CHARLES WRIGHT

J.R Yes, if you could just tell me first how you came to be in the army?

C.W Well I got called up, I was in the first intake, I was one of those ones that the marble got pulled out of the barrel, and I'd received my letter to say that I had been selected, and, but shortly after that I received another letter to say that my call up notice had been deferred, they didn't even give a date or time and I thought "Hullo, well, they might just, the bureaucrats might forget about this and.." Anyway, only a month or so before the second intake I got the letter to say that my deferral's been to the second intake and I had to report to duty, and luckily I was living in Wagga at that time, I had my schooling at Wagga, and I was naturally called up to attend at Kapooka, so I didn't have far to go.

J.R And how did you feel about being called up?

C.W My initial reaction was one of (pause) oh, I suppose of worry, and a little concern, but on the other hand that was quickly taken over by the fact that well, I don't why it is but, my father he was in the 2nd world war, my father before him was in the 1st world war, and I thought well it's not unusual for me to be called up for some sort of a duty, if you like for the country, so let's get on with it and get it over and done with.

J.R What were you doing at the time?

C.W I was working for a Hardware firm, Hardware and Timber firm in Wagga, and it was one of the, Wagga's, New South Wales' oldest established joinery, hardware businesses, and I was simply junior advertising executive, doing a number of courses, business courses and so on like that. I come from there directly from school.

J.R And did they guarantee your job when you came back?

C.W Yes. In fact I was very surprised by my employer, the company was called Hardy's which is still there, and a guy called Davis, who was Managing Director in Tumut at the time and he called me in and he said to me, he said "I realize you may not be particularly happy about being called up, but I only wish my son was called up." And I said "God, what do you mean?" he said "Well you will learn more about people, and you will be far more experienced". He said "I don't want you to go away and anything happen and you be injured and things like that", but he said "if you can get through it", he said, "you'll be far more experienced,

far more understanding of people, by doing this two years." And he was right, in my view.

J.R Yes, yes I suppose to a lot of people it was just an enforced maturing process wasn't it?

C.W Mmm. It throws you into the discipline, it throws you into the understanding of people, it throws you into... where before you, in many ways, your own family and your own life style, it puts a little wall around you.

J.R So how did you enjoy life at Kapooka?

C.W I had an interesting time at Kapooka because, Wagga is a funny town and it was somewhat a division between us 'cause you've got Forest Hill, the RAAF, on one side and you've got Kapooka on the other. And there was always a division in the town, if you like a standoffish position in relation to, particularly from the young girls and the mothers of the young girls, with the boys. And I never thought that there was a, anything about it, but when I got called up for national service and can see exactly what was happening, from the inside. And how I did that is that I went to, after our 6 weeks initial training we all had leave and, and there was various dances on and things like that in Wagga, and I went along, course I was one of the very few that were dressed in civilian clothes because I'd lived in the town. But I was with a lot of the guys that I'd been called up with, and when we went to dances I just noticed that all the girls were avoiding these blokes, you know, the short hair cuts, the whole thing. And I could see for my own self then what was really happening by being one of them. So when I went home I wrote a letter to the newspaper, you know the normal letter to the editor, and it was a fairly, by the time I finished it was fairly lengthy, but essence I was saying, well I didn't realize this before, but now that I am in there, why is it that the girls are ignoring the boys, why is it they stand off, and the next day I, the paper was delivered and here on the front page of the Wagga Daily Advertiser, this "local digger says give us a go". And it printed out word for word, it covered the whole front page, my letter, which stirred up a fair amount of guilt in the town, and what had happened was that, and I didn't ever realize it, even though I lived there for 16 years, going through my school and I never realized, but what had happened, many years ago there was a rape at a little town called Uranquinty which is just outside of, and two army guys were charged, and that was a, they saw that, it was inside the minds of many mothers about their daughters, so, and I of course said well it appears that you blame the uniform rather than the person. And I had many people come up to me and apologise and if you like felt sorry for what they'd done, and they didn't realize and, it had gone too far and so on. Anyway, they set up a billeting process then and the whole town sort of opened up, felt a lot better about it.

J.R I gather it's still something of a problem? [Mmm?] I gather it's still something of a [In Wagga or anywhere?] Well I've

just heard about it in Wagga, that there is a sort of feeling. ... (talking together)

C.W Yes, I think sometimes the local community have got to be jolted into it from time to time because ...

J.R Well I suppose it's any concentrations of sort of young men, you know? Who all get off on leave at once, and all have money to spend and they're sort of seen as a danger..?

C.W Yeah, because we're a bit of a, you know devils ourselves, we sort of come in and we've been away for so many weeks and we've got a bit of pocket money and the first thing that goes is the local pub and invariably one or two play up and of course, particularly as national servicemen I think we were very conscious of the fact that we had to create some sort of a image that, you know, that we were just the same people next door, but we just got a uniform on instead.

J.R And how was the training?

C.W Well I was one of those ones that, could never really, could never really get into training, but you know every time they said "left wheel" invariably I'd turn right. And most times it was because I was trying so hard to do the right thing. But I was very lucky in the sense that when I got called up, I was in Wagga and I was in a band, you know just a small rock band and I played the drums, and I got in there and the next thing the band out at Kapooka was short on drums, they didn't have a drummer in the engineers and the next thing I got a call to say can you go and play the drums and I said "yes", and next thing I'm being fitted out with the high bowler type hat and the black tails, the whole thing and then, in fact I spent the rest of my time in there, in Kapooka, even though I still did my normal training, in the band. But interestingly, at the end of it, I just felt that there was no way at the end of that term at Kapooka that I could possibly go through all that drill without making one mistake, but I did. You know it just sort of come second after a while, just pumped into you so much I suppose.

J.R And what corps did you elect to go into?

C.W Well because I was in music I elected to go into the band you see, and they said "Oh congratulations you've got what you want in number one." you know "you've got the band and we're sending you to 7 battalion at Puckapunyal, who are establishing a band, and you've got there." So I thought, well this is good, I'll spend my two years virtually being in music, which I like doing. Anyway I got to Kapooka and they informed me that they decided not to set up a band at all, so next thing I found myself in A company, infantry, like everyone else.

J.R So your posting to 7 battalion still held, even though there were no drums?

C.W That's right, they didn't send me to a drum or a band anywhere else.

J.R And this was what '66?

C.W Yeah, that's right.

J.R And so was 7 battalion liable to go to Vietnam?

C.W Yes, it was liable to go in late '68, and of course in our case because we only had the 2 year period, we were only in Puckapunyal for some months before we were called up as reinforcements to go, to 6 battalion, we went over directly as reinforcements from Long Tan, when Long Tan... The casualties they lost over there, I went over with a group of guys as a direct replacement for those who were lost in Long Tan.

J.R And how did that feel?

C.W Well it was a funny thing, people said that everyone that went over to Vietnam volunteered, but I don't recall volunteering

J.R I don't think people positively volunteered, I think they were sometimes asked if they didn't want to go, that they could make their feelings felt.

C.W Yeah, well all I know is that a number of us had been called to say that we'd been transferred to Ingleburn for training and, you know, providing all the details and information to be sent to Vietnam and we'd be there to get the injections and those other, all sorts of procedures, so I went and...

J.R And was there a feeling in your group that people were keen to go or didn't care much or didn't want to go?

C.W There was a few in there that felt that we'd been there, well we'd been in here training to fight, so why not, that's what we've been trained to do so, you know, we can't very well say that we weren't in here for doing just nothing, we were trained to do it. And of course we spent some time at Canungra and went through all those obstacles courses and confidence courses and, it was tougher there than in Vietnam, I reckon. And I think the general view, there was one or two that, surprisingly the ones if you like were people who always showed off a bit that they wanted to go, when the time come that they did go, were ... They, one guy I went there with at school, he, he, he was in cadets and his mind was always set on being a military career, and when he was, finished school he went to join and he was knocked back on medical grounds. He ended up getting called up for national service and he got passed. So he was delighted to be in it, but by the time it was ready to go to Vietnam he went AWOL. I think we just took the view that once again it was a bit like being called up the first time, well, father went...

