

Contents

Book A

- i. Title
- i Foreword
- iii References and Acknowledgements
- iv Acknowledgements
- v - vi Vessel Types
- vii-viii Contents
- 1 The RAAF Marine Section Point Cook.
- 4 Advance Operation Bases
- 5 Escape from Tanambogo Island, Solomon Islands.
- 11 Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.
- 19 RAAF Marine Workshops.
- 23 RAAF Base Rathmines, Lake Macquarie, NSW.
- 26 Arrival of Catalinas.

Book B

- 31 John Lewis Couch, Engineer (FMBC).
- 35 Oro Bay, Air Sea Rescue Boat 08.3 "Mary Ann".
- 52 Mooring Buoys
- 53 Millingimbi and Melville Bay.
- 61 Cairns Bound, Jim Hewett.
- 72 RAAF Base Cairns, Frank Purcell.

Book C

- 77 06.9 "Betty Joan", Ketch.
- 89 Karumba Marine Section.
- 95 06.11 "Yalata", Ketch.
- 102 Sailing Vessels and RAAF Radar Units.
- 103 03.13 New Guinea Air Sea Rescue Patrols.
- 108 Trawler 016.3 in New Guinea.
- 111 Ship and Boat Building.

Book D

- 119 Trobriand Islands 04.2 Air Sea Rescue.
- 125 03.1 Torpedo Recovery Boat.
- 131 015.09 "Una V", Ketch.
- 137 02.2 Air Sea Rescue Boat.
- 143 S.S."Wanaka".
- 147 RAAF Townsville Marine Section.
- 153 RAAF Lake Boga, No.1 Flying Boat Repair Base.
- 158 RAAF Evans Head Marine Section.
- 160 RAAF Base Bowen
- 162 Other Flying Boats
- 163 Brisbane Capital of Queensland
- 170 Martin Mariner Ditches in Storm.

Book E

- 173 Defence & Offence: RAAF Bases in Australia's Nth.
- 175 RAAF Base Truscott & West Bay Marine Section.
- 191 RAAF Base Doctors Gully.
- 201 06.10 Schooner "Waimana".
- 211 Marine Section Merauke, Dutch New Guinea.
- 217 06.14 "The Ruptured Duck" Steel Supply Ship.
- 226 Marine Section Borneo Campaign.
- 234 Royal Australian Navy's, 925 "Air Mercy", A.S.R.
- 236 R.A.N "Air Boats"

Book F

- 247 Fremantle Marine Section
- 259 RAAF Base Townsville
- 265 West Coast Marine Sections
- 269 Catalina, Crew and Passengers Rescued.
- 272 Saint George's Basin
- 276 Jervis Bay
- 280 Cockatoo Island "SHE CAT"
- 282 East Arm Darwin
- 291 Admiralty Islands, Manus, Los Negros
- 293 Paynesville Victoria

Book G

- 295 Japanese Rabaul Surrender
- 301 Disposal of Marine Section Boats
- 304 RAAF Marine Sections in the Post War period
- 307 Interim RAAF Port Moresby
- 309 Morotai
- 313 Timor, East Arm, Borneo, and Rathmines
- 319 Point Cook
- 323 Townsville
- 329 Cocos Atol, the International Air Port
- 339 Neutral Bay
- 349 Cairns Memorial
- 351 Epilogue
- 352 About the Author
- 353 Roll of Honour

Inventory of RAAF Marine Section Vessels

RAAF Marine Section

John Lewis Couch Engineer

John L. Couch (46020) entered the RAAF on the 17 November 1941 and trained as a Fitter Motor Mechanic in Melbourne, Canberra, and Rathmines (Lake Macquarie).

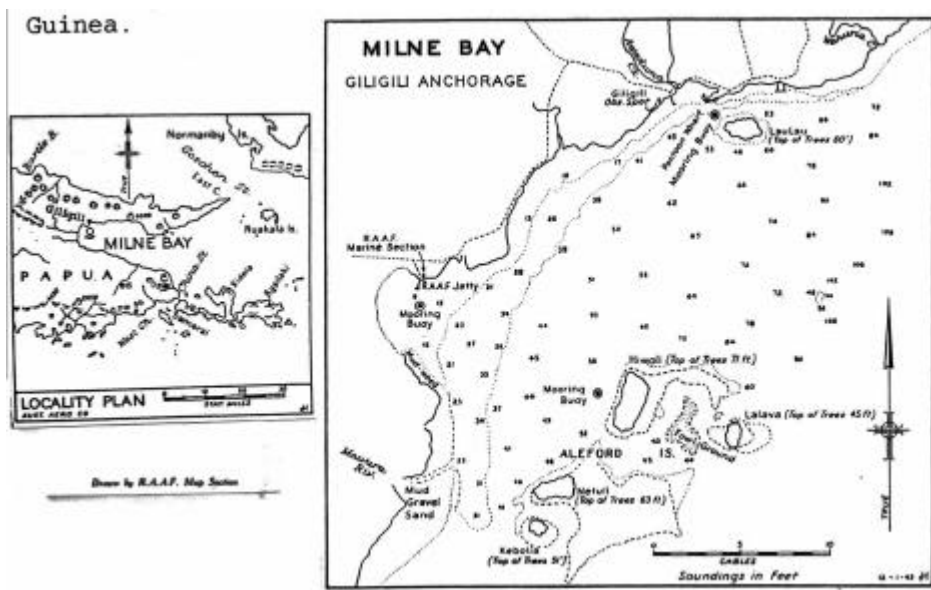
John was posted to RAAF Darwin where he fitted engines in Luggers that had been taken on strength by the RAAF Marine Section. These boats, along with large Ketches and Schooners, were used extensively to carry Personnel, supplies and equipment to remote islands, bays, Bases and Units of the RAAF. In many cases these large sailing vessels were sailed by their owners, who were then members of the RAAF.

RAAF Milne Bay

John's following posting took him to RAAF Milne Bay where he was the Sergeant in Charge of the shore based Marine Section Repair yard and workshop. Here major repairs and ship conversions for specific tasks were carried out.

During 1941 a RAAF Crash Boat, some 35 feet long, with a powerful motor, operated from the RAAF Jetty in Milne Bay during the Japanese invasion attempt. Throughout this desperate period the Crash Boat was used to gather vital information about the Japanese ships and their location. Some time later, while trying to escape from Milne Bay under cover of darkness, it was sunk by the Japanese.

An opportunity presented itself so John Couch joined the Crew of Air Sea Rescue 08.03 as Engineer, under Bernie Bashford, the Skipper, at Oro Bay on the east coast of New Guinea.





John (Jack) Couch, Engineer (Fitter Motor Boat Crew) at Townsville (Queensland) Embarcation Depot November 1942. (Jack Couch)



Jack about to be posted to Port Moresby Marine Section Base Workshop, and later to Milne Bay Workshop. (J. Couch)



Some of the Milne Bay (New Guinea) Marine Section Workshop tradesmen of the Engineering Section. (J. Couch)



Japanese wounded found drifting in a Landing Barge were brought ashore and given medical treatment by Base Medics. (J.Couch)



Local Milne Bay people also received medical assistance from Base Personnel.
(Jack Couch)



By invitation, members of the Marine Section made a visit to Wedau Mission.
(J. Couch)

"Marine Section"
Oro Bay
 (East coast of New Guinea)
 with

Air Sea Rescue 08.3 "Mary Ann"

Crew:

Skipper: Sergeant Bernie Bashford
 Engineer: Sergeant John Lewis Couch
 Radio Operator: Peter Caldwell
 Doctor: American, Peter Fleming
 Navigator: Harry Reilly

There John constructed a slipway by scrounging, hard to get materials, so as to be able to carry out maintenance and repairs to "Mary Ann" 08.03. It was most important to every Engineer that his boat was kept in first class condition to carry out its role in saving lives in the most efficient time.

An American ship was bombed and sunk in Oro Bay but the "Mary Ann's Crew made many trips to rescue the seamen during an air raid. For their bravery the "Mary Ann" Crew receive a commendation from the Americans.

The following is an account of one day on a RAAF Marine Section Air Sea Rescue boat, the "Mary Ann", written by one of the Crew, an American Doctor, Peter Fleming.

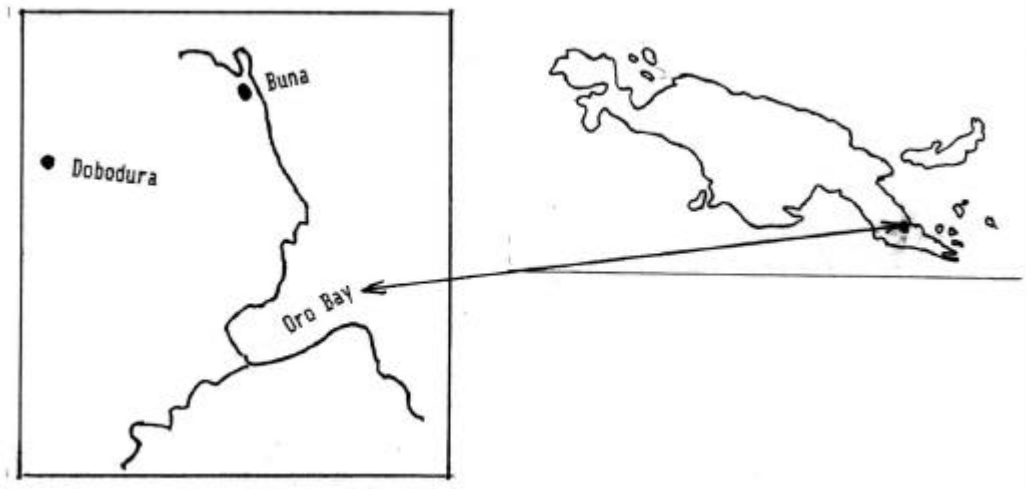
Perhaps other American Doctors also served on an Australian Air Force Marine Section vessel but as yet I have not discovered any. (Author).

