J.R Could you start by telling me how you came to be in the army?

T.B I was born in Melbourne. I left home at the age of 15, worked around properties - Queensland, N.S.W, Victoria - and when I was 19 - I married at 19 - bought myself a small property at Ballarat. I was there till I was 23, and that was just at the stage when Australian troops were being sent to Vietnam. I decided at that stage that I'd like to join the army, probably from the aspect of, grandfather'd done his bit, father'd done his bit, now it was my turn.

J.R Do you think you would've joined up if Vietnam hadn't been on?

T.B No, no, no. I only joined for 3 years as it was, only joined, specifically, to go to Vietnam.

J.R Can you remember what, at the time, you thought of the war?

T.B Had no thoughts at all, about the war. Absolutely no thoughts at all.

J.R But you felt it was patriotic?

T.B I thought if Australian troops - if your government was sending Australian troops to Vietnam, then it must be right! So I was willing-to follow my country. Patriotic at that stage - But I think the big thing was the family history. I think that was it.
I joined up in July 65, and I was in the army for 10 months, and then I was sent to Vietnam as a reinforcement to 1 Battalion at Bien Hoa. I Battalion only had about 6 weeks to go at that stage, and it was a pretty lonely sort of a time...

J.R When you got to Saigon, did you go straight to Bien Hoa?

T.B Yes, we landed at Saigon one afternoon, we had a night in Saigon and went to Bien Hoa. Straight from there, I was allocated to D company, 1 RAR. They were winding their tour down at that stage, no-one was very interested in going out on operations or doing very much, so we were only getting TAOR patrols and ambushes over towards the edge of War Zone D, but there was no operations. But then a group - I don't know what it was, probably 2 companies - went down with 5.RAR, to go through the Nui Dat area, Phuoc Tuy, clear the Task Force area, with, I- think, units of the 173rd.--But I think, from memory, the 173rd may have done an operation in about march, as well.

J.R You weren't with them?

T.B No, I didn't go down with them at this stage. No, I remained back at Bien Hoa with the other fellows. I'd only been there about a week, and there was a Saigon gate guard, which was to guard the transmitter and the Pogos hotel, in Saigon. No-one wanted to go, 'cause they were all frightened of getting the clap,

all sorts of things, just before they went home ... So no-one's interested, they asked me if I'd like to go down, 'course I jumped at the chance, and I went down there for a week or 10 days, on Saigon guard. And had a wonderful time, I might add, very exciting! The Buddhist riots were on at that stage.

J.R What were your impressions of Vietnam and the Vietnamese at this stage?

T.B I think you got into the habit of hating the Vietnamese very quickly. They were just slopes, and they weren't worth worrying about - That was the accepted stereotype of the Vietnamese - they shit in the streets, did all sorts of things ... Of course we didn't think they only shit in the streets because they didn't have toilets! no, we didn't look at it from that point of view.

J.R And did anybody try and reconcile that with why we're here, helping them? Did you feel they were on your side?

T.B No, from the private soldier's level we were there for the yanks... The Vietnamese were only a secondary ... Poor buggers were only secondary - nobody really thought about the Vietnamese at all. They were just a mob of slopes - dirty, slopeheads that didn't really .. weren't really taken into consideration at all.

J.R Did the army ever give you any information, lectures?

T.B I've been trying to think back on this. See, I'd only been in the army 10 months. I did Recruit training, into corps training, then I went straight to a reo wing, new reo wing. During corps training there were several lectures, but they were very very low key lectures, communist aggression from the north, etc, and we've gotta' be there to halt the communists sweeping down through South East Asia, etc, and they were very low key. And we probably got 2 or 3 lectures during training, that was it. So we knew virtually nothing about it.

J.R Did you get issued with the Pocketbook?

T.B I can't remember, I've been trying to remember that for ages, I can't remember whether I did or not. I don't think it was much use - I think I can remember seeing it at one stage, but I'm not really sure.

J.R So did you get any information about geography, climate...?

T.B That was about all we got. This is where it is, and it's quite tropical, and you won't need jumpers over there etc. No history of the Vietnamese. I mean, I had no idea for years what the Buddhist riots were about, no idea. It's a contradiction straight away. Buddhist riots, against a government that's fighting communists. And I was at a stage, where my view of the world was so very limited, it revolved around ... myself! and anything outside my view of the world didn't exist, as far as I was concerned.

J.R Was that the average?

T.B I think so, yeah. In fact, I think I was probably more aware of what was going on than the majority of people. You know, it was still very limited!

J.R So you were, a reo with 1 RAR?

T.B Yes, and got this big adventure in Saigon, with this Saigon guard. This might be worth talking about, there was a really funny aspect when you talk to fellas' that went on Saigon guard much later. We went down to Saigon guard, and the fellow in charge was a corporal, and remembering that all these fellows were going home in 6 weeks, they didn't care what happened. And the guard commander was a LCPL, had a little girl up the road, it was supposed to be 24 hours on for half the group, and 24 hours off. But, I mean, we just used to say ... As long as there was 2 people on the outside of the gate, the hotel, he didn't care what happened with the rest. Used to do all sorts of things, like say to the bloke, I'm going up to town for a while, might be back in 5 hours, will you hang on here, "Yeah, that'll be right, I don't wanna' do anything." So you had all this freedom, I was just running around, I was running around with this great big bayonet, I was so frightened, I didn't know anything about Saigon. I was carrying this great big bayonet inside my things because we weren't allowed to have weapons, and I just wandered around there like a big kid. Run into several Buddhist riots, and at one stage I was lost in a big Chinese funeral - came down the road and very angry, the people, at that stage, with any sorts of Europeans. I was rescued by an American MP wagon which took me back to the hotel. There was .. It was quite exciting for me at that stage to actually be there, involved in this, see all this, what was going on ... But my understanding of it was still zilch. Nothing.

J.R So then you went back to Bien Hoa?

T.B Went back to Bien Hoa, till 1 RAR left, then 1 RAR left, we were taken ... I believe some of them went down by track, on the road, but the group I was in, we flew down from Bien Hoa straight to Vung Tan. 6 RAR - 5 RAR were at Nui Dat, they'd been setting up the Task Force there for about 2 weeks - and 6 RAR was still organising on the beach, so I went to 6 RAR and we stayed there for possibly a week or 10 days. After I got there.

J.R So you'd been transferred to 6 RAR?

T.B Yes, into D company, 6 RAR.

J.R Were you on your own in doing that?

T.B No, there was actually a fair group of us, but I didn't know the other fellows, 'cause I'd only been in 1 Battalion for 6 weeks, and hadn't got to know any of the other fellas' coming down, which were from all other companies as well. I think D

company finished up with the most, because they were so short, and I think we finished up with about 8 of us, most of us went to 12 platoon. So there was a fairly strong group, I wasn't on my own like I was at Bien Hoa. Which was pretty hectic at Bien Hoa, like you went there and the other battalion was going home, no-one wanted to know you, you was just dumped there and "what do I do?' But once we got down there it wasn't too bad, we got into a little clique ourselves, the fellas' from 1 RAR. And caused all sorts of problems for the officers, I think ....

J.R Can you remember whether you were asked at any stage whether you wanted to volunteer for service in Vietnam?

T.B No, I can't remember whether I was ever asked. But I joined the army so I could....

J.R Some people say, everyone in Vietnam was a volunteer, so when did they volunteer? Some people can remember being asked, others don't know.

T.B Well, the story that I heard with the battalions, some of the other blokes I can put you onto may remember this, was that the battalions used to have a big parade, and they'd say, "We're going to Vietnam, anyone that doesn't want to go take 1 step forward". And of course no-one ever took a step forward, 'cause they're thinking what's my mate going to say. And that was the way it worked - I don't think you were specifically asked ...

J.R You didn't sign a form?

T.B No, you didn't sign a form and you weren't asked singly, there was just this big parade, and "anyone that doesn't want to go, STEP FORWARD, TAKE ONE PACE FORWARD" And I think that's pretty right, but you could probably get it from other people better than me....

J.R So, now you're in D company, 6 RAR?

T.B Yes, now I'm in D Company. It was a pretty hectic time as far as the living conditions and everything. It was so badly organized, we were living in the pup tents and then when the tents come, they come down there from Bien Hoa, they were all rotten, broken, there was no floorboards, the rain came down every night, she washed everything that deep over the ground, it was terrible living conditions for a while there.

J.R The site at Nui Dat was actually a rubber plantation, and then they cleared it by...?

T.B They didn't clear it no, no, it was in the rubber. We were quite lucky, because where D Company's position was, it was in quite young rubber, and you did get a bit of light through, it was only small trees, 4 or 5 year old.

J.R And the tents in amongst the trees?

T.B Oh no, we chopped down trees where we needed to, oh yeah,

just chopped the place to pieces wherever we wanted to. But the other - A Company and B Company and half of C Company were in old rubber, which was very, very uncomfortable, because the rubber trees were large, formed a canopy, and nothing came through and nothing grew. It was terribly uncomfortable up there, I used to hate going up into that rubber, because - just like being in a rainforest. Terrible. But at least where we were it was young trees and we did get a bit of light through. And of course when we started chopping down rubber trees to put our lines up, we got a bit more light through. So then it was just a matter of working our bums off, trying to get some sort of organisation. 'Cause we had no wire, there was no wire in front of us or anything, so we dug pits, put up wire, did patrols, it was pretty hectic for those first few weeks.

J.R And the digging was sort of... hand digging?

T.B Yeah...all done by hand! We started off originally, all our digging was done by the small entrenching tools. And of course we had no sandbags...

J.R They didn't have things like backshoes?

T.B Nothing, absolutely nothing! That's one of the points I bring out in my book: why didn't one of the engineer battalions come down and set up the place?

J.R Did they not have any engineers there?

T.B They had a small group of engineers, a small engineer Australian battalion, but they were so busy getting their own area done, like everyone was so busy trying to get their own little area secure. And then when we started on operations, see that cut everything down again too.

J.R While you were settling in you were doing close area patrolling too?

T.B Oh yes, yeah, "patrols every day, out within what they called the TAOR area, they said our TAOR area was something like 3000 metres out from the Task Force, that was a black area. When we first got there we had a lot of trouble with civilians 'cause they were coming back into the area, and I can remember going out 2 or 3 days in a row and running into groups of civilians and then not being able to go any further because we had to bring these civilians back, take them to the TF for interrogation by Intelligence officers. By the time you got out again it was time to come back, so...

