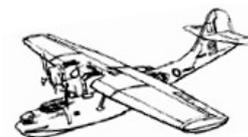


RADAR RETURNS

Signals & Echoes For RAAF Radar Veterans



EDITORIAL

After this issue (which once again will be a bit later than I had hoped – sorry, but I don't have the zip that I seem to remember once having had) there will be, if all goes according to plan, just one more, which should (but may not) come out in the middle of September this year. After that, unless there is someone else out there who is prepared to continue producing it, that will be the end of *Radar Returns* as we have known it for the last 14 years. I am sure that it will be missed, especially by some of our older readers – even I will miss it. But I must face the need to settle down and enjoy being an old man while I can. I shall, however, for as long as is needed or possible (whichever is the shorter) look after extending and maintaining the website.

In the Editorial to the previous issue of *Radar Returns*, I explained that I had been approached by the Australian War Memorial suggesting that they should archive our website as a 'site of relevance to Australian military history' within the PANDORA project set up by the National Library of Australia to facilitate its long-term access by historians and other interested parties throughout the world. Early in November last I signified my formal acceptance, having warned contributors to *RR* over the years, as best I could and without response, that, unless they specifically objected, their material was to be publicly archived. On 12 December 2008, in a communication from the AWM, I received the following:

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I am delighted to inform you that your site Radar Returns www.radarreturns.net.au is now publicly available in the PANDORA Archive and is scheduled to be re-archived on a half-yearly basis. The publication has been catalogued as one of a collection of sites selected to represent specific subject areas that we are interested in collecting and preserving for the future. The catalogue record for the site will be included in the Australian War Memorial's Research Centre online public access catalogue available at: <http://www.awm.gov.au/firstopac/> [our cataloguer has been sick so it's not there yet] but you can go directly to the archived version at the following address: <http://pandora.nla.gov.au/tep/92023>.

In the four months since that, there have been a number of communications from Australian and overseas researchers, revealing quite a widespread interest in the history of radar generally as well as in that of RAAF radar in Australia.

The website has ten sections. They are listed below with a summary of the material in each and brief notes on what is planned for the immediate future.

News & Notices. Information about events and developments of current if passing interest to RAAF radar veterans.

Newsletters. An archive of all issues of *Radar Returns* from 1995 to 2009, with a link to the most recent issue from the home page. After the final issue later this year, I hope to develop a comprehensive index of all 40 issues to assist future historical and genealogical researchers.

Faded Echoes. This is list of notices of deaths of radar and associated people by ascending date of death in much the same format as is used currently in *RR*; any tributes available are linked to the relevant notices. I hope to extend it to include all those whose passing has been noted in *Radar Returns* since 1995, and to continue it into the future.

WWII Radar Units. Based on work done by the founding Editor of *RR*, W/Cdr Peter Smith, before his untimely death in 2004, this is a list of all radar units, giving for each information on principal radar equipment used, dates of formation and disbandment, significant events in its history, the names of Commanding Officers and the dates of their appointment, and Notes on the Events, including where possible the geographic coordinates and elevation of the radar unit; similar

information is provided on such associated units as RIMUs and FCUs. A listing is also made of all the COs, giving the units they led with dates of taking over, and their promotions with dates.

WWII Technical Personnel. This section also owes much to the work of Pete Smith, who analysed the training reports given in the Personnel Occurrence Reports of No 1 Radio (later Radar) School (IRS), Richmond and later Maryborough Qld; a not-quite-complete set of these documents is held in the National Archive. Every unit was required to produce these documents as a daily report on personnel movements, leave, promotions, training, sickness, deaths, disciplinary action etc; generally they were hurriedly typed (not always accurately) and roneoed and displayed as notices within the unit; a copy was also sent to the appropriate Area H/Q where it was filed. The PORs for many units appear not to have survived, so it is fortunate that a reasonably good set of those from IRS is available. From it, Pete drew up lists of all who took technical courses for Officers (Ground and Air), Mechanics (Ground and Air), and Operators. From these lists, a full list of all the names (with initials only, not given names), in alphabetic order, and with the courses they took, has been prepared and posted to form this section. As errors come to attention they are corrected and the list becomes more satisfactory. Theoretically, it should form an almost complete list of all those involved technically in radar during WWII.

Archive - General. Here we have so far posted three of the books which have contributed most to RAAF radar history, *Radar Yarns*, *More Radar Yarns* and *Echoes Over the Pacific*, edited and written by Ed Simmonds and the late Norm Smith and, so far, several other documents that are important in the same context, including the report by W/Cdr A G Pither, the driving force in the RAAF behind the wartime development of radar.

Continued on page 9

The closing date for material for Volume 14, No 2 is 28 August 2009.

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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.

Richard Peter (Dick) Bradshaw

1/04/1917 - 24/06/2008
Qld; Cpl Rad Op (MO31)
138RS, 333RS, 13RS, 1Rad Sc

Donald Alan Brown

15/08/1923 - 15/10/2008
ACT; Cpl WMM
Editor, *We Were WMMS* (1992)

***Ernest Martin (Ernie) Bullock**

5/06/1921 - 2/08/2008
NSW; Engineer, NSW Gov't Railways
Design & construction of LW/AW aerial,
tower etc

Jack Stokes Coomer

16/05/1921 - 17/3/2009
Qld; Sgt (later S/Ldr) Rad Mech (M6G)
17RS, 18RS, 153RS, 41 Wg, 3RIMU

***Allan Robert Dennison**

27/03/1924 - 12/10/2008
NSW; Cpl Rad Mech (M28G)
59RS, 131RS, 150RS, 152RS

***Dr Leonard Ulysses Hibbard**

2/11/1916 - 21 12 2008
NSW; BSc BE PhD
CSIR Radiophysics, wartime design &
development of radar

Allen Lees Hobson

29/03/1915 - 29/10/2008
Qld; LAC Rad Op (MO14)
50RS, 210RS

***Kevin John Johnson**

30/03/1921 - 23/05/2008
NSW; F/O Rad Off (B1, M9G)
131RS, ?, 16RS, 309RS

***Stanley Lawrence Middleton**

10/10/1922 - 2/11/2008
Vic; Sgt Rad Mech (M25G)
50RS, 80RS, 306RS

Douglas Evan Quade

22/05/1914 - 21/09/2008
NSW; LAC Rad Op (MO87)

***David Alexander Clow Ross**

24/12/1921 - 3/02/2009
Qld; Cpl Rad Op (MO21)
25RS, 29RS, 49RS, 138RS, 164RS,
306RS, 114MFCU

Henry Irving (Hal) Sewell

3/06/1925 - 4/04/2008
NSW; LAC Rad Op (MO89)
18RS, 162RS

Jessie May Smith (Dennes)

3/05/1916 - 6/08/2008
NSW; ACW Rad Op (WO19)
135RS, 136RS, 208RS, 211RS

George Hartley Treadwell

5/07 1924 - 30/12/2008
Vic; LAC Rad Mech (M32G)
14RS, 101RS, 332RS

* Tribute follows

TRIBUTES**Allan Dennison**

Born in Brisbane, Allan was a child of the Great Depression. In 1938 his father died and Allan, aged 14, was obliged to look for work. He joined the City Mutual Life Assurance Society as a Junior Clerk.

In May 1942, aged 18, he joined the RAAF as a trainee radar mechanic.

After successfully completing a wireless course which included the study of electricity, magnetism, radio waves, etc (in peace-time a 3-year course) he took the two months ground radar mechanic's course at Richmond, NSW. Posted to 131RS, his training was on the English COL MK V GCI gear which was larger than the Australian LW/AW and LW/GCI units and less suitable for mobile warfare. In fact, only one of this type of radar was used outside Australia, at Milne Bay. Allan's service was all in Australia at COL radar stations 131, 154, 150 and 59.

It was his service with 154RS, Truscott, in 1944/45 of which Allan was most proud. Formed at Richmond in December 1943, the vehicles and equipment were shipped to Darwin in April 1944 while the personnel travelled by train to Darwin, thence on the Liberty ship SS *John Owen* to West Bay on the Anjo Peninsula in far north-west WA. Allan was delighted when 154RS was instrumental in a Dinah aircraft being shot down by Spitfires over Truscott in July 1944, the last Japanese aircraft to be shot down over Australia.

After the war, he returned to City Mutual, qualifying in accountancy in 1947 and completing the Insurance Institute Examinations in 1951. His obvious ability resulted in many promotions and senior appointments in Brisbane, Adelaide, Hobart, Perth and Sydney. He retired in August 1986 after 47 years service.

In 1988 Allan joined the NSW RAAF radar veteran's association and attended radar reunions at Bendigo, Nelson Bay, Wagga, Maroochydore and Perth. He was a keen photographer and acted as the official photographer at many of these functions. As he expressed it "I take pleasure in capturing such events for fellow members

which they'll find will become more precious to them and their families as time goes by."

