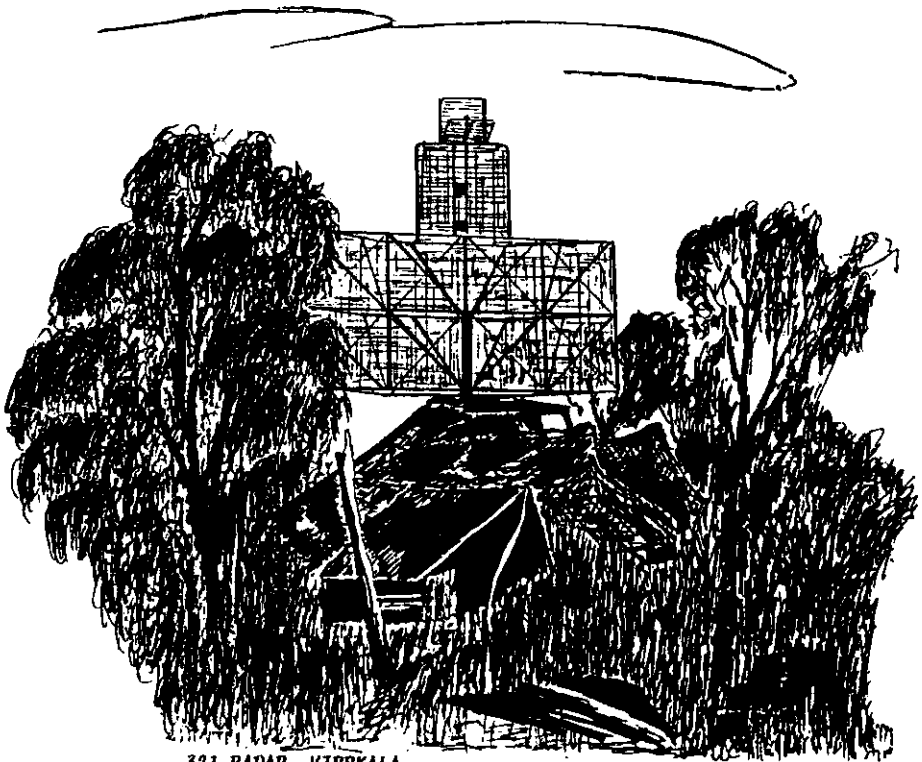


R 15/6/98

321 RADAR YIRRKALA (GOVE)



321 RADAR, YIRRKALA.

Edited by **MORRIE FENTON**

The History and Stories

of

**321 RADAR
YIRRKALA
(GOVE)**

*The Story of a small
Australian Radar Unit
from its formation in
Sydney in April 1943
to its disbandment at
GOVE NT in October '45.*

oOo

Morie Fenton
Edited by **MORRIE FENTON**

CONTENTS.

Acknowledgements.		Page 3
Foreword	Peter Callaghan	5
Introduction	Morrie Fenton	6
From the 321 Diary	"	7
Personnel		21
321 Radar Yirrkala	Merv Harms	26
Early Days of 321	Max Allen	30
Yirrkala '44	Wal Cornish	34
Jottings from Yirrkala	Mr. A.D.Banks	35
A New Role for 321	George Mills	36
Yirrkala...A Nostalgic Trip Back	Lynden Carter	38
Stirring Up Memories of 321	Max Counsell	40
Faded Memories	John Whitfeld	42
Yirrkala - '45 and '91	Alan Stark	43
321 Yirrkala Closes Down	Laurie Leckie	46
Maps		48
Gove Peninsula Today	Morrie Fenton	51

#####

321 RADAR

YIRRKALA
(GOVE)

ISBN 0 646 33705 X

C 1997

Edited by M.E.Fenton

(Morrie Fenton)

Published by

M.E.Fenton

27 Lasscock Avenue,

LOCKLEYS 5032.

#####

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

I acknowledge with thanks the help, the enthusiasm and the co-operation of all who are mentioned below. Their personal contributions and stories bring this little history to life.

In my opinion, all are co-authors of a 'combined effort.' It is my hope that this story will add a little to the history of our northern coastline - of Eastern Arnhem Land particularly.

*Peter Callaghan
Merv Harms
Max Allen
Wal Cornish
Mr. A.D.Banks
George Mills
Lynden Carter
Max Counsell
John Whitfeld
Alan Stark
Laurie Leckie
RAAF Historical*

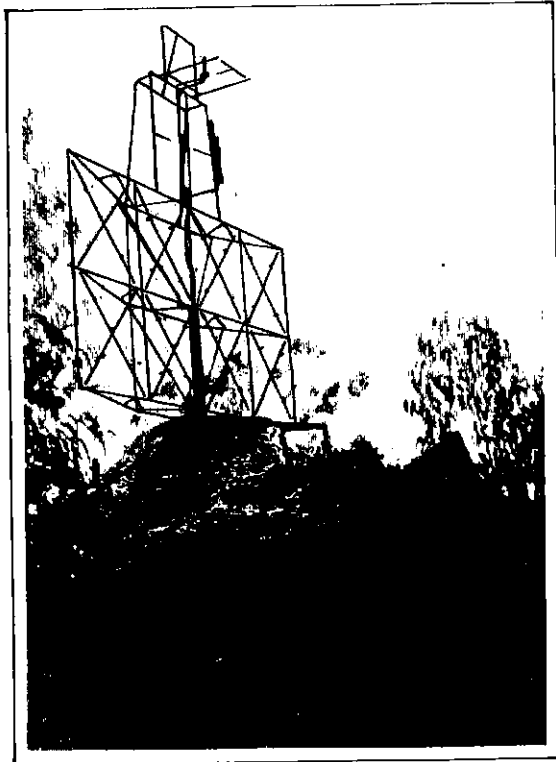
The photos mainly came from Merv Harms, Laurie Leckie, Alan Stark, Max Counsell John Whitfeld, Lynden Carter and Berney Adams.

#####

There are two books which are strongly recommended to add to the story of 312 Radar.....

*"A Bridge Over Time" Harold Thornell 1986
"With the RAAF at Gove" Peter Callaghan 1988.*

#####



321 Radar at Virrkala. A Light Weight Air Warning (LW/AW) station, its camp site is now the car park of the Virrkala School. No trace of the radar or the camp remains today.

FOREWORD

I lived for a decade in Gove, and in my spare time spent many interesting hours wandering through the bush discovering remains of the old RAAF base installations. These moving reminders of a violent time in our country's history led me to undertake research into the history of the RAAF involvement in the Gove area during WW 2.

Radar was one of the war winning inventions about which very little has been written, and RAAF Radar is no exception. The official RAAF histories and the Form 50 Operations Record Logs give scant information about the radar operations for latter-day historians. Consequently, very little is known about the men who operated the vital early warning radar stations around the North Australian coast. My knowledge of 321 Radar was therefore very limited at first.

During the course of my enquiries, I heard about the Radar Groups and Morrie Fenton, and started corresponding. The records held by Morrie, and his contacts among the radar veterans provided the key for me to open up the mystery surrounding the establishment of 321 Radar at Yirrkala (Gove). Subsequently, I also had the pleasure of meeting some veterans personally when they returned to Gove for nostalgic visits.

I also enjoyed reading 'Radar Yarns' and other radar publications over the years. As well as 321 Radar, I was also able to obtain information on 312 at Wessel Is., 308 at Milingimbi, and 309 at North Goulburn Is., which completed the picture of Radar in East Arnhem Land. Surely one of the most remote groups of radar installations anywhere!

Unfortunately, nothing remains of the old 321 Radar site. The area was levelled and cleared for the Yirrkala School in the early 70's. During 1995 - 'Australia Remembers' Year - I was able to have erected at Yirrkala township an historic sign commemorating the work of 321 Radar in WW 2. This sign overlooks the Arafura Sea, down from the hill on which the radar array was operated, and faces the direction from which an enemy attack would have most likely come. Fortunately, armed raids never eventuated, though Japanese high flying reconnaissance aircraft overflew the Gove base on several occasions. They undoubtedly would have done something had they the resources at that stage of the war to do so.

Chronicles such as Morrie Fenton's narrative of 321 Radar are an important record of the lonely, repetitive job that operating a radar station was. These men did not receive from the media the publicity that the more glamorous flying squadrons received, which makes this record all the more valuable.

Cottesloe, W.A. September 1997.

Peter Callaghan.

o o o

INTRODUCTION.

