Australian War Memorial

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ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

ACCESSION NUMBER: **S01137**

TITLE:

INTERVIEWEE: Bob Hann

INTERVIEWER: Gary McKay

RECORDING DATE: 20 March 1993

RECORDING LOCATION: Brisbane, QLD.

SUMMARY: Enlistment; training for war; impressions of Vietnam; jobs; people; relationships; leadership; the aftermath.

TRANSCRIBER: Gale McKay

TRANSCRIPTION DATE: 22 SEPTEMBER 1993

This is Tape One of Two tapes of an interview with Bob Hann, recorded by Gary McKay for Delta Four - Australian Infantrymen at War. Recorded in Brisbane on 20 March 1993.

Why did you join the Army?

As a matter of fact I didn't go to join the Army at all, I went to join the Navy. It seems a bit strange. In '59 it was not long after Korea, there had been a big retrenchment and the Army was rationalised and there had been a whole lot of, particularly a lot of the more senior blokes back from Korea, had been retrenched. The Army went down pretty well and I was knocking around the bush and thought the Navy really appealed to me; all the sailing and stuff and I thought this was the answer and I would join the bloody Navy.

I went down to the CES in Collie and they said I would have to go to Perth to do all the things you had to do. At that stage there were three Services that manned the Recruiting Depot in Perth on a rotational basis, and when I got there it was the Army's turn. So I went in and said I was here to join the Navy and this Recruiting Sergeant said 'Bloody Navy, why would you want to join the Navy?' So, as I consequence I went in to join the Navy and walked out joining the Army for six years. I said three years first of all, but he said 'Mate, you're wasting your time. You join for six years and I guarantee you will do two years interstate, two years overseas and two years back in your home State. Twenty-one years in the Army and I never looked like getting back to Western Australia! That was the biggest load of bullshit I ever heard. So I walked out joining them for six years.

Was there any reason - you had been a farm labourer before?

I had never been to the city before that and I thought there had to be more to life than what I am doing. There were a couple of local blokes that joined the Navy and I thought one day 'Yes, that appeals to me, the bloody Navy caper, I'll have a go at that'.

So, Bob Hann was really just out to have a bit of adventure?

Yes and get out of the place. In those days, it is probably a bit hard to understand now, but to be in the bush of Western Australia, the Eastern States were so mysterious it might have been the other side of the world. Air transport was pretty well unknown and people just didn't go to the East. I don't think I knew anybody that had gone; I did in fact there was one bloke there that had come over for the Inter-Dominion in 1956 - I remember it was 1956 because it was the year television was produced and he missed the Trots. He was a trotting owner and he bought a horse over for the Inter-Dominion and he watched this bloody magical box and got so switched off that he almost missed the races. He was the only bloke I knew that had been out of Western Australia at that stage. It appealed to me that it would be a hell of a good idea.

Vietnam hadn't kicked off at that stage.

Had never heard of it.

So off you went to Kapooka. What did you remember most about Kapooka?

I remember it was a hell of a shock. It was the first time I started to get a bit homesick. I suddenly realised that I had about the same status as an insect. Nobody ever talked to you in Kapooka - they yelled at you. I found that there were stupid bloody things. You had to make your bed up in the morning and had to have your blankets and sheets all done up with boards and everything had to be two inches across. It was such a bloody drama in fact that we used to sleep on the floor and not disturb our beds. So then they used to make us go out on six o'clock parade with both sheets wrapped around us so you had to wreck it anyway.

Was it what you expected it to be?

I had no idea. No preconceived ideas. Again, I was very naive. It was the first time in my life as a matter of fact that I had been paid every second week. Working in the bush you went to town once a month and got paid when you went to town. Just a whole new life for me. Met a lot of people and not been in that situation before.

I hated the place. But on reflection it was great. It was good training and taught us a lot about ourselves I suppose. A bit of discipline. Had to go back to school. They used to have the compulsory education courses and so on.

What about Ingleburn - what was that like?

The thing I remember most about Ingleburn was the calibre of the instructors we had because, again , it was a very small Army at that stage, and what used to happen was an intake would march out of Kapooka, get to Ingleburn for Corps Training and they would sometimes sit there for four or five weeks until another intake came in and they had enough troops to actually start doing Corps Training. We had blokes like Lenny Williams, 'Lying' Lenny Williams who finished up as the RSM at Duntroon, another bloke named Terry. These were the sergeant instructors we had and all went on to be RSMs. They were all very professional bunch and I think it was a bit of a relief after Kapooka. We were treated differently. I suppose we graduated from insects to very small dogs at that stage. It seemed a bit of a step up the ladder. We still had to wear khaki though; in those days you didn't get greens until you got posted to a battalion.

That was the big status step was it?

Mate, greens. We coveted those. But you weren't allowed to wear civvies either until you got to a Unit.

So, when you went out on leave?

Khakis.

It would have been great fodder for fighting, wouldn't it?

We did all sorts of silly bloody things. I cobbered up with a guy from the West called Bing Crosby, who is dead now. We were as bloody thick as thieves for years and in fact he was the best man when I got married and I was best man at his and was MC at his daughter's wedding a little while ago. So we had some civvies stashed away - that was the big thing. We had been in uniform for five or six months at that stage so we got into

Liverpool one night, on the booze. One of the blokes we were with got arrested by the MPs and chucked in the back of the wagon so Crosby goes over to get up those MPs to let this bloke out and I am saying 'For Christ's sake Crosby leave it alone will you' but he says 'I'm in civvies - they'll never know me'. So he's got a big chin-strap scar right around his bloody face, short hair. I said 'You're bloody crazy Crosby'. Anyway he finished up getting chucked in the slammer too. We told them we were on a working holiday from Western Australia and it took them two minutes. We finished up getting chucked in gaol back at the Infantry Centre. Fortunately that incident happened about a week before we were due to march out. We fronted the OC and didn't he rip strips off us. 'You pair of bastards', he said, 'you're bloody lucky you've only got seven days left here because that's all the CB I can give you otherwise you would have been on CB for the rest of your lives'.

> You spent a bit of time in 3 RAR and 2 RAR, bit of time in 1 RVR and now in the Q Stream, bit of time up in PIR and at this stage the war is on, 1967-69 and you are up in 1 PIR.

Didn't want to be there.

> In PNG?

At that stage I should have been in a battalion going to Vietnam.

> Did you want to go to Vietnam?

Shit yes. In fact it was rather strange. I hated every minute of the time I had in New Guinea and that was because I was so anxious to get home and get it over with. Deslie would have like to have stayed. When my time started to get close I got a posting as a staff sergeant at the Army Reserve unit at Kelvin Grove. Now, I would have killed for that posting. I wrote to the Director who at that time was (Colonel) David Thompson and told him that this was no good to me and I reckoned I was not being treated fair and all this sort of shit. No long after I got a letter back from him and the letter started 'Dear Sergeant Hann ... In response to your letter', and the letter said in part that he had also forwarded a copy of the letter to my CO who he assumed I would have discussed the matter with, and of course I had never said a bloody word. Someone said 'Shit, you can't write to the Director without letting your CO know'. I thought 'Holy Christ I am in deep shit now'. The CO was a bloke named Maurie Pearse. Anyway I trundled myself up to the Headquarters and saw the RSM and told him what had happened and he said I better get in and see him. He arranged for me to go in and of course as I walked in Colonel Pearse said 'I assume you are here to talk about the letter you wrote to the Director?' I said that I was sorry that I didn't realise that I should have talked to him first and he said 'Don't worry about that; the only thing is that I could have probably put a good word in for you and made it easier for you.'
The upshot of it was that my posting order was changed and I was posted to 4 Battalion who at that stage were in Enoggera and it was just before the move to Townsville.

