BILL HARRISON

J.R Right, if you could just tell me a little bit about your background, and how you got into the army? Where you grew up, why you joined up?

B.H Oh alright, let's see. I was born in Cronulla in N.S.W, my Dad was a motor mechanic, my mother home duties, we lived in Cronulla until I was 8 years old. We then moved to South Australia, we moved to South Australia 'cause my Dad's twin brother-fin actual fact lived in South Australia. What prompted the move in actual fact, was the fact that Grandmother, Dad's mother, living in Sydney at that time died, and he had no other, well I think because they're twin brothers they were pretty well simpatico. And they, they'd gone to war together, themselves in the 2nd World War, you know. My Dad in actual fact was a RSM of, um, probably background information, well he led me into the military life I suppose. But, yes, moved to South Australia, I went to both, what, Primary and High Schools there. I suppose what with Dad being an ex—military member, there is always some type of memorabilia around the place, so, there is always the army influence in the household. Dad always used to go off to Anzac Days which I abhorred, mainly because they turned out to be you know, a booze-up with the boys, and you don't fully appreciate those sort of things until you go through some experiences yourself. But, so I was well aware, I was probably aware of such an organisation as the army at a very early time of life. When I was at High School I joined the, joined the Brighton High School Cadets, that's the High School I went to and, oh I progressed from the rank of private there which is, I suppose they were based on infantry units, I progressed from private to cadet under officer, in actual fact. I suppose that was a major influence, as far as thinking well, you know, this is not bad) I enjoy the types of things we were doing when we went on cadet camps and things like this, and besides which you had the contact with the military service.....

I joined the army when I was, when I was about 18, and that was 1967, in January 30th I think it was. I hadn't had much outside work experience, with the exception of say work over the Christmas period, the holiday periods and things like this. That consisted mainly of working with my Dad, at Claridge Motors in Adelaide, just doing the sort of apprentice type jobs around the place, cleaning up, detailing cars, doing a bit of mechanical work. I was quite used to mechanic work, cause my Dad in actual fact was a, a backyard mechanic also, people used to come to him all the time, I usually end up having to hold the spanners or; you know, hold this, or hold that, or be the unwilling victim when the car fell down to sort of get under and get that. I really think that was the lead up to it so to speak. I think mainly it was the cadet influence.

J.R So you wanted to be a mechanic and in the army or?

B.H The mechanic didn't come along until later, I, my main thing was to join the army for some reason. Probably important time to ask, because at my time of life now, you look back and you think what may have influenced it, you think of some of the songs that are on the radio now, because Vietnam's becoming a real big issue. When I was in Vietnam it was a big issue in another way, now it seems we're all searching for the good part of it [Yes, yes, yes] when then it was all the bad part, and that's each to his own discretion as to what they think of it, but..

J.R But were you aware of Vietnam at in say 67 when you ..

B.H I was at school, yes, we were very aware as High School... students and Leaving and Leaving Honours, especially being in cadets, you know, it was a, it was a very high profile action that was going on. Probably wouldn't be unfair to say that because we had cadre, cadre staff which were you know, actual [regular] serving members, who had had influence and you know it was sort of like when you're on a camp sit around and tell yarns, well that's what it became in those years there.

J.R You had training staff who'd been in Vietnam? Did you?

B.H I can't remember seeing Tiny wear ribbons, I really can't, I remember him as being the warrant officer around the place, that would be untrue to say I remember that. I think as all young boys do, I suppose we were looking at adventure, and that appeared to be adventure at the time, 'cause being brought up on all the good stories of war, 2nd World War and the mateship and things like that, you try to associate with that as a, as a person, and you hope it happens to you because it all sounds like good fun, and as I said it's cowboys and Indians but in a different way.

J.R Yes, yes. Did your father ever tell bad stories about the 2nd World War?

B.H Yes, he told some bad ones, only when he was with the blokes, when they'd had a couple of drinks, other than that it was the, the veneer was always there, they only really got serious after they started to get maudlin, I suppose which would have been the alcohol, I assume. But, you're aware of it, they weren't as very evident as what the supposed good times were.

J.R But anyway, you joined up, after you left school?

B.H After I left school. I joined up just to join the army, had applied to army apprentices school and OCS, my academic prowess however, left a little bit to be desired. I suppose you don't realize, again looking back, how much of a slug and how much wasted time there was in those years.

I didn't join up with the intention of doing anything except possibly getting an apprenticeship to become a carpenter or bricklayer. The bricklayer aspect or thought came from a family friend, it seemed to be a pretty good job. I was looking for a trade because that seems to offer security, not only within but when you get out, because you don't know when you get in as to how long you're going to stay there, and I suppose at that age, you're pretty selfish too, in so much as you don't know where you're going, but you'd like to have something, if you're going to put some of your own time in.

The carpentry in actual fact was a hangover from my Dad in a lot of ways, he used to do a bit of carpentry around the place, but my grandfather, whom I never knew, he was killed on a motor bike accident, he was a carpenter and his father before him, so it seemed to run in the family. In actual fact both my cousins, on my uncle's, my uncle's sons, are both carpenters, and I think my cousin Kathy, who's a female, she married a carpenter, and there seems to be that thing. I've done a bit of the family tree in actual fact and it's quite surprising, names come up and so do professions, right back to 1743 in Derbyshire in England, that's quite interesting.

But, after talking to the bloke who was the bricklayer, he said "No, no, you're stupid, electronics is the go, look at all these transistors stuffy and he said "this is going to be the way ahead." It never really caught my imagination except possibly during physics at school, where you learn about voltaic cells and photos, photo dyes, and your basic electronics, which I found interesting but certainly nothing I thought I would take on as a career. I went along to the army, recruiting, so to speak and they put me through this high test and they said I had a very good mechanical ability. I suppose that's, might be only a hangover from my work with my father, because I'd already been indoctrinated in that, I can't remember if I really wanted to, but you know I was there and as I said, it was a case of pick up the spanner and do it.

So, he said "do it", I went along they did it, and they said I was okay for mechanical work, and I suggested that I would like to try electronics, they said "it's very hard". And there was a procedure then, they call corps enlistment, and Dad put it on me that I shouldn't go in unless they gave me what I wanted, so I indicated that I wanted to corps enlist, and that means to say, unless I got into R.A.E.M.E, into electronics training, I wouldn't be signing up. Anyway, it worked out that way that even though I probably put up a couple of stumbling blocks myself while I was at basic training at Kapooka, for instance, applications for OCS came up, and I applied for OCS there and I was then knocked back because I had previously applied and been knocked back on my academic qualifications, which really hadn't improved that much.

J.R Did they have a complete cut off thing with academics in those days, that you had to have matriculated in particular subjects, or at a certain level or?

B.H (talking together) yes, you had have the, shown the ability that you could um, whereas RMC ... [it's on actual results isn't it] Yes it is, a friend of mine... [but OCS was done on aptitudes was it?] More so, yes. they perceived you had the ability to go ahead, and they perceived I didn't, which is something of history. Do I answer the question, as well as you want?

J.R Yes, yes, yes. Anyway, so you've joined up, you're in basic training at Kapooka, and then you go on to corps training after that?

B.H That's right, you do your, I think it's 10 weeks at Kapooka, and you get drafted out, and it's quite surprising 'cause they still do it, buses arrive here at RAEME Training Centre on Tuesdays and phoof, you're landed on the ground, and there they are like fresh beans in a cornfield, they stick out, they really do, 'cause they swing their arms at shoulder height still, and all that sort of thing, strange to look back and think you were one of those. I spent I think it was 3 months at RAEME Training Centre, prior to going on my course.

J.R And RAEME Training Centre was here at

B.H (?) Mmmm, where RAEME Training Centre up the road here, where they, I was enrolled in what they call an adult trade training system, and I was paneled for 25/67 A-tech course, or whatever they call it now, radio. And for the first 3 months, as I said we spent a lot of time on GDs it's quite surprising now, up behind the mess there, the OR's mess, one end there's a trellis with, what do they call them, with passion fruit on it, in actual fact I was the bloke who dug in that trellis and [it's still there] Amusing story, we were sitting there, 'cause you sort of become autonomous because of the class you are, so you only really mix with your class mates, so all the blokes who came in for 25/67, we were all in a little batch, and I was there digging a hole with a bloke, and we saw, having a bit of belated summer, about May I think, I remember we had our shirts off and we were sitting beside these holes, after we'd dug it out and this old bloke came wandering up and sat down in the hole with us and started talking to us and "How's it going here boys" and I thought, that's quite surprising, he sort of walked off and then, it wasn't until a few days later I found out it was Colonel Blundell, in actual fact, the bloke who ran the place. You know, I didn't believe that a CO would sit down in the hole with us, 'cause when you're at recruit training, a corporal is God, and a sergeant is even larger than life1and you know, boy oh boy, to have a colonel, or somebody come down and talk to you, you..

J.R Anyway, at this stage, did you like the army, was it what you expected?

B.H Up to that stage, all the training had been infantry oriented

which was what I was used to in cadets, and so therefore it, well lived up to expectations.

J.R Was it tougher than you expected? Or easier or?

B.H What, the training? [Yes] What at Kapooka? [At Kapooka] In actual fact I had problems coming to terms with the training at Kapooka, I was obviously overweight because I couldn't run the two miles or what it was without getting a stitch. You spent ten weeks there, I know towards week six or seven, I realized that I had to put in, and I used to go down to the, what do they call those things, step-ins, we used to have to lift yourself up with your hands and turn yourself over and touch your toes on the bar and back down again, so it's almost a chin up and then roll over. And you had to have a number of those, and I found I wasn't capable of meeting those sort of things, I was getting better on the runs. But, how can you put it...

J.R What happened to people? I mean even though you went through medical tests there must have been people who were sort of medically fit but weren't sort of very physically fit, and ten weeks isn't that long to sort of go from, you know, not being able to run half a mile to being able to run two miles.

B.H (talking together) No, you've really got to push it. Well see the tests have changed too, I can remember we had to do a 30 mile route march, that was towards the end of it, that was an overnighter starting at dusk I think it was and marching through the night because it was cooler. Because I was in, as I said I was in there in January and Kapooka in January is not funny, January/February. I really cannot remember the dropout rates or anything like that and whether or not anybody was ah, eased out because of medical restriction. I'm sure if it happens now it would have happened then. And I wouldn't be surprised if that was the case. That is the sorting out period, there is also a sorting out period when you can do, RA-EME training centre, I think it's 16 weeks IET training, 16 weeks into it you've made a decision whether or not you [what is it, IEC?] IET [IET, right] Initial Employment Training, IET ......

