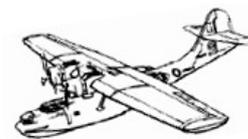


# RADAR RETURNS

*Signals & Echoes For RAAF Radar Veterans*



## EDITORIAL

A glance at the list of contents below may leave you with the impression that this is a super-bumper edition; twelve pages instead of the usual ten. In fact, it is an effort to make the workload involved in editing *Radar Returns* more appropriate to my capacity and to my other commitments. I have decided that henceforth, unless circumstances change, there will be only two issues a year, each of twelve pages (so long as the material available justifies it), to be published in March and September.

Most of you will know that I have been seeking editorial help. Various people have made sympathetic contact with me on the matter, but none unfortunately has been in a position to provide practical and ongoing support or to contemplate the prospect of taking over the function when I can no longer cope.

However, we are coping for now and I think you will find this to be a stimulating issue.

### In This Issue

Articles from Keith Taubman and John Gould continue our exploration of the lives of radar people concerned with airborne

#### IN THIS ISSUE

Editorial	1
Faded Echoes	2
Tributes	2-4
Personal	4
Radar in Catalinas	5-6
A Mechanic in Air	6
Down to Earth	7
A Japanese Look at the Admiralties	8-9
A Testing Job	9
Do You Remember . . . ?	9
State Associations	10
Eating Vegetables is Good for You!	10
Ghosts of the Past	10
<b>Post-WWII Radar Returns</b>	
Joe Ulett	11
114 MCRU	11
Destination Darwin	12
Brookvale Police H/Q	12

radar in WWII. The officers and mechanics involved (there were, of course, no operators; the equipment was normally operated by members of the aircrew) lived and worked in conditions that were very different from those experienced by typical ground-based radar people, with squadrons forming much larger stations and located generally in more comfortable circumstances. Though the risks the air radar people faced were different, they were in fact often more immediate and dangerous, involving the possibility of being killed in action or accidentally while serving as auxiliary members of the air crews, and also through the need to live and work on large operational bases which made tempting targets for enemy bombing raids. Not, of course, that it can be said that the lives of ground-based radar people were necessarily free of similar dangers, as the article by Athol Cottrill demonstrates.

Jack Woodward's article arrived very shortly before a note from his son, Phillip, telling of his death. Though a W/T operator with limited direct association with ground radar people, he clearly had a high regard for their dedicated work and the difficult circumstances in which they sometimes had to do it, and he took the trouble to write about it even though he was old and terminally ill; we salute him for it.

This time I have ventured to devote two pages to post-WWII activities and interests. When launching this segment in the previous issue I expressed the hope that it would stimulate a flow of material of general interest. However, almost all the material for this issue has come from one person: Howie Campbell; I am most grateful to him. There is also a piece written by W/Cdr (ret'd) Peter Smith, shortly before he died in April 2004, which was a tentative Preface to a history of 114MCRU that he had partially completed.

### The Position of Editor

Although I have no immediate plans to vacate this chair, I am still hopeful that someone with an interest in RAAF radar, its history and its people and some skills in putting together a newsletter and maintaining a website will come forward with a proposal that will enable this publication to continue beyond my obviously limited time. Any suggestions or comments on the matter will be welcomed.

### Radar History Since WWII

The experiences of Ed Simmonds and his co-workers have shown that it is risky to leave the recording of the history of radar activities to academic historians making second-hand interpretations of official records that were demonstrably inadequate in the first place. While there are living memories of post-war radar history, as well as those of WWII, we need, for the benefit of posterity, to have them recorded. That was a large part of what Pete Smith had in mind when he started *Radar Returns* twelve years ago, and the need now is no less urgent.

The other principal aim was to provide communication links among those still left who were associated with the origins of radar in WWII sixty plus years ago, and also within the broader group whose interest in Air Force radar activities is more career-oriented and has related to the long period of technological and political development since that conflict. In that time, Australia has taken part in at least four significant wars and in a variety of other military activities. The RAAF has no doubt been involved at least to some extent in all of them. Radar equipment and radar people will have been used, but I can find little reference to them in this context. I know that there are post-war people among our readership who will have interesting memories; please spend some time recording them; they are important!

### The Radar Returns Website

The website has already had quite a lot of use and seems to be satisfying a real need. With more time before the next issue, I hope to be able to develop it still further and to report such developments in the September *Radar Returns*. If you have any suggestions or comments, please use the guest book or contact me directly.

Warren Mann

The closing date for material for Volume 12, No. 2 is 31 August 2007.

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## FADED ECHOES

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

### **Dr Norman Russell Bushby**

8/10/1922 - 2006

Tas; Cpl Rad Op (ROp 30); 39RS, 109RS; 38RS; 13RS

### \***Frank Cecil Cooper**

21/9/1922 - 28/11/2006

NSW; F/Lt WAG (RCM)

### **John Howard (Jack) Embling**

23/10/1924 - 19/2/2007

Vic; LAC Rad Op (ROp 63); 52RS

### **John Forrest**

2/12/1919 - 11/3/2007

Qld; LAC Rad Mech (RM 36G); 45RS

### \***Francis James (Frank) Glynn**

27/6/1924 - December 2006

Vic; Cpl Rad Op (ROp 22); 20RS, 152RS, 333RS, 2FS

### **Vaughan Paul Hingston**

14/6/1921 - 14.3.2007

ACT; LAC Rad Op (ROp43); 39RS, 46RS; 59RS; 103RS; 132RS

### \***Harold George Kurth**

11/4/1910 - 15/11/2006

Qld; LAC Clk Gen; 341RS

### \***Joel Henry Mace RAN**

30/8/1912 - 27/11/2006

NSW; Lt Cdr, RANVR (RCM)

### \***Richard Leonard (Len) Paech**

12/11/1914 - 28/12/2006

SA; Cpl Rad Op (ROp 15); 7RS, 37RS, 330RS

### **Lester John (Jack) Woodward**

21/6/1916 - 3/12/2006

NSW; Sgt W/T

\* See tribute below.

## TRIBUTES

### **Bob Barling 1922 - 2006**

Robert Cyril Barling, born 13/9/22, grew up in Preston, near Melbourne. After leaving school, he worked as a draughtsman, before joining the RAAF as a trainee radar operator in May 1942, aged 19.

I first met Bob when he arrived at 306RS, Bulolo in the highlands of Papua New Guinea, probably about March 1943. We were rostered on the same shift, so we often spent off-duty time together. On one occasion, accompanied by Dave Ross, we went on a two-day gold prospecting

expedition, which was quite rewarding.

Another time, following the crash landing on our rather small air strip of an US Liberator in August 1943, we were part of a group of five who went out to look for crew members who had parachuted into the jungle just before the plane crashed.

Some months later, on 28th November, Bob unfortunately stood on an unexploded hand grenade. His right foot was severely injured. The nearest Casualty Clearing Station was at Wau, some 20 km away. Bob would have had to endure a very rough journey in a Jeep. Fortunately, on that day, a USAAF Douglas aircraft had arrived with a crew to salvage parts from the crashed Liberator which still cluttered our small air strip. They readily agreed to fly Bob and the doctor to Wau. Following a preliminary amputation of his foot, on 5th December he was flown to Port Moresby and admitted to the Australian General Hospital for more surgery.

At the time, I was stationed at 41 Wing in Moresby and visited Bob a number of times in the three weeks before he left for Brisbane on the hospital ship *Manunda*.

After much more surgery and the fitting of a prosthetic leg, he was discharged from the RAAF in August 1944. After a course in engineering at RMIT he worked as a draughtsman at the Army Design Establishment in Melbourne, where he eventually became Head of the Draughting Department.

During this time he met Betty and they married in 1945, celebrating sixty years of happy marriage in 2005.

The family then moved to Canberra where he worked in the Repatriation Department. Part of his job was to liaise with artificial-limb factories around the nation; certainly an excellent man for the job.

After retirement in 1977, the family moved to Banora Point in south-eastern Queensland. Then followed a time of extensive travelling around the world.

During the last few years of his life, Bob's health slowly deteriorated and he needed a high level of care. He died 11th February 2006. He is survived by Betty, sons Norman and Bruce, and daughter Glenda.

His Air Force mates extend sympathy to the family. We too will miss him. Thanks to Norman for assistance with information.

*Len Ralph*

### **Len Paech**

Few radar operators could equal Len in their operational service in the defence of Australia, particularly back in 1942 when things were really serious. He became one of the early radar operators and, at the age of 28, was sent off to Milne Bay to 37RS which was a front-line radar station at the time.

Here Len operated on the only COL (English) equipment in New Guinea, reporting enemy planes heading down towards Milne Bay and Port Moresby, and also watching for enemy shipping heading down with the same evil intent.

