

CITY OF SYDNEY
ART AND ARTISTS
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
TRANSCRIPT

Interviewee: Eric Stevenson

Date: 23 October 2008

Place: City Recital Hall foyer

Interviewer: Margo Beasley

Recorder: Marantz PMD 671

TRANSCRIPT

0.00 MB: This is an interview with Mr Eric Stevenson. It's taking place inside the City Recital Hall's foyer where we've sheltered from the cold and rain outside. It's the 23rd of October 2008. My name's Margo Beasley. The interview is part of the Art & Artists in Sydney Oral History Project which is being conducted on behalf of the City of Sydney's History Programme. Glenn Wallace is also here with us today and if a third voice is heard on this recording, that's who it is who's speaking.

O.K, so we're here to talk today, Eric, about what everybody's calling 'The Tanks', what are in fact armoured personnel vehicles, of which there are three which are being parked in various laneways around Sydney for the duration of Art and About Festival in Sydney in 2008. You're not the artist but

you're a very integral person in this whole schema. So, can you tell me a bit about who you are and where you come from and why you're here?

ES: Okay. I joined the military in 1975 and was allocated to Armoured Corps where I spent twenty four years in reconnaissance and armoured vehicles and I actually started a masters in Adult Education which I finished as a PhD in Leadership Development. I then joined Defence as a civilian and the PhD became so commercially viable I started running a company called 'Leadership Solutions Australia' which measures how people think and then I started another company called 'Armoured Vehicle Adventures' which hires out armoured vehicles. So, that was the sort of the background behind it all. Adam Norton's concept was to draw attention to the laneways and in so doing he wanted not one, not two but three armoured vehicles because one's sort of a display, two is an accident whereas three is quite dramatic, as you see.

2.01 **MB: Adam Norton being the artist whose name we haven't mentioned so far.**

ES: Correct, yes. So, that was the concept, so he approached us and said, could we do it for a period of time? In this case I then said, "All right", so we set up the transport arrangements; we now moved the vehicles, repair the vehicles, fix the vehicles, guard the vehicles and this is the second last day of all that sort of stuff.

MB: So you've been moving around the laneways of Sydney for how long now?

ES: This is the thirteenth day, so we're getting pretty used to it. We move at three o'clock in the morning because all the tradespeople are moving at three o'clock in the morning and it's much easier to be on the wrong side of the road with no lights and we guide it. It's got to the stage now we wave to all the truckies as they to past and all the people cleaning the streets, so they know us fairly well.

MB: So, when you say "we", who's we? It's not just you who's looking after the vehicles in this case.

ES: Yes, there's three of us. The other fellow that actually owns one of the vehicles is not really a people person so he didn't want to be mentioned but he owns one of the vehicles and my son's the third person. And we were supposed to have four altogether but my other son has got caught up with CIT so he wasn't available. So, each morning we - - -

MB: What's your son's name?

ES: David.

MB: David.

ES: David, yes.

MB: Stevenson, right.

ES: So, David Stevenson – and he’s actually asleep at the moment too because we do rotations in all the guards and things like that.

MB: Asleep in one of the vehicles or -?

ES: The other fellow sleeps in the vehicle, which is normal for armoured crews when they’re – and he’s ex military but David sleeps – we’ve got a motor home which we park out on the street. So, David and I sleep in the motor home, which makes it much easier.

MB: I’m sorry; I interrupted your train of thought there.

ES: That’s all right.

MB: We were talking about moving the vehicles around and so on.

ES: Yes.

MB: You said that you'd got to know the truckies and so on around the streets a bit.

ES: Yes.

MB: So, what’s it like at three o’clock in the morning when you start moving the vehicles around, who is on the streets of Sydney then?

ES: There’s lots of interesting people. At night there’s a lot of cleaning going on, much more than I ever expected. There’s people sweeping the streets and then there’s a fellow that goes around with a small streetsweeper that cleans up, all the trucks come around and clear the garbage bins - and it’s different trucking companies; always thought it’d be the same sort of trucking company.

4.06

And then the contractors come in earlier in the morning, about five o’clock, and clean the steps because that’s not cleaned by the other people. There’s a lot of deliveries go on because the streets are so congested during the day and it’s the ‘Revitalise of the Laneways’ Project and so a lot of their deliveries occur in those laneways, so it’d be interesting if they’re taken up with shops and things as to whether they can still deliver, how it affects them, what they’re doing. And there’s a lot of courtesy between the people delivering because they all have a job to do, they all get out of each other’s way, they share,

which is very interesting because it differs from the people in the morning. The people going to work are quite aloof; they put their heads, walk quickly, which I thought's actually quite cold and they walk past us in a laneway, "Yes, that's just like there's a drunk or someone in the laneway", they don't pay any more attention than that. Lunchtime's a bit more friendly, where they come and chat, but it's the same thing at night. And then throughout the day various people will stop and talk to us. Different from the weekend: on the weekend a lot of families out, a lot of tourists out and they'll stop and talk to us.

MB: So, what did you understand by Adam Norton's idea about this work of public art, what did he talk about with you about what it would mean or what he expected or why he was doing it?

ES: Right, yes. I think the overall concept is if you're going to revitalise the laneways the first thing you do is draw attention to them which I think that's Clover Moore, the [Lord] Mayor's overall idea. So, to draw attention you have a variety of art exhibits, including the paintings, the paintings in the gutter - we had on the launch one lady pretending to be a clock and doing the time, which I thought was fairly good - and us. So, Adam said he wanted us to draw attention to the laneway and, as with the museum, not interact with people unless they actually approached us. So, we stand back and we watch the car - and I suppose they call it "situational awareness"; you're watching what's going on for safety, to make sure people don't climb on, but then if you see someone that's completely startled it becomes a public relations thing, that you go forward and you reassure them but as a general rule they'll come up and talk to you.

