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S02864

Wallace Talbot Claxton Thompson OAM as a rifle section commander 2nd Battalion The Royal Australian Regiment (2 RAR), Malaya 1955-1957, interviewed by Colonel David Chinn MBE (Rtd)

Recorded
at: Canberra, ACT
on: 26 February 2003
by: Bill Brassell, AWM Staff

Description
Thompson speaks of his military training prior to joining 2 RAR in Australia; 2 RAR in terms of individual and collective operational experience; 2 RAR's perceptions of its operational roles in Malaya; the training of 2 RAR in Australia for Malayan service; 2 RAR's transit to Malaya by ship and its settling in to the Malayan military environment; his experience in and commanding of a rifle section; the appropriateness of the Australian training to the Malayan operational circumstances; 2 RAR's coming to terms with the jungle environment on operations; counter-insurgency tactics and techniques up to rifle company level; animal life in the jungle; attached and detached personnel, including Iban trackers; air support including resupply; rations used on operations; medical and health matters; the lifestyle for the soldiers, particularly the single soldiers; the most significant character in 3 RAR from his point of view; some general impressions of service in 2 RAR in the Malayan Emergency setting.

Transcribed by: C.L. Soames, December 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).

A few changes or additions may be made by the transcriber or proof-reader. Such changes are usually indicated by square brackets, thus: [ ] to clearly indicate a difference between the sound record and the transcript. A double dash (- -) indicates an unfinished sentence.

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Identification: This is an interview with Warrant Officer Class 1 Wallace Talbot Claxton Thompson OAM (Rtd); it is conducted by Colonel David Chinn MBE (Rtd) on Thursday 26 February 2003 at the Australian War Memorial. The topics covered are mainly the experiences of Warrant Officer Thompson as a rifle section commander in 2nd Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment (2 RAR) in 1956-1957 during the Malayan Emergency.

The interviewee's profile is as follows. Warrant Officer Thompson was born in Dulwich Hill Sydney, New South Wales, on 9 November 1932 and was educated at the Ashfield Technical School. After leaving school, whilst in the civilian workforce, he joined the Citizens' Military Forces in 30th Infantry Battalion (New South Wales Scottish) from which he was drafted for full-time training in the national service scheme of the 1950s. He was then posted to the 45th Infantry Battalion (St George Regiment) where in due course he attained the rank of sergeant. Enlisting in the Regular Army he saw service as a corporal rifle section commander in 2nd Battalion the Royal Australian Regiment (2 RAR) in the Malayan Emergency 1955-1957. His later significant postings included the British Army Jungle Warfare School at Kota Tinggi, Malaysia, as an instructor in 1961-1963; the Australian Army Training Team, Vietnam, 1964-1965; Company Sergeant Major, Charlie Company 1 RAR Vietnam, 1968; Regimental Sergeant Major 4 RAR Vietnam, 1970-1971; Regimental Sergeant Major of the Jungle Training Centre, Canungra, in 1974; RSM of the Infantry Centre at Singleton, 1975-1978; Regimental Sergeant Major of Training Command in 1979-1981; Regimental Sergeant Major 1st Infantry Brigade, 1982; and finally, he became the first Regimental Sergeant Major of the Army in 1983-1986.

That's a very significant and distinguished career there, Wally, and we are very grateful to you for giving up your time and coming down to talk to us this morning.

It's my pleasure, David.

I will launch into the topics we suggest as the basis for discussion. Firstly, would you give us your service background and experience - where necessary emphasising some of the aspects of your profile - as well as training, which were preparation for the Malayan Emergency commitment?

Well, up to the stage where I joined 2nd Battalion virtually all my training while in the CMF, and also on joining the Regular Army my basic training, was for limited warfare. First of all, with the Reserve, it was for limited warfare, sort of anywhere, advance to contact, et cetera. But my emphasis, once I joined the Regular Army at my training, was really being reinforcements being sent to the battalions in Korea. At that stage they were in the static defence phase, so it was really working on defences - sandbagging, wiring - and the emphasis was on patrolling, night patrolling, using different techniques, such as box patrolling, et cetera. So really, until I was posted to 2 RAR I had very little knowledge, if any knowledge, of fighting in the jungle environment.

I suppose once you joined 2 RAR on posting you had some impressions of a battalion just back from Korea. What were your initial impressions, the operational state of the unit and, as you can deduce at that time, what was the operational experience of the key warrant officers and NCOs in 2 RAR?

Well, once again, the majority of the senior officers - that would be the company commanders

and company 2ICs - were mostly veterans of the Second World War, including my company sergeant major who I had a great deal of time for - Alan Lawson - and served in the Middle East and New Guinea. But, of course, their operations in New Guinea were quite different to what we eventually performed in Malaya.

I found in the battalion the majority of the people - there were the odd sprinkling of Second World War veterans - but the majority of the troops, almost half the battalion, had served in Korea in this static defence phase that I mentioned earlier. So they were not in the big, long advance in the earlier days of Korea, they were in the static phase of this defence and patrolling activity. So their knowledge of jungle warfare or working in the jungle environment was as limited as mine, so I found the battalion actually at the stage where we had a long way to go and we had to train hard to achieve a standard, I think, before we went on operations.

> So even those that hadn't served in Korea, you were both on a par with the ...

Well, I thought we were all on a par because when we first started going through Canungra; it was a new experience for all of us, coming from the sort of open Korean hills and very little vegetation to this close country environment. So we all had to sort of start to learn navigation instead of map reading.

> At that stage of the game, when you joined 2 RAR, did you or the guys you were serving with have any perceptions of this British Commonwealth Far East Strategic Reserve, did we hear much about it, and also, the Malayan Emergency?

Not really. Remember, at this stage I'd served in the CMF which really, in those days, the CMF and the Regular Army were very divorced, it was nothing like the total force as it is today. We sort of played our part and the Regulars went off and did whatever they were doing; and, of course, all we thought about the Regulars is Korea, no thought of South-East Asia. We knew those who were interested in military background that the French were having a bit of a lacing over there in Indo-China at this stage, but as far as us being committed to a jungle environment on active service, it was never a thought to us. As I said, I don't think we gave it a thought.

> At that stage, I think, you joined the battalion and some of us joined a bit later. No formal announcement had been made about it, it was supposition we might go to Malaya because Korea had finished, but there was no announcement, I think, till quite late in the piece, no formal announcement to 2 RAR.

No, there wasn't, and we were sort of ... of course, the 28th Commonwealth Brigade that we did join because, I think, the Far East Strategic Reserve only came into operation about 1955 or 1954 because up to that stage it was a political thing, and things were not publicised as much as they are today.

> With that sort of background, would you like to give us your feeling on the training that 2 RAR had in Australia for the Strategic Reserve and the Malayan Emergency? It's a bit hard; I think the analysis of that may come a bit later of how relevant it was, but the training that you had in 2 RAR in Australia, considering both local unit training round Enoggera and other areas and, of course, naturally, the training that we went through at JTC - Jungle Training Centre.

Well, personally, in the close environment area of Enoggera, we were very fortunate in those

days that Enoggera camp had a close training area to the camp itself, known as Fraser's Hill, where we could do, say, section and a little bit of platoon work - very limited - but the great advantage there, we had a rifle range. So it was in the camp environment we could virtually do infantry minor tactic training and shooting, which was excellent.

But in that phase, until we went to Canungra, it was very limited training. I think it was mainly on weapon handling and the principles of attack, defence, withdrawal, et cetera. I remember in those days we didn't do any thing that we did later on, like the big advances to contact. Remember in those days that training was virtually conducted by the battalions themselves, there was no functional command. We did what our commanding officer virtually directed we would do. But going to Canungra was a great experience.

You were a section commander at the time then, weren't you?

No, I was still a private.

Still a private soldier in a rifle section?

In a rifle section.

In Bravo Company?

In Bravo Company, and this was our first experience of going to Canungra. Canungra was a new, exciting period in our lives. Our instructors were all extremely professional - even though I don't like that word 'professional', I'd say competent - competent Second World War soldiers of high standing who trained us. And the training was mostly of their experiences, but it was to fight a full-on enemy in a limited environment. But the training was excellent I thought, every day we were learning something different, not only of working in that type of terrain, but of our weaknesses in the battalion that we had to adopt. I think that virtually all of us, except those who'd served maybe in the Second World War and South-West Pacific, it was a completely new ball game to us and a great learning stage for all of us, particularly, I would say, at the junior commander level as a platoon, and at section level. We had to not only be good at map reading, which is so much easier in open country, but we had to start learning to navigate, we had to learn about being a lot more self-reliant because in close country you can't turn around and ask the skipper for something, you are there on your own and the self-reliance started then, saying, we won't be having a lot of supply, we've got to look after ourselves because the echelons would be further away, et cetera. But really, I was then a private soldier and I was more concerned about learning those new skills, but being an ex-NCO on the Reserve, particularly being a sergeant, you are virtually at the same level of learning as a platoon commander. I was looking to all these things, a complete change to what I'd learnt before, and I knew myself I had a bit of a learning curve.

Was there a feeling of mystique or inspiration from the fact that Canungra had been the training camp through which almost all reinforcements of the South-West Pacific area went in World War II, that you were inheriting something from their learning, and so on, and the atmosphere was inspiring?

Well, in a way. Canungra was virtually a legend; going to Canungra was Canungra. Of course, you know, with legends there's a lot of myths and legends and mis-truths. But the training was hard, it was meant to be hard, and we found that in that type of environment there is more self-

reliance on the junior commanders. In much of the other training I'd done we were in quite close contact to the company commander and the company headquarters, but in that type of terrain, particularly at night, you are on your own and you must learn to make the decisions yourself.

> Were there any particular incidents that occurred at Canungra which were either humorous or drastic, or stayed with you for the rest of your life - getting off that water tower into the ... getting the diggers off the water tower ... or getting the platoon commanders off the water tower into the river?

