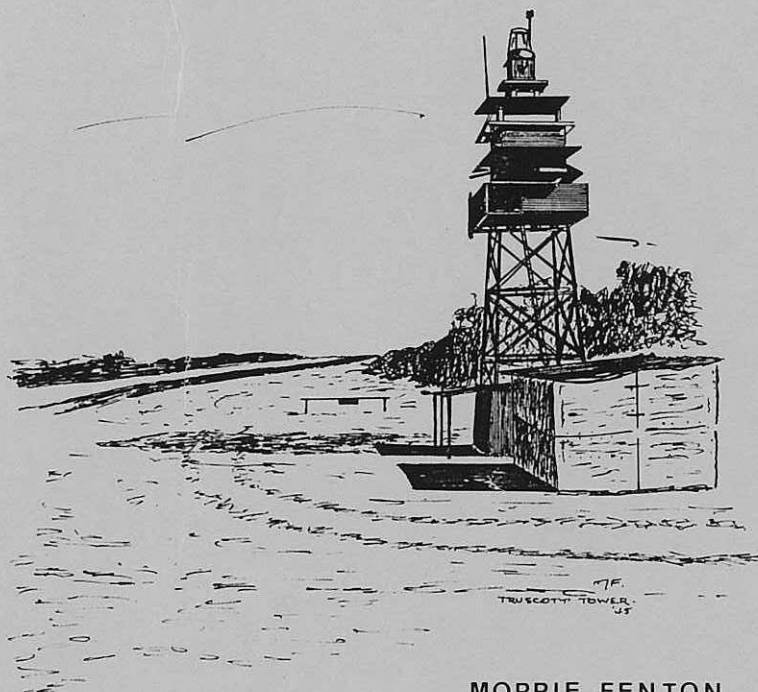


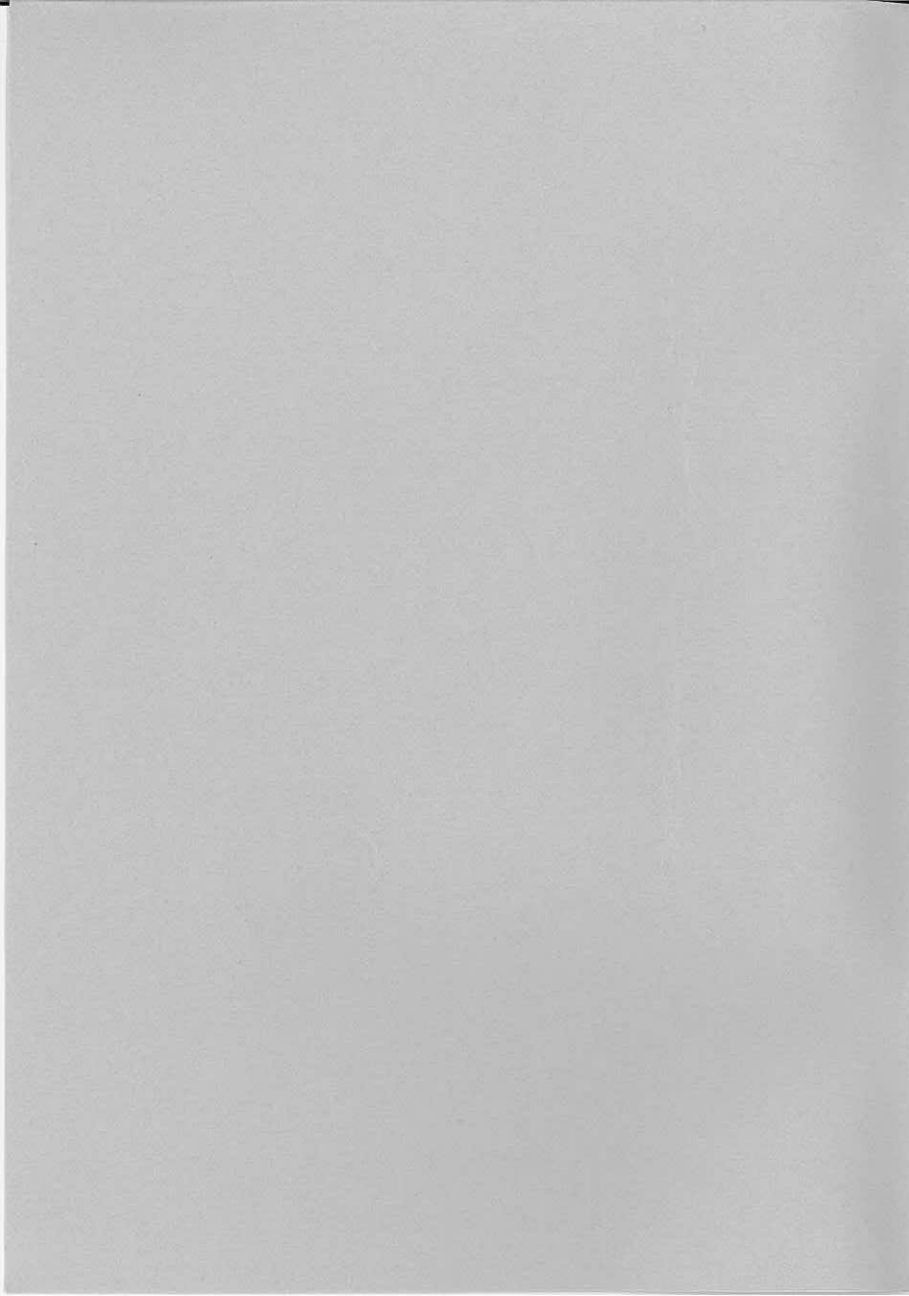
R. 18/7/94

Souvenir of
Truscott.



MORRIE FENTON





*Souvenir of
Truscott.*



MORRIE FENTON

SOUVENIR OF
TRUSCOTT.

Marking the 50th. Anniversary of the construction of Truscott Airbase.

ISBN 0 9596866 8 1

Morrie Fenton.
(M.E.Fenton.)

Produced and Published

by

M.E.Fenton,
27 Lasscock Ave.,
LOCKLEYS, 5032. S.A.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS. Whenever possible, acknowledgement for the photographs from which the Souvenir sketches were drafted is given on or near the relative pages in 'Script'. The source of a few photographs is unknown.

Cover- Garnet Pearce. Inside Title, Bryan Wardle- Page 18 Allan Ferguson.

TRUSCOTT HISTORY.

On Page 18 of this Souvenir is a report on the work of John and Carol Beasy, who have been collecting and compiling the History of Truscott over a long period. In that time they have contacted more than one hundred Truscott Veterans, and have gathered in well over one hundred photographs. Their work and research have taken most of their spare time over the last four years. I have seen the manuscript, and I know the book will be a remarkable record when it is produced.

In the meantime, John and Carol have produced a Video to 'whet the appetite,' so to speak, which shows many of the photographs. I certainly can recommend it.

Any enquiry concerning the availability of their history, or the video, can be directed to them at their address shown on Page 18.

Morrie Fenton,
154 Radar, Truscott, January to May 1945.

INTRODUCTION TO TRUSCOTT.

Truscott air base was built in a hurry - probably to provide facilities for the big Liberator bomber which was being manned increasingly by Australian squadrons and crews - and possibly to lessen the likelihood of any further attacks on Drysdale Mission (Kalumburu) where 58 OBU had long been based.

