

ANZAC Centenary Project Interview on September 14, 2016 between Andrew Allen and Vietnam War Veteran Terry Westerway at HJ Daley Library

AA Terry joined the Australian army in 1964 learning in '66 that he was going to Vietnam. In August I approached Terry to be apart of Anzac Centenary project. Fortunately he's agreed to share his experiences with us. So Terry, let's start from the beginning, can you tell me where you grew up?

TW In Randwick actually, dad had an old house that he'd bought under the old Starr-Bowkett system and that's where I lived till '75, I was born in '45 and I think we moved to the house about 1948 or something like that. It was a nice old house but it was old, as I said I was a child of a second marriage, my father was much older, he was a real country boy, he'd been born in Tingha, if you can believe it, he used to tell me stories of when they had the old bullock trains, he always said you knew when the bullockies were coming, he said you could see the blue air rising from miles away.

AA Was it a big change from Tingha to Randwick?

TW I don't know what age but he came down to work on the trams in Sydney, he had left school when he was twelve, I'm not sure why, I think maybe his father told him to get out, but he worked at one stage in Queensland as a rouseabout, he worked on a mine running the mine machinery and then he came down to Sydney and I'm not sure when he was in Sydney, but he worked on the trams, all the time that I was alive he worked on the trams. Dad wasn't real well educated in the formal sense but he was always reading, I've still got his little concise Oxford Dictionary, and he actually used to sit there and read it, he'd go through it and it was surprising what he actually learnt just by reading the dictionary. The biggest thing he taught me when I was little was how to use an index, how to take the question apart and find the (important) bit and look it up and that was, as I say, self-education really.

AA So he was keen to learn even though he hadn't had that education, he was keen to improve himself?

TW Yes, he was keen and he encouraged me too, one of the first things he bought me was an encyclopaedia. If you can imagine someone in the 1950s being bought a set of encyclopaedias and told to read it, to look up things, he'd find things for me to find, "Here, I want you to find out about this" and I would have to go through that encyclopaedia. I had to learn how to use the index so that I could find what I was looking for and then look it up and then I would have to come and tell him about it. That to me was one of the most important things,

that he learnt how to find things, didn't always understand them, he didn't know them off the top of his head but he knew how to find them. To be honest with you, like all kids you don't really appreciate your father until they're not there.

AA How old were you when he passed away?

TW Fourteen and a half, dad was sixty-three when he died. It was all sudden, it wasn't a drama, we went to the movies one night and he said "Gee, I feel a bit sick" and they carted him off to the Eastern Suburbs hospital and a week later he was dead. He'd had an aneurism in the aorta and it was bleeding but he just said "I feel colicky", they called it colic and apparently they didn't pick it up that he was bleeding and he essentially bled to death internally.

5 mins

But it was all rather sudden no great complaints of pain, well dad would never have complained of pain anyway, he never did. I'm a bit the same way, I hate telling people I'm in pain or I'm suffering, it's just something you don't do, it's called complaining and mum was very much the same way, stiff upper lip. She came from New Zealand; she was married to a guy in New Zealand who had been at Gallipoli, he was in a machine gun battalion, a Kiwi machine gunner at Gallipoli, she would never talk very much about Mick, she'd mention his name, but never talk anything about him. He died, must have been in the early Thirties I guess, there was some mention of him being put in a sanatorium, the only time I've ever seen mum talk about Mick — one time she was talking to my first wife's mother — must have been early eighties, so that's fifty years later, and she was talking about her first husband, Mick's death, and it's emotional, she burst into tears and the first time I've ever seen my mother burst into tears about it, it just struck me just how emotional it was even fifty years after the event, but mum generally did not, you know I mean she would say "Oh nice dear, ok". For instance when I was being sent overseas, I was doing a survey course over at the School of Artillery at North Head and our Officer walked in and he said all members (I was 131 Battery) "all members of 131 stand up", he said you are hereby warned for active service, you'll be going in a month. Oh, ok. So that night I rang mum and I said "Um hey, listen, they're sending us overseas", "Oh that's nice dear, that's wonderful, where are you going?", "Vietnam" — dead silence, dead silence on the other end of the phone. Mum was very stiff upper lip; bear in mind she been through two World Wars, she'd seen the results of two World Wars and her husband was dead, she had no family in Australia, sorry she had one niece, very little contact with my father's family — letters occasionally, one or two friends and here was her only son saying "Oh, I'm about to go and get my head blown off", it never struck me at the time what it was like but I've since thought, Gee that must have been traumatic, it never occurred to me, well I mean I was twenty you don't think about those things, I've always said, I can't speak for girls but boys between the

age of about fourteen and about twenty-six think they are immortal, invulnerable and God's gift to the female half of the human race. It just didn't occur to me that this might be dangerous or that it I might have my life at risk.

