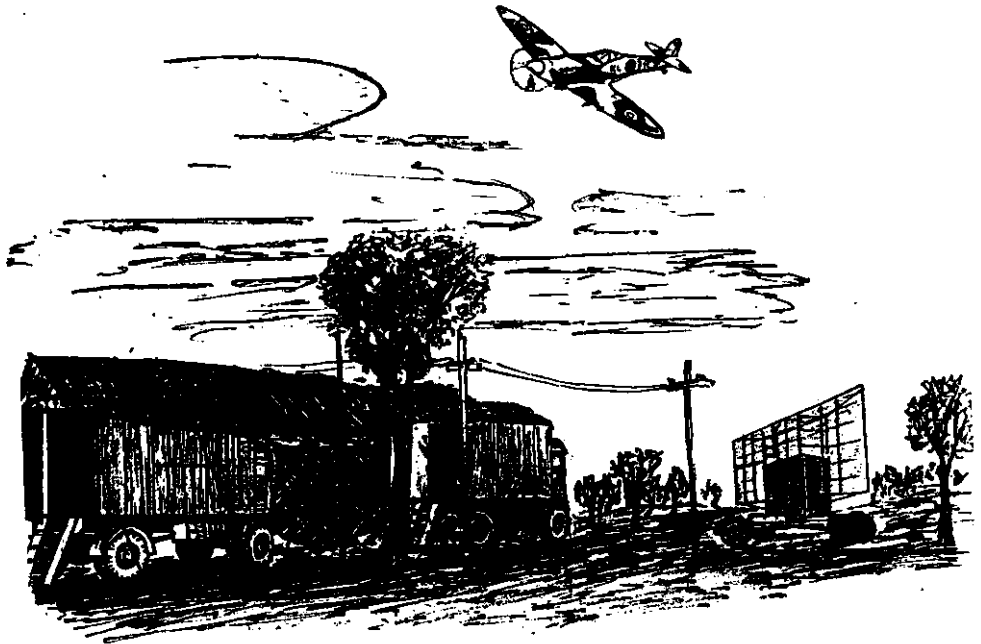


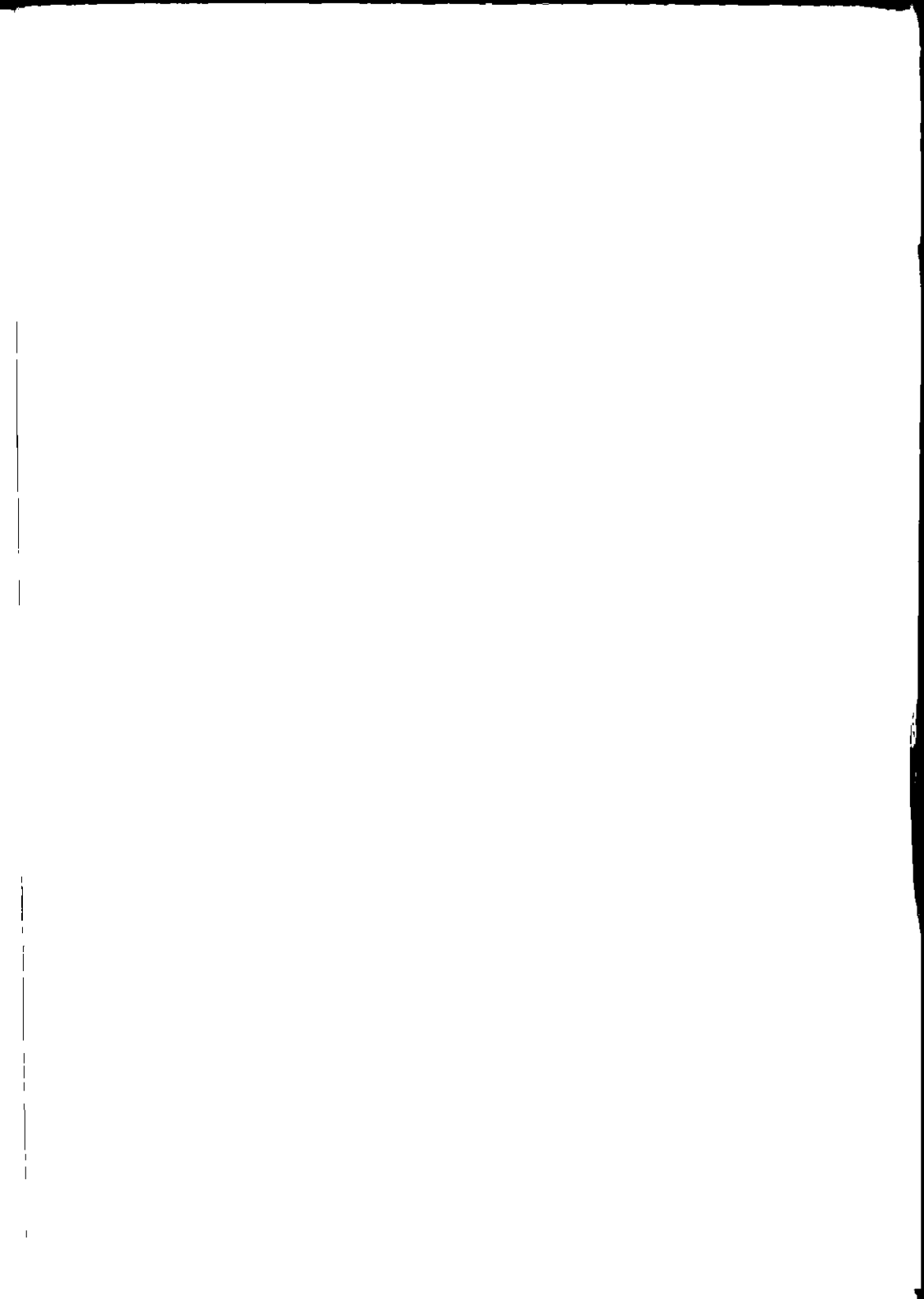
22/7/99

132 RADAR
and
150 RADAR

The CROSSLEY GCI's *of* NWA



Edited by MORRIE FENTON



The History and Stories

of

132 RADAR

and

150 RADAR

The **CROSSLEY GCI's** *of* **NWA**



Edited by **MORRIE FENTON**

132 RADAR

and

150 RADAR

THE CROSSLEY GCI's of NWA.

Edited by M.E.FENTON.

(Morrie Fenton.)

Published by M.E.Fenton

(Morrie Fenton.)

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Other Station Histories that are Currently Available:

60 Radar Melville Island,
154 Radar Truscott.
321 Radar Yirrkala.
39 Radar Port Keats
46 Radar Cape Don.
307/61 Radar Peron Island.

#####

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

There are many who deserve 'Acknowledgement' at this time - the Radar Air Defence Branch, RAAF Assoc. N.S.W., who arranged our first National Reunion in 1988 which has led on to other reunions,(each a beauty)with Warren Mann taking over for more recent get-togethers. And our original historians, Norm Smith and Ed. Simmonds deserve thanks also, for their work has in turn encouraged others to 'have a go':- also Pete Smith whose good work continues as the unifying factor now keeping us all in touch. These folk have given us old radar chaps a wonderful and rewarding ten years.

Ed has told me that the most satisfying aspect of his work has been his ability to put old mates in touch again after 50 years - and at a guess, this has happened 20 or 30 times - probably more.

In 1944 at 13 RS Cape Otway, I first met Bob McDonnell, a Corporal Op. just back from 132 RS Darwin who impressed me then as a seasoned Op. much older than myself...he would have been at least 21 ! I next met Bob at 154 RS at Truscott, and we enjoyed meeting again, this time as tent mates.

Nothing more during the next 44 years - then to encourage me to attend the Canberra reunion, Ed gave me Bob's address and Bingo! - we both attended, and we have been mates again for the ten years since despite living 1000 kilometres apart. And so with many others I'll bet!

Bob has praised and encouraged me along the way while I prepared a series of station histories - and I being ever mindful of Bob's long and unique association with those huge old Crossleys, the 'Doover' of both 132 and 150, was careful to leave that history well alone...that was Bob's Territory! But now the end result has been effectively a joint history - I've scribbled, searched, cajoled, copied, set out and edited, but only after referral to Bob at each step. He has been the expert, for at no time did I even sight those mighty Crossleys.

So....Thanks Ed....and Thanks Bob.....you've been two very good friends.

Finally and at last, I acknowledge the help and co-operation of those listed below. This small booklet has come about hopefully as a worthwhile token of their well known stations, and of the time they spent on those stations. I hope all are pleased with the result.

I gratefully acknowledge the help of all listed below:

Articles.

Bob McDonnell. Ev. Wade.
George Mills.
Eric O'Brien.
Fred Box.
Keith Backshall.
Ian Grayling.
Bryan Wardle.
Bill Langcake.
Laurie Norris.