In his later years Allan applied for a Gold Card and felt unjustly treated when it was refused. He argued that leaving Darwin on a ship loaded with bombs and ammunition was just as dangerous as trips by ship to Rottneest Island or Tasmania which had qualified some servicemen qualifying for a Gold Card. Other arguments were that the Japanese were very interested in the RAAF at Truscott, resulting in the loss of the Dinah mentioned above. Also his knowledge of the heavy British equipment led to him not being posted overseas and this did not help his cause. He was ably supported by the NSW Radar Branch in his submission but he never did receive a Gold Card.

Allan's private life was very happy. He married Marion, the love of his life, in 1949 and they shared 59 years of mutual devotion. At his funeral his children all spoke in glowing terms of their father, their happy family life and the fact that he was held in high esteem by everyone with whom he was associated.

Steve Hardisty 154 & lifelong friend

On behalf of all those who came to know and appreciate Allan for his tireless work in photographing a number of reunions, and for his thoughtful friendliness, I express to Marion and her family our deepest sympathy. He will be greatly missed by many people.

Warren Mann

Stan Middleton

Born in Warragul, Vic, Stan attended school at Bunyip from Jan 1927 to 1935, walking from his parent's dairy farm at Labertouche, and never missed a day. The farm provided the opportunity for hunting rabbits for pocket money and, like most farm boys then, Stan was a good shot. His first job was with the Victorian Railways and, at Auburn station, collecting tickets, he met his future wife, Marjory Harris.

Stan joined the RAAF in December 1941 and trained as a wireless mechanic in Course No 8 at Melbourne Technical College then as a radar mechanic on Course No 25G at Richmond NSW, graduating on 3 Jan 1942. His first operational posting was to No 306 Radar Station at Bulolo, PNG for a short period before moving to No 50 Radar Station at Dobodura at the end of March 1943. 50RS moved from Dobodura to Tsili Tsili on 16 August 1943 where the unit played an important role in the paratroop attack and capture of Nadzab in the Markham Valley.

TRIBUTES (Cont.)

As mentioned earlier Stan was an excellent marksman and took great care of his rifle. However, on one occasion, having just returned to his tent from the midnight shift at Tsilli Tsilli, he hastily prepared to attend a rifle inspection and forgot to take along the bolt - an essential item. During an inspection the bolt must be 'worked' so Stan went through the motions, He and the man next to him in line, Ray Loveday, could not hide their mirth and the inspecting officer noticed this. He said calmly, "Middleton and Loveday have just volunteered to dig a Bren gun pit". All station personnel were required to practice with the Bren guns; Stan never liked them because he was left-handed and the ejected hot, empty shells passed close to his nose.

No. 50RS moved to Amami in October 1943 and on to Tadj in May 1944, where it was disbanded in July 1944 and long-serving staff posted home on leave. Stan had had dengue and hepatitis, and, though fit to travel, he suffered an attack of malaria on the journey and on arriving home he spent several weeks in hospital.

Stan and Marj Harris were married in Nov 1944. After a short duty at a southern station, Stan, now a sergeant, was posted north in April 1945, this time to Melville Island. He was posted home in December and discharged on 27 Jan 1946.

After two years as a technician with the PMG, Stan joined Michaelis Hallenstein and managed their Fishing Tackle Dept for 3 years. Then he accepted a position with a wholesale leather merchant and when the firm closed down he acquired part of the business. He and Marj worked successfully as wholesale leather merchants, representing local and interstate tanneries catering mainly for the footwear trade.

Soon after they were married Stan and Marj set up house in Maurice St Hawthorn, and there raised two daughters, Helen and Judith. Stan's hobbies had been golf, fishing and the Hawthorn Football Club. However when he learned to fly aeroplanes in the 1960's that became his main hobby. He was a skilled aerobatic pilot and attended Air Shows in London and Paris and the International Aerobatic Championships in Kiev, Russia. He remained loyal to the Hawthorn Football Club and was very active in the Masonic Lodge and Rotary. Throughout his time at Collingwood, where the 'Midlea' leather business was located, he supported the Children's Protection Society and the Collingwood Children's Farm.

Stan attended many ex-WW11 Radar reunions and other functions, including Canberra, Bendigo, Nelson Bay, Darwin,

Adelaide and Geelong. He was one of the *ad hoc* group that formed the Victorian RAAF Radar Association in 1952.

Marj passed away in Feb 1996, soon after they had moved to a smaller home in Kew. Stan's health deteriorated slowly from late 2007 and he passed away on 2 Nov 2008. Until his last few days he loved to talk about flying and football. He is survived by daughters, Helen and Judith, 6 grandchildren and 4 great-grandchildren.

Thanks, mate, for 65 years of wonderful memories.

Alex Culvenor

David Ross

Born in Barcardine, central Qld, the eldest of six children, David grew up on the family sheep property 70 miles west of Longreach. His primary education was mostly by correspondence and, after two years as a boarder at Toowoomba Grammar School, the effects of drought on family finances forced him to leave school after his Junior Certificate in 1937.

David joined the State Tax Department in Brisbane and the following year he met Enid Bath when she also joined the Department. In 1939, both were transferred to the State Auditor's Department, by which time they were firm friends.

Prevented from joining up by manpower regulations, his opportunity came when the regulations were changed and David enlisted in the RAAF as a trainee radar operator in mid-1942. After completing course No. 21 at Richmond, NSW and postings to two Queensland units, he was sent to 29RS, Port Moresby and thence to 306 RS at Bulolo.

Some readers may recall Len Ralph's story in *RR* of March 2006 of three airmen from 306RS including David finding several ounces each of gold in the Bulolo Valley, PNG. David moulded his into a crucifix which he took home for Enid, to whom he was then engaged. Sixty-plus years later, some gold from the back of the crucifix was used to make a heart-shaped insert for the wedding ring of one of his granddaughters. David had forgotten how he had come by the gold, so he and the family were delighted when Len visited and was able to give them the details.

In August 1944, on leave after his spell in New Guinea, he married Enid at Gympie, Qld. Discharged in March 1946, David worked for his uncle on a sheep property near Walgett in NSW for a couple of years and then, after a period doing casual bookkeeping jobs, he found work in 1949 as bookkeeper to the local newspaper and radio at Longreach. Soon after, he

accepted a position in the town with Queensland Trustees and bought a house. In 1953, the branch was closed and David set up his own business. This prospered and David and Enid became active citizens of Longreach. David was a foundation member of the Rotary Club in the town.

In 1969, David and his brother Alec, with their wives, went into partnership to purchase the family sheep property and made it a success. In 1983, David and Enid decided to move to Beenleigh, selling their home and business, and after a period of part-time accounting practice, David retired to enjoy his family and his interests.

With their family of two daughters and two sons grown up, there were grandchildren, eight in all, and recently the first great-grandchild. His principal interest, quite a lucrative one, was horse racing, with other interests being current affairs, stamps, travel, Rotary, Legacy, etc. He particularly enjoyed participating in the activities of the RAAF Association Radar Branch, and marched each Anzac Day for as long as his health permitted. In August 2007, he and Enid moved into a nursing centre, where they shared a room.

David had a full life with a wealth of experiences. He loved, and was loved by, his family and he made many friends. He will be sadly missed by them all, and we extend to them our sincere sympathy.

Prepared with the help of David's family

Kevin Johnson

Born in Armidale, NSW, the son of a school teacher and later principal who was moved around schools in rural NSW, Kevin was the middle of five boys. He showed an aptitude for mathematics and won a scholarship to St Joseph's College, Hunters Hill, where he twice won the Liguori Medal for mathematics. Winning an exhibition to Sydney University, he began his studies in mechanical and electrical engineering. In his second year, he was recruited into the RAAF as a member of the first 'Bailey' course to train radiolocation officers. For some reason, perhaps illness, he did not complete that course and was remustered to take training as a radar mechanic at Richmond, NSW. Completing course No 9G, he was posted early in July 1942 as a radar mechanic to the newly formed 131 Radar Station, which moved from Kogarah to Ash Island in September and was finally set up there as an operational unit.

In mid-1944, after having served on 136RS, Alligator River, and 151RS, Merauke in Dutch NG, and having been promoted to sergeant, Kevin was accepted for officer training and was commissioned

TRIBUTES (Cont.)

in September. After a stint as Commanding Officer of 16RS at Gabo Island, he was posted as technical officer to 309RS at Marsden Park, NSW which was preparing to take part in the Borneo campaign. The unit arrived at Morotai in April, where Kevin took over command, and went on to take part in the successful assault on Tarakan. Late in 1945, he was posted back to Australia for discharge.

Kevin resumed his university course in 1946 and after graduating he worked with the Shell Company for a year before joining Clyde Engineering as assistant to the chief consulting engineer. He remained with Clyde for the rest of his working life, rising to be General Manager and CEO.