Looking back I think the soldier of that day didn't question like the soldiers maybe today, like during my experience in Vietnam with national service. I don't think questioning is a bad thing, but the soldier of that day more saluted and got on with the job, and I don't think ... there were some who may be frightened of water, but they virtually did it because the rest of us did it and they would do it. I found more harder, really, was maybe the obstacle courses. It was very strenuous because the Army in those days, we didn't have a big physical program of PT, and physical fitness was a sort of - well, how will I put it? - we didn't actually do physical fitness training, it was a sort of personal thing. If you kept yourself fit, or you were fit, you were. When we went to Canungra on these obstacle courses and the actual terrain, it was very, very demanding and I think it was an eye-opener to say, hey, this is Canungra, it is fair dinkum, and what people said about it is true, and this is going to be like here we are going to do a lot of hard yakka when we get across to Malaya.

> Would you say it brought out the old adage that training should be tougher than war itself? Did you get a feeling that this was being pushed at in the training?

I would say very much so. In the military, as we all know, there's the old 'waries', and of course, some of these senior instructors, people like George Wharfe and Benny O'Dowd, they certainly threw in a few 'waries' now and again. Of course, I think that is quite important too in a way because it gives the soldier the actual real history of what can happen and what did happen, if it's not overdone; you don't want to terrify the troops.

> As an aside - and I know that some of the platoon commanders had this feeling - did you feel that the emphasis seemed to be placed on the presentation of colours with inspection of blues, and drill, do you think that detracted from the training for Malaya, either in outlook or the physical time spent on operational training?

I personally don't because I'm a person who likes attention to detail. If a person ... what I liked about having a parade in the mornings, for example, patches of information, but also it's a communication where, say, on a company parade, the soldier can identify the chain of command because he won't always be inspected by his own platoon commander, it may be the company 2IC, the company commander or the CSM, and then the chain of command which you don't see, because they are away in their office or somewhere, are actually there in front of you talking to you. I feel that if a soldier can keep his clothing clean, et cetera, when he's on operations the emphasis is being put to him all the time that one day you'll be responsible for these sort of things on your own bat.

No, I don't; maybe I'm an old traditionalist sort of soldier, but I do believe that that contact was good, things were promulgated, we knew what went on - we didn't get emails, like people do today, and don't read them; we were told, and when you are being told, you have a chance to question. It was a great honour to receive the colours, the first battalion ...

It was the first battalion to receive the colours.

... of the regiment. No, to me that was ... when you look back it was quite an honour to be on a parade receiving the colours from a famous general, Field Marshal Slim. No, I found that was an honour and another thing that I remember of my time in 2nd Battalion.

So in many ways you could say, I suppose, it just provided a lot more depth in building the battalion's morale for service - the other extreme of operations, but the other extreme is still linked back with the combat of the earlier days when troops were lined up in ... formed up in lines, and attacked and advanced in line, and so on, as well as the ceremonial aspect which, as you say, with the great field marshal who was presenting the first colours for the Royal Australian Regiment.

Well, I think I can sort of sum it up and say that in those days - talking about a lot of the NCOs, the junior NCOs and the soldiers - it was a real way of life. In many ways we lived in isolation so all these things were part of our family activities. We expected to do duties, we expected to be mess orderly, we expected to do guards, it was part of life, training duties and, of course, leave. We were closer, I might say, than I've seen the military in the present day.

That's interesting. And ceremonial was so much part of it in those days, less so, perhaps, these days, although you see the Federation Guard, and you see other ceremonials here in Canberra.

Well, it's more so that when you do drill it gets down to the NCOs doing it, and the NCOs are in command, and it makes the NCOs do their job of issuing, well, orders - there's orders in drill - normally the drill would be run under the CSM with the platoon sergeants - so it was the lower echelon of command that were commanding.

That's very important.

Well, they don't do ceremonial guards now, but that's a big thing for a young officer, to go out and do his first guard with everyone looking at him, and he has to give orders, and he has to give crisp commands, and he has to be obeyed. I'm a great believer in the fact that that's all training.

It's interesting getting that perspective because also, from your experience in the Army, apart from your experiences as a private soldier in the battalion at that time, it's interesting to get that overall impression of the part that played in the preparation of 2 RAR for its service. Could you talk a bit about how you found the transit of 2 RAR from Brisbane to Penang on the *Georgic*, and disembarkation, and, when you got to Malaya, just briefly anything on acclimatisation, the sudden shock of being in the tropics - although coming through the tropics you got a feel for the heat and humidity - but the transit?

Another adventure. For most of us, those who hadn't served in Korea or the older people in the Second World War, this was a great adventure for us, we were going to the mysterious East, we were off to Malaya, we'd only heard about these places - travelling on a large liner - well, it was a migrant ship that we used. I think, on board, when I look back, I can't remember a great deal about it, but I think we had the concerts, we had that Crossing of the Line ceremony, it was all

new to us. Remember, many of us were very naive, I suppose, in those days, we weren't worldly. Australia wasn't a worldly country in the fifties, we didn't have the media or things that we have today. Yes, I think it was a great adventure going on board the *Georgic*. Boxing troops we had, we had boxing competitions, yes, I think it was enjoyable. We had other people doing the duties, we weren't doing the dixie bashing, et cetera.

> Living in the bowels of the ship and the saltwater showers were all part of the experience.

Well, many places we went training we had cold showers. I think our expectations weren't all that high in those days. If we had a shower, well, that was good enough.

> Having arrived in Penang could you talk, perhaps, about your recollections of the accommodation at Minden Barracks, how your company was settled in, the standards of accommodation, messing, recreation facilities, barrack duties, and so on? Was it that much different from Australia? The accommodation, I guess, was certainly quite different.

The accommodation was because we moved into Minden Barracks, which was an old - from my memory it was a British artillery camp for the Coastal Artillery people. The British had been at this game for hundreds of years, of living in garrisons. For the size of an artillery regiment it would have been a lot smaller than we were as an infantry battalion. Now, my company didn't go into a barracks environment, we went into tents, and they put up tents. They were comfortable enough - it was hot, but we had a bed, and we had a locker, and there were four to a tent. We adjusted to that. The other companies who were in these barracks, they were like a whole company to a floor - we had similar furnishings, the bed, the locker, et cetera, but there's a whole company in there.

The food; I found that the cooks, on the rations we got ... we didn't really complain about food, food wasn't exotic in those days, but there was plenty of fruit - we had a lot of fruit salads - paw paws, mangos, all these tropical fruits - I think the meat ration could have been a bit better because the Brits aren't great meat eaters, or they can't afford it. But generally speaking, I found no problem. For duties we did guards and security piquets, but generally speaking, it was quite a comfortable life.

The main thing we did when we got there, we changed over completely; we went up in KDs - khaki drill - and we didn't take our weapons, so once we arrived in country we adopted really the British uniform. I'd particularly like to mention the bush hat. What everyone thinks is real Australian, the bush hat we adopted, which went right through to the Vietnam era and is still being worn, was a British hat. We went in the British greens, the British jungle boots, and then we were equipped with British weapons - well, weapons we had, we had our Owen guns, we had the Bren gun, which we all knew; we went onto the short Lee Enfield rifle, the Number 5 Jungle Carbine. The platoon commanders, if I remember rightly, we only had one carbine, that was the 30 calibre carbine which the platoon commander carried. But we still had our Owen guns. Also we were issued with shotguns for the scouts; I think it was one shotgun. But there was a hotchpotch of weapons.

For ammunition we had 9 millimetre, we had .303, we had 30 calibre, we had shotguns - oh, 9 millimetre for the pistols - so it was a very hotchpotch of weapons. But we'd trained on a .303, and we'd trained on a Bren gun, and the other ones weren't hard to adapt to - a shotgun is pretty

easy - and I think mostly the platoon commanders carried the carbine. They had the option of a carbine or an Owen gun, but I think a lot of them carried the carbine.

The main thing we did when we arrived, we had to get acclimatised, so there was a lot of ... As I said before, we didn't go a great deal of PT back in Australia, but we started to do runs and that was really all the PT we did to acclimatise us. But, of course, we'd do the runs, and then in those days soldiers did drink quite a bit of beer and we were then introduced to the NAAFI, the Navy, Army and Air Force Institute, which is the canteen. There was a great supply of Tiger beer, or Anchor beer, so the soldiers were quite happy, they had their canteen, they did their training. And, as I said, it was a real family environment.

As I recall, there was a swimming pool also, just behind the guardroom at Minden Barracks. Did you make much use of that?

Yes, the swimming pool. I was a fairly keen swimmer, I used to play water polo, so the pool was great.

That was big enough for water polo, was it?

Er ...

I can't remember.

I don't think we ever played games there, but I was on the water polo team and we used to play in town. But, of course, we used to go as troops. We'd play at the swimming pool in town, which was the sort of colonial ... In those days they didn't have independence, we were quite up a bit the ladder towards the old ‘tuan’ (Malay for ‘sir’), it was sort of we could go to places where the local Malays couldn't go. So we played at the swimming pool there.

That was a European swimming club, was it?

Yes, yes.

Right on the water's edge?

Yes.

That's where the swimming carnivals were held, I suppose.

Yes, all those things. So we were sort of ... we did a lot of these things as well, but that was sort of later on, not just after we arrived. But there was a lot of this sort of activity went on between our training - we had athletic carnivals, swimming carnivals. I know I might be getting a bit ahead, but later on we were there for the Independence - Merdeka - and I was on the guard for that. I also had the opportunity to do a lot of courses in Malaya, I was able to do a parachute course, I did an air photo interpretation course, and also we did the first C-in-C's (commanders-in-chief) guard, this was done at the command of the Chief of Staff of Far East troops, the whole of the British Army; we did that in Singapore. So there were a lot of activities that you did besides you operational things, but I'm sure we'll cover operations later.

I think we've covered, as you said, the clothing, equipment, and the weapons issued in

> Malaya, and the comparisons. The organisation of your rifle section; at what stage were you promoted Corporal? If you could talk about your rifle section when you were promoted Corporal.

When I started off I was a Bren gunner, then a forward scout, but I was promoted Lance Corporal Section 2IC in December of that year. So we'd only been in Malaya a couple of months and I was promoted Lance Corporal, and the next year I was promoted Corporal, so virtually most of my time I was either acting section 2IC or a section commander, and the majority of time as a section commander.

I found the organisation was virtually the same as we used in Australia. Unlike Vietnam we didn't have the casualty rate that we had in Vietnam, therefore our sections were normally at a reasonably high level. We could operate with our two scouts, section commander, machine gun group, or Bren gun group, and our rifle group under the section 2IC. If I remember rightly, we always had at least eight in the bush - I don't know if that's your memory of this - whereas in Vietnam we were down to six, with casualties and replacements. So normally we had a fair sized section to operate all the time.

