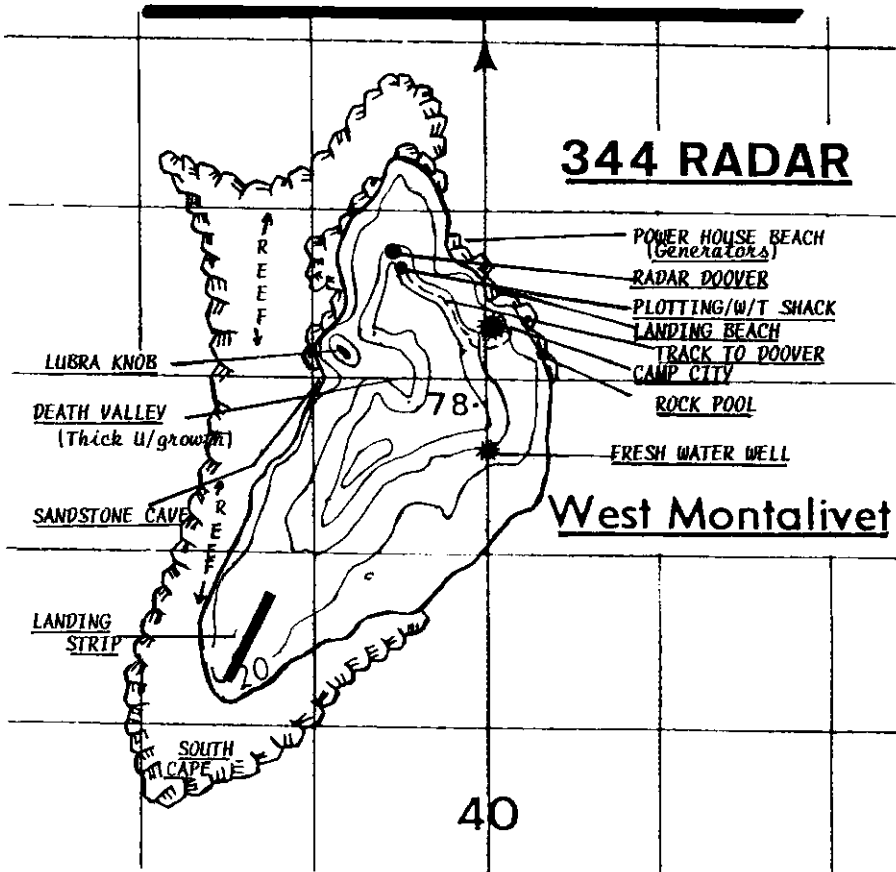


R 90/4/98

# 344 RADAR, WEST MONTALIVET.



*Edited by* MORRIE FENTON



*The History and Stories*  
*of*

**344 RADAR,  
WEST  
MONTALIVET.**

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THE STORY OF A SMALL  
AUSTRALIAN RADAR UNIT  
ON A LONELY CORAL ISLAND  
OFF THE KIMBERLEY COAST.



*Edited by* **MORRIE FENTON**

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344 Radar,  
West  
Montalivet.

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(M.E.Fenton.)

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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

I acknowledge with pleasure and gratitude the enthusiasm, and the help, the encouragement and effort of those I now mention. Without their co-operation and support, this story of 344 Radar on Montalivet Island would have been far less interesting. Their personal contributions certainly bring the story alive.

The following are all co-authors of the station's story:

Laurie Leckie.  
Wally Duckering.  
Austin Asche.  
Ken Nice.  
Stanley Morgan.  
Walter Wood.  
Gordon Shearwin.  
Duncan Stewart.  
Max Baker.  
Ray Kelly.  
Bill Langford.  
Cliff Leavy.  
Lynden Carter.

Ed. Simmonds.  
Pete Smith.  
M. Fenton.  
Claire Fenton.  
"Radar Yarns."  
"More Radar Yarns."  
Peter Callaghan,  
{Paper on Northern Territory  
Aerial Medical Service.}  
"The Art of the Wandjina,"  
{I.M.Crawford 1968}

A special word for Laurie Leckie whose idea this is !! and who went to great effort to cull the collection of letters he possessed..... also to Austin Asche for the 'Foreword,'...an original and pleasing idea for a little booklet like this.

Historical research by Claire Fenton.

The photos are not many really, but those that came in certainly add to the story, even though they may have appeared before.

I thank Pete Smith for loaning the Bill Sanderson collection, also Laurie Leckie and Lynden Carter.

Finally, a note about The Lonely Star, the station's newsletter. I'm not sure how many copies or editions....but I have to the best of my ability copied two, and these are available separately.

Murray Marks and J.P. Seymour were the Editors of that rare paper, and I acknowledge their effort of 50 odd years ago. Murray Marks was a good friend of mine, and I'm pleased to pay an Acknowledgement to Murray for his work...and friendship.

Morrie Fenton.

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*Wally Duckering and Jim Seymour at the cave  
on the western side of the island.*



*Two neighbours from a nearby island drop in for  
an 'exchange and barter' session.*

## Foreword.

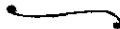
Well met, good friends, though scattered far  
About our great South Land.

This book will bring us home again  
To sun and stars and sand;  
And rocky soil and stunted trees,  
And sweaty days and evening breeze.  
And nightfall over diamond seas,  
And winds by tempests fanned.

Though half a century or more  
In years have passed away,  
There still remains those mates of yore,  
Wal, Laurie, Ken and Ray,  
And others whom we'll not forget,  
For Bill and Phil are with us yet,  
Their laughter in our memory set,  
And live with us today.

Old Monte stands alone again,  
Cares not for hopes and fears  
Of young lads turning into men  
Once in her million years.  
We were a shadow passing by;  
But we'll remember when we fly  
To that great Doover in the sky,  
And take her with us then.

Austin.



## THE FRENCH CONNECTION.

C.Fenton.

Stretching northward from the site of 326 Radar at Cape Leveque, the Buccaneer Archipelago and the Bonaparte Archipelago reach along the Australian North-West coastline to the northern-most Kimberley point at Sir Graham Moore Island above the Anjo Peninsula - a continuous chain of small islands protecting the mainland.

A dangerous coast this...with reefs and shoals...a huge 10 metre tidal variation....not to mention the islands themselves with the crocs and sharks that patrol them.

At one time, ten or twelve thousand years ago probably, those archipelagos were actually part of the mainland; but then the rising seas at the end of the ice age changed the shoreline, with the lower parts of the coastline inundated, leaving only the higher peaks to form the dangerous chain of islands and reefs which first began to appear on the maritime charts only after the exploration and survey work of the early 1800's.

In the early years of the new century, both the French and the English were intent on exploring the North-West coast in the vicinity of Timor and the Spice Islands. The French explorer and navigator, Nicholas Baudin, sailed north from Cape Leeuwin, and the Englishman Lieutenant King sailed westwards from the TIWI Islands. So it is no great surprise to find a rather curious mix of French, English and Dutch names - for indeed the Dutch were the first - identifying the coastal features and islands.

The Montalivet Islands in the Bonaparte Archipelago were named in 1802/3 by the French expedition headed by Baudin in 'Le Geographe'...the name honoured Jean Pierre Bachasson, Comte de Montalivet, (1766-1823) who was a French engineer and a peer of France, a soldier and statesman. Baudin also named Cape Leveque for Pierre Leveque, (1746-1814) an engineer hydrographer, while the Bonaparte Archipelago was named for a patron of the expedition. The Buccaneer Archipelago was named by King in 1821 to commemorate the visit of William Dampier to this coast in 1688.

The Montalivet Islands have a volcanic and sandstone base, the higher plateau areas being covered in harsh scrub common to the area.

West Montalivet Island where 344 Radar was set up proved harsh and dry, with fresh water only to be found in the monsoonal wet season.

\*\*\*\*\*



## INTRODUCTION

Among the radar fraternity, there was a fear - yet fascination about 344 RS on Montalivet Island. An air of mystery, yet some envy, about a posting to this remote island off the Kimberley coast. And all we other operators and mechs felt we had missed out on one of life's experiences unless we were posted there. Hard to believe perhaps but true.

The stories of isolation - deprivation - tough and rough living, - these were savoured almost by others....and almost certainly embellished by those who could speak first hand of the place.

Tinned rations every day - drinking water carted in and tasting of aviation fuel - no pictures - no transport - infrequent mail - nowhere to go - no comforts to speak of except an occasional Comforts parcel. A 'closed ' island off an uninhabited coastline.