J.R And did he, after this fellow went AWOL and came back, did he go to Vietnam then?

C.W No.

J.R Do you think it was because he'd made his views known, they

think he'd be unreliable or something?

C.W I think he made it abundantly clear that he just didn't want to go. And there was not much point sending him if...I think he ended up going, they got hold of him or found him, pulled him in and I think they suggested they were going to send him again and I think from memory he went AWOL again, so I think they, they sort of gave up the ghost and put him somewhere and let him do out the remainder of his time, from memory.

J.R Did you (phone rings and they talk about it) Did you or the other people, the other soldiers in your group have any views about the war do you think at that stage?

C.W No. I mean the whole area of communism and, there was no, this hurrah hurrah sort of grand final stuff, like football that we were all in the one team and we got to fight the enemy. There was no-one in my, certainly in all the people that I was involved in that took the view that, great this is what we've been after, this is what we're going to do, we're going to go over and knock them and you know, that sort of thing, it was very much of a concerned attitude that while we've been called up, someone's got to go, we're trained to go, let's go over and get it over and done with. It certainly wasn't any intention of going over there and, as soon as you get off the plane start looking for someone you could fire a gun at it.....

J.R So you went over as a reinforcement [Yeah]; by plane and when was that?

C.W Well that was in the earlier part of '67.

J.R So you served a full 12 months?

C.W No, because I then was discharged in, was it the September, so I spent just over 8 months there, 7, 72 months, from the beginning of the year through then got home for a month, leave and then was discharged. So 6 battalion left mid that year and were replaced by 2 battalion, so I didn't go home with 6 battalion, I stayed on for another month, 6 weeks with 2 battalion before we were then shot back on VIP or champagne flight I think it was called, probably one of the last of them too, I think.

J.R And was it difficult to settle in going as a reinforcement into a, especially into a company that had been, such a lot of casualties?

C.W I think if I'd gone over just one or two of us it might have been a bit, but there was 100, 110 of us or something that went over, so we were all taken out of 7 battalion, we were all, I suppose we ended up being a tighter knit group than we would by being in one large battalion.

J.R And you all went to 6 battalion?

C.W Some went to 5, but there was a limited few, limited few, but most of us went to 6 battalion.

J.R And so which unit did you end up in?

C.W I ended up in support company, and it was only because when I was at the reinforcement wing I used to do, when I said I was in a band I used to do a bit of entertaining and I used to also as part of the act, I used to get up and tell a few jokes and yarns and sort of sing a few bawdy songs and things like that, so when I was at the reinforcement wing in Nui Dat which is on the hills at Nui Dat, we had the big marquee there virtually where we were all sleeping in, and besides doing some patrols and getting to know the country area at night, of course we had very little to do except do a bit of washing and also a bit of drinking. And a couple of guys knew that I did this entertaining, so they convinced me to take over a tape, like the system you've got there, and they said "just take over the tape, we'll get a tape recorder" 'cause I used to mime a few things, and so after sitting down there and they convinced me that I should do this, I put on this little act and everyone was crowding around and, and I can remember the late George Chinn coming, who must have been walking by, he was RSM with 6 battalion, and he must have been watching in the crowd, or he was watching in the crowd because when I finished the act he said to me, that's when it was finished, he walked in and said "you report to me at 0900 hours tomorrow morning, you're, from this day you're in my company, in my support unit, he said "can you add up?" and I said "oh a bit". He said "alright you can do the pays as well as doing a bit of, I want you to entertain the troops whenever you can." He said "You've still got to do your patrols like everyone else" but he said "I'll, because you'll be doing this entertaining at night, I'll let you off from guard duty."

J.R Sounds like a good deal.

C.W. Yeah, so I figured, yeah that's not a bad deal I don't have to do guard duty and I'll have to... So the next day I was over in support company and I put on a show at the officers' mess and the sergeants' mess and then went over to New Zealand and did a couple of shows there and, in the meantime I'd go out on patrol with the battalion or the company for a couple of weeks and then come back again, so that was basically the sort of daily routine while I was over there.

J.R That's unusual isn't it?

C.W Mmm. Used to run the S.P there as well too.

J.R Oh right. Did you make a profit?

C.W Got slaughtered the first, the first day, we used to have radio Australia of course and it didn't take me long to work out that there was a bit of a S.P network round the place, and, so the particular warrant officer that was in charge of it, he said "oh they're looking for someone over in our area" so I said "well I'll do it." And a friend of mine that was sent over to support company as well, he put a bet on the first, the first Saturday, that I virtually opened the books, of course he was daring us to take any bets and you know you're just conscious

whether you take a bet or what size bet you take. And he put $20 on this 33 to 1 thing, he said "it's listed as 33 to 1 in the paper" and I thought oh this can't win, so I said "Oh I'll take whatever you want, "you know "whatever you think", so he put $100 on it and the bloody thing won (laughs) And I had to rake around a bit of money and borrow a bit of money, but gradually I got it all back from him by the time I left, but that was my first little experience.

J.R The banker always wins in the end.

C.W That's right.

J.R And what was it like up there then, the living conditions and ...?

C.W Well I had a great deal of difficulty because being a fair person I haven't got much of it left, but my nickname was Snow 'cause ... I had snow white hair. And fair people have a great deal of problems in the tropics, and they advised me when I went there that I could have and I did, in fact I was in hospital for one period for about 6 weeks and it wasn't malaria because we were taking the pills and all that sort of thing, but it was a similar disease to malaria and one minute I'm cold and the next minute I'm hot and the perspiration's just pouring out, next thing I'm freezing. And that went on for something like 2½ weeks, and I recall one time there the nurse saying to me, I got to, oh just under 104° at one point, I must have been very close to snuffing it, and that's when they race around and put ice packs and all this to bring it down, and just didn't feel like eating and of course and I got put on my documents was "posted unknown origin" P.U.O [actually means "pyrexia of unknown origin"]

J.R P.U.O, yes.

C.W And had no idea what it was, but it had similar, because when I got out of that the whole damn company had had diarrhea, and in my condition I thought I was as strong as an ox after getting over that, and that hit me as well (laughs) But because, I mean the living conditions over there, I mean most Australians just wouldn't live in them, because you'd clean your boots and you'd wake up the next morning and they'd be green because of the humidity. And there'd, pouring down rain one minute and of course the stench, the smell the, the things that we're not used to here and then....

J.R You were in tents?

C.W Mmm.

J.R And did you go outside Nui Dat much?

C.W Oh I went out about 6, I think 6 times I went out.

J.R But you didn't go out on long operations?

C.W No we went on one operation, I just can't recall the name of it, where the whole battalion went, and we were out for 21 days I think. We saw very little action, just, just spasmodic action, but after Long Tan of course, there was very, it was considerably quiet for awhile, because it was generally acknowledged that the Australians came off that much the better of that and knew that area so extremely well. And if you're going to take on somebody in that area, take the Australians on in that area that we were looking after, it would have been extremely difficult. So it was more, the North Vietnamese never came into the area while I was there, it was always the Vietcong.

J.R Right, so did you have any hairy experiences yourself?

C.W I had some funny experiences and I also a couple of close ones, but I've never regarded us as being a, I mean the Australian soldier is very brave, but he is also very sensible. And I remember going down a, and I was section commander at this particular time, and I went out and we were advised that roughly along this particular track there was three Vietcong who were generally tax collectors who would come there on a regular basis to collect money from the local village. And we set up a trap for them, and after I'd set up the, the whole section all lined up ready to take on the, a message was sent through on the, on the wireless that there'd been a slight mistake and there were something like 80 or 90 coming down that particular day. So it was up to us whether we wanted to take them on or not. I said "Oh bugger this, they can have it themselves." (laughs) We went back.

