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This is Tape One of two tapes of an interview with Kevin O'Halloran conducted by Gary McKay recorded on the 14th of January 1993 at Inverloch, Victoria. The topics covered on this tape are training for war, enlistment, national service and the jobs.

Kevin, the first question I guess is not really why did you join the Army, but how did you get to be in the Army?

Through National Service. I was in the first intake in 1971 and did the training at Puckapunyal.

How long was that - was it a normal three month recruit training?

Yes, we did three months or ten weeks I think. Ten weeks there and then Corps training. Three choices. None of them were Infantry. I think I was going for small ships, probably went for Artillery and a truck driver. All the easy jobs. And got Infantry, so from there up to Singleton for another 10 weeks.

So you did your Corps training at Singleton?

Yes.

What did you know about Vietnam before you were drafted?

Fairly little. We had had a couple of chaps from Wonthaggi, from the local area, that had been across, guys that I knew. But other than that not that much. A close friend of the family was Kevin Stephens with 7 RAR, lives probably 30-40 miles away. He was shot over there and copped it through both legs, and being close friends of Mum and Dad, we went over to see him. He had been brought back to Australia, through Heidelberg and then brought home. But his wounds still hadn't healed - he actually copped it through one thigh and through a knee - and it took a long time for him to recuperate.

That was about the only knowledge I had. I had seen all, being '71, all the rallies and demonstrations, but I never got involved in them.

Inverloch is a far way out of Melbourne - is it because you were a long way from Melbourne?

No, actually I was working in Melbourne then. My career was in the bank, the National Bank, and I had spent probably three or four years in Melbourne so I had been there through a lot of the main stages.

I used to come home every weekend. I would go surfing and as far as I was concerned Vietnam was a long way away. Didn't mean much to me.

Did you play football?

Yes.

So footy and surfing and Vietnam was a long way away?

Yes. Didn't mean much.

So you went to Puckapunyal for your recruit training?

That is right.

What do you remember most about Puckapunyal?

Being January it was sticking hot, the dust. My background - I had done six years at boarding school under the Marist Brothers and they were fairly strict on discipline so what a lot of people found difficult at Puckapunyal didn't worry me. Lining up for food with 300 people didn't worry me at all. People shouting at you, giving you orders - I had been through all that and the disciplines, I had gone through that too. Probably watching other people who had obviously had come from home and spent all their lives at home and thrown in with 20 or 30 guys in one shed, sleeping with them, having to make their beds, get up at a certain time and generally mix with people lining up, that was interesting to watch.

I had a good time. Although at the Swan Street Barracks, before we went to Pucka, I walked in there and I had long hair, board shorts on, and all my mates were saying goodbye to me, but I had no shoes on. I suppose it was a corporal or a sergeant who said, 'Have you got shoes?'. I said 'Yes', and he screamed, 'Well, bloody well put them on'. Lining up for the last medical before we went to Puckapunyal, the guy in front of me was told, 'You're unfit, off you go'. Everybody just looked at him; 'Bye mate. Bye'.

I suppose, as with everyone too, that was a recruit - haircut. I had been on the beach for weeks and hadn't washed my hair and the Army barber got the scissors and chucked them down and said, 'You bugger, you've got salt through it'. And I said, 'Yeah', so he nearly ripped my hair off. Then after that I suppose the needles - standing there both arms out, bang, bang, bang. Like a pin cushion.

Had you ever done any rifle shooting before then?

Yes. A lot.

So small arms training wasn't a worry?

No, I had a bit of a thing for rifles. Living on a farm I used to go shooting nearly every night I was home after rabbits. I used to walk for miles.

So then you went off to Singleton, after not getting your choice of corps, which I can probably understand it at the time. What do you remember most about Singleton?. You would have got there around March/April?

Yes. Starting to get a bit colder. Whereas Puckapunyal covered a fairly wide area of training, naturally Singleton was more to the infantry side of things. We used the SLR at Pucka and I think the F1. At Singleton we got into the Armalites and we did the Bren gun course. I think they were trying to reintroduce it at that stage. We also used the M60, the M72 and the M79s, and then we got into contact drills. It was more

defined into what we were doing. Again, one of the corporals up there, similar to Puckapunyal where we had a guy called Peter Dodds and he was a guy that came from Anglesea, liked surfers, I could relate to him. Another guy at Singleton was Jack Rutledge and he seemed to be one of the guys you could really relate to. He was quite good.

Interesting about Singleton - NSW and Queensland guys that had done their basic training there. The Victorians, South Australians and Tassies and Western Australians came up there and the first thing you noticed was a division, as though the guys who had done their basic training there, that was their home, and we were kind of invading it, and we didn't mix. One weekend we got on the grog and boys got charged, and a group came through our hut and punched the hell out of us. The guys were asleep. There were broken noses. One fellow pulled a bayonet on another man. It was probably a bit of a flashpoint there. We had weekend leave cancelled after that. There was always that bit of friction there. That probably stayed until we went to Reinforcement Wing at Ingleburn when we then started to mix with the Regular soldiers, and all of a sudden it was the Regulars and the conscripts. That's what I noticed most about Ingleburn, all of a sudden we then joined together and we were all conscripts and then there were the Regs.

> That brings up a couple of points then - what was your reaction to actually being in Infantry? You obviously felt that you would probably go to Vietnam?

No, in fact I didn't even think about it. I was in the bank when I started off. I got called up when I was at Merimbula, NSW. Up there by myself on a surfing trip, listening to the wireless. It was pissing down rain and the bloody marble came out. I thought, 'You beauty'. So I got in my car and drove home. It wasn't that so much. Vietnam wasn't a question, it was more going into the Army. Dad didn't worry about it. I know four guys from our area that got called up, although I was the only one who went in.

> Had you father had any previous military service?

Yes. He was in World War II, although in Australia down at Wilson's Prom and up to Darwin.

> At this stage you are not really zeroing in on going to Vietnam?

No.

> When you got to Ingleburn, which is where the Reinforcement Wing was, was it starting to get then, and what was your reaction with the Regulars?

It gelled because our company at Singleton was chosen to go to Reinforcement Wing because it looked like we would be going to Vietnam. Everyone else, and there was probably 2,000 to 3,000 people in every call-up, there was only about 100 of us who looked like going across in infantry. Then we got to Ingleburn but we weren't even sure then. I remember walking into the boozer in Ingleburn and everyone was just looking across, because no one knew each other, and we started to hear the stories about 'When you do picket duty be careful because some Reg will jump out of a tree

and hit you on the head with a pick handle' or something like that. And then some of the Nashos were putting it back on the Regulars, like, 'You've got to be dickhead to be a Regular' and all that. It was friendly banter but it got serious after a while. The Reg guys - never really had much to do with them. We were only there a matter of weeks.

If you can sort of look back on your training aspect now, getting ready to go to Vietnam, do you reckon you were well prepared to become a rifleman?

More than anything, and I probably have the value of hindsight now. Looking at the first battalions that went across and what they knew and where they were going and what was happening, and their training, their weapons, their clothing. We had the benefit of all that knowledge. From Pucka, all the corporals had been returned Diggers; they had probably been wounded, and they could relate stories. Same with Singleton. Reinforcement Wing not so much but we did Canungra from Reinforcement Wing and the sergeants up there who took us through were all returned guys.

