



TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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Description	Vernon Samuel Donegan, as a lieutenant, 5th, 2nd and 102 Anti-aircraft Batteries, interviewed by Jane Fleming-Panegyres for The Keith Murdoch Sound Archive of Australia in the War of 1939-45.

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Transcript methodology

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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE A.

Identification: Tape one of an interview recorded in Perth on the 4th of August, '89 by Jane Fleming Panegyres with Major Vern Donegan, permanent army retired. At one time an instructor with the 5th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery in Western Australian and who served in Darwin with the 2nd Ack-Ack Battery and later in other units and postings including in New Guinea. End of identification.

Were you born in the country?

Yes, I was born at Toodyay, W A.

And how long had you family been in Toodyay?

Uh, well their whole identity's at Toodyay and I'd say all their life.

Where did you go to school?

Um, in Toodyay at several country schools, but all being managed from the Toodyay State School.

What made you go into the army?

Uh, well I was invited to play football with East Fremantle. They visited the town when I was playing in Toodyay in the association there and I must have impressed somebody because they invited me to come down and play with them for the next season. Um, well, I used to go down by taxi - they had a daily taxi from Toodyay at the time - go down on the Thursday and probably come back on Sunday. But just - I'd go down Thursday so I could be with the team on training on the Thursday night. Um, well, eventually they asked me to - if they could get me a job, would I come down and live in and work in the city. So seeing it was during depression years anything was better than sitting home doing nothing. So I thought well, I'll see what they can find.

So I told the secretary that I'd do that and one weekend I received a letter to say - or a telegram to say, 'Come down, job waiting'. So I - I was thrilled to bits to think I'd got a job. Anyhow I came down - as a matter of fact my friend brought me down on his motorbike and I had a case about two feet by eighteen inches and full of all I belong... all I owned, and we - coming past the Alcapulco Restaurant - they were forming the road there and the, the motorbike wasn't too keen on the gravel so we ended in the bush, and - but nobody injured. Anyhow I came onto ...

The restaurant wasn't there though of course, in those days. That's a much more recent ...

... That's right, yes ...

... thing.

Mmm. So I ... um, came down to Fremantle and went down, saw the secretary and said, 'Well, here I am, what about this job?' And he said, 'Oh yes,' he said, 'they're recruiting up at Artillery Barracks. Go up, they'll take you on, you'll be able to enlist.' So, I thought, well okay, so I went up and joined the army and I've never regretted joining the army. I think it served me very well and I had a wonderful time, particularly with the townfolk at ... or the city people at Fremantle, they took me under their wing and being a boy from the bush they advised me this and that and it turned out trumps.

(5.00) So I didn't - or I haven't regretted at all - or didn't too - because when we, ah, when war was declared on Germany - 1939 - I'd - I'd got all my qualifications for bit of promotion and whenever a promotion bobbed up, well I was there to accept it. Which I did and I found that the positions too that I received were well worth having and here I am now as you probably heard earlier in the interview a major. And I think that's a rank that was well beyond me when I thought of joining the army.

How did your family initially react to the fact of you joining the army?

Oh, actually it was only my father living at home. My mother had - was deceased and, um, they all thought, well it'd be a good thing. Probably teach me a few things that I'd 've missed in the bush. But ... it didn't. It more or less came my way with anything I touched and I was quite thrilled about it.

Did you keep up with the football while you were in the army in Fremantle?

Oh yes, I managed to play state football - represented the state in 1939 and then played a few games up until early 1940 - 1941 rather - and then someone said, 'Look you're needed in Darwin. The Japs are getting a bit too close. Go up and turn 'em back will you?' So I says, 'Right', and that's how I got to Darwin.

If you could tell me about the early training that you received? You know, if you go back and think about, um, the first months and so on that you were in the army as a young man.

Well it was, we thought pretty hectic there for the first three months. Ah, they had the parade ground and ah, they certainly taught us a lot as regard the comradeship, the ah, spit and polish that was always expected and I feel that now I will often stand things in a line, which was probably the training I got at the barracks at Fremantle when I lined everything up. And my wife used to say to me, 'Oh can't we have a different set up in this garden instead of your straight lines'. I used to say, 'Righto', and change it to what she wanted.

It was a natural inclination after a while to make everything terribly tidy?

Mmm. I even do it now, for different things. If people are there and, like ANZAC Day parade, I'm fussing around getting them in their right places, right size and all that. But I think if you can get the, um ... Everything looks much neater. As I look at this photo you've got here you can see if they're all in line and they've all got their hands in the same position and it certainly brings out discipline and good training.

At what stage did you undertake anti-aircraft gun training? You went to that ... Do you want me to hold it for a minute? [Break in recording.]

Uh, I was had four years before I ... with the Heavy ... 3 Heavy Brigade at Fremantle as a gunner and the training on the equipment there was with the 6-inch guns on coast defences. Uh, so, from 1934 to 1938 I became a corporal - as you were, we were talking about gunners aren't we?

Mmm.

So I was bombardier and did, towards the end of that period, I was an instructor on the 6-inch guns. So as well as anti-aircraft I had the training on the 6-inch guns on the coast defences. And then later on I joined 3 Field Regiment [sic] which meant that I was trained then again on field artillery.

(10.00) Now, the - the actual anti-aircraft training, you'd had a fairly long period then as a gunner before you went off for that special training, but how did that come about and where did you go to do that?

Oh, you mean the special training?

Mmm.

Uh, to Georges Heights in New South Wales - in Sydney, New South Wales. Uh, that's the ... was the ack-ack anti-aircraft headquarters and most of the training - I'd say all the training was done at Georges Heights and then they'd go out into, oh I wouldn't like to try and name the place for shooting and that type of thing. (Coughs). Pardon me.

How was the training organised? Who were the people training you and what sorts of instructions did you have, what sorts of manuals and and so on and how much preparation had been made at that stage? Because it was a relatively new thing then, wasn't it, anti-aircraft ...?

Well there was - as far as I know, they had quite a ... uh, at the headquarters, a training cadre I suppose you'd call it. Or it could've been called a cadre... a battery and these fellows had all been ... I wouldn't be surprised if I heard that they went to England for a lot of their training in the first place, or some of the English officers came out here and briefed the ... those that were in - at headquarters in Sydney. But we always looked upon Georges Heights as the home of artillery and we had some very pleasant times there, but some very difficult ones too. With the training, all these things unless you're pretty well, um, teed up in trigonometry and that type of schooling, it was difficult to learn the theory of a lot of the later instruments. But, uh, it was enjoyable, and when you look back on it now, I often wondered how I did get away with a lot of the instruction I gave. But anyhow, we - we got a victory or two later on in the war, so I guess I must have been somewhere on the right track.

