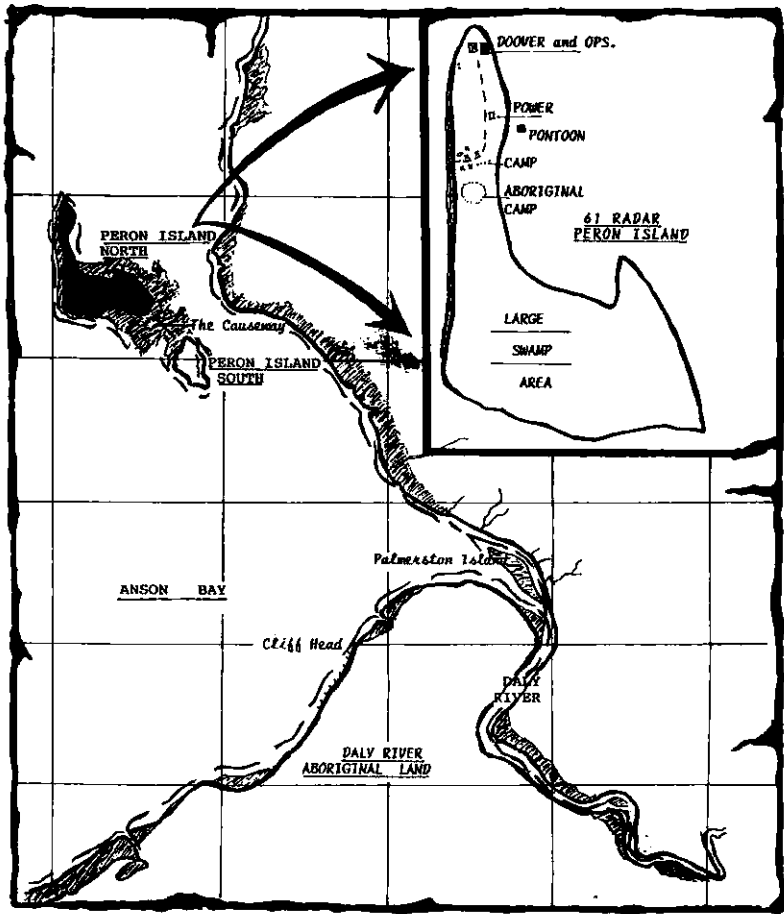


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(Fenton)

307/61 RADAR PERON ISLAND



Edited by MORRIE FENTON

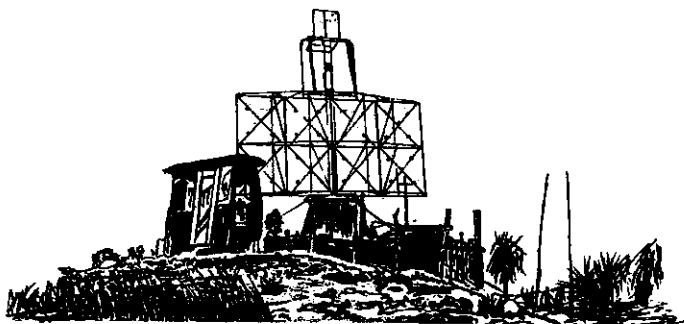
Alan
Regards from
Merric Fenton

The History and Stories

of

307/61 RADAR

PERON ISLAND



*"The Island of
Death Adders"*

*An important link in
Darwin's Radar Chain*

Edited by **MORRIE FENTON**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

I acknowledge with thanks the help, the enthusiasm and co-operation of all who are listed below. Their personal contributions and stories bring this little history alive. All are co-authors really.

I particularly thank Brother John Pye for his permission to quote from his book, 'The Daly River Story,' - and I thank Cec Blumenthal for his attempts to trace something of the story of the 'spotters' who we are sure were on Peron prior to the arrival of 307 Radar. Michael Loos, of the N.T.State Library has also assisted with early 'background' to these little radar station stories.

Wing Commander P.G. (Pete) Smith.
Bro. John Pye, M.S.C.
Ed. Simmonds.
Mr. A.D.Banks.
Owen Jones.
Allan Brayne.
Theo Harvey.
Ron Richards.
Jack Bleazard.
Morrie Fenton.

Jack Baker.
Len Powell.
'Bud' Ford.
Kev. Coughlin
Jim Coad.
Peter Rolle.
Ron Sawade.
Oscar Boyland.
Frank Stubbs.
Cec. Blumenthal.

The photo credits are many....but Jim Coad merits 'special mention' for several outstanding prints including the 'Doover,' - all of which must have been taken on a 'better than average' camera. Those lending photos :- Ron Richards, Owen Jones, Jack Baker, Jack Bleazard, Ron Sawade, Merv. Harms, Jim Coad, Kev. Coughlin, Len Powell, Bud Ford, and Murray Marks.

Morrie Fenton,
October '96.

307/61 RADAR

PERON ISLAND.

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(M.E.Fenton)

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S. AUST.

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More photographs of Peron arrived for copying than for any other history with which I've been involved! For that reason, photographs are not listed in 'Contents.!...there are just too many!

However, two principal Pictorial Sections can be found at pages 9 and 57, and other photographs have been scattered in the text. A glance at the 'Acknowledgements' will give some indication of the number of proud owners of Peron photos...an astonishing number!

Please note also that sometimes small contradictions and differences appear in the various articles. No attempt whatever has been made to correct these and can be explained...firstly because stations were constantly being changed and improved...secondly because of differing points of view and varying emphasis and knowledge of the various writers...and thirdly because fifty years have elapsed and differences can surely be expected. I hope we all can just read and enjoy the memories and nostalgia. (Editor)

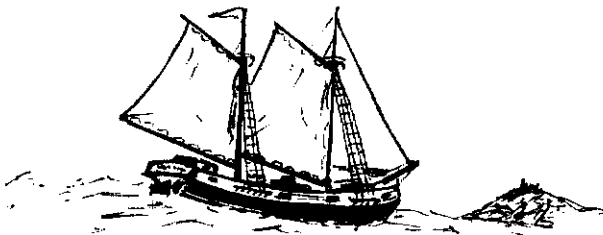
THE EARLY EXPLORERS.

Early explorers fairly abounded in the seas around Australia's coastline from the 17th. century onwards, and particularly after the discovery of the trade route to the East Indies...Dutch French and English - all with the naming rights for the coastline features. This explains in part the sometimes confusing mix of names honoring distinguished men of the various nations which has been applied to the features of the northern and western coastline particularly.

Peron is an estuarine island in Anson Bay, a few miles west of the Daly River and fifty or sixty miles south of Darwin.

Lieutenant P.King in his cutter 'Mermaid' explored and charted much of this coastline in the years 1818 - 22 and he named the bay in honour of the Anson family and Lord Anson (1697 - 1762) a celebrated naval commander and navigator who was to achieve the ultimate appointment of First Lord of the Admiralty. In the years 1800 - 1803, Nicolas Baudin, celebrated French navigator and explorer of Australia's coastline, and the islands to the north, named Peron Island in honour of his botanist, Francois Peron (1775 - 1810) who sailed with him in 'Le Geograph' until Baudin's death in 1802, after which the expedition returned to France where Peron participated in the publication of a journal detailing the achievements of the voyage.

The Daly River was named in 1865 by Lt. Colonel B.T.Finnis, formerly Governor of South Australia:- he named the river to honour Sir Dominic Daly the then Governor of South Australia.



THE DALY RIVER.

Brother John Pye M.S.C.

Of recent years, the Daly River area has captured the interest and imagination not only of Territorians, but of all the people of Australia. The sightseer and the historian can wander among the ruins of the old coppermine. Nearby is the cemetery. Half a mile downstream from the present Catholic Mission and on the opposite side of the river are the ruins of the former Jesuit Mission. The anthropologist will find the remnants of so many Aboriginal tribes - the Brinkens and Mulluk Mulluks, the latter a very self-contained little group of Fish people...and there are many others.

The Daly is a river that never runs dry. It is really a continuation of the Katherine River. Fifty miles from Katherine, as soon as it is joined by the Flora, the River Katherine becomes the Daly.

J.McDouall Stuart had discovered the Katherine River when exploring the Centre in 1862, but it was not until 1876 that McMinn, Saunders and Sergison traced the course of the river. In the meantime, Lt. Colonel B.T.Finnis, former Governor of South Australia was commissioned to explore the Victoria River area, and on his way back, discovered the estuary of the Daly and named it after the Governor of South Australia, Sir Dominick Daly.

J.McKinlay, organiser of one of the search parties for the lost Burke and Wills, also investigated the Daly for the South Australian Government, and recommended that Anson Bay be the chief settlement in the Northern Territory. This suggestion was given a cool reception down south.

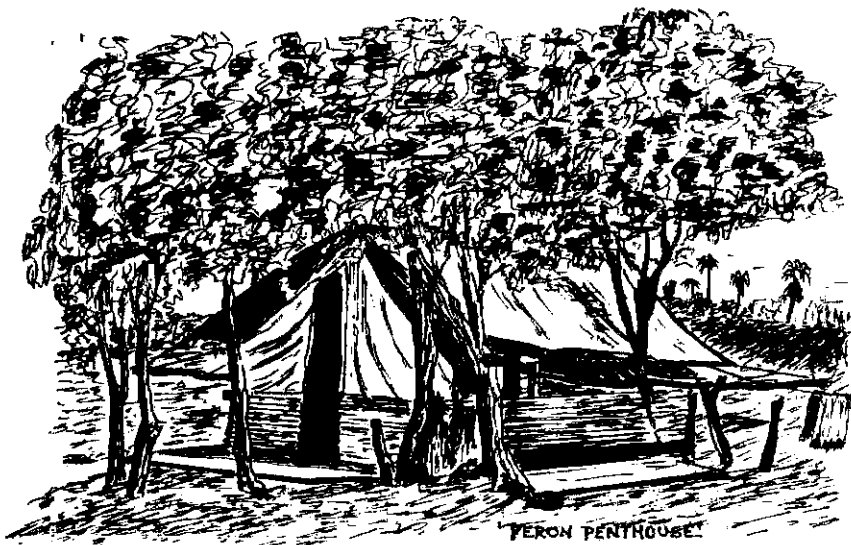
The first settlers in the Daly River area were the Chinese. These people established a ninety acre farm cum vegetables on Peron Island, a delta type island just out from the mouth of the Daly. From here they exported vegetables to Darwin. The farm on Peron Island was abandoned after a few years.

In the early 1880's copper was found on the Daly. Some wandering miners found the copper on the Hayward Range at a spot now known as The Coppermine, about six miles from the Catholic Mission. Few signs remain of the base they set up, but they had a house and garden. The mining of copper continued, and between 1886 and 1889 some two thousand tons of ore were sent to Newcastle. Various miners, especially Chinese, persevered and a smelting plant was set up in 1904, but the whole operation ceased a few years later. Mining was not the only industry in those early days. A few miles from the copper mine, the Melbourne based Palmerston Sugar Company had twenty acres of sugar cane planted and cultivated with the help of seventeen Chinese workers. The plantation was soon abandoned.

No single venture in the early days of the Daly was more significant than the missionary enterprise of the Jesuits from 1886 to 1899. They were to make three foundations on the Daly. The first, 1886, was at Uniya on the west bank, and this closed in 1891. The second was at Serpentine, also on the west bank, but twenty miles inland near Hermit Hill. This functioned between 1889 and 1891. The third station was on the eastern bank and known as the New Uniya. This was founded in 1891 and closed when the Jesuits withdrew from the Northern Territory in 1899.

On 3rd. June 1954, Bishop O'Loughlin with Father Henschke inspected the area and purchased a property. The main buildings of the present Daly Mission were 'Bowas' buildings; a modular ready-to-erect frame, using timber and steel, hence the name "Bowas" (building of wood and steel), manufactured by Sydney Williams of Sydney. The type was used widely by the Army and other services during the second World War.

[The very brief story above has been gleaned from Brother John Pye's book, "The Daly River Story." Brother John has a deep knowledge and interest in the people and history of Port Keats, Daly River and Tiwi Islands.]



'PERON PENTHOUSE' The Army ridge tent with an extra fly covering for coolness was standard accommodation on many radar stations, sleeping two, three or four men depending on additions, refinements and careful improvements. Sometimes there was the insurmountable problem of no spare materials, which was the reason why the tents on Peron at 61 Radar were still pretty much as per original specification, even in the station's third year.

Floors were of sand - power output from the Ford 10's was so low that electricity was restricted to the principal huts - the Mess, the kitchen and the Rec. hut. Any spare wood pieces from crates and the like, and used to construct lockers, stools and similar items quickly attracted thousands upon thousands of voracious termites, and any parcel of delicacies from home had to be constantly monitored against an invasion of red or black ants.

The tent shown in the sketch was considered very superior to its neighbours for it boasted a concrete floor and surrounds which helped mightily in keeping the place clean - a no small achievement on Peron - and the floor served as an effective barrier to the entry of ants of all colours.

This tent was home to Owen Jones and Bud Ford, who recalled that the cement had fallen off the 'back of a barge' - and it had the added effect of firmly cementing their friendship which has lasted for more than fifty years...probably longer than did the floor of their tent.

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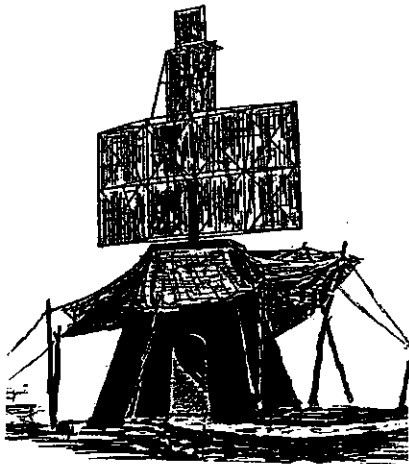
FOREWORD

A few years ago, some radar veterans decided that they wanted to make sure that the history of radar in Australia was not lost with the passing of time. Over the intervening years a number of volumes have been produced which describe the vital role played by the men and women who operated radar equipment under extreme conditions. Morrie Fenton has become the most prolific of our radar historians. The books Morrie has produced may not be very large but they contain the real heart and soul of our radar history. They have documented the histories of individual radar stations and the personnel who manned them. For me, every one of the stories contained within these books has reinforced the adage that the equipment is only as good as the people who operate it. And the more I read about our radars, the more I'm convinced they were operated by the best.

This present addition to our history documents the life and times of 307RS (renamed 61RS) on Peron Island. Its equipment was no different to a lot of other radars in the RAAF but its situation was special. Here is the story of a radar station whose personnel operated their equipment on a small island off Northern Australia. During their time on the island they were shot at by their own side, constantly threatened by the local fauna, had problems finding enough food and water to exist and coped with the constant strain of boredom and isolation. Despite all these problems they proved to be a very effective station whose personnel still retain fond memories and friendships made during their time with the unit. They typify the spirit and character of the personnel of RAAF radar.

I wish to thank Morrie for the opportunity for allowing me to add these comments to the Peron Island story. His continuing efforts are providing important additions to the sparse history of the air defence of Australia.

Pete Smith
Wing Commander
Commanding Officer
No 3 Control and Reporting Unit
Williamtown NSW



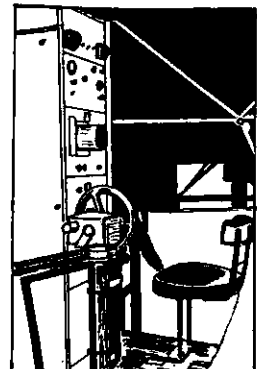
By mid 1942, the Australian Light Weight Air Warning (LW/AW) ground radar programme was getting under way. The design for a portable and light weight Doover with a 4 bay aerial, and with the Australian AW transmitter and receiver all mounted on a revolving platform and turned by hand proved to be highly successful; but the problem of a suitable power supply proved more difficult to solve. The early sets used a two cylinder air-cooled engine designed for the Howard auto-cultivator farm and garden implements and was certainly never intended to run 24 hours a day which was now expected of it. Mechanical failures were frequent until Ford 10 5KVA units were introduced after some months. These units, - two to a station - were far heavier and called for considerably more handling and manpower when being transported or moved.

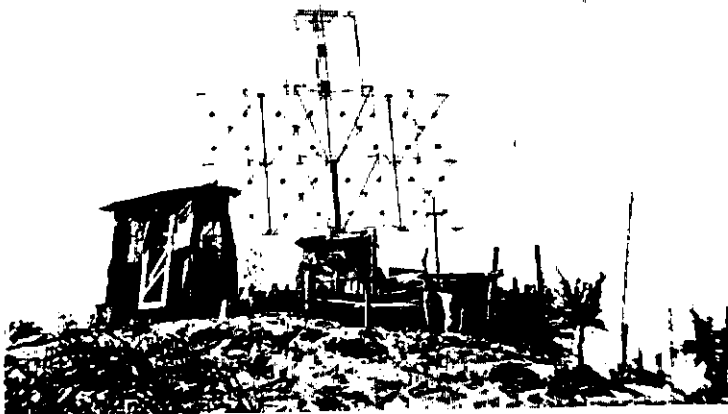
This set the scene when 307 RDF station - and one of the first of the LW/AW's - was formed as an associated station of CAPSTAN, the code name for No. 1 Fighter Wing, being equipped with the new Spitfires. 307 RDF first formed at Mascot, Sydney, in December 1942, and the unit shipped out on New Year's Eve, 1943, to arrive in Darwin with two sister stations early in January 1943. From Darwin the station and personnel moved in two lots down the coast to Peron Island where 307 commenced operating on 1st. April 1943, and officially came on air 8 days later. The station filled another vital link in Darwin's expanding radar chain, and tracked numerous raids and recce incursions, as its strategic location was often directly under the enemy's path when flying in or out of the Darwin area, and visual sightings were a regular occurrence.

The Peron Island unit was another isolated station which was to become so very dependent on 'Doc' Fenton's 6 Communications Unit for mail, fresh supplies and personnel transport - and towards the end of the war, up to twenty planes would fly in to the island in a month.

The station continued its vital task until October 1945, by which time its identification number had changed from 307 to 61, in the expectation of receiving heavy, new COL Mk. V equipment - but the LW/AW gear continued to give good results for the life of the station. Possibly the new equipment was not installed because of the rapid movement of the war zones away from Australia's shores.