But then came the reward . . . Len was posted home, and out to 7RS on Wedge Island where he filled something of a paternal role and spoke with the voice of experience to the many young 18-year-olds posted there straight from Richmond Radar School to gain experience and knowledge. On Wedge the gear was the Australian AW and with the winds and seas coming straight from the South Pole (or so it seemed at times) the island life seemed far removed from the heat and stress of Milne Bay. Len was also able to indulge a little in his sporting interests, even if it was only 10-a-side football or a game of cricket if the weather allowed. He was always an avid sportsman, and even in the early 1930's when employed in the Public Service as a clerk in the Police Commissioner's Office, Len was regularly to be found challenging all comers to billiards or snooker in the canteen where he had his fair share of success.

But then in 1944 it was back to PNG to Port Moresby and on to Madang. On 330RS, the gear was the renowned LW/AW, favoured by our allies as well as by the Aussies, and so Len became a very experienced operator.

Len - and Lorna, while she was still with us - both actively supported our Wedge Reunions, and we enjoyed their company over many years. So Len fulfilled his radar role from 1942 to 2006.

He was an amiable chap who will be sadly missed.

*Morrie Fenton, for Len's 7RS friends*

### **Harold Kurth**

Born in 1910, Harold's grandparents were German immigrants who settled in central Queensland in the 1860s. His father was a dairy farmer until he had a heart attack when Harold was 14, after which he turned to growing flowers for the florist trade. Leaving school at 14, Harold worked first in a grocery then got a job with a sporting goods firm, more in line with his interests. There he learned to restring tennis racquets and did so for some of the best-known Australian international players of the time. He continued to restring racquets for most of his life.

In 1936, he married Viwa, the granddaughter of a missionary to Fiji. They rented a house in Gaythorne and stayed there for 57 years. In November 1942, Harold joined the RAAF as a Clerk (General), soon after the birth of his second daughter. After initial training, he was posted to 341RS, Mulgrave

**TRIBUTES (Cont.)**

Island in the Torres Strait, as the station clerk. Later he spent time at the Bowen Catalina flying-boat base.

After the war, Harold had at first some difficulty in securing a suitable job, but then joined a wholesale hardware merchant with whom he remained for 30 years when the business was destroyed by fire. Then 65, he did not expect to work again, but several hardware firms offered him jobs; he accepted one and stayed there until retiring at aged 70.

Most of his many outside interests were sporting. He played golf, tennis and cricket when younger, and was involved in establishing a successful bowls club near where he lived. Shortly after the war, he applied for a licence to work at the Brisbane horse races at the weekends. He worked for one of the top bookies in several capacities including pencilling and payout clerk until he finally retired as something of a celebrity at aged 87.

After Viwa's death in 1993, Harold lived with his younger daughter in Brisbane, joined a bowling club, a Probus club and a gardening club, did some overseas travelling and was surrounded by an extended family including five great-grandchildren.

He was an active and highly regarded member of the Queensland RAAF Radar Association until shortly before his death; he will be sorely missed. We extend our sincere sympathy to his surviving daughter and the rest of his family.

*This has been adapted from Harold's brief autobiography, which was supplied by his family and obviously written quite recently.*

**Frank Cooper**

Frank Cooper, from Charmhaven on NSW's Tuggerah Lakes, was one of the earliest RAAF people involved in radar countermeasures (RCM) against the Japanese.

Born on 21 September 1922, Frank attended Sydney Boys High School and Cessnock High School, leaving school in 1939. In March 1939 he joined the Commonwealth Savings Bank as a junior (changing ink nibs and blotting paper!).

Frank joined the 30th Battalion Militia in August 1940, before his 18th birthday. In March 1941 he was accepted by the RAAF for training as a Wireless Air Gunner - a blessing in disguise as the 30th Btn. ended up in Singapore.

In the RAAF he undertook training at Parkes, Ballarat, Point Cook and at the Marconi School of Wireless in Melbourne. After completion of training in February 1942 he was posted to Richmond NSW for

3 months. In June he was posted to No.1 RIMU (Radio Installation and Maintenance Unit) at the Presbyterian Ladies College (PLC) in Croydon, Sydney. While based at PLC, which were in effect barracks, he and Keith Bevan travelled daily to CSIR at Sydney University to undertake radar-type work as well as to work at North Head. At this time he met others involved in RCM work and learnt of Section 22.

From there he and Keith Bevan were sent north to Cairns to 11 Squadron where they did several operations in Catalinas using airborne radar receiver sets. The two were sent to Milne Bay for some 10 days to fly with American B-17s but never flew as the Japanese bombed and destroyed the aircraft. There are also records of Frank on 4 February 1943 being the RCM operator on RAAF Hudson that was used to search for Japanese radar sites in the Solomon Islands (using a ARC-1 receiver). During this time, Frank and Keith were posted to 20 Squadron (Catalinas) doing RCM work for an unknown period [unfortunately, Frank's memory on some of this was vague because of his stroke, the fact that he hadn't spoken about the war for over 60 years and also he had lost his logbook].

After operations on Catalinas, he and Keith were sent to a gunnery course at Evans Head in July 1943 with EATS students and trained on Fairy Battles. They graduated from the course as pilot officers and were then posted to the 380th BG based in Fenton flying B-24s in about late October 1943. However, for some reason Frank was delayed in Brisbane and Keith went north without him. Tragically, by the time Frank had arrived at Fenton, Keith had been killed while on operations against the Japanese flying as the RCM operator in a Black Widow over Manokwari in Dutch New Guinea in November 1943.

Whilst at Fenton with the 380th (as part of Field Unit No.6, Section 22 GHQ, SWPA) Frank does not appear to have flown in operations. Instead he seems to have been taken on an administrative role, working in the RCM office (called 'the Shack') and responsible for reporting Japanese radar sites detected. However, he did recall flying operationally with the 380th BG out of New Guinea, possibly over New Britain.

Later in the war Frank was again in Hudsons doing training with Allied ground radar in the use of appropriate countermeasures to possible Japanese jamming. He did this work in northern Australia and in New Guinea.

Discharged on 2 Nov 1945 as a Flight Lieutenant, he returned to his job with the bank from which eventually he retired as a manager.

Frank suffered a stroke in the 1990s which affected his memory as well as physically. His second wife, Gai, looked after him in his later years. He died aged 84 years on 28 November 2006 and is survived by Gai, his children and stepchildren (Louise, Ashton, Paul, Kathie, Andrew and Megan), and grandchildren.

*Craig Bellamy*

**Joel Mace**

Joel Henry Mace was born on 30 Aug 1912. He enlisted in the RAN on 25 July 1940 and, after starting in the area of anti-submarine warfare, became a radar specialist responsible for getting equipment out of the laboratory and into naval ships. Before the war, he had completed a science degree at Melbourne University, worked for ICI Building, including building the BHP chemical works in Newcastle and was a member of the Royal Australian Navy Volunteer Reserve.

During WWII Joel was heavily involved in early radar and was instrumental in the formation of radar countermeasures (RCM) unit, Section 22 which he said he just 'fell into'. This secret organisation was charged with the location of Japanese radar installations and planning RCM activities. Section 22 evolved from an original concept of a small group of RCM people under the command of the American Navy (the USN 7th Fleet) to 'step into the big time' as a large multinational unit under the command of General Douglas Macarthur based in Brisbane as part of the large General Headquarters (GHQ).

It is apparent that certain frictions occurred between Joel (then a Lt Cmdr) and some members of his staff and with his US counterparts. In about 1944 Joel was 'promoted out of the job' and sent to the US and UK to investigate the latest RCM techniques. He visited many bases and research establishments on his mission and reported back to Section 22 on overseas progress in RCM. During this period Joel also participated in a deception raid off the French Mediterranean coast with the actor Douglas Fairbanks Jr. (then a USN Lt Cmdr) about the time of the D-Day landings (the raid employed various measures including radar jamming and the playing of battle preparation noises from fast attack boats 'making a noise like a battle fleet').

On his return to Australia he never returned to Section 22 but evidently continued with work on radar

## TRIBUTES (Cont.)

countermeasures, possibly at HMAS *Rushcutter* in Sydney. He was discharged from the Navy on 28 February 1946 as a Lieutenant and went back to Sydney University to complete an engineering degree. He went on to run an engineering business which made mining equipment and was an entrepreneur involved in various ventures, including the very successful Raja Indian restaurant in Crows Nest on Sydney's North Shore, one of the first such restaurants in Australia. He also sailed around the world (1¾ times) on his 75 footer yacht *Buccaneer* with a 14-man crew for some three years in the early 1980s.

In the 1990s Joel suffered a stroke which greatly incapacitated him. He died peacefully in hospital on 27 November, 2006 aged 94 years. His wife Margaret had died some 6 weeks earlier. They are survived by their four children (Margo, Prue, Glen and Pam), nine grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren.

