

## **ORAL HISTORY RECORDING**

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**TITLE: VETERANS' VOICES**

**INTERVIEWEE: PAUL GALLAGHER**

**INTERVIEWER: GARY MCKAY**

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**VETERANS' VOICES**  
**MAROOCHY LIBRARIES' ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**  
**Interview Transcript**

**Interviewee: Paul Gallagher (PG)**

**Interviewer: Gary McKay (GM)**

**Date of Interview: Friday 1 June 2001**

**Place of Interview: Eudlo, Sunshine Coast, Queensland**

**Transcribed by Laura Manasserian: 21 January 2002**

**Corrected and edited by Gary McKay: 1 March 2002**

**Final edit by Gary McKay & Caroline Foxon after interviewee perusal: 23 August 2002**

Interviewee's details: Paul Gallagher was born in Brisbane in 1948 and whilst working as a public servant in Brisbane volunteered for National Service, (commencing January 1969). He underwent basic training at Singleton and then trained as a rifleman - with his battalion about to leave for operational service in South Vietnam - at Enoggera, Queensland. He deployed to war as a rifle section 2IC with 8 RAR and saw active service in Phuoc Tuy Province for 12 months. He was discharged from the Army holding the rank of lance corporal on his return to Australia in January 1971. Today he is a volunteer worker for Vietnam veterans.

Subject of Interview: Australians in South Vietnam, the Vietnam war 1965-72 (particularly 1969-70), training for war, training courses, combat and battle, deploying to Vietnam, tactics, National Service, Malaysia, casualties, morale, return to Australia. The Allies, leave, discipline, demonstrations, trade unions, the Labor Party, North Vietnam. Mine incidents, casualty evacuation. Allies, leave: R & R and R & C, discipline. The aftermath of war, PTSD, stress and family impacts.

Start Tape 1

GM This is a recording of an interview with Paul Gallagher recorded at Eudlo on Friday 1 June 2001. Recorded by Gary McKay for Maroochy Libraries' *Veterans' Voices* Project.

Paul, firstly thanks very much for taking the time to talk to us today for this project. My first question is, why did you join the Army and how old were you when you did?

PG Well, I actually volunteered for National Service and I would've been 19 at the time. That'd be 1968 when I actually, yeah, would've put my papers in to volunteer.

GM Why did you volunteer?

PG Funny story; not because of love of King or Country or things like it. It was because I was working in the State Public Service as a clerk. Didn't enjoy my job. It was pretty mundane. I was having financial problems. I was probably too much of a larrikin. I was drinking too much amber fluid, getting into too much strife around town. I had a young lady who was insisting that she was bearing my child and I thought well, listen, the best way to get out of this country is to let the government pay for it, so I also really did have a bit of a military yearning, you know, I probably wanted to go into the Army some time, but I just brought it forward.

GM Did you have family connections in the Army?

PG My dad was wounded in the first air raid in Darwin and he died of those wounds when I was five, so I had this fixation about the Army right through my childhood, having not even known the person who I worshipped really and he was my hero so ... We used to always play big war or little war in the back yard and it just sort of ... it must have been just sort of a continuation of well, I better put this into practice.

GM Yeah.

PG Yeah, and as I say just brought it forward.

GM Almost a French Foreign Legion story. So, you enlisted in where?

PG Enoggera.

GM At Enoggera?

PG Yeah, I was a Brisbane boy. Yeah, born and bred.

GM Okay. Went down to Kapooka?

PG No, Singleton.

GM Oh, went to Singleton.

PG Yeah, flew us down. Very first airplane ride on a Fokker Friendship down to Singleton. I was messing myself from Day One.

GM What time of the year was it when you got to Singleton?

PG January. Hot.

GM Sixty...?

PG '69.

GM '69. I was probably one of your platoon commanders.

PG Yeah? 15th intake.

GM Yeah, I was B Company.

PG Yeah, I think I was too, yeah. 7 Platoon, I think it was.

GM Did you do your corps training at Singleton?

PG No, no. Because this bloke was on a mission to get out of the country, meaning me. I also volunteered for the infantry and I volunteered to go to Vietnam as well, while I was down there. I made it known. And so I don't know what happened or what was the rationale behind it, but I was drafted to 8 RAR, and we went straight from [PG: *Singleton*] - after recruit training - back up to bloody Brisbane because I also wanted to see a bit of Australia while I was in the Army as well before I went overseas. But no, back home to Greenbank and did our corps training with the battalion whilst they were coming back from Malaya.

GM Right. Okay. That's right because in actual fact there was a shortage of ...

PG Instructors.

GM Of places to just train people plus instructors, yeah, so the battalions were doing it.

PG Yeah.

GM Yeah that's typical. You get to see more of Brisbane.

PG Yeah.

GM Okay. So, how much did you know about Vietnam at that stage?

PG Nil.

GM But you wanted to go there anyway?

PG Yeah, well I just wanted to get out of the country, you know. But it was nil. I was just a larrikin around town. I was in the surf club. I was playing football for Brothers in Brisbane and

drinking lots of grog and messing around with women, and politics was the furthest thing from my mind. So yeah.

GM Okay. So there was no great desire to stop this, this spread of communism.

PG No, once I suppose it was explained to me, you know, the talks and that during corps training in particular, well I started to get to believe - while I don't know whether I was brainwashed or not - but I believed what they were saying. It made sense to me so I thought, well yeah, that sounds like a good cause, let's go and stop the yellow hordes because I had this thing about the Japanese against my father, so I thought well this is another slanty-eyed mob of people, so I might as well have a shot at them as well, you know, sort of try and make up for something that type of race did to my father.

GM So, how long were you with 8 Battalion in Australia before you went to Vietnam?

PG We got in, yeah from April (1969) and we embarked in November.

GM So, almost six months training? And what sort of training did you do?

PG It was pretty intense, we did ... Actually I got picked as a private soldier to be part of the cadre course, you know the battalions cadre team that put the battalions through Canungra so I went up there and did that, which got me out of going through Wiangarie (State Forest Training Area) fortunately and so I enjoyed that, but so there was only two of us that got picked and so we did the Canungra thing and then we did the usual Tin Can Bay thing - in winter of course - and these bloody mountains around the back of Brisbane, Bunya Mountains and what have you, and then we did the Shoalwater Bay thing and then off.

GM Yeah. And you're in a rifle platoon and what job did you have?

PG Well at that stage I was a rifleman.

GM Okay. What do you think was the percentage of your platoon that would've been National Servicemen?

PG I tell you what, 8 Battalion itself was I think, the stats are something like 60 percent and that probably was the same in the platoon. There's a hell of a lot of us.

GM Okay. And what company were you in?

PG I was in B Company right from the start, yeah.

GM Okay. Who was your platoon commander?

PG Well, at that stage, look it's fuzzy, I can't remember who it was, all I can remember was who I went over with.

GM Yeah.

PG It was Phil Thompson, but I think that someone else may have been there prior to that you know, it's just fuzzy.

GM Righto, so how did you get to Vietnam?

PG I went over on the (HMAS) *Sydney*.

GM What was that like?

PG It was good because, well, it was my first ship ride too. Everything was a 'first'. This was a great time, you know, the government was paying for to go on a cruise as well. It was good because we went up through, of course going from Brisbane, Hamilton Wharf, we went up through the Barrier Reef, inside the Barrier Reef and then across to Darwin and then up. Going around the Cape (York)

was an experience. It was early hours of the morning and no one - of course the matelots wouldn't have - didn't want to tell us what they were going to do. But when we got to the Cape because of the huge tidal variances they had to drop the anchor at a certain time. But we were sleeping in hammocks up on the focsle and they never told us of course and you can imagine, there were sparks and the noise was just enormous and so we've all jumped out of our (skins), because we're all tense as cane toads, and we thought, shit it's early. So that was just one funny thing that happened on the way and then everything was just plain sailing. We did all our training and rifle shooting off the back on the way over. And I can remember a Japanese trawler going past and I thought ... it had the flag up, and I actually bloody put one across their way when I was [PG: *shooting*], and I thought there's one for me father, you know. And back again onto the balloons that we were supposed to be shooting at and then everything was fine until we hit a typhoon in the South China Sea. And it was about oh, four days of absolutely horrendous bloody weather.

GM That was probably Typhoon *Patsy*.

PG I don't recall, yeah rings a bell, and we were as sick as dogs, the whole battalion and all the matelots were all crook.