AA She would have known how dangerous it was going to be.

TW Well as I said, she was ten when World War One started so she was about fourteen when it ended, she'd been married to a man who been at Gallipoli and then she went through World War Two, and even if she didn't actually serve she saw the results, she saw what was happening and she saw people who had been wounded or killed or whatever.

10 mins

I mean she'd been through that so she had a far better idea of what was involved than I did. It never occurred to me, but as I say, that was mum. When I first left school, I was never terribly brilliant at school and I didn't know what the hell I wanted to do so I didn't know why I was going to school and mum just said, "Well look there's no point in you going on", I did my school certificate and she said, "Well there's no point in you going on you're not that brilliant at school and it's too hard to find the money to keep you, you know, and survive" so she said go out and get a job and low and behold she says, "You could join a bank that's safe, it's secure, it's a big organisation", well alright. I go to the bank I wasn't desperate and didn't know what else I was going to do, joined the bank, two years I lasted and I thought, oh pushing money around and the bookwork it didn't grab me at all so I thought, Gee, the Army is an adventure and I thought I'll try it first so I joined the CMF, I joined an artillery unit in the CMF and oh, great fun.

AA How old were you at this stage?

TW I was seventeen so I spent probably eighteen months in the CMF artillery unit and we got to fire "big boys' toys", actually I was put on command post duties what they call a TARA, (Technical Assistant Royal Artillery) where you do the calculations to fire the guns but you know this was pretty hot and I still remember I had to do a camp, a two week camp for the CMF and the accountant at the bank where I worked, he'd been in the Army in World War Two and he said, "Look we know the Army doesn't pay real well so the bank will let you have your two weeks off to go to camp and you come back and show us your pay slip and we'll make up whatever the difference is between what the army pays you and what you'd normally earn". Well I think I was earning about roughly twenty-two pounds a fortnight, that doesn't sound a whole lot today, but it wasn't too bad in those days, but I spent two weeks doing the camp and I got paid twenty-five quid and I come back and the accountant says "How much do we have to pay you?" And I said, "Ah no and I'm not going to give you my three quid bloody extra". I thought afterwards I can get more

money in the Army and do something that's adventurous and mind you, the big thing in those days the ads were "Join the new army" and the standing joke was, after I got in, well I enlisted to join the new army and they've put me in the old one by mistake, nobody was around to tell you, armies are the same no matter what time that they are.

AA So you felt you were fairly suited to it when you first started?

TW Well it was an adventure, God I was what, eighteen, when I enlisted in the regular Army, a life of adventure, it didn't occur to me that three quarters of the Army life is spent bloody doing bugger all, you know make work jobs.

15 mins

But occasionally you would go out and do some fun stuff. Our mob used to man anti-mortar radars and I was doing survey so I had all this you-beaut survey equipment, theodolites, tellurometers and things like that to play with so that was fun, the calculating was a bit of a drag but that was alright, that was fun.

AA So you were called up to Vietnam about two years into the Army?

TW I joined in July '64 and I was told in, probably about March '66 that we were going to Vietnam; I had enlisted for six years so I had plenty of time and as I say, it never occurred to me at the time that this was likely to be dangerous.

AA When you got the call, did you have concerns or trepidations or fear?

TW No didn't enter my tiny little brain, didn't enter my tiny little brain that it might be dangerous, and as I say, if mum had ever said anything maybe it would've but mum was the real old style stiff upper lip she would have never said, "Oh dear, I'm worried", it didn't occur to her. I remember when they brought in conscription, because our mob had to go down to, we got sent down to the barracks in Marrickville to where they were having this big ceremony, we had to be in our best battledress, with all our spit-polish boots and I was put into the kitchen, into the staff kitchen, oh wonderful, but I remember they fed them twice, a midday meal and then they had an evening meal and I can remember for the evening meal I was carrying this garbage can full of junk and trying to hold it out at arm's length to keep it off your best uniform and I had to walk between these lines of guys, these conscripts and I heard one guy say to the other one, "Hey this Army isn't real bad" and I thought, Ah, you'll find out my son (laughs), that made my day. It was interesting, mind you all the save our sons demonstrators and things like that p-off, you know, what the hell are you on about?

AA So you left and first of all you went to Nui Dat?

