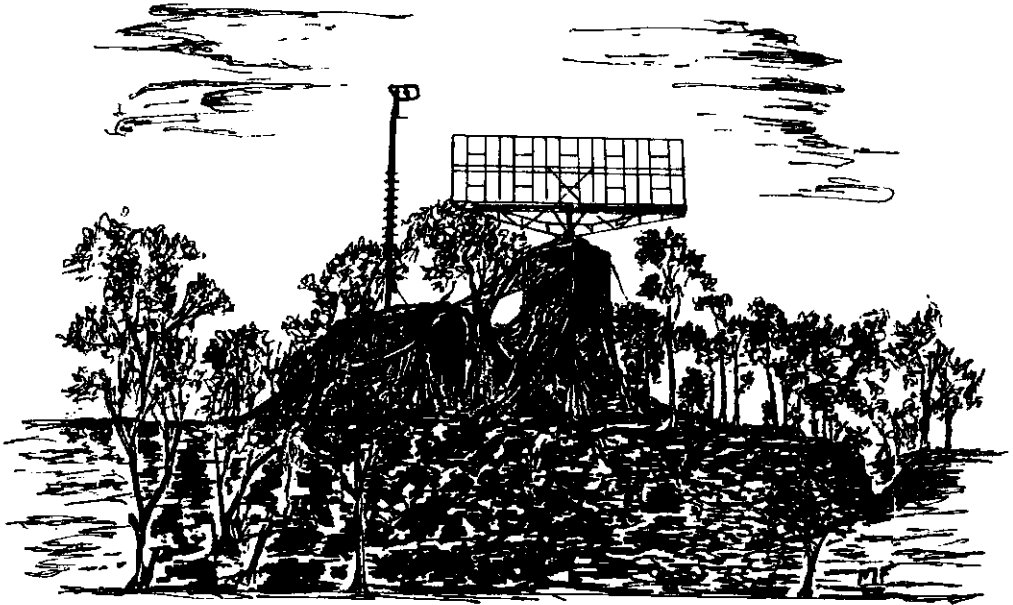


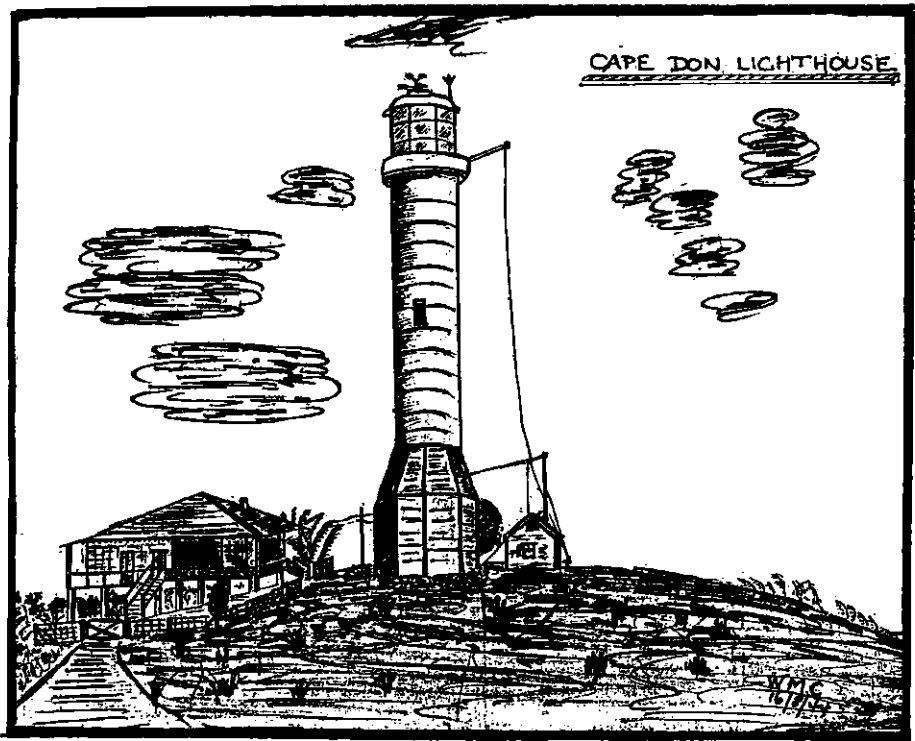
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(Fenton)

46 RADAR CAPE DON



46 RADAR, Cape Don. The COL Mt. V.

Edited by **MORRIE FENTON**



CAPE DON LIGHTHOUSE, 1944. A sketch of the famous landmark drawn by Max Counsell while at 46 Radar, 1944.

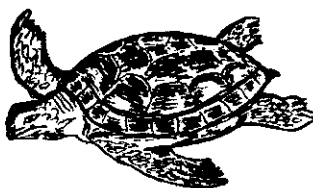
The History and Stories
of

**46 RADAR
CAPE DON**

A RAAF RADAR STATION

on Cobourg Peninsula -

now the Gurig National Park.



Edited by **MORRIE FENTON**

CONTENTS.

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|---------|
| Acknowledgements. | | 3 |
| Foreword. | Harry Freeman | 5 |
| Cobourg - A Hint of its History. | Morrie Fenton | 6 |
| The Cape Don Lighthouse. | " | 7 |
| Moir and Owens. | " | 8 |
| Today. | " | 9 |
| 46 RS - My First Command. | Harry Freeman | 10 |
| The 'Tower AW' Days at Cape Don. | John Reen | 13 |
| Early Days at the Don. | Vaughan Hingston | 16 |
| A Few Recollections of Cape Don. | Pat Fox | 19 |
| Setting Up 46 RDF in '43. | Terry Spencer | 19 |
| The Diary History of 46 Radar. | Morrie Fenton | 25 |
| Personnel. | | 37 & 38 |
| The Lighthouse Men. | Morrie Fenton | 41 |
| Posted to 46 RDF Station, Aug.'43 | Jack Fraser | 42 |
| Study Time at the Don. | Cliff Burnett | 47 |
| Fadaed Echoes of 46 Radar. | Lionel Gilbert | 51 |
| Some Memories of 46 Radar. | Max Counsell | 56 |
| The Don was Different. | Ron Sawade | 58 |
| Cape Don Memories. | Rod Harris | 60 |
| A Chink in the Cloak of Secrecy. | 'Radar Yarns.' | 63 |
| 'Foreigner' Material at the Don. | Morrie Fenton | 64 |
| The Don in '45. | Tony Hick | 65 |
| 'Mud Map' of the Cape. | Ron Sawade and others. | 67 |
| Cape Don, 1990. | Jim Harper | 68 |

Photos appear at Frontispiece, pages 23,24,36,39,40,41,47,48,49,50,55.

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46 RADAR

CAPE DON

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Edited by

Morrie Fenton

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Morrie Fenton

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I acknowledge with thanks the help, the enthusiasm and the co-operation of all who are mentioned below. Their personal contributions and stories bring this little history to life. In my estimation, all are co-authors of a 'combined effort.'

| | |
|------------------|-------------------------|
| Harry Freeman | Cliff Burnett |
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| Pat Fox | Rod Harris |
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| Terry Spencer | 'Radar Yarns' |
| Max Counsell | (The Paul Butler story) |
| Jim Harper | |

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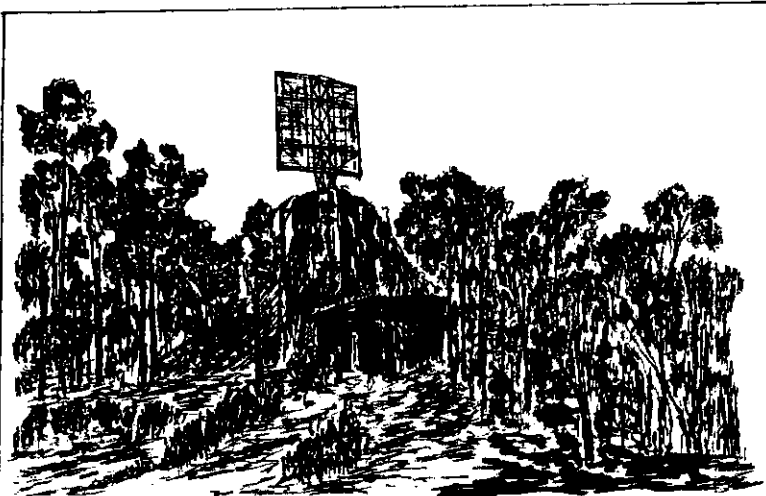
It is my hope that this story will add just a little to the rich history of our northern coastline - of Cobourg Peninsula and Arnhem Land particularly.

Morrie Fenton,
March, 1997.

#####

Editor's Note. A few differences and variations may be noted from story to story. It would be strange if there weren't any. Additionally, stations were continually changing, and this also results in descriptions and opinions which differ. Each man's story should be read as his recollection of his station, or of an incident, as he recalls it now, after 50 years.

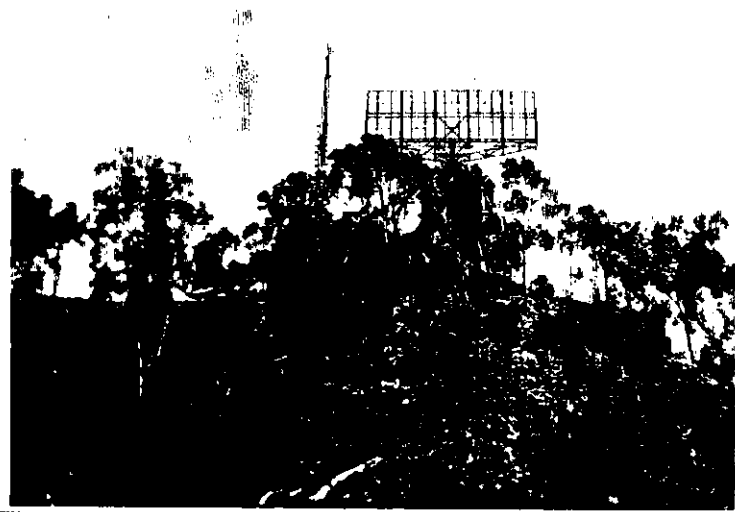
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46 RADAR, CAPE DON. The sketch above is of an early 'Tower A.W.' of the type at Cape Don in 1943...the operations area was about a mile south of the lighthouse. The generators and W/T hut were close by.

In 1945 the A.W. was replaced by the large English COL seen in the photograph below. This was on the headland north of the lighthouse and within easy walking distance.

46 Radar was very isolated, with no roads or airstrip- no motor transport, no phone or landline. A Walrus amphibian landed on the lagoon from where a light railway lead up to the lighthouse. Mail, stores and Personnel were brought to the Don by launch also.



FOREWORD.

No. 46 RDF station holds a special place in my memories. It was my first command, if only for a couple of weeks, and I was the first C.O. of the station. I had no thought that I was actually making history, even though I religiously wrote up the A50 sheets. I am therefore delighted to have been asked to write a 'Foreword' to this history. Morrie Fenton has set himself a daunting task in trying to assemble the history of the war-time radar stations from the A50's and the fading recollections of the participants. It is a task which needs to be done, since the unique features of these stations will never be duplicated. Small, often isolated units, they had their own culture, and had to rely on their own resources to solve all sorts of niggling problems. Many a young man found the challenges of this life brought out strengths that he never imagined he had.

No. 46 was one of the luckier stations. It was the last transportable AW installed in NWA and benefited from the hardships and the lessons learned from the installations of its predecessors in the area.

Accommodation and living conditions were good, by the standards of the time. Isolation, boredom and irregular supplies, the bane of many stations, were features that could not be overcome.

I am sure this history will be a worthy addition to the growing literature of WW2 Radar.

Harry Freeman,
C.O. No. 46 RDF Station,
15th. January, '43.

COBOURG...A HINT OF ITS HISTORY.

Until war struck at the North Australian coastline in 1942, Arnhem Land was almost exclusively Aboriginal tribal country. There were a few church mission stations with perhaps two or three mission folk at each. A mission boat made its way from station to station along the coast with supplies; and there was one well known lighthouse.

For centuries past, there had been occasional visitors along that stretch of coast...Maylayans...Macassans...even from China...but their visits were only to seek water and provisions...to trade or barter...or to prepare their catches of trepang and sometimes shark for transport back to their home country.

In 1623, the Dutch ship ARNHEM, with Willem van Colster as Commander, made its way along the coast from the Gulf of Carpentaria - and gave the land its name. Abel Tasman, that renowned early explorer, sailed these waters in 1644 and turned south through Dundas Strait into what he then called van Diemen Bay...but he soon turned north again without venturing too far.

The French and English navigators followed, with Nicholas Baudin being perhaps the first in 1803, his ship being 'Le Geographe.'

In 1818, Lieutenant Phillip King, son of Governor King, made his first voyage along that part of the coast in his cutter, 'Mermaid,' and named many of the coastal features...and at the westernmost extremity of Arnhem Land he named Cobourg Peninsula after Prince Leopold of Saxe-Cobourg, Uncle of Queen Victoria, and later King of Belgium. To the westernmost tip of the peninsula he gave the name Cape Don - to honour Lieutenant - General Sir George Don, KCB, the Lieutenant-Governor of the Fortress of Gibraltar.

The English, to establish a hold in this new land on the route from Port Jackson to the East Indies, attempted to set up several 'Outposts of the Empire' in the vicinity:

Fort Dundas in Apsley Strait in 1824. This was on the strait between Melville and Bathurst Islands.

Fort Wellington in Raffles Bay in 1827,

Victoria at Port Essington, near Croker Island in 1838. The last two were east of Cape Don, along the coast of Arnhem Land.

These all failed...though cattle and pony descendants of their livestock are still in the bush on Cobourg Peninsula, and there are some ghostly stone remnants and ruins of Victoria still to be seen.

Early this century came the era of the coast adventurers, well described in the books of Ton Idriess...when shark fishermen, crocodile hunters, mineral seekers and miners scoured the coastline, the inlets and the rivers, considering themselves successful if they received sufficient income to keep themselves and to provision their boats. Then with the outbreak of war, the military garrisons, naval patrols and air stations brought the easy camaraderie of service life to all the northern coastline areas, and these years marked the beginning of a new era for all tribal Aborigines, particularly so for the generations that followed.

The many Radar stations scattered along hundreds of miles of coastline were undoubtedly significant points of contact in this period of transition.

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THE CAPE DON LIGHTHOUSE.

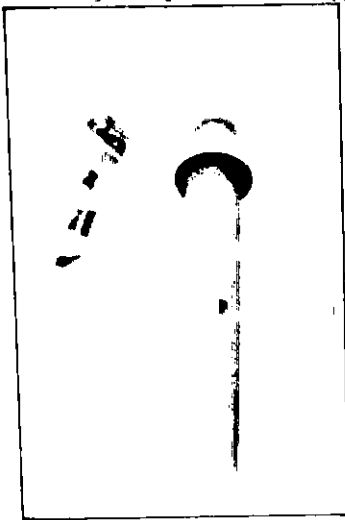
The Cape Don lighthouse has long been a well known and even famous landmark at the entrance to Dundas Strait where it marks the sea approach to Darwin from the easterly and northern directions. The tall light was constructed over a two year period from 1915 to 1917 - and was built on the most westerly point of the Cobourg Peninsula, on what is now the Gurig National Park. Across the strait is the eastern part of Melville Island, the home to many of the TIWI people - and Darwin itself is approximately 180 kilometres or more south west of the lighthouse.

Iron construction is said to have proved popular in overcoming the termite problem, but the heat inside iron buildings proved so great that the decision was made to build the Cape Don tower of concrete. However, as no metal aggregate was available locally, all of the materials necessary for its construction were transported from Melbourne and trans-shipped to be landed a few miles from the site. From here, a horsedrawn tramway was built to bring the materials to the building site. The tramway is believed to have continued in use until 1943 when the RAAF established a radar station at 'The Don.'

When it was completed, the light tower was some 28 metres high, and the lantern was 50 metres above mean sea level, and could be seen from a distance exceeding 35 kilometres. Vapourised kerosene was the fuel used; the lens was of three panels, floating in a bath of mercury, and the lens was turned every fifteen seconds by descending weights via a large clockwork type mechanism.

A team of up to ten men laboured over three 'dry' seasons to erect the lighthouse and its attendant houses and buildings. It was first commissioned in August 1917 after which it began its long and lonely vigil, showing a single white flash every five seconds.

A delivery run for mail and supplies was arranged from Darwin each fortnight, and heavy fuel supplies and materials were delivered by lighthouse tender while mechanics also checked the mechanisms. Strangely, no wireless communications were established until 1937. The lack of communication with Darwin was to become very evident as early as 1929. No electricity was generated at 'The Don' until the RAAF installed generators in 1943...at this time two lighthouse attendants remained on duty during the war, but their wives and families had left their Cape Don homes for a safer home away from the war zone.



The Cape Don light was modernised, first in 1970 when diesel generators and a tungsten halogen lamp was installed, and again in 1983 when a bank of solar panels was installed. The lighthouse attendants were then withdrawn as the light was now completely automatic.

#####



MOIR AND OWENS.

Vickers Vellore

Back in 1929, the lack of wireless contact at 'The Don' resulted in a rather unusual and newsworthy adventure story and sequel.... The English aircraft firm Vickers had designed a new long range aircraft - the Vickers Vellore. The first design was improved and the second model emerged as a large, single engined biplane with a wingspan of almost 80 feet, an open cockpit, and a cabin where mail and parcels could be stored. It was decided to prove the new aircraft on a long flight to Australia, and two experienced Aussies were chosen as crew...F/Lt Moir and F/O Owens. To prepare the plane for the long flight, an Armstrong Siddeley Jaguar engine was fitted.

The departure day was March 18th. 1929, and on that day the aircraft, G-EBYX, climbed into the skies with a full load of 5000 lbs and set course for the Mediterranean. But engine problems developed, and an examination was made at Benghazi. This was followed by a forced landing at Mersa Matruh with more engine faults and damage to the plane itself.

The aircraft was repaired, and the flight was resumed on 28th. April - on through the Middle East, India and the Dutch East Indies with the plane battling storms and bad weather.

On the last leg of the flight, engine problems struck yet again when it began labouring heavily...power and speed were lost...and on the night of Saturday, 18th. May 1929, the situation became desperate for the two aviators. Somewhere over Melville Island a light was sighted. It was of course, the Cape Don lighthouse, and the crippled aircraft and its anxious crew changed course and headed for it.

The lighthouse keepers realised the emergency on their hands when Verey lights were sighted. They lit fires which then enabled a crash landing to be made in an open, if very roughly cleared area. Afterwards, with no wireless communication, and not even a canoe to cross to Melville so that news of their plight and safe landing could be carried to Darwin, the men were thought to be lost, or to have crashed...and there was even the thought that they could be at the bottom of the sea!

Eight days later!!!! and still with no news of Moir and Owens, one man... pilot Brain of Qantas....decided they could still be alive, and set out to look for them. On Sunday, 26th. May, he arranged to be in touch with the Darwin Post Office at 6 p.m. and set off in his DH50 to fly as far as Croker Island.

With no sightings on his outward flight, he commenced the return when his wireless operator sighted the crashed aircraft at Cape Don. Back at Darwin, the news was flashed to the southern cities, then on to the world...and the steamer KYOGLE was contacted by wireless so that Moir and Owens could be picked up and brought into Darwin. Here the two were met and greeted by the Government Resident, Colonel Weddell, also by the crew of the aircraft that had found them, and by the usual government officials.

Meanwhile, the Cape Don lighthouse quietly continued with its nightly watch...

#####

TODAY.

The Cobourg Peninsula has now become the Gurig National Park and the Cobourg Marine Park, and most of Arnhem Land is part of an Aboriginal Reserve accessible to others only by permit.

The lighthouse, and its helipad is now known as the Cape Don Lighthouse Complex, and is on the Register of the National Trust. It remains Commonwealth property, however, and its maintenance and servicing is still a Commonwealth Maritime responsibility carried out by crews moved in by helicopter.

The houses and other buildings are now vested in the Cobourg Peninsula Sanctuary Land Trust which administers control over the peninsula. Because of vandalism, ranger staff have maintained a watch at the site since 1993, but recently a fishing-cum-tourism venture has shown interest in improving and using the houses as accommodation for its visitors who wish to try the wonderful fishing and exploring possibilities of the place. Between 1950 and 1970, the Aboriginal people living around 'The Don' were encouraged to leave the area and move to settlements where the children could attend school, but in recent years some of the traditional owners of the land have returned, again hunting and food gathering in the peninsula lands, but also taking their part in the management of the area.

The Cape Don Lighthouse Complex, dating from pre WW 1 times, can now be described as a relic of a system which has ceased to be, for there are no longer any manned lighthouses on watch around the Australian coastline. Automation, solar energy, helicopter crews and even satellite navigation have taken over. But the Cape Don lighthouse, a sentinel for the last eighty years at the entrance to Dundas Strait, will long remain a dominant landmark of the Cobourg area.



I was on the second Bailey Boys' course starting about April 1942. Near the end of the course several of us were selected to leave early and start Officer Training at Bradfield Park. We then went to Radar (RDF) School at Richmond, and four of us were posted to Mascot in January 1943 to set up new stations. My station was No. 46 at Cape Don; the others were LW/AWS for unspecified locations in North Eastern Area. At Mascot we were given office space and a list of items an earlier group had requisitioned as a guide to what we needed.