GM Is that right?

PG Yeah, yeah, yeah it was really bad.

GM So when you were in that storm, you were basically, just had to lock down and...?

PG Lock down yeah.

GM Oh yuck.

PG Absolutely there was blokes spewing everywhere and what have you. I didn't see me mate Blue for three days, poor bastard, he just...

GM Oh well that answers the question about what was memorable about the trip. Now that would've taken about ten or 12 days?

PG Yeah, that's right, yeah. Ten to 12, not sure, yeah,

GM And the *Sydney* steamed into Vung Tau Harbour?

PG Yeah, early hours of the morning and so we had to sit, sit in the harbour waiting for dawn to actually embark onto the, what do you call them, the landing craft.

GM Oh, so you went ashore on landing craft.

PG Yeah.

GM So how did you get into the landing craft?

PG Oh, down the side you know. It wasn't rope, I don't think they were rope ladders like the cargo nets, I don't think it was like that.

GM So down a gangplank?

PG I think it was a gangplank.

GM Gangway. Yeah

PG Yeah, I don't remember going cargo nets at all.

GM What happened then?

PG We just steamed in and came into Vungers (Vung Tau) and I think because our battalion was - mainly the core of it was - 1 RAR, ex-1 RAR blokes, who had already had a tour, so they knew what to expect and so it wasn't like other battalions where we thought we were going to storm the shore and you know, fix bayonets and the like. No, all I can recall is getting into Vungers, having a good look around and seeing all the civvy's just gawking at us. They really didn't care about us too much, because by that time so many of us had come through - so many battalions.

GM Because, this is now, late 1969...?

PG Yeah, November '69 yes. And the biggest thing I can remember about our arrival was we've got onto the trucks and we're heading up Route 2, is it, towards the (Nui) Dat. 9 RAR whom we replaced were coming back down, so our convoys passed and one clown from 9 RAR yelled out, 'Righto boys, you're 8 RAR. We're going home to stuff your wives, your girlfriends, your mothers. We're gonna do all that when we get back home', and, you know, that didn't please us too well but one of our fellas, one clown, he just yelled out, 'Yeah that's all right 9 RAR, we've just finished doing it to all of yours'. So that broke the ice, broke the tension and off we went up the...

GM Good answer.

PG Yeah, it was good.

GM So, by trucks.

PG Yeah

GM Up, up Route 2?

PG Yeah.

GM And into Nui Dat...

PG Yeah.

GM Was it, was it liked you imagined it to be?

PG I guess so, yeah, it was similar to, you know, camps in Australia. What do you mean, Nui Dat itself?

GM Yes.

PG Yeah, it was similar to, camps and things like that so. Yeah, we heard a bit about it and had seen photos and things, so it wasn't strange, no.

GM And on that road up, I guess, necks swivelling on the trucks looking at things?

PG Exactly that's what I was gonna say, yeah, and you go through Baria and see all the picture theatre and...

GM Well, it was still showing the signs of the Tet (1968) Offensive.

PG That's right, yeah. So, we're all gawking and looking around and things like that and wondering what the hell's next and all hyper alert. Yeah, then we got to the Dat. I actually, I actually got to the point - when we got to the Dat - they had those familiarisation [PG: *demonstrations*] and you had to go down the range and they showed you all the weapons.

GM Yeah, firepower demos.

PG I didn't go down. I sort of got there and I thought Jesus, I don't know whether I want to play any more. I'm here and, mmm this might be getting a bit serious. So, I didn't even go down to that and I think I started writing a letter home. I started getting home sick straight away.

GM Yeah?

PG You know, it was quite funny. Quite bizarre.

GM But you were a single man?

PG Yeah.

GM What did your parents think?

PG Mum didn't know. I didn't tell her. I only told her about oh, five or six years ago that I volunteered. Yeah, it was all done in secret because the paperwork came through exactly as if you were called up so there was no hint that I'd volunteered see. And the funny part about it, I've got a good mate in the company, Paul Kruger, and we shared the exact same birthday and he went in in the 16th intake. So I would've went anyhow, so it didn't matter. The marble came out.

GM Yeah, yeah. I trained Kruger.

PG Did you?

GM Yeah.

PG Is that right? He just got his TPI.

GM We played football together. Oh, okay. So, what sort of things happened before you went out on operations?

PG I think we did the usual familiarisation. I remember, yeah, we had to go out on a bit of a TAOR patrol and they took us out with the cavalry as well. We did that and I remember seeing Normie Rowe, he was on his way home. And there's Normie, you know, yeah piss on me Normie, I'm in the front row sort of thing. That was one thing that I remember, that familiarisation with them, and then we must have done some TAORs (patrols) that I can't remember. And then I had my 21st birthday there not long after arriving.

GM Is that right?

PG Drunk as a lord. Yeah, because, and I remember being very scared, drunk but scared because I fell into a pit on my way back to my tent. I didn't break anything but there was artillery going off and all sorts of nonsense and I remember being very, very scared and wondering what the hell's going on. I'm drunk and I haven't got control.

GM Yeah.

PG I'd lost control. You know, I would've been useless. Yeah, so not long after my 21st birthday, then we had our first op.

GM Ok. Just tell us about that first operation.

PG Yeah, that's pretty memorable too because the very first day, we went out in choppers and by then I was section 2IC. I'd received a hook just before embarkation. I forgot to mention that, as a result of, you know, the Canungra thing and what have you. They must've had their eye on me so I got this hook and I was section 2IC and so therefore, in charge of the gun group. We're in choppers going out and it was mentioned, somehow or other, that it was a hot insertion. So, whether the bloody, whether 9 Squadron were having a crack, a bit of a go at us because their gunners opened up on the way in see, so

we're all shitting bricks because we're thinking well, Christ there's nogs on the deck and we're in for the shit straight away. Is it all right to swear?

GM Yeah.

PG And so, my gunner, who's nickname was White Rat.

GM White Rat.

PG White Rat because he had snowy hair and he was a little fella and he carried this gun. He was a strong little bugger though. 14th-intaker and he jumped out from about eight foot because his role was to have the gun on the ground ready to cover us. That was his role - in his mind - so he's jumped out with the whole lot, you know yourself as an infantry man, he's got the full pack, five days worth of rations, frontline ammunition, a heavy M-60 and he's busted both legs and they've telescoped up into his thigh...

GM Oh no.

PG ... and so straight away chaos. We didn't know what happened to him, we thought he'd been shot. Chaos immediately and... White Rat's been dragged back onto the chopper. 'Here you take the gun Mawksey' (Jeffrey Mawkes) and then it was shake out and so right from the start

GM You had a casualty before you even landed.

PG Shits were trumps you know, and then we realised it wasn't a hot insertion and we were sort of, had to really get ourselves together. We had to reorganise you know the gun group and so on and so forth so, yeah, that's my first impression of the first op.

GM Gee that's a bad injury too.

PG Yeah, it was. The poor bugger was in hospital at 1 Mil(itary) Hospital) at Yeronga longer than we were in country.

GM Geez.

PG And he's still fighting for a TPI now actually.

GM Oh, that's ridiculous.

PG It is, yeah.

GM God, so as a section, second in command (2IC) you mentioned a gun, what's important about that job?

PG Well, in my opinion it was that I had to ensure that, you know, they were doing their job, that the gun was (working), and that the gunner was doing his job, like cleaning the gun and making sure that it was always serviceable. And I would stick with them, and in a contact situation you were always ready to go with them, you know, to the high ground, or to the left or right or wherever you were directed, so, your role then was to control the fire, because gunners can go off and expend quite a hell of a lot of ammunition before...

GM In a short period of time.

PG In a short period of time, yeah. So, so that was your main role and I saw it as an important role but not only were you head of the gun group, but you were the section's 2IC, so you had to take care of the admin within the section; stores, picket lists and so on and so forth.

GM And under study the section commander.



PG And under study I mean, and the anxiety and the tension that went with that was pretty horrendous because I knew he was going home soon. He was only a 12th-intaker and he was...

GM Oh, he was a National Servicemen too.

PG As well yeah and he'd been to Malaya. They had a good tour those 12th-intakers. They had done Malaya, come over and did three months Nasho Vietnam and 'see ya later'. So, I knew Al was going, so the whole time I was watching him to see how he's doing his job because I mean, I was pretty green and I was scared.

