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Lieutenant Colonel Claude Henry Ducker MC (Rtd) as a platoon commander, later Officer Commanding Tracker Team, 3rd Battalion The Royal Australian Regiment (3 RAR), Malaya 1957-1959, interviewed by Colonel David Chinn MBE (Rtd)

Recorded
at: Canberra, ACT
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by: Lenny Preston, AWM Staff

Description

Ducker speaks of his prior training in Australia; 3 RAR's deployment by ship to Malaya; his initial role in Malaya as Assistant Quartermaster 3 RAR; the jungle warfare course at the Jungle Warfare School, Kota Tinggi and comparisons of tactical doctrine with the Jungle Training Centre, Canungra, Queensland; general and specific aspects of platoon commanding on operations during 1957-1959; characteristics of platoon weapons; communications; limited helicopter support; resupply of rations and replenishment of water; rules of engagement and security of arms/ammunition; health and morale; 3 RAR's Tracker Team and its attack on the communist terrorist (CT) camp northeast of Sungei Siput in November 1958; his posting as the Chief Instructor Tracking Wing at Kota Tinggi.

Transcribed by: C.L. Soames, November 2003

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Transcript methodology

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

Readers of this transcript of interview should bear in mind that it is a verbatim transcript of the spoken word and reflects the informal conversational style that is inherent in oral records. Unless indicated, the names of places and people are as spoken, regardless of whether this is formally correct or not – e.g. 'world war two' (as spoken) would not be changed in transcription to 'second world war' (the official conflict term).

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> Claude, thank you ever so much for coming in this morning and giving us your time to take us back to Malaya and your experiences in that conflict. As you see, we've arranged a series of topics and we are asking you, as we go through the topics, to use the topic as a vehicle to bring your own personal reminiscences into this, and any comments, et cetera, that you'd like to make on your experiences or the Emergency in general.
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> Identification: This is an interview with Lieutenant Colonel Claude Ducker MC (Rtd); it is conducted by Colonel David Chinn MBE (Rtd) on Thursday 23 January 2003 at the Australian War Memorial. The topics covered are mainly the experiences of Lieutenant Colonel Ducker as a platoon commander, and later Officer Commanding Tracker Team in 3rd Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment, during 1957-1959 in the Emergency.
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> Lieutenant Colonel Ducker was born in Hamburg, Germany, in 1933, educated at Melbourne High School, and graduated from the Royal Military College Duntroon in 1955. He joined 3 RAR in 1957, seeing service during the Malayan Emergency until 1959. This period included duty as an instructor at the Jungle Warfare School at Kota Tinggi. His later service included Borneo Confrontation as a company commander, then second in command with 4 RAR in 1964-1966, the Vietnam War as a company commander with 5 RAR in 1969, and prior to his resignation in 1974, the Senior Inspector Army Establishments at Army Headquarters. In later years he was the Committee Secretary of the Joint Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee at Parliament House, and then the Director Export Controls, Department of Defence, both in Canberra.
>
> Claude, we'll launch straight into the topics, and Topic 1 is: Could you think about and talk on your service background and experience, as well as training, which were preparation for the Malayan Emergency commitment?

Well, for two weeks at the end of RMC at JTC - that's the Jungle Training Centre at Canungra - that was probably the best training I had at Duntroon in preparation for Malaya. It was the first time Canungra had run a course for RMC graduates, and we had very good instructors up there, the likes of Benny O'Dowd, and it really focussed on jungle warfare, even though we didn't know we were going to Malaya as platoon commanders then.

The only other posting I had after that, before going to 3 RAR, was as a platoon commander at Puckapunyal, the National Service Battalion, which was at best marginally relevant to later on being in Malaya.

> Topic 2: What was your introduction to 3 RAR when you were posted in 1957 - initial impressions, the operational state of the unit, and the impressions you might have had of the previous operational experience of the key appointments?

Well, as soon as I got to 3 RAR I had the impression it was fast becoming a very professional unit preparing for operations. The new CO, Colonel 'Blanc' White hadn't yet arrived, and there were a lot of changes with officers and NCOs. This didn't affect me too much at the time because all the young platoon commanders from RMC, or most of us, had to go on two six-week courses at Seymour. One was a six-week mortar course and one a six-week machine gun course, a weapon that was going out of the Army fairly soon. We were all champing at the bit to get into operational preparations and here we were, spending twelve weeks away from the unit on something to do with promotion courses - for captain they were compulsory. I guess one

couldn't see the point of that, so I wasn't there during the flux of all this hand-over too much of people in the unit, but it did take a large chunk away from our preparations for Malaya.

I'd actually had a cartilege removed from a knee playing in the Battalion football team - I was captain of that - and I wasn't a hundred per cent fit. I was still getting over that cartilege operation and I was made assistant quartermaster, which I was pretty disappointed about. This was a view to, when I got to Malaya, that I would take over a fairly new system, the British barrack's stores system, which was a real pain in the backside because it was an intensely administered system; so I did that, and also, I was assistant quartermaster at Canungra while the Battalion was going through, while the quartermaster was back at Holsworthy getting ready for a fairly tricky administrative move to Malaya. As I said, my impressions of 3 RAR - it was the first regular unit - were very good, particularly of the CO and his style of operation. He certainly gave the unit a sense of purpose after he took over.

The companies' OCs, they were a varied bunch of company commanders with basically World War II experience. They were older to my memory now than the company commanders in the units I served with later. They had some very good senior NCOs with at least Korean experience in the main.

> You mentioned in a prior discussion that then Major 'Judy' Garland was your company commander and he was a fairly fierce or serious disciplinarian. Were the others of the same mould, perhaps tempered by their experiences in World War II?

No, 'Judy' was an act apart from the others. The others were actually more relaxed and not quite so intense. Ron Cowan had been with an independent company during the war and you learnt a lot about tactics from him. Perhaps I would do some things differently to him in a management role, but I learnt a hell of a lot from him. But I didn't come under him until about February 1958.

> Topic 3 asks you for your perceptions of the role of the British Commonwealth Far East Strategic Reserve, which was the major commitment at the time, and separately, what were your perceptions of the role of security forces in the Malayan Emergency? - and this is before you left. What was your understanding of those two facets before you left Australia?

Well, we were certainly completely focussed on our role in the Malayan Emergency. I was not too aware of our strategic reserve role. We didn't, was I recall, do a major warfare exercise with the Battalion before leaving Australia because we just had enough time to get ready for our role in the Malayan Emergency.

And I guess if a platoon commander and a company commander focussed on jungle warfare training it would have some benefits for our major warfare role as well, and if the specialist platoons trained for their role that would be important in that regard. But if it was the other way around and we just concentrated on major warfare we wouldn't have featured much, or very well, in a counter-terrorism role, and that's what we would be judged at if you are realistic about it. So the emphasis was on the Malayan Emergency. I don't think the CO had time to have us focus on both; he might have been.

> I think it was probably influenced by the fact that 2 RAR had been there since 1955 and their complete focus after about the start of 1956 was on the Emergency. That would have followed through, I guess, to 3 RAR.

> For Topic 4 could you talk about the training of 3 RAR in Australia for service in the Strategic Reserve and the Malayan Emergency with the emphasis you mentioned? Could you talk about that training?

Yes. The companies went through the Jungle Training Centre at Canungra, and also finishing with a very tough exercise at Wiangaree State Forest. As I said a moment ago, I was acting for the QM for both periods in Canungra. The specialist platoons also developed their skills, as well as doing JTC. The Tracking Platoon - or the Tracking Team, which I was involved with later in Malaya - was not formed as yet. As I said, I don't recall any major warfare training at the time.

I was interested years later, when I had the job of going through archives, to learn that our battalion had a role in Thailand and Laos. In 1959 the Government was considering sending us there and I was completely unaware of it as a young subaltern in Malaya. I'm not even sure how much - perhaps the company commanders would have been aware of that.

> Topic 5 introduces the transit of 3 RAR to Malaya. I understand that the troopship carrying you had some problem in the Torres Strait, as I vaguely remember - and also, having got to Malaya, how did the Battalion find adjustment to the climate, and particularly the very high temperatures and the humidity?

The main body and their families went on the ship *New Australia* which arrived in Singapore slightly late on 11 October. They had a collision with a Norwegian tanker on the way up in the Torres Strait Islands area which was something exciting to talk about for everybody, but luckily, no lives were in serious danger. But I wasn't on the boat myself, I went up with the advance party to take over the stores from 2 RAR, the advance party having flown up and arriving right on the day after Malaya got its independence. We arrived there on 2 September 1957 and we went by plane. Most of the advance party went to Kota Tinggi to do their training so they in turn could help train the rest of the Battalion main body a month later. I went to Penang to take over the stores from 2 RAR. I was under the guidance of Major Max Simpkin who had been with 2 RAR at the end, but he was going to be a battalion 2IC. He emphasised to me to be very careful taking stores over from 2 RAR as they had been in a lot of trouble with the Brits in losses. It was out of this world compared with Q procedures in Australia initially, but once we settled down I'm also aware that, having got used to the new system, it gave us unending problems like 2 RAR seemed to have at the end.

There are some other aspects I may not have covered there. The families, well, they were due to go on the ship to Penang because the ship had to have repairs. The married men went by train, settled their families in, and then went down to Kota Tinggi. That took quite a bit of juggling, but I think our CO gave emphasis that the people settle their families and get that worry out of the way, and then get on with running their platoon or company. And the soldiers too, there were quite a few married soldiers, a lot of them had got married just before they went to Malaya. It took about two weeks, I think, to acclimatise to the heat, perhaps not as long as we'd expected, as long as you kept yourself fit.

> And your role as a quartermaster was ...

Assistant quartermaster, yes.

> ... to coordinate for the Battalion, the accommodation the Battalion was getting, both

barracks and married quarters ...

No, I wasn't involved in married quarters.

Not married quarters - but furniture as well?