321 Radar was first formed at Mascot in April 1943, and was set up at Yirrkala NWA in August of that year. Yirrkala is at the eastern end of the Aboriginal tribal lands known as Arnhem Land - the history of which dates back before the 16th. century when Macassans, Malaysians and even Chinese periodically visited the coastline seeking trepang, pearls and shark and other treasures of the seas.

But the recorded history of the area commenced with the Dutch explorers of the northern coastline, and in 1623 two Dutch ships sailed into the Gulf of Carpentaria. One of these - the ARNHEM, - commanded by Willem van Colster, turned westward after sighting the bottom of the gulf, then sailed north to follow the coastline. The north-east point of land was named Cape Arnhem and the land took the same name....Arnhem Land....after which the ship turned west again along the coastline.

The Gove Peninsula took its name during World War 2, after Pilot Officer William Gove, a Hudson bomber navigator and son of Wing Commander Robert Gove, was killed on 20th. April 1943 after take-off from Milingimbi, which is about half way along the Arnhem Land coastline. Afterwards, a new war-time airstrip at the eastern end of Arnhem Land was named Gove Airstrip - and subsequently the peninsula of land on which the airstrip was located.

Yirrkala was the name given to the Methodist Mission established near Cape Arnhem about the year 1935 or soon afterwards - Yirrkala meaning 'running stream' - and in fact a stream, or creek rather, was near to the Mission site.

321 Radar has at various times been described as having all three as its location - Cape Arnhem - Gove - and Yirrkala - but the last is the most correct, for the station was set up next to the Mission. 321 was the most easterly radar station in North West Area during World War 2, and was the first RAAF Unit on Gove Peninsula.

321 RADAR, YIRRKALA.

From the A50 Diary from Formation to 'On Air.'

321 RDF station was one of several radar units which first formed at Mascot, Sydney, where stores and gear were collected, packed and prepared ready for transport. This was in April 1943, but the first Diary notes are made only in June. Here also the men of the various musterings reported in to be brought on strength. Pilot Officer D. Oakes was the first appointed Commanding Officer.

On 2nd. June, a unit movement order was received to proceed to MWA, and eight tons of equipment and the technical gear were moved to Alexandria rail yards, while the remainder of the equipment left by convoy for Terowie, S.A. 321's C.O. and 40 men left Sydney by rail on 6th. June, travelling via Melbourne and Adelaide to arrive at the famous - or infamous - Terowie staging camp on 8th. June. They moved quickly on again by narrow gauge, and Alice Springs was reached on 11th. June. from where they moved on the next day by road convoy for Larrimah. At Elliott, AC1 Watts received treatment at the RAP, and at Larrimah, AC1 White was admitted to the camp hospital. On 17th. June, 321 RDF arrived at 44 RDF Wing, Coomalie, near Adelaide River, and P/O. D.Grahame was appointed to take over as Commanding Officer, but P/O Oakes stayed with the unit as Tech. Officer and 2nd.I/C. LAC Crawley became the third casualty of the trip when he was admitted to 1 MRS at Darwin on 28th. June....and so ended the first eventful month for 321 RS.

The opening days of July saw the return of LAC Crawley to the unit, and P/O Grahame attended 4RSU for a two week course, no doubt leaving P/O Oakes in charge of the unit before the C.O. returned to 321 at Wing on 18th. July. Three days later, the unit's gear was again packed and transported to Darwin, and orders were received to proceed by air to 59 OBU at Milingimbi, which is about half way along the coast of Arnhem Land. Six men from 3 MWS were now attached to the unit, also four guards, a camoufleur and two men from the OBU Marine Section, making a total complement of 35 men on strength while the station was being set up and established.

At Milingimbi sea transport for the party was prepared, and the unit embarked ready to leave. At sea, course was set for Yirrkala, near Cape Arnhem, which had been selected as the site for the station, with the transport ship towing a barge with an experienced crew to facilitate the landing operations. There was some excitement in the early hours of the 26th. when the hawser line to the barge parted, and it was an hour before the tow was picked up again.

Yirrkala was reached the next day, and here the unit received a somewhat cool reception from the Missioner, Mr. Rupert Kentish who had received no advice that he was to have a service unit as a close neighbour for his Mission.

Temporary quarters were established - some of the gear was unloaded and moved to the intended camp site. But although the 3 MWS men were ready, willing and able to lay out and construct the camp buildings, it was suddenly realised that no plans had been supplied! Nevertheless, work started, and the first improvement for the station was the construction of a camp oven....and before long the men enjoyed fresh bread for the first time at 321.

Next on the list came the slit trenches; but meanwhile several cases of diarrhea and high temperatures occurred among the men....clear evidence of a suspect water supply...and an order was issued that all drinking water had to be boiled - a wise precaution....but nothing could control the millions of bush flies that clearly enjoyed their arrival. Meanwhile, the sea transport was still anchored off-shore waiting for the heavy surf to subside; and so the camp store was built ready to receive the supplies which finally began coming ashore by barge on 8th. August.

"Unloading proceeded under tremendous difficulties. Barge and ship's lifeboats stood well off-shore, and the unit personnel had to wade out until up to their necks in water. Coral on the bottom cut the men's feet to pieces and the knowledge that sharks and crocodiles were about did nothing to ease the situation. Hand cart unloaded late today - too late to be of any assistance in unloading. Mishandling or tampering with stores resulted in a very large percentage of cases and packages being smashed before they arrived off-shore. Many cases of rations, particularly tinned cabbage, were in a stinking condition and had to be buried at low tide. Transport and escort extremely anxious to get away, and all petrol and oil drums were dumped in the sea about 150 yards off-shore, resulting in these being scattered over a mile of beach. Still no works officer or site plan. Unloading completed 1500 hours 10th. August. Approximately 300 tons of material on beach." (Diary entry.)

There was no motor transport at this time....indeed there were no roads or tracks even.....but the technical gear was moved to its intended site on a trailer dragged by some 20 odd men, many of whom reported with lacerated and infected legs and feet.

There were two trailer breakdowns - but some progress was reported when a W/T Administration watch was established. Water became another problem. The pump supplied proved incapable of the job of lifting the water to the required height, so a new site was selected for the kitchen and Mess so that a water supply could be readily available.

By the 18th., the beach had been cleared, and 321 RDF was operational at 0900 hours on 20th. August.

On 23rd., the kitchen was built and finished with water laid on and the refrigerator working. And now the barge finally was able to leave.

In another day or so the showers were working...and so after a hectic and arduous month, the station 'stood down' with its complement now at 27 men.

September 1943.

A DH84 appeared over the station and dropped two sealed bags containing Security and Code Publications - also a bag of mail for the 3MWS detachment still with the unit.

The Mess building with the mens' and sergeants' sections, and the canteen, were now completely finished with a compacted floor and fly proofing, and these were immediately brought into use. A vegetable garden was reported to be doing well with lettuces, chinese cabbages, tomatoes, water and rock melons, radishes and green peas - obviously there was a garden expert among the personnel.

On 5th. September, the first motor transport from Melville Bay was able to get through to the unit - a Jeep - and on its return trip took a safe hand bag and outward mail. The following day the C.O. was indisposed with a poisoned arm. This disability continued for several days. Meanwhile, the 3MWS men completed their work and finished off with a few odd jobs and cleaning up. The engine shed was now complete with blast proofing and cement floor, and so the generator units and motors were moved in and installed.

The 28th. was a 'big day' on 321 - the first inward mail arrived, and a noticeable improvement in morale and tempers was immediately apparent. The detachment of men from 3MWS departed now that their schedule of work was complete, leaving 49 men on the unit - 2 officers, 25 men on strength and 22 security guards who had evidently arrived during the month.

321 RDF was now fully operational and completely independent.

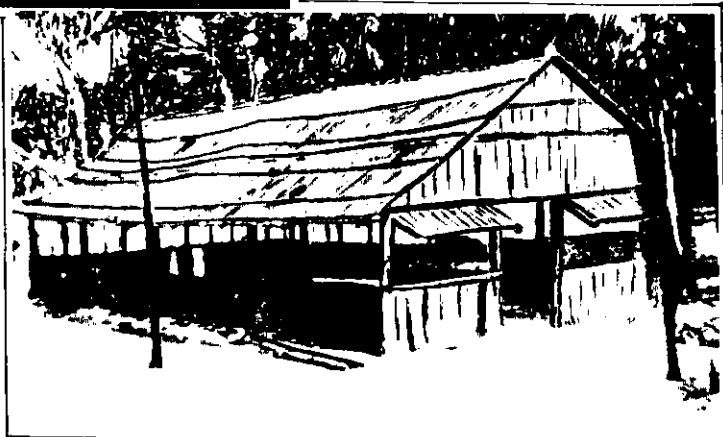


(Above) The Revd. Kolinio Saukuru and his two sons. Kolinio was in charge of the Virrkala Mission in 1944 and was a good neighbour to the radar men.



