J.R A bit of background, what were you doing before you joined up?

T.D I was at school before I joined up. I don't come from a military family, but from the age of 12 I always wanted to join the army. So I spent some time in school cadets, before I was old enough to go to the OCS at Portsea, I did about 18 months in the Army Reserve, or CMF as it was in those days. And then at the age — the minimum age possible — I joined Portsea, and then joined up.

J.R You like it?

T.D Then or now?

J.R Then.

T.D Yes. And now too. Both.

J.R And what corps did you go into?

T.D I chose Infantry. It was the only thing that I really wanted to do.

J.R And so what year did you go into OCS?

T.D In July 1966.

J.R And was Vietnam a factor? Did it influence you in any way?

T.D I don't think it did. I don't think I'd 'a heard of Vietnam in the 5 years previous to that, and so .. it just happened to be on at the time that I joined, I think. I didn't join to go to Vietnam.

J.R So, .. how long was the course?

T.D It's a 12 month course. And then I spent about 18 months after that at 2 PIR. In PNG. I was disappointed not to go to an Australian infantry battalion straight from Portsea, because the war was on .. I don't know for what reason I wasn't sent, but I was sent to PNG instead. I enjoyed that, and whilst I was over there I was concerned that the war would be over before I had the chance to go across, but it wasn't to be, and I ended up going across as a reinforcement officer in December '68.

J.R Can you explain to me what a reinforcement officer is exactly?

T.D Yes, it's a replacement officer — a reinforcement or replacement. It's a fellow who takes the place of someone who is wounded or killed, or sick, or comes home for any other particular reason.

And so I didn't go across in a particular unit, I went across as a reinforcement, trained well, continued training in Vietnam for, I think it was, 3 weeks at the ARU at Nui Dat, and was then allocated to 9 RAR in January of '69.

J.R At that stage how long had 9 RAR been there?

T.D They went over in the November, so they'd been there a couple of months.

J.R And who were you replacing? Was it someone who'd been wounded?

T.D No, in fact ... The way it's worked out, for normal operations you're going to get many casualties, there were so many people going home or whatever, it just so happened that 9 RAR didn't have any casualties at that time, so I was in fact spare, and was used in the FSB for a month or so before being allocated to A Company.

J.R Just to go back a bit, can you tell me a bit about your trip to Vietnam, the journey over there, and your arrival - first impressions?

T.D The funniest thing that I remember about the whole business - we caught a Qantas flight, left from Sydney. And we had to take in our overnight bag a civilian shirt. We were wearing our polyester trousers, black shoes, and our uniform when we left. But when we got off at Singapore, we had to take off our army uniform, our army shirt, and put on our civilian shirt, so we could go and have breakfast at Singapore. It just seemed strange to me - I don't know what it was, a 707, how many it carries - there would have been 200 or 300 of us I suppose, young men between 19 and 25, all with short haircuts, fairly fit, getting out with khaki trousers, black shoes, and multicoloured shirts. It was strange! That was a vivid memory I have.

We landed in Tan Son Nhut airport in Saigon and were very quickly moved onto a tactical aircraft to move to Nui Dat. I remember flying over, seeing lots of fires, which I didn't really know what they were at the time - in fact it was just burning off - and we landed.

J.R And so you didn't see anything of Saigon?

T.D No.

J.R And you landed at Nui Dat. How did you find the settling in?

T.D Well, fairly routine. A vehicle picked us up, took us down to the RU, where we - I was allocated a portion of the perimeter to look after. There was a number of trainees there with me (settling in trainees). There were also platoon commanders who'd spent some time in battalions, who acted as the training officers, and I understudied one of those for 3 weeks, before going to 9 RAR.

J.R So, can you tell me a bit about your daily life? A day in the life of a platoon's officer?

T.D There's two distinct periods of service. The first one was when I was in the FSB. I was the mortar platoon 2 ic, or the mortar line officer. Well, we'd start off .. We would stand-to of a morning, when it was light. We'd clean our gear, have breakfast, get squared away for any fire missions during the day, and we'd virtually wait for mortar fire to be called from the companies or patrols that were out from the FSB, That would go on all day.... Night time would come, we'd stand-to, a number of people would be allocated as duty for the night, and then .. we'd rest during the evening, and start again next day. More often than not they'd not be too many fire missions during the day; sometimes none at all; sometimes fire missions would be required during the night if a platoon had a contact. At around dusk, every evening, platoons would call for what they called defensive fire tasks - they would go into an ambush, or an overnight location, and they would call preregistered mortar fire close to their location so that if they needed support during the night they would know exactly where the rounds would fall and then adjust it to any enemy action. So we'd do that just about every night. So that was in the FSB. We moved a couple of times while I was there, we'd move from one location to another, to support operations in various ... I think we went to a couple of provinces while I was there, while I was doing that particular job.

