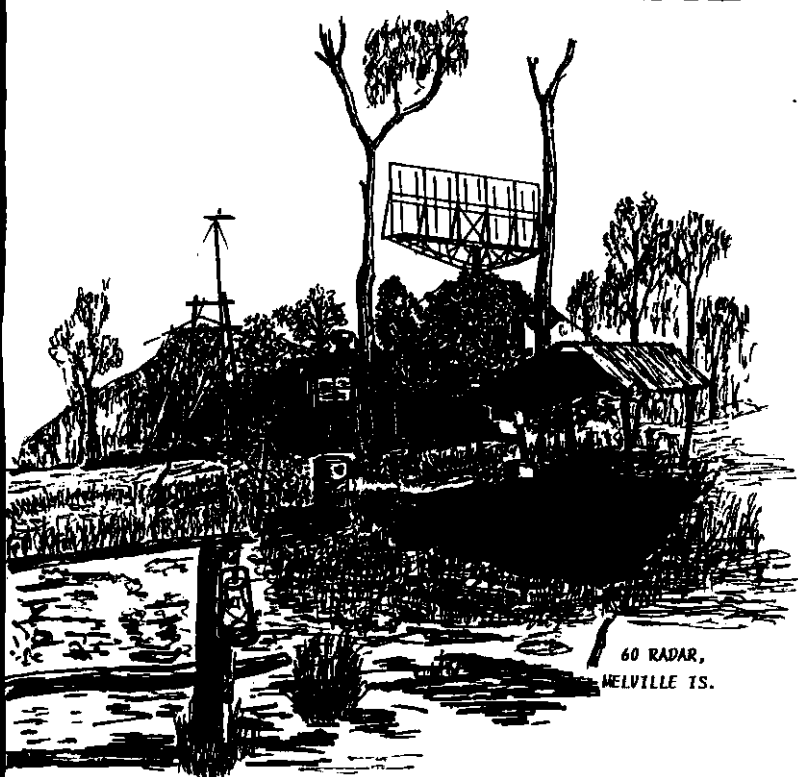


60 RADAR MELVILLE ISLAND



60 RADAR,
MELVILLE IS.

Edited by MORRIE FENTON

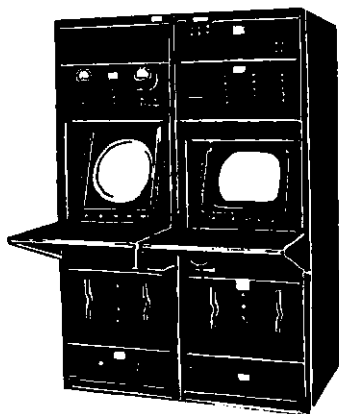
Mom & Ken Taylor

The History and Stories

of

**60 RADAR
MELVILLE ISLAND**

RAAF RADAR
AT THE TOP
OF THE
TIWI ISLANDS.



Edited by **MORRIE FENTON**

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60 RADAR

MELVILLE ISLAND.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

I am indebted to all who assisted in any way towards the completion of this small history of 60 Radar on Melville Island, - particularly Stan Burge who sent copies of some wonderful material he had kept since his Melville days.

As with all the station histories I have put together, this booklet is the result of a combined effort, and all contributors are co-authors.

My thanks to.....Ed Simmonds

Stan Burge

Colin Thiele AC

RAAF Historical

Knox McKenzie

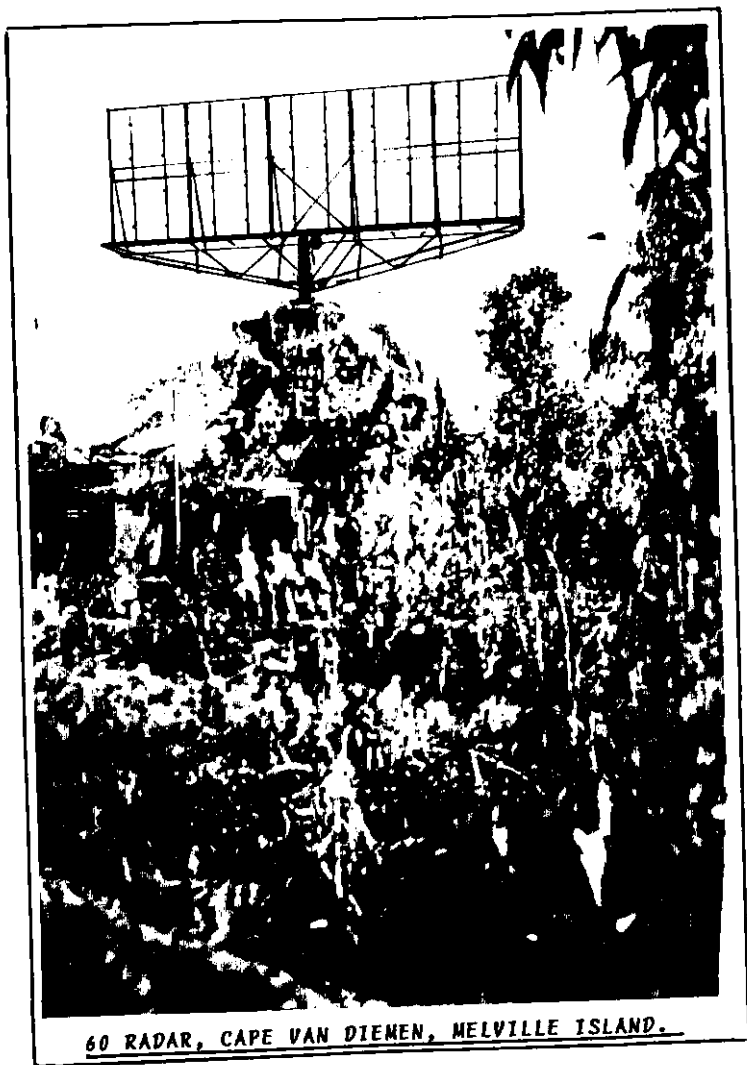
Theo Harvey

Ron Jones

I thank Fred Stanley for some fine, fresh photos; also Stan Ledger for the Walrus amphibian photos and the photos of the Guards. The photos of the departure from Melville I took myself, while the Doover photo and the Victory party photo came my way many years ago, probably via my friend Murray Marks, but I have no idea who originated them. I recommend the book "The Tiwi Islands" by our old radar friend Bro. John Pye to anyone seeking more history. Finally, I again thank Ed Simmonds and Pete Smith for their help, advice and interest.

Morrie Fenton.

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60 RADAR, CAPE VAN DIEMEN, MELVILLE ISLAND.

Preface

When the veterans of RAAF ground radar started to collect information and stories to record that service's history, one of the most ardent, if not the most, supporter of the overall project was Morrie Fenton.

Therefore it gives me great pleasure to introduce his latest booklet. His work is of immense importance as he has concentrated on the many radar units in the North West Area of Australia during World War II.

Certainly as the counter offensive against the Japanese increased, the Operational Bases in NWA, with Liberator bombers, long range Catalinas Mitchells, Venturas and reconnaissance aircraft, played an important role in attacking enemy bases throughout the Dutch East Indies and right up to the Philippines.

The essential radar coverage for these bases also increased with many new radar stations being installed from the Kimberleys in the west to the eastern end of Arnhem Land. From the outset, 38RS at Cape Fourcroy on Bathurst Island, 46RS at Cape Don with 60RS at Cape Van Diemen on Melville Island were intended to be fixed stations acting as an early warning network mainly for Darwin. The equipment to be used was the English Mk V COL which was both heavy and cumbersome, and its performance was only slightly better than the LW/AW.

As such, by the time that 60RS had been erected towards the end of 1943, the success of the network had reached a very high level which is confirmed in the following quotation from page 185 Prof Alan Powell's book, *The Shadow's Edge*:-

"From mid-1943 says the official Japanese history of the campaign, 'the air defence became very strict and our losses increased greatly. The RAAF defence fighters and radar system (in Darwin) became the highest level in the world.'"