Having an American Doctor as a member of the "Mary Ann" must have been quite unique, and the following account, written by Peter Fleming, during 1942/1943, highlights their some times dangerous occupation.

When the Siren Sounds

For the past several months I have been assigned to the RAAF Crash Boat "Mary Ann" whose job it is to attempt to rescue survivors of planes that crash into the sea in this area. The boat is equipped to care for many casualties. There is one physician, myself, and a crew of four, all trained in rendering First Aid.

These past several months have been a complete metamorphosis in me, from a rather quiet Doctor to a carefree, energetic one, from a poor sailor to a knot tying, cursing one. The six of us, for Mary Ann must be counted, having great times together. We have gone through hell, and have happily survived. My whole outlook on life has altered for courting danger makes you live more fully, while you can of course.



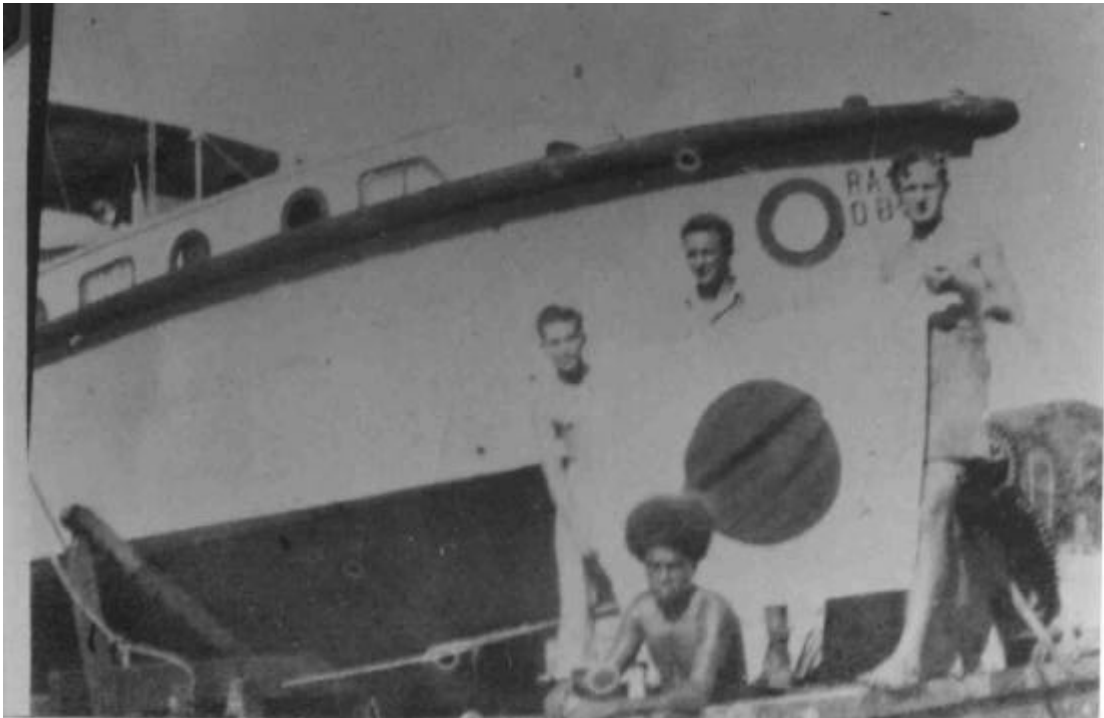
Jack Couch was posted to Oro Bay as Engineer (Fitter) on 08.3 "Mary Ann" Air Sea Rescue Boat. The Crew were the only RAAF personnel in Oro Bay so they lived ashore in tents and food was provided by the Americans. (J. Couch)



(Left) Tom Joel, a Boat Builder, was brought in to replace the keel on 08.3, Bernie Bashford (helmet), Harry Reilly, (?) , US Dr Shubert, (?) , US Dr Peter Fleming (in Crew) , outside the “Surgery!!”. (J.Couch)



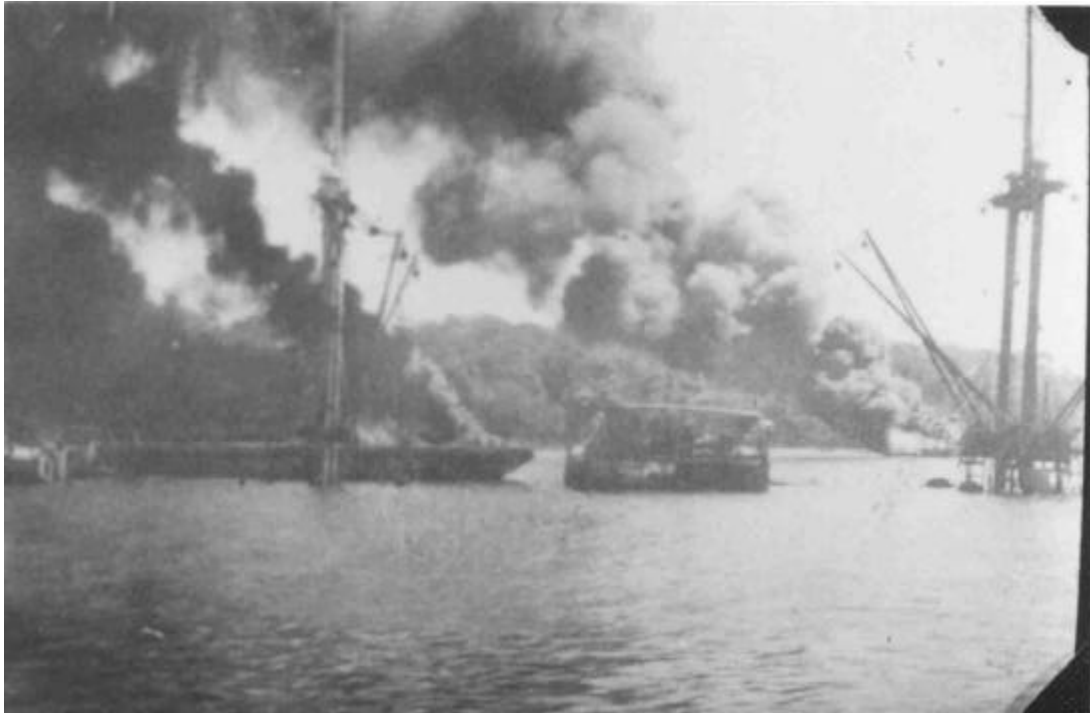
From Oro Bay 08.3 “Mary Ann” searched for shot down Air Crews during a Japanese bombing raid. Peter Caldwell (left) here assists Dr Peter Fleming haul aboard a body of a Japanese Pilot in whose flying suit was discovered vital charts & secret information. (J.Couch)



Dr Fleming, John Couch & Peter Caldwell display a flag retrieved from floating wreckage. "Gliddon, is a Water Boy from Goodenough Island. (J.Couch)



Jack Couch constructed this slip way from scrap taken from a sunken ship and the timber from coconut palms. Maintenance and painting could be more effectively carried out. (J.Couch)



“Batam”, an American cargo ship was hit and destroyed in a Jap air raid in Oro Bay. Skipper, Bernie Bashford took 08.3 along side and eventually save 38 members of the Crew. (J . Couch)



The U.S. “Dodge Bros” Mother Ship for U.S. Torpedo Boats, was also based in Oro Bay, an important distribution point as well as a Base for assault on Japanese shipping. (J.Couch)

A few weeks ago, it occurred to me that although I could never forget this experience, it might be a good idea to put on paper an idea of what we do, and what we feel. Our work starts with the air raid attack.

I was in the middle of a letter home, when the shout "RED ALERT" came, followed by three shots, which verify it. When there are enemy planes headed this way, we speak of it as an "alert", and is a red alert if they are in the immediate area. Three shots are our air raid siren. It is easily heard, naturally, and it is taken up by successive "hot" line men, whose sole duty is to give the alert.

When an air raid sounds there is great, feverish, activity. Men rushing to slit trenches; men rushing from obvious bomb targets. Men putting on their helmets. Men parking their vehicles and getting into roadside ditches. Men peering skywards through field glasses.

The natives hoop and dash by us towards their village. God knows why, the protection there is no greater.

Suddenly, startlingly close planes appear directly overhead. Silver planes in majestically perfect formation. You feel a tremendous sense of admiration for their flying skill. They are very high.

Then the inevitable wave of hope. Voiced shouting "They are Ours, they are Lightnings" or "They're B24's, matched by equally inevitable scepticism, "No they're Japs" only to be met by "Hell, they are B24's".

The planes have passed. You relax. No wait, they are turning, they're coming back, they are Japs. Then the mad scramble to get into the trench or ditch.

