

RADAR RETURNS

ECHOES FROM THE PAST AND PRESENT

“History is not another name for the past, as many people imply.
It is the name for stories about the past”

A.J.P. Taylor

Editorial

I must commence this edition with an expression of thanks for all the support and encouragement I have received for the first edition of Radar Returns. As a result of your responses, this edition has been relatively simple to produce. The most difficult issue was deciding on which replies to include and which to leave out. The result was that I ran out of room and I have had to hold some items for the next issue. For example, missing for this edition only, is the picture poser section for the lovers of mysteries. I did have enough room though to include the responses I received to the first two photographs in this section. You can read about these responses later on in this issue. I also received a number of replies which contained information about target ranges during WWII and how temperature inversions affected the radar's performance. From

the correspondence received to date, a lot of you have experienced this phenomena and its impact on your work. I shall be consolidating these replies into a later edition.

Despite the competition for space, a few new columns have been added. One of these is entitled Faded Echoes. As you will see, this particular column will ensure that we don't miss the passing of some of our comrades as they reach their maximum range.

As you can see, this newsletter is still evolving and will continue to do so in order to meet your needs.

So, please tell me what else you would like to see in Radar Returns !

Once again, thank you for your response and I only ask one thing - don't stop ! I gain a real sense of excitement every time I see a Radar Returns letter as I never know what priceless piece of radar history it may reveal.

Pete Smith - 3CRU

Q & A

Last edition's questions (and answers) have prompted a number of people to support, question or add more detail based upon their own experiences. Before we launch into the new questions for this month, I have included a selection of some of these replies to demonstrate that there is more than one opinion on the same topic.

WAAAF Radar Mechanics

Dot Mustard (VIC) was able to add more information to the question of whether WAAAFs were trained as Radar Mechanics. “I can advise that approximately 20 WAAAF were included on a Mechanics course at Maryborough in 1945. The course started in Melbourne in January and proceeded to Maryborough about three months later. The WAAAF were previously WIRELESS ASSISTANTS and then graduated as AIR MECHANICS.”

Also, Ted Dellit (NSW) found a reference in Joy Thomson's book **The WAAAF in Wartime Australia** which stated "The group 1 mustering of Radar Mechanic was open to WAAAF in March 1945, and the Air Force called for both male and female remusters from serving Radar Operators - the female trainees were to take the place of male mechanics when the latter were posted to new units in the Northern Territory or overseas. The specialist course took approximately seven months. Ten WAAAF successfully completed their training but, with Japan's surrender on 14 August, were to work in their trade for only a few months before being demobilized."

Attacks on Radars

After consulting his own diaries, T. Jones (ACT) has provided more detail about radar stations which suffered direct attack during the war. In particular, 37RS, Milne Bay, became the subject of special interest by the Japanese and "was strafed by a Zero on 27 Aug 42. The doover itself was hit. There was also strafing on 24 Aug 42 but this was 200 to 300 metres away from the 37RS camp. Also, on the night of 8 Sep 42, a bomb landed in the 37RS camp site just

outside one of the huts. There was also shelling by a cruiser on 26 Aug 42. One of the shells landed in a gully not far from the doover.

I assume that the above events would come under the heading of 'subject to enemy action'?"

Definitely !

Mornington Island

This item prompted quite a few replies which, while not directly concerned with the action itself, did provide corroborating evidence of activities in the area. Additionally, Robert Piper in his new book '**The Hidden Chapters**' (ISBN 1 875575 22 7) dedicates an entire section of his book to this part of the world during WWII.