True all that was for a while - particularly in the early days when the station was 'working up,' - but it's a revelation to read in this booklet of life on the island after the first year. Ballantyne's 'Coral Island' was almost compulsory reading in my young days....and I could only compare Montalivet with 'The Coral Island.' The reef - the fishing - the 'making do' - the lack of resources - but sound leadership and young followers.

But it's been an eye-opener to read of the great life there actually enjoyed by those who followed the 'originals.'

The mateship - the indomitable spirit of youth - the ability to ignore or overcome each hardship with Australian adaptability....and now nostalgia - all these show out in the pages of memories that follow.

There were many other island radar stations through the NWA, but none could match Monte's reputation other than perhaps Bathurst in the very early days.

And I'm now convinced none could match Monte's spirit of mateship which has endured for more than 50 years.

I'm only surprised the C.O. did not record that well known motto in the Diary....."Semper Unitas."

Morrie Fenton.

WEST MONTALIVET ISLAND.

344 RADAR STATION. Latitude 14°18' Longitude 125°14' .

The following Data Extracts are from a Reconnaissance Report made by F/O Crocker, of No. 12 Survey and Design Unit, DARWIN following a survey of the island in February 1944.

DESCRIPTION OF ISLAND.

- (a) Size approximately  $1\frac{1}{2}$  by  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile.
- (b) Three beaches on all of which materials can be landed by shallow draft vessels.
- (c) The Officer in charge of HMAS SOUTHERN CROSS advised that satisfactory anchorages are present at each of the beaches although not all-weather anchorages.
- (d) Island rises from sea-level along gentle slopes to central ridge approximately 230 feet above sea level.
- (e) Generally fairly well covered with trees and shrubs. Average height of trees 14' and shrubs 10'.
- (f) Very little overhead cover for natural camouflage.
- (g) No natural tracks.
- (h) There is evidence of white ants.
- (i) No areas either beach or ground suitable for landing aircraft.

MATERIALS AVAILABLE.

Timber - None suitable for building.  
Gravel; Sand; Aggregate. Available.

WATER.

- (a) On the S.E. side of the island there is a large catchment area terminating in low lying ground of sandy loam with a group of Pandanna palms and luxuriant foliage.
- (b) There exist two native wells. The larger contained approximately 400 gallons. 300 gallons were baled out which were replaced within 12 hours.
- (c) This well was enlarged to 1000 gallons which was full at time of departure. Immediate water supplies will therefore be available for the working party on arrival.
- (d) Water will also be found at the rear of a beach approximately 400 yards N.W. of proposed Camp site.
- (e) From observations it would appear that a reasonably constant supply of water will be available for the needs of the radar personnel.

ACCESS.

Natural slopes generally negotiable but covered with long grass and large boulders. A fair amount of clearing would be necessary to operate a truck.

CAMP SITE.

Selected on a well drained area on N.E. side of island, approximately  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile from site of well. Camp level 100 feet above sea level. No attempt made to site individual buildings, only general area.

RADAR UNIT SITE.

Radar Unit sited N.W. point of ridge on N.E. side of island, 230 feet approximately above sea level.

AIRCRAFT LANDING STRIP.

A satisfactory landing area available on East Montalivet Island approximately 5 miles from W. Montalivet. Access between islands could be maintained by work boat.

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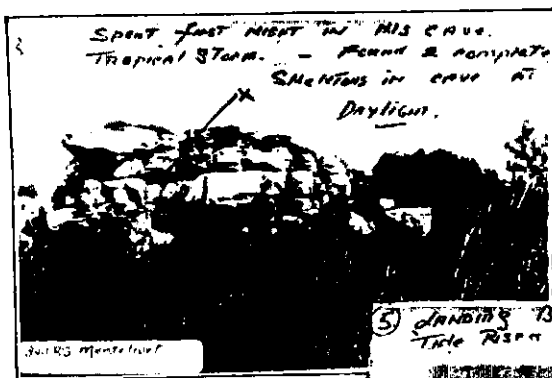
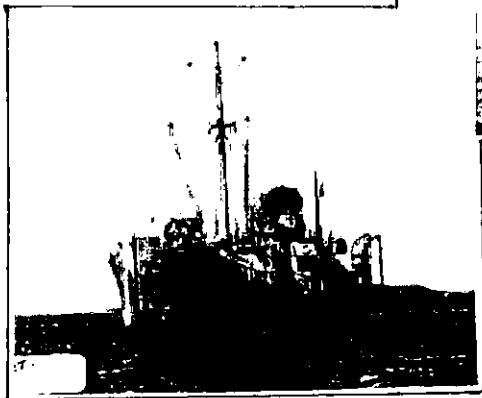
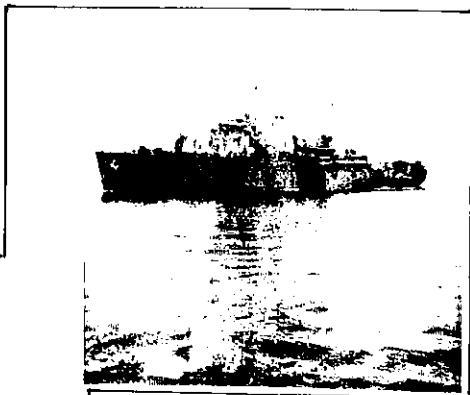


F/LT. BILL SANDERSON AND HIS CREW.

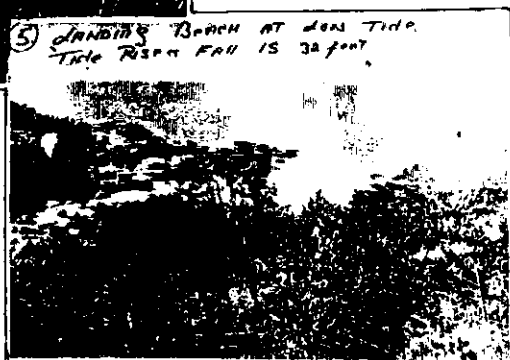
Ed. Simmonds.

Radar men had to be a pretty resourceful lot, for besides setting up the radar gear and getting 'on air,' they often had to set up camp as well. Showers, a workshop, not to mention the all important kitchen and Mess.... often these were attended to by the men who used bush timber, black iron, sisal paper and even ant bed material to make the camp comfortable. But towards the end of the war, more assistance seemed to become available, and so in the NWA in March 1944, F/Lt Bill Sanderson was in charge of a construction unit given the job of erecting the few buildings considered necessary for the 344 Radar camp down on West Montalivet Island. Bill Sanderson was an officer who, while he was not actually a Radar Officer, played a significant part in the RAAF radar network of NWA and Queensland. Before the war he was an electrical contractor in Victoria, and the manpower authorities considered him to be working in an essential occupation.... in other words he was not allowed to enlist. That restriction was relaxed when he made his business into a company!

He first tried to enlist in the RAN only to be told that his qualifications were not considered suitable for a Naval Officer. So he joined the RAAF as an Airman, and it was quickly realised that his background was such that he was needed for the 'civil' side of radar installations. He was then commissioned and placed in charge of installation parties at 1 RIMU. The 'civil' side can be described as constructing buildings, erecting aerials, installing electrical connections, placing transmitters and receivers into buildings etc. etc. Bill said that he then handed over to the intelligent and bright bods within the radar system. His knowledge of lifting devices, levers and winches proved invaluable for fixed radar stations such as the ACO's, 209 and 210 radar stations on the east coast, and the COL's at 38 RS and 46 RS, as well as the buildings for the LW/AW at 344 on Montalivet. His crew consisted of about 12 men, among whom was Perc. Robinson, said to be the oldest serviceman in NWA - who is said to have reduced his age by 10 years in order to enlist as a DMT in the RAAF in 1943 when he was



JUL 25 MONTAGUE





COMING ASHORE AT MONTALIVET.

(Opposite page)

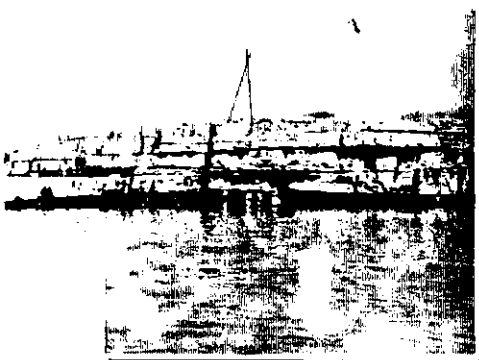
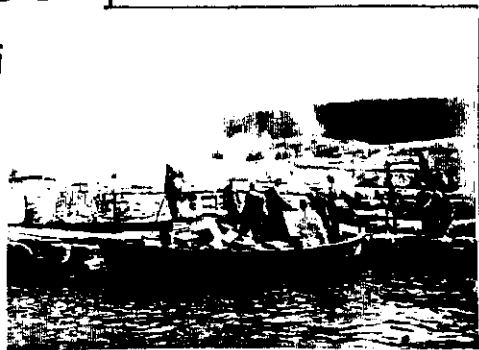
Escort vessel HMAS COOTAMUNDRA  
and transport HMAS BOMBO  
arrive at the island.

