Australian War Memorial

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TRANSCRIPT
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ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

S02292

Colonel Eric Harold Smith DSO (Ret'd) as the captain Adjutant later a company commander 1st Battalion The Royal Australian Regiment (1 RAR), Korea 1952-1953, interviewed by Bill Fogarty

Recorded
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by: Lenny Preston, Australian War Memorial

Description
Smith speaks of his pre-military background; his posting after commissioning to operational infantry service in New Guinea in July 1945; his service in the British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF) in Japan, then with a CMF unit in north-eastern NSW; his transition on posting, from 13th National Service Training Battalion at Ingleburn NSW, to 1st Battalion The Royal Australian Regiment (1 RAR), also at Ingleburn; his role as Adjutant 1 RAR and the preparation of 1 RAR prior to its arrival in Korea to join the 28th Commonwealth Infantry Brigade in June 1952; the coordination involved in taking over from another battalion in the line; the living conditions in the line including the extremes of weather; the coordination of, planning for and conduct of patrolling, and the evacuation of casualties; the Chinese sense of humour in the line; the Chinese Army's tactics and equipment; his commanding officer's rebuff to the brigade commander's proposal for a 'blooding' operation for 1 RAR and the planning for a consequently agreed company attack (A Company) on the Chinese position on Hill 227 (Operation Blaze); his experience as a company commander in preparations for and conduct of Operation Fauna - a raid aimed at capturing prisoners and destroying enemy defences; his view of the combat effectiveness of the three British battalions of 28th Brigade, as well as the characteristics of Canadian and Australian patrolling policies; his experience, as adjutant, in the raising of 1 RAR for service in Korea in 1951 compared with his experience as commanding officer in raising 7 RAR for Vietnam service in 1965. Smith also speaks briefly of his service in Malaya, 1961-1962, initially with 1 RAR, then with the relieving battalion, 2 RAR.

Transcribed by: C L Soames, Gondwana Scientific, August 2001

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Transcript methodology

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It is strongly recommended that readers listen to the sound recording whilst reading the transcript, at least in part, or for critical sections.

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> Identification: Sound tape identification. This is Tape Number 1 of an interview with Colonel Eric Smith DSO, conducted by Mr Bill Fogarty, recorded on 3 July 2001 at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra.
>
> Welcome, Eric, and thank you very much for coming along. First of all we might go and cover the field of your childhood, where you grew up, schooling, and how you came to have an interest in the military.

I was born in Sydney and I went initially to Clovelly Primary School, and after that to Randwick Intermediate High School which was a three-year high school - I was captain of that school. And then, for the last two years of my secondary education, it was at Sydney High School where I became a prefect which helped, no doubt, for Duntroon selection in due course. At the conclusion of my time at Sydney High School I applied for Duntroon and did the normal entry course which, in that time, was two years - they were trying to turn out officers a bit more quickly, there was a need for them during the Second World War - and I graduated in 1944.

My interest in the army began at an early age, and I'm not quite sure how, but long before the war began I was interested in an army career, possibly because my father, who was at Gallipoli in the 3rd Battalion, was shot and blinded at that time, and possibly I was conscious of the fact that it was a war situation that had caused that blindness and maybe that's where my interest was ignited. But I can't put my finger on an exact event or an exact time at which my interest began but it was always there.

> So you graduated from Duntroon and went to the Wewak Campaign, serving there as platoon commander?

Yes. After Duntroon my class went to - we did a little time at Canungra at Jungle Training Centre and then we were all posted off to various battalions. I went along to the 2/3 Battalion which was, at that time, sitting on the beach at Wewak. I went in the ship called the *Duntroon*, and I can remember my arrival quite distinctly. Someone threw a net over the side and the side of the ship bulged outwards so there was no way to get your fingers underneath the net, and they said, 'Climb over'. I remember climbing over, my rifle banging my head and my haversack pulling me backwards, and I thought, well, this is probably a difficult start for this military career. However, I got down this net alright and arrived on the beach, and the first thing I saw were steel helmets, not in ones, and twos, or tens, but in hundreds, where people had just thrown them into the water. A steel helmet wasn't much good in the jungle but everybody arrived with a steel helmet.