*Craig Bellamy*

## Frank Glynn

Frank died in December last year after a long illness. Born in Heidelberg on 27 June 1924, he joined the RAAF as a Trainee Radar Operator shortly after his 18th birthday and completed No 22 Radar Operators' training course at Radar School Richmond in September of that year.

He served on 20RS (Tomaree), 152RS (Tadji, PNG), 333RS (Goodenough Is, PNG) and 2FS (New Lambton), reaching the rank of corporal before being discharged in January 1946.

Frank spent all of his professional life in the commercial area of the State Electricity Commission of Victoria, retiring as Assistant Secretary of that large organisation.

Unfortunately, in the last few years he was a resident of Cabtini Residential Care at Ashwood and, although his mobility was restricted, his memory was good and it was a pleasure to visit him.

In earlier years, he took an active part in the various radar functions including the reunions at Bendigo (1992), Nelson Bay (1995 and 2002) and Adelaide (2003). He thoroughly enjoyed meeting and chatting with his old radar mates.

Sadly several of us who would have liked to pay respect to him at his funeral were unable to get details of it as it was not possible to make contact with any members of his family. This has meant, also, that we were not able to get fuller details of his life and career. Perhaps some reader can fill in some of the gaps?

*Keith Tudball*

## PERSONAL

### 100 NOT OUT!

39 Radar Station at Port Keats was 'on the air' from August 1942 to October 1945, and was a most important link in Australia's air defence. Port Keats itself was in wild tribal country with a Catholic mission the only stabilising influence. Father Docherty was in charge, with Brother John Pye his right-hand man. Both men assisted the RAAF radar men considerably and their help was much appreciated. The mission men also enjoyed the company of the radar men during the war years.

Recently, Brother John celebrated his 100th birthday and, as he and I were in touch when I was writing the 39RS story, I sent him good wishes on my own behalf and from all radar men. The reply was:

*Dear Friends and Well-Wishers,  
December 28 2006 was the biggest event of my life. I never realised I had so many friends and I really appreciated your contacting me on that great day, and thank you for your gifts.*

*My nursing home is most enjoyable. The staff are very friendly, obliging, capable and well organised.*

*The doctors are worried, they can't find anything wrong with me. I have no major health problems.*

*Again, many thanks,*

*Yours in the Heart of Christ,*

*Br. Rex (John) Pye*

I thought perhaps ex-39ers might like to hear of this old friend.

*Morrie Fenton*

### GET WELL SOON

Several stalwarts of the RAAF radar fraternity are having health problems.

It will no doubt be noted that the most prolific contributor of historical and technical material to Radar Returns is missing from this issue. **Ed Simmonds** has been far from well and has been in hospital, not at all happy. However, I am pleased to be able to report that he is on the mend and that we can expect him soon to be able to resume his important role of chronicler of WWII ground radar activities.

It came as a shock to me and no doubt to many others that one of the most active and prominent radar vets, **Walter Fielder-Gill**, relatively young and very fit, should have suffered a severe stroke on New Year's Eve. He is now in a transitional unit for rehabilitation, physically though not mentally impaired. He is making a slow recovery and is determined to regain full mobility and independence, though he

recognises that it will be a long haul. On behalf of the many radar people who have known him through his 35 years as President of the Radar Branch of the NSW RAAFA or through his activities in arranging reunions and the like, we wish him well.

**Ted Dellit**, too, has had a couple of stints in hospital since Christmas. However, he is home now and sounded upbeat when I spoke to him on the phone a few days ago. He can't get about much, as he needs a walking frame and can only drive short distances from home. Our thoughts are also with him.

Given the amount of time that has passed since we developed common cause through our involvement in RAAF radar, it is not surprising that many among us are suffering from ailments of varying but generally increasing severity. No doubt there are many others whose battles with such ailments could be recorded in this column. To them, too, we extend our best wishes and the hope that enough of the community spirit which developed within wartime radar remains to give them solace and support

*Warren Mann*

### WEDGE ISLANDER REUNION

The annual reunion of No 7RS, Wedge Island will be held on Saturday 31 March 2007 in the Mitchell Room, Marion Hotel, 849 Marion Road, Mitchell Park, SA between approximately 11am and 3pm.

Lunch should begin about 12 noon, under the benign supervision of Ian Walton (John Briers will be in Queensland). The lunch cost and arrangement should be very similar to previous years; a Seniors meal will be available - please bring your Seniors Card. Hopefully, there will be a special anniversary cake - to mark our 64th anniversary

There will be the usual small but informative display, showing 3 or 4 aspects of radar history. There will also be a special presentation showing a busy morning on an island station./ It will depict, in words and illustrations, a morning on 61RS, Peron Island, something not attempted before.

Interstate and country friends will forgather on Monday 2 April for lunch at a venue to be advised.

Anyone interested, especially radar friends from 10RS, with friends and relatives, is welcome to join us. Contact me on 08 8443 8717

*Morrie Fenton*

## RADAR IN CATALINAS

This is an addendum to Don Richards' excellent *Radar in the Air* article. I went through the same process as he did and became a Bailey Boy. Prof. Victor Bailey devised and organised the basic training in maths and radiophysics of mostly 2nd year Science and Engineering students to emerge as RAAF (and a few RAN) radar officers, eventually specialising in ground, airborne or naval radar. I was pleased to be in airborne radar: the ground radar officers had to grow up very quickly to be Commanding Officers of often remote radar stations with all the problems of providing everything for some 30 to 45 men, many of whom were older than their CO, as well as the technical side of setting up and keeping the radar operating.

Even with airborne radar there was almost instant responsibility for new officers. I was fortunate to have had a few private flying lessons, to have been in the school cadets and, particularly, to have had electronics as a teenage hobby. After six months in the RAAF in 1942 as a lowly AC1, I suddenly became a lowly Pilot Officer. In October 1942, I was posted to Richmond Radar School to learn the basics of the ASV (Aircraft to Surface Vessel) airborne radar, then operating on 176 MHz, surprisingly lower than the current ground radars, as higher frequency meant smaller size, especially of antennas on aircraft.

I then revealed that I had a long-time medical problem which could have prevented my RAAF enlistment. This led to a successful operation at Concord Hospital. After this, I was posted in Feb 43 to Lake Boga, a large circular freshwater lake, part of the Murray River system, which was an ideal flying-boat base. There I met my now much-loved Catalinas. Much of my story complements Don Richards' memories as it is heavily biased towards flying boats. New Catalina arrivals from Consolidated Corporation and later from Boeing in America were 'Australianised' for longer range and larger bomb-load capacity. To this end, the self-sealing fuel tanks' linings were removed, as was the armour plating and later the wheels of amphibians (except for a few used for the air-sea rescue flights). The radar was installed and the aircraft painted dull black, hence the nickname 'Black Cats'.

The accommodation at Boga was designed to appear from the air to be part of the township with shells of pretend houses with pretend fences. The sergeants' mess was a pretend town hall which was destroyed by fire in less than 30 minutes during the time I was there.

The most time-consuming work with radar (then called 'special radio' or 'radio

location') was antenna impedance matching to the ASV equipment. It was at Boga where I had my first Cat flight, which was also my first RAAF flight.

In April 1943 I was posted to the Rathmines flying-boat base and aircrew training centre for further familiarisation for my posting as Radar Officer of No 43 Catalina Squadron. This posting was via Townsville Personnel Depot where on arrival no one had heard of 43 Squadron or knew where it was. Eventually I found someone who had heard a rumour that it might be at Bowen which was a Flying Boat Repair Depot (FBRD). So I went to Bowen where the FBRD was expecting the formation of 43 Squadron, and for three days I was 43 Squadron. On the third day, the Adjutant, Bill Addison, and Padre John Alexander arrived and we sent a signal to HQ advising of the formation of the squadron. Three months later, during which time I had my 21st birthday and was promoted to Flying Officer, having collected 400-plus bobs, masses of equipment and even some aircraft, we set off on 24 August 1943 to our first operations base at Karumba at the mouth of the Norman River at the south-east corner of the Gulf of Carpentaria. Here there was a former flying-boat base, part of the early Kangaroo route to the UK which used Empire flying boats. From that we took over some civil aviation equipment; we also took on strength six pawpaw trees (2 non-bearing).

For company, we had brush turkeys, pigs left over from the former Karumba meat works, sea-going and fresh-water crocodiles and lots of fish. Some men netted the fresh-water crocs and sold the skins for a shilling an inch.

43 Squadron was set up as a bomber squadron as the Cats could reach more distant targets than other aircraft designed for the European war. They sometimes refuelled at Darwin, Groote Eylandt or Horn Island. At times we were involved in torpedo attacks and mine laying in very exact locations, in transport and provisioning of coast watchers and, very rarely, in maritime reconnaissance and air-sea rescue.

