



TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE A.

Identification: This is Tape 1, Side 1 of an interview with Mr Michael Thomas Kennedy, recorded on 6 April 1990 by Susan Green. End of tape identification.

Mr Kennedy, how old were you at the outbreak of war?

I would have been sixteen.

And what was your occupation at that time?

Sheet metalworker, apprentice sheet metalworker.

Who were you working for?

E J Atkins. They are now called .... Oh, he went out of business really but the company is Containers Limited, now but they were a sheet metal firm before.

And what were you doing at that time?

Oh, I was manufacturing tin ware at that particular time.

What sort of product was E J Atkins involved with producing?

Mainly, they used to do a lot of rubbish bins and tin kettles and tin wash-up dishes and all that type of kitchenware type of stuff - canisters and it was mainly all kitchenware, you know. And the milk measures and petrol measures, all that type of thing, you know.

Now when war broke out did you attempt to get into the services and enlist?

I did, yes. But I was manpowered out. See I, the trouble was my boss was pretty hard but some people have got in, they let them go but each time I tried the boss went in and had me manpowered out again. So I had to stay where I was sort of thing, you know.

In fact you weren't really old enough to enlist officially.

No, but when I was old enough to enlist, they just stopped me, wouldn't let me go. But no-one would have known the difference anyway.

And how did you first hear about the Volunteer Defence Corps?

I don't know. It's just generally hear about it around the place, you know. I didn't .... Then the mate and I decided we'd go down and join it, that was all.

What influenced you there?

Well, you couldn't get in the army, so I thought, you know, doing something. But, we used to go down on Wednesday nights and Sunday mornings and did a bit of drill and muckin'

around. Marches around the streets and that. And learnt how to use weapons and that, you know.

> Now you joined up with the organisation really before it became the official Volunteer Defence Corps and assumed as part of the army. So what were those early days like? Can you tell us a bit more about the training that you got?

Oh, yes. We used to go out on bivouacs weekends and did camps, you know. And we went down around the Port Beach and done barbed-wiring on the coast. And also around South Beach - barbed-wiring the coast.

> Now I assume that was probably later, after the army took control ....

Could be.

> Because in the early days you were in No. 2 B Company which was based pretty much around the South Perth area.

The South Perth area, yeah. That's right, yeah.

> So what were some of the activities that you were asked to take part in there?

Oh, well, we used to ... did a picket on the council offices there [inaudible] at night for some time. But then it was later on, after the army took over I think when we would have been doin' the pickets on Canning Bridge. Used to do a night picket there, one night a week. But, um ....

> Can you describe what happened there? What time would you go down to Canning Bridge?

Oh, used to go down about, wouldn't be sure now. Used to go down and I think the first picket went on about eight o'clock, or it might have been before that. And you did two hours on and four hours off during the night and just keep boats and that away from under the bridge, you know. It was rather stupid when you look at it now but that's what we did.

> And just one sentry post, or were there more than one?

No, one at either end of the bridge. And we just used to do a walk backwards and forwards to check it and that sort of thing. Just to see that no-one got under the bridge, that sort of thing.

(5.00) And what sort of arms did you carry then?

Oh, we carried a .310 rifle. They were the ones that we first got. But, um ....

> And how long did that picket duty carry on for? Can you remember? Was it a long time?

Oh, I couldn't remember how long but it was quite a while. I know I used to be pretty tired the next day at work. It went on for quite a while but I couldn't tell you how long really.

Now you had two hours on and four hours off.

That's right.

What did you do in your four hours off?

Oh, we used to sleep.

And where did you sleep?

We used to sleep in the district hall, there at Canning Bridge. You know the Applecross District Hall, used to sleep there.

That was accessible for you.

Oh, yes. That was where we used to operate from, there. And my boss from work used to be there, too. That's how I used to get away with it.

Oh, when you say you got away with it, you got away with what?

Bein' there. Oh Jim Hough, I don't know if you've seen any of the photos there, he was in it. But, um, bein' tired at work sometimes.

Was he an influence, Jim Hough, in your joining the VDC, do you think?

Oh, no, no. Nothing to do with it. No we just joined because, you know, oh, it's, well, it's something. I couldn't get in the army so I did it, that was more or less the reason. No-one really influenced me to do it. I just decided to do it.