You watch them swooping down towards you. You discern that there are two groups, Bombers and pursuit escort; no, wait- three groups- for suddenly out of the west comes a fast formation of unmistakably Allied fighters. Our planes are met by the Japanese pursuits who have turned to face them. They are flying so high, so fast, you cannot tell one from the other. You only realize that they are dog fighting, because of the rapid manoeuvring and the white puffs of smoke preceding the planes.

Now the bombers are low, 7000 feet, you hear the motors buzzing in your ears, humming, droning. Then you hear the sharp "k-lack k-lack- the noise of the bomb bays being opened. You pull your helmet down closer, you snuggle deeper into your ditch or trench. Out of the corner of your eye you are conscious of planes, whose planes? falling.

Then 500 feet in front of you, in the water, you see silent geyser-like sprays rise out of the sea from dropped bombs, 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10. The last three have hit the wharf and gasoline bursts into fire.

An eternity later you hear the deafening thunderous "BOHMFF" of the bombs that land in front of you. With each detonation you can feel the tremendous concussion. It seems to press you around your waist, especially over your kidneys-short sharp, strong embraces-at about two a second. I suddenly remember the half completed letter on my cot.



“Staunch Defenders” of the RAAF Marine Section in Oro Bay. Some have acquired a deeper tan. (J.Couch)



Jack (hat)left and Harry (hat right) were sent to bring back these two RAAF Radar men from a remote village. (J.Couch)

"Nothing ever happens here. War is boredom, inconvenient-not blood and glory and song- like I thought." A letter tailored to fit censorship regulations.

The enemy bombers are lost in the melee of zooming planes. More bombers repeat the attacks. Interspersed is the "crack-crack-crack" of strafing. The air vibrates. The holocaust is so loud you would have to shout to be heard. The fighters are now low, now high. One plane is on the tail of another- but it is the rear plane that falls. Out at sea a bomber exploded as it crashes- followed into the water by the plane that shot it down.

Bernie shouts "That's us. Let's go Doc!." We all dash to the beach, me trailing my heavy medical kit. The five of us: Peter Caldwell, telegrapher, Jack Couch, engineer, Harry Reilly, navigator, Bernie Bashford, skipper, and myself push our collapsible canvas dinghy off shore getting wet to the waist in the process. We long ago learned to keep our cigarettes in our breast pockets, our best girls' photos on our packing case bureaus. We row, pole and paddle with our hands. The bombers seem to have left. We finally reach the spot where the Mary Ann is moored, hop on board.

In an instant, everyone is doing his job. Jack is down in the engine room, Harry is lifting the anchor, Bernie is starting her up, Peter is busy at the radio, I am looking towards the puff of smoke that marks the place where the fighter, which blew up the bomber, fell.

Here comes another wave of bombers as we pull away from the shore. We are so intent, we hardly notice them.

Bernie has now set the course and replaced me at the lookout as Harry takes the helm. I look shoreward and see a petrol barge and a tar dump have ignited. We feel the heat of the brilliant orange flame. The ebony smoke is rushing upwards, punctuated with blast after blast of flame.

Jack is making a racket louder than the engines and is seemingly rapping at the motors with a hammer and cursing a blue streak. "Bloody Bah-stid!" is all I can make out. I go below and check my equipment, lay out my morphia syringes.

I hear Peter in the typical sing-song chant of the short wave operator. "Mary calling Floodlight, May-ree call-in Floodlight. Hell-oh Flood- light, this is May-ree. Have you anything for me? Go ahead, please."

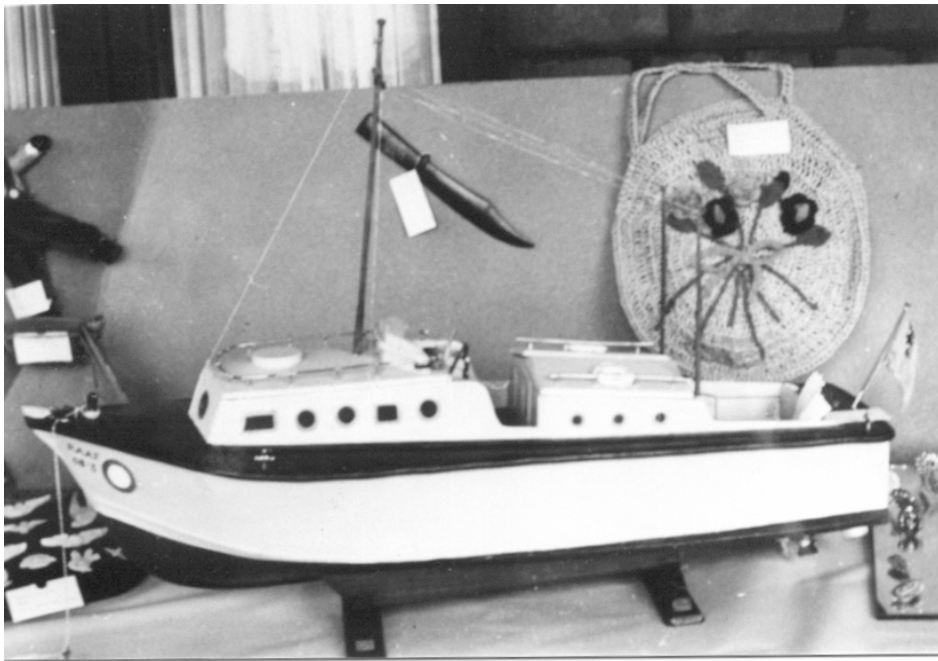
I'm back on deck. We are stripping off our wet clothes preparatory to diving into the sea if necessary. Suddenly, on the port side, we see a plane coming our way. Bernie, still at the look-out, can't identify him for he is coming out of the sun. Probably ours. No, its heading for us, straight at us. We all frantically take what slim cover there is. Harry is crouching down, and steering the boat by reaching the wheel from below. We zig-zag. The plane is almost on us. He zooms at us, crosses our bow and it is only then that we can make out he is one of us. He circles and heads out to sea. Is he trying to direct us? Probably he is. The plane, now close to the horizon, suddenly dips and there we make out an oil slick. Bernie sees it first.

"Oil slick to the starboard side," he yells.



Skipper Bernie Bashford would follow the track of Allied Bombers on their way to Rabaul, and other targets and take up station some seventy miles off shore. There he would wait until the Squadrons returned, ready to assist ditching Air Crews. There was always the possibility the “Mary Ann” could become a target for Japanese aircraft.

(J. Couch)



This model of 08.3 “Mary Ann” made by Jack Couch after the war was a reminder of his very important days on a RAAF Air Sea Rescue Boat in New Guinea.

(J.Couch)

I suddenly remember that the Geneva Cross we usually have on the cabin roof is on shore on my clothes line. I consult Bernie, who feels we should have one. I improvise one out of some four inch bandages and metaphen.

There are groups of planes all about us, very high and we cannot make out if they are ours or not. We look back and see the black mantle of smoke shrouding the port. The fire is now a tremendous furnace. Billows of oil smoke rise for thousands of feet and then seems to come to a standstill. The orange fire will make a good target tonight, I think.

Jack comes on deck; he is completely wet with perspiration, and has gotten extraordinarily dirty in 15 minutes. Now he is checking the fuel supply, now he's back in the engine room, issuing periodic "bah-stids" some "bloody", most them worse.

Bernie is shouting for his sun glasses, I take the wheel. Harry is attaching a metal ladder that trails into the water, to the side of the boat. Peter is now on telegraphy and the "dit dah dit dah dit dit dah" clicks noisily, thrillingly.

Suddenly we are in the oil slick--a field of white fluff that is kapok. No sign of any large pieces of plane wreckage. Suddenly we see a flying suit. We slow down I'm on the ladder over the side of the boat. Peter is holding my hand so I can reach further. I grab at what was once a pilot which is now so much meat. There's some scalp left, though. It's a Jap. "It's the Japs" Peter and I shout together. We are so intent that we fail to realize a plane was headed for us. We again can't identify him. We unconsciously duck as he passes over and then see the friendly blue and white circle. (RAAF roundel) We immediately get the significance of this pass. The plane was afraid we'd stop at the wrong slick. He wanted us to go further.

We're off again-- "Full a head" onto the slick that has now become visible.

We enter this slick but there is no sign of anything but oil; no wreckage is seen. We shut off the motor; no cries for help are heard. We peer all about; no body is observed.

We start her up again, cross and re-cross the mile wide oily area, stopping the motor again and again. Nothing..... Wait, there is something---a light. "Full ahead to port"... but in a few hundred yards we see it is merely a tin can reflecting the sun. We turn back to the first area, to the Japs.

We again locate the remains of the pilot but the boys are squeamish about handling the greasy mess. Again with the help of Peter, I am hanging off the boat dragging the surprisingly heavy mess aboard.

It consists of a torso, some leg muscles, a boneless arm and part of a scalp connected to the torso at the nape of the neck. I decide to search the body for we will put it off at the dock. Perhaps some enterprising soldier there will go through the pockets and thereby accumulate some souvenirs which would be greater value to the Intelligence Section.

I find water soaked cigarettes and matches. They are Chesterfields. (USA make) Harry cries "Cripes, too bad they're wet. That's my brand!" I also find a black (sic!) book with Japanese characters

in it. I let the body hang over the side of the boat so some of the water will drip off. Later Jack tells me, he then took a picture of the body.

