



TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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Identification: this is tape one of an interview recorded by Jane Fleming Panegyres on the 26th of August 1989 at Swan View on the outskirts of Perth, Western Australia, with Ross King who served with the 2nd Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery in Darwin, having previously been in the 5th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery and prior to that in the Light Horse. End of identification of tape one.

Were you born in Perth or were you born in the country?

No, I was born at Bunbury in 1916. And my people were - my ancestors rather, were well-known in the Great Southern area and eventually my family moved into the wheat belt there and I grew up in the wheat belt and then continued visiting a town on the Great Southern, Cranbrook, where my grandmother was alive. 'Cause she was well-known there because when the line went through they built the first hotel at Cranbrook.

Then as I - after I left school I went to various state schools and after I left school I worked in farming areas. Worked for an uncle for a number of years and, er, I went away and worked in Beverley for eighteen months. Returned from Beverley at the request of the Bank of New South Wales and worked on a property which my father was managing at Bolgart, the Chandling Estate and I was there and war broke out and I vacated and enlisted (laughs).

Was that when you had your first military training or had you had military training prior to that?

During that time I was in the 10th Light Horse. I remember at Toodyay branch, it was the 10th Light Horse, and we did Camps at Naval Base.

This is while you were working in the country ...

Yes.

... in later years?

They used to give us weekends - like time off, about a fortnight a year - and we did a camp at Bunb... Naval Base and also one at Bunbury. That was a - I think the Bunbury one was a three month one. That was in the war was on and we then - I came back after the Bunbury camp and joined the anti-aircraft battery - 5th Battery - at Fremantle, Burt Street Barracks.

(5.00) How much training had you actually had in the Light Horse? What sort of training?

Well we used to have perhaps two weekends a month, they used to have officers come up and you'd do it in the country and you'd take your horse and do that.

Mmm. What I meant was, what sort of specific things did you do in the course of the ...?

Well mainly horse drill and the handling of rifles it was, and that was about all.

And what made you decide to join the 5th? Why were you interested in the anti-aircraft?

Well, uh, it sounded all right to me, artillery, better than foot slogging (laughs) and being a horseman I says, 'This'll - we'll try this,' and I was accepted whole heartedly by a chap, um, Ken Forsyth. You may have heard of him, and he was recruiting officer at the time I think, and I had no difficulty in getting in and I stopped at Burt Street Barracks right through till we departed on the 19th of December '41.

What sort of training did you have at Burt Street Barracks in that time between ...?

Most of it was foot drill at Burt Street and very little gun drill because they only had 3-inch mobile guns at the time and they were - and they were building where the John Curtin High School is, they were putting guns in there. We worked there like navvies ....

This was to protect Fremantle?

To protect Fremantle, then to follow it up, we went to Buckland Hill and we were starting there digging gun pits, holes and dug a magazine into the side of the hill and then we were up tools and went to Darwin.

So you really had very little gun practice?

Very little - very little training at all. We did have one shoot down at Naval Base with 3-inch ones.

How familiar were you with the actual guns by the time you left, if you couldn't do live?

Not - not particularly knowledge of it at all, we weren't. We were very poorly trained I would say at the time.

Could you describe the guns in a bit more detail - the guns that you were using then? They were 3-inch mobiles you said.

They were 3-inch mobile ... oh, well they had a very harsh - when they exploded the charge, it was a very harsh noise. It was compared with the 3.7 guns later and it was a - they were towed behind Marney and Herrington tractors and just sat up and mostly engaged at drogue shooting at Naval Base - um, yes, Naval Base.

When you left for Darwin, did you know where you were actually going?

Not - not at all. We didn't know and they put us on a first class train and away we went on more or less a minute's notice and we were very poorly equipped. We didn't have rifles, uh, and that and to me, it seemed rather fruitless going away when you - to fight a war - when you had nothing.

Did you have any idea where you were going?

Not till we got to Adelaide and after Adelaide, when we left, er, Wayville? Camp there and went back to Terowie and then we caught the train at Terowie onto the Ghan and then we

knew we were off - we were going somewhere in the northerly direction and there was great questions amongst us where we were going and we reckoned must be Darwin.

(10.00) How much can you remember of that actual trip?

Matter of fact, Boyce Donegan and myself we mothered a couple of the younger boys there because we were the oldest ones, you could say, on it and there was two were hardly - I think they were just - they were under seventeen years of age - and they had no experience of country life and it was in the midst of summer and water was very restricted - um, drinking water - and they had no idea of the water bottle lasting 'em all day, they would drink it up in the first half an hour and then collapse for the rest of the time and we gave them water of ours and kept them going. As a matter of fact there was one chappie I was talking to only last year and he had the name - I think his name was Lawrence but they called him 'Pinocchio' and Pinocchio, he was the youngest and very thin fellow at the time, and he used to reckon the - now he says, 'Only for you and Donegan I'd have died on that trip.' (Laughs).

He wouldn't have even made it to Darwin. Why did they call him Pinocchio?

(Laughs) I don't know why but he had a very loud voice and I th... at the time, and he still has. If he was talking to you now, well you could hear him in, uh, Midland.

What are the other things you remember about the trip over?

Well I remember Oodnadatta - probably a lot of others do too. There was two places that was selling beer and one particular place - uh, it was I think two shillings a bottle and the other place was cheaper and the - not much cheaper - but there was no ice or anything and they had a hundred gallon water tank full of hot w... full of water and the beer in that and he'd take it out of .... That was the dear one and the other one was just out of the cart... the box and at the conclusion - when the train was leaving there was bottles of beer - I think it was *XXXX* beer. Half bottles were everywhere, nobody - I don't think anybody drank a bottle full. Then we went on from there to Banka Banka and eventually end up at Tennant Creek and the citizens - I think it was the Country Women entertained us with an afternoon tea there and the flies were very men... menacing they were at the time.

But to the ones like myself and Donegan and that, that was nothing, we'd been in the country quite a bit. But the under ... these chaps that had not it was very hard for them. Then eventually we arrived at Elliott and I think we - from Elliott, I'm not too sure, it was Larrimah where we caught the train for Darwin, again on the .... But the trip was on flat top trucks all, um .... After we left the Ghan we travelled in ordinary army three-ton trucks on the back of them, no protection at all to the weather, and it wasn't just the ordinary three-ton truck in a row ... fairly rough and there was no road in those days, it was just a track. And the trip then on the Darwin train, which was from Larrimah to Darwin was in track - in ordinary cat... not cattle trucks, just ordinary trucks and they had a bit of a canopy over the top of them.

Mmm. I gather some people were pretty sick by that time they got there.

There was quite a few got sick - there was, quite a few. But there seemed to be more got sick I thought, on - after they left Alice Springs - uh, after they left Terowie for Alice Springs and up that way. 'Cause there's another chappie who aimed at carrying his gear, he - a chap Peter Hackett - he ... they put him in hospital at Alice Springs and I ended up with his gear the rest

of the, that and he never caught up to us, he didn't until the 6th of January in Darwin. We'd arrived and I still had his - his personal gear, what it was.

(15.00) What was it? Was it food poisoning that got to people first or was it ...?

I think it was the heat and the food on that particular .... See on from Perth to Adelaide was first class travel and waiters and everything on - just like a passenger train it was.

They commandeered the train to take you?

They just commandeered the train. But the rest of it was rough and ready.

Christmas dinner was along the way wasn't it?

Oh yes, you didn't .... I can't remember (laughs), I think it was bully beef and those army cream biscuits they used to have. That was ... but it's a bit .... I just wouldn't like to say what the menu was then, but it was ....

Probably tried to forget it fairly quickly.

Your stomach did (laughs).

What were your first impressions when you actually reached Darwin?

Well we were whipped - wizzed away to Larrakeyah Barracks and we stayed there the night and I think only the night. I think the next day we were taken out to the gun-site where ar... which was in construction - Berrimah. And that was an eastern states, uh, contingent there and we were West Australians and they never blended too well. There was that interstate jealousy seemed to exist and it was only in - the officers were all eastern staters too and we had, uh, one officer who was with us who was a permanent soldier in peace time and there was a very ... he was not suitable for the conditions there ....

This is the eastern - one of the eastern states?

No, this is the West Australian ...

... A West Australian officer.

Yeah. Um, he was an excellent soldier as a soldier - parade ground soldier - but when it came to the .... He was up in years too and eventually he was boarded back south. But when we arrived at this Berrimah, it was only - the guns were just sitting there and we were slaves, you could say. Donegan and myself did a lot of sandbagging and revetment work around the guns and carting sand to try to complete the thing and it was - most of it was completed by the 19th of February.

Were you still there when that raid took place?