J.R Were there any contacts, unfriendly contacts?

T.B Not that I can remember at all. They tell me there was a bloke killed on that first operation into Long Phouc, I think there was a couple of sniper incidents, there was nothing as far as I was concerned, nothing near me. And I think a track hit a mine, but it was very low key, so everyone just saying, oh well. But we had this feeling, silly feeling we had, that we were

invulnerable. Because we were Australian troops, and we had, and we could see, our artillery, and we had our tracks. We were thinking, VC! we had been led to believe VC were nothing much more than bandits. And so we thought there was no way we could run into anything really heavy .. because these people are only bandits! They're ill-equipped, ill-trained, got no political motivation, Not that we were thinking much along political lines ..... But what we were going to run into was what everyone'd been telling us - what all the old diggers'd been telling us - what happened in Malaya, in Borneo. No threat at all. I don't think any of us could see any threat being there, because of the strength that we thought we had. Although looking back on it now, from a different perspective, you could see we didn't have any strength at all. We were so spread out, we only had a coupla' batteries of guns. But at that stage we thought that's it, we're...

J.R Was that feeling shared by the officers?

T.B Oh yeah, I'm sure so. I don't know how far up that went. I'm sure it went up as far as company commanders... How far up it went after that I don't know. But speaking.....

J.R They were complacent?

T.B Oh yeah, yeah.

J.R Even after 1 RAR's experiences? You know, fairly badly equipped?

T.B Yeah, yeah, still very complacent about the whole thing. Because we had no respect for any Vietcong, that was the whole thing, no respect for them.

J.R And nobody tried to counter this by saying, you blokes've gotta' be really careful?

T.B Oh yeah, they did sorta' bring that up, you gotta' be careful, you've gotta' keep your weapons right, but by this time everyone was so tired, they were saying "oh go and get knotted", you know, we're going out in the bush, let's do our job, let's get back".

J.R What was the feeling about patrolling?

T.B Useless. Waste of time, but let's do it, we've gotta' do it, so let's do it, ambushes, the same thing. I don't know how many ambushes I sat on in my 12 months and never sprung a thing. Blokes'd go to sleep in the middle of the night, they'd be snoring, Christ knows what...

J.R But in the early days, was it the same?

T.B Same, exactly the same, yeah.

J.R I thought perhaps afterwards - after Long Tan - things changed?

T.B Tightened up yeah. I don't think - I think it did, if you were in an area that looked a bit tight. If you were in an area -

but if you were in an area that you considered yourself personally pretty good, well, no-one worried very much at all about it. But when you were in an area that's tight, well, everyone worked very very closely together then, no-one mucked around then. I can remember we were out in an area near Xuyen Moc, and a couple of the blokes - I was carrying a gun - and a couple of the blokes that came up at night time in the harbour position were talking, and I got out of the tent and I was going to flatten both of 'em, if they didn't shut up. And they sorta' realized, aw gee, we're doing the wrong sort of thing. But in those types of things, yeah - but everybody still played it pretty low key, even after Long Tan.

J.R So how long were you in there before Long Tan, at Nui Dat?

T.B Oh, it must have only been about 10 weeks. June - I think - 8 - 10 weeks.

J.R And what sort of ops were you on, anything except patrolling?

T.B Oh yes, well, we went out and destroyed Long Phuoc, that was an operation in itself. And we ran into - the section I was in ran into a half section - that's right, I was wrong when I said about that - we ran into a half section of Vietcong in the rubber. And they, they fired at us, they let drive a burst, and everyone went to ground and couldn't see them. The next thing there were people coming out of the scrub on the other side, we were just about to open up on them and we found out they were our own! They were - 10 or 11 platoon had heard the fire, and thought, oh, here's a kill, here's a kill, and all come screaming out of the rubber. So it was pretty lucky at that stage. But I think they must've been a recon patrol at that stage.

It was a funny one, we ran into a woman. We just come out of a garden, and we ran into a woman, and I... I grabbed her and she was absolutely petrified, I dunno, I thought, there's something wrong here, and I shoved it to the other fella, an' I said, take her back to the looie and do something, see if we can interrogate her or take her back. I'd just sort of spun around - I was a forward scout I think - and I'd just sort of spun around and I think the next thing they'd opened up on us from the rubber, so I'd say what's happened was she's only been speaking to them a couple of minutes before, but it was big rubber. I dunno how we missed 'em... But anyway, that was Long Phuoc. So then we just sort of went through there, it was work, work, work, cause we were just like Whelan the Wrecker, we just went through there burning everything, pulling it to pieces.

J.R All done by infantry?

T.B All done by hand, yeah. The engineers'd come in and blow up the wells. Some of the houses were so strong that we couldn't pull 'em down, they blowed them up too.

J.R Why were you doing it? Did you know?

T.B No, we didn't, no they just said ... Well, we'd been told they'd shifted the people, and they just said - this was in our TAOR

area, close to the Task Force, the TAOR area had to be evacuated of all civilians. So, that was the reason we were told, so no-one questioned it very much, (they were just) 'noggies'...

J.R They didn't just evacuate it though, they destroyed it too?

T.B Oh, completely destroyed everything, completely. In fact you'll see in the battalion book there, 6 months after we went through Long Phuoc it was written off the maps, off the existing maps, it was no more after that.

(Then look at the maps in books...)

J.R And were there any Vietnamese there?

T.B Oh yes, there was a lot wandering in and out. We killed one woman that wandered in there, you know, she wasn't a Vietcong...

J.R What did the soldiers - you lot - think at the time? Did you think anything of it?

T.B No, no, the poor little bugger shot this bloody woman,... (laughs) Is this going to be censored?

J.R It can if you want - I can turn it off.

T.B No, no, one of the fellows yelled out there, "Ah, you betta' fuck 'er while she's hot, Dennis!" (laughs) I mean that's a terrible ... That's the attitude. I've only said that to try and convey the attitude that most of us had at that time.

J.R Was it just a verbal attitude?

T.B Oh, I think it went right down... we didn't care, we didn't care.

J.R But I mean did people follow up on that?'

T.B In what way?

J.R Did people fuck the woman while she was hot?

T.B Oh no, no, no, that was just a joke, "you'd better fuck her while she's hot, mate". So, you know, the attitude became fairly callous, and as the tour went on, the attitude hardened, especially when, you know, you'd go down on leave, 3 or 4 days, and you'd get ripped off by cowboys and everything in the bars, and the bargirls'd rip you off, and all sorts of things happening, and you absolutely hated 'em, and the other thing was you realized how much they hated you! And I can remember Peter Deltman getting upset one day - we come out of a bar when we'd been on leave for a couple of days, and he said, "I'm really disgusted with this, we're supposed to be helping these people and they absolutely hate us. They hate us, You can feel it". And you could, you could feel it, wherever you went. They hated us. We were an army of occupation. That's what it all boils down to, and one loves an army of occupation.

J.R To me destroying a village like that is really bad ...

T.B Yes, and the problem is, no-one knows what it was like except us fellas that went in there. It was so beautiful - these were stone houses, brick tile floors, beautiful ceramic tile floors, and walls, brick sided, you know, living area round it, a bullock area. They all had their own gardens, as you can see (points to photo in 6 RAR history), they all had their own fruit gardens, mango trees, and then their rice padis were further down.

J.R Were they known as a 'bad' village like Hoa Long?

T.B According to the American report there, stay behind parties of D445 had fought tenaciously in Long Phouc during the 173rd Airborne operation. So I suppose if they thought the Vietcong could fight tenaciously in there then they must have a lot of support. But the stupid part about it, is what we couldn't see, let's face it, most of these people were probably apolitical, all they wanted to do was get on with their lives. If someone walked in one day and said "I'm a Vietcong," you'd say "O.K, beauty," and if someone walked in next day and said "I'm an Australian", you also said the same thing, "Beauty"! Just leave me alone, I just want to live my life. But they weren't allowed to.

J.R And where were they resettled to?

T.B As far as I know, Long Dinh.

J.R So did you have any contact with Long Dinh?

T.B As far as I know, I didn't go into Long Dinh. It was south ... just southeast of Baria. I think you went down to Baria and took the road out... I probably went through it a couple of times, but I can't remember having anything to do...

We had nothing to do with civilians at all, nothing at all. Not like Vietnam: the Series, where he could say, I'll meet you in Vung Tan on Saturday night".

J.R That didn't ring true to you?

T.B No, it didn't.. I had ..ah... I think 13 days leave away from the Task Force, in my tour. And that included my R & R, so ... about every 3 or 4 months we might get 1 or 2 days in Vung Tan, and that's it. Didn't go anywhere near the place. We were stuck in the Task Force. Or on operations. When I was say away from the Task Force, I mean, you know, Task Force or operations. But on actual leave, to go down there on leave - never happened. 13 days. And that would've worked out to 6 or 7 days in country, R & C.

J.R And there weren't any civil aid projects much at that stage?

T.B Yes, there were a couple. They weren't doing much, but there was a C.A team there. I can remember at one stage a bullock had taken his heel off, he'd stepped on his heel and taken it right off. I can remember the civil aid team coming up then, and doing

something...I think they had to destroy the bullock. I think the fella' might've been working for the Australians at one stage, doing something, and the bullock'd taken his heel off, and the vet, or whoever was there ... [continues]

So there was a couple, but we had nothing to do with 'em at all.

J.R I won't ask you to describe Long Tan, since you've written a whole book about it, but afterwards, was the rest of your tour lots of ups and downs?

T.B Mm, yeah. Periods of great inactivity ...The operations kept going, there were plenty of operations. I think at one stage there ... we went about 8 weeks between 2 operations, but that was only because - we must've been working on the camp, to strengthen the camp up. But the rest of 'em were all fairly close together, so it was only a matter of patrols, ambushes... The TAOR area, I don't know whether you realize, the TAOR area had to be patrolled 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. So... there was always ambushes, TAOR patrols ...

J.R Say, you went out, usually for 3 or 4 weeks ...

T.B No, we didn't do long operations on that first tour. I think the longest one we did was about 21 days. It may not even have been that long....

