MICK MALONE

J.R Right, if you could briefly tell me how you got into the army?

M.M Well I joined the army in 1966 at the age of 19, on the grounds that I'd be called up the next year anyway, and as it turned out my name did come out of the barrel, but I was already in by then. And went straight to SAS from initial employment training, I never went to a battalion which is quite unusual. Quite a few of us did that. They're investigating doing that origin now, to try and get more soldiers. But in those days it was quite a novel approach, young guys at 19 with no experience straight into SAS to learn only SAS things. We had a lot of trouble with battalion guys coming in with battalion ideas and not fitting in very well.

J.R Is there a big difference between operating in the SAS and operating in a battalion?

M.M Yeah, there is, especially is, in those days it was anyway, 1966/67, the Borneo veterans were still running the show. The, we already had one squadron or a squadron to Vietnam and back, that was 3 squadron, that was the squadron I went with later on. And they found that young guys that had no previous experience could be trained up just as easy with only SAS stuff in their brains, basically.

Getting back to your original question, I joined the army at 19 because, for two reasons, that was the first reason, to avoid getting called up and suffer the indignity of being shoved hell west and crooked and secondly it was a bit of a jingoistic stuff on my part, or our part, there's three of us, because of the battle of Long Tan. The battle of Long Tan was such a, weighed heavily on our, on our sense of nationalist pride, we sort of felt we needed to go and rattle the sabre in Australia's name, because of the boys that died, 18 died.

J.R So you were fairly aware of what was going on in Vietnam, were you?

M.M Yeah. Only because I'd read the papers and things, I, I was in the army reserve, I'd spent some time in School cadets, but that's, my father had lived and breathed the army and still does..

J.R He was in the army was he?

M.M He was in the 2nd/13th battalion, the great 2nd/13th that kicked

daylights out of the Germans at the battle of in the desert and then New Guinea at the battle of Lay. So I've had army, presence of army most of my life. And it was only a natural extension really that I went into the army when Vietnam was on. Initially my father wouldn't sign my papers, but I convinced him of that otherwise I was going to abscond. And I was glad I did that as a regular because I was able to then dictate where I went.

J.R So how long, you joined the army and then how long did you have before you went to Vietnam?

M.M 2 years. Which, as you probably realise, a lot of national servicemen and people who joined battalions didn't get that much, they got 8 months maximum, maybe, or 12 months. But we basically trained for 2 years with our squadron, went to New Guinea for 3 months) and then deployed as a squadron, fully ready to go. We had no gaps at all in our training.

J.R And training was directed pretty much with Vietnam in mind was it?

M.M Only Vietnam in mind, for sure.

J.R And did you have, apart from what you said were jingoistic feelings, did you have views on the war? At that stage?

M.M No, not at all, or not any political view. Not any conscientious view that apart from the military side of things, I never thought about it either way, the army was there, I voted Liberal in those days, so it was a Liberal decision to go there, and that to me was, the army was doing what the government told them to do anyway, so, no I wasn't anti the war at all. I was just a young guy....

J.R You weren't especially pro either you mean, you were just fairly neutral?

M.M Yeah, no I wasn't pro the war, I don't think, I was a bit concerned about the old "All the way with LBJ" stuff that came out in the early days, I was, we were all a bit toey about that. We weren't concerned, we weren't too happy with the way the Americans had been using Australia for the last 50 years anyway, but it was never to the stage where we were going to protest about its or worry about it too much. And the fact that Vietnam was an adventure really, it really was a thing to look forward to, more than anything, the death and all the rest of the stuff that went on later was something that you always knew was going to happen, but you're never ever prepared for it, you know. And when it did happen, it was still a bit of a shock, yeah. But no I had no political aspirations or political views on it, apart from the Bolsheviks and the students seemed to be the ones rabble rousing and I was anti-them anyway, so it's through default I suppose you could say I was pro-the war, but I wasn't standing there waving a flag "let's go to war", you know.

J.R Where were you when you joined the army, where were you living?

M.M In Sydney. I was working for Dalgetys Wool Classers out in - it's all gone now, - the Darling Harbour things all taken it up.

J.R It's studio apartments now.

M.M That's right.

J.R So you were happy presumably to go to Vietnam.

M.M Oh decidedly so, yeah, but with my unit, I trained for two years with them, we were all so, the bond was so close by the time we went away that, the mateship level, — that's why I'm still in the army, 23 years later. The mates that I gained in those first two years are still my mates now. We lost guys dead on in training, we only ever lost one in the war, we've lost about 25 since, so it hasn't been a very good thing in training for SAS, but in the war they committed themselves very well. And to go away with all your blokes and come home with them all, was always a very strong, very strong thing. And it's the same as my father's feelings now, it's the thing he hangs his whole existence on, you never ever experience that feeling any other time in your life, that feeling of mateship and safety and the fact that you're doing something worthwhile, even though later on 20 years on I think the war was a, was a terrible waste of 495 Australian lives and 50,000 yanks, you know, that was a terrible waste, for what achieved? nothing achieved. And that's the terrible thing about it, but we always looked at the war as a must, without the war our army would be nothing. It would have meant we had no firm conflict since 1953, and in 53 they were still using 303s and stuff from the 2nd World War. The technology would have gone right by us, we'd be like Canada, Canada haven't been involved in a conflict since 1953. Their army haven't got a schmick how good they are, whether they're any good anyway, they've got no method of validation, but Vietnam was a method of validation and a learning process of a new, not a new style of warfare because we already knew how to work in a jungle. We were still the best, in Vietnam the Americans were hopeless in a lot of areas and we were very good at what we did, everything from artillery to infantry to engineers to SAS, were all very good in what they did. And it got better as the war went on, so 8 years at war made us a very good army, which...

J.R So is there a problem now?

M.M Well the decimation that was wrought upon the army by Gough Whitlam in '72 to '75, we've never really recovered from it. Something like half the military got out, the whole fortress Australia thing was started, people were so depressed and so, you know and this march last year should have happened about 1973, but in fact it happened in'87, put 14 years of dislocation between us and the civvies, <u>per se</u>, and it made it a very rocky road, it got to the stage where a lot of my mates wouldn't

even admit they were in the army, or in Vietnam, they denied it, for God's sake. Those guys marched on that big march last year and now they're right.

J.R Is there still a feeling now, I mean whether it was to do with Vietnam or not, that it's kind of unacceptable to be in the army?

M.M Yeah, the army's gone from being a fairly high profiled acceptable way to earn a quid, to being viewed upon as a non-producing parasitic style of, part of our community. As evidence by that article in the Bulletin a few, a month or so ago, "What does the army really do?" And it was, it really bucketed the army. And it was unfair, people work very hard and people just don't understand why we need an army if there's no war, and there's no likelihood of war for ten years, and we know that, but in 1938 when we had 3000 men in the army and something like 85,000 militia, when the balloon went up, only 5,000 militia turned up to the war. The other 80,000 fled, for God's sake, so the concept of a C.M.F. to hinge your whole military thing on didn't work. And the government sort of intimates now that that's what they'd like to do. And the army's a very professional outfit but we're losing too many good soldiers, to make it a viable thing anymore. See the arms, it's got a ceiling to work on, 30,000 men, you lose 100 Vietnam veterans, well we've lost 100 Vietnam veterans since Christmas to now, there were 2000 Vietnam veterans left in the military at Christmas, there are 1900 left now, so we've lost 100. You just can't replace those 100 with 100 recruits at Kapooka, that's the thinking, they shove them in, they go out the top, you know, it doesn't work. So without Vietnam that would have happened continuously and we would have been a really, a mickey mouse outfit.

J.R You need an overseas posting somewhere.