If we can go on to Canungra then - what was your reaction when you got to Canungra?

It was then heading into July and it was the coldest joint that I have ever been to. The fire buckets iced up. The days were stinking hot.

But the training - in Singleton again it was dedicated to infantry training; Canungra was spot-on for jungle training and in particular what we found for Vietnam. The mock villages they had and how you went into those; along the trails that they had through the jungle. I was a 'tail-end charlie' and as I walked passed one of the staff said, 'Bang, you're dead'. I looked around and said, 'Where are you?' There was a little mound and he was just sitting in there. I wasn't covering an arc and he said that was what I had to look for. Even the walk-through fire lane, identifying targets; firing from the hip; and going out on night ambushes. The whole thing was designed, we thought, especially for Vietnam. First time ever that we had been under the Lewis gun, live firing.

The Vickers.

Yes, the Vickers.

On the battle inoculation range.

Yes.

What other things do you think about Canungra?

Trying to break you. The amount of hours that we spent out at night just doing patrolling, ambushing, getting up at say 5 in the morning, up and running again. In fact on the last day we had done 'Heartbreak', did the live firing, marched back in to the commando course, and one of the guys next to me said that he had just had enough and sat down and started crying. They got him. But a lot of guys, at the end of it, were probably at the end of their tether.

That commando course - is that where you jump into the river?

Yes.

Okay. The Obstacle course or confidence course I think it was.

Yes. Great for your confidence!

Was that a four week course?

Yes, three or four. I am not too sure.

Did they call it the BE Course? The Battle Efficiency Course?

I don't know. I can't remember now.

Do you consider Canungra prepared you pretty well?

Yes. They were demonstrating booby traps and how to disembark from trucks in contact situations. We had the value of a lot of experience coming back to us there.

Especially grenade targets. We had one instance up there where a guy panicked with a grenade and it actually rolled out of his hand. The sergeant grabbed him and both of them went over the other side of the wall and the grenade went off and blew his Armalite to pieces.

What was so special about Canungra for you?

The challenge more than anything, just to see if you could get through it. I mean it was an eye opener too. For a start I had only been to Merimbula out of Victoria and here I was in Queensland, up in the mountains and supposedly jungle. Compared to Vietnam it wasn't but just being able to get through there. I mean the last day when we had to jump off that tower. One guy jumped and he said, 'Fuck Canungra' and hit the water. They said, 'You get up there and do that again'. So his mate who was next to him in line and he jumped and said, 'I'm not going to say 'Fuck Canungra'. Just getting through it mainly was the challenge.

What organisation were you with when you did that?

Reinforcement Wing.

RHU Ingleburn?

Yes.

Did you do any other type of training to prepare you for Vietnam? Did you go to Shoalwater Bay for example?

No. Nothing. Not like the battalions - we were raw reinforcements.

Now, here you are in 1 RHU at Ingleburn - how are they picking guys to go to Vietnam? Were they going in drafts, in plane loads, or just trickling out?

As it worked out, we were about the only company taken out of Singleton, went to Reinforcement Wing, did Canungra and came back to Reinforcement Wing for about a week. They said okay, we were going and had about three days leave and then we were on the plane, the whole lot of us, and off.

What sort of jobs did you do when you were at Canungra? Were you just a rifleman, a machine gunner, a scout or what?

Did the whole lot - carried the sig set; we covered all scopes right throughout the company.

Who were the platoon commanders and section commanders?

None of us. We had sergeants taking us through it. We weren't trained to be leaders or anything like that.

They were Battle Wing staff were they?

Yes.

They weren't corporals and lieutenants from RHU?

No. The whole lot of us , the whole one hundred of us that went over were all privates.

This is a hard question to ask now, but is there anything that you think you missed out on before you got to Vietnam that sort of surprised you when you got there?

Oh, yes. We did Pucka in January, finished Canungra in about say July, and then in August we were on a plane to Vietnam. Virtually all we had been doing up until that stage is training. I was in there probably just to have a good time - getting shot and going to Vietnam didn't enter into my head and I thought it was a bit of a game. That is when I tried to make the best of the situation and if someone said, 'Look do you want to go there?' I said, 'Yeah' because I was in National Service, and I was going to be in there for two years as I thought then, so I thought I might as well make the most of it and get what I can out of it. But, when we got over there and I am probably jumping ahead, we went straight into the jungle training wing, all the reinforcements again were in the one area and we went into about another two or three weeks of training in country.

Who were running that - the 1 ARU I think it was called?

Yes.

So you went to 1 ARU and the platoon commanders and the section commanders there were?

They were already there.

They were reinforcements themselves?

No, I'm not sure. I know one of the lieutenants there he was called a ninety day wonder, but the sergeant, the corporals - they were all Regular. I don't know whether they were dedicated just to 1 ARU over there.

Can you think of any of that training that you went through, was there anything new in theatre that was a surprise to you from training in Australia?

Well whilst we were training in Australia it was all make believe, but actual training over there was going out doing patrolling. It was for real, although it was down in that AO Paddington area. We did the Nui Dinhs too, out there, so it was real live training - carrying ball.

So, you got there on a QANTAS ...

QANTAS flight out of Sydney.

And you were telling me this was when you found out it (National Service obligation) was only going to be 18 months.

The night that we were going in on the bus to the airport, we were listening to the wireless on the bus and they said all troops will be pulled out of Vietnam. We thought great, we were heading across, and the other one was that conscription had been dropped down to 18 months.

What was the reaction amongst the nashos?

Eighteen months was great, but everyone had the same feeling you know, well we were going over there now so no-one really knew what was going to happen.

When you came back from Canungra and they told you you were going to Vietnam, did you get any pre-em leave?

Three days.

That all?

That's all.

Did you go home?

Yes.

And what was the reaction at home?

I didn't tell them.

You didn't tell them?

I didn't tell them (laughs). Well actually I went home. When I was at Canungra I celebrated my 21st (birthday) we were out the scrub there, oh, we were patrolling around and I had a can of apricots and I shouted myself a can of apricots with the guy I was with. For my 21st, when I got home, Mum and Dad had a 21st birthday (party) lined up and invited a couple of the teams from the footy club and said you know, Kevin's home on leave, come round, have a few barrels and ...

Why didn't you tell them you were going to Vietnam?

Oh, I knew what Mum was like and when I got back to Sydney I rang up and I said, 'Oh listen, we have just been told that we are going'. 'Course talking to Mum - that was the end of her for about ten minutes, and I was talking to Dad after that, he was alright, but Mum was a bit of a screaming heap. Which I knew she was going to be, so I had delayed it.

Did you go via Singapore?

Yes.

Change into a white shirt when you got there?

No, no we had ... we were in polys but without any insignia on it. I remember we had a few cans at the (Sydney) airport all singing and yahooing, got on the plane, had about half a can, woke up in Darwin, then woke up again in Singapore as crook as a dog.

Any other things you can remember from your flight over?

No, that was about it. I slept most of the way. It was a night flight.

I know it's a hard question to ask but were you thinking about was going to happen when you got there?

No.