We circle around and fish things out of the sea including a boot, two gloves-not mates, a flag, a brief case, a sponge rubber cushion. It was of course my job to remove the hands from the gloves, the foot parts from the boot. I thought the gloves were being taken merely as souvenirs by the boys. It later turned out that the gloves were very important to the Intelligence. I estimate at least four people were in the plane by the amount of scalp floating about.

We started back, I place the body on a stretcher and cover it with a blanket, then wash off the blood that has puddled on the deck.

Peter is back at the wireless. "May-ree calling Flood light". He has told me that he has been unable to raise shore. Traffic is especially heavy during an air raid. He also said, that if they had anything for us, they would no doubt have picked up our call.

Bernie is at the wheel and the rest of us are still on the lookout. Another plane zooms close, looks us over, is away.

Soon we are at the docks. We examine the brief case. It has telegraph messages in Japanese in it Harry "translated!" one for us. "Velly sorry we are at war with the Allies" he begins to stop again when some one throws something at him. The case also has a large flag, a belt of a thousand stitches, a free hand drawing of a soldier, a loincloth that looked like a bandanna, and a good luck charm. There is a bullet hole through the telegraph blanks. On the back of an unused one was this strange notation in English. "Have you a knife?"

Bernie and I carry the ridiculously light stretcher onto the dock. It doesn't look like a man. A crowd gathers quickly.

Roy, the ambulance driver, who doesn't know our stretcher contains a corpse, has been madly circling back and forth between two docks for he cannot decide which one we are going to pull into.

The curious soldiers are silent for some time and then one more aggressive than the rest says. "Who is it?" We tell him its a Jap, but he repeats it as:

Oh, a good Jap" A brave one peeks under the blanket and lifts it off. Those up front move back just a little. A wise one asks, "Is he dead?" Another says to Bernie and me, "Shame, shame." We were still naked, unconsciously so.

Later we moored the boat and come ashore. Dead fish line the beach-killed by the explosions of the bombs in the water. Lt. Sampson is waiting for us. We briefly exchange news of our trip for his news of the casualties of the raid.

I'm back at the dispensary tent and there in the afternoon sick call waiting for me. All cases are beyond the ability of my enlisted assistant. Anxious to wash off the oil slick and human gunk, but confronted by the impatient sick call, I dispose of them temporarily by shoving thermometers in their mouths. But too quickly, I learn later. One of the men is merely there for a signature.

Jacks yells that food has been saved for us, just after I have disposed of the last patient. We are about to eat our cold dinner when the whole thing starts all over again.

Aftermath

Intelligence advised us that the material we picked up is invaluable and might conceivably "change the course of the war!"

Dr Peter Fleming's description vividly portrays just one Air Sea Rescue that he and the RAAF Marine Section Crew carried out during the dark days of the war against the Japanese.

On another occasion 08.3 "Mary Ann" was sent out to recover an American Fighter Pilot Ace, who had just been shot down. They were guided to the location by an aircraft circling overhead which then left. The Crew of Mary Ann searched for hours, crisscrossing the area many times looking for the downed pilot. Occasionally the boat's motors were turned off so that Crew could listen for any calls in response to their shouts. Eventually the "Mary Ann" returned to their Base in Oro Bay without finding this well respected pilot.

So incensed was Jack Couch that he hitched a ride to Port Moresby in a light aircraft and marched into Head- quarters and demanded a pair of binoculars. He blurted out that because of the lack of binoculars had contributed to their lack of success in locating the downed American pilot.

The confronted H.Q. Officer roared. "Why didn't you salute, Sergeant?"

This was closely followed by. "You'll now lose a stripe because of your lack of respect to an Officer!"

Jack had also blurted out a threat that he would not return to the Air Sea Rescue Boat until he obtained a pair of binoculars. This also tended to aggravate the situation.

That same evening binoculars were delivered to him. Jack had noticed that the H.Q. Staff all had their own binoculars for watching the "dog fight".

During a post war discussion with an ex-Army friend (which was recorded by his Wife) Jack described an incident he observed when an American Torpedo Squadron Base was blown up. It appears that these high speed boats were fitted with five motors and capable of 50+ MPH were based in a bay protected by 400 foot cliffs. While refueling was being completed a cigarette was flicked into the sea causing spilt high octane aviation fuel to ignite. Some 32 of these P.T. boats were destroyed yet there was not one fatal casualty. Jack had observed this inferno, compounded by exploding torpedoes and ammunition, from well out to sea.

Some time later Jack's pride and joy, "Mary Ann" was blown up during an air raid by Japanese bombers.

Jack ended up in the sea severely wounded on another occasion after the Crew was disbanded and posted to other duties. He was repatriated back to Western Australia. No details of what occurred, or what happened to the Crew are available as Jack Couch, Engineer, passed away in 1994.

These details and photographs were provided by Mrs Couch.

On another occasion 08.3 "Mary Ann" was sent out to recover an American Fighter Pilot Ace, who had just been shot down. They were guided to the location by an aircraft circling overhead which then left. The Crew of Mary Ann searched for hours, crisscrossing the area many times looking for the downed pilot. Occasionally the boat's motors were turned off so that Crew could listen for any calls in response to their shouts. Eventually the "Mary Ann" returned to their Base in Oro Bay without finding this well respected pilot.

So incensed was Jack Couch that he hitched a ride to Port Moresby in a light aircraft and marched into Head- quarters and demanded a pair of binoculars. He blurted out that because of the lack of binoculars had contributed to their lack of success in locating the downed American pilot.

The confronted H.Q. Officer roared. "Why didn't you salute, Sergeant?"

This was closely followed by. "You'll now lose a stripe because of your lack of respect to an Officer!"

Jack had also blurted out a threat that he would not return to the Air Sea Rescue Boat until he obtained a pair of binoculars. This also tended to aggravate the situation.

That same evening binoculars were delivered to him. Jack had noticed that the H.Q. Staff all had their own binoculars for watching the "dog fight".

During a post war discussion with an ex-Army friend (which was recorded by his Wife) Jack described an incident he observed when an American Torpedo Squadron Base was blown up. It appears that these high speed boats were fitted with five motors and capable of 50+ MPH were based in a bay protected by 400 foot cliffs. While refueling was being completed a cigarette was flicked into the sea causing spilt high octane aviation fuel to ignite. Some 32 of these P.T. boats were destroyed yet there was not one fatal casualty. Jack had observed this inferno, compounded by exploding torpedoes and ammunition, from well out to sea.

Some time later Jack's pride and joy, "Mary Ann" was blown up during an air raid by Japanese bombers.

Jack ended up in the sea severely wounded on another occasion after the Crew was disbanded and posted to other duties. He was repatriated back to Western Australia. No details of what occurred, or what happened to the Crew are available as Jack Couch, Engineer, passed away in 1994

These details and photographs were provided by Mrs Couch.

Skipper Bernie Bashford

By sheer coincidence contact was made with the Skipper of "Mary Ann", Bernie Bashford, whose further exploits are recorded elsewhere. Bernie was later promoted to Warrant Officer.

Bernie was much older than his Crewmen for he had joined the Royal Australian Navy and in 1925 sailed on the "Melbourne" to England. Later he was paid off from the "Australia" after nine years, and when the Japanese attacked Darwin in 1942, joined the Marine Section.

After completing a 2nd Class Coxswain course at Rathmines he was then posted to Port Moresby. His meteoric promotion to Corporal after four months caused some raised eyebrows. He was then thirty six years old and married. Comments from some of the "old hands" referred to the new arrivals as "Students from the College of Nautical Knowledge!" A number of "scrubbed" Air Crew trainees had joined the Marine Section.

When the Commanding Officer at Port Moresby called all the Section to the Mess he unexpectedly announced that General Whitehead, Chief of the 5th Air Force (U.S.A.) had demanded a RAAF Air Sea Rescue Boat be sent immediately to Oro Bay on the East coast of New Guinea. Apparently a Fortress had landed in the sea some forty miles off shore and all the Crew perished because of no rescue boat was available. A call for volunteers resulted in Bernie Bashford and a young Crew set sail in the "Mary Ann", a 38- foot, unarmed launch, powered by two Chrysler six motors and capable of 25 knots.

The Crew all had the rank of LAC while Bernie was still a lowly AC1 for his stripes of rank had not yet appeared. No charts were available so Bernie, armed with a torn out map from the Townsville Times, a compass that had not been corrected for the region, and a New Guinea Native guide left Port Moresby for Oro Bay via Milne Bay. The guide, who seemed to be on a betel nut "trip" nearly ran the "Mary Ann" on a reef four miles from Port Moresby. He was smartly put ashore. Rock hopping was the means of navigation but down the coast Bernie secured the assistance of a Mission trained young man who spoke fluent English and wrote in English, but more importantly knew the way. His name was Adelbert.

On arrival in Oro Bay, the "Mary Ann" Crew discovered it to be an important distribution port to supply Dobodura Air Field. It was November 1942 and this Air Sea Rescue Unit was operating the furthestmost north than any other RAAF Unit. Bernie reported to the U.S. Commanding Officer, Major Moffat (a Clark Gable look alike) supplied the Crew with tents, "cots" (stretchers) etc and arranged for the Crew to eat in their Mess. An American anti-aircraft battery was there to defend the port and the newly built wharf.

Major Moffat asked Bernie how long would it take the "Mary Ann" to go to sea in case of a red alert.

"Four minutes!" was the reply.