Kevin met Helen Therese McKay in Melbourne and they were married in 1956. They lived most of their married life in Longueville, Sydney. Kevin is survived by his wife and three daughters, Catherine, Sarah and Jane. To them and to his many friends we extend our sincere sympathy.

Prepared with input from Kevin's family

Don Thomas

Born 13 December 1917 at Caine, Wiltshire UK, Donald George Thomas was the eldest son of George and Emma and last survivor of their four children. The family migrated to Australia in the early 1920s and settled at Sylvan, later moving to Melbourne. In the early 1930s, the family moved to Canberra and for many years lived in Forrest. Don often referred to himself as a 'whitewashed Pom'.

After completing his education in electrical engineering, Don worked at the radio station, 2CA, the Power House and at Mount Stromlo Observatory before enlisting in the RAAF where he was commissioned and posted to Richmond, NSW to join five others in the second course for airborne radio location officers. On completing this, the course members were given further training in ground equipment and formed the first course in ground-based RDF equipment.

They were still in training when Japan struck at Pearl Harbor and entered the war. Don, the youngest member of the group, and one other, P/O Colin Abercrombie, were promptly posted to Singapore to assist the British defence of that outpost. Don found himself establishing a radar unit on the roof of the Changi Prison, but it quickly became obvious that the Japanese were about to overwhelm the island. He was able to destroy the equipment and escape in the confusion that followed the fall of the stronghold on 15 February 1942, making his way to Java. However, within a

fortnight, the Japanese had invaded Java, with the Dutch forces there surrendering on 8 March. Don was captured shortly after.

As a POW, Don was able to conceal the fact that he had knowledge of the then highly secret RDF equipment, but, as a big man, he attracted the brutality of the Japanese guards and sustained injuries to his legs that affected him for the rest of his life. He was held in several prison camps in Japan until released shortly after the Japanese surrender on 15 August 1945. Returning to Sydney in early October, he was hospitalised for a period then discharged on 2 January 1946. Three weeks later, in Sydney, he married Mavis Winifred John (Win) an RAAF nursing sister whom he had met at Richmond some three months before leaving for Singapore.

Don returned to his former position at Mount Stromlo Observatory and remained on the staff there until his retirement in early 1980. He and Win lived at Turner and at Mount Stromlo before moving to Lyons in 1965. They were proud parents of three daughters, Merran, Margaret and Janet and, later, grandparents of Merran's son, Iain. When Win died in November 1998, Don remained at Lyons until ill health forced him to move to a nursing home in 2005.

As a young man, Don was a keen swimmer, and from 1936 for almost 30 years he held a breast-stroke record at a major pool in Canberra. He was an active member of Masonic Lodges in Sydney, Melbourne and various country towns in NSW until Win's and his own ill health curtailed these activities. He was a long-standing member of St Andrew's choir and of Canberra Choral Society and took part in the recording of numerous services and recitals. Don was also a foundation member of the Rover Car Club.

Don remained interested in radar affairs. In April 1996, travelling with Ben Asman, he took part in the reunion at Batemans Bay to mark the unveiling of a commemorative plaque at the site of 17Rs, Burrewarra Point. Then, in the following year, with Win, he attended the Wagga reunion, thoroughly enjoying it and making many new friends. Unfortunately, Win's health declined shortly thereafter and she died in the following year; Don on his own was not able to take any further part.

Don was a colourful character with a prodigious memory and a great love of discussing the technicalities of radar and his memories of its early history. He will be missed. We extend our sincerest sympathy to his daughters and our thanks for providing much of the information upon which this tribute is based.

Warren Mann

Ernie Bullock

Known as Martin to his family and friends, Ernest Martin Bullock was widely known as Ernie among his workmates and RAAF friends. He was born, the youngest of four sons, to a farmer and his wife in western NSW. After taking his Leaving Certificate at Dubbo High School, and a year at Wolaroi College in Orange where he was Dux, Ernie studied electrical and mechanical engineering at Sydney University, graduating in 1941.

Early in 1942 Ernie was appointed a project manager for the NSWGR Defence Branch at Eveleigh, under the Chief Electrical Engineer, the late J G Worledge. In June, he was assigned to investigate the manufacture of an aerial and associated tower with the same performance as the British CHL array but weighing much less. He submitted three designs and worked closely with the RAAF on the one that was selected, improving it and preparing it for manufacture. The final design was considerably lighter and much easier to assemble and erect in the field, with matching and phasing now an easy task. Then the Railways, as sub-contractor, manufactured and delivered the first LW/AW aerial within 30 days of the acceptance of the final design. It was urgently needed equipment and was rushed into service. With the AW radar unit developed by CSIR Radiophysics Laboratory and the Worledge aerial, as it became known, the equipment was much lighter than anything in use overseas, and played a significant part in the defensive and offensive operations which eventually defeated the Japanese.

In March 1943, Ernie married Helen, whom he had met in Orange in 1937, and he stayed with the Railways until he retired, becoming Chief Electrical Engineer in 1974 and Chief Operations Manager in 1980. During his service he was responsible for a number of significant developments and was active nationally in railways electrification affairs.

On retirement, he returned to university and completed a Master of Engineering Science with a thesis on water purification systems. For many years, he and Helen had been active in church affairs, especially in providing support for overseas students, among whom they made many lifetime friends. Very much the family man, he was very proud of his daughter and two sons, his grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

A significant person in the history of RAAF radar, we salute Ernie Bullock and extend our sincere sympathy to Helen, his wife, and their extended family.

Prepared with help from Ernie's wife and their eldest son, Dr Ramon Bullock

TRIBUTES (Cont.)**Len Hibbard**

Sydney-born Dr Len Hibbard died late last year aged 92. He took his secondary education to Leaving Certificate at North Sydney Boys' High, excelling in maths and physics, and graduated BSc (1937) and BE (Mechanical and Electrical) (1939) from Sydney University.

He then lectured at the university and worked for the newly established CSIR Radiophysics Laboratory between 1939 and 1945 on radio and radar development. One of his first jobs was to modify the primitive radio equipment on the British freighter *Doric Star* in Sydney in the early days of WWII. The improvements were highly successful, so that, when the ship was confronted by the powerful German raider, the pocket battleship *Graf Spee*, in the South Atlantic a few weeks later, it was able to send a strong 'battleship attacking' signal before it was sunk. The signal alerted a RN squadron of two RN cruisers and the NZ light cruiser *Achilles* that was in the area. The ensuing battle on 13 December 1939, now known as the Battle of the River Plate, was Britain's first naval victory of the war. The *Graf Spee* was damaged and took refuge in the harbour of Uruguayan capital, Montevideo, at the mouth of the River Plate. When she emerged she was scuttled by her crew. Hibbard received a congratulatory telegram for his contribution.

Over the next four years or so, Len Hibbard was engaged under Dr Jack Piddington in the radar development work which played an important part in the history of RAAF radar. After the war he went to England to take a PhD at Birmingham under Sir Mark Oliphant. When Oliphant returned to Australia in 1951, Hibbard, by then married to another Australian, Joan Single, returned also and worked with him on the ANU homopolar generator, then the largest particle accelerator of its kind in the world. This was a massive project involving some formidable engineering problems.

In 1964, when that task was successfully concluded, he moved to CSIRO's National Standards Laboratory in Sydney where one of his tasks was to build Australia's atomic clock. He remained with CSIRO until he retired in 1981, after which he and Joan travelled and he became interested in computers and their development.

Joan died in 1994 and four years later, his only son, Paul, also died. Len is survived by two daughters and his son's partner, and by two grandsons.

Adapted from Sydney Morning Herald obituary by Harriet Veitch, 26 Dec 2008

THE ADMIRALTIES LANDING

Bill Freeman

My recollection of events that occurred during this landing is necessarily flawed with time. Also, incidents significant to me may not have impressed others who were there with me. The sequence and timing of events are difficult to establish accurately, so their time and place may be wrong but individual activities remain clear in my mind.

The exercise started for me with my agreeing, the day before its departure, to join the advance party for a proposed move of our Unit, 114MFCU. The prospect of a few weeks freedom from routine and discipline was the main influence at the time and no other electrician was asked. At this stage, I was not told our destination.

We took off from Kiriwina in a DC3 at about 9.00am on 28 Feb 1944 and landed at Dobadura about mid-day. After lunch we took off again for Finschhafen, arriving about mid-afternoon. At 8.00am next day, we boarded LST 202 and left Finschhafen just before midnight. The convoy, as I recall, comprised just two LSTs, with a few destroyers for escort. [*Records show there were actually six LSTs (each towing an LCM), escorted by destroyers and two minesweepers.*] During the daylight hours, we observed a number of fighter squadrons (P38s and P47s) but otherwise the trip was calm and relatively uneventful. The food was good and, as a bonus, there was a chilled water tap that was popular.