Just going to let it happen and roll over you?

Yep. No preconceived ideas about it at all.

Okay, so you arrive in Tan Son Nhut, and what was your initial (reaction) ... you're obviously looking out of the window I imagine.

On the way down and seeing all these bomb craters, I said, 'God, what's happening here?' Then we landed at Tan Son Nhut, got off the plane and looked around and there was all these military planes everywhere and bunkers. Tan Son Nhut airport was a tin shed at that stage, it had bullet holes through it, everyone was walking around carrying rifles. I thought, 'Phew, this must be the real thing now'. But, stinking hot and smelly.

So, what happened then, you arrived?

Arrived, probably got processed somewhere. We were just told to sit there and wait and then a plane came in.

So, you didn't overnight you just ...

Straight off - onto Nui Dat

Onto Wallaby airlines.

Wallaby airlines? This American pilot came out, Goddamn it, he had beads, he had everything hanging off him. 'We're on this trip man,' I said, 'Well, off we go!' We landed, I'm sure we landed sideways.

So, but you went in a Caribou to …?

Nui Dat. Straight off there, but I'm sure it wasn't in a RAAF Caribou.

Nui Dat, okay, so what was it like on the plane going down to Nui Dat?

Everyone was just sitting there, wide eyed, bushy tailed, probably just trying to soak in what was around us, not much at all. No-one was saying much.

When you get to Nui Dat - what happens?

Straight off there and I think trucks took us across to the Reinforcement Wing. And just dropped off there, got their gear together, got allocated a tent. It was probably into the afternoon, and someone said , 'Okay, chow's at whatever time it was, just bunk out for the night and we'll take over from tomorrow morning. Issued with a rifle.

Were most of the guys Regulars or nashos?

All nashos.

This was an all National Service group?

All National Service crew - one hundred of us.

So had you formed any strong friendships with any of these guys?

Yes, all the way through, there was only probably a couple that actually carried through from Pucka. Couple, no probably would have been about a dozen or so, because even at Singleton we were split up, but a few managed to carry through all the way. And you kept meeting new guys all the way through too. The tents, you know you just got put in a tent with whoever they allocated. You had to start afresh, got new people, had to meet them, start all over again.

I just want to ask a few questions now about National Servicemen. I think we covered, or did we? What was your reaction to being drafted?

No, it didn't really worry me. When my number came out I thought, 'Oh, you beauty!'. I felt a bit down on that one, I don't know whether it was because the weather was that bad or I got drafted, other than that I thought well I'm here I might as well make the best of it. It didn't worry me. The job - I had been in the bank for a few years, I thought well here's a bit of a change of scenery. I knew I would get around the country, I had only been to Merimbula - that's the furthest.

Did you have a girlfriend at that stage?

No.

And your Mum's reaction to being drafted?

Oh, not too bad. See, I had been at boarding school for six years so, and then away in Melbourne working, so it was nothing new there.

You must have met some National Service officers?

Yes.

What did you think of them?

Take 'em as you find them. Some were good, some were not so good let's say. The guy at 1 ARU in Vietnam, can't even remember his name, I was talking to a mate of mine, Graham Taplin, from Hobart the other day, he rang me up for Christmas, and he had just read your book, *In Good Company*. He was just telling me about it and said, 'Yes, I've read it', and we were talking about people and the old times. He said, 'Remember that ...' we were talking about reinforcement wing because he got some KP duty, and he said, 'That bloody lieutenant, second lieutenant, what ever happened to him? I said, 'I don't know', I said, 'but he was a dickhead'. And he said, 'Yeah'. I can remember we went up to the Nui Dinhs and here he is screaming his lungs out at the top of his voice, I said, 'This guy's crazy'. I didn't get on with him, not that I had fights with him, it's just that there was something there. Not many other people did either. But like everyone, be it a nasho, a Reg, an officer, NCOs, you just took them as you found them.

Did you get on well with all the Regular Diggers yourself?

Yes, some you do, some you don't. The ones that you didn't you just left alone. But mainly if you were in trouble you could always count on them. If they said, 'Have a beer' you would have a beer with them, but other than that, no, there wasn't that much pressure. There was that many people around you could have a good time.

So, you're now in the reinforcement unit at Nui Dat and what sort of jobs did you get landed with then?

Out patrolling I was 'tail end charlie'. We swapped around a bit too. It was either myself or the corporal who was either forward scout one night. I was following him and we picked up movement. I was looking one way he was the other way and he said, 'Down!' He had seen something on his side and we went down and we followed up and we found a tunnel - just not far out of Nui Dat itself. Next morning they brought in the engineers and they blew it up. Other

than that, 'tail end charlie' for a couple of patrols, we stayed out doing a lot of night patrolling, ambushing and then up in the Nui Dinhs for a week or so.

So, most of them were around the TAOR area around Nui Dat?

Yes.

And how long did you stay in ARU?

It was either two or three weeks.

And then what happened?

We were then allocated out. Most of them went to 4 RAR and other corps as well, myself and Wayne Butcher - I think it was only the two of us - we went across to (HQ) 1 ATF - the Australian Task Force.

Whereabouts, in Vung Tau or ...

No, in Nui Dat.

In Nui Dat in the D & E Platoon?

No, Wayne ended up in the D & E Platoon, I ended up as a batman for a week.

Oh, that would have been good!

It was, it was different (laughs). I had 26 sets of brand new fitting greens. By the time I was finished I was well decked out! We only used to work about three or four hours a day.

Who were you batman to?

The whole lot, it was right up in the intelligence area.

So, all the officers in the Task Force Headquarters?

Yes, right in there. Even where the brigadier was but not a batman for him.

Can you remember anyone from there that sticks out in your memory?

No, just names and faces. Some wanted their gear cleaned, you know, just collected their greens. Took a trip down to Baria on the laundry run- that's about the only time I got out while I was there. But lasted about a week as a batman and then got field hygiene - got promoted (laughs).

So, you became a blow fly!

Only for a short time until I blew up one of the toilets - out of there pretty quick. There was trouble with pesky flies down in the pits of the toilet so I droped a bucket petrol in, lit a piece of paper, closed the toilet lid and the shit hit the fan - literally.

And then what happened, what did you do then?

Off to 4 RAR.

So, who did you march into?

Went across to, I think it was headquarters, 'cause there was only myself and (Private) Wayne Butcher again.

So this would have been August or September?

We went across to Vietnam in August. In fact, while we were at 1 ATF was when the big fight occurred. It was in September, we were still there at 1 ATF, because we were reloading the choppers for the fight. And it was straight after that we went off to 4 RAR.

So, what was your impression on arriving and what company did you get allocated to?

Well, we had the choice. We were told that 4 RAR were pulling out. We could stay with 4 RAR as a reinforcement or we could go to D Company and stay on, because we knew that D Company was going to be there right until the end. So we said, listen we'll go to D Company. D Company at that stage were up on SAS Hill. Were taking over that, from the SAS.

What was it like when you marched into Delta Company?