M.M Well, I think it does, it teaches people a lot of, a lot of different things, we need to be in New Guinea, we need to be, have a presence in the South Pacific, we need all that sort of stuff. This fortress Australia thing.. see New Zealanders have kept that attitude going since Vietnam, they've had people in New Guinea and Malaya, Singapore, Borneo, Brunei, you name it they've had people up there training in realistic training conditions. The people in our military say there's no requirement to go overseas because we've got every training condition you could ever experience overseas right here in Australia. And that's basically true, but, it is a shame, there's young soldiers’ve got no experience with the jungle of Malaya which is better, different to the jungle of Australia, when you've got 17 foot snakes and you know, 4" scorpions and foot long centipedes and things in the bush, and you've got crocodiles, well we've got more crocodiles here though, but crocodiles in areas where they shouldn't be, plus the natives, the, interface with natives and understanding of, that's all important to soldiering. But instead we've got these plush

offices and we sit here and pontificate. It's a place of work.

J.R And what, I mustn't spend too much time on this, but, you're an R.S.M.so you work in office, but where are the SAS grunts these days?

M.M Well this *is* the commando regiment now, this is not SAS. Commandos are basically the, the Army Reserve Arm of SAS, you see [Oh right I see] This is a posting of SAS, an SAS posting, for an R.S.M. Now I've got 5 sub units, I've got one commando company over at Mosman, which is a company of about 100 strong, two commando company in Melbourne, at Fort Gellibrand about 100 strong, 126 Eagle squadron in Watsonia in Melbourne, that's about 100 strong, we've got the Special Warfare detachment down at Swan Island which are responsible for guerrilla warfare training, we control all that, we've just finished a guerrilla warfare course actually, and we've got the headquarters which is about 17 strong. So all up we've got about 400 people spread over everywhere. And this is basically the letter box for all the training, we formulate training programs, we validate, we initial things, we have Land Force Headquarters at Vic barracks, are our direct command headquarters, and we follow their direction and we push everything up through there. So we're basically the people that, and the C.O's here obviously, or we've got an operations officer and an intelligence officer and orderly room staff and Q stores and things. It's a fairly big organisation for an army reserve unit, and there's the premier army reserve unit in the army, this one, bar none, and that's a fact. We do all the things SAS does, except that we have to do them part-time, and consequently our standard is not half as high as SAS, it can't be, if it was, then we'd have to run the pencil over what SAS are doing on a daily basis. But it's a very good posting for that sort of thing and there'll always be an R.S.M's job for an SAS bloke, and an SAS background C.O, SAS background operations officer and so on.

J.R But the rest of the SAS...

M.M SAS's are all in Perth [Over in the west] Yeah.

J.R Yes, well to go back, to 20 years ago, the SAS was already up there when you went up? Was it?

M.M Yeah, the SAS first went to Vietnam in 1966, the 3rd squadron went, they did 12 months, no, they did about 7 or 8 months I think, in the early tour. They came home and their place was taken by, by 1 squadron, who'd just deployed back from Borneo, so it's quite a unique situation actually, we actually had two squadrons deployed in two different countries at once, and we only had 3 squadrons. And that's never happened since and it will never happen again probably.

J.R Was it a strain on the organisation?

M.M Oh incredible strain, incredible strain. But it meant that you having selection courses where you didn't assess people, you just got numbers, and you trained them and you sent them away. Nowdays, SAS have 200 people doing their selection courses and they pick up about 30, selection course are so stringent, but ...

J.R Did that mean that some people were going who weren't quite fully....

M.M I suppose you could say that, but the performance at the other end was to the contrary. I think we've got a different type of bloke these days than we had then, we had bushies, and we had rat bags, we had a lot of rat bags in SAS and they were the lynch pins, they were the guys who did very well in the field. And without those guys we wouldn't have done half as well, and we won quite a lot of medals over there, one distinguish, oh one distinguish conduct medal in my squadron, no sorry two, Fred Roberts and John Robertson both got D.C.Ms, and we won an M.M, quite a lot of M.I.Ds, so the blokes performed very well and each squadron did the same sort of thing. But getting back to the question, yes SAS were there, and a squadron would arrive by plane, 707, they'd get off the plane and the other squadron would get on it and go home. So the changeover, apart from our advance parties which would go up a couple of weeks or a month before, and do the handover of all the key positions, and maybe go out on patrol once just to feel what the bush was like. And most of those guys were on their 2nd tour anyway, and they'd be there waiting for us when we arrived and we were raw young 20 year olds and here we are, wide-eyed in Vietnam. And we spent 12 months at it to the day, exactly to the day, and then we got on the plane that brought the next group in, which was 1 squadron, and we flew home.

I was in the field on the Wednesday, in a heavy contact over in Binh Tuy province, to the north east of where we were, real heavy shoot up, 38 hours later I was home in Mum's lounge room. You know, very hard to understand the dislocation we suffered there because, the battalion blokes never had the same problem because they all travelled home on the Sydney [Oh they didn't all] Well not all, but the bulk of them did [Yes] My C.O. talks about his trip home, he got married the day after he got home. But that 3 weeks on the ship or whatever it was, was enough to allow them to get rid of all the pent up ..

J.R .. Sort of come down a bit..

M.M But our squadron, God, we were chucked straight into the deep end by lobbing home.

J.R Did you all went over together and all came back, you didn't have people rotating?

M.M We did, we had some, some reinforcements that come through.

J.R But you didn't have the national service..?

M.M Yeah, we had national servicemen [Oh you did] in our group, they trained with us, most national servicemen did three years, that had trained with SAS. The 2 squadron, the very last squadron that went away in 1971/72, something like 70% of them were national servicemen, a very good squadron too, they were Dentists, Doctors, Lawyers, Carpenters, Bricklayers, you know, you name it there was every profession there mid trade you can imagine amongst the group and they were very very good soldiers. When they come home they all got out except one bloke, he's now now R.S.M rank over in SAS.

J.R So how many, can you sort of estimate in looking back, how many did come and go, how many from your squadron [People, all up?] during that twelve months, yes, would have ..

M.M That had come and gone within [Yes] There wouldn't have been any more than 6 or 8, per squadron that stayed on, people that went up half way through a tour to take people's places when they were injured, wounded, never killed, only ever lost one killed. They'd come up, they'd stay half a tour with us and if they wanted to some of them were offered to go home with us and some took the option. But generally they stayed on for another half a tour with the next squadron and came home half way through that tour. Or, stayed till the end of that tour and did 18 months altogether. But not many, there was only, our squadron 6 or 8, see we also had a kiwi troop with us, a whole troop of 25 Maoris that were attached to us. They had a similar sort of changeover problem, and it wasn't a problem it was just the way the thing worked. It was very easy to put people on a plane and send them up there, there was no sweat at all, it wasn't as if you were sending them to the Middle East or Europe or anything, it was only going to Vietnam; 9 hours on a plane I think it was.

J.R Anyway when you went up you flew up?

M.M Flew up by 707 from Sydney.

J.R To Saigon?

M.M Yeah. Flew from Perth to Saigon, Tan Son Nhut airport, in polyesters, via Singapore and we had to have a white shirt [Oh yes I've heard about the white shirt] You've heard about the white shirts have you?

J.R The cunningly disguised soldiers in Singapore.

M.M Ridiculous, I've no idea why even to this day, I think it was something to do with -the diplomatic situation, Singapore wanted a foot in both camps at one stage there I think. But we got off the plane at Singapore and wandered around the terminal for an hour and got back on the plane and put our polyester shirt back on again, ridiculous stuff. And then got off the plane at Tan Son Nhut say midday, met the other guys who were going home, and we knew quite a few of them, and then had a meal, put onto C130, strapped onto the floor, no seats in it, just a big

strap across your arms and flown into Nui Dat, which was quite a, a very short strip, so when the plane hit it really had to stop otherwise it would have hit these big embankments at the end. When we got there it was very very dry, it was the middle of the dry season in February and it was dust.

J.R Which year was this?

