M A MOLONEY

START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

This is Tape No. 1 of an interview with Mark Augustan Moloney, conducted by Clive Swaysland, recorded on 10 April 1997 at the Australian War Memorial. The topics covered on this tape are Mark's early life, his army life, Vietnam 1967-68, specifically the Charlie Company bunker action on the 1968 Tet Offensive from 5-7 February.

Mark, you were a platoon commander of 8 Platoon, Charlie Company, 7th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment; you viewed the war in Vietnam through a front-line gun sight. The aim of this interview is to remember the war before it is forgotten.

Mark, when were you born?

I was born on 29 June 1944 in Bathurst, New South Wales.

Where did you go to school?

Initially I went to school in Parramatta at the local school there, then I went on to St Patrick's College Strathfield, and then finished up at St Ignatius College Riverview.

What was the highest level you reached at school?

Leaving Certificate.

After you completed your Leaving Certificate, did you decide then to become a career soldier?

At that stage, in 1962, I'd filled in an application for admission to RMC and had already been accepted in September. So upon leaving school I went direct to the Royal Military College.

What degree studies did you undertake at the Royal Military College?

The course we undertook at the Royal Military College was the last of the non-academic courses, so we were the last course that didn't have any academic accreditation. Whilst we undertook academic work, that was accredited to those who were able to go on to university; the most that you could attain was two years accreditation whilst you were there. I initially started studying engineering and completed it by doing arts in the last year.

When did you leave the army?

1 July 1986 was when I was discharged.

What was your rank on retirement?

Major.

Did you have any professional qualifications on retirement?

Whilst I was posted to Training Command in Sydney I completed a commerce degree in accounting, so when I left I was a qualified accountant.

Did you have any problems returning to civilian employment?

No because I transferred across and used the tertiary qualifications as an auditor in the Auditor General's Office.

So your army service did not hinder your present career?

No, not at all.

Do you march and go to reunions on Anzac Day?

I haven't been for a number of years - I selectively go to marches on Anzac Day. It's not for the Anzac Day per se, it was a personal feeling of how members of the platoon had been recognised for their actions in the period over the whole tour in Vietnam.

Do you go to unit reunions at other times?

I have been to a couple, but I do not go to most reunions, again for similar reasons.

Do you think that Australian governments have treated ex-servicemen fairly?

It's a difficult question, Clive. I think what you've got to put into context, or have a look at, is, at the time the Government had particular policies in place. If we compare it now to what occurred at the end of World War I and World War II, and subsequent actions or peacekeeping operations in the Middle East, and so forth, each of those campaigns had a recovery reintroduction activity; there was none of that for Vietnam.

Despite - and again it relates to how people returned from Vietnam - some returned on aircraft so they could be back in Australia within twenty-four hours, others could return on the HMAS Sydney (troopship - converted aircraft carrier) and be there, two weeks or three weeks, depending upon what the vessel was doing.

Now, even that wind-down period didn't necessarily prepare people for what was about to confront them in Australia, and I think that that in itself created some problems. Now, that was a political/military decision the way it was done. As far as treatment of wounded and looking after veterans subsequently, I think there was little more that people could do, although there are a number of veterans who are suffering, but it's very difficult on occasions to prove the injuries are linked to service in Vietnam. So it's again, a very delicate decision for the relevant authorities to make.

I don't think you can point the finger at any government or at any military command and say there has been lack of treatment, but on occasions I think that in some cases it has been a

little bit unsympathetic and hasn't allowed those cases to gain coverage.

An example. A friend I know was involved in distributing agent orange, and there were definite birth defects and deformities in some of his children, but the link has never, ever been allowed or recognised. Now, that is difficult on occasions, particularly as he was aircrew and flew the chemicals around; to say that there is no direct link is a very difficult situation.

> Was he directly involved on Operation Ranch-Hand (defoliation programme)?

He was definitely involved in flying it, they flew it around, then spraying it. But, you know, it's just one of those things. That's one of the problems I have, is that those cases of agent orange are not unlike the mustard gas or other treatments, but it's developing the recognition of the claim that is the hardest part.

> That's an interesting comment. Did you have any difficulty reestablishing relationships with friends and families after Vietnam?

You could probably say that because I came home with a couple of friends - we went walkabout for about six months to try and readjust to the environment, and that in itself was probably the best thing we ever did, rather than try and get back with families - well, most of us were still single. We just went

walkabout on the leave and allowed ourselves to adjust back into society the best way we could.

> Have you suffered any long-term illness or disability as a result of the war yourself?

Well, that's still to be determined. I think that whilst, as a result of some of the wounds I received in the bunker action on Operation Coburg, I have had some problems with my legs, but they are still standing up; but I think in the long-term there will be some ill effects.

> Were soldiers in Vietnam modern day crusaders, marching into battle under the banner of political adventurism?

I don't think so because I think that any soldier who went to Vietnam was able to segregate the political decisions and the political environment around their dispatch or departure. They were over there to do a job as a result of a government decision, whether it be left or right, it doesn't really matter; they paid their respect to the government decision and implemented that; there was no distinction as to whether they were regulars or national servicemen; and I think in all parties I was never able to detect any animosity or ill feeling about the decision of going. I certainly don't recollect any cases of people that I was directly involved with where that was an issue.

> Yes. And today, do you think some returned service people are left cynical about its aims and results?

I think it's very difficult to look back at something where you might say we ultimately lost, in the fact that Vietnam today is now under a communist regime, which is what we were originally sent to stop. But again, the commanders - or the military commanders - at all levels, had certain political impositions placed upon them which was quite different to previous conflicts, quite marginally different from the Second World War and Korea which tended to be set piece battles. There were also impositions on them which were quite different to those which had been placed in an indirect way on military commanders in Malaya and Indonesia, in the fact that a number of options were always taken out of their hands, they weren't able to aggressively seek the enemy or to deny him his base. We always had to accept that he had the advantage of always being able to jump over the border and nip back through Laos or Cambodia.

Had a home town advantage?

He had more than a home town advantage, he had a neutral playing field where he could zip back to. So it's difficult in that context.

At the time Australia pulled out, I don't think Australia had lost any battles - there had been some magnificent actions by a number of Australians throughout the whole period in Vietnam, not only in the training team, but also in the Task Force area. And I think that the recognition given to that we're probably only now just starting to come through as people dig back through the archives and the histories to try and tell some of the untold stories. But I think that every

Australian should be proud of what was achieved and how it was achieved in the involvement in Vietnam. So I don't think we suffered any loss of face; I think in a lot of cases we did ourselves very proud as a very small nation.

> Yes. And at the time there seemed to be an indifference by Australians who watched the war from the safety of their lounge rooms, passing judgement on our soldiers, usually from highly coloured, slanted, biased versions of our participation by reporters who felt the only good news was bad news, in effect hijacking the history of the Vietnam War.

Well, I think that what people were getting - bear in mind that we have reporters that were sent over there, either to sell copy in the written press, or to be able to present images through the visual press that was coming back - and a lot of the visual press was not necessarily being provided by direct representatives of the channels or organisation, a lot of it was done through agencies and resident agents in the country who were trying to make a living out of it. So naturally you had a conflict of interests because there's very little TV or print media that is sold on good news, it's normally sold on bad news or sensationalism. So I think there's that part that's got to be brought to mind when you start looking at the press.

Some of the information that was being used in Australia was certainly misinformation and was very colourful and produced to do that. And again, I did not necessarily confront any of that because subsequent to Vietnam I went to New Guinea so I

was basically out of Australia for near on six years, so I missed a lot of that press in confrontation.

But to say the question that people were viewing it in living rooms; what they were being fed was what was coming out of the agencies.

On the other side of the coin - as you probably recollect - I had a reluctance to take or let reporters or photographers anywhere near us, so there was a certain amount of reluctance on behalf of a lot of operational units to be friendly to the press because there was suspicion. So I think that what you ended up with, coming out, was where they could get a story. So I think that the military operations people were their own worst enemies in one respect, but they wanted the privacy of being able to do things; they didn't want the risk of having press around in case something slipped in the heat of the battle which was then used. So I think you've got to look at that question openly, bearing in mind that the press have a job to do, it was being supplied by agencies, and there was a reluctance on a lot of operational people to involve press intimately in their dealings.

> And back at home, the attitudes and debates, looking at the Vietnam moratoriums, were often so far removed from the reality of the battlefield as to make soldiers feel isolated and even bitter. What are your feelings on this?

The issue of the moratorium was probably something that I only had to confront once, and that was at a funeral where I was an official representative subsequent to my return, where it was

very difficult to deal with the issue because of misinformation at a time of when bereavement was fairly high on the order and everybody was emotional about it.

It's one of those issues that, yes, there were certainly strong political views about Vietnam which were subsequently expressed by a number of people through the moratorium. These were principally aimed at certain decisions that the government had made, and, as such, the use of information, or the highlighting of matters which some people could view as political, is often very difficult to take out of those areas. At the same time the moratorium probably hastened the withdrawal and in the end saved any loss of face if there was any defeat in the end. So I think you've got to balance the whole thing off.

I don't have a view about the effect of the moratorium. I do recognise the moratorium did have an effect on the political process.

> You didn't see this as a betrayal of our soldiers in Vietnam?

I don't think you could take it as a betrayal, per se, as such, because no matter what conflict you look back through history, there are always going to be certain elements of the community that are going to be in disagreement with the decisions of government. I think you've got to take it as a characteristic of democracy. And quite often, in any democratic society, you've got a vocal minority, who will always have a fair amount of press and coverage because that's

their art of being able to achieve that. The vocal majority quite often becomes the silent majority.

I think you've only got to have a look at - you know, not even in World War II was there complete agreement to some of the decisions.

And that's true for government.