The only other time there was a couple of Vietcong which a number of us fired in the one direction, I don't know, to this day I don't know whether I in fact shot or killed anybody, I'd seen one of me mates being shot, but when you're out, particularly in a battalion, you know, your companies are going different directions and they'll be in an attack or something at one end and something in another, you might get one or two, but there was very little, you know massive action of any description while I was over there. I think Long Tan was really the only major real exercise that we got involved in, we went out in sections and groups and, picked our mark, made sure our whole area was covered and well patrolled, and it was a holding type operation rather than take on, anything-that-walk type operation.

J.R And that was mostly in the area just round the Nui Dat base was it?

C.W That's right, yeah. But the biggest problem was the booby traps and things like that, that's a thing that you had to be so very careful about. You couldn't very well think that, now the normal person would, would walk along that track, and if he's a bit clever he'd walk off the track, and invariably if you walked off the track that's where the booby traps would be, because they were, they'd known the area and been lived in it and assumed, and that's what the Australian soldier would think. But after awhile we got to be one step ahead of that again and took extreme precautions, and invariably we had very

little casualties in real terms, simply because we, we thought like soldiers and had to really, I believe the Australians, I remember a couple of Americans coming over and visiting, he reckons the Australians were by far the best soldiers over there. We adapted so easily to the jungle conditions, and I think it's right because we, we used to give a hell of a lot of thought and we would travel one person, per person in a long distance so you could just see, where the Americans and others tend to stroll along, you know, Sunday afternoon type thing and we took the whole matter far more seriously, far more disciplined than what they did. And naturally if anyone was to get hurt it was only one or two.

J.R So there weren't any mine casualties in your platoon?

C.W No, no there wasn't. There was one in our company when I was there who'd walked on one and he was just blown to smithereens, I can quite vividly recall looking at the stretcher and seeing a pile rather than a long body. And, but there was so many close calls, I recall going out, to give you an idea of the training, and I never remembered this until the Welcome Home parade march when I met a friend of mine who I was with at the time, hadn't seen him for years and he started recalling some of the things that we did which weren't considered dangerous at the time, but when you look back on it, we thought strewth, you know. We were out on patrol and we found an extremely large supply of ammunition and grenades and all sorts of primitive type things made out of fosters beer cans, and bits of shrapnel in them and short fuses and a bit of explosive in them and that was enough to ... And we were just walking along this rather large plantation and somebody just stumbled on, a bit of movement in the ground, and we pulled it open, pulled the grass open and about a foot down they not ?ed 3 or 4 of these sort of hand-made grenades with our own beer cans on them. First you'd think was that someone had just left some beer cans and were going to plant it there and come and pick it up later you see, so the bloke cleared the, and noticed it had a primitive stick out of one end and, we cleared an area, I would say it would be 40 or 50 metres, square, where there was ammunition, guns, rifles, and everything just lying down flat where they'd been put there. And, I was section commander at the time and we called in the engineers to dispose of them, and we organised a bit of a clearing and we looked around and we found 4x44 gallon drums so we used them as sort of markers for the helicopters where to land. But I noticed in the plantation there were a lot of mines set in the, the ground, so you were walking through, they set mines around this area. And we put these 44 gallon drums up around the place, what we thought was a clearing and called the helicopters in there and we waited till the helicopter came in, and as the helicopter was coming down, you know there was a large flow of wind underneath, I noticed one of the 44 gallon drums was, was rocking, and immediate this bloke who reminded me of it said "geez if one of those lands on one of those mines it will blow the helicopter out of the sky", which wasn't far away from them. So I just hurtled across the field and just grabbed this thing and it was just going over and I just grabbed it at the end of it before it landed on the, well it was about to land on it and pulled it back and held onto it.

And I never thought much about it for a while, just did it, but when I got back that night at the camp I couldn't stop, couldn't stop shaking with the, it never dawned on me then whether there was any danger and you sometimes think you're not trained for the job until you go over there, I mean *we* were just doing things which, you didn't have to think whether it was dangerous or not, you just did it. Because that was the way obviously we were trained, to do it.

J.R And was it sort of common then to have that reaction afterwards do you think?

C.W Yes, what do they call it when you have a shock reaction, when you have an accident, car accident and nothing happens and suddenly and hour or so later...

J.R ... the adrenalin sort of surges and then stops and then you go into shock.

C.W Yeah. Well I had a few of those sorts of experiences, but it never happened at the time, but the aftermath of it, and of course the first place you went was the wet canteen...
(talking together)

J.R Does it have a sort of cumulative effect do you think?

C.W It did on a few. And that's why I remember a 2nd world war digger saying to me that he reckons that whilst they talk about the 1st and 2nd world war, in many ways you knew what you were up against, he said, the nerve-racking of the Vietnam war, the guerrilla type war would have been far worse in his view. Now I can't imagine anything worse than what they experienced in the 1st and 2nd world war either, but I can understand what he was getting at. Particularly as you see some people after they've been there for a night they just, it was common knowledge, I forget the name of the disease they, Hoskins disease, or something where they snap (clicks their fingers) and you know that they're gone and they're never right, like blokes, like it happened to one bloke who was in the tent with us, he was always a quiet sort of bloke, he did his job and he went out on patrols, but he was always very quiet and then one night he just woke up screaming for his mother, and we all knew then that he was another one of those that had gone, mentally they just have a complete break-down. And apparently, so they say, they're never right again.

J.R So what happened, what was the procedure with someone like that?

C.W Well, in many ways it was just one or two of us get up and grab him and say you know, you'll be right mate, just calm down, and call the medical guy very quickly and they just take him away.

J.R And then he doesn't come back?

C.W No, never. They either put them in hospital for awhile and get them at home, as quickly as they can.

J.R And have you sort of heard any follow up on say people like that?

C.W No. No, I've never bothered to check out the, but the one that was in my tent, I thought I saw him around Canberra not long ago, but um, looking at him he didn't seem to have, have, I walked past him and looked at him in fact, and I thought that looks like the bloke and, but he was in a world of his own, he was, he was very noticeably nervy, edgy and things like that. Not because he saw me, but he just seemed to be, his style, and I said good day to him and he just walked past and didn't .... he ...

J.R ....So you're not sure if it was him?

C.W No, I'm not totally sure, but you know when you see a face and you say, gee I know that face... So I don't know most of them, but all I knew that people, and that was probably one of the major concerns by most of us over there, we didn't want to like go round the twist, we'd rather get wounded, lose a leg or anything, but to go round the twist would be, would be very hard to live with.

J.R Were there ever any sort of accidents or things that might have been accidents or it might have been somebody wanting to get sent home or something like that?

C.W Oh yeah, there was one bloke shot himself in the foot. There was quite a lot of, I mean it was court martialed every time the rifle, if a rifle went off accidentally, there was just no excuse for it. And of course if somebody gets a letter and their girlfriend's in difficulty, or gone with another bloke or, and these blokes, you know some were, most of us would sort of say oh well, figures, you know, and get on with life, but some of them of course were very, very close to their girlfriends, mothers, sometimes something happens to their brother or sister. And certainly was the quickest way to get home was to wound yourself. They'd get court martialed, but you've still got to have your finger fixed or your foot fixed. And there was an exercise, there was an incident over there where a guy shot himself in the foot just to get home.

J.R And they do, I mean in his case he *was* successful and he went home and didn't have to come back?

C.W Well you see he wasn't fit enough for duty, so they don't keep you over there, even if you're court martialed ...
I think the army overall are pretty lenient to the national service, but interestingly going on the facts and figures at the last history conference about which ones were affected more, it seemed to be more the regulars than it was the nationals..

J.R Yes, yes, it's probably a function of age and education I think.

C.W Yeah, I think a lot of us, also pressure; because they always wanted, there was always this division between the real soldiers and the, and the, the nashos if you like.

J.R Was there?