I was very anxious the whole time I was there. I was dead scared because they would have these Paris Peace Talks and all that sort of shit and I could see that I was going to miss out. At that stage I had been in the Army a fair while and it was just inconceivable to me that so many people had gone and I would be the only silly prick that hadn't gone. It just didn't cut the mustard.

Did you know much about Vietnam before you went up to 4 RAR?

Yes, I did know a fair bit about it. The posting before, when I was down at 1 RVR, there was a bloke that was pretty famous in the Training Team, a fellow named Kevin Gabriel, 'Shaky' Gabriel, who probably did more time in Vietnam than anybody else. He used to visit Australia and be back again, and visit Australia and be back again. I think he did about four tours and couple of them were eighteen months. He was one of the people at 1 RVR, so I talked to him about it a hell of a lot, and by that stage a lot of the blokes were coming back so I reckon I knew a fair bit. Not so much the political side of it or the reasons why we were there and the philosophical things if you like. I was not particularly concerned about that. We were committed and we had a job to do, so the reasons didn't really effect me one way or another.

Was there any other reason why you wanted to go to Vietnam, apart from being the only guy around without ribbons on his chest?

Well, I sort of had this feeling that I had been trained a long time to do a job and that was the job; that is what every soldier trains to do. And I suppose I wanted to experience what it was like and how I would react. All those questions you sort of wonder about yourself. There are probably a number of reasons why I wanted to go.

Colonel Jim Hughes selected you to be the CQMS of Delta Company as it was being raised. You then watched that company build up before it went. Do you consider the company well-trained before it went to Vietnam?

Very. Very well-trained. There was an awful lot of it. As you know we did a hell of a lot of bush work and the blokes were all very fit. I think the company was well-trained but it certainly lacked something. It was a little bit like sometimes you talk to a bloke and realise there is nobody home. Morale was never good. There was always a morale problem. But as far as the training went, I thought the training was good and they were a keen bunch. We had quite a lot of National Servicemen amongst them but they were just badly led; I think that was the biggest problem.

I know there is a question that comes up a little bit later about (Major) Kudnig, but it's a strange thing; as you get older you mellow a bit and he would probably be the only person I know who I still detest to this day. I still cannot stand a bar of him. And the older I get the bloody worse it gets. It is not as if I feel I would like to go and shoot the prick or anything like that; it is just that I can't stand the bastard.

Was it because of the way he treated you?

Not so much the way he treated me. I was old enough and probably senior enough in rank for that not to have a debilitating effect. I could handle that. Just the general reaction of the company. It could have been a lot better. You saw the situation when Jerry Taylor took over. You could almost see the spirit of the company change. I would have like to have seen a different OC right from the word go and I think it would have been a better company.

I have heard some blokes say that (Major) Kudnig actually trained us well; he toughened us.

I would say that in some respects the company owed a bit of debt to him because he certainly did that. He worked them like bloody dogs - there is no doubt. No risk. His big failing I think was that there was never any positive feedback; everything was always negative. I always had the impression that everything Franz ever did was for Franz. I firmly believe he was a self-centred, selfish sort of a prick and as long as it was going to reflect some glory on him he really didn't give a shit about who he trod on or how he had to go about achieving his own ends. And I am not sure exactly what his own ends were. There were just so many things.

And in some ways I blame Jimmy Hughes too. I can't understand for example; we went through platoon commanders and platoon sergeants like it was going out of style. We have a company commander who has a company and surely to Christ he has a responsibility to train people. You don't sack them for Christ's sake, unless they are absolute dunderheads. If you sack them you piss them off out of the battalion. How the hell can you sack someone from Delta Company and send them to Charlie Company or Battalion Headquarters or wherever. It was crazy and I don't know why Jim Hughes let him get away with it, but he did. Those sort of things had a hell of effect on the Diggers. This platoon commander was sacked - why? Is he a dickhead; are they all dickheads? That sort of thing is not the way to train a company.

Do you think you were well-prepared for Vietnam?

Yes I was. I was well-trained and had done all the courses and had a lot of experience in the things I was doing.

When we went to Canungra was that your first trip?

No. Canungra was almost like a second home. I thought Canungra was a bloody waste of time. Canungra was nothing new to me. Out here at Enoggera it was so convenient and every time they had nothing new to do they would chuck us in a truck and take us to Canungra. I was in Delta Company (I was always in Delta Company actually) and one of our platoons was a demo platoon at Canungra so we spent a lot of time at Canungra.

A lot of other guys thought it was a good place to assess and test?

Perhaps it was. They have been using it for a lot of years and a lot of people have gone through there, so it has to have a lot of good things going for it. But, I can't come to terms with the fact that you are going to train people for close country fighting and you are going to take them into an area where they can't dig holes and they have to emu-bob when they have finished. That is bullshit.

We were in Townsville for Christ's sake. Money wasn't a problem. If you wanted to do training you did it. If you wanted to have track time or choppers you got it. How much further was it from Townsville to New Guinea than from Townsville to Canungra? Let's go somewhere there is some good country and we don't have to fuck around doing emu-bobs when we have finished the day's training. That is bullshit. I have never been to Tully

in fact and I have heard a hell of a lot about Tully and that would have been a better testing ground than Canungra.

The environmentalists. We have got to protect our environment for sure but you either protect it or train for war. You can't do both.

> You've answered a couple of the questions there about what would you do if you were going to train to fight in the jungle where would you go.

That's what I would do. I would be looking for somewhere which is going to be a little bit more like the terrain we are going to use and we don't have to worry about 'greenies' looking down our neck. If you want to dig a hole to have a crap then you dig a hole. We were always taught field discipline and we always took our rubbish out because that was important; the enemy might be able to find out all sorts of things. That is good; I have no objections to that. But when it comes to emu-bobs in particular. We were up at Wiangarie for Christ's sake and the place is full of possums for openers. Poor old (Private K. M.) Kingston-Powles (KIA 21 Sep 1971) almost died of fright that night the possum dropped on him. I thought it was a bloody waste of time.

> When we got to Vietnam and was there anything there that surprised you, that you hadn't been prepared for?

No.

> Did you go over on the Advance Party?

No, (Corporal L.J.) Blue Roulston did, my storeman.

> You went over on the boat?

On the boat.

> When you arrived it was as you thought it would be?

Mate, as the CQMS it was really no different there than if we were at Canungra or High Range or whatever. I had a company to look after and I had been doing that for long enough to know what was required, so that was my job, that was what I had been trained for and that was what I was good at.

> I won't be asking too many questions on the deployment because it is not too relevant to what we want to do today, but I would like to talk about National Servicemen. You enlisted as a Regular and were in the Army before National Service started and all of a sudden here was the Regular Army with a whole bunch of Nashos in it. What did you think of National Servicemen?