> And did you become Section Commander in the section you served in all the way through?

Yes. I stayed in B Company and I took over the section that I was a lance corporal in. I knew the fellows. Now, in that section there was a Second World War soldier, three of the group had served during the Korean War - actually the Battle of the Hook, et cetera, with 2 RAR - and one chap who'd served later on. So there were only about three of us who hadn't had operational service. But in those days it didn't seem to matter that much that people had served overseas, whether in the Second World War or in Korea. If you were prepared to take on the duties of the section commander, and the duties were really getting those people from point A to point B in the jungle without getting them lost. If we had a contact I think they all knew the drills and things and we'd get on with that, and your leadership skills would have to come in there. I think if you were prepared to take that responsibility of looking after them, and navigating, they were prepared to let the younger people have a go. I think that was the type of army it was then. If you showed potential you were virtually given the opportunity to take it.

> Were there any interesting personalities, or any rough diamonds who were hard to handle? Your skills, I guess, you would have to apply differently for every soldier in your section, wouldn't you?

I think people - obviously you've had a lot of people talk about leadership and I found that I always treated, in leadership, people as I'd like to be treated myself. Everyone's got their good points, their bad points, they've got their failings, and they've got their strengths, but people who haven't been in the military don't understand that discipline is not a yelling scream at the majority of people, it's dealing with the individual and the group when you need to. Some of the bad guys were actually bloody good guys, but they all had their strengths and weaknesses.

The only time I ever had problems, a reinforcement came along, he'd served in 3 RAR in Korea - and one of the things in Malaya, on the movement, particularly when you are off in platoon and sections on your own, was quietness. We did operate very quietly in our movement, and when we'd stop there was no sort of loud talking, et cetera. Of course, this chap said, all this bull you go on with here, we'd never done that in 3 RAR in Korea. I just said, 'Look, keep quiet

Smithy, we are not in Korea now, we are in Malaya.' This bloke kept on making a bit of a nuisance of himself and I thought, how will I handle him? So I thought, okay, Smithy, there is the map and compass, now, you take us home, and he fell apart. He could be there, but he couldn't lead, so he just shut up then.

Otherwise, with the other chaps, they accepted me as the section commander and I was their boss, there didn't seem to be any worry. I virtually acted up acting platoon sergeant.

> This was 4 Platoon, wasn't it?

4 Platoon, yes. I had a very good platoon sergeant who helped train me along the way, a fellow called 'Jock' Richardson. I remember, even as a young digger there, he'd sort of go up to me and say, 'Where do you think we are?' and they were constantly training you. And the other person who I had a lot of respect for was my company sergeant major.

> Alan Lawson?

Alan Lawson - 'Big Al' Lawson. He quite often used to get me to come up and he'd talk to me about things. The training was there, and maybe they saw I had a bit of potential and they helped me develop that. I found it was a great experience.

I think the next great experience to that was later on when I was a company sergeant major. I think those levels are very important - of course, as a sergeant - but those two levels, section commander, is a real learning curve and you are thirsting for knowledge. But I was very fortunate that people helped me obtain a lot of that knowledge, that practical knowledge also.

> It's good to hear you talking about the way your platoon sergeant and your CSM tended to look after you and encourage you, and so on. That's a thing that perhaps sometimes the officers aren't that much aware of.

Well, my CSM gave me a lot of extra tasks. I remember one in particular. We came back and I'd taken a patrol out on food denial that was actually - we talk about food denial later - but it was checking vehicles, logging trucks, out of a place called Lasah. Of course, when I got back he said, 'You've got a chap on CB, you've got to drill him', and I said, 'Oh, sir, you've got three other corporals who are permanently in the camp ...' He said, 'No, I want you to do it.' It was all testing and later on in 2nd Battalion when I was a sergeant, I had a very similar bloke who tested me, gave me a very hard time, Major Rofe - Arthur Rofe - but it was, once again, testing and training, but you don't realise that at the time. When I look back now I much appreciate those people.

> You see the benefit of it.

Yes, you certainly do.

> It also encourages you to adopt, over a period of time, the same sort of approach to people.

Well, you only learn three ways: by doing it yourself, talking to people who have done it, or reading about it. I was very fortunate, I had the two up front so it was good.

I was going to ask you about your initial reactions to the operational environment of the Emergency, bearing in mind that the battalion did a certain amount of training exercises in Penang Island before it was launched onto the mainland. But in the operational environment of the Malayan Emergency, what sort of reflections did you have on the training in Australia, how appropriate did it seem once you were in operations in Malaya, particularly the Jungle Training Centre at Canungra? Was it relevant, was it helpful?

I think the training at Canungra was excellent. As I said earlier about dedicated people who knew what they were about, but they were training us for a limited war, up against, as they did, the Japanese or whoever it may be. Remember, at this time there was all that Domino Theory of the 'Red Peril' overtaking by dominos, coming down through South-East Asia - and one of the prime targets, of course, in those days was Malaya, for the rubber, and tin, et cetera.

When we actually got onto operations the intensity was very heavy, but if we'd had a contact we wouldn't have come up against the same type of enemy. It's sort of similar later in Vietnam between the VC and the NVA. One is the sort of regional troop and the other is the professional army.

Of course, in Malaya these were all people who'd been in the jungle for a long time, they were very experienced in what they did, and they also had new recruits, but they'd been at it for a long time so they knew how to avoid our patrols, and if we did strike them we weren't going to strike a platoon, we may, at the largest, strike a section. Most of the contacts we had were with couriers, with messengers going from point A to point B, was ones or twos.

The intensity of the jungle is overwhelming. People who had not worked in the jungle environment don't understand the pressure of it. The day in, day out of patrolling, up and down ridges, it is very demanding and it saps your strength; but mentally, you are still aware that if you have a contact, one bullet can kill one person. So if you have a contact you've got to be alert because it could be one, two, or it could be a section, you could be ambushed. So the mental strain there is the whole time, regardless of the size of the enemy. I think we realised that as junior leaders you had to really be on the ball and look after your people because morale could be a factor, not so much the first year, but maybe the second year. We weren't getting that many contacts and it was just - how will I put it? - it was just bloody hard yacka, up and down those hills in Malaya, particularly on the border. If people have not experienced it, to get into the jungle areas where we had to operate, you've got to get through the elephant grass and the lalang, and the heat in those is immense. Even though we weren't an army who did a lot of physical training, I think our army then, the soldiers, had a lot of mental stamina and a lot of guts. They were a pretty rough old group who'd sort of let their hair down when they get into town, but you get them in the bush, they weren't quitters - they weren't quitters, and they would carry their gear and do their job, and not bitch or complain. No, they were great fellows to work with.

As you say, getting through that lalang, getting into the jungle areas, you are carrying at least four days' rations, rations plus water on your back to get in there.

See, that's another myth. People think in the jungle that you've got plenty of water. The water is down in the creek lines and you are up on the ridge lines.

You'd send the water parties down.

You'd send the water parties down. So water is a priority the whole time. We didn't, in those days, the water bottles that they have today. But with that patrolling the weight is there, but we found that the communist terrorists, they improvised. Instead of having the heavy ponchos they had plastic, to get off the ground. So what we did, we started to use a bit of plastic. The other thing we started to do was, when we were on long-range operations, we'd have parachute drops. Now, the parachutes had to be accounted for and carried back, which is more weight, and be accounted for. But it's strange that on one patrol one parachute was up a tree and we had to destroy it with a flare. What actually happened, we cannibalised that and made sleeping bags out of the silk. A lot of this stuff happened. We also, to get off the ground, used li-los and things. We sort of adopted what our enemy was doing, their equipment. We needed to cut down on weight, and when I look at the Army today weight is still a problem, they are carrying too much weight, and you must cut that weight down. The important things to carry on operations is water and ammunition - of course, rations you've got to eat. Weight was always a problem, but those parachutes helped a little bit. But we were always looking at ways to cut down, and many of those things that we did then, later on, say, in the sixties, developed into different types of equipment to lessen the weight. It's always load-carrying that is the worry for any soldier; anyone who moves with everything on his back, load-carrying is a problem.

> In this context of operations, and thinking of the training at Canungra, and the training that some people had got initially at Kota Tinggi for those that did the early courses, there was a difference in the emphasis of engaging targets, either from the hip or from the shoulder. At Canungra, as I recall, the teaching there was to give a quick burst of fire from, say, an Owen gun from the hip, or a Bren gun from the hip; in Malaya, the Far East Training Centre was teaching the aimed shot. Do you have any recollections of these teachings and the conflicts?

There was a conflict virtually of doctrine. We (were) trained by the people who fought in New Guinea and the South-West Pacific, and they fired from the hip; so our initial training was firing from the hip. Now, our battalion did not go through Kota Tinggi or the British FARELF Jungle School. 3 RAR after us did, and the other battalions, which, in a way, would have been better because it would have given us more of an idea of the type of operation we'd be doing, the actual conducting of the operation. The Brits had the thing about saving ammunition, naturally, so aimed shots are better than shots from the hip, which is sort of a wild shot. But when you get into contact, if you've got an Owen gun slung on your shoulder, or you've got a Bren gun, you will fire from the hip, you are not going to get it off there and get it up. By the time you do that, a fleeting target in jungle, you'll see the target, or the enemy, whoever it may be, for maybe one or two seconds, and you'd better get a shot away. At least it will frighten him, it may hit him, but trying to get an aimed shot - okay, we all realise an aimed shot is better, but because of the terrain and the limited time the enemy was available for you to see and take an aimed shot on him, I think we just ignored that and we just got on. If we had a contact we fired the best way possible.

> Did you have a contact?

No, we didn't have one, but our company had a couple. One was very close to us. As I say, two years of patrolling and then having a contact. We came across camps and things, but there was no-one in them, it was a little bit soul destroying. But still, that's what we were doing.