Anyway, I got off on the beach and walked along the beach till I found the 2/3 Battalion. There wasn't really much reception, you just found the battalion that you were allocated to, and I reported into the adjutant, who was Gil [Corey] - Gil Corey, and the CO was Ian Hutchinson.

> You got a good reception, I believe.

(Laughs) A very poor reception. I think that people thought, unless you were an original you'd been avoiding the war, but of course, that wasn't the case with people who were younger, you had a certain time before you could enlist and engage. And anyway, at that time I think I was twenty and two months, it seemed to me to be early enough. I was pretty enthusiastic to take my

part but the reception was not cool, I suppose the word was frigid. Frigid: I won't use the exact words with which they welcomed me. I was put in A Company and before the afternoon was out I was on my first patrol. These patrols continued.

Somebody, at some level, said all patrols had to be officer led and in the company I was in there was a company commander and one lieutenant, who was me. So I led these patrols every day and that wasn't well received either by the other platoons because they didn't now me and I didn't know them. It wasn't very good at all, that was a tough time. It went from June till August when the war finished, but I worked hard in those two months.

And then you went off to BCOF (British Commonwealth Occupation Force).

Yes, I went to BCOF with 67 Battalion which later on became 3 Battalion. I went initially as assistant adjutant and then as a platoon commander in C Company - and C Company occupied Hiroshima. I spent almost two years in Hiroshima. There was, I think, a captain company commander, Captain [Luken], a lieutenant company 2IC and three platoon commanders, lieutenants.

We had three jobs and they rotated each six weeks. The first six weeks you looked after company training; the second six weeks you looked after the arrival of the ships in the harbor or Hiroshima, looking to discharge the Japanese Army; and the third six weeks you were in charge of the barracks of 15,000 people which housed the slave labour being returned to wherever it came from on the same ships that had brought the Japanese Army home.

So after BCOF you went back to Australia and became an adjutant in a CMF unit?

Yes, that's right, I was adjutant in the 41st Battalion, the [Byron Scottish] based in Lismore with depots from Murwillumbah in the north down to Grafton, and then later on, for a short time, Byron Bay in the south, so it was spread over a very large area. I was there for about three years, I think.

Colonel Green was your CO?

Colonel Green was my CO and I must say, he was a very fine person - person as well as officer. Each Friday night I would go to Grafton, take the week's business down. We would first of all attend to the business, and then we would have either lobster or prawns for the evening meal and have a great weekend.

And after that, national service?

National service. I was then posted to 13 National Service Training Battalion in Ingleburn and it was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Hutchinson who had been my commanding officer in the 2/3 Battalion in New Guinea. I knew him reasonably well because of that previous association and at that time I was a company commander, captain company commander of E Company, 13 National Service Training Battalion.

Can you relate how you found out you were going to go to Korea?

Yes, I can, it's very clear in my mind indeed. Ian Hutchinson was called in to see General Woodward who was commanding Eastern Command - GOC Eastern Command - at the time. And he returned to the Battalion in the afternoon at about three o'clock and he came down to my company, E Company, and said, 'Come on Eric, let's go for a walk.' And it was unusual for him to come to my company, usually he would ring up and I would go to his headquarters, but this day it was different.

So we walked out - and there were a lot of paddocks in Ingleburn at the time - we strolled through the paddocks and he told me that General Woodward had told him he was going to command 1 RAR and take it to Korea. The general had said to him that he needed experienced battalion commanders in order to take the Battalion overseas and he'd been chosen. I must say that he was not happy about this, he expressed to me the view that he had already served as a battalion commander in war, and he thought that perhaps he had deserved a little time with his family now and to see them grow up, and contribute to the army in the training situation.

At the end of this walk and discussion, which took three-quarters of an hour, he turned to me and he said, 'Eric, you will be coming too', and that was when I knew I was also going to be in 1 RAR - he didn't ask me, he just simply told me. However, I was a professional soldier and I was very happy with that.

> By this stage, of course, you had a lot of experience in training in the role of an adjutant, three years and other experience, and company commander. What was your posting at 1 RAR and how did that pan out?

Ian Hutchinson made it quite clear, right from the beginning - the very next day he spoke to me - he said, 'You'll be adjutant', and having been adjutant for three years with the [Byron Scottish], and then a company commander, I thought, well, I'm going back to being and adjutant. But, however, there was no arguing with him and there it was, I was adjutant.

