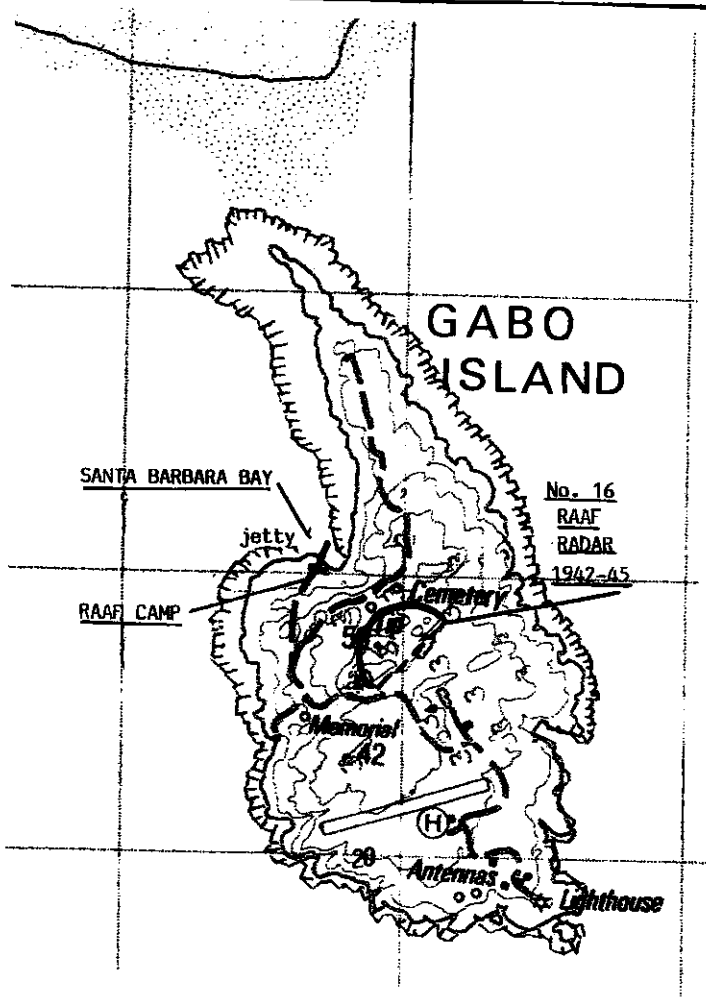


MEMORIES OF 16 RADAR GABO ISLAND



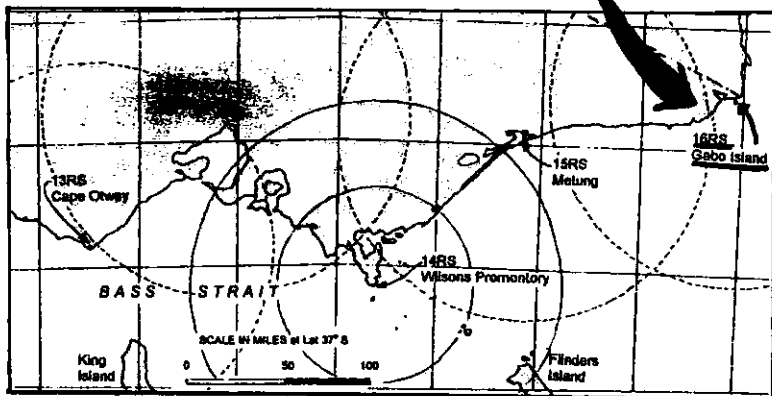
Edited by **MORRIE FENTON**

MEMORIES OF

16 RADAR, GABO ISLAND.

The station on the shipping crossroads

Seabirds and Seals
Sandhills and Sea
Subs and Shipping
Sails and Steam



Victorian coastline and Bass Strait showing the location of various WW2 RAAF radar stations. The circles indicate ranges of 100 miles, also 50 miles for 14RS, where an aircraft might have been detected if flying high enough and not obscured by adjacent high ground.

Cover map of Gabo, and
Inner Title map of Bass Strait,
from Ian McKellar.

EDITED BY MORRIE FENTON.

Morie Fenton

MEMORIES OF
16 RADAR GABO ISLAND

EDITED BY

MORRIE FENTON.

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Other booklets of 'Fenton Publications' still available

10 RS, Yankalilla, (Cape Jervis.)
13 RS at Cape Otway.
39 RS at Port Keats (Wadeye.)
105 RS, Charles Point.
132/150 Pictorial.
327 RS at Broome.
and the Exmouth Radars.

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The photographs appear throughout the book, and have come from:

Len Ralph, Max Huxley, 'Snow Cottam' and Dawn Stubbs.

They appear on pages: 11, 13, 19, 23, 27, 29, 31, 35, 37,
39, 41, 43, 47, 48.

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Max and 'Snow' supplied an incomparable collection of photos which transformed the effort into success.

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A special 'Thanks' to Allom, Lovell and Associates, for permission to include extracts from their 1994 Heritage Report on W.W.2 Sites and Events in East Gippsland.

Also to Max Huxley who lived on Gabo during the war as the son of a light-keeper. His unique photos were taken as construction of the station proceeded.

A 'Thank You' to Keith Murray, an ex-PMG Technician who used to visit Gabo after the war. He became interested in the island's history, and was able to offer several useful leads to folk who could help.

Leone Pheeneey sent the photos of her father's boat - Hugh Brady was of course the Mallacoota boatman who kept the mail and supplies flowing to Gabo.

Dawn Stubbs was actually on the island only a few years ago with Frank when they sought the site of the old station. Her photos and story are much appreciated.

'Snow' Cottam, a Sgt. Mech. at 16 RS, has made available his unique collection of Gabo photos for inclusion in this booklet. These show various scenes around the island and include one extra good Xmas group scene - the men dressed for the occasion and complete with names. Thanks 'Snow.'

Finally, Thanks to Pete Smith for Newsletter mention....

and Thanks to Ed Simmonds who always advises, and does his utmost to help record the story of RAAF Radar.

Morrie Fenton.

EDITOR'S PREAMBLE.

The RAAF Radar on Gabo Island has proved quite a challenge to chronicle, really, for most stations have had more historical records and more correspondents interested in penning their memoirs. 16 Radar has been lacking somewhat sadly in both these departments. Yet 16 Radar was located in a most strategic spot on our shipping lanes - a shipping crossroads so to speak, and the station must have had some hairy moments which only H.Q. in Melbourne would have realised.

After assisting in the preparation of our Pictorials, I thought it strange there were no Gabo photos, whereas other stations had photos to burn - metaphorically, despite the ban on cameras. This seemed something of a challenge also - so too that the early A50 records were lost - or missing - or destroyed- or whatever. And early Personnel, who might have told us about the station in its first year or so, just didn't seem to be around anymore.

When I found that the A50's began only in 1944, recording mainly the weather and supply boat arrivals, I almost despaired. But perseverance won the day. Correspondents proved interested and keen. So I pushed on regardless; and then an interesting Heritage report of 1994 clinched the deal so to speak, especially when I received permission to use it.

Suddenly, photos began to arrive, and in goodly numbers too. So "Memories of Gabo" were on the way - not as informative and complete as a History perhaps, but quite interesting nevertheless to any radar type.

And Gabo must have enjoyed or endured weather and sea conditions equal to any radar site along the southern Australian coast - an interesting subject to write about in itself.

Finally, a big "ThankYou" to all contributors - your memories and photos have proved absolutely essential to our Gabo effort - in fact, your Memories of '42 and '43 are the only station record of the early months. And among the contributors are four 'friends' who were not attached to the station, but who have long been associated with Gabo in some way.

We've all done very well!

Congratulations!

Morrie Fenton.

FROM ED. SIMMONDS.

Many people might ask why the history of radar is so important so perhaps I can explain. Radar was different inasmuch as it was a technical arm, not a fighting service *per se* and was cloaked in secrecy during World War II.

The first objective of giving the overall picture has been attained in the publication of *Echoes Over The Pacific* and *Technicalities and Generalities*. That project gave me a lot of personal satisfaction and resulted in several close friendships including one with Morrie Fenton.

However, more is needed to complete the history - namely the stories about Fighter Control Sectors and individual radar units. W/Cdr (ret'd) Pete Smith is dealing with the former while Morrie is attacking the latter. Personnel on radar stations were moved individually from unit to unit resulting in less bonding when compared with the Army where the man in a battalion stayed together throughout the war.

When, in 1988, we started to collect information from veterans about RAAF radar Morrie Fenton was one of the first, if not the first, who asked if he could help. We did not then know that Morrie was an amateur historian of some note in South Australia.

He has been instrumental in the re-unions of Wedge Island over the last decade or so and has produced many booklets about radar stations and other subjects.

Now we can all sit back and admire his extensive list of publications about individual units so making the story of radar more complete.

This book is the latest of Morrie Fenton's work telling the story of 16RS on Gabo Island.

It is a story of the station and its men and I am very pleased to be in the position to highly recommend it to readers.

Ed Simmonds
West Haven NSW
February 2003

FROM RECEIVER TO CONTROL CENTRE.

"Bearing 102 - (one zero two)....Range 052 (zero five two miles.)"
Similar type plots would have passed thousands of times from the radar op. on the receiver to the man on the big plotting board and to the recording desk.

The plotting board was divided into squares, each with its own reference lettering.....DU...DV...and so on, with each square further divided into numbered small squares, 1 - 10 horizontally and vertically.

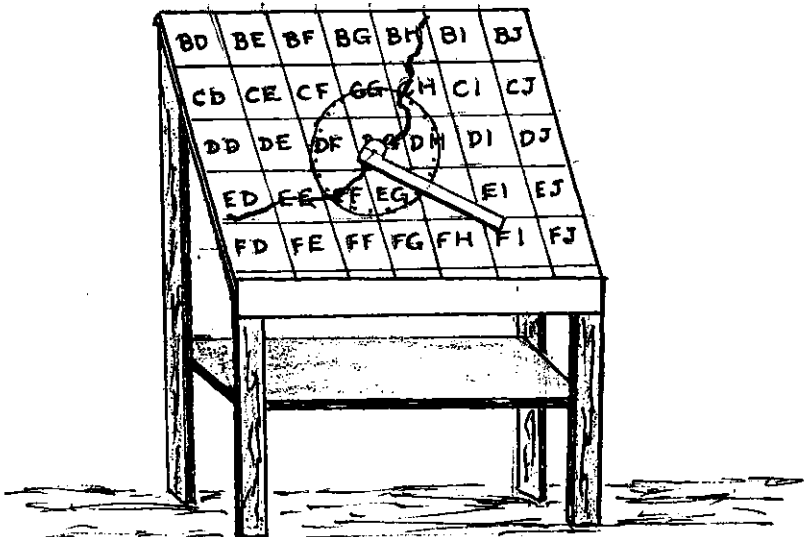
So a Grid Map Reference - Dog Uncle 32 - 44 and the time is passed to and placed on the big plotting table at the Control Centre where the plots from all reporting radar stations appear.
Speed and course and possible destinations are all calculated, and identification too.....but strangely the plots usually remained an unidentified mystery to the radar stations where they had originated. Were they friendly, unidentified, or even possible 'bogies'?

The stations seldom were informed, unless instructed to concentrate on one track for a particular reason.

The Cape Howe - Gabo Island region, with its tall lighthouse, was a strategic and busy corner for shipping turning north or west, a fact known back in WW 1 times when an enemy minefield was laid down close by - and it was known that enemy subs, raiders and minelayers operated across the Bass Strait waters in WW 2.

A strategic place to have 3 or 4 radar stations.

No. 16 Radar was set up on Gabo Island early in the Pacific War..in mid 1942.



GABO ISLAND.

GABO ISLAND is a tiny, windswept speck in the ocean, only 500 metres from the Victorian mainland, and not far from the Victorian/NSW border. The island is extremely rocky, with huge outcrops of pink granite and a cover of sand and soil which supports several plant species of some significance. On the north-western side of the island is a small bay - Santa Barbara Bay - with a beach, jetty and a stone hut thought to hark back to the seal hunting days. There is also a small groyne, or breakwater.

The town closest to the island is Mallacoota, some 14 kilometres west. Across the border in NSW, the closest town is Eden. The first sighting of Gabo was by Captain Cook in 1770, and the name is thought to have its origin in the Aboriginal pronunciation of 'Cape Howe,' which is close by. There is evidence of early Aboriginal activities. The area of the island is 154 hectares, or about 500 acres - there is a very large population of sea birds, particularly the small fairy penguins which make up the largest known colony of the birds anywhere in the world, also shearwaters, or mutton birds which breed on the island. Both are hunted by the predator birds - sea eagles, falcons and the like. Sea mammals also frequent the nearby waters.

The outstanding and dominant feature of Gabo is its lighthouse or light-tower, a splendid and graceful column built of the island's pink granite. It is 49 metres tall and stands on the high cliffs at the south-east extremity of the island. The column and its light was the second to be built on Gabo, and was designed by William Wardell, an outstanding and distinguished architect of the times. It was completed in 1862.

In 1853, the steamer MONUMENTAL CITY was wrecked on nearby Tallaberga Island with the loss of 30 lives, and this disaster probably speeded up the construction of lightstations across the Bass Strait section of coastline. A granite pillar, commemorating the MONUMENTAL CITY disaster still stands on Gabo Island. Today the importance of the light has decreased, and its duties have largely been taken over by solar powered lights. The present day keepers now welcome island visitors, for there is now an airstrip on Gabo, and if desired, accommodation is available in a previous keeper's cottage.

A Navy Signals Station was established near the lighthouse during WW 2, and in 1942 a RAAF radar station was also

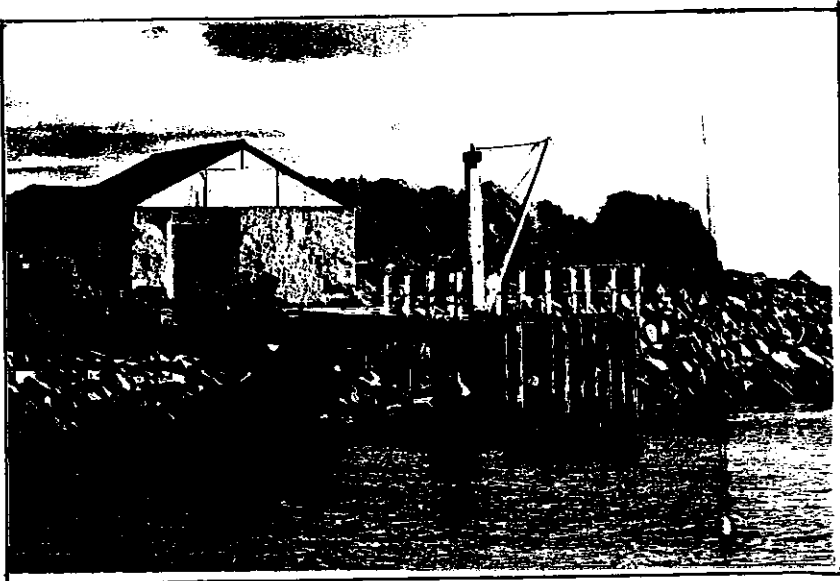


The slender beauty of the red granite column - the Gabo light.

set up on Gabo, for enemy submarines and minelayers were believed to be active in the area where shipping turned to steam up the east coast, or along towards the west.