Now, had you had any experience with weapons prior to joining this organisation?

Oh, yes. I used to do a bit of shooting, you know, rifles and that. Used to go out shooting. Used to go out to the farm quite often on shooting weekends and that. Quite a bit of shooting.

So you weren't a complete novice at handling guns.

Oh, no. I'd handled firearms and that before.

And what sort of training did you get from the people there that were instructing you?

Oh, we learnt .... They taught us how to use firearms correctly and they had weapons, other weapons besides machine-guns and that which they pulled apart and we learnt how to pull apart and put together. And we learnt how to use them sort of thing.

Can you remember what those weapons were?

Oh, I think they had a Lewis and ah ... I think one might have been the old Browning, I wouldn't be sure - old Browning machine-gun. They were an American job. And when the army took over we got the later firearms, you know, and they brought them down and we pulled them apart and put them together.

Now what ...? Can you remember what sort of arms you had in the very start? Was there a shortage of them then?

We didn't have much ... any arms at all, for a start, just more or less just muckin' around learnin' to drill and that, but we didn't have rifles or anything for a start. It was quite some time before we got any rifles or anything, you know.

So what did you train with, then?

I don't know, we just went around, I don't remember to tell you the truth but it was quite a while before we got the rifles.

Okay, you talk about going off on camps, can you remember a particular place or any one of those camps particularly that you can describe?

Oh, we used to go out to Kelmscott. Used to be a pool there, you know, we used to .... The naval used to do weekend bivouac camps out there and wander through the hills - exercises and that. That was, we did that two or three times, you know, exercises through there.

Were people pretty enthusiastic about coming along to all of these things, or was it a bit of a drag?

Oh, no. People were sort of, well you know, it was wartime and people were sort of into that sort of thing. I mean, if we look back now, we did nothing but we thought we were doing something, you know, that's really ... but it never seemed to be a drag to anyone, they seemed to enjoy going, you know.

You feel, you sound now as if you think it was a very ... you don't place much value on what you did do at that time. Did you ever have any doubts at that time?

No, no. You thought if anything .... We were here, we were trained and that was it. I mean, if we'd have had no training, well, it would have been no good at all, but I mean, the amount of it, people ... you know, when you look back now, the amount of people who was in it, it wouldn't have been much good if ... but it would have been something, that's all there was to it, you know.

What were the officers like in your company?

Oh, they were very good. They were very good, very efficient.

Can you remember any of them particularly, that made an impression?

Well, old Earle Arney, he was a very good man. He was ... had a lot of time for him. But Richardson, he was a nice man. They were good officers. You couldn't complain any of them really. They were, you know, very good. I thought it was a very good crew really.

(10.00) What do ...? What makes you single out Arney? What made him special?

I probably had more to do with him, I suppose, you know. He was .... You used to see more of one than the other sort of thing, sometimes, you know. But he was quite a nice bloke.

What is the sort of person, I mean, was he the kind that came up and clapped you on the back, or what kind?

Oh, no, no. He was just, well, quite a reserved type of man I'd say, you know. But he was very easy to get on with.

This is Arney, now, we're talking about.

Mm.

Now.

Well, they were all easy to get on with but probably I had more to do with him, you know, come in contact with him more than the others, sort of thing.

And in what way were you coming in contact with him?

Oh, I don't know. You just, I suppose he sort of made himself more available than the others sort of, you know. But, um, I enjoyed the time with him. I thought it was quite good.

He would have been the contact person if you wanted to know what was going on?

Oh, yes. He was ... would have been really. Let's see, he always used to end up at camps and that too. He was always there.

Now, the very early days, you didn't have a uniform or anything ....

No, no.

It was just turning up in your civvies.

That's right.

Right. What was the general attitude, did you feel from other people to the VDC at that time? You were a group of people that were in plain clothes training with practically no weapons. What was the general community attitude to that?

Well, oh well, I think they thought it was a bit of a joke. Used to march around the streets and that you know and they'd, they'd think we were a bit of a joke, but we didn't, and that was the main thing.

> Yeah. Did you ever find that you were being criticised for not being away and off fighting overseas?

Oh, not really. I mean, I'd have gone if I could but they just get me and that was it, but ....