C.W The professional soldier, you know where we weren't professional

soldiers, and of course in many ways it was a jokingly sort of thing, but there was also underneath a bit of stirring going, if they'd go to a canteen or you'd have a beer and of course under a few beers and someone'd say, oh you're not a real, you know the only real soldiers are the regulars and things like that. And, there was very few fights, but there used to be some and we would argue, look you know, if a person's going to shoot it doesn't matter whether you're regular or whether you're irregular or whatever you're still, oh you gotta have two, you know, you blokes have been in for six months and you're out here fighting, and many of the regulars felt very sorry for the nashos because he was thrown into the situation. But...

J.R Did they feel you weren't well trained enough or something?

C.W Oh yeah, they felt that we were, we could never be as well trained as them, 'cause some had been with Borneo and Malaya and been in 3 battalion and some other battalion, been over there three or four trips and they were seasoned soldiers, you know. But there was always a degree of reservedness with them, being NCOs in particular against the national service, but every time we came back, when we came back from overseas, well we did an exercise, as long as I was in there for the two years, I can recall NCOs saying well, I've got a great deal of time for the nashos, for a short period of time that he has learnt, he's had to learn, he's turned out to be a top soldier. I mean it was jokingly and a bit of stirring in the first bit, but by the end of the two year stint, there was no one that said that they were any better or any worse. In fact most of them had a great deal of admiration for the, the nasho was pulled out of whatever he was doing and he had to do it, at least these blokes volunteered to do it, and they trained for it and, and so they, in the end, it was quite the reverse.

J.R And what sort of proportion was it in your platoon, nashos and regulars?

C.W In my platoon I think at least two thirds of them were nashos.

J.R Were they? [Yeah] What about your Lieutenant?

C.W Umm, no, he was full time, at Duntroon. A couple of us were selected when we went to Kapooka, you know if you had a certain level of education, I think if you had leaving certificate, and a few of us were called in and asked if, they'd like to send us to, I forget, Portsea or, southern Victoria I think.

J. R Scheyville wasn't going at that stage?

C.W No, I thought it was Portsea. I couldn't exactly correct that. You went there for six months and you came out a 2nd Lieutenant, and, and some of us were selected, I said "Look I'm only to do my two years and I don't want, I just, I'll do it and that's it." A couple of them went, but there was very few, I mean out of the intake I suppose there might have been three or four that went, so there were very few officers that were actually

national servicemen. I think I met one or two in Vietnam, but, that was as much as I... But invariably those blokes were talked into try and, we always took it that it was a sneaky [to sign on] way of getting us to sign on. And I remember when I was in, in hospital when I had that disease problem and Jake O'Donnell who I had a great deal of time for, who *was* my company commander of 7 battalion and he came, hewn Vietnam at the time and he came and visited me in hospital, and he said "I've brought some papers for you" you know and I said " he said "to sign on" and I said "you've got to be joking, here I am, you know [not very happy] half-dead, and I've only got a few months to go and I'll be out of this place," he said "Oh" he said "you're a soldier and the army is a great career and you're ideally suited for it" you know "I could have swore you were going to sign on." I said "gee, you must be joking," but I had a funny experience with Jake O'Donnell, he, he was a born soldier 'cause that's all he lived for, and when I was at Puckapunyal I thought to myself when I was sitting there one night one night and I thought, "well being in infantry's not one of the greatest position to be in, I wonder if I can make some use of this two years or at least the other 12 or 18 months that I've got left." So I was very keen to open a Restaurant when I got out of the army and, I was, my father cooked and my mother, grandmother, they were in the catering business, and I said "well there's a go I'll apply for catering and do 12 months and..." and so I put down application for transfer to catering and God forbid Jako was the one that called me up and said "what's this?" and I said "Oh I applied, thought I'd do something... he said "you're a soldier and you'll always be a soldier" and tore it up and put it in the rubbish bin and, left wheel, right wheel, out the door wheel. But I have no regrets with it...

J.R Did you like the army?

C.W Yep. I did actually, particularly because of the camaraderie, I suppose. I don't think I'd like to be in it, although it's hard to say whether I'd like to be in it 20 years or something like that, it's very hard to say, but I have some fond memories, well fonder memories in my view than sad memories, and I'll always look back on it as something that I did and had to do, I felt a duty to do it, but I enjoyed it, I come out of it alright, so, I'm happy.

J.R And how would you say your unit was, your particular platoon, I guess that's the group that you would have a feel for, is it? You wouldn't really have a feel for the company as a whole? Or you did?

C.W No, it was mainly the platoon, but, I think there was a very fond bondship between the national service guys, particularly the lot that were called up first. And there was more a bondship to that group if you like, than it was to our particular platoon or company. We would, some of us'd be in A company and do, you know, that particular section, somebody in B company and somebody in C company. And invariably at night we'd, we'd get on to one another and talk and have a few drinks and go out and things like that, it was never a whole section or part of a section as a whole going out, it was very much the people we met the first 6 weeks we were together..

J.R From your basic training?

C.W From my basic training, and it carried us right through, and even now, you know, it's been the one that's kept us";'"altogether, even if we've gone from, I used to remember in Vietnam when we used to go over to 5 battalion, we used to go over there every second night just to call in and see a couple of our mates there, things like that, rather than stay back all the time with our own company or section and things like that. Though in our section, particularly going over there as reinforcements there were some people we didn't know, so you tend to look for people you know, it's almost like a school I suppose..

J.R Yes, yes, stick with your group...

C.W You stick to your group of mates and you, regardless of where you are you look each other up.

J.R Was there much turnover within the platoon during the six months or so that you were there?

C.W No, very little, very little. We, I don't think there was, I can't recall any except for one or two like the guy who, who broke down one night and the guy that wounded his finger or something, but then they were out for a little while and they come back. There were never any major overall changes, as such.

J.R And was them much, people being away from work because they were sick?

C.W Well there was, not so much, well people like myself who got disease and so on, I was off, I was away for awhile, but there ...

J.R Did that recur by the way or .....just happen once?

C.W Well I haven't, haven't, I haven't had it since I've been back.

J.R You just had it once while you were over there, did you, I mean it didn't keep, it wasn't chronic or anything over there?

C.W No. I just woke up one morning, I was walking out and the sun was burning, and there's something wrong here and I thought I was just getting the flu or something, and I had to duck under a tree to get out of the sun. But that certainly hasn't happened, certainly hasn't happened since. What was the other question you said before?

J.R Were people away sick very much?

C.W Oh that's right. No, no, very rarely were they away sick at any one particular time, they were more treated for, if you like self inflicted wounds after R & R and things like that. But that was generally you had to report morning and report in the afternoon to get injections and treatment and things like

that, but, very rarely were they away for any long period of time because of illness.

J.R Yes, so I was going to ask you what you did for relaxation. You entertained the others?

C.W Yeah, we did, but when it wasn't on, we used to spend most of our time in the wet canteen of course. Not only, there was a lot of people who didn't drink of course, but...

J.R Was there a restriction at that stage on, two cans a day thing?

C.W Yeah you were only allowed,... that's right. But we, at the time I was there we never had a shortage of any cans of beer. I don't know what the blokes in the mess did, but there was never any shortage of beer. I think we had, I think as far as paper work was concerned we either had ten times more in the company or battalion than we should have had, or we didn't have, half the company didn't drink, or something, but there was never any shortage of beer.

J.R What about any other sort of substances, were you ever aware of people using marijuana or other drugs?

C.W In my company, in the reinforcement wing, there was never anyone to my knowledge that had any drugs at all, if they did, they did it very quietly and I never saw it, never saw it once.

J.R Do you think drugs were available at Vung Tau?

C.W Oh I think if you wanted them in Vung Tau you could get them, I understood that there was a lot of it going on over in the American unit that was, you know, the artillery American unit was there. But, the only drug that we ever had was beer, you know, or spirits or cigarettes. In my area there was never anyone that I saw that was on any drugs.