No. 16 radar station was on watch from June 1942 to September 1945, and its everyday watch was very much influenced by the gale force winds and the rough seas which swept and battered the island.

More detailed descriptions of the island and the lighthouse are available from Park rangers' stations and tourist Centres.



The dangers of the Bass Strait waters were well known to skippers when the MONUMENTAL CITY disaster occurred and a beacon light was erected on Gabo, but mishaps and shipwrecks still happened, particularly near Gabo.

Since then, reports indicate that perhaps 10 ships of varying sizes have been lost in Gabo waters - some wrecked, others by enemy action, the worst in W.W.2 being the IRON CROWN when 37 men were lost.

As early as W.W.1, an enemy minefield was laid near Gabo by the raider WOLFF, and a German minelayer is known to have operated across the southern waters of Australia early in W.W.2.

Similar dangers existed around the South East corner of the continent and northward up the east coast at least as far as Disaster Bay which suggests that the NSW coastline also had its dangers and shipping disasters.

#####

GABO ANECDOTES AND ODDITIES.

'Snow' Cottam

While not an 'original' of the station, 'Snow' Cottam, a Sergeant Mech., joined the Personnel of 16 RS as early as September or October 1942.

* Grease Traps. Traps and Latrines, the bane of our lives, were cleaned and serviced once a week by personnel off duty. After doing Grease Trap duty, one of our blokes asked to be paraded before the C.O. where he declared that in civilian life, he was a Bank Officer and that Grease Trap Duty was unknown to him. Upon hearing this, the boss was quite irate and suggested to the airman that there were no Qualified Grease Trap technicians in the unit. His decision was Grease Trap Duty for this bloke for a month. Each day when we walked past, perhaps on our way to latrine duty, we would give this bloke a serve and have a great laugh, because he was done up with his face fully covered by his gas mask.

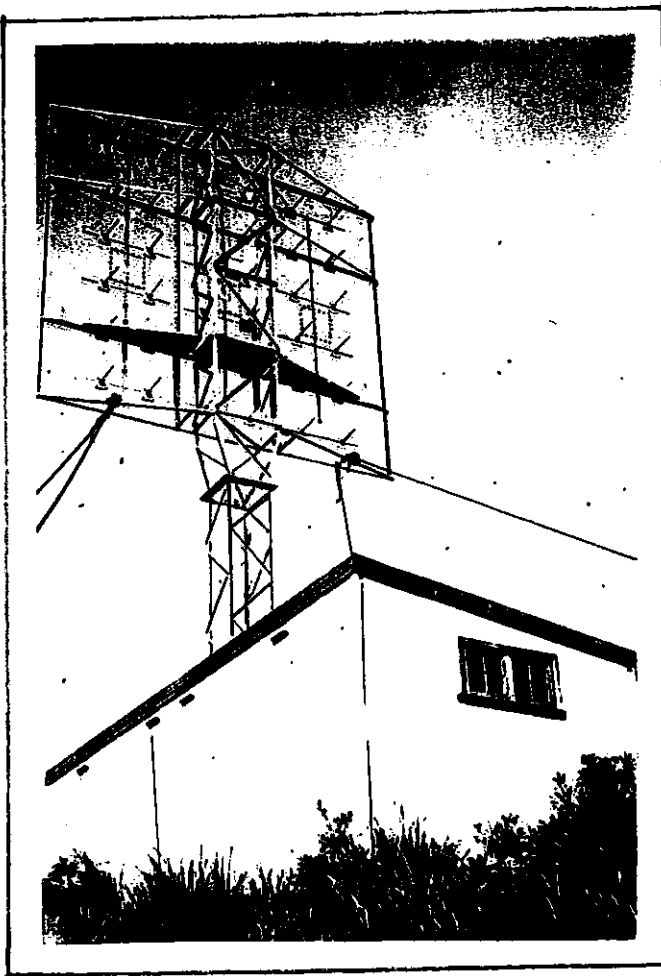
* Sent to Coventry. At Gabo I was placed on a charge by the Flight Sergeant in the Orderly Room. I cannot remember the reason, but I know it was a very childish sort of charge. Anyway, on being paraded before F/O. Parris, he very quickly dismissed the charge. All men on the unit messed together, and because this thing was so childish, all the blokes pitched in with me and we sent him to Coventry. At Mess or any other occasion, when this fellow approached, we would turn our backs or walk away, and we would not answer him unless it was in the line of duty, and then we would have to treat him as our superior. On stand-down, however, we would not respond to him in any way.

After time progressed, we realised this was too severe, so we admitted him to our conversations and so on. I cannot remember him sending anybody else to the boss while I was there.

* Christmas Dinner, 1942. Prior to this dinner, the boss thought it might be a good idea to arrange some entertainment amongst the blokes. So I, along with other blokes, wrote a ditty to the tune of "Over the Waves." On the night, this proved to be a huge success and caused much laughter. Of course, the ditties were not suitable for the drawing rooms of Melbourne or Sydney, or anywhere else for that matter. During Christmas week, the Boss invited the two Lighthouse Keepers and their wives to dinner. Sometime that day, I was paraded before him and instructed that the words of our ditty had to be changed. So that night, we put on a sanitised version of the Gabo Lyrics.

* Making Cocoa. On duty in the Doover, we would make ourselves a cup of Cocoa, procured mainly from parcels we had received, or maybe supplied by the cook. We had an old saucepan given to us by the cook, but we lacked a good immersion heater. So, being innovative little airmen, we made one! One piece of 1 inch timber, two 3 inch nails hammered through it, with a heavy piece of resistance wire between the nails, and of course a connection to the mains. The saucepan would contain a milk mixture made from condensed milk given to us by the kitchen. The piece of wood was placed over the saucepan - the resistance wire immersed in the mixture, and somebody would switch it on! The lights in the huts and elsewhere on the unit would almost disappear and the mixture would boil in about a minute or so. The phone would ring immediately, then a voice of authority.... "Have you got that bloody heater on Cottam? Of course the answer would be "No Sir! - we just switched it off!!!!" Our cocoa was nice and hot by this time

* Joe the Penguin. Towards evening each day a penguin would appear whom we named Joe. He would come from the sea, fall over the doorstep of the power hut and settle down for the night. Of course, he found it delightfully warm alongside the engine.



16 RADAR, Gabo Island. The Radar Doover was constructed on the highest point of the island before the transportable towers were used. The aerial was tied down to hold it steady, and also during the frequent strong winds and gales.

Photo: Max Huxley.

* The Refrigerator. The unit being a dry one, but with good friends in the fishing fraternity, sometimes we would get some grog from Mallacoota. It wasn't too often though, because as you would guess, cash was always 'light on.' However, when it did arrive, we would put it in a corn sack, attach a long piece of rope and drop it from the jetty, two or three feet down in the water alongside a pylon. Nature provided an excellent refrigeration system.

* Lass the Dog. One day, one of the local fishermen asked me if we would like a dog. Of course, I said we would. So, Lass joined the Air Force, and is shown in one of the photos. Lass was a black Cocker type dog and she proved to be very much a favourite with everyone. Lass thought she was in Doggie Heaven - she had never seen so many birds that could be chased. Each evening, as the penguins tumbled on to the beach on their way back to their nesting burrows, Lass would chase them. One evening she followed a penguin to its nesting burrow, and as the penguin disappeared, Lass put her nose into the burrow. She had never retreated so quickly in all her life ! The penguin grabbed her by the muzzle and caused much bleeding. After that, she quickly gave up chasing penguins.

* Trench Duty. Each morning, a detail was placed on Penguin Trench Duty. Invariably, each trench would hold several penguins, (and not very happy) In throwing them out of the trench, always on the seaward side, they would go happily on their way back to the sea. If you threw them on the landward side of the trench, their one track mind would lead them back to the trench.

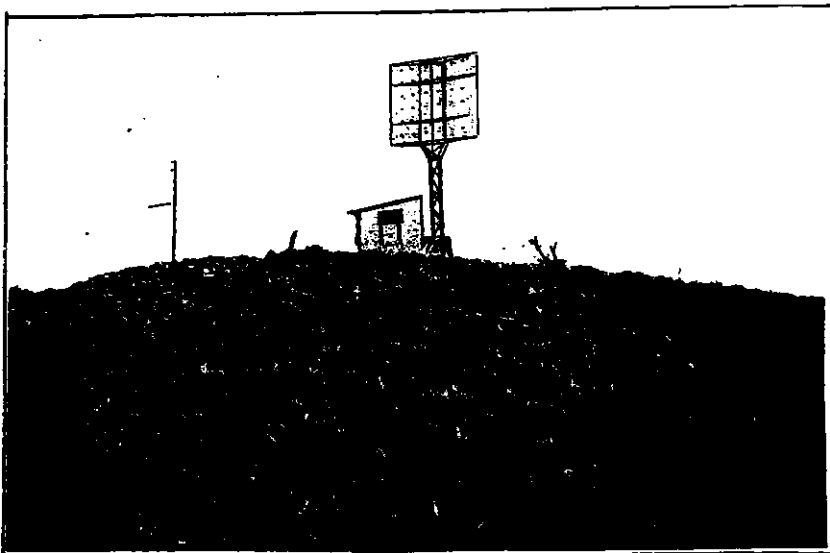
* Animals. Reports indicate that various animals have lived on the island at various times....native animals, domesticated animals, sheep, even goats, and some cattle. On the island also, were a light draught horse and a bull. They were the strangest companions, and many strange stories were told of them.

I enjoyed my stay on Gabo. It was very busy, because there was much traffic coming around the corner from Bass Strait. Most of the ships were iron ore carriers from South Australia. I was told by Eden Cole that if they were hit by a sub, they sank in about two minutes. I left there in 1943 to return to 1 RIMU at Croydon.

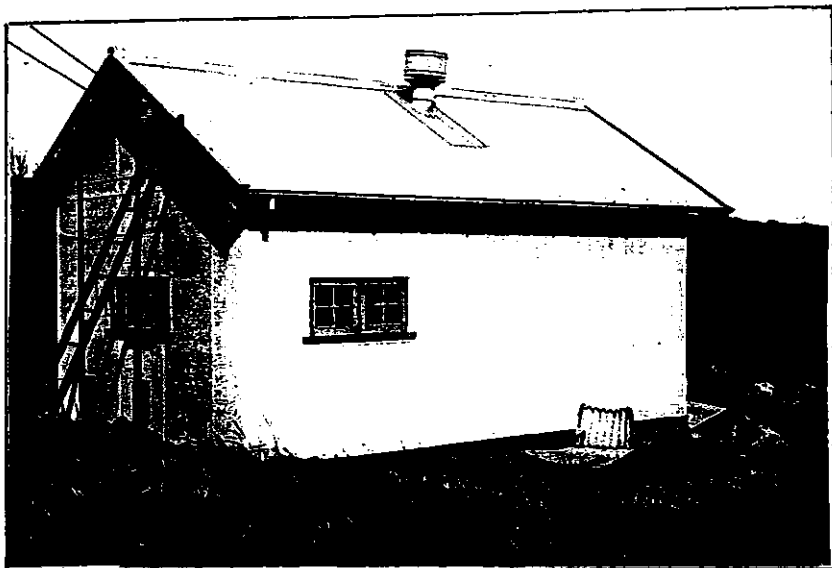
I have also sent in an account of Eden Cole from Eden NSW.

#####





16 RS under construction. The buildings eventually enclosed all the gear, and the aerial was referred to as the 'flyswatter' by the locals. The Doover was sited on the highest hill...the gear was early AW Mk 1.



A completed engine shed before it was camouflaged to become part of the hill. The protruding exhausts are from the V8 installed inside, and the curved sheet of iron was used by the Huxley boys to slide down the hill.

Photos:Max Huxley.

The story that follows, put together by 'Snow' Cottam who was a Sergeant Mechanic on Gabo, came to me from Ed Simmonds and via Mollie Angel, of RAAF Historical Section, Canberra. Evidently Eden Cole contracted deliveries and mail to 16 Radar on Gabo in its early days, the contract eventually switching to Hugh Brady, a Mallacoota fisherman.

The Mail Delivery to 16RS on Gabo Island during WWII.

The following story comes from Sgt B F (Snow) Cottam, a radar mechanic, who served on Gabo Island from December 1942 until March 1943. At other locations it was customary for mail and food to be delivered by one authority or contractor. Gabo Island was different in that mail came via Eden, in southern NSW, while food and other necessities came from Mallacoota in Victoria. [Approximately 70 km of open sea between Eden and Gabo 15 km from Gabo to Mallacoota]

Eden Cole made the mail deliveries, a fisherman whose seamanship greatly impressed 'Snow' Cottam who has said: -

"I admired him greatly as a remarkable and highly efficient sailor.

There was a regular pattern to Eden's visits so we looked forward to his arrival on a particular day with great expectation. He did not necessarily arrive in daylight. Depending on the seas Eden could arrive at any hour. If the seas were extremely rough we could depend on him arriving as soon as the seas had abated.

If he arrived early in the day we would unload his boat, re-loading it with mail from the unit and Eden would leave on his return journey with the least possible delay. That is of course if the seas were favourable. We were lucky in that Gabo had a wharf, shed and a set of rail lines and trolley used to service the lighthouse there.

If the seas were rough or it was late in the day he might decide to stay with us until the wind dropped. We always had a bunk ready for him. The very instant that either the wind dropped or the seas abated, regardless of the hour, Eden would wake and leave for home.

We also slept in the same hut. Almost invariably when we awoke the next morning his bed would be empty, as he would have left sometime during the night. On occasions when he had the time and the seas were suitable he would take some of the station personnel on a circumnavigation of Gabo Island trolling for fish so that the station could have a delectable meal of fresh salmon.

Eden's boat was carvel or clinker built, with one mast for a sail and an inboard engine plus a hand tiller that he operated with one foot or a big toe in particular. From memory his open boat would have been about 18 feet long

with a wide beam. In the hands of such a capable sailor it was very sea-worthy. He always carried as much cargo as was safe and it was a delight to see him arrive and leave.

To the best of my knowledge Eden did not use a compass, marine charts or any mechanical aid while sailing. Time was no object. He would sail night or day. His knowledge of heavenly constellations and stars must have been enormous, as, I feel sure, they were his guideposts from Eden to Gabo Island and return.

The following statement and the photograph of Eden Cole in his boat, near the wharf in Eden, were supplied by Ms C Buckland, PO Box 42, EDEN NSW.

It is fascinating that Gabo's mail man sailed his open boat across Bass Strait down to Triabunna which is two thirds of the way down the eastern coast of Tasmania.