Now four of you went over together for that particular training school ...

... Yeah ...

... from Western Australia ... [Break in recording.]

You've actually got photos of the four of you in your uniforms there, and they're bent over. Who are the others with you?

Oh yes, we had a very neat uniform and we were quite proud to go out on the streets in it. There were other types of uniform that we used to wear. There was our fatigue dress which we certainly stayed indoors when we put that on. And then there was ceremonial, but this walking-out dress that we were wearing at this stage, and you can see on this photo I have here, four of us walking down - uh, I'm not sure the name of the street - but we're all abreast and we all happened to be about the same height. So we, I'm sure, people would wonder what was going on when four of us would get out together. But ...

Very smart boots and everything, this uniform and so on.

Yes, oh there's a few time... or a bit of time spent on those - on the leatherwork - particularly boots and leggings and I remember our - or the officers in charge of us before we left, he looked us over and said, 'Oh Joe, that's ... you've been putting a lot of work in on your leggings and the rest of the leatherwork', and he said, 'What did you use?' And one of us remarked, 'Spit and polish, sir.' And then he said, 'No, what did you used to get the polish on your boots and leggings like that?' This fellow says again, 'Spit and polish, sir'. And the officer says, 'Now listen, don't start getting too smart or you may not be going on this trip', and he says, 'now what have you been using?', and he says, 'Well I spit on the - on my leggings and then get some polish and rub over', so he says, 'the spit and the polish, that's what I've ha... that's what brought the shine onto the leggings'.

(15.00) So then, uh, oh there's four of us walking down the street: there's [Jack Moss?], who was Bombardier Moss at the time; Vern Donegan, I'll put myself in there 'cause I'm next in line, I was a sergeant; [Archie Metherall?], who was a bombardier; and [Percy Mofflin?], who was a bombardier. And the four of us had left Perth quite happy about this trip. It was something that didn't happen very often because there were no wars brewing when we first joined up. Um, it, as I said, a very neat uniform and I feel we looked the part. We must have because in the background you can see there's a couple of women taking a look at us (laughs).

How many other men were being trained at the same time? Now there were the four of you from Western Australia, but, um, who were there together with you, from say the other states and so on?

Oh I think the number would be somewhere around about thirty. Oh, I'm not too sure, but I remember there was quite a lot in the barrack rooms and I think they held about about ten and I think there were three barrack loa... barrack rooms occupied at the time.

It was fairly intensive training that you went through over there then, how long did it last?

Uh, normally it'd be about six weeks and that was sufficient to give us all the, uh, grounding we needed to well, get accustomed to the equipment and know the front from the back or the elevation panel from the other side of the instrument. But ... ah again I say, we - we got along very well. As a matter of fact two of the - the two on the outside of this picture, ah, both returned to the School of Artillery as instructors. So they certainly impressed while they were there for their cadre.

> Now you mentioned the technical side of it, but what say proportion would there be in your instruction in a day of the technical theory side of it and the actual practical familiarisation and ...

... well ...

> ... work with the guns?

Well it might be all day sometimes, depending on the weather. If you got a wet day, you'd be kept in on theory and uh, that type of work. But about half and half I suppose. We all had to - to operate the machine from all the different positions and the same with the guns. We had to know what the gunlayer was doing and practice his part as well as any other particular part of the equipment. That'd go as far as the height-climber was concerned, the predictor - the predictor i an instrument, the main one, in the anti-aircraft set-up at the time, and same with the guns. We all had to do the number one's job on the guns, that'd be the sergeant who was in charge of the gun and they're supposed to look after that like a - like a - baby because if you let your gun get knocked out or it misfires, well you've certainly lost a big opportunity.

> Now when you came back from that training school, you were in fact the beginnings of the, um, the 5th Anti-Aircraft because you became a cadre of the - the 5th, out of which grew the 5th Anti-Aircraft Battery?

Yes, that's right.

> In what order did things take place? How ... What sort of setting-up procedure was there, and so on?

The main thing was to get the troops trained that had come in as the 5th Ack-Ack Battery, and, uh, we only had two 3... 3-inch twenty hundredweight guns. So it meant a fairly continuous stream of ... recruits coming onto the guns. With only two guns it was hard to give them all a, say a go on the elevating gun or on the loading platform, things like that. But we kept them going as much as we could ...

(20.00) Where did you get your men from? Where did the recruits come from?

Um, I couldn't say definitely, but I feel it was from the general public around the city and probably those that had heard of the an... the ack-ack cadre being formed from the country, were quite anxious to join and they could have come from the country as well.

> How active was the recruitment for the ack-acks? Was it, um ... was there, you know, a big drive to get the suitable sort of men into it?

Um, I think, by what I remember of it, they were all keen to get in. You had kind of a queue at the gate but we could only recruit a certain number and they were recruited and we trained the - whatever the requirement was.

> How long a period of training did the men that you were training receive before they went off to Darwin? About how long would they have been actually training with you?

Uh, well a training period is normally over three months for them to become skilled at their particular job, and also as far as the parade ground training was concerned, their dress and the duties they had to perform. How they performed their duties. If they couldn't march they were held back in an awkward squad and the others would go on with probably more training for the guns and whatever instruments we had.

> Now you said you only had two guns on which they could actually train at that time, what about the situation with ammunition and so on? Was there any problem with that and how much you could actually ... the - the complexities of using, say live ammunition and so on, was it possible to do that?

Oh yes, we had live shoots. We had a plane that would drag a target behind it - a drogue I think they were called - and we'd fire at this drogue. We did hit it several times and of course the training would have to stop until we can get a replacement. Uh, but I believe the ammunition was difficult to get so we couldn't be too generous with our shooting. Although everybody wanted to have a shot and/or to control the gun while it was being used. So I'd say, from what I can recall, that the, um, you couldn't have too many shoots because you didn't have enough ammunition for it and you had to make the most of what we had. Probably you'd be allowed to fire six rounds and if you didn't knock the target out, well the next fellow'd take over. But it was all out between Fremantle and Rottnest, where the plane used to ... on that particular course, north and south in the channel there if I'm permitted to call it a channel. So it was make the most of what we had and everybody seemed happy with it. Even the officer in charge, who I haven't mentioned and who's the officer responsible for all this. He was from Duntroon and a very good officer, Lieutenant Long, at that stage and he went on to ... Can you stop it? [Break in recording.]

And I'd like to say that Lieutenant Long was one of the boys. He used to come out and play cricket with us, and football and was quite popular. And I've noticed that he signed my discharge - or the record of service in the Australian Military Forces, he signed the commendation that's in the back of the book, and that is signed by C E Long, Major-General, Adjutant-General. So he certainly went up in the world, and after starting from anti-aircraft.