J.R That's alright it's just the person types this up has to figure it out.
But it was okay the basic training and you got through the physical things?

B.H Mmm, I did.

J.R And did you like it?

B.H Yes, I enjoyed it. Ah,... I was well schooled for it because of my years in cadets, which was what, five years in cadets. I knew all the basics, I learned a bit, I probably improved my skills, as far as field craft and things like that, that really

could only be tested, or practiced, every two weeks in a year, when you were in cadets, so this became, this became part of life, it was great.

I only had one unpleasant time, because, bear in mind my platoon was the National Service period. I think out of a platoon of 30, some 20 of them were national servicemen, they were older...

J.R You were all trained together at ..... (talking together)

B.H They were older, they may have been 20 odd, 22, 23. Whereas the regulars were pretty young, 18, 19, pretty raw I think. So there was a bit of father—son relationships in some cases, like) I've got a problem/how do you sort it out? Not in that sort of aspect, but they would come along and tell you, they handled it pretty well some of the blokes, 'cause they're more mature and they could probably see the light at the end of the tunnel. And I suppose their light was Vietnam, if they were looking for that thing or not looking for it.

J.R Was there much difference or any difference in attitude between the national servicemen and the regulars? Was there griping by the ... (talking together)

B.H Oh a regular's, a regular's green, as in, oh gungho go, go, go, to the national serviceman, you had to do it. He wasn't really interested in doing it, otherwise he would have joined up as a reg, he had other aspirations. But they had a, a nonchalant air as in acceptance, and they did it, and they did it I suppose with a great deal of finesse, they were rather cool about it, if you understand the terminology from those days, rather cool, yes. I don't think it really worried them, they just did it and accepted it and, you could probably use the word blasé, some were, some weren't. You remember some of the funny instances there.I can remember there was a Lieutenant Pritchard, a real pig of a man, to my way of thinking anyway, and, I can't remember where the instances, but he had a go at this nasho bloke about something, Bill Wright I think his name was, and he said "Alright Sir, my turn will come", whereas I was worried about corporals, him giving a mouthful to the officer didn't seem to worry him. He was a country lad, knew his way around and it was quite surprising because he was on the grenade range, and we were throwing grenades and Bill Wright threw his grenade and we all went through the drills, and we heard this yell from the sentry box at the back, the sentry box is up and it is armoured and it was only a little slit whereby the supervising officer can look through to make sure the practice is running safely, and he flew out, the officer, Pritchard flew out the back of the sentry box, probably up about 20 odd feet.What had happened was a grenade splinter had come through and hit him, somewhere on the face I remember, 'cause we walked up to him and he said "Ooh" out, and there's blood all over the place, and Bill Wright walked up and said "See I told you I'd get you" and just walked off, well it broke us up, you know he was the hero of the platoon, for the time he was there, because I don't think Pritchard was very well liked.

Young, second Lieuie, I think he might have been a Scheyville, bloke, who was feeling, supposedly his power, whatever, he was a real pig of a man. Yeah, there were some humorous instances like that.

J.R But then it was a different atmosphere once you came to this place and started your employment training was it?

B.H Oh yes.

J.R More relaxed?

B.H Yes, because here the place had changed to what it is now. Bear in mind we've still got national servicemen, they would come here for equipment training, they would come here as crafties3 some would stay here as instructors, they would be promoted the next day to sergeants.

J.R They were people who already had done apprenticeships?

B.H Yes, that's right, were, were practising outside. The training was technically oriented, there is obviously a regimental content, only for the sake that it is in the army, and those sort of things had to be still instilled to you because we were basically at a time of conflict, and discipline or automatic reaction, is not a requirement, but it is good to have it. And so those things are still instilled in us. I think it's probably a time of, not disillusionment, but a time of not being able to come to terms with what was going on, because it was something new. Ah, it was certainly different to what I expected, but I suppose I adopted the national serviceman's attitude, like, yes I have to do this, and when I get out I'll become a soldier. Same as they adopted it at Kapooka. So, ah, it was probably different in that regard. It took a while to switch on, we started off our course with 47 on our course, and there's the whole mixture, whole bag, there were the direct entry sort of blokes, the national servicemen. There were blokes from other corps, there were people like myself who were under the scheme so to speak. We started off with 47, I remember because as our course grew smaller, we changed classrooms and we ended up in a small classroom where there was 7 of us left.

J.R Out of 47?

B.H Out of 47.

J.R And the others had what, gone out of ..

B.H Yes, that's right, they weren't passing terminals. I don't think, training system was in then, but there were exams, progressive exams.

J.R So those people who dropped out would have been reallocated to another corps?

B.H Another corps, that's right. Or another job. You know, they might have gone over to armour wing or vehicle wing, just for an attempt at one of those courses. And, that was quite surprising, it's strange when you look back at it now, there was 7 of us graduated, I think, yeah, well there were, and there's, I think I'm the only one left, out of that 7.

J.R In the army you mean?

B.H Mmm.

J.R It's a very high failure rate isn't it, 7 out of 47 getting through?

B.H Yes, I'd think so... (pause) The army moves in cycles too, you have to be aware, it's like a weather cycle, you'll have a glut one year and a famine the next, and sometimes it might be a 5 year cycle or a 7 year cycle, but we're going through one now, you know, RAEME training centre stopped all adult trade training for the last 2 years. But slow they're gearing up, just to start again next year (talking together) [Because they had enough do you mean?] Well they had a glut of people and they, great, but we've had, you know the attrition rate and they find they can't fill them from the apprentice stream, so they're starting to get the adult tradesmen again. Well that's been about 3 year cycle I think, rather than a 5 or 7. At that stage I think it was probably part of the cycle whereby they were down on radiomecs, so anybody who put up his hand to radiomec, choo, you know put him in and just see how he went, and they were quite willing to accept it, losses, I suppose. Because the spin off was, they got them in to other trades anyway. I remember as I said, there were blokes there wearing different corps, corps badges and they were soldiers to us, 'cause they'd been there and done that. 'cause some of those blokes were, really only trying to find a way out of their particular corps at the time.

J.R When you finished at the end of this course, were you then a fully trained radio mechanic?

B.H Well they have different levels. I was classed as a, I think they called it a field tradesman. I can't remember what pay level it was, they, we've gone through so many changes of pay level, but it probably would equate to what we call the tradesman now and after so many years', so many years' training, in those days, I think you had to a, what is now called a proficiency course. I was sort of a level one, sorry that's probably misleading. If there was say, ah, 6 or 7 levels of pay, I would be in a level 4, okay, and to get to level 6, I had to go away and do a particular course. But it seems strange, 'cause in the army you'll find that some people will be able to qualify in this course because they're in vogue at the time, others will be deemed because they've changed the criteria. It so happened I spent my time as a level, I think it might have been a level 4, we'll say anyway, level 4 field radio mec tradesman, how do they say, it's a tradesman field radio or something, I can't remember the

exact terminology, I've got my blue book over there anyway, it would probably say it. And I stayed that for the first year that I went to 101 field workshops, it was while I was in Vietnam they changed the criteria, whereby some of the blokes that I knew, who were of my vintage, in actual fact were deemed, in the next level, they had? in actual fact done the course, whereas I had, when I came back and I went and did the course, it was just one of those things, some are lucky, some aren't. And I don't know what the criteria were, whereby, whereby you had to do the course you didn't, it was just one of those things, that didn't really fuss me.

J.R But after you finished your training you went to a unit?

B.H Yes, I went to 101 field workshops in Sydney, at Ingleburn actually.

J.R And you were working on what?

B.H Radios.

J.R Radios, right. And then did you apply to go to Vietnam? Was there a procedure where you volunteered or anything?

B.H I know most of us were pretty keen at that time, because 101 field workshop was used as a reinforcement unit for 102 and 106 in Vietnam. I think it was identified, if you went to 101, you would be going, but I really can't remember whether I was, you know, like put up your hand I want to go, and I think I probably would've been one of those blokes who would have said yes, I'd go anyway.

As far as the radio work goes, I don't think I was very competent. Not looking back on it now, but possibly I was, you know my level at that stage, I, when you look at some of the blokes now you think, my goodness. We did a lot of armoured work there, bear in mind the field workshop, it's more regimental, it's almost like going back into infantry training, but having to apply trade skills, and you don't have to apply them to a very great level, it's only a matter of saying, checking out the radio and saying "You're right, it doesn't work". (laughs) If you're lucky you might have the chance to take it back into the shop and run through the spec test and say "Oh, I think the receivers out".

J.R It's called a field workshop because it's designed to go out with a battalion or a formation of some sort is it?

B.H Ah, yes, it can operate in the field.

J.R (talking together) I mean does the name have some significance being called a field workshop?

B.H Yes, well there are three levels of repair, unit, field and base. Now for instance, a field workshop is used in support of units.

There are a number of units will call upon it for its second line of support. It would have attached to it RAEME tradesmen, it might have, for instance,5/7 RAR, it is now 5/7 RAR, one of the infantry battalions we'd have a 1 radio mec, as I was in Vietnam attached to 4 RAR, attached to ...

J.R You sort of check the batteries and..

B.H Yeah that's right, he would do the sort of mmm, no-go type test batteries, yes you're right, then he'd come back to us and we'd say "Yes, he's right: if it doesn't work, now why doesn't it work." And ah, given time and parts and test equipment, you might be able to do something with it. Such as, what's a simple task, might be able to do an alignment, you might be able to rechange a module, and align that. 'Cause as a radio mec field, that's all I was trained to, changing modules at a, or changing modules, which is field repair. Unit repair is just looking at it and saying, yes, change the assembly, change the unit itself. Field repair is changing the module, and basic repair is recurring at the module. You know in broad terms, alright?

J.R Yeah. So, anyway, you were there and this would be about in 1968?

B.H May, May, May, May, '68 I think I marched into the unit, 101.

J.R And you were there for about a year, were you?

B.H That's right.

J.R And then how did you get to go to Vietnam?

B.H How? um..

J.R Well, you were allocated to a unit there? Or you went over to..