GM I mean it's quite a lot of responsibility for a bloke who's been in the Army for less than a year.

PG Exactly yeah. And I was wondering, as I hadn't had much responsibility in life up until then you know, as I said I was a larrikin.

GM So, it must have had an impact on you?

PG It did, it did. I think the anxiety and the nervous tension started from day one really when I realise d, and I thought, 'Hang on, I'm gonna have to take over from Al one day. Can I do the job? Will I be able to stand up and look after these blokes?' Yeah, I was worried.

GM Would've had eyes like a wild cat I reckon.

PG Yeah, yeah.

GM What do you think was the hardest part of your job as a 2IC?

PG I don't know, I don't know. I think I probably just answered that, the hardest part. The physical hard part - I could handle the job. I wasn't worried about it. The 2IC's job was pretty good because I could put myself on picket wherever I liked and I got the best (times). Oh no, I wasn't a jack man. But no, I think the hardest part was the fact that as I said I was under study to the section commander.

GM And you became a section commander, acting section commander didn't you?

PG When Al went home, then I had to take a section over, yeah.

GM What was the, what was the hardest part about that job?

PG Well, it was the responsibility that you've got about nine blokes' lives in your hand, so the response, the hardest part was trying to sort of keep yourself in control and together so that when the shit did hit the fan that you would try to do the right thing. I think that had to be hardest part, keeping yourself together.

GM What was the reaction of the other blokes, like, when you took over?

PG Oh, they knew it was happening and I believe I was fairly well liked in the section. They were quite happy because my nickname was 'Wombat' and it was just, yeah 'Wombat, you take over when Al's gone', and so it was just carry on.

GM How did you get the nickname?

PG I don't know, I got it out at Greenbank and it's got all sorts of connotations to it. I don't look like a wombat. I'm bloody tall and skinny and what have you. But I don't know, it might've been something to do with women. I'm not sure but yeah, it's a bit of a mystery but anyhow it stuck and I still get called 'Wombat'.

GM Did you carry an M-79.

PG Yeah, yeah.

GM Might've been from there. Oh, in 4 RAR it was known as the Wombat Gun.

PG Oh, no never heard of that before.

GM Oh, we called it the Wombat Gun.

PG Yeah, no, it was other National Servicemen nicknamed me, so they wouldn't have known that.

GM Okay. Oh, never know where it come from. Okay.

PG They eat, root, shoot and leave so that might have something to do with it.

GM Now, going out on these operations. 1969 had been a fairly horrendous year for land mines. Did that play a part, were they up in the front of your mind?

PG Initially no, because we hadn't had any contact, any dealing with them initially. In the first op, mines weren't an issue because we were up North.

GM When you say up North, where?

PG We were up near the Long Khanh province.

GM Okay.

PG Operating up there amongst bunker systems and in heavy, very thick heavy 'J' (jungle), so there were no mines to speak of up there that we came in contact with, and I didn't know whether anyone else did either. I'm not sure about that; but initially no, not until the Long Hais where mines become an issue.

GM When you went out on operations, generally how long did you go out for?

PG Well, the first op was five weeks and I think that was the longest, yeah, prolonged time and that was long enough. We had Christmas out in the 'J', New Year's Day and the like and then when we come back to the Dat, the officers served us Christmas lunch mid-January.

GM As they should.

PG As they should.

GM Yeah. Was it, how did, did you have any contacts in that first (op)?

PG Yeah, yeah we had two or three contacts, and I think we got about four kills up in that first op, yeah.

GM Describe how you felt and what happened around you on the first contact.

PG I've been trying to think of it. Things get blurred, but I'm pretty sure we were, we come across a disused bunker system, a good one, and we were just scouting around, just having a look around. And probably we were a little bit 'thumbs in bum' when a couple (of enemy) walked in behind us and they were probably the caretakers coming back and one of our blokes had turned... No, that wasn't the first one. The first one was the funny incident. When you ask the funny one, I'll tell you the first one but this was another one. So one of our blokes turned around saw him, shot him and in fact I think we wanted to actually finish him off so that we could get it registered as a kill, but our platoon commander put the kybosh on that and we had to take him out, he had to be taken out as a wounded.

GM So you got a PW?

PG Yeah, we got a PW as well.

GM Not many platoons did.

PG We got another one later on in the tour too.

GM You mentioned that the first one was a funny incident. You'd better tell us about that.

PG Well, we'd been patrolling for you know quite some time and we, yeah weeks, and we were still switched on of course and we came across what would've been the Ho Chi Minh Trail for sure, because it was so well used, it was polished! The red mud was polished you know, and so we stopped and had a look, you know, the boss was deciding what to do, where to ambush and so on and so forth, I would imagine. So we'd all gone into harbour and Little John, being Australian - Little John, he's about 6 foot 6, red head, big fella from bloody Western Australia - wanted to relieve himself in a big way, number twos, so he went out in front of the gun and he's dropped his daks, but he had his SLR beside him. And I remember watching it. I mean, I don't have a fixation of watching blokes go to the toilet. I remember in my peripheral vision I was sort of aware that he was out there and the young fella in the dark suit, pyjamas, walked up the track. Little John's seen him half way through his bowel motion and because he was a country fella too, he's a good shot. He's just reached down picked up his SLR and he's hit this bloke with one shot.

GM With his trousers round his ankles?

PG With his trousers round his ankles. So we've all hit the deck, blah, blah, blah. Once, then our section had to go out and follow up because he did, he took off. He was wounded but he managed to get away, so he didn't knock him off completely. So we followed him up and found him about 50 metres along the track just crawling along trying to get away.

GM He died of wounds?

PG He died of wounds and the intelligence that came back later on in the tour was, when we got the feedback, was that he was the lead, forward scout of a bunch of about 30 who were about 150 metres behind him, metres behind him. Poor bastard, he was the forward scout and they made a decision apparently that they thought that we were SAS, certainly not Americans or even Australian, so they decided not to have a crack at us, thank God.

GM Yeah.

PG So that was that, the poor chap died of wounds, yeah.

GM Yeah.

PG Because of the lack of ammunition that was expended.

GM Yeah.

PG That was the reason.

GM Yeah, well it wouldn't sound like a normal contact.

PG No, no, no.

GM And that was the SAS SOP.

PG Yes.

GM You saved every round you've got unless you're really in trouble.

PG Exactly.

GM And then you make it sound like you got a company with you.

PG Yeah, so, so, I think they were NVA as well.

GM Can you remember what he was dressed in?

PG I think I have got his sandals in my room. Yeah, well he...

GM Was he in a uniform or was he just in black?

PG Well he, no. Well, he therefore mightn't been NVA but he was in black pyjamas and Ho Chi Minh sandals and that's all, yeah.

GM Could have been Main Force.

PG Yeah, but no helmets or anything like that, no pith helmet.

GM When you went out on operations, what was the thing that made you most apprehensive?

PG Well, I guess it was the fear of being shot or killed. I mean that was just an animal instinct of mine. Self-preservation. Is that the sort of thing?

GM Yeah.

PG Yeah.

GM I mean, other blokes have said they, whenever they've heard that they had to go down to the Long Hais, they used to get a cold shiver up their spine.

PG I didn't know anything about the Long Hais. So when we were going, we were called out as ready reaction to the nonsense that Charlie Company had gone into and so we were called out and we didn't know anything about the Long Hais at that stage - because it was not long after the first op. So we never went back. However, if we were told we were going to operate out around that area, round Xuyen Moc and, is that east or west? Out that way, yeah, the fear of mines, because we did have a mine incident.

GM You did have one?

PG Yeah, yeah. After the Long Hais yeah.

GM Tell us about the mine incident.

PG Well that's, that's one that sort of really sticks in (my mind), it's one of my bloody stressors or whatever to this day. We were patrolling, it was after the Long Hais and we were following up trying to find where *D 445* got to. We were chasing them and so we were patrolling as a company and 4 Platoon had only just been rested from being in the lead, and we went through them as 5 Platoon. We went through them and then we propped at a dry creek bed, an obstacle. So, platoon commander Phil Thompson took a section with himself across the obstacle to have a bit of recce up front, so we propped and he went with this, for this recce section up front, up further to see. I don't know why, but anyhow he did. And we were just sitting there and bang!

GM What sort of a bang, what sort of a mine was it?