> There weren't ever any sort of comments from people in, say, public transport or just in your day-to-day life?

No, I never had any problems at all. I mean, well, at the time you were either a protected industry or there was something wrong with you, or you were in the army or the air force. That's all there was to it. I mean, you didn't get out unless you were in a protected industry or something. So I never had any problems whatsoever.

> Now do you remember, was there a sort of change in the feeling within your group when the army took over?

Oh, yes, the, sort of got the idea you were really in it, you know. And when we started to learn, went down on these anti-aircraft guns that really made a difference, we thought we were really big time. But, um, I think that we were trained reasonably well, as far as, we could have taken over the guns without any problems, and the range-finders and everything else. We could have taken it over without any problems, the crews. If they'd have had to drag those army jokers out they could have left us there. We could have handled it because we were trained, you know, we had the training. That was the point.

> And when that happened, what was the sort of routine? If you could give me an idea of your involvement, for example, with the guard duty on Canning Bridge and then with the gun crew responsibilities when that started?

Well, we used to go down to the .... Occasionally we went down during the week of a night, and just ... and come back. See the army used to pick us up. But mainly it was weekends we'd go down ... And sometimes we'd only go on a Sunday and sometimes we'd go on a Saturday and stay overnight, sort of thing, you know. Most times we used to, in the finish, go down and stay over the weekend sort of thing. But, um, that was, they'd pick us up and bring us back. And drop us .... They had a pick-up point at Canning Bridge, and another one, a couple along the South Perth, Vic Park, and there was ... but um .... There was other VDC, I think over at ... um, the Buckland Hill, too. There was quite a few men all told, you know.

> Now you went ... can you remember where you went first was that the point where, near what is now John Curtin High School, or did you go to Buckland Hill first?

No, we went to, we did all our training at Park Station.

> Right. That's near John Curtin.

That's right. Then we went over .... We did have shoots from the Park but in the finish we used to shoot from over at Buckland Hill.

Why was there that change?

Well, I don't know. Possibly they might have thought there might be a drop short or something, you know, you could get a premature fuse or something and this is over the ... you're shooting more or less out over the harbour and everything there. Whereas you were just shootin' out over the coast from Buckland Hill. There wasn't much houses or anything there. But, um ....

(15.00) Can you remember any particular situations that come to mind of those shoots?

Well, I remember once when a round dropped. We were loadin' a round and it dropped, never caught it with your hand, it dropped onto the floor - big panic. Oh, it wasn't really but, you know, it was just ... everyone stood and they got it out into a bunker and that was it. But, um, that's about the only thing that I can remember that went wrong.

And when the war really began to heat up and there was a great, there was a real danger of an invasion of Australia and particularly of Western Australia seemed to be particularly vulnerable. What was the sort of feeling, was there a change then, in that attitude?

Oh, no. Well, we thought that if happened we were right, we were ready, so .... I mean, we were quite happy with our training and the way we were trained. I reckon if anything had happened and we'd have put on an action, we'd have done all right. It wasn't as though, you know, like you see this thing on comedy in England about the civil defence forces, it wasn't anything like that, nothing like that, it was .... I reckon we were reasonably well trained in the finish.

Did you get training for example in demolition and sort of what might be required after an invasion?

No, we never had any demolition or I never had it. Probably were units might have, but I never. But, um ....

Aside from the gun crew were you ever involved in, say, setting up barbed-wire, or trench duty, or, you know, digging trenches or anything like that?

Well, we used to do that on bivouacs, dig trenches, you know. But the barbed-wiring was only what we did along the coast mainly at South Fremantle, on the South Beach there, and we did some along Port Beach there, just on the water's edge, along there.

Did you come in touch at all with people from other parts of the VDC? When you went on your camps, from some other companies and battalions?

They were mainly, see the Vic Park and our crowd were sort of associated mainly with the guns and that. What I met anyway. We had the similar thing to Vic Park so we went over to Buckland Hill and some came over to .... But there and again, I think there was some from

Fremantle and some other stations, too. I wouldn't be too sure about that, you know. But we never got more or less mixed up much.

Where were you living at the time?

I was living in South Como.

And you don't remember any particular distinctions between what you were doing and say, some of the people from the inland VDC groups were doing?