6.04 And there's really three different types. It's interesting in Australia that you can park three armoured vehicles in the city and everyone thinks it's a movie or everyone comes up and says, "Is this due to a very clever advertising campaign? Is this part of the 'Art and About'" or something like that? And we say, "Yes". So, of all the people that we've met, and we've probably met over about a thousand people in the two week period - we've handed out a lot of cards and things to people if they ask - only three have objected to what we're doing. Two of those were drunk at night and one of those actually came back the next morning and apologised because he said, "I was drunk". So, there was only one person that really objected to it all but again we said, "Look, it's art, it's confronting, it's challenging". So, Adam said, "Be like in a museum where you go up - in some cases people will go away either challenged or wondering what it's all about", and he was quite happy with all that sort of thing, so yes.

MB: Can I just ask before we go on about that?

ES: Yes.

MB: The people who objected, what form did that take?

ES: Most people in Australia are supportive of the military. We're not wearing military uniforms, which most people are familiar with, the camouflage uniforms; we're actually wearing black tank suits which is 1950s British because it doesn't show the oils - they didn't adopt it in Australia because it was too hot – so we wear black tank suits, which is clearly not Australian, which most people can understand. The vehicles themselves are painted different colours and in a normal military environment, if they are current military vehicles they'd all be painted the same, so that gives people a bit of a clue as well too. The person that really objected to, I think, wanted to climb on and we said, "No", and then got up quickly before we could and so when he was asked to hop down then started becoming quite abusive and things like that. We have met, I suppose, of that thousand two because one of the vehicles is called 'Beast'. The vehicles themselves are named by the driver and if it's a B Squadron vehicle it begins with a B, if it's an A Squadron vehicle – and so we're both ex B Squadron people, so we named it – one's called 'Beast and one's called 'Bandit'.

8.04 It's called 'Bandit' because it took all my time and money to repair it over four years, 'Beast' because when he'd finished painting it he stood back and said, "Oh, I like the Beast". Two very religious people have come up and said, "Oh, the nature of the Beast in 666" and that sort of stuff so we automatically go into, oh, client focus, "Yes, thanks very much" blah, blah, blah, and you then change the subject, like, "Where are you off to today?" and "Havin' a good day?" and "Isn't it nice weather?" and you gradually guide them away towards the bus or wherever they're going to.

MB: So, when you talk about people "objecting" - - -

ES: Yes.

MB: - - - or making that kind of kind of comment, it's not that they're actually objecting to the public art itself - - -

ES: No, no.

MB: - - - or what might be a perception of threat in some way or something like that - - -

ES: Yes.

MB: - - - it's just fairly random and not particularly focused?

ES: I think it's objecting to the military side of it all too because they haven't objected to the 'Falling from the Sky' exhibit or the other art things like that; it's just ours is actually quite challenging – that's probably a safe way to put it. So, it challenges their style, their

perceptions and their values. And there are some people which don't believe we should have a military and all that sort of thing, which is the beauty of Australia; they're quite entitled to their opinion.

MB: And so some people have actually expressed that view to you?

ES: They have but it's not necessarily coherent and rational in the way they do it; a lot of it's emotional, rhetoric and colloquialisms – and so I've come across that sort of stuff before particularised in the real military, so you go into a – basically, you help them relax and change the subject and say, "Yes", and they vent their spleen and then they go away, so it's not a big problem.

MB: So, you're very adept at the psychology of confrontation and how to defuse it, are you?

ES: This, to me, is really – because I'm not in the military any more but this, to me, is like a military operation whereby you're moving things at night, you're working odd hours, there are things that come up, there are surprises: you park somewhere and a truck has to get in, so you'll get an irate person wants to go past, so you go out and say, "Well, how can we work together to – oh, well, if you move across a bit we can do this".

10.06 So, in most cases people, if you give them a solution and say, "Look, I'll help you back out onto the road, I'll help you unload", they've been quite good. Or you say, "Look, we'll get the person to move the vehicle but it's going to take about fifteen minutes. It would be easier if you backed up and I'll guide you, I'll help you back up" and so if you give people a logical solution they're not too bad. Sorry, another question, yes.

MB: Well, my next question is really - - -

ES: Yes.

MB: - - - what did you anticipate would happen - before you came, what did you imagine the responses might be?

ES: It's the 'Revitalise the Laneways' Project and laneways by nature are narrow - we actually take up half the laneway and trucks take up more than half the laneway. So, no matter where we park there's going to be people that we don't get on with or – and they're doing their normal job – so what we try to do is park somewhere where it's out of the way, we give them solutions for turning circles. We try and make alternate options too, so that they can go another way to get into the particular job. We tried parking up on the gutter but that was actually chewing the tyres and it's about three thousand dollars per tyre. So, it was chewing the tyres too much, so we stopped doing that. It's like anything you do whereby you've got to be aware of

what's going on. I'm also conscious of my son doesn't necessarily have the interpersonal skills to do that sort of thing because I've had a variety of training to talk to people and placate people. And particularly when it becomes a hostile situation, like, if we're leaking oils all of a sudden – and now it's raining, we're leaking oils, we've got to put things underneath, we've got to talk to the Water Board arriving, so you've got to say, "Yes, we know about it, we've got a spill and we're doing all that sort of stuff", and to show that you're responsible in what you're doing.

MB: So there's a lot of interaction with agencies?

ES: Yes, and different agencies.

MB: Other agencies in the city.

ES: Yes, and it's short term solutions. Someone'll come around and they want to unload a truck and they wouldn't expect you to be there. It's also other people too. We've had a group of skaters come through, so I was talking to someone and I saw the skaters looking underneath the vehicle – this is on skateboards - - -