One of our first duties was to report to the AOC (AVM Williams?) at Potts Point. We fronted up for a brief interview which I remember as formal but friendly. I think he felt that we were 'boys on a man's errand'; in any case a few days later all but one of us found ourselves demoted to second-in-charge with an older officer appointed to command. We were a bit put out, but also somewhat relieved. My C.O. was F/O Ted Shaw who had been a publican at Phillip Island in peace-time.

It took about five weeks to assemble all the stores, and during this time a few additional personnel were attached to us. A clerk for each station; at least one DMT between us, and a truck on loan, but I don't think the main complement arrived until just before we left. There was little work for them, so they were used by the station as extra hands.

We left Mascot in February, with the personnel travelling via Melbourne and Adelaide to Alice Springs by train, and then in trucks to Larrimah, then on again by train to Darwin. The stores went independently via Broken Hill with a small detachment to look after them. They met up with us, I think, at the Radar (RDF) Wing at Batchelor, or maybe at Knuckeys Lagoon. The Wing (or was it the Area RDF Officer as Wing had barely been started) had already organised things for us, and I found that the tower had been erected. I think an Airfield Construction detachment had done this. While waiting for transport to Cape Don, I visited the Fighter Sector and was given a map with a reference grid, and the W/T Operators arranged frequencies etc. I also visited 31 RDF station one evening. Transport to Cape Don was on Navy vessels, either the TOLGA or the TERKA. These were sister ships that had been requisitioned by the Navy and provided general transport around the area. At Cape Don there was a landing jetty with a hoist, and a notice above it - 'Abandon Hope All Ye Who Enter Here.' Unloading was orderly, but as there was only a small launch to carry everything from the ship to shore, it took about three days. One surprise was to find that there were several RAAF personnel who had been left there as caretakers after the tower had been finished. They were very annoyed when we told them that we had been getting mail addressed to people we didn't know and returning it to sender.

A lighthouse had been built at Cape Don in 1917 with three houses. The lightkeepers' families had been evacuated, and it had been arranged that the RAAF would have use of two of the cottages. One was used for Admin. and Officers' quarters, while the other accommodated some of the airmen. There was a lot of space on the wide verandahs, but I think some tents were still needed.

There was a narrow gauge tramway from the jetty to the lighthouse, a distance of about 200 metres, with a man powered trolley. The Doover site was about 800 metres to the east with access by a rough path. A rubber wheeled handcart was used to haul equipment to the site. We only had a bicycle pump to keep

the tyres inflated. The equipment included two Lister diesel alternator sets. Although I have no recollection, they must have been partly dismantled to get them there. I think we installed them under a substantial branch of a tree, to which we attached a block and tackle.

The installation went ahead fairly smoothly. Our limited resources were adequate and there were no serious shortages of equipment, but we had to rely on manpower for transport. The construction party for the tower had bashed out a reasonable track to the Dover, and I only remember a few gremlins. The first was that we had nothing to mix the battery acid in except kitchen utensils, and at first Ted Shaw was unwilling to let them be used. After a few expedients proved hopeless, he finally relented. A consequence was that Fighter Sector had ceased listening out for us. The operators managed to get a message through by breaking into another net. Down came a number of signals, all in code. I tried to decipher them, without success. I was humiliated...all my training in cipher (two hours) was wasted. F/O Shaw was rather sarcastic. Finally I realised that the time/date headers were peculiar and that I had been using the month instead of the day as the deciphering key. Sure enough, when I decoded all the signals, one of them was an advice that in future the American notation for dates was to be used! How was I expected to decode it without first knowing about the change it announced?

The aerial feeders were a balanced pair, unlike the co-ax which had been used in earlier stations. At least I didn't have to use the buggery bar! Instead I was given a device which was meant to measure standing waves and a diagram of the feeder arrangements. When I put power on, the discharge tubes in the TR switch kept blowing. Eventually I looked closely at the feeder diagram and found that it was wrong. One of the sections was a quarter wavelength too short or too long. I have forgotten the details but when this was corrected everything was OK.

A little more fiddling and we were on the air with only one diesel alternator working. It was nearly a month before we got the second one on site and working, but the Listers were reliable beasts. I recall looking at the first one after it had been running for a week or so and marvelling at the steady way it kept going.

As you can see, the installation of 46RS was almost free of hassles. I didn't think this was unusual till reading recently of the troubles which beset some of the other stations. Credit must be given to whoever organised the siting and got the building and aerial up before we arrived. Incidentally by the time we got there the termites had been busy on the masonite lining of the equipment room in the tower, but the GI lining on the outside was intact.

Wing did their best to keep supplies up to the station, but with no road access or airstrip, we had to depend on the Navy, and their ships only arrived at intervals of about six weeks so there were no fresh rations. The lightkeepers kept a small flock of goats, and supplied us with milk. We bought a young goat from them once and the natives caught some fish for us. A Walrus could land safely near the jetty but only if tides and winds were right. There was a beach nearby (Alkira)* and a Tiger Moth landed there once to take out a sick airman, but it was too dangerous for regular use. I note from the history sheets that supplies to us and to the lighthouse were not coordinated, and I remember some of the disappointments when supplies and mail arrived for them and not for us. Then the next ship might be for us only.

**The beach has been called 'Alkira' in 46RS records also. The Atlas seems to name the bay 'Alcaro.'*

The station establishment included a batman, and one was actually posted to it. He was a pastrycook in civilian life, and so for the first month or so the station had fresh bread. One day the AOC visited the station and F/O Shaw asked the batman to prepare something special for dinner. The AOC complimented him and next week he was transferred to Area HQ!

Only a few men at Cape Don stand out in my mind. Ted Shaw was the oldest, fairly well steeped in RAAF ways, and kept the station on an even keel. He organised concerts and an athletics meet where the batman ran a book. One of the races was for the Aborigines and all of them were bribed not to win by various persons. The result was hilarious.

The Medical Orderly, Cpl Harman, was versatile. He had a St. John's Ambulance Certificate, and was also a lay-reader. On one occasion the Aborigines called him in as mid-wife when a woman was having a difficult birth.

Our Fitter/DMT, Cpl Dann, was a bit of a larrikin, but a very competent fitter. His offsider was at best 'average.' A young Aborigine called Charlie, aged about 15, hung around the engines and helped with maintenance. He was alert and a good learner.

One of the Operators was known as 'Texas Ted.' He had a .22 pistol, and until he was stopped, took pot shots at rats when they entered the Doover.

There was a minor crisis when our tobacco supplies ran out. Most of the Guards were heavy smokers and became very twitchy. After all the good tobacco was used up, they tried the nicki which they found pretty awful. Strange mixtures of dried leaves were tried as well. Ted Shaw had instituted a password system which was treated as a joke, but on at least one occasion a Guard, suffering from withdrawal, insisted that a Mechanic go back to the Orderly Room and get the password before he would let him in the Doover.

The A50's mention the fitting of a pump to the water supply. The water supply was stored in an underground tank, designed for three light keepers and their families. It proved hardly adequate for fifty men. And as with other stations, we had a couple of bombs to demolish the station if attacked. These were kept under cover some distance away and had the necessary wiring and detonators ready. Soon after we arrived there was a grass fire, lit by the Aborigines, and the bombs had to be quickly moved.

The lightkeepers had been on their own since their families had been sent south a year earlier. Not surprisingly, their actions were at times a trifle irrational. There was hardly any work for them as the light was only turned on when requested from Darwin, and this only happened a couple of times while I was there. For some reason, one of the keepers was not talking to the other two, and arrangements for rosters, messages etc were made via notes written on a blackboard.

There was a camp of Aborigines close to the lighthouse, and I understand that they had moved there from Darwin after the bombing started. We had little to do with them apart from buying fish from them. We had a shotgun, and got them to shoot some birds for the pot. After one try we decided that bully beef was better than parrot!

There was a small amount of trading for artifacts, and one day an airman was asked if he would like a pearl. A price was negotiated but the agreement was hurriedly cancelled when he found that he had negotiated, not for 'a pearl,' but for 'Pearl!'

44 Radar Wing had a policy of rotating staff from the remote stations to those closer to Darwin where rations were better, and sometimes there was a picture show. And so on September 3rd 1943 I embarked to leave Cape Don when I was posted to 105RS at Charles Point.

* The term 'Radar' was adopted in September 1943. The first term used had been 'Radio,' then 'Radio Direction Finding,' or 'RDF.'

Posted from 319 RS at Fenton in late August '43, and staging through Radar Wing, I arrived in Darwin with a party of eight airmen, mostly Security Guards for 46 Radar, about September 1st. We sailed at midnight aboard HMAS TERKA, and accommodation was certainly basic, for we slept on deck. After a pleasant and uneventful day, we arrived at Cape Don late in the afternoon of September 2nd, and the bosun ferried me ashore in a dinghy. I still recall my surprise at the Navy's relaxed style of dress...the bosun wore a large floppy hat that looked like a ladies' straw. The party of airmen remained on board for stores unloading.

From where we landed, a light rail track ran up to the lighthouse, and luggage and stores were pushed up to the light on a trolley. I had been there only a short while when a messenger arrived from TERKA...the Captain had requested a RAAF Officer to come to the ship. So I was ferried out to TERKA and escorted to the bridge, where the Captain unleashed a magnificent bellow, directed at the mixed Navy/RAAF party at work in the hold below:- "Get that scum off my ship!"

He declared they had breached our cargo, in particular our beer supplies, and demanded what disciplinary measures we intended? I explained that the Security Guards were not directly under our control, and we would have to signal Darwin to have them attached for disciplinary action. Then who would be accused, who could supply evidence, and who would be witnesses? All of this I explained carefully, particularly the restricted powers of a 'detachment commander' in our circumstances. Later someone broke it to me gently...the skipper was a 'wavy Navy' reservist, called up from the Yachtsmans' Scheme, and in civvy street had been the Professor of Jurisprudence at the University of Tasmania!

I found two of the lightkeepers at the Don were easy to get on with, but the third was a somewhat surly character who had fallen out with the other pair. His watch changes were accomplished by him walking around one side of their house verandah and his relief coming around from the other end.... the changeover was thus accomplished without personal contact!

The water supply came from a well in the clear area between the houses, and originally was pumped by a windmill. To meet the increased demand, the RAAF had supplied a pump-jack, driven by a 'one-lung' petrol engine of agricultural appearance. The engine, a 'hit-miss' governed model, broke a rocker arm and so we were back to the windmill until a replacement arrived.

The radar was a 'tower A.W.' at this stage and it performed well and reliably, as I recall. Its diesel alternator sets (Listers?) were about a mile or so from the lighthouse, so our living quarters in two of the houses had no 'mains' power. We had two AT5/AR8 communications sets - a battery powered version at the H.Q. house for Admin. traffic, and a mains powered set at the Doover for operational traffic.

I only recall one glitch in radar coverage, when an unidentified aircraft was observed high overhead, and, not being detected by radar, was reported as a visual only. Sector identified it as enemy, resulting in a terse signal from Wing directing that I check over the entire set personally, which turned up nothing more than a possible dry joint. This, when re-soldered, yielded no detectable improvement in performance. Meteorologically caused performance anomalies were just not well recognized, at least in the field, at that time!

It was probably about this time we received - unsolicited - a compact little battery-powered H.F Transceiver, with several crystals, for use on pre-set emergency channels - in case evacuation became necessary. Which was a prudent, if not a very cheering provision! I saw no paperwork, or heard further mention.

Two breakdowns stick in my mind...the major one being of the transmitter H.T. transformer. The overload kept popping out, which proved to be due to an insulation failure of the H.T. winding which had gone down to core. This was replaced by a spare which soon failed similarly. Temporary repairs resulted in H.T. voltage being substantially reduced, but the set limped along with reduced performance.

Later we 'cooked up' one of the failed transformers, connecting the secondary to the mains - the voltage across the primary was now quite low. When the transformer was nice and warm, we filled the case with sump oil. After cooling, the transformer was put back into service. It worked sweetly, and we were back to normal power. The sump oil suggested itself when we inspected a failed spare and found it contained a teaspoon of salt water. How?...Why? One suggestion was that some gear had come out to the Don as deck cargo - and had encountered salt spray en route.

The second breakdown was a seizure in the turning gear drive. One shaft had to be driven out of its bearing with an axe. With the aerial disconnected from the drive, it was 'walked' around by an aiman on the tower roof, but we stayed 'on air.' With the offending shaft and bearing cleaned up and re-lubricated, the drive soldiered on happily.

With the changeover from IFF MkII to MkIII, we were visited by the BL4 installation team, and the installation went in sweetly. But one night after midnight there was a rather eerie aftermath when a MkII response was observed. The II to III changeover as I remember it had added a second and lower trace below the normal trace, and the BL4 had fed the lower trace. But this MkII response appeared on the normal radar trace, as had the original MkII responses. But further, I think this odd return had shown the MkIII coding.

All of which is consistent with the story which later drifted back on the grapevine...the source was a MkIII transponder in which the tuning had gone out of whack, and now tuned through 200 MHz.

Cape Don did not have a strip, so we were supplied by Navy and by the RAAF Walrus. On the Navy side, I remember a visit by a Fairmile sub-chaser. It was a lovely wooden vessel, engined with twin Anzanis. I've often wondered how those engines came into Allied hands! I was invited on board, and I can remember drinking warm beer in a very compact wardroom - with disastrous consequences! Anchored beam-on in a moderate swell, she rolled markedly. The swell also posed problems for the Walrus. In taking off, the pilot had to get his port float out of the water, and commenced his run by heading straight out into the swell. Then, picking the critical moment, he swung at right angles to run along the top of a wave.

In an attempted take-off on December 7th., the drill came unstuck when a float dipped back into the water, straining a wing root. The upshot of which was the return of the Walrus to Darwin under tow by the supply vessel SAPPHIRE. Reports of this journey only filtered back on the grapevine, but apparently the Walrus had to run its engine for much of the trip.

The availability of water at the lighthouse well/windmill attracted quite a few birds, and on one occasion a carrier pigeon was noted amongst them, distinguished by a little metal cylinder fixed to one leg. With breadcrumbs and like attractions, we tried to catch it.

The house of the lighthouse men had a light wire fence around it, more a symbolic boundary than a useful barrier. The pigeon would occasionally run into 'lighthouse land' and then back into the general area. It looked rather battered, as though it may have been attacked by hawks. The lighthouse staff in pre-war times had represented the Government presence in the area, and hence could claim a range of appointments:- Postmaster, Protector of Aborigines, Justice of the Peace, Protector of Flora and Fauna etc. etc.,

and they now claimed the bird as coming within their jurisdiction, apparently as 'Protectors.' So whenever the pigeon ventured under their fence, we enticed it back onto RAAF land where we finally caught it. A real comic opera scenario which needed Gilbert and Sullivan to do it justice. The message was from an Army Water Transport vessel, reporting engine trouble and that they were at anchor in either 'Snake' or 'Shark' bay. As Snake Bay on the top of Melville would have meant the bird was hopelessly off course if heading for Darwin, I guess now it must have been Shark Bay which is only 5 or 6 miles east of Cape Don.

There were a number of official visitors during my term at Cape Don, one being the Commanding Officer of Radar Wing, F/Lt. Wadsley, and the Medical Officer, F/Lt. Clarke. The Wing C.O. made a comparatively brief inspection, and seemed pre-occupied with other concerns. We had two aircraft bombs for emergency demolition, and I was busy running a tree-slung line to the slit trench where the dynamo exploder was to be located. I recall discussing with Rex Wadsley the comparative merits of bottle necks and timber insulators boiled in sump oil! Ingenuity was the keynote on radar stations!

In another surprising incident, a young native came in with an odd message. It had a rambling text which included snippets of poetry (I recall bits of Omar Khayyam) and came from an old beachcomber living near the mouth of the East Alligator River, perhaps 70 miles south east. His basic query was simple....could we tell his messenger the date of a recent minor earth tremor to enable him to reset his calendar. The message was on very heavy paper, like a page torn from a bank ledger.

I could date the tremor - I recalled sensing something odd while working in the Orderly Room, and looked up to see our ceiling hung kero lamp swinging vigorously.

Earlier in the war, an Army team had operated in western Arnhem Land, trying to round up a mob of wild Timor ponies, for which task they had established several fuel dumps along the coast, and had left a truck behind on pulling out. The old beachcomber had removed the truck engine and installed it in his boat. He had taken a lubra as wife, and the messenger who brought the calendar enquiry was one of their sons. Perhaps fearing a hostile reception, they had only brought the boat part-way to the Don and walked the last section of the journey. The son also queried the possibility of trading which was agreed, and a piglet was later delivered for Christmas dinner, in exchange for a drum of flour, I think it was.

A surprising feature of the Don scene was the fuselage of a crashed aircraft. The wing, tail, engines and instruments had been removed. Local folklore explained this as the remnants of a crashed participant in the London-Melbourne air race of 1934 but I could find no mention of it when I checked.*

I was posted to 312 on Wessel on 16th. December 1943, and was first flown back to Darwin. All I can recall of that flight was that the pilot expressed doubts as to whether his camera hatch was sealing fully (it was in the belly of the aircraft), so he landed on Darwin Harbour to check. If indeed it had been leaking at all, it was sufficiently minor to permit him to leave the aircraft for an hour or more while he dashed to the dentist at RAAF Darwin 'to have a tooth checked.'

In many regards, in NW Area at least, WW2 had its funny aspects.

*The story behind the aircraft remnants at the Don is fairly well explained in the story of Moir and Owens in the Historical section of this story.

EARLY DAYS AT 'THE DON.'

Vaughan Hingston.

My recollection of events of the time is somewhat hazy, but I hope the following anecdotal information will be of some value.

I did not accompany the original party from Mascot, having travelled from Melbourne via Adelaide to Birdum in December/January 1942/43. I was posted to 44 RDF Wing on 14th. March and to 46 RS on 17th. March. I note from my records I was posted back to Wing on 20th. March which appears to indicate that radar personnel were attached to Wing no matter which stations they subsequently served in the Area) and so my next recorded posting was to 3PD Brisbane on 3rd August 1944.

Whilst I was not part of the original party my recollection of my travel to Darwin by troop train (more accurately cattle train) is reasonably vivid. My recollection of Quorn is that we were handed over from the charge of the RAAF W/O to an Army Officer and we appear to have been under Army command for our overland trip. My experience would probably have been similar to that of the 'originals.'

The weather in January was hot and dry, and we did our best to get some relief by sitting on the side of the train with legs dangling to catch any breeze; the slow speed did not help to create such a luxury. As far as I can recall the journey to Birdum took about eight days. We had occasional relief when the train stopped to take on water from bore pumps, and we all took advantage of a cool shower.

The toilet facilities were, as to be expected, primitive: but the speed of the train allowed us to jump off when the need arose and jump back on again without much effort. I don't recall considering the conditions of the trip to be too uncomfortable, which would be an indication of a youthful adventure mentality, and as it was often said at the time, we were at war.

On arrival at Birdum, I was admitted to the Medical Quarters with some minor ailment, and had occasion to visit the latrine, which was a construction of a number of holes in the ground covered with pine boxed toilet seats with lids. The lid of the seat I used was up, and so I did not see a warning painted on the top of the lid which read...VD PATIENTS ONLY. In a panic, I reported my lapse to the Medical Orderly who said "Don't panic...Nobody uses that seat so it's the safest!"

The stay at Birdum seemed to be otherwise uneventful with the exception of a visit from the well known radio personality of the time, Harry Dearth, who was highly entertaining. And a very dedicated and energetic Salvation Army Chaplain also contributed to relieving boredom by organising a few sing-songs and concerts.

So then I was posted to Wing and 46 RS as I have mentioned. I joined 46 at 132 RS at Knuckeys Lagoon. I was one of the seven men who accompanied F/O Shaw on the merchant vessel to Cape Don with part of the original equipment. I recall the vessel was a commandeered private merchant ship, very rusty and weather beaten. It was, however, a comfortable break from Darwin heat to enjoy the sea air and the relaxation of a slow sea journey to Cape Don. We apparently sailed close to the coast, and I recall one crew member making regular depth tests. We were accommodated on deck.

Cape Don was, as you know, a lighthouse station in peacetime, and was commandeered by the Government during the war for defence purposes. There were three separate residences constructed with the Territory climate in mind. They were reasonably large with wide verandahs on three sides, a living room, kitchen, and two or three bedrooms. The three lighthouse keepers

occupied one house; the other two were acquired by the Government. The Officers and Sergeants occupied one, and we other ranks occupied the other. The Orderly Room and Medical Section were part of the Officers' and Sergeants' residence.

Our amenities were few, but we improvised with the occasional cricket game - cards, and we had the luxury of a hand operated gramophone, two records, and a few needles. My guess is that the lighthouse keepers' family had left this behind. The cook, who appeared to be feeling the isolation more than most, would, when he had finished cooking our meal at night, start the music with one unforgettable record - "While Rinaldo he wishes, She washes the dishes, In my little house by the bay."