TW No. Actually, we were in the advance party. Nui Dat hadn't been established, we got dropped in Vung Tau, there was a paddock on the outskirts of Vung Tau where we were all set up, and we had tents and things like that and part of it I think was acclimatisation because it was hot as hades, and it was humid, I don't know what the humidity was but it would have to be somewhere around ninety per cent and it was hot and humid and one of the things that we had was, they only had one water purifier going so however many of us were there, we were limited to one gallon per man per day for everything and that's drinking, cooking, washing, everything, so you could probably have a thimble full of water to shower in (laughs). It was just the beginning of the monsoon season, the monsoon used to come over about two o'clock in the afternoon almost like clockwork; you could almost set your watch by it.

20 mins

"Monsoons coming" and all the guys would disappear into your tent and get your gear off, get your bar of soap, wait till the rain started and rush out into the rain. If you can imagine a couple of hundred naked guys standing out there rubbing soap on themselves and it was "send her down Hughie" make sure it all washes off before you have to go in, don't turn the water off yet. That's what it was, we didn't get any leave we weren't allowed into town or anything like that so we had no idea what it was like in the middle of this paddock.

AA Did you get bored?

TW Oh no they've always got something for you to do. Do you mind if I tell you a funny story that's a bit rude?

AA That's fine I don't mind at all, I'll let it go but if we need to later we can take stuff out.

TW One of the things that they did when we were there, oh sorry we did get into Vung Tau once or twice but anyway one of the things is they bought this bunch of reporters over and they were going around talking to people and going around town and one of the things that got told, all these little kids in town would come up and beg money, "give me a hundred P" and the usual thing was "frig off kid" anyway this bunch of reporters one of which was a very nice young lady and she walked up to this kid and said "Hello, how are you?" and this kid with a big grin across his face said, "Frig off". And from there on it went around, no swearing – five pounds fine, that's half a week's wages you know five quid, five pound fine just for swearing or five dollars maybe, I can't remember anyway it was a pretty substantial sort of fine so we invented then the thing well if I can't swear, "Have you been told today, consider yourself told." That's the little things I remember. There was a place in Vung Tau where they had a big plinth and they had all the flags of all the nations that had sent troops to South Vietnam to assist and they used to have all these big urns out the front on the

little step in front of it well one of our guys, someone sold him these urns, so Ralph when the truck comes in, Ralph's busily loading these urns onto the truck and one of the guys that's driving sitting there, and one of the white mice, the South Vietnamese police jumps up onto the running board pulls out his 45 and puts it behind Shorty's ear and cocks it, "Ralph, Ralph put the urns back Ralph" oh dear, but all of that didn't occur to us, just didn't figure. I don't know how long we were in Vung Tau a couple of week's maybe a week? No, more than a week, it must have been a couple of weeks at least. Then we were told we were moving up to Nui Dat up to the permanent base and we had to take all the seats out of the Land Rovers, we took the back cover off it, took the windshield off it, the reason you take the windshield off is if a bullet hits it you get showered with glass so you take the windscreen off and took the doors off so you can get out of the thing quickly. Do you know how a Land Rover's set up?

AA Not really.

25 mins

TW The fuel tanks would sit right underneath the driver and the front passenger so the seats were pulled off and we'd put sand bags on so you're sitting on sand bags, a sand bag on the floor and a sand bag on where the seat was, this was in case you ran over a mine, wouldn't do much to a mine not unless it was a very small mine but they also got a steel star picket which they welded to the front bumper of the Land Rover and it had a V shape cut out of the forward edge of it and we're all saying what's this for, well that's in case they string a piano wire across the road to cut your head off, oh ok. You're not given much time to think about these sorts of things you just do it and go ok.

AA So having a sense of humour got you through a lot?

TW Yes, if you stand around worrying about it all the time you'd go bloody well insane, I knew a couple of guys who used to worry about it and they went damn near berserk, it's stupid. You've got to be able to see the funny side of it or you go crazy, but we went up there, I don't know what time it was but it was getting on dark when we got up there, do you know what a weapon pit is?

AA I think I do.

TW It's about, well, for two men is about three metres long and a metre wide with a couple of returns off the end of it, so the idea of the returns is you can hide in the return so if a shell lands in the main trench you're protected to a certain extent from the blast, don't know how well it works but that's the theory. The ground was clay and it was wet, have you ever tried to pick your way through wet clay, you've got to pick, pick, pick, dig, dig, oh God and finally you built it and that had to be done before you put up your hootchies to sleep in and then it was pretty late and you've got to get something to eat which you get out your

ration pack and pull something out to eat. I still remember that the first day we were there, we had to picket at night, digging your trenches and putting your hootchies up and then you had to go and mount a guard for the night and go stand in your little weapon pit for a couple of hours, never had much fun.

AA Did you have much to do with the locals, the local population?