I might bring this out now. Later on, when I read about Malaya, we didn't realise what a great

job we were doing because by our constant patrolling, and saturating the area, the CTs couldn't get into their supply bases, which were the new villages or wherever - the rubber tappers, or the tin miners - and by our saturating patrolling, even though we didn't see them, I'm sure they saw us and we kept them out of the area. When we moved after one of our first major operations, which was very intensive, there were so many CTs who surrendered. So we, as the soldiers, didn't realise, with our frustration not having contacts, but we didn't realise that we were achieving the aim. We weren't killing the CT in the contacts, but he was surrendering, so we were achieving our goal, but we didn't know it. So I really think the passage of information got down to the soldier, in a lot of ways, in that type of operation, I do feel that we could have been more informed of how ... See, we didn't understand the committees that were formed, we didn't understand the structure of how the things operated. I think the soldier never really questioned, we didn't question it - and I don't like using that word - it would have been nice to have known how that situation worked, with the committees. We sort of saw it as a military operation, but really it was a government operation with miliary and police as the doers; but we saw it ourselves as a military operation and that wasn't quite what it was all about. We were there to assist the civilian authority to eliminate this communist threat to government.

> The District War Executive Committee Level, to them, the number of surrenders is quite significant, but that didn't get down. I think perhaps at the intelligence officer level in battalions, and he would have been on, say, the District Committee with the CO - Dave Allen, the IO, would probably have appreciated the value of the surrenders, but when it got down to the platoons that never came down.

Well, it didn't, and in a way I feel that was a bit of a failing of our commander.

> Yes, it should have been passed on because that's still success, and even more successful than one body on the track is not as successful as fifteen surrenders, or ten surrenders.

That's right because they come in - if you kill somebody he can't talk, and if you capture him, somebody surrenders, if he surrenders he is giving up, therefore he'll give up information. No, we didn't get that and when I look back at it now I think that was one of our failings.

> That's a very interesting comment, Wal, I'm glad you made that one.
>
> Talking of the enemy, I wonder if you could give us an outline of the nature of the communist terrorist enemy that we anticipated bumping into. You've mentioned section and platoon levels about the highest. How well were you and your section briefed on communist terrorist tactics, where there bases were to be found, supply systems? I guess you were fairly well briefed on that, weren't you?

Yes. I think that we knew the whole system and we came across their camps so many times, but this also led to very hard patrolling, very demanding patrolling, what, I presume, people call 'cross graining'. Now, it's a lot easier, when you are moving in any type of terrain, to go up a spur line to the ridge line, but they are not going to camp on those, they are going to be down in those creek lines. They were normally at the junction of a spur so that if we did come down that spur they could go different ways. So to find those camps, normally our operations - there were two types of operation ...

Do you want me to go into this?

Go ahead.

There were two types of operations that we got involved in. One was the soldierly operation with the soldiers, that's the patrolling, to find him, have a contact and destroy him. That's what the soldiers, the diggers, think about it. Now, to do that we normally have company bases (in areas) similar to what they call Aos (area of operations) today. The company would set up there. The company commander and his tactical group virtually didn't go on operations into the jungle to find the CTs. We'd be given areas, the platoon commanders, and the platoon areas we'd move to, and normally then, when we'd get into a platoon base, the platoon commander would work out his patrolling and we'd go out either in a fan patrol, which is sort of like a fan, or, if we had very good intelligence that we knew a camp was there, we'd do this 'cross graining' which is virtually going on a bearing, taking a slight bearing north or south, again going on a back bearing, and you sort of are going across, up a little, back, up, and you are going up and down, because if you got that really good information the camp would be there. The other one was fan patrolling which, once again, did a little bit of cross graining, or otherwise we'd be given spur lines to check out ourselves.

Now, normally the sections would go out on those. There would be a small group left with the platoon commander as a sort of reserve. There would be the platoon commander, the platoon sergeant, the Sigs, and maybe each section might drop off if we had a couple of soldiers as well as protection in that little group. But also, they were a sort of reserve; if we had a contact they could have a little group. Either the platoon commander would go out or the platoon sergeant, or maybe they would go on one of the patrols. In our situation it was normally the platoon commander and platoon sergeant would stay behind, if we got into some problem they would come forward. That was the type of operation we did out there.

But we knew where to find them, we knew the enemy. What they needed, like we were talking about earlier, is water. Now, they are not going to camp on the top of a ridge line when the water is down below because they needed water to cook, they needed water to wash, so you know they'd be near water somewhere. So normally if we did get onto ridge lines, then we'd go down spur lines and drop off and follow them down the creek lines. So I think virtually we knew where their camps would be.

The other area we patrolled a lot was sort of on the fringes of the rubber plantations. The idea there was to stop the communication of the CT getting in to the rubber tappers to talk to them, or getting into those new villages, not only to get information, but to pick up food supplies, medicines, or whatever - maybe plastic to make their tents with.

So our type of operations was, one was to get them in their camp and destroy them, and the other one was to deny them access to the population for resupply and also for intelligence. Part of that resupply could be money or medicines. But the other part of that was a real demanding thing, was this food denial, was constantly ambushing the rubber plantations at night-time. The soldiers in Malaya did a lot of ambushing.

This is on a platoon basis?

Well, it normally was on a platoon. It could be a linear ambush where you lay out, or it could be a sort of area ambush, a lot of that. So they were the sort of operational things where we could actually contact the enemy and kill him if that was the situation.

The other side which the soldiers tended not to like doing was food denial. Now, food denial had a number of things - I think I mentioned one earlier about stopping lorries, timber getters, and searching their trucks. The main food denial we did, we'd put groups into villages, these new villages which were formed to get all the squatters in, and as the rubber tappers would come out in the morning they'd be controlled at a gate - these villages would be surrounded by fences - they'd have a gate where these police would be - these were the state police. They would open the gate and we would actually check the rubber tappers who came out, check their bikes, check whatever they had there, to see that they had no food or stuff. The soldiers did not like doing this very much.

Now, a lot of the rubber tappers were females. Now, we couldn't search them, but we could search their bikes. This was a failing we saw even in our day; we'd have maybe one female, and she was normally a Malay, to search these Chinese rubber tappers. Now, the majority of them, say sixty per cent, were Chinese so how is she going to search ... A lot of the things we did, we knew it was, I suppose, working, but it was tedious and we didn't like doing it, and in many cases, like the case I've just mentioned about the female there, it was bloody useless. If you are going to send anything out, you are going to send it out with the females. The digger is not stupid. Sometimes we used to wonder what people are thinking. That's a point that came out to us, but we didn't like doing that, and I have never liked people getting involved with too much peacekeeping type of things, in the earlier days, because of my experience in Malaya. The soldiers thought it was not what they were trained to do, they were trained to seek out and contact the enemy.

And of course, the other thing is, we are in another person's country, searching people, and we are Europeans who live in another country, and myself, I thought it was a bit demeaning. It was what we had to do, but when you look at it, you can understand how they felt. And a lot of our soldiers were pretty rough characters, and I don't think they would have liked some Asian searching them in their own country. So it's a point there that I bring out that other people may not mention, that the soldiers did feel a bit indignant about doing that, but they did it.

> In talking through that you covered very well one of the other topics about patrolling and food denial, and so on - patrolling the different types of terrain, and so on, food denial in villages and the states. Although you didn't have any contacts, what were the types of incidents you had in terms of picking up camps, tracks and trails, and so on, that type of thing? Were there many of those you could talk about, the experience of them?

To myself, personally, and I think to most of the others, we sort of studied the country, the terrain, and eventually we could work out - and we are talking about moving at patrol pace - we could work out what type of terrain we were in, whether it was secondary jungle, primary jungle, rubber, how far we could move within a certain time. But if we were looking for signs ... These people were no fools, they would use the tracks along a ridge line. If you are going to go somewhere and you want to go fairly fast, you go up a spur line onto a ridge line and move along. But then they would cut out, they would go off that ridge line so if we wanted to find out where they would go down a spur to where their camps were, et cetera, we'd have to get off that main trail. So we would have to really jungle bash, we'd have to decide where those spur lines were running off and then we'd have to start moving perhaps twenty metres in, off that track, on either side, to see if we could pick up their trail leading down, wherever it was. But generally speaking, to find them, it was just this fan patrolling and cross graining.

The other thing is, we never really got very much intelligence. There was a Police Field Force

which we saw a few times, and, of course, we all heard about this Special Branch of the Malayan police. I'm sure they used to get a lot of successes. Now, I'm sure we were doing all this jungle bashing while they were getting all the credit with the easy tasks because I'm sure a platoon, if we could identify somebody who was at a location point, or a pick-up point, we could ambush that and I'm sure we could have got those results.

But I don't remember us ever getting any real hot information. The only time I do remember, because my platoon commander commanded the group - (the operation) was called Eagle Strike, or something like that - and it was while we were up in the Kroh area some CT surrendered and said there was a major camp across the border in Thailand, about seventy CTs. Throughout the battalion - Digger Campbell was the officer at the time - they formed a special platoon to go in there and knock out this camp, but by the time they got there it was deserted. But that was the only time I remember ... oh, there may be a another couple of times where our company found - what would you call it? - a workshop in Perak, that was Special Branch information, but that was a major operation which other battalions - I remember the Royal Scots Fusiliers were involved and we came across them - that's the other thing, you had to be careful if you ran into other people. Mainly we just jungle bashed.

Was there much risk of contact with friendly forces within your own platoon and so on?

We had come across what they call the Police Special Force.

Police Field Force.

Police Field Force - didn't even know they were in the area and, of course, most of them were Malays, there might have been the odd sprinkling of Chinese, but they could have been the CT for all we knew. If it hadn't been for our good control we could have quite easily had a shoot up with them. But we didn't know they were in our AO. There was a lot of intelligence which didn't get down to our level. I think a lot of these Special Force units, or Police Special Branch, or Special Force units, did their own thing.

If you think back to Vietnam with its incredible emphasis on AOs and AO boundaries for those very reasons, but it was quite frightening in Malaya when you compare Vietnam with Malaya and think of the lack of control on boundaries and people crossing into other people's areas.

Well, if that had been Vietnam they would have been shot up. Once again, I must emphasise here that the soldiers were a pretty good crew, a bit rough and ready, but they did all this and they didn't really complain very much, they just got on with it. I think we should be very proud of our diggers.

It was a good team.

I think they were a very good team.

Talking of those contacts with friendly forces, we dropped out to you a copy of this Use of Lethal Weapons Regulation identifying the rules of engagement. Did you ever have any problems with identifying people who were coming through, including your own people?