The other district area of service was when I was a rifle platoon commander. And that was again a similar thing except we weren't in the same location. We would stand-to at dawn, do the morning routine, We would then get orders for the day; patrol, either as a platoon or as part of a company patrol; clear an area looking for the enemy. Certainly, more often than not, not have a contact, it was dull most of the time - dull from the point of view that there was no contacts, but you were still on edge, because contacts could occur any time. Um...stop for lunch, have a break every now and then, continue during the day, before dusk we'd stop .. Every second or third night we'd stop in an ambush position, where we had a lot of people on stand-to during the night, on a likely enemy route. And the other nights we'd have off, in a harbour position, a safe position, not expecting contact with the enemy. Again, next morning, stand-to again, and continue. These operations'd be anything up to a month or so long, then we'd come back to Nui Dat and have a break for a week, a week or so, and then start again.

J.R And what did you prefer, being out or in camp?

T.D Oh, being out, certainly.

J.R And the soldiers - much the same?

T.D Oh,... (pause) I think, generally speaking, the soldiers would prefer to be out, doing something, rather than being back in Nui Dat resting. Ah.. generally speaking, yes.

J.R Was boredom a problem?

T.D Well, we didn't have a lot of time to be bored. As I said, we'd come back for a week or so, we'd come back, clean our gear, at

some time during the time off we'd get a couple of days at Vung Tau, R &C at the Peter Badcoe Club. We'd then have some local patrols, you were still required to do local patrols around Nui Dat. Also, you could be Ready Reaction Company, you could be required to go out as sort of bushfire fighters .. for anything that might happen quickly, and then you'd prepare for the next operation, and go out again. So you couldn't say .. boredom wasn't a real problem, you were kept fairly bush while you were there... You'd go down the range, just to keep your weapons skills up... Improve the defences, etcetera, it was.. You weren't kept too busy, you did have time for relaxation, but there were no real boredom problems, I don't think.

J.R And what were the living conditions like?

T.D At Nui Dat?

J.R No, out in the field - at the FSB and out in the field.

T.D At the FSB, we'd all.. because it was static it was a target, the enemy, you'd all be dug in, you'd sleep underground. But ... there was regular meals, you'd keep dry, most of the time, it was certainly not as hard as being out with a rifle platoon on mobile operations all the time.

Out in the field, you'd spend most of your time patrolling, if you weren't patrolling you'd be ambushing. There were a couple of different operations we did, a couple of cordon-and-searches, a couple of protection of mine-clearing vehicles, mine clearing operations, but mostly it was ... with your pack on your back and patrolling through the area.

J.R Could you describe to me how a FSB functioned, what its role was?

T.D A FSB was normally occupied by - a battalion FSB by a battery of field guns, which was in direct support to the particular battalion it was supporting. It would also have elements of a support company, such as the mortar company, the anti tank platoon, the assault pioneers, and battalion Head Quarters. It was the forward operational base for the battalion. And the companies would then operate within gun range of the FSB. They would clear the area of enemy, and after that, or the operation was over, normally you would go back to Nui Dat and rest, or, as did occur on a couple of occasions, the FSB would move from its current location to a new AOP and you'd start again. So you'd operate within gun range.

J.R It's 1969 ..what sort of operations were going on, what part of the province were you involved in?

T.D We did operations mainly in Phuoc Tuy province, but we did - around February '69 - you'd recall the very large Tet offensive in 1968, it was thought that perhaps something like that might occur in '69, and so we were moved as part of the TF group up to FSB Kerry, which was outside a large American base called Long Binh. I can't recall the name of the province off hand,

but it was out of our province into an adjoining province. We were on a route that had been used by the enemy in '68, an infiltration route, in case they were to use that route again. As it happened, the enemy were knocked about so much in the '68 Tet Offensive that Tet '69 was a big fizzer, nothing much happened at all.