12.05 **MB: By skaters you mean skateboarders?**

ES: Skateboarders, yes. And the skateboarders looked like they were going to go underneath and then the words I heard when he came up, "Yes, I reckon you can make it". And so instead of saying no, you say, "Well, yes, you could but you've got white on and there's a lot of oil under there and you're going to get dirty". So, rather than saying no, it's easier to say, "Yes, you can but these are the consequences" and they say, "Oh, okay, we won't do it". And then later we were outside or near the Stock Exchange and there was a set of steps which is about my sort of shoulder height, so it's quite a decent steps, and what they were doing is they were skating, trying to do a turn in the air and land on the ground, picturing the armoured vehicle and after half an hour they got a very, very good shot of it. So, what we then said is, "Look, can we put that on our website because that'd be good advertising and we'll give you full credit" and do that sort of thing and they said yes. And so rather than shooing them away or turning them away, say, "Look, this is what you want to do", they take responsibility for injury because it's not coming off the vehicle. We also found street performers on monocycles and they said, "Can we get up on top of the flat bit of the vehicle and bounce?" and I thought, "Oh, okay", and they did – because we watched them bounce on the ground before going up and I said, "Well, I'm confident that they can actually do it". I turned away and I was talking to someone else and when I came back I heard them say, "Yes, I reckon I can make it", and I said, "Make what?" "Oh, jump from the top of the vehicle to the ground", and I said, "No, because you're now jumping three or four metres to the ground on a monocycle". And I said, "No, no, I would

get into trouble”- not “you would get in trouble” – “No, I would be in real trouble because it’s occupational health and safety and lack of duty of care and they would say, ‘What were you letting them up in the first place?’, so please don’t do it” and they said yes. And they filmed it and we said, “Look, can we get your website because this is probably the only time you’ll actually see three armoured vehicles in the centre of Sydney and it’s also very rarely will a monocycle and a street performer get on an armoured vehicle to do that”, and they said yes, so they gave us the thingamy. The other ones we meet in the middle of the night is groups of kids and so one group came up the other night - and I think they were from Penrith, which is a long way away.

14.02 The challenge with children is that they don’t realise the consequences of what they’re doing and you’ve got to be really careful because they travel in packs. Now, when they first came up the other fellow was there at this stage – that’s the other driver – and the first thing he said is, “Oh, you’re all wearing shamarghs. Do you realise you’ve got a Palestinian Liberation Organisation shamargh on and you have an” - - -

MB: That’s the scarf?

ES: The scarf that covers the head.

MB: Which is very fashionable at the moment around the world.

ES: It is, yes. And he said, “Do you realise you’ve got a PLO scarf and you have an Israeli scarf? Do you guys fight each other?” and all of a sudden it went from confrontational to, “Oh, that’s a good point”, so that, “How do and what do you wear them and how do you actually put them on” and he talked about feel and the warmth and he says, “Actually, the real ones are camel hair”. So, in the space of about five, ten minutes he then started talking about them and their bikes and they’d, yes, and “Where do you go and how far do you go at night? And it must be pretty exciting, what do you see?” So, he’d changed it and as soon as he interacted with them he was accepted as part of the group.

MB: And can I just ask how old were these kids about?

ES: Ten to fifteen, sixteen, seventeen.

MB: And about how many of them?

ES: Anywhere up to ten. We’ve had two groups so far. One was a group of about eight and one was about – he was saying about ten, the driver was saying about.

MB: And what time of night was this or day?

ES: Must have been between twelve and three. We do shifts at night, so we do basically three hours and change and then we do it sequentially, so the first time we're on the first part, the middle part and the rear part. So, it was probably between twelve and three in the morning.

MB: So, they'd come all the way in from Penrith?

ES: Yes.

MB: On the train, presumably?

ES: Probably on the train. We didn't really – you didn't really find out.

MB: But they weren't on bikes?

ES: No. And there's a difference between the sort of the day crowd and the night crowd and it's interesting watching the night crowd, particularly Thursday, Friday night, and there's really groups of people. So, males and females together are quite polite, even though they may have had alcohol. Males together, you will normally get one in the group who's very outgoing and you can pick it straight away when they're coming towards you.

16.05 So, the whole idea as they come up, rather than be challenging, is to say "They're big, aren't they? Don't you want to take a photo?" And they say, "Oh, yes, please", and then they'll say, "I'd like to jump on", and you'll say, "Well, you can jump on but if you do you only see part of the vehicle. If you only see part of the vehicle no one'll believe you but if you stand next to it everyone'll see how big it is". And they'll go, "Oh, right". Now, Robert's asleep in one of the vehicles so what we then say is, "If you're next to the yellow vehicle you get a better picture because it's a camouflaged vehicle". "Oh, okay". So, they all move to the vehicle away from the other driver, they stand next to the vehicle - and then the difference between males and females is a male will stand next to the vehicle and put their hands as though they've got some sort of arthritis, which you see on TV, with the fingers out and the – females will drape themselves over the vehicle, consistently. So, ninety per cent this happens. So, it's very few make a shooting pose – I think I've only had one seen to do that. So, in the groups at the moment we've got males together. Now, females, three seems to be a critical mass. If you have three very well-dressed females on high heels, drunk, they will all want to climb on the vehicle. So, they'll say, "Please, can I climb on the vehicle?" and I'll say, "No", and then they'll say, "Oh, please", and I'll say, "No", and they'll generally try three times and after the third time they'll try and climb on the vehicle. There's no sobering influence amongst females whereas there is among males. Whereas males, the rest of the group will say, "Look, mate, no, you can't do it" and because

there's normally someone responsible for going there. So, females are more trouble than males. And the other thing is that I really don't want to be photographed assisting females to get down from vehicles; it's just not a good look. The other beauty of what we're doing is that we're actually near a series of gentlemen's clubs in Pitt Street and so there are very large bouncers there and when we're in Angel Place there's also a security in Angel Place too. So, the security people work closely together too and they pick groups coming towards them and they pick whether they're staggering, whether they're moving.

18.05

From about thirty onwards they're all fine, they're all happy and they'll talk but normally if they're in their twenties they get a bit boisterous. At one stage I was talking to a person that climbed on the vehicle before we – and this is one of the ones that got angry – and he actually got off and he then actually got quite confrontational and without me seeing the security guard from the pub he actually stepped between me and this other fellow in the classic security guard position, which is sort of hands in front, not offensive, and saying, "Look, just chill out, mate. What would you like to do? You've been asked to please -", and all I could think of was "Hooray, he's on my side and we'll buy him a whole bunch of beers later". But it was also looking at his language, his body language and the way he stands, slightly back, so it's not with the hands up or anything like that. So, we're not trained security guards, we're trained So, the groups vary. So, on a Thursday and Friday night we can spend three hours negotiating with people to take photos or not climb on the vehicle, which makes it quite busy. Different during the day; everyone's – particularly families and things. The difference between Australians and foreigners is that anyone with an accent is very respectful of armoured vehicles. Many of the Slavic countries and the Asian countries can't understand why they're in here and there's not some sort of police presence. They will always ask permission, "May we take a photo?" We encourage them to take photos and that sort of stuff too, yes.