No, no. Well I never had much to do with them at all. We never had anything to do with them really, but um that's mainly ... guns crews was the main stuff and the pickets.

What was the feeling among you all as to the situation of Western Australia? I mean was there a feeling of resentment towards the east or any suspicion towards how the eastern states were going to treat Western Australia as part of a sort of an outpost of Australia?

No, well I, no, I mean, I suppose there was to an extent but it wasn't that much. But, um, we reckoned we could handle it, I suppose. But, um, see, we learnt a lot more about this, we that were going to be treated as an outpost later than what we did then, didn't we? It wasn't like, they didn't turn round and the Government will say that we're going to leave Western Australia and just put a line across here and look after the rest of Australia.

Well, that has been, well, I mean, that feeling was put forward later in the war that there was ....

Later in the war they, yes, but sort of the war was more or less pretty safe when they come round to that thinking, I think. They were pretty well ... and we never sort of, it never seemed to worry us much anyway.

Right, you felt quite confident ....

Oh, we were confident enough, yeah, yeah.

And there were no contingency plans of what would happen if there was an invasion or an attack?

Oh, well, they reckoned, you know, we'd just leave the job and all come, and we'd be picked up taken to where we were going and that was it.

Can you remember any particular emergency situations when there was thought to be, say, sightings off the coast or anything like that, where you had to go down there [inaudible]?

No, there wasn't, not to my knowledge. I can't remember anything, but, no.

What dictated when you were taken to Fremantle some times in the week, you said?

Well, we went down, see, they had a night shoot, so the permanent army blokes had night shoots and that. Well, we went down to witness it. And we were in there, you know, we got in around the guns to get the feel of it at night, sort of thing. But um, we done aircraft recognition schools, that sort of thing, you know.

(20.00) Were those sort of things done in a class situation or out in the open?

No, we did it in a class. Tim and I done a course. We went with the ....

This is Tim Megaw?

Yeah.

Right. He was also a member.

It was done, the gunners, sort of a course, they had so many army jokers, and Tim and I went down to this course and done this recognition - all the different types of aircraft. We got top marks above the army [laughter]. But we were real keyed up [more laughter].

You were pretty chuffed by that.

Oh yeah.

Can you remember other courses that you did, particular specialist courses like that?

No, not really. They were mainly with the gunning arts and all that. We did a bit on the, never did a specialist course or anything like that, we did a bit on the range-finders and that, you know. Everyone had to learn how to do it, use them and read them, that sort of thing. Same with the guns, you know, you did fuse-setting and range-laying and all that sort of thing. Everyone does it. Well, everyone had to know how to do it, sort of thing.

Was that done in a class situation?

No, it was done on the guns. It was just general practice, you know.

What about map reading and survey, that type of thing?

Oh, we did a bit of map reading, but not a lot, but we did do a bit, you know.

Were maps available to you then?

Oh, there was just, when we went out on these bivouacs, you know, they had a maps of the area and you had to be able to go from one point to the other, read the map and get there, you know.

So you had army maps issued to you?

Well, they were sort of area maps of, I don't know whether they were army, or whose they were, they were just area maps. Just the ground, you know. It was being able to pick out the features from the maps, that's all.

How was the communications? Did you feel you were getting a pretty good story on what was happening in the war?

Well, we thought we were. Whether we did or not is another thing. I think we got fairly good communication, you know.

Was there a lot of what you'd now call propaganda in terms of encouraging you to be in it?

Oh, I don't know about propaganda. I mean, there was no ... everyone I knew was in it, they didn't need encouragin', they were quite, you know, that's what they were doin' somethin'. They were happy to be in it. But, um, I don't even know anyone that pulled out.

There were no drop-outs along the way?

I don't remember any pullin' out, you know. The only people that might have, some of the young ones might have got in the services or something, but other than that there was no-one that I know that started that pulled out until it finished.

What were the other fellows like? What sort of people were joining the VDC?

Oh, they were from all walks of life, you know. There was printers, accountants, any walk of life you can meet. I think, a magistrate, there was all different types of people in it, you know.

Was it a pretty egalitarian sort of set up or did there tend to be a bit of a hierarchy for those who were perhaps better educated?