Even so 60RS still had an important role to play, namely the provision of supportive services helping damaged or lost aircraft back to their bases. Along with normal duties, the ASV beacons had to be maintained by radar mechanics.

The story of the construction of this unit is quite an epic. It was no mean task landing the heavy equipment and Lister diesel power supplies; clearing a track some 20 miles from Garden Point to the Cape; erecting the steel tower and array without mechanical lifting appliances; digging wells for water for about 30 men; setting up a 'paperbark' camp from the natural material on hand. At the same time those men had to win the confidence of the Tiwi people in the area.

Once again Morrie has woven together an interesting story which is in keeping with the traditions of RAAF radar men. He has said that this, like the others, is his last booklet.

I sincerely hope not.

Ed Simmonds.

THE LEGEND OF THE TIWI ISLANDS.

".....and then Mudangkala, the old blind woman, arose from the ground carrying three babies in her arms. As she crawled in darkness across the featureless landscape, seawater followed and filled the imprints made by her body. Eventually the pools became one and formed a channel. The old woman continued her journey overland and once again the moulded earth filled with the flow of water.

Before she left, Mudangkala covered the islands she had created with plants and filled the land and sea with living creatures. Finally the land was prepared for her children and for the generation of TIWI who followed."



THE STORY OF THE ISLANDS.

Morrie Fenton.

Who can even imagine when the dreamtime stories and legends of the TIWI people first began.....15000 - 20000 years ago or more - long before the end of the last ice age when the rising seas severed the islands from the mainland, to become 'the world' and they became 'the people.'

The Dutch explorers and adventurers of the 17th. and 18th. centuries have left their record of the first European contact with the TIWI people - from the 1630's to the early 1700's when the island warriors defended their world and their homes - and the Dutch were content to make an orderly withdrawal and sail away.

Over more recent years, the Macassans, Chinese, Portuguese, the English and the French have all made some contact with the islanders - the English even established a small outpost for a few years at Fort Dundas near where Garden Point and Pirlangimpi are now located on Apsley Strait - but the TIWI people of Bathurst and Melville have been able to maintain their independent island life, almost untouched by others until well into this century.

In 1911, Father Gaell began the church mission work on Bathurst - its influence has gradually increased with the passing years - and in the 1920's the islanders worked at various Darwin defence establishments, so beginning a closer contact with the outside world - but the outbreak of war in the Pacific brought about the biggest impact on TIWI island life when the men were sought to assist on marine craft, and to work at defence posts.

Bathurst Island was the first Australian soil attacked on February 19th., 1942 - and the first two warnings of the coming air attack on Darwin came from Melville and Bathurst Islands. The war eventually ended with the islanders held in high esteem for their contribution to the defence of Darwin and its surrounding areas.

At 60 Radar, at the N.W. tip of Melville Island, the TIWI people earned a high reputation as good workers and a proud and reliable people - and in turn the radar men were careful to respect their families, and their way of life away from the Air Force camp.

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CAPE VAN DIEMEN was the site chosen for 60 Radar late in 1943. The cape is on the N.W. tip of Melville Island - and quite close to where the first British settlement on the northern coastline was established in 1824 - a tiny outpost in Apsley Strait of 100 or more men, 44 of whom were convicts. Fort Dundas was set up by this special detachment from Port Jackson under the overall superintendance of Captain Bremer, who first took possession of both Bathurst and Melville Islands, then sent parties ashore to search for a suitable source of water, naming the selected site King's Cove in recognition of the work of Captain Phillip Parker King, the English explorer and surveyor of the northern coastline.

Captain Barlow was the first Commandant of Fort Dundas. He had a very small detachment of troops - the necessary officers - and the convicts who were intended to be the labour force of the place - the idea being that the outpost would establish a British presence in an area where the French, Dutch, Portuguese and other adventurers and traders were already taking an interest.

The small fort was well armed and protected, and its strategic position near the East Indies islands and the route to India was to well and truly show the British Flag in the area. Its site in the Apsley Strait was close to and immediately south of the one-time Garden Point Mission, now the TIWI township of Pirlangimpi.

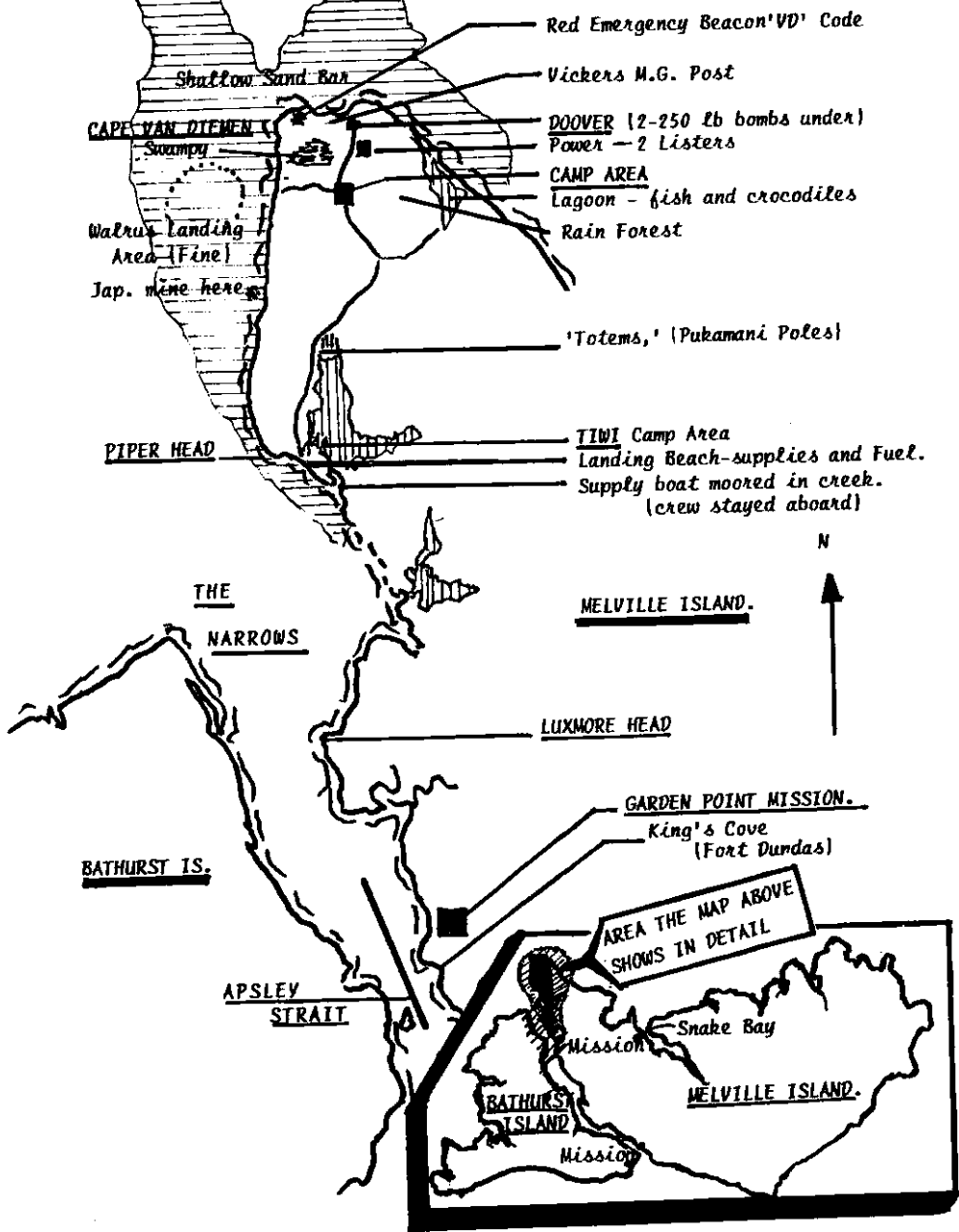
The remote and lonely location of the place, and the ever increasing hostility and aggressiveness of the TIWI warriors added to the difficulties of keeping the flag flying...."Once established - soon forgotten" - was practised in those days too - and the tiny settlement was abandoned after only three years. Two settlements on the Coboung Peninsula were attempted in the following years, but these too were abandoned.