Yes. I took over the barrack stores - Minden Barracks at Penang - but particularly at Kuala Kangsar. For some reason all the stores were taken out of the base camps from 2 RAR because they wanted to repolish it all so they could fine us for every cigarette burn that was on it. So I had to inspect the furniture to make sure it was all clear, and the right numbers. I came under a lot of pressure from the senior officers in 2 RAR to just accept it the way it was, then I had to reissue it to the CQMSs (company quartermaster sergeants) of the companies; and then I had to carry it all out again to Lasah, Sungei Siput, and Kuala Kangsar - that was where we were. There was a large team of civil labourers honing down this furniture, getting it all looking new again, so everybody had a fresh start as far as barrack stores were concerned in our battalion, so we were lucky in that regard.

A strange experience for a platoon commander going to Malaya to get involved in the Emergency.

It was.

Probably useful in many ways in terms of the perception of the whole thing and for later years.

Yes. It was a bit disappointing to be doing that, but I only had that for a month or so and then I went to do a course at the Jungle Warfare School, what our advance party did; I did a jungle warfare course for a month down there and it was great.

Topic 6 asks you to address the training of 3 RAR at the Far East Land Forces Training Centre at Kota Tinggi, the Jungle Warfare School component - well, you've mentioned a bit about this - but as well as describing the training that was carried out, can you also compare some of the tactical doctrine? One of the things we've heard about was, as I recall - ourselves and 2 RAR - at Canungra we were taught World War II tactics in terms of aiming or shooting from the hip with your weapon whereas at the Jungle Warfare School the emphasis was on aimed shots from the shoulder. Without labouring that particular last point, could you lead up in terms of general training and any comments you've got to make on firing from the hip or firing from the shoulder?

3 RAR benefited greatly from its training its advance party and then the main body at Kota Tinggi. I think there was one big advantage we had over 2 RAR. It's always hard to be the first battalion in a new theatre, which 2 RAR had to do, and I think we benefited from some of the things we heard about - weapon safety, I think, was one emphasis in particular, and training, at what was then called the Far East Training Centre renamed the Jungle Warfare School, and I went there later as an instructor.

I think the difference between Canungra and Kota Tinggi was quite significant. At Canungra, as you said, they trained you in techniques generally for jungle warfare, and it wasn't honed so much for the Malayan Emergency. If I can give an example. In Kota Tinggi they were up-to-date with the phase of the Emergency they were at at the time. I know we changed contact drills

all the time while I was there. It was particularly important with a fleeing enemy, for example, to come to grips with the enemy quickly, whereas at Canungra they might teach a section on a contact to first find out what was happening and perhaps go to ground. Because of the fleeing enemy, as soon as there was a contact, I think the thing to do was to charge forward and take a few more risks otherwise the enemy was always going to flee away from you and put down a lot of fire. But particularly, if you saw anybody, (the procedure) was to aim from the shoulder because the enemy was very resilient and good at getting away.

I can only illustrate this later on. In a later contact we killed a district committee member, and I counted about thirteen bullet holes in his body that he must have got over the years, mainly 9 millimetre, and he survived - acupuncture or whatever. They did get away from us a lot, particularly after being hit by an Owen gun (Owen Machine Carbine), for example. Those are the sort of things that you were taught at Kota Tinggi, to perhaps, as soon as you had a contact, to close with the enemy much more quickly and chase him. That's just one example of a difference in what you were taught at Canungra. That may not have worked at the beginning of the Emergency, but as it evolved. You mentioned firing from the hip; well, that might be alright if you are caught in an enemy ambush, but the emphasis in Malaya had to be firing from the shoulder that you could hit them. That's just another point you mentioned there.

The other thing about Kota Tinggi, I think it concentrated more on techniques; at JTC at Canungra the emphasis was on physical fitness. Often the blokes were pretty buggered late in the day. I know, I went through there about seven times in my Army service and the emphasis was always getting up early in the morning and going for long runs, and obstacle courses, and this sort of thing. I think some of the less fit people, some of the soldiers, were so exhausted they weren't perhaps taking in as much, whereas at Kota Tinggi there wasn't that emphasis. There was certainly emphasis on straight shooting, but it was more giving a lecture about a subject, then practicing it, and then a short exercise.

> That's interesting because certainly the recollection of keeping fit at Canungra is very strong in almost everybody's mind that went there, the emphasis on fitness and agility, and all those things ...

Yes.

> ... and the fatigue ultimately. But the question you raised about the 9 millimetre round from the Owen Gun, I guess the same would apply to the British Patchett and the Sterling; it didn't have the stopping power.

No.

> I guess that's why in Vietnam we tossed the Owen gun, after 1 RAR's experience, and were after hard-hitting weapons. But have you any thoughts on that in terms of the great image we had of the Owen gun in World War II as being the basic and most important weapon the infantry soldier had, vis a vis, its stopping power against the Japanese and its stopping power as evidenced in Malaya and later Vietnam? Have you got any sort of feeling on that, the aura, the mystique of the Owen gun, which was debunked through Malaya and Vietnam?

Well, I thought the Owen gun was a great weapon to carry and I carried it for two years. I felt that you needed to get a lot of rounds away to hit somebody and stop them, and I strapped two

magazines on it - I had another one upside down. You could bring it to your shoulder quickly, but it just wasn't good on the stopping power. I mean, I'm not talking about my experience so much as from what I heard from others and what was coming back to Kota Tinggi when I was an instructor there. This is in sharp contrast to the SLR (self-loading rifle) - it was actually called the FN there, the Belgian rifle which could kill two people behind a tree, it was so strong, it had great hitting power - it was almost a worry. I remember somebody, a team, coming out to look at the results of a contact I had because there was some criticism of the great hitting power of the weapon, what mess it made of a body compared with, say, an OMC. We were one of the first battalions to use it; Australia had access to it on operational service.

The other thing - just coming back on the training - there was quite some emphasis at Kota Tinggi on making people aware of tracking techniques, and they ran separate courses on tracking with some elements of the Battalion. We all had to be conscious of it because it was a way of closing with the enemy. You might have this quick contact, or you might come to a resting place, or a camp, and the enemy may not be there. But if you could read how old the tracks were you could pass back information to the company commander. The tracking techniques were vital; you rarely came across a live enemy, but you came across tracks. I don't remember that same emphasis at Canungra on that.

A feature of jungle warfare is that because you can't see, like in Korea or World War II in the desert, what was going on around you, the platoon commander had to have great confidence in his section commanders and what they were reporting back, and the company commander had to have confidence in what the platoon commander was reporting back. I must say about my company commander, Ron Garland, he had confidence in what we were reporting back because quite often he'd quote back to you six months later. He'd say, 'Well, look Claude, you said there were enemy in that area, let's go and have a look for them.' You had to be like that, it was confidence in the junior leader. You had to send a section commander out to report, Is there something on that bearing? or, Is there something near that stream? It's very different to another type of warfare.

> We'll probably get more on this when we ask you about your experience in leading a platoon. The next topic, Topic 7, is your initial reactions to the operational environment of the Malayan Emergency, including reflections on the appropriateness of the training in Australia, particularly at the Jungle Training Centre at Canungra and the Battalion's operational readiness. I think you've fairly largely covered what the Jungle Training Centre's role was in this, but are there any other points you'd like to make about your reaction once you started taking part in operations, applying what you'd learnt at, particularly, Kota Tinggi? What were your reactions to that?

Well, the operational environment in Malaya was great for platoon commanders, you just had this large area of responsibility that was given and you were on your own, there wasn't much way of air resupply - in particular, I suppose, (this is) the thing that will always be on your mind if you did have a casualty. So you had an awful lot of responsibility, even as your platoon's doctor. You just had this large patch of jungle, as I said, and you were totally responsible. I mean, the only link with your company was a tenuous radio set - we had the 510s and they didn't work after four o'clock due to atmospherics. Quite often we were so far away it was difficult to get communications. There were few LZs in the area and virtually no helicopters, except for serious casevacs. If you had an LZ you could cut in a hurry.

> Topic 8: Could you talk about the hand-over between the Battalion in relieving 2 RAR,

> and 3 RAR, including the operational experience, barracks and married quarters, new patterns of clothing, equipment, et cetera? Also, what personnel you might have detached - and you were probably more aware of this when you got a platoon - of persons being detached for various duties peculiar to the operational and administrative circumstances. For example, perhaps you had fellows detached from the Platoon to be shotguns on escort vehicles, to be dog handlers, and so on, as well as detachments of other people, for example, the Sarawak Rangers, junior civil liaison officer, et cetera. And some of these topics you've already covered, I acknowledge that, from your talk as assistant quartermaster.

Yes, well, I've mentioned the requirement, which was purely British, of barrack stores, the emphasis was on a separate sort of even supply system - but there were junior civil liaison officers. From our point of view we had to detach an effort into looking after civil labour, for example, which we had a lot of - which we wouldn't have had in Australia. JCLOs - the junior civil liaison officers - were very good at interpreting.

Most significant of the things you mentioned a moment ago were these marvellous Sarawak Rangers (Ibans) recruited in Sarawak, and some of which had already been handed over from 2 RAR. Two of those were given to each platoon and when we formed the Tracking Team in April 1958 they had four. Now, they were tremendous in informing us about the signs they finding in the jungle. You had to know how to use them because they were out to please the white man and you had to ask the questions in a way where you put the onus on him - for example, 'How old was the track?' and 'How many men?' and this sort of thing - but they were great in helping our fellows live in the bush as well.

> How much could you trust them? I've heard stories in 2 RAR that occasionally an Iban tracker would, in fact, say the footprint and the tracks indicates the CT went that way when, in fact, the platoon commander might have looked at it and seen the fact that the footprint clearly indicates they went that way, the idea being that the Iban tracker wasn't that keen to get involved in the contact. Did you ever encounter any instances of that where the tracker might mislead you because he was worried about getting a contact with the enemy?

No, my experience was quite the opposite. I got to know my Ibans very well, I put a lot of effort in camp explaining if there was a contact, how we would behave, and they would be well covered by out people, but what I wanted to know from the tracks ... I tried to overcome the language problem back in camp, talking to them and learning key words in Malay to talk to them. I even had an Iban language little booklet that I carried with me. I thought they were wanting to get to grips and a couple of contacts I had, I could see that they were eager and I knew they weren't sending me around. I found them thoroughly trustworthy.

