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# ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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**TITLE:**

**INTERVIEWEE:** Wally Burford

**INTERVIEWER:** Gary McKay

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Wally, you were drafted in 1970. What was your parents' reaction to you being drafted?

When the actual notification came through I had just made the State Hockey team and the State carnival was in Perth at that stage. They actually received my call-up papers during the course of the carnival and they held them over to after the final. They gave them to me the night, WA won the carnival, the State Championship, and the night after winning the carnival the old man gave me the call-up papers.

I just took it as it came. If I was called up I was called up, as I was. I could have got out of the Army or National Service on a couple of different grounds, but I thought that if you are called up you have to cop it sweet and that was pretty much the attitude at the time.

You were in the CMF at the time weren't you?

Yes.

What unit was that?

I was in 16 Battalion, the Assault Pioneers.

You didn't consider doing the five or six years CMF training instead of doing Nasho?

Well, I had already done three years in the CMF. There were other people in the CMF that were in there to get out of National Service but once again, I just had the attitude that if I was called up, you get called up, your country has called you up and you have got to do the right thing. Also I had a pretty chronic bad arm as a young bloke and I had a growth in my bone and almost lost my arm on a couple of occasions and my father contacted the specialist and said that I had been called up can we get him out on those grounds. The specialist said most certainly and that there was no way I should go in the Army, but once again, I thought that I had been called up and I will leave it up to the Army doctors. I told them about it and they weren't particularly concerned so they passed me fit and in I went.

What did you know about Vietnam before you were drafted?

You could probably write on a back of a matchbox what I knew about Vietnam. If someone had given me a pin and said stick it in Vietnam there was no way in the world I could have. I knew it was in south-east Asia and I knew we were fighting some sort of war up there. But it never affected my lifestyle at that stage and apart from the occasional headline where someone was killed I probably didn't know what was happening.

You went from Karakatta where you were drafted and you were sent across to Puckapunyal. By air?

Yes.

What do you remember most about Pucka?

I think the most striking thing was the coldness. It was that bloody bleak over there. I think certainly initially I wasn't the sort of person to get homesick, but by gee, I think everyone in the hut was homesick for the first couple of weeks there. Just the 'busy-ness' of it all. I think in retrospect it was a very good idea. They never gave you two minutes to think about anything else other than the Army for the first few weeks there, almost certainly for the first four weeks. Running from place to place, needles, medicals, mental tests and the whole shooting match. I think it sent the trend for my time in the Army in that you got used to handle exhaustion. Not used to it, but certainly made you realise that the whole time you were in the Army you are going to be operating on long hours, hard times, and never feeling perfectly fit.

When your recruit training finished how did it turn out that you went to infantry? Did you have any choice?

Well yes. About half way through the recruit training they mentioned that 4 RAR was the next battalion to be warned out to go to Vietnam and they were looking for people to go straight into 4 RAR with the infantry to do their corps training in Townsville. Through my CMF backup or background I wanted to be in the infantry. I thought that if you are going to be in the Army you might as well be where the real Army is, so I put my hand up to go to Townsville. Luckily I was accepted to go up there and do the corps training with the battalion up in Townsville.

So you would have been off to a bit of a flying start really wouldn't you amongst other Nashos?

Most certainly. What you learn in the CMF is not to be compared with the training that we underwent, the CMF training was pretty low-key, but most certainly it did help. I had handled the rifles before; I knew how to put my gaiters on the right legs and a lot of silly little things that seemed to hang the other blokes up, it just came pretty easy because of my three years training in the CMF.

And you had already done a 14 day recruit course I imagine with the CMF?

Yes. I had done three annual camps plus recruit camps.

The prospect of going to war didn't worry you?

No. It is something you just took for granted. When I was called up I knew I had been in the infantry, and being in the infantry there was every chance I would go to Vietnam. It was just something I took for granted at the time that I would eventually end up in the infantry in Vietnam.

Wally, why were you a member of the CMF?

I suppose I have always been a bit fascinated with the military in that I have always read historical books on different wars and that sort of business. My brother was in the CMF and I suppose that was an influence of sorts. One of the mates was very keen. Gary Dawson. He ended up going to Vietnam with 3 RAR and got wounded up

there. He volunteered as a nasho and I think it was just a natural progression. Once I was in the CMF or to join the CMF. A sense of adventure.

Parents or uncles or grandparents in the Army?

Yes. My father fought in the Second World War and my grandfather fought in Gallipoli, so there is a bit of a background.

The Burford tradition.

Yes.

Do you think that the basic training you went through was tough enough and relevant for what you eventually did in Vietnam?

Well I think by the time we came through, what this interview is about, we were the last company, virtually the last battalion to go to Vietnam, and I think the Army had learnt a lot of things and modified a few things and I think our training could not have been better really in so many ways. The physical side of it most certainly was absolutely brilliant, yes, I don't think they could have added much. Apart from the peripheries, you know I have mentioned on the sheet here, further down the track, things like our uniforms - I don't think they were up to scratch for that particular war, you know we were in jungle greens. Where even nowadays you see cadets wearing the camouflage outfits. I think we most certainly should have had that equipment. I still have some doubts about the suitability of the SLR for jungle warfare, but that's gone now as well sort of thing so they have certainly changed a few things that I didn't think were quite right at the time. But our training itself, yes, no I most certainly would not think we were under-trained.

So you did your IETs with 4 RAR, who were the guys doing your training in 4 (RAR)?

Well there was most of the, the platoon commander was a Lieutenant (later Captain G.R.) Shannon as he was at the time. He went onto one of the executive positions in the battalion. Our section commander was a bloke called (Corporal W.W.) Warren Dowell, who ended up a section commander in 11 Platoon, and most of the section commanders that were in the training, (Corporal R.E.) Williams, (Corporal R.V) 'Sludge' McGahan, they were all actually section commanders from Delta Company, 4 RAR.

So you would have got up there about September 1970?

Yes, that would be about right.

And, how long did the IET training go for?

Ten weeks for the training.

Did you go to Canungra?

No.

Because that would have overlapped.

No, no corps training finished before Canungra but we had an exercise on Mt Spec, not Mt Spec, High Range. I fell over and actually what, to start off with, when the battalion went to Canungra I was supposed to go with it but the Battalion picked a few of us to go down and do different courses down at Ingleburn. I went down on the (Assault) Pioneer course. So while the battalion was in Canungra I was in Ingleburn, and when I came back from Ingleburn and the battalion had come back from Canungra, I was supposed to go down and do a course with the other blokes from Ingleburn. But on an exercise at High Range, I fell down the side of a hill and stripped all the ligaments off my ankle. So, when the other blokes went to Canungra, I was unfit so I never got there. Which was probably reasonably unique. There wouldn't have been too many infantry blokes I think went to Vietnam without going through Canungra.

Yes, that's right. So, after your leg got better when were you allocated to a platoon, which one?

I was allocated to 12 Platoon at the completion of our ten weeks corps training.

And who was your section commander?

My section commander was a bloke called (Corporal M.P.) 'Harry' Duggan, another National Serviceman, the section 2IC was (Lance Corporal J.A.) John Bergmans who was a Regular army bloke.

Do you reckon your platoon was - because you spent another three or four months training before you went to Vietnam - do you reckon your platoon was well prepared for Vietnam?

Oh, very much so. I made mention earlier I think you know the fact that we came at the end of the Vietnam war, I think a lot of things had been learned and we were very well trained, I think. The person that we all, I say by we, you know most of the blokes at Digger level, learnt to dislike very, very intensely, (Major F.J.) Franz Kudnig was the company commander, but I think knowing in retrospect the training he put us through in Townsville really prepared us for the job that we ended up having to do in Vietnam. Townsville itself I found a lot harder - the training there - a lot harder and the conditions a lot more harsh than they ever were in Vietnam.

So, it was almost that old adage of 'train hard - fight easy'?

Oh, for sure, Yes, it made the physical side of Vietnam a lot easier. Our preparation was absolutely first class.

Was Wally Burford pretty confident of himself by the time he got on the boat?

Oh, extremely yes. No, I was looking forward to it. It was a kind of a sense of anticipation, fully confident in my own abilities.

What do you think was the aim of your training before you went?

I think just to fight as part of a unit in Vietnam, as part of an infantry company in Vietnam. To be part of a team and I think most certainly that was accomplished, you know everyone, especially so on a platoon level, but that even stretched into our company. I know every company that has probably been to Vietnam thought they were in the best company - I have really got no doubt that ours was. I think it would have been very few if any companies went to Vietnam better trained, better prepared or a tighter unit than our company.

The sort of training you had done in the CMF, was that jungle training or was that more for conventional-type fighting?

Well it was more conventional, because I was in the Assault Pioneers there. There was a lot of building bridges, pontoon bridges across rivers and things that I never saw in Vietnam anyway. A lot of the stuff there was inapplicable. What did help me was my use of demolitions that I learned in the CMF, that's how I got on my Pioneer course when I went to 4 RAR and most certainly that did help at different times in Vietnam - my knowledge of explosives.

What do you think is the hardest part about fighting in the jungle?

Well the hardest part to me would have been, as I said earlier, the exhaustion when you're doing two hours guns on your own. Nights to me were the worst part of Vietnam. Nothing much happened at night in the scrub whilst I was in Vietnam, but that was the part that I think when the imagination played a lot of tricks. I think that was the part where my nerves started to pack up, it was just the thought of what can happen. It is what goes through your head when you're stuck out in the bush, sitting behind a gun, it was that black you could wave your hand in front of your face and not see anything. You're on your own for two hours - it would be pissing pick handles - just laying there just thinking the worst for the whole time.

Why were you on your own?

Well, to start off with when we first got there and we all had ten man sections, it used to be two blokes on the gun, but towards the end when different National Service intakes were kicked out; or most certainly when we got some blokes wounded in the platoon; a couple of blokes would go on R & R; we would be a bit short handed and quite often it would necessitate being on the gun on your own at night. Which you know to me is never, not one of my favourite times of Vietnam (laughs) that's for sure.

