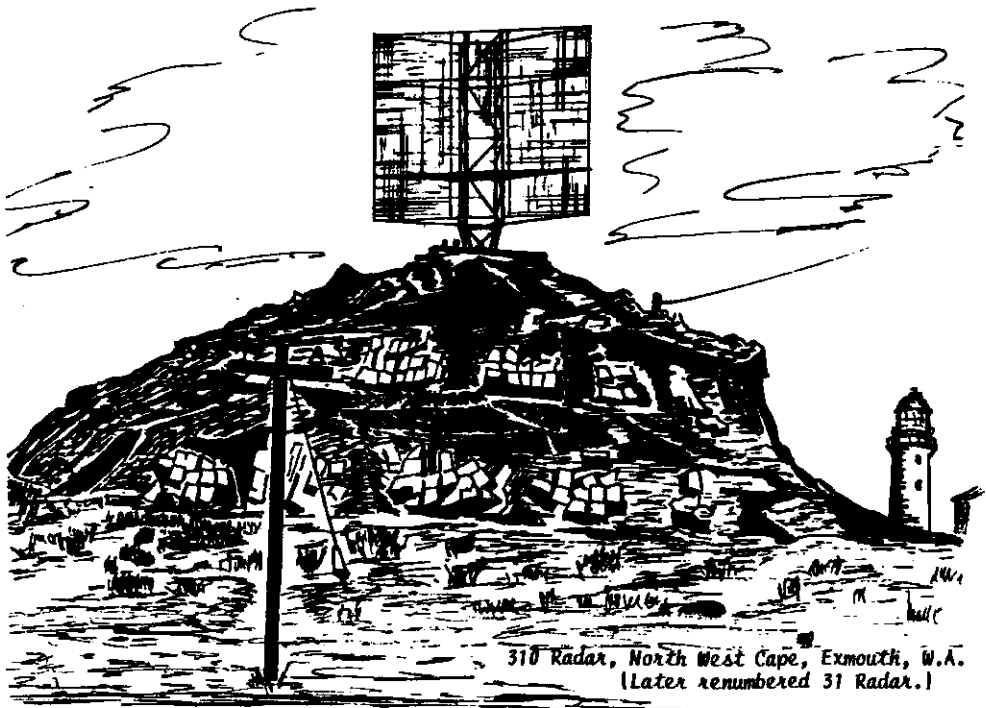


*Al. Ferguson  
R. 2/16/44*

# The EXMOUTH RADAR STORY.

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310 RS; 31 RS; 161 RS; 155 RS.



310 Radar, North West Cape, Exmouth, W.A.  
(Later renumbered 31 Radar.)

COMPILED BY MORRIE FENTON.

Regards Allan  
Compliments  
of  
Morne Jentzen

*The*

# EXMOUTH RADAR STORY.

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**310 RS; 31 RS; 161 RS; 155 RS.**

*The North West Cape and Exmouth Gulf region in Western Australia became a strategic area in World War II. An American submarine fuelling base was established in the gulf with supporting Australian forces - an air base was maintained at Learmonth to provide the protection of an Australian fighter squadron until 1943, after which Spitfire squadrons were on call from other bases. And the cape became the landfall and first port of call for the tenuous air link across the Indian Ocean from Ceylon and India to Australia,*

*The cape and its lighthouse must also have been a significant navigational landmark for both Allied and enemy naval units - and air force units - as they turned south towards Perth, or northwards to the war zones.*

*Four RAAF Radar Stations guarded the area over a period of three years. Two were destroyed by a cyclone - two were destroyed by fire - nevertheless during the critical years of the war, an almost constant watch was maintained to the highest traditions of RAAF Radar.*

*This is The Exmouth Radar Story - 310 RS, 31 RS, 161 RS and 155 RS - all located at North West Cape near the Vlaming Head lighthouse which was then an 'active service area in a southern location.'*

*The history records only briefly the station exploits at other locations. Hopefully, by making it only the Exmouth story of their service, it will prove of general and local interest, rather than being merely an enlarged unit history.*

**COMPILED BY MORRIE FENTON.**

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THE  
EXMOUTH RADAR  
STORY.

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310RS 31RS 161RS 155RS.

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ISBN 0 646 18554 3

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MORRIE FENTON.

(M.E.Fenton.)

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Produced and Published

by

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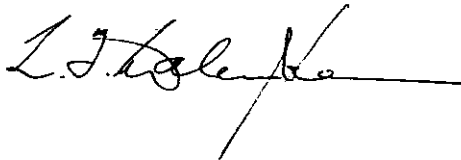
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## **FOREWORD.**

*Morrie Fenton has kindly asked me to write a Foreword to his Exmouth Radar Story. I was posted to this area in August 1944 and saw service there until November 1945 as Commanding Officer of No. 31 (earlier No. 310) Air Warning radar station and also No. 155 G.C.I. (Ground Controlled Interception) radar after the unfortunate death of its Commanding Officer, Flight Lieutenant K.N. Drummond. I came to know this isolated area quite well.*

*Morrie has produced a most interesting account of the radar stations in the Exmouth Gulf area which fittingly has rewarded his painstaking research into documents and archives, and his persistence in tracking down and obtaining accounts from those still available to relate them after fifty years. Little did I then think that such an account would eventuate from what many of us regarded as a harsh isolated environment in which to serve our country. It was and still is a location of strategic importance.*

*Morrie is to be congratulated for his effort to capture this history before it is lost...and I commend The Exmouth Radar Story to those who still have memory of those years and others who have the interest, enthusiasm and desire to learn something of the early application of then secret equipment to the defence of Australia in such isolated and secret locations.*



L.T. Malempre.  
B.E. (Hons.), B.Ec., B.A.  
Melbourne, May, 1994.

THE EXMOUTH RADAR STORY.

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# # # # #

## THE EXMOUTH RADAR STORY.

### PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

*Station Diaries have proved notoriously unhelpful to those seeking to extract a story from their 50 year old pages. Some Diaries are non-existent even - some just non historical. Pages are missing. maybe even months are missing. Some are just a visitors' book, others a statistical or technical record only. All are faded or illegible, with the minimum of human interest. In actual fact, really good historical information is rare indeed in station records.*

*For all those reasons, 'The Exmouth Radar Story,' first edited from the Diaries, then brought to life with the rich memories of men who served on the stations, is a story far more comprehensive and descriptive than the usual Radar unit history.*

*Then add the incomparable Diary comments of C.O. Bill Tucker, which, to contradict me, are so refreshing, descriptive and entertaining, and 'The Exmouth Radar Story' becomes a regional Radar picture not attempted before. A selection of photographs completes the picture.*

*It is my hope that this story also makes a unique addition to the local history of the Exmouth region.*

The sources for this story have been:

|                    |         |
|--------------------|---------|
| The A50 Diaries of | 310 RS. |
|                    | 161 RS. |
|                    | 155 RS. |
|                    | 31 RS.  |

|                          |              |         |
|--------------------------|--------------|---------|
| The Personal Memories of | Wal Cornish  | 161 RS. |
|                          | Bill Hoiberg | 161 RS. |
|                          | Lou Malempre | 31 RS.  |
|                          | Gordon Mills | 155 RS. |

And the A50 Diary comments of H.E. (Bill) Tucker 31 RS.

Photos - RAAF Radar Pictorial II (Bill Babb and Alan Browne) and Gordon Mills.  
Also from Lou Malempre and Denis Holmes.

Personnel - The lists of Personnel of 310 RS and 161 RS at time of formation were supplied by the Air Force Office, Department of Defence.

Compiled by Morris Fenton.

FURTHER RADAR READING.....

*For almost fifty years, the fascinating story of Australian Radar has remained unrecorded, and something of a mystery.*

*However, since the Canberra Radar Reunion in 1988, a series of related histories and pictorials have been produced, the principal five books being the first five listed below. And there will be more !*

# # # # #

- RADAR YARNS. Edited by Norm Smith and Ed Simmonds.  
MORE RADAR YARNS. Edited by Ed Simmonds.  
PICTORIAL I (Overseas) Norm Smith and Ed Simmonds.  
PICTORIAL II (Mainland) Morrie Fenton, Norm Smith  
and Ed Simmonds.  
PICTORIAL III An Album of All Areas.  
Morrie Fenton and Ed Simmonds.

The books listed above are obtainable from:  
Ed Simmonds,  
2/13 Cromer Court.  
BANORA POINT 2486.

- THE STORY OF 319 RADAR. Allan Ferguson.  
154 RADAR TRUSCOTT. Morrie Fenton.  
327 RADAR BROOME. Morrie Fenton.  
RADAR SKETCHBOOK. Morrie Fenton.  
THE RADAR COUNTRY  
SKETCHBOOK. Morrie Fenton.  
SECRET ACTION OF 305. Norm Smith and Frank Coghlan.  
A SAGA OF ACHIEVEMENT. G/C E.R.Hall (Retired)

# # # # #



## INTRODUCTION TO THE EXMOUTH RADAR STORY.

Four RAAF Radar stations were set up at North West Cape on the Exmouth Gulf, W.A., during World War II. These four stations were located at five different sites, and were identified by four station numbers.

