

# RADAR RETURNS

## ECHOES FROM THE PAST AND PRESENT

Research is the process of going up alleys to see if they are blind.

*Marston Bates*

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### Editorial

Greetings and salutations to the readers of the second edition of Radar Returns produced in the chilly climate of Canberra. The recent drop in temperature around this part of Australia has meant that I've had more excuses to stay inside and pour over radar archives. Unfortunately, this has lead to more questions about RAAF radar and the activities of its personnel. I hope you can help with the entries in Q&A.

The ultimate aim of all this digging in the archives is to produce a concise database of all the RAAF radar and associated units. This database which will contain each unit's history, COs, and any special events which may have affected the unit. Once completed, I shall make it available either directly in printed form or via the Internet in computerised form. I shall keep you posted.

Another exciting activity occurring in Canberra is the restoration of the LW/AW radar held in the Australian War Memorial. As the Government has agreed to extend the AWM next year, the management of the AWM has decided to produce an Aircraft Hall which will include the LW/AW displayed in all its operational glory. It will also contain a substantial photo and history display. Radar Returns and the Radar Archives are supporting this activity but none of the present items within the archives will be 'given' to the AWM. However,

they will have access to items for research as well as copies of the appropriate items for the display. Please don't be concerned, nothing will be lost from the Radar Archives but the display will also not suffer. I have been given a detailed description of the AWM's plans and viewed the LW/AW in its current state. The staff of the restoration section is genuinely interested in the radar and its significance to the war effort. The restoration work they carry out in this area is magnificent. I'm confident that the radar will look impressive when it is finally displayed to the public.

In the mean time you should be hearing from a group being established to support the restoration of the LW/AW (this type of work is not cheap). Please give them as much support as you can as this is an activity that will ensure that radar's contribution to the war effort is fully recognised and it is placed in full view for the general public.

Finally, I've tried to keep up the variety in this edition and I hope you enjoy some of interesting information that has appeared out of the archives.

**Pete Smith**

## Wagga Epilogue

The period of 14-18 April this year was yet another eventful period for radar veterans. It was time of congenial meetings, renewed friendships and enjoyable exploration of the local district. Although we have had other reunions in other areas, this get together was joined by more veterans who had not been able to attend previous functions or, had not heard of the brotherhood and sisterhood of radar veterans. For my part, I was excited at meeting old friends, discovering more information about adventures in the past and being able to expand the readership of this newsletter. I was not disappointed in any of these expectations.

As further evidence of the camaraderie of the group, an informal 'whip around' among the participants was organised to provide gifts of appreciation for the organising committee. Not only were there sufficient funds for the gifts, but, there was sufficient funds left over to finance a plaque marking the event. This plaque was presented to the Wagga RSL Club for their central role in this reunion and the magnificent support they provided for the company. The plaque was presented to the Club President at a brief ceremony in early May. Mr Jack Mullins made the presentation as a representative of all those who attended the reunion and the plaque will be displayed in the foyer of the club.

As a footnote to the reunion, the organising committee has decided that the RAAF Radar Veterans Organisation, supported by the surplus funds from the reunion, will continue in existence. It is hoped that this organisation will form the nucleus for one or more future reunions on the same national and informal basis as Wagga. They would welcome any suggestions for future events, especially events supported by the people prepared to take part in their organisation.

## Q&A

The majority of the questions in this issue have resulted from diving into the deep end of radar history at both the RAAF Historical Section and the Australian War Memorial. After working my way through a number of A50s, PORs and other documents of historical interest, I have a few questions that someone may be able to answer.

### 302RS Wagga Wagga

Does anyone have any information about 302RS being formed at RAAF Base Wagga in 1956? I have references to the unit as part of the RAAF School of Technical Training and, as such, was in existence for about two years. It was disbanded in early 1957. The CO was a PltOff J.W. McPhee. 302RS seems to have risen from the ashes. Can anyone fill in the gaps in the official records?