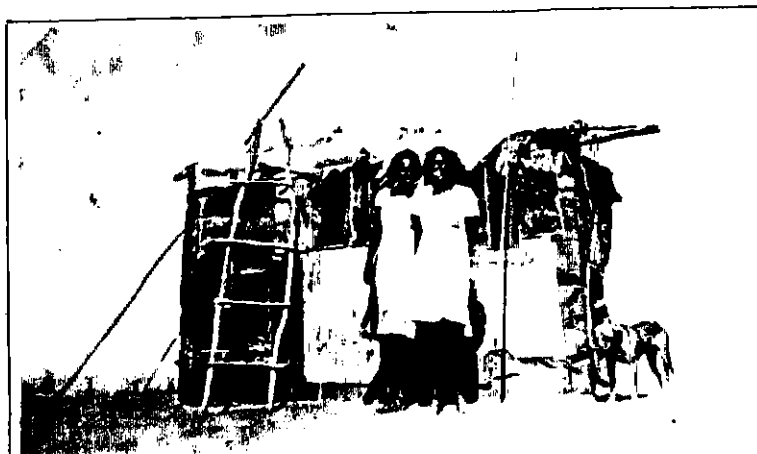
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Three of Jim Coad's outstanding photo records of the Peron station taken in 1945. Can you name those in the group...and can you see the figure in the Doover photo?

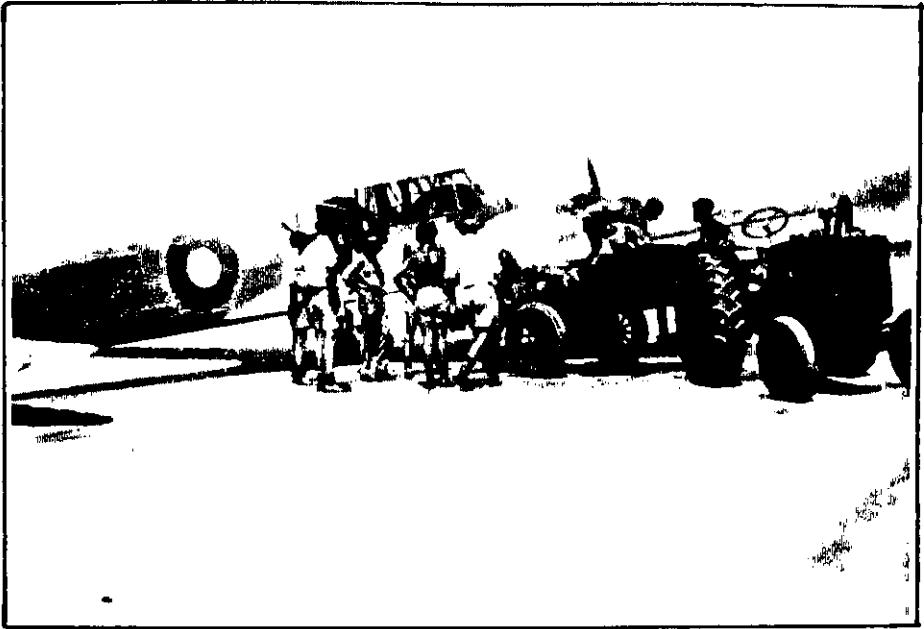




Two of Jim Coad's excellent photographs of the Aborigines on Peron... the top study could possibly be the outstanding study of 'life on the island,' and has been captioned... 'Belles of Peron at Chief Ahcor's residence.' The dog evidently was not impressed.

(Right) Mellah-Wallah, an elder of the Peron tribal group, draws in the sand for Bud Ford.





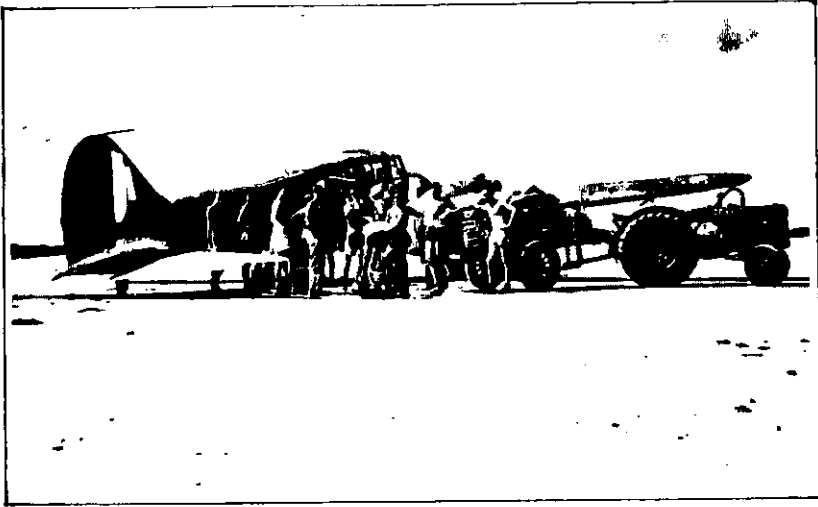
THE PLANES OF 6 COMMUNICATIONS UNIT.

S/Ldr. Clyde Fenton's 6 Communications Unit provided a very positive and reassuring link between Darwin and the outlying and isolated radar stations.

Using mainly outmoded aircraft, 'Doc' Fenton's carefully chosen pilots brought their planes into sometimes almost impossible landings on tiny cleared strips, or onto - hopefully - firm, hard beaches at low tide.

Out on Peron Island, Ansons and DH84's - 'Aggies' and 'Dragons', - provided a weekly plane service which later increased to as many as three or four flights each week, bringing mail, personnel and fresh supplies. Men requiring medical or hospital attention were flown out - and the always popular movie show and operator were flown in - and on at least two occasions, two Ansons flew in a cricket team from 6 Com. Unit to give the island cricketers some serious competition.

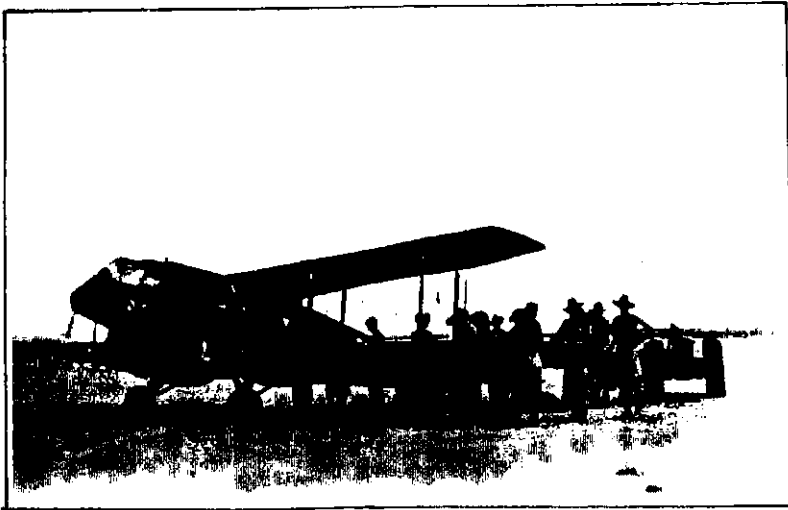
The photograph above shows one of 'Fenton's Flying Freighters' - Anson AX442, being unloaded on Peron's western beach which offered a wide and firm landing beach at low tide. A new arrival, dressed for the occasion in long 'uns, shirt and tie, has alighted and checks his gear onto the trailer, while a young Aboriginal helper assists the Driver M/T. The tractor/trailer combination was almost standard transport on radar stations.

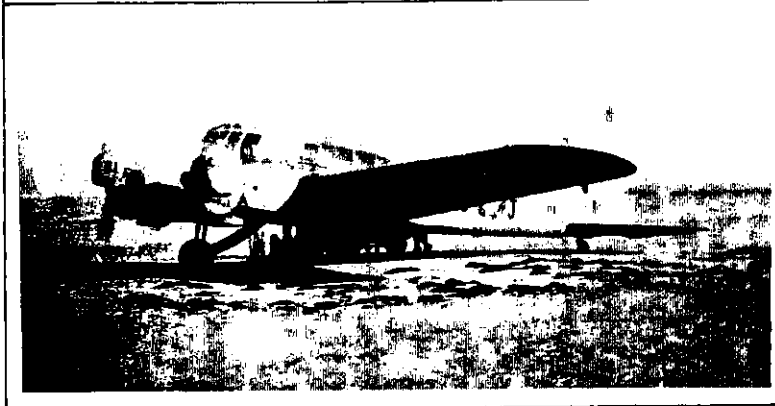
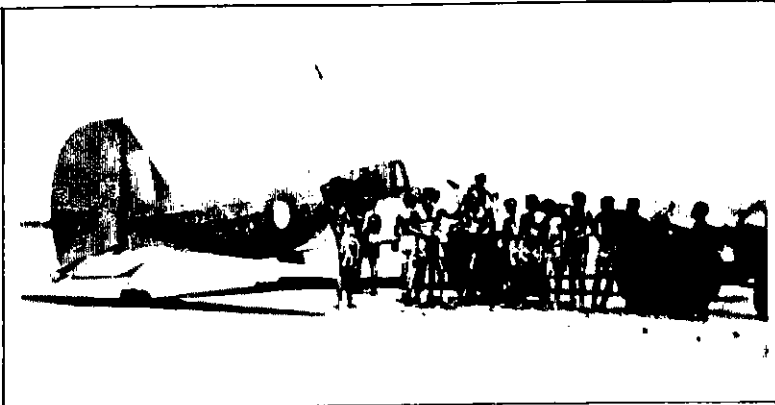


Two excellent photographs of aircraft from 6 Communications Unit on the western beach on Peron...the top photo from Jim Coad and the lower photo from Bud Ford.

The Anson, W2117, flew with the unit until November 1945, while the DH 84, or Dragon A34-27, crashed at Darwin in December 1944. Doc Fenton himself seems to have preferred flying the Dragon, which was also considered by the Aborigines to be the safest and best aircraft as it had two wings.

The nose motif appears to be a dragonfly.





The Big Event of the Week!...Aircraft arrivals at Peron Island.



(Top)

*Spinebashing! -
Tommy Walsh,
the No. 2 cook
at Peron.*



(Centre)

*Norm Tibbet
and Jim Coad
at the entrance
of their
airconditioned
home.*



(Lower)

*Kev Coughlin, Owen
Jones and Jim Coad
in committee.*



PERON PERSONALITIES. (Top Left) Sgt. Alan Ward displays an intruder despatched in the Orderly Room. (Top Right) Ron Sawade in front of the station store shed. (Lower photos) Oscar Boyland and Ron Richards, still keep in touch today.



PERON IN PICTURES....(The Jack Baker Collection)

Top photos..... Jack Baker and Col Jacobs, Peron, September 1943.

Centre photos..... Jack (left) and Johnny Brown (right,) with some local friends. — Trading turtle shell, September 1943.

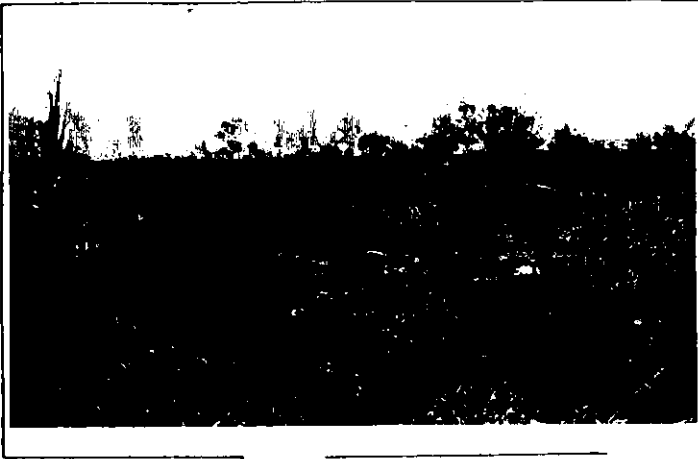
Lower photos..... Some of the island locals with one of the radar crew. — Bringing in a load of firewood.



PERON IN PICTURES.

Top and Centre. The Sydney Williams huts built to defeat the termite menace. They were also called BOWAS buildings. (Built Of Wood and Steel.) Ron Sawade is at the right of the group.

Lower. Panoramic view of the island.



PERON IN PICTURES.

Top. The Mess and the Rec. hut closer to camera.

Centre. The Orderly Room, a sisal and mal-
thoid structure.

Lower. An almost silhou-
ette view of
Peron Island, look-
ing towards the
mainland about 5
miles distant.

THE DIARY HISTORY FROM THE A50's.

Morrie Fenton.

307 Radio Direction Finding station commenced its service life at 3 C.F. Mascot on 3rd. December, 1942 under the command of Pilot Officer A.W.Williams, and the unit was originally intended to join No. 1 Fighter Wing (CAPSTAN) as an associated unit. Other units formed for the same purpose were 308 RDF and 309 RDF, which eventually were located at Milingimbi and North Goulburn Island.

At this time, P/O Williams had only eight airmen and one Corporal under his command - nevertheless stores and equipment were requisitioned from No. 2 Stores Depot, and after a few days these began to arrive. On 15th. December, the motor generator sets were checked at 1 RIMU Sydney before they were handed over to the unit, and it is more than likely that these were the early Howard air cooled units, as these were the standard issue to the first of the LW/AW stations.

By 22nd. December, the men had been issued with webbing equipment and rifles, and the station technical equipment at 1 RIMU was packed, then transported to the RAAF facilities at Glebe Island ready for shipment. By the end of December, all stores, equipment and personnel were at Glebe Island, the usual port of embarkation in Sydney for RAAF equipment and stations.

The station complement then comprised 1 Officer, 2 Corporals and 22 men. These were:

P/O	A.W.Williams.	C.Officer.	LAC	G.I.Lay	RDF Mechanic.
Cpl.	E. Stewart.	Guard.	Cpl.	R.J.Martin.	Med. Orderly.
AC1	L.P.Madden.	Guard.	AC1	J.K.McLachlan.	RDF. Mech.
AC1	H.B.Rigbye.	Guard.	AC1	C.M.Lees.	RDF. Op.
AC1	V.L.Milledge.	Cook.	LAC	M.J.Everett.	RDF. Mech.
AC1	D.S.Ogilvy.	Messman.	AC1	E.J.Giddins.	RDF. Mech.
LAC	W.T.Robertson.	F/DMT.	AC1	J. Hewson.	RDF. Op.
AC1	F.I.Bishop.	RDF. Op.	LAC	A.G.Springell.	Clerk Gen.
AC1	M.Brewer.	RDF. Op.	AC1	J.R.Salter.	RDF. Op.
AC1	J.A.Donald.	Clerk St.	AC1	E.W.Thomas.	RDF. Op.
AC1	D.Gordon.	RDF. Op.	AC1	R.E.Gyton.	RDF. Op.
AC1	F.Hudson.	RDF. Op.	AC1	L.C.French.	Guard.
AC1	J.F.Morrison.	RDF. Op.			

THE STATION MOVES TO DARWIN.

January 1943 was to see the deployment of the Spitfire Squadrons and the various associated units from the southern bases to the NWA, and over the next two months the new units were to settle into their Darwin bases and prepare for action against the Japanese.

307 RDF station has no recorded notes on this period, and the station Diary shows no entries whatever for January 1943 when the unit apparently was shipped along the east coast of Australia and on to Darwin.

The next entry for 307 RDF station appears on February 3rd, when apparently packing and moving was practised at Berrimah, after which the equipment was packed ready to be shipped to Peron Island.....but before that.....

The American Liberty ship JAMES RUSSEL LOWELL was fully loaded and preparing to sail as Sydney prepared to see out the old and to welcome in the New Year - 1943 - in restrained and blacked out war-time fashion...and first light on New Year's Day revealed that the ship had moved well away from the wharves at Glebe Island in the inner harbour and was making her way towards the protecting net and the Heads and on to the dangerous open seas beyond. Amongst the supplies and war materials crammed into her holds were the stores and gear for three new LW/AW RDF stations - 307, 308 and 309 - all three destined for service in the North West Area as part of CAPSTAN, the secret new Spitfire fighter defence of Darwin.

Out in the heavy ocean swells, the JAMES LOWELL, escorted by the corvette INVERELL, turned north on a zig-zag course while Avro Ansons patrolled the seas ahead. On board, fatigues and mess duties were allotted to the servicemen, and fire drills were practised every day.

On January 3rd., the ship entered the passage inside the Barrier Reef, and two days later arrived at Townsville where to the keen disappointment of the men on board, no shore leave was permitted, although their outward mail was cleared.

At sea again on the 6th., and anti-sub drill now became the order of the day. The escorting corvette impressed mightily by dropping a depth charge, and several rounds were fired from the ship's 4" aft gun, the series of blasts achieving the total destruction of a deck lavatory. Presumably that essential structure was unoccupied at the time - or hurriedly evacuated!

On January 8th., the ship was north of Cape York and anchored off Thursday Island, and again no shore leave was allowed. But the JAMES R. LOWELL did not tarry long and sailed again the following day on a westerly course across the Gulf of Carpentaria, now escorted by the sloop WARREGO as well as the INVERELL, with the warning to all hands that any future alarms would be the "real thing." Anti aircraft drill and boat drill were carried out, and on the 11th., Hudson and Beaufighter aircraft arrived overhead as reassuring aerial escort from Cape Wessell to Darwin harbour where the ship arrived and anchored on the 12th. The men of the three RDF units were able to disembark on the day following arrival, and temporary camps were then established at the 11 mile near the Transmitting Station. Some tents were borrowed from 132 RDF, and slit trenches were hurriedly dug while their equipment was being unloaded from the JAMES LOWELL and delivered so that it could be checked and re-packed.

307 RDF now began preparations to move to Peron Island; 308 RDF to Milingimbi; and 309 RDF to North Goulburn Island.

(Although the A50 entries for January are missing from the 307 RDF Diary, the account of the voyage from Sydney to Darwin has been described in the Diary entries for 308 and 309 RDF stations. The units formed up together, and as the three were ready to embark on the 31st, it can be reasonably assumed that the three embarked and travelled to Darwin together as part of CAPSTAN. 307's Diary picks up the threads again on 3rd. February at the 11 mile camp at Berrimah.)

By early February 1943, 307 RDF was at Berrimah while preparations were completed for the move down to Peron Island. The technical equipment and station stores were again checked and repacked - the men endured a kit inspection, and after the arrival on strength of 3 W/T personnel, arrangements were made for the transfer of some of the gear and the first party of men to the new station site.

Meanwhile, advice was received that 44 RDF Wing had now assumed responsibility for the administration and organisation of the RDF stations on watch around Darwin....still only a few....and after receiving necessary W/T equipment, all the technical gear, stores and rations were transported the last few miles to Darwin ready for shipment to Peron Island.

SETTING UP THE STATION ON PERON.

March 1943. Six guards were detailed to accompany the first party of men to the new station site, and all were loaded on S.S. BALINDA, which after moving down the coast to Anson Bay, was eventually unloaded with considerable difficulty onto the beach at Peron.

Meanwhile, following an interview with the Commanding Officer of No. 1 Fighter Wing, P/O O'Donohue was posted to 307 RDF to attend to the station Administration, always a big job on new stations, and then on 18th. March, all the remaining personnel and stores were loaded on board the SOUTHERN CROSS, to arrive the next day at the island where work commenced on setting up the camp site and the Doover. However, because of faulty W/T gear, no contact was made with the mainland.