(25.00) When you actually went to Darwin, how much warning did have of the move?

I'll say not enough (laughs). But I just can't remember the exact ... whether it was a fortnight, ten days or - it certainly wasn't ten weeks though. We had to move pretty smartly. So I - I feel somewhere round about fourteen days, twenty-one days.

> Now did you know where you were going?

Ah, yes, we had a fair idea. Particularly when we went in that direction. Oh, we went across the Nullarbor and you don't cross the Nullarbor to go to Rottnest Island or to South Africa, so I'm told. But it wasn't much at all. We had to move smartly and tee-up anything that we may have been buying at the time - like a motor car - so when the ... when we got cracking well then we did go across the Nullarbor and over to Adelaide. Then by certain transport we eventually got to Darwin.

Quite a trip.

Yes it was.

Parts of it weren't very comfortable, I gather?

Oh no, a cattle truck with the cleats still on the floor of the cattle truck, I'd say it doesn't make a very comfortable bed. But still it - it was reliable transport and it got us up there in time.

You had Christmas on the way?

Yes, we had that at Oodnadatta and I've got a snap here somewhere, if I can find it at some stage. But it was so hot that you could just sit in the - the carriage and the carriage was like a bus with the seats down the sides - running in line with the railway line - uh, and to try and cool down a little we used wet towels and had them over our heads and so forth but it was quite a blistering day and we had Christmas lunch at Oodnadatta. I think everybody'll remember that, with a tin of bully beef between about six and a loaf of bread and whatever you could get to drink. But whatever it was, it was so hot that you'd hardly drink it at all.

Some people got a bit sick before the end of the trip to ...?

Beg your pardon?

[Break in recording.]

That's the photo of Christmas - Christmas Day.

Ah, yes, so you can see the towels hanging from the ceiling, they are drying out. While one was drying, you'd use another one to damp you down and perhaps when the train was moving, create a little cooler atmosphere than what it was previously. But in this picture you can see Ken Forsyth, and I think it's Doug Williams, Vern Donegan and Les Watson, and all stripped off to the waist and wishing we were home for Christmas instead of sitting out in the - out near Alice Springs somewhere.

Yes, it says 120 degrees on the back there.

Yes, that's right, yes that's 120 degrees.

You don't look very cheerful anyway (laughs).

No.

I'll just turn the tape over.

END TAPE 1, SIDE A.

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B.

Another big group photo there, what ... who are they?

Oh this is the, uh, P&RT course that I was on, before - before I went to Darwin. Uh, it was back in 1940 at Frankston and there was somewhere about thirty-five to forty on the course. This other photo that I've got here is a group of us who had won trophies and so forth. But the one I pride most is the end of the 100 yard sprint. Through playing football and doing quite a lot of foot running and so forth, I was in pretty good condition to win it and I won it by enough anyhow to prove that we had some pretty smart fellows over in Western Australia.

When you were over on those courses in the eastern states, were you very actively Western Australian about it? Being very full of state pride?

Oh yes, we always liked to be in the top group if - doesn't matter what it was. Even at the examinations you'd like to top it, or endeavour to, and in the practical stuff. Running for the gun, any gun drill was always done at the double and we found that if you could run it was a big help. You'd get a pat on the back from at least the bombardier in charge, so we used to always strive to win - win all the time.

When you arrived in Darwin, what memories have you got of your first impressions of Darwin and the way it was at the time? How much it was still a civilian town and how much it was being prepared for defence purposes?

Um, there wasn't a great deal of activity as far as we could see. And I say we, because we drove into the town and then we were taken out to the gun-site called Berrimah. That's on the way into Darwin and it was on the - in line with the end of the strip at the RAAF. So it was a pretty ... good position to see what was going on at the RAAF but it was also a good target for the bombers, because in their patterned bombing they would act on the navigator or the bomb... bombardier in the - if you call him a bombardier - in a certain plane, probably the leading plane, and when he gave the order to release the bombs, they would all do it at the same time and of course you'd get this pattern of - of .... This formation of the flight up top and the - the bombs landing, well wherever the ... if the fellow was good enough, right on target. But being at Berrimah was always a pleasure to get a posting from there because of this - you're right in line with the main airstrip at the RAAF. What was the other bit?

When you, um, first went up there, you were - the men that you'd trained had had a fairly extensive training, but there were a lot in the group that came up with you that had had far less preparation as far as specifically anti-aircraft training anyway, weren't there?

Yeah. But the - there was, I'm not sure whether it was one or two officers and some of the NCOs were allotted the job of training these fellows that were lacking in training. So, uh, we didn't have too much time before the first raid to really make them top-line gunners.

(5.00) But they did play a part and I believe they performed very well. 'Course later when they knew that there was ... the real thing was on, they showed a lot more interest and became better gunners too.

> What happened when you first go up there, because you went up as the 5th - as one big group, the 5th Heavy - what happened as far as the allocation of men and how soon where you separated out into other groups and so on?

Um, as far as I know, was put in charge of building a road into the gun site -into this Berrimah gun-site - and it meant the only way we'd get across the bog was to lay down timber - planks side by side and got through that way. But, um, I didn't stay on the job long because I got dengue fever and I found myself in hospital after about a week and I think I had about a fortnight in hospital and then I was sent to the Fannie Bay gun-site. And at Fannie Bay, apart from a few Western Australians who came with me, they were all New South Welshmen on that particular gun-site. And it wasn't long before I found ... I made the second officer - there was an officer in charge there when I arrived and then the night of the first raid he was involved in an accident which left me then the only officer on the gun-site. And so I had to more or less concentrate on training and I never left that gun-site for six months and I felt that there were a lot of things that happened and I wasn't aware of it. I didn't have a clue it was going on, all I had to do was fire those guns so that's what I did more or less.

But, uh the fellows were pretty well trained there, on that particular site and I had plenty to do. Particularly in the censoring of letters. I'd find a great pile on my desk when I'd come in after training and then I'd have to try and get through these letters. So the only way I could do it was to rely on the NCOs to play their part and make sure their guns were ready for action. Uh, that the right supplies were coming in and at that stage too, they seem to just disappear somewhere between where they were loaded onto the truck until they came to the gun-site. Because there was never enough, and I think a lot will back me up on this, that if you didn't like M&V - which is meat and vegetables - uh, well you'd have very little to eat, and M&V was a terrible meal to put in front of anybody. You'd feel as though you'd rather go down to the beach and try and land a fish to - to get you through. But ... so what was happening further down the track, it was no concern of mine so I didn't bother about finding out. Well, on the other hand I couldn't find out unless I got someone who - and spoke to someone who came up from that area. Now I can't very well say just how well these fellows were trained, but it did take the officers away from the - their actual positions on the guns - or not actually on the guns - but commanding the troops and ... But later on, when we all got sorted out, it was a different kettle of fish and everybody seemed to be quite happy with their standard of training, so that's where it ended as far as I know.