J.R Each series, where you went out, was that called "an operation"?

T.B No, not patrolling, not in your TAOR area, but yeah, if we went out further, as a battalion, that was "an operation". But the others, the TAOR's, that was only your regular type work.

J.R So "an operation" could be just a series of patrolling, day after day, week after week? with or without contacts?

T.B Yep, yep, exactly. We were up on Ingham, Operation Ingham, up towards Xuyen Moc, and we had the same thing, running into little groups, I ran into little groups ... I was caught in 2 contacts, but I mean they were over ... like that, just start and finish. But then the Yanks hit us with bloody ... The Yanks hit us with ... Yank gunship opened up on us, and then a yank navy ship fired into us! You know, it was the highs and lows, highs and lows. Just months and months of boredom, boredom, boredom...

J.R Was there an after effect of Long Tan in your company?

T.B That's a bit of a hard question (Pause) One of the reinforcements that come in said there was. He wrote a little thing for me, and he described us as very ... hard, hungry looking fellas that were different to all the other soldiers that 'e'd met... Probably from an outsiders view, looking at ourselves, we didn't consider there was any difference. But I suppose an outsider, coming in, would notice it, because we were very .. ah... we became very cynical, very hard...

J.R Against the army?

T.B Aw, both ways, army and...Probably not so much against the army - we became cynical amongst ourselves, so that if we lost anyone, "so what?" It's just part of the game. 'Cause you always think you're never going to get hit.

J.R Did it stop people forming as strong friendships as before? were people closing themselves off from one another?

T.B I think so, yeah, yeah. I think we've become very much involved with ourselves, and our own, probably little group, rather than - yeah, yeah I'd probably say that's pretty right, now that I come to think of it. I never thought of it from that area before. But looking back now, everyone had their own little close knit sort of group, everyone did close themselves off in that way, I feel, yeah. There was no interaction between the company, that's one thing that there was never any interaction between the company.

J.R But the platoons within the company, were O.K. were they?

T.B There was still no real interaction between them either, in them, only within these little groups within the platoons. It was a very funny sort of a situation there ...

J.R And that was different to what it'd been before?

T.B I think so, I think we were more sort of open before... We'd all sort of ..But you're gotta' remember, the platoons were pretty well isolated, themselves, within the companies, because - I mean - it got to the stage where we'd have one platoon on the wire and the other two platoons'd have the night off. Well, I mean you were still sort of locked into your own platoon - You couldn't go and have a drink with someone because you were on the wire that night. So you were virtually - the whole system pushed you into this little way. And of course the people in your own section were the people you were involved with. You spoke to everyone else, but you weren't close to them at all.

J.R And after Long Tan, did they switch personnel round much?

T.B Yes, a fair bit. I got shunted up to 10 Platoon...

J.R And did that break things up much?

T.B Yeah, because Peter D and Dave B and myself, we were pretty close, we thought oh, it won't make much difference, but it did ... I remember Peter being very upset about it one night near the end of his tour, he was drunk, and I was a bit of a bastard because I was up with those 10 Platoon blokes, and never bloody - didn't even bloody come down to see 'im - that was a bit hard to take really.

J.R Why did they do it do you think?

T.B I dunno. What from the army point of view?

J.R Yes.

T.B I dunno. I'm not really sure, I don't think they had any real grand plan ... The army doesn't seem to have many real grand plans!

It was just: we need so many blokes up here, so there's a couple here and a couple there. There was definitely no thought put into it. "This fella' has friends up there so we'll send him there."! It would've been more the other way, "send the bastard up there where he 'asn't got any friends", yeah, get him away from anything and he mightn't be such a troublemaker. They were very hairy about that 'troublemaker' - Like I was a troublemaker .....

J.R Were you?

T.B Mmm

J.R Were you a good soldier?

T.B Oh, I think I was, I was a good soldier in the bush. I've always been told I was a good soldier in the bush and a bastard back in camp. Because I wouldn't play their game back in camp.

J.R So what sort of things did you do and how did they handle it?

T.B Oh, always put me on a charge! I was always on a charge, always getting C.B, and digging holes and filling them in again, with all your backpack and your webbing ... They got to ya', they tried to get to you.

J.R Did they want people to be conformist?

T.B Oh yeah, yeah, very much so - you had to be conformist, yeah. They didn't want you to - this is one of the things that, probably, where you bring out that the civilian soldiers of the 1st and 2nd World Wars were ... oh... it was more a professional army. We were a professional army and so you had to conform. They liked people that conformed and didn't cause any trouble, didn't question anyone, didn't answer back. That's what they liked. So for the likes of myself, that didn't ...! I wasn't real popular.

J.R Were there many like you?

T.B Noooo...Not a lot, not a lot. I know I've ah.. John Thompson, the bloke from ah... Vietnam Vets, knows a fair few of our blokes, was talking to me the other day and he said "I don't know what to make of you, I've heard some terrible stories about you in the army, you were a real animal" so I'm trying to live that down now. But no, I don't think there was a lot, there was a few of us used to knock around together, so we were always the troublemakers. So that's why they made me up to a Lance Corporal in the end.

J.R To try and tame you?

T.B Well, this is the old army thing oh, you know, make him up ...

And I was quite happy to take that then, because I had 12 months to go when I got home, and I thought, geez, I don't want to be doing kitchen duty when I get home, so I'll take it. So that's the way that worked out.

J.R At the time, did you pride yourself on being like that?

T.B Probably, Probably. It was probably one of the things you did think of, well I'm not, I'm not goin' to conform and that's it. I mean, I mean, I got kicked out of the army! (laughs) Virtually. On my...discharge paper it says, "Re-engagement having been vetoed" (laughs) But I vetoed it myself, but they made it, they put it on me so hard, they said that we don't want you in the Battalion any more, you're out, you're a troublemaker... You and your friend are about to become instructors at 1 RTB! The other fella was sent out on the train the next night, I put in for a discharge straight away, knowing that I could put in for a discharge ... In many ways you could say that I was kicked out of the army! (laughs)

J.R Do you think you changed after your experiences at Long Tan? I mean immediately?

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

J.R Did you think anybody did? Did you suffer from stress?

T.B Oh, suffered from stress, yeah, a lot of people ... See when you say "change", it's hard to say. A lot of people did suffer from stress - Dave Behan and me were drinkin' one night in the lines and Dave walked outside and had a fit. And we had to get him up to the RAIO.
Oh yeah, oh yeah, it was a nervous fit.

J.R Was there any medical debriefing - they kind of downplayed the whole thing'....

T.B Oh yeah, it was nothing, I think that's one of the points I brought out in my book, they tried to keep it so low key, because I'm pretty sure it was the esprit de corps of the whole battalion, they didn't want to make a big thing out of one particular ...

J.R Do you think they thought that sort of thing might keep happening?

T.B The army? ah..I'm not really sure about that.

J.R They made sure after that - I think you say in your book - they didn't send platoons out on their own, they kept companies...

T.B And they made sure that - well, even just before that, when they got hit on that first operation, even then they made sure that when they were on operations they were closer together, that companies could support each other, you know? And it's a couple of things - that a couple of fellas've picked up for me, Korean blokes that I know, "This is stupid, I can't understand the tactics that you were using, you've always gotta have", you know - we were say first and second world war,

Korean side, you know, always gotta have one foot on the ground. And I mean the way they were workin' early, there were no feet on the ground, the feet were everywhere. One foot couldn't support the other, you see? And I think they did wake up to that then, particularly after Long Tan. And even the ammo situation was indicative of what they thought - you know, 60 rounds per man! It's ludicrous! And 200 for the gun! Ludicrous!

J.R But did people talk about it much, the blokes that'd been through it?

T.B Long Tan? Naa, not at all.

J.R Was it preying on people's minds?

T.B I don't think so, I think we just didn't think it was anything very much, you know. We thought, oh well, that's it, nothing to get excited about. Because we could've got the same thing the next day, this is the whole thing. Someone could've copped it the next day.

J.R But you say in your book that it haunted you

T.B Oh, afterwards, yeah, afterwards it has.

J.R How long 'afterwards'?

T.B Oh, a long time afterwards. It's always worried me, because I didn't know the full story, and I didn't think that the story was the same as what the army was telling us, and I've always thought, I think, we were sacrificed.

J.R When you say 'what the army was telling you', do you mean what was in the official, in the unit history?

T.B yeah, well, we hardly ever saw any of it'', you know, the newspaper reports, and the blow ups from the army, you know, they'd get onto the army and say "you know, about Long Tan". And they'd have "the army said this and that". But none of those things were right. And the thing I'm very, very angry about, is, I feel we were sacrificed. Our boys were sacrificed. And we could've lost the whole lot of us there that day. All those boys that got killed - it was just because of army incompetence, as far as I'm concerned. They were incompetent, and that's what's really preyed on my mind, and haunted me for a long time, is I ...aah, I don't like to think of people being sacrificed like that because of incompetence by army people that now try ... That all got medals! See this is the other thing that really riles me, is all those bastards back in Task Force, they all got medals, and they've become big heroes, and that's not helping the poor kids that're dead.

J.R Did anyone in the company get medals?

T.B Umm, a couple, Bob Buick, he got a medal. How whatsaname is this? [He means censored] [At this point the tape was paused while TB elaborated...]

J.R So anyway, relationships within the platoon, after Long Tan, between the troops and NCO's and officers, how were they?

T.B Very, very, very... A great deal of tension. Right through. We didn't have any ... The only one we had any time for -was Neil Rankin, and he got kicked out of the bloody company ...in December, for pinching a jeep or something that's ... I don't know what the story was, but anyway, he got kicked out, and then we got another platoon sergeant. But no, they were terrible... There was another fella called Lance Larcombe, came down and took over from Paddy Todd, he came down from 12 Platoon. He was really well respected, he got wounded at Long Tan, so this fella Larcombe came down and he was, he was a pure arsehole. And Buick was, always was and remained, a pure arsehole. And then we got a bloke called Savage up there, he wasn't an arsehole, he was just a dickhead! [Laughs]

I look back on the whole thing now, and those - even the corporals I would not cross the road with them men, now, I would not cross the road with them! And yet we put our life in their hands. And they were, they were hopeless.

J.R Were they regular army?