And if you go back and have a look at the environment that surrounded the withdrawal of the troops from the Middle East, back to Australia, the subsequent invasion of Darwin, and the state of the troops that were sent to Moresby, I think you've got a similar scenario. So you've got to put it into context.

That's an interesting way of looking at it. And is Vietnam important in your memories? And do you often think about your tour of duty today?

Well, Vietnam, per se, is just another step along the line of - what I took out at that stage was a professional military career. To say that I look back on it; the answer is I'd have to be candid and say yes because of a number of events that occurred. Do I feel relaxed about it? It's only recently I've felt relaxed about the involvement because in the past it's tended to have been a lot of locked up emotions. As you probably remember, I've always been reluctant to talk about these particular actions, and to me it was something that belonged to those that went, and what they achieved was for each individual to weigh up in their own mind. But I'm pretty sure that anybody in 8 Platoon (C Company) had certainly held

their head high as far as their achievements and what they had done in the time they were there.

> Have you noticed people changing their level of interest in what happened to you in the war - family, friends and colleagues?

I think, as a result of the National Memorial - on the opening of the National Memorial - there's certainly been a larger interest in the community as to what went on, to try and get some answers to some unanswered questions. I think almost every person that went to Vietnam would have an unanswered question.

There has, to a certain extent, been recognition of the people, and I think to see the faces there at the dedication ceremony showed that there was still a lot who still needed to say thank you to the Veterans for what they had done which had never, ever been said before. I think there is a general awakening of the community. I think the military, in some respects, has reacted to the fact that they haven't had a major action for such a period of time that they are now looking at trying to determine the best way for the future on the lessons from the past because they've now been in peace for over twenty years, which is a lot of - it's almost a generation of servicemen - who have passed through the services and have not seen action, and it's very difficult to portray, in peace, an action environment where, in the period we were talking about, the regiment had always had at least one battalion in action since its foundation. So we were still learning lessons and learning from each other, in a period,

through operational environments, so we had that advantage over what there is today.

I think that now there are some analyses being done on the data and the information that's available which was not available in the past, either through the information being locked away, reluctance of people to have their decisions subject to scrutiny, but that will inevitably increase as we get closer to the release of more material.

What did you think of the Unit's history, 'Conscripts and Regulars' (7 Battalion history book by Michael O'Brien)?

The Unit history was, I think, a very solid attempt to document the actions of a battalion in Vietnam through two tours. In saying that I think you've got to have a look at the nature and style of the two commanding officers. They were certainly different personalities and enforced different styles on the Battalion, but they both achieved very proud records in different ways.

I think that the fact that 7 was a young battalion, had difficulties in its raising, had a number of additional obstacles put in its path, firstly through location in Australia in Puckapunyal - which is, for those who don't know, a wide open space used, in those days, for armoured training; and people would say, imagine that you are in the middle of the tropics, in Vietnam, and there you are standing around a fire with a greatcoat on, in the middle of winter - little bit difficult when you are only issued with tropical warfare clothing and told to go and train in Puckapunyal. I think the

disposal store did record trades in greatcoats because we all had a modified or cutaway (greatcoat) to survive there.

The issue of being an early battalion with national servicemen - in the fact that we had first and second intake soldiers with us - as to whether they would go to Vietnam, and then the late decision to take them and then to seek reinforcements after an initial period of probably only two or three months. That meant that there was automatically a large turnover. So, all these taken into account, I think it was marvellous what they did achieve.

If you compare the second one, under General Grey, again a different style with a different environment. It was interestingly put in the book and certainly portrays that, and certainly brings the characteristics of the battalion out because the image of being the pig battalion came from the soldiers - people tried to stamp it out, but I think now people look back with pride that there is the pig, and there is the image, of being part of that unit.

Especially since Babe.

I don't think Babe's got anything to do with it.

Why did you join the army, Mark? - was it a family tradition?

No. Probably, at that stage, when I left school - almost about to leave school - I wasn't sure of what I wanted to do. I'd

filled out the application, was offered a scholarship, and decided to take it.

And did your family support your decision to join?

Well, at that stage, yes, there were no problems with animosity there or anything, the life was rewarding, and I think that service life certainly offers a lot for people which they can use in the community later on.

And early training at Duntroon, was that quite a shock?

I think you've got to remember, in those days, what used to happen was that people would arrive at RMC about Australia Day weekend - the only people at the college at that stage were those from the senior years who were back doing sup (supplementary) exams.

You arrived on a Friday, and, I think, by the Monday we were on trucks and out to Point Hutt to start recruit training before we were ever allowed back into the barracks some ten weeks later. I think, in the middle we probably got one visit back in that time. So we did the recruit training out at Point Hutt.

That was quite a spartan/stoical existence.

Yes, a stoical existence, under canvas and so forth. But people - most people - had in those days come with some cadet background so the style, and the living under canvas, was not new to most people, so it didn't come as a shock.

So the other cadets were similar to you in age and background, in your particular group?

With our particular group, we were very similar in background, except that there were a few older cadets from the New Zealand contingent. So we were all about the same age, and same environment, and the idea was for us to blend together as quickly as a cohesive group in that period of time. So when we returned we were let loose upon by the other three peers that were able to survive.

Who, in general terms, were your instructors at RMC?

Most of them were, at that stage, regular staff - just trying to think. It wasn't till the later periods that we had anybody who had been through Vietnam; we had one or two instructors who came back in the last year who'd been involved with the training team, but there were certainly personnel there, both NCOs and officers who had operational experience, either in Malaya, Borneo, or going back into Korea - there were still some Second World War people still around at that stage.

Very competent staff by the sound of it.

Yes. You'd have to say that at that stage there was certainly no doubt about the competency of the military staff.

And did the cadets readily accept the services demand for strict discipline?

Discipline was never, ever an issue that was raised, I don't think, it was just something that was accepted. I don't think we've ever challenged it or queried it, it was just one of those things that was given from the environment that we were in, whether it be within the corps itself or in the broader military context.

Upon graduation - what year did you graduate, Mark?

Graduated December '66; was allocated to infantry earlier on in that final year because a large number were required, obviously, through the expansion in the number of units, and went straight to 7RAR.

You don't have to answer this: Were officers conscious of rank and social background, revelling in all sorts of privileges?

I'd definitely say no because it's never been an issue. I think, unlike the - it's even difficult to say in the British scenario, but even in the British scenario there's a certain amount of tradition amongst certain regiments and certain units; but in Australia I've never, ever come across anything where people were conscious or revelling in the fact that there was us and them. I think that sort of lays back to the Australian characteristic of not allowing that to grow because most people just accepted that they had to get on. If you are talking about us having something, the officers' mess at Pucka was probably not the Taj Mahal because as soon as we left they put a bulldozer through it. So to say we had privileges of rank I don't think was any different. Probably those up in S

Block had better facilities than some of us down the bottom end, on occasions.

> What are your thoughts about the training in the Battalion at advanced level, before leaving Australia? That is, did the large-scale military exercises, Barra Winga and Nilla Qua, where you had to coordinate with other units, and where there was an attempt to recreate battlefield conditions - other than the Puckapunyal experience that you spoke about previously?

Looking back, you've got to try and identify and say what were those training activities which were performed, and how did they prepare people.

Well, firstly, the flow of information from Vietnam at that stage was difficult because the first task force was still on operations over there - bear in mind, we were the second task force - so the experiences of 5 and 6RAR, and the establishment of the Nui Dat base, were difficult to get out of because they were actively involved in still establishing a pattern for future use which we were to occupy in the April of '67 - if I remember rightly.

> Yes, that's correct.

So then there were people who had either come into contact with 1RAR, or people from 1RAR who'd been part of a larger American organisation in Bien Hoa Province, but they were a small player in amongst a big American organisation. So a lot of the lessons and things from there were entirely different

and not related to the Nui Dat environment. So that made it difficult at the start, and I think that a lot of people have probably commented, in looking back on the history, that the flow of information, from Task Force Headquarters back to units preparing, was not as good as it should have been. If the information was coming back to Australia, it certainly wasn't being disseminated. That made it difficult because then everybody was on premonitions. Bear in mind, at that stage, yes, we'd had some warrant officers return, or staff return, who were at Canungra from the training team, but they were involved in a different role and a different environment, so you weren't getting accurate information or lessons to build upon. That made it difficult.

You also had the need and urgency to raise skill levels in a very short time. In other words, you had to work away at raising shooting skills, field craft, all the other necessary skills, under peace time environments which imposed tremendous safety restrictions upon people.

So it was very difficult to create a live scenario, and quite often on occasions you were isolated from the units that you were going to marry up with. For example, we only saw the gunner officers on exercise, it was very difficult to get together with the BC (Artillery Battery Command) parties, and FO (Artillery Forward Observer) parties, in between because they were located - I just can't remember, I think it was Sydney or Townsville at that stage.

Yes.

And we were in Puckapunyal xxx.

Instead of Townsville.

The other units you were working with were APCs (M113A1 armoured personnel carriers) and so forth which were not necessarily always available, or the command structure was not the one you were going to work with, so it was quite different.

The helicopters; we didn't have in Australia the number or volume of helicopters that we were going to get involved with in Vietnam. Nor the size, because the minute we got over there we found that instead of working with Bell Iroquois Bravos, which were in Australia, we were working with Bell Iroquois Deltas and Bell Iroquois Hotels which were able to carry more. We weren't used to seeing the heavy-lift helicopters, such as the Boeing CH-47 Chinooks or the Sikorsky S-64 Sky-cranes. We didn't have the variety of air power available to practice with in Australia.

So all those things. Whilst we knew the mechanics and the theory, you weren't able to practice or develop. So that made one side of the training very difficult.