We were on deck for the entire trip and remained in an area near the stern of the vessel, together with an American signals unit to which we had been attached. It was here that we came to know a US Captain Humphries who was second-in-command of the unit and in charge for the trip to the Admiralties. We never met the commander (Major King), as he had gone ahead and was killed on the night before we arrived at Los Negros.

During the voyage, Captain Humphries advised his unit (and us) of what the imminent operation was all about and what could be expected on arrival at the beachhead. This was my first knowledge of the destination (Los Negros in the Admiralties) and of its location with a number of significant Japanese units being closer than friendly bases. We were told that, compensating for this, we could expect superior air and naval support.

We were advised that some 600 troops of the American 1st Cavalry had preceded us with the initial landing on 29 Feb [*a total of 1000 troops were involved*] and, though the observance of radio silence did not permit an accurate appreciation of the

current position, we could anticipate that the airstrip and a surrounding area of one and a half miles beachfront and one mile inland would be secure. It was expected that Major King would meet us and direct our deployment. Our unit was a component of the first reinforcement of the landing and the LSTs also were bringing forward an additional 200 combat troops, some heavy artillery (two 75mm howitzers and a radar-controlled 90mm anti-aircraft gun) and the American 40th Construction Battalion. [*A total of approximately 1500 ground combat troops and 428 Seabees were transported by this convoy. This reinforcement raised the 'assault' manpower to a total of about 2928. The opposing Japanese occupying force consisted of approximately 4450 troops*].

Specific advice concerning the Japanese, was that air raids, if any, would probably occur at night and we could expect to see mainly 'friendly' aircraft during the day. There was some concern about the danger from heavy artillery unless it had been fully suppressed by our bombing or naval guns. When I drew attention to our limited supply of .303-calibre rifle ammunition, Capt. Humphries said that when we ran out he would expect us to convert to the use of a .30 calibre "carbeen" by taking one from a dead American. By now, of course, I knew that this trip was not to be the pleasant break from routine I had expected and that the next few days could turn nasty. With a feeling of unreality, I resigned myself to the inevitable and set about learning how to operate a .30 calibre carbine.

Late in the morning of 2 March, we approached the south-east coast of Los Negros. It appeared on our port side as a typical tropical island, with large areas of coconut trees. Just above the trees we saw a couple of B17 bombers circling and dropping supplies by parachute. They then proceeded to strafe some adjacent targets (evidently only some 100 yards away from the drop site). I remember that their dropping accuracy was a bit astray, since some loads landed in the ocean. The scene was much like watching a newsreel and I recall feeling somewhat in the role of a detached observer. Some distance ahead on our starboard side a P38 crash-dived from a considerable height into the ocean followed slowly by a parachute, with no sign of any other aircraft nearby. It seemed as though this was the signal for us to join the action.

Our 'observer' role was at an end as we were ordered to go below and the decks were cleared of all except essential LST gun crews. We remained there until the

The Admiralties Landing (cont.)

vessel beached beside the airstrip in Hyane Harbour. It was somewhat unnerving in the gloomy environment, listening to the intensive fire of deck guns and not knowing what was going on. Shortly before hitting the beach, combat troops were called to assemble along the sides of the LST to access the pedestrian ramps. We went to the bottom of the vessel, where our equipment truck was located as we were expected to drive ashore.

We were one of the early units to drive down the ramp. As we left the LST, our truck passed through a narrow fringe of coconut trees and directly onto the airstrip, where the scene was quite confusing. There were explosions on the airstrip close to us and small arms fire seemed to be coming from all directions. *[This engagement was mainly a concentrated Japanese attack near the 'skidway' (a few hundred yards north of the airstrip), which drew sustained heavy fire from the American Cavalry, supported by the deck guns of the LSTs].* We were briefly in the crossfire. Our driver quickly decided that the situation was not good and did a smart U-turn and returned us to the beach area, adjacent to the LST, where we got off the truck and tried to shelter on the ground nearby, which was relatively flat with no convenient depressions. I landed on top of my rifle but quickly wriggled it out from underneath me in a futile attempt to get a little bit lower. The roar of small arms fire was continuous and I had no real idea of what was going on.

While we were lying on the beach (for what seemed like half an hour), it became evident that most of the fire was 'friendly'. The LST was playing a significant part with its multiple machine guns from the high deck. I was relieved to discover that a loud regular thumping noise was not Japanese heavy artillery but was the departure of mortar shells from a firing position about ten yards away. At this stage, the occupied area was unclear but it would reasonably have been described in hundreds of yards rather than miles. Roughly, the beach side of the airstrip was 'ours' and inland was 'theirs'. This was confirmed, immediately after our arrival, by a number of B25 aircraft carrying out a bombing and strafing run on the far side of the strip, directly in front of us. They passed from left to right and were so close that we could see every detail clearly.

Our uncertainty and lack of direction ended suddenly when F/Lt Gorringe appeared on the scene. The small arms fire in our vicinity had reduced in intensity and

it was evident that we could now stand up with reasonable safety. We were moved to an area near the most southern point of Hyane Harbour and this became our base for the next couple of weeks.

Our top priority was to prepare some shelter for the coming night. We scrounged a trenching tool from the Americans and discovered how hard the coral ground was. All we could to achieve before nightfall was a series of small hollows, each being big enough for one person lying down.

With the approach of darkness, on this first day ashore, Captain Humphries advised us on the present position. We were told that through the coming night, we should maintain our cover, shoot at anything that moved and "don't move yourself or you'll be shot". It was probably at this time that we heard about Major King. He had survived the initial landing but had been decapitated whilst resting in his jungle hammock that first night - a sobering thought as we approached our first night on the island.

During the night, small arms fire built up in intensity until its volume could only be described as a continuous roar. Although some of the shooting was obviously from our immediate area, I could not, at the time, see any evident targets and could only wonder what others were firing at. I was aware that I only had 50 rounds of 303 ammunition and considered that the best thing to do was hold fire until I was certain that an infiltrator was present. Under these circumstances, I 'sweated out' a long and uncomfortable night.

With the eventual coming of daylight, the firing slowly subsided and I became aware that the mobile kitchen on the beach was becoming a centre of activity, as people gradually emerged from their shelters. I was soon sampling an unusual breakfast of flapjacks and molasses followed by rather strong stewed tea. It was some relief to have survived thus far and I found myself morbidly wondering if I would last for the next ten days until my twenty-first birthday.

Four of us now combined our efforts to dig a better shelter. We selected a location some 100 yards closer to the beach, on the judgment that the ground would be softer and the shelter would be just a little bit further from the front line. The hole that we made was big enough for us to sit up, with feet together (two facing two) and we also partially covered it with coconut logs.

During the morning, we saw some members of the 1st Cavalry patrolling the area between the beach and the established front perimeter, with the evident intention

of flushing out any Japanese who had infiltrated during the night. Confidence that the area was now clear was soon lost, when a GI from our Signals Unit decided to explore a foxhole about 100 yards from our position. He had to shoot a live and aggressive Jap, who had been missed by the Cavalry patrol.

It was shortly after this incident that we were using binoculars (souvenired from the Jap foxhole) to study a destroyer that was patrolling off the coast. We noticed a twin-engine bomber flying above and presumed it was ours. We were proved wrong when the aircraft dropped a flare over the destroyer, then dived to bomb and strafe the beachhead before departing. I don't think anyone was hurt on this occasion, but the radar control of the 90mm anti-aircraft gun was permanently disabled.

During the day, we noted that some targets seemed to be receiving special bombing and strafing attention from our aircraft. In particular, the opposite harbour shore was singled out for a concentrated attack from a squadron of A20s (Bostons) and some B17s gave special attention to the road that led north from the airstrip.

As the second night approached, Captain Humphries gathered the Unit together for a further briefing. This time, he specifically changed our instructions for shooting. Instead of "firing at anything that moved", we were to restrain this action until we were essentially in near physical contact. He indicated that this was because the front-line cavalymen had not liked the 'friendly' fire of the previous night.

Concern, at the time, was that the coming darkness might provide the opportunity for a Japanese counterattack from the opposite side of the harbour. A concentration of enemy troops and barges had, during the day, been targeted by the Boston attack but there was no certainty that the threat had been eliminated. Our planned defence relied on use of the 75mm howitzers and the 90mm anti-aircraft gun to engage any barges attempting to cross the harbour and concentrated rifle fire was to commence if they reached our beach. Should it become evident that we were to be overrun, priority was to be given to destroying radio equipment, before seeking to escape somewhere inland, in the hope of early relief. At this stage, our 'foothold' on the island could probably not be classified as completely secure and I had some misgivings about the wisdom of moving our shelter so close to the beach.

