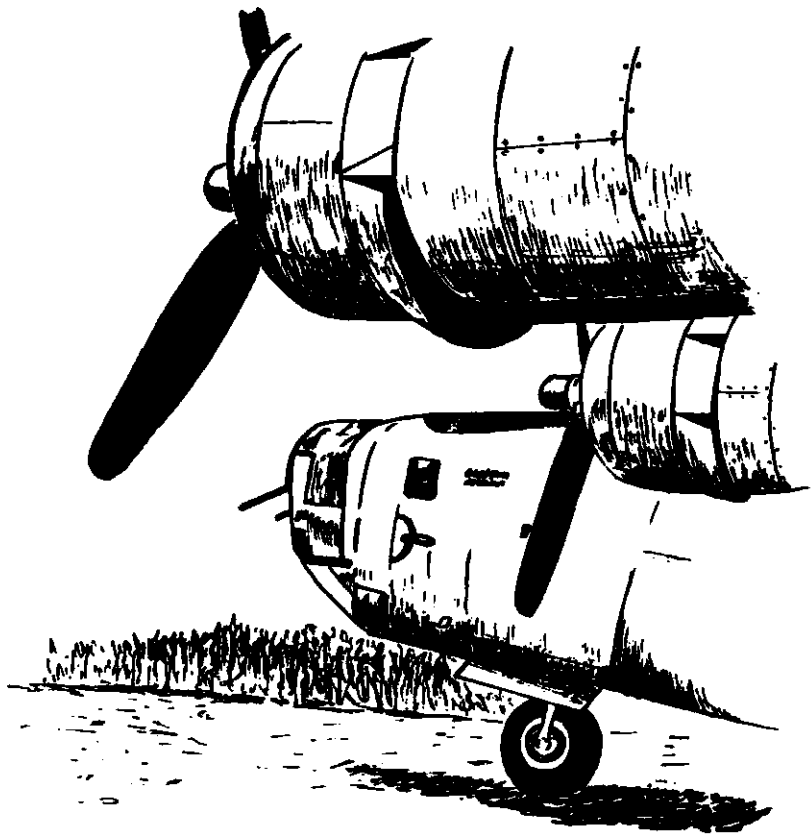


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Tracks around

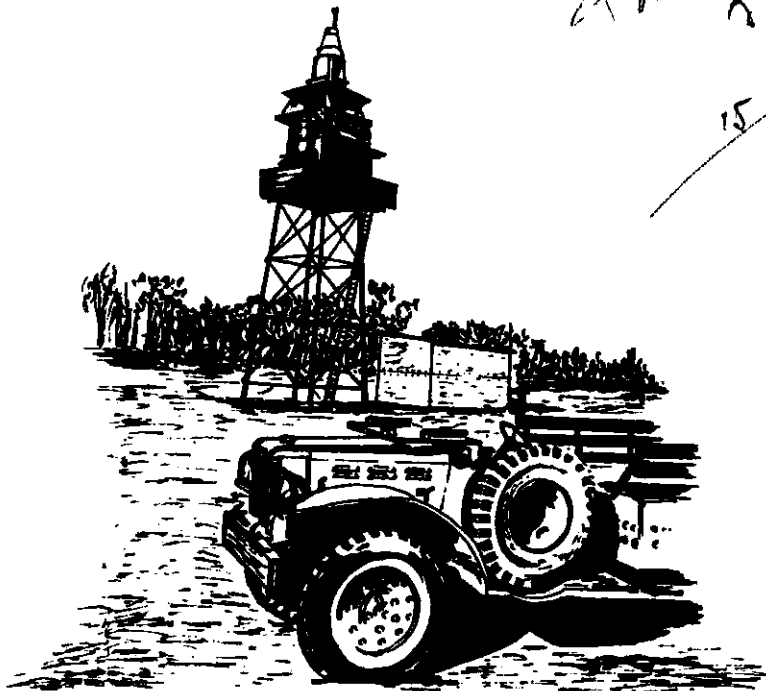
Truscott.



MORRIE FENTON.

*Tracks around
Truscott.*

*To Alton & Margaret
From Mamie
Sam
15-6-95*



MORRIE FENTON.

TRACKS AROUND

TRUSCOTT.

ISBN 0 646 23044 1

Morrie Fenton.

(M.E.Fenton.)

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Produced and Published

by

M.E.Fenton,

27 Lasscock Ave.,

LOCKLEYS, 5032, S.A.

Other Booklets in this Series:

Souvenir of Truscott.

154 Radar, Truscott, 1944-45.

327 Radar, Broome.

The Esmouth Radar Story.

Radar Sketch Book.

The Radar Country Sketchbook.

131 Radar Ash Island. (Late 1995.)

Wedge Island Sketchbook.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

Whenever possible, acknowledgement for the photograph from which sketches were drafted is given on or near the relative page.

TRACKS AROUND TRUSCOTT .

Truscott air base might well be called Australia's best kept war-time secret, for even after fifty years, the big airstrip of W.W.2 is hardly better known than when it became operational back in 1944.

Located out in what is now probably the last of Australia's frontier country, Truscott air base, home to 58 Operational Base Unit, was built in just three months by the RAAF Nos. 1 and 14 Mobile Works Squadrons - and it was then so isolated, and so little was known about it, that many men arriving there on duty had no idea where they were.

The new base was built in the most northerly part of the Kimberley country of Western Australia, on the remote Anjo Peninsula. There were no access roads and no towns. Mail and fresh supplies were flown in by Dakota, while heavy stores, fuel and vehicles were landed from Liberty ships at West Bay. For a few months, the AIF was also on duty manning anti-aircraft guns and searchlights.