310 RS was the first. It was an Air Warning (AW) Transportable station erected close to the Vlaming Head lighthouse, which had been a cape landmark since 1912. 310 RS and its neighbour 314 RS along the coast at Onslow came on air at much the same time in January and February 1943, and these two stations gave effective long range radar cover for the Allied war bases established in the area, particularly the American submarine refuelling base.

In June 1944, 161 RS arrived. This was a Light Weight Ground Control (LW/GCI) station, sent probably to control fighter cover assembling at POTSHOT (Learmonth) as land based air cover for a large Allied naval force which formed up at the gulf before moving north. 161 RS flew in from Truscott, and was first set up at the Learmonth air strip, but quickly moved on to the North West Cape area where the station was erected on the flat, low ground in east of the lighthouse. After only a few days, the station was accidentally destroyed by fire, and 161 RS disappeared from the scene as quickly as it had appeared.

Two months later in August, 155 RS arrived by road, apparently to replace the burnt out station. This unit was a Mk. V GCI station, a large mobile type, English gear mounted in large International trucks; and these were set up on the previous 161 site, east of the lighthouse, and adjoining the small local airstrip which the radar men constructed east of the lighthouse area.

Meanwhile, on July 1st, 1944, 310 RS had been instructed to change its station number to 31 RS, which brought it into line with the number series allotted to AW Transportable stations. (At the same time at Fenton, N.I., the historic 31 RS, now equipped with new LW/AW gear for overseas service, changed to 310 RS, the 300 series being for light weight stations. So the two stations effectively changed numbers.)

In February 1945 when a fierce cyclone devastated the Exmouth region, 31 RS and 155 RS were virtually destroyed. 31 RS was beyond repair, but was quickly replaced with an LW/AW which retained the station number. This was erected at a new location a short distance from the old. 155 RS was slowly repaired, but the station was not called on to operate again on a regular schedule, and was disbanded eight months later in October. The new 31 RS, now a Light Weight Air Warning station (LW/AW) again sustained severe cyclone damage almost a year later, then was destroyed by fire shortly afterwards. The station was disbanded in February, 1946.

The role of the Exmouth stations was to give early warning cover to the Exmouth Gulf area, also ground control for fighter cover should this be necessary. A further important role was to cover the approaches of the overseas air route which had its first landfall at the Learmonth air base, from where the planes proceeded on to Sydney or Perth after refuelling. This air traffic increased significantly immediately the war ended.

This history concentrates principally on the Exmouth life of the four stations, so making it a local history as well as a radar history. Perhaps by so doing, it will answer some of the questions aroused by the gaunt remains of the old station at Exmouth - the skeleton remains of 31 RS, still there in 1994 near the Vlaming Head lighthouse.

# # # # #

RAAF RADAR AT VLAMING HEAD.



Above;

*The lighthouse quarters at Vlaming Head after the cyclone. The building was vacant when the RAAF arrived, and was used as sleeping quarters, orderly room/office, signals room and medical room for 31 RS, and for 155 RS after the cyclone of 2/2/1945.*

Below;

*The 155 RS Dodge weapon carrier was the first vehicle to escape from the devastated area after the cyclone.*



12.1.1943. *A party of eleven airmen under the command of Pilot Officer C.R.Meckelburg (A6601) arrived at the present site and commenced installation of equipment.*

This brief Diary entry is the first record of the early history of the Exmouth Radar Stations. There is no entry telling of the formation of 310 RS, where it first assembled or how the first party travelled to Exmouth, or the North West Cape. The men would have had the responsibility of installing the Transmitter and Receiver, probably also the Wireless Telegraphy equipment, for when they arrived at the station site, construction of the camp was well in hand. This was being attended to by 22 AWC workers and tradesmen, and their tasks would have included the construction of the control tower, the installation of the heavy aerial, the power units, the Mess, and ablutions.

The tasks associated with setting up a station were quite numerous, taking two or three weeks at least to settle in properly and to come on air. First priority was an adequate water supply, then the enforcement of camp hygiene, and the drawing of stores and rations so that the all-important cook could be comfortably installed in his kitchen. Then came the matter of finding sufficient wood fuel so that the big stove could be fired up. Meanwhile, the technical groups were seeking out their places - the motor transport and diesel generators, the wireless telegraphy, their schedules and reporting to the Zone Filter Centre at Broome; and the Radar equipment needed testing, calibrating, and fine tuning. In addition to all these tasks, the somewhat more mundane jobs such as the sleeping quarters, the Orderly Room and C.O.'s quarters and the Mess were all attended to as the station prepared to begin its work. All these problems, and others, would have immediately confronted the eleven good men who first accompanied their C.O. to the station site.

Lou Malempre, who later was to become C.O. of the station, recently made these observations which are quite relevant: *Apparently one of the reasons for having the Radar there was to cover the American submarine base at what was then called 'Potshot.' The base was transferred to Fremantle with the mother ship, the USS PELIUS. After the Japanese had bombed the base a few times before I got there, submarines still used the place to top up with diesel fuel before going out to sink Japanese ships further afield. They were very large ocean going vessels all painted a light blue. Apparently the mother ship was vital to the whole operation, and when the Japanese bombed the place it cleared out to Albany and later moved back to Fremantle. There was usually a small tanker anchored off Potshot to provide the diesel fuel. This base was supposed to be secret, but the Japanese knew about it. The base was staffed with US Navy staff and consisted of several igloo type huts near a jetty. We had little to do with them.*

*And (the station) was not at North West Cape but close by, a few miles away on the peninsula, on the northern end of Cape Range, close by the lighthouse at Vlaming Head. We were very much in Western Area, and had nothing to do with North Western Area. The radius of detection was about 200 miles, at least from the elevated site at Vlaming Head. Vlaming apparently was an early Dutch navigator who sighted the head and so his name is recorded. He probably sighted it near the end of the seventeenth century. From the Radar tower and the lighthouse, we had a good view of the surf breaking on what is now called Ningaloo Reef. The Transmitter and Receiver were housed in a permanent structure, well camouflaged, and the aerial system was mounted on structural steel angles*

and turned by an electric motor. Because of this arrangement, it was called an 'AW Transportable' station. Why transportable I do not know because it was quite a permanent set-up.

At this time, January 1943, the Vlaming Head lighthouse apparently was not lit, and the lighthouse quarters were empty - so the RAAF moved in, using the quarters for sleeping, and for the Orderly Room and C.O.'s quarters. The separate Mess and camp area was constructed some distance away to the west of the lighthouse.

The new Commanding Officer, though at the time a lowly Pilot Officer, came with some little experience from 14 RS at Wilson's Promontory (which experience was to be rewarded in due time with the rank of Squadron Leader), and by the end of January his station was shaping up quite well with a Massey Ferguson tractor, and a GMC tender on strength, not to mention the 26 men who had now gathered at the station. And already there had been many Army, Air Force and USN visitors to the new unit - an invasion which was to increase almost to flood status through the coming months. Indeed, with the dearth of reports on station activity, personnel and technical details in the A50 Station Diary, it appears to be a splendid record of visitors, with little else recorded.

Early in February, the new unit had its first distinguished visitor of note - Air Commodore R.J.Brownell, DFC, and Air Officer Commanding Western Area - who over the next few years was to make many visits to the station: (indeed his successor, A/C Wilson, later spent one Christmas Day at 31 RS.) Midmonth a party from the 11 Mobile Fighter Sector, then at Yanrey (Death Valley) arrived for a few days, and the Diary continues as a visitors' book rather than as a record of station activities. Nevertheless, the impression gathered is that there were several Army installations in close vicinity, probably A.A., searchlight etc., and by late March as calibration tests were being carried out, 310 RS must have been operating. Two 18 pounder guns arrived on 29th. March, in the charge of Sgt. Horsnell and Lance Sgt. Yeomans - these were installed near the unit, and usually the men formed part of the guncrew - and with 'Morale very good,' the station appeared to be fully operational by the end of March.

*(Although no entry in the Diary mentions the accident, Squadron Leader 'Bluey' Truscott, then in command of 76 Squadron at Learmonth (Potshot) was tragically killed at Exmouth on 28th. March, hitting the water while escorting in a Catalina.)*

The pioneer of RAAF Radar, Wing Commander A.G.Pither visited the unit on 2nd. April, and left the next day. A short visit, but one which can only be described as a notable distinction for station 310 - few stations were so honoured. The remainder of the month was distinguished by a continuous stream of Army and Air Force visitors, with other notable guests being Captain J.Eggleston of M.V.KOOLINDA, Lieutenant Commander Johnson of the U.S.N., and F/Lt. Kerville of 76 Squadron - who all arrived at the station by launch.