### 33RS Cape Naturaliste WA

The Personnel Occurrence Reports for 33RS report the fact that the entire unit (38 personnel from CO to GEN HAND) was posted from 411RS to 33RS on its formation on 26OCT42. As 411RS was a US Army Radar Station, does this mean that the Aussies were operating the station or were they just there for convenience? Can anyone enlighten me?

## Deaths in Service

During my research through the archives, I have encountered a number of records of personnel who died while serving on radar stations and their associated units. Neither my research nor this list is complete, but I have listed the names, to date, on the last page of the newsletter.

Can anyone provide me with further details on any of the incidents or of other personnel who died while serving their country on a radar unit? I shall keep you informed of the results and of any other personnel I discover in the records.

### 14MFS, 114MFS, 114MFCU

All of the above titles are the titles for the same unit during WWII. I am presently compiling this unit's history and I am eager for anyone to provide me with further details, or incidents, concerning this unit during WWII. I have contacted a number of ex-114MFCU members but I am also interested in hearing from anyone else who served in, or with this unit. You may have been on a radar station that reported to this Fighter Sector, or, you may have heard some piquant stories about the unit. I am interested in any information, be it a complimentary story or a complaint, as I wish to ensure the whole story of this unit is recorded for future generations. If you can help, just drop me a line and I'll follow up the leads you provide.

**201RS Hobart**

Just recently, Ed Simmonds was carrying out some more research into radar history and he developed a conundrum. (Don't worry, it's not painful, just frustrating.) All our early records indicated that 201RS at Hobart was selected as a site for a radar but it was never used. However, within the archives he has now come across a reference to 201RS at Hobart being operational on a single watch. The records indicate that this reference was made in June 1945.

Does anyone know anything about this station? Please let us know. It will stop a lot of head scratching.

**Who put the 'C' in C-Rations?**

Do I have to ask if you remember C-Rations? Have you ever wondered why C-Rations are called C-rations, Ks are called K-Rations, and if there were any A-, B-, or D-rations? Come on, of course you have! Well, not surprisingly, this type of military lexicography was derived from a form of logical process. The letter designations for the rations were supposed to make catering easier to understand and, more 'logical(?)'. To understand this particular alphabet, I have to talk about how things were done prior to WWII, and how we ended up in this position.

Of course, all this ration naming is the result of American logisticians. Before WWII the US Army

divided its food requirements (for purchasing purposes) into three types of rations - the Garrison Ration, the Field Ration, and the Iron Ration. The Garrison Ration was what was sent to the permanent messes on bases. The food was pretty much what you would find in any other institutional feeding facility. The Field Ration, on the other hand, was food appropriate for use in a field kitchen (ie one constantly on the move). This ration consisted of non-perishable goods, (canned food and dry food mostly) that could sit in the back of a wagon or a truck for a few months without spoiling. The Iron Ration was an idea the US Army borrowed from the British Army in WWI. Cans of food were issued to each individual soldier to be kept in his pack as an emergency ration, in case he was caught behind the lines or couldn't get to a field kitchen. The British originally called it 'iron' ration because it came in metal (iron) cans.

Later the Army realised soldiers would dig into their Iron ration anytime they could.. They were using it as a 'box lunch'. The people in the Army catering branch decided this wasn't all that bad, in fact, it was a pretty good idea. However, there was still a need for an emergency rations, so they developed a fourth category of rations and called it the 'Emergency Ration'.

In the late 1930s, when the US Army was reorganising to prepare for WWII, it also reorganised its food. Under the new system, the Garrison Ration became 'Field Ration A', the Field Ration became 'Field Ration B', and Iron Rations became the infamous 'Field Ration C'. To replace the Emergency Ration, they developed a highly fortified chocolate bar and called it 'Field Ration D'. As usual, the

troops didn't use it as an emergency ration; they ate it as sweets.