"In that case, I'll get a Doctor to live down here with you Guys"

This arrangement must have been quite unique for an American Doctor to be a member of a RAAF Crew. Another U.S. Doctor shared the same tent with Dr Peter Fleming and they also had another tent they used as a Dispensary.

When the American aircraft set out to bomb Rabaul and other targets the "Mary Ann" followed their track to some seventy miles out to sea where they would wait the return of the bombers and escorting fighters. While at Oro Bay the "Mary Ann's" Crew were responsible in saving many downed Air Crews and Crews from bombed ships.

Clandestine Operations

They also landed A.W.W. (Air Wireless Warning) personnel behind enemy lines where they would operate in the mountains for a month until a relief team were brought in. This was not without some "hairy" occasions.

Oro Bay's Beach Commander, Major (US) Moffat called Bernie to his quarters and there explained that he wanted the "Mary Ann" to transport US General Heavy to Lae so that he could personally make a topographical survey. General Heavy had a Task Force of nine Liberty Ships loaded with combat troops and equipment ready to depart Townsville for the invasion of Lae.

The trip to Lae was uneventful, although the area was swarming with Japanese troops, and lay some six miles off shore while General Heavy carefully studied the proposed landing site.

Returning to Oro Bay was done during the night but their presence was clearly marked by the glowing phosphorescence trail they left in the ocean. Oro Bay was being bombed as they approached so Bernie, as Coxswain, zig zagged in case the bombers decided they wanted to "play". This added some drama to the voyage but the whole voyage had been subject to the ever present possibility of attack by shore based guns or aircraft.

American Generosity

Because the Communication Code used by the Oro Bay Base Radio to keep in contact with the "Mary Ann" had to be replaced, Bernie had to visit the US Colonel at the Air Strip known as Dobodura. On arrival the first greeting was, "Sergeant, you should have been here at 12 o'clock and it's now 1220 hours?" queried the Colonel.

"I am sorry Colonel, but I couldn't get a lift!", explained Bernie.

"You mean you don't have transport?" He then reached over and picked up his telephone and spoke to some one .

"Deliver a Jeep, and a Driver to my Office now and tell the Driver to take all his gear as he is going to live on the beach." The Colonel then turned to Bernie and asked. "Do you drive Sergeant?"

"Yes Sir!" was Bernie's reply. With that the Colonel picked up his telephone and ordered!.

"Cancel the Driver!"

Bernie then became the temporary owner of a Jeep.

Bernie's Crew had other jobs to perform with their boat like the occasion they had to collect an American Serviceman, who had severe wounds caused by careless handling of a hand grenade, from a Base well up one of the local rivers. On another occasion they had to transport an American Legal Officer to Porlock Harbour 30 miles away to make out a report about a self inflicted fatal shooting.

HMAS Pirie, while escorting six Merchant ships, was bombed and the six sailors of the forecastle gun, were all killed. One of the Merchant ships was sunk and 08.3 "Mary Ann's" Crew rescued 38 seamen and landed them ashore in Oro Bay. Dr Peter Fleming attended the injured on the return trip.

While there at Porlock Harbour a Japanese air raid began and one very large bomb landed some twenty feet from the "Mary Ann" lifting the craft clean out of the water. So severe was the damage to the engine mountings that the boat was a right off but the Crew suffered only small abrasions except Bernie was thrown backwards against the side of the boat damaging his back.

On arrival back at Oro Bay Bernie was advised that the Crew was to be disbanded and Posted out. He then had to report to the American Headquarters where he was presented with the following:

**Headquarters
First Air Task Force
AFO 503
Oro Bay, New Guinea**

Subject: **COMMENDATION**

To: RAAF Command, Air Force Headquarters, Melbourne,
 Victoria

1. A non-commissioned officer of your Command, **Sergeant B. Bashford**, 65244, has for the past two months been associated with my Air Force Headquarters in this area as N.C.O. in charge of rescue boat operations. Having been transferred to another Base, I wish to comment on the faithful performance of duty by this non-commissioned officer.

2. Sergeant Bashford's work has been highly satisfactory. In both rescue operations and the recovery of valuable intelligence data and material, he has been cooperative and efficient. The maintenance of his boat and Crew has been excellent.

3. I highly commend the performance of Sergeant Bashford and his Crew.

Signed

Robert R Herring
Captain Air Corps

Flying Boats & Seaplanes

Mooring Buoys

Probably the most taken for granted piece of essential equipment must surely be the humble mooring buoy.

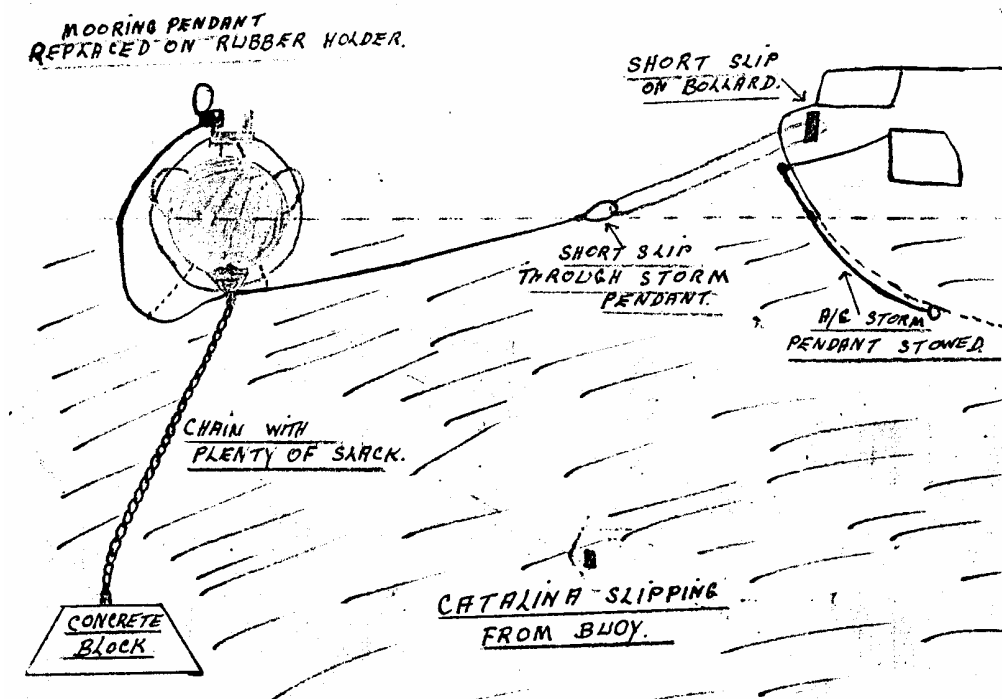
In every flying boat base and alighting area the provision of mooring buoys was the utmost importance for the ultimate safety and security of each aircraft.

In severe storms the mooring not only had to be very strong to absorb the constant pounding, but the weight of the anchoring concrete block, with its attached heavy chain, was there to resist dragging. In some extreme conditions RAAF Personnel remained on board with engines running to prevent the anchoring block from dragging.

Marine Section Crews laid these moorings and were responsible for their regular inspection and maintenance. Many moorings had to be provided to cater for more than one Squadron, Air Sea Rescue Flights, Transport Flying Boats carrying essential supplies and personnel, and aircraft staging through.

Dispersal of buoys was to lessen possible damage from enemy aircraft. With the enormous tides and currents experienced at many Bases, the location of moorings was most important.

Upon the humble mooring depended the safety of these valuable Flying Boats.



Millingimbi & Melville Bay

Northern Territory

Herbert Kitchener (Kitch) Williams joined the RAAF in South Australia (1942), trained as a Fitter 11E and worked on aircraft engines.

In February 1943 he requested a transfer to the "Marine Section" as a Motor Boat Mechanic, and, after training, his Unit assembled in Sydney. An American ship, "Admiral Halstead" a 10,000 ton vessel was loaded with 14 boats and barges together with 44 gallon drums of aviation fuel. RAAF personnel were taken off the ship and sent by rail to Townsville. There they rejoined the ship and headed up through the Great Barrier Reef. A Hospital Ship, with all lights burning, was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine while Kitch's blackened out ship was un-molested. At Thursday Island they joined a convoy of seven ships, and, with a RAN Corvette, headed towards Darwin with an umbrella of aircraft.