The point you mention about perhaps being found unreliable is they might sometimes tell you what you wanted to know and you had to frame your question in a way that was impossible (of misinterpretation). You had to ask them how old the track was. I heard some people talking to them, 'Oh, is this a day old?' - they wouldn't want to contradict a white man, so they'd say, 'Yes', and it might only be two hours old. You had to ask an open question of them and understand the answer which, when they are excited, might be in their language.

> That's so important. One of the concerns in 2 RAR was that some of the trackers were supposedly recruited from fellows that had even been taxi drivers and rickshaw

operators in the towns in Borneo, where, in fact, they were not truly bushmen who understood tracking and so on. That could have explained some of these.

In the same area, the junior civil liaison officers, I presume most of these you had were either Tamil or Indian, they could have been Chinese, but they were fluent, I would imagine, in both Chinese and Tamil, as well as English.

Yes. I remember at least one of ours was Indian.

Multi-lingual, in fact.

Yes.

You found that very useful, I gather?

I personally didn't have much use for them except in that earlier role as assistant quartermaster. Later on they weren't seen at platoon level very much in my case. But I think they did help in organising some of the porters that we had.

I suppose sometimes, if you were moving into a village or somewhere like that were perhaps you weren't that fluent in Malay, they could have been quite useful in that area where they could interpret.

Topic 9 asks you for your reflections on 3 RAR's incorporation into the 28th Commonwealth Infantry Brigade group. Did you get much feeling for the Brigade and how it worked in the other battalions, and aspects like that?

It was a great experience serving in a brigade where there were other Commonwealth units. As a platoon commander I didn't get involved too much with other battalions except I had some friends in other battalions which I might see, which would be coincidental, on a stand-down period. So it was just occasional interaction only. There was one occasion when we had a sports meeting against the Kiwis on Anzac Day, but we came off an ambush the night before and went straight out again that night, so it was a brief thing, but there was some rugby played against other battalions, I know. We had our rugby players more in Support Company.

What were the other battalions in the Brigade?

Oh, there was the Loyals took over from the Lincolns, a British battalion, and there was a fair bit of rivalry, I think, at higher level, perhaps, but not at our level. The Kiwis, of course, they had 1 RNZIR, our old friends.

I had one interaction with the Loyals; we had to assist them in putting a cordon around a village south of our area, into Line 58, and we helped put the cordon in, but that was the only cooperation I was involved in with another battalion.

That British battalion would have been fairly heavily loaded with national servicemen in those days.

Yes.

There officers were national service too.

Yes. I met some of them on courses and became friends with them. But there was a lot of interaction at the soldier level down at Ipoh where the British battalion tended to have their leave and were operating in the area, and also the Kiwis. There was quite a lot of interaction at that level, in fights after a few drinks. That was a bit of a problem at times for the MPs.

I would imagine the MP patrols were combined, British, New Zealand and Australian military police would have been on the combined patrols so they could handle any nationality.

Yes. Well, I didn't get too much involved with the MPs, I can't tell you their form, but I do know the brigadier kept the whole show running together pretty well on a very cooperative basis. This was even more so when Brigadier Mogg came; he was a great man-manager, I think, and everybody felt much more relaxed, I think, after he took over.

I presume his senior staff would have been both Australian and New Zealand.

Yes.

Who was the Australian brigade major?

Brigade major, Major Oxley was there when I was first there, and there were other Australians there. I think the area liaison officer was Jimmy Stewart - the tall Jim Stewart - MC was the ... IO (Intelligence Officer), for example ... so there were a lot of Australians there.

Topic 10 reflects on the deployment of 3 RAR into Operation Shark North. If you could perhaps talk about the nature of the communist terrorists, the CT presence, in that and any facets of operations at company and platoon level, and, if it's relevant, perhaps you could even, while you are on the subject of operations, talk about later operations in terms of the enemy, whether the nature of the operations changed, and so on.

Yes. Well, the type of operation in Malaya, as you know, was what they called 'framework operation' where everybody had their own area of responsibility to separate the CT from the population, and particularly their own supporters called them in when there was a lot of them. There weren't too many CT, they were in very small groups by the time we got there. Our main aim was to chase and eliminate, if we could, the armed work cells which were only about eight or ten people associated with various villages, and there was an independent platoon - 31 Independent Platoon - which may or may not come into the area occasionally - or its 27 Section. That was our role based on intelligence, to catch up with these people.

As a platoon commander we didn't always know the broad picture exactly where they were, and that may have been that Special Branch kept things pretty close to their chests. The CO would know, and the IO, but we were just sent out to an area and told there might be some enemy in this particular area, but I didn't always know on what that information was based, I think people wanted to keep that pretty secure, what their sources were.

I think it's always good, in hindsight, to tell people where the information is coming from, whether it's red-hot or not, otherwise soldiers can just believe it is just another jungle bash. But I felt I was getting enough information, but by God, I've learnt a lot since leaving Malaya, who

the people were that we were chasing. I've read some memoirs from the Local Special Branch officer, and I just wish I'd known all that at the time.

The platoon commanders had their task of an allotted area. If B Company went out - and I joined it in February 1958 - we would have, say, one platoon in one area, another platoon in another area, and a third platoon in another, and, I guess, it would be uppermost in the company commander's mind that if we didn't clash - because there is nothing worse than killing one of your own people, and we managed not to do that in our company - that idea was that perhaps we could drive the CT into certain areas and the whole area was ours. We might be told, on a trace on a map - which would actually be marked on our maps - which particular map square, or it might be a bit more than a map square - we would search this in a day. That was regarded as a yardstick for the platoon, if you thoroughly wanted to search that, about a map square - it tended to be a little bit more than that.

One of the problems initially when we were there was that our maps were not as good as they were later and we actually had the streams running on top of the mountains - they were done on a different grid. We had to do dead reckoning to be accurate.

> The map squares were, in fact, 1,000 metre squares, or a 1,000 yards on those maps in those days - 1,000 yard square - 1,000 by 1,000?

Yes.

> Did you ever encounter a situation, perhaps near the border, where there was no map cover at all, it was a patch of white which represented cloud cover? You didn't strike that?

No. I found that on the old Dutch maps in Borneo, not in the area in northern Perak where I was in the main. Now, that wasn't so, it was occasionally a photograph which we also used.

> So the pattern of operations, apart from Operation Shark and later operations, were a very similar pattern, they were 'framework operations' in the main, weren't they?

Yes. The biggest thing at the beginning was that we were ambushing the new villages where the Chinese had been congregated under the Templer Scheme and we were trying to separate the armed work force to stop them going into their sympathisers on these wired-off villages.

We may have had success in stopping them get food occasionally - or probably a lot with road blocks, which the police were helping with, and ambushes - but our company didn't actually have a success in ambushing outside a village, catching one of these armed work cells coming in. There was a brilliant ambush done by a Corporal Hanley, a three-man ambush, inside a mangling shed in mid-1958, on a rubber plantation where a large tin of sweet potatoes had been found. He put a brilliant ambush inside a hut and the enemy approached it at night-time. They killed three and one local armed workforce leader had got away - he surrendered with his wife the next day, that was tactically very important. So it was a good example of a good, small ambush because three people had to be awake for most of the night - highly successful - but around the villages I think we weren't so successful because I think the enemy sympathisers knew we were there. They had dogs near the wire that would bark, I remember that was a problem.

But who knows, I think we probably stopped them getting a whole lot more rice than if we hadn't done that. But I know my platoon and myself, we preferred much more, to be looking for them in the jungle, patrolling, rather than these long ambushes, or even overnight ambushes.

> Was your platoon also employed on checking people moving in and out of the villages, combined with, say, the police and the home guard?

Gratefully, not in my time - I think the others were occasionally. I think that was a job for local police who knew what they were looking for, for rice in the tyres, or whatever, you know.

(break in interview)

> Topic 11: Would you like to talk about leading a rifle platoon on operations, including an overview of the soldiers of your platoon, the preparation for operations, weapons and equipment carried, and how your platoon operated on patrol? If you talk on those general terms and then I'll go through each of the sub-questions that are listed below that. Would you like to talk about the general picture?

Well, during early 1958 I took over 6 Platoon in B Company for about seven months before becoming the Tracking Team commander. I had a good bunch of Australian soldiers, many of them became junior NCOs and then senior NCOs in the Australian Army when I came across them again in places like Borneo and Vietnam. For example, 'Dasher' Wheatley was one of my private soldiers. I came in for some criticism from the company commander for wanting to promote him to lance corporal, which I did. He was a very wild bloke, but he was a very good junior NCO in the bush and very much admired by the other soldiers, and I think it was a good decision.

> He won the VC posthumously in Vietnam.

Yes. He had been a sergeant in a company I had later at [YRR 2]. I was 2IC of a company and he was a great bloke for keeping up the morale of the company, or the platoon certainly.

So they were a good bunch of soldiers, they were all regulars. I would say their education levels were not as high as in my company that I had in Borneo years later, and certainly not in Vietnam where the average education was high in Australia at the time, and particularly amongst the national servicemen which were a cross section of the community. But these guys became very professional, I had a great admiration for them.

The weapons. We had a Bren gun in each section, which was a marvellous weapon. It was easier to carry in the jungle than the later machine guns that we got, and with its capability of firing twenty-five to thirty rounds it was sufficient firepower for what we needed. And in the Tracking Team we actually made the weapon even lighter, taking off the flash-eliminator and the front bipod, so we could fire it light - it was the cover gun for my tracker - get a good volume of fire down to protect him. And that had to be fired from the hip. But in the platoons we left the Bren gun the way it was with a bipod on. We had the FN rifle, which we spoke about before. This gave you a good whack of fire, it really sort of made a big bang, and I think it would have frightened any enemy who wasn't used to it, out of his wits because it sort of crashed through a lot of foliage, and even through the very easily penetrable tree trunks in Malaya - and the shotgun for the forward scouts.

> Would you say that the FN (SLR) had a greater penetrating power than, say, the .303 (rifle)?