At a certain day he and I walked across the road to where 1 RAR was - and 1 RAR at the time was very under strength - but we walked across the road, I walked beside him, and we went through the doors of the mess. Ian Ferguson was waiting inside with his adjutant and Ferguson said to Hutchinson, 'Well, I don't suppose there's anything I can tell you about a battalion, Ian', and Ian said, 'I don't suppose there is, Ian'. And they passed each other, one coming in the door, one going out, and that was the hand-over.

Instantly he turned to me and said, 'Organise one hundred per cent stock take. Stop everything, organise a stock take now.' And that was the first job I did as adjutant of the Battalion, get it organised. The quartermaster, of course, was responsible for the stock take but it was set off that very first day.

> Okay, you've got a battalion, it's been warned for active service in Korea, the adjutant, the new CO, and I would expect, of course, you'd be undertaking rigorous training before going to Korea. What was the actual role that you did xxx?

Well, that might be the way you might think it ought to be but it's not the way it actually was. 1 RAR was very under strength and there were people in it who were not fit - quite a lot of them, in fact. I can't remember how many were in the Battalion at the time but I think possibly about 400. In any case, many of those people had to be moved out and the Battalion had to be built up

to about 800 strong in order to actually be a battalion. So the administration of carrying this out was a long and difficult process and extended over all the time until literally the day before we left to go to Korea. And quite frankly, there was not time for training, all the time was spent on administration, and it was intense, people were marched out, people were marched in, some of those who marched in were found to be unfit, or physically unfit, or not, in some other way, ready for service overseas and were marched out again; and so it went on. We had to fill the place with officers and that also took time. We carried out one training exercise and only one, and that was at Green Hills, it was conducted by Bill [Weir] and it was a patrolling exercise. Even that exercise was stopped midway through for administrative reasons and the Battalion Headquarters, of which I was part, never went into the field at all before we departed. We didn't do any training.

We were fortunate in that the officers of the Battalion were professional and knew their job and that the men, by and large, had come from K Force - or many of them had come from K Force - and had previous battle experience.

> And what, do you think, was the morale of the Battalion when it actually boarded the ship to go to Japan?

Morale was good because we were enthusiastic, that was the first time really that the regular army had been committed to a war. We were all looking forward to doing very well in Korea, we were full of confidence. Although we hadn't had any training together as a battalion, I think individually we were pretty competent and this saw us through in the end, in fact. No, morale was high, very high.

> What was the voyage like?

The voyage, I think, took a long time, maybe seventeen days to Japan. What we did on the ship was, I can remember small arms weapons training, the stripping of the Bren gun and reassembling it in various, and shooting at targets over the stern of the ship where various objects were thrown out. Quite a lot of shooting was carried out. I suppose, on reflection, that was probably what it was all about anyway, you needed to be able to shoot in a situation like this. So we did get plenty of shooting practice on the way across.

> And you went to Japan?

Yes, we went to Japan. We left Australia with very little equipment and we were to pick it up in Japan. We were to pick up our vehicles, our seventeen-pounders, and the other weapons of Headquarter Company which later on, of course, were Support Company. And there was also still a lot of administration to be carried out and this took a period of six weeks while we were in Japan.

And then from Japan to Korea we went in five different groups; a recce group went by air, some went by landing craft, some went by ship, and finally [rear] party, I think, flew over - or came by ship, I can't quite remember - but I remember it was a very piecemeal operation to get them across from Japan to Korea. But we all arrived there in due course.

At that point we did do some training. We had one month to settle in and we went in to a defensive situation in the very rear of the line and the company commanders got on with ambushes and patrolling exercises at company and platoon level.

What was the way in which the troops settled in? At that stage the weather was summer?

Er, let me think back. Now, wait a moment ... May, June - yes, it was summer, it was summertime and hot, it was very hot indeed, and got hotter, as I remember, in July and August. Each afternoon there would be a thunderstorm, a really big thunderstorm with flashing lightning - it sounded like artillery in a way, I suppose. We were all a bit concerned that we would have casualties through lightning; although it didn't occur it was something that was in our minds all the time.

So when the Battalion actually went in to the line it would take over a defensive position because that was the way the war was being fought at the time. Can you describe your role in taking over a defensive position at that stage?