Oh, no, they all sort of ... it was pretty good, they mixed pretty well. There was no trouble at all. No-one seemed to worry about what you were or who you were, you were just one of the boys and that was it. It was, we had an old chap come over from Japan, Mr Douglas. He'd been the manager of the American Bank in Tokyo. He joined it. Well, he was a real old gentleman, but you know, he was no different to anyone else. He used to come down and do his guard duty on Canning Bridge the same as anyone else. No, everyone mixed very well, I thought. There was no .... It's not like the army, when you get an officer he's it, but it was a different set up there altogether.

So the officers weren't seen as a sort of elitist group?

Oh, they weren't seen as an elitist group, they were just like the rest of us. I think it might have been different if they were in the army, that's a different thing altogether. But, no, I don't think they were, anyway. not as far as I was concerned, they were just some of the boys.

That's the end of Side 1, Tape 1 of the interview with Mr Kennedy.

END TAPE 1, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B

Identification: This is Tape 1, Side 2 of an interview with Mr Michael Kennedy recorded on 6th April 1990 by Susan Green. End of tape identification.

Mr Kennedy, can you ever remember being asked to do any sort of intelligence work as part of the VDC?

No, never.

There was no encouragement to keep an eye open for unusual happenings or anything like that?

Oh, well, yes, if there was anything like that, but there was no intelligence. You know, we weren't an intelligence service or anything like that. But if you saw anything unusual, well report it, that was all.

Do you remember anything like that occurring at all?

No, not my knowledge it never happened. Not in my time, anyway.

No, I mean just seeing anything unusual.

No, no, I never seen nothing unusual happen at all.

Yes. Was there ever, did you ever hear any rumours of the VDC being involved with intelligence work?

Oh, you hear all sorts of rumours about it. I mean, we'd start a few ourself.

[Laughs] Tell us ....

When we got the uniform, you know, and the VDC. What's that? Oh, that's the V Bomb Disposal Corps. Oh, yeah. Everyone used to .... That was just, you know, anyone could start some sort of silly thing like that.

Was it a time very much then, you know, that weird rumours would go around and ...?

Oh, you used to hear a few rumours and different things, you know. I mean, down south in the VDC, I had a friend down there, and they always used to reckon they could hear an engine or a motor, something goin' at night, and they could never trace it. They reckoned, they still reckon there was something going on down there but they don't know what, but .... That was friends, you know, but, in the VDC down there.

Right. Where was that? Where were they posted?

Just down at Yallingup.

Yeah. Did they ever try and trace it?

Oh, they tried to trace it but they reckoned it was somewhere out in the bush but they couldn't find it. They reckoned it was a generator or something it sounded like, you know, but what it was, God knows. They never seemed to find out.

Yeah. And were you ever sent down south ...

No.

... to do anything, any work down there?

No, no. We never went past South Beach, I don't think. [inaudible] South Beach, that's about as far as we went, I think, there.

Yes, it seems to be a very sort of coastal clinging type of company that you were involved with, the B Company.

Yes. Well, I mean, see, you were gettin' into the aircraft guns. Well, they were all along the coast and that sort of kept us on the coast, more or less.

Right.

As I say, we used to do a few bivouacs up in the hills but that was all.

Right. Now, were you among the very young members of the group, or were there quite a lot of people who were about your age?

Oh, there wasn't a lot. They were mainly older than us. There were a few about our age, but mainly they were older men, you know.

World war one veterans?

Oh, some of them would have been, I suppose. Never worried to find out what they were really, but I mean, some of them were pretty old. But, um, there was only a few young ones but we more or less were all together sort of thing, you know.

And did they take much of a hand in training the younger ones?

Oh, yes. There was ... they looked after the younger ones and trained 'em, same as anyone else.

At the same time, you were going off to work each day to E J Atkins.

That's right.

Working as a sheet metalworker. What was life like during the wartime at E J Atkins? I mean, how did it affect that company?

Oh, well, it affected it. You know, it started manufacturing stuff for the army and there was a lot of shortages in metal, type of thing, and ....

(5.00) I mean, you couldn't get galvanised iron durin' the war. They used to make what they called lead turns and it was a lead-coated sheet. And tin plate, you couldn't get English tin plate. And you finished up gettin' American stuff, it was rubbish. It was very highly polished but compared to the English plate, it just used to be ... I mean, English plate would last about six or nine months. This other stuff would last a few weeks, you know. It was so highly polished it was like a chrome finish, it wasn't good metal though.

