

Mm, I started on as Vallon man and I was the second Vallon man to learn, because one of the other lads had been doing it a little bit longer than me so I like sort of learned off him, followed what he was doing because we work in a two man team. After a while it become where I was leading the patrol and we'd take it in turns each day, we'd just have a laugh about it, the lads, because there was just me and him. So we'd, one day he would do it or one week he'd do it and then I'd do it the next and we just do that all the way through the tour. It was really good like. It was a bit scary being the first bloke walking everywhere and knowing that you've got to make sure everything's clear and that there is nowt there because all them people behind you are counting on you so you've got, you've got to go through all the, choose all the routes, you've got all the route selection. Make sure that it's tricky and try and think of where they might not put any devices. Go through that area and you're constantly trying to look around the area to find out if there is anyone acting suspicious whilst keeping on your toes with listening to the intermittent tones on the Vallon from high pitch to low pitch. And some places because there's quite a load of rubbish in Afghanistan, there was loads, you see it's mental like. When we first got there you'd do one sweep with the Vallon and you'd hear thirty tones, you'd be like 'oh God this is it, I'm dead'. And then after a while you were just walking along and you got used to it. It was quite hard, your arms ache like hell as well. That was quite a bit of a difference as well holding the Vallon out which is about two and a half metres long, three metres long and just swinging it with your, just with your left arm constantly all the time and having one arm on your weapon and moving all the time so it's a bit like a workout all day. So six, seven hours of doing that and then coming back in off patrol it was quite hard graft like

A Vallon is basically a metal detector that picks up a metal signature in the ground and that will help you to find out whereabouts a device would be. I.e. some of the devices could be a 105 shell so it's a big solid metal object, so what you'd do

is you'd sweep along with the, with the Vallon head, which is shaped a bit like a, like a rectangle and then it comes, comes up on a pole and you have your light sensor to let you know and you have vibrations as well and sounds so you're working off three different senses off your body.

So you've got your touch sense, you've got your sight and then you've got your, your hearing for it as well. So a lot of the lads they'd set it on the setting that it needed, it needed to go along. Go along the ground, find a metal tone. Now sometimes it could be just a daft little Coke can, so you'd hear, you'd hear quite a high signature and then you'd check round it with because in the centre of the Vallon is where it's mainly coming from the signal so you'd, you'd go round the outskirts and try and find the size of the object. Once you found the size of the object try and adjust it yourself. Get down on all fours, move your Vallon out of the way and move anything metal out of the way and slowly brush away the dirt and use a paint brush and really just brush away, brush away until you get the edge of it. As soon as you get the edge have a look around and if you notice that just is a Coke tin you can just pick it out of the ground and chuck it away and think 'oh God that's alright'. Other times you might find something i.e. a device. You'd be going along and you, you'll find some rubber in the middle of the ground, which is they used to waterproof the pressure plates that they used to use on it and they'd encase it in like a bike inner tube. So in your average desert you're not, or your average Green Zone you're not going to find a bike inner tube just laid in perfectly square.

*Yes.*

So you'd get down, you'd find that. As soon as you'd see anything like, anything like a device shout 'device found', or like IED, if you think it's an IEDs but normally it was just 'device' because you didn't, you couldn't confirm what it was yourself. After that you'd send a ten liner up, which is a report

for an explosive ordnance that's in the ground. After we've done that we get, mm, the Bomb Disposal Team to come out. They'd come out and they'd have a, they'd go in more depth into it because that's their job and help us out that way. Sometimes it could be nothing, you might have found a daft *Palmolive* container that some kids had put a load of nails in and put in the ground and that's been left there, or you might find an old bike wheel that's just been over floods and time have had mud over it, so you'd pull that out of the ground and they'd tell you. But it's better to be safe than sorry like. So it was just...

Me personally, I only found one.

*You only found the one?*

Yes, I only found one personally. Mm, one of my mates he got just over thirty.

