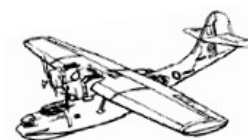


# RADAR RETURNS

*Signals & Echoes For RAAF Radar Veterans*



## EDITORIAL

I must apologise that this issue is so late. Time takes its toll in subtle as well as obvious ways, and I find that I no longer have the mental stamina to apply the concentration over time that this job needs.

### New Directions

In April 2004, without warning, I found myself 'volunteering' to become, temporarily, the editor of *Radar Returns* following the tragically premature death of Wing Commander Pete Smith (ret'd), despite my being already thirty plus years older than he had been. After the first issue or so, I realised that I could not hope that there was a RAAF radar veteran willing to take over the job.

Clearly, what was needed was a flexible 'business plan' to guide me in making best use of the time that I might expect or hope to devote to the project and then to leave it with some prospect for its future. When he launched it, Pete saw the need for a newsletter "devoted to keeping Australia's radar heritage alive". I became involved because I believed then that there was such a need; I still believe it, though the means for satisfying the need may have evolved.

The plan that I followed, which developed over a period, led to bigger newsletters published less often, emphasis on articles which could become primary

sources for an eventual definitive history of RAAF radar, a workable though by no means impregnable financial position, and a website providing some but not yet all of the features I had planned for it.

The site has now has a news and notices page, a 'Faded Echoes' facility, a 'Units' information section, archiving facilities to accommodate reports, books and articles relating to RAAF radar, especially in WWII, as well as past and current issues of *Radar Returns*, a 'guest book' for reader feedback and links to other sites of interest.

The plan for the website is not yet complete. I propose to install a database of people who trained at Radar School as radar officers, mechanics and operators during WWII, and also an archive for WWII photos etc. Arrangements are being made for the site to continue indefinitely into the future, but there is still need to secure its longer-term maintenance and development.

As a result of correspondence with Ed Simmonds, the Australian War Memorial has approached me seeking permission to include the *Radar Returns* website in the PANDORA Archive. PANDORA is Australia's Web Archive, set up in 1996 by the National Library of Australia to provide archiving of, and long-term access to, online Australian publications. The AWM, as a PANDORA partner, identifies, assesses, selects and catalogues sites of relevance to Australian military history for archiving by the NLA as part of the PANDORA project; more information on PANDORA at <http://pandora.nla.gov.au>

My acceptance of this suggestion would mean granting the AWM a licence under the Copyright Act 1968 to copy *Radar Returns* into the Archive and to provide public access to it via the Internet, thereby permitting the NLA to retain the website in the Archive and provide access to it in perpetuity. That means that anyone who has contributed material to *Radar Returns* agrees that their work will be archived by the NLA. If there is anyone who does not so agree, I must know promptly so that I can withhold permission to copy that particular segment. I propose to sign the agreement on or soon after 1 November 2008, so the deadline for my receiving notification of any disagreement will be 31 October 2008. As the AWM will be re-archiving periodically so as to record

significant additions and changes, I must know of any unwillingness to agree in respect of contributions after 31 October 2008 at the time of their submission to me.

There are significant advantages in our accepting this proposal. The AWM, in partnership with the NLA, will take the necessary preservation action to keep the website accessible as hardware and software change over time, and the Research Centre of the AWM will catalogue the publication and add the record to its online database at [www.awm.gov.au/firstopac/](http://www.awm.gov.au/firstopac/); this will increase awareness of the publication among researchers using libraries.

In the meantime I want to extend the web site along the lines mentioned above and to archive as many radar unit histories etc as possible. To do this I shall be asking authors and editors for permission to do that and, wherever possible, getting electronic manuscripts. The alternative is to scan them, a page at a time – a rather daunting task that will limit the number that I can archive. Similarly, once the graphic archive is set up, I shall be seeking electronic copies of as many as possible of the WWII photos (illegal and otherwise) that are out there. Scanning of original photos is not so massive a task and I shall be happy enough to do it if necessary. More on that, however, in the next issue.

For the print newsletter, I am afraid that, since I have not been able to find an editor who has the skills, interests and time as well as the will to take Pete Smith's brain-child into a new era, I shall have to go to Plan 'B' and wind it up. I am planning, if I can, to produce just two more issues, in March and September 2009, and then to finish, by which time I shall be nearing 87.

In the meantime, please don't forget that all this activity carries some costs and donations will still be needed and welcomed, especially from those who have

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The closing date for material for Volume 14, No 1 is 27 February 2009.

Please address correspondence to:

The Editor, Radar Returns,  
39 Crisp Street, HAMPTON, VIC 3188  
Phone: 03 9598 2193; Fax: 03 9598 2193  
Email: [whcmann@optusnet.com.au](mailto:whcmann@optusnet.com.au)  
Website: [www.radarreturns.net.au](http://www.radarreturns.net.au)

## FADED ECHOES

*The deaths of the following people have come to our notice since the publication of the previous issue. Tributes, where available, follow this listing. If you can provide a tribute or further details on anyone mentioned, please send them to Radar Returns.*

### John Robert Barker

17/10/1925 - 28/12/2007  
Vic; LAC Rad Op (MO100)  
352RS, 15RS; later Catholic priest &  
RAAF Chaplain, Butterworth

### Harold Frederick Blythe

14/9/1913 - 10/3/2005  
SA; LAC Rad Op (MO81)

### Alexander William Thos. Bower

28/11/1920 - 28/4/2007  
NSW; Sgt Rad Mech (M14A)

### Paul Britnell

22/7/1919 - 5/9/2008  
Vic; W/O Rad Mech (M3A, M1G)  
POW

### Frederick Mayne (Fred) Courtis

15/4/1916 - 15/7/2008  
Vic; Sgt Electrical Fitter  
42RWng, 1RIMU  
m. Gloria (Trotman) Rad Op (WO47)

### \*Richard (Dick) Ellis

5/7/1924 - 6/6/2008  
Qld; LAC Rad Op (MO86)  
42RS, 151RS, 322RS, 323RS, 1RIMU

### Keith Hinchcliffe

17/9/1923 - 15/4/2008  
NSW; Sgt Rad Mech (M08)  
37RS, 54RS, 161RS, 301RS, 162RS

### Vaughan Paul Hingston

14/6/1921 - 14/3/2007  
ACT; LAC Rad Op (MO43)  
39RS, 46RS, 59RS, 103RS, 132RS  
Wife: Beatrice (nee McKenzie) (WO42)

### Ruth Ellenor Inglis

7/9/1921 - 19/9/2007  
NSW; ACW Rad Mech (MW63A)

### Alexander Ronald McAndrew

28/6/1924 - 2007/8?  
NSW; ?; 306RS

### Terence Joseph O'Sullivan

12/9/1922 - 19/3/2008  
NSW; Cpl Rad Mech (M17A)

### William John (Bill) Pens

26/6/1922 - 24/6/2008  
SA; LAC DMT;  
151RS  
Sheep & wheat farmer at Burra, SA

### Henry Albert (Mick) Saverin

16/6/1924 - 3/6/2008  
Qld; LAC Messman; 151RS

### Cyril Rowland Jack Short

2/10/1919 - 24/2/2007  
SA; F/O Filter Off; Sgt Rad Op (MO8)  
37RS, 1Rad Sch, 114MFCU, 111MFCU

### Donald George Thomas

13/12/1917 - 18/8/2008  
ACT; F/O Rad Off (O2A, O1G);  
POW

### Patrick John Toohey OAM

27/4/1925 - 19/10/2007  
Qld; LAC Rad Op (MO85);  
20RS, 26RS, 28RS, 40RS, 151RS,  
207RS. 2RIMU;

\* Tribute follows

### Kenneth Alexander Mackenzie (15/6/1924 – 11/11/2007)

Ken enlisted in the RAAF as a trainee Wireless Telegraphist in Nov. 1942, graduated from course No 67 at Point Cook in June 1943, and was posted to 211RS then forming at Mascot NSW. In Sept. 1943, the unit moved to Home Hill, Nth Qld, and in November Ken went to Perth on 10 days leave, spending an extra 20 days in travelling. Back on Christmas Eve, he found the unit still not operational.

As all communication was by post-office landline, his job was not very challenging and found himself employed in the orderly room, mostly amending Air Force Orders. He applied for forward posting and, early in 1944, was sent to 40BU in Merauke, DNG for onward transfer to 322RS at Tanah Merah. As the Tanah Merah airstrip was not completed, he had to wait several months for water transport. Eventually, early in May, he embarked with several other RAAF and Army personnel on the small ship *Soedoe*. On the first evening out, she encountered a violent storm and the Dutch officers, suspected of being drunk, would not venture into the Princess Mariana Strait. The vessel dragged anchor with heavy seas breaking over it; all gear was saturated, all food destroyed and almost everyone was seasick.

Next day, the ship returned to Merauke to take on a fresh supply of food. Thereafter, the trip of seven days along the coast and up the Digoel River was quite pleasant. They travelled by day and tied up to the bank at night so as not to collide with the logs that floated by. Arriving at Tanah Merah at about 2pm, they had to unload the ship with its hand-cranked winch. All gear was again soaked so they spent the night in wet blankets.