When that raid took place, the morning of the 19th of February, we were carting sand from Mindil Beach and we just arrived back with a load of sand and we're sitting on the back of the truck with the sand and one chappie who was with us - who unfortunately has passed on since

- had a very good knowledge of aircraft and we looked up and we saw these planes coming out of the formation of cloud and at that time there was rumours that the Americans were coming in a big way and everybody's cheering, 'Oh the Yanks are here.' And this chap whom I spoke about, I mentioned his name even 'cause I - Kevin Moran - well Kevin says, 'They're no so-and-so - American planes, they are bloody Japs.' And he wanted to ring the alarm and he says, 'They're ....' He nominated the types of planes they were and they come out in formations of seven at a time and flew on and the next thing the - we heard gunfire from the harbour and they were dive bombing and that, the harbour. And then they started to strafe Berrimah site.

(20.00) Well some of our boys got a berth on the guns and some of us didn't, 'cause there was too many of us for the gun crews. So [inaudible] Donegan and I took off and we were - there was a machine-gun post being constructed and as the planes dived in to strafe the gun-site we'd have to get on the opposite side for protection because we had nothing to shoot them down with and as they turned and come back, we'd have to run around get the other side. This went on and eventually one flew over and he - it apparently tried - we thought he had another bomb on to let go, and he was quite low, we could have shot him down with an ordinary rifle. And we saw the arm come down and nothing come out and there was a couple of the boys got shot up, and then the orders came - the lull came, they wanted more sandbags. So back we go for more sand and we got the second load - we were on the next load and we got back to where the RAAF was - where it crossed the railway line - and we looked up and there was twenty-seven - two formations of twenty-seven bombers flying across. And they bombed the RAAF good and proper. We took off - a gentleman there by the name of Stan Hall was with us and we took off and there was no better runners than Donegan and myself and there - where the railway culvert was, which was concrete - I had great faith in concrete - we dived there and in the race poor old Stan slipped in the wet ground and he hit the ground and we gathered him up - Donegan and I did - one on each arm and dragged him and he thought he'd been shot, so did we at the time the bombs were falling, and we stayed there till they dispersed but the RAAF was in a turmoil at the time.

We went on then carrying, uh, with the sand and continued in the afternoon after, carting sand and the the whole of town of Darwin was being evacuated, which is a sight you didn't - you laugh at them now, I do. I saw motor cars with everybody in. It didn't matter whether they were Chinese, natives or that, pushbikes and even the most humourous one that ever stuck into me head was one chap was pushing a perambulator with his personal gear on and they were all - and we'd picked them up sometimes and put them on the truck and they - as we were coming from Darwin out to Berrimah site and give them a lift. And no-one knew where they were going, they were just going south, that's all.

How much did you see of the damage that had been done?

Not that - at the time, uh, no. On the 19th of February, no, but the following day - I'll get to that in a minute if you don't mind. On the 19th of February - the night of it - there was one of these planes that was strafing Berrimah, we shot, by one of our chappies and it went through in - in a line from the site and we - Donegan and I reckoned it was going to crash. So unofficially that night, being bushies, we went out looking for it. Well we got - by the time we got to where we thought it would be it was getting too dark so we had to retreat. We went back and the next morning, unofficially, we went and we found it and here was the crashed plane and the pilot is still in it. So that was - that - then we went back and everything ... we got early in the morning this happened, we went back and we started carting sand and we had

a bit of a cook's tour of around Darwin and saw the damage which was pretty devastating in most cases and also the RAAF. Well it was just - only this framework buildings were left and there was no planes and nothing there at all.

(25.00) But the whole - I think that night on the 20th of February, um, the only ones that were there was the anti-aircraft defenses. Everybody - they had guns and they couldn't get out and anyone who could got out, got out. I won't say it was any cowardice or anything like that about it.

Just seemed the best thing to people to do.

Well they had nothing to do, we had nothing to defend ourselves with. Uh, a little while after we were issued with twenty-five rounds of ammunition between two of us and you were told, if one got shot or anything, be sure and get his ammo so you'd have fifty.

While you were building the gun-site, you wouldn't have had much time for practice or ...

No.

... anything like that.

But they had a limited resources of manpower for it, they did. 'Cause we - some of our boys - or some of us, had been trained a bit at Park gun-site in Fremantle - South Fremantle - before we went and I think our boys were far in advanced of the eastern staters. They - I think they were only just brought up from the south and there it is.

You said that when the raid came there were more men available than actually could man the guns.

That's correct.

And how did they respond, the ones that actually got, you know, to the gun, considering that you've got a group of people who've had various levels of training and, um, no experience of anything like that?

Well it all happened so quickly. There wasn't any - if you got a berth you hung onto it and the ones like - now we were .... When it happened they were all had their - taken up their position on guns prior to us getting there so there was nothing for us to do. We couldn't say, 'Right, get off, I'm taking over.'

The ones that actually got a position, how well did they handle things once they were there?

They did their best they did, because they - the guns were - they never had automatic fuse-setters or anything and it was all manual and as they were I think very new - the whole lot was - and I think they did an excellent job under the conditions.

You were saying that had you had a rifle at one stage you could've actually done something.

Had we had a rifle, um - Donegan and I to this day swear that we would have shot this plane down. You could see him as plain as I can see you in the - he was sitting in the cockpit and he was low as .... 'Cause they came in and they strafed and then they - they continued on and .... 'Cause Berrimah Hospital is over the other side and that's where they would be sort of turning on and some of, I think, some of the bullets went into Berrimah Hospital roof.

Interview continues on the second side.

END TAPE 1, SIDE A.

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B.

To go back to that point about the rifle, you would have been able to - had you had one - move quickly and respond quickly, but what was the sorts of problems inhibiting the gun crew in that sort of situation?

Well the low flying aircraft were low down and you could not elevate your 3.7 down low enough and it had no instruments to handle them. After the first raid the powers to be came good with a - uh, sights they fitted on but you could bring them down and use them, sight - the layers of the gun, the number one and two layers could elevate and traverse the gun on these, like you would shoot it with a rifle and there was a chance of hitting something. And even if you didn't hit it that the enemy would be a bit scared of pacing into it coming in. But the - the remainder of the crews, they performed admirably, although in the first raid at Berrimah, there was two boys shot - wounded. I never saw them, they were taken away. I think that was in the leg and that, but remarkable with all this, that the plane that we shot down which we found, I think from memory it was shot down by one of our boys with a Lewis machine-gun which he mounted on a forty-four gallon petrol drum. Uh, now I think that is pretty right myself. It's a bit hazy now after these years to remember all these things, you didn't rehearse it too much (laughs).

How much can you remember of, um, the actual composition of the gun crew? You know the roles and responsibilities of the different members of the crew and the sequence of things ...?

Well, there was one and two, they were the layers for bearing and elevation; um, from memory, three and four were ammunition numbers; number five was the firer, he fired it; six .... The ammunition numbers, I must - at that time, as there was no automatic fuse-setters, they were all done by hand by placing a key on the fuse and turning the - rotating the fuse to the si... whatever was called from the GPO's position and number one - number one of the gun was the one in charge. Mostly is a bombardier or a sergeant at the time. Pretty sure it was number one now, it's too - I was that meself and I forget now (laughs).

That was your ...?

Yeah, number three gun I was on and Donegan was on number four gun. I was looking at that - there .... 'Cause at that time we were only gunners and we got promoted on various dates I've got there to bombardiers, we were. But at that first raid we were only gunners the same as ....

How much afterwards were you promoted to bombardier? Have a look at the ... right.

Boyce Donegan and myself were both promoted to lance bombardiers on the 10.6.1942 and we were promoted again on the 2.8.1942 to bombardiers.

(5.00) Right. The, um, aftermath of that first raid on the 19th, what were the sorts of things that, apart from those you've mentioned, what were the other sorts of things that happened soon after that in response to that raid?

Well we went into the town or the - the edges of the town and there was places where people had deserted their home and the meals and that were still left on the table, there were starving chooks - fowls in there. No water or anything. We opened them up and let them out. Uh, 'cause there was nobody there to look after them and of course we did this unofficially of course and there was nobody to supervise us and we just were acting on our own initiative.

Did people leave their pets behind or ...?

Left everything. Even their clothing, washing, they went - the ones with - evacuated, the civilians went away in such a hurry they only took what they had I think. They had no way of carrying it and that.

What happened where, you know, domestic pets were left behind? What did ...?

Well I think they were destroyed afterwards. They had to destroy them because of - everything we was left as it was. There was a lot of probably - I never saw it myself, and a lot of looting and that went on, um, 'cause we went - we were only in and out as quick to get like stuff, and later on when things got more back to earth, I was in charge of a truck and we used to get salvage material and you - we could use for salvaging building huts or something at Quarantine's gun-site. Uh, and that was very helpful for us but there was a lot of stuff disappeared.

Mmm.

Because we were out of Darwin like at Berrimah, being out of it about eight mile, we missed all that stuff, thank God (laughs).

