

# MEMORIES OF WEDGE,

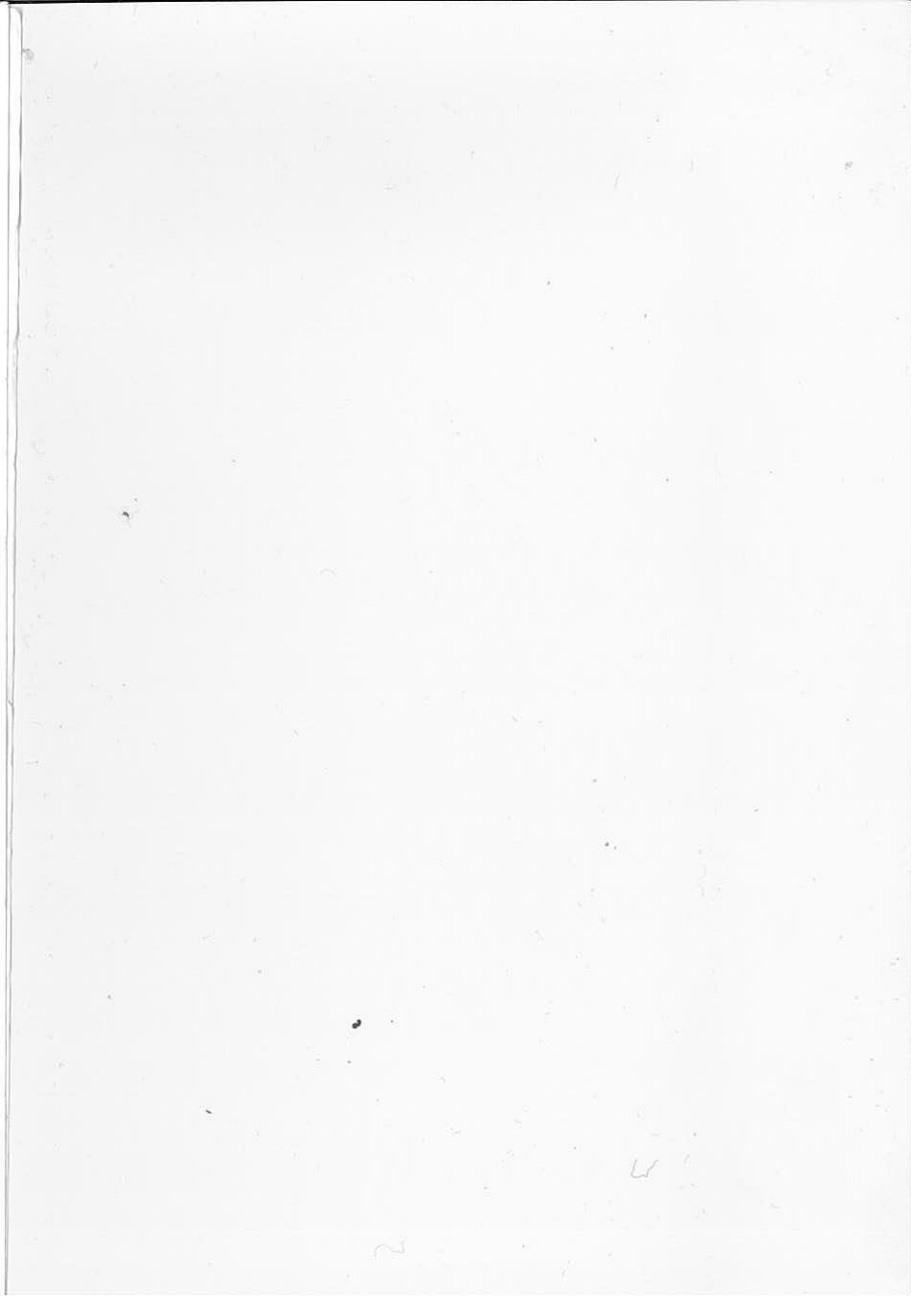


The Cairn at the RAAF Memorial Grove near Canberra.

(Photo:Allan Dennison.)

**7 RADAR, WEDGE  
ISLAND**  
**1943 - 44**

**19<sup>th</sup> REUNION 2007**



A WARM AND SINCERE WELCOME TO OUR VISITORS.

Today we are happy indeed to welcome all visitors - especially our friends from 10 Radar at Cape Jervis - a beautiful location looking across Backstairs Passage towards Kangaroo Island.

7 and 10 Radars were the guardians of the shipping lanes which crossed the two Gulfs below Adelaide, also the approaches to the important gulf ports. But the stations had one big difference - 10 Radar had a large complement of WAAAF Operators, and today we are delighted that a number of those one-time operators are with us.

So please enjoy our reunion, and make it your reunion too. Share our memories for they are so similar to your own.

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OUR NATIONAL REUNIONS.

Our National Radar Reunions began in 1988, and so did our history, our photo collections, and our yarns and stories. Ed. Simmonds and Norm Smith surely began something when they first spoke with 'Macca' on the 'Australia All Over' programme one Sunday morning.

