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GARY SHOEMARK

J.R First of all if you could just tell me where you were and how you came to get into the army?

G.S Um, I went into National Service because, I got out of the C.M.F too early, and I was called up. In other words I missed the conscription, went back over a period of time, in other words my O.C. that I had in the C.M.F dobbed me in and I got called up.

J.R Right, but if you were in the C.M.F you only had ...

G.S You had to do five years [Right] I did four and a half [I see] then I went to Newcastle to work, I told them I couldn't be bothered transferring, so I got called up, up there.

J.R So you got called up when you were a regular 20 year old group did you? [No, no...] or you were older?

G.S I was 21.

J.R Right, okay. So how did you feel about being called up?

G.S Well I wanted to join the army when I was 15, me Dad stopped me.

J.R So you hadn't joined the C.M.F to get out of nasho?

G.S No, it was one of those things, if I went I went. The only thing I had against it was I reckoned everybody should have gone, at least done, instead of having this lottery business, everyone should have done it. But I don't hold that against anybody. I just happened to go, so.

J.R And why didn't your father want you to join up?

G.S No, he didn't want me to join up, I tried to join an apprentice school when I was 15, I just got out of, you know school, I was still going to school. And I wanted to join the apprentice school, but it was, you had to sign up for 9 years, and Dad reckoned I couldn't handle that. I passed everything and found out when I turned 21 that Dad was the only one that stopped me going, he didn't tell me at the time. So I wasn't too, too depressed when I got called up. I had a couple of, not business ventures, I started to work for meself, I'd been working for meself for a week, got called up.

J.R (laughs) Doing what?

G.S I'm a plumber by trade [Oh right] I work for the hospital, been up there 15 years now, so there was no drama really.

J.R And you were a qualified plumber by the time you got called up?

G.S Yep, yep.

J.R So could they use that directly . .?

G.S Yeah, yeah, I got paid when I went to ah, when you go in and do your rookie training, I did that here at Kapooka. We could, I wanted to go to the engineers because I was a plumber. So that wasn't too bad. I went over there as a plumber, when I got posted to Vietnam I got, I went as a F.E, Field Engineer.

J.R Is that related in any way to plumbing?

G.S (laughs) No, not one iota.

J.R Right, so where did you do your corps training?

G.S Corps training at S.M.E in Sydney. At, ah, yeah, S.M.E, that's close enough, at Holsworthy there.

J.R And did they at some stage, say you could volunteer to go to Vietnam?

G.S Yeah, well they give, they give you preference, they just said "Righto, you've got three choices where you'd rather go". My first choice was Vietnam, mainly because I thought I was doing the right thing. Well being in the army for two years I thought, well, the only way I was going to get anything out of it, was to go. Well I was thinking on the money side of it, staying there, your wages were about half of what you got outside, so I suppose my motive was money at the time.

J.R You weren't employed before you went in, you were working for yourself?

G.S No, I only started to work for meself for a week. Just me and another bloke.

J.R But you weren't, you know how some employers made up, if people were called up they made up the army pay to what the civilian pay would have been?

G.S Oh no, no.

J.R You weren't in anything like that. It may have only been Banks and things that ..

G.S If you were in the private sector I think you were right, like working for the government. More or less, but yeah they had to keep a job for you. But like I said I started working for meself, so didn't want to go back to, but the boss I had before that period of time, he said, any time come back, as soon as I come back and find the work in Newcastle, had a job there for me. So he was a pretty good bloke.

J.R And the other people that you were called up with that were in

your sort of group, were they keen also to go to Vietnam? The general feeling do you think?

G.S I'd say, I think the general thing was that you were doing the right thing. We didn't, you didn't really know much about it, about the war thing.

J.R What year was this?

G.S I went in '70, 26th November, my sister's birthday, I know it's the exact date.

J.R And did you have exactly 365 days?

G.S No, I had 30, 30 days short of it, I went for 11 months, I come home on the 26th October the following year. That's when they started to pull them all out.

J.R Yes, yes. And, so you volunteered to go, was there a formal sort of thing where you put your name down and ...

G.S Yeah, well that's what I was saying, they give you a sheet where you'd like to go, you've got three choices, you had, you might want to go to Townsville or want, within, wherever the corps unit was, like engineers were, you know, and I said, well I'll volunteer for Nam. Ended up, giving it, you had to put, if you volunteered for it you had a pretty fair chance of getting it, just one of those things. And we were, we went over as, what do you call it, we were in a holding wing called RGA, not R, can't remember the name of it. But we were in a holding wing and if they wanted someone specifically they used to say righto you're_ going, you really didn't know when you were going, so we, I did ten weeks corps training then 3 weeks at Canungra, to get you sort of acclimatized to the jungle-type conditions, more or less the heat and that. And I went to the sergeant I had, I said "well when do I go?" he said "you won't be going till March the following year", this was in 1971, and about three days later they called me out in parade and said "you're going in a week". I said "why" and they said "oh a bloke got hurt" and I had to take his place. I got, I got a form at home, I've still got all my, when I got out of the army they give you your whole history [oh yes] when you went and why you went, and they had who I replaced on the form. He got hurt, I don't know how bad he was, the bit I heard he'd, the way he got hurt he trod on a mine... [he got hurt badly] he got hurt very badly, yeah. I'm not saying that's true, I, you get a lot of hearsay. Like the bloke that was on the T.V the other day about war atrocities or some garbage, he heard from a friend from a friend who told him in a pub that happened to hear it somewhere along the way. That could have been from (talking together) that's garbage really.

J.R Yes, yes, yes, you have to take him with a grain of salt really.

G.S But why would he write a book on it, that's garbage, you know, unless you're there, you don't really know I don't think, you

shouldn't write things on hearsay.

J.R Well that's what I'm doing. (laughs)

G.S No, but he didn't hear it from somebody that was there [Right right] He heard it through a hotel like any, most Anzac Days a bloke would stretch things a little bit.

J.R I've even, actually a friend of mine in Sydney told us, knew I was interested in people who'd been in Vietnam and she said 'oh there's this bloke I met he's really interesting you should meet him, he was with the Australian troops that invaded Cambodia and he was really badly injured, and I said [certainly were Australians in Cambodia] but, [Australians were in Cambodia] I know some were, but not as a sort of, you know he was telling everybody how they'd gone in and you know, battalions of them and things, and it turned out, my friend met his mother and she said he was never even in the army, he hurt his leg in a motor cycle accident and he tells everyone he was in, wounded in Vietnam because it sounds good. (laughs) You know so...

G.S I had a there, he was over there early on when they [was he] we had a lot of Australians in Cambodia. Not saying I know it for a fact but they were. Not like Americans they were there but they weren't there.

J.R Yes, yes, yes, the border was fairly fluid. [Yes the border was] Yes.

G.S I never ended up up there, thank goodness. [No, no] Furtherest I went was Xuyen Moc. That was hairy enough, spooky little area.

J.R Anyway, so you went to Vietnam as a single replacement? [Yeah] And you travelled over by?

G.S Plane. Went over with Qantas, I think it was Qantas those days.

J.R Yes. And were you just pretty much on your own or were you one of a group of replacements going?

G.S Yeah, out of the engineers I think we had about 7 on the plane that were engineers going over, some went to what they call-small ships, some went to 17 construction, some went to 1 Field, I was the only one that day that went to 1 Field, that was an experience in itself. We come in, we flew in, flew in, into Saigon, Tan Son Nhut airport, then they say righto you got to wait for a plane to go to, up to the Dat, up to Nui Dat, so I flew up to Nui Dat, flying over the Dat there's nothing, all you could see was the air strip, and you land and they say "there you are, hop out of the plane" and here you are standing in the middle of this, standing in the middle of this bloody air strip and you can't see anything, just a building, and you got no rifle, and you say "well what happens here?" Next thing a Land Rover come up and they said "you so and so" and I said "yeah", "get in"

he drove me in, took me over and said "that's where you're going to live for the next 12 months", and then they give you what, ah, 2 weeks acclimatization, which is, oh, and then from there they, where did they sent me out to the horseshoe, there was a fire support base. And you do your operations from a fire support base, started off with night time ones, just went out of a night to a certain area and you ambush the area, come back in the morning.

J.R And you do, did all that even though you, that was just the acclimatization?