Anjo Peninsula had been surveyed - a site was chosen - and an advance party began work early in 1944. Work began when 14 MWS moved in, and this construction unit had the job of building the new airstrip and many of its facilities. Their work began on April 25th, 1944, and by the time the squadron moved on at the end of July, the strip was finished, also 6½ miles of taxiways, 20 miles of roads, 5 miles of water mains, and over 100 buildings - a tremendous achievement.

58 OBU then moved from Drysdale to the new base, best described as a giant bush camp, scattered over 8 miles of the peninsula. Canvas, black iron, sisalkraft and steel mesh were the principal building materials, used with timber from a sawmill established on site. At first the base was known by the name of the peninsula where it was built - Anjo - but the name Truscott was quickly adopted to honour 'Bluey' Truscott, one of Australia's greatest war aces who lost his life in a tragic accident at Exmouth, W.A. in 1943.

The giant strip eventually was 8000 feet long, and it was protected for some time by Army guns and searchlights. A flight of Spitfires from Darwin fighter squadrons was on standby at all times, and several radar stations guarded the area. A marine section operated at West Bay with air sea rescue craft, barges and workboats, and 7000 ton freighters could anchor in the bay while unloading heavy supplies into the barges.

The strip was used mainly by Liberator, Mitchell and Ventura aircraft, but Beaufighter and Mosquito aircraft also staged through, while Catalina flying boats rested easily on the calm waters of West Bay.

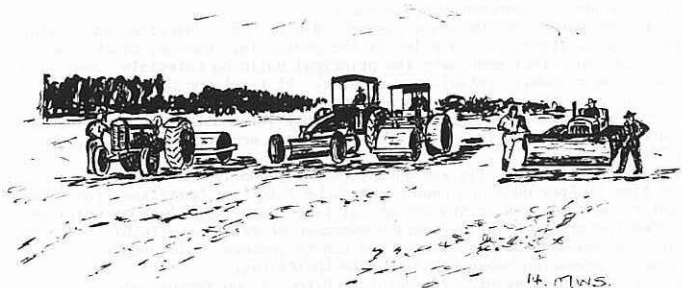
No sooner was the strip in use than an intruder aircraft appeared and the defences of the base were put to the test. The enemy aircraft was promptly destroyed by English pilots flying English Spitfires; and Truscott then settled into a routine pattern of servicing the aircraft staging through the strip, until the end of the war when its role quickly changed from attack, to a role of receiving dozens of planes flying in with ex POW's from the islands and enemy strongholds to the north.