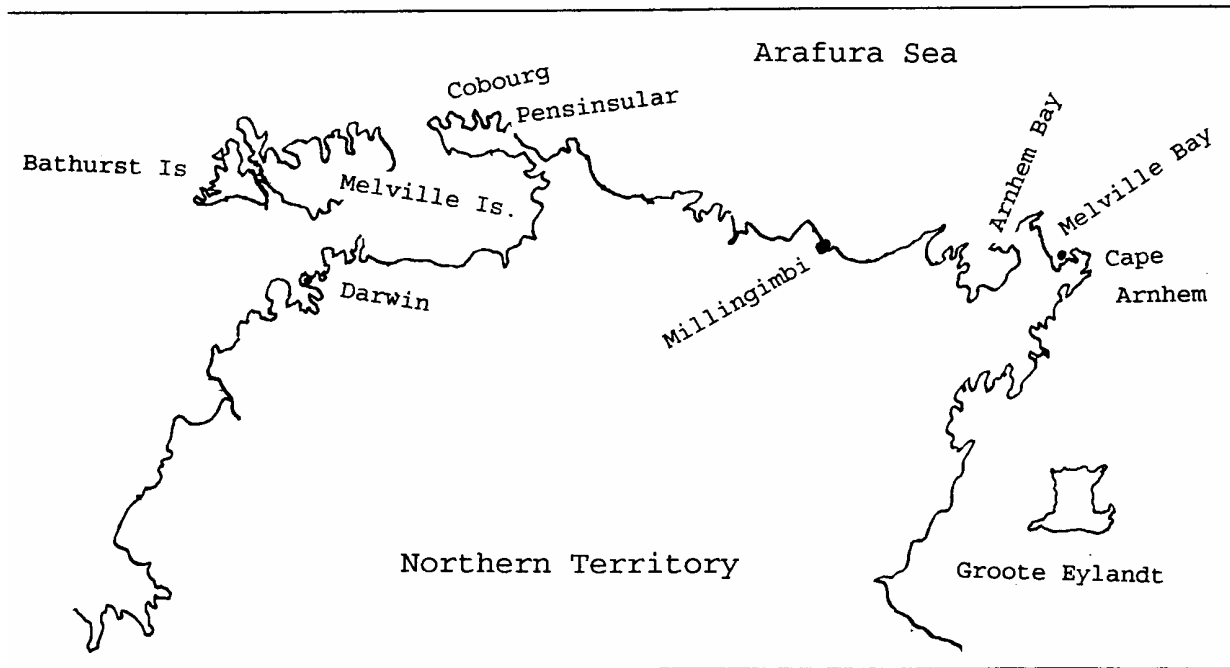
Off Millingimbi (Arnhemland) their ship anchored and unloaded their boats and barges then commenced unloading supplies. A Fijian Methodist Missionary, Kolinio Sukuru, had accompanied the "Admiral Halstead" and he guided the Marine Section boats in through the reefs to Millingimbi

A camp site had been established on the banks of a salt water creek where the boats could be hidden under the mangroves. FLGOFF John Grey was the C.O.

Trucks, from the site of the air strip being built some five miles inland, backed onto our powered landing barges and taken out to the "Admiral Halstead" where cargo was lowered by the ships derricks directly onto the waiting trucks. While the motorized barges were heading for shore the Dumb barges (without motors) would be loaded then towed to the beach by Work boats. The Unit had 10 Dumb barges, each 40-foot long, 2 Power barges each 60-foot long with a Drawbridge that was similar to the well known Landing barge.

Millingimbi was plagued by sand flies and mosquitoes so a bucket of smoldering mangrove leaves was kept burning and creating smoke as a means of combating these pests. Prior to Kitch's Marine Services arrival the Japanese had bombed the Base and a number of RAAF Personnel had been killed. They had been buried next to the air raid slit trenches along side our tents.

Each man scrounged all sorts of materials to construct furnishings to hold personal belongings. These young men had no amenities whatsoever so it was really living "rough". A bed and a mosquito net and a tent was their home. Most of their food was supplied in tins which they individually heated and prepared themselves. Bully beef, tinned meat & vegetables was the staple diet washed down by tea laced with sugar.



This aerial photograph was taken high above RAAF Base Millingimbi, on the north coast of the Northern Territory (Australia). From here aerial warfare was mounted against the Japanese Forces.



Similar to this 02.4, 48 foot Crash Boat, powered by three Chrysler eight engines, of the RAAF Marine Section, Millingimbi. operated at Millingimbi. Powered Barges, Dumb Barges and Work Boats were used to bring vast quantities of aviation fuel in 44 gallon drums, supplies and equipment ashore from transport ships anchored out beyond the reefs. (K. Williams)



40 foot Dumb Barge (no motors) moored in salt water creek, with mangroves each side for camouflage. A manually operated winch in place, hatch covers over holds where 4 tons of cargo could be carried. Work Boats & Crash Boats would tow these Barges into shore where they would be unloaded onto trucks. (K.Williams)

When ships and inter-island vessels brought supplies and materials there was frantic haste to complete the unloading so that the vessel was not delayed.

The nearby Mission Aborigines often appeared and a friendly atmosphere developed, but when Kitch's group gave them M & V to eat it was tossed away for they preferred their own tucker. Because of friendship shown to the Aborigines the Missionary, Kolindi, (an incredibly strong man who could lift a 44 gallon drum of fuel) invited the Marine Section to visit the Mission to show them around.

Because of the heat the men took to wearing only a hat and boots because of the chafing they suffered. It would appear that this mode of dress, especially in small remote Units was quite common around Australia and New Guinea. Kitch was soon to develop a severe attack of dermatitis, which would not clear so he was sent to hospital south of Darwin. He would remain there for some three months and experienced two Japanese air raids.

Kitch returned to his Unit which had been transferred to Melville Bay where No.8 Mobile Works Squadron (MWS) had the task of constructing the largest aerodrome in the N.T.

Melville Bay (now called Gove)

The aerodrome was being built some 14 miles inland so the Marine Section continued to live by the beach and to be independent. The No.8 MWS had their own cook, who produced fresh bread so this addition to their monotonous diet was most welcome. A supply of gelignite that found its way into their camp was put to an effective means of acquiring fresh fish to augment their diet. Out of generosity, the M.S. sent a supply of newly caught fish to the Main Camp which resulted in an inquisition of our Sergeant Crapp.

A RAAF Radar Unit had erected their "DOOVER" and cleverly camouflaged it along with their supporting dwellings.

A group of 15 Aborigines would occasionally arrive from Yirrkala Lutheran Mission, where Wilbur Chaseling, the Missionary was in charge. These Aborigines sought out a number of the M.S. and indicated they wanted to be "Wa-Wa". This was eventually discovered to mean they wanted to be a "brother" to individuals. Once again the visitors rejected bully beef offered to them much preferring wallaby and the fish they speared. At night the Aborigines held a corroboree and on another occasion the M.S. fellows would entertain them with a concert in the form of a mouth organ solo or playing music on the wind up gramophone. Wilbur, on hearing about the friendly beach RAAF invited the whole Unit to the Mission. Wilbur himself and his Aboriginal wife showed the M.S. over the Mission but all the tribe women were not to be seen.



MARINE SECTION MELVILLE BAY

Top: Ted Smith, Kitch Williams, (?), Tony Hordern, Middle: P.Smith, Mick Warn, (?), Jim Redin, Jack Near, Jim Paton, (?), Tom Goodwin, Ces Hocky.
 Front: (?), Freddy Chadwick, Arthur Tavener, SGT Keith Crabb, SGNLDR Davies, (?), Ross Wiseman & Bert Rees. (Kitch Williams)



Aboriginal visitors from "Yirrkala Mission" became firm friends with members of the Marine Section, whose living tents were located close to the beach. This made the M.S. a separate Unit, for the RAAF Base was located some distance inland. (K. Williams)

To enable a jetty to be constructed at Melville Bay a party of RAAF personnel had been sent by barge to Arnhem Bay to cut down suitable trees. On the return trip a Boomerang aircraft dropped a salvital tin containing a message for the Coxswain, Mick Warne, to return to the timber cutters and collect L.A.C. Hawthorn. Kitch still has the original message. During the week the barge was away 20 inches of rain fell at Melville Bay, which together with the heat, caused a thick green mould to collect all over his private mail

Though the Aborigines wore a loin cloth the M.S. fellows regaled themselves with a hat and boots but at meal times every one had to wear shorts. At night the heat was so fierce no clothes were worn yet for some periods during the year the weather was beautiful.

On one occasion Kitch found the water so inviting he decided to swim ashore from one of the barges instead of waiting for the rowing boat. When nearing the shore he swam into a Portuguese Man-o-war and the resultant pain was unbearable. Sergeant Hockey grabbed his medical kit and applied methylated spirits to the mass of tentacles to clean them off while Kitch was held down by several men. Tannifax was then applied.

To celebrate Christmas 1943 Kitch organized a concert based on Uncle Toms Cabin and the M.S. men trained for weeks to prepare. A stage and log seating constructed for the invited guests. Every thing was ready for the show that night. Kitch and a mate set off in a boat to retrieve two cases of beer that had "fallen off" a barge into the sea. The resultant booze up by the performers some what marred the concert performance but Kitch contends that SQNLDR Davies from the No.8 MWS enjoyed the escape from his own Unit.

Men at the beach camp rarely visited the RAAF air strip where some 200 lived but preferred their domain under Sergeant Crapp. An occasional cricket match against the Base personnel was played on the landing strip before the bitumen was applied. On one occasion Kitch (known as Silent Joe) had taken two wickets and trying for a hat trick when SGT Crapp offered him two bottles of beer if he could make it. The hat trick did not occur but because he took four for five balls the bribe was honoured.

Men in these isolated Units had to make do with what they had, but above all, make their own enjoyment and get on with one another. Nick names were common and laughing at small misfortunes relieved the monotony. Long remembered mateships reflect those days with, Ted Smith, Joe Williams, Jack Near, Tony Horden, Dave, Mick, Big Mick Warne, Jim Redlin, Jimmy Paton, Tommy Goodwin, Cec Hocky (Doc),



Freddie Chadwick, Arthur Tavener (Tavie) Keith Crapp (the Big Boss) and Smokey Joe.

When July 1944 arrived Kitch packed his gear and was posted out to the Marine Section Workshop at Doctors Gully in Darwin with its 25 boats and 170 "bods" with thirty in the Workshops. Another bout of dermatitis put him in No.1 MRS Hospital for three months followed by a posting to Sydney Technical School, Ultimo. Billeted in the Hotel Pacific, Bondi Beach, and his first experience with a spring mattress since joining the RAAF made life a bliss.