Just how far, and the effect of it, and how effective it was, I think probably the most effective training that we did was the period at Canungra. For a battle wing it wasn't a friendly environment, but I think that put pressure on people to perform and introduce them to the environment. I think the nature and the terrain of Shoalwater Bay was not conducive,

and the environment of Shoalwater Bay, of being assessed rather than helping - it hindered the outcome of those activities rather than assist.

And subsequently I did an exercise in Shoalwater Bay on the other side, as the enemy commander, and we found it very difficult, within the terrain, unless you were in particular pockets, to create an environment which was similar to what you would find. We did create one scenario, but we had to lead the people in to ensure the exercise finished on time, rather than the unexpected which they were about to confront in Vietnam. You never, ever knew what was going to happen one day to the next.

Overall preparation at unit level, and individual skill level, was certainly fostered and very high. I don't think any of the officers will ever forget; every time lunch time came around they were on the range somewhere; it was just as likely to see niner (commanding officer) would turn up in a Land Rover and spend the lunch hour shooting with him, whilst the troops had a rest, and then we got back into it after lunch - we weren't supposed to eat during the day.

The activity and the environment of training, but again, it was tempered by - I don't think it was until we got to Vietnam that we actually got the whole platoon together in one place at one location, there was always elements of it away doing something else, rather than what they were doing.

I was going to ask you, were there any spectacular incidents during training that you recall with horror or laughter?

Oh ... probably ... it's difficult because ... The only thing I'll say here is, there were some lectures that we had to give which were to try and prepare you people for Vietnam, and I still remember one. I had to talk to the company on why we were going to Vietnam. And I'd been through all the preparation of this lecture, which was supposed to go for forty minutes. You were all lined up in the hall up there - and it was next to the canteen up in S Block - and I think your heart was more in the room next-door than elsewhere. And I looked down the back and there I see one of my favourite soldiers sound asleep, low and behold, none other than Lance Corporal Clarke. And I said, 'Massa, why are you going?' - hu, hu - to get into a fight - back to sleep - that was Massa.

For those who don't know, I'm talking about an aboriginal soldier who used to have musical service ribbons. I think the last count we got to was somewhere between twelve and thirteen, but we never, ever saw the full set. The birth certificate was, shall I say at the least, musical. I still don't know, to this day, even though he's dead, that anybody knows the exact date.

Looking at the men - this is a rather delicate question - were there any Jack men, the I'm-all-right-Jack types, in the Platoon, or was it basically egalitarian and altruistic in principle?

Well, I think if we had a look at all the players - and I'm not too sure on the numbers, but I think it's somewhere about 101 names went through the Platoon over the period of probably eighteen months. Of all those times I think we can look back, and there was probably only one instance that led to disagreement in any way, in the whole time. And you had some pretty interesting characters that made up the organisation. First off, you had myself and Paddy (Sgt Paddy Craig), entirely different personalities ...

An Orange man (Protestant Northern Irishman).

... entirely different outlooks on life, but I think we buried the hatchet and got on with the job.

You have a look at the section commanders. We started out with Maxie Poole - I don't think we had a full section, I think we had Max and one other - I'm just trying to think - I've had difficulty placing some of the names because I don't want to offend people if I missed their names out. But we had a balance, a lot of it came from Jock Isaacs, is one name that comes to bell. And a lot of these came out of 3RAR, they were the single component of 3RAR, mixed in with a fairly large component of national servicemen, being first and second intake. A lot of them had been through 2RTB in Puckapunyal, trained in F Troop within the Battalion to do their infantry elementary training, and then allocated for the company. So they'd been through that environment, the sausage [slicer] internally.

Ex-British Army too.

A lot of ex-Brits because we picked up the singles out of 3RAR, and they brought some characters and some stories with them. But I think, when you look back on it, you look back over the period and you get down to the Jordie Wilkinsons, the Jock Isaacs, the Stevie Wests, the Graham Pashleys, the Griffiths (Graham), the Massas (Clarke), the Charlie Hopes ...

Brooksie?

Brooks - we all - the NCO level was a mixture of experience and youth, and I think that, yeah, they were trying to teach me how to look after them, and all I had to do was manage this tirade of experience and try and point it in the right direction. On occasions it didn't want to go necessarily the same way, but I think in the end we got to it. It probably led to a characteristic that we tried to inculcate early, was a no-rank, no-name environment, that we had trust in each other. And I think that went down to the troopers as well in the fact that, yes, you guys had your cliques, you had your little groupings, but I think if you go through and you think back on some of the names - and, you know, I'm not trying to belittle anybody that I don't mention - but the Hendo's (William Henderson - called Brian because of the TV personallity, Brian Henderson), the Shortie's (Illingsworth and Masson), the Smithies (Alan), Fitzie (Leon Fitzsimmons), Doc (Brian) Doctor - all those had different characters, different personalities. It was just a matter of how we engineered that group to achieve the goals. I think that we did, you know - Steelie (Graham), Hendo, Bourke (Tom), they've all got places and they all fit into it, but when you stand back and say, How in the

hell did this mob of mishmash ever work together? - I don't know.

> Yes, it was probably a lot to do with the professionalism displayed by you, as the Platoon commander, and your NCOs.

Well, we didn't always agree; we quite often agreed to disagree, but I think in doing so we look back, and look around, we had some reasonable support in Graham Chapman, the OC, and Ted Lewis, the CSM, to fall back on.

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START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B

And around the other areas, the other platoons, Fitzie (Lt Jim Fitzsimon), and Walshie (Sgt Brian Walsh) and company up in 9 Platoon. You know, the other platoons came into it as well. I think overall there was a good balance. Now, I don't think you could pick out 8 Platoon and say it was any different to anywhere else, although I will say that I seemed to spend a lot more time in the COs tent than other platoon commanders, and I don't know whether any preselection criteria to get into the Platoon, but at the end of the day we still got there.

> Yes. And did you think that you and the men in the unit were well trained by the time the unit left Australia - looking at competency with weapons, patrolling, field craft, and team work, that we've just mentioned?

I think, looking back on it, we only had a short time to get together - and bear in mind that I went over to Vietnam in early March so I didn't see all till later on. The problem, we only had a short period on Nilla Qua at Shoalwater Bay to finally get everybody together.

I think that we went over with sufficient idea, and I think the experience that people took enough with it (experience) that we were going to survive, and we were going to adapt to the environment that we were going into - very quickly. So I think that, provided we were always willing to learn - and I think I remember when you guys arrived in country we already had a series of lectures on the changes in weapons, changes in procedures, the introduction of the new mines, how we were going to operate, and so forth - from what we picked up from 5RAR. So I think that in that respect we had a framework. I don't think you could say it was perfect, but I think we had a framework upon which to build.

> Would it be fair to say that the infantry were highly trained specialists, able to employ many different skills? We could function as heliborne assault troops, mechanised, and patrolling from section to battalion level it was virtually a self-contained unit, would you say?

Well, it's an interesting comment you've ... There's been a comment passed to me by Henderson - Brian (William) Henderson - who served with us and then went back on a second tour with SAS (Special Air Service). That respecting the roles of the two units, he indicated that the pressure was on the

battalions to perform far higher. Whilst SAS had pressure on it to perform and achieve objectives, it was in a far more controlled environment than what the battalion had to operate on. That's probably related to this issue of multiplicity of medium, but that's a characteristic of any battalion being able to do it.

I think if you look through the organisations of all the battalions in Vietnam, you will find each of them adapted the structure slightly differently. We, in 7, there was a conscious decision on the first tour to retain anti-armour, and subsequently we used those weapons where other battalions disbanded them - threw away the anti-armour weapons - and developed pseudo-reconnaissance recondo type activities, which, at the time, were probably more appealing for some people than their traditional role. But it was how they were blended and how they were used. I think the relationship as to whether you fly to work, drive to work, or ride to work, I'm not to sure whether that absolutely matters. Ultimately, at the end of the day, you've got to do the job once you get there.

And I think that what you've also got to bear in mind is how well you planned, what you achieve out of it - I know that you people were always reluctant, when I came back and said it's seven days, or fourteen days, rations, but there was some method in their madness; it was to try and cover their tracks. Rather than have a resupply early, we were trying to delay exposure, and I think in some ways that led to success, and in other ways it may have counted against us because there was a fair bulk and slowed down movement. Maybe we might not have

been, in today's environment, taking in the right amount of nutrition, I don't know. But those decisions were weighed. It's quite interesting to see people's environments; what was more important, bullets or food when it came down to weight. And yes, it's probably now created some medical problems which will start to show in later years, but those things at the time were short-term decisions, we were not worried about the long term.

The flexibility of the establishment of a battalion. It is a flexible organisation, it is adaptable, and it's up to how the leaders use that to achieve what they're about. I think that was one of the characteristics of the Australian battalions; there was certainly an amount of flexibility within each of them, but I don't think you could say there were any two the same.

> What were your first impressions of Vietnam, specifically, Nui Dat? And how would you describe Nui Dat (Australian Task Force Base in Phuoc Tuy Province)?

Well, you've got to remember that I went over on the advance party so we left Australia like unwanted mongrel dogs because people hadn't made the decision that we were going, but we had to board an aircraft. I think, if you remember, the people of Seymour weren't supposed to know that we were taking off, but half of Seymour happened to be at Mangalore when we took off. We got across to Manila, we were incarcerated for twelve hours because we couldn't get visas to wander around because the government hadn't teed it up. Arrived in country in Tan Son

Nhut (Saigon Airport) late in the afternoon, and then Cariboued (De Havilland Canada DHC-4A Caribou) into Nui Dat.

At that stage it probably, to most of us, just looked like another echelon in a base in an exercise area, the only difference was that people had to man pickets and sentry posts for real. Nui Dat itself had just been established - had been established for some months by 5 and 6RAR, but there was always improvements needed. It's like anything in the tropics.