Much greater. There was one example in Borneo where a Ghurkha, in the Brunei Rebellion, with three bullets shot four enemy hiding behind the tree. One bullet went through the tree and actually killed two enemy; it had a colossal firepower. And remembering that the trees in Malaya weren't as tough as the ... you know, they were thicker than the gum trees in Australia. It was a great weapon, but a bit awkward to carry. The soldiers didn't always prefer to have the FN to, say, something as light to carry as an Owen gun, but they had a much more effective weapon. The Owen gun was actually used by section commanders and platoon commanders, and forward scouts, unless they preferred to have a shotgun. And the signaller too, the sig had a lot of extra equipment to carry.

> Was any part of the platoon using the M1 carbine, the very light carbine?

No. 2 RAR used the carbine, but we didn't think it had enough hitting power.

> Did you ever change weapons around, swap them with other platoons, depending on the nature of the terrain, for example? If you were in rubber would you tend to take more SLR (FNs), with their longer range, and in close country take more Owen guns? Did you ever try a balance like that?

No, we wanted a person to have his own zeroed weapon and he stuck with it. Occasionally, at night-time, for night ambush, we took weapons out that had torches attached to them, or we would attach them to our own weapons, but generally people stuck with their own weapon. Obviously, if a forward scout needed a break somebody might take over his weapon and he would then take over the other guy's weapon.

> The equipment you wore was the '44 pattern webbing?

Yes; it was great equipment. The only problem was that occasionally they wanted us to do three-week operations rather than two and it was very hard to fit even two weeks rations into it. But that was a good thing, it meant that people didn't travel too heavily. We used to discard anything that people didn't want or didn't need from those rations. I mean, it was just a Mars bar for lunch. I remember hearing a story where Brigadier Moore went round to one of our soldiers saying, 'What do you have for lunch? Do you have a warm lunch?' and the soldier said, 'Well, whoever heard of an 'f' roasted Mars bar?' So lunch was just very light, just a few lollies, and breakfast was just cornflakes - sorry it wasn't cornflakes, it was porridge with a small tin; for an evening meal you'd cook rice with a larger tin; and those tins were pretty heavy. What I tended to do was to mix some raisins that I bought myself in to make the porridge more palatable, in the morning, and kept a tin for lunch time because I never liked Mars bars. That's the sort of thing you would do. You would give away the Mars bar and leave it behind, or the soldiers would trade.

As for the equipment, coming back to that, some people took Bergen packs, but then carried too much and they weren't mobile. I think the thing was to be as light as possible and I encouraged my Tracking Team to draw three days' rations and be prepared to be out for five days, and live it harder, because what you lost in leaving the food, you had to carry less, and soldiers seemed to accept that.

> Having the equipment, weapons and so on, in preparing for operations did you practice contact drills, or did you do counter ambush drills, did you practice these as a course of preparation for going out?

We did occasionally. We didn't at Sungei Siput have a very suitable area and we never had a chance to sort of put enemy out - pseudo enemy - and practice against him, it just wasn't practical. We did discuss tactics. I remember I bought a big blackboard to discuss tactics on and I used that particularly to explain it to the Ibans so they learnt the way we operated. I think people had the contact drills pretty well pat which we had to adapt at times, as I said earlier, to come to grips with the enemy quickly. And we had to discuss our tactics for fan patrolling.

Would you like me to discuss the way we patrolled?

> Go ahead, that's what we want to know, how you actually operated on patrol.

What we did was ... the hardest part of an operation was getting out the first day, carrying, say, fourteen days' rations and to get our first base position, then we would move from a succession of harbour positions. There were several ways of searching areas, like a map square, or you might have a task of searching along streams, or likely enemy areas of one shape or another, and there were several techniques to do that. I tended to favour a method called 'fan' patrolling where from the platoon base you dumped your gear there and small patrols of three or four men would move ten degrees apart - I tried five degrees at times to get a better search, but it wasn't safe, they could hear each other's noises. As they got away from the base further, about 1,000 yards, they are less likely to hear each other - and very lightly armed and nothing except water bottles and an emergency type of food, they could come to grips with the enemy, find the enemy camp and then report it back to me (so) that we could take some action against the enemy camp, and have something planned.

That seemed to me a good way of patrolling, and it was taught too, because you weren't moving along tracks, you weren't moving along rivers where the enemy might be expecting you. The enemy camps weren't actually *on* the rivers - but you could find their tracks - but they were up hill a bit. But if you were moving down along a stream they could probably see or hear you coming, so this fan patrol was a very systematic way of patrolling. So we'd do that once in the morning, and then we'd go in a different direction in the afternoon.

> How did you bring the small patrols back in when they are all converging on ten degrees? Was there any staggering of their return in on a time basis?

No; what I did was they all turned right fifty metres, or a hundred metres, depending on how many degrees apart the patrols were, at a particular time so there was no chance of a patrol clash. If they were very close together I'd have to get them to come back the way they came out, but that's wasted patrolling. So we'd all turn, say, right at a certain time. You had to give very strict instructions.

> There was no concern about possible contact between these patrols as they converged on these ten degrees because they are getting closer as they are coming in?

Well, that's right, we did the right-hand turn, yes. No, we didn't have any problems with that, but it was a danger you were worried about. I would go with one of those three-man patrols and I'd leave the platoon sergeant behind for half the time, and then we would alternate and we'd be a

ready reserve. So we might be able to put five fan patrols out, and we'd have a small reaction force of about two in command and two or three others. The idea was, whenever there was any firing we'd all converge on the area where there was a contact, but if they found the camp they'd come back and report it to me and I'd have to wait for the other fan patrols, which had a time limit, then we'd have a methodical plan for attacking that camp. Of course, this never, ever eventuated.

What sort of time were you allowing them to go out and get back?

About an hour or an hour and a half - an hour out and it usually tended to be quicker coming back. So that would take about two or three hours if they found nothing; if they found something they'd come back to me immediately. Or I might be out and the platoon sergeant would have the control of that decision.

One of the disadvantages of Malaya was that we only had one radio set per platoon, and that was a disadvantage in Vietnam too, apart from the forward observer who in Vietnam also had one. But we really only had one radio set which took a long time to set up when we were far away. The aerial took about twenty minutes or half an hour to put up sometimes, that was probably the biggest disadvantage that we had.

When you were patrolling as a platoon moving, say, along a track or across country in single file, where were you as platoon commander? Were you with the leading section commander, or did you let the lead section go on and you were where platoon headquarters would be conventionally?

If the platoon was moving as a platoon to a new area, which we would do once a day, or once every two days, we would move the whole platoon together, it was the most economical way of moving quickly. When we were carrying anything between two and fourteen days' rations there would be a little bit more noise. That was a constant battle, to make sure that we could surprise the enemy in the new area and to take that fairly easily. Then the platoon commander, because he was involved with map reading a lot, would move behind the leading section with his radio operator.

So you had a lead section, or a march lead section, then platoon commander, then these other two sections?

And the platoon sergeant would move between the last two sections. But every now and then, if I didn't feel the section commander - who had a big role in map reading, but he also had to watch his forward scouts, he had to be alert; I had a better chance to do it in a way. We would compare notes and every now and then we might halt, listen, and then check our maps, and we would do dead reckoning; I would appoint somebody to do some pacing. And, I guess, all commanders at all levels should have been doing that, pacing.

How did you find map reading? Pacing is one method, but were you able to ...

Compass and map, and pacing.

How confident were you about the ground's representation on the map?

Well, as I said earlier, the problem was, in the first part of our time in Malaya, the maps were

accurate as far as the mountains went, and accurate as far as the rivers went, to a degree, but they seemed to be superimposed on each other. There was one grid for the rivers, which were correctly apart - of course, sometimes they were dry and didn't exist in some seasons, and vice versa - but the mountains were on another grid, perhaps, and the tracks would have been done from air photographs, and the rivers, so there were problems. Towards the end of 1958 the maps were good, but still, if you were doing this fan patrolling - remember, we are not using tracks - whether the map was good or not.

You were just using the bearings.

You had to rely on good map reading. And our Australian NCOs and most private soldiers were very good at reading a map. That's why we created so many good junior NCOs because half these fan patrols were commanded by a private soldier.

Good for developing responsibility.

Yes. And you had to have implicit trust in your blokes for reporting things to you, and you had a pretty good idea yourself what they were reporting back because you'd just been out on patrol yourself.

Referring to some of those sub-questions: To what extent did you get involved on this Use of Lethal Weapons requirement which really, as in the case of Vietnam, we call Rules of Engagement, the use of lethal weapons with a set of guidelines to prevent innocent people being killed, and so on? Did you ever have to apply those rules, or teach your soldiers, and practice your soldiers, in the rules under which they could engage persons unidentified?

Yes, this was a constant worry. By the time I took over 6 Platoon we were mainly operating in deep jungle, although we did some work outside villages. But everybody was under strict orders to only fire when you were sure it was an enemy, so in other words, you were avoiding firing on your own people, which would have been very bad for public relations if we'd shot an innocent civilian, so therefore you only fired at something when you were sure. Now, fortunately, when we were mainly operating in the jungle, if somebody was coming up in front of you were knew it was an enemy and we had to fire instantly. Generally speaking, while sometimes they might have been in green, sometimes they were in khaki - and (if) he was coming from the opposite direction in a camp he should know what they were. I did have the bad experience once of striking somebody who was in greens, in a camp, but I'll come to that, perhaps, later.

The other thing is, there was very heavy punishment for anybody that lost a grenade or lost rounds, or, more seriously, even a weapon - it was something like twenty-eight days in gaol and very heavy fines. We had to have that strict rule so as not to give weapons to the enemy, or ammunition, which they were desperately in need of.

I guess you all had your weapons in various states of readiness, depending on whether you were travelling on a vehicle, say, in camp.

Yes.

On a vehicle anticipating ambush, and a different state of readiness, perhaps, for the leading forward scouts ...

Yeah.

> ... as opposed to the fellows in the platoon.

The forward scout tended to be the only one with a safety catch off because you could trip over a vine or something. In an ambush it was up to the platoon commander to give his orders, but obviously, the sentries would have to have the safety catch off.

> The second sub-question relates to air resupply. You mentioned, in fact, you sometimes were carrying up to two weeks' rations; this implied, of course, you weren't getting air drops. What was the reason for that? Were you working in terrain where it was hard to identify DZs, or was it a tactic in terms of not giving away your position by moving on a long carrying of rations to avoid air resupply giving your position away?