B.H Well, you know, you're asked, oh you're asked these days, I don't know if you are then. Posting orders come out, indicating, you know, you're going to be posted to such and such. Mine indicated I was going to be posted to 4 RAR, that was all very well and good and I went to, what they call ECPD, Eastern Command Personnel Depot, which is on the Heads, I can't remember what they call it now. And we went through DP-1 checks, medical, dental, all those sorts of things. It was during that time I got married, in actual fact I got married 3 days before my date to go, which upset the applecart. [That was very good timing] Yes it was, I came back and said, I can remember the conversation with the bloke, Westland I think his name was, the CSM, a grunt, that's an infanteer [yes, I've met the grunts] I walked up and I said "I'd like to see the pay group " and he said "What for?" and I said "Oh I got married on the weekend" "Oooh" I can remember him going right off the deep end, "you bloody, you're going to muck everything up", so, they gave me 3 weeks before I went over. And I, by coincidence I left on my sister's birthday which was the 17th March . That was quite interesting, getting there.

J.R And had 4 RAR, was it just going over, or was it already there?

B.H The 4 RAR radio mec in actual fact was a nasho, and he was due to come back. 'Cause you see he'd spent his year in Vietnam and so they needed a replacement for him, even though they were going to stay there longer. It was poor planning I thought, but still, 'cause the national serviceman does have 2 years and the unit was only in Vietnam for a year, so anyway, that's the way worked out.

J.R So you flew over?

B.H Mm, I flew over with, I suppose Qantas. It's quite strange, because I arrived there, and they sorted us all out, as to where we were going to go and they called out the names, you know, the officer that manifested the draft and RAR RAR, and read out my name and they said "ALSG': "ALSG, maybe they've changed it, I don't know" So I wandered, ALSG is um, 1st Australian Logistic Support Group, well you were there [yes, yes] And according to the paperwork the people in the Vietnam end had the NCO there, I went to the BOD, the Base Ordinance Depot, and I rolled in there and I said "Good day, here I am: and they said "What are you in here" you know "who are you?" and I said "well, that's what I tried to tell them" "Huh" And I marched in probably about 10 o'clock that morning, and they said "Oh, we'd better get this sorted out;' And there was a young typist there) and they said "Grab hold of the young bloke and take him out and get him, you know, show him around the place and keep him basically occupied" I suppose. She was a Vietnamese, she spoke great English, and she just showed us where things were, and we went to the canteen and said "If you want to come down to the PX this is where it is" and all that sort of thing, and that was good. And, went back there and they found out "yes, you're supposed to be at 4 RAR", threw me in the back of a landrover, out to the airport again, and onto a caribou up north, and that was it, and then I landed on the ground and, at I can't remember the details exactly, but I can remember sort of marching into the unit, 'cause I was posted to support company, part of the sig platoon I think, or whatever it is, can't remember how all that works. Because I know I was dislocated from the actual LAD, which is further down the track, somewhere in the camp. I was right near the sigs, so I could work on the radios. I remember walking in the the bloke said, the nasho said "And where the hell have you been? I've been waiting for you for 3 weeks".

J.R And he couldn't leave until you'd arrived?

B.H That's right, he couldn't. So you know, I was in the poo from day 1 (laughs).

J.R Did it make you feel a bit unwelcome, the fact that they'd, didn't know where you were meant to be going and things? Or, you know, do soldiers just sort of take that as the ...

B.H Well I accept that now, you know because some things can happen that way. I really can't think what my reaction was then.

I always thought of the army as an efficient machine, now it's only as efficient as the people in it obviously, and sometimes things do come unstuck so to speak, and I've suffered that a number of times.

J.R Well is a big organisation isn't it?

B.H Mmm, it is.

J.R But as you say, you know, slip-ups can happen anywhere. You were attached to 4 RAR [That's right] but your actual unit was a RAEME unit was it?

B.H Yeah it was a L.A.D, Light Aid Detachment. Like as we were speaking previously a sub-unit attached to the main unit, and they still have them, but I think they're called Tec support troops) now or Tec support squadron depending on the size of the organisation they're attached to.

J.R So you actually lived with the fellows from the L.A.D? Or you lived with the grunts?

B.H No, I lived out the, as I said, there was a building there, the support, what were they called, support company I suppose, 6 platoon, I lived out the back in a tent1from the actual wooden building itself, so I suppose probably to be on call if they required something, lived in the tent with a couple of blokes. One was a sig, he was, what was he from, he was in 104 sig squadron I think. He was the actual sig working with the, the battalion. Quite funny 'cause I run across him, just recently in actual fact, about 3 years ago, he's still in the army but he's changed over to RAEME, he's now a powder puff.

J.R What's a powder puff?

B.H Powder puff? aviation, blue beret boy.

J.R Oh right, right, okay. [all the colloquialisms] Yes, yes. Right, so what was daily life?

B.H In Vietnam? [Mmm] Daily life in Vietnam, gracious me.

J.R You arrived there in the wet season did you?

B.H I'm not even sure.

J.R What time of year was it, May, March you said.

B.H March 20, no March 17, it was my sister's birthday at the time I left, so it must have been 18 by the time I hit the ground, whatever. Gracious me.

J.R Was it comfortable? Comfortable tent?

B.H Oh the tent, oh gracious me, tents are tents, duck boards, the old sort of iron frame with a mattress, and mosquito net slung

across the top. It was a point of professional pride to have a thing that looked nice and square, I don't know whether that's because you're in the military or whatever, but your mosquito net was always square and you'd rig it up so it could be, and then you'd have a locker and your D.PA. gear under the bed and you used to have a place for your boots and have a wash bowl at the front, jerry can that you used to pour the water into and have a shave in the morning.

J.R Did you have hot water?

B.H Really couldn't answer, I can't remember. I imagine we would have because they'd been on site for quite a while and it was quite easy to make a choofer out of a 44.

J.R Right, I've spoken to some people who were there in 65/66, they sort of mentioned you know, didn't have a hot shower the whole time they were there sort of thing.

B.H Oh no, we weren't that unlucky, not from what I can remember... What happened there...

My life was, pretty hectic, I came in late/and therefore I was an outsider as far as those blokes were concerned. I remember one night I went to the boozer after they came back in after an operation and I think I might have been lucky to get out with my skin, because I wasn't one of them, I hadn't shared those sort of things, and I was an outsider. It would have been different for the other radio meth who'd been with them all through those sort of things, besides which I was a pogo, in the fact that I never, outside the wire, and so there was that stigma and with a grunt platoon that's very pronounced. 'Cause they're out there getting killed and your back there nice and safe and...

J.R You didn't ever go out [With 4 RAR?] Yeah.

B.H No, not on an op. The only thing I ever did was sit on the wire, on one of their listening posts. I remember they had them all scattered around the perimeter. I remember my first one there, you had a 2 hour watch and it went like 5 minutes, and you hear the geckos, and the deer, and all those sorts of strange noises that took quite a while to get used to) 'cause they're all different. As I said that 2 hours went like 5 minutes, and when you come, I remember there was a sort of a tent behind, set back, and the listening post was forward with a gun, just back from the wire itself and you had an arc of fire, and I remember looking out, and it was moonlit and everything that moved was you know, "the enemy" 'cause you're here in Vietnam and this is where it's all at) and people get killed here. In front of us too, in Nui Dat, they'd just cleared all the scrub so you had really a big field of view and you could see out through the, out to the scrub on the other side. There was even a name for that too, wasn't there? The Jay or something like that I'm not sure now. 'Cause they'd cleared I think about a kilometer out from the wire/and you could see right out there.

J.R And did you have to do guard duty and things on the perimeter?

B.H Guard duty was just that, sitting on the, sitting there behind the gun, and you had arcs of fire, and somewhere down further they had it all set up so there was another unit, ah(clicks his fingers) O.P. observation post, set up and they all interlinked. And there was a radio net and you used to have to report in. And they usually what give a call, a radio check every hour or so just to make sure you were awake I suppose.

J.R And did you have much work to do? Much technical work?

B.H I think the most technical work I got involved with, aside from fixing K phones and don 10 and fixing radios 'cause there wasn't much testing equipment except for a watt meter, I think, to tell you whether or not you had power and you'd check from one good radio to another to see what was going on, you know either in the transmitter or the receiver. Except for the light globe for the power, you know, you've got a 2 watt light globe lit up when you plugged it on you'd know you had 2 watts off the stick.

J.R It’s not very advanced sort of electronics!

B.H No, no, but, when you consider those blokes knew nothing about it, you were probably streets ahead, I don't know.

I think the most technical thing I did was make up a, I was occasionally called in to fix up a switchboard, SB86 is a type of switchboard, I can't remember how many lines. It also had a trunk facility on it, I remember I spent some time working on that. But I think the most technical job I did was trying to make a, a T.V, antenna out of coat hangers for the, I think it must have been for the boss. I had to sit down and I had to drag out all my books to find out what quarter wave lengths were, and how far I should make the antenna and I remember cutting up these bits of things to make this antenna with reflectors and deflectors, deflectors, and ... We got it going, but I think all in all it could have all been done with a coat hanger anyway rather than bang it all together and put it on a stick (series of coat hangers) (both laugh)

J.R Yeah, yeah, but you only did work for the battalion?

B.H Yes.

J.R And so were you fairly contented? During that time?

B.H I think so. Um, as I said there was some animosities there because I was the new boy, and the pogo. I know, I did have an instance whereby I was aggravated; and that was, I can't remember the cause of it, but there was, you know, a sort of a verbal clash with somebody, with the sergeant or the warrant officer, he looked like a bull frog, great big bloated cheeks

on him, very swarthy skin. But I ended up breaking my hand, out of sheer frustration, I hit something and I broke the, I broke the knuckle in there, and there was something to the effect it was a self inflicted wound and I could be charged for that. And I gave them the story that I ran out of the tent, and tripped over and put up my hand to stop myself from falling and hit the tree and broke my knuckle. I remember reading the medical report saying "this is not, this injury is not consistent with the story he gave." But I wasn't about to admit that because they would have thought that I was trying to get out of, you know, being in Vietnam, and in actual fact that wasn't the case. But I thought it could have been misconstrued that way, and I certainly wasn't one to let down the side because of my own stupidity. I know I'm pretty much a loyalist as far as that goes, I think I always have been, people call me green, I used to have a nickname called "Monty" when I was at 101, when I became a corporal, as in Montgomery, rather green and very officious, in some places that's necessary and others it's not, and I think part of the maturing process is to know when you should apply that and when you shouldn't.