M.M '69, yeah February '69, 18th February. And we arrived and it was just dust and hot, God and we weren't acclimatized, we'd already done our training in New Guinea in August, September the previous year and it was raining all the time so it was wet season and when we arrived in Vietnam it was dry season so we had to relearn and reacclimatize. So it was about two weeks before we went into the field. We stayed in the camp and worked up before we went out in the bush. Actually the day before we arrived the big ammunition dump blew up next to our camp and there were sand bags everywhere, and under each sand bag there was a bomb, unexploded bomb, quite a, two guys were killed in that, it was quite an introduction I tell you, and then that same night we arrived we got mortared, the V.C. fired about 7 mortars into the camp, so it was a good welcome to Vietnam for us, helmets on in the bunker from day one.

J.R Yes. So it was all set up pretty well by then? 1969?

M.M Yeah, yeah, 66/67 they lived under army pup tents, or it was shelters individual, down where the old water pointer was when we were there and, with some wire over the front and an engineer group in front of them. And very very rudimentary facilities and they had an old, an old tarp up and they called that the Purple Onion Club and that was their boozer, with cans and it had a trunk with a few blocks of ice in it and that was their canteen.

But when we arrived we had a picture theatre, we had a built canteen with a roof and, you know bar, the whole lot, freezer, big connexes full of grog. So over the preceding three years they'd built the camp well, all the bunkers were in, above the ground and below the ground, the command post was built, the big thing was covered in sand bags, all the tents needed redoing and in my year we revetted all the tents with corrugated iron and concrete, as mortar protection. But yes, it was an established camp, and we kept maintaining it and upgrading it so by 1972 it would have been a, like Pitt Street, put in steel roadways and pathways, we had a mess hall, a big kitchen with proper stoves, a big Q store. Army bumpups, you know those collapsible buildings they've got made of steel, half a dozen guys, it was like a big mechano set, half a dozen guys with a shifter and all the instructions could put one of these things up in a couple of days, yeah big steel things they are. Yeah, it was well established.

J.R And did you feel safe, I mean apart from the arrival and the occasional mortaring..

M.M It was really a joke, because Nui Dat had 8000 troops in it at

any one time, and it was about 3 kilometres by 3 kilometres big, and we were right in the smack in the middle of it or not in the middle, on one side with a, on top of the hill and they called it SAS hill, we had a big log periodic aerio-1 on top of the hill shaped like that, four thingos, and they had big lights on top of it for the aircraft to know, they kept mortaring us thinking that was the headquarters, and we were the poor bunnies copping it. Whereas the headquarters was way down the other end in the rubber, on the flat, and it was like, it was just a totally uncanny thing where you'd, you'd go out in the bush where it was totally hostile in the bush, you'd get picked up by a chopper brought back into the camp, you'd empty the magazine in your weapon into a test fire pit to make sure your weapon would have worked if you had've had a contact, unloaded, checked all the weapons off, went down to your tent, threw your stuff off, burnt your underpants and socks, because you know you couldn't, unusual, and then ripped the beard off, we always wore beards in the bush, and then you just felt at home. There was no dramas, you never carried your weapon around the camp. If you went outside our camp you always carried your rifle and a live mag in your pocket. But inside our camp it wasn't a worry at all, they had row after row of barb wire, no one could have got in there anyway, they would have had to cross through an air field, a big chopper pad, go through about three other battalions of troops to get towards us, we were as safe as houses, like being back in Australia, you know. And then you'd train up, go round to the range, have a shoot, get your gear and as soon as you get off the chopper you were in totally hostile territory again. Only a couple of kilometres away, you know it was very disconcerting like that. We never felt unsafe at all. Bit hairy sometimes when the rockets and mortars were coming over the top, but no worries, you know. For a young bloke like me, I was wide-eyed for most of my 12 months, it was certainly a great, a far cry from all of the things I'd read about the 2nd World War, Korea, where the poor buggers are dug in all the time and snowing and dying of frost bite and all the rest of it. We had none of those discomforts, we had big, big tape recorders in our tents, and stereo systems, and we had a, hot showers, washing machines, the lot, we could hang all our clothes up, you know, it was ridiculous.

J.R So what's your feeling about the *stress* side of things? This idea that Vietnam was more stressful than other wars?

M.M Well, that's rubbish, really. You <u>can't</u> be more stressful than Korea or 2nd World War, 1st World War, absolutely not. Anyone that thinks it's more stressful is either, was either fairly weak to start with, in my opinion, and we didn't have many tough people in Vietnam, we haven't got any tough people today, we're getting worse as we go. 1995, it's going to be a country of wimps anyway. But the guys who went away to the 1st World War, absolutely no comforts at all, they were rained with shell and shot day in and day out, slept in the mud, they would have died in the mud by the thousand, we lost 60,000 killed and there was no psychological back up to them when they got home. [no] I think the people that went to Vietnam are suffering stress now.... there could, I won't say that it's totally beyond it, and I know

that a lot of battalion blokes went through a lot of stressful things. Terry Burstall and the boys that went to,, that were at the battle of Long Tan, that was very stressful because there were 3 or 4 hundred Vietcong trying to kill them, and they survived, however there were 18 of their own blokes were killed, and it was pouring rain, there was artillery coming over the top, there were tanks-or not tanks but armoured personnel carriers, - they ran out of ammunition, each man only had 3 mags of ammun.. and that was, some people were using the butt of their rifle for God's sake. That was stressful and some of the patrols we did were quite stressful in that we were chased all over the province by, by dogs, by people chucking grenades, by people towing small machine guns behind them which were 12.750 calibre style machine guns which were, would have cut our patrols to ribbons. And we always escaped through guile, speed over the ground, and part of our precepts was that we always ran away, we hit then ran away. None of this stand-and-fight business.

J.R Which is what they did.

M.M Which is what they did, yeah exactly, and, but the battalion never did that, the battalion never ran away, the battalion always advanced to contact. But they had the support, they had artillery, they had helicopters, they had hundreds of men, we had 4 or 5 man patrols, you can't survive in the bush if you're going to stand and fight like that.

Some of my mates have suffered a stressful, last 10 years have been pretty bad for them, but generally, SAS has come through pretty well unscathed in stress stakes.

J.R And those ones who have suffered stress, how is it connected in their minds and in your mind) with their Vietnam service?

M.M Mmm, I don't know, I'm a bit of a sceptic.

J.R I mean some people in middle years suffer stress anyway, don't you, I mean you sort of look back on your life and think I haven't done what I wanted to do, or it hasn't all worked out.

M.M There's a lot of genetics involved in this is my opinion, people who develop these sort of stress things would have anyway, a lot of them. I reckon I've been under more stress in this job as R.S.M. than I was in Vietnam, even though we were all shitting ourselves over there really, when we were in the bush, but our training brought us through. Now I know there's a lot of people who are bananas now, and, but my sceptical nature will say that they would have been bananas anyway, without the war, and the wars probably tipped them over the edge. It wasn't the war as such you know, and there weren't that many units were up to their neck in it [No no] you know. Fire support bases were home away from home, the battle of Coral and Balmoral were pretty torturous for the people that were there. But generally the battalion would wander round the bush for 6 weeks, advance

into contact, having a few shoot-ups here and there, the hot m2(x/.5 at night, the hot helicopters used to fly hot meals into them, God's sake, they'd have a couple of beers at the fire support base, but after 6 weeks of that they'd come back to Nui Dat where it was just like back in Australia. Some people succumb to the stressful aspects of that. We had guys say, no this is not for me, I've had enough of this I want to go home, we had a couple of guys did that, but generally 99% of the blokes that I served with are still in one piece. Maybe it's the training we went through compared to the training that a lot of the other guys went through, but I think, there's a lot of ...

J.R Well you were also more selected weren't you?

M.M Yes, we were, that's right we were, but only on a psychological basis, and a first impression thing. This selection process, we go through this selection procedure here...

J.R They're not foolproof.

M.M Oh no, God. Anyone that does any psychology at all

J.R (talking together) Even to be polite about them.