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

Only in the way the relaxation of regulations you know in carrying the firearm full of ammunition for the first time when you go to the boozer; when you go to the dyke. It was a bit of a surprise and then you go down the range and have a big 'yippy' shoot and then you wouldn't have to be running around picking up the brass cartridges

afterwards. If you stuffed a pair of boots, you didn't have to worry about you know going beg, borrowing or stealing a pair of boots or a pair of greens. All that side of it was just so much easier than Townsville.

You went across on the HMAS *Sydney*?

Yes.

What do you remember most about that?

Ring tinea.

Is that right?

Had it all around the nuts (laughs) aw, it was bloody horrific. Each morning I would have to go on sick call, a medic would be coming along, there would be at least twenty of us I suppose, and he would come down and rub all this bloody grease and shit into your nuts. Ah, burn! (laughs) Oh dear, everyone would be rushing down trying to wash this stuff off their nuts in the wash basins. Probably would be my most easily remembered part of the trip! The other part was trying to train. It was pretty easy to hide you know. I remember no-one really seemed too sure of where anyone was at a particular time. Quite often I would be able to sneak off and just sit down and read a book somewhere and no-one would even think to look for me. So, it was a pretty lax trip up. The heat below decks was another thing that was quite outstanding. You know you would get down inside the boat and by Jesus it used to be bloody hot, and I suppose the beer parade was the other thing where we used to get our big 26 ounce can of beer a night. It was supposed to be one can, per man, per night, but we would always be able to bludge two or three. But by the time you got to the third one - they would crack them all at the same time - the third one used to be pretty hot and ugly. So, I guess that's another thing that sticks out pretty well in my mind.

Talking of National Service now, about half of Delta Company were National Servicemen. What was the relationship like between the National Servicemen and the Regs?

Oh, it was unnoticeable really, in that there was a lot of chiacking and that, you know, the nashos would be getting stuck into the Regs, but it was only a very, very tissue - thin sort of chiacking. I don't think it really affected anyone's thoughts of each other. Most of the Regs there anyway, except for our section commanders, were first tour, so they were as green as we were, and I don't think it really made any appreciable difference at all to the relationship, I really don't.

What about National Service officers, did they scare you, the fact that they had only done six months officer training and then.

No, once again, I didn't really give it a lot of thought, Gary, you just presumed the bloke there is competent. Once again, I think in our company I think we were exceptionally lucky, most certainly in retrospect, I think we were exceptionally lucky in that all the officers - bar the top bloke initially - were extremely competent. I think that all the Diggers had the utmost respect for all the officers. And the fact that if they

were National Servicemen or not I don't think really concerned anyone too much. In fact, I'm pretty sure 'Spingo' (Second Lieutenant G.D. Spinkston) was a Reg, but I know you were a nasho initially, but I don't think anyone ever made the comparisons.

> I would like to talk now about your job. Now, you might be called a rifleman, but what was really your job out on operations in the platoon?

Well, I was a rifleman for only a reasonably short period of time before I became a section 2IC. I was a (forward) scout for a while, so I did most of the, all of the jobs except (machine) gunner in the rifle section. But the job there was just you know is just part of the team. You know, the old search and destroy, as it used to be called, but you know most certainly we were just patrolling, trying to find the enemy, and if we did we were very prepared to pull them on. I think just each member of the section was literally just all eyes and ears just trying to achieve that ultimate goal of finding someone so we could initiate a contact. Because it was you know, initially, a big adventure. You know everyone was looking forward to their first contact - I know I most certainly was - it seemed to take us a long time to find one and after that we didn't seem to be able to get away from them. But, it was ... My actual job was just as part of the team looking for the Vietnamese, the North Vietnamese.

> You said you did some scouting, what is the hardest part about scouting?

The bush bashing, you really don't get a chance to do a scout's job properly and that is to take it nice and easy and have a good look before you go anywhere. Some of the jungle we went through was pretty thick and you spent more time trying to bash your way through the bush and trying to make sure you were staying on the bearing that your section commander was giving you than really devoting your time to looking around the way you should. That was exemplified most certainly in the early part of our tour and this is where - I keep coming back to (Major F.J.) Franz Kudnig - but we just had to cover too much ground when he was our company commander. Some one once said that he was pretty keen to win himself a Military Cross when he got to Vietnam, and most certainly the miles, the distances he made us travel patrolling at that time seemed to indicate that he was pretty keen. But, by making us do those miles we were doing - it tired us a lot, but also we never had the ability to concentrate and actually do the quiet patrolling which should have been required at that time. I think that most certainly changed when (Major F.J.) Kudnig left the company and we had a new company commander who was an absolute plum and it was left more to the platoon commanders on just what patrolling we would do each day and it was a lot more relaxed and we did do a lot better job and a lot more thorough job of patrolling once we got back to that routine.

> So, what your saying is that you can still patrol aggressively but you can do it quietly?

Oh, for sure, yes. On different occasions (Major F.J.) Kudnig would say okay, you have got to be between here and there and you have got to be there at night - regardless of what the terrain might have been at the time you had to get through there. And he seemed to be - you know you keep pretty close touch with your platoon commander - you are a group you're like a little family and he tells you exactly what's going on. He said, 'Well Kudnig said we have got to be here by nightfall', so one way

or another you had to get there. And running through the bush or bush bashing is not patrolling aggressively, to me or to all of us I think, it was a little bit bloody crazy in fact having that sort of approach at the time. Even though by covering the all that extra terrain of course you've got more chance I suppose of initiating a contact, but you were not in a position to be able to initiate it on your own terms by patrolling in that manner.

So, you're more likely to get hit yourself.

Oh, most certainly.

What do you think was the hardest part of your job as a rifleman in a platoon?

Well, once again I would come back to nights, pickets at nights without any shadow of a doubt. That to me was where everything came home, you know. We were there during the wet, it was absolutely pissing pick handles at night. There was one night, I'll never forget it, we used to have a little comms cord which used to run from each hootchie out to the gun. Somehow, it was one of these stages where we were just doing single pickets, and it was absolutely pouring down rain and I tripped over and lost the comms cord. So, I bloody walked around, kind of two steps left, two steps right for about two hours trying to find the comms cord. It was raining the whole time, in the end I started to get terrified that I might be in front of someone's hootchie; wake them up; frighten them; or might drift in front of the gun - even though I was pretty certain I was still pretty close to where it was I tripped over. So, I just had to sit there for the rest of the night - pissing pick handles (laughs) on my own in the middle of the jungle and that was possibly one of the … That is probably one of four really bad nights I put in even though there was no real threat - we weren't in a contact area at the time. But that, well I think that was a night that really started putting the wind up me at nights.

One of four, what were the others?

Well, there was the night the company got the first kill. Ten Platoon hit a bunker system and (Private J.M.) Johnny Lawton got the first nog we 'arse-overed'. We were patrolling a fair way away, and this was another one of (Major F.J.) Kudnig's mad rushes, and we had to get over to 10 Platoon's position straight away, so it was head down and arse up and we virtually ran for several kilometres through the jungle to 10 Platoon's contact position and then when it really started to come home to all of us I think, just how silly it was operating in that manner and that we never had time to look around. We knew we were going into an area that where obviously there were nasties. We didn't have time to do it properly. Anyhow, when we got there, they had found a bunker system etc., we got there right on dusk, anyway we didn't have time to deploy properly and we ended up standing - as it got dusk - right in the middle of a track. So he says, 'Okay, well just lay down where you are and that is where you are going to stay for the night'. And I thought, Holy fuck! You know laying on this bloody track all night and once again it was still pissing pick handles. So, anyway that's where I had to lay down for the night. Once again, we knew we were in an enemy bunker system, we presumed where there was one where we got the kill, we knew there would have to be more around. And just laying in the middle of this track, oh ... All night I was too scared to fall off to sleep; there were noises all around me; I am

sure I heard at one stage people running down the this particular track - but it was too dark to see anything, and that was a pretty horrific night.
The third night I think that will always live in my memory, was when we had a platoon ambush along the rubber. Anyway, I had a bit of a cough at the time, so the blokes with coughs we put into virtually a rear party - in the rubber - to keep them away from the killer group. Anyway it was like having a little holiday to ourselves you know. The intelligence reports were that they were using this track in front of the rubber, so we went far enough in, so that we could set up little hootchies back in this rear party and we just had the one gun pointing back into the rubber and I was the commander of that little group that was in the rear party. Anyway, so I set up my hootchie directly behind the gunner. Anyway, I went to sleep and I remember waking up, just wide awake, every nerve just seemed to be pulsing, and I couldn't work out why and then it hit me - I could smell the nogs. I thought, Holy shit, you know I was laying in this bloody little hootchie, in a hammock, had a mosquito net around me. So, the smell was that strong I knew they had to be very, very close, so I was trying to sneak my way out of the hammock and of course my rifle got caught up in the mosquito net!. And I thought, Gee whiz, and I could hear a bit of rustling around me, my mind was playing, I thought, Oh, if I lay here, and as I looked around too by the way, the other hootchies that we had up, looked like neon lights in the rubber - the moon was coming through the rubber - and I thought Gee whiz! It was obvious the nogs had missed the killer group and somehow they had ended up very, very close to us. Now I just built up in my mind that I was going to take a huge leap out of the hammock, when the gunner - somehow the nogs had got between where we had set the gun up and our claymores - and they caught him a bit by surprise, the bloke that was on the sentry, and he knew if he touched his gun well the link from the M60 was going to rattle and he was going to have a few problems. So, all he could think of was to hit the clacker on the claymores. So, just as I was about to throw myself out of the hammock, he has hit the claymores - blew me about twenty feet the other way - they all thought I was dead and I thought I had copped it and I didn't realise it was our claymores going the other way that flung me backwards. It took me about ten or fifteen minutes to orientate myself then. Everyone was screaming and shouting, so that was a pretty horrific night.