The rations themselves stayed the same, only the names were changed. The one change the US Army made official was that C-Rations were no longer considered an emergency ration, they were now to be used as portable food for when troops couldn't get to a field kitchen. C-Rations weren't designed to be eaten for more than three consecutive days (!!!), so the catering people initially only developed 3 different menus. This is one of the main reasons C-Rations became so detested.

When the United States entered WWII, there was an initial flurry of enthusiasm for special troops. Each of these special groups wanted their own type of rations. The paratroops asked for a concentrated 'Parachute Ration', the jungle fighters wanted a 'Jungle Ration', and when the 10th Mountain Division was being organised, they asked Army Subsistence to develop a special 'Mountain Ration'. Each of these special rations, as well as life-raft rations, life-boat rations, and a few others, was assigned a letter from 'E' to 'J' while they were being developed.

The Catering Branch tried its best, but the requests came in faster than they could develop rations to meet them. The last straw came when General Dwight Eisenhower asked for a special concentrated 'Assault



Ration' for troops to carry with them when they stormed the beaches of Normandy. Finally, the Catering Branch cried STOP!; and ceased working on all the special orders. They agreed to develop one (and only one) new concentrated ration that would take the place of the parachute and assault rations. This they called 'Field Ration K'. This was probably the most popular field ration with troops in WWII - except for the British 'Compo' ration.

The troops talked so much about how they liked the British Composite Ration ('Compo') that Army Catering decided to come up with their own 'Compo' ration. The Compo ration was based on feeding a group of people rather than the individual. A box of 'Compo' would feed an infantry section (about eight to ten men) for a day or tank crew (around five troopers) for two days. The 'Compo' was essentially a box with lots of cans of food in it. Its primary attraction was the great variety of food it had. Rather than set menus, the British made sure each box had a balance of meat, vegetables, bread, and condiments. The American answer to this was the '5-in-1' ration (feeds 5 men for 1 day), which was changed to the '10-in-1' ration (essentially 2 '5-in-1' boxes). The 10-in-1 was advertised to feed 10 men for a day, five men for 2 days, or 1 man for 10 days. They even developed a 'Squad Cooking Set' to prepare the 10-in-1 ration. This ration

got to the troops in late 1944, early 1945, and they loved it.

By the Korean War, the '10-in-1' ration was apparently forgotten and C- and K-Rations were back on the menu. Later (Vietnam) C-Rations became 'Meal, Combat, Individual', and then, even later, (pre-Desert Storm) 'Meals Ready to Eat' (or 'Meals Rarely Eaten'). The British, on the other hand, still issued an updated version of 'Compo' Ration in Desert Storm.

So now you know. The bad news though is that the dreaded M&V (Meat and Vegetables) still turn up in ration packs. Some have even suggested that it is still there because all stocks were not consumed during the war. Based upon your comments, that does not surprise me.

The above information was derived from:

Erna Risch, The Quartermaster Corps: Organisation, Supply and Services, Volume I, US Army in WWII series 1953, Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army.

Military Service Publishing Company, The Officer's Guide, 1944, The Telegraph Press, Harrisburg PA.

### Casualty of War?

During my reading time in the RAAF Historical Section, I came across an interesting item within the Personnel Occurrence Reports for 16/RS. In the 31DEC44 edition of the said document, listed in the 'Casualty' column, was the marriage of one FlgOff W.H. Mann and a Miss Helen Serpell. I sent a copy to Warren and asked him if the Casualty column was the appropriate location for the event. After receiving his reply, I'm still not sure.

At the end of DEC44, CPL Ron Ferris was the unit clerk at 16/RS

and, in the absence of the CO, he produced the report. He may have been displaying insight as he was an older, wiser and long married member of the unit. When the CO returned from leave, he must have felt that his entry in the PORs was, in fact, some form of prophesy.