The catering rations were limited and the cook had to draw on his imagination to vary the menu; but there were few complaints. Some rations did run out after some weeks, particularly MSV (Meat and Vegetables) - a tinned ration which was popular with the cook as it gave him room to vary the recipe. The other tinned ration, Bully Beef, (Corned Meat) was always acceptable, but that also at times became scarce. Dog Biscuits, hard as a rock but healthy, were plentiful and were always enjoyable spread with jam and tinned Maxim cheese. Dried egg powder, dried potato powder and dried milk were part of the kitchen supplies. Baked beans were popular too, but the supplies seemed to run out well before the next supplies arrived.

Mail was undoubtedly the one 'supply' we missed most and of course was delivered every few months, either with the normal rations supply, or when an occasional light aircraft flew over and parachuted a mail bag to us. I recall a time when we were desperate for mail, and one genius thought it a good idea to send a message to Base that we were 'out of matches.' The idea being a light aircraft would be likely to drop such an item, and there should be a good chance that perhaps mail would also be dropped. To our surprise, our message found the right response, and an Avro Anson arrived over the area a few days later.

The aircraft flew quite low and circled a few times before dropping a small parcel attached to a small parachute. We watched with excitement as the aircraft appeared to begin its return to Base, when we saw the parcel was caught in the undercarriage. The pilot seemed to realise the problem and tried to release the parcel by frantically dipping his wings. His tactic was successful and the parcel was released, only to be dropped into nearby mangroves where it disappeared. Quickly, one W/T Operator signalled the pilot and asked what was in the parcel. The answer...MATCHES. We needed matches like the proverbial hole in the head. But we were grateful our efforts to get mail did not succeed - mail in the mangroves would have been a disaster.

The operational Doover was situated some distance away from our living quarters. As Radar Operators, we worked on a schedule of four hours on and six hours off. We walked to the Doover and operated the radar screen in groups of two - one hour at the screen and one hour off. We were kept busy most of the time as enemy aircraft blips could appear at any time. I cannot recall how often during my time we detected enemy aircraft, but in the early days it was often, but reduced as the months passed. During our hours off the screen we made use of a home-made hammock swung between two trees. Here we slept or read or just enjoyed a tropical moonlight. I should say our presence at the Cape Don station was worthwhile from the perspective of its purpose which was to detect enemy aircraft in time to warn Darwin of their approach.

Probably to relieve boredom, John Swanson (Hank) and I decided to run a

small business in the way of a Laundry Service. We would offer to wash and iron shirts and shorts for a charge of sixpence and threepence respectively. Mick, one of the Aborigines, was persuaded to become our first employee and was paid for his services in cigarettes and coin. Mick would light up the copper, cut up the Sunlight soap, stoke the washing as it boiled clean, and help with the ironing. My nickname at the time was 'Hink,' and so the Business of HINK AND HANK LAUNDRY SERVICE commenced. Both John and I became qualified accountants in civvy street, and so we may have been developing our latent talent for business. We did not do any arduous work, apart from ironing, and we enjoyed the diversion. The laundry business had a short life, as after a few weeks a severe water shortage occurred and the enterprise lapsed.

We did have a small RAAF Canteen which stocked luxuries like cigarettes, tinned fruit, tinned cream, boot laces, envelopes, writing pads and similar items. This was stocked as supplies arrived with mail and pay. The canteen supplies ran out fairly rapidly as we used our pay for such luxuries.

Three or four Aborigines were employed on a permanent basis and paid by Government issued plug tobacco - nicki-nicki. There were a few heavy smokers among the airmen, and as with other supplies, there was often a dire shortage of cigarettes. Some of us who did not smoke relieved the situation in a small way, but I clearly recall some men scouring the ground for butts. This was after they had already purchased all available supplies of nicki-nicki from the Aborigines.

The Medical Orderly was one Corporal Harman. He was a fairly dedicated individual and looked after our small medical ailments, but if some more serious ailment occurred, it was a matter of degree as to whether that person was returned to Wing for treatment. A case in point was when John Swanson had a number of his front teeth knocked out or seriously damaged during a game of cricket. John remained at the Don for a considerable time before he was spotted back to Darwin for treatment.

During my time at 46RS I remember we had an official parade on Anzac Day, the only official parade I can recall. And Corporal Harman who was a Lay Preacher conducted a Church Service. Then in the evening we had a concert. LAC Price was the main talent behind the concert, and he was painted and appropriately dressed as Mo McCackie, and did an impressive impersonation of 'Strike Me Lucky It's Mo!'

I had volunteered to recite 'Gunga Din,' but I had little or no part in the programme preparation. And so the concert began with the National Anthem. The stage had a makeshift screen and I was asked to be behind the screen to deliver the first item. I had no knowledge of what was in front of the screen until it was pulled back, and there to my embarrassment was a catafalque draped with the National Flag. Responding to the situation, I delivered "They shall grow not old as we who are left grow old...Age shall not weary them nor the years condemn. At the going down of the sun, and in the morning...We Will Remember Them." I did later get to deliver my Gunga Din.

I was posted back to Wing in November 1943 and was picked up by the Mission vessel ST FRANCIS which dropped me off at Bathurst Island. I had to return 'by available means,' and while waiting I enjoyed the hospitality of the Missioner, who I think was the renowned Father McGrath. Eventually a Navy vessel arrived, and a young Lieutenant announced, "Hingston, you'd better come back to Darwin with me." I don't recall thanking him for the offer.

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A FEW RECOLLECTIONS OF CAPE DON.

Pat Fox.

I was at Cape Don from 6th. April to September 1943. As the Operations Record book confirms, it would have taken eighteen days to get the Doover operational. I cannot recall who put the Doover together, but I remember pushing stores from the jetty, on a trolley running on rails, up to the residences, and with the help of the natives, pushing radar equipment to the radar site.

I also remember the pleasure and excitement when the infrequent mail services delivered, and the terrible disappointments when a ship passed by without calling in with mail or supplies. Another memory is of the failure of the windmill, in a calm, to pump sufficient water, and as a consequence, showers were banned.

We were limited in enjoying diversions such as picture shows because of our isolation, but somehow managed to get along well with sports meetings, debates and a concert.

In hindsight, and comparing Cape Don with subsequent postings in the Territory, I would now regard 46 RDF, in present parlance, as a 'hardship' posting.

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Ed. Note. *Many of us found that our Radar Stations were close by some of Australia's famous old lighthouses. For those interested, an extremely interesting and comprehensive history of the Cape Don lighthouse (and others) appears in "From Dusk to Dawn : A History of Australian Lighthouses" by Gordon Reid, and published by Macmillan Aust. 1988.*

SETTING UP 46 RDF IN '43.

Terry Spencer, (Radar Mech)

In the last week of February, 1943, I first travelled to Adelaide where I met up with the other men of our radar unit. Then in the afternoon we were loaded into old corridor coaches and we were off northwards to Terowie. On again from the railway town, this time on the narrow gauge northern railway, the train had to stop frequently to clear the firegrate of ash, while we enjoyed fantastic scenery like that painted by the Aboriginal artist Namatjira.

Some where along the line we were transferred to cattle motor trucks...then Army trucks which were not much better. We could not sit, but had to stand and hold on to the roof.

A stop at Alice Springs...then we were on the road to Darwin. We were given a look at the Devil's Marbles, and eventually arrived at Batchelor where the RAAF had its repair and salvage unit. Finally we reached Darwin which had been bombed, and were unloaded into the still habitable buildings, while our radar gear was dumped in one of the storage sheds.

The newly arrived Spitfires of No. 1 Fighter Wing were now based in Darwin. As a Radar Mechanic I was quartered close to where our gear had been dumped so that I was one of those who could watch it and report damage or theft. As luck would have it, we were right across the road from the armourers' range. Every morning at daylight a Spitfire was jacked up on the range and all the guns tested. First single shot with the .303 guns, then bursts of fire - the sights adjusted and further single shots and bursts, and this was repeated with the heavy calibre guns, the .50 calibre and finally the big 20 mm. cannons. It was deafening, but we could not get away from the noise. When they had finished with the guns, the engineers would come and test the engines, the noise again deafening. It was mid-day at least before the aircraft was pronounced ready for action. No ear muffs were issued for radar personnel - the armourers' assistants were the only men I saw wearing them.

Finally we heard that the Bishop's one time sea transport and supply ship, the 'SOUTHERN CROSS' had been secured for us. It was quite a large motor ship, 60 or 70 feet long and twin screw. All the gear for the station had been taken to the wharf by motor transport, and the sailing time was set for dawn the next day. When we arrived at the wharf, we found the crew already busy. The mess staff were going to feed us and the engineer's crew, all local Aborigines, were in the engine room attending to the two huge 4 cylinder oil engines. These were old crude oil Bollinger engines with hot-bulb ignition. Each engine had a great primus blow lamp directed on its ignition bulb. There was a great continuous roar, each engine being attended by one of the Aborigines with a blanket over his head to protect him from the heat of the blow lamp. When the bulbs were nearly red-hot, the starting cylinder was adjusted to the start position with a crow-bar and the compressed air turned on, with each engine starting in turn. Before the blow-lamp was turned off, each cylinder was tested for ignition by turning on a tap in the cylinder head. If it squirted flame, the cylinder was firing OK, but if smoke came, the bulb probably required more heat. The SOUTHERN CROSS pounded along until we reached the lighthouse about mid-day. The ship was anchored close to the wharf, and we unloaded first into the ship's boat, then unloaded again onto the wharf.

We were not allowed to have motor transport because fresh wheel tracks could be seen from the air and give away the location of the station. We had to make do with a trailer for the two large Diesel engines and the generators for the power plant, which all had to be manhandled. After these, the cargo mostly consisted of the radar receiver and transmitter housed in domestic refrigerator-sized cabinets, then the communications gear handled by its own crew, and the heavy but reasonably portable power line. It had to be all stowed during the evening before the Japanese reconnaissance planes were about. There was a small gauge railway and hand trolley on the side of the little harbour. We would go as far as possible in one direction until we came to the points which were shifted with a crowbar to allow us on the other leg of the railway. I think there were four changes in direction before we reached the top of the thick ridge where the lighthouse and the three large houses stood. The radar crew were to live in one house, the administration crew in another, and the lighthouse crew of three retained their own residence.

As we reached the top, we heard a roaring noise like a wind coming, and the earth started to sway like the deck of a ship. Several more tremors came during the afternoon but did not interfere with the unloading. Everything was stored in or under the three houses as we did not want to show signs of activity which could be seen from the air. There was a windmill and well

for water, but work on the windmill was stopped because an operational windmill is an indication that some people are being serviced by it, and because of the numbers of footpaths we made as we walked about. It was finally decided that we could repair the pump-jack and work it with a small engine. The overhead tank was filled once a day and we had showers in a concrete building. We came and went along the old tracks. The Japanese reconnaissance planes used to fly overhead but did not seem to take much notice of our activities, so we must have concealed everything fairly well. While we were settling in we had two more quakes. We could see the waves in the earth as they travelled, just like a wind coming, and the trees also looked as though they were bending before a wind, but the wind was not there.

The biggest problem which confronted us was to transport the two large Diesel engines and the alternators up to the operations area on the little trailer intended to be pulled by a utility. We had no prime mover, only human traction for this ridiculous trailer. After much struggling, we finally got the engines and generator to the concrete beds we had prepared for them. The next thing was to connect our generators first to the signals hut and then to the operations room where the antenna, the transmitter and receiver were housed. Adjoining was a small mechanics' workshop and bench for the test equipment. On my first night watch in the operations room before we connected the power, the place was dead silent. Normally the blower which cooled the two power valves of the transmitter would be working, but on this night the whole place was pervaded with a strange crackling sound. This turned out to be the sound of large termites eating the woodwork! We had a small quantity of creosote which we used to protect the essential parts of the building.

The watches were arranged so that each of the operations staff had one day stand-down per week. These were often spent on long exploratory hikes. One that stands out in my memory was a walk to a point which took us to a wide bay with a wide sandy beach. This would have been close to Popham Bay. On this expedition we found an old four-cornered bottle like a modern Schnapps bottle. It was well worn by sea and sand. The letters were engraved into the glass, not raised as on a modern bottle. We tossed for it, but I lost. I have discussed this bottle with a Dutch friend who said such bottles were made in Holland a long time ago, probably contemporary with the Dutch explorers and adventurers who used these northern shores for shelter.

We were strictly separated from the local Aboriginal population. I often wondered why we did not see any Aborigines, and any chance association was discouraged. At the end of the war, when I returned to study medicine, I discovered that one of the reasons was to protect them from any chance of infection with malaria. Before our first posting to North Western Area, we were closely questioned about our previous residence in Australia. Those who had resided north of Brisbane were posted south. There had been one accidental infection, resulting in a high death rate, so what appeared to be unnecessary precautions were certainly warranted.

There was very little communication between the radar staff and the lighthouse staff, who were apparently under Navy administration. The Navy used to visit us to replenish our stores and fuel and we were warned of their visits so that we could help unload. I can remember only two occasions when the lighthouse was put into operation. The first time would have been just after the Battle of the Coral Sea. We were told it was to guide survivors.

Later it was operated for one night only...we were told this was to guide an important convoy through the Dundas Strait. It was a very powerful light with three beams which lit the area from one horizon to the other.

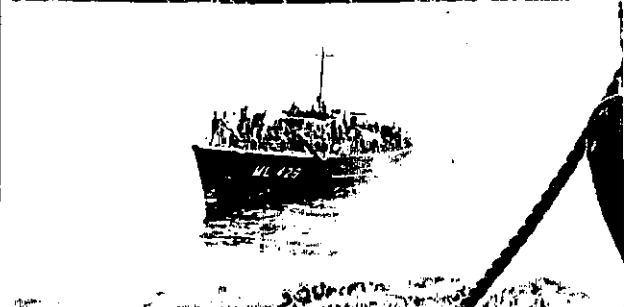
The mechanics and operators, having access to the small workshop, used to manufacture various decorations for wives and families at home, such as brooches and rings. These were made from dural, sea shells, tortoise shell and buffalo horn. One English radio operator told us how they became known as 'foreigners.' He said the Air Force workshops were often asked to handcraft various things for the Resistance movement, which were known as 'foreign orders,' officially illegal, but allowed if their destinations were to be Allied countries or resistance movements. These were for radios, compasses and sometimes engine parts or gun parts. As the orders dwindled, the name 'foreigners' stuck to unofficial manufacture of decorations for family gifts, which was one way of letting the families know we were well and thinking of them.

Periods of extreme range over the horizon and echoes of extreme range were noted from time to time. I thought I could relate these phenomena to temperature inversion. At times we could plot the outline of Bathurst and Melville Islands, and on one occasion we were able to plot aircraft taking off from their Timor airfield. 'The Bug' was a mysterious echo which moved with great speed. These often originated at the extreme far end of the trace, sometimes hovering around the middle of the trace, then progressing at reduced speed to zero or infinity and decreasing in strength. I have often wondered if these echoes originated from meteorites grazing the upper atmosphere on a tangential path. This would explain the mysterious behaviour of the echo moving up and down the trace and tending to hover around the middle.

From time to time we saw a small echo in Van Diemen's Gulf, not much higher than the echo from the surface of a rough sea. This echo troubled us a bit because it came and disappeared and only moved slowly. The possibility of a submarine periscope was considered but none of our operator staff had seen a submarine echo. Plain language communication on the radio was prohibited. I think this matter was logged and reported to the administration staff who could report it in code. I remember soon after these sightings the Navy made a supply visit and we heard about a small Japanese submarine stranded on the Bathurst Island fringing reef. We were told that the submarine was deserted and propped up with timber cut from the island, and one of the sea cocks left open, showing that the crew was about with hopes of refloating at high tide. Later we understood that the crew had been killed and buried in unmarked graves, and that the navigator's code book was never found.

46 RDF as it was then known, received a commendation for rapid and accurate plotting of enemy aircraft before one of the raids.

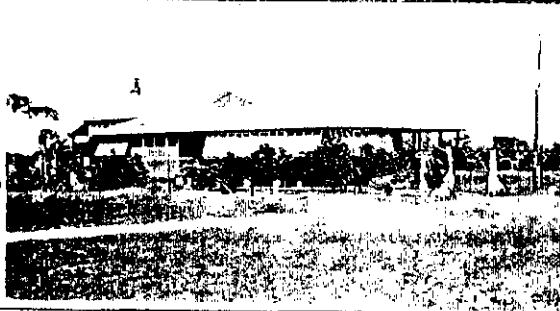
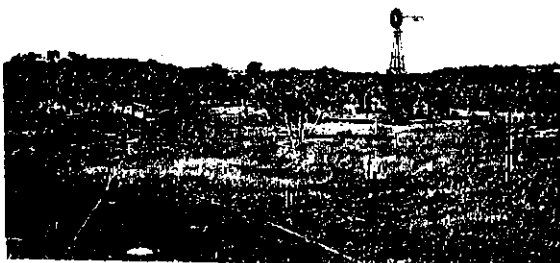
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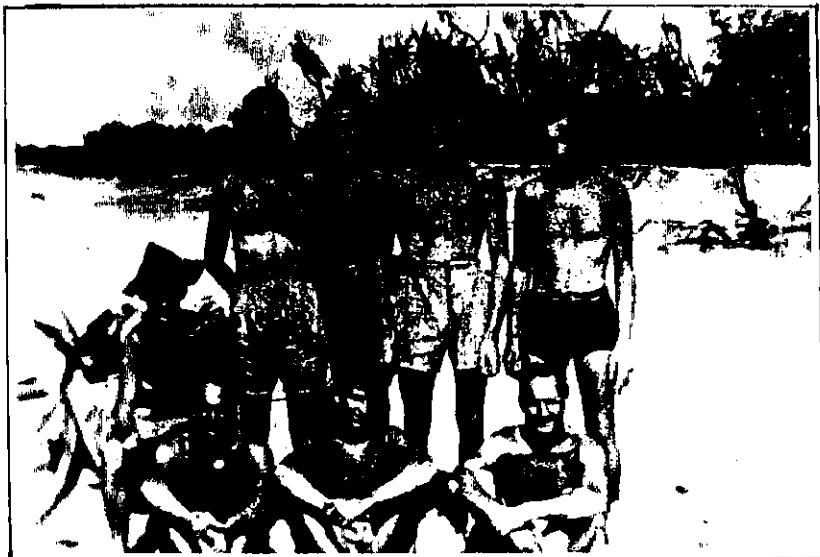
CAPE DON VIEWS.

(From the top down.)

1. The view from the Doover looking south.
2. ML429 calls at the Don, evidently carrying men from other stations. This craft called fairly often.
3. Looking south from the houses past the windmill.
4. The Officers' and Sergeants' quarters.



Photos from Jack Fraser's collection.



46 RADAR, CAPE DON. These appear to be the two best group photos available, despite the poor quality of the lower photo. At top the group is the crew when the A.W. ceased operating. Regrettably names are not known...and the lower photo shows most of the station personnel when the COL was about to close down. In this group are Rod Harris and Clem Richardson on the left, and Tony Hick and Jack Kelly in the centre rear row. The top photo came from the Bill Sanderson Collection:- the lower from Rod Harris.



THE DIARY HISTORY OF 46 RADAR.

Morrie Fenton.

46 RDF station first began its service life at Mascot on 15th. January 1943 under the control of Eastern Area, and with Pilot Officer A.H.Freeman as Commanding Officer, pro tem. At first there were only eleven men attached to the unit - and after only eleven days Flying Officer E.H.Shaw took over as C.O., with P/O Freeman evidently remaining as the second I/c Officer. In February came advice of the unit's move to North West Area, and some of the equipment was delivered to Alexandria Goods Yards for delivery to Melbourne under the escort of two airmen. F/O Shaw also left Sydney to arrange supply and delivery of some outstanding items.

The remaining men of the unit - now 24 strong - followed on to Melbourne the next day, and the unit was able to re-assemble at 1 ED at Ascot Vale; but their stay in the bright lights of Melbourne was cut short after only one day and they were again on their way via Adelaide, this time their destination was Terowie.

After two days enjoying the 'comforts' of the Terowie staging camp with its dust and heat, the unit was on its way yet again on 'The Ghan,' bound for arrival at Alice Springs on 27th. February. But again no time was lost, for their departure by convoy for Larrimah was scheduled for the following day.

The unit was on the road for three days before arriving at the Larrimah Army Staging Camp - one night's rest was enjoyed, then it was 'All Aboard' the 'Spirit of Protest' bound for Adelaide River - an overnight and sooty journey which finally ended at 44 RDF Wing at Coomalie on 5th. March.

After almost two weeks at Wing, the unit first moved on to 52 OBU at RAAF Darwin - then on to the camp area where many radar units lodged for a spell - 132 RDF at Knuckey's where the usual and inevitable red tape was attended to. The Officers and men other than the Guards were attached to Wing - the Guards to the Security Guards Unit - and there were even a couple of visits from Wing Officers making their very important inspections - until finally on 1st. April an advance party of seven, commanded by F/O Shaw, embarked for their new location, now known to be Cape Don, the site of perhaps the most northerly light house actually on Australian soil. On their arrival, two of the keepers' houses and outbuildings were handed over to them by the Head Light-house Keeper.

By the 3rd. April, the equipment with them had been unloaded and the vessel was able to leave. The remaining men of the unit arrived three days later, and 46 RDF began to settle in as a unit.