What did you hear about it? What were the stories that were going round at the time?

Well I heard a lot of reports at the time of somebody got a - sent a grand piano away and anything like that. Uh, refrigerators - sent them south and all this, they'd looted them. But I don't know whether it was true or false.

Who was said to be the people that were actually involved in the looting? Was it anybody in particular that did it?

No, I couldn't nominate anybody it was just a ... but I can't see how you could do it because there was very .... We was - built a fish trap to catch fish. Had we not had that fish trap I think we'd have starved there after the first raid.

So communications were pretty hopeless ...

They were hopeless.

... and you think it's unlikely that people could shift things?

I do. To - you had to be in the net, you could say, of the shipping and that to do it and .... But I'm not saying - there was a lot of stuff dis... taken and destroyed for nothing, no reason, it was no good to them and they did... they just took it I think, they did. There's some - it's nice to say these things but it's .... But I know - I don't know of any of our blokes ever getting anything because we were pretty well under control. We had a pretty good crew of officers - a very good crew of officers I must say and they wouldn't have allowed it. And you'd - there was two very good sergeants there who went away to schools and that while we were in Darwin itself and they held the - the things together very well.

You mentioned earlier, a bit of tension between say the New South Wales ...

Yeah.

... and the West Australians and there were people from elsewhere as well, ...

Yeah.

... there were Victorians came up and so on, did that ease up as time went on and people got to know one another better or did it persist?

It - yes I think it did a lot but it always seemed to have, uh, the sort of - the same as our - today, our interstate football. There's that bit of friction there.

(10.00) And it wasn't just all shiacking and funny, it was ....

Oh no it got nasty at times. 'Cause we used to - when things were dull I used to start an argument meself with them about the - the New South Wales fellows we had some and we had Victorians and a few South Australians and, uh, when things were dull I would say, 'Oh this rugby game you mob play, is a great game.' Well the Victorians would bait, come in hook, line and sinker than and they'd - the Vics and the New South'd be arguing amongst themselves and I'd be sittin' back (laughs). The West Australians would be sittin' back just stirring a bit along, you know, it broke the monotony.

How many were there of you West Australians in that group?

I think from about - there was 120 of us went away I think at the time. But we were split up so much.

Mmm.

See some went to Batchelor, uh, some went to the Oval, some went to Fannie Bay, some went to Berrimah, and then afterwards when they - the Quarantine gun-site, when that was done - that was done in April I think, got it there - in April Quarantine was started, there was Boyce Donegan, Ron Sullivan, Chris Crawford and Ross King, we went down, we were the first ones there and we were on the tent on our own and Chris Crawford was a good cook and that was why he went along (laughs).

It saved you.

And we had this piece of stout then.

Well that group of West Australians, how many other men would have been at that same site with you say?

What at Quarantine?

Mmm.

Uh, oh, probably sixty.

So there weren't really very many of you in proportion to the others. They would have again been split up from different stations?

Yeah, they were split up. That in the one group in Quarantine was mostly West Australians there. We had a few 'reo' - re-enforcements come up from, well South Australia, the Queensland and New South, from Victoria, they were a mixed mob as the saying is.

So to trace your movements before, you know, we go on to talk about the other raids and so on, for how long were you at which site, you know, if you follow through where you were from when you got up there?

I was at Berrimah from New Year's Day till the 25.3.1942. Then we went to Quarantine and put in - prepared the site there. When we arrived at Quarantine there was only the holes for the concrete to be poured and that was done by the PWD - or some of it was Allied Works Council - and the chap in charge of it was a civilian named Stan Secret, a gentleman, and on the 19th - the 18th of the 4th the guns were - had been put in and they were proofed ready to fire. On the 19th Badger Donegan and myself we put in a shower recess. Um, Mr Watson, or Lieutenant Watson left us on the 11.5.1942 and Mr Wilkinson took over on the 23.5.42. Re-enforcements from the eastern states arrived - arrived on the 29.5.1942 and Mac - I can't think of his other name now, he went to Sydney for school.

Now between that - that first raid on the 19th and the next raid which took place and your - all the notes that you've got that you kept up there coincide with the list of the raids that have been ...

Supplied ...

(15.00) Mmm. Between that first lot and the second one you were in hospital?

I was in Bagot Hospital .... I was in Bagot Hospital from the 4.3.42 till the 7.3.42 with a bad hand, been jarred and they had to operate on it and I was there. There was a few raids while I was there which I did not rec... which I recorded in my diary.

> Can you remember what it was like being in hospital while there was actually a raid going on?

Yes, while I was in the hospital there was one raid, and the matron came to the entrance door and she says, 'All you so-and-sos get under the bed, the Japs are here.' And there was - the only ones that didn't get out of the bed were the really injured ones and that, but I only had a bad hand and I - take a bit of beatin' like that and getting under the bed (laughs). Then I came back and I was off on light duties for a while with this hand that was bad and then we continued on in the normal way then I think till ....

> In those first few months of that year the raids seemed to have come in bunches ...

Bunches, yeah ...

> ... about a month apart.

About a month apart and that and we, in those times, we lived on prunes and rice and they changed the diet then. They had rice and prunes the next week (laughs).

> How did it affect people having to keep on their guard because when things happened they happened in a fairly concentrated way but there were those long stretches in between?

Yes, at times you looked for a bit of excitement as the say is, it used to wear you down it did. But there was a - you kept - the boys kept in pretty good spirits. There was always the one or two that were a bit weaker than perhaps the others and - but they took it well.

> You said that on the way up there you had to do a bit of sort of mothering ...

Yes.

> ... of younger men - well boys really ...

Boys, yes.

> ... that were there, how much did that continue to be the case in the first while up there?

It was in two or three cases it was bad, it was. They were only boys and they .... One chappie I can remember running away when there was a ra... an alarm for a raid. He run through the scrub and there was star posts driven in the ground for - with barbed wire on and he run into one of those and it went through his thigh. And it was only sheer panic, you know, in his part, there was nothing to worry about, 'cause raids - planes could be miles away out there, you could see them and they're hostile, but you had no worry here 'cause they - bombs don't go round corners do they (laughs).

You mentioned getting the guns adjusted so that you could get them to get the low flying planes, but in fact the planes began to come in at a ...

Higher ...

... higher level.

They come in originally at a height level, round about 22,000 feet, but then when we got - there was Bofors, light anti-aircraft guns were attached to us and we had one Bofor and, um, that was quite useful if they were to come, but I don't think it ever got used because there was no - they kept coming higher and higher and we .... At the initial stage they had nothing to worry about there, no defence, we had to combat them at all.

When they brought in a new gun such as the Bofors, what sort of training was arranged for that?

Well they'd put a perhaps a selected few on it, who had - and they'd pick it up fairly quickly, the training and do it. 'Cause when it gets - when the heat goes on you for... the good book goes with you to the site a lot. But - no they were pretty good crews all round. The - unfortunately the re-enforcements that came up, they'd had no training and we trained them up to the standard they were. But by the time we got them up the show'd lost all its venom.

(20.00) How much of the time was spent on the training, you know, when you look at a day, how much of the actual day was spent on what? When there weren't any raids actually on.

Well when there wasn't any raids you would have a morning and a night manning guns with the whole crew and you just go through the drill automatically and it would be all over in twenty minutes at the most. I doubt whether it would take twenty minutes and you mostly kept a couple of them on maintenance, cleaning it to stop it from rusting and that because the climatical conditions in the tropics and the wet season could cause a lot of rust.

To go back to the first raid and the aftermath of that, how much was there in the way of talk about the lack of warning that you'd had and also the lack of equipment that you had?

There was a lot of talk about it and the same with - there was a great controversy over who fired the first shot and the alarm being given at .... Apparently the alarm was given after the bombs were falling, they were and yet they'd had ample warning prior from Bathurst Island and that but everybody got mixed up with the idea that the Americans were coming in a big way and - but when you look back on it, it was rather silly to, not to know that the Japs would be there because they chased the fleet. There was a fleet of ships going to Timor and they dr... bombed them that much and they harassed them but they returned to Darwin that night and they were all tied up in the harbour so they may as well come over and have 'em as cooked ducks mightn't you.

You said that just about everybody else disappeared, um, and there you all were, how real was the feeling that you were going to be invaded at that stage when the anti-aircraft guns and all were still there?

The - well it was very much they were all thinking there was going to be an invasion it is and I know, um, two chaps who'd made up their mind they'll stick together and we'll come home and we had a few hangers-on. We had a ga... Dodge tip, we were never out of their sight. If they thought, well if the word gets going those two are going, we're going with them, but we had different ideas. But it'd been rather superfluous if we had have tried to do what we had in mind, even with all the bushcraft we knew. 'Cause I've been up that way through the Territory and north and West Australia and that and I know how rugged it can be but we were going to give it a go, we weren't going to stop.