PG I'm not sure. I'm not sure to this day, whether it was a booby trap in a tree or someone stood on it. I tend to think it was stood on because Graham Harris lost both legs. But the screams that came, the screams that followed that bang and the dust that we saw, it just, it...

GM Was the, was the noise very loud?

PG Yeah, it was the loudest thing I'd ever heard and of course it was dead quiet, so it had more impact. Yeah, so then the noise and then the screams and then we had to actually, well we couldn't

rush straight up, because well we didn't know, thought they might have been in a mine field and so we had to get the splinter team that was with us to - fortunately we had them with us - I think they were with us, or whether they choppered them in.

GM If you were travelling as a company, it's a good chance that they were with you.

PG Yeah, so they prodded their way through, and that seemed to take weeks to get to them, and when we finally got in, it was our section again that had to go up. When we finally got in, there was just blood and flesh and chaos everywhere. And it was quite, yeah, quite awful really.

GM How many were injured in that?

PG There was a Snow, John Bresso (Bressington), Graham Harris, platoon commander Phil Thompson and a couple of others that had (been hit), they were the major wounds. Like Graham lost his legs and one of the blokes got an MM for actually cutting his leg off there and he wasn't a medic or anything. Just a rifleman.

GM Yeah? That would've been tough.

PG I think he was a scout. Young fella, well he's not very good these days, yeah, I can remember myself. By that time, first aid had been given by someone, I don't know, we might have, I can't recall. But all I can remember is that they all seemed to be under control, you know. Like there were shell dressings on and legs had been cut off and bleeding stopped, and then it was just a matter of getting them out to an LZ because we were in thick country. So we had to cut the LZ and get them out. But I can remember feeling at a loss, and the feeling was of horror, of hopelessness, and I felt ashamed of the way I was feeling, because there was nothing for me to do other than to look at these maimed bodies of my mates and my boss. And so I was just, feeling, oh, I felt ashamed so then, I must of snapped out of that and we had to get them out. The other mob must've been cutting the LZ out because I wasn't instrumental in that. We got the wounded to the LZ and then I can remember protecting Snow, 'Snowy' (Stephen) Odal. They were, we put him in a stokes litter and of course the chopper is overhead hovering and he'd lowered (the litter) and the dust and shit was flying everywhere. I was protecting Snow's face from the debris and then it was time to take him up. And they left his face covered up and I went to uncover it, you know. I said, look you know, 'take that off because he's got to breathe' and they said 'no he's dead'. And I didn't know that. I broke down actually, not violently, but I had a bit of a weep on the LZ as Snow was going up and, and some prick could see that I was upset and he just said to me, 'Oh that's just war,' and I don't know who he was, fortunately I don't, today. I can't recall who he was, and I got very angry with what he said and stormed off and then, from that, we were in shock after that. And I can remember (Major) Mick Jeffrey our OC coming around later on in the day and giving us a few kind words.

GM Yeah, how did, how did the impact with that go with the rest of the section and the platoon?

PG Well, it had a big effect because we lost our boss, we were in chaos. Squizzy Taylor, the platoon sergeant had to take over, but we didn't doubt Squizzy's bloody ability and but we were in, not chaos, but we were fragmented and disorganized. And we had to shake down again, but being professional soldiers - as we believed we were at the time - and, you know, well we continued on. There was no bloody 'I'm going home now'. We just kept going. But blokes were sad and numb; but you just got on with your job. I mean you just had to do it because the threat was there; and of course you started to look where you bloody stepped from then on too. Yeah, so, no, we got on with the job.

GM Brings the war home pretty hard doesn't it?

PG Exactly. Yes, yes. Well, that was the first time any of ours, in our platoon, that is, were wounded or killed. We lost two. Bresso (John Bressington) got killed that day (6 March 1970), like he was dead before they took him up apparently.

GM Is this the guy that lost his legs?

PG No, no, Graham survived.

GM The guy that lost his legs survived. That was Graham...

PG Harris.

GM Harris

PG Regular soldier. It was, it was quite ironical and I don't draw a distinction between Nashos and Regs but the three blokes that copped it, well, like Graham was a Reg and Snow and Bresso were really good mates, both Regs and both dead. And I'd only been talking to Snow and Bresso the day prior to that. I didn't know them very well and I had sat on a log, when we'd harboured up the day before and had a chat with them because I thought, oh well, I'd like to get to get know these blokes. You know, regular soldiers.

GM Were you 2IC-ing then?

PG Yeah. And I just thought oh well, they were in a different section, I'd like to get to know these blokes and I went over and had a chat to them. So I don't know there's just something, you know, you, don't know what happens in life eh?

GM It's fate.

PG Yeah

GM Who was the, who was the person who most stands out in your memory from your, from your tour?

PG Yeah, I've wrestled with that question and I've come up with the boss, Phil Thompson. I just respected that man so much, I mean he was only in country, oh four months, but he, we just, I don't ... it might've been more, but we just trusted him, we believed in him. We would've, if he would've said walk over that bloody bed of broken nails, glass, we would've, you know, so he's ... he is and we actually continued a social relationship when we came home.

GM Now, he was badly wounded in the...

PG Face.

GM ...face and didn't come back?

PG That's right.

GM So, you got a new platoon commander?

PG Yeah.

GM Who was that?

PG Tony Jucha.

GM Was it hard to bring in a new leader?

PG Exactly. I mean, and I think my feelings that I just expressed about Phil weren't alone. I wasn't the sole person they had, I mean we all adored, you know I mean the word adored sounds a bit bloody flimsy, but we all respected Phil so much it was, and I feel sorry for Tony, he's come in and he could never, ever have filled Phil's shoes.

GM So, what'd you think was the, the one after that, the worst thing after the wounding of Phil?

PG Yeah, which was prior to then was when we were reacted down to the Long Hais and supported Charlie Company who had *D 445* bottled up. That period of time down there was extremely harrowing. I mean, one night, the first night down there, I, this is another funny incident, I was on

picket by myself. We had hooched up, or harboured up around a B-52 crater in the sandy soil. It was open country and on our way in, we came in in tracks (APCs) and our section was sent back to just have a look to see, to go back, you know, a bit of a clearing patrol and we walked down the tracks because you know, we didn't know about mines, the whereabouts; and already Ho Chi Minh sandals had already passed within five minutes. Ho Chi Minh sandals had already passed, already passed across those tracks that we made coming in from the APCs. So that night I was very apprehensive sitting there by myself on (picket), and then I started hearing, I could hear these footsteps coming straight at me and I shit. And it turned, long story short, it turned out to be a bloody big boar and it was stalking me and he charged at the last minute and of course I've yelled out without firing a shot and made a goose out of myself and woke everyone up and it's just a bloody boar and we got mortared that night as well.

GM Got mortared?

PG Yeah, and, yeah, there was, well, when I say mortared,

#### *BREAK IN TAPE*

PG Yeah, and, yeah, there was, well, when I say mortared, one lobbed in and it was short and didn't land near me. But anyhow they knew we were there and dropped one in just to say 'Welcome to the Long Hais'.

GM Were you dug in?

PG No, well only below the surface (shell scrapes) because of the B-52 crater which was there and we were down in that. So they would have only to drop one into the middle of the crater and they would have got the lot! So from then on it was hyper alert and then we had an unfortunate incident later on when we were racing in to get to the bunker system where - in tracks (APCs) where Charlie Company had had a big assault and had to withdraw. They had lost blokes and tanks, and APCs and that and we were racing in. We were delayed because the Cav (Cavalry) blokes yelled out to us that there were nogs up on the ridge to our right. So they stopped and they were opening up with .50 cal and .30 cal and I had an M-79 and I was having a great turkey shoot lobbing all these rounds. I could watch the HE flying through the air and it was hitting the target where the tracer was landing and we were having a great old turkey shoot and it turned out it was poor old Delta Company. We didn't know, well knew when friendlies came through. But I was talking to a bloke from Delta Company the other night and they didn't know that it was friendly fire coming into them for days afterwards. They were not told immediately. Unfortunately we wounded quite a few of theirs as a result of the rocks that were splintered off as secondary shrapnel. But anyhow we were delayed and while we were delayed, 4 Platoon had a contact with the nogs, who were trying to get out from the bunker system. And they had a contact at their exit point and we were further back having a go at Delta Company. So by the time we got there, theirs was over and they stayed there and we went around in front of the bunker system and the greatest show on earth was before my eyes. This was what war was all about. And I thought, well here it is. Because what was happening was there was baled up in this bunker system and it was like an amphitheatre. It was a natural area for us to assault - I am glad we didn't - and gunships, Phantom jets were coming in and Canberra bombers over the top doing their stuff. Artillery, naval support coming in from, because we're just near the coast, everything was going on, rockets and, it was just, there was everything happening in front of us. Flak jackets were issued, helmets, dig in, you're going to assault tomorrow morning at dawn.

