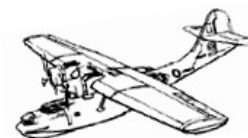


RADAR RETURNS

Signals & Echoes For RAAF Radar Veterans



EDITORIAL

The close and abiding friendships which developed among WWII radar people, especially those on ground radar stations, led to the establishment of radar veterans' associations in most Australian states in the years immediately after the war. These associations, some formed under the aegis of the RAAF Association and others independently, survived the demands of careers and families, became stronger as those demands waned, but now, naturally, are under threat as the years take their toll in death and incapacity.

Later wars, of course, generated more veterans whose friendships and memories can perhaps be preserved through similar associations, and, indeed, some such have been established. The NSW and Victorian associations that arose from WWII, like the larger general associations, RSL, RAAF A, etc, are being adapted to meet this newer need.

I believe this can work, but not without problems. If the associations are to succeed and survive the period during which the WWII veterans die out and the postwar cohort takes over, there will have to be a clear understanding of the nature and needs of the two groups, especially of the essential differences between them.

The differences arise from the circumstances of their service. In WWII there was an overwhelming threat to the nation, the deflection of which was totally beyond the military defence resources available to or achievable by the normal recruitment processes in this country. Those resources had to be built up rapidly, hastily trained and put to work. The great bulk of the people who comprised them did not see themselves as embarking on careers but rather as responding to an emergency, expecting to return to their normal vocations when that emergency had passed. In the event, the portion of their lives involved was limited to five or six years. As servicemen and women, they were essentially amateurs, though in many cases very skilled and highly effective. Finally, of course, it all happened around sixty-five years ago, so all who survive are now quite old.

The people involved in all subsequent wars (excepting some of those caught up in Vietnam) and other military activities have been professionals in the sense that they had joined the forces as a career move, expecting to serve for at least a substantial part of their working lives. The length, nature and intensity of their service will have varied widely, as also, for those not still actually in the services, has the length and nature of their post-service experiences and their current ages.

Clearly, the attitudes of the two groups to ex-service associations, be they general, function-based or unit-based, is likely to be rather different, as will be the nature of the support and services expected from the associations. And, of course, the ageing of the WWII cohort means that fewer of them are able and willing to take active executive roles within the associations. Consequently, the management of association affairs is passing from those for whom they were established, and for whom the need from them for support (including political lobbying) has never been greater, to people who perhaps are part of, and represent the interests of, a cohort whose concerns and needs are different, maybe radically different.

It is true that there exists among some serving and retired members of the radar units in the postwar Air Force a real and abiding awareness of the historical roots of their 'trade' in WWII and of the fact

that the memories of the survivors from those who served then represent an important primary historical resource.

However, if that resource is to be properly exploited, it must be carefully husbanded. The key forces to that end are, on the one hand, the Department of Veterans' Affairs and their political masters, and on the other, such bodies as the RSL, the RAAF Association, etc. which were founded and ostensibly exist to "keep the bastards honest". The DVA claims that its "mission is to support those who serve or have served in defence of our nation and commemorate their service and sacrifice" but is limited in its effectiveness by the legislation under which it operates and of which its interpretation seems not to have changed in the last decade or so.

The recent change of government in Canberra represents an opportunity for further thought on these matters. An election promise of the Rudd government was "to give the ex-service community a greater voice at the highest level of government by establishing the Prime Ministerial Advisory Council on Ex-Service Matters" and it has now made the first step towards implementing this promise by issuing a discussion paper and calling for "the views of the ex-service and defence communities, as well as other key stakeholders and interested members of the public on the structure and terms of reference of the Council ... Your comments on the paper will be most welcome and will assist greatly in the work ahead.". A copy of the discussion paper is available on the DVA website (www.dva.gov.au) by using the link [Discussion Paper for the Prime Ministerial Advisory Council on Ex-Service Matters](#). Submissions are required by 28 April 2008.

I suggest that one or more submissions from the RAAF radar fraternity would be justified and perhaps influential in drawing attention to the need for the Council to properly represent all interests.

Warren Mann ■

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The closing date for material for Volume 13, No 2 is 29 August 2008.

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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, follow this listing. If you can provide a tribute or further details on anyone mentioned, please send them to Radar Returns.

***Francis Ronald Briscoe-Hough**

25/5/1924 - 3/2/2008
NSW; Cpl Rad Op (MO22)
16RS, 326RS

Maxwell Alan Burns

25/10/1921 - 29/7/2005
NSW; Cpl Rad Op (MO23)
138RS, 4FS, 20RS, 167RS, 164RS,
169RS, 330RS

George Conomy

17-12-1923 - 10-06-2007
NSW; Sgt Rad Mech G (RM26G);
19RS, 26RS, 311RS, 4RIMU

***Joseph Edward (Ted) Dellit**

21-11-1923 - 01-09-2007
NSW; Cpl Rad Mech A (RM14A);
11Sqd, 42Wg, 12RSU, 13ARD

Bernard Patrick Howard

31-03-1923 - 29-09-2007
VIC; LAC Rad Mech (M27G);

***Timothy Geoffrey Jones**

08-01-1922 - 25-07-2007
ACT; Cpl Rad Op (ROp 8);
20RS, 37RS, 29RS, 330RS

***Keith Gordon Alfred Lloyd**

20-05-1924 - 27-07-2007
NSW; LAC Rad Op (MO90);
301RS

Kenneth Alexander Mackenzie

15/6/1924 - 11/11/2007
WA; LAC W/T
211RS, 322RS

William Kevin Murphy

4/11/1923 - February 2008
Vic; Cpl Rad Mech (M32G)

John Joseph Nevill

17-09-1917 - 02-11-2007
VIC; LAC W/T Op;

Ross Joseph Shaw

22/3/1924 - 29/2/2008
Vic; LAC Rad Op (MO74)
323RS

***Wesley Norman Smith**

2/7/1915 - 23/1/2008
NSW; F/Sgt Rad Mach (M14G);
135RS, 305RS, 316RS, 41Wg

Victor Crawford Thomas

29/12/1907 - 31/10/2007
NSW; Sgt Med Ord; 345RS

* Tribute follows

TRIBUTES

Noel Prentis

Born at Sandgate Qld on 9 June 1923, Noel lost his mother when he was a month old and his father when he was 9. He and his brother were brought up by an aunt, a war widow with two children of her own. Noel was educated at New Farm State School and Brisbane Boys' College. He was forced to leave school and go boarding before his 15th birthday, making him all the more determined to have a strong family life and to be successful. So, in 1938, Noel joined City Mutual Life Assurance as an office boy.

At 18, Noel enlisted in the RAAF but was rejected for air crew because of flat feet. He had built his own radio set so the RAAF decided that he should go into the new, top-secret area of Radio Location. Noel trained in radio in Melbourne, then in radar at Richmond (Course 10G). He was posted to, 36RS (Horn and Hammond Islands), 25RS (Fraser Island), 20RS (Tomaree), 355RS at Dapto and then shipped out with 308RS (Tarakan - Sadau Island and at Cape Pasir). He made Flight Sergeant by 21. Noel had a stint in Thursday Island Hospital with a tropical disease, which haunted him for years afterwards, but enjoyed the company of a musical islander in the next bed. He reminisced about surfing in on the fuel drums at Fraser Island. At Tarakan, he narrowly escaped being blown up by a land mine, had a pet monkey which stole his toothpaste, was a crack shot obtaining coconuts, caught mud crabs, took lots of photographs, came to appreciate the Dyak people. His diary of the time includes caustic comments about how the Tarakan campaign had been misrepresented. In one incident he kept to himself until relatively recently, he disobeyed an Australian Army officer who clearly intended to execute a Japanese POW. He made great friends in the RAAF, with whom he and Mum kept in contact for many years, attending among others the big reunion in Bendigo. Just after the war, he became an Associate Member of the Institute of Radio Engineers but went back to City Mutual.

Noel had met Claire Cornelius in 1938 at work. During the war, she wrote often to Noel, they became engaged during the war and married in December 1945, with Noel still in RAAF. They built a house at St Lucia, Brisbane in 1948 and had three children.

To improve his public speaking, Noel joined Rostrum and got into debating. This led to his representing both Queensland

and New South Wales at national debating championships. He was an early advocate of professional management education, elected Fellow of the Australian Institute of Management in 1962 and published articles on management. In 1955, he achieved the Fellowship of the Australian Insurance Institute and was progressively promoted at work, becoming state manager for WA in 1958, Queensland Manager in 1962, NSW Manager in 1967, eventually retiring as Assistant General Manager in 1981 and he and Claire moved to the Sunshine Coast.