G.S Sort of, yeah. [Yeah, so you...] Well, if they were in a hurry for you well you did it while you were doing it... But it was supposed to be two weeks and I think I got about 3 days, when you were out in the scrub. That's when I was with 1 Field. We were one day out in the, well when we were at the horseshoe, we had to go (pause) I come back in from the horseshoe, they said we had to go and pick some grunts up from up near Xuyen Moc, just as we were getting there we went out with the tracks, out with the APCs, with the amount of mine incidents that were in that area, that was our job, you know do mines, blow up bombs, look in tunnels, used to hate them, didn't like tunnels, that was spooky. And we were probably about two clicks from where they were, and a big fire fight broke out, and we, you know the blokes called the choppers in to give them a hand, and the Vietnamese left and we had blokes, two of their infantry blokes shot, one was shot in the leg, one was shot in the stomach. The bloke that was shot in the stomach lived and the bloke that was shot in the leg died, bled to death internally. And the bloke that was in charge of the infantry, he said "I know where they're going", this was Christmas eve as a matter of fact, so that was how long I was in country before we got into... So I was only there a month. They took us out to, go up towards Xuyen Moc, well I reckon, it was up near an area called Tiger and Picton, the Americans used to have two big fire support bases there, they were null and void when I got there, they were pulled down, and he said "Oh they'll come through here, and about 3 o'clock in the morning they did, I think they estimated there was 20, estimated there was 32 of them, and the APCs and the grunts had ambushed the area, they killed about 28 of them, in one big ambush. They never stopped shooting for, all night, until the sun come up. We called a, or they called a chopper in called Snoopy, drops flares, and the flares, you know because the Vietnamese had a pretty fair, they used to like picking the bodies up, if they could get them out, there was nothing worse than say, it sounds pretty morbid and they say, there's nothing worse than if you have a fire fight, know that you've killed somebody, and when you go out to get the bodies they're not there, and that's,.. you don't condone killing people people, in a war it's pretty simple. Anyway, we had a, so that was our job then in the morning as engineers, like when this fire fight was going on I, excuse the expression, shit meself, I had me back to where the fire fight was, and when the claymores go off, they've got a back blast on them, and it flashes into the

trees right along this corner, and it's all flashed into the trees, and I thought they were coming in from behind me, 'cause I was dead to the world asleep, and all of a sudden you're awake, I tried to find a rifle and me, and magazines and I got rifle in one hand and I couldn't find them, I had them both in me hands, it freaked me right out, you know.

J.R Were you in a fire support base?

G.S When this happened?

J.R Yes.

G.S No we were just sitting on the ground. And we had four APCs it was only, well there was four APCs, they were out the front and one behind, and there was two of us engineers and, I don't know how many grunts, I can't remember the exact number, probably would have probably 50 of us all up. The only reason we got them, it was a moonlight night and we were like in a big clearing and there was a track that come down through into the scrub and we've ambushed the corner, ambushed the corner in there. And the Vietnamese come down, they've, they did the same things we used to do, walk the same, when I say walk the same, they did our formations different, I think formations are a big strange, always they were, and they missed the corner, they were spread way out, see you walk as far as you can see the next bloke in front of you, and he missed the corner, the forward scout so he's doubled back and that's brought them all together like that, when they brought them all together, they let fly, 30 claymores, all these blasts in the trees, I'm screaming. Scared half to death.

J.R You were in what they call splinter team were you, so you were attached to a platoon?

G.S No, I, you either had a mini team, you had a splinter team, mini team, sprinter team was two blokes a mini team was six. Now you, if you went out with the infantry you went out with the platoon as a splinter team, yeah and mini team you'd go out with a whole company, that way you had two blokes for each platoon. And if you went out with the ca; you went out as a splinter team too, that was two blokes. You had a number one and a number two, so that the number one's the bloke that's been there for awhile, teaches his number two, over a period of time you'd come up to be the number one and you teach the next bloke that comes in. [You get new one] A lot of blokes didn't want them, but we went out with most everybody in the finish, 'cause that whole area that we were in, down the bottom was, a lot of mine incidents, 'cause we had our own, what you call mine map, our mine map, if we went out with infantry they just had an area map, our map was the same but it had all the mine incidents marked on it, and where suspected mine fields were and all this sort of stuff. And we went out with, see after about four months I asked to get taken out of the bush, 'cause I, my nerves were R.S. Like I was saying after this ambush where we got, on Christmas, Christmas has never been any good to me, I just go wanders, I never have

presents for Christmas, people say you should be able to forget it, but it's pretty hard when it's on Christmas Day, on Christmas Day we, we stripped 26 bodies or 28 bodies whatever it is, the exact amount I can't remember. And we had to search all those people and bury them, and we did that on Christmas Day.

J.R That was sort of considered an engineer's job was it or did everybody do it?

G.S See the thing was we had, if you had a body, you couldn't just walk up to a body and search it, you had to turn it over with a grapple, we had a little grapple hook [In case it was booby trapped] That's right. So we, that's what we did all morning. There's nothing worse, the human body decays very quick, as soon as the sun comes out it starts to smell, so you can imagine what the whole place was like by about lunch time, especially in that sort of area. So we searched them, stripped all their clothes off burnt all their clothes and then just dug a big hole and buried them. And we used to go back every now and then and check it and the bloody pigs dug them up.

J.R Did they? The VC didn't come back and ...

G.S Oh no, they wouldn't come back, they wouldn't come back and pick them up, that's just, I know. That's like over there too if you get shot in the head the body stays, the Vietnamese won't have anything to do with it, because they think if you get shot, your head's damaged, your soul's gone, your soul escapes. So, you can have anything else as long as your head's alright, you still have your soul. It's quite, it's really an eye opener. But after that, you know I thought about it when I got back to camp happened.

J.R Was that your first contact, experience of contact? [Yeah] So you sort of ...

G.S Other than the one before that when this bloke got shot in the stomach, that was 24 hours before, 12 hours before. [So it was a pretty sort of] Oh it's [Going in at the deep end isn't it] Oh you got thrown in at the deep end alright. Like I, they said, I was sitting, the reason I went out, I was in camp, I'd come back from the Horseshoe, I'd only been back probably 8 hours, and as soon as you come back in they put your name up on the board, I was sitting in the hut, not in a but in a tent, and a bloke come up to me and he said "Look, you want to go out and pick the grunts up, you'll be back for tea?" And I thought, oh yeah no problem, I'd had a shower and what I'd call me clean clothes on, I just threw the rifle in me hand and the, I never carried me magazines, you know I had a big bag I used to carry them in, I used to just sling it over me shoulder it was easier to get at, so I just threw them and jumped on the track and the bloke said "oh we'll be back in a couple of hours", 3 days later we got back, and the hell shot out of everybody. Well one track shot 30,000 rounds.

J.R Which battalion was that with, do you know, do you remember?

G.S No we weren't with a battalion, we were with a... [Oh it was only, only the cavalry] Only the cavalry, this bloke said "I know where they're going", so, RARs get me beat, I don't know half the RARs that were up there at the time, 'cause I really didn't have that much to do with them [Didn't you, right right] When you went out as a splinter team you just got to know people, you didn't, they were soldiers like you were. If you went back through the year, it wouldn't be hard to find out what RARs were over there and the contacts they had. I don't know how, that never ever made the paper that contact, I never [No I don't think a lot of them, I mean a lot of them didn't, looking at the...] That was probably one of the, other than the Long Tan, a big one, that was back in the 67 or whatever it is. But this one, it was the biggest one, you could find it because it was at Christmas time, Christmas Day, Christmas morning. I mean all hell broke loose in that. You know I got back into camp after that and I wrote home to me Mum about it and I said it wasn't real, it was like a dream, I just sort of put if off, it really didn't worry me all that much, I put it down to something that happened, and, what was the other one we ended up in....

J.R And did it, but did it sort of keep coming back?

G.S Well I can talk about it reasonably easy, there's no drama with it, <u>that</u> one. The one that got to, we had another one after that on New Year's Eve, New Years Eve [Sort of festive] Festive occasion, we'll see, there, they have the Chinese New Year over there see, their Christmas doesn't come round till, what they used to call the Tet offensive [Sort of January, late January] Yeah see all these blokes were going home, see one bloke I got, I ended up with his watch, that sounds pretty morbid too, but that's war I think, if they killed, if they had've got rid of me they, [they would have taken your watch] Well I didn't have a watch. I wore a watch, oh probably when I got home for about 5 years and it stopped one day, oh it got wet, and I said, 'cause it had blood round in it, had all, black ring around it when this bloke was shot, the blood got into the face of the watch. I got it cleaned out, and that watch never went again. I thought, well, so I just threw it away, didn't know if it was an omen or what, but there you go.