April.

By the 1st. April, the RDF gear was actually operating, but not so the W/T gear, and P/O O'Donohue had to somehow seek medical attention. A plane landed on the beach with replacement battery chargers for the W/T gear, and P/O O'Donohue was able to return to Darwin when it left Peron so that he could seek medical attention.

307 RDF station became fully operational on 9th. April, 1943.

A signal was received on the 19th. April advising that the station was now part of the RDF chain administered by 44 RDF Wing - and on that same day the first enemy plane was plotted when a recce was picked up at 150 miles - a very good range indeed for a new station.

On the 20th., the Diary mentions that Teleradio equipment previously used at the 'observation post' was taken over and moved to the camp.

Wing Commander Pither, the Director of RDF Services, paid his customary visit to a new station on 28th., and so 307 RDF station began to settle into its service life as part of the Darwin chain of stations which was gradually building up.

May.

Lieutenant Colonel Cannon, the Area Defence Officer, inspected the station defence installations and arrangements early in May, then on the 2nd. an enemy air raid was picked up at 95 miles as the bombers approached Darwin to attack the airfield and floating dock. A Spitfire fighter in difficulties was sighted some 12 miles south west of the station, and patrols were active all over the island, searching for a survivor or any wreckage.

On the 5th., Wing Commander Davies, Principal Medical Officer, inspected the station....then all was quiet and settled until the 21st. when SOUTHERN CROSS arrived with rations and equipment, some of which were damaged by salt water because of the lack of landing facilities of any kind.

June 1943.

At least four enemy bombing raids were detected this month, at ranges varying from 95 to 135 miles - a very good performance. Winnellie, the RAAF airfield, Vestveys and the air base at Fenton were the targets.

On the 2nd., the Commanding Officer P/O McGrane received advice of his promotion to the rank of Flying Officer - and on the 17th. F/O Lysaght, the station Administration Officer left the island on posting.

The station personnel strength at this time was 1 Officer and 47 O.R.'s. July.

There was yet another raid on Fenton on 6th. July, and 307 RS first located the enemy planes at 135 miles west of the station. On their return journey, one enemy bomber was seen to be on fire at about 2000 feet and was being escorted by 3 HAP fighter planes. Two motor generators and an electrically heated flying jacket were retrieved after they had been jettisoned and landed on the island. They were forwarded to NWA Intelligence.

On the following day, the pilot of an incoming 6 Comflight plane reported seeing a parachute with an airman beside it some 30 miles from the station, the exact position being confirmed when the pilot circled the spot on his return flight.

On the 13th. TOLGA arrived bringing a fresh detachment of 22 guards to relieve those on the island, and this time the unloading operation was made easier by using collapsible boats towed by a motor launch.

On the 18th. two enemy reces were located and plotted. Then came a quiet spell until the 30th. when new power units arrived on CHINAMPA, which shows that Howard units were now to be replaced by Ford 10's.

August.

The month began with Defence Training under the direction of the Guard Commander - no doubt as the result of the visit of the Area Defence Commander and the arrival of the new island guard detachment; and work began on sinking a new well which was to provide sufficient water for all normal camp purposes.

Two enemy reces were plotted over the Fenton and Batchelor Areas on the 11th., and these incursions were followed by two enemy night raids on the 13th. and 21st.; one range plot was tracked at 158 miles.

Pilot Officer J. Sands arrived on the 23rd. to take over command of 307, and after the takeover had been effected, F/O McGrane departed on the 27th. The station numbers at this time was 1 Officer and 45 men.

September.

There was a day raid on 7th. September, then very little activity until the 14th. when the supply craft COOLEBAR arrived, unloaded and took on some material for despatch and departed again the same day.

Two enemy night raids were tracked on 15th. and 19th. when the bases at Fenton and Long were attacked - but abnormal W/T interference prevented plots being passed on the second raid.

And as from this month, the term 'Radar' was adopted to replace the RDF term.

October.

There were several official visitors during this month for routine inspections and for maintenance...also Padre Ridgeway visited the station to make what was probably the first Chaplain's visit to Peron.

COOLEBAR called again on the 25th. and another fast unloading operation followed under the direction of the ship's crew...they no doubt were unwilling to be caught with their anchor down! COOLEBAR was able to leave late the same night.

November.

This proved a quiet month...one raid only in the early hours of the 12th. But there was a Pay Parade and Security Guard Instruction.

December 1943.

Some extra excitement was caused this month when aircraft wreckage was discovered washed up on the western beach on the 8th. NWA Intelligence was informed and the various articles were later forwarded on for examination.

The same night the RAAF seaplane tender 08-21 anchored off the eastern beach and departed the following day.

The C.O., P/O Sands received advice of his promotion to Flying Officer on the 11th., then on the 20th. the supply craft SAPPHIRE anchored off the western beach to discharge stores and rations, using a ship's boat to ferry the stores ashore. SAPPHIRE was able to depart the following day.

Evidently there were few celebrations for Christmas worthy of note, but on the 27th. a technical party arrived to modify the radar equipment.

The station strength at the end of 1943 was 1 Officer and 48 men.

January 1944.

Few activities indeed greeted the new year....but the station received a visit and inspection by Lieut/Col. Bolton, the current Area Defence Officer. Also Major Bray, a 'Salvo' Welfare Officer stayed overnight while on a visit.

February.

Very few activities were recorded for this month - Salvo Welfare Officer Darlow arrived with Padre Blake, and an open air picture show and church service followed...this must have been one of the first shows arranged for the unit.. and also a Pay Parade was called on the 13th. At this time in the story of the early radar stations, usually a Pay Clerk attended from Darwin, bringing the necessary cash with him.

Personnel now totalled 44.

March.

On the 7th. came yet another inspection of the camp and its hygiene arrangements. After the formalities, F/Lt. Chilton, C.O. of Radar Wing, and F/Lt. Clarke the Medical Officer stayed on the station for 4 days.

On the 9th., COOLEBAR arrived and stayed overnight while stores and equipment were unloaded and brought ashore by barge. And Padre Browne spent two nights on Peron from the 18th, and had a busy time arranging a social night and a church service while he was on the Island.

April.

On April 9th., Flying Officer Henderson-Wilson arrived to takeover command of the station - also a Maintenance Party and a Pay Clerk.

Enemy shipping recon planes were plotted on the 18th. and 21st. when good ranges were obtained.

On the 28th., instructions were received to change the station number to 61 Radar as from 1st. May, the first step towards installing English COL equipment. *{It is understood 'spares' for the new gear arrived, but not any of the new equipment itself.}*

May.

On the 2nd, the popular Presbyterian Padre Beckett arrived, and if his usual activities took place, the men would have enjoyed a pretty active quiz and concert night.

Enemy reconces were tracked on the 4th., 16th., and 26th, the best range recorded being 145 miles.

The station personnel now numbered 37.

June 1944.

Enemy Reconnaissance planes were tracked on three occasions during the month, - on the 2nd., the 12th. and the 18th.

On the 12th a recce was observed when in a running interception with 'friendly' fighter planes, and was seen to crash into the sea approximately 16 miles north of the station.

HMAS CHINAMPA called at the island on the 27th, and after unloading personnel, rations and equipment, set off for Darwin, to carry out R.M.S. duties on the way under the direction of Lt/Cmdr Anderson, O.B.E., G.M.

All non-duty personnel attended a church parade on the 6th., on the occasion of the announcement of the Allied landings in France.

July.

Station activity was now fairly quiet, and during the month the camp prepared itself for an inspection by the Area Radar Officer, S/L Grout-Smith. Meanwhile, HMAS BOMBO arrived off the island to anchor and discharge cargo.

A severe gale struck the station on the 7th., and 61 RS closed down for a few hours while the aerial was lashed fast.

No enemy activity was reported for the month.

August.

This month a new camp area was marked out and work commenced using steel frame buildings to overcome the termite menace.

COOLEBAR arrived with stores and materials, and some steel matting was used for the 'stand' area and runway down on the beach.

On the 19th., voting took place for Commonwealth Constitutional Amendments - and three days later the administration and control of all NWA radar stations passed to 105 FCU.

Three visits to Peron were made by a 16 mm. mobile picture show during the month, and cricket matches and athletics, or sports days featured prominently on the station recreations programme.

Again this month, there was no enemy air activity - and the Diary records that 12 flights to Peron were made by 6 Com Unit planes - usually Ansons.

September.

A B25 Mitchell crashed into the sea early in the month some 2 miles off-shore, and considerable salvage work was attempted with the limited resources of the unit. F/O Gathercole arrived to take temporary command of 61 while the C.O. went on compassionate leave, and after his departure a sports afternoon was held on the beach.

On the 11th., instruction was received from a visiting Cypher Officer on the new Radatab - and a Mobile Picture Unit also arrived, the very welcome visiting aircraft staying on Peron overnight. And a shooting party on the 28th. bagged several geese and a 9 foot croc.

October.

The Commanding Officer arrived back at the unit from Compassionate Leave on the 10th., and his principal duty was to hand over command to F/O Gathercole. Stores and equipment arrived on the GEORGE PEATE - and then on the 13th. a small disaster hit the station when four airmen were despatched to Darwin all suffering from ptomaine poisoning.

The new Orderly Room and Store was occupied on the 23rd - a significant advance in the standard of facilities of 61 RS - but at the same time when the hospital patients were arriving back from Darwin, yet another airman was evacuated suffering from the poisonous bite of some unknown insect. The station complement now numbered 39.

November.

The Commanding Officer received advice of promotion early this month, and on 21st. F/Lt. Oakes arrived to take over command of 61 RS.

Two days later the partly completed kitchen and Mess were brought into use as a windstorm had destroyed the old kitchen.

November 1944, (Continued.)

This month the Diary carries the only operational comments appearing in the record, and are certainly worth quoting in full:

"Operations for the month continue to be satisfactory, negligible time has been lost on technical breakdowns; average range is 130 miles, and 4500 aircraft plots were recorded during the month. There was no enemy reconnaissance, and no enemy raids during the month."

"General Comments. Morale of personnel is quite good, although living conditions have been very bad. The new 'Comet' huts are very satisfactory as compared with the old white ant infested buildings, but much work remains to be done before the camp will be satisfactory."

December.

Evidently a fire had caused some damage to property recently, for F/Lt. Buchanan arrived on a ten day visit to conduct an investigation. And on the 19th. F/Lt. Oakes departed after handing over command to Flying Officer Banks.

Christmas Day '44 was evidently a fairly quiet affair out on Peron. The new Commanding Officer held a short service in the Recreation Room, and this was followed by a concert and Xmas Tree celebration.

January 1945.

The New Year opened with a noticeable lessening of enemy activity, but a great increase in the number of friendly plots. Consequently, more attention was given to arranging recreational activities to reduce the inevitable boredom.

During the month the C.O. was relieved by F/Lt. Muir... the Army supply vessel RADIO arrived off the eastern beach...and two movies were shown - "Know your Ally," and "Ferry Flight."

A concert and quiz was arranged by the unit welfare committee, and two visiting welfare entertainers presented an evening of items, songs and 'gags.' The month drew to a close with an evening of recorded music, a presentation which was arranged at several radar stations.

February.

Early this month an installation party of four arrived on Peron to instal a landmarker beacon, the work taking about a week to complete - and the C.O., F/O Banks who had been on compassionate leave arrived back at the station on the 10th.

Group Captain Walker, Commanding Officer of ADHQ, arrived to inspect the station, but his visit was very brief (perhaps an escape from H/Q) and a concert was arranged for that evening. A Housie-Housie night was held on the 17th. followed by a 'Dining In' night and a picture show when the film "Hoppy Issues a Writ" was shown. It would have been interesting to see the attempts at formal dress for the 'Dining In' night.

March.

March 2nd., Target 58° - 61 miles - 0853 hours. This X-plot was eventually tracked out south-west of the station...Was this the last enemy plane tracked over Darwin?

Recreational activities were now a regular and essential part of Peron life and this month there was a debate, a concert, a sports meeting and a talk on New Zealand given by a visiting padre. There was more debating during a concert, then came a picture show with "March of Time" and "Three Men in White" as the attractions...and the month ended with yet another picture show. But here's a mystery!...the mystery being the unit transport summary which shows 1 Tractor, 1 Trailer, 1 Bicycle. Could it have been the legendary Padre's bike belonging to the visiting padre?

April, 1945.

Sgt. Jack Savage and his well known Maintenance Team arrived early in the month, and on the 25th. three officers arrived for two days on Peron, their probably not too arduous task during an enjoyable stay was to select the best site for the proposed new COL gear. And the Diary records that 21 men of the station subscribed £700 to the Third Victory Loan - not a bad effort from men earning perhaps an average of 10/- per day. There were now 29 men on Peron.

May.

This month the RAAF vessel 03-1 brought a useful addition to the transport fleet - a 4 x 4 utility; and on the 18th G/C Walker made yet another visit to the station. One gains the impression that the Group Captain preferred life on the stations to that in Darwin.

Two picture shows were enjoyed this month... "Tall in the Saddle" and "Our Hearts Were Young and Gay" featured for the first evening, and three nights later the picture show man was back again with "Maisie Goes to Rio" and "Up in Arms."

June.

This proved a very quiet month, marked only with the usual arrival of several aircraft from Batchelor, and a couple of small supply vessels, — AMYRILLIS and RAAF tender 03-1.

July.

A similar pattern to June at first, then on the 22nd. HMAS SEA SNAKE under the command of Lieut. Jarvis arrived at Peron to carry out amphibious landing exercises in conjunction with Army personnel. SEA SNAKE stayed in the area for 4 days, and some of the station men joined her for a trip.

On July 29th., no doubt following some careful negotiations with 6 Com Unit, 2 Ansons arrived bringing a cricket team from Batchelor, and a welcome match, 6 Com versus 61 RS, was fought out down on the beach.

Personnel on the island now numbered 30.

August.

The IFF gear was overhauled early this month, and on the 12th. F/O Mills arrived to take over as Commanding Officer.

August 15th. The station closed down on VP Day for 2 days, and several picture shows followed - more shows than the men could ever have thought possible on an isolated island unit.

Then on the 26th. another two Ansons arrived with a cricket team to fight out a return match.

September.

Early this month a replacement Ford 10 engine block arrived - evidently 61 RS was still considered an important link in the Darwin radar chain - then followed a series of aircraft arrivals, most of which brought a fresh picture show:

Together Again.

And Now Tomorrow.

Song of Russia.

Hollywood Canteen.

Princess O'Rourke.

Once Upon a Time.

Lost Angel.

The Last Gentleman.

Silver Fleet.

Meet Me in St. Louis.

Man About Town.

Parachute Battalion.

The Road Show.

Finally, at 1200 hours on 29th. October, 61 Radar ceased operating.

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MY TIME ON PERON.

A.D.Banks.
(C.O. Dec. 44 - July 45.)

I probably arrived late November or early December 1944 from 321 Radar near Gove, and I left Peron to take over 59 Radar Darwin on the day of the Jap capitulation. I spent that night in Doc Fenton's Mess at 6 Com. Flight. During January 1945 I was given Compassionate Leave to re-locate my wife as my second child was born on 2nd. February 1945. I was probably away from the station about a fortnight.

Accommodation. This was probably the best of any I had 'up North.' It was designed around a standard tent which was raised above a concrete floor and it had fly-wire screen walls. There was a phone to the Doover and a small battery operated transceiver. I do not think we had 240 volt power at the camp-site as the Unit power supply was 2 Ford 10 driven 5 KVA alternators about half a mile away at the Doover site. The Mess hall was adequate and the cook at the time did an excellent job - except the first occasion when we received fresh eggs in the shell. As until then the only eggs we saw was of the powdered variety, our cook was not popular when - in all fairness to him - he tried to please everyone by serving the fifty odd personnel with 36 eggs all nicely scrambled.

I think there were only two or maybe three Sergeants on the station - I remember a Radar Mech and a Guard Sergeant. About fifteen Aboriginal men were "employed" for five shillings a week plus rations for the whole Aboriginal community. Their camp was about a mile south of the RAAF camp. The 'head' boy, Nim, had been associated with the police in Darwin and spoke reasonable English. In February 1945 Nim's wife had a daughter (Nim maintained he did not know she was pregnant). The baby's Aboriginal name was 'Wood-a-woo.' I was given the privilege of suggesting a 'white fella name' and I called her Lorraine after my own daughter born a few weeks before.

The Island. Peron Island was five or six miles long and generally less than a mile wide, lying mainly in a north-west - south-east direction, and was several miles off the mouth of the Daly River. The Doover was on the N.W. tip on a hill about seventy feet high. 6 Com Flight under Doc Fenton brought in supplies once a week, the planes landing on the western beach abreast of the camp site. In the centre of the island was a large swamp. I never heard of or saw any live crocs, but the skin of a Johnstone River croc adorned the wall of one of the buildings. The swamp was home to thousands of magpie geese.

When heavy supplies arrived by barge, they were unloaded on the eastern beach. I remember petrol drums and a blitz buggy being landed. Our only other transport was a Fergie tractor and trailer. To the east of the camp was a small food storage shed housing wooden boxes filled mostly with bully beef in their odd shaped cans. White ants attacked the wooden boxes and as the termites consumed the wood, the heat of their nest caused some of the cans to bulge, and I had to condemn some of the food. I don't know why it was stored instead of being eaten unless by that time we were receiving good weekly supplies of fresh food.

Operations. This was pretty normal, but on March 1st. 1945 a Jap recce came in over Bathurst Island, flew over Darwin, then down nearly to Katherine, before it headed north-west to pass about 30 miles north of our station which had passed plots on this aircraft during most of its flight. It wasn't until the plane was leaving our shores that someone said "It isn't one of ours." This was the first fine sunny day after the Wet. The plane was chased but not caught. I understand that Liberators afterwards bombed

the areas from which this plane came.

Recreation. We had 'movies' on the hill near the Doover, and the Aboriginal folk used to attend. We had visits from the clergy, and the Salvation Army officers were especially welcome. We played cricket on the beach and in June or July two Avro Ansons from 6 Com Flight brought in a team from the mainland, and we enjoyed an exciting game. One Sunday about that time about twenty of us took the Fergie and trailer to the southern tip of the island where we sunbaked and skinny dipped for some time while a Liberator bomber was flying about and firing at rocks well to the south of us. Presently the Lib came towards us, still occasionally firing. It then flew directly over us at about 500 feet and the firing continued. We took what shelter we could among the rocks, and I felt that my backside pointing heavenwards was a target invitation. Fortunately no one was injured, and I collected about twenty spent .5 inch bullets from the sand around the tractor. The plane continued firing over the swamp, but when I complained to H.Q. about the incident, all knowledge of a plane in that area was denied. On one occasion, a Com Flight pilot visited us in a Tiger Moth. I had gained my Private Pilot's Licence before the war, and I was able to persuade the pilot to let me fly the Tiger. Unfortunately the stick in the front cockpit had been taken out so I fashioned one from a hammer handle and had half an hour flying the Tiger from the front seat.