The word is [‘barenti’] - stop - that was our thing. If we saw somebody who was in an area where he shouldn't be we had to challenge him, and the word was stop – ‘barenti’ - I still remember ‘barenti’. But by the time you yell out ‘barenti’, he's gone, but once again, that needed good fire control. There were some things there which, when you look at them today, were pretty gruesome because if you did have a contact - and the battalion did and people were killed - the police would put those bodies outside the police station as a deterrent, which they still do today ... You think it might happen in a third world country somewhere, but for us to be involved in these bodies under sort of British jurisdiction, bodies lying outside a police station, it's sort of like the days of Ned Kelly being put outside the police station. They really got the message down to the people; if you do supply these people and you are caught out, and you are in the wrong place and the wrong time, this could be you.

I think a lot of people don't know - it wasn't so much in our time because we were in a different phase in the Emergency - but there were a lot of people killed in that Emergency, on both sides, a lot of civilians, security forces, and a lot of CT. I think they told us, at our stage when we were there, there were still about 500 in the Perak-Kedah area which is, when you think of it, quite a few people - it's a few platoons. There was still quite a bit of activity, but in our effort there, as I said, we were informed that there were a lot of surrenders when I read about it later on, and that was a different phase. There was the sort of deep penetration phase in the jungle, then there was the food denial phase, then there was saturation patrolling.

> You might remember, in terms of the size of the enemy force, you might remember in Bravo Company's area, there was an ambush on the [Kruder] Estate where there was about a platoon strength, thirty CT, led by a Tamil, who was supposed only to be killed by a silver bullet. They apparently did a very well drilled ambush on the assistant estate manager who had an escort, I think, of about six or seven Malay police - I think about five or six Malays were killed - and the platoon, having done its ambush as a CT platoon, formed up on a whistle blast, were dispersed in the right directions, and went off. And this is where - I think it was Alec Piper's 5 Platoon - did a follow up on them. They were quite capable of doing that sort of action.

Oh, yes. Well, I remember when I was on stand-by, if something like that happened there'd be a reaction platoon. I remember that one because I was in B Company at the time. They followed that group up and they crossed the [Sungei Plus]. It sounds a sort of 'Boys Own Annual' thing, but there was a sort of barge that they were going across on. An RAF - I don't think it was RAF, he might have been the British ...

> Army Air Corps.

Army Air Corps - sighted these people crossing and the only weapon he had was a Very pistol, and he was firing at them with a Very pistol. They went into the water, or whatever they did, but they got away. But that patrol was followed up later on and another chap who became well-known in Vietnam as the commander of D Company - 6 RAR, Harry Smith - was a lieutenant then - and his platoon, they had contact, and obviously one of these chaps was dying in a cave and they found him. But he'd been wounded by 5 Platoon obviously. That was a bit of a comical incident - well, it sounds comical, but it isn't really. But that could have been very nasty that incident - it was fairly nasty.

> It shows you the size of force they were prepared to put in, not against us, but against a lower level of military and tactical skill.

Well, the other one they did put in against us was the ambush on the pipeline. That showed that if they were determined to do something they had the ability to do it. They were prepared in that to fight in the ambush position.

They were dug in.

Yes. Then they withdrew tactically. They were well trained and they knew the terrain. When you look at it, we reacted with our counter ambush drills, but we really lost that battle, we were the ones who were hurt.

Had more casualties than they had.

They were still there and they were prepared to fight, so during our period there were some reasonably nasty contacts.

A question without notice, going back to your rifle section's operations. Within the platoon, the platoon normally had one rifle section leading with the two scouts and the section commander, and so on, the normal military deployment, lead section, then platoon commander with perhaps his radio operator, then the two remaining sections, the thing in my platoon, the platoon sergeant brought up the rear.

Tail-end Charlie.

Tail-end Charlie, yes. That was the convention you would have followed?

That was normally the pattern we used. Your section would lead, your section commander would come behind your scouts, and very close behind you then would be the platoon commander and his radio operator. So the platoon commanders actually were always well up to the front, if you were moving, not when we got into these patrol bases, but point A to point B.

Air resupply. I think you and Bravo Company would have had quite a bit of experience of air resupply, and you mentioned parachutes being hung up. Any interesting incidents about that, like bottles of rum being caught up the tree and being smashed against the tree?

No. That's interesting, you hear a lot about this rum. I don't know whether it was up to the discretion of the company commanders whether rum was issued to his company, but B Company, I don't remember, on many occasion getting rum.

Not on air resupply?

Only rarely did we have rum in our company. I remember another company had a few incidents about rum, but our company ... yes, we had it now and again, but not always. I don't know - see, there's another thing, I don't know whether it was at the discretion of the company commanders.

Or the platoon commander might have requested it on air drop.

Yes.

> In the platoon I had - 6 Platoon - we invariably got - I don't recall making a special point of it - but there always seemed to be - and I think it followed on from my predecessor and Alan Bulow, the platoon sergeant - there was always a bottle of Ghurkha rum arrived in the air drop. I found it was good for morale.

Jimmy John.

> Yes. But it was good for the diggers because wet and cold, based up at night, when they got into their dry greens out of the wet greens, and you had the sentries on the Bren gun each end along the track, the platoon sergeant would do the rounds and give each bloke a tot of rum out of his water bottle cap. It would help the guys sleep.

Maybe 'Jock' Richardson kept ours. We did have it. See, you talk about the noise we kept down, but night-time, I don't think the CTs moved at night very much any rate. But people who have not been in jungle terrain don't understand how cold it can get at night. We were very well - I'll get onto a bit of the health business here if I may.

I think, for the amount of terrain and work we did, our health was pretty good because we used to insist that at night you would change out of your wet clothes, which you'd been in all day - if it hadn't been raining they were just soaked with sweat - you'd change out of your jungle boots - and we carried hockey boots - and you had a dry pair of socks and you'd make sure you slept dry. But you didn't need much rocking to fall asleep because you were pretty exhausted, but we did make sure we slept dry. And I'll tell you, it was quite tortuous getting up in the morning and putting on those wet clothes.

> I was going to say, that is the worst experience of Malaya, putting those wet greens on, and the cold of the jungle, that was the most shattering experience that I had.

This is something that you also saw, David, in Vietnam. I don't remember us doing that; we might have changed our socks, but I don't remember changing our greens all that much. But in Malaya it was SOP and we did it. As you said, it was tortuous.

> We were so much better for it, those dry greens, it was like putting nice pyjamas on.

Well, we had very little sickness. We did get jungle sores - I got jungle sores myself but that was because of those canvas boots. I think, when we look back in retrospect - once again, I shouldn't be saying that - but a leather boot would have been better - our feet were really spongy.

> They were soaked all the time, weren't they?

Yes. We needed to dry them out. Of course, there's all the leeches and all the other bits and pieces - and mice. Another thing in the jungle, people who haven't been in it don't realise how noisy it gets at night. Your first time in the jungle on operations, the noise, just at last light, is incredible - animals moving to the water, or just settling down for the night, and fireflies. When you first go into it, for a young soldier, it can be quite frightening.

> Well, the very first - must have been one of the earliest nights I'd been out on patrol, but up on the Thai border - there were some monkeys up there which have a huge, bulbous throat effect, which when they were calling out at night just made this hooting, honking noise, and it was absolutely frightening. It was a bright moonlit night, I hear these

monkeys hooting and honking right along the border, apart from all the other noises you've just mentioned. It was quite eerie - frightening.

Then there's all the creepy-crawlies. The 'chomper' ants that would eat through your ponchos.

You mention monkeys; monkeys are quite a strange animal. People may think monkeys are graceful in swinging from tree to tree, but if you are moving along and everything is completely quiet - and we used to move extremely quietly - and you'd come across some monkeys. The monkeys would start to move, and the noise, the screeching of them, and they'd swing from tree to tree, and they miss branches and fall. They are certainly noisy. But we did come across, in Malaya - I don't know now, but a lot of the jungle has been destroyed - but there was a lot of wildlife - elephants, tigers - I've seen a tiger in the bush, that was later on on my second tour there, but I have seen elephants. It's quite incredible.

Also the encountering a hornet's nest. The leading scout bumps a hornet's nest, then the whole platoon scatters as these hornets are trying to get at you. The only technique, I gather, was to head for the thickest bush.

Well, that's interesting too that the average soldier is very brave, they'll fight, and they might fight a tiger or elephant, but a snake or ants, they'll just get off the track and give all caution away. It's strange how little things frighten people.

On patrolling, on operations with your section, from the platoon point of view, how did you find the communications set-up. The platoon would be working back the company, the company base was static with, I guess, a 62 set, and the platoon would be working with a 510. How did you find the communications?

Communications were always difficult till we went on to Morse; Morse normally got through. When we first arrived there the radios we had were British radios. I can't remember the number or what they were called, but they were extremely heavy, terribly heavy, and not very effective. Till we went on the 510s - and the 510s had Morse - Morse seemed to be the only way to get through. So that's interesting, and people don't realise how important Morse was, and really, Morse was a fairly old technology.

It was a great bonus to the 510, and of course, the company could talk on voice, company on the 62 set would talk on voice to the platoon sig, but the sig had no problem understanding him, putting it down, but then he could tap out at his own speed in Morse code back to company.

Yes. What you said there, you've described it well.

What about attached and detached personnel? I think the battalions had extra shotguns required on vehicles, blokes volunteering to go as dog handlers, and so on. The platoons, as you say, sometimes sections would be down to, say, eight men, so a few blokes you'd lose from that point of view, and perhaps you experienced that, but also people attached to the platoon, like Iban trackers or junior civil liaison officers, and so on - and linguists. Were there many people lost and gained?

We lost a few. I think the biggest platoon in Malaya was the Transport Platoon because on these road convoys they had to man, through the battalion's resources, scout cars, the little Ferrets,

also they had to have 'shotguns'. So there was a commitment from the rifle companies.

When you say 'shotguns', for the listener's understanding ...

'Shotgun' as a person, to sit, in the terminology like the old stagecoach, sitting 'shotgun' with the driver. So if there were truck convoys there were 'shotguns' and also these Ferret scout car people. So yes, there was that commitment.