Photos.

Morrie Fenton.
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Max Grant.
Fred Box.
Bryan Wardle.
Ian Leith.
Ken Eckley.
Keith Backshall.

As always, 'Thanks' to the Staff of RAAF Historical, Canberra.

And 'Thanks' also to Fred Woodgate, who readily gave permission for extracts from his book, 'Lion and Swans,' to be used. Fred's book describes the actions of the 54 Squadron particularly, also some of the other Spitfire Squadrons. His address is 1151 Pittwater Road, Collaroy Beach 2097.

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132 RADAR

KNUCKEY'S LAGOON

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS.

31 Jul 42 Unit began to form at Richmond.
31 Oct 42 Vehicles and half of Personnel leave on WANAKA.
09 Nov 42 Remainder of Personnel travel overland to Darwin.
19 Nov 42 132 camp established at 11 Mile.
24 Apr 43 Camp established at Knuckey's Lagoon near vehicles.
18 Jul 43 Enemy plane intercepted.
17 Aug 43 Two enemy planes intercepted.
04 Oct 43 RWG Installation commences.
01 Dec 43 RW/GCI operating.
06 Dec 43 Mobile CDL packed for move.
07 Jan 44 Personnel move to 11 mile camp site.
31 Mar 44 RWG/GCI fully operational.
27 Jul 44 132 Radar on Stand-by status.
20 Oct 44 Personnel lodging at 105 FCU.
07 Dec 45 Operations cease.
18 Apr 46 Unit closed.
18 Jun 46 Unit disbanded.

#####

FOREWORD

When Morrie asked me to write a few memories of 132 Radar some 55 years after the events of those days, I must admit to an attack of nostalgia.

I suppose the fact that I was attached to 132 from September 1942 to April 1944 and again from October to December 1944 after it had changed its station number to 150 and moved to Adelaide River brought on the thought that I must nearly hold the record for the longest serving operator on any one station.

We youngsters quickly learned that war was not a game, and this was so clearly brought home to us at 132 with the RT speakers in the Doover telling all that was going on up above us - the exhilaration and excitement of pilots in battle coupled with disasters - even death - when all did not go their way. Brave young men from both sides being killed, and you felt by hearing all this while the Controller calmly and clearly gave directions to the fliers, that you were much closer and more involved, and always with the feeling that if you made a mistake it could have serious repercussions.

The operators on all stations became skilful at their tasks - and in fact we didn't have to ruin our eyesight trying to pick up a blip at extreme distances as did the men on the outlying stations - they just passed on the results of their good work to us at 132 and we took over from there.

To put into statistics the comments I have just made:- From February 1943 to November 1943, 65 Japanese aircraft were destroyed; 24 were possibly destroyed, and 49 were damaged;

And this for the loss of 57 Spitfires and unfortunately 20 brave young pilots.

And to my memory, 132 Radar was involved in some way in all the raids and recce flights during that time.

*Bob McDenneil,
132 - 150 - 154.*

INTRODUCTION.

132 RADAR began to 'form up' at Richmond air base on July 31st, 1942, and Bob McDonnell has given the best possible account of the station's early days. The big, mobile Mk. V GCI mounted on Crossley trucks with Lister diesel generating units and the aerial on separate trailers had shipped from England as part of 'Capstan' - the code word concealing the arrival of the Spitfires of No. 1 Fighter Wing which first saw action over Darwin in March 1943 - and co-inciding with the commencement of the 132 Diary - obviously 132 came 'on air' when the new fighters went into action. In the intervening months, the station had been equipping and making ready at Richmond while the operators were training, and on 31st October, half of the personnel shipped out on WANAKA from Glebe Island bound for Darwin - the remainder of the personnel travelled overland via Adelaide - this trip being recalled by Bill Langcake.

The WANAKA story is interesting. She was a New Zealand ship taken over by Australia for use by the RAAF. The ship was crewed with Kiwi officers, RAN gunners, seamen of the Merchant Navy, and RAAF wireless, medical and stores men. The ship served the RAAF well until 1946, but during her service was all but destroyed when gale force winds of 130 m.p.h. threw her onto Eden Reef on 15th. December 1943. Ten crew members were lost - and an appeal for a salvage crew went unheeded when the decision was made to try to save her. However, RAAF volunteers came forward, and the ship was saved after she limped into Sydney Harbour, listing heavily, but with the RAAF ensign flying.

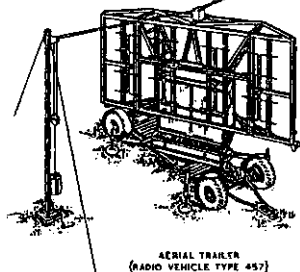
At Darwin in November 1942, the vehicles and gear were landed from WANAKA and brought to the selected site at Knuckeyes Lagoon, some 9 miles from Darwin proper, where it was carefully tested and brought up to a satisfactory working condition so that tuning, calibration and height testing could be carried out.

Early in March 1943, the announcement was made that Spitfires were now operating over Darwin.

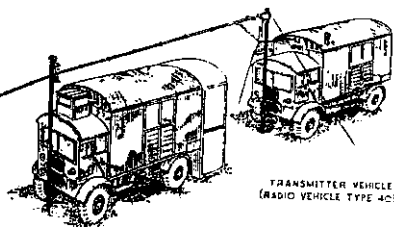
The 132 Diary commenced at the same time:-

THE MYSTERY OF THOSE CROSSLEYS!

MOBILE GCI MKIV, GENERAL VIEW



AERIAL TRAILER
(RADIO VEHICLE TYPE 457)



TRANSMITTER VEHICLE
(RADIO VEHICLE TYPE 402)

RECEIVER AND OPERATIONS VEHICLE
(RADIO VEHICLE TYPE 408)



EDITOR. Very few photos of the 'Mobiles' have survived or surfaced - none at all of the Crossleys - so the booklet illustrations have depended on recollections, plus the sketches found in magazines other than a few photos of the Internationals. This page shows an English sketch of a mobile GCI and a sketch of a Crossley radio van. From these, and from the memories and descriptions offered 'with good intentions' by ex-personnel, the illustrations in this booklet have been produced.

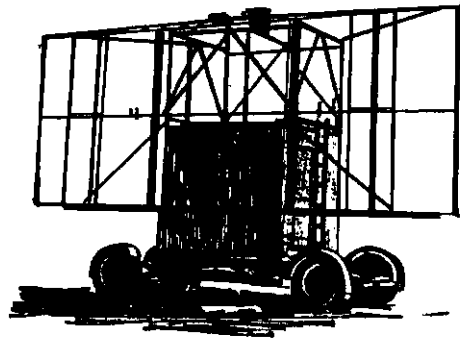
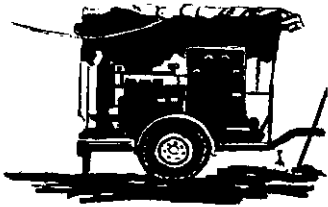
Naturally (after 50 odd years) memories and opinions have varied, and certainly the individual Doovers and vehicles also varied greatly through the war years, particularly the canvas light traps and annex ops rooms tacked on to the vehicles, just as the 'fixed' Doovers were constantly being changed and improved.

Strangely, a good idea of a Crossley van used in England has been obtained from a video, but the Australian version seems to have been somewhat different in appearance. Maybe the vans were 'built up' or altered at 1 RIMU or while on service. But most opinions seemed to favour 'hard-tops' with little ventilation. The Internationals presented few problems as I well remember the vehicles at 154 Truscott, and the photos helped a lot.

So....the sketches have been presented, hopefully, to give at least a good idea of our GCI's on wheels, but at the same time pointing out that no two memories (or Doovers) were quite the same.

My thanks to all who have helped, or who have tried to help.

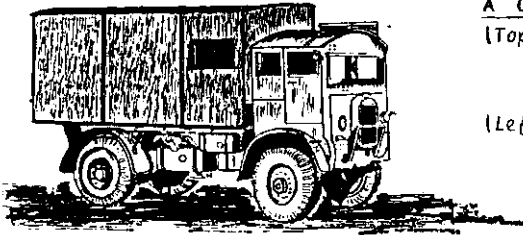
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A CROSSLEY 'DOOVER.'