But the worst one, the one that got me in the finish, you know, we went up to, we were in the Horseshoe, we had to go up into what they call the Long Hais, the mountains, I hated that place, you couldn't move, everywhere you went you had to do with a mine detector, there was so much shrapnel and crap up in there. So went into this, one day we went up in there, and, daytime you're not allowed to move, you get, 'cause the mountains they look down, they're always in there, so a bloke said " "Right we're going to move at night time," so we shifted, we started moving at dark, and we were still mine detecting at 2 o'clock in the morning, moving to where we had to go. And we pulled up and we said, "oh we'll ambush this corner on the track", and we put this ambush down and it was on a corner, another corner, the track come around like this, and we were sitting in there, I don't know

what time it was in the morning, next thing there was about 30 Vietnamese come along, they were, been down getting water from the creek, and the bloke said "Ah, we'd better not hit them", 'cause there was only 15 of us, any time you always go, if you're going to ambush somebody you go about 2 to 1, 2 of them, 1 of them, 2 of us, and the bloke said "yeah, we'll let them go", and they got to about the last 3 blokes going past and they started into it, they knew we were there. And I was, being in the engineers, where they put the ambush down they had about 12, 13 grunts in a circle, and we were up in here, and the gun right in front of us, an M60, and the bloke that was using that, had his number one beside him and his gun jammed, and he's jumped off, the easiest way to clear an M60 is to get off the ground and give it a good old reef, takes 3 seconds I suppose, he's up off the ground, hit the ground again, and in that time they drive a grenade underneath him. They've just, like sitting in behind us, he's number one and when the grenade went off all it did was put a nick across his nose, and this bloke's took the lot, he's up, he's turned around, I've looked at him, never had a mark on him and all of a sudden the whole front of him was just red and over he went. And he was, his mate's, he was still alive/and his mate's says "scream, make him scream", so he was hitting him and we were throwing rocks at him to make him scream and the chopper come in, the medivac chopper, and they've dropped a, the basket down to put him in, got him in and they got caught in the trees going up and he died then. He only had 6 weeks to go to come home. And they said to me, they said look, if they ended up with a heap of blokes wounded and this bloke killed, I never got a scratch, I was hiding behind a tree about that round, about as round as me finger.

J.R Were you as engineers sort of expected to do anything much in like that...

G.S Oh yeah, we, oh christ yeah, oh yeah.

J.R You didn't, the grunts sort of say ...

G.S Oh no, no, no, no, we weren't protected, we were there to do the job too, we were taught to fight, so. Not that it was my best forze, not saying that I was a coward, but it scared the hell out of me, I think anybody said they weren't scared was pretty crazy. But the bloke was in charge and he said "Look, we're gonna' have to clear an area behind us", and I thought, Jesus. We've gone over to cover our rear, but the gooks they used to hit and run, you know, they'd fight and then go on. We killed probably, I think we killed 3 of them, I can't really remember. Anyway they rang up and said "get the cav in", they had blokes to get us out, as soon as we get hit we call choppers in for support plus the cavalry, the APCs come in. Although they come tearing in, they just come straight through scrub so that, as soon as they start coming the gooks will go anyway. They came, and I got in the APC, I got back to, back to the Horseshoe and they said "righto you can get out now" and I wouldn't get out, I said "no, I've had enough" they said "big deal" 3 blokes

had to get me out, I wouldn't get out, petrified was the word I think, nerves were rat shit. So I went to the O.C after that and I said "Look, you're going to have to give me a break", he said "I can't", I said "If you don't I'll find a way around it" I said "I'll job one of the officers and you'll have to put me in jail, that will get me out of it". So he said "alright", and with 17 construction they had a, they were doing all these, building all these flat things for, little homes for the gooks and the, like in Baria and Long Dien and a few of the other places, and they said "Oh we'll send you over there for a month so you can cool down'. I said "Oh I'd appreciate that, give it a shot", I ended up over there for 6 months, which was great. I used to, I come home on R & R and my nerves were terrible.

J.R Did you. You came back to Australia for R & R?

G.S Yeah. I thought, well I didn't really want to go anywhere else. See how Mum and Dad were going, I was engaged at the time, don't know why, shouldn't have, I think that was a bit selfish really, should never have got engaged.

J.R Did you get married?

G.S Yeah, I'm still married to the same lady. Known her for 20 years. But I thought, when I thought about it later on I thought it was a bit selfish, like it's cut her life down a bit and if I had of got hurt well, you sort of put her on a bind. In a way I sort of didn't forgive meself for doing that, at the time I thought it was the right thing to do.

J.R Yeah, yeah, it's hard to know isn't it, I mean [Yeah that's right] I mean in some ways it's probably a help to both you and her to have sort of a commitment, but...

G.S I stayed out in the Horseshoe for awhile after that I suppose. Funny, you get your funny things too, like they had curfews and in the horseshoe they used to send a mortar up, a flare, being 6 o'clock at night that's curfew you're not allowed out on the roads or anything. Anyway they had a misfire on the flare, it went straight through the padre's tent, it went in one side and he came clear out the other side, it was classic. We saw it happen, he says, next thing we get a phone call, we've had a misfire can you come over and get it, see that was our job too, any unexploded bombs and all that sort of thing we had to go and defuse and that sort of thing. Went out to another place called Bridget, it was a fire support base, this was in the first 4 months I was there all this funny stuff happened, and, you had to live underground out there, in the sand, it was all sand, I mean sand in <u>everything</u>. And we had one ya ya there, he went home, and for some unknown reason he had a footlocker full of high explosives like mines and bombs and all things he'd collected, don't ask me why he collected them, they said "we've got to get rid of this", so being our job we took it about 3 clicks away from the fire support base, in the sand, well they'd cover you while you did it, and you got to blow it all up. So we've gone up there and, people not knowing very much about explosives, well they get a bit

funny, we were taught about it, and...

J.R Did you feel you knew enough? (talking together) [Oh yes, I liked explosives] you felt pretty confident about [oh yeah] yeah.

G.S But it's like anything, if you're interested in it, you learn pretty quick, if you don't want to learn you don't, that's just the... When I was going to school I never done study for an exam in my life, I hated school. Then I went and did plumbing, and passed that easy, came top of the state after 5 years, never studied for an exam, it's like you either learn it or you don't.

So anyway, we got out and we said, "oh we'll blow this thing up. And we had the APCs with us, they protected us while we set it up. And the bloke said "Oh how long a fuse are you going to put on it?" and I said "Oh, 3 minutes will be plenty" and he said "we can't get away from here in 3 minutes" I said "oh that's plenty of time". He said "Put about 7 minutes on it", I said "alright". Well we set the thing up, put a 7 minute fuse on it. And we drove away, you got to go about a click away, about 1000 metres. Anyway, we were sitting there like forever before the thing went off, and the bloke said "it hasn't gone off'.' I said "come on mate 7 minutes ain't up yet" He said "yes it would be." And while we were talking up she went. So that was alright, got rid of all that stuff, and I ended up back at the horseshoe again. And we had a couple of H.E rounds, high explosive rounds to blow up. Had the same bloke take me out. I was standing there, I set it up and he said "How long do you put on this?" I said "2 minutes" (laughs) He never even gave me time to get on the APC, he took off. I'm standing there with this fuse going, so I thought "don't panic!" [just run] (talking together) 'cause I put no, no, you don't, that's the worst thing you can do, if you run you've got more chance of falling over, and I thought I'll just wait for him to come back. So I've stood there and he come back to pick me up and we drove to where we had to go, then it went off. [You had time] See 2 minutes is a long time. [Yes, if you're ready to go] This bloke just, this officer just panicked, he went choo, gone, he left me standing there. I was scared, yeah. We were, it's funny in the field squadron though, you didn't see many people, you know, when we had the reunion I had a bloke walk up to me and say "Good day Shoeie" I said "who are you?" he said "I was in the same tent as you" In the field squadron either he was out or I was out, you were always going...

J.R You weren't operating as a unit together I suppose were you?

G.S Well that's with the splinter teams and mini teams, you were out with them and you were always crossing over, see that was the drama of it. See you really didn't get to know anybody.

J.R Was that a problem, did you feel a bit isolated or?

G.S Not isolated, I, I got to know one bloke pretty well. This is

the bloke that had 6 weeks to come home, the one that got killed. So I thought, oh I couldn't afford, I didn't want to afford myself the, I had acquaintances but no really close friends. You depend on one another, but you couldn't afford to get too close, I don't think. That, I think that's unique with Australian soldier, they, the comradeship was there, without getting too close. We all get out and got drunk together, had a good time whatever, and that was the end of it, you know you still went your separate way. Well even when we come back, a lot of, all those guys, I never got in touch with them when I got home for 16 years. And we all got back together and it was like we hadn't been, after the weekend it was like we hadn't seen each other for a couple of weeks, you know, you just got in and had a talk and then...

J.R So you did, I mean you did sort of know them?

G.S Oh yeah, mainly blokes that, when I went to 17 construction. The blokes in the field squadron I, I pretty well forgot most of them, 'cause I never saw them all that much.

J.R And after you went to 17 construction did you stay there for the rest of your tour?

G.S No, I went to 17 for 6 months then I went back to the field squadron, 6 weeks before I come home. They threw me out, 'cause all the work was done. Although it had its moments, you know.

J.R And 17 construction was just building basically was it? [Yes] Just building and repairing and [Mmm] right.

G.S Oh we used to do what they call the "rat patrol." Used to go down and guard the tip for the night time. 'Cause there was a blind spot on the wire. We had the tip by SAS on the hill, if you look down the tip was blocked down there in a certain area, so, we used to have to [that was yours] Oh if you wanted a day off you used to go and do the, what they call the rat patrol, it was funny, that's the good times.