Pretty interesting, we got jeeped in and we stopped and introduced to (Major) Jerry Taylor, the two of us, both of us saluted - we didn't know what to do. Both of us saluted, waved, shook hands (laughs) we had no idea and he said, 'Okay, well thanks for coming across'. We said no worries and he said, 'Well I'll allocate you down to 11 Platoon', we said, 'Right'. He handed us over to someone and said, 'Alright' - at that stage it was week in - week out (patrol frequency) doing TAORs. While we were there (SAS Hill) they were building bunkers, putting wire up everywhere, claymores all over the place. We just said okay, down to 11 Platoon, this is so and so, can't even remember who that one (was) and you're on the work detail putting up fences. That night - I didn't know many although a fair few of the guys from 1 ARU had been transferred across there, it was a bit bewildering, a bit scary, going across to 4 RAR because we knew what D Company, everyone knew about D Company and the battle they had just gone through, and here we were new boys on the block and we were walking in and we were green. Didn't know anything, hardly knew anyone and I sat there probably the first night by myself just soaking it in - having a look around. Met (Sergeant D. K. Jenkin) Daryl Jenkins (sic) pretty early on in the piece. But first night ...

What was your impression of him?

A straight shooter, not humorous by any means. Said it as it was. Never really got to know the guy very well. We had (Lieutenant R. J.) 'Dicky' Wellard, I think he took your spot. In the end got to know Dick Wellard pretty well, because I went on R & R with him. But, first night I never even got a tent with the other guys. There was the TV tent, with a little bunk behind that, so I slept in there. But I was just sitting there by myself and (Private R.V.) Bob Tucker, Tuck, came up to me and started talking to me. But I just took it slowly because I didn't know any of the guys - wasn't going to force myself in there, just took it as it came.

Did it take long to assimilate you or did they do anything special to assimilate you into the section?

No, no, I just worked there for a few days then it was, did the gun duty a couple of times, and then we went out for a week, got number two on the gun and just ... There was nothing special, I was just there and I just followed the leader. What ever they said, I did, I was mainly learning off them again.

Did you notice a difference between what it was like in 1 ARU and then going into Delta Company, in that rifle section?

Oh yes, look …

What was the main difference?

Delta Company was experienced, I mean they had been there for months before us, they had the knowledge, they were fairly well hardened. When we were in 1 ARU we were all the same. Now we were moving into an area where all these guys had gone through training together, gone through battles together. The other thing too that was a bit different was we knew we were pulling out. I don't what the earlier troops felt, when you first went over there, you're probably thinking twelve months. But when we were there we knew we were going. We were also told that we were to cut ... if we got get into any contacts - we were to get out of there fairly quick. It had been announced on the wireless. I mean even in September, that last battle, and I don't think that was too well received (back home). It was big one but after the announcement had been made that all the troops were pulling out, I think there might have been a bit of pressure coming down from the politicians just to, okay make sure you all get out of there in one piece. No, there was nothing special, no-one really, you had a job to do I suppose and that you were part of the rifle company and they probably thought, well you have done all your training and you probably know a bit about it. In actual fact we didn't.

Did you stay in the one section then?

Yes, I was in 11 Platoon, Five Section.

Who was your section commander?

Good question. Wouldn't have the faintest. Dicky Wellard.

He was the platoon commander.

Yes. He was, but look there was guys like (Corporal W.W.) Dowell(y) around, Daryl Jenkin(s), but other than that, even the guys further along I look through the photos now and say who was in this section with me? The main guys I was attached to was the gunner and the guy behind me.

So, can you remember who they were?

Yes, (Private) Ian Boulton was the first guy I was with and then Bob Tucker was the second one - we ended up with a heap of machine guns in our crew. Koochie (Lance Corporal B.

Koczyrkewycz) had a cut down M60 he got off the SAS, there was the captured M60, there was a normal M60, there was guns everywhere. But, no even though I was out there for week on an end, I never really, especially in the bush, that was the hardest place to meet anyone.

Yes, because it was quiet

Well, you weren't talking to anyone it was only just the guys next to you.

How long did it take before you reckon you were part of the platoon?

Three or four weeks at least. One night, even when we came back into camp, I would go up to the boozer I would know one or two guys, then they would introduce me to a few more. There was card game one night - got invited down to that, so I went down had a game of cards with the guys and a beer, but it took a while - took a long time in fact. It's not that they were there and I was here, it's just that I was the new kid, they had been mates together, they had been all their training together, and I was just a new guy coming in, so I didn't push it.

There wasn't any hostility toward you was there?

Oh no, no. And I didn't force it either. Took it slow.

When you were out on patrol what did you consider the most important part of your job?

I suppose doing the job that I had to do. I mean you didn't want to stuff up, if any messages came along you made sure that you passed the signals on that you got all the way through. Just covering where you were supposed to be looking, making sure you didn't stuff up. I remember one time we did. There was a typhoon or a cyclone or what ever it did came through - we were out there at the base of the Nui Dinhs. We had heard about it that it was coming down and it had started up north and this great rain depression came through. Sounded just like a mighty great roar when it came down, and rained! We were sitting in water this deep (indicates chest high). We had lost the guns. The guns were under water.

Up to your chest in water?

Yes, I was sitting on my pack, had my rifle against the tree, and I was back leaning like this; I was sitting in water here. Now also that night - we were ambushing a couple of tracks. There was a light, there was someone out there. It appeared that they knew where we were, we were screaming at each other, I was from here to you away (one metre) yelling, saying, 'There is someone there!' But all you could hear was the rain belting down. You could see the light, they came back a couple of times, it was too far out to do anything, and just couldn't do anything. We said, 'Oh well, stuff it. They are not going to worry about us we are not worrying about them'. Next morning, of course, everything is saturated, we left and then went down, oh say, a click further down the track and I got out the groundsheet and started drying it out and Daryl Jenkin(s) came over and (said), 'You bastards, put them bloody things away, we are not out here on show'. I mean I wasn't the only one who did it. Everyone was dry cleaning their guns and stripping their rifles down, but they were trying to get some gear dry, but, no Daryl went off his brain at that one. But yes, the other one is I suppose sleeping on duty - gun duty at night. That happened once or twice too.

Out in the bush?

Yes. With some of the guys. That was a bit of a worry, you would wake up next morning and say, 'Shit no-one woke me up last night what happened?' And you would work out the picket broke down somewhere.

What do you think was the hardest part about being a reinforcement?

Continually, whether it was from Pucka to Singleton - reinforcement; then across to Nui Dat - and then even 1 ATF; to 4 RAR; continually changing over -meeting different personnel. I mean if you had have been with the battalion you would have known all the guys, gone across with them, known how they worked and lived, and what sort of personalities they are. But it was continually learning new training, new faces, just trying to be involved with people. You just never got time to settle down.

You have been through that cycle now, if you were doing it all again and you know how a reinforcement gets handled and processed and all that, what would you do to help them assimilate into a platoon?

To an established platoon - like D Company, one of the D Company platoons. You really ... they probably ... you either would have to start a new platoon up with reinforcements which would throw the rest of the company out or you would have to through what I did again. I don't think there are any other alternatives. It's just that our training went right through, we never had a break between training and then going over. I don't think you can do it.

They didn't allocate a 'buddy' system sort of like this is 'Bloggs' he is going to look after you?