Yes, all those factors, David. There weren't that many DZs just where we were operating, but certainly it would have been a give-away to have air drops. Air drops are very time consuming, you've got to prepare the DZ if there isn't one there, and you've got to break up the rations, and you have waste which the enemy would pick up if you buried it. It's far better to make the sacrifice of having a heavy carrying - we didn't have the benefit of helicopters like in Vietnam to bring the rations every few days, but even there they were a give-away. So we preferred to carry the stuff in and sometimes, if we'd been out a fortnight and had to stay out longer, we used Sakai porters to have the rations brought out to us. I feel that these guys were making so much noise that the enemy might have heard them, but it would have been preferable to a plane flying over and dropping down.

The big difference in Malaya was, of course, that we didn't have the helicopter support we had in Borneo and Vietnam, and of course you couldn't take your casualties out very quickly because there weren't so many helicopters available. Also, there weren't that many LZs in the area. We went out with maps with known LZs or patches of low grass near a river which could be a potential LZ, but there weren't too many around. The problem was the helicopters were for purposes like command and control and the occasional casevac, but not for ration resupply.

> When you were in, say, for two or three weeks, carrying the rations, you presumably had no difficulty in getting water resupply because of the abundance of water in the streams, although, I guess, you would have had to sterilise the water to be quite sure you weren't going to pick something up.

Yes, that was a constant problem if you are on the ridges; water resupply could be a very big problem. We carried lots of water bottles because nothing makes a man more fatigued (and that is) to be short of water. The blokes were carrying three or four water bottles. You had to wait for a while to drink the water with the chlorine tablets - I don't think many worried about the de-tasting tablets. There were lots of things we had to worry about, leptospirosis was one - that's (caused by) rat's urine in the rivers - so sometimes we even had to boil the water, that was a nuisance.

One point about the resupply which was a bit of a problem for administrators, I suppose, (was that) the parachutes were very popular, the silk, for making sleeping gear and soldiers certainly liked that aspect of it.

In terms of water, what was the policy on shaving? Did you shave every day with what water you had?

Yes, Major Cowan was very keen that we always shaved so we did shave, yes.

You weren't using camouflage cream at that stage?

No. It's an interesting point you are making. We did occasionally camouflage ourselves, but if we'd had the camouflage cream it would have been easier, but what we had available soon sweated off. I'm afraid to say a lot of soldiers thought, well, we only see an enemy about once in a blue moon, and I think they didn't bother much. We could use the black charcoal off a burnt tree or something, but it's something we weren't as assiduous about that you might have been in later conflicts.

I mean, soldiers have got a lot of commonsense and they would behave according to the threat of the enemy. Most of our platoons never had a contact or serious contact, so to expect a soldier, twice a day, to refresh his make-up, they'd laugh at you. You might argue that it should have been done. What about yourself when you were there with 2 RAR?

We never bothered camouflaging, there was no point. With one company I was with for a short time the policy was that you didn't shave in the jungle, theoretically, for camouflage purposes, but you had to shave the morning you were coming out so when you were picked up by the vehicles on the road everyone was clean, clear-eyed, clean-shaven and bushy-tailed.

Yes.

But by and large we shaved every day and didn't bother camouflaging for exactly the same reasons.

Could you talk about the ambushes laid and the results, just in general terms?

Some patrols did extensive ambushing for fourteen days or so; my platoon did very little of that. I found that soldiers started to fidget after a while if nothing happened for a day or so. It was better use of them to be patrolling for their physical fitness and making contact with the enemy. Ambushing is a great thing if you know enemy are going to use a track regularly, but we didn't have enough firm information quite often to put ambushes in. When we did ambushes it was outside the new villages which we covered a little bit before, but that was just an overnight ambush and got away before it got light. There was this one good ambush I covered before by Corporal Hanley which was an excellent ambush, but on very good information. I think ambushing is very good if you have excellent information.

And the fourth and final sub-question on Topic 11 was contact and incidents experienced, other than by ambush. Later we will be asking you about the Tracker Team attack on the CT camp, but if you could talk, perhaps, generally about contact and incidents you experienced.

We are dealing with contacts and incidents experienced in Topic 11. Go ahead, Claude.

When I was with 6 Platoon we did have one actual contact with the enemy which was

successful. That happened on 3 July 1958. We were doing this fan type patrolling as I was describing before. I was absolutely amazed afterwards that this enemy camp that we had a contact with was only about 250 yards away from where we based up late the night before when we carried our fourteen days' rations in. We did clearing patrols around our harbouring positions for each night, but that didn't go out quite that far. I'm surprised the enemy didn't hear us because there was always a little bit of noise basing up for the first time.

Then, when we fan patrolled the next morning, just about lunch time - and I remember it was lunch time because the enemy were cooking their lunch; they had cooked monkey on their fires - we had these fan patrols out. It was 'Dasher' Wheatley on the right who passed the camp fairly closely, and he'd already passed it well and truly; I had another fan patrol to the left commanded by Sergeant 'Chalky' [Moye]; I was back at base; Sergeant Moye was standing in for the other normal platoon sergeant, Sid McLachlan, who was on leave; and I had Ted [Henski] in the centre. They all three-man patrols and Corporal Henski was in the centre, and he went very close to this enemy camp but didn't see it, and the enemy fired at him before he charged in. There were three or four enemy and they had logs built up on both sides.

I had this drill - I was only 250 yards behind and we came up - the idea was to converge on the firing. Now, one of the enemy moved in the direction of Sergeant Moye - and this is the great value of the fan patrolling - they gave away their position by firing the two shots, and Moye put his two men to ground. I heard this rustling noise and one of the CT came towards him, and a very accurate shot by Private O'Brien killed the bloke with one SLR shot, an aimed shot, and that's how we managed to kill one.

The other enemy got away. We did find a camp the next day, which was for about twenty-odd people, about a year old, and one of the enemy had stayed there overnight. There was an attempt to make the Tracking Team, which was then commanded by Peter Phillips, to get him to come out and into contact. We had to carry the dead body out, or part of the platoon (had to), which was a bit of an encumbrance because they swell up so quickly. It was a huge body by the time we'd got to an LZ - all swollen up, and it took half my platoon away carrying him out.

I must emphasis the importance of this because they had to very quickly try and identify the body to realise which enemy group it was because every person on the enemy's side was in a photo in the command post and they, of course, wanted to know which group he was in and recognise him. Afterwards, of course, he'd be ripped off and a line put through.

> So that was the one contact where you had a ...

With the platoon, yes - with 6 Platoon. We had some other near contacts, we found lots of signs of resting places, and tracks, and that sort of thing, which the Ibans were very helpful in giving us a very accurate idea of the tracks.

> Topic 12: Your experience in training and leading the 3 RAR Tracker Team, but excluding the attack on the CT camp, which is the next topic. Could you talk about training and leading the Tracker Team? I think you said Peter Phillips was your predecessor.

Yes, Peter Phillips got the team together in April 1958. It was recognised that we needed to have some better expertise at tracking, might be at platoon level.

Had he done the course at Kota Tinggi?

Yes. The specialists, the visual trackers - the Ibans - were also trained down there, more in techniques of moving with white men, and they were judged on their tracking ability (and) to avoid somebody who might just have been a towns man - and the dog handlers had their tracking married up with their dogs down there. These things were welded together into one team because you needed cover men for the dogs and the trackers. So Peter had them from about April till about August. By the time I got them they had this marrying together very well. Peter had done a very good job with that.

I must explain just the differing values in the Tracking Team between visual and dogs. The dogs had the advantage of being able to track at night, which was rarely used because the visual tracker can't see. He could go faster, but he could also lead you into an ambush because the visual tracker, being up front, I mean, he was much more alert, and these were very jungle savvy, the Ibans, and his cover man could much more easily combine with him.

The tracking dogs were, in fact, Labradors primarily, were they?

Yes. There was the occasional Alsatian, but the Alsatians were used for patrol dogs to stop you going into an ambush. If the enemy you were following tried to double back to your flank the patrol dog could point out to the side, but they didn't develop that technique so well. But the Labradors were very good, but they did get exhausted in the heat after a while. In fact, I had an instance where a bloke had to carry his dog out for thousands of yards. The Ibans were certainly better when you got close to the enemy, even though a dog was trained to point at the enemy, the handler may not always have been able to read it. And he was more in position, the Iban up front; the dogs tended to be noisy so I preferred to have the visual tracker as we got close to the enemy.

So it was really like a symphony, you had to meld these together and use whatever was best to use. And, as I say, we had to practice the cover men. It was very important that the Iban had his head down, had confidence in the Australian covering him. He didn't want him looking up so much because he was meant to track rapidly forward. And there was a second tracker behind the first cover man to see the CT that jumped off the side of the track as they tried to scatter. We had to have these various techniques of searching along rivers. If they went into a river they'd walk along the stream for a while to throw you off - it would certainly throw the dog off - so we'd check the banks to see where they got out. So there were all sorts of techniques we had to practice, and we practiced and practiced all the time. We were on five minutes notice at Lasah, held centrally, to be called by Battalion HQ, but we were training all the time in a nearby training area, honing up our techniques, and particularly our fitness because we needed to be super-fit to get quickly to where the platoon had a contact. If we got there slowly we wouldn't be called out because they'd lose confidence in us, they were wasting time. Basically each platoon and each company commander wanted to get the kills themselves so I knew I had to make a success of that and get there quickly.

So the Tracker Team was obviously only deployed when perhaps a contact or incident occurred where there would be something to start tracking from.

Or fresh tracks, if somebody came across fresh tracks.

You wouldn't send out a patrol to try and locate tracks, which invariably were where

some lead, a contact or an incident occurred.

You are quite right.

How much were you carrying in the way of rations and water? I realise you were travelling very light.

Our orders were to be able to be out for five days, but we tried to only carry about the equivalent of three days and took a punt on it that we probably wouldn't need it for more than that. But there were times when we had to stay out much longer.

In the lightest case would you be travelling with a light '44 pattern pack, or would you even be able to carry extra rations in water bottle carriers?