As it finally transpired, the action on the night was not a lot different to the previous one. Small arms fire was still intense and

The Admiralties Landing (cont.)

daylight was eagerly awaited. Although the waterfront assault did not eventuate, the anticipation was a strain and the effect of some 48 hours with little sleep was not good. [For a few hours on this night of 3-4 March, the most savage action of the entire campaign was experienced. American losses, during this short period (61 killed and 244 wounded), were near 16% of the total casualties for the 2½ months engagement and comprised 10% of the entire force landed at this stage. There were probably more than 500 men (mainly Japanese) killed within one mile radius of our location and this reversal caused the Japanese to assume a purely defensive role for the rest of the campaign. The previous night's action, which to us had seemed to be of equivalent intensity, was recorded as "mere harassment".]

George Odgers, in *Air War Against Japan 1943-1945* has recorded the action on the beachhead during our second night ashore in the following way: "A supreme effort was made by the enemy on the night of 3-4 March, when they attacked in a series of waves, but were repulsed. To the astonishment of the American soldiers, one of the enemy attacks was preceded by the playing of a gramophone record *Deep in the Heart of Texas!*". This action was most severe in an area some 200 yards or so to our right and I didn't hear the music. The beachhead perimeter was breached to some extent and the American 40th Construction Battalion provided back-up in close engagement with the infiltrators. [This involvement of 'service' troops resulted in Seabee casualties of 9 killed and 38 wounded (11%, of their total strength)]. We were fortunate that the perimeter adjacent to us remained relatively secure and no hand-to-hand combat was required.

During the following morning, I went with three or four like-minded individuals on a boat ride on the bay. One of us had acquired a quantity of Japanese hand grenades and we intended to try and stun some fish for a change in diet. The boat (abandoned on the beach) was about 20ft long – open, clinker-built hull - fitted with a small inboard motor in the centre. We soon had the motor running and moved out into the centre of the bay. Unfortunately, no one seemed to know how to activate the grenades, so our fishing enterprise was abandoned and we went over the side for a swim instead. Also, during this boat ride, I had the opportunity to try out an American hand gun. It was a 45 calibre automatic and I found it quite easy to handle (using floating coconuts as targets). From an electrician's viewpoint, this type of

weapon would have been far more sensible than the 303 calibre rifles that we carried. Our duties, which included climbing coconut trees and manhandling 44-gallon drums of fuel (at relatively isolated power-plant installations), made it impossible to keep a rifle on hand at all times.

These early days of re-occupation, and some free time, presented us with a good opportunity to explore the beachhead and near vicinity. Our advice, at the time, was that, during daylight hours, "as long as you maintain six or more people in a group, you are reasonably safe". Thinking back, I now have difficulty in comprehending our motivation for undertaking some undoubtedly risky excursions. There was no real plan or purpose behind our wanderings except for some thoughts of acquiring souvenirs and satisfying the type of morbid curiosity that attracts a crowd to an accident scene. For me, there was certainly an element of peer pressure that caused me to conceal any apprehension of danger and go along with the others. Another factor of influence was that we Aussies were numerically insignificant in the situation and consequently sought to make our presence more obvious by moving around the area.

Our first venture took us to a foxhole near the perimeter and I can still recall the corporal plunging into this hole in the ground in a very 'gung-ho' manner, with a grenade in one hand and tommy gun in the other. He was quickly followed by other members of the party until, within seconds, I was (for all practical purposes) alone in the jungle. Although I was conscious of being isolated and possibly exposed, the need to maintain a watch kept me on the surface nervous and acutely alert. There were no noises from down below and the lush undergrowth that had developed between the coconut trees seemed to be uncomfortably close, in all directions. I was certainly relieved when, some minutes later, my mates re-emerged from the hole, waving an assortment of minor souvenirs.

On the 5th March, a group of us ventured along the road, heading north from the airstrip approaching the area that had received special bombing attention from B17's on the day after our arrival. The stretch of road that we followed ran close to the shore of Hyane Harbour and there was some subsidence into the water caused by bombing or disrepair. We encountered some foxholes and abandoned motor vehicles before finally reaching the recently bombed area. The substantial bomb craters provided no real clue to the objective of this raid but there was a

sizeable foxhole nearby that we explored in some detail. It was here that I souvenired a Japanese field telephone that impressed me (at the time) with its neat appearance. I've subsequently wondered what may have happened if I had cranked the generator handle instead of disconnecting it - there may have been a Japanese response! Before leaving we also acquired an abandoned 30 cwt. flat-top Japanese truck in near-new condition and had some 3000 (miles or kilos?) on the odometer. I remember that we had difficulty getting it back to camp because of the road conditions and appreciated some American help with massive tractors, over the otherwise impassable spots.

The next day saw the arrival of a significant party of 77 Squadron, RAAF. We drove across and met them on the beach - only to have the officer-in-charge commandeer our 'prize' vehicle. Unfortunately, as soon as it was loaded, the engine failed to start. Shrapnel had damaged the magneto and it chose this moment to expire. Interest in the vehicle vanished and our Fitter DMT was left with the task of repairing it. He had it going on the following day with a replacement magneto and it gave good service to our unit for some considerable time.

On the 9 March, after we had been on the island for just one week, the first Kittyhawks arrived and it was good to see the familiar figure of W/Cdr Steege wandering through our camp area. It seemed that normality could soon be restored with tents and beds instead of holes in the ground. A further week was to pass, however, before the main body of 114 MFCU arrived (on the *Marcus Daly*) and I rejoined them in early April. All told, we experienced a full month of 'rough living' exposed to the elements and underground at night. During this period, due to lack of adequate washing facilities, it was not surprising that I developed a number of ringworm eruptions. Treatment by the American medic was quite impressive and I noted that he applied three different medications, depending on the degree of inflammation.

At some stage, in these early days, I can recall what might be described as a celebration party. It was approaching dusk on (possibly) 5 March and it seemed that the worst of the action was probably over when we gathered in a tent to sample 'souvenired' liquid refreshments. I was teetotal in those days and had no difficulty in identifying soft drink bottles but some of the others who sought to sample more widely had the interesting exercise of trying to interpret Japanese labelling.

DO YOU REMEMBER . . . ?

Jack Ryan

One of the early direct entries into RAAF radar, Albert John (Jack) Ryan, was a colourful person. A big, bluff, red-haired man with craggy brow and heavy features, he scared some at first, but he was a considerate and positive officer who earned the respect of the 'troops' by leadership.

He served for six months with the 1st AIF Wireless in WWI, then seven years with the PMG's Dept starting as a cadet mechanic. Then he set up a radio and electrical shop in Kingston, ACT, and later started the commercial radio station 2CA from his shop. A book could be written of his adventures in Canberra, starting with the way he accumulated the necessary bits and pieces for the transmitter. Although he was not be really qualified to run a radio station, Jack believed in the saying "among the blind, the one-eyed man is king."

Jack's qualifications included a Marconi Marine Operators Certificate, an amateur radio licence, a Mine's Department Certificate to drive a steam engine and a diploma for playing the piano. The latter was used to great effect during the time he was at No.1 RIMU at the Presbyterian Ladies College, Croydon, NSW.

The Assembly Hall had an organ and a parquet floor. In 1943 church services were held in the Hall with Jack at the organ. The Hall was too small for the personnel of the unit, so Corporal 'Cappy' Andrews would beat time at the French window for the lesser ranks, wearing boots that would damage the parquet floor, standing outside. Sometimes, 'Cappy' would 'accidentally' get out of time and beat his arms furiously to catch up with Jack who was watching him in the mirror at the organ; the result was a flurry of notes from the organ and a restart of the hymn. Later the services were transferred to a local church where there was a screen between the organist and the congregation. Often Jack could be seen having a quiet puff of a cigarette during the sermon.

He was the first CO of 208RS at Swansea, NSW and served on many other stations. Much older than most radar officers, Jack was CO of 309 RS on North Goulburn Island and aged 47 when he developed an ulcerated leg; he refused to leave the station, as the Medical Orderly had recommended, until flying doctor, Doc Fenton, forcibly evacuated him. Burning the grass to clear a path for the aircraft's takeoff caused a bushfire.

Jack worked on, installing almost every type of radar equipment except, possibly,

MAWD. He showed a wide and deep knowledge of the workings of radar.

After the war, Jack set up and managed 2CK in Cessnock, NSW.

Ben Asman

F/O Icchok Benjamin Asman, with at least two degrees in the sciences from European universities, was experimenting with radio reflections in Poland in the 1930s. A Polish Jew, he escaped the Nazis and came here in 1938. When the need for radio officers for radiolocation was advertised in Australia he was 'peeling spuds' in the Army. He enlisted almost immediately. Ben was a brilliant man, probably the brightest man and best mathematician I have ever known. One wonders whether the RAAF used Ben to his full potential.

After taking Course No.7G for radar officers he started his radar career tuning the AW aeriels and T/R switches on AW stations on the east coast. Then, even though he suffered from vertigo, he matched and phased the ACO transmitter aeriels by directing a mechanic more than 100 feet up by 'remote control' from the ground. This radar equipment used the floodlight system rather than the beam type used with the higher frequencies in the CHL and LW/AW. He achieved a front-to-back (F:B) ratio in transmission of 9:1 which was 50% more than the basic figure specified by the manufacturer of the Lufkin aerial system of the ACOs. It was surprising that the RAAF brought out an English officer from the Middle East to improve the front-to-back ratios when F/O Asman was available at No. 1 RIMU.