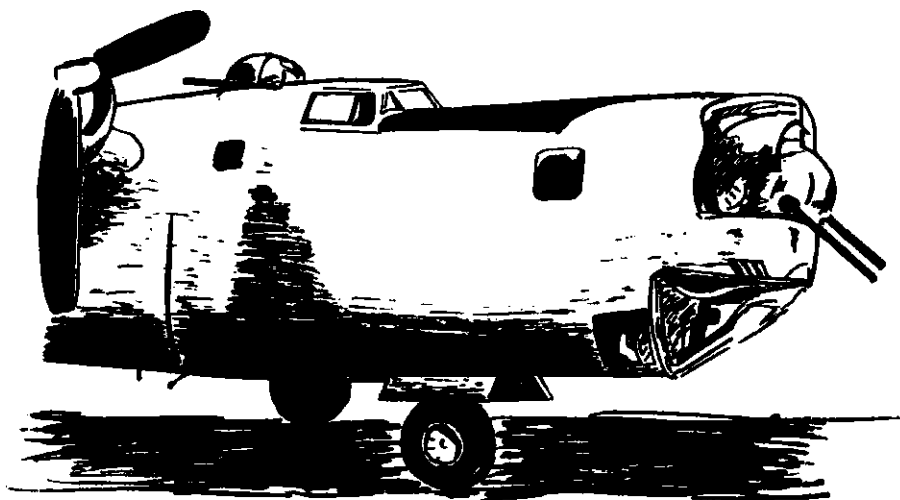
The Kimberley area was then - and remains Aboriginal tribal country. The Drysdale Mission - now Kalumburu - was the closest settlement, and the surrounding country was so harsh and so difficult to traverse that few Truscott men travelled more than a few miles from the base when out on a recreational 'walkabout.'

Truscott saw most of the famous war planes then in service, but after some time a routine became established, and the Liberators of the Australian Squadrons, 12, 21, 23, 24 and 25, the Venturas of 13 Squadron and the Mitchells of 18 Squadron were those usually staging through, while a flight of Spitfires from one of the Darwin squadrons was constantly at the ready against possible intruders. The giant airstrip was covered with immensely strong interlocking Marsden steel matting, a new idea in Australia, though it was used more extensively on air strips through the islands.

An important facility at Truscott was its Marine Section at West Bay, some six or seven miles to the north of the strip. Here the heavy supplies and fuel arrived to be unloaded into barges and brought in-shore at high tide where gangs of men, conscripted from all units and sections, worked furiously to unload as many barges as possible before the tide receded from the hard landing area.

A fleet of small craft was also based here, of both Air Force and Navy vessels, to act as couriers to the small units on outlying islands and as workboats, also to be on standby at all times for Air Sea Rescue duties. Here also the big black Catalina flying boats rested while being refuelled, ready for a 24 hour sortie to the north, or taking on just sufficient fuel to return to their bases at Doctor's Gully or Melville Bay.

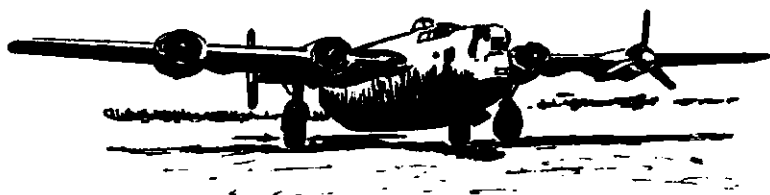
58 OBU, based at Truscott, was scattered through the bush on Anjo Peninsula in many camps, so ensuring good coverage with little to be seen from the air other than the strip itself, for the natural bush and vegetation was left as undisturbed as possible.

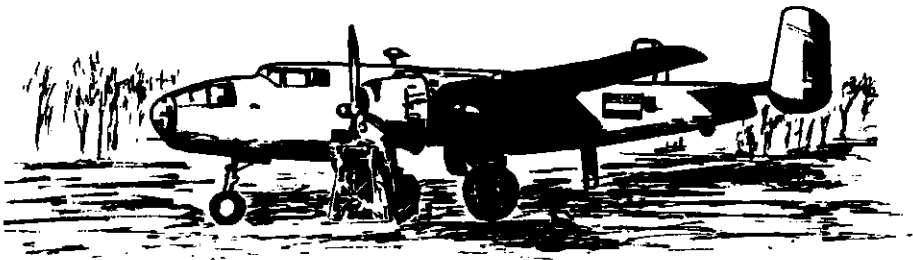


*Liberators at Truscott. (Above- G.Pearce.)
(Below- S.Ledger.)*

The B24 Liberator. Australia's largest bomber in W.W.2. The Liberator first appeared at Truscott in July 1944 after several Australian squadrons had converted to the giant new four engine plane. First flown from Australia by American crews, afterwards almost 300 Liberators were supplied to the RAAF, and 82 Wing, the initial Australian heavy bomber wing, comprised 21, 23 and 24 Squadrons. Liberators of the W.A. 25 Squadron, displaying the black swan insignia, also occasionally staged through Truscott to refuel - so too the Libs of 12 Squadron.

Normally with a crew of eleven, the big silver aircraft always attracted a circle of admirers, particularly if some striking nose art was featured.

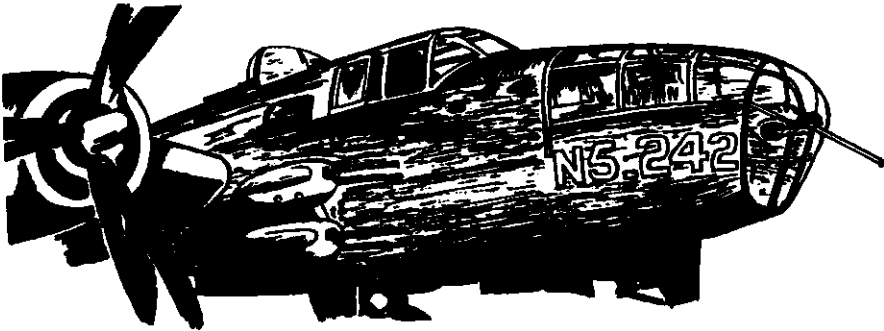


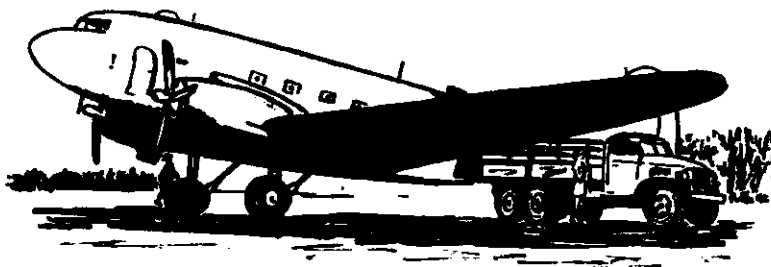


Photos...Lou Malempre and Ray Enright.