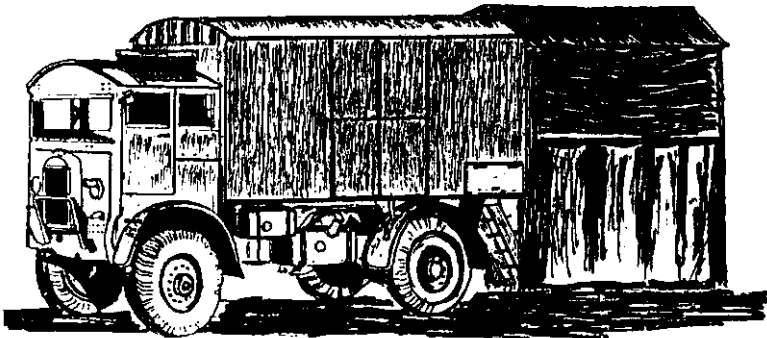
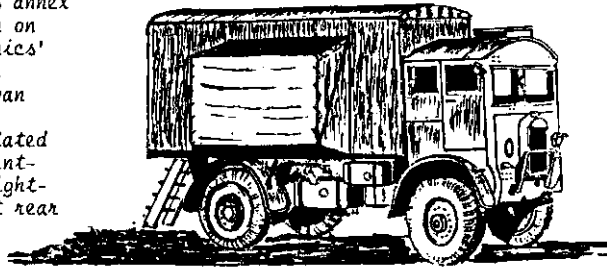
(Top) A 3 cylinder Lister generator on a 2 wheel trailer, with an older design portable aerial, probably hand turned.

(Left) Crossley tender, with unlined framed hard-top. One window in front panel.



(Right) A Tx van - insulated hard-top. Canvas annex could be let down on one side. Mechanics' bench and storage across front of van

(Below) An Rx van - insulated hard-top - fan ventilated. Canvas light-trap and annex at rear over steps.





*The first 132 camp at Darwin - the RAAF wireless station at
the 11 mile.*



The 132 Mess and Orderly Room at Knuckey's Lagoon.



The showers offered protection from the tropical rain!

ALL ABOARD FOR DARWIN!

Bob McDonnell.

I had been in the Air Force from the 4th. February 1942 and could easily have been a Wireless Mech or even a Radar Mech except for one important reason - after four months of theory - maths, physics etc., - the rather foolish RAAF Instructor placed a wireless set in front of me. They might just as well placed the innards of an aero engine - and to top it off they also demanded that I solder something. I think they called it a 'rat trap.' My bad luck, there was no super glue in those days!

After the usual brush with S/Ldr. Reynolds which we failures had to endure, and after being asked if we would like to see our mothers and sisters raped by the Japanese, I was 'asked' if I would like to be an RDF Operator and undergo a period of training at Richmond. As I had little alternative, I gladly accepted the suggestion, and in August 1942, along with several others, I joined Operators' Course No. 24.

We all passed....I don't think there were any failures in that one...so on 25th. September some 24 of us AC1's were posted to 132 RDF station which was then situated in a cypress copse in a corner of the Richmond Air Base.

132 was a Mobile COL Mk V which came out with the 'Capstan' or Spitfire Wing then also stationed at Richmond. There was much coming and going....Guards came and went - Mechanics, General Hands, Cooks, Clerks, Drivers, Fitter DMT's etc., all gathered under the leadership of a very new CO - P/O John Brier. He was a kind, benign 'Oldie' by our standards and very easy to get on with.

When there was a dearth of Guards, the Operators had to take their turn as the equipment was 'Top Secret' - I think we would have had to bayonet any spies as we had no ammo, and those 'spying' RAAF and WAAAF types trysting in the copse were a constant source of worry.

We were allowed to have a play with the set - uncalibrated of course - but I don't recall picking up the Jap aircraft which history now tells us were actually over Sydney about that time.

132 was quite a set-up, - Crossley trucks with the transmitter and receiver trucks each towing a Lister diesel trailer and a hand-turned aerial. We also had a Chev. panel van and also a stake-side 3 tonner with seats. We were taken to the Mess for meals and there were portable toilets. A great many of the Personnel were from NSW so the stay in Sydney suited them fine as the CO was very generous with Leave Passes.

About mid October things started to move - we were all sent home on six days' Final Leave. All returned, and on October 29th. after a big packing session most of the Personnel were given two days in Sydney and told to report to Glebe Island at 8 a.m. on 31st....again no absentees.

About half the Personnel were to travel by ship - the WANAKA - a RAAF charter ship. The CO and the others were to travel overland. The 'Expendable' and the 'Non Expendables.' The gear had by then been loaded and we sailed in the evening of the 31st. October, "Darwin Bound."

The crew of the WANAKA was a mixed lot - some RAAF - some Merchant Seamen - and some RAN gunners to man the stern gun which fired 4 inch shells. There were Mess tables and bunks with horse hair mattresses below decks, which, after hearing hair-raising stories of all the ships being sunk along the east coast, we gladly accepted their advice and put our mattresses up on deck, and brought our meals 'up.' (no pun intended.) I seem to recall that we were in the charge of a very new RAAF Officer with the name of 'Dripps' or something similar.

There was a General Hand with us - Dick Simpson - who if still alive would be a Millionaire or in gaol....he quickly produced a Crown and Anchor board and two up dice, and proceeded to make his first million. He also went on to trace in indelible pencil on the khaki Comforts Fund handkerchiefs the ports of call of that voyage. He sold them to us for 1/- each when the ship reached Darwin. Mine is now in the Archives at 3 CRU or Pt. Cook. We had to do look-out duty on the bridge extension and were shown how to fire a 'Heath Robinson' contrivance....a rocket with wire and a parachute which was supposed to tempt Jap dive bombers to collide with it and destroy themselves - but no luck.

First stop was Townsville where a light shower of rain sent the wharfies scuttling to their sheds and the Army finished the job - we had to do some moving of stuff in the hold, but I think we were more of a menace than assistance.

Next stop was Cairns where I had my first ever pint of beer 'Twice' - once down and once up!

We were all a bit intrigued by Grafton St., Cairns....Queensland seaboard towns had legal brothels and several of us went for a walk along the street - not to sample the fare but to see what a real live lady of the night might look like. No luck...they stayed inside. Probably busy.

Next stop Portland Roads. We all had to help load a lifeboat and to ferry goods ashore. The Skipper actually sculled the lifeboat with a single oar at the back...or stern rather.

Between Portland Roads and Thursday Island the look-out spotted a rubber dinghy and the ship picked up some American airmen who had been on some mission in New Guinea and had run out of fuel trying to make Townsville. Apparently no one had told them of the RAAF base at Horn Island.

Thursday Island was interesting. It was under Martial Law and lots of the shops and houses were deserted and open. One of our bright sparks had his eye on a set of barrel scales in a shop...what for nobody knows...but they remained safe and intact.

Next and last stop was Groote Island. I'll remember that one. The lifeboat again and McD weighing 125 lbs gently sank under water beneath the weight of a 180 lb bag of flour - I'll bet there were some good dampers cooked that night.

Next and last stop....Darwin!....Darwin was the REAL war! Jetties twisted and torn - sunken ships in the harbour and the NEPTUNA at the wharf - or rather its remains. The town ruined and shattered and the RAAF 'drome an absolute shambles. Things began to look really serious.

We were taken by vehicle to our new home at the 11 mile - it was a RAAF wireless station, graced by two 180' metal towers, and it had been partly fitted out by either the Dept of Works or the AWC. There was a Mess - Officers and Sergeants' quarters but all the Erks were in one very large room upstairs at just the height for the mossies to fly in, and the whole outfit appeared to be manned by a single RAAF chap called Stafford.

The gear was set up two miles closer in at Knuckey's Lagoon at the 9 mile and we were told a camp would be prepared - provided of course the war didn't end.

We had to dig our own latrines and slit trenches at the 11 mile, but the huge disadvantage was the communal living - the coming and going on shift duty by the Guards, the Operators and Mechanics at mid-night meant that few had a good night's sleep.

The Wet season was coming on by November, and the trenches began to fill up, but the most dangerous thing was that the 'Long Drops' also filled and the water was getting dangerously close to the point of departure, so another was hastily dug on a slight rise. Down at the lagoon the water began to rise, but the mobile set was well out of harm's way.

On 23rd. November some 18 bombers put on a raid and we saw one shot down in flames by a Kittyhawk piloted we now know by S/Ldr. Creswell - and so it went on. Red alerts on 26th., and 27th. November and on 20th. January 1943 with bombs dropped. About January 1943 after calibration by F/Lt. George Day, 132 was in business. There were 5 Operators on a shift of 8 hours, and you circulated through each activity - Range, PFI, Plotting, Communications and of course the inevitable hand turned aerial when half asleep you turned with one hand a rubber pedal, and the whole box and dice turned - you had voice communication and a buzzer with the range Operator. It surprised me at the time why the GCI with a comparatively short range of 100 miles worked 24 hours as it seemed to be a waste of resources, for I could not recall any instance when 132 got the first pick-up - it was ALWAYS the AW stations on Bathurst, Pt. Charles, Dripstone and later Peron Island and Port Keats that gave the first warning and alerted 132 to range and bearing.