An Air Raid Alert was sounded at 12 noon on 29th., with the All Clear sounding at 12.15 hours.

On 12th. May, a practice shoot with live ammunition was carried out with the 18 pounders, the target being the wreck of S.S.MILDURA, just north of the cape. Three hits were scored. and Major Moseley, O.C. of 4th. Heavy A.A.Battery, expressed his satisfaction with the results of the practice shoot.

At 2244 hours on 20th. May, a Yellow Warning was sounded followed by a Red at 2300 hours. Enemy aircraft were heard passing over the camp as they continued towards Potshot where they were engaged by Anti Aircraft fire. Only one bomb was dropped. Again the next night at midnight an Air Raid commenced at 0020 hours with the planes passing over Mindaroo and Yanrey until Potshot was reached where a stick of bombs was dropped. A fighter gave chase, indicating that at least one 76 Squadron pilot was still on the job at Learmonth, but there was no result - and no damage from the bombs either.  
The morale and discipline of the men was good during the raid.

On 4th. June, Pilot Officer R.M.O'Hanlon arrived from Radar School to take over command of the unit. The actual changeover was effected ten days later on the 14th., when Flying Officer Meckelburg departed for 48 RS at Jurien Bay W.A.

A/C. Brownell, AOC Western again visited on the 20th., and two days later heavy machine gun fire was heard, and flares seen near Yardie Creek. To protect the camp against the possibility of attack, reinforcements arrived from Potshot, Army and Air Force, and patrols were sent to investigate. The source of the alert was found to be an American sub-chaser, wrecked while on patrol. A Catalina picked up 30 survivors, but one Ensign missing was presumed drowned.

July proved a rather unremarkable month - visitors and inspections only are noted in the Diary, and there were 37 men on strength.

August. Many visitors, Army, Air Force and civilian came to the station this month, but the outstanding event proved to be the completion of the small unit airstrip on the 18th., permitting quick communication and some transport by air between the Radar at Vlaming Head and the Learmonth base. The strip was capable of handling aircraft up to the size of Ansons and Dragons, but the most frequent visitor over the coming months was a Tiger Moth from Learmonth.

And the term RADAR was now officially adopted:- until this month the term Radio Direction Finding (RDF) had been used.

Early in September, Mr. L.S.Hogan, camoufleur of the Department of Home Security, and accredited to the RAAF, arrived at the station from Onslow, and as he was attached to 310 RS for the next six weeks, it would seem that at this time the Control Tower, or Doover, of the big AW Transportable was camouflaged. Lou Malempre described the work: *The Radar was originally surrounded by a high wooden wall with sandbags in between the walls. It came up about to the floor where the electric motor was mounted to turn the aerial. Over the lot was wire netting covered with spinifex for camouflage purposes. A Vickers gun was mounted not far from the aerial, hopefully to cover the track up facing away from the sea. The other side facing the sea was a vertical cliff which ran along the front of the hill past the lighthouse.*

Pilot Officer Balfe, Commanding Officer of 328 Radar at Wallal Downs, also visited the unit this month and stayed one night.

Another Air Raid occurred at midnight on the 15th., with 3 to 5 hostiles approaching from the North East to fly over Potshot. No bombs were dropped, but two bombing runs were made over Onslow. The raiders were tracked over a total distance of 325 miles. There was no panic, and discipline was good.

At the end of this month there were 43 men on strength.

October was proceeding quietly with the usual visitors and inspections until the 12th. when an Army vehicle caught fire about three miles from the camp, and the flames spread to the spinifex. Fanned by quite a strong wind, the fire quickly increased in size and travelled towards the Radar camp, but the unit personnel were able to extinguish the flames and subdue the fire.

Mr. Hogan the camoufleur, his job completed, departed on the 19th, and on the 23rd., A/C. Brownell the AOC Western arrived by Anson with a small party and departed the same day.

November also proved a quiet month with visits from Canteen, Signals and Accounts officers. Another fire was discovered about three miles away, burning on a half mile front, and a party from the unit was again able to control and extinguish it.

December 1943. A few visitors only - one being a Wing Commander from RAAF Headquarters who with his party had come to inspect Works and Buildings. The year ended with 40 men on the unit.

January 1944 - and the Commanding Officer, Flying Officer O'Hanlon left on three weeks' leave. Pilot Officer Hickman assumed temporary command of the unit. Later in the month, a trial shoot with the beach guns was arranged, and a high ranking party of Army officers arrived - Brigadier, Lieutenant-Colonel and Captain.

February saw the return of the Commanding Officer, after which Pilot Officer Hickman departed to take temporary command of 325 Radar at Corunna Downs. On the 21st., a small concert party of four attended, probably a musical group.

March. Early in the month, G/C. Eaton and a party of North Western Area officers visited the unit, possibly in relation to the movement of fighter aircraft down towards Perth from the Darwin area. These returned on the 24th. Mr. Hogan the camoufleur again visited and stayed for two weeks. At 1515 hours on the 22nd., a fire broke out in the mechanics' tent next to the operations room. The fire was extinguished in thirty minutes, but a tent and some equipment was destroyed.

On April 4th., Mr. Hogan the camoufleur departed, and the Western Area Canteen Officer and Messing Officer called on inspection. The AOC Western Area again arrived at the unit with a party of officers, evidently by Anson aircraft.

And at the end of the month a party of Army officers arrived by air from Corunna Downs with a trial shoot of the 18 pounder beach guns being arranged as a consequence.

In May the GCI station, 161 Radar arrived from Potshot where it had first been set up, and 310 Radar provided Mess arrangements and accommodation for the technical crew which accompanied the equipment. This was on May 11th. At 1610 hours on 16th., 161 Radar was destroyed by fire. An investigation was carried out the next day by the Signals officer from Potshot, and the 161 men departed with the remains of their station to return to Radar Wing at Darwin.

On the last day of the month, an unidentified plane was observed on reconnaissance over the area. The aircraft was presumed Hostile, and a Red was sounded. The All Clear came an hour later. This was the month when the Spitfires moved down from Darwin to cover the assembling of a large fleet.

Lou Malempe arrived at the cape about three months after the fleet left the gulf, but he knew of the operation:-Before I got there apparently a large fleet with the battleship RICHELIEU as flagship anchored in Exmouth Gulf and went up to the Dutch East Indies and bombarded some target(s). Exmouth Gulf was regarded as a strategic location. The lighthouse was re-activated while this fleet was there. Possibly this is when 161 Radar was there but I did not hear of it. I did hear they had a Spitfire squadron at Potshot to give some coverage for the fleet and the odd one visited the rough strip near the Radar at the time.

June proved a most unremarkable month with various visitors only.

July proved more noteworthy because a change was noted in the events recorded in the Diary - for the first time, some aircraft plotting and station personnel received mention, which makes for a little more historical content. On the 4th., a Skymaster, or C54 was plotted to 163 miles, which indicates the station was performing well.

Then on the 6th., a signal was received from Western Area Headquarters advising that the station had been renumbered as from 1.7.44....the station would henceforth be 31 RS.

And a new Gun I/C replaced Sgt. Dewar after 10 months - the new man was Sgt. V.L.Smith. Also an entry on the 25th. indicates that a QANTAS Liberator was tracked to 145 miles.

August proved to be quite eventful, for on the 1st., a DH84 landed at the Radar strip with a cinema operator and his gear, and the station was treated to its first picture show. And on the 7th., 155 RS arrived by motor convoy comprising 13 vehicles - an impressive spectacle. Their tents were pitched around the Mess which they then shared with 31 RS.

Now about 155 RS. I do not know why it was sent there. Possibly they had some idea of another naval strike from Exmouth Gulf, but this did not eventuate during my time. American, some Dutch and British submariners continued to use Potshot as a staging port.

155 RS was set up in what would be the flat area near the V.L.F. towers on the map nearby the rough airstrip. It consisted of a transmitter truck in an International vehicle, a receiver truck in a similar vehicle, two separate power trailers with Lister diesel generators, and aerial system mounted on a Bofors gun chassis. The transmitter was an English COL type, of 120 Kw peak pulse power operating near 200 Mhz. The receiver was also of the COL type and comprised two units side by side, one being the Plan Position Indicator, and the other being an 'A' scan display with a horizontal time base and the ability to split the aerial beam which, noting the relative sizes of the same echo when split, enabled one to assess the height of the targets, very necessary if one wanted one's own fighters to intercept them. Its range, from memory, was about 100 miles as being an interception Radar, it performed a different function to the AW long range Radar.

(Lou Malempe)

On the 11th., The ADC Western arrived by Tiger Moth - possibly checking on the arrival of 155 RS - and two days later on 13th., Flying Officer Malempe arrived to take over the station.

