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INTERVIEWEE: Warren Dowell

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This is Tape One of two tapes of an interview with Warren Dowell recorded by Gary McKay for Delta Four - Australian Infantrymen at War. Recorded on 16 June1993 at Merrimac, Queensland. The topics covered on this tape are training, National Servicemen, deployment, battle and casualties.

Warren, the first question is why did you join the Army?

I joined the Army really to get away from the environment I was living in. I had grown up in a broken family and moved with my mother to Sydney, first to Redfern, very early, and from Redfern we made a big leap forward to Liverpool; and as I grew up as a teenager I found that Liverpool was alive with petty crime (in which I became involved) and things like that and I could see I was going nowhere there. I had a couple of friends whose dads were in the Army and they suggested that I get away from the whole thing and join the Army.

So, how old were you when you enlisted?

Seventeen.

You enlisted in?

In Brisbane. I left home at about 16 years and 10 months because my mother wouldn't sign the papers (for the Army) and I went to find my father who I hadn't seen for probably about 10 years. Once I found him I convinced him of what I wanted to do and he signed the papers for me and away I went.

That was in 1969. The Vietnam War was well in its seventh year of involvement for Australians with a couple of years with the Training Teams and the battalions in '65. Did you think anything about Vietnam before you actually signed Up?

In fact in my younger days in Sydney before I joined I knew quite a bit about the anti-war movement because I used to go down to The Domain every Sunday, to listen to - I think her name was 'Old Rita' - and the wags that used to get down there, and I used to listen to them up on their soap boxes and all that; and I found that the anti-war movement was where all the young girls used to be so I thought this was alright. So my involvement with the anti-war movement was because that’s where the girls were and where I needed to be. And that was how it started, with girls.

So, you enlisted in Brisbane and you went down to Kapooka. What do you remember most about Kapooka?

Kapooka was a real shock I can tell you. Being a little bit of a smartie as I was in my younger days, coming up against discipline like it was down there was really an eye-opener to me. I tried to buck the system down there a couple of times and it just didn't work. Kapooka was probably the best thing that ever happened to me. It dragged me into line in a lot of ways, and while I hated it and I shudder very time people mention it, it probably was the start of a good time for me.

You didn't ever feel like chucking it in?

I did. But the fear of saying 'No, I've had enough' was more than the fear of going forward with it. I didn't want to fail.

Or give the instructors the satisfaction?

Or give the instructors the satisfaction.

You did you 12 weeks or so of 'rookies'. Did you want to go to Infantry and did you elect to go to Infantry?

You had three choices to join any Corps you liked and I went 'Infantry', 'Infantry' and 'Infantry'. I got Infantry. That is the only Corps I wanted to be in.

Any reason why?

I think having a look at the instructors that were down there at the time I thought that they were very, very good. They were Infantry Corps in the main and I think just from things I had been told and things I saw, Infantry was the Army and the rest of them were all just there to help out.

So that standard of the instructors had a big influence?

Yes it did. My Platoon Sergeant at Kapooka, in fact, he was a corporal when I first arrived, Jerry Astin his name was, he ended up being a platoon sergeant in 2 RAR and I met him on the (HMAS) *Sydney* - on the change over - when we were preparing to get on to the Chinooks, he was getting off the Chinooks (after flying out from Nui Dat). He said, 'Good to see that you have made it'. Not made it to go to Vietnam, but just made it that far in the Army.

You did your IET (Initial Employment Training) training - where?

Ingleburn, in the old lines.

What do you remember most about Ingleburn?

Ingleburn was in a lot of ways a bit of a let-down from Kapooka where things were on the go all the time and it was tough. When I got to Ingleburn there was a lot of slack time and a lot more indoctrination in lessons, not doing things - but in listening to things. Plus, my training there was interrupted. We changed over platoon sergeants half way through and I ended up getting Bob Buick who won a MM in Long Tan, so our training was a little bit disjointed and that sort of thing. I didn't think the training was as good as I got in Kapooka in fact. I didn't really like my platoon commander, who ended up being a company commander years later on in 2 RAR, and some of the things went on there - we would go to a range practice and the staff seemed a little more interested in playing cards and taking a few dollars off us than they were in training us. In a lot of ways it was a let-down to me.

From Ingleburn where did you go then?

From Ingleburn I got sent to 4 RAR as Aust Component, so I went to Enoggera in to the very old wooden-hutted (Gallipoli) Lines. 4 RAR was still away and because of my age (17) that is where I went. I ended up going into the holding Company for 4 RAR Aust Component. I was happy going to 4 RAR as it was Brisbane based battalion, so I was going back to Brisbane.

That would have been 1969?

Yes.

That would have been July/August I guess.

About that time.

You look back on this basic training you did and then what subsequently happened to you on operations, was the basic training tough enough?

The basic training I did at Ingleburn?

Yes, and Kapooka.

Well, the Kapooka training is different from the basic training, to Infantry training, because they are trying to make you into part of a team, to take you away from being a civilian and to mould you into the way they want you to be and to think. In Ingleburn, during my time, they didn't seem to be as interested, unfortunately, and having said that I have conducted infantry training in the battalions, both 4 and 6, at the Infantry Centre and I know the standard has got a lot better. I think we just had a bad run at it.

You went to the Aust Component of 4 RAR. Were they inVietnam?

Still in Vietnam and once they got home, the blokes only stayed at Enoggera for a very limited time and they all went on leave except for the National Servicemen who were going to get out. There was half a dozen National Servicemen who were ready to get out; they stayed with us. I only spent a short time in the holding platoon until everyone arrived home and then I was allocated Delta Company, in fact, and that is where I stayed.

And then up to Townsville?

Yes. Because I didn't have enough time up to take Christmas leave the Battalion went on Christmas leave and those that didn't have any leave (like me) went by bus to Townsville and we waited up there for the battalion to re-form. It was a long trip.

So, for all that time you were a Delta Company 4 RAR man?

Yes.

In 1970 the Battalion comes back from its leave and starts working up. Would you talk about getting rank because you were quite young and you were in a brand

new company, which I imagine wasn't fully manned. How did all this come about?

Well, in the period while the Battalion was still in Brisbane and trying to come up with more people and that one of the CSMs took a liking to me, Jesse James, and because they must have been looking to the future and knew that there was a lot of National Servicemen getting out, they started running the subjects A, B and C, Jesse James put me in for Subject A to start with. At a very young age; I wouldn't have been any more than six months out of Corps training. I was lucky, I passed that, and then I went on to pass the other promotion subjects, and I got promoted. I think it was a case of I had done enough to warrant promotion but I was only promoted temporary so if things went wrong they could reduce me.

Were you a full corporal or a lance corporal?

Full corporal.

Did you spend any time as a lance jack?

Yes. I spent all of six weeks as a lance corporal. How that come about was that I was promoted to lance corporal about a week before (Corporal D. K.) Daryl Jenkin and I went on a PTI course down at Manly, North Head. Daryl and I both got through that and came back to the battalion and then I spent another week in the battalion and then the next thing I know myself and (Private D. G.) "Beetles" Bayliss got fronted to the company commander, Captain (J.D.) McAloney who was the Acting Company Commander and I thought, 'hello', because 'Beetles' was a private and I was a lance corporal and I thought, 'Hello, I'm going to get stripped here and "Beetles" is going to get my stripe', but no, we were marched in and 'Beetles' got promoted to lance corporal and I got promoted to full corporal, so my time as a lance corporal - the first time - was very short.

Was it a bit scary. I mean you were 18 or 19 years of age and you were a full corporal?

Yes it was scary.

Because you are in there with guys who are done Borneo and one tour of Vietnam and are Corporals. How did you handle that?