The NEI No. 18 Squadron - the Dutch Squadron - operated from within the RAAF, and had a long war-time history from 1942 to 1946 with the B25 Mitchell. The fast medium bomber was used on various type missions, but was particularly successful on anti-shipping sorties, and the 'Flying Dutchmen' frequently staged through Truscott.

Some 50 Mitchells were also delivered to the RAAF No. 2 Squadron, and together the two B25 squadrons formed 79 Wing, operating principally from Batchelor and Hughes fields via Truscott, so extending their range to the maximum over the NEI Islands to the north of Australia.





Above. The C47 unloads at Truscott. (Photo - Bryan Wardle.)

The Dakota C47 courier run to Truscott brought men, mail and meat once or twice each week. The arrival of the transport plane from Darwin also meant a fresh movie for the local picture show, as well as essential stores and replacement parts for machinery, transport and aircraft which were urgently required. And to some men posted out, it meant their stint of service in the Anjo bush was finally over.

The first transport aircraft to land on Anjo did so 'by accident' back in 1942. Actually, the aircraft was en route from Perth to Broome - it followed the wrong course - and crash landed on the peninsula near Vansittart Bay when its fuel ran out. Here it was re-discovered by a surprised party in 1944. Fifty years later, the wreckage of the old plane is still easily recognizable.

Below. The C53 crash-landed on Anjo in 1942. (Photo - Russ. Ames.)





Above. Relic of the Officers' Mess - the remains of the pond and fountain in the forecourt. (Photo - H. Young.)

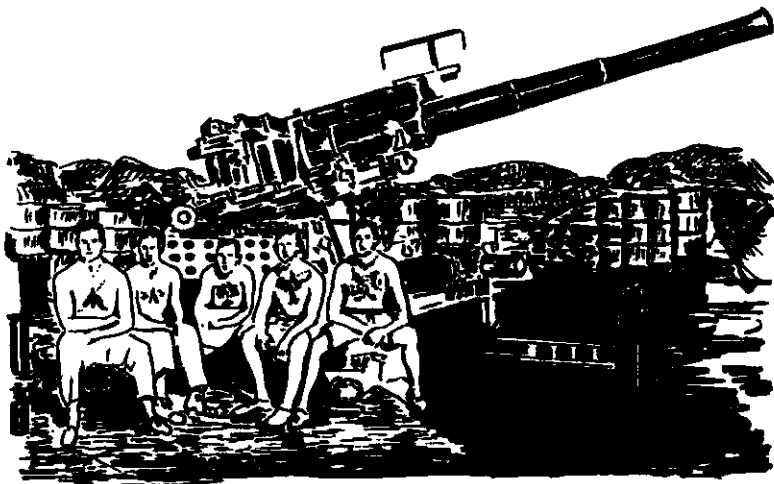
The Officers and Sergeants at Truscott enjoyed Mess arrangements best described as 'better than the Anjo average,' and their meals were served in surroundings far superior to those in the Mens' Mess. 'Dining In' nights were arranged, complete with items and a printed Menu describing the superior dishes being prepared for the occasion. Delicacies such as Vansittart Bay whiting - Cape Londenderry lamb - Drysdale Tropical fruit salad - West Bay lobster - Monte Levette sandwiches - Sir Graham Moore sausage rolls - all appeared on the illustrated Menu on the final occasion.

As an additional feature of the place, a fish pond and fountain, the remains of which are shown in the sketch, was built in the forecourt of the Truscott Officers' Mess.

Not to be outdone, the Sergeants attempted a feature also - an aviary of colourful parrots. But the only birds willing to be caught were the raucous black crows - and so a display of giant black canaries was arranged!

Well - so the story goes, anyway.

But it is known that the Sergeants' Mess did feature wall murals and sketches by Jolliffe - Eric Jolliffe - who was the camouflage officer at Drysdale and Truscott.



Above. A heavy 3.7 AA gun of the 54th. AA Battery at Truscott.

The AIF at Truscott. The AIF first arrived at Truscott in strength on the JAMES D. PHELAN early in August 1944. The 54th. Composite AA Regt. commenced setting up their heavy 3.7 guns at sites well out in the bush, with their lighter 40 mm Bofors clustered closer around the airstrip.

Their guns, and the searchlights of the 67th. S/L Battery worked in with the Fighter Control and the RAAF Radar to receive plots on possible targets - but it soon became evident that a defence element was hardly necessary at Truscott.

A large Mess hut and Recreation centre was built, also a sports ground where cricket and football could be played, and these, together with lectures and training exercises, kept the men occupied for a few months.

The extremely rough terrain around the outer gun sites kept many of the Army men almost completely isolated with very few visits to the OBU - and the extreme shortage of water made life doubly difficult, and one ex-gunner remembers he was rationed to one bottle of water per day. And to overcome the transport difficulties of their sites, donkeys were brought in by ship and used as pack animals.

As early as November 1944 the AA unit commenced packing and transporting their gear and equipment to West Bay, ready to move on - and on 29th. January '45 the SAN RAFAEL left West Bay with most of the equipment on board, also the last party of men.

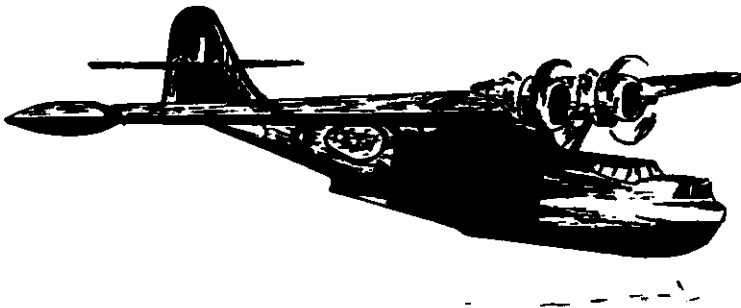


Above. The lonely camp of a gun crew out in the Anjo bush.