EDEN COLE

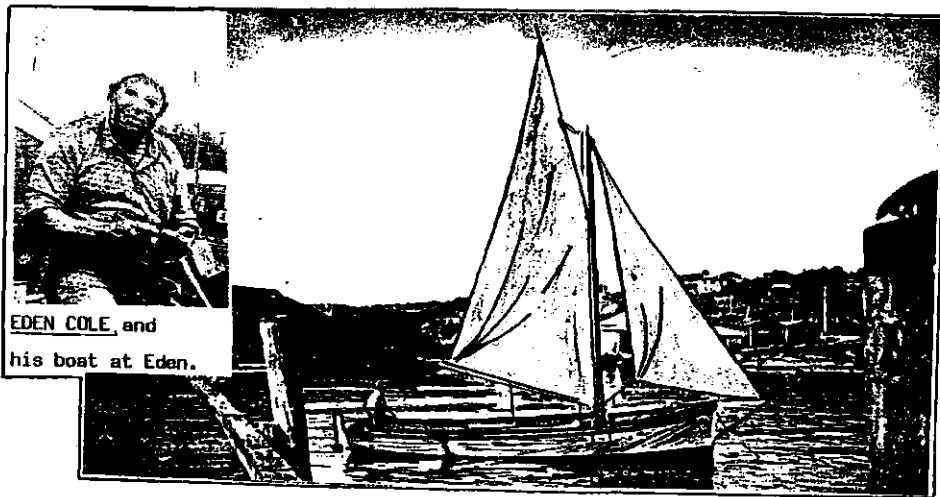
I REMEMBER HIM WELL AS HE WAS OFTEN AT HOME WHEN I WAS YOUNG.

IF HE HAD BEEN AWAY FOR SEVERAL DAYS OR MORE HE WOULD ALWAYS COME VIA OUR HOUSE IF HE ARRIVED BACK IN EDEN LATE IN THE DAY. MY MOTHER WOULD COOK EXTRA AND HE WOULD JOIN US FOR DINNER AND THEN HE WOULD TAKE A BATH AS HE HAD TO BOIL A COPPER FOR HOT WATER AT HIS HOME. MY FATHER WOULD LATER DRIVE HIM HOME AS HE LIVED ON THE OTHER SIDE OF EDEN AND DID NOT HAVE A VEHICLE.

I REMEMBER ONE NIGHT WHEN MUM WAS READING US A BEDTIME STORY AND EDEN WAS IN THE BATHROOM DOWN THE HALLWAY. THERE WAS A GREAT CRASH, DAD RAN DOWN TO CALL TO HIM, AND ALL THE RESPONSE HE COULD GET WAS GREAT BELLY LAUGHS. EDEN HAD FALLEN WHEN GETTING OUT OF THE BATH, WHEN MUM WENT IN TO CLEAN LATER THE WATER WAS DRIPPING OFF THE CEILING HE HAD CREATED SUCH A GIANT TIDAL WAVE (HE WAS A BIG MAN).

ANOTHER STORY I REMEMBER WAS WHEN EDEN WAS DOING THE MAIL RUN TO GABO DURING THE WAR. HE TOLD US THAT ONE NIGHT HE PULLED INTO BULL CREEK NEAR WONBOYN ON THE WAY BACK TO EDEN AND SETTLED IN FOR THE NIGHT UNDER THE FRONT DECK OF HIS BOAT. HE WOKE DURING THE NIGHT TO THE SOUND OF MOTORS AND TOOK A LOOK OUT. A JAPANESE SUBMARINE WAS IN THE BAY ON TOP OF THE WATER CHARGING UP THE BATTERIES AND CREW HAD COME ASHORE WITH WATER BARRELS TO FILL FROM THE CREEK. HE WAS FAR ENOUGH UP IN THE CREEK UNDER THE BANK THAT HE WAS NOT VISIBLE SO HE TUCKED BACK DOWN UNDER THE DECK AND LEFT THEM TO IT. THEY APPEARED TO KNOW THE AREA WELL.

EDEN ALSO WENT TO TASMANIA IN HIS SMALL BOAT ONCE (TO TRIABUNNA) BUT DID NOT CARE FOR TASMANIA SO CAME BACK TO EDEN.



EDEN COLE, and
his boat at Eden.

IT'S NOT EASY TO REMEMBER.

Doug Beard.

I arrived at Gabo Island early in October 1943 straight from the Radar Operators' Course at Richmond. I had applied for an overseas posting with a group of associates from Sydney Teachers' College...they all went north and I never saw them again. The next entry in my Paybook shows that I was back at Richmond again on 20th. January 1944 waiting for a posting up north, so I guess my stay at Gabo was something over 3 months.

I regret I am very vague about names after all this time, but I remember the C.O. was one C.J.Mathieson who had been the Maths Master at the Shore School. I think he was an F/O. or maybe a F/Lt. I also remember there was an Operator named John Graham and another one Peter Forrest of Melbourne. There was a Mechanic named Bitmead, but that's all I can remember.

I have marked the position of the camp and Doover on the map you sent, however, I am a bit vague about the Doover which was on a very high site. I remember we walked up hill for about 20 minutes when going on duty, so it probably was about 1 km. from the camp which was next to the wharf.

A fishing boat from Mallacoota - about an 18 footer - regularly brought out supplies when the weather permitted. It also brought stock for the Canteen as well as Personnel. Fuel for the generator engines and other large items were delivered by a coastal freighter... the light house tender... and these arrived about every 3 months. I cannot recall any vehicle on the island, for I also recall that the drums of fuel were manhandled up the hill towards the Doover where the engine sheds were, then just rolled off into the bush. There were lots of drums almost buried...perhaps some are still there, as the most recent were always used first.

The main recreation was swimming at the small beach near the camp, and we did have rifle practice at a rough range, also practice with the Vickers Machine guns. These had to be transported to prepared areas, and we had to 'belt up' the .303 bullets to feed the guns. I think there were some ball games on the beach - nothing organised though - and I can't remember any parades.

The food was quite good, though mostly tinned except for a few days after the arrival of the supply boat when we received fresh meat and veg. I can't recall fish being caught while I was there - probably a few feeds came from the boatman.

I can recall life on Gabo being quite pleasant and the weather really wasn't too bad. I ran the canteen, so that kept me occupied in my spare time. I also went with 5 others on a trip to a dance at Eden which I'll describe in a separate story.

I'm afraid it's just too long ago to remember any more details. I think there was a hut where we boiled the billy during our shift - I think we did 4 hours on and 8 off with two operators and a mechanic, as well as the Fitter/Turner looking after the generators.

I will include several anecdotes which come to mind...use them or throw 'em out, but if I think of any more I'll send them on also.....

TALES OF GABO ISLAND.

Doug Beard.

Anecdote 1.

We had an old 10 foot dinghy which was available for all hands to use for recreation, and as I was one of the crew who had some experience with boats, I regularly took this boat out for a row. One day I was approached by one of the fellows who shall remain nameless, who asked me if I would row him to the mainland for a small fee. It seems he was madly in love with a girl at Mallacoota, and she had asked him to come visiting. He had a week's leave and she was on holidays. The trouble was no supply boat was due for a few days. We were about 500 metres from the mainland and there was a heavy breaking surf on the beach. He had permission from the C.O, which I checked, so then plans were made. He donned his trunks and sealed his good uniform in a kerosene tin which he soldered up. He took a long length of strong fishing line and attached it to the tin and then we took off. I couldn't interest anyone else in joining the trip, so with my one passenger I set out. When we got near the breaking waves, he dived over and swam through the surf with the fishing line. When he was ashore, I threw the tin over and he pulled it in - simple. Then off he went with the tin on his shoulder to walk the 9 miles to Mallacoota! I returned to base to quite a hero's welcome....they hadn't expected to see me again. Our Romeo returned a week later assuring us a good time was had by all..... Love will find a way !

Anecdote 2.

One of the fellows had a friend in Eden who invited him to bring a few of us to a dance being organised by their local Church Fellowship. Sounded like a good idea, so we arranged to charter the fishing boat that brought our supplies. He organised his next trip to fit in with the dance. So six of us set out on the four hour trip in quite calm seas. We were met at Eden and taken somewhere to shower and change. Tea, then off to the dance. A great night was had by all, and accommodation had been arranged in a hostel somewhere. Next morning at the wharf we had an extra passenger - one of the fellows had rescued a mongrel dog that had been captured by the Pound-keeper. He assured the officer that the dog was his and brought it on board. So we took off and had a very rough trip back to Gabo against a stiff southerly. The dog was sick all the way and made the trip rather unpleasant. Back on dry land, the dog was so delighted it immediately attacked the C.O.'s pride and joy - his vegetable garden. A Tommy Gun - and the dog's days appeared numbered, but our trusty sergeant intervened and calmed down the situation. The dog was subsequently relocated to the mainland and a happy home.

Anecdote 3.

One of the Gabo highlights was the Fairy Penguins that lived and bred on the island. Early every morning they would head down to the sea and spend the day swimming and fishing. At dusk they would come ashore in droves and waddle up the path to their burrows. When the midnight shift came off duty and were returning to base, it was a favourite trick to catch several penguins and release them in the mens' quarters. They made an awful noise and an awful mess before being despatched on their way to their burrows.

TALES OF GABO ISLAND. (Cont.)

Doug Beard.

(Anecdote 4.)

All communications from Gabo to Fighter Sector in Melbourne went through Orbost Telephone Exchange. This gave the opportunity for the fellows to 'chat up' the operators during the course of their duties. One fellow developed a 'crush' on a girl called 'Maria.' When things were quiet, he would talk to her for hours, and he thought he had fallen in love with her. He was forever pleading for a photo which she consistently refused. Finally she gave in. The whole camp was waiting to see 'Maria' when the mail was due. With all hands gathered around, the letter was opened, and all were dismayed to see the fellow almost go berserk as he produced a photo of the most unphotogenic girl you have ever seen. We all agreed it could not possibly be 'Maria', but it served its purpose no doubt, for it cooled the ardour of our lover-boy down to a bearable level.

Anecdote 5.

The C.O. was a keen sculler, and when he heard I was also interested, he summoned me to a meeting in the Officers' Mess (I was an AC) where we discussed building a single racing scull. There were plenty of bits and pieces lying around, and he produced a plan with all details. Three months later we launched our craft - 28 feet long, 22 inches wide and 9 inches deep with a sliding seat and outriggers. We used to go out to sea in this thing, one rowing the scull and the other in an old dinghy. We would change over at sea. The skin of the craft was of newspaper and waterproof paint, with many thicknesses, and it actually withstood the rigours of the Southern Ocean. A pair of oars was borrowed from the ship which dropped our fuel, and we reinforced the skin with lots of muslin.

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PESKY PENGUINS ON THE PATH.

John Davey - an early Operator.

I'm sorry I don't recall much of the early radar days on Gabo - it's all so long ago now - but I do know I was one of the early operators. I remember the 16 RS Commanding Officer, F/O. Mathieson, and another early operator, Doug Beard. Those two formed a 'team' and somehow they built a sculling canoe which looked very light and fragile. I guess they put to sea in it, or one at a time more likely, but I really don't think it could have survived too long in the seas around Gabo.

My other long lasting memory is of the birds on the island - the penguins and the mutton birds I think they might have been. The penguins seemed to be with us every night, and each evening they would come ashore after a day's fishing, and their cries seemed to come from all over the island as they searched for their burrows. They constantly were in our way, particularly at night on the path up to the Doover.

I remember travelling through both Mallacoota and Eden - and Gabo wasn't too bad a posting in my opinion.

The Reunions, the histories and the books of the last twelve years or so have all been good for the story of Australian Radar and I'd like to pass on my good wishes to all old Gabo men of 16 Radar.

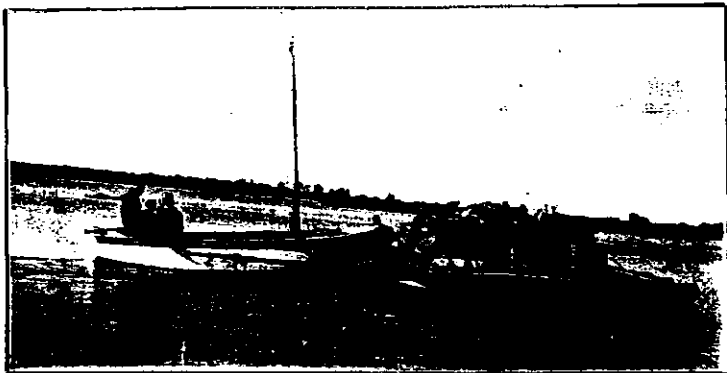
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The Two Group Photos. Little detail is known of both photos, except that (above) Frank Stubbs appears 5th. from left, Hugh Brady is at the right wearing hat, and Len Ralph is at his right elbow. Probably dated in 1944.

In the lower photo, the Officer is F/O. Parris. 'Snow' Cottam is thought to be 5th. from left. The date would therefore be about the end of 1942.





HUGH BRADY ON THE ISLAND RUN. (Compiled from various sources.)

It becomes apparent, (despite the missing station Diary) that the contract for the transport of men, mail and supplies to Gabo was taken over by Hugh Brady, a Mallacoota fisherman. The Brady family was well known in the town, and E.J. (Ted) Brady, father of Hugh, had won universal respect as an Aussie post of some distinction.

The run from Mallacoota to Gabo was only about 12 miles, but could only be attempted when access from the inlet to the ocean was possible over the notorious sand-bar. Hugh Brady relied on his small fishing boat of about 18 feet when making the run which took only about 90 minutes - and despite the wild weather which often persisted to the west of Gabo, usually a run could be attempted once or twice a week. But there was at least one occasion when a run was delayed for 2½ weeks - wild gales lashed the island, and the men had to exist on emergency rations. Hugh and Beatrice were very welcome when they did arrive. (Hugh's boat was named after his wife.)

Hugh proved a reliable contact with the mainland, and there are a couple of good stories which add to our picture of the man. He also was the local baker and baked a batch of loaves when a delivery was due.

The local postmistress was the local authority on departure enquiries...when she could see smoke issuing freely from the bakehouse chimney, an island delivery was due the next day!

And Gabo was declared 'dry' to the men - each delivery was carefully watched by the C.O. as it came ashore. But what the C.O. didn't know was that any liquor for the men was dropped overboard in a bag and tied to a jetty pile, where it was retrieved by the men, nicely chilled, at their leisure some time afterwards.

Hugh Brady was a good man 'on the run.'



Top photo. Hugh Brady and 'Beatrice' assist in laying a cable to the island.

Lower photo. 'Beatrice' moored in the Mallacoota inlet.

Photos:
Leone Pheeny.

POSTED TO THE LAND OF SEALS AND PENGUINS. Bob Feldman (1943 ?)

Gabo Island was about sixty years ago, and of course the memory becomes dim over that span of time. Nevertheless, I have memories of the radar station which I will try and record.

I was posted to Gabo Island after a longish spell on Bathurst Island followed by a stint at the 132 GCI eleven miles from Darwin. It was known to all as Knuckeyes Lagoon.