And the beach where the  
men came ashore.

(This page)

Landing stores and equipment  
from the ship's landing craft,  
and lifting some of the  
equipment over the island's  
rocks and low cliffs.

\*\*\*\*\*



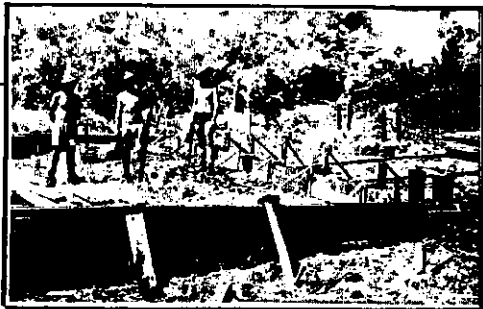
aged 50.

Perc, or 'P.O.' as he was perhaps better known, was in the installation party on Montalivet where he divined and located water - and then lost portion of one finger when packing a gland on the water pump while it was still working. He was put on the first boat that called and was packed off to receive attention in Darwin. Bill Sanderson referred to him as a 'Grand Man.'

The photo illustrations have been selected from many taken by Bill Sanderson on the Montalivet trip, these being the most relevant perhaps. The installation party, after completion of its tasks, left the island on SOUTHERN CROSS on 5th. June 1944.

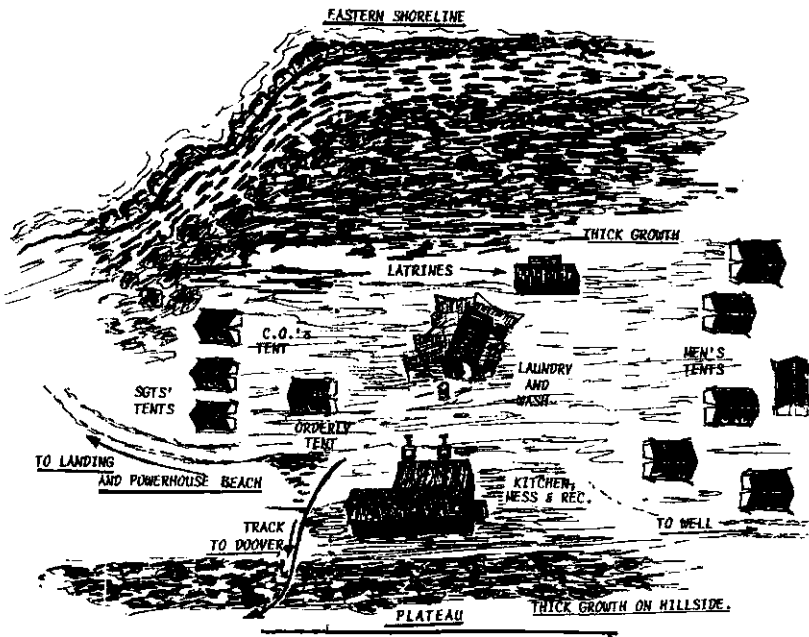
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(At Right) Pouring the Mess Foundations.



ROUGH PLAN OF 344 RADAR CAMP,  
WEST MONTALIVET.

(Laurie Leckie)



WEST MONTALIVET.

Stanley W. Morgan - (Radar Varns.)

344RS was formed at Mascot, NSW and we went by rail to Mt. Isa and road to Darwin. There we were loaded on the HMAS BOMBO with West Montalivet as our destination.

This trip took four days and we were told that the waters between Darwin and Timor and near the coast had not been charted since William Dampier in the 17th. century. Therefore we anchored each night because of unknown reefs. There were two submarine scares and the RAAF personnel refused to go below decks, for reasons obvious to us at least. After this incident RAAF personnel were treated as being members of the ship's crew and we had to perform the same duties. As a RAAF Medical Orderly I finished up shovelling coal in the boiler room.

Fortunately we reached our destination on the fourth day and so we escaped from the Navy. But we then faced the task of unloading our gear. Firstly into barges and then by manual labour onto the beach and up a cliff. Then we carried the gear to the site selected for the Doover and the camp area. No trucks or jeeps were supplied.

Most of the food landed on the island was hard tack on which we lived for some months until an oven was built to bake fresh bread. 19 meals a week were bully beef with the rest being either tinned 'gold fish' (pilchards in civvy street) or fish we could catch ourselves.

In the early days they did try an air drop of fresh food but this was unsuccessful so we went back onto hard tack.

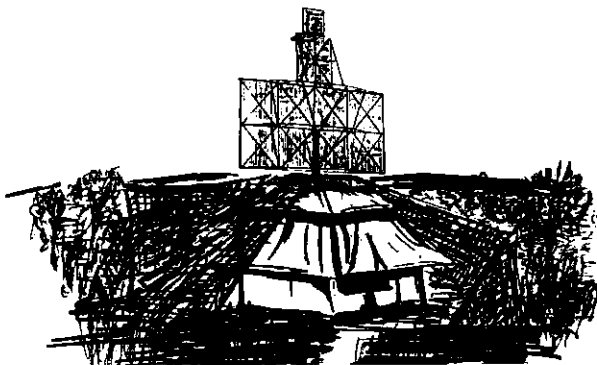
Fresh water was the greatest problem - no fresh water available - however the Navy left us some 44 gallon drums to tide us over until we could dig a well. This we did but the water turned salty after a very short time.

Since further supplies were uncertain, we were rationed to half a pint of water per man per day. Clothes had to be washed in sea water which caused skin problems among the men as well as quickly rotting our clothes.

After six months a small fishing craft manned by an RAAF crew arrived with food, water, mail and Comfort Fund parcels and this was repeated every few weeks. Once, not only did they bring the usual food, water and comforts but also a Salvation Army Officer.

We really had few problems except that we had a few bombs dropped by enemy aircraft returning to their bases plus a few shells from surface craft but no landings - just as well because we only had half a dozen guards with one NCO and they were only armed with the standard 303 Lee Enfields and some Mills bombs.

\*\*\*\*\*



## 344RS AT WEST MONTALIVET.

Walter Wood. (Radar Yarns)

### Isolation and Loneliness.

My main recollection of this station was the isolation and loneliness - about 30 men, no changes of personnel for approximately seven months. The same faces, the same limited view, the same food, no fresh water, no 'flicks' and no mail for several months initially.

344RS was a very tough posting. Six months was almost more than enough for any man to bear and the initial crew spent about nine months there. Probably what helped preserve our sanity was the hard work in establishing the place. The unloading of the 'BOMBO' was the worst with the boys standing waist deep in shark infested waters with lookouts, armed with .303's, standing on nearby rocks to frighten off any of the hungry monsters.

Supplies, including water, came initially by boat every two or three months until we were able to construct an 'airfield.' Thousands of stones and rocks were removed by hand between radar shifts. These were dispersed in the surrounding area so as not to make the runway noticeable to the Ungodly. What a celebration when the first plane arrived with fresh tucker and mail.

The shortage of fresh water caused problems with the Ford 10 generating plants - running 24 hours a day, they inevitably used water that we really needed for living. Now the C.O. was an ingenious man (a former builder and radio ham) and he got the boys to build a substantial evaporative cooling tower over a large holding tank which was then filled with sea water. The radiators were then disconnected from the engines and the water pumps connected to pipes leading to the top with cool water being drawn from the bottom of the holding tank. A periodic chore was the removal of salt which formed on the tower during the evaporative process but the unit was still working well when I left the unit after being there for nine months.

### A Visit by a Jap Submarine.

Late one afternoon a Jap submarine surfaced off the island. Frantic signals were sent to Fighter Sector and a rapid overhaul of our defences took place. These ranged from one Vickers machine gun (ex-WW1), two Brens, two Thompsons, a number of 303's, one box of hand grenades to the C.O.'s revolver. All that plus deadly silence.

Midday on the following day a Beaufighter appeared ready to do battle. But where was the enemy? Somewhere in the Indian Ocean feeling fully refreshed no doubt.

