ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

ACCESSION NUMBER: S02600
TITLE: VETERANS' VOICES

INTERVIEWEE: MAUREEN JAVES
INTERVIEWER: GARY MCKAY
RECORDING DATE: 29 MAY 2001
RECORDING LOCATION: COTTON TREE, MAROOCHYDORE, QUEENSLAND
SUMMARY:

TRANSCRIBER: LAURA MANASSERIAN OF EAST COAST HUMAN RESOURCE GROUP

TRANSCRIPTION DATE: 10 JANUARY 2002

VETERANS' VOICES
MAROOCHY LIBRARIES' ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
Interview Transcript

Interviewee: Maureen Javes (MJ)
Interviewer: Gary McKay (GM)
Date of Interview: Tuesday 29 May 2001
Place of Interview: Cotton Tree, Maroochydore, Queensland
Transcribed by Laura Manasserian: 10 January 2002
Corrected and edited by Gary McKay: 11 February 2002
Final edit by Gary McKay & Caroline Foxon after interviewee perusal: 23 August 2002

Interviewee's details: Maureen Javes was born in Dannevirke, New Zealand in 1933. She was a triple certificate registered nursing sister and serving part-time in the NZ Territorial Forces when she volunteered for duty with the New Zealand Nursing Corps in South Vietnam in early 1968. She served with 8 Field Ambulance and later the 1st Australian Field Hospital as a charge sister (Captain), mainly in medical and surgical wards and Intensive Care. She met her future husband who was serving in the RAAF in Vietnam in early 1969 and emigrated to Australia in 1970.

Subject of Interview: Australians and New Zealanders in South Vietnam, the Vietnam War 1965-72 (particularly 1968-69), medical service, hospitals, field ambulance duties, Nui Dat, Vung Tau, 1 ALSG (Australian Logistic Support Group), Red Cross, living conditions in Vung Tau, combat and battle, deploying to Vietnam, tactics, wounds, casualties, casevac, helicopters, surgery, triage, morale, dress, return to New Zealand. Butterworth Air Base. Leave, discipline, socialising, Rest and Recuperation (R & R) and Rest and Convalescence (R & C) leave, National Servicemen, doctors and nurses in Vietnam.

Start Tape 1

GM This is a recording of an interview with Maureen Javes recorded at Cotton Tree on Tuesday 29 May 2001. Recorded by Gary McKay for Maroochy Libraries' *Veterans' Voices* project.
Maureen, firstly thanks very much for coming in today and taking part in the interview. You were a registered nurse in New Zealand, how did you get into Army nursing?

MJ I joined the (NZ) Territorial Army service and from there I joined the Nursing Corps. I took it up just as an interest and a view to travel and helping the troops should there be a need for it. I had to attend monthly weekends, or camps and so forth

GM And whereabouts, whereabouts was that in New Zealand that you joined the Territorials?

MJ In Dunedin

GM In Dunedin, okay.

MJ In 1954.

GM Okay Maureen, could you explain how being a Territorial soldier, for want of a generic term, how you actually came to get to Vietnam with the New Zealand Army. How did all that happen?

MJ I was working at the Mater Hospital and one day they rang me up and asked me to volunteer for 12 month's service in Vietnam and I said to them, 'If this is for 12 months service in Vietnam, the answer's yes. If it's your idea of conning me into the Regular Army, the answer's no.' So they said no, that it was definitely a once-only commission to Vietnam and I agreed, and that's how I ended up in Vietnam. They were short of nursing, military nursing sisters at the time and they couldn't fulfill their commitment to New Zealand soldiers. Because New Zealand's policy in war is wherever they have troops in war, they will be cared for by their own people, and I was sent to Vietnam as part of the contingent to look after the New Zealand soldiers.

GM So you were working at the Mater in Auckland.

MJ Yes.

GM What sort of preparation did they give you before you actually went to Vietnam?

MJ None at all, because this had been taken care of - so they said – because of my previous training in the Territorials. They demoted me.

GM They demoted you?

MJ Yes, because for me, to go from [MJ: *Reserve to Regular*], I held a higher rank in the Territorials than was considered appropriate for the Regular Army. So they demoted me and then the other, another problem arose. I couldn't go to Vietnam with a higher rank than the matron, so they demoted me so that I wouldn't be higher in rank to Jean O'Neill.

GM So what rank were you? You were a major, then they demoted you to captain.

MJ Well, no. I was sort of, well would you say, a five-star captain. Then they reduced me to a four-star captain.

GM Okay.

MJ But I, I was due for promotion at that time to major. Had I stayed in the Territorials I would have become a major, but because I was going to the Regulars, they withheld my promotion until afterwards.

GM Does this mean a loss of pay, from what you were doing at the Mater to what happened, the money you got in Vietnam?

MJ No, because I suppose I was better paid sort of in the Army because I got allowances, which I didn't get in Civvy Street.

GM Did you have, did you have tax-free pay in New Zealand, Vietnam?

MJ Yes.

GM That's good. What did you know about Vietnam before you went?

MJ Nothing.

GM You were really well prepared weren't you?

MJ Yes. I had known there was a conflict between the countries and I had had exercises, you know, explaining the topography of Vietnam and the sort of trouble that was going on between the North and South Vietnamese and Cambodia. And I was made aware of the closeness to New Zealand of these countries and the possibility of invasion and all that sort of thing, but other than that I knew the topography, that was about it.

GM Soldiers in Australia went through the Jungle Training Centre, Canungra.

MJ Yes.

GM Did you have to do anything like that?

MJ No. They taught me how to use a pistol and a rifle, but that was about it, because they didn't recognise the Geneva Convention and therefore we were open slather for anybody that wanted to attack us. So they thought. I should, well, I can't remember if I learnt to use a pistol before Vietnam or afterwards. I think it was before and some part of my officer' s training course for promotion to major that they decided that I should know how to use a pistol. They sent me off to Vietnam with one, but as soon as I got there the Australians confiscated it because the Australian nurses didn't have one.

GM You had to clean it anyway. Now, how did you actually get to Vietnam? This is, this February 1968?

MJ Yes, I went on a DC-10 trooping flight. The Brits had just brought a lot of troops out for training in New Zealand and I went back on the return, on its return flight to Singapore on the DC-10. And then in Singapore I went to Saigon in a Bristol 'Frightener'. [MJ: *I spent a few days in Malaya at Terendak Hospital, whilst the Tet Offensive settled a little. Vung Tau was on Red Alert*].

GM Oh good grief.

MJ And then I got a Caribou in from Saigon to Vung Tau.

