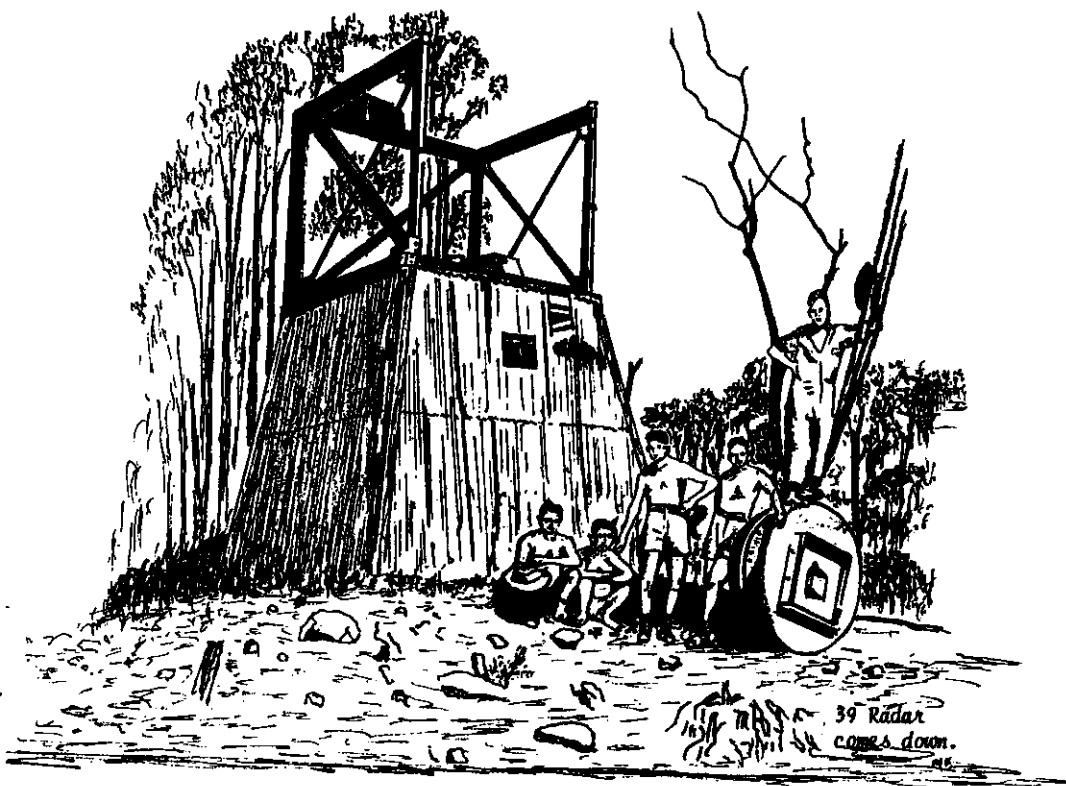


# 39 RADAR

## PORT KEATS.



*Edited by* **MORRIE FENTON**

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*The History and Stories*  
*of*  
**39 RADAR**  
**PORT KEATS.**

A RAAF RADAR STATION  
IN REAL TRIBAL COUNTRY

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*39 Radar filled a key  
defence and offensive  
role in the story of  
wartime Darwin.*

---

*Printed in 1996  
as a companion booklet  
to the story of 38 RS.*

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*Morrie Fenton*

*Edited by* **MORRIE FENTON**

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39 RADAR

PORT KEATS.

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ISBN 0 646 27356 6

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Edited by

Morrie Fenton.

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Published by

Morrie Fenton,

(M.E.Fenton.)

27 Lasscock Ave.,

LOCKLEYS 5032.

S.AUST.

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Books which are recommended for further reading:

38 Radar, Bathurst Island.	(Morrie Fenton and Max Counsell.)
The Port Keats Story.	(Brother John Pye M.S.C.)
Mantracks.	(Ion Idriess.)
Nemarluk.	( " )
The Black Diggers.	(Robert A. Hall.)
Echoes over the Pacific,	(Ed Simmonds and Norm Smith.)

---

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

Having worked at Port Keats with the maintenance party when 39 Radar closed down in October 1945, I have a few quite vivid memories of the place.... of the young Aboriginal workers and their camp at the station ..... of working on the 'blitz buggy' with Gabriel.....the meal we enjoyed at the Mission.....just to name a few. For that reason, it has been a pleasure to compile this booklet.

But it is because of the enthusiasm and the help of those I now acknowledge that this small history has been put together. Without their encouragement and co-operation, this story of 39 RS would have been far less interesting, and their personal contributions certainly bring the story alive.

I am grateful to the following who are all co-authors really.....

Ed. Simmonds	Merv. Harms
Brother John Pye, M.S.C.	John Howell
Arthur Raw	Ian Grayling
Bob Meredith	Ron Richards
Max Grant	Oscar Boyland
Ralph de la Lande	John Beasy
Jim Flaherty	John English
Bill Eacott	Derry Mann
Robert Willison	'The Port Keats Story.' (Bro. John)
Morrie Fenton	'Echoes over the Pacific.' (Ed. Simmonds and Norm Smith.)

I particularly thank Ron Richards and Jim Flaherty for their great interest and personal involvement in the project.

My thanks again to Ed. Simmonds for his knowledge and help freely given at all times.

Also to Wing Commander Pete Smith, Commanding Officer of 3 CRU, Williamtown, whose practical assistance has been much appreciated, not only with this history, but also with other similar projects. Because of W/Cdr. Smith's interest, a Radar Archives and Research Facility has now been established at Williamtown.

Photo Credits....M.Fenton; Arthur Raw; Jim Flaherty; Ralph de la Lande; Ron Richards; Brother John Pye; Max Grant; John Beasy; John English.

Morrie Fenton,  
29/2/96.

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# FOREWORD

It is indeed an honour to be asked to write a Foreword to Morrie Fenton's story of the RAAF Radar station at Port Keats. We, the ex-radar veterans, are indebted to him for his work since he has been one of the most prolific contributors to the collecting of material, the writing and publishing the history of RAAF Radar in WWII which only started eight years ago.

39 RS at Port Keats was one of the strategic stations on mainland Australia, and played a significant part in the defence of North West Area. It would have had an even more important role had the enemy decided to attack on this front. Mount Goodwin is still an excellent radar location, and is used during the annual defence exercises in the region.

In mid 1942 the situation was still somewhat desperate. There was not much equipment available and it was a case of using what was available, such as an old car engine driving the power supply. So 39 RS became a fixed installation using the AW Transportable Tower - more than 12 tons of it had to be manhandled and assembled, like an overgrown meccano set, on an almost inaccessible peak. No bulldozers to form tracks and level the site - no helicopters to lift heavy items - just manpower. The original group quickly learned the meaning of the word 'Ardua' in the RAAF's motto of "Per Ardua ad Astra."

It took months for 39 RS to become operational, whereas a lightweight LW/AW, even on this difficult location, may have taken a week; two at the most. However, the LW/AW had not been developed at the time, which made 39 RS one of the last fixed stations in the VHF Band.

This booklet contains a variety of facts and stories which are to be savoured. I liked the comment by the late John McConnell that the C.O. never ever caught the men on watch 'slacking' when he made a surprise visit. One wonders if he knew about the micro-switch on the rickety ladder which alerted the men if someone put a foot on the said ladder.

To me, there is a clear message that the airmen at 39 RS had the utmost respect for the Murinbata people, for Brother John Pye and for Father Docherty who apart from spiritual support, provided gravel for the roadworks and the airstrip, termite resistant timber from his mill and labour from his Mission. No one can gauge how much time was saved in getting the unit 'on the air' or how this support improved morale on this remote station. Many missionaries helped remote Radar stations, and one wonders whether this invaluable assistance has ever been properly or officially recognised.

Like many other remote Radar stations, friendships which began while on service have endured ever since the war and it is very pleasing to see the camaraderie enjoyed by us old radar codgers at recent re-unions.