(Left) 'Sailor' was a popular and well known lad around the camp.

(Below) The native 'church.' Its open sides enabled a visitor to hurl a spear among the congregation and to cause pandemonium.



321 Radar...October '43 to September '45.

This month proved quieter - evidently the station was settling into its routine operating pattern. Calibration flights were arranged, and the highlight was the arrival of the station's second inward mail. A phone line was laid from the newly arrived 8MWS at the site of the new airstrip to the radar station which was now the recognized name for all RDF stations...but the new phone line meant little at the time as 321 had no phone hand set to complete the connection!

The 14th. proved a another Red Letter Day for 321 - 2 hindquarters of beef were received from the Mission Station in return for slaughtering the animal. Needless to say, the fresh meat was greatly appreciated. And on 19th. an area behind the Mission was cleared and ploughed to prepare and roughly level the ground for a sports area. This work was followed by preparatory work on a station rifle range.

On 20th. the airstrip was used for the first time..and the AOC for the NW Area, Air Vice Marshal Cole visited the unit.

Towards the end of the month the water pumps on the Ford 10's were modified as some trouble had been experienced with the engines, evidently in the cooling system, and assistance in this work was given by the fitters from 8MWS. Meanwhile, the Commanding Officer who had been admitted to Sick Quarters was evacuated by air on 26th. for admission to 1 MRS at Darwin.

November 1943.

Early in November, the station Fitter/DMT, Corporal Collins became seriously ill and a fitter was attached 'on loan' from 8MWS to help out. And the station water supply became a problem when king tides silted up the creek, and a channel had to be cut to flush out the silt and to drain out the water.

The Commanding Officer, F/Lt. Grahame, who had been with the station since its formation, was able to return to his unit in company with F/Lt. G.B.Frost who was to 'take over' 321 as C.O. This became effective on the 14th. which was also distinguished by a programme of educational short films being presented at the station.

On the 16th. two parades were called so that the new C.O. could meet every man on the unit...this was followed by a general inspection of the camp.

On the 17th. the unit Ford motor transport was returned to 8MWS as the vehicle had proved useless on the hills, and transport assistance was promised by 8MWS until a replacement transport unit arrived. Meanwhile, the new Officers' Mess was declared open, and with the assistance of native helpers, the station wood heap was considerably enlarged, tent floors were built up, and the new Orderly Room and C.O.'s quarters were completed. Evidently the 'old bark hut' previously filling this important role now became the station guard post.

Over the last few days of November, several trees were felled, probably to improve the Dover performance; and several men were posted out. Some operational performance notes appear for this month; the best range was 174 miles, and the station was 'off air' for 11 hours.

December 1943.

This proved to be quite a busy month at 321 - firstly because of a 6 day security defence programme for all personnel; also because a survey was carried out to attempt to overcome the water supply problem, the idea being to survey a new route for the pipeline to avoid the brackish water near the creek mouth which was also popular with the natives as a bathing spot.

The urgency of the work was further emphasized when the creek again silted up and drinking water had to be carted in to 321 for about a week. A stone wall was built up to maintain a deep supply, but despite these efforts the water remained brackish because of recurring high tides.

Both Protestant and Catholic church services were held to celebrate Christmas, and a Special Christmas Dinner was arranged (for some unexplainable reason radar cooks always seemed able to excel themselves at this time of year) after which 170 natives at the neighbouring Mission received a 'comforts' present from the C.O. and Welfare. At night there was a quiz and concert with launch trips and special meals the following day, also a sports meeting for the Mission natives, organised by a group of the airmen, with prizes presented by the C.O. from Welfare supplies.

There were several visiting officers before the month ended, mainly from 8MWS - then on New Year's Eve another concert and quiz session was held in the Airmen's Mess.

During the month the number of security guards was reduced to 15, and six natives received casual employment on station improvements - the latrines, the Mess and kitchen, the Orderly Room and some tents having the floors built up, in addition to which a new emergency store and new guard post were established. And P/O Oakes was posted and ended his stint at 321. The best range for the month had been 169 miles - two enemy aircraft plots were tracked resulting in a successful interception; a BL4 transponder was also installed.

Indeed a busy month! And an enjoyable one!

January 1944.

With the start of the New Year came notice of 321's replacement motor transport - this time a heavy 6x6 to replace the disappointing Ford stakeside. The 'new' truck was to come from 8MWS which was still on Gove Peninsula finishing the new strip and camp for 56 OBU - and doubtless also the facilities at Melville Bay.

On the 5th., a party of men attended the MWS Sports Meeting, and the Wing Medical Officer visited the station to check the circumstances of the camp water supply and the very questionable quality of the water.

Another welcome supply of fresh meat was arranged via the Mission on the 7th. when a heifer was slaughtered, and the station also enjoyed the formality of a Pay Parade.

During the month a Survey Fix of the station's exact position was arranged; this was imperative for all radar stations so that accurate details of plots could be sent to Fighter Sector - and the station security was improved with attention to its camouflaging and barbed wire entanglements. The camp tracks and paths were also defined with wire. On the 19th. a pigeon shoot resulted in enough birds to feed the whole unit, and as an educational session, a mock court martial was held on the 20th. - and on the day following the emergency store was stocked up with 40 bags of rations.

The replacement station truck arrived on the 23rd., and more hunting and fishing expeditions were organised late in the month.

The installation of the BL4 transponder was completed on the 27th., so making identification of plots easier, as well as slightly extending the range at times...and with the arrival of the heavy new truck, all stores and fuel stored at the Mission were moved to the camp area.

On January 28th., the Gove airstrip became fully operational, so that 321's role could now change from watching over the Works Squadron to watching the security of the operational squadrons of aircraft which would be based there.

February 1944.

February commenced with the newly installed and now operative BL4 being put to the test - which proved satisfactory - and a Pay Parade was also arranged. But the 4th. February proved a highlight, for the first real picture show was held at the OBU, and about half of 321's personnel was able to attend.

On the 8th. came the bane of all radar stations - a C.O.'s Parade - and all weapons were inspected by a Defence Officer and Armourer.

56 OBU Gove made arrangements for its second picture show, this time to be held over two nights so that those on duty could also enjoy it. These shows were held on the 9th. and 10th., and it must have been that 83 Squadron had quietly moved into the now operative Gove strip, for the squadron C.O., S/L Goon, visited 321, also the OBU's Cypher Officer. Then came a series of gas lectures involving the checking and testing of all gas masks...and the Boomerang fighter aircraft of 83 Squadron flew over the station for the first time.

Several of the radar men suffered attacks of dysentery about the 15th., with at least one man requiring hospital treatment, and once again it was decided that the problem originated from the camp water supply still being pumped from the creek.

The 18th. was taken up with a series of practice defence tactics, mainly concentrated around the Dover area, but the next day undoubtedly proved more popular with the men for the third picture show was arranged. Two of 321's personnel became involved in Court Martial proceedings as Officiating Officer and Counsel (A most unusual radar station involvement) towards the end of the month, and a station committee was also formed to arrange sports and entertainments - always an important appointment on radar units where station activities depended very much on the men themselves. During the month considerable progress had been made with camp improvements and the maintenance of defence positions - and of most importance was the addition of a new 3000 gallon tank to the existing 1000 gallon system to improve the station water supply in pressure and quality.

March 1944.

The month started with some very wet weather, but that did not stop S/L Goon and his officers from visiting 321 with the purpose in mind of effecting an improvement in communications between his squadron and the radar.

On the 4th., an airman from 8MWS drowned in the river near 321 - all possible assistance was given by the unit and the neighbouring Mission.

As a defence precaution, a track leading from the camp past the engine shed was covered and camouflaged, and a Wirraway and an Anson repeatedly flew over the camp no doubt to check the effectiveness of the work. Mr. Kentish the Missioner attended on the 13th. and gave the men an enlightening talk on the Arnhem Land Aborigine. And as 8MWS was soon to leave the area, arrangements were made to receive some of their stores and rations; and resulting from the visit of the officers from 83 Squadron, work was put in hand to improve the phone line between the unit and 83 Squadron.