I took over from Dick O'Hanlon who later became a doctor. I had the usual spread of Radar mechanics, operators, some W.T operators, a diesel mechanic, messing staff and guards. We were quite isolated, and had some ATF Artillery staff to protect us with 18 pounder guns, and we had Vickers guns on Vlaming Head, Bren guns, sub machine guns, rifles, grenades and gelignite. One had to learn quickly about human nature in such a place. We were about 33 miles north of 76 Operational Base Unit at Potshot near the American base.

By chance we were housed better than many other Radars which had tents only. We had the generously dimensioned lighthouse quarters at the foot of Vlaming Head. The Mess was in a separate building on the sea side of Vlaming Head. The bend where the road (such as it was) turned from going north on the sea side to going south on the Exmouth Gulf side was known as Madman's Corner. That is where we lived. I remember an isolated grave nearby.

We supplemented the rations we got from Potshot with such items as fish, oysters and turtles. We also had an arrangement with a nearby station owner, Eric Payne, to supply us with sheep which the guards turned into mutton. He was some miles away at Yardie Creek station - a genial gent in his early forties, living there with his wife, young daughter, and an efficient Chinese stockman named 'Tommy.' We also had kangaroo tail soup and steaks at times. There were plenty of kangaroos (euros) and emus about. He ran about 10000 sheep I think in low rainfall country. I think its average was about ten inches a year, but that was not regular. The country was mainly covered in spinifex and rather rugged.

(Lou Malempre)

After the arrival of the new Commanding Officer and of 155 RS, routine life continued with a couple of good plots recorded - a Skymaster en route to India was tracked to 186 miles, and a Liberator was followed to a range of 177 miles. A new grid map was installed in the operations room on instructions from the Zone Filter Centre at Learmonth, and as has been recorded in the story of 155 RS, a boxing competition was arranged with disastrous results.

September began with one of those unusual incidents recorded in similar fashion at a number of stations - a white flare was seen above 155 RS, and another was seen over 31 RS. A patrol by armed guards revealed no explanation, but there were general suspicions at these stations that 'fifth column' was at work.

On the 16th. of the month, a cricket match was arranged on the two Radar stations. 155 won the match, but this was to be expected as that station had the larger complement. With confidence at a high level, a combined Radar team challenged a team from 35 ZFC, and emerged the victors. Towards the end of the month, an inspection by an officer of the Public Works was made regarding work to be done on the Mess and the powerhouses, and on the last day, Warrant Officer Dickson, of 7 Com. Unit, while taking off from the small strip in a Tiger Moth, crashed into the scrub. Fortunately, it was a 'good crash,' for the pilot was able to walk away from the wreckage.

In accordance with instructions, the lighthouse was lit at sunset.

October. The story of the illness and death of Flight Lieutenant Drummond, Commanding Officer of 155 RS, has been told in the story of that unit. On the 12th., a salvage crew arrived with suitable transport to remove the crashed Tiger Moth; and on the 18th., F.D. Malempre, C.O. of 31 RS and Temporary C.O. of 155 RS, flew to Learmonth for an administrative conference. And on the 19th., a maintenance crew arrived to instal a new Air to Surface Vessel (ASV) beacon. On the last day of the month, a combined party from both Radars attended a bushfire burning some 15 miles from the camp.

November was noteworthy because of a day spent fishing with wire nets - a huge haul of 42 dozen fish of various sorts was made. Doubtless fish



featured on the menu of the two stations for several days. And on the 15th., another unusual event was a singles tennis tournament, with keen interest shown by all who took part.

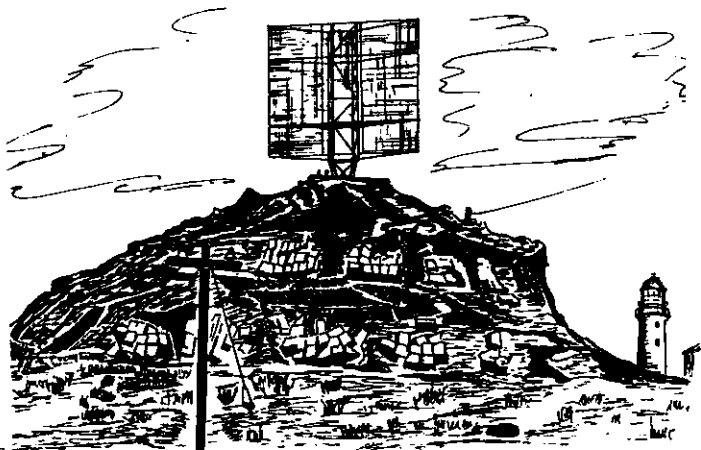
December 1944. Another year ending, but routine life continued with the usual visitors and inspections. Boring operations were being carried out to secure a more reliable local water supply, and the presence of unidentified surface vessels was expected. This event has also been well recorded in the story of 155 RS, and in view of evidence since obtained from Naval records, the possibility was that the vessel was U-boat 862 of the German Navy, operating from Batavia.

Christmas dinner was held in the Mess at 1800 hours on Christmas Eve - no details are recorded in the Diary, but the likelihood is that some 'extras' were provided from Welfare funds and Canteen funds - the cooks made an extra effort, and the sergeants and C.O. waited on the men of the unit. The Christmas season continued with a competitive beach sports day arranged at a good surfing beach three miles down the coast. The year ended with the film, 'The Battle for China,' being shown in the Mess at 1900 hours to all personnel.

January 1945 commenced with the entry - 'Nothing of interest occurred.' Camp life continued quietly until the 12th., when a competitive beach sports day was held for members of both units, and on the 16th., A/C. Brownell ADC Western Area arrived on another of his almost regular visits to the unit.

W.T. tests between the Zone Centre at Broome and the Radar commenced on the last day of the month, and it is recorded that there were 24 men on the unit.

February.....came the 'Big Blow.' (Chapter 4)



310 RS was re-numbered 31 RS on 1st. July 1944, and Lou Malemprè states that before the tower was destroyed by cyclone, an ASV beacon was erected.

161 Radar was a Light Weight Ground Control station, (LW/GCI) Mk. 1, the gear being modified from American equipment, technically known as the SCR 602 I6. The purpose of the portable station was to control and direct fighter aircraft; and the equipment was designed to rapidly calculate speed, height and course of target and interceptor. This in turn enabled the controller - usually an officer - to direct his fighters on to an interception course, all this being done from the consoles inside the operations tent.

Wal Cornish described his station thus: *161 RS was all housed in a heavily oiled tent, like a Dryz-a-bone. It was about 10 feet square and 8 feet high with small diameter pipework for a frame. The floor was plywood. The turntable was probably 8 feet in diameter and similar to the LW/AW units. However, everything seemed lighter, lower and smaller than the LW/AW.*

Wal expressed the thoughts of many when he said: *I suppose our main concerns were*

1. *Where were we ?*
2. *Where were we going ?*
3. *What would we be doing ?*

The station had formed up in December 1943 at Richmond, N.S.W., and in the new year had moved up by rail through Queensland, then by road to Adelaide River. Along the way, the men experienced the usual small adventures of most service units, but at the new site, after the dust and dirt of the road across to the Northern Territory, the new camp experience was flooding, which caused considerable concern.

At the end of April 1944, the station found itself struggling to set up camp at the new base on Anjo Peninsula, later known as Truscott. This was out in Kimberley country, and the 14 Mobile Works Squadron was still hard at work finishing the airstrip and base. By this time, the men had acquired more than a little skill in packing up and moving their portable station in a matter of hours. Bill Hoiberg claimed that *We were so expert we could assemble or dismantle in a very short time, in the darkness of the darkest night, and without the help of artificial lighting.*

So when yet another order to move was received - this time for the equipment and technical men only, the guess was that something pretty big was on.

The unit was quickly packed and ready for an early morning departure from Truscott, taking off from the unfinished airstrip. This time the destination proved to be POTSHOT, or Learmonth air base, near the North West Cape in Western Australia which they reached after practically a day's flying in the transport aircraft. As soon as they arrived, the operations tent and gear - the Doover - was erected and assembled very quickly. By midnight it was working, after which the men slept in the open alongside the tent. At Learmonth they found that a squadron of about 40 Spitfires had assembled, their job being to protect an Allied fleet which was expected to assemble there.

The operators commenced their training with the Spitfires, and Bill Hoiberg noted: *During calibrations and test flying with the Spitfires, 161 was proud to be associated with Group Captain Peter Jeffries, an Australian who flew in the Battle of Britain. It was certainly a thrill to us 'rookies' to observe Jeffries and his pilots come screaming over us, do a roll, and fly upside down about 30 feet above the strip. Certainly 'Spitfires over Australia' which to my knowledge has never been tabulated. Jeffries and his pilots quickly taught us all the tricks of the trade when working with Fighter Control Units (FCU).*

But then came another move - this time a matter of 30 miles from Learmonth to North West Cape - probably considered a more favourable site for a GCI station because of its restricted range. Once again the gear was packed

and the gear dismantled ready to move.