Over Christmas 1944, the Guard Sergeant and I patched up a wooden dinghy that had washed up on the island. We took some food and with a makeshift sail, we set off to the mainland where we arrived after dark. We camped on the beach and next morning we were surprised to see that we had crossed a reef before coming ashore. During the next two days the wind was unfavourable to return to the island, and an aircraft flew over and circled us. A plane had been forced down near Drysdale Mission, and the plane was searching for it. I had feared that the crew on Peron had reported us missing and that the plane was searching for us.

At one time we had a visit from the SEA SNAKE. The crew was enjoying a bit of relaxation. I went with them to the mouth of the Daly River where we tried some grenade fishing. Several Aborigines went into the water hole to throw out the stunned fish. A catfish landed at my feet and its spike penetrated my instep. The pain was cruel and I spent a sleepless night on board. For years afterwards, that spot remained tender and itchy.

Transport. During May 1945, the station transport was much improved when a 4 x 4 utility truck arrived at the station, but one day it hit a patch of soft sand down on the beach, and the front wheels sank to the top of the tyres. The tractor was unable to dislodge it, and as the tide was coming in, the vehicle was hurriedly stripped of all electrics. Empty 44 gallon drums were attached and the vehicle secured with wire to trees on the bank. Next morning, the drums had floated the vehicle which was then high and dry on the bank.

I recall that about the same time, an Aboriginal woman and a boy were evacuated by air and taken to Darwin hospital. Her husband, who was 'employed' at the station returned to the native camp to see his wife's tracks in the beach sand along with those of another Aborigine whom we would not employ. The husband came to the conclusion that the two were 'playing up', and he bashed his wife, breaking her arm and several ribs, and leaving her unconscious in the water.

It later transpired that the tracks were not made at the same time, and the

husband was repentant. He insisted that she should not go to hospital. I finally found out that he was reluctant to have her fly as 'she had no pants.'

When she returned to the island after about a fortnight she was wearing several dresses supplied by the nurses in Darwin, and she walked from the plane as proud as any queen, and she was the envy of all the assembled native women who always lined up to greet the incoming plane.

Sadly, the Aboriginal boy had cancer of the stomach and died in Darwin. His island folk were very upset as they could not obtain his few clothes. This meant that his spirit was troubled and he could not rest in death. I was present at the funeral corroboree, or 'Pukamuni,' at which his tribesmen did a number of dances around a fire, and at the end of each dance the 'chief' selected a painted stick and ceremoniously placed it on the fire. It was explained to me that each stick represented a time or place in the life of the deceased boy, and by burning it comfort was offered to the spirit. Any possessions such as clothes or blanket were also burned and I thought at the time that this could be a primitive way of preventing disease spreading.

I left the island in August 1945.

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C.O.'s Inspection. Flying Officer A.D.Banks, accompanied by Medical Orderly Higgs and the Guard Corporal, sets out on the weekly camp inspection.

THE ABORIGINAL FAMILIES ON PERON.

Owen Jones.

There were distinct advantages in having a few families of local Aborigines living close by - as many N.W.A. stations discovered. The station security was improved - their keen eyesight, hearing and observations saw to that - and the men and older boys were able to supply a pool of willing labour for many of the routine jobs around the camp. And there was their natural and 'local know how' in hunting and fishing; and many a welcome feed of goose or duck broke the monotony of bulla or M. and V. after a successful hunt or fishing trip.

There was a native camp out on Peron, but only the workers employed by the station came to the RAAF camp. Theirs seemed to be an independent and self-contained group of families - an off-shoot of the Daly River tribe known as the Muluk-Muluks, or Fish people, of the lower reaches of the river, and the RAAF men were careful to respect the privacy of their family life. The usual ration handouts were made, and the kitchen left-overs were there if wanted; also the regular pay of five shillings per week for the workers enabled them to buy some of the small luxuries of the canteen to share out at their camp, but they seemed largely content to care for themselves while living on the island. Jackie and Nim were the usual contacts, and through them an amicable liaison was established, and even some mutually satisfying trading in tortoiseshell and native crafts took place.

But even in this apparently idyllic way of life, undercurrents of resentment and jealousy were building up - as evidenced by an Aboriginal murder while the RAAF was still on the island.

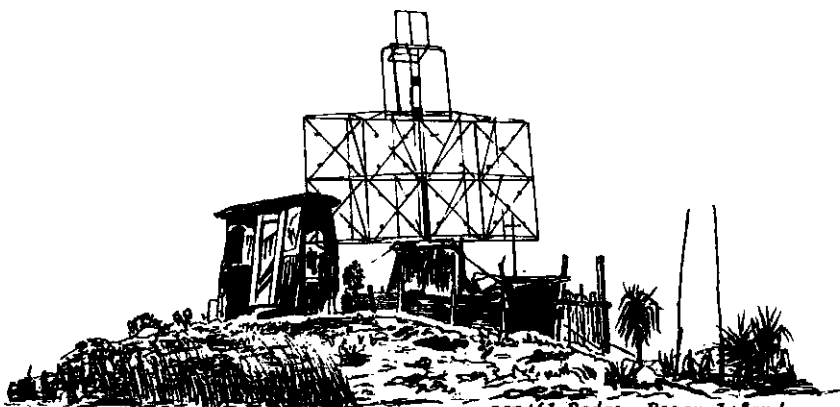
A member of the tribe had been in Melbourne to play Aussie Rules football. Apparently he was not wanted by the club, and he returned to his tribal family out on Peron. He had become something of a 'swell-head,' and was attempting to fool around with any of the native women he desired.

"Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned" proved true even out on Peron, where evidently his tribal wife was suffering at his hands. One day as he was sleeping in his humpy, she put a shotgun to his belly and pulled the trigger - the gun had been supplied by the RAAF for a goose and duck hunt around the swamp area. A signal to Darwin advised them of the killing. About a week later !! - came the reply advising no interference, as it was a tribal matter. The wife was abandoned by the tribe and left to fend for herself pending 'white fella law.'

After a period of mourning, a funeral corroboree was held; then the dead man's humpy was burnt, so ending the Aboriginal ritualistic observance of the death - the Pukamuni.

The Radar unit was indirectly involved after another violent incident in the island community in June 1945 when a native woman was bashed and injured by her husband. A DH 84 arrived and the woman was flown out to receive treatment and care at a hospital on the mainland.*

** Owen Jones, Mr. A.D.Banks and Ron Sawade all write on different aspects of these two incidents, giving individual accounts of their most vivid recollections of the time, and no attempt has been made to edit, or 'bring them into line,'-the facts would be in all three reports. Similarly, the height of the Dover hill varies according to the writer. These could refer to the height above the surrounding terrain, or the height above sea level...we all assess things from our own point of view.*



307/61 Radar, Peron Island.

THE PERON DOOVER.

The first six stations of the LW/AW programme promptly moved up into the New Guinea and Island areas - but 307 RS, 308 RS, and 309 RS were assigned to the CAPSTAN (1 Fighter Wing) project to increase the effectiveness of the radar warning system around Darwin, and were deployed to islands in NWA - 307 to Peron, 308 to Milingimbi, and 309 to North Goulburn. Of the three, 307 was the only unit to stay on site for the duration of the war. The other two moved northward after a period of service in NWA.

307 RS proved very effective, and plotted many raids and recesses. Peron itself proved little better than a desert island, with a poor water supply - few amenities - nowhere to go once the small island had been explored - but 'Doc' Fenton provided an air service which improved morale considerably, and after some time, picture shows were flown in fairly regularly. In addition, a small tribal group of Aborigines residing on the island provided some interest with their crafts and skills, and a view of life entirely remote from that of the radar men.

Living on Peron was not entirely without excitement. A Liberator bomber 'shot up' a party of men relaxing at the south end of the island - and in addition to the bites and stings of the multi-coloured ants and termites, there was the ever present danger from the Death Adders which seemed to infest the island.

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PERON ISLAND RECOLLECTIONS.

Allan Brayne.

My very first flight was from Batchelor to Peron Island by de Havilland 84 'Dragon' on 25th. June 1943. Previously I had been at 31 RDF at Dripstone Caves, Darwin.

Wednesday 30th. June 1943 was a memorable day, although no one worried about Income Tax in those days. The D.H. came over again with supplies in the morning, but when it was twenty miles away on its return trip we picked up a Japanese raid at about 134 miles. As the mechanic on duty, I was busy taking plots from then on. The raiders came in from a north westerly direction but when still well out, they changed course and came straight towards us. At a range of 20 miles and still coming straight towards us, the operator on the tube asked if he could go out for a look. My answer - 'No, wait until they are in our ground wave.' The power of a L.A.C! But if that operator should read this, I did indeed feel for you sitting in the dark, with only good quality canvas between you and any low flying approaching objects. At least the other operator, the W.T. operator and I could see anything low through the flywire walls of our Ops. Room, about forty feet from the Doover.

When they were right overhead, we rushed outside and saw twenty two silvery bombers in perfect formation at 20000 feet. Earlier, others had caught glimpses of Zeros which were much higher up. They flew on towards Batchelor and we wondered how the D.H. got on. Later we found out that they had bombed Fenton Field. This was the first time they had flown in over the island since 307 RDF had arrived. However, we noted they came in and returned over the island about six more times, including the last raid I experienced, on 12th. November 1943.

Most night raids were composed of several waves. Incidentally, at the time of the first raid we had no slit trench at the Doover....we had one next time!

FELLOW ISLANDERS.

Two Aborigines, 'Nim' and 'Jacky' worked around the camp and made a few boomerangs and spear heads in exchange for food and other supplies. Nim had a wife and three young children.

One night a number of us went to their camp by invitation, and were entertained by them dancing around near their fire, stamping their feet, beating sticks and playing the didgeridoo. However, we did not join them for their evening meal of birds they had caught. These were placed on the fire fully feathered, and when the feathers were not even fully singed off, they began pulling them apart and eating them.

One night a light was seen approaching the island, and another couple came ashore from their canoe. Roy was a very big man and had a number of lines across his stomach, the skin being either burnt or cut. He had a number of cane bands on his upper arm.

ISLAND WILDLIFE - WHITE ANTS AND DEATH ADDERS.

The Peron Island termites were the largest and most voracious I have ever seen. A newly made packing case cupboard was, next morning, swarming with ants and partly eaten through on one side..... and anyone leaning against the mess hut upright posts invited a bite on the arm; but the two-holer with wooden seats was a really bum-bitten experience. My first-hand experience - or first-foot experience with death adders was

while sitting on the side of my bunk writing a letter by hurricane lantern. A tickle on the foot induced a kick to dislodge the crawly insect. Another tickle and I flashed the torch. There it was...a death adder! There followed a leap onto the bed... a grab for the bayonet, and a wild slashing of the intruder. There was no thought of preserving the species in those days... only of self-preservation.

CONK - OUT OR CLOBBERED.

We often picked up shipping, or possibly surfaced submarines on the radar. One night we were all called out to the sandhills near the beach with loaded rifles - 'On Guard!' We stayed for a few hours.

There was one dark night on duty when the motor generator slowed down and stopped. Everyone looked at me. Was it a fault or a raiding party? Not wanting to appear scared, I headed down from the maybe 80 feet high Doover hill alone. Half-way down it did seem to me in retrospect a better idea to have asked the guard on duty to come with me. Entering the dark engine-shed by the water's edge, there was a 'Ping' - a bullet? - no, just the engine cooling down.

It was a great relief to get the trusty Ford 10 started again.

SUNDAY, 16th. JANUARY 1944.

I left Peron Island about 1700 hours by D.H. Jake and Robbie were also going back and there was another passenger as well, so with a lot of mail and all our gear, we were heavily laden. All the boys and also Nim and Jacky Mungalung were down on the beach to see us off. We had to move up near the front of the aircraft to get the tail up, and it still took a long run along the sand. We all started breathing again when it cleared the rocks at the end of the beach.

The pilot circled low over the Doover and everyone on shift came out to wave. Heading over the camp for the last time, we saw our Peron mates hauling back the mail and supplies on the cart with a long tow rope.



*Almost as crowded as the morning bus back home!
Peron Islanders hitch a ride on the local transport.*

PERON-ITIS.

Theo Harvey.

We Radar bods were sent into some pretty queer places during the war....sometimes to spits of sand out in the oceans around Australia....other times to tropical island paradises with blue lagoons and swaying palms or maybe covered in steamy green jungles. On some of these the mosquitoes rivalled the B24's the Yanks flew....others had spiders and mud crabs of giant size that hungrily eyed us fair skinned intruders and tried to eat us at the first opportunity. Death adders - sharks and crocs - bats and rats - we copped them all- but the fiercest of all predators I encountered were the multi-coloured ants of Peron.

Peron Island first struck me as an inconspicuous dry speck in Anson Bay, out from the mouth of the Daly River, chiefly noted for its 18 foot crocs. It was shaped a bit like a bull-ant with its rear part skewed to the east. The other end was a rocky outcrop on which the Territory oyster had patiently grown, layer on layer, until an island eventually raised its fangs above the sea. Generations of cyclones and changing sea currents brought sand and what-have-you from the river giving the island the appearance of a wide sandy beach and a few sandhills. The red sand mirrored the sun which bounced up to your face causing sunburn under the chin. There was a passable, potable water supply from a reservoir beneath the sand, but it didn't sparkle like the billabong water out on Bathurst. It was tapped by a well about sixty feet deep sunk by persons unknown, and was timbered to keep the sand from filling it in.

One or two members of the Acacia and Eucalyptus families had struggled fiercely through the years to establish an island foothold, but they no-way impressed me as much as the teeming ant and termite population feeding on, off, and down under them. These truly ferocious members of the insect world lived either off the timber or used its shelter as a springboard to attack all who approached. The termite variety attacked all the uprights and the seats provided for the shelter, comfort, relief and convenience of us radar types, and they lived and sustained themselves in the channels and tunnels they had savagely chewed upwards from their underground fortresses. Bear in mind also the red, black and green ant varieties which fought each other to establish nests up in the shelter of the shade covering intended to shield the radar chaps from the sun, but which they quickly claimed as their territory and exclusive domain.

Such was the scene when I was caught one day in dire need and approached the convenience to settle with a great sigh of relief and satisfaction which changed in an instant as the reds launched an attack from my unprotected rear - the white variety made a frontal attack - and the greens, upset and disturbed by the four letter racket below, made a dive bombing run from above without warning.

The noisy disturbance drew off-duty bods from near and far, also the attention of our M/O who was always keen to demonstrate his expertise in treating all bites and wounds. Some heartless types actually laughed at my discomfort, and when the M/O said 'Hang on a minute...I'll have to shave 'em off and probe for the pincers,' they all hung around to enjoy the spectacle of my public humiliation.

The only humorous incident I recall concerning the termite population was

on New Year's Eve, 1943. We opened the last case of beer in the canteen and found the white ants had waged war on the straw packing, and the bottles had to be dug out from a nest of virtual concrete in which the temperature of the occupied nest was well up on the normal. Unknown to us, this had increased the beer pressure and slightly lifted the bottle caps, and each bottle had begun to ferment, so raising the alcohol content from about 4% to 8 or 10%. The result was a Bacchanalian session for our group of nine, the six bottle ration producing a hilarious, irresponsible group intoxicated to the gills and intent on staging a white man corroboree in my tent. It wasn't long before someone stumbled and pulled the tent-fly free to collapse over us, from which we finally crawled, nine sick, sorry and somewhat sobered operators mumbling New Year resolutions which the C.O. helped us to keep by banning us from a beer ration for a month.

PERON MUSIC LESSONS.

One of the junior members of a very young crew was indeed a handsome fellow - obviously a female delight who spent his spare time learning to play a very reedy clarinet. He was at the scale stage and hadn't learnt to 'boogie,' so his misnotes were many and curious. By comparison, the didgeridoo music from the Aboriginal camp sounded like a theatre wurlitzer. His tent mates finally persuaded him to schedule his practice sessions from the top of a nearby sandhill where his discords and 'blue' notes were mercifully lost in the cries of the seabirds. But I have often wondered if he progressed to a reasonable level of competence...he just might have contributed to the reason for the girls swamping Johnny O'Keefe at a later date.

Notice I have conveniently forgotten his name which still may save me from a broken nose one day.

MAGPIE GEESE.

Occasionally when a change of diet was called for, a few of our intrepid hunting types managed to bring in a brace of magpie geese, and we dined on tough muscular poultry and declared it a magnificent treat. It certainly made an acceptable change to the mediocre menu of the men's Mess.

The toughness was attributed by me to those sinews and muscles which evidently did not develop in domestic geese. A knowledgeable informant and 'instructor' in culinary matters said the sinews should have been drawn from the birds by anyone calling himself any sort of cook, and one day he was 'gonna turn the restaurant trade upside down' with all the tricks and lurks he'd learnt from his father 'who was a French chef from wayback'....(from wayback I think he must have meant Tobooburra where on special occasions they dine on emus brought in from the desert and then fed for tenderness.)

I reckon those magpie geese eventually got their revenge by getting their heirs and descendants to eat out the seed planted on the Ord River and at Humpty-Doo, so sabotaging a possible agricultural industry in the post-war Territory.

#####

*Theo
Harvey.*



MY RECOLLECTIONS OF 61 RADAR.

Ron Richards.

.....I have no memories of the Aborigines on the island, except that several were employed on camp duties. I can recall that they took the Army Commandos to the south and brought back geese or ducks which were handed over to the cooks. On another occasion the Aborigines gathered turtle eggs from the beach and the cooks baked a fairly choice cake from these. The western beach was venue for the popular cricket matches as well as serving as the landing strip for aircraft e.g. the Avro Ansons and Wirraways.

The track to the Doover had to be negotiated carefully at night when going on or off shift. It seemed to attract the death adders, so we carried a bayonet and torch. During the day shifts we could get a ride on the station tractor which steered itself in the well worn ruts. The metal huts were taken to the Port Keats Mission after the war. I shifted from a tent into one, and I think Merv Harms, Ross Edyvean and Ron Sawade did the same.

The eastern side where the pontoon was moored was adjacent to where the S.R.D. craft anchored (SEA SNAKE). That's where we boarded a RAAF crash boat or Army Water Transport for a visit to the mainland near the Daly River mouth. This trip nearly ended in disaster when we were tossed into the drink from the boat's flat bottomed skiff which broached and turned turtle in the heavy swell. A giant cook who couldn't swim panicked and tried to commit Oscar Boyland and myself to a watery grave and nearly succeeded, until someone with great presence of mind tapped him on the back of his head with an oar. Kindly hands then placed him gently on the upturned skiff. The next nightmare was to swim out to the crash boat and this was no easy feat, being fully clad and booted, and not before Oscar and myself had sampled a large drink of the Timor Sea.