M.M That's right. Well, we've just proved with that guerrilla warfare course, we selected these people very very closely, and some people on the course have proven to be unsuitable, even though we put them through this selection procedure. I might say though the bulk of them 'proved to be suitable, so our selection procedure is three quarters of the way there, we just need a bit of fine tuning with it, to fit the people further into the mould than they are now.

But stress, Sydney traffic produces stress, living in Sydney produces stress. The stress that some people have, this waking up in the middle of the night sweating and screaming out, seeing dead bodies all over the place, that didn't really happen to us that much, Australia never experienced that to the extent the Americans did.

And the Americans, it was a different story again, they were fighting an all out war, they were in the, they were in the trenches basically, and they did it hard. Mainly because they were inept at what they did. They had no, their self discipline and their discipline structures broke down, and they started to kill their officers, fragging their officers and senior NCOs, and that started to creep into our, well not SAS but started to creep into the Australian, I think 1969 we got one officer killed, some fool threw a grenade in his bed, that starts to creep in, self discipline, morale starts to break down. But generally the Australians were above that, and doing it pretty well, but the yanks were absolutely tortured by the drugs, the discipline broke down, the black-white thing, the blacks always out on point and the white men would be back. We

didn't have those problems. Plus the acceptance thing at home. I think the thing that's produced a lot of stress in people is probably the lack of acceptance at home, fathers saying to sons "I didn't believe in this war" you know "what have you done?"

J.R Do you think there was a lot of that, when you look at the, it wasn't a generally unpopular war, it was unpopular with a minority of the Australian electorate.

M.M But I think that's the thing with the, the thing with the popularity of the war, it started out a reasonably popular war. We had battalions marching through the streets of Sydney, heroes, you know, "well done, men", and then we had the 1st battalion marching through the streets one day and a woman threw a bucket of red paint, for God's sake.

J.R But there was still, I mean at that, I looked up in the newspapers, there was 100,000 people or so watching the battalion, [Oh yes, certainly] And there was one woman who threw paint I mean....

M.M Yeah, but, but that one act that nearly caused a disaster, the men nearly broke the ranks and they were going to kill people. That one act really exemplified what the underlining, the underlying feeling was, the background that, what the dissenters were saying. That feeling then started to permeate itself through the society a lot further, when it was proven it was really an unjust war, the Vietnamese were going to handle themselves anyway. The Americans had made the biggest stuff - up in history in getting in so heavily involved there, when I was there there was 700,000 Americans in the country, for 8000 aussies. But 700,000 and the Vietnamese had a couple of million [it's too many] Oh far too many, but their whole economy started to revolve around the Vietnam war, you know, they had something like 6000 companies working on making war materiel for the states. I've seen rifles, M16 rifles made by 25 different companies, so all these companies were just being generated by the war. Poor old yanks got so heavily entrenched in it they couldn't pull out. It was a, "I'm damned if I will and I'm damned if I won't" sort of situation. Now we luckily were able to withdraw quite unceremoniously before the fall, and even now we say we didn't lose the war, we didn't lose the war. We did our, we had a province that was clean than, for another word [briefly] The V.C were going around it, 'cause they weren't bloody game to come into it, their arse blown off basically. But the Americans didn't have that, they didn't have that, they didn't have that luxury, they were up against it all the way. And when we withdrew the V.Cs just flooded in again, you know it's one of those things that you keep them off for awhile and away you go. But we learnt, we learnt lots by being there, but politically the war was a disaster for Australia, Billy McMahon would testify to that. Gough Whitlam played on the sentiments of the people and won easily, however he got thrown out very easily three years later, and I think one of the, I think his treatment of the military would have

caused something like 99.9% of the military to vote against him. Whereas a lot of them would have voted for him in '72, a lot of them would have, he was a charismatic leader and all that sort of stuff. The way he treated the military in those three years, even though he gave us a thousand bucks bonus, was very shabby. We were relegated to second class citizens, and I think there's still a fair bit of that going on today. There's still people in Australia who think we don't pay taxes you know [Are there, yeah]

(Turn off tape as people singing in background)

J.R Just tell me about the sort of operations you went on?

M.M Well our training in our build up for Vietnam centred around reconnaissance, and ambushing. The two things that the SAS were used for in Vietnam. I'll just add before I start there, that SAS weren't used correctly in Vietnam. In the general plan of things, an SAS squadron is supposed to be allocated to a division for tactical reconnaissance duties, now SAS is basically a strategic unit, but there was no strategic sort of operations we could do unless we went to North Vietnam and that was a bit out of the question, we'd have lost whole bloody patrols and squadrons up there. So they allocated a squadron to a brigade, which is a third the size of a division. So basically we had, we had and a troop, a troop of 25 is supposed to be allocated to a brigade. Well that doesn't work in practice and it didn't work up there, and we were basically the eyes and ears of the of the, of the Task Force, we were working in the extremities of the province which was about 35 kilometres by 38 kilometres wide, that's all it was, oh maybe 50 by 50 extremes from coast to border, and we'd wander around in A.Os, areas of operation, allocated to us by the headquarters down at brigade headquarters or Task Force headquarters they call them, "SAS I want you to check out this area, this area and this area". We divide them up into grid squares of say 8 grid squares per patrol, four man patrol, and we'd be inserted by helicopter, by A.P.C. or by foot into that area, we spend up to 14 days in the wet season, mainly because you didn't have to carry water and you could catch it in a tent or in a hoochie each day, in the dry season six days was the maximum you could, you could carry because you had to carry 18 bottles of water for 6 days on your back.

J.R Was there not enough natural water?

M.M Oh no, God, the dry season was like the desert. The wet season was..

J.R The rivers dried up and everything?

M.M Absolutely, absolutely dry as a bone. The V.C. had a lot of systems where they dug tunnels into the banks of creeks in the dry season and they'd dug down, they had underground wells and all that sort of stuff, well we had no access to that stuff. So the dry season was a very hard time for us, in that you had to carry every damn thing and it was so hot, incredibly

Hot, and noisy in the bush. Our forte, was sneaking around the bush, undetected in their back yard, doing what they did, but we kept off their tracks. We crossed their tracks and we ambushed their tracks and we used them as observation posts, we put observation posts on them, to great success and we had a lot of successes with ambushes and I think S.A.S, killed up close to 500 enemy in these sort of ambushes, some big ones. The big tractor ambush that was, that David Horner is going to write about in a book in '89, no this year the book will come out. The main thrust of the book, or the start point of the book is the tractor ambush where they, a very successful ambush, they blew a tractor up with about 25 enemy killed at the same time, big bang. That was a very successful ambush, and quite a lot of other smaller ones. Those ambushes were to glean information, we'd take packs, we'd take documents, weapons, identification, money, radios, anything we could get hold of to bring back for the intelligence people to analyse. So they could say, "oh the 274 regiment or the 346 North Vietnamese regular regiment is now in this province or moving down towards Saigon". And during, or pre-Tet offensive in 1968 prior to, or the year before we came up there, was the main thrust by the V.C. on Saigon, a lot of our patrols picked up a lot of movement of vast numbers of people plus different, people from different units that hadn't been seen in the province before. So our basic role was gleaning intelligence through ambush and reconnaissance and we did that very well, never lost anybody, lost one bloke who fell off a rope, in my squadron actually, and he's still listed as missing, but he's he couldn't have survived it, he fell 200 feet back into the jungle, so he's gone. We did it very well and we gained a very heavy expertise in close reconnaissance. Small patrol movement, we'd only move sometimes a hundred metres a day, a hundred metres, now that's very slow, picking your way through, absolutely no sound or movement, so you're moving so slowly, anyone looking wouldn't see you. In the wet season our camouflage was very very heavy, we camouflaged ourselves exactly like the bush, we didn't shave, we didn't use toothpaste, we didn't use any external help at all. The only mistake we did make, was we used American rations which were very obvious in the bush, the smell of some of the food, would have been very obvious to the V.C, who were living on yams and tubers and fish heads, you know. Well we needed that otherwise we wouldn't've been able to perform at the level we needed to, Australian rations were too heavy, in tins and stuff. So basically we...

