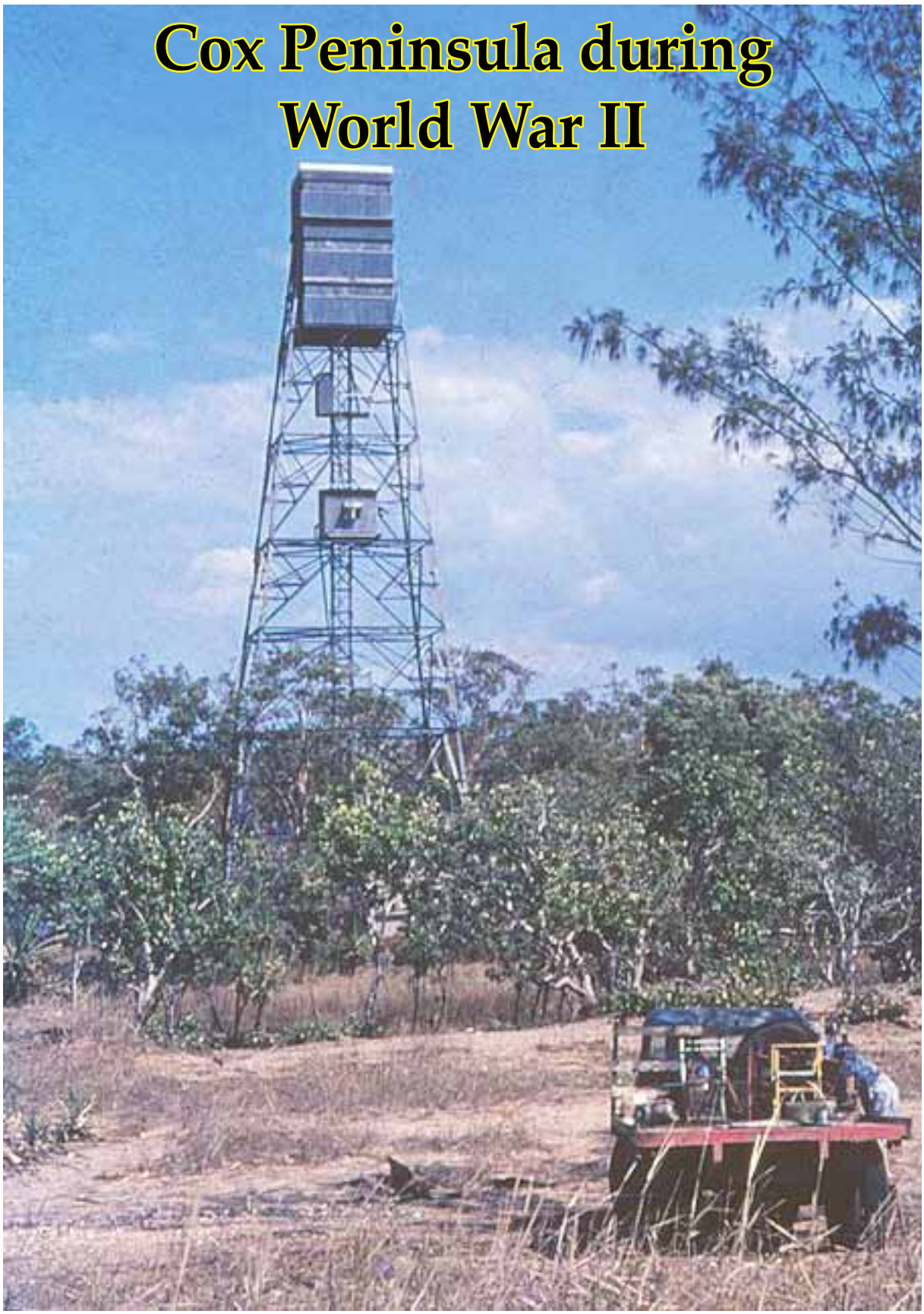
Cox Peninsula during World War II



Wagait Tower after World War II, possibly 1950s. Photo Alan Carter Family Collection

Compiled by Jack Ellis and Lorraine Gardner as part of the Anzac Centenary Program

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Preface

This small publication, an initiative of the Wagait Shire Council, is an attempt to record what happened on the Cox Peninsula during World War II and to recognise the many Army, Navy, Air Force and Aboriginal auxiliary personnel who served in one of the remotest areas of the Territory. Not that the peninsula is far from Darwin in a direct line. In terms of resources, accessibility and awareness, it seems it might well have been 1000 km away.

The booklet is not a history in the true sense of the word. Time, resources and the lack of easily accessible and reliable source documents prevented this – our fault, not the ever-helpful NT Library staff. But in a year that marks 100 years since Australian troops landed at Gallipoli, it attempts to show how the same Anzac spirit lived on among those who served on the Cox Peninsula some 70 years ago. Most of the material has been gathered from other publications and papers whose authors we gratefully acknowledge and hope your hard work has been used appropriately.

None of this would have been possible without funding from the Northern Territory Government's Anzac Centenary Community Grants Program. We believe we have satisfied the program guidelines as well as contributing in some small way to the military history of the Northern Territory.

There are still some signs of the military presence in the local area, but unfortunately a vast amount is gone forever. There now is little to suggest that hundreds of people, maybe several thousand, spent in part or in full, four years of their lives ready to defend the Cox Peninsula. Those of us who call the peninsula home salute you.

Jack Ellis and Lorraine Gardner
April 2015

Notes:

Over the years there have been several different spellings of Wagait. While this contemporary spelling is generally accepted today, Waugite was the common spelling in the 1930s and 40s. This publication has adopted the spelling of the day as the most appropriate.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be aware that this publication contains the names and images of deceased indigenous people. Our thanks to their families for permitting this use.

Chapter 1: As it was in the beginning

This bloody town's a bloody cuss,
No bloody train, no bloody bus,
And no-one cares for bloody us
In bloody, bloody Darwin.

Despite the rumours and concerns, there was little indication in early 1940 that the sleepy small town of Darwin and its surrounds were about to become Australia's vital front line in the war against the Japanese. Darwin's defences, near non-existent 1931, were being built up but progress was painfully slow. Northern Australia was not considered a priority. The then Prime Minister Robert Menzies had placed his trust in Britain and its ill-fated Singapore fortress strategy. This strategy assumed Britains military might would contain Japan's incursion into China and any direct threat to Australia. Even after Japan invaded Malaya, Darwin was seen as little more than a refuelling stop for ships in transit between southern ports and the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia), Singapore and Malaya.

Robert Rayner's book *The Army and the Defence of Darwin Fortress* details there were 2880 troops in the Top End in early 1941. Historians Peter and Sheila Forrest say there were 6000 by the end of that year; a figure at odds with the new Fortress Commander Brigadier Blake's count of 10 283 a month earlier. Whatever the correct number, these troops included artillery, anti-aircraft batteries, engineering, signals, infantry, medical, administration and support units such as the delightfully named "bath unit". Not exactly a force to deter the then all-conquering Japanese. In July 1941, Brig W A Steele, the 7th Military District (Darwin Fortress) commander, introduced a strategy to defend the five major peninsulas: Nightcliff, Darwin, the area between King and Mickett creeks, Lee Point and the Cox Peninsula. A summary of the Cox Peninsula defences concluded that if the Japanese landed, the gunners and a platoon of support troops at West Point could defend the whole peninsula until help arrived. With the Japanese planning on at least two divisions for a successful invasion – five if the Japanese Army generals had their way – that help could have been a long time coming.

Brigadier David Blake, Brig Steele's successor in September 1941, increased the number of troops allocated to defend the peninsula and the West Point artillery battery. This came to an abrupt halt with Canberra's conclusion three months later that war against Japan was inevitable. Ignoring the recent experiences in Malaya and Singapore, it was decided troops and aircraft from Darwin would be sent to beef up defences in Java, Timor and Ambon, a move that was to prove disastrous. The strategy made a large dent in the 10 000-odd troops available to defend Darwin identified by Blake on November 30, 1941. While many of those sent to the then Dutch East Indies were lost as the Japanese advanced, the efficiency of the Japanese air power against shipping saw at least two troop convoys forced to return to Darwin, doubtless saving hundreds of lives.

There were many issues that impacted on establishing a viable Darwin front-line defence and ensuring the Japanese did not get a foothold on Australian soil. But the amazing reluctance to put the defence of the north before or at least equal with the campaigns in Europe and the Pacific (including New Guinea), and the failure to improve the food and equipment supply chain until 1943 possibly were the two key negative factors. Another was the constant changing of unit names and numbers and their responsibilities. Troops were moved in and out of various camps, merged, split up, renamed or renumbered, sometimes almost weekly as the "strategy" to defend the Top End changed.

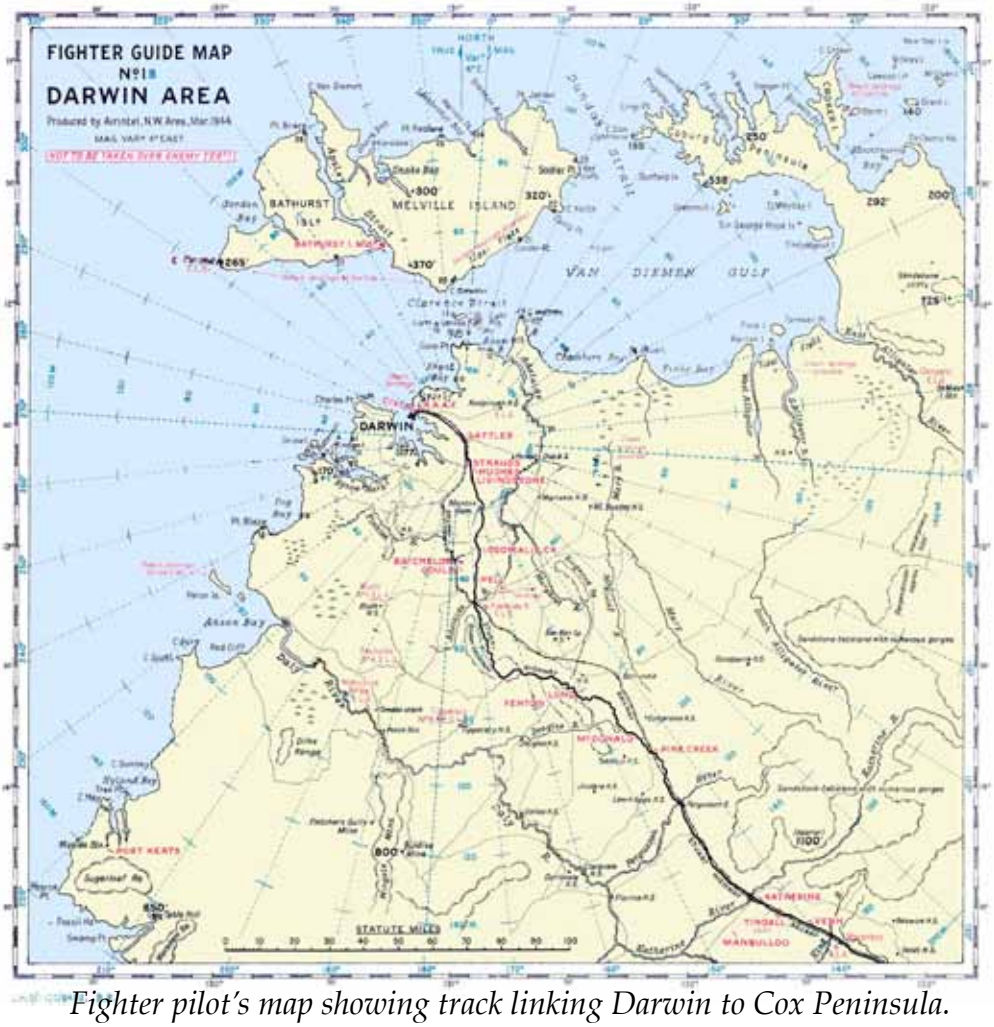
Right at the bottom of this pecking order was the Cox Peninsula. Military historian Robert Rayner quotes Brigadier Steele's July 10, 1941 situation "plan and appreciation"

as follows (with edits). “The coastline on the north east coast of Cox Peninsula is well covered by the Darwin fixed defences but some protection is necessary against enemy forces which may land further west or on the Bynoe bay (harbour) side of the peninsula with a view to establishing guns on Talc Head or West Head (Point) for the bombardment of Darwin.

“This could be done by sending detachments to the two heads or constructing a road to them along which our troops can be quickly moved by motor transport. The present road, constructed by the 2/3 Pioneer Battalion with improvements, will meet this situation.

“The Bynoe area provides the enemy with a good landing and a route direct through Tumbling Waters out to our lines of communication and thus to Darwin. To provide for this eventuality, it will be necessary to have a force of available (based near Darwin) for early action in this area. The preliminary disposal of a strong force would unduly weaken the main force.”