GM Yes. For the tape, the 'Frightener' is also known as a Freighter. But they are 'frighteners'. Anything memorable about that trip apart from the scary bit of being in the Bristol Freighter (DC-3)?

MJ No, it was jolly noisy and…

GM Oh yeah.

MJ All the troops on board were suffering airsickness and they were all feeling, you know, I think it was the nervousness of the troops. They were all feeling … tummy upsets and so forth and I was expecting myself to be a bit sick with the flight, but my concern for the troops did away with my fear of the flight and I just, it didn't bother me at all.

GM You would've been the only female.

MJ Yes.

GM And so you went from, whereabouts did you land in Vietnam?

MJ Tan Son Nhut.

GM What happened after you got to Tan Son Nhut?

MJ I was carted off to the American…

GM Camp Alpha?

MJ Yes there, and put on a Caribou to Vung Tau.

GM Okay. What was, what was your impression of arriving at Tan Son Nhut?

MJ Terrible, because I was desperate to go to the toilet at this time and I couldn't find any toilet, and when they finally told me that the toilet was in the airport down there I trotted off to what I thought was the toilet. Yes it was a toilet, but I couldn't get in because all of the cleaning equipment filled the room and there was no place to get to the toilet. So I had to hang on a bit longer and this was one of the fears and the problems that we females had in Vietnam, that there were never any toilet facilities available to us. And the American thunder boxes, well, they were so high off the ground they had to put a little ledge on them so we could step up on the ledge, so we could reach the hole. And then you had a foot (300 mm) of wooden board in front of you before your bottom could reach the hole. And my being short, I used to have to stand up and sort of get in an awkward stance to push my backside out so I could get over the hole to hit it without misfiring! And they were few and far between and we had to cut down on our fluids because we never knew when we would find another toilet or how long it would be before we, you know, would be able to relieve ourselves.

GM Before you actually left New Zealand, was there any anti-Vietnam War-type thing that you come, came across?

MJ Not that I recall.

GM Now, you went into Vung Tau?

MJ Yes.

GM And at that stage the hospital organisation was probably known as 8 Field Ambulance?

MJ Yes.

GM But it was really an enlarged field ambulance?

MJ Yes.

GM Because it had some surgical capacity didn't it?

MJ Yes, and we had an Intensive Care (Ward).

GM Right, so it was, it was in that transition period between being a fully blown field hospital?

MJ Yes.

GM How were you received there and how did they settle you in?

MJ I was received in open arms at the airport. I landed at, what is it, 9 Squadron, 9 Squadron I think it was, I suppose it was…

GM 35 Squadron were the Caribous.

MJ 35 Squadron but they all landed at… I suppose it was just Vung Tau airport.

GM Yes.

MJ Yep. They were pleased to see me because that meant that someone was going home. I would take their place. After that it was just straight out hard work.

GM Yes. What did you think of, what did you think of it when you saw the field ambulance sitting there in the sand hills? Was it what you'd like to imagined or?

MJ No. Not like I imagined at all. It was, well, I just couldn't imagine it. All you could see was acres of sand and telegraph poles at strategic points dotted all over the place and the barrenness struck me, there was not a tree or…

GM Where was the jungle?

MJ Yep. All the defoliation. And then the other thing that struck as I arrived - came in the truck from the airport to the hospital - was the Vietnamese just relieving themselves out in the open. And I just, you know, couldn't get over this, going along the road and seeing people crouched on the ground relieving themselves with no sort of concern for anything.

GM Yes. Was this your first trip to Asia?

MJ Yes.

GM So bit of an eye opener?

MJ Yes.

GM So, what was your job and whereabouts did you do it?

MJ My job was looking, caring for the troops and I spent my time in the Intensive Care, Medical and Surgical Wards.

GM Okay. What do you think was the most important part of your job as a charge sister?

MJ I think understanding the situation that the troops found themselves in and trying to get them to come to grips with the situation, and help them to get over their illnesses, or their injuries I should say.

GM What did you think was the hardest part of your job?

MJ Not showing my emotions and trying to present myself to the troops as sort of caring individual without being emotional about it. To help them with, and sort of see their terrible, terrible wounds, but at the same time not let my feelings interfere with the comfort of the troops.

GM What's the big difference between nursing in a military environment and nursing in a civilian environment?

MJ The biggest difference was the attitude of the troops. I found it unbelievable to see troops in wheelchairs with one or two legs missing and an arm in a sling and intravenous equipment and drainage tubes coming out from all over them, and another soldier wheeling this wheelchair with an arm missing, pushing his mate around in the wheelchair and taking him off to the toilet. The one thing that the soldier was reluctant to do was to use either a bedpan or a bottle. It was unheard of in their 'get well', and at all costs they would go to the toilet if it was at all possible. Unfortunately for them our toilets weren't what you would say conducive to doing what one does naturally in the toilet, and the troops would invariably get to the toilet and light up a cigarette and, because of the gases in the thing, would explode. We only had thunder boxes - or right at the end of my tour we had septic tanks put in for the hospital, which we struggled to have them function properly because of the conditions they were sort of put into and we had a lot of trouble with them to start with. But it was unbelievable; the bravery and courage of these guys to help each other and do what they did with their terrible injuries. Anybody in a civilian life would have been flat on their backs complaining and moaning and you would be looking after them hand and foot and whereas these guys wouldn't allow you to do anything that they could manage with a struggle themselves.

GM I guess the other thing is too they're basically all fit, healthy young men

MJ Yes.

GM Who are just broken.

MJ That's right. They were fit and broken.

GM Yes, well I can attest to the fact that my 12 months in hospital, I never used a bedpan, ever.

MJ No

GM I refused to. They're impossible!

MJ Well this is something you know, I just couldn't believe it when I walked in there and saw these chaps just barely able to stagger and helping each other and taking them. And I just couldn't figure this, well, I never would' ve believed it if I hadn't seen it, because my nursing experience in Civvy Street never told me that men acted this way.

GM What were the doctors like to work with?

MJ On the whole, very good.

GM I mean you were basically a stranger, weren't you?

MJ Yes.

GM I mean you wouldn't have known anybody?

MJ No. I got along with them very well.

GM So basically you didn't have any trouble sort of fitting in as a senior…

MJ No.

GM …sister and. What were the orderlies like?

MJ Very good.

GM They were males weren't they?

MJ They were all males, yes, and for male orderlies their abilities and, okay, they didn't do things quite the way I had been taught to do them as a nursing sister or as a nurse trainee, but they did them their way and accomplished just the same thing.

GM Yes. You would've come across probably a few National Servicemen.