Some of these historical names and places are shown on the attached map, also some of the sites and places more relevant to the story of 60 Radar. And the story of the naming of some of the more relevant landmarks is also recorded:

- Cape Van Diemen. Named by the celebrated Dutch explorer Abel Tasman, who thought the cape was on the mainland. The name honours Anthony Van Diemen, Governor General of the Dutch East Indies who sent him on his voyage of discovery.
- Melville Island. Named by Captain Phillip Parker King to honour Viscount Melville, one time first Lord of the Admiralty.
- Bathurst Island. Named by King to honour the 3rd. Earl of Bathurst who held many government offices and appointments.
- Apsley Strait. Named also as a compliment to the Earl of Bathurst, who was the son of Baron Apsley, Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies.
- Luxmore Head. King named Luxmore Head in compliment to the Right Reverend, the Lord Bishop of Luxmore.
- King's Cove. Captain Bremer named the site to honour Captain King.
- Fort Dundas. Evidently named by Captain Bremer in honour of the First Lord of the Admiralty in 1824, and son of Viscount Melville. Another possibility was to honour the family of Viscount Melville.

60 RADAR AREA, CAPE VAN DIEMEN. (Composed with help
of STAN BURGE and
THEO HARVEY.)

Position 130°22'E - 11°10'S



(At right) An extended Tiwi family on the beach at Piper Head.



(Above) a Tiwi funeral.
(At right) A corroboree held at the Tiwi camp near the beach.



THE TIWI FOLK - 1944.

Much has been written in praise of the Tiwi people and their island way of life which now is looked upon casually by probably hundreds of tourists each year; but at no time in their long history were they more deserving of praise than in the war years when Bathurst and Melville were the northern outposts for the big Allied forces in Darwin. Indeed, the very first warning of the first air raid came from a coast-watcher on Melville who was also assembling and training a small force of Tiwi men to watch the island coastline; and the first Japanese airman captured on Australian soil was taken prisoner by a Tiwi islander - and the crew of an enemy bomber aircraft was also captured on Melville.

But when 38 Radar was set up on Bathurst, and later, when 60 Radar was set up on Melville, the Tiwi people earned the respect and admiration of the RAAF radar men stationed on both islands. Not only were they of great help while the stations were being built, but afterwards they became the eyes and ears for the stations, besides helping with all the routine daily jobs.

More importantly perhaps, the Tiwi people were masters of the bush, and their skills in fishing, hunting and even croc hunting were such that they were constantly called on as guides for walkabouts, or to augment the very basic camp menus. Their island knowledge, and their company, helped the radar men to enjoy their 'time off' in far better fashion than if confined to the camp and its surrounds. But fifty years later, the Tiwi way of life that the radar men knew, has largely changed.

#####

GARDEN POINT.

The name 'Garden Point' has its origin back in the years 1824 to 1829 when the English at Fort Dundas named the nearby headland before moving out after only a few years to seek a more favourable location for a settlement. The name has survived the years - and few changes to the Tiwi way of life other than the establishment of the Bathurst Mission occurred until the years of the second World War, and the Pacific War in particular.

The Tiwi Islands and the Northern coastline had long been visited by traders and crews from other lands, and the unfortunate off-spring of these visits - the children of mixed races - presented problems difficult to ignore, for they were often orphans, or even cast-offs from their families and people.

From 1937, Patrol Officers were stationed at Garden Point, and the first house was then built. In 1940, Father Connors pioneered the Mission there on behalf of his Church, taking up a grant of 130 square miles and £5000 - a tidy sum indeed in those days, and the new Mission was to provide a home for the unwanted coloured children. Houses were built for the boys and girls who began to arrive in 1941 - the girls being in the charge of Sister Annunciata and other Sisters of the Church. Sister Annunciata was to continue her work for almost 28 years until the Mission closed.

With the impact of the Pacific War in 1942, so soon after the establishment of the Mission, the Sisters and the girls went south, eventually spending most of the next three years at Carrieton, in South Australia. Back at the Mission, there was considerable alarm in June when a strange, open boat was sighted approaching the Mission, obviously manned by well armed men. But Lt. Morrell and his crew had survived a 2000 mile trip from Corregidor Bay in the Philippines where their USN minesweeper QUAIL had been scuttled rather than have it fall into enemy hands. The band of men had somehow cut loose a harbour launch and hidden it in a creek while they gathered fuel and stores to attempt an escape.

After many hair-raising adventures on their trip south, they had arrived at Garden Point with no clear idea of where they were, or whether the enemy had already arrived.

With identities duly established by both sides, the new arrivals were welcomed and rested before they continued their journey when they startled the Darwin authorities as they tied up at the wharf after passing unobserved through the harbour defence boom.

In return for the hospitality and care received at Garden Point, the open launch, named QUAIL to honour their old Navy ship, was given to the Mission where it enjoyed a long and useful life as transport craft, and for fishing and croc hunting expeditions.

When 60 Radar arrived in 1943, Garden Point proved a convenient place and a good anchorage to land the equipment and supplies, and to set up a temporary camp. From there a track was cleared to the station site at Cape Van Diemen, so enabling the anchorage to be used whenever required by the RAAF marine craft when the more open seas closer to the station at Piper Head were too rough for the small craft.

The Garden Point Mission and 60 Radar at the Cape proved friendly neighbours during the short stay of the station on the island, and each was able to support and help the other during those difficult years - as good neighbours should. Father Connors, the founder-priest of the Mission, was the first to visit the station in December 1943, (probably a late Christmas service) - and after he retired to Sydney in early in 1944, Father Flynn, the new Priest-in Charge, carried on the good work by periodically visiting the lonely radar station.

The Sisters and girls returned early in 1945, and at this time the Mission

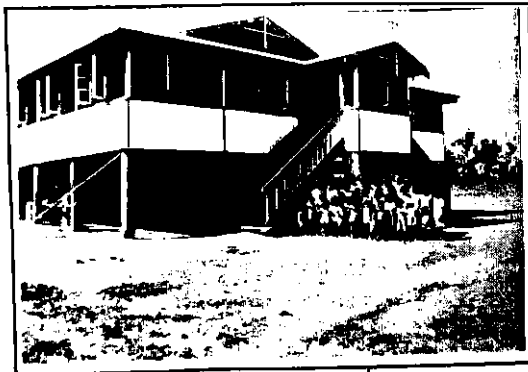
was enlarged. One of the Army all-steel Williams huts was erected as a church, and a new school building 'on stilts' was built also. When the radar station closed in November 1945, one of the Lister diesel generators was left at the Mission to provide power and electricity - whether as a gift or by arrangement who would now know!

In 1947, the first marriage between two who grew up at the Mission took place, to be followed by others of course. So new homes had to be built, and a village was started - St. Anne's Village. Then in 1967 as the result of negotiations between the Church and the Director of Social Welfare in Darwin, the place became the nucleus of an Aboriginal settlement, with a store and a few shops. Various trades and occupations were attempted with varying success....even tobacco growing!....But perhaps the most successful occupation has been Australian Rules Football!

Various names have been tried and even adopted for the settlement....but today the place is known as PIRLANGIMPI, and some three or four hundred folk live there, while many of the young children now live at special homes in Darwin. A new church was opened for worship in 1990 - the Church of our Lady of Victories.