For the next forty five years until 1989, Truscott slowly returned to nature, and became something of a giant hidden museum, lost in time, and lost in the bush with its unwanted residue of the war years - the vehicles, buildings, and facilities enduring decades of heat, tropical rain and fierce bushfires, slowly wasting and rusting, though the strip itself remained surprisingly clear and usable. Who can guess how often the strip was used in the intervening years and for what purposes.

Suddenly in 1989, the strip was 're-discovered' when a landbase for Timor oil and gas exploration was needed. Heavy construction equipment again landed at West Bay. The plans of the place were sought out from old records. The strip and some roads were restored, and new base facilities were built. So the giant wartime base and its secrets were again discovered and explored.

So in 1994 Truscott turns 50 - and with the co-operation of the Aboriginal owners, and the lessees of the place, some veteran Truscott men will commemorate the anniversary by returning to the old base where they served during the war. Here they will find not only the remnants of their wartime camps and tents perhaps, but also they will remember their mates and men who worked and lived there.

Truscott - its wartime role - and its men - wrote a proud and noteworthy chapter in Australia's war history.



14 MOBILE WORKS SQUADRON. Some of the initial clearing and construction work must have commenced early on Truscott, for 161 Radar flew in and landed on the cleared portion of the strip on 26th. April 1944 when apparently an overanxious gunner at the end of the strip sent a few shells towards the Dakotas as they approached. 14 Mobile Works Squadron took over in strength as from 25th. April. All the officers were qualified engineers, and the NCO's were capable works supervisors. The work progressed at a furious pace - 24 hours a day - and with over 400 men in the squadron, the laying of the interlocking steel surface matting commenced only one month after the work was started. The 8000 feet strip was finished by 4th. July. Just eleven days later, the first mission flew out from Truscott, while the men of 14 MWS were still finishing the facilities and buildings.

Its work finished at Truscott, the construction squadron moved out in August. A month later, it was at work again in Morotai.

(Photo: Jim Trevor; opposite, via Jim Trevor.)



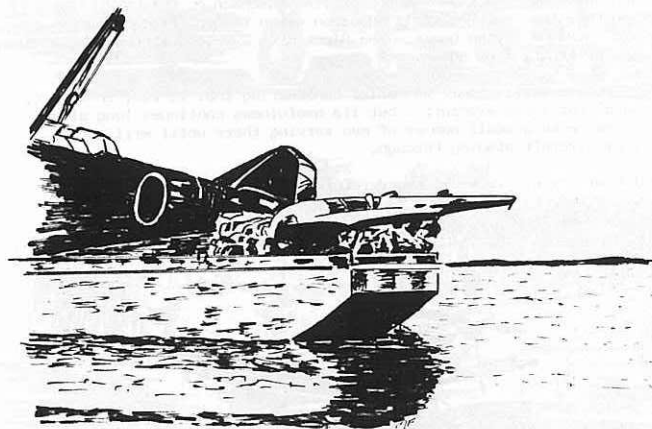
The DINAH Reconnaissance Aircraft.

The radar station at Cape Leveque in W.A. was the first to pick up and track the enemy 'recce' on July 20th, 1944 - then other stations at Montalivet, Sir Graham Moore Island, and Drysdale were able to pass plots on the aircraft and so record its progress towards the new base at Truscott. Finally, the GCI station, 154, located the approaching plane and its interception was planned.

Three Spitfires from 54 Squadron were on alert, and these were 'scrambled' with two being directed to the course and height to intercept the enemy, while the third was deployed towards Drysdale.

After a short engagement, the Dinah came down in Vansittart Bay - the last enemy plane to be shot down over Australia.

The wreckage of the Dinah was recovered at low tide and for years was left in the bush, but apparently some parts of it have since been taken to Perth.



AIRCRAFT AT TRUSCOTT.

Truscott was first used on July 16th. when four Beaufighters flew out from the new base. Many different types of Allied aircraft then staged through the big base, but after it had settled into a routine pattern of use, those most likely to be seen