J.R Did the Vietnamese ever come and raid the dump or anything? [Oh...] I mean civilians.

G.S They didn't have to, we used to give it to them. [Right, right] They didn't want for too much from us. See we had, that was the problem over there, western society made it too easy for them. If you go right back to when the, the French and that were there, western society has, you use something out of the packet and throw it away. You know, in those days in Vietnam, if they got a tin, say of fruit, they'd eat the fruit, and they'd burn the paper, and put the tin on the side of the house, there was no waste. And when we came, you didn't have, they'd say righto, they'd eat the fruit out of the tin, oh no, we'll give them a sheet of corrugated iron to put on the wall, so they'd throw the tin away. See that was the point. Go to Saigon, they had a tip there about 6 mile long and about 3 mile deep, of Saigon, it was just, garbage everywhere. But we did that with a, I don't blame, that's not their fault their country being dirty, it was

Americans, Australians, 'cause we made it so easy. They didn't, all their old ways of using everything fell in a heap. Western society's not as good as everybody makes out. (?)

J.R We do waste a lot don't we?

G.S You've only gotta go to a tip in a small town. Every council's got a tip [Yes, yes, full of good stuff] a tip.

J.R My husband always brings home treasures from the dump.

What did you think about the war? You know when you were over there and before you went?

G.S Well before I went I thought I was, when I was told, you know, they said "you're going, going to Vietnam, it's not a war it's a conflict." See they tried to tell us that, a war is someone, you can't fight a war against yourself, even though America had the civil war, they said Vietnam was not a war it was a conflict. You know as far as I'm concerned they're pretty well the same. But, I really, I suppose I was, like most people pretty naive, and you'd say, righto I'm doing the right thing, my friends have gone to Nam I might as well go too. And, where, like I said I was pretty army orientated through my life, when I got there the first thing I said to the bloke, "where's the front line?" and he just pointed in a 360° circle, he said "we're in the middle of it". There's no such thing. You know, you could be talking to one of the Vietnamese during the day, working with them. See we worked on this job site with these blokes just out of Baria, I can't, I'm blowed if I can remember the name of the town, if you went over a map I could show you, but I haven't got a map of Vietnam. We worked with this bloke for 6 weeks, when I went back to the field squadron we went out with the grunts on an ambush and we killed him, and I'd been working with him. You know, that sort of spooks you a bit, you know, if they wanted to, their blokes you're fighting during the night and they're working with you during the day. And in the finish I didn't have a clue what we were really doing there. America could have won it, I reckon, my own opinion, I think America could have won that war in 2 years. Their economy's based on wars.

J.R Yes, it seems to be.

G.S About 60% of their, their monies are wars. And in the finish it got to the point where they couldn't win it. Public opinion was, if they had've got in and blown the hell out of everybody else, and they'd say "oh you'd kill all the civilians off" See that's, it's history now anyway. And the problem was, and I suppose after 6 months I, you know I, I sort of couldn't wait to get home 'cause it was just futile, blokes were getting wasted for nothing.

J.R Were you aware, when you were over there were you aware of opposition at home? Was there much talk about that or did you

get local, home newspapers?

G.S Yeah, Mum used to send me the papers, you know. But the, the thing was, people that were in the army, my view was, you were sent because they thought things were right. Fair enough public opinion come out, it was when you come home more or less that the public opinion was rat shit. We thought we'd done the right thing, you walk, you get off the plane, when I come home and got off the plane, I walked in a pub to have a beer and a bloke said "where have you been?" I had the, you know the strips you have, I said "I just got off the plane from Vietnam", and he looked at me like I was shit. Like from the 1st world war and the 2nd world war, Korea, Malaya and all that, those blokes came back, they thought they did the right thing and they were accepted. We come back and no-one wanted to know you. In a way I was good I was in a small town, my parents reckoned I did the right thing and that's all I was worried about. They accepted that I did what I had to do, I didn't want to go to jail for a start, I could have said "No, I don't want to go", but that, people say you could have gone to jail for a year, see people hold that against you too.

J.R Course they do, yeah.

G.S There was one bloke came into Rookies when I went into Rookies at Kapooka, he said "I never want to carry a gun" and he went to the O.C and said "look, I don't want to carry a gun7, he said "I don't believe in the war" and he laid it on the line to him. And the O.C out there said "Righto" he said "you do your 10 weeks and what you have to do", which means he had to use a rifle and had to learn to shoot, then he said "then I will help you out". So he did his 10 weeks, then he was posted to the Ambulance, the medical side of it. He ended up in Nam as a medical... He got, he went through the right channels to help people, that way. And he, the 0.C. respected him for saying righto, that's what you want to do, but he could have said no, stick it in your ear, I don't, and be a real hard case, you can do without that. So he ended up he did his tour and he ended up in Nam, saw what was going on, but he never picked a rifle up from the time he left. See even if they got shot at, he was in Vung Tau, if they got shot at he wouldn't fire a shot back. And he got through his whole tour that way. And you respect somebody for, you respect people for their beliefs, but I, but like I say, I believed I was doing the right thing. Well after say 6 to 8 months all I wanted to do was come home. It got just out of hand.

The one that annoyed me the most, but you got home and people say "Oh how was your holiday?" Now as far as I know 500 people don't get killed on a holiday. People don't realize how tough it was, and when I say tough, tough mentally.

J.R Did you feel the strain, sort of build ...(talking together)

G.S The strain's there, it's there 24 hours a day the strains there, because like I said, when I said to the bloke "where's the

front line?" he just said "in the circle". Like you could have a nice sleep and the next night all hell breaks loose, fire fights all over the joint. There's no front line, like you could be walking down the street and someone'd shoot you in the back, that's the way it was.

J.R So even when you were with 17 construction, did you still feel sort of as tense as when you were with the field squadron?

G.S Only for a while. [And then you sort of...] Oh you got out of it. See we went up to, up through what they call the Courtney Rubber, towards the Black Forest, there was a fire support base up there we were working on, we were building huts and things up there. We went up through there one day and they shot out through the, we were just sitting in the back of a truck, the bullets were whipping across And you'd say "what the hell", just put your foot down, keep going. I drove a truck for, oh probably 3 months, because I had an army driver's license see, that wasn't too bad. You used to have another bloke with you for the rifle, then most times it was pretty safe, you'd drive by yourself. You had apathy was there too I suppose.

J.R And could you see a sort of change in people during the 12 months do you think, I mean did people get a bit twitchy or [Oh yeah] bad tempered or what?

G.S We had a bloke over there, he, two of them came over at the same time, into 17. They were the best of mates when they got there, towards the end of the tour, he threatened to kill him. You know he had a SLR up his nose, on the end of his nose, he said "if you ever get in my face ever again I'll kill you". And he was dead serious. The thing is you could in a way, you couldn't afford to have blues with everybody, you rely on one another.

J.R Well you can't get away really can you?

G.S But if you'd, well that's normal you have people, in 17, when you're in, when you weren't working you do the same thing every day. If you were in a confined area, you can't do anything else, but the same thing every day. See we'd come back in from working, we'd get in say, back at 4 o'clock, you'd, the boozer was open from 4 to 5, so you'd go and have a beer from 4 to 5, then you'd come back and play volley ball for an hour, then you'd go and have a shower, then you'd go and have tea, and you had movies every night, and you'd go and watch a movie, then you'd go and play cards, this would happen every night.

J.R Did it get monotonous after the...

G.S That's what I'm saying, you had...the same, that's monotonous...

J.R I mean it sounds alright for a sort of a [oh yeah it was great] an average day, but maybe ...

G.S Then if you're on picket you go down there and sit on a gun all night.

You had 2 hours on, 4 off and you sit there by yourself. That's not real good for your nerves. Well I had a picket on a, on a track out in the scrub, sitting there by meself on the thing, they've got what they call ha ha birds, they laugh like people, sitting up there in the middle of the night and this thing started laughing like a person, I thought I was dead, did the hell out of me. A place called Pagoda [yeah spooky] The jungle, we did a, we had a, when I was with the field squadron we went out on an operation and, we were going along this area, and we were, my number one, he was, we tried to get him out of the bush, he was starting to freak right out. He used to talk to you, and he'd say "look tonight we're going to get hit, I think we're going to die" and I used to just brush it off, but over a period of months, it started to get to me. See that was half the reason my nerves went straight out, up the tubes. Anyway we were out on this listening post, and you got the gun and you were out a bit further, for early and we were sitting out there the two of us see, see that's what I mean, we helped the grunts out, we did what they had to do. We were sitting out there and anyway, it sounded like foot falls, someone walking in the scrub, and this bloke so uptight, it was dark, and I mean when I say dark, in the jungle there was no twilight, it goes from light, just like someone turned the light off, and you put your hand there and you can't see it [very sudden] Anyway we were sitting there and you, pitch black, and you can hear this, like foot falls, and he'd done a bunk; bolted, back to the lines and he's left me out there by meself, and I'm trying, and with a jungle you, I used to sleep with me rifle beside me in, you never took a bed, you just took a liner out of the thing, just the silk, just to sleep in that in your clothes, never took your boots off, the whole time you're in the scrub you don't take your boots off, you can take your trousers off, but don't take your boots off, it's pretty hard to run with no shoes on. So we were, I'm sitting there and I'm trying to get this bloody rifle out, call the thing out, next thing it was a pig and it started to [breathing noises] Thought I was dead again, but you couldn't see, that was the problem. But the thing you had to think of, they'd say "Oh you can't see, sure to Christ they can't see either."

