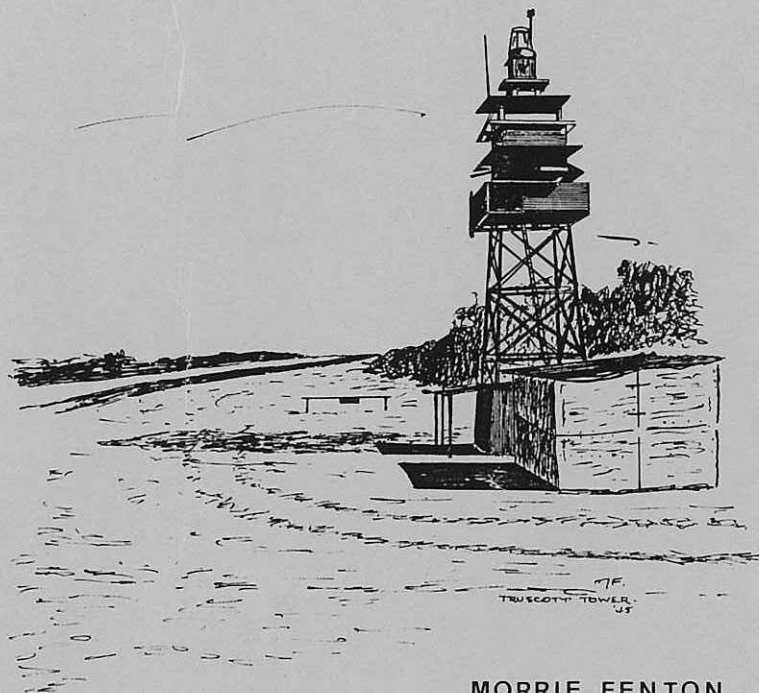


R. 15/7/94

*Souvenir of
Truscott.*



MORRIE FENTON





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TRACED TO
THE BEACH,
VANSLIMPTON GAY.

MORRIE FENTON

SOUVENIR OF
TRUSCOTT.

Marking the 50th. Anniversary of the construction of Truscott Airbase.

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(M.E.Fenton.)

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by

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Cover- Garnet Pearce. Inside Title, Bryan Wardle- Page 18 Allan Ferguson.

TRUSCOTT HISTORY.

On Page 18 of this Souvenir is a report on the work of John and Carol Beasy, who have been collecting and compiling the History of Truscott over a long period. In that time they have contacted more than one hundred Truscott Veterans, and have gathered in well over one hundred photographs. Their work and research have taken most of their spare time over the last four years. I have seen the manuscript, and I know the book will be a remarkable record when it is produced.

In the meantime, John and Carol have produced a Video to 'whet the appetite,' so to speak, which shows many of the photographs. I certainly can recommend it.

Any enquiry concerning the availability of their history, or the video, can be directed to them at their address shown on Page 18.

Morrie Fenton,
154 Radar, Truscott, January to May 1945.

INTRODUCTION TO TRUSCOTT.

Truscott air base was built in a hurry - probably to provide facilities for the big Liberator bomber which was being manned increasingly by Australian squadrons and crews - and possibly to lessen the likelihood of any further attacks on Drysdale Mission (Kalumburu) where 58 OBU had long been based.

Anjo Peninsula had been surveyed - a site was chosen - and an advance party began work early in 1944. Work began when 14 MWS moved in, and this construction unit had the job of building the new airstrip and many of its facilities. Their work began on April 25th, 1944, and by the time the squadron moved on at the end of July, the strip was finished, also 6½ miles of taxiways, 20 miles of roads, 5 miles of water mains, and over 100 buildings - a tremendous achievement.

58 OBU then moved from Drysdale to the new base, best described as a giant bush camp, scattered over 8 miles of the peninsula. Canvas, black iron, sisalkraft and steel mesh were the principal building materials, used with timber from a sawmill established on site. At first the base was known by the name of the peninsula where it was built - Anjo - but the name Truscott was quickly adopted to honour 'Bluey' Truscott, one of Australia's greatest war aces who lost his life in a tragic accident at Exmouth, W.A. in 1943.

The giant strip eventually was 8000 feet long, and it was protected for some time by Army guns and searchlights. A flight of Spitfires from Darwin fighter squadrons was on standby at all times, and several radar stations guarded the area. A marine section operated at West Bay with air sea rescue craft, barges and workboats, and 7000 ton freighters could anchor in the bay while unloading heavy supplies into the barges.

The strip was used mainly by Liberator, Mitchell and Ventura aircraft, but Beaufighter and Mosquito aircraft also staged through, while Catalina flying boats rested easily on the calm waters of West Bay.