(10.00) Now the men that you'd trained in Fremantle, and in Western Australia, had been been trained on 3-inch guns, hadn't they? Um, when you went up to Darwin, what were there in the way of guns up there?

Um, that's right, they used ... they were trained on 3-inch twenty hundredweight, uh, two of them I think were available at Artillery Barracks. But when we got up there, as far as I'm aware there were two 3-inch twenty hundredweight guns at Elliott Point and all the rest were 3.7 heavy ack-ack guns.

> How difficult a process was the training conversion for men that had say, trained on the 3-inches to use the 3.7s and how much time would that entail?

Oh I don't think it was difficult to operate one gun after handling the other one. It's only a matter of probably a weeks training on the guns. Uh, the instrument side of it would be practically the same. So I'd say the fact that they were trained on another gun didn't make a great deal of difference to the standard of training if you compare one with the other - of the other I mean, that'd been on 3.7s all the time and they hadn't seen a 3-inch twenty hundredweight.

> To get back to the - the first raid, if you can recall the circumstances surrounding that from your own point of view. You know, where you were, um, what you saw, how it felt and the lack of warning and so on?

Uh, everybody seemed to be, uh, going about their work and nobody was panicking or anything in that line, so I think the first we - or most of us knew about it, was to see the planes up in the sky. And not only one, but well over a hundred and I - that's a rather, uh, an experience that although it was good to see such a formation, but when you thought, well they're out to get you and everybody else it changed the - your idea on whether it was a good formation or otherwise. The ... but everybody kept at the job as far as the, whatever they were doing and I felt, well is it or isn't it. But when you started to hear .... When the bombs started to fall you knew it was on and it was then everybody to the - to his post and to his duties, which I think they were glad to get on the - on a gun and to be able to retaliate. And I often felt that after a raid that the fellows were quite cheerful and it gave them something to do. It also let them see that what they'd been taught was now a reality, and they had to accept it and get out there and stick to their guns, which they have in ... a lot of the documents you can find, that the different ones that were near enough to express an opinion, most say that they fellows carried out their duties well. There was no shirking anything and where help was needed, and perhaps to save a life, they were ready to go if they were called. But I don't think it ... I didn't feel as though there was any danger, although there was bombs dropped around, but it was something you had to do, so you accepted it and well that was it.

> On that first raid though, with no warning and people thinking at first that it was just practice and so on, how did you actually go about getting things underway? You know, and the guns actually firing and so on, and getting the men into position and ...?

Oh well, everybody's got a position and they're trained in that particular job, so it was just like blowing your whistle. But our signal was, we'd call, 'Plane!' and whoever could see it first - if you could pick it up you yelled 'Plane!' at the top of your voice and everybody'd run to their positions.

(15.00) So when it did come into range, everybody was there ready to go and ready to press the trigger. So we had no trouble at all as far as troops were concerned to get them onto the gun floor - or onto their jobs at the instruments. And it was like a stampede, as soon as you yelled, 'Plane!' and they can hear it somewhere - although you probably couldn't see them - ah, well then they'd be picked up and fellows'd be there ready to go into action.

Now there were two parts to the, um, that first day, weren't there? There was the first part of the raid and then there was a later raid, later on the 19th?

That's right, yes.

How serious was the second?

Well I think the little bit of experience that we got from the first one held us in good stead for the second and so it went on. The more raids we had the better we became on the guns and on the instruments and I - I can't remember anybody shirking anything and if anything, enjoyed the action because it was a relief and from the day to day business. But the second raid was, uh, more or less - they were still talking about the first one when we were at it again. So they weren't so far apart that you had time to forget and forgive. It was a matter of back on the guns and playing your bit wherever you could get in on the act.

People started to leave Darwin very quickly after things happened on that day, how much did you see of that - the movement of people and so on, out?

Uh, well it kind of, uh, came home to us that there was something pretty serious on. And with people rushing out, I know probably some would feel that we were being deserted and we were in a way, but you thought well all the time our guns will fire, we'll fire them and the Japs hadn't landed, they'd only dropped bombs on us and they had to come a long way to do it, so given a bit of time we'd be able to fight 'em in the air as well as from the ground. What I mean by that, we'd have planes that could attack and deal with the Japs in the air like the fighters and possibly ships from out at sea that - and some in their harbour - that could all fire anti-aircraft equipment and they would be there to - to take their share of the firing.

How much did you see of the damage that was caused by that first raid, or the first day of raids on Darwin itself?

Uh, I saw very little of the damage. Although I knew there was a very large amount of shipping sunk in the harbour and a lot of that I could see from - or a part of the harbour and the ships were pouring smoke which indicated that they were burning oil and so forth and the ship itself was burning.

But of the town I didn't get into the town and I was only about a couple kilos [sic] out but it was my job to be there ready for the next raid and that's all that concerned me. Uh, the devastation was severe in ... or was very high in the centre of the town and on the main communication centre, but ... I found myself too, that evening, there on my own as far as officers were concerned and I found next morning that I had a gun-site, about a hundred troops, four 3-inch gun... 3.7 guns and a bit of ground defence, so I'd lost my mate, or the

other officer that was there, he was in an accident that night, and I was then left with this responsibility of looking after the - and firing the guns.

(20.00) Uh, which was quite a shock more to me to know that I'd got the gun-site under my control now and the ... that at any day that I could be - I could find the Japanese invasion. Because normally after a bombardment of that nature they follow up with probably a landing and we'd even thought about then - this was a day or two later - of about dealing with them on the ground as well as in the air.

So it was very real, the feeling that you were likely to be invaded at any time?

Yeah, yeah.

Did you have much damage at your - you were at Fannie Bay - was there much actual damage around your site and did - was there much in the way of injuries or so on?

Uh, there was no damage apart from injuries. Uh, I think there was three of the boys got wounded in the leg, they were carried off by their mates from the gun floor, but they only went as far as the first building and stayed there until they got an ambulance out for them. Uh, but the - the rest of it was all nothing - no difference. You wouldn't known there'd been a raid on.

How effective were the emergency services and so on after that raid, because there'd been some damage done down around the hospital and so on and, um, how quickly did things get sorted out as far as the wounded and repairs and that sort of putting together communications and so on?

I'm sorry I couldn't comment on that. Because as I said, when I knew that I'd be in charge of the gun-site I don't remember anything at all as far as the ... what you've just mentioned.