No, we always carried a pack because we had to be prepared to stay out overnight. We had our sleeping gear hanging from the bottom of the pack.

Topic 13: Could you talk about your Tracker Team attack on the CT camp north-east of Sungei Siput on 20 November 1958?

I hate to talk about a contact that I was involved in myself really. I must start off by giving praise to 3 Platoon who found the tracks; it wasn't terribly far away from the side of a high ridge - mountain. When I got there my leading tracker told me that they were about two or three years old. I went up to have a chat to him about it and I could see that he was very confident. I had a great trust in Corporal [Khana] and he was getting quite excited, it was a good sign that we were on fresh tracks. We followed this for a while. I think the other 3 Platoon were getting pretty anxious to base up, but I said to him to be in readiness - because it was getting on in the day - to follow up because you want to be in a classic situation, if you came across a camp, to surround it.

But as time went on - it was already about four-thirty to five o'clock - I had a huge dilemma what to do. Normally we based up about four o'clock and got ready for night. It got dark in Malaya about that time, about six o'clock and I felt I was going to get a bit extra out of my blokes and perhaps try and get the enemy while they basing up. I couldn't really expect 3 Platoon to still keep following up at that time, and you couldn't with a 510 (radio) make contact with them easily, it was quite a distance they were falling behind - because we were a smaller group and we were tracking pretty fast.

We then, after a while, behind some rocks going very steeply up, saw two plastic bashas. I was still a little worried whether they were the enemy or not, although I thought they were because some of our people bought plastic in the markets and put tents up. So I couldn't be a hundred per cent certain, but I was ninety per cent certain this was the enemy.

Now, the normal drill was, if you saw enemy in front you charge up and try and get them. In the likelihood that they were aware that we were behind they could drop down and see us if they were alert - it was a little bit open, they'd picked a pretty good position, so it would have been foolhardy to charge up there. I wanted to try and catch them - they had a huge advantage being up high to get away from us and scatter.

So what I did was, I had a lance corporal who was my next senior person, I put him in charge of

(my 'stop group'). He had three other Australians and two Ibans - one of the Australians had a dog which was a liability at this stage because he could yelp at any moment. Thank goodness the dog kept quiet. I didn't have time to crawl around the back of the camp, it was getting almost dark. It was a very difficult decision (as to) whether I'd leave it till the morning or (go ahead) that night; but I felt if I did make a success of this - which was the best chance we'd ever had - the company commanders would never hand over a task to a CO again, they'd say, Oh, we'll follow up if the tracking team can't make a success of this. So I said I'd have a go.

So with two Ibans and two Australians I went around the left (see next paragraph) flank of this camp. As I said, we had to walk, we couldn't sort of crawl. If they'd looked over the side of the rocks they would have seen us, it was a risky decision. I was just lucky; if the enemy's sentry or somebody had seen us ... I mean, we moved very stealthily, but every little crackly was a worry. But the light was already getting bad. The risk for me also was if I'd taken a casualty at that stage there was no way of getting him out - I only had a small team to carry one or two guys out, but I seemed to forget about that and we moved around the back of the camp.

Two or three of us crawled up and I got the others to go around a bit further - I was on the extreme right-hand (? left-hand) flank at that stage. I was worried the Ibans might be tempted to prematurely fire. I had 'Kiwi' Gibbons with his lightened up Bren gun already in position and I was watching an enemy, just a few metres in front, in a tent, getting his gear ready for the night. But he was in greens, I could only see his hands, and he was wearing a gold watch, and I was worried, my gosh, is this an enemy or not? There is no prize for shooting one of your own, and he was sort of jiggling around with his gear. And I couldn't see the rest of his body - he seemed to be a very tall man because he seemed to have long arms. I was watching him for about a minute.

And then he moved. I signalled to the other blokes - because there were three bashas and we couldn't see anybody to get an accurate shot at, but they were sort of moving around. There were expected to be about four or five because there were three bashas, and these were their tents from the plastic - one of them wasn't quite complete. So I held a grenade up in my left hand - I had my Owen in my right so I had to throw it left-handed - and threw it at what I hoped to be the middle of the bashas, to drive them down - those who weren't killed - into the stop group because the natural thing for the enemy would be to run down hill.

The grenade landed a bit short of the centre and we all fired our weapons. The enemy threw a grenade back and also fired back, but it didn't seem to be accurate. It was successful in driving all but one or two of the enemy down hill. Actually, one of the enemy, a district committee member as it turned out later on, was actually having a wash down in the stream below, but I didn't know that. The people down the bottom were watching the enemy and they were worried that this bloke had gone down to the water - we wanted to capture everybody, that was the idea - and another bloke had just moved up from the stream. It might have been the bloke that I saw fiddling, putting his greens on again and getting ready, after his wash, to have a weapon or go on sentry, or whatever - they weren't cooking as yet.

Anyway, the only thing was to act quickly, it was getting too close to dark. One of the enemy moved down at first and he was shot by the stop group, and a little while later another enemy came down and that person was shot. She was carrying a Sten gun - we found out later it was a woman. The district committee member who was having a wash down by the stream, he tried to get away and my signaller, who was with the stop group, chased him with an accurate shot with his FN, killed him. We don't know about the one or two who got away. We found the sentry

post, not far from where we came around the back, later on. Whether any of them were wounded by the grenade, or by any fire attacking, we could not tell. But it was too late to mount a follow-up that night - I didn't see any sign of 3 Platoon following up so we established radio communications and told Battalion what had happened, and commenced our search again the next morning.

When people came in to carry the enemy dead out for evacuation it took a whole platoon to carry them out. We recovered quite a lot of documents - there were three weapons - maps and particularly food, about over a hundred pounds of rice which was quite a lot in those days to capture. Morale was pretty high, of course. One of the things we found out later (was that) the DCM that was killed - District Committee Member - he had been in the ambush that killed Sir Henry Gurney when he was ambushed in a hill station outside Kuala Lumpur. That made all the papers, the *Straits Times* and so on, in Malaya. So that was quite good, and I think they got a lot of information afterwards from documents, but more particularly, there were some surrenders later on and I don't know all the intelligence successes they had except there had been quite a lot of surrenders afterwards. There was good intelligence work done by the IO and Special Branch, and more and more people surrendered after that.

So it produced a lot of very good results.

I was very lucky, I must add, that I had a very good, trained, hardened bunch of blokes, it was very much a team effort. In fact, 'team' is a good word for it, it was a combined effort.

It also reflects on your leadership and enthusiasm, and so on.

No, I think it's all of them.

It's a team, it's a complete package.

The soldiers could have said to me, Look, it's time to base up, boss, it's about an hour later than normal; but none of them did. I think they knew that I wouldn't have done it anyway.

No. They were enthusiastic themselves too, they could make the same assessment you were making, I guess, where you either get in tonight and take risks on it, or we wait till tomorrow morning and nothing is there.

I don't know.

It's a tough decision to make.

There was no time to discuss anything, we had to be absolutely quiet.

The risk of some noise occurring, or the enemy may have even planned to move first light in the morning, before you could get into position.

We were on the side of a hill, we couldn't have based up, we would have had to have withdrawn.

Topic 14: The experience of casualty or captured and surrendered enemy personnel evacuation during operations. I think you've probably covered that, you've mentioned the

> enemy dead that you had to get out, the problems of getting him out. You also mentioned the scarcity of landing zones for helicopters. Is there anything else you'd like to say on Topic 14?

I didn't have any experience of capturing an enemy or any SEP (surrendered enemy personnel), but 3 Platoon and our Assault Pioneer Platoon each had an enemy come in to surrender to them. One of our vehicle patrols captured two surrendered personnel - one of them was quite an important one - after that ambush in the mangling shed where there was one escaped. That was our sort of experience with enemy surrendering that you mentioned.

> Topic 15: You may not have had the chance to experience anything which would give you comparisons of the operational effectiveness and morale of the other battalions of the 28th Brigade, the British battalion and the New Zealand battalion. Any images you developed, or pictures (impressions) you developed, in the time you were there about how they operated, how effective they were?

Well, this was all effected by the brigadier and I wouldn't like to make any judgement how we were compared with the other two battalions. I can only comment on 3 RAR. I've been in quite a number of battalions since and I think it was a highly professional unit, the CO was very good at watching morale, and morale was particularly high when periods of boredom had been broken by successes.

> Yes, it's a rather trite sort of question to ask thinking of the context of the Korean War where you take over from another battalion in a line and you'd be aware of how things were working with the battalion on your flank. Malaya was totally different, you were totally isolated from the other battalions and the only time you'd really ever contact them would be perhaps in sporting fixtures or something like that, unless you happened to be attached to another battalion for a couple of months to make observations.

Yes, yes.

> Topic 16: The characteristics we are interested in, from an operational viewpoint, of supporting forces - Police Field Force, Home Guard and others - you may have had more opportunity to observe those people from a platoon point of view rather than you would have units of the Brigade. Anything on Police Field Force or Home Guard, or Special Branch even?

Well, the Police Field Force and Home Guard were useful because of their knowledge of the local conditions and the acceptance by the Malay population in the Malay villages because they were mainly made up of Malays. The Chinese may have held them in disdain a bit, but they didn't associate themselves with the Home Guard very much. That was my impression. The Chinese (who) were very good were, I understand, the Chinese Special Branch officers, but I didn't have much contact with them.

I had one experience with the Police Field Force - sorry, they were actually Home Guard. My company commander had decided once when I was due to go on stand-down to get me to take 'Dasher' Wheatley and a sig (and) join up with a Home Guard platoon and cut a track right across the company area, and it was to be called the 'Gundagai Track'. I didn't have any prior knowledge of this Home Guard, but half-way through cutting this track - and it was an enormously big job with these three of us Australians and this platoon of about thirty Home

Guard. For some reason or other the signaller had an accidental discharge - I think he wanted to make it sound (like) two or three rounds instead, but he fired a burst with his Owen gun. This Home Guard, it took me about half an hour to collect them again, they just fled, so it gave me an insight into what they'd be like in a contact if you didn't know them. If I'd been with them before - I sort of joined up with them for that day to be the people to hack this track.