Ted Dellit (NSW) was a RADMECH (Air) in 1943 and was serving with 11 Squadron at Cairns [QLD]. In conjunction with 20 Squadron, 11 Squadron Catalina flying boats used Trinity Bay Inlet as their operational base. "Late one afternoon (probably May or June) two three-engine Dornier DO24K flying boats of 41 Squadron landed at our base from 'down south' and disembarked about a platoon of Australian

soldiers (with rifles, packs etc). The Dorniers were ex-Dutch East Indies Navy aircraft and had been taken into the RAAF in 1942. Because of their condition, range and performance etc, they were not considered suitable for operations or reconnaissance but were used as transports. I do not think that they carried any ASV radar, in any case, our Section was not called upon to service them. However, they were refuelled and had their engines and airframes checked by the appropriate 11 or 20 Squadron ground staff. The troops were taken to an army camp for the night. As we saw little of the Dorniers in Cairns at that time, there was much speculation in the Airmen's mess over dinner that night as to their destination and the purpose of the contingent of troops. The Fitters and Refuellers who worked on the two aircraft said that the troops were Commandos who were going to Karumba (or somewhere in the Gulf of Carpentaria) because it had been reported that the Japanese had landed there. The two Dorniers, and their human cargo, took off at first light the following morning. To my knowledge, they did not return to their base via Cairns."

Claude Williams (VIC) had similar experiences but his memories related to his trip to Mornington Island in 1944.

"I was posted to 313RS and arrived Mornington Island on 31 Mar 44. The journey required a flight in a DC3 from Townsville to Horn Island and then a boat trip to Mornington Island. Upon arrival *[at Horn Island]* I was informed that the boat that was supposed to take me to Mornington Island had been sunk by the Japanese. The only thing they didn't tell me was whether it had been sunk by the Navy or Air Force. I passed the time at Horn Island with 28 OBU until I was posted to 151RS at Merauke DNG."

From the correspondence to date, and the limited official records, there certainly seemed to be a significant amount of Japanese activity in the area of the Gulf and Mornington Island. Unfortunately, the entire story will take a lot more research in order to establish all the facts.

RAAF Radar Landing with Australian Invasion Fleets

This is the question which generated the most correspondence ! Primarily due, I think, because of the

information that was omitted rather than the answers supplied. Due to an oversight, two radars were omitted from our list of units which landed with Australian invasion forces. 342RS landed at Labuan within three hours of the initial assault by 9th Div on 10 June 1945. Commanded by FltLt Bruce Aldrich (of 305RS Kiriwina fame) the radar was operating in record time. It became operational so quickly that the ship which was acting as the Fighter Sector refused to take their plots because they did not believe that the unit could be operational in such a short time.

The landing of 342RS and 111MFCU was definitely not a 'stroll in the park' either. The station's equipment was driven off a landing barge (LST 1025) in three trucks, each manned by a driver and co-driver. They were supplied with a very obscure map and given definite orders to obey all directions given by the MPs. Stan McKaysmith recalls being in charge of a landing truck at the time. As he and Ken Bain drove off the LST, their truck was hit by ground fire. They were thrown around but the truck remained serviceable. After recovering from the confusion and rejoining the rest of their party, Stan eventually ended up in a

Field Dressing Station where he discovered that he had to have metal fragments removed from his leg.

Other members also recall that, upon reaching the marked turn-off point, they were firmly ordered not to turn but to proceed straight ahead. This order was repeated a few more times until they were stopped by a chap who stepped out of the brush and asked where they were going. After explaining their directions, they were informed that 'There's only Japs in front of you'. This, in itself, would not have deterred our six intrepid airmen with their 'intensive combat training received at Radar School', but, realising that their CO would probably have to foot the bill if they lost the gear, they turned back and reached their appointed site without further incident.

Not the most friendliest of welcomes for radar personnel.

Two days later, 325RS, lead by PltOff A.E. Irvine, arrived and set up camp. They were operational for 14 days before they moved south to Lutong. Here they became operational on Canada Ridge in the town of Miri on 5 July 1945. Together with 163 RS

(GCI), they were the only RAAF radars in the area.

My sincere apologies to all those members of both 325RS and 342 RS who were left out of the original response but, gauging by the calls I received about these units, I at least know you are reading the newsletter.

Most of the above information was supplied by *Noel Lynam [QLD]*, *Stan McKaysmith [NSW]* and *Bruce Aldrich [QLD]*

And now to the questions for this edition:

Q: Is it true that 207RS occupied an old site of radio station 2UE at Lilli Pilli ?
(*N.C. Edwards VIC*)

A: Short answer - yes. An ACO was located there but this was a poor location for this type of equipment. It operated from July 1942 until January 1947.