Just getting on with the job and what you had to do.

Yeah.

What ... from there on, were there memorable raids that followed that? What - when you took over those responsibilities and you know, there were a sequence of raids fairly close ...

... Yeah ...

... together after that time, what stands out in your memory about those?

Uh ... oh golly .... We had a lot of them. Most of them seemed to be hit and run raids. They weren't the 150 bomber raids or the 888 bomber raids that we'd had before. The ones to follow were smaller. When I say smaller, they used to operate more so with - in a V formation. If it was seven bombers, they'd be flying in a V. If there was say seventy, there'd probably be up to ten flights fitted in like a jigsaw puzzle, so they had the protection of the -

their guns for any fighter planes that might be about to attack. So, uh, the small raids - well there was one on Easter Saturday, the 4th of April, 1942. Uh, there was a formation of seven bombers came over. I think they had fighter escort, but we only fired on the formation of bombers. Um, now we were quite lucky, or fortunate, in that our first rounds from the guns burst in the centre of the formation and immediately the last - or the three trailing bombers - lost formation and was pouring smoke and they could ... you could see that they'd been damaged and two of them immediately started to spin and came down and landed in the ocean somewhere. But, uh, the third one lost form... lost height and burst into flame and we saw the pilot and possibly the navigator jump out and through using their parachute, it looked as though they - it'd caught alight - or the parachute had caught alight as they jumped from the plane, because they acted like a plumb-bob then, they just came straight on down.

(25.00) Now then there was the fourth one, whether that didn't stay with the formation, but we got a signal then from the fighters to say they were engaging and we'd always co-operate and that signal from them was a sign to stop firing because they were going into where the flak was.

So that was our big day in Darwin where we managed to get three bombers. Some say we got four but I'll be quite satisfied with a credit of three and the gun-site that I was on, was the only one that opened fire so no other guns could claim the fact that they had also shot down planes in that formation.

The men would have been extremely excited, I imagine, after this.

Well I think that did happen, that some of them were so excited and particularly the ones that were on the instruments and the ones that were using the telescopes to follow the planes, they could see what was going on very clearly and I think that that might have interfered a bit with their, uh, observation. I had binoculars, but it's pretty hard to - to see just what has happened to bombers or planes when they're probably scattered over a distance of anything up to a couple of kilometres.

What sort of response did this get afterwards, such a terrific success?

Oh we had quite a group came out to congratulate us on the - when I say came out, came to the gun-site from wherever they were stationed - not those off the other guns, but townsfolk and the senior officers, a group who had their headquarters right in Darwin. So congratulations were fast-flowing that day and I think it was well worth it too because ... I feel to shoot, even get three out of seven is, probably four, you're not doing too badly.

Do you in fact get personal recognition for this afterwards?

Uh, no, I - I didn't get any recognition at all. Um, I don't know what you'd have to do as far as an ack-ack gunner to better four out of seven, or whatever the case may be - three out of seven - but I feel that there should have been some recognition shown or given for what happened. Because everybody you met were quite thrilled about it and they thought it was such a - ah, such an action to warrant some ... some kind of recognition from higher authority.

You feel there's more to the story than we're telling here?

Mmm.

END TAPE 1, SIDE B.

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A.

> Identification: tape two of the interview recorded on the 4th of August, 1989 in Perth by Jane Fleming Panegyres with Major Vern Donegan of the 5th, then the 2nd, then the 102nd Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery, who also later served in New Guinea. End of identification.
>
> How much difference was there between night raids and day raids? Did they constitute any particular problems?

No, none at all. Uh, at times there would be a plane, uh, either just a nuisance plane or one that was probably out for a - to try and impress and get a ship or something, but we found that they would come into the target area, but they'd be out of range - even out of range of searchlights - and they'd just fly up and down to ... just as a nuisance, and probably drop a bomb somewhere about two o'clock in the morning and then away they'd go. So the night raids were of no trouble to deal with, because half the time you couldn't deal with them and they weren't doing much damage. The bomb would probably fall in the bush somewhere because they couldn't see their targets - that's if they had a target. So ... I can't say that I know of any place being bombed directly by a plane and I think they're just there to keep us awake.

> How difficult did it get as the raids tapered off a bit and there was more spacing between them to keep up enthusiasm and to, um, be on the alert so much with less happening?

Oh of course the fellows were getting a bit browned off. Some of them had been up there over two years and hadn't had a break at all. There was nowhere - no place where you could go for a, say to a dance or to a ... few beers. Perhaps (coughs) I'm sorry ... perhaps down the line to see your mates was about the - the extent of any leave and that was only possibly ten miles away. But, uh, it did ... when they eased off, I'd say the fellows were getting browned off because they'd been there too long without anywhere to go. And their only pleasure that they'd get would be probably letters from home, the newspaper - if we could get a newspaper - and a bit of a sing-along with the Salvation Army officer who was posted in Darwin, and he used to always bring in this little song called *Bottle of Sunshine* so we labelled him our 'Bottle of Sunshine'.

> How much in the way of sport was possible up there?

Uh, there were plenty keen to play but the thing was to get somewhere to play and to probably get some of the ... we used to play within the - the teams would be within the gun-site, but to have any kind of a big function with sport, there were a few carnivals arranged. As a matter of fact I've got a program there that was the program for one of the football carnivals that they had. And they brought troops up from down Alice Spr... No, Adelaide River and south of the

area and then they played the, probably the gun-sites or the main part of the town, if there was any troops in there.

(5.00) So, there wasn't a great deal of sport and ... that also I think, was a bit of a - a worry for the troops. Having to get up in the morning and know they were going to get back into bed again at the same place. But they could always raise a smile, and as I say, we had our 'Bottle of Sunshine'.

> Didn't have a bottle of much else though did you? The rations got a bit short didn't they, at one stage?

Oh, we were always short we reckoned (laughs). Mmm.

> What about censorship, you know, you had to censor the mail, I imagine, as you mentioned early, you know, the responsibilities there. How strict was that censorship and was it delicate task, you know, to have to read other people's letters and so on and particularly when they were bored and stuck up there and had ... couldn't say much about what they were doing?

No, it was delicate in this respect that you knew that what had happened and fellows would certainly write - write up something. Well as long as they could write it'd be something about the Japs, but as soon as you saw 'Jap' in a letter or 'planes', you had o knock it out - cut it out with a razor blade. I, ah, when I was there on my own, I had this censoring to do and I used to find myself sitting up midnight still censoring letters. So I eventually got help from headquarters and they - this is I suppose after about three or four weeks, and the letters were piling up. I'd say to the chaps, 'Look, look at the mail there, I've got to censor those. And what about you fellows playing the game and doing your job outside without me having to come out and supervise it. Do it properly.' And I said, 'If you don't put anything in the letter', and I says, 'and I get to know who does write these raids up onto their own opinion', I said, 'I can more or less just flash through that page, where otherwise you got to read the lot'. So they played ball pretty well and they did ease up with our letters and then headquarters came good and allowed me to send the mail into them and they used to do it in there - that was in Darwin.

