

**Central**  **Bureau**  
**Intelligence Corps Association**

NEWSLETTER NO. 4 1990      DECEMBER

## SYDNEY REUNION FOR WARTIME RADIO SPIES

Men and women who spent the years of World War II engaged in highly secret signal intelligence operations met recently in Sydney for a rare reunion. Significantly they chose a remote location deep in the interior of Sydney's Centennial Park on the edge of a tree lined swamp.

Former cypher clerks, code breakers, secret radio operators, intelligence analysts and their support staff discussed events which had remained under wraps for over thirty years after the war. They worked in organizations with titles such as Central Bureau and R A A F Wireless Units, titles which were designed to mask their real activities.

It is understood that WW II signal intelligence operations in the Pacific Area were largely under the domination of Americans who it seems were not so coy as the the Australians about unit titles. They signposted their operational teams as Signal Radio Intelligence Units. Sources close to former Central Bureau staff say that the Americans led the Australians to believe that they had played a big part in hastening the end of the war.

After the Centennial Park meeting the ageing veterans, some of whom had travelled to Sydney from Victoria and Queensland and remoter parts of N.S.W. had the exclusive use of the luxury cruiser "Katika" to explore the beautiful Sydney Harbour and continue with their private reminiscences in a style which contrasted sharply with the tough lifestyle of active service in the nineteen forties, especially in the tropical war zones.

Perhaps that is how to-day's popular press would have reported the Central Bureau Intelligence Corps Association and R A A F Wireless Units Associations' Second Combined Reunion held on 10 and 11 November assuming it was worth reporting. Some outrageous story line like the Sunday Mail's Yamamoto story would have to be injected to make it newsworthy.

But that, of course, is not how "NEWSLETTER" would report the reunion. The general impression is that everyone who attended enjoyed the weekend. Comments by some of the participants are "wonderful weekend", "venues chosen couldn't have been bettered", "successful and enjoyable", "wonderful afternoon", "hospitality and friendliness-----made the two days most enjoyable".

It was indeed a warm, friendly relaxed affair. There was a serious and solemn period when C.B.I.C.A. President Jim Williams placed a wreath at the Hyde Park War Memorial just before the eleventh hour on eleventh November and remembered our wartime colleagues who had died.

Aussie barbecues among the trees and cruises on "our 'arbour" are good settings for story telling and our combined membership has some excellent raconteurs. Stories overheard included one from a bloke who had General Alkins ear and another from someone who early in the war called on the R A A F stores ship "WANAKA" when it ( unintentionally of course ) led the Japanese submarine pack to Sydney to launch the midget sub. attack. Another good yarn spinner told about copying for C.B. not Japanese military traffic but the wartime broadcasts of the Domei Newsagency. As Association members it is our combined loss that generally these raconteurs are reluctant to expose their fascinating material to public gaze through print media, even the friendly columns of "Newsletter".

**Continue ...**

If some of the visitors to Sydney were lost during the harbour cruise they were not alone as some of the Sydneysiders were being exposed to little visited backwaters. Groups with harbour experts among them probably had expert commentary on the delights of Hunter's Hill, the spectacular homes, the archeologically significant industrial sites and submarines in a refit dock. Most of us just enjoyed the food, drink, conversation and general scenery (not especially in that order).

The team who organised the Second Combined Reunion and worked hard at the barbecue, notably the cooks, kitchenmaids, waiters and waitresses and bar tenders can rest on their laurels.

If you would like another opinion about the weekend just ask one of the following people who participated (with sincere apologies if any names are missed).