And so it would just rub off, would it?

Oh well, it just sort of went into holes. I think they used to polish it too much, you know, and it was too highly polished. But the lead turns that was very soft sort of metal and you were covered in black from head to foot after you use it, you know, with the lead, it was ....

And in a sense that was what they were sort of, they were coating the iron with?

They more or less coated it with lead instead of zinc and, er, like they galvanised ... well, you just couldn't get it, but, um ....

Any other shortages that you can remember, or ...

Oh, mainly you know ....

... effects on the production?

We got enough to do what ... to do at work, you know, but it was always a battle. It wasn't that ... you just couldn't walk in and get things like they used to before.

What was your work actually involved with? Were you maintaining machines, or ...?

No, manufacturing.

Right.

But, um, see, we were doin', um, these pannikins for the army. We made boxes for this pulped egg and dixies and ....

Boxes of ....

Yeah. We made containers, you know, that you put this pulped egg in. They used to use in the army and dixies and different sorts of stuff they wanted in the army, that's all.

Was there any sort of black market going on that time in materials of this nature?

Not really, to my knowledge there wasn't. The only thing on the black market was in petrol, I think. A bit of black market in petrol if you could get it. But other than that, I mean, food stuff, butter, I mean, there was a big black market in that, too, but not much else.

And the composition of the company, the people who worked in the company, was that affected by the war, the type of people that were there?

Oh well, people that weren't tradesmen, they went in the army. They only kept the apprentices and tradesmen. They were sort of manpowered but the general labourers type of thing they just automatically went in the army when they were old enough, you know.

Did women begin fill some of those positions?

Not till fairly late in the war years, you know, fairly late it was before the women came in.

Does that mean that you worked at lower, with less manpower?

Well, there was no shortage of young boys, see ... and a lot of general manufacturing, there was mainly boys. I mean, a lot of the time in those days a boy would work till they were sixteen, seventeen and as soon as he was that age they would get rid of him because wages were too high. It wasn't like it is today, oh, I suppose they do it to a certain extent today, too, but then anyone that was kept on was very lucky. But they'd just use the boys until their wages got to a stage they were too much and they got rid of them. So a lot of those blokes that went in the army they would have been gone anyway if they hadn't have gone in the army, you know.

So even though it was wartime they were still in a way looking for the younger person to pay less wages?

Oh yes, they looked after themself that way, don't worry.

Yes, you mentioned your boss, Jim Hough ...

Yes.

... who was there and who was also in the VDC.

Mm, mm.

Was there a feeling of employer/employee relationship when you were both in the VDC together?

No, no, no. No, it was a different set-up. He was always ... he was a real pugnacious old bugger at work but out of work he was all right. Once you'd left work he was a different person. I knew him socially outside of work, you know, and he was a different person altogether but at work he was a real pugnacious sort of a person, you know.

Did a lot of people at your work place belong to the VDC?

No. No, I think I might have been the only one, probably, other than him, you know. But there was no-one else. Oh, see, some of them, their parents had farms and they used to go up there and work on the farms at weekends and things like that. But, um, and the others, we were just a joke.

(10.00) What, in the VDC?

Yeah. A lot of it, yeah.

That was the general feeling at work, you mean?

Oh, well, some of them. I mean, anyone that thought it was anything, they joined it. Anyone that didn't, they didn't, I suppose. That's all there is to it, you know.

And did that change? Did the joking change a bit as the war went on?

Well, it just sort of died and that was it. Just, 'God help us if you jokers have gotta save us', this sort of thing, it was natural. But it sort of died, you know. It's like anything else it just would start as a bit of a joke and then it sort of wore off and that was it.

And in the same way, did your enthusiasm wane, at all as the war went on?

No, not really. See goin' down there to the guns and that weekends, it was interesting and we reckoned we were doin' a good job, so that was it.

Did the, did your boss stop others in your work place from enlisting in the same way as he stopped you whenever you tried to enlist?

Well, see, I was the only apprentice there that tried to enlist, but I don't know, no-one else seemed to worry. I think Johnny Wells tried to get in the air force, but other than that I don't think there was anyone else, anyone that got out. Like Alan Cameron he went in the air force but he wasn't a tradesman, you see. That's why he could go. But they were very hard on tradesmen, if you ... they wouldn't let you go and that was it.