J.R What if you were choppered in, I mean wouldn't it be pretty obvious...

M.M Yeah, but they had diversion plans, they'd land on one pad, they'd take off immediately, land on another one, take off immediately, or have four different choppers land at four different pads, but a patrol would only get out of one chopper, or something, you know. It was all very, towards the end of the tour, or not our tour, but towards the end of the last squadron's tour, the V.C. had people on every pad, so they

couldn't get in anyway, and they, as soon as the helicopter started to come in they'd open up. They wouldn't open up on a chopper, because if they did that, the gunships which would be hovering above would just open up with everything, and it was instant death with those things, they could, with those mini guns on them they could just cover every inch of space for 50 yards wide with a bullet. But once a patrol was in the bush, a lot of patrols found the enemy straight onto them, following them, tracking them, trying to catch, see the big thing was to try and catch an SAS bloke, that was the V.C's aim, they never ever did.

J.R They knew you operated as a ...

M.M Oh they knew, they call them Biet Kick, or Australian commando, "Uc dai loi biet kich". Australian commando and, they hated us because we were so effective in their back yard. They could predict, easily, what the battalion or the tanks or the Armoured Personnel Carriers, all these other units could do, because they were such a large group moving through the bush, you could hear them for a mile, the V.C. would fire one shot, the battalion would go into their automatic standard operational procedure of stop, investigate, pass back message, and consequently take up about fifteen minutes of their time. And over say a two or three day period they'd just fire one shot every hour and the battalion would be reacting all over the place. But we didn't have that problem, we were there in their back yard, living in the bush with them, striking then just disappearing again, and going, hiding, going low for about two or three days, moving off again, walking out, coming in by A.P.C, going out by chopper, you know they just couldn't track us, they just couldn't, And tracking was another thing, they just couldn't find our trail, because the 2 I.0 of the patrol, the tail end charlie, he would scrupulously cover up the trail anywhere, any cutting that had to be done he'd cover over the ends of the cutting with a piece of mud or a bit of dirt or something, very scrupulous. And we had to do that for survival purposes, because four or five men, or up to six men, couldn't survive in the bush if you had a whole, had a whole say company of men chasing you, well then it's only a matter of time before they get you.

J.R Yes, I was going to say what happened, I mean you had these very small patrols, were they operating in any proximity to one another?

M.M No. Each group had its own area, and there was a no fire zone around the outsides, each group would be briefed as to where the other group was, you'd all attend the briefing. So in the ops room you'd have a big map with 8 squares on it like that, and that patrol, his responsibility was to wander around inside that thing for his given time, reporting back with the radio, morse, long range carrier wave stuff, reporting back what they found, what they didn't find, whether the area was clear or not, and reporting information to the battalion, but

never ever wandering into each other)s A.O, we never had bordering A.O, if there was a bordering A.O, separated by 1000 metres by calling that a no fire zone. It was no drama, sometimes they had problems with R.Vs, the old rendezvous procedures where you had to link up with another patrol to do a job, but that was a bit ticklish, we lost a couple killed like that, shot by own blokes, and only by dozy people in the bush. Brian Jones was killed like that, Harry Harris was killed by his own patrol coming back from a, they'd put an 0.P on a track, instead of coming straight back to where the L.U.P was, the lining up position, he got off the track a bit) and he was a little aboriginal bloke about 5'3 who wore a Vietnamese tiger suit, a patrol sitting in there in the middle of the day, and they looked up and here's a guy peering through the bush like this looking for them, and in the dark bush he looked like a Vietnamese, so the patrol commander went boom, killed him, and that was a tragedy, but that happens if you, it's such a ticklish sort of problem that, we're very lucky we never lost a lot more, but the training of the guys got us through.

J.R It must have a very bad affect on them, the people who do that.

M.M Oh yeah, yeah. Actually one bloke, one bloke that killed Harry Harris is now very high up in the government, so it hasn't worried him too much. [No] Another guy that shot another bloke hasn't survived it, he's still wandering around in the nether regions of no promotion, no rank, still in the army, but 20 years later he's only a corporal. So it's stuck with him a bit. So we were the eyes and ears of the Task Force basically, if they wanted to know what was going on in the mountains, they'd send SAS patrols in to sneak around and have a look, a big hospital complex at the mountains. Other times they'd kick a 10,000 lb bomb out the back of a hercules, on top of a big camp complex up in the mountains, and then send a SAS patrol in to do a bomb damage assessment, or B.D.A, which were horrendous things, you know you just crawl up, you know those big ants nests you see in the bush, you rub your foot over them and the ants run everywhere, well that's what it's like after a bomb's been dropped on them, it's just frenetic movement in the bush and the patrol just can't do their job, they just have to pull out. Many, many contacts we had like that, many big shoot ups, the patrols are very lucky to get out with their lives.

But instead of doing a bomb damage assessment by flying over in aeroplanes, saying "oh yeah, that's pretty good", they wanted people on the ground to assess the real damage.

END OF TAPE 1

TAPE 2

J.R ..... out of the bush and you did come across some and got seen by the enemy, was there any sort of help that you could get?

M.M Yeah, there was, and depending on what it was, if we're seen by a small group maybe we could take them out, if we were on a reconnaissance patrol we would flee. We would set up communications immediately and call for extraction by helicopter, and we'd give an extraction landing zone within a couple of kilometres and we'd run for it, and we'd get to it and the choppers would arrive at the same time and away we'd go. To be reinserted into another area. Once you compromised on a reconnaissance patrol well then you might as well not be there, that's right.

J.R And did that happen often?

M.M It happened a fair bit, [on your experience] yeah it happened a fair bit, a fair bit indeed, because a lot of patrols were pulled out once they were sprung. If you were a fighting patrol, six man up to 17 man, we had a couple of 17 man patrols with machine guns and the whole bit, looking for, looking for a bit of action, basically, they never saw anything quite incidentally, they would probably stand and fight and hook in, take a few scalps and head back, not physically take the scalps, I mean, you know. And get out to be reinserted somewhere else again. But really, once you compromised in an area, their system of couriers and their systems of tracks that they knew intimately, they could have whole companies of people in there on you immediately, so you had to get out and redeploy somewhere else. But, yes, a lot of patrols were seen, and a lot of patrols were seen by one or two, and they killed the enemy and took their gear and maybe hid the bodies on the side of a track or something and headed off and stayed in, and had laid low for a day and made sure that no one was following them up. If they were following them up, then that would be the signal to get going. Like I said, you just couldn't survive with all these dudes chasing you.

J.R And you said before that you know it was scary being chased around the province by dogs and things.

M.M Well it was, yeah. There were patrols that were, in SAS they have a great tradition over there where they read the patrol reports, still now, today, read the patrol reports of the early

squadrons, especially 2 squadron in 1968, which was involved in the Tet offensive and that was hairy stuff, and you read these things and it reads like, it reads like a Robert Ludlum book, you know, you can't believe this stuff. Guys were actually chased with people, with machine guns, they had dogs, they were only small dogs, but they were sniffing them out giving the position away, they were chased all over the province and they couldn't get out, physically get out, so they had to keep running.

J.R Why couldn't they be extracted?