The last one was the September the 21st. That's a night that I don't think too many blokes will or could ever forget - September the 21st (1971). When we hit the last very big bunker system we hit. That's one that I have had several nightmares about since.

> Okay, well we will go back to that later on. We were talking about what was the hardest part of your job, what do you think was the most important part of your job?

Well, as a rifleman, I think just to stay alert I think was the main thing. Just to concentrate on.. (break for telephone call) I think that was the main part was to make sure everyone stayed alert so they could in fact do their jobs properly and you become a bit complacent after a while too, because you haven't had a contact for a while, or you haven't come across enemy sign, you tend to get in your own little nitty gritty world and you start thinking about your next leave and all that sort of business rather than the job at hand. So, that most certainly is the most important thing is keeping switched on and continuing, even though it might have been a long time since a

contact or whatever or since you had seen any sign - to make sure you do stay alert. By staying alert yourself, you can save other blokes; most certainly save yourself; and most certainly save other blokes in the platoon as well.

> You said you were a section 2IC for a while, what are the principal requirements of being a section 2IC?

The main one there was to coordinate the M60, usually the section commander was further forward and it was the section 2IC's job to, well look after the M60 initially, but most certainly then also to coordinate the riflemen coming up behind. There was only a couple of times I was called on to actually do that with the gun. There was the first bunker system we hit where 'Bergy' (Lance Corporal J.A.)Bergmans), our section commander, was pinned down up the front with the scout. Where I had to try and deploy the gun up to try and give him a bit of covering fire so he could pull himself back a little bit, and at the same time, because I was the only bloke there at that stage and that Bergy was out of action, I had to make sure that I also got the riflemen deployed properly. So, I think that would probably be the section 2IC's main role. Also, I was acting section commander for probably a couple of months all told. Bergy had leave and he was off sick I think for a while there, so that's the one step after where you virtually running the whole section and that probably for myself was the most satisfying role that I had in Vietnam - was that of the section commander.

> What do you see your main job being, when you actually got to take over a rifle section, what were the main things you tried to do in that job?

Well the main thing was to, once again, keep all the blokes on the job - on the ball. You knew yourself how you could see how easily complacency could set in, sneak under your guard a little bit, and I think that was the main thing you know, you're aware of what mistakes you made yourself, so you're most certainly trying to make sure that the rest of your section doesn't make that same mistake that you had done yourself on occasions - that drift off; when you put a bloke out on sentry make sure you go out there to check that he is wide awake and alert; not that he would go to sleep sort of thing, but make sure that he is doing his job - he is watching his front; making sure your section keeps their noise down. When you're the lead section make sure, most certainly, that everyone is close enough that if the shit does hit the fan that you can support each other without getting too bunched up so you can all get knocked off at the same time. There's a lot of things you have to think about as a section commander, so I think that's why I found it so rewarding, actually doing that job in Vietnam. It did give you more to think about, which made it a lot less likely to drift off in your own little world.

> A lot of people would say that, you know, at this stage you have only been in the Regular Army (for) a year and a bit and here you are commanding ten men on operations. What is your answer to that statement?

Well, I think you can be in the Army for twenty years, until you first get in contact and you first have a battle you're never going to find out what a person is like anyway. You can't possibly train someone and know what they are going to do under fire with any certainty. We had one chap in our platoon, (Lance Corporal C.H.) 'Blue' Goodwin, came from the (Q) store who was one of our section commanders when

(Corporal M.P.) 'Harry' Duggan went home and Blue, oh, he was full of war; he was a Regular soldier; used to have Commando comics sent out to him; he spent half his life talking about this battle, that battle - the whole business. But he had never trained actually as an infanteer with our company but he thought he was good enough until we hit that bunker system on the 21st. He was the section commander of the lead section there and he just went pieces - he was just laying there gibbering, bawling, crying. So, no matter how much training you have had, you don't know if a bloke is going to react in that manner. So, when they say okay, you didn't have enough training possibly to look after ten blokes in battle, well battle itself is the ultimate test. That's the only way that you can sort it out. Whether a bloke has only been in six months or twelve months, provided he has done his basic training - especially the way we did our training, did all our corps training with the company or with the battalion. We knew what our job was; we knew what our role was; and as I say you know it all culminates when you have your contact. So, you can be in a job for five years and never have contact and you will never know whether a bloke could do the job properly or not until the shit hits the fan.

> Did it scare you the fact that you were going to have to be commanding these guys and responsible for them?

Not at all, no. No, it was something that you kind of … you relish you know. When we were in Townsville, doing our training there, I suppose I didn't take it all that terribly serious, or serious to a degree, but I know when we were doing our corps training that my section commander, (Corporal W.W.) Warren Dowell, put in a recommendation at the end of the corps training that I be sent to Admin Company - he didn't think I was a suitable person for a rifle company in that I probably did fuck around a little bit. But, when we got to Vietnam, I was the first bloke in the platoon to get made up, so you know, most certainly the changes of the ground rules and that one is training -one is the real thing - that sometimes does change a person's attitude. I know most certainly it did mine. It came out of the blue being made a section 2IC as a matter of fact, maybe I thought well someone has got to get the job. I never thought it would be myself, I thought it would probably be one of the other blokes who had been in the platoon a lot longer than myself or most certainly one of the blokes who had been in Townsville longer than myself. When it came out I was absolutely thrilled, you know I was very excited about it.

> Did you like your job?

Well, in the context of that time, yes, most certainly. As I say, I pulled my finger out when we got to Vietnam as far as, you know not pissing around, I took it very seriously. I think the attitude changes were most certainly noted because I was the first bloke in the platoon to get made up once we got there, so yes, most certainly I did enjoy the job.

> You have given me the impression that Wally Burford liked to have a good time, a joke and muck around a bit, but here you are now your in a position where you have got to control either three men as a section 2IC or a maximum of ten as a section commander. How did you go about - how did Wally Burford go about instilling discipline into his guys or was it already there?

Well, I think most blokes just accept the fact that you know your platoon commander is your platoon commander; your platoon sergeant is your platoon sergeant; and most blokes just took that pretty much on face value. When I was made up it was pretty normal to be put into another section when you get promoted. But the blokes in the section said no, look is there any chance of keeping him here. So they were quite happy to accept me as the 2IC straight off and start taking the jobs that you would necessarily have to give which can at times cause friction. You know like your spot on the night sentry duty, obviously everyone wants the first spot or the last one sort of thing so they don't get interrupted sleep. So, you have got to be a bit of a jockey in that you have got to try and keep everyone happy, that you're not putting the same blokes in the middle of the shift all the time. Same as putting the claymores out. Well that was almost always my job from when we first got in country anyway - putting the claymores out at night. But digging the shit pits; sentries when you're on the move sort of business. As long as you treated the blokes fairly they just used to accept it. And if you didn't treat them fairly, if you gave them too many shifts they were pretty quick to let you know. (laughs) They didn't muck around letting you know, you know, you did that to me last time and the night before sort of thing, so there was fair bit of self control in that area. You know you can't be Atilla the Hun as a section 2IC. But if you do things fairly the blokes will accept anything you give them at the time and I noticed that even in contact, when I called someone and invariably they would come across. You know where at different times you know, when someone called me by Christ, you didn't particularly want to - you didn't want to move - but you did because, I suppose respect; and part of the team; and the way we were trained; you did things as a course because you knew it had to be done. And as a section 2IC you know so the blokes more or less respected the position that you were in, you were the section commander for that reason.

You said you did the claymores a lot, why did you do all the claymores?

Well I think probably because I did the Pioneer Course. Several days on the Pioneer Course were setting out the claymores, setting up the claymores; where to put them' how to put them. That was possibly one thing of our training that there were little aspects that weren't realistic in training. There used to be safety distances, you used to have your claymores so far away, well in country at different times, I would be sitting with the claymores only ten feet in front of the gun. But you would set them in such a way so that you would have a tree behind it to cover the back blast so you didn't blow your gunners away. But because I had done the Pioneer Course and I knew what to do with the claymores, I just automatically got the job as soon as we got in country and just carried it right though even when I was a section commander - I was still the bloke taking the claymores out at night.

Did 12 platoon use ring mains or did they ...?

Yes, most certainly did, yes. Depending on the circumstances once again, but we usually had up to five or six, well initially I think we only had three or four claymores per section. It might have only been two or three in fact but towards the end (of the tour) of course, we realised just how important a thing they are, just about everyone in the section was carrying one. So, most certainly I used to set them up with the cord so I would have a bank of them, most certainly in ambush positions, but when ever you were in what you thought was dicey position you would take a bit more care on how

many you put out and where you put them. Sometimes of course under the old Kudnig bloody regime, by the time we hit our night defensive position (NDP), usually it was invariably getting dark by then and that used to be a bastard - having to trying to wander around you know without your rifle as you're carrying all the claymores, hoping the bloke behind you is keeping a pretty good eye out while you're putting the claymores out. Once (Major J.H.) Jerry Taylor, and when (Captain P.J.) Peter Schuman was the interim company commander, we used to have that much more time at night that we could do things properly once again, you know they gave us time to do the job properly.

> Are you in favour of stopping patrolling a couple of hours before last light; do your admin; and then move into a different NDP?

Oh, most certainly yes. Where that's possible that is by far the best way to go, because no matter how much you try to keep people quiet in the jungle, when they are having their brew; and they're opening their cans; and they're bloody cleaning their weapons; there is a fair bit of noise and you notice that yourself when you're out on sentry. Although it's muted you can still most certainly you know be twenty, thirty metres out from the platoon and you think well there's no way anyone could accidentally walk in. But by doing that, by having an earlier meal and then going to a position, yes, most certainly you can still keep the element of surprise on your side. I think that should be an important part of patrolling.