In 1991, the settlement was visited briefly by Stan Burge, a former radar man at 60 Radar, and he was impressed with the clean and tidy appearance of the place, which now has its own airstrip to maintain a quick and easy link with Darwin.

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Two views at the Mission after the children and Sisters had returned in 1945.

The bell would probably be from the DON ISIDRO which was attacked and then beached on the western coast of Bathurst Island.



60 RADAR, MELVILLE ISLAND. (From the notes of Stan Burge.)

The Doover was a Mk. V COL - its position was 140°22'E, 11°10'S, and there were 2,250 lb bombs underneath with 4 gallons of petrol in the Transmitter room in case of demolition. In front was a sand-bagged pit with an old water-cooled Vickers as the local defence.

The W/T hut was a short distance south, equipped with an AT5/AR8; a set of back-up genemotors, a plotting board and phones. Closer again to the camp was the engine shed, with two English Lister diesels and 3 phase alternators. These were started by first thumping home the four compression plugs, then cranking to set the flywheel spinning, then lifting a bar to release the plugs and away she went.

The Doover seemed to work well. The ranges were up to 135 miles to the north, but to the south the ranges were limited probably because of the land. There was a breakdown during a cyclone when water blew into the Receiver, wrecking the Master Oscillator that provided the pulse to trigger the transmitter and time base.

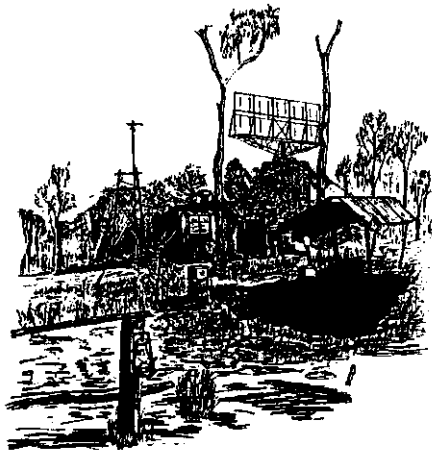
At the camp was a small parade ground complete with flag-pole, where occasional parades were held. There was a well with a pump and an overhead tank. The pump gave a lot of trouble, and the well didn't make enough water for the number of men.

In the Recreation Room was a gramophone, a small billiard table and a dart board. There was a store room with a mountain of M&V, Bully, tinned sausages, gold-fish etc. A small paper called the 'Arafura Flash' was produced. An emergency beacon was installed on the point of the Cape which flashed a red light spelling 'V.D.' when activated.

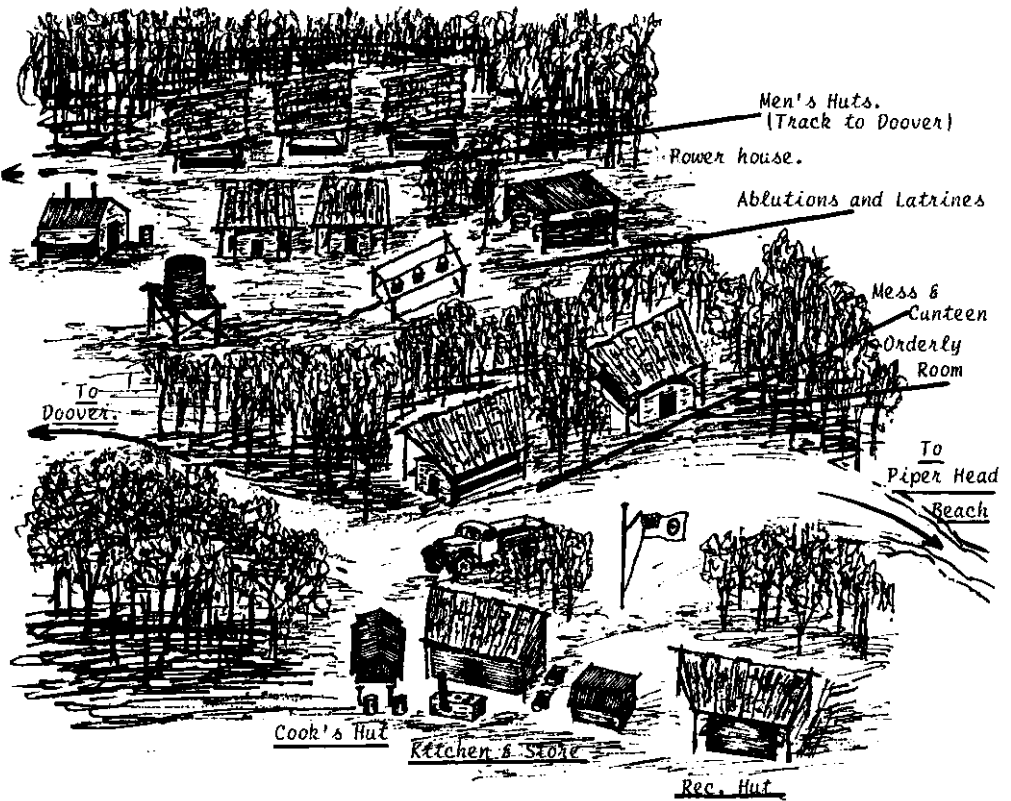
The huts varied in construction...some were sheltered beneath separate bark coverings, or roofs...others were constructed of sisal or hessian over wire-netting with a roof of bark resting on wirenetting - with all fixed over a simple framework. Ant-hill material, crushed, levelled and watered made good floors when it hardened which could be swept clean. And there were 'burn off' latrines. A terrific explosion shook the camp one day when dieseline was poured in (perhaps with a drop of petrol added) - someone dropped in a match...and up she went! But no one was hurt fortunately.

The first station transport was a Ford which was later replaced by the more usual Chev 3 tonner. There was a Jeep, but the wheel bearings were shot, so the C.O. did without.

Credit should be given to the crew who set the place up. Theirs must have been a super-human effort... floating the gear ashore on rafts of drums - constructing the huts from materials on hand...the lighting ... slit trenches...wells dug and tracks cleared...not to mention setting up the Doover and bringing the station to the operational stage.



SKETCH OF THE 60 RS CAMP AREA.





LOCAL BUILDING MATERIALS.

Local material readily available near the new camp-site was found to be most suitable and easy to use in improving the living conditions in the camp buildings. Paperbark came away quite easily from the trees, and long pieces over any framework of netting were used to both shelter the huts and other buildings, and also to act as the actual roofing for many of the huts, so giving shelter from both the fierce tropical sun and the drenching rain. The result was a cooler and much quieter hut - a big improvement on the hot, noisy black iron roofing so often used - when the iron was available.

Usually the separate bark shelters allowed air to circulate between the roofs...and when the bark itself was used as roofing, repairs were very easily attended to should a leak develop, the proven method being to add a bit more bark!

Crushed ant-hill material, levelled and well damped down, formed a hard, smooth floor that could easily be swept and cleaned each day.

AD ASTRA PER MELVILLE.

Colin Thiele.

After 55 years it is difficult for me to be certain about all the fine details of the events on Melville Island in 1943, but I have vivid recollections of many aspects of that remarkable enterprise. I hope my descriptions of them are reasonably accurate.

Work on assembling the equipment and personnel for 60 Radar had obviously been going on for some time before I was summoned urgently from Metung in Victoria to join the unit. I was flown north in a weary Lockheed Hudson in mid 1943. So great was the urgency that I was not allowed to take leave before I left.

Characteristically, after all this frenetic haste, we then cooled our heels for months waiting for something to happen. Meanwhile, the Wet set in and drenched most of our gear so thoroughly that it started to deteriorate - just how badly we were not to discover until we eventually tried to get it going on Cape Van Diemen.

To give the authorities their due, the logistics of the project were probably daunting, and I concede that shipping would have been at a premium. No doubt there were conflicting demands from all branches of the services and an intense juggling of priorities.