J.R And so did you go on any operations with American troops?

T.D No, not actually on operations with them. When we were in Kerry, it was adjacent to an American AOP, and we did see them from time to time, but we didn't operate with them, not with the infantry elements anyway. We would sometimes get artillery fire support, whenever ground attack aircraft were used, I think only on one occasion did we have the RAAF Canberras support us, the rest of the time it was American fighter/bombers ... The Australian gunships we had on a few occasions, but the American Cobra gunships also about the same amount as the Australian gunships. But the ground troops ....I didn't come into contact with them, except in passing, more than anything.

J.R At your level, were relationships good between Australians and Americans, if you did have contact?

T.D Oh yes, they were quite professional, the fire support elements that we used. They were, if anything, less formal than we were, and we were pretty informal anyway, and you just talked to them and they'd talk to you and things would happen. It was pretty good - that was with the gunships, the artillery. We got on pretty well.

J.R You didn't have a preference for using Australian support rather than American?

T.D In fact, the field battery that was supporting our battalion was a Kiwi battery. And they were very good too. I think people always preferred to use people of their own army, but I had no troubles with the Americans. The Kiwis were excellent soldiers to serve with, and the Australian gunners were excellent also, so.... They were professionals doing a job at the time and they all did their job pretty well, as far as I'm concerned.

J.R So you didn't have any impressions of the American ground forces having any particular problems? ...

T.D The time that we did come in contact with American soldiers was down on Rest in Vung Tau, and by talking to the,, I did gain the impression that they were having ... some of the people I spoke to did give me the impression they were having some problems in their units ... Some didn't want to be there, some did want to be there ... Um .. where we were operating, it was really well out of the main area of operations, so we didn't have a lot of contact with them. From my own personal experience, we didn't know too much about the Americans. I was aware that they did have

some problems, but the American armed forces T.V, for instance, with their anti drug advertisements and things, this pointed it out more than the meetings with the soldiers, I think. We just didn't have a lot to do with them.

J.R Apart from going fairly briefly outside the Province, you were operating mostly in the east? north?

T.D In Phuoc Tuy province. All round, yes, in the east and north of Nui Dat.

J.R Were you involved with the Dat Do minefield at all?

T.D That's the Barrier Minefield? Yes, I mentioned earlier on we were involved with protecting mine clearing operations? For some time our Company was allocated to protecting the engines clearing that. We were a sort of outer cordon while that was on, yes.

J.R Did your particular unit suffer any casualties?

T.D Our company didn't have any casualties from mines, that I'm aware of. There may have been an isolated instance from within the whole battalion, but I don't recall any major mine problems. Some of the other Battalions that were there when we were there had some mine problems, I think 5 RAR in particular may have had some mine problems in the Long Hai hills, but mines — while we were aware of them — I don't think we had any particularly bad incidents.

J.R What was the feeling about the minefield — was it a point of contention? of resentment? Anything like that? In the writing about it, it's selected as being the big blunder? And people seem to talk in rather heated terms about it.

T.D Yes, well, the concept of the minefield seemed to be a good idea. But for something like that to be effective, it has to be observed, continually, and it has to be well, covered by view and covered by fire, and once it was constructed it was handed over to PF, or RF, to look after, and they didn't provide the surveillance of the minefield that was required. And so mines were removed by the enemy and used. And, again — it caused casualties to the enemy while they were removing the mines and things - but it wasn't the barrier it was intended to be, and it did provide a source of explosives and mines for the enemy. That's about all I can say about the minefield.

J.R So it wasn't a big issue?

T.D At our level, you know, it was said, "what a bloody stupid thing, what a waste of time this is, you know, we'd laid it down a few years ago, and now we're pulling it back up again....aah", it was spoken about, but it was Another Job to Do. We just got on and did the jobs.

J.R Was there much talk, at your level, of how the war should be run, how it should be won; what people were doing wrong, what they were doing right?

T.D Not at my level, at the platoon commander level. Our discussions centered around small unit tactics, what had to be done at the small unit level. Whereas at the grand strategy level, we didn't discuss it that much...It was in the books, you did cordon-and-searches, you did fix-and-destroy operations, you did this, that and the other, and as far as it affected us, it meant patrolling and ambushing. And that's what we were doing, and so we talked about it more than the overall conduct of the war.