So the entire defence of the peninsula, unless there was a direct threat, was restricted to patrols by troops based at West Point and the Aboriginal scouts of the Black Watch who were charged with looking for any signs of incursions. A proposed “stop line” between Bynoe Harbour and West Arm would rely on troops being rushed by road to the line in the event of an invasion. A wet season convoy to West Point about this time took anything between three and 20 days to make the trip; hardly a rush. But despite all the changes in policy, people and leadership, the military presence on the Cox Peninsula did grow as the Japanese threat increased. The final chapter provides a summary of that activity on the peninsula from 1939.



Fighter pilot’s map showing track linking Darwin to Cox Peninsula.

Chapter 2 – West Point and Waugite batteries

Just bloody heat and bloody flies,
The bloody sweat runs in your eyes,
And when it rains, what a surprise
In bloody, bloody Darwin.

So what was on the Cox Peninsula during World War II and who were the people tasked with the defence of the area between 1939 and 1945? The fact that the peninsula was virtually a clean slate at the time had both advantages and disadvantages. Having no-one to disturb, evacuate or work around certainly was an advantage. Having no infrastructure such as shelter, power or water meant that everything had to be found, cleared, built or improvised – or brought over the harbour from Darwin. All the military personnel who lived and worked on the Cox Peninsula had to cope with these drawbacks in one form or another and there were some ingenious solutions. But there were few answers to the heat, humidity, mosquitoes, sand-flies and the endless tins of bully-beef masquerading as food that had to be suffered, not always in silence.

While the histories of the gun batteries at Waugite and West Point are reasonably well known, much less is known about the "secret" RAAF radar site at Charles Point. It also is not generally well known that there were five anti-aircraft searchlight installations dotted around the western shores of the harbour: at Picnic Cove, Talc Cove (Head), Swires Bluff, Harper's Folly and Flagstaff Hill, plus one betwixt and between on Middle Point. These small installations, all part of the 65 Anti-aircraft Searchlight Battery, generally consisted of around 10 men with a shed or small shelters for protection against the elements. Harper's Folly in particular provided an indication of what those responsible for the operation of the searchlights went through. The area on the foreshore near King's Table was little more than mangrove swamp and quickly earned the reputation of the worst place for biting midges in the harbour. Heavy equipment had to be disassembled then rebuilt to get it ashore while the supply barges spent as little time as possible anchored near the track to the searchlight installation. Much is said about Major Harper's decision to put a searchlight in such a place but there is no record about how long it lasted or what happened to the unfortunates who worked here. A heavy searchlight battery was deployed around the harbour and on the peninsula' north coast later in the war.

There was one facility that made a military presence on the Cox Peninsula essential; the massive anti-submarine net between Dudley Point near East Point and West Point on the opposite side of the harbour. This net was vital to the harbour's defence and while the eastern side was well protected by the East Point gun batteries, there needed to be a level of protection on the western shore. In early 1941, Major J S Young (Royal Australian Artillery) and other officers inspected the western side of Darwin harbour looking at how to improve the Darwin garrison's defences. He suggested two 4-inch guns at West Point and two 6-inch guns at Waugite (Wagait) to protect the anti-submarine boom net and boost overall harbour defence. He also recommended an observation post at either West Point or Waugite.

Anti-submarine boom net at West Point

It was three months later before Lieutenant G E Stronach of 2/11 Field Company Royal Aust Engineers attempted to survey a road route to West Point but late rains caused him to turn back two days later. In May, Lt E P Campbell (Royal Australian Engineers) inspected West Point to identify a site for D company, 2/3 Pioneer Battalion. Campbell investigated potential water supplies and the possibility of a landing jetty.

At the same time, work began to link West Point to the main Darwin Road with A and D companies of 2/4 Pioneer Battalion working from Darwin River and West Point. The track became passable some seven weeks later.

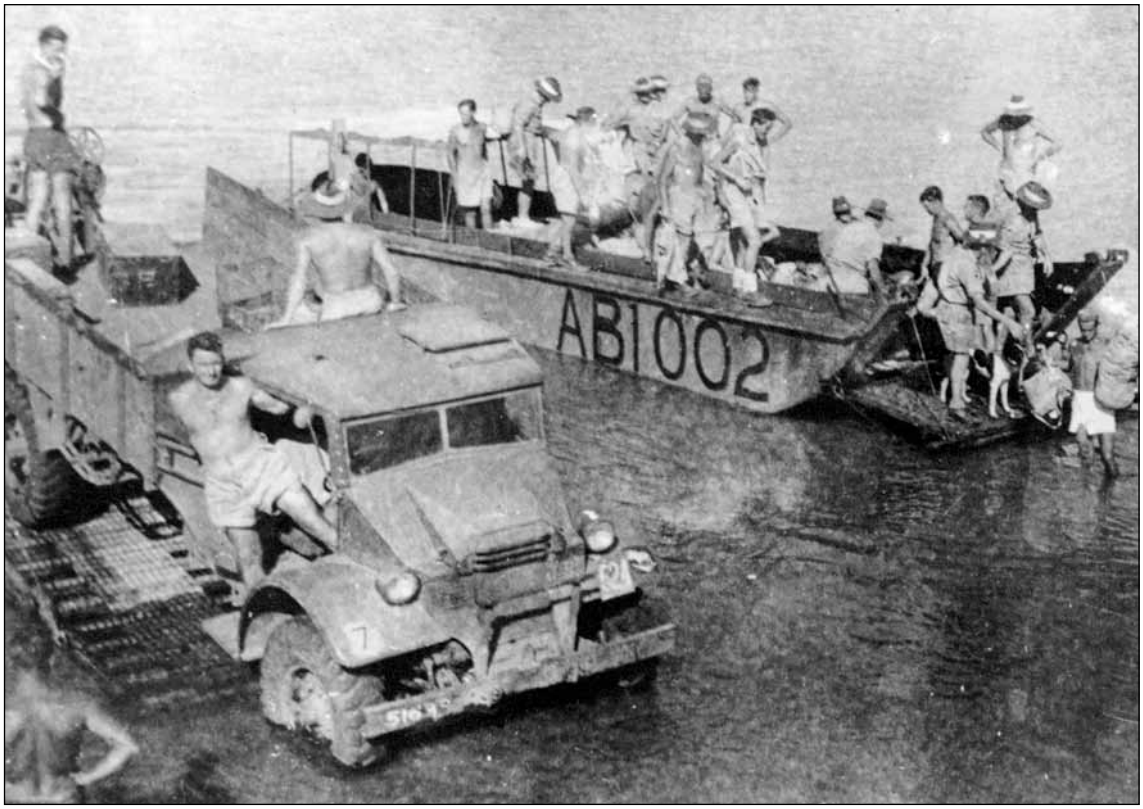
In June 1941, the 2/11 engineers returned to West Point and began gun emplacement construction. They established a water supply, built a small camp and started internal road works. They completed the work by July 18. A section of the specialist gunnery unit, M Battery, recently arrived in Darwin, was sent to West Point. The two 4-inch guns were in place but the gunners had to build their own accommodation and facilities so they were employed clearing scrub, laying foundations, building huts and improving the site. There were few tools and fewer machines, but the camp took shape and the men began learning about the guns in their evening "spare time". More gunners from the 118/119 Royal Artillery regiments (formerly M Battery) arrived in September, boosting the pace of construction – toilets, showers, a wash-house, petrol store, canteen and a recreation room. This work was helped by a rock crusher the new arrivals brought with them, a rare commodity in Darwin at the time. Planning also began for the larger gun emplacements at Waugite. By Christmas and despite early rain, West Point was substantially completed with the troops kept busy adding further camp facilities, repairing roads and training on the 4-inch guns in the early morning and in the evening after work.

A convoy to West Point tackles 2/4 Pioneer Battalion's track from the Darwin road.

With the track to Darwin often impassable, food, supplies, material and personnel were moved initially by Navy barges. With numerous anti-aircraft searchlight units being installed from West Point around the harbour to East Arm, as well as those on the Cox Peninsula, the demands on this service must have been extraordinary. The peninsula was at the end of this supply chain, with frustrations and delays waiting for materials, food and other essentials or for ill or injured troops to be transported to Darwin for treatment. This saw the formation of an Army 'Water Transport' division. A strange assortment of vessels was recruited, including *Mataranka*, *Pius* and *Irak* that were kept busy supplying essentials to those stationed on the Cox Peninsula.

Early planning for the western defences centred on the Waugite 6-inch gun battery. Although these guns were built in the early 1900s and discarded when the Australian Navy refitted its early cruiser fleet, they were formidable weapons. With a range of some 17 km, they had a field of fire out past Charles Point and across the harbour entrance. The net defences, the 4-inch guns at West Point, were a priority and by November 1941 that battery was close to being fully operational. Around mid-November, four barges arrived carrying cement, timber, iron tanks and sundries to make a start on the

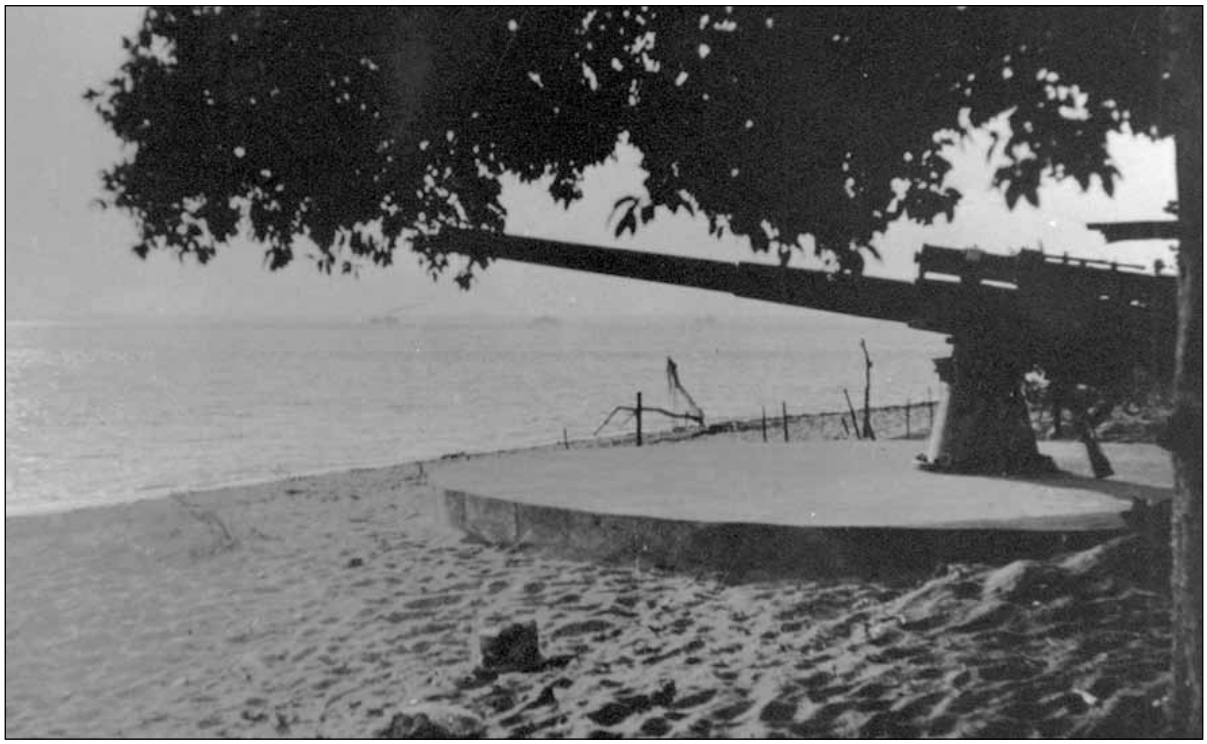
Waugite installation. It proved a difficult task with many casualties from cement burns and abrasions. Preliminary work also began on the Waugite camp site with Captain Miller, an Army doctor, supervising work to remove undergrowth and drain low areas to reduce the mosquito threat. Work began in earnest after Christmas on one of the two gun emplacements with the slab laid and reinforcing in place for the magazines and upper levels. It appears the other emplacement was still the earthworks stage when the Japanese air raids from February 1942 halted the project for some 18 months.



Unloading the barges, possibly at West Point.

West Point and the other nearby facilities were not bombed during either raid, but the battery was machine-gunned by fighters on February 19. One Zero was shot down by the 43 Infantry Battalion machine gunners. On August 31 that two bombers, apparently lost, dropped their loads randomly on Cox Peninsula. Apart from craters and gaps in the bush, there was no damage. Two later incidents saw bombs falling near the Aboriginal Black Watch teams based in the bush country, apparently more by accident than design. No one was hurt. It is surprising that with the two artillery batteries on the peninsula, plus the RAAF radar site, that the Japanese did not give these targets any attention. Perhaps they missed the significance of the radar in particular, or the improvement in the Australian and American fighter defences made it more difficult for the bombers to attack these apparently small and possibly insignificant targets.