\*\*\*\*\*

## THE LADDIE WITH THE LAMP.

Gordon Shearwin. (Radar Yarns)

As the Dental Officer at Truscott, Gordon Shearwin visited the island to make a routine inspection of the men. On coming ashore, he was somewhat concerned to see a figure wandering around the camp area carrying a lighted hurricane lantern - this in broad daylight and full bright sunshine. But all was well. The island was completely out of matches and the 'laddie with the lamp' was the camp cigarette lighter!

\*\*\*\*\*



## MONTALIVET DIARY HIGHLIGHTS.

Duncan Stewart.

23rd. March 1944. The operational members of 344RS boarded a DC3 at Batchelor and flew direct to the Drysdale River Catholic Mission. Here we had a 2 night stay at 317RS which was operating close to the Mission.

On 25th. March we were marched to the beach where we waded out in groups to a launch, and then trans-shipped to HMAS BOMBO which was loaded with all the stores, equipment and operational gear to set up a complete radar unit and its camp.

Two days later BOMBO dropped anchor off West Montalivet and everyone was taken ashore by small motor launch. Over the next few days, the gear was loaded onto rafts made from timber lashed to drums, and then floated ashore, despite the huge 30 foot tides and the steeply shelving coral beach.

During the landing operations we ate out of tins and bedded down under the stars on the beach where we dug holes in the coral for our hips. The worst job was carrying long lengths of bore piping up on to the ground above the beach - the pipes became so hot that they burnt our skin as we were wearing only our hats, shorts and boots.

The island was probably 2 miles long and about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile wide, and a spring was eventually located some distance from the camp-site, so we had to carry those pipes a further 500 yards inland.

On 3rd. April, BOMBO weighed anchor to return to Darwin - then our work really started as we moved everything - by hand - from the beach to the approved camp-site - bags of cement, lengths of timber, cases and drums of foodstuff and stores - in fact everything the Air Force considered necessary to set up a Radar station. There were 2 gangs of men working on establishing camp...the radar group who were trying to establish camp and to settle in, and a works unit whose task it was to build a kitchen, Mess, Admin. block and ablutions. But first of all everyone worked together to erect the tents which were to be our sleeping quarters.

By 14th. April, a work party had cleared and levelled the Doover site at the N.E. end of the island plateau, and on 21st. April 344 Radar was 'On Air.' I was on 'C' shift with Tex Corbin, Don Bailey and Ted Corless - Don was our W/T Operator.

The first crisis came on 12th. May when our water supply gave out. After a 3 day search another source was tapped and made available to the camp - meanwhile we bathed and washed our clothes in the sea. And a launch and a yacht arrived on the 15th., bringing our first mail since our arrival two months before. The yacht was left for us to use, so on our days off we were often out fishing, afterwards enjoying meals of fresh fish.

The Mess building was completed on 17th. May, and that night we enjoyed our first meal in it. And although there was still much to do around the camp, a party was detailed on 31st. May to begin clearing a flat area and to burning off clumps of grass at the south end of the island - the area was to become our air strip, and eventually we enjoyed delivery by air of mail and some fresh food - even an occasional film, for at this stage a DH84 found the area large enough and clear enough to land.

Both SOUTHERN CROSS and VICTORY visited the island during May bringing mail and food parcels (we heard news of the fall of Rome in the European war) and one of our visitors on this occasion was a Salvo who spoke to us at an assembly....I seem to recall too that the C.O. seemed to enjoy our morning parades with the men dressed in battle gear!! What a farce!!

At this stage in our progress, every movement of men and materials was still

by Shank's pony - with not even a barrow of any sort - but despite the hard work that was our lot, we were always anxious to welcome the launch which came down from West Bay near Drysdale where a new base was being built. We had to rely on each other for company and even entertainment, and my tent-mates were great company. Tex Corbin played a guitar and sang endless and mournful ditties of country style tunes of the day. We had occasional dramas with snakes crawling through our tent, but the mosquito nets over our bunks saved us from the centipedes - much larger monsters than those back home. There were no major health problems that I can recall - a few burns, minor accidents - and even overgrown toenails!

Two Diary entries at the end of June mention Tommy-gun practice down on the beach (I suffered hearing loss for some days) and our launch was caught on the coral reef below the Doover, but somehow we managed to pull it clear. For recreation we hiked around the island when off duty and saw many turtles - we even tried turtle soup. And a Spitfire dropped a mail-bag by parachute, but this was not tried again.

Life on our coral island seemed almost like a holiday, and there were very few dramas. Our plots were mainly of shipping which we did not need to report. But there was one aircraft track identified as 'hostile' - on 20th July. I understand it was shot down in Vansittart Bay by Spitfires from the new Truscott air base.

The 2nd. August was my 20th. birthday...then on 10th. September my six months were up - and in fact all operational staff received notice of posting back to Darwin once all the replacement crew had arrived and settled in. I can remember Cliff Leavy and Wally Duckering (I had worked with Wally at Tomaree, Pt. Stephens) and I have reference to Ray Holding, Ken Nice and Austin Asche. Laurie Leckie arrived by air apparently - the pilot was F/O Slade and the aircraft was a DH84.

Before I left, there was more trouble because of the critical shortage of water with consumption far exceeding supply, and water had to be shipped in regularly.

On 20th. October HMAS STEADY HOUR called in at Montalivet, and I was able to leave the island.

#####

### Flight Lieutenant Jack Slade.

Of the 20 plus aircraft landings made on West Montalivet, only two were made apparently by S/Ldr. 'Doc' Fenton....the rest were made by F/O - later F/Lt Jack Slade who first flew in using DH 84's, later in Avro Ansons. F/Lt Slade had first trained as a pilot in the Empire Training Scheme; then after some time flying with a squadron, in December 1942 he was attached to 6 Communications Unit as No. 2 I.C. to the 'Doc.' When 'Doc' Fenton was discharged at the end of the war, Jack Slade assumed command, and because of his experience flying over so much of the Northern Territory and its coastline, he was well suited to the work.

He was discharged from the RAAF in April 1946, and he then became the chief, and only pilot for the Aerial Ambulance service which was about to commence a big expansion programme as an essential part of the Northern Territory Medical Service.

#####

FROM THE DIARY OF 344 RADAR, MONTALIVET.

Morrie Fenton.

For 5 days after he first arrived at Mascot on 15th. November 1943 to begin the formation of his new station, Pilot Officer P.R.A. Watson held the uniquely responsible position of being the total complement, and also Commanding Officer of his new unit, 344 Radar. Then slowly the men of the various musterings began to assemble under his command.... Guards, a Clerk, a Fitter/DMT, several Radar Mechanics and General Hands. In December came the Radar Operators, Telegraphists, a Medical Orderly. Finally at the end of the month the all-important Cook and Messman arrived - and as the necessary stores and equipment had now been allotted, collected and assembled, the unit was ready to move on from Mascot - at this stage to a destination still unknown.

Came the anxiously awaited Movement Order - and on 19th. January 1944, 344 Radar entrained at Central Station, Sydney - destination 44 Radar Wing at Coomalie, N.W.A., and travelling to the northern areas via Townsville and Mt. Isa.

44 Radar Wing was reached on 4th. February 1944 where evidently the C.O. was advised of his promotion to Flying Officer - and doubtless all personnel now knew that their eventual destination and radar site was West Montalivet Island, an isolated inshore island in the Bonaparte Archipelago off the lonely West Kimberley coast.

The men of 344 must have wondered why they were being sent to this place on an uninhabited part of Australia's coastline - but no one would have known then that construction of a giant secret air base was about to begin on Anjo Peninsula, near Drysdale, and that their station was intended to help keep watch over it. The new base was to be known as TRUSCOTT.

On 22nd. March, 344 consisting of 1 Officer and 20 other ranks departed by motor transport from Radar Wing, and no doubt the men were pleased to be leaving the place which was notorious for its work parties, P.T. and route marches. At Darwin all embarked on HMAS BOMBO, its immediate destination being Drysdale where another 19 men were to join the unit after having flown from Batchelor. Also F/O W. Sanderson and his party from 3 Maintenance and Installation Section were to accompany the unit.

Finally BOMBO with its escort HMAS COOTAMUNDRA arrived at West Montalivet Island where all disembarked on 27th. March... 2 Officers and 43 men going ashore.