J.R Is fairly extreme isn't it to break your hand by hitting it?

B.H Pure frustration.

J.R Yes, isn't it?

B.H Well I didn't mean to break it, it was just to hit something and it turned out to be more solid ... (laughs) than my hand was at the time. And 19, I suppose I was rather fit) or at that stage I was, 'cause I'd gone through Kapooka and at the field workshop at 101, all the training was still infantry tactics you know, RAR RAR RAR and a bit of rifle and you're doing all this sort of stuff all the time out in the field for three months digging holes, exercise cold concern (?)I think was the first one I ever went on there, but, so when you had attained a level of fitness at Kapooka, you maintained it, and it was especially important at that time because Vietnam was on, so all units were sort of gearing their training that way. So you really couldn't not be fit.

J.R Was it a fairly tense sort of atmosphere though?

B.H I thought, I thought so because being the new chump, you're trying to break your way into a clique, because there's always very tense, I'm sure you feel' it yourself when you meet a new group of people you've got to sort of stay on the outside and slowly edge your way in, until they all accept you, even after somebody saying "Good day, how are you going?" or even take a, take an argument with you, when something you've said, you know that's acceptance.

And I wasn't one of them, so that could have, you know, helped. So I was, at that age too I was pretty much of an introvert, I was a black-and-white person, so I had definite ideas which

may not have gone with them, you see. So all those things, being a, I suppose a callow youth were playing against me. So, coupled with the fact that I'd just been newly married, and was very much in love with my wife and, that would have made it tense for me I think.

J.R So was there much drinking?

B.H Oh yes. On my part I'm pretty much a social drinker, I have been all my life. When I spoke of my dad and his mates having a drink, because of that I was very, very aware of the problems of drink. I've never tried to be a teetotaler, and I don't I've condemned anybody for being a drinker, but given the opportunity I wouldn't associate with a heavy drinker, and I still don't, but I enjoy a drink for the want of relaxation myself, I enjoy a good wine. At that stage I think I was drinking whiskey and coke, UDL I think, but..

J.R Were you allowed to drink whiskey?

B.H Yes (Up there?) Yes. Well you must remember too, I...

J.R Somebody else told me you see, I've listened to the tape... (talking together)

B.H You can buy a 40 oz bottle of spirits for $1.45 mpc, which is about 90 cents Australian, it was marvelous, because I can remember sending some of the more exotic ones back to the family in mortar cases.

J.R No, somebody told me that the troops weren't allowed to drink spirits, only the officers were allowed to drink spirits, things may have changed....

B.H (talking together) I don't think that was ever the case at 4 RAR.

J.R No, it may be different in different units.

B.H 'Cause as I said I was very aware of my situation and to get drunk was asking for trouble, you had to be aware to push off somebody who wanted to have a go at you who was drunk, and call you a pogo and... have a go..

J.R It was just the riflemen who had this attitude towards ... (Sorry?) Mostly the riflemen, was it, the real grunts who had this attitude towards....

B.H Those who'd been outside the wire, yes. And involved.

J.R But the other people in the support company, did they sort of accept new reinforcements or...

B.H I think those who were in similar boat, some of the sigs

might go out, but they didn't go out all the time, it was only if they were setting up a permanent area of operations, and got in.

J.R Yeah, the attitude of the, towards the pogos?

B.H Ah, I'm a different breed anyway, as an electronic tech, so I have a different, I talk differently, I think differently to those people, I even do now. I suppose whether childhood, or class, or what you perceive yourself to be, I don't know.
For instance I could relate more readily to the SIGS blokes, 'cause they knew where I came from. And I could appreciate their abilities as well, so I suppose it was like, I don't know, like mixing a priest with a murderer or something.

J.R So if you were say, going on R & C or something, or would you go with a...

B.H I never went on R & C with any of the grunts, my first three months... (talking together)

J.R You'd go with the LAD people would you or?

B.H I don't think I ever went on an R & C when I was in 4 RAR, for one reason or another. I don't think I ever, I knew it happened, we'd usually get one day in every three weeks off, on Sunday, I really don't know the circumstances, but I can't remember having had a R & C day while I was at 4 RAR. I think I spent the three months in camp. With exception of say going down to the, what was the Club down at Luscombe Bowl the PX or whatever it was down there or you know, whatever. I do remember going on R & C when I was at 106.

END OF TAPE ONE

BILL HARRISON

TAPE TWO

J.R Just finishing up about your time at 4 RAR, were you a good soldier? Keep out of trouble?

B.H Yes, probably too much. I was pretty much a black and white person. I perceive to be - myself to be - a person who does the right thing. Um...

J.R Did you get on alright with the NCOs?

B.H Then?

J.R Yes, apart from "The Bullfrog".

B.H The Bullfrog! Yes, I don't think I had any particular clashes there. Be aware that as a warrant officer now, I can look back on some of the blokes we've got here now, "bloody useless"! The bloke we had there, the warrant officer, Raeme, he was an Artificer Vehicle, I had to interface with him because he in actual fact was my boss, Raeme wise, though I was sort of seconded to work with 6 platoon, at the Spt Company. Um, I can remember some years later, because he stayed in for a while after Vietnam, him telling me what a dickhead he thought I was. But .... And that's probably true too, you know, very naive, very, whatever the things that one attributes to a young man who didn't know his way round, was pretty much of an introvert, who had his ideas of right and wrong. Possibly a mummy's boy, I don't know, how they viewed me.

J.R It's very young isn't it, when you look back now from the age of 40 or whatever, 20 or 19 is very young.

B.H Yes, it is, you look back now and smile, a little bit. "How callow was I then!" The attitudes I had then are Similar to the attitudes I've got now. 'Cause it makes you think then.... I talk to the apprentices now, and I feel like a father in some instances, and I say "Now look gentlemen, you might think you're 19, but you're nowhere near an adult. I'm nearing 40, I'm 38, and I'm still learning." So what does that mean? Am I an adult?

J.R Yes, there's a long way to go.

And what about your officers then? Your platoon commander?

B.H Didn't have much contact with him. I think in actual fact the only officer I would've had contact with would have been the Q.M, and that would've been through the warrant officer, and that's status quo, so to speak. Things are a little bit more relaxed now, and I think there's officers have more of a profile so far as the men are concerned. In those days, you went from ... I realized corporals weren't all gods, at that stage, because I'd been through 101, and realised that, well officers are gods, and you only ever saw them when you're on the carpet. And that's the way I play it here, I only bring the young blokes up, to talk to them, personally, when I've got something either good, very good or very bad to say to them. For the rest I let the apprentice master handle them.

J.R Okay, so how long did you spend with 4 RAR?

B.H 4 RAR? They went back in ...May.

J.R So you arrived right at the end of their tour, virtually, didn't you?

B.H yeah, March, April, late May I was there. At the end of May - I missed out, supposedly, that was a big thing for me, at that stage, when they brought out their Combat Badge, I missed out on the Combat Badge by about 5 or 7 days, some insignificant amount - 'Cause you had to have been there for 3 months. I thought, oh! I thought damn! See those things....

J.R So they didn't post you to another battalion?

B.H No, I got posted to 106.

J.R So where was it?

B.H Still at Nui Dat. It was just down the road, in actual fact. Don't think I even knew much of its existence. I wasn't very ... didn't seem to get out much at 4 RAR, you know, it was all work in camp. That's why I expected .....

J.R You didn't ever go out in the province? You'd driven up from Vung Tau?

B.H No, we flew in. By caribou.

J.R So you'd never been out on the roads anywhere?

B.H No! I'd heard about 'em, these places, we're going down such-and-such, but I had no idea where I was. I've killed myself for that, the first thing I do is buy a map, you know, when I went over to Europe, first thing I did was buy a map and say "where am I? Right, now I can work."

J.R So you didn't have a map there?

B.H No. No. Hear all these reports coming over the radio, this

and that, and this happened there, and you'd think "good. That's not here, because it didn't happen here, so it must be somewhere else!" Rather ignorant I think.

J.R You didn't get shelled or anything?

B.H Not while I was with 4 RAR, no, that came later when I was at 106.

J.R So how was it going to 106, was it better?

B.H Oh, yes, well they had a Tel shop (telecommunications) there of some 10 ... radio blokes, and I knew some. Bloke - actual fact, last weekend I went to a wedding in Adelaide (J.R interrupts to ask what a Tel shop is...) Where all the radio, electronic stuff is repaired, including mine detectors, anything that is whizz bang or had diodes in it, it'd come to us.

J.R So there was more of a variety of work than just radios?

B.H Oh yes, and it gave me a learning experience too. When I arrived there they had a couple of corporals, I can't remember their names now, Mick Stevens was the officer in charge, the W.O 1, you know, he's god, a W.O 1, whoo! And I was accepted as being, at least a radio mech, and given tasks that you know, obviously they graded me through a teaching process, And put me on things and I found out I couldn't handle, so had to grab hold of the EME? guys and find out what it was all about, and how it worked, and even do basic tests on some of the stuff. Some of the stuff I hadn't even seen, and some I'd forgotten I'd been taught, but I'd only learnt it 'cause I had to, and hadn't retained it, so it sort of - 'cause I'd learnt it here at Raeme Training Centre, go down to the front gate, empty it out one ear and get on with something else. That seemed to be the teaching sort of thing, rather than retention. But that's not quite true, because I know at the end of our training we had a test that covered the lot, and I was quite surprised 'cause I thought I was going to fail, and I came 3rd out of the 7. And surprised everyone else too! And I thought, oh! well! so I must've pulled my socks up right in the last 3 months or something. The "Awakening of Harrison" or something, whatever you like to call it! But still....

I must've fallen, I obviously fell back to being a slug or something because I had to go through a learning process at 106, and I started off on the old armoured squadron radios, the old C 40 T, B 47s, five battery power supplies, old valve jobs. Whereas the new equipment was coming in, the 25s and 5 x 4 radios which are all transistorised, see. Quite interesting to note that when I'd been doing my basic training, I'd been taught on valves, what we now call hollow state, and they gave us a quick brief of about a month, they said "All that, that you learnt before, we're now going to introduce you to something called transistors. They may not stay around, however, ... They're bringing out equipment with them

in, so we had a month's burst, trying to apply all the techniques we'd learnt here, on valves, in transistors. Phew!
(Interruption)

J.R The sort of work you were doing? Changing to transistors...