Some of our first radars were ASEs, the USA version of the British ASV Mark II. They were almost exact copies, even to screw threads, with the one difference being the 10,000 volt capacitors which repeatedly failed in operation, endangering both the missions and the crews. Rapidly, I had to work out a modification order and the radar transmitters were quickly modified to use Australian capacitors which were not earth insulated. In another incident, the ASV beacon we set up at

Karumba was destroyed by lightning, causing a few urgent problems.

One major maritime reconnaissance we did was a detachment of three aircraft which were sent to Darwin for about ten days to fly due west to maximum range and return, as Intelligence had reported that the Japanese might try to break through to the Indian Ocean. I am personally glad that we did not find them, as it could have been fatal: the Catalina and crew that found and reported in detail the Japanese Coral Sea invasion fleet was shot down.

W/C Charles Thompson, our CO, was concerned that long-range Japanese aircraft might shoot up our neatly moored Cats on the river - you cannot disperse flying boats! I was therefore ordered to construct a ground radar 'station'. We built a four-element antenna array backed by a parabolic reflector connected to an ASV set up inside the radar workshop. Luckily this was never required to be used in earnest.

The next problem was the unannounced arrival of new aircraft fitted with ASB, a lightweight ASV radar operating at about 500 MHz. It came with no literature, spares or test equipment. Luckily, the only major problem was the hydraulics for rotating through 90 degrees the cute twin Yagi antennas mounted on each side of the aircraft. They sometimes became almost impossibly hard to rotate between search and homing positions, but a good solution to this problem was never found. Next to arrive unannounced with no information or test equipment was ASD radar of about 3 cm wavelength.

One exciting incident occurred when practising air-to-ground gunnery with the 0.5 inch blister machine guns. After the practice one WAG left a live round in the hot breech of the gun in the stowed position. This went off with a bang, filling the aircraft with smoke, blasting a large hole in the bottom rear of the hull and just missing the IFF Transponder with its internal self-destruct explosive charge and a multi-million candle-power flare, but peppering it with shrapnel. After the initial panic, the problem was to set the flying boat down safely on the water with a hole in the bottom of its hull!

43 Squadron moved on 9 April 1944 to Doctors Gully in Darwin Harbour. One problem that arose in Darwin was to provide a one nautical mile range sweep for ASV to determine accurately the dropping distance of torpedoes to the target. This was done, and tests carried out using concrete torpedoes on the ships wrecked in Darwin Harbour as targets. However, there was no practical way of reducing the transmitter pulse length on a switchable basis, making the interpretation

of the standard-pulse-length echo difficult.

Newly promoted to F/Lt, my operational tour finished and on 25 October 1944 I was posted to No 1 APU (Aircraft Performance Unit) at Laverton, Victoria, for a very technically interesting time. We had at least one of each type of RAAF aircraft and some prototypes. I did not at first realise that I was in august company, with two other Bailey Boys, David Caro, who later became Professor of Physics and Vice-Chancellor of the Universities of Tasmania and Melbourne, and Charles Hamblin, who became a Philosophy Professor. I was definitely number three!

Some of the projects were corner reflector trials; automatic rocket ranging using a delay line and coincident rectifiers; radar jamming, including producing a training film; and a radar bomb sight tested on Bass Strait rocks from Liberator aircraft. We almost invented the microwave oven by cooking food in front of the dishes of magnetron-powered microwave radars.

When the war ended we only had to wrap up our projects and have fun flying in all of our various aircraft. I was lucky to fly again in our amphibian Catalina to the Gippsland Lakes and back. On one fun flight I was 'copilot' in a new B25 Mitchell. We crashed immediately after take-off and the B25 was a write-off. My last flight on 4 November 1945 took me in a Mosquito aircraft to Sydney via Uralla near Armidale for discharge. The diversion was to drop a letter to the pilot's girlfriend (and future wife).

The Catalina was an incredible aircraft, with its 20+ hours duration of operational flights, gross overloading leading to 120 second take-offs, often ending up beyond the river mouth, to be thrown into the air by the sea swells.

These flights and bomb-loads were made possible by its surprisingly sleek design and by its huge (104 x 15 feet) low-speed Davis wing, uninterrupted by fuselage eddies, and by its reliable Pratt & Whitney twin-row Wasp engines with Hamilton constant-speed propellers. As an example, Damian Miller and his crew from 43 Sqdn once flew for 11¼ hours on one engine (the other having been destroyed over the target) and, having jettisoned all removable equipment, ended up flying at 45 knots! The crew received a certificate from Pratt & Whitney.

The Catalina Aircrew Group has recently purchased a civilian version Catalina, flying it out from Portugal. We are now converting it to the wartime version at Albion Park, NSW.

*Keith Taubman*

## A MECHANIC IN AIR

I was a mechanic on air radar during the war and did my training initially at Melbourne Tech with the illustrious Ed Simmonds. Then we were posted to Richmond for final training on radar. I was eventually posted to 20 Squadron at Bowen, Townsville and Cairns.

We worked on many Catalinas and also on the ASV beacon. With the humidity and salt water there were many problems mainly in the transformers. As they cooled down they sucked in moist air and the primaries would break down so that it was a case of taking the metal covers off, repairing the primary and leaving them exposed. We also had trouble with the transmitter Letcher bar condensers. One of our mechanics was Roy Streeter, a brilliant mechanic. He and I ground down four pennies and soldered them on to the Letcher bars, tuned the transmitter and it worked fine.

We all flew many hours on test flights and SJY patrols, homing in on the beacon in bad weather. When I was at Cairns we would install the sets late in the day as the crews would take off at dusk to do the milk run up over New Guinea and the Bismarck Sea. The boat crews were somewhat reluctant to take us back at night so, as there were many boats dismantled further up the Cairns River. I selected one that had a piston removed and went to a motorcycle mechanic and had one turned up. Having installed it, I obtained a magneto and we had our own boat. The other mechanics painted it with RAAF colours and roundel.

The mechanics all had their special aircraft and we had history sheets on each one, so as to verify what had been achieved on each aircraft. It was at this time that the American PT boat fleet came into Cairns Harbour and we were required to work on the destroyers and the PT boats which had English ASV on them (that was when Ensign J F Kennedy visited Australia).

We got on very well with the Americans and one day I asked one if they had any good installation tape available. He gave me a role of clear tape which had a funny name: Polythene! That tape was a boon to us for many jobs, especially aerial connections. I installed the radar on A24-14 that night. Flown by Terry Duigan (whose father flew the first home-made plane in Australia in 1908), he picked up the Jap fleet late that night and shadowed it using the ASV. That was the beginning of the Bismarck Sea battle. Terry Duigan died last Anzac Day; he had a remarkable record of service to our country.

Shortly after, I contacted S/Ldr F Chapman to go on a milk run. Our officer

was F/O Stan Deacon and he went. Sadly all the crew perished south of Gasmata. Naturally we were all in great shock. Afterwards many crews were lost and we knew them all.

A few weeks later I was posted back to Richmond to be an instructor, and then the work started, with all the new equipments pouring in. American ASV, the altimeter, 729, IFF, the centimetre radars 717, ASD, and last of all the APQ5, the electronic bombsight on Liberators which released the bombs automatically. Radar school was transferred to Maryborough and we had our own Anson so that the pupils flew with us and had hands-on demonstrations.

Americans had not been able to be trained on radar so we had many classes of them to be trained and they turned out to be very keen students. We fraternised with them and they were much better than us at basketball to our annoyance, as we had to shout for them at the bar! But a good time was had by all.

Flying in the Liberators was fascinating as their new bombsight was the first computer we had seen. You picked up a target on the 717 in the back of the Lib then crawled through the bomb bay to the Norden bombsight which was servo-connected to the controls of the aircraft, enabling us to fly to the target watching the screen with the manufactured blip coming up as the range decreased and when the two blips merged the relays worked and away went the bombs.

The instructors were a happy family. Bob Mitchell, Hugh Peaston and Jack Martin were our officers. Len Sprague, George Campbell, Jim Brown, Don Kirby, Jack Cowen, Ray Anscombe, Jack Thorn and of course Blips Bladin (a character) and Ivan Neville, a brilliant mathematician, were our senior NCOs. Just before the war ended, we trained two courses of WAAAF radar mechanics who were very attentive and meticulous with their work.

One of my last of jobs was to repair AVM Bostock's Hudson, which had ASD 3cm on it with 20,000 volts negative on the filament of the magnetron. Another trip I did was to Rathmines to train aircrew on the ASD on the Catalinas.

I look back on my service, and feel pride that I was able to join the family that we belonged to in radar. I agree with Colin Kerr-Grant in what he said about magnetrons and digital applications, and give thanks to my grandchildren who help me with computers, mobile phones etc. They do not see the hidden smile on my face as my memory goes back.