M.M Well there was nowhere to go. In the Long Green, down an area of jungle called the Long Green, there were two areas called the Long Green and the Light Green, they were both areas of jungle that were very very thick, we used to send patrols in there, down near the Ho Tram Cape, don't know whether you know the geography of southern part of Phuoc Tuy province, but Ho Tram Cape was there, stuck out a little bit and just say a kilometre inland was just really incredibly thick jungle, it's not there anymore by the way, they bulldozed it completely, the greenies would have been horrified [Who?] Australians, but the Vietnamese have now got about 2,000 acres of rice, a very productive area it is. But once you're in there, you were sort of two or three Ks to anywhere and it was all this thick boondocks. And you'd be running through the bush and the V.C'd be running down tracks beside you, you wouldn't know the track was there, see, so it was pretty scary stuff. And at night they'd be firing shots, talking, looking, torches, looking for you, and the guys are hiding low, see. And a four man patrol really can't defend themselves any more, all the weapons they had were all automatic, and all S.L.Rs with the barrels half cut off which sounded like 50 calibres, and it gave them a bit of breathing space all that sort of stuff. Some patrols had claymore mines set up on, on the back pack of the tail end charlie and the plan was to drop the pack off, set it up on the ground, plug the det in, run back and fire it, which would stop anybody chasing you, I tell you now. A claymore mine, most horrendous thing. That had to be done a couple of times to break contact, basically. Had to break contact, if you couldn't break contact then you were in big trouble. Because your adrenalin only works for so long, I remember running 1700 metres through the bush, we ran all the way, we broke contact, then we veered off, then went to ground for about 3 hours, then we veered off again and veered off again and so on for about four more hours, totally broke contact out of the area, and then we were safe again. We sat down for a day, and then proceeded with our patrol. They knew there was someone in the area but ..

J.R They'd lost you.

M.M Yeah. It was such a hairy thing at the time, your bloody heart really banging away but, once a shot's fired you feel strong, I don't know why it happens that way, it's as if there's

a release of tension.

Reconnaissance is very hard, you've got to, you can hear your heart beating so loudly you could swear the enemy can hear it too, and you're sweating and you're finding trouble, and people start panicking. Panic starts to set into people at night, when you've got people probing around you, and you've really got to gag people and you got to, some people had hands over the mouth trick to stop them crying out in fear, just a human reaction. We certainly weren't rambos, we were just ordinary young twenty year olds, twenty one year olds) and were terrified basically, of things like that, but once the, the shit hit the fan as it were, everything was fine. We found we had the upper hand most of the time.

J.R And did you sort of enjoy it?

M.M Well, you get back and you tell all sorts of stories and you bring back a few trophies and things, none of that rubbish like cutting ears and things off, but we used to bring back a belt off a person or rip his pack off, take his weapon, you'd bring back wallets and things, there was family photos and stuff, it was always a bit horrendous. But yes, you were treated as heroes back at the Dat when you got back, the guys were there to meet the meet the chopper, they knew the boys had had a big shoot up. Distinguished conduct medals were won like that, I guess the, it's all soldierly stuff see, the blokes are performing a function they've been trained to do, and they're doing it well and winning, so they're treated as heroes; they come back in there's a free carton of beer for each patrol, and everyone gets blind and then if it's been a particularly horrendous time, the O.C, gives that patrol 36 hours leave. And you go down to Vung Tau to the Badcoe Club, and get smashed for three days or whatever. And that's, then you come back, dry out, train and go out and do it again, and that's the way it went. A weird war, like that, weird war, never happen again.

J.R And did you sort of enjoy it? I mean when you were there, overall?

M.M No, not really, I don't think I enjoyed it, I think, no, no I don't think I'd ever say I enjoyed it, when you see bullets ripping into people, it's not a thing you enjoy. But I think you've got a feeling of relief that it's not the other way round, you know. We called it the two-way range, you know when you're on a rifle range firing down the range, well Vietnam was like one of those but someone firing back at you, you know, the two-way rifle range and it became more of a relief than enjoyment when you found you were still in one piece.

We had guys got their pack shot off their back, weapon shot out of their hands, bullets through their clothing and never got hit. Those guys standing there at the end of the day

saying, you know, "hallelujah, will I buy a lottery ticket!"

J.R Did many of your people get wounded?

M.M No, not really. Oh the odd bloke got shot in the leg, Russell Copeman got shot in the stomach, he died later in Australia of septicemia. Three months later actually, he was coming good, peritonitis became septicemia and away he went. But the guy who pulled him out, he got shot in the stomach in the bush, John Matton, who's a very good friend of mine, ran forward, fired at the V.C, that fired at him, I think he killed two, picked Russell, his pack and his weapon up, threw 46m on his back and ran 2000 metres with him on his back, with the rest of the patrol. The patrol cut a landing zone to get Russell out and John Matton threw his aerial on the ground and got comms and got them all out. They put him in for an MM for that, and he got nothing. You know one of the most incredibly brave, and tough things that's ever been performed.

J.R How do medals work?

M.M Well, it’s a nonsense, you know they allocate...

J.R I mean if something like that doesn't get one.

M.M Ah they allocate medals, they allocated medals in that...

J.R What so many per unit?

M.M Yeah. Yeah, it was a nonsense, ridiculous thing, the Americans made giving medals a joke, where everyone got a gong. If you went into the bush, if you cut your finger in the field, you got a purple heart. If you do something that our guys just treated as a normal part of their duty you got bronze stars and silver stars, .. I'm not decrying the Americans their gongs, but they gave too many. Americans allocated an <u>incredible</u> amount, so our system said, look we're not going to fall into that trap, we're only going to have a couple of V.Cs, we're only going to have a couple of D.C.Ms here and there and M.Cs, and that's how it was allocated. The fact that our squadron won two D.C.Ms and an M.M, was quite extraordinary, but there must have been a few vacant at the time. But you read plenty of patrol reports and some, some patrol commanders should have been given, and some, there are some battalion efforts that should have been V.Cs. Whereas the V.C winners that won them, I'm not decrying them either, it was wonderful to see them allocated V.Cs, but a couple were given on the word of American officers saying how brave it was, you know. We always suspected the Americans of over, over sort of, what do you call it, glorifying it, everything, and Australia's always been very laconic and very sort of, laid back, Joe Cool sort of system about gongs, it's always been our go, right back to Gallipoli, and I think Vietnam was very much the same, you know, they were very loathe to hand out too many medals. You look at the Faulklands, incredible amount of medals given out by.

the Brits, which was a total departure from their previous stance. Yeah, there were medals allocated to different area, they say "Righto, in the next six months these are the medals that can be won." Ridiculous [Go for it] (both laugh).

J.R Did you operate around villages?

M.M No. Kept right away from villages. The battalions did, the battalions encircled villages. There was a particular village you probably know about, was the, quite close to Nui Dat, [Hoa Long] No, Hoa Long was a mongrel place, it was all full of V.C, anyway, we kept away from there, the battalions were in there quite often though. But there was another village that the tanks got into, that has caused a big furore over the last couple of years.

J.R Binh Ba ..

M.M Binh Ba, the battle of Binh Ba was a bit of a, a bit of a big shoot up, you know, and there were V.C everywhere in there. And that happened in my year with 5 battalion, and I'm not sure what the details of it are, I've got some stuff on tape at home about it, but they got stuck into it because they were getting fired at and they lost guys and they reacted to what they saw. Now the point of completion of an action, when you've got people running everywhere it's very hard to say, "Righto men, we've now completed the job, stop firing", so the men just kept firing, and I think they killed a lot more than they meant to. But that was battalions and tank co-operation stuff. We never ever got mixed up with that sort of stuff. No, in the bush, working against bunker systems, working against transit camps, working against underground systems, did a fair bit of that. We never ever went down holes or something, that was engineers stuff.

J.R So anyone you saw, you could be confident they were legitimate enemy?

M.M Yeah. What they used to do..

J.R So you didn't have this worry about [No] no, is it an innocent mother and child or anything?