END OF TAPE 1

TAPE 2

J.R We were talking about drinking, do you think there were any problems with consumption of alcohol? With drunken fights or anything or was it just good natured drinking?

C.W Oh there was, most of it was good natured, some, some people, there's people, I suppose people are broken up into various categories aren't they, when they drink, some people just fall asleep, some people are very happy, some people get sick, and some people get, their fuse is much shorter, and, so you'd have a combination of all those things generally in the same level of percentages. But drink was a, I always thought that drink was one of the biggest problems in the armed forces, it destroyed some people. One of my friends now, he's, he's just an alcoholic, there's no question about him, but when he was called up alongside us he was by far the best dressed, he used to wear the hat and suit and all this sort of thing, where we were never, we never owned a suit, but he was that, and now he hasn't got a coat to his name let alone anything else. He's only got thongs and shorts and he's got that battered look, you know, you sort of see through the eyes, the eyes are still there but the face looks like it's been around 10 rounds with Mahommed Ali or something, it's just not with it. And that's through years and years of pelting, you know with beer and I recall when we first got back from, Vietnam when we all had our final medical checkup, and I can remember the Doctor saying to me, he said "gee you'se fellows knock yourselves around a lot don't you" you know, and that was from the ...

J.R He could tell that from the medical, yeah

C.W And it was from, from the drink. We were very lucky in a sense to be able to, you know, you get full as a boot if you like the night before and then you wake up in the morning crook as a dog, but, by the time you've been for a run and, you know 9 o'clock you're right again. And of course after coming out of the army you don't go for a run, wear it off.

J.R And did the sort of drinking habits that sort of got established in the army tend to, to carry over after you got out?

C.W Oh yeah, yeah. Well some just continued on the same way.

J.R And you definitely think as young men you drank more in the army than you did before the army?

C.W Oh yeah, absolutely, ... When we were young men we might, we used to go over in my case in Wagga used to go on

Friday night to the Hotel and meet up with the boys and probably we might get reasonably blotto that night, but in the army, 4 o'clock was you know, down to the wet canteen and you'd be there and you'd go to tea and back again and you'd go into Seymour or Melbourne or, and you'd come home at 3 o'clock in the morning, and that was it, for most of them (laughs)

J.R It's a wonder you survived at all.

C.W Yeah, well that's what the doctor said "geez you blokes knock yourselves around a lot". And we did, I mean, I was never one, I can remember when I was in this rock band, and one of the guys that was in it, when I was home not long after I'd been discharged and he said "I can't get over it", he said "look at you, you just used to drink lemon squash and an occasional beer, look at you now you're drinking schooners and things like that" and I was, it was at that time, but it didn't worry me, you could drink three or four schooners a day and it never worried you. But now of course I can drink two glasses, and that's about it.

J.R It's better for you.

C.W Yeah. But in many ways I suppose it's a born-again greeny type approach, but I really feel very bitter against what alcohol's done to a lot of people, it, it caused more casualties in my view, than the actual war itself.

J.R Do you think there were any people who were alcoholics when they were up there?

C.W Oh yeah. They wouldn't have known it, but, how do you define alcoholics from the.. I mean there were blokes there that had their bottles of beer underneath their bed and they woke up in the morning and they had to have their bottle of beer. We used to, a couple of times we, one bloke we used to get a bit fed up with him, so one night we've emptied his bottle of beer and peed in it, and, next morning woke up and grabbed the bottle and down the hatch and he just about choked on the spot, and of course.., we thought it was very funny, he didn't think it was very funny.

J.R No, it didn't cure him?(laughs)

C.W A lot of them, a lot of them had to have something as soon as they woke up, and they'd be right for the rest of the day, now these blokes are 19 and 20.

J.R So what happened when they went out in the bush?

C.W Many times they tried to get access to patrols or other places where they could get some beer and many of them were almost, I think they were at an age where they could do without it, but when they were there, they felt they had to have it when they had it, but, I remember when we went up to Rockhampton on an exercise up there, but the army was never short in ensuring the blokes had

some sort of beer, even out on patrol at night. And then we drank some terrible stuff up there called Mac's beer at Rockhampton, and we used to do a bit of exercise, but one or two nights we'd be out, but the following night truckloads of beer would come into the place and, I suppose the army were drawn between two things, I remember when I was with Jake O'Donnell and they had this, he decided that he would see how long the guys could go without smoking and drinking. Now it was alright for Jake because he doesn't smoke and didn't drink you see, so we were out on exercise and I think we went for about two weeks and by this time blokes were putting cow manure on shovels and tea leaves and, you know making anything, smoking, and I remember Colonel Townsend coming around this one day doing a general tour of duty and as he went from one pit to another we were dug into a spot and he was saying things like "how's it going fellas'?" and they'd say "oh it'd be alright if we had a bloody smoke" and go to the next one "oh it'd be alright if we had bloody smoke or drink" or something like that (laughs) And then I recall him saying to Jake O'Donnell "What's this about no smoking or no drinking?" he said "Well I thought I'd see how they'd go" because there's no washing, no nothing, you know, he said "You should go and get issue of cigarettes and tobacco now". You know "If we get to the stage where we can't provide the guys with the simple things of life like smoking and drinking"' he said, "psychologically it has a great deal of affect on a bloke". And it definitely did it relaxed, the smoke and the drink ... The old work hard play hard thing was very much the line in the army.

J.R When you, after the Welcome Home march and the big reunion, was it a similar sort of ethos? [No, it...] drinking, smoking or..?

C.W No, interestingly, we've matured a hell of a lot. You don't realize these things I don't think until you're dealing, but, I was sure that after the Welcome Home parade, particularly that day, that if I didn't end up drunk there'd be something radically wrong I thought, because I had a reunion at both 7 and 6 battalion, besides the committee, you know we had a little spot, and invariably because they knew we were on the committee that we had been invited to some of the other places. And we started, oh the parade finished, started at 12 and finished at about 3 o'clock or something, and we went straight to the Graphic Arts Club in Sydney, 6 battalion, and I remember us drinking jugs of beer and so on. But funny enough, at 9.30 that night the whole group that I was with, there was six of us, there were nashos called up the same time, and saw each other some of us for the first time in 20 years, we'd been to 6 battalion reunion, we'd been to field gun because we'd come from 7 battalion as well. And we had but we were talking so much that in fact 9.30, we thought, well I think we've had enough. We'd had a long, we were up for the dawn service, and we all agreed that yep, we've had a great day, no good wiping ourselves out, and we went back to my apartment and met our wives and had a bit of a talk and a yarn and then we were in bed about 10.30, so I thought... Well.

J.R (talking together) I don't think they were all as sensible as you! (laughs)

C.W But interestingly a lot of them, a lot of them didn't go to that extent, police were saying there were very very few minor instances of trouble in any shape or form, and overall everybody was very well behaved, we didn't find anyone lying down in the street drunk or anything like that. I think there were certainly some blokes walking around that were drunk, but funny enough they, I don't know whether it was because of the day or what, but they either managed it well or they handled it well, and I think, I certainly felt as a member of the committee felt very proud of the blokes, the way they handled themselves overall. We were concerned, you know if anything happened it would have put a dampner on the whole thing...

J.R (talking together) Yes, it would have reflected very badly. That's right, but nothing did.

J.R And were your sort of little group all okay, I mean all been successful or, you know, not necessarily wildly successful but ....