S/Ldr. Brand, our first attached Controller, told me after the war that the CO of 5 Fighter Sector, W/Cdr. Primrose, was reluctant to let the control of the Wing go away from the Fighter Sector, and only wanted 132 as an early warning station and not as a GCI which was the reason it was there. Things changed when W/Cdr. Jeffrey came on the scene and S/Ldr. Brand who was a Controller at 5 F/S, and actually controlled at 132, was attached to the station on 31st. May 1943.

The first Controller to do an interception on 132 was S/Ldr. Peter Kingsley Strack from 5 F/S. (He was killed at Sale later in the war.)

Because there were some hairy height readings from 132 to the Wing in early interceptions - it could be whoever was on the range tube at the time - anyone of 5 on shift or anyone of 25 Operators who could be on that tube at any time. For those not familiar with the height arrangement on the COL, the height estimate was arrived at by splitting the echo and one side was taken as a proportion of the other e.g. 10:7 or 10:8 and the height was then read off on a calibrated distance chart. The reading could be greatly affected by Temperature Inversion or storms, and the Jap practice was to sit Fighter Top Cover directly over the bombers so two different heights could register for the same target. With practice, however, it was possible to read the two heights - one for the Fighter cover and one for the bombers - as the top cover stayed slightly behind and above until they got very close to Darwin and they closed up.

S/Ldr. Brand always made it clear to the Range Operator that it was better to take a reading and add 1000 feet as planes run better down-hill than up-hill! When we were able after a raid, we would compare our height readings with those of the A.A. gunners for their predictors were accurate.

Because of these sometimes inaccurate readings, Mr. Brand then picked his own crew after observing all at work or practice so that the same Operator did the same job at all times and his team came on duty when a raid was picked up by the AW stations. Oh Great Joy to the shift going on...but that was the way the Controller wanted it, and that was how it worked until the last raid in November 1943.

During one night Mr. Brand organised an exercise with two Spitfires, one of which was piloted by W/Cdr. Caldwell just to see how accurate the set and Operator were. It was a moonlit night and when we thought they were nearly touching, the W/Cdr. could not see the other plane and got him to switch on his lights. From memory, he was a mile behind and 500 feet below. It was after this that Mr. Brand and W/Cdr. Jeffrey recommended to Air Command that an A.I. set from England be fitted to a Beaufighter, as there had been several night raids but no successful intercepts. It was subsequently learned after the war that the English GCI Operator handed over to the

A.I.Operator at 3 miles.

By April 1943 our camp at Knuckeys was ready....we helped to build it with the Dept. of Works. After reading of the living conditions on other Radar Stations, 132 was luxury indeed! Reticulated water - American tents with 3 men to each - electric light - Canteen - 2 bottles of beer per man per week and even flat lolly water. Meals were much the same though - goldfish - apple jelly - M & V - tinned snags - occasional bread and meat - really the same as any Mess in the Army, Navy or Air Force. Only a short walk to the Doover - pictures each week at Berrimah at the 8 mile. Two up at the AWC camp at the 12 mile for the gamblers, and swimming at Rapid Creek Darwin, Howard River or Berry Springs, and it was always easy to get a lift as the camp was only 200 or 300 yards from the main road.

S/Ldr. Brand was a keen fisherman, and as he could always get a vehicle, he used to take us fishing in the quiet times. We then got the idea that a good net would supply the camp with fish. We carefully removed the canvas scrim from some spare camouflage netting, and with some lead sheet from the AWC for the weights, and then for the floats there were many lifebuoys around the harbour, so we cut some up and behold - a 50 yard net when the nets were tied together.

It was fairly heavy when dry, and so we duly launched it but then came the hard part - it was just too heavy when wet. We couldn't pull it in and ended up with the camp vehicles having to drag it in and nearly getting bogged. So - exit net - and no fish!

Another rather amusing incident - the canteen got in some stuff called 'coffee and milk' - it was like condensed milk with a bit of coffee mixed, but you had to get boiling water to melt the mixture and then it wasn't bad, but we had no means at night of boiling water in the tents or at the Doover. I wrote home to my father who worked for the S.E.C. and asked if he would get the electricians to make up an immersion heater that would boil water quickly.

Up it came....it looked like a jug element with a piece of flat insulation to rest on the jug and allow the coils into the water to do their work. What I hadn't told him was that our 'insulated jug' was a 7 lb. prune tin. Max Gadd, a droll Mechanic in our tent said "I don't think you should touch that tin or the water or you are not going to live to enjoy the coffee." Easily solved. For a bottle of beer the Cook at the AWC provided a milk jug. All went well except when we plugged it in...the lights dimmed and some bods reckoned the diesels stuttered as it drew so many amps.

132 was a unit on which several other radar units lodged while awaiting transport out to distant parts, so it is very difficult now to separate 'lodgers' from 'lodgees.' And as they were often allowed to join crews on the GCI for a bit of practice, it was hard to know who was who at times. Towards the end of 1943, work commenced on building a big Canadian RWG unit out in the middle of the flood plains of the lagoon. The mobile COL was due to move to Adelaide River as there had been a few raids on Fenton, but as there were the usual few problems, the old set did not move until April 1944 when the war and raids were all but over. The RWG was a dream to operate - Selsyn controlled aerial and good accurate height readings - the camouflage was excellent - a race course with the set the TAB or grandstand, and the track out just above the water was the running rail. And after the terrific heat of the set in the Crossley with 4 Operators, the Controller and sometimes the CO, we now had air conditioning.

An interesting part of a couple of the raids was a black-out in communications between 132 and Wing, and 5 F/S or 105 FCU as it now was and Wing.

We had three RAF Wireless Mechs from 452 Sqn. seconded to us and they thought the Japs were jamming the frequency. It certainly made things difficult.

To sum up, 132 had a busy and interesting life, particularly in the first twelve months. But compared to some outlying stations it was a breeze. We were lucky....we always knew of an impending raid as the Japs had to first bring their aircraft down, and we were informed either from our own reces or from our code breaking teams.

Their reces came out of the blue of course, and again we must thank our outlying AW stations who made our life easier by issuing their very early warnings.

I think it was a happy station....one Parade only about February 1943 called by John Brier by order of 44 Wing. The usual things happened then...a wasp's nest in a rifle and an inhalation of ants in a gas mask when it was placed on. There were no more Parades thank goodness, and after reading of other stations, we were well off.

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The 132 'Comfort Station,' before and after censorship by the Commanding Officer.

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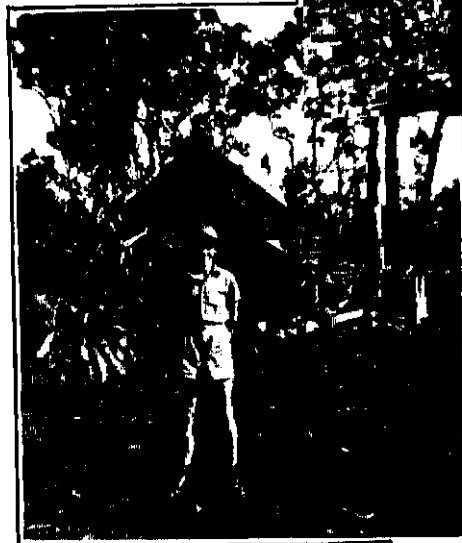
132 RADAR.

(Right.)

Ern Pascoe, R.Weekes,
Bob Doyle,
Bob McDonnell, M.Gadd,
and J.Sands at Knuckey's
Lagoon.

(Centre.)

Bob McDonnell shows his
ability to wear two
hats!