The radar equipment was the Australian A.W., and as only a short time was necessary before the unit was able to become operational, it is obvious that the control tower would have been ready and waiting - also a site for the generating units. By the 15th., the W.T. equipment was installed and working, which was just as well really, for on the 27th., after contact had been made with 5 FS and 52 OBU, a signal was sent requesting the attendance of a Medical Officer to attend a sick airman.

The M/O arrived by plane the next day, landing on a beach some 5 miles from the unit, the plane departing immediately because of the incoming tide, but it returned the next day and the sick man was flown out to Darwin, probably to 1 MRS.

46 RDF first attempted to go 'On Air' on 28th. April, but a few teething problems delayed the occasion until the 30th. when a 24 hour watch was established. The unit was by then adequately manned with 2 Officers, 26 men and 22 guards - a total complement of 50 men.

May 1943.

The first full month of operations for 46 RDF proved to be pretty quiet really, -doubtless the unit was weathering a time of 'shake down' into a regular routine of watches, duties, guard rosters and what-have-you. The Equipment Officer from 44 Wing arrived by air - a mere Flying Officer who nevertheless deemed it his duty to inspect the unit during his 4 day stay - and TERKA - a small stores vessel which with its sister vessel TOLGA serviced the outlying stations of NWA, arrived with stores and rations, and departed again after two days.

The big event for the month was the very brief visit of the Air Officer Commanding - the AOC of NWA, Air Commodore Bladin, who arrived on the 28th., inspected the unit - doubtless there was a parade and an address, then he departed, all this being on the one day.

During May, 7½ hours were lost because of breakdowns - a very reasonable effort for a new station.

June 1943.

TOLGA - sister ship to TERKA - arrived on the 7th., bringing mainly light-house stores and mail - and then over the next few days calibration tests for the new RDF station were carried out by an Anson plane at 4000 feet. The results were anything but startling - the best range being 63 miles. But the station results changed dramatically and the station demonstrated its true capabilities on the 20th., the 22nd., and the 28th. when enemy aircraft were detected at 140 miles - 112 miles and 128 miles - with the best range during these operations being 150 miles. These results were excellent indeed.

TERKA arrived on the 28th. with stores, gear and most importantly 'mail for the troops,' also an ASV beacon.

Only 7½ hours were lost during the months on account of breakdowns - and the total station complement was 52.

July 1943.

Early in July, an enemy raid was mounted over the Pine Creek area, and although this was beyond the normal range of the station, ten plots were logged - with the best range being 210 miles. The month then settled down in routine fashion - CHINAMPA and VIGILANTE arrived and departed - P/O Freeman received advice of his promotion to F/O, - a Walrus aircraft delivered mail and stores - and the station Fitter DMT and the Medical Orderly received advice of promotion to the rank of 'Acting Corporal.'

The lugger AROETA also delivered mail for the light house keepers - with no mail for the Air Force boys - but the troops were placated somewhat on the last day of the month when mail was dropped from a passing aircraft - probably a 6 Communications Unit plane.

Only 1½ hours were lost this month because of breakdown.

August 1943.

Enemy raiders were detected on 7th., 11th., 12th., and on the 20th. The ranges varied from 30 miles to 180 miles...and most importantly for the morale of the operators - a congratulatory signal was received from Wing. This was preserved in the station Diary, and so can be copied for this record:

(Above this line is for signals use only)

TO: **38 39 46 105 307 RDF STATIONS**

FROM: **44 RDF WING** Originator's Number: **23417** Date: **14/9/43** In reply to Station and Date:

| | | | | | |
|-----------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|----|----|
| CONGRATULATIONS | TO | ALL | STATIONS | ON | 5 |
| THIS | MORNINGS | PERFORMANCE | RESULTING | IN | 10 |
| 100% | DESTRUCTION | ENEMY | AIRCRAFT | | 25 |
| | | | | | 20 |
| | | | | | 25 |
| | | | | | 30 |
| | | | | | 35 |
| | | | | | 40 |
| | | | | | 45 |
| | | | | | 50 |

This message must be sent BY WRITTEN This message must be sent BY CYRNER

and sent: _____ to sent by W/T and sent: _____ to sent by W/T

Time out _____ Signature _____ Signature _____

Originator's Instructions: * Degree of Priority: _____

TIME OF ORIGIN: **170500/Z**

T.O.N. _____

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---------|--------|--------|--------|------|--------|--------|--------|------|--------|--------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Obligated to insert "RDF" if message is sent by W/T every part of the route. <input type="checkbox"/> (Below this line is for signals use only) | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Priority No. | Time of | Reader | Reader | System | Time | Reader | Reader | System | Time | Reader | Reader |
| | | | | | | | | | | | |

* The Special Agent is responsible that these details are transferred to the appropriate portion of the message form and that all possibility of compromised handling of information by routing to persons not designated thus the address, etc., is avoided. Failure delivery of the message these details are to be returned to T.O.N.

24 Dec 43 A. G. P. 1943

(Above) The signal received by the stations at Bathurst Island, Port Keats, Cape Don, Pt. Charles and Peron Island.

Other than plotting these raids, station activity for the month was restricted to the always welcome arrival of CHINAMPA, which carried in the equipment for 46 RDF a pump and engine for the water supply. Also 48 of the Guards and airmen completed 20 hours of training in defence in gas, rifle, sub-machine gun, grenades, fieldcraft and fire control.

September 1943.

September proved noteworthy for 46 RDF station, principally for some remarkable plots at extreme ranges - but nevertheless the usual daily activities continued in the regular manner.

All RDF stations suddenly became 'Radar Stations,' - and early in the month P/O Reen arrived to replace F/O Freeman who had been with the station from its earliest days as C.O. and then Second Officer - and calibration flights by an Anson and a Hudson took place under the direction of F/O Bullen from 1 RIMU. The work and service of two Radar Operators was rewarded with their promotion to Corporal - evidently those men deserving recognition for their service were now being chosen.

Two enemy raids were tracked - the first over the Batchelor area on 7th. September when 16 plots at 135 miles to 122 miles were logged...also on the 15th. over the Brocks Creek area when 13 plots at 165 miles to 150 miles were passed on to Fighter Sector. A 'Goody' was received. Pilot Officer Reen received promotion to Flying Officer on 8th. September; and on the 9th. an open air concert and campfire supper was arranged by the Entertainments Committee which should also be applauded for arranging a card evening on the 16th., and a cricket match between station Headquarters and the Technical Staff.

On the 20th. September, a suspected appendicitis case was airlifted out in record time - the Walrus amphibian taking just 40 minutes to take its patient on board and to leave again. Then on the 23rd., an 'all-day' swimming carnival was held at Alkira Bay - about four miles from the station and camp. The final recreational arrangement for the month was another card evening...these certainly proved popular at Cape Don! Two most unusual arrivals were two exhausted carrier pigeons - on 22nd and 24th. The second bird had apparently been attacked by hawks. On both occasions the message they carried was passed by signal to NWA Intelligence. (If only more was known of these incidents*...the messages and their source.)

October 1943.

The inter-unit cricket competition continued in October - a match between Unit H/Q and the Guards began the month's recreational activities, and that was followed by a card evening and a sports meeting, - quite obviously the Unit Entertainments Committee was working in top gear! The launch SAPPHIRE arrived on the 4th...and the C.O. of 44 Radar Wing, F/Lt. Wadsley and F/O Jacomb from 5 FS came ashore. The last named officer inspected the radar installation and departed again on SAPPHIRE, but F/Lt. Wadsley stayed on the station for 5 days before his inspections were completed when he too departed on SAPPHIRE. During his stay an enemy recce was detected at 90 miles and eventually was lost to the north at 31 miles....its home base possibly was in the Aroe Islands. A big asset for the unit was received during this month...RAAF dinghy 013-53. Besides being of great use when various craft called at the cape, a small dinghy was always of use for fishing or exploring expeditions. On the 9th. and 16th. card evenings were held, and two Radar Mechanics were advised of their promotion on the 10th. SAPPHIRE arrived on its 3rd. trip from Darwin on the 16th. bringing stores, mail and personnel. The 'Finals' of the Unit Sports were held on the 26th., and two more airmen were promoted - a WOM and a Radar Mech being 'corporalised.' And the month ended...with yet another card evening.

November 1943.

November at 'The Don' began with two enemy 'recce's' detected on the 1st. and 2nd - both north of Melville Island, one at 85 miles, the other at 88 miles - an indication of the reliable performance of the equipment and the operators. Mild earth tremors were experienced on the 6th, but they were not severe enough to disrupt a card party in the Rec. room....and over the 7th. and 8th. several short cricket matches were played between the Radar and Guard personnel. (Perhaps these were the forerunner of the now very popular one day matches?) Thirteen plots were passed on an enemy recce north of Melville on the 10th. - the plane was possible spying out the land for a heavy raid which followed on the 12th. over the Batchelor-Adelaide River area. 46 Radar detected the first wave of bombers at 135 miles - the second wave at 150 miles. The station maintained normal sweeps and search patterns during the raid, but nevertheless 36 plots were passed, and a 'Goody' was received from Fighter Sector. More cricket was played over the 14th. and 15th., and yet another recce was detected north of Melville at 59 miles on the 15th. COOLEBAR arrived on the 17th. with a beacon installation party and a change-over Guard detachment....the Guards were never considered as part of the station complement, being controlled from a Unit in Darwin..... and with

* The story from John Reen explains one of these incidents.

one month's mail which could not be unloaded and brought ashore because of incorrect stowage....(one has to wonder who was in charge of loading the ship)....However, perhaps as a safety valve, a Walrus arrived the following day with 'later date' mail - also fresh provisions.

Over the next few days, the busy Welfare and Entertainments Committee was hard at work arranging card and cricket activities, with the principal entertainment being the Old Guards playing the New Guards at the Royal, Ancient and Honourable Game....and the Walrus called yet again on the 22nd. with mail and foodstuffs.

COOLEBAR arrived again on the 24th., bringing a few visitors - but more importantly was her cargo for 'The Don' of station supplies, fuel and mail, this time no doubt loaded in such a manner that all came ashore quickly and easily over the next two days. Meanwhile, the visitors inspected the station, and one or two church services were held before COOLEBAR was ready to sail. The visitors then embarked, also the old Guard detachment, and all headed back to Darwin.

December 1943.

The station activities continued in rather similar fashion this month. There were Walrus arrivals, cricket matches and church services all requiring attention and support. But on the 6th. the Walrus was unable to take off because of rough seas. Another take off was attempted on the 7th., but this time the amphibian aircraft was damaged and assistance of some sort was necessary. Meanwhile a Naval launch arrived with the Staff Officer Intelligence - a Lieutenant - Commander whose visit to the Don Lighthouse Service resulted in a discussion concerning the possibility of the RAAF supplying or providing stores and rations to the lighthouse keepers still on service.

SAPPHIRE arrived on the 9th., also the launch WHYALLA, and their arrivals brought about the departure of the damaged Walrus, towed by SAPPHIRE and escorted by WHYALLA in case any assistance was needed.

The C.O. of 46 Radar, F/O Shaw, was posted to command 318 Radar on the 16th., (records suggest that 318 Radar was then at Cape Don) and a change-over of Officers was effected on the 27th. when F/O McDougall took over the station. At the same time F/O Reen was posted to 312 Radar on radar duties.

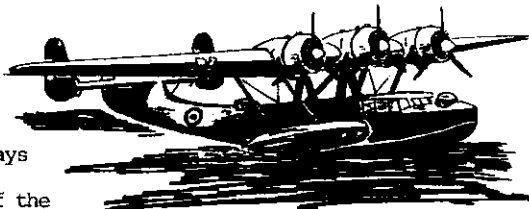
The new ASV beacon became operational on the 18th, and two welcome calls were made by the Walrus in the 'lead up' to the Christmas period, bringing mail and supplies - F/O Reen departing on one of the return flights.

Christmas Day 1943 at The Don was celebrated with a special dinner and party....Radar Station cooks always seemed to excel themselves for these very important occasions on the station calendar...and on the 26th. a 'Monster' Sports Carnival was held...also a church service. Three vessels called over the next few days...WHYALLA, supply vessel AK127, and HMAS SOUTHERN CROSS.

On New Year's Eve a Barbecue and Concert was held...and so the year 1943 drew to a close at 46 Radar with 51 men on strength, and with the station on watch for 720 hours for the month - 23 hours of normal maintenance, and only 1 hour when the station had to go 'Off Air' because of equipment breakdown.

January, 1944.

The New Year commenced at Cape Don with an afternoon cricket match and a church service - followed a few days later by a deck quoits competition - a new idea of the entertainments boys...especially popular as a prize had been allocated from Welfare Funds.



Dornier Flying Boat.

On the 7th. a powerline to the living quarters was finished, and the work of wiring the houses commenced...evidently to this time the houses had employed a different system of lighting. Then on the 11th. the supply vessel SAPPHIRE arrived with the regular supplies and mail, also a BL4 installation party, a Pay Clerk, and one airman on posting. The vessel departed again the following day.

Work on the installation of the BL4 equipment commenced on the 14th., and on the 18th. a Dornier Flying Boat arrived with Group Captain Farrar, the Principal Medical Officer; F/Lt. Stribbling the Area Messing Officer; the new C.O, F/O McDougall; 4 airmen, supplies and parcel mail. A quick inspection of the station was made, and three hours later the Dornier took off again with the visitors and seven airmen on posting; F/O McDougall assumed command that day, and F/O Shaw departed on SOUTHERN CROSS which had arrived earlier.

The installation of the BL4 was finished on the 21st., and a test of the equipment was quite satisfactory - and a Walrus amphibian arrived the next day with fresh meat and vegies, parcel and letter mail - it departed after only twenty minutes.

A cricket match was arranged for the afternoon of the 23rd., and a deck quoits competition began on the 24th. Some concern was felt when a strong wind and cyclone warning was received, but fortunately the station was not affected in any way.

A total of 1330 plots were passed for the month.

February 1944.

The month began with a breakdown in communications with NWA H/Q - the temperamental station battery charger became permanently U/S and Fighter Sector remained the only contact.

On the 6th., a cricket match was held and all personnel joined in...meanwhile a power unit was constructed from available components and a listening watch was set up, while outward traffic was still handled by Fighter Sector. Results were noted from plots showing IFF, and a 'Goody' was received from F/S on a plot of 173 miles...so it was decided that the installation of the BL4 was successful; and on the 13th. advice was received of an aircraft arrival, but while the plane arrived at the Don, it was not able to land. On the 14th., the COOLEBAR arrived with mail, gear and personnel...also a Sergeant to instruct personnel in gas defence and decontamination methods. Two battery chargers arrived the next day, and normal communications were soon resumed - meanwhile the visiting Sergeant gave instruction and demonstrations in gas effects and control. All personnel passed through a gas chamber, after which gas instruction was considered complete, and the Sergeant departed on a Walrus amphibian on the 20th.

A Naval vessel, ML 429 arrived after the Walrus had departed, and it stayed for only a short period while two airmen came ashore. Four days later the same launch returned, this time with mail; and one airman who had been posted out in the meanwhile left on her. Total plots for the month were 2151, and there were 47 men on the station, including the C.O.

March 1944.

March must have been a very quiet month at 'The Don,'....that's according to the Station Diary, for no activity of any sort whatever was noted until the 10th. when there was the excitement of a Walrus arriving, but even then it did not land as a heavy swell was running. The plane was able to land the next day when it returned with mail, some equipment and canteen goods....and an airman needing medical treatment returned to Darwin on the return flight.

There was a euchre tournament, and a cricket match about the middle of the month, and then two more Walrus arrivals, on the 14th. and the 28th.

A total of 1860 plots were passed to Fighter Sector this month, and the station complement is recorded as 1 Officer and 44 O/R's.

April 1944.

On April 6th., a signal from 6 Communications Unit was received, requesting attention be given to possible submerged rocks in the channel where the Walrus landed. A search was carried out, but the channel appeared to be clear. However, the best landing strip and channel was defined by placing poles topped by drums painted white.

A Walrus landed on the 10th., and some entertainment was organised for the 15th. when a cricket match was played.

As a precautionary measure, fire breaks were burnt so that phone and power lines were protected. And on the 22nd., a 'Housie' tournament proved popular, with prizes 'staked' by the Welfare Fund.

The total plots for this month were 3923.

May 1944.

The Diary for May is particularly non-informative, for the only station activities recorded are the arrivals and departures of three vessels..... the launch WHYALLA arrived on the 11th. and departed on the 13th., bringing 6 airmen on posting and taking 7 airmen back to Darwin. MEDEA arrived on the 16th., and departed on the 18th. And the AK121, OROEMTA arrived on the 20th. on survey duties and departed on the 25th.....returning again to carry on with the work on the 31st.

June 1944.

H.M.A.S BOMBO arrived on the 10th. June, departing on the following day after dropping off mail, equipment and two airmen... then A.K. 127 called en route to Goulburn Island, site of 309 Radar....then on the 12th. an enemy recon was plotted for half an hour...this was to prove probably the last enemy contact for 46 Radar.

Then came a quick call from an aircraft on the 13th., also a visit from the craft A.K. 127 on the 16th., and RAAF craft 03/12 on the 17th., to leave

4 cwt. of supplementary rations. RAAF vessel 03/12 was back again on the 23rd., and when she left again on the 25th., she took seven Guards recalled to their unit. Evidently the station was being reduced in complement status.



Walrus amphibian.

An aircraft called again on the 28th., bringing mail and rations...and so ended the month of June, with 35 men now on the station.

July 1944.

The RAAF Marine Launch 03-12 arrived at The Don on 1st. July, bringing the A.W. Maintenance Party - also P/O J.P.Gowing who was to assume command of the station - and on the 7th. the Army water carrier launch A.K.127 called in on its return trip from Goulburn Island. 03-12 was back again from Darwin on the 10th., this time bringing the C.O. of 44 Radar Wing, S/L. R.R.Chilton, S/L. C.T.Grout Smith, the Radar Officer, and F/O W.Sanderson, their task being to select a suitable site for the intended C.O.L Mk.V equipment which was to replace the A.W. And C.O. F/O McDougall was notified of his promotion to F/Lt. The party of visitors from Radar Wing was able to depart two days later.... and the work of the Maintenance Party was also completed, with the Radar Wing Officers travelling on the 03-12, and the maintenance mechanics on a visiting Walrus. Towards the end of the month, F/Lt. McDougall left the unit on posting - P/O Gowing assumed temporary command, and the water transport launch A.K.127 again called in on its way to Goulburn Island. The Area Chaplain and two Salvation Army Welfare Officers visited for two days...always a welcome visit at a remote Radar Station...and the station complement was now noted as 34 men...a considerable reduction in numbers. There had been three Walrus delivery flights during the month.

August 1944.

On August 1st., the launch 03-11 which had anchored overnight, departed for Snake Bay, returning two days later - and A.K. 127, the Army water carrier, called in on its return trip to Darwin after a delivery to Goulburn Island. A new camp for the unit's Guard detachment was begun away from the main camp at the light house station.... and on the 11th. a new type of aerial for Admin. W.T. transmissions was set up. On the 14th., an Anson aircraft dropped Safe Hand bags....and the following day saw the completion of the move for the Guards' camp. A picnic sports meeting at Alkira Bay was held on the 20th., and on the 21st. the M.V. KING BAY arrived with an attendant barge, carrying 318 Radar with F/O A. Campbell as C.O., its purpose at Cape Don being to experimentally try the site selected for the C.O.L. equipment. On the 24th August came a RED LETTER DAY for 46 Radar - the first ever picture show was held at The Don...the equipment and operator having arrived by Walrus. Pilot Officer Gowing was notified of his permanent command of 46 RS, effective from 18th. July. There had been several visits from launch 03-11 during the month, some of its trips being to Snake Bay on Melville Island....and A.K. 127; 03-12 and M.V. KING BAY also called.

September 1944.

The 46 RS Diary for the next few months can hardly be described as being very informative, other than noting arrivals and departures of delivery and service craft, both Marine and Airborne. Cape Don was now obviously on the route for deliveries to Snake Bay, Melville Island, and RAAF Marine Craft 03-11 and 03-12 were frequent callers....also a 6 Communications Unit Walrus amphibian which during September called on three occasions. Also on the 15th., COOLEBAR anchored for three days and Flying Officer Sanderson was an officer who came ashore - he was to instal the COL. This was apparently the delivery trip when the new COL equipment and generating Diesels were brought ashore and moved up to the Doover site which was immediately in front of the light house, with the power houses located between the Doover and the houses.

October 1944.

The station activities for October are also recorded in truly spartan fashion; RAAF launch 03-11 called several times - so too did the Walrus amphibians, which brought a movie show on one occasion...always a positive morale lifter at outlying stations. RAAF lugger 015-53 dropped anchor for two days, and a Cypher Officer called for two days - also a camouflage expert. The station complement had now been reduced to 32.

November 1944.

The Diary for November records no unit activities at all unfortunately, and again is principally a record of delivery arrivals and departures. BOMBO arrived on the 1st. and departed on the 4th., probably bringing more gear for the new COL set-up. A Walrus arrived on the 6th., and RAAF Marine craft 03-1 arrived with a posse of visiting officers on the 12th., stayed for two days then took two of them on to Snake Bay. 03-1 arrived back on the 16th., and then took all three officers back to Darwin. The last of the monthly Diary entries shows that the Walrus called with mail on the 22nd., 23rd., and the 27th. The station complement was 35.

