



## Blast survivor relives horror

By KEN GRIMSON

ALLAN Bartlett has no words to describe adequately how he feels about being the only survivor among 28 soldiers blown up during a military training exercise that went tragically wrong at Kapooka 50 years ago yesterday.

Back in Wagga yesterday as an honoured guest at a memorial service to mark the half-century of the disaster, 68-year-old Mr Bartlett, a young Sapper training in demolition in 1945, said he could still shed no light on the cause of the blast because he did not see it happen.

"It never occurred to me when they lifted me out of the dug-out what had happened," Mr Bartlett said,

explaining the miracle of his survival.

"We were being lectured — the gelignite was still in the boxes," he said.

Some people have explained that Mr Bartlett survived the blast because his mouth was open at the time of the explosion. Apparently, many of the 26 victims died from the concussion of the explosion and having his mouth open may have saved Mr Bartlett from that cause of death.

Yesterday, he said he regained consciousness in the bunker standing up with his back against an earthen wall that had been tilted to a 45 degree angle by the blast.

"My first thought was

**SOLE SURVIVOR:** For 50 years, Allan Bartlett has known little about an explosion at Kapooka that official records say killed 26 soldiers even though he was the only survivor. Yesterday, he and about 150 people, including family members of the fallen soldiers, attended a memorial service to mark the anniversary of the tragedy. With the help of a photo supplied by Max Howison (below), Mr Bartlett returned to the scene of his miraculous escape. (Note tree in both pictures) More KEN GRIMSON stories and PETER TREMAIN photos Pages 10 and 11.



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