T.B Yes, most of them were regular army blokes, but they were made up, you know, because of the expansion? The quick expansion. Probably if the army'd remained at the normal state, those blokes would never've got up to bloody corporals, or sergeants. You know, the whole lot of them. Buick'd been a corporal, got out of the army, rejoined, came in, was in the army 3 months and he was a sergeant. 6 months and he was a sergeant. Neil Rankin'd been in for about 6 years, he was a corporal, as soon as the National Servicemen came in, he was - they were short of sergeants, so they made him up to a sergeant. All the privates were made up to corporals.

J.R Seniority?

T.B Oh yes, you look back at 'em now, it was, I wouldn't cross the road with them! It was... [laughs] And yet they were in charge of our lives, at this stage. And I mean....

J.R You didn't have confidence in them, as knowing what they were doing, or you just didn't like them?

T.B No, didn't have any confidence in 'em either. Didn't have any confidence in 'em. Sabbon wasn't bad.....

J.R Did your experiences at Long Tan make your feelings worse about them?

T.B No, no, I think we ... everyone just looked on 'em as arseholes, and incompetents, and ... forget about it. We've gotta do our job, let's get it over with the best way we can.

J.R What about your feelings towards other privates?

TAPE 1 ENDS

TAPE NO. 2

J.R Yes, you were talking about how you felt about officers?

T.B Yeah, well I just didn't like 'em, I, that was it, I thought they were incompetent... But that wasn't ... And I thought they were... you know, this class thing, "class" I'd never heard of in those days, but there was this "class" factor. They spoke different to the way we did, they'd been brought up different to the way we were, and they didn't view the world in the same way the diggers did, so there was naturally this animosity. I'm not really sure about the incompetence of them... I shouldn't really say that, because they were reasonably competent, you know, efficient, let me put it that way. But I felt they didn't have any man-management skills, looking back on it now, that's probably one of the things they were lacking. They were only very young too, naturally, and their man-management skills were very limited. Ummm... I mean Sabben'd been a ... a trainee manager for Farmers Department Stores, and the other fella'd been a... T.V cameraman or something, before they were called up, and they'd only been in the army for 12 months. So their man-management skills were very deficient in that area.

J.R Did you have much personal contact with lieutenants?

T.B No, none at all. Only work wise. No personal contact.

J.R But even at work, did you see them - speak to them on a daily basis?

T.B Oh yes, yeah, there was usually a daily contact, but it was still only more-or-less "you do this, you do that", and that was the end of it... "Why aren't you doing that Burstall I'll put you on a charge if you don't do this". You know, it was very ....

J.R And was it better when you were out?

T.B Oh yeah, everybody was glad about going out on ops, it was, because you were getting away from the bullshit back in camp. And the work - the work! it just never stopped the whole time we were there.

J.R Were you tired?

T.B All the time! You'd just get one thing finished and they'd put you on something else, you know. They were digging ... When we'd finished the wire and our own tents and our own weapon pits we started digging ... command posts!!14 foot deep command posts! we started digging them! you know, just to keep you going all the time, all the time....

J.R Do you think they wanted to keep you busy?

T.B I think it was ... these things were needed, but I think it was, that was one of the big points, to keep you going - "Idle hands....!" [Laughs]

J.R So what did you do in the rare times off? At night?

T.B Go up to the boozer. Get drunk.

J.R Was there a restriction on how much?

T.B Oh yeah, yeah ... That was the other thing about the officers. We weren't allowed to drink spirits! Only the officers could handle spirits. So we were restricted to drinking spirits, so we could only drink Teer ... but of course whenever anyone went down to Vung Tan we'd all get together and go to the PX and blokes'd bring back... So we always had heaps of spirits, 'spirited' away in all sorts of funny places. But we weren't allowed to ...

J.R And did you get drunk?

T.B Oh yes! I got marched up to the guardhouse .. There was the odd times when, you know, tensions, things'd come up, and people'd get sometimes very, very drunk.

J.R Is that how you relieved tension?

T.B I think that's mainly what it was, yeah, relief of tension. I got marched up to the guardhouse one night, under armed escort [laughs] I got marched up to battalion for being on vodka and wanting to fight everyone, and abusing people... going to shoot someone. I was marched up under armed escort, put in the battalion boob, my bootlaces were taken off me so I couldn't do anything stupid, like strangling myself... It was ridiculous, but I think if they'd let us go, we'd've probably been better, but having all these restrictions on you, you weren't a man! You weren't an individual! Just part of that green machine. And that was the way they wanted you to stay. And anyone that bucked the green machine, well they came down on you pretty hard. Pretty hard.

J.R Did tension build up over the length of your tour, or could you relieve it...?

T.B Naa... you couldn't really relieve the tension, I think it did build up. Mate of mine, Col Comithes (?) we sat down in a tent, we were on CB, we weren't allowed to go to the ... Every morning we got up, the other fellas'd do their ablutions 'n that, we'd put on our packs and our helmets and our shovels, and we had to go up and report to the CSM and then we had to ...aah... I think we were cuttin' down rubber trees at that stage, cuttin' down rubber trees till breakfast time, then we could go and have breakfast, then we had to do our day's work, then at 4 o'clock when everyone's work was finished, we had to go up and do another - the same caper, again with our packs and shovels. And we'd do a day's - we'd work till teatime, and then we were confined to our tent for the night. So the blokes used to bring us... I had a bottle of vodka, and a few blokes

were slipping us a beer down. We were sitting there playing cards... We were the best of mates! We were sitting there playing cards, and I said "you cheated"! And he got quite upset, and I've picked up the table, and smashed the table, and grabbed him, and he's grabbed me, and bit me on the ear, and I smashed him, we wrecked the whole tent! And then we sorta said, "what are we doing?" We finished up sitting down crying in each other's bloody... "Boohoo, we're supposed to be mates, an' we're doin' all this sorta' shit, But we were pretty drunk. But those sorta things'd happen. Yeah. More than once, more than once. We came back from...

J.R Do you think everybody up there was like that?

T.B Oh yeah, yeah, "troppo". Troppo was the ...

J.R You've obviously thought about it a lot, was it the combat?

T.B No, no, it wasn't the combat, it was the tension. I put it down to the constant tension, with no breaks, it didn't matter where you went ....

J.R The tension of being controlled by the army, or of being in a war zone?

T.B Well, both. Both, both. I think it was the constant tension of always having that weapon with you, always - never knowing when you might step on a mine, never knowing when you might run into something, umm, and, plus the army, this tension from the army to conform and be good boys and do the right thing by everybody. I think it was a combination of both. But it was this tension without break. 12 months of tension with no break at all.

J.R What about R & R?

T.B Well, we went for 7 days and it wasn't really ...

J.R Not enough?

T.B Nah, not enough to do anything. All we did was got drunk and run around the brothels and run around the blue movie places and do all sorts of things. I think we tried to put so much into 7 days, and then we were - next thing you were back there, so...

J.R looking back on it, if you were designing it - the army' - for somebody, is there some sort of therapy that could've gone on..?

T.B Afterwards, you mean?

J.R Well, or at the time? Occupational therapy, something to keep people occupied, some sort of outlet? Or is it not feasible?

T.B Really, looking at it, I don't think it was feasible to do that. Because, I mean, there were, if you wanted to sit in your tent and do basketwork, well you could've done that if you wanted to. There was nothing much that could've been done, because of the situation of the Task Force. If it'd been like the Americans,

where we could've got out of the Task Force - like at Bien Hoa, I dunno whether you went to Bien Hoa or not [No]. They could go in and out of Bien Hoa, the other side of Bien Hoa there was about 30 or 40 bars, you know, and they could just go out there of a nighttime... Then they had movies, all sorts of things ... They could wander round to all the other bases, just so ... But here very tight control, isolated and controlled. That's probably one of the things that .. the tension from both sides.

J.R Some people think that was the strength?

T.B A lot of people tell you that was a strength, but I'm not really sure about it...I'm not really sure myself. Not having done anything on psychology, I'm not really sure about it. But the strength in many ways - but then there was a bad side to it too. And I think the bad side was this constant tension.

J.R Were there any people who were misfits, and who didn't get on with anyone?

T.B Oh yeah - there was a couple of blokes who just went their own way. One bloke was on grass all the time - he was stoned out of his brain most of the time ... They sent him back for being drunk, he was going out on patrol one day, he got to the wire, and we realized he was as drunk as a skunk! They sent him back straight away. Oh yeah, you got a fair few of them blokes that sort of withdrew into themselves...You know, they'd talk to you and that,

J.R Did they function alright as soldiers?

T.B Oh yeah, yeah, yeah... except that time he was drunk, that was the only time, either drunk or on grass, I don't think anyone knew what he was. 'Cause no-one knew where he was gettin' it! We weren't out like the Americans, so we couldn't get it, you know, so every time someone went to Vung Tau, he's probably got a mate of his to bring a heap back for him. But ah.. He was a regular soldier too, stayed in the army 20 years, but .....

J.R Was there a difference between the National Service soldiers and regulars?

T.B No, very little. Very little at all. It was quite cohesive, in that respect, yes, yes.

J.R When people were wounded, say the people who were wounded at Long Tan, did they kind of disappear from your world? Did you see them afterwards?

T.B No, they just disappeared from the world, yeah. Yeah. That was the same with anyone wounded....

J.R Was that a problem do you think?

T.B Oh, it's hard to say. I think all you thought was, oh the poor bastard's out of it, hope he's alright. I think that was - that was sort of the attitude that you got. But I mean most

people didn't - most people wanted to seem to keep - I know I did - I kept that - wanted to go up to hospital, wanted to see people - I went up to see a mate of mine, I think I shot him actually - and he was in a terrible way when I went up, and I couldn't get out of the place quick enough, and I never went back and saw him again. Ah

J.R Have you ever seen him since?

T.B Nup, nah. No, we... you just wanted to wipe him out of ya world, that was it... They were gone, that was it....

J.R Do you think that, that sort of attitude has any long term effect?

T.B I don't know... [laughing] I don't know ... No idea.

J.R What about people who were wounded and came back? Were there many of them?

T.B Anyone that came back wounded was only very very slightly wounded, so... you never had anyone come back that'd been badly wounded. It was only, you know, grazes or something like that ... So they didn't really count, you know, might only have a few stitches in their head, or bit of a sore back... So they were just fitted back in straight away ...