It was late in the year before we were told that a small freighter was available to take us out to the site on Melville. It was crammed with cargo. Mark V COL Radar was heavy gear at the best of times without all the rest of the stuff that had to accompany it - the two big Lister diesels, stacks of fuel, a truck, food for six months, and all the equipment needed to set up such an isolated base.

The trip round Cape Fourcroy on Bathurst Island to the northern tip of Melville was no cause for joy, the ship butting through choppy seas with the captain on tenterhooks, forever scanning the sky for Japanese planes. When we eventually reached Cape Van Diemen there was no hope of landing on that exposed coast through running whitecaps, so the ship turned south and sailed down Apsley Strait for some twenty miles to the Garden Point Mission. I don't know what negotiations went on before it was agreed that we would make our landing there. I doubt that we would have been overly welcome. We were sitting ducks if attacked and our presence would have made the Mission a target as well.

Our haste was now genuinely desperate. We had to unload at high speed so that the ship could get out of the strait to the open sea again, and so that we could shift everything inland, out of sight. I still have indelible memories of those few feverish days - mental pictures of moments perilous, painful, farcical, rewarding, entertaining and fulfilling.

The first essential was to float the truck ashore on a hastily constructed pontoon - a timber deck sitting uneasily on a collection of 44 gallon drums, and roped down as securely as possible. Without the truck there was no hope of transporting anything on shore. We held our collective breath as the ship's crane lifted the truck and lowered it gently over the side onto the rocking pontoon. I, for one, was quite sure that it was on the first stage of its journey to the bottom of the sea, but miraculously it held its balance. Accompanied by heart-stopping crises and frenzied warnings, it was finally towed ashore and manhandled safely up the beach.

The rest of the gear followed. There were dozens of near-misses with disaster, especially with the big diesels and the heavy radar transmitter. The 44 gallon drums of fuel were simply dumped overboard into the water where we acted as marine sheep dogs, rounding them up and droving them ashore. There we had to roll them up beyond the high tide mark, a murderous job if ever there was one, which explains why I've had a jaundiced opinion of 44

gallon drums ever since. In the end, we had the whole cargo scattered along the shore, looking for all the world like a run-down industrial precinct recently wrecked by a cyclone. If we then thought we had broken the back of the task we soon learnt otherwise. The task was waiting to break ours. Although we could say that we had successfully taken 60 Radar out to Melville, it was lying uselessly in the most inappropriate place on the island. The headland on Cape Van Diemen where it was meant to stand as a guardian sentinel was twenty miles away beyond an intervening barrier of dense virgin scrub, in places verging on jungle. There were no roads.

We therefore became woodcutters and road makers, trail blazing through the wilderness. It was only then that the truck could start hauling everything up to the Cape, making countless journeys back and forth. Christmas came and went, but there was no time for celebration because after all this delay 60 Radar, we were told, had to be operational immediately - if not sooner.

By now the Wet had set in with real gusto (to brighten us up we were told that the Cape probably had a yearly rainfall of 90 inches compared with Darwin's 60), and so the gear was drenched yet again before we could get it under shelter. In the humid atmosphere many of the transmitting and receiving circuits were now sick, as well as thick, with mildew.

We worked for weeks, cleaning, drying, replacing, testing, and climbing about on the tower and antenna, itching with dermatitis. It had been hoped that the station would be a regular Hercules, reaching far out over the Arafura Sea, but for some time it remained an anaemic wimp, stricken with monsoon sickness. It was only after much delay and heartache that it began to live up to expectations, eventually vindicating itself by being the first station to pick up an enemy plane far out over the Gulf of Carpentaria. But by then the tide of the war had moved north and the station spent much of its time tracking our own departing and returning Liberators and Bostons on bombing runs over the Dutch East Indies.

Our camp was built in dense scrub about a kilometre from the Dover. Daily life when we were off duty was free and relaxed. We lived in huts built on the spot with sturdy timber uprights and bark roofs, the sides partly enclosed with wire mesh. The section below the mesh, about a yard in width, was open space from the ground up, which allowed the wildlife - wallabies, lizards, bush rats and carpet snakes - freedom to come and go as they wished. This was responsible for a painful moment in the life of my mate John (Jack) Harrington which I have described before. One night, half asleep in the midnight gloom, he was outraged to see a small wallaby sitting on the end of his bunk. Determined to teach it a lesson, he reached back stealthily and seized one of the nulla-nullas he had collected from the Tiwis. Then, stretching his arm for maximum leverage, he swung the nulla-nulla down with great force. Unhappily the 'wallaby' was his own foot sticking up under the bed cover. After that Jack was on makeshift crutches for a while, harbouring an intense dislike of all marsupials.

He developed an even greater dislike for the bush rats that made themselves at home around the camp. When they prised open his 'Willow' cake tin one night and ate every crumb of the fruit cake his mother had managed to send up to him, he declared total war. On the bench in the Dover he devised the Unique Unpatented Harrington Electrical Rat Trap - two small squares of sheet copper placed a short distance apart on an insulated base, connected to opposite poles of the main power supply, with a sprinkling of food between them as a bait. Unfortunately the first rat he caught created a dead short and blew the station off the air. There was a good deal of speculation in high places later on about the inexplicable reason for the station's sudden breakdown.

Jack was a loveable character, laconic and ironic, and with a fine disregard for protocol. He had studied anthropology at Sydney University and was understandably fascinated by Tiwi culture. The Tiwis were fine people, strong, able, independent and good humoured, with whom Jack developed such trust and rapport that he and I were eventually invited to several of their ceremonies and dances. It was a rare experience, especially when we realised that the choreography of one of the dances was based on the first big Japanese air raid on Darwin.

Some of the Tiwi men actually assisted the station as Guards. They were a source of comfort to us because no enemy patrol attempting a landing on the nearby coast could have escaped their eyes and ears, and their uncanny understanding of the natural (and unnatural) world.

From time to time we organised picnics on the beach, with races and competitions. The Tiwis joined in wholeheartedly. They sometimes set up poles made from the stems of pandanus palms and used them as targets in spear-throwing contests. We took care to stand well out of the way because the spearheads not only struck the poles every time but often slammed into them with such force that the points emerged on the other side.

When we were free we went for long walks in the bush and along the coast. Jack and I were particularly interested in the environment, the whole place seemingly pristine and untouched. So total was the solitude that we pictured ourselves as the only two people alive on the planet, walking on sand that had never known the footfall of human beings. But sometimes the environment also brought us back to the present with a jolt. We were well aware of the tidal rise and fall in the north, and we knew that Apsley Strait became a mill-race at times. We also thought we understood the nature of the inlets and estuaries along the coast into which the sea regularly surged and retreated. Yet one day we were caught.

After crossing the outfall of a small creek, pleasantly ankle-deep in water, we walked further along the coast, stopped for a drink and a bite of lunch, and finally turned and headed back. But when we reached the creek we were stunned. It was a racing maelstrom six feet deep. We had to wait nervously until the water slowed down before we could wade across up to our armpits, fearful that we were about to be seized from behind by crocs.

I also learned an unhappy lesson about tropical jellyfish when I accidentally swam into one. The pain of the stings was excruciating. Luckily my fellow bathers helped me back to shore as fast as they could and rubbed the burns with sand and water. I survived, but I carried the red weals on my chest for months afterwards, as though I'd been branded all over with a long-nosed soldering iron.

Fortunately marine creatures were not all dangerous or unpleasant. When the Tiwis caught a dugong they generously gave us some of the meat, and we were sometimes able to improve our cookhouse diet with fresh fish.

Although we had constant radio contact with the mainland, the delivery of material things was always a problem. There was no airstrip, and the sea at the Cape was usually too choppy for seaplanes or flying boats. We therefore spent long periods without hope of incoming or outgoing mail, afraid that our families and friends back home were convinced that we'd fallen off the edge of the planet. At one time we even packed all our outgoing mail into an empty four-gallon tin (that had been used for dehydrated potatoes revolting stuff that it was), soldered the lid back carefully so that it was air and water tight, and sent it down Apsley Strait to the Catholic Mission on Bathurst Island in a dugout canoe. It was the only way of getting it to the outside world.