Despite the lack of progress at Waugite, the West Point Battery was officially designated "West Section of Waugite Battery". Although work on the guns had stopped, support facilities such as living huts, messes and even recreation facilities were slowly taking shape. The Charles Point radar was kept on alert with several raids towards the end of September. The Black Watch wasted several days looking for a pilot in Tapa Bay, although the pilot had actually been shot down in the Wildman River area. It was one of a number of misdirections that sent the Aboriginal patrols off on wild goose searches although one of these had a surprise ending (see page 22). They also conducted a four-day search for a missing plane in the Fog Bay area but found nothing.



West Point 4-inch gun battery manned by 118/119 Royal Artillery (formerly M Battery).

Orders came to camouflage all military sites on the peninsula. This order stemmed from a change in tactics by the Japanese to attack the new airfields and military installations such as anti-aircraft sites that were coming into operation in the area south of Darwin. Like the troops in these areas, those on the Cox Peninsula were kept busy making guns and facilities difficult to spot from the air. The West Point Battery's recently delivered twin 6-pounder guns at West Point were proof fired in October. Although the firing was successful, it later transpired that the range of these weapons meant a section of the submarine boom net was not covered. (West Point originally had two 4-inch former Navy guns mounted on the large concrete slabs. The remains of those slabs can still be seen near West Point Creek today.) About this time also, the RAAF radar plotters began using a grid reference method of reporting the aircraft positions. The new system was tested during a series of night exercises with the fighters and proved very effective. These practice flights halted when the enemy raids began again on November 22.

By Christmas, Japanese aircraft losses and the build-up of Australian and American air, sea and ground forces brought some optimism about the potential threat of an invasion. The earlier expectation among the units based on the peninsula that they could be at the front of a very thin front line had the Japanese landed in the days and weeks after the February raid was replaced by a real hope that this may now not happen at all. Problems with the ever-extending supply lines, setbacks on the ground in New Guinea, the growing strength of the US Navy in the Pacific and the inability to stop the air strikes from Darwin finally slowed the all-conquering Japanese advance to the west and south of their homeland.

The early months of 1943 brought some heavy monsoon rains that would have been very uncomfortable for those based on the peninsula and living with the biting insects, the humidity and the heat in very basic accommodation. Despite the discomforts, the weather also virtually stopped enemy air activity, bringing some relief for the defenders – except for the Charles Point radar operators who worked every day and night monitoring the skies from their open seats and manhandling the heavy antenna array into position.

An Army reconnaissance party travelled to the Cox Peninsula to inspect the coastal battery at West Point and to select a target for an air co-operation shoot with coastal defence and anti-aircraft guns. The group included Lt-Col Stillman and his 2ic from 2/11 Aust Army Field Regiment. The site selected was in the vicinity of Waugite Battery, no doubt a boost to local morale because they now seemed part of the overall defence of Darwin. Diaries and reported comments from those stationed at West Point and Waugite indicated many of the gunners in particular believed their time on peninsula was the result of some transgression of Army discipline on the other side of the harbour. But the facilities were improving with the 18 Fortress Company completing the radio direction finder tower at West Point as well as upgrading other battery infrastructure.

Fortress commander Major-General J S Whitelaw made changes mid-year to the planning for the Darwin Fixed Defences so that when the long-awaited 9-inch guns at East Point were in place, two of the surplus 6-inch guns would be moved to Waugite. Several reports about the Waugite guns, including one from former Mandorah Hotel publican and historian Mike Foley in the 1980s, cast doubt whether real guns were ever installed. It was rumoured they were dummies placed on the beachfront to fool the Japanese into thinking the area was heavily defended. Rayner's comprehensive accounts of the Darwin defences and the military policies in place at the time make it abundantly clear the guns were very real and a vital – if somewhat delayed – part of the harbour defences. Even the serial numbers of the two 6-inch guns are recorded. One piece of not so good news was that the October change to smaller guns at West Point meant the centre of the boom facility was out of coverage or range. The Navy was asked to place 40-mm Bofors gun on each of its boom gate vessels to fill the gap. There are no records of the Navy's response, but the thoughts of the hard-working crews of these little ships constantly under threat of air attack as they worked the boom can well be imagined.

One of the 6-inch guns that were installed at the Waugite Battery.

By July 1943, a decision was made to restart work on the Waugite battery with the lower portion of a Radio Direction Finding Tower fabricated in Melbourne to be shipped and erected by the Australian Works Council as a battery observation post. The Waugite gun emplacements were incomplete, having been virtually abandoned after the first Japanese air raids almost 18 months previously. The concrete platform and steel

reinforcement for the emplacements were still standing thanks to an earlier order from the camouflage authority that an abandoned work should remain as such.

There eventually were two towers at the battery. The first, an 80-foot (25 metre) tower for a forward observation post (FOP), also served as a battery observation post (BOP) for the Waugite Battery. The overall installation included a searchlight, ranging equipment and two directors for the guns. The concrete engine room (power house) at the base of the tower can still be seen from the dunes area (Lot 217 Wagait Tower Road). The following month (August) brought fine weather allowing a barge to land a cruciform mounting for the first of the guns. A large tubular steel barracks room at West Battery was dismantled to allow it to be transferred to the Waugite Battery. In October Captain Claude Augustus Fay was appointed Officer Commanding Waugite Battery. The Waugite Battery No 2 cruciform mounting for the 6-inch gun was moved into its final emplacement position and covered. Both 6-inch BL Mark XI guns were ready to be installed at Waugite after being moved from the East Point Battery. It had been a very busy three months at the new gun site.

The Waugite battery before it was camouflaged

Around at the West Point Boom Defence Battery, work finalising the installation of the twin 6-pounder guns were completed. The Boom Defence unit was renamed West Section of Waugite Battery under the command of Captain Fay. The gunners then prepared to dismantle the two 4-inch guns ready for the move to their new site at Dudley Point on the opposite side of the harbour.

November saw the first 6-inch gun completed and in place, with the other on site and being assembled. A month later both 6-inch guns at Waugite were fully installed and the mountings proofed. The battery was, finally, an established fact. As with all locations around Darwin and the peninsula, more work was always required on camp buildings and maintenance. Following the installation and proofing of the large gun positions, the battery remained on a warning basis for manning. This released most of the gunners for other duties and allowed the camp's full time works policy to continue. The Waugite site also included a Bofors quick action gun that was placed in position and camouflaged.

The beginning of 1944 saw the Waugite Battery operationally manned for the first time in a counter bombardment coast defence role. The battery headquarters, which until that time had been maintained at West Point, moved to Waugite proper. Although any spare or off-duty troops still carried out much of the building, road and general base improvements, the 9 Anti-Aircraft and Fortress Company supervised construction of the camp and its water supply.

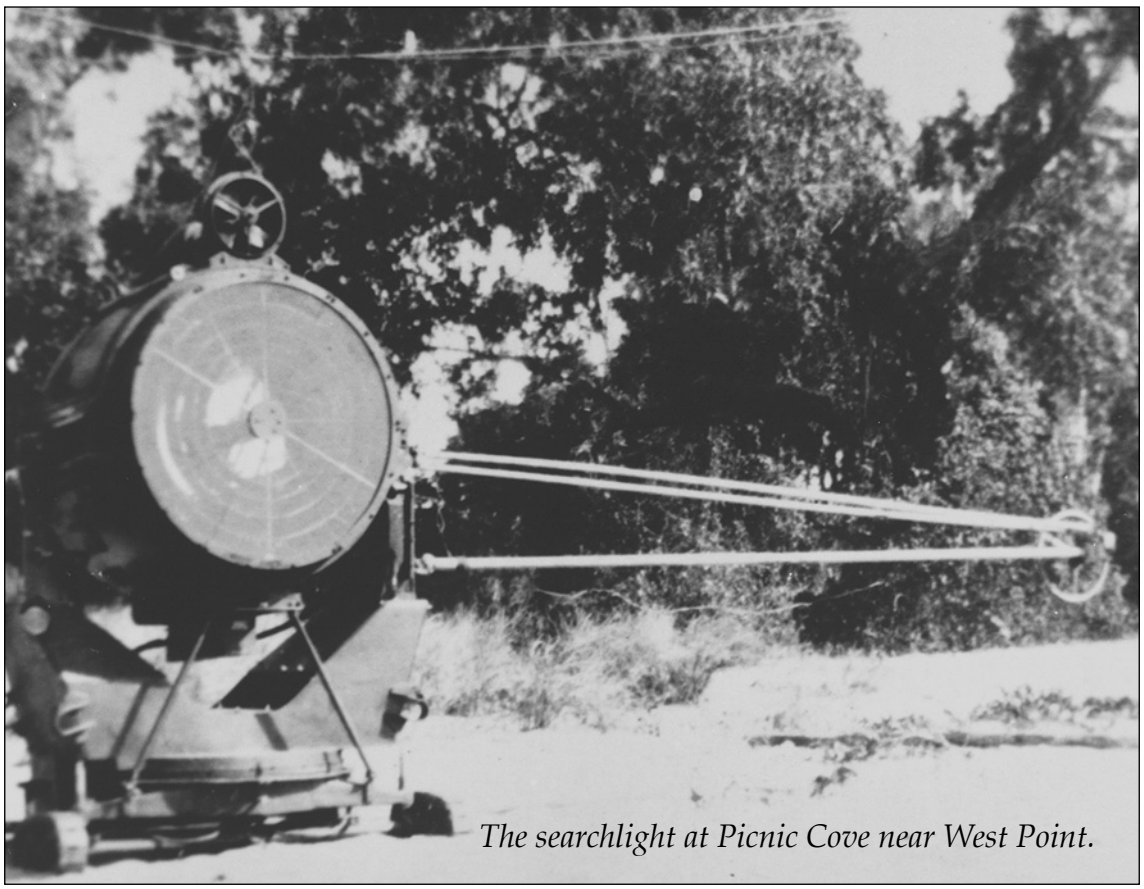
There were more personnel changes in February with Major W Weight appointed Battery Commander at Waugite with Captain E G Foreshew the new Battery Captain. The finishing touches were being put to the 6-inch gun emplacements with the No 2 magazine complete and excavation for the No l magazine started. Trip and alarm wires were laid around both searchlights, and a temporary shelter constructed combining sleeping quarters for the Section Commander and the searchlight personnel. A 120-foot metal observation tower was started at Waugite in late March-early April that included plans to house equipment plus staff quarters and sleeping accommodation.

Early in May the bore water supply to Waugite began to fall off slightly, causing concern about future supplies later in the dry season. This ultimately led to the unit

acquiring a 400-gallon (1800 litre) water cart that was used to transport water for drinking and washing from the more reliable large soak at Delissaville (Belyuen). The battery and camp camouflage also had problems that ultimately led to camouflage being renewed all around. By this time the whole of the camp area at West Section and Waugite had been consolidated and the bulk of the ammunition previously held at West Point being transferred to the Waugite magazines. Other works included a new cable trench from Picnic Cove (Mandorah) to Waugite. This was completed on May 16, 1944.

May also marked six months since the last Japanese air raid on Darwin. Despite all the work being carried out on the gun batteries and the camps, several reports mentioned boredom as a problem among the troops. This led to "game days" being organised on the beach and photographs of this era show dozens and possibly more than a hundred men on the beach engaged in sport of one sort or another.

Camouflage was erected over the site of the new Waugite motor transport ramp in July and work started on the ramp proper. The month also saw the arrival of an Ammunition Repair Section who began work on the scraping and painting of all 6-inch ammunition on charge. 240-volt power was connected to the recently completed recreation room, the canteen, sergeants and officers mess. Lieutenant-Colonel P W A Kelso arrived to inspect the No 65 Anti-aircraft Searchlight Battery sites on the Cox Peninsula. These small groups obviously played a key role in the defence of Darwin and the peninsula with at least five small sub-units between Picnic Cove and King's Table further down the harbour. Unfortunately very little information could be found about the men whose main battle would have been isolation and the hoards of biting insects that greeted them at every sunset.



The searchlight at Picnic Cove near West Point.

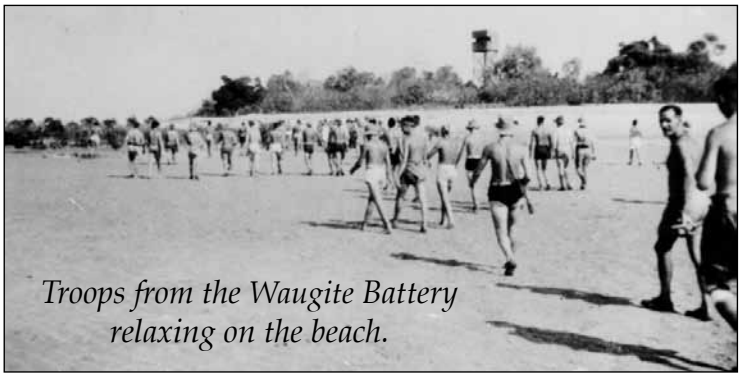
The Waugite Battery earned a new role in August when it was suggested it should become the harbour Examination Battery rather than the 4-inch Battery at Dudley Point. Waugite had a greater range and could support the examination vessel more effectively. Both the Navy and Army agreed that the harbour strategy should be amended.