MB: It's really interesting. In a way you're talking about how people have reacted to you - - -

ES: Yes.

MB: - - - but also how you react to them, like the interrelationship.

ES: Yes.

MB: Is there a way of separating out where you could say people might actually react differently if they are perceiving the vehicles as a work of art? Like, do people actually look at it and think, "This is a self conscious work of public art – how should I respond to it?" Would people say, "Oh, that's really interesting

– I have odd reactions to this” or “I don't know what this is about” or “What’s it trying to tell me?”

20.04 ES: There’s only three people that I can remember that have consciously said, “Oh, yes, I read about this art. This is so and so”. One then said, “Well, what’s the nature of art? How does the artist contribute to it all?” and we were talking about concepts and it’s challenging and art is different things to different people. And one other person was an artist who then said, “I should have picked that it’s art because I’m an artist and I should know better”, so was more annoyed at herself for doing that sort of thing.

MB: Well, that’s quite an interesting response, though, isn't it?

ES: Yes. “I’m an artist, I should have known that it was” - - -

MB: They should have known.

ES: Yes, yes.

MB: But it means that on that level it’s working, isn't it?

ES: Yes.

MB: It’s working as art in a surprise sense, that people come, immediately look and think, “Oh, I’m looking at a work of art now, I must respond in a certain way” - - -

ES: Yes.

MB: - - - because it doesn’t actually have a sign on it, saying, “This is a work of art”.

ES: Correct. And we had at one stage a sign and Adam said, “Can you please remove the sign?” because he still wants it to be like an art gallery, what it’s doing.

MB: What did the sign say?

ES: It gave the characteristics of the vehicles, saying that “This is a Saracen”. So, rather than saying, “This is a Rolls Royce engine and it goes eighty kilometres an hour” and “No, this is not a – “it had all that one a board. So we did, we just took it off. We only had it on for, oh, a couple of hours, I s’pose, before Adam asked to take it off, yes.

GW: So, what do you suppose most people thought was going on then?

ES: When they saw it?

GW: Yes, with the vehicles, yes.

ES: I would say if they hadn't seen it in the publicity and of that probably about forty per cent have seen it because it was quite a good marketing campaign, probably the other thirty per cent picked it as some sort of movie because it's been done before. There were comments that, "Oh, is this a riot?" or "Should I be scared of the Stock Exchange?" and things like that but it wasn't –it was more of a humour rather than worry. I don't think I've physically seen anyone worried, even an Iraqi garbage driver who wound down his window and said, "I used to drive these in Iraq for eight years", and I said, "Do you want to come and drive?" and he said, "No, thanks, I'm happy as I am".

22.07 So, there's no one physically thought that anything was going on, as in riots or requirement to protect the Stock Exchange.

GW: You did mention the story about the orchestra that was here, the Jerusalem Quartet.

ES: Yes. The [City] Recital Hall had the Jerusalem Quartet on and we'd set up on one side of Angel Place and there's actually two entrances, so when someone came out after the performance and said to us, "Oh, thank you for being here for Israeli security, it's good to have you guys here", we said, "Well, actually we're not Israeli, it's part of the revitalise –" and when they went off we just thought, "Oh, yes", and then another person said, "Thank you for coming out", and I said, just, "Where did this come from?"

MB: These were people in the audience?

ES: In the audience, sorry, yes, and - - -

MB: Australians in the audience?

ES: Yes, Australians in the audience. So, it's interesting to see that Australia would allow Israeli vehicles in to protect Israelis and it just – it never happened but half the audiences were firmly convinced – because they came in another entrance – that we were Israeli security and, yes, different, very, very different - I wouldn't have thought. So, we then went 'round the other side and handed out cards to people going that way too so they knew what was going on, so.

MB: And what about – I think that you have some odd experiences if you're actually sleeping in the vehicles?

ES: Yes.

MB: People coming along and –

ES: Yes. There's an overwhelming desire – most museums you can't touch vehicles and they'll have a big rope around it, whereas this one you actually can. So, a lot of people will tap on the vehicle and the driver will get about four to five taps a night, sometimes with a key, sometimes rapping on it, and they normally do it in two places; they tap the side screen over the wheels, which is quite thin, and then they'll tap the main part which is twelve millimetres of steel, which is a very solid sound. So, people are very tactile. When they see it and can actually see inside, which they can't normally, they have this overwhelming desire. The other thing is it has a camouflage net on it and they have an overwhelming desire to feel and pull off a bit of the camouflage net which is about three thousand dollars worth of net so it's just – we debated to put it up somewhere else but we didn't, we left it where it was.

24.09 So, I suppose people don't get to see inside, and particularly kids don't get to sit inside and actually put headsets and things on which we let them do, so they're quite appreciative of that too.

MB: So you actually do let people come and sit inside the vehicle? You showed us before we came in here – you opened up the back doors and - - -

ES: Yes, that's correct, yes.

MB: - - - showed me where the seats were. I think you said about ten people can - - -

ES: That's right. There's a driver that obviously drives, there's a crew commander that commands the vehicle and they're normally armoured corps and the vehicles were in service in Australia between the '60s and '70s and there are ten soldiers in the back. In some cases you will get collectors that'll come up and start talking about the vehicle and they will talk about specifics of it.

MB: So, they're vehicle collectors?

ES: Yes, and they have specific questions and they see inside. On the weekends, if there's children that want to get inside and they're all excited, yes, providing the parents lift them in and things like that. And then they open everything, which is interesting. We had a lot of – they call them “bins” on the outside which contain things, so we actually had to lock those because people would open bins and have a look and you think, “Well, you wouldn't necessarily do that on a Porsche if it was on display”, why - - -

MB: They don't have bins on the outside.