I thought they were tremendous. That is it purely and simply ... I don't know whether the soldiers we had were typical of National Servicemen or not. I didn't have a hell of a lot of experience with National Servicemen until Delta Company in 4 Battalion because there were none of them in the Reserves, none of them in New Guinea. Again, I don't know

whether our company was typical but by Christ we had some fine young National Servicemen in our company.

They were maturer. I suppose because the Regular Army soldier tended to join the Army when he was seventeen or about his mid-twenties. Not many of them come in at 20 and it seemed to me that was a pretty good age. We had a few dunderheads amongst them I suppose but I always tried to look at the National Servicemen we had and the comparable Regular Army soldier and there is no comparison. The National Serviceman was a stand out in my book.

A lot of people said that National Service was good for the Army.

It was.

Why do you think it was?

Well, it gave us nine battalions for openers. We stuffed around for years with three. We just couldn't possibly have operated nine battalions or a Task Force in Vietnam on a rotational basis without National Service. We just couldn't have got the recruits. There is no way. Strangely enough I don't think I ever ran into a National Serviceman that resented being in the Army. I can't remember one and we had the reverse situation. Remember (Private) Geoff Hannah? I can remember him and another guy and I can't remember the other guy's name now. They got pissed one night and they came back and ripped all the flyscreens on the barracks and did all sorts of bloody terrible things. (Major) Kudnig fronted them and gave them a terrible bloody rocket, but the upshot of it was that he told these two blokes that if he ever caught them drinking booze again they would not go to Vietnam. That was the threat that he used. And these buggers would go to town on Saturday and they would be drinking and have a beer there and a glass of lemonade in front of them with one eye on the door. To me that speaks volumes for the attitude that the blokes had, when you can threaten a National Serviceman that if he doesn't behave himself you are not going to take him to Vietnam it has got to tell you something.

The only thing that I thought was a bit crook and that perhaps could have been handled better is that we lost so many bloody key blokes during the tour because their time was up. You only have to look at the number of section commanders we had in the company that were National Servicemen. Blokes like bloody (Corporal P.L.) 'Dogs' Foley and (Corporal P. R.) Menner and (Corporal M.P.) 'Harry' Duggan - there were some bloody fine soldiers amongst them.

In fact, I was going to ask you that question about reinforcements coming in to the company, and I guess one way to do it is to make sure you have your National Service intake squared away with your departure times.

It would have been difficult with the two year period by the time you got the blokes recruit and corps trained and then all the training prior to deployment and then enough time for them to be discharged at the end of their time. Terribly difficult. I don't know what the answer would have been but I saw that as a bit of a pity. Mainly because of the calibre of the blokes we lost.

What about the National Service Officers? You had seen a lot of Duntroon and OCS Officers at this stage because you had been in 10 years?

I really hadn't had a lot to do with National Service Officers as such. In the time that I was in Delta Company, they were the company officers. There was never really any ... what would you say? It never occurred to me that someone might have been Duntroon or Portsea or Scheyville. They were the officers we had in our company and they were our officers. There was nothing to single them out in my view. I mean if the National Service officers were worse than the Duntroon officers that would have stood out and you would have said to yourself that he was only a bloody National Servicemen. But how would you know; nobody would know. I could see no bloody difference.

I am going to ask you a question now about the people and the jobs. This question might sound silly. What was your job in the company? We know you were the CQ, but what do you reckon was the essence of your job?

My job was to look after the logistic administration, if you like, of the company. Also I felt fairly strongly that I had an obligation, a responsibility, to make that as simple as possible for the soldiers. To not fuck them around and to make things happen and to try and anticipate what was needed, and try to get it set up before it was needed. Often that meant that you fucked around like an old gin doing things that were never needed, but it was nice when you had everything organised and someone would say out of the blue that they needed this and you could say, 'well, there it is'. I saw my job as to make life as comfortable as I could for the blokes. Christ Almighty, they spent six weeks at a time up to their balls in bloody mud and living on shit rations and doing it bloody hard. The last thing they wanted when they came back was to be fucked around and that was the job. To make things as smooth as I could possible make them.

What was the hardest part of your job?

Are we talking about any particular period - while we were in Vietnam?

Yes, we are talking the second tour.

Strangely enough the hardest part initially for me was the bloody strange personality clash there was between me and the Quartermaster. Old (Lieutenant) Jack Catton. Jack and I are great mates; in fact I was just talking to him the other day. But, for some reason, I was like a red rag to a bloody bull to Jack. And I relied entirely on him. My company was totally dependent on him. I would go down and want this and that and he would tell me to fuck off. It finished up that (Warrant Officer Class One) Wally O'Brien, he was our RQMS and he said to me, 'If you want something come and see me. You go near the QM and it is like a red rag to a bloody bull and all you do is bloody fight'.

I often thought about that and I have come to the conclusion that it was old bull, young bull. Of the CQs we had in the battalion I was a bit different. I was younger. 'Crow' (Staff Sergeant F. Galvin) had been there forever; Jack had known him forever; 'Toad' (Staff Sergeant C. A. Fletcher) had been there forever; (Staff Sergeant) Peter Webber was an original 4 Battalion man and I was the outsider. I was the only one of the CQs that was a qualified RQMS and I had a fair bit of experience. I knew what I was talking about, and I really think it came down to a young bull/old bull. I didn't realise it at the time and I often

wondered about it. That is the only conclusion that I can come to. I suppose Jack had a bit of a chip on his shoulder and rightly so too. It was unforgivable that they commissioned him and sent him to a place like Vietnam as a Quartermaster as a lieutenant. They commission people and they commission them as captains if they are going to be quartermasters. So I thought that put Jack under a lot of pressure and it made a difference in some ways. It also made a difference that you leave the battalion one day as the RQMS and you come back the next day as a Lieutenant Quartermaster. The only Lieutenant in the whole bloody Regiment who is a Quartermaster so he had a few things that were upsetting him I suppose. And I was one of them!

That made my job pretty hard at the start. We always got what we needed, and of course it was always my aim to get everything we should have got plus a bit more. All CQs are playing that game. They were the sort of things that led to a bit of frustration.

Who was the bloke you worked closest with in the company?

The Company 2IC.

What did you consider to be the most important part of your job?

Well, again to make sure that the company was as well-equipped and as comfortable as I could make them, and to try to make sure that they were stuffed around as little as possible in areas that were my responsibility. They were the things that were important to me anyway. I can't say they always worked by the same token but that was always the aim.

So, it was anticipation?

Yes, anticipation. Trying to out think the next bugger. That sums it up pretty well I guess. Anticipation.

Did you like your job?

Yes I did. It was a challenging job. When things went well there was a lot of satisfaction in it. When you could get a little bit extra for people. Because they all thought I was the meanest bastard in the world and I have never met a generous Q man yet. But our blokes did pretty well.

How were you received into the company as CQ when you arrived?

Well, see I was the CQMS before anybody else arrived. So I was always there. I was the CQ and I sort of did not come in half way through, and like 'who does this prick think he is?'. I was the first bloke the soldiers saw when they arrived - they had to come and get their bedding and whatever equipment they needed. So everybody knew who I was right from the word go, so I didn't have any problem.

Let's get on to talk about battle. I know that as the CQ you are not up there in the front line and all that, but he you are back in Nui Dat - can you remember what your reaction was like when you heard that the company was in contact?

A cold sort of numb feeling. You have known all along that some day it is going to happen but you are never really prepared for it. Trying to get information. Down at the CP on the radio net trying to get information.