> I would like to talk about battle now. What was your first contact like? What were your reactions, how did you feel?

Oh gee, that was exhilarating. The first one, you know the rush of adrenalin. You just about become an adrenalin junky after that first one. The sense of adventure, here it all is, this is what we have been training for, you know it was absolutely (noise over tape). But of course in the first one we had (Private B.M) Bernie Pengilly get killed and when you get the word after a few hours that someone is dead you think, oh Christ, who was it. Early in the piece you knew every bloke in the company, you knew every bloke in the company well. It makes you think a bit more about it, most certainly, when I knew it was Bernie, a bloke that I knew and liked very, very much; that hits home very, very hard. And then I think from there on, I think from the first contact, most certainly, was huge, but I think the subsequent contacts we had you know a person was most certainly a little bit more introspect and most certainly not as gung ho.

> That was a very confusing, I mean 12 Platoon had it tough by coming in to almost a company attack for their first contact.

The whole thing was funny because we had been reacted out. One of the other companies had hit the bunker system, anyway we had followed the tanks there and we thought oh, it was well and truly all over and when we left the company (harbour) position we formed up more or less in a company position where the original contact was - I think it was Charlie Company had the original contact - but when we started moving out, we had only moved I suppose forty or fifty metres when (Private R.B) Ray Davis, our gunner, stopped. He called me up, 'Wal, whereabouts is 10 Platoon?' I said, 'Well we were told before we left that they are out on the left' and I said, 'What's

wrong with you?, and he said , ' Well, I just saw some bastard running through the bush on the right!' So I called the platoon commander, 'Spingo' (Second Lieutenant G.D. Spinkston) back, and I said, 'Ten Platoon is definitely on the left is it?' and he said, 'Yes', and I said , 'Well Davo reckons he saw someone on the right'. Spingo said, ' Well I don't like this too much', he said, 'Well tell Davo if he sees some bastard - shoot him! He's not one of ours'. So we only just, Spingo had just gone back up the front, would have only gone probably another ten yards when 10 Platoon hit the bunker system and firing broke out on our left. As that broke out, we started bloody running up and next thing 'Bergy' (Lance Corporal J.A. Bergmans) was in a contact. Right in front of him was a bunker as well. He started shooting, he went down, I tried to get the gun up to him. He was screaming out, 'No get back, get back, you can't come up, there's too much fire here'. So, we started trying to swing around to sweep. We came into increasingly heavy fire, then everything lulled for a second. An M60 opened up and we could hear that whipping through the trees and that was coming from the wrong way. It wasn't our M60, so we thought we must be running into 10 Platoon and that created - oh, the confusion this M60 caused that day was un-bloody-believable. Every time we tried to move it seemed this M60 was shooting through us, so the boss was on the phone to 10 Platoon, 'Okay, you stop shooting your M60 we will stop shooting the M60', and the bastard kept shooting, so we knew it wasn't one of ours. But it didn't help us a great deal once again because it still made it hard to know whether it was 10 Platoon being hit or that we were being hit or there was a nog opening up.

So yes, the first contact, it could have been really bad - except for the fact that we had the tanks. The tanks had headed off to head home but they did a U-turn and came flying back sort of thing and they most certainly saved the day. Because I know our platoon and I know 10 Platoon were in a very similar position as it transpired. We were right up to the edge of the bunker system and we really couldn't go much further. You know we were in a fair bit of bother but when the tanks came of course, you felt a huge wave of relief seeing those blokes come - except for the fact that they might run you over. You were always a bit concerned about that. But, no it was a hell of a relief seeing them go through the lines and that saved the day for us. It turned our first contact - hitting a bunker system - so it could have been a really bad bastard, but the fact that we had the armour support, you know that made it a lot easier for us.

> Apart from being crushed by the tank, what were, what are the other difficulties of fighting with armour?

Well I think the communication, the main one most certainly is being crushed, but knowing exactly which way they are going to go and which way they are going to be firing. It needs someone usually to jump up and have a chat to them and by doing that they are most certainly exposing themselves. There needs to be some sort of communication link that you don't have to jump up and bloody stand behind the tank to talk to someone even though you think standing behind a tank, you've got the tank in front of you - in jungle warfare it's not like that. You know you could be standing up smack bang in the middle of the bunker system, you're not too sure where it is. I think that would be the main difficulty in coordinating what they are doing compared with what the ground troops are doing so you can have some sort of unison. They can go forward and you can sweep behind and you can support each other, because they are pretty vulnerable too in the jungle. An RPG can take one of them out pretty quick

so they do need infantry support as well. They can only fire in one direction and while they are firing in that one direction, they really need the infantry in close support to be able to keep the nasties off their back.

> What was the hardest part about fighting the section, getting the section to fight that day?

Well, in that first contact, it wasn't too difficult at all really I think. Everyone felt pretty much the same as myself you know, there was a huge buzz of excitement, we were finally in contact sort of thing. Everyone was very eager and keen to go. We dropped our packs pretty quickly and I think that should be an important part too, getting rid of the packs. Some people used to work on the theory you keep your packs with you, which can work in your favour when, as it transpired on the 21st (of September), we ended up getting separated from our packs and we couldn't get back and so a lot of our supplies were in those packs. But, at that stage they were getting the blokes to do what you wanted you know it really wasn't a problem. We hadn't had anyone killed; we hadn't had anyone wounded and it was still pretty much of an adventure to all of us, you know. It was the first time we really had to use our training. The communication was fantastic. Unfortunately, there is always a lot of confusion in the battle and that is one thing that always sticks in my mind. Everyone screaming, shouting; everyone shooting, bloody everything is going bang, bang, bang. Your really never too clear on the exact position; you're never too clear where the bad guys are; where the rest of you are; and especially when you have got a two platoon contact like we did with that first bunker system - where you know you had 10 (Platoon) on your left; you're dead set worried you're going to be brassing them up; you're too scared to go forward yourself in that you're equally as worried about the other platoon as you are of the Vietnamese or North Vietnamese. I keep saying North Vietnamese, you know. That's a bit of a furphy you know the old Viet Cong. I suppose they were somewhere up there but we never seem to hit the bastards too often, where ever we went, we hit the North Vietnamese regiments. But I think that's it. In the first contact, there was no trouble at all keeping control, everyone had been trained and it really went like a plum, the first contact was just about an ideal contact.

> What was the fire discipline like amongst your guys?

Oh, good, yes it was excellent - the first one. In fact, I think as part of our training you know, firing short bursts, at one stage there I had to give the gunner a gee up when I was trying to cover Bergy's (Lance Corporal J.A. Bergmans) withdrawal - to get him to fire more than you know, five or six bloody round bursts. That was the way we had been trained, I said, 'For Christ's sake Davo, just keep shooting 'till he gets back'. And then once you start doing that and the firepower you're putting out there is very good. And we carried a heap of link. The other blokes you know, everyone seemed reticent to fire until they had a target in all honesty. At times we possibly could have been firing more, but the fire control was excellent. No-one was just blazing away, everyone was actually trying to identify a target before they had a shot. But they were only pretty fleeting things, we all saw one or two that day, but they were always just a flash through the bush sort of thing. I had a couple of pings but not with any kind of optimism on that particular day that I had hit anything, but yes, the fire control was good. I don't know of anyone who was shooting away for no reason.

Good. What scared you the most when you were out on operations?

Well, I'll get back to the nights I suppose as the main thing. The other thing when I was patrolling; when I was scouting or even as section commander, when you're up at the pointed end and you have to do a bit of bush bashing, you know that's a bit nerve wracking. I remember at one stage we went through an old booby trap. I think about three-quarters of our platoon went through before it was seen. All it was, was a shotgun set up in a tree with a trip wire across the track that had fortunately been there long enough that all the mechanism had jammed. I had been up with the scout that day, (Private G.M.) Garry Sloane, and we had gone straight through, and as I say just about half the platoon had been through before someone actually spotted the what-is-name. So, had it not been an old booby trap, one that had rusted, most certainly could have ... And that worried me a bit more from then on too, when you knew you had been through that.

In battle, who is the person who most stands out in your memory?

I think without any doubt 'Yosemite Sam' and (Second Lieutenant G.D.) Graham Spinkston. I think Yosemite Sam the night of the 21st (September 1971)

Who is Yosemite Sam?

Sorry (laughs) Warrant Officer (Class Two G.N.) Huish, the company CSM. He was absolutely unbelievable during the course of that day and that night. Keeping everyone cheered up, keeping everyone - not that you had to keep your mind on the job - but just his verbal support, you know getting ammunition states and checking the numbers of the blokes and running around making sure everyone was accounted for. He is a person that I will always remember. (Second Lieutenant G.D.) Graham Spinkston that day, just about everyone else got a gong in the hierarchy of the company that day. I don't know how Graham Spinkston missed out - a Mentioned in Dispatches at least or a ... He did as much as lot of other people that day I thought at that particular time. Graham was very good that day too, he could have got out earlier when he was wounded. He most certainly never contemplated leaving, in fact he had to be ordered out in the end. So yes, those two people most certainly will stick most in my mind.

They're the people, what about which incident or what event sticks out most in your memory - is it September 21?

Without any shadow of a doubt. You know that to me was Vietnam, that was proper warfare. They called it a contact but it's dimensions were a lot greater than that and I think the Army itself bloody should have got a kick in the arse over that one in that they pulled out our armoured support while they left troops in the field and I think that was a nonsense. I think had we had armoured support that day the result would have been one hell of a lot better. As with our first bunker system we could have been in a very similar position with that one except for the armoured support and I think that made the whole difference in the battle that day. The North Vietnamese were at a disadvantage in that we had the air support; we had the artillery, but them being dug in and in fortified positions you know when you are in a ground war without armoured support that puts the advantage very, very greatly in their favour. You know

trying to flush someone out of a bunker system in the jungle without armoured support is an extremely difficult thing, and the army should have never, ever have withdrawn the armour before they pulled the blokes out of the bush. I am quite sure about the armour that day - we wouldn't have lost the same amount of blokes killed as we did and I think we would have got a lot more of them.