J.R And what about reinforcements?

T.B Well, that was another problem...It took awhile for the reinforcements to fit in, but, umm, once they had, you know, it was just a matter of fitting in, but I think it must've been pretty lonely for them for a while. And having got....

J.R It wasn't a problem on operations?

T.B Oh no, no, no, that was.. you see, all trained soldiers, so you fitted in pretty well.

J.R So individual platoons or sections didn't have their own little ways of doing things, that was hard for people to pick up? It was pretty much routine?

T.B Oh no, no, the Australian army conforms pretty well!

J.R So tactics would be .....

T.B Tactics all the same, yeah.

J.R An ambush is an ambush?

T.B Yep, she's all writ... There's only one book! Only one book....

J.R Going back to the sort of ops you were on: mostly patrolling, ambushing? That sort of thing?

T.B Well they were called search and destroy operations. So what

you usually did, you'd go out into an area and you'd say, righto, we've got to... we're going to... work through this area, someone else is working through there, etcetera... And that's the way it worked. You might, you might, you might walk as a company, you'd stick as a company for the full time, but then your section might go out to do half section patrols or something, the-,company might say, right, we'll stay here, we'll send a couple of patrols out, one go one way, one go the other way. Same with - see usually, unless there was a specific ambush put up on operations, you wouldn't go on sort of ambushes like the TAOR patrol ambushes. You'd go into a harbour position and, oh, you'd sit in your harbour position all night. But they might say, 0.K, we want you blokes to ambush that track, so a platoon might go there and the other two platoons'll just sit in the harbour, that sort of thing...

J.R Could you describe to a layman what a harbour position is?

T.B Yeah, you go into a harbour position just on last light, and you go into a circle. And the company Head Quarters are in the centre of the circle, and every platoon... One platoon goes from 12 o'clock to 4 o'clock, the other goes from 4 o'clock to 8, and the other platoon goes from 8 o'clock till 12. So you've got your full circle covered, with your Company Head Quarters in the centre. Two sections are out on the perimeter, and one section is back to give you depth. So you've 3 lots of depth to the centre, counting the... You've got a gun on 12 o'clock, 4 o'clock, 8 o'clock. So you've got a wide coverage of fire from each... But you go in, it's specifically an area where you're not to fight, it's a hide, it's virtually a hide for the night.

J.R And were ever attacked in....

T.B Not in harbour positions, no. Very hard for them to pick you up in a harbour position, unless they stumble across you. And of course you're off known - you weren't on: known tracks. You went into reasonably dense bush, vegetation....

J.R You wouldn't do that where you were resupplied?

T.B Oh no, no, you'd move away. If you got resupplied, you might get that in the afternoon and then you'd move away, you see.

J.R And this would always be in jungle or rubber or something?

T.B You wouldn't harbour up in a rubber plantation because it was too open. You'd go into thick bush, yeah. It's a good tactic, good tactics. It worked. Yeah.

J.R Did you spend most of the time patrolling in jungle, or in rubber, or

T.B Oh, most of the time we were... Phuoc Tuy was... it didn't have a real jungle, it had more thick bush. You wouldn't call it jungle. And..ah... most of our work was in this bush. We

didn't do many operations anywhere else except the east. So, you don't patrol through, um, open country. You go round open country, or if you've gotta cross it you get across it as quick as you can. All your work is in bush areas - Except if you're on convoy patrols, you know, those sorta things. 'There was one operation we did, Operation Duck, we ... the Americans were having troubles getting boats up the Saigon River, ships up the Saigon River, so what they did was put a ..... bring everything into Vung Tau. And then they transported them by road up to Saigon. And we were covering one area of the road. So we did a lot of patrolling in open country in that respect, on that operation. But that's the only one. But any operations were all done in bush country.

J.R Does the unit history - is that a pretty accurate record, to you reading it now?

T.B Oh, it's accurate, yeah. It lays out the operations, it lays out the body counts, it lays out the losses. Yeah, it's pretty accurate.... There's nothing in it, that's the whole thing with it, it's very sparse account. One operation, you get an operation might last for 12 days, and it's covered in two pages. You can't do much with it.

J.R Did you have much in the way of contacts after Long Tan, for the rest of the tour?

T.B Yeah... [laughs] I keep trying to think about this. I ... said to a fellow the other day, I had a very quiet tour, and he said "Bullshit"? So yeah, we, Ingham was the worst operation I had. Operation Ingham. [Ingham] We were right up on 'em, all the time. There was a unit there somewhere, and we were running into all sorts of things, little contacts and that, and we were hearing contacts. I think what made it so eerie, was that we went in.... We went in with 2 days or 3 days rations, and then they got us on the ... They resupplied us on tracks, to the edge of the rice paddies, and we took up - that was for the full battalion - so we resupplied ourselves and left all our stuff there, and then we walked all the rest of the stuff through to the next company. And then they took theirs and walked through the rest of them. So that was about 6 days when no-one knew where we were. No helicopters flying about, no tracks, no nothing. That was pretty eerie, on that one. And we was running into these people that just didn't have a clue we were there. And it was a pretty successful operation that way.

J.R At that time, if you talked about "success", did it mean kills? finding caches of supplies?

T.B Oh...well, I think camps and supplies was the main one, that's the only success then...

J.R Destroying supplies?

T.B Yeah, well, we found a helluva rice cache, I don't know how many tons of rice was in it, but it was a <u>huge</u> amount of rice there. That was one of their logistic positions. Um, we ran into

another camp that was half a dozen - the day after I shot that bloke - we came down off a saddle, and this bloke came down waving to us, as we come through, and we opened up on 'em, he got away, and just over further they opened up on us with the guns over there, because they were - this fella was walking towards us, but they were over there. And as soon as we opened up, they just brassed up the whole area. And when we went through there was a camp of - oh, about 6 to a dozen people there. They'd left everything. We'd wounded 1 bloke, we followed up his blood trail but he must've jumped into the river I think. We never found him. But - um - we were running into those type of things on that operation, small camps, and they're dangerous, because you don't know... All of a sudden you come out and you're onto them, before you realize what the hell's going on.

J.R Was there a feeling you wanted revenge?

T.B No, I don't think so, 'cause no-one... I don't think... I think the revenge thing was gone, the day after Long Tan. I don't think... When we went back in, yeah, that's why those blokes got blown away, because we were .. we were pretty uptight that day. But I think after that...

J.R You realized a lot more of them had died?

T.B Yeah, I don't think it went any further than that. But of course, what you did do, was become very hardened up and cold. You didn't care about blowing someone away. You know, cold bloodedly blowin' someone away I'm talking about. There was no.....

J.R Do you think that's a general reaction to having been in combat?

T.B Yeah, I think so. Think so. You don't worry very much (pause) Blow 'em away. See, and that gets back to the whole thing of dehumanising the whole Vietnamese race.. You see, yeah. We dehumanised the whole of the Vietnamese, every Vietnamese in country was dehumanised in our eyes, and we treated them as such.

J.R Did people talk, you know after you'd been there a while, did people talk about what you were doing there, or how the war was going?

T.B Nuh, No, the only... The only talk was: 55 days to go (laughs) That was the only talk. No worries about anything else.

J.R So the business about 'being short', that was right from the first battalions being in there?

T.B Short of...?

J.R You know, being short, only got so many days to go?

T.B Oh yeah, yeah, Yeah, right from the word go. Yeah they started counting down pretty early. [laughs] So many and a wake-up.

J.R Did people like being over there, or dislike it, or....?

T.B You know, it's a stupid bloo - it's a funny question, [pause] you sorta' didn't like being in there, you wished you were home. And then again you didn't wish you were home because this was a little bit different to what you'd ever had at home. And then, you know, I put in to go back again! And, ah...

J.R I think that's hard for people to understand, you know, in some ways people hated being there, but everyone wanted to go; and they didn't like being in the army back home. They said, "oh, it was better up there, but you counted every day till you got home", it's a kind of ambivalence, isn't it?

T.B Oh yeah, yeah. I think it's sort of, if you could've got home every 3 months [laughs - for a week - well you would've spent 7 or 8 years there! Would've been good.

J.R Would it have been better like that?

T.B Well, the cost would. But if blokes were thinking along those lines, you know... I think a lot of people were. There was a lot of people that weren't too, of course. But... I mean, crazies like me were! That was for sure.

J.R Did you miss home?

T.B Oh... I dunno whether I did or not. I think I did, but ... ah...

J.R You were married at that stage?

T.B Yeah, I was married, I had a farm at Ballarat, so I had a pretty substantial sort of stake in Australia. But...ah... I missed it, but I didn't... It's a hard question, that one, about 'did you like Vietnam!' Some blokes'll tell you straight out that they hated it from the word go, but with mine it's a very ambivalent sort of a thing...

J.R Did you like the excitement?

T.B Yeah, yeah, the adrenalin thing was good, yeah. That was real....

J.R Yeah, one chap I spoke to said he got hooked on the...

T.B Yeah, you got hooked on the adrenalin surge, that's for sure. Nothing like it!

J.R So how did you go when you got back? Pretty boring?

T.B Oh well, see, I made my own excitement see. I went up to New Guinea for 3 years after I got back, I was managing a plantation. When I got back I was running round The Valley [a rough suburb in Brisbane] in a pub down there, getting into all sorts of scrapes, strife, getting backed up... Bashing people up...

J.R This is the classic soldier coming back, having troubles, isn't it?

T.B Um, yeah. Umm.

J.R Did other people?

T.B A few did. We've got a few crazies running round. We've got one of our blokes that's disappeared, I think he finished up in goal, We've got another bloke went running with a bikie mob, he's just....He's in goal in Sydney now. The other bloke's disappeared altogether, off the face of the earth, we can't find him in any way. The last I got, you know sort of unofficial word that he did do about 2 or 3 years in Bogga Road [goal in Brisbane] you know, to do 2 or 3 years, that's pretty heavy, you've done something pretty violent. Yeah, So, but we can't pick him up. So there's a few of us went off the rails, yeah. [pause] I rang up his mother, wanted to know if she knew where he was, and she said "If you hear from the bastard, tell him he's got a mother!!". So she hadn't heard... You're going pretty bad when you give your mother away, aren't you! You can give other people away, but you don't give your mum away! But he's even given her away, so I don't know what's happened with him.