On being posted south, I had visions of living the high life near civilization...it was not to be. Imagine my horror when it was announced that I was posted to a habitat for seals and penguins. I had a vague idea of Gabo's location, but when I looked at the map I was grief stricken. I thought a good alternative was to go A.W.O.L., but common sense prevailed, and I proceeded by steam train to Bairnsdale instead. There I was bundled into a car, and was told our destination was Mallacoota, where I would be transported by a motor boat to the island, weather permitting,

After some hours of rough riding, we arrived at Cann River where I was billeted at the hotel for the night. For some obscure reason only known to the RAAF, I was holed up there for 48 hours. The hotel was very comfortable, it served excellent meals, and I had the good fortune of meeting the publican's daughter who was very good company. We spent a couple of happy days roaming the hills and exchanging talk about the war and boy and girl stuff. I was twentyone years of age, and comparatively naive about females. I was a little more informed after leaving Cann River.

Eventually we arrived at Mallacoota and once again I was billeted at the hotel. Well, it really was a pub in the true Australian tradition. Pretty rough and ready with a good supply of beer. On arrival, it was announced that the local fisherman would deposit me at Gabo when the weather improved. Not being a good sailor, I was mortified and pictured myself drowning at sea. The weather improved after a couple of days but not before I fortified myself by drinking a good quantity of beer to ready myself for the dreaded trip to Devil's Island.

On arrival at Gabo, I was greeted by the inmates who were a bedraggled bunch of guys. Unfortunately, no WAAAF's were stationed on the island which was a typical RAAF mistake. At this point I can only give you snippets of memory. The station consisted of a number of steel huts with no outstanding characteristics. They were much like the huts at Richmond, N.S.W., where I had completed my radar courses. Being a Sergeant, I dined with my Sergeant mates and the C.O., Bill Fulton, in a separate Mess to the other ranks. Even after all these years, I can still recall his name because he was a really nice guy. We had many pleasant meals together where we exchanged the gossip of the day.

The Doover had been built on the highest hill, and the view was magnificent if you liked to look at 300 degrees of stormy water. There was nothing inspiring about the outlook I can tell you. To reach the site one had to climb the hill which would have tested a mountain goat. I remember there were goats on the island which roamed at random. Fortunately, I was reasonably fit in those days, but now it would be a day's march with constant stops on the way.

Being a keen fisherman, Claude Moloney, a radar operator and myself used to fish in the open sea in an old punt. We were both classified as 'crazy,' as it was dangerous and quite stupid to tempt fate in this manner. We used meat as bait, and we caught many flathead which were served in the Messes.

When it was too dangerous to venture out in the punt, we would throw hand

grenades from the wharf, run for our lives and return to collect the stunned fish. Everyone at the station was convinced that we would kill ourselves. When they saw Claude and I heading for the wharf, there wasn't a soul to be seen. On one occasion, a whale surfaced a few feet from the punt - Claude and I managed to grab the oars, and I'm sure we could have beaten any Olympic duo. After that episode Claude and I weren't so enthusiastic to go fishing. Sad to relate, in later years I heard that Claude had died when he was in his late twenties.

Periodically, the RAAF and the Navy would play a football match on the only stretch of level ground on the island. There were a few trees and bushes here and there, but that didn't stop us. It was very competitive and injuries were quite common. On one occasion I hurt my finger, and the Sergeant in charge of first aid thought I'd broken it. I was taken by boat, once again, to Mallacoota for transport to the hospital at Sale. From memory, I think it was a training station for Beaufort bomber pilots. On arrival at Mallacoota, I was escorted to a Beaufort, bundled into the gun turret, and was told the aircraft was on its way to Sale on dive bombing exercises. There was no escape....I froze. I think the flying time was about 30 minutes, and that was sufficient to turn me into a soggy bundle of human flesh. By the time we arrived at Sale I couldn't stand up, and I was driven to the hospital in an ambulance. There I remained for five days.

My finger wasn't broken, but the Doctors had a lot of trouble trying to find my stomach.

Another recollection is the Canteen. It was 'owned' by Clive Tyndall, who was a wonderful salesman, and a funny man to boot. Everyone enjoyed visiting the Canteen and having a yarn with Clive.

Bill Lonegan was a Corporal Mech. who was very proficient, and he was certainly more technically minded than me. I met Bill at the Canberra Reunion and we had some laughs recalling old times.

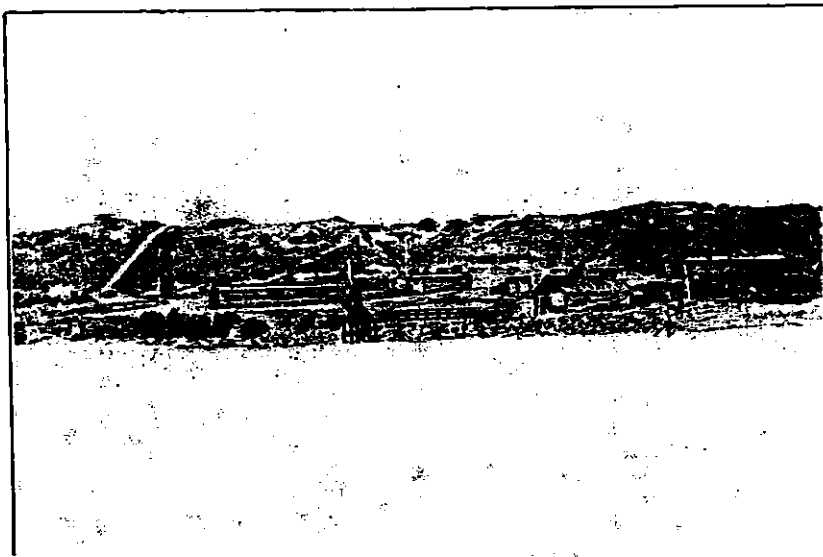
Finally, a few answers to some of your queries:

It was an AW station, with a standard antenna.

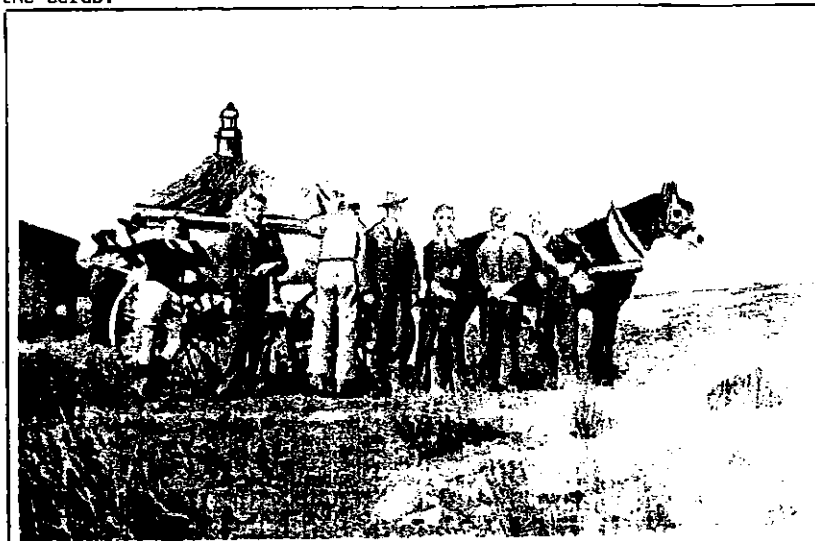
The camp was 50 metres from the jetty, and there was no station transport. The food was reasonable, and the fish meals were outstanding. Yes, there was a water supply, but don't ask me the source.

We had to make our own fun. Life on the station was dreary, yet I have fond memories of the time I spent there. Like anywhere else, nice people make all the difference.





THE GABO RESORT The RAAF camp was on Santa Barbara Bay, right at the jetty and crane where supplies were lifted ashore. But the heavy drums of fuel were a different problem...they were pushed on the rail trolley as close as possible to the engine sheds, then manhandled to be hidden in the scrub.



THE GABO EXPRESS The light-house vehicle was a weapon carrier of W.W.I vintage - and so it doubtless served a useful purpose in both wars. Mr. Huxley, one of the light keepers, stands with his back to the camera, and some RAAF lads seem anxious to help. The lighthouse shows above the load.

Both photos "touched up" and from Max Huxley.

FROM BULOLO TO GABO.

Len Ralph, (Aug. 1944.)

My posting to Gabo Island in August 1944 was, for me, somewhat ironic. At that time, there was a promise that after one had completed a tour of duty in New Guinea of at least 18 months, one would get a posting in one's home state. In my case, I had spent almost two years in New Guinea, so I was more than a little miffed to find myself posted to Gabo. However, Gabo is in Victoria, just - but I felt that it was as desolate and deserted a spot as any in which I had been in Papua New Guinea. I arrived there in early August 1944, and left towards the end of September to be sent up North again.

As best I can remember, the radar was an A.W. It was sited in about the middle of the island, on what is probably the highest point. The lighthouse is on the south-eastern cliffs, probably about 500 metres from the radar. The radar camp was on the north-western shore overlooking a small bay - Santa Barbara Bay. There was a very short jetty, with a crane used to deliver stores etc. from the supply boat. The bay was well protected from weather from any direction. The supply boat, one of the local fishing craft, came from Mallacoota, about 12 km away. Mallacoota is a very small seaside fishing town, just inside the entrance to Mallacoota Inlet which is protected from the ocean by a very shallow sand-bar. It was not possible to cross this sand-bar whenever even a slight south-easterly was blowing, as there would be almost no water above the bar in the troughs between the waves. I remember an occasion when the boat had not called for some weeks. Mail was dropped from an Avro Anson which I remember, was fitted with the most ungainly Yagi antenna for the onboard radar. There was a story, apocryphal perhaps, of the time when a delivery of fresh meat was being made by an aircraft. One of the men had been injured when he had tried to catch a leg of beef.

I can't recall much of the recreation facilities. I think there would have been the usual Rec. Room, with table tennis. There was a fishing net which was used occasionally whenever fish were noticed in our small bay. The net was towed out behind a very small dinghy and then pulled up onto the beach. The size of the catch was never huge but was always acceptable.

Radar activity was not exciting, as it had been in New Guinea. There were always ships going past and sometimes an aircraft, perhaps from the training school at Sale. A natural phenomenon provided a diversion. September is the time for the beginning of the return of the mutton bird, properly called the Short-tailed Shearwater, after their annual migratory flight to the Bering Sea. The radar screen was rendered almost useless with the echoes from the never ending stream of these birds which flew past Gabo. This situation continued for some weeks.

Another bird which was not appreciated was the penguin. These creatures covered the island at night. The din from their calls was oppressive, but perhaps eventually one became used to it.

Communication to the mainland was via a submarine cable. The cable was pressurised by a small cylinder of compressed gas, carbon dioxide I would imagine. It was one of the jobs of the duty mechanic to log the reading of the pressure in the cable, at frequent intervals.

There was an event which I will never forget. We had received an invitation from the Mayor of Eden to come as his guests to the Mayoral Ball. Eden is another fishing town about 50 km up the coast in N.S.W. After reorganising radar duty rosters, about twelve of us were able to accept. However, even in those days, nothing was easy. On the morning of the day on which we were

to leave, the strong south-easterly that was blowing made it impossible for the supply boat to come over for us. Nevertheless, the good people at Eden must have been determined to have us with them, for they arranged to have one of their local boats come down for us. The skipper of the boat was one of those unforgettable old sea salts with an unforgettable name...Eden Cole. However, on the way down, Eden sent us a message saying that the weather was such that he felt he could not get us back to Eden. He suggested, as an alternative, that he could get across the Mallacoota sandbar if he surfed his boat across on top of the right wave. I can confess now that at the time, I was more than a little apprehensive of such a manoeuvre, but at age 23, how could I chicken out?

Eventually we arrived outside the sandbar and Eden circled around waiting for the 'right wave.' Apparently that wave wasn't going to arrive, so after a while, he said that he would try something else. He knew of a tiny little opening amongst the rocks at the foot of the cliffs, just around from the entrance.

He was not exaggerating when he said that it was a small opening - I am sure it was an operation no other skipper would have tried, but Eden had nerves of steel and he did it. As it was necessary to keep the boat away from the rocks, we were obliged to strip off, before jumping in and swimming the few metres to where we could clamber up the rocks. It was not until we had put our clothes back on that we became aware that there was a number of locals who were on top of the nearby cliffs and who had come around to see the fun.

I don't remember any detail of the night at the Ball, other than it was an enjoyable evening. However, next morning we had another problem - how to get back onto Gabo Island? Of course, with twelve people away, the station was operating in a situation which could not be allowed to continue for more than two or three days. The south-easterly was still blowing, so it would be impossible for a boat to get out over the Mallacoota bar. Luckily the Navy, which had also been represented at the Ball, came to the rescue. They offered to take us down in their Fairmile sub-chaser and deliver us on to the jetty in our well protected bay.

Of course, some of the boys were still suffering from the previous evening - not a good way to start a journey in a Fairmile, a craft designed for speed and not for comfort. Inevitably, most of us quickly became seasick, much to the delight of our good Navy friends. I was one of the few airmen who had not at that stage contemplated the geni in the bottom of a bucket. This must have been a challenge to the sailors because I was asked if I would like to have a look at their Asdic gear. Stupidly, I said I would love to do so. On the way down to the bottom of the boat, I was taken past the kitchen where the Cook was making fish soup. Even now I can remember the fish heads doing slow somersaults in the big cooking pot. Soon after, when I stood in front of the Asdic equipment, I really saw nothing and had to quickly go up top to join my mates still contemplating the insides of their buckets.

Fortunately the journey took little time in the Fairmile, and we airmen were very relieved to find ourselves in the shelter of our bay at Gabo. Yes, the bay was well sheltered, but there was an enormous swell, the result being that as the craft approached the jetty, it appeared to be rising and sinking by as much as two metres up and two metres down. It was quite a job to get twelve sick men and their baggage onto the jetty without accident.

It was soon after this episode that I was posted once more on my way back up north again after only about 6 weeks on Gabo.

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"CONDITIONS ON GABO WERE REALLY QUITE REASONABLE."

Jack Love. (Oct '44)

I came to Gabo direct from Radar School in October 1944. I remember getting a train from Melbourne about 8 a.m. and arriving in Orbest about 5p.m., then having a steak and linking up with someone from Mallacoota Station. Next we caught a bus which deposited us at Cann River Hotel about 9 or 10 p.m. I was very dry after the trip, but we were served in an upstairs room for guests or travellers. I had my first ever beer, and shouted for my fellow traveller, then headed for my room - not being too clear what effect a beer might have on me.

We had to wait a day and a half for onward travel to Mallacoota. At the air base, I was housed in a tent apart from the base personnel until a fishing boat could take me to the island. The fishing boat (Hughie Brady and an off-sider) was supposed to take fresh food and personnel to Gabo twice a week, but because of a sand bar at the entrance to the lakes, the boat sometimes couldn't get out for 2 or 3 weeks. We always had plenty of tinned foods but it was very frustrating to see Victoria across the water, but to have no fresh bread or meat for lengthy periods. Sometimes the Ansons from Mallacoota would drop some bread as they set out on early morning patrol, but this was unofficial.

The lighthouse supply ship CAPE YORK would call every three months with supplies of fuel and tinned foods for us and for the lighthouse people. There was a small rail line from the jetty up to the lighthouse area. This involved pushing the supplies on a trolley up to that area where there were three houses with three families, all well separated I recall. I think I only visited there once.

