in the next province, you know things like that. A rumour just appeared that the Australians would be pulling out in the next couple of years and the enemy knew this and were building up in the next province. Ah. Lang Rhanh.

J.R Right, were you involved in any actions outside Phuoc Tuy?

P.T Ah no, we went into the next province once, that was only to get choppered out, I think it was only to say we'd been in the next province.

J.R So did you have anything to do with the American forces when you were out on patrol?

P.T No, no. They had nothing to do with us at all, the only Americans that we run into were American Green Berets that worked out of. they had a, Mike Strike Force had a base near the Long Hais, We used to go and get their grog off them and things like that.

J.R Help them drink it?

P.T Yeah. No, we'd have to buy it, you know get our booze from there.

J.R Did you have anything to do with the SAS Battalion?

P.T No.

J.R What were they, they were operating pretty much on their own?

P.T I had no idea what SAS was doing, you know I never saw them.

J.R They were very secretive about it

P.T We would very rarely even see one of our own rifle companies.

J.R Right. So did you fire a weapon often? In anger?

P.T Oh yeah, yeah.

J.R Did you hit anything?

P.T Oh it's hard to, hard to say, as a machine gunner I suppose I did, I never saw anyone lie down and thrash around in front of

my sights, but I definitely fired at them and there was the results afterwards, but whether or not that was from my fire or someone else's I don't really know.

J.R Did that worry you in any way or, you know, did you think about it much later on?

P.T No, no I thought I, under all the circumstances I believe I held my end up, you know and did my job.

J.R So most of the Australians up there were quite happy with what they were doing? Felt, I mean did you feel the war was being fought in the right sort of way? That you were being effective?

P.T Oh yeah, yeah, I think we could See results, the enemy were being restricted, their numbers were being cut down all the time, and after I came back I had a, which I haven't got now unfortunately for you, but I had a translation of a Viet Cong, Battalion Commander's diary which is extremely interesting.

J.R Yeah, yeah, where did you find this?

P.T I stole it (laugh) but however, I don't have it anymore.

J.R Was it captured somewhere where you were?

P.T Yes, yeah.

J.R Why haven't you got it anymore?

P.T I think someone stole it off me (laugh).

J.R There's a bit of a trade in this. Yes, yes, it would have been an interesting document.

P.T Mm, and ah the effectiveness of the Australian force was evident in the diary.

J.R Right, right.

P.T A gentleman by the name of, he had a long name, but generally known as Namvoo and it was interesting to get his, read his side of things.

J.R Yes, yes. "These Australians keep mucking up our.."

P.T Yes, he had a few complaints.

J.R yeah, did the Australian soldiers think that they had a better way of operating than the Americans? Do you think?

P.T Yes, yeah. We knew we had a better way of operating than the Americans.

J.R Why, because they?

P.T Oh they

J.R Didn't go on patrols or?

P.T No, they didn't do a, I don't think they operated in the same way of constant patrolling as the Australians which was proved extremely effective in Vietnam.

J.R Mm, mm, yes.

P.T I'm not even sure, I can't even, can't see a lot of logic in the way they fought. But, it told in the end I think.

J.R Mm, did you see when you were up there and people were talking about it, did you feel optimistic that the war would be won in the long term.

P.T Oh yeah.

J.R So how did you feel when the Americans pulled out and the Australians pulled out?

P.T I was very disappointed. That, it seemed, at the time I felt it was a waste, you know, it had all been done for nothing.

J.R Right, yes.

P.T Whereas, (do you mind if I smoke?)

J.R No, no go ahead.

P.T If they'd, I think if the Americans had done things differently it would have been a, they could have won it easily, or not easily, but they could have won it.

J.R Do you think they had the co—operation of the Vietnamese though?

P.T Oh, you could probably write another book just on that. It's, I suppose there's so many factions and it was hard to say who was co-operating and who wasn't.

J.R yeah, I just wondered when you were, you know operating, and relying presumably on intelligence from, partly from the Vietnamese forces, did you feel that they were telling you all they could've told you?

P.T Oh, I didn't trust the Vietnamese forces at all.

J.R Were you involved in any operations with them? Joint operations?

P.T Only on a very small scale. Because we were the Reconnaissance Platoon we had 2 Bushmen scouts attached to it who were, both had been in the Viet Cong previously, and had swapped over, which made you suspicious of the little buggers right from the word go. You know if they'd changed over once they'd quite easily do it again, you know?

J.R Yes.