Some of it was my own self-confidence and a little bit of bluff. Not so much bluff, but a little bit more than self-confidence pushed me through. Yes, it was scary because the other Reg Section Commanders, as you said, 'Skinny' Willie (Corporal J. M. Williams) and (Corporal R. V.) 'Sludge' McGahan and all those sorts of characters; (Corporal D. K.) Daryl Jenkin - they had all done at least one tour, if not Borneo as well as Vietnam already. They helped me in some ways, but in a lot of ways it was sink or swim, and it took a bit of growing up quickly to get through, and in a lot of cases early on I didn't think I succeeded as good as I should have. One bloke that helped and pushed me along was (Sergeant K. B.) Ken 'Dusty' Miller. Dusty had been to Borneo and Vietnam when I joined 4 RAR and he is a very good friend.

You played a lot of sport to didn't you - what sort of sports?

Mainly stuck to Rugby Union and a little bit of Rugby League, but Rugby Union in the battalion, and also outside with the different Clubs like Teachers. Bruce Kannon who played for Queensland was Teachers captain/coach..

Did this help you in any way?

Yes. Being in a team sport I think did help me a lot. You learn to be part of a team that your needs are not always the case, and I think it did help me in my Army career, and that is why I have always insisted on my daughter playing a team sport first. You can go on to become the world's greatest golfer or whatever later on, but you have got to play a team sport first.

You are now in Delta Company and you get your second hook and you are allocated to 11 Platoon?

Yes.

The Platoon starts building around you.

What happened prior to that; the Platoon was building but prior to that the Company Commander got myself, (Corporal) 'Sludge' McGahan and (Corporal) John Williams and said that we had IET people (National Servicemen) coming straight into the Battalion and we had been allocated a certain amount. We were told to go down to the training company, which I think was Charlie Company in those days, and you will train - the three of you - will train the IETs who will then join the Company and go overseas with us. So I was given a complete section of National Servicemen to train. The reason why I was there too I think was to give me more experience too. There were two old heads there and myself and it was to give me experience too. We trained them and and then they joined the Company.

Did you find going over those lessons and subjects of benefit to you?

Yes. Once again, that was part of the deal too. Not only was I giving guidance and training to the blokes, but I was getting it myself and relearning it as I went to shape me up as well.

So 11 Platoon forms. When you look back on all the training that the Company did, going to High Range, Shoalwater Bay and Canungra, do you think it was well-prepared?

In the whole it was. Our Company Commander (Major F. J. Kudnig) was extremely tough on us, physically and mentally, and pushed us quite a bit, but I think it was this tough training that got us through a lot of trouble once we got into country and into contacts. I might not have liked the man, but when I look back he was certainly a big influence on the Company. We were very,very fit, which is a must for infantry soldiers.

When you say toughness?

Physically it was tough on us and he pushed us to the limit as far as doing long route marches and nine-milers and that sort of thing, and he made it tough on us mentally by putting us up against time and space and pushing us that way.

Do you think you were well-prepared for Vietnam as a section commander?

I was probably as well-trained as I could be made, that is learning drills and what to do, but I don't think I was mentally prepared. You can do a lot of training with blanks and that sort of thing, but I wasn't really mentally prepared or mentally tough enough when I got there. That goes along with... we used to do a week out at High Range; two days break in Lavarack Barracks, and then we started to get four weeks out and a week in, but you knew that at the end of those four weeks or week you were going to come back to camp and have a couple of days in camp and get drunk and carry on. Where when you got into country that break wasn't there as much, you were always 'in country' and I found the twelve months was a long time.

When you look back on it, do you think that the training that we did was either a waste of time or we should have done more of?

I would have liked to have seen more live-firing exercises and more calling in of artillery and that sort of thing. If I remember correctly it was only once we got in country that my Platoon Commander actually started, probably because training restrictions were lifted off him, he actually started pushing us through doing dry DFs (Defensive Fire) and then live DFs. I am pretty sure that he was the only Platoon Commander that was doing that, and that is the sort of thing that section commanders have got to know.

Especially in counter-revolutionary warfare I guess.

It really comes down in a lot of ways to being a section commander's war.

So most of the training was search and destroy operations, cordon and search and all those sort of things. The Battalion goes down to Canungra - what did you think of Canungra?

It was a hell hole. I hated it. It was very tough and in fact there were times there that I thought if it lasted another week I wouldn't have been able to hack it. I really did. The rain and the terrain and the time pressure that was put on you, if it would have lasted another week I would have said 'that's enough for me.'

What about the pressure from the guys with the green and yellow armbands - the JTC Staff?

I thought we were under a little bit more pressure than most. First of all, we had a new Platoon Commander but also our Company Commander didn't seem to get on with the DS (Directing Staff).

Your platoon commander has just arrived.

Yes, but not so much that, because we the staff, were there to start with and the platoon commander could work his way in under the guidance of the platoon sergeant. I thought we were under a little bit of pressure from the hierarchy (DS) too, because our company commander didn't get on real well with different people and that pressure was (then) put on to us. But having said that, I can remember a company attack that was planned and we were the only company that got into position, and the other companies said they weren't moving any further, but Delta Company got there. Now I had personal pressure put on me because, being young they really wanted to know what I could do, because they weren't going to let me loose over there with a section of men unless they thought that I could do it. As I said before, I thought if it went another week I would have pulled out. I had had enough, but we all got through it.

> I ask people what is so special about Canungra and they say that once you got through Canungra you felt as though you had actually graduated and were ready to go. Did you feel like that?

Without a doubt. I felt it was the biggest hurdle I had to get over, but people were still being asked not to attend the 'party' between then and the time we got on the boat. In fact I lost my platoon commander that way - my first platoon commander. For all sorts of reasons he never made the grade early on and away he went. That was why we had a new platoon commander posted to join us at J.T.C.

> You mention the company attack - anything else stick in you mind about Canungra?

No. It was pretty tough, but very good, hard training.

> Do you think a 'Canungra', and I use a generic word there, is the sort of thing that Units should go through before they go off the war?

Yes.

> Having outsiders look at you?

Yes. I think so. Some of the points that they bought up were good; some I didn't agree with, but I still think you do need something like canungra with trained DS assessing you. We all learned and re-learned things from Canungra.

> You mentioned live-firing as something that you might look back on to train better for fighting in jungle. Anything else pop out?

No, the live-firing was the main one that I think we need to do more of, because you can train and train and train with blanks and simulators going off, but as soon as you know that someone is actually firing back at you and that it is for real, that old adrenalin gets going. Adrenalin is a strange drug and it can really put you on a high while you are doing things but then once everything is finished it makes you that tired it is not funny. You have to train to overcome that tiredness and the only way is by doing live firing and I am talking battle inoculation. Where you can't get blokes to move because they can't hear you and there is stuff going over their heads and unless you have given them the right directions and your voice is good enough, your communication then has to be

passed on from one man to another. That all comes in to it and that is the live-firing that I think we need to do.

Do you include in that instinctive shooting?

Yes. Definitely instinctive shooting. Being in close country you have got to be able to do that sort of thing, initially to give you the time you need to think about how you are going to react to the enemy.

You are talking about the time you are trying to get the initiative back?

Yes.

You went over on the HMAS *Sydney,* if I'm not mistaken, and it was about ten days.

Yes.

Any memories come back about that?

No, not so much memories. I worked under my Platoon Commander. Our task was to conduct the battalion shooting skills and that's where we let balloons off the back of the ship and we put everybody through their drills; IA's, fire control orders and the sections engaged the balloons. I must admit we did better than what I saw of HMAS *Sydney* with their Bofors trying to hit balloons.