It's a struggle to remember names:

I can't remember the C.O.'s name. My pay book is signed by a FERGUSON, but I think that may have been the Sergeant in the Orderly Room. There was also a JEFF CARTER in the Office.

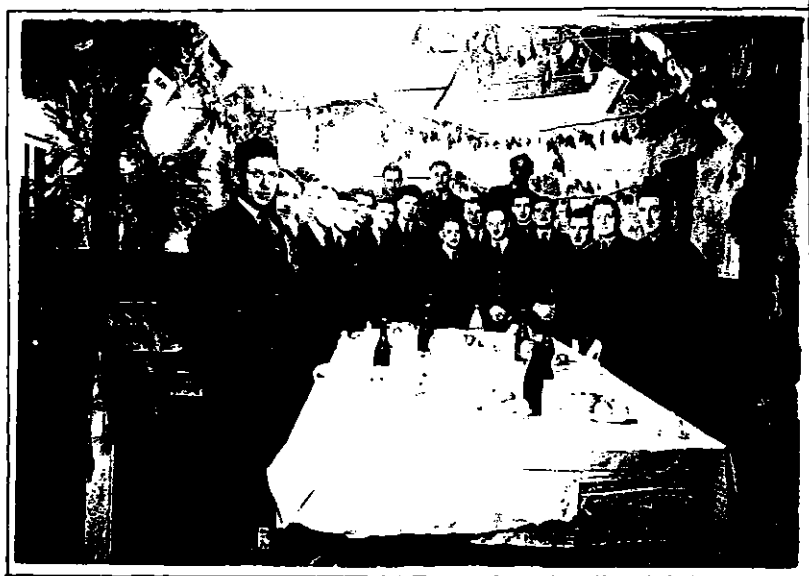
The Medical Orderly, RON ? , was in charge of allocating all the fatigues around the camp. He was a very religious type and helped out with some books on sex education for some of us young characters who knew very little.

There was SCOTTY, an older man with a very Scottish accent. He was a Guard by posting whom we really didn't need. He took on the job of maintaining the furnace we had for hot water, showers etc.

And there was a JIM BREEDEN - an Operator who had been a teacher at Ballarat. I don't believe I can name the men in the photos you sent, but I think LEN RALPH is in the more casual photo - to the left and behind the chap in the hat. I served with Len for a long period on Sir Graham Moore Island, but I think I may have met him on Gabo before that. I think there was an ALEC MORRISON, a W.I. Operator. We had a W.T. Op on each shift, but I think our communication was by a dedicated telephone line direct to 'control' in Melbourne.

The Doover was an early modified AW with a motor driving the aerial, but I can't do better than that. There was no transport on the island and we walked up a track to the Doover, tripping over penguins after dusk, as they used the same track returning to their burrows to feed their young.

We did have a boat, and could go drifting for flathead to help out with fresh food. We also had a film projector, and I was taught to operate it early in the piece and did so most of the time I was there. We would receive two films each week if the boat could get over, otherwise we would have the same films several times in the next 2 or 3 weeks. The projector was an old silent one modified for sound, but it worked O.K., and of course



Christmas 1942 at 16 Radar, Gabo. The evening celebratory meal.
(Doubtless the RAAF Tradition of Officers and Sergeants waiting on
the men at the lunch had been observed.)

The names are:

Cottam,
Gravell,
Talbot,
Dallas,
Tucker,
Bruton,
MacGuire,
Reinpleurs,
P/O. Parris,
Sgt. Knight,
Lewis,
Briscoe-Hough,
Sheridan,
Amos,

King, (Doc)
Hughes.

(Standing)

Ireland,
Crawford,
Atkins.

Photo: 'Snow' Cottam.

there was an interval between each reel.

The 'other ranks' were permitted to have drinks in the Sergeants' Mess in the evenings, but I didn't take part, leaving my second beer until VJ night on Sir Graham Moore Island. Soon afterwards, we must have been scaled down to 'care and maintenance' i.e. one shift - and by December a lot of personnel were posted away.

I remember getting up on Christmas morning in 1944 to prepare for Christmas dinner only to learn that a ship had been torpedoed off the N.S.W. coast and we were put back on full operation with two radar mechanics filling in as operators too, but it only lasted for 24 hours before we went back to one shift, but it sure put a dent in our Christmas day celebrations.

We received 4 days' Rec Leave every 6 months I think, plus six days travelling time. By working in with Mallacoota, we could get a RAAF truck to Cann River and so cut actual travelling time to one day each way. I got my turn in March/April 1945. On the way back, I met up with another operator at Mallacoota. He developed chicken pox and was sent to Bairnsdale. I went over to Gabo and developed it seven days later. I was isolated in a supply tent until the boat could come over. On his way over, the fisherman put out a shark line, and on the way back they pulled in 23 school sharks, each about four foot long whilst I sat in the back of the boat. There was an ambulance at the jetty to take me to an Anson on the strip which flew at 1000 feet along the coast to Bairnsdale RAAF Hospital. After two weeks there, I returned to the Island where I collected my posting and the rest of my gear which someone had packed, and I returned on the same boat. My pay book shows the date of my posting to 1 P.D. (the M.C.G.) as 10.5.45. From there I went by train to Adelaide - overland to Darwin then a flight to Truscott, and barge to Sir Graham Moore, but that's another story.

I have tried to show the camp site on your map at 'A' where we had a long hut holding 10 or 12 men, each with a bunk and a locker, but I can't remember the toilet or shower arrangements.

On the other side of the path at 'B' you entered at the end of the hut past a room housing the film projector to enter the Mess. The kitchen must have been next, but I don't really remember. The Sergeants' Mess was entered from the back of the hut. I think there must have been separate accommodation for the Sergeants, for I don't remember them being in the sleeping hut.

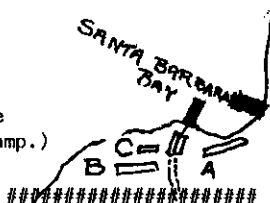
At 'C' in front and towards the sea was a hut including the C.O.'s office and Orderly Room, and possibly the C.O.'s quarters.

I know we had rainwater tanks, but possibly we also drew water from the dam as well.

Conditions were generally quite reasonable, apart from the frustration of the mouldy bread and the delays in getting fresh food.

I can't think of anything else that's relevant....and I hope you can get something out of this.

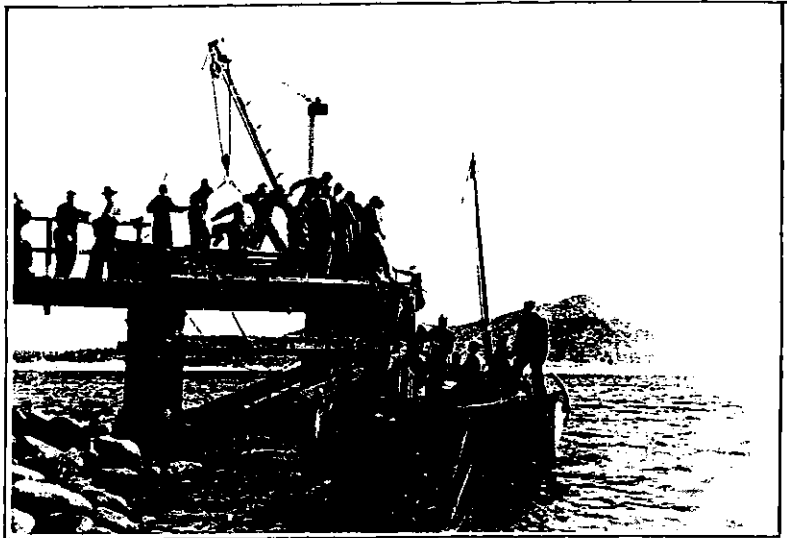
(Jack's recollection of some hut placement in the RAAF Camp.)



A - Long Hut
10 - 12 men
B - Mess - Kitchen -
Sgt's Mess
C - Orderly Room
C.O.'s Quarters



The trolley and rail line from the crane or gentry to the storage shed, or Scalers' hut. The names of the men are not known.



Eden Coles' 18 foot boat tied up at the island wharf. It would seem the station boat is about to be lowered.
Nearby the wharf was our ice chest for illicit opium. (Photos:

I REMEMBER GABO ISLAND.

Leo Doolan (March 1943.)

Like you, I have thought it a bit strange that very little history of Gabo has been recorded in the various history books. I was at Gabo from about Easter 1943 to December the same year. The station was serviced by boat from Mallacoota which at that time was a very small fishing village, and the boat trip was dependent on the weather, for while there are very large lakes at Mallacoota, access to the open sea is dependent on the tides and weather. Gabo was about 90 minutes travel when the weather permitted. I don't have much recall of the history of the station, but the Doover was located on a sand dune which was the highest point on the island. I believe it was also the site of a beacon light which was the forerunner of the tall lighthouse almost on the cliff tops. The island was composed mainly of the famous red granite which was the base of many sand dunes. The radar camp was located at the base of one dune near a small beach about 70 metres long on Santa Barbara Bay, with a granite breakwater on one side and a small pier with a hand operated crane opposite. The camp itself consisted of a sleeping hut, kitchen and Mess, another sleeping hut, an ablutions block and an Orderly Room. There was also a stone building at the land end of the pier which I think was called the "Sealers' Hut."

As far back as I can recall, the Doover was a heavily sandbagged wooden building with a concrete floor and I think a cement sheet (probably AC sheet) lining. The radar was an AW Transmitter and Receiver in one room with the turning gear, and the other room was originally the Radio Room and Mechanics' room. When I first arrived, a direct telephone line was being installed to Fighter Sector at Preston, and the PMG were being assisted by our members in pulling a cable from a cable laying ship. Power for the station was provided from two generator rooms hidden in the sand dunes and scrub. I think the power dug-outs were of the same construction as the Doover. From what I can recall, the supplies and gear for the foundation of the station were taken to Gabo by boat from Eden in N.S.W. Rations, mail and personnel were transported by boat - weather permitting - from Mallacoota. It was not unusual for the supply boat to be delayed due to weather conditions, and things in the food and supply line often looked grim. I can recall in one instance there was no boat for over two weeks and supplies were dropped by Anson aircraft from 1 OBU at Mallacoota. Incidentally, the lake there was a maintenance base for flying boats - the Catalinas - but due to Jap sub activity along the east coast, the base was moved to Lake Boga near Swan Hill in Northern Victoria. Heavy supplies for the station, the Lighthouse people and the Naval Signal Station at the lighthouse were brought by the lighthouse tender, CAPE YORK which anchored off the beach and the supplies were lightered ashore - manpower was used for the unloading. There was a trolley system for transporting petrol drums to the generator rooms, and the daily fatigues included manpowering the drums, two per load, to each room where the drums were concealed in the coastal scrub. The empty drums were taken back to the pier on the return trip to be taken away when next the CAPE YORK called.

Travel to Mallacoota from Melbourne was quite an experience itself. Victorian men on leave or posting were required to travel from Melbourne to Bairnsdale, by rail, then coach to Orbost, service car to Cann River (overnight), a stop at Genoa to meet up with N.S.W. men who had over-nighted at Eden, then a short journey to Mallacoota via Gypsy Point. Finally, the weather often caused a stay at Mallacoota for a week or more.

The C.O. when I arrived at Gabo was F/O. Mathieson, who ran a pretty good unit. The numbers were about the same as for any other radar station,



Eden Cole taking the boys for a trawling jaunt - usually successful too. Note the flat sea - always preferred by land-lubbers - especially those in the small station boat.



Six men pulling the net - 100 fish caught in one haul one night. The netting was always at the one beach on the island, and fish were always a welcome addition to our usual rations.

Photos: 'Snow' Cottam.

although there seemed to be more than the usual number of operators, who like myself, were just out of radar school. The shifts were the usual 6 on and 12 off except that there were usually 3 operators on shift and one operator was usually needed to watch over the generator room for a solitary six hours.

Most activities apart from the usual camp jobs were rather limited due to the isolation. One activity was fishing as we had a dinghy and we eventually obtained a fishing net, and with all hands on the job, the next meal was usually fresh fish. Other camp activities were cards, table tennis and the odd game of football. The weather was the controlling factor in most Gabo activities, and it was not unusual for the radar to be on fixed bearing, array tied down, for over twelve hours. Shipping convoys were almost more numerous than aircraft, and usually the patrolling Anson was the first indication of a convoy which could take quite a time to come and go. It was not unusual to pick up a convoy when on early shift and to still have it on the screen on shift 12 hours later.

I have enclosed a copy of an article I sent to Radar Returns a couple of years ago, and when a bit of a flap was caused, resulting in doubling the Guard and also belting up some rounds for the Vickers guns. One advantage of the isolation was the fact that the unit did not have many H.Q visitors. When I left Gabo in December 1943, some of the bods there remained resident until late 1945 when I was at 13 Radar at Cape Otway and were posted to the Cape when Gabo closed. Earlier this year I read some publicity in Vet Affairs news and the RSL Mufti describing the restoration of the Operations Bunker at the Mallacoota strip and it appears that Radar gets a mention. I sent them a copy of the sub activity, and it seems this bunker will become a tourist attraction.

I am not able to recall many names from Gabo, and I guess some could well be Faded Echoes....I recall Len Ralph, Bray Bagust, Jack Lonegan, Peter Forrest, ? Ashton, John Dalton, Albert Sing. I've searched the Attendees' Lists from the Reunions and only to find 16 Radar was poorly represented.

Finally, where was the wind the strongest....Gabo or Cape Otway? I'll settle for a dead heat!

I reckon neither would hold a "Candle in the Wind" to Wedge Island.(M.F.)

"SUBMARINE!"

Doug Beard. (RADAR YARNS.)

Very early during my career at Gabo, I was on duty in the wee hours of the morning and detected an echo on the screen which looked similar to what we were told was a submarine. I called the chief operator and reported a possible 'tin fish.' In no time flat the whole station was put on alert, the Vickers gun mounted and armed and all hands at battle stations. Melbourne Fighter Sector was advised, and they had a squadron of Spitfires ready to take off at first light. The 'target' was still moving up and down the coast about two miles off shore and we were ready for an invasion. The Spitfires duly arrived and after several runs over the target, reported a very large school of tuna just below the surface! We were commended for our vigilance, however, as this was the time when Japanese submarines were active off the coast. Gabo was a very enjoyable place to fight the war, and we felt somewhat guilty at being so far from the action.

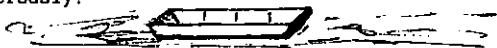
RELIEVING THE C.O. ON GABO.

Ron Pearce. (August 1943)

I left Radar School during early August, 1943, and reached Gabo Island about the middle of the month. The train was very slow....it was possibly burning wood as the coal miners in N.S.W were on strike. I had to wait in Bairnsdale for a day or so before catching a bus to Genoa where I stayed in the hotel. I was told there that many of the fittings had been removed from the wreck of the RIVERINA.