An indication of the change in resources and equipment in the past 12 months came with the installation of a 129 Australian Heavy Searchlight Troop Sperry searchlight on the peninsula. Rather than the smaller generators of earlier days, a 240-volt power cable was laid to the main supply. Fortress Signals personnel also linked the Waugite site to the troop's other installations to ensure reliable telephone communications.

By October 1944, the Waugite Battery was completed with all the necessary equipment having been installed. Now it was down to carting gravel from Talc Cove required for the gun floors, recesses and engine room floors and this was completed before the end of the month. The men then set about clearing a playing field west of the No 13 Searchlight. The work took until the end of December although games of soccer were played earlier.

Despite another water bore failure that threatened to ruin Christmas for the battery troops, things were definitely on the up. This was spoiled in mid-January when an American B-24 Liberator bomber crashed to the west of Waugite. A doctor and a patrol were despatched to the scene but all six men on board were killed.

A screen for 35 mm picture shows was put up after a regular power source became available at the Waugite Battery. A mobile cinema truck was brought across the harbour by barge and the films were shown each Monday night. Other amenities such as powered fans, wireless and the use of a PA system made life for both Waugite and West Section personnel more pleasant, possibly even boring, at last.



Troops from the Waugite Battery relaxing on the beach.

The Waugite Battery gunners finally got a chance to show their skills during the testing of a new East Point coast artillery radar known as CHARLIE. The Fortress Commander ordered 40 rounds at two-thirds charge fired during a daylight exercise followed by a night practice on June 29 with 48 rounds fired at two-thirds charge. It was the closest to real action the battery ever saw.

The records of July 1945 show that construction started on 18-pounder gun emplacements at Waugite, although whether these were to be in addition to the 6-inch battery or to replace it is unclear. It became immaterial a month later when Japan surrendered and the need for guns of any description ceased. As part of the victory celebrations, Waugite Battery's 18-pounder guns were sent to the Darwin Fixed Defences headquarters for the firing of a victory salvo. Like the rest of the troops, all personnel on the peninsula were each granted two bottles of beer and granted two rest days.

According to the NT Heritage Branch's informative *WWII Gun Emplacements Wagait Beach, the Cox Peninsula batteries*, four days later a recently installed generator, weapons and ammunition were moved back to storage in Darwin. The following month, the defences were reduced to one control post, one 6-inch gun, two twin-6-pounder guns and five coastal searchlights, with a minimum number of personnel to maintain them. Both Waugite and West Section batteries were abandoned completely before the end of the year.

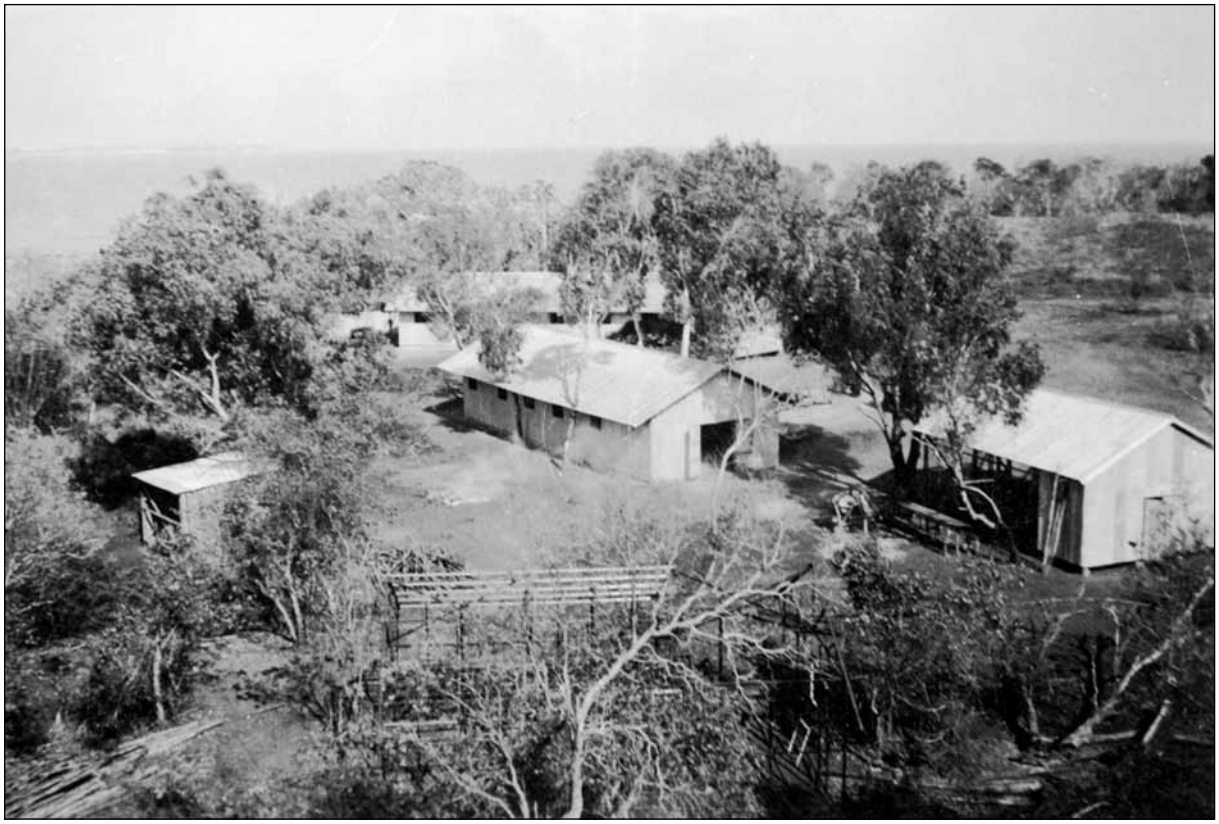
Chapter 3 – A day with Eric Lukeman: May 6 1992

Bombadier Lukeman served at the Waugite Battery in 1944-45

And everything's so bloody dear,
A bloody bob for a bloody beer,
And is it good? No bloody fear
In bloody, bloody Darwin.

Jill Mumme, a long term resident at Wagait Beach, had a brush with the past in 1992 when she was asked if she could show an elderly Army veteran then living in Queensland around part of the Cox Peninsula. Jill, along with her husband John, were both busy people but decided to take some time off to show him around. They met Eric Lukeman and his son Peter off the ferry and chose to head home for a cuppa and to see exactly where Eric would like to go. Jill described him as "… an elderly gentleman, meticulously dressed in shorts with long white socks and what I call, a Bogart hat". It turned out he had been a gunner at East Point and then at the Waugite battery in 1944-45 and wanted to see what remained of his old haunts. Eric brought along a number of old black and white box brownie photographs that he'd taken during the war.

"As he placed each photo on the table, he began to talk," Jill said. "It was as if he was remembering for the first time when and where they had been taken. As the day progressed he shared the feelings and thoughts he had as a 19-year-old thrown into war. There was so much I wanted to know about him and about this place he called home for 12 months. At first, he kept apologising for talking so much but that was wonderful for me. Even after 50 years he could recall so much.



Part of the Waugite Battery camp Eric Lukeman would have seen from one of the towers.

"We finally set out to see the plane wreck. I wanted to go out there first because I didn't know how Eric and his son would handle the heat, just coming up from Sydney. As we drove out to the wreck Eric said he had seen the plane crash. Well, not crash, but they heard it and saw the big billows of black smoke after the impact. A doctor from his

unit was called out to go to the wreck but Eric was on his way to Darwin by barge. They had only just left the beach when it happened.

"When we arrived there I pulled up in a clearing so we could view the plaque with the wreck behind it (what's left of the wreck). Between bushfires and cyclones there's not much left and people have stolen bits and pieces from the debris lying around. John and Peter immediately emerged from the back of the vehicle. Eric just sat there for a few moments. He hesitated and turned to me and said 'we must treat this with the respect it deserves'. I've taken many people out to that wreck over the years but this time was different. I felt different.

"He slowly approached the plaque and read the inscription. He tried to recall how it happened and I'm sure he was remembering how he must have felt at the time. The wattles were in bloom and as he wandered around the scattered wreck he spoke softly of events on that day but he could never remember how or why the plane had crashed. On the plaque it explained that they had been returning from a practice run. Eric seemed satisfied with the explanation."

Eric was silent on the way back to town with Jill driving and John and Peter in the rear chatting about football. The next stop was to be Wagait Beach and the site of the old 'Waugite' gun battery and the tower.

"This is where Eric was actually based," Jill continued. "His photos showed a tower and some gun turrets so we headed down Wagait Tower Road. Sure enough, when we got out of the car, Eric immediately recognised the old radio shed but minus the tower. We walked up towards the beach and headed for the highest bit of ground so Eric could get his bearings. A lot had changed he said. The engineers had built a small bridge from where we parked to the beach because there was always water running through there especially during the wet. They had named this creek Parallel Creek. I've looked back on some old maps but I haven't found a creek on any of them.

"We stood at the top of the sand dune and Eric pointed out where they had set up their camp and each week they would sit out in the open air and watch films. Even during the wet. He said the Aboriginals used to hide in the trees and watch the movies. They always seemed to know when movie night was. They exchanged tins of bully beef and other rations for fresh vegies from Belyuen (Delissaville). He said they played a lot of sport because they were all bored. Unfortunately there were quite a few sporting injuries and they had to stop contact sport."

Jill's footnote: Eric Lukeman was 19 years of age when he lived for 12 months at Waugite (now Wagait Beach) during the World War II with "M" Battery-Waugite Battery.

Note: The photos Jill speaks about were misplaced or loaned to someone. During research for this publication, it was found Eric Lukeman or his family donated them to the NT Library. They can be found by searching PictureNT for the Lukeman collection.

Washing day at Waugite 1945. This is one of Eric Lukeman's photographs showing the life and times of the troops based at the Waugite battery during the war. The washer-bloke is not identified but possibly may be Lukeman himself.

Chapter 4 – RAAF 105 Radar Station Charles Point

The bloody dances make me smile,
The bloody band is bloody vile,
They only cramp your bloody style
In bloody, bloody Darwin.

The "father" of the RAAF World War II radars, although known originally as gunnery radio direction finders, was William R Blair, director of the US Signal Corps Laboratories, who had become interested in radar technology in the late 1920s. After seeing some of the US Navy's radar work in 1935, Blair strongly recommended that the Army get into gunnery radar in earnest. Despite funding shortfalls, Blair robbed funds from a different program and by December 1936 had a working prototype. In the spring of 1937 they demonstrated an improved version of the set, picking up a bomber at night.

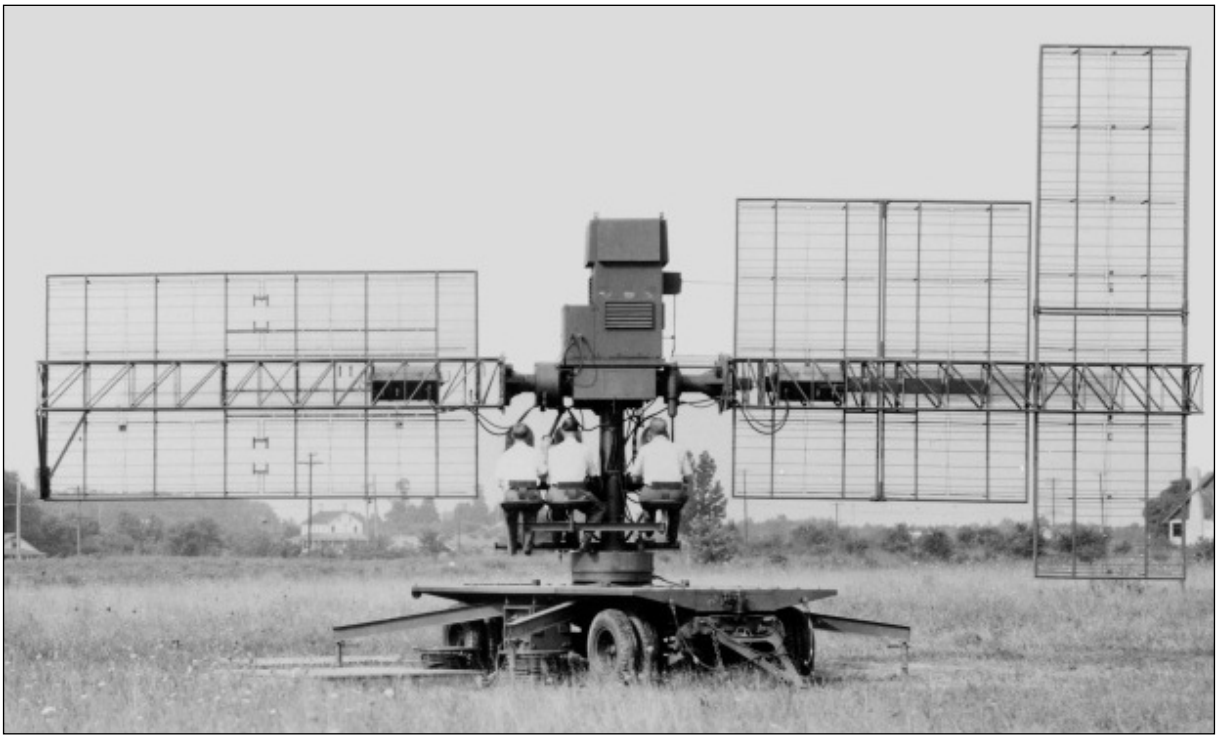
That saw $250,000 allocated for development of a practical system, to be designated "Signal Corps Radio 268 (SCR-268)". Getting the SCR-268 ready for production proved difficult. Blair's health went bad and he was forced to retire, but by November 1938, a crude prototype was ready for demonstration. The set was to pick up a Martin B-10 bomber flying overhead, but nothing was found until the radar operators searched around and found the bomber had been blown out over the sea by strong crosswinds. The radar operators had a better idea of where the bomber was than the plane's crew did. A production contract was awarded to Western Electric. Initial deliveries of the SCR-268 were in early 1941– a clumsy-looking device featuring three antennas, including a transmit antenna, a vertical receive antenna, and a horizontal receive antenna, fitted horizontally on a truss that was held by an altitude-azimuth gun-style mount. The operators sat on the set in the open and turned the heavy antenna array by hand, a system unchanged on the much-modified RAAF equipment.