Yes. I was adjutant in the beginning and I wrote the orders for the relief, relief in the line. The commanding officer would tell me which companies were to take over from the various companies in position and I would get it down into an operation order with a time frame, and then we would carry out the reconnaissance. Usually the reconnaissance were carried out a company at a time in order not to have a great gaggle of people going forward into the line and being obvious to the enemy, who were only about 700 metres away. So the reconnaissances themselves took two or three days.

I can actually recall one particular reconnaissance in which I was involved myself - my commanding officer, myself, and [Holland], the IO - three of us - and the same three from the opposite battalion which was a KOSB. We went to a forward trench and both commanding officers stood there with adjutants and IOs beside them, and I can remember hearing pop! pop! pop! pop! pop! - five mortars being fired on the far side, from the enemy. I nodded to the CO and said, 'Did you hear that?' - he said, 'Yes, I heard that' - I said, 'We had better get down' - and he said, 'When he gets down, I'll get down' - and we stood there. And I can remember, we all stood there, these mortar shells finally arrived and they landed about twenty or thirty feet away, great stack of sand and dirt went up. The next I remember, I was lying in the trench; I was actually lying in the trench on top of Ted [Mahollen] and everybody else had gone, they'd scurried away down the trench somewhere. So reconnaissance, I suppose, took a different form.

What were the living conditions like for the troops in the line?

Well, I would imagine they were similar to those of the First World War; we lived in bunkers in the ground. In the forward trenches we had firing steps up to look over the parapet and on the rear side of the trench we would dig into the hill and make bunkers, and you'd set up your stretcher in these bunkers. And any other thing you could make for yourself out of any wood or anything else you could find, perhaps a little table or something of the sort, but very primitive, there wasn't much comfort. And when the winter came, which it did, of course, it was very cold - freezing cold - and soldiers and officers tried to keep themselves warm with little fires they'd make themselves, mostly fuelled by diesel. You'd get a tin and fill it with sand or dirt, pour diesel into it and then light the top (laughs). Made a very foul smell but it did keep you a bit

warm - but it was a fire hazard. When we used the same procedure out of the line we had a number of fires.

> Now, at this stage I would imagine that the primary role of the Battalion would be conducting patrols.

Yes, yes it was.

> What type of patrols were they involved in?

Almost all of our work, except for two major operations, were always patrolling work. Always there were standing patrols and fighting patrols went out every night, sometimes two - sometimes one, sometimes two, very seldom more than two. Standing patrols, fighting patrols and recce patrols were continuous and if you had more than two fighting patrols out you had a problem with communication; we were working in a fairly restricted area and walkie-talkies were the means of communicating - you couldn't rely on them completely because if you got behind a hill or a rise you weren't sure you would be able to be heard or could receive a signal, so it was difficult to run more than two fighting patrols.

So the answer to the question is, we ran fighting patrols and we ran standing patrols, and sometimes ambushes.

> What would be the sequence of events leading up to, and after, a patrol?

Well, the whole business began each morning, quite early in the morning when the operations officer - in our case, Bill Weir - would advise each company of its patrol commitment for that night. If you had a standing patrol or a fighting patrol then you first of all selected the patrol that was going to go out, brief the patrol commander, get what maps were needed, or make sketches - that always took a lot of time - and then set up the fire plan to support that patrol. And in my own case I used to climb into the tanks - and there were three or four in our area - and line their weapons up on the exact spot that I wanted fire, if I called for it. I would ask the artillery to be particularly careful to get the map references exactly right, that I gave them, because, as I say, working in an area which is probably only 700 metres between the right and the left, there wasn't much room for error. And it took all day really to get the patrol, the night before, debriefed and the next patrol set up, and then to control them during the night-time. It was a long procedure.

(Break in interview)

> With the patrolling, it doesn't finish as soon as the men get back into the lines. What else goes on after that?

Well, the patrol commander had to be debriefed, first at company level. You'd talk to your own patrol commanders and ask them what they saw, or what went on, or if any incident happened during the night, to elucidate on that. Then the patrol commanders would go back to Battalion Headquarters, which were 1,500 metres in the rear, and be debriefed by the operations officer; and he would take quite a while over each debriefing because he needed to get the information for future patrols. So that too was a fairly long procedure.

> How did the company deal with casualties that occurred during a night patrol?