GM How did you feel about that?

PG Oh, scared shitless. Absolutely petrified.

GM I would've been too

PG Yeah, knowing what Charlie Company had just been, they'd been repelled with tanks and APCs. Well you tend to think well, there might be something formidable in there, you know. So, and I, and history knows and it's read but we were ready to go. We didn't sleep a wink all night. Hyper vigilant, ready to go the next morning and then the word came through during the evening that we had to withdraw because there was a B-52 strike coming in. so we had to (withdraw), couldn't be there. It had been decided that B-52 strike be put in which gave us mixed reactions, mixed feelings. Feelings of,

Jesus we're up there now, well we wanna go, we wanna have a crack at this mob and in the other little voice in your mind was saying, 'Thank Christ. I really didn't want to get killed '. I really didn't want to go into that bunker system but so, we withdraw and history has it that *D 445* said thanks very much.

GM We're out of here.

PG We're out of here, and they got out. The B-52 strikes had no effect whatsoever and we believe or I'll say believe that the word came from Canberra. They didn't want any more casualties à la Long Tan because it was too politically sensitive at that stage of (the war).

GM I think it was a good decision.

PG Yeah, in hindsight. I'm still here talking to you.

GM In hindsight, a great decision.

PG Yeah

GM You know, I mean, you would've achieved bugger all.

PG Yeah.

GM But, I know what you mean, it's that mixed feeling of yeah let's have a go but oh geez it's gonna be tough.

PG That's right yeah.

GM So.

PG Will I be able to do the job?

GM Yeah

PG You know.

GM Yeah

PG It's an infantryman's job.

GM My legs, my stomach used to churn and my legs felt like jelly.

PG Exactly, that's exactly right.

GM Yeah. What is the incident that most stands out in your mind from the tour?

PG I guess I've just described both of them.

GM Yeah?

PG Yeah.

GM 8 RAR did a lot of ambushing.

PG Yep.

GM Was that a deliberate, are you aware that it was a deliberate tactic that (Lt Col Keith) O'Neill was using?

PG No, no I didn't. Not until well after, in hindsight, reading afterwards in particular Bob Hall's book, he explains it very well that, that Peggy, - that's O'Neill - wanted to do that right from the start.



He didn't believe - and it makes sense - he didn't believe in going into their territory and getting brassed up by them in their bunker systems because if anyone's ever gone into a bunker system, you're certainly...

GM You're on a hiding to nothing

PG Exactly, so he, there was a change in (1 ATF) command apparently and he was able to convince the new commander that ambushing them whilst there coming into (villages) for re-supply or on their way back out was the way to go. Yes, so for the last six months we ambushed all the villages.

GM What was, was that tough to do?

PG No, well, well, no not as tough as, well when I say no, I immediately said no because it's not as tough as - and you know yourself as an infantryman - as tough as lugging through the scrub with five days rations (rations), bloody frontline ammunition and all your water and that through stinking hot bloody jungle is not as tough as that at all. Because we used to go out at last light in basic webbing and your ammunition and you didn't have all that and you didn't walk. You weren't walking, well, you'd walk a little way to your ambush site, settle and go back out the next morning.

GM Cos, they, mostly the ambushes were sited around...

PG Hoa Long.

GM Hoa Long and places where the enemy were coming in to get either get supplies or do their thing.

PG I think they had the other battalions do it as well, so all of the, all of the province, the villages in the province were just about you know right down Long Dien, all that way they were all being ambushed as well. I'm glad we didn't do that area because there's too many mines down that way. But we had a pretty safe area actually at our own...

GM And 8 RAR had some great successes.

PG Yeah, yeah particularly the bloke that owns this place. He was involved in that famous ambush of Chad Sherrin's ambush there outside Hoa Long.

GM Hang on. We have to stop.

#### *BREAK IN INTERVIEW*

GM Yeah, and then it was, it made a lot of sense didn't it rather than going into the enemies killing ground, have them come into yours.

PG Exactly, yeah. Yeah and poor old Chad that night, I mean, I think he was on a hiding to nothing as well too because he didn't have a crack at them going in, because they were too far away and then he changed his ambush site to get them on the way out and thank God he did, because I think he was out of the Army.

GM Yeah, they were going to, they were. Chad ended up being my battalion second in command when I commanded 8/9 Battalion.

PG That's right, exactly.

GM And he often, we often talked about the night it was either going to be a Military Medal or a court martial.

PG That's right exactly. And I think that's reality.

GM A DCM (District Court Martial) or an MM (Military Medal).

PG Yeah, that's right.

GM Yeah. And, but as it turned out, what do you think was the toughest time either physically or mentally that you experienced?

PG I think that first op was the toughest time both physically, it was bloody hot, and physically demanding because we were doing - I was going to say 'beaucoup' - but we were doing lots of kilometres - clicks - in the day through bloody horrendous stuff. I mean, I can remember our scout, he never became a scout, he wasn't a scout, Ricksy, Ray Ricks because he, I can remember being behind him and I don't know why, but Al must of sort of been, must of bloody been rested or something but ... all that Ricksy was doing was snipping with the secateurs, just snipping a path for us, the whole way. It was through thick, thick stuff. And his weapon was actually shouldered. He had it slung. I was the forward scout, you know, covering his, and the poor bastard, that's all he did. He was a...

GM Gardening?

PG A gardener, yeah, so it was physically demanding and then it was also psychologically demanding because we, we hadn't been blooded waiting for that first contact so you didn't know what to expect. You didn't know where the bunker systems were, it was all new to us so that, the very first op was the worst.

GM Because you're a leader. You are always looking at your own men for various reasons, making sure they're watching their arcs or whatever. After that first contact, was there a change?

PG I think the blokes, yeah, by that stage they were probably getting, before the first one, they were probably just sort of getting a little bit jaded, little bit switched off, back on again of course as usual you know. Back into checking, everything, their arcs better.

GM Was it hard to keep guys switched on?

PG No, no, no.

GM Self, almost a self-discipline was it?

PG Yeah, look honestly, I believe that we were bloody good soldiers, you know, as we're all Australians. But just speaking for ourselves I think we did, we were good, we were well trained and we did a good job and I, there was no, I didn't see any slackos or anything in my mob anyhow.

GM Well I don't think that would've lasted too long anyway

PG No, no, didn't take them out

GM Because I mean it is, I know it's a truism, the guys if they don't work as a team, you're in strife aren't you?

PG Exactly, exactly, yeah somehow or other there were other slackos in probably in other sections or whatever, they were left behind.

GM When you deployed in operations what was the more common mode of getting out to the bush?

PG Chopper, chopper, when they tried some silly bloody business... hoppers I think they call them, the engineers used them and you know, when they carry gravel or whatever and they used to tip it out the bottom. I forget what they call them, there's a photo of it in our book and we were down in these bloody things, it was a ploy, deception, see. They thought oh, it was just a road team going out you know and so that was, they tried all sorts of things, but that failed, it didn't happen again.

GM You mentioned APCs before. What did you think of APCs?

PG Initially excellent. Jealous. These bastards were bloody living really comfortably, you know, they had ...

GM Carried lots of water

PG Carried lots of water and they weren't, by the time '69 come round, they weren't Jack men, apparently, they were earlier on in tours, where they wouldn't share their water but we got on well with them. And I was always used to say to them, Jesus, you know, as we were leaving them, wish I was staying with you, you know, but once we had another mine incident where I was fortunate and the photo's in the 8 RAR book, the first book, I was in the first APC that went across a dry creek crossing. And probably we didn't belly hard enough, so we didn't hit this mine. It was a huge bastard. The second APC did and from that day ... and the driver was, had to be cut out and our blokes got wounded and what have you and it was up on its nose, and from that day on I thought, no, I don't like these things. I'd rather not be in them, yeah.

GM Well they, I mean, whereas the infantry triggered smaller mines, when the APCs hit a mine, it was a biggy.

PG Yeah, yep.