Work commenced on landing stores, material and equipment, and F/O Sanderson and his men commenced the construction of the few buildings required, while the men set up temporary camp and began to erect their tents, latrines and cooking facilities. The immediately pressing task was to establish communications with H/Q and to erect the Doover together with its Ford 10 power units, and on 8th. April W/T communication with N.W.A. was established. Finally, on 21st. April, 344 Radar came 'On Air' and was operational. In a well co-ordinated effort, construction of Truscott air base began the same month, and 317 Radar, the other 'eyes' for the base, moved to Sir Graham Moore Island immediately north of Anjo Peninsula, leaving 319 Radar at Drysdale.

May would have been a very busy month at 344 - but few Diary entries were made. The supply launch VICTORY arrived from West Bay bringing more stores and equipment, and SOUTHERN CROSS, attached to the unit for the time, came with her. Moorings for SOUTHERN CROSS were established at East Montalivet, just a few miles east, and by then the construction work of F/O Sanderson and his men was completed.

Water proved a big problem on the island, and one of the construction party who claimed some success as a water-diviner, selected a place showing some promise - which after a fairly major digging operation, proved correct, although the water proved pretty brackish. However, eventually when a pump was installed, the water was suitable for ablutions and the like. At the end of May there were 2 Officers and 48 men on the island.

On 5th. June, F/O Sanderson and his construction party departed on SOUTHERN CROSS, together with camoufleur Mr. Dignam from the Department of Home Security - and on 16th., VICTORY arrived bringing the Area Radar Officer, S/Ldr Grout-Smith and F/Lt Clark the Wing Medico, to make the customary early inspection. All must have appeared satisfactory to the inspectorial eyes, for they departed the following day, happy no doubt that the lonely vigil was in good hands and as comfortable as possible.

Meanwhile, the men were already hard at work clearing an area at the south of the small island to serve as an emergency air strip, and 600 yards of the most suitable ground was cleared with the wry Diary comment....'Unless constantly attended to, the strip would become unserviceable due to the building of mounds by white ants.'

July proved an eventful month indeed, for VICTORY arrived on 9th, but was not able to afterwards continue her trip to Champagny because of engine trouble. Spare parts were requested by signal from RAAF Marine at Darwin, and these were flown out and dropped by parachute. Nine days later VICTORY was able to continue her trip.

Then on 20th. July, 344 was one of the stations which tracked the last intruder aircraft to be shot down over Australia.

The Dinah recce was first located by 326 at Cape Leveque as it approached the Australian coastline. 344, 317 and 319 also tracked the aircraft as it crossed the coast and turned eastward to approach Anjo Peninsula from the south. As the result of this carefully watched approach, 154 GCI at Truscott was able to take over and plan the interception.

Three Spitfires from 54 Squadron, RAF, were 'Scrambled' and the Dinah was shot down in Vansittart Bay by 2 of the fighters, while a third Spitfire was deployed over Drysdale - just in case. A well executed operation.

Then on 25th. July, Flying Officer Slade of 6 Communications Unit landed in a DH84 carrying mail and supplies, departing later the same day. So all the hard work at the strip was to pay off. F/O Slade was second only to S/Ldr Clyde (Doc) Fenton in his skill and daring in landing on the improvised landing strips of isolated radar stations.

Finally, VICTORY called again on the last day of July when returning from Champagny where a LORAN slave station had been established.

44 Radar Wing closed down in August 1944, and 344 then commenced reporting to 105 FCU which in turn became known as ADHQ, and for the remainder of the month the men continued with the work of improving their station, particularly the clearing and extending of the airstrip. Good drinking water was scarce too, and VICTORY was now to bring in regular supplies in drums - which often caused a taste suggesting the previous contents. And the SOUTHERN CROSS, which had been standing by while attached to the station, also left the area to return to West Bay and probably Darwin.

September saw the work parties still at the strip - 100 yards of extension was now completed; and meanwhile the calibration of the set was carried out with the co-operation of an aircraft from 6 C.U.

The unit strength was now 1 officer and 40 O.R.'s.

October proved fairly quiet. VICTORY called 3 times, and also STEADY HOUR arrived with an emergency supply of water. F/O Slade flew in twice in a DH84.

The W/T Administration reporting was now organised with ADHQ, which was now responsible for all matters of radar stations.

November saw the regular routine continuing :- further calibration flights were carried out, and VICTORY dropped anchor at the island on 4 occasions. On the 4th. trip, VICTORY brought a Dental Officer - also the new Commanding Officer, F/O K.S. While who was to take over from F/O Watson. This was effected on 6th. December, leaving F/O While as C.O.; and the Dentist and F/O. Watson left 344 on VICTORY on the 10th., but the BIG NEWS for the month was the arrival of a barge carrying a Jeep and trailer as transport for the station. No longer would Everything - but Everything - even drinking water, have to be manhandled and carried by hand from the landing beach to the camp, or from the beach to the Doover. No wonder the power house was constructed down at the beach!

December also saw a report on the station performance, with 40 plots exceeding 100 miles, the best range being 175 miles.

The Diary for January proved very light on information - particularly as the men would have been enduring the worst of the monsoonal season with storms, flooding downpours, humidity and insects of all varieties. But only a couple of promotions are recorded in station doings, with Sgt. Gore WOM promoted to Flt/Sgt and LAC Deane M.O. to Corporal.

February proved far more informative, with the arrival of well known Fr. Cubero from Drysdale Mission to hold Mass...and on 13th. F/Lt Slade (note the promotion) arrived in a DH84 to convey LAC Morton back to sick quarters at Truscott. And once again there was Big News for the lonely little unit with the arrival of an Entertainment Party on VICTORY. Admittedly there were only two men in the party - LAC Doug Elliott and LAC Fullagar - but how they were welcomed!

The Stats for this month were again very favourable with the best range being 182 miles.

VICTORY arrived at the island 3 times in March. And an aircraft showing distress IFF was picked up 80 miles from the station i.e. about 150 miles from Truscott. Over 50 continuing plots were passed in less than 40 minutes, and the echo faded gradually as the aircraft approached Truscott.

April proved rather noteworthy, for S/Ldr 'Doc' Fenton landed with urgently needed fresh food and supplies...VICTORY seems to have broken down on the regular island runs - but when she did finally make it on the 12th., not only did she bring the Area Chaplain, S/Ldr Carver, but she also brought a Cinema Operator and his equipment for a first island visit. Both were equally popular though, for the Chaplain's visit was the first in six months and of course the arrival of a film show was a tremendous morale booster for the unit. 344 was almost suburbanised!

F/Lt Slade flew in later in the month with a passenger - but more importantly for the unit, the 6 C.U. pilots could now bring and operate film equipment, and he turned on another film show. But unfortunately a tyre on the landing gear of his Anson had punctured, and a DH 84 flew in on the following day with a spare wheel for the Anson. Two aircraft on the Montø strip! Temperature Inversion had been evident during this month with some very long ranges being logged...and a ship was followed out to 160 miles. Late in the month were two more picture shows...one arranged by F/Lt Slade, and the other four days later when VICTORY arrived with film equipment on board.

There were now 34 men on the unit.

May proved a fairly uneventful month...VICTORY arrived twice and F/Lt Slade dropped in on 3 occasions. 'Doc' Fenton made a visit also, and each aircraft seemed to signal the arrival of yet another officer on inspection duties.

An important event was the arrival of a new Commanding Officer - F/O J.P. Gowing - early in the month on the supply launch VICTORY after which F/O While, the previous C.O., left by Anson on the 19th. June followed a rather similar pattern....F/Lt Slade arrived by Anson on 4 occasions, and also the small vessels VICTORY and AMARYLLIS called. VICTORY arrived early in the month bringing F/Lt Gordon Shearwin, the Dental Officer from Truscott; also an officer to inspect the water and distillation facilities. Later in the month a Medical and Hygiene inspection was made by F/Lt Kidd and F/Sgt Dewey from ADHQ. AMARYLLIS brought F/Lt Trathan, the Methodist Chaplain from Truscott. And there were now 29 men on the island.

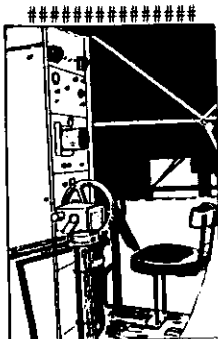
July began with yet more visitors, and AMARYLLIS apparently took over the supply run, for she called twice. But aircraft deliveries now seemed the accepted way of bringing visitors and fresh provisions, for an Anson landed on 4 occasions. Wing Commander A.K.Stielow, Commanding Officer of ADHQ was on one of these flights, and 3 days after his visit - on 26th. July - instructions arrived from ADHQ to cease operations that day. The following day the men set to work dismantling the gear, and packing and moving everything down to the beach ready to move out. On 29th. July 1945...some two weeks before VJ Day...a Farewell Break-up party was held, so signalling the end of operations for 344 on Montalivet Island.