On the 22nd, the first camp concert was staged and was deservedly acclaimed a great success...and the day following saw the start of work on a new pipeline to bring water from a better source, while at the same time further camouflage work was carried out.

The AOC NWA and a bevy of his attendant officers visited 321 on the 29th., and instructions were issued to move the station to Mt. Saunders (near Melville Bay) but evidently wiser counsel was to eventually prevail for 321 stayed put. Meanwhile, further attempts were made to improve the unit's phone link.



(From Top down.)

Doug Folkard, Fred Rowe, and Kev Kaufline at the strip - a 13 Squadron Ventura as the background. "Whisky" the 321 dog also poses for the photo which was taken on 18th. August, 1945.

"Off to the strip!"

Tennis day in a dispersal bay



The maximum range for the month of March had been 175 miles - a very good effort perhaps due to the recently installed BL4.

April 1944.

Under the supervision of the 8MWS camoufleur, some thinning out of trees was organised from around the Doover - this was usually to improve the coverage. And 39 Zone Filter Control was set up at the OBU and became operational early in the month with a landline established between 321 and the new local reporting centre.

A couple of test flights took place on the 6th., the first being with a couple of 83 Squadron Boomerangs, and in the second test flight G/C Jeffreys, flying a Spitfire, attempted to approach the base undetected, but he was picked up at 60 miles and tracked in, his height being correctly estimated at 15000 feet.

On the 7th., a unit sports meeting was held - and a meeting was also arranged for the Mission natives, with Mr. and Mrs. Kentish attending.

A possible new site for the Doover was chosen by the C.O. on the 9th., and the first breakdown in the new local arrangements occurred the next day when the Zone Filter landline failed, bringing the stand-by W/T watch on line. And on the 10th. a new road was commenced to link 321 to the other units on the Gove Peninsula - April was proving a busy and eventful month.

The very questionable water supply was still causing dysentery problems when a hygiene inspection was made - and on the 15th. Radar Wing ordered the Doover to be moved, and work commenced on preparing the new site some 70 yards from the first. The move was completed on the 20th. and meanwhile work also continued on setting up the new water supply.

A special parade was held on Anzac Day - and advice was received from 8MWS that the new water pipeline should be ready in 2 days time...which forecast proved to be correct.

The C.O. and one section of security guards held some Bren gun practice on the 29th., and at the end of the month the unit strength was 1 officer and 35 OR's. The best range for the month had been 122 miles.

May 1944.

On May 1st., F/Lt C.F.J. Bogue arrived to take over command of 321, and on the evening following, an educational film programme was arranged, after which Mr. W. Horney, Inspector of Aborigines, gave a short talk on the Aborigines of the area, their customs and beliefs.

F/Lt Frost and other unit personnel departed from Gove on the 3rd., and the unit truck was returned from 8MWS but the steering still proved to be defective. An alert was caused when Mr. Kentish reported an object resembling a submarine was sighted off shore, but this proved to be a floating oil drum. Work started on the preparation of a new site for the Operations Room, and on the 5th. a Ford 10 went down with the governor needing re-bushing.

On the 10th. a Red Alert was sounded - but strangely all of the Gove units knew except 321. The alert had evidently come from 312 at Wessel, and apparently Temperature Inversion caused 321 to miss the plot entirely. New committees to take charge of the canteen, entertainments and welfare were elected on the 9th., and the 321 truck again broke down with a holed radiator and an almost flat battery.

Fresh meat arrived on the 16th. - always a morale booster at a radar station - so too was the C.O.'s parade on the 17th, followed by rifle drill and a short

route march. (a booster for the C.O. that is.)

Yet another educational film evening was presented at the station on the 19th. and then followed more camouflaging work, some maintenance on the beacon, and then sufficient rations as a reserve for three months were received and stored. The new Operations Room was finished and occupied on the 25th., but a W/T watch was still maintained as the landline was still unserviceable. The month ended with the arrival off-shore of the HENRY DODGE, and commencement of work on a new road from the Mission to the airstrip, also the mending of the landline to 39 Zone Filter room. But the most popular occasion was the comforts parcel issue, or perhaps the picture show at the OBU. The arrival of fresh meat and butter was also high on the popularity list.

June 1944.

June commenced with the completion of the preliminary grading of the new road from 321 to the airstrip, then came a message from the Missioner that he was being attacked by a group of hostile natives. A party of guards was immediately despatched to attend the emergency, and after several hours the disturbance was settled and the party of guards withdrew and returned to the unit.

A Ford 10 gave some trouble on the 7th. and a bracket and a fan pulley were sent to the MWS camp workshop for welding and repairs; and on the 9th., the 16 mm. film "Battle for Britain" was shown. This film seemed to be doing the rounds of the radar stations.

On the 12th. all light installations in the tent lines were cut off as instructed by NWA H/Q - then on the 17th. the second Ford motor broke down with U/J coupling problems. Again the 8MWS unit attended to the necessary repairs, and the motor was back in service again two days later. Meanwhile, eleven security guards were posted back to their main unit at Darwin, and replacements duly arrived.

On the 26th., interference on the IFF signals was traced to the OBU Signals Unit - and a fire on nearby Bremer Island caused some concern, particularly at night. Meanwhile by the end of the month the new road was finished...but more trouble and work was caused when high winds brought about the loss of phone line communications for up to three weeks.

July 1944.

July 3rd. was undoubtedly a 'special day' on the calendar, for the Tivoli Concert Party appeared at Gove. There's no mention of the 'Tiv' Show Girls, but if they were with the party, the 'House Full' sign would have been needed, and the S.P.'s would have been on the watch behind the stage. But it was back to the everpresent hard work the next day when the old water pipeline was taken up and delivered to 8MWS.

On the 5th. the unit had a practice shoot at sea markers with .303's and Tommy Guns - a 90% result was recorded, and the Principal Medical Officer of NWA, G/C Counsell arrived to inspect the station and camp the next day. Yet another educational film was shown at the unit on the 7th., and with the installation of a switchboard in the Orderly Room and new phone lines hooked up, the 24 hour W/T watch ended.

On July 11th. a Liberty ship anchored off-shore and 8MWS embarked to finally leave the peninsula, and a practice shoot with Bren guns resulted in a 70% pass. July 15th. was notable as an LAC guard was charged for not challenging a Flight Sergeant in the small hours of the morning. 14 days CB was meted out as punishment (perhaps the F/Sgt was out to 'get' that poor LAC) - and a unit quiz and concert was held that night.

An aerial photograph of the station was organised via 83 Squadron on the 18th.

(buried now in old records preumably) and on the 19th. phone lines were down again and the W/T watch was again back in operation until the line was repaired.

The Catalinas arrived at Melville Bay on the 24th., and then the embargo on tent lighting was lifted, and the lights of 321 came on again. But a serious health problem was averted when a dead rat was discovered in the smaller water tank. Both tanks were drained, cleaned and chlorinated, and then refilled. Further trouble then developed due to the small tank having a corroded joint which restricted pressure. A solution was attempted by raising the larger tank to increase the water pressure. Then No. 1 Ford 10 broke down, but the Fitter had the engine stripped down, repaired and running again within 24 hours.

On the 27th. extensions to the sergeants' and officers' Mess were finished, while a definite 'plus' for the station was that the garden was again producing with chinese cabbage, tomatoes, cucumbers and beans being regularly harvested.

But then the same motor broke down again and new motors awaiting despatch at Batchelor were requested 'on priority.' And a visit was received from the OBU SP's concerning a missing refrigerator - surely the radar boys of 321 were not to blame!

On July 29th. a small mission lugger anchored off-shore - then sailed the next day for Groote Island...and on the last day of the month a piano arrived at 42 Squadron while a party from 83 Squadron visited the radar unit. The picture show at the OBU had also been considerably improved for a 35 mm. projector was now installed and operating with much improved results. 321 Radar now had 36 men on strength.

August 1944.

A CSIR officer was an early visitor in August - operating conditions and Temperature Inversion probably being his agenda - but of immediate importance to the station efficiency was the arrival of new Ford 10 engines; and by the 3rd. the Fitter had both units installed and working, afterwards crating the old motors for return to Wing. Then on the 4th. the Revd. Kolinio Saukuru the new Missionary for Yirkkala, arrived to take over from Mr. Kentish. The new man was to become a firm friend over the next twelve months. The following day seven visitors from 39 Zone Filter Centre arrived to familiarize themselves with the system of tracking planes and passing plots to the Filter Room and a bushfire which had been burning towards the camp burnt out and was declared safe. Then on the 9th. came a rather unusual event - the inspection of identification discs and cards. Another strange event on the 12th....five grenade explosions were heard from the bushfire still burning near the camp, and a careful search revealed six more which were exploded with rifle fire. The grenades were thought to be those stolen or which disappeared from the station armoury several months before. A strange one indeed.