J.R And is that a common Vietnam thing?

T.B There're a lot of blokes gone a bit funny, a lot of blokes had problems with their family life and everything.

J.R Do you think it's combat?

T.B No, no ... It's just this tension thing. That's the thing. I think that's what it all gets back to, the tension. The 12 months of tension with no breaks, and, hating the Vietnamese. Coming to hate the Vietnamese, as a race. And I think this plays on you, these 2 factors sort of play on you.

J.R They're not emotions are they?

T.B No, they're not good emotional factors at all. And you get a lot of blokes now that absolutely hate Vietnamese, they .... like, you know, you've only gotta see the thing with the Anzac Day parade when the Vietnamese wanted to march on Anzac Day, and there was a great thing from the Vietnamese....

J.R What, in Brisbane?

T.B Yeah! Yeah the Vietnam Veterans Association wouldn't have a bar of it! They bucked like buggery.

J.R What, Vietnamese who'd been in the army?

T.B Yeah, yeah. See this thing about hating the whole of the Vietnamese race. No, they'd didn't want, they didn't want them to come in...They are doing it, but only because the RSL really stood on their dig and said, "Yep, they can", we've got Germans marching. So that's a funny one too. So all these different emotions. And the, it's very hard to try and get... to say, this is a dominant emotion in all Vietnam veterans. You can't, you can't pick up one or two, things....

J.R You haven't been to any groups, discussion groups or things like that?

T.B No, no, I've kept right away from everything. I'm a member of the VVA, but the only reason I am is because I feel that they're worth supporting.So I give me $10 every year. But I don't get involved in any of their things. Although I am, I am now, we just put in for A Writer in Residence, this thing down at the V.V.C.S - not the VVCS - the Halfway House. And I got told the other day, unofficially that it was through. So we're doin' a 14 week Writers Course there, to try and get a lot of Vietnam Veterans in it. To let out some emotion in some ways.

J.R Do you think it helps people, to talk about it, or to write about it?

T.B I think writing about it helps, yeah.

J.R There's a lot of effort in writing...

T.B Yeah, because there's a big effort in it, yeah. There's a personal effort, you've gotta really work hard at it. You don't just write it out once, 'cause you write it out once and it's just complete rubbish, so you've gotta do it over, and over; and over again. But if you do finish up with something good, you know that that's what you want to say. You know, because it's been so - you've lived with yourself for so many years and you've never been able to articulate how you feel. And you know this is... this is the problem with a lotta' blokes, they cannot articulate what it is that they are feeling. Do they feel angry? I think I feel angry. Why do you feel angry? I don't really know - because we lost? But then when they start writing, you've gotta define it to a very fine point. So, hopefully, we'll just see how much interest there is involved there. We may not get anyone interested in it.

J.R This business of the homecoming, the parade in Sydney, some battalions marched, if you came back with one, do you think that that sort of ritual homecoming was important? or would've been important if it'd been made more of?

T.B As I've said, that's another whole... I marched with... That's another really hard question.... See I marched with 6 Battalion when we come back, I remained with 'em right to the end and we marched with them, we had quite a good parade.

J.R Marched in Brisbane?

T.B Marched in Brisbane, yeah. And everyone was quite supportive. But that was before the antiwar movement had started, so

J.R When was this? '66? early '67?

T.B Early '67, yeah, no June '67, so, yeah it was quite supportive then. But they tell me that the blokes that marched otherwise - later on - that they got a terrible reception, you know, booing, and paint, and...

J.R I think there's a bit of a myth attached to some of that....

T.B Yeah, yeah - I don't know, because once I got out of the army I got right away from everything. I just didn't want to know about Vietnam, didn't want to know about the antiwar, didn't want to know what was going on, I just kept right away, and then in '69 I went up to New Guinea, and of course I isolated myself again up there. '72 I come back, it was all over. So I don't really know.

J.R Was this you, your normal way of reacting towards things, or do you think Vietnam had had a bad effect?

T.B I couldn't answer that question, with any honesty at all. I couldn't answer it. It's just - I'd always been a fairly unsettled sort of person, I'd ... I think my problem was, I was ambitious. In many ways I'm ambitious. But I left school early and I had no direction for that ambition. But I always knew I wanted to do something better than just become a working man, and own a house and a car and go to work every day. My mother used to say to me "Why don't you just get a nice job and settle down!" [laughs] But I know that wasn't... As I say, I knew I was ambitious but I had no direction. That's really made me... That's why I'm really into the academic side now, I really can channel all that energy I had, that was going to waste before. I can channel it and use it now, but I couldn't before. I had no - and I was very self conscious of this lack of education, too. You know, left school when I was 14, I mean that wasn't even enough to get you into the bloody police force or something, some ridiculous job like that!

J.R But enough to get you into the army?

T.B Yes, yeah, enough to get me into the army - And of course there was for many years when I come back, I'd look at blokes that'd were privates when I was in, and got to sergeants, and you'd say, "Oh, geez, should I've stayed in?". I mean, now, I know, you did the right thing, I was working in a pub, and I rose to the dizzy heights of .. ah. bar manager in a hotel. And these blokes'd come in, earning 3 times as much money as me, and they're working half the time, and say "Come up to the mess!" And you'd go up to the mess, and they'd make a big fuss of ya' up at the mess, and you'd think geez....

J.R It's pretty impressive, isn't it, when you get the full treatment?

T.B yeah, yeah. So there was a lot of times when I thought, maybe I should've stayed in, but I locked myself away from it all... I never really started thinking about Vietnam at all until around about '75, '76, I reckon...

J.R Why do you think that happens... 'Cause people, lots of people have said to me, of course, and someone in the VVCS said to me it's a recurrent thing, he thought in all wars, that people take about 10 years to sort of, get it out. It goes round and round, and then they get so they can cope with it...

T.B I think that's probably what it was, that I didn't want to know about it before. But then when I started to look at things, and

started to become a little bit interested, and started to find out all the bullshit, and the lies, that we'd been told, and how we'd been conned, the whole country....

J.R Why, did you start reading things about Long Tan?

T.B Yeah, no, well, just reading about the war, and it was up in New Guinea I did a lot of reading, cause there was nothing else to do, and I became quite interested in education. And I started to look at things a lot more than I would've, you know, where I'd just pick up a book and throw it down....No, you'd become interested, and look into it, and I started to want to know why we'd ... You know, what... Well, this is what they told us. And this is what I went away, thinking it was a good idea at the time. But that's not right! Someone was ... pulling my leg! They're having me on! And I become quite angry about it - This is the thing, a lot of Vietnam Vets, they keep saying, 'the anger', this anger thing... And I think it was about 1975 that that anger with me really started to surface, and I became so disgusted that we'd been conned. You know, that's the thing that really hurt me, they conned me! And I hate being conned by people.

J.R But once you know you've been conned, does that make you feel a bit better?

T.B Um... No, I don't think it does.

J.R Have you still got the anger?

T.B Oh yes, yeah, very much so, very much so.

J.R I notice one of the reviews of your book said, this is an angry book.

T.B yeah, yeah, and I think it's probably getting worse. Cause if I get a chance to shove something up the army's nose, I'm not going to hesitate. I'm not going to be like Frank, pull back way outta the way, I'm going to be the opposite way! I've gotta' be careful of my biases, you see, that's my problem now. I've gotta' be careful of any biases the other way.

J.R But there's 2 schools of thought on biases, aren't there, you know, if you have no biases you have no values, do you?

T.B Yeah [laughs] Don't talk about that, I'm just doing an assignment on values and I'm going round and round in circles....

J.R It's awful, isn't it, everyone does that essay...! I tend to think you're better to jump in and state your biases and go for it. It makes much better reading.

T.B Yeah, yeah, I think so.

So yes that ...

J.R Do you think people get over that - See I'm really interested in this idea of false consciousness, which seems to me to fit perfectly to the veteran's experience. Especially the Australian veterans, after talking to them, more than the Americans: The Americans seem to be able to grass the nettle and to say, we were had, we were used, and it was all for nothing, whereas the Australians seem to still want to say, "Oh yeah, it was for something, we did a good job, we weren't anybody's fool." And that seems to me to be keeping really their eyes closed.

T.B Yeah, this is one of the things that I said on an interview about the atrocity business. And I said the thing about it is - and it actually relates to the whole thing - is that we should be man enough to admit the mistakes of the past. 'Cause if you don't admit the mistakes of the past, you're not going to have anything to look forward to in the future, are you, So, you've gotta' look back with honesty, about these things. And that really goes back to the whole thing. But while we're still looking back in these hairy-fairy ways, I don't think anything's going to come out of Vietnam as far as I'm concerned.

J.R No, no... and somebody was telling me.. I said, what did you think the army got out of Vietnam, and he said, that as far as he knows, at places like ADFA, where they're training people, that it's been expunged, it doesn't exist, they don't want to know about it. I don't know if that's true.

T.B No, no I don't think the army got much out of it. In fact, you know, the army weren't real keen to go in there in the first place,

J.R It disrupts the training schedules ...

T.B They weren't keen on National Service, they weren't keen on.. they weren't keen on people going there. The army would've actually liked o have kept it to the advisors, they weren't even keen on the advisors, 'cause it was taking too many blokes out of Australia.

J.R When you think of it, the most they ever had there... compared to 1st and 2nd World Wars, it was peanuts wasn't it?

T.B Peanuts, oh yeah. That's why we've gotta look at this international relations stream. You know, I'm sure that they... I'm sure that the army, didn't want to go there, after their experiences with 1 Battalion they - ah, they said, we've gotta get out of this. But of course they couldn't get out because of the political situation. Then they said, Phuoc Tuy! Beautiful! Beautiful little area down here, Phuoc Tuy! Quiet, flat, nice little port, everything, get out of there real quick. Let's go down here. Because you know, as far as, they weren't _serious, because they never even took over control of the province, they were still working under the ARVN direction, province chief, the American CORDS fellow. They had no control over anything... It was a lost cause, right from the very start. Taking over Phuoc Tuy was a lost cause...