In retirement, Noel acted as a business consultant, was heavily involved in the Sunshine Coast branch of the AIM, was in Toastmasters and was Chairman of Sunshine Coast Lifeline. Despite leaving school at 14 or, possibly, because of it, Noel was always very enthusiastic about education and he encouraged his children, colleagues and subordinates to take appropriate education or training. Noel was a life-long loyal churchman.

Ill-health forced Noel and Claire to move closer to their daughter on the Gold Coast in 2001. Dementia had started to affect his sharp mind and, after Claire died in 2002, he deteriorated rapidly. To the very end, he remained proud to have served in the RAAF and loved hearing from old comrades.

Malcolm Prentis (Noel's son) ■

I have known Noel Prentis since early 1939 as a work colleague and we soon formed a close friendship. Coincidentally, we both served as radar mechanics in the RAAF during WWII. I had the pleasure and honour to be best man when Noel and Claire were married and the compliment was returned when Noel was my best man.

During his working life, Noel earned the respect of top management, business clients, professional colleagues and work mates. He was a clear thinker with a ready wit and an excellent memory and consequently we looked with great sorrow on his failing health in recent times.

Noel has been my good friend for more than sixty-five years. I greatly enjoyed his company and respected his intellect, his leadership ability, his scrupulous honesty and trustworthiness, his love and support of family and his unheralded humanity.

Marion and I and our family will remember with warm affection our long and happy relationship with Noel and Claire and their family.

Allan Dennison ■

TRIBUTES (Cont.)**Ted Dellit**

It is my sad duty to report the death of Ted Dellit, a WWII radar veteran. He passed away at the Kareena Private Hospital Sutherland. He has been ill for a few years, but was always stoical and never complained.

Ted was born at Caboolture in Qld, and educated at various state schools and Brisbane Grammar School. He joined the RAAF in 1942, trained in Melbourne and Richmond (NSW) as a Radar Mechanic (Air), and his RAAF service was with 11 Squadron, 42 Radar Wing, 12 RSU and 13 ARD, all in mainland Australia. He was discharged from the RAAF in October 1944 with the rank of corporal, to resume his civilian occupation in the Commonwealth Taxation Department.

He attended the University of Queensland, under the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme, from 1946 to 1949: in graduated Bachelor of Commerce and Associate in Accountancy. He was also a Fellow of the Australian Society of Certified Practising Accountants, and an Associate of the Chartered Institute of Secretaries.

Late in 1948, he joined the Queensland branch of a large nation-wide commercial organisation, as a management trainee. He was transferred to Sydney early in 1955 and held various junior and senior appointments with the company. He had been Director of Accounting for a number of years prior to his retirement in 1986.

Ted had lived in the Collaroy/Dee Why area from 1961 for many years, and his book *Who Were They?, The Royal Australian Air Force on Collaroy Plateau in the Second World War*, is one of the best written and researched unit histories I have read. He donated many books to the library at EASTROC RAAF Williamtown, and the library was renamed, 'The Ted Dellit Library'. I introduced him to the RAF Radar Museum at Neatishead, near Norwich in England, and he made sure that the RAF knew as much about RAAF WWII radar as we did. As WW2 radar people wrote their unit histories, Ted saw that a copy of each went to the museum.

He was for many years an active member of the Radar Branch of the RAAF Association (NSW), a member of the committee since 1993 and held the positions of Secretary and DVA rep. until he retired from the committee in 2007. He was also an active member of the Collaroy Plateau Public School Parents & Citizens Association and managed a number of soccer and cricket teams for the Collaroy Plateau Youth Club.

With the death of Merle, his wife, early in 2005, Ted moved to Caringbah. His daughter pre-deceased him, and his son lives in Qld..

Vale Ted. You will be missed.

*Howard Campbell (Secretary,
Radar Branch, RAAF A NSW) ■*

Tim Jones

Tim was born in Sydney in 1922 and moved to Canberra in 1934 where he attended Telopea Park Intermediate High School. During his school years that he became interested in geology and mines and retained this interest throughout his life. When he finished school he joined the Patents Office as a Clerk Class 1. To supplement his meagre pay he used to develop and print films. He was fortunate to secure a promotion to a Staff Clerk position, the first step in his later career.

In February 1942 he joined the air force. Having been rejected for air crew because of colour-blindness, he was persuaded to join as a trainee radio operator and, after a completing Radar Operators' course No 8, was posted to 37RS at Milne Bay. The radar installation was very secret and Tim kept a diary and surreptitiously took and developed many photos which have now been given to the War Memorial. An enormous enlargement of his photo of No 37 Radar Station is in the War Memorial next to the LW/AW Radar Station exhibit. With help from several of his wartime friends and with his own research and recollections he wrote a book, *Milne Bay Radar* (Australian Military History Publications, 2001).

After the war he returned to Canberra, married Thelma in 1946 and moved into their house in Ainslie. In 1948 he joined the Public Service Board. He studied part-time at the Canberra University College (now ANU) and graduated B.Comm in 1954. In 1956 Tim was appointed itinerant Public Service Inspector for the Northern Territory and spent some 9 years in this job which he thoroughly enjoyed. He loved the Northern Territory and made some close and abiding friendships. His job involved a significant amount of travel which meant he was also able to pursue his interest in mines. Tim retired from the Public Service Board in 1985 after some 37 years.

In retirement he was able to develop his interests. Tim had been an active trader in the stock market from an early age and an honorary judge at the Canberra racecourse for 20 years from 1969. In 1987 he became a Commissioner for the Australian Council of Independent Business Colleges, a job which took him all over

Australia. In particular, he turned his attention to history and writing. For many years he had been keen to research and write the mining history of the Northern Territory. He received a Northern Territory History Award in 1982 and in 1985 *Pegging the Northern Territory* was published by the Northern Territory Department of Mines and Energy. It became and still is a standard reference work.

China was another of his long-term interests. A member of the Australia China Friendship Society from 1982, he served on the committee and went on to take several tour groups to China. He took TAFE classes in Mandarin and was able to make his way around Beijing on his own. When *Pegging the Northern Territory* had been published, Tim decided to research the history of the Chinese in the Northern Territory. With another history research grant from the Northern Territory Government, *The Chinese in the Northern Territory* was published in 1990. Tim's interest in the early mining prospectors and identities of the Northern Territory and the Kimberleys led to a paper on Ping Que in *The Journal of Northern Territory History* and several papers in the *Journal of Mining History*.

Tim was a man of great integrity (in the style of the old public servant – providing 'frank and fearless' advice to his superiors). His humour, his gift for the right observation at the right time and his intolerance of pretentiousness were hallmarks of his personality.

He will be sadly missed.

Carol Keil (Tim's daughter) ■

Norm Smith

When Norm Smith passed away on the 23rd of January I lost a very good friend and a close associate. The RAAF radar fraternity lost an invaluable source of information and advice. Australia lost a dedicated man and a perfectionist. I do not know of any other man who twice refused promotion because he believed that what he was doing was more important than the promotion offered to him. During the war, he refused a commission in the RAAF. Then later, when offered a move from primary to secondary teaching, he would not move. Norm was dedicated to his primary school students and made sure all who left his 6th grade could read and write - something that does not happen today.

In his war service Norm was an outstanding radar mechanic. His importance was such that S/Ldr Israel ordered him to return to 41 Operational Base at Port Moresby as soon as the installation of 335RS was completed. He was stuck on an invasion barge, during the

TRIBUTES (Cont.)

landing of 335RS at Pilelo, in the midst of the Japanese efforts to repulse the landing (see p 207 of Radar Yarns). Towards the end of WWII he installed the last operative station 316RS plus other service at 305RS and other units.

We trained together in 1942 but lost contact until 1987 when he rang me. Norm had written, with Frank Coghlan, a book entitled *Secret Action of 305*, published in 1989, which won an RAAF heritage award. He had also started to collect information on the history of radar generally but the time was not opportune.

At our first meeting Norm pointed out that *A Saga of Achievement* (written by the late G/Capt E R (Bon) Hall, 1978) had 30 pages on RAAF ground radar but it contained many errors. It was then we agreed to cooperate in rectifying the position – Norm was to look after the overseas stations while my efforts were directed to the mainland stations and general questions. The timing of this second attempt was better as it coincided with the time when most of our veterans were retiring and were looking back at their lives. Radar veterans will know the result of this alliance.

Norm was always ready to talk to anyone who was interested in any of his projects. He was currently involved in recording the history of schools at which he taught, collecting papers and memorabilia on radar as well as pushing for a museum at Murwillumbah. At the age of 92, he was using a computer program to enhance his collection of radar photographs before sending them to the RAAF Museum at Point Cook.

Norm Smith can rightfully be called 'The Father of RAAF Radar History.'