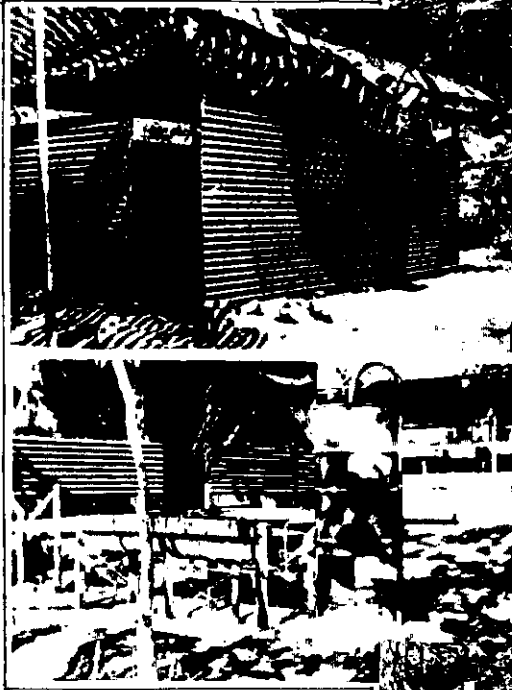
The men would have had little difficulty in pulling down, packing and transporting the equipment to the eastern landing beach, under the supervision of the C.O. and Sergeants, The heaviest items, the Ford 10 generators might have presented some problems, as they weighed about 1500 lbs each - but as the power house was at the beach, any problems would have been minimised.

Meanwhile, on 1st. August, a convoy of 3 small vessels under the command of F/O Brownson left West Bay at Truscott to bring the station in, the convoy comprising the launch AMARYLLIS - launch 017-29 and landing barge 018-11.

Evidently the work went well due no doubt to the easy loading on to the barge because of its loading ramp, and the convoy was back in West Bay by the 9th. with the men and gear to be transported to the strip and loaded onto 3 C47's. These flew out the same day to Darwin.

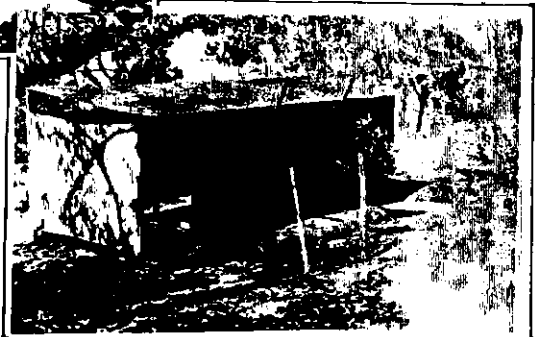
The last of the station Diary notes record that 344, now down to 1 Officer and 11 O/R's, travelled overland to arrive at RAAF Richmond on 11th. September. On 30th. November, F/O Gowing was posted to 2 P.D. for discharge, and F/Lt. A.F.Williams assumed Temporary Command, with 8 men left on the unit.





MONTALIVET IMPROVEMENTS.

1. The Mess nears completion - note the flywire and louveres for coolness.
2. The showers.
3. Hot water service for the laundry and kitchen. A dangerous looking convenience!
4. There was little privacy down in the 'essentials,' - airmen for the use of.



MONTE MEMORIES OF MATES AND MUCH MORE.

Austin Asche.\*

I am not going to write about those who are still with us because it would give them all swelled heads which might be dangerous at their advanced age. Suffice to say I was lucky to have had such congenial companions.

So...Ken Nice, Laurie Leckie, Wally Duckering, Ray Kelly...and others whose names are now a little indistinct...Thanks! Also to Max Baker if he's still around. Max was a mech, a little older than the rest of us, certainly wiser, and almost a father figure. He could assess character well, sometimes with a dry sarcasm which would prove very entertaining to the listeners, though not always to the person described. Also to Gus Sims our very friendly cook who tried very hard to get some variety out of the rather monotonous supplies of M&V and tinned sausages. He lives in Perth now, although I have not seen him for some years.

When thirty or so men were confined in these small, isolated camps, there were often problems of one person who could not get on with another particular person, or of just one person who somehow managed to disrupt the place. I saw such things in other camps, but not at Monte. That of course does not mean that all was sweetness and light. Various personal irritations erupted from time to time and minor feuding manifested itself sometimes between individuals. But apart from the traditional whinges which act as an emotional catharsis in every camp, there were no really troubling incidents, and we managed to tolerate idiosyncrasies and remain on friendly terms. Perhaps we were all fairly reasonably adjusted individuals...perhaps we were lucky, or perhaps years have dimmed the memory. Who can say now?

Our arrival was not propitious. We were the first batch of relieving operators and mechs. Those who had set up this place had been there for nine or ten months and were heartily sick of it. We were greeted with loud encouraging cries of "You'll be sorry!" and regaled with stories of the hardships to come. In fact, owing to the hard work of our predecessors, the camp was in good working condition, and the Doover was operating well. But clearly, it must have been a tough job for the first few months. If any of the original team reads this, we offer our thanks and respect.

There is a venerable old service joke of a new recruit arriving at a camp and being asked by the sergeant if he can make a bed. Naturally he says "Yes" - and is then handed hammer and nails and told to do so. Something like that happened to us, though some of us managed to inherit the framework of some of the original beds. It didn't make much difference because mostly they were made of local wood, which was definitely not of Huon Pine, and was subject to rot, ravage, and white ants. And any frames we did inherit were in pretty poor condition, for their makers, conscious of our impending arrival, had not bothered to attend to the frequent maintenance necessary to keep the superstructure from collapsing. So we set to making beds. It was an important skill to learn, because lack of expertise inevitably led to one's being deposited on the ground, usually in the middle of the night, to share fortunes with various creeping or slithering creatures which at best, regarded the human body as just another obstacle to crawl over in the journey from point A to point B.

Having put together the legs and frame, the next task was to fit hessian to the frame. If the hessian was properly and tightly fitted, one had a firm and comfortable foundation for one's blankets. But the moist climate, and the impact of sweaty bodies 'spine-bashing' after shift, would ultimately rot the material. My carpentry skills were about 'zilch,' so I became quite used to that familiar old tearing sound that meant the bum was once more about to be deposited on to the knobby and pointed rocks beneath.

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\* Hon. Austin Asche AC, QC.



The other problem was to discourage the insect life from crawling up the legs of the bed, and more importantly, the very large centipedes which obviously welcomed the desirable new residence between blankets provided by friendly humans. To combat this, each bed leg was placed in the centre of a cake tin filled with sump oil. Great care was taken to see that the legs remained in the centre as any shift to one side and the invasion began again. I can personally vouch that sharing one's bed with a centipede is not to be recommended.

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We found that West Montalivet was about half a mile wide and about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles long. It was selected as the furthest north of the Bonaparte Archipelago islands, thus allowing the Doover a forward sweep to the north uninterrupted by any islands. This was of course, a necessity for the best performance; but the drawback was that this island had virtually no fresh water. Some brackish water served for the showers, but was virtually undrinkable, so that all fresh water came in 44 gallon drums on a supply vessel. When jeep transport arrived, the drums could then be taken direct to the kitchen. This of course meant building a road, so we included road building in our extended education. But the jeep made things much easier all round. The Doover itself was on the highest point of the island about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles from the camp. One trudged up a rocky path to the Ops room to start one's shift, usually carrying the essential waterbag, and at night, a hurricane lamp or torch.

There were certainly snakes on the island, but I can't say we were really worried by them. They were shy creatures and generally kept out of our way. We were more interested in the lizard life which scurried around us. I regret to inform the RSPCA (of which I later became a patron of the MT branch) that our pleasant habit was to throw small stones at these lizards - not to kill them, for we enjoyed their presence. The idea was to aim at their tails. A well directed hit would see them discard their tails which remained wriggling on the ground while they made their escape. This was apparently their main form of defence against predators. The interesting thing was to see how quickly they grew new tails, and we would often see our recent victims with small stumps protruding from the back, indicating that a replacement was on the way. It was, of course, considered most unsporting to throw stones at any lizard with an incomplete appendage.