They hit the ocean.

That would be about all they hit.

When you finally got there, the night we anchored in Vung Tau Harbour, any special thoughts going through you mind that you remember?

Yes. I thought to myself that this is it, because the Navy Clearance mob were going round dropping charges and around the ship and the smell of the place and with the the sounds of choppers going over, I knew I had arrived. I had doubts about how things were going to work out, but after that, once the Chinooks arrived and we started going it wasn't too bad.

Did you mother or father know that you had gone off to the war?

Both parents did. Dad took it okay; Mum was pretty upset about the whole thing, as Mums normally are - they are worried about whether you are going to come home either as a whole person or changed. Mum took it pretty hard.

Any mates or girlfriends?

I didn't have many mates outside the system because I had left Brisbane when I was only five years old and went to Sydney and then I joined the Army. So, it was really only my Army mates that were any concern. I got a terrible ribbing off my two sisters.

At that stage the American poop that was shown on TV and in the news was really starting to hit home in Australia and everybody was worried that you were going to go out there and burn the first village you could find and rape, pillage and plunder, which just didn't happen - in the Australian Army anyway. So some of the comments from my own sisters and which were based on that sort of TV thing I really didn't like.

Were they anti-war?

I don't really know if they knew what anti-war was. I think it was more a case that they had been indoctrinated to the American way of things on TV and that and they took what they saw on TV to be the way we were going to be ourselves, and it just didn't turn out like that. Even when I came home and explained to them we just didn't operated like that I don't think it sunk in. The Americans have a lot to blame; the journalists have a lot to blame for the whole thing.

Did this protest stuff that was going on at the time, did this influence you in your desire - did you want to go to war?

I don't know if I wanted to go to war - I certainly wanted to go to Vietnam because I don't think I had a real understanding of what war what all about. I wanted to go to Vietnam because I had been trained and that was where the Army - the real Army - was at that stage. I had seen other people walking around with ribbons on and I wanted to be like them, and I wanted to put my training into practice. So I wanted to go to Vietnam, but not necessarily go to war.

I like that. You mentioned before that you were training National Servicemen. What was your impression of the Nashos?

I liked the majority of them. I thought they were good for the Army.

Can I just ask you why were they good for the Army?

Well, you had a 19 year old kid like me, and in some cases when I first joined, a 17 year old kid, and we were knocking around with 20 and 21 year olds. I can remember many a time going from Enoggera down to Surfers Paradise with some of the Nashos, and if you misbehaved and stuffed their night up, you soon got told where you had gone wrong and got a cuff under the ear. So, while they were only young blokes themselves, they were a little bit more grown up than me, and I learned how to behave and what was expected of me through listening to older people and being with older people, even though there was that small age difference. One of the things I feel is wrong with the Army at the moment is that everybody is either 17, 19 or whatever, and there is not the older single soldiers to pass on to the younger blokes how they should behave. Of course, with everybody now living out of barracks and not living in barracks there is no great bond any more.

Soldiers get a lot more money too.

Yes. I thought the Nasho were good for the Army. Some Nashos probably, just like some Regs, just didn't make the grade, but on the whole, I thought the Nashos were good.

Were they easy to instruct?

In some ways they were and in some ways they bloody weren't. Especially for young blokes like me. I found that I couldn't bullshit to them - if I didn't know the answer I had to tell them I didn't know the answer. Some of them must have been nuclear scientists because some of the questions they asked me. They thought things through more, you couldn't just say, 'The trajectory of the round is such and such' and leave it at that. They wanted to know <u>why</u> the trajectory was such and such. And I had to go and find out too -which was good for me. I learnt very early on that if you didn't know - you couldn't bullshit - you had to tell them that you didn't know but that you would go and find out. I tried bullshitting a couple of times and got caught out and I found out that they would lose respect for you if you tried that one on them.

How did they handle, or did they know, that you were younger than them sometimes by two years?

Yes, I think they did. They must have just thought that it was part of the system and we'll give him a run and just see how he goes. They might have had thoughts of, 'is he going to make it?'.

What you are telling me here, and what I am getting in the background of this, is that it wasn't so much that you had the two hooks on your arm but you had to earn that?

I had to earn the respect not only from them but especially from the older Regs in the Company, the older blokes and that, because I think they thought I was too young to make the grade and that I had not been in the Army long enough; I had not done enough years to be a section commander.

What did the soldiers think of the National Service Officers that came in - were they ever looked upon as being 'ninety -day wonders'?

Yes. All that sort of thing went on. 'Ninety - day wonders'; 'we are here to do a job not get a job'; 'we are here to change magazines not read magazines'; all that sort of thing went on. But the system - being the system - weeded out anybody that they didn't think was good enough, regardless of the fact that they were Regs or National Servicemen. For sure we said to ourselves that they were ninety - day wonders and what would they know, but having said that, in some cases they were a little bit more down-to-earth because they knew that they had only done ninety days. Some of the Regular officers were more interested in whether you were using the right spoon and fork. So it balanced itself out.

By the time you were ready to go and you had a mix of Nashos in your section - were you happy with what you had?

Yes. I was. In fact I had a very good 2IC, (Lance Corporal J.R.) John McClymont who was a National Serviceman and he ended up being a very good mainstay too me. He might have only been 21, I am not too sure, but certainly because of his background in the country and running his own station, he was a lot older in years than the 21. If he

didn't agree with what was going on he certainly told me so, and we would come to an amicable arrangement.

He was a pretty big strong bloke wasn't he?

Yes.

I would like to talk now about the people and the jobs. We know you are a section commander but I want you to read into this more than it will sound, what was your job in the platoon?

I think my main job was to keep the section sharp and alert at all times; to keep their minds occupied; to give them as much information as I could so that they could maintain their alertness and know what was going on. The link between the platoon commander, the section commander and the section is an information link. Not only must you carry out his commands but you have got to pass on what he is thinking and what he tells you, to the soldiers. Because the better informed the soldiers are, the more they will maintain their alertness and do what has got to be done.

What was the hardest part of your job?

Finding a happy medium between being a popular person and getting the job done. When I was just starting out I thought the best way to do things was to be popular and not necessarily get the job done 100 percent. But that is not the way to do it - you have got to balance both those things out, and the hardest part was constantly reminding blokes that they were doing something wrong. They used to get pissed off with that too, but they had to be told if they were doing things wrong. That was hard. I didn't find ordering them to do anything overly hard; if they had to go forward under fire or anything like that they did that because of their training, so I didn't find that hard. It was the constantly being on their back all the time, and not only that, it fell back on me too, because if I was on their back all the time I had to be better than them to set the standard. So it got tiring in that way.

A lot of people say that the section commander is really the guy that commands men. Platoon commanders command section commanders, and company commanders command platoon commanders, and so on. What do you think of that statement?

I think that is very true. At those levels you are just talking about, platoon commander and company commander, he gives guidance but it is actually a section commander who has to interpret that order and actually say to the blokes that I want you to do this, this and this. Certainly it is a section commander at the forefront; on the kokoda Track, Nui le or on the streets of Somalia.

Was your 2IC in your command chain at all or was he really just in charge of part of your section?

Definitely part of the command chain. He just wasn't in the thing. He has to command the gun and be prepared to give orders to help his section commander fight the battle.

We both relied on each other a lot and he was a very big part of the section, he can't just be a number, he is a leader just like the section commander.

What do you think was the most important part of your job when you are out in the field on operations?

Once again it gets back to making sure that I kept the blokes informed and kept the blokes on their toes. Making them be aware all the time of what was going on.

When you say 'on their toes' what I am getting here is we are really taking about security when you talked about being alert - security on the move?