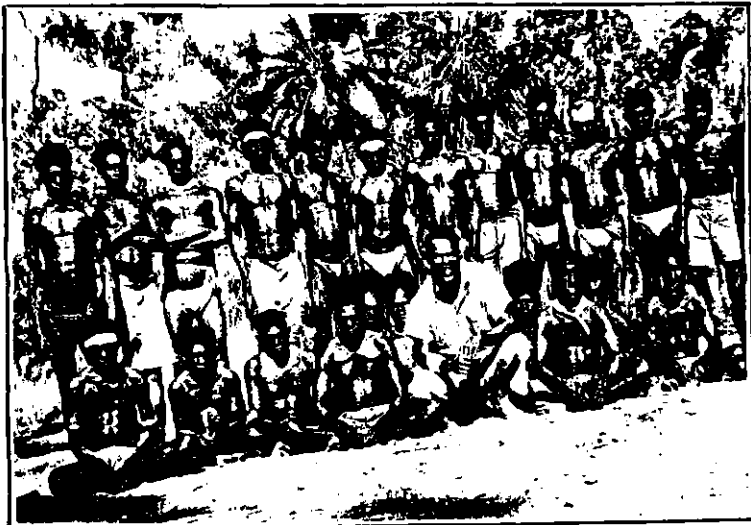
Congratulations and a big thank you to Morrie Fenton and all of the contributors for successfully recounting the events relating to 39 RS at Port Keats, so providing us with yet another chapter in our history.

*Ed Simmonds,  
Banora Point.  
6th. February, 1996.*

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Anson W1941 from 'Doc' Fenton's Communications Flight at the Port Keats airstrip in October 1945. The small Mission church can be seen behind the aircraft wing. DH biplanes were more regular visitors, and during the war planes as large as Dakotas and Mitchells landed on the strip.



Murinbata tribesmen gather at the Port Keats Mission, 1943/44.



## 39 RADAR, PORT KEATS.

The 'twin sister' stations, 38 Radar at Bathurst Island, and 39 Radar at Port Keats, were identical in almost every possible way - they 'formed up' at the same time - July 1942 - at the same place - 31 Radar Dripstone - and with identical equipment - the new Australian AW. The only major difference seems to have been the generating plant, for 38 RS was equipped with a 1926 Auburn engine, whereas 39 RS had a couple of Studebakers.

Both stations suffered similar shortages of gear, parts, fresh rations and supplies of all sorts; and both units set off to their new locations within a few days of each other. Both stations afterwards came to rely on S/Ldr Clyde Fenton and his 6 Communications Flight to supply them with mail, personnel and small items of supplies. And of course both stations relied very much on the goodwill of the local Aboriginal tribes.

Together, the two stations formed a radar chain across the western approaches to the Darwin area - and the story of 38 Radar Bathurst should first be read as so much of that station's early difficulties and struggles also applied to 39 Radar.

Port Keats was named by Captain P. King, R.N. who on a voyage to survey parts of the northern and western coastline of Australia, found himself at Tree Point, the entrance of a deep inlet where he anchored over the next few days while a party went ashore. This was on 5th. September 1819, and Captain King found that the inlet provided sufficient depth for his small vessel, "Mermaid," to anchor, even when the tide fell some twenty feet.

He named the inlet 'PORT KEATS' in honour of Vice Admiral Richard Goodwin Keats - later to become Admiral Sir Richard Goodwin Keats, 1757 - 1834, who, after a long and distinguished Naval career, also served as Governor of Newfoundland and Governor of the Greenwich Hospital.

So Port Keats and Mount Goodwin were named, and remained almost undisturbed until the Catholic Mission was first established there in 1935.

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## IN TRIBAL LANDS.

In the years before war broke out in 1939, the lands around the Port Keats and Anson Bay region had earned for itself a deservedly dangerous reputation as wild tribal country, visited by very few strangers and adventurers, and roamed by savage tribes of Aborigines who were often warring between themselves. And just as fiercely they resisted any incursions by strangers along that lonely coast, white or brown, who sought to land along their beaches, or in the bays and rivers of their lands.

The fearless and warlike efforts of all the tribes between the Daly River, the Fitzmaurice and the Victoria to drive off all invaders of their territories ensured that all who explored the eastern coastline of the Joseph Bonaparte Gulf for any reason - firewood or water or game for food - or whatever - did so only at their own peril, and by exercising the utmost caution; and under no circumstances was that caution ever relaxed - even more so after the killing of three shark-fishing Japanese on the lugger OUIDA in 1933\*, when Nemauluk, probably the fiercest leader of all the Aborigines, and his Red Band of warriors, were able to outwit and kill the intruders, despite the supposedly unequal contest between spears and firearms.

Down on the Fitzmaurice River in about the same period, Tiger and his mob just as savagely killed two prospectors merely to steal their few possessions: that coastline was certainly a place to be avoided....but in 1935 a Catholic Mission Station was established near the entrance to the tidal estuary at Port Keats, and the tiny Church outpost was in 1938 moved further inland to the head of the port. The place was built almost like a fortress, undoubtedly with safety, even self-defence in mind.

But because of the touch of civilization the Church was able to make, Port Keats was one of the first sites chosen in 1942 for a RAAF Radar station when the NWA programme for a chain of stations was planned around the northern coastline. And as at several of the lonely mission stations, a small emergency airstrip had been cleared, with the help of the Aborigines, for the dual role of national defence, and as a safety access precaution for the mission staff.

It has often been said that the tolerance and easy camaraderie between servicemen and Aborigines marked the beginning of recognition of Aboriginal rights which has developed into true land rights and self determination. This has since taken over from the influence of the old church missions and cattle stations and the like.

Today the Port Keats Mission of old is no more, and an Aboriginal township - Wadeye - has sprung up in its place in the Daly River Aboriginal Reserve with all the conveniences of a typical small township, and controlled by the community itself which has its own industries, large and small.... subject of course to the same laws and regulations as are all townships. Violence now seems confined principally to the football field, while the church services pioneered sixty years ago by Father Docherty continue on in a very attractive Aboriginal style church. A road now sweeps to the old WW 2 Radar site, and Mt. Goodwin has featured on TV as the site of modern military exercises, with radar, helicopters and satellite communications. The site of 39 Radar was certainly well chosen back in 1942..... and now to the story of the men and the station.....

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\*From "The Port Keats Story," by Bro. John Pye. Other books quote 1931 or '32.



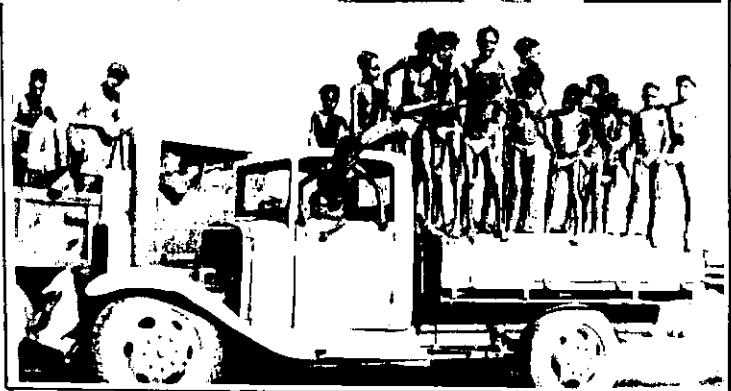
Above and at right.

Father Docherty and Brother John Pye who were at the Mission when the Radar men arrived, and who greatly helped in establishing the station.

At right and below.

The famous old Ford T, with Father Docherty at the wheel. And the Bedford of 1945, which evidently 'took over.'

Father Docherty's 'Lion tamer' hat can just be discerned through the windscreen. The meeting took place as the maintenance party was on its way to the paperbark's swamp.



Brother John Pye with some of his pupils at the Port Keats Mission during the war years.



In 1942, the Mission station at Port Keats featured as the one and only touch of civilization and humanity at the place. Then 39 Radar arrived, and for a few years each was important to the other.

Today the Aboriginal town of Wadeye has grown in place of the Mission, but the original Catholic outpost, established by Father Docherty, marks its true and historical beginning.

Brother John Pye was at the Mission from 1941 to 1943, also from 1970 to 1975, and in that time he has prepared a history - The Port Keats Story - and has given permission for the story below to be printed as extracts from his book.

#### The Story of the P.K. Mission.

Brother John Pye.M.S.C.

Most people, I think I can safely say, have never heard of Port Keats, and many of the minority who have done so, do not know where it is or much about its geographical lay out. Port Keats is about ten miles in length and stretches from Cape Hay and Tree Point on the Timor Sea to Mount Goodwin where the RAAF had a Radar Station during the war years, to the present site. (of the township.)

In the early thirties, we have to keep in mind that this land was unknown to the white man. The sole occupants were the Australian Aborigines. They imported and exported nothing. The Aboriginal is a consumer not a producer. The white man and his world of depression were remote. The land gave this

very primitive man all he needed. The natives of the country regarded it as theirs, and any stranger, regardless of colour, was an intruder.

Now I introduce Nemarluk. The Port Keats story really begins with him. Back in 1932, it was around him, and events connected with him, that brought about the change and breakaway from the Stone Age to the establishment of a Mission, and today a new town, a completely Aboriginal town, with mod cons, shops and recreation facilities. Even the hunting grounds are now a cattle run.