P.T But, they mixed in when they had to though. Occasionally we'd mount ambushes in conjunction with RF and PF forces, but they were a waste of time.

J.R What, nobody came by?

P.T Oh, the RF and PF forces were useless, they were ..worse than useless!

J.R So if the locals weren't that keen on the fighting, did you think it was worthwhile for you to be there fighting?

P.T Well, it's, we just, the impression we got was that they, ah, were relying on us to do their fighting for them, and I know the ARVN itself was a competent sort of machine, but the RF and the PF weren't interested at all.

J.R Did they think you were a bit stupid for bothering, bothering ..

P.T I don't know, probably. (laugh)

J.R Yes, yes. So tell me about your particular unit or platoon, was it a happy outfit?

P.T Oh yeah, we were all, we were all fairly close I suppose. I still keep track of a few of them. I know where a few of them are and...

J.R Right. Do you go to reunions?

P.T No, I don't as a general rule, but I sort of catch up with them on the sly.

J.R Right, right. Did you have good N.C.O's?

P.T Yeah, we had good N.C.O's and good officers.

J.R Right. Were your officers National Service or Regulars?

P.T Oh, a mixture, like all of us.

J.R Right. Were about half your platoon National Servicemen?

P.T Yes I'd say so, yeah.

J.R Was there any difference you could see between their attitude and the

P.T No. Oh, no, I don't think so, I think the National Servicemen were fairly vocal about wanting to go home all the time (laugh).

J.R Did they really mean it or did they just?

P.T Oh yeah they meant it. They wanted to get the hell out of there.

J.R Right, but they were just as good soldiers as the regulars?

P.T Yeah, yeah, they were.

J.R Right. So there wasn't any real problem about mixing the two in together?

P.T Oh no, no. No, it was, with hindsight I think it was deliberate, and worked well. I think they learned lessons in the 2nd World

War with the chockos, I suppose, if you like, and the lessons they learnt from that experience they applied in Vietnam and it worked well.

J.R Right, right. So when you were out in the bush was it easier to, talk, to your officers than when you were back at the base?

P.T Well you didn't talk (laugh).

J.R You didn't talk?

P.T No.

J.R So who did the officers talk to?

P.T Oh they'd mostly talk to the, the Platoon Commander would talk directly to the Section Commanders and you'd see them, he was sort of always around, his finger on the pulse if you like, but...

J.R So was discipline any different out in the field than ..... in the base?

P.T Oh we, when we went into the bases we relaxed, to a great degree you might say, 'cos we felt secure, you know, and so our personal discipline was, well I suppose it was treated as a bit of a joke, we'd say "Yes Sir" and giggle about it a bit. (Pause) People who were there, like in Nui Dat all the time, used to get a bit intense about it all, but..

J.R So when you were out you didn't, I mean you wouldn't get put on charges when you were out on patrols, presumably?

P.T Well you could, I suppose but everyone knew the rules and there were different reasons for having the rules.

J.R So there wasn't any problem about people saying "No I won't do that" or..?

P.T Oh no, everyone knew that if something had to be done, well they knew the reasons it had to be done and there was no argument.

J.R Right. So what did you do to relax when you were out in the bush? Could you relax?

P.T Oh, relax?

J.R Mm, was it a fairly tense sort of existence patrolling all the time, did you feel you were, you know, maybe being watched?

P.T Oh I think you sort of, you know if nothing would happen for a couple of days you'd relax a little bit, but you watched all the time. Just moved along very quiet, just watching and listening all the time.

J.R Mm, mm. And did you find that you got very tired?

P.T Ah, yes.

J.R Short of sleep?

P.T Yeah, you'd do, you'd have-2 hours on and 4 hours off all night. It did sort of tell after awhile. You slept very light.

J.R Right, right. So did you find when you did go back from after you'd been out on operations that you needed to let your hair down and get drunk and all that?

P.T Yes (laugh) yes we did.

J.R Right. So you'd go back and have a couple of days at Nui Dat or go down to Vung

P.T Yeah, go down to Vung Tau, for a couple of days and get on the scoop.

J.R Right. And what was Vung Tau like?

P.T Oh Disneyland I think!(laugh) It was, we thought it was a marvelous place.

J.R When you went down there, did you stay at A.L.S.G., you didn't stay at Pubs in the town or anything?

P.T Oh, I used to stay in town.

J.R Was that allowed?

P.T Well it was...from memory they said you had to be back by curfew, but in practice the military police would say "As long as you're off the street after curfew, that's it, we don't particularly care".