Yes, there has been criticism of some units as to how they've left the base, or what they've done in the base, but I think you've got to balance that against what those units had to do, or the time they operated in the tropics, from the period of time they were over there. They may not have had the time to carry out all those domestic chores that they needed to carry out to keep Nui Dat looking and being in shipshape order, because there was always a large amount of work to be done there, whether it be re-sandbagging, re-tenting, rewiring, changing claymores (mines), changing anti-personnel mines, and so forth; changing over of ammunition because of the tropics and deterioration. There's a large amount of that that had to get prioritised because people didn't have the time to do everything in twenty-four hours. So that's got to be taken in context when you look at the base, or what was referred to as the base, of Nui Dat.

I think, again you've got to refer to the requirement because initially the water point was outside the wire, so that required protection. You had normal patrols. I don't think, in the early days, that we had ARU up on patrolling; that came

later on - that's right, because we had the reinforcements with us - so there was still a fair amount of patrolling and activity that was required.

So to me, I think that any criticism - and around Nui Dat there was still a development, but that had to be taken in context. All Nui Dat was, was like an echelon base for people to operate out of.

> Yes. When your men finally arrived, were they keen to go into action?

Well, I think that earlier on most people had to have a shake-down, and I think that once we got outside the wire we were able to have a shake-down. Now, I could be wrong - the sequence - whether it was the TAOR (Tactical Area of Responsibility) patrol came before the first operation - no, I think the first thing we did was Puckapunyal which was a short operation, and then we had a TAOR patrol for about three days where we started to also engage the NCOs and people working with artillery, and various other procedures. And, you know, yes, we got hurt. Of course, that where we had an incident which subsequently cost Max Poole a trip back to Australia through a artillery tree burst - but that sort of environment - was through that involvement and trying to adapt to the procedures that were required and use, or become familiar with, the tools of the trade that were available. I think over the early periods we tried to involve as many people as we could in that, and that built up a base for people, and understanding between people, as we went on.

I don't think those lessons could have been done anywhere else in Australia; I don't think you could have created the environment.

> What do you think we knew about the enemy at that stage? How did platoon commanders and NCOs feel about the enemy? Did they think they knew enough to meet them on their own terms?

Well, I think that ... one of the things you've got to be careful about, in any discussion on this, is to look back and see what we were dealing with. We could go to all the lectures that you liked - and they talked about the three levels: the village guerilla type area, the district province type soldier, and then the regulars. Well, at that stage, and following on from briefings by 5RAR in country, and by Task Force people, we didn't expect too much action from the top group, from the regular soldier elements. We expected certain to come against the village guerilla and the district provincial element.

We weren't too sure at that stage what effect the contact at 6RAR ...

> Long Tan?

... Long Tan had had on one of the regiments in the fact that that had occurred in the August before. There was still feeling of mistrust about what was around there. And, at the same stage, we were there when there had been decisions made

about the introduction of the minefield and a few other things.

So, whilst we accepted the enemy's beliefs in that, I think most people were not unlike anywhere else, sceptical about all people and - I think we had a reasonable knowledge of what we were about to expect. Whether we were prepared for what ultimately occurred, I'm not too sure because I think that ultimately we ended up getting involved with some regulars (Tet Offensive 1968, Operation Coburg) which we weren't able to quite at the time determine who they were. I think that, as you go through, if you look back over the whole period of time, or the whole year, you go back to the frustrations of earlier on, of where - I don't think it was that we were doing things incorrectly or anything else, but we just didn't seem to make that early contact that other people did, albeit with small parties; we always seemed to find the installation that had been occupied twenty-four hours ago, or in the process of being cleaned out.

So I think the frustration, coupled with the period of time it took to get the first contact, but then subsequently after that it never seemed to stop, so maybe it should have gone on for a few more months.

Did you notice a change in the behaviour of the men at this stage?

Oh, I think it's very difficult to say whether I noticed any change in behaviour of people over that period because, bear in mind, that we are all probably within four or five years,

apart from a few, of about the same age group. Even the older NCOs were not that old, they were probably only a handful of years older than most of us, because that was the nature of the environment - Vietnam was certainly a war for under thirties, and certainly not for over thirties. I think anybody that was over thirty found it very difficult, physically, to keep up the pace, so it was certainly a young man's environment. The demands placed upon the body were young man's type activities. I think in that respect, to say there's a change, I think it's very difficult; it's now probably looking back later on at people and saying, Did that change them or did it make them do things differently? I think that would be the difference now. I don't think, at the time, you could notice the change.

> No. After the first contacts, what did you think of the weapons that the Platoon was using?

Well, I think you've got to go back and have a look. I think that our approach was not to criticize the weapons, but to make the weapons work for us. I don't think I can remember a serious stoppage on an M60 machine-gun (GPMG) the whole time in operations. I think there was a reluctance within our environment to use the Armalite (M16) rifle because people found that it was probably suspect; we had a couple of nasty experiences with stoppages in the sand-belt with sand getting into the teeth, so we basically went back to the SLR (7.62mm L1A1 SLR) rifle. Most people had confidence in the SLR rifle. I don't think we believed that 5.56mm ammunition was hard hitting enough. I think that we had confidence within the grenades, we had confidence in our people. I think we

generally had confidence in the basic weapons, and we wanted to keep those weapons for ourselves and to ensure that we maintained them to work. I think that a lot of the criticism of some of these weapons, you've got to look at how people maintained them. I don't think we had - although you might criticise me on this - necessarily a problem with people maintaining their weapons. I think we'd done enough training to ensure that this was first nature.

The machine-gunners were very dedicated people.

Yeah, but then again, I think, it came from an environment of what we created within the Platoon to ensure that they didn't have to be reminded. I think that even that monster that we got given - the 50-cal machine-gun in the main bunker - people said, oh, you wont get this firing, or so forth; well, I don't think we ever had a stoppage on that in the time we were there. I think every time we test fired it, it went first pop. Yeah, we chopped down a few trees - but a few hundred dollars compensation. I think that we didn't have a problem there; we didn't have a problem with turning over of ammunition to ensure that it was serviceable. I think that came - and I think, probably looking back on it, was probably a reward for some of the education processes we'd been through earlier on.

Yes. You've probably covered this, but I'll go over it again. Would you say the soldiers in your command were masters of improvisation, modifying and streamlining many of the skills and field-craft learnt in Australia to suit the terrain of South Vietnam?

The short answer is yes.

Yes, I think you've covered that quite well.

You've got to - got to look back at the characters, the nature of the person, some of the one-upsmanship that was going on. I think people - the group - worked together and levered off each other, to use a term 'leverage', in their ideas and concepts; I think they just became adaptable.

There was a lot of cohesion there within the unit - morale was always good, would you say?

Well, I hoped it was because, you know, we were always probably trying to challenge the authority of others, as a group, and that brought us closer together.

Moving on now to Bien Hoa. The Tet Offensive of 1968 was probably the flash point of the Vietnam War. What were your thoughts when you were told that we would be operating outside Phuoc Tuy Province?

Well, you've got to cast your mind back, that the latter part of 1967 we'd spent a fair bit of time on the borders of Phuoc Tuy Province or across the border in Long Khanh Province, across into Binh Tuy, so we'd always been used to operating at the extremities - you know, the provinces - so to go into Bien Hoa was no real surprise. I don't think that it meant anything different to any of you people, or to any of us, the fact that we were going into another area further north, was just a continuation of the sequence. I think that we had, through our

patrolling and work within Phuoc Tuy Province, seen that we had - it wasn't totally clean, but we had the Province in a state where we could say that it was reasonably under control.

The bordering areas were not quite so, so the step into Bien Hoa was nothing new or not what we didn't expect - no, there was no surprise about it at all.

> The VC/NVA forces were concentrating in South Vietnam, preparing to assault major cities, towns, and military bases as part of their planned Tet, Lunar New Year, Offensive in 1967 - late '67. Part of this build-up occurred north-north-east and east of the Long Binh/Bien Hoa complex. The enemy concentration commenced before Christmas 1967 and continued into January 1968. Elements of the 5th VC Division Headquarters, and mainforce infantry, and artillery regiments, were positively identified in the area. The Australian Task Force deployed from Phuoc Tuy Province to Bien Hoa Province on 24 January 1968 with the aim of denying the enemy access to suitable sites ...

'67 - sorry, '68, yeah - January '68, yeah, you are right.

> ... with the aim of denying the enemy access to suitable sites from which to bring 122 millimetre rocket fire onto the Long Binh/Bien Hoa bases. C Company was detached from the Battalion command and placed under command of the Task Force Headquarters. It was tasked with the responsibility of establishing and providing local

defence to FIre Support Base Harrison. Mark, could you tell me the Company's operations from this time on?

Fire Support Base Harrison was the western and northern of two fire support bases established. The other one was Fire Support Base Anderson. Fire Support Base Anderson was established by a vehicle movement road convoy after Harrison had been occupied. We were to fly in, secure Harrison - which had been used by an American unit prior to our arrival.

Once we'd established Harrison, and the guns were in there, Anderson was to be occupied, or the final occupation of Anderson was to take place, from the road convoy which had departed some time earlier.

Upon establishing Harrison, we were showing the effects of a long period of operations in the fact that platoon strengths were not full numbers - we were down to - and I think the number is about sixteen, but we were nominally a platoon. That was the same in the other two platoons as well. I think on that operation the total company consisted of somewhere between seventy and eighty people, including attachments and detachments, rather than about 140. So the numbers were quite sizeably down. So that meant there had to be some initiative and imagination used to meet that criteria.