The patrols themselves brought them in. If we had more than one casualty, or more than the patrol could handle, then it was necessary to send out another patrol specifically to bring in the casualties.

It's interesting, this casualty business is quite interesting - I digress slightly. I can remember an attack which happened very near the end of the time that 1 RAR was there on tour, and it was carried out by a British battalion, and they suffered very heavily. The next morning the Chinese came up with loud speakers and said they would give us two hours to clear the battlefield of the dead and wounded and they wouldn't fire on us during that two-hour period. Two companies went out, A Company and - I've forgotten the second company - and brought all these people back in, and the Chinese kept their word, they did not fire on us.

> I had read that on occasions, when they were going out to try and retrieve casualties, that the Australians had waved stretchers to let the Chinese know that they weren't in an active role, they were just looking for casualties - they would hold their fire.

That probably did occur - that probably occurred at the soldier level and I'm sure that it did. But I personally thought the Chinese were an honourable sort of enemy, they had a bit of a sense of humour too. They'd occasionally set up a hurricane lamp which we would shoot out, then we'd set up one which they would shoot out. It took away a little bit of the monotony. And they would play music to us, not always the sort of music you wanted to hear, then they'd have a propaganda broadcast.

I can remember at Christmas time - before Christmas they said they'd send us Christmas cards. I can remember at this time, Bunny Austin was the CO and he was quite incensed with this, determined we wouldn't have any Christmas cards from the Chinese. And that night, half of the Battalion was out in a standing patrol situation in front of the wire, spread well out, and sure enough, next morning, the Christmas cards were on the wire - hundreds of Christmas cards, beautifully done. They must have been produced in Peking or Beijing, or somewhere else, they certainly weren't produced in the front line; but the Christmas cards were there alright. They were virtually propaganda but of good quality.

> Is there a chance we could talk about how you perceived the weapons that the allies had versus those of the Chinese?

Well, we weren't so very far removed from the Second World War and we still had the same rifle we had in World War I and II. We had the Owen submachine gun, we still had - I'm just trying to think - we still had the old EY rifle from which we could throw a grenade about 80 metres. I can't remember anything at all that was in any way different or modern, such as we used some years later in Vietnam where we had different and better equipment; we were still on a World War II level of equipment. We still had Bren guns and we still had Vickers machine-guns. That was it, I think, the same as we had before.

> Do you think that the Chinese weapons were comparable?

I think they were probably much the same - they had a 'burp' gun which seemed to - I don't know whether it was - but it seemed to fire rounds at a faster rate than out Owen submachine gun - everybody talked about the 'burp' gun but in reality I don't think it was much more

sophisticated than our own particular weapons. But they were used. The Chinese sent out very big fighting patrols, they'd send out fighting patrols of up to 200 men where we would use fighting patrols of 15 men. Of course, if you ran into a fighting patrol of 200 men the best thing to do was to retire quite quickly. But 200 men can't be controlled at night-time, they simply can't be, and we would often hear them fighting in the valley, they were fighting each other, and this would happen a number of times. There were quite decent sort of brawls going on in the valley where the Chinese fighting patrols had obviously become too unwieldy to handle.

You've mentioned that the Battalion carried out two major operations; the first one was with Major Thomson. Can you relate the way in which this operation was set up?

Yes, I can, I remember it absolutely clearly - Operation Blaze - it began this way. I was still an adjutant at this time and Ian Hutchinson was called down to see Brigadier MacDonald, the brigade commander, and I went with him, of course, as adjutant. We got out of the jeep, went in to where he was - which I can't recall, whether it was a tent or a dugout - but anyway, we went in and sat down. And he said - in the exact words - 'Well, Ian, it's time to get your battalion bloodied' - I can remember those words so clearly because they made such an impression on me at the time. I thought, 'get the battalion bloodied', this is an odd thing to say. And he said, 'I want you to do a battalion attack on Matthew, Mark, Luke and John' - that was a feature north-east of 355. And Ian Hutchinson sat calmly back in his chair and he said, 'No, I won't do it.' This, to me, as a young adjutant was one tremendous lesson, I thought there would be a court martial coming out of that; but that wasn't the case. What they did then was set-to and discuss the situation.

The outcome of it was that Ian Hutchinson agreed to do a company attack on Matthew, the closest of those four features the brigade commander had mentioned - and this attack was to take place in about a week's time, I think.