> Okay. We are going to stop this tape now because the next question will take us over it so I will stop there. This is the end of Tape One.
>
> This is Tape Two of two tapes of an interview with Wally Burford conducted by Gary McKay for Delta Four - Australian Infantry in Vietnam, recorded on the 28 March 1993 at Glen Forest in Perth, Western Australia. The topics covered on this tape are battle, relationships and the enemy.
>
> Wally, apart from the lack of armour what was the other main difference between the 21st September and the July battle?

Well it seemed, it is hard to know what is going through the North Vietnamese head of course but it seemed they were more prepared for us, they most certainly seemed to be waiting for us to a greater degree. The first one, the movements around, the way they were running around - the way Davo (Private R.B. Davis) saw one guy just running through the bush, they seemed to be a bit surprised. I suppose everyone is always surprised but just the way they ... It seemed like a bit of a set up, in that they knew that we were coming. I suppose the contacts that 11 Platoon had had in the vicinity prior to that, they most certainly would have known that we patrolling the area pretty heavily and even though, the other bunker system they, the fact that there had been a contact so close to C Company they would have been a bit prepared, but I think probably there when they heard our tanks leaving, they might have thought that the whole Australian bloody forces at that stage were leaving. But whereas these blokes there most certainly ... the volume of fire that we got to initiate the battle and the way every time we tried to go forward, the volume of fire we run into - they were very, very well prepared on that day.

> So, lots of heavy fire?

Oh, unbelievable. I thought it was a lot in the first battle we had, or the first contact but nothing compared with the second one. Just the RPGs and the grenades and oh, it was absolutely withering.

> Were you a section 2IC on that?

I was, yes.

> You mentioned before when (Private J.) Duff was killed right in the very beginning, that I think that one of the guys who was a section commander, didn't react at all well.

No, no he went to pieces.

> Why do you think that was?

Well all I think you can put it back to is lack of training. He came into our platoon from the (Q) store. As far as I know he did all his time with the battalion in the battalion store and I don't think he ... He gave all the outward appearances you know he was always saying; he can't wait for his first contact; can't wait for his first kill; he was always reading Commando comics. But, I don't think he had been through the training with the rest of the battalion. Most certainly not to the degree we had of actually being out there; he hadn't had any minor skirmishes on the way. The first one he copped was a big one. The first one he has copped was (Private J.) Jimmy Duff being killed and several other blokes up the front being wounded and he just went to pieces completely. I think you can only reflect that back to his training. As I was saying earlier, we didn't train you know people say less than a year later you commanded ten men but at least we had been training for that job the whole time - of being in battle. Whereas this particular person hadn't been trained, he had been trained to count pairs of greens and pairs of boots and organise for them to be sent out to the bush and he just never had the same depth of training as we did.

So, he was almost a reinforcement to the platoon wasn't he?

He was, most certainly he was, and on the whole the reinforcements were not trained to the same degree we were. I think we had the unfortunate incident where we killed one of our own blokes and he was a reo; and I think that reflects on the sort of training. You know at that stage, our blokes, as soon as you had a contact the first thing you do was hit the deck and then worry about it later. Apparently he just dropped to one knee or stood where he was and got hit. There was another reo also got wounded that day and it seems rather coincidental out of all the blokes that were being shot at that day - by ourselves, the two people - one person dead and one wounded were both reinforcements.

In 11 Platoon there were four killed and two of them were reinforcements.

Yes, I think that's most certainly part of it.

So, maybe we shouldn't bring our reinforcements out into the field straight away?

Oh, I think they should certainly do some bush work prior to that with some-one like a tracker platoon that are only doing local ambushing. Just getting used to what might be expected of them in country. To come from Australia into a company that had trained together- had been in battle together and just to be an extra 'bod' is a bit strange. The two blokes that got wounded in our mob that were not in the initial group but further back in my section, (Privare R.B.) Bob McBeath and (Private A.K.) Andy Batt, they were both reos. It seems a bit coincidental, as you say, as you pointed out, a lot of our reos were hit. Considering the amount of blokes who were in the country the whole time, a lot of our casualties were from the small group of reinforcements.

The enemy fire on the 21st of September was extremely heavy, how did your guys react to that - again with their fire and movement and their fire discipline?

Very well I thought. You know really good. It caught me a bit by surprise. I was under the impression that day that even though there had been contact with 11 Platoon I thought we were pretty well heading out of it, in all honesty. I heard firing up ahead and I thought it must be 11 Platoon again, I didn't realise that the front of our platoon was under fire. So I just stopped and put the hand up for the rest of the blokes behind me to stop and I looked up and everyone else in front of me in the section was running head first down the track (laughs). That was when I realised that it might be us that were in contact! So, anyway I took off and I just caught up with the last bloke and oh, the spasmodic firing that had started it, just suddenly opened up into something unreal. It all started ripping up everywhere and we went to ground. I can't remember who it was in the rear section - word came down from 'Spingo' (Second Lieutenant G.D. Spinkston) to swing my section around to the left, so I called out to the blokes to start coming around and as we started coming around we started getting a lot of fire from our immediate left. So, I called out to Spingo that there was not much sense in continuing to sweep because we just had no idea at that stage of the place where the enemy were definitely located. We knew they were up in front of course because we were in contact there too. But as I told the blokes to stop, and I said return fire if you see anything, the blokes just more or less pretty well lay there until we started receiving fire, then they started shooting back and once again I thought that the fire control was absolutely excellent. No-one seemed to be blazing away for no reason, no-one really wanted to get off the ground too much because we weren't too sure what was going on, but you know a couple of times we had to make a move forward sort of thing. So I said okay, first group go, and the others cover sort of thing - put out a bit of covering fire just while we move the blokes up and that was very controlled fire, their covering fire, so it worked very well.

What was the toughest time that you experienced that day?

Oh gee, I think when I saw (Private R.J.) Ralph Niblett. Ralph was being brought back - he was one of the gunners with 11 Platoon. Once again a bloody good friend and one of the nicest blokes. I say this not because he is dead, but he was one of the nicest blokes I have bloody met in life I think, Ralph. He come past and he was being carried on a what's-his-name. He had a hole in his chest, you know, bloody insignificant looking bastard of a thing with just a little bit of blood dripping out of it. He said,' Oh shit this hurts, Wal, shit it hurts'. Anyway he went past and I thought well it didn't look too bad, but then we heard pretty well straight away he died, but apparently he might have died and the 11 Platoon medic might have brought him back, I think might have been how it transpired. But that to me was the hardest part of it. That really brought it (home) I thought we could be in a fair bit of bother here. We already had (Private J.) Jimmy Duff down; we tried to sweep forward - we couldn't; and just the thought of what the outcome could be I was thinking was the hardest part in that. That was the one day I really thought I was dead you know I was just laying there envisaging how the word was going to be broken to my parents. You know I thought ... I could virtually see it in my mind you know the people knocking on the door at home.

After the aborted assault where 11 Platoon got a lot of casualties and the company was then told to pull back so they could do more air strikes, and it was getting dark. What was it like then?

Hectic, it was bloody hectic. You know the confusion was pretty great. We knew we were taking off. We were virtually the rear party and as we started trying to pull back, we started taking a lot of fire and we could see bloody different people flitting through the trees behind us, so we started doing fire and movement while we were trying to run backwards. Once again that day I think that's ... I was pretty sure I pegged someone myself that time but once again the confusion, you know, there was one nog that run right up behind us virtually and ... I got separated from my blokes for a while, I stopped to try and make sure there was no-one coming, next thing I ended up with 11 Platoon for a while beside (Corporal W.W.) Warren Dowell and (Private R.K.) Bob Simms and we saw a bloke bloody trotting down the track with what looked like an RPG over his shoulder, and anyway I think I was the first one to get the shot away but I think Bob Simms claimed him, but I'm pretty sure I was the first one to put one into him that day. But that was the sort of confusion, we weren't too sure even when we started gathering up in our company group, it was getting dark, we started getting hit again from the front and we knew these pricks were coming up from behind us and once again the old battle confusion becomes a bit of a problem. Where were we, where were they? Wasn't too sure where the rest of my platoon was and I sitting in my section at that stage so I just kept on running through the bush hoping some-one would spot me and call me which did happen. I think it 'Spingo' (Second Lieutenant G.D. Spinkston) called out, 'Get over here Wal'. Once again I think the confusion at that stage because when we took off we thought we were withdrawing and we ran straight into them again, and I think no-one could really work out exactly what was happening.

Was Spingo there or was it (Sergeant K.D.) Kev Philp commanding it?

Well, I can't remember 'Philpy's' (Sergeant K.D. Philp) role on that day in all honesty, I just cannot remember him ... To me he was a bit of a non-event as an NCO, Philpy. Not trying to denigrate the bloke, but (Corporal C.R.) Charlie McKenzie was acting platoon sergeant on occasions and I remember Charlie's role most certainly. But I really can't remember Kev Philp doing too much. I'm not saying ...

Was he there?

Well, I'm not too sure you know. Thinking back now as I try to go back over the years, maybe he wasn't there that day, maybe (Corporal C.R) Charlie McKenzie was, because I can remember Charlie on that day but I can't remember Philpy at all.

Was Ralph's death the saddest thing you can recall?