Ed Simmonds ■

Keith Gordon Alfred Lloyd

Keith Lloyd was an apolitical New South Wales Public Servant who served for 42 years in the New South Wales Premier's Department from 1941 until retirement in 1984. Retirement for Keith was clouded by Parkinson's Disease which stopped him playing Pennant Bowls and led to life in a wheelchair at a nursing home for the last two years before his death in July, 2007, aged 83 years.

Keith joined the RAAF in 1943, doing his initial training at Tocumwal in southern New South Wales. In later years he would tell how the brass fitting on the butt of the 303 rifle used to stick to the palm of the hand in winter! After training at Richmond as a Radar Operator he was posted to the re-forming 301RS which became operational at Saidor on the north coast of New Guinea between Finschhafen and

Madang. Keith told how their group's Doover readings alerted the Allied Forces to Japanese air attacks on the gathering of vessels for the invasion of the Philippines.

Keith enjoyed his membership years with the Radar Branch NSW and with his wife attended Radar Reunions at Bendigo, Nelson Bay and Canberra as well as marching in Sydney on Anzac Days. For many years they attended the Branch Christmas functions organised by the then President, Walter Fielder-Gill. As well they joined the U3A excursion organised by Jo Dunbar, to Gallipoli and toured some of Turkey's ancient ruins.

Frances Lloyd (his wife of 52 years) ■

Ron Briscoe-Hough

Ron was born in Sydney in 1924, the eldest of six children.

His primary schooling was at Rockdale before high school at St Mary's. He was an altar boy at St Mary's Cathedral.

On attaining his leaving certificate he worked first as a storeman & packer, [which he really enjoyed], then for the NSW Department of Education. At 18 he joined the RAAF in which he served as radar operator at 16RS on Gabo Island and at 326RS at Cape Leveque, WA until discharged with the rank of corporal.

In civilian life he re-joined the Education Department where he met Joan Thurlow. They were engaged in 1947 and married in May 1948. They had eight children, Michael, Therese, Patricia, Peter, Matthew, Catherine, Andrew and David.

The family moved to Tamworth in 1964 when Ron had been appointed Area Secretary for the Education Department.

Ron was a keen sportsman. He played Rugby League and had a passion for basketball - starting and editing Australia's first basketball magazine, *Hoop High*. A professional sprinter, he won invitation races such as the Bombala & Gunnedah Gifts. In Tamworth, he coached basketball and football.

Ron was unstoppable; his compassion led to his involvement in many community organisations including the Holy Name Society; the Cusillo Movement; the Paulian Society, Tamworth Youth Centre in the 1970s; Peel Valley Social Development Council; many 'door knocks' for Freedom from Hunger, Auscare and the Heart Foundation; he became a Tamworth City Council alderman and Deputy Mayor; President & later Patron of the Tamworth Services Club; CBC School Council; Adult Literacy; & Housing for the Homeless.

Ron is survived by his eight children, 23 grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren as well as his brother John and sisters Rosemary and Doreen.

Denis Gill (Ron's son-in-law) ■

NOTICES***The Tanah Merah & DNG Gazette***

Veterans who served in any capacity at one or more of the six RAAF radar stations in what was known as Dutch New Guinea during WWII are invited to be placed on the mailing list to receive copies of the *Gazette*. Suggestions for or contributions of material for the *Gazette* would also be welcomed.

Currently, this is being published quarterly and may be obtained by contacting the editor, John McAuley, 3/1310 Pacific Highway, Turramurra, NSW 2074 (phone: 02 9449 4441; email: johnpmcauley@bigpond.com). ■

Radar Publications

There is an on-going demand for radar publications, many of which are now out of print. These include the Simmonds & Smith publications: *Radar Yarns*, *More Radar Yarns*, *Echoes Over the Pacific* and the *Pictorials*, and also the map headed *RAAF Radar World War II - Where Did You Serve?* There are also calls for publications presenting individual radar stations, such as those edited by Morrie Fenton and others.

Any of these items donated to *Radar Returns* will be sold and the proceeds applied to the continued production of the newsletter.

Contact Warren Mann (details on p 1). ■

The Radar Returns Website

The website, www.radarreturns.net.au, is developing along the lines foreshadowed in the previous issue:

The *News and Notices* page is ready to go, though little use has so far been made of it. Let me know when you need it.

Faded Echoes are being posted as we hear of them.

There is a technical problem with the *Tributes* page which should be fixed soon.

The *Archives* page is operational, with the full texts of *Radar Yarns*, *More Radar Yarns* and *Echoes Over the Pacific* already posted. Watch for more soon. If there is a publication you would like included, please let me know. If you are the author or editor of one or more radar publications, I should like to discuss the archival policy with you.

Our *WWII Radar Personnel Database* should be posted in a month or so. Don't forget to use the *Units* page for queries on WWII Radar Stations and associated units.

Further developments are being considered, including material of current significance in radar. Inquiries, suggestions and comments, please, to:

Warren Mann (contact details, see p 1) ■

IN AT THE DEEP END

Angas Hurst

Bruce Aldrich and I, having completed the Bailey course at Sydney University, been commissioned, and passed out of RAAF Radar School at the end of 1942, expected that we would be posted to some southern coastal radar station for a month or so to get some idea how they worked. The RAAF thought otherwise. Bruce was posted to 305RS on Goodenough Island and I to 304 on Normandy Island. Both are in the D'Entrecasteaux Island group north-east of and close to Milne Bay, P-NG, and were at that time on the front line. When we arrived there, both aged 19, we were introduced to our first ever radar stations.

Normanby Island is the southernmost of the D'Entrecasteaux Islands; the other main ones being Fergusson and Goodenough Islands, with Goodenough then a large military base. Normanby is quite large and mountainous, over 30 miles long, with peaks rising above 3,000 feet. The terrain is generally rugged. There were no roads, not even sufficient level ground to put down an airstrip, so transport to and from the island was by boat, and on the island by foot. It was quite heavily populated by Papuans living in villages each of a dozen or so grass huts. There was a mission station run by a Samoan missionary, and an army spotters unit about a mile or so from the radar station.

Bruce was fortunate in that there was another officer already at 305, who was the CO, somewhat older than Bruce and administratively experienced. Bernie Katz later became famous as a Nobel Prize winner in 1970, along with von Euler and Axelrod, for work on the processes of nerve propagation. So at the time Bruce was spared the responsibility of commanding the station, and could concentrate on the technical operations. Katz left after some six weeks, satisfied that Bruce could handle everything.

I was not so lucky. I took over from an officer who couldn't get out of the place quickly enough, and I was pitchforked into administration as well as radar technology. It was a most instructive experience.

Following news of our postings, Bruce and I were kitted up for the tropics at Bradfield Park, then a two-day journey to Townsville by very slow train over the 3'6" gauge railway. The next leg up to Port Moresby was by aircraft, and this was our first introduction to flying. The aircraft was a Mariner flying boat, equipped with short sponsons rather than floats. Take-off was very dramatic because the taxiing aircraft raised such a cloud of spray that

we couldn't see anything. After one night in Moresby, Bruce and I travelled down to Milne Bay in an American DC3. Americans had acquired a reputation in Australia of being lousy navigators and this trip supported that view. We had just got airborne when the navigator asked "Have any of you guys been to Fall River?" None of us had so we suggested that the pilot just fly down the coast of New Guinea until he got to the end and that would be Milne Bay - Fall River. The pilot did what was suggested and we landed at Milne Bay, but it was the wrong airstrip.

From Milne Bay, I went on to Normanby Island, to Cape Pierson where 304 was sited, in a small and slow boat called the *Oomabah* (known to us as the *Oomabastard*). On arrival at the bay the boat anchored and we prepared to go ashore. The outgoing CO came out to meet us, paddling a dugout canoe, and he invited me to join him to go back to land. I agreed and he began to paddle back. But there was a slight chop, and the canoe started to fill with water, so he thought it better that I swim back to the *Oomabah*. I dived overboard, fortunately without my 38 strapped to my waist, and very slowly swam back to the boat. My boots filled with water, and every time my arm came over I could see my watch. I barely made it back to the *Oomabah* and was hauled aboard by the airmen. In the meantime, the CO, clad only in shorts, was still sitting on the submerged canoe for, as I found from my later experience, the canoe didn't sink even when filled with water.

My arrival would not be what one would recommend for a very young radar officer taking over his first command, but I didn't seem to have lost any respect. I am still amazed at the RAAF's incompetence in their treatment of us. Here I was, 19 years old, with no experience of the world outside private school and university college, put in charge of thirty-five adult men of ages ranging from 20 to 30, on an island essentially on the front line (there was nothing between us and the enemy) and the only contact with the rest of the air force a very slow old commandeered boat. Things did not always go well and it is not surprising. But what sticks in my gullet is that we always got the blame and not the idiots who organised it.