B.H At 106? Well I was working on the old valve state. The beauty of that was the radio sets were laid out as was taught, as a normal sort of standard block. And you could file through the radio saying, well that's the receiver, that's the the transmitter, and there it was, in little batches. It was easy enough to fault find, trace the signal input.... The valves were funny too, they've got heaters etc .....

J.R So you worked in the workshop pretty well every day? Regular....

B.H Yes, that's right, regular sort of hours. There's times there we had to work overtime. I remember - we were working 8 hour shifts - and we were working 3 - and we were, that only went on for a little while... We were expected to do other things as well, I remember 106 they used to draw TAOR patrols, and not only did we have to do listening patrols, on the wire, we had our own OPs, 88 alpha and 88 bravo, down on the dam, that looked towards l aria, I think it was the little place next door. Now or Dat Do? I'm not sure, they're all intermingled, I should've looked at a map I suppose....

J.R I've got my little map here.

B.H (Laughs) Have you? Nui Dat.... [looks at map]

J.R But anyway, you were down that southern side of the perimeter?

B.H Yes, yes, looking that side. That's right. (Laughs)

J.R Brings it all back?

B.H Yes/it does.

J.R Did you feel, because you were basically Raeme..... (Back with my own kind?) were you okay at doing patrols and things?

B.H No, no... I suppose you become more aware how vulnerable you are being a Raeme tradesman, 'cause you lose those skills, you have to recognise that the grunt is a professional in his own right. Even that stage, you had doubts about your own ability as far as doing these sorts of thing. I know ....

J.R But you went out just as a section or a platoon?

B.H A section. Normally about 10.

J.R So you didn't have any real professional grunts with you?

B.H No, but we were supposed to be able to defend ourselves as well. And we weren't out on a fighting patrol, we were just out on listening patrols, where we'd go out - move out - from the OP, and go forward into the J, but only to that side, so, at least you were early warning.

J.R So, it wasn't likely that you'd get ambushed or something? It wasn't impossible

B.H It wasn't likely, but it wasn't impossible, No, in actual fact I think after I left 106, went to 131 Div Loc, 106 went out and set up an ambush, and caught a couple of VC in it. I remember one of the blokes -

J.R Would have been a bit of an event?

B.H It was, for 106 to be involved in a firefight. I think it was all pure accident! You know, the way things normally happen, unless you're in one of the big AOs where they're actually out looking for trouble. It was good to be back in that sort of environment - how can I say it - it made me more aware that, technically, I was falling behind, and not doing it, and it was good experience in that regard because I was made to become more technically proficient or competent. Because Raeme is a very professional corps, and if you're not up to it, they'll let you know. It's still is the same, if you haven't got any credibility you're not worth a pinch of salt. And to become respected, and one of the boys, you've gotta' have your own expertise. Until you gain that, excuse me mm'am, but you're shit. Amongst your own - It's a very professional corps. Still is - You can suffer, if you don't perceived to be doing the right thing professionally.

J.R And the NCOs in Raeme, are they better technically.....?

B.H They should be - That's why they're promoted. They should be overseeing.....

J.R And the officers, are they technical officers, in Raeme?

B.H Aah... Yes, they are, but mainly of an engineer status. There's a difference between being a tech and an engineer. We look at the Artificer - the W.O. artificer - as being the go between, between the actual putting in practice of a tech officer, and the theoretical concepts of the engineer.

J.R The reason I ask was that, when I visited Nui Dat, one of the places I went to was an LAD workshop for the tanks.

B.H B squadron? Over the road from 106? yes it would have been .....

J.R I can't remember, I'd have to look it up, but I was talking to some of the soldiers, and they had a real gripe, that the tanks and things, APCs they were working on, were all lined up, so they were all visibly, almost under surveillance, and they said the officer walks up and down" - and he was doing it while I was talking to them, sort of walks up and down, and they said "he doesn't know Buckleys about the actual what we're doing, but he stands there and watches and supervises: And it really used to annoy them, because they said he didn't know anything about it! If he knew something about it!

B.H Maybe he's trying to learn! I think -

J.R Maybe, but they just resented the surveillance. That was it) they resented the surveillance -

When he didn't know what they were doing. It was lined up so that they could all be seen from one place (B.H laughs) You might see it differently now that you're a warrant officer.

B.H Well I'm not an officer, I'm a warrant officer, and I'm still one of them, so to speak - yeah, yeah I can equate to that. Engineers have a different outlook on life.

J.R And you went outside the wire sometimes?

B.H Oh yes, we did.

J.R Did you go out to units, to FSBs?

B.H No, well not so much at 106, I did that later.

J.R You were at three separate units?

B.H That's right. 3 months basically in each. 4 RAR, 106, 131 Div Loc, then back to 106 for my last 3.

J.R Was that unusual?

B.H Oh yes, I think so.

J.R Did it make it difficult for you to settle in? Form friendships and things?

B.H Oh you had your own friendships, within your tent and within your trade... And you had your animosities too, and those you would consider enemies, even within your own cliques. Yeah.

J.R So were people more involved with one another, was there more mateship there than when you were in Australia?

B.H Yes. Because you're living 24 hours a day. You've gotta' accommodate the other person.

J.R And was it what you'd expected from your father's experiences?

B.H Mateship? Yes, I think so. I think so. In retrospect I think there's more mateship after the event, when you meet blokes, "I remember you! you were in such and such." And you only remember the good times. (Pause) But it's certainly different. Yeah 106 was an experience. How can I put it? That was my first - I experienced my first contact there, 'cause we did one of those TAOR patrols, we had to go a particular place, past the wire ..... I remember De Catania was the electrical fitter sergeant - we weren't grunts, we were just going up there to do the listening patrol you don't want to hear warries anyway -

J.R No, tell me!

B.H Oh alright. We went out, and we were supposed to go to a particular place, hootchie up, down in the grass.... All hush hush. Just to show you the difference, when you reported in, they'd ring you up on the radio. And you wouldn't answer, You'd just click the pressure switch to break the squelch. Twice if you'd got it, to let them know you were there. No talking, minimum amount of movement. No noise. We're supposed to go to a particular place, couldn't go in there 'cause of the spiky bamboo, we're supposed to be in the centre of that. On the map it looked alright, but when we got there, couldn't move. She's like that, couldn't get through it, so we sort of detoured round the side. And on such things you're given protective fire, by artillery, and there was a defensive fire zone called Hotel Six. And I often smile 'cause there's a taxi running round here, and its call in sign is Hotel 6. And I always smile to myself, for some reason, it brings back that memory. And we were there, just laid down in the grass, in the harbour, and De Catannia and I in the centre, and the troops around, as per the book, whatever. We were in the elephant grass, And around midnight, whoosh whoosh What the hell! And they'd come in behind us. I can't remember how far back they would've been, but they'd set off some rockets and rocketed the Dat. And we were out there in the middle of it! And De Catannia, you know (we) said what are we going to do? And De Catannia said, you know, "support fire, Hotel 6". Well the trouble with our movement was that we were far closer, much closer to Hotel 6 than we should've been. We were practically dead in the centre of it. So this starts comin' down, to try to, you know we woulda' got on the ground and then moved just where we thought. You know, like, 'up 200' left, or right. And that woulda' brought the pattern on the ground onto where we thought they were. As far as we were concerned, they were virtually right behind us, about 50 - 100 metres. But we weren't going to go charging in there in the middle of the night! I'm sure you become very well aware at that stage, you're a Raeme soldier, and you haven't got the skills. You might be committing suicide, probably another thought too. But this stuff started comin' in, and you could hear the shrapnel through the grass going sh-sh-sh—sh, cutting the bamboo grass. And that's when we started grabbing clods

and trying to bury ourselves underneath it - For we were far too close, we really were. And, we have an expression, I don't mean to sound crude, but we talk about "bringing to the surface the nervous water," and that certainly did. That really did. And, so we just let that go on, and tried to move the fire towards where we thought it was, and the first thing was away from us. Then back in. And De Catannia did that on the radio. And all stopped. And we stayed awake all that night. Then we headed off in the direction we thought they were, and we came across where they sliced the bamboo and laid the rockets in them, and fired them. And it wasn't all that far away, about 50 - 100 metres behind us. So we weren't far off in where we thought they were. They then asked us to follow up. Which we did. And we came across the tracks....

J.R So they had enough confidence to use you for that? They didn't call in an infantry platoon or anything?

B.H Well in actual fact it's, we came across a trail, and they asked us to describe a trail. And I can remember De Catannia pointing out a string of ants, the track was about that wide. And had been squashed down pretty heavily. And we wondered how many? And we looked back at our own, and there's 10 of us, and you could hardly see our tracks. And we look at this, and you could see a definite imprint, and we thought well, "more than 10". And the fact there's an ant trail, the ants are still picking up their dead, so they may well have gone to ground as soon as they're hit. And moved out. And we thought we weren't all that far behind them. And De Catannia estimated at least a platoon, a platoon sized strength, about 30. From the pattern in the grass. And didn't think they were that far ahead. So they put us down then, said "go to ground". And they called out the choppers, brought in a company of grunts, put them on the ground and pulled us out. And they then followed up.

J.R Where did you learn how to do any of this sort of stuff - infantry tactics? At Canungra?

B.H Yeah, I did my 10 weeks at Canungra.

J.R Did you have any when you arrived in Vietnam?

B.H No, we were supposed to be fully trained. I'd forgotten all about Canungra, in actual fact, and that was 10 weeks of 'getting to know you'! It really was. As I said, up until that stage, there was the Kapooka training, the 101 Field Workshops, which was oriented to being a reinforcement unit for 102 and 106, and the B.E, course - I think it's 10 weeks - at Canungra, prior to going over. But that was a thing in itself too, I think I was supposed to be going to Canungra 3 times. Going up on a particular draft 3 times. Had all the needles, got called back in, I hated those needles, it was I think you got 8 needles every time you had to go anywhere.

Aah, Self preservation, the instinct, I've got tough skin anyway. Ugh. You could feel it. I don't like it.

J.R So anything else you want to say about 106?