Below. The Bofors gun sites were clustered around the strip.

(Photos - John Watson.)





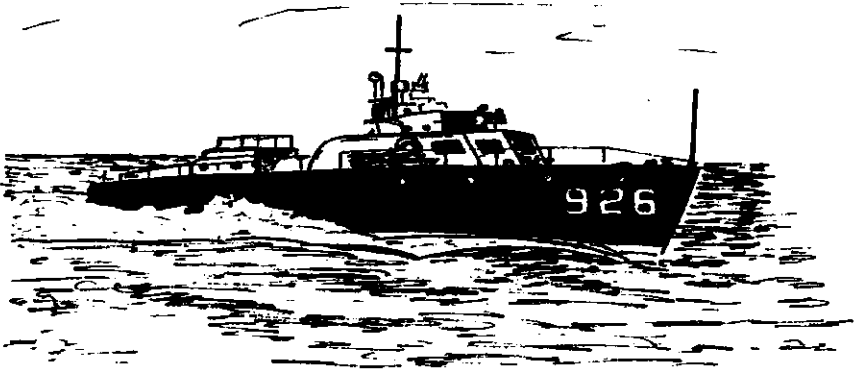
The Marine Section at West Bay. The all important task at the Marine Section was servicing and attending the Catalinas, mainly of 42 and 43 Squadrons, but also of 11 and 20 Squadrons, and the very essential 112 Air Sea Rescue Flight which plodded out in the wake of bomber missions in case of trouble.

The Catalinas were usually out on long range patrols, and often two crews were on board to carry out the 24 hour flights that were often undertaken.

The Marine Section small craft were a mix of Air Force and Navy -the ASR launches were Navy craft, while the barges and work boats were part of the Air Force OBU force, and regular trips as far as Montalivet, some 80 miles down the coast, were regularly undertaken to keep up supplies and water to the isolated and lonely island stations.

The Marine Section men preferred to live an independent life away from the more routine life at the strip, though the C.O. and Adjutant of 58 OBU were not at all happy about this arrangement, and insisted that a 'token' number of men appear at the parades - an order which was not observed whenever possible.

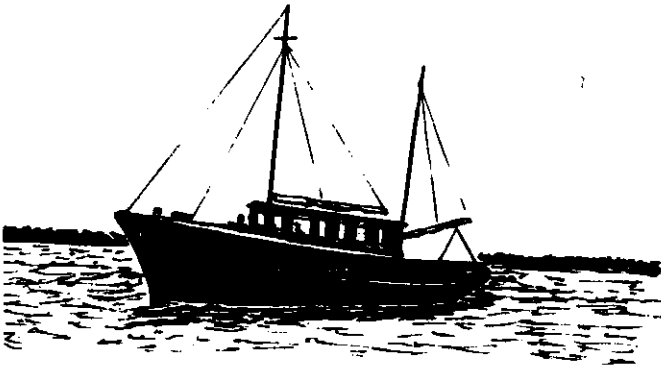
Whenever a freighter was due at West Bay, men were conscripted from all sections and units to help the unloading operation, which had to be effected as quickly as possible.



Above. HMAS AIR SAILOR, and similar ASR craft, HMAS AIR CLOUD, were fast new vessels, specially equipped to provide the best possible rescue facilities off-shore at Truscott.

(Photos - G.Shearwin.)

Below. HMAS COONGoola had been a private pleasure craft, but was acquired for ASR duties. Although a first class vessel, her speed, or lack of it, made her unsuitable.





The OBU Hospital at Truscott. (Photo - G. Shearwin.)

The Hospital, - The Medical Receiving Station, or Hospital as it was better known, was among the first of the buildings constructed at Truscott, and during its short life of less than two years, it earned a reputation for first class service and facilities, considering the loneliness and isolation of the base.

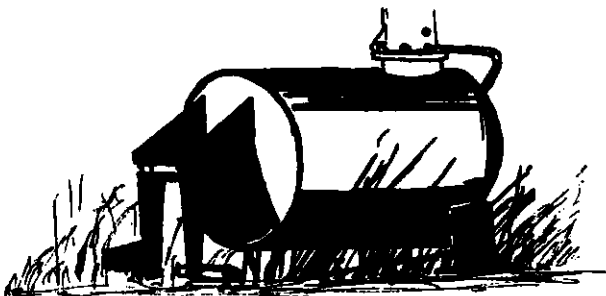
Mostly its patients were of the Daily Sick Parade variety, but ward facilities were available for those requiring extended care and attention, and some dental services were provided also. The dental officer also provided a 'mobile' service to outlying stations, and on one occasion landed at the Radar station on Montalivet - an isolated and lonely place of harsh conditions, with a reputation of possibly sending long serving men a bit 'troppo.'

He was concerned to meet a lad wandering around the camp in bright, hot sunlight, but clutching a fully lighted lantern. Fearing the worst, the dental officer was relieved to learn that all was well - the station was completely out of matches, and the 'laddie with the lamp' was the camp cigarette lighter!



LOOKING AROUND ANJO COUNTRY.