When the CO returned to work in JAN45, he was sporting a cut and bruised lip. The injury arose when the CO's bride was woken by the alarm clock. Taking offence at the noise, she aimed a well-weighted blow towards the offending item but hit the wrong dial. She missed the clock and delivered a punch Mohamed Ali would have been proud of right to her new husband's face! Being an officer and a gentleman (or perhaps displaying discretion in the face of adversity), he did not return the assault. However, one must wonder about the stories that must have circulated amongst the troops at the unit after his return from leave.

The incident obviously did not have any lasting affect as the couple concerned is still together after about 52 years of marriage. (Warren must have learned to duck.)

### Faded Echoes

Mr Alf French passed away in January 1997 after a short illness. Alf served with 301RS, 315RS and 337RS. Mr John McDavitt died suddenly in late December 96. John was veteran of 134RS and 347RS. Mr Lou Malempre has passed on. He was a

member and CO of 310/31RS, 32RS and 155RS. Mr **Jim Brown** served with 306RS and Radar School and has moved the the big doover in the sky.

Mr **Jim Weir** passed away mid 1995 from cancer. Jim served as CO of 15RS, 59RS and 352RS.

Mr **Jim Grimmett** died 30APR97. Jim served on 25RS, 29RS, 49RS, 336RS, 339RS, 4FS, 41WG, and 3RIMU

Mr **Ed Graham**, a QLD Radar Branch member, also died in JUN97. Although Ed was a pilot with 11Sqn, 111Sqn, and 267Sqn, he was an active and supportive member of the Radar Branch.

### Commanding Officers?

As part of the development of the radar database, I have been recording all the Commanding Officers of each unit. The first criteria I applied was that the person concerned had to be formally designated as the CO and this fact had to be recorded in RAAF records. These records include Unit PORs, A50 History Sheets, CO's Reports or Headquarters Diaries. This means that T/CO's, appointed to cover a leave of absence or illness, did not make the list. Sorry, but I had to draw the line somewhere. Even so, some interesting revelations have surfaced.

I am only part of the way through all the records but, already, some interesting statistics have surfaced.

There were 989 individual appointments to the position of CO of a radar or associated unit. For WWII radar units alone, the rank of the Person In Charge (on appointment) varied as follows:

4 CPLs  
12 SGTs  
5 FSGTs  
1 WOFF  
252 PLTOFFs  
274 FLGOFFs  
226 FLTLTs  
and, of special interest  
11 SECTOFFs (WAAAF)

As I develop this collection of information further, I will provide a more thorough breakdown. In the meantime, let me know if you have any comments about these figures.

### LW/AW Height-Finding

A good idea laid to rest.

During WWII, the biggest flaw in the otherwise remarkable Australian designed and manufactured LW/AW radar was its inability to determine a target's height.

On page 76 of 'Echoes over the Pacific' there is a mention of the efforts by 308 Radar at Millingimbi to overcome this deficiency by determining the antenna vertical lobes pattern and displaying these on a purpose drawn chart with a grid in height and range. An experienced operator could then calculate target height as it flew in and out of the main and secondary lobes by the variations in the height of the blip.

This was a good idea - especially in the desperate days of 1942-43.

The idea finally filtered up through the RAAF hierarchy because a unit of four men was formed in August 1944 at RAAF Headquarters Northern Command

(HQNORCOM) Madang to pursue the idea.

FlgOff O'Brien, Sgts Williams and Coomer, (both Radar Mechanics), and a Cpl Draughtsman commenced a program of calibrating the vertical lobes pattern of each and every LW/AW radar in 41 Wing.

Occasionally there was a fifth member of the unit. This was a Beaufort Bomber pilot, FlgOff Bird. His Beaufort was a decrepit, degraded original model with the tail number A9-13 which, apart from being totally superseded, advertised its age and war record by a near total lack of paint, numerous patches and an unserviceability record second to none.

This aircraft was primarily used as the HQNORCOM runabout and the calibration aircraft when it was available. About six calibrations runs were flown for each radar station at heights of 5, 10, and 15,000 feet on two bearings

The aircraft and its pilot caused the two sergeants in the unit some real misgivings, and, at times even fright. One sergeant flew in the aircraft on each calibration flight. He sat in the gangway at the side of the only other occupant, the pilot.