The story of the Charles Point 105 Radar Station (originally Range and Direction Finding Station) began immediately after the first bombs dropped on Darwin. The RAAF found that it needed more radar coverage and early warning than the newly commissioned 31 Radar Station at Dripstone Cliffs. The RAAF had snapped up a number of SCR-268s after it was discovered that without predictors, they were of little use to the Australian Army. They were modified to increase the range substantially and converted to early warning air defence radars – a modified air warning device or MAWD for security purposes. They were trailer-mounted and weighed some 20 tons.

A MAWD that had been used at Richmond (NSW), Amberley and Archerfield (Qld) was dismantled on March 24 and flown to Batchelor, with all the essential items arriving by April 6. It was reassembled into two pieces in less than two days and moved overland by two 8-wheel American Army trucks to Charles Point, accompanied by nine members of the new unit plus a 3-ton truck carrying the men's gear, food and stores. The convoy travelled along the road made a year earlier for the troops at West Point. There were streams to cross, ditches, gullies and a "jump up" or two to manoeuvre. The vehicles were bogged numerous times and in some areas the crew walked beside the trucks wielding axes to chop down trees and branches. One of the RAAF members, Bob Meredith says he had to tie his blanket to the tail-shaft of one of the trucks to make a hammock so he could sleep off the ground while water flowed under his bed. The journey took two weeks but by April 20 the unit was being set up at near the Charles Point lighthouse.

The station diary records it took just six days to set up, carry out more modifications to extend the range to 160 km (it regularly achieved more than that) and, despite some teething problems, become operational only five weeks after the Dripstone site. May and June saw more tests and work to improve the range and height accuracy with 105

"Radio Station" (as it was known from May 25) going to 24-hour operation from June 3. A four-day series of Japanese raids began on the 13th with the unit excelling with plots of unidentified aircraft, some as distant as 141 miles – more than 220 km. This information was transmitted to the fighter control centre near the site of today's Berrimah Farm. By June 17, 11 enemy aircraft had been destroyed with three more listed as "probables".



The installation became known as the "doover" – an item, usually machinery, that defies description. In 1942 it was cutting edge technology and top secret. Although the operators had previous radar training, they only found out they were working at 105 Mobile Range and Direction Finder Station (later 105 Radar Station) after it was disbanded. The posting never appeared on their records. There were 12 men, mainly if not all from the RAAF, initially stationed at the unit. Records show more than 100 personnel were stationed there at one time or other.

A twin Vickers machine gun post was set up for anti-aircraft defence. An operations hut was built and camouflaging of the area undertaken. The post had 24-hour coverage so the men worked shifts. Accommodation was a canvas cover over a dirt floor and a "cyclone" stretcher to sleep on. There was no protection from mosquitoes or sand-flies which were referred to as murderous. Food was mainly from tins so it didn't take long for the men to grow tired of it. Fish caught in a trap were a real treat, as were the bananas from an abandoned farm not far away. Occasionally fresh meat was picked up on weekly visits to West Point.

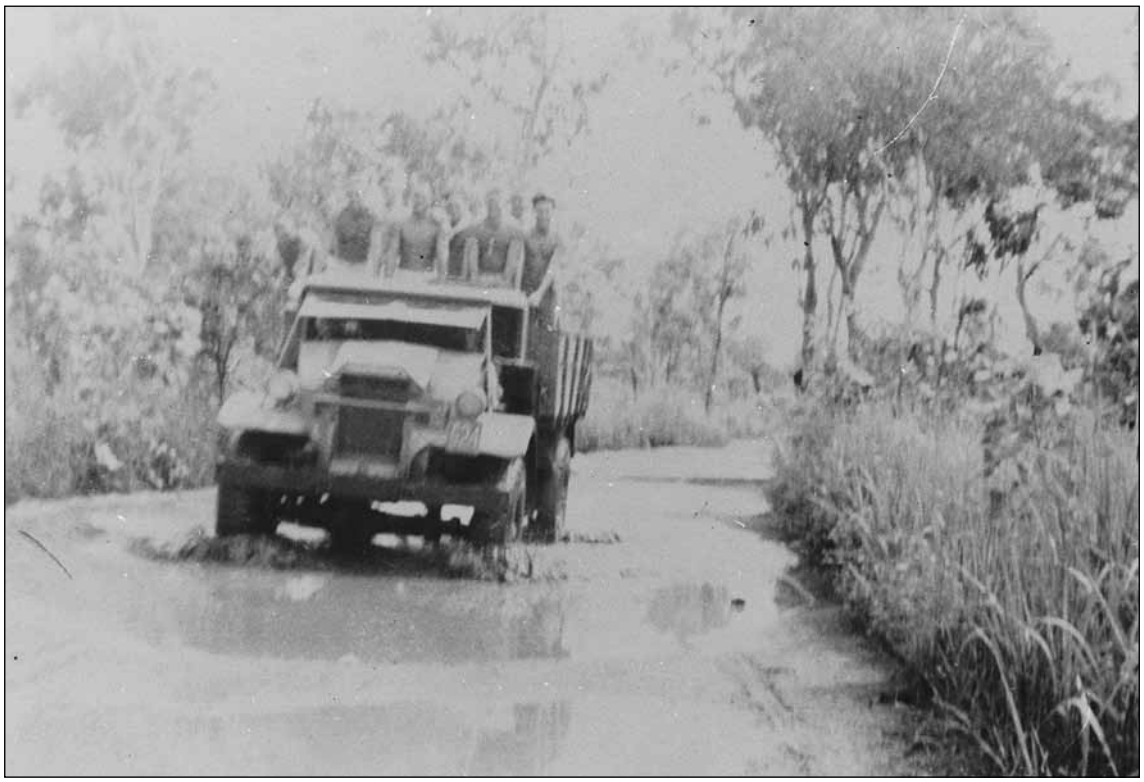
Stores came by road and by sea because in the wet season the road was impassable. The troops never put their hands up to go back to Darwin by road. With the Navy supply boats unable to unload on the beach, stores were dropped over the side, usually in 44-gallon (200 litre) drums. The troops would clamber down the cliff, swim out to the drums and swim them back ashore – no mean feat considering the tidal movement. The drums were then manually winched up the cliff-face. Guards were on watch for sharks and crocodiles.

The equipment sat in the open without cover or shade. Initially the men chose only to wear lap-laps and bathe regularly in salt water to combat the heat. Stomach upsets, dengue fever, prickly heat and tropical ulcers became common. Eventually, with the

encouragement of the medics, the men learnt wearing more clothing, including gaiters and boots, justified the discomfort and protected them from the elements. Washing in fresh water rather than salt also helped with the medical problems.

The men enjoyed the company of the local Aboriginal people who passed on bush and craft skills. The camp offered employment and they were always welcome at camp activities – bandicoot stew made a very welcome change from the bland and monotonous military rations.

Isolation also brought resourcefulness. The discarded drop tanks from enemy planes made ideal canoes. An entertainment hut was needed so with determination and bush skills, a "gunyah" or "woolshed" was built. The structure was of local timber and paperback covered the walls and roof. The floor was made from termite mounds. It was reasonably waterproof and from photographs it did look like a woolshed. Some of the men had musical instruments so this was a good place to play music. It became the venue for table tennis, cards and monopoly, writing letters and reading. The most amazing thing is that is housed a piano. How it made the journey to Charles Point and how the men managed to tune it after it arrived is a mystery. Apparently it was "borrowed" from the Darwin Town Hall. At one stage (December 1942) there were 52 RAAF personnel based at Charles Point, rising to 57 in February 1943.



Supplies and mail being delivered to Charles Point and Waugite-West Point during the wet.

In September 1943, 31 radar at Dripstone had to make a move after part of the cliff crumbled and undermined the installation. It was upgraded with new equipment, renamed 310 Radar Station and moved to Charles Point when another new radar at Lee Point became operational. Two further radar installations were set up on Melville and Bathurst islands and 105 was disbanded in late October 1943 – 18 months after it commenced operation.

The unit log book records: "In typical Air Force fashion and with the station about to close, a cricket pitch and badminton court were opened on the 25th". The aerial for 31 Radar arrived five days later. Many of the men from 105 were transferred to 60 Radar on Melville Island.

Chapter 5 – The Delissaville Black Watch

Researched by Lorraine Gardner

"We fight blurry Japs alonga you" – unkown black digger

Robert A Hall in his book *The Black Diggers – Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in the Second World War* states the name Black Watch was the official name given to the Aboriginal patrols during World War II. The people of Belyuen (Delissaville) had not heard the term Black Watch prior to my visit in November 2014. They did know that the men went on patrol with the Army. The term "Black Watch" honours the Aboriginal men from Delissaville who assisted in the war effort without any formal recognition or monetary payment, instead they were given food and tobacco rations. At the time the Aboriginal people were not accustomed to paper notes. They did not understand the European monetary system or its value and did not know how to trade or barter with it.

On January 1, 1942 Jack Murray became the superintendent at Delissaville settlement where there were approximately 100 people. Thankfully Jack wrote diaries and notes about his time at Delissaville that have been placed on the internet by the National Archives Office. With this information, the book *The Black Diggers*, other information researched on the internet and from talking with people from Belyuen, I have been able to construct the following information about the assistance our local "countrymen" provided in supporting the defence units on the Cox Peninsula during World War II.

Charles Point Army patrol led by Lt Cyril Molyneaux with Delissaville guides on a successful hunting trip at Jib-boog (Gibbong), near the former Radio Australia installation.

On February 19, the day of the Japanese bombed Darwin, Jack Murray took 40 able-bodied Aboriginal men to the Army camp at West Point to offer assistance. The men went with the soldiers to guide them in the search for planes and pilots that had been shot down in the area. This included finding a P40 Kittyhawk near Two-Fella Creek. Sadly, the pilot was dead. Two days later, a large number of men who had been camped near the Darwin hospital during the bombing arrived at Delissaville.

A week later, most of the Delissaville people had been evacuated to the surrounding bushland. Two tons of rations had been placed in a well-camouflaged galvanised iron shed built about 4 miles away. Some men stayed back to help at the settlement, working

on building roads and helping at the West Point Battery. From *The Black Diggers*: "As the air raids continued, the Aborigines' rescue efforts became better organised with Murray establishing permanent watch posts manned by Aborigines and food caches for downed pilots. Pilots were issued with maps showing the location of these.

"…Throughout the period, they provided a measure of reassurance to the pilots who faced the possibility of crash landing or parachuting into the deserted bush and wide mangrove forests of Cox Peninsula – so near Darwin yet so inhospitable."

From early April the Delissaville men continued to guide the servicemen and help in the search to locate planes and pilots including two Japanese bombers that were shot down over the Cox Peninsula. Both were located – one between Wagait Beach and the lighthouse and the other at Point Margaret in Bynoe Harbour. There were no survivors.

Lieutenant McGlaglen visited Delissaville on April 12. He discussed with Jack Murray the formation of a native patrol to be used in searching for planes and pilots and also to patrol beaches around Bynoe Harbour, Point Charles and down to the Finniss in Fog Bay.

Murray was enlisted in the Army and, although his men had been operating under the name Black Watch, it was on June 19 that the Delissaville Black Watch came under proper military control. It was agreed the Army would provide additional rations for this service.