Nemarluk, a Port Keats warrior of giant build 6 feet 2 inches with cat-like movements, was Chief of the Chul-a-mar, Red Band of Killers, Japs and otherwise.

On the Fitzmaurice lived Nemarluk's half-brother, Tiger. True to his name, as coming events prove, Tiger's band was involved in a few murders as late as

1954 and 1961 near the Daly.

Between the Daly River and the Fitzmaurice, the main tribes were and still are Brinkin, Dilek, Chulamak, Chit-i, Cura Chipmun, Pongo Pongo, Muluk Muluk, Wolwanga and Wogait. The language mainly used is Murinbata.

About this time, and following decision by the councils of Nemarluk and Tiger sealed with blood to kill intruders to save their country and get loot, a series of slaughters took place. The main ones were against the Japs; for this they were mostly put in Fannie Bay Jail for long terms. However, when the Japs bombed Darwin the jail gates were thrown open and Judge Wells told them to go back to their country and kill more Japs. Confusing to everyone. I met them the day they arrived back at Port Keats - they had walked all the way back.

**Mission Starts - Port Keats.** (as told by Father Docherty.)

It was in 1933 the killing of the Japanese by Nemarluk and company took place at Injin Beach.

In 1934, says Father Docherty, about mid June, I met Jack Mahony of N.T. Police returning from Port Keats with prisoners. Jack told me of Wadayer Creek, an area surrounded by hills. He advised me to make my first settlement there. (That is the present site.) The same year Bishop Gsell was asked by the Government to begin a Mission at Port Keats. "I" says Father Docherty, "was chosen for the job."

We finally decided to establish our first Mission site and Headquarters on the mainland, east of Injin Beach. Just behind Lounga (Wallaby) Island as it was then called - now it is Docherty Island, on the west side of Port Keats. A safe and adequate boat landing and anchorage was found here. In 1934 I returned to Darwin to make reports and prepare for the beginning of the Mission.

In 1935, all in readiness by June 6th, the ST FRANCIS was loaded with the house and the old model T Ford, and we set off amidst farewell cheers and words of encouragement from Bathurst Island en route for Keats. We arrived at Hyland Bay to the right of Port Keats and anchored there. On 9th. June, feeling like Captain Cook, we sailed into the small creek or waterway between Lounga Island and the new Mission site. It was a sight to remember, hundreds of natives standing on shore staring and talking in their own Murinbata language. All the men had threatening looking spears in their hands.

It took us a few days to unload the boats, and Port Keats Mission had begun. The spear fights were on almost nightly, and I was not greatly worried. If they wanted to kill us, there was nothing we could have done about it.

In three weeks we got the house almost up, but found we did not have enough roofing iron. We closed the gap with the tent sheets and moved into it. We stayed four years at this site, now known as the Old Mission. As the site was considered temporary, we could not put up any worthwhile buildings.

So we decided to go walkabout and find a suitable place for a permanent settlement. We formed two parties: Bro. Quinn took one and I the other. Bro. explored the north; myself the south and east. This was 1936. We still could not decide on a new site. In 1937 I settled on the present site. The first lot of cattle were brought onto the Mission land from Tipperary Station (a gift from Burns Bros.) by Bro. Quinn and his native helpers in 1938. In June 1939 after having the airstrip surveyed and a place found for the boat to come at Alligator landing about a quarter of a mile to the right of the present landing, we began to move to the new location ten miles inland. Paul Bynam, ex Chicago, had the contract to clear the airstrip. After it was cleared, I gave Bro. Quinn - a pint size man with gallons of energy - the job to level and complete it ready for a plane.

The first plane, piloted by Dr. Clyde Fenton, landed at the end of 1939. The next year was spent erecting buildings. We put up a Presbytery. Peter de Hayer from Bathurst came down and built the present Convent. Except for the Presbytery, Convent and a very small church, all other buildings were

of bark: Hospital, Dispensary, Brothers Quarters, Dining Room. Kitchen and School.

Late March 1941 saw the Sisters three. Dionysius, Magdalen and Xavier arrived in the ST. FRANCIS. A new Brother arrived with them....Bro. John Pye.

(Bro. Pye takes up the story of the next three years)

My first sight of Port Keats was two small buildings on a rising almost hidden by mangroves and paperbarks. Next, like Father Docherty, the sight of hundreds of primitive natives with their spears and wearing only loin cloths struck me as very impressive. At that time, I could not believe such a Captain Cook like lot of natives still existed in Australia..

1941 showed great hope for the future, as slow but sure development took shape. Fr., myself and natives built a school, two storey of cypress pine sawn locally. The drome was extended and a taxiway made into the Mission. A boat carrying 10 tons of cargo came every three months. In spite of no refrigeration, fans, planes or films, we did not seem to want for anything, and all were contented in their work. The goodwill of the natives was fast being won. However, 1942 saw the whole picture change. A whole gale hit us in mid February and lasted for a week. We survived the gale only to find the Japs were waiting for it to stop, so they could bomb Darwin. On the 17th. February the ST. FRANCIS skippered by Bro. Smith appeared and stated he had orders to take the Sisters to Darwin immediately. The Sisters as all good Sisters do - obeyed orders. When they entered Darwin harbour, they saw big boats, the Zealandia and Neptuna, standing on end, debris floating by, smoke rising over Darwin, dead and dying everywhere.

The Sisters returned to Port Keats in 1945.

About August 1942 the RAAF arrived by ship. They set up a Radar Station at Mt. Goodwin, three miles from here. They remained until 1945. They were good company, and Fr. Docherty and myself had not seen another white man for quite some time. We held sports meetings with them. Formed a cricket competition. Held concerts. Their outing was to the Mission - ours to the RAAF. Fr. Docherty was a man ahead of his time. On one Christmas Eve, he held a combined service. They sang their hymns, we sang ours.

A few months later, a Mitchell bomber was forced down on the edge of the Moyle plain near Hyland Bay. Sgt. Gough, RAAF, went out in a boat to bring the crew in to the Mission. I went in the Mission's 14 footer to assist. The same day five planes came down. Bad weather and shortage of fuel caused the forced landings. That night about 9 p.m., one was forced to land near Pine Creek. It hit the side of a hill and all were killed.

A later air tragedy to mention is one in 1944 when a Vultee Vengeance coming in to land at the southern end of Port Keats airstrip back-fired and as the petrol tank cap was loose, it caught fire. The pilot bailed out. The passenger was incinerated. The Mission helped out. The wreckage can still be seen at the Port Keats crossing.

Fr. Docherty over the remaining years until his departure from Port Keats established the Faith on a solid basis. Building with Sydney William huts, old Army huts were the main works. Many uses were made of them. White ant resistant, cyclone proof and could be made to any size or shape. The Sydney William huts came mainly from Peron Island at the mouth of the Daly. Some came from Adelaide River.

Fr. Docherty M.S.C. left Port Keats in June 1958.

\*\*\*\*\*

# Missioners Outsmart Native Witchcraft

From NOEL OTTAWAY, a Herald War Correspondent.

**SOMEWHERE IN AUSTRALIA:** — I have just returned from one of the world's loneliest outposts where two missionaries, Father R. Dockerty and Brother John Pye, with some help from the military authorities, have prevented a native tribe from bleeding to death.

The aborigines were the Pacific River people who were surrounded by warlike tribes which systematically raided them, stealing most of the young lubras.

With no babies being born into the tribe, it seemed inevitable that this black community would die out and the process was accelerated by the old men of the tribe who devised laws and superstitions which gave them power over what lubras had escaped their raiders.

The establishment of the mission rapidly reversed the process, although generally the advent of civilisation causes native populations to decline. Babies began to be born again under the peaceful mission regime.

Surrounding tribes sent spies to the mission settlement to ascertain the lie of the land, preparatory to attacking, but spies reported that the tribe was now too well organised and concentrated.

When war came to Australia, military authorities enabled the mission to carry on by guaranteeing it at least basic food supplies.

Catholic fathers established their authority by debunking native magic, formulated by aboriginal sorcerers, by ridiculing the totem superstition that it was death for

lubras to see a bull-roarer and by breaking publicly spears of native trouble-makers who were disposed to defy them.

The breaking of spears, especially before lubras, is a great disgrace which causes the native to lose face in the tribe.

These natives are also great talkers and missionaries assured the maintenance of their ascen-

dancy by out-talking the greatest of the tribe's talkers in public.