Possibly that would have worked, I mean even when we were patrolling, I had Boulton and I had Tuck as gunners, not that I trusted Tucky too much but - he was a bit of a worry - but Dowelly was always (there) ... We were doing a patrol one morning and we caught movement coming across in front of us. Tucky went down, we all went down and we were ready to go and Dowelly came up and he has gone, 'No, they are ours'. And what we were doing we were following a creek and they walked straight across in front of us. But Dowelly, there was enough experience there and knowledge of what was going on. He saw it. We couldn't really make them out. Everyone was fairly 'toey', but you do rely on the experienced guys. Even when we were doing those recon (clearing) patrols going out. Just the four of us, as we went down at night or up in the morning, the four guys went out and just did a check around. Always if I went it would always be with the other experienced guys.

Oh, clearing patrols.

Clearing patrols. That was ... you had to make sure what was going on there.

Did you think they were fairly switched on those 11 Platoon guys?

Oh yes. Yes.

Next question, is a funny one. Did you like your job? I mean ...

In infantry or where I was?

Yes, I mean as a rifleman. Was there something you would rather have been doing?

Oh, it's not much fun slogging around out in the bush is it? (laughs) No, again there was a challenge there. At the time, you would say, I suppose the grunt always regarded himself as the lower end of the heap. The old foot slogger - the grunts. When we took over SAS Hill some of the SAS guys were there you see, well there fairly well elite those guys - the super boys. But, one good thing about being in the infantry was that you had plenty of mates; you were all in the same situation; and there were always laughs. I mean during the time ... the whole time from when I first started the National Service training until the end. I probably never laughed so much in my life. You were, once you made a mate there - the close mates - they were your mates for life. That way, yes, because you were doing it hard, you were probably doing the best job in a way.

You saw yourself come in and join a rifle company that had been there six months and you looked at your own standards, do you reckon you were well enough trained to slot into that pretty well?

Yes, to patrol - to react in action I don't know. That comes with experience.

Did you ever get into a contact with those (11 Platoon) guys?

No.But I did have one experience where I reckon if I had have I don't know how I would have ended up. It was the very last night in Vietnam, we were in 'Vungers', we were doing gun duty up on the bunkers overlooking the swamp. We were actually sitting on top of a bunker and there was myself, I call him 'Wanker' a guy called (Private T.W.) Walpole, he was with me and we're sitting up there, had the gun there ready, and we looked down and here is this little black figure coming up near the wire. Now I have jumped up, I have grabbed the gun because he was coming through the swamp, and I don't know whether it was a misfire or a jam or I don't know what happened. So I have picked up the ammo box and I am standing up and I am screaming at this bloody thing down there. I have looked down and here is 'Wanker'. He was down and I thought to myself, 'You idiot, if that had have been bloody Charlie or someone coming after us, I would be dead now'. I mean I just ... my panic reaction was aggressive. 'Wanker' he said, 'No, stuff this, put your head down'. As it turned out it was one of the guys from D & E Platoon who had gone out for the night ...

Coming back in through the wire!

He got wet, his clothes were wet. He looked black and he's coming in through the wire, and I even knew the guy. But he was, instead of walking straight up he was hiding down behind the bloody clumps of rushes, trying to sneak in. Scared the crap out of us. I always wondered how I would react.

When you went out on operations was there anything that was at the forefront of your mind, or scared you or made you feel edgy - when you were out on operations?

Yes, night time was the worst. During the day you knew where everyone was and there was like there was a chain of command, you knew what was happening. But at night it was that bloody dark over there it was usually raining. You always heard movement sort of thing and you would be on the gun. You would be looking, you could see things moving - of course it

probably wasn't. You could see trees moving. One night we were sound asleep, it was the first time ever I had the hooch up, with a mossie net. I normally used to just sleep with the groundsheet wrapped around me. This guy started screaming, 'They've got me, they've got me!' Everyone just bloody jumped up. I've grabbed, I went for my rifle except I grabbed Boulton's leg. I didn't know what that one was, and it was pitch black, what a turn out. The next morning we found out it was the guy was dreaming about snakes! 'They've got me, they've got me!' but I had to do picket duty after that and when it was my turn we had the rope up to get back to the gun position because it was that dark. I just stood there, I froze, I mean I was that bloody scared. I didn't know what was happening till next morning. I suppose also mines were a bit of a worry.

> The D & E Platoon as a matter of fact got really hammered badly in July '71. Did you ever here about those sort of things?

Yes, see when I was with 1 ATF I was actually sleeping down with D & E Platoon. I got to know a heap of the guys there and they had their ... I suppose their 'kill board' up. But they changed their tactics and training when on APCs from sitting on top with their ammo next to them because I think it was the RPG hit that - and up they went. So, yes, we got to hear about every action that was happening. I don't know whether it was because we were up in the intelligence area or what, but we heard what was going on. But I know when we were up the Nui Dinhs we were doing a clearing patrol and it had been an area where there had been a lot of activity, the joint was just shot to the shit house, and we were actually doing a clearing patrol and we gave our position; the response came back, 'I think you're in a minefield'. And everyone just started looking down and I don't know to this day whether we were or we weren't in a minefield, but we were just watching where we were walking and the next minute these black things went straight across to the side of us and we just hit the dirt and they were monkeys! But we weren't watching what was happening around us. We just had our heads down walking.

> Is there any other incident that really sticks out in your memory when your thinking of patrolling?

Just the feelings. You get the hair on the back of your neck standing up. You say 'something's not right here, your walking around, you feel okay but your saying no something's wrong. I don't know what, probably heaps of people went through it for different reasons, but no.

> Is there any one person that stands out in your memory most of all?

Probably Dowelly. (Corporal W.W.) Warren Dowell.

> And why is that?

He was a corporal. There was a heap of them. Got to know Dowelly back in camp and he was a totally different guy when he was out in the bush.

> Would you like to expand on that?

Yes, when he was in camp he was ... 'specially when he had a few beers in him, he would do anything you know you wouldn't expect - some disgusting antics. I know he had lost his stripes heaps of times for doing exactly the same things (laughs) but when he was in the bush he knew what he was doing. He was very good - a lot of the guys were too. Because I heard about

(Lance Corporal P.M.) 'Paddy' Leahy and those guys. Different from when they're bush. When they are in the bush they're on the job, but that seemed to be their occupation in life, they were very good at it. I don't know why some people are cut out for it. It appeared to me that that was their job in life.

Ok, right we will stop here. This is the end of Tape 1 of two tapes with Kevin O' Halloran.

This is Tape Two of two tapes of an interview with Kevin O'Halloran conducted by Gary McKay recorded on the 14th of January 1993 at Inverloch, Victoria. The topics covered on this tape are relationships between men in battle, battle itself, casualties, the Allies, the enemy and the aftermath.

Kevin, if we can talk on relationships now, you have talked about you and your section commander, how did you actually find your relationship with the corporal? Was it a big difference in the relationship between you, was it a formal relationship or was it a fairly casual one?

No, fairly good. With most of the corporals actually, whether it was Warren Dowell, (Private D.F. Cooke) 'Cookie', who else was there?

(Corporal D.J.) Dick Heatley?