Is that where you used to hang out?

Yes. I used to spend an awful amount of time down there. Trying to keep in touch with what was going on. Getting everything second hand. You can imagine the chaos that is going on out there and you don't know who is hurt or who is down and just what is happening. That was the worst thing. Then the names of casualties start to come in and you think 'Shit'. A feeling of disbelief I think, particularly the first time.

When the company got into heavy contact did the OPDEMS come back to you?

Yes.

What sort of things did you do to make those sorts of things work slicker?

Well, again anticipation. One of the first things I used to do when that sort of thing happened, because the battalion used to know what was going on - was to get straight on to the RSM and get the magazine sorted out. There was going to have to be an ammunition resupply. And of course he was a very experienced bloke too, the RSM, and he had a much better idea of what they were going to need than I did. He would sort of take care of that. Then really there was nothing you could do. I used to maintain stocks of equipment in the company at a pretty high level all of the time and I could supply most the things that a company could need immediately. Open the door and get it. I would always contact (Warrant Officer Class One) Wally O'Brien down at the main Q and tell him the company was in strife and might be needing stuff. That sort of thing. Getting things cranked up so when it did happen you could get it.

How did you keep yourself occupied when company was out on patrol?

There was always miles too much to bloody do.

MAINTDEMS?

That's right. That happened every five days and that included changes of clothing and the rations. One of the things; the Diggers used to get snaky with me because I didn't send out all the Mars Bars and that sort of shit, but I was sort of caught between a rock and a hard place. Franz (Major Kudnig) would say 'This is what goes in those bloody sand bags' - so you got five days rations and that is what the guys could carry. So you could try to sneak a bit in and the Diggers would come back and say 'you miserable prick'. I used to have a dirty bloody great box out the front of the Q Store that was full of bloody biscuits and they would come back and wouldn't fuck'n eat it anyway.

Franz had made part of the Company SOPs what would go out. This would be discarded and he wouldn't give a shit about what the Diggers wanted - this is what they got. So by the time you got a company's worth of rations sorted out and got the laundry done and

clean greens and down to the (Main) Q Store to scrounge new socks and boots and all this sort of stuff, there was always plenty to do.

Did you ever go out and visit the company in the field?

Yes. I used to try and get out every time there was a MAINTDEM; every five days.

That was your impression when you got out there and looked around?

Well, I was pretty impressed by the way the blokes were handling it. It was always great to go - it was a pretty lonely place there when the blokes were away. There would be a few Diggers around but not much. It was always nice to get out to have a bit of a yarn to Butch (Sergeant B. K. Porter) and Daryl (Sergeant D. K. Jenkin) and ask how it was going and what was going on and to see 'KB' (Second Lieutenant K. M. Byrne) and yourself, so I always looked forward to going out. One thing that really sticks in my mind is Butch Porter and the other bloke too is (Warrant Officer Class Two) Noel Huish at one stage who looked so haggard and absolutely rooted. Sort of camped down on a reasonably secured LZ; often they would come in by chopper or sometimes by tracks. Just the fatigue and talking to them again. Fucking Kudnig - the blokes had had it but they had to dig in. I can't believe that prick and I still can't. Pissing rain and they are stuffed anyway and they are dug in - in a foot of water! Shit! Sometimes you thought, 'Thank Christ it is them and not me'.

What was it about Butch - you said he looked tired?

Yes. Butch was a bloody larrikin. Him and KB were a pretty good team actually. I remember one particular time we went out and I remember seeing Butch and thinking 'Jesus Christ you look shagged!' It was just after the time, you remember, that they had that bloody Army Reserve officer with him and they found that rice cache that hadn't been used for 75 years and they ambushed those two blokes. Well, it was very shortly after and of course he was rooted. Things of course didn't go according to plan and he set this classic ambush up to impress the shit out of this ARes (Army Reserve) bloke and no bastard went near this thing - forever. Nobody is ever going to go near it. Then these two dozy poofters walked into it. I can remember the radio traffic that night too. The Ops Officer, (Major) Ted Stevens I think, trying to get a helicopter in and having the audacity to say to the OC, 'If it was one of your own blokes what would you do?'. He (Major Taylor) said 'you fucking idiot', and of course in the meantime when I get out there the tension is over and Butch says 'these cunts are screaming their fucking heads off and I've got their mouths stuffed with '4 by 2' and stuffed with dried grass trying to shut them up, and this fucking Army Reserve whacker is going off his brain and the Ops Officer wants these blokes back there so they can interrogate them'.

Is there any one incident that stands out in your memory?

I think there was a lot of incidents. The whole things was about incidents wasn't it?. I can remember the casualty that effected me the most out of the whole lot was (Private) Ralph Niblett. I think because Ralph was such a nice bloody young fellow. That was an incident that had a pretty bloody profound effect on me. But there were all sorts of things.

I think one of the funniest things I've ever seen, or heard, was Menner, Duggan and Foley talking about R and C when in Vung Tau. You would piss yourself laughing just listening to these pricks talking and each one trying to outdo the other. If they had done half the things that they had claimed to have done they would have been dead long ago.

I tell you there was another incident too; when I almost got (Major) Jerry Taylor killed. It was a terrible bloody night. We had a young fellow ...

He was from 11 Platoon.

(Private P. J.) Higgins. His brother had been killed and his mother had discovered that he didn't have to go. He went without her knowledge and after she found out she kept on writing him nasty letters.
He got blind drunk. I had a MAINTDEM duty to go out the next day and I had all the rations bagged up, and he got drunk and decided he wanted a feed. So he came up and started knocking off rations. I heard a noise and I went out and caught him. He was obviously too pissed to do anything with so I told him to go to his tent and go to bed and I would deal with him in the morning. So I went to bed; this was fairly late at night. The next thing the bloke that was on the CP, (I think it was my driver actually) came up and said Higgins has just come down the CP and has rifle and is going to shoot you. I thought 'Holy fuck this is all we need now!'. So I went up to the CP and in the meanwhile he had gone up to his tent. So I went up to the tent and he is standing there with this rifle. I told him to put it away and wake up to himself. The lights were on and I walked through the door and he had the rifle pointed at me and he said ' You get out of here or I'll fucking shoot you'. I kept talking to him and he fired a round at the ground near my feet and I said 'Alright, I'm out of here'. I thought there is a shot and they are not going to know whether it is incoming or what and there would be all sorts of dramas any minute now. Next thing the Battalion 2IC turned up, the Kiwi, (Major) Don McIver - full as a bloody bull, the RSM - full as a bloody bull, (Major) Jerry Taylor - thank Christ he was bloody alright - all milling around like bloody Brown's cows. So I told Jerry what had happened and he took charge and he said he would go up and talk to him. I said for him to be bloody careful.