M.M There were areas on the border of some of our A.Os, see what they used to call them, no fire zones, they used to... or free fire zones, they used to call the area within, the A.O, but the borders were all called no fire zones. They'd promulgate through the civilian network, through the civil affairs people, that, this area of country, if you are in it during X day and X day, you are classified as enemy. It's just an exclusion zone, they say, righto, it might be 12 miles big, and they'd put 7 SAS patrols in that area, they wouldn't tell them that they'd put 7 SAS patrols in. And the word was, anybody in that area's gone, if you were out on an ambush patrol or a fighting patrol they were all dead, that was that. That was, it was plain

sailing. You had no qualms at all about it. There were a few instances where women and children and God knows what there, but they all carried arms, you know, what do you do. But the patrols had no qualms about what their role was, and the briefings from the headquarters were quite plain. You were in a free fire zone. There were a few instances where American patrols strayed out of some of their areas into some of our areas and we had confrontations. A 2 squadron patrol shot a South Vietnamese army patrol led by an American advisor, shot it to pieces, they ended up "stop firing" when they heard an American voice, they thought what the hell's going on here. It turns out the V.C they thought they were firing at were South Vietnamese army, I think about 5 were killed. None of our blokes, but it was just a mistake on the American, he was 2 kilometres out on his map reading. No, the free fire zones and the no fire zones were the only ways our patrols could guarantee that the people were, were legit, or legitimate enemy. And 99% of the time that was how it was.

J.R And can you estimate during your tour how many contacts you were involved in?

M.M Me? [Mmm] I'd say about 8, 8 in the 12 months, but they were good shoot ups. They were, I think 5 of them, oh we had a couple of ambushes, I was only involved in a couple of big ambushes, but 8 shoot ups that required us to flee, basically. The biggest one was 7, 7 KIA, that the patrol got, that was a bad one, and that was, wasn't orchestrated by us, that was a bomb damage assessment patrol, led by Clem Dwyer, who was probably the best patrol commander in Vietnam. He was a cool man, and we were sitting in the bush one day and all the enemy walked out of the bush straight into us, and we were sort of, it was a fait accompli, we we were on a reconnaissance patrol but all of a sudden the world opened up, and we got seven killed out of that, none of our blokes got killed. I got wounded on that one, or I got wounded, a shell came and hit me in the eye and I thought I lost my eye, I had to get pulled out, I've still got a scar on it actually, I can still see a scar on my eye. But those 8 patrols, 8 contacts were fairly hairy stuff. In '69 most patrols had a lot of contacts.

J.R And what sort of duration were those sort of contacts be usually?

M.M Well depending on what they were, if you, if you were crossing a track and you were compromised crossing a track, it would be a shoot up, it'd be a burst from each person and then the patrol. The SOP for the patrol would be, the person in contact would, the guys behind him would go to ground on each side, he'd run back through the middle, they'd cover him by firing into the area. The next two guys would cover them back and so on, and that's how you break contact, 'cause you wouldn't just clear out, but you'd break back into a line and you'd open up just to suppress the bush and then gone. The V.C. if they followed you up were either very brave or in great numbers. Duration? you know, 20 seconds sometimes, two minutes, oh no longer. You

had to extricate yourself very quickly otherwise you were gone. And sometimes it proved that patrols that lingered bloody near went in the bag, or not in the bag but nearly went, nearly got killed. One patrol got caught in a creek, an M.M, was won on this patrol too, and one guy thought they were gone, and the V.C. were on each side of the bank firing down at them in the creek, and not one person got hit. Thank our lucky stars the V.C, were so bad shots. Joe Van Goss's ? patrol, who got ambushed completely ambushed, every round went over their heads. You know, our ambushes every round used to go horizon.. or you know parallel to the ground. Luckily they then assaulted into the ambush, and were able to get out by superior fire power and taking over the initiative, that was very close, very very close. But that'd've only lasted a couple of seconds too. But what you had then is follow up patrols and if, and some patrols had three or four contacts by virtue 4' being followed up, followed up, followed up. Finally they'd break contact, but, and they'd come out absolutely shattered from running around the province with this giant pack on their back. No one ever, we never ever dropped our packs, see. Most guys were fairly loathe to lose their kit, very typical Australian trait. Fairly hard to scrounge some of this stuff off the Yanks and the Brits, and we didn't want to chuck it away. [Put a lot of effort into it] Mmm.

J.R Did you, was the sort of view of the V.C. as an opponent that he was a pretty good soldier?

M.M Yeah, he was a good soldier. Mainly because he'd been living in the bush for so long that he became one with the bush, but that's what we attempted to do too, we became one with the bush when we were in it.

We assessed very early in the war, that the only way to defeat him, on our, was to, get in the bush with him and do what he does. Don't move in the middle of the day, when he goes, he has a siesta in the middle of the day, from 11 till 1, they all do, they call it park time, we used to call it park time. So instead of moving in the middle of the day, the battalions used to keep moving and they'd walk straight into camps and get shot up and God knows what else. We'd park at 11 o'clock, and sit in the bush, just sit there, listening, and have a smoke, reading books, whatever, and at 1 o'clock we'd head off again. Knowing full well the V.C, had just had their 2 hour sleep, or 1 hour sleep, and he'd be also moving. Never moved in rain storms, which you'd think it was perfect time for people to move. As there was, one patrol which I was on, we walked into a group of V.C. sitting on the ground with plastic over their heads. Luckily they were down like this... and the patrol walked into them and very very carefully walked away again, you know, it brought it home to us that the V.C. don't move in the rain either, so we didn't move in the rain after that. Monsoonal rain, the absolute down pours, you used to get, just like, just, only for about 10, 15 minutes, used to absolutely bucket down about 4 o'clock in the afternoon. So we sort of tended to

become one with the bush, especially in the wet season, we, we were just about impossible to detect, the blokes were moving so well. And if you had a really well—oiled patrol, it was just about impossible to spring it. The scout would be able to see the change of light ahead of him, at 50 metres ahead of him in the bush, he'd say "Ah, there's a possible track ahead," or an ox cart track and sure enough 9 times out of 10 it was. Or he'd see a cutting or a bit of a fire lane cut, he'd say "possible fire lane here, could be a camp or a bunker up here." And 9 times out of 10 it was.

J.R So the V.C, usually moved on trails?

M.M Oh yes, yes, always had to.... their only means of communication was to run down these tracks, we used to, often saw patrols with great packs on their backs running, or not ...

J.R They didn't have any radios?

M.M Well they did, early in the war we captured a few, they had some American radios which they captured obviously. But they found I think the best way to do it was get on without them, and they used a series of cut-out systems, they used a series of cellular groups within areas and they had couriers, and all that sort of stuff. And they did very well without all the radios, you know we had everything, everything that opened and shut and we still couldn't beat them. Yeah, bit of a worry, especially now we're ...

J.R What moral do you draw from that?

M.M Well, this is, we teach guerrilla warfare here, and we teach that the V.C, were the best ever, basically. The lesson the V.C, have taught everybody about guerrilla warfare are the things of resilience, toughness, commitment, don't rely on technology, but you must have the people. Mao Tse Tung said "without the people I am nothing", can't run a guerrilla war without the people and that's what they had, they had, they lost millions of people, killed and wounded, but they still had millions to draw from. See the Americans never ever come to grips with that, they had all their phantoms and their tanks and their, the old V.C, they'd lose a hundred and they'd just go and get another hundred, you know, wouldn't worry them. And that was the go, they also had a cause, the Americans didn't have a cause there you see. And we were treating it mainly as a training ground for us, Vietnam. We still wear our ribbons proudly and, you know, no worries about that. I'll never ever not wear them proudly. The V.C, and I tell you, we're still studying their methods and they had it shot to bits, and another thing was they were in their own country, and that's something we could never match [no, no] They were one with the country and the language, the culture, the diet, they were quite used to living on nothing, or they had to live on a couple of pounds of rice a day. Their systems, their medical systems were so well tuned, even though they

were rudimentary. A person would be shot but he'd be on an operating table as quick as an American could be, but he'd be underground in a very crude thing, but they'd have drugs, they'd have, they had all those sorts of things. No, they learnt how to fight the war against the French, the Vietminh in the fifties and it's just gone on, is been nearly thirty years from the time the French came, or the end of the Japanese, the Japanese were there they were fighting guerrilla warfare against them, then the French, then the Americans, so I suppose it would be a thirty year war they were in, they were actually in the bush. There's book out called "The Tunnels of Cu Chi" which you might have seen, people lived underground for five years, for God's sake, you know, never saw the light of day some of them, you know it's horrendous, we couldn't do that, we don't come from that sort of society.