Next day it was onward to Mallacoota, but I had to wait in the hotel there until the tide and the weather were suitable to cross to the island. There is a sand bar across the entrance to the lakes which makes it quite hazardous to cross in rough weather. While waiting, I borrowed a dinghy and rowed all over the inlet

I had no idea that I would only be staying on the island for a few weeks while the C.O., F/Lt. Mathieson was on leave. Somebody on the island had constructed a boat (maybe it was a punt) using sound timber but of poor design. The C.O. did not want to wait for the next boat, and he rowed ashore in this boat and without a life jacket. Perhaps he just liked to live dangerously!



There was another dinghy of proper design but it looked about 100 years old, and appeared to be held together by tar and mouldy rope. I imagine it belonged to the lighthouse.

Then came my introduction to Radar Station cuisine - beans, bully beef etc. I tried angling off the end of the jetty, but could only catch inedible fish. But then we received a fishing net. It was just the right size to stretch across the little sandy bay on the usually calm landward side of the island, and we made a successful catch every time we tried. We netted gar-fish, and a fish I have never identified about 30 centimetres long, but many had an ugly parasite in their throats.

I believe there were then two staff at the light house. They had some sheep for fresh meat. I was not invited to visit the lighthouse during my stay. There was also a R.A.N. Signals unit but I didn't visit it. Most days it was windy. Sometimes we had to tie the array to prevent it being blown over, and when it was raining as well we had oil skins and sou'westers.

I can't remember much about the radar except that it worked well. It seemed to me that the actual circuit of the receiver was not in accordance with the circuit diagram. I can't recall many contacts with ships and aircraft to the eastern sector - only to the west where aircraft from the Mallacoota OBU were making training flights.

One day I recall, there was a very strong wind I was walking up to the radar tower when I saw an eagle with a broken wing. He had an angry look or expression, rather, as though he had just realized that he had been stupid to fly out on such a day. I thought of rum soaked bread, or chloroform with some idea of trying to catch him and possibly mending his wing, but later someone shot him.

I can't remember much about the camp accommodation except that there were rainwater tanks as well as water from a spring, but I do remember the fitter who kept our Ford V8 engines going well. He had been a gold-miner at Kalgoorlie.

There was a telephone connected to the Mallacoota exchange. We had W/T gear for sending our plots to the OBU there, but I think they were usually sent by phone.

Occasionally it would be calm, and then the sky would be full of towering cumulo-nimbus clouds, and flocks of sea birds would be diving into the glassy water to catch fish.

Nothing untoward happened until the end of my stay when a radar operator developed appendicitis. Again there was a wait for suitable weather and tide so that the boat could call. I left on the same boat, and saw for the first time the trouble that might happen - the tide going out - the surf surging in etc. By this time, F/Lt. Mathieson had already returned and I never saw him again. He had been a science teacher at Sydney North Shore Grammar School, and some of his students became Bailey boys on radar courses.

A few days later I was at Scotch College, Mitcham in South Australia, an embarkation depot for those in transit to Darwin, where I arrived at 44 Radar Wing just in time for the last Japanese raid.

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A brief note on MALLACOOTA.

The fishing village at the mouth of Mollacoota Inlet is becoming increasingly popular as a seaside resort. There is excellent fishing, and quiet beaches and waterways. Abalone divers skim their high speed boats over the sand bar to reach the beds on the ocean side.

Whalers and sealers used the entrance during the early 19th. century, and the first settler, Captain John Stevenson, arrived in 1841.

The early township was across the lake from the present town and consisted of a hotel, Post Office and several houses. One grave is still discernible in a Pioneers' cemetery.

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SUBMARINE ACTIVITY.

John Graham. (MORE RADAR YARNS.)

There was a lot of submarine activity off the Australian coast then in 1943, much of it still not public knowledge. We had regular rifle and machine gun practice, and were often warned of the possibility of a landing party from a submarine being put ashore to knock out the station. But I was rather sceptical of the likelihood of a small boat landing from a submarine.

However, I had a rather frightening experience one night which made me realize that I had not entirely dismissed the idea of an enemy landing from my mind. Operators' duties included the manning of the alternator hut which had been camouflaged and built into the side of a sand dune. It was usual for one of the men on dog watch to take the opportunity to write letters home, as much for the purpose of keeping awake as keeping in touch with relatives, as the heat and drone of the generators and fans were torporific.

I was so engaged in letter writing one night and not far from dropping off asleep, when I received a terrific blow on the back of the neck. I was knocked off my chair and laid out for a minute or two. When eventually located, my assailant turned out to be not a Japanese submariner, but a larger than average penguin which had fallen through the ventilator opening high above my head.

What it had been doing wandering around the sandhills in the dead of night I can't imagine, but it was smartly assisted out the door into the dark again, with the aid of a broom.

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Frank Stubbs and I lived in neighbouring tents at 154 Truscott in '45 where we enjoyed the easy and friendly relationship common on most radar stations. Post war I contacted him a few times when the station histories started, and he phoned me once or twice. I knew he had tried to return to Gabo - but my attempt to contact him this time brought a letter from Mrs. Stubbs. Frank had died suddenly at Christmas time, 2001. We all thank Dawn for her notes and photos.

(M.F.)

OUR VISIT TO GABO - 1998.

Dawn Stubbs.

In 1998, Frank and I decided to fly out to Gabo for a few days while on our way to Mission Beach in Queensland where we had been spending six months each year. So we booked a trip in Mallacoota via Vic. Parks. Next we were taking off in a small plane - the pilot, the two of us plus limited food and clothing. Our accommodation proved to be a clean and comfortable house next to the lighthouse-keepers homes. It had all mod cons, even a microwave and gas fire plus an ocean view from the bathroom window. The power was supplied from windmill generators - no shortage either - and dozens of resident penguins attempted to welcome us by visiting us each night.

Frank and I walked around the island on a couple of days, then a lighthouse keeper drove us to where the radar had been. We were quite excited and thrilled to see there was still quite a bit of the old radar gear there, still rusting away quietly after all the years since 1945.

The keeper was very pleased to meet Frank and talk about the radar and where things had been placed, and then Frank found where their football oval had been.

There were quite a few cows on the island, and Frank said there were cows there during their time there during the war - also a horse which obviously thought he was a cow.

Some of the radar lads (2 or 3) would be asked to visit a keeper's house on a Sunday night for a roast meal which was much appreciated, for RAAF rations were often a bit rough when the boat was late.

On our next trip north, we tried a second time to return to Gabo, but the weather was too rough to fly.

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(Top Photo) Dawn at the MONUMENTAL CITY monument on Gabo.

(Lower Photo) Frank Stubbs about to climb up from the beach.

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THE STATION DIARY....1944- 1945.

M.Fenton.

16 Radar became operational on 17th. Junc, 1942, and probably formed up at Mallacoota or Eden, some time before. The equipment was AW Mk 1, and the Doover was constructed 'on site,' with V8's powering the station, which closed after 3 years and 3 months.

There were 4 stations along Bass Strait - at Cape Otway, Wilson's Prom, Metung, and Gabo Island. Subs, Minelayers and raiders operated in these waters, and Gabo had a reputation for shipwrecks.

Unfortunately, the early unit records which usually form the 'foundation' of a station history, are just not available for 16 Radar on Gabo Island, for the A50 diary notes from June 1942 when the station opened to February 1944 are missing - so too the C.O.'s Reports and all the POR's. But from the diary notes that do exist, it becomes obvious that the ever-changing weather of that region decided the availability of supplies and mail. Eden Cole, the fisherman from Eden, and Hugh Brady the Mallacoota fisherman who later took over the contract to provide the supply link to the island, would only attempt the crossing when the weather was settled enough for their small fishing craft, or when the tide was sufficiently high to allow a crossing of the sand bar at the Mallacoota lakes.

So the memories received from those few men posted to the station in its early months must form the first part of the station history which is further impacted by the almost complete lack of photos.

So the first notes that are available abound in reports on wind, weather and waves which not only affected the operation of the station, but also controlled the arrival of fresh supplies and family mail.

From the A50's of March and April, 1944....Both months proved to be fairly unspectacular. The C.O., F/O Fulton left his unit on the supply launch to enter hospital, and F/O Hurst arrived to relieve him. AC1 Mobbs also was evacuated suffering from pneumonia, and a few airmen departed on posting, being replaced by new arrivals. There were 9 boat arrivals from Mallacoota, and at the end of April there two Officers and 30 men on the unit.

May 1944. On the 4th. and 5th. the aerial had to be lashed down to prevent damage, with operations resuming again after a few hours.

The supply launch was able to call again on the 8th., but as a high tide was necessary to allow it to return because of the sandbar guarding the entrance to the inlet at Mallacoota, the launch left the island after only a short stay so that it could catch the high tide.

F/O Fulton returned to his unit on the 11th., and with the weather again deteriorating, the aerial was lashed down yet again.

The lighthouse supply ship CAPE YORK arrived on the 14th with coal, coke and wood - mainly for the lighthouse folk - but the weather prevented any unloading until the following day, with the job being completed on the 16th. when radar operations were also resumed.

The bad weather returned and continued until the end of the month - a fault in the radar gear was located and corrected - and an airdrop of mail was organised on the 25th. with the co-operation of 1 OBU at Mallacoota.

The supply launch was finally able to call again with fresh food supplies on the 29th, and the RAAF/RAN football ground was flooded.

2066 plots were recorded for the month, but as was customary, no report was received on the status of the plots - whether friendly or otherwise, identifiable or suspicious. There were 31 men on strength and there was no motor transport of any sort attached. This was hardly necessary as the camp was very close to the jetty where the supply boat unloaded.

June 1944 was a fairly routine month, thankfully with better weather - the supply launch arrived and departed 3 times. A mobile dental unit arrived on the 12th. and departed after 4 days of inspecting and treating all



'Snow' Cottam with a very angry local resident, anxious to get on with his family duties.



Catching penguins appears to be one of the few recreational activities on Gabo.

Photos; 'Snow' Cottam.

personnel. The C.O. received advice of his promotion to Acting Flight Lieutenant, but on the 29th. he left the unit on posting. 33 men were now on strength.

July 1944. Early in the month, a Fairmile on patrol from Eden anchored in the bay, and Lieut. Skates came ashore during its stay of 2½ hours. Rough weather threatened again on the 8th., and the aerial was lashed down on a fixed bearing on the 14th. and 15th., while on the day following in response to a unit request, an aircraft from 1 OBU dropped mail which was greatly appreciated.

A rifle shoot was also organised on the same day.

The rest of the month was marked by problems with the two generator engines - big end trouble - excessive oil use - voltage drop - and engine vibration necessitated closing down the station operations. A spark plug and the distributor points were replaced, and this brought one engine to life. The station came back on air on the 21st., and a mail bag was dropped by air.

More trouble when the fan belt broke, but this problem was resolved by using the fan belt from No. 2 engine.

The supply launch finally arrived on the 24th., bringing a maintenance party and one new engine whereas 2 new engines were considered essential, and another one was promptly sought. But while this was being attended, more fan belt problems were experienced.

By the 27th. both engines and their fan belts were giving reasonable satisfaction, and the supply launch made it to the island on the 28th. with a new film projector as well as the usual stores and supplies.

As an insurance against any future fan belt trouble, an aircraft from 1 OBU flew over and dropped 7 fan belts, and both engines were again running well.

August, 1944. There was even more heavy weather early in August - the aerial was lashed on the 1st. and the 4th. and F/Lt. Fulton returned from hospital. On the 5th., a passing ship reported suspicious lights south of the island, but these were found to be the navigation lights of an aircraft.

The CAPE YORK arrived on the 7th. with lighthouse supplies, and was able to leave during the following day after unloading was completed.

More trouble! There were problems with the submarine telephone cable on the 9th. which was attended to by two PMG mechanics.

Rough weather persisted until the 15th. when the launch was able to call again. A PMG technician was on board to test the submarine phone connection, and on the next day an Anson aircraft dropped the parts required by the technician.

Fairmile 810 from Eden called on the 20th. and picked up two airmen going on leave as the supply launch had been unable to leave Mallacoota due to the rough seas - but the launch finally made it to the island on the 22nd. Two days later, Mr. Corless, a PMG engineer arrived with a party to attend the phone cable again as another air leak had developed.

The fault was not located, and the party returned to Mallacoota on the next boat which had also brought a fishing net for the station as large shoals of fish were now reported in the bay. Fresh fish always provided a welcome meal on radar stations regardless of the location.

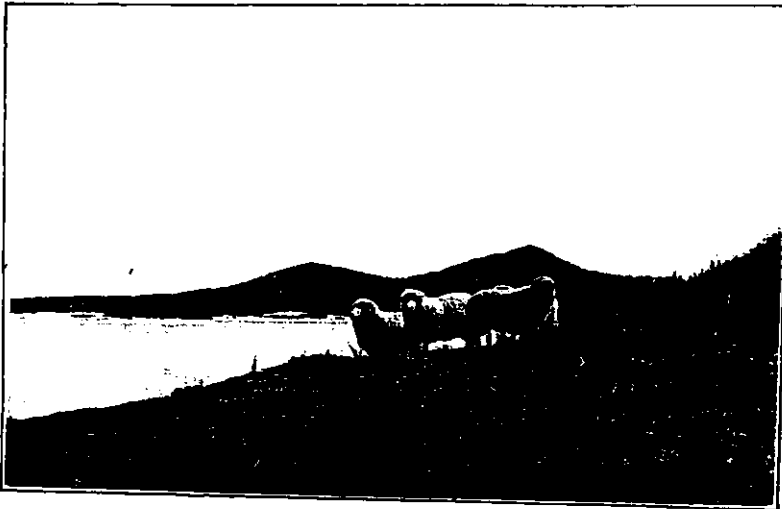
1880 plots were recorded for this month, and there were 36 men on strength.

September 1944. It was the 9th. September before bad weather again prevented a supply run from Mallacoota, and in the early part of the month good weather resulted in unusually good plots. But bad weather again prevented the arrival of the supply boat on the 11th., and arrangements were made for an Anson to drop mail, both official and private.

Rations were soon running low, and Emergency Rations were used. An air drop of mail and bread was made on the 14th. - all arrived in good condition



Mt. Howe - an easily recognized permanent echo.



The local sheep were fat and ready for war-time duty as food for any ship-wrecked sailors.

Photos: 'Snow' Cottam.

too. Operating hours were reduced to a 4 hour daily watch also, and no. 2 generator developed a bad sounding rumble which was diagnosed as a faulty ball race in an alternator.

The station emergency rations were still in use until the 21st. when the launch was next able to call, and F/Lt. Fulton again left the station seeking medical attention. The alternator also was despatched despite its bulk to Orbest for repairs.

The Fairmile patrol boat from Eden called on the 28th bringing F/O. Hurst to act as temporary Commanding Officer, and thankfully the rough weather abated somewhat on the 30th., allowing the launch to call again, bringing Cypher Officer F/O. Upjohn to discuss the introduction of a new radar cypher. There were still 46 men on strength, and Volleyball proved to be a popular new recreational sport this month.

October, 1944. The Fairmile on patrol from Eden called for a short stay on the 2nd., then on the 6th. the weather deteriorated yet again; and after a request from 16 RS to 1 OBU, an Anson dropped mail which was recovered without difficulty.