*John J. Gould*

## DOWN TO EARTH

No 335 Radar was still suffering its birth pangs when I reported for duty at Mascot Aerodrome in October 1943. The orderly room was in a closed-off section at the end of P/O Colley's quarters. However, I settled in over the next few days and met most of the crew - nice guys one and all.

At the end of November we were loaded into U.S. Air Force C47s and flown to Port Moresby, eventually arriving at Jackson strip or '4 Mile' as it was known by the local inhabitants and were trucked out to 41 Radar Wing at John's Gully. After a few days of unpacking and checking the radio equipment, AT5/AR8 transmitter and receiver, we were joined by a W/T sergeant last seen at Sig School, Point Cook, who proceeded to check our knowledge of frequencies and operating procedures on both sets. After a settling-in time we were whisked off to a beautiful island called Goodenough, an idyllic South Sea island setting. I think we all thought "if this is a war, give me more".

However we found that we were in the middle of an assembling task force for the invasion of New Britain and at this time we first met F/O Les Bell, our installation officer and a man everyone looked up to and trusted implicitly, and he was never to let any man or any radar unit down.

On a US LST we made our way to Finschhafen on the North Coast of New Guinea where we unloaded the Doover and radio equipment and mobile-loaded everything on to six-wheeler US Mack trucks in preparation for the invasion of New Britain.

We left Finsch a day later on an LST, which sailed about 4.30 in the afternoon with 335's crew as deck cargo sleeping on top of the pre-laden trucks in bright moonlight. We were passed at about 1 a.m. by HMAS *Shropshire*, USS *Chicago*, HMAS *Westralia* and about six destroyers, Australian and US, on their way to Arawe accompanied by three barges set up as rocket launchers.

At about 1 a.m. our LST turned back towards Finschhafen - change of orders - but about 45 minutes later we turned again towards New Britain. After a couple of hours we could see the sky lit up as the Allied ships opened fire.

The bombardment went on for about two hours, blasting the mainland and Pilelo Island. Just after dawn our LST crept on to the beach (Orange Beach) on the mainland, where we caught up with Les Bell and Merv James who had previously gone ashore on Pilelo with the assault troops.

We set about transferring our pre-loaded trucks on to LCVs as the coral reef was

just beneath the water at Pilelo and not safe for LSTs. We eventually beached on the only sandy beach and commenced to unload but did not get much done before the Jap air force was on to us, bombing and strafing the barges. One bomb landed so close to our LCV that it was lifted bodily at least 3 feet on the side where the bomb landed. All the personnel standing on the deck were thrown off their feet - no serious injuries, although the LCV was riddled with shrapnel holes.

Les Bell and Merv James were busy surveying the route for a jeep track to be cut through the jungle. The 335RS people were still on the beach sorting out the Doover and radio equipment. It was imperative that the unit became operational as speedily as possible to provide the task force with protection from the Japs. On the second day we were able to progress up to the German mission house on the highest point of the wedge-shaped island. Unloading of the Doover and radio equipment got under way with accompaniment from raiding Jap aircraft.

By the fourth day the Doover was up and running but badly in need of sandbagging. At night Les Bell lay on the cliff edge outside the Doover and gave a running commentary to the duty operator. On the fifth day we all, including F/Os Bell and Bernard Katz (who had joined the installation team), started work on the radio and plotting room (dugout), blasting coral every 10 or 15 minutes as the whole island is coral.

On approximately day 16, US General Cunningham visited the unit and congratulated all 335RS men saying we had saved many US lives since going on air, and that he would recommend the unit for a US presidential unit citation. However, our CO, F/O Colley, quickly squashed the idea, telling General Cunningham that the Australian government would only allow individual bravery awards from a foreign government and not unit awards.

At this time we had a unit of Tex/Mex Rangers arrived on the island to help protect us from an expected paratrooper attack on the island which did not eventuate. Variety is said to be the spice of life and the Mexicans introduced us to chilli con carne and biscuits (scones).

By this time, three weeks after the landing, air activity by the Japs was tapering off to nuisance raids by one or two aircraft during the day, about two or three each day, plus one to three raids at night.

Four weeks after the landing a flight of US Bell Aircobras came in low over the

island; US AA gunners shot down the leader who was rescued by a US barge. About two hours later a very wet and angry colonel came up the jeep track to the Yankee gun. He lined up the gun crew and gave them what-ho for an hour. He then told them he would be back the next day and to show them an Aircobra from every angle, which he did for an hour. We felt the pilot was astounded that the aircraft held together - it was an excellent air show, with all the 335RS guys were lined up along the cliff top watching.

F/O Katz left for Milne Bay by US barge a few days later. Then a large civilian yacht arrived from New Guinea, bringing no less than three-star General Kruger on an inspection tour. He went ashore on the mainland and then had a leisurely cruise around Pilelo Island.

Intruder raids were now tapering off and now, averaging eight to 10 per week. The RAAF sergeant in charge of the five armed guards shot himself in the foot with a Tommy gun and was invalided to the New Guinea mainland. The joke is that the main brunt of the Jap assaults was almost finished but apparently the tension was too much for him so took the easy way off Pilelo - SIW (self inflicted wound).

A total of 240 raids on Pilelo were recorded at the orderly room hence its title of the 'Malta of the Pacific'.

From 335, I was posted to 305RS situated at Bomatu Point on Kiriwina, a real South Sea island R&R unit. There, our popular CO was posted to 335RS and we inherited a 90-day wonder whose first order was to call a unit parade with arms. Many of us had done our island time and were awaiting return to Australia. It took me at least 24 hours to remember where my rifle was!

*Athol Cottrill*

### To the Editor, *Radar Returns*

On the page 10 of *Radar Returns* Vol. 10 No. 3, the segment 'A last word' is a complaint about lack of recognition by military historians of the contribution made by radar to the WW2 war effort. I was a RAAF W/T operator who served in Signals offices in the New Guinea area in 1942-44, when we were under threat from the Japanese, and I have written two books on the period. Here are some of my first-hand observations.

When radar first began operations early in 1942 (before the availability of IFF) there was confusion in the reporting because of the lack of identification of enemy and allied aircraft. Each base had installed an alarm system of some kind, after the delay and confusion in the first

Darwin raid, which was sounded on any evidence of an impending raid. On Horn Island the best we could do, in early times, was an empty 44 gall drum hanging from a tree, with a stick nearby to beat it!

To help the radar reporting and in an effort to save a lot of needless running to slit trenches, a designated course was laid down to be used by allied aircraft approaching bases. However, some pilots, either from ignorance of the order, wind variation at the critical time or because of a shot-up aircraft, lucky to be able to land from any direction, ignored the order. Unfortunately the radar unit got the blame from those waiting in the trenches when they saw one of our own aircraft come blissfully in and land.

"The radar people have got it wrong again! Maybe a fly crawled across their screen or a flock of birds eh!"

Radar operators could not be blamed for the inadequacies of their equipment. W/T operators knew little technically about Radar but were doing a lot of running to trenches! At Port Moresby they had trouble with the installation of Radar because of the proximity of the Owen Stanley Mountains.

Radar stations were erected in isolated jungle territories, chosen primarily for their technical operational requirements and apparently with little thought to the health risks to men stationed there from tropical diseases. Late in 1942 when IFF was installed, radar reports became accurate and radar gained deserved acceptance.

On my second tropical tour I finished up as W/T operator on a three-masted RAAF wooden schooner, fitted with Gray marine engines, used for transporting supplies round New Guinea. On a course south from the Admiralty Islands, I noticed our skipper spending some time with his binoculars focused in a western direction, a chart in hand. Standing nearby, doing my wheel watch, correcting any wallowing from the compass course, I asked if there was something particular to look out for in that direction. He replied "I have been told to avoid setting a course anywhere near small islands over there."

He had been informed of a group of four small islands called Purdy Islands. Individually they were called Bat, Rat, Mouse and Mole. It appeared that whoever had named them had tried to leave a message with their naming, which was not appreciated when an officer surveyed the area and chose Bat Island for the erection of a radar station. The island was only about half a mile across in any direction. The radar men carried out their order to set up the station there and it was put into

operation in March 1944. However, it was soon found the island was infested with rats, bats, seagulls and a foul smell from their droppings. An outbreak of scrub typhus and dengue followed resulting in several deaths. After a month in operation the station was closed down and pulled out because of the unhealthy state of the island.

It seems to me that the men who obeyed orders and stuck it out on that disease-infested island, giving good service to the war effort, ought to have received some kind of a special award.

*Jack Woodward*

## A JAPANESE LOOK AT THE ADMIRALTY ISLANDS

In August 1944 I was sent to 337 Radar on Los Negros as part of a crew to assist in testing and evaluating the MkIII LW/AW experimental set. The crew included F/O Jack Stark, mechanic Sgt Alf Curtis, another operator and myself. Our O/C host at 337RS was John Ross; it was a happy, well-run outfit producing good results.