The radar itself was at the top of a cliff about 150 feet high. When the station was first established the main camp was in a belt of coastal trees immediately below the cape, and traffic from the camp to the radar was up a pathway cut in the cliff face. The administrative office and CO's quarters were up with the radar. However, within a

month of my arriving, the camp had moved completely to the cliff top. This involved a building program using native labour. The Papuans were very cooperative and were quite happy to work for sticks of the horrible black twist tobacco provided by the Papua-New Guinea administrative unit (ANGAU). Ample sized huts could be erected in a day using green timber cut from saplings and coconut and sago-palm leaf fronds for roofing. As the main weather hazard was rain and the palm-leaf roofing worked admirably, it didn't take long for the whole camp to be resited very acceptably. All the timber was cut green and, because of the high humidity, the huts started sprouting soon after being built, and had to be pruned regularly. The whole outfit consisted of the administrative hut, dining room and kitchen, plotting room, radar, living quarters and toilets. As I shall describe later on there was added to this a magnificent theatre and stage where regular performances were given by the airmen.

Apart from the settlements, the island was completely covered by jungle and, as there was a lot of rain following the onset of the monsoon, the paths were usually pretty muddy. When the regular supply boat could not get into the harbour alongside Cape Pierson, cargo would be unloaded some miles down the coast where there was a safer anchorage. The supplies then had to be carried, a job left for the natives, or rather their women. They were always uncomplaining under what we would regard as very harsh conditions. I remember seeing one woman, pregnant and leading a small child by the hand, balancing a box of hand grenades on her head. She was still able to smile when she handed over her load. Her man would probably have been walking alongside carrying a single spear.

When I arrived in January, the weather was dry and the sea rather calm, so swimming was very popular. But when the monsoon arrived it all became much more hostile. The first day of the monsoon I stood at the top of the cliff amazed at the way the whole bay had turned a deep red, from clay washed down by the nearby river. In poetic vein I thought of Macbeth: "The multitudinous seas incarnadine, Making the green one red".

Because the radar was sited on a high cliff, it was capable of receiving echoes from well over 100 miles. Observation consisted of an operator sitting on a seat in front of a six-inch cathode ray screen and slowly turning a handle so as to rotate the aerial through its full sweep - about 180° backwards and forwards. Each shift was

IN AT THE DEEP END (Cont.)

four hours, and of course the radar was manned continuously.

The trace was green against a black background, and the whole length - representing about 150 miles - was covered with randomly oscillating noise signals. An aircraft echo would appear initially as a small steady 'blip' growing in size as the aircraft approached. Once such an echo was found the operator would stop the sweep and report the range and bearing to the plotting room, where it would be plotted on a large map, and the observation signalled through to Fighter Control Centre. When an echo was detected at the extreme range, it was usually much smaller than the noise level. But the fact that it was steady and not fluctuating meant that it could be readily seen, even late in a shift after hours of fruitless sweeping.

On one occasion there was no problem about seeing the echo. One day in April I was called to the radar to see an echo right up to saturation at a range of well over 100 miles. It just sat there, moving slowly towards us, with no need to change the bearing. From the strength of the echo we estimated it to contain at least 100 aircraft, and eventually we saw them flying almost directly over us. They were in tight formation with circling Zero fighters, making the characteristic drumming sound of a large raid. It was a massive Japanese air raid headed for Milne Bay. Goodenough, being over 100 miles north of us had picked up the same echo long before, so that Fighter Command had well over an hour's warning of the raid. This meant that they were able to bring squadrons of Kittyhawks, Lightnings and Aerocobras in from Port Moresby and Buna in time to intercept the raiders.

About an hour later we saw the remnants coming back, no longer neatly aligned and much nearer the sea. Just as they were passing us a Hudson aircraft turned up on one of its regular patrols, clearly unaware of the enemy aircraft. The Zeros, obviously miffed at being beaten up at Milne Bay, tried to take it out on the Hudson, and we were treated to a dogfight on our doorstep. The Hudson pilot dived down almost to sea level and the rear gunners opened up on the Zeros. The latter were greatly hampered because they had to pull out of their dives well short of the target and so were not able to shoot it down. The Hudson headed thankfully back to Milne Bay, having had a bit more excitement than usual, and probably not very pleased at not being warned.

The following day we received a congratulatory signal from headquarters, which boosted our morale. It was doubly welcome because not long before a less enthusiastic message had come from headquarters. One evening I received a signal from Milne Bay (it was short enough for me to remember the exact words): "The aircraft you identified as friendly flew over this area dropping bombs and causing damage. Please explain." I went to the plotting room and found the track. It consisted of six plots, the first of which showed a track moving across the mouth of Milne Bay and were clearly marked as showing IFF. The next three, which were reasonably close and which were heading down the bay, did not show IFF. There were no other plots nearby so the operator reasonably identified all the plots as part of the same track, and interpreted, again reasonably, the lack of IFF on the latter part of the track as merely indicating that it had been turned off by the aircraft for the home run. What must have happened was that there were two tracks, with one going out of view just before the other emerged. I don't think headquarters was particularly impressed with that answer but nothing further was heard.

Although we were fortunately free from malaria, we were not so lucky with dengue fever. A number of the airmen went down with dengue which, though not regarded as life-threatening, was nevertheless very unpleasant. Dengue was known as 'bone-breaking fever', a very apt description. It usually knocked people out for several days, and that threw the operating roster out. So I took several shifts, sometimes for eight hours at night, and then had to run the station during the day. I learnt how to operate the hard way, and fortunately avoided getting ill myself.

Whilst the operating side of the radar was reasonably satisfactory, the technical side was not so cheerful. We were badly understaffed with the only NCO being a corporal mechanic. From the family of a former Labor Premier of Western Australia, he was one of those unforgettable characters with a very strong personality. Previously he had been at 50RS at Buna, when the battle was still raging, and according to him he had more than once ventured behind the Japanese lines. Given my complete lack of experience, it was not surprising that, in the absence of any more senior NCO, I went along with his advice, eventually to my detriment.

The equipment was not very reliable, and we were grossly under-supplied with spares. At times the situation would get so desperate that, with the boat taking so

long, we would ask to have spare parts dropped from the air, but that was usually a waste of time and material. The pilot could not fly along the beach because of the cliffs, and had to fly in directly over the bay, pulling out just after crossing the coastline. As a result the parts either fell short into the sea, or overshot the beach and fell in the jungle.

So there were times when the station was off-air for long periods, and headquarters was completely unsympathetic. The culmination came when the transformer blew, and of course we had no spare. The corporal told me that in the circumstances there was no way we could get back on the air in a reasonable time if we waited for a replacement, and so he would like to have a go at rewinding it, assuring me that he was quite capable of doing that. Rather naively, I accepted his assurance that he could do it, but he told me later that he had found it was not possible, and so we had to wait for a replacement. What he didn't tell me was that he had dumped the mutilated transformer in the box of u/s items to be sent back to headquarters. Apparently the people there went into orbit when they found it, and I was heavily blamed for allowing it to be done. However there were several things wrong with the headquarters reaction, which typified the way they operated. First, I was never told of their displeasure but only found out about it on the grapevine. Secondly, it was no great sweat - the transformer was blown, and would have to be stripped anyway - and thirdly, would we have been good boys if we had not tried to do something in the serious circumstances of being off the air indefinitely? As a request had already been made for a replacement no extra time off-air was incurred.

Eventually our protests about lack of spares and capable people filtered through to headquarters, and by the time I left our on-air time was right up to standard.

Initially the only military force we had were about five guards, under a single corporal. They were armed with 303's and a Bren gun, and were regularly posted on guard duty. All the rest of us had our own small arms, mine being, as mentioned before, a Smith and Wesson 38 revolver, which I used only for trying to shoot flying foxes. However, there was one occasion when I thought more formidable targets might be presented. There was an army spotter unit about a mile or so down the coast whose members used to call in from time to time, so we knew them quite well. One night we heard two or three shots coming from their camp, followed by

silence. One interpretation of this was that they had been surprised by a Japanese patrol, and probably had been finished off. So we went on to full alert, and later in the night I lay down on my bed with my 38 under my pillow. I don't think I would have presented much of an obstacle to a determined raid. Eventually, of course, we found it had been a false alarm; one of the spotters had found a snake in the toilet and had had a go at it with his rifle.