J.R But it's different isn't it, if you just wake up you have to adjust to it haven't you, whereas, I mean ...

G.S I wasn't asleep...

J.R No, but if you sort of...

G.S But I was trying to get the rifle out, I was going to let fly but I couldn't get the thing out of me bed. And this other bloke's gone, but we never ever reported that, we said "no need". We went back to the 0.0 and we've said "look," after that when we got back in, and I said "you're going to have to get him out of the scrub, and I mean get him out." and he said "why?" and I said "he's, he's sending everyone up the tubes." His nerves, he was, he was gone, but I don't really know what happened to him after that 'cause that's, I got posted [you got moved] over to the 17 construction mob.

END OF TAPE 1

SIDE 2

J.R Yeah, now you mentioned a couple of times in your unit that you went and saw the C.0, how did you find relationships with officers and ...?

G.S Well the officers we had (mumbles) [keep talking] well the officer we had was Major Sanders, and I thought he was a gentleman. I, you know, I, him being in charge, he was down in Sydney for the reunion, now as far as I know, he 's now a Brigadier General, he made the point of coming down there, probably 2½ hours before we had to march and he went around everybody and said good day to them. Now not too many officers would do that, but he, he took some money off me, he knew who I was, he said "I remember you being ...

J.R Did he take money off you?

G.S Oh I got charged with a few indiscretions.

J.R What sort of things?

G.S Drinking in the line [Oh right] Telling the O.C he was a yobbo, and that's one of those things. No, I was marched in front of him and I said "look, I'm a national serviceman", I said "I'm here to do a job" I said "you're a regular, you're here for one." He didn't take to , bit low, but that's the way I felt at the time. Some of the, some of the, like Lieutenants and that we had, you know were, cowboys. We had one, I got into a bit of trouble with him, I'd been out in the bush for a period of time, come in, the time you were in the scrub, you can be in the scrub for 2 days to 6 weeks, 6 weeks was about the maximum. I'd come back in, I hadn't had a shave or a tub, changed me clothes in a couple of weeks, you know all I wanted to do was, in that time I was carrying 1601b on me back, did that for a long time, you could be [you'd be tired] the word would be pissed off to be nice and calm, and I'm walking across the thing going back to me tent, and he's rounded me up and said, he'd only been in country 2 weeks, this Lieutenant and he said "you're unmilitary dressed sapper", I just told him to go and get stuffed. He said "you'll be on a charge"› and I said "I couldn't really care less mate”. And he said "you come and see me in 10 minutes, get yourself cleaned up." went down and had a shower for an hour, went back to me tent and he came flying up fuming and he said "I told you to come and see me." I said "you're here now you might as well talk to me." He ended up charging me for insubordination and a few other odds and sods. That's when I got to

visit the Major, he said "I understand, understand what you go through," he said "his charges, nothing I can do about it." I said "mate", that's when I said "You're doing a job of mine" (?) I had no animosity towards the bloke, like I say, they were only doing their job. But some of the Lieutenants were, were bad news, they were, they were dick heads I thought.

J.R And for something like that, a charge like that, you got just fined?

G.S forty dollars ...

J.R ... forty dollars, so it's not sort of too...

G.S No, there's no drama in it. See the most they can fine you is $40,and the most time they can give you is 21 days, without you being court martialed, I had...

J.R And did anyone get 21 days much, I mean...

G.S No, I got a few, I got one.

J.R And what did that involve? I mean vas that just confined to barracks? (talking together) Not down to the ...

G.S No, you did pickets and things like that, straight picket lines. Like where the other blokes'd go and watch the pictures, you were down sitting on a gun protecting them, that sort of thing, so that was no drama. I asked them to court martial me once, that was trying to get meself out of the bush see, I said "well if you're going to charge me for this, I'd like to be court martialed." But the thing is you get that, you get a dishonorable discharge which is not very good, in civilian life, and you got to come back to civilian life sooner or later.

No, most of the officers, well the main, most of them I got along with. We had one sergeant, he was a real yes-man, 'I'll do this for you till you had', see we worked, when I went over to 17, we worked probably four months straight without a break, four months every day we went to work to get all this stuff finished, and he said, "well if you get this finished on a certain time you can have the rest of the time off till the end of the month." So we've, we've really got into it, got it done, which meant we were supposed to have probably 8 days off. We got 1 day. And we've said to the officer, the officer in charge of us "what happened about this?" he said "I didn't know anything about it." See this bloke had just been in our ear and, so we went on strike, can you imagine being in the army and going on strike? Anyway we organized [I know what builders are like] No, you can't do it now I don't think. So we've gone on strike, we said, well bugger them, we'll go on strike. So we were all standing down there and the O.C. come down, this Major Saunders, he said, I think it was Major Saunders, anyway one of the big officers come down and he said "What are you blokes doing?" We said "we're on strike" he said "no you're not", We said "yes we are", He said "well I'll give you 5 minutes to go back to work", he said "otherwise you'll all be charged

with," was is it,...see when you're in a war zone and you refuse to fight or work, it's a chargeable offence which you can be hung for, so... we all went back to work! (laughs)

J.R Yes, very wise.

G.S That took the sparkle out of the lot of us, we went "Oh, fair enough" and went back to work, it was as easy as that. See it's not like being in, working for a boss, just can't do it. We thought all coming from private enterprise...

J.R Were you all nashos? Or most of you?

G.S Well I'd say 80% of us were, yeah. I honestly don't know, you'd probably have more of an idea of what the percentage over there, national servicemen...

J.R Well only the sort of overall figures, not the figures in individual units.

G.S No, well all us, civilians what was it, do you know?

J.R It was supposed to be between 40 and 50%, all up.

G.S Were nashos? [Mmm] Oh, I kind of disagree with that! (laughs)

J.R What, you think there were more or...

G.S Oh yeah, I think so. Towards the end of it, there was more national servicemen than anybody else, See we had national service officers, the lot.

J.R Did you? What about your NCOs?

G.S Oh, a couple were regulars, but a lot of NCOs were national service. [Were they?] The worst ones I got on with, we had a Major come over from the C.M.F, when we were out in the scrub, he wanted to take over the whole thing. He got threatened with death and I'm not kidding, I'm not kidding, I could blow his head off, all these things he, you know he'd come out "we'll do this we'll do that. We said "mate, we've survived here for 5 months now without your..." he thought it was play time. You don't know what a war's like until you get in it, and he come over, he was over there for 3 weeks or something and he thought it was GREAT FUN. But he thought he was still out, he could just jaunt off during the night and have fun, like you do here on, you go out on an operation here for fun. Well when I come home they wanted me to join the C.M.F again and ... "I've been there, I couldn't hack it for fun anymore", it's just not the same. And the bloke, one of the blokes there he couldn't sort of couldn't understand that. I nearly stayed in I says to the wife I said, either get married or I stay in the army, they couldn't, 'cause if I went and stayed in the army I was going to for a I mean if they wanted to post me there tomorrow I'd go, it's pretty hard if you've got a wife, so I got married

instead and got out. Ended up working for the hospital, been there 15 years now, so, pretty happy that way, a bit easier.

J.R Yes, so was there any sort of tension or differences between the nashos and the regulars?

G.S Not really, no. Not that I found. Oh you have your basic snide remarks at one another every now and then.

J.R Were the nashos a bit older?

G.S Well you had to be, I'm pretty sure you had to be 20, to go to Nam anyway, whether you were regular or whatever, probably...

J.R 18.

G.S No you couldn't go at 18, I'm sure of it, we didn't have any 18 year olds over there. I think they made a point of that, that's when they say average age was 19. I hardly run into anybody that was under 20. Then if you were regular army, if you went in at 17, trained, you'd have to be 19 at least. But they tried to make a point of not sending people that were too young. And they made a point if you had brothers and sisters, brothers, they had one at a time over there, which wasn't a bad idea.

J.R No, although I have interviewed a pair of twins that were both

G.S There at the same time..

J.R Yeah, but they were told that they didn't have to go, but they said they both got called up and they both went in, in one of the battalions.

G.S Oh they'd have to if one of them went if they were twins...!