B.H (Pause) It was a different unit. We had a pet monkey, Susie, she used to, we used to have movies most nights. You'd be able to buy a beer for about 10 cents, and a goffer for about 5 I think it was, a goffer being a soft drink.

J.R So it was quite relaxing after work was it?

B.H Yes it was. You used to hop into your "flying suit", you used to have a local fold out chair, and you used to go and sit under a 40 x 20, and watch movies - There was the Club, so to speak, where you'd go and buy your grog, and you could adjourn there later on if you wanted to. And I remember this monkey, used to have a affinity for beer, used to run along, arch somebody's beer, drink it down. Scamper up the thing out of people's way. And sit at the top and urinate over everybody! Whole bunch'd clear out! Her name was Susie, she ended up taking an over dose of some sort of pills, paralysed from waist down. We had to take her to Vung Tau to the Americans, they had a veterinary surgeon there, I don't know what they had set up, possibly for the dogs. But I know we lost her.

Getting caught in having stand tos in the middle of the night, when there had been movement on the wire, flares've gone up and they've set off things, whether it be a deer or something, and you'd have a stand to, you'd have to jump out wearing your flying suit with your basic webbing and your rifle and you'd jump into a fox hole - well they weren't fox holes, they were all the what would you call them? - rainwater drainage around the place, we'd utilise those as fox holes, and you'd jump in and you'd be up to there in water. And stay there for 2 hours wondering what the hell's going on!

J.R Not too comfy?

B.H No, it wasn't. There are memories of that sort of thing, having, in the wet season, being able to walk out of the tent at 5 in the afternoon and stand there, and it'd rain, and soap yourself up. And just walk back in and dry off. And by the time you came out, the rain'd stop. And you go up to the boozer, and you have lunch, or you have dinner. Those sorts of things. Or having to stoke the fire for the 44 gallon drums of hot water. 'Cause we had hot water. A Raeme unit is pretty well supplied, you have all the trades, you can do anything.

J.R So you went from there to....

B.H 131 Div Loc.

J.R So what did it do?

B.H 131 Div. Loc. "Div Loc" stands for Divisional Locating Unit. They work with radars. And their idea was to, using the radar, determine incoming rounds, and from their trajectory, extrapolate backwards to where they originated from.

J.R So were they attached to an artillery unit?

B.H Yes they were. So they could follow it up.

J.R And they were all Raeme trades? In the Div Loc?

B.H Yes, yes, they were. All radar mechs, radar blokes are in actual fact are at work with, or had met on... Whereas I did a basic radio course, some of the blokes would do partly radio and then swap over to radar halfway through - See the radio trade provide the basis for other trades in electronics. And, yeah, I remember Jack Hulms was the ASM there, the W.0 1 ASM. Jack's a bit of a corps identity so to speak. And Gabby Gablonski and a couple of those, couple of things going on there, went to Baria, rolled a landrover, had to come back through the wire, after hours, after curfew! All sorts of things. Life was starting to brighten up! (Laughs)

J.R Different sort of atmosphere to 106, was it?

B.H Mm, yes it was. It was back again, basically the same as 4 RAR. But I knew my way round then, 'cause at 106 if you had Q-3 C s 7 so I knew where the roads went, I knew where various parts of the province were, so I was more streetwise, as far as Nui Dat. So that wasn't too much of a hassle. 131 again offered other experiences. As I said, I was on image intensifiers, I was there as the tech to look after ground intrusion radar, and that seismic stuff you were talking about, Elliott's spies (?) I think it was called, I'm trying to think of it, Elliott spies seismetric detection or something..... And a couple of funny little things they had that were on loan from the yanks I assume they were on loan from the yanks, I hadn't seen them in our inventory before. Later on I did see them, when I came back, they were for EME eyes, for instance EME eyes were out on them(?)

J.R And the sort of job you did?

B.H Well the job wasn't so much technical. I thought - that's why I went there - I think it was mainly for operation, it was a unit, or detachment, formed, from the units, within Vietnam. I don't think there was any establishment for it, I think they just perceived a requirement for somebody to test this, and they asked for volunteers to form this unit ..... And they called us the Ground Surveillance Troop. I don't think there ever was one before we were there, but that's only through my own ignorance, maybe there was one. But we were put out to FSBs with this stuff - FSB Polly, and Searle, and oh; a couple of them ... I know I went up north, I was there when that chopper lost its, chinook lost its chopper, I saw it in actual fact, when it went over backwards. Blow up. There

was a bit of a deal about that.

J.R Which battalion did you work with, all the different battalions?

B.H No, umh. The FSBs, from my knowledge of them, were composed mainly of howitzers, was it 105s I think? howitzers, pack howitzers. And they had infantry in support. You know, they were set up in support of infantry in the field, but they had infantry assigned to them to look after them. See? And... ah... we were placed around at various times.... I think I went oh 3, but it's probably more, probably 4 or 5 FSBs in my 3 months that I was there, for various lengths of time. One I was only at for a while, because the .. um, what-do-you-call-it, the tower, the only place they could put it, crested the guns, and they couldn't fire, so they had to get me out of there, so I went to another one. "Crested the guns" means they interfered with their - ah - which guns get fired, or which ones couldn't, see they, me being there obviously detracted from their ability to help out the infantry on the ground who may have needed extra fire support. So we were moved out - or I was moved out of that one.

We travelled sometimes as a couple, I remember just near Baria, I'm sure it was, stuck up on the tower there and another bloke had the ground intrusion radar, and we sort of hootchied up together and he went off and did his piquets and I did mine on the thing. I remember when we moved in there, we were going to set up on a pagoda somewhere there, and - it must have been Baria, 'cause we were coming in behind the mine clearer - we're coming along in the landrover and she hit a mine, and this jumping jack come out of the ground. And we were about – I can't remember how far, but it looked awfully close! We thought, Good Lord, we know what that is, and we dived out of the landrover, and it careered off into the ditch, and this thing went Bang! and we climbed out, and all the side of the Landrover had been peppered with this shrapnel off this bloody mine. We were - gracious me! (laughs) Yeah it was close!

J.R And this tower, was it just a prefab thing that could be taken round?

B.H Yes, by helicopter. You could drop it in, normally we used to go in by chopper. Chinook normally used to pick it up, put it down, and I'd be aboard and then they'd drop us with extra stuff and we'd load it aboard.

J.R And was it a successful sort of thing?

B.H I think so. I know there was one FSB and we had - not movement on the wire, it was on the mine line again - up near Baria there, 'cause I spotted the blokes in the field, lifting mines, and - only 'cause they'd caught alight or something, and I was able to focus in and brought the mortars in on them. And I know there's a fair bit of kerfuffle, 'cause I wasn't that good at estimating the range, I can't remember whether I

was over the range and had to bring 'em back or whether I was under and had to bring 'em up to it.

J.R You had to estimate it visually did you?

B.H Yes, that's right. Had the compass up there, and you had to lay the bearing on it, across the top of the sight, and say, well, that's the bearing. Magnetic, then you'd try to estimate the distance a bit, with magnifying) well I found it pretty hard.

Well I brought them in on it, I think there was about 3 of them 'cause they went out to check the following morning, and they had a bag full of mines, and that's what made the big bang when they hit them.

J.R And what was this device called again the tower and...

B.H Well I don't really know what you'd call it. I think it was the forerunner of the Starlight scopes. It was a rather large sight, like a quarter? sight, but almost like one of the things you see down at Philip Island. Big telescope, but it worked in the night. A forerunner of the I.I. cause it's green rather than red. It wasn't I.R, it was image intensification. And I think probably 1st generation, cause the definition was very hard, to the ones I've seen now anyway. So I've worked with some of the newer ones, the BM8005 At the Regiment we used to have those in the tanks. They had a lot more definition in 'em. It was depending on the starlight at the time, it seemed to work a lot better of black nights, sorry, overcast, with some starlight. You needed some sort of light background to make the thing work properly.

J.R They weren't a heat sensing thing or anything like that...?

B.H No, no just a straight viewing device.

J.R And was it interesting doing this different sort of work, travelling round to different places?

B.H It was. I felt more... (Pause) at home with it. Rather than being a straight tech or a straight grunt, I was sort of combining the 2 skills which I thought was probably how I should've been utilised. I found it much more adventurous, so to speak, because of the situations you were put in. And um, I suppose at 19 I was looking for adventure. And confrontation such as that offered it. The fact that you might wear it, didn't seem to enter into the conversation, though you were very close to it. I know at the same FSB, the blokes were called in on a landrover, they'd been ... Some of the kids'd found some plastic explosives or something, they'd lit it, they went behind a tree, 5 or 6 of them, and they stood on a jumping jack and it came up, blew half of them away. And they called for some support from us, we were the closest thing cause it was on the main road, to whizz in and pick up the kids and take them - up to the Horseshoe I think they wanted us to take them. A

couple of the blokes hopped in the landrover, and off they went. And because - it was either early morning or dusk, I can't remember which way it went - they ran into one of the White Mice booby traps, they'd set up on a tree. They blew, they blew the ah, passenger, who'd went along to help out these kids, blew him away, and injured the driver. There was hell, all hell to pay about that, I can remember the blokes were most disgusted. Obviously.

J.R What was the feeling in a unit when there were casualties like that?

B.H Oh. Resentment. Sheer stupidity. Lack of communications and all this sort of thing. You know, who do you blame? You really can't blame anybody, you'd like to blame those people, but if they weren't told.... I think the chains were too long, it's like when you have a look at some of the thingumabobs now, even in our army now, if we want to talk tip somebody over there in a sig, we've gotta' talk to all these units here, and in sig form, name all these people, information this person. Even though you want to talk to them. And I think it was the same way then. Chains were too long and high. Because we were 2 different forces, the Australian forces up there, then across to the Vietnamese net, then down through the Vietnamese net.

J.R Did you have much contact with any Vietnamese? Or see Vietnamese forces much?

B.H Forces? (Like the local forces, or ARVN?) Not a great deal. Only when you'd go down on R & C or something, only other time was when I went back to 106 in my last 3 months, we got volley ball games going, we went out a little bit then. I know we went to a plantation, um, that figured supposedly in the Long Tan thing.... We played volleyball, that's the international language of sport. Everybody knew the rules, so you just played the rules. Didn't have to say much, say Good day! And obviously some of them could speak English, more so..... I think the main contact was in the towns. Some of it was good, some of it was bad. The sheer wastefulness of things.... I know I got ripped off when my pocket was slit, and I saw the same thing happen with a couple of blokes. Down near the ground, I saw a White Mice pull out his pistol and just blow this young kid on a bike away, cause he'd stolen somebody's wallet. You know. We all headed for the nearest fence and just tried to get the hell out of it.