ES: No, but would you open the boot, would you open the door, have a look in the glovebox? - and they do that sort of thing.

MB: Well, I'm just guessing here but it looks like a display, doesn't it?

ES: I'd does, yes.

MB: It looks like you're opening to the public in some way.

ES: Yes. It does, yes, and it's quite inviting when it's in there too. And the only fellow I haven't asked not to climb on the vehicle must have been about seven feet tall. He didn't even – most people can pull themselves up on the side skirt but it's quite an effort whereas he just sat on it and I wasn't game to ask him to hop down. I said, "Do you want a picture?" and he said, "Yes, please", we took a picture; he said, "Thanks" and left. I thought he was too big to ask to get down but everyone else, "Can we get up?" "No, we'd rather not", and we're going, "Look, it's not us, it's the insurance company - they won't insure us", which is not strictly true.

26.04 *GW:* Did anyone interpret it as a recruitment drive for the military? Some people asked.

MB: Did they?

GW: Yes.

MB: Some people asked if it was a recruitment drive?

ES: Yes.

GW: If it was perceived that way.

MB: I see.

ES: One or two actually did ask, "Is this part of the army?" and we said, "No" and we go into the spiel. Of the people that would have been - particularly here there's two people - because these vehicles would actually go back to 1st/15th Royal New South Wales Lancers Museum and go into the museum, we've been hiring them out - - -

MB: This is where these ones actually live there?

ES: Well, they did.

MB: That's at Parramatta, isn't it?

ES: That is, yes. So, originally we hired them out at Tuggalong Outback Station, which is five thousand acres and allowed people to drive them 'round and it's halfway between Sydney and Canberra near Moss Vale but it was becoming too problematic. We were hiring out

for about three hundred and thirty dollars an hour and it was costing about three thousand dollars an hour to run it. So, we tried it for two years and we said, "Look, it's just not cost effective. We can only really now do displays and the big stuff, we'll now put them back into the museum at Parramatta and then let them out from there because I'm also the commanding officer of 1st/15th Royal New South Wales Lancers at Parramatta.

MB: Are you?

ES: As a Reservist, yes, so I'm a Reservist of the light cavalry unit. So, the museum has them, it can register them and then they put them out for displays and things like that too. So, that's where we'll put these three when they depart here.

MB: And have you enjoyed it?

ES: It's been hectic. I s'pose that I can sleep very, very easily. Having been in the military where you can go to sleep within thirty seconds, if you're given two hours you get two hours, fifty five minutes' sleep. The other two – certainly, my son takes an hour to get to sleep. So, it's a challenge trying to get them into the sleep cycle but to me it's very, very similar to a military operation where short term, you move, sleep when you can, awake when you can. For argument's sake, when we finish here I'll go and check the other guys are right and then I'll sleep for three or four hours because I literally got up at 3.00am. Sorry, yes, got up at 3.00am, moved the vehicles and have been up since then and then this afternoon there's a bit of a lull so I'll go to sleep then.

28.03

But you're then - working with any team, unlike reality TV where they're designed to vote everyone off the island, here you work together. So, you watch what they're doing, you watch their eyes. When they got up this morning, particularly if they're guiding a vehicle or driving I say, "Are you O.K?" "No". O.K, once you've done that - and sent my son to bed this morning because you can tell they're just not a hundred per cent there when they're doing it and it's easier for me to do another three hours, knowing that I'll do the interview here. And then at other times he'll come back and say, "No, I'm right" and he'll do a big one. So, sorry, the question was, have I enjoyed it? It's been very, very challenging when - particularly at nights when you're on you've got to be very, very careful of people coming up, who they're talking to, you've got to assess a group when they're coming up. And Thursday, Friday night is a disaster because you've got to assess the situation, you've got to listen out, even when you're off duty for noise and if you hear something out of the ordinary you've got to go over and be prepared to do that sort of – we tried alarms and all that sort of thing but it didn't work. I don't think I'd do it again and the reason I wouldn't do it again is that you really need about a minimum of four people. Normally, in armoured operations you'd

have six, a minimum a crew of six so you can actually do that sort of thing. The other people that I was working with aren't used to this sort of stuff too so their sleep cycles were out. You've got to be very careful, you say, "Look, be aware, we're going to be very, very cranky. Day one everyone will want to talk, day two you're going to be tired, day three you'll be burnt out", so you're physically ordering them to go to bed and that sort of stuff. And the so you at this stage, which is day seven, you're going to become quite tired and you'll not catch up. I think we would do day displays. Originally, I think it was going to be five days and five days would be O.K. but fourteen's a long time and I think there was also everyone's now seen it, we're not getting the same impact as we had; we could've done it all in about seven days.

MB: Right. So, the people who are around the city are familiar with it?

29.56 ES: Yes, yes. And I s'pose the other thing too is that, like, for Adam asked, "Can you go to this lane at that?" and I said, "Look, if we can get in we'll try". So, when you wake people up at three o'clock in the morning, "Look, there's a space, we can get it, we've got to go", it's to some extent, "Oh, grumble, grumble, grumble", and you say, "Look, we said we'd do it, this is our word, if we can do it and we can -" and all of a sudden, just as we're about to park a guy came and jumped in and they said, "Oh, we don't have to move", and I said, "No, no, no", and I asked him and he went. So, there's an element of saying, if you say you can do something, if you say you'll be on time there's this, "Yes", you do that sort of stuff. So, back to the original question, I don't think I'd do it again.

MB: And it's not what you expected then?

ES: I s'pose it is what I expected – I knew it would be difficult and probably because I'm aware of what's required; it's all the liaising with people, talking to people and it's all the things I used to do in the military anyway. So, it's thinking ahead, planning, before we do a move the normal thing would be, we know we're going to move at three, we've set up the picket roster or the guard roster, I then do a recognisance of where we're going to go, drop the support vehicle off, go back and then we guide in and then you've got to say, "Well" – like, this morning it's raining and you say, "Well, let's picket". You might have to wake them up half an hour early and they're expecting to wake up at three and you get up at two thirty and say, "Look we've got to go now because the rain's stopped" or "We can't go". So, there's a degree of frustration which people need to get used to and I s'pose the difference between military and civilian is that civilian don't develop coping mechanisms for that sort of stuff too and also don't recognise the signs for doing that sort of stuff. It's not that civilians couldn't do it, other than the fact the military knowledge of moving military vehicles and that sort of stuff, yes.