The 7th Military District Fortress Command set down Murray's duties: *Your primary duty will be to organise and carry out patrols of those areas directed, to search for and locate:-*

1. *Allied pilots from crashed aircraft*
2. *Personnel from crashed enemy aircraft*
3. *Crashed Allied aircraft*
4. *Crashed enemy aircraft*
5. *Your secondary duty is to serve West [Point Coast Defence Artillery] Battery in any capacity directed by the Battery Commander*

On April 29, Murray and five men made a three-day search of the peninsula to locate a Japanese parachutist without success. It was believed to be "another wild rumour". During this search they were redirected to search for an American fighter pilot, Lieutenant Martin. They found Martin hopelessly lost. He was taken the Pt Charles camp. Another American pilot, Lt Andrews, was waiting at the camp to be taken back to West Point. Andrews' plane had been shot down at sea and he had made a miraculous swim back to shore where he was met by an army patrol not far from the Charles Point. Both men were transported to West Point where they were delivered safely back to Darwin by motor launch.

Between April and September the Black Watch continued to help with patrols and searches and also helped the Navy with surveys of Bynoe Harbour. One of the most amazing rescues was of a Lt Johnson whose plane had gone down in the vicinity of Bynoe Harbour. On June 19, Black Watch members were mistakenly sent to look for another plane and pilot that had actually crashed north-east of Darwin. During the search next day, they found another Kittyhawk pilot, Lt Johnson, five days after his plane had been shot down. He had had been wandering around crocodile, mosquito and sand-fly infested mangroves for five days. Murray believed that "this was undoubtedly the best effort of patrol as it definitely saved a life" (See full story next chapter).

Jack Mulberry, who was referred to as the "boss boy", also gave an account in the *The Black Diggers* about finding Johnson. "By and by one fella white man bin sing out alonga mangrove another side of creek. We fella bin go alonga that side now. We bin leavum boat. We two fella, Mr Murray bin look about amonga mangrove. We bin hearum one fella white man singin out all the time alright. We bin find him. We fella bin go follerum up that one white man singin out. We bin go long way amonga mangrove, alright. We

bin find him. Him up alonga tree. That one white man him close to bugger up … We bin cookim tucker. That one American him properly hungry bugger. He bin eatim tucker no more little bit."

Stray bombs were dropped near where the Black Watch was camped at Bin-bin-ya on September 27 and again a month later a few miles away at Jib-boog. Sadly Jack Murray's diaries finish on October 25, 1942 (see opposite page for part of one report).

Up to 25 Aboriginal people from Delissaville worked an average of three full days a week at the West Point Battery. Looking through the photographs in the NT Library web site PictureNT it is evident the Aboriginal people of the area associated well with the servicemen. They were not excluded from ceremony and were taught bush and hunting skills. The RAAF 105 Radar Station at Point Charles mentions that the Aboriginal people taught them bush skills and caught fish for them. It is also said that the servicemen enjoyed a fresh bandicoot stew made by the Aboriginal people as a welcome relief from the endless tinned bully beef.

Wagait Beach resident Jill Mumme met with one of the former West Point battery gunners, Eric Lukeman, on May 5, 1992 after she was asked to show him around Mandorah. Gunner Lukeman recalled that the Aboriginal people knew when it was picture (film) night and would sit in the trees to watch the movies at the open-air theatre, even during the wet. He also remembers giving the Delissaville people rations of fresh vegetables and bully beef.

Another veteran, George Pollock, was stationed at the Waugite Battery. He writes: "the men from Waugite (a name given to the Aboriginal people living on Cox Peninsula) came to our camp to gain experience with the light weapons we had, that is .303 rifles, Vickers and Lewis machine guns. They in turn taught us how to live off the land. I had great respect for the Black Watch and for what they did. They worked without pay, repat(riation) benefits or any leave entitlements."

Alice Jorrock from Belyuen was about 12 years of age at the time and remembers stories of the men helping with the patrols and showing the army how to survive. Alice said she and the other children would run and hide near the creek when the Japanese planes flew over. Children would be crying for their mothers. Alice recalls being evacuated to the Katherine Donkey Camp in the back of a truck. She talked about her brother Roy Yarrawin finding and burying a pilot near Two-Fella Creek. She also remembers that food was placed in drums along the coast from Point Charles to Talc Head for survival of both the patrol and the military. Alice was able to confirm that Jib-boog was swamp lands between Bin-bin-ya and Point Charles that is not marked on current maps. Amazingly Alice remembered the name of the main patrol motor-boat Amity and the two canoes Kittyhawk and 2 O'clock.

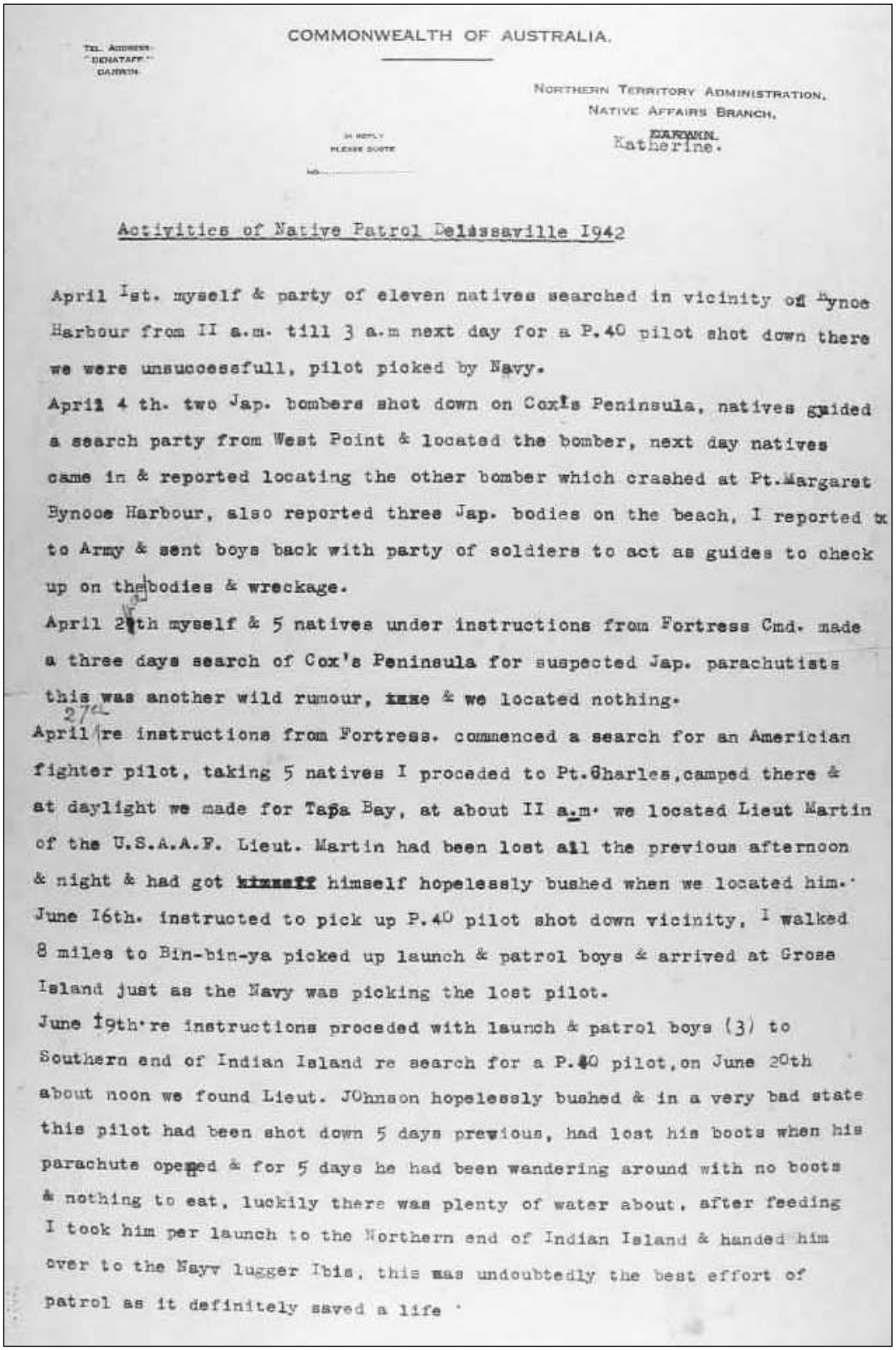
Ann Moreen said her father Fred Timber was part of the patrol. He told her stories of collecting bodies and searching for planes. Fred lost two fingers when they were caught in the chains as they were dragging bodies in from the ocean. Ginger Marine was from Delissaville and people believe he was in the "fully army" (Navy) as a Petty Officer.

People at Belyuen today believe the following Delissaville men assisted in the war effort. There were many more but sadly, with the length of time and the lack of records, their names have been lost.

Nugget Towaria
Jack Maranulk
Jack Kungeeung
Charlie Gardmea
Micky Djulung
George King
Johnny Beanamuk
Paddy Bingal
George Munbin
Jimmy Bunduck
Tommy Burradjuk
Jonny Beyanamu

Nipper Rankin	Paddy No 1 Boy
Willie Woodie	Mosec (Mosic) Nungalbidja
Roy Yarrawin	Roy BilBil
Fred Timber	Jack Mulberry
Tommy Lippol	Paddy Djiminbe

Ginger Marine – Navy Petty Officer (Mosec's brother)
Tommy Merin (Merrick)



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

TEL. ADDRESS "DENATAFF" DARWIN

NORTHERN TERRITORY ADMINISTRATION,
NATIVE AFFAIRS BRANCH,
DARWIN.
Katherine.

IN REPLY PLEASE QUOTE
No.

Activities of Native Patrol Melassaville 1942

April 1st. myself & party of eleven natives searched in vicinity of Bynoe Harbour from 11 a.m. till 3 a.m next day for a P.40 pilot shot down there we were unsuccessfull, pilot picked by Navy.

April 4 th. two Jap. bombers shot down on Cox's Peninsula, natives guided a search party from West Point & located the bomber, next day natives came in & reported locating the other bomber which crashed at Pt.Margaret Bynoe Harbour, also reported three Jap. bodies on the beach, I reported to to Army & sent boys back with party of soldiers to act as guides to check up on the bodies & wreckage.

April 26th myself & 5 natives under instructions from Fortress Cmd. made a three days search of Cox's Peninsula for suspected Jap. parachutists this was another wild rumour, & we located nothing.

April 27th re instructions from Fortress. commenced a search for an American fighter pilot, taking 5 natives I proceded to Pt.Charles,camped there & at daylight we made for Tapa Bay, at about 11 a.m. we located Lieut Martin of the U.S.A.A.F. Lieut. Martin had been lost all the previous afternoon & night & had got himself hopelessly bushed when we located him.

June 16th. instructed to pick up P.40 pilot shot down vicinity, I walked 8 miles to Bin-bin-ya picked up launch & patrol boys & arrived at Grose Island just as the Navy was picking the lost pilot.

June 19th re instructions proceded with launch & patrol boys (3) to Southern end of Indian Island re search for a P.40 pilot,on June 20th about noon we found Lieut. JOhnson hopelessly bushed & in a very bad state this pilot had been shot down 5 days previous, had lost his boots when his parachute opened & for 5 days he had been wandering around with no boots & nothing to eat, luckily there was plenty of water about, after feeding I took him per launch to the Northern end of Indian Island & handed him over to the Navy lugger Ibis, this was undoubtedly the best effort of patrol as it definitely saved a life.

Chapter 6 – Delissaville Black Watch Bynoe Harbour rescue

– as related to *Melbourne Herald* war correspondent Douglas Lockwood.

Early in 1942 Jack Murray was superintendent of Delissaville Aboriginal settlement, across the bay from Darwin. Part of his honourary activities when American and Australian airmen were dog-fighting with the Japanese was to attempt to rescue anyone who bailed out or were shot down. Delissaville was equipped with a wireless transceiver and messages giving approximate localities were flashed to him immediately an airman said he was ditching or was reported missing in his area.

Late one day he picked up a message from Darwin that an American flying a Kittyhawk had been shot down at a point 20 miles south-west of Delissaville, and was thought to have bailed out. Murray and two locals, Mosic and Willy-Woodie, set out at once to make a search by sea. A few minutes after Murray's launch was over the horizon, his assistant rushed out to the landing, yelling frantically, "Jack! Jack! It's not south-west; it's north-east. There's been a correction".

Jack Murray's launch in the mangroves

But Murray was well out of sound range and with his two helpers was off on a wild goose chase. The assistant superintendent radioed Command Headquarters and another launch was sent out and the pilot, afloat in his rubber dinghy, was rescued. Meanwhile, Murray took his launch around the southern tip of Indian Island in Bynoe Harbour until they were at a point about 18 miles from Delissaville. Standing less than a half a mile from shore they could make out the mouth of a small creek – one of hundreds of such tidal estuaries emptying into the harbour.

Then Mosic, a beautifully built Wargaitj dancer, said, "Funny thing, Jack; I dream about that creek last night. That same one." "Yeah?" Murray said, "What you dream about him?" "Aw, nuthin' much," Mosic said, "I just bin dream we see that creek and we bin go up him in the boat."

Murray's directions to the scene of a crash which didn't exist had been vague indeed, but he reasoned that he was somewhere in vicinity of 20 miles south-west and should begin looking for clues. His intentions had been to make a landing and search the country on foot, anticipating that if the American had any chance he would have ditched over land. But Murray had played hunches before and Mosic's dream was as good a solution as any to his problem.