Part of the thing in Harrison was, we would also bring in the two 106s (recoilless rifles) and use a flechette round in the 106 recoilless rifle to provide us some additional coverage. Harrison itself was an open fire support base, there was limited coverage around in the form of tree-lines, and so

forth, to occupy, so we tended to have to occupy a position out in the open. And when your defending a gun position, you have to - the size (of the position) is given to you by the number of guns, so we can't restrict that or reduce that because we just haven't got the manpower; you've got to make use of what you've got.

I can't remember, off the top of my head, but I don't think there were any mortars in there; I think the mortars were up at Battalion Headquarters providing support back down to the fire support base anyway. And we were provided with support for that area from Harrison, but initially we had to get American support.

Upon occupation we occupied, if my recollection is correct, the eastern part of the fire support base, and we were very lucky in the fact that the depth position happened to be Platoon Headquarters, that was about all we could provide.

So from that we then went into the normal process of securing the fire support base by having patrols go out, operating from the fire support base, to give us a little bit of in-depth protection. This went on for a few days, and at the same stage we started to get, or hear, reports of some contacts with other units.

This naturally made us feel as though we might have been left out of seeing the action, but I think that everybody realised that we had a job to do and we had to keep on with what we were doing.

I think it was probably - and I'm not too sure about the dates, but around about the 29th - that there was a decision made that we would be relieved by a company from 3RAR which had recently arrived in country, and that company would occupy the fire support base. We would move into Task Force reserve - not platoons, the Battalion - but be allowed to patrol from a position north of Harrison, thus giving Harrison a little bit more security and depth.

That 3RAR company was commanded by Major Ian Hanns.

Ian Hanns, yeah. They arrived - I still remember that - just wondering whether I had enough pits, and couldn't explain why I didn't have enough pits for a platoon, but anyway ...

We got out of that and we went up a little bit further north. We started to patrol up in that area; I know that there was one area where we put in a protracted ambush for a period of three days. Basically the routine there was that we would occupy the ambush position forward and people would filter in and out from eating some quite at least three kilometres away from the ambush positions so there was no food or fresh smells around the immediate ambush site.

In that area again, there was improvisation - probably it wasn't the wisest decision in hindsight, bit of vulnerability, but we did create a tree OP (observation post), but it did give us tremendous vision for a long area. And yes, there was an engagement as a result of the person in the tree spotting it, but he had to do a scamper down quickly.

But that sort of operation, again, was an adaptation of what we had been doing. We'd actually quietly dug in in a position that was almost fully dug in in the ambush position by the end of it, by people just chipping away at it during the day and occupying it, so forth. From there we then were picked up by some APCs (M113A1 Armoured Personnel Carriers) and moved to the southwest to patrol, probably to the east of Harrison.

I think it's on Day 1, 5 February 1968, just after a drop-off, we were moving up along a creek line, and reports had come through that there was some high ground and you could see the ground rising up to our right of approach. I'd asked permission to see whether it was worthwhile checking out the high ground or whether I was to proceed along the low ground. Confirmation came past that we should check out the high ground, and at that stage a decision was made that 9 Platoon would move through us.

9 Platoon had just, shortly after, moved through when contact was established. Initially 9 Platoon thought they could handle it, but it became apparent fairly early on that it was going to be a bit more than what they could handle.

So what had occurred was that 9 Platoon ended up to the top; we had closed in probably in underneath 9 Platoon, to be there, on 9 Platoon's right, with 7 Platoon closing at the rear or still in the process of coming in from somewhere else - I'm not too sure.

9 Platoon then tried to get in, but they were rejected through some heavy fire from a very well disguised position.

It was then decided that we would try and come in from the right where we got into the forward area of the bunker system, a little bit further down than 9 Platoon. Unfortunately, again, we got into some heavy fire and were - not totally rejected, but we couldn't see ourselves getting any further forward than where we were. So rather than try and beat our head against a brick wall there, we decided that it was time to pull back a little bit and to consolidate and let's find out what we'd got up against. This was certainly something bigger than what we'd ever, ever encountered before.

In doing so - one of the risks that we had to do in this whole operation - was once we got down to calling artillery in closely, we had to break contact, get back a safe distance, then let the gunners engage, then come back in.

This created several problems in the fact that you are breaking contact, you don't know what he is doing whilst you are out of contact, and if there is any drop short, or so forth, it creates a natural barrier that you have to then get back around to get back into the camp.

I think later in that afternoon we had another go at getting back into the camp, and we found that it was still fairly well occupied - there was certainly some heavy machine-guns in there because they were creating some havoc over the top of us and around us every time we tried to move. It was during one of these withdrawals - and I think it's probably later in the afternoon, when 7 Platoon was closing up and overshot - actually collected - the tail gunner of 7 Platoon.

Mick Ayers.

Mick Ayers, yes. So we had to at that stage evacuate ('Dust-off') Mick, consolidate and think about what we were going to do. The decision was to pull back a little bit, consolidate into a harbour, and hopefully try and get some reconnaissance patrols out the next day to try and find out what went on.

George Turner, he was wounded at this time too.

He was wounded. Well, if my recollection is right, he was wounded in the initial 9 Platoon's engagement.

Yes.

The 9 Platoon engagement - really, that first day was 9 Platoon's total involvement, and it was really their day. All we provided was support. Yes, we did get into - fight them into the camp - but that was as a result of trying to provide support to 9 Platoon.

Heroics and so forth. Yeah, I think that just professionally we were around supporting 9 Platoon, trying to find another way in. I said to Kev Lewis (Lt Lewis, 9 Platoon Commander) some months after this, I said, 'Kev, thanks very much for knocking on the front door, but you didn't tell me it was the Hell's Angels having an unwelcome party waiting there for us', as I was to find out shortly thereafter.

The next day, whilst we were not trying to assault the camp ...

This is 6 February?

6 February - we tried to reconnoitre as much information as we could between provision of air strikes and so forth onto the camp complex, and this meant that we spent most of the day, probably within viewing distance of the camp, trying to reconnoitre east and west of the camp to see whether there were weaker areas to get into.

One of the misleading pieces of information about this camp was that all the service facilities that supported the camp were outside the camp perimeter. For every time you thought you found the back door, either thinking it was a lavatory or a service facility, upon further examination we found that they were outside the perimeter. So it was a little bit misleading getting information.

The pressure of time restricted the amount of time that we could do on patrols to get into some of the creeks and gullies because we were still not too sure as to how big or how far it was, or whether we were going to end up isolated ourselves from the remains of the company. So we had to put a very strict time frame on patrols in and out, so most patrols were - reconnaissance patrols were restricted to about an hour and a half duration, and most of them carried only bare essentials - there was only fighting belts where ever allowed, there were no rations, no nothing, because we needed to be able to withdraw fairly quickly.

After the consolidation of this, on the 7th we then decided to make a concerted effort, and indications were that we couldn't find any better way in to the camp than the access that we had originally assaulted on, which was at right angles to where 9 Platoon had initially established their position.

So very early that morning we moved up with the aim of trying to punch a hole into them. Earlier on, Griffo's (Corporal G L Griffiths M.M.) section made contact and occupied the front end. That section was to stay there for the remainder of the engagement and provide support.

There's a large amount of information that it's only in recent times that I've become aware of, of what went on there because, whilst we closed up and joined them, for a limited time platoon headquarters and the remainder tried to get in using them as a fire support base from the right-hand side. So we went up another gully, up the other side. So I was unaware of the fact that I don't think, in that section, or that grouping, there was one person who was not at some stage wounded.

Early on in the contact I lost the radio (radio was hit by enemy rocket fire) - well, that was probably a godsend in disguise - but Sarge (Pte John Sergent) was the quickest dig he's ever done.

He was a slow digger?

A slow digger, but he dug that day. So we went up the other side there, trying to get in from that side, and we eventually were starting to make inroads in. And I don't know whether you would say it was forty all, or deuce, after a couple of hours, but it was about that stalemate. You know, we got as far as we could. We had to have a regroup and redistribution because we were all getting short of ammunition. So we consolidated, we remained in contact, and the Company had an O group to try and decide how it was to go.

> At one stage there the Company was being, or was, flanked during that time - or appeared to be flanked. I know 9 Platoon section commanders were saying that they were taking fire from the rear.

At this stage I am still not able to describe the camp because I've never seen a diagram of the camp, at the spot the engineers and efforts have been made to try and find it. I understand there is one about, but I've never seen it. It is quite possible, looking back at the lay of the ground, the ground itself was a fairly large knoll which had ridges running off to the left and right from where we were trying to get in, so it was confusing as to whether you could ever find the back of it - because I actually got round to one of the reconnaissance patrols, and then found that I was starting to go back up the other side, and that's why I went down the right-hand gully because that's the area I was more familiar with. But there was the copse of bamboo which was channelling people in a particular way - we didn't know how far that copse of bamboo went on to the west - it went on the right-hand side down the gully because we could end up being split. So we

tended to be a little bit careful about how we moved around there. But I didn't know the exact extremes to this side because again, there was another toilet on the outside there, there was a toilet outside on 9 Platoon's side that we could never, ever find out where the back of this camp was before we started to attack it, because it would have taken probably another two or three days to fully reconnoitre the whole place to place a deliberate attack on it.

> Was it a problem? The Battalion had trained for guerilla warfare operations against the VC, to take away their initiative and deny them access to towns and villages. But on the Tet, especially this bunker action, it was more like conventional warfare, something the soldiers had not experienced, or had been trained for in Vietnam.

I don't think it was a problem in the thought process. I think the problem was that where people had been used to having a contact, or you would hear the word 'contact front' or 'contact left', 'contact right, or whatever, and there would be an immediate action drill followed by a sequence of actions, and very seldom did people have to go further and go into the deliberate attack mode. I think what we were doing was saying, this is bigger than what we've encountered before; we have to go back to what we have been taught in the process and go back through a set battle procedure and try and get in there.

> So the war had stepped up several gears?