MJ Yes.

GM What did you think of them?

MJ On the whole they were very very good. Their morale was good and they were, I didn't notice any misfortune among them. We had a couple that couldn't take the pace and they self-inflicted themselves with wounds so that they could go home. But on the whole, they were very good.

GM Now, how many nursing sisters were there in at 8 Field (Ambulance)?

MJ Eight.

GM Eight. That's… and you would've been the only females I think around?

MJ Yes.

GM Must have been a great environment.

MJ Oh it was terrific!

GM Never had to buy a drink probably?

MJ Yes, we did, we sort of paid our way in the Mess, but every now and again the guys would give us a drink. I didn't do too well on that phase - I wasn't a great drinker and the CO on my report back to New Zealand, after I left, was that he accused me of being anti-social because I refused to join him in the bar drinking every night and I didn't think that was justified.

GM Now, did it did it make it difficult being, you know, with so few females around? I mean socially or…

MJ It did. We would sometimes invite them over to the nurses' quarters for a drink to celebrate one of the nurse's birthdays or something like that, but then we had a problem where our underwear was disappearing off the (clothes) line.

GM 'Snow dropping'.

MJ So our quarters became out of bounds for any male members, so if we wanted to have male company it had to be out in the Mess.

GM Yes.

MJ With everybody else.

GM Had they established the Quiet Room, what they called the Quiet Room when you were there?

MJ No.

GM Oh, they had in '71. It was neutral ground, it wasn't the Mess.

MJ No.

GM It was the Mess Annex.

MJ Oh right.

GM But it was just for the Field Hospital. Yes

MJ Right.

GM It was really good. What was your job as a nursing sister in that ward, in the wards that you worked in? I mean do, you control the orderlies or…?

MJ Yes, basically to supervise the work of the orderlies and to organize, tell them what had to be and when it had to be done. To supervise the giving out of drugs and the care of wounds and dressings and general nursing care for the patients.

GM Okay. How busy were you?

MJ Sometimes we were very busy. We would work, we only had a day off a week if they could, if we could afford it - that was if the place was quiet enough to do without our services. We were always on call if need be for us to go back. If we were having time off we would be called back, or our time off would be cancelled, depending on the number of helicopters, or medevac flights, not medevacs, Dustoff flights that were coming in.

GM So basically it, were you working shift work?

MJ Yes, we worked, we worked shift work, afternoon, morning and night shift and we kept to those duties but if we had a number of Dustoff choppers come in, then we'd just worked until the situation was relieved and everything had quietened down and we would go off. On a couple of quiet periods that we had, I used to go into town and teach English to the Vietnamese. Just as a pastime to help overcome the situation.

GM So there's a whole lot of Vietnamese people walking around saying 'sux ' and 'ut'?

MJ Well, I took over from the Americans and …

GM Oh God.

MJ This was quite funny. I used a different technique to the Americans and I started off in a class of twelve and by the time I'd finished at the end of the year, I had a class of fofty. They all came to me from the American classes and saying, 'We no understand American, we only understand you'. So these students graduated and the following term they were supposed to move on and I got started off with a new set, but as the year went by, or as the months went by, the ones that I had previously came back and said, 'We no understand, we understand you. You teach us good.' So they joined the class again.

GM That must have been, that must have been satisfying to be able to do that?

MJ It was very satisfying because they were good students; they learnt the language very quickly. I had a bit of a problem with a young pregnant Vietnamese student who came into labour while she was in class - and nobody was supposed to know that this child [MJ: *young girl*] even was pregnant. And I had a little bit of difficulty with my lack of knowledge of the Vietnamese language and the sign languages that were being passed around to get one of the locals, somebody to come and help her and take her off to have this baby.

GM Now, what sort of work did you enjoy the most in the hospital?

MJ Oh, I think I enjoyed the Intensive Care.

GM Pretty demanding but isn't it?

MJ Yes very.

GM Yes, I mean it doesn't really mean that you are next to that patient the whole time?

MJ Yes. More or less. There's only, can't quite remember, but only three or four in the Intensive Care Ward and it was very intensive work because the wounds were so bad. We had a few, we had no infected wounds as such, but unfortunately that because of the weeping and oozing from the wounds, you …because you couldn't always close them up. We had a few maggots in the wounds that got fly blown because it was very difficult to keep the flies away and while this … the patients used to find it very hard to accept that they had maggots crawling around in their wounds, but they actually kept them clean and they did a good job, but when you see these foreign bodies running around you can't, it's very hard to console a patient and tell them, that they're there, they're 'good' for you.

GM Why's my wound itching, yeah? What about, what did you least enjoy?

MJ Oh, well I don't know really. I suppose the number of cases of VD, which we weren't supposed to have. Trying to cope with them and when there were, you know, others more deserving of our care. I think that was sort of a black spot.

GM Yes. Yeah. Well, if you got the opportunity to get into town, not like some of us. Down in Vung Tau who is the person that most stands out, stands out in your memory?

MJ Oh, I don't know.

GM Who was the CO of the Field Ambulance?

MJ When I was there?

GM Yes.

MJ Bill Watson.

GM What about the matron, Jean O'Neill?

MJ Yes, well she stands out but …

GM She's a very strong personality.

MJ Yes.

GM Who would you say was your best friend when you were in Vung Tau?

MJ I suppose I'd have to go along with the other New Zealand nursing sister that was there with me who came after I did, Jill Murphy. We seemed to get along better; we didn't find some of the Australian nurses overly friendly towards us.

GM Was there a reason for that?

MJ No, I, I don't quite know, I sometimes think it might have been a little bit of jealously. Because we were responsible for getting - or the New Zealanders offered Jill and I a refrigerator for our room. And they also offered us, offered us air conditioning but because the same hadn't been organised for the Australian girls, we weren't allowed to have it, and this lead to us getting one air conditioned room for us to sleep in during the day on night shift because it was, sleeping in the heat under the Ketspan (sic: spandeck) steel roof – it was absolutely unbearable. The temperatures got to over 40 (degrees Celsius) at times. And we were supposed to try and sleep and then we had wooden louvres on the building and the sand used to blow in through the wooden louvres and your bed sheets got covered in sand. And with your sweaty bodies and trying to sleep rolling on sand, you itched, and it was most uncomfortable and about six months after I was there, they gave us an air-conditioned room for the night sister to sleep in and that helped the situation a little bit.

GM Yes. Now you arrived basically as the Tet Offensive was on?

MJ Yes.

GM Just started. What sort of, what do you remember about that?