J.R Well that's it, it would be a way to check up wouldn't it. Yeah, what about drink and drugs and things like that, were they a problem up there?

G.S Only a problem if you wanted to use it, there was no trouble getting it. Well I'd say I got drunk twice the whole time I was there, When I went in the army I had a drinking problem at 20 [Did you] Oh yeah, it was a good one too.

J.R And it didn't get worse in the army?

G.S No, when I went in the army I saw it as an out, when I was in civilian life living in Newcastle, if I went to work drunk I was feeling good, if I went to work sober I was crook, 20 year old alcoholic. When I went in the army I went to the sergeant I had there, sergeant Honeysett, and I said "look I've got a drinking problem" I said "mornings I'm going to be pretty R.S", but I said "just bear with me", I said "I won't go to the Doctor or anything." I ended up I got meself out of it, with a help from him, he backed me up. Middle of winter and

I used to sweat, on parade and I was sweating, so I thought... So I, so I got to the point if I drank I give up when I knew when I still knew what I was doing, I controlled me drinking, I still drink, I had a few beers last night, but I get to a point and I say I don't want to have any more, because, people say "oh have another one" and I said "no, I've already been there, I did it for a long time. I used to have 2 bottles of beer to go to work, it was terrible.

J.R It's lucky you stopped when you did.

G.S Oh yeah, I'd be dead now, for sure, I'd have nothing. I realize, I think half the problem is admitting that you had a drinking problem. It only took me 6 months to have that problem, 'cause I had nothing else to do. I probably had other things to do but I didn't want to do anything else, so that was good. Drugs, over there, no, You could get them (clicks his fingers) like that. People'd fend them off, you'd go in on leave in Vungers and they would accost you on the corner "would you like to buy". And then see out in the open you could just take off there and then policemen, and MPs'd walk past you...

J.R And do you think, did many people use drugs do you think?

G.S Well I think that being so open, Australians, not many Australians had a problem I don't think. It wasn't my scene, I smoked, I was smoking 70 cigarettes a day.

J.R That's a problem!

G.S But that was, that was, I had to do something with my hands, I was, I'm doing it now.

J.R Do you still smoke?

G.S No, I give it away 3 years ago, best thing I ever did. I used to smoke Camel and the strongest ones I could get hold of and, but I tried weed and all that, I still use it now and again, but I don't go looking for it though, if it happens to be there or if someone will say "do you want to have a hit?" and I'll say yes or no, if I don't want to I don't, that's just one of those things. But really I don't think it was a problem.

J.R And was drunkenness a problem?

G.S No. 'Cause you never had a, if you were in one field unit you didn't have a chance. See you got tickets to go and get your beer with, and you got 2 a day, you were allowed 2 cans of beer a day.

J.R And they were strict about that were they?

G.S Well they give you, they give you tickets, you had to go up, each day that was, you'd go up and you'd give them a ticket, pay your 15 cents for a can of beer and that was it, unless you had some bloke, everybody got their two cans of beer, now

if you were a non drinker [you could swap it around] you could give it to somebody else. But if you, if you'd been out in the bush, more than likely you never went back to the bush for 3 or 4 days, so you could have a skin full, and you had a day to get over it. If you went on ops, they left you alone pretty well, you didn't have to do anything else, you'd go and play sport. Sport was there, you played basket ball, you played volley ball, oh what else, go swimming, we had a big pool up near the strip, I say, it was only one of them portable ones, but it was somewhere to go and jump into. But no, I really don't think drugs were a, if you wanted to get into them there was no drama in getting into them, it was easy, simple, same with beer, like 'cause I got drunk twice, it took me about 3 days to sober up after one binge, and I thought, no, I'll give it a miss.

J.R Right. So if people got sort of twitchy or anything, how did they unwind? Or do you think people did just sort of build up the tension?

G.S I think, well like I say you're on the line, not like the 2nd World Var, you had, you could be taken off the line and go to a rest area, The only place we had to go was to Vung Tau and you were only allowed 2 days a month. But I went the first four months and never got to go anywhere. 'Cause I was out all the time, see this is what happened, you really...

J.R It's a fair while$_s$ isn't it$_3$ to go without some sort of a break from anything.

G.S But they think your break from it, if you ...

J.R Coming back to Nui Dat?

G.S Yeah, you'd back to the Dat or you'd go back to the 4orseshoe, you'd spend all night out in the scrub, we used to do night ambushes, we'd go out with the local, when I say the locals, the South Vietnamese army'd come out with us. And you'd come back in and then you'd have the day off, that was your unwinding, you sit down and write a letter. You're still there, you're still at the Horseshoe, blokes sending, guns sending rounds out, that's where you unwind. Or you could take your gun down to the rifle range and shoot at nothing, In a way it doesn't work.

J.R No. And what about going to Vungers, was that relaxing, I mean...

G.S That was good, yeah you could sort of get away from the war there, it wasn't too bad, you just didn't get to go there enough. You could tell the difference between the blokes that were there all the time, worked there, like you had Small Ships and the medical staff and all that, they saw what, they got, I felt sorry for the medical staff and the people they had to treat, the people that were coming home and the ones that were in boxes, and the ones that were, that was pretty, I know I got... They can have that job, like I say, we only saw that occasionally.

[bad enough] It was everywhere, you know, that's one of those things, but, it wasn't too bad. Unwinding was pretty hopeless, well the only way to unwind like, oh you go on leave and men will be men and boys will be boys, whatever. I held out for four months, I thought I did pretty well (laughs) But that was pretty rife over there, the old social disease.

J.R Was it, yeah? And was that taken pretty much for granted and people just get treated and forget about it, it wasn't a big drama ...?

G.S No I don't think it was a big drama. Well I think with our unit alone, when I was with 1 Field, we had a, over the whole time, whole session over there, the Australians, they reckoned there would have been, I think it was 94% that people who were sent to Nam, ended up with the social disease of some sort, and the other 6% weren't doing it (laughs) As I say it was pretty rife... I mean that was the risk you took (laughs) I took it and missed out; didn't miss out. I wrote home to mother "don't bother bringing in the firewood I'm bringing home a load" she didn't have a clue what in the hell I was talking about, and she quizzed my dad I reckon for about two months and he wouldn't tell her, thank heavens (laughs) And she still doesn't know.

J.R Yeah, probably people might be a bit shocked I suppose, I mean it's got that sort of stigma hasn't it? I mean it hasn't in the army it's taken more or less for granted....

G.S Well it's not taken for granted, fair enough it's, it's funny people said to me when I come home, they said "Oh you should be able to go without it", it's funny, I suppose you could if you really wanted to, but you say "why the hell, take the risk". You'd go out and get on the booze, what do you do though, you go into a bar, and you got, you haven't, doesn't matter women will come up to you, for what they do to you while you're standing there it's pretty hard to say no, without belting them fair in the mouth or something, but, men will be men. The way that I, when I think about it later on, before I got married I went to the doctor and got myself checked out properly, and I said look, I even told my wife straight out, I said "when I was there, I got the social disease" I said "as far as I know I'm right now, before we get married, if you still want to get married I'll, I'm going back to be checked out again." She said "I can understand that sort of thing can happen." What I'm getting at though was when you went to these bars, if you, you think about it, all you've been with is blokes for 3 or 4 months, and you walk into a bar for a drink and you got women all over you, it's pretty damn hard, in more ways than one. (laughs) And you get beer into you and have a few drinks, you know, your resistance does lower a little, does lower a fair amount, yeah.

J.R And did you have any health problems while you were up there?

G.S Yeah, I ended up with, I caught prickly heat. I can't still to

this day stand the sweat under me arms, 'cause this prickly heat, well the way the doctor over there said it to me, I ended up with boils, tropical boils, I got scars on me neck and me chest and me elbows, I ended up with about 12 of them. And that bottom was, well I had one on me neck, there, scar's still there, and my neck went from there to there [shows Jane] that's how much it swelled up. And you couldn't squeeze them out, they, oh, I'd've had, they were painful, I got one out of me, the one out of me neck would've been that round, and it had about 13 heads in it. I just, just busted one day and pulled it out of me neck. You could put your finger in the hole.

J.R Did you have to be hospitalised for things like that?

G.S No. They said "what can we do"? The doctor said "look, all I can say is in Australia in an environment," he said "you come over into environment here that's entirely different, we've got different bugs here, and they do something to your body." I reckon half the time I was there I had the shits, and there was nothing they could do about it. The only time I didn't, was sort of when we were in the bush you were on a specific diet, on a, when I say high fibre, what you ate, you used to keep you going, your toilet wasn't, the thing, that was how the Americans designed their food, you'd think there was something wrong if you didn't go to the toilet every day, 'cause that's the way their food was designed, so when you were in camp you were eating everything and anything, and you spent more time on the, in the well. But prickly heat and boils that was about it. That and an upset stomach.

J.R And did that all clear up when you came home?