TW Not a whole lot, the nearest village was Ha Long, which was about one and a half k's down the road but you just drove straight through the village and that was it, you didn't have anything to do with them, if you got into Vung Tau head for a bar or a brothel. If you ask any Vietnam Vet, if you say to him "You buy me Saigon Tea?" he knows exactly what you're talking about, the girls used to, that was their opening thing "You buy me Saigon tea?" which was actually crème de menthe, she would get a share, some would go to the bar owner and some would go to her. Have you ever heard of a thing called the "Cheap Charlie Song?"

AA I don't think so.

TW It's – *"Uc-da-loi, he no good, he no buy me Saigon Tea,, he cheap Charlie"*, there's a whole lot of verses in it but that's basically it but if you ask a Vietnam Vet to buy you Saigon tea he knows exactly what you're talking about.

30 mins

We didn't get much leave at all, I believe guys that came later had a bit more time but we didn't, one of the things that always gets me is our supplies were bought up by the Jeparit which was a National Lines Freighter that the Army, they hadn't commandeered it, they had just hired it and the Seaman's union wouldn't unload the damn thing. So a lot of us got rounded up and sent down to unload it, we couldn't use the cranes because none of us had crane drivers experience and we weren't allowed to use their bloody crane so we were unloading it by hand, I remember being in the line and one of the seamen walked up to our guys and said we're allowed to go into Vung Tau can you tell us some good places to go and one of the guys looked at him and said, "Mate you go ashore and you won't be getting back on board".

One of the things I still remember, We once had a rickshaw ride; me and a mate thought we'd get a rickshaw from the main area round to what was then the Grand Hotel which was the premier establishment, big white French style place, we got into this rickshaw and this poor little Vietnamese, two big Aussies sitting in the back of this thing and his toes were barely touching the ground and he's trying to pull this thing, are we going to let him off – No.

AA Is that the Grand Hotel that they sing about in "I was only 19"?

TW It could be I can't remember the words of "I was only 19", if it's the Grand Hotel in Vung Tau, yes. Big old white painted, solid white, French Colonial style and it

was the premier place in Vung Tau, but that poor little bugger trying to haul us down there. They're the sort of things, they're amusing, I can think of them as amusing. One of the things in the main street, there was the markets, there was the main road and then this side here there was the old bus station where buses from various places like Saigon used to stop, the entertainment for the bus passengers waiting to board the buses was this big cage with chicken wire which had a python in it and this guy used to throw chickens in and they'd all watch this python chase the poor chicken around this cage, this was entertainment for the bus passengers. We're all going oh yeah right ok, we'd give him a couple of dong and he'd throw a chicken in for us. Things like that, you can't think in terms of danger, you really can't.

AA I can see what you mean.

TW If I had to think in terms of what was at risk I couldn't hack it, I really couldn't, I can only think in terms of how funny it was.

AA So Long Tan, how long were you at Nui Dat for?

TW I was there for twelve months, it was a base and we'd go out on various exercises, not exercises but operations, we used to go out and come back again.

35 mins

Long Tan, they'd mortared us maybe two nights before, didn't drop anywhere near me but I can remember I'd been working all day and I'd just come in after two hours of standing guard and I was dog tired and I heard the crump, crump, "You guys hear that?" – "Yeah", our slit trench, our so called protection, we'd only just started to build the thing and it was a big hole in the ground full of water, I'm not jumping in that be buggered, just rolled over and think go to sleep and if they get us they get us, I heard guys running around get into your slit trenches, I'm not doing that, woke up, you know came to in the morning and ok we got mortared. One of our guys, who shall remain nameless, was a bit older than us, but he was a fairly corpulent person, big built, wherever he was he was somewhere a few of the shells landed, he made a dive for cover and he dived into a shell scrape which is, you dig sort of a scrape in the ground that's just to get your body below ground level anyway he dives in there and being somewhat corpulent his posterior protruded above ground level, guess where he got shrapnel? He went down to hospital and had some of it removed but he came back and you know, "Hey mate come and sit down and have a drink", "Shut up. I will drink standing up".

AA It's weird that we're sort of laughing at that, because in a way it's also not good, it's not nice but it's sort of funny at the same time.

TW As I said they're the sort of things I can remember as being funny, I mean for instance we had over in TAC Headquarters, all the accommodation we'd built ourselves, nobody came and built it for us, but they built a big concrete slab, the Army got them some cement and sand and they mixed the concrete themselves and made it and they painted the floor and this one time they brought the GOC, no he was the Chief of the General Staff came over and he looked out, he was an old soldier you know he'd been through it all, walks in and they took him to show what these constructive diggers had done and built this thing and painted it, see they've even painted the floor and had chairs and table out and he walked in and he took one look at it and said "God that's the biggest crown and anchor board I've ever seen", course he was a gambler and all the hangers on go What, God it is! Of course it got painted out after that but that was some of the funny things.