C.W Well I think it's, it's hard to, one of the interesting things that came out of this Welcome Home parade and that is that there was a fierce desire as Vietnam veterans that we were, not just equally as good as anybody else for our age if you like in the community, but better. We wanted to put on this parade, we wanted to raise the money, we wanted to organise it, we, and we didn't want the R.S.L. having any say in it, we didn't want the Vietnam veterans having a say in it or the Legion or the government or anything like that, and ironically we didn't want officers, we wanted just the, generally the privates, the diggers as it was commonly referred to. And, and we developed that sort of camaraderie that was so prevalent when we were called in for national service, you know. And when you get a group of people together like that, and they've got a couple of people they can look up to and there's just the basic things are covered, they only need a bit of encouragement and then nothing will stop them. And, but they were the group that I was with, one guy he's on the, he's still on the railway, but he's the assistant station master now, the other guy, he was a law clerk, now he's an administrator of a hospital, so he's quite successful, he's got a very big house, 50 odd squares out in the bush and he's very happy. The other guy was the alcoholic, and he just hasn't got on, anything to his name, another guy he's been retired off, he lost his arm actually when he went back, he was on the railway as well, there seemed to be quite a few people from the railway. The other guy, I would say that most of them, a guy called Broughton, he came off a property in Young, and now he's got his father's property so, and he's married and he's not long married actually, he's got a young child. He virtually didn't change much he just sort of, as he grew older took over the farm. There is a few people who have reached, I suppose middle management area but I don't know whether you can say anyone's, well do you put it, politician, like Fisober and all I suppose.... I don't know,

I suppose it's a little bit like the 2nd world war, and I... er.. you know, ex service people and so on, ...

J.R Well it's part, I mean the age, you're sort of, you know, 40 would be about the average age wouldn't it? [Mmm] So, I mean there's a way to go I guess. I mean I wasn't sort of meaning overall I was thinking more of your particular little group, I was just wondering how they'd handled the intervening years (talking together)

C.W Well another bloke's still in Taree, he, he's in the same job as he was. I suppose it's fair to say that most of them went back to what they were doing and now continue to do what they've done, you know, an extra few rungs up the ladder. Earning more money and generally pretty happy.

J.R You hear these sort of allegations, well don't want to call them allegations, it makes them sound as if they're not true, people say that some veterans have gone bush you know Cape York and things like that do you think those are authentic stories?

C.W Well I've heard, I've heard of a couple, I mean all the friends that I knew, none of them went bush. And I'd be very surprised if any of those were national servicemen, because basically they weren't bush type people, even when they come out of the army, you know. But in the Welcome Home parade, we had two instances, and I suppose, that I knew of out of 29,000 or so that marched, I suppose that may be a reasonable indication of who've gone bush, but, one case of a guy that came back and he married before he left and he came back and his child, his daughter was just over one, years old before he left and he met his wife, again, *was* with her for a day and then left a message, she got up one day and he left a message on the thing that he couldn't adapt and, he had to sort himself out, you know, and we got a call the day before the march from a girl who said she wanted to talk personally to either one of the members of the committee and I happened to be on the phone talking to her and she wanted to thank us for bringing her a father, and I said what's the story about, what do you really mean. Well, explained the story about her father, she didn't really met her father, but on the Thursday before the march, she had a knock on the door and there was her father, it was on her birthday, and he said happy birthday and she said thank you for bringing my father to me. Now he'd gone, he'd gone, so called bush, and there was one bloke who rang through just when we were having a meeting one day and he'd vanished off the scene of the place and he up in the bush up near Queensland somewhere, and he was telling us he was hitch hiking, that he'd been gone bush and he was hitch hiking his way to Sydney to attend the march. And everyone was looking for him, they didn't know where he was, but.. So there is two instances that I know of, but, I don't know that there's too many more than that, well I haven't heard any.

J.R And what was the final figure at the march? Was it 29,000? That's extraordinary isn't it, out of 47,000 or something..

C.W Well we didn't go and count them like that, but we heard a guy there who's, who was also involved in organising the concert, and he was able to tell us fairly quickly and fairly easily from a crowd, within a few thousand how many people were there, you know at the concert and venue and so on. He'd been used to those sort of, seen mass groups of people before and knowing what goes through the turnstile. And he said, he'd come up with a figure of 29,000, he would be surprised if it'd be over or under, that amount be very close to that, you know out of a, out of an absolute possible of 50,000 that went, it's an extraordinary result because some people are just overseas or not around anymore or....

J.R Australia's such a big country, I mean you're ....

C.W Well I had a guy actually, last Thursday who I'd never met, I met him at a conference and he came up to me and he said "Are you one of the organisers for that march?" and he said "I didn't go to that march and I'm bloody sorry, by not going" he said "I should have gone" he said "I'm bloody mad." he said "I've been kicking myself ever since."

J.R Yes, I think probably everyone who didn't go is feeling that way.

C.W He said "When I saw it on television I just broke down." he said …

J.R Yes, yes it was most impressive.

C.W And he said "What a bloody fool I am I should be there with them." And I can understand watching it. 'Cause if you watch it there, now and see that I've been there with them, it makes it...

J.R Just to backtrack a bit, because I'd like to talk to you more of your experience of being a veteran, but how was the return home for you?

C.W Well it was really nothing, 'cause I got home in the very early hours of the morning and...

J.R Travelling on your own?

C.W No, there was much the same people I went over with, came home. And we arrived at Sydney airport, and all that was there was our mothers and fathers, girl friends and so on, out of a group of I think about, there wasn't quite 100 then, it would be about 80 or so, and we just collected our gear, went through customs and went straight into our parent's car and just went. And I can recall going into a, because it was a long flight, my mother and father booked us into the motel just out near Parramatta somewhere, I've got a picture of it but I can't remember the name of it, and, if you like the dull silence of, and I can remember lying down on the bed and tears started, I just couldn't imagine that what had happened in that period of nine months, and that in fact was all over. And I'm never one for really showing

emotions much, much to my wife's disgust, but, she always says let it out, that sort of thing, but I was just lying there, a a bit like the after math of a shock or something like this, suddenly hits on you, it really takes, it's like when you go away on a holiday, it takes you two or three days to sort of get back into the routine again, but this took me about a week, but, but luckily I was able to wipe everything so, I'm always one of those people that, much to the annoyance again of my wife for saying, oh it's happened, let's get on with it, you know. And that's been my attitude so I was able to wipe that very easily and just get on with it.

J.R Do you think that was a good idea?

C.W Well I thought it was a good idea. I mean the kids and everyone don't think it is because they want me to talk about it and things like that.

J.R But now that you've been involved with veterans, I mean do you think looking back it would have been better to have done it some other way?

C.W Done what?

J.R For people in general, coming back, should, I mean if there'd been more of a, say discussion groups or whatever you want to call them, after you got back, do you think that would have helped people's long term adjustment. It seems to me that, you know you all, well you all, well a lot of you put it away at the time, then 15 or 20 years later there's this big, really big sort of need on the part of the veterans to have a Welcome Home.

C.W Yeah, many of them were very very bitter and I, I mean once again I've sort of, no hassles sort of type person and didn't worry me at the time, and even when we talked about developing this parade, I was somewhat reserved as to what the average bloke would think about it. Whether he would, or she, come to the march. But after being involved in it, I just noticed that everyone wanted something, they wanted this, if you like recognition of at least saying, that yes, we do believe you did something, you did...what, put your life at stake, or represent your country and, and did play a protecting role or something, and that you did go through a considerable amount over there. I mean we were very conscious of not seeking anything substantially different to anyone else, I mean so many people, we had difficulty with the advertising agency and others who wanted to promote the whole thing as the heroes of the war and everyone was very anti that, I mean we've never once regarded ourselves as heroes or anything like that. But it took some years for a lot of us to realize that we did do something, we did play a role in a, a protective role in Australia, like our fathers and grandfathers did, and it makes us look back and say how long was the 1st world war, how long was the 2nd world war, what was our father doing and I think in many ways we play down, I mean we just regarded ourselves as national servicemen or going over there, doing a job and that was it. We never regarded it as a massive confrontation

war that we had to go away at and I think the big thing is that with this group at least, they weren't glory seeker. Not one of them glory seekers about it and were very conscious of not wanting to think glory, but, when I attended the dawn service and after Brigadier Colin Kahn read his, what citation or, whatever the thing, and I was having great difficulty, I was with Normie Rowe, had great difficulty holding back from bursting into tears, you know, and I thought it must be just me and I was looking around and I could just see everyone, at the corner of their eye, you know.....

