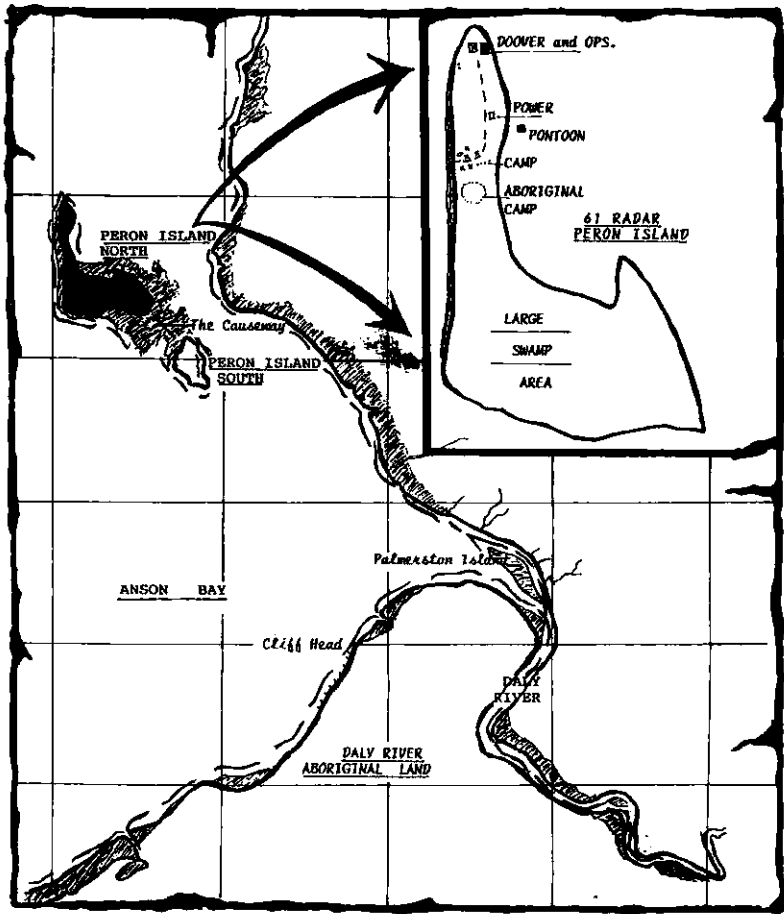


R 8/5/01
(Fenton)

307/61 RADAR PERON ISLAND



Edited by MORRIE FENTON

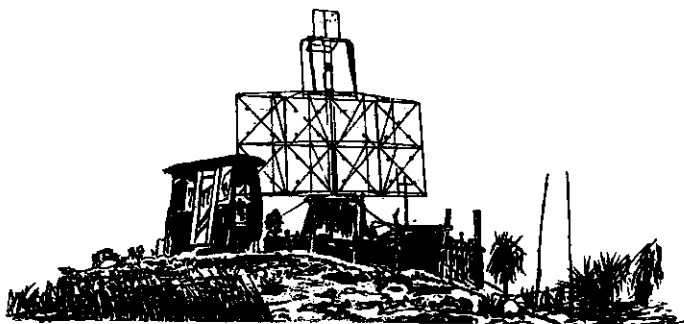
Alan
Regards from
Merric Fenton

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.

ISBN 0 646 29732 5

Edited by Morrie Fenton.

© 1996.

Published by

Morrie Fenton,

(M.E.Fenton)

27 Lasscock Avenue,

LOCKLEYS 5032.

S. AUST.

CONTENTS.

	Page
Acknowledgements	ii
Contents	iii
The Early Explorers	M.Fenton iv
The Daly River	Bro. John Pye M.S.C. v
Sketch...Peron Penthouse	M.Fenton vi
Foreword	W/Cdr. P.G.(Pete) Smith vii
Introducing the LW/AW	Ed. Simmonds 8
The Diary History	M.Fenton 19
My Time on Peron	A.D.Banks 27
The Aboriginal Families on Peron	Owen Jones 30
Sketch...307/61 Doover	M.Fenton 31
Peron Island Recollections	Allan Brayne 32
Peron-itis	Theo Harvey 34
My Recollections of 61 Radar	Ron Richards 36
Peron Island	Jack Bleazard 37
The Peron Island Radar	Jack Baker 38
Peron Portrait	Len Powell 39
Sketch... 'Going on Duty'	Bud Ford 42
61 Radar and Life on Peron	Kev Coughlin 43
Sketch...Peron Pictures	M.Fenton 45
A Few Peron Incidents in '44	Jim Coad 46
Peron Recollections	Bud Ford 47
Memories of Peron	Peter Rolle 49
61 Radar Peron, 1945	Ron Sawade 50
Sketch...Camp Layout 1945	" 56
Personnel List	66
Peron Victory Celebrations	Oscar Boyland 67
An Unconfirmed Story	Anon 68
Peron's Closing Days	Frank Stubbs 68