My other vivid recollection of Peron was V.P. Day. I think that we were granted a couple of days stand-down. Someone produced a bottle of gin and the rest of that day is hazy. That person did me a great favour, for from that day to this, over 50 years later, I've never tasted gin again!

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A few additional notes from 'Bud' Ford.....

"We were very fortunate to have a great cook, Peter Sproule, who had been a chef at some well-to-do establishment in 'Civvy Life.'; and his status entitled him to wear the neckerchief knotted around the throat - the symbol of a true CHEF. He made wonderful bread, marvellous rolls, and - I seem to recall - the croissant and the muffin!"

"Narnduk, Narndook, Nyada Betung" ...translated into "Brother, my Brother Belanga Me."

*And another oft used phrase...."Matyeat, Gibbit Matyeat Tobak.....
Give me matches and tobacco."*

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PERON ISLAND

We were fortunate on Peron to
get a good bunch of blokes. Y

(At left)...Letterhead
to Jack's 'memories.'

PERON ISLAND.

Jack Bleazard.

We were fortunate on Peron to be able to work with a good bunch of blokes. They came from various states and walks in life, but I cannot recall any disagreements. They also got on well with the island Aborigines, and it all added up to a pleasant camp.

I remember the cricket matches down on the beach, played with all the intensity of a Test Match...and how we enjoyed that one bottle of beer (our weekly ration) in the evening. It was at these gatherings that Bob Killorn would give us a woeful rendition of "The Blue Bird of Happiness." I also remember George Mathews going back to his tent one night and unable to make it to the bed, finished on the floor, on his back and looking at the lights in Swanston Street. And all on one bottle of beer!

There was no long hair in those days, and what wonderful creations those haircuts were. Every camp barber had his own style despite the 'short back and sides' and 'baldies.' They did provide us with a laugh.

Peron was renowned for its snakes, particularly the Death Adders and the Blacks. I recall coming off shift at midnight one bright night and entering our luxury unit, stepped over a stick on the floor, and got into the bunk. Next night off the same shift, I returned to the flat and again saw the same stick. I suddenly realised that it had not been there that morning. The bedside lamp was on in a hurry. Don Maikie was out of his sheets in a flash to see the black snake slithering away under the bunk before we could properly welcome it aboard. Next morning Ahcor called in as usual and was told about the snake. He sent his dog on a mission, and in a short time the old fellow had a meal and we had a wrecked tent.

Darby O'Connor was a keen fisherman. One evening 'M.O.' Higgs and I went with him, in a dug-out, about twenty yards off shore to get a haul. We were not game to move in that boat. We got plenty of bites but were too fearful to apply any pressure to the line in case we would roll the dug-out. Sharks were really plentiful in that area. Needless to say we did not stay out too long and our Aboriginal friends had some fun with us on our return.

Another evening, Darby and I went beach fishing and after a lot of work getting bait, we eventually caught a 3 foot Grey Nurse shark on a gut line. It was finally beached and put to sleep, then cleaned and skinned. The cook was awakened, (he wasn't very happy about that) and told we had a shark for the frig. He refused to handle the fish, so that meant

the C.O. had to come into the picture, and he wasn't happy either at having his sleep disturbed. But needless to say the camp had fresh fish next day and all enjoyed it.

You could say that the Aboriginal women were not exactly well dressed, so I asked my mother to send me some clothes. Eventually the clothing arrived and I gave it to Ahcor with the instruction that he give a dress to each woman. The instruction was not carried out, and Josephine his daughter kept them. Now amongst the dresses was a yellow creation that certainly needed a slip beneath, and which caused some interest among the boys.

Not long after the arrival of the clothes, we had a film night and our island neighbours were invited, and much to the amazement of the boys, Josephine wore the yellow dress complete with slip. She was the "Belle of the Night!"

Morrie, I hope these memory flashes will be of assistance and bring back one or two you may have forgotten.

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THE PERON ISLAND RADAR.

Jack Baker.

The 61 Doover was situated towards the northern end of the island on a sandy hill which commanded a good 'all round' view. The hill was not very high, but stuck up from the flat environment around it. My guess is that it was only 30 feet or so at most.

The camp was a short distance walk of a few hundred yards from the Doover. A walking track from the camp to the Doover was camouflaged with the usual camouflage netting and pandanus leaves.

The vegetation on the island was mostly poor scrub, pandanas, a few gum trees and in some parts, long bull-rush type grass. There was a small Aboriginal tribe who kept to the south of the island but we occasionally had contact with Jackie and Nim. They made ornamental spears and brought turtle shell which they traded.

The beaches around the island were not attractive for swimming as the water was very shallow and warm, and it was a long way out to get any depth. I might be a bit severe about that, even insular, thinking that all beaches had to be like those around Sydney. Anyway, the Peron Island beach was good enough for the 'Doc' Fenton flight of planes which brought in fresh supplies and mail.

What our cook (a fellow called Mort I think) did with the bully beef was astonishing - and mostly acceptable - but I have never been able to eat apple jelly since those days on Peron!

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*Len Powell and Jim Coad
'at home' on Peron.*

I was with 12 Squadron at Merauke when that squadron was disbanded and moved south in June 1944. On the way down I was posted to the North West Area to a repair and salvage unit at Batchelor. On arrival at Brisbane, the Adutant was good enough to advise the powers that be that I had gone on leave, and would report after its termination. After a spell of leave in my home town of Grong Grong, I travelled to Alice Springs by train from Adelaide, and then by truck up the Stuart Highway to Larrimah. After a great night's sleep on a bull wire mattress under a half thousand gallon tank for a roof, I joined the 'Spirit of Protest' for Adelaide River and Darwin. I finally got to Batchelor where I was soon hard at it. The unit was posted

to Rabaul in October 1944 and I was ready to go, but as I already had 14 months tropical service, the C.O. advised me, the day before the boat sailed, that he was not prepared to take me. I was subsequently posted to 105 Fighter Sector. I half expected a posting home from there but Lo and Behold....I was sent on my way to 61 Radar Station. Where was this place? Enquiries led to the information that it was on Peron Island in Anson Bay, some hundred miles South West of Darwin. My informant gleefully told me it was known as the 'Island of the Death Adder,' and I was not impressed.

Having been cleared from 105, I set off for Batchelor again to meet up with the old Dragon which was to ferry me to the island. I was joined by a Guard also going to Peron who was not at all happy about the aircraft and gloomily pointed out to me that a prop was only held on by one nut. The pilot assured us he wouldn't fly a plane that wouldn't make it, so we were soon on our way to Peron which was to be my home for the next eight months. I had my first glimpse of a crocodile as we flew low over the Daly River and saw many of them sunning themselves on the muddy banks. Sometime later we landed on the beach where we were met by a party of RAAF boys. The airman I was replacing was there, kit bag in hand, all ready to go back home. I guess he was thinking..."You'll be sorry!"

My first impression of Peron was of low lying scrub with a few larger trees and a lot of Pandanas. The soil was mainly sandy and it was certainly not very attractive. I think at that time strength was about 26 consisting of the C.O., one clerk, guards, cook, radar operators and mechs, and a few others. On the island as well were the local Aboriginal people, some thirty in number. I soon settled in and with Jim Coad as my tent mate, my Peron life began.

The C.O., Dennis Banks, was a good bloke and very helpful. And as we were very isolated, RAAF regulations were watered down. My most vivid memory of early days was celebrating Christmas as best we could. We inadvertently upset native custom when we decided to give out gifts - hair oil for the boys, looking glasses and necklaces for the women. We held the party in the old Rec hut, but the occasion did not go as smoothly as we hoped. In line with our customs, we decided to give the women their presents first. This caused an uproar from the men who began to shout - "Lubra, nothing. We first."

But the C.O. stuck to his guns and the ladies did come first this time, much to the disgust of the menfolk. However, next day, the many heads shining with brilliantine and the flash of beads in the sun showed that the gifts were appreciated. Unfortunately the local lads also got into the methylated spirits which we had stored there, and this caused some problems. Fights broke out during the night and no doubt many old scores were settled. Fortunately we had a Medical Orderly on strength and the wounds were attended to. I was promoted to off-sider to the Medic and found that the injured were good patients as we had to stitch up the many wounds without any pain killers and there were no complaints. One lubra had to be sent to Darwin with a dislocated elbow per 'Doc' Fenton, C.O. of the Communications Flight. Whilst I was on Peron I got to know the Aboriginal people quite well and learned something of their culture. A corroboree was held and some mainlanders joined the locals for the occasion. Old Nim, one of the elders I had got to know quite well, explained to me the stories told by each dance. The women beat rhythm with clapping sticks while the men performed the many dances. The mournful sound of the didgeridoo echoed over the darkened island and seemed to go on forever. Much amusement was caused at the end of the evening by my attempts to play the didgeridoo. I couldn't get a sound out of it at all which caused Nim to really laugh. Next day the natives were all very quiet having tired themselves out dancing all night. The Aboriginal men on Peron never walked two abreast but always in single file, with the man leading considered to have the best eyesight. This was also a safety precaution because of the Death Adders on the island. Their eyesight was really good. We would all go down to the beach waiting for the mail and supply aircraft to come in. We would know in advance when the aircraft was due, but without fail the Aborigines would always be first to sight the approaching aircraft. They would pick it out when it was just a small speck on the horizon.

On the island we discovered a boat which had been fashioned from a large tree trunk about ten feet long and with a rudder attached. Our C.O., F/Lt. Banks had come from Lake Macquarie and was a competent sailor. He decided a trip to the mainland was the order of the day, so under his instructions we fitted the boat with a sail made from an old tarpaulin. On a clear day we could see the coast outline though I can't remember the exact distance. After much thought a suitable crew was selected consisting of old Nim who had lived on Peron most of his life; young Nim - perhaps a relative; - a very intelligent young man, Peter Sproule the Cook; (no expedition could be complete without a cook) and myself with no particular qualifications. We took the walkie-talkie and some hand grenades which were supposed to be unserviceable, but experience had shown that some were alive. We waited for the morning tide, took our positions in the boat and pushed off. Sitting next to old Nim gave me some confidence as this was the first time I had sailed. There was a light breeze to fill the sail and finally the coastline of Australia became more defined as we approached. Soon we were landing our gear near the mangroves and I felt relieved that we had crossed without mishap.

I felt a bit startled when a very large, very black Aborigine emerged from the bush. Old Nim spoke to him and all was well. To this day I don't know how he knew we were coming as there seemed to be no camp in the area. No doubt we were in his tribal lands.

There were many large, deep holes in the water along the coast filled by the morning tide, not only with water, but also with fish. We threw grenades into the holes and when the occasional one exploded, the stunned fish rose to the surface. Old Nim and young Nim collected the fish which we cleaned and strung along the branch of a tree. Late in the afternoon the tide

came in which enabled us to refloat the boat, load the fish and head for home. We called Peron to say we were on our way. I recall there was little or no wind and our progress was slow. I noticed it getting dark very quickly, and old Nim, sitting in front of me, turned and said, "Me frightened - Peter can't swim. In five minute big wind come." At his words, my confidence ebbed. It seemed only a few seconds before the light seemed to disappear, and the wind rose alarmingly. The gale increased in ferocity as the C.O. fought to control the boat without knowing where we were heading, as visibility was almost zero. Then the boat heeled over and water slopped in over the side. On Peron there was some consternation when we had not returned by the time the storm struck. Someone had the presence of mind the light a bon fire as a beacon to guide us in. This fire was sure a plus for us. The C.O. steered straight for the light which glowed out in the darkness. The Aborigines rushed into the water and carried us all ashore. The boys were relieved that no one had to call H.Q. to report that the C.O. and company were missing. We had spoken very little on that trip home, each with his own thoughts. A few days later the C.O., with a twinkle in his eye, said to me, "Corporal, I think we'll take another trip to the mainland." I replied, "Sir,-----" You can guess my reply. I don't think that trip was recorded in the station Diary.

At the age of 35, I was the 'Old Man' of the RAAF Personnel, or 'Number 2 Boss' according to Nim, and there were times when 'sage' advice was needed. When Peter Sproule first arrived, the tucker really improved, especially the daily portions of fruit. The day came when Peter had to hand in his monthly Mess Return. Mr. Banks, the C.O., looked at it and pushed it away, saying it was not satisfactory. Peter's face fell. The C.O. suggested he seek the assistance of Corporal Powell. I looked at the Return and realised the problem. "Peter, I think you have used too much fruit. You'd better check." Peter returned looking anxious and indicated he was supposed to issue fruit once a week...not once a day. What to do? My eye fell on the 'condemned' column, figures were quickly adjusted, and the Return resubmitted. With a half smile, the C.O. signed the Return and it was on its way. Peter was joined by an assistant, Tommy Walsh, who arrived on the barge on one of the hottest days, wearing his greatcoat! A willing worker, he offered one day to cook his speciality....rock cakes. The tempting cakes were placed before us and we dived in. But how the Dentist didn't have overtime that week I'll never know, for they were the consistency of high grade cement - set hard!

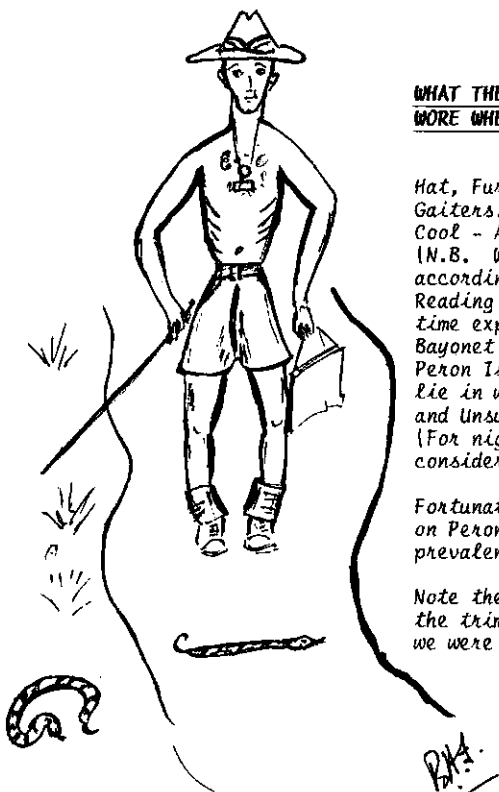
Entertainment was usually provided by the lads, many of whom could produce quite a turn. I can remember Brian Ford's amusing monologues, and Tommy Walsh's singing. However, one day a signal came that a film could be flown over if we had somewhere to show it. Naturally, we said "Yes," - the only problem being that we had just a few hours to prepare a venue. With visions of Betty Grable in their heads, a team quickly assembled to erect a theatre from empty 44 gallon drums for the walls, and sisalkraft for the roof. A sheet was pressed into duty as a screen. The film arrived and everyone quickly assembled as the show had to be completed before the incoming tide covered the landing strip. In the stifling atmosphere, the title flashed on to the screen..."The Battle for Britain." A chorus of groans issued forth in the gloom. Most had seen it before, and there were no good looking girls in it. But old Nim and his lads really enjoyed it.

One of my pleasant duties was to hand out an issue of tobacco to our Aboriginal helpers. One of them, Jackie Mungalung, always came back to see if I

had any scraps left over which he carefully placed in an old tobacco tin which gradually filled up. I was curious. "You're not smoking that, Jacky, what's the story?" "Oh," he said with a broad smile, "I've gotta lubra longa mineline." (mainland) Another problem solved!

On their trip across to the mainland, the party was met by a mainland Aborigine. In this photo, Len Powell and their new friend show some of the catch after a spell of 'grenade' fishing in the pools along the shoreline.





**WHAT THE WELL DRESSED OPERATOR
WORE WHEN GOING ON DUTY ON
PERON!!**

Hat, Fur Felt....Meat Tickets.....
Gaiters....Cotton Underpants,
Cool - Airman for the use of.....
(N.B. Webbing belt sometimes worn
according to fashion....) Boots.....
Reading or Writing Material if quiet
time expected.....Stout Stick or
Bayonet to fend off or destroy
Peron Island Death Adders known to
lie in wait in warm sand for Unwary
and Unsuspecting Operators.
(For night shift a good torch
considered essential.)

Fortunately I do not think anyone
on Peron was ever bitten despite the
prevalence of the viper.

Note the lean, firm rib-cage of
the trim, taut and terrific troops
we were in those days on Peron!!!!

Bud Ford.

Peron Island, in Anson Bay off the north-west coast, is 4 to 5 miles long, slightly "L" shaped, with the southern end covered in mangrove swamps. The Aborigines had a camp on the beach front towards the southern end. The 61 Radar Doover and operational hut were situated on the highest hill at the northern-most tip of the island, with the motor generators housed down the cliff face below the Doover but above the high water mark. The camp site was about a mile to the south and in the narrowest neck of the island. The often brackish water supply came from a bore, and because of the mosquito menace, collection of any run-off water was outlawed. Despite the order, rain water was collected in open buckets as it ran from the tent flies. The mosquito problem on Peron was enormous and very stressful, as was the prickly heat! During the wet season, long sleeved shirts and long trousers were compulsory dress, as were nets at night. Boots and gaiters were also included in this code or mode of dress. Death adders were another island menace. They were about fifteen inches long, and used to bury themselves just under the surface of the sand. For each change of shift, the W/T's and Radar Ops used to walk to and from the camp and the operational site, but whether it was from fear of the death adder menace, or as the result of the sympathetic intervention of George Matthews, the Fitter DMT, the C.O. allowed the men to use the tractor and trailer as a transport vehicle. However, George stipulated that the W/T's were to be the sole drivers and responsible to him for the safe use of the equipment. It was not realised until the 1992 Bendigo Reunion that some of the Radar Ops at the time resented the W/T's being the preferred few.

The unit also had a 4 x 4 light truck which was restricted in its use because of the amount of loose sand on the island, a fact that one of the 'Seniors' learnt when he bogged it on the beach below the high tide mark. The incoming tide completely covered it. When it was retrieved, George Matthews had the task of stripping it down to get rid of any saltwater corrosion.

The 61 RS Recreation Hut took some time to be built. All the iron structure work was on hand, but there were no bolts or nails. However, once it was completed with the billiard table, the kero frig, and the tables and benches installed, it became the main evening meeting place for the off-duty personnel. Beer and lollywater were the coolest drinks available.

The main recreation and entertainment on 61 were swimming and cricket during the dry season - swimming was out during the wet season because of the shark danger. Billiards were always in demand, and geese hunting often filled in an afternoon. The local Aborigines sometimes arranged a corroboree for their enjoyment and ours, but a Western movie used to send them into raptures when the occasional film found its way to Peron. For movie entertainment, a screen could be erected at a suitable location half-way up the Doover hill. At low tide, the waters would retreat miles out from the shoreline, and it was then that the cricket matches could be played on the hard damp sand, with the pitch site being shifted after each innings. Concerts and evenings were sometimes arranged by Welfare, and over a period of several weeks, Doug Elliott, of Melbourne radio fame, was able to visit Peron and organise concerts with the help of the local talent. "Frankie," a guard then attached to the station, was a star performer.