Cec and Connie Allman, Ivan and Jean Auprince, Brett and Francis Bargalle, Bruce Bentwich, David Berry, Ian and Lorraine Buckingham, Jack and Dorothy Bleakley, Don Burn, Syd and Norma Carey, Keith and Joan Carolan, Len and Margaret Carrigg, Michael and Joyce Casey, Geoff and Gwen Charlesworth, Betty Chessell, Ron and Madeline Chidgey, Alf and Flora Davis, Geoff and Joy Day, Bill and Florence Estep, Eric Fuller, Dave and Steven Geyer, Gordon and Sue Gibson, Sheila Gregory, Ailsa Hale, Earle and Eleanor Heap, Thelma Hodgson, Al and Eunice Jenkin, Nancy Johnson, Harold and Florence Jones, Norma and Jackie Keeling, Helen Kenny, Stan and Joy King, Noel and Betty Langby, Alan and Pamela Langdon, Peggy Larkin, Jean and Keith Lavers, David and Marel Lee, Mick and Manestar, Margaret McCafferty, Doug McNally, Lachle and Noni McNaught, Dennis and Peggy Moore, Bernie and Pat Mortimer, Narelle Moyle, Reg and Molly Murphy, Mona Owen, Gerry and Diana Parker, Keith and Wilma Payne, Aub and Gwen Roberts, Doris Rogerson, Bert and Jean Rushen, Clare Stegga, Gerry and Marg Stewart, Norma Temens, John and Nancy Vasey, Jim Williams, Jim and Heather Williams and family, Stan Willis,

Gordon and Maria Wilson, Marion Winn.

The Secretary recorded apologies from L. Laird, G. Patience, B. Lording, E. Scott, F. Cureton, A. Whyburn, C. and S. Hinds, I. Chessire, M. Maroney, J. Shoebridge, D. Pyle, A. Osborne, G. Ballard, S. Winn.

#### **EXECUTIVE NEWS.**

From the President's Desk.

It was with much trepidation when I observed the rainstorm (Friday 9 Nov) on the eve of our Centennial Park function. But as luck would have it, Saturday turned out a most pleasant day. Our venue in Lachlan Reserve among the paperbark trees proved an excellent setting for our initial "get together" and I'm quite sure it was enjoyed by all present. I was more than pleased with our numbers.

The wreath laying ceremony at the Anzac War Memorial in Hyde Park was one I was honoured to perform. I find wreath laying on our observance days quite an emotional experience. It always brings to mind memories of my late father, a twice decorated digger in World War I. He died, a relatively young man, from the effects of gas in France.

Our Harbour cruise left nothing to be desired, with over eighty on board and another perfect day. Overall a most rewarding weekend.

I must refrain from mentioning Committee members by name, when due thanks are the order of the day. Suffice is to say I am most fortunate in having a hard working Executive who never let you down.

I extend Xmas and New Year Greetings to members and their families. Good luck and Good Health in 1991.

**Jim Williams.**

### Honorary Secretary's Paragraph's New Member

A warm welcome to our new member, John Vasey who served with 4W.T. In the Middle East, 55 W.T in New Guinea with C.B. at Hollandia and San Miguel. It was great to meet John and wife Nancy on the M.V.Katika. We had a long and interesting chat.

### Combined Reunion No. 3.

Sparkling Sydney Harbour on a sunny spring day was the pleasant setting for a conversation I had with Al Jenkin, our C.B.I.C.A. member who is also prominent in the Queensland Ex RAAF Wireless Units Association. The topic was the venue for Combined Reunion No. 3. As a reminder I should perhaps explain that "Combined" means the ASWG, RAAF WU'S, CB and even SIS(USA) personnel, their friends and relations are all welcome and that it was decided that it should be an annual event held in a different centre each year. The two reunions so far have been outstanding successes - Melbourne 1989, Sydney 1990, Brisbane 1991 ?? The question marks indicate no final decision as yet but Al, Harold and I are enthusiastic supporters of the proposal and Al has agreed to take the suggestion back to Brisbane and try to imbue Max Jamleson and Co. with an equal enthusiasm. The suggestion is that proceedings should be timed to coincide with the Brisbane WU'S usual get-together, which falls in mid-August and that the actual venue should be 21 Henry Street Ascot, providing that the friendly and hospitable couple Mr. & Mrs. Look will again open their gates to us. Those who were fortunate enough to be at the Bicentennial Re-union in 1988 will, I am sure, need no convincing this will prove a most congenial not to say nostalgic location for our third interstate and inter-service re-union. It is hard to think of a more attractive setting for our get together than the gardens of 21 Henry Street, on a Brisbane Spring day, so please keep this suggestion in mind with a final warning that it is so far only a suggestion. More definite information soon!