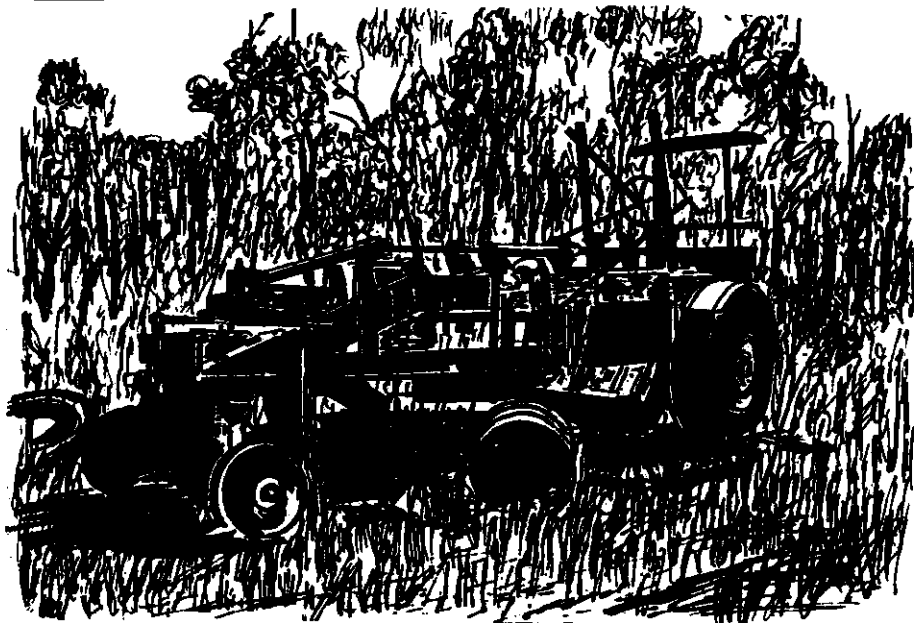
Construction and Maintenance. The construction of Truscott airstrip, its many buildings and facilities represented a giant Australian achievement for all involved - and even the transporting and movement of the heavy equipment itself into Anjo Peninsula was a major undertaking, as everything had to be landed directly from the ships onto the shore at West Bay where few improvements had been made.

An advance party from 1 Mobile Works Squadron made the first big inroads into the peninsula, and when the main body of men from 14 Mobile Works Squadron arrived on April 25th., 1944, transport aircraft had already landed on an improvised short strip alongside the main airstrip site.

Below.

The Moore road grader.

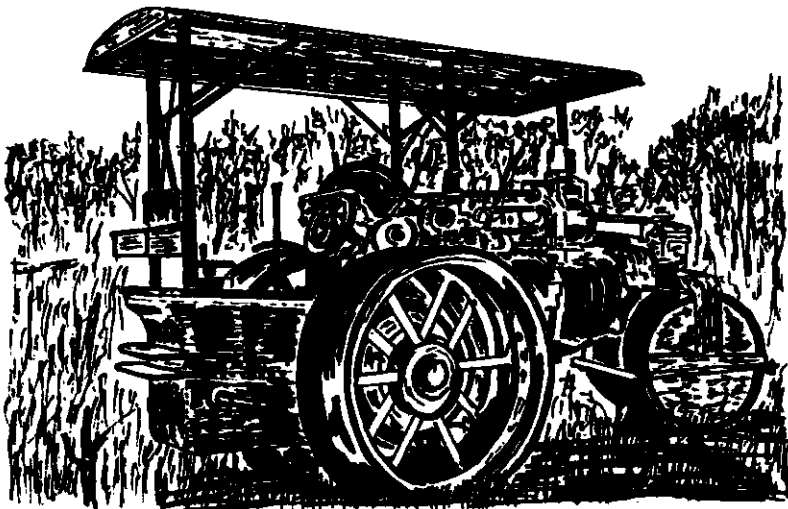
(Photos - Howard Young.)





The major work on the strip then started - 24 hours a day - and by August 19th., 14 MWS was ready to move on again, after having built the strip, covered and sealed it with interlocking steel Marsden matting, built 20 miles of roads, 100 or more buildings and 5 miles of water mains. A RAAF maintenance team then attended to the various and varying repairs, but when an extension to the strip was undertaken, together with other major repairs, the Allied Works Council, a construction group controlled by a civil body, moved into their own Truscott camp in May 1945 to attend to the work. Fifty years later when the strip was again brought into use, it was in remarkably good condition, though the buildings and their remnants left few indications of their existence or purpose.

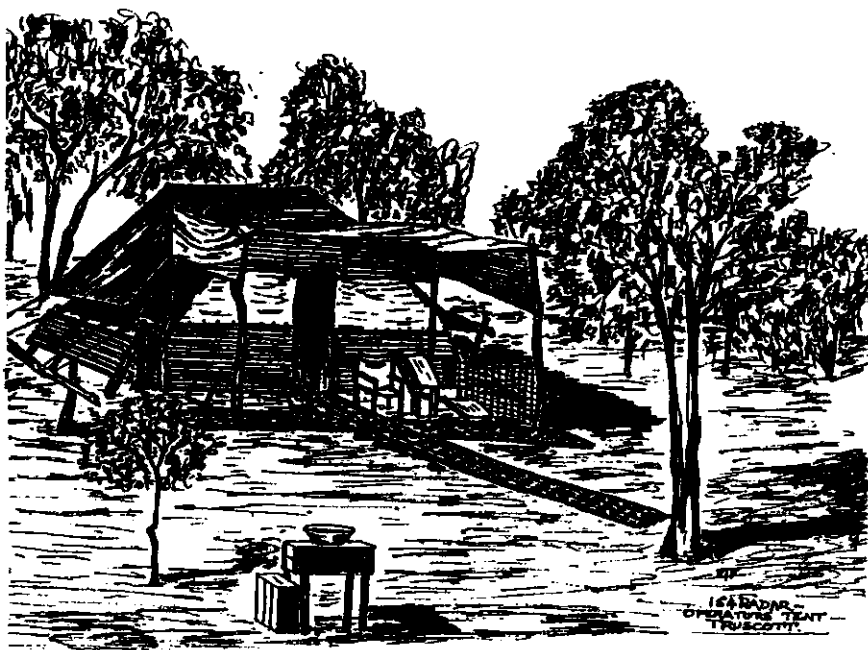
Below. *The steam roller, of classical outline, stands immovable in the bush near the West Bay landing.*





LOOKING AROUND ANJO COUNTRY.