The supply launch was able to call again on the 7th., but the repaired alternator was not on board; and then, with the weather continuing unsettled, 15 men who had been posted away left the station on the Fairmile to return to Melbourne via Eden.

On the 13th., the Fairmile was back again - also the supply launch bringing the alternator this time, also two representatives from the Department of Interior to inspect the camp buildings.

An inspection of the alternator revealed that no work had been carried out, so once again it was despatched to Melbourne for repairs.

There was a welcome mail drop on the 19th., and on the 21st. the alternator - all 1400 lbs of it - returned once again to Gabo.

F/Lt. Fulton returned from hospital on the 25th., and an aircraft from Mallacoota safely dropped two distributors for the engines.

Numbers were down this month with the postings away...23 men on strength. November 1944. On November the 8th., the no. 2 engine again played up - one cylinder was not firing. The weather was still too rough for the launch, so a mail drop was arranged.

The CAPE YORK arrived on the 16th., and unloading commenced immediately, continuing steadily until the 18th. Meanwhile the launch arrived bringing a Fitter DMT and taking a further 3 men who had been posted away.

A request from Operations at 1 OBU was received on the 20th., requesting 16 RS to continue operating in a search for a lost Anson. Fairmile 810 also joined the search with the crew of the aircraft eventually being located.

2 mail drops were arranged because of the persisting bad weather - and on the 28th. P/O. Johnson arrived to take command of the station.

There were now only 17 men on the station which was able to operate for 126 hours during November.

December 1944. Another war-time Christmas away from home and loved ones. Parcels and cakes arriving - special Christmas treats from Welfare. But the everyday routine of the station continued but with reduced hours and fewer men on strength.

The Area Maintenance party arrived again on the 8th. bringing a Canadian Ford engine, and a refig. mechanic arrived too to check the unit's refrigeration.

Operating hours were extended on the 11th., and were further revised on the 15th...could this have been because U-boat 862 was known to be in the vicinity...but the station returned to the regular hours on the 18th.



Nine of our strong men pulling in the huge ray we found to be caught in the net one night.



The giant ray landed on the beach. The airman is Briscoe-Hough. The vision in black is our only female - Lass the Cocker Spaniel.

The sting or barb in the tail of the ray was about 15 inches. While still alive it would rear and roar quite loudly. It was eventually loaded on our boat and consigned to the deep.

Photos: 'Snow' Cottam.

The supply launch arrived on the 20th., and there was another flurry on extended hours on Christmas Day. It has become traditional on RAAF stations for the C.O. and Sergeants to wait 'at table' for the men at the Christmas Dinner - also for 'extras' to be served - beer, fruit and nuts, pudding, poultry and the like, and certainly this would have come about on 16 RS. The month ended with a couple of extra operators being attached, probably because of the extended operating hours and the lesser manpower. And so the year ended. There was no indication of any special observance of the New Year.

January 1945. The arrival of the supply launch on the 7th, 9th, and 19th. were the only events of note until the 22nd. when 16 RS was again directed to commence continuous operations - but this directive lasted only for one day when operations reverted to the hours of 1900 to 0600.....Dusk to Dawn. On 28th. January came the instruction that 16 RS was now to be under the direction and control of ADHQ Melbourne.

There were now 20 men on the station, and because of the seemingly ever-present gales, the aerial had been lashed for 16 hours.

During January, the supply launch had called on six occasions.

February 1945. Dusk to Dawn operations were still in effect, and the launch from Mallacoota arrived on the 4th., 6th., and the 9th when it brought W/O. Christie from Laverton to sort out the stores accounting.

Then came the Big One on the 15th., - the AOC Southern Area, Group Captain Eaton arrived with several of his H/Q Officers and the Area Radar Officer to sort out a number of station problems.

On the same boat was F/O. Trainor who assumed command of the station.

F/O. Johnson and W/O. Christie then departed.

The highlight of the next boat arrival on the 17th. was two new film shows. But then followed 11 days (17th. to 28th.) with no launch arrivals and no fresh food delivery, and with the gale force winds continuing, it was necessary to lash down the aerial for the daily 4 hour session on air.

March 1945. The reports indicate a further 9 days elapsed before the supply boat next arrived with personnel, mail, films and most importantly, fresh food supplies; and when it departed it took 4 men on leave and much outward mail, but it also left the station without a Medical Orderly who was one of the 4.

F/Lt. Oakes from 15 RS now assumed temporary command - and at 15.15 hours that day there was a spectacular sight as 18 Seafire aircraft from an aircraft carrier flew over the island.

On the 10th., No. 2 V8 generating motor broke down, and the ASV beacon was now off air.

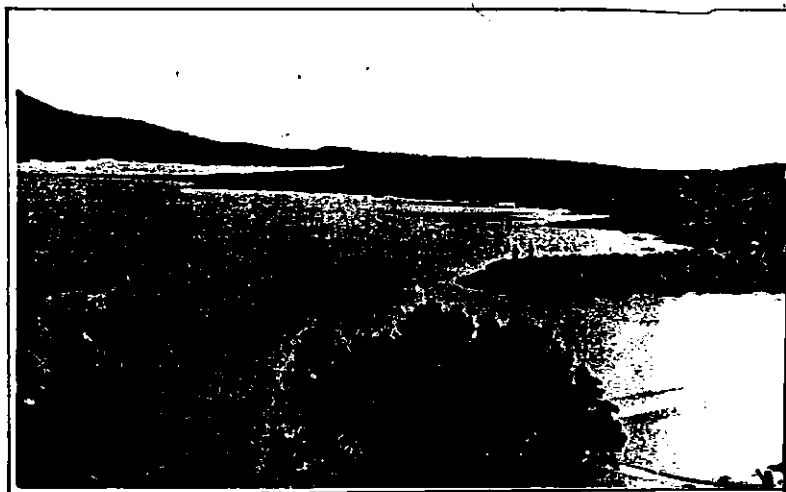
Personal mail and fresh bread were dropped by aircraft on the 13th., 15th., and 18th., and on the 19th. the supply boat arrived with mail, stores and the Medical Orderly returning from leave. When it left, it took 3 airmen with one suffering from an infectious complaint.

The boat was back again on the 20th., and in addition to the usual items, it brought 2 1½ KVA generating units.

From the 21st. to the 28th., aircraft dropped mail and bread, and the CAPE YORK also arrived, unloading and departing on the 29th.

There were now 15 men on the station.

April 1945. The two new 1½ KVA units were installed and operating on the 1st. April and the ASV beacon was back on duty 24 hours daily, and on the 6th., 11 th., and 13th. the station received air drops of mail and fresh food. The supply boat eventually made it on the 15th. with canteen goods, films, equipment and even a couple of airmen as well. On the return trip, 2 men went on leave and 4 proceeded on posting. Meanwhile, a F/Sgt. Mech



View of the groyne at the north end of of the beach - the photo appears to be taken from the front of the camp.



Photo taken from our boat looking into the beach and up into the folds leading on to the Dover.

from Southern Area H.Q. inspected and checked the ASV. On the 18th. came an instruction from the Filter Officer at ADHQ Melbourne to remain on air until 18.35 hours - the reason being that H.R.H. the Duke of Gloucester would be passing close to the island - but no plots were recorded on his aircraft.

The supply boat was back again on the 21st., and on the 23rd. came another instruction that the Duke would be returning from Tasmania....however the weather took no notice for the aerial had to be lashed for the occasion. The 24th. saw yet another air drop due to bad weather, and the Senior Equipment Officer from H.Q. phoned from 1 OBU to check the station equipment - a wise move during bad weather. The Area Welfare Officer also wisely cancelled his trip to Gabo.

There were 3 more air drops on the 27th., 28th., and the 29th.- and 14 men were still on the unit.

May 1945. This month proved probably the worst ever for rough weather in the story of the unit - there was one supply boat arrival and 5 airdrops. The boat arrived again on the 13th. with its usual load of supplies, a few airmen and recreational gear.

When it departed, it took 2 men for dental treatment at the General Reconnaissance School at Bairnsdale. (perhaps they'd been topping up on the rations with too much sweet stuff from the Canteen.)

Before the month ended, there had been a further 5 air drops and 3 more boat arrivals, and renovations to the barracks buildings commenced.

June 1945.

2/6/45. F/Lt. D.A.Oakes departed this unit on leave.

2/6/45. F/Lt. J.B.Ross arrives this unit relieving.

10/6/45. Arrival "S.S.CAPE YORK" coke and fuel supply

11/6/45. Departure of "S.S.CAPE YORK."

26/6/45. Arrival ration boat.

28/6/45. This unit extended operations from 0730 hours to 1930 hours, pending arrival of sufficient personnel to maintain 24 hour watch.

(The notes above repeat exactly the A50 entries for June.)

July 1945. The supply boat arrived on the 3rd. July with rations and films, and a frig. mechanic was on board to repair a U/S fridge in the Mess.

C.O. F/Lt. Oakes was posted away on the 13th., and F/Lt. Ross replaced him as C.O. of 16 Radar.

Wing Commander Resch, who evidently was to visit the unit on the 14th., phoned to enquire as to complaints and difficulties - with only 11 men now on the unit, he probably guessed there wasn't much to check up on, and anyway, the weather was too bad for a Wing Commander to visit Gabo. Towards the end of the month, the 2 Telegraphists were posted away, leaving the station without W.T.'s and schedules ceased.

Evidently the weather had improved too, for the boat from Mallacoota arrived on the 29th. and the 30th.

August 1945. A couple of Southern Area H.Q. Officers arrived on the supply boat on the 7th., - evidently departing again the same day - truly a very hurried visit

And on the 9th., supplies arrived by air mail again

15th. August 1945....VJ Day. But with only 11 men on the station, the big occasion could only be celebrated quietly if at all. F/Lt. Ross left for Melbourne for a Medical, and F/Lt. Williams arrived to take Temporary Command.

The supply boat arrived again on the 21st., - an aircraft dropped mail and supplies on the 29th., - and the boat arrived again on the 30th.

Advice was received that squadron exercises from 1 OBU at Mallacoota had ended this month.

September 1945. The CAPE YORK arrived on the 3rd., carrying fuel and supplies for the lighthouse - and Mr. Cottman of Works and Housing arrived to inspect the buildings.

F/Lt. Ross returned on the 8th., and on the 11th. the unit began preparations to close down.

The boat from Mallacoota on the 13th., and with unfavourable weather blowing up, an aircraft did the honours again on the 25th.

October 1945. There were three boat arrivals and one aircraft drop..... only 7 men now remained on the unit.

November 1945. F/Lt. Ross was off to Melbourne again on the 14th., - F/O. Warford Mein arrived to take over - and on the 25th. the CAPE YORK arrived with packing cases and material suitable to assist moving.

December 1945. The arrival of F/O. Stamp from 2 TMO and his party to oversee loading operations signalled the end of the watch for 16 RS.

Loading the CAPE YORK commenced on the 5th., and the few men still on Gabo embarked to leave the island.

16 Radar on Gabo was officially closed on 11th. September, 1945.

#####



16 RADAR PERSONNEL.

Unfortunately, the Personnel Records, or POR's, are in the same category as the A50's....they just don't seem to exist despite some reports that they do. So a list of all names on photos, in stories, or in the station records that still exist has been compiled and can be added to whenever a 'new' name is found.

'Snow' Cottam	Gravell
Bob Feldman	Talbot
Claude Moloney	Dallas
Clive Tyndall	Tucker
Bill Lonagan	Macquire
Len Ralph	Reinpleurs
Frank Stubbs	Knight Sgt.
Jack Love	Lewis
- Ferguson	Briscoe-Hough
Jeff Carter	Sheridan
Ron -	Amos
Jim Bruden	King Doc.
Alec Morrison	Hughes
Leo Doolan	Ireland
Bray Bagust	Crawford
Peter Forrest	Atkins
- Ashton	
John Dalton	
Albert Sing	
- Mobbs	
Doug Beard	
John Graham	
Harold Ogilvie	
John Davey	
- Bitmead	

OFFICERS.

As far as can be ascertained, the Officers at 16 RS were:

1/6/42	P/O. R.E.Abbott	28/11/44	P/O. K.J.Johnson
27/9/42	P/O. J.E.Parris		F/O. R.L.Trainor
17/2/43	F/Lt. K.M.Trotter		F/Lt D.A. Oakes
10/4/43	P/O. C.J.Mathieson		F/Lt. J.B.Ross
30/2/44	F/O. W.A.Fulton		F/Lt. K.Williams
7/4/44	F/O. C.A. Hurst		

F/O.Ron Pearce relieved P/O.Mathieson.

The radar gear at 16 RS was the AW Mk. 1, and the station operated from 17/6/42 to 11/9/45. The radar buildings were not transportable, and were constructed 'on site.'

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AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES

ADVICE NOTE

No. *1151/79*
Supply Depot **BSD MALACOTA**
Contract *1151/79*
Address *Malacota*

1151/79 **BSD MALACOTA**
General Order *1151/79* (Order for Supplies) etc.
Contract Specification *1151/79* to strictly observe

Commodity	Quantity
<i>Beans</i>	<i>1000</i>
<i>Quail</i>	<i>1000</i>

CAN YOU HELP WITH NAMES

PLEASE ?

(Particularly with names
for the two groups, photos
1 and 5.

Photo 1



2

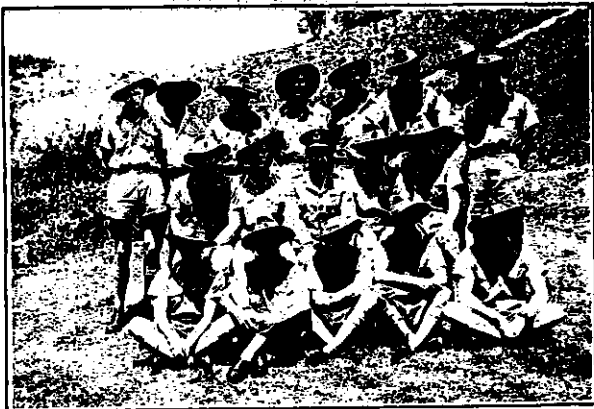


3

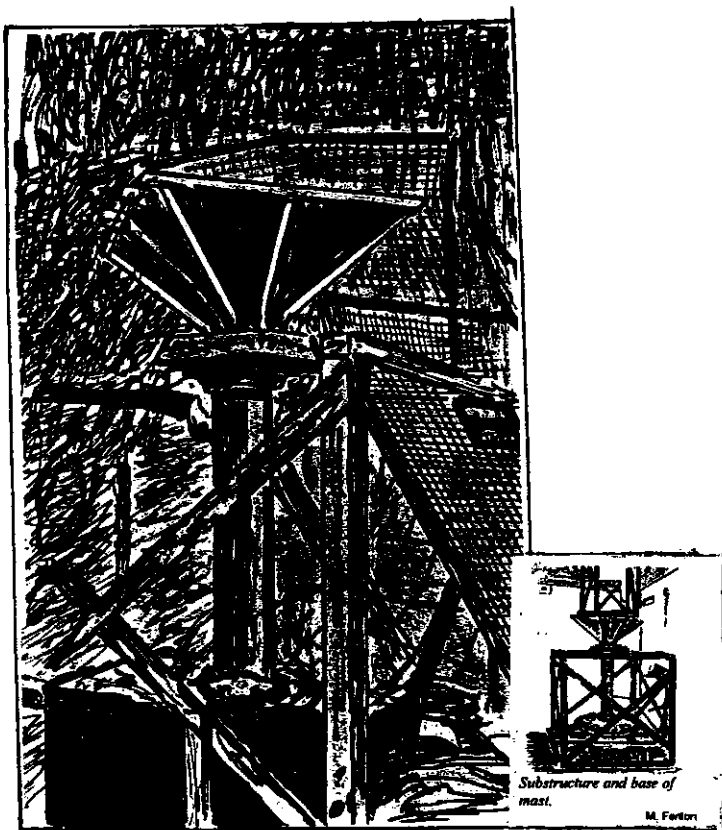


4

In photo 1, we recognize Frank Stubbs, Len Ralph and Hugh Brady, the Mallacoota boatman.
In photo 2 is Mrs Huxley with sons Doug and Max, also a friend, Geoff Fancourt from Eden, NSW.(left) Geoff and Max are also shown in photo 3.
The airman in photo 4 is not known, and F/O Parris is in photo 5.