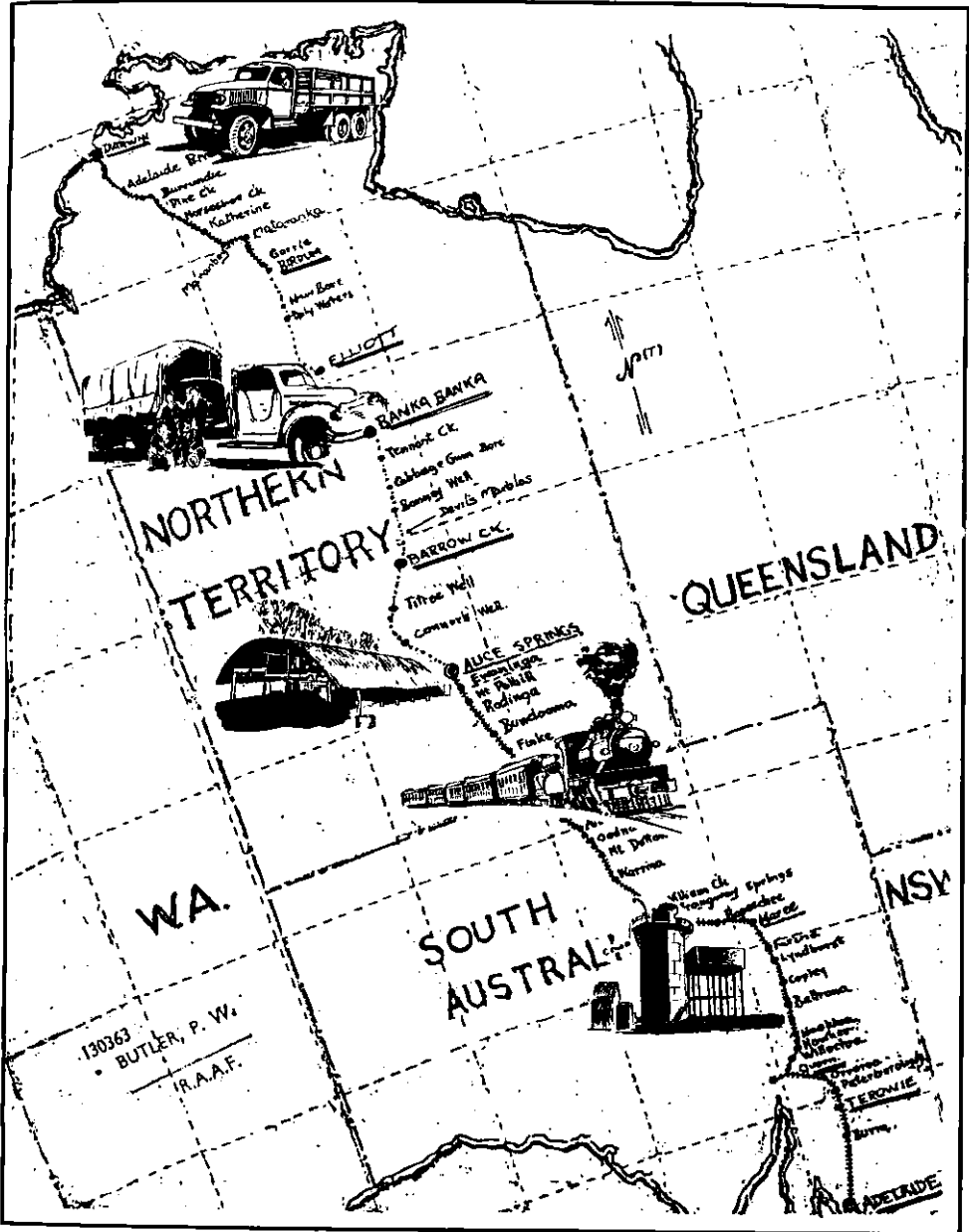


(Right.)

The Controller could
occasionally be talked into
using his transport to 'go
fishing'.....

R.Weekes, S/Ldr Brand
and Bob McDonnell at
Howard River.





This excellent map - "Overland to Darwin" - came from Paul Butler, and has been slightly adapted only, as the original showed personal dates and destinations.

132 RADAR GOES OVERLAND. From the Diary of Bill Langcake.

With about twenty other newly trained operators fresh from Radar School, I was posted to 132 RDF in September 1942, which meant moving out to the back of Richmond Air Base where 132 was forming up. The station was highly secret and under close guard with guards constantly on duty. No one was allowed near the vehicles - but we operators were allowed to try the gear. We also learned that 132 was to become part of the Darwin Spitfire scene, many of which were in the air over Richmond every day. Our Commanding Officer was Pilot Officer John Brier.

Soon there was news of the station's move....the Crossleys and half the men were to embark on WANAKA at Glebe Island bound for Darwin, and I reported there as 'first reserve' in case anyone went AWL, but all reported on time and anxious to go; so I rejoined the men who were to endure the trip overland via the Alice.

We left Sydney on 9th. November, and travelled almost non-stop via Melbourne and Adelaide to Terowie where we entered the famous - or infamous - staging camp on the 11th, leaving again the next morning on the narrow gauge Ghan.

At first there were towns of reasonable size - Peterborough, Quorn and Hawker - and the day passed reasonably well, but the next day the scene changed as we travelled 'up track' - Copley, Farina, Marree and Curdamurka where many had a swim in the water tank to cool off and clean up a bit. It was only when the train started moving off with much whistle blowing that we all dashed back. There was no real hurry - it was a mighty slow train. A couple of times at small inclines the engine would steam on with half the train to a siding, then come back to pick up the remainder. There were some flat tops among the wagons carrying heavy machinery (probably for the A.W.C.) and at times the train was so slow we could jump off and trot alongside picking up stones and dropping them on the flat tops, then we would climb aboard and have target practice aiming at the hundreds and hundreds of bottles on both sides of the track. It helped us break the monotony a bit! On the 14th. we crossed into the N.L., and 20 miles further on over the Finke River. There were now a few Aborigines along the track, and we sighted the Table Top Mountains when we were about 120 miles from the Alice. We arrived there at 11 p.m., and slept on the sand at the side of the tracks until 4 a.m.

Hard to believe, but at 6.30 that morning, we were on the trucks and on the road - such as it was, and immediately we were coated in the red bull dust and sweat. We pushed on with lunch at Ji-tree, and staging that night at Barrow Creek. Here we received 1/3 bottle of beer which didn't even crack the dust in our throats. The 'highway' was unmade, dusty and bumpy, and each truck stirred up more dust for those following it. Work was proceeding on sealing, and when we encountered one of these sections, the trucks ploughed through the bulldust at the side with thicker and thicker clouds of dust. But there were some things that impressed - the underground bores with hot water surging out - the Devil's Marbles and the Salvo utes.

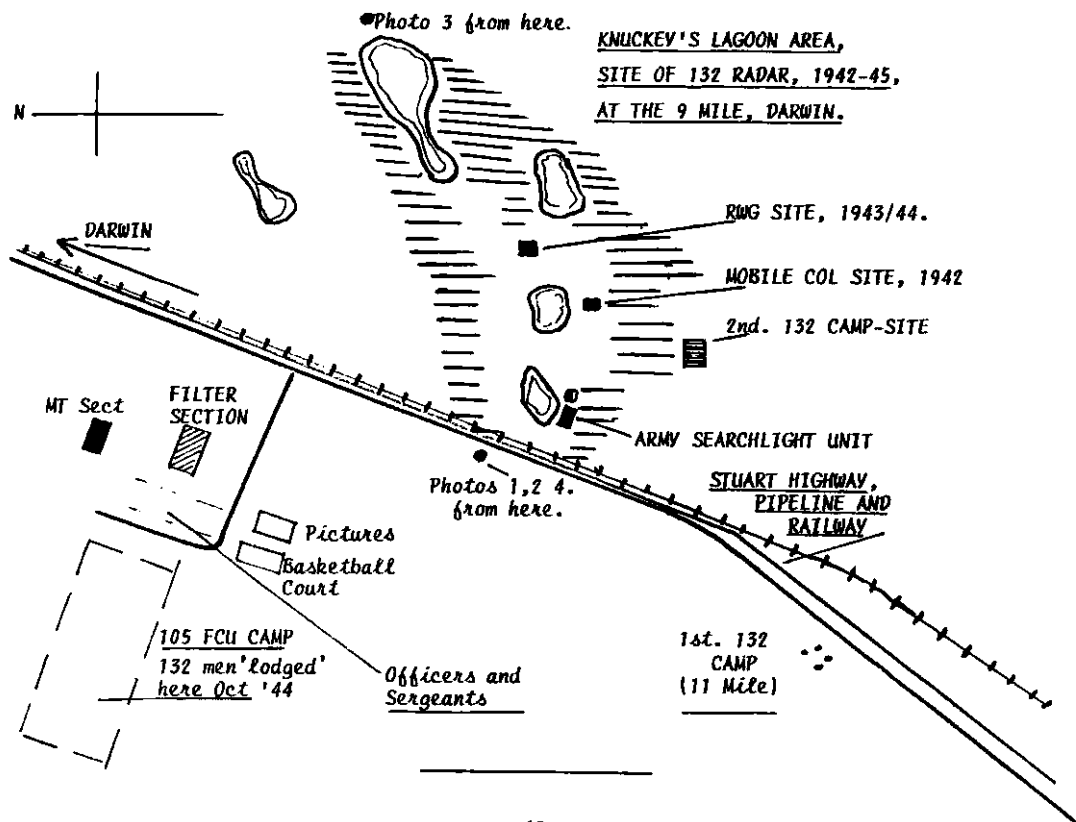
For some reason, Tennant Creek was out of bounds to troops, and we filled up with good water 10 miles further out, and that night - the 16th. - we staged at Banka Banka. The 17th. was an easy run to Elliott which was a good camp where we rested a bit and could do some washing. The day following we were at Larrimah with a few jobs in the morning, and after lunch we left by rail in open trucks for Darwin, passing through Katherine and sleeping in the trucks on the train, a far from comfortable night with soot and smoke pouring in over us.