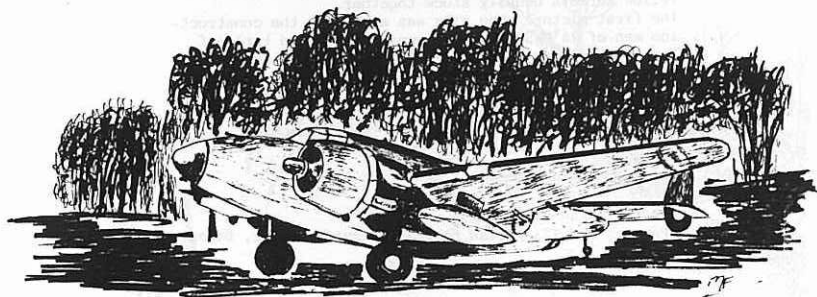
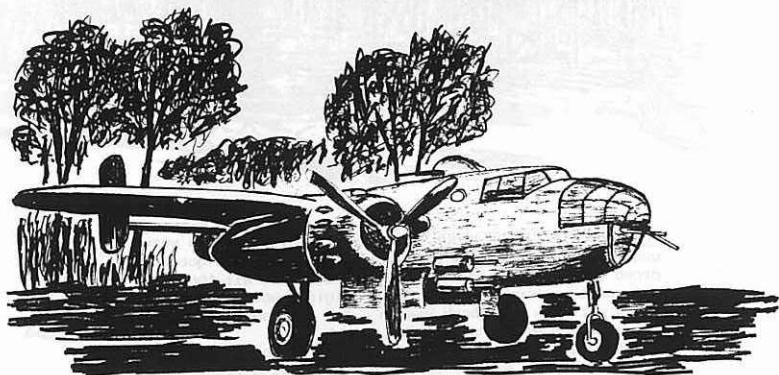
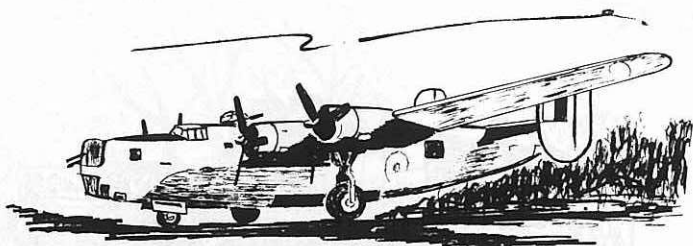
were the big silver Liberators of Australian squadrons, and the Mitchells of 18 Squadron, sometimes known as the 'Flying Dutchmen.' In later months, the Venturas of 13 Squadron often staged through, so too the big Catalina flying boats - the Black Cats - which often were in the air for twenty four hours.

Truscott's active wartime role was brief considering that it was, in effect, a 'home base' for large aircraft - but its usefulness continued long after the war ended, with a small number of men serving there until well into 1946 to fuel aircraft staging through.

The final Diary note:A big thunderstorm in progress !

(Photo: G.Pearce,
Opposite,
Jim Trevor.)







THE TRUSCOTT PICTURE SHOW. The Truscott pictures were usually well attended - a hundred or more being a good crowd by local standards, even with men from all the Anjo units attending. A few Aboriginal workers - a few extra air crew if a bash was on - and the usual regulars who attended once, maybe twice a week.

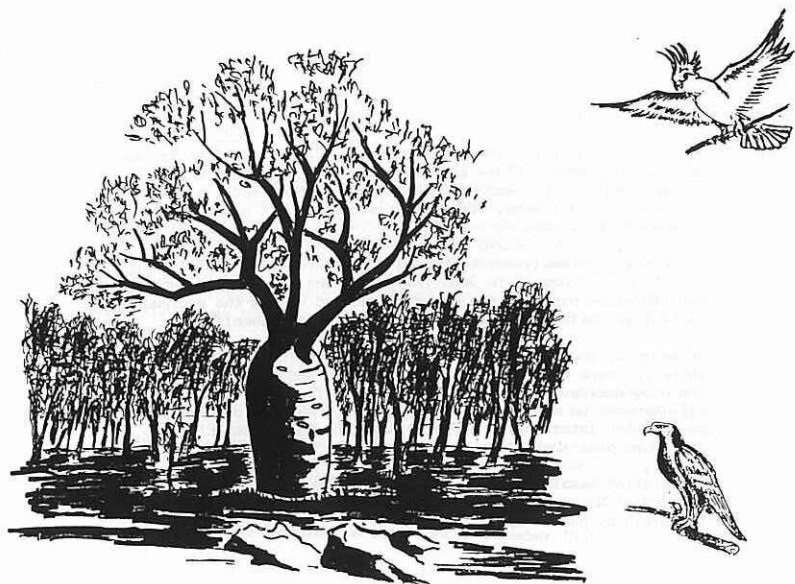
The single projector was housed in a pre-fab hut raised high on stilts, and the audience mostly sat a little uncomfortably on flour drums, in a mix of rank and types which took little notice of status, though mates and fellow workers usually stuck together.

The first picture show site was set up by the construction men of 14 MWS and was known by the grand title of The Anjo Palace, but whether the second site was merely an improved and enlarged version of the first is not known.

As often happened, the comments of the audience were appreciated just as much as the film dialogue.

(Photo: Allan Ferguson.)

(Pages 7 and 12: Allan Ferguson, Laurie Leckie, Bryan Wardle.)