The other thing that we did have attached to us, in our early stages we had Ibans who were really very primitive, we had the real original ones in their own sort of native dress, not in a military uniform as such. I remember one of them - I don't know if they were all that effective because I remember one, they had a bag of bones, and he rattled all these bones and threw it on the ground, and said, 'They went that way', and we virtually could follow the track and they went that way. I think till they got these people and started training them at Kota Tinggi into the Iban Platoon. And then, I think, under Harry Smith we got a group of Ibans and he was in charge of them for a while, but we didn't get this more trained group till later on. I think by that stage we'd had enough experience in the jungle to be able to follow a track ourselves.

Some of the later Ibans, I gather, were, in fact, taxi drivers in Jesselton, or somewhere like that.

Yes, well, that's the point.

They weren't skilled in the jungle anyway.

That's right. Unless they lived in the jungle I think we had more experience, and that's one thing that came out in our posting there. For the period we were there we did a lot of jungle bashing and we were not only proficient in navigation and a reasonable degree of tracking, but we could live in the jungle, we knew how to survive. I think that's where the section commanders came in, they were very competent, and the platoon commanders, of looking after their people in the field for an extended period, without any resupply, because even with medical evacuation, normally you had to walk your people out if they were crook, there was no helicopter - very little helicopter support in Malaya.

So you wouldn't have any casevacs from contacts, but, as you say, if a medevac is going out he has to be escorted by at least two other fellows.

Yes.

At least two, perhaps even a carrying party has to take a rifle section to take the fellow out.

So yes, it was a problem. If somebody did get ill you were far better to make sure he didn't go out in the first place.

You mentioned a number of aspects of operations in the jungle. Did you ever require location by light aircraft, the Austers coming over to find where you were?

No.

> What about the resupply aircraft, the Dakotas or Beverleys, that might have done supply drops? Did you have much experience of that? The platoon would do that really.

We had a number of times. You used to carry a marker balloon and this marker balloon, you'd just find an area and put it up. Normally a drop to a platoon was about three parachutes. It was only on a number of occasions we did that. That was a fairly easy procedure anyway. Anyway, these procedures you worked out yourself anyway; once you'd got the balloon up he could see where you were. But once again, Malaya, like most armies, communications tended to be a bit of a problem. You talk to younger soldiers today, they don't understand how we could operate as sections without having a radio. When you explain to them that even the platoon had difficulty getting back, having communications ... There was more and more reliance - the more communication the better, obviously, communication is, so it puts more reliance onto people to make your own decisions.

> You were talking about when you are patrolling, the health of the soldier. In terms of his health, how did you find the food, the ration packs? Did the ration packs get broken down, did soldiers select what they wanted to take out, and so on? Was there much of that?

The ration packs varied, we had different types. When we first went there I think it was a horseshoe box, but virtually all of them were a British ration pack as such. Really, with the Brits, they concentrated really - you had two meals, you had one in the morning and one in the evening. Normally the lunch one was a snack, and the snack they put in, people would sort of think it would melt, but it was normally a Mars bar and some [Thai Hong] lollies, locally made, like barley sugar type of thing. Our procedures were, in the morning, we'd move from where we based over camp, we wouldn't eat in our base, we'd move on, then we'd have breakfast. We'd patrol all day and then have this snack, this Mars bar or these lollies; and then in the evening we'd try to harbour up about four o'clock so that we could cook a good meal. Now, we soon learnt that to supplement your ration you've got to cook - you must cook your food. We were never like the Americans, Americans eat cold tucker out of ... cold tack, they think it's tough, but you must try to cook it. We soon learnt to cook rice and use the curry powder. Many of the diggers used to bring the odd onion or potato, or something, and add to their food.

But once again, it was the problem of carrying. We only had the '44 pack, which is a very small pack, and you couldn't carry a lot of extra. But unlike maybe other soldiers that tended to carry what they call now 'jack rations', bits of this and that, we didn't have 'jack rations'. I don't think we could obtain them anyway because NAAFI didn't sell them, and at the camps we weren't near any shops to buy anything. You could normally get some potatoes or onion curry powder off our own cooks. But generally speaking, the rations were adequate, we weren't all fat people. No, I think it was and I used to love my evening meal, a big dixie full of curry.

> A big brew of tea, and block of chocolate if you wanted it, and some raisins. I think it was so good for morale that, as you say, the hot food - if it was just cold - but you always looked forward to that evening meal after a hard day. You could really smell the food. We would warn the CT for quite a distance that there are Australians there, but the smell of the cooking food, the curry and that sort of stuff, it was just like being home.

And the other thing in those days, soldiers drank tea. I'm a tea drinker, I've never been a coffee drinker. The only trouble, like at night where you'd have the tea, because you've got to have boiling water for tea. Normally with coffee, when it was starting to come in, but it seemed to be

that you don't have to have the boiling water, it could be sort of lukewarm. But we liked our big pot of tea.

But I do remember an incident with these rations. We had General Vaughan, who was Chief of Operations, visit us wherever we were at this stage - it might have been in the early training days. He was a fairly short man, a very experienced officer, I think he'd lost an arm somewhere in the Second World War. Anyway, he was talking to us and I remember, he asked this digger of ours, he said - and it was quite interesting, he asked the question, he replied with the answer himself, and then he sort of raced off without getting an answer, and the digger yelled out to him. He said, 'How do you cook your mid-day meals?' - oh, no, first of all it was, 'How's the grub? Grub good? That's good', then he went, so he'd asked the question. And the digger yelled out, 'How do you cook a bloody Mars bar?' That was an incident there. I like the old Brits, they are sort of very ... their pattern of doing things is not our way.

They are very stuffy in some ways.

But delightful.

You talked a bit about Police Field Force and the Home Guard - you mentioned the villagers - but did you have much dealing with them?

My first incident with the Home Guard was our first operation that we went onto on the mainland - I think it was New Year's Eve, 1956.

1955 was the first one.

1955. And I don't know how well our company commander at the time understood how proficient or the standard of these village policemen. They were sort of a civilian organised police, they weren't actually the police force. Any rate, they were going to lead us through the rubber plantations to the jungle edge, and into the jungle, and whatever. Anyway, away we go and we sort of marched just about all night. The company was stretched out in the jungle, and we were pretty buggered. The section I was with, we were very close to the company headquarters - this was my first time on operations, the big deal. Anyway, we stop there in this jungle and the two commanders were called for, and they all came up - and the company commander. I'm producing notebooks, and pencils, and maps, and a big operation order - 'Gentlemen; we are bloody lost'. So that was the standard of these police leading us in there. Obviously the boss trusted them and there we were. Then it worked out, the section commanders would go and do recce patrols and then we found out where we were. I'll never forget that because the two commanders, they were obviously bright, young lieutenants, and waiting for the company commander with all this Second World War experience, and there it is, we're lost.

At least he was blunt and frank about the whole thing, he didn't try to fudge it.

The other one I remember, I was on one of these rubber plantations. There were two types, there were the new villages which were what the word interred means; the squatters were moved into the new villages which were laid out, but they were also on the rubber tapper lines. We were actually in that camp where there was a little police station, and they were the police we were dealing with there. Normally they had a constable - mostly Malays - he was a senior constable of corporal's rank, he had his wife there with him, and him family, and he had about six

constables. So they had their little police station there. I had quite a bit to do because our section, we were put in there for, I think, about ten days. So I dealt with him and we'd do the food denial on the gate, so we worked very closely with him. But we never sort of had anything to do with Special Forces, or Special Branch, or anything, it was just the local constabulary virtually.

> Getting well away from operations, do you remember any distinctive training periods, say, conventional training periods, during the time you were in Malaya?

I know we were pulled out twice to get back to our limited war training. We were supposed to be there as part of 28th Commonwealth Brigade and the Strategic Reserve, South-East Asia. I think really on that it was mostly Support Company got more out of that because they would go down to the large ranges and use their weapons that they didn't use during the Emergency. You know, the mortars would fire, mortars and machine guns were set, but for the rifle companies I don't really remember us doing a great deal of limited warfare training. If we did do it, I can't remember it really. But I think mainly in our time it was support company honing up their skills on their weapons. You'd remember yourself.

> I left, a few of us came home a bit earlier to exchange with some 3 RAR officers. The only thing I've got a recollection of what people were talking about was right toward the end of the battalion's tour, about the last month, there may have been some conventional war training then. But as you say, the rifle platoons were doing the sort of operations they'd be doing normally against a conventional enemy anyway.

Yes. It would just be a different type of orders for a different ... See, the CT thing was, more or less, what we were being taught at Canungra, and that was limited war.

> That's right.

Whereas the British system was, once you came across a camp, was just to attack. But we had our contact drill so really, the rifle companies, I don't think - unless we did an advance to contact and we did a definite platoon attack, or company attack - I can't remember doing that. Whether we did or not, well ... I might have been away when we did it because that's when we came back in.

> On the subject of discipline, could you talk about your recollections of whether you did anything with leave, out-of-bounds areas, malaria, alcohol? - malarial precautions, of course.

Well, malaria precautions, I think, were pretty good - the paludrine tablet. By taking a tablet daily it becomes a routine, and I think it was virtually well supervised by both the platoon sergeant, and the platoon commander and section commanders. The tablet was given to the digger and he'd swallow it in front of them, or stick it under their tongue, or whatever. I think the digger just took it, it was part of the deal. I don't think there was any worry about people worrying that they would become sterile, or all these things like that. I don't remember us really getting much malaria, except when they went up into the Alor Setar area, it was a different area. Most of our operations were in Kedah and Perak, mostly in Perak which is more in the central area. Alor Setar is sort of further up on the west coast, near Langkawi, around that area. It seemed to be a different strain of malaria there, and there were some cases there. But if you got malaria it was a self-inflicted wound, which I think was a bit wrong because people can take

precautions and get things.

I don't remember scrub typhus as much. Scrub typhus I now hear is pretty bad in East Timor. We had to do anti-miting, which, I think, was a big of lip service. Jungle sores and that type of thing were more (of a problem); I think we got more infection from rashes and things than from anything else. Of course, there was all the cases of VD; people could take precautions, or couldn't. There were quite a few people had VD. I don't know, I think they just got a needle, or a couple of needles, and things were pretty right. I don't think in that period that the medical was a great problem; I don't know if you remember it.