Did you have a particular plan of direction that you were going go?

Oh yes, we had an idea, we knew east and west and that and we - there used to be an old chappie lived down from Quarantine - between Quarantine and Berrimah in the bush as you could say, and he had chooks and everything and we used to visit him and get a few eggs and that from him. He was an old chap, he didn't know whether to worry about the war being on or anything, and we were going to get a few - a bit of supply from him (laughs). I know there when the PWD foreman gave me a loaf of bread and we thought it was something great, to get a loaf of bread. And that's how - I don't how we lived now, you know, it was very .... Except that we had a very good cook, he could just about cook up anything and make a reasonable meal.

I hear the navy were a good deal better fed than the army.

Oh yes. Yes, one part of the piece, I had a go in - they sent me in with a party to put a gun-post in at Signal Hill in Darwin itself and we were there probably a week or so putting - digging this out and we ate with the navy and there was a marked difference in what we were having and what they were having and we could - made the job hang out a bit longer (laughs). But those things happen and that. Then I went away then to - they sent me down to Hughes Field on my own, I was in a tent there for about eight weeks.

(25.00) On your own?

On my own there while they built - while equipment came in to build another gun-site down at Hughes Field and that time I was rather fortunate, they used to bring me food down and I was supposed to look after myself but I had mates in the RAAF and I ended up living - dining in the RAAF quarters and that was quite good.

What were your responsibilities while you were overseeing that?

Well the only thing it was, the equipment would come in and I'd just have to check that it arrived and it used to come in today and nothing for two days sorta.

How did you fill your time in?

Well I did a bit of messing around you know and that, probably shooting and that and visiting other camps there was and that is when the 6th Div. chaps came back from the Middle East and I had a few mates in that I - and they were camped down there and, um .... But the powers to be didn't know those things see (laughs).

I was thinking if you went out shooting, where did you get your ammunition to do this?

Well you could get a bit from the RAAF (laughs), they used to - never seemed to have to account for everything like we did but ....

They lived pretty comfortably too?

Oh they - in most cases they did, they had pretty good facilities.

You say you had friends among them, what was the sort of response among the air force men to the stories that were around about their leaving Darwin at the beginning? You know, I mean, it's not the same guys actually but ...

Yeah well, as a matter of fact, I think that'd been forgotten. That - it was on... It was just that they were disorganised at the time and they regrouped and came back full of fight, as the saying is.

They were said to have been under orders to ...

Yes they were.

... to move out, but a lot of talk persisted afterwards and I just wondered if there was any feeling among them that ....

As a matter of fact some of the stuff what they were flying there, they ought to get a VC for it. As a matter of fact I - how silly one could be, um, I went over with them on a flight to Timor on a bombing raid.

Oh did you?

And - just to break the monotony - and how, you know, and the old Hudsons they had there, which were only civilian planes converted and it was a nightmare even to get them off the ground, let alone do anything and that. But they were - no they were a good showing I think, once they regrouped, there was a lot of things happened early in the piece which everybody I think thought, this is it, get out. And especially when - after the first ra... day, you saw everybody going down the road, like you'd think it was five o'clock knock-off time here, everybody was getting out as best they could.

Was that very demoralising for yo - all of you?

Uh, no, it didn't, I don't think. We were too wrapped up in getting stuff - sandbagging and that and you didn't have time, I don't think, to let it soak in and at night you were that bloomin' tired you - you just went to sleep.

You didn't have very much to sleep on I suppose at the beginning there either?

Oh no we made beds. We were pretty industrious mob, uh, we did - out of bush timber and that, you know. Uh, we made beds and we'd - wouldn't be backward in getting a bit of wire from anywhere, it didn't matter what it was, whether it was off a chook yard or not (laughs).

Mmm. Just as well there were people that were from the country I suppose.

Oh, I'm not boasting but it was the cha... the ones - the senior ones in age - a lot of the chaps, good chaps, never been out of the city and they were lost unfortunately. Never - the training. Now Fred Foxon, he came from timber country, good lad he was, and there was quite a lot of it. Like you got every walk of life out there - good chaps. Now Des Lambert, he'd be - you couldn't get a nicer chap than Des but I don't think Des could drive a nail (laughs), you know.

Interview continues tape two.

END TAPE 1, SIDE B.

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A.

Identification: this is tape two of the interview with Ross King of the 2nd Anti-Aircraft Battery, recorded by Jane Fleming in Swan View near Perth on the 26th of August 1989. End of identification of tape two.

Are there any raids or incidents during raids that stand out now to you more than any other?

They started raiding at night. The Japs were getting the worst of it - their day flights - so they decided to come at night and there was no searchlights, there was no radar equipment accurate enough to deal with them at night, so they'd decided they'd have a box barrage and put it up and all guns would fire into a certain arc when the Japs - the planes were that area and hoping that they would get results. So they come up with an idea - I don't know who it was but - that they would have dummy guns and these dummy guns were a 4-inch pipe about five foot long and sitting on the ground, very much similar to a trench mortar, and they had these bombs as they called them you drop down the spout and it went off and flash. And they'd call them flash illuminators and these were to mislead the Japanese that there was another battery in the area and you had four of them - these guns like a gun-site - four of these flash illuminators - and I don't know how it come, but I was selected to operate these and one night we went out, we set-up on the old civil aerodrome. And the next thing we - the Japs come over and we were out there doing our stuff, putting up these and there's flashes going everywhere and we could hear bombs coming. So we des... left the (laughs) ... we knocked off putting up these flash illuminators and we went flat on the ground and lay there but the bombs fell many - quite a way - distance away. I won't say miles but quite a distance away and I always remember that as well as anything. Here we were - how stupid it seemed, us putting up these things to draw the crabs (laughs). But the powers that be that thought of that never - they weren't doing it, only the mugs (laughs).

What were the difficulties particularly, of night raids in general compared with say, day raids?

They were very difficult night raids, because whenst the guns went off each time, there was the flash and it temporarily blinded you. You were sorta in the darkness, you were, and you're groping around a bit to do it. But you could - we could put up a fairly good effort but, at night. You do it automatically sorta, with your training and that, you knew where everything was. But it was very - much more pleasant in day time 'cause you could see where they went.

(5.00) The guns had to be cleaned down afterwards.

Straight after, no you cleaned them out.

More of a problem at night?

Yes, oh well, it didn't take much doing. You got - you probably didn't - weren't so keen at night. That'll do till tomorrow (laughs).

How much did you actually swap round on the different positions and so on?

Mostly you, if everything was going well, you had a good crew you wouldn't, um - you'd keep it if you could. But if somebody else had, er, one a bit weak and that - and they might take some of your strength to reinforce that up, to build it up to standard. But mostly it was pretty automatic, they - chaps stood up to it pretty - all the same. But when they got, um, the radar equipment there, it made a big difference. We had that at Quarantine, Mark II radar and that fed the instruments with the information but did away with the old height and range-finder and predictor so much. Which was a lot of work and it made a lot more error I - my way of thinking. It was more hands it passes through, if you can get it more direct it was. But they did a good job, the height and range-finder boys and the predictor mob, but it was only a matter of turning a hand wheel and keeping pointers matched and it should be right but sometimes it wasn't, sometimes it was (laughs).

How much did you have to do with the Americans while you were up there?

(Laughs) Well not that much. I had a little bit to do with them there for a while. When I was at Hughes there, when the battery was going to be put in at Hughes, uh, there was a fighter strip next door and I used to mix with them. In those days I used to smoke and the Yanks had everything and we had nothing so it wasn't hard to .... But there was some woeful things done to them - the Americans. They used to like your beer and you used to get one bottle of beer per week perhaps - more often perhaps. But there used to be pictures every - once a week and when we got .... This is, oh, it's nearly twelve months after the first raid, there used to be pictures and ....

Things had got very quiet then, didn't they?

Oh yes, things got quiet and if there - you'd be screening a picture and if there was a night raid come over - plane come over in a raid, everything went black straight away and everybody got to their position and the gun crews, you always roster them. If there was pictures tonight you just roster - you'd keep a skeleton gun crew there that they could carry on. But, um, they used to be always after your beer and ....

The Americans?

Yeah. So there was a couple of fellows - it used to be in ordinary bottles, there was no label on the bottle to say it was Swan. They used to be put into water see, to keep it cool and that and the label would come off so there was not much .... Well they used to sell, we used to call it 'lolly water' in - it was brewed up there I believe, somewhere I never saw the brewery

where it was brewed but - this lolly water and that used to, we used to buy that for sixpence. A big sum of sixpence a bottle.

What went into that?

Well it was similar to what, uh, you're lemonade and that of today, not quite as ni... palatable, but.

Mmm.