5



IN RECENT YEARS.....

(M.F.)

In March 1994, Allom Lovell and Associates, Conservation Architects of Melbourne, prepared a Heritage Report titled "World War 2 Sites and Events in East Gippsland". This was for the then Historic Places Section of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

The Report included some 8 pages describing the remains of 16 Radar on Gabo Island.

At my request, permission was granted to include extracts from the report in this record of the old station, and we are most grateful for their permission.

The small sketch (inset) shows a similar aerial base still 'in situ' at 13 RS C. Otway

**WORLD WAR II SITES AND EVENTS
IN EAST GIPPSLAND.**

Prepared for the

**Historic Places Section
Department of Conservation and Natural Resources**

**Allom Lovell and Associates
Conservation Architects
35 Little Bourke Street
Melbourne 3000**

March 1994

STRUCTURE/FEATURE

Name:

GABO ISLAND RADAR STATION

Location/Access:

(1) Boat, aeroplane, or helicopter from
Mallacoota to Gabo Island

(2) Highest point on the island

Mallacoota 8822 / 570E390N

Grid Reference:

Local Government Area:

Shire of Orbost

Potential National Estate Criteria:

A4, D2

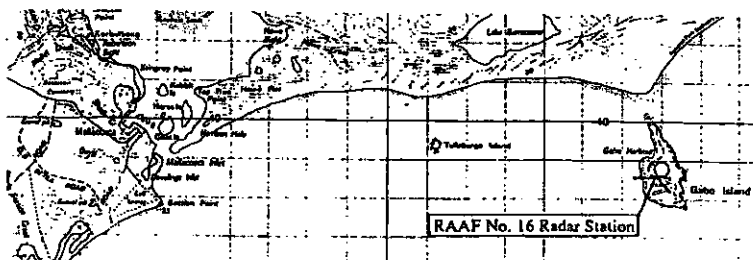


Figure 21 Plan of Gabo Island showing the location of the Radar Station.

HISTORY

In addition to the Advanced Operations Base at Mallacoota, the RAAF also had significant numbers of personnel based on nearby Gabo Island, where its Radar Station no. 16 was established in late 1942 or early 1943.¹ The Radar Station itself was one of a chain of such facilities established along the Australian coastline during World War II. The actual mechanism was set up on the highest point of the island, while the camp itself was located on the north-west shore of the island, along the beach near the present jetty.

Alan Roberts remembers large numbers of RAAF personnel arriving on the island in connection with the radar station, as many as 250-300. It is not clear why so many personnel were required; it may be that many of these left once the camp was properly established. The RAAF Radar Station camp was run along strict military lines. RAAF personnel busied themselves with formal parade drill, and treated the Radar Station as top security military installation. The radar station itself was surrounded by a fence and was subject to a twenty-four hour sentry guard.

At the time, the general appearance of the island was very different from today. Many more domestic animals, including goats and cattle, grazed freely over the land. Photographic evidence suggests that there was very little of the tea tree scrub which now dominates the island (Fig. 23). Alan Roberts remembers much of the island as being made up of sandy ridges, with scrub visible only in the gullies and hollows. The radar station was clearly visible on the highest point of the island. An asbestos cement hut was located to one side of the actual mechanism. The area was fenced off.

DESCRIPTION

The Radar Station is located on the highest natural point of Gabo Island (Fig. 21). Access to the Station is through dense tee-tree scrub from the road that runs between the lighthouse and the northern tip of the island.

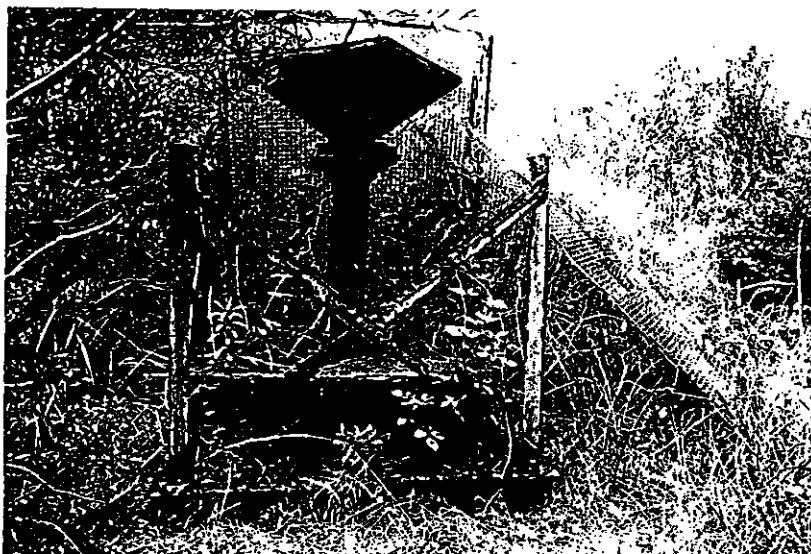


Figure 24 General view of the Radar Station showing the open braced steel frame box resting on the concrete slab.

The base of the Station comprises a reinforced concrete slab which is on two levels, approximately 5m x 2.5 m in size. Located centrally on the upper section of the slab is a steel framed structure which houses the radar mechanism. It is square in plan and consists of rolled steel C-channels bolted to the concrete slab which support an open braced steel frame box around the lower section of the radar mechanism. It appears that the steel frame box originally had sides which consisted of sheets of steel with a central hole in them for ventilation (Fig. 24).

The radar mechanism is in two sections. The lower section comprises a movable base which rests on paired C-channel joists which are bolted to the concrete base and the structure. The base consists of a large open fan wheel on a steel plate. Bolted to the steel plate and rising through the centre of the fan wheel is a circular steel column which is terminated by a flat steel plate to which the radar screens are attached (Fig. 25). The column is taller than the steel framed structure. Originally the column could be moved along the joists at the base of the structure like a train on tracks and also in a circle by the fan wheel to direct the radar screens.

The screens, which comprise the second section of the radar mechanism, are no longer attached to the column but are collapsed around it. They consist of three large rectangular steel mesh sheets which have a border of flat steel strapping (Fig. 26). Each screen has six square holes evenly arranged down its length. The exact purpose of these is not known.

Other artefacts around the site that were located include a large steel truss which has been bent in half and lies on the edge of the concrete pad just to the north of the radar mechanism. It is possible that this was part of the structure for the screens. Also to the north is a rolled steel aerial base which it appears would have been located either on the radar mechanism or close by. Also found were scattered pieces of AC sheet, probably remnants of the hut associated with the radar station, two timber telegraph poles, various timber posts, ridge capping, a section of cloth insulated wiring in a

steel pipe and a large timber post which appears to be a remnant of the original Gabo Island Lighthouse which was located on this site. The location of these artefacts is shown in Fig. 22.

SIGNIFICANCE

The former RAAF No. 16 Radar Station, Gabo Island, was one of well over 100 RAAF radar stations established in Australia during World War II. Though it may be one of a relatively large number of surviving radar station remnants in Australia, however, the Gabo Island Station was one of only five in Victoria. The other Victorian stations were at Cape Otway, Essendon, Wilson's Promontory and Metung. Remnants of the Cape Otway Station, in the form of a concrete bunker, are believed to have survived, but the fate of the other Victorian stations is not known.²

The remnants of No. 16 Radar Station are of considerable significance in the history of Gabo Island and in the wider East Gippsland area. The station is the most significant surviving relic of the RAAF occupation of Gabo Island during World War II.

It is of regional significance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the former RAAF No. 16 Radar Station be included on the Register of the National Estate.

It is further recommended that the radar station and its immediate surrounds form the subject of an archaeological investigation. In connection with this, further research could be carried out into the history of the RAAF occupation of the island, and into the functioning of the radar station.

As it stands isolated in virtually impenetrable scrub its greatest threat is from natural weathering and degradation and the practicality of its conservation lies in documentation and recording rather than active conservation.

Potentially it could also be threatened by the proposed sale and redevelopment of the area. If this occurs, provision should be made for the protection of the radar station and its immediate surrounds. It is recommended that development not take place on this site.

Sources:

STRUCTURE/FEATURE

Name:

GABO ISLAND GROIN

Location/Access:

(1) Boat or aeroplane from Mallacoota to

Gabo Island

Grid Reference:

Mallacoota 8822 / 575E384N

Local Government Area:

Shire of Orbost

Potential National Estate Criteria:

A4

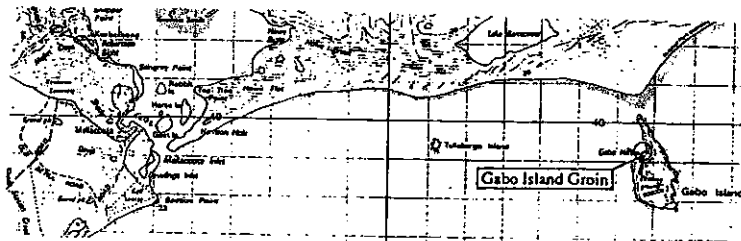


Figure 29 Plan of Gabo Island showing the location of the groin.

HISTORY

The groin was constructed by RAAF personnel from the camp associated with No. 16 Radar Station. Nothing else remains from the camp, which was strung out along the shore at the same location.

The island is not easily navigable and the groin was clearly intended to provide a safe harbour for ships arriving at Gabo Island. It appears that the groin was not completed, as its short length does not achieve its intended purpose. An undated plan of the island shows a 'Proposed Breakwater' located west of the jetty (Fig. 30). Though never built, such a breakwater would have achieved something of the same effect as the groin.

DESCRIPTION

The groin is located on the northern side of the small bay along the west side of the island. On the other side of the bay is the timber jetty which is used by visiting ships for docking and the unloading of supplies. The groin is constructed from large blocks of the distinctive rose coloured Gabo Island granite.

SIGNIFICANCE

The groin is of some historical interest as a relic of the RAAF occupation of Gabo Island during World War II.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Leave as a landscape feature. Active conservation is not required.

Sources:

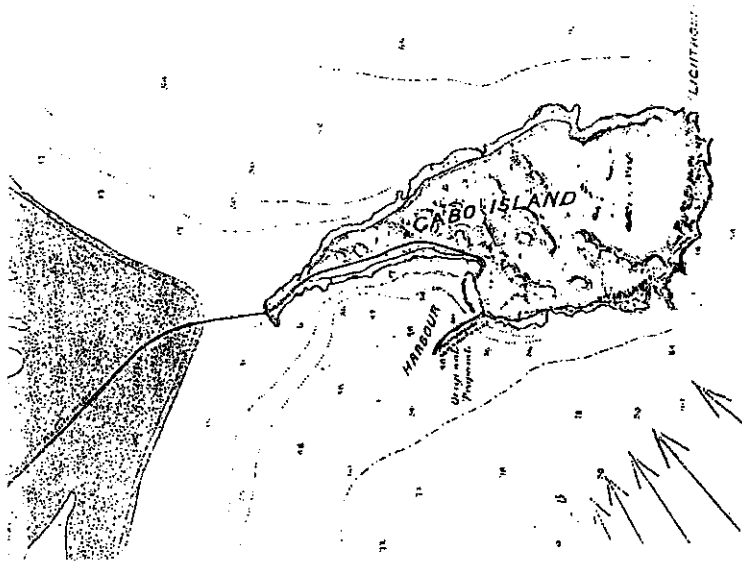
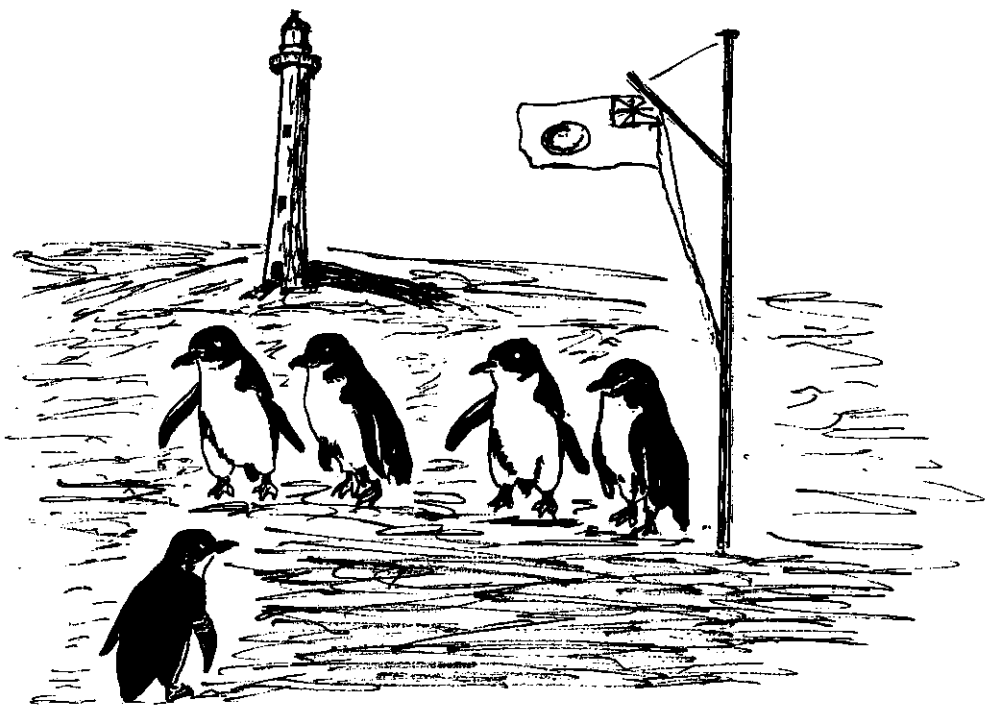


Figure 30 Undated plan of Gabo island, showing the location of the Proposed Breakwater.



Figure 31 View of the Gabo Island Groin from the jetty.



Morning Parade on Gabo....1942. ?