J.R You're meant to cry at dawn services [Mmm?] You're meant to cry at dawn services.

C.W Yeah, but I suppose we've never regarded ourselves as real soldiers.

J.R Yeah, but you don't have to be soldiers, I mean I find Anzac Day very moving, just because of the words that are used and the form of the service, I mean, and it's not sort of any personal sort of application to me.

C.W But it makes you think, you know, I had instances for example where I, leading up to the march and after it where I've been in R.S.L clubs and things like that and, and I remember one day and I was with Reg Saunders a drink at the Combined Services club on afternoon at One of Reg Saunders mates came and he was talking to us and he was praising us on the march and all that sort of thing, next thing he burst into tears and I said to Reg "what's wrong with him?" by this time he moved away, he said "he always wanted to volunteer in the 2nd world war, they would never let him go 'cause of medical grounds" and he's never forgotten, he's never... And another time that happened to me as well. Makes you start to think that you were one of the privileged few that went, because there's a hell of a lot of people out there that felt as if they haven't done their duty, that they haven't, haven't achieved something that their parents and fathers and mothers before them and things like that.

J.R Actually, one person I was interviewing introduced me to a friend of his and sort of with a view to talking to him too and he was introduced to me as having, you know, this was a volunteer national serviceman, and I said "Are you, you chose to join up" and he said "Course I bloody chose to join the army how else do you get to be a man", I said "I don't know, not a problem I've had" (laughs) You know he was very very adamant about it, he said, you know that's the thing you've got to do, that's part of growing up.

C.W It's a bigger thing than I realized, certainly a bigger thing, and I notice things like, for example I had long discussions with Kim Beazeley, the Minister about medals and things like that, and how some of the people haven't been issued with medals, and one in the case of a war correspondents and others who've been there for five years and haven't got anything, and some of them wounded,

some of them got recognition by the Americans and yet they haven't even got one. But I recall in the march where one of my mates who came over there a little later than I did, he, he just got, he only had four and a half months there, see and he got one medal, and that guy was actually embarrassed to march with us because we had two. You know it's this psychological thing that in people's minds that, certainly as far as I am aware in my own mind doesn't mean much to me, but it must mean a hell of a lot to a lot of other people. I know lot of them you know, go for medals, go for all sorts of things, but, I think there's this proudness amongst us underneath, we may not believe is there, but I think a lot of that come out on the march too.

Oh no, it's a, it, I believe it, the Welcome Home Parade march relieved the valve of pressure off people's mind that were there for so long. A hell of a lot of people and diggers were reserved about coming, they didn't know whether they were going, emotionally upset or they were going to have fights or they were going to get boozed or they were going to get, you know... But those who did come and like I say, the vast majority of them, will never forget that day. So I suppose when it comes right back to it, we didn't really have a welcome home, there was really nobody there. Um, I'm not saying we all looked for a welcome home parade, but after the years, of up to 20 years of being home and then looking back and saying, well... gee...

J.R Yes, it was never finished satisfactorily was it. I mean the war didn't ever have a finishing time [Just went away] and, for each batch of soldiers that went there wasn't a sort of satisfactory ending was there, sort of just ...

C.W No, it just went away.

J.R People rotated in and out and then the war, you know, Australia was through but the war went on, and then the war finished but it didn't finish well and...

C.W Yeah I think a lot of it also *was* to do with because there was a so called war at home, the difference in the opinion in the polls and politically at that time of course there was a likeness of change of government and so on, and we weren't at that point, we felt I suppose underneath that it wasn't much point even considering fighting for a welcome home or persisting or demanding or, you know we just, No. 1 priority was glad to get home, was glad to get feet on the ground and glad to see family and friends again I think that was the priority.

J.R When you came back in '67, how, did you sort of follow politics more closely after that, did you have views on the war and the anti-war protesters and..

C.W No, I took a different view to many of the others, I mean so many people I find, tend to try and, follow the majority of

People, and not express, really underneath their own views about things, they think Oh if he thinks that way well I'll go along with him. For example with the war, I always felt that people like Jim Cairns saved lives, I mean a lot of people, a lot of the diggers over there thought he was the greatest communist ..you know should be strung and shot and all sorts of things and, but, I always took the view that, it wasn't, no-one agreed, I mean everyone that I was with, certainly were of the opinion that the war really didn't need us to be there, I mean we were just a token force as part of the American centre. We could have been there and made some difference, we could have not been there and it wouldn't've made any difference to the thing. So it comes down to whether, whether it was useful, or whether it did stop the communist so-called aggression and world take over, because it was promoted at that time that it had to be stopped there and if we stopped it there it wouldn't go any further. I suppose the majority of us felt that there was some substance in that view, which of course took the view then that a labor government getting into power would only be somewhat supportive of the other mob, you know, of the North Vietnamese. But we never went around and said that we had to shoot or had to hereby declare every day that we were going to shoot so many North Vietnamese or Viet Cong or anything like that. We were really just a protective force, we were given a certain area to look after and that was it, and if we were confronted by anybody, well naturally we had to fight our way out of it, or if we come across a group or we were flown into an area to, to take control of it, well we did it, but we were just very careful we looked after our patrol of dirt, so, when I got home and I could look at all this and see what was going on and actually being there myself and thought to myself, well, what really did happen over there, what did we achieve out of it all? Because the Americans left anyway, and I came to the conclusion that maybe people like Jim Cairns and Whitlam and so on were right, and that they felt that quote "the boys should be home". And I just wonder if there hadn't been a change of government whether there would have been more lives lost for what; for the same result or the same end. So I felt somewhat differently about that to others. And I never got involved in politics in that regard, and I only got in, I mean you live in Sydney or Melbourne you're virtually divorced of any politics compared to living in Canberra in the heart, I mean it's every day events here, but in Sydney and Melbourne I just, I don't, I had no ambitions, no view points, I'd vote Labor if I thought the guy was alright I would vote Liberal if I thought the bloke was alright, I just had no allegiance to any one particular party or person at all, just on the day of voting I thought was the best ones for the job and vote them in. But I still take, I do still take this point of view that, which would be contrary to what a lot of people in the R.S.L would, for example, that contrary to what most people believe about Jim Cams and various members of that Whitlam government, that they in fact in my view saved lives rather than, by bringing them home earlier than they would...

J. R Well in fact the liberal government brought them home [Hmm?]

The Liberals brought them home.

C.W They started to, they started to....

J.R Certainly, no they finished it, they brought them home at the end of '71, by the end of '71 and Gough didn't get in till the end of December, till December 72.

C.W But there was still more to come wasn't there? I mean Gough Whitlam ensured ....

J.R Just training team, there wasn't a lot left...

C.W Well regardless as to who was in power, that the pressures that were applied on a march and a protest, you know.... (talking together) government had reacted to it.... yeah

J.R I think the writing was on the wall perhaps.

C.W The government had reacted to that, 'cause you very rarely see, you know, the size of the marches that were involved, nowadays, to what were then involved. There was a lot of people who didn't even like Cairns who didn't even like the people at the front, mothers of the sons and things like that, that also felt for a number of reasons, one is that why should their son, should have been every son at that age, I think that would have satisfied most of them more than just picking my son. A lot of them were very much concerned that they might lose their sons and the ones that are over there and that's with, they really only had the things like that protest march to, to voice their views and their opinions, to get things done, I mean many of them wrote to ministers and tried to influence ministers, you know, but that was a waste of time. So their only outlet for that form of protest was, during that time...

J.R And did you have association with other veterans? Did you keep contact with your little group after you got home?

C.W Very rarely.

J.R Didn't join, well there weren't any Vietnam veterans groups I guess, but did you join the R.S.L?