In the meanwhile we have a tent further up in the rubber with five Diggers who are due to go out the next day. They had been in for a break and were due to go out with the MAINTDEM. So I'm thinking they've heard a shot and they are all armed to the teeth and you can imagine them sitting in their bloody tent with the safety catches off saying, 'This is it'. I thought that the last thing we needed was for one of these pricks to shoot somebody, so I said to Jerry that I would go up to get these blokes out and bring them down to the Company Headquarters area. I walked through the dark to the tent and let them know who I was and I told them briefly what had happened and told them to get themselves together and go down to Company Headquarters. We started to move through the rubber and I thought 'Shit, loaded weapons'. I told them to stop and clear their weapons as we didn't want a UD (Unauthorised Discharge) with all these silly pricks running around. So, they stopped and cleared their weapons. In the meanwhile Jerry is in the tent with the lights on and this prick has convinced himself that we are going to put snipers around and shoot him. You don't think about these things of course; here are all these weapons cocked and Jerry came that close to fucking dying. He has his finger on the trigger and these weapons all cocked. I talked to Jerry about it after and he said he thought that that was it - as soon as he heard those weapons cocked because when you

looked out the tent you could see nothing. It was pitch bloody black from inside the tent. Anyway, Jerry managed to get this bloke under control and they took him down to the RAP and he took to (Sergeant K. B.) 'Dusty' Miller with a bloody machete down at the RAP. And Dusty was the bloke that got in the shit because Dusty clocked him. You know how big Dusty Miller was and he was arse over head and Dusty was the one who got into strife because the Padre got involved and said he had trouble etc. I thought there was no fucking justice. That was a pretty memorable incident.

When we had casualties was it your job to pack up their gear?

Yes.

What was that like?

KIAs or WIAs, casevaced back to Australia or killed in a road accident when we were at Canungra - no difference. By then the emotion has gone. The emotion happens at the time when it has all happened. When you get their gear back it was bloody days later and it certainly wasn't a pleasant task, but it was not the sort of thing you would imagine it to be because the emotion has all been spent and you are more concerned that he might have something in his gear that he might not want his parents or his wife to see.

You used to go through the gear like that?

Yes. Things like letters and stick books and things that you would take out. I used to check their gear pretty carefully. In fact it depends on what the circumstances were. If there were people from his platoon there I would get them to go through it. Often there was stuff there that you didn't know whether it was his or whether they had borrowed it from somebody or whatever. But the main concern was that there was nothing there that might have been offensive.

What do you think was the toughest time you experienced in Vietnam?

I can't remember anything that was any tougher than anything else.

How did Deslie handle your absence?

She handled it extremely well, but bear in mind that she had lived with this - she was bloody relieved when I went. She had been living with this for years with me bloody whingeing and getting bloody irritable and cranky. She knew what it was about and again we had been married for a fair while and we had two kids. That was one of the hardest things. The daughter was only born in October and we went in March so she was only a little toddler. Alex was only about two and one-half. So it was a bit hard to leave the responsibility of kids that young.

Did you take R & C?

Yes.

Did you come back to Australia?

Yes.

When you went back was it hard to get back into the swing of it?

No. It was as though you had slipped down to the Main Q for five minutes.

When did you come back - how far through your tour?

I think it was October.

After the big battle in September. Did you feel as though you needed that rest, that break?

No, not particularly. I took it because the thing was going to finish in December and there was a slot come out of the blue. They said there was a slot for anybody who wanted to take some R & R. That was the main reason I went but I didn't feel as though I physically needed a break.

What was the saddest thing you can recall?

Ralph Niblett. (Corporal A.C.F.) 'Tassie' Wilkinson was a bloody tragedy. Any of the blokes that got killed or wounded was bad news. But Ralph for some reason, and I don't really know why. Maybe because he came from a little bloody country town and I think his old man owned a dairy farm. I can relate to Ralph. That had a pretty profound effect on me.

What do you think you learnt most from your time there?

I don't know that I really learned anything. I think I cam back just as stupid as I was before I bloody went. In fact it was a bloody sight easier to do your job in Vietnam than it was to do it in Australia. The training in Australia was ten times harder than it was in Vietnam and so in fact the blokes were trained to do a job and they were finally getting to do the job. Most of the bullshit was bloody gone and people got on with it. And did it bloody well too.

What do you think are some of the important things to maintain a company ready for battle from your perspective as a CQ?

Maintaining. Well, in that context you would have to be back here in Australia. They were in battle all the time - they came in for two days and went back for six weeks. If you had the time I would like to see most of whatever spare time that there was on working at what the job was about. Learning as much as you possibly can and getting familiar with the terrain and the tactics; looking at after action reports and any intelligence you can get hold of. Learning as much as you can about it and being prepared as much as possible. Even to the stage of the sort of terrain and try and be one step ahead of them. Involve the Diggers a lot more.

Did you ever witness a casevac?

No.

Did you ever go down to the Hospital?

Yes.

What was that like?

Well, hospitals are hospitals aren't they. I had no real problems with it. It was not pleasant. My main thing was to get some gear to them. I used to take down some shaving cream, razors, clean clothes or whatever I could get them. The same as you would do if you were visiting someone in hospital here. In fact I used to think that they were a bloody sight better off lying in hospital in Nui Dat than they were sleeping in a bloody pit out there in a foot of water. Tassie Wilkinson was one that sticks in my mind when he finally came in. I was bloody stunned when he died. In fact 'Shus' was there then and 'Shus' and I went down to see him and I thought he was going to be alright.

What was it he died of?

I don't know.

I heard it was pneumonia or something.

I don't know but he went pretty bloody quick when he did go.

This is Tape Two of Two tapes of an interview with Bob Hann, recorded in Brisbane on 20 March1993 by Gary McKay for Delta Four - Australian Infantrymen at War.

Bob, I would like to talk about relationships now. How did you see your relationship with the riflemen?

Well, I was pretty comfortable. It is a little bit hard. I was the CQMS of the company - what relationship did I have with the Diggers?

Did you distance yourself from them?

I did to a degree. Because the platoon sergeants were exactly the opposite. The platoon sergeants got very close to their soldiers, and rightly so. But that sort of relationship that they could have with their Diggers didn't work between a CQMS and the Diggers. I can remember an incident with (Sergeant) Daryl Jenkin, the mongrel. Remember those camouflage raincoats we used to have? He has got hold of one of these things somehow and I had never even seen one. It is pissing rain - they were bloody useless anyway and you got wetter on the inside that you did on the outside - and Jenkin was strutting around the place with this camouflage raincoat. One of the Diggers said to him 'Geez Sarg, beaut raincoat - where did you get that from?' and he said, 'The CQ. He has a bloody Q Store full of them over there.' Next thing I have got every bloody Digger in the company over asking 'where's my bloody raincoat'. I didn't know what they were talking about so I told them to piss off and of course they thought I was the bloody meanest mongrel in the world because I had a bloody Q store full of these and I wouldn't give them one. So from

that point of view it was a sort of thing that I couldn't get too close to them because they are conniving bastards, Diggers; they'll take advantage of you every minute they can. So, I did distance myself to a degree.

What about the platoon sergeants?

I got on exceptionally well with the platoon sergeants. In fact I am still pretty close to them and it has been a lot of years. Daryl Jenkin in particular, but Butch, always had a lot of time for Butch. Kev Philp and I still have a beer even now. In fact I don't know if Kev is going back on the trip with us but I rang him when Garry (Sloane) contacted us and he seemed pretty keen at that stage. But I haven't spoken to him for a while, but he lives here in Brisbane. Yes, I got on well with the platoon sergeants.

And the CSM?

Pretty well I suppose. We were different sort of people. We had different jobs and so we really didn't associate that much together. I had a hell of a lot more to do with the platoon sergeants than I did with the CSM, but normally I got on well, and again, we still run into each other.

What about the platoon commanders?