Ken found the 14 months he spent at Tanah Merah quite tolerable. They were quartered in an old Dutch hospital which was spacious and dry. His work consisted

of passing radar plots to the Fighter Control Unit at Merauke and enciphering and deciphering administrative traffic. For a period, there were only two WTs who had to work 12-hour shifts, but they managed. The Japs didn't bother them during his time there. Ken had his first dose of malaria while there and in May 1945 he was posted to 5 Personnel Depot in Perth. He took 11 days AWL in Sydney on the way, and then had his second dose of malaria in Perth in time to spend his 21st birthday in Hollywood Hospital.

On recovering, he was posted to 2 Reserve Personnel Depot in Morotai for onward disposal to First Tactical Air Force, with three days at Bradfield Park for tropical kitting, and he was on a draft there which did not leave before the war ended. He was reposted to Western Area Headquarters for a few weeks, then to Geraldton over Christmas. He was discharged from the RAAF in Jan. 1946.

*Adapted from notes prepared by Ken some time before he died, and passed on to us by his widow, Iris.*

### Dick Ellis

Dick was born in Charters Towers on 5 July, 1924, the fourth of eight surviving children, to Mary and Peter Ellis, including six sisters and a brother. His father, died when Dick was only 12 years old, leaving his mother to bring up a large family.

At the age of 15, Dick received a scholarship to attend Kelvin Grove Teachers' College and left Charters Towers to come to Brisbane. After completing the course, he taught in primary schools in Pomona, Tewantin, Roma, Innisfail, Sarina and Virginia. In Pomona, he met Phyllis Buhrmann, a local girl.

He left Pomona to enlist in the RAAF, trained as a radar operator at Richmond in Course No 86 and was posted to 42RS at Bowen Qld. From there he went to Dutch New Guinea where he spent time first on 151RS at Merauke later on 322RS at Tanah Merah and 323RS at Boepel.

After the war, Dick retrained as a high school manual arts teacher and returned to Pomona. In 1948, he and Phyllis were married. Their daughter Jenny was born in 1954 and son Robert in 1957. They built a house in Red Street, and Dick bought his first car, a new Ford Prefect.

In 1960 Dick received his Bachelor of Arts Degree from Queensland University following twelve years of part-time study by correspondence. In 1962, he was transferred to Yeronga State High School as deputy principal, Fred Barrell being the principal there at the time.

**TRIBUTES (Cont.)**

This proved to be a good training ground and, in 1965, he was transferred to Charters Towers State High School as principal. He was the first former student to become principal of the high school, a fact which made his mother extremely proud. He moved to Town High School, Townsville, in 1971.

After only one year in Townsville, Dick was transferred to Cavendish Road State High School in Brisbane, where he was principal for about 18 months. Then in 1973, he was asked to become an acting inspector of schools, a position which later became permanent. Although based in Brisbane for much of the time, Dick travelled extensively throughout Queensland as part of the job. He held this position with the Education Department until he retired in 1984, after which he worked on a part-time basis for the Board of Secondary School Studies until 1987.

In retirement, Dick and Phyllis enjoyed life and travelled both in Australia and overseas but, in April 1994, Phyllis died and for some time Dick was rather lost. However, an old friend, Allie Butler came back into his life and they have remained together ever since.

In more recent years, Dick was active in radar veterans' affairs. He attended national reunions at Bendigo (1992, with Phyllis), Nelson Bay (1995), and Maroochydore (1999), Adelaide (2003) and Geelong (2005), the last three with Allie. He was also active in the Radar Branch of the Queensland RAAF Association, as Vice-President for a period and taking over as President on the sudden death of the then president, W/Cdr (Ret'd) Pete Smith, in April 1994.

Dick will be missed by his many friends in Queensland and elsewhere as well as, more poignantly, by Jenny, Robert and Allie; our sympathy goes out to them.

*Adapted from the eulogy presented by  
Dick's son, Robert Ellis*

**Ross Joseph Shaw**

Ross was born in Fairfield, on 22 March 1924, the only son of Joseph and Doris Shaw. He was educated at Primary School and then Scotch College Melbourne. He commenced a dentistry course but didn't continue with it.

When he was 18 he joined the RAAF as a trainee radar operator. After completing Course No 74 at Richmond, he was posted to 323RS, then forming at Mascot. In July 1943 Ross then went with the unit via Horn Island to Merauke in Dutch New Guinea and then up-river to Boepel where the radar was operational for almost a year. In May 1944, Ross was part of an advance

party travelled to Mapi Post, north-west of Merauke, to prepare a site for the unit. 323RS arrived about two weeks later and was operational there for about six months before returning to Australia. Ross was posted to a clerical job in RAAF HQ before being discharged in June 1945

Ross then became apprenticed to his father as a watchmaker in Ivanhoe and worked as a watchmaker for the rest of his life. He worked in his parent's shop in Upper Heidelberg Road, Ivanhoe, until the early 1960's when he purchased his own shop in Burgundy Street, Heidelberg, where he remained until his retirement. Ross met Jean Bolifinger at Hayman Island a little later and persuaded her to come and work in Melbourne. They were married in Wagga Wagga in April 1966 and moved into the home in North Balwyn where they have lived ever since. Sons Andrew and Michael were born in 1967 and 1968.

Before his marriage, Ross was the President of the Ivanhoe RSL, a member of the Eaglemont Lodge (past Master - one of the youngest) and was a member of the Jewellers Association of which he later became President. Ross loved holidays at Cowes, Phillip Island and also at Yarrowonga. In later years he was keen on caravanning up the coast. As a schoolboy he had been a rower at Scotch and he enjoyed playing golf when he was younger. Ross was very skilled with his hands. He was excellent working with wood, making tables, carry bags, drawers, etc for the family. He made toys for grandchildren and wooden items for charities to sell. He retired from the Heidelberg shop when he was about 65, almost 20 years ago.

In his retirement Ross caravanned with Jean and worked in his workshop. He battled two bouts of Bell's Palsy and he had a number of difficulties with his heart but it was when he faced renal failure at the beginning of 2006 that his health went downhill significantly.

He was always ready to help anyone that needed something made or some other help. Amongst those who benefited were the MS society in Ivanhoe for whom he made many wooden carry handles to sell. "He was always ready to turn his hand to anything". Jean describes him as "slow but sure, loving, loving, generous to those he loved. He never ran."

Ross had many friends among RAAF radar veterans and took part with Jean in several reunions, the most recent being Geelong in 2005.

Our sympathy goes to Jean and their family and to his many friends. He will be sadly missed.

*Prepared with help from Jean Shaw*

**IMPORTANT MATTERS FOR VETERANS**

In the previous issue of *Radar Returns*, I reported that the new federal government had moved to give effect to an election promise to "give the ex-service community a greater voice at the highest level of government by establishing the Prime Ministerial Advisory Council on Ex-Service Matters [PMAC]". A discussion paper prepared by DVA as instructed by the Minister, the Hon Alan Griffin MP, sought the views of the ex-service and defence communities and of other interested parties on the structure and terms of reference of the Council, and revealed government plans for a comprehensive review of the Department's consultative arrangements. In the hope that this new government might appreciate more clearly the essential needs and problems of WWII veterans as distinct from those of people who have served in the defence forces throughout the sixty plus years since, I made a submission.

In all there were just over a hundred submissions, of which some thirty odd were personal contributions with most of the rest coming from ex-service organisations and a few from other bodies concerned with the health and welfare of ex-service people. The only radar group to make suggestions was listed as the 'RAAF Radar Vet's - WA Group' and represented by Laurie Leckie. Most of the personal submissions were from people who have served since the end of WWII and I was the only RAAF radar veteran to respond.

Laurie Leckie has been the Gold Card Delegate with the WA radar group for some years and has been actively promoting the view that the Gold Card should be much more widely available to WWII veterans whose conditions of service provided for their deployment as required by the exigencies of the war. He argues that those who did not get the Gold Card in 1999 because they had served only in Australia at times and places other than those laid out in the Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986 ("continuous full-time service for a period of at least three months in that part of the Northern Territory that is north of the parallel 14 degrees 30 minutes south latitude (including any of the islands adjoining the Northern Territory) between 19 February 1942 and 12 November 1943") had had no choice in where they served.

He made two main suggestions:

1. that the VEA definition of place be amended to that part of Northern Australia that is "north of latitude 14.5 degrees south and islands and waters contiguous to this

## Matters for Veterans (Cont.)

area, including the Torres Strait Islands, for any period between 7 December 1941 and 7 September 1944 inclusive” as recommended by the Clarke Report of February 2003 (and rejected by the previous government);

2. that the Council consider granting the Gold Card to all WWII veterans, male and female, who do not already have it, in accord with its granting, in 1973, to all then surviving WWI veterans regardless of whether they served outside Australia.