The spotters were part of a remarkable chain of observation posts all around New Guinea. Later on, when I was in Port Moresby, I visited the Fighter Control Centre and saw a string of reports about Japanese aircraft parked on various airstrips further up the coast. I asked how they knew this and was told that army spotters were sited on hills overlooking the airstrips, observing them through binoculars. A pretty scary sort of operation!

It was clear that we needed more substantial protection, so an army platoon was assigned to us under the command of a lieutenant. Not only did this give us a greater feeling of security, but it meant that I no longer had to eat my meals in solitary state. Both the officers who commanded the platoon were very pleasant company and we got along well together.

They set about erecting a chain of pill boxes along the beach, dug deep and covered with several layers of coconut logs. Fortunately they were never needed, quite different from the experience at Goodenough. After the Coral Sea Battle a lot of Japanese survivors finished up on Goodenough, and quite close to the radar. However, they were so debilitated that they presented little resistance to the party of RAAF guards from the radar unit who confronted them as they came ashore. In our only contact with the battle, a ship arrived in the bay shortly afterwards and we saw a number of Japanese prisoners lying in the bottom of the hold, looking completely exhausted.

I used to go for walks in the jungle guided by Joseph, the Papuan who had been assigned to look after me. At first I found the slippery steep paths through the jungle difficult to negotiate and Joseph would often leave me panting well in his wake. But I was pleased to find that my condition improved so much that I was able to keep up with him quite easily in the end. This became obvious when I took the army officers with me, and although they were enormously fit they weren't able to keep up with us.

Joseph was a lovely person. He had been to a mission school and spoke English very well. I started to compile a dictionary of

Motuan with his help, so that eventually I could ask for small services in the language. My favourite was to ask for my morning cup of cocoa. It went something like this. 'Kugwinuhai coke. Bwassi boossu boossu,' which translates to mean 'I would like some cocoa. Boil some water'. Some of the airmen cottoned on to this and the story I was told was that when a group of them visited the local Samoan missionary, one airman tried to show his linguistic skills by saying 'Boossi, boossi'. Unfortunately that didn't mean boil water, but instead was 'I want to shit'.

Up to the time of the war and during Australia's control of Papua-New Guinea, the administration was under the command of Sir John Murray, who was generally recognised as being quite humane by the standards of the time. There is no doubt that ANGAU was regarded with great respect by the population, and in general they were much more supportive of the allies than of the Japanese - the legendary 'fuzzy-wuzzy angels' - although there were some notable exceptions. Certainly we found them very friendly indeed. On one occasion a number of us paddled down the coast in a large canoe and found when returning that the weather had turned rather nasty. Whilst we were struggling with the very choppy sea we saw some natives calling to us from the shore and soon afterwards some of them paddled out to us and took over the navigation of the canoe. They got us back safely and much more quickly than we would have been able to without them.

A less friendly incident occurred one day when a large pig strolled through the camp. An enterprising airman got out his 303 and shot it dead. The cook was very pleased to have such a large fresh food addition to his larder, and very quickly reduced the corpse to a nice collection of joints and steaks. However, just after he had finished doing this a native turned up claiming it was his pig, and that he should be compensated. It seemed that he had a substantial case, and we had to find an appropriate currency to meet his demand. Fortunately we could do this, and he was satisfied.

The medical orderly, a corporal, was a very talented and mature person, and I used to rely on him a lot to get things done. Having only three low-ranking NCOs meant I was very dependent on them to keep the station running. This one was paramount. In addition to his medical duties, which were considerable in tropical conditions, he organised a series of concerts. The talent that emerged was outstanding. The scripts and the acting by the airmen were both highly professional,

and would provide a good hour or more entertainment at a time. Most of the material was pretty earthy but it was very witty with unexpected and beautifully timed punch lines. There was an echo of the slightly crazy at times in the strain of *Hellzapoppin*, Abbott and Costello and other movies of the era.

One airman had aroused my wrath for something, and as punishment I ordered him to pick up all the empty tins around the camp site. This was not only a beautifying but also a health move, because empty tins collected water in which mosquitoes bred. The man did much better than I expected, finishing up with a large garbage tin filled with tins, and after that was always known as 'Jam-tin Joe'. He took it all in good part, and was strong member of the corporal's concert party. I remember one show in which he would appear from time to time walking across the stage leading a coconut on a leash, speaking to it in endearing terms.

These concerts were not only appreciated by the airmen, the army platoon members and the spotters, but the natives would also roll up. So it was decided to build a concert hall, and this was done by the natives using their standard materials of green timber and coconut and sago palm fronds. It had a very substantial stage together with seating, and eventually was written up in the Radar Wing newsletter.

In May we had a visit by the OC of Radar Wing. He seemed impressed with the way the station was now running, and was intrigued by the concert hall. As he was leaving he told me I was doing a very good job. I knew he had a reputation for commandeering good personnel and transferring them to headquarters, and I managed to make use of this to solve a problem we had. After months with only three corporals as my NCOs we were finally sent a sergeant guard, who turned out to be a real bastard. So when the OC asked me about the men and particularly about the sergeant I praised him to the skies. Sure enough, not long after he returned to Moresby, the sergeant was posted to Radar Wing and, as I expected, soon became thoroughly disliked there.

At the end of May I was posted to Radar Wing and shortly after to 15RS. My replacement, whom I had met before, let drop in conversation that my posting had been terminated because of the problems with the station's operational record - a charge that I thought grossly unfair. However this apparent blot on my record did not delay my promotion to Flight Lieutenant, which came through not long after and on schedule. ■

DO YOU REMEMBER . . . ?

Les Bell

This is another modified extract from Significant Contributions to RAAF Ground Radar During WWII by Ed Simmonds (2004, Privately circulated).

Lesley William Gordon Bell was born on a station property in Herberton, Qld. Most of his school holidays were spent on stations where he learned bushcraft and to shoot. He picked up some aboriginal words and developed an understanding of the differences in culture.

He chose to be a marine engineer in the days of steam and took correspondence courses in electrical technology and refrigeration while at sea where he also spent a lot of time in the wireless room and learning radio theory.

Then he moved to New Guinea where he established saw mills, traded with villagers on the southern coast, worked with an engineering company in Rabaul and electrified an island using a diesel alternator. Having set up an engineering works in Kavieng, New Ireland, he then traded throughout the region in trochus shell and bêche-de-mer. Just to keep himself fully employed he used his weekends to establish a one-square-mile coconut plantation.

All of his experience, his local knowledge of reefs etc and his understanding of native behaviour, was invaluable during the war when the campaign moved into his 'backyard'. Les was a very brave man and if he had a fault it may have been his disregard for himself and for other human beings - he had been known to have referred to our airmen as 'white boongs'.

In September 1941 at the age of 37, Les enlisted as a direct entry radar mechanic. He worked on several of the mainland stations including Shepherd's Hill (the first RAAF radar station) and Wedge Island before being involved, as a sergeant, in the establishment of 37RS at Milne Bay, where his local knowledge was first used effectively.

Les Bell was commissioned in June 1943. As an officer, most of his work was within 41 Radar Wing, commanded by S/Ldr Bert Israel, for whom he was a 'Mr Fixit', tackling the more difficult problems arising from managing such an enterprise in the Papua-New Guinea region. On several occasions he was appointed to command radar units in the area for short periods in circumstances involving difficulty or crisis.

For his work in installation and early operation of 335RS at Pilelo Island, New

Britain, he was awarded the MBE. With unrelenting Japanese bombing and strafing over a period of five months including 60 attacks in the first three weeks as well as sneak night raids using rubber boats and phone lines being cut frequently, the citation the citation concluded that "it was mainly due to F/O Bell's outstanding courage, resourcefulness and leadership that the morale of the personnel was maintained at a high level".

With regard to the landing at Pilelo Island, Les had told the Americans that they were landing at the wrong location and that they would suffer casualties, which they did.

His most unfortunate incident was on 340RS at Bat Island where he took over from the first CO and became himself one of the victims of scrub typhus. The ironic part of his misfortune was that he had earlier tried to alert the authorities and had recommended that no station be sent to Bat Island. Two men from 340RS died of the disease as well as several other people who were located on the rat-infested island.

It has been suggested that he should have received more promotion because of his knowledge and understanding of the vagaries of the Pacific area. However, he was too forthright in his attitude, clashing with the RAAF bureaucracy on matters about which he was uniquely qualified to advise.

After the war he went back up north, resuming and expanding his prewar activities and finally retired to Airlie Beach in Queensland, where he was active in the Scout movement and other local activities.