In some recompense for our discourteous behaviour, we would catch flies to feed to the smaller lizards, who became quite tame enough to crawl on our hands to be fed. It was considered normal to talk to the lizards, but when they started talking back it was time to see the MO. The nearest of the many other islands of the archipelago was East Montalivet. Since we never got across to it, it had a sort of "Bali Hai" enchantment. It was supposed to have plenty of water, beautiful beaches, and some soft sandy soil which contrasted with the motley collection of rocks which constituted the surface of West Monte. I don't know how much of this was true. Sunsets were spectacular, and although the climate was almost always hot, there was some relief in the wet season when magnificent storms swept across the island, and for a few hours, one revelled in the novelty of feeling cold.

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The radar gear was LW/AW, and I have never yet met anyone who has operated an LW/AW who does not, when describing it, start moving one arm in a sideways circular motion. The operator propelled himself, and the gear, round 360° by turning a wheel at the side of his chair, slowing and adjusting the aerial to get the best echo when a blip was found. Distance and bearing were then read, and that information was telephoned through to the other operator on shift who positioned it on a Grid Map with that position then radioed by the W/T operator (the third member of the shift) to the HQ at Truscott.

Shifts lasted six or seven hours and, as mentioned, consisted of two radar ops and one W/T op. One radar op took turns on the Doover, usually in half hour stretches, while the other took over the plotting, recording and other odd duties. We were quite keen about the work and each shift would compare its results with others. This was not always a fair competition because flying activity was usually concentrated in certain hours and the shift that got those hours usually scored the most sightings. Nevertheless it served to pass the time and gave us incentives. I still have one or two cards on which we recorded the results of the month. Of course most of our keenness was inspired by the hope that we may be tracking a 'bandit,' or enemy plane. Regrettably, I must in all honesty report that this was unlikely. By the time we reached Monte the Japs were in retreat from this part of the world. We did pick up a few unidentified aircraft, but these were almost certainly our own who had forgotten to turn on their IFF. However, we did have the pleasure of tracking our own planes on various manoeuvres, or flying off on bombing missions. And on some rare occasions we would detect one of our own in trouble and displaying the emergency IFF.

Like all radar sets, the LW/AW could not pick up very low-flying aircraft. I was therefore not particularly surprised one day when two aircraft 'buzzed' the Doover at about 200 feet. But visual sightings had to be reported back to HQ and this posed a dilemma. Although we had all been given a course in aircraft identification, much of it sounded too technical for one like myself who had long realised he was a mechanical moron. During the lectures I had happily turned off and caught up on a little refreshing snooze to prepare for the next and hopefully more interesting subject. Now the day of reckoning was at hand and I was being asked to identify these intruders roaring overhead. At least I knew they were ours as they had RAAF markings - even I knew that much. But how to describe them? I settled on the only description I could think of, and solemnly informed HQ that "two twin-engined monoplanes" had just flown over. Since this information would have fitted at least 50% of all RAAF aircraft at the time, I am not sure just how much HQ was enlightened. But at least it was accurate.

The Cathode Ray tube on the LW/AW was calibrated to 180 miles. Our effective range was on average about 120. With Temperature Inversion we could often get the full range, and with mechs doing mysterious things to the calibration we could, on rare events, get a bit more. Our skill improved with practice and ultimately we could all pick up the smallest of blips from the surrounding 'grass.'

The LW/AW was developed by Australian engineers and scientists and was a splendid tribute to their efficiency and initiative. Being light and easily transportable, it could be set up very quickly. It was much used in the South West Pacific Area and by all accounts did all that was required and expected of it - and more.

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Swimming at Montalivet was one of the great pleasures of the place. There were a couple of superb beaches away from the camp, but the camp beach itself was excellent and only about 200 yards down from the tents. The landing beach wasn't so good because it was smaller and had a number of rocks. But it proved very exciting in the wet when storms churned up the sea. Then its narrow confines compressed the waves and gave us some surf. It wasn't Bondi, but it wasn't bad.

I was rather a skite about swimming and liked to go out further than anyone else. Nick Carter followed me out one day. It was clear he was challenging me to see who could go furthest before the other lost his nerve. We went a hell of a way out and we began thinking deeply about certain large sharks

that were reported to be in the area and might wish to join us for lunch. The water was very deep, and we were both getting tired and starting to realise the obvious fact that the further out you go the further you have to swim back. Finally, and under the influence of increasing concern, or more accurately, plain simple fear, we came to a sensible decision. We both turned back at the same moment, so that neither could claim he went further than the other.

This was my first experience in the art of face-saving compromises, and it was a lesson worth learning. In later years in the law I employed it to good effect. Some cases must be fought out of course, but many lend themselves to obvious and sensible solutions, and the art of settlement is to find a fair result which makes both sides happy.

I remained an incorrigible show-off about swimming. We saw a log far off in the sea. Naturally the great bronzed camp skite decided to investigate. This was on the landing beach which had a few rocks sticking out in the distance. I swam a fair way out to the last of these and climbed up to get a better look. It was just as well.

There he was - a very large crocodile, slowly and peacefully drifting along about 200 yards away, and fortunately, quite unaware of my presence. While I had been swimming I had not been able to hear the shouts and yells of the chaps on the beach who had made some further observations from a higher point and concluded that the average log does not possess a tail to swish backwards and forwards, even in leisurely fashion. I heard the shouting now, but the advice being tendered was, as far as I was concerned, boringly superfluous.

It is a pity no-one had a stopwatch that day. I am convinced I covered the distance back in a time that would have done credit to any Olympic Champion. The chaps got out their .303's for some useful target practice, but they didn't get him - he was too far away. The only result was to make him move a little faster: but I think he was sneering as he did so.

It may be appropriate to say something about the guards whose duty it was to defend the camp from attack. This being somewhat unlikely, and it being highly undesirable to have a dozen or so men doing nothing all day every day, the guards were appointed to various general duties round the camp. The duties were not burdensome, and I suspect they found camp life far easier than anything they had done before. For they came from a hard school. Being much older than the operators (they were in their late twenties or early thirties) they had been through the worst of the depression and experienced the hardships and miseries of those times. They were not unfriendly to us, but obviously felt that we had seen very little of the world. We rather resented this at the time, but of course, from their point of view, they were probably right. They had all been recruited from the same area and were West Australian miners and very tough. I think they regarded us with the sort of bored tolerance of an old dog surrounded by yapping puppies. Perhaps I should make it clear, if I have not already done so, that we operators were all in the eighteen or nineteen year age group. The guard sergeant was the odd man out, in the sense that he was a Tasmanian, but he too had been a miner, and completely understood his troops. They respected him and so did we. He was tolerant and fair, and had the leader's skill of being obeyed without question.

I think he found us rather amusing and we gave him no trouble.

Our own sergeant, Nick Carter, was a good bloke who managed us well, tolerated our eccentricities and didn't come the raw prawn. Not that he had too much to worry about. We were fairly amenable and none of us went troppo on him.

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Going round and round on the Doover could get very boring when no blips were appearing. Most of us took to singing to keep awake. Bing Crosby would have been extremely flattered by the numerous versions of his popular hits sung loudly and lustily, though he would have found it a painful experience to hear how they were rendered; and I use the word 'rendered' in the dictionary sense of 'tearing or wrenching apart.' Suffice to say that, despite a vast amount of repetition which might charitably be called 'practice,' if any of us felt that he was destined for fame as a vocalist, he was speedily disabused by the frank and forthright comments of the others.

I very much doubt that I could or would or should suck out a whole tin of sweetened condensed milk today. But on Monte it was an accepted recreation. One purchased a tin from the canteen, punctured two holes in the top, lay down on one's bed and imbibed slowly. Delicious! It was, however, most unwise to leave a partially consumed tin around. Ants, it appeared, had the same predilection for the stuff that we had. They were even prepared to sacrifice themselves, for, once inside the tin, they got stuck in the goey mixture and died what was no doubt a glorious death, which did not stop their multitudinous friends and relatives from rushing in to do the same.

I found out the hard way. I had consumed some part, and left the tin standing for no more, at most, ten minutes. On return, I grabbed it, and with pleasurable anticipation, took one mighty suck. A mixture of condensed milk, formic acid, and recently deceased ant bodies does nothing for the taste buds - or at least nothing desirable. Nor did my spluttering profanity (when I could speak) arouse the slightest sympathy in my companions, who seemed to regard it as the joke of the weak.

The first officer we had at Monte was not liked....but looking back over the years I can put a reasonable case for his defence. He had been in charge of setting up the camp, and had obviously done it well in the face of harsh, natural surroundings. The camp itself was run efficiently and I am sure, delivered what HQ asked of it. Nor can I point to any glaring injustice, to any deliberate persecution of an individual, or for that matter, to any cronyism or favouritism. If he criticised, it was usually on a sound basis. His favourite term was "piss-poor," which, in any RAAF camp, would hardly qualify as likely to shock and horrify the average serviceman. Furthermore, when he used the term, it was usually an accurate description of what had been done, and if he exacted a penalty, it was a penalty perfectly fair and appropriate to the offence.