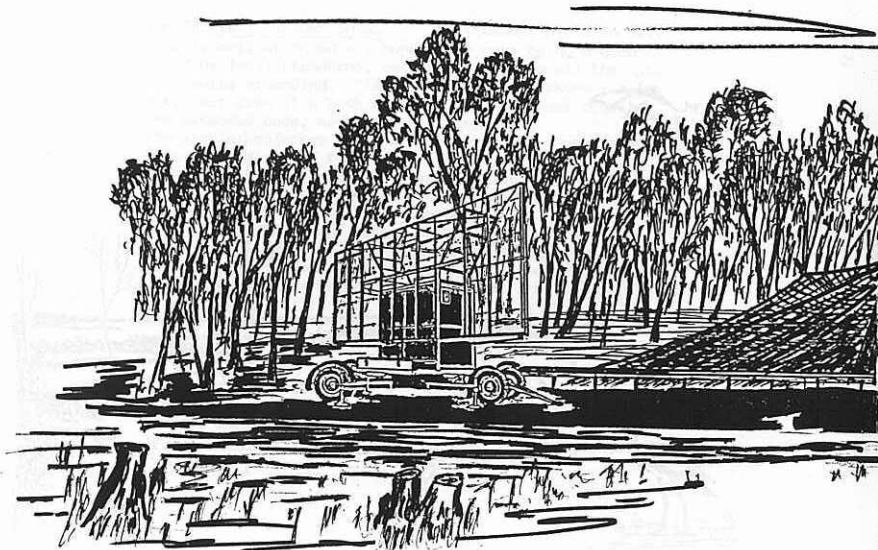
154 RADAR. TRUSCOTT.

154 and 155 Radar stations were 'twins,' - they formed at Richmond on 20th. December, 1943 - and with identical equipment which was the English Mk.V Ground Control Interception sets, mounted in big International vans, with Lister diesel 25 KVA generators in 4 wheel trailers.

155 Radar eventually was installed at Exmouth W.A. The 154 Radar was shipped to Darwin in June 1944 where the men, who meanwhile had travelled overland via Adelaide, helped unload the equipment so that it could be tested at 44 Radar Wing at Coomalie.

On again by the Liberty ship 'JOHN OWEN' to West Bay at Truscott where the vans were safely brought ashore, and when a suitable site had been decided on, the station was installed, adjusted and gradually brought on air. Shortly afterwards, the station played an active part in the interception of the Dinah, the last enemy plane to be shot down over Australia.

The station remained at Truscott as airstrip watchkeeper until the end of November, 1945, when the mobile gear and the men returned to Darwin by RAAF ship.



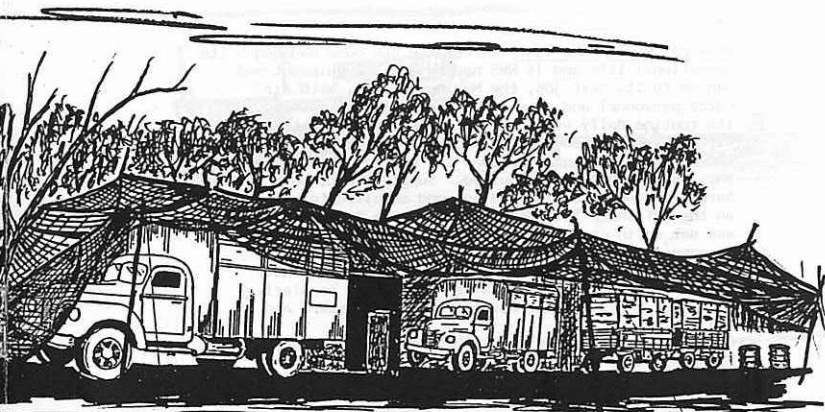
TRUSCOTT RADAR.

317 Radar at Drysdale had been the first early warning radar in the area. This was one of the LW/AW (Light Weight Air Warning) series, and was set up in April 1943. Then in April 1944, 161 RS arrived at Truscott by air actually before the strip was finished - but after settling in for a short while, this Light Weight Ground Control station, part of the air defence system, was urgently moved on by air to 'Potshot,' at Exmouth.

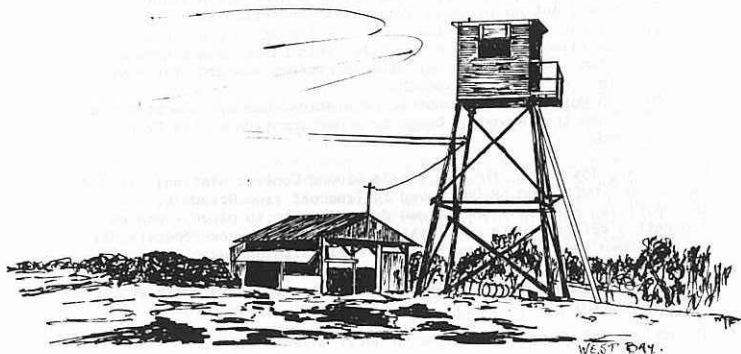
Meanwhile in March, 319 RS, another LW station. had arrived at Drysdale, and 317 RS was then moved by barge to a new location on Sir Graham Moore Island.