December 1944.

A similar pattern continued for December, but with one important addition concerning the Doover late in the month. There were six Walrus amphibian arrivals....and RAAF launch 03-1 called in again on its way to Snake Bay....but the important entry shows that the Radar and W/T watch ceased on the 26th., and immediately afterwards the A.W. equipment and spares were packed for transport away, while on the 29th., the old Diesels were shut down, and the new Diesels were brought into use :- these apparently had been installed and were now ready for work. However, a glance at the station photographs show that a Christmas party was arranged, not only complete with gifts, but also a Radar Santa to hand them out. The 'Locals' evidently dressed for the occasion, which also suggests that a corroboree dance may have contributed to the festivities of the occasion. which was to be the last Christmas celebration of the war at 'The Don.' The station complement was 32.

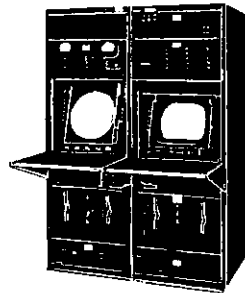
January 1945.

The New Year began at "The Don" with the Walrus flying in on four consecutive days, bringing mail and also the Presbyterian and the Catholic padres - obviously the station had a few church services to start the year.

But evidently the regular station work also progressed, for by the 10th. the old A.W. equipment had been packed and crated, and was at the loading point....probably the end of the tramway.

The RAAF Marine craft 03-1 arrived on the 13th., with the Radar Officer F/Lt. Meckelberg - also the radar and beacon mechanics who were to install the new gear. F/Lt. Meckelberg left the unit after two days.

Four additional Walrus visits were noted before the month ended...on the 18th., 20th., 21st., and the 22nd. Evidently 46 Radar was receiving better delivery services as the war progressed.....so too with other outlying stations.



C.O.L. Receiver.

February 1945.

The month began with another two Walrus visits....then the Church of England padre arrived on craft 03-1 which took him on to Snake Bay after two days. BOMBO arrived on the 10th. with 309 Radar on board - evidently after being collected from Goulburn - and to facilitate the loading of the heavy Diesels and the radar gear, BOMBO was accompanied by a barge and the launch DERNA. F/O Gallagher and the 309 personnel came ashore.

BOMBO departed from Cape Don on the 12th. taking the old gear...also F/Lt. Sanderson and his installation party who were returning to Darwin.

On February 13th. the launch 03-1 called in on her way back to Darwin from Snake Bay, but was back again on the 18th. bringing F/O Hickman who was to take over as C.O. of 46 Radar....also a bevy of Officers including F/O Gallagher who was to take over 318 Radar.

Meanwhile, a very regular and reliable mail service was being maintained by the ever reliable Walrus.

The station complement now numbered 29.

March 1945.

On March 8th., the Walrus arrived with mail, fresh meat and vegies, and even fresh eggs! And on the 10th. launch 03-1 arrived from Darwin. F/O Gowing handed over command to F/O Hickman, and the previous C.O. was able to depart on the launch which returned to Darwin two days later.

On that same day....12th. March....the new COL equipment became fully operational and a 24 hour watch was once again taken up by 46 Radar.

There were problems of a different kind on the 13th. It seems that numerous leaks had developed in the water pipe line, and probably to conserve water, a tank was erected near the well.

On the 15th. launch 03-1 arrived from Darwin with yet more visiting officers, and F/O Gallagher moved to take over 318 Radar which eventually was to be re-located to Cape Van Diemen.

A big day on the 16th. A film show was organised. These were still quite a rarity at Cape Don.

On the 21st. as part of the 'running in' process, the new equipment was calibrated with flights at 2000 feet and 20000 feet.

And on the same day the camp water supply failed completely....the pump had become a casualty, and until spare parts could be obtained, the camp had to rely on the tanks and a windmill...which was not much help as there was no wind!

On the 24th., RAAF ketch 06-11 YALATA called with mail and one passenger, and the 30th. brought relief from the water shortage when rain fell and there was sufficient wind to work the windmill.

April 1945.

The appearance of RAAF craft 03-11 heralded the arrival of the Radar Officer, F/Lt. D.G.Scott and Equipment Officer F/Lt. D.Boyle, both being from ADHQ - but more importantly the launch brought the much sought and very necessary pump parts and new piping to restore the water supply system, which was working within 24 hours.

Over the next few days, 03-11 made two trips to Cape Van Diemen, taking men and equipment to set up 318 Radar at its new location....also taking as passengers the two officers from ADHQ. And launch 03-1 arrived on the 11th., bringing the Messing Officer to inspect the Mess and Rations Store. On the 19th. the Walrus arrived with an ever popular movie show...and it came again the following day with meat and mail.

03-11 arrived again on the 24th. with a Pay Clerk, a Fitter DMT and a Sgt. Operator....also a new turning gear motor for the radar aerial. This was duly installed when the station went 'Off Air' for 9 hours on the 26th. and all performed well when tested.

May 1945.

On the 3rd. May the turning gear became U/S completely due to a broken shaft. Two days later replacement parts arrived, and normal operations were resumed on the 7th.

There were V.E. celebrations and station stand-down on the 9th. Some rewiring was then attended to, and calibration flights resumed on the 16th. when the Walrus also arrived with fresh provisions.....including eggs! There were two more Walrus arrivals on the 20th. and 21st. with fresh provisions....and with a movie show.....then a calibration flight by a Spitfire was also arranged.

There were pictures again on the 25th. and 03-1 also arrived on the 29th. on a regular run from Darwin.

June 1945.

June proved a very quiet month. The new equipment was now operating efficiently, and 3 Walrus arrivals brought mail and equipment, also a picture show and two entertainers who evidently were visiting outlying stations in turn as transport became available.

RAAF 017-30 arrived with rations....also 03-11 which was en route to Melville Bay, near Gove. A cinema projector was left at the station for installation at 'The Don,' also canteen supplies and replacement personnel were dropped off. There were now 26 personnel.

July 1945.

The projector was installed and a picture show was arranged that night. On the 4th. a Walrus arrived with provisions, and the Sgt Cinema Operator responsible for setting up the station projector was able to return to Darwin. The RAN ASR craft AIR SAILOR called in # a 63 foot craft probably on its delivery run from Queensland, for in August it took up duties at Truscott.

On the 10th. and 11th. July, as a part of the camp duties, firebreaks were burnt around the key areas of the camp...particularly towards the power house and Doover where the power and phone lines could easily be destroyed. On the day following, marine craft 03-12 called and stayed overnight, leaving next day for Darwin with 8 personnel posted away from The Don. The same craft was back again on the 20th. with W/O Scadden and his maintenance party, and after preparatory work and testing, the station went 'Off Air' on the 22nd. which continued for the next 6 days.

August. 1945.

HMAS MORESBY called at the station on August 3rd., and Surgeon Lieutenant Carter came ashore to visit and to render any medical service needed. A Walrus called with a cinema operator, and at 1930 hours that evening, "Sensations of '45" was screened.

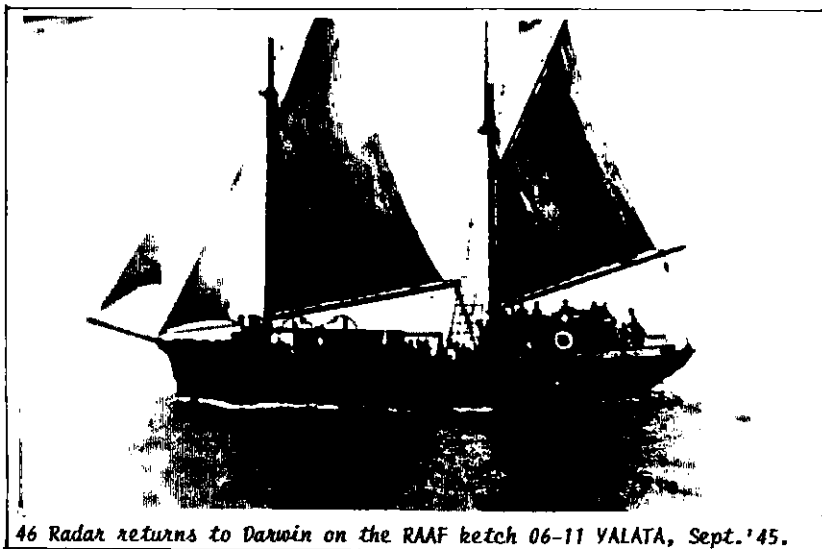
The 14th. August was a very eventful day for the station...ketch 06-11 YALATA arrived at 1300 hours....a Walrus arrived at 1430 hours...then at 1630 hours the Walrus crashed and sank while attempting to take-off. On board were the Pilot, F/O Denning and the aircraft fitter; W/O Scadden who was in charge of the maintenance party, and LAC Jeffree, a Guard. Fortunately, all were rescued and no injuries were apparent, but the Walrus was a complete loss. RAAF and NWA Headquarters, 6 Communications Unit and ADHQ were notified by immediate signal. All outward mail on board was lost in 40 feet of water.

(A story at the time related that W/O Scadden, a large, powerful man, could not possibly have escaped through the small window....but he did!)

On the 15th. came news of Japan's willingness to surrender unconditionally.

Then came 'stand-down' for two days, with operations resuming again on the 17th.

The final entry in the Diary at 46 Radar...30th. August, marine craft 017-30 arrived with supplies, and mail and supplies dropped from Vultee Vengeance.



46 Radar returns to Darwin on the RAAF ketch 06-11 YALATA, Sept.'45.

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PERSONNEL LIST.

The names of those who 'formed' with the station in Sydney are shown on this page. The names were advised from the Discharged Personnel Section, RAAF Records.

46 RDF Station first formed at Mascot on 15th. January, 1943

P/O A.H.Freeman, (first C.O.15.1.43)

F/O E.H.Shaw. (26.1.43)

P/O A.H.Freeman (No.2 I/C)

RDF Mechanics.

| | | |
|-----|----------|--------|
| LAC | Duff | T.G. |
| AC1 | Peterson | R.B. |
| " | Spencer | T.E. |
| " | Thiem | M.S. |
| Cpl | Corless | E.W.S. |

RDF Operators.

| | | |
|-----|-----------|--------|
| AC1 | Armstrong | W.S. |
| " | Callahan | J.E. |
| " | Dyke | C.R. |
| " | Swanson | J.D. |
| " | Schmidt | L.H. |
| " | Weinert | M.L. |
| " | Fox | T.P. |
| " | Hingston | V.P. |
| " | Thom | R.G. |
| " | Quirk | R.E.I. |

Clerks.

| | | |
|-----|---------|------|
| LAC | Hollett | C.A. |
| " | Tucker | R.N. |

Cooks.

| | | |
|-----|---------|------|
| LAC | Hawkins | A.J. |
| " | Sanford | B.G. |

W/T Operators.

| | | |
|-----|---------|--------|
| LAC | Price | A.L. |
| AC1 | Cuckson | P.V. |
| " | Fenton | J.H.C. |
| " | Walker | R.H. |

Mess.

| | | |
|-----|---------|------|
| LAC | Hubbard | B.J. |
| " | Davey | S.F. |
| " | Town | J.C. |

Fitter DMT.

| | | |
|-----|--------|------|
| LAC | Dann | A.G. |
| " | Tunkin | W.J. |

Medical Orderly.

| | | |
|-----|--------|------|
| LAC | Harman | F.G. |
|-----|--------|------|

Driver M.T.

| | | |
|-----|--------|------|
| AC1 | Thomas | L.E. |
|-----|--------|------|

General Hand.

| | | |
|-----|--------|--------|
| AC1 | Newman | J.D.F. |
|-----|--------|--------|

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PERSONNEL LIST.

This Personnel List comprises only those names remembered, or noted on photos, or perhaps mentioned in the Diary. The list then, can only be regarded as comprising names encountered while the story was being prepared. **In no way can it be considered a complete list....there could be dozens of names not recorded.**

Jack Fraser.
Ron Sawade.
Max Counsell.
James Harper.
Lionel Gilbert.
Cliff Burnett.
Eric Wilson.
Frank Bratby.
'Doc' Green.
Clarrie Bennett.
Harry Roach.
Stewart Gunthorpe.
Geoff Wilson.
Kev Hawkins.
George Dunn
Clive Harberg.
Lloyd Eva.
Sid Rippon.
Lew Knight.
Keith Pettit.
Eric Post.
Phil Kelly.
Peter Finlayson.
Bill Tonkin.
Paul Butler.
Jack Kelly.
Tony Hick.
Rod Harris.
Clem Richardson.
- Price.
Jeff Wehring.

Guards.

Mel Snowden. Sgt.
Frank Gunn.
- Mac Gillivray.
S.B.Chapman.
M.M.Miller.
J.G.Tenham.
L.L.Ward.
A.L.Brisbane.
R.L.Dean.
F.W.Haby.
V.H.Riley.
R.G.A.Wiseman.
L.A.Smith.
L.C.G.Pedler.
- Jeffree.
- McCann.
- Burton.

Lighthouse men.

George Knight.
Charles Johnson.

Commanding Officers.

P/O A.H.Freeman. 15/1/43
F/O E.H.Shaw. 26/1/43
F/O H.McDougall. 18/1/44
P/O J.P.Gowing. 15/7/44 (Temp)
" 24/8/44
F/O P.L.Hickman. 10/3/45

Other Officers.

P/O A.H.Freeman. 26/1/43
P/O J.Reen. 2/9/43



A few 'Don' personalities...

(Top left.) Lloyd Eva, Phil Kelly, Keith Pettit and Col Hollett.

(Right.) Peter Finlayson.

(Lower Left.) Cliff Burnett on the tube, and (Right.) Rod Harris.

Photos: Jack Fraser; Cliff Burnett and Rod Harris.



The Don Scene.....



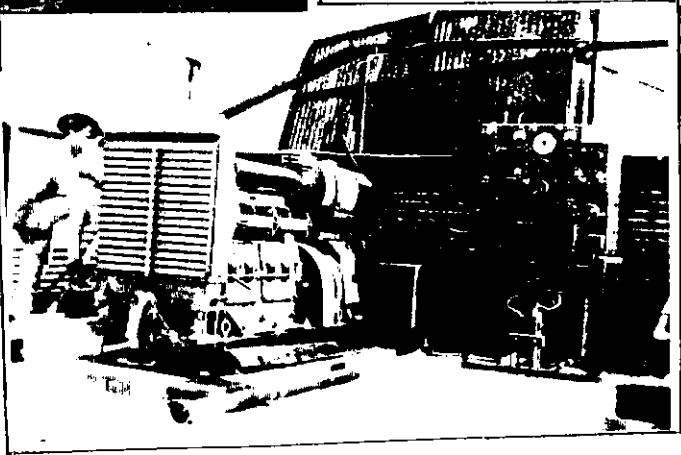
Left. Cliff Burnett and fishing mates, Eric Post at the right with a typical Don shark.

Below. Cliff Burnett and a fishing mate out in the station dinghy.



Left. Eric Post and a mate try a native dugout canoe for comfort.

Below. The Listers about to be closed down in 1945.



Photos.

The top three
from
Cliff Burnett.



THE LIGHTHOUSE MEN.

George Knight and Charles Johnson would have undoubtedly been very happy - and mighty relieved - to have company arrive early in 1943 when 46 RDF came ashore at the 'Don.'

There were three light keepers when the RAAF first arrived...their families had been evacuated from what was then a very conspicuous and vulnerable Australian outpost...indeed a forward war area....leaving the three the lonely custodians of the cape.

As often seems to happen in such cases, two were friends and worked well together. The third was sometimes not in harmony with the others, and left the scene, leaving George and Johnno to hold the fort. They were ex-Navy men, and were under the control of the Navy, but their duties were mainly maintenance, with the light being lit on few occasions. However, the RAAF men made life far more interesting for the two with social evenings, cards, talk sessions and so on, and their hobby of creating tortoise-shell trinkets and preserving the creatures as ornaments found ready sales among the RAAF men, (though their hobby might find little favour with the conservationists of today.)

George and Johnno were again a lonely duo when the RAAF left Cape Don in September 1945, but their company made life far more interesting for the radar men for almost three years. They invoke happy memories still among the men who knew them.

(Photos, Cliff Burnett)



POSTED TO 46 RDF STATION, AUGUST 1943.

Jack Fraser.

My posting out from 44 RDF Wing, where I had been stationed since January 1943 arrived in August of that year - my destination was 46 RDF station at Cape Don on the western tip of Cobourg Peninsula, 135 miles north east of Darwin. The immediate problem of how to get there was solved when a Navy supply ship was due to pass the area shortly. With another mechanic, Lew Knight, I boarded the small ship TERKA on September 1st, 1943. The TERKA, and her sister ship TOLGA had been built to carry granite blocks from Moruya on the south coast of N.S.W. to Sydney to be used in the pylons of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, and were now Navy supply ships. And we quickly realised that food in the Navy was much better than food in the Air Force. The captain of the ship decided that we should earn our passage by doing turns on watch to spot for enemy planes. After one boring shift of four hours standing in the ship's stern, we noticed that on a raised deck were two deck chairs, so on the next shift we climbed up and settled ourselves in these chairs. This was far better and more efficient as we had a much better view of the sky, but it was not seen that way by the skipper when he saw us "lounging on his private deck." So for the rest of the trip we were considered unfit for Navy duty, and we enjoyed the time counting turtles swimming on the surface and watching sharks in the clear still water.

On reaching Cape Don, the ship anchored in the open sea, and we were picked up in Aboriginal dug-out canoes and taken to shore. On the way we saw a number of crocodiles on the surface in the shade of the mangroves that covered the shoreline. At the lighthouse pier we noted the signwritten words on an arch -"Abandon Hope All Ye Who Enter Here." We wondered if that was put there because of experience or in humour....but we never found out.

Our gear was loaded onto a trolley on rail tracks and pushed up the rather steep hill to the houses around the lighthouse. We found that our accommodation was to be in one of the three houses originally built for the lighthouse keepers and their families. One now housed the Commanding Officer, F/O Shaw, the Technical Officer P/O Reen, and the Sergeant Medical Orderly. A second was the home of the light keepers, while the RDF and Administrative Staff were billeted in the third. So our living conditions were very good, and we were happy to have the four Mechanics in the one room. The Senior Mechanic was Ted Corless, whom we considered old at 40. The station Guards lived in tents among the trees away from the houses, and as a result there was very little mixing between the two groups.

No attempt was made to camouflage the houses as they had been there for many years, and were surrounded by grassy paddocks. We tracked some Japanese planes that used the lighthouse as a navigation point, as did American planes on their way home from bombing raids. The track of about a mile to the operations site (the Doover, Lister diesels and the W/T hut) wound through heavy bush and would not have been seen from the air. On my first walk down this track to go on duty I was followed by two of the Guards. I think I was being tested in some way as .303 bullets were fired into the ground not far from me. I decided to ignore this and continued on my way, and evidently I passed the test as I afterwards got good cooperation from the Guards. To walk the track on a dark night was almost impossible, so the duty personnel would sleep in a hammock made from camouflage netting and slung between trees until awakened by the men coming off shift. The mosquitoes seemed in favour of this practice as they obviously enjoyed us being there. And on some nights we would be awakened by the noise of kangaroos crashing through the bush. Another problem at night was the large spider webs often

strung between the trees. These spiders were very large and their webs very strong. The proof of this was shown on one occasion when we found a bird entangled in a web and unable to escape.

46 RDF was one of the early stations established in the North West Area, and had been operating for probably six months when I arrived. It was one of the original Air Warning units developed before the LW/AW, but used the same transmitter and receiver, mounted in standard metal cabinets. The Doover building was made from corrugated iron on a wooden frame which was popular with the huge termites which lived in the vicinity. The antenna was built into an angle iron frame and was turned too slowly for impatient operators during the tracking of enemy aircraft. We all regretted our instructions that the antenna must be fully rotated during tracking.

An aerial bomb, thought to be a 100 pounder, was kept in the Doover at all times, but we soon became accustomed to having it under a seat. In a shallow depression not far from the huts more of these bombs were stored, covered with camouflage netting. Our instructions were that in the event of an enemy landing, we should place a bomb under each motor/generator and in the wireless hut, insert detonators, run wires to a slit trench, connect the exploder, then blow up everything. One day during a demolition drill I found the exploder, which was kept up in the turning mechanism room above the Doover, was riddled with white ants. The exploder was put on a meat ant nest and the ants despatched the termites very quickly. These super termites were about 15 mm long, and they even attacked us when operating the equipment, falling from the roof area onto our shirtless bodies. One day a grass fire raced through the area, and some of those on duty thought of the bomb dump and "made themselves scarce." However, the Mechanic on duty, Ron Peterson, climbed onto the dump and tore the burning netting away. That took some courage!