On the 13th. the Mission lugger anchored in the creek - and a talk was given on the pros and cons of the coming Federal Referendum. A second party from the Filter Centre arrived on a similar familiarisation visit and then on the 16th. a 'welcome' to 42 Squadron and 13 Squadron was arranged - 13 Squadron now flying Venturas from the Gove airstrip. Mr. and Mrs. Kentish left as passengers on the lugger on the 17th. - and a raft was ferried to the local beach by the natives.

44 Radar Wing ceased to function this month, and 39 Zone Filter Centre moved to Gove from Milingimbi, with 321 now reporting to the local Filter Centre. Then on the 24th. P/O Banks replaced F/Lt Bogue as C.O. of 321 Radar, followed by yet another visit by the OBU SP's on the 25th....with 321 in the clear..



(Above)
A Virkkala family group.



(Right)
The entrance to the
Virkkala Mission.



(Above)
The only building on the Mission-
The Missioner's cottage.



(Right)
Burrumurra, who became a leader of
his people, is second from left....
Sailor, Greg Arnold and of course
'Whisky' are at the front.



Photos mainly from Merv Harms, Alan
Stark, John Whitfeld and Max Counsell.

and S/Ldr Grout Smith, the Area Radar Officer, inspected the unit. On Sunday the 27th. the Revd. Kolinio conducted a church service, ...and an unidentified plot which caused some concern proved to be a DH 84. A charge was laid against a W/T operator for not obeying orders, and he was subsequently fined 7 days pay...this was on the 27th. Then once again the unit motor transport broke down, this time completely, and it was towed to the OBU transport section for repairs. The OBU arranged for 321's mail and supplies to be delivered by ute while the repairs were attended to.

At the end of the month, a USA Intelligence Officer, accompanied by the Area Intelligence Officer, inspected the unit and the neighbouring Mission, and the Area Radar Officer watched an IFF test with a Catalina flying boat. A report on the unit transport was received declaring the engine U/S, and while a replacement motor was being obtained, arrangements were made for a daily run from the OBU, with picture show runs on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

A pleasing arrangement now in force was the regular supply of fresh meat and butter, and there were now 34 men on the station.

August 1944 to 22nd. January, 1945. The pages for this period are missing from the A50 Diary.

During this time, F/O G.D.Mills took over as Commanding Officer.

On January 22nd 1945 39 Zone Filter Centre at Gove was closed, and the method of reporting changed -- all plots were reported by W/T to Air Defence Headquarters at Darwin and the necessary changes to aerials and equipment were attended to. On the 24th., the C.O. held a parade and an inspection, which seem to have become a regular feature at 321, though certainly not a popular one. A unit quiz evening was led on the 27th., but the month otherwise proved quiet.

The Diary records there were now 28 men on the unit.

February 1945.

A rather official sort of day on the 6th...first came a Pay Parade, then a C.O.'s Parade followed by an inspection of the camp area. Probably those on watch at the time were the lucky ones!

On the 10th. a lecture was given on jamming and anti-jamming techniques, which was followed by a demonstration when an aircraft flying within range showed the various effects with 'Window,' noise jamming etc. This was also witnessed by aircrew from 13 and 42 Squadrons.

On the 12th. the gear developed a bad fault in the valve cooling assembly and until an exchange or replacement could be arranged, the station went on a restricted hours schedule. On the day following, the AOC NWA, A/Cdr. Charlesworth visited - and departed, and despite some offers of assistance from the technicians of 13 Squadron, only temporary repairs could be made to the set.

And another C.O.'s Parade on the 27th., when it was also decided that a Defence Training course would be arranged, with instruction to follow the weekly parade.

The Diary records that 814 plots were passed for the month.

March 1945.

The first week of March proved quite busy - a Pay Parade, a Hygiene Inspection, C.O.'s Parade and Inspection, then the first of the new Security Instructions and Lectures, followed by a church service and communion. The

one bright spot in all these arrangements was the issue of comforts and welfare parcels.

The second week began with more Defence Training and a Malaria Control lecture - then the well known maintenance team of Sgt Savage and Cpl Mann arrived to look over and check both radar equipment and the BL4. The Defence Training session proved to be a long lecture on rifles and light arms - the maintenance inspection resulted in an urgent signal requesting a new valve cooling blower - and at the end of this eventful week the YMCA man from the OBU arrived with cool drinks and refreshments for all who would join him (probably every man in the camp!).

A solid series of postings and new arrivals then came about, lasting over several days, at the end of which the popular YM rep. again called for a cheer-up session, and an issue of 'comforts' to all. And after all these camp activities a Welfare Committee meeting was held, and a party arrived to carry out calibration tests on the equipment.

Sgt. Savage, Cpl. Mann and LAC Taylor departed for ADHQ after completing their maintenance visit, and the unit activities concluded for the month with a Parade and an Inspection, C.O. style; a rifle shoot and a further lecture on light arms and guns, and a unit Pay Parade.

A Beaufort aircraft made the first of a series of calibration flights, and the month ended thankfully on a lighter note with a games evening with cash prizes, cigarettes and sweets.

During March 660 plots were passed to ADHQ.

April 1945.

Early in April the No. 1 Ford generator unit broke down and 321 finished up 'off air' for 13 hours. During this time arrangements were made to instal a unit from 312 radar Wessel Island which was then at the OBU awaiting transport back to Darwin. So the calibration flights continued to finish on the 7th., and with the surprising decision after 321's long service that the coverage was poor - a new site was desirable - and that the two best sites were Mt. Saunders (as recommended by the AOC months before) or Drimmie Head on Melville Bay. The eventual decision was for the Drimmie Head site, as the station could 'lodge' at the 42 Squadron camp, whereas the Mt. Saunders site presented many difficulties with obtaining water, new phone lines etc. Further observation of the sites was called off for two reasons - there was too much dust - and the calibration party was recalled to Darwin.

These initial investigations had taken up much of the month, but on the 19th. a 'Housie' night was organised, and on the 24th. a Welfare Committee meeting was called to discuss entertainments and outings. The month drew to a close with a visit from the Principal Medical Officer who inspected the Mess, the kitchen and the sick quarters.

There had been 1364 plots for the month.

May 1945.

On the 1st. May, twenty men took part in a Tommy Gun and rifle shoot on the beach a mile from the camp - there was a hygiene inspection of latrines and showers, and on the 9th. came the welcome news of Peace in Europe, marked by both a church service held on the unit, and a Welfare night of entertainment.

'Black Jack' Walker, who as C.O. of ADHQ and No. 1 Fighter Wing, managed to visit most of the radar stations in NWA, arrived on 321 on 10th. May, and soon after his visit the gear 'crashed' and a careful inspection revealed that the receiver was in a very bad condition. As appeared to be the norm

at 321, there was a succession of visitors and inspections, the most welcome visitor without doubt being the YMCA man - but the event of most significance occurred on the 29th. when F/O While arrived to take over as C.O. of 321. 1178 plots had been passed to ADHQ for the month of May.

June 1945.

With the takeover of the station by the new C.O., the style of reporting in the A50 Diary also changed greatly, and far less of daily happenings is reported, and more of aircraft plots which appeared unusual for some reason. On the 2nd., an aircraft en route from Darwin was tracked - it had no radio and one faulty engine. And two plots with a range of 100 miles were noted, this being a noteworthy range evidently. Plans for social and sporting activities were made, and a talk on post war training education was delivered by the Education Officer of NWA. Then more aircraft plots were recorded, the best range being 135 miles, and on the 22nd. a Ventura was located 50 miles out showing distress IFF, and apparently having difficulty in finding bearings and calculating courses. The necessary information was passed to the Operations Room at the OBU from where contact with the aircraft would have put it on track. The most important visitor for the month was W/Cdr Stielow, the Commanding Officer of ADHQ, who made an inspection of the station on the 6th. The complement of the station was now 26 men.

July 1945.