I had a lot of time for all the platoon commanders. I thought we were bloody lucky with the platoon commanders we had. Getting back to the earlier days and all the dramas that went on with (Major) Kudnig. I can remember I was up at High Range when (Second Lieutenant) Kev Byrne arrived in the company, and Kev pulled the oldest stunt in the book and its a cliche - 'G'day Butch, I'm Kev Byrne, when you reckon I'm ready to take over give us the nod.' It worked for Kev. It was a very impressive debut. I can remember when you arrived at Canungra and I think you were driving a mini, a green mini.

It was white.

Whatever. A little mini loaded to the gunwales and out you stepped and I thought, 'Holy Shit'. You looked keen and eager and a little bit apprehensive, because it is not the greatest way to join a company in the middle of Canungra. I don't know whether you'd met the Company Commander at that stage but I can remember thinking, 'You poor bastard, wait until you meet the biggest prick you are ever going to run in to - this is no gravy train here old son.' He was shooting platoon commanders like shit.

That was from my point of view. I never had any problem with platoon commanders and was always glad to see them and have a yarn and a few beers together. We were pretty well-served with our platoon commanders. We were well-served by our officers all round, with the exception of one. I thought we had a bloody good team.

You said you spend some time working with (Captain P. J.) Schuman (MC.)?

Yes. He was the Company 2IC, so the administration of the company is ultimately his responsibility and so we worked pretty close. People will never understand the debt that company owes (Captain) Peter Schuman - he was the one single thing that kept that company together. If he hadn't been for him - if we had had one of the young gung ho

captains that company would have been destroyed. It wouldn't have lasted. I think 'Shus' had the big advantage of 'been there, done that'. He had a MC (Military Cross) and didn't have to prove anything to any bastard.

There were time when I would get despondent. Kudnig would do stupid fucking things - we would have a range practice on and he would say, at the Company Commander's conference, 'CQMS issue weapons at 7 o'clock. Quarter past Seven the trucks will turn up, onto the trucks, out to the range. We'll be there at quarter to eight and commence firing at 8 o'clock ... blah, blah'. I thought, 'For fuck's sake'. Of course I didn't say anything - you couldn't say anything to Franz. Bloody hell - fifteen minutes and I have to issue 120 fucking soldiers with all their gear and we had to keep the bloody bolts separate from the weapons. It was a fucking drama. We had to process these soldiers at about five or six a minute. It seemed to me so easy to say 'Righto we fire the first shot at 8 o'clock and it is going to take us 30 minutes to get there so we will have to leave by 7.30. I want everyone on parade at quarter past seven. Staff, how long is it going to take to issue weapons?' I would then say 'I want everybody here at half past six' It was too easy. Those sorts of things. It just went on all the time I knew Franz.

I only ever had two victories. One was at bloody Wiangarie and I was to go out to do the resupplies and he used to go up me for not wearing camouflage paint and I used to tell him to get fucked. And I didn't - the whole time I was there. Every fucking time he saw me he got up me. Another time we were doing a nine-miler up in Townsville, stinking bloody hot, and I am about stuffed. I've got my head down, my arse up, my rifle on my shoulder and holding it by the barrel and doing everything wrong because we didn't have slings so I couldn't sling the bastard; and I'm fucked. I could see the truck in the distance and I am watching my clock and I have about two minutes to make it. Franz pulls along side in the Land Rover and says, 'Get that fucking rifle off your shoulder Staff', I said, 'You fucking get out of here or I'll jam this up your arsehole'. He took one look at me and looked at 'Floss', the driver, and said, 'Get out of here.' Away he went. That was the sort of prick he was. I digress again. What was your question again.

If we can talk about your relationship with 'Shus' (Captain Peter Schuman) ?

He was the sort of bloke that could see when I was getting really bloody frustrated and he would come and say to me, 'Don't worry about it, don't worry about the prick, it'll be right'. He would settle things down. But by the same token I never heard him bad-mouth Kudnig, publicly. What he said to me and to you was something different. He was very, very professional. Loyalty and professionalism he had down to a tee, but it didn't stop him coming to me. He was a good man manager and would always give you a bit of a pat on the back when things were going well.

How would you have described Kudnig's leadership style?

Didn't have one. You can't lead by fear. Leadership is about teamwork. If you can get people to the stage that they <u>want</u> to do something for you - that's leadership. Kudnig threatened and in my book he had no leadership qualities. I am fucked if I know how he ever graduated from Portsea or wherever hell he came from. He certainly didn't inspire me and there weren't too many people I know who he inspired.

When you compare him to say, Jerry Taylor, what were the biggest differences there?

How do you compare chalk and cheese? When Jerry Taylor took over, and I think Jerry was known to the company a little bit because a few people got to know about the Higgins incident; he was the sort of bloke that you thought, 'How the fuck did a bloke like that get to be OC Admin Company?' He was known about the traps a bit, and when he took over I suppose he had some style and Kudnig had none. Strangely enough, one of his most effective attributes, if you like, was that he didn't interfere. He could achieve a hell of a lot just be leaving the Diggers alone. They would come back from the scrub and he would put his running shoes on and go for a five mile walk or run and I would think that he was crazy. Never tried to press the rest of the company into doing it. He was a fitness fanatic himself but he didn't. force anyone else to be. If Kudnig had of been in that boat he would have had everyone in the company running bloody five-milers.

Again, you used to get some pretty positive feedback from Jerry. If you did a good job he would let you know it. He was the sort of bloke you tried very hard not to let down because you felt bad about it.

Was the main difference you think that he trusted you?

I think that had an enormous lot to do with it. I think he quickly summed people up and if he summed you up and decided that you were a good operator and knew what you were about and you knew what your responsibilities were he would leave you alone and get on with it. That was like a breathe of fresh air. If I ever had a problem I had no drama at all going to Jerry Taylor to have a talk about it, and I knew that I would get all the cooperation in the world from him. Whereas with Franz I would talk to the 2IC and he would go and talk to the OC. Just totally different.

You could see the spirit of the Diggers change. It was almost overnight - it was dramatic. There was a bit more self-respect and you could see a lot more pride in the company and they started to feel good about themselves, and it had been a long, long time that they had been ground down.

From what I have heard then it seems to me that the main difference was that Jerry Taylor was approachable.

He was approachable, but also he was professional. I don't think too many people had doubts about his ability. It is a little bit hard to exactly put your finger on, but his whole approach was different. And, as you say, he was certainly approachable. He didn't try to rule by fear, that was the big thing. He was the Company Commander and it was quite obvious that Jerry was proud of that company and that rubbed off. I never once got the impression that Franz was proud of Delta Company. Yet every bloke I know who was a member of Delta Company would die for Delta Company. Even now, years and years later, it still evokes something special about having been in Delta Company. I never once got the impression that Franz was proud of Delta Company and that rubbed off a bit.

You had an opportunity to see a lot of junior leaders when you were there, because whilst you were definitely a part of Delta Company you were actually off to the side

there and able to look at the operating side of it. What sort of qualities do you think a junior leader should have?