In my submission, I tried to suggest a format for the Council that could ensure:

- a. that it is flexible enough to adapt to the changing circumstances that must be expected as the proportion of WWII veterans among the Department’s clientele declines sharply;
- b. that it is independent, not only of government and bureaucracy but also of the entrenched attitudes of the major ex-service organisations;
- c. that it is broadly representative of the interests it is established to support;
- d. consistent with this, that it is small enough to operate efficiently;
- e. that it is courageous and influential enough to tackle such questions as the Department’s trend towards what appear to be expensive, combative and legalistic responses to veterans’ appeals, as well as the previous government’s apparently penny-pinching attitude to the recommendations of the Clarke Report, especially those relating to widening the definition in the Veterans Entitlement Act of ‘qualifying service’ in respect of WWII service in northern Australia.

The Minister for Veterans’ Affairs held a series of eight meetings in the capital cities of each state and territory to discuss the establishment of the Council and the associated review of existing consultation arrangements. On 1 August, my wife and I attended the last of these, in Melbourne, along with several other radar veterans including Alex Culvenor, President of the Victorian RAAF Radar Association, and were impressed by the Minister’s grasp of the problems involved and by his evident determination to move quickly to get the Council established and operating.

The Prime Minister announced on 6 September the membership of the new PMAC. The Chairman will be Dr Allan Hawke, a distinguished former public servant, diplomat and current Chancellor of the ANU; the members will be: Frank Benfield; Dr Robert Black AM RFD; the Hon Graham Edwards; June Healy OAM; Commodore Nick Helyer MBE RANR; Warrant Officer Peter Hind

OAM; Ken Tipping AM; Gail McDonell; Anne Pahl; Philip Pyke; Donna Reggett; Brig. Keith Rossi AM OBE RFD ED (Rtd); and Brig. Neil Weekes AM MC (Rtd). In his statement, Mr Rudd said “As a group, these people have personal and professional experience spanning the three services, in advocacy, rehabilitation and parliamentary processes, and have an understanding of the impact of service on families. I look forward to their input on ex-service issues.”

Though one might criticise the balance of the appointments, the general structure seems as good as or perhaps better than might have been expected, and it will be interesting to see how effective it turns out to be. The only person with WWII service appears to be Brig. Rossi, though even he is not typical in that he was from the pre-war Permanent Army.

Though the Council’s first meeting in October 2008 is likely to be concerned mainly with terms of reference, etc, the government has already referred two big issues to it: a study of suicide in the ex-service community, and a review of the Clarke Report recommendations not accepted by the previous government.

In fact, the Minister has already taken first steps in relation to these issues. In particular, he is calling for submissions on the overlooked recommendations of the Clarke Report. He has stated that priority will be given to a reconsideration of the position of participants in the British Nuclear Tests at Maralinga and Australian members of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan after WWII, but clearly the position of those who saw wartime service in northern Australia could and should be on the agenda. Submissions are required by 1 December 2008 and I suggest that there should be as many as possible. There are many cases of obvious anomalies to be found in the experiences of people who served on radar stations in remote locations north of latitude 14.5 degrees south, including on off-shore islands in Western Australia, Northern Territory, Queensland and Torres Strait in the period between 8 December 1941 and 7 September 1944 inclusive. Further information is available on the website [www.dva.gov.au](http://www.dva.gov.au) or I can provide it on request (for contact details see page 1).

The radar and associated units on which qualifying service (3 months between 19/2/1942 and 12/11/43) was possible under the present provisions of the Act were: 31RS, 38RS, 39RS, 46RS, 105RS, 109RS, 132RS, 150RS, 224RS, 307RS, 308RS/ 309RS, 312RS, 318RS, 319RS, 321RS, 105FS and 44RWg.

The criterion recommended by the Clarke Review would extend the cover to all of northern Australia above latitude 14.5 degrees south and the time to the period between 8/18/1941 and 7/9/44 inclusive. This would involve service in Australia on all of those listed above together with 36RS, 43RS, 45RS, 52RS, 59RS, 60RS, 67RS, 154RS, 161RS, 162RS, 311RS, 317RS, 341RS, 343RS, 344RS, 351RS, 352RS, 112MFS and 32 ZFC.

Those who served during that period in other remote locations on units such as 27, 28, 44/56RS, 155RS, 310RS, 314RS, 324RS, 325RS, 326RS, 327RS, 328RS and 329RS could also seek consideration under Section 6A(1) Item 1d of the Act if it were modified in accord with the apparent intent of the Clarke recommendations.

People who would benefit from such a change, as well as others who are concerned that this privilege should be applied with more fairness generally, as it was from 1973 for WWI veterans, might consider making personal submissions.

*Warren Mann*

After I had written this piece, I had a letter from Laurie Leckie which refers to the Minister’s call for submissions mentioned above and reads, in part:

As you will note, submissions are invited re recommendations made by the Clarke Review and not acted on by previous government - deadline 1 Dec. As this is a matter of vital importance to many WWII radar veterans who have not qualified for the Gold Card, it is important that every possible concerned veteran make his/her submission by that date.

He goes on to suggest that mention of this matter might appear in the next issue of Radar Returns. Though this had already been done, it seems worth drawing attention to his emphatic concern.

*Editor*

## EDITORIAL (cont. from p.1)

not contributed for a long time. And, of course, I still need contributed articles etc.

Since, in effect, *Radar Returns* will be replaced by the website, it makes access to the internet essential for anyone who wants to keep in touch. Those who have not been able or willing to try using a computer to gain access to the vast world of the internet may feel that they have been left out, but that is not really necessary. Virtually every public library has facilities for users to access the internet and people who can explain simply how to do it. I would urge you to try it – even the rawest newcomer to that world will find it fascinating.

*Warren Mann*

## ACTION WITH 336RS

David Caldwell

Seeing a photo of 336RS at Tufi, PNG, in *Radar Returns* Vol. 3 No. 2 and no supporting article, I thought you might be interested in a bit of its history.

Radar Station 336 was formed on 15 September 1943 at Mascot in Sydney and we flew out to Port Moresby on 10 October. The camp, but not the station, was set up in a staging area out of Port Moresby and remained there until near the end of November. This gave some of the boys time to make a few bob in the local two-up school and for all of us to be taught how to clean out the little black body of the bush mocca, which is a tick picked up from kunai grass that can cause typhus when it bites. The Bell Brothers system is gruesome but efficient: cut around the body, stuff in a couple of match heads, and light them.

Near the end of November 1943 we flew to Losuia at the northern end of Kiriwina Island and staged again, while we surveyed the southern end of the island for a likely spot to set up. At the very southern end was a good landing beach, the native village of Glibu and a 'cliff' about 16 feet high to give us elevation for the doover. The unit then moved down to Glibu on 13 December. Incidentally this is the southern end of Kiriwina Island, not the southern end of Vakuta Island as shown in *RAAF Radar in World War 2 Pictorial I*. The two islands are separated by a relatively narrow gap through which the tidal runs at their peak have to be seen to be believed.

From mid to southern end Kiriwina is made up of a series of north-to-south, roughly parallel, coral rises with the gaps filled with soil where the natives had their gardens or with black water where the mosquitoes had the time of their lives. From the swollen spleens of all the kiddies in the village, and from all our own problems, it didn't take a qualified entomologist to guess how prevalent the anopheles were. This led to a visit from a Headquarters team to see what anti-malarial precautions we were taking, and after one night's collecting of the little beasties, they recommended our early withdrawal.

Much to the disappointment of the village people with whom we were on splendid terms, the lugger *Betty Joan* came to take us off on 25 March 1944 thus severing our contact with the old *Oomoobah*, which had kept us up with supplies, mail, etc., while we were in Losuia. We packed the lugger which moved about one mile off shore for the

night and there experienced a sight I am sure none of us will ever forget. The lugger lay west-east on the tide with the stern facing the gap between Glibu and Vakuta Island and a full moon rose over the peak of Kitava Island on the horizon in the gap. Several Glibu youngsters paddled out to us with fruit and then gave us a concert and dance on the raised stern deck silhouetted against the rising moon. You could have heard a pin drop among the boys watching.

The lugger trip took four days to Goodenough Island for supplies with the skipper keen to see how she would perform under sail. Most of us began to wonder whether we were at war or on a top class holiday cruise when the lugger stopped to allow a couple of open-ocean swims. We landed at an old wharf quite deep in a fiord on the New Guinea mainland, and were lucky enough to catch a departing American unit who loaned us trucks to cart our gear the 8 miles to our chosen site at Tufi. Our own promised blitz buggy with a broken spring, no top, bald tyres, no chains and burnt out clutch plate, wasn't delivered until about a month later. Once again, the local people came to our aid and portaged all our supplies in and took two injured stretcher cases out during this month. They also built an excellent set of huts which made living conditions very tolerable. One of our payments to them was a plentiful supply of wild pig shot with some ex U.S. rifles and a box of tracer bullets we had found - quite a spectacular form of hunting!