Again this month several aircraft plots were recorded - Douglas - Anson - Ventura - with the best range being 111 miles. And for the first time despite reports that it had been in vogue for some time, 321's interest in cricket is recorded. The unit's team was defeated for the first time in the current season by 4 runs, the successful opponent being the OBU Signals team - but nevertheless, the 321 team remained equal top with 42 Squadron in the local cricket competition.

August 1945.

More aircraft plots recorded for this month - one at 138 miles - but the principal entry for August 1945, as at all radar stations, records the official announcement of Peace - VJ Day. 321 went 'Off Air' for 2 days, and a concert was presented by F/O Harry Dearth and Party. Towards the end of the month, F/O Eddy and a salvage party arrived on their way to Wessel Island, their stay continuing for 4 days before transport became available.

September 1945.

Five days later the salvage party returned from Wessel, and on the 15th. F/O Milvain took over as C.O. of 321. And very appropriately for 321 Yirrkala, the Diary ends with the note:

"A church service at the YMCA Hut, (OBU) by Rev. Kolinio Saukuru."

#####

PERSONNEL.

321 RADAR..... The Airmen posted to 'Form' the station.

P/O	D.A. Oakes	Commanding Officer.
LAC	A.W.Collins	Fitter D.M.T.
AC1	M.G.Allen	Radar Mechanic
AC1	K.G.Bird	"
AC1	K.Holland	"
AC1	F.W.Koochew	"
AC1	D.C.Watts	"
AC1	S.H.Swift	Telegraphist
AC1	L.J.Tully	"
Cpl	G.F.Turton	Clerk Stores
LAC	L.W.Rogers	Cook
LAC	E.H.Jasper	Nursing Orderly
Cpl	H.Davies	Aircrafthand
Cpl	H.W.Smith	"
AC1	W.Agnew	"
AC1	A.W.Barnes	"
AC1	H.E.Barnett	"
AC1	R.T.Cotterill	"
AC1	H.D.Cranston	"
AC1	R.A.Gosper	"
AC1	W.G.Groves	"
AC1	C.H.Hardefelt	"
AC1	T.H.Jobson	"
AC1	R.A.Mason	"
AC1	C.W.Moran	"
LAC	A.McCluskey	"
AC1	R.F.McKeon	"
AC1	E.K.Price	"
AC1	L.Rowe	"
AC1	A.A.White	"
LAC	R.L.Crawley	Messman
LAC	F.J.Moran	"
AC1	S.A.Audrousseau	Tr. Radar Operator
AC1	J.B.Browne	"
AC1	B.P.Coe	"
AC1	G.R.Dixon	"
AC1	K.H.Gowers	"
AC1	M.H.Harms	"
AC1	D.C.James	"
AC1	M.B.Mercovith	"
AC1	T.L.Stratford	"
AC1	A.E.Westman	"

(Two of those posted to 321 were not able to stay with the station but returned to Darwin.)

#####

PERSONNEL OF 321 RADAR.

This list of personnel who followed the 'Originals' has been compiled from various sources - the A50 Diary - memories - photos etc., and while all care has been taken, the list must be considered 'incomplete.'

Commanding Officers.

P/O D.A.Oakes Apl. 1943.
F/O D. Grahame June 1943.
F/Lt G.B.Frost Nov. 1943.
F/Lt G.F.J.Bogue May 1944.
P/O A.D.Banks Aug. 1944.
F/O G.D.Mills Jan. 1945.
F/O K.S.While June 1945.
F/O H.Milvain Sept.1945.

Radar Mechanics.

LAC Wright
Cpl Oakley
LAC Gill N.
LAC Martin C.
LAC Stark A.
LAC Taylor A.
F/Sgt Carter L.
LAC Peterson
F/Sgt Harnath

Radar Operators.

AC1 Dixon G.R.
AC1 Barnes J.K.
LAC McGregor
LAC Cornish W.G.
Cpl Carriss F.
LAC Ashburn A.
LAC Brewster A.W.
LAC Hebden K.
LAC Fitzpatrick M.H.
LAC Toohey A.J.
LAC Andrews F.J.
Sgt. Bown
LAC Muir A.
LAC Whitfield J.
LAC Counsell W.M.
LAC Leckie L.
Lou Schmidt
Ken George
Alan Pier
AC1 Cox L.

W/T Operators.

LAC Smith J.
LAC Souter F.W.
LAC Polkard D.A.
LAC Leach
LAC Grant
LAC Huddleston
LAC Michelson
LAC Morgan
LAC Halls R.
LAC Bruhn
LAC Hull
AC1 Hinton J.J.
AC1 Greer W.R.

Mess Staff.

LAC Trenwith (Ass.)
LAC Whelan "
Cpl Dowling J.D. (Cook)
Cpl Duff J.C.
LAC Rogers L.W. (Cook)
AC1 Hambly D.T. (Ass.)

Various Musterings.

LAC Bye A.W. Clerk.
Cpl Cribb H. "
LAC McReynolds A.R. Fitter DMT.
LAC Todhunter "
LAC Rowe F. "
Cpl Sidwell M.O.
Sgt Ord C. "
Cpl Alderton "
LAC Ganzer Fitter DMT.
LAC Ferguson Clerk

(Continued on next page.)

PERSONNEL OF 321 RADAR. (Continued.)

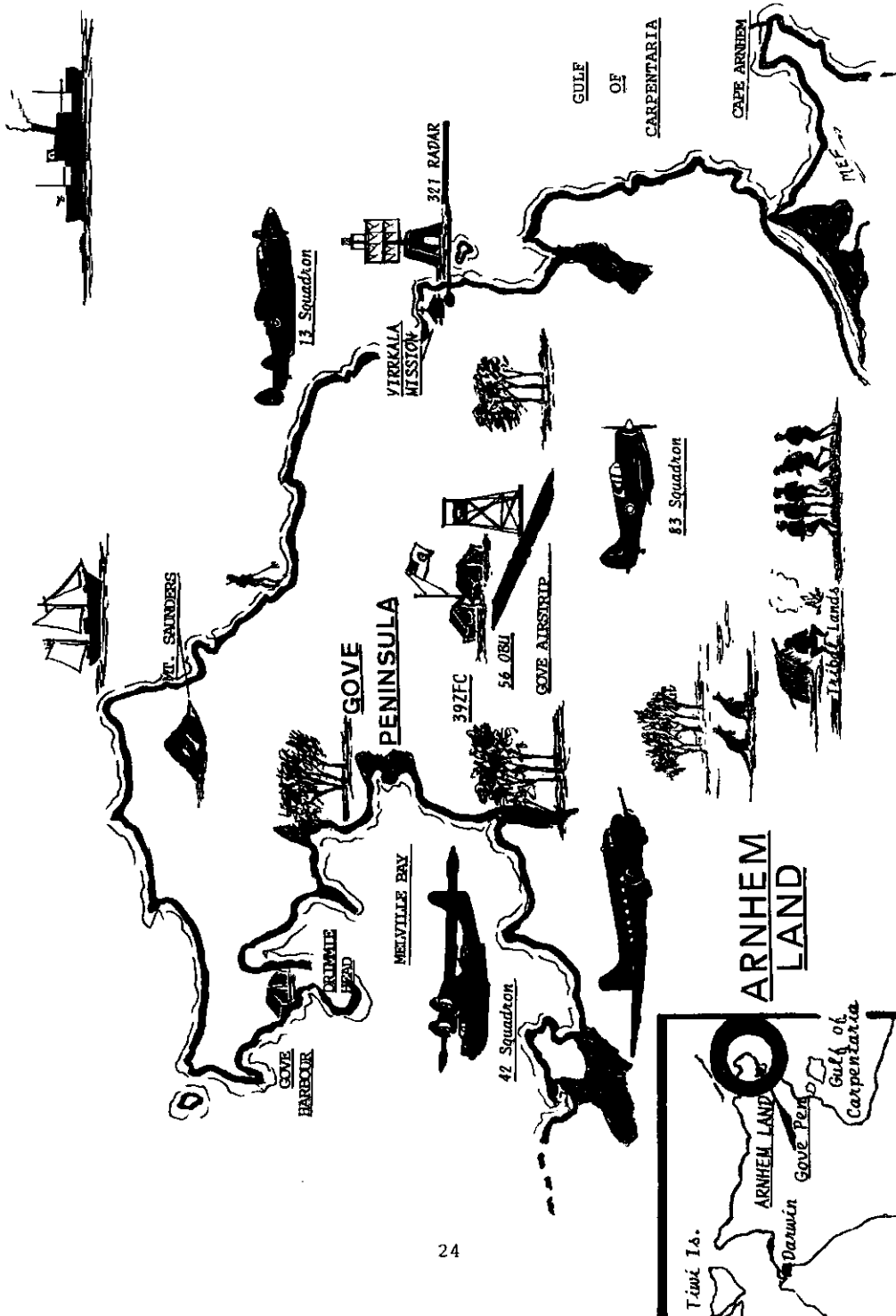
Mustering not known.