MJ Just that there was an extra influx of casualties and round about the same time we also got an influx of malaria patients because these… well, it was said that as we got a whole battalion of troops with malaria at the same time as the Tet Offensive so we were struggling both medically and surgically to cope with the massive war wounds from the Tet Offensive and also the influx of malaria patients, which was just about a whole battalion.

GM How many, how many wards were they running in 1968?

MJ One, two, three.

GM So, three. One for people who were sick?

MJ Yes. We had to build, we had to put up another, open up another ward to cope with all the malaria. We only had the Surgical Ward and the Medical Ward and Intensive Care and the operating theatre suite and when the malaria came we had to make another Ward available to cope with them all.

GM How many people could the operating theatre handle in any one time?

MJ About three (patients) I think.

GM Yes, yeah, okay.

MJ Dependent, you know, on the injuries, how bad they were and how much time they needed to spend.

GM What do you think was the worst time that you experienced in Vietnam?

MJ The first six months I suppose, that I was there.

GM Was it tough for a certain reason or…?

MJ I think it was tough, no I think it was just the fact that we were so busy.

GM Yeah?

MJ And we had the monsoon rains came and the floor used to go under water and we had to paddle round in water to, I mean nothing, nothing was easy. We had all the problems that you could have. We even struck a tsunami that was coming and this proved to be a massive exercise and probably turned out to be stupidity because the tsunami didn't happen and after we had evacuated the whole

hospital. Loading up all these orthopaedic beds, if you understand what an orthopaedic bed is - it's got steel frames, it's steel posts on all sides and the patients are strung up on pulleys and weights and all this sort of thing. We had to load them on to the back of trucks and, with a view to taking them to higher ground because it was said that the hospital would be swallowed up by this tsunami. So after we had evacuated the hospital and got everybody all ready to move out, I suddenly realised that we hadn't - we'd put the patients on board - but we didn't have any of their documents. So I went running down the sand dunes to collect all their documents, realising that without their documents there wasn't anything we could do for the patients because we … [MJ: *didn't have treatment sheet*]. And I got stopped in my tracks by the CO who said what was I doing and I told him and he said, 'You get back up the hill and get on with your work, the documents aren't important.' And this struck me as being somewhat ridiculous because I couldn't function without the documents, knowing the medication that they would have and so forth. However, the tsunami didn't happen and we had to go through the tedious process of unloading everybody again.

GM I think I heard about this tsunami from Pam Barlow.

MJ Oh right.

GM Right. Pam and Geoffrey Barlow.

MJ Yes.

GM Who, Geoffrey was a pharmacist.

MJ Yes, they were there at the same time.

GM Yes they told me about the tidal wave that never happened.

MJ Yes.

GM And they, moving people out they said it was pretty hard work.

MJ Oh, it was, well as I said, it was absolutely terrible because these, you couldn't lift these beds - you had to have mechanical means to lift them - and, oh it was a good exercise for somebody.

GM Well, what incident most stands out from your tour? Any one thing that, you know when you think about Vietnam you think, and you have a sort of a memory of a particular incident?

MJ I can't think of anything really that stands out. The incident that I think troubled most of the women was the lack of toilet facilities. We had a thunder box that was full to the brim and they couldn't burn it out, they couldn't suck it out and they couldn't do anything with it. The maggots - were the largest I've ever seen - were just below the brim and you were afraid to sort of sit down in case one of them jumped up.

GM You painted a pretty horrific picture of life in Vung Tau, I mean, sand blowing around, incredible heat, monsoon rains, tidal waves, poor, was it, not so much poor sanitation, but <u>lack</u> of facilities?

MJ Yes, lack of, lack of sanitary facilities. We were always grateful for an invitation to go to over to 9 Squadron just so that we could use the toilet facilities and then when the Badcoe (recreation) Club opened up it was onto the Badcoe Club because they had toilet facilities which we didn't have. We had a broken down washing machine for our clothes and we had a mamasan who used to do the washing. I didn't allow her to do mine because I didn't sort of trust them with my washing. Then when they got the washing done, they would take it into the room and do the ironing, and after they had finished the ironing, they would sit themselves on top of the ironing and de-nit each other! And, you know, there was always a fear of catching their nits. However, don 't think any of us caught nits. But the … I mean, it was these things that sort of, you don 't sort of think about but when you, you know, have time to think about them, they were quite big things in the course of making life there more pleasant.

GM Yes. Did you ever get sick yourself?

MJ No, I didn't. I managed not to have any illness, although I did develop a rash on my legs which used to come and go. And I also had a bit of stomach problems and the doctor's solution for the rash on my legs was to go without my stockings for a while and that it was probably the heat and the nylon.

GM You actually wore stockings?

MJ Yes. We wore white nylon stockings.

GM It must have been so hot?

MJ Yes. But this was regulation.

GM Just describe your uniform that you wore day to day.

MJ We wore white cotton uniforms with a veil, white shoes and stockings and that was it. I applied to New Zealand for some three-quarter gumboots because of the water we had to paddle through in the wet season. And they sent out gumboots for Jill and I to wear in the wet weather conditions. When we went out to visit Nui Dat on the odd occasion, we wore jungle greens, which were specially made, and they were hot as well, and wore our berets with that and that was the way we got around.

GM But stockings.

MJ Oh…

GM Oh, geez. Talk about tough. Oh God, I can't believe it. Now, what do you think was a, you probably look back on the tidal wave as being a funny thing but…?

MJ Yes.

GM It probably wasn't funny at the time?

MJ Oh no, it was dead serious at the time.

GM Yes. Were there any other funny times that you can remember?

MJ Not really, I've forgotten a lot of what transpired. It wasn't the sort of things we tried to remember.

GM You, how much social activity was there?

MJ Not much. We had occasional films but that wasn't very long because the theatre where we used to show them got blown down or damaged and it wasn't put up. But generally we had the odd Mess do and the odd invitation over to 9 Squadron but that was about all. Providing things were relatively quiet and there was no 'red alert', we could go into the town of Vung Tau and do a bit of shopping or just wander round, but no we didn't have very much.

GM When, when you think back to Vung Tau the town itself what sort of images come back into your mind about the town?

MJ Oh, well it was, one side of the street was brothels and there were only a few shops. You could get dresses and things made fairly cheaply, but then the sewing and everything else was pretty cheap to go with it. There was nothing of any real value there. Everything was sort of cheap and nasty. The markets, they were fascinating but smelly. And to see the shrimp laid out on the road to dry to eat was pretty unbelievable - that people would eat all these things and to see them sitting there cooking with their little bunsen (sic: charcoal) burners or similar little kerosene heaters, cookers, which they

invariably, they used to steal aviation fuel to use in these burners and that would explode and cause them nasty wounds and injuries [MJ: *burns*]

GM What about the, the French style breads?