In later years he used to regularly talk to old radar mates on an amateur radio network. He took part in reunions at Canberra (1988), Bendigo (1992), Nelson Bay (1995), Wagga Wagga (1997) and Maroochydore (1999). His wife, Bertha, came with him to Canberra and Bendigo, but died in about 1994; they had no children. At Nelson Bay, in his ninety second year, Les joined the demanding trek to the summit of Tomaree Point to inspect the site of 20RS and achieved it with less distress than many who were twenty years and more his junior. Already a legend to those who served with him in the PNG region, he made a large number of new friends and admirers at these reunions.

Les remained mentally and physically active almost to the end. He died on 1 December 2000, just before his 96th birthday. ■

Radar Inventiveness

Looking through my notes I found a cryptic notation reading: "Arthur Fields - telemetering and reflectors." It took me some time to recall the details:

W/O Arthur Fields, a senior radar mechanic, was asked to telemeter the heart beats of fighter pilots back to base so that medicos could monitor the depth of their reaction when in action. He successfully developed a system to give the medicos the information they needed.

W/O Field also developed suitable reflectors so that aircrew who had bailed out could be located while floating around in their rubber dinghies waiting to be rescued.

These unusual activities apparently took place in late 1943 or early 1944.

Ed Simmonds ■

S.S. Wanaka

This ship has 'radar' connections, as many radar stations of the WWII era were carried by it, all or part of the way to their final destinations.

In late January 1943, the *Wanaka* was loaded at Glebe with equipment and some personnel of 311, 312, and 313 RDF stations, picking up the remaining airmen at Townsville before offloading them at Thursday and Horn Islands. During the trip up the east coast it had encountered some cyclone type weather, shipping some salt water into the hold which contained the radar transmitters. Sometime later in 1943, the *Wanaka* ran into a full-blown cyclone and ended up on the Great Barrier Reef in the general vicinity of Cairns.

During this time, I had been on Mornington Island in the Gulf of Carpentaria, then home on about 12 days leave and back to 42 Radar Wing, Townsville towards the middle of February 1944, awaiting my next posting. A few days later the public address called six or seven names (including mine) with instructions to pack a few essentials in our duffel bags and report immediately to Headquarters. We were flown to Cairns in a DC3 and, next morning, transported to Cairns docks where we were confronted by the S.S. *Wanaka* with a 15 to 20° list. She had been towed in from the Reef, and our task, along with five or six other 'work teams', was to clear out as much of the debris as possible and reduce the 'list' so that she could be towed elsewhere for refitting. A Squadron Leader salvage expert was in charge of the work, with fire trucks from Cairns Fire Brigade at his disposal providing hoses and powerful pumps.

We worked from early morning to late evening, shoveling, hosing and dismantling, but each evening we were called on deck where the S/L opened a 9-gallon keg from the Cairns brewery for the troops.

Much the worst part of the job was when we had to clean out the refrigerators which had housed meat, butter, cheese, etc. Several months on the reef had not done these much good, so we had to work in gas masks, and even then could only stay for short periods before seeking some salt air on the upper deck.

One of our group was from Cairns, and was permitted to go home most nights. His household benefited from a variety of electric fans, crockery and cutlery, etc. I used several enamelled plates branded USSC (Union Steam Ship Company) in my kitchen until well into the 1960's.

After five or six days the S/L declared a finish to the job, and signed local leave passes for three days, after which we had to report to Cairns airport for transport back to Townsville and 42 RW. Our group, having worked together on the ship, decided to stay together and boarded the train to Kuranda and the Barron Falls and Gorge - a most enjoyable interlude, climbing from top to bottom of the Falls, swimming in the Paradise Gardens and having an occasional beer when it was available. Alan Weeks and Eric Shelley are the only names which I can remember, but perhaps there are others still alive who were part of the exercise.

The end of this non-radar attachment was a most beautiful flight from Cairns to Townsville near sunset firstly over the canefields along the Johnstone River and then out over the islands and cays of the Barrier Reef.

Eric Unthank ■

AN EXPLOSIVE CLEAN-UP

I was serving as a radar mechanic on 33 Radar at Busselton WA in 1943/44. The equipment was an English-made COL Mk V, and consisted of a transmitter using VT90s in the signal generation side running on around 25,000 volts, a sophisticated modulator unit, a blower motor and power supplies, and there was also a large cabinet which housed various contactors for controlling the aerial rotation.

This was all housed in a hut together with the work bench and spare parts, The receiver was housed in the area approximately 8 feet square beneath the aerial and rotator mechanism, from where we had a direct phone link to Fighter Sector.

The standard procedure for maintenance each week included cleaning the air filter

on the transmitter by dowsing it in petrol. This had been done on many occasions quite satisfactorily, but on the day in question, another problem became apparent and it was some time before we were ready to go back on air. When the time came to start up, the handle at the end of the transmitter was pulled to put it on air. There was the most tremendous explosion!

I don't remember much about the next few minutes because I was hit on the head and shoulders by the cast door from the modulator. Every panel was blown off and buckled. It was a disaster and it was thought that the transmitter was a write-off.

However the CO was called and he and the mechanics worked on it for hours. They found that, remarkably, the only internal damage was one VT90. The main problem was that the cabinet had to be sealed for the flow of air from the blower motor. Not only were the panels buckled and the heads of the retaining screws blown off, but they were of heavy gauge metal. Anyway they hammered them out as best they could, and stuffed the gaps with rags. The transmitter looked a sorry sight but it actually worked until new panels were supplied some weeks later.

As a result of this episode all stations were instructed not to use petrol for cleaning equipment.

John Sheard ■

BOOK REVIEW

During the last fifteen to twenty years, there has been a growing interest in the histories of individual ground radar stations as people have become aware of their significance in the war effort in the South-West Pacific Area and of the fact that irreplaceable first-hand testimony on them is fast disappearing. In that time, attempts have been made to compile the wartime histories of about a third of the 140 or so radar stations that became operational during WWII, some at least of which have been very successful. The work done in this regard by Morrie Fenton is especially important, as he has edited the stories of some 24 units, all of them located around the coast of Australia, while another dozen or so people have each recorded the activities of one or more units.

Two approaches have been taken in this work. Morrie and several others have sought and collected the written memories of as many people as they could find who had served on the unit concerned, with photographs where possible, and edited

them, with explanatory comments where needed to make a coherent narrative. Some others have chosen to build the stories around their own personal memories (and, in some of the more successful cases, their diaries from the period concerned). Given careful editorial work, the former approach seems generally to have generated more comprehensive and reliable histories, though two or three of the most successful fall into the latter category. In some of the others, faulty memories and inventive interpolations have reduced their value as historical documents.

Radar Returns has received a review copy of *Just an Aussie - with 152 Radar Unit in WW2* by Alan Whitham from the publishers, Australian Military History Publications. This is Alan's story of his wartime experiences when, as a relatively young radar operator, he was posted first to 54RS at Collaroy then later to join the recently formed 152RS which was about to move up to Tadj in PNG, with a six-week stopover in Finchhafen while the Americans secured the perimeter at Aitape. 152RS was one of a number of truck-mounted British-made COL Mk V units set up for use as mobile GCI units and deployed in Australia and New Guinea. No separate history of 152 has previously appeared, though there are references to its part in the Aitape operation in Ed Simmonds' *Echoes Over the Pacific* (pp 223-4) and in *The Mobile GCIs of RAAF Radar* edited by Morrie Fenton (p 19). A comprehensive account of the operations of 54RS and other radar units at Collaroy is given in *Who Were They?* by the late Ted Dellit.

Alan Whitham has produced a detailed, colourful and very personal account of his wartime experiences, with emphasis on their part in shaping his future career as an Anglican minister. However, there are some discrepancies between his account and the picture that emerges from comments by other members of the unit which are quoted in the above-mentioned works by Simmonds and Fenton. The publisher's blurb comments that he has written of "A very interesting life", and this certainly seems to be the case. Unfortunately, what he has written does not contribute much to the history of radar operations in WWII.

Just an Aussie is available from War Book Shop, 13 Veronica Place, Loftus, NSW 2232 (phone 02 9542 6771), price \$40 (postage free in Australia).

Warren Mann ■

STATE ASSOCIATIONS

VICTORIAN RAAF RADAR ASSOCIATION

The Association was formed in February 1951 with its main objectives being to provide a focal point for Radar Veterans at the Anzac Day March, and to organise annual reunions.

Unfortunately, our Sec/Treasurer of 53 years, Len Ralph, has not been in good health since September 2007 and is now recovering from major surgery and post-operative treatment. Len has advised that he will be unable to continue as our Secretary/Treasurer. Hopefully one or more of our younger members will volunteer to fill this and other vacancies. The passing years have taken toll of membership with numbers falling from 450 to 120 at last count. It is clear that we will depend on our younger members to take over the administration within the next two or three years.