MB: So, all of you have been here twenty four hours a day?

ES: Correct.

MB: And sometimes sleeping in the vehicles but also I think you said you had a mobile home?

ES: Correct. Well, we've got a motor home which sleep two, because there's two single beds. We can sleep three but Robert, the driver's quite happy to sleep in the vehicle and so we – but it's got a shower and toilet and that sort of stuff. We've also been fortunate that one of the building managers gave us a swipe card to get into his shower and toilet down the bottom which has been very handy.

32.07 **MB: Yes, I was wondering about that because you need to stay comfortable, don't you, if you're here twenty four hours a day?**

ES: We do but when we set it all up the logistics vehicle is designed shower and toilet and sleep and they call it "hot bunking system" so you rotate through, so there's always someone on, preferably two, during the peak periods but there's always someone and you rotate through the vehicle.

MB: And what about eating?

ES: We've done a lot of takeaway. Because the motor home's got an actual kitchen but we weren't really fussed so we do Chinese or pizzas and that sort of thing.

MB: And where are you actually parking the motor home? That'd be tricky, wouldn't it?

ES: We've got special permission – we got special permission off Council to park in areas which are normal loading zones or parking zones. We've also had a lot of parking inspectors come past and none of them have ever challenged us other than yesterday – we were on the wrong side of the road in a 'No Parking' area and they actually rang up and they said, "No, no, that's O.K", and we got photos of it as well too because it was quite funny because we wanted to get a parking sticker and stick it on because a number of people have said, "Are you sure you're supposed to be parked here?" and we said, "Yes", so.

MB: Have you ever been involved in any other public art projects – is there anything you can compare this experience with?

ES: No. And I s'pose the other thing is I can't compare to other cities too because we found Sydney's quite clean except there's a lot of cigarette butts and a lot of smoking. I found the Sydney people quite aloof other than the tradespeople who work in a different world altogether. The other thing I noticed is that when I'm walking along, if

I get out of the way for someone, if it's a thin laneway people would normally say "Thank you". One person in two weeks when I've got out of the way has said, "Thank you" and I recognised him as ex military.

MB: So, you're not from Sydney?

ES: No, I'm actually from Canberra, yes.

MB: I see.

ES: But I haven't done this in Canberra so it's very difficult to compare. And there's also different areas here too. We're in quite a good area: the Recital Hall has the type of people that are here for a particular purpose, the pubs tend to be upper class, it doesn't tend to be the sort of bulk stuff as in Australia Square – so we steer clear of Australia Square in the really peak periods.

34.11 So, I really can't compare it to other cities but to me it's quite cold and aloof and I wasn't expecting it. And the people in the morning are quite determined; they're the centre of the universe, they're marching down – particularly if I'm wearing overalls because I'm just a dirty worker, which is true; I am a dirty worker when I'm walking along, so, yes.

MB: And what about vagrants and homeless people – any issues there?

ES: The vagrants tend to steer clear of us because they – there's a couple – some will drink and some are after cigarettes and most of the vagrants steer clear of us except two – on the first night went to the toilet on one of the vehicles when we weren't there, when we were changing the vehicle. Also, they came back and they were going to do it again and I call it my angry crew commander voice, so I just yelled at them and they went off and didn't come back. Similarly, the Pizza Hut guys were going the wrong way down the street and I'm sitting there, talking to a group of people and outside of the Recital Hall he's coming the wrong way into a group of people and I just let fly and everyone said, "Oh, that's unusual". I then went up to the Pizza Hut and asked to speak to the manager and then the manager was too scared to come down so I then passed on the message – I turned the TV off, passed on the message which basically said, "Under Occupational Health and Safety I'm personally holding you and the people in charge of this restaurant legally liable, not Pizza Hut, you, because of failure of duty of care, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, don't do it again or I'll take you to court" and then apologised to the people turned the TV on and went out.

MB: So, your worry was that the pizza delivery person was going to drive into the crowd that was surrounding your vehicle?

ES: Correct. And the pub has asked them not to do it, the Pizza Hut has been told not to do it. They have to drive a long way 'round, so they're going the wrong around a street. So, I'm about to write to the manager of Pizza Hut and say that they need to provide motorbike parking for their Pizza Hut delivery people outside, otherwise if there's a death they are legally liable and we've got witnesses, we've got photos and the police and everyone will talk to them to.

36.08 The police have been very good; they come up and have a big chat. And, yes, I s'pose it's my angry voice – people don't see my angry voice.

MB: You sound very calm as well.

ES: That's how you're supposed to be and it's all just fake, just make it up as I go, make stuff up.

GW: *It's good information for us if we want to improve the laneways.*

MB: It's very information.

GW: *Exactly the sort of issues we need to deal with also.*

ES: Yes, yes.

GW: *You know, basically.*

ES: And yes, if you wish to improve the laneways, people have said - Melbourne's already doing it. Yes, you have a marketing campaign to draw attention, more toilets so that people wouldn't have to go to the toilet in the street. The coffee shops are light and once you start doing light and coffee shops and drawing more people in, more coffee shops – the existing coffee shops don't complain because people come - - -

MB: They're not alone.

ES: Yes, and they also said that the laneways are for tradespeople unloading in certain hours so they need to be kept free and then during the day in the coffee shop, that's when you do the coffee shop and it takes them out of the main thoroughfares like Pitt Street and George Street, so they're quite strong about that too.

MB: Anything else you think we should talk about, Glenn or Eric?

GW: *What to after this?*

ES: I'm going to have a sleep this afternoon, Glenn.

GW: Yes

ES: Okay, in the longer term, we'll take these back. I'm actually on holidays from Defence – I work in Defence as a civilian.

MB: So, you're still fully employed by them?

ES: Yes.

MB: I see.

ES: Yes, this is actually on leave so I'm doing this for fun, so yes.

MB: And it's your business too, isn't it?