MJ Well, that was the only thing we could eat. Most food and that in the town was out, off limit to us and we weren't allowed to eat any of the food except at the American PX (Post Exchange) but we did get bread rolls into the base on special occasions. And the bread roll or bread, the French taught them how to make this, absolutely fantastic; it was really good by comparison to everything else.

GM Yes. What do you think was the toughest time, either physically or mentally that, that you experienced?

MJ I think psychologically, coping with the situations that existed. I remember going out to Nui Dat and a young serviceman came up to me and asked me if he could talk to me for a few moments. And I said, 'Yes, what is it, what can I do for you?' And he said, 'Oh ma'am,' he said, 'I'm going home in a month's time and I'm afraid to go home. I have got into such bad habits here,' he said. 'I don't believe I can go home and talk to my mother. 'I swear all the time, and I just can't go home and swear like I'm doing here. My mother would never forgive me.' So I said, 'Well come on and we'll sit down and have a little chat,' and I chatted to this serviceman for about half an hour and it came time for me to depart, and I said to him, 'I'll have to go now; they've come for me.' And he said, 'Thank you ma'am. I didn't swear when I spoke to you did I?' And I said, 'No you didn't swear, you didn't swear once,' and I said, 'you couldn't have been more of a gentleman. I think your mother will be proud of you.' He said, 'Thank you ma'am, I can now go home to my mother knowing that I won't swear when I open my mouth to talk to her.'

GM Oh dear me.

MJ And this was something that really stood in my mind because a number of the lads must have felt the same way and there was nobody for them to talk to. And, so, it just felt great to think that I had made it easier for this guy to go home.

GM Well, for a lot of them that was their first real time away from home.

MJ Yes.

GM And, how often did you get up to Nui Dat?

MJ I think probably about half a dozen times in the time that I was there.

GM But was that to relieve in Nui Dat or just to visit or…?

MJ Just to visit. It usually came when 6 RAR or one of the companies changed over and we were invited up to just to meet the new company, commanders of the units and just to sort of get to know a few people

GM Oh yeah.

MJ And well I think for them it was a case of 'square eyes'. Before, they had this thing about seeing people with round eyes and which meant a lot to them, because all they looked at slit eyes all the time. And it was quite a relief for them to see somebody that didn't have slit eyes, you know, they could talk to us and I think this means a lot to the troops just to sort of see some of their own people and a female.

GM What sort of facility did they have at 8th (Field Ambulance), at Nui Dat?

MJ Oh, for medical…?

GM Yes.

MJ That became 8th Field Ambulance after we started, 1 Aust Field Hospital (1 AFH), it was more or less just an RAP. And they had an RAP with a bed and so forth, with, for taking minor ailments that sort of could be treated on the spot and then sent out to the unit. So that was just a field ambulance.

GM Right. And it grew into a real field ambulance later on?

MJ Yes.

GM When it expanded yeah. Was it, was it difficult to work with the Australian medical system?

MJ No. One medical system is much like all the rest.

GM Yes.

MJ Everything is the same; we speak the same language, you use the same terminology. The only difference is with some American pronunciations which are different, but you soon learn to put them together.

GM When you look back on it in hindsight, were you well prepared or under-prepared or not all prepared for your tour in Vietnam?

MJ I wasn't at all prepared for my tour of Vietnam from a medical viewpoint. I had no idea what I was to expect and the injuries were just so extensive and so mutilating that I wasn't prepared at all.

GM Had you ever done any work in like casualty in a major hospital, you know car accidents?

MJ Yes. I had done a lot of casualty work. I did a lot of neurosurgery in New Zealand, which includes brain and spinal cord, and I used to get a lot of accidents, paraplegics and the likes of. And I did work in casualty in Wellington and Palmerston North but none of these were to the extent that one struck in Vietnam.

GM Yes.

MJ I mean I did orthopaedics in Auckland. We used to get in racing car drivers and patch them up, but that was nothing compared to what I was to receive there.

GM I think you've just, I've got a question here, what was the atmosphere like in the wards with wounded Diggers?

MJ On the whole it was very good. We did a couple of circumcisions while I was there and this caused hilarity among the wounded troops, but those that were suffering, that suffered the surgery of circumcision it spelt absolute disaster. Because the boys would go around dishing out Playboy magazines to all those that had had their circumcision operations. And the next thing the poor patient would be calling out for help and they'd, we'd give them a can of cold fluid to spray on the area to relieve the problem and this happened. It was laughable, but at the same time it was cruel.

GM Were those circumcisions done for health reasons were they?

MJ Yes.

GM Yes. I mean it's, it's something that an adult male wouldn't normally venture into if he could avoid it, I guess.

MJ Well, that's dead right and I think this was why it was so comical for the troops that hadn't had it and why they made such a big fuss about the, or why they caused so much agony to the poor fellow that was having it done. They put them through hell and they used to wake up screaming in agony because of their mates' folly.

GM Yes, let's talk about casualties now. And we want to go through the Dustoff processes as it affected you at the hospital end. How much notice did you get of incoming casualties?

MJ We didn't get any really. When we were told that they were, that there was a Dustoff coming in and within minutes, seconds of being told, they would be arriving on the doorstep.

GM So…

MJ At Vampire Pad….

GM Was it called Vampire then?

MJ Yes.

GM Yes, Okay. So let's just run through it. You were in the ward…

MJ Yes.

GM And then the word would come through…

MJ Yes.

GM Go to where, triage or …?

MJ Triage yes.

GM Okay and what would happen then?

MJ They would be sorted out in triage and put into, would be determined what their injuries were and what sort of treatment they would need. Then from triage they would go straight into the operating theatre or … and then from the operating theatre they would come into Intensive Care and then into the ward depending on the severity of their wounds.

GM What would you be doing?

MJ I would've been in Intensive Care, or depending on what, what duty I was doing. We would automatically be told where to go and what duty we were to perform at the time depending on what the injuries were.

GM What was it like when a Digger got carried in on a stretcher?

MJ It was terrible. It was, well it was really nerve racking and quite terrifying really because you didn't know until you saw the stretcher coming in. And invariably there would be blood around and you just didn't know how bad or what the severity was until you finally got them onto the stretcher and had a look at them. It was really hard to cope with, the massive injuries.

GM So normally they would come in, be put on the floor and then you cut their clothes off.

MJ Yes.