So, looking back, perhaps we misjudged him. All I can say is that we did not get on.

My real purpose, however, is to mention his successor, and to pay a long delayed tribute to an officer and a gentleman in all the best senses of the word.

When F/O While came, the camp continued to run efficiently, but the atmosphere changed. He was interested in what we were doing, and made us feel that we really were doing something important. Without losing his identity as an officer, he was friendly and happy to help us organise various games, debates and other recreations.

One instance of his co-operation and good sense stays in my mind. We, the operators, told him we were not happy with the way the shifts were organised. The earlier officer would have told us not to be presumptuous and to get on with the job. F/O While suggested that we present him with our own plans. This we did. It merely involved changing the lengths and times of the various shifts. He immediately accepted it. It was not only good psychology but had sound common sense. After all, so long as the operators provided a 24 hour service, there was no harm in letting them organise it.

He did not fuss or deliberately try to court popularity, but we knew he was genuinely trying to do his best for all of us, so popularity naturally came to him. We enjoyed his command: he was a great bloke, and, if he is still with us - my deepest thanks.

. . . . .  
Bill Tucker.

The comedian of the camp was Bill Tucker. He had a delightfully sardonic sense of humour mostly directed against himself. I first met him at Wilson's Prom, where he regarded himself as the oldest inhabitant, since successive drafts out always seemed to miss him. However, he finally made it to Darwin and then on to Monte.

He was hopeless at drill, invariably going left on the order 'right turn,' and presenting arms in a way which put those nearest to him in considerable danger. At Monte he achieved the distinction of producing a rifle for inspection in which an army of opportunistic ants had built their nest right through the barrel. His reaction to such misadventures was an expression of mock horror and a long and involved explanation which, so far as it could be understood, suggested that he was the innocent victim of malignant forces over which he had no control. It worked. Even the most ferocious sergeant ended up regarding him as some special case of irredeemable incompetence, and apart from relieving his frustrations by much shouting and threats of dire and often seriously illegal penalties, left him alone. If this suggests that Bill was a bit dim - forget it. He was in fact, one of the most quick-witted persons I have ever met. He was a natural entertainer, and, as well, a competent amateur magician. While at Monte he decided to learn the clarinet, and later in civvy life, he and others formed a jazz band.

His great mate was Ken Nice, a quiet, likeable bloke, with a gift of laughing at and with Bill, and contributing his own brand of sly humour. They were both jazz fanatics and introduced me to this fascinating world which I had not before encountered. I learned of legendary characters called King Oliver and Duke Ellington and Fats Waller and Bessie Smith. I cannot claim that I ever became an aficionado, but I am grateful for the education they gave me.

Bill died a few years ago. Ken is still with us...Hi! Ken.

Phil Newbold.

Radar Ops will remember the apparently haphazard system where, periodically, friends were separated and sent to different stations. In the Army, and some other parts of the RAAF, blokes stayed together for years. I suppose our system meant that we necessarily learned the art of tolerance and mixing well, since you never knew when you were going to be separated from a group you had come to like and be comfortable with, and thrown in with a new mob. Somehow Phil Newbold and I stayed together. We met at Wilson's Prom, got posted on the same day, travelled to Darwin (train, lorry, cattle trucks), and then to Monte, and later, to Bathurst Island, and then home. I saw a fair bit of Phil after discharge, then we lost sight of each other for a time. I suppose we were both building careers, and I spent a few years in Brisbane. We met again, a few years later and remained firm friends until his death.

Phil was a fascinating character. He was highly intelligent and full of ideas. At Monte, while I spent the leisure hours reading Shakespeare, (which may or may not have done me any good), he busied himself learning much more useful things, such as how to build a radio. Ray Kelly, one of the aristocrats of the place, (i.e. he was a radar mech), helped him. Of course

all the mechs had built their own, so we were able to listen to the dulcet tones of Tokyo Rose announcing the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere. It would be wiser not to enquire too much where the mechanics got a lot of their equipment.

Phil then got down to the Power Plant, trying to find out about electrical generation. When the jeep arrived he turned his attention to motor mechanics. He acted quickly to douse a fire in the Doover one day, and thereafter claimed to have been mentioned in dispatches because our CO, F/O While, had mentioned him in reporting the incident to HQ.

We all learned Morse Code from the W/T ops, but Phil learnt it best, and his technique was sufficient to take over the W/T op's job from time to time and let the W/T man have a go at the Doover. This was probably highly illegal.

After discharge, he did a course at the Gordon Institute of Technology and then commenced his own business. He was full of original ideas and was obviously going to be a great success. I have no doubt that he would ultimately have become one of the movers and shakers of our country. But it was not to be.

Still in his twenties, he had a serious road accident which left him a paraplegic. While he was in hospital, his business, a one man show, fell apart. He obtained employment with the Geelong Water Board (I am not sure that is its correct name) and I have the word of the CEO there that he gave sterling service. But he was never afterwards in good health.

He had one piece of good fortune. He met and married Maureen, a sweet lady, who looked after him with loving care.

He remained his old cheerful self, still exploring original ideas, until his death many years ago.

I retain the memory of a bright questioning mind in someone who would have gone far if the fates had been kinder.

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*Sergeant Lynden Carter and F/O While ('Nick' and the C.O.)  
swimming with the sea creatures.*

The group I arrived with on Montalivet was the second wave of operators posted to relieve the 'originals' who had, among other things, endured the rigours of building the station in the first place. They were more than overjoyed to welcome us, and to regale us newcomers with their tales of their hardship and woe. As far as my memory serves me, Bill Tucker, Phil Newbold (both now unfortunately deceased) Austin (Oscar) Asche, Laurie Leckie, Wally Duckering, Cliff Leavy and myself flew from RAAF Darwin to Truscott in a Dakota, and after the inevitable period spent in 'Pool' at 58 OBU, we were shipped by RAAF launch to Montalivet - a day and overnight trip. Laurie was the lucky one - he scored a flight by DH84. Due to the limited carrying capacity of the launch, only those tinned essentials to keep body and soul together were brought in, which made life for the Cook extremely easy. Hence no beer at that stage - no entertainment - and basically nothing extra for the first 3 to 4 months

Due to sickness on the island during the wet season and the difficulty of removing urgent cases, the word went out that somehow or another we had to cut a landing strip suitable for a small aircraft. The island was extremely small, but on the far southern end we toiled for days and weeks to clear a short dirt run just long enough for a light aircraft to land. I think that was the hardest physical job I have - and others - ever undertaken in my life. However, it was all worth while in the long run, for it certainly added to our feeling of security as well as other benefits. Then, to add to our problems, the 'well' on the island became salty and drinking water had to be brought in from the mainland - a 2 day trip by launch - in smelly 44 gallon petrol drums. The problem of getting the drums to the beach was quickly solved by the then 'powers that be' by marshalling off-duty personnel - usually shift workers which meant operators - to swim out to the launch then swim and push the drums to the beach. Everyone, which usually meant operators again, then had to fill and cart at least 2 buckets of water a day for about a quarter of a mile up hill to the camp. Though now all of this may seem a bit of a whinge, when one looks back, we were all remarkably fit at around 19 years of age, and no doubt it certainly didn't do any of us any harm.

Before the small aircraft started to land on our hand-made strip, we managed to supplement our tinned diet by one day catching a huge turtle. I don't know if you have ever tried turtle, but those of us so inclined (which included myself) managed to feast on turtle steaks for a couple of days.

Another trick in which the whole camp was involved was the catching of huge quantities of fish with the aid of a couple of hand grenades. These were thrown into the water from the cliffs from where we sighted a large shoal of fish which, as can be imagined, did a good job of stunning them. We then all dived in and collected a huge haul. All of this seemed to have the C.O.'s consent so I guess it wasn't against any regulation.

Life started to change a little for the better when the entertainer, Doug Elliott, arrived on the island and did a wonderful job in entertaining us with jokes, stories and musical records and numbers - I think he travelled the whole of the Northern Areas entertaining the more remote radar stations. When the small kite started to land in the two months before we were all reposted, we managed some beer, films, and some fresh meat and eggs. Believe it or not, we also managed to receive a 'Jeep' in the last month of our stay which solved the water carrying problem, and made life a little easier for our replacements.