C.W No. We were given a, a card which gave us I think three years free membership or something to the R.S.L. And it's an interesting topic even now because most of the guys you talk to don't want to be in the R.S.L, which is a pity.

J.R Well the R.S.L claims that they have the same sort of proportion of Vietnam, of people who've been to Vietnam, the same proportion join the R.S.L as applies to the previous wars, that it's always about a third of those who go, will join.

C.W Well I'd be interested to see what the breakup of those figures are because I think a lot of them are also former, they would certainly be the vast majority of them would be full time people, the national services I bet would be very minimal in

comparison, you know if you took a percentage and I haven't seen it, I'm only going by friends that I know, that the definition of a Vietnam veteran is fairly broad too, I mean Peter Gration is a Vietnam veteran, ...

J.R Yes, they take your most recent war (laughs)

C.W Jim Flemming is a Vietnam veteran and so on, you know, so there, as far as the R.S.L's concerned they naturally are numbered as a Vietnam veteran. But some of those were involved in the R.S.L and through other conflicts Malaya and other things as well, they were in it for a while, but of the, if you like the national service period, and the, generally the NCOs to the privates and that, most of them around my age and I suppose the key to it is really age more than anything else. I guess I think places like the R.S.L you're more encouraged to join those places when you get older and we're now just starting to think that, that maybe we should get involved in the R.S.L, something. in it, where ten years ago, I mean all I was concerned about is well, like everyone else, a family and friends and children and a job, survival more than anything else. And I think the other thing is, I didn't want to go to an R.S.L Club every night for a few beers, you know, where the 1st and 2nd world war bloke, or the 1st world war no, but the 2nd world war bloke still do and would like to do and they still have their spot where they go and so on, where we've got other priorities and I think many of them are very bitter against the R.S.L, they certainly don't see eye to eye with people like Ruxton, and so on in the immigration, they will not join the R.S.L while there's that anti-approach to migration and you know that sort of approach that's taken. And interestingly, a lot of its got to do with the mentality of the people that run the R.S.L, so many of the bloke's have told me that they've been, they've, come to a R.S.L Club and some of them got long hair and a bit scruffy looking and the bloke's said "Oh you can't come in here" and the bloke said "Oh hang on I'm a Vietnam" "You mustn't be" you know "buzz off" you know you really felt not welcome round here. And I got a couple of blokes in Canberra that won't go in the R.S.L Club because of the attitude of, of if you like the officials that run the R.S.L Clubs. And I mean one bloke I can remember, Colin Hines saying to me one day, he says "You blokes you know you're going to run this place, we're going to rely on you" and particularly with the Welcome Home group. They see this group as ideally , the ones that could [move in] move in, you know they don't want the Vietnam Veterans association and that mob over there, [they're a bit suspect] they want the Legion,, they don't want this mob, ah but <u>these</u> young blokes, they're shrewd, they've organised something, they've proved their worth, these are the fellas we want to come in. And a couple of them are already talking to us about various state positions and even Federal Presidents and things like that, but whilst they talk about those things, they are also very very reluctant 'co, to let anyone take over, I mean they're very firmly fixed in their ways, their attitudes, some of them are also very very clever, too. I mean you gotta be, some people've been in their position 10, 20 years National, Stat Presidents and

Secretarys and anyone that goes in that sort of, those sorts of groups, or political groups, whatever you like to call them and survived that long they've got to, they've got to know what they're doing or they've got to have some friends somewhere. And it's still going to be a slow process, still going to be a slow process, but you can't imagine people like Ruxton retiring for a while..

J.R Time will, time will overtake him...

C.W But interestingly enough if a national serviceman Vietnam veteran was toe over a senior position in the R.S.L, and publically run not an officer or anything like that, they've got this... once again the R.S.L seems to have got this view that you need to be an officer before you get into these positions. I remember at the War Memorial, you know they, when I told them the highest rank I ever got to was Acting Lance Corporal, you know that, that really didn't melt too well with them, but, because there's this view if you run an organisation you're involved in these sorts of decisions, you must have had some officer training, which is a lot of hog wash really, but anyway. So the R.S.L, you know, they look carefully at your background, and certainly if you've got one person there who can handle the job easy and another person can handle the job easy, but this bloke was an officer and this bloke wasn't, invariably they'd [take the officer] go for the officer.

J.R Somebody suggested to me that the officers tend to join the R.S.L and the private soldiers tended to join the VVA.

C.W I think that's pretty right. I don't know any facts and figures but I think you're pretty right, because, ..

J.R No, well the R.S.L certainly won't disclose them if they, if they have them, they probably haven't got them actually.

C.W Oh they have them because .....

J.R I don't think they've perhaps collated them all... because they're not computerised yet, or they weren't a year or so ago.

C.W Oh that's probably right. Although some of the states are computerised I know. [Are they hmm] Because you get Reveille and it's got a computer wrapper on it that goes on the computer, so N.S.W are on a computer. But, well, you know when you fill out your application, you've certainly got to put your discharge certificate and your, all that sort of thing, so it would have that information on it. But if, if and I think that's another thing this Welcome Home parade had a very significant effect on the ex service community as a whole, I mean it was really looking for something like that to create more emphasis on the ex service community, 'cause I think it was generally seen as getting away from the realities war, real life because they were an older group and so on. And to see this group of blokes come in, not one of them'd be an officer, but show all the qualities of being able to run an

organisation and a parade and do anything that's made a lot of them...

J.R It's always a bit of a shock to officers isn't it (laughs) And how about Anzac Day? Do you think Vietnam veterans have been participating in that, and will continue?

C.W They've been reluctant to get involved in it. I've only been in two Anzac Day marches myself. And I've always felt that it's, it's my fathers and grandfathers and uncles and that's their day, you know, the two-up thing and all that sort of thing. I've never felt it being a, a day for me. Although in the last year or two it's, I think you start thinking you get older, and your children get off your hands and things like that, you start to think about what you can do to assist people, your mates that have been, and some of them may have had some difficulties and you look at, well how can I help, and you find that in the R.S.L at least there's various organisations in the R.S.Ls, various divisions, various auxiliaries, various funds, various.. all those sorts of things, that are available and that um, we need to do is to apply for those sorts of assistance or get them to talk to various people and you find the organisation is a very big organisation, it has tremendous amounts of assets, it has a lot of facilities available to it and, well, why don't we use this sort of thing, these sorts of things come to your mind see.

J.R This is going to be sort of right for a takeover in the next 20 years isn't it? Because of the age.

C.W Well time, time's on our... (talking together) I know a couple of the members of the Welcome Home parade committee have been tested out for State Presidents really, so once one happens and then another one, in the next 10 years I suppose.

J.R How do you feel about the treatment of Vietnam veterans by the community? Did you ever personally have any, any hostility towards you because it was known that you'd been to Vietnam?

C.W No. In many ways I, I sometimes I hear of the stories about some people about the way they've been treated and some people what the stories you hear, but I, I'm always a little wary too of people exaggerating, things too much, rather than giving, you know, you tell a story, it suddenly builds up to this and builds up to that and, before you know where you're up to you've almost convinced yourself that you've been attacked by 20,000 people down the main street, things like that. But I never had anyone who came to me and was very bitter against me, I think that the vast majority were interested to know what it was like, I think a lot felt sorry for the fact that, that we were one of the ones that were pulled out of the barrel and, unfortunately, I don't know, no-one's really come to me and said "have you killed babies" or "you've killed this" or "you did this" or "we don't want you" or anything like that. I've seen stories and I've seen even in the Welcome Home Parade where a girl put up that sign I can remember seeing marching

along where she said "I protested before you went, I'm sorry, Welcome Home" That's why a lot of people said to me "Why do you think it's taken so long for, you know, the Welcome Home to come, I think it couldn't've come any sooner, because I think now the community's relaxed about it, they've accepted it and they've been able to ...

END OF TAPE 2