Dick, no never got to know Dick that well. (Corporal M.A.) Mick Kennedy neither, (Corporal S.N.) Steve Thornton, I got to know them after, but just slowly and not closely. Snoopy (Lance Corporal P.E. Pallant) - Tarrant or Farrant?

Pallant.

I always had known him as Snoopy. Corporal Snoopy. No, fairly good with them. Always have a beer with them but kind of ... especially with Dowelly, had a lot of respect for the guy - for his knowledge and could trust him I suppose was the best thing about him.

He was younger than you.

Yes, that didn't worry.

Didn't worry you?

No. See he had been there and done it, I was new at it.

Okay. How do you think they treated you?

Yes, no differently to anyone else, I mean there was no kid gloves stuff there. I don't know whether they looked after me, I didn't notice it myself, I just think I was one of the riflemen that came along. Had the job to do and I really would have to question we were only doing TAORs (patrols) and that we knew we were going home shortly and whether that had any impact on it or all I am not sure.

Did you ever ... do remember who your section 2IC was, your second-in-command?

No.

Okay. What about your platoon sergeant?

Daryl Jenkins (*sic*).

What was your relationship with him like?

No, pretty quiet. Just knew him as Daryl Jenkins, might have had a beer with him once. Out in the bush, no, didn't see that much of him. I just did my job and stayed in my little area and hoped that I did it right. If the orders came through, if any orders came through I just carried them out. No questioning, no troubles. I did with Daryl, I did notice the relationship between Daryl and Dickie Wellard wasn't that good. In particular one day down on the beach at Vung Tau we were playing touch football, Daryl got in fairly close with a couple of punches (laughs). I think ... I don't know what the resentment was whether it was because Dick took over from yourself. Dick was a full lieutenant, I think he might have had CMF background or something like that.

He was CMF full time duty.

Yes, and whether there was a lack of respect there because of that I don't know. Daryl was hard man, I found him quite good. If he told me anything to do, I trusted him. And that also a lot of the other fellows were looking at Daryl Jenkins. Dick Wellard, there was a fair breakdown there.

What was the most important thing to you about these guys when they were dealing with you? How did you want them to treat you?

No different to anyone else. They had to be fair and I can probably go on a bit. I got into a fair bit of trouble down at Vungers at a concert one night. Took a swing at a major from engineers in front of everyone and actually there was a photo there of the concert. What happened after that was a couple of MPs came running in and then all the 11 Platoon guys got up and they got into them. The officers who were watching, I think (Captain P.J.) Peter Schuman might have been there, (Major) Jerry Taylor wasn't, but I think the CSM was there too. They all just disappeared. Next morning we were up on parade and (Major) Jerry Taylor was reminding us of what had happened. It was Christmas party and we were really having a good time of it, and Jerry Taylor said, 'Would the person who threw the punch come along, I would like to have a few words with him'. So, I went and saw him. I explained to him what had happened, that I was up on stage having a dance with the girls and this guy just came along, pulled us off the stage, didn't identify himself and I threw a punch at him. And he said, 'Oh well if that's the case just be careful who you hit next time'. I said. 'Alright then'. But, as long as it was a good explanation, you didn't stuff up too much, they treated you fair.

What did you look for in these junior leaders, these corporals and sergeants and platoon commanders?

They were probably the ones that I related to the most. Mainly because I was very short time there, they were the ones I had access to a lot earlier and I really needed them. Well I felt that coming out of Nui Dat out of the Reinforcement Wing there, that second lieutenant there didn't

do anything for me. I mean he virtually turned me against a lot of, say the officers, because you didn't see a lot of the officers. I didn't, a lot of the other guys probably didn't see a lot of them either unless you had been with them a long time. I mean (Second Lieutenant K.M.) Kevin Byrne, although he might not have been with us (11 Platoon) I knew of the guy. I knew all the names, but I didn't have a lot to do with them. I was relating more to the NCOs.

What sort of qualities did you look for in these guys - these junior leaders?

Out in the bush?

Yes, or any time.

The two were different.

Okay.

Totally different. In the bush I had never minded ... well start at Pucka. All the way through our training you had to take orders, so that never worried me. As you said there before Warren was younger - that didn't worry me - he knew what he was doing. I had heard stories and I can't, it's only hearsay, about one of the other corporals - how he stuffed up in an ambush, but the one's that I was directly associated with knew what they were doing, gave the orders, you had to obey them, they would also listen to you and they would have a beer with you at the end of the day. I think communication is a lot to do with it. If they wanted to be isolated - away from you - that's okay. I suppose it's a fine line of being one of the boys and then when it needs be, to have enough command and respect for the other people. For them to have that respect for you.

We call this situational leadership in actual fact. Where the guy needs to be tough and hard and no democracy about it when it has got to be, and then when the tension is off he can be sort of more one of the group.

Yes, but, still be able to command a fair amount of respect, at it.

Going on to the other tack then, what made you detest other men?

I don't know, I suppose just in general loud people. D Company was made up of a variety of people. They were nashos, they were Regs, you had all your NCOs and the officers and sure, you're going to come across people that you didn't get along with. I managed to upset a few myself. I suppose I got into trouble with probably 12 Platoon after the concert in Vungers. They were on ready reaction that night, so they missed out on all the drinking and the Christmas party that day and the concert that night because they were going to have theirs a couple of days later. After the ruckus, they heard they were going to have their party cancelled. I was escorted across to their rooms, interviewed - a nice way of putting it - by a few people, there was a bit of pushing and shoving going on. I just said, 'Look, I have been to see Jerry Taylor, I had sorted it out and you're going to have your concert, your piss-up, you're alright'. There was fair amount of agro towards me at that stage, but after a couple of days they had their party and they all simmered down again. I suppose, probably the loud people were the ones that you just had to watch out for.

What pissed you off most when you were in Vietnam?

What, about people or just in general?

Just anything?

Food, lack of sleep. I didn't like the food; lack of sleep was the most difficult. You became short and irritable with that. Night after night, I mean you used to virtually sleep with one ear open. Come picket duty time when the guy came to get you I always used to be able to hear them coming. I knew it was my turn. You couldn't get a good nights' sleep.

You really weren't sleeping deeply?

No.

That will bring me onto Rest and Convalescence Leave. You said you took some R & C?

No, R & R.

How long had you been in Vietnam when you got it?

Four months. It was between Christmas and New Year. We were actually in Taiwan on New Year's Eve.

Did you feel that you really needed it?

I had the choice of going back to Australia, I took Taiwan, actually I put in for Hong Kong as well and Thailand and I ended up in Taiwan. Makes sense, what you put in for you get the direct opposite. (laughs)

That's the Army.

No, we had been in Vungers, I never came out of the bush for leave, I had already been in Vungers for about one month but it was good to get a break.

So it was just like a cleaner holiday?

Yes. It was getting out of the country. It did give you a break from that place - from Vietnam. Again it gave me another country to look at, although they were Chinese, all the Asians looked the same to me - I'm hopeless with faces. But it was different again, it was almost like having a China in Melbourne. No, the break was good in fact I got to meet the guys again on a different level. Dick Wellard went with us on R & R. Off came the rank and he was with you, he was up there dancing on the tables. Even when we got back to Tan Son Nhut we had to stay at Camp Alpha for the night. We walked into their big bloody mess tent - mess hall, sat down for tea and a beer, Dick took off the stripes (sic - pips), he said, 'I'm one of you, don't call me lieutenant whatever you do.' It was Dick this and Dick that and he just sat down and drank with us, ate with us, he was one of us. It was really good.