Ted Jones
Ken Nixon
Allan Wadmore
Kevin Kaufline
Kevin Lynch
Alan Muir
Laurie Schnookal
Jack Bland
Ossie Reidy
Frank Walton
Greg Arnold
Doug James
Keith Gower
Fred Souter
Jack Seymour
LAC Denning
LAC Dakin
Cpl Gyton
Cpl Ward D.J.
LAC Bole A.J.
Cpl Goss R.W.
LAC McKnoulty
Sgt Ring
Cpl Alderton
LAC Unger
Cpl Fraser
LAC Dempsey
LAC Fogarty
LAC Daly M.M.
AC1 French G.H.
LAC Griffith A.
LAC Steiger H.
LAC Sisson H.L.
LAC Boswarrick
LAC Amey C.C.
LAC Baldock W.A.
CPL Flood H.H.
AC1 Adams R.J.
AC1 Burke R.J.
K. Cotter
L. Mathieson
B. Mergan
B. Martin

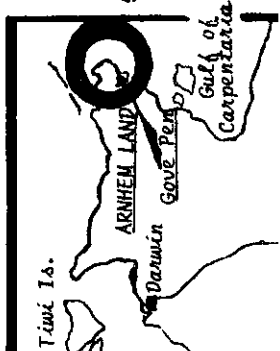
Security Guards.

Sgt Hill
F/Sgt Burley
Cpl Cheese
LAC Glancy M.
LAC Lowrey V.
Cpl Wright T.
LAC Crowe J.
LAC Wellington N.
LAC Evans E.J.
LAC Rowe A.R.
LAC Stapleton J.
LAC Lamont J.
LAC Fischer H.
Cpl Harding W.G.
LAC Burgin E.
LAC Caldwell L.
LAC Clinton J.B.
LAC Cooper R.
LAC Ecclestone E.
Lac Keenan J.
LAC Thomas A.
LAC Fanning E.
LAC Lobley.
Cpl Hickey J.B.
LAC Spriggs C.
Sgt Lake J.H.

#####



Tivi Is.





(Above)

*On the beach at Yirrkala, VJ Day, August 15th, 1945.
Standing....Lou Schmidt: Max Counsell: John Whitfeld: Ken George:
Ted Jones: Ken Nixon: Jack Wadmore: Kevin Kaufline:
Kevin Lynch: Doug Folkard.*

Kneeling....Fred Rowe: Alan Pier: Alan Muir: "Whisky": Laurie Schnookal.

(Below)

Doug Folkard: Frank Walton: 'Ossie' Reidy and Alan Stark.



321 RADAR YIRRKALA.

Merv Harms.
(From his personal Diary notes)

The 321 Radar unit first formed in Sydney at Mascot Airport with P/O D. Oakes as the Commanding Officer. This was in June 1943. The area used at the airport was where the multi-storey car park now stands. The personnel were gradually posted in to the unit - the Radar Operators, of which I was one, came directly from the training base at Richmond RAAF Station. We were housed in tents and iron huts, but during those early days several of us slept at the Air Force House in Sydney and travelled to Mascot each morning on the old trams.

On 6th. June 1943, the unit equipment (then some 8 tons) was moved by train from Sydney via Melbourne and Adelaide to Terowie, and then on to Alice Springs by the old narrow gauge train. From Alice Springs we became part of a road convoy to Larrimah, then on to Adelaide River and to 44 RDF Wing at Darwin, arriving there on 17th. June.

To this time, we operators had not seen a radar set, and we were somewhat at a loss to know what eventually our duties were to be. The reason for this was the RDF equipment as it was then, and its operation, were both on the highly secret list. While at 44 Wing we were given general duties such as guard duty and some Mess fatigues. Darwin itself, and the Fenton Air Base were raided quite a few times during our stay at Wing.

On 22nd. July 1943, all unit personnel excepting the guards were moved by air to Milingimbi. Then on 25th. July we embarked on a small RAN troopship, the SOUTHERN CROSS - and headed east. A barge was towed by the ship to be used when unloading supplies at Yirrkala. Some part of the journey was smooth sailing, but there were also rough seas encountered when the hawser attached to the barge snapped during one night. By some pretty clever seamanship, the barge was located and the tow was taken up again. Then while passing through the Wessel Islands, the ship struck a reef and almost capsized, but fortunately no damage was done. Several of our contingent were very seasick - one man lost both his upper and lower dentures while 'feeding the fishes,' and he had to exist toothless for many months.

We arrived at Yirrkala on 27th. July and we were met by the Missioner Mr. Rupert Kentish, and our welcome was very much the reverse of cordial. Mr. Kentish had no idea that a RAAF station was to be established next to his Mission which had originally been established in 1934. Our temporary headquarters were established half a mile inland, and no campsite or building plans were carried by any member of the RAAF party. All of our basic camp equipment such as the tents and kitchen equipment was then moved from the beach by each man carrying as much as possible on each trip in to the camp site. Then our cook first directed the building of an oven on the side of an embankment, and this then allowed him to bake some fresh bread, and this provided us with a break from the Army rations and hard biscuits. And additionally we bought fresh vegetables from the mission natives which added to the Army rations and were a big improvement. Then somehow we acquired a wallaby and had fresh meat for a change, for only basic supplies and equipment had been carried on the SOUTHERN CROSS, and these were all moved to the campsite by hand.

On 7th. August, a merchant ship, the ALAGNA and the corvette, HMAS LATROBE anchored offshore, and the equipment from the ALAGNA was ferried ashore by

barge towed in by the ship's lighter. The twelve months' supplies and the RDF Doover equipment were landed on the beach, and we airmen had to wade out to the barge beyond the surf line and carry the stores and equipment in to the beach.

The supplies and materials were then moved on to a secluded site where all was out of sight, and a water pipe from a nearby freshwater creek was connected to the camp-site to save us carrying all our water by bucket brigade to the camp. The RAAF had included in the equipment a hand cart, and it took about eight men to tow it when loaded to the camp-site since we did not have a jeep or any motor vehicle. This was pretty heavy work as naturally we loaded as much as possible on to each load.

There were several cases of diarrhea and fever among the men during the unloading period, but the urgent work of clearing the supplies from the beach and the Mission area continued as quickly as possible. On 1st. August two Air Force surveyors walked into the camp-site much to the surprise of the airmen. They had surveyed a site for the new 'Gove' airstrip, and about this time also, the RAN WESTRALIA landed a RAAF construction unit, the 8 MWS, in Melville Bay, west of the 321 site. The construction of the Gove airstrip and its buildings and roads then started.

Somehow, a 5 ton Ford truck was driven through from Melville Bay to our camp to assist with the transfer of the Doover equipment to the highest point of land near our camp-site. The attempt was not successful due to the steepness of the point of land and also the soft gravel soil which had to be traversed. A jeep was then sent as replacement and this completed the Doover transfer, and also the last of the stores and equipment from the Mission area and beach.

About this time, the SOUTHERN CROSS again visited the Mission area, and one airman was taken back to Milingimbi because of the fever he had contracted. By 18th. August, the beach was completely cleared, even though some items such as drums of petrol and building timber were dumped over the sides of the ALAGNA and allowed to wash ashore. Much of this equipment had been scattered along the beach for a considerable distance. Another problem was the original water pump which was not strong enough, and so a replacement was sent out to the camp which then allowed water to be pumped to the showers and kitchen.

The Doover was operational on 20th. August, and the basic camp, buildings, showers, Mess and Orderly Room were completed. Doug James and I were the Operators on the first shift at 321. The first mail was received on the 28th. September, the first since leaving 44 RDF Wing, and the first in ten long weeks. So the routine for 321 RDF station was established and then continued on a regular basis. Over the next few weeks, we had many RAAF and RAN visitors to the unit, and particularly I remember the mobile dental unit to check all personnel, some of whom had to endure the thrill of their pedal operated drill.