Yes. Security at all times, because over there you could go days without coming across sign or anything and yet you can tend to, with the weight that you are carrying and being tired, tend to drop off. Once you have dropped off you have lost your security - and your safety.

Did you get R & C while you were there?

I did. I just can't remember whether it was early in the piece or later but we went down to Vung Tau and that.

What about R & R?

Yes, I got R & R about half way through or maybe it was a bit later.

Where did you go?

Came back to Australia.

Why did you do that? Why didn't you go the fleshpots of Taipei?

That's what I ask myself now. In fact the reason why was I wanted a break away from Asia and all things Asian. I wanted to go somewhere where I felt safe with round eyes, and I wanted a complete break away from Asia and the pressure. I wanted to come back and get on the grog back here with people that I knew and I knew that I would be safe. But having said that, in the years that went after that Asia became a second home and I love it. But by that stage I had had enough.

Did you feel that you needed that break?

Yes.

Can you tell me why?

I think just the pressure that we were under all the time. Especially section commanders and anybody with added responsibility. You had to perform because if you didn't perform then someone was going to get hurt.

Did you like your job?

Loved the job.

You have got to tell me why. It is not that easy.

I don't think you could find any other job in the world that would give you the satisfaction of being able to command men like that. We talked before about how a section commander actually commanded men and that is what it all comes down to - to have people under you like that and to have their respect and support - you just can't have any better job. Especially overseas because everyone did rely on you. It was a section commanders' war and you were doing what you had been trained and you couldn't have any better job.

What sort of things made you feel really good about what you were doing, or made you feel proud?

The fact that we were doing such a good job over there I thought. If there was a contact or something like that everyone worked well. We didn't have any major problems in the section, platoon or company and there was no fights or anything like that. Just the fact that I was an Australian soldier doing a very, very good job. I wasn't fighting for kangaroos, meat pies or Holden cars or anything like that. We were doing it for the other people in the section and the other people in the platoon. There was no flag waving or any of that stuff.

None of this dying for your country stuff?

No. No. It was for the people that you had around you because you knew that you had to do it well because they were doing it for you. That flag-waving and all that - nothing in that way at all.

Is it hard living with the guys in your section, or is it something that just comes part of the job for the section commander?

It does get hard in some ways because you are living in each others pockets all the time and you don't get away from them as such. But having said that I think over the time it then becomes to be your family, and if someone gets a 'Dear John' letter you knew about it or someone got a packet of biscuits from home everyone shared in it. You shared their problems as well as their joys and that sort of thing, so it did become a big family. I found that in the years to come I may not see people for years, and then see them again; there is no shyness; you don't have to worry about trying to think of things to say. It all just comes easy. One big family.

Did you think you were well-trained to be the section commander?

I think I was given a good chance. I was trained as best as the Army could train me in all ways. They told me what to do when someone shot at me; they told me how to map read and other different things. I was trained well. But I don't think I was mentally tough enough.

What do you think were the greatest strengths that your section and your platoon had?

The greatest strength out of the platoon and the section was that we knew each other, that in the main we could depend on each other and we were pretty honest all the way along with each other. When you have got that sort of thing going for you and everyone can depend on each other you have a pretty good push.

This came from the fact that the platoon was together for a fair while with the exception of the platoon commander who was the last guy in.

But once again when he came in that was only the start before Canungra got intensified. It was never as hard again as Canungra but certainly it got intensive with being in the field all the time. So, once again, you ended up spending so much time together you soon worked out each others weaknesses and had time to work on them.

If you were told that tomorrow you would have to take a platoon to Vietnam or Somalia or Cambodia or whatever, how much time would you want to have as a minimum to train them up you think, and they had done their IETs?

I reckon three months at least - full time. If I had the luxury of three months the first thing I would do was to grab a Herc, a Section, and go straight to Butterworth, or whatever the equivalent of what Butterworth is going to be. So you are living in another environment but you are living together. I mean you are 'living' together, in the same barracks and all that sort of thing. You are in a strange environment and you have to depend on them and they have to depend on you and do it that way. No 'Big Macs'; 'K.F.C.' - only you, the section and so on.

You are cutting all their ties and throwing them together?

Yes.

What sticks most in your memory about your time in Delta Company in Vietnam?

The main thing that sticks in the mind is that I made so many good friends. They became part of the family to me and when I see people that I haven't seen for years, as I said before, there is no worrying about trying to think of things to say - it comes quite natural. So, the biggest thing was that it was a family to me.

Half way through your tour you go across to Support Section in Company Headquarters. How hard was that to adjust to those other guys?

It was hard. First of all I didn't like where I was. I didn't like the fact that I had to leave 11 Platoon and go to Support Company so when I got across there I found I was hard on them and I didn't want to make the ties with them that I had with 11 Platoon. But you realise that you can't afford to do that because the way we operated - we were just as likely to get shot at within Support Section and the Company Headquarters as the platoons were. They all had a job to do. Looking after the Engineers was bad enough - the mini team we had with us. Terrific Engineers but would never make infantry soldiers. Everything rattled.

Can you remember any of there names?

Harry Smith, Corporal Smith was one, and I can't remember the little blokes names. But they were good blokes too, they knew their job.

Being close to Company Headquarters, what sort of things of did you get out of being close?

Probably a better picture of what was going on, because my close proximity to the Company Commander and that I could listen to what he was saying to the platoons; I could see from his battle map what his overall picture was. In those sorts of ways it was quite good.

We will go on to battle, and all the questions really relate to when you are in contact or when you are about to be in contact or whatever?

What was your first contact like?

The initial part wasn't too bad. I found that training took over and you just went into your drills and did everything you were supposed to. I wasn't scared at that stage - the adrenalin was pumping - but it was only after things had stopped that I started to get the shakes and the adrenalin started to really make me tired and it hit me that way. That is where it brings back to me that you have got to keep (the Digger) informed all the time. With section commanders, platoon commanders, the Company medic, the radio operators, they had things to do which kept them busy, where the soldier had to not only do his own field craft, but he had to wait for the other people to direct him to do things. That must have been hard for them; waiting if they were in support to move forward or whatever. We had things to occupy our minds. That is where if you keep your soldier informed of what is going on they understand why they have to move forward and do different things.

You are talking about after the rush and they are tired, that is when security is going to drop, isn't it?

Yes.

I guess that is when people are most vulnerable?

Yes.

And why we always emphasis all-round defence after contacts?

Yes. It is unbelievable how tired you get. I don't know what is in the drug adrenalin but it certainly knocks you around. It keeps you going while it has got to but it takes its toll after it wears off, and because of this we tend to let our guard down and we become vulnerable.

What do you think scared you the most or made you most apprehensive when you were out on operations?

That's easy. I didn't want to get captured. The most scared I was was at night time when I was moving around the perimeter seeing how things were on the perimeter or going to a gun position. I don't think I could of handled being captured. The was the only thing I was scared of.

Mines didn't affect you?

No. We didn't really have a lot of mine incidents. There was one, if you could call it a mine incident, that I can recall. In fact it was (Lance Corporal P. E.) 'Snoopy' Pallant who had a (M) '79 and he had it slung on his back. The trigger got caught in a vine and set it off and we all immediately thought that he had trod on a mine with the initial pop. But because we never moved on foot tracks but on compass bearings - mines were not a big worry. That is as close as we came to a mine incident. Mines didn't worry me mainly because I'm sure we would have been told that we were going to come into a mine area. We had a very good anti-mine training during the first weeks in country and we were put through 'Exercise Lifesaver' which in part was about mines.