> Only just the odd occasion where one of the diggers would have to go back for a check up at BMH (British Military Hospital) Kamunting, with the VD that he had, so he couldn't go on the patrols. Another guy had indications on a patrol that he'd caught it and his morale was pretty low. For the sake of two days, I was going to send him out with an escort of two other blokes. It cut the platoon down a bit.

No, I don't remember that.

The other thing about leave is, there was a bit of an ill feeling because we had - it was the first time we took married people to Malaya. Married people did go to BCOF, but they were sort of pulled out in about 1952, so when the Korean War sort of started - well, it started early in 1951 - but the people were coming home there - they were still the Occupation Force, 3 RAR - so after that, from, say, 1952 onwards, all the families were pulled out. Malaya was the first time we'd served really on garrison type duties - we did a bit of everything - and we had the families there. There was a bit of ill feeling between the 'singlies' and what we used to call the 'marrieds' - we used to call this the 'passion truck', the 'passion truck' would leave for Penang. It would seem to be that ...

Once again, I don't know exactly because I was in a platoon, but the platoon seemed to be, we were out there doing what we were doing - and I'm not quite sure of what the company headquarters was doing back at these base camps. The 'passion trucks' used to get filled up fairly well. There was this feeling that the 'marrieds' were all deserting and going in for their weekend. But then again, the soldiers of that day, when they went to town they were no angels. It was pretty open, Penang was a major port, and of course, there were a lot of merchant seamen there as well. There were these dance halls in those days, the city lights, and the Piccadilly. It was a great experience for a soldier who hadn't been overseas before. The chaps who'd served in Japan has seen them in Korea and Japan, mainly in Japan, but it's like a big dance hall with a bar, and the girls, you buy tickets to dance with them on the dance floor. Some of them you could make other arrangements (with), but normally they were just dance girls. But it was a different sort of lifestyle. Normally most of us in Australia would go to dances, and we'd sit up one end and the girls would sit up the other, and then you'd say, 'Well, will I go and ask her for a dance?' We'd slip out the back for a quick drink of something to steady our nerves, and go and ask. But there, you'd just have a ticket and looked at the girl, and if you liked her you'd go and dance with her. A lot of people thought a lot of these girls were prostitutes, but they weren't - the odd one was - well, they were, but there were other areas if people wanted that sort of activity. We used to love going down to the old city lights, but the competition there was always the merchant seamen, so there were a few little incidents happen, a couple of brawls and things. One major one we had there. If people liked a bit more spicy life there were quite a few bars there - the 'Green Parrot' and the 'Boston Bar'. People could go there.

I think the soldiers had a pretty good time on leave, generally, but we were put, as the first battalion, there were some very heavy restrictions on us which, I believe, were overkill. We were told that we couldn't ride in trishaws, which was the main means of transport, because they'd take you to an out-of-bounds area, so you weren't allowed to ride in those, which was ridiculous because it was the only means of transport, unless you got a taxi. The other one at night, we had to roll our sleeves down and wear ties. That's quite strange for an Australian who'd never had a tie. The only time we wore ties was with our blues, but we'd only wear them on the odd ceremonial. So yes, the wearing of ties ... They tried to make us look like the British planters, the old planters, because we were the ‘tuans’ - and ridiculous. Blokes were out having a few drinks, the putting a tie on - obviously that caused problems - and rolling your sleeves down - it was almost a stupidity. And, of course, all the out-of-bounds areas used to have a blue circle with a red cross, and of course, that's a temptation - what's down in the out-of-bounds? The restrictions didn't work at any rate, and what that causes then is an over influx of military police, and soldiers who are drinking and military police do not just jell well, it doesn't make a good cake.

But generally speaking, the blokes got into trouble. The discipline in the Army then was pretty much, if you played up, you fronted up, shut up, and took it, and faced the music. It was a disciplinary code, if you got into trouble and you were caught - 'Yes sir, three bags full, sir'. I don't think it was a great drama.

> In fact, I think sometimes - remember the out-of-bounds cards which showed you all the out-of-bounds areas? - if anything it had the influence, 'What's inside that area?'

I think the soldiers knew what was there, and they were curious.

> What do you reckon was the most testing or trying time as a rifle section commander in 2 RAR?

I think virtually the period we were there, I think two years, was maybe too long; on the operational side too long. As I mentioned earlier about non-contacts. It was keeping the motivation there with the soldiers, they were slackening off, that this was what we got paid to do, this is what we do. We weren't having the contacts, unlike Vietnam - every time you went out (there) you had a contact - and I presume in Korea it might have been much the same; I don't think they had that many contacts on their patrols in the later stages. So I think it was good leadership at the junior level that kept the motivation up, and I think that put more stress on the NCOs and the junior officer.

Talking about that, I really think that it was the junior officers and the junior NCOs - and the sergeants, of course - I think we were the ones who held it all together. I don't really think that our company commanders had a great influence on us because we never really saw them very much, unless we were back socialising, back on long rest or doing all these activities.

> The whole family was the platoon really, wasn't it?

Well, it was. When we'd come back to a base camp they'd be going out - say we were at Kroh or Sungei Siput, we'd be in, we'd do the duties there and have a bit of leave, but the other two platoons then would be out. So we didn't really get together as a company, so it was still the individual thing.

I must mention here about sport. Things we did take up, we played a lot badminton, if we could, and we played a lot of volleyball. They are two sports that I've noticed - we played a little bit in Vietnam, volleyball - but volleyball is a very easy game, just to set a net up and play, and it's a very active ... it's a good sport, and so's badminton if you can get a closed-in area. And some of us became quite good badminton players. Generally speaking, the soldiers' activities involved lying around, maybe going for a swim, and going to town.

> Can you recall any events when you were in Malaya which were cause for amusement or light relief in 2 RAR - something comical or hysterical that kept people laughing and thinking about it?

Oh ...

> Nothing in particular at a company level or platoon level?

Oh ... some of the chaps used to give some of the locals a little bit of a hard time. One particular bloke was the 'Magnolia Man'. Now, the 'Magnolia Man' was the ice cream man and he sold this 'Magnolia' ice cream, but he also had soft drink bottles - [Fraser of Neeve], if I remember what it was. Because we were in, say, Minden Barracks, they had these purposely built garrison, prior Second World War, barracks for the Brits. The 'Magnolia Man' would be here and the blokes would throw down maybe a basket or something, and say, 'We want so may drinks, Johnny, and so many ...' and they'd pull it up. Either the money wouldn't come down or a bucket of water would, or something. But they would pay them, it was all a bit of skylarking, I suppose, but the old 'Magnolia Man' copped it a few times.

Also, at that stage, Malaya hadn't had Merdeka which meant independence - that was the Malay Free States - and I think the soldiers, they didn't abuse the police, but they really didn't take much notice of them. I think it happens anywhere when you get soldiers overseas with a pocket full of money, on leave. I think, to the locals, they can become a bit obnoxious, put it that way, but that has always been. They've done all this time in the jungle - it reflects on younger people, like the cowboys doing these long cattle drives - they come to town and play up. Well, the soldier who has been doing all that jungle bashing, comes to town, pocket full of money, he's determined to have a good time, regardless of out-of-bounds areas or police presence, or whatever, so they have a tendency to break little rules; but normally it's nothing, it's nothing that really hurts anybody.

> Most times the police won't take action unless it's repeated.

Unless it's fairly serious. And I don't think, at that stage, before independence, the police didn't really want to get involved with the military. The military police were there, if it got out of hand the military police would sort it out. I think we were ambassadors; they used to keep saying, 'We are ambassadors for our country'. I'm sure we played at that, but we didn't do anything. I think, if anyone, we fought the Brits who were there. At that stage there were the Royal Scots Fusiliers. I think some of the incidents there with them ... I never heard of the 'Liverpool kiss'. Our soldiers normally have a fight, and what the 'Liverpool kiss' is, these 'Jocks' would grab you by the shoulder and head-butt you across the bridge of the nose. It is known as the 'Liverpool kiss'. These sort of things happened, but generally speaking, they were the normal - couldn't ride in a trishaw so blokes would have trishaw races - no different in the First World War, diggers on their camels.

A lot of this was imposed by the Brits too, by 28th Brigade, I guess - the dress of the British soldier, we had to conform to what the British were doing with their soldiers, and they had strange rules and strange attitudes that applied. If we'd been in Australian battalion or an Australian brigade there I don't think we would have found the same sort of ...

No. Well, we were part of the British formation, the British commander was the brigadier, two other British battalions and us, and we were the new boys. I think more restrictions were put on 2 RAR as being the first battalion there, to set an example, to set a pattern, I suppose.

Yes, that's right. Can you think of any administrative actions, or events, that had really significant effects on the raising or lowering of morale within the battalion over the two years?

Yeah, there is one, but when I talk to the soldiers who served with 3 RAR - later on, our only place where we could go on leave would be back to Penang. We weren't really encouraged, which we could have been - because we had our R&R like we would have had in Australia - if Battalion Headquarters had really looked into it maybe they could have organise trips, we could have gone to Hong Kong on a holiday, or we could have gone to Bangkok, or we could have gone to Singapore. We could have gone somewhere and seen more of South-East Asia. We had the money, but we tended just to go into Penang and just blow our money in the bars, or buying gifts, or whatever we did. But I know myself, personally, I was engaged at the time and when I joined the Regular Army I thought I was going to Korea. I'd had my farewells and when I was sent to Malaya it was two years, and that was a long time with an engagement - but my wife stayed with me. Even so, I think to fly too far away would have been too expensive for us, and we didn't use telephones, but I think we could have done trips to Singapore or Hong Kong, or somewhere, that could have been organised with a bit of planning and thought, I think now.

And the other thing that 3 Battalion did, which I was just going to mention a little earlier, they found a little island off the coast - I forget the name of it - but they developed that. While the 'marrieds' went to Penang for their leave, the 'singlies' could go down to this place, and they had a bar there, and they had swimming, and snorkelling, and they had all that sort of lying-back-on-the-beach attitude which would have been a far better environment than going back to Penang all the time.

You'd see Penang whenever you were back in barracks, you'd see it then every day.

Yes, that's right. So I really think now that there wasn't enough thought given to the soldiers' welfare. Maybe I'm being a bit harsh there, but it seemed to be that the 'marrieds' were looked after and the 'singlies' could do their own thing, with heavy restrictions on them. And really, the more I think about it now the more I think that there wasn't enough thought went into things there.