We also met up with the ANGAU unit two fiords south of us and had some very enjoyable cricket matches against them. Our last match was interrupted by a volcano behind us letting loose, reducing visibility and breathing, and necessitating a close-down of the gear and our truck to prevent intake of the ash to the motors. Needless to say, this led to our immediate marching orders again as the volcano indicated it wanted to play some more, so we packed up and left Tufi on 14 September 1944 for Dobodura in Oro Bay.

On our way out we passed the liner/troopship *Lurline* and four LSTs hard and fast on the coral reef of Tufi Head. They had obviously been trying to run from the volcanic ash cloud and left it too late to take the port turn necessary to clear the coral on the Milne Bay to Oro Bay run. The *Lurline* was busy jettisoning everything but the kitchen sink, and must have been refloated because she passed us going hell for leather with her nose well up in the air. In 1966 I was transferred by my Victorian firm to Wellington, New

Zealand, and, as our home overlooks the harbour, we have taken an interest in the shipping. We were quite interested, when looking up details of incoming liners, to find that on, the *Ellinis*, was the *Lurline*, refitted, sold and renamed after the war. So she did get to Oro Bay safely in 1944.

Life in the Bay was quite different as we were right in a settled area with pictures, inter-unit sports visits to other US and Australian camps, good, fresh food and regular mail. One American friend, on hearing that I couldn't come to a particular mess night at his place because our transport was out on a job, was quite amused and promptly handed us a Jeep for keeps. He later moved with his transport unit but left us the Jeep and I have often wondered how this was explained when 336 was finally disbanded.

All this waffle to date makes it sound as if our tour was all beer and skittles. However, like all units, we had our low points: masses of ulcers from coral scratches at Glibu were no joke as they bit to the bone in a matter of days; malaria, dysentery, a disabling and near-fatal premature explosion of gelignite, a couple of broken legs and up to 6 weeks without rations or mail; and that occasion when the barge broke adrift and we were only able to salvage some of the stuff when it grounded off Vakuta Island after a storm. For all that, the high spots outweighed our lows and with five exceptions all 24 of us who joined at Mascot in 1943 completed our tours of up to 19 months with 336. Of the five, three were medical repats to Australia and one was a compassionate posting home received the day after he decided to join the gang and have his head completely shaved. The fifth was the only serious accident, a casualty of the premature gelignite explosion.

As you can see, I have been rather carried away. Only in recent years have I discovered that my father had kept all the letters I wrote from New Guinea. On seeing the photo of 336RS, I dug them out and read them for the first time since I wrote them, mainly to establish a few significant dates. The reading took me more than a day, reliving the whole 18 months. An even harder job was deciding which, if any, of our activities could possibly be described as of historical significance. If the editor decides to run any of it in *Radar Returns*, he should feel free to take any bits he wants and consign the rest to the round file

David was CO of 336RS for 19 months from its formation in September 1943. The "round file" is already too full so I have left readers to decide for themselves. Editor

## DO YOU REMEMBER . . . ?

### Robert Ralph Chilton

The importance of first class instructors and instruction should not be overlooked. The whole of radar and its success depended on the technical staff, especially the mechanics and operators who actually operated the equipment. If these men and women did not fully understand the complexities of the radar set and its operation, then there would be more aircraft missed on the screen and more equipment down-time.

Bob Chilton was the first Chief Instructor at Radio School, Richmond NSW, where he set the standards, selected instructors and kept his finger on the pulse of the school, carefully monitoring the progress of every student. Bob continually and quietly crept around the establishment to the extent that he earned two nicknames, CJ or Creeping Jesus, and Prosperity – because he was always just around the corner.

In the early days, when F/Lt Hal Porter went through the school, there were no manuals for the AW transmitter and receiver, but Bob Chilton had delved into the experimental AW and was able to explain to the students the intricacies of the equipment. Hal described him as being brilliant but he would readily admit if he did not know the answer to a question. Then he would reason it out with the class.

F/Lt Hugh Peaston agreed and said that even several years after the war, Bob was still able to talk about any one of the students who had passed through the school in his time. Not only could he quote the class the individual was in, but also tell Hugh exactly where that person sat in the class. Bob had kept photographs of every class but alas these have been lost.

Bob was an amateur radio operator therefore known to F/O M A Brown, the first CO of Radio School. It is alleged that the original group at the school was sort of a club, 'Brown's Club'.

In retrospect, Bob Chilton seems to have been a lonely man but he certainly was a fair-minded man who did not brook idiots. A couple of stories about him show something of the measure of the man:

F/Sgt Les Kinross relates that, when on course at Richmond, he and a mate were on the way to the pictures when Bob asked them where they were going. Les replied, "To the pictures, sir. Would you like to join us?" To their surprise, he joined them and all three enjoyed the show - the Chief Instructor and the 'sprogs'.

On Fridays radar school normally went on leave at 1300 hours. However, W/O A G 'Digger' Nottle, another mechanic, reported that, one Friday, oranges had been handed out during the morning break. Boys being boys, after a short time, orange peel was being pelted around the classroom with the inevitable happening: Creeping Jesus appeared and asked the offenders to step forward.

There was a general reluctance on the part of the class to 'own up' and they feared that the whole lot might have their weekend leave stopped. So Digger and a mate stepped forward and were told to report to him outside the school in working dress goon skins. This they did, and were somewhat surprised to find that the Chief Instructor had arranged flights for each of them. One went on coastal patrol in an Avro Anson and the other had a flight in a Wirraway. On their return they had to report once again in their 'blues.'

Naturally they followed orders. They were given their weekend leave passes and told to get into a 'limousine' which was complete with driver. They sat in the back with the Chief and conversed. They were taken to a first-class hotel in Sydney where they had an excellent meal before going on leave.

Regrettably many of us did not have the opportunity to get to know Bob Chilton but we all gained the impression that he was a very intelligent fair-minded man who had a photographic memory.

Bob Chilton 'escaped' from the school after a year or so and rose to the rank of S/Ldr. He was CO of No. 44 Radar Wing in Darwin when the unit was disbanded. The following extract from his final report for that unit is clear evidence of him giving credit where credit was due.

In achieving all this [the overall work of the Wing], the degree of service given by the individual members of the Wing has been higher than is normally expected of men who joined the Service to serve. Many have toiled under most arduous conditions to establish RAAF radar stations where not even the aboriginal could live before. Many have maintained vigilant watch despite the extreme tedium of the job. Some have worked at high pressure for long hours every day at Headquarters. Their work is not glamorous; it is secret and not talked about. Their reward is their pride of accomplishment.

*Adapted from Ed Simmonds:  
Significant Contributions*

### A 'Green' Radar Mechanic

*Ray Sewell*

Fresh out of Course G35 at No 1 Radio School, I entrained at Sydney on 23 May 1943 for the return trip to the West and ultimately to 33RS at Cape Naturaliste, arriving on the 31st.

The station was set on a lonely, well-elevated site about 3 miles south of the lighthouse (as the crow flies) and was approached by a track winding up the hill. The camp had been well set up with standard huts etc but was a long walk from the doover.

There were two sergeant mechanics at the time. The one I can remember was Max Osborne from Adelaide (I believe he passed away some years back). The power was supplied by means of two Ford V8-driven alternators of around 25kva, located closer to the camp than the doover. It was a cold miserable walk to the doover on a wet winters night. A six foot barbed -wire fence enclosing the bunker containing the COL Mk V unit protected the doover.

No time was wasted; I took my first shift starting at 1800 hrs on the day of arrival. Then came the first shock - I found that I was expected to join the operators in the watching duty and they took great joy in teaching me the ropes! Actually it would have been terribly boring otherwise and we soon became a close-knit group of friends who joined together in most of the activities. Our crew included Bert Garrett, Bill Weekes and 'Mac' McNamara.

The surrounding area was thoroughly explored despite the prickly bush and we took long treks to bays and rocks etc. This included the Sugarloaf which today has been made accessible by a tourist road.

Does anyone remember 'Bugs' Dawson? He was a keen fisherman and we once witnessed him clinging grimly to a rock as a 'king' wave swept all his gear away. Bugs had another close call while at Onslow. He borrowed a bike and rode out into the wilderness looking for insects. It was always very hot at Onslow and on this occasion he failed to return by tea time and the truck was sent out to retrieve him. He was found utterly exhausted on the side of the track. But I have strayed.

Once a week on morning shift the gear would be closed down for maintenance; this normally took about 30 minutes. On the first occasion for me the sergeant instructed me to clean the air filter on the transmitter - with petrol! So I took it off and dowsed it in petrol and - without waiting for it to dry - put it back in position. We then went on with the rest of the routine.

“Right,” came the call, “start it up!” I rushed over to the starter crank and whipped it through the gates. The blower motor speeded up and in a few moments the centrifugal switch switched to run. In the meantime the petrol fumes had been drawn into the modulator compartment and through to the lower chamber where the blower was located.

Woof! it went and the modulator compartment door flew across the room. I can still see it in slow motion. John Sheard, standing in line, collected the door on his shoulder - he later claimed that he was knocked out though I don't remember that. But I do know that I was standing in the doorway on the way out when it hit.

The spare modulator was hanging off its mount and worse still the filter was on fire!