So in June, 154 Radar, the big mobile Ground Control station, arrived by the JOHN OWEN, and 58 OBU moved to Truscott from Drysdale. The Spitfires arrived - the AA gun defences were in place - and so Truscott's defences were on alert as the new base became operational. Further down the coast as part of the early warning chain of stations, 344 RS on Montalivet Island also watched the approaches to Truscott, and finally 319 RS moved in to share the 154 radar camp north of the strip.

154 RS and 317 RS remained on watch until November 1945.



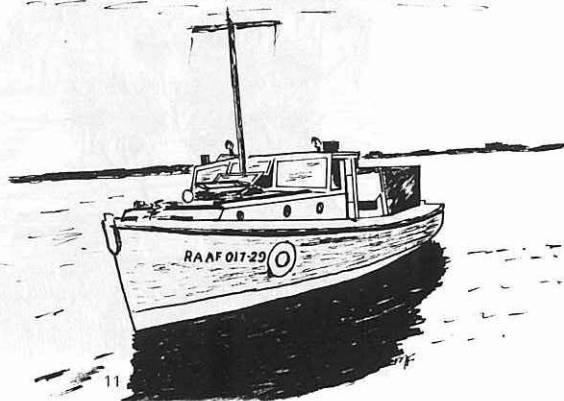
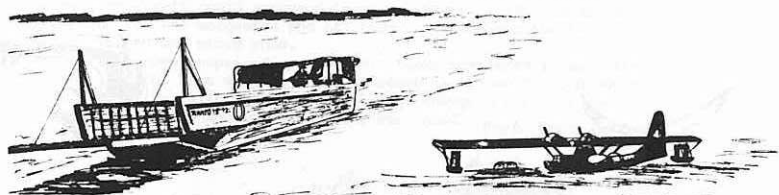
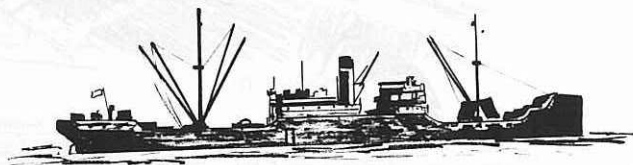
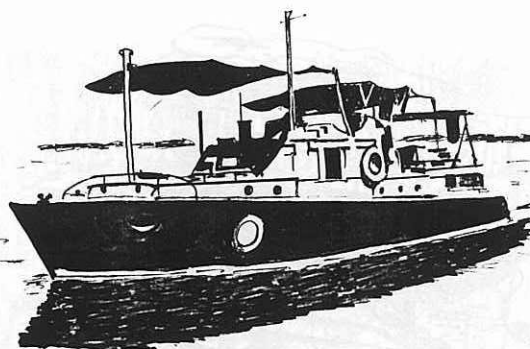
Mobile GCI - Mk. V in International trucks.
(An impression of 154 RS at Truscott.)

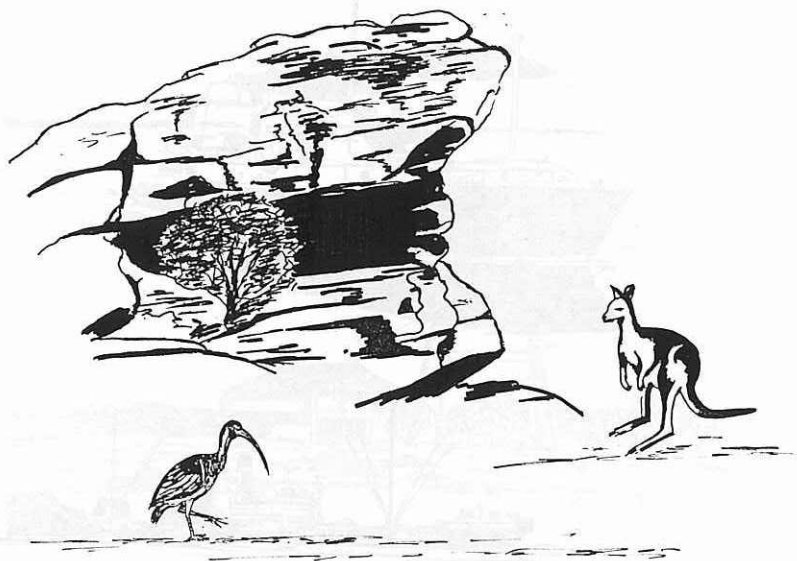


WEST BAY MARINE SECTION. After the new base had begun its operational life and 14 MWS had moved its equipment and men on to its next job, the Marine Section, with Air Force personnel and a small Navy contingent, settled into its routine daily work. First there were freighters with heavy supplies and fuel for the OBU, but afterwards the Catalina flying boats used the bay as a base, and they were serviced and fuelled. Supply craft, both barges and cutters, carried men and supplies to units out on the off shore islands, and an Air Sea Rescue service was set up in case of mishaps when aircraft took off or came in to land. The efficiency of this essential service was continually improved with better and more suitable craft, one of which was afterwards regularly stationed in Vansittart Bay out from the western end of the strip.