"All right, Mosic," he said, "We'll go up that creek for two miles. Then we'll land on the right bank and do a footwalk, see if we can find this pilot feller. Blast him for getting shot down in the mangroves; the place will be crawling with mosquitoes and leeches."

In the narrow tree-lined creek the pop-popping of their two-stroke motor was amplified and became deafening, but the going was easy, although one crocodile made things momentarily uncomfortable with a violent bow-wave as it headed for the bank. They had gone about a mile upstream when, for no reason he has been able to explain, Willy-Woodie pushed the tiller hard to starboard. He was an expert waterman, yet here, in a confined creek, he deliberately hazarded the safety of the launch. The small craft veered crazily, heading straight for mangrove roots and the rocks along the shore. Murray turned to curse Willy-Woodie and to correct the heading, but he saw that it was

too late to change course again without scraping the bottom on some rocks ahead, so he cut the motor.

And in that instant, as the noise died, they heard a faint, hoarse voice. "Help!" it said. "Help!" Mosic's hair stood on end. "Debil-debil there," he said, his eyes wide. "Yeah, debil-debil," Willy-Woodie agreed, for this was completely uninhabited country.

"No," Murray said. "That's a white man; that's the bloke we've come to find. We've got him without having to walk far."

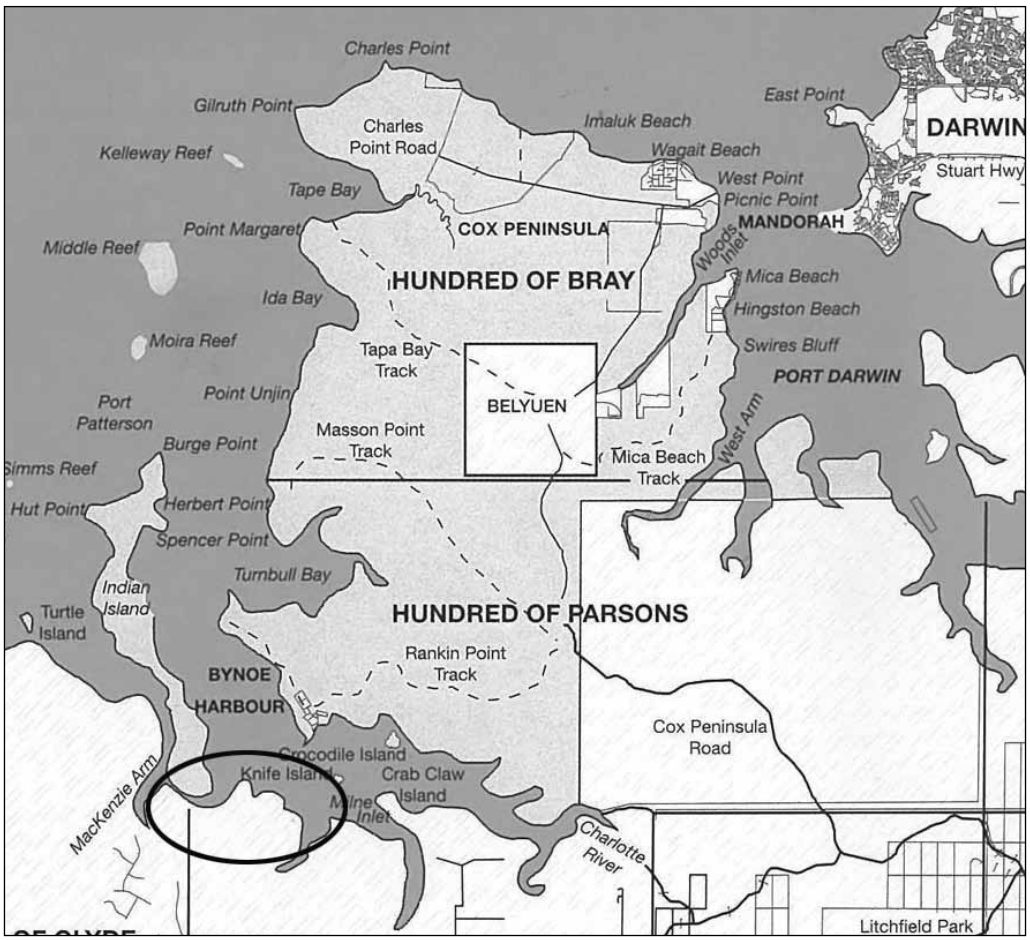
They stepped ashore and began wading through knee-deep mangrove slime. Crocodile tracks were everywhere. Then they heard the call again, closer. "Help! Help!"

"All right," Jack shouted, "We've got you, mate; who are you, and where are you?'.

"Keep coming for God's sake. I'm here, up this tree. Can't you see me, I'm an American airman,"

They found him in the fork of a mangrove, about eight feet from the ground. He was near collapse, bootless and hatless, bearded, scarred, and bitten by every known pest. Murray and Mosic had to lift him out of the tree, for he was incapable of much movement. His speech became incoherent as he dared to believe he had escaped from the death he had seen sliming beneath him. When they carried him to the launch he cried; and when they laid him on his back in the stern he rolled over and kissed the gunwale.

Murray gave him rum and waited for him to recover. The black men seemed embarrassed by this show of masculine white-fella weakness. They boiled the billy and gave him a drink of tea. In 10 minutes the American grinned, began brushing dried mud from his flying suit, and spoke.



Lucky to be alive … the remote search area (oval black line) where Lt Johnston was found.

"Name of Johnston," he said. "USAAF pursuit group. I was shot down here five days ago. This is the sixth day. I parachuted, lost my boots when the "chute opened. Maps in

my boots, couldn't find them. No idea where I was, or track to nearest emergency food dump. I wandered around in the mangroves, barefoot, through the mud. It was horrible!

"No idea this creek was here; I had walked from the other direction and didn't get this far. But that explains the crocodiles. They were grunting everywhere. At night I had to climb trees to get away from them, and had to stay awake so I didn't fall. This morning I was too weak; I couldn't get myself out of that fork in the tree. Had nothing to eat."

Jack looked at Mosic and Willy-Woodie and wondered if they had understood. He knew the natives had an abiding fear of madmen, and it was obvious that Johnston was mad. The awful experience of having been shot down early that morning, and then found himself lost in a mangrove swamp had been too much for his brain. Now he imagined he had been there for five days and nights.

"But they only sent me out this morning," Murray said. "They said you were shot down a few minutes earlier. I came at once."

"Those office-wallahs back at base always take days to get around to doing anything," Johnston complained. "Leave a man for dead, doesn't it worry the chair-borne division."

"You sure it wasn't this morning you were shot down?" Murray suggested.

"Hell, man! Don't you believe me? Here, look at the handle of this pistol. See that – five long notches. I kept a track of the days to see how long I could last. "I'd had it, and I was going to give myself one at sundown today. I couldn't take another night of that horror in there, listening to the scratching and sliming at the foot of the tree. God, I'm thankful I had enough strength left to make you hear me from the boat."

Murray met Johnston's eyes. "We didn't hear you, mate," Jack said. "Couldn't hear a thing beside that two-stroke motor."

"That's silly!" Johnston said. "I heard you when were going out to sea and I began shouting, then you turned into what I realised was a creek and your engine noise was getting louder all the time. I thought you must of heard me. I fired a couple of bullets to make sure. When you were opposite me, you cut the motor and I knew you had heard and that I was saved."

"We didn't hear you and we didn't heard the bullets," Murray said. "We were sitting right on top of the engine, and anyway, a revolver bullet in the mangroves wouldn't make much more than a pop."

"But you cut the engine when you were exactly opposite me. Why, if you hadn't heard, did you cut the engine just there? "Ask Willy-Woodie that one," Jack said.

Willy-Woodie, still ashamed of himself, hung his head. He could not explain why he had pushed the tiller over, a thing he would never do even on the open sea unless ordered to do so by the boss.

They returned to Delissaville late that night. Jack was completely mystified when he was told the original message was incorrect, that another airman had been picked up.

"Who is this bloke?" Jack's assistant wanted to know. "Johnston's the name; Kittyhawk pilot," said Johnston.

They wirelessed through to base. "Johnston. Johnston!" the operations officer said. "He's dead. We abandoned him five days ago. Poor devil, probably eaten by a crocodile. What's that? You say he's turned up there? Good boy Johnston; he must've walked a long, long way. Here, let me talk to that guy!"

Willy-Woodie had no explanation. "I just bin do him," he told Lockwood.

Mosic was the same. Asked about his dream, he said, "I never been past that creek before; I don't know why I dreamt about him, but I did; I saw him all right."

Chapter 7 – Timeline: World War II military Cox Peninsula

No bloody fun, no bloody games,
No bloody sport, no bloody dames
They won't even give their bloody names
In bloody, bloody Darwin.

1939 to 1941

An anti-submarine boom net was installed across the entrance to Darwin harbour between Dudley Point and West Point. The 6.5 km long net was the longest floating net in the world. It cost around £2 million ($4 million) – a huge amount in those days and some four times the original budget estimate.

1941

January-February 1941. Royal Artillery officers inspected the western side of Darwin harbour looking at how to improve Darwin's fixed defences. They suggested two 4-inch guns be installed at West Point and two 6-inch guns at Waugite (Wagait) to protect the anti-submarine boom net and boost overall harbour defences. Also an observation post for West Point or Waugite batteries.

April: 2/11 Field Company Royal Aust Engineers attempted to survey a road route to West Point but frustrated by late rains. Project deferred until May.

May: Lt Campbell (3 section 2/11 field company Royal Australian Engineers) inspected West Point to identify a site for D company, 2/3 Pioneer Battalion. He investigated potential for water supplies and a possible landing jetty. Road works started (A and D companies of 2/4 Pioneer Battalion) to link West Point to the main Darwin Road. A rough track cleared and opened in seven weeks.

June: 3 section RAE (see May) arrived at West Point to begin gun emplacements. A water supply established, a small camp built and road works started. Gun emplacements completed July 18. Aboriginal people, mainly Waugite and Larrakia, displaced by military activities in Darwin, arrived at Delissaville (now Belyuen) settlement with Bill Harney, then Bill Sweeney and later Jack Murray as superintendent.

M Battery had to make do with mosquito nets outside while building the camp.

July-August: Section of specialist gunnery unit, M Battery, arrived at West Point. The two 4-inch guns were in place but the gunners were employed clearing scrub, laying foundations, building huts and improving the site. They began a road to Waugite and built stone paths around the camp. Changes to the Darwin defences saw infantry defences withdrawn and replaced by irregular patrols.

The canteen at the West Point Battery.

September: More gunners from the 118/119 Royal Artillery regiments (formerly M Battery) and a rock crusher arrived on the peninsula, boosting the pace of construction and planning of the gun emplacements at Waugite.

October: Toilets, showers, a wash-house, petrol store, canteen and a rec room completed at West Point. Troops working on camp facilities, road repairs with 4-inch gun training in the mornings and evenings. Material delivery delays disrupted the work.

November: The 2/11 engineers at West Point to build water storage tanks but hampered by wet weather. Four barges carrying cement, timber, iron tanks and sundries arrived to start building the Waugite battery. Many casualties from cement burns and abrasions. Preliminary work on the Waugite camp site with Army doctor Captain Miller supervising removal of undergrowth and draining low areas to reduce the mosquito threat. 2/4 Pioneer Battalion D company back at West Point for battery guards and protection, but left on February 3, 1942, when battalion ordered to Timor.

December: 4-inch guns at West Point operational, the first defence works on Cox Peninsula to be completed. Parts of the camp a work in progress.

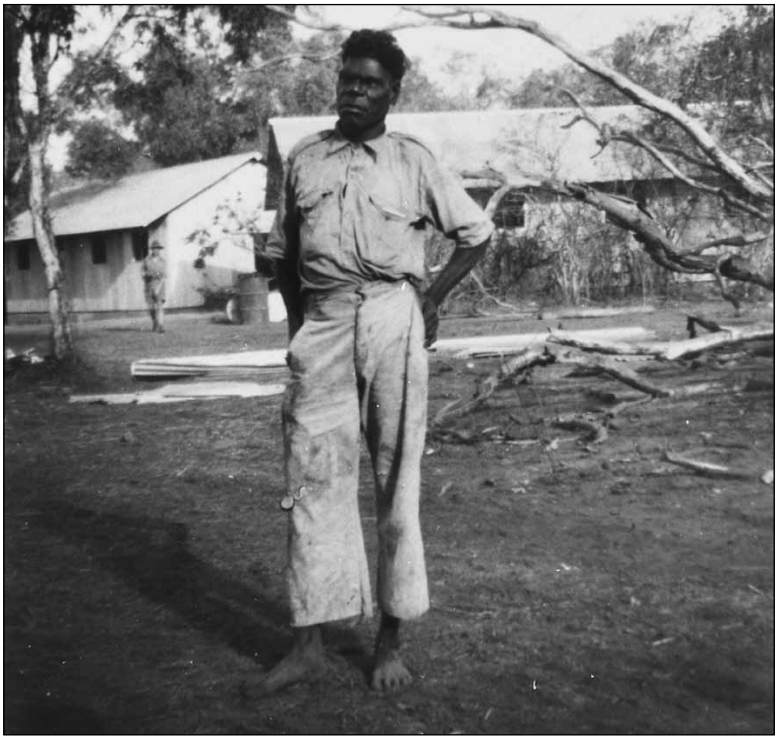
4-inch guns at West Point. The second gun is almost hidden by the large tree.