We arrived at Adelaide River at 8.30 a.m., and had some breakfast at a camp, then a swim in the Adelaide River. We were back on the train again after lunch....and so we arrived at a camp 3 miles from Darwin at 4.30 p.m. after 11 days of travel from Sydney. Immediately after de-training, we were moved by tender 4 miles or so back along the road to the 132 camp past Berrimah where the unit was already settling in - a wonderful place beyond all expectations. We had our first air raid warning that night at 11.30 p.m. but there was nothing doing near us.

During the day a couple of us had climbed to the top of the steel masts at the camp (this had been the RAAF Wireless Station at the 11 mile) and as the authorities wanted the place to appear unoccupied, we had to remove all signs of habitation such as washing on the clothes line when any air raid warning sounded.

Over at Knuckey's Lagoon, the Crossley trucks and equipment were being set up, and in a matter of days the testing started.

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KNUCKEY'S LAGOON - 1992.

THE WAR TIME SITE OF 132 RS.

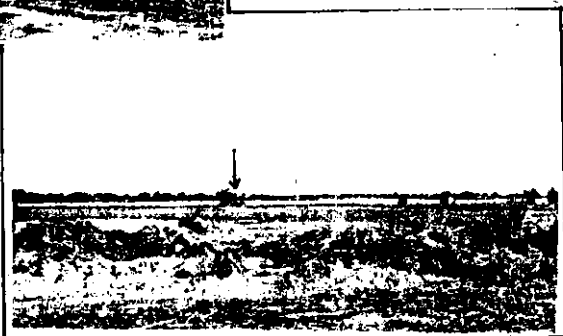
1.



(Top)
The 132 camp in the bush
along the side of the
lagoon area.

(Right)
The RWG Doover site.

2.



(Right) L. to R.
The Mobile COL site.
The camp site in the bush.
The RWG site.

3.



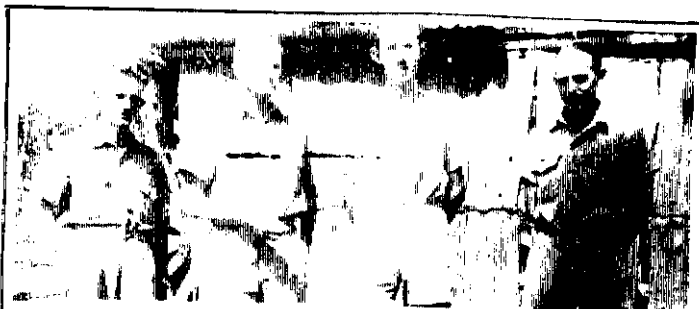
(Below)
The Army searchlight site
was next to the road.

4.



132 RADAR.

(Top Right.)
Les Duthie.
Bill Langcake.
Alec Panelli.
Harold Bignett.



(At Right)

Ern. Pascoe,
M.Gadd,
Bob McDonnell,
R.Weekes,
R.Cruikshank.



(At Right)

7'2" python killed in the 132 camp.
An extra long photo to show it all!
Also in the photo are W.McMillan,
- Muir, R.Weekes and - Harding.



(Below)

"Christmas is coming and the geese
are getting fat!"





GCI Team at 132....from left - G.McGarvie - J.Sands - R.Cruickshank -
S/Ldr. Brand - J.Bryan - R.McDonnell.

A DAYTIME RAID ON DARWIN.

Bob McDonnell.

132 RDF - 20th. June 1943. F/Lt. Brand and his crew of Ops. were on standby on this day as there had been a recce over two days before - then on the 19th. came the warning of a large concentration of Jap planes on Timor - they always moved them south when preparing them for a raid. This was to keep them safe and away from any danger of a precautionary raid from Darwin based bombers.

F/Lt. Brand (later a Squadron Leader Controller) always was on standby when a raid was expected - also his preferred GCI team with R. Cruickshank on the PPI - J.Sands on Communications with 5FS - G.McGarvie on the Plotting Board - J.Bryan out on the Manual Aerial (a mighty lonely job at these times) and R. McDonnell on Range and Height. When operating, the PPI Op called the compass bearing from the station - the Range Op called the distance and height - the Plotter calculated the Grid Reference position which was relayed to FS and recorded. On the 132 Mobile Mk.V COL, the distance was considered accurate to about 3 miles, but height was fairly primitive. The echo was split, and the right hand echo was estimated as a proportion of the left - e.g. - R.10. L. 7½.....R.10. L.8. etc., then the Operator's chart gave an estimate of the height. The chart was the result of calibration flights with an aircraft radioing its height and the station recording the range, and the readings made the basis of the chart. Readings were considered accurate to about 2000 feet, but could be misleading whenever T.I. was present.

But the most misleading estimates could be made during a big raid when for instance, the Japs had bombers at say 26000 feet, fighter cover at 30000 feet directly above and slightly behind, and then more fighters at about 32000 feet. These all showed on the screen as one huge blip, virtually impossible to separate or accurately estimate.

So at about 9.30 a.m. on this day we were warned by 5 FS that 38 RS on Bathurst had given warning of a fairly large raid. 132 picked them up at about 100 miles, and by their slow speed we advised that they were climbing and to expect bombers with fighters slightly behind and about 4000 feet above.

Some 40 plus Spitfires were 'Scrambled' and Vectored to intercept near Melville Island where we heard the 'Tally Ho' from the Wing leader who then took over, and eventually we lost them in the ground pulse about 5 or 6 miles away. There were about 21 bombers and the same number of fighters, so we heard afterwards.

F/Lt. Brand was passing information to the Wing leader, but the Japs kept their formation very tight. We heard heavy explosions as bombs were dropped - and we heard the regular 'Crump' of the heavy AA boys who put up a box barrage - and so with the Spits diving among the Japs - and the AA fire, it was fortunate there were no casualties among our own fighters that day.

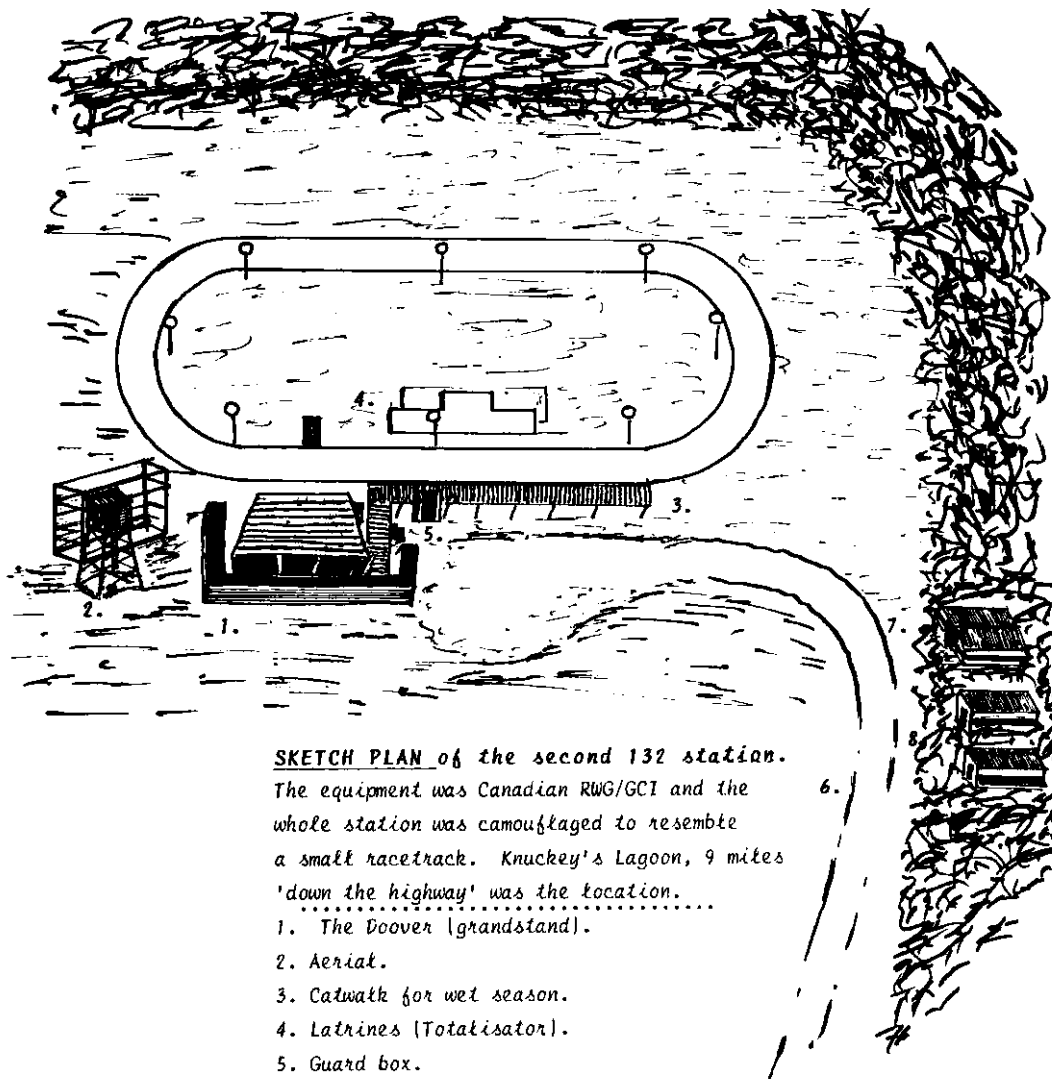
Then came a real surprise. Nine light bombers (I think they were Dinahs) came in at sea level, apparently lifted over 31 RS at Dripstone who apparently missed plotting them too - then screamed at low level over RAAF Darwin strafing as they went - then out and gone before anyone realised they had arrived..... meanwhile all our Spitfires were high up and still busy chasing the bigger game.