We would get intelligence summaries through saying we were doing this, we were doing that, and basically it looked as if it were going alright. And militarily, I believe it was. It just wasn't going all right politically.

J.R The sort of operations .. can you describe for instance a cordon-and-search?

T.D Alright. Whilst I was in the battalion I never actually conducted a search as such. I was part of a cordon, I think the village name was Xuyen Moc, to the east of Nui Dat We went in there late one night, we cordoned the area to prevent any North Vietnamese or Vietcong or sympathisers from escaping from the village, when the search teams went in. The search teams went in with a particular angle and searched the village, and we waited for people to try and exfiltrate themselves. There were, during the evening, a number of people tried to escape, none through my particular platoon area ... During the day the search went on; people were interrogated; we heard shots being fired, and words of minor breakouts in other sectors other than mine, but nothing really occurred in my area at that particular time.

J.R Did you do these in association with local forces?

T.D Yes, the cordon was put in by ourselves, but the search team, that was done in conjunction with the local forces and local officials, yes. They would be responsible for the interrogation and screening of people, and things like that. We provided the protection and the armed force .. the environment for them to do that.

J.R Did you do this very often? cordon-and-search?

T.D Our bread and butter was patrolling and ambushing. That's the only C-and-S that I remember taking part in. In fact there was one prior to me joining that particular company, I remember the men talking about that ..I think it's the only one that I actually took part in.

J.R The patrolling and ambushing, what was the purpose of that exactly?

T.D The purpose of that was to seek out the enemy and destroy him. To destroy his infrastructure, his base areas, his rest areas... To keep him on the move, unsettle him, an enemy moving is much easier to kill than a fellow who's dug

in and waiting for you. So if you can keep him moving from place to place, perhaps disrupt their safe areas... It's like kicking over an ant hill or something, its confusion, you wait for him to walk into you, and bowl him over.

J.R So you didn't go into the enemy base areas?

T.D Oh well, yes, the Phuoc Tuy province itself was out of the main area of operations. The enemy was using it as a supply area and a rest area, rather than ... You know, there were no large military or political targets down in that particular area. And so ... there were not a lot of North Vietnamese mainforce units there. What were there cadres, and units resting between operations against places like the Long Binh complex. So we were there to .. disrupt their preparations. We came across a couple of enemy bunker systems ... A dozen or so, but at the time only 2 or 3 were actually occupied, which we had to fight for. The other, there were a couple of caretakers in them, and when we turned up they decided to leave. We would then destroy the bunker system, remove any produce, the stores that were there, and then move on, seek out the enemy elsewhere in that particular area of operations.

J.R Did you ever destroy any crops?

T.D No, never destroyed any crops. Destroyed caches of rice, tinned food, things like that which weren't worthwhile recovering back to Nui Dat for redistribution. Some was recovered and sent off - where, I'm not quite sure - others were destroyed in situ. But we never went into villages, and burnt crops, or destroyed villages, or anything like that.

J.R Did you in fact go into villages very much at all?

T.D On very few occasions. Most of the village areas were within RF or PF boundaries, and the local forces were responsible for the protection operations in village areas. We operated mostly in what they called "free fire zones", out in the bush, that's where we operated. We would come across, woodcutters, every now and then. We would ask them for their papers, we would often have an interpreter with us, a South Vietnamese - or ARVN - soldier with us, he would look at the papers and things, sometimes we would detain somebody, sometimes we would let them go and send them off.

J.R Did you have any language training?

T.D No, no formal language training. We were given some cards for things such as "Halt", "Don't move", "hands up", "lay your rifle here", things like that to read.

J.R Did you master them?

T.D Yes, in fact I was unfortunate enough to be in hospital for 3 or 4 weeks, down at the AFH in Vung Tau, and there was a linguist there, also in hospital, and to fill in the time I did do some training, but just for interest more than anything else.

Before we went to Vietnam, there was a requirement to do what they called a Battle Efficiency course, at the JTC at Canungra, and we got booklets and cards and things about the language, and we were told about the culture, and simple things such as "Hello, how are you?" Counting from 1 to 10, but nothing that would get you by other than in Vung Tau or Saigon.

J.R The other sort of operation you mentioned, fix-and-destroy what was that?