Did you see the VDC training as a way of perhaps, maybe, getting into the main forces? Was that an avenue?

Oh, not really, because, see I had been accepted twice for the army and the last time I was accepted I was even told when to come into camp and I was comin', the foreman from where I work come on the Sunday night and said, 'You're not going to the camp. Go into work tomorrow.' And I got word that I was manpowered out again.

It seemed to be all very much on a kind of a small scale basis of people being able to ... those directions came through very quickly, at short notice.

Yeah well, [inaudible] I told them on the Friday and they got in touch with, well, the boss got in touch with someone over the weekend because on Sunday afternoon, like, Sunday evening they come to my place and said, 'You're not goin''. And that was it.

Did that make you feel slightly resentful about your boss?

Oh, I wasn't very happy about it. [Laughter] You can imagine. You wouldn't have been happy about it, would you, if you wanted to go? But, um, I finished my time there and that was it.

> And just in terms of your, of the company feeling, how did, you obviously all thought you were fairly efficient in what you were doing in the B Company, how did you rank yourselves as against, or compared with some of the other groups in the VDC?

Oh, we reckoned we were top. That was our opinion of that.

> Was there a feeling, do you think, that the B Company was seen as a bit of a, one of the prime forces in the VDC?

Oh, I don't know, but we thought it was.

> I mean there are stories that the instructors were asked to go from B Company to teach some of the other groups. Can you remember any of that?

Oh well, it's happened but, ah, that was only because, I suppose, some of them were ex-army men from previously probably and that's, they could instruct in weapons and that type of thing. But, it's nice to have someone experienced to be able to teach you. See we had [inaudible] pretty sure there was someone there, he'd been on the Lewis and that durin' the war years. He could pull it down and put it together with his eyes closed, sort of thing, you know. Just can't think of his name now, that's the way it was. Well, I mean if you get a man like that he's handy to have to be able to go and teach someone isn't he?

> And did you have any training at all in grenades or things like that?

Oh yes, we went out to Bushmead, you know out here and I think they call it Bushmead, out at [Broadview?]. They had a range there and went out there and threw grenades and that. Went out to grenade training and did all that type of training - grenade throwing and that type of thing.

(15.00) Was there a feeling of, well, you mentioned that you felt much more accepted once you were, the army took control of the VDC, what was the sort of relationship between you people and the regular army people?

Oh, it was very good. I mean, we used to go down there and we were just treated like they were. Used the canteen and everything else, the same messes and it was very good.

> What was their attitude to you? Did they accept that you were pretty professional in what you were doing?

Oh yes. They were quite happy. They taught us. They were quite happy. They were quite pleased that we done the right thing ... quite ... let us ... they were quite happy about it because it was a feather in their cap, they trained us and they were quite happy.

> They trained you?

Well, they trained us on the guns and it was the army that trained us on the guns down there, anti-aircraft guns, and the range-finders and all that, it was all the army personnel that trained us.

Now going back to the early days again, you mentioned that you were on guard duty at South Perth council rooms.

Yes.

Why was that?

Well, I couldn't tell you, to tell you the truth. I think it was to give us something to do. You used to go down one night a week and answer the phone or some damn thing. I just don't remember what our idea was, just to see that no-one got near the council rooms and that, that's all it was. That was right early in the piece, very early in the piece, you know.

And was there very much of a sort of emphasis on reconnaissance and knowing your territory in the South Perth area? Were you very involved with that?

Oh, you did a bit, but we did a bit of work at night, out in the bush, out, I suppose it would be Solus Point way, you know, demolition explosives and that type of thing and ....

What?

Demolition explosives and that type of thing, you know. Did a few nights out there and learnt how to blow stumps and things like this.

When you say you did nights out there, you went out there on an evening ....

Yeah, yeah, you know, in the night-time and done a sort of bivouac out there.

And what sort of things were you exploding?

Oh, we were just learning how to use explosives, that's all. How to blow things, how to use gelignite and that type of thing, you know. How to set it up and how to blow it, if you wanted to blow a stump or, you know, you wanted to blow a bridge or something, it was just how set it up, that's all.