Q: What WWII Australian based RAAF aircraft were fitted with ASV or ASD radar ?
(*Ted Dellit NSW*)

A: Catalinas, Beauforts and Hudsons were fitted with radar, but can anyone supply information about other aircraft types which may had this equipment fitted ?

Q: Were any RAAF squadrons serving in SWPA fitted with AI radar ?
(*Ted Dellit NSW*)

A: 456 Squadron RAAF, (flying Beauforts and later Mosquitoes from UK bases) were equipped with AI radar. Is anyone aware if any other RAAF aircraft in the SWPA employed this equipment ?

Q: The following question has a long introduction but the questions it raises should provide some intriguing answers (I hope).

"I was a Radar Operator at 16RS at Gabo Island after leaving Radar School in March 1943 until December of that year. I was then posted to form 345RS and was with that unit at Bipi and Harengan's Island until mid June 1945.

During the time at Gabo Island, there were several unusual radar echoes which most of the operators regarded as submarine activities. One, in particular, occurred about Mother's Day 1943 when a light was noticed on the mainland near the wreck of the *RIVERINA* (sic). This area was almost directly opposite Gabo Island and was on a deserted section of the beach. The unit noticed that the light appeared to circle and it was thought

that a signal was being made to sea whenever aircraft from the RAAF strip at Mallacoota were operating. This was just after dark. At the same time, the operators on duty reported a submarine type echo as well as quite a large convoy echo. There was quite a bit of activity as the unit prepared to repel the 'invaders'.

After the plots were passed to the Fighter Sector, the convoy changed course and later, the large mystery echo just disappeared. By means of a sighting tube made with bits of wire, a piece of piping and a stake in the ground, the area where the light was seen was located for better scrutiny during daylight.

Daylight revealed the location of the light and the CO (Mr Mathieson) and several guards visited the mainland. There they discovered footprints in the sand leading from the water's edge to the sand dunes. The light appeared on another night but with less drama.

I was informed by a fisherman from Eden that it was not unusual for himself and other fishermen to hear large diesel engines at night in Disaster Bay, just north of Gabo Island. At the time it was thought that the convoy was what interested the submarine, however, I

now feel that the primary reason was a search for fresh water. The charts at that time would show the location of lakes behind the sand dunes and the light circling was the path of the loading party from the dunes to the water's edge. It would appear that it was not unusual for Japanese, and possibly German, submarine crews to land for water.

Does anyone else have a similar experience or can they give me more information about this activity around Gabo Island?"

(Leo Doolan VIC)

A: Gabo Island was a notorious hunting ground for enemy submarines during WWII. Ships sailing from Tasmania to Sydney would make their first landfall there, as would vessels sailing from New Zealand. Vitality, Gabo Island is also at the eastern approach to Bass Strait. G. Hermon Gill is his official history of the RAN in WWII, states that through this part of Australia 'passed the traffic essential to Australia's war economy, the iron ore trade between SA and NSW, the Tasmanian limestone trade, and the Newcastle coal and steel traffic to VIC, SA and

the west.'

The submarine activity around Australia has been documented in **Battle Surface !** by David Jenkins (ISBN 0 09 182638 1) but he does not dwell on the activities around Gabo Island in much detail. As I have already stated, there are intriguing questions within Leo's story and if anyone else has some more information, please pass it on to me at 3CRU.

Q: This next question does not directly concern radar, or its use, but an incident which has intrigued Jean Renew for some time and she looking for an answer. In 1945, Jean had the maiden name of Grant-Stevenson and was a Radar Operator looking for a job. This is where she takes up the story:

"In early 1945 some Radar Operators were redundant and I was about to be discharged, but was asked to fill a place, temporarily, at 113 AGH (Concord Hospital). I had to take photographs for the RAAF Plastic Surgeon. One morning, while following him on his rounds of the ward, I suddenly felt the effects of having sat up all the previous night on an interstate train, and I fainted. 'Get her a brandy !'