T.D We'd get information from various intelligence resources, such as SAS, with their deep penetration patrols, they would find a particular enemy complex - And say it was at grid reference so and so, a force would be inserted behind that, and another force would advance towards the enemy complex .. with an attempt to fix them in that location and destroy them there. That was patrolling against a known enemy location, as opposed to search-and-destroy.

J.R And most of the time when you were patrolling was it just your platoon operating?

T.D No, we'd operate in an AOP within support of the guns of the FSB. The four companies would be given a particular area to search, and it would then be up to the company commander as to how he would deploy his 3 platoons. Sometimes we would search .. he would subdivide the area into 3 sub areas and we would patrol those areas ourselves as a platoon. Sometimes we would cover it from north to south, or east to west, on 3 separate axes, or sometimes we would patrol as a company. Move into the middle of a grid square, then patrol from it, move along to the next grid square, then again patrol from it. It would depend on the likelihood of enemy contact, the

lay of the ground, was the enemy expected in small groups or large groups, and it was up to the company commander how he would use us. So some of the time we'd be on our own, sometimes acting as part of the company.

J.R How good was the intelligence that you got?

T.D (Pause) It wasn't as good as we would like. A couple of these fire-and-destroy missions we went on, only one was partially successful, I believe, - O.K, I'm talking about our company - was only partially successful, there was actually an enemy bunker system there. There was nobody in it, but it was there! A couple of other occasions, we walked through the bush, I remember one with fire supporters, it was so red-hot, this information, it was going to happen - and we actually found nothing!

J.R Where did your intel come from?

T.D Down at my level, it all came from the company commander, who got it from the battalion commander, etc, but it came from our own patrolling resources. It may come from another company, saying we've just bumped some people and it looks like they're heading towards your area. It could be that or it could be something from the SAS patrols, saying they've been out and they've seen this, and there's a particularly well used track in this area. Or it could come from Task Force sources .. through interrogations or through aerial spotting. You know the Americans had a lot of sophisticated surveillance devices, we carried some minor things ourselves in the platoon. There were seismic devices, during the night you could use them as early warning devices, to hear people coming along the track.

J.R Did you trust them? If there was no seismic activity it meant you could relax?

T.D Oh no, we would still have our .. it was just an early warning device, we would still have our normal percentage of stand-to

during the evening, and whilst lying in ambush, it was just an additional help. They were good devices, but if the wind was blowing it would pick up the roots of the trees moving, so, you had to get used to them.

The Americans had these aircraft that would fly over with big light bulbs that would flash, do flash photography during the night. They had other infra red devices for picking up the heat of bodies, you know, large bodies of troops moving and whatever .. As part of the war, we had access to the American intelligence, but, being further down the line, I think some of the intelligence we got was stale when we actually got it, particularly down at my level.

J.R Did you get the impression that the enemy was very mobile? Or presumably they knew where you were? from resupplies ....?

T.D We generally worked on a system where we would not have any resupplies over a 4 or 5 day period. We would go into an area, and then we would move, and not have any resupply for 4 days. And so we would have - well, discount the first day - so the next 3 days, we could move a fair way on the first day, and then operate without the enemy knowing we were there.

J.R How far could you move?

T.D And then we'd get a resupply in. This was O.K in the wet season, when there was plenty of water around. In the dry season, we generally got a resupply of water every second day. If not every day.

J.R So how far would you go afield on patrols?

T.D Well, the range of the guns was about 10,000 metres, and so we would generally not be any more than about 10,000 metres away from the FSB. You could generally travel about 1000 metres an hour, and so it was engaged on that. We'd move for about an hour, then move onto a new grid square. Then spend say, the next 2 hours searching that grid square, move off,

another hour, search that for a couple of hours. So we'd do say 3 or 4 grid squares in a day, I suppose. That was when we were searching - if we were moving, to get into an AOP, we may move 6 or 7 thousand metres in a day, just moving along. And in primary rainforest, now that's a fair way.

J.R How do you tell how far you're going?

T.D By pacing ..

J.R You refer to it as metres, is that a pace?

T.D Well, not really, people with a pack on your back and all your gear, you take a pace which is much shorter than a metre. But the maps are in metres, and so, you have a number of people in your sections .. You have little pace counters, and every time you take a step, you add it up, and then, depending on the size of your step, you convert it to metres, and then you know how far you've been on a particular bearing, and then you can give a grid reference to those who need to know it.