What made you feel good when you were in Vietnam?

Strangely enough it was out in the scrub. It only happened a couple of times, it was either early morning or on sunset when things were quiet. Being up in the Nui Dinhs, right up, we were

well and truly up one morning and I woke up and it was cool. It wasn't bloody hot and it hadn't rained, so it was nice, that was dandy and I just woke up and everything was quiet and you looked across and you could see the whole of the countryside. And you say, 'Jesus, is there are a war going on here?' You just really didn't realise it. And you would say, 'Yeah, this could be a nice country if it wasn't for the war'. And there was this little barking deer there, just out in front of us, you didn't really get to see a lot of the animals, you know, or birds. Crikey, when you were at the Reinforcement Wing they were bloody shooting them. We had, I think it might have been ARVN next door to us at that stage. 'Bang', there would come a bird out of the sky. They were shooting birds all the time. There were plenty of snakes and that, but just to see a little barking deer - it was probably the softer side of the country that you never saw. Even at evening when it was nice and quite and cooling down up on SAS Hill looking down - across the coutryside.

> Okay, well that will bring me onto some experiences now. What was the funniest incident that you can recall from your time in Vietnam?

Oh, probably, we were out patrolling. We were out going along the paddy bunds. Walking out, we had full packs on, bloody heavy as anything. One of the guys, slipped, it was Ian Boulton actually in front of me. He slipped and he went backwards into the paddy field - it was full of water. Here's this guy laying on his back, hands up holding the M60, legs up in the air kicking and he couldn't get up because his bloody pack had been pulling him down into the water. Yes, that was probably one of the funniest ones. There was ... a lot of them were in situations and I laughed a lot but they were little ...

> Just little things ...

Little quick comments or a little action or something like that and they were, they were a situation comedy.

> What was the toughest time that you think you ever experienced?

Yes ...

> It doesn't have to be in Vietnam either.

Just in the Army?

> Yes, at any one time. You mentioned Heartbreak (Hill) and doing the confidence course at Canungra and ... Did you find your training was always tougher than it was on operations?

No, a different sort of thing. I suppose just it wasn't one instance it was just when you were out patrolling all the time. It was bloody hot, the mosquitos, you were tired from lack of sleep, you were tired physically and you just had to keep going. That was the hardest thing - just to keep going. I suppose also, there was a lot of 'highs' in that, whilst I never got into contact personally, you were always out there, you were ready for it, there was a certain 'rush' there a couple of times. A big rush. Other times just being out there. I didn't like the joint, I never got to see many ... to have conversations with many of the South Vietnamese at all. I didn't trust them. It was a totally foreign country to me and I just didn't like the place. I was glad to get out of it, I just never felt comfortable there. I suppose just being on the guard all the time there,

until you got pissed and you didn't worry about anything. But just being on your guard. That kept you going but then the boredom set in - that was worse than anything I suppose. Some days, as long as you had something to do you were alright, but if you were sitting down, you got bored easily. There were highs and lows.

Any sad times that you can recall?

Yes, when I was with (HQ) 1 ATF it was when the big contact with 4 RAR in September and two of the guys that I went across with in particular - I know there was a third one (Private M.L.) Max Rhodes - but (Private B.C.) Brian Bielken, (Private R.J.) Rod Spriggs (sic Sprigg). I had played footy with Brian, I was on the same footy team. And it came through it was him and we had heard that they had been killed, and a couple of the guys that we were with at that time also knew them and I thought ... I just couldn't believe it. He was a quiet sort of a guy. If you had a told me a few of the other guys had probably got hit and I would say, 'Oh yeah, but'. This guy seemed ... both of them were really nice, quiet guys. And we said it's just not fair.

Did you ever see anyone wounded or killed?

Strangely enough - in Vungers. We were, I was with (Private A.G. Garbett) 'Pommy' Garbett, (Private G.M.) Greg Stuchberry and a heap of other guys - (Private D.F.) Cookie. One of the bars there, we were a couple of floors up and they had a band going and we were dancing. I think we were trying to strangle a couple of Yanks there, doing the Limbo rock or something and the next minute, 'Bang!' down below, and you looked down and here is a guy lying on the footpath. Someone had just been shot. Ah well, it'll be alright - back dancing again.

But you didn't ever witness an Australian ...

No.

Did you ever see a casevac?

No.

Didn't get wounded yourself?

No.

And you mentioned your reaction to Bielken and Sprigg?

Yes.

Did that sort of worry you at all the fact that you knew these guys and then they had been killed?

No, it was the direct opposite. There was an anger there. You know ... against the enemy, I really hadn't had a hate for them I was just ... I suppose when I got over there my impressions of Vietnam was I wasn't going over there to save the country. When I got over there, I was there to save myself! We got in there and got out - that was alright.

Was that the most important thing to you?

Oh yes, I mean to hunt them I would rather get in first rather than to walk into say an ambush. I felt a lot more comfortable doing that if, I suppose it's easy to say because I never got into the situation, but if I had to shoot someone to save myself - that would have been okay. I don't think that would have worried me.

> When you were down in Vung Tau you would have had a chance I guess, then, to meet a lot of our allies, you know the New Zealanders, ROKs, Thais, Montagnards, South Vietnamese - the ARVN, did you meet any of these people or get any impressions?

No, not a lot of them. I stayed a lot with our own guys, we did get tied up with a couple of the Yanks.

> What did you think of them?

Loud. They seemed the biggest and the best - that's the way they came across. At Vungers you would go down to the Beachcomber (Bar), there was this little bar down there which we were never allowed into anyway. But they had everything, they had surfboards, they had sun deck chairs, they had bloody everything. I remember when they took over, they actually took over the Peter Badcoe Club. We had, oh, there was a full company there and it was at full strength, so it had got be over a hundred guys. And they came in, 'Goddamn it', they said, 'We couldn't feed twenty people in here!', so they refurbished the whole lot just for that amount of people and I thought, nah! They really didn't do much for me. We got to meet a couple of negroes at Camp Alpha in Saigon and they were okay.

> When you say they were okay, why was that?

You could talk to them and they weren't loud, they weren't pushy, they were kind of laid back sort of guys you know, have a bit of a talk to.

> What about RAAF, did you meet any of the RAAF guys?

No.

> Let's talk about the enemy. Now you might not have got into contact with them, but what did you think of the enemy?

From what I heard and what I was expecting. Going back earlier, on my impressions from the start of the war all the way through to Tet, was heavy VC involvement. What I was surprised to find when I got over there was the amount of NVA coming through Phuoc Tuy Province. I didn't really realise that till then. We were talking about the Chau Ducs, D 445 (Battalion) and things like that. They were, from my knowledge, their numbers had been greatly reduced. The Diggers that had been there earlier used to talk about going out and nearly every hour or what not and meeting, coming in contact with people. We were out there for weeks. Now whether they were keeping away from us or we just weren't in the right spot I don't know, but I didn't see that many. To me after hearing of D Company's contact with the NVA in September (1971), that was a worry. The VC didn't seem as great a threat as what the NVA did because I thought the NVA were well trained, they were the soldiers. I had heard stories of how they react and I thought, you know these guys are good. They had to be, I mean they never had

tanks; they never had aircraft support; they were wandering around the country - their own country - and surviving. They had survived all the way through.