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)

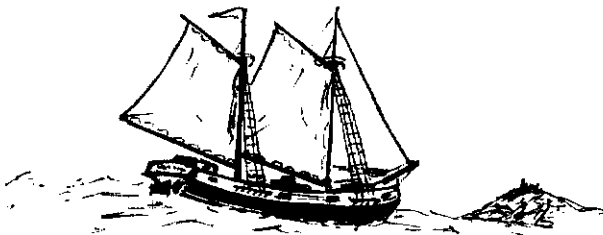
THE EARLY EXPLORERS.

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.

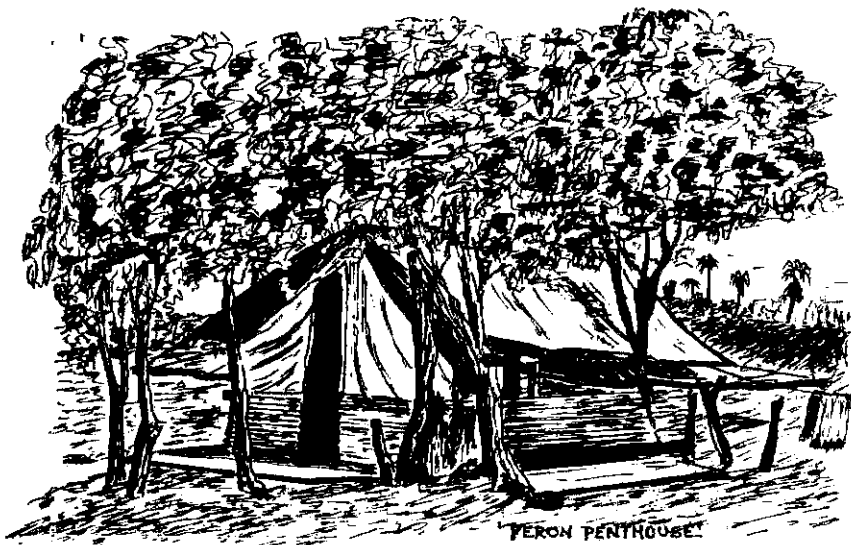
The first settlers in the Daly River area were the Chinese. These people established a ninety acre farm cum vegetables on Peron Island, a delta type island just out from the mouth of the Daly. From here they exported vegetables to Darwin. The farm on Peron Island was abandoned after a few years.

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.

#####

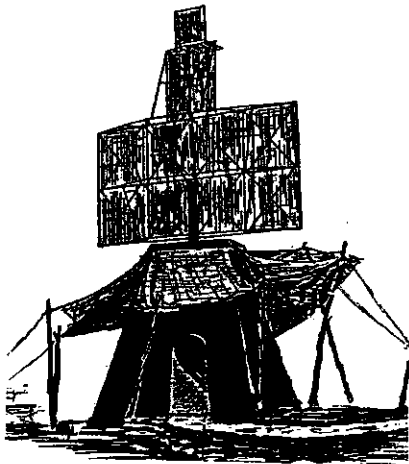
FOREWORD

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



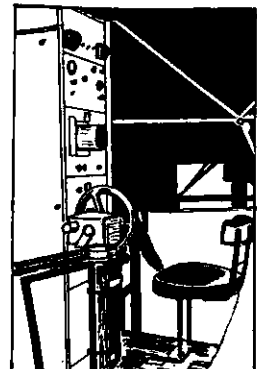
By mid 1942, the Australian Light Weight Air Warning (LW/AW) ground radar programme was getting under way. The design for a portable and light weight Doover with a 4 bay aerial, and with the Australian AW transmitter and receiver all mounted on a revolving platform and turned by hand proved to be highly 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.