J.R Right.

P.T They were fairly flexible as far as that was concerned.

J.R And were there ever any incidents in Vung Tau? Of soldiers being attacked or?

P.T No, no, it was the safest place in the world to be. I think the Viet Cong and the N.V.A used to go in there too, so on the basis that we won't bother you, if you don't bother us. Worked along fine.

J.R Right. So it was quite a good atmosphere?

P.T Yeah, yeah.

J.R Or was it purely commercial?

P.T Oh, it was fun (laugh).

J.R Yes, and did many people form lasting friendships?

P.T With the, with the locals?

J.R With the locals?

P.T Oh, a couple of them did I think. A couple of them brought wives back.

J.R What did other people think of that?

P.T Oh, I don't know, I don't even care, you know it's up to the individual.

J.R It wasn't something, it wasn't something that the army particularly tried to discourage? As far as you know?

P.T I don't think the army were rabidly keen on the idea, but ah I think they would back the soldier up, they would wait until they were 100% sure, you know, they'd advise the soldier to wait for a certain amount of time as I remember it. as I say it didn't happen often.

J.R No, no.

P.T It didn't happen to me.

J.R No, right. And R & R, where did you go to?

P.T Taipei.

J.R Right, and was that as good as everybody said?

P.T Yeah, that was a lot of fun too, yeah...

J.R Do you think that having spent time in the Islands that you were more familiar with being in a foreign country than some of the people were?

P.T Oh, it might have made some difference, but ah I'd be more used to the heat and things like that, More acclimatized, or able to acclimatize quicker.

J.R Yes, yes. So what do you mostly remember about Vietnam?

P.T Mostly the, I suppose the ...Vung Tau I liked, I remember, I'll always remember, the short time I had there.

J.R Right, right. You remember the good times do you?

P.T Yeah, yeah.

J.R They stand out.

P.T Yeah.

J.R Right, I'll just change the tape.

Yes, now did you have any health problems while you were in Vietnam?

P.T No, I was very fit and healthy.

J.R Right. You weren't hospitalised?

P.T No, no.

J.R Or anything while you were up there?

P.T No, no.

J.R And you weren't wounded obviously?

P.T No, no.

J.R Right, right.

P.T I lost a lot of weight, I was.

J.R All the water drinking?

P.T Yes, I suppose. Looked like something out of Changi I suppose.

J.R Did you why?

P.T But I was very strong.

J.R Right, right. And you haven't had any health problems since then?

P.T No.

J.R As a result of being up there?

P.T No, no.

J.R What do you think about the Agent Orange controversy?

P.T I don't know, this is probably a touchy subject. I really don't know. I've never, I'd like to think I haven't suffered any ill effects.

J.R Any of your friends?

P.T Not that I know of, no.

J.R No, no. So what do you think about the Vietnam Veterans Association pushing it as an issue? Are they doing the right thing?

P.T If people have been affected by, adversely affected by something they encountered in Vietnam I think they should make it an issue.

J.R Yeah, but there's not a general feeling amongst the people you know that people have suffered ill effects from their Vietnam service, whether it's from chemicals or stress or any other sort of medical things?

P.T No, I don't think so, no.

J.R No, right.

P.T But like I say I don't really know, it may be that just the people in my circle didn't encounter the particular stuff.

J.R Were you aware of ever being sprayed for anything?

P.T Yes, we were sprayed at the horseshoe feature from a Hercules. That was for mosquitoes and I believe that...It had no, ... I think it was just an insecticide.

J.R Right, right.

P.T Probably just a kerosene base.

J.R Right. Was malaria a problem?

P.T No, I'd already had malaria a few times in New Guinea and I didn't get any attacks over there.

J.R Right, right. Did you have to take malarial pills?

P.T Yeah, paladrin.

J.R Right, and did people take them?

P.T Oh yes, yeah.

J.R Right. Was drink a problem? Or other drugs a problem up there?

P.T Um drink ah, well there's only so much damage you can do to yourself in 4 days, I suppose, but I didn't think it was a problem, no.

J.R When you got back for your few days leave in-between operations, were you restricted then to the 2 cans a day?

P.T Oh well, our people had a little system worked out and we usually could have as much as we liked.

J.R Right, so did people drink ...?

P.T On the basis that the people who lived in the camp itself were restricted to their 2 cans a day, but if we went for 6 weeks without ...

J.R Yes, you could make up for it.

P.T Yes.