"We learned to beat the trouble-makers in eloquence," Father Dockerty declared. "We didn't give them an opportunity to speak, and we talked them out in front of the women; but we had to keep straight faces. If the natives see a twinkle in your eye, the whole case is lost."

## LAUGH AT DEATH-MAGIC

Missionaries then had to undertake an uphill task of eradicating witchcraft from native consciousness.

Several deaths due to non-physical causes were traced to suggestion based on supernatural myths. The missionaries began working by contra-suggestion, firstly by publicly laughing at persons who had made the suggestions, next by removing persons convinced they were victims of magic practised by their enemies from camp areas to new surroundings.

The mission's greatest problem is obtaining cloth supplies since rationing was introduced. Although the natives wear only "maja" (loin-cloth) they have developed modesty since the advent of the missionaries.

When supplies of cloth were tem-

porarily exhausted, male natives preferred to "go bush" rather than continue at mission without a maja.

The outbreak of the war caused great excitement among the natives who, through sad experience with marauding pearlers, realise the ruthlessness of the Japanese.

In the past when lubras have borne half-caste children to Japanese pearlers who kidnapped them, they have covered the babies with charcoal in the vain hope that the pale skin will turn black.

Natives eagerly crowd around the mission wireless to hear the war news, which is explained by the missionaries, but they are politely incredulous of the statements that bombs can be carried by aeroplanes and dropped on villages causing great damage.

PORT KEATS — 1943.

Arthur Raw.

Arthur Raw was one of the early Operators at Keats, and for more than 50 years he has kept this cutting which must have originated after the visit to the station of the two journalists-cum-war-correspondents on the SOUTHERN CROSS recorded in the Diary for May 1943.

Arthur was one of the keen cricketers who slaved with other devotees of the Royal and Ancient Game to prepare a pitch of ant hill material down on the strip where many a minor Test Match was then desperately fought out. There were Operators v. Guards...S.Aust. v. Victoria...or any other contest of gladiators that could be conjured up. Long stop was the critical fielding position and the key to the match, for if the ball escaped into the bush, the batsmen could easily run a dozen before running out of puff. Father Docherty and Brother John were Honorary Members of the Association and acted as Patrons, 12th. man or whatever.

Cricket was always THE favoured sport at Radar stations, for the ACF could supply bats, and ball, and stumps pretty easily, and two teams could usually be conscripted, especially when kitchen duties were offered by the Sergeant as the alternative.

#####

PERSONNEL.

The names of Personnel known or thought to have been posted to 39 Radar at Port Keats have been printed in 3 lists...the first list when the station formed (unfortunately with no record of Radar Operators):- the second when the station was taken over by 44 RDF Wing:- the third list is comprised of all other names thought to have been associated with the station, from memory and photos, the A50 Diary and the like. The record must be considered 'incomplete,' possibly incorrect in a few instances. They are produced 'as the best possible.'  
The first two lists came from RAAF Personnel Records.

List 1. (Formation.)

F/O L.E.Radcliffe. Commanding Officer.

Williamson.	T.	Steward.	Taylor.	S.	Clerk Gen.
Willison.	R.	Cook.	Lazarus.	J.	Radio Mech.
Jacobs.	L.	Guard.	Bowering.	B.	W'less Mech.
Castle.	C.	"	Amos.	J.	W/T Operator.
Bryant.	E.	"	Brown.	W.	Med. Ord.
Smith.	L.	"	Browne.	L.	Fitter 2E.
Clement.	D.	"	Blackney.	E.	Aircrafthand.
Timmis.	A.	"	Mead.	B.	Guard.
Duffey.	A.	Phone Op.	Robb.	L.	Cook.
Heinrich.	W.	"	Robertson.	G.	Radio Mech.
			Hammond.	J.	Cook.

#####

List 2. (R.D.F. Wing.)

F/O L.E.Radcliffe. Commanding Officer.

Bridgeman.	A.	Fitter DMT.	Allen.	A.	RDF Mechanic.
Starkey.	E.	Fitter 2E.	Edsall.	J.	"
Wood.	M.	"	Kenny.	J.	"
Hanckel.	W.	W.O.M.	Lazarus.	J.	"
Watts.	L.	"	Reid.	H.	"
Amos.	H.	"	Marks.	A.	RDF Operator.
Gaze.	W.	"	Frith.	B.	"
Schonfelder.	E.	Telegraphist.	Gorton.	R.	"
Hamilton.	J.	Clerk Stores.	Grant.	O.	"
Tulk.	R.	Cook.	Kloeden.	P.	"
Probert.	C.	Driver M.T.	Mouat.	G.	"
Roberts.	A.	Med. Orderly.	Newell.	W.	"
Cole.	P.	Clerk.	Raw.	A.	"
Campbell.	R.	Aircrafthand.	Russell.	R.	"
Smith.	A.	Messman.	Wall.	J.	"
McGill.	G.	Mess Steward.	Walton.	J.	"
Bowering.	D.	W.O.M.			

#####



PERSONNEL.

List 3. (From various sources.)

Commanding Officers.

P/O L.E.Radclyffe. 25/6/42.  
F/O E.J.Bass. 14/5/43.  
F/O C.S.Worboys. 29/5/44.  
F/Lt. R.W.McCosker. 12/10/44.  
F/O A.Harris. 11/12/44.  
F/O H.E.Orriss. 14/5/45.

Admin. Officers.

P/O Bacon.  
F/O H.Fenton. 8/43.

Sergeants.

Sgt. Gough.  
Sgt. Fisher.  
Sgt. Parkin. Guard Commander.  
Sgt. Cameron. W.O.M.  
Sgt. Meyer. E.  
Sgt. Coyne. P.J. R/Mech.  
Sgt. O'Farrell.  
Sgt. Watts. W.O.M.  
Sgt. Holder. Guard Commander.  
Sgt. Mayo. Med. Orderly.  
Sgt. Smith. W. Clerk.  
Sgt. Dodd. Guard Commander.  
Sgt. Smith. M.F.

Radar.

Bowes. C.L.  
Dodds. J.  
Young. R. Fulman. L.  
Brown. N. Whittaker. M.  
Taynton. M. Toope. A.  
Harms. M. Delamere. R.  
Eacott. W. McCarroll. -  
Flaherty. J. Deuble. R.  
Smith. W. McConnell. J.  
Boyland. O. Bushby. J.  
Richards. R. Macdonald K.  
Seward. R. McKernon J.  
Grayling. I.  
Mann. D.  
Day. G.  
Ross.  
de la Lande. R.  
Hingston. V.  
Howell. J.  
Bartley. J.  
English. J.  
Coe. E.  
Parkes. S.  
Sparkes. J.  
Ayres. J.  
Foreman. L.  
Campbell. T.  
Mills. H.  
Segal. S.  
Edyvean. R.  
Killorn. R.

Mess.

Coffey. M.  
Murray. D.  
Quayle.  
Wright. E.

Fitter DMT.

McNaughty.  
Wadell. M.

W/T.

Collier.  
Watkins. W.  
Lapthorne. J.  
Cook. D.  
Thorburn. J.  
Kelly.

Medical.

Campbell.  
McDonald.

Clerk.

Hennessy. J.

PERSONNEL. (Continued.)

List 3. (From various sources, Diary, photos, letters, memory etc.)

Guards.

The Guards Detachment formed a most important element within all radar stations, and under the control of their trained NCO 's in charge, were responsible for the security of the stations, as well as contributing to the everyday life and station routine. At 39 Radar, up to 20 Guards were attached in the station's early days, finally reducing to about 7. More than 50 men must have formed part of this detachment. The names following are only a few of the total, but are the only known men of the detachment.

Meredith.	R.	Quealy.	Thompson.
Lane.	J.	Pascoe.	Morgan.
Bateman.	L.	Donaldson.	Robinson.
Paynter.	C.	Ashby.	Watson.
Reed.	M.	Zarb.	McQuade.

Unclassified. (Mustering not known)

Monger.	H.	Wellstead.	Meyer.
Mont.	G.	Jacques.	Steer.
Ferguson.	E.A.	Findlayson.	Darling.
Phillips.	W.A.	Wall.	Whiting.
Davey.	S.	Cox.	Saker.
Murray.	J.	Fillmore.	Wand.
Ensalt.	W.	Starkey. E. Dresel <sup>17/24</sup>	Greer.
Watkins.	W.	Cliff.	Quirk. E R.Op.
Bleazard.	J.	Cole.	Watso.
Simmonds.	A. R.Op.	Nuft.	Giddins.