So what does your resourceful mechanic do - he dragged a wet and sandy sack doing duty as a doormat and threw it over the filter pronto. That fixed the fire but filled the compartment with sand.

I must say Max was quick to evaluate the situation and called the filter room requesting an extended maintenance period, which was granted. Fortunately the modulator was found to be undamaged but the rear panel, which was secured with a myriad of brass screws, had buckled and sheared off many screw heads. (These proved difficult to get and the local hardware shops were stripped of stocks). Fortunately we did manage to do makeshift repairs and were soon back on air. The event was more or less covered up and there was no comeback as far as I know.

On another occasion I very nearly came to grief in an endeavour to get the beacon back on air without throwing off the power to the camp. This arose on a dark, windy and wet night when it was discovered that the beacon was off the air. I made my way down to the cabinet and found that the constant wind had caused the power lead to break just above the cabinet. I decided to use the lid (an asbestos cement moulding) on the ground in the belief that it would insulate me and so allow me to work on the lead while it was still live. It didn't work, and I received a real blow to my shoulders. Obviously I survived. I then had to go to the duty alternator to cut off the power so that the repair could be completed. It really was only a five minute job but on that occasion took much longer. (It is most unlikely that there were any planes out in the stormy dark anyway).

The radar site is virtually cut off today and I have not so far managed to reach it. In fact the only person I have known to visit the site was Harry Busch (now deceased), quite a long time ago.

## A Canadian Radar Museum

*Nicole De Schiffart*

The Secrets of Radar Museum was incorporated in 2002 as an independent not-for-profit museum. It does not receive funding from the RCAF or Department of National Defense as other military museums do, though we are certainly in contact with those museums that include radar history as part of their mandate. These museums rarely afford the attention to wartime radar that its story merits. Independence is an advantage, since it allows us to seek funding through diverse funding agencies and gives us a broad mandate, although the financial security of government support would be welcome! In fact, it is funded largely by membership fees, with occasional project grants. Our budget is small but growing.

Until March of this year, the museum was run by volunteers, many veterans, and open for four hours a week on Saturdays only. Summer or part-time jobs for students from the local university had helped greatly with cataloguing the artefacts and archives in a database, and with creating some displays. We have been quite successful in getting local community grants to change the earlier displays into museum-quality laminate panels, and recently received a grant to assist in developing school programs, including an interactive radar filter room table. My position is a two-year full-time contract funded by a provincial heritage grant.

Coming from a background in museums, my primary goal is to obtain ongoing operating funding from the province by achieving the museum operating standard of the province of Ontario, and to raise the profile of the museum. We are now open Thursday to Saturday, 10am to 4pm, year-round. Our visitorship is about 600 per year but growing now that I am able to devote myself full time to the museum's needs, unlike our wonderful but very busy group of volunteers.

Like your newsletter, the origins of the museum came out of a series of radar reunions organised during the 1990s. A group of veterans near Ottawa, the Ottawa Radar History Group, were very influential in this. This group continues to be supportive of the museum by assisting with research, writing panels, etc. They have also published a number of informative memoirs and books, as well as a 15-minute DVD that we will be distributing to our school groups in the fall.

In the late 1990s another veteran started the Radome Museum of Electronics on the former RAF/RCAF base at Clinton, Ontario (a seven-hour drive from Ottawa)

which is where all of the wartime radar training in Canada took place. The base was closed in 1972 and sold to private interests, but Clinton has a large radar dish in the centre of town and prides itself on its connection with that history. Displays and memorabilia that were brought to the reunions were frequently donated to the museum, which was entirely run by veterans. When it closed (for a number of reasons) in 2001, a group of London-area veterans and community members became concerned about what would happen to the collection and relocated it to London (a much larger city about a hour south from Clinton). The most influential people in the founding of the current museum were a Canadian wartime radar mechanic, and his wife who was a WAAF radar operator and a war bride. They incorporated as a not-for-profit and secured a building on the grounds of Parkwood Hospital, the local veterans hospital in London. The building is a former one-storey cottage in a rehabilitation complex that was built after the war. We have four gallery spaces (about 750 sq. feet each), an office and a small kitchenette. It is a good facility (and affordable) but difficult to find, since we are in a park behind the hospital. Many of the other buildings in the complex are not in use, but the school board has an outdoor education centre across the pond. We hope to relocate to a more visible location in the next couple of years. The museum opened its doors in 2003, and we recently celebrated its fifth anniversary.

Our mandate is to collect and preserve the history and artefacts of the men and women who served the radar division of the Canadian military (this does include more recent and current military radar, but limited resources have led us so far to concentrate on WWII), to educate the public on the history of radar in Canada, and to provide a therapeutic setting for veterans. The majority of our collection is archives, but we do possess a number of pieces of equipment, including IFF, Gee and Loran. We have difficulty acquiring WWII-era items because of the level of secrecy you described and the fact that much of the equipment was ordered destroyed. I'm certain those in the RAAF faced many of the same challenges as the Canadians. Close to 6000 Canadians were trained and essentially 'loaned' to the RAF. The base at Clinton was originally an RAF base on Canadian soil, built in 1941 to train radar mechanics and technicians far away from the dangers faced by Britain. It was 'RAF Clinton' until 1943, when there was a food riot against the poor quality of the British rations!

The men faced the same problems getting promoted, since both RAF and RCAF personnel claimed that they lacked the authority. In 1943 the base became RCAF Clinton, and much later Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Clinton. We also collect items and information relating to the training program at Clinton, and if you know of anyone who passed through the base, please let us know. (Interestingly, a number of American military were also trained there long before the US became involved in the war.)

That's probably enough of an ear-full for now, but I'm happy to answer any more questions. I do consider myself fortunate to have a job where I get to work closely with the individuals whose history we are working to preserve and share - when you work in museums, it is a rare opportunity! We all certainly have much to do to ensure that the significance of radar and the efforts of veterans worldwide, such as your wife and yourself, are recognised and appreciated. I did find your most recent edition of *RR* on the website, and I have to congratulate you on it. I confess our museum newsletter pales in comparison, but I hope to have a new one out in a month or so and will email it to you.

There seem to be a number of similarities between your group and ours; it's encouraging to see others who feel as strongly about the need to share this story as our group does.

## TO ANGAS, EX-304 . . .

*Ron Short*

Thank you for your recap of service, Normanby Island, 1943. Most interesting, as I travelled that road in August on (for a short period) 303RS Tufi via Boirana (Milne Bay) and together with 305 Goodenough were at that period the most forward coastal LW/AW system in PNG and, most important the apparent 'triple' air warning of the radar ops of the 100 plane raid on Port Moresby and Milne Bay – the attempt to cripple these H/Qs leading to a planned invasion of our country. This, as we all know, failed.

About queries from H/Q as to the accuracy of reports – the radar ops from these three units were on the ball!

So back to Normanby and your social memoirs. The concert party compere/host/producer was Wes Adams (Sydney). His style based on our Jack Davey: "Hi-ho, everybody" – Sydney radio etc. The chorus line ( of which I was one of five) generally attired as Papuan girls – half coconuts (boobs), grass skirts, hair-dos etc etc including vocals – the audience mostly

villagers all gathered in the native-built concert hall – a relief from the daily grind.

I recall on one occasion going walkabout with local guides and, although somewhat physical, an insight into the real New Guinea jungle lifestyle.

Being a keen 'fisho' – one grenade, village boys – recovery spears and, as desired, fish aplenty for all – the villagers appreciating the variety, quantity for their own use.

The Army Spotter and his 'housekeeper' – lovely lady – made occasional visits to the unit. Then there was the local belle, Nedulo! My major problem is memory, especially in so far as names are concerned – couldn't even remember 304's OIC – so be it!

From Normanby – my official records are inaccurate, there being no reference to rejoining F/O Campbell (303), Port Moresby to Lae via Buna, setting up on One Tree Hill overlooking the harbour and its military activity of Army Navy and Air Force pursuing enemy forces up the valley. At one stage (Lae) sick relief was called for to 331, Tami Island, (F/O Bell – F/lt Bishop) and several RAAF (303), Sgt Charles Henderson and self included spent a short period there.

At this time the assault on Sattleberg was being planned and our route to Tami was via Dredger Harbour (ex USA base) and Finchhafen – fortunately just one overnight stay. Our return to Lae was 'unplanned' and I recall my friend, Charles, and me hitching a ride in a US aircraft back to Lae. From there the movement early '44 was back to the mainland – ultimate posting to OBU Camden and November 44, off again, this time to Port Moresby (45 OBU) and RAAF station where my service ended following peace in the Pacific.

Special memories of my WOp friends, Row Will, Jack Roper (dec'd), Ken Baker and Charles Henderson, Rex Page, Harry Ames (Mt Evelyn), Norm Campbell, Cec Kirby (dec'd), Ron Spowarth. W/O Galley (IRPP), Sgt Brown (IRPP) and my esteemed father-in-law, Aub Beckett (2/9 Batt. AIF (dec'd) and Sgt Laurie Evans (Port Moresby).