And you'd go to the pictures this night and the Yanks'd buy it - they'd be coming along to .... You'd be sitting in the rows on logs and 'Buy your beer Aussie, buy your beer.' And this particular night there was a couple of chaps in their wisdom, they says, 'Right we'll fix this.' They went back to their camp and got six bottles each and they come back with this lolly water, six bottles each and they had it in the handbag and they kept kicking it and it'd clink in the bottles and the next thing the Yanks going up and down, 'Buy your beer Aussie,' and they sold him six bottles at two pound a bottle, but they never stopped to see the pictures finish (laughs). After they got their two - their money they didn't - they evacuated the place quick, but not - that only went over once. The next time the Yanks went along the next picture show and they would buy your beer but they'd take the top off and taste it before they paid up (laughs).

(10.00)I gather that some people, um, did a bit of home brewing.

Oh yes, there was a bit of home brewing. As a matter of fact we had a chap I believe, he - I never saw it - but he used to be a specialist in it they said, but I never tasted his stuff. But the Department of Interior at Parap, right in Darwin, they used to have a distil and distiled and it was like whiskey. Mangoes, they used to do and I went there one day to get some stuff for the - for the army and the chap said to me, 'Would you care for a drink?' Well I said, 'Yes,' and he fixed a drink, tried this stuff. It was very palatable and that and they put it in a glass, well I think you tu... as soon as you drank it, the first drink of it, your toenails went black and your hair stood up on ends (laughs) but you didn't want the second one. That'd last you for a week. But there was lots of things like that went on.

Was there any other entertainment except the pictures?

Uh, not till well along - just before we came home, the Tivoli came - the circuit came up there and the - had a very good showing. I think it was, they reckon - I don't know if you know Jenny Howard, she was one of the artists - and there was .... We hadn't seen a white woman for about three years I think, hadn't seen a woman at all (laughs) for that time, but we had - and they came up and they had this in a - a hollow and they put up a stage and they had loud speakers and very good show and they reckon there'd be 60,000 troops there to see it. And there would be I would say and it was a marvellous show it was and this Jenny Howard, she - she entertained troops in world war one, so she was no chicken and she was only knee high to a grasshopper and the same Jenny Howard, at the conclusion, she was the - one of - you could say - in my book she was the show. There was good artists she was and she - there was good artists as well, not only her. At the conclusion of the show the GOC of the Northern Territory came out on stage to thank the Tivoli show for their show. Well there was - must have been 60,000 voices said, 'Sit down ya mug, who wants to listen to you,' and that and he never got a word in he wouldn't have, and she walked back out on the stage from backstage, put her hand

up and says, 'Now you blokes, you don't want to listen to 'im, I don't want to listen to 'im, but you're going to,' and you couldn't have dropped a pin, you coulda dropped a pin ....

Mmm.

And, uh, the idiot thanked the night and then as soon as he finished his speech they all, I think, they all come out with 'Just his place, hiding behind a woman's apron strings,' you know. But those incidents would happen, you re... they not - they're humourous at the time.

The lack of company, you know, as you said, that not seeing a woman ...

Yeah, yeah.

... in all that time, did it get to some men worse than others do you think?

No I don't think it did. They - it used to be, in my way of thinking you could put a - a hundred men in a group together and they'll have an argument every now and again, but that's it, and it's forgotten, but you can't put a hundred women like that, they'd be killin' each other, wouldn't they?

I'm not commenting.

No comment? (Laughs).

I asked you a question. Um, about letters and - the mail that you ...?

Mail, that's the greatest demoraliser there is. We went there for weeks early in the piece and never got any mail and the old morale's pretty low. Yours truly's too, and then, uh, all of a sudden you'd get perhaps five or six letters all together. And then - but the mail would come in like today perhaps and everybody'd be around and .... To see chaps waiting to see their call out, 'Letter for you Jack,' and that and the difference in the way and then you see the other poor bloke who doesn't get one, you know, his shares are dropping all the time and that.

(15.00) Although we had a very humorous fella, he'd never write home, he wouldn't and his mother apparently wrote to the CO to see if she could get him - if he could him to write home. So this bloke in his wisdom he - Dear mother, he wrote, and he got a razor blade and he used to censor it, and he got a razor blade, and he said, 'Dear mother,' and he cuts all the centre out o' here and signs his name at the bottom. This officer, rather wittily, wrote on the bottom 'and the centre piece was not cut out by the censor' (laughs) and signed his name. And that one is dinkum. 'Cause I knew the officer who - but you know, those are the sort of incidents which ....

On the main though, did the censorship worry most of you? You knew it had to be done?

It had to be done. It never worried me. I wrote to L'ette pretty frequent, she wrote very frequent, sent me parcels and everything and that ....

You were married by this time or ...?

Uh, no.

Engaged?

No, we were engaged. No we were going to be married when I went away - but went away too quick probably and she hung on till I came back and, um, we never regretted a minute of it, you could say.

Did it bother her getting letters that had been all chopped up?

Well she - she reckoned there was very few of mine were because you'd be stupid in my book. No, there's not much you can dig and if the censors are silly enough to read it all word for word and thinks it's a great joke, uh, that's good luck to him, if you're supplying him with some humour. But the stuff - material that is beneficial to a war cause, you - they're not interested in it at home.

But did it inhibit you as far as writing, you know, personal letters, 'cause if you're engaged and you want to write, you know ...

Yeah.

... letters to your fiancee, was that ...?

Well at odd time you would - they used to have what they called a green envelope and that was not censored but you'd only supposed to be allowed one every so often. But you could get more if you wanted it. You mightn't want one, so I'll have yours, and that. But I don't think you - most of the chaps did. There was some good letter writers, some - they'd never write, you know, you get that in every walk of life.

But - but the ones that genuinely - the disappointment of them not getting mail - not getting mail. I think the longest we went was three weeks without a letter. One stage we didn't have any writing material and you'd write on anything, you know, just a piece of brown paper or something and post it.

Now the information was blocked out about what had actually happened in that ...

Oh yes.

... major raid, but how much was actually getting back one and another to here?

I don't think much got back, see. The bombing of Darwin on the 19th of February, it wasn't only the RAAF which suffered so much, the communications, the post office and that. If ever you go to Adelaide River and see the war graves there, the whole lot they buried together. Uh, that was pathetic, like it was. Uh, right in the middle they copped it and, um, very good planning by the Japanese I suppose. They want to get the communications out of it and that, but it was pathetic that was, in my book.

See people knew if you were in an overseas area, they knew that you were under some sort of threat.

Yes.

But, um, how much were people here aware of the raids that were coming in over you?

They never heard anything much of it, they didn't. There must - there was - well all the shipping was sunk in the harbour, they never left the .... The only ship that they didn't sink was the *Manunda*, the hospital ship, but they bombed that. It got bombed which again in my book, I blame ourselves for having it bombed. They tied another cruiser not on - more or less on the side of it. They sunk that - well you only can bomb - you can't bomb really accurately and the one they put on the *Manunda* ....

(20.00) Instead of leaving it clear?

Yeah, if it had been out on it's own, you can't tell me they couldn't have sunk it. And yet it lingered back and it came back to Fremantle. Brought a chap back I know there on it. Sorry.

The, um, what you mentioned, you know, the awful way in which the communications were cut out ...

Yes.

... as far as the human aspect of that, but how quickly did they get communications going again after the raid?

Well it seemed to be quite a while to us, 'cause we - we only had communications from gun-site to gun-site which was army and the outside world you didn't know of. Then they started - they improved things and they got a printing and they used to print a paper and, um, only had one leaflet and they used to have all the bull in the world in it (laughs). And the plane used to fly it down from Darwin to - a Tiger Moth used to - to the different places on - going south and he used to fly over us every morning and he used to toss us one out and there was a free-for-all for it to get it. You'd have thought it was gold and - but no, it's very difficult to .... But the news was remarkable, how it came - filtered back from this end.

They had bombed Broome when they sunk all the flying boats there, in the morning and at two o'clock in the afternoon we knew. And I - I remember that as well as anything, uh, but we - that they bombed Broome. And we didn't know the extent of the damage but how the heck did .... Smoke signals we reckoned, the Abos (laughs).

Talking about that, how many Aboriginal people did you actually see while you were up there? Did they stay round the area or ....?

Only when we first arrived there I ever saw Aboriginals there. When we first arrived I think in the about the first perhaps, month, there was a heap of - well I won't say a heap but three or four of them, and not being funny, they were on a night cart, they were. And I remember seeing that and you know, and that and I got a photo of some piccaninnies here that I got, but never saw any native women or natives at all.

Did they disappear once the raids started?

They just seemed to disappear. And they were - as we were - the mate and I were going to be getting to want to recruit one to get his knowledge to get away if it was necessary.

Mmm.

But we did a bit of salvage work for, then after - later on when things got quiet. There was a lot of stuff left - good stuff and the powers to be thought well they may as well sal... somebody better salvage it, it was only going to get left and looted and we salvaged quite a bit of material. Timber and tin and that but there wasn't nothing personal items of - to salvage that I could see.