Wal Cornish recalled: *I remember the day we travelled to North West Cape from Potshot. We had to pass through the American submarine base camp on our trucks and in so doing some dipoles were ripped off the array (aerial) when they got caught by an overhead cable stretched between two huts.* While travelling slowly along the rough bush track which took them towards the cape and the Vlaming Head lighthouse, they were surprised to meet a sheep farmer and his wife (probably Eric Payne from Yardie Creek station) who were able to describe their destination for them - and there they eventually found 310 Radar, the big transportable station. They erected their tents around the existing campsite and Mess, and were glad to clean up and eat. Work started again, and this time the Doover was erected on the low flat ground east of the lighthouse, and over the next day or so the set was again brought up to peak efficiency.

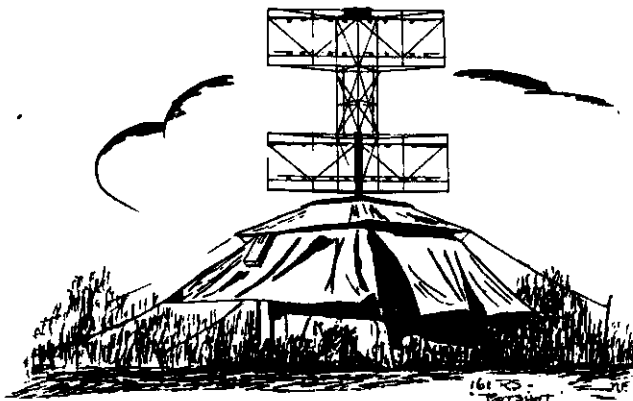
It was soon apparent why 161 Radar and the Spitfires were there! Bill Hoiberg wrote: *The gathering of warships was the biggest I have ever seen. If I remember correctly, they took twenty four hours to pass a given point, and were packed into the landlocked port at Exmouth Gulf for victualing and organisation.*

The Allied fleet comprised capital and smaller naval ships of the Americans, British and French, and the story circulating was that they were assembling for a bash at Sourabaya. True or not - the task of the Spitfires and 161 Radar was to provide an effective air cover while the fleet assembled and sailed from Exmouth.

Then.....Disaster struck! Suddenly the Doover with its state of the art equipment at peak efficiency was in flames, and soon was a burnt out shell with all the sophisticated Radar gear completely ruined. Bill Hoiberg had the opinion that during testing and adjusting, a hot soldering iron was placed on the pipe frame, touched the oiled canvas, then in a flash came the flames.

A Court of Enquiry was convened...the fire was accidental...and so after a very short tour of duty at Exmouth, 161 Radar was on its way back to Radar Wing at Darwin. There the unit was re-equipped, and in January 1945 embarked for service at Morotai.

# # # # #



155 RS was formed at Richmond, N.S.W., in December 1943 and first became operational at Ash Island, Newcastle, in May 1944. It was a twin station in every way to 154 RS - the same advanced English Mk. V Ground Control Interception equipment with a motorised aerial, the Receiver and Transmitter being mounted in large International trucks. The two power units were Lister diesel generators on four wheel trailers. The large rotating frame aerial was also mounted on a 4 wheel trailer/carriage.

At Ash Island, the new 'state of the art' station was paired with 131 RS for testing, and it is likely that WAAAF operators from 131 RS took part in the comparing and testing operations.

Suddenly the operators were an all male crew - and movement instructions were received in July, within a month or two of the destruction by fire of 161 RS at North West Cape in Western Australia - a fact obviously not known by the 155 men across the nation at Newcastle where they had begun packing stores and spares, personal gear and technical equipment. Their future destination was unknown to them.

Additional motor transport was allocated to move all the non-technical equipment, and the Commanding Officer, F/Lt. Ken Drummond, was instructed to have his station ready to move out on 6th. July.

The convoy of technical vehicles - the Internationals and trailers - rolled away on 9th. July on a slow, quiet route to Sydney. Here the vehicles were loaded onto the freighter, "River Glenelg," which sailed for Perth on 16th. July. Meanwhile, the station personnel and other vehicles entrained at Newcastle on 24th. July to cross the nation by rail to Perth, a journey very trying and involving many days and many changes of gauges. At Port Pirie, they set off across the Nullarbor in cattle trucks, with two meals a day, until their troop train stopped a few miles from Kalgoorlie. Gordon Mills remembered: *We had two meals per day - at 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. The meals were prepared at the rear of the train which stopped anywhere for the meals. Porridge for breakfast, and bully beef for tea. Eventually the train stopped at a staging camp five miles outside Kalgoorlie where we transferred to a normal train for the overnight trip to Perth. We did not stop at the Kalgoorlie station. Apparently the authorities considered that the health of the boys would be endangered by the welcome extended to them by the good ladies in certain establishments in Kalgoorlie.*

155 Radar reached Perth on 29th. July, one day behind their technical vehicles which had already left to travel overland on the appalling northern roads to POTSHOT, at Learmonth on Exmouth Gulf.

The well known and very popular coastal steamer KOOLINDA was the usual way to travel north from Perth - and by now the C.O. was aware of their destination - so they embarked on a comfortable sea trip along the coast to Onslow where the 314 RS C.O., F/O Flett and his men made them all as comfortable as possible. A waiting convoy of vehicles then took them to Potshot where they at last met up with their technical vehicles, which they had last seen on site at Ash Island. But they were to find that their trucks and equipment had suffered some damage on the trip. Gordon also recalled that: *...the transport driver Leo Lamont had acquired six chooks, a bag of wheat and some wire netting....he didn't like powdered eggs!*

On again to their new site at North West Cape and the Vlaming Head site of 31 RS, as the station there was now known. So one month after the unit had left its previous location at Newcastle, and after a marathon journey

across Australia, their Headquarters finally declared itself open on 8th. August, with the 155 technical vehicles set up on the old 161 site. Gordon Mills remembered that: *The personnel of 31 Radar were quartered in the lighthouse keepers' house; their kitchen and Mess were about ½ mile west. Our camp was built around their Mess which was apparently where the 161 RS men were camped. The camp area today is a parking bay with toilet facilities.*

And from Lou Malempre: *The 155 staff were camped in tents around the Mess on the sea side of Vlaming Head. Because of their proximity to the sea they were not allowed electric lights. They had an Orderly Room truck in a Chevrolet vehicle in the same area. They were probably ½ to ¾ mile from the lighthouse quarters on the Gulf side of Vlaming Head. So there was not all that much fraternising between the staff of the two Radars. 31 RS personnel were mostly Western and South Australians, and 155 RS seemed to all come from New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland.*

Air Commodore Brownell, the ADC Western Area, arrived a few days later on what was probably a morale boosting visit, and for the remainder of that first month installation proceeded steadily with test flights, calibration, vehicle levelling and communications schedules with 35 Zone Filter Centre at Learmonth. As soon as possible, the station commenced operating as an Air Warning station each morning while 314 RS at Onslow and 31 RS attended to maintenance. At other times 155 was on standby.

Towards the end of the month, a boxing competition was arranged, which was to have disastrous results. Gordon Mills: *When 155 Radar was formed, it appeared they must have recruited boxing champions - we appeared to have every champion that ever was: so Ernie Holmes suggested a Boxing Contest to decide the Unit Champion. A ring was built and the Flying Doctor arrived to referee the fight. Norm Wilson, a radar operator, became the Champion. The Flying Doctor had a biplane with either 2 or 4 inline motors and a crew of three. The next morning on take-off, there was an explosion and they crashed into the gulf. All three men died.*

A mysterious event was recorded on the last day of the month when the station at last became operational was the sighting of two white flares near the operations site, but investigations by the guards found nothing. At this time the unit was 50 men strong.

It soon became apparent that with about 100 men on the two stations, the limited water resources at the camp were just not adequate. More water had to be found and found quickly. Mr. Eric Payne, of Yardie Creek came to the rescue. He made a well available, but this was 15 miles from the camp, and a decision was made that a bore be sunk two or three miles from the camp. Meanwhile, work progressed on establishing a telephone hook-up from the Orderly Room tender to the operations site, which suggests that the vehicles were now located near the small unit airstrip. Towards the end of the month, some alterations to the Mess were planned also, as with so many men eating there, some expansion was obviously necessary. And the camouflage officer arrived to start the work of covering and disguising the all too obvious technical vehicles - the Doover.

On the sports scene, cricket, that favourite sport of most Radar stations, had started with a match between the two stations (results not recorded) and then a combined Radar team played a team from 76 OBU and 35 ZFC at Learmonth.