GM And that's, that's seems to be a natural action, everyone seems to do that. Just cut the clothes off.

MJ Well, yes before you do that, you examine, you check their respirations and what they're doing and how they, their general situation. And then you've got to cut their clothes off so you can get to their wounds and find out what's wrong, and then they're just put in the operating theatre and treated accordingly.

GM And if necessary stabilise them before they go in for surgery?

MJ Yes, they're stabilised before they go in for surgery. That's usually done by the anaesthetist and he has a (team); we had orderlies trained in theatre technique and what to do and they just took over - everybody did their job.

GM Was the operating theatre air-conditioned?

MJ Yes.

GM Well that's a relief. Some normality somewhere.

MJ Yes, well we had air-conditioning in the Intensive Care Ward too. We also had a visit from the termites in the Intensive Care Ward. One morning we heard this terrible crackling in the walls and the, part of the walls were just plywood and we had a terrible infestation of termites and the whole wall had to be taken out and replaced.

GM Wonder where they came from? They must have walked across the sand for miles!

MJ It was unbelievable, but termites were there.

GM Termites?

MJ Yes. We seemed to get hit with every problem, you know, that you could think of. It went through the…

GM I mean there was no shade…

MJ No.

GM I mean it was, the whole thing was in a sand dune complex;

MJ Yes.

GM Was windy…

MJ Yes.

GM Salty, just makes me wonder why they actually put it there, but I guess…

MJ Well I suppose, I don't know, it was access.

GM Yes, safe.

MJ Yes.

GM Relatively safe.

MJ Relatively safe.

GM Did you ever get rocketed or mortared while you were there?

MJ We did, but fortunately for us we used to get fired on from the Long Hais (Hills) and the rockets that they sent from the Long Hais only reached the boundary or the perimeter and none of them managed to get beyond the perimeter to cause us any problems.

GM Yes. Now you must have had those 'stand to' drills. That stuff, did you have them when you were there, when you have to put on a helmet and…?

MJ No, we never had time for that.

GM Didn't have any of that. Yes.

MJ No. We had helmets under my, mine stayed under my bed all the time.

GM .Now.

MJ Also slept on a Vietnamese hand grenade. Someone gave me a Vietnamese hand grenade as a trophy and I put it in the trunk under my bed and it stayed there the whole time I was in Vietnam. And when I came to go home, I thought I'm going to take this trophy with me. So I had to take it over to somebody to defuse and they were absolutely horrified when they saw it. 'Where did you get this from!' and I said, 'I' ve been sleeping on it for 12 months, I want you to defuse so I can, or okay it, so I can take it home' - and that was the last I saw of it.

GM Oh dear. You mention that the wounds were pretty horrific. How did you actually handle that, that visual impact of seeing this? I mean, do you just bite your bottom lip or what do you do?

MJ Yes, you … this was the hardest thing of all to not reveal or not show your feelings or sort of… Well you couldn't break down in front of the patient because he is there and you're trying to convince him - while you don't like his chances very much - you are trying to convince him that things are going to be okay. And it was very hard to keep a stiff upper lip and not break down.

GM You see people always I think imagine that the nurses and the nursing sisters aren 't affected by it.

MJ Yes.

GM But you, you seem to be telling us that you are and it's very hard to cope?

MJ You are very much affected and this is one thing which I think probably accounts for a lot of the PTSD that some of the nursing sisters showed when they came home. The mere fact that they had to put on such a brave face the whole time they were there, when they left the situation and suddenly began to let their feelings be known or to be free with their feelings, they broke down and weren't able to cope.

GM So they'd been suppressing it?

MJ Yes.

GM And not being able to handle it at the time?

MJ Yes and we, there was nobody there with whom you could talk because they were all in a similar situation and you just had to cope with it as best you could and some coped better than others.

GM What do you think were the worst injuries to treat?

MJ Oh, I think probably the amputations; and we had a couple of medical situations which we never really got to know the cause of whereby paraplegia or quadriplegia had set in and we didn't know what was causing this quadriplegia. So that it was very difficult to treat them when we couldn't find a cause. We stabilised them as best we could with the facilities that we had and with what we were able to find out about the patient. And then they had to be medevaced home because we just didn't have the means to look after them, We couldn't keep them there till we found out what was wrong because we had exhausted probably the resources that we had available to us to help them.

GM So most of those amputations would've been as a result of mine blast, wouldn 't they?

MJ Yes. A lot of them were. Jumping on a mine and you can't normally, you can't get them off it without unless you can reach across and keep the same pressure on the mine and to enable that person to jump off and detonate it in the clear. They were dreadful because these mines had nasty pieces of bamboo and all sorts of shrapnel and other nasty elements in them, which used to penetrate the body and cause terrible wounds. One of the worst was seeing a young lad, we didn't actually get him, but I

went over to … [MJ: *36 Evac*] - the American hospital - to look after this guy. He had hindquarter amputation and part of the hindquarter removed and an arm and he also had abdominal injuries as well.

GM What's a hindquarter?

MJ Whole leg and buttocks.

GM Good grief.

MJ Just like an animal, when you know, when you get a hindquarter of beef or something, it's the buttock part and the leg and he was in a bad way… He was so bad they brought his parents out from Australia to…

GM He was an Australian?

MJ … be with him and I can't remember if he managed to survive to go home or if he passed away there. My memory fails me.

GM Did they do that very often - bring out parents?

MJ I only know of it on a couple of occasions when they had ... the troops were so badly wounded that they didn't know if they would be able to help them.

GM Yes. That 36 Evac, was that 36 Evac hospital?

MJ Yes.

GM That hospital. Did you ever do an exchange there?

MJ Not while I was there. We, the New Zealand Army tried to organise it for us to do an exchange, but at the time the Australian Army didn't agree with the exchange, but I think later on in the tour some did go on an exchange.

GM Did you get to see any other medical facilities in Vietnam?

MJ Yes.

GM Where was that?

MJ I went up to Qui Nonh to the New Zealand hospital that was run by the Red Cross there which was a civilian hospital. I spent a weekend up there. I went to an Australian based medical unit in Bom Song and one in - I think it was Baria.

GM What were they like?

MJ Terrible. The one at Qui Nonh in particular, the patients more or less were cared for by their families. They used to bring in their food and feed them and they were treated as best they could and sometimes it would be necessary for them to have a catheter in. And they, when they were considered well enough and for the catheters to come out, the Vietnamese decided that they were better off with the catheter in and they would go and retrieve the catheters from the waste and try and put them back in and the hygiene wasn't, wasn't very good at all. They, there was no proper facilities for urinating and they just urinated out in the hospital grounds, not a very pleasant situation to be in.