> With the boredom and the isolation and the way things dragged on, did that present, sort of discipline problems and morale problems?

Oh yes, but what could you do? Uh, if a fellow ... Neglect of duty was about the one that most of them would, uh ... you know, go to sleep on duty or would go out when they were on duty, but a lot of them thought - and I did too - that if there was a raid coming onto Darwin and they'd say, 'Where would you like to be now', I would say, and I think a lot of the others too, 'right here on this gun-site'. Because you can hit back from the gun-sites but you can't from elsewhere. And I think that kept a lot of fellows in, that they were prepared to sit it out and if there was a raid, well, we'd be unlucky if it was our turn to cop the full blast of whatever the formation had.

Now you had notable success but how effective were the anti-aircraft guns really, in terms of range and so on in relation to the way in which the Japanese flew their aircraft in?

Oh I think they were very effective, and the first thing is that if they've got guns down there firing at them, they're going to get up a bit higher and they'd keep doing that until they were just about in range long enough just to sight the target and let the bombs go and then get out of it - get away as soon as possible.

Um, so ... well I think that's about as much as I can say.

(10.00) Effective from a defence point of view but a bit frustrating sometimes in terms of the ... the height would be frustrating in terms of range from some of the gunners I suppose who are keen to score?

Well they - they would always appreciate firing a shot or two, but if the thing is out of range, you know, if you've - you're instruments will only - or your fuses will only burn to a certain height and then they'll explode - the shells I mean - they'd explode, otherwise you could waste your ammunition if you kept firing when there was no value in it.

Now you were lent to the 2nd ...?

... Yeah ...

... and were mainly with New South Wales men ...

... Yeah ...

... how did you feel about that, about being attached to largely a New South Wales outfit?

Ah, I wasn't very happy in the first place because it meant me leaving all the fellows that come up to Darwin with, and being a - a lieutenant whose signature was hardly dry on the paper from signing his commission. But, I was a little bit bitter, but the thing was they sent me off to hospital when I had dengue - dengue fever - that was okay, I appreciated that. I had a time in hospital and then they sent me to a gun-site where I think they thought it'd be easier for me there than probably sending me to another one and .... But then when I lost my - lost the officer that was in charge of the gun-site and I found myself next day with a - I think I've mentioned it before - with a responsibility of a gun-site - eighty-two men and ... and everything that goes with it, it wasn't a very pleasant thought. But anyhow, everything turned out all right, so I was quite, ah, appreciative to think that I'd been allotted the gun-site, probably over some of the other fellows that were - could have taken it.

... back a bit [Break in recording.] you'd joined the AIF in, when? September ...?

'42.

'42. Um, was there much feeling between say the AIF and the militia and the attitudes of one to the other and how did you feel in fact about joining the AIF?

Uh, I was going to say I never gave it a thought. But it - it didn't make any difference as far as I know. I thought about going to the office and saying, 'I want to join the AIF' but then I thought, well I'll go in any case and perhaps if I do stay with the PMF, I'll probably get a better job somewhere because of my qualifications and that. Well then I got my commission and I then - it wasn't for that reason though - but I knew I had to join it somewhere along the line and as I couldn't do it when I was ready to do it, I just carried on. But I can't think of - and I don't remember anybody at any stage saying, 'Well look you got to do a bit more than me because you're in the permanent forces and I'm in the AIF.' So I let it go, but in the end I thought, well I'll be better off eventually and it must be my turn to take a risk and go overseas and that type of thing. But I've al... always felt that I would have been sent overseas if I had have just stayed as a - in the PMF.

There wasn't any feeling among, say, the men that came up in the group that ... 'cause some of them were pretty young, you know, some of the men went up to Darwin with you and some had ...

... Yeah ...

... done some preliminary training on a sort of part time basis, was there any sort of, um, thing in the way of comment made though to them, by others and so on about the quality of their ...

... Yeah ...

... background and training?

Oh no, I think that everybody was accepted as they - at face value and that was it. As a matter of fact, I was in the, uh, 10th Lighthorse before I joined the 3rd Field, or the 3rd Heavy Brigade. So it applied to me and then the - being in the milit... permanent forces, uh, I was - I done a lot of running around on instructing jobs, but .... No I couldn't - or I didn't notice it if there was any friction between the two. I wouldn't even know who they were.

(15.00) One of the things that's been talked about, about Darwin, is the, um, the looting. How much of it there was, what actually did go on, how much do you know about that and, um, how much has it been exaggerated?

Uh, I didn't see any looting but I wasn't in the position to see it. As I said, after the raid we stayed on our gun-sites, and I was there for six months and only went from one gun to the other or back to my bed, which was in a tin shack about 100 yards away. So ... but I know from what I've heard of and what I heard while I was there, that there was looting. I think it was looting in this respect that (coughs) if we don't get it, it'll probably be burnt through, uh, bombs dropping on the building or the Japanese will get it - ah, take what they want. Now - but I do remember, and I think this could have happened in a lot of cases, where we were at Fannie Bay there was a chap lived about half a mile from the gun-site and about the second

morning after the raid, he came past, and he had everything he could pile on his car - on the hood and goodness knows where else - and he had a wife and two children and as he came by, he said, 'Listen you fellows,' he said, 'there's - we've left a lot of fowls down there - chooks,' he said, 'you can either feed them and use the eggs or,' he said, 'you can kill them and eat them'. He said, 'It's up to you,' and he said, 'I can't find a spot to put the refrigerator on the vehicle,' so he said, 'it's down there in the house, make sure you get that and use it, too.' So that's what I think a lot of them did and why they thought there was so much looting. It wasn't looting, it was just being given and it was accepted.

Now after that six months where you stayed put in those conditions, what did you - what was your move after that?

Can we stop it?

Mmm. [Break in recording.]

Yeah, after that.

After that, well I left Fannie Bay and I went to a course down at, uh, Liverpool - an anti-aircraft course. Um, I think it was to find out how to shoot down Japanese planes, but I was used a bit there to, uh, tell them a bit about formations and so forth and ammunition and that, so on the other hand I got married while I was down there and then I came back to Darwin and I went then to Berrimah gun-site - back to my unit that I went up there with. That's the 2nd Ack-Ack Battery.

How much leave did you have when you got married?