Subsequently I found out there were 21 heavy bombers, 9 light bombers, and 21 fighters. Some 14 of these were destroyed and several more damaged, while our losses were 2 fighters. The IFF on the Spitfires made easy the job of identifying them on the GCI, but there was interference on the radio between Fighter Sector, 132 and the Wing Leader which our RAF Wireless Mechanics blamed on the Japs - there was apparently some way they could tell.

It was always a great worry to us that the height reading we passed to the fighters might put them in a position where they could be 'jumped,' so we tried to play safe and put them high, for it was much easier to dive than climb with engines we now know were clapped out. It has come to light that Air Board in its wisdom sent NEW Spitfires to OTU Mildura for the trainee pilots - afterwards sending them on to Darwin. Talk about doing things back to front!

But a great advantage was the advance warning of a raid given by the Bathurst Island and Peron Island stations. They were always 'on the ball.'

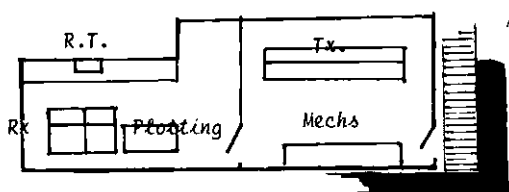




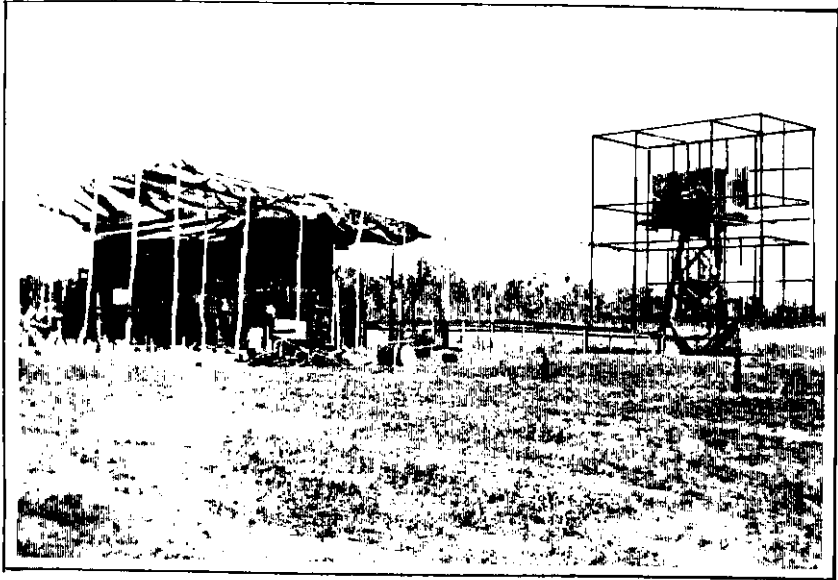
SKETCH PLAN of the second 132 station.

The equipment was Canadian RWG/GCI and the whole station was camouflaged to resemble a small racetrack. Knuckey's Lagoon, 9 miles 'down the highway' was the location.

1. The Doover (grandstand).
2. Aerial.
3. Catwalk for wet season.
4. Latrines (Totalisator).
5. Guard box.
6. Track from highway.
7. Diesets.
8. Guards' camp.



Approx layout of Doover.



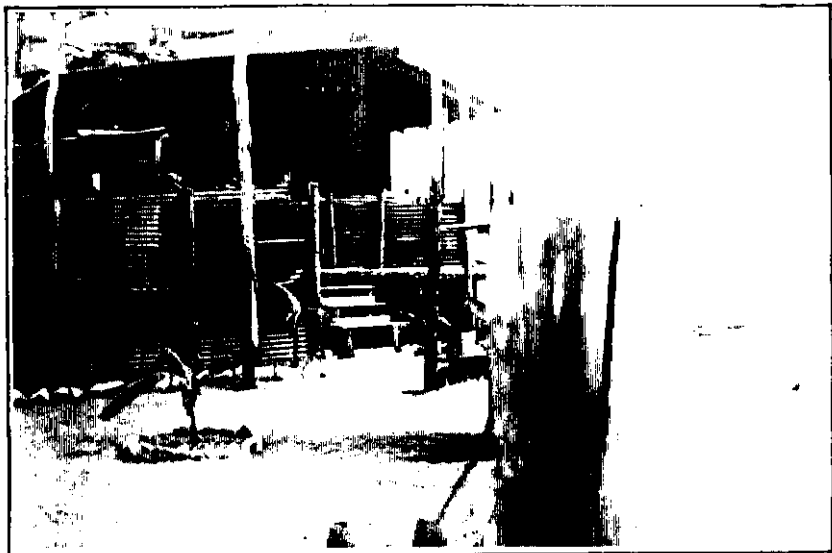
132 Radar, Mk. II The big RWG that replaced the Mobile Mk.V.

When I was posted to 132 in November 1944, the station appeared to me to be split into at least three sections - possibly four. First I was introduced into the 132 sleeping hut and allotted a bunk in a large, airy hut sleeping ten or twelve men. The side walls were of louvred sisal - the floor of malthoid. There was a doorway at each end but no doors or windows, and each bunk was adorned with the standard issue mosquito net. The hut was but one of many in the lines of huts and tents at 105 FCU, but the distinguishing '132' sign above the doorway was sufficient to ensure exemption from the rules and regulations, the parades and what-have-you of 105 FCU, not to mention the chores and fatigues of the place which were carefully supervised by their Sergeants.

Meals were also 'enjoyed' at the 105 Mess - and the big Rec hut, the Post Office, and the Canteen were all pretty good facilities too, as well as the weekly picture show and the games at the basketball court. So much for the advantages of 132 lodging at 105 FCU.

The Doover was further down the road a mile or so at Knuckey's Lagoon - a queerly camouflaged two room asbestos building on concrete stilts out on the flood plains, with the huge box kite aerial some 30 yards in front. In the wet season when the lagoon waters rose up around the Doover, access was only possible by a raised catwalk; but in the dry the truck could pull up to the Doover itself, the surrounds of which were carefully camouflaged to appear as a small race track of some sort, with furlong and winning posts, running rails, tote, and with the Doover evidently meant to appear as a grandstand of sorts. An air-conditioning unit was meant to provide an even temperature for the gear - but seldom did - and the area under the Doover, well sheltered by the blast wall, provided a cool sanctuary much favoured by the men as alternative sleeping quarters, and several wire bunks were available there.

Over in the scrub at the end of the catwalk was the Guards' camp and the engine shed housing the big Caterpillar diesel generators. This apparently was the site of the early 132 camp. The Guards drew their rations from 105 FCU and more or less lived permanently at their camp while providing



132 Dover, about September 1945, and some evidence of Ed. Harges' gardening efforts can be seen. Nose cones of demolition bombs in foreground.



Ed. Harges, Bob Doyle, Controller 'Nelson' Eddy, Stan Crichton and Jack Parkinson.

the necessary 24 hour presence around the Doover where a small guard box was set up.

The Fitter and his truck seemed a rather separate and independent part of 132. The Caterpillars were his big concern, and much time was spent in the engine shed - the station power house - over in the bush near the Guards' camp where the station motor transport was often checked and maintained. Mechanical adjustments and repairs were attended to at the big 105 MT section. The FitterDMT and his always well kept transport provided the regular 'three times a day' courier service between 105 and the 132 Doover delivering the shift workers, and collecting 'end of shift' men at the set times so that all men other than the Guards could 'Mess' at 105 and also adhere to the Roster times at the Doover.

In the Doover itself were the Transmitter and Mechanics' room and the Receiver or Operations room, mostly known as the Ops room. There was the receiver gear, the big plotting board, and a bench for the Recorder log book, a switchboard and the AT5/AR8 which provided an R/T link with 105 which normally was direct via the Operators' phones and landline to 105.