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*In 1993, Bob Meredith received three letters from Robert Willison, who had been one of the 'Originals' of Port Keats station to form up at 31 Radar Dripstone before setting off down the coast to the site of the new station. The following small excerpt from the letters is intended as a tribute to those first men of 39 RS.*

FROM ONE OF THE "ORIGINALS" OF KEATS.

R. Willison.

Nightcliff radar was operating when a team of us formed to erect and operate Port Keats radar. It took approximately 3 weeks to bring everything together and then embark on the flat bottom ship HMAS YAMPI LASS (14 of us) - no lifebelts - no dinghy - one tip truck. One machine gun could not be found. As we were about 6 days on the trip, we were under the stars every night. Incidentally, I was LAC cook, and P/O Radclyffe was Officer in Charge. The most capable and amiable man you could ever meet.

\*\*\*\*\*



Above and at right.

Two excellent photos from Brother John Pye,  
but unfortunately no names have been recorded.



At left.

Ron Richards, Des Murray, Des Cook,  
Neville Brown.

Lower left.

Harry Monger, Bill Smith, Oscar Boyland,  
Ron Richards.

Below.

max Kenyon - Bob Burke Ray Pi  
Bill Watkins, 'Blondie' Dodds, Charles  
Paynter, John English and centre,  
Jim Flaherty. Then Bill Eacott and  
'Doc' Campbell.

The photo is endorsed... 'And the best  
looker took the photo!' 1944.



THE DIARY HISTORY OF 39 RADAR, PORT KEATS. Morrie Fenton.

By mid 1942, the RAAF ground Radar programme was gaining just a little momentum, though still very much in its early stages and without its own independent radar control. At Darwin, 31 RS was operating successfully at Dripstone, and had already proved its effectiveness and efficiency, reporting its plots to a Fighter Sector apparently operating in a tent! Two MAWD stations, 105RS and 109RS, modified from American gunlaying equipment, had also been set up at Point Charles and Nightcliffe, and as 44 RDF Wing had yet to be formed and commence its work, the stations came under the direct control of NWA Headquarters and a Radio\* Officer, an arrangement which inevitably resulted in misinformation, delays and inefficiencies...i.e. 'out of sight meant out of mind.'

Nevertheless, on June 25th. 1942, two new early warning stations began to form up at 31 RS Dripstone where the personnel were billeted while men, stores and gear arrived for the new stations. 38 Radio\* station, and 39 Radio\* station (as the stations were then called) gathered together whatever equipment they could lawfully (or unofficially) request, requisition or 'find,' and the two crews gradually gathered, waiting anxiously for their new AW gear to arrive from the south. These two 'sister' stations were intended to form an interlinking, effective radar barrier from their new locations to cover the western approaches to Darwin.

The first 'advance' party of 38 RS men left for Bathurst Island on August 14th., and their eventful and fascinating story has been told in their own history, and in the book 'Adventures in Radar' by Hal Porter. Meanwhile, Pilot Officer L.E.Radclyffe had been appointed to command 39 Radio Station, and he arrived on 19th. July at Dripstone where the 20 men of his new station were awaiting arrival of the station equipment and stores - and for their next movement orders.

On 11th. August, the steelwork of the mast and tower arrived - and 4 days later P/O Radclyffe and his advance party of 2 Corporals and 11 aircraftsmen set off down the southwest coast from Darwin in HMAS YAMPI LASS bound for Port Keats. F/Lt. Hannam, the Area Radio Officer from NWA H/Q accompanied the party which also had a 30 Cwt. Chev. truck on board to use as the unit transport.

Two days later, the party went ashore at Port Keats and set up a temporary camp at the Catholic Mission which was only a short distance inland from the landing point at the head of the port inlet.

Over the next few days, two small Navy supply craft, TOLGA and TERKA brought equipment and personnel from Darwin to Port Keats, and the Transmitter and Receiver would certainly have been the essential part of the equipment received. Meanwhile, the men at the temporary camp began to extend the landing strip along the flat ground next to the Mission, and also improved

the track from the river landing to the Mission buildings. The already overworked Chev. truck was fully employed moving stores and gear to the chosen camp site some 3½ miles north of the Mission, while preparations were made to lift the Radar gear to the Doover site on the flat top of Mt. Goodwin - a major task in itself. The construction of the Doover was commenced on 23rd. September.

A narrow track, just wide enough for a vehicle, was prepared for the first part of the lift, and this involved the clearing and levelling of a steep

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\* Until February 1943, the units were called Radio Stations - then Radio Direction Finding, or RDF Stations. The term 'Radar' was adopted in September '43, and 'Radar' is used in general terms throughout the story.

path around the southern almost sheer side of the hill. From this vantage point the equipment was lifted by block and tackle, or on a cable, to the top where construction of the standard AW tower was commenced. Quicker - but even more hair-raising access for personnel was provided by climbing a perpendicular ladder from the sloping path above the camp area up to the top - a climb which demanded total concentration! AWT hut and Mechanics' hut were eventually built close by as improvements were made and more equipment became available.

P/O Bacon arrived at this busy time to assist the C.O. as Second-in-command of 39 RS, and to act as Administration Officer, and a party of 'base-wallah' visitors from H/Q also came ashore to inspect camp conditions and hygiene etc. The party included the Principal Medical Officer, S/Ldr. Laver, the Area Dental Officer, F/Lt. Brunner and P/O Blumenthal who as Assistant Radio Officer would undoubtedly been 'on the job' back in Darwin by gathering in all and sundry equipment he could beg, borrow or even scrounge for the two new Radar stations.

F/Lt. Clyde (Doc) Fenton, arrived by Tiger Moth to make his first RAAF visit on 28th. September - his passenger being F/Lt. Hannam the Area Radio Officer who might well have arranged the visit. This would have occurred when the much respected and renowned 6 Communications Unit was first being formed at Manbulloo, for December 1942 seems to be the generally accepted date when the unit formed.

At the end of September, the 39 RS Diary showed a total complement of 40 men. F/Lt. Fenton Called again on 8th. October, and HMAS SOUTHERN CROSS arrived two days later on a brief call while more supplies and equipment were dropped off. And P/O Bacon evidently was recalled to Darwin about then, for he left that afternoon when the ship sailed.

On October 25th., 'Doc' Fenton called yet again...this time Wing Commander Pither, the Director of Radio Services (who in effect was a one man commander of all radar services and programmes was his passenger. W/Cdr. Pither proved a tireless leader in the early days of Australian Radar, and there would scarcely be an early station anywhere in the country that did not receive a visit from him to check on the work progress - and more importantly his visits kept the H/Q Officers 'on the job' as far as watching the interest of each new station. No doubt the work at Port Keats was very much under scrutiny after the poor H/Q effort for 38 RS out on Bathurst. Two days later, Doc Fenton flew in yet again, this time in a larger Avro Anson he had acquired so that he could fly out Corporal Wellstead to 1 MRS.

The PAT CAM arrived again on the last day of October, this time to deliver the generators and motors for the station - two Studebaker units - and with these duly installed, tested and running, the station was almost ready for service.

December 1942 began with another check-up visit from F/Lt. Hannam...Bathurst Radar was now 'On the Air,' and doubtless NWA H/Q was anxious to have the western radar cover for the Darwin Area operating as efficiently as possible. The first W/T Schedule with 5 FS was successfully carried out, and with everything ready, a bout of illness struck the station - two men were flown out by DH 84 - but none the less, the station commenced operating on 23rd. December, and 39 RS at Port Keats was 'On Air' at last.

The complement of the station was now about 35, but additionally there were 7 guards, also a Medical Orderly had been attached, and 8 men from Area Works were on the station to help establish a camp water supply, and probably to assist with the camp progress - the Mess, Orderly Room, the roads and the like.

January 1943.

After some 5 months of gruelling hard labour (and much of it in the enervating heat of the wet season) 39 RS seemed settled at last for a more regular life, improving the quarters and sorting out the inevitable gremlins in the gear, but on New Year's Day the unexpected happened when a party of NEI fugitives arrived by lugger and were brought up to the Mission by Aborigines. A party of guards from 39 RS took their vessel in charge and placed the party under guard until the SOUTHERN CROSS arrived to take the refugees on to Darwin.

Doc Fenton's 6 Communications Flight was now operating a service to the outlying stations, and DH 84's and Ansons began calling fairly regularly to deliver stores, mail and personnel - a RAAF service which must have also been a great advantage for the Mission folk at what was previously a very isolated outpost.

On the last day of January, a Dutch Mitchell bomber, N5.138, landed because of fuel shortage after first dropping its bombs in the estuary, and a second Dutch Mitchell crash-landed in the bush about 20 miles from the station. February 1943.