AA What was your role Terry?

TW I did surveying; I operated theodolites and tellurometers, our mob had to survey the radars in and then we did survey to bring the guns in because the guns all have to be surveyed into position so we bought the survey in, we wouldn't go out for an entire operation because they would go out and establish a fire base but we'd take the survey out so they could set the guns up for the fire base. I remember one of them.

40 mins

Operation Portsea, if I remember correctly, was east of the taskforce; we were taken in by helicopter and of course the helicopter flew with the doors open, they had a guy on a machine gun at the side, everybody else of our survey crew was sitting on the rear seat where there were actually seatbelts guess what muggins wound up sitting on a crate full of survey equipment in the middle of the helicopter? And not to put too fine a point on it, this helicopter comes into land and an American Chinook came past so our guy had to sheer away. Well I don't know, how do you feel about sitting on a box of things with nothing to hang on to and twelve hundred feet isn't that way (indicating the floor), it's that way (indicating straight ahead) – oh! And then I felt this thump on my back, it was our Officer, I accused him of trying to murder me, I never got on very well with him at all, he says "No, no I was trying to grab you", I said "You lying bastard you were trying to off me". I was still ropeable when we landed, "No that's not true Gunner Westerway I was only trying to help, trying to grab you". Oh well, it was a fun time.

The Americans had more equipment than I've ever seen in my entire born days, this mob moved in and they bought Chinooks and you know one of the first things they bought in was a fridge full of ice cream. Geez, how about guns, ammunition? — it was a bloody big fridge full of ice cream. They had a little truck there with what must have been the Landing Director sitting out there with

the tray flaps down and sitting out there with a radio directing them and he must have had a go at one of the Chinooks coming in about where they were to put the stuff because it was fairly dry and it was blowing lots of this dry grass off the ground well I don't know what he said but he must have said something because the next Chinook put the load, I mean he's sitting there and the load went right there (next to him) and all you could see was this great brown cloud, it was so funny, don't tell them off.

AA How did you get on with the Americans?

TW Pretty good, generally they're nice guys, they're normal human beings. I got a shock because at one stage there I was on a post down on one edge of the American Battery and we used to eat in the American mess, you may have seen them in M.A.S.H. that little segmented tray to eat on, anyway walked into the tent for the first time for breakfast and, "How do you like your eggs man, fried, boiled or scrambled" and I said "I feel like scrambled eggs this morning", now you know what our scrambled eggs look like, anyway he puts a couple of eggs on the thing and starts to fry them, gets his little spatula and starts chopping the blazes out of it into a little mess, oh ok, it's not what I imagined.

AA So it was the last time you had scramble eggs?

TW Yes, but you know they were nice guys, generally easy to get on with but they did have this truly exaggerated idea of how dangerous the Viet Cong were, I remember our little post, we were on one edge of the American Battery and I used to watch, you understand with an artillery position you send out night and morning what's called clearing patrol.

45 mins

TW You send out a patrol on foot to sweep the front of your Battery position to make sure you get anybody that might be hiding in the bush and they used to go out, there would be six of them and they'd be one behind the other, one behind the other, and I thought I'd get you all with one burst, you watch our guys go out and there's about maybe ten, fifteen metres between each man and they're on alternate sides of the road or of the track so you might get one of them but you're not going to get all of them, these Americans used to go out and you'd have taken out the lot with one burst. The funniest thing, the American guns that were at the Battery were 155 SP's - Self-Propelled 155s, big tank chassis, big armoured turret with the gun in it and up on top of that was a little cupola with an armoured back and a top over it and a fifty calibre machine gun in front of it and we had a party line to our position because we formed part of their thing, the next one down was number six. Now the Americans had built this thing and they had three rows of concertina wire, not the concertina wire you see in World War Two movies where it's just a roll of wire on the ground that some guy jumps on, no this is two rows, three high with

star pickets and wired to the star picket, you could jump on that all you like and you won't fall over and they had three rows of that, so three double rows, what they called tanglefoot, which is horizontal wire in between that with mines and along the front edge they had claymore mines and then they'd cleared about a good one hundred to one hundred and fifty metres they'd bulldozed till it was clear anyway I'm sitting there one night and the phone rings, pick up the line and its number six gun which is just down the road there and he's whispering "Man, I think I can see some movement down in the banana plantation", this is a banana plantation on the other side of all this wire and mines and things about at least one hundred and fifty metres away and he's whispering and he's in this armoured cupola and he's talking to the command post which is back behind that, right in the middle maybe another one hundred metres back and they're in a dug in bunker and the guy in the command post he's whispering "You sure man?" Jeez, you think how can you do that?
Did you see the newspaper I gave the girl a photo that I had taken?