## ANOMALOUS PROPAGATION

In an earlier edition of Radar Returns, I reported on some very lengthy tracks we followed at 27RS, Dunk Island - almost saturation echoes at 180++ miles which we followed for hours, on an LW/AW. These had to be the result of anomalous propagation, but as I was relying on memory, at an arms length of about 60 years, I left it at that.

More recently, having been coerced into compiling a history of 27 Radar Station, I have been reading the Unit History Sheets, A50's, and find that my memory wasn't too bad. What I hadn't recalled was that staff from CSIR (as it was) had obviously been advised of the phenomenon, and visited Dunk to observe it.

More than twenty years later, there were those who still had a strong interest in AP.

In about 1965, a Mitsubishi Weather Radar had been installed by the Weather Bureau on the top of a tall building at the Univ. of Melbourne, to be used for weather observations and research. Echoes from Tasmanian mountains, well beyond the radar horizon, were soon being detected.

A project was developed by University staff, which eventually attracted funding from the US Office of Naval Research, and 100 hours flying time of an instrumented RAAF DC3 aircraft from Laverton, Vic.

When AP was being measured at the radar, the aircraft would take off from Laverton and fly spirals, from 500 to 5000 ft. over Bass Strait, between the radar and the A.P. source. Measurements of temperature, atmospheric pressure and radio refractive index were taken continuously.

A radar phenomenon, detected in WWII by the RAAF, was still being pursued to ascertain whether the conditions causing it could be used for any useful purpose.

*Eric L. Unthank*

## A JAPANESE TRIFECTA

The word 'trifecta', in racing circles, means winning on the first three places in a race. This is exactly what the Japanese achieved in the Pacific - Pearl Harbor, Singapore and Darwin. The tragedy is that all three targets were given air warnings which were ignored or misinterpreted so that the Japanese had the advantage of surprise in each of the attacks.

*Pearl Harbor - 7 December 1941*

The Arizona Memorial Association conducted a seminar from 7 to 12 December 1991 apparently as part of the 50th Anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor. The December 1991 issue of the magazine *Systems*, published by the Aerospace and Electronics Society of the American Institution of Electrical Engineers, contained some articles from that seminar. Joseph Lockard was the radar operator on 7 December 1941 at Opana on the island of Oahu. The following summary from the magazine includes some of Lockard's recollections:

Six SCR270B type radar sets arrived in Oahu late in July 1941 to be operated by the US Army Signal Company Air Warning, Hawaii. The units were dispersed



around the island and on-the-job training was begun. The initial results were more than satisfactory, in fact they were good. As an example, on 27 September 1941 there was an exercise with carrier-based aircraft and the US Navy planes were detected at a range of 85 miles almost as soon as they had taken off.

Stephen L Johnston believes that the success of the exercise “may have created a false sense of security of Pearl Harbor in the government in Washington, which may have led to improper actions in negotiating with the Japanese government then.”

Lockard was on the 0400-0700 watch on 7 December at Opana on the northern most part of Oahu. The SCR270B was located at an altitude of 500 feet with a clear view over the ocean about a mile away. Inland from the antenna the ground sloped downward slightly before rising to the heights of the Koolau Range. Due to the high level of back radiation from the SCR270 antenna the Koolau Range caused interference extending more than 20 miles!

Lockard had a new man, George Elliot, with him as the plotter and the direct line to the Information Centre [Fighter Sector] at Fort Schafter was in operation but only until 0700 hours when it closed because it was a Sunday when only a skeleton staff worked. There was little activity before 0700 hours but at 0702 when Lockard was giving George Elliot some training, a huge echo was picked up at 137 miles. It was moving but was not pulsating because of the large number of aircraft.

The sighting could not be reported because there were no plotters at the other end of the direct line. So Elliot rang on the other ‘general’ line and eventually Lockard spoke to Air Corps Lt Kermit A Tyler stressing the unusual nature of the target, direction and size, only to be told not to worry about it.

A USAAF officer who was there in training instructed the Opana operators to disregard the detections of the radar as he had anticipated a flight of US B17 bombers from the mainland at about that time.

Waiting for the truck to pick them up for breakfast they continued to plot the target until around 0720 when it was lost at a range of 20 miles in the interference from the back radiation.

Lockard ended his article by saying: “The incident at Opana is one of those ‘what if’ footnotes in history. Of all the scenarios one can devise about this event, the most intriguing to me is this; what if the attacking planes had left their carriers 15 minutes earlier?”

**Pearl Harbor was first in the trifecta.**

*Singapore - 8 December 1941*

G/Cpt (Rtd) E R (Bon) Hall, author of *A Saga of Achievement*, supplied the following information. G/Cpt Hall was a POW along with F/Sgt R R Prowse.

F/Sgt Prowse was a RAAF Wireless Operator Mechanic with HQ RAAF Sembawang and was transferred to the RAF Radar Section in the Cathay Building in Singapore after passing a course in radar. Here he was in charge of 20 RAF radar mechanics working on radar systems.

Prowse was on duty in the early hours of 8 December when he received a message from the Mk V COL radar station at Bukit Chuang, on the south-east tip of the Malayan Peninsula, advising that a large number of aircraft were approaching from the north. He immediately rang the ops room at Air HQ Far East Command.

This information would have given Singapore 45 minutes notice of the raid which was the first bombing of that city. As at Pearl Harbor the warning was ignored. **Singapore was second in the trifecta.**

*Darwin - 19 February 1942*

The Lowe Report and many books about Darwin have more than adequately covered the failure to take the proper action following the sighting of enemy aircraft by Father McGrath on Bathurst Is. The fact that no radar station was operative at the time is of little real significance - an air warning is an air warning.

W/Cdr Pither later said that, in his opinion, it would not have mattered whether the warning had come from radar or a visual sighting - the end result would have been the same.

A story in the *Courier Mail* on 28 December 1988 adds insult to injury. It is not known how much of this incident was reported to the authorities in Darwin but here is evidence that the presence of the Japanese carrier force was known at least to the crew on HMAS *Deloraine* and warning could have been given nearly 24 hours before the attack on 19 Feb 1942.

Former Navy telegraphist Len (Buster) Crabbe has written to, and obtained information from, the Japanese and Australian governments, has studied naval records, including the log of the *Deloraine*, and has written to many of his former shipmates. There is general agreement from the latter that Crabbe’s version of the events is correct.

“It was about 1800 hours on February 17. We were in the Arafura Sea, about 12 hours out of Darwin, escorting the SS *Admiral Halstead*, an American cargo ship carrying 15,000 drums of aviation fuel from Thursday Island to Darwin.

“We were heading into heavy seas at the tail end of a cyclone; it was raining and visibility was pretty bad. Norm McKinnon was duty signalman on the bridge and he called down to me on the wireless room’s voice pipe: ‘Hey Buster, go outside and have a squiz.’

“I went out... it was what you call the waist of the ship, a sheltered deck on the port side. There was a break in the weather and I could see an aircraft carrier quite clearly. There was what I took to be a cruiser behind the carrier and the smoke of other ships in the distance. I wasn’t sure they were Japanese, but they sure as hell weren’t Australian or American. After a couple of minutes I went back into the wireless room and sat down. You could say I was shaking with patriotism.

“If I’d been told to break radio silence and notify Darwin I would have... but we would have been a hole in the water a minute or two afterwards.”

Signalman Norm McKinnon gave the carrier the regular three-blink challenge. The reply was a steady light that Norm could not interpret. “Maybe it was just as well”, he said.

It appears that the Japanese knew that they had been seen but decided not to open fire as the *Deloraine* would have been able to get a message out before it sank.

Buster Crabbe was not the only one to see the Japanese carrier. Len Popplewell, a leading stoker on the *Deloraine* was one of a group standing at the rail and they all felt that there was no doubt that the larger ship was a carrier. To quote Len Popplewell:

“I remember saying that we were in for a right bollocking and we would have been too if the weather hadn’t closed in again so quickly... and if we had broken radio silence to warn Darwin.”

The *Deloraine* arrived in Darwin on the morning of 18 February 1942, nearly 24 hours before the Japanese attacked. The ship’s captain, Commander D A Menlove, was sick in his cabin, nearly dead with dengue fever, and on arrival in Darwin was taken straight to hospital. A Lieutenant, the second in command, was on the bridge and according to the sailors “was out of his depth and lost his nerve.” The gunnery officer was not informed of the sighting and later in Darwin the story was that it was a hospital ship that had been seen.

Buster Crabbe added that after the bombing the Lieutenant, “blamed himself and went bonkers later. He’s dead now: they say he drank himself to death.”

**Darwin took third place in the trifecta.**

*Ed Simmonds (from More Radar Yarns, pp30-32, edited)*

## BOOK REVIEWS

In the previous issue, we reviewed Allan Whitham's story of his wartime experiences with 152RS, published in his book, *Just an Aussie*. Several other former members of the unit have contacted me since and it has become obvious that there are significant differences between their memories and Allan's. For example, Jack Dickeson (former corporal radar mechanic) sent me a copy of the excellent diary he had kept during the period between the formation of 152RS and its arrival at Finchhafen on 31 March 1944. He stopped writing after 2 April in deference to the regulations forbidding the keeping of diaries in operational locations, but in the meantime he had failed to record the fierce battle that Allan had described as taking place while they landed. However, in his covering note he comments:

"I could hardly wait to purchase a copy of *Just an Aussie* . . .