This is Tape Two of two tapes of an interview with Warren Dowell recorded by Gary McKay for Delta Four - Australian Infantrymen at War. Recorded on 16 June1993 at Merrimac, Queensland. The topics covered on this tape are battle, casualties, relationships, the Allies, the enemy and the aftermath.

Warren, to continue on with battle, is there any one person that stands our most in your memory in the contacts that you had?

Yes, it would have to be (Major) Jerry Taylor. The reason why I say the Company Commander is because of my time in Support Section, Company Headquarters. I actually got to see him as the main director and as a man not just the boss. While there was a lot of small contacts with the platoons and then platoon against platoons, it actually came down to the time where we ran into bigger parties; 274 (Viet Cong Main Force [Dong Nai] Regiment) when we had Charlie Company in support with the tanks, and then later on when we ran into the 3rd of the 33rd (North Vietnamese Army Regiment), especially the 3rd of the 33rd when Taylor came to the fore. I cannot think of Vietnam without thinking of Taylor and the good job I thought he really did.

And the good job centred around..?

His leadership, his 'unflappability'. He oozed confidence to me anyway. I don't know about anybody else, but because he seemed to be unflappable, I thought if he can do it the rest of us can do it.

What incident stands out most in your memory of Vietnam?

The main incident that stands out in my memory was Ralph Niblett getting wounded and then dying later. There are a lot of other things that flash through my mind and different things but Ralph was a really nice bloke and the centre of the platoon. He was a good soldier, a National Serviceman - but a good soldier, and him being killed out of everybody is the thing I will always remember. It doesn't happen like that in the movies - the good guy doesn't get it.

Is that the saddest thing you can recall?

Yes. There were probably two other incidents that knocked me around a bit. Seeing Ralph go knocked me around. Then I think it was about two days later after all the fighting and the NVA had bugged out. We had to go back into the bunker system to get our bodies out that we had left back in there. The Company Commander decided that he would go, and he grabbed a couple of us and I went down with them. To see the blokes that way after two days lying in the jungle, from people we knew to what was there knocked me around. Putting them into make-shift body bags was very hard. Then the next part was when we said farewell to them prior to us leaving Nui Dat. It hit me that we would never see them again. We had finished the tour at that stage and there was only loading stores and then guarding Vung Tau with the gun bunkers and that. But those three incidents, in that order, were sad.

When you say 'farewell' you mean a memorial service?

Yes. We had a memorial service on the top of SAS Hill, because that is where Delta Company was living when 3 RAR pulled out and 4 RAR concentrated around Nui Dat. We had a bit of a Company service and then if I remember correctly we had another one down at Vung Tau for the whole Battalion, but it wasn't the same as the one for Delta Company.

What was the toughest time you think you ever experienced?

Once again it was the same time I think, when the whole Company was in action at Nui Le against the 3rd of the 33rd, when at one stage there we had all three platoons in contact and we were trying to pull back and consolidate ourselves and there were bad guys getting out of the pits and moving against us using fire and movement. When that is happening to you it is pretty scary. I was worried that the company might be over run.

You were in Support section then - what was your main job then?

What happened there was initially 12 Platoon were in contact and myself and little 'Kempy' (Private C. J. Kemp), I can't remember his name - he was the 12 Platoon Medic - I went down to 12 Platoon to see what I could do for them. I had to take some ammunition down so I ended up staying with 12 Platoon for a while and one of their blokes got shell-shock, I suppose is the word we know use, and we had to get him out, so I helped Kemp do that, so I stayed with 12 Platoon for a while. Once we got told to pull back I ended up marrying with 11 Platoon again later on and I stayed with 11 Platoon for quite a while. That is when I saw Ralph and a few of the other blokes cop it. Then when we started to withdraw and concentrate back in as a Company I ended going up back into Company Headquarters and trying to direct people into the makeshift perimeter we were trying to get in on. At the same time this was happening 11 Platoon had to resort to fire and movement because the bad guys were getting out of the pits and doing it on us. At the same time as this was happening I think 10 Platoon was in contact at the front of the Company area. I thought 'Oh shit I am in deep trouble here!'. That is how my actual time was spent - a little bit of time with Support Section,

but more time out and about with the platoons, taking out ammo, giving them information and direction from Company.

From what I remember you were acting more like a traffic cop?

Yes.

Telling people which way to go and where Company was and that sort of thing.

I think it was anything you could do to help because that is the way it was, to try and get every one in with directions and get them on the ground. The sooner we could get in on the ground the safer we were going to be.

The attack on the bunker system in July where the tanks were. What are your memories of that?

Once again, things were a bit confusing there too. We thought that a machine gun that was firing was from Charlie Company but it turned out to be one of the bad guys' machine guns that they had knocked off. Anybody that says that tanks can't operate in the jungle just doesn't know what he is talking about. They did an excellent job and got in there and really sorted it out for us, and it was a sad day when we saw that they were being pulled back. They did a good job.

You were a section commander on that day?

Yes.

Fighting your way through bunkers. How did you maintain control when your section was in contact?

You had to rely on people passing the word on and in the 'J' with six man sections you're not that spread out. You found that if you started to give orders a lot you could draw the crabs and things. The enemy will tend to zero in on people talking, if the section can't hear you, you had to stand up and run - certainly bend over, scurry over, and get across to whoever you wanted to talk to or they would have to pass the word on for you.

Did you have any trouble getting your guys to go forward?

Never had any trouble in getting them to go forward but having said that, I had never seen any of them get up and run forward like they do in the movies. Going forward is either a leopard-crawling sort of affair or on your stomach going forward. I didn't see any long rushes or 'Banzai' sort of stuff. It was all moving forward slowly, but still moving forward.

That was in close contact and you were locked in combat there.

Yes. Going forward could mean a metre maybe. The enemy might only be five to ten metres away - close contact.

What was always your first reaction when your section was in contact?

In the main, training took over all the time really. As I said before, training took over, you got on the ground and did what you had to do and ascertained the situation and then listened for orders either from the Platoon Commander or you got yourself into a position where you could return fire. Training was the big thing. In fact I had to do a 'para' (parachute) course years later and training is the only thing that got me through the 'para' course too. No sensible person would ever do it! It's training - you are indoctrinated into doing that and it comes second nature, and then after you have done it then you think bout it. If you had to think about it first you probably wouldn't do it.

We can train for contact and rehearse for drills?

Yes.

Then what, do we hope that aggression carries through?

Aggression and training to carry us through, yes. As I said before, if we could do more live-firing exercises, especially the battle inoculation one when you have actually got the sound coming over the top of you and around you all the hard points of control come out in that sort of training - it gets the adrenalin pumping.

How do you instil the aggression into your section?

Training and for them, to have complete confidence in the other people around them. Once again, nobody goes forward and that sort of stuff because someone is playing the 'Star Spangled banner' or waving flags. It is relying on your friends, your mates, your Diggers, and having trust in them and knowing that you have to do that job otherwise more people are going to get killed. The aggression is doing it to the enemy before he can do it to you.

Whereabouts is the section commander in this battle - is he up with his blokes, is he behind them, or is he leading the charge?

I think he has got to be in all those positions. He has got to know when to do that and he has got to know that if he wants them to do something he has to be prepared to lead them by example, but there are other times when he has got to be behind them cajoling them and pushing them forward. You do that in all sorts of ways by the things you say to them. But they have got to have confidence in you and the rest of the company or platoon otherwise they wouldn't do it.

Did you ever see anyone shot?

Yes.

How did you feel?

