**Transcription of audio file HT 9594 (HD194851-aud-HT9594-01)**

Interviewee: Alan Laurence Walton Date of Interview: unknown

Interviewer: not specified Transcriber: Nina Buchan

**Alan Walton (AW)**: “I joined the Airforce in 19 -, June 1940. [My service] Number was 10721. We went straight off to Sydney, Ultimo, I did an instrument-repairers course. Later on I was posted to um… 2S FTS [No 2 Service Flying Training School] at Wagga, and in October - in November 1941, I was posted down to do an instrument-makers course, in Exhibition [the Royal Exhibition Building]. We did the preliminary force (?) course, the hazard (?) fitters course at the Showgrounds, and somewhere along the way they decided they’d experiment with us, so they shot five of us up to Laverton, to wait for the next course, and we had an unwieldy course, we had about 37 [people] instead of about 30, which would have been manageable.

And, ah, we eventually started this course, and ah, we used to march everyday down to the 1STD [1 S.T.T., School of Technical Training] the Ex Hall [Exhibition Building], the Melbourne Tech [Technical College], all dressed up in cuddles (?) and ties, and swinging the arms shoulder-high, and anyway we’d march back at lunchtime, we’d march back – we spent half our time marching!

And, ah, [clears throat] the Exhibition [Royal Exhibition Building] itself was not what you’d call, ah, it was certainly no Hilton! And we slept on the balconies, where the cubicles were divided into, ah, cubicles of four beds. We had no lockers or anything, we just…everything was out on display, and of course a lot of stuff used to get pinched [stolen], unless you had a suit-case you could lock, and even then that didn’t stop a lot of them. I was lucky, in that I – living in Melbourne – I could keep most of my stuff at home. But every so often, they’d spring a kit inspection on you, and if you’re short of a needle or something, they’d put you on a charge [penalty]. And the nursing facilities were pretty crook [bad], I finished off with a mouth full of crook teeth, Pyorrhea [Gum disease], through dirty dishes. And I s’pose [suppose] the others [had it] just as bad, although I got it pretty bad.

The facilities there, we had only little dim lights, we couldn’t read at night, and we weren’t allowed to smoke in the barracks, except [in] one particular section, we had to go right downstairs, right behind the organ to the showers. There was a rec [recreation] area there, which was… well, you could smoke, but – and also they used to have the concerts there, and they had a few billiard tables, and table tennis tables; they were more useless than they’re worth, because everyone used to be fighting over them. The mess was at the west end – the north end – of the hall, and there was the dental section, I think outside the handah (?) and I can’t remember where the medical section was. And then downstairs in the basement was the canteen, and the stores, and ah… the Post Office could have been there, too – I’m not sure.

**Interviewer (I)**: And the organ? [large musical organ]

**AW**: The organ was up the end, that was in a bad state of disrepair. It had been vandalised, and I can remember seeing just organ pipes just laying on the floor, just walking – [getting] trampled on, and of course they squashed up [claps hands together] like that because they’re tin, pure tin, and ah… of course the organ, I don’t think it had been played since the Great Exhibitions… or what happened since then… you know, the Federation celebrations. At any rate, the place had been let run down for years, about all they used it for was the nova (?) show, and occasionally flower shows and things, and a palm (?) in the background (?) of course it was a freshman course nothing (?)…

The outside – we used to parade outside the south gate – the south entrance, which was the main entrance, and they had that fenced off, we used to parade right along there. You’d come in from Nicholson St, there was a gate – guarded – a gate with a guard on it. If you managed to get through the gate without a leave pass, you still had to pass the SPs [Service Police] on [duty]. [Laughs]… It wasn’t impossible!

At any rate, I was there for three months, and then, as I say, we were part of some – someone got the bright idea – an experimental group, they sent us back to the Showgrounds again, another three weeks, and then I was posted back to Wagga.

But then the Exhibition – they decided to change the format there – the Exhibition [Building] basically was only barracks. [Repeats] And then they started another – they took over what they called ‘Boston Glass’ down on Gertrude Street. And they had trade courses there (?), and of course they still had the Melbourne Tech [Technical College] as well. But ah, before they took over the Exhibition [Building] the had the old West Melbourne Tech, as barracks, but of course, later on it wasn’t big enough, so they had to look for bigger first (?) base, so they got the Exhibition.