These details were taken from an Oral History Publication recorded for the N.T. Archives Service in 1987 as well as a personal interview with "Kitch" Williams at his home in Mandurah, Western Australia.



Aboriginal visitors from Groote Eylandt suddenly appeared one day.

(Kitch Williams)

Cairns Bound

Edward John (Jim) Hewett (46307) applied to join the Royal Australian Navy in 1940, but, because of the lack of response, went to the RAAF Recruiting Office. There he was rebuffed by indicating he was too old at 35 years of age and was married with two children. Undeterred, Jim re-applied, but this time gave his age as 27 years. After a Rookies course was posted to RAAF Point Cook digging ditches. A telegram from the RAN offering him a Commission caused the RAAF powers to be, to make a counter offer of a Commission. After a prescribed introduction to the mysteries of Commissioned Rank responsibilities he was posted to RAAF Darwin Repair & Salvage Unit (RSU) the largest in Australia. When this Unit was divided into two Jim went with one group to Jacki Jacki on the tip of Cape York.

Fortunately for both Jim and the RAAF he read of the formation of the RAAF "Marine Section" at Cairns so he made an application. Probably because of his previous experience with boats and yachts he was selected and went to RAAF Rathmines. Completed a course and was posted to Cairns as Officer in Charge of the "Marine Section". With two squadrons of Catalinas, No. 11 & No.20 operating from there on very long patrols, bombing raids and mine dropping missions, the Marine Section was a large Unit with a great variety of boats to meet their many roles. Some 150 RAAF Personnel were in the Unit to handle both the crews operating the marine vessels as well as the men who maintained the boats in the workshops and slipways.

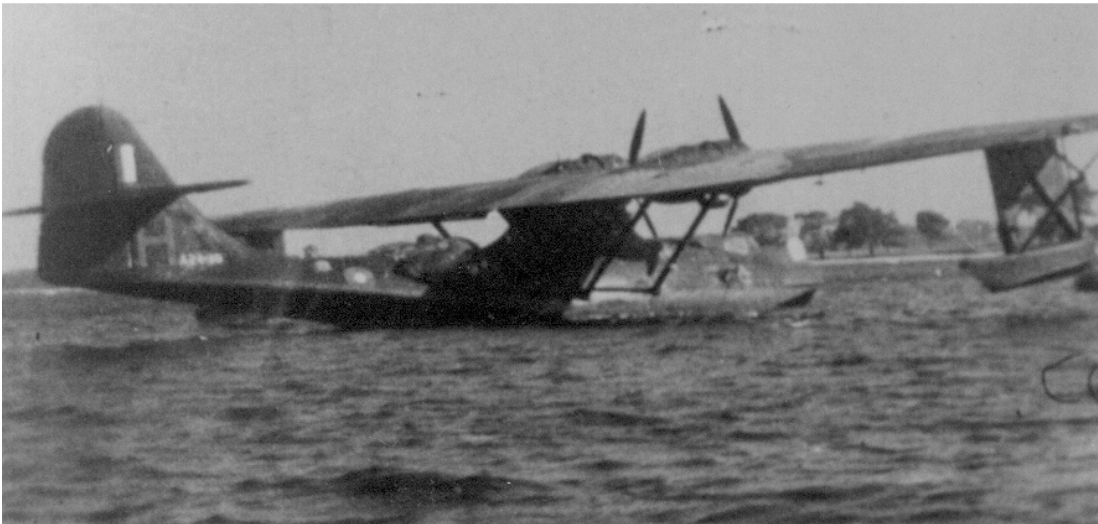
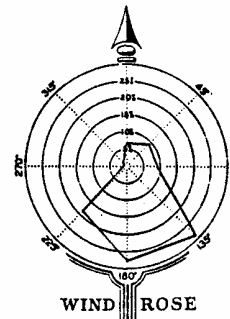
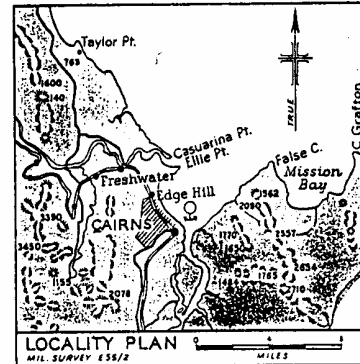
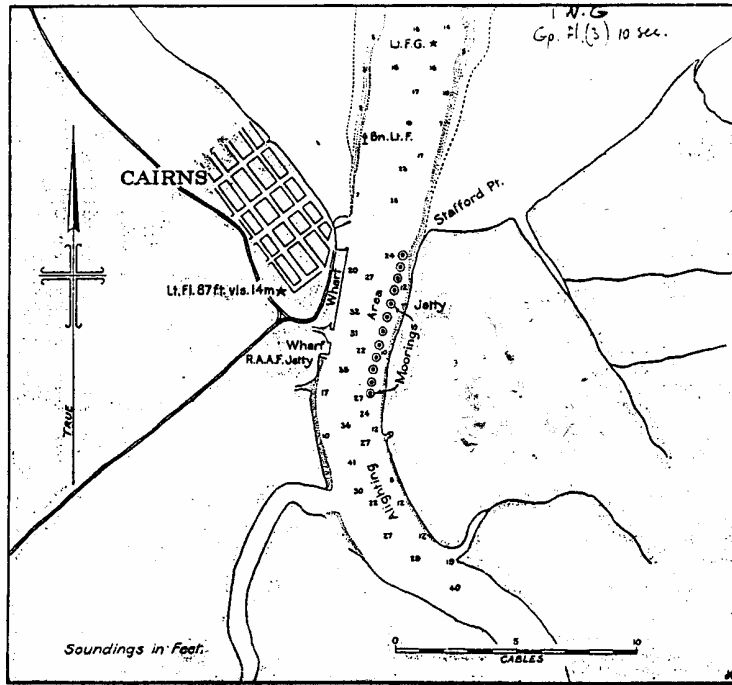
Boat crews handled the Refuelling barges (05 types), Bomb Scows (010 types), Crash boats (08 types), Fire boats (020 types), Air Sea Rescue, Work boats (011 types), Sail/Motor boats.

This great variety of vessels had to be serviced and kept in first class condition to meet the need of Operational Squadrons so the shore based personnel had a vital part to play.

Air Crews had to be taken immediately to the already bombed up Catalinas, and, on their return from long and dangerous missions, to be brought ashore as soon as possible for de-briefing, and some times with wounded on board. Boat Crews carried out these duties with the most diligence and efficiency leading to a close relationship with the Air Crews.

Fast launches travelled down the flight take off run to check there was no flotsam or jetsam that could seriously endanger a take off by flying boats, heavily laden with maximum fuel and bomb loads. These same crews would often shepherd the taxing aircraft as they approached their allotted mooring ever ready to assist if required.

CAIRNS QLD.



Catalina Flying Boats formed the major Squadrons of the RAAF, but all were served by the Marine Section Boats & Personnel. From RAAF Base Cairns (Queensland) No. 11 & No.20 Squadrons set out on their long patrols, bombing & mine laying missions. Other Flying Boats would stage through on their way north & south.



Air Crews received the latest information at briefings regarding targets, defences & alternative Bases & emergencies, along with Allied Shipping movements likely to be sighted.

(Jim Hewett)



Marine Section Boats & Crews would always be waiting to take Air Crews to their aircraft & be on hand up until take off. On their return from a Mission the M.S. would be nearby when the aircraft landed & accompany it to the mooring. Crews would be then ferried ashore.

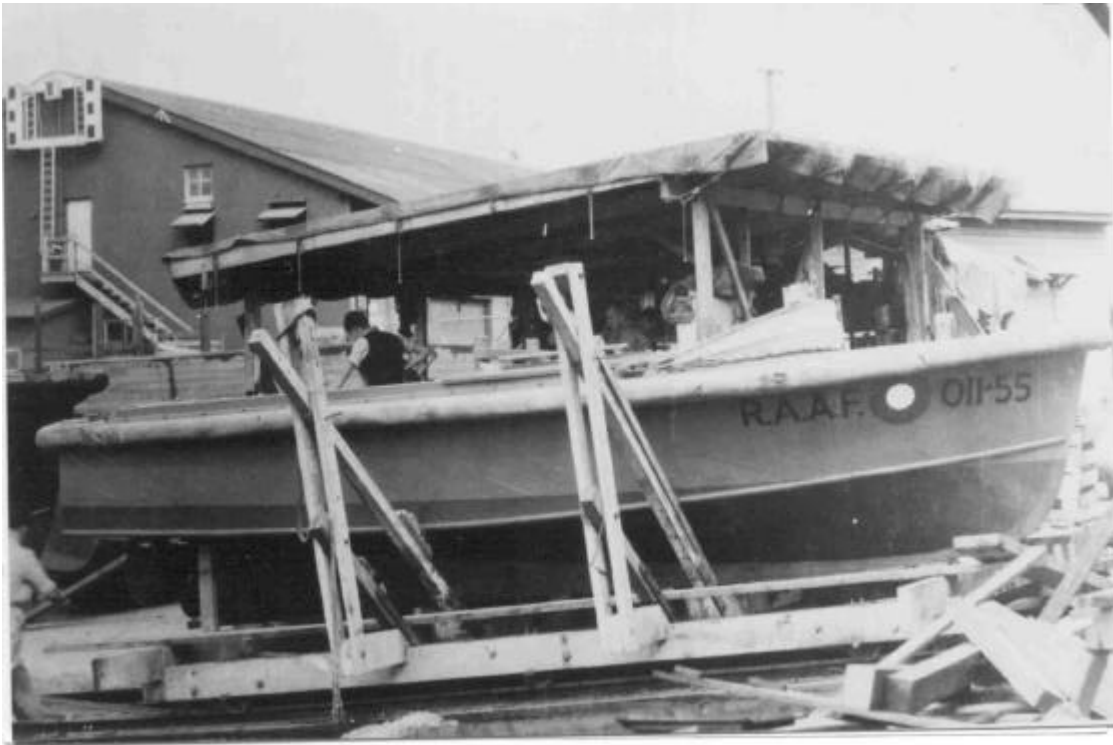
(Jim Hewett)