By comparison with the main OBU, only a small number of men were in the Marine Section, and they saw to it that they lived as independent a life as possible away from the main camp.

(Photo: Garnet Pearce.
(Opposite: Eric McNabb.)

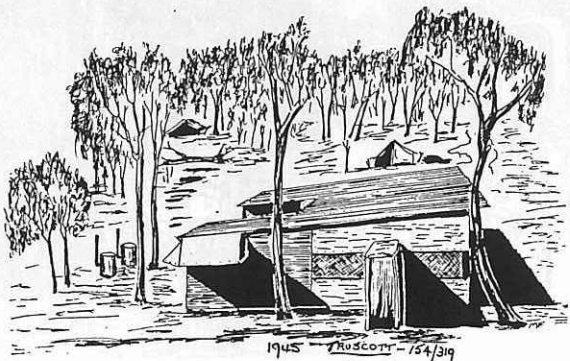






154 and 319 RADAR STATIONS. It is hard to relate this small amount of fire ravaged junk with the once busy kitchen and Mess where Joe the Greek cook happily presided. The scene apparently represents the area behind the kitchen where an outdoor stove was located. The Mess itself could accommodate about 40 men, with a separate section for the sergeants and officers. In between the two was the kitchen and store room.

The radar camp comprised up to twenty tents scattered through the bush, and the Mess was the only structure on the unit which could in any way be called a planned building, though a Rec. hut was built by the men about the time the war ended. (Photo: Barry Mattock.)





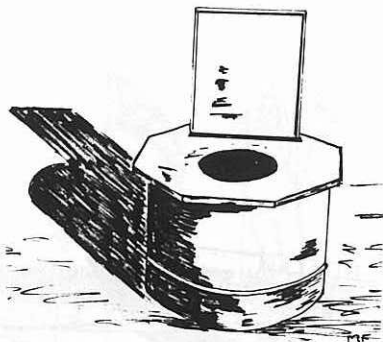
TRUSCOTT Transport Relics. When the time came for the disposals sales, the cost of shipping away the trucks and vehicles must have been greater than the anticipated income - so the vehicles were mostly left out in the bush and sold on site to any purchaser who was prepared to travel to Truscott to realise on his acquisitions.

Not surprisingly, the vehicles of all shapes and sizes were merely stripped of saleable parts - engines, wheels, transmissions - and the shells of these once carefully maintained transports were then left in the bush to survive years of rain, heat and fire.

After fifty years, there are still enough recognizable features of the old trucks to cause a feeling of nostalgia in all old Fitter/ DMT's.

(Photos: Norm Greaves and J. & C. Beasy.)





TRUSCOTT '89.

If ever a humble convenience was a symbol of a place, then the 'Thunderbox' must have been a symbol of Truscott, for they were everywhere!

Actually, the thunderbox became a wartime symbol of many places, but they were especially important on remote bases such as Truscott where it was important to reduce the fly menace to a minimum to lessen the likelihood of dysentery and similar complaints.

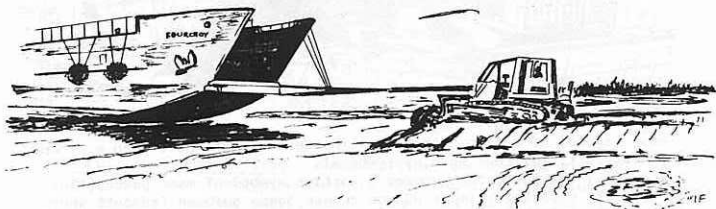
Firewood was first dropped into the drums, and after a couple of days, dieselene was poured in and the combined effort of the troops went up in a conflagration which could burn sometimes for 24 hours.

Sometimes drums were linked underground as 2 burners or 4 burners which could result in multiple hot seats - but this battery of boxes which has survived a half century in very good fashion appears to be a line-up of single burners.



All such 'Thunderbox' latrines were notorious for rumours - furphies and latrine-o-grams - for most seemed to originate from the communal facilities. It was astonishing, really, how accurate these stories usually proved to be.

(Photos: Top , Barry Mattock,
Lower, Howard Young.)



TRUSCOTT 1989.

In 1989, the decision was made by SANTOS to restore the old wartime base as a land springboard centre for their Timor Sea oil and gas exploration, and a Kununurra earthmoving contractor was given the job.