Oh, I think I would tie that up with both Bernie (Pengilly) and (Corporal A.C.F.) 'Tassie' Wilkinson. Tassie Wilkinson's (death) was one that hit me very hard, you know that's when I ... None of us liked (Major F.J.) Kudnig very much, but after what happened to Tassie, I think if he got killed I don't think anyone would have lost any sleep, I don't think anyone would have lost any sleep. I remember the day (Major F.J.) Kudnig went out of the bush, the word came out, 'Oh, Kudnig's gone', and I said, 'Why?' and they said, 'It doesn't look like he's coming back', and there were blokes running around the bush throwing their bush hats in the air, screaming and shouting (laughs). It was like the war had been won, the war's over sort of thing, it was equivalent to that. Everyone just went ape-shit out in the middle of the bush. There

was screaming and shouting - all because one person had departed, you know, it was ...

Why was that? Why didn't people like him?

Well, I think any commander is going to be aloof and has to be aloof, but he just seemed to ... he was just too hard. You know, some of the operational procedures through him were just absolute lunacy you know. The different times that I have mentioned earlier in the interview, the distances that he expected us to cover in a day - just silly things. Whenever we went there (CHQ) you know when we were out patrolling as a platoon group, you get a bit more casual with things like shaving and that with the rain and the bloody sweat it's hard to keep the camouflage cream on your face. Where as you get a bit of stubble we found it did darken our faces a bit better. Of course as soon as we got anywhere near company headquarters this bloody lunatic would be running around you know making everyone shave; we weren't allowed to put our hootchies up until it was virtually bloody dark, so there you are in the dark and you're making all this noise putting bloody hootchies up which is a nonsense; digging shell scrapes. Gee whiz, you know they can be a bloody handy thing at times you know, most certainly, you know a shell scrape - but not on all occasions. As soon as you start to do them there goes your silent patrolling you know, you can eat one place and go to another place to sleep. But if you have to pull out your bloody entrenching tool and start digging a hole, you're giving the whole game away. And I think it was just silly things like that, and then most certainly the (Corporal A.C.F.) 'Tassie' Wilkinson incident, because Tassie always hated (Major F.J.) Kudnig's guts. They had a huge personality clash and the way he treated Tassie that day. We knew that Tassie was very, very seriously ill. 'Spingo' (Second Lieutenant G.D. Spinkston) kept telling (Major F.J.) Kudnig that Tassie was very, very seriously ill and I think if it had been anyone except Tassie, then Kudnig might well have bloody done the right thing and had him evacuated from where we were. But I think because it was Tassie, (Major F.J.) Kudnig stuck to his guns and made him be carried out of the ambush position we were in and I don't know if it would have saved Tassie's life or not but that man's got a lot to answer for in regard to Tassie's death I believe.

With other casualties, guys like (Private J.) Duff and so on, (Private R.J.) Ralph Niblett, (Private K.M.) Kingston-Powles, Bernie (Private B.M. Pengilly); what was the reaction of the other guys around you? Were you able to observe that?

Oh yes. You know, it hit everyone pretty hard you know. Especially as I say, you know, with blokes like Ralph (Niblett), you know he was just such a bloody terribly popular bloke, you know, everyone liked him. He had been right through all the training with us. Kiwi, you know bloody (Private K.M.) Kingston-Powles he was a bit of a square peg in a round hole Kingston-Powles. Actually in a way I suppose (Major F.J.) Kudnig contributed to poor old Kiwi's death too, in that Kiwi had been Kudnig's batman and he got caught knocking off Kudnig's rations (laughs) so he got kicked out into the rifle platoon (laughs) and from there of course you know the end result was Kiwi was dead, but I wouldn't hold that one against Kudnig sort of thing. But you know yes, the deaths they kind of ... they hurt everyone. Well it was just the way we trained; the way we lived together; the way we had gone on leave together; all the blokes that had originally joined in Townsville - it was just like a huge family - it really was. And then of course, as soon as a family member dies, I don't think I would

hurt any more now my father dying than the hurt those blokes dying at that time - in all honesty.

You weren't ever wounded but you did become a casualty, how did that happen?

Oh, it was after our first battle, the whole place had been shot to shit house by the tanks the day before plus the artillery of course. Anyway the very next morning, where we had slept, we had slept right on a bunker, so everyone was pretty jumpy but we weren't too sure of the extent of the bunker system at that stage still. So, Spingo (Second Lieutenant G.D. Spinkston) asked me to take out a small clearing patrol about twenty metres around the front of our area. Anyway as we started moving out, choppers started coming in to drop out ammo I believe, and re-supply. Anyway, because everything had been shot to pieces bloody branches started falling, I just turned around to the blokes behind me and I said 'Look, jump down beside a big tree', and as I said that the big branch from the big tree I was under came straight through and hit me straight across the scone. I knew what had happened, I knew I had been pole-axed but I couldn't speak and with the noise of the choppers, everyone just saw me go down and they thought I had been nailed. So the bloody gun opened up, (laughs) (Corporal M.J.) Mick O'Sullivan (medic) comes down in his normal dash and here is a person that you know should have had more than one bloody Military Medal - Mick. But out he came and that's reassuring when you see him coming through the bush, but he came out and he wasn't too sure if I had been shot or not, you know he is asking me, 'Have you been shot?' You know all I could do was gargle and point. I must have been pretty heavily concussed at the time I think. So, anyhow it took a while to realise it had only been the bloody tree that had got me and not the nasties. Anyhow, Mick (O'Sullivan) bloody took me back into the area and he's trying to stitch up my head. And he is saying, 'Gawd, fuck Wal this cotton is rotten'. And I could feel him pulling on the scalp as he is trying to stitch up my head and 'plonk' you could hear the cotton go and I suppose he had tried about ten or twelve stitches before he said, 'Oh, look, no it's no good I'll just have to stick a bandage across it and get you back on the chopper'. And I am pretty sure it was the same chopper that caused me the smack on the scone that eventually took me out sort of thing. So back to camp I went and I had the head stitched up at the hospital back at Vung Tau, er, Nui Dat.

So you went back to the Field Ambulance?

Yes.

What was it like being back out of the jungle with all your mates still out in the field?

Well it was a bit of a hollow feeling but at that stage you know as I say, it was after our first big battle and I think I really wanted to be back out there with them. I kind of felt cut adrift because they kicked me out of the hospital in the afternoon which was crazy I think you know in retrospect now, I really haven't got much recollection of the next couple of days. I remember going down on my bunk; I remember (Captain P.J.) Peter Schuman coming down at one stage and he must have been a bit concerned because he took interest saying, 'Are you okay Wal, are you okay?' I have images laying on the bunk virtually for a couple of days, it would have been near on a couple of days, anyway I am not really all that too sure what happened around me and finally

I got roused up by the bloody Kiwis. The Kiwis in Victor Company were down in the lines next to ours and they had gone on leave, so their rear party had come down to look for people to help them drink all the bloody grog they had knocked off from their Officers' Mess and I was laying there so they bloody co-opted me. So, down to there I went and so I spent the next two days after that virtually drunk out of my brain with these Kiwis. In the end I was looking forward to getting back in the bush.

Were there any funny times when you were out on patrol?

Oh, not sort of instances so much that stick so much terribly in mind, but just the different one-liners that you can't recall. There was always a lot of humour in the bush and I think one of the funniest things that happened in the bush was when in the first bunker system, we had this bloke (Private W.T.) 'Dirty Douglass' in 10 Platoon and he was due to get out. He was in the National Service intake one or two ahead of myself. Anyway, it was his last day in the bush effectively, and I can still bloody remember, we were laying up where we were, everyone was shooting and shouting, you could hear 'Dirty' screaming out from the 10 Platoon lines, 'The cunts have got me, one day left in the fucking bush and the bastards have got me!' and that to me, you know, that broke everyone up. The seriousness at that stage and here is 'Dirty' screaming out through the bush that's (laughs) a humorous incident that will stay. 'They've got me again the bastards, bloody one day, one day in the bush!' And you could hear it, he would have carried on for about five minutes before someone put a gag on him. So, I thought that was bloody extremely humorous. I think that would be the one incident that actually in a very serious situation everyone stopping to have a bloody giggle, you know that's a pretty rare thing you know, everyone bloody being shot at and shooting back. For everyone virtually en masse to kind of look at each other and start smiling and kind of giggling sort of thing.

What do reckon you learnt most from your time in Vietnam?

Gee, tough one. I think most certainly it changed me, I think most certainly emotionally as I say you know, I think you most certainly build a cocoon because of the blokes that die up there. I think you build a cocoon over your feelings to a fair degree. I think as far as life is concerned, you know that's most taught ... most certainly taught me that. That people who die and how to cope with it and why and when that sort of thing does happen, I think the meaning of team spirit I think you know when we went back to Sydney for the Welcome Home Parade (1987) - it was like going back in a time warp. You know you forget about the camaraderie, you kind of build it up in your mind and you don't know whether it still exists but you see those blokes. You know some of those blokes I hadn't seen for twenty years and it was just like you had seen them yesterday. You know, see you most certainly learnt how to live as a a member of a team of people that are just stuck together for a particular reason. That to me would be probably the highlight of the Army you know that you can see blokes twenty years later and it was just like yesterday, it was just a fantastic feeling I think if people haven't been in that position they can never understand what I am talking about.

I think how to control your fear, you know. Fear is a bloody invidious thing you know, it's a bit like a toothache. When you're frightened you know all about it, but five minutes afterwards, it's pretty hard to remember what being frightened is like.

But when you have been frightened and had the fear creep through your body and know that you have still done what was required of you - that's the sort of thing that you learn about yourself that you could not learn in very many other environments - ever.

What was sort of leader was your platoon commander?

Oh, Spingo (Second Lieutenant G.D. Spinkston) was I think very, very much liked amongst the blokes. He wasn't a dictator; he seemed to have the respect of the blokes. You know some blokes really had to work at you know being a boss, where as Spingo seemed to be pretty laid back, pretty relaxed and he had a good rapport with all the blokes; he was a bloke I think that you know, people just took for granted you know, he's the boss and what he said went. I don't think he ever had too many arguments when he asked them to do something. I think you know he could be the epitome of what you would expect in the Army to have as a platoon commander. I don't think you could do any better.