A group of Aborigines lived on the flat below the cliff near our quarters. They had been raised on or near the Mission Stations at Bathurst Island or Croker Island and spoke quite good English. Regulations stated that they were to be given rations, and each morning and afternoon they came to the Orderly Office with empty four gallon drums. Into these the Duty NCO put their food entitlement, consisting of flour, tea, sugar and rice. I was on duty on Christmas Day 1943 and supplied double rations in the morning with explicit instructions that there would be no more that evening. But that evening along came the boss man and his carriers, and there was no way they would go back to their camp without the normal evening ration. So I learned how shrewd those fellows were, and I was not caught again. About a month later we had a food shortage and had to buy back some supplies from the Aborigines at extortionately inflated prices....supply and demand! The Aborigines worked for us in return for the food provided for their camp. Two were assigned to the Mechanics; one was named Jimmy who had a withered arm, and both were good workers. They decided to help by pouring a concrete floor in the workshop attached to the Doover, using a drum of cement that had long been ordered and had just arrived. There was always several inches of fine dust on the floor which had to be removed before laying the concrete, but that did not bother Jimmy. When no one was in the workshop, they mixed all the concrete with water and poured it all over the floor. Naturally it was no help, but what could we say. We soon had our floor of dust again.

We would sometimes get the Aborigines to take us spear fishing on the nearby coral reef, and they would show us how to spear the fish. But all they

obtained went back to their camp so again they were too clever for us. We held a sports meeting before Christmas and invited Jimmy and his mates to take part....sure enough, they won all the foot races.

The Guards, who seemed to eat better than the rest of us, killed another of the local goats and cooked it on a spit they had constructed. We ate the meat between army biscuits, and it was a change from bully beef and M & V. I said "another" goat as the herd was steadily diminishing, and those of us living in the house never saw any of the meat. The Guards also had the job of transporting food supplies when a ship or seaplane arrived, bringing the supplies up to the store on the rail trolley. Usually it was said that some fell off the trolley on the way. Sufficient to say that we had nothing but basic rations in our Mess.

On one well remembered occasion we became very low in food, and we ended up with little else but bully beef, weevily rice and a number of forty pound tins of sour dried apricots. There was no tea, sugar or smokes of any kind. The canteen seldom had supplies while I was at the station. During this period food was continually requested from Wing with no result. The smokers were desperate and went to great lengths to get anything resembling tobacco. They cut up the hollow metal legs of one airman's bed because it was known that at night he put his butts down them. They fossicked in the grass around the base of the lighthouse looking for fag ends the lighthouse keepers threw over the parapet way up above. At that time of enforced deprivation, it was hard to live with the smokers.

At last a signal came saying supplies were on the way, and eventually a small yacht, the LADY YVETTE, sailed into our tidal lagoon. They certainly brought food - most of it in six pound tins of bully! But it was a change as our existing bully was in one pound tins! However, whoever packed the tins in wooden boxes had driven many of the nails into the tins instead of the wood. The result was these tins had "blown." But they did bring supplies of tobacco for which even the non-smokers were grateful. The Officers and men of the yacht were not in regulation uniform but wore lap-laps made from the yacht's curtains. We thought they must be more "troppo" than our Guards who claimed that disability of the tropics. But they made a hit with us when it was found they had brought mail from home.

One day a large seaplane landed in the ocean near the Cape, and it brought a group of senior officers who told us we were the RAAF's most isolated outpost. They even promised a better supply service from Darwin, and although we did not get the bi-weekly delivery as promised, it became much better. Then on October 4th., F/Lt. Wadsley, C.O. of Wing, came on a supply ship to inspect the station. It was at this time we were advised that the term 'RDF' had been replaced with the term 'Radar.'

But despite all these other happenings, we were conscientious in our work, and had very few periods when the antenna was not turning, and a capable operator, or mechanic, had his eyes glued to the receiver screen. If the W/T operator did not get a plot by phone regularly, he would check that all was well. The W/T hut was about 100 yards down the hill from the Doover, and near the generators. My first experience with a raid was on October 7th. when planes attacked Darwin. We were the first to report enemy aircraft, and later our station was given a "goody" from Fighter Sector. Later that day we were off the air for ninety minutes with a fault. We found the problem to be a badly fitting Jones plug...and three days later both Lew Knight and I were notified we were now Corporals, back dated to August 1st. In the next few weeks a number of faults developed, but we did not have much time off the air, although for several days we had to run on low power because

of a combination of faults. However, the siting of the station was such that tracking aircraft was not diminished to any extent. Another fault that troubled us later was bad focus due to a troublesome potentiometer. From time to time a valve lost power and had to be replaced, so to save time we built a "valve age-er" in which the replacement valve spent a short time so that when it was transferred into the operating gear, no time was lost in getting it to settle down.

Senior Mech. Ted Corless and Corporal Mech. Ron Peterson were posted back to Wing, and departed November 25th. I was then made Senior Mechanic. This enabled me to finish an innovation on the receiver that F/O Reen had authorised. We had felt that it would be much more interesting for the operators if they knew where the plots they found were coming from, so we set out to do something about it. We drew an accurate scale map of our search area, surrounded it with the 360 degree compass points then mounted it on a square board. This was then attached with hinges to the receiver frame at eye level. Metal was cut from the top of a 44 gallon diesel fuel drum, and a scaled pointer was made from it. When the Selsyn motor was mounted in the centre of the compass circle, the pointer was fixed to the motor's shaft. This enabled the operator not only to give Fighter Sector the distance and direction of the plot, but also to see for himself where the plot was on the map.

F/O Reen left on December 22nd. by Walrus which left us without a Technical Officer. F/O Kay was on the station with a working party installing BL4 equipment, and he was put in temporary charge of operations, but left the running of it to me. I carried on when he and his party left for Wing on January 12th. Terry Spencer, a Mechanic, left on the same ship. Our new C.O., F/O McDougall, arrived on a Dornier Flying Boat, and later on the same day F/O Shaw departed on the SOUTHERN CROSS. Lew Knight and several other postings left on the same ship. Another Mechanic, Theo Duff, arrived as replacement.

We had been told by Wing that our station was not covering the sector south of the station. This was evident to them because there was little activity in that area of the wall chart covered by our station. Of course the reason for this was that we were always told to stop recording when it was our own planes flying in that area. When enemy raiders attacked Darwin, we had no trouble tracking them. On one occasion we were the only station to pick up the raiders on course for Batchelor, according to Fighter Sector.

Our sightings were not always useful. On one occasion we tracked what was thought could be an invasion force. A large plot was picked up approaching from the direction of Timor. It was travelling at an estimated 20 m.p.h. and appeared to be a convoy of ships. This apparently caused consternation in Darwin and we received a long message in code by W/T. But either we or Fighter Sector were using the wrong day's Syko code sheet because we could not decipher it. So more urgent coded messages were received and we became even more confused. This went on for a long time while we recorded the blips coming ever closer. It was eventually resolved when the "convoy" reached us and passed right over the Cobourg Peninsula. We had tracked a storm...but it was nothing compared with the storm which arose later over the coded messages.

The C.O. decided before Christmas that it would be good to have electricity in our accommodation houses. We set about this, and strung wire, especially requisitioned for the purpose, between trees from the Lister units at operations to the house area. After rudimentary wiring of the houses, we erected

a freshly cut-down tree pole near the other ranks' house and fitted a home-made 'insulator.' I affixed the lead from the house to this insulator and then, without walking the mile to ops to cut off the power, set about connecting the wires. I was on the ladder, wearing only shorts, and to maintain my balance while using both hands, rested my chest against the pole, which was wet with sap. I was wet with perspiration, and on removing the insulation from the active lead, received a nasty shock which removed me from the ladder post haste. I did not want to try that again and the power was switched off smartly. The lights incidentally proved a great success.

Our ablution and toilet facilities left a lot to be desired. Water was obtained from a well near the houses. We wondered how good water could be found on top of a cliff, and it was no surprise when we were ordered to limit ourselves to three water-bottles of water per day for both drinking and washing. It was hard - but we managed until the arrival of the wet season and we were again allowed the use of water in the bucket shower attached to the limb of a tree. The airmens' latrine consisted of several 44 gallon drums with holes cut in the top. These were mounted over the usual trench dug in the ground - a pole was erected at each corner of the rectangle and a corrugated iron roof fixed. There were no walls. Some of the natives from the camp had a sense of humour which caused us a problem. For instance, three of us were sitting on the drums late one afternoon, doing what comes naturally, when several of the girls came and stood in a group about ten yards away, giggling. There we sat and stayed, suffering from the myriads of sandfly bites, and asking politely for the girls to move on. Eventually they became tired of their game and left.

A hero of the outlying Radar stations was F/Lt 'Doc' Fenton, C.O. of 6 Communications Flight, and at our camp we had good reason to think he was a good guy. On one occasion we had not received mail for some time when a signal was received that an aircraft was on its way with supplies. We believed the plane would be a Walrus, a part fabric seaplane or amphibian equipped also with wheels allowing use on either land or water. Both wings were mounted above the fuselage, and the motor was the pusher type with the propeller pushing the plane rather than pulling it. It was slow - we thought its cruising speed was about 65 miles per hour. Eventually our radar picked it up and we were kept informed of its progress, using the phone we had recently run from ops to the houses. However, the ocean at the landing area was rough and the pilot just circled the area a few times then headed back for Darwin. Our welcoming waves turned to gestures of considerable disappointment!

Later a plane coming from Darwin was picked up, and this time it came in to land on the tidal lagoon near our pier. This was dangerous at low tide, as the area was mostly mud flats, and the navigable channel was marked by old railway lines driven into the mud. Doc Fenton was the pilot as we knew no other pilot would land where he did. A native dug-out canoe was taken out to the plane and the supplies were unloaded. For Christmas he had brought us mail, a box of beer, and a box of beetroot. We suspected there was more but we 'other ranks' did not see it. In the mail I received a Christmas cake which was enjoyed by all even though a bottle of Californian Popy hair oil in the package had broken and the contents seeped into the cake.

46 Radar at Cape Don was a happy station, and not many men were anxious to go back to the mainland unless leave was due. I would have stayed longer but received a posting, and on February 20th. 1944 went aboard Navy Fairmile Subchaser 429 for transport back to Darwin. It was not a direct trip

as the ship was on patrol and first sailed to Croker Island and met the ship COOLEBAR with Keith Pettit on board. Keith had left 46 RS earlier on posting and was enjoying a leisurely trip. The Fairmile had hit a reef before reaching Cape Don and was shuddering because the twin propellers had been damaged. Our next stop was Snake Bay on Melville Island where the ship was beached and an effort was made to correct the prop blades using a blow torch, but with no success. During the day, however, two of us went fishing and made a good catch. We were in the ship's row boat and the weather was hot, and so the fish went bad before we returned, so there was no fish dinner. It was February 26th. when I arrived back at 44 Radar Wing.

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STUDY TIME AT THE DON.

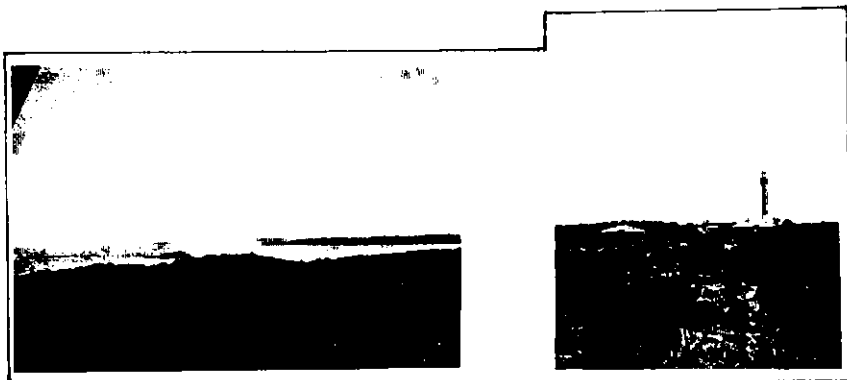
Cliff Burnett.

I was at Cape Don from 25th. March 1944...I was there because of the flooding of 161 Radar at Adelaide River. I left about 21st. August, so I was at the Don for about five months.

Our quarters in one of the lighthouse keepers' cottages were very comfortable. Fishing was obviously a popular activity, but other than our shifts on the Doover, there wasn't much to do. I was fortunate in being enrolled in Year 3 of the B.Ec. course at Sydney University. Eric Post helped me with his knowledge of Accountancy, and I was able to sit for the examination under the supervision of the Commanding Officer. I was quite sorry to be moved after only five months.

I remember Johnno and George quite well...they were always ready to tell stories to groups of airmen...stories which I am sure gained much in the telling!

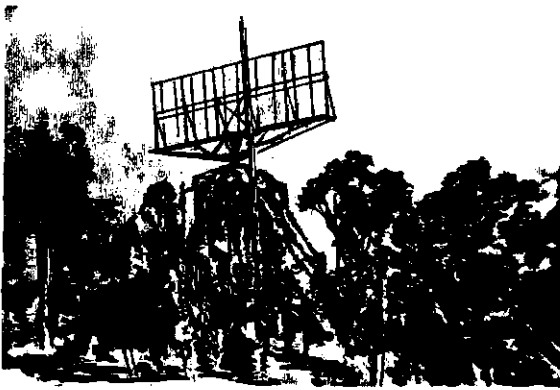
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Two views from the Doover. (Left) Looking northwards.. and (Right) Looking towards the lighthouse. The camouflaged engine-house is in the centre foreground.

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DON MISCELLANIA.....



(Left.) Another Doover photo....a bit indistinct, but 'touched up' for a better result.

Below.(Left.) The Sgt. Mech. nurses an orphan of the bush. (Right.) The Barber of the Don..Phil Kelly trims Bill Tonkin's hair.

Bottom. On guard for sharks and crocs. One shot and the water was cleared.



Photos from Jack Fraser, Cliff burnett, and Rod Harris.

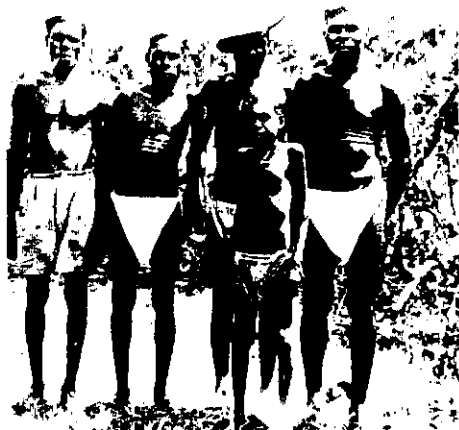
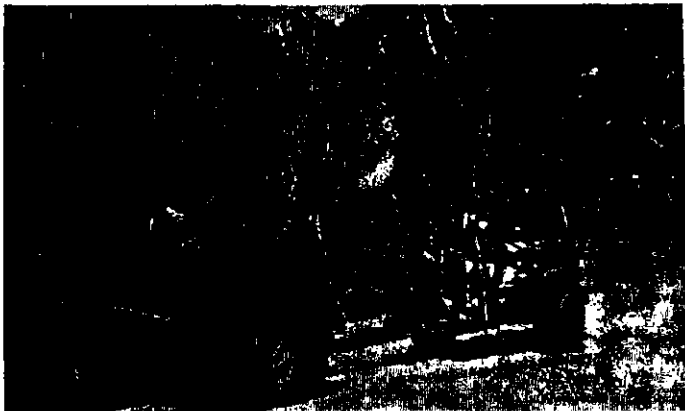




The Aboriginal folk at Cape Don became an important part of the little radar community, joining in most of the activities. The details of all the photos is not known, but in the lower photos can be seen the 'fillies' race at a picnic;- 'one arm Jimmy' working on a ceremonial spear, probably for trade purposes, and young Archie, the serious faced youngster who was to be seen most days around the camp houses.



Photos: Rod Harris.



More photos of the local Aboriginal people at the Don. The top photo shows all who helped with the COL installation having fun on the tractor.

Photos from Cliff Burnett and the Sanderson collection.



FADED ECHOES OF 46 RADAR, CAPE DON, COBOURG PENINSULA.

Lionel Gilbert.

Looking back after fifty years, the most memorable thing about being posted on 1st. June 1944 from 210 RS at Toorbul Point near Caboolture to 46 RS at Cape Don on Cobourg Peninsula was the seemingly endless journey. But in view of the remoteness of many, if not most of the radar stations, this should not have been surprising.

The journey began in an RAAF tender from Toorbul Point to Caboolture, continued by rail (three gauges) to South Brisbane; Sydney (week's leave); Melbourne (Cricket Ground, 10 days in a fog-filled grandstand, 9-19th June); Adelaide; Terowie (20-23rd June in the Army Staging Camp, held up by the old locomotive on the 'train ahead' which blew a piston) to Alice Springs; then by road convoy up the Stuart Highway to Birdum (29th. June) with a final 3'6" gauge rail journey to near Darwin (12th. July) in closed cattle trucks with sliding doors on the side, and historical traces of the northern cattle industry on the floor.

After fatigue duties around the latrines of 44 Wing, and in digging, spreading and rolling an ant-bed floor for a new Mess shelter, there was a Pay Parade during which F/Lt. Robert Chilton advised that I was to go to Cape Don, and was to be on the wharf by 6 a.m. the following morning, 23rd July. Powered by three large Chrysler engines, the 60-foot lightly armed torpedo recovery boat took some 12 hours for the final 120 miles of the journey which had taken me nearly eight weeks.

Apart from the roughness of the outer sea, the most impressive aspects of this last lap of the journey were firstly, the slow movement past the rather eerie forest of masts and funnels of sunken ships before passing through the great anti-submarine boom guarded by HMAS KOOKABURRA, and then shortly seeing flying-fish and massive water spouts for the first time. Most on board were sadly seasick, including an Anglican Padre and a Salvation Army Officer; but the RAAF skipper, with his tiny pet sugar-glider secure in the pocket of his rough-weather coat, steadfastly held his small vessel on course, while a trusty deckhand brought from below a large tray of freshly fried chops for lunch.....!

At the end of what was literally a 'rough day,' we beheld the spectacular sight of the Cape Don lighthouse, before easing into a virtually hidden inlet amid coral reefs and muddy mangrove thickets, and tying up at a diminutive wharf.

Standing on a high knoll of ironstone, the lighthouse was (and is) a cylindrical reinforced concrete structure standing on an octagonal base. It was commissioned in 1917, and two months after completion, the structure had been sorely tested by an earthquake. A grave near the wharf mutely suggested that all had not gone completely without incident during the construction. The materials and equipment could not be landed close to the construction site, and so a 3 mile light railway of about 2 foot gauge had been built for horses and trollies. A section of this line now remained between the later small wharf and the lighthouse area for the transport of kit bags, mail bags, stores, fuel and other necessities. The intervening slope tested the manpower of both RAAF men and the local Aborigines. However, the return journeys could be extremely fast, with gravity and foolhardiness, and the slight comfort of a wooden brake.

Three houses had been built for the light-keepers and their families. In

mid-1944 Messrs George Knight and Charles Johnson manned the light between them, and they lived in one of the houses. Another was occupied by the C.O. and Administration, also the Sergeants, while the third including its verandahs provided accommodation, a recreation room, a Mess room and kitchen for the men, chiefly Mechanics, Operators, Cook, Messman, General Hands and a few of the Guards. Elsewhere there were Guards' tents and a tent for the Operators on shift near the Dover a mile or more away through thick bush. The light-keepers were frequent visitors to the men's quarters, forever chaffing 'the young Air Force blokes' and drawing regretted comparisons with the way servicemen 'used to be.' There would be the usual good-humoured exchanges until the inevitable "Ah, get back to your bloody candle and leave us alone!" The light-keepers were in contact with Darwin, and lit the light only when Allied shipping was due to use the Strait.

The radar gear, installed in March 1943 was standard motor-driven A.W. equipment on an elevated site overlooking the sea. The antenna motor was effective but noisy. The Dover was constructed of iron with a timber floor a little above the ground. About 20 or 30 yards away was a stores and equipment shed, also of iron, under the floorboards of which lay some sinister looking bombs ready to oblige with demolition in the event of invasion. Further down the slope inland about 50 yards away was another iron-walled building housing the plotting table and radio equipment which kept the station in contact with 5 Fighter Sector and the Operations Room in Darwin. It also received Japanese radio signals, probably from the occupied Tanimbar Islands about 180 miles to the north. In the quiet of night, the sound of creaking timber could be heard quite distinctly as the industrious termites tunnelled their way through the supports of the benches on which the equipment stood.

It was determined that No. 46 had a 'blind spot' to the all important north, occasioned by the transmission lobe being deflected upwards, thereby reducing the range. Blind spot or not, on one memorable night, there appeared at short range the characteristic 'beating blip' of a surface vessel. Yet no ships were known to be in the area, either by Darwin headquarters or by the light-keepers. There came an order to watch and follow this 'target' closely. But its movement was slow, if in fact discernible at all. Clearly it was my own personal encounter with the Japanese Imperial Navy ---no doubt a submarine had surfaced to charge its batteries or to have a breath of fresh air. As excitement grew, the blip faded, then disappeared. Obviously the submarine had dived. Of course, we had all heard about vigilant operators locating whales and floating packing cases, and other odds and ends. The next night, there it was again, a little later, a large beating blip. My submarine was a cheeky one, returning to confound the valiant defenders of our extensive shoreline. More panic, and once again the echo faded. The explanation: climatic conditions had caused the transmission lobe to dip, picking up a coral reef, which simply disappeared from view when the tide rose. What an unconvincing argument! Anyway, apparently either my submarine or the coral reef sailed away...or the transmission lobe straightened out....but to this day I retain a distrust of cathode ray oscilloscopes and screens. Which is why I typed this on a manual Olivetti, bought second-hand over thirty years ago.