GM And with obviously catastrophic results.

PG We were running over small ones down the Long Hais, that was quite amazing. Just little anti-personnel ones, boomph, just going and just kept going, you know, but Jesus.

GM Yeah. When you look back on the tour, the fact that you're a National Serviceman and the amount of time you've been in the Army, do you think you were well prepared for the tour?

PG We were well prepared. The only thing ... as I said before, you know, good soldiers, well trained. There's only one proviso, and I never realised it really until I read - I think it was 7 RAR's book - we didn't do enough time on the range, shooting out. I know myself, I was a shocking shot. Being a city boy, I'd never fired a weapon before and never had a father, you know, like, I wasn't raised that way, I wasn't a country boy and I know, it was funny because there's a bloke I know he's, he lives up here and he's, and I did recruit training with his brother, and I was as fit as a fiddle when I went into Nasho. I was bloody rowing surfboats and playing football and he said, 'Oh yeah, I remember Paul Gallagher,' he said. 'Yeah, I was in the same platoon with him in Singleton,' he said, 'fit as a fart, couldn't shoot for shit,' and he was right. I had to go through bloody twice. I had to have a re-shoot to get through and I can't recall us doing much range work during our ... it was all bush work, so we could've been better shots I guess.

GM I was the marksman on the Claymore. But, similar experience, but thankfully my section commanders and my platoon sergeant had been Borneo, Malaya, Vietnam the first tour - all with 4 RAR. All we ever did was instinctive shooting and that paid dividends in the end.

PG Exactly.

GM But I've heard that before, about not enough shooting and really not enough instinctive shooting because I mean when you run into someone in the bush, it's really is the quick and the dead isn't it?

PG Not only that. I can remember sitting writing a letter one day and our section was fanned out and it was a nice sunny spot. We had a bloke on picket of course and he's yelled out 'nogs'! And there's two, I looked up and there's two of them walking towards us. We all aimed, all of us missed. I had a bloody jam and the only thing that got them I put my M-79 into the tree where I saw he went down and that killed him. Not a bloody bullet and the other bloke got away. Firing high.

GM Yeah, it's excitement, adrenaline, nervousness.

PG Exactly. Oh yeah.

GM All those things. What is the, what is the saddest thing you can recall?

PG I think that saddest one with Snow; learning that he was dead was the saddest, saddest moment and I, actually I became an angry ant after that, after that incident, towards the enemy.

GM Well, that brings me on the next, what my next question is. What did you think of the enemy then and what do you think of them now?

PG Well, after that incident ... well before, before the incident, they were just the enemy. After the incident when Snow died - and Bresso and the others got wounded of course, but I always say Snow, because he actually died in my arms - I hated them with a passion.

GM So it became personal did it?

PG It became personal and in fact, I carried it out. The very next contact I personalised it and I even had to go and see a priest about that during my recovery in the last couple of years, to actually confess the fact that I, that I believe I murdered someone and he was saying it was war and things like, but I took my hate and revenge out on this poor bastard who was just trying to crawl away, wounded and I'm ashamed of it but I did it and I opened his head up with a full magazine. I got in the shit for using a full magazine instead of one bullet, I mean, you know, but because the platoon commander didn't know at the time why, what was happening and I still see his brains just, and I didn't care. And I said words as I was doing it.

GM Now that the blood is cooled, what do you think of the enemy?

PG I still, well, well I respect them. I don't want to go back to that country. I don't hate them as much as what I did before, but I just don't want to go back there. People have asked me to go back on trips, but I won't go.

GM Okay. Now you did a full tour. So at some stage they must of let you off the leash and sent you on rest and convalescence leave?

PG R & C yeah.

GM Did you take that?

PG Every six weeks we had that, yeah.

GM Where did you go?

PG Down to Vungers, yeah.

GM And what was that like?

PG Yeah, that was a good release, yeah. Initially it was, initially, the first few times great. You know, eat, root, shoot, electrocute. Did all that. Had great times, but then something came over me. I can remember being in the Badcoe Club and I didn't, wouldn't, didn't want to go to town. I was not interested in bloody getting my rocks off or anything. I had ... I wanted to go home. I'd had enough. I can remember lying in the bed, looking at the ceiling fan. It was like a chopper, a chopper's, you know, rotors and things like that and I was going through a ..., oh it must have been early post traumatic. I don't know, but I didn't want to play the game any more.

GM You might also have been maturing.

PG Could've been.

GM Could've been growing up?

PG      Yeah, yeah, true. I didn't want to play any more, in there anyhow. I'd had enough.

GM      Well, I mean, I think it could've been a bit of self-preservation too and also as you said before about being in control.

PG      Yeah, I guess so. Yeah.

GM      Because when you're in town, you're very often out of it.

PG      Absolutely, well I've got, I got close, that was probably the closest I got to being ... when I say the closest, to being killed, was in Vung Tau.

GM      Yeah?

PG      Because I went with my mate Blue. We were bored shitless in this bar, and he said, 'Oh listen, let's start a fight,' you know, so we just started to fight between ourselves, a pretend one. Well then everyone, the tables, just like a western; the table and chairs going everywhere. So the MP's come flying through and we passed them on the way out. We jumped in a couple of Lambros. (Blue) took that girl, I took the other girl. He went his way, I went my way. Went to the back street of Vungers. Curfew was on, so long story short, done the business. She's stolen me wallet, because idiot put it underneath the mattress. While I'm washing up, she's gone. I go outside kicking up a hell of a stink. Had to go through the family kitchen first to get there, and mama san and them, and then I was surrounded by civilians and a .45 was put to me forehead. And I've thought, well, better go. Turn me back and I said 'See youse', and I thought, well I'm not gonna hear this, but it didn't happen. They let me go. They were obviously nogs on R & C themselves and so that's really close. You know, I thought I was gone. I got charged too. Breaking curfew. \$20.

GM      Yeah, did you get R & R?

PG      Yeah. Like a fool, came home to Australia because I started writing to an ex-girlfriend. So I'd started this distant relationship again with her, which was thinking in terms of getting married and what have you. So I came home and spent R & R with her back here.

GM      In Brisbane?

PG      In Brisbane, yeah, and drove up to the surf club and got a bloody ticket for speeding on the way, I couldn't talk him out of it.

GM      Now, so, it's what five days back in Australia I guess. And how far were you through your tour were you?

PG      I was about half way I think. Yeah, about half way I suppose. Yeah.

GM      Now, what was it like getting back on that jet and going back to Vietnam?

PG      I was a bit sour because I'd spent my last \$30 in Kings Cross and for a nil result and I was very angry with the said lady because she only put me on three minutes and I didn't come up to the scratch in three minutes, so I was bit of an angry boy - but I know what you're getting at. Yeah, I'd dunno whether I wanted to go back or not. I just did it, just yeah, I don't, I can't remember thinking, oh shit, I don't want to go back here. I got back and stayed at Saigon, at Tan Son Nhut and I was broke, that was the only thing, I was pissed off because I was broke. Couldn't go out on the town before I went back to the Dat once again, you know. Back into the J, yeah so.

GM      And back in the section. Back out on ops how was it. How did you feel, do you remember? How you felt about being back?

PG      I think it was like putting on an old boot. But I, by that time I'd shifted platoons, I think. I think I'd shifted platoons. Not sure.

GM What, you went from one platoon to another did you?

PG Yeah, I, I had to. I had an altercation with platoon commander because I had taken over the section and I hadn't been rested. You know how you usually leave a couple of blokes in the section behind for rear duties every op. Well, right from the start I hadn't had that turn, because I was 2IC cum section commander when Al went home, so I had no break and we'd agreed that I'd half way through the next tour around Binh Ba, that half through the op I could stay back. And when that time came we came back to the fire support base Leloi (near Route 2) and it was denied. I had to go back out and I spat the dummy. Quite ashamed about that, spat the dummy and in front of my Diggers, and the end result was I did stay back, but the compromise was that to keep my hook, I would shift platoons and swap with another bloke. And I was happy because I knew all the other blokes in the other platoon anyhow and I just melded in with them.

GM Still in the same company?

PG Still same company, just went from 5 Platoon to 4 Platoon and continued on with them. But I did feel a bit awkward about, you know, having spat the dummy. Yeah, we're macho men, you weren't supposed to do that, you know. So I tried to patch it up with the platoon commander back in Australia, but he'd forgotten it so it was only my problem, not his.