It was during the low tides that the Anson or Dragon supply planes used the hard sand as a beach landing strip. Rough weather meant no supplies and no mail....and above all, no replacement personnel. When bad weather contin-

ued for some time, the Aborigines proved themselves by supplying wild geese from the swamps, and with the aid of a three pronged spear, they caught barramundi in the pools and waters around the rocky outcrops. Our cook, Peter Sproule, excelled in tenderizing the geese, and generally produced super meals, but his off-sider, Tommy Walsh, was content to just survive as a trainee cook.

A floating platform, constructed from a number of planks bolted to empty 44 gallon drums, was used as an aid in unloading drums of fuel from the supply vessels off-shore from the eastern beach. During one severe storm this pontoon platform broke loose from its moorings and was missing for several months until word came from the mainland Aborigines that it had washed up on a mainland beach. Len Powell, the Orderly Room clerk, the C.O., Peter Sproule and a couple of Aborigines set off in an old dinghy that the C.O., who was a keen sailor, had repaired and fitted with a sail etc., to survey the site and see if it was possible to do a salvage job. When they were returning, strong winds whipped up the sea and waves threatened to swamp the boat. The Aborigines became agitated and when questioned, they pointed to Peter.... "He can't swim." It was a fact! However, the party arrived back safely, guided by the big bonfire burning on the landing beach.

Ralph de la Lande recounts that on another occasion the Aborigines became alarmed when they spotted crocodile tracks through the camp. And the entire Aboriginal community was in a panic when word was received from the mainland that the local 'witch-doctor' was about to make his way to the island to 'point the bone.' But as he approached the island, a few bursts from the Tommy guns changed his mind, and he retreated to search for a victim elsewhere.

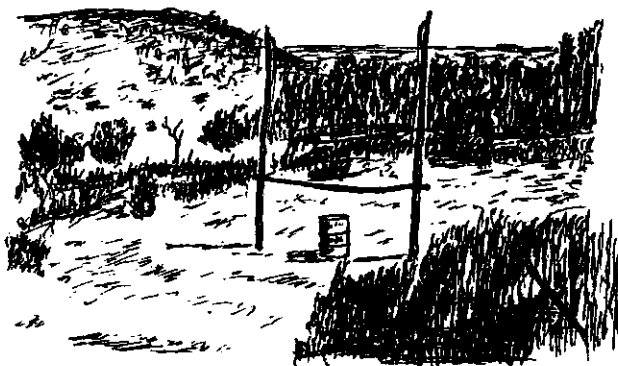
Frequently the unit was put on alert for possible Japanese commando raiding parties intent on replenishing their supplies. It was rumoured that the Japs were determined to find and sabotage the secret Truscott airbase, in the Kimberley country further west on the Anjo Peninsula. It was from here that the principal bombing strikes were being mounted to the islands north of Australia, and in January 1945, F/Lt. Gough Whitlam navigated a crippled Ventura bomber back to this base. During the wet season with its bad atmospheric conditions, 61 was employed as a relay to pass on messages between Truscott and Headquarters.

In February 1945, there was another alert, but of a different kind. Mr. Banks, the C.O. received word that the Commanding Officer of our H/Q, 105 FCU, then Wing Commander B. Walker...and generally known as 'Black Jack Walker,' was about to inspect the radar units under his command. Immediately the order was issued to wash and clean all apparel and gear, and to keep it ready to don when the big day arrived. A squad was drilled to form an impressive Guard of Honour.

One morning, with no prior warning, a Wirraway landed on the western beach, and out hopped Black Jack, dressed only in a pair of shorts and boots, a gunbelt slung around his waist, and a six shooter on his hip. So much for our preparations, our practice parades, and our formal dress!

The vegetation on the island was mainly of pandanus palms intermingled with small eucalypts. During the wet season the grass would grow six feet high, and the hibiscus vines would climb over everything in reach. Peron South, mainly a rocky outcrop, was used by the RAAF as a practice bombing area, but at times the Liberator crews would 'shoot-up' or bomb the main island area. Whether it was by mistake or mischief was anyone's guess.

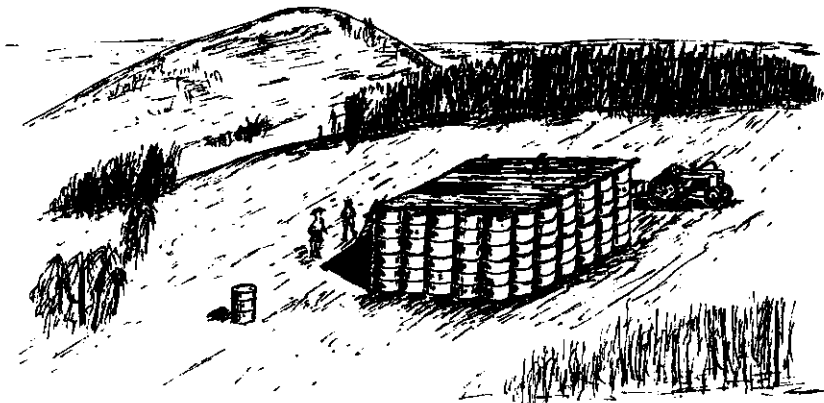
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PERON PICTURES. A 'Picture Show' was always appreciated at an isolated radar station - and was enjoyed by all except the duty crew who rued their bad luck. The audience included the local Aboriginal families who treated it as a big occasion.

On Peron, a site was selected on high land near the Doover where power, and cooler air, were available. A frame of sorts was erected to hoist the screen - seating and refreshments were supplied by the viewers themselves; and pretty girls in the cast were appreciated by the radar men...cowboys were far more popular with the 'locals.'

On one occasion, before overnight stays were arranged, a show was promised provided that the operator and his gear could return before high tide claimed the airstrip - and possibly the aircraft. So a theatre of drums and sisal was hurriedly erected, and the audience, black and white, endured the stifling heat inside to view 'The Battle of Britain' - but more popular programmes were regularly viewed under far better outdoor conditions as the war came to an end.



A FEW PERON INCIDENTS IN '44.

Jim Coad.

I arrived on Peron in late 1944, and took up regular duties as Radar Operator. Air traffic was still fairly constant, and the W.T. Ops were kept busy relaying our plots.

Living conditions were pretty spartan but easy going. We looked forward to simple pleasures such as spear fishing with borrowed Aboriginal multi pronged spears; collecting turtle eggs and gathering some beautiful sea shells. And each Saturday a cricket match on the beach was a weekly highlight. We also went swimming at every opportunity, well guarded from shark attack by one of our chaps on shore armed with a .303 rifle. Then of course there were the times we went power fishing with hand grenades in some of the rock pools, which had excellent results.

We enjoyed expeditions to Little Peron and the swamps on the southern part of Peron with our expert hunter, Johnny Toby who was permitted to use the unit shotgun. He quickly supplemented our rations with geese and duck. On one occasion I was detailed with a young Aboriginal lad to take the tractor and trailer to pick up Johnny Toby and his bag of geese at the 'Big Tree' by the southern swamp. There we found plenty of magpie geese, but no sign of Johnny Toby. On questioning my Aboriginal off-sider as to Johnny's possible whereabouts, he said, "Him gone that way," indicating the further side of the swamp. Sure enough, on walking another half mile, there was Johnny sound asleep in a patch of pandanas.

Then there was the trip to the mainland on the supply ship when we landed to attempt to recover a barge which had broken its moorings at our eastern beach and was now lodged on the mainland beach. After several hours of digging, we were able to free it, and cut it in halves, ready to be towed back to our island. I was one of the last to go back to board the supply ship, and our dinghy was swamped and capsized by the fast incoming tide. I thought it was curtains for me when I was dragged under a couple of times by a 'not so strong' swimmer. Fortunately we were able to right the dinghy and get back to board the supply ship safely.

Another memory I have is of the time when members of the 'Z' force visited the island. Although my recall of this event after fifty years is pretty vague, I remember being one of a small party to go on board their ship, the SEA SNAKE.

Another event that caused a tense situation was when an attack by hostile Aborigines was expected. The Guards were turned out for regular patrols of the camp area. As it was my turn to go down to the camp and wake the next watch at about midnight, I was challenged by one of the guards, George Rigger. Hearing a round go up the barrel of George's .303, I responded by saying, "Don't be bloody silly George...it's Jim Coad!" A very relieved George said, "That's good....you frightened hell out of me!"

Fifty years ago is a long time to remember... but Peron still features as a very important time in my life, despite the now vague memories.

PERON RECOLLECTIONS.

Bud Ford,
(ex.Radar Op, 170016, LAC Ford B.H.)

Peron Island? "Boring, Boring, Boring!!!"

That was just over 50 years ago, but who of us today would not say..."But I wouldn't have missed it for quids!"

After the routine of Richmond; taught that we were an 'elite' flight; privy to one of the war's great technological advances; enclosed by that high wire fence for "SECURITY"; visits to Sydney Town with Dit-happy Radio-ops dit-daahing the billboards that were advertising Craven A cigarettes and Persil washing powder; those wonderful overnight stays in clean sheets at the Castlereagh Street Air Force House; the last train back to barracks at twenty three fifty nine! If it was a decent sort of guard on duty at the gate, perhaps he'd share the marvellous warmth of his brazier, even a cup of that condensed milk type coffee we had in those days! It did help to remember to bring some 'sweetener' like a bar of Nestles chocolate, if by chance one's departure from the warm embraces of that girl you met at the dance at the 'Y' had made you catch the absolutely LAST train through Parramatta!!

All that six or eight weeks of fairly intense study; then pre-em leave to home. Return by troop train, three days and nights all the way from home in western Queensland down to Melbourne. Lucky if you found a sleeping place in the corridor, but as stripling youths the luggage rack up top was a prime billet! Couldn't fit there these days!! Melbourne Cricket Ground...then movement order said..ADELAIDE!?? "But orderly officer, I did not join up to go to Adelaide!" I think he may have been an old dig who got back into a uniform the second time round. "Don't you worry laddie. You'll find out soon enough !"

Gorgeous town Adelaide. Great hospitality. Great billet. All too soon "REPORT TO ORDERLY OFFICER TROOP MOVEMENTS OFFICE." In the dark on that platform, it was hard to see if we were even to be in carriages. "God, cop that Jack. Those are what we send our cattle in to the abattoirs, back home!"

"Mate, just wait till you get on the 'Ghan!"

So, off we went. Terowie; we overnighted at a staging camp that had the biggest Swy school in the Southern Hemisphere. Had never even seen the pennies tossed. Just a simple country boy! Must have had beginner's luck, won a few quid actually. Ended up shoving it in pockets, even under the old slouch hat!

"Something for the spinner, sport?" "Who?" The ring keeper too. He was a permanent Army bloke, PERMANENTLY stationed there just to run the School. Years later I learned he bought a pub from the kick-backs. Now that just showed good common sense!

On through Quorn, up through the centre, slow train but a most interesting trip to those of us bushies. Saw my first camel team and a huge donkey team at Oodnadatta. Staging camps, Banka Banka, Ti-Tree Wells, past the famous Elsey Station turnoff at Mataranka. Our generation was brought up on "We of the Never-Never," a school set book. Birdum pool, and I think, after Alice Springs it had been all dirt road in trucks. A bit rough on the seats!

Finally Darwin. My mate got his posting, right off, TARAKAN! And where was I to go to? PERON ISLAND! Delivered with the mail and the rations (just like our mail run at home! except this was in the old Aggie, the biscuit bomber for the Darwin group.) First impressions - a shapeless couple of little islands, sandy, pandanas palms, scrubby brush. And there on that beach was a blue Fordson Tractor with trailer. A bit like home? Yes... But not a face that was familiar! Dress of the day---flaring cotton issue UNDERPANTS! Slouch hat and Boots. Not a bit like Richmond! Report Orderly Room, viz, pole posts, tarred paper walls, malthoid roof. A number of our 'coloured cousins' around. Didn't look like our boys at home - different mob! But what great fun they turned out to be!

The R.A.P. was manned by the bespectacled rotund Medical Orderly "Nimmy" named after one of our local indigines, because, as it turned out in time, he and I were often called out to mend broken noses, split faces, burns, you name it. The menfolk showed a masterful way of dealing with their women!

Years later, in my Dental Practice where I had often to deal with similar injuries, I was always so impressed with the stoicism of our Peron Island blacks. We had no modern anaesthetics up there, yet never a whimper as we repaired damaged faces, with suturing minus Novacaine, minus any pain relief. I am sure there will be plenty of stories about the Doover, night shifts, death adders, the little "babbling Brook" we had - a chef in civvey street who made the most wonderful bread; cricket matches on the sandy beach. All the IMPORTANT things! But my two most vivid memories are of fishing with two of the boys in their dug-out canoes, spearing marvellous fish, with the expertise only they had. Listening to their corroborating late into the night. Watching some of their dances. Dances that actually MEANT something...that told of the turtle hunt; the dugong; not the stylised stuff that is passed off today on the gullible tourist as "Cultural." That slithering around as part of our recent P.R. at Atlanta for the Sydney Olympics!

I think I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to our Peron Island natives for having awakened in me a lasting interest in Archaeology, a science here in Australia that allowed me to become a member of 'Digs' that were, back in the sixties, able to extend the known occupation then of about 7000 years to 22000 years with Radio Active Carbon Testing. Of course this has been extended enormously since then, but I owe it to my time on Peron in 1944. Probably of course, there was very little else to occupy one's spare off-duty time, and this was a diversion that was quite engrossing.

Last but not least. The Air Force moved us round so much in the ground staff...not like Air Crews who stuck together. So there was little chance to establish long and lasting friendships. But I was lucky. I had as tent mate in the best, swankiest, concrete floored tent you ever did see-(fell off a barge that cement)- Owen Lloyd Jones. Never had a cross word, and if one had S.O.L. the other stayed away for an hour or so. We went to each other's wedding - still visit regularly - know our families - AND IT'S ALL HIS FAULT THAT I HAVE WRITTEN THIS..... IT WAS HE WHO SHOWED ME YOUR PLAN.

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MEMORIES OF PERON.

Peter Rolle.

My recollections of Peron are not too good....I don't think I was there very long and I cannot remember any names. However, here goes!

Travelling from Darwin to Peron Island was by Avro Anson, and it was an old one which appeared to be held together with wire...it flapped about a lot, but we got there O.K. and we landed on the beach. The tide was out and there was a very large area of firm sand.

Transport from the beach to the camp was by tractor and trailer. From memory, this was the only transport on the island. That beach was so firm and wide that we used to play cricket there, and the tide was so far out that we were unable to hit the ball into the water. When the tide came in I can remember seeing sharks close to the shoreline.

On the other end of the island and on the opposite side I can remember a ship bringing supplies and dropping them overboard so that the waves washed them ashore where it was very rocky. This made it very difficult to handle the boxes and drums when bringing them ashore.

I remember very little of the camp. I was in a tent with a sand floor and I was able to see where a snake passed through the tent at night, but I never actually saw one. I think they were death adders, but they kept out of our way. The Doover was at the North-west end of the island and away from the camp. We used to pass through a depression in the land on the way to our shifts. At night it was fairly cool and rather creepy. We occasionally saw some bush turkeys in this area. The beach below the Doover was covered with hermit or soldier crabs, and in the morning there were hundreds of tracks in the sand.

The Anson used to land regularly with fresh supplies and occasionally with pictures, but this only happened a couple of times while I was there and the films were shown outside. I cannot remember the Aborigines very well but I did see their camp once and I remember a helper shooting some geese for us at a swamp. We had a meal from them which made a welcome change of diet.

There was one occasion I recall when the island was covered by a thick fog for two or three days which seemed most unusual, but it eventually went as quickly as it had appeared. I can recall one odd experience I had...I broke a front tooth while chewing on a match, and I was flown into Katherine to see a Dentist. There I spent a week at the hospital and was given a gold filling. When I was due to return to Peron, I was taken to the airfield where a pilot asked me my name. I told him, and he said to hop aboard. After a fair while I was told we were due at either Melville or Bathurst Island...can't remember which, so I asked when we were due at Peron and was promptly told we were not going there. The mix-up occurred with the names, and a bloke named Cole should have been on the plane and not me. Anyway, I had another week at the hospital before returning to Peron, and everyone thought I had shot through! A very lengthy filling!

We enjoyed a beer ration of two per person, and as there were a few non-drinkers, we used to enjoy a bottle before the evening meal, and that's when I learnt to drink out of a bottle. That's about all I remember of Peron, and I hope some of my jottings will help.

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61 RADAR, PERON ISLAND, 1945.

MEMORIES AND TALES SUPPORTED BY MY DIARY.

Ron Sawade.

I arrived at 61 Radar Station Peron Island on June 17th, 1945 - four months and twelve days before the station was closed down and dismantled. At this time the possibility of enemy action in the area was very remote; however, the radar stations continued to keep watch over the considerable volume of friendly aircraft movements. Some of the happenings related to my transfer to 61 were slightly out of the usual routine and perhaps are worth recording.

About May 1945 a notice was issued to radar stations inviting operators to apply for remuster. Apparently there was a surplus of operators. I was at 46 RS Cape Don at the time and promptly applied for change to a technical mustering; and was posted back to ADHQ Darwin for a trade test. I duly arrived there on 13th. June, only to be told that there was in fact no trade test required in my case. I wasn't keen to go back to 46 RS, and after some discussion with the 'postings' person, it was decided that I should go to 61 RS rather than travel back to The Don, which involved a 10 hour sea trip in a RAAF 60 foot launch - a less than pleasant experience for a land-lubber like me, except in very calm conditions.

So on June 17th, at ADHQ, my name was called and I was instructed to proceed to RAAF Darwin, the main RAAF base, for onward transport to Peron Island. On reporting to the appropriate movement office at RAAF Darwin I was informed that nothing was known of any flight to 61 RS. I was invited to settle down until the next day in some very uncomfortable looking transit accommodation under a building set up on concrete piles, Darwin style. I had just unpacked my ground sheet and blankets and mosquito net, and was feeling very 'fed up' when my name was called over the P.A. system...there was an aircraft ready to leave for Peron. I had to repack my gear in a hurry and was driven out to the strip in a jeep where an Avro Anson (Aggie) was waiting. It had come from Batchelor (where Fenton's Flying Freighters - 6 Com. Flight - were still based at the time.) It had landed at Darwin to collect me and two other operators. There was no sign of the other two - first names Ron and Keith - so we took off without them and after a pleasant 75 mile flight, we landed on the long wide beach adjacent to 61 RS.