What were the Home Guard mostly in this case? Were they mainly Chinese or Malays?

They were Malays from a local village. I didn't know them from a bar of soap, it was my first contact with them. One of our platoon commanders normally led them for a few months - a spare platoon commander he was.

Topic 17: What did you find was the most testing and/or trying time you might have had as a platoon commander in 3 RAR? You can include the Tracker Team as well. Perhaps the most testing time was that attack on the CT camp. What was the most testing or trying time you had?

Well, leaving that aside, I mentioned the difficult decision about whether to go on that night before the contact. I think the most difficult decision I had to make was when I (had) just joined 6 Platoon and we had to go on an ambush the next night - and I hardly knew the platoon - outside a local village. It was one of these Chinese controlled villages with a big fence around it, they'd all been brought together under the Templer Scheme of village resettlement, Jalong village. It was some distance away and we jumped off the back of these encased vehicles which were known as 'pigs' where we jumped off the back, on the run, and then we went in the darkness and had an ambush outside the village. The idea was to get out before light, before the villagers came out to go to work again so they wouldn't know we were ambushing.

When we got back to camp - I thought everything had gone reasonably smoothly, no enemy came into the village that night, in fact, they never did on these ambushes - I discovered in a weapons check that my signaller left his grenade in the ambush and that was a very serious situation. I mean, here, on my first patrol with this platoon, I was going to be instrumental in him getting twenty days, twenty-eight days, gaol. There was very little time left so I decided to go back into the ambush with a very reliable corporal and look for the grenade. So there was very little time. We just got back there in time before it got light; we found the grenade and came back. When I got back 'Judy' Garland said, 'Well, Ducker, you've just buggered up months of work. You've obviously come out of the ambush too late and the enemy know we are doing this ambushing.' But I hadn't, in fact, I'd got there before dark, but I wanted to retrieve this grenade. Well, I didn't want to dob this soldier in. Anyway, it was a very difficult leadership question. I think, in retrospect, I made the right decision, but I couldn't tell him why I was personally late back - the platoon were back, I just went back to find this grenade. But I couldn't take the risk of the grenade being found and enemy using it against us. So it was a rock-and-a-hard-place decision on my first day with the platoon. That was one difficult day.

The other difficult decision, I think, I had was that once the Assault Pioneer Platoon had a contact against three enemy in very difficult terrain, up very high mountains, you could describe them. We had to go out, and it was about a one and a half day trek to get to them. We wanted to get there quickly - this was in late October 1958 - and we caught up. Sergeant Larson was in charge of the Pioneers, a very good sergeant. The Tracking Team followed these enemy - three enemy - followed by the Assault Pioneers. We managed to do this for about four or five days, came across a camp which we had gone to the extended line for, but the enemy had gone - there

were about eight bashas there.

The rain kept washing the tracks out, but we managed to track them for five or six days until we lost the tracks, then the Assault Pioneer Platoon were called back. We tried finding them, and occasionally we found some more - and our boots were worn out and we were out of rations, and we had to take a resupply with an Auster aircraft, which was a bit of a give-away, just before the Pioneers left us. So they needed rations to get back too.

So we got some more rations and that kept us going for about another three days, but we were a long way away from Lasah where we started. I was worried about the morale of my Tracking Team then because we were actually much closer to the Grik area.

You were well north of Lasah.

Well north, we'd gone over two or three mountain ranges. In fact, we were away about thirteen days altogether by the end. I had to make a decision whether to go back to Lasah, which would have been very demoralising doing the same trip back. I talked to my Lance Corporal Peck about it and we both agreed that the best thing for the morale of the troops would be to go forward. To go to an unknown area - we didn't know if we were in another battalion's area or what - but I did get clearance from Battalion to go forward - I think I managed to establish communications. We went another couple of days forward and came out at a Malay kampong miles away.

How many days out were you out all told?

Thirteen days. At least five of that was following up the enemy. I've seen some books that said nine, but I haven't checked that in the war diary.

That was certainly the hardest work I did in Malaya. It was very cold; I remember, we were wet and cuddling up to a dog for the night to keep warm. When we were finally picked up in the truck it was a long journey back to Kualar Kangsar for several hours. I was actually shivering still when I came in the officers' mess because we were just in our thin clothes in the back of this truck. That was certainly the hardest decision, whether to go forward or ... You had to worry about driving your men too hard. My tracker dog had already broken down and the dog handler volunteered to carry him back on his own. That was fairly early in the piece, perhaps the sixth day.

Topic 18: What events were cause for amusement or light relief for 3 RAR?

My first experience of a laugh - although I don't think other people would have seen it that way - was when I was still doing the hand-over. I had just taken over all the stores from 2 RAR - 2 RAR had left - and I got a call from Colonel Ochiltree (CO 2 RAR), who I didn't know very well, who was just about to get on a boat, or a plane, or something, at Singapore. He said, 'Ducker, I've forgotten to sign the visitor's book at the Sultan of Perak's Istana (Palace). This is something that must be done.' I said to him, 'Well, are you sure you don't want me to sign for all your other officers as well; I'm sure they haven't done it either.' He said, 'Oh, yes, you can if you want to, but there's thirty-eight of them.'

I didn't have a vehicle. My new Citroen - it wasn't new, it was a clapped out one I bought from one of the 2 RAR blokes - it wasn't reliable enough to go to the Istana, and the only other

vehicle back in camp was a water truck which was leaking water all the way. So I went out to obey Colonel Ochiltree's order, out to the Istana in this damn water truck. Went and duly signed Colonel Ochiltree's name and as many of the other officers that I could remember, some in left hand, some in right hand, making them all different.

I thought I'd done the job well and drove away in the water truck.

> You were driving?

No, I wasn't a reliable enough driver, but I had a new driver I didn't know. We were just driving along this fairly narrow road away from the water truck and who should come along but the Sultan, who was about an eighty year old bloke, reputed to have syphilis - but I'm not sure if that's at all right - but I hope he doesn't have me up for libel. But he could have me up for something else because as I drove up - we drove up in this water truck - we drove him off the road and he went into a ditch, but it's something I've never revealed to this day.

> Until this day he believes all those signatures in his visitors' book were genuine.

Yeah. He didn't come to any harm, the Mercedes just sort of went to the side. I drove off hoping he knew I wasn't an officer in the front of the truck. So that was a terrible experience, but I was trying to do the right thing.

The other amusing incident I do recall was with 6 Platoon. I was on one of these small fan patrols, and there were four of us, including myself. The forward scout had a shotgun, I had the Owen gun, neither of them would do any damage to anything much. There were two other men further back, one of them had a FN rifle.

Anyway, it was very dark and gloomy, it was about half-past four in the afternoon, raining very heavily, and all of a sudden we came across this lone bull elephant. Private Bunting was in front of me, and the first thing I knew he was behind me and we both made for the nearest tree. It wasn't too thick, the country, but we just got to this tree and we couldn't climb the damn thing. This elephant, he was probably a bull elephant expelled from the herd, kept chasing us around this tree for a while. Finally it gave up, but we couldn't do anything because we didn't have anything that would hurt him. You have to actually hit an elephant with something like an FN right behind the eyes, and it's a very hard thing to do.

So we finally got away from this elephant and it took me quite a while to collect these other two guys who were laughing, miles back, but it was a frightened, nervous sort of laugh. The same thing happened to my replacement in the platoon, he also was chased by an elephant, tripped over a log, and the elephant kept going, but it's actually more frightening to encounter some CT to be honest.

> Tough situation. Topic 19: What events, and perhaps administrative actions, had the most significant effects on the raising or lowering of morale within 3 RAR? Anything outstanding from that?

I think boredom was the greatest thing that you had to encounter as a CO, I would imagine. Not that they would be bored, they would be the least bored because they were planning operations, but the routine of patrolling for soldiers was difficult and that was sort of broken up by success in patrolling, even if you only found some tracks showing the enemy were around. So that had

good effect on raising morale.

I think the other thing that helped raise morale - the CO (inaudible) he always stood by it - giving us regular stand-down; both married men and the single men had stand-down at the same time. There was talk in 2 RAR occasionally that the married men had a bit more leave than the single men. I'm not sure if that was true, but we had exactly the same. And I think the CO was very good at watching morale, or if you were tired. For example, after we had this contact I spoke about, we were a bit hyped up a bit, I would think, after the long follow up in the mountains I spoke about before. The CO always came out. He wasn't the first to welcome you back, he left that to the company commander, but he'd see you later. He'd say, 'Right, Claude, you take your blokes off for three days' leave', even though you might not have been due for it. I thought that was a terrific thing to do. He watched you getting too tired.

> Topic 20: What would your comments be on the nature of casualties and illness, and how did medical facilities cope?

Well, skin diseases were a problem, I remember blokes having acne and skin rashes - and how do you overcome that if you are wearing greens for a fortnight? They would perhaps take their shirt off for a while in base up at night-time for half an hour, but it was by far the biggest problem. You had to watch leptospirosis and boil the water in certain creeks. You were told beforehand the areas which were rat-polluted. Malaria precautions were absolutely essential, it was a self-inflicted wound, and the platoon sergeant issued those tablets every night at stand-down.

> It was paludrine in those days, wasn't it?

Yes - along with the rum ration. If anybody didn't want their rum ration I had my mug handy to share it with the platoon sergeant. But that was good. If you went on ambush you could easily have a drink of rum at night-time to relax a bit because you just couldn't patrol in the jungle at night-time.

> Also helped you sleep, I would think, too.

Well, that was the main thing.

The other big health problem was VD. By the time I took my platoon over I understood, from the previous platoon commander, a lot of them had picked up VD already in Singapore while training at Kota Tinggi. So they had to get treatment for that, so that was a problem.

> So you'd lose a man or two from patrol because he had to go to BMH (British Military Hospital) Kamunting for tests and that type of thing?

Yes, or even admission; that was a real nuisance. And we were constantly implored by our company commanders to lecture the soldiers on this subject, but it was actually a bit late in my case, some of them had caught it early on the tour. And you had to watch it particularly with married men too; there was a possibility of the odd bloke perhaps carrying it home.