J.R Did you have much impression of what the province was like? The countryside? Was it damaged by war?

B.H I suppose the closest - not in Vung Tau so much, as you're probably well aware, you know, that was pretty provincial, there wasn't too much damage there - I think Baria, I think everybody remembers, I think it was the old picture theatre, on the corner there we used to go round. I think the White Mice used to blow whistles and pull out guns cause we didn't stop. Stupid! Cause when I was at 106 I used to do some

of the escort patrols. 'Cause I was basically a non drinker. We used to get on the escort vehicles, front and back, mount a machine gun, and took great delight when they used to pull a pistol, just to swing the machine gun round, say Gooday! And they'd let us go, you know. We weren't obeying the traffic laws and we weren't going to. The blokes, if they'd got out would'a killed everybody. Being half drunk. They didn't like to be intimidated.

J.R Did you have a view of what the Vietnamese were like?

B.H As people? Well, I was quite lucky, I did a couple of civil aid patrols, in my last 3 months. But also going down to Vung Tau itself, I made the acquaintance of a young girl who was a prostitute..... She took me home to her family. She had an American boyfriend, she had a son by him, and we just hit it off - there was nothing sexual in it at the time, I was rather chaste. As in, I had a wife at home, and you'd heard of all these things, and you played square. You might go to a massage parlour, but you made sure that it was one of those that, you know, wasn't a brothel, it was only a straight massage parlour. They might charge the earth, but at least they left you alone. So you wouldn't be placed in that position where you'd have to make that decision.

I found getting to know her family was.... nice, I s'pose, it gave some sort of contact point and the world wasn't all bad. But, um, sort of reinforced my views of why I went to Vietnam. Which was just sort of um like the neighbor next door being beaten by the boy next door, and you 1-lop the fence to give them a hand - You know - I wasn't particularly interested in the politics of it, you know why we should be there and why we shouldn't, as far as I'm concerned, just on a moral basis, helping somebody out who couldn't help themselves. I think that was proven in the long run when the forces pulled out and they were just overrun. What was it, 3 months from the time we left to the time they ....?

J.R Not very long.

B.H So obviously we were achieving something. And it felt good to be able to say you were part of that. I spent some time down there, 'cause I - was that when I had my broken hand? - No, that was afterwards. But it was strange when I - I remember when I did get my broken hand, they dusted me off down to Vung Tau, and I spent some time there getting it set 'cause it was a difficult fracture type of thing, and they sent me back up country, in the back of a landrover. And I was wearing a sling, and I remember the people saying "Uc dai loi No. 1", and the fact that I'd supposedly been injured, or shot, they associated that with having done something for them, as I, you know....

J.R So you got quite a positive feedback

B.H In that regard yes, I think they appreciated it....

J.R And you mentioned you were on a civil aid patrol?

B.H Mmm. That was towards the end. Aah... what the hell were we going to do?

J.R Not fix a windmill!?

B.H Yeah, I remember one of the old Southern Cross windmills there. No, I think it may have been one of the medical thingumabobs. 'Cause we had the intelligence people with us. We went out and spent the day there. Couple of us doing it. It was one of the less dangerous things that you could do. 'Cause in the last 3 months they normally wouldn't let you outside the wire, and these were bits of swans, you see, just to get out and sorta' shake your heels. And you wouldn't go out on any TAOR patrols or anything like that, they'd try to protect you.

J.R What, that was the unit policy?

B.H Oh I think that was all over, yeah.

J.R Not in the battalions I don't think.

B.H No, not so much there, but they played it pretty calm, you only had to listen to thingumabobs when they were getting short, they weren't going in, they'd wait for it to come to them. They'd fight, but it didn't appear they went looking for trouble. Whereas in their first 9 months they were, but they became very aware they only had a short time to go, and they just didn't want to step on a mine or walk into something. In their last couple of days. Though it happened to some blokes. I remember the wife of a - I remember a women, whose husband was there, we became friends later in life, her husband got killed 3 days before he was supposed to come home. He went down to Baria, out of hours, they walked into an ambush on the way back. Three days, you know - sad.

.....Positive feedback. (Pause) The disenchanting thing about that civil aid project, it wasn't long after, and I think it might've been in one of the things that 106 set up. They caught some V.C, and one of them turned out to be one of the people we'd met on the bloody civil aid. And that brought home the truth that you couldn't tell who was who. And that was .... that was disheartening.

J.R And so did you then, and looking back now, think that what the Australians did, was useful?

B.H Yes.

J.R That you could've in some sense "won", or that you did "win"?

B.H I dunno. I believed, as I said, it was a case of jumping the fence and helping somebody out. You give it your best shot, but I don't think Australia as a whole gave it their best shot. We didn't have a lotta' support I remember, another flashback obviously, some of the boys going, landing at Richmond, and

being ashamed because their mothers had thingumabobs Save Our Boys. And they were ashamed to call them their mothers because they thought they were doing a job, and yet they weren't being supported. And I remember some of the comments in the paper, the blokes in Vietnam agreed. The blokes who were there. For what political reason they were there, I think once you were there, you took on the sense of trying to help the people out. And you couldn't really 'ye cared what the politics were. They were somebody who were going to wear it. And I suppose in their shoes, you would've liked somebody to come and help you out too. And I think that's probably - well, to my mind – that was the attitude adopted by the blokes I knew.

J.R So when you came back from Vietnam, was there any reaction to you by civilians, if they knew you were a soldier and you'd been to Vietnam?

B.H Nothing negative. I think more interested than anything else. (Pause) It surprised me too, I can remember going back to see Mum and Dad, and I ran into someone in a street in Adelaide, and they said "Oh, where've you been?" and I said "I've just got back from Vietnam," and they said "Oh! really!" And it struck me that they didn't know that those things..... "Oh, Vietnam, yeah that's right, that's something going on .....” Different circles, obviously, but I'm very well aware of it 'cause I was a military person, but others outside that circle, they think, oh yes, they're doing this and that, but they can't relate to it being people until they meet one of us.

J.R Were you welcomed back in any way?

B.H Other than the family?

J.R Yes, you weren't part of a march or anything?

B.H No, we were just one of the flybacks and hop out of the airport and go home....

J.R And was it hard to readjust? Too sudden a change?

B.H I had some problems. 'Cause I was posted back to 101, and I'd become one of the boys. I was promoted about 3 weeks before I came home, too, I was a corporal, you know, "been there done that". I went back to 101 to train... But aah, whoo, I had some problems in the fact that (pause) I couldn't perform sexually, for some time, there was some sort of relationship strain there. I went to the R.A.P. after a while, my wife was very supporting, we'd just had a baby girl at that stage. Um.... and so we went and got that sorted out. I was still a bit jittery, I dunno whether it was a bit of show or whatever, but the blowing of whistles was always a bit of a Ooh! "Cause the White Mice used to always blow them before they blew - And that was always a bit touchy. I remember once pulling the car over to the side of the road, at one stage, because of that - I didn't drive into the gutter or anything.

J.R I find it interesting talking to people like you, who haven't been in a lot of combat ... but still say that when they came back, that there was this real jittery, or tension, or whatever. So obviously you must have been very tense when you were over there?

B.H Without knowing it, or possibly it's the change. Change can bring a lot of tension. I was happy in that environment, I had grown accustomed to it, and this was another environment. I think environment change might have been all it was. You move into a new neighbourhood, and it's a while till somebody's willing to talk to you, if it's just to pick up something they disbelieve, at least you're accepted then 'cause they're willing to talk to you. The first overture. To me that was back in another environment, 'cause after not having been in it for a year, it was another environment. That meant to say – I remember as you came back they gave you a little pamphlet, in 106, it said, it was written to the wife, it said, um, "please be advised that such-and-such is coming home on such-and-such a date. Now be prepared, and show some leniency towards him, cause he's used to seeing women with staple marks in their stomachs." You know, like Playboy centrefolds....

J.R Yes, yes, I've seen that, "Advice....."

B.H And I thought, it's very clever, but it's very true – Those things were the way of life, you had to change your way of life. Now you just could walk up to a tree and ... have have a wee! You know.

J.R Yes, actually, I remember when I was up there I went out to dinner with a corporal, and I was - we were just walking along the road and he stopped, and –

B.H Dropped his daks. mmm.

J.R I thought, "Heavens this is not normal behavior!" you know (different way of life), different standards.

B.H Yes, strip away some of the things and you become – This is all being.... rather ... 20/20 vision hindsight type thing and read a lot into it, I s'pose, but..... But that was very true, that particular.... Was it a Welcome Back Book as well? I'm not sure, but I remember that screed, it was very pointed, very true, and some of the simplest things are very true, aren't they?

J.R And how long do you think it did take you to get back to "normal"?

B.H Oh 6 months or so, I s'pose, I can't remember any.... There was a certain amount of pride in having been there. I know, 'cause the young blokes in the military sort of looked up to you "you've been there, what's it like ra ra"

J.R Did you get the ribbons straight away?

B.H Yes, wore them home. Well in actual fact we bought them, you could buy them in...., once you qualified for them, 6 months was, that one was it? active service, and the Vietnamese ribbon after 12 months, and you could buy them in the market place, down near the flags. So you wore them home. As soon as they were gazetted, or written in you're A 83

END OF TAPE 2

TAPE 3

B.H As soon as they were gazetted or written into your AB-83. As it became a, it became the old symbol of adulthood or manhood I suppose.

J.R Did it have a long term meaning for you, having been to Vietnam do you think?

B.H (Pause) Vietnam, at the end of it2was sort of a nasty picture. There was that gap where, up until now, where it seems to be we're looking for something, society, and the only thing we can focus on for acts of ..... whatever we consider to be good. Looking back at it then, we've had the hollow period where there's been the changeover. Um....you don't get much of a chance to sit down and talk about it very often. I haven't said much to my kids or anything. There's just not a great deal to say, there's probably a lot to hide as far as some of the things that we accept as being the norm here, but we sort of laugh at over there. I don't suppose you like to think you could be as brutal, callous.... Cause the environment here just wouldn't accept that, you know, weeing behind a tree, Gracious me! Or spitting out the window, or some of the other things, you know, just simple things like that. You wouldn't accost every girl on the street, or expect to be accosted by every girl on the street!