J.R It all depends how you... This is what it seems to me, the whole thing about talking about success, is how do you define it? What are you trying to do? And some of them have such limited sort of objectives, they could quite honestly say yes, we said we'd do this and we did it! And that's what even the soldiers were saying, they were told, you're gotta patrol and kill anyone you find. And they say, we were terrific at patrolling and we were terrific at killing, so we've done that.....

T.B And that's success. But I mean, no, we didn't stop anything, we didn't stop a thing. I come across a thing there the other day, a 1969 or 70 - it's what I was saying to you about these 3 provinces, and the Fifth Division working in the 3 - whenever they wanted something they just come down and took it. The only people we had on the run, were the D445. And they were only a provincial battalion of 500 men. Well, Jesus, surely 3 battalions can keep 500 men on the hop! They'd be pretty slack 3 battalions if they couldn't keep a lousy ill equipped 500 men on the hop! So where's the trumpet blowing in that? But I mean....

J.R But soldiers like you at the time didn't have that sort of picture, did you?

T.B No, no.

J.R And most people have never gone any further than what they experienced there.

T.B No, no. That's right. D445 was it; we kept them on the hop; so therefore we were successful in our operations. And they don't want to think about the 5th Division wandering around Long Khanh and Bien Hoa and going over to the Parrots Beak and doing all sorts of things.. And I was just going to say, that Hat Dich, 5 battalion, must've been the 2nd tour, 1969 or '70, ran into a group of 300 at Hat Dich. And out of 57 blokes they had 1 killed and 37 wounded. And they had to get 'em out real quick. And what happens to the Vietcong? Like the Vietcong chopped 'em to pieces, they walked all over 'em. That's how scared of us they were. That was in 1970. Their main force battalions - whenever they wanted something they just came in and took it. No problem. No problem. So those fellas', those fellas near Dat Do that we hit, they were definitely main force units, they were definitely 5th Division blokes. And they didn't worry about us, they had their machine guns in the trees, they had 'em dug in, and they weren't moving....! I mean we've got tracks comin' at 'em and they're not movin'! So how scared of us are they? They were coverin' the withdrawal of all of the rest of them. They were there to die if they wanted to.

J.R Did Australian soldiers respect the enemy?

T.B Oh yeah, I think you'll find that most of them did, yeah, Any infantrymen did, yeah.

J.R More than you respected the ARVN?

T.B Oh yeah, the ARVN had no respect at all.

J.R Crazy sort of way to fight isn't it! To respect your enemies...

T.B Yeah, and hate your allies, yeah!

J.R And how do other veterans react to you, for the work you've been doing?

T.B Not good. Not good. I get a bit of flak.

J.R Leave it all alone?

T.B Oh yeah, leave it all alone. Well my mates are on the leave it all alone kick....

J.R Why, because they're sick of you asking them

T.B No, I don't ask them any, I got through all my own research, but.... Three of them, I've got three good mates, they said, don't worry, we won't sack you, you've got us forever. But I know there's a few of the others who're saying why, does this really matter so much to you Terry? Why don't you just leave it go? I probably am a bit obsessed with it.

J.R When people say, they want to forget, to leave it all in the past, do you think that's genuine.

T.B I dunno. I think they only want to forget about it because it's gone; it's done; and we lost! And better to just leave it go at that...

J.R I'm in two minds about it. For some people, it was just 1 year in their life, and if nothing much happened to them, well, perhaps it was no more important..... Or, perhaps they're hiding something...

T.B I'm... I now... the thing that gets me now is that I tend to look on the broader side of it now, and I keep saying, look we've gotta know about these things, and we've gotta really ... that's why I believe we've gotta really lay out cards on the table, of how it was and what happened, for the future - Yeah - What did it mean, what was it for - Let's find out really, how we performed, what we did, and, where we went wrong. So that we don't make the same mistake again.

J.R Frank's line, in the revised form, is that it was doomed from the start. The way it was set up it wouldn't work.

T.B And that's why the Americans went in, because they thought, with their technology, that they could pluck it from the fire. But I mean, you know, when we start looking at political science, and we start looking at, you know, war as the last political act; how can you prop up something that's not there to be

propped up, something that's not strong enough.... So you went in there, and the Yanks went in there, propping up this corrupt, illegitimate regime. And we still haven't learnt our lessons, we're still doing it in the El Salvador... I mean this is the thing, you can't beat people who are motivated. You just can't beat 'em...

J.R If they're motivated, and on their home ground...

T.B And we went in as an army of occupation. There's no doubt about it, we were classed by the Vietnamese as an army of occupation. Broinowski, was saying to peter Charlton not long ago, that he was down in Vung Tau, and he said, the animosity down in Vung Tau! was absolutely.... brrr!

J.R What, just lately?

T.B Yeah. Well I went there last year (1986), and I could feel it. I couldn't put my finger on anything, but I could feel the animosity towards me. I could see people walk past me, you know, sorta' get 3 or 4 paces past me, say to their mate, "Errh - Uc dai loi", [uc dai loi - Australian] that sort of thing. I went around in the markets, to buy a hat, and I couldn't .... Just nothing. No smile, no... Haven't got one.

J.R Did you get that feeling when you were there, in the war?

T.B Yeah, I got that feeling.

J.R I got it, especially in Saigon. People'd spit as you went past.

T.B Well Vung Tau was the same. It wasn't ever nice down there. They tell me it got worse.

TAPE 2 ENDS

T.B .... where we could say, we've got to follow the Americans, because we're only there as a small force. And, I mean, if the Americans wanted to pull out, they just said "we're goin' to pull out", and that was it. But the Australians couldn't, we had to follow along. But, by the same token, if anything went wrong, we didn't have to blame ourselves either. We could ... we always had someone to blame it on. So.. we had that psychological cushion, that's for sure. And we're still hanging on to it, we're still not letting it go.

J.R It's really been swept under the carpet, the whole commitment.

T.B Yep. It'll come out soon, someone'll get it all together, and bring it out, which we hope... Hopefully anyway. What questions did we have?

J.R What did you think about the political situation in Australia when you got back? Were you aware of any hostility towards you as a Vietnam veteran?

T.B No. That's one of the things that I've never encountered, never encountered that at all. So, and as 1 said, I didn't go, I went to New Guinea in '69, umh, and it wasn't until '68, after Tet, that the animosity started to get reasonably strong. I never encountered any of it at all, none.

J.R And what about - were your family supportive when you came back?

T.B Um... They thought I was a bit of a lunatic, and I think they were glad when I left!

J.R More of a lunatic than when you left?

T.B I think so! I was in a pretty strange way... But Dad and all that being in the army, they realised that you have gotta'... anyone coming back from active services got a, great amount of adjustment to do?

J.R Did your father ever talk about it with you?

T.B No. No, he was dead against it. He didn't want me to go to Vietnam. He was one of these liberal - thinking people - Liberal, I mean as in Liberal Party, not liberal thinking, he was very conservative thinking. He was a Liberal thinking person that believed in National Service, he said, oh, national service was good, we should have it, we owe something to our society. But, He was very, very confused about the situation in Vietnam, he didn't want me to go because he didn't think it was right even in those early days. He said there's something not right about it, I can't put my finger on it, but I, I feel we should look into it a lot more before we commit ourselves to these sorts of things. And I can remember the first thing he said when I came back, was, "Well, what do you think now? Should we be there?" And I ...[laughs] the old track, I mean.., you're not going to admit that you've done the wrong thing, are you? So I can remember saying to him, "oh yeah, we should be there, should be there, keeping the communists - aggressor from the north - out of the

road, yeah". But I wasn't very convincing to anyone, even to myself. Ah... So, they were very supportive, always have been supportive to me, all through my life, so... I was lucky in that respect. And no anti war ... feelings from anyone.

J.R And were you in the army for a while? After you came back?

T.B 18 months, I think yeah. Until I was kicked out! Or 'asked to leave'.

J.R Were you a problem in the army when you were back here?

T.B Yes. So I believe, yes, Well thinking back on it now, yeah, I was a problem, 'cause we, we became... At first when we came back we went on leave, I think we had something like 10 weeks leave, an enormous amount of time.

J.R Had enough money?

T.B Yeah, had enough money. And then when I came back our company was sent to Canungra. So we were down at Canungra for 6 months, and it was beautiful. We had... we were only the demonstration company, we were living in tents, virtually the same environment as when we were in Vietnam, we had no army bullshit, we never went on parades, we didn't do any locker inspections, or guards, or any formal, army, military...

So I signed on again, I signed on for another 3 years! And went to Townsville, well, everything just hit the fan then. Because .... it was formal guards, locker inspections, all sorts of things were happening. And we got back up to the battalion there wasn't one officer left from the battalion before, they were all officers and not one of 'em had a ribbon, there was not one of 'em 'ad been to Vietnam. This was the army turnover, trying to get everyone with their little bit of combat glory. And of course... ah... I don't think it was just me, I think there was a lot-of other fellas' were in the same boat, we weren't taking their training and everything seriously, we were just sort of And I was told a few times that if you fellows aren't careful there's going to be young fellas leading old fellas - young soldiers leading old soldiers in this battalion shortly. So just pull your finger out and just do the right thing. And there was all sorts of things like.. um... I was - we were getting a lot of deserters at that stage, too, blokes going AWOL.. Ah... One time they were having the battalion Ball. And they said everyone to the battalion Ball. But they wouldn't let us wear civvies, they made us wear polyesters, and I said, I'm not going if I have to wear polyesters, I'm sick of bloody army .... getting around in uniform all the time, I go out for a night out and I've gotta wear my army uniform! So I wouldn't go. That was another one, you know. All those little things started to come in... And... um, I wasn't very popular. I had a fight in town, and I busted a bloke up pretty badly, and the police came and got me and then the M.P's came and got me, and then the RSM fronted me up,.... That didn't go over too well with him, because he'd been telling all these blokes, "Ah, any of these civvies, we'll just give 'em... I don't care what you do as long as you win!" was one of the things he told the battalion at

one stage....! And he said, "you kicked that bloke"! and I said "Yeah!" And he said "That's terrific! You kick a bloke! What sort of a man are you?" I said you told us, don't worry how you win, as long as you win! No, all these sort of little things built up over a period...

J.R Were you hoping for another tour in, Vietnam?