I believe that the biggest single quality, not only for a junior leader but a senior leader, is confidence. Provided his confidence is soundly based; provided he has worked hard to get the skills; provided he is prepared to listen and he is prepared to learn. If you can convince yourself that you should try to learn something new every day and of course there is no greater teacher than experience. So have a go at whatever you are going to have a go at. Listen to the people that know. Take it on board and don't just pay them the courtesy of listening to them, listen to what they have to say. A lot of them have nothing to say but you will just get occasionally that real bit of information that you think 'Shit, I'm going to use that.' Once you get as much experience as you can and learn as much as you can, the confidence that you have got then is soundly based confidence, and it stands out. You can look at a bloke that really knows what he is talking about and you feel good about him - 'if he tells me to do it, it has got to be right'.

I don't think that counts only for junior leaders. Junior leaders have still got to learn it all, but senior leaders have got the same sort of thing. If they are confident it rubs off.

So, I reckon the single most important thing is confidence, provided it is soundly based. You work hard getting the right skills so that the confidence you wear comfortably, knowing you can back it up.

Was there anything that made you detest people?

Shit. I think thoughtlessness, arrogance, self-centred. People who say 'I'm the boss so you do what you are bloody told.' They might not know shit from clay but because they outrank you they have got to be right. That arrogant, selfish attitude that you get with people. That is the sort of thing that really gets under my skin.

What made you feel good when you were in Vietnam?

I feel good because I felt I did a good job. I think that was backed up to a large degree. I don't think it was any accident that Delta Company was chosen as the company to stay back. I think we had the best OC; we certainly had the best 2IC, and I think we had the best CQMS. Jack Catton was pretty confident in my ability. It was a big job at the end, logistically, because we inherited the whole of the LSG (Logistic Support Group). Don't put this in the book for Christ's sake, but I used to get things from (Lieutenant) Jack Catton back in Australia, and I used to do the write offs. Because I had qualified as an RQMS I was able to do all those things, so we did all sorts of shonkies. In fact he is a prick you know. I bought back that much spare gear you know in a conex - rifle parts, greens, you name it. When I finished they had to do a stock take of my Q Store when I marched out to go the Melbourne and the poofter tried to make me pay for it. I told him to fucking get out of here Catton you prick or I'll blow the whistle on you.

So I felt that I did a good job and I felt pretty proud of the fact that Delta Company was the company that was chosen to stay, and I think we did a bloody good job.

What were most of the duties in the ALSG time - TAOR (Tactical Area of Responsibility) patrols?

No, we did not do TAOR patrols. We did ready-reaction all the time. The most difficult time that Jerry had was trying to keep the company occupied. We got back to the stage of PE tests and all this sort of shit because we were trying to fill in time. That was funny, and I don't know if (Warrant Officer Class Two) Noel Huish mentioned these PE tests, and by this stage we were down there living pretty soft.

This is in real accommodation?

This is in real accommodation. This is the R&C Centre - swimming pool and the whole bloody bit. So away we go and Noel has talked the Company Commander into doing the PE test at 4 o'clock in the morning to escape the heat. It is pitch dark. We were living in the big rooms that used to sleep four and the CSM and I commandeered one for ourselves. There were fridges and fans and it was luxury accommodation. So we tear off and get up to the first building and hide around the corner and watch the clock until it was just about time to finish. Hardly raised a sweat and it was easier than any five miler than I had ever done in my life. But they were the sort of problems that Jerry had - he had a company full of young blokes that were as fit as scrub bulls, and of course it was a battle company too.

It was a huge organisation.

It was a big organisation and we had all sorts of support so trying to keep them occupied was his biggest problem. Not my problem. It certainly wasn't a problem for me because I had all this bloody stuff. I mean the battalion pulled out and it was pretty bloody easy because you had a company staying and just leave all this stuff with Delta Company and they will sort it out and get it back to us. The Main Q at the ALSG, when they pulled out - they gave me the keys and I thought, 'Holy shit, it is fully equipped'. I suppose I spent a very, very large proportion of my time consigning steel trunks home for the Diggers because I made sure each soldier got at least two and sometimes three or four steel trunks, and then they loaded it with greens and boots and all the kit they could use for the rest of their bloody lives. I guarantee if there are any of the buggers still serving, they are still bloody using it.

Again, we were the stevedores too - we were loading all the ships so it was easy for me to get all this stuff home. They would address it to themselves and back it would go, We had at the back of the area we were staying, the back of the Badcoe Club, we got the Engineers in with bulldozers to dig pits where we chucked things, like the Amenities Centre gear, all the Bell & Howell projectors and all the equipment that they had. Refrigerators and Christ know what - we chucked it in bloody holes and buried it.

That basically was the thing. As a unit would move out, we would inherit their area. We were kept pretty busy but it was astonishing what went on.

What was the thing that got Diggers into trouble most?

Booze and women that was for sure. In that last three months we had blokes sending back to Australia for money.

Do you think that guys under 20 years of age should go to war?

Mate, I know people 50 years old that shouldn't go. Age has nothing to do with it. It is the individual. You get 20 year old and 20 year olds. There are 20 year olds that are kids and you get 20 year olds that are hard-bitten. I don't think age has anything to do with it.

What is the criteria then?

Well, I suppose you have got to set a criteria. Maybe the criteria they set ... what is the age? 18?

Noel Huish reckons it depends on the training.

It depends on the individual too. I suppose the training would certainly be so but that goes without saying. We commit troops to war and they go well-trained, and I think that is a sin that you could never level at the Australian Army that they sent people off that weren't well-trained. So training certainly was important. But you can get a well-trained 18 year old and a well-trained 18 year old. It depends on the individual. Some blokes are stand outs - they are mature - and other blokes will be kids all their lives.

Did you work with any of the Allies?

No mate. We had a little bit to do with them but not enough to really form an opinion. Most of the opinions that I have heard people talk about were second-hand anyway. There were very few people that I know that actually, apart from the Training Team of course, genuinely spent enough time with the Allies that we had there to really form an opinion.

What did you think of Victor Company, the Kiwis?

We didn't really have a lot to do with them. I hated Victor Company because we used to follow them on R & C and they used to get down to Vung Tau and wreck the joint and we would come in and they would close the bloody town down. The second time it happened Jerry Taylor went to the Mayor and said to open this bloody town old son or there is going to be hell to pay. The place was under curfew - I think they put a six o'clock curfew on. After they lifted the curfew everything was opened again but they used to give me the shits. The poofters used to get down there and drink themselves senseless and go and wreck the town. And then we would miss out.

They would love to fight. I went to a couple of the 'do's' they had, the big do you have when the company comes in from the scrub. They were strange people. The CSM was a Maori and the CQMS was a big bloody white bloke and he was the bloke that ran the company and kept the peace, because they had people who were higher caste than the CSM, Maori Princes and all that sort of shit. The sort of stuff that you run into in New Guinea but you certainly don't run into it in Australia. You get to one of these end-of-operation BBQs that they would have and every bloody time it would finish up in one gigantic fight. The bastards would fight just for the hell of fighting. They were bloody crazy. They had this thing that when they were down in Vung Tau they had to beat the record of the previous company that had been down in the amount of piss that they drank before they got to town. No wonder they wrecked the joint.

Did you ever see any evidence of our guys using drugs?

Never.

They got into enough trouble with grog did they?

They did. That is not to say that they didn't do it. I remember one time I decided to try it. Marijuana and all the rest was readily available and we were there on R&C and I got full of piss and decided that I would try this stuff. You know, the birds that used to go around with the trays. They gave me the drum that this is where you get it, so I got this old bird and told her I wanted some marijuana and she didn't have any but she said that she would go and get some. About an hour later she turned up and has this little plastic bag of bloody stuff, and by this stage I had gone cold on the idea. She abused shit out of me. I certainly didn't see any evidence of it.