1942

January: Jack Murray now superintendent at Delissaville with some 100 people living there. Further work on 6-inch gun emplacements for Waugite. One of the emplacements was to be finished by mid-March but the second had yet to be started. February 19 Japanese air raids stopped work until July 1943.

February 19: Bombing of Darwin by the Japanese. West Point battery was not bombed during either raid, but was machine-gunned by Zero fighters. One Zero brought down by ground fire credited to 43 Infantry Battalion machine gunners. All on the peninsula on high alert for the expected invasion.

February 20-28: West Point detachment stationed at Charles Point lighthouse with foot and vehicle patrols along the coast to Charles Point. The West Point battery fired its first real shot on the 20th when an unidentified vessel attempted to enter the harbour. It carried refugees from Port Keats seeking to be evacuated. Anti-aircraft defences strengthened by extra two machine guns plus three men from US 147 Field Artillery with two Browning heavy machine guns.



Paddy No 1 Boy from Delissaville in his Army uniform while working at West Point. Despite the order to evacuate the settlement, many men stayed to work with the Black Watch or at one of the military installations.

The Delissaville community evacuated to bush areas but asked to retain contact. Community helped prepare hidden food dumps to assist downed pilots. Other Delissaville people assisted looking for crashed airmen or working at West Point battery, also assisting with the road building. Jack Murray formed the "Black Watch", an auxiliary search and rescue group to check any suspicious activity, look for crashed pilots and search for any downed aircraft and their crews.

March: 2/4 Pioneer Battalion D Company returned (March 8) to West Point for the third time after 43 Infantry Battalion troops ordered to rejoin the greater Darwin Peninsula defending force. Three weeks later the new Darwin defence commander ordered D Company back to Darwin and made West Point commanding officer responsible for Cox Peninsula's ground defence.

April: RAAF took delivery of a modified radio direction finder at Charles Point to boost fighter defences. After being trucked from Batchelor (161 km took two weeks see Ch 5) the unit began setting up April. Technical changes improved the range of the Modified Air Warning Device or "Doover" from 55 miles to more than 100.

Earlier in the month (4th), two Japanese Betty bombers shot down over the peninsula. Delissaville scouts found one crash site west of Charles Point with three crew dead in the wreckage. Delissaville men found the other bomber near Point Margaret in Bynoe Harbour. Again, all three crew perished. Bynoe Harbour saw a Jack Murray search for a Kittyhawk pilot but the navy got there first. Another American Kittyhawk pilot was found by a West Point patrol after crashing near Charles Point. Then a third US pilot was reported down near Tapa Bay. Jack Murray and his local troops found the missing pilot after a short search. Both were taken to West Point and later back to Darwin.

June: Two twin 6-pounder gun sites under construction at West Point to replace existing 4-inch battery. Two 6-inch guns ready to be moved from East Point to Waugite once emplacements completed. At this time, up to 25 Aboriginal people worked at West Point Battery "on an average of three full days a week, no clothes (or boots) were issued by Army and no natives were paid wages" – Jack Murray report. Instructions from Darwin to pick up a Kittyhawk pilot shot down in vicinity. Jack Murray walked 8 miles (13 km) to pick up his rescue launch and patrol members. They arrived at Grose Island to see the Navy retrieving the pilot. A US pilot incorrectly reported down near Indian Island. After much searching, a different pilot, Lieutenant Johnson, was found in a very bad state. He reported being shot down five days earlier.

Soldiers visit Delissaville. Jack Murray in the white shirt watches as a small child panics.

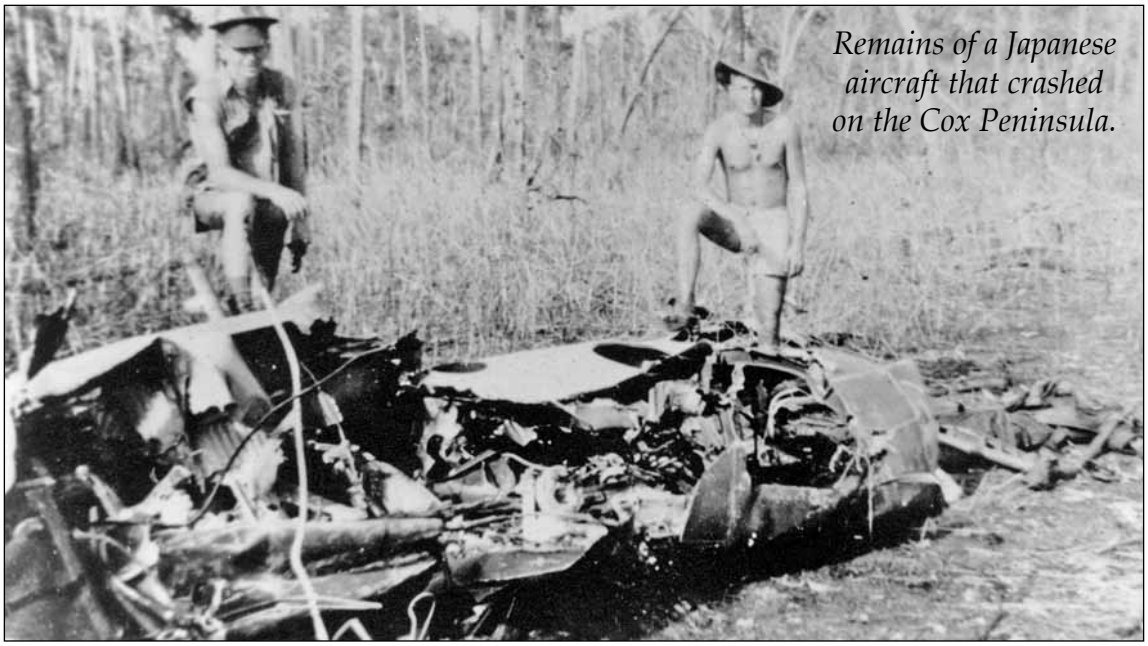
August: 105 Radar Station detected "hostiles" on six of the seven days between the 25th and the 31st. Bearings indicated the raids originated from Timor or close by. The raid on the 31st saw two bombers drop their loads randomly on Cox Peninsula after appearing to get lost. No known damage. Similar incidents followed in later weeks. Apart from a few frights for Jack Murray's bush teams, no-one was hurt.

September: West Point and Waugite Batteries officially designated "West Section of Waugite Battery". The 105 Radar Station had another month of intense enemy activity. The Black Watch sent to look for a pilot but recalled because the pilot had been shot down in the Wildman River area. Searchers also conducted a four-day search for a missing plane in the Fog Bay area but found nothing.

October: Military sites on the peninsula all camouflaged. The new twin 6-pounder guns at West Point were proof fired on October 26.

November: 105 Radar Station: improved grid reference method of reporting plot locations came into operation. Shipping also plotted. Enemy raids began again on November 22.

December: Japanese air losses and the build-up of Australian and American air and ground forces brought some optimism about the ever-present threat of an invasion.



Remains of a Japanese aircraft that crashed on the Cox Peninsula.

1943

January/February. Heavy rains saw little activity – except for the radar operators who worked in the open manhandling the heavy antenna array 24-hours a day.

March: A reconnaissance party travelled to Cox Peninsula to inspect the coastal battery at West Point and to select a target for an air co-operation shoot with coastal defence and anti-aircraft guns. Site selected near Waugite Battery. The 18 Fortress Company completed the radio direction finder tower at West Point.

June: More changes to the planning for the Darwin Fixed Defences regarding the long-awaited 9-inch guns at East Point. Smaller guns at West Point meant the centre of the boom facility was out of range of the shore batteries. Navy asked to place a 40-mm Bofors gun on each of its boom support vessels.

July: Work restarted at Waugite Battery. Forward Observation Post (FOP) tower erected. The concrete engine room (power house) at the base of the 80 ft (25 m) tower completed. Intelligence Section of 38 Infantry Battalion arrived on the Cox Peninsula to carry out a full reconnaissance of the area.

August: Gun mounting arrived by barge for erection at Waugite. A steel barrack room dismantled at West Battery for transfer to Waugite. 4 Australian Water Transport Coy (Small Craft) operated daily runs to Charles Point, Waugite, West Point, Talc Cove, Swires Bluff, Harpers Folly, Flagstaff Hill, Middle Point and East Arm. Small craft CO visiting all units to get an understanding of the existing services.

October: New radar at Charles Point (310 Radar Station) replaced 105 which had proved so valuable to Darwin's air defence. New commanding officer for Waugite Battery. The No 2 cruciform mounting for the 6-inch gun moved into its final emplacement position at Waugite and covered. The 2 x 6-inch BL Mark XI guns moved from the East Point Battery to Waugite. The Boom Defence unit at West Point renamed West Section of Waugite Battery. Gunners dismantled the 2 x 4-inch guns for move to Dudley Point.

November: At Waugite Battery the first 6-inch Mark XI gun was completed and in place. The second large gun was at the location and was being assembled.

December: Both Waugite's 6-inch guns installed. More work continued on camp buildings and maintenance. The battery remained on "warning basis" for manning to allow a full time works policy to continue. Bofors anti-aircraft gun in position.

1944

January: Waugite Battery on full alert manning in coast defence role. West Point battery HQ moved Waugite proper. 9 Anti-Aircraft and Fortress Company supervising Waugite camp construction and water supply.

February: New Waugite battery commander and battery captain appointed.

March: Waugite Battery – one magazine complete and other one started commenced. Trip and alarm wires laid around both searchlights, temporary accommodation shelter constructed. New 37 m (120 ft) metal tower at Waugite for forward and battery observation post and fitted out to house equipment, staff and sleeping accommodation.

The beach fronting the Waugite battery and its two towers.

May: Poor water supply at Waugite. Battery and camp camouflage problems reviewed and new camouflage ordered. Camp areas at West Section and Waugite consolidated and most West Section ammunition transferred to Waugite magazines. New cable trench linking Picnic Cove to Waugite.

July: Camouflage over Waugite motor transport ramp as work started on the ramp proper. Ammunition Repair Section began work on scraping and painting of all 6-inch ammunition. 240 volt power was connected to the recently furnished recreation room, the canteen, Sergeants and Officers Mess. A water cart used for carting water from Delissaville for drinking and washing at Waugite. Inspection of No 65 anti-aircraft Searchlight Battery sites on the Cox Peninsula.

August: 6-inch Battery at Waugite nominated as examination battery rather than the 4-inch battery at Dudley Point. Waugite's greater range and support for examination vessel saw Navy and Army agree to amend the "Bring to Line".

August-September: Power cable to Sperry Searchlight started, plus telephone lines run to all 129 Australian Heavy Searchlight Troop sites by signals personnel.

October: All equipment installed at Waugite Battery for its counter bombardment role. Troops clearing a playing field near No 13 Searchlight.

December: Bore failure saw water shortages at Waugite Battery.

1945

January: B-24 bomber crash south of Two-Fella Creek. New engine room constructed at Waugite Battery. A 35 mm screen for picture shows installed after Waugite Battery connected to power and mobile cinema truck barged in every Monday. Other amenities such as powered fans, wireless and the use of a PA system.

Sergeants Mess at West Point.

June: Waugite Battery testing the new "CHARLIE set" (Coast Artillery Radar) at East Point. 40 rounds fired plus another 48 rounds during night practice.

July: Construction of 18-pounder gun emplacements commenced at Waugite.

August: As part of the victory celebrations, Waugite Battery 18-pounder guns were pulled out and sent to the HQ Darwin Fixed Defences for the firing of victory salvo. All battery personnel were each granted two bottles of beer, while August 5 and 16 were declared rest days for all troops.

Facilities at both West Point and Waugite improved considerably in the latter days of the war.

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Special thanks to the staff of the Northern Territory Library PictureNT for the use of photographs from the World War II collections featuring the people, military activitities and installations on the Cox Peninsula. Many of these photos came from collections donated by the men who served on the peninsula during the war. Their forethought to record their life and times has proved invaluable.

The best place is in bloody bed,
With bloody ice upon your head,
You might as well be bloody dead
Than be in bloody, bloody Darwin.

—Anon

This poem is reputed to have been written originally by Australian troops during the Boer War. It reappeared in World War I in Cairo where the Australians trained, at Gallipoli and in France. There were many versions during World War II, with the unit 'poets' weaving local place names and events into the rhyme. No record has been found of one for Waugite or the Cox Peninsula.

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