Well, it had stepped up several gears, but I don't think there's any difference in - I'm not saying we weren't prepared for it. I think the fact of it, it took a longer time to do things, you had to be more thorough, was what was coming out of this action.

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B

START OF TAPE TWO - SIDE A

> Identification: This is Tape No. 2 of an interview with Mark Augustan Moloney, conducted by Clive Swaysland, recorded on 10 April 1997 at the Australian War Memorial. The topics covered on this tape are the 1967-68 Tet Offensive, Operation Coburg.

I think where the problem had arisen was, there was a command problem in the fact that we were Task Force reserve, we weren't supposed to get into a bun fight because we were the ones that were going to help those others that got into a bun fight, should it occur - therefore there was no Task Force reserve. We couldn't bring people from the fire support base that was closest to us because there was no protection then for the gunners. The Battalion itself was engaged in actions a little bit to the north, so therefore we couldn't rely on support from there. We were more or less by ourselves.

The only thing where I will be critical of in this area is, I don't think the people on duty, in the Task Force Headquarters, related the incidents that were occurring and put two and two together and made a deduction that there was

something big there, because there were sufficient signs, if you look back at the information that's available, as it was reported, rather than recorded as one-liners in the logbook and putting a pin on a map. There was no analysis of what was going on, because there would have been flags and bells coming out of this whole episode as to what we had actually hit. This, coupled with what 2RAR were involved in, and the Battalion to the north, indicated that we had got ourselves into something which we hadn't encountered probably since Long Tan back in August '66. Now, how we went about it, and the process, was nothing more than using what we had been taught.

A classic infantry confrontation.

It was a confrontation. You know, we just relied upon the skills of trying to reconnoitre the area. As I said earlier, we weren't able - we had the camp in sight the whole time, we used various groups - and I know you went on one patrol, around one area - but we used various techniques to try and gather information and piece it together, because we just weren't able to determine the extremities.

The fire power was ferocious that the Viet Cong were able to concentrate on us when we tried to get into the installation. As you just said, this quite obviously indicated they were there in large numbers and they must have thought their position was unassailable.

Oh, I think they did because I don't think they had expected that the numbers that we had would create the thorn in their side that we ultimately did.

With their sophisticated weaponry - they had heavy machine-guns, a recoilless rifle ...

I don't think at the time - I think we can go through what was there ultimately, but I think at the time we just had a target piecemeal. There were certainly indications that there were heavy machine-guns, but all you could do was treat the heavy machine-gunners - a machine-gun which was on a mount and was capable of probably indicating that there were a fair number there because you didn't put these things in lightly - the RCL (recoilless rifle), the size of it is very difficult to determine, in contact, as to whether - you could tell the difference between an RPG2 (rocket launcher) and a 7, but once you got from a 7 to anything bigger, it was only when you heard the ignition, as things were fired, that you could tell the difference, because once you heard the detonation, the 7 was very similar to a lot of the heavier stuff. So unless you heard the ignition - now, there was sufficient noise around through that period, either from our own artillery or fire support, that made it very difficult to determine what was going on, what was ours, what was theirs. You had this problem in your mind of trying to eliminate and determine what was going on, plus your thought process going to try and muster the troops around what you had.

Now, throughout that engagement - bear in mind that whilst we only had sixteen - I think Paddy was still with 7 Platoon so I didn't have a platoon sergeant, so we had to fill in there - we had four that were in Griff's area providing support there

- there was Griff, Massa, I think Hendo - no, Hendo wasn't in it - was Hendo in there, or was he up the other side?

Hendo was there.

Hendo was there, and I think Fitzie was in there.

Fitzie was in there, yes.

So that group of four, once we made contact early in the morning, about nine o'clock, we didn't see till after six o'clock that night because they had basically stayed there. Yes, they had got in on a couple of occasions to them, or back out again, through various reasons or movements, but most of the time was spent away from them, relying on them and trying to get word to them. Bear in mind that it wasn't till later in the afternoon that we actually got our radio back, when we had a redistribution of one, because ours had got hit early in the morning - so that was 'goodby Charlie Brown'.

As I was saying, we were back, we had the O Group, and at that stage I came back to say, well, look, look guys, there's no way, we've just got to get on and try and get through. So we went up the side again, to try and get in - because I thought it was the best way - because 9 Platoon, if we went the other side where 9 Platoon was, there was no show because they had never, ever been able to make any progress that way. The only way we've got any progress was to get up the right-hand side of the camp.

Once we started to get up there we again came into the bamboo copse, and a track, and there was indications that we were below the camp and exposed. So there was a request made for us - or a suggestion made - that we would hold and we would get one of the other platoons to sweep through the fire support area and come in over the top - and bear in mind that we were below them - because I didn't want to come back up out of the gully into the camp again, as I'd already done that twice already and not got too far. So we tried to form a footing, and at that stage it was then that 7 Platoon came over the top - or 9 Platoon came over the top - and found that they had withdrawn.

Now, that was late in the afternoon. There is a whole series of events that go in between this. In some of those engagements, earlier on in the day, particularly early in the afternoon, we had gunships down to, I think, about twenty-five metres. There had been a change in command and we'd been put back to the Battalion, and that also brought in a resupply of ammunition, and also a mortar section had been deployed down to provide us support. And we had the mortars coming in on one side to about twenty-five metres, and the guns down to about seventy-five metres, so we were on the limits all around, trying to keep continual fire on this particular position whilst we moved around.

> And the VC, they were still quite confident because they were mocking us - because I'll never forget, it was 'Mr Moloney, Mr Moloney' every time one of your soldiers called out to you for advice, or whatever, the VC came back 'Mr Moloney' - up went the chant from the bunkers.

So they were still quite happy about their position at this time.

I think that there was never any doubt that they thought that they weren't going to surrender the position at any stage. Now, throughout this - and it's very difficult to talk about the exact sequence of the events as they occurred because there are a number of things going simultaneously, like a lot of the reconnaissance was done under cover of a fire support plan which was laid over the top of it; the gunships were brought in at various times, as they could spend time on station we had to try and get support in for them - it was very difficult. Bear in mind, we didn't have a radio for half the day so I was relying on support through Bombardier Mick Williams's (Bombardier M Williams M.M.) radio - getting messages out that way, and getting support requests through the gunner net as opposed to the infantry net, and he was feeding it through the FO to the company commander, Graeme Chapman. So that was a rather tenuous command structure that was in place, till we got a spare radio forward.

I was reading recently where 4RAR actually carried a spare radio, so somebody must have learnt by our mistake. But then again, it was the weight and poundage; do you carry a spare radio for dead weight? - I don't know.

But a lot of things were going simultaneously. There were several occasions where we had an air strike planned, and until that got on station and were able to mark for the FAC (Forward Air Controller), we still had people forward of us - because we were trying to get information as late as we could.

So, you know, it's not easy to say that all this is going on in isolation; there was a lot of things going on at the same time. To describe how people felt, or how I felt, I don't know. I don't know to this day how my name got across there, to the other side, but it did, because the normal reference in the platoon was either Skip, or Boss, or whatever, that was no name, no frills.

They were being very polite calling you Mr Moloney.

Oh, I don't know, it was far more respectful than some of you guys. But in actual fact, when you think back about the whole thing, there were sixteen people, of which four were taken out to provide fire support, there were very few to actually assault the camp position, and it was - I think it has been confirmed - that it was at least a company position that we took on, and we ultimately forced our way into it. We'd got in, on several occasions, a couple of rows into the bunkers, but they were always able to repel us from the higher ground. We never, ever were able to dominate that position, but we kept getting in there and getting repelled back out again.

Again, it was cohesion and recognition, I think, that at one stage there. Griff would have probably been sixty to seventy metres away from where we were operating, but they were able to recognise that it was us there and were able to keep the fire going without actually endangering us ourselves, and were able to distinguish between our own fire and the enemy by sight. It was an eerie feeling to know that you are relying on somebody else's instinct as to whether you are going to survive.

> I know an Australian helicopter pilot (Army) said that attacking an enemy, in a well-constructed bunker system, in thick jungle - the casualty rate was always going to be high without accurate knowledge of what the enemy's actual strength was - amounted to downright suicide.

Um ... I think that in this case ... I think the whole thing that people ... the whole reason people survive, with the nature of injuries that they sustained, was mainly through the professionalism of the individual, their ability to carry out the orders without question. At no stage, in the whole involvement, did I ever have any orders, or any requests, questioned by anybody, and ultimately the trust that they had developed amongst themselves came to the front and that they were able to rely on their cohorts for the support they needed.

> During this battle, the company sergeant major, Lewis, gave the order to fix bayonets, at one stage. I don't believe that happened at any other time during Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War.

I don't know whether ... well, still to this day, I don't think - that's 8 Platoon - ever fixed their bayonets because I don't think we had enough time to worry about it. But I did hear that the others within the company had bayonets fixed.

But again, if you think back, the bayonet is another weapon that we have to use. There were several bunkers in that complex that I think a couple of us got on first-name terms

with because we were seeing them throughout the whole three days, quite regularly, that, you know, we got to know them by instinct, just to say, Well, here we are again, now, let's have another go.

But I think, looking back on it, that if I was to do it again we would probably need another twenty-four hours of reconnaissance, to do it, and I certainly would have tried to have got a lot further south to break contact and try and come back up the other side. But looking at post action reports and information analysis, that may have got me into more strife than I was after because Victor Company (New Zealand company), just across the way, was again having heavy contacts as well.

It appears to me now that we were on the southern end of a fairly large massing of NVA regulars, and the contacts made by us, the 2RAR, and the Battalion further to the north, all indicate that we upset the Vietnamese Christmas party.

> I will go on to something that's often spoken about by members of Charlie Company, and that's your bravery and professionalism in this battle. What do you think it is that causes a man to rise above his fellows in battle? Did it have anything to do with the Anzac tradition, or was it concern for the men under your command?