In a matter of three months or so he wrote the *RAAF Matching and Phasing Manual ACD2024*, including the detailed mathematics, with no assistance from the RPL. He also developed a radio-frequency voltmeter for measuring standing waves on the LW/AW feeders. It could have been easily modified to suit the wider-spaced feeders of the ACO transmitters.

To emphasise his brilliance he learned Dutch by studying a book in Dutch on the subject of chess, which he played very well.

After the war, as the principal officer in the Patents Office, he learned the Thai language in a very short time before going to Thailand to install a patents system based on Australian practice.

Ben was a gentle, modest and sociable person who made many friends in the RAAF and in his later life, He died in Canberra in September 1999.

*Adapted from Ed Simmonds:
Significant Contributions*

OF FISH & PAWPAWS

Ray Morrison

I joined 335RS at Milne Bay in NG in March 1945. We moved to Emirau Island in mid-April and set up camp and finally arrived back in Australia in October.

As a Teleg I never sent a Morse symbol while with the Unit. On Emirau, communications were carried out by 112MFCU. As the war came to its end, life became boring with nothing to do. Cards were the go – bridge, poker, pontoon, etc. We also played cricket against MFCU and Australian Army AA units on the island.

Our cook decided that he would supplement our menu with fresh fish and pawpaws. I ignored the 'never volunteer' rule and got the supply job.

How to obtain (not catch) fish: with suitable clothing – shorts and sandshoes essential – obtain a billy-can and add food scraps from the kitchen mixed with a tin of bully beef; next collect a .303 rifle and ammo (or an American .30 Garrard rifle, which was preferred; anyone who has fired a .303 knows that if you don't hold it correctly you finish up with a very sore blue/black shoulder - the Garrard had very little recoil and did the job); take a suitable bag to put the fish in and then pick the correct time of day – low tide – and proceed to the allocated Unit fishing area.

Emirau is a coral island, surrounded by an outer reef. In our area at low tide the outer reef was approx 300m from shore and was 700m long with a mangrove swamp at one end. At low tide the outer reef is above sea level, leaving a lagoon of still crystal clear water with an average depth of about 800mm to 1m deep. The fish had not figured out that they were trapped in the lagoon. There were fish of many kinds with a majority of mullet. The mangroves provided the breeding ground for these fish; they were also the breeding ground for coral snakes. Whilst only small (up to 1m in length) they pack a deadly venom - an untreated bite ends in death. I learned by experience that you do not get between a coral snake and its young. It is rather scary to see a snake approaching at speed with its head about a foot out of the water. Fortunately the rifle barrel was swung in the right direction at the right time. The lesson – keep away from the mangrove swamp. In the lagoon were various clumps of seaweed around which the fish congregated.

Back to fishing: at an appropriate location, scatter the 'burley' about 5m in front of you; wait until the fish assemble about the burley and then fire a shot into the water. The angle of the shot is critical –

enough to stun the fish but not kill them.

Quickly collect the stunned belly-up fish as selected and put them in the bag; speed is essential as the fish usually recover within about 1 minute. Clean and gut the fish and return to a happy cook.

Pawpaws: in my school days I had learned to climb almost anything vertical including trees with no lower limbs; on the island was a coconut plantation and also a large area of pawpaw trees. Getting the pawpaws was easy. It is a very versatile fruit: over-ripe ones make tasty soup; green ones are good in salads and also when baked resemble a squash or zucchini; end the meal with ripe pawpaw as a sweet and you have had a very satisfying 3-course meal.

The army units were much more brutal in their fishing. They used hand grenades and dynamite. Rumour at the time had it that a construction unit had been told to dispose of its explosives offshore at sea. It could be that they were disposed of 'at sea' via the army units. Such fishing is messy with many dead and bruised, inedible fish resulting. It also proved that this procedure, carried out regularly, can result in an extreme shortage of fish in the area. Anyway, that was a long time ago.

Cape Otway History

The operators of the Cape Otway Light Station have been placing interpretive panels around the sites of WWII military installations including 13RS as well as the Navy War Signal Station. The Light Station was close to some of the minefields laid by the German ship *Passat* in Nov 1940. The minefield claimed the American freighter *City of Rayville* a few days later. The *Passat*'s mines had also sunk the British ship *Cambridge* off Wilsons Promontory just one day earlier. In another incident, a Glen reconnaissance plane was launched from a Japanese submarine off King Island in Feb 1942. Making landfall at Cape Otway, it flew up the coast to Pt Lonsdale then across Port Phillip Bay to Laverton, Port Melbourne and Mentone and back to the sub via Cape Schanck.

Ian McKellar, who wrote a history of 14RS (Wilson's Promontory), has been asked to prepare a book covering all the above. It will incorporate Morrie Fenton's history of 13 Radar published in 2000 but now out of print. If you have any other memories of 13RS that did not get to Morrie at the time, Ian would very much like to hear from you. He is particularly interested in the details of the COL Mark 5 transmitter that was installed at the site. He may be contacted at 9 Homebush Court Heathmont Vic 3135.

STATE ASSOCIATIONS

VICTORIAN RAAF RADAR ASSOCIATION

Reunion Lunch

The venue will be as usual as this is easily reached by public transport and road. We meet in the Bistro area on the ground floor, which is wheel-chair-friendly.

DATE: Friday 24 April; TIME: 12 noon;

PLACE : The Rosstown Hotel, Cnr Princes Highway and Koornang Road, Carnegie (Melway 68 J3). This is only 100 metres north of Carnegie Railway Station, on the Cranbourne/Pakenham line (trains every 15 minutes from the city). Parking is available in Princes Highway and at the rear of the Hotel. Enter the Hotel at the Bistro entrance in Koornang Road.

COST: A donation of \$10 is requested, to help finance projects and postage. The meal and drinks will be at your expense.

We hope to see many of you present, spouses are welcome. Anyone who is in any way connected with radar is welcome.

Melbourne Anzac Day March

Assemble in Flinders Street east near Russell Street. Look out for the blue RAAF RADAR banner. We march near the end of the RAAF South Pacific Group, behind the RAAF Wireless Units and

RADAR BRANCH, RAAF ASSOCIATION (NSW)

Anzac Day, 2009

All RAAF and WAAAF veterans and serving members are invited to assemble as usual at 10.30am in Elizabeth St, just south of Market St.

Current RAAF units may once again march with veterans, so a contingent from SRG, RAAF Williamstown will march with the Radar Branch.

The Branch contingent will again be led by Cec Blumenthal, a WWII radar officer who served in Australia and New Guinea.

For details, contact Howard Campbell.

before 112 Mobile Fighter Control Unit. Be there before 11 am ready to move off soon after 11.20 am.

If you have any problems finding us ask an RAAF Marshall for the Radar Units.

Plaque for No 1 Signals School

The Association is planning to place a plaque at the Point Cook RAAF base to commemorate the work of the No 1 Signals School on this site between Aug 1940 and Nov 1945, providing technical tuition for men and women as W/T operators, signals clerks, telegraphists, wireless mechanics, wireless operator mechanics, electricians, electrical fitters and cypher operatives. It also trained radio mechanics and operators for the US Army Air Corps. In 1943 its strength hit a peak of over 1000 trainees. Our thanks to Ted Ruddle for research into the School's history.

The plaque is expected to be unveiled and dedicated in mid-2009. Please contact the Secretary if you would like to be present or need further details.

Ian McKellar, Secretary

9 Homebush Court, Heathmont Vic 3135

Anzac Day Banquet Lunch

Venue: The Emperor's Choice Restaurant, Cnr King & Castlereagh Sts, Sydney.

Time: 12.30 - 3pm; Cost: \$40.

Guests are welcome.

The Joe Ulett and Pither trophies sponsored by the Branch will be awarded at the lunch to serving members who have made exemplary contributions to their field.

To book, contact Howard Campbell, Secretary, 2 Preece Close, Springfield, NSW 2250 (02 4322 1505) by **Friday 10 April 2009**

EDITORIAL (Cont. from p. 1)

Several other documents are being prepared and will be posted in the coming months. As other general material important in this context becomes available, it too will be added.

Archive - Units. In this new section will be posted, progressively, material throwing light on the histories of individual WWII units, including diaries, memories, photos etc for the most part supplied by people or the relatives of people who served on them. In due course, it may be possible to extend this to archive material from post-WWII units.

Guest Book. A facility by which you can record brief comments and other

communications directly to the web manager through the website.

Links. By which you can make contact with other websites of possible interest.

Contact. A list of the means by which you can make contact with the Web Manager and Editor.