J.R And did people get pretty drunk?

P.T Oh yes, yes, I used to (laugh).

J.R And were fights any problem as a result of drinking?

P.T No.

J.R Just happy drunks?

P.T There was no point, you know there's no point, there's nothing to fight about.

J.R Right, right. Now when you, was there anything else you wanted to tell me about your tour? Any particular incident you remember, or particular aspects of it that worried you at the time? Or that you enjoyed at the time?

P.T I don't think so, no.I possibly have a different outlook now, being older, but I was young and cocky at the time.

J.R How would you feel about going to a war like that now?

P.T I'd still go yeah.

J.R Right, because you feel it's your duty or enjoy it?

P.T I'd probably enjoy it.

J.R You'd probably enjoy it, right. What do you enjoy about it, what did you enjoy about it?

P.T Oh, which aspect?

J.R Well, when you say you'd probably enjoy it, is it being out in the bush or?

P.T Oh just the excitement I suppose.

J.R Right. What leaping in and out of choppers, that sort of thing?

P.T Oh, you can do that here I suppose.

J.R .. Well, if you can find a chopper.

P.T Oh no, I enjoyed the active service and I would go again and do it again, yeah.

J.R So when you came back to Australia, tell me about that? You all packed up and jumped in a..

P.T I came back I was at a bit of a loose end because everyone else had family there to meet them, I thought oh, didn't know what to do, standing there with my bags and thought, "um can't stand here all day I've got to do something", went down, tried to get into possibly the best Hotel in Sydney, I can't remember what it was now, they sort of looked me up and down and said "Oh no, we've got no vacancies, why don't you try somewhere else" I thought "umh, ok" got the message, so I went out to Cronulla and stayed there for about a week I think with one of me mates and his family. His mother was very good and extremely tolerant.

J.R Did you have trouble readjusting to Australian customs?

P.T Oh no, no I don't think so. Sort of slipped back into it, you know.

J.R Right, right. And so you were on leave at this stage? And you said you had a march, where was that? When was that rather?

P.T Oh when we first, well we dropped in at Perth, had a day and a night or something in Perth on the way through, and then we came, I think it was the first day back or second day that we marched through Sydney.

J.R Right, right.

P.T And the people there, won't say we got a ticker tape welcome through Sydney and...

J.R There were no anti war demonstrators or anything?

P.T No, not that I saw.

J.R So did you feel that you were well received?

P.T Oh yes, by Sydney, yes.

J.R And did you ever have any incidents after you came back of people expressing any hostility to you because you'd been to Vietnam?

P.T Oh the odd crazy hippy I suppose.

J.R What, they'd pick you by your haircut or?

P.T Oh yeah, that didn't bother me unduly, I treated it as a bit of a joke.

J.R Right, right. And what was the political situation in Australia when you came back, about the end, what early '71?

P.T Yeah.

J.R And was there much opposition to the war by then?

P.T Oh yes, there was always, there was always opposition from the Left, and._

J.R And how did you feel about that as a Veteran?

P.T I felt insulted more than anything, I suppose. I remember the North Vietnamese Delegation coming over a few years later and didn't impress me a helluva lot as I remember.

J.R So when the withdrawal, when Australian troops were withdrawn, did you feel pretty disappointed then?

P.T Yeah. (pause) I felt, I felt as if the Australian Commanders had been given charge of the whole lot they would have cleaned it all up.

J.R Right. So do you think the Americans should have stayed on?

P.T Well I think at that stage there was no point in their staying on, unless they changed their outlook on everything, it'd mean sort of starting again, from scratch.

J.R Right. Do you think the Australian politicians did the right thing? Do you think they were honest with what they were doing?

P.T I think so, I think they, the succession of them I think they believed in what they were doing.

J.R So you didn't feel that as a soldier you'd been exploited or used by the Government in any way?

P.T No, I didn't feel that.

J.R Right, so you came back, you stayed in the army?

P.T I got out for a couple of years.

J.R Did you? Why?

P.T Mm, I did my 6 years and thought I'd have a change so I got out and went back up to New Guinea, I was working on Bougainville Island for about 18 months I suppose, on the plantations, realized that I was getting nowhere fast there, so I, sort of stagnating, so I came back down to Cairns and sort of bumbled my way around to Perth, didn't fit into anything, so I re-enlisted in Perth.

J.R Right, so did you go back into the infantry or?

P.T No, the eye ruling had changed again and particular eye defects I've got like colour blindness and things like that barred me from rejoining the infantry.