Several other events stand out still in my memory...the shooting of a large snake after our guard spotted it near the Doover and killed it with a couple of shots from his Tommy gun. Knowing that the Aborigines enjoyed this as a delicacy, the snake was taken to the camp and placed in the incinerator. As it cooked, it was found to have inside it another smaller snake, and in that one was a rat. Obviously the smaller snake had won the argument when the rat was discovered.

Another memorable incident was the sight of an old Aborigine going through our camp area on 'walkabout' followed by his many wives and children. They would return days later.

A visit by a mobile picture show unit also was most enjoyable, particularly since we invited the Aborigines, and especially the children to see the show. This was something the Aborigines had never seen before, and it was a pleasure to see their enjoyment, not to mention the amazed looks on their faces.

So after I had been with 321 for some five months, I was posted to 319 at Fenton, and on 21st. November I left Virrkala to fly back from Gove to 44 RDF Headquarters.



THREE 'ORIGINALS' OF 321 RADAR.

(Above) Merv Harms 'On the Road' to Darwin. The truck appears to be an International FB Model.

(Above right) 'Doc' Jasper, the Medical Orderly...a responsible job on a lonely radar unit.

(Right) George Dixon, one of the first radar operators.





(Above)
One of the renowned 321
Cricket Teams....an
indistinct photo but the
only one! Max Counsell
at the extreme left,
Alan Stark is the 'keeper,
and the C.O. Keith While
is at the extreme right.



(Above Right)
Doug James and Merv Harms,
the first operators to go
'on shift' at 321.



(Lower Right)
Keith Gower and Doug James.

EARLY DAYS OF 321.

Max Allen.

I don't remember much about the trip north, but at Alice Springs on 11th. June '43 we slept on the ground and froze overnight..and no one could ever forget the Army road convoy to Larrimah which took the next three days. The road was unmade - rough and dusty - and dust seeped through any small gap in the canvas covers of the trucks. It took a while to realise that it was best to leave the front and back of the truck open to let the air and dust blow straight through. However, that didn't help much other than the first vehicle. We seemed to drive through a continuous cloud of dust so that many men finished up with reddish dust-covered faces out of which blinked a pair of red eyes.

The train trip from Larrimah to Adelaide River was also a bit of a shock. The 'personnel carriages' were cattle trucks, but anyone calling them cattle trucks copped some abuse from the NCO in charge. Gaps between the floor boards opened and closed as the floor twisted with the motion of the train. However, it was far preferable to the dusty trip by road from Alice Springs. At 44 RDF Wing I learnt that if you didn't like drill, it was a good idea to volunteer for hygiene duties. I became an expert at burning out pit toilets (made with half 44 gallon drums on top) and cleaning out grease traps. I found this preferable to the 'bull' parades and it stood me in good stead for the whole of my service in the RAAF. Self-defence training was the exception I didn't resent, but thank goodness we never had to use it.

I can no longer recall the sequence of events nor the name of the ship (I think the SOUTHERN CROSS) which transported the gear from Darwin to Milingimbi. I do remember the vessel going backwards against the incoming tide between Melville Island and Cape Don, so I presume I must have been on the ship. I was shocked at the state of the Aborigines who hung around our tents looking for cigarette butts or anything else. I can also recall unloading bombs from a ship onto a lighter for the very good reason that I hurt my back in the process.

For the run from Milingimbi to Yirrkala (25th. to 27th. July)the vessel was camouflaged with branches etc. so that it looked like an islet when at anchor. I only remember one alarming incident en route and that was in the evening when we were entering the base of the Wessel Archipelago. I was sitting on one of the several toilets below deck and up forward when there was a grinding sound and a sudden lurch to starboard. I've never got off so quickly, and the only comment from the bridge was...."That's navigating for you - we hit that one last time!" Then we anchored for the night.

I certainly remember the very cool reception the Missionary, Mr. Kentish gave us on arrival. He soon began to lay down the law on what was "out of bounds." He was married to an attractive part Aboriginal woman who moved to Brisbane not long afterwards.

Unloading and setting up camp in the early days at 321 was hard work, particularly carrying stores from the beach to the camp site. And again I hurt my back, probably because there was a bit of rivalry about how much we could each carry. But spirits were high.

Moving the Ford 10 motors and alternators was a major exercise and they were manhandled by a team of men. Afterwards the Fords gave us a lot of trouble as they needed continual fiddling to keep the alternator frequency within the necessary tolerance.

I shared a tent with Doug Watts, Kevin Bird and Kevin Holland the other Radar Mechanics, and we got on well together. Doug was a tall strong lad from the Gippsland and good with an axe. I also came from a country town -

Murray Bridge - and I was used to axe work so we seemed to land a lot of the axe work in felling trees for bush structures. A sort of log cabin-cum store was the most impressive and later earned the station the nickname of 321 Orderly Room Unit amongst the men. We didn't like being broken up by postings and I often wonder what happened to my tent-mates. I also remember P/O Daryl Oakes as a good and thoughtful Officer. I think he was a school teacher who came from a dairy farm in Central Victoria. I met him again on North Goulburn Island at 309 RS and in P.N.G.

Our food was reasonable and an antbed baking oven gave us bread. I think our cook was a good manager. We heard of one cook from Wessel who went 'troppo' and was taken off the island. Apparently he had used up all the more attractive supplies quickly and was left with no option but to feed bully beef in various forms and couldn't stand the grumbling from the men. At 321 we had turtle egg and bacon pie occasionally when a swap could be done with the Aborigines via the Mission, and kangaroo sometimes came on the menu the same way.

The sea provided our best recreation and we had a trail through the bush and mangroves east of the camp to a beach which was beyond the Mission 'out of bounds' area. Some of us made 5 pronged fencing wire fish spears copying the Aboriginal methods, but we had no hope of matching their skills. We got an occasional parrot fish or a ray but nothing else. Some were more successful with rifles which stunned the fish if they were reasonably close. I remember watching Aborigines standing with spear poised watching fish passing their observation point until the right one appeared. The spear almost invariably went in just behind the head. I often picked up the knobbly rock which outcropped on land and in the sea and wondered what it was. I later graduated in Geology and now know it was lateritic bauxite and could kick myself for not carrying some south. Gove bauxite mine is now nearby.

Boxing gloves were amongst the recreation equipment supplied to the station, but I soon learnt that boxing wasn't my sport. Kevin Bird took great delight in rat-tattooing my nose.

One of the first questions asked of Mr. Kentish was whether he ever had trouble with any of the Aborigines. His slow response went something like this...."No-o-o-o. I had to knock one out last week but he tried to hit me over the head with an axe!" That wasn't the only time he impressed, for on another occasion two of the Guards went onto an 'Aboriginal beach' which was 'out of bounds,' so Mr. Kentish frog-marched them up to the C.O. and told him he had thrown their guns into the sea. I understand he was the brother of the Mr. Kentish who had been taken by a Japanese float-plane pilot and later beheaded.

Not long after we had set up our camp, an Aborigine with a fishing spear was persuaded (bribed I think) to demonstrate his skill. He drove the spear points clean through a eucalyptus sapling several inches in diameter and from a considerable distance. Impressive! The sapling had to be cut to retrieve the spear. On another occasion an elderly Aborigine fashioned a beautifully sculptured spear point by flaking it from a broken beer bottle and then offered it for barter. Mr. Kentish certainly would not have approved and there were no takers.

We saw the Aborigines as a happy lot but there were quarrels when an attractive young Aboriginal woman went bush with the wrong man (she had a nickname amongst the airmen.) Tribal punishment followed after their return some days later. The Aborigines sometimes sang in the evenings in the trees up from the beach and it was here I first heard the fascinating sounds of corroboree singing.

321 came 'On Air' in August, and we were proud of the ranges achieved on the LW/AW. Some of the Operators had quite good voices and sang the latest hits to keep on the alert, particularly at night as they wound the handle to rotate the platform. The words and tunes still return with a little prompting. Many times we tracked Catalinas and saw disabled aircraft limp over the station as they returned to base. There was jubilation each time a 'rat' was down. And 321 was a harmonious and happy camp. But it was September - a long time - before our first mail arrived. When it did arrive, there was excitement and relief in the camp, and we all retreated to our tents and bunks to read of home, our families and our friends. Thankfully, our later mails became more frequent. Particularly in the early days of the station, flies and diarrhea caused real problems, and few escaped dysentery. Tropical ulcers, some originating from sandfly bites also occurred. We sometimes retreated under our mosquito nets to eat in our tents and so escape the flies which were always a pest, and seemed to always descend in clouds when food was about.

#####