I am well aware that many of my contemporaries have not explored the use of the computer as a tool of every-day life, and may feel that the loss of the print version will shut them off from access to all this material. However, there are ways of overcoming this, and I shall discuss them in the next issue.

Warren Mann

POST-WWII RADAR RETURNS

POST-WWII RR EDITORIAL

It is encouraging to find the need to increase the page allocation for *Post-WWII Radar Returns* from two to three, though the two contributors who have made it possible and indeed necessary are building on the success that they had achieved in the previous issue. That, of course, is not meant as a criticism – Butterworth and the Malayan Emergency are significant features of Australia's military history, and merit the recording of any material that will give some flavour to the events of the time; Wilf Hardy and John Reibling have been able to do this. But, there are other features of Australia's postwar military commitments that merit similar treatment and I certainly hope that others who have appropriate memories will be inspired to do something about it.

The Editorial on page 1 gives details of the *Radar Returns* website and indicates its significance in our quest to promote some awareness of the seventy-odd years of RAAF radar activities. We have so far concentrated on the first six years or so of that history in an effort to capture the substance and flavour of those critical years while there are still eye-witness accounts to be obtained, but the picture is a developing one and won't be complete at any particular time without including what has happened since. While the technicalities of the development of radar over the years are fascinating and important, it is at least equally important to record for posterity the social and organisational consequences of the technology. A reasonably complete and accurate picture of these consequences depends very largely on the personal memories of those who have been directly involved. I hope that the structure of the website will provide encouragement for post-WWII people to contribute to the achievement of that aim.

Warren Mann

MALAYA 1958 -1961 (Part 2)

Wilf Hardy

The advance party turned out to greet the rest of 114 MCRU personnel when they flew in toward the end of August. Married members and families were bussed to the Australian Army Hostel on Penang Island where they were billeted until allocated houses, generally in the better northern area of the island. Assembly of the unit's equipment then proceeded in earnest. The site had been prepared at the south-western end of an old wartime runway and

consisted of permanent buildings for stores, amenities, offices and fitters' workshop. The search radar and height-finder antennas were installed on mounds, whilst demountable buildings became the operations shelter, search and height-finder shelters and a diesel-generator shelter. Self-contained cabins and antennas for VHF receivers were adjacent, and the VHF transmitters were at the north-western end of the runway. Cabling was supported 18 inches above ground, which proved a problem as the locals employed to cut the grass with small scythes cut many cables over the years. The transmitter site was a haven for snakes; on one occasion I alighted from my jeep and strolled across the gravel hardstand daydreaming, through hundreds of sunbaking, highly venomous vipers without stepping on any of them or even noticing them. When I did see them, I thought of Tiny Tim singing "Tiptoe Through The Tulips" as I regained the jeep without being bitten!

The first flight of Sabres, air ferried from Australia via Biak and Labuan, was to arrive at the end of November, and it was imperative that the radar be up and running for their arrival. The refuelling stop at Biak off the north coast of Dutch New Guinea was touch and go as the Dutch administration was in its last days, and only a handful of Dutch nationals were on hand to receive the Sabres. The real concern, however, was the long flight from Labuan across the South China Sea, the Malay Peninsula and into Butterworth and the risk of an aircraft going down into the jungle was a worry throughout the years. However, there was a sigh of relief when the nose paints of the Sabres, at 40,000 feet, came up solid as the aircraft popped over the horizon at a range of 215 miles.

The maximum range of those radars was a fanatical secret at that time. For centimetric radar of high transmitter power and state-of-the-art valved receivers, with no obstructions, range had to be a function of the height of the aircraft and curvature of the earth. Of course there were obstructions, with Penang Island due west and Kedah Peak to the north-east, but air defence exercises showed remaining bearings to be not too bad - provided the 'enemy' didn't cheat! I recall one such case when the RAF sent in Beaufighters at coconut-palm height, and the air traffic controllers were the first to see them - through binoculars! However, in the air defence sense, the concern at that time was a high-flying bomber at just under Mach 1 carrying an atomic weapon. The fighters were not much faster than the average bomber and attacking at, or very near,

Mach 1 gave the bomber a distinct advantage. If the 'enemy' got within 20 miles, then it was considered we'd lost, and, as the Sabre took 6 minutes to reach 40,000 feet which was pretty near its service ceiling, there was generally only time for one pass to down the bomber. I recall one time a Russian aircraft was heading our way some 140 miles off track and, due to so many squadron bods taking 'leave in lieu' for guard duties etc, not one Sabre out of 38 was serviceable and RN Venoms out of Kuala Lumpur were scrambled, which was just as well, as the straight-wing Venom had a service ceiling around 10,000 feet higher than the swept-wing Sabre! The RAF Vee Bombers used to wait until the Sabres closed on them, then stand on their tails and go straight up, leaving the Sabres wallowing below.

However, the main task throughout my time was vectoring the Sabres and Canberras to strikes at CT targets designated by ground forces. I recall some unserviceabilities which worryingly delayed strikes and then it was a rush to get the gear working again. I worked mainly on search radar, which in hindsight was pretty reliable. We lost a magnetron occasionally, but it was the front end of the receivers that was usually the problem, with poor receiver performance and although I worked on literally hundreds of radar systems of all types both military and commercial after I left the air force, I never again struck a system which had so many failed mixer crystals. The radar used radioactive pre-TR cells which burned up frequently. The approved disposal method was to bury them at least 2 feet down and place a 'foul ground' sign over them; the graveyard was just to the south of the search radar mound. I've often wondered what happened to this dangerous site.

Another task for our aircraft was the bombing of any cultivation sighted in the jungle as part of the CT food-denial program. The CTs mainly relied on food being spirited to them by Chinese squatter sympathisers on the fringe of the jungle. To prevent the smuggling of rice, the larger villages used central cooking, where all rice was cooked in policed kitchens and as the rubber-tappers went onto the estates, they were only given cooked rice to carry, which was largely useless to the CTs as it became rancid and inedible after several hours. The smaller kampongs were surrounded by barbed wire and police searched travellers both entering and leaving the village. Many of these measures were seen as we drove about the countryside on leave, as we were also subjected to these restrictions. If any locals

Malaya 1958-1961 (Cont.)

were caught smuggling food, they were charged before a Magistrate, usually found guilty and hung.

Being unarmed still irked us and a number of us tried unsuccessfully to obtain pistol licences from the police in Georgetown. You could buy firearms from many outlets and just about every European civvy on the mainland carried a pistol. Once I drove up to Kroh on the Thai border, which was still very much a 'black' area ('white' areas were those designated CT free) where I was taken to task by the Malay border police and told to clear out as a policeman had just been shot by the CTs. On another occasion I entered a hill-climb event in Ipoh in my Berkley B65 mini-sportscar and the road was protected for its full length by armed police in case the CTs decided to join in the event!

An important function for the unit was tracking aircraft to pinpoint locations of crashes. The forests of the Malayan jungles contain some of the highest and fastest-growing trees in the world, commonly reaching 300 feet in height. The Botanical Gardens on Penang Island have specimens of these incredibly tall, straight trees, no branches for the first 150 feet or so and growing to a height of 300 feet in as little as 80 years! The RAF had lost pilots in the southern states of Malaya due to parachutes being snared in the tops of these jungle giants, leaving the pilot with the choice of starving to death or dying in a fall to the jungle floor. Very early, our parachute harnesses were provided with a long length of cord to give some hope of getting down out of a tree. It was therefore imperative that we identify the locations of lost aircraft. On one occasion, a British Army Auster was lost on the 50-mile flight from Butterworth to Taiping; nothing was ever found of the aircraft or pilot even though we had the coordinates.

On another occasion, during practice intercept training, two Sabres collided. One made it back to Butterworth, but the other broke up, with the pilot ejecting and alighting on the side of a hill from where a rescue helicopter was unable to carry out a retrieval. And yes, you guessed it, the downed pilot was unarmed! So a pistol had to be dropped to him together with rations and a cold 'tinny' of VB) while the RAF Malay Squadron (our airfield defence unit) walked in to get him.

Other memories were of the Brit's making, like trying to open a cheque account at the fine old British Chartered Bank and being told only military personnel over the rank of Warrant Officer could open a cheque account (I opened an account at the Hong Kong Shanghai Bank over the road). I remember being turned

away from the Selangor Cricket Club in Kuala Lumpur (it was called the Spotted Dog as it was painted in red and white stripes) because I wasn't an officer. I stayed a night at the Coliseum Hotel in K.L. which was like a wild-west bar; rubber planters came to town in their V8 Mercuries armour plated with steel cut off old Jap tanks and checked their guns at reception before entering the bar. Then later at night, well and truly under the weather, drew their guns and charged back to their estates hoping they wouldn't be ambushed by CTs!