In my diary I summed up this example of communication breakdown in three words - "got mucked about" - but the consequences were unfortunate for Ron and Keith. They actually arrived at Peron the very next day, but were charged with having been AWL. Ron tells the story on page 181 of RADAR YARNS. Had I not heard my name called over the P.A. at RAAF Darwin, perhaps I would have had to talk my way out of an AWL charge.

THE LOCATION OF 61 RS.

I note that maps show two islands - North Peron and South Peron. We were on North Peron. It is only a few miles long. The area we occupied was mainly sandy hills or dunes. There was a swampy area at the southern end which was home to magpie geese. The only other wild life I was aware of was death adders.

The Doover and Ops. Room were situated at the top of a hill at the northern extremity of the island. The camp area was about half a mile away among sand dunes and only a short distance from the beach on the western side.

At this point the island was only a few hundred yards wide. The western beach was very wide, long and firm - ideal for use as a strip by Doc Fenton's aircraft. But the water was very shallow - it almost disappeared in the distance at low tide, leaving a very wide expanse of firm hard sand. Swimming was virtually out of the question because of the lack of water. There was deeper water on the other side of the island - the eastern beach - where there was a pontoon near the shore.

Peron Island is in Anson Bay, not far from the mainland...I think less than five miles. The local Aboriginal people referred to it as "longa mainline." The Aboriginal community lived in a camp a short distance from the RAAF camp. As was customary, it was a "no go" area for us; although I did visit them once while working as DMT to deliver their rations with the tractor/trailer. The Aboriginal folk always attended our picture shows and we used to see quite a lot of several small boys who liked to visit our camp and socialise. Some of the men did odd jobs around the station. One man was very good with laundry work for a very reasonable fee, usually some tobacco or cigarettes. I wondered how he could do such a good job using the hopelessly hard water we had.

Another Aboriginal man had the use of a 12 gauge shotgun belonging to the station for the purpose of hunting magpie geese. On occasions he brought in enough geese for the cooks to produce a meal of roast poultry for the whole station. Very acceptable.

A TRAGIC EVENT.

Unfortunately there is a sad story connected with the man who hunted geese for us. I recorded in my diary that on June 26th. he, and perhaps others, gained access illegally to a supply of methylated spirits kept at the station. It seems his wife spoke about it to our C.O. and was punished by her husband with a beating which necessitated her evacuation by DH84 to hospital in Darwin with a nasty head wound. (There is a photo of her being carried aboard the aircraft.)

Some months later during the period when the station had been closed and was being packed up, some sort of argument/fighting took place at the Aboriginal camp, again involving this woman who was now back on the island. This time she took the shotgun and killed her husband. Many months later, after I had been discharged from the RAAF I saw a story in the Adelaide Advertiser about this same woman, then serving a gaol sentence in Alice Springs. She had escaped from prison, and set out to walk back to her home country with another escapee. They had been recaptured walking northwards along the Stuart Highway. I could not help feeling sad for her. As I remember, her sentence was not very long.

ACCOMMODATION.

When I arrived at 61 RS, most personnel were living in tents. But set on top of a sandhill was a large steel-framed black corrugated iron hut which was completely empty and unused. There was even a 240 volt power line connected to it. I was not keen on tent dwelling at any time if something better was available - and naturally we were not permitted to have 240 volt power in tents - so I promptly got approval to wire the hut for lighting and moved into it. I soon had several mates; but the hut always had plenty of empty space. The "older" inhabitants seemed quite happy in their tents, and of course the few of us in the hut were content to be a small number rather than be over-crowded.

WATER SUPPLY.

The water supply for the camp consisted of a well - I think 20 feet deep or thereabouts - in a hollow behind the first line of sand dunes from the beach. The well was virtually dry at low tide, and gained water as the tide came in. The water we pumped from the well wasn't exactly sea-water, but it was very hard and salty. It seemed undrinkable when I first arrived there, and most of us drank as little as possible. The canteen did a very good trade in "lolly water" - the soft drink from the aerated water factory operated by the Army in Darwin. Eventually one did become accustomed to the water to some extent. When I first tasted ordinary mains water on return to Darwin, my impression was unfavourable. It seemed 'empty' and tasteless. But I was pleased to be able to use soap again. The addition of soap or laundry powder to Peron Island water had a slight discolouring effect, but produced absolutely no lather.

Water was pumped from the well to tanks in the camp by means of a pump unit powered by a single cylinder Buzzacott petrol engine controlled by a 'hit-miss' type governor. At one time the engine broke down. A thread holding a head bolt was stripped. At this stage aircraft were calling on us very frequently, so the damaged parts were sent to Darwin for repair in RAAF workshops, and were returned within five days. Meanwhile we pumped water into 44 gallon drums with a hand operated semi-rotary pump and carted it to the camp by tractor/trailer. I remember using a rope and bucket to get water to prime the pump.

TRANSPORT.

The station transport equipment consisted of a small Farmall tractor and two wheeled trailer. This performed very well on the sandy tracks in the area. There was also a Chevrolet 4x4 'Baby Blitz' truck there; but soon after I arrived - on July 1st. to be exact - someone (who shall remain nameless) drove it out on to a mud flat at low tide and got hopelessly bogged. It was floated out a day or so later, using 44 gallon drums for flotation; but it had been partly submerged by the tide several times and was never much use afterwards.

Travel to and from the Doover for operational staff was normally by tractor. The distance was perhaps a half mile or more, up and over several sand hills and up a long slope to near the Doover. The approved driver was the W/T operator member of the shift. The other shift staff would cluster around the driver and hang on as best they could. Knowing how unstable tractors can be when not operated on level ground, I used to worry about the possibility of overturning on one particular part of the track which had a fairly steep side slope. But it never happened; and tractor riding sure was better than walking, and probably safer, bearing in mind the habits of the local death adder population to stretch out on our sandy tracks in the dark hours.

DEATH ADDERS.

No account of life on Peron would be complete without some discussion about these (to us) unloveable reptiles. Peron was reputed to bear the name "death adder island" in the general radar community..and it proved to be well merited. As with radar stations generally, movement around the camp and to/from the Doover was always along designated tracks. These were mostly sandy, and seemingly warmer at night than the sand in the bush. So the custom was that any airman walking about at night always carried a torch focussed on the track ahead. The tracks seemed to attract death adders

as comfortable places to lie and sleep or rest or whatever it is that death adders do when not busy.

I imagine there are seasons for death adders, because they were rarely seen during June after I arrived, but towards the end of my stay at 61, in September and October, they suddenly became very active. I remember that on one particular day three were seen (and dealt with) around the station. On two occasions I encountered one on a track at night, and there were many more instances involving other airmen. One morning we could see the tracks where one had entered our hut, which had a soft sandy floor, had crawled a considerable distance up the middle, around a bed, and out again. I'm afraid that we did not generally consider that these reptiles had as much right to live there as we did, and we treated them accordingly. What attitude would we adopt today when snakes are protected?

EQUIPMENT AND POWER SUPPLY.

The gear was LW/AW. This was my first experience with this equipment in an operational situation. The hand operated rotation feature was something of a culture shock for me after spending so much time on COL Mk V gear, but I'm sure it was good physical exercise.

The power supply consisted of two Ford 10 alternator sets located along the track between the Doover and the camp. I seem to remember seeing the remains of an earlier power supply location virtually right on the beach above high water mark almost immediately below the Doover, but don't know its history.

The Ford 10 units, which were used alternately on a (usually) 12 hour shift basis had little in reserve with the Doover operating continually, and more power used in the camp for lighting in the kitchen, the mess and the recreation hut, and of course our living accommodation mentioned above.

The Fitter/DMT was kept fairly busy keeping the power supply up to scratch.

At one period I was seconded to assist him in dismantling an engine and grinding the valves etc. One engine gave up completely on September 1st, and a replacement was sent out from Darwin the next day. A single power unit wasn't able to operate on a continuous basis because of over-heating problems. The cooling system of the Ford 10's could not cope with non-stop running in the tropical conditions. So when there was only one unit available, the Doover had to go 'off the air' for cooling down periods.

WATER HEATING AND TEA BREWING.

We found that because of the high mineral content of our water, it was possible to heat water very quickly and effectively for making a brew of tea in our hut by using an improvised "electric jug" equipped with two metal plates set close together instead of an element of resistance wire as in a conventional jug. But the current drain was so great that we had to be cautious about using our "jug" at night because of the severe voltage drop it caused, as the poor old Ford 10 struggled with the extra load. It would dim the lights in the camp and so alert the authorities that something was happening to cause a power supply problem. But of course we would NEVER do anything silly which might put the Doover off the air...not deliberately anyway!

Up at the Doover it was customary on some shifts - mainly at nights - to light a fire and boil the billy for a brew. On one occasion the mechanic on our shift was breaking up a wooden crate with a tomahawk to get the fire going. Suddenly he started yelling in pain. I rushed out, and there he was with a board from the crate firmly nailed to the back of his hand. It was not very funny. We pulled the nail out and he calmed down. Luckily, the wound healed quickly with no infection.

THE PUZZLE OF THE DIESEL FUEL.

One matter associated with our power supply intrigued me. The Ford 10's of course used petrol as fuel. But near the power-house there was a dump of seventy 44 gallon drums of diesel fuel. No one was able to tell me why this was delivered to a station without any diesel engines. Then almost fifty years later I discovered by reading Appendix A of 'MORE RADAR YARNS' that the delivery of diesel fuel was no mistake. It had been intended to re-equip the station with COL Mk V gear. This also involved Lister diesel power units. Delivery of some supplies had been arranged before it was decided not to proceed. I have wondered sometimes what eventually happened to the seventy drums of fuel - were they carted back to Darwin or left to rot or to be souvenired at some future time.

LEISURE ACTIVITIES.

The lack of deep water at our nearest beach ruled out swimming except on the eastern side of the island. I don't recall going swimming very often, even though I was a keen swimmer. Perhaps I was too lazy to walk that far. The firm sand on the western beach lent itself to other activities. Cricket was very popular with the sport minded personnel. On July 27th. a cricket team from Doc Fenton's unit visited in two 'Aggies' and played a match against 61 RS. We won...but I was not a player.

On another occasion a rugby football match was staged - both teams were made up of Peron Islanders. I'm not sure how this was managed from our small establishment, as undoubtedly there would have been several like me who knew nothing about rugby, or were not interested anyway. One thing I do remember is that there was a greater than usual attendance on the Medic the next day by footballers with minor injuries.

FILM SHOWS.

During this period it seems that generally there was a Cinema Operator standing by ready to take film shows to outlying radar stations whenever there was room on an aircraft taking supplies, mail and personnel etc. As a result, we were very well served with picture shows. I recorded twenty four in my diary while at 61 RS. At first we saw only 16 mm films, but commencing August 7th. the Operator brought a portable 35 mm projector on many occasions. One problem for operational crew - mechanic, operators and W/T's, was that if on shift, no picture show...tough!

WARLIKE ACTIVITIES.

Peron Island was a very peaceful place at the late stage of the war when I was there; but two events stand out in my memory. These are both described by our then C.O. Mr. Banks in RADAR YARNS, page 180. One was the occasion when a group of our airman relaxing on the beach were fired on by a Liberator bomber with U.S. markings. (I was on shift at the time and missed the "fun.") The other was the visit by some soldiers (A.I.F.) in a strange looking sailing vessel. I understood that there was some sort of "hush hush" mission involved; so of course we didn't expect to be told where they were going or where they had been. One of the soldiers had an Owen gun and showed me how it operated and how simple it was. Quite a lot had been written at that time about this weapon which had been designed by a South Australian. After a few days on and around our island, the craft and its team of soldiers or commandos left us to practise their activities elsewhere.

FENTON'S FLYING FREIGHTERS.

We were very well looked after with regard to fresh food, mail and canteen supplies delivered by air during the period I was at 61 RS. During one eleven day period I recorded eleven aircraft arrivals in my diary. The most we had on any one day was three - two for a visiting cricket team, and one with supplies. Doc Fenton's team at 6 Com Unit made a huge contribution towards maintaining morale and the general welfare of airmen on isolated outlying radar stations.

The fresh meat, vegetables, eggs and the like delivered by air provided a most welcome variation from canned and dehydrated food which comprised a large part of our diet. But there were occasional hiccups. The worst one I recall occurred on a particular night when practically everyone on the unit spent hours up and about with tummy trouble of the worst kind. It was obviously caused by some form of food poisoning - probably from a batch of bad meat. But we all recovered quickly and all was well 24 hours later. Then during the seven day period leading up to the end of hostilities, when two atomic bombs had been dropped on Japan, and we were all waiting eagerly for the expected good news, we ran out of cigarettes, tobacco and lolly water. What a terrible addiction smoking is!! There was hardly a cigarette butt to be found anywhere around the station. Any smoker who saw one would swoop on it. The one thing we were not short of was beer, but of course we were limited to a ration of two bottles per week. The price was one shilling and eight pence per 26 ounce bottle - good value even in those days.

Then on August 15th., the very day that Peace was announced, an aircraft arrived with fresh food, smokes and lolly water.

THE WAR IS OVER.

What a day August 15th. was!! Peace at last, and we can go home. There was an official stand-down for two days, with the Dover off the air. I noted in my diary that there was a lot of noise in the camp that night. I have a feeling that the rule about our beer ration may have been relaxed a bit that day, but I really can't recall. One thing I do remember is that late at night there was a loud explosion outside the camp area - probably some idiot had detonated a hand grenade - but no physical harm resulted and we did not hear any more on the subject.

DISPOSING OF EXPLOSIVES.

As with all radar stations in operational areas, 61 RS had a supply of .303 ammunition for rifles and the Vickers machine gun, as well as .5 Thompson sub machine gun ammunition and hand grenades, for protection in case of enemy action, also two aerial bombs and detonators to destroy the radar equipment in case of imminent capture. Such events were thankfully, quite remote possibilities during my time there, but certainly not so in earlier times.

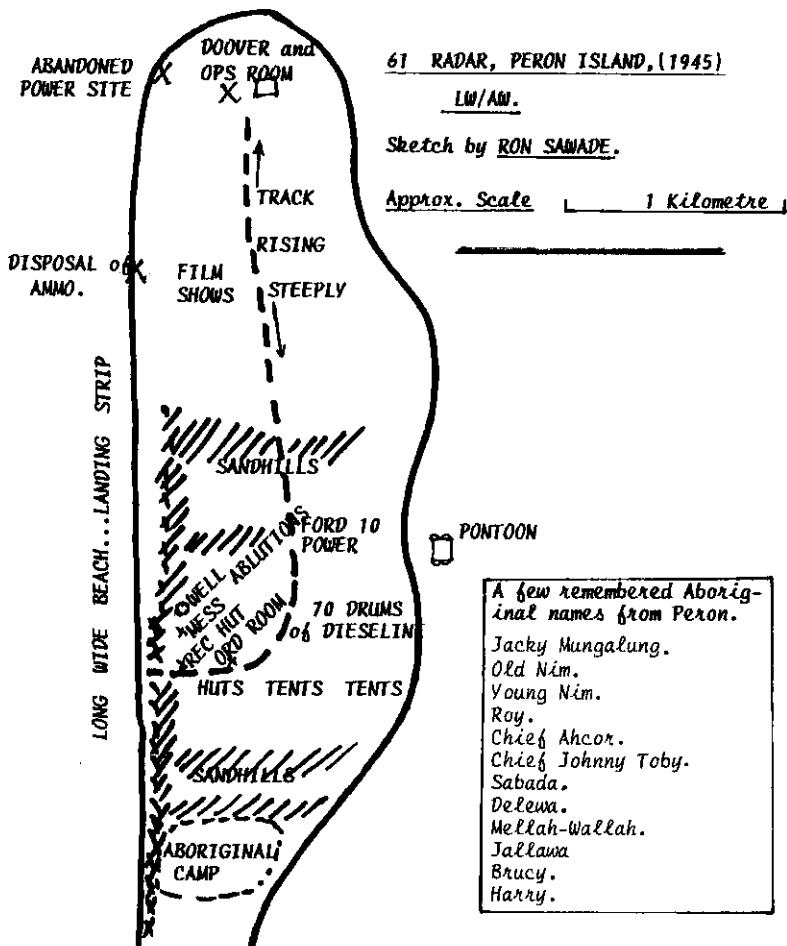
During the closing down period, steps were taken to dispose of the explosives. A large pile of ammunition etc. was made on the beach with the bombs at the centre. Then while we all waited at a safe distance that evening a detonator was set and the fuse lit. What a let-down! There was no big bang. At the time I was surplus to operations and was working as assistant to the Fitter/DMT, so the next morning the C.O. and I drove along the beach with the tractor to this dangerous heap of ammo. We approached very gingerly, and there was the fuse lying on the sand. It had burned some distance but then failed at a point where it had been kinked.

The Boss relit the fuse and we moved well clear with the tractor. This time there was no failure....up it went with just one big BANG! All that was left of the thousands of rounds and other items was a hole in the sand a couple of feet deep and a lot of shrapnel scattered around.

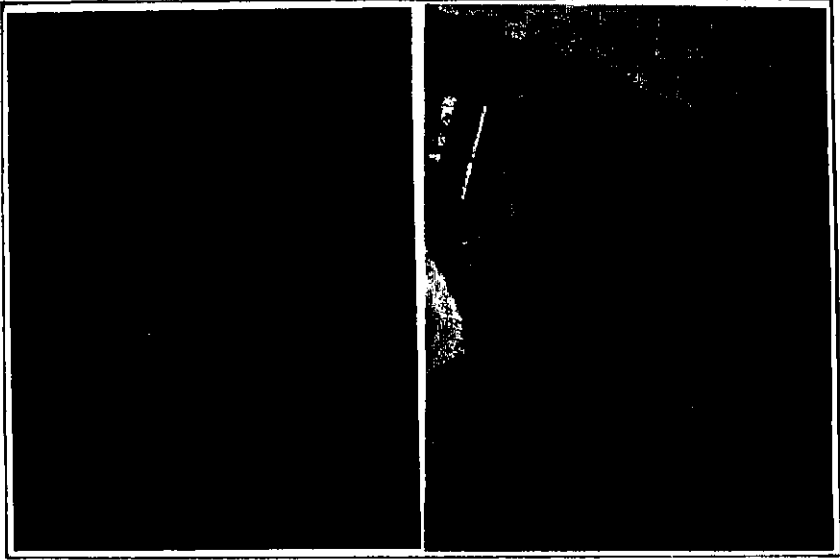
FAREWELL TO PERON.

Operations were reduced to 12 daylight hours per day from October 13th, 1945. Then on October 27th. I was posted South, having completed a tour of service in the tropics. Two days later the station was closed down completely and the work of dismantling the Doover commenced. I actually left Peron on October 30th., on the next available flight after I was posted. Just as our pilot was lining the 'Aggie' up for the take-off run along the beach, we saw the antenna array of the LW/AW being lowered to the ground.