G.S Oh yeah, I had the boils cleared up when I was over there, but I had prickly heat I reckon for, well you'd get up in the morning and have a shower, 10 minutes later you were sweating, you'd sweat all day, in this humid heat, I can't, that's why I can't, I won't go to Queensland to live. Where Mum and Dad live, or where Mum lives now, Dad died about 3 months ago, where they live, I can handle there, it's not too bad, but get into the tropical areas, I can't, like I said I can't stand the sweat, I hate, I can sweat anywhere else, but under my arm, I always got to have something under my arm, got to dry, it's still in my mind I can't handle it, sounds weird. I walk round like a bird ...

J.R So did you find the medical care up there was good?

G.S Oh it was adequate, yeah. Well the doctor that's the boss doctor at the hospital, he was over there the same time as me, he was one of the medical practitioners. In a way, in the finish they really didn't, they didn't sort of care, they, I think it was because they were... I don't know how they ended up in the army system, whether they were shanghai'd, for a better word, into it. They had to g4 I really didn't get involved with them, some of them were good, some of them really couldn't care a less [just average] You'd walk in and say "well I've got the social disease""oh yeah, get that, this that", there was no, they didn't

check you out to see whether you had a different strain of it, or anything, they just really couldn't care less, they said "well here's your pills, 21 days, no alcohol" and that was the end of it. You sort of, when I had the boils I walked into the bloke and he said "nothing I can do about them", you know just some soap, wash with that. But I still had to go to the scrub, with these ruddy boils on me, go and work, I was driving a truck at the time and I had boils on both my elbows, I was forever smacking them on the door of the truck "Oww!". That's one charge I got on, I was, I went to sleep on picket, that was because of the antibiotics I was taking, and they charged me, I got sprung, 'cause I was on picket, they put me on light duties when I had the boils, so I was on picket from 7 o'clock in the morning, no 6 o'clock in the morning, from the sunup till 7 o'clock at night. I had an hour off for dinner, the rest of the time I was sitting on that gun. Now you try and sit the gun for 12 hour.

J.R And stay awake.

G.S And stay awake, you weren't even allowed to read anything, well I used to take me stuff up there, write letter and things, it was the only thing you could do. Anyway, this lieutenant's come up and I was asleep, anyway, fair enough I shouldn't've been. They say you should get up and walk around when you're tired, but how do you know when you go to sleep, one minute you're sitting there and the next minute you're asleep, you're gone. Anyway this dude come up, he said "you were asleep': I said "yeah, I know", but he expected me to crawl to him, you know, say "look don't charge me" he said "if you don't do this I'm going to have to charge you" and I said "well do whatever you think's right." Anyway I went down and saw one of these doctors, the one that give me these pills I said "look, will those pills make me drowsy?" he said "yeah" he said "if you're not careful they'll put you to sleep." I said "well alright will you come to for my defence to the thing?" "Oh yeah no problem," I get marched in and he never turned up. I nearly got court martialed over that. That is, for going to sleep on picket, you're supposed to be protecting people and I went to sleep. I don't think it was my fault, fair enough I should have, like you say, get up and walk around, but there was nothing I could do, it was in a catch 22, and this bloke, I couldn't, I said to him, I said "look this bloke's going to come up" he said "he's not here" I said "ring him up," "Can't do that". See officers on their honour or whatever it is, and he just didn't turn up, he put me in a dirty great hole, so I just had to take what I got, I got 7 days and another $40. He said "we'll let you off," the major, he let me off to say "righto" he said "I understand", but he said "I've got to go by what's in the book." I said "That's no bloody good to me." If this bloke had've come along and said "Righto and that's what'll happen" I probably would've got off. I know I did the wrong thing by going to sleep, but I didn't know when I was going to go to sleep.

J.R No, it's a pretty inflexible sort of system isn't it? [Yeah] yeah.

G.S And the only bit of fun we had there one time, we used to ride a, blokes used to wear on their hats, I don't think you ever saw

it was just FTA [No] “Fun, travel and adventure”, but it means something entirely different, not "for the army", just that nice little word you put out the front. Anyway we got up on the roof of the huts, the boys and painted "FTA" in big letters, but... for the... That was 2 days before one of the big, the grand poobahs come from Bridget, one of the big generals, whatever he was, they fly over in the chopper and there's this big red letters "FTA". They put us all out in front and said "who put it up there? And we've "don't know, just arrived there: "What's it mean?" "Fun, travel and adventure" "Oh right". "For the army", they knew what it meant. But till the day we shifted it was still on there, till we all come home, we were the last, pretty well the last mob to come out of the Dat.

J.R So you stayed there until the withdrawal?

G.S (talking together) Yeah, but I went back to 1 field. See we were the last troop out of 1 field, to come out, we came out the morning and that's when they had the choppers flying, everybody was protecting us along the road, but the only thing was the night before they weren't, it was crazy you know. They did the big thing for the...

J.R That's right for the convoy coming out.

G.S The night we stayed up there we said righto, we all got on the booze and said "well if they hit us, there's no-one", 'cause half the people were already gone. We were left there just for this big grand, grand scale withdrawal, all had to sit up there hanging onto our rifles like we were going to shoot the Pope or whatever we were going to do. So that was a bit more grand standing so to speak, so out we come.

J.R And so how did you feel, pretty glad to be coming home?

G.S Yeah I was glad to come home, I, it's the quickest year of my life though.

J.R Was it?

G.S Just went [clicks his fingers] like that. The days just, in a way, flew.

J.R Because you were so busy?

G.S I really don't know. I might have willed it to go quickly.

J.R Time flies when you're having fun!

G.S But the thing was like I say, when I was in the .field squadron you went out in the bush, you were out for 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 up to 6 weeks. Now next thing you come back in, there's a month and a half of your tour, then you have a couple of days off and away you go again. It went, well when I look back I think "Jesus, it didn't feel like a year but I talked to Pam I said "how did it feel?" she said "long time." My way of looking at it, it

seemed pretty quick. But I say, see I never come home till August on R & R, so when I went back again, I only had two months to go [only had two months] I came back in October, see, October, August, September, October, yeah, July I think, I only had something like about 80 days to do when I went back to Nam. We had all these shows, it was pretty good really, the Vietnamese used to put on singing shows and strip shows and things like that. We had Lorrae Desmond and all those coming over, we used to do that up at, where the strip was at the Dat, we had a amphitheatre up near the Dat, we used to trundle down there and it was good, it wasn't bad.

J.R And did you feel, when you came home, did you feel pretty sort of tense or you know, you were sort of saying you, your nerves weren't too good earlier on.

G.S Oh no, I was terrible, really, I couldn't stand people standing behind me or, you had to come straight at me to talk to me. Well I used to play a lot, I played, I was playing football for Turvey Park, when I got home, you know parents were good, most of my friends were good. I went down to the pub one day and I'm sitting down there playing cards and one of the blokes walked up behind me and grabbed me, and I, I nearly died on the spot, you know, he said, you know, they didn't know. At home, you probably heard it before, cars back firing and things like that, I'd wake up in a cold sweat.

J.R And were people interested in...

G.S They couldn't've cared a less.

J.R Where you'd been, no.

G.S Could not have cared a less. Like I said, other than Mum and Dad, I could talk things out with them, but I, it was funny, I kept most of it to myself for a long time, I wouldn't go near, near the R.S.L or anything, probably for, probably for 8 years. Dad used to say "Come to the, to the" you know they have Anzac Day and they have their lunch, he said "Come down there': I said "Mate, I'm not, as far as I'm concerned I'm not classed as a returned serviceman." I said "no—one wants to talk to you or anything." I even found, some of the, even the old 2nd world war blokes were a bit funny. In the finish Dad would say, "come on we'll go for a drink." And he'd bring me down, and we'd come out here [interviewed at Wagga RSL Club] and have a drink.And I was out here one day, having a drink with dad, and we were standing at the bar there and a bloke walked up to dad and he was talking to dad and he was a pommy, had been in the RAAF, he was half cut, and he started at me, he said "And what have you got to do with Anzac Day?" and I said "Oh well," I said "I went to Vietnam." He said "Oh yeah, that would be right, that wasn't a war" he said "that was". And he started on me and he's going on, he said "Oh all these pogos went over there for a bit of a holiday and you'se did nothing and it was a big holiday camp', and all this sort of crap, and I said "listen mate, just go away and leave

me alone will you?" I said "I don't spruik Vietnam, you get out of me face" And dad was getting a bit testy with this dude. Dad said "look, don't do anything in the Club", and dad said "I gotta' go to the toilet" and I said "righto", any way this bloke, I was standing there and he's standing on me left, and he at me again, and this is probably, I hadn't been home long, like I said I lost two good friends over there were killed. Oh they were good friends but I don't know their names, good friends, 'cause names meant nothing really, just called them mate or anything. Anyway this bloke started at me again, I just put me beer down and as I put it down I hit him, and he went down, and dad come out and he said "it was about time you hit him", and he was standing there looking out the glass in the door. He just got to me this bloke, and I found out later this bloke was in the ground crew, never went anywhere near fighting of any sort, any, 'cause he was in Malaya, another one of these guys full of crap. You can pick them usually, you know.... So that was just one of those things, you know, and I run into a couple of blokes who'd been to Nam, they said "why don't you come in the march?" and I said "Oh yeah, suppose so". And we turn up every, you know, come down here every Dawn service and come out here for breakfast and make a day of it.