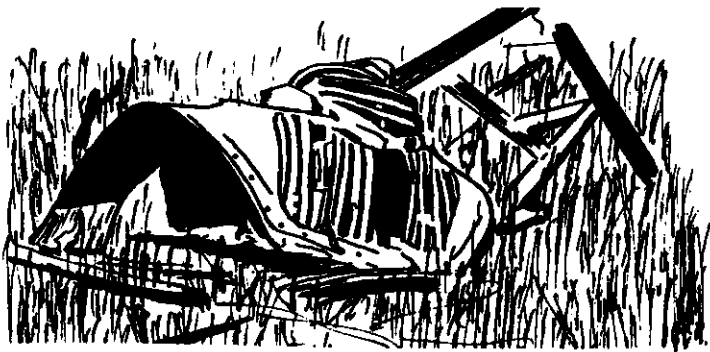
Above. The Operators' tent at 154 Radar, 1945. (Photo - C. Norris.)

Radar Operators' Tent. There would have been few tents at Truscott more comfortable than the Operators' tent at 154 Radar - though this claim would undoubtedly have been hotly disputed by any one of a hundred other tent occupiers in the Anjo bush.

But an almost continuous programme of improvements is evident at a glance - the lift up sides - the verandah and chairs designed for easy living and relaxation - the Marsden matting strips, laid to keep the feet dry when tropical downpours literally deluged the area - the convenient wash-stand.

The functional interior design was equally commendable - there was even a convenient garbage disposal unit - a resident goanna that cleaned up the small hard to dispose of bits 'n pieces.

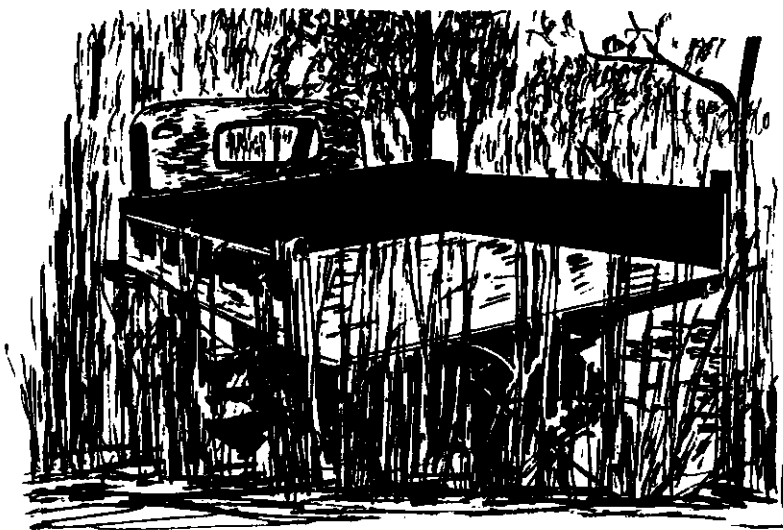
The tent was certainly comfortable and roomy, and its occupiers were justly proud of their Anjo residence, maintaining a daily schedule of duties to keep the place spic and span. During its fairly short life, the tent would have been called home by at least four complete changes of occupants.



Truscott Transport. It could probably be claimed that the many vehicles still scattered around Truscott were all genuine low mileage jobs, an attractive sales pitch under normal conditions - but the sale of vehicles at Truscott was not an easy task, for they were there to stay, and buyers only showed interest in the removable, easy to sell parts.

Most of the truck shells are still very recognizable - the Canadian Fords - the Chevys and the GMC's - but slowly the wrecks are rusting away after fifty years of fire, tropical rain and intense humid heat. Ashes to ashes - rust to rust.

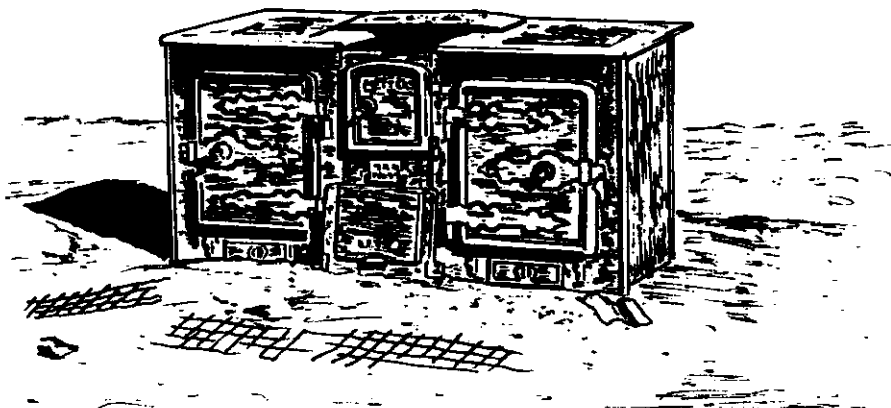
All photos used in this section came from Howard Young.





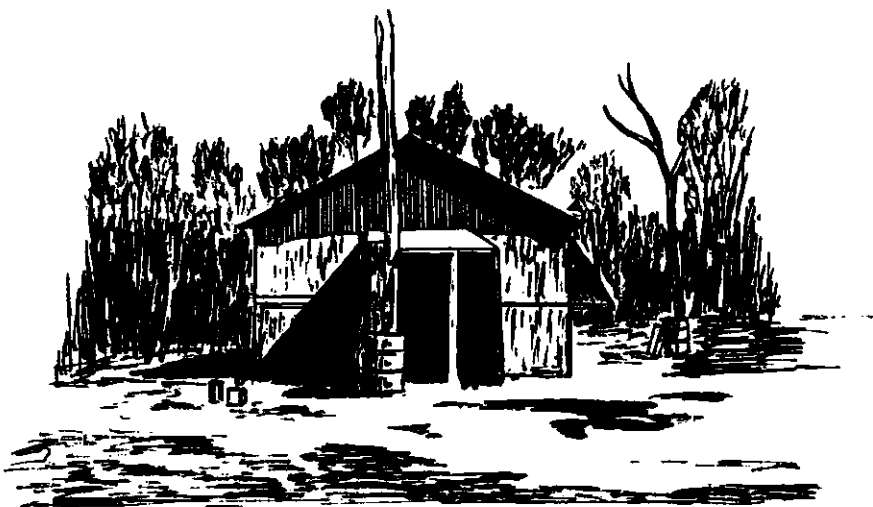
Truscott transport line-up - mainly Canadian Fords.