A Hudson from 2 Squadron, and a Wirraway from 12 Squadron located the crashed aircraft on the first days this month. The Wirraway then flew Sgt. Gough over the downed plane to calculate the site bearing, and to see its position, and after food and mosquito nets had been dropped, Sgt. Gough set off in the Mission launch with a party of airmen to locate the wrecked plane and crew. On February 3rd., Wirraway A20-488 of 12 Squadron made a recce flight to check on the rescue team and its progress - all was evidently going well, for the plane afterwards departed for Darwin, but was forced to return because of adverse weather conditions and engine trouble - possibly the first caused the second, for this seems to have been quickly rectified the next day when S.Ldr. McDonald, the C.O. of 12 Squadron arrived probably with a fitter as his passenger, and both aircraft were able to fly out that afternoon.

At midnight, the rescue team arrived back at the camp with the crew of Mitchell N5.139, all of whom had escaped injury. A Hudson from 13 Squadron arrived on the 6th. and flew out the entire crew.

Two 13 Squadron Hudsons flew in on the 8th. with a detachment of guards and 4 Vickers guns, intended as the principal defence of the station, and the guards who were being replaced departed on the same aircraft.

On the 15th., LAC Findlayson and Brother John Pye set off in the Mission launch to recover a parachute and water bottles dropped near Tree Point, the northern point of land marking the northern entrance of the port inlet. Evidently this was near the crash site. They returned at midnight the following day. And a special Wirraway delivery on the 24th. brought a supply of sugar and other stores in short supply - similar shortages were a continuing problem at the early Radar stations, but few received an Air Mail delivery!

Calibration of the AW equipment was carried out and checked over a period of days at the end of the month when a 2 Squadron Hudson arrived with a party of officers from H/Q, some checking the radar gear, and others looking to the W/T gear, while a Pay Sergeant with them attended to the problem of the cash shortage among station personnel. (perhaps the station poker champ was stockpiling!)

The unit strength at this time was...37 men plus 1 Medical Orderly attached, 21 guards and 2 men from a works unit who were drilling and digging out a well in the hope of establishing a convenient camp water supply.

March 1943.

Doc Fenton's DH 84 (Dragon) aircraft were now arriving fairly frequently with

mail and supplies (6 Communications Flight was officially operating from December) and several airmen were flown back to Darwin for medical or dental attention. The calibration checking of the radar gear was completed by the 7th., then rain began to fall and continue to fall so that by the 10th. the road to the Mission and the landing strip had become impassable. So the Mission transport operated on one side, and the RAAF transport met it on the other side of the swamp, and a team of willing Aborigines acted as carriers between the two.

*( A feature of the early days at 39 RS was the willing help and assistance given by Father Docherty and the Mission Aborigines in making the roads and helping in every possible way to advance the work of establishing the station.)*

On the 12th., a DH flew in with replacement personnel, but those who had been posted out were unable to leave as the station had not been advised of the ETA of the plane, and so did not have sufficient time to pack and check out - the pilot did not wait around. Two Naval vessels entered the port on the same day - stores vessel HMAS DEFENDER, and corvette HMAS CASTLE-MAINE - and a considerable amount of stores and supplies were unloaded including a badly needed tractor and a new generator motor. Unloading was completed by the 13th., but as no reply had been received to a signal requesting permission for the posted personnel to leave on the ships, the Navy departed without passengers. Meanwhile, back at the landing strip, those stories concerning the navigational skills of our Allied pilots seem to have been borne out, for a lost American transport plane had landed, seeking directions. No doubt someone pointed the way to Darwin...and the aircraft promptly took off again!

On the 15th., the battery charger for the W/T gear became U/S and operating hours were restricted; but all was well again by the 20th. when the generator was repaired and a spare generating unit arrived by air. The full 24 hour watch was promptly resumed.

April 1943.

39 RDF station was now well established, though still lacking a reliable water supply close by. An impressive party of officers from H/Q arrived by Hudson on the 5th., the SASO Group Captain Sims being the heavyweight of the group; but all must have been considered satisfactory, for the party happily went on its way again that afternoon.

The power supply broke down on the 7th., and the decision was made to operate only in an emergency. The Ford V8 power unit was now installed and was operating by the 10th., but on the 13th., while carting water to the engine room, the Chev. truck ran off the edge of the road and tipped over on its side. Fortunately, AC1 Cox the driver was not hurt; and the transport unit was found to be not badly damaged and was still serviceable once it was righted.

On the 19th., an Aborigine reported a suspicious aircraft, and 10 FS and AIROPS were informed by signal. Sgt. Gough, who seems to have been the station troubleshooter, set off with a small party to investigate. He returned the following day weighed down with a belly tank, apparently from a foreign plane. Further enquiries appeared to confirm that the suspicious aircraft was indeed a Hudson...but the tank of more dubious origin was despatched to Darwin for examination.

A sick Aboriginal child and a companion were flown out on the 25th... the airstrip must have been considered a great asset at such times...then on the 27th. Group Captain Wiggins arrived with a couple of supporting Wing Commanders. And on the 29th. Sgt. Gough located the door of a crashed Hudson, after the 'strange' object had been reported by an Aborigine.

And at the end of April the unit strength totalled 32, plus a guard detachment of 20, plus the 2 aircraftsmen from 3 MWS who were still hard at work digging that well!

May 1943.

Early in the month the calibration of the gear was checked again when several testing flights were made by an Anson - also a Colonel Cannon arrived to check the defence and camouflage precautions of the station and the camp. Sgt. Gough and his party returned after inspecting the crashed Hudson - and SOUTHERN CROSS arrived with stores and equipment. Two war correspondents who travelled down with the vessel spent two days on shore before the vessel left again, after having unloaded a second V8 generating unit which must have been promptly installed, for the two original Studebakers were then backloaded.

On the 14th., P/O Bass took over as Commanding Officer from F/O Radclyffe, who very deservedly had received promotion while at Port Keats; then the station routine proceeded quietly until the end of the month when a Hudson flew in on the 30th. On board was the AOC NWA, Air Commodore Bladen, CBE, with a supporting party which included F/Lt. Abbott, the Area RDF Officer. After the AOC had inspected all sections (presumably including the two well sinkers still busily employed) the party enjoyed lunch, then made a visit to the Port Keats Mission, also inspecting the wharf facilities at the head of the inlet where the stores vessels unloaded.

The VIP Hudson departed at 15.35 hours

Perhaps as the sequel to the tour, P/O Bass received advice of his promotion to F/O on the following day.

June 1943.

The station Diary entries are certainly worthy of note for this month, as for the first time a record of plots was logged, almost as a daily ritual. The Diary also indicates that the plots, and those from May through for several months following, were passed to '10 Mobile Fighter Sector,'...but where this was located is not clear, other than the note of our historian that both Darwin and Sattler were the locations. A possible suggestion is that the Darwin plots were so many at this period that 10 FS handled some of the work previously passed to 5 FS, perhaps for the air strips 'down the road'...but that is speculation only.

During June, 1258 plots were passed to 10 FS which included a series of plots on enemy aircraft approaching Darwin on the 28th. at a range of 160 miles when Vestseys was bombed, and a 'Bogey' again on the 30th. at a range of 127 miles when Fenton field was attacked. This attacking force was plotted out again to a range of 148 miles, an extremely good result, and these recorded actions indicate that the station was performing extremely well, as several plots were well in excess of 100 miles - 165 miles being the best. The Diary also indicates that a supply route from Batchelor (6 Communications Flight) to Wyndham was established as a regular flight several times each month.

39 RDF station was certainly proving itself!

Earlier in June, two Liberator bombers had circled the small airstrip when two DH's had approached to make their landings - and on the 16th. two sick airmen were flown out from Port Keats for admission to 1 MRS, with a third on the 18th., which suggests a possible dysentery outbreak.

Activities during June are listed as Welfare - training - camp and road construction - and of course well digging.

Personnel on strength at the station had remained fairly constant for several months..32 station..20 guards.. and 2 works.



July 1943.

The Diary records that on the 6th., enemy aircraft were detected at 158 miles, bearing 328° at 1044 hours - and after attacking Fenton field, their homeward track was followed out to a range of 114 miles: 163 plots were passed by 39 RS during the raid. A few plots on enemy aircraft over Darwin were also picked up on 18th. July.

Just before mid-day on the day following, a loud explosion was heard from the Hyland Bay area, and this was followed by dense black smoke. Aircraft were heard and tracked over the same area that afternoon, but no detail of any action was received.