ES: It will be but I think we'll wind it back. I'll turn it back into the leadership stuff because we can do exactly what we're doing now through the museum as part of them with the insurances and things like that too and the liability.

MB: Right. So, the leadership stuff, as you call it, is your sideline from your military work?

37.54 ES: It will, yes, and it's really based on my PhD and we can then do the hiring out as a outdoor experiential type activity, so I can cover it under the costs of that sort of business, and do it just for fun on a weekend or – because the other driver is retired. My son, he can do it - I think he's about to head off to New Zealand to do work over there, basically, so. So, I've run out of people that I don't have to give lots of money to. In fact, we don't pay at all.

MB: But I guess you do need skilled people to do this kind of thing, you need people who are familiar. You can't just pick up any old bloke from anywhere - - -

ES: True, yes.

MB: - - - and say, "Look, let's just go and look after this armoured personnel vehicle".

ES: Yes, and when we're moving you're moving a ten tonne vehicle with a centimetre either side over anywhere up to fifty metres. So, it's just very, very tricky so you have to know what you're doing and the consequences of getting it wrong is you'll take out a post, the vehicle won't even feel it, you'll take out cars. And at one stage we lost the engine – once you lose the engine you lose power – on a slope and so it missed a car, missed the bikes and fortunately - - -

MB: That was here in doing this project?

ES: That's right, yes, and fortunately it rolled into a series of milk crates which were all plastic which then absorbed the shock and didn't take out the but that was more luck than anything else. So, that's when we said, "Look, we're not doing that again", which is just too hard. But it's also the risk management: you've got to look at things and say, "No. I know it's a brilliant idea and you want to do it", just say no.

GW: Actually just on that, do you want to just give a quick description of the age of the vehicles and -?

ES: O.K.

MB: Yes, I think that's a good idea.

ES: O.K.

MB: Tell us about the vehicles because - - -

ES: Okay.

MB: - - - because most people won't really be familiar at all.

ES: Okay. The vehicles themselves are all Alvis Saracen armoured personnel carriers.

MB: Alvis?

ES: Alvis is the company.

MB: A-L-V-I-S?

ES: Yes, yes, Alvis and the company - the Rolls Royce engines, stroke eight engines, so, Rolls Royce set up Alvis after WWII to actually do it. So, conceived in WWII, all built in 1952. There are earlier ones on the production runs, so all of them would have seen service in the Malaysian confrontation.

40.02

And then we can track ones from ex Hong Kong police, one saw service with Northern Island with the British in the five years and one was in Aden, which is the Suez Crisis for four years and we've tracked that sort of stuff. So, they'll go eighty kilometres an hour, six wheels, seven and a half to ten tonnes, depending on whether they've added armour to it, and a precursor to what's in overseas now, which is what tricks people: overseas now they're eight wheels and go a hundred and thirty kilometres an hour whereas these are six wheels, etcetera. They're old, they're fifty six years old, they take a lot of maintenance, they'll carry ten fully combat loaded soldiers.

Everyone says its pretty squash – yes, it is but I've never had anyone say, “No, thanks, I'd rather walk or I'll catch the next one”, it's all “Thank God you're here” and they jump in.

MB: **And how did you come to have them?**

ES: Collectors brought them into Australia and then they lie derelict in the field or – I'm probably the youngest person, just over fifty now, that's working on them, whereas the art is dying out; the current generation are not interested. So, some of the older generation say, “Look, I want to sell it, I'm not interested in doing it any more. I'm eighty years old, I don't want to touch it”, and so we'll pick them up that way. So, I own one outright and the other driver owns two and he owns some more armoured vehicles which we hire out too which So, that's the vehicles. So, they're Rolls Royces with sun roof and all of the - - -

GW: *And they were decommissioned at some point?*

ES: Yes, they were in Australia in the '60s and '70s but only with Reserve units but all of these were decommissioned probably thirty years ago. And they are still in service around the world with some countries. For argument's sake, Indonesia's just purchased some off England for Aceh which is quite controversial because for a variety of reasons and foreign policy it's the access to new material.

GW: *Well, what's a new vehicle that does this sort of job?*

41.54 ES: The new Australian equivalent would be the ASLAV, the Australian Light Armoured Vehicle number 25 - it's currently overseas with the forces - and there are two regiments in Australia, 2nd Cavalry Regiment and 2nd/14th Cavalry Regiment, both in Afghanistan and Iraq - a very good, very capable vehicle. The difference would be it has remote weapon stations which means all the people are inside and everything outside is controlled electronically by TV whereas the vehicles we have, it's the old days, you put your head up through the turret to do that sort of stuff.

MB: **So, you're obviously going to continue – this is your life in one way or another.**

ES: Yes.

MB: **This and your work in the Defence Force as well.**

CB: It is, yes, but it'll probably more continue as a hobby and, as I said, we'll probably do day displays but I don't think we'll do big displays again. I don't think the people are there that could actually do it and have the time to do it too if they're not – if they're in the military now they're doing professional jobs and things like that, so.

MB: Did Adam have to do much persuading of you to get you to be a part of this project?

ES: No. He said, "Do you want to do it?" and I said, "Yes, please".

MB: Right.

ES: No, it was fairly easy. He said what he wanted to do, he was quite persistent with the three and so we said, "Look, we've got these ones available" and he said he'd like these three and said, "Yes, we can do that".

MB: Just when you were talking about the vehicles themselves and what they were for - - -

ES: Yes.

MB: - - - I mean, it does remind us that we have a city that is not used to seeing this kind of thing around the streets at all - - -

ES: Yes.

MB: - - - but most – well, probably not most cities in the world but certainly on television and other kinds of imagery that we see, we see it all the time.

ES: Yes.

MB: And yet what you're describing about the way most people respond to this is not really that, it's not a sense of it being military.

ES: Mm.

MB: You could say perhaps that people in Sydney really don't expect trouble of that kind on the streets.

ES: Correct. I mean, it's not confrontational. We have black metal tubes in to represent thirty cal machine guns. I suppose it's also the context, that it's still fairly friendly, they're not in an aggressive pose, they're not surrounded by police, black-clad police in armour and things like that.