Was he easy to talk to?

Oh, extremely, most certainly extremely easy to talk to. If you had a problem of any sort you could go and have a chat to him. If you wanted to discuss tactics or you could say you're going on this particular bearing or something, if you look at the map and you think oh no, 'What about this re-entrant here, what about we skirt around that?', or whatever. He was always available to listen, you know he wasn't a hard or closed-minded person in that he could always be approached; you could always make a suggestion to him and you know he was very, very good. He was very, very well thought of.

What sort of things do you reckon that soldiers are looking for from their officers?

Well, I think some of the traits I just mentioned about Spingo I think you know. The person that ... although you know he's the boss, you know at the same time you can talk to him; you know what he says is common sense. I think we were extremely privileged in our company - as mentioned earlier - in the quality of officers we had. I saw some of the other officers around that didn't really impress me too much, I know there was one what's-his-name, (Lieutenant G.D.) Bryant; after Spingo got wounded, this bloke came in as our temporary platoon commander and to me he just seemed like an absolute goose. But, once again I don't know what his training record was as far as … I think it was Garry Bryant, but everyone just virtually treated him, well not with contempt, but no-one really seemed to take any notice of him you know.

Is this because he was an outsider?

Well, possibly, but then when (Major J.H.) Jerry Taylor came in he was most certainly an outsider but you know he had the whole company behind him in a very, very short period of time, so..

Why do reckon that was?

What, Jerry?

Mmmm.

I just think, just the first day he came around. He used to carry an SLR, which I think kind of brought him to notice; he just seemed so relaxed; he came over and talked to everyone in the company within the first two days of being there. We seemed to cut out the bull shit immediately, you know, this having to bloody shave because you're a soldier and you're supposed to shave every day; and not that anyone got untidy, but just that it was that little relaxation. When he came through the bush everyone kind of looked forward to seeing him and saying hello. Where as when (Major F.J.) Kudnig was going to come through the bush every one was trying to scarper, it was the only time people used to volunteer to go out on sentry duty because they didn't particularly want to clap eyes on the bloke.

What sort of things made you feel good when you were in Vietnam?

Oh, I think most certainly the comedy, you know the times when you were on leave with the blokes was most certainly the highlights. Just being a close knit member of a close knit group you know, and you take that from section to platoon, and most certainly to our company. As I say all the blokes in the company that we went away with even though you would go kind of probably weeks at times without really seeing the others. But as soon as you have a company maintdem or whatever, all the blokes from the platoons would intermingle and it was just, it was just a big family atmosphere you know, it was actually fantastic.

What sort of things pissed you off?

Well, I think the thing that pissed me off the most about Vietnam, or the two things. One, that I recognised at the time and that was when the withdrawal had been announced, we knew Delta Company was staying behind; they asked us blokes you know did we want to soldier on in Vietnam, but they had cut down our term of National Service to18 months, so we could go home. Most of us opted to go home, but then we were just stuck in Support Company lines in Vung Tau. And I don't know it was three or four weeks and it just seemed so senseless and needless. Once it was announced - the withdrawal - we should have been somehow started on our way back at that stage rather than the way they eventually did it - just one day you're in bloody Vietnam and the day ... night before I left Vietnam, I had to do a gun picket down the beach. I was gun commander down the beach, and you go from that one night to the following night you're virtually sitting at the kitchen table at home with your folks. And it just seemed you know, in retrospect it was just an unreal way to treat people. And the Army didn't want to know you. We would turn up after that at Karrakatta (Barracks) to pick up our pay. You get the bloody pogos from there that have never heard a shot in anger trying to tell you you have got to go and mow the lawn and paint rocks white and every one was just telling them to get fucked and walking off sort of thing. And just the different attitude, you know the time that went into us to get us up to Vietnam and then there was the way that no-one wanted to know us you know even in the Army level, we had just virtually become a pain in the arse to the Army and I think you know there should have been some sort of wind down period - I know at the time we all wanted to get back to Perth and that, but I think you know in retrospect,

we shouldn't have come straight back home as I say, 24 hours gap between what you're living up there ... We learnt to live like animals and fight like animals and behave like animals, and you know, it was animal behaviour a lot of the time. You know, I seen blokes scholling bloody cans of their own urine and that was all bloody part and parcel of the ball game. Bloody blokes sitting out with a knife and fork eating someone else's chunder; you know that was just the way we behaved up there because it was an animalistic sort of experience and to be able to try and transplant that back to twentieth century one day later is just not possible.

Maybe there is a lot to be said for the trip back on the boat?

Oh, for sure, I think in retrospect that is what should have happened, you know no-one should have been brought home the way we were you know. Most certainly, not blokes that lived in the environment we had - in the combat environment - that we had, that was a nonsense. I think the blokes that came back on the boat had a huge advantage on us as far as settling back into a normal lifestyle.

If we can go back to when you first joined your platoon, did it take you long to settle in?

No, I don't think so because most of the section commanders that were running our corps training were from Delta Company proper. We had down ... to the boozer we had a fair bit to do with the blokes that were in Delta Company proper. We knew that we were going into Delta Company and virtually it was ... I think that is where the family began to start even at that stage, even though we were very much the new chums, the other blokes hadn't been in Delta Company terribly long either - most of them. Even the blokes that actually were up there training with Delta Company, and they knew that we were going to be their reinforcements and there is an acceptance straight away. So, by the time we got into our platoons, you know there was so many of us did the corps training, I think there was something like ten or twelve blokes came into our platoon, well that's over a third of the number came straight from corps training so you knew a good group of the blokes intimately; you knew the other blokes from the Mess; and the boozer and on leave sort of thing anyway; so it wasn't any trouble at all joining in at that stage.

I would like to talk about the enemy now, what did you think of the enemy?

Well at times he frightened shit out of me, but you know the whole thing was I wanted to see him; I wanted to kill him - in all honesty, you know, that is what we had gone up there to do. Everyone talked about their first kill; and everyone thought about their first kill and what it would be like to kill them and that is what we wanted to do. At different times though, I noted when I saw the first body; the first bloke that (Private J.M) Johnny Lawton got, I saw him. Ten Platoon had already dug a hole by the time we got there after that contact and they had this bloody nog in the bottom of the grave and I went for a walk and had a look at him, and I tried to feel a bit of compassion and I thought, oh, gee whiz, you know. To me they were just ... it's like bloody shooting dogs or cows or what ever. You didn't really assimilate them as being a human being - well I most certainly didn't anyway. I didn't really dwell too much on what they might be like in bloody personal or private life you know, whether they had mums or dads or daughters or what ever, it really didn't concern me at all you know.

The job was there - we wanted to kill them. When we heard, you know, 10 Platoon's got a kill, everyone was ecstatic about it. When we heard 11 Platoon has got a kill, everyone was ecstatic about it. You know that was what we had been sent there for and that's what we were trying to do and that's what we wanted to do and when we heard about it we were very, very happy.

Were the enemy like you imagined they would be, before you left for Vietnam?

No quite probably not, because we had gone through this Viet Cong syndrome where you know, a lot of our training was based around the VC which you know was virtually the old cut lunch cowboy. We never saw that, you know, just about everything we bumped into up there was North Vietnamese Army. They were well trained; well armed; well uniformed; they looked bloody fit; they seemed very disciplined. So, in that respect, yes, I would have thought you know, like the first kill we got was a VC. Well, he was operating out of a VC bunker system anyway, that is like ... compare that bloody bunker system with the bamboo tables and chairs on top compared with the next two we hit and you could tell the difference between what might be a VC unit and what was a North Vietnamese unit and so, in that respect, most certainly they were different. I have seen on TV since, documentaries of the Viet Minh and the French conflict. I thought some of those films there, they obviously had them you know at the time, they should have been shown to us to make us a bit more prepared - the fact that we were actually pulling on a proper army not just a bunch of guerillas to a degree. But, once again I suppose, a lot of those things, even though they had them in the archives they possibly never thought them relevant at the time but, the fact that where ever we went - we bumped into NVA I think was very significant that we didn't really concentrate on that so much in our training.

Did you hate the enemy?

I don't think hate - I think just wanted to see them dead. As I say you kind of ... No, I didn't hate them, even when Ralph was dead you know, I suppose if you actually saw the bloke that shot Ralph, you would probably hate that individual - but I didn't see that sort of thing. You just want to see them dead and not for hatred just because you're there to kill them and you wanted to see them dead.

How do you think you would react now if you ran into one?

Oh, I think time has gone by, I don't think that would faze me a great deal, as I say at the time we were there to kill them; they were obviously going to try and kill us - that's part of their role. I don't think, like a lot of the old Diggers, I can understand from the POW days, how they could have a built in hatred, but like my old man now, he doesn't hate the Japs - I don't think he ever hated them then, I don't think most certainly he wouldn't now. I deal with them a fair bit with the work I do, and I have to go around and see them quite often and all that sort of business - Vietnamese. And even though of course, they are not the same blokes we fought - there is probably the sons and bloody daughters a lot of them, but I most certainly don't hold any long term grudge, no.

Did you ever feel sorry for the enemy?

No, no I never ever felt sorry for him. As I say, I just wanted to see him dead you know, dead was the end result, and I was more than happy to see them dead.

Do you think they were good fighters?

Oh, extremely yes, for sure. I think though some ways they did it tough in that we went up there we knew we were going up there for a maximum of twelve months. When they came down from the north, most of them came down and it was virtually a life sentence for a lot of them and to be able to accept that sort of situation, you have got to be tough.

At the time that you went to Vietnam Wally, the anti- Vietnam protesters were at their peak - probably. How did that affect you?