Early in October, the Commanding Officer of 155 Radar, F/Lt Ken Drummond

was taken sick - he had long been unwell - and arrangements were made for him to be flown to 4 MRS at Broome for an appendectomy. Lou Malempre remembered him : *Ken boarded with me at the lighthouse quarters, and I got on well with him. He was not a well man and in his condition I believe the RAAF was blameworthy in sending him to such an isolated place with an appendix condition that gave him pain and trouble. I remember he used to take paraffin oil for relief.*

Corporal Cooper was to accompany him from Learmonth on the regular transport flight. Accordingly a Tiger Moth landed on the small unit strip to fly him to Learmonth where the courier plane called. Within a week came the distressing news of the death of their Commanding Officer. Flying Officer Malempre then assumed Temporary Command of 155 RS.

155 unit life continued, however;- Cpl. Jennings achieved a moment of fame (plus a mention in the unit Diary) when he landed a 69 lb. groper - a return cricket match was played at Learmonth in 110 degree heat, with victory to Radar - the Mess improvements were completed - and a beach sports day was arranged with a very comprehensive programme including a chariot race and a musical race.

The month ended with the men fighting a bushfire.  
37 men on strength.

Work continued on the equipment in November. Calibration, matching and phasing was attended to which again suggests that the equipment was being tuned to peak performance at its new permanent site at the airstrip. A card evening and a fishing and shooting party was organised. Boredom was always a problem at isolated Radar stations, and morale was improved with a programme of varied events and outings, so that as many men as possible found something of interest to do. And on units where fresh rations were always scarce, the odd kangaroo or two offered a change of diet that was always welcome.

*The food (was) hardly worth mentioning. Powdered egg, thick dry bread, running margarine, baked beans, bully beef and mutton supplied by the "King of the Spinifex," Eric Payne, the owner of Yardie Creek Station of 220000 acres and carrying one sheep per 8 acres, and they were about the size of rabbits. He had a Chinese cook and one jackaroo. His wife and daughter spent four months of each year at the cape, the remainder of the year in Perth.*

*On one fishing expedition we got nineteen dozen fish with one grenade - fish was on the menu until all had been eaten, so we did not do that again. [Gordon Mills.]*

GCI stations were equipped with Radio Telephone facilities, and it was difficult to test the 155 equipment with few planes at Learmonth so equipped, so when it was learned that an Avro York from India, and RT equipped, regularly passed the cape on its way to Learmonth, a test session was arranged - and a route march from the camp to North West Cape was undertaken, which was followed by another beach sports day, offering a big selection of events.

December commenced with the usual camp routines and duties - and an AWC overseer called to check the water bore progress. Advice was received of unidentified surface vessels in the vicinity, and extra guards were placed on watch, just in case.....

Gordon Mills recalled that : *About one month before Christmas Eve 1944,*

*the two field guns were taken away, and shortly afterwards word came through of a Japanese submarine moving south. It passed North West Cape during the night about three weeks before Christmas, but did not land. A signal was sent to Fremantle for permission to extinguish the lighthouse; a reply arrived three days later refusing the request. Three English destroyers at Fremantle chased the submarine around Cape Leeuwin, and we learned that the crew of the sub. were spotted exercising on a beach in the Bight. On Christmas Eve a ship was sunk outside Sydney Heads. I wonder if this sub. was the villain. \**  
*The morning after the submarine went past, the Tiger Moth from Potshot flew over; the pilot waved to us with a .38 revolver, then headed out over the Indian Ocean looking for the sub !*

Advice came that the casing material for the water bore had arrived at Onslow, and the contractor arranged to collect it and bring it on site. The unit Christmas Dinner was served at 1800 hours on Christmas Eve - no doubt the Air Force tradition of sergeants and officers waiting on the men was carried out. A few days later a combined beach party and sports day was held at a good surfing beach three miles down the coast - and on the 29th. the Diary notes that a full length film, "Battle for China," was shown in the Mess to a combined and appreciative audience.

And so ended the year 1944 and the Christmas Season at 155 and 31 RS.

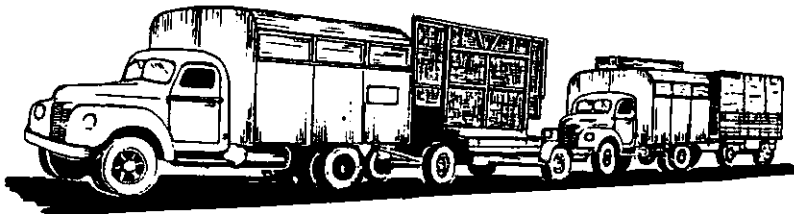
At this time it is noted that the combined total of men on the two units was 53 - a very considerable reduction on the total of a few months before.

January 1945 was ushered in quietly - on the 4th. a range shoot was organised; and through the month a series of postings, mainly of guards, saw many men departing from the unit and not replaced.

Air Commodore Brownell, AOC Western Area, again visited the unit on the 16th. January, and several officers, no doubt the specialists and the officers-in-charge in their various fields, also called to inspect facilities as varied as camp hygiene and unit records, to communications and technical equipment. These 'spit and polish' inspections were a continuing process each month - and a proven way of maintaining efficiency.

At the end of the month, the Diary reads as though the station at last had reached a satisfactory standard.

February...came the 'Big Blow.' (Chapter 4)



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\* It is interesting to read in the RAN history by Herman Gill, Vol 2, page 548, that a German U-boat, U862, based at Batavia, left that port on 17th. November to travel down the W.A.coast, crossed S.A. where it shelled a Greek ship, then travelled towards Sydney where it sank a Liberty ship on Christmas Eve. On the return journey, it sank a second Liberty ship 700 miles west of Fremantle, with the loss of 40 lives.

The devastating cyclone which hit the Exmouth area on February 2nd. 1945 is best described in the eyewitness accounts of those who were there. Fortunately, Lou Malempre and Gordon Mills have each given a rich description which in slightly edited form to avoid some duplication, enlarges greatly on the two Station Diary entries which are more matter of fact. F/Lt. Lou Malempre, effectively the Commanding Officer of both stations, was responsible for both Diaries, but the 31 RS record offers a far better description than the 155 RS effort.

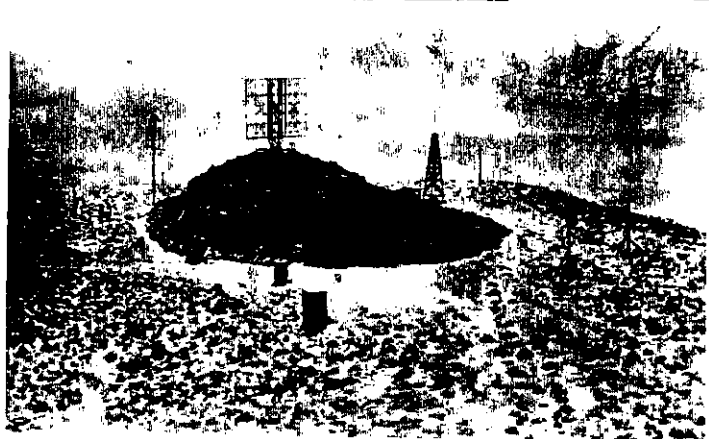
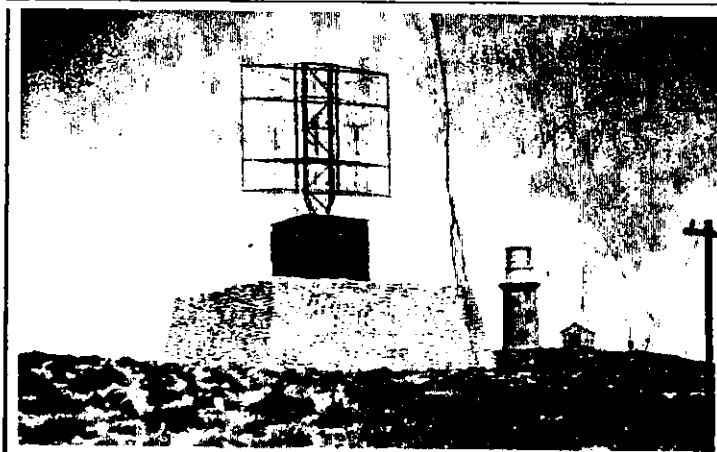
So... first from the 31 RS Diary, 1st - 6th. February.

- 1st.. Cyclone warning was received and all tentage was fastened down. Valuable stores were deposited in safe places.
- 2nd.. Heavy winds commenced blowing at approx. 1500 hours, increasing all day and at approx. 1600 hours power lines were blown down and it commenced to rain. Electric power was then switched off as, owing to moisture, camouflage and even wet doors about the power house were alive. At 1700 hours an attempt was made to lash the aerial tower with rope as the wind was steadily increasing. This, however, was a physical impossibility and would have endangered life to attempt it. At approx. 1815 hours the Mess was blown away together with all outbuildings. Between this time and 2359 hours the wind was at its height, trucks were turned over, tents were blown into the sea and general damage inflicted.
- 3rd.. A scene of utter desolation presented itself. The quarters and roads were covered with feet of sand. Both powerhouses were filled with sand. All motors were in the same condition and had to be stripped right down before it was deemed wise to run them.
- 4th.. W.T. communications were re-established with A.D.H.Q. The kitchen was set up again, but for four days 31 RS and 155 RS lived on two meals a day. The weapon carrier was made serviceable again. A RAAF Liberator flew over the camp site.
- 5th.. An attempt was made to clear debris from the quarters. Much kit lost or damaged. Weapon carrier managed to get through to Learmonth for supplies.
- 6th.. A Beaufort aircraft circled the camp-site and enquired if medical assistance was required.