When it was the enemy it wasn't so bad. It was more a case of 'you beauty, we got him before he got us', sort of thing and it didn't worry me in the least. It gave me confidence in a lot of ways to see them shot because we knew then that we could kill them. There

was no sweat about that at all. However, when I saw my own people get shot it bought it back to you how vulnerable you were too. But having said that, we had been trained enough to know that you had to leave the casualties where they were at that time because there were people like Support Section and the medics that would help out. It was afterwards when things had quietened that it would really come to you that your own blokes had been hit. It was then that it knocks you around again. It does take a little while for you to bounce back. But the job of the Platoon Commander, Section Commander, Platoon Sergeant, is to say 'Hey, let's get on with it'.

How did you feel when they left the bodies on the battlefield in 11 Platoon?

I completely understood what was happening because we had always been told from stories of our fathers that you never leave your dead down there and that sort of thing, you never leave your wounded. Well, there are times when that is just not practical - it might happen in the movies. But during that incident I saw one of the greatest things I have ever saw. (Private K. G.) 'Fred' Casson I think it was, a water meter-reader, I think he was, from Western Australia. We were all grovelling on the ground in very close contact and Fred actually went forward to make sure everybody was dead. He did a real good job - he checked out everybody and we knew they were dead. He was a National Serviceman. But getting back to what we were talking about, there are times when you are going to take more casualties trying to get them out than you are by trying to pull back and trying to help them later.

Getting casualties out; that became the responsibility of Support section when they re-org(anis)ed after the attack, the attack later in the afternoon on the 21st September. What was your main job there?

Helping to carry the casualties to a main place where they could either be treated, or when we could get them out. My main job though, was directing my people to do that and assist the platoons, because the platoons were bringing out their own people as well. As I said, in a lot of ways I tended to go back more to 11 Platoon than I actually stayed with Support Section. That is where I had started the tour with and that is where I felt I needed to be at different times.

What was the reaction of other guys around you? Were you able to see that or were you too closely involved?

No. I saw the reaction of the other blokes. You mean when our people were getting hit?

Yes.

Once again, it mainly involved around Ralph in 11 Platoon, because he was such a bright personality and a nice bloke. There were a lot of people who really felt bad about seeing him hit. I wouldn't say we all wanted to run out there and do bayonet charges on the NVA in front of them but certainly we said to ourselves, 'We'll make sure we get a couple of them'. But it did effect different people in different ways and when I talk about Ralph, it's because he was part of our platoon, I am sure that the other blokes in other platoons felt the same way about their blokes too, like when 12 Platoon lost their blokes.

What was the reaction like in Company Headquarters when all this was going on?

Well, once again, Company Headquarters was 'malfunction junction' I suppose is the way it was. It was controlled confusion. Jerry Taylor stood out like a beacon again, standing there directing what was going on and directing air support and gunships and all that sort of stuff. (Corporal M. J.) 'Doc' O'Sullivan was excellent and doing what he was supposed to be doing, fixing people up as best he could. Company Headquarters is lucky in some ways because they all have jobs to do which keep them occupied. Support section blokes were trying to help as much as they could. In fact one of my blokes got wounded in the foot and at that stage he was back somewhere in Company Headquarters and he actually got hit in the foot. Even us 'pogos' in the middle copped it at different times.

Did you ever feel personally responsible when guys got hit or is that just the vagaries of war?

I never felt personally responsible. That is just part of it. As I said, it does hurt and there is no denying it but never personally responsible.

Flipping the coin over now. We talk about sense of humour and a lot of people talk about sense of humour as essential. What is your reaction to that?

I agree. You have got to be able to laugh otherwise it would just build up inside you. I can remember a time the platoons had been in for a Company MAINTDEM. The platoons had got their resupply and left Company by itself. Jerry Taylor wanted us (CHQ) to follow one of the platoons out. I can't remember which platoon it was but anyway, I couldn't find the track that they had gone out on. I had walked past Jerry Taylor standing in the same spot about four times trying to virtually find north and the platoon's out-track. Taylor used to give out a chocolate frog each day and if you did a good job you got a chocolate frog for the day and if you did a bad job you never got your chocolate frog. I certainly missed out on the chocolate frog that day, but we all had a bit of a giggle when I went past him for the sixth time and he said, 'You're not making your chocolate frog any easier today.' You have got to have a sense of humour.

There are other things. Daryl (Sergeant D. K. Jenkin) and was it the shit sandwich?

No, it was the biscuit with (Private) Frank Wessing when we put the mud in the middle of the biscuit.

That was the one. Those sorts of things. That's what makes you so close. A sense of humour is very, very important. It just relieves the tension. As long as you don't overdo it. I can remember in Canungra. We were mucking around and had come back from the boozer and I couldn't handle that bloody 'Gold Top' in those days, and I was living in the same tent as (Corporal) Daryl Jenkin who at that stage was the senior corporal in the Platoon and had not become the Platoon Sergeant. Canungra in those days was bloody cold and I was going to throw a bucket of water over (Private G. K) Geoff Hannah as he walked through the tent. Unfortunately it was Daryl who walked out instead and my sense of humour that day didn't go over too well because I got biffed in the ear. He's got a temper at times.

Let's talk about relationships. What was your personal situation in a relationship, like between you and your riflemen?

I thought it was pretty good. I had never had any main worries that I can recall, even with the Nashos. I think what brings that home to me now and makes me feel better is over the last few years, especially since the 'Welcome Home Parade', I have had blokes ring me up and say, 'Are you going to come down to it?' and that sort of thing. This is Nashos as well as Regs who ring me up to talk to me and things like that. I know that time tempers a lot of things, but if they weren't honest about it I don't think they would bother about ringing me. That makes me feel good too.

You mentioned that you had a strong link with your Section 2IC. What was it like between you and your sergeant?

What happened there was our original Sergeant we had, Wayne Grinter, was an ex-Armoured Corps bloke that had transferred over to Infantry and he had gone through Signals in Infantry and for one reason or not I don't think he wanted to be where he was and he ended up getting reduced to corporal and being sent to Support Company. Daryl took over and we had known each other very well prior to that; we used to go out drinking and on the town together and we were good friends. Having said that, Daryl was very professional in his approach and could leave his friendship aside and be very professional in what he wanted to do, and I think that Daryl might of thought that I was a little young for the job of section commander. He could make it hard on me, but having said that, I still respected him as the Platoon Sergeant. He was the right man for the job.

You and the Platoon Commander?

Well, I thought me and the Platoon Commander got on all right. He invited me home one night, it was for dinner in Townsville. He invited all the Section Commanders home and we all turned up drunk and he still talked to us. Once again, I think we got on okay. I think also that he might have thought that I was a bit of a weak link at times. We got on okay and we still talk to each other and I am proud of how well he has done in the Army. He was a 'Ninety Day Wonder' and stayed on.

What about the CSM?

(Warrant Officer Class Two) Noel Huish, I felt sorry for Noel in some ways. I first ran into Noel Huish in late '69 I think it was. We went to Shoalwater Bay as enemy for 2 RAR I think it was and Noel was the RP Sergeant, and I thought he was old for his job then. When we had (Major) Franz Kudnig for the Company Commander it really made it hard on Noel Huish and I thought he aged then. Noel was a decent enough bloke but he had to be loyal to a very hard Company Commander. How can I put it? If the Company Commander said that the grass was blue, the grass was blue. Noel is a nice bloke but I thought he could have mixed; talked more to us junior NCOs, instead of being seen as Kudniog's off-sider. Under (Major) Taylor he became one of the battalion's best CSMs. Changing OCs changed everyone for the better.

You said you felt sorry - was that because of the circumstances he was placed in?

Yes, that was with Kudnig.

Or is that more of a case of him being loyal to the Company Commander?