Well, I never saw any of it in all honesty Gary, you know. Perth, I suppose was a bit of a backwater in that. I had read about them but it had never really worried me a great deal; I just never actually saw it close up; I was never in a position to be called a baby killer or anything like that, which you know subsequently I have heard that other blokes (over) in the eastern states had during their parades there they had red paint thrown at them. Occasionally up at Townsville, the local students would throw a can of paint on the thing out the front of Lavarack Barracks, but even in Townsville when we were doing our march through town and all that sort of business, we didn't really come into any contact to hard core anti-war groups. So it never worried me.

What about when you came back?

I think when I came back, once again the anti-war movement kind of, I never really run into anyone from there, but once again as I say probably comes from Perth's isolation to a degree. I think just the blase way people treated you. You know yourself, you have been up there; you have done a hard job; you ... As I said earlier, you live like mongrel dogs; we had fought; we had died. I thought myself I was going to die, and then, my mates that I came back to, you know blokes that I had been through school with and known - I just couldn't really relate to them when I came back. As I explained earlier in the interview also, the last thing virtually before getting called up was I was in the State hockey team - that was going to be my ... well that was my ambition at that stage to play for Australia. I still think I probably would have done because that was my whole life, sport at that time. When I came back, that was just gone you know, I tried to play again but I think I turned up at one training session and I thought this is not real, you know in comparison with the life that I had been living. I moved out of home, my folks were absolutely fantastic the way they accepted my idiosyncrasies at that stage. A bloke did some strange things. I know the old man worked at the *West Australian* newspaper and he used to come home around two o'clock in the morning. At one stage he came in and he woke me up under the bed. I was under the bed, I was having a sly smoke under the bed! Just things like never remembering to flush the dunny; but I knew I was putting a strain on. The old man would come home, there could be myself on my own passed out. I might not come home for days or I could come home with eight or nine blokes and they would all be bloody camped everywhere all through the house. My folks were absolutely fantastic, but I realised very quickly that you know, I couldn't put them through that sort of thing, so I moved into a flat with other army mates and spent twelve months there.

And that to me was the de-winding period and that was the therapy for the four of us in that flat and plus blokes like (Corporal M.J.) Mick O'Sullivan who came back with the what's-his-name. We had regular get-togethers; regular booze-ups and alcohol became a big part of my way of life for the first couple of years. Most certainly, that first year when we were living in the flat. But that was our way of de-winding, you know winding down at that stage. There was no such thing as psychological counselling or any bloody thing like that at the time. I suppose we were all pretty nutsy, but we were nutsy because we were living in the environment that we couldn't relate to anyone else that we knew before we went into that environment. As I say, my mates from that stage, I still see them on occasions and that and have a drink, but all my mates at that stage really none of them are my mates now. I still count as my mates people I have met since, and blokes from the Army at that time; you know the blokes in the flat, we have still bloody have regular get-togethers - I'll be seeing a couple of them this afternoon. My very good mates from before the Army are virtually you know non-entities to myself now.

Wally, when you look back have you got any regrets?

Oh, the obvious regret is the blokes we had killed up there, you know, what sort of people they could have been. Bloody blokes like Bernie (Pengilly), bloody Ralph (Niblett). That to me is the regrettable part. We were lucky we didn't have any mine incidents with blokes with legs or anything blown off. So, no, most of the wounded I have heard about have recuperated to different degrees. Most of our blokes that got wounded up there, but not the blokes who were killed of course, no. I had the experience of meeting Ralph's folks the last time I went over to Canberra last October. They were just sitting there with another mate (Private M.J.) Mick Gilpin who was in 10 Platoon and company headquarters up there and we were just sitting in the RSL there having a drink and Mick saw a woman walk past with 'Niblett' (indicates a name tag). He said, 'That's Ralph's mum', and I just broke down on the spot. You know, I really did, anyway I followed them up and oh, that got to me. It was something that I wanted to do for a long, long time. I chased up Bernie's dad and had a chat to him, but Ralph's folks I had always wanted to meet and that gave me the opportunity to say, yes … That was immense for myself that day.

When you look back on Australia's involvement in Vietnam, we had 519 deaths, do you reckon it was worth it?

Well at the time, we did it once again Gary, without putting a lot of thought into the worth of it. We were told we were going to fight communists. It was made quite clear to us that it wasn't a civil war it was you know it was communist insurgency that we were fighting. And I still think you know, the old 'Domino Theory' that they reckon has been shot in the arse since Vietnam that was the worry at the time. You know, communism was on the march through south-east Asia. And I still think to a degree the involvement in Vietnam helped stop it. You know they say now it probably wouldn't have happened, but you go to places like Malaya, Borneo, Singapore where there was most certainly a fair degree of communist agitation at that time. They gave those places longer to build up their own governments; to make sure there couldn't be a threat because virtually Russia, China and virtually the whole of communism in south-east Asia had to put all their bickies in one barrel - and that barrel was Vietnam. And I think without Vietnam I think there most certainly could have been a lot higher

degrees of conflict in south-east Asia. So, in that degree yes, I think we possibly did accomplish something. The end result of course you know, you pull out and leave the South Vietnamese there. They didn't last, oh they lasted as long as anyone expected them to. No-one really admired them or respected them while we were up there. In that sort of form it makes blokes like Ralph (Niblett) and ... I just can't myself believe that those blokes were just wasted for no bloody reason, I really can't. I like to think that by being in Vietnam we did help them stem the expansion of communism at that time.

Wal, is there anything in your notes there that I haven't covered that you would have liked me to have asked you? Is there anything else you would like to add?

Well just a few things, most certainly the pay rates that we were paid you know like we never went away as mercenaries but I know that at the time I was getting paid more than the Crown Law Department as a junior clerk than what I got paid as a rifleman in Vietnam. In fact the Crown Law department made up my pay so I didn't actually lose money out of it, but it's a nonsense that - that a bloke can be a junior clerk in a government department earns more than a bloke that is in the bush. Bloody putting his life on the line. Also the silly way the Army structured their pay. You would have the bloody water tanker driver back at Nui Dat on Group 11, because his skills are supposed to be higher than the bloke who is doing the bush bashing in the fighting war! I think you know if you're going to put people out there - the people that are most likely to die should get the bloody danger money and should get paid better than what we were. We were really I suppose that was the bulk of the people in Vietnam so it's a good way to cut costs in that the biggest majority of blokes are on the lower pay scale. But, when you have a truck driver or a bloke sitting in an orderly room earning you know Group 11. I had a mate that worked in the Post Office and he was Group 22 or something! Working in the Post Office at Vung Tau. Well that's a nonsense, his pay scale had been much higher than mine - the life I was living. He was off at four o'clock every night; he had every weekend off; we were working seven days a week - 24 hours a day and I suppose you can't really count 24 hours because you did sleep for about four or five, but the fact that they were paid higher to me was an absolute nonsense. The other thing is also, that I will explain that I mentioned earlier, very jewy as far as equipment and that. You see school cadets and that now running around in camouflage greens, at that stage when we were doing ... in a jungle war we should have been the ones that had camouflage greens. Things like night scopes - they were available at the time. I remember we had one in a ambush position once and they were absolutely brilliant at night but of course we were told when it came out, it was $7000 or something this night scope cost, and if we lost it everyone's butt was going to be kicked and the shit would hit the fan. That shouldn't be a consideration when you can be in a battle where thousands of rounds of artillery are fired, yet they worry about one night scope! Every platoon should have a night scope, you shouldn't be in ambush position without them. So, little things like that, yes, most certainly should have been tidied up.

If I can just go back to one thing. Delta Company did a lot of six week patrols.

Yes, too long. Too long.

Why do you say that?

Because what I would believe in that case you can't stay switched on for that period of time. If you're not having contact; you're not finding regular sign of the enemy, everyone starts getting blase; you start getting a bit too casual; you start making a little bit more noise at night; when you're patrolling you're not as alert. A patrol of three weeks means you can keep your mind on the job the whole time. Six weeks - with the exhaustion you get, as I say when you're patrolling in jungle all day, it's very debilitating in that you're sweating, it's a lot of physical work; you're not having your sleep, even though the rations are okay of course, you're not having most certainly what you would call a first class menu with green vegetables and all the stuff you need for stamina. Your nights - where you're laying awake a lot. Operating in the rain, the rain keeps you awake and you're out on sentry and you have got to come back and try and get to sleep. You're operating on exhaustion a fair bit and trying to do that long on the three (sic - six) weeks means that you do start to lose your sharp edge. And you start to lose your sharp edge, then you can start losing blokes. So, patrols should be most certainly, have been of a lower period of time or a shorter period of time.

Did you ever take R & R?

No, it was offered to me but I knew I was coming back shortly, so I said at that stage I said no and I saved the dough.

Did you ever feel that you needed it (R&R)?

Oh, I think that if we had stayed there longer most certainly. You know if we had stayed operational I most certainly would have taken (R & R) for a break. Provided once again you could tee it up with one of your mates at that time but, yes, for I think that's an essential thing - to get right away from it. As I say I knocked it back but it was offered to me just before or after the withdrawal was announced - we were out in the bush actually at the time and it seemed to be a bit of a silly time to offer a bloke R & R.

Do you think those R & C's down in Vung Tau were a good thing?

Oh, sensational! (laughs). Oh yes!

Is that a battery re-charger?

Oh, of course it is. It's a pressure relief in that for you know most of the blokes. You can't put a blanket across everyone, but most certainly in all the blokes that I knew, you just virtually blew your self out of the water for a couple of days, you know you didn't worry about the war. All you worried about was getting it up and how many times and how much piss you could drink. You got away from the war for a short period of time even though in Vung Tau still there was always you were conscious of it you know. There's people with weapons and ... You know it was obviously ... you're on leave in a town that's been very heavily affected by a war, but at the same time, just the fact that you could drink and you could go to sleep and you didn't have to get up and do gun duties - just silly things like that that just let you get away from that war and that was extremely important.

Okay, well I think that about wraps it up Wal, and thanks very much.

Thank you.