Elsewhere I have described the notorious beef bombing run when an aged

Duck (the aircraft, not the bird) tried to drop our Christmas fare of fresh meat and other goodies onto the beach without parachutes. The results were unspeakable.

Sources of good fresh water were also scarce. We relied on our own well, but in the dry season the quality deteriorated, and there was always the risk of contamination. Shortly before I left Melville I went down with dysentery. I owed my recovery, and perhaps my life, to the new sulphur drugs that had then become available.

These, then, are a few random reminiscences about 60 Radar. I could go on indefinitely but I have already written too much. The chapter did not close entirely with my departure from the island as I was seconded to a three-man (soon a two-man) mobile radar maintenance team. We were meant to be high-speed trouble-shooters, dashing out to stations here and there with spares, solutions, and presumably up-to-date knowledge. Consequently Horrie Baker and I flew about in a superannuated Dragon Rapide biplane, landing perilously on beaches, or in an old Anson so decrepit that we were amazed to find that we were still alive at the end of each flight.

So it came about I paid one last visit to Cape Van Diemen. It was a fond farewell. Looking out over the vast sweep of that pristine country Horrie turned to me and said, "You know, some day tourists are going to pay good money just to come and see all this." How right he was.

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An Anson from 6 Com Flight climbs up from the Bathurst strip towards a threatening afternoon storm. The B.I.M. strip was the closest to 60 Radar. From here the station launch carried men and supplies - and mail - first to Garden Point, then on to the Piper Head beach near 60 Radar. Close to Apsley Strait was the wreckage of the U.S.A C53, destroyed by the first raiders as they approached Darwin.

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"ON GUARD!"

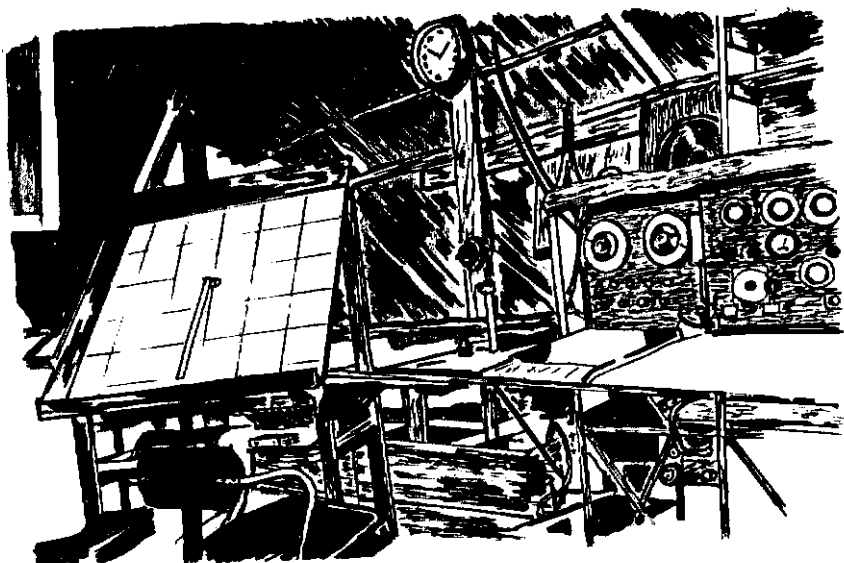
Large or small at times, there was always a detachment of Guards at each radar station, forming a separate yet integral part of the unit's personnel.

The Guards were 'attached' as part of the Area's Security Guards' Unit - not part of the station complement - and although the station fed and housed them, there was usually a Guard N.C.O. who was in charge of the Guard Detachment and who answered to the SGU back in Darwin.

Besides attending to their every-day duties of maintaining a 24 hour watch and patrol of the camp and technical buildings, the Guards found time to assist with the usual camp duties and in effecting the continual improvements which seemed to be the law at all radar camps, and to support any activities such as sports afternoons and social evenings. And they often assumed authority as arms instructors, or rifle shoot supervisors, as well as acting as drivers of motor transport, or sometimes acting as the all-important camp barber, at the same time earning a few extra shillings each week.

The Guards were always good to have around, and they in turn were proud of their part in radar station life.





THE OPERATIONS ROOM AT 60 RS, MELVILLE.

With less complex equipment at some stations, a plotting board and recorder's desk could usually be tucked into a corner of the Doover - but with the large equipment of a COL, space was always at a premium - and that's when Australian resourcefulness and adaptability came to the fore.

The Ops Room at 60 RS was built from local material - the flexible sheets of paper-bark carefully stripped in sheets from trees nearby, and laid over a framework of almost straight native trees and boughs - all carefully selected.

The mandatory plotting board, clock and recorder's desk kept company with the W/T equipment - a friendly and more companionable arrangement which usually suited everyone.

A corner of the bark roofing was lifted to allow the air to circulate and some light to enter. This was easily and quickly replace if the rains came!

Doubtless there was a bench in the background where a brew could be made, and altogether the arrangement was admirable with 2 Operators in the Doover, 2 men in the Ops Room - or 3 if the mechanic was looking for company and was able to leave the big transmitter and his workbench in the adjoining iron hut known as the Mechanics' Hut. This was usually a far warmer and more airless place than the cool Ops Room.

(The sketch has been drafted from a Fred Stanley photo.)

THE STORY OF THE STATION (from the Diary.)

Morrie Fenton.

60 Radar appeared relatively late on the NWA scene - and while as a result, its operational life was pretty uneventful, many of the early shortages and difficulties experienced by its personnel were almost identical to those encountered by the radar men on the older stations, despite the eighteen months separating their formation and establishment.

The station began to form up at 44 Radar Wing at Coomalie in October 1943, and by the end of the first month, the Commanding Officer, F/Lt. W.G. Flux, was in command of 25 men, and all non-technical equipment was packed, and preparations were being made for an advance party to move to Melville Island, and then on to the station site at Cape Van Diemen. The equipment was to be the well proven English COL.

On 12th. November, the advance party, in charge of F/O K. Henderson-Wilson departed for Piper Head, a headland in Apsley Strait some miles south of the probable station site - arriving next day at Garden Point Mission further south again - then moving on to establish a temporary camp nearer the station site. Meanwhile, the men left at Radar Wing moved the technical gear to 132 RS at Knuckey's Lagoon, after which they received a course in weapon training at 52 OBU Darwin.

Meanwhile, things were happening for the advance party at Piper Head. A well had been dug and timbered - Lieutenant J. Gribble, RANVR, and of coastwatch fame* visited the camp, and Squadron Leader 'Doc' Fenton of 6 Com Unit attempted to land - probably after his usual fashion on the beach, but evidently with no success.

Next came a nasty scare when lights were sighted at Luxmore Head, down past the beach in Apsley Strait, and the men were kept 'on alert' until the emergency was called off - a possible explanation being phosphorescence.

**John Gribble was in charge of a Government ration station at Snake Bay which in 1940 became something of a correctional station where unco-operative Aborigines were attached. John Gribble was able to assemble many of his charges into a useful and well disciplined force, and assisted by these men, he was able to maintain a voluntary coastwatch and patrol force. He had a radio transmitter and a simple code system which enabled him to send the first message to Darwin on February 19th., 1942, advising that he had sighted a large number of aircraft. His message was followed a few minutes later by Father McGrath's famous message from Bathurst Island Mission.*

Later in 1942, John Gribble was enlisted into the Navy as Lieutenant Gribble, RANVR, and he and his men maintained their coastwatch and Melville patrol work at least until well into 1944, when Petty Officer Jensen was also stationed at Snake Bay. Apparently the force was recognised sufficiently for the Navy to supply arms, uniforms and the necessary stores.