RMIT has advised that it is proposing to establish an RAAF McIntosh Memorial Medal to be presented to the instructor judged to be the most effective each year. The first presentation will probably be made in April or May this year.

Ralph McIntosh was well known to the many people who took mechanic's courses at RMIT in WWII. The university hopes that a contingent of former wireless and radar mechanics will be present at the first presentation. If anyone knows whether Ralph had family who might survive, please let me know (03 5476 2288)

These and related matters will be discussed at the Anzac Reunion on 24 April 2008, to be held at the Rosstown Hotel in Carnegie as in recent years. The Radar Banner will continue to be the marshalling point for the Anzac Day March. Further information will be contained in the April Newsletter

Alex Culvenor, President ■

QUEENSLAND RAAF RADAR ASSOCIATION

On December 4 2007 the Association held its annual Christmas dinner. It was, however, to be the last such event.

Twenty-five members attended, including our two most senior members, Norm Smith and Alan Hobson, both aged 92 and both living outside Brisbane. It is always great to see them and they enjoyed the time with old friends; we thank their families for providing transport for them

Sadly, since then, Norm, after a short illness, passed away on 23 January. He was very well known and respected by both the

radar veteran and his local communities, and will be sadly missed.

During the dinner a presentation was made to Noel and Monica Lynam in appreciation of many years of holding office, and generally, being the backbone of the Association. Members and past members supported the presentation wonderfully.

At the monthly meeting held on 17 January nominations were called for members willing to take on Executive duties. There were none forthcoming so the Queensland RAAF Radar Association has ceased to exist. The executive down the years included: Ray Burton (dec'd), Ross Smith (dec'd), John Davey (dec'd), Noel Lynam, Arch Trail (dec'd), David Ross, Les Anderson (dec'd), Roy Payne (dec'd), Col Fitch (dec'd), Pete Smith (dec'd), Bruce Aldrich (dec'd), Dick Ellis, Bill Brown, Jack Coomer and Monica Lynam.

It was decided to keep alive the strong friendships that have formed over the years by meeting socially for lunch at the Irish Club, on the 3rd Thursday in each month, at 11am - as was usual for the Association meetings. Monica Lynam has volunteered to be the coordinator.

Bill Brown ■

NSW RADAR BRANCH

The Radar Branch held its annual Christmas Luncheon at The Landings, Turramurra on 6 December 2007. Over 60 members and guests enjoyed fine food and wine plus the company of serving RAAF members. Unique pre-dinner entertainment of a WWII phonograph and 78rpm records was provided by our treasurer Stan Burge which perfectly set the mood for the lunch. Special guests included AVM (Retd) Russ and Patricia Law, AVM (Retd) Bob and Barbara Treloar, A/Cdr Tim Owen, AFHQ Canberra and G/Capt Mike Walkington, OC GTESPO, RAAF Williamstown. Mike gave an enthralling presentation on the engineering challenges in modern RAAF radars. One topic was the installation of a new radar on Bathurst Island. Mike had the pleasure of meeting and exchanging notes with our Vice-President, Cec Blumenthal, who was posted to No 38RS in 1941 and installed the original radar there.

The Surveillance and Response Group from RAAF Williamstown was represented by S/Ldr Stuart (Clarrie) Briese, (HQSRRG), F/Lt Sean Gell, (XO SACTU) and S/Ldr Scott Redman, (HQ41WG). Clarrie Briese responded to AVM Treloar's address on behalf of his Commander, A/Cdr Warren Ludwig, while Sean Gell

and Scott Redman provided a great presentation on their recent experiences in Afghanistan. The presentations by Mike, Scott, Clarrie and Sean were a highlight of the luncheon and greatly appreciated by all. Our thanks once again to serving RAAF members for their valued support.

A main aim of the Radar Branch is to increase membership so that all those connected with RAAF Radar can become part of the network and keep in contact with comrades. Our website at raafradar.org.au will, we hope, help the Branch reach out to potential members. On our site, you will find information on the Branch and its varied activities. Since its inception, the Radar Branch has been served by many wonderful people who have given much time and effort to fostering the spirit of discovery and camaraderie that had its beginnings with the advent of Radar in World War II, matured post-WWII, and endures in the RAAF today. We welcome members from all areas of radar technology.

The Radar Branch Annual General Meeting will be held on Tuesday, 18 March 2008 at 10.30am at the RAAF Association Headquarters, Defence Plaza, Level 23, 270 Pitt Street, Sydney 2000 (Phone 02 9377 3485). Please contact the Secretary (details above) or e-mail to contact@raafradar.org.au

Terry Delahunty, President ■

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

The RAAF Signals and Radar Association of SA will hold its annual luncheon on Thursday, 17 April (12.00 noon for 12.30) at the Marion Hotel, Marion Road, Mitchell Park (Bus M44, stop 24) - bring your Senior's Card.

If you intend to come, please notify me (08 8271 5401) or Asst Secretary, Ron Coat (08 8296 6681) before 14 April.

Ray Deane, Secretary ■

Wedge Island Reunion

The 20th reunion of 7 Radar Station will be held at the Marion Hotel, Mitchell Park, SA on Saturday, 12 April from 11am to 3pm. There will be a few small displays of radar stations and of Wedge Island, but the principal presentation will be a short illustrated talk on Truscott air base and 154RS which was its principal radar.

Interested radar folk and friends can attend by buying a pub lunch and advising Morrie Fenton on 08 8443 8717 that they wish to attend.

Morrie Fenton ■

POST-WWII RADAR RETURNS

EDITORIAL

This is the fourth issue in which we have included a section devoted to news and comment on post-WWII radar operations and people. Although some useful and interesting material has come forward, there has not been nearly as much of it as I had hoped, and each issue is something of a challenge to fill two pages with it. Indeed, it seemed this time that I would have to confine PWRR to one page until, at the very last minute, Barry Morris' interesting sidelight on Malaya in 1964 came, out of the blue.

Post-WWII veterans have often commented that they knew nothing about the extensive RAAF radar operations which followed the decision on 7 November 1941 that the Air Force should be responsible for early warning. Similarly, most of us who served in wartime RAAF radar have little if any idea of how the radar concept developed after war. What part did radar play, if any, in Korea? Vietnam? Malaya? Iraq (either time)? Has radar had a role in any of the lesser-known military activities of the last sixty years or so? Are there no people out there whose memories would cast light on this darkness? And what about current and future developments in RAAF radar?

Finally, I should be delighted to hear from someone who has an urge to take editorial responsibility for the Post-WWII section of Radar Returns!

Warren Mann

THE NIGHT I TOOK A PRISONER

Barry Morris

I was a RAD TECH G and had been at 1CARU Brookvale since 1961 when I was posted to 114MCRU, then at Butterworth, Malaya, on 21 February 1963. On arrival in Malaya I was assigned to the AN/MPS-7 Surveillance Radar. In 1963, the preoccupation of the unit appeared to be improving proficiency at volley ball; the Techs vs the Plotters were important events.

However, in 1964 a sense of urgency became apparent. Unidentified aircraft over the Malacca Straits began to appear on the radar screens. Medan was the nearest Indonesian air base.

The RAF presence increased progressively and we observed the arrival of V-bombers - Victors, Valiants and Vulcans. Security around these aircraft was intense. A later arrival was the Gloster Javelin Interceptor which came under the control of 114MCRU as the night-fighter.

114MCRU went onto 24 hours per day, 7 days per week operation. The word around the traps was that "things are getting serious". I do not recall the troops ever being briefed as to the reason for the escalation of the warlike activities.

However, discrete questions to a friendly controller on the midnight-to-dawn shift gave some clues eg. "What is that aircraft flying Combat Air Patrol (CAP) up and down the Malacca Straits"? Answer: "a Vulcan".

For security reasons the back gate was closed, so entry and exit via the local kampong ceased. Sandbags arrived and sensitive facilities such as the OPS shelter, the MPS-7 shelter and the diesel generators were given protection.

How far can eyebrows be raised?

An Oerlikon anti-aircraft gun was installed in our compound and the Orderly Room clerk was nominated to operate it. An Australian Army light anti-aircraft battery of three guns was set up at the our end of the Japanese strip.

RAF Controllers and Plotters were seconded to the unit to bolster the numbers and we even had a RAF Tech. Sgt. take up duties in the MPS-7 shelter and he really knew what he was about. RAF regiment personnel, led by an officer arrived to guard the unit perimeter.

Things looked very serious indeed when the local Indian and Chinese traders went around the married quarters demanding that all outstanding accounts be paid up immediately. Why was this? There was a rumour amongst the locals that all married women and children might be evacuated because of impending hostilities.