S/Ldr. Galvin, C.O. of 10 Mobile Fighter Sector, and Mr. Edwards of the Operational Research Group arrived on the 23rd. and when their aircraft departed later that afternoon Sgt. Gough was also on board for admission to IMRS with an injured leg - also an Aboriginal family of suspect malaria cases was flown out.

A fresh detachment of 22 guards arrived by steamer on 24th. July - also a pay clerk - and cargo unloading continued for 4 days.

Several improvements to the camp were carried out during the month - shelves and tables were built in the orderly room and duly installed, and a motor transport workshop was constructed - a necessity for every Fitter DMT trying to do a good job.

842 aircraft plots were passed to Fighter Sector during the month.

August 1943.

Flying Officer H.L.Fenton arrived to take up his appointment as Administration Officer on the 11th., but August proved a quiet month until the 13th. when enemy aircraft were again detected just before 2100 hours. These were plotted in 2 waves at 91 miles and 102 miles, and appeared to be heading towards Fenton Field. Their outward course was tracked just after midnight after Fenton had been attacked, and the aircraft were tracked to 107 miles. Enemy aircraft were again detected on the 21st. in the early hours of the dogwatch when Fenton and Coomalie were attacked. They were picked up at 126 miles and 2 hours later were tracked out to 116 miles.

A total of 1097 plots were passed to Fighter Sector this month...and improve camp conditions saw new sick-quarters almost completed, a badly needed facility at isolated stations like 39 RS. Also improvements to the road continued to make satisfactory progress in an attempt to overcome the difficulties experienced in the previous wet season.

The station complement this month is shown as 2 officers and 48 men, which probably included about 20 guards.

September 1943.

An unusual visiting aircraft is noted in a Diary entry on the 10th.....

"A17-495 Tiger - American markings - landed 1000 hours to re-fuel - 8 gallons 73 oct.- departed 1130 hours." (One has to wonder if the fuel bill was ever paid!)

The Diary mentions a camp concert for the first time on the 11th., but talent details are not described. And on the following day a P/O Woods of 61 Works Wing visited the camp to inspect the continuing saga of the well and the camp water supply - or lack of it.

A second 'Entertainment Evening' was arranged for the night of the 18th., but it was back to business again the following night when enemy aircraft were tracked in at 0230 hours and out again at 0419 hours. Fenton field and Long airstrip were the targets, apparently.

Temperature inversion was obviously affecting operating conditions at 0548 hours when a surface vessel was picked up at 62 miles, and it was plotted until 1300 hours when its range was 71 miles, the bearing readings having varied considerably in that time.

On the 26th., a DC3 aircraft landed, perhaps the first big transport to land

at Port Keats. Besides mail and stores, it carried well equipment, probably a suitable pump and pieces of piping. The Works Squadron seemed determined to make their hard labours succeed - and in the afternoon a swimming carnival was held. The increase in organised recreational activities was a sure sign that the station was now well organised and the camp in good repair. At the end of the month came a special report on that well ! It was 44 feet deep with a further 20 feet having been dug out by hand...but still no water!

Constructional work and repairs on the road and strip have almost been completed - and the station Sick Quarters were now complete and finished. A total of 902 plots were passed to FS during the month.

October 1943.

The list of aircraft using the Port Keats strip was expanded again when a Beaufighter landed briefly on the 3rd., seeking some replacement fuses - but the pilot did not wait around while some were sought out and he decided to leave without fixing the problem.

Flying Officer H.K.Fenton was posted out on the 10th., his Admin. work apparently well up to date - and the month progressed quietly with several DH aircraft and one or two steamers maintaining the link with Darwin. A new Store shed was completed...and 641 plots were passed during this very quiet month.

November 1943.

Three waves of enemy aircraft were detected approaching the coastline in the early hours of the 12th., - at 115 miles, 95 miles, and 88 miles,- and the three waves were tracked in over a time span of one hour as they approached the Darwin area. Their target proved to be Parap, Adelaide River and Batchelor, and 48 plots were passed on during their approach.

Other activities during November included the construction of a canteen building - a special course of instruction for the guard detachment, and 10 DH delivery aircraft were met at the strip. IAC Zarb was flown out for medical attention...and a total of 1120 aircraft plots were passed on to 110 FS.

December 1943.

Several DH 84's landed early in the month bringing stores and mail - but on the 7th. a DH en route to Wyndham landed because of engine trouble. A Fitter flew in later the same day, and evidently his opinion was not good, for a replacement engine was flown in the next day - a lengthy engine change was considered necessary.

Meanwhile the steamer SAPPHIRE arrived with heavy supplies, and the RAAF seaplane tender 0821 sheltered overnight in the port on the 9th.

More DH trouble occurred on the 14th. when a plane damaged its undercarriage - a very heavy landing no doubt - but other than the aircraft problems the month progressed quietly with a total of 556 plots passed to 110 FS, and with a complement of 1 Officer and 49 airmen on the station.

January 1944.

Early in the month, a Sergeant Bradburn and a small Army survey team arrived to map the coastal area - an ongoing programme which occurred around several defence areas. A succession of DH flights arrived every few days during the month, - then on the 30th. a particularly heavy storm hit the area, felling trees and breaking telephone lines. The radar aerial was stopped and securely fixed, and 39 RS was 'Off Air' until the storm abated.

After the storm, water was pumped from the well for the first time, the supply lasting for two hours. And the landing strip had to receive attention with a session of grass slashing, and the depressions had to be filled. A total of 658 plots were passed to 110 Mobile Fighter Sector during the month.

February 1944.

On the 10th. February, work commenced on the construction of a new wharf or landing stage, and also the road was renewed to facilitate unloading stores from visiting stores vessels - there was always a works programme of improvements necessary at new Radar stations. The following day a church service was held followed by a movie and community singing - an easier day for the hardworking men.

Wing Commander Jeffery, C.O. of 1 Fighter Wing, and two other pilots flying Spitfires arrived during the afternoon, no doubt testing facilities at the strip in case of emergency landings. After their departure, a Beaufort landed and stayed for a couple of hours - and a week later four mechanics arrived to repair the damaged DH84 aircraft - also a mechanic to repair the pump at the well.

A Hudson and a DC3 arrived on the 26th., and on the 29th. the repaired DH was able to take off, ending a month of aircraft activity rather than Radar activity!

During February a hut to house the batteries and chargers for the WT gear was built and put to immediate use.

The station complement at the end of the month was 38, including 13 guards. March 1944.

Diary entry, 6/3/44....."Very rough weather has been experienced since the first day of the month, 15 inches of rain having fallen in that time. The barometric pressure dropped to 29.264, the lowest recorded reading since the Port Keats Mission Station was started 8 years ago. The wind at times reached gale force, bringing down trees, telephone wires and power wires in the camp area. The Radar Station was closed for a period because of the strong winds interfering with the aerial turning. The road to the landing strip has been under water to a depth of 2 or 3 feet for a distance of 200 yards."

On the 8th., COOLEBAR arrived, delivering 80 drums of fuel and backloading 50 empties - then a daily service of DH aircraft followed, until the Diary records a Special Occasion on the 16th., certainly unique at wartime Radar units....."An art exhibition was held this evening. The exhibits consisted of various articles such as rings, pendants, ash-trays, etc., and sketches - the work of members in their spare time. A variety of native curios were also shown. A visiting officer judged the entries and presented prizes for the best exhibits in the various classes."

Meanwhile, work continued on grass slashing at the strip - an almost permanent job at this time of year - and Pay Clerk Sgt. Miller flew in to restore the cash on hand for the men.

During the month, the new road to the landing was finished - the road to the strip was repaired - and the grass cutting at the strip continued.

1432 plots were reported to 105 FCU this month - a clear indication that the 110 F/S had now closed down.

April 1944.

April proved to be very quiet - there were a few arrivals and departures, and 13 DH aircraft landed with stores and equipment.

Principal activity was at the construction of the new jetty, with the Mission Aborigines quarrying rock and supplying timber for the new work. Fire-arm practice was carried out with the rifle, Tommy-gun and Bren gun - and all personnel completed a course in unarmed combat under the instruction of an officer from NWA H/Q.

An ASV beacon was installed and went into operation on the 12th., and 1146 plots - all friendly - were passed to 105 FCU.

May 1944

The month commenced with various routine tasks - fire breaks were burned around the camp and around the fuel dumps; and a RAAF Circulating Library Box

arrived, so enabling the men to choose from a selection of books which would periodically be changed.