A big response and much interest was generated, and the first reunion in Canberra in 1988 further fanned it.. Stories by the dozen came in....photos arrived in their hundreds.... technical history was researched, and books of radar yarns were produced, followed by quite a few radar station histories. There was a great response when seven or eight national reunions were organised, at least one in each state.

But that all began 19 years ago now. We were all only around the 60 mark then...and we're now 19 years older of course and all at the OBE stage. The inevitable has long since started, and keen radar folk, all anxious to have our proud and impressive history recorded and recognised, have since been dropping off the perch, or just dropping out, literally by the dozen.

The great enthusiastic effort of the 90's has died away, and now it is in danger of completely ending, except for the efforts of the few.

So...if you have any radar history in historical fact, or story, or photo...or if a mate or anyone you know has anything worthwhile, please do your utmost to see that it is preserved. There is a Radar Archives at Point Cook Museum which is the right place for it.

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## OUR WEDGE REUNIONS.

We've now enjoyed 18 happy Wedge reunions, and in a fit of nostalgia, I looked back over the photographic records. There I found mainly happy memories, and just a few sad reminders of those good folk who no longer join with us on that one day of the year.

The first reunion evidently was in 1989, though Doug did start his marshalling programme in 1988 - all quite a long time ago now. Until 1994 we gathered at the Italian Club in Carrington Street, with one exception in 1991 when we assembled at the CTA Club in North Terrace which was a comfortable and roomy place I recall.

Since 1995 all our 'get-togethers' have been in the Mitchell Room at the Marion where we have been welcomed and well-looked after.

As our reunions have more or less co-incided with the big National Reunions, it's been natural to 'show and tell' much from those big shows interstate when any number up to 500 attended, with 160 at the most recent national show at Geelong. Our biggest gathering was 50 which for a tiny speck of land out in Spencer Gulf was pretty good really, and quite enough to look after, particularly as our first show in 1989 attracted only 14.

Since then the folk of 7 Radar and Wedge have come from every state except the Northern Territory, and the faithful still come from afar, even from over the border, and regularly too. We've had personal reminiscences, a video or two, photo displays and radar displays of various stations where the Wedge men were posted. - and some of those were pretty weird and hairy too. We've even seen a model of Flinders' "INVESTIGATOR" sailing across our Anniversary cake - and a model of our old island doover seeking out the secrets of the room. Every reunion has had its strange and wonderful gimmicks - and all these have been worthwhile, for a novel approach is necessary each time to maintain interest.

We introduced a cake as a novelty, and John Beiers joined us for the first time in 1994.... a happy encounter that one, for over the succeeding years he has exerted his talents and influence from the top table to make everything go well. And apart from that he piloted a Cessna over to Wedge with 3 passengers each time on board.

Now we hear there are a few new homes on Wedge...no B, and B's mind you - but I guess the really keen fishermen who have enjoyed Wedge in the past will still be content to sleep on the beach or stick up a tent there. But it's all been good, enjoyable fun - more like a family gathering, for we all know each other, and we all look forward to the Annual Wedge Do when we meet old friends again.

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## INSTALLING THE GEAR AT 7 RADAR ON WEDGE.

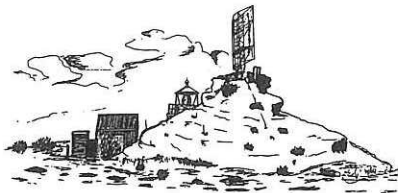
(Cec. Blumenthal)

With the pressure really on in '42 and '43 to provide radar coverage across Australia's north, I had several months at Darwin and Bathurst Island. I then returned to 1 RIMU in Sydney where I was appointed to head No. 2 Technical Installation Party. After installing two LW/AW's along the NSW coast to serve until the permanent equipment became operational, I was instructed to proceed to instal the gear at 7 RS in South Australia. Sgt. Emerson who had been with me in the Technical Installation Party and another Sgt. Mechanic were to accompany the equipment on the train to ensure safe transhipment at the change of gauge and to guard it generally. I was to go ahead to make sure all was ready to get it on air. Arriving in Adelaide, I first proceeded to Parafield where the new station was forming up, and after a few days, the CO, P/O Glover, asked me to take an advance party to Wedge. It was arranged that I go on MV MINNIPA to Port Lincoln, thence by Ray Welfare's launch to the Island. On arriving in Lincoln, it was discovered that Welfare was away with a party of doctors on a fishing trip in the Bight, but was expected back in about a week. So we booked in at a local hotel where we enjoyed a very informal and relaxing few days before Welfare returned. I confess that having recently returned from Darwin, I in no way objected to the convivial break with such pleasant company. But all things, good and otherwise, have to come to an end, and so we found ourselves off to Wedge.