One day, the aircraft had barely got off the Madang strip to start a calibration run for the Saidor radar when the starboard engine spluttered and stopped. The

silence from this engine was inversely proportional to the increased level of swearing from the pilot. The complaints were not only aimed at the design, manufacture and maintenance of the defunct engine but also at the parentage of the port engine if it should also decide to expire.

Fortunately, as the Beaufort was empty, the pilot was able to circle back and land.

On the return trip to Madang, FlgOff Bird usually flew back along the New Guinea shore line just below tree height. "Look for Jap barges sergeant, under the trees".

For the hapless Radar Mech, cramped in the draughty perspex nose of the aircraft, watching the sea, mangroves, trees and terrified natives in lakatois rushing a few feet below was frightening.

This very secret little calibration unit didn't last long. By Christmas 1944 everyone had been posted.

The height-finding idea had been good in theory. In practice it was soon proved that external factors precluded its practical application. The radar's vertical lobe patterns changed with the tides and with radiated direction. Permanent echoes and back radiation reflection distorted both horizontal and vertical patterns on different bearings. The IFF also did not assist the radar operator.

The IFF would obscure his view of the echoes as they reduced in height between lobes.

This activity was a break from the usual mechanic activities for the two sergeants. However, they will forever remember an incident that occurred upon arrival at the newly allocated NORCOM accommodation area. Once they had pitched their tent they decided to plant a couple of paw-paw trees. When they tried to plant these trees outside their tent, they discovered that, two feet down, the 9th Division had used the area as a burial ground for the Japanese defenders.

The calibration aircraft A9-13, the 'terror' of the tropics, never quite died. Its remains, largely in one piece, are a prized exhibit at the Oakey, Queensland, Army Aviation Museum.

If you look carefully one can see the indentations in its frame caused by the fingers of two mechanics trying so hard to hang on.

**Jack Coomer QLD**

## How SECRET is SECRET ?

At the time of this incident I was a brand new chum, straight from rookies and Radar School, with about four weeks 'on site' training at 26RS Cape Cleveland Townsville. I then received a posting and proceeded 'under my own steam' to 36Rs Hammond Island [even further north in QLD].

In order to travel to Hammond Island, I was on board the MV Wanaka in November 1942 and steaming north. The Wanaka had left Townsville with a mixed passenger list of RAAF, Army, a few RAN and several Civil

Construction Corps (CCC) members. All aboard were bound for Thursday Island. Somewhere north of Cairns, several of the passengers spotted a radar array on a headland on the horizon. The group included one of the CCC men. This particular burly fellow then proceeded to tell everyone within hearing distance, in a very authoritative manner, what the antenna was, what it did, its pickup range and the fact that it was a 'secret' weapon.

I was horrified! Especially being fresh from Radar School where you were being told that this radar was Top Secret and that we were not to talk about it to anyone - not even our best friend or family.

I've pondered over this incident since then and wondered if there had been a 'Fifth Columnist' within ear shot, who knows what would have happened.

**David Bell NSW**



For those of us who were part of BLIPS, and witnessed the magnificent presentation by the New Lambton Public School, the following poem will come as no surprise. Stephanie Ross, a member of Form 5A, submitted this poem as part of an RSL writing competition in 1996. For her efforts she was deservedly judged the joint winner. Not all of the 'younger' generation is missing the meaning of ANZAC day.

### **What ANZAC Day Means To Me**

I remember as a little child  
Standing holding my mother's hand  
Watching men go marching by  
And trying to understand

They march on April 25th  
Just one day a year  
Some walking, some with canes, some in cars  
Upon their chests, medals and colourful bars

A long time ago these men went to war  
To fight a faceless enemy  
To bring pride to their country  
All on a foreign shore

To fight and die in a foreign land  
So far from home, so far away  
Their families should be proud of them  
As all Australians are today

I now understand what ANZAC means  
And why we should all be proud  
We should never forget these wonderful men  
Whose deeds indeed speak loud.