After some testing it was found that I and my co-operator very often had time on our hands. At Jack Stark's suggestion, 337 was given an extra shift of operators. I was teamed up with Georgie Smith from 337 and the other operator was with another 337 operator. This provided relief for the other operators from the usual schedule of 6 hours on 12 off, and was much appreciated.

The Japanese had for a period occupied the Admiralty Islands. Once they were eliminated, the wonderful harbour on the main island of Manus became a huge American base, full of shipping, both naval and non-naval. At one time I counted 12 aircraft carriers. Michener in his book *Return To The South Pacific* quotes 14; there were also large numbers of ships of all descriptions in the harbour.

Air traffic between the Admiralty Islands and New Guinea was always heavy, mainly in the afternoons when many planes were returning from New Guinea. 337RS shared the full sweep with 347RS on the north end of the island. 337 had a sweep of 190° facing south. 347 RS had a similar sweep facing north, so that the whole 360° was covered. On the day the Japanese came over I picked them up right in the sweep overlap. They were high, about 20,000 feet, well above the normal traffic, and naturally showed no IFF. The next time they were picked up was by my coworker (Georgie Smith) as we had swapped places on the half hour. They had at this time swung out and over Rambutyo

Island where the Japanese had had a naval establishment. The distance they had travelled was far in excess of normal air speed. When I worked it out, it was 300mph. I asked Fighter Sector for the Duty Officer. A voice came on the phone and I queried the plot. The voice said, "That is only the DC3 we are expecting at this time." I said, "What? At over 300mph!" The voice replied, "Do your work properly!!" and the phone was slammed down.

Not long after I heard the "crump, crump" of bombs exploding. They were daisy cutters which landed in the disposal area of Momote Strip. The Japanese had swung back from Rambutyo Island and over Manus Island. Some of our personnel were in this area but suffered no casualties but all had tales to tell. The only near casualty was the rotund Mk 111 mechanic, Alf Curtis, who dived under a Grumman Goose and was irretrievably stuck as the ground clearance was under 9 inches. The Yanks were not one bit pleased.

Next day we were inundated with high-ranking Yank officers. Our records were absolutely correct. No blame could be placed on either myself or George Smith, despite the fact that many U.S. officers visited 337RS. None of these were allowed to interrogate either George or me.

Shortly after the raid, the MkIII LW/AW was being disassembled to be sent to Aitope for further evaluation. I was posted to 335 RS which was then staging at Milne Bay in preparation to a move to Emirau Island, there to cover Kavieng in northern New Ireland which was still under Japanese control. I was surprised when John Alder the CO gave us the official version of the raid on the Admiralties. This was distorted, presumably to cover a Duty Officer who was not as much on duty as he should have been.

One night I went to the pictures with some Yank friends as their movies were the latest from Hollywood, whereas the Aussie picture shows were old pre-war Monograms. Ugh!!! I was sitting next to an Aussie flight sergeant. Naturally we got talking when reels were being changed. His voice was somehow familiar. I learned that he was at the fighter sector, and found out that he was on duty the day the Japanese came over. I said that I recognised his voice as the one which had told me to do my job properly. I asked him where the duty officer was. "Oh," came his reply, "he was touring around the island in one of our jeeps."

Some years ago, I was at the local barber for my occasional haircut. Lo and behold, there looking at me from a POST

or a PIX was a Japanese Zero. It was sitting on a coral outcrop in the Bismark Sea and looked intact. The accompanying article explained that it was one of two which had a looksee at the Admiralty Islands during the war. It had run out of fuel; the other got back to Rabaul. The pilots were best mates. The last conversation they had was one telling the other that his fuel was gone. The surviving pilot was traced through the Japanese Embassy, still alive in Japan. He had never known just what had happened to his mate.

*Bryce Daniel*

## A TESTING JOB

In early 1943 I was posted to 101RS, Collaroy. After about a month, boffins from CSIR Radiophysics at Sydney University started to test experimental gear there, with Cpl Bob McPhee assigned to operate with another operator. I got this job - I don't know whether it was because I was a good operator or I was the last asked who didn't want the job.

We sat the gear on a banana case and sat in front on a stool and took turns at plotting. The drill was for an Avro Anson to come overhead and head out to sea. We would calibrate our gear as zero and then, by means of radio to the bods at the uni, check our range and distance of plotting. They would pack up and go, then in a few days another lot would come from Radiophysics and carry out similar test with a new type of gear.

Our CO was F/O Geoff Terry and he had told us we could have leave when not on this type of work. I was in Sydney when 'Provos' picked me up without a pass so I got their sergeant to ring the station and I was OK. When I got back to unit the CO gave me a pass which said if I wasn't on the unit I was on leave.

*Bill (Larry) Bennett*

## THE CLOCK OF LIFE

The clock of life is wound but once  
And no man has the power  
To tell just when the hands will stop  
At late or early hour.  
Now is the only time you own:  
Live; love; toil with a will;  
Place no faith in time,  
For the clock will soon be still.

*Harold Kurth*

*(Harold called this a "special poem" when appending it to his brief autobiography, The Life and Times of Harold George Kurth (see tribute on p.2 above). It seems to have been written by Harold, and not long before his death at aged 96)*

## DO YOU REMEMBER . . . ?

### Hugh Hamilton Peaston

Hugh Peaston was probably one of the best-known of the ground radar personnel because of his long association with Radar School. Most of us remember him with deep affection, recalling his gentlemanly manner, sense of humour and personality, coupled with the fact that he was an excellent instructor who did not look down on his students. He always tried to ensure that we really understood the subject.

Born in Scotland on 24 November 1917, Hugh, like many of the direct entries, had been involved in radio broadcasting before the war. He had obtained his Marine Wireless Operator's Certificate (No 59) in 1936 but did not go to sea as he got seasick even on the Manly ferry. Having also been successful in obtaining his Radio Broadcast Engineer's Certificate (No 55), he spent some time at 4WK in Warwick, Qld and 2GF, Grafton, NSW. In Grafton he joined the local militia, the 41st Byron Regiment, and was 'called to the colours' when war broke out. The authorities would not permit members of the regiment to join the AIF and Hugh rose to the rank of Sergeant Major in the Army Instruction Corps.

Having seen an advertisement in the press for people needed for radiolocation, he applied to join the RAAF on 30 June 1941. When called for interview he had to pay for his own fares, meals and accommodation to attend. However, his call-up did not materialise until 23 September.

After his 'rookies' at Williamstown, NSW he fronted up at Radio School, Richmond NSW, on 21st October 1941, where he attended No 4 Air Mechanics' and No 2 Ground Mechanics' courses before being posted to the radar station at Shepherd's Hill, Newcastle, NSW. His posting to Newcastle (an unnumbered station and the first RAAF-installed air warning unit) lasted only about a month before Shepherd's Hill was closed and the equipment and most of the staff were moved to Bombi to form No 19RS. Then he was posted to Port Kembla, another unnumbered station, for a similar period. With P/O Bill Nash, Hugh then did a short stint with the RAN. At HMAS *Kuttabul*, the pair of them were involved in setting up some initial training courses for the Navy and assisting with some installations on ships.

Early in 1942, Hugh's long period of instructing began as a sergeant. There was a short break at the end of that year when

he was commissioned but it was back to the school again. It was not until late in 1944 that Hugh broke the shackles of Radar School when he was attached to the US 868th Bombardment Squadron to learn about their SCR717 centimetric radar and the AN/APQ5 automatic bombsight. Once more it was back to Radar School, which by then had been moved to Maryborough, Qld. His final escape from the school was on 11 April 1945 when he took command of the Loran stations on Bathurst, Sir Grahame Moore and Champagne Islands in the North-West Area. This posting lasted until January 1946 after which he was discharged on 11 April 1946 with the rank of F/Lt.

In civilian life Hugh worked for his old employer AWA in Sydney and then established his own successful company. His continuing involvement in the Radar Branch of the NSW Air Force Association for over three decades or so until his death on 21 December 1990 will be long remembered.

*Slightly modified extract from Significant Contributions to RAAF Ground Radar During WWI, by Ed Simmonds, 2004 (Privately Circulated), with permission.*

### A Short Spell With the RAN

Having spent a month down at Port Kembla, after being at Shepherd's Hill, I got posted to, of all places, HMAS *Rushcutter* where the Navy was starting up a radar school on HMAS *Kuttabul*. Together with a couple of other guys, we were expected to set up a mechanics training course for the Navy.

They were equipping at that stage *Hobart*, *Warramunga* and *Arunta* with English radar equipment and we set to and drew up a curriculum for them. We also helped with the installation on the ships. We trained quite a number of naval radio mechanics in the intricacies of radar.