Well, I don't think I did anything more than that which would be expected of anybody in the circumstances. I think the men themselves did what they had to do in a professional manner, and it was just us working together. I don't think there was any esteem as to one person doing more than another.

In hindsight, the actions and recognition of Griffo were as a result of his actions over a protracted period, in detachment from the rest of the platoon, that his medal (Military Medal) was in recognition of, because he, at no stage, ever moved, or wanted to move, or balked, or felt lonely - I know he must have felt unwanted, sitting out there in the corner by himself, with his band of four - but they kept there for the whole duration. Now, that's what that was in recognition for.

I think the others, you could pick out of the others isolated areas, but at no stage would anybody be any different to anybody else.

> Mike Williams also received a Military Medal in this action.

Mike Williams was again, he was the meat in the sandwich in the fact that he was sitting in the corner - it's very difficult to describe this now because I've got one group over there, Mick seemed to be to the right of that group, but he was my go-between because we didn't have a radio. Once the fire plan was in action, it was basically left to Mick to control it, because there was no way that an individual could understand, or get involved in, the total action without placing reliance upon the ability or the responsibilities of each member within that organisation; and Mick was that go-between.

I think at one stage Mick may have got hit about the same time as a couple of us got hit by some RPG shrapnel, which made his life a little bit more uncomfortable than ...

You were wounded at that time too, were you?

Oh ...

At that particular time?

Well, I don't know. I was wounded in the action; at what stage, I just don't know.

You were actually attacking bunkers with rocket launchers there, at one stage, and it seems most people believe that you were wounded during those attacks that you made on the bunkers.

It's difficult to say when I exactly was wounded. At some time in that period, yes, I believe that it's a possibility.

In the end it was the soldiers of Charlie Company - 7RAR - that won the day in this fiercely fought battle. The NVA, it was obviously an elite unit, very well trained and highly disciplined, armed with the most up-to-date military weaponry. The Viet Cong not only had a numerical superiority, they fought well from their well-constructed bunkers. Now, we've spoken about the Australians; what did you think of these soldiers?

The soldiers that we were up against were mainforce regulars which had obviously been well trained and well prepared, and I think, you know, it's like any soldier, there's mutual respect for both parties. I would certainly, at no stage, ever belittle or contemplate belittling the actions of any of the enemy soldiers because they were as competent as we were; it was a matter that we were just more persistent.

> Yes. And this battle is unique in that in no other battle fought by Australian soldiers, in the Vietnam War, were men called upon to line up, time after time, and march directly into enemy fire, over a three day period. Would you agree with that?

I'd certainly respect the honour, the integrity, and the duty of the members of the Platoon - the 16 members that were there - because at no stage were any of them ever faltering or show any signs of wear of the fact that they would not do what was required of them.

> Mark, after you were wounded in this battle, can you describe what happened - treatment and 'Dust-off', and so on?

Well, what happened after we occupied the position which - I think we eventually got into the company harbour after dark, on the evening of the 7th - as we were the last elements to come in - we tried to consolidate and find out the nature and extent of the wounds, and then started to prioritise the casualties. That meant us doing a rather hazardous night winch to get some of the people out to the Bien Hoa air base.

The reason I say hazardous is the fact that the casualties were such that we couldn't have retained them in there overnight with the limited support that we had, particularly as one of our stretcher bearers was one of the casualties. So we got the first out, and since it had been such a heavy fight to get into the position, the conduct of a night winch, where we had to for a limited time use lights, was a very hazardous operation. So we kept it down to a minimum, we got those out that night, and then - I don't think, to be honest, anybody really slept that night; I think most people in what was left of the Platoon were uneasy, wondering whether there would be a counterattack that night, or early the next morning. There was apprehension around the whole place.

> There was a certain amount of fatigue after three days in battle, I'd say.

I don't know whether it was fatigue or apprehension; I think people could relax. I know, myself, I didn't unpack anything, I basically lay on the ground and just stayed as I was, I couldn't be bothered that night - and I know I didn't sleep.

The next morning, when we stood to, we were still waiting for this counterattack which didn't come, but it was early in the morning when the CO and the doctor arrived, at which stage every member of the Platoon was put through a medical, and there were further evacuations.

It was in that second group that I was evacuated back to Bien Hoa with others. We were evacuated to the American hospital

system where some of them were treated and some of them weren't, and it was through the Australian liaison staff at Bien Hoa that some of us were on-shipped, after a day or so, to Vung Tau where we received medical assistance.

I think I was fortunate - we were very fortunate in the fact that we did have - the Australians - had provided a medic as a liaison person, at Bien Hoa, for Operation Coburg, to ensure that we got appropriate treatment in a timely manner. And that's the reason that some of us were shipped to Vung Tau. A few days after our arrival, the remainder arrived in Vung Tau on their way home. I think, if I remember rightly, there were twelve evacuations out of the company over the period - I could be corrected on this, on the numbers - but of that there were only two of us that went back to the Battalion, the remainder were on-shipped to Australia for further treatment.

There were over thirty casualties.

Some of those would have been treated by the doctor and remained on duty, so I think of the evacuations, I think there were about twenty-odd people evacuated.

Twenty-seven, according to the official figures.

Yeah, evacuated. I think there were only two of us that came back to the Battalion after recuperation in Vung Tau. I think I was down in Vung Tau for the best part of a month; I came back and I was on light duties for another month after that.

> That day after you left, Brigadier Hughes flew in. After he surveyed the battle scene he was shocked; he said, 'My god, I had no idea what you were up against', and he congratulated what was left of Charlie Company for their fighting spirit and on a job well done. But Charlie Company wasn't a company any more, there were only a handful of soldiers left, and they were choppered back to Nui Dat because the Company was no longer operational.

Well, I don't think ... I think that when you start looking at operational numbers, I don't think we were operational to start with - when you looked at the numbers.

> No, you mentioned that.

But that was the thing, a fact of life. I can remember, later on, when I was given a TAOR patrol out when 1RAR arrived, and Graeme Chapman, the company commander, that I was taking twenty-two out, he said, 'You wont know what to do with them all', because we'd never had those numbers. The reason we'd never had that number was the fact that, whilst we might have had thirty-three on our books, there were always three left behind for the defence of Nui Dat, there were three on R&R, and there were three on R&C. So you take nine out of thirty-three to start with, otherwise you become non-operational if you don't trickle flow people through those processes. We couldn't afford to leave Nui Dat unattended, and if you had any people that were temporarily sick, lame, or lazy, that added to the numbers that you had to leave behind. They couldn't count as defending Nui Dat because if they were

required to they had to be operational, so you had to leave three operational people there.

So I think that when you treat the term 'platoon', you've got to be very careful about what you are talking about. If you took our platoon out and some of the 9 Platoon casualties, there was hardly a handful of the Company left.

But I think that in hindsight, what people have got to do with it, is look at what we did, how we got in there - and bear in mind, if you look at a number of actions in Vietnam, now in hindsight, you will find there are several bunker actions. There are some which involved tanks, there are some which involved additional support, but a significant part about this action was that we didn't have the additional fire power, or the additional support, to get in there. People got in through their own skills and determination to keep knocking at the door, and the use of the weapons.

Now, to say that we didn't run low of ammunition, yes, there was redistributions, but we only had one ammunition resupply in the whole time, and that was later, about mid afternoon on the third day. It was through discipline, and redistributions internally, that we were able to keep sufficient available to ensure that we were able to look after ourselves.

There is a lot of discipline involved in that too, in many ways.

Well, I think it was contrary to the current philosophies around Vietnam at that stage - large fire power, blaze

everywhere, try and blaze your way through. There were no contacts that 8 Platoon carried out where there was blatant blazing of ammunition, everything had to be an aimed shot. And I know that we, on occasions, got into strife with superior officers for not blazing away, but we believe that we carried it to fight and therefore we wanted to use it when we had to, not waste ammunition. And it was internal discipline that we'd built up over a long time within the Platoon.

> Yes, we were desperately in need of that resupply on the third day when the Battalion 2IC, Alf Garland, flew in and hand-dropped that resupply into us. That was quite a difficult operation in itself.

Yeah, well, that was after we came back, and I think it was glad that we got back to the Battalion at that stage because I don't know how much more we would have had.

> Yes. During the tour of Vietnam, how did the loss of national servicemen, flown home for discharge, impact on the effectiveness of the unit's esprit de corps?

I don't think the loss of national servicemen affected the morale within the Platoon at all; I think that what we had to do was, we had to manage the turnover of personnel - bear in mind that, when we arrived, we took on a couple of extra NCOs because they came from 6RAR. When they departed - and when we left, we left a couple of NCOs behind to complete their tour with 1RAR. This was a natural attrition. As far as the people coming in, we were so used to, by the end of the tour, of the intakes departing, at times, that we knew that we would

probably have to go through this slight initiation phase, on the next operation, to ensure people were familiar with the way we operated. And I think that, basically, built up amongst the soldiers themselves, and they were the supporters of that, and they quickly worked it out amongst their own tent mates as to how this was to work: This is the way it's done here, you might have been taught that in Australia, but forget that when you arrive over here. I think it was a self initiation.

I don't think there's any difference in that to any other action or unit. I think that even if you go back to World War II, a unit could have lost casualties of the nature of ours, and had to regroup and be back in, on line, fairly shortly. It's a matter for people how they managed it.

I think that earlier on in the tour we were probably spoilt, although I wished it would have continued where we actually carried the first line reserves in the unit, because it made the replacement easier, but the temptation was always there to use those reserves for other duties. So you were spoilt on one hand, but you had the resource available. The slowest part in getting reinforcements in was the time it took once a person left the unit and went to, say, Vung Tau for medical evacuation till the time a reinforcement arrived. It was not an instantaneous pipeline, it took time for the paperwork, and the individual, to come through the pipeline. That was the problem, not the national servicemen per se.