### Seasons Greetings

Meanwhile a very happy Xmas to all, and don't forget the annual general meeting early in 1991 (Monday 4th February to be exact). Make it a new year resolution to attend!

Gordon Gibson

### Treasurer's Report

What two great days we had for our Re-Union and to see everyone enjoying themselves was terrific. I would like to thank everybody for sending in their money before the event. It made it so much easier for me and also many thanks for the donations I have received and we appreciated all those who travelled from Queensland and Victoria to join us. So sorry bad health prevented some members joining us and hope you are all now on the mend and thanks also to the people who wrote and sent their good wishes for a successful reunion.

The 'Battle of Britain' celebration in Brisbane went off well and I walked around to 21 Henry Street hoping to see Mr. & Mrs. Look, but they were overseas. I re-read our plaque and was proud to show it to my friends and to think I had been part of it. The church service at St. Johns Brisbane was particularly moving, and thanks Eve for your phone call on my arrival. I now wish you all a Happy Xmas and may 1991 bring us peace throughout the world.

And this little "think again" verse:-

*If you are not leaning, no one will ever let you down.*

Norma Keeling

1991

### MEMBER'S DIARY.

- |            |   |
|------------|---|
| 4 February | Annual General Meeting.                       |
| 24 April   | Anzac Eve Sunset Ceremony<br>Sydney Cenotaph. |
| 25 April   | Anzac March and Association<br>Reunion        |
| 15 August  | Victory Pacific Service<br>Sydney Cenotaph.   |

( One to be pencilled in )

Mid August      C B and R A A F Wireless  
Units  
T h i r d   C o m b i n e d  
Reunion, Brisbane.

## PEOPLE.

( Reporter: Marlon Winn)

More than one of our members has family associations with Gallipoli veterans. This story is contributed by Norma (Peel) Schneider.

"On Anzac Day every year, the people of the small village of Hendencourt in France meet to pay tribute to the Australians who fought and died there in World War I. My father ( also a Gallipoli veteran ) was one of those who fought and came back.

My daughter, who is an economist at OECD and lives in Paris, attended the ceremonies this year with representatives from the Australian Embassy.

On arrival the Australian party was welcomed at a luncheon in the village hall for about 200 people - locals and Australians - and in the evening there were drinks in the school grounds, the school teacher and his wife being the main organizers of the events in this area.

Next day in the neighbouring village of Bullecourt, after a Mass, wreaths were laid at both the French and Australian memorials. It was all very formal the police had closed off the town, and the French Prefect and his entourage were present, as well as the Australian Ambassador and a contingent of Australian army officers studying in Britain. This was followed by a procession to another memorial ( about a kilometre from town ) and the laying of wreaths.

There was also a large and impressive ceremony at the Australian Cemetery at Villers-Brettonneux, followed by another at a memorial in the town, and another luncheon.

My daughter told me that there is a good sense of attachment between many of the people in the area and Australia and she found that it was very exciting to have participated in these memorial events. "

Bob BOTTERILL died in Melbourne recently. He was an Army member of C.B. and served also in D.S.D., occupying the position of Director at his retirement a few years ago. Bob's wife, Judy,

was in the AWAS in C.B. Former colleagues from C.B. and D.S.D. attended his funeral.

## **THE WIRELESS UNITS-CENTRAL BUREAU STORY.**

*In response to an invitation from "Newsletter" Mr. Jack Bleakley has kindly submitted the following information about his forthcoming book "The Eavesdroppers".*

*"The manuscript, begun in 1985 has been cleared by the Director D.S.D., to whom I am extremely indebted for allowing me access to secret material and for his ready advice and friendliness.*

*It is at present with a prominent international publishing house and we should see the book published mid 1991, in paperback, available through normal bookselling channels at around \$15.*

*The book could not be categorised as merely a "Unit History". It does however recount the behind the scenes stories of most of the important events of the Pacific war (especially the air warfare against Japan) through the "ears and eyes" of the WU kana interceptors, their "in house" intelligence staff, in combination with the outstanding efforts of their control headquarters personnel at Central Bureau.*