I guess you have all heard that we used to say to people coming to the Radar School that if you were mad it did not matter; it really helped to understand radar.

Fortunately for me I had left *Kuttabul* when the Jap subs came in and sank her. At the end of the time spent with the RAN I was posted back to Richmond where I found that I had been made a sergeant instructor.

That was the beginning of my fairly long association with Radar School.

*Hugh Peaston*

*First printed in Radar Yarns (1991). p165*

## STATE ASSOCIATIONS

### RADAR BRANCH NSW

The name of the Branch was changed to the Radar Air Defence Branch about 15 years ago to provide for the growing importance of Air Defence in the RAAF. Recent changes in the structure of the Service have broadened the range of possible membership, and it has been decided to revert to the original name, the Radar Branch, to reflect this.

Our year started badly with our President of 35 years, Walter Fielder-Gill, suffering a massive stroke on New Year's Eve. He is making a slow recovery in a transitional unit at Wyong.

On 1 January 2007, two of our senior committee members, Tom and Norma Bond, resigned from the committee and from our branch. They will be sorely missed, as they have put a great deal of effort into the branch over many years. In mid-December, whilst running for a train at Lapstone, our Treasurer, Mal Le Bas, fell, badly injuring himself; he decided he was unable to carry on his duties. Stan Burge, committee member, has taken on the Treasurer's job.

We had a successful Christmas lunch at 'The Landings', North Turramurra, on 1 December 2006. The next branch outing will be on Friday 30th March, a luncheon at Parliament House NSW to celebrate the 86th Birthday of the RAAF and the 87th birthday of the RAAF Ass'n. We usually muster a two full tables at this function, which is organised by RAAF Ass'n NSW.

The Branch Annual General Meeting will take place on Tuesday, 20 March at 10.30 am in the Defence Plaza Building, Level 23, 270 Pitt Street, Sydney, only a short walk from Town Hall Station; we are expecting a good roll-up.

Somehow or other, I have been given the job of Coordinator for the RAAF Element of the Sydney Anzac Day March; with a dedicated band of Air League Marshalls and maybe a couple of blue cattle dogs, the task should not be too difficult.

The Branch Anzac Day lunch will be held this year at the Emperor's Choice Restaurant, 147 King Street Sydney, which has graciously offered to open on the day for us, for which we are most grateful.

We are seeking new branch members from post-WW2 and serving members.

The Branch now has a website:

[www.raafradar.org.au](http://www.raafradar.org.au)

and we invite everyone to visit. Post-WW2 members of Air Defence also have a site:

[www.angelfire.com/rings/caru](http://www.angelfire.com/rings/caru)

Howard Campbell, Branch Secretary,  
[howann@comcen.com.au](mailto:howann@comcen.com.au)

### VIC RAAF RADAR ASSOC'N

#### Plaques

We are still patiently waiting for the completion of the new memorial garden at Point Cook Air Base. We believe that we will be invited to place a memorial plaque during the latter half of the year.

Heritage listing of the Royal Melbourne Exhibition Building has prevented our proposal to place a plaque at this site. However, we have not yet given up hope. We believe that we can mount a good argument that, as our plaque will record part of the history of the Exhibition Building, it should be included amongst the eight historical plaques which are already there, none of which refers to the war years.

#### Anzac Day Reunion

Our Fifty Sixth Anzac Reunion will be held at the usual time and place this year. The date is 24th April, from mid-day, at Rosstown Hotel which is near the Carnegie Railway Station. We look forward to meeting old mates once again, in this very congenial location.

The Anzac Day March on the following day will take much the same form as in recent years. A newsletter from the Association giving full details of the arrangements will reach members in the week before Anzac Day. Anyone interested who is not a member or for some other reason does not receive the newsletter should telephone me.

Len Ralph, Hon. Sec. 03 9337 8272



#### EATING VEGETABLES IS GOOD FOR YOU!

A recent newspaper article raised the old wives' tale that eating carrots improves vision. It pointed out that betacarotene contained in carrots is converted by the body to Vitamin A and that Vitamin A helps to maintain healthy vision, but carrots do not contain enough betacarotene

to make any significant difference. The article went on to claim that during the war the British spread the rumour that eating plenty of carrots improved the night vision of plane spotters and night-fighter pilots, so accounting for their enhanced success in detecting and intercepting German raiders which was in fact due to the use of the highly secret radar.

I was interested to read about this. Carrot-eaters? Well maybe there were a few rabbits among them, but not as a general rule. I was reminded of the occasion when I went on shift one night with a shift-mate who had just returned from a pub meal in town. Obviously - very obviously - his meal had been liberally garnished with garlic. Phew! There was just no escaping it!

The aerial dipoles suddenly needed careful cleaning, a job which took up most of the shift. Guess who copped that job!

*A Nonymous*

### GHOSTS OF THE PAST

Who would believe that, within Australia, you could see three WW2 fighter planes in the one group? In all probability, you would have difficulty finding even one such plane in a world-wide search.

Yet, that is what I saw when driving down the Stuart Highway in 2006. Well, that's what I thought I saw. Closer inspection revealed that what I had seen was in fact three photographs, enlarged to perhaps fifty per cent of actual size of the original aircraft. Each photo had been attached to a firm backing, perhaps metal, which had been cut to the profile of the image.

During WW2, three airstrips had been constructed adjacent to the North-South Road, at the 34 Mile Point. The images are at the strip known as Strauss, so named in memory of Captain Allison Strauss, CO of 8th Squadron 49th Pursuit Group USAAF, who was killed in combat April 1942.

The three images are of aircraft which operated out of Strauss during WWII:

Warhawk, P-40E, as flown by the  
USAAF 8th Squadron;

Spitfire, Mk Vc, 452 Squadron, RAAF;  
Spitfire, Mk VIII, 549 Squadron, RAAF.

The three profiles were placed there by the NT Government, with technical help from Bob Alford, who also gave me the above details.

The project has been beautifully done. It is very realistic when viewed from a distance of about 100m, as when driving down the Stuart Highway.

*The W.O.R.M.*

## POST-WWII RADAR RETURNS

### John Gordon (Joe) Ulett

Joe was born 15/11/1922 and enlisted in the RAAF on 29th May 1941, in Brisbane. He trained as a radar operator in No 2 Radio Operators course, completed 30/1/1942. His wartime postings included Radar Stations 13, 25, 51, & 13. He served as a radar operator in Darwin (on three occasions), Coolangatta & Cape Otway. He was promoted to Cpl in December 1942, Sgt in August 1943, and F/Sgt in April 1944. Joe served with the RAAF Japanese Occupation Force as a member of No 111 Mobile Fighter Control Unit, embarking from Sydney in April 1947. In September 1948, he re-engaged in the Permanent Air Force, & in May 1952, remustered to Aircraft Plotter with the rank of F/Sgt, and was promoted to W/O in November 1955, the year in which No 1 Control & Reporting Unit was formed at RAAF Brookvale NSW.

Joe was posted to No. 1 CARU from July 1956, and was responsible for training the operational surveillance team to a very high standard of readiness. This was no mean feat in peacetime, although there were masses of aircraft in and out of Sydney every day which had to be identified and plotted. Joe was a tyrant when it came to teaching radar operators, and 'percussion discipline' was often dealt out to tardy operators. Joe had a theory about airmen: "If you see an airman, kick his arse, as he has just done something wrong, is doing something wrong or is about to do something wrong". Most young airmen avoided him like the plague. On the other hand, those who trained under him greatly admired him, and we always gave him 130%. Joe always said, "I want better than 100% on scope. Miss one aircraft and we could all be dead".

A big shock for Joe was the arrival of the first post-WW2 WRAAF Aircraft Plotters Course at Brookvale in late 1960. No more screaming, bad language etc. He coped very well, and a posting to No 114 Mobile Control & Reporting Unit at RAAF Butterworth, Malaya from July 1961 to July 1963 saw a more mellow person.

Joe was held in high esteem by the members of the RAF Radar Group. 114 MCRU was one of the top radar units in the Far East, and each year when the RAF Inspection Team ('The Trappers') arrived in the area, our Australian unit won top marks, due to Joe's excellent on-the-job training. Our cross-training was the envy of all visiting Air Forces. The local RAF radar people were not impressed by us, but then again, they were a slack lot anyway.

Joe was posted RAAF Staff London in mid-1967, on exchange duties.

WOFF Ulett died of a sudden illness on 21 February 1968, whilst serving at No 3 Control & Reporting Unit, RAAF Williamstown. He was greatly admired and missed by all who worked with him. Joe never married and was always a 'Single Living-in' member.