I heard my boss order the Ward Sister. This drink was then put on the tray spanning the nearest bed. The glass was almost full. The surgeon's entourage moved on but I blacked out again. When I came to, and made enough effort to grasp the brandy glass, it was empty ! I looked over the glass to the innocent stare of the young man propped on his pillows. He winked at me !

My question is - can anyone help me identify this fellow. All I know is that he was a Radar Mechanic or Operator. He had served 'Up North' and his station has been strafed (by mistake) by the Americans and he had lost all the fingers from one hand and had some other wound. I would like to hear from this person as he owes me a brandy !!

(Jean Renew [nee Grant-Stevenson] QLD)

A: To be able to identify this person, and to hear from him would be most gratifying, and, for Jean's sake, would solve a mystery. For now though, all I can say is, what was true then is still true today - never leave an unattended drink when there are radar people about !

Picture Posers

Last month's response to the picture posers was tremendous. I received a number of worthy contributions and a more interesting information came to light as a result. Thank you to everyone who responded, your contributions have been duly noted, but true to my promise, I must name the people who were best able to provide the information necessary to catalogue the photographs in question.

Picture 1: This turned out to be a photograph of 50RS personnel at Aitape PNG in June 1944. I obtained this information one evening when I received a phone call about the photograph in question. The person on the other end of the phone said 'You know that photo in Radar Returns - well that's me!' I couldn't ask for more precise identification of the photograph! The person in question was Alex Culvenor (VIC) and he was not only able to give the circumstances surrounding the photograph, but, he was able to identify everyone in the group and who actually took the photo. He has since provided us with a similar shot with the photographer and one of the

subjects switching places. For those interested in the fine detail, the personnel are, (l-r) Stan Middleton, Max Fendler, Eric Childs, Bill Glover with Alex Culvenor sitting on the truck bonnet. The photographer was the station medical Orderly Harry (?). They are in front of the old gaol on Aitape Point.

Picture 2: The photograph of the men attempting to raise the radar spindle on Hammond Island took a little more time to identify, but, the information, when it arrived caused just as much excitement. The answer came from Keith Blair (NSW). Keith was also able to provide background information as well as identify some of the hard working individuals in the group. The photograph was taken by the CO of 36RS Jack Bullen and the personnel are, (on the pulley rope from the front) Fred Blanden, Len Bath, Ivor/Ivan (?), Ron Wright, (?) Army TI Driver, Chas (?) Henderson, shaved head operator, Cpl Ken (?) Army TI Driver, (?). On the lifting plank from the back: Tom Ockleby and Bill Fulton (with white handkerchief on head) and (?). The side rope is held by Keith Blair and Bill Maver.

As Keith explained in his letter, the operation shown in the photograph was not an easy task and would have produced some sore backs, burnt hands and a lot of strained muscles. I'm just glad that radars today are not as cumbersome to move about! I don't think the erection method displayed in the photograph lends itself to rapid deployment.

Due to space limitations, the picture posers have been held over until the next edition!

Faded Echoes

A column dedicated to those who may no longer be with us in body but their spirit still remains.

Eric White [VIC] passed away early in 1995.

Eric was the revered cook for 306RS while they were stationed at Bulolo PNG. He was renowned for his prowess in providing tempting dishes instead of the usual M&V or bully beef.

Eric Suttor [QLD] passed away 1 Oct 95.

One of the staunch survivors of 38RS Bathurst Island.

Yvonne Beadle [QLD] passed away 14 Sep 95

Perce Pierce [QLD] passed away 12 Sep 95

THE CLASSIFIEDS

RADAR PLAQUES

The Radar Air Defence Branch NSW is proceeding with the subsidising of plaques on ex-RAAF radar sites and one is going to be placed on the site of 17RS Burrawarra Point, near Batemans Bay NSW. Tentatively, the date has been set for 20th April 1996. If enough people are interested, Les and Maureen Kinross are happy to arrange a three day coach trip from Sydney to Batesman Bay via Canberra. To make this an economical trip, at least 45 persons will be needed and this will keep the cost approximately \$130.00 per person. The cost includes the hire of the coach and accommodation.