Set in the wall was a loudspeaker through which came the R/T responses from the Flight leader of the Spitfires or the fighters being directed from the console by the Controller.

Finally there was the 132 Orderly Room, which I seem to recall occupied a small section within the 105 Orderly Room.

This then was the 132 set-up as I recall it when I arrived, and by the end of 1944 the Doover had become something of a show place with many visitors viewing the gear or practice interceptions which were rather mysterious demonstrations of the most sophisticated radar gear in Darwin.

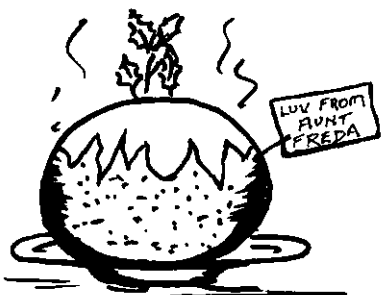
During my second stint at 132 beginning about May or June 1945, a water pipeline was laid from the old Army searchlight station by the road, and so we had showers and a tap, and besides the bunks underneath the Doover, there was now a bunk in the Rx room so that the Duty Operator of the night could sleep, only being disturbed if a phone call dropped a shutter, setting off an alarm bell.

As the station was still on 24 hour standby, the personnel usually had quite some time to fill in, for the practice interceptions and demonstrations took up no more than 3 or 4 hours each day. Plenty of reading and letter writing took place, and provided there was an Operator in the Ops room at all times, the others could spend time outdoors. One Operator had fitness in mind, for he would do a few laps of the racecourse. A well known F/Sgt. Mechanic tidied up the surrounds with some gardening and stone border work. One Operator constructed a weird device he called a 'chuffer' which burnt a mixture of dieseline and water and generated sufficient heat to melt dural to pour into various moulds. And there was always the wildlife show to watch in the late afternoons when the wallabies ventured into the open to spar and play.

There were the brews, the talks and the smoko's of course - but by far the most popular location was the Mechanics' bench where up to three could work, shaping and constructing 'foreigners,' - pearlshell, tortoise-shell, perspex and even small silver objects made from the coins of the day. Time never dragged - rather the reverse, for additionally in the 'off shift' periods, it was easy to thumb a ride into Darwin, or Mindil, or East Point or down to Berry Springs or 224 at Bagot Road.

At night there were the RAAF Darwin pictures, or the Larrakeyah or Parap picture show. Life was O.K. considering.

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CHRISTMAS WITH 132 RADAR, 1944.

Our festivities began about 7.30 on Christmas Eve. We all had received parcels, cakes and hampers, though many were gone before Christmas. There were a few in reserve though, and these were produced from their many hiding places, and cleaned of cockroaches and ants ready for supper. The hut was decorated with palm fronds, ferns and leaves, and the effect was very tropical...and so in these very pleasant surroundings, we settled

down to a quiet, cool evening of talking, spinebashing, study and letter writing.

Our 132 hut was one of about 20 in the 105 FCU lines, I suppose, and all was quiet for nearly an hour when Russell Jack decided it was time to go to the cookhouse for his lemon jelly, 2 pint size; and our first supper comprised jelly, pears and the usual condensed milk. About this time some unknown hero of the hut lines set off the station hooter, and fully five minutes passed before it was silenced. By this time the hut lines were in an uproar with cries of 'Invasion - Air Raid - Santa's coming etc' - and everyone seemed to become bright and happy. Our former C.O., F/Lt. Craigen, RAF, arrived shortly afterwards with his stalwart comrade-in-arms, F/Lt. Buchanan, RAAF. Both had reached a state of benign intoxication where they considered themselves, in their own words, 'a pair of so-an-so fine so-an-so's.'

They produced a couple of bottles of wine - "Just a little Christmas drink for youse chaps," and of course we couldn't refuse this convivial and friendly gesture. Soon we were drinking each other's health, making speeches, and telling the corny old jokes in the best manner possible.

Naturally, as time went by, our two officer types appeared ready to fall into each other's arms and have a good cry; their jokes became as muddled as they were, but we all did the right thing and laughed.

Paul Kloeden and Arthur Whatmore had by this time returned from the swy ring, and after a few more drinks to celebrate their wins and losses, The Pudding was carried in. Now this Pudding was the King of all Puddings, made by Auntie Freda for her dear nephew Russell, and contained three-penny bits, brandy and a fine mix of fruit. Auntie Freda was toasted by all as a 'dam' fine cook,' and it was certain that no more popular aunt ever existed than Aunt Freda during the sampling of her pudding. At this stage there was a bit of an interruption when a very unsteady and sweaty personage appeared at the door, blinked at the light, and demanded of no-one in particular: "Ish thish 132 'ut?" "Did you get thruppence?" politely asked F/Lt. Craigen in his very best Pommy, no doubt thinking of his good fortune with his last mouthful of Freda's pudding.

"Ish my friend Tom 'ere?" (Tom was our FitterDMT.)

"I got sixpence!" (said with emphasis designed to impress.)

"I've got fivepence, thash all, B.... you!" and the intruder vanished in the night, still calling for "My friend Tom."

The F/Lts. eventually retired with all the officer type dignity and decorum they could muster, whilst I, following them outside, was surprised to see a few fights, a couple of choirs, and one unfortunate individual who had obviously lost his hut and had fallen asleep in the middle of the track.

I returned to find that our Sgt. Op Russ. Balmer had now arrived in what can only be described as a very inebriated and befuddled state of mind. Naturally,

drinks and toasts started all over again, between which he did his best to impress on Paul, our S.P. bookie, the importance and necessity of him backing Busybody in the races on Tuesday:

"Now Paul, I haven't any money, but I'm expecting a reg - registered letter, Pa.. Paul ...you know, registered, so don't forget Paul, five bob I want."

"Here Russ, have a drink."

"No thansh all the same...I brought mine with me." and delving deep into his shirt pocket, he brought to light an almost full glass of beer, which he had transported thus all the way from the Sergeants' Mess.

That more or less broke up the evening, and we retired soon afterwards, though the sounds of revelry continued long into the night.

Christmas morning revealed many strange sights. One bomb, an ornament from the parade ground, was attached to the top of a telegraph pole while its mate was hanging from the flagpole where usually the RAAF ensign flew. The station hooter had totally disappeared - and most of the chaps looked distinctly the worse for wear. I think Santa was too frightened to visit - there was nothing in my sock on Christmas morning.

Our 132 Radar group sat down to dinner 12 strong in the Sergeants' Mess, complete with Sergeants to wait on us all. The waiter for our table was W/O Ashdown, the DWO of 105 FCU.

Dinner was really splendid, lasting in all over an hour; but it did seem strange eating such excellent food out of my two old dixies. The menu offered little selection, but the lack of choice detracted in no way from the quality. Fish soup, poultry, ham and veg, plum pudding, fruit and nuts, and a bottle of cold beer per man. Who could ask for better.

We had no complaints about our waiter either, and altogether with returns we enjoyed 19 bottles of beer, and a few bottles of lolly water.

Afterwards the whole group decided to collect the mail and relieve 'the boss' at the Doover where he had been standing by 'on call.' And so, with much singing and another half dozen of the best, we set off for 132 Ops room, down the highway a few miles at Knuckeyes Lagoon.

F/Lt. Craigen greeted us from the door, and gathering together on the tray of the truck which incidentally was describing a tight circle at about 40 m.p.h., we all sang that well known ditty which commences:-

"Farewell Mr. Craigen, Farewell 132,
Since we've been at Darwin,
We've been messed about by you.
The Air Force is a failure, and Radar is a farce,
And as for interceptions, you can.....

A rather stunned Mr. Craigen was somehow persuaded to have a few drinks, and of course...everyone was toasted. Then returning to our quarters again, we more or less went our own ways.

Tea was much the same as any other meal. There were a few more visits, a few more toasts. We started a sing-song accompanied by me on a concert flute which turned up from someone's kit. The attempt at a spirited rendition of 'The Messiah' seemed to signal the end of the Christmas festivities.

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(Slightly altered from a story written in 1947)

*** AUTOGRAPHS *****

*W. J. ...
P. ...
S. ...
W. ...*

..ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE..



AIR MEN'S

DANCE.

A.P.H.Q.
DARWIN. N.T.

...RECREATION HALL



*** PROGRAMME ***

1. FOX TROT.
 2. FROG. BARN DANCE.
 3. FOX TROT - SLOW.
 4. MODERN WALTZ.
 5. FOX TROT.
- S U P P E R.
6. FOX TROT - SLOW.
 7. BRIDE OF ERIN.
 8. FOX TROT.
 9. GYPSY TAP.
 10. MODERN WALTZ.