I was on the 4pm to 8am shift. On arrival at the Butterworth front gate security was very tight, passes were scrutinised as though we were the enemy arriving. As we drove through the base we were amazed to see that motor vehicles and aircraft were dispersed all over the place even the golf course was occupied. We must be at war!

On arrival at the unit, the usual practice for me was to go to the MPS-7 shelter and check on the serviceability of the equipment. Not on this occasion - the Techs had to report to Orderly Room.

We were informed that Intelligence reports indicated that 'saboteurs' were expected to attack 114MCRU tonight and that technicians would be armed to help repel them. I was issued with a rifle and a bucket of bullets. Again, I thought "Things are really serious." as I did not have to sign for the rifle or the bullets. I asked: "What

is this thing?" pointing to the rifle? I was told to learn quickly. We were informed that the three local employees, Malays, had been sent home to ensure their safety.

Back in the MPS-7 shelter I started to learn quickly. I had been issued with the Self Loading Rifle, SLR L1A1, two 20 round magazines and enough bullets to fill them.

Around 0200 hrs, I had the bright idea that if saboteurs were to arrive, I would not see them by staying in the shelter. So I moved outside with the rifle, magazine fitted and the spare magazine in my hip pocket.

About one hour later, it happened. I saw an Asian male move quickly and quietly from behind the equipment store, past the MPS-7 antenna and head towards me following the line of power and signal cables. He stopped still, looking directly at me; he had seen me. Was I cool calm and collected? No way! My hair stood on end. We had been told to challenge: "Halt, who goes there. Advance one step and be recognised". Not for me, I just loaded a round and aimed from the hip. The noise was amazing, the effect dramatic.

His arms shot up and he said "Suh suh don't shoot, suh suh don't shoot." I recognised the accent - it was Gus, the Malay handyman. I asked "What are you doing here?" He said that there had been a riot in his kampong and he felt he would be safer back at the unit. One might ask how the RAF regiment allowed Gus back in? Perhaps they didn't even see him.

It took me a while to learn how to unload the round safely!

Many years later, a report appeared in the Herald Sun of 25 October 2004, to the effect that the Indonesian President Sukarno had introduced his policy of Confrontation, and with help from Russia, had sought to annex Malaysia, the Philippines, Sabah and Sarawak. The region was to be called Maphilindo.

I left Malaya on 3 April 1965. ■

NO 1 CARU

Rex Gillham's article W/Cdr. Alcock's obituary in the last issue of Radar Returns brought back a lot of memories for me. In the mid-fifties, Rex and I were posted together in Darwin and he was a regular visitor to the shack we called our married quarter. He must have written nice things about us because, when our first-born arrived, his grandmother (in England) sent

a lot of hand-knitted baby's clothing. At that time, Rex was a Telecommunications Operator (Telsop) and I was a Telecommunications Technician (Telstech).

My first posting to 1CARU was in 1962. By this time Rex had left the RAAF but was living in nearby Manly, where I caught up with him and his delightful wife and children. In his new career he helped me obtain some rare parts for my antique Mercedes Benz 150 D. However, soon afterwards I was promoted and moved on, losing touch with Rex.

I managed to get back to 1 CARU four years later, when the establishment for Telstech was raised to sergeant, and was there for two years. I enjoyed the work and fondly remember Junior Hillary who Rex mentions, also Max Sutherland who was the W/O plotter during both my stints.

I ran into Junior Hillary when doing an installation at Butterworth in the early 70's. He was a W/O in the Royal Malaysian Air Force, seconded from the RAAF with a big team of fighter controllers and plotters. Junior made my short stay at Butterworth very interesting. He was steeped in the history of the place and loved to talk about it. I still smile when I think of him wearing the colourful pillbox cap, which made him look like an American hotel busboy.

Because of the varied nature of the work in my mustering I only spent four of my twenty-three years in the RAAF in a radar unit, much to my regret. I found my time at 1CARU interesting and rewarding with more camaraderie than any other unit in my service experience.

On leaving the RAAF in 1974, I took up a scholarship to a Victorian State teachers' college, which I won when I did my HSC at night school, and became a teacher. While teaching I continued my studies, gaining a B.Ed. and a B.A. from LaTrobe University, and finished my career as principal of an international school at Vatukoula, Fiji, retiring in 1993.

I now am a full-time carer for my wife, Fay, who suffers from dementia.

Roy Smeaton ■

ACTIVITIES AT KANDAHAR

The article *114MCRU in Kandahar* prompted me to copy a page of the 2007 RAF Yearbook which gives details of 1ACC at Camp Bastion, the neighbouring Radar to 114 at Kandahar. Both units will be controlling the squadron of Harriers based at Kandahar which are rotated between the two RAF and two RN Squadrons. Incidentally, they are the only jet squadron based in Afghanistan as the runways there are not suitable for

conventional jet operations. All other allied jet aircraft are either based in neighbouring countries or on aircraft carriers in the Indian Ocean. The relevant excerpt is given below.

David Eves

“No 1 Air Control Centre deployed to Camp Bastion in November 2006 to provide enhanced Air Battle Management for UK operations in Helmand Province. The location of No 1 ACC now offers complete coverage over Helmand Province and Regional Command - South (RC-South), linked and integrated within a similar unit based at Kandahar. The deployment of this unit has already significantly enhanced C-130 Hercules and UK helicopter operations from Camp Bastion and within the southern area of Helmand Province.

“This deployable ground-based radar is based around the BAE systems Type 101 Radar with the latest communications and data link systems. No 1 ACC provides a Tactical Air Command and Control capability that enables 24-hour control, and air surveillance coverage, within the Joint Force Air Component Commander's Area of Responsibility. Utilising a mix of organic radars, Tactical Data Links and Command Information Systems, No 1 ACC can undertake ground-based duties, similar to those normally associated with Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft.

“The Helmland region continues to be a hostile place, both in terms of environment and enemy. The Taliban, and local poppy producers, have already stated their intent to ‘take down’ a helicopter and they may have the capability. Helmland is a powerbase for supporters of the deposed Taliban regime with well-established insurgent groups.

“Numerous RAF personnel are also working alongside their Army, Royal Marine, Navy and ISAF partners throughout Afghanistan as part of the NATO-led ISAF mission. This mission continues to assist the Government of Afghanistan and the International Community in maintaining security within Afghanistan. ISAF supports the Government of Afghanistan in expanding its authority to the rest of the country. It provides a safe and secure environment conducive to free and fair elections, the spread of the rule of law, and the reconstruction of the country. The RAF continues to be heavily committed to supporting UK and ISAF forces in achieving this.”

From RAF Yearbook 2007, page 14 ■

RAAF BALLARAT REUNION - 2008

My first RAAF Ballarat Reunion, WOW! It was very well organised by a committee consisting of Phillip & Doreen Marsh, Jim Owens, and Val Robinson.

On Wednesday 27 February, Anne and I made a hot drive to Ballarat via Albury and Echuca. We arrived wearing only T-shirt and shorts, and were hit by a freezing wind. Ahah! Ballarat! Nothing changes.

The registration and happy hour at the Ballarat RSL was terrific and we caught up with old mates Tony & Yvonne Rogers, and Arthur & Doris Ellem.

On Thursday morning we visited the Eureka Centre. At 1500 we attended a Mayoral Reception at the Ballarat Town Hall. Finger food was provided and we were welcomed by the Mayor and Councillors. Then Anne and I went for a drive around Lake Wendouree - bone dry, as was every other lake in the district. The drought is as bad as ever, and is not getting better.

On Friday morning, we visited the POW Memorial at the Botanic Gardens. Absolutely beautiful. 136 metres of engraved black marble, with the names of over 32,000 Australian POWs from all wars. I found my step-dad's name and that of an old mate, Ron Guthrie. We all then went by coach to the old RAAF Base, (now the Ballarat aerodrome), enjoyed a tour of the museum and then had lunch at the Ballarat Aero Club. After lunch, we went to the old gymnasium, which is now the Anson museum: lots of memorabilia and an Anson aircraft is being refurbished. A walk through the Botanical Gardens showed what awful damage was being done by the drought. Anne and I then visited the Gold Museum at Sovereign Hill - a ‘must see’ when visiting Ballarat. We then retired to our motel and slept through the Friday happy hour.

On Saturday, we attended an official memorial service at the POW Memorial, which was well attended by those at the reunion. Lunch was served at the Ballarat RSL, then home for senior's nap.

In the evening we went to Ballarat University for a formal Dinner, and an excellent night was enjoyed by all.

On Saturday, we checked out of our motel, and visited the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery to see the original Eureka Flag which is housed there. At midday we went back to the Ballarat University for a BBQ, and our last function before leaving the reunion. We then headed for Stawell and Horsham to visit old ex-RAAF friends.

Howard Campbell ■