On the 14th. occurred the dread of all stations - fire broke out in the engine room, and despite all efforts, the shed and all equipment was destroyed. The station went 'Off Air' at 1746 hours. The next day, at 1530 hours, a DC3 landed with two Ford 10 generating units which were set up on the old engine room site, and 39 Radar was operational again at 2030 hours. F/O Worboys, the new Commanding Officer arrived on the same aircraft - and on the 19th. work commenced on the construction of a replacement engine shed.

A Court of Enquiry into the circumstances of the engine room fire was set up on the 26th. and continued for two days - the decision was not recorded in the Diary.

On the 28th. an unusual aircraft arrived - a Walrus with a crew of five who were quartered for the night at the station. F/O Bass handed over as C.O. to F/O Worboys on the 29th., and F/Lt. Clark, the M/O of 44 Radar Wing arrived to inspect the camp and Mission personnel.

The Station complement was listed as 1 Officer and 38 OR's.

June 1944.

Other than visiting personnel arriving on various duties, the most noteworthy event was a much appreciated picture show on the 8th., - then again on the 15th., - with yet another on the 24th. (This was the month when a cinema operator commenced flying to outlying stations with Fenton's Flying Freighters whenever the aircraft space was available, and stations previously starved of shows found they now received almost regular picture nights.)

Station personnel shown as 1 Officer, 24 men and 9 guards.

July 1944.

The Area Radar Officer, S/Ldr. Grout-Smith, arrived to inspect the station on July 1st, also a cinema party with a 16 mm. picture show. A Wirraway was forced to land down at the strip with engine trouble, but all of these visitors were able to leave the next day.

A rather rough road to the beach was completed on the 3rd., and 6 drums of hi-octane fuel were salvaged.

The film 'The More the Merrier' was shown on the 9th., and on the 12th. HMAS BOMBO arrived with 2 Ford V8 generators and a replacement 30 cwt. truck as well as a large supply of rations. The Ford 10 generators and the old 30 cwt. truck, as well as 200 empty drums were backloaded on BOMBO.

On the 18th. 'The Hunchback of Notre Dame' was the film shown, making 3 shows for the month. And after the road to the beach had been improved, a beach picnic was organised. "A grand day was enjoyed!"

August 1944.

Two Spitfire aircraft arrived with important operational instructions on the 15th - and on the 18th. another picture show was enjoyed, combined with a Quiz (2/- Canteen Orders were the prizes) and some community singing was tried. At the end of the month came yet another picture night - the previous lack of shows was certainly a thing of the past.

The station complement now was 1 Officer and 30 men.

September 1944.

The first evening of the month was brightened with a good picture programme, with the cinema party departing the next day. Then came two days of solid hard work, bringing in barge loads of fuel in drums from a General Purposes vessel anchored at the entrance of Port Keats.

A visiting Cypher Officer gave instruction on RADATAB...its purpose or the method was not noted. This took place on the 5th., and presumably related to the W/T system of reporting and communications.

Then on the 7th., the barge which had remained to help with unloading supplies left with COOLEBAR.

There were a couple more outings to the beach....then on the 27th. the camp water pump became unserviceable, and the camp water tank was filled by gravity from a road cut above the camp so that services could continue while the camp and tents were checked and prepared for the coming wet season. October 1944.

Two new Ford V8 KVA's arrived this month and their installation organised - the old units were back-loaded on the vessel LORRIMA. However, the governor unit on one new engine proved U/S necessitating 'changeover' with each engine 'shutdown.'

More heavy supplies arrived on the 14th., and again on the 16th., and a 200 yard rifle range was constructed with two targets.

Towards the end of the month, a new floor was laid in the Airmens' Mess, and a new stores hut was built. Up near the Doover site, the Operations hut was completed.

A total of 48 men were listed as 'on strength.'

November 1944.

This proved a singularly unremarkable month. There was a visit from the popular Chaplain, F/Lt. Beckett - also from the ever popular Zone Pay Clerk; and F/Lt. Scott, the 105 FCU Radar Officer arrived to inspect the station. December 1944.

Two new M/T vehicles arrived on BOMBO, and on the 4th. the governor on the remaining serviceable generator unit failed, necessitating urgent signals for early replacement.

On the 8th., Group Captain Walker, C.O. of 105 FCU arrived by Wirraway delivering a repaired motor governor which enabled normal operations to be resumed.

F/O A.Harris took over as C.O. of 39 Radar on the 11th., and from the 15th. to the 17th. heavy rain fell - approximately 12 inches... the monsoonal season had started in earnest once again.

Christmas mails and rations arrived by Anson on the 23rd., and on the 27th. a new Orderly Room was occupied. On the same day heavy supplies arrived on the JOYCE OAKES.

The station establishment was now down to 30.

January 1945.

The New Year began in quiet routine fashion - a Maintenance Party spent several days checking the gear...a Pay Clerk arrived....then came a movie show and Padre Beckett conducted a church service.

On the 22nd., the BL4 became U/S and a signal was sent off requesting replacement parts; on the 24th. an entertainment party of two arrived, followed up with another visit from Group Captain Walker in his well known Wirraway to carry out an inspection of the station.

At the end of the month came two days of rain and storm, and one of the main power lines was struck by lightning. However, on the last day of January both generating units and the BL4 again became fully operational. The station establishment was now 29.

February 1945.

The month began with one generator and a H.T. transformer unserviceable, but both were repaired within a few days

The ARAWATTA arrived with heavy supplies on the 11th...the arrival of a supply vessel always meant a hard session of work for all hands unloading the fuel drums particularly, and on the 13th. some acknowledgement of the hard work of the local Aborigines was made by handing over all surplus ration holdings after a check had been made by a visiting Messing Officer. On the 24th., the aerial was matched and phased, entailing 4 days of work; and the power line to the W/T was again damaged by lightning. While repairs were being effected, the opportunity was taken to re-organize the Ops. room. All equipment was again serviceable on the 28th.

March 1945.

The vessel RADIO, with an off-loading barge in tow, arrived on the 1st., and its cargo of 65 drums of fuel was unloaded. 65 empties were back-loaded. The reconstruction of the Mens' Mess was completed on the 15th., and over the next couple of weeks two good picture shows were enjoyed, for both equipment and operator seemed now to appear regularly on the 6 Com. Flight service.

Towards the end of the month, signals were despatched requesting the overhaul of the generating units, this becoming a matter needing urgent attention by the end of the month.

The station complement still totalled about 30.

April 1945.

The installation of a landmarker beacon commenced in April, and the overhaul of the generating units was commenced. By the 6th., work on the beacon was completed, but then several anxious days followed when Anson DJ173 was reported missing. Following an extensive search, the aircraft was located on the 11th., some 25 miles south of the station. Supplies were dropped, and evidently S/Ldr. 'Doc' Fenton got on the job quickly, for he later escorted the plane into the Port Keats airstrip.

The road to the beach was cleared, and an ASV beacon was installed. The remainder of the month proved uneventful, except that Sgt. Jack Savage and his maintenance crew arrived to check the gear.

May 1945.

This month was notable for a sequence of events which, while not of significance at the time, all tended to indicate the quickly reducing role of 39 Radar.

Firstly, advice was received that the detachment of guards still remaining was to leave... and then on the 14th. F/O H.Orriss took over as Commanding Officer.

Group Captain Walker arrived again by Wirraway on the 18th., carried out an inspection of the station and no doubt assessed its performance and importance since his previous visit.

On the entertainment side of things, a billiard tournament was held, also a euchre tournament. There was another good night's entertainment on the 18th when the sound system of a picture show broke down completely, and much amusement was derived from the attempts of the local boys to fill in the dialogue. It's not difficult to imagine the result!

Brother Cummerford from the Mission was a guest on the 25th., and further entertainment was provided by a 16 mm picture show, a couple of musicians, and a concert, amateur style, organised by Padre Alexander and the visiting musicians. The busy programme was apparently designed to overcome increasing boredom.

The station complement was now down to 23.

June 1945.

Trouble developed early this month when a generator developed faults and variations, and a replacement was flown in and installation commenced. Meanwhile the fan belt on the other unit broke down, and the station went 'Off Air' periodically to service the motors. All was well again on the 18th. A rifle shoot was held on the 10th., and a visual was passed on an unidentified plane which eventually proved to be two Spitfires.

On the 14th., the new Triatic system of W/T reporting came into use, and 39 RS found itself operating on the same frequency as 46 RS at Cape Don.

On the 19th., the station clerk was posted away with no replacement...the BLA gave some trouble, and the usual Sunday picnic was enjoyed.

On 30th. June came the 'Care and Maintenance' instruction, and 39 RS at Port Keats was left with 19 men. The station was 'brought in' in October.

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