GM Yeah, yeah. Now you got to work with some Allies?

PG Well, only, the only time I worked, no didn't work with them, the only time I came across Allies was the Yanks when we were operating the other side of the Nui Dinh, flat country. Dry season winter and dusty as all shit and we were patrolling along as a section and I was section commander and we were obviously near black because of sweat and dust and I saw these Yanks in the distance, probably a couple hundred metres away and they were standing there just in trousers, no shirts, helmets on, thumbs in bum, weapons over the shoulder or none at all. I could see them, and I said to the boys, have a go at these Yanks, let's go and have a yarn to them, you know. Their AO must have been right on the border of our AOs

GM Were they just standing around?

PG Just standing around. So we proceeded to walk up towards them in single file, so naturally we looked like nogs, see, so they started to point their weapons at us and beat us up. So we've hit the deck and then I had to, you know, shout and carry on that we were friendlies and blah blah blah and finally we get up to them and pussy footed up to them. And they were still looking at us very cautiously, you know, I said to them, 'Listen, we're Australians you know, we're on the same side. How're youse going?' 'Oh yeah, oh right.' They weren't very talkative. I said, 'What are you blokes doing here?' They said, 'Oh we're just waiting for a chopper to bring us in some gofers, and then we're going down that creek down there for a swim.' So I said, 'Oh righteo, we'll leave youse to it. See youse later.' So, we choofed off and did our tactical stuff and left them to it. And that night they did their clearing patrol by fire. They were still near us and of course all their rounds came straight over the top of us. They didn't know where we were, so that was a bit of a nonsense.

GM You weren't impressed?

PG Not impressed. Nah, nah.

GM You didn't get to do any work with ARVN?

PG Nup.

GM Okay.

PG No, the only other exposure I had with the Yanks was when we went over to their Husky, was it their Husky Chuck? Their artillery unit.

GM From the 2nd/ 35th?

PG Yeah and we were over there in their boozier one night and a couple of their blokes, they weren't drinking - they were obviously high on drugs because ... and then they got called out for a fire mission and I thought Christ, I'm glad I'm not on the end of those guns, but yeah so there you go.

GM Okay. Now whilst you were in Vietnam the anti-war movement was picking up speed and a lot of strength and political clout. Was this having any impact on you or your men?

PG The only impact it was having was because the union movement was stopping the *Jeparit*, the supply ship, from sailing. So we were delayed in mail and stores, parcels and the like for a time and I can remember writing on envelopes, 'Punch a Postie on RTA', return to Australia, and my brother was a postie. He took umbrage to that. So, yeah, but we weren't really aware of the big picture of the demos and things like that until we got home and then wow, it was in your face, yeah.

GM Okay, let's talk about that. Describe how you feel, how you felt when did come home? Firstly how did you get home?

PG On the *Sydney* again. Wonderful trip home, wonderful trip.

GM Because?

PG Because it was a cruise this time. We just relaxed. We got cod liver oil and vinegar from the mess and painted ourselves and we fried ourselves on the deck and we were black by the time we reached Brisbane and we just drank beer. Like I mean there was only one can, but of course those that don't drink give me yours, so we had a good time coming home, and it was good weather, no Typhoon *Patsys*, and sailed back home to my own home town and got home. We marched through the streets of Brisbane. We formed up in the Botanical Gardens. Raced up to the bloody Port Office (Hotel) for a beer, whilst we were forming up and don't think we even had to pay, so that was good and then we marched through, marched past where I'd worked, the old Executive Building in George Street. Friends bloody waved. So it was a good march. There was no one demonstrating against us that I recall. Other blokes say there was. I didn't see them.

So that was my experience. Then a void. It was break off, see you 15th-intakers in January, you're out of the Army. So from that day I was out of the Army. Went to a party that night at Shawie's pub, the York hotel, his old man had the York Hotel in Queen Street. We had a company party there that night and I felt I didn't hardly drink, I felt empty. I felt like I didn't know where I was. I felt I didn't know, you know, everything was strange. It was a funny feeling. I just didn't want to be there. I wanted to be somewhere else. I didn't want to party. Other blokes were getting pissed out of their heads and what have you. And I'm thinking, I'm feeling weird, you know, I should be like, doing what they're doing but I didn't like the... I didn't just wind back a little back. When the ship pulled up, I looked down from the deck and saw the girlfriend I'm writing to, Theresa - I know she won't ever listen to this - and I looked at her and she's waving and I thought, I don't want to be with that girl any more. No, no, no, I don't, no, there's something wrong. So I broke that up a couple of months afterwards of course. I didn't want anything to do with her, I felt strange around my family. The whole thing was strange. Yeah, so that was the first ... yeah.

GM So when did you get discharged?

PG January. We come home in November. So I was on leave until January

GM So, had leave until January? What was it like being discharged?

PG Well, it was another empty feeling because it was just ... 'Oh you blokes, rake up some leaves'. 'No we're not. We're going down the Brook to drink', and then it was just, 'Got any complaints, any health problems, no, no, no, no, Okay, see ya. Sign this'. It was no formalities, no nothing. It was ohhh ...

GM No 'thanks very much'.

PG No 'thanks very much' and because it was my town. No, it was awful I guess, yeah. Back to work. I went straight back to work after that, like an idiot. You know, back to the same, same ... in the Public Service.

GM What was it like going back into that?

PG Work?

GM Into work and not carrying a gun any more?

PG Yeah, well it was strange again. Yes, I felt strange and had to catch up. People, they didn't talk my language. They were all different and I was having arguments. I was drinking a lot, at lunchtime, and also drank during working hours over at the York, bottom bar, arguments about the war. I was fiercely for it, others were fiercely against it. And it nearly come to blows. So that was awful, you know.

GM And speaking of blows, you actually attended a demonstration.

PG Yeah, yeah.

GM Tell us about that.

PG Well, okay. I got married early. I met my wife not long after I come home in fact and we got married early and in February '72 and it was about, it must, our first born was born in August, so you can see what happened there. So, it was about October, November, I was sitting at breakfast waiting to jump in the old Volkswagen and go to work and I was listening to the radio and they said the North Vietnamese Trade Union Delegation is now arriving at the Brisbane Airport and there are demonstrators there for and against and I just said to my wife, 'See ya.' She says, 'Where you going?' I said, 'I'm off to the airport,' and you wouldn't believe it. I jumped in that Volkswagen and in those days there was no bridge. So the James Holt Ferry, I drove straight on to it because it was there just waiting for me as if it was saying, here it is, we're ready for you, we'll take you over the bridge. I've gone straight to the airport, got a park and straight into it, because they had landed. Politicians were there greeting them and kissing them and their flag was bloody flying, the NVA flag and, together with the South Vietnamese flag, because those demonstrators were there, the DLP mob and I'm into it. I'm by myself, didn't know a soul and my first experience in being a demonstrator, haven't done it before either, haven't done it since I think.

GM Haven't done the course.

PG Hadn't done the course, so I'm into it and next minute I'm into a fracas with some bloke. I've thrown a punch, bit like a football punch, missed. So did he, fortunately, but there was a photographer there who took the photo and I didn't know and anyhow, I went back to work and I'm late. Nine o'clock start in the Public Service, the boss said to me - he's an ex-Second World War RAAF bloke, teetotaller, good bloke though - he said to me, 'You're late Paul, what's happened?' I told him the story. He said, 'Geez I've heard some good stories, but that's a good one, there go and sit down, we'll sort it out.' Anyhow the *Telegraph* come out that afternoon, and here it is, front page and I said, 'Bill, have a look at this.' Well, I was his shiny haired boy from that day on. He says, 'You were right,' he said, 'I believe you.' I couldn't do a thing wrong. He let me drink grog during working hours. I could do whatever I liked from that day on.

GM Why, why were you upset?

PG Because the war was still on. We still had troops in the field. We were still getting wounded, killed and these, the enemy was coming over and fraternising with, and our government, our politicians, the Opposition at the time were welcoming them. It was, it was just seemed to me, just, abhorrent.

GM I thought it was obscene.

PG Absolutely obscene.



GM I was laying in hospital, still being put back together and it was, there it was Bob Hawke on the town, on the steps of the Sydney Town Hall welcoming this delegation. This must have been before they came up to Brisbane. And I was, and I just couldn't believe it was in Sydney. And there were, and I knew there were guys in Concord Repat like me, and guys in Heidelberg...