**N.B.** New Lambton Public School was the site No 2 Fighter Sector during the war and a number of our members have some fond (and not so fond) memories of this location. In recognition of their part in WWII, the school was presented with a commemorative plaque at BLIPS. Additionally, the RAAF formally presented the RAAF Ensign which they proudly fly every ANZAC Day.

### **CLASSIFIEDS**

#### **Fenton Publications**

Morrie Fenton still has some of his Radar History & story booklets available for those who have not caught up with them all. Each of the following titles are still available for \$5.00 post paid:

Exmouth  
39RS Port Keats  
307/61RS Peron Island  
46RS Cape Don

Address your orders to:

M. Fenton  
27 Lasscock Avenue  
LOCKLEYS SA 5032



## Deaths in Service

The following are the results of a, presently incomplete, search of the official records for those personnel who died while serving on radar or associated units. This list is not exhaustive and will grow. The following details are all that is available within official records.

- 01JAN43      LAC E.L. Lewis 29RS Port Moresby PNG - Electrocuted when he came into contact with power lines at the ASV at Beacon Camp. Buried at Hanuabada Cemetery.
- 17FEB43      LAC ? Roberts 40ZFC Broome WA - Accidentally shot at Cable Beach WA
- 22FEB43      ACW H.C Harrison 24RS Caloundra QLD - Fatally injured when unit utility, in which she was a passenger, rolled over 200 yards from the unit. She died in Redbank Hospital 26FEB43.
- 01JUL43      Sgt W.A. Mackay 41 Wing Port Moresby PNG - Disappeared while on an RCM mission with 63 Sqn USAAF to Vunakanau.
- 19AUG43      AC1 B.J. Lacey, 47RS Geraldton WA - Drowned in surf about one mile from the unit. His body was recovered by a beach patrol on 23AUG97. He was buried in the War Cemetery Geraldton WA
- 23NOV43      FlgOff C.H. Bell and LAC E.H. McCarthy, 1RIMU - fatally injured when an aircraft collided with their parked vehicle at Livingston Strip NT. Buried in Adelaide River War Cemetery 24NOV43
- 04DEC43      LAC P. Cavanagh 1RIMU, (Att 27RS Dunk Island) died on duty from cerebral malaria in Tully District Hospital. Buried in Tully Cemetery. Contracted the malaria while installing equipment at 27RS Dunk Island
- 07JAN44      FltLt W. deB. Percival 329RS Warricarran WA - Collapsed and died on duty.
- 23AUG44      LAC A.W. Irwin 5RIMU fatally injured in a motorcycle accident at 59 Mile Darwin NT. He is buried at Adelaide River Cemetery
- 06OCT44      FltLt K.N. Drummond 155RS Vlaming Head WA - Died from a suspected ruptured appendices.
- 29OCT44      LAC H.R. Moorhead 4RIMU, drowned at Morotai when he was caught in the undertow while swimming. His body was never recovered.
- 27NOV44      CPL T.A. McGlade 109MFCU Dobodura PNG - Swept away in a flood and drowned.
- 29JAN45      SGT F.T. Burgess (Att 3RIMU) was passenger on a Beaufort, from 8 Communication Unit, which disappeared on a flight from Milne Bay to Madang.
- 30JUN45      AC A.R. Pardey 3RIMU fatally injured when he was knocked down by a truck at Lae.
- 13JUL45      LACs Berry and Lyons 346RS - as a result of an accident at sea LAC Berry drowned and LAC Lyons missing believed drowned. LAC Berry buried at Madang Cemetery.
- 20MAR46      LAC D.G. Keene 4RIMU fatally injured in a vehicle accident at Esk QLD. Buried at Lutwyche Cemetery Brisbane.