As I said earlier, there were few helicopter evacuations. Probably one of the toughest things confronting me in Malaya was that we were constantly running into wasps' nests for which I got myself a private supply of antihistamine tablets to give to anybody. One day one of my lance

corporals had seven wasp bites and he couldn't breath any more and he was completely out to it. I didn't know what to do. I managed to make contact with the Battalion doctor. He was a pretty fierce sort of character in some ways, and very bad communications with him with the 510 fading. He said, 'You've got to do a tracheotomy.' I didn't know where to even start on the blokes neck, but I got a rusty old razor blade out which I had in my razor, but the site it - he must have momentarily come to and he saw me hovering over him with this rusty old razor blade. He came to and that was that little crisis over with.

So you were the medic with your platoon?

No. The platoon's commander carried a little British pack, little phials of key tablets, and he had a tourniquet, which was still in vogue in those days for snakes, and you carried morphine. Each section commander had one of these packs, and I think the platoon sergeant carried a bit more.

So this took the place of a platoon medic?

Yes. The stretcher bearers were too busy in my time, in doing hearts and mind, band work, and other medical work in villages, so we didn't have medics with the platoon like we did in Borneo and Vietnam.

Anyway, fortunately Higgins came good, but I'm glad I had those antihistamine tablets.

Topic 21 - you've mentioned this in part earlier on - could you talk briefly about rest and training periods out of operations, perhaps comparing the lifestyles of married and single personnel in the context of a posting to Malaya being an accompanied posting, meaning married personnel took their families?

Yes, well, after these fourteen-day operations - that was sort of the pattern, or sometimes we tried three weeks at a time as a platoon - we would then clear up, recondition our equipment. The first thing to do - people were tired after that - was to go on leave. We generally got two days' leave, plus travelling time which was about half a day to Penang and a little less to Ipoh in travelling time, and then enough time to get back on the third morning.

So that was the highlight, in a way, for everybody in that particular month, or whatever it was. And that was the same, as I said, for married men and single men. The married men went off to Penang, and I must say they were very good. There wasn't a weekend, when I was at 3 RAR, if I wanted it, where one of the married subalterns wouldn't invite you home - it would be a different one usually. I remember one or two, I stayed there often, and that was terrific and I am very grateful to them for that. Then I could have some time in Penang, or laze around the swimming club - it was good for your skin to get a bit of sun on you.

The single blokes tended to go to Ipoh and they could get into heaps of trouble. I mean, not only with the girls - it was a necessary respite for them to get down there and do whatever their thing was. They'd drink plenty and sometimes they'd get into fights, as I said earlier, with people from other units - not other Australians.

After we came back from stand-down the first thing we did, if we hadn't already done so, was always zero our weapons so we could fire accurately because they'd get knocked around - it might be knocked on a rock on an operation or something. Accurate firing was of paramount importance and you had to get the armourer in to adjust the sights, it was absolutely important

that we did that, and do shooting practice. And I also did a lot of shooting practice with the dogs so that they could get used to firing and wouldn't bark a lot, and that sort of thing; that would be the last thing you wanted.

And then the preparation for the next operation. A lot of time would be taken by platoon commanders getting orders, perhaps even doing a reconnaissance occasionally on a plane or from a hill, and preparing maps and air photographs, briefing your section commanders, and the briefing the whole platoon about the next operation. It all had to be in general terms because the situation changed every day according to the sign of the enemy you found.

> Were there any significant periods out of operations which the Battalion used for retraining, any style of retraining?

In the first year - none in 1958 - that wasn't done so much when we were busy trying to chase the enemy. I understand in the last six months there was a fair bit of that done, and some thought given to the strategic role towards the end. It's almost as if somebody suddenly said, Oh, we are meant to be doing this, and then doing it; but the CO was quite right in giving emphasis on our operational areas - the brigadier would have insisted on it. After all, the patrolling we were doing was keeping us fit, we were shooting well - we were supposed to be shooting well - and we were chasing enemy. I mean, that was a far better way of keeping up morale, I think.

> Rather than training for a hypothetical enemy.

Yes.

> Topic 22: Which do you think are the circumstances of the operational environment which put most strain on 3 RAR? Was it the weather, enemy tactics, patrolling commitments, casualties? Which would you say was the most significant aspect?

Well, thankfully, 3 RAR didn't have many casualties, far less than our predecessors, 2 RAR, who had unfortunately killed almost as many of their own, I think, as the enemy. I know one of our Charlie Company people was killed by one of their own people in a clash. We didn't have that problem so much.

I think the fact that we were constantly on a patrol regimen which was pretty arduous, combined with routine and boredom, and the lack of contacts with the enemy, was the biggest factor to counter in the way of morale.

> I think, as you've talked all the way through, that's the impression one gets, that summarises really what you've said on many other aspects of the topics.
>
> Topic 23 asks you for your thoughts on the member of 3 RAR who had most influence on you during your time with the Battalion; or, if not so much influence, who was the most outstanding character or personality of the Battalion from your point of view?

I definitely (would say) Lieutenant Colonel John White who we all called 'Blanc', he was the outstanding influence. It isn't just because he was CO, because a CO has got the greatest influence, if he's good, it was just the way he was, he was a good CO, particularly in pre-empting morale problems. I've mentioned some examples of ensuring sufficient leave breaks. I think he was a good bloke in that he knew his key people well enough to know whether there

might be character clashes or if somebody was working somebody too hard. He was good at making the right joke at the right time. So he was the outstanding character.

> Topic 24 - a bit of an abstract one - could you talk about the performance of members of 3 RAR in this first general deployment of Australian troops into a tropical environment since the Second World War? Could you see much influence of previous service and operational theatre in that from, say, World War II veterans? How well do you think the officers and NCOs were selected and employed in 3 RAR?

I think it was good to have so many people - company commanders and senior NCOs - with previous wartime experience, in the case of the NCOs of Korea, it was just managing men in an operational circumstance which they'd had. I think there are some pros and cons with that. It was great to have their man management experience in operational areas. One or two of them at the company commander level might have tried to have applied World War II tactics a bit too much. In Malaya service was very distinctive and it was really three- or four-man patrols being the key thing. I think our platoon commanders adjusted to that pretty well, and our sergeants, and our corporals, and our private soldiers. As I said earlier, these private soldiers were the NCOs of the future in many cases.

I think 3 RAR was a very professional battalion so I think they chose the people well, and I think some of the weaker people were weeded out earlier in Australia and early in the service in Malaya. I can only speak to highly of the professionalism of the Battalion and the CO; you've got to give credit to Colonel White for that.

> The last topic: Can you speak on your posting as an instructor for the Jungle Warfare School at Kota Tinggi in Johore?

Yes. I went to Kota Tinggi in 1959 - that might have been coinciding to being due to be a temporary captain, perhaps - and that was a very good experience for me. I was very sorry to leave the Battalion I might add. I didn't ask to go to Kota Tinggi, I think I would have stayed on as a lieutenant rather than get promoted because the Tracking Team was working so well and had high morale at the time after the contact. In fact, the CO got me to take over another platoon - 3 Platoon - for a month just before the end because that platoon commander had been promoted to be on Battalion Headquarters. So I was sorry to leave the Battalion.

I went there as Chief Instructor of Tracking Wing in the main, but I also became involved in other jungle training courses as DS (directing staff) on platoon tactics when the Jungle Wing was running courses for Battalion cadres coming through. We were also training Cambodians, Vietnamese, the odd American Special Forces (personnel) - I had to run a special course for Indonesians when the RSL objected to them coming through Canungra. So I saw a great many people from other parts of Malaysia. We ran courses for Malays I should say, we ran courses for the trackers from Sarawak; we ran tracking courses for individuals from units; and I also had to run Tracking Team courses - they were now starting to form in all units after the initial successes of the Loyals Tracking Team - they had some success. All units starting to want to form tracking teams and they sent them down, so it wasn't just individual tracking, it was team tracking. I learnt my individual tracking skills - and I was only average - from a chap who'd learnt his tracking skills as a chap fighting the Mau Maus in Kenya. The trackers from the Iban head-hunters that came out, they had the tracking skills, but they had to be welded into a team and taught our contact drills so they could meld in with it. So it was a multi-disciplinary training, and I also had to get involved with the War Dog Unit that was there and teach the war

dog handlers how to meld in with tracking teams and with units. So it was a variety of training. We also put on demonstrations for Vietnamese generals who came over in 1959 - they were already getting interested in counter insurgency, of course.

So you were a captain then?

Yes.

For how long were you at Kota Tinggi?

For a year.

So you came back after the Battalion came back?

Yes.

That must have been a great experience to culminate your time in Malaya then.

Yes.

Especially from the international viewpoint, plus applying directly the skills you'd developed through the Tracking Team itself.

Yes. It was a break from operations - and I had a girlfriend in Singapore, a nurse down there I was able to see on many of the weekends. The Australians down in Singapore were very good to me at headquarters and provided me their places whenever I could get away. It was a good year. I also got to visit other units. Other units asked that we come up on visits, particularly near the Thai border. I was asked to give some advice to COs on tracking techniques, and to unit officers there, so I got to travel around Malaya quite a bit.

Is there anything you'd like to say in conclusion - any recollections, reflections, or comments on the whole period of experience in Malaya? of do you think you've covered it and summed it up neatly with Kota Tinggi?

I think, in many ways, being a platoon commander is being the highlight of your career. I was a company commander in two operations theatres, in Borneo and Vietnam, later, but you learn most as a platoon commander. I really think that because having that area where you are just on your own, just at the end of a radio set that occasionally you had communications with, if you were lucky, every hour. That's where you made your mistakes and, hopefully, got a few things right.

Well, Claude, thanks ever so much for that, a most fascinating interview. You are the first of the Malayan series and I hope they all bear up to the standard that you've been able to give us in your recollections and thought on your service in the Malayan Emergency. Thanks ever so much.

But I just must say one thing. We've talked a bit about myself here, but I was very lucky to have good soldiers under me and any success that my platoon or tracking team had was due to the good blokes I had. I'd like that to be on the record.

Well, that's one of the satisfying things, as you say, about being a platoon commander, you are so close to your soldiers.

Yes.

That's great, Claude, thanks ever so much.

Okay.

11/03