AA Yes I have seen that.

TW That bunker, we built because we initially started with this hole in the ground and it used to get hot, you couldn't sit in it. We used to set up a little camp chair and set it up on one side but you couldn't get in, it was too hot, too muggy and it was wet so anyway we eventually built this bunker for us and I mean there's a lot of work in a bunker, the walls are four bags thick, four bags on the roof but we'd lined it, we'd put wooden panelling all through it, which the artillery ammunition used to come in a wooden box and you could bash it apart and you could use the side and bottom and tops as panelling, so we panelled this and we built little seats all through it and we had a little space in there for an esky, so this was a good after hours thing, we did have an M60 in there I do assure you, we did have an M60 in there to fulfil our function but it wasn't the primary purpose of this lined thing.

50 mins

TW The Americans used to come up and have a drink with us and things like that in this little bunker and I remember one night our Officer come round and he looks and he says "The grass in front of the bunkers a bit long I want you cut it", I thought you're kidding, have you ever tried to cut green grass with a blunt machete? I had a couple of whacks and I thought, I'll be here all day so I walked down to number six and I said "Give us a couple of charge bags will ya" because they always have charge bags left over, it's granulated cordite, so I come back with these things, throw it in amongst the grass *whomph*, instant grass cutting. Well unbeknownst to me that night we were sitting there and something happened way over on the other side, there were flares going off and people running in all directions and we're all sitting in the bunker having a drink and in storms this American Line Sergeant, comes in "You guys alright?"

gun at the ready, "You guys alright in here, you alive?", "Yeah why what's going on?", "You're not answering your phone", I thought, Oh I cut the grass this afternoon and burnt the party line.

AA Did you get into trouble for that?

TW No, Yank cackled and he got his line guys to bring another line up, *oops*, things like that were funny. When they ask me about Long Tan, I wasn't directly involved in the battle so much as helping supply ammo for it. I remember the Little Patti concert, I went to the Little Patti concert, sat there and when it was over I wandered back to where I'd come from and it was later in the afternoon early evening maybe, we heard the guns start to fire, they were always firing at something, you know, what's going on?, "Gee, they're going on for a bit long aren't they?", where I was living was just up from 161 Battery - The Kiwi's, and these guys, the Kiwis were going "Hey give us a hand, give us a hand", well we go down there to see what's up and they said "We need ammo" so I wound up with a couple of other guys, we were going up to the dump, bringing the ammo down, dumping it and going to get some more. The 105 Howitzers that we were using, the ammo comes in a wooden box, they were the boxes we used to pull apart, two rounds in each box, the shell weighs fifteen kilograms probably about five kilograms in the cartridge and then maybe another five kilos in the box itself so you're talking around about twenty-five kilos a box and we used to get, if you carry one it's hard because they're too long, and if you take one box you got two guys, so what we used to do is we'd put one guy in the middle with hands on both and one guy on each end and then we'd run with it. I remember at one stage, it was pouring rain, absolutely wet through, we knew something was going on, we weren't told what was going on, there was just continual firing and I remember a couple of times I had to load because the poor old Kiwis couldn't keep up with it.

55 mins

I remember the Sergeant saying "Get a shell out and get it ready" which means you pull the thing out, I don't know what charge we were firing, but basically it comes with the shell still in the cartridge, you pull the cartridge apart, pull out however many, it holds seven bags, if it's say charge five you'd pull two bags out, put it back together and you leave the two bags hanging on a little cord outside and you'd take it up to the Sergeant so he can check, if he sees two bags hanging out he knows the right number of charges are inside the cartridge so he'd just rip it off, I can remember doing that a few times. I have been told since that the eighteen guns of the Australian and New Zealand artillery batteries fired thirty-one hundred rounds in just over an hour, if you work it out it's about three rounds a minute per gun but if you're doing that for an hour you've got your ring hanging out.

AA I was going to ask you how long did this go for?

TW Probably about an hour, and they stopped firing which I presume that meant that was when they got the APC's through to their position. I honestly don't remember how long it was, an hour I think, I have been told it was an hour, you just lose track of time, but we didn't know what had happened and who'd done what to whom, it was only the next day we were told there had been a big stoush and there were three hundred and forty-five enemy bodies, by body count. They made a distinction between body count and then there were blood trails where they'd dragged bodies away, the Viet Cong used to try and haul away bodies so that you wouldn't know how many of them they'd killed. I believe that the Commander of D445 sometime in the mid '90s admitted that he'd had over a thousand casualties out of twenty-five hundred, that's not bad, but most of them were killed by artillery fire.