I might digress here to say that Matthew had been attacked by a British company only several weeks before and they'd barely got past the wire - that's our wire - they'd never even got to the base of the hill to attempt Matthew, so the thought of this attack wasn't really a very pleasant one.

So how did you go about planning this attack?

Well, the CO said to me, as adjutant, 'Alright, now prepare the operation', which I set about doing. There is a standard format for an operation order so I began to prepare it, and whenever I'd come to a particular part that needed a decision I would go to him and say, 'Alright, well now, what do you want here? Which company is to do the attack? What do you want on the fire plan?' and he would tell me, or the operation officer would tell me, and I would commit it to paper. I can remember we discussed at great length - I say 'we', the CO, the operation officer and myself, as adjutant, discussed, at great length, the start time for this operation. Previously, I think, the attack that had failed - the British attack - had started at first light and quite obviously everybody is standing-to at first light, it's not a good time to begin an attack in a situation such as we were in.

We finally agreed that nine o'clock was the time, the thought being that everybody would be stood down and if the Chinese were the same as our soldiers they would have had their breakfasts, their night patrols would be over, and they would be beginning to have a sleep. This, in fact, is what happened because when the attack began A Company carried out the attack,

David Thomson, the commanding officer OC, and Peter Cook, the second in command, they got at least half-way up the hill - perhaps three-quarters of the way up the hill - before enemy fire began at all. So we got that part of it right.

> And the last one that you were involved in was Operation Fauna. I know that your company wasn't the actual attacking company but what was your company's role in this particular operation?

By the time Fauna came on I was a company commander, I was commanding A Company, and my role was to relieve B Company who were to carry out the attack - who were to carry out Operation Fauna. I moved my company from the reserve position in the afternoon, arriving in the B Company area between three and four o'clock. Each of my sections took over from a section of B Company, we took over the outpost on a man-for-man basis, section-for-section basis, and they went into the company CP and took over from Joe Mann who was to lead B Company in the operation. And present there were myself, Joe Mann and John Salmon who was the artillery [FO] to go with B Company on this particular operation.

> And what are your reflections on the way in which the operation was carried out?

Well, as I recall it, the operation, I thought, was a pretty hazardous one, even in the planning stage. It was designed to capture a prisoner and we were putting a lot of resources into achieving this; I hope it was worthwhile in the end.

The company had to go down the forward slopes of 355, turn left, go along the valley. I think it was 6,000 metres, or perhaps it was 6,000 metres there and back, but it was a long way - and it was winter time. I know they broke through the ice because Joe Mann told me when they came back, every step they took was on ice and they made this very hazardous approach through the valley, no doubt being lucky to miss enemy standing and fighting patrols on the way.

> Now, because the Battalion was part of a mixed brigade, what I'd like you to do it perhaps talk about how you perceived the differences, or the similarities as well, between the Australians and, perhaps, the English troops that were in the same brigade.

Well, let me think about this very carefully. We worked with - I think it was the Royal Fusiliers, the KOSB and the Black Watch. The Black Watch, I think, were quite a good battalion, they worked well. The KOSB took over 355 after 3 RAR captured it in Maryang San and withheld several counter attacks. The KOSB lost it after one counter attack giving a VC to one of their private soldiers. I think the VC says he finished throwing beer bottles at the enemy, didn't seem quite reasonable to me. Anyway, you ask me, I'd say I wasn't impressed with the KOSB in any fashion at all.

The Royal Fusiliers, I think, were a competent battalion, they were set to a task which, I thought, was very difficult for them and they suffered a lot of casualties; but they were a good battalion. The Black Watch were a good battalion - and those three I remember. We probably worked with other battalions as well.

I think, generally speaking, Australians are more aggressive in their attitude. We looked to run patrols, we looked to run a proper patrol program, and we don't want enemy to creep up and catch us unawares, and we take a lot of care with this. The Canadians, who held 355 for a while,

had one company overrun - completely overrun when the Chinese [sat] to within thirty metres of their position, overran them in the morning. Frankly, that sort of thing would never have happened with us because we always had patrols out.

I'm not trying to say we were better than anybody else, or worse than anybody else; what I'm saying is, our natural inclination is to do it properly, I think.

What was the leave rotation basis and how did it operate in the Battalion?