In 1968, the Commanding Officer of RAF Western Hill Penang, Malaysia, Wing Commander R. (Frank) Pusey, presented Wing Commander Ron Alcock, CO of No 1 CARU, RAAF Brookvale, with the first 'Joe Ulett Memorial Trophy' to be presented for excellence achieved by the most outstanding Aircraft Plotter. This trophy is still presented annually, with a cash prize from the Radar Branch, RAAF Association NSW.

I was 'Joe-Ulett-trained', and this training served me very well in my 18 years in Air Defence.

*Howard Campbell*

### 114 MCRU

When I completed my basic training as a Fighter Controller, I received my first posting to an operational unit - No 114 Mobile Control and Reporting Unit. I was thrilled about the prospect of this event as this was a unit which operated sophisticated electronic systems including new highly classified radar equipment. Before going to 114MCRU, I took some leave and visited my parents. I proudly announced that I was going to be working at an important unit. My father asked what was the name of the unit. Upon hearing its name, he replied "I brought them ashore at Tarakan in 1945". In my youthful arrogance I had not contemplated that a radar unit would have had a fighting history. After all, wasn't radar a new invention?

I did not think much more about this event or my father's statement. However, after he died in 1978, I remembered his statement and realised that I did not know enough about his war record, nor that of the unit in which I was then serving. I decided then that I would not let any more information on this subject slip away without making some sort of record. That was when I discovered how little had been written about the RAAF's history in radar and fighter control. It varied from very little to non-existent. I realised that this was not going to be simple exercise nor a quick one.

Before commencing to read a history of an RAAF unit, a reader will normally have deduced the unit's role and function from its name or the equipment it employed. However, mention of the unit title of 'Fighter Sector' or 'Fighter Control Unit' produces more blank stares than profound nods.

This is primarily the result of the veil of secrecy that surrounded these organisations during and after World War II. Additionally, these units operated from inside buildings and did not produce any physical evidence of their activities. This contrasts with a flying squadron whose equipment and operations are highly visible.

Our fighter squadrons have, quite rightly, had many volumes written about their exploits in the Pacific during World War II. However, the other major components of the air defence system that helped win the war in the Pacific have suffered from neglect. The historical publications produced to date have only described the teeth and claws of a complete fighting system. Much has yet to be written about its radar eyes and its heart and soul in the Fighter Sectors.

There is a need to fill this gap in our RAAF history.

*Peter G Smith*



W/C Frank Pusey RAF (right) presenting W/C Ron Alcock with the first Joe Ulett Trophy in 1968

## DESTINATION DARWIN

After completing No 7 Aircraft Plotters' course at School of Radio, RAAF Ballarat (Part A) and at No 1 Control and Reporting Unit RAAF Brookvale NSW for Part B (located at Beacon Hill and French's Forest) I was posted to 1 CARU on 1/12/1959 with the hope that I would go on to No 114 MCRU at RAAF Butterworth Malaya some time in the near future.

Alas, that was not to be and, on 2/2/61, with a group of Aircraft Plotters, I was posted to No 2 Control and Reporting Unit at RAAF Darwin NT (Lee Point). Airmen on posting to Darwin had to wait at RAAF Richmond on 'Pool' (a slave-labour group under the control of a tyrannical 5 ACS warrant officer) where our duties were hard manual labour, building the base swimming pool and the ASCO service station, and any other crappy jobs that would keep us busy while we waited for flights north. We highly trained radar people did not take this well, and a small mutiny resulted in several charges and CB.

Eventually, our group, LAC's Howard Campbell, Tim Chubb, Ken Hodge, Allan Scott & David Hadley, left Mascot Airport by Lockheed L 188 Electra (the PC3 Orion Maritime aircraft is a derivative), for Brisbane, where we changed to a Vickers Viscount for the flight to Mount Isa and Darwin. (both these aircraft belonged to Trans Australia Airlines, TAA)

After a couple of hours on the ground at Brisbane, most of our merry band were starting to get rather tipsy. We clambered aboard the Viscount for the trip to Mount Isa. Meanwhile, a low depression made it impossible to land and low fuel stopped the aircraft from holding on the edge of the storm, near Mount Isa. By this time our intrepid heroes had drunk the aircraft dry, so the aircraft captain decided to land at Longreach, where the aircraft was refuelled and re-stocked with beer etc. After a small wait out of Mt Isa for the rain to stop, we landed and the aircraft was refuelled and re-boozed for the trip to Darwin. The trip to the northern capital was a bit rough, but uneventful, and we landed at RAAF Darwin, well after dark. It had been a very long day.

When the aircraft doors were opened, I was hit by a wall of water and humidity and I managed to fall down the steps into the arms of the waiting Orderly Officer, who was a F/Sgt Plant Operator from No 5 ACS. I had met Shorty (?) when I was posted to No 2 ACS at RAAF East Sale in 1959. He loudly exclaimed, "Oh no! Not LAC Howie Campbell again!".

We were trundled into a long-wheelbase Jeep and driven to our new home, under the Transit Hut at the bottom of the Oval, near the main gate. Every time we had a tropical downpour, our gear was washed from underneath the hut, and a fun time was had by all, recovering it. This only seemed to happen when we were at work out at Lee Point.

The conditions in Darwin were primitive. No washing machines, electric coppers that were always burnt out, mossie nets that had survived WW2 and food that was mediocre (tinned butter, powdered milk and those bloody awful salt tablets we had to take). After many months, 5 ACS constructed new huts for us. These were relocatable aluminium dormitory huts, insulated with fly screens and overhead fans. We also had brand-new washing machines! Before getting these machines, we had taken our laundry down to the married quarters area, where a couple of the wives had set up a great laundry service. It was wonderful to come home and pick up freshly washed and ironed clothes.

There was no airconditioning for airmen on the base. The Airman's Club only had overhead fans. The best place to drink was at the Hot & Cold Bar at the Hotel Darwin.

The daily trip by bus out to Lee Point was an adventure. We went via the back gate of the base and had to cross Rapid Creek, which during the 'wet' was often flooded, which meant a round trip back via Berrima to Lee Point.

Much of the road to Lee Point was gravel, badly corrugated, and took its toll on our vehicles. Many times, we had to get out and push the bus. At the radar site, which was being built by 5ACS, there were no sewer toilets connected and a 'thunderbox' pit toilet had been built in the bush, outside the main gate. A swivelling sign indicating 'occupied' and 'vacant' was situated a few yards from the toilet. Often, some smart-arse would leave the sign as 'occupied' so that the next person would wait in vain, until loud yells showed the toilet to be empty.

The airconditioning in the new ops building had not been connected, so some wall panels were removed to get some airflow.

Late in 1961, with the imminent arrival of the first WRAAF Aircraft Plotters, interior toilets were completed and the airconditioning turned on. No more shorts and boots as dress of the day - civilisation had (almost) come to Darwin.

*Howie Campbell (ex-Sgt Air-Defence Supervisor, 1957-1977)*

## BROOKVALE POLICE H/Q

In October 1959, two criminals, Simmons & Newcome, escaped from Long Bay Gaol and fled to Emu Plains, where they murdered a prison warder. Simmons was eventually tracked to the Northern Beaches area. The police set up an operational headquarters at the domestic site ('Boomerang') of No 1 Control & Reporting Unit at French's Forest.

The Barracks Store was turned into a Police Media Centre with nightly television reports of the coverage of the search. Every alarm or reported sighting of the fugitive resulted in a mass exodus of police cars along the single road of the domestic site with sirens wailing.

Police were given full access to the Airmen's Club & Sergeants' and Officers' Messes. A condition of entering the Airmen's Club was that all weapons had to be left in the vestibule. The room looked like a gun shop. All three messes overlooked the Skyline Drive-In and, with speakers connected, this was an ideal rest area for the 'long arm of the law'. Radar coverage (as much as possible, because of the closeness of the radar set to the search area) was provided to track the light aircraft used in the search.

Much to the annoyance of the airmen, extra guards were posted at the Domestic and Operations site, though we couldn't figure out why the fugitive would want to come to a place where several hundred police were looking for him.

My faith in the 'truth' as presented by the press (*Daily Telegraph*) was destroyed forever when a photograph appeared, depicting "weary and exhausted police search[ing] the bush in the rain for the fugitive" The actual photo was taken in the garden outside the Officers' Mess.

Simmons was eventually captured in the Ku-rin-gai National Park, where he was trying to bury a small caravan that he intended to use as a 'hide out'.

With the police leaving, the radar base quickly returned to normal routine, much to the relief of the troops.

*Howie Campbell*

## A LIGHTER MOMENT

In the early 1960's, Lofty and Bluey, two young single airmen, were wandering around the back streets of Georgetown, Penang, when a 'lady of the night' called down to them, "Hey Aussie boys, come up here and I give you something you never have before".

Lofty looked at Bluey and remarked, "What do ya reckon she's got mate...leprosy?"