**Richard (Dick) Thompson, RAAF**

4 August 2020

Notes by Deborah Tout-Smith

**HT 9603, Audio Recording - 'Memoirs of the RAAF at Royal Exhibition Building', R.D. (Dick) Thompson, Melbourne, Undated**

*Interviewer not named[[1]](#footnote-1); date of interview not noted, but dates in interview suggest 1987-1991.*

**MP3, part 2 (first part) – time codes**

0.15: he would have arrived at Exhibition Building about 1941, Feb-March. Arrived in Melb in Jan 1941. Slept on paliasses in an old building in Spender St – perhaps an old wool store. Then went to Exhibition Building – thinks they were the first group to go there.

1.13: slept on the ground floor. Came in on side entrance, where the steps were. That was their operation area, where they used to parade. Come straight in and walk almost to other wall – slept next to acquarium wall – could hear seals at night.

1.55: Some slept on floor on paliasses and some on wire beds.

2.20: the organ had been dismantled; holes in floor, or wells.

2.48: “I was a young bloke who was primarily intersted in radio.”

3.13: the normal day – got up at 6.30-7.00; paraded in overalls on south side, near fountain; quick jumping; quick route march, fast, towards city, around side street, then back into front of building. Firly cold. Someone would get thrown into the fountain! Neighbours objected to shouting!

4.42: showers – had to go downstairs, to left of main entrance, into basement. Doesn’t remember canteen there. Showers were freezing cold. You got out quickly, for breakfast. Got into overalls for breakfast.

5.26: if you walked in the main building, the eating area was directly opposite, towards the acquarium on the other side. That’s where they had the kitchen and servery.

6.12: (thinks) he came back for a second course about 1942-43, to do a special course in VHS transmitter-receivers.

6.41: there was a little hospital unit inside the buuilding, towards where the mess used to be, near the acquarium. A little sickness place, about 1943. He had to go in with a bit of eye trouble.

7.19: Carrying beds made of canvas and two wooded poles – “one down there in the museum still”, that “belonged to the ordinary carrying ambulance thing”.

7.34: in the morning would have lined up, had breakfast, grabbed books, and marched down to 1STT (1 School of Technical Training). It was at AWA and Melbourne Tech, and they used Beecham’s Building too – spread around.

8.49: for the first month there it was all morse code and telegraphy, 8 hours a day. Trained by reserve army captain/lieut man, elderly (35-40!), and an ex-PMG bloke. Break for morning tea about 10, then go on until about midday.

9.50: paraded back to Exhibition Building for lunch. In that time would either drop a line home to parents.

10.05: the post office was lcoated as you walked in the side door, to the right, an outrigger platform, commanded by the post office themselves. He would send one a day home! About 30-45 mins for dinner.

10.41: breakfast – porridge; sausages & gravy; onions; mashed eggs; tea; milk. Dinner (aka lunch) much the same. Marched back to training site. Telegraphy: Beecham’s or 1 STT, or AWA; radio mechanics too.

11.55: They did morse code until about 4pm, paraded again; had a bit of break for afternoon tea; canteen on the spot; marched back to Exhibition. Leisure time – shower, tidying, could go out until about 10pm. (Interviewer corrects to say on Wednesdays only perhaps.)

12.45: 10 or 11 would be limit anyhow. Older ones wanted to stay out later, and they all decided to parade outside aobut 10.30 (as a cover). They were ordered inside, and servicepeople arrested some. No action was taken ultimately – they had all agreed they wanted to be able to stay out later.

14.10: the interviewer himself “would have been a young bloke” and was also onsite.

14.25: no objection to discipline as long as it was just, which it was in most cases.

14.42: fire – curtain. To the left of the entrance there was a hall for night concerts. Doesn’t remember it.

15.58: concert – heard “The Last Time I Saw Paris” – stayed in his mind.

16.15: air raid trenches – didn’t get involved. Can’t remember them at all. Likely it happened after he left.

16.34: was only there for 6 months, and really wasn’t there all that time – you could be billetted out of the Exhibition Building, and paid extra to cover cost. He was billetted at South Melbourne beach. Had to appear on parade as normal.

17.15: was billetted with a friend called John Crowley – thinks he finished up in railway dept in Brisbane.

18.34: remembers wandering round the organ one night with a friend. Didn’t climb dome – was restricted; didn’t have time – was dark.

20.04: had SPs around, but no major conflicts or upheavels

21.16: doesn’t remember much of the acquarium, except for sound of seal pond, that you got used to! “They talked to us after a while.”

21.38: (after a recording break) starts talking about Kitty (Hawk) and bombing raids. He can remember the Japanese planes coming in groups of 3, and could see the bombs falling from the aircraft and the sunlight flashing on them. Liberator and hospital hut hit.

26.08: next year is “the Darwin anniversary” (Darwin was bombed in Feb 1942 – could be 50th anniversary, making the interview 1991). “We were part of the do” – the Air Force should take them up! The American Air Force has already booked hotels.

26.43: air raid at Batchelor (Airfield) – “I was right in the middle of that” (24 Oct 1942). Was doing wireless telegraphy; doing day and night shifts. He was on night shift, laying down, when got a call. Air raid had started on Darwin. Wirraways at Batchelor, and transmitting station, and signals office. Heard aircraft. Lights out, but the aircraft were ready to drop, and couldn’t make it to air raid shelter, so lay on ground. They were splattered with mud.

29.43: posted to 3 WAG school at Maryborough, and had to instruct the wireless air gunners. There for 15 months or so. Then volunteered for active service again, which took him to the islands, New Guinea (Pinchhaven), then 1 month Admiralty Islands, then joined mobile fighter control unit, then came back to Strathpine – (it) reformed, then went back to Borneo, so was in the Tarakan invasion, then just prior to Christmas came back on barge (not Queen Mary, by choice).

**MP3, part 1 (second part) – time codes**

0.15: fountain had little guard rails; someone was thrown into the pond!

0.35 (interviewer): there was a fence on the south side… (interviewee); yes, I think there was; fences around fountain.

1.11: (interviewer): “46 years ago” (if referring to 1941, this makes it 1987)

1.21: how many were there? 43WT (Wireless Training) would have had about 50 in it. 500 in total group (?)

1.55: WAAAFs – none at that time, but not sure – can’t recall. Later on during war – yes, certainly. Remembers after Darwin in1942.

3.10: (no photos of inside) – he points out that people weren’t supposed to be taking pics of Air Force installations. Interviewer: we used to photograph air crew in front of aircraft. Interviewee: cost of photography prohibitive – he started off as apprentice electrical engineer, and then “came down here” on “five bob a day”.

4.40: was there Feb-May 1941. Were pretty healthy. Ate well; early nights; used to swim each morning at Sth Melb.

5.15: finished lectures about 4pm. Paraded about 8am. March to Exhibition (for lunch), then go back later in afternoon.

6.22: where slept – if you walked in the door, straight across to other side, to the eating area. To the right, a wall with acquarium beyond; they were sleeping about 20 ft away from there. On steel beds with paliasses.

7.02: cook house lcoation – if you walk straight through the door, as far as you could go, to the other side, past the seals, and collect your food from the mess table.

7.26: “looking at this plan” (what plan?) – we used to parade outside, from there to there. Sqn Ldr Francis would stand on a dias and talk to groups

8:48: music, as if tape has been recorded over.

1. Interviewer could have been World War II veteran Major Edward (Ted) Millett, service # NX137217 (N27476) – although perhaps unlikely as he was in the Army. His final posting after WWII was the 14 Australian Ordnance Stores Company. He was an honorary staff member at Museums Victoria 1953-1992. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)