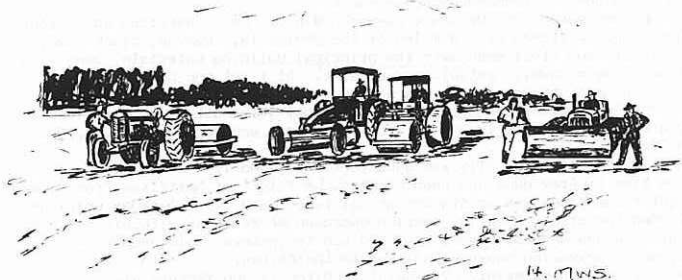
No sooner was the strip in use than an intruder aircraft appeared and the defences of the base were put to the test. The enemy aircraft was promptly destroyed by English pilots flying English Spitfires; and Truscott then settled into a routine pattern of servicing the aircraft staging through the strip, until the end of the war when its role quickly changed from attack, to a role of receiving dozens of planes flying in with ex POW's from the islands and enemy strongholds to the north.

For the next forty five years until 1989, Truscott slowly returned to nature, and became something of a giant hidden museum, lost in time, and lost in the bush with its unwanted residue of the war years - the vehicles, buildings, and facilities enduring decades of heat, tropical rain and fierce bushfires, slowly wasting and rusting, though the strip itself remained surprisingly clear and usable. Who can guess how often the strip was used in the intervening years and for what purposes.

Suddenly in 1989, the strip was 're-discovered' when a landbase for Timor oil and gas exploration was needed. Heavy construction equipment again landed at West Bay. The plans of the place were sought out from old records. The strip and some roads were restored, and new base facilities were built. So the giant wartime base and its secrets were again discovered and explored.

So in 1994 Truscott turns 50 - and with the co-operation of the Aboriginal owners, and the lessees of the place, some veteran Truscott men will commemorate the anniversary by returning to the old base where they served during the war. Here they will find not only the remnants of their wartime camps and tents perhaps, but also they will remember their mates and men who worked and lived there.

Truscott - its wartime role - and its men - wrote a proud and noteworthy chapter in Australia's war history.



14 MOBILE WORKS SQUADRON. Some of the initial clearing and construction work must have commenced early on Truscott, for 161 Radar flew in and landed on the cleared portion of the strip on 26th. April 1944 when apparently an overanxious gunner at the end of the strip sent a few shells towards the Dakotas as they approached. 14 Mobile Works Squadron took over in strength as from 25th. April. All the officers were qualified engineers, and the NCO's were capable works supervisors. The work progressed at a furious pace - 24 hours a day - and with over 400 men in the squadron, the laying of the interlocking steel surface matting commenced only one month after the work was started. The 8000 feet strip was finished by 4th. July. Just eleven days later, the first mission flew out from Truscott, while the men of 14 MWS were still finishing the facilities and buildings.

Its work finished at Truscott, the construction squadron moved out in August. A month later, it was at work again in Morotai.

(Photo: Jim Trevor; opposite, via Jim Trevor.)



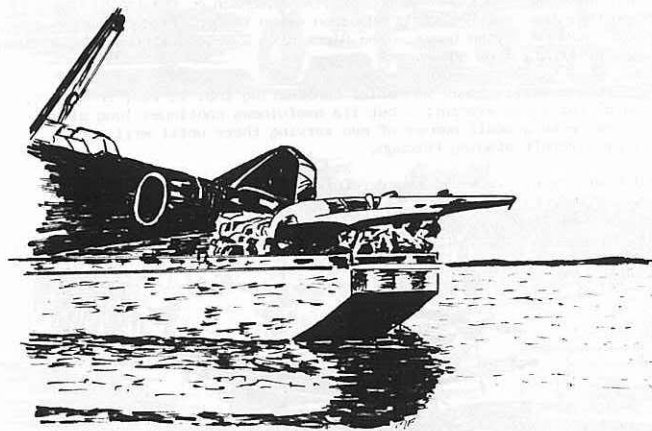
The DINAH Reconnaissance
Aircraft.

The radar station at Cape Leveque in W.A. was the first to pick up and track the enemy 'recce' on July 20th, 1944 - then other stations at Montalivet, Sir Graham Moore Island, and Drysdale were able to pass plots on the aircraft and so record its progress towards the new base at Truscott. Finally, the GCI station, 154, located the approaching plane and its interception was planned.

Three Spitfires from 54 Squadron were on alert, and these were 'scrambled' with two being directed to the course and height to intercept the enemy, while the third was deployed towards Drysdale.

After a short engagement, the Dinah came down in Vansittart Bay - the last enemy plane to be shot down over Australia.

The wreckage of the Dinah was recovered at low tide and for years was left in the bush, but apparently some parts of it have since been taken to Perth.



AIRCRAFT AT TRUSCOTT.

Truscott was first used on July 16th. when four Beaufighters flew out from the new base. Many different types of Allied aircraft then staged through the big base, but after it had settled into a routine pattern of use, those most likely to be seen

were the big silver Liberators of Australian squadrons, and the Mitchells of 18 Squadron, sometimes known as the 'Flying Dutchmen.' In later months, the Venturas of 13 Squadron often staged through, so too the big Catalina flying boats - the Black Cats - which often were in the air for twenty four hours.

Truscott's active wartime role was brief considering that it was, in effect, a 'home base' for large aircraft - but its usefulness continued long after the war ended, with a small number of men serving there until well into 1946 to fuel aircraft staging through.

The final Diary note: ...A big thunderstorm in progress !

(Photo: G.Pearce,
Opposite,
Jim Trevor.)