If you are interested in:

- attending the presentation,
- accommodation (using your own transport)
- travelling on the coach, or
- more information

please send your details to:

Maureen Kinross

3F/11 Queensbury Road

PADSTOW HEIGHTS NSW 2211

Phone: (02) 7922346

WHERE ARE THEY NOW ?

Could anyone inform us of the whereabouts of Mr Jim Wier, ex FLTLT Commanding Officer of 317RS on Sir Graham Moore Island. Rex Borchers, the Medical Orderly from 317RS would like to contact him or anyone else who was at the station during 1944. He can be contacted by writing to the following address:

Mr R. Borchers

8 May Park Drive

PAYNESVILLE VIC 3880

Mrs Joy O'Brien [Wishart] is trying to locate two of her WAAAF compatriots from the Townsville Fighter Sector during the war. They are WOFF Mavis Whittingham - last known at Preston Fighter Sector, Victoria; and, Cpl Hazel [Topsy] Reeves - last known at the Townsville Fighter Sector. Any information should be passed on to:

Mrs J.M. O'Brien

49 Jocelyn Street

CABOOLTURE QLD 4510

RADAR HISTORY

A couple of our erudite members of the radar fraternity have decided to write down the history of their units and are interested in contacting anyone who was with them, or the unit, during its operational life. If you can assist the following people, please drop them a line and offer them any information you can. Any little piece of information can help and they are embarking on a valuable exercise in the recording of our history. Please help if you can:

50RS - Mr Alex Culvenor

"Osnaburgh" Sandon

RMB 444

NEWSTEAD VIC 3462

313RS - Dr. Eric Unthank

18 Tyrrell Avenue

BLACKBURN VIC 3130

WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN 1997 ?

After the success of BLIPS in 1995, some other people have been inspired to contemplate another informal gathering in the autumn of 1997 at Wagga Wagga NSW.

Helen and Warren Mann have made some enquiries in the Wagga district and have received encouraging replies from the local tourist authority. Additionally, the RAAF has a Technical Training base nearby which also served as WWII airfield. They have also established a museum centred on Wagga's contributions to RAAF history.

To make a success of a venture of this type, we have to have enough interested parties to proceed further. If there you are interested in another function of this sort, drop us a note on the back of an envelope, or telephone us at 3CRU, and we will record the level of enthusiasm for this event and then proceed from there.

THE DUTCH MEDAL

In order to recognise the contribution of those servicemen and women who served in Dutch Territories during WWII, the Netherlands Government commissioned the "Netherlands War Commemorative Cross 1940-45" [commonly known as the Dutch Medal]. This medal is officially recognised by the Australian Government but has been classified as a foreign award. (Reference: LtCol Richard Pal, Canberra).

Anyone who served in Dutch New Guinea, Java, Borneo and other Dutch Territory is eligible to wear this medal and is worn on the

left breast in mufti following all other campaign awards. However, the medal has to be purchased and is available from:

Cary Corporation Pty Ltd
PO Box 200
SANS SOUCI NSW 2219
Telephone: (02) 529 2009

The official ribbon is also available from the same source.

Anyone wishing to purchase this medal must provide proof of identity by providing a copy of their discharge records. Warwick Cary JP (Managing Director) has advised that the foreign service medal, with ribbon, costs \$45.00, Dutch lettering denoting Pacific Area 1942-45 is \$5.00, miniature medal complete is \$12.00, ribbon only (6 inch length) is \$3.50 and 10 inches of ribbon for court mounting costs \$5.50.

(The above information appeared in "The Kookaburra" Vol No 2 March 1992. This publication is the official organ of the 7th Aust Div AIF Association.)

Other Radar personnel have written to the above organisation and have since received this award.

If you wish write to us with any questions or information, please address all your letters as follows:

Radar Returns
c/- 3CRU
RAAF Base
WILLIAMTOWN NSW 2314