Above. The stove at the Marine site, West Bay. (Photo - Howard Young.)

The old Metters stove. Standing immovable and indestructible, the old stove stands almost as a memorial to all the Truscott cooks who battled against heat, tropical rain and humidity - shortages of cooking aids and facilities, not to mention waiting and hoping for the arrival of fresh meat and vegetables. But it was amazing what a good cook could do with tinned fruit and dried stuff, though the M and V, Bully and Goldfish tended to receive a poor welcome regardless of the magic the poor old 'babbling brook' tried to weave with crusty coverings and the like. But a happy unit depended so much on the work and effort of the cook and their work and contribution seldom received proper acknowledgement. Hours were long - conditions were primitive - cleanliness essential - and so too was good humour. No wonder that Commanding Officers did their best to keep a good cook and to keep him happy!



Above. The 154/319 Recreation Hut, completed August 1945.
(Photo - A. Ferguson.)

Radar Recreations. Radar stations invariably seemed to be isolated little communities, out on their own in the bush somewhere, or on an island perhaps. The Truscott radar units 154 and 319 were fairly typical, away from the main camps where the men themselves planned their own recreations and comforts. Fishing and netting, oystering parties and walkabouts were the norm, while in camp they made their tents as roomy and comfortable as possible, for here they spent much of their off time, reading, and making brews.

The longer a station existed, the more complete it became - and so towards the end of the war a Recreation Hut was built by the men themselves, obviously from surplus material they found here and there, and here reading, writing letters, and a few games could be played and enjoyed.

Most importantly, it gave the men a community centre where they could meet and mix away from the confines of their individual tents. The hut was completed only a month before the war ended, but as 154 Radar continued on air until November 1945, the efforts of the men to improve their conditions would have been worthwhile. More importantly perhaps, the construction of the hut gave the men a project which relieved their boredom.



Above. *The Truscott Chapel.* (Photo - V. Pedersen.)

Church Services. A succession of chaplains served at Truscott, and so at various times most of the more generally accepted denominations were represented for a month or two before moving on to another unit. A few sought out the men particularly and became well known and popular, - however, as chaplains usually held commissioned rank, others seemed rather remote towards the men. The striking exception were the Catholic fathers from Drysdale who regularly visited to celebrate Mass at the base, and even travelled to Sir Graham Moore Island for the purpose where a Loran unit and Radar station were located.

Towards the end of the war, a small building was erected and set aside as a chapel. The walls were of the usual airy design - the floor of crushed ant-hill material - and in time even a small steeple was added to lend a slightly more distinctive and church-like appearance.



The Truscott 'Salvo,' - the Salvation Army Welfare Officer - was a well known and well liked personality on the peninsula, and was to be seen at any time around the various camps and workplaces in his battered ute, bearing cooled water, drinks and music as well as a cheerful word for each and every man.

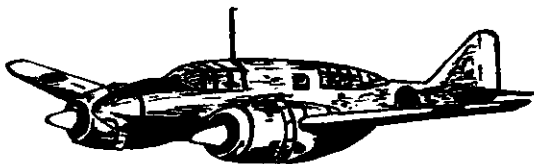
He was known even out on Sir Graham Moore Island where history records he was the first man to arrive by plane - in his Tiger Moth - where he arranged a picture show for the men still at the Loran station in late 1945. A story of his work would be a true legend of Truscott!

Above. The Salvation Army officer's tent at Truscott.

Below. The water cooling plant near the picture show site.

(Photos - Capt. Vic Pedersen.)



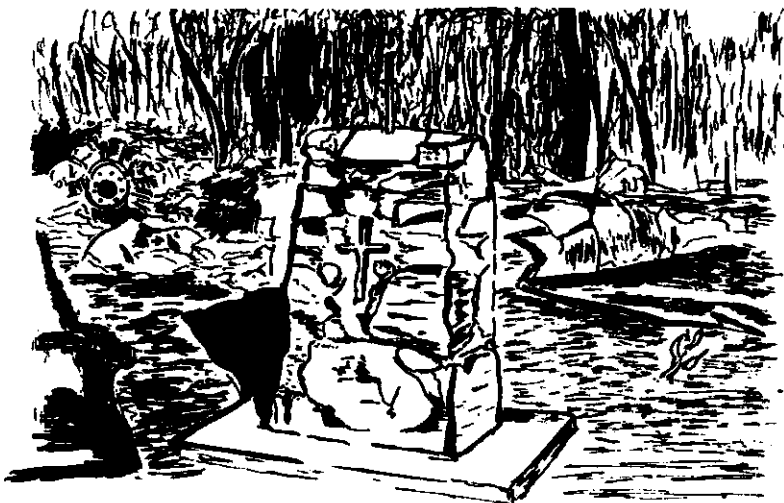


The 'Hostile' recon plane. The destruction of the Dinah reconnaissance aircraft seeking to find Truscott on July 20th., 1944 was the last incident when an enemy plane was shot down over Australia in W.W.2. The 'Alert' was first sounded when an unidentified plane was detected by 326 Radar, C. Leveque, as it penetrated the coastline and flew on towards Drysdale and Truscott. 344 RS, Montalivet, 317 RS Sir Graham Moore and 319 RS at Drysdale also tracked the plane - until the shorter range 154 GCI station picked up the target and planned its interception. RAF Spitfires with RAF pilots were 'scrambled', and after a short time, contact was made - the plane was destroyed by two intercepting Spitfires, and the wrecked plane came down in Vansittart Bay. The third interceptor was deployed over Drysdale.

Sadly - one of the RAF pilots was himself accidentally killed shortly afterwards at Livingstone strip when his Spitfire struck a tree and exploded.