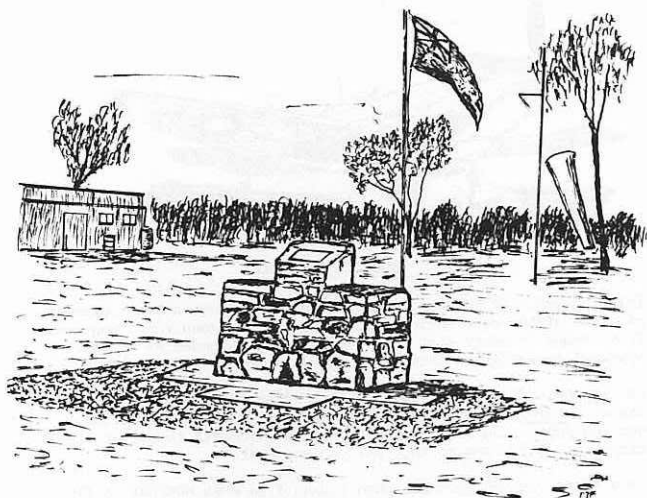
West Bay again came to life as the place of entry to Anjo and to Truscott - and a beach-head was prepared so that heavy machinery and transport could be landed from a large capacity shallow draft barge.

Immediately more of the hidden camps and abandoned equipment out in their hidden bush settings were revealed, and gradually a good idea of the extent of the camps was gained, though to what use and what purpose many of them served remained something of a mystery.

Gradually as much information as possible was gathered from whatever old records could be located, also from contacts made with men who had been there in 1944-45.

Meanwhile, the strip and road were repaired, a hangar and accommodation block were built, and aircraft again came in to land at Truscott.

(Photo: Howard Young.)



TRUSCOTT BASE TRIBUTE COMMITTEE.

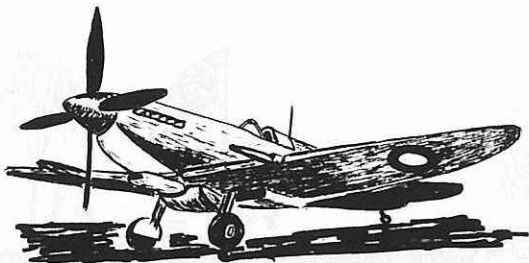
Back in Kununurra, the Truscott Base Tribute Committee was formed with the object of gathering an archives of information and photographs of the old base, also to contact and possibly bring together the veterans of the place, so preserving some memories of Truscott. The first 'Return to Truscott' was arranged for Anzac Day, 1992, and two veterans were flown in from Kununurra. There two commemorative stone cairns had been built - one near the site of the wartime control tower - the other near the crash site of Liberator bomber A72-160.

These were unveiled with due ceremony on Anzac Day in the presence of service personnel, local workers, Aborigines who had served at the strip, and some members of the Kununurra RSL.

On May 20th, 1993, 10 men returned, and plans for a larger 50th. anniversary reunion in 1994 were revealed, for through extensive publicity, a register of more than 120 men had been established.

The TBTC is to be warmly congratulated on its work and achievements in preserving memories of the old base, and in bringing back old veterans of Truscott. The committee is always pleased to hear from men who have been there, and can be contacted via PO Box 1108, KUNUNURRA, 6743.

(Photo: Howard Young.)



TRUSCOTT HISTORY.

This 'Souvenir of Truscott' offers the reader just a quick glimpse of a few of the more obvious and already well known facts and views from around Truscott - it is not in any way intended as a 'short history' nor is it an account of the life and work of the base.

For the past four years, John Beasy, an RAN helicopter pilot, and his wife Carol (also RAN) have been gathering personal stories, seeking photos and researching records of Truscott to put its full story into book form so that all can share it.

John first visited Truscott when flying from HMAS MORESBY in 1987. Both he and Carol have since been back and have visited all the known camp sites, mapping and surveying the recognizable remnants, and at the same time researching historical documents and summarizing the events and operations written up in the 58 OBU Diary.

The result is a unique history of an Australian operational air base and its associated units in the war years.

A COMPREHENSIVE HISTORY OF AN OBU HAS NOT BEEN ATTEMPTED BEFORE.

Their history tells of the daily incidents and happenings - tragic accidents - secret assignments - wartime action and heroism - and above all else, the story of ordinary Aussies at war.

Unfortunately, publication is proving difficult. John and Carol hope their work will be published in the future, so watch for the history, and keep enquiring.

Meanwhile, in this 50th. Year of Truscott, they have put a big selection of historical photos, and some recent photos, on to a one hour Video tape, to be shown first at the 50th. Reunion and Back to Truscott trip.... and if you like it and would like a copy, orders can be lodged with John and Carol Beasy,

14 Harrison Street,
NORTH NOWRA. 2541. Phone (044) 233175.

THE VIDEO IS VERY REASONABLY PRICED, SO MAKE SURE YOU GET A COPY.

SPECIAL !! It is now a possibility that the RAAF will publish 'TRUSCOTT' as part of its special 'events' for its 75th. anniversary.