Did you ever feel sorry for the enemy?

Not sorry for them, I recognised earlier on that it was their country. I suppose if you put yourself in their position. W were strangers in some one else's country, I recognised that one early. One of the first things - I might even be jumping questions - is that it didn't take long to recognise the futility of being over there. I mean one of the first patrols, we were walking out through the paddy fields and there was this farmer. Now I came off a farm and I saw this guy, and here we are walking past and he was just standing in his little cover there. Must have been about midday, don't know what he had been smoking, had a silly grin on his face. I thought, Jeez, no matter who wins this war it's not going to change these people. They're going to be the same.

Okay, well that actually leads us into that area, which we call the aftermath, do you think that our involvement in Vietnam was worth it?

In hindsight?

Yes.

No. I really don't.

And why is that?

Well, first of all we didn't win. If you are going to do a job, you do it to your best. We did that, but we didn't win the war and then really, as I said before, even if we had have won, how would it have changed? I mean from what I have heard now, the Russians (are) in there - they're as hated as what the Americans were. I really don't ... I think that was more - I know it was - it was more of a political war than ...

But that didn't worry you before you went?

I wasn't into politics. If you had have asked me who the politicians of the day were - I wouldn't have known.

Okay. What did you think of the protesters - when you were there, especially when you were there?

I think, even then, I always queried why they went against the troops and I do know there were cases stated where there were certain sections of the protest who were actually supplying the enemy, and I thought, Jeez, I'd rather have a crack at these bloody crew that were going against us from their own country. Look, it's no worries with them protesting, that's their democratic right. I suppose it's silly enough we were going over there fighting so the Vietnamese could have democratic rights and we have got protesters back in our own country. We had a little saying over there, it's bloody twenty years ago and I've forgotten it, but doing forgotten people, or something like doing the unwanted job for the ungrateful or something like that. That's the way it felt. One of the best things over there was getting mail from home. One of the worst things was getting the paper and seeing the protests. You sometimes felt it was aginst you

personally. We were probably lucky in that that was at the end of the war so I don't think we saw the greatest impact of it. But I know even when we came back off, we got back February/March (1972) - came off the *Sydney* - in Sydney - and they said there could be protesters waiting there and then, and they put us all in a little group and said you know, 'You're not to go out and have a crack at them'. Which would have been a very easy little thing for some of the guys to do. But, no protesters. When you're over there you would like support, you would like to think that what you were doing is right. But if they ... to me they protested against the wrong people - should have been the politicians - not the troops.

You look back on your time there, you got any regrets?

No, only that I never got into contact.

A lot of people who have never been in the Army would think that is a strange thing to say.

It was, if I had not have gone into the Army and been trained, and I think that is one of the things about the training, is that they really did instill in you a sort of fierceness. You were trained to be a aggressive and it took a lot of time; probably took about two or three years to get that aggressiveness out of me - even when I got out of the Army. And that you had to react to certain situations. Trained for eight months, even while I was over there and patrolling, I was still learning and you like to think it would be like playing football all year and getting into the grand final and dropped. I mean it is the greatest effort you can do for playing a game is to get into the grand final and see how you perform under that sort of pressure. Again with the Army, they taught you, you were built up for it, you were ready for it, and you never knew.

That is a good analogy.

And I suppose also one little more thing on that if you did have any aggression in you, it was very hard to get rid of it that way. But then again I have also seen guys who have been through a heap of contacts have more aggression and then have trouble getting rid of that after it.

What did you think about the Australian infantryman, when you were in Vietnam. You know when you look at them as a group of people?

Yes, I have done a lot of reading. I have read a lot of Yank magazines since then, so I have got that value of hindsight again. I believe the Yanks fought the wrong war, looking at the Gulf war now, that was their sort of war. They can get in there, they have got all their high technology, they have got everything 'you beaut', they have got their numbers, they can go in and go 'wham!' Jungle warfare is not what the Yanks are about. They had bulk numbers, their way of doing it was to crash through everything, attract attention and then flatten it. The Australians had the better way. They mixed it with the enemy, they fought the enemy on their own ground. I believe we did the right thing - we fought the right way. From what I heard earlier on to when I got over there, Phuoc Tuy Province was becoming fairly quiet. I mean at the end of the Australian involvement the NVA were coming in, but they got pushed out every time they entered Phuoc Tuy, so ... The VC were a lot quieter. But I don't think we ever won the local people.

Is there any question that you would have liked me to have asked you?

Yes, one big one. The media involvement. Just having a look at the Gulf war, a lot of the trouble over there (Vietnam), the way it was reported back here in Australia, I remember I was on camera over there. We were coming out of the Reinforcement Unit one night and were only fifty metres outside the wire and here were the cameras. As soon as we went past they were back in again. Heavens knows how that was portrayed when it got back to Australia on the news and I think that the Yanks got it right in the Gulf - that they kept the media out, did their job and then let them in there afterwards. I think the media destroyed a lot of both the troops over there - their morale - and added to the support of the protesters back ... because they were, they weren't getting a balanced picture. I mean media is pretty well sensationalised, they have got to make a story, it's got to be sensational, they have got to sell it, and I think they have got a fair amount to answer for too.

What sort of personal skills do you think that your military training left you with?

A good trigger finger, I haven't had to drink heaps in years (laughs). [Unintelligible remark.] Oh no, its none of the Army skills I could use in civilian life, but I have been able to mix with a heap of people, I mean I have been around, not all around Australia, but I have been up and down the coast now from Townsville right down. I have met a heap of people, again I have been disciplined, the job I am in at the moment, I am under a fair amount of pressure with customers and the media. I have got six board members over me, and I am dealing with water and sewerage. Now, the water supply isn't that good and we get a lot of people complaining. We have got split groups in the community for and against the Water Board. I have been able to handle that. I think under the situation, I can handle stress a lot better than possibly if I hadn't have been over there.

Sort of exposed you to it?

Yes, probably a lot more tolerant of people.

Okay.

And I have also got six people above me telling me what to do. So, although I probably clash with them a fair bit, a lot of people probably wouldn't be able to do that.

If you were put in charge of your rifle section or anything like that, is there anything that you would have done to make it work any better or differently?

No. Look, I couldn't really comment on that one, I just never had enough exposure, if I had have been with 4 RAR at the start and gone all the way through and knew all the guys - I was still learning too much - to say well listen this was the way it should be done. Look, I was setting claymores and I didn't really know what the hell I was doing. I knew how to set a claymore, but I didn't know why or where they were being set. One area for improvement I felt if there was anything going on in the bush that I really didn't know enough of what was happening. They had their little O Groups, then that filtered through, you had to do this, you had to do that, but I never ever got the actual picture of what was happening.

The big picture?

No.

Right, well I think we will call it quits there and I will sign off this interview at 1213 (hours) with Kevin O'Halloran.