(Interrupted here)

J.R You were just talking about Anzac Day and Vietnam, views of Vietnam.

B.H I said I don't march, cause I think I said I leave it to the 'real soldiers? That might mean something that I'm not even aware of, but um. I think the grunts earnt their spurs, and those who in actual fact were in combat. My contribution in that way) may entitle me to march, but I don't think it does as much as it does those blokes who actually suffered and who remember their mates. I didn't know one bloke, who was in actual fact killed. So, you know, I haven't got that sort of camaraderie. Now I have served with blokes and we have a particular type of camaraderie, but I'm not sure, it's different to those who've served together and had, you know, a mate go while they were there, in combat, at that moment.

J.R And how do you feel about having a Welcome Home March for veterans? Have you heard much about it?

B.H Yes well in actual fact I thought I'd go along, but I may be

going to Europe, I don't know. Um, yes, I was going to go along to that, just for the, um, want of supporting it, because I believe there are some people who need that. I've heard a lot about it from the Veterans Affairs, not that I'm a member or anything, about this Agent Orange and the effects of the Vietnam War. I don't think I've suffered any of that, but I can see that some people might perceive they do. And that's another argument entirely. Because I haven't - Now I always, or often, used to think, Crikey, what's a nervous breakdown, that's only those weak-gutted people etc, to speak coarsely, but when I came back from Vietnam I was suffering problems, and he said, oh you've got nerves. And he gave me these things, and lo and behold I came back to being the Bill Harrison I thought I would be. And so obviously there are some things about myself I don't really know myself. And so to point a finger at somebody and say "you're as weak as water", I don't know, I may well be that way myself.

J.R Did anybody you know have any long term problems?

B.H Mentally speaking, or socially?

J.R Oh, or physically.

B.H Well one bloke I know, lost an arm and a leg, he used to work with my wife. He would obviously, have some problems. And probably something I couldn't even realise or visualise, as to how he perceives, you know whether or not he thinks people owe him, or people should feel sorry for him, or dammit, that was his contribution - I really don't know.

J.R Was he a mine casualty?

B.H Yes he was. Only a small one too. I was amazed, cause I'd never actually... One of the small hand type things, hidden in the ground, not bigger than....

J.R Is there much awareness in the army now, about Vietnam? or is it just a bygone war?

B.H We're trying, I think as a whole, nation or army, we're trying to get over the thing? thinking? that left a bitter taste in the mouth, people're saying it was a bad war and this 'n that. I obviously don't have that opinion, I've already expressed my view, I can't get over it though, I read in the Army newspaper the other day, a bloke saying he felt ashamed to wear his ribbons. Why? What did he do, that he thought so wrong? That's a personal thing, but I don't think he should be advocating that for everybody.

J.R Well some veterans say - that's why I was asking you the reaction of people when you came back - because some people would say, yeah, they got a bad reaction when they came back, from civilians or from their family, in a pub somewhere, people'd get aggressive towards them because they'd been in Vietnam I suppose it depended a bit on the political climate and when people came back.... Were you aware of anti-Vietnam

demonstrations .....

B.H Oh we were, but you know, that's what turned your stomach, you know when I was saying, we weren't getting any support from the Australian people, y'know. Regardless of whether it was right or wrong, you should've been supporting the troops. For crying out loud, their sons dying over there. That might be y' reason for wanting us out of there, but, too late, son. Y'know, but what about the rest? Maybe it was presented in the wrong way, maybe it's all a great big theatrical show, they cocked it up by saying, this is the way it should be done. No, no, people don't like it that way, present it this way it might be acceptable. I dunno. (Pause) I can't think of any definite bad feeling, anything like, anything I have had, I've normally passed it off as their ignorance. Maybe that's a safeguard to myself, in trying to sit down and question it. ....too simple.

J.R What about the RSL, do you belong to an RSL Club?

B.H No I don't. No. I went to a reunion recently, 101 Fd Workshops 30th Reunion. I went along, 'cause I'd never been to a reunion, as such, ...I didn't know what to expect, I went there, I was rather - I must have been expecting something 'cause I felt it was rather empty, people I suppose hoping to see there, weren't there. Obviously they'd ... it was a unit I'd had a particular amount of - associated with in a particular way, 'cause that was sort of stepping stone to Vietnam, stepping stone back, and maybe that means something. The fact I've been there makes me think that I have served in some way. That's an attitude, as I said I'm a Royalist, I believe I'm a good Australian - I try to be a good Australian. I think giving service: I'm in the army, for crying out loud. I'm a Justice of the Peace. Maybe I'm a giver rather than a taker.

J.R I was wondering about the RSL because I was wondering whether you think they accept Vietnam as being equivalent - well, not equivalent perhaps - but a war in the same way .....

B.H The Second World War was the war as far as those blokes're concerned. I suppose Vietnam for us will be our war. Nothing will be as dirty, or as ... I don't know what we're looking for as a society, whether it be the glory of, whatever, I haven't researched that enough in myself to be able to put a word to it. But we seem to be searching for something! Look at the upsurge now, of all the Vietnam books and all the Vietnam films, you know, that thing about Platoon, people said, Is that what it was like? I say well, taken over the canvas of it, you would expect one bloke in every platoon would've had some sort of experience like that.

J.R Did you see Platoon?

B.H Yes I did.

J.R What did you think of it? I mean ....

B.H It showed the confusion. Oh, crushed? grossed? me. When I was with 131, we were called out on a TOAR patrol - sorry a clearing patrol - dusk; we went around one way, we're going through it, we had a grunt by the name of Mamoun, Corporal Mamoun, I was most indignant, I said for Chrissakes I joined the army to be a radio mech, not go out there, this is dangerous country, for crying out loud! Young Harrison's got his wind up.

Anyhow I went out there and played soldier! They had enough grunts, why'd they want a Raeme bloke, that's what you blokes are for, I'm being paid to look after this! Any excuse, I suppose. I let myself down, I think, in a lotta ways in that way.

Anyhow, I went out – SHIT! there's somebody out there. Thumbs down, hit the ground, line up, we reported back 'contact'. I thought, we're going to get in a shit fight here, no problems at all, because behind us, all you heard was "open sights, canister load." Well if you've ever seen the effects of canister we wouldn't 'a had a chance if they'd opened up, 'cause that was just after Coral was overrun too, by that platoon that had their guns inward, that'd happened probably 12 months before - I say 'just after' cause we're talking 63-75 period.

But ooh ooh - the patrol'd gone round the wrong way, see, and we were just about to brass 'em up. And we could'a done it! And it would've been just another mistake. The confusion factors there, as portrayed by Platoon. Probably on a much greater scale, and the boredom of, ah, burning out the cans (from latrines) that had to go on, the camp routines, even applied to digging out the stormwater drains, and dixie bashing, you get turns on that... Cause you're self supporting. You know, different to say Vung Tart_ where they had the Vietnamese in. At Nui Dat you didn't have that, you had to do it all yourself. For the security aspect of it. We weren't going to have Vietnamese in, for that reason, we were up there. But...ah ....Yeah, I think they had to try to portray, in Platoon, a particular incident, and attribute it to one man in platoon , say you have 30 men in a platoon, they're all kooks, had suffered the 'ravages' of war or whatever it was, I don't think it was that way, from my recollection of 4 RAR, and my contact with the grunts themselves. Be it on R & C, R & R or even just ordinary course of business when you had to - whiz out from 106 to go somewhere. It wasn't like that at all. I think they probably tried too hard, but then again it wouldn't've been as impressive as it was.

J.R No, it was a pretty nasty sort of film. Someone asked me, Did You enjoy it? And I said, No, I don't think 'enjoy' is the word! I came out feeling a bit....

B.H ....Fragile. That sort of things happen. Body bits everywhere.

J.R I think I've just about done all this (looks at cards). Is there anything else you'd like to say? Oh, there's one final thing, do you have any thoughts on what the general image of the Vietnam veteran is? Do you think it's seen in a positive way now? Or seen as a shaky, sickly sort of person?

B.H I think that's slowly taking shape (the positive image). Oh sorry, as an individual?

J.R No, the whole concept of the veteran - Did you see the Vietnam miniseries on television? (Yes I did) What did you think of that?

B.H (Pause) Yes and no, it was the same with Platoon. Some of it very well done, others just too unreal for words. So it didn't really form, I don't think it would have formed an opinion with anybody. Those who already had an opinion would have kept that opinion.

J.R For people who don't know anything about it, which is most people in the population, if they see something like that, they perhaps think, oh, that's what it was like.....

B.H (Pause) It could be true, couldn't it. Phew. As far as the image.... Oh, gracious me.... Personally it appears to me, and I can only tell from the aspects of this Agent Orange thing, and how it's affecting people... It would appear the Vietnam vets, or a Vietnam veteran, may be a bit of a whinger, looking for something. Maybe some require it. We're all different people, and it might've affected some people that way. But I don't think it's the majority, I really don't. Then again I wasn't in the situation where I came face-to-face, hand-to-hand with having to kill somebody, or, you know, fill up body bags. Had I done that, my views may've been different, and they may well be the same as these fellows who now're claiming, that they're suffering because of it, you know mentally and physically - or more mentally, I think, is the go, isn't it, and physical aberrations in their offspring, and things like this. My 2 kids are okay. I lived at Nui Dat, I slept in the stuff, I walked through it, I reckon I got as much as those blokes did, you know, how much do you need? I suppose my comments are pretty paltry, in that regard, unless you talk to somebody from either extreme I probably am at an extreme, at one end, where I wasn't on operational duty. I was talking to a bloke up at DSU the other day. Out of 365 days he spent 302 days on operations. Now that would be at the other extreme, to my way of thinking. But he seems, you know, a normal bloke - we talk about the same sort of thing, seems pretty well adjusted.

J.R Well, you're more typical than the grunts, aren't you, in terms of numbers: there were more people in support units than on operations.

B.H Well, yes, what was it? 7:1 or something?

J.R No, no, not quite like that, about 40% in the field, more like 2:1 then.....

J.R Well I've come to the end of my questions, you'll be relieved to hear.