> Another problem was illness. We were faced with the problems of malaria, hookworm, various other complaints that do occur in the tropics.

We weren't supposed to get malaria - that was the first rule - but I think that what Vietnam did, highlighted, and was subsequently confirmed with my experiences in Papua New Guinea - which is another malaria area - that there are certain strains which are resistant to some of the suppressant drugs. So whilst it was under threat of severe action if people got malaria, I don't think it reflects on them not taking the suppressive action - it did occur. The other illnesses occurred, but I think, overall, because again, you are dealing with the bottom end of the spectrum of the fit young fellow - as I alluded to earlier, Vietnam was an under-thirty environment - that the chance of some of those diseases, provided you took adequate precautions, and applied common sense - in other words, you know, clothing was treated, people didn't bunch up or try and create too many layers of clothing - in other words, to increase the chance of heat rash, and infections, and so forth - that a lot of these diseases wouldn't occur. But you can't stop them all occurring; provided you take preventative action, you can reduce them. And I think that our sickness rate was no worse, no better, than the average.

> No. Getting back to national servicemen; how did you rate the national servicemen against his regular counterpart?

I think what you've got to say, the view that we took - and I think the view that applied fairly widely throughout the Battalion - there is no discrimination or distinction between whether a person was a national serviceman, or an individual, over a soldier, and that is what we had to manage. We had to

manage soldiers, not national servicemen or regular soldiers; you couldn't discriminate, you couldn't afford to because you had to place reliance upon each to perform under the same set of conditions.

> And national servicemen, I've heard it said that they were much better educated than their regular soldier counterparts as well; how would you comment on this? Did it make any difference to performance.

Well, I think that when you get into a selective lottery system, yes, the selected lottery numbers is obviously going to have a broader span of education. When you start asking for volunteers for the services, you will tend to get at the bottom end, for general enlistees, a particular group of persons. You are not spanning all stratas of the population of which you doing in a random sample. So therefore the outcomes of those two different methods of recruitment will be different, but it is how you then use that for the betterment. And I think that the mixture added, on a lot of occasions, for the betterment of the unit because those with the higher education, or different skills, brought different attributes which you otherwise wouldn't have had, you would have had to acquire elsewhere.

> Yes. And commentators on the Australian/Vietnam experience emphasise that the force was professional, an efficient, well-trained fighting force, and overall that it was rather dull compared to its American allies. Gone was the larrikinism and mateship that had made Australian soldiers, in earlier wars, legends.

Well, I think that, first of all, to say larrikinism had gone, I think that's an understatement. To say that they were dull compared to the Americans, I think that's a compliment because the Australian soldier, particularly the infantryman, was far more serious, and far more dedicated to his duty, than his American counterpart, and that is a byproduct of being in a small army where we had to pay attention to skills at lower levels because we didn't have the mass numbers to allow it to dissipate; we had to make do with what we had, and we had to try and retain what we had.

The larrikinism. I don't think there was any difference between a group of Australians in Vietnam to a group of Australians in the Middle East in the Light Horse. I think that 8 Platoon did a pretty good Light Horse at Vung Tau, one day when a couple of people decided to disagree with a couple of Americans over a hamburger, and consequently led to about half of us missing the bus and being barred from Vung Tau for evermore. There were a few people who decided that 'no, Boss, they are not pineapples on the top' - after a pineapple train has gone past and the floor is covered with pineapple skins - or 'no, Boss, I've got no booze here', and the next minute you hear is, pop! and out comes a bottle of Johnnie Walker or something. What is larrikinism? - I don't know. If it's good-natured spirit and fun, fine. I don't think there's any difference between Vietnam, Second World War, and First World War.

> Yes, I've often wondered, was it the nature of the Vietnam War that did not lend itself to this larrikinism

> that they talk about. Our mateship was very symbiotic. We seemed to spend most of our time in the field on operations, and when men did go on leave, they didn't usually go on leave as a unit, as they did in the previous wars; they went on leave in dribs and drabs. This, possibly, didn't lend itself to large-scale larrikinism that ...

Well, I think you've got to take - there's a couple of things there that you've got to take back. The first one is that the infantry battalions were on twelve months unit replacement, the same applied to the artillery units, but a lot of other units were on individual replacement - the armoured units were on individual trickle flow, engineers were on trickle flow, and so were a number of other units. The unit itself stayed there, and the personnel just rotated through it - that's what I mean by trickle flow.

When you compare that with the Second World War, you may have had units which were formed, go into action, and then they were taken out of action, as a unit per se, for a period of retraining in a rear area. Where was the rear area in Vung Tau? - was that the rear area, or was that just another base. You are dealing with counter-revolutionary warfare as opposed to conventional warfare, so a different environment.

Was there a need for - there was still the same need for protection and security around Vung Tau as there was around other areas. What were you doing? - you were just going back to some area to have a bit of relaxation, it wasn't an area that you dominated as per the Second World War, where it was

totally freer - there may have been a few curfew restrictions, and so forth, on that area.

So I think that the nature of that created a different environment; you managed the people going on leave in groups - smaller groups - so you could ensure that everybody got a chance, in their twelve month tour, to have their entitlement to R&R and R&C. So I think that that created this slightly different scenario to what you had for the Middle East and for the Second World War where there was actual physical ...

END OF TAPE TWO - SIDE A

START OF TAPE TWO - SIDE B

You had no equivalent to the retraining, say, of the Second World War that went on in the Atherton Tablelands with I Corps when they were brought in there in total and sent back to New Guinea after a period of retraining; you had none of that in Vietnam.

That was the 9th Division, if I remember correctly.

Confusion in war is total; demand exercised by determined men, clearing their way, often blindly, through the smoke. Would that sum up Vietnam for you?

Don't know whether it was feeling the blindly - I hope it wasn't.

I think that one of the problems - if you start talking about command and control of Vietnam - that reared its head in Vietnam, which is a Vietnam characteristic as opposed to a Second World War or Korean characteristic - was that senior commanders, on a number of occasions, tried to do the work of platoon commanders, and run the battle for them, the way they intended it to be run, from a remote location, rather than having reliance and confidence in the platoon commander - or the company commander for that matter - to carry out his duties the best way he knew how.

Whilst the staff at those higher headquarters should have been putting on standby resources, if they were needed to be requested, they tended to turn it around to a request that we are delivering this to you, use it or whatever. I think that in future, commanders, whilst they may want to remain involved at lower levels, have got to pull back a little bit and concentrate on analyzing, and ensuring resources are available when they are required, rather than push them onto people. I think that that was a problem in Vietnam.

I think as far as the commanders go, that the lower-level commanders certainly banded together. I know that in 7 there used to be a bit of a jostle between the platoon commanders and the RSM for status on occasions; we know who won eventually, in the end. But we respected each other for their roles in life. But it was an interesting challenge, and we, on occasion, levered off each other. The same happened at company level between the CSM and the platoon commanders. Again, it wasn't a rivalry, it was a leverage off each other's experiences. It is more important to establish trust and

respect without demanding it, and I think some people tried to demand it where I hope I earned it.

> You earned it, I'll say that.
>
> Most Vietnam War veterans were made stronger by their experiences, seeing life through new and more grateful eyes. Some slip in and out of various forms of depression, like everyone else. However, unlike most people, war vets are very tough people who know how to endure pain. Would you agree?

I certainly wouldn't accept depression as an excuse. I accept that there are some people who have had problems, post Vietnam. To say that those same people would not have had problems otherwise is a very big assumption to make. I think that you can look at individual cases and try and be as sympathetic as possible with each of those, but I think, at the end of the day, to push the blame solely on Vietnam, I don't think it fair. What I think Vietnam did was, in some cases, create pressures on people, that they may have reacted differently. What I don't think people did, effectively after Vietnam, was to manage the pressures or alert people to the possible problems. I think that there were some in-built recognition problems which, as a result of lack of communications, passage of information, recognition of what Unit A had done, what Unit B could do, rather than trying to boast all the time that Unit A was far better and that nobody ever did anything else but Unit A. I think that that is not a productive pastime.

I think, looking back on Vietnam, if there's one area that could have improved, and that would have been the flow of information from what was going on in Vietnam, at the battlefield level and the unit level, to the units coming over, and the changing environment, so that people could react and prepare for it. I think we've got to be very careful about saying that Unit X did this wrong, Unit Y was right; I think we've got to balance it and ensure that that sort of process is improved for future periods.

I think it's a matter of going back to say, whether you fly to work, drive to work, walk to work, you've still got to do a job when you get there. Now, because somebody is issued with a spoon to do it, somebody gets the shovel, and because somebody can take the pick and shovel to do it doesn't mean that the pick and shovel is going to produce the better job. The person with less resources may become more resourceful as a result of less resources, but there's a limit to how long he can do that for. The fellow with the pick and shovel may be able to do it a lot longer than the fellow with the spoon. So that's where I say you've got to ultimately balance what you expect people to do.

> Is there any particular thing you'd like to add to our conversation here this afternoon?

The only thing I think that you could say in summary was that we didn't determine the events that confronted us, they were created by forces and powers other than those that we controlled. I think that the way the individuals reacted and bonded, or showed that characteristic during the period,

showed that they were a professional group which anybody would be proud to be associated with, and I think that they may have had a reputation for larrikinism in certain aspects, but I think that that was probably just the relief valve triggering to enable them to position themselves for the next operation. And I don't think any of it was intentional. I think that anybody who has been associated with any of those men - and I don't only include the ones that were there involved, in the February incident, but the whole lot - can be proud of what they achieved.

END OF TAPE TWO - SIDE B - END OF INTERVIEW

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