J.R So is there sort of an army view of it now that says, you know, is there still a feeling we could have won if we'd done it differently or..

M.M No.

J.R There's not?

M.M No. I think our training team, the A.T.T.V, was probably the most incredible, or the most effective tea, method we used in Vietnam. Our battalions did very well and our SAS did very well. But the training team were spread amongst the people, they learnt the people and they used their expertise in teaching the South Vietnamese army, the Rangers, the Montagnards, all of them how to combat the V.C, and I think without the training team doing what they were doing, we would have been in deep water, years before. Without the Ray Simpsons and the Badcoes and all these V.C, winners, who did an incredible job all those blokes. We say now, you know in hindsight, we always say we should have been doing that job, but the training team consisted of very experienced warrant officers, majors, colonels, the lot. Our squadron consisted of 20 year old diggers, who had no idea about anything. We wouldn't have done very well, we would have done okay, but not as well as they did.

So I look at it as an experience we'd never ever ...see our province was clean like I said, in the end, and they were walking around our province and that was a fact. Our last two squadrons never saw anybody, never saw any enemy, they went out for days and days and days and came home with only, anything at all, which pointed to the fact that the V.Gs weren't coming through Phuoc Tuy.

J.R Oh 4 battalion had quite a big.....

M.M Oh yes, it did, it did, but SAS blokes didn't see anything. 4 battalion in the end had a few shoot ups, but not compared to 68/69 stuff, you know. There was all those big operations that 2 battalion and the whiskey and victor company, the kiwis were involved in, they, they were good size shoot ups then.

You know Balmoral and Coral and Long Tan, things petered off and I think the D445 V.C, unit, and the 274 regiment which were basically Phuoc Tuy units, were either shot out, or in hiding and resting up, and waiting for us to go home, and when we went home they all zoomed out of hiding again, you know, and give the Americans a bit of a hiding.

J.R And how did you feel when Saigon fell? Was that a sort of significant time for people who'd been in Vietnam?

M.M Well I don't know. It was a bit of a strange feeling, I'd been to Saigon, I saw the decadence of Saigon, and the size of the airport and how much, how many incredible amounts of aeroplanes were there. The thing that struck me about Saigon was the report that came out in the paper around the same time as Saigon fell, was about C5A galaxy from America, have you seen a galaxy, a gigantic plane? [Yeah, huge] Flew into Tan Son Nhut with a great heap of artillery pieces on board, ready for the South Vietnamese army; flew in, offloaded the artillery pieces into a warehouse at Tan Son Nhut, put 450 orphan kids on board and all their people with them, took off, and it was shot down by a V.C, at the end of the airstrip and crashed. 4 or 500 people killed, all these guns immediately went into the V.C, arsenal, immediately, so just that little episode itself really brought home the tragedy of Saigon, to me, I thought, "God, what a waste, what an absolutely incredible waste. See in everything, the Americans worked on a system everything that left the States was written off, everything. You could have, if we had been able to fly planes,...

J.R They didn't take anything home?

M.M Well they took some of their major equipment home, but they left everything else there, the Vietnamese were bulldozing planes off the strip to use it, C130s, phantoms, they were dumping helicopters in the ocean, for God's sake. You know that was a tragedy, the absolute waste of materiel was a thing that came home to us I think. But it was a feeling of, I think it's about time it happened, or it's a feeling of, I told you so or you know, it was bound to happen, everything pointed towards it.

And you've got to give the North Vietnamese their due, they, once the Americans decided to play, play the game as bad as they did at the end, and the South Vietnamese army started running, well then they really put the dirk in and they hooked in. Seeing that tank drive into the palace in Saigon, was really the clincher, you know.

J.R Yes, it was very dramatic.

M.M It was dramatic and, and some great footage taken by our great Australian, Neil um, [Davis] Neil Davis, he was killed in Bangkok later on, that was a tragedy, that was a bigger tragedy losing Neil Davis than half the other stuff, 'cause he was a

brave man.

J.R Yes, yes, have you seen his movie have you? Front Line?

M.M Yeah, yeah I saw it when it first came out, the premier in Australia, we all went, over in Perth. The fact that he was with the V.C. when there were cobra gunships in the air is enough to make anyone blanch, because they were horrendous aeroplanes. The V.C. used to hide when they came over, I tell you now because they would, they'd fly over an area and "zzz" they had mini guns, they had rockets, they had bloody everything on them, they were just a flying gun platform and they just devastated an area in one pass. But he was there watching, filming these damn things coming over the top.

J.R Yes, you sometimes feel he had a charmed life somehow.

M.M Yeah, I think he might have had a charmed life, but people's luck run right out.

J.R Did you see much sign of physical devastation, or you were mostly in jungles were you?

M.M Yeah, but the jungle was devastated.

J.R Was it?

M.M Yeah, the Agent Orange just, we were in areas, we were actually in areas where planes are flying over spraying it. We were saying "what's all that" you know. And it was defoliants, and - I'm alright, a bit uglier than I was before.

J.R So Phuoc Tuy was, sort of had a lot of defoliated sectors?

M.M Oh yeah, up round the Hat Dich area the central, the, up route 2, route 2 went up like that (demonstrates) and route 1 and route 328, up route 2, the Hat Dich or "Hat Ditch" it's spelt, Hat Zich it's pronounced, was just bomb damaged, and it was the most incredibly horrendous area to move through, gigantic trees just uprooted, craters in the ground 30, 40 foot wide and 15 foot deep, you know 10,000 lb bomb craters.

J.R That would have been bombs dropped to try and get people [Oh yeah] or were they just dropping bombs?

M.M Well they'd, see they used to fly from Guam these B52s, given a, they'd punch all these co-ordinates into their computer and just fly and at a time the plane would drop all the bombs and turn around and go home. They had no idea what they were bombing. Little bit like, at least the planes over Germany in world war 2 knew they were bombing ...

J.R Aiming for the city.

M.M And cities full of people. But concussion bombs they used to

do, used to, and a lot of them were time delay fuses which would bury themselves in the ground, then blow up, would lift bunkers out of and all these tunnel systems and, the amount of people that must have been killed and they still haven't found is just incredible. A concussion from one of these things will kill people hundreds of metres away, you often see that bit of footage with a blast, where the bombs are going out the back of the plane, fairly low, and the blast is following it and you see the big waves of blast, that's the stuff that kills people, concussion.

Yeah, the area was devastated by bombs, it was so, we used to use picto maps, which are [picto?] picto [As in?] Picture map, in other words an air photo transposed into a map. Basically an air photo, a coloured air photo gridded with a map, I've got some there actually, and on those you'd see whole swathes 1000 metres long of bombs, holes, where a B52 strike's gone in. I was in the Badcoe Club in Vung Tau one night, we were all on the drink and about midnight we hear this just rumbling, like a volcano or an earthquake, everyone just bounded out of their hoochies, what's going on. The Long Hai mountains which were over on the cape were getting B52'd and it was just incredible. We were six miles away, 7 miles and it was just [very noisy] everything was moving like this (demonstrates). And the blast, and the people who were in the Long Hais must have been horrified.

J.R And yet with the, some of the tunnels survived intact I believe,...

M.M Yeah, they did, they were deep, 30, 50 feet deep these tunnels. To go down on a shallow angle and they'd, they'd have entrance ways, they'd have blast tunnels where they'd build in like that then go that way, then that way, so any blast hitting here would blast down the tunnel and stop against that wall and dissipate. They were very very cagey tunnel builders, they were the best, never see tunnel builders like that ever in the world, you know. Most incredibly fertile country to dig through too you know, one bloke could dig a tunnel in no time at all. Except in the mountains, the mountains were obviously rocky and the rest of it.

Oh, the effort by the V.C. was just, just admirable. ...

J.R I don't want to cut you off, but I don't want you to miss your plane.

M.M I better get going.

END OF TAPE 2