"To say that I was very disappointed after reading it and finding that virtually none of Allan's experiences at Finchhafen and Taji/Aitape gelled with my 152 experience would be well off the mark! I presume that, although Allan was with 152 for a period, he must have been attached to other units for his many adventures"

Jack also quoted passages from *Echoes Over the Pacific* (Ed Simmonds & Norm Smith, pp 205-7 that provide little support for Allan's version.

Since the last issue, two other unit histories have been received. The first was written by Doug Brenkley who, although not a WWII ex-serviceman, was a schoolboy in Geraldton during the war. He has compiled a brief history of the effect of the war on the district, a history of the development of radar overseas and in Australia and a history of No 47 Radar Station, RAAF, which, though formed at Pearce WA in October 1942 and spending several months operating SCR270 equipment and training US Navy personnel in the Perth area, was re-equipped with COL Mk V equipment and moved to Geraldton in February 1943. WAAAF operators were posted there in April and took over all the operating shortly after.

Doug Brenkley has collected a large amount of material, including official records, personal reminiscences and photographs of personnel, the unit and its surroundings and compiled a fascinating if slightly incoherent record which he has published and made available at reasonable cost, despite being aware that more proofing and editorial work is needed. The book, *World War II*,

## STATE ASSOCIATIONS

### VICTORIAN RAAF RADAR ASSOCIATION

#### Notes on recent events

1. The annual Anzac Reunion was held at the Rosstown Hotel, Carnegie, on 24 April 2008. The turnout, though down a little, was still good.
2. Following the retirement from the Committee of Len Ralph, foundation member and Secretary/Treasurer since 1951, Ian McKellar has become Secretary and Beryl Mainon, Treasurer.
3. At the RMIT Honorary Awards Confering Ceremony held on 9 May in RMIT Storey Hall, the first RAAF Ralph McIntosh Medal was awarded to Mr Justin Woolley for Excellence in Instruction. The President, Secretary and several members accepted invitations to be present.
4. At the annual luncheon held this year at the Rosstown Hotel on 21 August, the President presented a framed Certificate of Appreciation to Len Ralph for his outstanding service to veterans of WWII Radar Stations throughout his 57 years as Secretary/Treasurer and organiser of Anzac Day Reunions and Marches for the Victorian RAAF Radar Association.

*Alex Culvenor, President*

*Geraldton 1941-45*, is available at \$10 plus postage from the publisher, D J Brenkley, 71 Marine Terrace, Sorrento, WA 6020; phone: 08 9448 6384; fax: 08 9448 6545; email: [brenkd@bigpond.com.au](mailto:brenkd@bigpond.com.au)

In the November 2005 issue, we reviewed the second edition of Ian McKellar's *History and Memories of 14 Radar Station Wilsons Promontory*. Now the indefatigable author, retired engineer, amateur radio buff and bush walker, has produced a new edition with four pages of hitherto unpublished material including more memories from former members of the unit and some extra photographs. He has also done some work enhancing the existing photos. The book is an excellent example of an objective unit history, compiled, written and edited with skill and understanding, by a person whose interest in wartime radar has developed as a result of its association with a special place.

Copies of the book are available for \$21.70 plus postage from Ian McKellar, 9 Homebush Court, Heathmont, Vic 3135 (phone: 03 9729 4359) or over the counter from Information Victoria, 515 Little Collins Street, Melbourne.

*Warren Mann*

### NSW RADAR BRANCH

1. Christmas is approaching at a great rate of knots. The Branch Christmas lunch will be held at City Tattersalls Club in Pitt Street Sydney on Thursday 4th December 2008. We decided to have the lunch in Sydney, as it is more central and will allow our older vets easier access. Full details will be in our next Bulletin (October?)
2. The Branch President, G/Capt Terry Delahunty AM, will finish his tour of duty as Air Attache in Iraq, and will return later in October. I'm sure his wife and family will be pleased to see him safely home.
3. The No 2 Control & Reporting Unit's 50th Anniversary reunion, to be held in Darwin from 19 September 2009, is now less than one year away. More information from Mrs Leslie Stowers (0421 104 320). The second newsletter from this group will be out soon, with all details.
4. Your Branch Secretary has recently completed the DVA TIPS Welfare Officers' Course. It will help me to formalise information to veterans, widows/widowers and family members.
5. Sixteen Radar Branch people attended the Battle for Britain Lunch at NSW Parliament House on Tuesday 16 September 2008.
6. I will be visiting Queensland in late October to consult with the Gold Coast Council on placing a plaque at Point Danger to commemorate RAAF radar men and women who served during WWII on two RAAF radar stations, 102RS (June/July 1942) and 51RS (June 1943-January 1946), on this site.

*Howie Campbell, Branch Secretary*

### *The Tanah Merah & DNG Gazette*

'John Patrick' McAuley is continuing to produce this 4-page publication directed to RAAF radar veterans who served in one or more of the six radar stations deployed in the southern part of Dutch New Guinea during WWII. The June and September issues have arrived since the last RR went out and make good reading.

This is an excellent newsletter and deserves support from those for whom it has immediate interest and from those with an interest in the history, geography and politics of the area.

John can be contacted at 3 Brampton Mews, 1319 Pacific Hwy, Turramurra, NSW 2074 (02 9449 4441) or by email: [johnpmcauley@bigpond.com](mailto:johnpmcauley@bigpond.com)

Modest donations towards postage and other costs would be welcomed, as well as, of course, material for publication.

## POST-WWII RADAR RETURNS

### EDITORIAL

It is encouraging to be getting a trickle of articles which give some understanding of the conditions in which postwar veterans have served in the various activities with which the RAAF has been involved over the last sixty or so years. The two which follow both relate to Butterworth base, first in the Malayan Emergency in the late 'fifties and then in the Indonesian Confrontation in the middle 'sixties. In each case, they give some idea of the 'feel' of these campaigns, quite different from anything experienced by WWII veterans.

I would be pleased to get a much wider spread of such reminiscences so that our readership, now and into the future, can understand the nature of conditions faced by RAAF radar veterans over the years.

*Warren Mann*

### MALAYA 1958-1961 (Part 1)

*Wilf Hardy*

I was in the poo for having taken off early one Friday afternoon from a boring wait at Richmond before deployment to Butterworth, together with John Rice and Bob Hollingsworth in Bob's Ford Prefect. Acting CO, F/Lt Fred Lindsay, was giving me heaps after sending a telegram to my parents' home in Murwillumbah ordering me back for immediate movement to Malaya. Of course, being the only single member of the absconding group, it was all my fault and for punishment I, a Rad Tech, was to be sent up with an advance party of Plotters - some punishment! We flew out of Mascot on 25 July 1958.

Later, I knew Fred Lindsay as one of nature's gentlemen; he was a great help to me in Malaya when it seemed the whole world was against me. We named our second son Michael Lindsay - we didn't want the poor kid being called 'Fred'. Sadly, Fred has now passed away; it would have been nice to have him know of his positive influence all those years ago.

A short stop-over in Singapore, then a commercial flight to Penang where we were picked up by RAF Police (Pommy Red-Caps) in a Land Rover for the trip to the air base via the old side-loading Penang-Butterworth ferry. I'll never forget my first whiff of the tantalising 'smell of the East', which I guess is mainly garlic and raw sewage.

After settling in, a group of Plotters and one LAC Rad Tech 'G' (still evidently under Fred Lindsay's punishment) was sent up north by RAF 60-foot launch to Song-

Song bombing range to triangulate Canberra-released bombs splashing into the sea (hopefully) near a tethered target. We lived in a dorm hut on the idyllic tropical Song-Song Island, dining on bangers, reconstituted vegetables and whatever fish we could catch and drinking a concoction tasting vaguely like orange cordial made from powder in packets with a manufactured date of 1941.

The OC, an RAF F/Lt navigator who spent much of his time perfecting a quick draw with his issue .38 revolver. On the 24-hour train trip to Prai from Singapore, he was the only one of us with a firearm.

I remember being dropped off for a lonely day on Telor Island (which means egg) and the description fitted well. At high tide a strip of sand barely a meter wide met almost vertical and impenetrable jungle rising to the top of the island's solitary hill. Another chap was dropped off miles away at another island the name of which meant 'pregnant woman' and it sure looked like a pregnant woman lying flat on her back. The launch came in as close to the beach as possible and I had to jump into six feet of water and wade ashore trying to keep my lunch dry holding it over my head. At one end of the strip of sand was a crude hut mounted on four rough-hewn timber poles about 20 feet high and accessible via a crude ladder. Inside the hut was a rudimentary sight and quadrant to enable a bearing to be taken of the bomb splashes and some sort of RAF aircraft radio, powered by a battery. All pretty straight forward - just listen out for the Canberra on its bombing run then take a bearing of the splash and record it. Except the radio didn't work and my one effort at being a Plotter was a dismal failure. I only saw three splashes all day and as my Penang 'copy-watch' with the bamboo hairspring had stopped, I couldn't even record the time of the splashes I did see!