Probably about August or early September 1944, 318 Radar, an LW/AW, arrived from Batchelor to help cover the blind spot, and personnel from No.46 helped to operate the 'revolving latrine,' thereby gaining experience on one of the most successful types of radar gear. And in September 1944, F/O Bill Sander-

son, the great installer of equipment, arrived to set up the new COL Mk.V equipment. A small steamer, the COOLEBAR, brought not only 130 tons of equipment, but also a tractor which completely revolutionised transport procedures. The tip of Cobourg Peninsula was becoming rather crowded with radar stations. The old 46 A.W. was therefore dismantled and stowed in great packing cases which, when lifted, assumed some rather unusual shapes. Here one is reminded of the interesting diversity of jobs available to 'volunteers' and others at Cape Don. For me, these included, during the first six weeks of 1945, the nailing up of crates; erecting a pole for a D.F. beacon; cutting 44 gallon drums longitudinally, using heavy hammer and cold chisel, to make new washing tubs; the usual grease trap cleaning and wood collecting in the bush with the aid of Aboriginal helpers and the provision of a heavy man-hauled cart; unloading boats and the Walrus sea-planes on their visits; threading steel pipes for some very important job I have forgotten; de-wiring and re-wiring one of the houses; making camouflage 'trees' for the newly arrived installations and erecting camouflage netting; servicing fire extinguishers; collecting and carting sand and stones for the new works; fixing two new buoys in the little bay used by the 'Ducks' and torpedo boats, and making targets for rifle and Bren gun practice. Most vivid of all is the memory of hanging on to the top of the beacon pole with both hands while standing on foot spikes, and for some time being unable to trust to Providence and a wide leather strap to support me while I actually let go to work with both hands on the beacon! There was a week of this supreme exercise, from 20th. to 27th. January 1945. I hope the installation enabled countless pilots to discover where they were. Eric Wilson, Radar Mechanic, whom I met again at Brunswick Heads School some 30 years later, will doubtless recall my diffidence concerning this particular duty.

More relaxed hours, when off shift, were devoted to playing football with the sure-footed and bare-footed Aborigines; throwing a medicine ball around; target shooting; exploring mangrove swamps and coral reefs; and perhaps sunbaking! In my case, there were some assignments to write for obliging and encouraging tutors at Sydney Teachers' College. We had been warned sternly and repeatedly at the RDF (later Radar) School at Richmond by our earnest instructors, fresh from tropical service, that everything we had, from boots to brains, would surely go 'blue mouldy' if appropriate and preventative steps were not taken. "Spine-bashing," we were assured, would prove lethal in hot, humid conditions. And if one did not keep fit physically and mentally, he would soon go 'trotto.' It was in fact, good advice.

For the budding naturalist, Cape Don was a paradise, with coral reefs teeming with beautiful plant and animal life; dark mangrove swamps, and thick savannah bush, dominated by Eucalypts, Melaleucas and Pandanas.* The Aborigines, whose camp was not very far from the lighthouse, were adept at spearing fish from their dug-out canoes, and at catching great mangrove mud-crabs, and they also offered for trade unusual shells, such as huge bailer shells, carefully decorated ceremonial spearheads, and well woven items made by the women from Pandanus leaves. During my time, July 1944 to February 1945, the C.O. was a true Officer and Gentleman, F/O Preston L. Gowing, a member of the well known Sydney firm. I recall his annoyance becoming apparent on only one occasion. Some bananas were ripening nicely on a palm beside the Admin residence. Then one night they just mysteriously disappeared. The Boss was surely and sorely piqued. He called a Parade at short notice, and while some may have

stifled a snigger, others growled at a perceived injustice when his ultimatum was delivered - "If the bananas are not returned to the verandah of the Admin. building by 6 p.m., the beer issue for the week will be cancelled." The Boss's customary good nature had been offended. In fact, it was probable even as he spoke, that the tasty fruit was beginning to digest within the unknown culprits.

No bananas were returned, but late that night, our inimitable humorist, Frank Bratby from Melbourne, our Messman, called out in the darkness - "Hey, Larry, you old b....d, will you take this jug of banana custard over to the Boss?" There was of course no custard, and Larry had long since retired to his family in the Aboriginal camp. Frank was enjoying one of his compulsive, and frequent, outpourings of morale-building humour. He saw the funny side of everything, yet hardly smiled himself while those within earshot could hardly control their laughter. On one occasion when things were quiet, perhaps a little tense, Frank, brandishing a broom, chased the light-house keepers' small herd of goats through the men's quarters, with an unnerving mixture of Frank's highly individual vocabulary of abuse and a mad clatter of hooves.

These goats had highly improbable names - Rasputin, Old Peter, Ajax...and at least one had an improbable fate. Frank once served us roast goat with little comment, when the 'Duck' which arrived monthly with fresh meat, mail etc. was unaccountably delayed, reducing the larder to M.&V., bully beef, biscuits, dehydrated cabbage and potato, and powdered eggs.

Larry, who customarily collected rations from the cookhouse and carried them to his camp each day, sometimes wore a crescent-shaped brass chest plate, signifying the fact that he had been a greatly valued tracker. His people honoured us on the night of 31st. December 1944 with a ceremonial dance for the New Year. Christmas Dinner had been quite a gala affair, at which the C.O. and N.C.O.'s served the men. A special menu was produced on the Admin. duplicator, and on one of these, (now probably in the radar Archives) I obtained the signatures of most of those who were not then on shift.

On Sunday, 11th. February 1945, BOMBO called on its return from island outstations, enabling me to renew acquaintance with an old school-mate, Neville Adcock, and with Geoff Felton, our Corporal at Toorbul Point.

Health at Cape Don was generally good. There were the usual problems of sunburn for the unwary, and of tinea, and some unpleasant feverish attacks. Skin rashes were irritating at times, some apparently being caused by contact with certain plants on the track between the living quarters and the old 46 Doover. Mosquitoes and sandflies were a constant nuisance, and we slept under nets. Sleeves had to be rolled down at dusk. And the storehouses were plagued by cockroaches.

On Tuesday, 13th. February 1945, I was up at 5.15 for one of Frank's 'early breakfasts' to leave by boat at 6.30; but the boat's dinghy sank, and departure was delayed. The trip to Darwin was very rough all the way with rain squalls. Once back in Darwin at 8.30 that night, I learned that I was to report the next day at 224 Radar Station at Southport Road, a little south. Back again on ACO gear, I met many of those I had known at Toorbul Point.

* See L.A.Gilbert : "Zoological Notes on the Northern Territory"
Parts I and II in Victorian Naturalist, V.65 No.4 Aug '48
and No. 6 Oct. '48.

"Botanical Notes on the Northern Territory"
Parts I and II in Victorian Naturalist V.64 No.1 May '48
and No. 3 July '48 for some amateur observations.

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Christmas at the 'Don' and Father Christmas, (radar style)- had presents for the young ones.

The radar cooks always turned on an extra-special meal...and a couple of locals felt it necessary to dress for the occasion



Photos: Pictorial III

SOME MEMORIES OF No. 46 RADAR UNIT, CAPE DON,
24.7.44 to 19.10.44.

Max (Bill) Counsell.

We left Darwin at dawn on the 24th. July, 1944. The harbour was crowded with shipping of all shapes and sizes as our RAAF Marine Craft O3-12 quietly slipped through the boom barrage to the open sea. Our destination was Cape Don, some 120 miles to the north.

The sea was very rough and most of the passengers and crew were sick. There were very few takers for the cold pork chops served for lunch! We passed through Dundas Strait between the Cobourg Peninsula and Melville Island - an important track for ships approaching Darwin from the north and east. The lighthouse at Cape Don could be seen for about an hour before we reached a secluded inlet behind the light and the camp. The journey had taken about twelve hours.

The 'camp' comprised three large houses on concrete piles, grouped around the lighthouse. Prior to the war, the lighthouse keepers and their families lived in these houses. Now, one house was occupied by the unit Commanding Officer, a very popular Flying Officer Jim Gowing, together with the stores and equipment. Two elderly lighthouse keepers lived in the second house. They were under the authority of the Royal Australian Navy. "Johnno" Johnson and George Knight were real characters, and despite the big age difference, we got on very well with them. They used to come over to our house in the evenings to play cards, and they always wore their First World War ribbons on their shirts. They both spoke very colourful language - and really fractured the King's English. The third house was the living quarters and Mess for the rest of the Radar airmen...(the Guards lived in tents) This was luxury living for me, as on all previous units everybody was housed in tents. The rooms were big and airy with real beds, and the Mess and Recreation Room were quite large and comfortable.

Our Cook was a rough but likeable fellow by the name of Sid Rippon. He was a first class fish cook, and baked a good loaf of bread. He used to wipe the perspiration from his brow with his forefinger and flick it into the dough saying he was adding the salt! The poker school at 'The Don' was almost continuous and was well catered for by Sid. Every couple of hours he would provide mugs of tea and thick cheese sandwiches. He would have made a lot of money from tips and gratuities.

Tending the lighthouse was not a time consuming task for the 'keepers of the light,' so they had time available for their craft work, the most profitable being fashioning buttons, buckles, and necklaces from turtle shell, and jewelry items from pearl shell. Johnno was very skilled at taxidermy, and over 50 years later I still possess an example of his work - a turtle beautifully preserved and life-like in appearance.

One night about 0300 hours, my mate and I on shift thought we had picked up a sub. on the A.W.screen, at about 3 miles, from memory. It had all the characteristics of a stationary submarine. I had seen sub. blips when I was stationed on Bathurst Island. We debated for a while as to whether we should report it to Fighter Sector. We called in the Duty Mechanic and the W/T Operator and had a discussion about calling the C.O. to see what he thought. As by now it was nearly dawn we thought we should wait and get a 'visual.' Good job we did, as in the light of day, a reef was exposed due to an exceptionally low tide, and that was the blip!

The transport of mail, supplies and personnel between Darwin and Cape Don by RAAF Marine Craft O3's was fairly regular - about once a week. These visits were supplemented by the faithful old Walrus sea-plane which landed in the bay. We had no air strip. I was secretary of the unit's welfare and recreation committee which was very active. We arranged cricket matches, fishing trips and sports days. Every night there was some activity in the Mess, with prizes financed by grants from Canteen profits. A poker school was popular. It operated nearly twenty four hours a day with personnel changing every shift.

On the 20th. August, fourteen of us and a number of natives set off for a picnic and a sports day at Alkari Beach, about four miles from the camp. This was our nearest swimming beach, as high cliffs and mangroves surrounded our camp. We went some of the way by dug-out canoe and saw many sharks. On the shore of this bay were huge Norfolk Island pines, reputed to have been planted by an early explorer while his ship was beached for careening. We had a lot of fun with the natives who really enjoyed the competitive sports of water polo and of running and jumping. They displayed their skill at spear fishing, a difficult pastime for us as we didn't have the ability or judgement to throw a spear while allowing for the refraction effect of the water.

The lighthouse keepers had a domestic goat herd and some poultry. From time to time a chook or a young kid would disappear and the luckless natives would cop the blame. However, it can now be revealed the real culprits did not have dark skins!

In the bush was a herd of feral goats ruled over by a Billy Goat we nick-named "Shaggy Bill." On occasions, he would invade the camp to have his way with the domestic nanny goats. The domestic Billy Goat resented this intrusion, so a fight would ensue and "Shaggy Bill" was always the victor, to much applause from the spectators on the verandahs.

The 24th. August was a big day/night for the unit, as a Walrus brought out a film and a cinema operator. This was the first time a film had been shown at 'The Don.' The film was entitled "The Leopard Man" - it was just a fair show but the natives thought it was pretty good! A month later another film was flown in - "Tarzan's Desert Holiday." Really terrible too, but the natives thought it was terrific.

I enjoyed my stay at Cape Don. There was plenty of action on the tube, but mainly allied activity. This was the heavy air traffic with our bombers flying to and from the north, and shipping from the north and east of Australia all passing through Dundas Strait between our unit and Melville Island.

The nearness of the lighthouse, the company of two very likeable keepers, a popular Commanding Officer, and the interesting life of the natives as well as many and varied off-duty activities, created good fellowship and a happy and efficient unit.

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THE 'DON' WAS DIFFERENT.

Ron Sawade.

Of course all stations were 'different,' but there were some unique features about life on the Don. I arrived on 8th. May 1945, the day before V.E. Day. We were up at 4 am, taken by truck to Doctor's Gully on Darwin Harbour where all was pitch dark and quiet. After an hour or so a beautiful tropic morning dawned and some signs of life appeared. The tide was out and the jetty was high and dry. There was a small boat about 100 yards out which we were 'invited' to board. Picture the scene! Three fit young airmen - boots and pants off - shirts tucked up above the waist - wading out to this boat through water about 'spark plug' depth, with all our gear held shoulder high to keep it dry - kit bag, pack, rifle and web equipment - then clambering into the small boat desperately trying to avoid damage to our vital equipment!

We travelled on a RAAF 60 foot craft designed for air/sea rescue and torpedo recovery work. It was powered by three Chrysler 8 cylinder engines which consumed about 40 gallons of petrol an hour, and it had a nice turn of speed. About 11 hours and 100+ miles later we arrived in the lagoon at Cape Don. Of course, it was now low tide time again!!! So the small jetty normally used for landing supplies and men was also high and dry; and again we had to wade ashore, but this time there was shin-deep black mud underfoot instead of sand, and according to my diary it was raining, but I don't remember that.

Then we put our gear on a small trolley which ran on a light railway track - about 2 foot gauge - and pushed it up a reasonably gentle slope to the camp - a distance of about three hundred yards - less than $\frac{1}{4}$ mile. The railway was part of the lighthouse system at the Don. There was no motor transport or any roads or tracks at the Cape.

The camp was also very different, for it consisted of three substantial solid construction houses set around the tall lighthouse, and the Air Force occupied two of these which had been equipped with electric lighting thanks to the RAAF Lister diesel power units for the COL Mk V radar. But the lamp that provided the beam for the lighthouse was a traditional kerosene oil lamp, and the machinery that made the beam rotate was a clockwork and weight mechanism.

Another difference - there was then very little air activity. Per my Diary I didn't see an aircraft blip on the radar in my first two shifts, which made work rather boring. However, we were visited on two or three occasions by several Spitfire aircraft from a squadron based at Darwin. The Spits would roar in at treetop height, 'shoot up' the camp and make spectacular tight turns around the lighthouse, which annoyed the senior lighthouse keeper immensely. He claimed that the rush of air endangered his anemometer - his wind speed measurement equipment.

Cape Don looks over Dundas Strait between Melville Island and the mainland, and there was a lot of shipping activity through the strait. There was also a very powerful tidal rip most of the time because of the colossal quantities of water that passed through the area as the twenty foot plus tides ebbed and flowed. On one occasion two of our men went out in the station dinghy, but went too far out to sea and were caught in the rip. We could see this small speck disappearing northwards towards the open sea and places beyond. Luckily the RAAF tender was there on one of its visits. The crew saw what was happening and went out to rescue our boys. If the launch had not been there our two brave lads would no doubt have spent a long time getting home, as we had absolutely no way of rescuing them.

As was usual around radar stations, there was a local Aboriginal population. However, it seemed to me that those at Cape Don were very different to those I had been associated with elsewhere in the Territory. They were more tribal and independent. For example, they went fishing, and used dugout canoes and native style spears; even fishing at night using traditional means to provide light to attract and spot fish. On occasions, the cooks were able to provide us with meals of fresh fish caught by the Aborigines and bartered in exchange for canned food. On one return trip from Alkira (Alcaro) beach, rowing our dinghy, we caught up with a native family. Dad, Mum, and one or two children in a dugout canoe. It was equipped with a mast and sail, but it was calm, so we gave them a tow for a while to give them a rest from paddling. I understand these people travelled long distances by canoe. Most of the adult men had patterns of raised scar tissue on their bodies apparently related to tribal customs.

The shoreline around the Don was mostly covered heavily with mangroves. Alkira (Alcaro) Beach was pleasant, and a reasonable walk from our camp, but it was necessary to cross a tidal creek to get there. This was OK at low tide, but involved swimming at high tide times, and there was general concerns about the possibility of crocodiles being a problem. So when we had a picnic there, some of us took the dinghy round from our lagoon to provide a ferry for crossing the creek. One event at the picnic was a 'staying under water' competition. The Aborigines won hands down. It was amazing how long some of them could hold breath and remain under water... several minutes.

Another different feature at the Don was the toilet facilities at our house - a very well constructed affair made from planed timber - 'long drop,' and I think, a three holer. It was burnt out regularly using diesel fuel and/or petrol as an accelerant. There was a story often told, but I can't vouch for the truth of it, that an airman sitting in contemplation on one occasion, lit a cigarette and then lifted the hinged lid next to him and dropped the match in. Unfortunately the hygiene worker had poured some fuel down a few minutes before and wandered off for some reason before lighting up, and the area below was charged with explosive fumes. I understand the resultant explosion did not have any very serious results, but gave our contemplating smoker a nasty shock.

The most popular social pastime with off-duty personnel around our house was playing billiards or snooker on a quarter size table that was there. This table provided a huge amount of pleasure for us. At the Don and on other radar stations, amenities such as this were very important in helping to overcome boredom and the pain of isolation from home, family and friends, and with the complete absence of any contact or association with women. The dinghy was also used for recreation. It was pleasant to row out to the middle of the lagoon at suitable tide times and anchor on an exposed sand bank and swim.

There is an entry in my Diary for Monday 4th. June 1945....'Killed pig. Roast pork for several days. Good oh!' I have no memory of this now. Presumably it was a wild pig, and some of our ever resourceful fellows did some hunting and butchering.

I left the Don on 13th. June '45 after just five weeks. I have to say that it was the 'longest' five weeks I have ever spent anywhere. It was a pleasant trip back to Darwin in the RAAF vessel - smooth sea and suitable tide conditions at both ends of the trip, so it was not necessary to strip and wade to get aboard or to go ashore.

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CAPE DON MEMORIES.

Rod Harris.

(Regrettably very few, but for what they are worth, here goes!)

Having said goodbye to the mobile group who were being shipped off to Morotai, I received my posting to Cape Don on Cobourg. Transport to this remote tip of Arnhem Land was usually by sea, but because of one of the periodic maintenance periods we were flown out by the pregnant porpoise, more familiarly known as "The Duck." No glamorous WRAAF hostess and no in-flight refreshment, but the view was terrific. Finally into sight came the 'Don', conspicuous by its lighthouse which made the Dover camouflage somewhat superfluous. We landed, (if that's the correct phraseology when alighting on water) and drifted to the anchorage. With the all-important mail, bottled beverage, fresh meat and sundry supplies unloaded, of least interest to all was the new operator. Well, to most that is, all except the person who was going south as the result of the arrival of his replacement.

Arriving in the late afternoon at Cape Don introduces the new arrival to the welcoming committee whose enthusiasm invariably makes an impression that lasts for days afterwards. I refer of course to the hordes of sandflies that descend upon the unsuspecting victim at sunset with some uncanny instinct that tells them there is a new dish on the menu tonight.

It is surprising to see just how much cargo can be loaded into a 'Duck'. Today's consignment was off-loaded on to what resembled a small rail wagon which reposed at the bottom of a long gradient, made all the more imposing by the rusty narrow gauge rails disappearing into the distance. New arrivals are told the story that there was once a donkey which was used by the lighthouse men to haul their supplies to higher ground, but unfortunately the sandflies ate him. The new arrival readily believes this sombre tale as the myriad of itchy red insect bites begin to appear on all exposed parts of his anatomy. To add to his discomfort, he is also expected to help push the wagon to the top of the hill and there present himself in pristine condition to the C.O.

With the formalities over, it's great to see a few familiar faces and almost with eager anticipation suss out the accommodation and look over the gear. The lighthouse keepers' residences were used as barracks, and the one to which I was assigned also housed the kitchen and Mess. My predecessor had occupied the passage of this particular house and it became my abode for the duration of my stay.

One of the ops had acquired a tent which he had set up some way from the houses in a grove of pandanas trees. It had a tarpaulin floor, comfortably furnished with bush furniture and pieces scrounged from who knows where. Around the sides he had erected a low wall of corrugated iron sheets which he had painted with regulation 'Dorman Diesel Green,' and over all of this a massive tent fly, so that the whole in its remote setting looked like a Bedouin potentate's private retreat. I must admit that I was always a little envious of its attractiveness and privacy. The mention of pandanas trees brings to mind another item of activity no doubt brought about by sheer boredom and a macabre sense of humour. Most pandanas trees in the area were host to colonies of green ants, and ants, being what they are, were always hurrying about their ant business from one place to another. Now underneath the battery box outside the W/T shack was always dark and damp, and it too played host to a colony of not green, but white ants. It often amused the small minds of the day (and I was one of them) to take a few white ants and place them in the path of the green ants, then watch the fun. I told you we had a macabre sense of humour.

What followed was a desperate fight for right of passage as the white ants, with the advantage of larger jaws, would snap at the middle part of the green ants' bulbous bodies, snapping them in two, and bits of bodies would be falling everywhere after a few minutes of this barbaric entertainment.