We had two periods of leave, one was five days in Japan and the other was twenty-one days in Japan. Everybody, I think, got that amount of leave although it was not always easy to let people go for such a long period of time. There was the roster - and I think most people did get that amount of leave.

Now, one of the people that we are interviewing in this series is Brigadier Phil Greville who became a prisoner of war. Now, I believe you had some dealings with him prior to his capture.

Yes. Phil Greville and I were classmates and we knew each other well - still do to this day. At that particular time I was OC of Headquarter Company and I was in the rear echelon. And Phil came down for some purpose one afternoon, and we talked together for a while, and I said to him, 'You look pretty exhausted.' He said that he had been out on wiring, night after night, and he was exhausted, but he was going on leave the following day. I said to him, 'Alright, well, what about spending the night right here in the echelon with me and going off on leave the following day from here?' and he said, 'No, I've got a patrol to take out.' I said, 'Perhaps your sergeant could take it out tonight because you've been out on these wiring efforts every night', and he said, 'No, I think I should take it out.' Anyway, he went back up into the line, took the patrol out and was captured that night.

Luck of the gods.

Yeah. It was unfortunate for him but if he'd spent the night down in the echelon it wouldn't have happened.

What I'd like to do now is jump forward a number of years, particularly to about 1965, when you were given the role of raising a battalion to go to Vietnam, and ask you to reflect on the way in which you went about that particular task using the experience that you'd had from Korea.

Yes. I think by the time that I was given the task of raising 7 Battalion in Puckapunyal I was really very well equipped to do it because I'd spent a long time as adjutant, on two occasions, I'd been company commander of Headquarter Company and A Company, and I'd also been a company commander in National Service Training Battalion, and I'd watched Ian Hutchinson perform as a battalion commander, and work for him, on two separate occasions and I'd learnt a great deal from him. I think that that experience helped me a great deal in the raising of 7 Battalion. I learnt, to begin with, to be very exact in relation to the stores that I handle so that there was never any argument about stores, which seemed to take up so much of other battalion commanders' time. So I looked [to the right officer], I looked to other accounting procedures to keep that right; that was on the domestic side.

On the training side, because we'd had so little opportunity to train in preparation for Korea, I was insistent that we be left alone and given every opportunity to train. And this was the case, nobody interfered with us at all. If ever anybody suggested I should provide soldiers from the Battalion for a particular job, or a duty, I opposed it and after a while people stopped asking. So I learnt that lesson and I concentrated on teamwork and teaching everybody, or giving everybody the opportunity to learn to shoot well - and that respect each company had - a miniature range of their own and they used it extensively.

> For Korea your CO was able to select you to be his adjutant and probably selected some of the other officers and had a say in who came to his battalion. Did that happed for Vietnam?

It wasn't quite the same, no, because the army resources were very extended, there were just so many officers available. For argument's sake, I had a lieutenant out of Scheyville as a quartermaster. He didn't have any experience as a quartermaster at all but I couldn't say give me someone else because there was nobody else to give me. And it was pretty much the same with the company commanders and the platoon commanders. There were a couple of occasions when I moved people on but there wasn't the flexibility that had existed in the Korean situation where the CO could, and did, change people around if he felt that he would like to do that. I didn't quite have that flexibility because the resources of the army weren't available.

> I'll let you in to a nice little secret here and that is, I knew that you must have been scratching to get young lieutenants because at that time I was a lieutenant in the CMF at 1RVR and I actually went up to your house and asked, 'Would you take me as a platoon commander if I could get in to the ARA?' and you said, 'No worries, I'd take you straight away, but you have to get in.' And that was the trouble, they wouldn't take CMF people at that stage because you were getting them from Scheyville, but I was determined to join the Battalion, which I eventually did as a private.

All I can say, Bill, it was rather unfortunate, I would have been very happy to have taken you - very happy. In fact, I did get a couple of people from your battalion, I think, and I'm not quite sure how the mechanics of it all worked, but I can remember a young [Chris Hyacin] - one other, I think, came from your battalion.

> [Inman]

Inman, he came from the Battalion too. Yes, you would have been very welcome, I know you would have done a great job.

> Now, if I can go back and talk about the fact that you also served in Malaya, and you went to Malaya about 1960?