*The book contains introductory pages which trace the history of Japanese Sigint and include intercepts relating to the U.S., British and Australian pre knowledge of Japan's preparations for war, leading to Pearl Harbor 1941.*

*The subsequent 18 chapters cover events in the war in the S.W.P.A. in chronological order, recounting the background signal intelligence provided by the W/U's and C.B., which influenced the outcome of actions such as the Coral Sea battle, Milne Bay, Gaudalcanal, Bismarck Sea battle; air battles over Darwin, Port Moresby, Rabaul, Wewak, Hollandia; the land struggles in Papua-New Guinea including Lae, Nadzab, Finschafen, Sio, Madang, Aitape, Morotai and Borneo. Also covered are the U.S. actions*

*in which the R.A.A.F. W/U'S and C.B. participated.-Admiralties, Hollandia, Biak, Owi, Morotai, culminating in the invasions of Leyte and Luzon, Philippines.*

*Life and times of the participants, Australian men and women and Americans are also freely depicted.*

*It is anticipated that the book will interest not only ex-service personnel, but will attract a wide readership of many age groups in Australia and beyond."*

## EDITORIAL

Some people seem to accept lots of things at face value. They are probably very comfortable and are not driven to ask unnecessary questions and seek answers which change nothing. I am often uncomfortable----- like a few weeks ago when I focussed on some data about RAAF Wireless Units. There were indeed seven such units. Why did our leaders tie up all that resource of personnel and equipment? While watching the T.V. programme "Reach for the Skies" on 14 October I heard a WWII American fighter pilot say something like stupid people start wars and stupid people seem to be involved in managing wars. Now that's provocative stuff, especially if you had worked closely in wartime with people you admired and who may have been involved in planning. Surely every one of those units was well planned and necessary.

Let's have a quick scan of some published data. The source is "A Saga of Achievement" and in particular the chapter headed "The RAAF Radio Story".

1 Wireless Unit was formed in Townsville on 25.4.42. It moved to Port Moresby on 3.9.43 and five months later moved to Nadzab leaving a detachment at Moresby. Leaving some people at Nadzab 1WU went to Biak on 25.8.44. In February 1945 it disposed of its equipment and returned to Australia. It wasn't finished, however, and a reformed 1WU left for Manila on 9.8.45. The war ended, 1WU got waylaid at Morotai and came home to disband in December

1945. (1WU operated in the darkest days of the war when we were being beaten back and in serious danger of invasion.)

Two Wireless Unit was formed in Townsville on 19.2.1943. The fall of Singapore allowed some equipment for that port to be unexpectedly diverted to Australia. 2WU was trained in offensive and defensive use of firearms. In October 1943 it caught a train to Mount Isa and then travelled on trucks to Batchelor to start operations in December 1943. A detachment took over the Broome High Frequency Direction Finding Station in February 1944. In March 1945 the unit returned to Townsville and while it was preparing to move to a forward area the war ended and so did 2WU.

Meanwhile on 20.8.1943 Three Wireless Unit was born in Townsville. It trained extensively in the use of "Bren and Thompson sub-machine guns, rifles, gas and allied subjects". In January 1944 it caught a train to Mt. Isa and then travelled by truck to Coomalie Creek to commence operations. Operations ceased on 27.9.45 and 3WU disbanded at Strathpine on 6.1.46.

The thirst for WU'S continued and in April 1944 the RAAF gave birth to Four Wireless Unit. This seemed to be the ultimate in planning. 4 WU was the last word in mobility with fifty two vehicles "provided for all facilities." No train travel for 4WU. It would drive to the site of operations and start to intercept almost immediately. It seems that the expectation was that the war would last for a long time and be fought on, or close to, the Australian mainland. Fortunately most of the war was fought across the seas, but Australia did not have access to drive on-drive off sea transports to enable 4 WU to leave our shores to chase enemy signals. It did eventually get closer to enemy transmitters but it had to remove its own gear from trucks and air freight it to operational sites. Some of 4WU got to Hollandia in January 1945 and a detachment went to Morotai by sea on 12 January. In June 1945 a 4 WU detachment operated at Labuan soon after the Allied landing. On 14 June the main body of 4WU and its trucks were loaded on to an LST to travel to San Miguel. Prior to this big operation some 4WU people joined 6 WU for the Allied landing on Leyte but by the time the main body got to Luzon time and the war had run out. 4 WU was disbanded on 12.2.46.