It is clear that, for several months at least, a spirit of co-operation existed between the Navy and the Air Force on Melville Island, but it is possible that 60 RS effectively took over the coastwatch duties of Snake Bay, though Lieut. Gribble and his men undoubtedly would have continued patrol work, which had proved to be most successful and effective in the past. By this time, the construction of a RAAF strip had begun there for a station eventually to be named 'Austin.'

Today, Snake Bay is the location of the TIWI township of Milikapiti.

F/Lt. Chilton, the Commanding Officer of 44 Radar Wing, arrived on the 25th., and his stay extended over 5 days while the Technical Site at Cape Van Diemen was selected. Meanwhile, work progressed at the station camp site and the main party of men arrived at the No. 1 camp at Piper Head from Darwin on their way to the new station site.

The work was concentrated around the technical and permanent camp sites, and the equipment was unloaded from the transport vessel, thought to be COOLEBAR. Meanwhile a well was commenced and the 'mobile' works party began constructing the camp buildings, while a third party was selected to commence clearing a track to the new camp.

On the 11th. December, wireless contact with Darwin was established, and on the next day the Wing Medical Officer arrived to make sure all was going well with the important matter of camp hygiene. Most of the men were at the station site by the 17th., and the new 'road' was further extended so that the Ford tender could travel between the camp and Garden Point which was the proven anchorage where vessels could load and unload. And by Christmas a supply of water was found at a depth of 31 feet in the new well, the Ablutions, the Mess Huts, and Recreation Room were completed, and most importantly, the Christmas turkey, ham and vegies had arrived for the Christmas Day celebrations, for which a 'Stand Down' day had been declared so that all could enjoy the day in the best possible way.

The hard work began again on the 26th. - a second well was begun, and the combined Orderly Room and Store, and the W/T ops hut were completed. And Father Connors from the Garden Point Mission arrived on the 30th. - a little late for a Christmas Mass and Church Service perhaps, but very welcome nevertheless.

Meanwhile, the marine craft attached to the the station over this busy period departed for the Bathurst Island Mission as instructed by signal from Darwin, and the air strip and A.O.B. at the Mission, and Garden Point, were to become the two principal means of transporting stores and personnel for the station.

At this time, there was 1 Officer and 27 men at 60 Radar.

New Year's Day 1944 proved just another work day at 60 Radar - in fact it proved just the beginning of a week's hard work. 2 tons of rations arrived by road from Garden Point, and the work boat departed again for B.I.M. probably seeking mail, personnel and stores of various kinds. The second section of the Doover tower was erected, and the wiring of the Mess and kitchen was completed. The second well had been sunk to 34 feet, and 2 trucks left the station bound for Garden Point to bring back a Diesel engine and the Receiver. The second Diesel and panel arrived the next day.

On the 7th. the Transmitter arrived, apparently also trucked from Garden Point, and while one engine was being set up to operate, the second well was slabbed and tested, giving 1000 gallons per day. Meanwhile, the first engine began operating, and light was introduced to those buildings already wired and ready to receive it.

The Receiver room and Doover was ready to operate on the 15th., and 60 Radar came 'on air' soon after - the satisfactory result of 2½ months' work to bring the big station to the operating stage.

More rations arrived from Garden Point on the 18th. - the first telephone lines were laid on the 20th. - and on the 22nd. the main power line was

completed. Meanwhile, evidently work had begun on the engine sheds, and suitable stone for the engine beds was trucked in from Garden Point. At the same time, work still proceeded on the huts, and huts 4,5 and 6 were completed, evidently sleeping huts.

Apparently at this time transport was at a premium, for F/O Campbell departed for B.I.M. by the dinghy!

A further 90 crates of stores and equipment came ashore at Garden Point from COOLEBAR on the 29th., and the station must have been a hive of activity, for 3 Officers and 51 men are shown as 'On Strength!'

The concrete engine beds for the Diesels were poured on the 1st. February - the power line was finished on the 2nd., hut 7 was completed on the 5th., and hut 8 was finished on the 7th. Quite a busy week.

Meanwhile, work was proceeding on improving the track through the bush to Garden Point, and a Beach Patrol was commenced, which probably meant a 'look out' along the shoreline of Apsley Strait was included in the regular Guards' patrol.

By the 10th. of the month, the new concrete engine beds were considered cured and ready for the installation of the big Diesels; and so work continued steadily until the 20th. when the Diary notes a 'flying boat' made an experimental flight, landing on the 23rd. and again on the 24th. when F/O G. Spencer came ashore to take over as C.O. [Ed. When writing the history of 46 Radar at Cape Don, the Diary noted that a Dornier flying boat landed at the Cape on 18th. January 1944, so it follows that the same plane might well have called at 60 Radar.]

Meanwhile, F/Lt. Flux departed and headed down to Garden Point hoping to find transport to B.I.M. on the Mission boat QUAIL. Evidently work at the station was now well advanced and well under control, for a C.O.'s Parade was called on the 29th., and the men were instructed on the necessity for clean rifles and serviceable boots. This was followed by a thorough inspection of the camp by the C.O. and Medical Orderly. Truly - How NOT to win friends and influence people on a new Radar Station!

March 1944. 60 Radar certainly gave every indication of settling into a regular routine this month, as a Welfare Committee was formed, a very important event on an isolated station. Then on the 16th. Major Goertz of USAAC, Lieut. Norris AIF and Miss Staunton ARC landed from the Army launch TOORBUL to meet Lieut. Gribble. Unfortunately the reason or result is not recorded.

A Walrus amphibian arrived on two occasions during the month bringing fresh meat and vegetables - and a few passengers. Lieut Gribble anchored off-shore and lunched at the station, after which he and F/O Campbell left for Garden Point to pick up a BL4 (IFF equipment) which apparently had been off-loaded there. And at the end of the month there were still 50 men on the station.

April began with a signal from 6 Com. Unit to light a smoke signal to indicate if the beach near Piper Head was safe to attempt a landing....a DH84 appeared but did not attempt to land on the beach. But the reliable old Walrus arrived on the 9th. to bring mail and stores. And a party of men arrived to attend to the calibration of the gear.

Evidently the launch which had been attached to the station as 'transport' was now instructed to return to its normal duties back in Darwin, for the Mission launch brought stores and mail to Garden Point where they were collected by the station tender.

In May a Church Service was held by Father Flynn from the Mission, and the launch 017-12 CANBERRA was attached to the station, the launch arriving in company with 015-16 which had a party of officers on board led by

* Air Commodore de la Rue, who expressed his satisfaction with the station. (Despite his expressed satisfaction, the distinguished visitor must have felt a little strange at such a raw, basic war-time bush camp.) A letter arrived from Snake Bay on the 9th. advising that the W/T equipment was unserviceable, and that supplies were low. This advice was sent on by signal to NOIC Darwin, and a reply was received that Lieutenant Gribble was on his way with supplies, and this information was sent to Snake Bay by runner.

On the 13th., the launch 017-12 departed for B.I.M. to collect fresh food supplies and other cargo - a trip was to become a regular weekly event to meet the usual air delivery. Then on the 21st. the C.O of 44 Radar Wing, S/Ldr. Chilton arrived to inspect the station - a visit that lasted 6 days - and the month ended with the visit of Padre Beckett, the popular Protestant Chaplain.

June 2nd. provided quite a bit of excitement really, for an unidentified plot proved to be of an enemy plane - probably a 'recce,' - and a congratulatory signal was received from 105 FCU. Whilst other unidentified plots would have been tracked through the coming months, this plot was to be the only 'confirmed' hostile.

F/O Campbell, the station's Radar Officer, left on posting on the 12th., and two days later, on the return of the launch from B.I.M., Pilot Officer G. Ward took over as Radar Officer.