J.R Right. So they've got tougher on those, on visual things.

P.T I suppose they can afford to these days, pick and choose a bit.

J.R I don't know, high resignation rate, haven't they?

P.T Yeah, they have.

J.R What do you think people think of now when they think of Vietnam Veterans, do you think there's a particular sort of image that people have, or is there a lot of apathy or?

P.T I think it, I think it generates a bit of interest. There is interest in the subject.

J.R Mm, do you mix much with civilians?

P.T Oh yeah, yes.

J.R And are they interested at all or?

P.T The odd one, you know, ah usually they might ask a few questions initially and then the subject's sort of shelved, you know you don't sort of want to rattle on.

J.R No. Have you seen many movies or anything like that, that are about Vietnam?

P.T I've tried to watch a couple of them I suppose, they're usually, they usually miss, you know, by a country mile what actually happened.

J.R Right, what American movies?

P.T Yeah, American movies, although as I said, I didn't work with the Americans, you know, they could have been doing all kinds of outlandish things. (laugh)

J.R But it doesn't reflect what you were doing?

P.T No.

J.R No. Have you seen the T.V miniseries?

P.T No I haven't as a matter of fact.

J.R No, it hasn't been on here yet, I just thought, some people have seen it in Sydney.

Right. Do you feel sort of nostalgic ever for Vietnam or Vung Tau or?

P.T If I look back at it, I think I'd like to have another crack at Vung Tau... (big laugh), for a couple of days.

J.R Do you know of anybody who’s ever been back there?

P.T Ah, yes, I think a couple of people have gone back, but.

J.R Would you be interested in going back?

P.T Oh,

J.R As a tourist say.

P.T No, not really. No, I wouldn't go back as a tourist.

J.R No.

P.T Not as a tourist.

J.R Not as a tourist. Only as a worker?

P.T Yes.

J.R Do you think the war and the Australian experience there has had any sort of long term impact?

P.T To Australia?

J.R Mm. Or do you think it was just something that happened and sort of put away?

P.T Oh, it's hard to say, I suppose it's been, it has reflected, it has reflected on the army, you know, but...

J.R How?

P.T It trained the army I suppose.

J.R Right. Do people still talk about Vietnam in training?

P.T No, not as, because I think the emphasis has swung to a different form of warfare or different form of defence.

J.R Mm, mm.

P.T Now, ah, the whole policy's changed.

J.R Mm, right, so it's not a thing that people talk about a lot or refer back to all the time?

P.T No, not really.

J.R Right.

P.T The lessons learn2ci there would be filtered through, right through the system, they're probably just not so obvious.

J.R Right. Do you think the army found that there were problems that they needed to alter the way that they did some things?

P.T I think that, I'd like to think that if there was a problem it was fixed at the time.

J.R Yeah. But in general soldiers thought that the army did pretty well, they didn't feel that it was an organisation that had a lot of problems?

P.T Yeah, I think so, ah, ah, bitching about the system is sort of almost a sport in the army, but no-one really takes any notice of it.

J.R Yes, the green machine.

P.T No-one takes any notice of it though, it's just.

J.R No, it's just a way of talking is it?

P.T Yes, I think so.

J.R Do you think civilian organisations are like that?

P.T Oh, ah probably not, I suppose they have different objectives, and play by different rules, you know.

J.R Yes, yes. Yes it's true soldiers do sort of, they do bitch a lot.

P.T Oh yeah...

J.R Because they've signed on do you think?

P.T Passes the time I suppose.

J.R Yes, yes. Yes boredom, was it a problem?

P.T Boredom?

J.R Yes, just passing the time.

P.T In Vietnam?

J.R Mm.

P.T No, I don't think I was bored very often. (Laughing)

J.R Weren't you, no.

P.T Tired and pissed off.

J.R In other wars, the 1st World War and the 2nd World War, people said it was a big mixture of, you know, great excitement and incredible boredom.

P.T Oh no...

J.R But if you were out patrolling so much weren't you?

P.T Mm.

J.R You had very little time to just sit around the base?

P.T Yeah, you know, if there was nothing happening I think I was quite happy to, you know just sit there and do absolutely nothing.

J.R Right, right.

P.T You know, and think about nothing.

J.R Yes, just switch off.

P.T Yeah.

J.R Yeah. Right. Well, anything else you'd like to talk about?

P.T Oh no, I don't think so. I think that's covered it.

J.R Right, thank you.

(Interview ends)