And did you ever practice on any sort of bridges?

Oh, no bridges, no. It was only logs and stumps and things like that. No, never, no bridges. I think we were looking after the bridges, not blowing them up.

And you don't remember being attached to guarding any sort of other bridges than Canning Bridge?

No. No, Canning Bridge was the only ...

Or railway bridges or anything like that?

No, no, it was only Canning Bridge that we did and a picket down at, when we were on the guns, there was a picket on the station at night, you know. We used to do that.

Were you ever sent on any guard duty or sort of longer terms of duty up along the north coast, at all?

No. Never.

And the camps that you mentioned, how long would they last?

We used to go on these weekends mainly, just weekends. We had to go to work during the week.

So you never were in a position that you needed to take time off from work?

Only when we done the aircraft recognition course, we had to take some time off there. You got part of the day off each day to go and do it, but ....

Where did that happen?

That was, I think we went to Buckland Hill. It was just a matter of learning all the different aircraft's silhouettes and that, and bein' able to pick them. We'd pick them off the cards. I don't know how we'd go if an aircraft had come. It would have been a different thing, probably.

Sorry. What did you say then?

You could pick 'em easily enough off the cards and the slides and that but it might have been different if it flew over it might have been different.

And you never really had an opportunity to test that, of really distinguishing between different planes, you ...?

Only what local planes, you know, the Kittyhawks that came here. Well, I mean we knew all them, and the old Boomerang and different kites, but ... old Wacketts. But we never seen no enemy planes to see if we were right or wrong.

So your assessment of the whole period of that time for you was that it was a worthwhile exercise?

Oh, as far as I was concerned it was. I thought it was. Well, when you look back now it probably wasn't but there and again I think if anything had happened it's better to be able to do something than not being able to do something, you know what I mean. We were trained to do something and that was it. As I say, if they'd have wanted to take those crews away, they could have took those gun crews away any time and we could have taken over. We could have walked in and taken over. Well, that would have relieved, you know, would have let that manpower go if they needed it. So I thought we were doin' a good job, but ....

(20.00)I understand a bit of gambling went on down there, too. Did you ever get ...

Oh yes.

... involved with that?

No, no. I've never been a gambler, never in my life.

So what were some of the pastimes that you took up to while the time away?

Oh, we used to do a bit of, play a bit of cards and that. We went down there Saturday nights some times, sneak over the fence to go to the dance down at the town hall, too, if you got caught. Used to go down there, there used to be dances in the town hall. If you could sneak out we'd be down there. We weren't supposed to be but we did a couple of times.

What was the feeling then about foreigners in our society, in the community? With the various European countries that we were at war with, and there were people from those nationalities living here?

Well, you sort of, ones I knew, I knew, but any you didn't, you just sort of didn't know how to take ' em really. But the ones you knew, you knew they were all right and that's it, but ....

Did you have some close friends of, say, of either German background or Italian background?

Oh, I knew a few Italians and that, they were all right, I mean ....

How did it affect them? What was the situation for them during the wartime?

Oh, the Italians that were around, they sort of, some people sort of mistrusted them, I think, but mainly they were, if they thought they were any risk they'd have been in camp, for sure, you know. People around, they were pretty sure and pretty safe.

Were there any of them in the VDC?

I can't actually remember any bein' in there. There could possibly have been, I wouldn't know. I don't remember any.

But there was a general feeling of perhaps, you know, if not suspicion, guardedness about foreigners, people that you didn't know?

Oh yes, people you didn't know you might, but anyone you knew, well, they were all right and that's it. I mean ....

Did you ever come across any people sort of dobbing other people in during the war period, of people acting a bit suspiciously? Say, for example, of that type that they, a different national group.

No, I never actually, nope.

Did you know any Japanese people who were living here then?

No, I didn't.

Right.

Never got to know them until I went there.

And you later then did enlist in the army is that right?

Yes. Oh yes, later.

And went to Korea, is that correct?

Yes, I went to Korea and back in to do occupation in Japan for a while. But, I went in the infantry there.

Right. Okay. Mr Kennedy, thank you very much for talking to me today.

That's all right.

That is the end of Tape 1, Side 2 of the interview with Mr Kennedy and that's also the end of the interview.

END OF INTERVIEW