However the thing that had given me cause for alarm and effectively kept me in the hut all day, were the slither and huge claw marks in the sand. I guessed they couldn't be goanna tracks and, after being picked up late that afternoon by the launch, I nearly died when I was told there was a colony of Komodo dragons on Telor Island! These giant reptiles have saliva so corrosive it will melt flesh, so I was glad they couldn't climb ladders and I started to wonder why the hell I was left there unarmed, which was the first of my experiences in Malaya with no means of defending myself.

There were still 38 Communist Terrorists (CTs) known to be operating in the jungle on Penang Island. Efforts by us young 'bullet-proof' fellows to tempt fate by driving around the island late at night on that weirdly cambered, twisty road were often thwarted by police and Ghurkha sweeps attempting to round up the CTs. Amnesty leaflets littered the outer suburbs of Georgetown, dropped by RAF aircraft and now, 50 years on, I regret not having collected at least one to keep for posterity. An RAF Dakota fitted with a powerful amplifier and banks of huge speakers under the fuselage often droned over the jungle calling in Chinese for the CTs to surrender. I've learned in recent years that the Secretary-General of the Malayan Communist Party, one Chin Peng, managed to spirit most of the Penang CTs out to Singapore disguised as students, whilst others were smuggled across to Sumatra by bribing fishermen. (see *Alias Chin Peng - My Side of History* (2003), ISBN 981 04 8693 6). However, what Chin Peng didn't admit in his book was that in 1959 one starving CT staggered out of the jungle with a rusty .303 and surrendered to a group of Army wives on the Minden Barracks golf course! The ladies took him to the Officers Mess and fed him a sandwich, whilst they awaited the arrival of the police to arrest him. However it wasn't always amusing. Also in 1959 there was a gunfight between the police and a senior Communist cadre in the cave temples just outside Taiping south of Butterworth, with the CT being shot dead. I well recall the sound of exploding bombs west of Butterworth when the Canberra squadron eventually began operations.

Throughout my 2 years at Butterworth the only firearms I handled were drill .303s - it seemed I was the right height to catch all the ceremonial crap. There was an exercise in 1960 when the Techs were given Mk 1 Sten guns (mine had a broken stock) which had been made during WW2 for two and sixpence each. I never went onto a rifle range in Malaya and probably did more range time as a 14-year-old ATC cadet than in six years in the RAAF.

The advance party had been at Butterworth about a month when the SS *Braeside* arrived off Prai with the unit radar equipment. A few unit personnel accompanied the gear on the ship, including the CO, Wg. Cmdr. 'Butch' O'Donnell, whose nick-name belied his gentle nature. On parades, he could never get the hang of it all and seemed to have two left feet! In those days, all cargo was

off-loaded on to lighters out in the shipping roads using the ship's derricks, and then towed to the Prai wharves, where it was craned ashore. The task of guarding the steadily growing pile of fifty M35 trucks and trailers containing our radar equipment on the wharves fell to the advance party. Perhaps I was still being punished by Fred Lindsay, but I always copped the midnight-to-dawn shift. It was always the same; I'd be driven the 20-odd miles south from Butterworth to the Prai wharves by the Pommy Red Caps and left on my own. I recall the first time, the shocked Red Caps asking S/Ldr Geoff Svensen why the hell I was being left down there unarmed and even the suggestion that we should have at least a night-stick was turned down.

One night, about 3 am, a hullabaloo arose as hundreds of Malays from the local Kampong rushed along the wharf. I tried to stop one elderly chap to ask what the commotion was all about.

All I could get out of him was a shouted "TIGER"! as he rushed by. There I was, 19 years old, all on my own on that deserted wharf 20 miles south of Butterworth, unarmed (apart from a thermos of vile tasting orange cordial made in 1941), no telephone, no radio and no transport, recalling a newspaper photo I'd seen of a Sumatran tiger shot by Kampong Malays, measuring 12 feet from the tip of its nose to the tip of its tail - a damn big cat! If the thing came slinking along the wharf, I considered jumping into the water, but one look at the flotsam, oil, dead dogs and raw sewage discouraged that avenue of escape. Besides which, I knew that, unlike a tabby cat, tigers could swim. So I climbed into the cab of an M35 hoping the oily smell of the vehicle would mask my scent, wound up the windows and stayed there for the rest of my shift.

What were our lords and masters thinking, putting us in harm's way without any way of defending ourselves? Years later, working for Navy, I used to watch sailors, no older than we had been in Malaya in 1958, training to board illegal vessels in our north, armed to the teeth with 9mm pistols, SLRs and Owen guns. Why were we never armed in Malaya? Even the fellows guarding the radar equipment prior to its loading onto the SS *Braeside* in Sydney each had a .303 and bayonet - we had nothing! The argument had been that, if we had encountered any CTs, they would have taken the rifle from us - never mind that they would have shot us anyway. Just before we had arrived in Malaya, a British Army vehicle recovery team had driven out to a broken-down truck in the southern state of Johore, the

sergeant in charge taking his 15-year-old son with them for an outing. They were ambushed and all shot dead by the CTs, apart from the 15-year old. At about this time I started to realise I wasn't Biggles after all - perhaps I'd joined the Air Farce!  
(Part 2 will appear in a later issue.)

## I DIDN'T TAKE A PRISONER

Barry Morris' *The Night I Took a Prisoner* brought back fond memories of my stint at Butterworth as a Rad Tech G at 114MCRU in 1965. My posting there was somewhat of a surprise, first because a year or so before I had passed through Butterworth on my way to Ubon, Thailand. Like most people I knew in the RAAF at the time, I too had had Butterworth as a posting preference, but during my 24-hour layover I had decided I didn't like the place and so had changed it. Secondly, I was not of the 'radar clique' and thirdly, just prior to my posting, while on pre-embarkation leave, I had gone down with appendicitis. The posting was not cancelled and I left for Butterworth a month later than scheduled on the last ship used to take personnel to Malaya (they were already flying people there) and reached Malaya in January 1965.

The fact that 'Confrontation' was in full swing was well-known. The unit's personnel had been greatly increased by both Australian and English techs and operators so that we now operated 24-hours a day on a rotating three-shift basis. While theoretically we were on a war footing, things were pretty normal in our every-day lives. The only pressure we were under was the speed at which we had to complete any scheduled maintenance on the equipment.

During one of my turns on 'doggo' shift I drew the short straw to go and change the frequency of the HF link that we had to the main operations centre in Singapore. The equipment was located some distance from the main compound, in a chain-wire enclosure with a couple of steel containers holding the equipment. It was a pitch black night as I made my way to the compound, opened the gate and went in. The changing of frequencies did not take all that long and I came out of the container into the deep blackness of the night. I was almost blind from the effect of the lights inside the container, now extinguished by the closed door.

There were no floodlights nor street lighting in or near the compound and, of course, even if there had been, they would not have been on to mark the place for the enemy. Immediately outside the gate to the compound was a deep monsoon drain. I had just locked up and was about to walk

across the small bridge spanning the monsoon drain when I was startled (let's say petrified and frozen with fear) by a movement in the monsoon drain. A ghostly black shape began to rise out of the drain, barely visible except for a large pair of white eyes. I froze - it froze! I don't know who moved first, but amid some colourful language on my part I finally realised that one of the local Indian workers had decided to take his evening ablutions in the drain. In any case, he went one way and I headed for my vehicle and a quick trip back to the main compound. I can't say I had to change my underwear - but it came close.

There are a few other adventures from Butterworth that I can relate at a later date.

*John Riebeling*

## A SPEEDING TICKET!

Two traffic patrol officers from Newcastle were involved in an unusual incident while checking for speeding motorists on the F3 Freeway. One of them used a hand-held radar device to check the speed of a vehicle approaching over the crest of a hill, and was surprised when it was recorded at over 800Kph. Then the radar stopped working and the officers were not able to reset it.

Just then a deafening roar over the treetops revealed that the radar had in fact latched on to a Williamstown FA-18 fighter jet engaged in a low-flying exercise over Wyong, approaching from the ocean.

Back at police headquarters the Local Area Commander fired off a stiff complaint to the RAAF Liaison officer at Williamstown.

The reply was in laconic RAAF style: *Thank you for your message, which allows us to complete the file on this incident. You may be interested to know that the tactical computer in the Hornet had detected the presence of, and subsequently locked onto, your hostile radar equipment and automatically sent a jamming signal back to it. Furthermore, an air-to-ground missile aboard the fully-armed aircraft had also automatically locked onto your equipment.*

*Fortunately the pilot flying the Hornet recognised the situation for what it was, quickly responded to the missile systems alert status, and was able to override the automated Defence system before the missile was launched and your hostile radar installation was destroyed.*

*Thank you for your enquiry.*

*Supplied by Col Medcalf*