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- A few remembered Aboriginal names from Peron.
- Jacky Mungalung.
 - Old Nim.
 - Young Nim.
 - Roy.
 - Chief Ahcor.
 - Chief Johnny Toby.
 - Sabada.
 - Delewa.
 - Mellah-Wallah.
 - Jallawa
 - Brucy.
 - Harry.



Medical cases evacuated from Peron. Two Aboriginal women were flown out...one with serious head wounds, the other with arm fracture and other injuries. Their stories are among those sent in, and the three accounts should be read, for no doubt each adds a few details to the stories of the two women. In each photo, Medical Orderly Higgs is to be seen supervising and helping.



The Wirraway which flew in to Peron on September 8th. 1945 when a Pay Sergeant attended for a Pay Parade, an occurrence 'by arrangement' usually on radar stations when the men were running out of cash. Merv Harms appears second from left in the line-up, and Ron Sawade is fourth from the left. One man only appears dressed for a formal Pay Parade - or perhaps it was to be informal!

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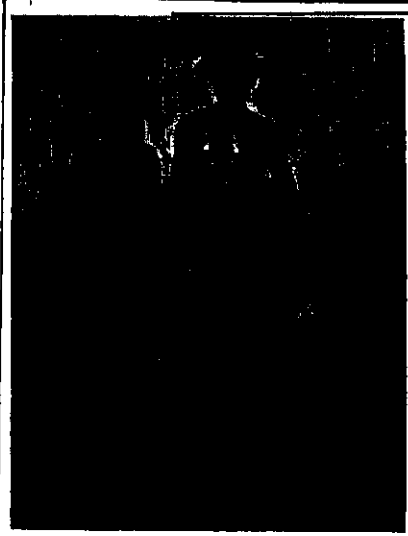
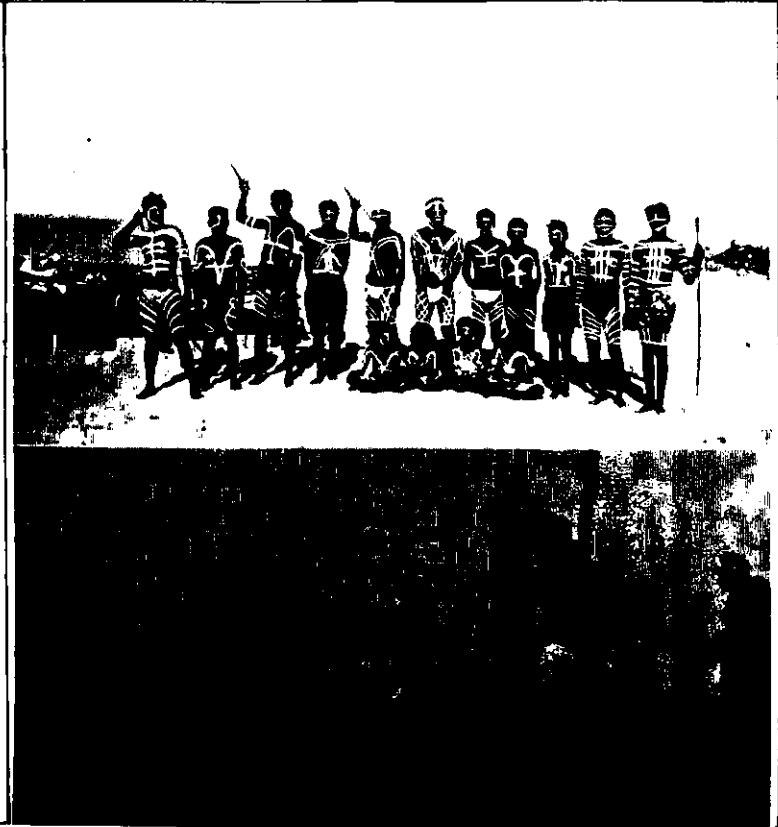


Top (Left) Jack Crisp is in the spinebashing chair..Bud Ford waits his turn.
 (Right) DH84 (Dragon) lands on the Peron western beach.
 Centre (Left) Peron Lifesaving Team...Jim Coad, S.Germaine, Kev Coughlin,
 Bud Ford, Owen Jones and George Farrell.
 (Right) Bud Ford tries his hand at baby-sitting.
 Lower (Left) The Peron Desperadoes out on patrol.
 (Right) A successful Peron turtle hunt....Alan Williams and F/O Banks
 with a few helpers.

(From the Bud Ford Collection)



PERON PERSONALITIES. (Top) Bud Ford relaxes and reads the current island library offering.
(Centre Left) Merv Harms receiving the local tonsorial treatment. (Centre right) Can you name them?
(Lower) Don Maibe and Jack Bleazard at the door of their air-conditioned apartment.





LIFE WITH THE MULUK-MULUK PEOPLE ON PERON.

- (Top) The young ones line up in front of a typical family humpy.
 (Centre) Negotiations for shell are about to start..George Farrell on the job.
 (Top Right) One of Nim's boys at home.....'Donny.'
 (Lower Right) Peron teenagers ready for a night at the movies. Parcels of clothing were sent by families of the radar men.
 Opposite page. (Top and centre) Island corroborees, one being arranged as part of the Pukamuni, or mourning period, after which the humpy of the dead man was burnt. (Lower right)
 (Lower left) Two of the station 'helpers,' getting some water;- Ahcor and Jackie.



Above, (Top) LAC Jones, with Bud Ford second from left, and C.O. F/O Banks at right.

(Lower) A work party setting out on the tractor, their target for today probably the camp latrines in the background.

Photos at right and from top down.....

(Top)

"The Barber of Peron."
Kev Coughlin and his victim, Owen Jones.

(Centre)

Kev Coughlin and Peter Rolle appear to be in contemplative mood.

(Lower)

George Farrell chose a tropical background for his photo.





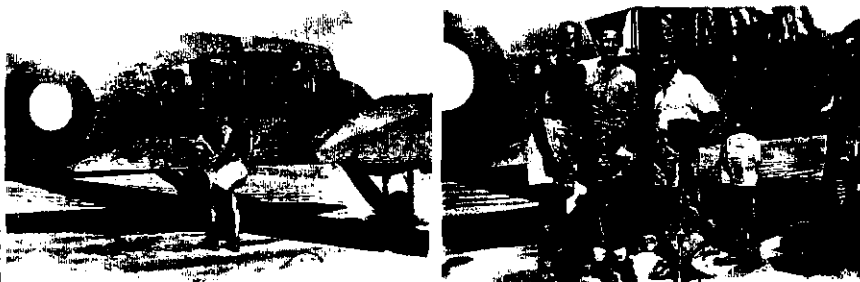
(Left.) C.O. Mr. A.D.Banks, Peter Sproule, Len Powell, and island Aborigines on the expedition to the mainland.

(Right.) Local Aborigines with Len Powell, C.O. Mr. Banks, Arthur Higgs, and the Guard Corporal just in the photograph.



(Left.) Jim Coad and Len Powell 'at home.'

(Right.) A Guard, Mess-hand, Guard...then Doug Elliott, Bob Killorn, Len Powell, Peter Sproule, Jim Coad, Arthur Higgs in the truck; C.O. Mr. Banks, and Ern Taylor.



(Left.) George Matthews is in the Anson, and Arthur Higgs is having a few words.

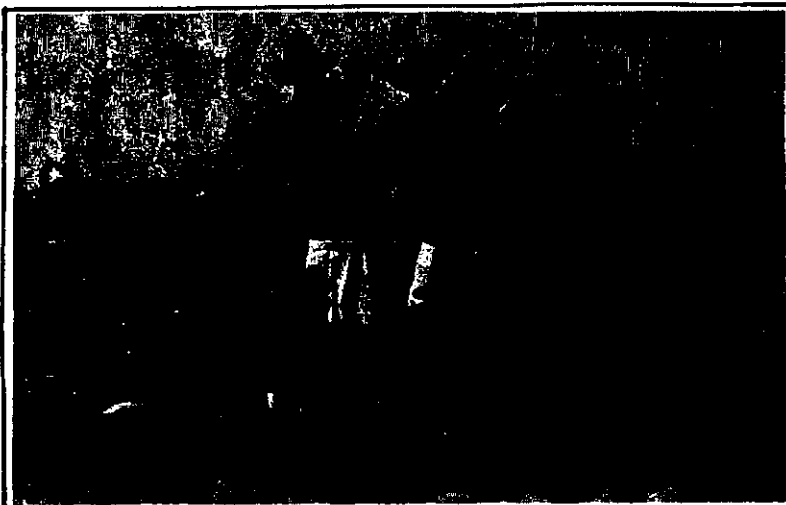
(Right.) Len Powell, George Matthews, Bob Killorn, Alan Wall and Bob Walker.



RADAR CRICKET.

The Ancient and Honourable Game of Cricket proved the most popular of all sports on radar stations and for some obvious reasons. Firstly, the A.C.F. was able to easily organise a couple of bats and balls, half a dozen stumps - and the rest was up to the cricketers. Maybe a pitch of ant-hill material - or a firm, hard beach like that on Peron - then select two teams of preferably eleven, but nine would do if numbers were short - and then the game was on! Test Matches were regular fixtures - N.S.W. v. Victoria, or S.Aus. v. Q. Or maybe it could be Guards v. The Rest, or Marrieds v. Singles. The latter invariably invited argument - which side could the 'Betrothed' play on - are they single still or 'hooked'? A resounding victory provided excuse for celebration - but so too did defeat - but this was known as 'drowning our sorrows.'

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PERON ISLAND CRICKET.

The two photographs above were taken in July 1945 on the beach at Peron Island, and show:

(Top).....The Singles XI.

(Lower).....The Marrieds XI.

On the opposite page is a photograph of the truly historic occasion when a team from 6 Com Unit flew out to Peron from Batchelor to play the local team. Note that aerial transport was used in July and August, 1945....fully ten years before the Australian Test Team used aerial transport to fly to England.

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This very incomplete list of 61 RS Personnel has been compiled principally from names mentioned in the A50 Diary, though a few names are from memory, and a few from photographs and other contacts.

Commanding Officers.

P/O A.W.Williams 3.12.42
 P/O J.McGrane June '43
 P/O J.C.Sands 24/8/43
 F/O K.Henderson-Wilson 12/4/44
 F/O R.H.Gathercole Temp 9/9/44
 Perm 15/10/44
 F/Lt D.A.Oakes 21/11/44
 F/O A.D.Banks 19/12/44
 F/Lt J.D.Muir 12/1/45
 F/O G.D.Mills 12/8/45

Senior N.C.O's.

W/O C.Baker
 Sgt J.H.Giraud R.Mech
 Sgt H.Eland Med.Ord.
 Sgt R.W.Horrocks
 Sgt W.Wood R.Mech
 Sgt Ward
 Sgt Nagel
 Sgt Sharpe
 F/Sgt White

P/O J.M.O'Donohue Admin.
 P/O Lysaght "

Personnel.

- O'Connor		- Talbot		T.Walsh	
L.J.Tully	W.T.	- Andrews	R.Op	- Walters	
H.J.Baker		- Romaro		L.Powell	Clerk
D.D.Spiatzler		O.Boylard	R.Op	- Williams	
R.W.McKenzie		J.Coad	R.Op	- Scholes	
- Cant		P.Rolle	R.Op	- Crisp	R.Mech
P.Sproule	Cook	- Ryan	R.Op	R.H.Walker	W.T.
- Johnson		J.James		- Ellsworth	
R.J.Baker	R.Mech	L.V.Stanton		- Hepplewhite	
- Young		G.Matthews	F.DMT	- Lyell	
- Darnley		- Burgess	Guard	J.Bleazard	R.Op
J.English	R.Op	A.K.Williams	Clerk	D.Maike	R.Op
- Nielson		B.H.Ford	R.Op	R.Killorn	R.Op
- Toki		F.C.Pain	R.Op	- Ramage	
- Wilks		W.E.Miller	F/DMT	R.Beasley	
H.B.Strantzen	R.Mech	C.A.Higgs	Med. Ord	- Cameron	
- Bowien		J.Lawrence	R.Mech	D.O'Connor	
- Jones		K.Coughlin	W.T.	W.Andrews	R.Op
- Burgess		N.F.Maine	R.Op	S.Bell	
- Fullagar		K.G.Bird	R.Mech	N.Bridges	
R.Jones	R.Op	R.S.de la Lande	R.Mech	G.Farrell	
O.Jones	R.Op	I.A.Moscript	W.T.	G.Rigger	Guard
G.Farrell	R.Op	J.F.Hudson	Guard	A.Tibbet	R.Op
- Jones		C.Jacobs	R.Mech	G.Grub	R.Op
- McLellan		M.Harms	R.Op	J.Crisp	W.T.
- Walter		R.Sawade	R.Op	A.Baker	W.T.
- Gardner		T.Harvey	R.Op	E.Taylor	W.T.Mech
- Scutts		R.Harris	R.Op	A.Wall	W.T.Mech
- Howell		C.Richardson	R.Op	S.Germaine	
- King		R.Edyvean	R.Op	F.Stubbs	R.Mech
- Gerakiteys		W.Harnath	R.Op	M.Marks	R.Op ?
- Ross		A.Brayne	R.Mech		
R.Richards	R.Op	E.Kelly			
- Moore		J.Brown			
- Ferras		- Darnley			

PERON VICTORY CELEBRATIONS.

Oscar Boyland.

My stint on Peron came very late in the war...on my arrival there, I found that the station was winding down and the number of personnel was starting to dwindle. Leading up to V.P. day, I was indeed a 'Jack of all Trades,' with spells of duty as Orderly Clerk, Medical Orderly, and Canteen Boss. I was not there when the station finally closed down. There would not have been very much left to shift out... nearly everything had been wrecked, including the all important Canteen! I had released the last of the reserve beer supply, and the game was on! They even wrecked the Pool tables in the Rec. Hut. This later became a cause of some regret...they found they still had plenty of time on their hands and no tables! The Boss wasn't the least bit happy about their actions, but as I said..."How would you have stopped it?" So we 'cracked' another bottle of the amber on the strength of that very wise observation.

I was really impressed with the high tides at Peron. At the peak, the water was lapping the top of the low sand dunes....low tide saw the water up to two miles out to sea. This gave us two big advantages - firstly, a marvellous landing strip for lighter aircraft (an Anson usually) and secondly, a very fine cricket field. Incidentally, Peron had quite a good cricket team while I was there, and I remember 61 RS winning two matches against Darwin teams.

Of considerable concern to all Personnel was the prevalence of Death Adders in the camp area. I recall we killed 23 in the immediate vicinity in a span of three weeks. They used to crawl through our tent at night, and I found that by smoothing and levelling the sand floor in the tent and its surrounds, one could track them down next morning, usually in a clump of grass or rubbish nearby. Certainly there was no walking around in bare feet at midnight, or whenever nature called!

Good luck with your Peron enterprise!

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Aboriginal Johnny Toby; Norm Tibbet, R/Mech; Oscar Boyland, R/Op; Kev. Coughlin, W.T; Peter Rolfe, R/Op; Bob Walker, W.T; Tony Baker, (Driver) W.T; and Gil Grub, R/Op.

AN UNCONFIRMED STORY.

Anon.

Group Captain B. Walker, the Commanding Officer of Air Defence Headquarters, (ADHQ) and perhaps more generally known to all as 'Blackjack' Walker, often flew a Wirraway when officially visiting the radar stations of North West Area under his command...he seemed to like the life away from ADHQ.

A story, (still not officially confirmed after fifty years but from a Very Reliable Source) records that 61 Radar received a signal from Darwin one night about 2100 hours - "ETA 2200 hours - light fires." This instruction was carried out.

An aircraft was plotted - heard - and flew over at 2200 hours but did not land. And when the next 'Aggie' landed, the pilot was quizzed for the story.

Apparently 'Blackjack' had been celebrating at the ADHQ Mess, where he bet anyone interested One Hundred Pounds...a small fortune in those days of Service Pay....that he could land on Peron Island that night. The bet was taken up and so he took off from Darwin and set course for Peron. Evidently on the flight over, he wisely decided that discretion was the better part of valour...especially so if the tide was sweeping in, and despite the hundred green ones.

The story even related that he was to prove his arrival by arranging for a special agreed upon signal to be sent from Peron to ADHQ as proof that he had indeed landed.

Which all adds up to quite a good little story.

PERON'S CLOSING DAYS.

Frank Stubbs.

Now to your questions on 61 Radar Peron...Yes, I was there. To the best of my memory, this was my life after leaving Truscott:

I left 154 Radar at Truscott via C47 to Darwin early in September 1945 - then one week later I left Darwin's main strip with 'Doc' Fenton in an Avro Anson to Peron where we landed on the beach. I'm sorry but I've forgotten the name of the mechanic I relieved.

61 Radar continued operating until late October when the station closed down and was dismantled. The station actually returned to Darwin about 5th. November 1945 via a ketch I believe was the YALATA. I think she had been to other radar stations in the area. I personally loaded gear and travelled on the ketch with others while some personnel remained and cleaned up. Afterwards they were flown out by 'Doc' Fenton.

My main memories of Peron are:

The death adders.

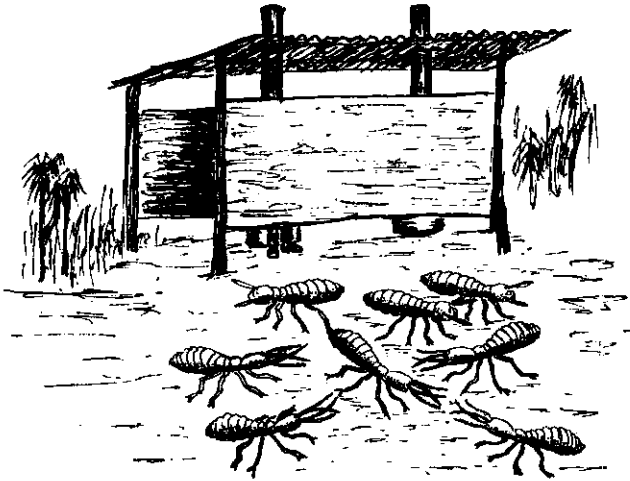
'Doc' Fenton's visits with fresh vegies and film shows in exchange for our fresh geese.

A murder of husband by his wife with our shotgun.

Death of an Aborigine after a bone was pointed at him and the corroboree that followed.

The final dismantling of 61 RS Doover with the help of the local tribe.

After my stint at Peron I was sent to 132 GCI. The station was 'Off Air' and we started to dismantle same, but as no one was in charge and the control room was air-conditioned, we slept all day and spent all night in Darwin at the Pictures etc.



*"Here's the plan fella's! IFF and we let 'im settle.
No IFF and we attack. Any trouble and we call up
the death adders! Right?"*