Two days. My wife came over from here - she flew over. She knew I'd be down there for about six weeks and then we were married and we had two attendants at your service. Uh, one of those fellows is in the picture - mmm this chap.

Mmm.

Uh, so then I was sent to, uh, Berrimah and as far as the accommodations were concerned, we used to have to look after yourself. If you could make a bed, or find a bed, uh, well that was up to you. But we had - in the gun-site at Berrimah a very good carpenter, a chappie came from Kalgoorlie and he could never be still, so I said to him, 'Righto, build a - build us a sleeping quarters,' ... Can we stop it?

Mmm. [Break in recording.]

This is a photo here of what he actually built for you. It's quite an elaborate mess.

Yeah. Yes he was a very good tradesman and, um, you'll notice there that all the uprights look as though they've been bought from the store next door. But what it is, it's pandanus palm and he cut them all off same length, let them into the ground, then put a railing around the top.

(20.00) Actually it's only about - that wall's about three feet high, just enough for the bed to get down below it, and then on the top is the camouflage, with a little bit of iron fitted in to keep the place dry. But as you can see that it's quite well-done and I often feel that he gave us a lot of comfort. On the other hand, uh, we allowed them to - to build their ... whatever shelters they could arrange with this carpenter, or do it themselves, providing it didn't obstruct the gun from firing and also to - or our observation of the area around the gun-site. So ...

This is you here, lying here ....

... Yeah ...

With a photo of your wife.

Yes, that's right. Um, there's a few more similar here but, uh, they all bear that message that we were comfortable there where otherwise we were, um, it was pretty rough.

You mentioned dengue fever, that you had dengue fever. How much illness was there among the men up there?

Oh I think a lot of them got .... See malaria was still going then, they hadn't really rid the place of malaria. Uh, and we all had to take atebrin tablets and God knows whatnot, salt tablets. But, oh, I think they saw it through. At that stage, when we got up to this stage we had this officers' mess as we'd call it, the troops were pretty comfortable in their areas (coughs) so, uh, we couldn't very well expect much more because any minute we might have been .... Well not at this stage, I think we were - we were just about over the danger point and we knew that we could put our feet up, so that's what we did.

By what stage did you really feel that things had eased right off and that you were past the point of danger as you say?

Oh, I think it kind of told it's own story because the raids stopped, the censoring was eased a lot because fellows had nothing to write about so they wouldn't write a story about a raid or anything and you'd know. But ... and then we tried to get more recreation and we succeeded and got .... Can you turn him off? [Break in recording.]

Uh, and here is a drawing - or a ... actually a shot of a 2nd Battery out at Berrimah that says, 'Welcome to the Tivoli Show' and we had the - or it was arranged that these girls went from unit to unit and entertained them and this was done by one of the officers - this little fellow here - and all those on the gun-site at the stage when that was taken, or when the girls entertained, and they all signed the picture.

Your poster. Who were the girls, the chorus line here?

They were all Tivoli girls.

They were actually from the Tivoli circuit?

Mmm.

And how long were they up there?

Oh they only stayed with us for about - time for a show, and then they had to go somewhere else. I suppose, it might have been a week. I don't know. When they left us, they left the thought only.

What sort of reception did they get?

Oh mighty, yeah. They ... they did quite a - a good act as far as I know.

It must have made a terrific change for the men that had been up there for so long?

Well it did I think, and it also gave us something to talk about and something to write about. I think if you winked at one of them that was quite a - ah, thrill and it'd last you for another two years, before you (laughs) got back.

(25.00) When did you get news that you were coming back down from Darwin?

Oh, ah, actually I don't know about got the news of when we were coming but it was stated that there would be so many of us going to the 102nd Battery and that was in the north-west of WA. So I said, 'We can't - we don't want all of you up there, but we'll take those who've been nominated or selected.' And so we went right through and picked the fellows that we wanted - ah, this was from two batteries - two batteries not 2 Anti-Aircraft Battery. There was ... that's right ... and we then came to Perth, had some leave, and picked up some mobile ... no they'd gone before us, that's right. Ah, we were up at Corunna and also at Noonkanbah and they had two, uh, landing strips there and bombs - they had great piles of bombs everywhere - and we were supposed to go up and protect these two gun-sites - not gun-sites, airstrips, well and the gun-site too. But, ah, nothing came of it, so all they could do was to get someone to cart the bombs back and we packed up and came south. So we had a long trek and the guns there were 3.7 mobile guns and we crossed the Fitzroy River at Noonkanbah and down through Broome - didn't go quite into Broome - down to Port Hedland and over to Meekatharra, and then from Meekatharra to Midland Junction. Uh, using - or towing the 3-inch - 3.7 guns. I can't think.

How much leave did you have before you went up to the north-west? How much leave - home leave - did you have once you got back to Perth from Darwin?

Oh be about three weeks I suppose. I doubt whether it'd be that much, because they wanted to do this strike from, uh, Noonkanbah and so I think, had it been urgent though, we wouldn't have stayed that long in Perth. But we went down there and just had a bit of leave and then up there and then they said, 'Come back, we don't want you.'

> And ... (Vernon coughs) after you came back down from there, uh, how soon was it that you went overseas? Did you go straight overseas after that or did ...?

Uh, let's see now, where are we. Yeah, we came back and we'd put our vehicles on the train at Meekatharra and then came down by train. Then ... then we had to take the - these fellows went to, I think it was personnel depot where they were allotted, or they were posted to other units, but there was half a dozen of us who stayed on the train to return these vehicles and we took them from Meekatharra, right around up through - through Adelaide, and then down to Bandiana, where they were returned to depot and then I became available for overseas posting.

END TAPE 2, SIDE A.

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE B.

> Now, when you came back down from the north-west, that was when the - you ceased to be anti-aircraft and um ... that was the end of your anti-aircraft days?

Yes, that's correct. Ah, I then, after returning all our vehicles to Bandiana in New South Wales - is it New South?

> You got me there?

I was posted to the 39th Australian Works Company and that took me to Rabaul where I stayed until I was then transferred back to the mainland.

> What sort of experiences did you have in Rabaul, in your period up there?

Oh, it was all right, but they were a bit .... I found there was a lot of naughty boys in the unit. I think they got posted to the Works Company because they couldn't very well rely on them to do jobs that were more important and that they needed security and secrecy, things like that, and I think these lads got posted to the 39th Works Company (coughs). But they may have been okay, but I didn't see them that way because you'd - you'd put a fellow in the gaol for something that he had done and he might be three days or a week in - in the clink that we had, or that they made for them, and then when there was a picture show on, if you'd go to the pictures, you might sit next to the fellow that's supposed to be in the clink, in gaol. The NCOs weren't strong enough to keep them in and look af... you know, deal with them properly. So I think that was a bit of a farce (coughs) as far as the unit was concerned and the other thing was, that they were unloading ships and so forth and we also had the native boys there, and the native boys would probably unload a ship twice as fast as these blokes. But the - the native boys were very keen to please and get their pay and their meal.