44.05

If for the APEC or for Operation Testament they had military vehicles in, that's completely different whereby it'd be cordoned off, they wouldn't allow people to approach, there'd be some sort of sentry well forward, preventing them to come up, whereas here it's very easy just to walk past and walk up and although we're there we're sort of quite aloof. It differs from overseas. The people overseas have had not

necessarily a great experience with them, depending on the regime, whether it's a dictatorial or coups and things like that. So, that's why I think the foreign people that have come past are very shy and just confirming what it is and is everything O.K, knowing full well that in Australia, a democracy, it's very rare. And if you look at it, really, I don't think there would be armoured vehicles in the city again, you can't have them for ANZAC Day and things like that. To bring some in is actually quite unusual and particularly even outside the Stock Exchange. One morning they said, "Look, go to this lane", and I checked on the map and it was at – and I said, "Oh, that's O.K, the Stock Exchange is lower and we're up there" but when I got in in the morning I looked up and I said, "That's the Stock Exchange", and I said, "Don't you think it's a tad insensitive that we're outside the Stock Exchange with pretend machineguns and armoured vehicles when the Prime Minister is trying to defuse the situation?"

MB: Yes, you're talking here about the current global economic crisis?

ES: Crisis, that's correct. And so they said, "Oh, that's O.K", and I said, "No, I don't think so". So, what we did is we pulled back; we pulled the machineguns, shut them all down and went quite quiet, mainly because I think it's – you can't really do that sort of thing - everyone else is seeing this. You can joke about it but not in real life because it's just a public relations picture waiting to happen. And we were fortunate that Sophie Monk was in the hotel next to us and I think the media were more interested in Sophie Monk and where she was going and the ARIAs.

MB: She's a current starlet?

ES: Starlet, yes, that's right. And there was only two journalists from the Stock Exchange came across and got a photo of the vehicles and the ASX and the Stock Exchange and they got - a couple of tourists did - they'll probably make a lot of money out of those photos, but there was probably about three tourists did as well too.

46.04 *GW: I think it's interesting in that regard that we didn't cross any kind of boundaries like that. I mean, we could have, certainly kind of upset the Prime Minister even on that day.*

ES: Correct.

GW: But we stopped short of it.

ES: Yes.

MB: Yes, well, it's interesting, isn't it, that we have to make those kinds of considerations - - -

ES: Yes.

MB: - - - perhaps because it's a work of public art as opposed to private art, if you can categorise things that way. I mean, some artists might say, "No, well, that's what I want to do, I want to cause a shock, I want to draw attention to the Stock Exchange and what the Prime Minister is saying, I want this to be confrontational".

ES: And that's freedom of speech which is correct but in my particular case I said no, we're not going to do it because also indirectly you could then say, "Hang on, you're the Lieutenant Colonel of an army Reserve unit and members of your museum are here; that is just entirely inappropriate". But also on the other side, two weeks before the activity – I've worked in the army operations room before in Defence – so, I actually sent a statement to our media relations which then told the operations room and everyone, "If this comes up and someone rings, that's O.K, it's the art. This is the number you need to ring", and gave them my phone number too. So, yes.

MB: Well, I'd just like to draw out one thing there is that although it's a work of public art it's actually you are not the artist per se - - -

ES: Correct.

MB: - - - but you are another factor in the way that the whole thing is presented - - -

ES: Yes.

MB: - - - because you have to make determinations about what's appropriate or sensible or reasonable - - -

ES: That's correct, yes.

MB: - - - which the artist doesn't and can't.

ES: Correct, yes. And he'll say he'd like to do this and we'll say, "Well, we physically can't fit" and it doesn't matter how much he insists, you say, "Well, we physically can't get between those two trees to park there".

MB: It just can't be done.

ES: "But what we can do is this" and then there are things we'd prefer to do, is that we'd like to keep them close where we can see them all at once. I know artistically we'd like one on that corner, one on another corner fifty metres away and a truck and you say, "Well, no, because it's too much mucking around. We're happy to do this, we're happy to go in the gutter and park them together and pretend, basically", yes.

48.11 **MB:** So, you've been here in Angel Place - - -

ES: Yep.

MB: - - - you've been at the - - -

ES: Australia Square.

MB: - - - which is the Curtin Place.

ES: Curtin Place, yes, in different combinations, different ends – and there's two parts to Angel Place - and we've been at the Stock Exchange during the week, which was more by accident because they said, "Oh, you weren't supposed to be there" but we then said, "We know" because when we did the recognisance in the morning there was a truck blocking one, there was a truck blocking this one and we couldn't get in there and there was an abandoned car there, so we went 'around and that was the only street available and I'd already checked to say that it was nowhere near the Stock Exchange on the map – but it's an old map - which is actually in Australia Square. So we're there and I said, "Yes, I know we're not supposed to be here. This is what we're going to do about it now". And they said, "Oh, but you're not supposed to be there". "Yes, we know we're not supposed to be there" and we fixed it, so, yes. And then later in the weekend, when the Stock Exchange is not open and there's also the Tank Stream Pub we said, "Look, they queue up past that way so what we'll do is we'll do a PR photo in the day so there's the public relations. Yes, we were in the archway, we had a centimetre each side but now that we've done that shot we'll now move to the other shots which are also impractical in the day and then go back into our normal combination" because you just can't do it. So, there's really three overall sets of laneways and we do different vehicles, different combinations facing different ways. Like, this is the first time today out the back - we've go the other two vehicles facing the other way too. And the aim would be, "I've seen it all before" and people would say, "Oh, didn't you have one vehicle before? Now you've got two, now you've got three".

MB: So, that draws attention as well, just that change in the combinations?

ES: Yes, that's right, yes.

MB: Well, good luck for the next few days and - - -

ES: Thank you very much.

MB: - - - and I hope you enjoy resting up and sleeping normal hours when you finish up.

ES: And back to work on Monday.

MB: Yes, back to work on Monday, yes.

ES: Yes.

MB: Thank you.

ES: Thank you, thanks for your time.

GW: Thanks very much, Eric.

Interview ends