The RAAF's thirst, or was it C.B.'s, was unabated and Five Wireless Unit was born at Strathpine on 21.9.1944 — a healthy baby with a strength of 58. By February it was strong enough for "tropical hardening" and in July 1945 it was moved to Luzon but the war ended before 5WU started to operate. It came home in October 1945 and breathed on officially until 22.3.46.

The story has it that General MacArthur wanted a RAAF Wireless Unit to form part of his force for the Philippines campaign. For this purpose Six Wireless Unit was quickly conceived and born. Seventy members left Brisbane for Hollandia in American aircraft and after fitting out with American equipment joined a Leyte bound convoy in October 1944. 6WU endured a typhoon at Tacloban and then found a substantial school building at nearby Tolosa. They made operating benches out of packing cases and tuned in to the Japanese. An advance party went to the Lingayen Gulf with the invasion force and it is said that some actually travelled in General Alkin's communications ship and operated at sea. When Manila was secured 6WU was consolidated in San Miguel and while continuing operations was also in the early stage of preparation for inclusion in the invasion forces for the planned landing on Kyushu. Then the bombs were dropped and 6WU came home. (As many 6WU operators were "blooded" with 1WU at Biak to some extent it could be said that 6WU carried on when 1WU took a well deserved R & R.)

As late as 2.7.45 not many weeks before war's end the family was not finished and the RAAF or C.B. gave forth yet more issue in the form of Seven Wireless Unit. Obviously the end of the war was not anticipated. 7WU was born in Strathpine but it was still in swaddling clothes at war's end and was quickly disbanded -- in September 45 to be precise.

When 1WU was formed in April 1942 things were grim in Australia, far more serious than we were led to believe at the time. In May Japan had submarines in Sydney Harbour and in August Japanese land forces had spread to the eastern tip of Papua-New Guinea. Japan had many bases over the South West Pacific Area and long lines of communication. The task of monitoring Japanese radio traffic both long range and short

range over a vast geographic area was immense. Radio intercept was carried out by Army Special Wireless Groups, American signal Radio Intelligence Units, 1WU and goodness knows who else. There was no hint of anything other than one ignominious defeat after another until late in 1942 when Australia had successes on the Kokoda Trail and the Japanese were beaten at Milne Bay. There was a significant Australian victory at Gona. The notable exception was, of course the psychological boost of turning back a Japanese fleet in the Coral Sea in May.

In 1943 the long tentacles of the Japanese octopus so often drawn by the cartoonists of the day very slowly began to contract or to be cut into squirming pieces by the American island hopping campaign. So also did the number of Japanese bases contract and their sphere of operations contracted. It could be assumed that the volume of radio traffic would also contract. Yet after 1WU its brothers or sisters were born regularly throughout the remaining years of the war; the WU's had fertile parents. WU's seemed to be bred for service on the Australian mainland and were trained for close quarters armed conflict. That seems to be consistent with the Brisbane line concept which saw Tocumwal as a rear bomber base to cover Northern Australia. The exception was 6WU which had a somewhat unusual beginning.

Months of bloody fighting got Australian troops into Madang in April 1944 and by that time there were four WU's. 1 was at Moresby, 2 at Batchelor and Broome, 3 at Coomallie Creek and 4 was an infant with trucks. By mid 1944 strong perimeters were established in recaptured territories and the island hopping campaign proceeded. The American effort moved north and Australian forces lost many lives mopping up strong Japanese forces isolated in the Solomons and Borneo.

So why was 5WU formed in September 1944 and why was 6 established at about the same time. Couldn't 5 have satisfied the great General's request? What was the plan for 7WU? Imagine seven Wireless Units, AWSG's and SRI's all copying a diminishing volume of enemy radio signals emanating from fewer bases, fewer aircraft and fewer ships.