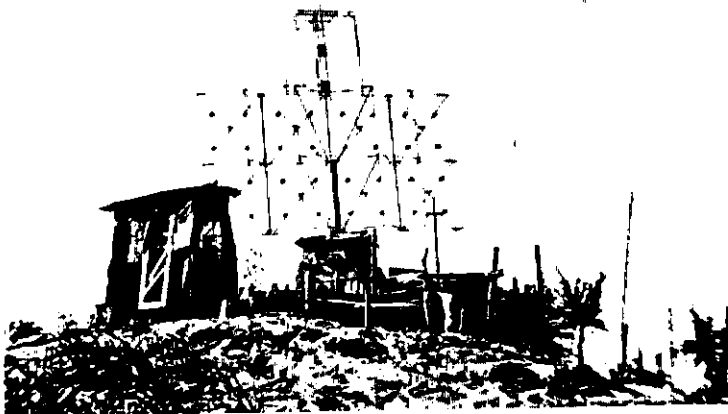
This set the scene when 307 RDF station - and one of the first of the LW/AW's - was formed as an associated station of CAPSTAN, the code name for No. 1 Fighter Wing, being equipped with the new Spitfires. 307 RDF first formed at Mascot, Sydney, in December 1942, and the unit shipped out on New Year's 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.

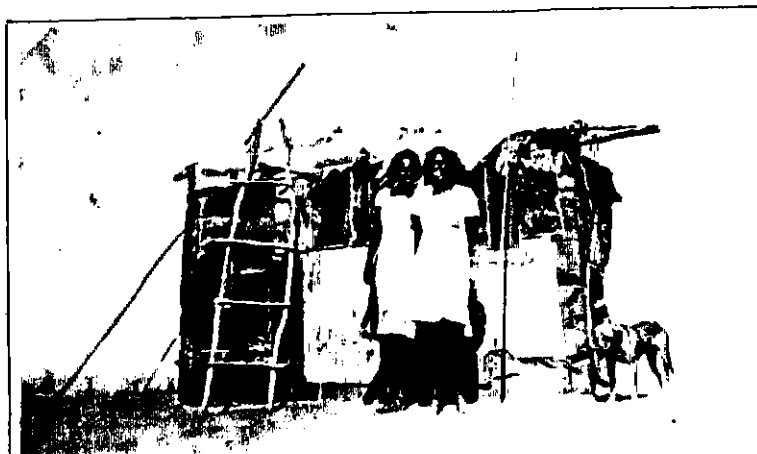
#####





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?

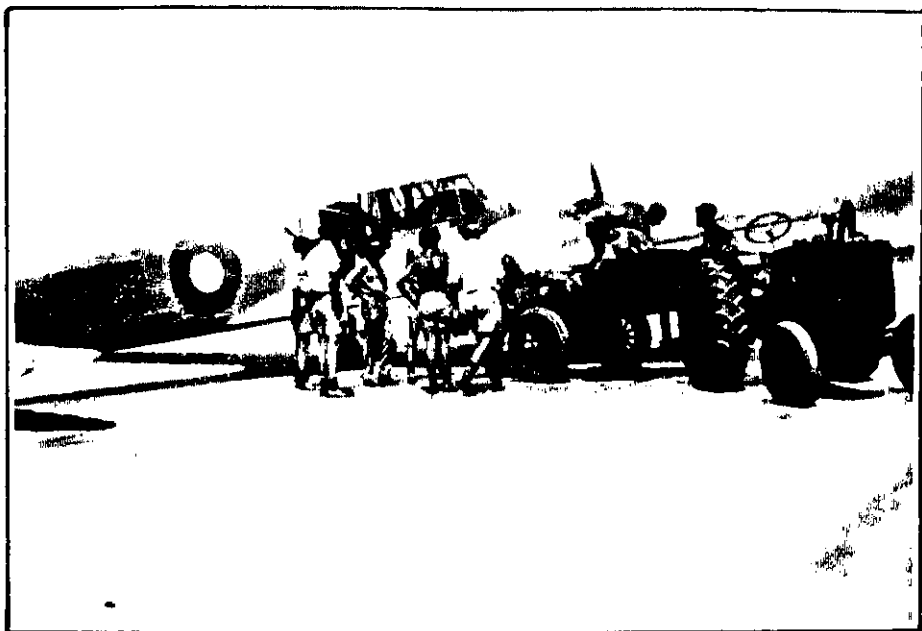




Two of Jim Coad's excellent photographs of the Aborigines on Peron... the top study could possibly be the outstanding study of 'life on the island,' and has been captioned... 'Belles of Peron at Chief Ahcor's residence.' The dog evidently was not impressed.