T.B Oh yes, I was looking forward to going. Yeah. But I think I did become a bit worried towards the end of my time with 'em, I was a bit worried about what the battalion was going to be like. You know, you're thinking back on the old battalion, this was the same battalion but it was a new battalion. I think I become a little bit ... I went off it. By the time I was out, I was right off with going back with that battalion. Yeah.

J.R And so although you'd signed up again, you didn't do another 3 years?

T.B No, um.... I'd done a sergeant's course, I was due to be made up to sergeant, doing my military law, that I had 6 months in which to veto my re-engagement. So that's what I did, I vetoed my re-engagement, and that was accepted and I got out. So I finished up doing 32 instead of 3.

J.R And then you went up to New Guinea?

T.B Um, after about 6 months or something... I was a buildier's labourer here in Brisbane and then went to New Guinea.

J.R And it wasn't then until some years later that you started reading about Vietnam, and thinking about it?

T.B It was probably after The Fall - after '75.

J.R Was that a significant sort of event, do you think, for people who'd been there?

T.B I don't know... I don't know. I can remember feeling quite devastated by it in one way, and elated in another, if you can get those contradictions.

J.R It was a sort of shocking thing to watch on the T.V....

T.B Yeah... you kept getting all this, "Ah, those dirty, sneaking communists", and then when you start to look at it, they weren't dirty, sneaking communists, they were just people the same as you and me, fighting for what they believed in, they fought better! That was it, so....There was nothing sneaky about the attack on... ah... the final push. There was nothing sneaky about it. Nothing sneaky at all. And anyway, we're all supposed to use ... the military's 'sposed to be sneaky, in many ways, aren't they. Tactical advantage, is what you call it.

J.R So, did you become involved, as you started thinking about it

more, with veteran's groups?

T.B No. I've never kept any contacts with veterans groups. But did always try and keep in contact with a few fellas', from the Company here. But that was all, no.... nothing structural. I went to Anzac Day once, about 10 years ago, and that's the first time I've ever been and the last. Not interested in any formal structurals. Formally structured organisations.

J.R And what did you think about the Agent Orange controversy?

T.B Ah.... I became quite interested in it when I realised that they'd also... That was another thing they'd been lying to us through their teeth, about it, and that was one of the things... I was very, I was quite devastated that they should actually do something like that, um, it's not really a weapon of war, is it, it's not the way that you should fight a war.

J.R It was used as a weapon of war up there....

T.B It was used, that's what I mean, it was used as a weapon of war, but it should never've been, it was - ah - no I was actually devastated by the thought of them doing that, and then I was even more devastated by the thought that they didn't care, they didn't know, and they didn't care about who was copping it. You know, their own blokes, our blokes, there was no... They just thought, "this is a good idea".

J.R Were you aware of it up there?

T.B Not at all. None at all. Never thought of spraying, or herbicides, until it came out.... what, '73?

J.R And did you see any sprayed areas up there?

T.B Um. No, I've been trying and trying to think about this... Saw a few planes, and, but, but: the whole thing I can remember is, the side of the mountain started to die, in huge areas. And they told us that it was B52's, 'd raided the thing. But the whole side of it died. Now, I never went up into that devastated area, but whether it was spraying there or not, or whether it was B52's, I don't know. But as I say, nobody even knew about it at that stage.

J.R No. People weren't as aware of chemicals then, were they?

T.B No, no. We didn't use them at all, no. We didn't do any spraying on the wire or anything, but some of them poor buggers did. Some of them were actually spraying the wire, using this... And that's what, again, the lying, the incompetence, that's what really get in my craw about it.

J.R And what about the VVA, do you think they took the right sort of line about Agent Orange? Do you think they've been effective?

T.B Oh, I think it's the only line they could've taken, when the

RSL threw them aside. You know, it's the only line they could've taken. The thing with the VVA that comes out, it's so.... so splintered! There's no cohesiveness with the VVA. The VVA are fighting amongst themselves, they've got these little splinter groups, some people - Vietnam Veterans - are aligned with the RSL, you've got others aligned with the VVA. You've got the Vietnam Legion, you've got all you splinter groups. You've got some people who're ex-Vietnam veterans, who wouldn't spit on the VVA. They think they're just a bunch of radical ratbags! Because they wanta' follow the old structure of the RSL. And then you've got others that hate the RSL. So it's really divisive, the whole thing.

J.R Yes.... Do you think that the Vietnam veteran has a particular image? Do you think you can talk about 'the' Vietnam veteran?

T.B No, not really, I think we're all "individuals"! I think we've all individuals....

J.R .... In your own right?

T.B Yeah, and it's all affected us in different ways, our world views are so very different, you can't even get 2 people to sit down and agree with what Vietnam was about, so, it....ah.

J.R Do you think there's any sort of coherent image presented in the media?

T.B Only of a nutter! That seems to be the only image that comes across, of a nutter. It doesn't come across as a .... You know....

J.R You've seen the recent T.V series, Sword of Honour and Vietnam? What did you think of them?

T.B Yes, Sword of Honour I didn't even bother 'about. I watched little bits of it and just couldn't watch it....

J.R Why, not realistic?

T.B Oh no, it was just completely out of it's tree! Just a bad image all round, of the whole thing. The Vietnam series over all, I thought it was the best thing to come out of Vietnam, except for the Vietnam scenes! Whoever done the research on the Vietnam aspects of it, did not do his research on it properly, and it came over as a.... um... something that it wasn't, it was completely ridiculous to portray that, in the television series, as Australian involvement in Vietnam. But I thought overall, with the Australian side and everything, it was very good.

J.R But you didn't think it portrayed the actual soldiers' role?

T.B No, no the soldiers' role, that was very badly done. Lack of research on somebody's part.

J.R Or perhaps too much research in the wrong places?

T.B Yeah, he was 'sposed to be an ex-officer, but of course, they always go for the officers, you see, without going for the diggers, which is a bad failing, so, whether it was only, whether it was the storyline, and the technical difficulties that they may've had, I don't know, but it was portrayed.... very, very weak portrayal of what conditions and that were like in Vietnam. But the overall series I thought good.

J.R And have you read many books, Australian books, about it? Novels or...?

T.B About Vietnam? No, no...Not novels, in fact there hasn't been that many out, only lately, there's only been the ... a few academic ones, and Peter King's, which is probably the best, but there's nothing, very little from the Australian angle out on it. The couple of novels that I have looked at, haven't been worth reading, to my mind, anyway.

J.R So do you think - to ask the big question - do you think Vietnam has had an impact on Australia? Historically?

T.B I feel that it has, yeah. I'm not really sure how deep the impact has gone. It's definitely had an impact on the way the young people look at the likes of, ah, foreign wars, and, um, responsibility to the state. Now I don't think you would ... I go to High Schools sometimes having talks, and I say to the kids about National Service, and they look at me absolutely horrified, they say, "You can't do that!! They can't do that!!". Two years in the army, whether you like it or not, that absolutely horrifies kids....

J.R What do you think about it?

T.B I'm, I'm a little bit the other way. I'm not against National Service, but I believe that it should be a blanket, if it's going to be National Service it's gotta' be blanket. There can be no such thing as selective national service, so therefore I don't feel in the same boat as everyone else, the country won't get enough out of it, if we only have.... To have a blanket call-up you'd only have 6 months at the most. And that's not enough to do anything, so.... um.... I feel it's not something that should be just pushed aside, and say no, we shouldn't have it. If they had a cohesive - that's the main thing with it - is to have a cohesive program, so that people doing National Service don't look on it as a bloody waste of time, don't look on it as 2 years out of their life, or one year out of their life. So that at least they know they're doing something for their country! And I 'spose I'm old fashioned in that sort of respect, but if ... they could um, sort of bring National Service in like the Peace Corps or somewhere where you go up to New Guinea and you're actually doing something productive. But to have people sitting in the army picking up cigarette butts and painting stones, to my way of thinking is... useless.

J.R And do you think Vietnam's been largely forgotten?

T.B Oh yeah, I think so. I don't think anyone's ... Although ...

Yeah, I think largely it's been forgotten, the problem it affected a fair few lives, there's a 50,000 people went to Vietnam, so you've got those families and that there, but within the context of Australian society it's only a minute number.

J.R The people of my generation, it was our war, wasn't it, we remember it.... But I'm wondering if it had much long term impact, after it was over?

T.B I don't think so. It's not like America, where it affected almost every second family. You could say every second family in America was almost affected by it. But in Australia it was very minimal, and, I mean, you talk to people now, to kids at school, and most of 'em wouldn't know a Vietnam veteran, where, when we come... When my father come back from the War, everyone of that age group knew someone who was in the Second World War, in some capacity or not. But I mean Vietnam, you find hundreds and hundreds of kids who wouldn't know, "Vietnam? No, I've never had anyone in my family in the army". So you've, got that big gap between....

J.R I've got a quote out of an American book that said "The Vietnam war would never leave the-United States. The soldiers would bring it back with them like an addiction". And there seems to be that sort of feeling in the States, that the war had a big impact on each individual, and that they did, they bring it back, they can't get away from it. But do you think that's....?

T.B Well, I think for the same reason that I'm not sure whether it'll happen here in Australia, because of the minimal amount overall of people that were affected by it...

J.R There's not a critical mass...

T.B No, no, and I don't think we're taking any notice, you know, we've forgotten all the lessons of Vietnam, If there were any lessons 've come out of it, I think we've forgotten them all, and we're not looking at it in - which we were talking about before - we're not prepared to look at it in a positive sort of way ... And by "positive" I mean looking at the negative aspects as well, in an honest, positive way. And so we're not ... There's not going to be much controversy about it, there's not going to be much thought, much throwing about of ideas about it. It's just going to stay a fairly dull lesson in the history books for most people.

J.R It'll be interesting to see what this conference's like, won't it?

T.B Yeah, very interesting....

J.R Some people said they thought it'd be a riot!

T.B Yes, I think in the long term there has been an impact. And I think that impact is with the younger people, on this 'freedom of the individual' thing. I think....

J.R Things change so quickly, don't they. I mean 10 years ago we were sort of 'leftish', overall, and you never would've thought we'd have this big shift... and yet it's all happened so quickly....

T.B .... to the right, and it's very pronounced too. I 'spose we can all put it down to economics....

J.R Well, we might finish there.

INTERVIEW ENDS