J.R So why, do you sort of for the first what 8 years or so you didn't really have anything much to do with it, but then you...

G.S Yeah, I got, I got to, some of the blokes that were doing it, they were the same you know, someone's got to start it I s'pose, and they started talking about it with their friends and what sort of, what they went through and that sort of thing and I was, I suppose, it's an outlet I suppose, people that can understand.

J.R So how did you meet up with any other Vietnam veterans in Wagga, just, you happened to meet them or ... ones you knew....?

G.S Well ones through work, well see Tony Mason, you meet him this afternoon, he delivers concrete and I knew him, well before Nam, I'm pretty sure, yeah, through a, through a Dennis Belling, he was in the C.M.F, he was killed out, he was killed out at Pine Board Factory, he got blown off the thing, got burnt pretty bad. But I knew him through that, but I never knew he went to Nam, he never spoke about it either see, (talking together) [Yes, that why I was wondering ...] Then someone said "Oh Tony was in Nam" and I went "Oh, oh". But you'd be surprised how many people around here did go to Nam that you don't know about.

J.R Yea, yeah, well there's no way of knowing unless they join the ... join the Club or something, is there?

G.S Or unless somebody says. .... Like at work, I went up to work one day on Anzac Day, and I, 'cause I had to go up to do something, I had me things on, they said "we didn't know

you were in Vietnam" and I said "it's just something I don't talk about very often" unless someone's interested in it. I don't try to bend the truth, or not here anyway. One of the, people say to you "you go to Anzac Day ..." we say "Oh we duck a lot of the bullets on Anzac Day," you know, a bloke said to me, he said, a mate of mine, we were in a ? he got interviewed by the Advertiser one day and they said "Look, you come down here" and he said "you make a big thing out of war and you get drunk" and all that and he said "Hey woo, I don't make a big thing out of it." he said "we come down, it's the only day we can remember our friends; he said "we may get drunk and have a good time, but we don't forget". You know I reckon that hit the nail fair on the head, and that ended up in the paper, and the bloke said "this is one of the best things I've heard all day". He said "we enjoy ourselves, but we don't forget." Which I think's true.

J.R Yes, yes, so you regularly come to Anzac Day?

G.S I come every year.

J.R And go in the march?

G.S Yeah.

J.R And, how did you get involved with, or are you involved with, the Vietnam veterans group in Wagga? The Legion group?

G.S Yeah we go, we do these barrow pushes, and ... we raise money for whatever we can, if I think it's worthwhile I'll go in it. But now we have, like I said my, being accepted by my parents was the major part of it, that's all I was really worried about, and they accepted what I did so, we kept it amongst ourselves, but dad tried to push me into going to things; not push, say "come on you gotta' do something about it, you might as well get in amongst it." But I was still involved, probably the reason I'm not involved too much *in* the veteran association at the moment is because I've still got outside things, I play basket ball and I play a lot of sport and my time's limited with a young family and that sort of thing. You can't put everything into one, I try to spread it around a bit. If they have anything going I'm usually involved with it, I think it's worthwhile, you've got to think, say when I pass on and I got my family, you've still got to keep that going, you still have Veterans Affairs, I'm still involved with Legacy and that sort of thing, you still help them out, they still help, well we will be in years to come, ' cause the other blokes aren't going to live forever are they?

J.R No, no, you'll be the old diggers one day. [That's right] So, how was the Welcome Home march?

G.S I loved it. Well no, ...

J.R Did you feel a need for that sort of thing?

G.S No. The march, I think that could have, it become political I think. Fair enough if we had've gone down it was, I asked one of the blokes that organised it, Terry Doyle, I don't know whether you've met him or not [No] dell he's he was one of them that helped organise it, he's from 17 constructions, /ell I got involved with him and I rung him up the other day, and I said "look," and he said-"What did you think of the march?" and I said "mate the only thing that really annoyed me was Bob Hawke there. Because when we were in Vietnam, as far as I can remember Bob Hawke was in the A.C.T.U, I think he was the boss of it. When we were over there and the Jeparit was bringing our gear over, they stopped the loading of that for some considerable time, then he has the hide to - call him a hypocrite if you want; to stand up there and say "welcome home: Like we were over there doing a job and he's stopping us being fe4 and bringing our mail over, you know like, I'll never, and he thinks people have got memories that long.

J.R Did people salute him as they went past?

G.S Yeah, the Royal wave, like the fingers up, and booed him, and things like that. And I was one of them, I quite admit that I think he's a bloody hypocrite. And the main reason I went I wanted to see (talking about something else) the main reason I went, the march was good, I only went to see, mainly how other guys were getting on, more or less just to see how they were getting along, how they'd changed, and what their lives were like and, 90% of them are pretty good.

J.R And so the reunion aspect was more important than the actual than the marching ....?

G.S The reunion was good, yes, ... well like I said my parents welcomed me home and said "righto", and that was the end of it really. But the main reason I went was to, to see. Well while I was there, I don't know what the woman's name was, she's from channel 9, short blondish hair one, you often see her on T.V, she said to me, she said, "What does this weekend mean to you?" She was more after sensationalism, like, I can't explain what she was after and I said "look, the only reason I came down is to see how other people were getting along." I said "the march didn't mean much" and all this sort of thing and she said "Oh and what was Vietnam like to you?" I said "alright" I said "Us coming back from Vietnam, what do you think about it?" she said "oh ..." she didn't have an answer. I said "lady, you're either after..." I said to her straight out, I said "you're full of shit, now get out of me face." She really annoyed me, just the way she come at me. I didn't like her straight off, I said "go away and leave me alone."

J.R Well they like, you know they want you to give you one really good sentence don't they?

G.S I did, but it didn't ... [to play on the ....] But she annoyed me. Like say, that was all they were after, probably if I'd in and said "I enjoyed going over there and killing somebody, blowing away and seeing them die", I reckon that she would have been all ears and, you know? Couldn't hack that.

J.R And did you stay down, what happened after the march, rather, you had the reunion?

G.S Yeah, we went out to Marrickville R.S.L. They'd catered for about 800 and got about 1800.The place was packed, it was great, yeah. And after that I went to Hurstville, then went down to the show the next morning, the next day, so I only got drunk once for 4 days. I went down Thursday night, come home Monday, eh yeah, it was good. Yeah, most of them are pretty good, some blokes haven't changed one iota, a few have changed a bit.

J.R And what do you think the sort of image of the Vietnam veterans, do you think there's a, do you think there is any sort of hostility towards them, or..?

G.S Well, I don't think there should be [do you think there has been?] Oh there was before. I think there was hostility because people didn't understand, if you, you know, understand why we went. I think most of us went, like I said before, 'cause we thought we were doing the right thing, well we were sent, it was our job, it was a job, you're going. Most of the hostility is from people I think the object is, like, like that movie, "Vietnam": Tony might even bring it down, there was a letter written, a bloke said "they give more credence to the people that went against it," like the end of it where he come out of jail, that was the end of the film, when he come out of jail and she, when he come out of jail and she's got his arm round her as much to say, what could be the word, that they condoned the people that went to jail, than the people [Right, of right, yes] who had to go and fight. If you get what I mean there. Now that sector of people that were against the war, I think they're the only ones that are pushing against us for going, like on Anzac Day they had what, "rape in war", those women ["women against rape"] "women against rape". I think that's utter shit. Because you didn't have to, like really for what we did, the Australians did, we didn't have, we, we weren't in that situation, and that more or *less* comes from, you take a village obliterated, that women are left, you do what you want. But it could have happened, there could be isolated incidents that I don't know about, we were never in that sort of, that incident, we were all taught over there to respect the people. Fair enough, we give them a pretty hard time, but you didn't wreck their things just for the sake of doing it. [No, no] And this bloke that come on the T.V. the other day about this war atrocities by Australians, that's dead set garbage, I think it's garbage. [referring to Stuart Rintoul]

J.R Was that the, I didn't see this, was this on Willesee?

G.S No, my wife saw it, I didn't see it, *she's* only telling me, I'm only getting it 2nd hand, I'd like to get hold of it just to have a look. But they had a Vietnam veteran bloke on with him..

J.R So they had the author of the book and the veteran?

G.S Yeah. And that's all the story I've got, I'd like to get hold of it just to find out what it was all about, you know, it's just some ....

END OF TAPE 2