J.R Did you feel frustrated patrolling and not making contacts? did you feel that maybe he was staying in his base areas and you were patrolling in the jungle?

T.D No, not really frustrated .. Perhaps we were frustrated on a number of occasions when we thought there should have been a contact and there wasn't .. But contacts would occur at the most unlikely times, and places also, and so you were on edge, a lot of the time, you were alert the whole time you were out, even when you'd stop for a break. Even though the fellows inside the perimeter would be able to relax a little. It was still very quiet, everything was handy to move and go, in case there was something going to happen. There would always be sentries out, and they would be.. they would be particularly alert. They had the responsibility of looking after the others anyway. On a number of occasions, when we'd stop for these little rests, the enemy would walk into us, unaware that we were there..

J.R Was it hard to maintain the level of concentration...?

T.D Oh, no. We knew .. you know you're out looking for somebody, and you know he's out there looking for you, and you're both armed with lethal weapons, it's very easy to stay alert! It's very easy to stay alert.

J.R So how often were there contacts? was there any sort of pattern?

T.D Oh no, no pattern at all, completely random. You might go 3 weeks without one, and then 3 in 3 days. You might have 2 or 3 on the one day.

J.R It didn't vary with the season?

T.D Not that I can recall. It was at random, throughout the whole 12 months I was there.

J.R And night time, day time?

T.D We very rarely moved of a night, patrolled of a night, unless we were moving into a cordon, and we had to get a particular location at a particular time. We would very rarely move at night. So any night contacts we had, we would set up at a likely looking track, and hope that the enemy would come along, so that we could get him moving, when he was vulnerable. That was reasonably successful. During the day, when we were moving, more often than not our guys would see their guys first, and get the first shots away. That's when they were moving. The worst thing, of course, was when we were moving, and unexpectedly would come across a bunker system where we're moving, their sentry is alert .... you could walk into it direct on, or you could come obliquely to it, and if you're moving and he's steady on the ground, you're at a disadvantage. And that was the worst thing to come across.

J.R By then, had the Australians criss crossed every grid square in the province?

T.D I'm not sure! It's a fairly large area .. I don't recall ever going to the same area twice. You'd come across well used tracks, we wouldn't generally walk up the track to see where it was going, you'd go off obliquely then come onto the track again. Because if you were to walk up a track, the enemy - who're quite bright chaps - would have their directional mines facing down the track. If you sort of came up the track, they'd wait till they saw you, then press the trigger and you'd have casualties. So we didn't walk up a track, we'd sort of go off it, then come back - go off, come back. We kept on an idea where the track might be, and so you may strike the track right at the bunker system, or, you might in fact come into the side of the bunker system, where the track finished or where, part way along the track.

J.R Was ere a feeling that there were too few of you, too few Australians in the province?

T.D Oh, there were occasions when we would've liked more people, but .. there may have been feelings higher up, with the support... looking back in retrospect now, we were flat out providing 3 battalions of soldiers over there. If we were to go .. It was only a limited war, without mobilising the country, we couldn't have provided much more. And it was causing such a rift in the nation anyway, that it just would'nt've been politically expedient to do so. Of course, it would've been much better to have had more people - swamp the place, and get everybody .. But the Americans had a million people there, didn't they? And whilst it was going militarily alright, the hearts and minds just wasn't going as well as it should.

(END OF TAPE 1)

(TAPE 3)

J.R Your health in Vietnam? You mentioned that you were hotpitalised once?

T.D Yes, I picked up a dose of dysentery. Bacillary dysentery, I think it was called. I was on operations at the time, and I was just very, very ill. I was medevaced down to the hospital, and I was there about 3 weeks I think.

J.R Any chronic problems as a result of that?

T.D No.

J.R General health of people up there - pretty good?

T.D You had to be pretty fit to get there in the first place, and I don't recall any bad cases of any illnesses, anything like that. Some people might be ill for 2 or 3 days or something like that, with this, that, and the other, there may have been some gastric upsets ... But no severe problems. They changed the dosage of the anti-materials while we were there, they upped the dose, they gave us some dapsone as well as some paludrin, so you had it morning and night instead of just in the morning, to overcome some particular form of the virus ... Generally speaking, they were pretty fit.

J.R Any psychological problems?