The 15th. saw the arrival of HMAS BOMBO - a large supply vessel of several thousand tonnes. She brought fuel supplies and canteen stores - and there were more canteen supplies by air which were collected from Bathurst by RAAF craft 017-12.

BOMBO departed on the 18th., and only a few arrivals and postings are noted for the remainder of the month.

The station Diary for July 1944 is a record of Personnel Movements only, with no station happenings or events mentioned whatsoever. But there were 2 Officers and 21 men on strength, and these included 2 Motor Boat Crew who arrived, which suggests a replacement marine craft was now attached to 60 RS.

The August Diary entries follow an almost identical pattern, being mainly a record of Personnel Movements. However, there are a few entries of some small significance:

On the first of the month, a fire was started by bush TIWI near the Piper Head beach where craft sometimes loaded and unloaded. Some Air Force equipment was destroyed necessitating a report to Radar Wing and to the Security Guards Unit. An investigation into the circumstances was to be carried out by F/Lt. J. McMahon. And 60 RS was advised that 44 Radar Wing was to close on 22nd. August after which all Radar Stations in the Area would be attached to 105 FCU.

On the 20th., a Sergeant Pay Clerk arrived from 5 RIMU to pay both station and Aboriginal personnel, which indicates that several TIWI men were employed on jobs around the camp.

During the month also, the expected replacement marine craft allotted to the station arrived....the auxiliary yacht AUSTRALIA (017-3) with its regular crew of two.

* Air Commodore H.F. de la Rue, C.B.E., D.F.C. When the RAAF was formed in 1921 he was a Flight Lieutenant pilot. Royal Navy Air Service 1915-1918. C.O. 223 Squadron RAF during that time. C.O. RAAF Richmond 1937-1940. A.O.C. Western Area 1940-1942. Inspector RAAF Administration 1942-1946.

The Commanding Officer, F/Lt. Spencer, left the station to attend a 5 day course on cypher training on the 3rd. September, and P/O G.Ward, the Radar Officer was left in charge for the time being...and on the 6th. of the month a Walrus amphibian landed close to the station, bringing supplies and a portable cinema outfit. Probably because of threatening weather, the Walrus afterwards moved to the more sheltered waters at Garden Point, returning to Darwin with the cinema operator and his gear on the 7th. F/Lt. Spencer returned to his station on the 10th., and 60 RS continued quietly until the 22nd. when COOLEBAR arrived with fuel supplies and the hard work of unloading began and continued overnight so that the vessel could depart at dawn on the following morning.

On 9th. October, a powered barge arrived at the Piper Head beach bringing some provisions, but mainly building materials - roofing iron, cement, malthoid, hessian...all those things a radar station seemed to be built of.....and on the 13th. the newly installed ASV beacon commenced operations. F/Lt. Spencer relinquished command of the station on the 19th., and newly promoted Flying Officer Ward, previously the Tech. Officer, took over as Commanding Officer.

On the 21st., F/Lt. Spencer left the station to return to 105 FCU - also the ASV Installation team - and on the 27th. S.S. SAPPHIRE arrived at Piper Head with 7 tons of supplies and equipment.

For the first time, the month ended with a C.O.'s report:

Command of the station was changed during the latter part of the month, F/O G.J.Ward, previously the Technical Officer, taking command. Operationally the station has given satisfaction, the technical equipment being maintained at a good standard of operation.

On the 11th. November, the vessel JOYCE OAKES arrived with fuel and rations, and W/Cdr. Cox, the C.O. of 105 FCU came ashore to inspect the station. The JOYCE OAKES meanwhile moved on to Snake Bay to pick up 50 drums of fuel for 60 RS, returning again 3 days later to anchor at Garden Point where she remained overnight. On the 15th. the vessel returned to the beach at Piper Head where the fuel was unloaded. Empty drums and some equipment was back-loaded before the vessel left for Darwin with W/Cdr. Cox on board. A Dental team arrived on the 19th. to set up their equipment, and when the Dental Officer arrived on the launch AUSTRALIA from B.I.M., the examination and treatment of the men commenced. Meanwhile, arrangements were made for the station launch AUSTRALIA to leave each Friday for the Bathurst A.O.B. because of a changed schedule of aircraft arrivals at the airstrip. The visiting Dental party finally left at the end of the month...and again there was a C.O.'s report:

REMARKS. Operational performance for the month has been good. Improvements have been made to the camp area, particularly the drainage system at the rear of the kitchen which has been concreted for a considerable distance. The unit is in a generally satisfactory condition.

December commenced with 2 weeks of maintenance and overhaul of the gear carried out by a visiting team of three, the team including IAC Thiele who had been with the unit when the station was set up - and W/O Bagley, a Calibration Mechanic, left for 38 Radar on Bathurst Island. The maintenance team left the unit on the 15th.

F/Lt. Kidd, the Radar Medical Officer, arrived on the 16th., which was fortunate in a way as an airman, IAC Dimsey, was suffering from appendicitis. He was evacuated by launch to Garden Point - then by Walrus amphibian to Darwin.

On the 25th., a RAAF powered barge arrived with a welcome present for the station - a Chev. 3 ton truck, and the Ford stake-side was back-loaded the next day.

A Pay Parade was held on the 30th....and again there was an 'end-of-month' report:-

"The station benefited technically during the month from the Maintenance Party's visit, all the equipment receiving thorough overhaul. The Medical Officer inspected the camp, and gave advice on sanitation and hygiene etc., expressing satisfaction at the general condition of the camp."

January 1945.

Early in the New Year, both Father Flynn from Garden Point and Padre Beckett from Darwin arrived - no doubt to conduct somewhat belated Christmas services, and on the 10th, 'Bob 1' - a RAAF TIWI labourer, was evacuated by Army launch to B.I.M. from where he would have been flown to Darwin for hospital treatment.

Also on the same day LAC's Elliott and Wall arrived. The two were popular entertainers at radar stations everywhere, for LAC Elliott was a 'one man show' and organiser. Usually his mate was a musician, and their shows were varied, with music, concert and 'audience participation.' They departed 6 days later, doubtless leaving lasting memories of 3 or 4 concerts, with music and items.

On the 23rd. the N.W. Area beacon installation party left on the launch AUSTRALIA - and LAC Dinsey arrived back on the station after hospital treatment in Darwin for appendicitis. Fortunately, in emergencies such as this, a signal to Darwin would ensure a plane met the launch at the Bathurst strip.

The C.O. was now able to report: "Beyond an increased number of movements on posting etc., the station's routine has been normal. The Radar operations have suffered somewhat due to faults occurring in the gear. At the end of the month, normal working has been resumed."

February proved a quiet month. F/Lt. Scott, the Radar Officer from ADHQ and F/O Johnson the Area Welfare Officer left after a 4 day visit and inspection...there were the usual few postings in and out....an RC church parade conducted by Father Flynn...and a Pay Parade was attended to by Sergeant Buchanan from No. 1 Fighter Wing.

On the 20th., W/O Bagley, who had been checking and arranging calibration flights for both 60 RS and 38 RS decided all was now well and departed for N.W. Area H/Q..then another arrival...the Area Camouflage Officer, F/Lt. Griggs...on inspection and to carry out camouflage maintenance. The C.O.'s report for this month contained mention of some significant improvements to camp buildings: "Sundry improvements were made during the month to camp huts etc. The floor of the R.A.P. was concreted and an improved shelter was erected at the cook-house to accommodate the two coppers in use. At the end of the month improvement and maintenance to the camouflage of the technical buildings was commenced. Technically the operation of the station was normal."

March began with the departure of the Camouflage Officer....but then W/O Boorman from 5 RIMU arrived to check the gear. There were several postings in and out - and LAC Fyfe (DMT) was evacuated by launch to Garden Point, then by Walrus amphibian to Darwin suffering from appendicitis. Also on the 16th. the launch AUSTRALIA and crew departed -