Yes, I arrived in Malaya in May 1960 and I was there until about December '62. I went initially to the battalion commanded by Bill [Weir] - I've got the battalions mixed up a bit now, 1 and 2, because I served in them both several times. I think it was 2 Battalion that I went to when Bill Weir was a commanding officer and I arrived on a ship called the *Roma* in Pinang. It was met by Movement Control, taken to the Runnymede Hotel where myself, my wife and my two children spent one night, then we were moved into a married quarter in Pinang in the Chinese sector. My

wife was pretty isolated there because she was away from the regular cabbage patch. My children played in the kampong and learnt a few words of Chinese at that time. But the following day again I reported to Battalion Headquarters, which was in Kuala Kangsar, and was put in charge of a company on the Malay-Thai border and I spent the next four months there.

What was the role there?

We were looking for CT terrorists. Bear in mind that in the whole of that Malaysian Campaign there were about 4,000 at their maximum, by the time I got there that had been whittled down very considerably and we were looking for individual commanders of the CT; in the [Grik] area there were several. We would have a conference each day which consisted of myself as representing the Battalion, the local police chief - and there were two intelligence organisations, one was British and the other was local Malayan - and there were one or two other people whom I just don't recall now. But each day we had this conference and any information - intelligence information - which was gathered which might lead to the capture or ... so the capture of any of these high-powered CTs, and if we had any firm information, then I would send out ambush patrols and we would endeavour to catch them. While I was there we were unsuccessful, we didn't get any of these top CTs that we tried to get.

And do you believe that the soldiers then were carrying on the same traditions they had from Korea in different climatic conditions?

I think the army was beginning to change. I thought that Korea was not so different from the AIF, we were not really well trained then and we didn't have much preparation for it, but the natural instinct of Australians predominated and we did well. By the time we got to Malaya the regular army was much better organised and a lot of training programs had been carried out in Australia, and we were a pretty professional team. We really did it pretty well at all levels, I think. I think by the time Malaya came along we were competent, very competent.

And you became Battalion 2IC in Malaya?

Yes. I was actually sent up to 2 RAR as a company commander to get the feel of the situation and I was 2IC designate of 1 RAR. The idea was that I would proceed down from Kuala Kangsar down to the new barracks at [Torrenda] in sufficient time to take over the barracks, set up the place for the arrival of the Battalion, and families, of which there were 218.

The reality was that I didn't get away from 2 Battalion with very much spare time, I got there one month before the Battalion 1 RAR arrived. During that month I had one platoon commanded by D R Paterson who later became company commander in 7 RAR. He had a platoon of soldiers and they worked very hard indeed. We took over the barracks from the British and we had to be very careful indeed because, later on, anything that was wrong had to be paid for. And fortunately there was a three months period in which the builders of the place had to repair anything that went wrong, but we were very careful in taking over that barracks. We were the third people on the ground; the British were first, then the New Zealanders; and we got the third of the three battalion barracks. And while the buildings were the same, the place we took over was barren of any vegetation so one of the early things I did was set up my own little garden where we propagated plants and began to plant trees, and various other things.

But also I had to take over 218 married quarters, and there was no furniture in these, one month before the Battalion was due to arrive. The British and the New Zealanders were already equipped by this time but because of my late arrival we didn't get any of this early arrival of furniture and we had to take delivery across the beach - they came in containers across the beach and it was physically very demanding indeed.

Anyway, we worked day and night getting all that stuff into the quarters. I think we got the last chair in just about as the Battalion was getting off the train to come to the barracks. It was very hard work indeed.

> And how was the relationship between the nations there at the time? because it was almost British, and New Zealand, and Australian.

It was really quite good, we all got along very well together. Torrenda - I'm talking about Torrenda now - Torrenda was a very good camp, a very good barracks, well set out and spread out, all the facilities were there for soldiers, and married quarters; it was extremely good and we all got along pretty well together. Occasionally there would be a little outbreak of fisticuffs. I think there was one occasion when some New Zealand Maoris and a few other people got into a bit of a blue in their local picture show but that was soon settled. By and large we got along well, yes.

> And when did you leave Malaya?

I left Malaya in December '62 and came back to 3 Division as AQMG.

> And from there you raised 7?

From there I raised 7, yeah.

> Okay, Eric, thank you very much, I think that's the end of the interview.

Okay, thanks, Bill, it was a pleasure.

08/01