AA So you were involved but you weren't —?

TW Right there, no, we didn't know what was going on, you're never told, artillery are very rarely told what they're shooting at, but there was the artillery fire officer directing the fire was a guy called Morrie Stanley, he was absolutely brilliant as a fire director, but the story goes that 11 Platoon, I don't know whether it was Bob Buick who did it, but asked "Just fire the bloody things on us, we'll take the bastards with us" and Morrie said "No, not going to do that" and instead of dropping them in front of where 11 Platoon were or where the infantry were, and trying to put up a barrier, he dropped it behind them (the VC) and he walked it forward, so they were sort of stuck between the rifles of our guys and these shells marching in behind them and I do remember one guy talking to me and he said "I was down behind a log shooting, I saw this human wave come up out of the ground and start dashing forward and there was an almighty crash and then I looked up again and there was nothing, they'd gone". That's what gets me, a lot of people, you're brought up in Hollywood, you have no idea what an artillery shell will actually do, you've probably seen Hollywood movies where there's an explosion and the body goes whirling through the air, I assure you it doesn't, it doesn't, bits of bodies will go whirling through the air but whole bodies don't, they do not I assure you.

60 mins

I see Arnold Schwarzenegger or Sly Stallone or some other hero running through the shell blasts, excuse me, anybody, when the shell's start landing, you find a hole and you cower in the bottom of the hole until they stop. Just to tell you for instance, the blast radius of a fifteen kilogram one hundred and five millimetre shell is forty metres.

AA Wow, is it really?

TW It is, now the blast radius, you've seen Atomic bomb movies where the house goes "boom" that's a blast wave, it's a huge one, but it's a blast wave, at forty metres that one hundred and five shell will do to your body what that atomic bomb did to the house, bits of you go in all directions, and you've probably heard the term shrapnel, shrapnel is about small coin size, what comes out of shell is splinters which is maybe, I don't know, maybe the width of your glasses frame, and it's travelling at supersonic speed, that connects with your body anywhere you are not a well vegemite I tell you.

AA I can imagine what it must do at that speed.

TW Believe me when the shell bursts, those splinters come out at supersonic speed, they're more than sound speed, they're supersonic and they make a horrible mess, some of those splinters will travel for hundreds of metres. I used to work as a guide over at North Head when they still had the artillery museum there and we'd get people down and I would always say "This is what artillery actually does", I can now understand why my Uncle Harry said "Join the artillery", because he would have been subjected to artillery bombardment, people just do not know what it does to them.

AA Do you feel a sense of pride with what you accomplished over there?

TW No, well I did what was asked of me. No, because we were not made to feel that we'd done anything significant when we came back. We didn't know it at the time, but when we came home, we weren't given any time to tell family that we were on our way home, we were told you're going tomorrow, your times up, you're going tomorrow and I didn't have time to tell my mother, you know I couldn't write her a letter saying I'll be home on such and such a date, no time, get on board the plane, we were put on board a plane at Nui Dat, we were flown down to Vung Tau, put on a Hercules and flown to Darwin. We got to Darwin in the middle of the night, 4 o'clock or something in the morning, if you've ever sat on a Hercules on these little canvas seats for god knows how many hours, must have been at least twelve hours I think, but, landed in Darwin and from there we were on immediate nine weeks active service leave and we were sent immediately, all dispersed to a Capital City nearest our home, so we were on a civilian flight, I can remember walking down what was the old Ansett Terminal in Sydney and I had my greens, which is the only clothes I had with my bags amongst all these people travelling in holiday gear or business suits, nobody took the slightest notice, and I thought, Ok they don't care.

65 mins

But I walked out and thought what do I do, I found a phone and rang up mum, "Hello Mum, I'm home" she said "Oh, where are you dear?" and I said "I'm at Mascot" and because we lived at Randwick, "I'll be home in ten minutes", this was the first time Mum had had any idea of where I was, but we worked out

later that of course they'd split us up so that we wouldn't attract any attention, that there would be nobody demonstrating. They never said as much but it was pretty obvious later that that's what they'd done, they'd split us up, if a whole march of us had come in marching, they might have had demonstrators or what have you, split us up and nobody would notice that we'd come home.

AA So no queues of people, no streamers?

TW No, no, no, no, ooh no in fact we were told, best not to appear in uniform in the street, wear your civvies in the street.

AA It would be hard not to — you said you were sort of fine then and fine now with it but I'd imagine a lot of them would be bitter about that?