**I**: And er…how…what were your hours there?

**AW**: Well, I think we paraded at 8 o’clock, and then we…I think we used to have an hour for lunch, but you had to allow two hours for marching! You know, marching up, and marching back… and we knocked off at five, at night. By the time you got back, it was half-past-five, and you’ve just got time to – you know, if you’re on leave – race out, grab a quick beer, and ahh… that was about it. But then the Mess…

**I**: Yes…

**AW**: I mean usually with the times you got back, if you’re living in, well you go straight down to the mess for tea at night, and then [laughs] the rest of the night was your own.

**I**: The nights… er, you worked, what, five and a half-day week, then?

**AW**: Well, yes, we used to do five days at the Tech, but on the Sat’day [sic] morning, we… you’re allowed the joys of desert trench-digging, or PT [physical training], or lectures on… er… oh one we did I remember on bomb disposal, different types of bombs, things like that, they gave us lectures on different things, how to avoid getting VD [venereal disease], things like that, that was always a good fight (?) for the doctors, anyway! [Laughs] Usually the Sat’day morning was free from lessons, but we always had some type of activity, like what I say, PT, or trench digging or lectures of some sort. But that was it – then lunch – by 12 I think. We were free ‘till about half-past 10 on Sunday night.

**I**: You walked in your boots across the Exhibition [Building] floor, things like that?

**AW**: [Clears throat] Well, we had to change… at night, and wear our sandshoes, because ah… the one night we marched back – and they used to read out the DRAs [Defence Reserve Association?] and the orders and anything important, they thought important – and this Sergeant, he was pretty – he wasn’t what you’d call a project mind (?) – and he’s said – I can’t remember his name, Sergeant Green? – ‘In future, youse [sic] jokers will wear your sandshoes around the barracks to *illuminate* the noise!’ [Laughs] And that got quite a laugh! And ah, they’re the type of sort I had to put up with, you know? Being tradesmen, we sort of resented being told – especially as some of these clowns were really – they were really only AC-1s, Acting Corporal, and they’d only been in [the RAAF] a few months, and we’d been in you know, 18 months, getting up to a couple of years, and being told what to do by some of these clowns, ex-dustmen, and bottle-o’s [bottle collectors], and you name it. And there’s one, our NCO [non-commissioned officer] and he was a good little bloke, Laurie Wilson, I remember, and he was a real nice little chap, I couldn’t see him lasting there, really. But ah, anyway the rest of them, nasty the rest of them. No job for some (?).

**I**: Was it a dirty place? Dusty?

**AW**: Dusty, yes it was dusty. Of course, running around all the dust used to come up through the floorboards. As I say, nothing had been done to the place for, probably, 10-15 years. No, sort of, maintenance or repairs or anything.

**I**: And, the oval itself, what was happening there?

**AW**: Well, we used to have PT out there, and as I say, these trenches that we dug, and then they used to have sort of lectures there, and things like that – you know, bomb disposal, bomb recognition type and what to do. And, across from there, there was the Army promo (?) Head Service, I just can’t remember… west side… It might have been part of the… What was the country road that went right up?

**I**: Directly up (?)

**AW**: In any rate, ah, earlier than that we used to, what I can remember was the bike races. And later on they had speed one (?) racing. [Clears throat] And then the track was pretty rough, so they shifted it down to the park. And, ah, that’s about all I can remember of the oval.

**I**: And the aquarium itself?

**AW**: Ah yes, I can remember the aquarium. I went there as a kid a couple of times – I remember the maze, mostly. But a couple of times we shot through there, out through the aquarium. Not sure how we did it – I know there was an escape route through there! [chuckles]

**I**: Was the Aquarium going full blast then?

**AW**: Oh yes, yes. Then there was the war museum down the side. That was earlier. I think that shifted about ’37 [1937] or something. But I remember that as a kid. But that was pretty well vandalised and dilapidated. Nobody seemed to be worrying much about it. You know, though mostly it’s just empty barges, and tanks and things like that… The gardens themselves, they were always kept in pretty good nick [condition]… but ah… the place itself – it was a shame to see it really getting so… It was good for exhibitions, but it was no good for barracks. So as I said, we would have been better off in tents. We would have been better off in tents!

**I**: So you never got up to the balcony, you never –

**AW**: No. Well, I don’t think we were allowed up there, ‘cause I don’t think - at that time it was declared unsafe. And ah, there was always a chance of somebody taking a dive [fall] from there anyway. There’s plenty of that happened, don’t worry about that. We saw quite a few suicides, while I was in the Air Force. But nah, I think that was declared unsafe. But we sort of proved we had no ambition to go up in the end.

**I**: You wanted to get out, as quick as possible?

**AW**: [Laughs] Yes. Okay.”

[End of recording]