*Below. The fifty year old wreckage in the bush at Truscott.
(Photo - J. and C. Beasy.)*





The Memorial cairn at the Liberator crash site. (Photo-Eric McNabb.)

LIBERATOR A72-160. A short distance past the north-western end of the strip is a small stone cairn, standing guard over the wreckage of A72-160, a Liberator bomber of 12 Squadron which crashed on take-off in the Truscott bush on 20th. May 1945 while loaded with depth charges. The giant aircraft exploded and disintegrated, killing the Captain, F/Lt. Sismey and his entire crew.

The wreckage has been left almost undisturbed since then, and when the 'Return to Truscott' annual visits were arranged for veterans by the Truscott Base Tribute Committee of Kununurra, the cairn was one of two erected at the old war-time base.

Since then, a dawn service has been held at the site, which deserves to be considered as a true war memorial.

As part of the 50th. celebrations held at Truscott in May, 1994, a party of some two hundred folk gathered at the cairn at dawn on 20th., 49 years exactly since the Liberator had crashed.



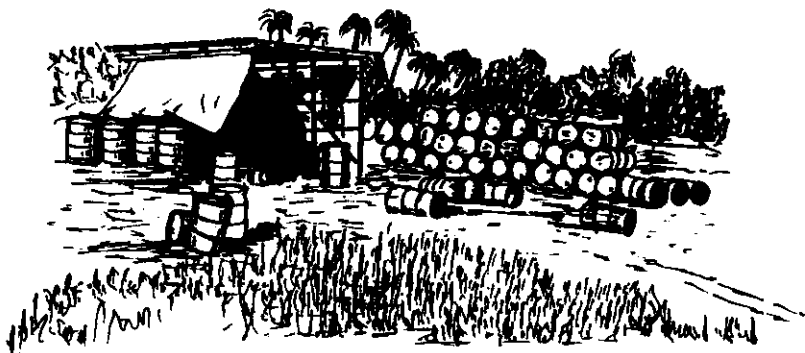
Sir Graham Moore Island. The RAAF Radar Station 317 was located on the island after moving from Drysdale, and later again American servicemen moved in to set up the master station of a navigational system known as LORAN.

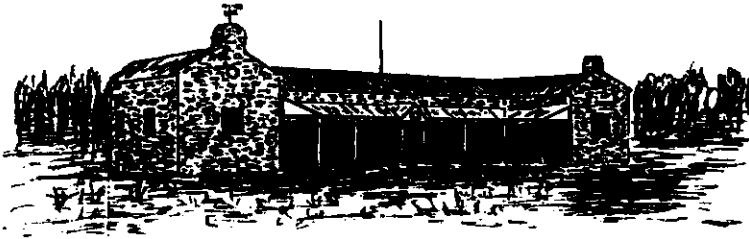
The difficulties of finding adequate fresh water supplies through the Truscott and Anjo area again became evident when RAAF radar men took over from the Americans at the cessation of hostilities. One of the first priorities was to learn the method of distilling fresh water from salt, and the desalination plant worked full time to keep the island men supplied. Even so, occasional water supplies were brought by barge from Truscott when the plant was not able to cope with demand.

Above. The seaward approach to the Loran station.

Below. The desalination plant.

(Photos - Max Counsell.)





Drysdale Mission...The isolation of several Aboriginal Missions was to be forever disturbed in 1940 when emergency landing fields were constructed, mainly by the Aborigines themselves, as part of the early defence preparations across the north. Drysdale (or Kalumburu) had been established on the King Edward River in the 1930's, the Mission having moved inland from Pago on the coast where it had first been set up in 1908, and its airstrip was ready for use in the early 1940's.

58 OBU operated from the strip increasingly from 1942, and it was in September 1943 when the Mission suffered casualties in an air attack. In July 1944 the OBU moved to Truscott, and many Aborigines from the Mission worked at the new airfield.

Above - The main building at Kalumburu. (Photo -B. Wardle.)

Below. At Longoni, the Mission landing in the King Edward River estuary. (Photo -G. Shearwin.)





AUSTRALIA REMEMBERS, 1945 - 1995.

This year, Australians everywhere are celebrating Victory in the Pacific, now 50 years ago. There are reunions, dinners, publications and histories, and folk who can remember, regardless of their occupations back in 1945, are urged to participate in the programmes, celebrations and events commemorating August 15th, 1945 when war in the Pacific finally ended. In no small measure, victory came about because of the relentless, unceasing air attacks which began from the air bases across Australia's north. From these bases, Allied and Australian aircraft struck daily into enemy held territory, attacking bases and facilities, airfields and harbours, and striking at shipping to help turn the fortunes of war against any possible action which could threaten Australia. Truscott airbase was one of Australia's frontline bases in many of these attacks, and daily air strikes were mounted from this secret, isolated place.

For almost 50 years since, the deserted base has slumbered in the Kimberley bush, but in recent years, Truscott has come alive again as the springboard for the workers on the Timor shelf seeking gas and oil. All this activity has in turn revealed Truscott's big war-time role; and many of the men who remember the place from the war years have been able to return, seeking perhaps memories of their young days in the armed forces.

The Truscott Base Tribute Committee has promoted and encouraged this interest in the old war-time base, and should be congratulated and commended for the hard work it has undertaken in contacting veterans of the place, and arranging the 'Returns' and ceremonies of recent years. Mr. Howard Young, who was responsible for restoring the air strip and base, has undertaken the principal office of the Truscott Base Tribute Committee which can be contacted at TBTC, Box 1108, Kununurra, 6607.

"TRUSCOTT. The Diary of Australia's Secret Wartime Kimberley Air Base." This complete history of Truscott is now available in both hard and soft cover form, after several years of searching and researching by the authors, John and Carol Beasy. The book is well illustrated, and has been prepared in Diary form, interspersed with many relevant comments from the many veterans contacted by the authors. The book is available from the publishers,

Australian Military History Publications,

13 Veronica Place,

LOFTUS, 2232.

Price...\$45 or \$39

Additionally, some small sketch booklets and histories are available via Mr. Young and the Committee at Kununurra.