Mmm. What did you actually build with what you got hold of?

Well, uh, gun emplacements you had, if we could - we were in tents and the gun emplacements that we had, you never stood up in. They were only about five foot high. You can imagine me in five foot, you doubled up, and (coughs) the guns emplacement was that high and you used to bring the wall level with it. You couldn't go above it, on account of the blast and that of the guns when they were fired. So we put tin - got timber and built them up as best we could and made tin. We made them quite decent to live in. We dug some of - we got bright ideas. We'd dug the girth out in the ground down so we could stand up. That was quite good in the dry season, when the wet season it was no good, it was a swimming pool. One lot of the boys they put in a machine-gun post, they were the Bofor crowd and they were gunna be right under ground all the time, independent. And they were - they dug this a hole six feet deep and the wet - oh beautiful in the summer, nice and cool and that and go down these steps. But the wet came, she filled up full to brim (laughs).

(25.00) Did you get away at all while you were up there. Did you have any leave at all while you were up there?

Nope, never had leave. Not - well when I say leave, the only leave you had now from Quarantine to Batchelor is about sixty mile - fifty-eight I think to be accurate - now some of your mates were down there - de Grussa and that mob - and they, they were not in Darwin, they weren't. They were on the Batchelor's down there. Well you had other mates and that down there, chaps you hadn't seen for perhaps six months, so you're getting a bit browsey and you'd say to the chief, or you'd work it out amongst yourselves, 'Righto, we'll go - I'll go down to Batchelor for the day. Might stop the night, you never know.' And of course (coughs) excuse me, what you would do - I'm sorry - uh, what you would do was, uh, go out on the road, the Stuart Highway and the first truck came along, you'd hail him and he'd take you. And he might take you half way or he might take you two mile, and you'd g... hitchhike down, you'd get to Batchelor and you might get one going straight through and good luck if you did. And have a day down with the - your mates, you know, and you'd have a - they'd have their stories and you'd have yours and, um, some tall ones both ways. And - but that's about the only recreation you got.

Mmm. I noticed from some notes that you got there that you caught a crocodile while you were up there?

Oh yes.

What happened then?

Well that one I can - that's a rather a humourous one that is. We struck this crocodile - we shot it. And then we'd have skinned it. I've got a photo somewhere here of the skin and that - it was eight foot six. There was Boyce Donegan, Fred Morrison and myself were in the crocodile episode. But another time we went we made - Donegan and myself - Boyce - we made canoes out of forty-four gallon petrol drums, flattened 'em out and bolted 'em together at the front, and we used to go out to the old - to some of the ships that were sunk during the first raid. When the tide was out we'd - you could get on them, they weren't sum... fully submerged the ones we used to go to. You could walk around on the deck and that and so there was another chappie and he made a canoe for him and he's only a little fella and he was out rowing around the harbour and we went down to these mangroves where the fish trap was and there was a crocodile - only a small, not a very big one now and we hoyed him and that, 'Hey Trennie, there's a crocodile.' Well he took off rowin' for land and I reckoned he was ten feet up on dry land still rowin' (laughs). Oh but you know, it happens that way. But no, we never got - you weren't allowed in Darwin. See they wouldn't allow you in Darwin. The boys that were in Darwin - um, Fannie Bay, the Oval, and that were the batteries and they were right in Darwin you could say. Well Berrimah was on the outskirts so we never got into too much trouble like that. But ....

Continues on second side.

END TAPE 2, SIDE A.

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE B.

How did you feel about joining the AIF and when you did that?

It didn't worry me, and I don't think it worried too many. Uh, most of them, we were there and we were - we didn't know we could be sent to New Guinea or anywhere they liked without being in the AIF, so it didn't worry one and I just thought, meself, I hung ... I had me old militia number from the 10th Light Horse, which was 83... W837 and I hung onto to that, I thought, well that was a heirloom and I hung onto that and then all of a sudden one day I says, 'Right, I'll make a switch,' and I made the switch and I could give you the date but ....

I'll just hold it. [Break in recording.]

I joined into the AIF in the 2nd of September 1943 to the 30th of October 1945 when I was discharged. Prior to that I'd been in the Militia, or Citizen's [sic] Military Forces, from the 14th of July 1941 to the 1st of September 1943.

You say that you reckoned that you were worked very hard when you first got up there as far as all the things that still had to be done and ....

That is correct. When we arrived there Berrimah was only partly com... built and, um, we arrived there in the wet season and worked with our knowledge of having previous knowledge of building Fremantle gun-site, where the John Curtin High School is now, and the starting of Buckland Hill. Um, they seemed to think that we were fully experienced I

think, and we went on - continued on that way and we were good workers I think. Um, Boyce Donegan and myself and that - they seemed to always put the load onto us and hope, but we had good blokes and they pulled - more than pulled their weight. The eastern staters, well, we soon had them on our side. At first they were a bit huffy I think. What are these blokes coming in onto our place doing this but when it got - chips were down they pulled in just as well and that, there was one or two that resented us much. But that - they would resent anything I think.

In terms of what you said, you know, when you joined the AIF you could have gone anywhere ...

Yes.

... theoretically, how anxious were you and other people you know to um - or knew at the time - to go away overseas?

As a matter of fact at that time, uh, when we'd been so long in the one place without leave and that I think that they'd have done anything, they'd have gone anywhere to get out of it. Because it got very monotonous at the latter part, you know. We - chaps wanted to do something and there was nothing to do really and the first - like early in the piece after the first raid, we used to cart like, building gun-sites and when we'd go on the beach - after the first raid on the beach, you'd dig up - you'd have bodies floating in and that and mangled up ones and that was - it sorta wasn't so .... It was something to do and you take your mind off things and you thought, well we're lucky to be here.

(5.00) Mmm. It was pretty gruesome I imagine ....

Oh yes, it was very gruesome. Um that - 'cause there was pou... tins of tobacco and stuff that was washed up in those days, in those air... air-tight tins, it was quite good in those days. There was a terrific lot of damage done here that was never let out, it was. There was 200 - 250 people at least they claim were killed and ... there, but I think that was a bit underestimated myself.

When you saw things on that second day ...

Yes.

... there was still a lot of evidence about of, you know, people and ....

Oh the evidence was there 'cause we went - as I say we were carting sand and that on the beach and there'd be bodies washed up and we'd just bury them and we'd probably buried them again tomorrow because you - you'd just dig a hole where it was and bury it and the tide - it might be out and when it come in tonight it would wash them up again. You know, it was one of those things which shoulda never occurred but it - and there was - seemed to be no authority to take over and crack the whip as the saying is, and do it.

Do you think overall there was a fair bit of wasted training and, um, wasted ability in what happened up there?

I think there was lack of training in lots of cases and lack of leadership if .... To me, uh, I know even with our little show there what a difference a good officer can make who takes over and - you mightn't like him but he - when you sit back and you think well his ideas are right. It's the same with a good NCO. My argument is a chap which is really popular is no good, he's no good, and if they say, 'Oh ...'. If they can turn around and say a chap he - he's hard but by God he's fair, there's nothing better than that in my book.

By and large you - the officers you had to do with were ....

We had - we had very good officers, uh, we did once .... Well as I said, a Mr Watson, he had a - he was on the eve of a nervous breakdown, he couldn't - and that because (coughs) he was not suitable for it and he was aged and that. But the rest of them, um, we had a good - a couple of very good sergeants - Bob Napier, his brother was Commission of Police later in life, and Mac, he was a good officer too and that. And they used to - and you couldn't get better and they were right on the ball. They were - you could always approach them I think if you had troubles and that - everybody has troubles in those places. But no, it was very frustrating at times, uh, chaps, you had to mother them.

When did you find out that you were coming back and when did you actually get away from Darwin?

That's a good question (laughs). Well there was that many rumours that we were coming - we were gonna be relieved twelve months before we ever did get relieved and that and they used to be - the parson used to come, used to be a Roman Catholic one come and there was a Salvation Army one come and there'd be a Church of England one. But they - the Salvation Army one used to come early in the piece, he came, and he was - used to have coffee and biscuits - a biscuit each and everybody worshipped him and he'd always was happy and go lucky and he was quite a good cornet player and he'd have bit of a tune on a cornet and that and everybody used to to reckon it was it with him. Then the uh, then the Church of England one came and he told them all they were going home in the near future, but that near future never came.

(10.00) Don't worry.

And he - then the Roman Catholic one, he was saying 'You'd be going home and I'll tell you the date next time I come,' and this went on. Well it went on and on and that and they lost all faith in them and .... But the - we didn't - the morale used to go up and down like, you'd be going home and then somebody'd get a, start of a bit of a rumour. He'd on so and so overheard somebody - some officers talking and we were going home in three weeks or something and they never have eventuated.