After the rough and ready conditions of Darwin, I was impressed with the contrasting and luxurious accommodation on the island - the excellent engine housing - the piped water (no longer from a soak at the edge of a billabong) - and the Doover erected and ready up on the hill, all set for us to get on with the job. We still had to wait for the ketch JOHN ROBB to arrive with the rest of the personnel, the Radar gear, my two sergeants, the aerial matching and phasing team and of course the rest of the station bods. Eventually all arrived including the matching and phasing team with F/O Ben Asman in charge. The radar installation was relatively quick and easy except that the Receiver was 'on the blink,' - and no spares had been sent from RIMU. Fortunately a signal tracer had been sent, usually a fairly useless bit of gear for AW sets, but I remembered that it shared a similar circuit to that in the Receiver with the 955 valve. It was only a few minutes work to replace the faulty resistance etc. On my return to RIMU I arranged for a set of spares to be sent.

7 Radar was then in service, only waiting for the radio link to be established. The date on air was 22nd April 1943. I remember that as the next day I caught up with my washing, 23rd April 1943 which was my 21st birthday.

Soon afterwards Ray Welfare arrived so we were off to 1RIMU Sydney with a kit bag of wet washing.



### A TRIBUTE TO A SOUTH OZ RADAR MECH.

Colin Thiele, A.C., who died on September 4th, has been described as one of our State's most respected and decorated writers and who was an inspiration to many. Though not mentioned in his several tributes, Colin, when a young man in 1943, joined the RAAF to become a Radar Mechanic and was eventually posted to 60 RS on Melville Island, afterwards becoming one of a mobile team of radar trouble shooters. Colin became Principal of a Teaching College near Adelaide. He wrote more than 100 books including classics such as Storm Boy and Sun on the Stubble. Colin came from Eudunda, and died at the age of 85.

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### DOES WEDGE ISLAND DESERVE A PLAQUE ?

Over several years now, there has been a succession of radar plaques set up at various locations around Australia, their purpose being to mark old radar station sites with history and heritage becoming more important as the years roll by.

Also plaques have been placed in Canberra and at other memorial sites where radar has earned an honorable mention - the Darwin Cenotaph being one of these.

All are important of course, and I guess we all like to see the places of our war-time service so marked...but without doubt the plaque placed at Dripstone, at the 3IRS site, holds the most significance being the first station in an operational area - even more so than that at Shepherds Hill which was the first station in Australia.

I know of a few others in the north particularly - Truscott, Kalumburu and Montalivet Island come to mind - and probably there are other northern sites.

Down south, I know Allan Ferguson attended the unveiling of a plaque for 35RS south of Albany, and I have photos from Keith Backshall of the plaque for 32RS on Rottness Island. 10RS, our sister station in South Oz, also had a plaque on the Tx wall when I visited the old blockhouse in 1983. I hope it is still there and has not been souvenired.

So - what of the more isolated sites such as Wedge Island ? I very much doubt that a plaque on Wedge would be seen by too many, or pilfered for that reason.

Maybe a spot on a 35 foot fishing cutter might be more appropriate, though I don't think that would be too popular with the general public either.... do you ?

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## W.W.2 RADAR PLAQUE DEDICATION.

A 'Stop-Go' progress through the years has been the story of the most recent RAAF Memorial near Canberra. It has been an Air Force Assn. project on the Federal Highway from Sydney to Canberra and was actually begun in 1952 with several 'Stops' and just as many 'Starts' as the Assn. Presidents have come and gone over the years, and the number of volunteers has varied. There have been other Memorials undertaken or established out there in the natural bushland - all have tended to lapse for varying periods, or have made little progress - and there have been some mighty big difficulties for the Assn. to overcome, such as lack of accessibility, and the bush moving back to reclaim its own, not to mention the lack of water. The lack of water availability was the biggest hurdle to overcome when building the Memorial cairn which was intended to be the focal point of the RAAF Area.

Water, building materials and tools were carted out to the site by the volunteers - and gradually the Memorial took shape.

Meanwhile, easy access was denied as the highway itself was changed - and despite the provision of suitable signs and indicators, the RAAF area remained largely inaccessible. However, in more recent times, major improvements have occurred. The Cairn was dedicated in 1980, and the Department for the Interior has provided some maintenance. There has been some landscaping, tree planting, and many RAAF units have established their own memorials near the principal one. There are plans to establish a rest area with some picnic facilities, and two black marble tablets now mark the entrance to the grove. A large metal cross also surmounts the Memorial Cairn - the cross was placed in position by a helicopter from Fairbairn.

On 22nd March 2006, we had our own special Radar ceremony at the RAAF Memorial Grove. There was a plaque dedication, the plaque being identical to that dedicated at the Australian War Memorial 2 or 3 years ago.

There was a strong RAAF attendance - RAAF Officers and ex RAAF Radar types; there was a firing party; WAAAF and WRAAF ladies; and a RAAF Chaplain who was in charge of the Dedication Ceremony which was conducted very formally.

There was a Welcome - an Address and Unveiling of the plaque, then the Dedication and Blessing. A wreath laying ceremony then followed, then came the Ode, followed by the Last Post and Rouse. Then followed an important final gesture....a Light Luncheon with Refreshments.