155 Radar ate in the 31 RS Mess, and the men were quartered in tents on the same camp site. The actual station comprised 5 vehicles - International Receiver and Transmitter trucks, aerial and 2 Lister diesel trailers, and the Orderly Room was apparently a sixth vehicle, a Chev. The 155 version of the disaster was recorded a little differently, because of damage to the vehicles:

- 1st.. A cyclone warning was received.
- 2nd.. Cyclone struck at 1800 hours. All tents were in ribbons. Sheets of water covered the camp site and canteen and store were blown down. Orderly Room tender was turned over. At the strip the receiver truck, one diesel trailer and an aerial trailer were turned over and the transmitter truck was blown off its blocks.
- 3rd.. Campsite was a complete wreck. Personnel shifted to lighthouse quarters and barracked with 31 RS.
- 4th.. RAAF Liberator flew over.
- 5th.. Weapon carrier brought badly needed supplies from Learmonth.
- 6th.. Beaufort bomber encircled campsite and enquired whether medical assistance was required.



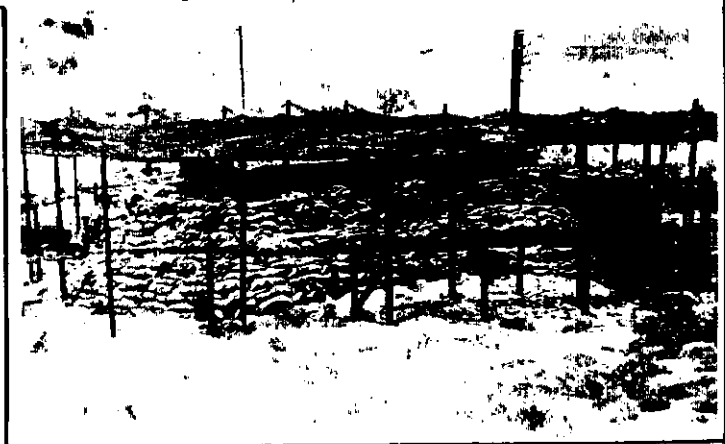


Above and Centre;

310 Radar, an AW (Air Warning) Transportable set, shown before and after camouflaging.

Below;

One of the two power houses.





Above.

*Yardie Creek proved a popular place for the men from the Radar stations.*

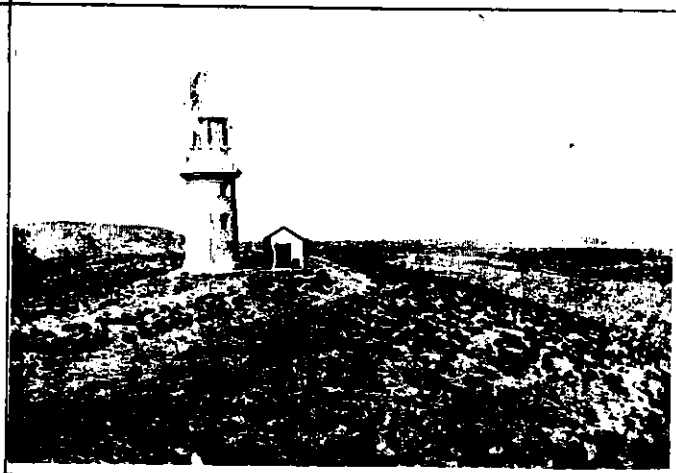
Centre.

*Water trough for the sheep of Yardie Station. The harsh, rocky nature of the terrain is clearly visible.*



Right.

*This photo shows the isolated, desolate and deserted appearance of the cape area when the Radar men arrived to establish their station.*



155 RADAR STATION, AFTER THE CYCLONE.



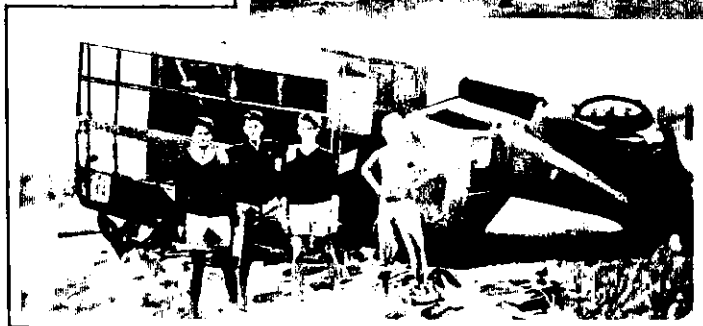
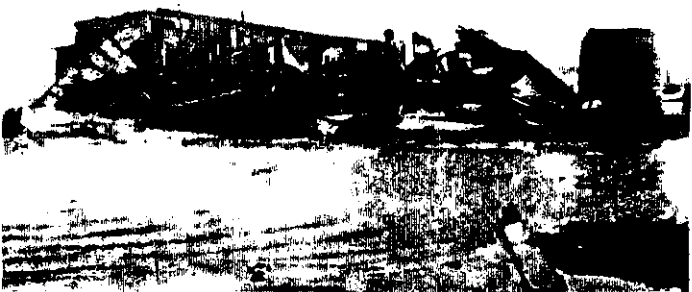
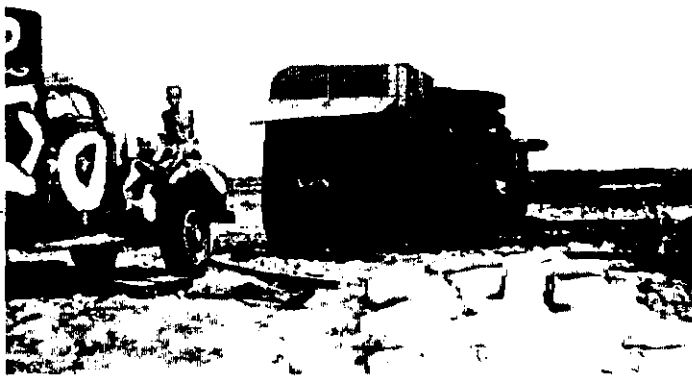
From Top:

The wrecked 155 station - generator trailer, receiver van and aerial overturned and wrecked.

The receiver van - the nerve centre of the station.

The station Mess building, with water still lapping at it.

The 155 Orderly Room Chev. - now anything but orderly!



AFTER THE CYCLONE.



Top photos;

These were taken immediately after the cyclone, and show.....

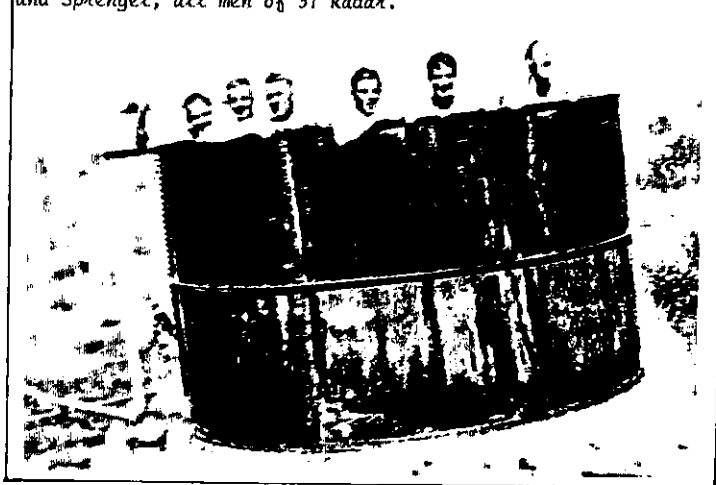
1. The west wing of the lighthouse quarters.
2. The wreckage of the toolshed, workshop and garage.



The rails were used when the lighthouse men hauled their supplies up to their quarters by horse and trolley.

Below.

Cooling off a little in the salt water tank at the rear of the lighthouse quarters. LAC's Hill, Bawden, Davidson, Erwin, McBean and Sprengel, all men of 31 Radar.



THE EXMOUTH RADAR REGION.