So that's where overseas ended for me, when I came back to Sydney.

> And what were your responsibilities when you went to Greta? That was next, wasn't it, when you came back down ...?

Yeah. Posted out - RTB. We complained about the posting to the OC of the unit - there was another chap with me - and we were both artillery and they posted us to a training battalion that was all infantry. So we only lasted there about two weeks and then we were brought back here, to the headquarters of West... Northern Command. No, that's right, I went to - came back and then after a break I was posted to Darwin. Back to where it all happened.

What did you have to do at that stage in Darwin? What were your responsibilities up there?

Oh, I was on - where are we?

Here.

Camp [inaudible].

Mmm. What was going on up there at that stage?

Nothing (laughs). That's why they posted me there. No it was, ah, general reconstruction of the army set-up and demolition of buildings and camps and things like that, that had to be cleaned up. Um, so I think I had a couple of years there.

Mmm.

(5.00) Three years. Yeah. But there was nothing really important. It was a good posting with, uh .... Well you were a big - you were a .... Let's see now, how can I put this? A - little fish - no, you're a big fish in a little pool (laughs). Because everybody was mates there and if RAAF had a function or the navy, well the army turned up to it and same vice versa and even if it was at Government House, you'd be included in the people that they wanted to come along for the show.

Just .... [Break in recording.] ... different too, by that stage too, you would have - as a married man, your wife would have gone up with you ...

Yeah ....

... as a permanent army man ...

Yeah ....

... you had, um, a family life up there?

Yes, there was quite a ... a variety, we'll say, of different units in the area, but most of them were on headquarters and there was like all the documentation had to be attended to and we had other people there. The S&T - Supply and Transport - there was the REME crowd, there was a couple of them there, signals had two or three (coughs), and so it went on, and we had native boys employed there as well as ... the white fellows to do the general duties around the camp. Or when I say camp, Larrakeyah Barracks is a pretty big place and all the buildings were vacated during the - the war. A lot of them had to be repaired. Ah, so there was quite a

bit to do, and I think we had something like twenty or thirty married quarters that had to be looked after. Um, but no - no big units or anything like that. They'd all moved out as far as I know.

Now, from there on your career was in Western Australia and at one point you went up to Onslow in 1952, what was happening up there at that time?

Oh well at that time there was the, uh ... Britain were doing a test - atomic bomb period - or a test period - and they needed some place for the, uh, scientists to stay while they were in the vicinity. Now if they could get to Barrow Island, they'd go over there and do their bit and possibly live on a - one of the British warships that were - was in at the time. Or they, I think they had three or four of them around the area, but one would be for accommodation, and they would then probably stay there or .... I'm not sure what they had on the island, I had no chance of finding out 'cause I couldn't get over there, so they then would come back to Onslow and if there was no plane available, they'd stay in the Onslow Transit Camp, and that's what I had there then at that time. I was the officer in charge of the Training Camp [sic]. Um, it then folded up - or the atomic bomb was released and apart from a big puff of smoke and a kind of big mushroom - like a big mushroom, uh, there was nothing to it as far as we were concerned because we didn't know what was going on, we weren't told and we had to protect these, uh, scientists from people like the press who wanted to - a statement as soon as they would see a scientist.

(10.00) But if - we used to keep all the moves quiet and wouldn't say anything about them so, it'd be a secret move and then I remember one fellow that came, and I think it was Dr Penny, who's here. I have a photo of him in the Transit Camp and he was a very polite and appreciative man. He knew what we had to - what had been done for him and the rest of that his scientists ... uh, well that's - that was about the extent of the (coughs) the camp in Onslow. But as you can see by that photo, they were only in tents and they appreciated that. Anything there? I got this - this card from a reporter who was up there, and he always tried to get a snap of [Dr Penny?] - or Professor Penny - and there he is. So that then ended ... We packed up. Uh, what we couldn't cart home in our own vehicles, we took them down to the wharf on the ... a couple of - what do they call them, transporters I think, belonging to British navy, came in and picked it all up and brought it direct to Fremantle.

So we got out in a day and - or a couple of days - and then brought all the equipment back to Perth that we were using at that stage.

And then, from that period on, you were in the metropolitan area for the rest ...

... Yeah ...

... of your service?

I think it was, apart from ... Yeah. Apart from Rottnest Island, but that's the other end of it.

Since you've retired, um, how much have you kept in touch with friends that you made during your years and how much have you to do with ex-service organisations and things like that?

With the fellows I was with in anti-aircraft, and particularly the chaps in Darwin, we've kept a pretty close - in close touch all the time. We even had a back to Darwin for the 40th anniversary of the bombing of Darwin and we must have had seventy or eighty of them come back. We went back by train, over the same ground as we did when first went up there, and then some came up by bus, aircraft and their own transport. So that group, I've kept pretty close touch with them, and even now we have about three outings - three or four outings a year (coughs) on a bus and go to some place that's attractive and we have a committee that deals with these things. So, I'd say quite a close - I'm in close touch with them all the time.

But of the others, uh, there's just a few that I was with while I was in the barracks before all this business started to come up - when I was with 3rd Heavy Brigade, and first joined up, but not many. Most of them have passed on or they have gone to other states. More so the other states I think, are the on... and the fellows I used to go out most - most with there at Fremantle. Of the footy crowd, I still go down to East Fremantle and cheer them on. I'm a life member of East Fremantle and I also, uh, what they call the transport officer. If there's anybody - if anyone gets injured and the doctor can't deal with it, well then I load him on my vehicle and take him to a hospital, and see that all his gear is - gets home. If he's got a car, get someone to take his car home and I do that for three games. That's the colt's game, the, uh, reserves and the league game every Saturday - or every Saturday they play.

So that's about the end of my sojourn with the anti-aircraft and from where I started East Fremantle, so it's one big cycle.

> You spend a lot of time up-country during the week days, do you, and come down to town more at the weekends?

Yes, I - while I was in the army at Darwin, I bought a place up at Toodyay and we've run cattle on it ever since. Um, it's a good hobby. I wouldn't say I could live on it by any means, but it's nice to go up there and just shout your head off if you want to or go for a swim. You got the Avon River comes right through it. That's why I'm a bit anxious to get away because I say there'll be 10,000 people there tonight and that's a lot of people to contend with.

> For the Avon descent?

Mmm.

END TAPE 2, SIDE B.

END OF INTERVIEW.