GM How long could you hold a patient in 1 Field Hospital before the cut off time came to send them back to Australia? Or send them back to the unit?

MJ Well, we could, two weeks we could have them in, in country and then if they were, if they were going to be well enough to go back to their unit that's what we did. If they weren't going to be able to go back to their unit, we tended to medevac them out as soon as possible and that depended on their condition and how stable they were and usually it happened on a weekly basis.

GM Describe a medevac day. When the Hercs are going to go back.

MJ Well it started fairly early in the morning, getting the patients ready to travel and we had those that had to be on … stretcher cases were all put onto stretchers ready to go back. And the walking wounded - they were put on to a bus. We had a couple of buses which used to come and take the walking wounded and they had facilities to take the stretchers on board. The day before the medevac, the air force officer used to come and inspect those that were going to be medevaced to find out what facilities they would need on board the aircraft to get them safely back to Butterworth or to Australia. Usually they went up to Butterworth first and then they were sorted out again at Butterworth and either kept there for a holding period until they were better or they were sent straight back to Australia. So that the pilot would know exactly what facilities were needed to transport them and make sure that they had the necessary equipment on the aircraft to take them back.

GM Yes. What about New Zealand soldiers? What happened to them? Those who got wounded?
MJ The same thing happened. They were treated at the hospital and medevaced out in the same manner as the Australians.

GM What, would they go to Australia then go to New Zealand?

MJ Yes.

GM Or did they go through New Zealand system from Butterworth on?

MJ That I'm not too sure.

GM Yes. I never ever thought about what actually happened to the Kiwis.

MJ No, well…

GM I imagine they would've gone to Richmond, then probably Richmond to…?

MJ To New Zealand.

GM Yes.

MJ I'm not too sure what happened after they got to Butterworth.

GM Yes, yeah. No, because I came back when I got wounded, but I got all wobbly at Penang, I had a dirty wound.

MJ Oh right.

GM Bad infection. And it all flared up apparently. I don't know, I can't remember. Anyway, I wasn't feeling too flash. But I stayed in Butterworth for at least a couple of days.
MJ Yes, well, they, they did keep them there for a period of time until they were fit again to go on to the next part of the journey. If they could treat them at Butterworth, they did.

GM Yes.

MJ We had one or two. We didn't treat eye injuries at the field hospital and they went up to Bom Song for treatment. Instead they were sorted out of the triage area and they were then sent straight back on a helicopter up to Bom Song.

GM Was it for all neurological or just eyes?

MJ Yes. Both.

GM Oh yeah.

MJ Eye and neurological.

GM Yes, yeah. Yes, someone told me about going to visit someone who'd been blinded and another guy with a bad head wound, I'm trying to think where they went? It was an American hospital.

MJ Yes, I think it was. I think it was Bom Song that they went to.

GM Bien Hoa or somewhere else. Doesn't matter. Okay.

MJ Might've been somewhere else, but I can't remember.

GM Yes, it was, I now remember, I think it was Bien Hoa

MJ Yep, Bien Hoa, yes.

GM A big American base there.

MJ Yes.

GM And I think that's where the head wounds and all that went. Yes. Did you ever treat wounded enemy?

MJ Yes.

GM Could you just tell us what that was like?

MJ It gave one a very eerie sort of a feeling because they never seemed to close their eyes. They were always lying in their beds staring at you and…

GM Probably petrified.

MJ We were given instructions that they were to be treated just like anybody else, but it caused a lot of trouble with the troops seeing the enemy being treated in the same ward as they were.

GM They were in the same ward?

MJ Yes.

GM Oh they changed that later on. They had a separate little ward for them.

MJ No, well we treated them all in the same, the same ward and it didn't make for good relations.

GM Yes, that'd be a bit difficult to handle.

MJ But we only kept them for as long as it took them to recover from their surgery and then they were handed over to the Americans.

GM Oh okay. Right. Yes, well, I'm not surprised that they kept their eyes open. They probably, I mean they used to be told, you know, it's a lot of their propaganda that the first thing we're going to do is, you know, take out their livers and kidneys and all that sort of stuff and eat them. Some dreadful things they were told. They were probably petrified.

MJ Take them up in a helicopter and throw them out.

GM They probably were expecting the worst.

MJ Yes.

GM Were they bad injuries that the enemy came in with?

MJ Not the ones that I treated. They were just lacerations, quite deep lacerations or a broken leg or something like that.

GM Yes. What did you think of the enemy?

MJ I didn't think much of them. I know I didn't like having them around because you always felt uncomfortable with them being there. Even on a trip into Vung Tau, you never felt safe. You always sort of felt that one of the White Mice were there with eyes sort of pinned on your back and you didn't feel comfortable. You couldn't walk around freely. You were, there was always this fear that somebody might spring out from somewhere and stab you in the back.

GM Yes. When you were treating the enemy, did they show any sort of gratitude or…?

MJ No, they were very unmoved. They just, they just lay there.

GM Yes, probably just did not know, yeah. Did you have R & R at all?

MJ Yes.

GM Where did you go?

MJ I went to Bangkok and I went up to Butterworth. I had a weekend in Butterworth and a weekend in Bangkok. [MJ: *I landed at Butterworth then went by road and ferry to Penang*]

GM Were they R & Cs or not the true R & R, you know, the five-day R & R?

MJ The Bangkok one was an R & R

GM Okay. Did you go with someone that you knew?

MJ No. I went on a flight with other Australian soldiers and I think there were a couple of New Zealanders among them.

GM How did you spend your R & R?

MJ The first thing I did was to go into a hairdressers or a beauty parlour - I'm not sure what - and got the trimmings, from a manicure and haircut and a facial I think at the same time - and it was quite heavenly.

GM Yes, and stayed in a real hotel.
MJ Yes.

GM That must have been nice?

MJ Yes. I've just thought of the hotel at Butterworth (Penang). It was the Runnymede that I stayed at.

GM Yes.

MJ Yes, it was an enjoyable few days in Bangkok, went to one of the native villages and saw handicrafts and artworks and generally toured around the town.

GM So you did the touristy things?

MJ Yes.

GM Yes. What was it like going back to the war zone after a five-day break?

MJ Oh, I think it was beginning to sort of feel a bit like home.

GM That's a bit dangerous.

MJ I don't think I had any real feelings. It was probably a little step closer to going home because I only had another month to go after that (R & R leave).

GM Oh, so you went late in your tour?

MJ Yes.

GM Right, yeah.

MJ Just before I was due to come home.