Right;

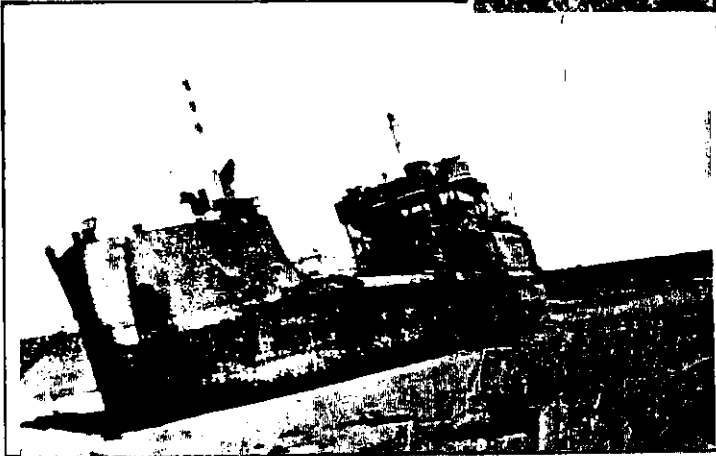
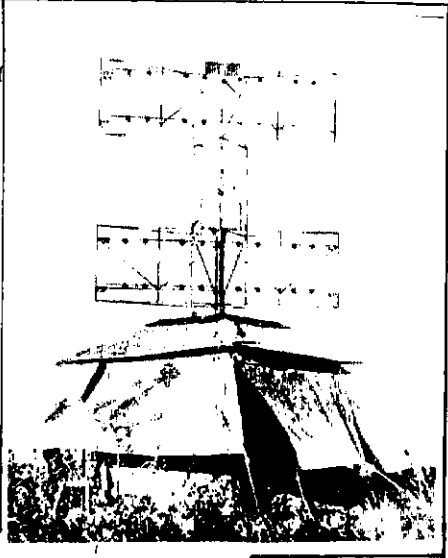
An LW/GCI - 161 Radar was equipped with similar gear.

Centre;

The small American tanker was stranded on the beach by the tidal wave which followed the cyclone. Refloated, it was brought back into service, but when it called at the Radar station, it hit a reef and sank.

Below;

A recent photograph taken at Vlaming Head. The aerial has been recovered from below the cliff and returned to the frame of the 310/31 Radar tower, which seems to have become a landmark, almost as well known as the lighthouse.





From Top.

In front of the lighthouse quarters: Front row; Sgt. Cooper; Commanding Officer, F/O Malempre; and Sgt. Holmes.

At Onslow Hospital; Two sisters with F/O Malempre of 31 and 155 Radars; F/Lt. Hanlon and F/O Andrews, the M.O and Sigs Officer from Learmonth.

F/O Malempre and Cpl. Cochrane from 155 RS try a bit of emu hunting while on the track to Yardie Creek. The Dodge weapon carrier was the 'maid of all work' at 155 Radar.



Below.

LAC's Roberts, Ivill, Young, Woodward and Barron.



Right:

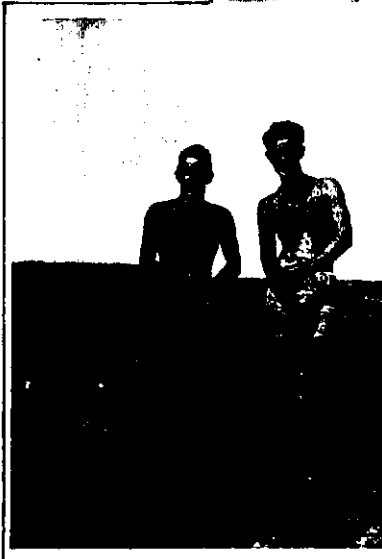
A tent in the 155 Radar camp, showing Vlaming Head in the background.



Centre Left.

Gordon Mills and Kerry Horton.

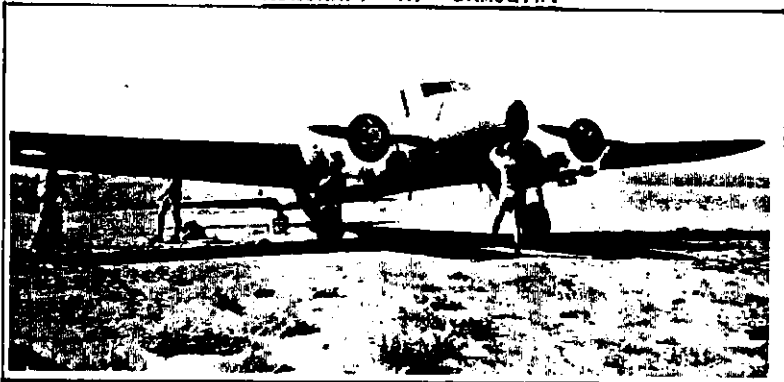
Centre Right:  
Cpl. F.A. Jennings and Cpl. S. Holley in front of a screened 155 tent.



Right:

Gordon Mills and Paul O'Gorman relax in the 155 camp. Today the area is a car park.





From Top.

An Anson pre-  
pares to take off  
from the Radar  
strip.

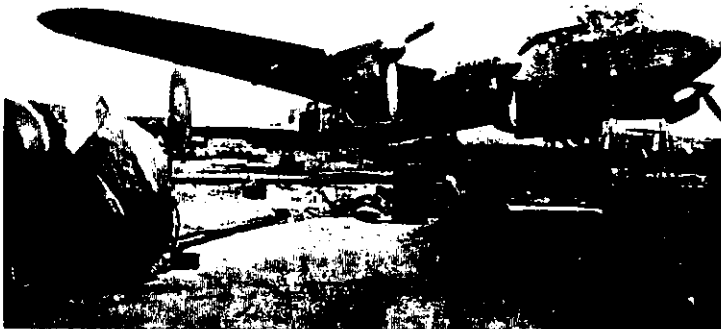
Below.

Three photos of  
a Lancastrian  
at Learmonth  
preparing for  
an engine change.



Another photo  
appears on p.23.

The principal  
work of 31 RS  
after the war  
ended was to  
watch for these  
aircraft as  
they neared  
North West Cape.





F/Lt. Lou Malempre was Commanding Officer of 31 Radar when F/Lt Ken Drummond the C.O. of 155 Radar died at 4 M.R.S. Broome. Lou was then made Temporary C.O. of 155 Radar. That was in October 1944. He was still Temporary C.O. of 155 Radar 12 months later when the unit disbanded. By reason of his joint position, his reminiscences are of considerable import:

Then came 2nd. February, 1945.

The war was moving now rapidly north and we seemed to be left behind in Western Area. The day was very hot and sultry, and very still. Away to the north there developed a strange pale green sky. This went on all day and we took little or no notice. There was not a breath of air. In the late afternoon a slight breeze blew up - nothing much. Near dusk it was really blowing but we had no inkling it was a cyclone. We received no warning of it. Rain started falling and I conceived the idea of securing the AW aerial somehow with ropes believing that I would be held responsible if anything happened to it. On ascending the track to the Radar from the lighthouse quarters, it really started to blow. I had a groundsheet on but not much more. There was no hope of doing anything at the Radar site and with some difficulty we descended to the Mess as we could not go back against the wind to the lighthouse quarters. By the time we got to the Mess it was raging. Tents were blown over, the Orderly Room truck was overturned, and the Mess was disintegrating. The Mess had a secure cold room and a concrete stove recess. We doused the fire in the stove, and with some other airmen, I holed up in the concrete recess on top of the stove while sheets of corrugated iron floated past at a great rate. Had one met one, it would have cut one to pieces. Other airmen holed up in the cool room which had a concrete slab floor and solid walls. We spent hours crouched in such shelter and I have never heard wind howling as it did. Rain pelted along horizontally. We could also hear the sea roaring and I was concerned it would jump the sandhills or dunes and drown us, as we were close to them. Air/sea rescue personnel in the Bay of Rest in Exmouth Gulf were so drowned we later learned. Fortunately, Ningaloo Reef broke the force of the waves further out, a mile or so, but the sea was still very angry by the time it reached the sandhills, but it did not jump them. Thank God for Ningaloo Reef!

Then came an eerie still, apart from the sound of the sea. The wind completely abated. We stirred but not for long. The eye of the cyclone was right over us as it wound its convoluted way south. After this lull which did not last very long, the wind started howling again as the eye of the cyclone moved away from us. So we all huddled together again and all the debris came back tracking the other way, stirred up by the wind. Some time after dawn the cyclone roared away and we took stock of things.

Everything was flattened, steel 'H' beams supporting power lines were bent horizontal to the ground; tents were flattened and buried in sand; any glass which remained on a very heavy 155 Radar truck was sandblasted to frosted glass; paint was stripped from vehicles back to shiny steel panels which, after a day, quickly started to go brown with rust as there was so much salt spray mixed with the rain.

The sea took days to calm down. The AW Radar aerial with its structural angle steel supports, which were quite strong, was torn off at the base and plunged a few hundred feet down the cliff on the sea side of Vlaming Head. From memory, the equipment room was sandbagged and apart from flooding, it survived. The lighthouse, apparently designed to withstand such conditions, stood up well with only its double doors at ground level blown off.