Mmm.

But when we did come home I think we came home in, what was it, March - March '40 ...

4.

4, mmm, because I was married in '44.

How much after you got back did you get married? How soon after you came back down?

Not many days because ....

What you got leave, and got married?

No when we come home see - being away so long we had a lot of leave due to us. It was on a points system and I think I had something like sixty-five days or something, leave due to me and as soon as we came home they give you - granted you twenty-eight days leave and in the meantime I'd arran... - through correspondence - that I'd be home, I'd got the message that we'd .... We weren't told when we were leaving but I was told by good authority that we'd be home at a certain time so I took the gamble and we - everything was arranged when I got here and we married and then - then the fun started you could say. I was married and nowhere to go and they were saying I went to - gone up to Noonkanbah - to Corunna Downs first and then Vern Donegan and I went onto to - we teamed up together and went on to Noonkanbah together and then I came back from Noonkanbah - I was flown back by, um, in a RAAF plane, that was a - Vern told me in the morning, he says, 'You've been posted to a school at Harvey,' and I said, 'Oh,' and he says, 'As soon as you can get to Perth,' he says, 'the school doesn't start till such and such a date,' and he says, 'You know what you can do, you can have leave can't ya.' And I said, 'Yes,' and this was about eight o'clock in the morning he told me this and I got onto the telephone to the RAAF and asked them if they had any planes going south and the bloke I knew there, 'Yes, we got one at ten o'clock.' Straight through to Perth. I says, 'I'll be on it.' Well I - me mates got to work and me gear was packed up and thrown in me ... I was on that plane with ample of time to spare and the chap that flew it was Lionel Van Prague, he was the world's champion speedway rider at the time and I'd been mixing with motorbikes all me life and I knew him well and we arrived that way and that was - did me course and had a bit of leave and here we were.

You go back up to, um ...

No.

... Noonkanbah after that?

Then I went - went - while I was doing the course at Harvey, Noonkanbah was disbanded, they'd all gone .... When I came back they'd all gone east. So ....

At what point did the anti-aircraft actually get disbanded in terms of all this, do you know?

Why? Well ....

Or when in relation to what you were doing?

Well I would say it was about 1944 it was disbanded practically. See the war apparently, was on its way out then.

So it was disbanded before you went up north?

No it was ....

Or after you came ...

After I came back ...

... came back.

When I was at Harvey at the school it was disbanded because they went over there and some of them went into infantry, some went in - they went up to Greta and Singleton ....

When they went up to the north-west, that was still as the - they were still the twenty....

They were still the uh ....

Which battery by then?

Now that's a good question.

Were you the 22nd again or were you something else?

I think it was the 22nd. See I was there on that discharge the 2nd. Then once I was at Berrimah I was the 14th. Then I came back and I think I was the 22nd. They just used to change around (laughs).

(15.00) You became the - the 5th became the 22nd when you got up to - soon after you got up to ...

To Darwin, yeah.

Darwin, yeah. So anyway you went from the Harvey school, you went east?

Yeah, went east to Sydney.

Mmm. To an artillery school?

Yeah to an artillery school there you see. And that's what amazed me and the rest of them - or all me mates had been shanghaied to everywhere but I think I got out - they got out of touch with me when I was at the school and they must have forgotten me 'cause then when I went up to Maitland there, after the school, I was up there and there - the war - that's when the war finished then.

What were your actual responsibilities up at Maitland? What were you doing up there?

Well it appears to me now, it was actually a holding camp it was and the training centre, they were training chaps there but I was a gentleman of leisure there and that and they put me in charge of working parties and that and then as I think I told you when the war finished we

were at - unloading this ammunition at Maitland and they decided they weren't going to do it and I had a different idea ....

> The men that were unloading it. What, because the war had stopped, that was that.

Yeah, the war's finished they were - we're not going to unload this. So I says, 'Right', now the Newcastle Flyer, that was the train that run, you've heard of her, she used to run at eleven o'clock from Broadmeadow. So I says - this was - we got this about half past nine that the atom had been dropped and the Japanese had capitulated. So I said to 'em, I says, 'You'll unload this ammo load,' and I says, 'I want - I'll be on that Newcastle Flyer at eleven o'clock,' and I says, 'if you blokes have got any brains you'll be on it too.' Well they shifted it in very quick time then and we were on the eleven o'clock Newcastle Flyer and its never been many people on that train as it was that day and there was never so many happy people. I'll never forget that. There was civilians and that, there were nursing them and there was - an elderly ladies, come on everybody was mama and that and racks up the top with the luggage in, there was blokes screwed up and layin' up there to get on and you couldn't get a - and the bloomin' thing ran on time it did. It got to Sydney and that and I was there for about three days. Nobody had leave or anything. Then after three days I think in Sydney, I decided, I think I better go back up there. So I went back, caught the Flyer back and I was trained back up there and got back and it was a deserted place practically and they just said, 'What are you doin',' and I said, 'I come back.' And we hung on there for a while and the next thing I went back to Sydney showground and waited around there for I think it was seven weeks. I couldn't get a berth home.

Then I tell you lots of things that I did. I was wharf labourer, I run out of money there, so I went down to the Glebe Island and was doing some wharf labouring. When I went there the chap, the stevedore boss said to me, they used to do pick-ups you see, and he said, 'Have you done this before,' and I said, 'You heard of Fremantle?' and he said, 'Yes.' I says, 'I was the greatest lumper ever walked on Fremantle.' So he says, 'Righto you can start.' Well I started and I did seventy-four shifts there and in those days it was five pound a shift, it was, plus four shillings tea money. I never know where the - what this tea money was but ... and I did that. And then eventually I used to report every second day to the showground, no drafts, no drafts and I had a good mate there - an eastern stater who'd been away in Darwin with us and he lived out at Rosehill and he used to keep me informed there was no sea... If you keep in touch with me every two days I'll let you know when there's a West Australian draft and eventually I got a draft home. And that was that, that's finished ....

And then I was working around here for a week or so trying to get discharge.

(20.00) How easy was it to settle back into, um, civilian life, peacetime life?

I didn't have much difficulty at all. I was very interested in - as soon as I came out getting a job. I took on wool classing - part-time wool classing - but I didn't .... I had to wait about six months before I could get a position. So in the meantime I thought well this is no good, having a wife, I gotta do something so I did - got a job at the Perth City Council pruning trees and I lasted - lasted at that for six months, or near enough to six months and one day I'd - prior to enlistment I joined - I'd applied to join the West Australian Police Force, so I thought then I was far too old, I was over thirty years of age and they only took till twenty-seven so I fronted .... One day I got a bit fed up and I went to the police in the [inaudible] and the chap

says, 'Oh, yes,' he went through and he got me application and file and he said, 'Mmm, you're a bit unlucky,' he says, 'they take them to thirty years of age now,' and he says, 'you're over,' and I was thirty years and six months. And he says, 'No luck.' So away I went very disheartened and I thought it over and then .... So I fronted up about two days after again and I got an interview with the Commissioner and he said 'I'm sorry I can't take you,' and I says, 'Well it's like this Mr Doyle,' and he was the commissioner and I said, 'It's like this.' I says, 'The show I was in I never had any - made the rules, how long it was going to last,' and I says, 'that's the way I didn't come before.' And after about two days I got a letter. They went out to where I was staying - was staying and for to report in and I reported in and I hence I had thirty years and a half as a policeman.

You say you were thinking of joining the police force before the war came.

Prior to the war yes.

Why did you want to join the police?

Well I'd gone through depression years, I'd seen my mother on farming. I have five brothers, I saw her slave on that and I says no wife of mine's going to and being through depression years when I worked for ten shillings a week, ah, I said, 'No way.' And that I decided to join the police force, but unfortunately I was joined up the army and then after I was in the army I got a letter from the police that - but I did have enough intelligence apparently to drop them a line and say that as I joined His Majesty's Service I was unavailable and that .... But I had no regrets at the police now, ever since I've retired. I've been retired now thirteen years.

Were you in the country and ...

No I ...

Or ...? The city.

No I was in the city fortunately. I was a traffic policeman, accident enquiry, done the lot as the saying is. Examined taxis and buses for years and ....

How much have you kept up with the, um, war years, you know, as far as friends you made then and ...?

Well not for a good while. Every year we have a dinner and I've been in that ever since that was organised. We organised that, I've been mixed up with that.

This is the Anti-Aircraft Association dinner or ...?