GM Right. Okay. Did the time go fast in the war zone?

MJ No, I think it dragged, dragged along. The days seemed longer and I think generally time seemed to be a lot longer.

GM Did the living conditions get any better during your time there?

MJ Yes. The last month before I was due to come home, we got flushing toilets.

GM Yes, that'd be right, just before you're about to go.

MJ Yes. We also had a shower which, when I first arrived there we didn't have. We had the all-steel Army washbasin, which we had to fill with water and wash our face and then flush the rest of it over our bodies, which was to suffice. I don't know why we didn't get a shower early in the piece because even the worst of campsites usually manage to put up some sort of a mobile shower.

GM Or even a shower bucket.

MJ Yep.

GM I mean geez.

MJ We didn't have any of that.

GM I would've withheld labour. I mean it's, oh geez. What do you think was the saddest incident that you could recall?

MJ I don't really know. I mean there were a lot of times when I sort of could have you know broken down and really felt bad about…

GM Did you lose that, did you lose many patients, I mean. I've often been told that you know, once you got the guys into the hospital, the chances of surviving were pretty good.

MJ Yes.

GM And the morbidity rate was really low, once they got in there.

MJ Yes, once they got in there, we, we didn't lose too many. A lot were lost in the triage area before they got into the hospital, but if they made through triage, they generally made it home.

GM Yes.

MJ Once we got to them because of the Dustoff choppers, and they were able to take them out of their battle fields and the danger zone so rapidly and get medical aid, a lot that would've died in previous wars, survived because we were on the spot. There was no demilitary, DMZ zone, we were all frontline, in the frontline and we got, got the troops out faster than any previous war and first class medical attention was available to them right from the start.

GM I mean, the Vietnam War really revolutionised military medicine, didn't it?

MJ It did.

GM I mean with casevac and Dustoff and all that.

MJ We had the equipment, a lot of the equipment wasn't yet in readily usable, ready use in civilian hospitals, but we had there for the occasion. I think the, the situation, the site of the hospital wasn't the best, but with what facilities we had, we coped very, very well and our success rate I think was very, very, very good and very high and our infections, or wound infections, were at a minimum as a result of the rapid attention that they got and the facilities available.

GM Describe what you thought of any Allies other than the Australians that you worked with.

MJ Well I found I had, up at ALSG headquarters we had an occasional get together up there and we met Koreans and Vietnamese soldiers. Under those circumstances they were all friendly and I can't say that I have any sort of ill feeling towards them.

GM Over at 36 Evac, the nursing sisters over there wore fatigues.

MJ Yes.

GM Yet we wore in the, in the RAAF Nursing Service, the Royal New Zealand Nursing Corps and the Australian Nursing Corps, our ladies always wore their veils and traditional (dress), I guess we use the word traditional?

MJ Yes.

GM And I know that it had a good impact on those who were wounded. Is that the reason it was done rather than wear fatigues, or were the Yanks just out of step?

MJ Well I think that it was the New Zealand and Australian way of life. This was how we, how we went to war. We never seemed to make allowances for us to wear different uniforms. It's traditional. When one was trying to sort of camouflage things, the white uniform stands out like a sore toe, so from that aspect I can't see it. But we were sort of untouchable. I mean, we were, we were there to do a job and do the job we did and everybody was accustomed to seeing us dressed in our whites and veils and that's just the way it was.

GM Wounded soldiers have told me that it was reassuring.

MJ Yes.

GM That it was a sort of an island of normality…

MJ Yes.

GM …in an abnormal environment.

MJ Well, this is, this is it, it gave them confidence and helped them to feel better thinking that they were, well seeing us they sometimes thought they were back home.

GM Yes.

MJ And this was good for their morale and so I mean we… It didn't matter what we wore, we did our job no matter what and so it was just one of those familiarities that the community have for nursing sisters, how they see them and that's how we visualise, pictured ourselves.

GM So after a pretty tough 12 months, how did you feel when, when you were going home?

MJ I guess I was pleased to be going home and into this sort of normal life again. Familiarity. I suppose too I missed the, oh I don't know, the manner of the men there. I mean I would never see such courage again in Civvy Street. It has left an impression on me forever and I don't think, well I didn't, for as long as I remained in the nursing profession, saw the courage of those portrayed anywhere else in the world.

GM But the war also, apart from being a very incredible year of your life, also became the beginning of a relationship where you met your future husband, who was a Royal Australian Air Force pilot?

MJ Yes, no, he was an engineer.

GM Engineer.

MJ Yes. He was CO of 2 squadron at the time and I met him in Phan Rang enroute to Butterworth for some R & R.

GM And that relationship was right, it was near the end of your tour wasn't it?

MJ Yes.

GM And, and this uniformed officer swept you off your feet?

MJ Yes, well I don't sort of look at it as sweeping me off my feet. I think he got me in a weak moment!

GM But you guys obviously met in towards the end of '68, early '69 and then married in December '69 and were together until he passed away in what… '96?

MJ Yes.

GM Yes. So it was some, well let's see.

MJ 26, 26 years, 27 years, 26 years.

GM So it was an interesting time?

MJ Yes.

GM What do you think you learnt most from your time in Vietnam? As, let's say, as a nursing sister, what did you learn the most?

MJ Probably how to cope in acute situations. I probably learnt compassion and understanding to a greater degree.

GM I mean because I would've thought going back to New Zealand or Australia, where you eventually lived, and nursing would've been a breeze after doing it in Vung Tau. I mean those conditions were pretty ordinary.

MJ Well, it was a breeze I mean, we had hygienic conditions once again and running water.

GM Running water. Yes, yeah. Have you got any regrets about going to Vietnam?

MJ No. I haven't any regrets. I think I… I had to be there for the troops and I think I had to be there for my country and I'm glad to have been able to care for the men involved.

GM You know, looking back, was the Australian and New Zealand involvement worth the effort and the lives that were lost?

MJ Well, I... I personally think that we Australia and New Zealand should have been there. I think it was the right decision, but I don't think that it should've carried on for as long as it did. I think that they could've come to, brought it to an end much more quickly than they did.

GM Well, I mean, all wars are silly really.

MJ Yes.

GM I mean, let's face it there's no such thing as a 'good' war.

MJ No.

GM But, yeah. Maureen is there anything else you'd like to mention that I haven 't talked about or any final thing you'd like to say?

MJ Oh, I can't, I can't think of anything.

GM Okay. Well it's been a terrific interview, and I know it's been a tough one at times, but I'd really like to thank you very much for taking part.

MJ Thank you very much.

End of Interview