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





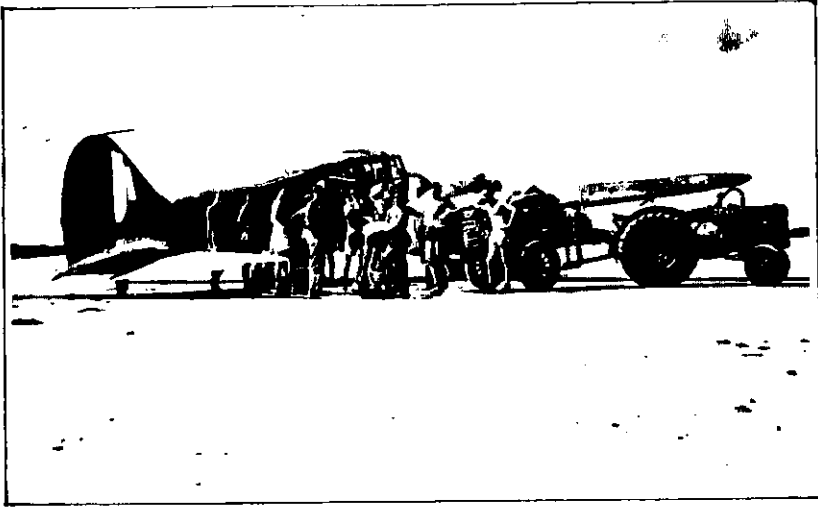
THE PLANES OF 6 COMMUNICATIONS UNIT.

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.

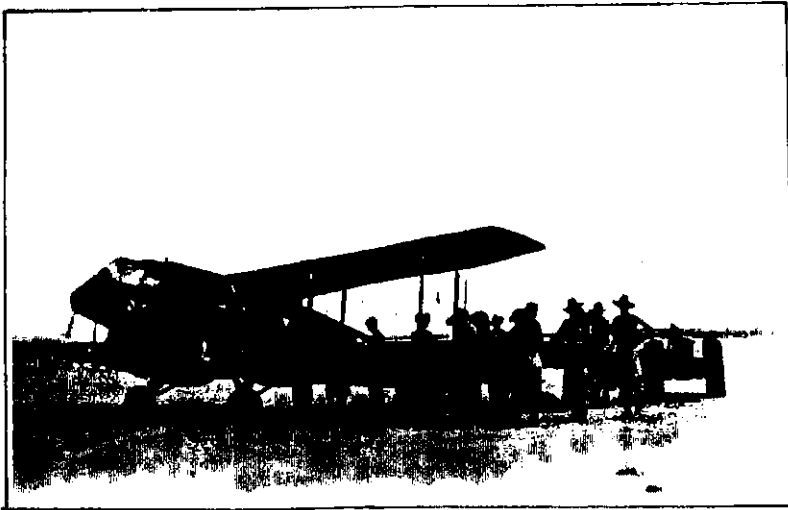
The photograph above shows one of 'Fenton's Flying Freighters' - Anson AX442, being unloaded on Peron's western beach which offered a wide and firm landing beach at low tide. A new arrival, dressed for the occasion in long 'uns, shirt and tie, has alighted and checks his gear onto the trailer, while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