T.D No, I ... the only fellow - this was the one with the drugs in the platoon - and he seemed ... I don't know, perhaps he wasn't handling the situation particularly well, and that's what put him onto it - I really don't know. But I wasn't really aware of anyone with real psychological problems. There was a couple of fellows in the platoon, one fellow who before I arrived had always been a forward scout, and I moved him into the platoon orderly's position .. And there was also another chap, the radio operator, who needed a rest a bit further back,

and we put him on the FSB as a radio operator there, instead of in the platoon. Other than those two chaps, things seemed to be alright.

J.R Was there any awareness, or talk, at the platoon commander's level, of people suffering "battle fatigue!!?"

T.D Not that I recall.

J.R So what do you think about the ideas of PTSD?

T.D The people that I've associated with, since I came back from Vietnam, don't seem to have suffered to the same degree as the people that I have not associated with! There certainly is something in it, I believe .. When I first came back, car doors would bang, and noises would happen, and I would be alert and shift quickly, perhaps duck .. I look back on it now as a bit funny, and even at the time they'd say, "What'd you do that for?" and you'd sort of "Oh, sorry about that!" But it passed, after a couple of months or so. I suppose I'm still alert today, if a shot rings out, when I'm not expecting it, I might crick my neck up - I'm a few years older now - looking around to see. But I certainly haven't had anything that I'm aware of that has affected me. As I was saying earlier, people are different, perhaps it has affected some people differently to what it's affected me, perhaps it's going to affect me later on, I don't know. It was ... I don't remember any lasting effects from it.

J.R You weren't troubled by dreams or sleep problems?

T.D I think my wife mentioned that I used to talk in my sleep a lot, and I haven't been doing it now for the last 10 years, but I suppose I was married to her about 2 years after I came back from Vietnam. And if I had been sleep talking before that I was unaware of it, she mentioned it to me but it has gone away since. Perhaps it was something to do with Vietnam, perhaps it was something to do with being married! I've no idea.

J.R Was there an alcohol problems over there?

T.D I don't think so. There was a TF restriction, 2 cans a day per person, on occasions we circumvented the rules. Because we were on operations we saved up our cans, per head per day, and because we had little time to drink them in ....! But .. men will be men, and enjoy yourselves, but ...

J.R Drunken brawls?

T.D No, no drunken brawls as such. Someone may have an altercation with someone else, in the solders club; they may strike each other, in the mess, or they may go outside to do it. I see that as a normal breaking of tension. I don't believe there were any alcoholic problems as such. Some of the guys might look a big green under the gills on the first helicopter trip out on the next operation, but there was no alcohol on operations, at all, and it didn't really affect us too much, if at all.

J.R So looking back on your tour, you mentioned that there were a couple of things that you'd prefer not to have happened...?

T.D Oh well, the deaths; is certainly one of them. You know, it's ... when members of your platoon are killed it's tragic, it's not nice, ... lives taken, not good at all. There's a couple of hangovers I might have had that I wouldn't want to occur again! There was one incident where perhaps - we were in a free fire zone - where a woodcutter was perhaps killed when he shouldn't've been killed. He didn't stop when he was told to stop, he ran... But there was nothing incriminating on him afterwards. The fellows gave him a chance, he didn't stop, so .. Perhaps that was a regrettable incident.

But all in all, it was a fascinating experience in my life.

J.R The return home, could you briefly...?

T.D Well, we came back, I was part of the battalion then, we came back on the Sydney...

J.R Just to interrupt you then, when a battalion was being withdrawn and another battalion was coming in to replace it, did it come out to operate where you were?

T.D Yes. The battalion that replaced us was 8 RAR. It had been in Malaya, I think, and had gone home for some training, then came out. So it hadn't been away from a jungle environment for too long anyway. But anyway, they sent an advance party first, to our company there was an attachment of an officer or two, a sergeant or two, and some soldiers, who were to take over our lines. They learnt the picquet routine, the sentry routine, the clearing patrols, they went out on TAOR patrols, they would go out and did a couple of those. And they were there to smooth the transition for their unit when they came in. Likewise, at about the same time, we sent an advance party back to Australia, to make sure the lines we were moving into were squared away, and things like that. And so, yes, we were relieved by that battalion and there was an advance party there for 2 or 3 weeks before we left.