TW Don't kid yourself, I wasn't exactly a happy little vegemite about it, I was just oh well 'FU' if you don't care about me I don't give a rats 'A' about you, even to this day I find it easier to talk to Veterans than to civilians, I don't identify with them. I'll tell you another funny story, when we came home, came into Darwin and I had two big bags, I don't know where I got the extra bag from but I had two bags, one was chock-a-block full of cigarettes, cartons of cigarettes which we were getting from the PX and were pretty cheap and I had another one full of bottles, I had four or five bottles of Old Grand-Dad Whisky and I had a couple of bottles of Johnnie Walker Black Label, now when we got into Darwin we had to go through customs and we were told the rules are, two bottles of liquor and two cartons of cigarettes, so of course oh ok, put my bags up on the thing for the guy to look at and you could hear it rattling and he just looked me straight in the face and he said "You've haven't got more than two cartons of cigarettes and two bottles of whisky have ya?", "Nooo", "Right, off you go", and that was most of our experience, these guys knew exactly what we had and they were not going to argue the point about it, that was good but when you got home it was all different, you had people demonstrating and objecting to conscription and all the rest of it and you just think, oh Crikey Moses what are you on about, at one stage I went to join an RSL and I had these old soldiers telling me "Oh, it's not a real war, you shouldn't be in here, this is for real guys that have been in a real War", oh ok, well stick it up your nose then. It probably took me twenty, twenty-five years to forgive the RSL for that and I eventually only ever went to join the RSL when I moved up to Sydney and wanted somewhere for a cheap meal and that's all I joined the RSL for, I didn't want anything to do with them.

AA Do you March or did you March at all on Anzac Day?

70 mins

TW No, I never did, I think I went in two Anzac Day marches; I went on the so-called "Welcome Home Parade" in '87 and I maybe marched in late '90s once or twice, by this stage of course my back is playing up so it's too hard to walk,

but I never felt, the memory of nobody caring about us is still there, I don't want to portray it, I don't want to relive it, as I said I only did that newspaper article because someone asked me, normally I wouldn't do it. I don't normally wear my medals, I've got them but I don't wear them, my children don't know bugger all about what I did, they know I was there but that's all they know, sorry they maybe remember one or two funny stories that I've told but that's it.

AA And your Mum was really happy when you got back, she was the same?

TW Can I say that the son she sent away wasn't the son she got back; she never complained about it, she never said anything, but a couple of little things she'd say, I was quite certain, she was — I had changed. I didn't think I'd changed nothing wrong with me. You ask a lot of guys that have been through it, and you think what an angry little ant you are, but it's, no nothing wrong with me, you might have a problem but I don't have any problems, not me, it's you. You ask most Veterans and they'll tell you that, so as I say, you don't talk about it very much, talking to you is probably about the first time I've said anything of any length to anybody who's not a Veteran.

AA Well I really feel honoured, I really appreciate you doing that and honoured that you've talked to me and I found it hugely interesting actually.

TW I'll give you another funnier story; we hadn't been there at Nui Dat for very long and we had down Bravo Radar I think it was, we had a weapon pit which we used as a guard post and we overlooked this paddy field, right behind us was a big bunch of bushes and there were hootchies, little personal two man tents, behind that where our relief was and this particular night it was, not only was it a new moon it was overcast, so you couldn't see your hand in front of your face, if the Viet Cong had assembled two thousand guys in this paddy field in front of us as long as they were quiet about it we would never have seen them, and in front of us we had one row of concertina wire on the ground, not the big fence so they would have jumped over that no trouble at all, anyway we're sitting there and at 2 o'clock in the morning my mate says it's time, so I said "Ok, go and wake our relief", so he jumps out of the trench and walks around behind the back and I'm sitting there, and as I said pitch black, heard this blood curdling scream from behind me and I thought, Oh, jumped out and put the bayonet on the rifle, put a round up the spout and ran around expecting to see this mass of Viet Cong slaughtering people, well anyway what had happened, one of the guys that was woken up, tall, slim guy, really thin, he could unlace his boots, undo his pants and he could drop his pants around the boots and pull his feet straight out. So he did this and he'd roll into bed, so he got woken and of course did the same thing, swings off his cot, puts his feet straight through the pants into the boots and pulls up the pants, we didn't wear underpants by the way.

75 mins

Well one of the things we had there were these big brown toads, and it had sat on the crutch of his trousers so when he pulled them up — and that was the source of the blood curdling scream, and there I was expecting to have a hand to hand fight with all these Viet Cong (laughing).

AA Well that's a good note to end it, I might end it on that Terry, that's a good way to finish it off, so again thanks very much, much appreciated and I really enjoyed speaking to you.

End of interview

75 mins 46 sec