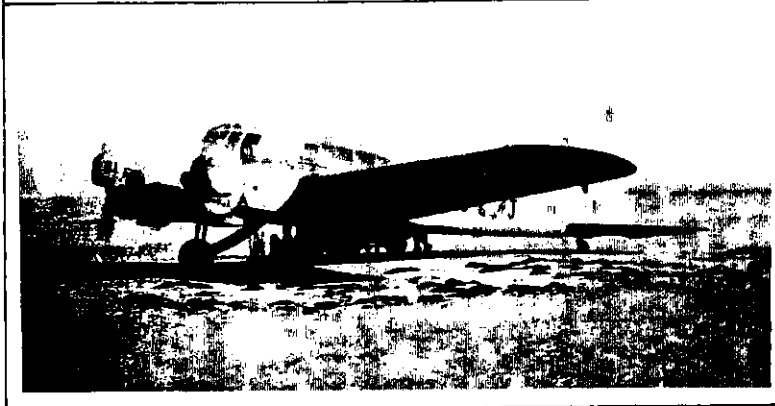
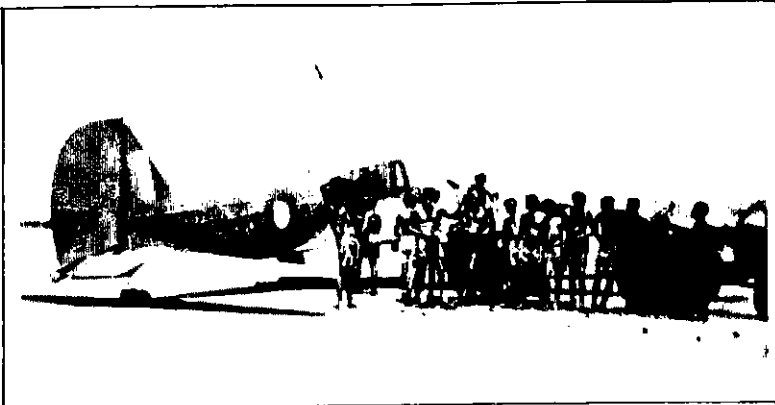


Two excellent photographs of aircraft from 6 Communications Unit on the western beach on Peron...the top photo from Jim Coad and the lower photo from Bud Ford.

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.

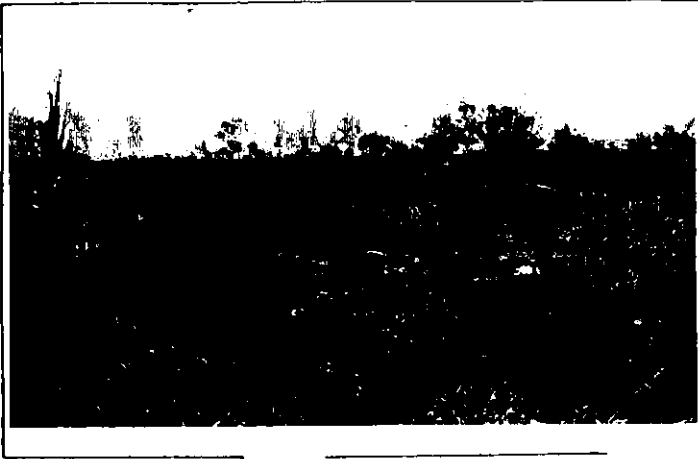
Lower photos..... Some of the island locals with one of the radar crew. — Bringing in a load of firewood.



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 silhouette view of Peron Island, looking 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 Telerradio 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 recones 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.

#####

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.

#####



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.

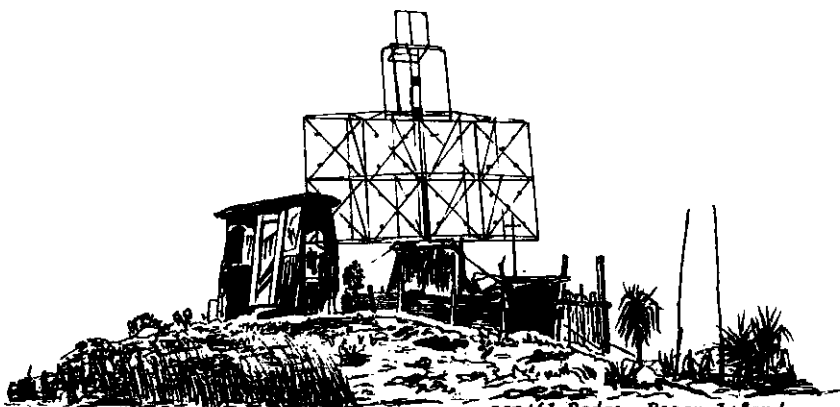
A member of the tribe had been in Melbourne to play Aussie Rules football. Apparently he was not wanted by the club, and he returned to his tribal family out on Peron. He had become something of a 'swell-head,' and was attempting to fool around with any of the native women he desired.

"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 recces. 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.

#####