I see the CSM as definitely got to be loyal to the Company Commander, there is no sweat about that. But I also see him as the lynch pin between the Section Commander, the OC and himself. He has got to have a good rapport. In fact the bloke that I liked for that reason was (Warrant Officer Class One) Wally Thompson, the RSM. He might have been the RSM, but he seemed to have the knack of being able to talk to everybody and getting the best of of them, including the Platoon Commanders, the lowest of the low tail end charlie and that, and I though he was good that way.

Did you have much to do with CQ?

Yes, when I was trying to get stuff out of the 'Q' Store that I wasn't allowed to. Or asking for two pairs of boots when I should have only got one. (Staff Sergeant R.J.) Bob Hann I thought was good for the Company and his offsider, (Lance Corporal L.J.) 'Blue' Roulston, I thought was excellent. Bob Han did a lot for the Company in a lot of ways hat went unseen, I'm quite sure that some of the stuff we got he got through the Black Market to supply the Company. While he was a hard CQ, if he could get it he would have got it for you. I thought the CQ and his offsider were a good team. They went out of their way to supply you withthings. Nothing was too hard for them. Bob Hann got in the shit with Kudnig for trying to get things for the Diggers.

Did you have much to do with Kudnig or was it really Taylor?

I don't know about the rest of the Section Commanders, but if I had the chance of avoiding the OC Kudnig I would of. He put it on me once in Canungra where we were having difficulties with the controlling staff down there and we were having a round table discussion with the Platoon Commanders, Section Commanders and their Platoon Sergeants, and he asked a number of questions. He asked me was what I thought was wrong with the Company. I told him I thought that was the Company was very well-prepared physically but we were having troubles with our morale. I didn't really push it to the full thing but I think he knew what I was saying that he was the trouble. I don't think anybody could get close to Franz Kudnig. He was just that way - a hard, cold man.

You must have seen something of Peter Schuman?

He was a top bloke. Once again, we were very, very lucky in the Company. We had a very hard OC like Franz was, but we had a buffer like Captain (P. J.) Schuman (MC). A no-nonsense officer but very approachable and he was confident in his own ability and I am sure he could have taken over the Company. He knew or understood that he was the linchpin between the OC and the rest of the Company, and I am quite sure some of the Platoon Commanders must have found that as well. I am sure they used his knowledge quite often.

When you were out in the bush with the OC, 2IC and sometimes the CSM, what was important to you the way these men dealt with you when you were out there?

I wanted to be looked at as an equal regardless of rank. When I say that I mean I needed for them to ask me my advice and for me to be able to give it freely, and for them to listen

to me. To be treated as an equal like that. We all know there is rank involved, but to be asked advice and to be treated an equal like that is very, very important. Especially in that sort of war because it was a Section Commanders' war.

You have mentioned a couple of qualities about people so far, about people that you have admired. What do you think are the qualities a junior leader should have?

Honesty is the big one, or one of the big ones. When I say honesty, it is honesty to yourself, honesty to your Platoon Commander and honesty to your soldiers. If you are honest with those three groups everything else falls into place. You have got to be honest enough with yourself to say that I am not as good as I should be and I should be able to do better, or I don't know what is going on and need to find out more; to be honest with your soldiers. If you don't know you tell them you don't know and don't try and bluff it out. Be honest with your Platoon Commander because he has to have respect for you too, and if he finds that you lied to him then he is going to have second thoughts about either getting you and your Section to do it or relying on your judgement. I think honesty is a big one there.

What were you looking for from your leaders?

To be treated like, I was going to say a individual but that is not right. To be given respect in that they asked my opinion, listened to me then made up their own mind. But I was also looking for reliability and trust in them too. If I knew they could do their job then obviously it was a big load off everybody's shoulders.

What do you think was the biggest difference between Kudnig and Taylor?

One understood, or made better use, of the men than the other one did. Kudnig from what I could gather had done a tour with the Montangards and I think he tried to treat us like them as well. But I think also in the back of his mind he was a bit worried for our sake as well. He wanted us to be as tough as possible. But it just didn't work; he didn't get it across proper. Where Taylor made you feel an important part of the team. I had complete confidence in him. I don't think he had any worries at all.

Was there anything that pissed you off?

Wharfies, Posties and Pogos. Wharfies pissed me off when they wouldn't load the *Jeparit* and bring over our grog or ammo; Posties pissed me off when they wouldn't supply the letters because they were against the war. Letters are a real big thing - not so much letters but anything from home is a real big thing. And of course Pogos. The whole joint was crawling with them, but they were never where you wanted them to be - up front with us. They were always behind you somewhere.

Was there anything that made you detest any guys?

Yes. A couple of people. One springs to mind and I can't remember what his name was but we called him 'Van Dyke'. He was a sergeant I think. He was the local manager of the Peter Badcoe Club and I can remember when we first we down to Vung Tau on R & C and we were met by this bloke in short polyesters and thongs and he had the best tan I've ever seen - no infantry soldier could ever get a tan in the jungle - and he treated us

like poop; where he started to say, and I can't remember the exact words, but something like 'I've seen enough of you Infantry types to know what goes on and you are not going to get drunk and misbehave in my place or I'll send you back to the war' sort of thing. That really pissed me off. So the first thing we all went and did was that we all went and got drunk and pissed him off. That's about it. People being big-time when they shouldn't have been big-time. We all knew what was going on and we all had a job to do and everybody did it. You didn't have to speak about it because you'd done it. Whereas you had some of these other people.

What got men into trouble the most?

Grog, without a doubt. It was grog, specially on R & C, when you only had a certain amount of time to enjoy it. Especially blokes like ourselves, Infantry and our Engineer and APC support and that sort of thing, because we were restricted when we were in Nui Dat to a couple of cans a night and we didn't get much time back in the Dat. But as soon as we got down to Vung Tau we really used to let ourselves go.

What happened to Warren Dowell?

In what area?

When he got into trouble. He was lacking the guidance of his Platoon Commander who had gone home and then he got into strife. Was that grog?

Yes. It was. Grog again. Things had finished as far as the war went. we were pulling out, so I hit the grog. It cost me my rank the Battalion Comander stripped me to Digger. I was promoted again three months later. Yes; beer.

What do you think about mixing bullets and booze. Should there be booze in a war zone like that?

I think there should be, but you can't be allowed to get too much because it doesn't matter how well-trained you are, when you are not used to it, it does cause problems. That is where places like Butterworth are good, where you have to live with your blokes and drink with your blokes. You learn who can drink and who can't and yet stay in control.

Do you think that soldiers under 20 should be allowed to go to war?

Well, from what I have seen these days, I think you have to be young. It really struck me, when we arrived in Nui Dat, prior to us leaving the '*Sydney*' really, you could see the different groups of blokes. There were the 'marriedies' who were worried because of the tour that was starting; there were young blokes like myself who didn't really know what we were going to get ourselves into; and then there was the blokes that had been over there before. They knew what they were getting themselves into and they were thinking about it as well. The older you are the less likely you are of acting instinctively and doing things. Because you have family responsibilities, you know more about what goes on. Young people don't seem to have the same worries as older blokes. I think younger blokes are more willing to do what has got to be done.

We are really talking about section here aren't we?

Yes.

> Allies - did you ever work with any of the Allies; any of the Americans or New Zealanders? Any impressions?