And then the advance party left, early, by Boeing 707 I think, and the main body left on HMAS Sydney, and then a rear party left on another airil flight - chartered flight - after we left on the boat. And we sailed down - I can't remember how long it took - 4 or 5 days perhaps, then we came in via Perth. There we let off the Western Australians of the battalion, then we sailed around to .. We got quite a good welcome on the Fremantle wharf. There was people down there, and they threw cans of beer up to us on the flight deck, while we let the people off. They had a yarn to us, waving and cheering ... I don't recall any demonstrations at all.

We then went round to Adelaide, where everybody disembarked (some only temporarily) and as a battalion, less the West

Australians, we marched through the streets of Adelaide. I remember one particular incident, where there was a student type - if I can use that term - a woman of about, between 17 and 22, early 20's I suppose - in the sort of hippy, beatnik gear, with some sort of placard, I couldn't see it properly out of the corner of my eye. And an older woman, in her 30's or 40's - a larger woman - picked her up and moved her back into the crowd!And her placard fell on the ground... But generally speaking, there were lots of cheers and claps and we marched through - I've never been to Adelaide before - I've only been back since for a day or two - I can't recall exactly where we marched, but it was the main street I presume. There were a lot of people there and we got quite a warm reception.

There the Victorians and Tasmanians flew to their states, the South Australians stayed there, and the Queenslanders and New South Walesmen sailed on up to Sydney, and they did a similar thing in Sydney, I understand.

I'd sent a telegram in fact from Adelaide, because we weren't quite sure of the timings. There wasn't anyone at the airport - I'm a Tasmanian - to pick me up at Hobart, they weren't there. I'd arrived with another member of my platoon, so I ended up around at his house for a couple of hours, then arrived home well after midnight. Knocked on the door, my parents answered, and there I was. The telegram arrived the next day! We weren't on the phone at the time...

J.R That was quite a satisfactory sort of homecoming, was it?

T.D Yeah, I thought so.

J.R Do you think it is necessary to have a march or something for units coming back?

T.D Yes. Yes, I do. It was ... pleasing to be applauded by the citizens of the nation, having done something, that we doing

the nation's will at the time. And it was pleasing to be appreciated. There were - as we spoke about earlier - there were some T.V snippets, paper snippets coming through ... We knew that there people against the war in Vietnam, certainly, I suppose we could talk about the moral majority - the silent majority it was in those days, that Nixon spoke about! - It was good to see that ... and it was the majority of people that were clapping, and those who were there were applauding us, and saying "well done", "glad you're home" etc. And it was nice to know that we were appreciated.

J.R Looking back, and today, do you think the war had very much impact? On Australia?

T.D It certainly had an impact at the time. I believe it was divisive. In the long term, I'm not sure it had a significant impact. There may be some personal impacts around the place, you know, sons who didn't come home to a family, that's a significant impact....But as a nation? .. ah .. What can I say? It's certainly, I believe, awakened us to the possibility of being involved in Asian wars. Perhaps it was part of a growing up process for Australia. You know, we talk about World War 1 creating the nation, growing up in World War 2, and whatever, but ... they were sort of ... I won't say popular wars, but they were ... the country was certainly behind them - Even the Korean war where there was a distinguishable foe and North Korea and China had actually trespassed against the U.N, there was a popular backing.

Vietnam was completely different, and, it was decision - not taken lightly by the government - you know, people talk about it as paying our insurance premiums and things, .. Perhaps it was that, I don't know - It certainly had some impact - perhaps it did - now that I think about it more, perhaps it was a little more significant than no significance. But there's not too many people talk about it .. I know there's a small resurgence now about the Vietnam war, but that I think's been

brought on by the Americans more than anything, with their new monument they've had, and things like that, people are coming out of culture shock in America. I'm not quite sure that it was such a big culture shock here in Australia. There were only a few - a very few - there weren't a lot of Australians involved - what 146,000 served? [No!] 46,000 served ... Say 50,000. That's not such a lot of people really. In my vintage, of course, it is perhaps significant, because it did affect those people who had to register for National Service. Most didn't make it, weren't called up, but everyone had to register.

J.R Only the men!

T.D Sorry, the men had to register. And so, perhaps in my generation group, you know, 5 years either side of me, where most of my friends and acquaintances are, it's significant. But my son's 12. He knows that Daddy went to war somewhere, the 8 year old, it's even vaguer, and even people 10 years younger than me are, I think, quite unaffected by it. I think that's true.

J.R Anything else you want to say?

[A few pleasantries follow]