Turning the clock back...I remember with some astonishment my first 'dress parade' at the 'Don.' We were joined on these occasions by a number of strapping Aborigines whose muscular development made my own appear somewhat insignificant, and I was thankful that our occupation of their tribal domain had to some degree been condoned and tolerated. I was rather incredulous, however, at their preparation for the all important 'parade.' It was a drag for us, but for them it was 'Number One,' and they would have done my Sar'major in Rookies' camp proud. With great trepidation I watched some of them shave with the fine edge of a freshly broken glass bottle as part of their preparation. Our audience on these occasions often comprised the local women and children in an amazing assortment of dress, and I mean 'dress.' One that I remember particularly well was a red velvet evening creation worn with obvious pride by a young and well proportioned Aboriginal woman who seemed to be jealously guarded by one whom we called 'One Armed Jimmy.' On one occasion, a group of us had gone off to a stretch of beach that was clear of the mangroves, and along came this star equivalent of 'Baywatch on the Don' in the person of this young woman. One of our cooks who was with us at the time got up and sauntered along behind her in Casanova style, frequently turning around to see if we were enjoying the show. A loud roar of laughter from us however, had him somewhat nonplussed - but what he hadn't seen was 'One Armed Jimmy' emerging from the mangroves further along the beach and walking along behind him and flexing his long fishing spear over his shoulder.

Flamboyant though he was, and unlike many of his kind who had been shanghaied into the catering muster, our cook knew his onions and could turn on a good meal - even potato pie made out of those dried potato flakes, which in other places I remember tasted like glue, and his crusty bread made even the runny greasy tinned butter and the ever present apple jelly digestible. To vary our diet there were regular fishing trips in which most of us, if I remember correctly, were required to participate, even though I'd not caught a fish in my whole life. About twenty of us not required elsewhere were assembled on a stretch of beach clear of the mangroves and deployed along the length of a drag net. The method of fishing required us to venture out into the deep to the length of the net, then swing round in an arc towards the shore, thus (hopefully) netting sufficient fish to satisfy the cook's culinary plans. My first effort in this joint venture was not a pleasant one as not only could I not swim, but the bods on either side were much taller than I, and I spent as much time under water as I did above it. Fortunately I did not know at the time, but when we dragged the net to shore, amongst the fish was a shark. Only a little baby about three feet long, but I couldn't help thinking where was its mummy when I was out there. At times when the supply boat was out of commission or being used elsewhere, our supplies of fresh fruit, meat and vegetables were flown out to us. Not as you might expect by the inimitable 'Duck,' but by Vultee Vengeance with the supplies loaded into the bomb bay. We had no airstrip, and the plot was for the aircraft to fly between the buildings and drop the goods. Parachutes were never the order of the day, and so out of the belly of the plane would tumble these sacks of provisions, often splitting open when they hit the hard earth, while others would disappear into the mangroves. Having been positively assured on my arrival that the crocodiles in the area looked forward to this occasional change of diet, I was never one to volunteer to go looking for the missing supplies, leaving it to the more

adventurous. Had I thought of it at the time, I would have excused myself as a conscientious objector, not on religious grounds you understand, but as an ardent conservationist of our native wildlife.

Concerning the religious aspect of life at Cape Don, it was to all intents and purposes non-existent. That is, until Clem Richardson one Sunday decided that we should have a church parade. Without any trace of guile, he nominated himself to take up the collection, and that I should be the preacher. Thus a deputation to the C.O. gained the required permission for a non-compulsory church parade, and from then on it became a regular feature for those of us who were not heathens or Catholics. I shudder to think of what the Lord thought of our well meaning but unlearned attempts at worship.

The Cape Don medical resources were minimal, as with most radar stations, and limited to First Aid procedures and remedies as prescribed in the Medic's Handbook of Diagnosis and Treatment e.g....Runny Noses - insert cotton wool plugs. My only recourse to the dexterity of our resident Medic was the occasion when coming off shift, a beetle flew into my ear. My frantic effort to remove it only sent it further into my ear, and in the process, with its hard shell uppermost, proceeded to scrape my eardrum with its spiny legs. It felt as if I had an elephant trundling around in there, and I was firmly convinced that it was burrowing into the empty space where most people have a brain. I evidently put on quite a performance for before long, I had an interested audience who in typical fashion offered the usual droll advice such as 'put his head in a bucket of water and drown the thing!' No one appeared to realise just how much I was suffering, but as I was making a lot of noise, obviously I was not dead. After many vain attempts to remove the beetle physically, our intrepid Medic decided to drown it in mercurochrome and nearly drowning me also in the process. I was not a calm patient - in fact quite the reverse - and let's face it, this was also a new experience for the Medic. Eventually the tumult and the shouting died, and so did the beetle which was dismembered in situ and extracted with forceps. Thus liberally doused in mercurochrome, though somewhat traumatised by the event, I was nevertheless pronounced fit for duty, and returned to the front, which on this occasion was the cookhouse.

So the daily routine continued until we on Cape Don first greeted victory in Europe...and later victory over Japan. The 'round the clock' surveillance from the doover on the headland still included the long night hours on watch when we tried to keep alert on the sticky 'coffee and chicory' brew with toast, or whatever we could scrounge from the kitchen. Time also to keep an open ear for morse code from the W/T shack should Darwin call us up, and then having to tap out an 'AS' (...wait) and then rouse our slumbering W/T op. Operationally, Darwin Fighter Sector liked to keep us on our toes and at the most inopportune times would send out a sortie of Spitfires to see how alert we were. On such occasions the rest of the camp, not aware of what was in the offing, would be startled out of their wits by two or three Spitfires zooming up over the headland after approaching almost at sea level.

It was about the time Peace was declared that we lost our intrepid 'Duck.' And not a shot was fired. Being a month or two before Christmas, I, along with others, had crafted an assortment of 'foreigners' as presents for those at home. My leisure time had resulted in what I considered to be a superb set of handcrafted tortoise shell steak knives and forks. The tortoise shell had cost me dearly in traded black twist, the potent tobacco product greatly sought after by the local indiginous population, and to my regret, probably contributed to their early demise. Thus cut, shaped, and polished with

numerous tubes of 'Comforts Fund Toothpaste,' these objets d'art were the epitome of my artistic prowess. Thus much of the station's outgoing Christmas mail was carefully stowed onboard the 'Duck' for its return flight to Darwin. Also outbound was a W.O. Mechanic. Now this fellow was big...and I mean BIG. Not fat, but solid bone and muscle...and he had a mountain of personal belongings as well, so much so that it was surprising that everything squeezed into the confines of the 'Duck's' interior. So with crew and all aboard, the duck waggled its tail, and taxied out into the bay.

Whether it was the contrariness of the wind, or the choppy surface, or overload was never made known, but after bouncing across the choppy surface, the duck rose a few feet, and then abruptly dived into the drink. Fortunately our dinghy was at hand and was soon at the scene and was able to extricate the crew and passengers, bruised and shaken, but otherwise unscathed, before our beloved duck sank to the bottom. As far as I am aware, it may still be there today, but if not, would whoever has my tortoiseshell steak knives and forks please return them.


Just one other item in my Memories of the 'Don' before I conclude this episode of my RAAF career...and that is the beautiful sunsets we enjoyed. I vividly recall sitting in the cool of the evening on the cliff edge, (if it could be called that) and gazing out across the mangroves to the sea and beyond to the horizon. Even those Cape Don sandflies could not detract from the splendour of God's handiwork as He painted the sky with such exquisite hues and colours. Since that time I have watched many sunsets but none to compare with those that gave me such awe and wonder as those I viewed at the 'Don.'

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A CHINK IN THE CLOAK OF SECRECY.

[Radar Yarns, with permission.]

Paul Butler reveals that to let the folks at home know where they were and beat censorship, they evolved what was thought to be a nice code. By including a greeting in each letter, beginning with "Love to Clare" in the first letter followed by 'Regards to Albert' for C and A respectively, it would take seven letters to spell out 'CAPE DON.' It was not necessary. There was a blue enamel sign at the lighthouse which read "Telegraph Office." Paul sent a telegram home to advise them of the new Postal Group Number. Imagine his surprise on arriving home to see the actual telegram!... Certainly it was February 1945, but it doesn't say too much for security!

| | | | | |
|--|---------------|--|-----|---|
| F.G. 42A | | COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA—POSTMASTER-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT. | |  |
| Form used for Quality, Safety and Economically Transmitted by RDNEY ORDR TELEGRAM | | URGENT TELEGRAM | | |
| P.O. C. 1111 17 1943 | | <small>This Telegram has been recorded subject to the Post and Telegraph Act and Regulations. The same recorded at this office in terms of the end of the message.</small> | | |
| Office of Origin: | No. of Words: | Rate of Telegram: | No. | |
| VIA RADIO CAPE DON VIA DARWIN RADIO X558 20 WORDS | | 2/6 8AM | | 11TH PASADELA |
| MRS F BUTLER 32 1 DARLEY RD RANDWICK NSW | | | | |
| PLEASE ADDRESS FUTURE LETTERS TO GROUP 665 RAAF DARWIN PAUL W BUTLER | | | | |
| 10-50PM PU | | | | |
| <i>The telegram home which defeated security!</i> | | | | |

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The Don was widely reputed to be one of those exotic places in NWA where foreigner material of various sorts was readily available, and when our maintenance party landed there in September 1945 to bring in the station, I had already been well clued up about this by Clem Richardson. So it was with high hopes of stocking up that I went ashore at the small wharf and found Clem. He helped me to sound out the current Don market, which seemed to be subject to daily fluctuations, just like the Stock Exchange, according to supply and demand. And happily, by the time I left, I had enough pearl shell, tortoiseshell and Aboriginal crafts to satisfy me for all time!

The Aborigines were a particularly fine looking lot, strong and well built, similar in appearance and physique to the TIWI people of Bathurst and Melville. Doubtless the easy and healthy food from the sea was the reason for this. Anyway, I was able to barter for a couple of pearl shells - one as big as a dinner plate - and also organise a bit of tortoise shell via negotiations with the lighthouse keepers who seemed to have this particular trade tightly sewn up, even to supplying carefully preserved complete specimens. Pearl shell was hard stuff to cut and work into 'foreigner' shapes, but it made very attractive pendants and brooches...very fashionable on the girl-friend scene...wings, hearts, flowers, ear-rings and so on. It was in great demand back in Darwin, too, so the supply was very welcome. I also asked to buy some native spears and a grass skirt, and after serious and intense negotiations with the local arms supplier, these soon appeared - wicked looking barbed spears, decorated with fine red and white lines of ochre in ceremonial style. The skirt arrived too, made from long kunai grass with a wide, plaited waist band, but I didn't get to meet the dusky maiden who had been persuaded to part with it. Doubtless a tribal daughter, now clad in nubile nymph style a la Jolliffe cartoons, was very busy making a new one and casting invective on all Air Force types from Darwin. So I traded 'baccy' with the Aborigines in an easy going arrangement and greatly to our mutual satisfaction, and I eventually left the Don with quite an assortment of local souvenirs.

Tom, the carpenter of our party, wanted a small pet - the popular flying squirrel which he knew were plentiful on the Cobourng Peninsula. These tiny attractive animals were actually sugar gliders, or flying phalangers, and made excellent pets if tamed while young. Tom had his glider within two days, and had it well tamed by the time we left again for Darwin.



The approved way to care for these tiny nocturnals was to keep them protected in a cage during the day while they slept, and to free them at night to hunt insects. Eventually they would glide back for shelter and protection in a shirt pocket while they ate their catch. They loved sweet things, with condensed milk and lolly water high on their list of preferred luxuries. On looking up 'foreigner' in the Oxford, I find among other things, a foreigner is an imported animal or article, so I guess Tom's tiny sugar glider was a foreigner, if not in the more generally accepted sense.

"THE DON" IN '45.

Tony Hick.

Jeff Wehring and I first sighted the lighthouse at Cape Don from the deck of a RAAF crash boat in March, 1945...and there we stayed until 46 Radar closed down and left at the end of September. After arrival, we were put on shift together, and after probably our first night watch, we came off duty at midnight and crept into the house with torches, trying not to disturb anyone. Cockroaches! There were hundreds...maybe thousands! They were everywhere - floor - beds - walls - lockers - the room seemed to be moving with the horrors! So after a couple of nights of this Jeff and I found an old ridge type tent and set it up down towards the Doover. We moved in with our beds, and found the usual boxes, drums, and what went for tent furniture, and here we set up our Cape Don home, far happier to face maybe the odd snake or goanna than have the nightly horror of that moving mass of cockroaches which for some strange, unknown reason were known as 'cock-harry's' out at 'The Don.' Jeff proved a good mate and a thorough gentleman, and we got on well together both on shift and off duty at home in our tent. He was a bit older than the average chap out there...came from North Queensland and was an analytical chemist.

The new COL was pretty good gear, and gave good results and ranges after a few early hiccups, but we didn't have one enemy plot on it while we were there. Plenty of Libs and Cats flying up around Borneo and back though, and the unit worked together very well. The chaps were a good lot which made for a happy unit - in fact some even had their posting out deferred when the usual three month stints were up and their transfer came through. The station had the usual two big Lister diesel power units. They had a great record for reliability, but I remember when one was stripped down for a major overhaul and we were all asleep one night. We all seemed to sense it when the other unit suddenly shut down too. There was something like panic...everything went black...no Doover...no communications...the little generator motor was down too, and the back-up batteries were flat and corroded. It was some sort of diesel disaster - a con rod, or cam rod, or similar.

The other diesel was put back together in record time, and when we were back on air, there was a rush of 'please explains' and 'explanations' flying back and forth between 'The Don' and Darwin.

Peter was our Sergeant Cook, and he had earned his stripes, for he was very good. He could even make that dehydrated stuff taste reasonably and acceptably like potatoes. His off-sider cook was known as 'Bully.' He did a fair job but not as good as Peter. On one occasion I recall - and probably on other odd occasions - we had roast goat. Very nice, too - very much like roast lamb.

And there was a shortage of everything once when neither the Walrus nor the supply boat had arrived. Meat - vegies - and most serious of all - cigarettes and tobacco. But the camp Aboriginal workers had received a recent ration of Sunlight plug tobacco. Nicki-nicki. They did a wonderful trade for old shirts, shorts and what-have you in exchange for the usually untouchable nicki-nicki. Some chaps tried to roll cigarettes with the stuff - dreadful! I smoked a pipe and that wasn't quite so bad, but we were all mightily relieved when the supply boat was sighted again and the new canteen stuff was in stock.

In August, the Walrus which usually brought mail, personnel and some supplies, crashed and sank when attempting take-off, and this cut down on the regular

deliveries we had enjoyed with mail particularly, but a Vultee Vengeance was then tried for a supply drop. The pressure of air prevented the release of the parcels and bags on the first runs, but after some strenuous aerobatics, the drop was successful, and we received an express delivery of the supplies and mail we were waiting for.

Life at 'The Don' would have been far less interesting without the Aboriginal helpers who lived at a camp somewhere out in the bush. We weren't permitted to go there, but a few of them would come to the station daily, doing odd jobs like gathering firewood, washing, and other odd jobs around the station. They were a fine lot, and their hunting and fishing skills, their bush and craft skills were much admired.

Strangely, when they were helping to unload heavy supplies - fuel drums and so on - we all waded through the water with little fear of sharks or crocs. But we found if anyone shouted 'Snake!' - the Aborigines would be out of the water in a flash, and this became a bit of a joke. But I still don't know if the joke was on us or them.

One big, strapping young fellow I remember was a very nice, and very happy chap. His name was Victor, and he taught me a few words. I recall "Barool-ii Joh-ina" was like our "Good morning, how are you." Another was "Bom - Bom" and when Victor sometimes appeared late and a bit the worse for wear, he offered that explanation as his excuse!

VJ Day...I can recall when word came through on August 15th. Japan had agreed to unconditional surrender, and 46 Radar 'stood down' for two days. A celebration party was promptly planned, and the C.O., F/O Hickman, very sensibly called in all arms on the station - rifles, side-arms, ammunition and whatever else he thought of, and all was locked away in his office. A very wise precaution. But after we'd all called 'Enough' for that night, and somehow we had found and crashed on our beds, we were awakened by a series of rifle shots...and not too far away either. So we cautiously investigated.

There was 'Johnno,' the Sergeant Mech, with an armful of our gramophone records, ski-ing them one at a time into the air 'a la clay pigeons,' while our Commanding Officer pinged at 'em with a .303 in regular trap shooting style. Both still tanked of course.

So much for his wise and sensible precautions...his instruction should have been - "Do as I say - don't do as I do!"

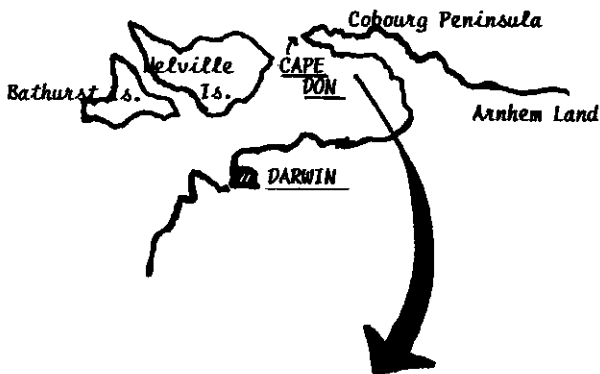
A few more weeks and then came word to close down and prepare to leave Cape Don. We began the work in very careful fashion - carefully undoing nuts and bolts, and saving and packing everything. But when a team arrived in the ketch YALATA and with a barge to move the unit, all that was saved and taken were the main pieces of gear, such as the receiver, the transmitter, the diesels and other pieces worth salvaging. The unwanted gear was dropped over a cliff.

The men boarded the ketch and barge, and then it was off to Darwin. I was pleased to be on the ketch, for the sea was a bit choppy, and those on the barge had a rough trip and were glad when the little convoy reached Darwin harbour.

There's not much more to recall. I remember Clem Richardson and Rod Harris, two who were about my own age. And other than that my only bit of memorable unit glory occurred when we had a snooker competition on the little table supplied by Welfare for the Rec. room.

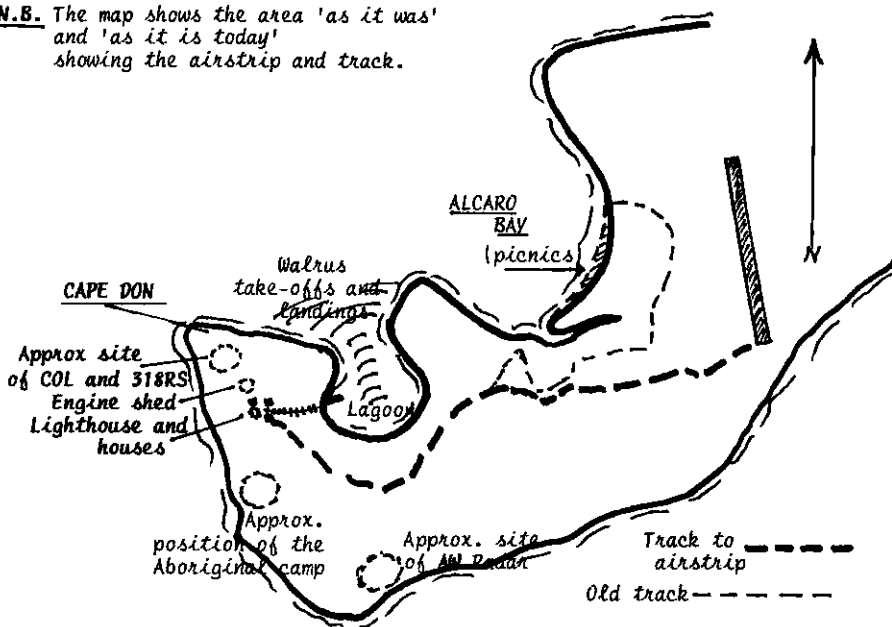
To everyone's amazement I took off the prize...and as there probably hasn't been another tournament, I think I can still claim to be snooker champion of Cape Don.

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"MUD MAPS" of the Cape Don Area. Ron Sawade, Lionel Gilbert and others.

N.B. The map shows the area 'as it was' and 'as it is today' showing the airstrip and track.



CAPE DON. The Commonwealth (Aust. Maritime Safety Authority) has retained the lighthouse and its helipad. The remainder of the site is controlled by the Cobourg Peninsula Sanctuary Land Trust as part of the Gurig National Park. In war years, supply launches unloaded at the small jetty in the lagoon and anchored out in deeper water, and the Walrus amphibians used the same location. From here, a light railway and hand trolley was used for transport a short distance to the houses, though the line must have also run '3 miles to a jetty at the mouth of a small creek' at Alcaro Bay. This is stated in the lighthouse history, and is supported by the memories of a few of the station 'originals.' The route probably followed the line of the track. These maps have been sketched 'by consensus,' and could be subject to correction.

CAPE DON, 1990.

Jim Harper.

I was at Cape Don from 31/7/43 until 16/3/44 and was one of the W.T. operators down in the little hut some distance from the radar building.

In 1990 I visited Darwin and spent a couple of days on Bathurst Island. I hired an aircraft and my grandson flew me over to Cape Don where unfortunately the Ranger was on holidays and we were unable to land. The strip is quite some distance from the site of the station and there was no one to meet us. However, I was able to take some aerial photos and am enclosing them to enable you to see what the Cape looks like today.