Yes. The main one that I can remember, the Americans, actually working with them, was when we were doing a blocking force for 3 RAR and a Brigade of Americans coming down from Long Khanh. Delta Company and 11 Platoon were the eastern most part of the blocking force for the Battalion if I remember correctly, and we had to marry up with Americans. Everything you see on TV is unfortunately true about the way they were. No security, carrying gun-liners and that sort of thing, chewing gum, smoking, and some of them had ear-plugs stuck in their ears - that sort of thing. They really didn't impress me. Then we had, off Courtenay Hill, a detachment of guns, 155s. That didn't really impress me either; it looked like whoever was the biggest bloke and had the biggest baseball hat was the one that was in command. But having said that, there must have been good American units either earlier on in the piece or further up North. But the ones I saw in Vung Tau and i the field really didn't impress me at all.

> What about the Kiwis?

Kiwis - they could play harder in town than we could, but having said that, when we got into trouble with the 3rd of the 33rd they were the company reacted to come and assist us. I think one of the other Companies was reacted; I think it might have been D Company 3 RAR, was reacted as cut-off but the Kiwis were actually reacted to come and assist us. When they arrived they really looked the part. They looked like they meant business, and the thing I liked about them was that even though they were made up of Maoris and Pakehas - they were us. New Zealand/Australians, Australians/New Zealanders. They were trained under the same system as we were and I had nothing but confidence in their ability.

> Did you do any work with Sergeant Hai.

Yes. Sergeant Hai, our interpreter. In fact I was in the boozer the night they tried to hang him. I think it was only though Blue Roulston who cut him down that he was got out of trouble. He had a bad habit of coming to the briefings prior to the operations and must have known what was going on. Because if he thought it was a bad op, he used to disappear, and then we knew it was going to be a bad time too. Then the night we had the big barbeque and piss up at Nui Dat after everything had finished he turned up and was drinking our grog. I can't remember who started it but somebody got hold of him with a toggle rope, and I am sure it was bloody Blue Roulston who had to come in and sort it out and cut him down and tell us all to sit down and shut up. He hit the toe after that and we didn't see him after that. I wasn't impressed with him at all. If the op seemed to be in a bad area - he seemed to disappear on us.

> Like when the going got tough. Well, he wasn't out there when we ran into the bunkers, both times.

He must have know what was going on.

What did you think of the enemy?

I thought they were very good and whether it was good or bad, but Delta Company saw the cross-section of enemy. The VC, D445 which was the local guys, and then the North Vietnamese Regular Army. I thought they were very good because of their training and they pushed forward with what they had to do. I think they believed in what they were doing too which makes it a big thing. They were defending their own turf and their training seemed to me to be quite good. The only thing I thought they lacked was communications. If they had better communications I think we could have been in for a lot harder time. That is saying for manoeuvring purposes and support.

Are you saying because they had no air power or not much in fire support? I mean the odds were against them.

From the start. I think the heaviest stuff they had were the small mortars, the 12.7s whenever they could drag around with them. They had to rely on small arms.

Were the enemy as you imagined them before you left Australia?

I changed my opinion. We talked before about our training prior to going and we were doing cordon and searches and that sort of thing and the enemy were always portrayed as being that comical guy in the bamboo cylindrical hat. Always portrayed to be the farmer by day and the fighter by night. It was never as a dedicated sort of soldier, but I certainly changed my mind when I got over there. They were quite dedicated to their cause.

So you think they were pretty good fighters?

Yes.

Did you ever feel sorry for the enemy?

No. As I said before, when you saw them killed it inspired that little bit of bravado in you. It made you feel better knowing that they could be bumped off. I never felt sorry for the enemy. I felt sorry for the country, but not for the enemy.

What about the anti-Vietnam protesters. What did you think of them? You mentioned before what you thought about them before you went and we know why you took some interest in some of them.

Wouldn't pee on them if they were on fire. They had every right to do what they were doing I suppose but they were misguided. They were indoctrinated a lot by what they saw on TV

This is Tape Three of three tapes of an interview with Warren Dowell recorded by Gary McKay for Delta Four - Australian Infantrymen at War. Recorded on 16 June1993 at Merrimac, Queensland. The topics covered on this tape areTthe aftermath and looking back on the war.

Warren, was Australia's involvement in Vietnam worth it?

I don't think it was worth it in a lot of ways. I think the Australian Army got a lot of out if but I don't know if we did anything for the country. When I say the Australian Army got a lot out of it when 1 RAR went over there we were still wearing boots and gaiters and that sort of thing. So the involvement with the Americans in that sort of area was good. We got a lot more modern equipment and we got a lot more training which produced experience, and rewrote some of the pams and dragged them out of the Second World War. So, the Australian Army got a lot out of it but I don't think we should have been there now, after looking back at it.

> I want to take you back to an incident that you may not be aware of when a member of 11 Platoon shot and accidentally killed a guy in 10 Platoon. How do you handle that situation with a guy who does that?

Because of the circumstances leading up to it, there was nobody at fault. It was one of those things that happens. Our training was good - very good, and if the training is very good and an incident like that happens, there is to be no blame placed on anybody. It does happen. We were at war, and if I remember correctly we had just come out of a Company MAINTDEM and we were told, at that stage, that the 3rd of the 33rd was in the area. We were about 90 strong in the field and we were told that there were a lot more bad guys out there than us, so everybody would have been sharp, and I think it just happened. It was just damn bad luck.

> When you look back on that and someone comes up to you and says Vietnam wasn't worth it, how would you react?

Well, I'd react in a couple of different ways. If it was somebody who was there he has every right to say it because he was there. If it was a civvie or whatever who was genuinely interested and just made the wrong opening comment I'd tried and explain to him, but if it was a shit stirrer I'd probably just walk away. Not worth talking to.

> Did the fact that people who protested about the war make you feel any different when you were actually in Vietnam. When you read newspapers and stuff like that?

We used to think to ourselves what a bunch of bums. They didn't really make any difference to us because we weren't there for them; we weren't there for the Government or anybody like that. We were there for the bloke who was beside you and behind you and around you. These were the blokes we were there for. Once we were there and started doing our job they were the only ones that mattered. The ones that are back home complaining - they had nothing to do with us. I certainly though didn't like the people who wouldn't supply us with our things; our mail; our ammo. Australians not helping Australians - that hurt. But the protesters, while we said they were a bunch of bums, they didn't actually worry me as such. I wasn't there for them.

> Do you think the Vietnam experience with the country being divided like that that had a lot to do with people getting behind guys going to the Gulf War?

Without a doubt.

> So may be something good came out of it?

Yes. I think there was a lot of the country that were young like me, and grew up and realised that they had made mistakes - not in opposing the war, but in the way they opposed it. The war got stopped, sure, but the price. Australia was a divided country and there was a lot of bitterness in the country. I'm not a RSL goer by any means or anything like that, but it certainly left a bitter taste in my mouth as far as the people went. I used to think that Australian was the best country in the world but after seeing some of the things that went on I wouldn't pee on half of them if they were on fire. But having said that, I think a lot of them learnt their lesson too and that is why I am sure that is why they got behind the Gulf War.

Are there any questions you would have liked me to ask that I might have missed today?

If I had to do it over again would I change anything. Yes. What I would do if I was running the show I would have made far, far better use of the journalists. In war I think journalists are another arm like you have Infantry and you have Artillery. General Schwarzkopf really brought this out in the Gulf War in the way they used journalists. They were allowed where the US wanted them to go and they weren't given the wrong information, but the information they were given made the Americans to be the good guys, and the bad guys obviously the bad guys. In Vietnam they just confused everybody. As I said before everybody thought Australians, used to do what the Americans did. Well, we didn't.

Somebody might say that that is not freedom of speech.

If a country is behind their Armed Forces and they believe their Armed Forces are doing the right thing, then there are times when those sort of freedoms have got to be tempered for the overall good. Not stopped - but controlled.

Sort of like with the Falklands War and fairly well controlled with their security?

Yes.