*Thirty?.*

Yes. He was there in my section as well.

At first, I remember I was, I was patrolling down the road called the 611 Road, patrolling down this road and there was like a hole in the ground which had been like as if you'd, as if you'd dug up something and then filled it back in with soil. And because it had been raining the night before it had sank and I looked at it and I thought 'bloody hell that is strange'. Walked over, gone along and there's a metal tone in it and I was like 'oh here we go'. Come in, and as I started pushing away I found, I found a battery pack with three D cell batteries all taped up and in a tube and it had a three wires running out of it. As soon as I seen that, because I was laid flat on the ground and I had my left arm out moving with a brush and I was all, so I shouted 'device' to the lads. I tried to uncover it just a little bit more and just to make sure that I wasn't saying it so the lads just got on the floor. Mm, I was shocked. At first, it was a great sense of 'oh my God I've actually found one, this is great this'.

*Yes.*

And then it was the realisation of 'oh Christ this could be an actual bomb here, this could kill us'. And being twelve inches away from your nose and looking down at it, sweat pouring off you because you're in the heat is a pretty scary feeling. Yes, pretty, it's pretty intense. And then once my Section Leader had said 'right, are you sure it's there Jono'? I was like 'oh definitely, aye, it's definitely one'. Moved back and called ATO out and they exploited, exploited it and found the IED. The best sense was seeing the IED get detonated by the ATO to know that I'd cleared one. And it was like 'that was one on my tally'. So it was like the lads turned in to a competition who could find the most and it's just like typical Army banter like, it was brilliant between the boys. So it would be like 'oh I've found three today' or 'someone's found four' and each week you're trying to get more and more than the other person and...

Mm, I wish I'd found a lot more because quite a few of our lads got hurt by some of the devices that were laid there. And I don't know. Part of me thinks if we'd cleared a few more up maybe they might not have got them. But the same as saying that as quick as we found them they'd put them down somewhere else. Or if we found one and we moved back to exploit it they'd try and remove it and reuse it, re-seed it somewhere else.

We try and find the safest route, there's no point playing about with stuff like that, definitely. Mm, if i.e. like for example if we're walking through a field and you'd have irrigation ditches we'd try and go through the irrigation ditch where it's really mucky and clay and really hard going ground so you're really, you're working hard just to walk through that ground. Because if you're working hard to walk through it your average bloke's not going to want to sit and spend hours there trying to dig a device in, and that's our type of thinking. So we'd take the worst route you could ever think of for your average bloke to go

through. And with all the kit that you're wearing, your body armour, your rifle, you've got all your ammo, everything it's really hard like.

The way our Section Commander works is he's obviously directing it. He'd show us the map, tell us where we need to be and show us where we are and he'd say 'right, I want you to go sort of on this route', north or south or east or west or whichever way it was, 'I want you to carry on a line down there', and on the map you'd see certain compounds. He'd say 'right, try and keep a good line with that compound and follow that'. Now if we were going that way and it looked pretty dodgy or we had, if, if you, quite a lot of the time you'd have like gut feeling that something was wrong round the area or you'd see a lot of locals moving out of the way of places or you'd watch and you'd see locals not using certain bridges or using certain paths, and if they're not using them we weren't going to use them. So you'd like try and adapt your route round the way but keep, try and keep on the same path all the time and try and just adapt your route round the way that you were going like. But if I ever felt that I didn't want to go a certain way because I felt a bit uncomfortable my Section Commander would go 'well, it's your call. If you don't feel happy then that's fine, you go that way'. And quite a lot of the time he'd just let you get on with it. Not force you, not pressurise you in any way because you're under a lot of pressure anyway yourself, you feel quite pressured because you've got eight, eight or nine blokes behind you and they're all counting on you not to get their legs took off or get to blown up or for anything to happen to you yourself because they're the ones that have got to carry your sorry arse out of there if anything happens like.