The Malayan Emergency was declared over on 31st July 1960. And that was the end of the British General Service Medal (Malaya) which was the requirement to get a war service home loan. There was a grand parade in Kuala Lumpur, but it all seemed to go off with a whimper in Penang, although I still have a photo of a banner across Penang Road proclaiming "Victory Over Communism". There was a tower built near the Butterworth main gate, manned by Ghurkhas with a Bren-gun. Cynically, we thought it was built for a photo shoot on the great day, but in reality it was probably built in case the CTs tried to spoil the party.

For it didn't end then at all. The Secretary General of the Malayan Communist Party, Chin Peng, moved from southern Thailand to China and in the mid-'60s, Chairman Mao ordered him to get back to Malaya and take it, and China armed him properly to do so this time. So there was a second Emergency which lasted another ten years or so, with most of the fighting on the Thai border. Amazingly, Chin Peng, now in his 90s, still lives in southern Thailand and has caused an uproar lately trying to get back into Malaysia legally! The Malaysian government won't have a bar of it.

Most of the unit's first deployment personnel returned to Australia in December 1960 by chartered ship (which caught fire in the Mediterranean some years later and sank!), although some came home in small cargo vessels carrying a handful of passengers and taking a month to get back by way of meandering through SE Asian ports. This was an old Pommy idea of unwinding after the rigours of the East, a sort of slow boat to/from China. I had been asked to stay on a couple of months as the penny had finally dropped and disclosed that many of the Techs in the second deployment had not been trained on the equipment. I finally left Butterworth on 1st February 1961 having been close to first of our group in, and definitely last out. Unfortunately Helen was pregnant, so we flew home first class on a Qantas 707 instead of taking a slow boat from China.

I've often wondered if there were others from my time in the service who used their radar experience as effectively as I did on discharge. I'd been doing some work on ships' radar in Penang and carried on from there with AWA, who at the time were agents for every make of marine radar in the world except Decca. So I covered Sydney, Botany Bay, Newcastle and Port Kembla at a time when there were many small and large vessels operating along the coast, servicing dozens of radar sets. I then moved to Navy at Garden Island where over another 10 years I could total experience on well over a hundred radars. On top of this there were overseas and local courses and overhaul, installation and repair of missile guidance, air search, gunnery, CCA (aircraft carrier precision approach) systems, comms from MF to UHF, ECM, ECCM on HMA ships and systems so diverse I could never keep track of them. I became involved in Navy Air with GCA, Airfield Surveillance, aircraft ASW equipment and extensively, with all types of airfield nav-aids and facilities.

In 1968 I had a final contact with air force radar, working on the aircraft carrier HMAS *Melbourne*, which had a Dutch Philips air-search radar which used a 5J26 magnetron, the same as I recalled in the FPS3 installed at Brookvale and MPS7 at Butterworth. The magnetron current was excessively high and power output very low and for the first and only time in my long experience I found the magnet had somehow lost its field strength. As navy did not have a spare, I was able to get approval through navy and air offices in Canberra to obtain an air force spare and drove over to Brookvale and picked it up. So a part of ICARU Brookvale carried on giving service long after Brookvale was closed down, until the old flagship was broken up in China in the late '80s.

Eventually I moved into Navy Air project management for everything from air nav aids, to buildings and even a sewage treatment plant, rising to STO3 in the public service. Some of my projects were single service managed by air force and it was at that stage of my career that I began to cross paths with bods from my air force days, one being my old sergeant Arthur Ellem, who was a Wing Co at that time. I retired in 1993, moving to Townsville to escape what had become a most stressful occupation and Helen and I have enjoyed a wonderfully peaceful retirement in North Queensland these past years. Throughout my career in radar, radio and project management, I've been aware that it started at RSTT Wagga and 7 Rad Tech G course at RADSCHOOL Ballarat, then blossomed in Malaya, 1958-1961.

THE 'SNAKE' IN THE GRASS

John Reibling

During my posting to 114MCRU, Butterworth, from January 1965 to October 1966 there were some substantial changes take place at the unit. The era, as we know, was during 'Confrontation'. My memory of the exact timing is somewhat blurry after all these years, but at some point in my tour the Unit moved from its permanent location at what was approximately the eastern end of the old runway, to the western end. This move was bought about by the desire of the RAF to install a squadron of Bloodhound anti-aircraft missiles for the defence of the base, while building a permanent and more powerful air-defence radar on a mountain top on Penang Island. So 114MCRU was eventually going to move anyway.

The move went quite smoothly as I recall. The RAF had set up a mobile unit to cover the area and we were operational again within a few days. The new site was right at the end of the old runway, almost at the water's edge. A chain-wire compound and some temporary buildings for our administration section were erected. Things went along pretty much as usual after the move. We were still operating 24-hours a day with three shifts. Our staff was augmented by RAF personnel who were completely integrated with us, sharing our accommodation blocks on the base. There were two RAF plotters bunked in my room.

One night while on doggo shift I decided it was time to get a cup of something to drink. There was a room set aside in the admin block where such was available. So I left the work shelter and wandered over to the building. As I was walking down the verandah I noticed that the two Malaysian Army guards assigned to watch our front gate were not in their usual position. They were both standing at the end of the building staring, in what appeared to be quite an excited state, at something in the grass. I immediately thought – snake!

Not being a lover of snakes (read terrified of snakes) I gingerly made my way to the end of the building and peered around the corner to see what they were so intently looking at. I don't think they even saw me. I still smile today at what they were looking at. There in the foot-and-a-half high grass were the flood lights that had been around the perimeter of the old 114 site. We had not got around to installing them and the poles with their florescent lamps were just laying in the grass. Every few seconds one of the lights would flash on and off, on and off.

Now, the guards knew quite well that the floodlights were not connected to any power, but here they were, flashing on and off. At first I guess they might have thought that one of us was trying to play a trick on them. Then, as I watched, their stare raised to the point where they could see that the height-finder radar was pointing right at them and as the antenna came down, the lights came on and when it moved up, the lights went off. It took them a few moments to work out that it was the radar making the lights flash. It took them just a little bit longer to work out that if the big nodding antenna was making florescent lights flash on and off – what was it doing to them? All of a sudden they took off. The gate wasn't very well guarded for the rest of the night!

THE BURNING LAND ROVER

John Reibling

While in Malaysia I was promoted to Corporal. Among the highlights of this posting to 114MCRU were the times I was sent to our remote radar site at Chiang Cat, sometimes as NCO in Charge.

It was during one of these attachments (as NCO I/C unfortunately) that the incident of 'The Burning Land Rover' occurred. The location of our remote radar was a very picturesque hill, rising a few hundred feet above the rubber and banana plantations on the coast of Malaysia, about an hour's drive south of Butterworth. The radar was at the top of the hill, while our accommodation, consisting of a number of atap (thatched straw) huts, was half-way up the hill. We had a Land Rover which was used to carry personnel and supplies to and from Butterworth and it had been playing up quite a bit with what seemed to be a faulty battery.

It had become normal practice for the doggo shift of plotters to drive up the hill and park the vehicle so that it could be rolled down the hill to start in the morning. On this morning one of the plotters, as usual, drove down the hill to wake the on-coming shift and drive them to the top again. He parked on the track at the sleeping accommodation, leaving the

motor running not trusting the battery, and went to wake the others. He decided that while he waited for the on-coming shift to get ready he would drive down to the bottom of the hill and back to charge up the battery. When he came out he found that the motor had stalled. Being fairly resourceful he attempted to start the thing by releasing the handbrake and letting it roll down the hill. This didn't work as he had parked it on a flat piece of ground. So he got out and started to push and as the vehicle began to roll jumped behind the wheel, just in time to steer the thing up an embankment and rolled it onto its side in the middle of the road.

This bright young fellow (a pommy plotter by the way) was just a little worried because he didn't have a licence to drive a Land Rover. So he woke the rest of his mates, leaving me sleeping, and they all went out to try and put things right. Surely, they thought, it wouldn't be too much trouble to roll it back onto its wheels and then make up some story about the damage to the side. Try as they might they couldn't roll it back upright. So they took a break to think about it. Now when you take a break you have a smoke - at least someone did, dropping his match into the stream of fuel running from the vehicle.

The Land Rover burnt beautifully. The petrol tanks, which held about 164 litres, were almost full and the meagre fire fighting appliances we had were no match. Did you know that a Land Rover is almost entirely aluminium and when they burn it melts? All attempts to put it out failed. It looked like the flames would spread to our highly inflammable huts and that is when they woke me. It is not a pleasant experience to be rudely woken with the words; "John! the Land Rover is on fire!" Our unreliable telephone link to the outside world proved almost useless. By the time we had managed to contact the nearest fire brigade, make them understand what was going on and where, and then for them to get to us, the only thing they could do was to squirt a few streams of water onto a blob in the middle of the road. Then I had to contact Butterworth and tell the boss about it.

What do you know about the history of radar in Australia and overseas?
Check it out in *Echoes Over the Pacific*, by Ed Simmonds and Norm Smith,

You can find that and much more on the Radar Returns website

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