PG Exactly

GM Around the country who were still getting over their wounds.

PG Exactly

GM And here was the Labor Party,

PG Yeah, I didn't mean, I didn't want to mention that, but that's...

GM Welcoming, what I call the bad guys, and I just was, I was stunned actually. And...

PG And my local member was there, one of them, Tom Burns, kissing them as they come off the plane. I'm thinking, come on comrade they're saying, you know. I'm, thinking, fuck this is not on.

GM It just didn't seem right when the war was still going.

PG Exactly, exactly.

GM I mean, once the war is over, it's over but, yeah, I ...

PG And there were moratoriums that I used to go down to in Queen Street and down in King George Square, and I was there and I was getting into bloody blues again and I was shouting at them and they were bloody spitting at me and carrying on. I was a very angry ant and I was upset because I've come home to something not like my father and his mates would've experienced and it just wasn't right. People were saying to me, 'Oh, what was it like?' and it was hard to describe to them what it was like but they didn't treat you as, as a returned servicemen. They were treating us as like we'd done something wrong and I didn't like it. Not at all. I felt, Jesus, I felt awful, really, it was just...

GM Interesting you should say that because I was still serving when they had the Welcome Home Parade and I asked my brigadier if he was going to go to it and he said 'No. I've got nothing to be ashamed of,' because he had that follow on feeling as well. Did you go to the Welcome Home Parade?

PG Yes.

GM And what was that like.

PG Absolutely tremendous. Yep, yep. That was where I found the blokes I'd been searching for, because I'd been going to Anzac Days, turning up with me gongs on, looking for mates in Brisbane, for someone I could talk to. And I couldn't, there weren't many. Yet, in '87 most of them come out of the woodwork, and we sat the next day, after the parade, we had a concert there, in what do they call it ...?

GM Hyde Park

PG Hyde Park and 8 RAR and B Company in particular, we just sat on the hill, there was a concert going on, didn't have a clue who was there, we just sat and talked and talked and talked and caught up.

GM Was that the turning point? The Welcome Home Parade?

PG Oh, I think so. It was fabulous, bloody terrific, yeah.

GM For the guys. A lot of blokes said they hadn't gone on an Anzac Day parade until after the Welcome Home Parade.

PG I know, yeah, that's right, but I'd been searching for these blokes because I just wanted some familiarity, you know, some comfort.

GM Well, unless you've actually been in a war zone, especially one as complicated as Vietnam, it's very hard to describe.

PG It was

GM Especially to a civilian.

PG Yeah, yeah.

GM I mean, my father, who was Second World War, had a lot of trouble understanding what, the way we did business, I mean because he, he just had something else in his mind.

PG Exactly.

GM Now what do you think you learnt most from your time in Vietnam?

PG Oh, well the first thing that came into my mind last night when I was, you know, prior preparation and planning for this, was I learnt and realised that Australia is the luckiest country in the world. And that all these other countries, well, I only saw Vietnam of course. But I realised that that we are so lucky in this country and then I ... other than that I learnt discipline. I learnt to, to be able to do without, to get a job done with very little. Because even now today, I don't worry about bloody lots of having lots of trappings. I can get by, very little money, very little comfort, creature comforts because I was an infantry soldier. That was, that's probably, and I learnt, and people call me, say that I'm sort of like mean or miserly and things like that now so no, I just do the best I can without wasting. I learnt not to waste things, you know, and I mean that sounds a bit silly I suppose. They're the sort of things I learnt, you know, and I learnt, in particular, mateship. Bloody mates, you know, they ...

GM You seem to be saying that you became, well you learnt about, a lot about mateship.

PG Yeah, yep.

GM And you have also mentioned that these days you, that they tend to be your main circle of friends.

PG Exactly, exactly

GM Veterans.

PG Exactly, yeah. It's, it's and I really value their friendship, you know, I had a couple come and visit me up here only the night before last, and we just, you've just got this affinity with each other, you don't have to be gushy or anything like that. You just know and respect each other, what you did, and it's the greatest feeling, and I think they're the closest people in my life, other than your wife. But I don't think civilian friends can come anywhere close, closer than your Army mates. Well blokes that you actually served with, you know, that you actually... and they know what you did and you know what they did and you worked as a team and you're ... and you supported each other. It's a very strong bond.

GM Do you have any regrets about volunteering for your National Service and going to Vietnam?

PG No, I don't really, no, no, I'm glad I did. It straightened me out actually, yeah, I'd say, well it straightened me out in so far as it stopped me going down the direction I was going, but then again it, it ... yeah, it's a two-barbed thing because the results, the results of the war, the experiences haven't left me. I didn't realise but it affected me, it affected my personality apparently and relationships, I'm having all sorts of troubles with my relationship and my children. So, I suppose I should rephrase, re-

answer that bloody question, I suppose. There's no regret in so far as that I ... the experience is something that I will always value; but I do regret how it has left me.

GM So, you personally have paid a price in relationships?

PG Yes, yeah, bad. I mean I've had the same wife but she's, she must be mad or she loves me or something, I don't know, but she's hung in and we're desperately trying to save our relationship now, but we've been separated for, you know, since '96 off and on. My three children, I've had, they've been affected by me. My first-born has got paranoid schizophrenia, my second born has been in and out of psychiatric hospitals since she's been 14, she's still not right. My third born is the only one who works amongst us, but he's got physical problems and he has psychological problems as a result of me being his father, and as a result of my experiences and how the actual experience of Vietnam affected me. There really can't be any other answer for it, the poor buggers, and it's not good. Not good.

GM Someone actually suggested to me that we need to look at the impact of Veterans' service in Vietnam on the families.

PG Yep. It's their turn.

GM Probably unlock a few mysteries and...

PG Oh yeah.

GM Maybe give some help?

PG If you were to do this very same, same exercise with wives and children, cripes you could fill, fill a library.

GM No, I've actually had it mentioned to me quite a few times. Now, on a global scale looking at Australia now, was our time and effort in Vietnam worth the 510 lives and the others that got wounded?

PG In the beginning I thought so, pardon me, and that's why I was so strong, strong against the demonstrators and then as time went by - we were good Catholics and we went to church on Sunday nights and after we come home from Mass, I'd sit down and I'd watch this show on the ABC called the Australians, no what was it called, 'Vietnam: a television history'. And it went for an hour and I'd sit down and watch it eating my dinner and each week, and it'd all unfold and it was the story from both sides of the wire and it started to make me realise that the whole bloody thing was wrong. And I started to become angry about the fact that yes, we had lost all those lives and the Americans had lost all those lives and the Vietnamese had lost all those lives all because of something that shouldn't have happened, in my opinion, it shouldn't have happened. You know, the politics of it were wrong and it's sad, sad because I look at Vietnam now. They're living in a socialist atmosphere and they seem to be getting along all right and you know, relatively speaking and it was the way they wanted to be, you know. Ho Chi Minh was just a nationalist, not a communist as it turns out.

GM I've heard that before. Yeah, as a matter of fact, I took two young soldiers back to Vietnam in '94 and one of them said to me 'It's a shame that Ho Chi Minh used communism as his vehicle for nationalism. If he had have used any other ideology he probably would've been giving the green light'.

PG Exactly, well he tried, he tried, and then China said 'Well we'll help you. '

GM Yeah.

PG And they happened to be communists.

GM French didn't do a lot.

PG No, no, that's right. The Americans, and he respected the Americans in, during World War Two; he helped them out against the Japs.

GM Oh yeah. Now, that's the end of our questions that we've got on the sheet. Is there anything else that you think I should've touched on or that you would like to talk about?

PG We just might stop if I could think about that.

GM Okay.

PG Just, with respect to that question, to wrap it up or whatever, I'm very much now concerned that our families and wives, children and their needs to be looked after. I know it's a heavy expense for the government to agree to that, but by geez there's some suffering out there amongst the veteran community. I'm involved with the Vietnam Veterans Association up here on the Sunshine Coast and I just know from what I hear there and my own personal experiences that yes, us as veterans are getting fixed up, we've got everything at our disposal but we need to get something for them and they are suffering in silence and I think it's their turn. Yeah, and I just appreciate, and I'd just like to also say thank you for the opportunity to have my voice recorded on tape. Thanks Gary.

GM Thanks Paul. That was a good interview.

PG Okay.

*End of Interview*