The only drug taking I saw, and I cant' remember the young bloke, who overdosed on those 'no-sweat' pills. Remember that? You might not have been down there. Did you ever see those 'no-sweat' pills - well, this bloke got violently fucking crook and they couldn't figure it out - he was chucking in hospital. Anyway, after a while they questioned him and he'd got all this information all balls-up; he used to have to take two of these after food at breakfast time, and he thought you had to take two every time you had a root, so he was bloody backwards and forwards from Vung Tau with these bloody Lambros and had been scoffing these bloody things till they had been pouring out of his bloody eyes. That was the only drug taking that I saw, and that was certainly purely accidental.

Did you ever form any opinions about the enemy?

I didn't have any opinion one way or the other. I had all the confidence in our blokes and knew how good we were. Again, I have heard a lot of bullshit talked about the enemy but I think a lot of it is just bloody that. Look at the fights you were involved in - did you ever get beaten? I mean, they chuck 200 blokes against 50 and you might have a spot of bother. Our blokes were better than them and I didn't really have any time to form an opinion about the enemy - they were the enemy and they were there for the good guys to shoot. That was what it was all about and I think our guys did a pretty fair bloody job of that too.

I would like to get on to call the 'aftermath' which is the protests. You were there in 1971 when we went off to war and the protest movement was getting towards its zenith. How did it effect you? Did it effect you, your wife?

It just caused an awful amount of resentment. My initial reaction was that the pricks were doing it because they were dead scared that they might get conscripted and have to do it themselves. But it always seemed personal. We were doing a job that the people told us to do. The people are the Government and Vietnam was on the political agenda when the people elected the Government. So it is the people who have told us that this is the job they wanted us to do, and we were doing that job. So why put shit on me. If you want to put shit on the Government fine, do it. We are doing the job that we have been paid to do, trained to do and that our Government told us to do.

When you were in Vietnam did their reactions or reading about it in the paper affect you in any way?

Only the frustration. We had the dramas on the wharves when they refused to load ships and things like that. You would see an interview and they would say that they were not aiming at the soldiers themselves and it is the system and the politicians and all that sort of shit. Well, if is so why do they stop loading supplies that the soldier at the other end needs if it is not aimed at us personally? So, it was hard not to take the whole thing personally. I felt it was hard anyway. I thought that they must think that these blokes love all the shit that they are putting up with in this joint. Baby killers and all this sort of shit. But they have got to have a cause. If it wasn't Vietnam it would be something else. The silly pricks now get out and chain themselves to gum trees in the path of bulldozers. What is the difference? It just happened to be the flavour of the month. I don't know how fair dinkum most of them were. It would be interesting to talk to some of them down the track - they probably couldn't give a shit now.

They had to have a cause. Maybe they were right. Who knows? In retrospect did we waste our time. What did we achieve?

Well, I was going to ask that question. Was it worth it?

No, it wasn't worth it. We lost a lot of soldiers and we achieved absolutely zero. I used to rationalise it over the years and say that in Phuoc Tuy it was fairly safe. The people who lived in Phuoc Tuy had a reasonable sort of ten years. But so what? The position that they are now in they could have been there ten years sooner. You have a look around at the various countries in the world that are divided. Have a look at Yugoslavia, Korea, Russia and look at any country that it divided and it does not work. It is alright to say that we are trying to protect the democracy or the democratic rights of the South Vietnamese. Vietnam is a country and you divide a country ... I can't think of a single country in the world where it works.

So, what did we do. We postponed the inevitable. Now if the people don't want communism let them do something about it themselves. Its their country. I could see why they would want a united country, because again a divided country just does not work. Korea could blow up tomorrow. Christ, who would want to be in Serbia or Bosnia or even Russia. Or Germany - all the resentment. Now that they have unified it is all starting to happen. So, I think we wasted our bloody time.

Looking back on it all, do you have any regrets?

No. I would do it all again tomorrow without a shadow of a doubt.

The people who were doing all that protesting, did that make you feel any different from when you where there and when you came home?

I didn't like the pricks when I was there and I didn't like them much when I got back.

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

No, the only thing; there was a question earlier about junior leaders and about the sort of things that make a junior leader. The thing I probably think is the hardest thing for the

people who are in a position of responsibility in the Army now - most of them are older blokes that have been around for a long time. It is very hard to come to terms with the fact that they are dealing with a completely different race of people than they were dealing with 20 years ago. Young blokes today are different. They are different - they are generally bigger; they are smarter. I can remember when I did recruit training we didn't have anybody in our company that had a Senior Certificate. We might of had one or two that had Juniors. Senior Certificates were near to being like a bloody professor. All the kids have got it now - a dime a dozen. The kids are different.

I suppose it has come home a lot more to me since I have been a civilian. Things like industrial democracy. You have got to talk to the Diggers; you have got to let them have their input and they have got to be treated different. If it comes to a stoush I don't think they are any different from the blokes that we had or the blokes that we were. They have just got to be treated differently and channeled differently because they are smarter and think a hell of a lot more. The 'sheep like' follow sort of thing is not the same as it was.

It makes it harder for the young leader today?

It just means that he has got to change his style. He has got to stop and think a little about the principles of industrial democracy. It doesn't work in a military situation and I am not suggesting that we should all sit down and negotiate and do all that sort of shit. That obviously doesn't work. But he has got to be prepared to let his soldiers have much more meaningful input into what is going to happen and he has to be prepared to listen. He has to be prepared to say, 'What do you think?'

I was talking to Wally Thompson a while back and he said to me that the biggest bloody problem that we have in the Australian Army now is that our junior leaders do not get a chance to lead. He said the officers are fucking them up and I asked him why was that. He said that there was nothing going on and so you get a platoon that goes on parade in the morning and it used to be section commanders and the platoon sergeants that took the parade, but now the platoon commanders are not getting the hands-on that they need and now they are taking over and running the platoons. They are doing all the stuff that the corporals used to do. He said that as a consequence we have a whole lot of sergeants out there that don't know shit from clay and haven't done their apprenticeship because they haven't been allowed to. Because the platoon commanders need their 'hands on' too.

I think the thing he was getting at is; because the dollars are so tight how can you have an Army on a budget? You either have an Army or you don't and give the whole thing away. When I was a young soldier we would go to the bush often just for a week and we used to do a hell of a lot of bush work just a platoon level. So we would jack up a couple of trucks and five days rations and away we would go to Mount Mee or whatever. He would do fucking platoon commander stuff and he wasn't interested in doing a six o'clock parade in the morning - let the corporals do that. This bloody bullshit about being in front of the platoon all the time - he was not interested in that. He had all he could handle doing what platoon commanders should do. Christ, you go to the bush and they set up a kitchen and serve you fresh rations; that is bullshit. As a platoon commander if you want to take your platoon to the bush, you want five days 24 hour ration packs and there should never be an argument about it - you've got it.

They are the sort of problems that the platoon commanders particularly; not so much the platoon commanders, but the corporals. We are just not getting them grounded the way they used to be.

It comes down to money.

Exactly.

Are they any responses in your sheet there that you want to have a look at?

(End of tape)