No, no - yes the Anti-Aircraft Association dinner for men only that one. Then we have another one for the women after but I have - it's only in more or less in recent years since I've retired, Boyce Donegan and Vern Donegan, we've always been connected sorta, because when Vern had his seventieth birth... no his seventieth birthday we were privileged to be invited, my wife and myself, but prior to that his - the Queen came out and he was in charge of a portion - the army portion of it - and there'd been a bit of a mix-up. I was on the speed bikes at those times and they took the wrong turn by mistake and I came along on the right road and Vern's there and he - and I says, 'What the heck are you doin' here?' He says, 'Waiting for

them,' and I says, 'Oh,' I says, 'they've gone down such and such a street.' Well he says, 'They shouldn't.' I says, 'Well they've gone, that's the way they've gone.'

(25.00) So I hopped - Vern hopped on the back of the police bike unofficial - you're not supposed to carry passengers - and I raced up to the - wherever we reckoned they were gonna come out and they came out at the spot and that was forgotten. But when he had his seventieth birthday they played - his son-in-law - this is your life, and he brought the - we were sitting there, Lynette and I like and everything and he'd come up and they brought up all about this episode and they all - nobody knew about it and you are the first ones that knows about it now. But then Badger and - or Boyce - or whatever you'd like to call him, we've been you know, corresponding with our wives and that, but the rest it's only since I retired and we got this Anti-Aircraft Association going, the women and that, that we sorta got there. But - go on ....

No, I was going to say what about the RSL? Did you join the RSL when you came back?

I joined the RSL early in the piece, very early, my father was in that and but I have had no grants - housing loans I didn't. When I applied for a housing loan, I had the land and everything they stopped having - issuing housing loans for about a period of twelve months. In the meantime I had everything going to get - to do it and I was a speed cop then and I happened to get onto a party one night who was leaving his house and, um, I said, 'Who's going in?' And he said, 'I don't know.' I says, 'Oh, fair enough, well I will.' And we went in and we bought it and we lived there for too long - thirty years nearly and I never worried about buying a house. I bought that one, see that ruined me from housing loan unless I sold it or got rid of it and then we had this land here and we built here, sold the other one, we kept it for a few years.

So have you got any other sort of - well you didn't get a housing loan then, have you got any benefits or any sort of ...?

Not monetary no.

Health?

I get a - I injured me back in 1942 at Quarantine when we were putting a tank in the ground and I never, you know, when I was in the police force you're supposed to be a 100 percent fit and that, well I was too, youth and everything I suppose. And then me back started to give me trouble and the police - at one stage I was a bit of a burden to them with me back and I got frightened that they were going to board me out. So I fronted the Repat. then and they accepted me back injury and gave me a very small percentage of a pension - twenty percent I think it was in those days - and then I hung on with that and I never - me back I kept nursing it a bit and I used to kept under because I got free medical treatment from the police and I had the other one if I wanted it to but fortunately I never wanted it. Since I've retired, well I used it quite a bit because I get aches and pains now which I never used to get.

Interview goes onto to tape 3.

END TAPE 2, SIDE B.

BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE A.

Identification: tape three of Ross King, 2nd Anti-Aircraft Battery recorded by Jane Fleming Panegyres, 26th of August 1989. End of identification.

On ANZAC Day, have you marched in the ANZAC Day marches?

Yes, I've marched there for many years. Um, being a member of the police force, the police had a police contingent marching and I used to march with them. When the Anti-Aircraft Association was formed and they'd decided to march I still marched a couple of years with the police and then I switched over to give them, the Anti-Aircraft a bit of strength and marched with them - marching with them now, but I still get correspondence from the Commissioner of Police requesting for me to march, switch back, so I don't know where I am but will be marching in either one.

Do you feel strong loyalty to the Anti-Aircraft Association? Do you think that's your first loyalty in a way?

Good comradeship I think, the same as I have in the police. Er, there's some police officers who you don't like, the same as in the army. There's some chaps you don't like but they are few and far between and you've got to be reasonable I think. It's - they mightn't like you. But you want to be of harmonious wherever you are I think.

You mentioned that your father was a staunch RSL member ...

Yes.

And that you joined the RSL, how good an organisation do you feel it's been in terms of what it's offered in the way of support and so on?

I think it's a very good organisation. I think anything you want they'll do - give you at least a hearing and I can't fault it myself. I know some people have got some very hard things to say about it, but perhaps they might not be handling it rightly.

How do you feel about the RSL moving into comments on more general sort of community issues these days?

Well some of them I don't agree with but still that's their privilege isn't it, to be able to do that. But on a whole I think their comments are pretty good, pretty solid.

Have you found that people were by and large interested in your war experiences or has that gone up and down with different years and so on?

It seems to go up and down, it depends on the company you're in. Some people wouldn't have a bar of it is the saying, other people are interested and they'll ask you and that. And even the children will ask you. My - our grandson, he's fourteen, he marches with us he does and he's entitled to because he wears his grandfather's medals and one - somebody said the other day to me, they says, 'Oh we're gonna rule these kids out marchin' in the ANZAC Day.' I says, 'Fair enough,' I says, 'you wo...' - I says 'One thing about this is you can rule them out,' but I says, 'you rule them, you rule me out, 'cause', I says, 'I can march with the police.'

Did your father talk to you much about his experiences in the first war?

Not that much he wouldn't. He reckoned it was - he was in France and had a pretty rough house and that and got gassed and he used to say very nasty things - well not how brutal it was more than the nastiness. But he - he carried on till he was eighty-eight or so of age, so he didn't do too bad.

(5.00) Did you find that, um, people's feelings towards war and war service and so on were different in say the period when the Vietnam war was still on and during the sort of sixties, seventies period?

No, I didn't. I know the ones that were - there was a lot of animosity I think would be the word for it was the - when they used to have a ballot and select them which I don't agree with myself - it's all in or all out with me - and I think they could have got all the - all wanted with this volunteering the same as they did every other way.

Now looking back on your war service and so on, how do feel about those years now? Do you - are you glad that you had that time or did it interrupt your life in a way that might have been better not to?

Well it's very difficult to say that. Perhaps had I not joined up [break in recording], had I not joined up I possibly would have gone into the police force five or six years earlier than I did. But as it was it's - I got no regrets, I brought up my wife and two daughters gave them a good education position I was in and so we're living reasonably well now. So life is round the corner, you don't know what's going to happen next. I've got other mates who have had very good opportunities and they've done no good at all. So ....

You said to me talking elsewhere, that you went up to Darwin, um, and were involved in giving information for a book that was ...

Yes.

... written on events in Darwin. Can you tell me about that a bit more in detail?

Yes we went to Darwin here in I think it was '83 - I'm not too sure now of that - it might have been '83. You see we've been twice, '83 and '85 and, um, a Mr Powell - Professor Powell - he was very interested about Darwin and got the history - wanted all the history he could from us and I arranged with him - I says, 'Well the best thing to do is to see us in the morning.' It was at the social by the Lord Mayor of Darwin at the time and I says, 'Call and see us in the morning.' In the morning I arranged with Fred Foxon, whom you've met, and Fred, we decided we'd go down and we went down to Quarantine section and pointed out various things there which we'd done in our past and give him all the information we could and I gave him - or I lent him a series of photos of about sixty I had which were taken by a chap in the navy and he would be delighted he said to have them and I jumped in and says, 'You take them, take what you want off and return the balance to me.' Well two years passed and I hadn't got them back. So we started correspondence and I found out that the first letter was returned unclaimed. And I found out that he was in America. So that was all right. Then we followed it up later with another letter and we got a reply that he could not find the photos.

Eventually he found the photos and after a conversa... a telephone conversations from Darwin to us and that we got the photos back in good order and also they came on certified mail so we got no ... but I thought I could have kissed them goodbye.

You kept a diary while you were up there of - a fairly brief diary ...

Yes.

... but a consistent one, how accurately do you find that the listings that you've read of the raids and so on and the numbers tally in with what - as far as the ones that you were actually involved in and could record - tally in with yours?

All the raids which - there's about four of that ... foolscap list of them and mine are identical they are. There's about four I just don't know whether they were, but they coulda been - see some of them happened down at Komali Creek and that which we may not have got word of, but we mostly did, but it's very - and the chap who was up in Darwin who's been in charge of the museum up there, Stan Hore?, he reckons that they were identical to what happened. He says, 'I've gone into it and I'm quite prepared to say, well just - if you only miss four in about sixty odd and that you're not doing too bad.'

What about the books that have been written and other sorts of reports that have been - of what went on in Darwin, how accurate do think they've been and how fair?

Uh, they've been fairly good, they have. I thought there - the one I read they ... uh, badly painted the RAAF. I don't think the RAAF was - when you saw what happened they had nowhere else to do but to get out. When you got - it's all right to say, this is me home - my home, but when it's knocked down there's nothing there. You got nothing have you? You gotta do something and it doesn't take much to go. I was a bit sorry that they rubbished them as much as they did. I'm not saying that they - they went through admittedly but they - some of them never stopped. Well they happened in everything I think, you'll always get the one that never stops.

That is the end of tape three and the end of the interview.

END TAPE 3, SIDE A.
END OF INTERVIEW.