Because the proportion of married officers was very high compared with the proportion of married diggers.

Oh, yes.

So although the system might say, well, there are married soldiers, and there are married NCOs, and married officer ...

And the married officers there lived extremely (well). I think at that stage they were living mainly at the E and O Hotel which was, I suppose, the biggest hotel in Penang, the main status hotel, and living there permanently would have been quite a treat - I suppose you ate extremely well there, and everything.

> Later on they got married quarters out at Batu Feringghi ...

Yes.

> ... all ranks, but there were many more private soldiers who were married than there were, proportionately, the number of officers and even warrant officers.

Well, even the soldiers there, in those days they lived in a hostel, and that was pretty grim. I went and saw a couple of them there. It was very hard on the wives. It was two ways. We'd had two years - I won't mention the two years because I've mentioned it earlier - I've spoken to a few of the wives and the wives said, look, the two years was hard also on us - at least their husbands would come home. But if they were in the platoons, like I mentioned earlier, they were doing a lot of patrolling and they didn't see their families all that much, compared with the higher echelons. I'm not trying to be a bit harsh there, but it seemed to me that it depended on what situation you were in whether you got more leave back with your family. And I think that happened with the 'marrieds' as well as the 'singlies'.

> There were at least two occasions when we were out for a month. When you got back you got four days off, the 'four Sundays' type of thing, but a month was a long stretch. You are air resupplied every four or five days, but out of, say, eighteen months in Malaya, a complete month not seeing your family. That was another question there: Do you think the deployment of Australian forces to Malaya should have been an unaccompanied posting?

I don't know because I wasn't married. But I wanted my fiancé to come up and marry me in Malaya, but her family disagreed, they wanted the white wedding at home, and all the trimmings, and that was their only daughter, and I can understand that. But some chaps did get their fiancés or girlfriends to come up and marry them.

It would have been a great adventure, I think, for a young married couple. It could have been hard away from their ... I think the extended family was more important in those days, therefore they would have missed their mother and father, the extended family, more than maybe they do today - that's being a bit harsh - but I think people fragment more today than they did in those days.

I think two years for the 'marrieds' in some cases would have been good, in some cases not - there were marriage breakdowns - but for the single man, it depended on your circumstances. In my circumstances it was too long because I wanted to get home, I wanted to get married, and I wanted to be with my fiancé, but I think for the majority of the soldiers, they were living that more of a family life as a soldier. They did the soldiering thing in the bush, they had the sort of ceremonial bit, they had the sports bit, they had a place they could go on leave and sort of be 'Mr King Pin' virtually, a lot of money, a lot of things to do. I don't think they missed Australia all that much. But two years is a long time and, as I was mentioning to you about trying to keep the morale of the troops up on operations, in two years ... then you've got to balance, is a year too

short for that type of thing, or is eighteen months? If you do eighteen months you may as well do the extra six. I couldn't really give you an answer, but I've given you some thoughts on that.

> I suppose in that context, what do you think put the most strain on the battalion, at Rifle Section level, in the time in Malaya? Was it the weather, the lack of enemy contacts, or the long patrolling periods? What caused the most strain?

I think it's a little bit of all those. I think the disappointment of the contacts, that you've come away for a two years' operation and weren't involved in a contact; yet we were under the pressure of operations without the result. But the battalion, when they did have contacts, they normally did extremely well, so our training came through. But it was one very good grounding for junior NCOs and junior officers, as you know, later on, because of the Vietnam conflict, we were extremely confident in ourselves as junior leaders, we were very good navigators and map readers, we had confidence that we could survive on our own, we knew we had ability, and two years develops a real sense of knowing people. The friendships we made there were everlasting friendships. But it was surprising that a lot of these regular soldiers didn't soldier on into the Vietnam period, but then again, they might have joined, say, in 1950, Vietnam was in 1962; they might have done two tours to six years, and that was enough.

> Interesting you say that because really that's another question I've noted, the idea was to ask the influence of Malaya in preparing the infantry particularly for service in Vietnam. You've said exactly as a number of other people have said, it was a very useful experience. It didn't solve your problems, but you had a great feel for operations of a particular low-level rifle section, infantry stuff.

Well, the Australian Army, as you know, and most people know, we've always been good at infantry minor tactics, but we'd lost that from the Second World War, but Malaya really put us on top of operations in close country. We understood, like that book, 'The Jungle in Neutral', we understand - well, we understood - how to live in the jungle, how to move in the jungle, how to live in the jungle, how to survive in the jungle.

> Did you say you almost looked forward to getting into the jungle? I had that strange feeling from time to time.

Well, it was nice to get away from Penang and the barracks environment, and to be your own sort of ... to have your own space - a new word the kids have today is 'space' - you had your own space and you knew what you were about in there, and knew the way you lived, if you failed the missions (it is) because you didn't know how to live there. No, it was a real ... no, it was good, actually you are right, it was nice to get back into the bush.

> I used to feel that. The platoon was heading in, you are away from all the other people ...

You are so comfortable with everything, you had no other restraints on you, you just did your job. Yes, you did have those sort of feelings, you felt comfortable about it, didn't you?

> Yes. Who of 2 RAR had the most influence on you during your time in the battalion? or without someone of influence, who was the greatest personality in the battalion? - maybe both.

When it came down to my own personal friends, two of the chaps there, one was a Second

World War soldier, and also served at Kapyong, he was a corporal with me. He'd also served in the Second War in the same battalion as the CSM, 'Big Al' Lawson. He became one of my very good mates, still is. He is a lot older than me now (*sic*) and is getting a bit frail. My other friend is a Korean veteran, a chap called Kev Masters, I've still ... But oh, my groomsman, and my best men, were chaps out of my section whom I became very fond of. I've sort of drifted apart from them, but the other two I haven't. That was at the sort of close level. But the greatest respect I'll ever have is for Al Lawson and for 'Jock' Richardson. I think you don't, in life - and I've written about this and talked at leadership things - you don't copy other people's style, but you learn things from them. You can never be someone else because your own personality is yourself. I suppose 'Big Al' Lawson to me was an image of the Second War soldier, Middle East soldier, New Guinea soldier, and I served with him later on back in Australia. He sort of made me realise that there was more (to life) than being a digger and a section commander. 'Jock' was the one who sort of made sure that I really had a grounding at the base things, that I could really navigate, or I could map read. I think they had a big influence, more than anyone else in the battalion.

> How well do you think the officers and NCOs of the initial battalion were selected, and how well were they employed?

Once again, as a private soldier and section commander it's a bit hard to make criticism of the highest level in the battalion. But I think I've said a bit about that already. Virtually the type of operation, we never really got to understand what capabilities, say, our company commander had because we never did an operation, we never did a company attack - we went on an AO and he plonked down wherever it was so logistics could work, at a road head, or whatever - and we never really saw him. So the type of operation we did, maybe there are a couple of things I've mentioned, they could have passed on more information to us about how the whole operations operated - well, we were never told (that). I think they could have planned (things) a little bit better for the soldiers' recreation, getting us out of the big smoke.

It sounds like I'm being a bit critical, but those are the points as they were, that's the way it was.

> That's right, it wasn't a bed of roses. I can't recall - whilst I remember O Group - Orders Group - in the company, I can't recall the company commander getting the CSM and the three platoon commanders, and the platoon sergeants together, and saying, Well, fellows, what problems have we got that we need to solve? I can't remember that sort of discussion taking place.

No, well, that's the sort of thing I'm getting at. There was no sort of CO's hours. He'd come down and say, Well, fellows ... we were sort of in isolation. Now, that was the company I was with; I don't know about the other companies, but from those I've spoken to I think it was much the same. There seemed to be a real gap between the junior command of the platoons, from the platoons down, from the platoons up.

> I think the gap was exacerbated to some degree because the company 2ICs, in most cases, were blokes almost the same age as the company commanders, whereas if they'd been, say, all fellows had been platoon commanders in Korea and they were just promoted captain there would have been a good link between the platoon and the company commanders.

There was a generation gap there.

A lot of those guys were World War II fellows with the 2ICs and company commanders.

Well, see, we looked to our officers - the platoon commanders - who were quite junior officers.

We were just learning.

You were in your learning curve, or your learning phase, but you were the commanders we dealt with all the time, we never really dealt with anyone else. No, it was completely different life for soldiers back in Australia, or in Vietnam on tour. No, it was a different ball game, there was a large gap between the two groups within the sub-units.

Just finally, have you any other comments on your period of service in the Malayan Emergency? Any sort of strong recollections you'd like to pass on for posterity?

No. I look back on it as a very big learning phase in my Army career because it was the first time that I was on actual operations, active service, where there was a live enemy, it wasn't the two-way rifle range. I learnt that as a commander - and I was at the lower level of the command structure - but I knew that those soldiers relied on me and I had to make them individuals. It was things like to clean your weapon you had your own oil. I couldn't go up to the Q store and get the oil. You made people self reliant. I learnt a hell of a lot about myself in Malaya, and I think the Army as a whole learnt a lot, that we had to get a real grip on this jungle training, and I think that gave us ... because if we were going to fight ... I think our army was still in the Reserve that you mentioned earlier. I think our thinking was still the desert; all our NCOs and officers were mainly from the desert, the old 1 or 3 Battalion - 2/1, 2/3 - and most of the training we did was limited warfare for that type of operation. I think this was the chance when that battalion really came to grips with jungle, and we learnt a hell of a lot about it, which was a great advantage to the Australian Army.

I think 2nd Battalion, and those battalions that served in Malayan Emergency, did never get enough credit for what we did. Basically, in that, is for the knowledge we gained of operating in a jungle environment.

That's great. Well, Wally, thanks ever so much for your coming and giving us all this time, and there are some really valuable reflections on your time in Malaya. I've thoroughly enjoyed it and I've enjoyed catching up with you again after all these years, off and on.

It's been my pleasure, David.

Thanks again, Wally.

And I'm very pleased, on behalf of the veterans - and a lot of veterans only served in Malaya - they have now been awarded - well, they were awarded an award - but their recognition of what they've done in that two years away - in isolation, they couldn't contact the people in Australia, they couldn't get back to Australia - is being more recognised by the general public. And when you call it a war - people call it an emergency - but the Brits call it a war, and it was a war that was won.

That's right. Thanks again, Wally.