Armourers returning from Catalinas in Work Boats of the Marine Section.
(Jim Hewett)



08.10 Crash Boat had many duties to perform in Cairns with two Catalina Squadrons based there. Being close to render assistance when aircraft were returning from missions was important .
(J.Hewett)



Cairns being such a large Base, boats were constantly on the slipways undergoing necessary preventive painting against weather & marine life that attacked underwater surfaces.
(J.Hewett)



Having just completed a refit for 07.6 the Workshop Crew take time to pose.
(J.Hewett)



02.3 a 46 Rescue Boat on a mooring with Crews always ready for returning Catalina Flying Boats, that may have sustained damage, or have wounded onboard.

(J.Hewett)



011.92, a Work Boat had many and varied duties around the base.

(J.Hewett)



FLTLT Jim Hewett, the Commanding Officer of Cairns Marine Section with visiting FLTLT Bill Lucas & FLTLT Len Muir taking a short break on Green Island, Jim's recollections of that period was his great admiration & pride in having served with such magnificent personnel of the Marine Section. (J. Hewett)



All members of the Marine Section also took short recreational breaks on Green Island. (J.Hewett)



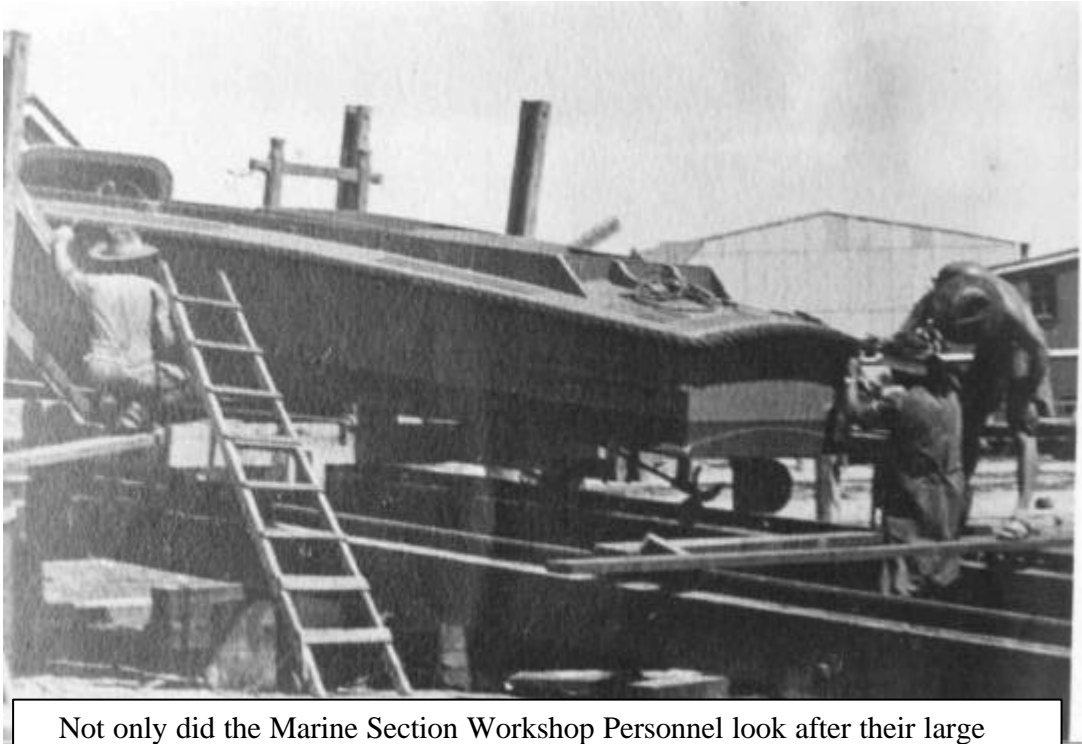
Berthing "S.S. Manoora" between two Marine Section Boats came under the appraisal of Jim Hewett and one of the Coxswains. (Note his adopted unofficial anchor badge)

(J. Hewett)



A group of Air Crew Officers about to set off to the Atherton Table Lands for a spot of leave after many hazardous flying operations.

(J. Hewett)



Not only did the Marine Section Workshop Personnel look after their large range of vessels, but also all the M.S. Boats heading north to New Guinea and the Northern territory & the Gulf.
(J.Hewett)



Sailing Sloops of the Marine Section also had special duties to perform.
(J.Hewett)

These Catalinas ranged far and wide and war time secrecy prevented any discussion of their patrols and missions.

Marine Section land based personnel represented a wide range of Musterings to keep all boats in first class condition. Shipwrights, engine servicing, instruments, radio, painting and a host of other trades as well as the catering and clerical staff.

RAAF Headquarters had taken over many of the Cairns Harbour buildings, facilities and workshops as well as having others built. To house personnel the Marine Section had taken over the Hotel Cairns close to the harbour. Amenities of Cairns were available to the personnel when not on duty.

FLTLT Jim Hewett was referred to in his Unit as "Skipper" and he required no parades, for his men exercised personal responsibility to carry out their allotted work. Stand down time allowed these young men an opportunity for sight seeing, fishing and local socialising. "Skipper"(now 90 years old) can only speak highly of the dedication the men of his Unit displayed and how very proud he was then and also to this day.

The ever present possibility of bombing raids by the Japanese on the Base at Cairns as well as the threat of invasion of Australia, meant that training to meet this threat was carried out.

Some short period after the Base was inspected Jim Hewett received an unwelcome posting to RAAF Headquarters in Melbourne. He delayed his departure for as long as possible for he also welcomed his association with the two Catalina Squadrons personnel. The high efficiency of the Marine Section, reported in the Inspection, was undoubtedly the reason for the HQ posting. SQNLDR Phil Andrews made the long journey to Cairns from Melbourne to find out why FLTLT Jim Hewett had been delaying his posting, no doubt to see that he made the effort. So it was with a great deal of reluctance that Jim left a front line Unit with its great camaraderie.

FLTLT Jim Hewett was to spend the next 13 months in RAAF Technical Division, Melbourne, with the responsibility of allocating RAAF Marine Section postings of men, with a great diversity of Musterings, to the then rapidly expanding Marine Sections at major Bases being created in northern Australia and New Guinea. Many small M.S. Units would operate in remote and isolated bays and islands right through WW2. These Units would operate and keep supplies and materials up to the Allied Works Council (AWC) who were building landing strips, air fields and the facilities required to operate Operational Squadrons. Mobile Works Squadrons also became highly efficient in creating runways and air strips on the off shore islands and remote locations for Operational Base Units (OBU).



“Other Ranks” of the Cairns Marine Section lived in the South Brisbane Hotel and had on occasions an opportunity for social refreshments during Stand Down during 1942.

(Frank Purcell)



Tragic accidents did occur on Bases and members of the Marine Section here parade at the funeral of W. “Lofty” Elliott, who lost his life on a Refuelling Barge fire on 3 .1.44.

(Frank Purcell)

RAAF Base Cairns "Marine Section"

Frank Purcell (41705) entered the RAAF in 1941 and completed a Fitters Course at the Melbourne Technical College. One of Frank's first jobs was to fly with Air Vice Marshall Jones, as a Flight Mechanic, but was in reality a Fitter 11e. For six months Frank flew in a Lockheed Hudson all over Australia and New Guinea carrying V.I.P. passengers until he was told by a Warrant Officer that he should not be flying as a Flight Mechanic and therefore should do a course. Rather than "do" another course, Frank, having read on a notice board that the "Marine Section" needed men as Fitters, made a request to the W.O. for a transfer.

The WO was a little shaken when Frank presented his application, with a recommendation from his FLTLT Pilot, Bill Upjohn, who had added that Frank had the blessing of Air Vice Marshall Jones, Chief of Staff, whom Frank had flown with over the previous six months. The W.O. had before implied that Frank's request would have to get past his desk. His only comment to Frank, after reading the application form was "Hope you bloody well drown!"

After completing a Fitters Course at the Melbourne Technical College early in 1943 Frank duly arrived in Cairns and commenced work on a Refueling Barge 05. Type for the two Catalina Squadrons Based there. Frank remained in Cairns until 1945 living in the local Hotel taken over by the RAAF. On one occasion his very good friend, and fellow crewman, Wally Elliott, was burnt to death on a refueling barge. Frank considered his two years were the best years in his life brought about to a large degree by the fellowship of all Marine Section Personnel.

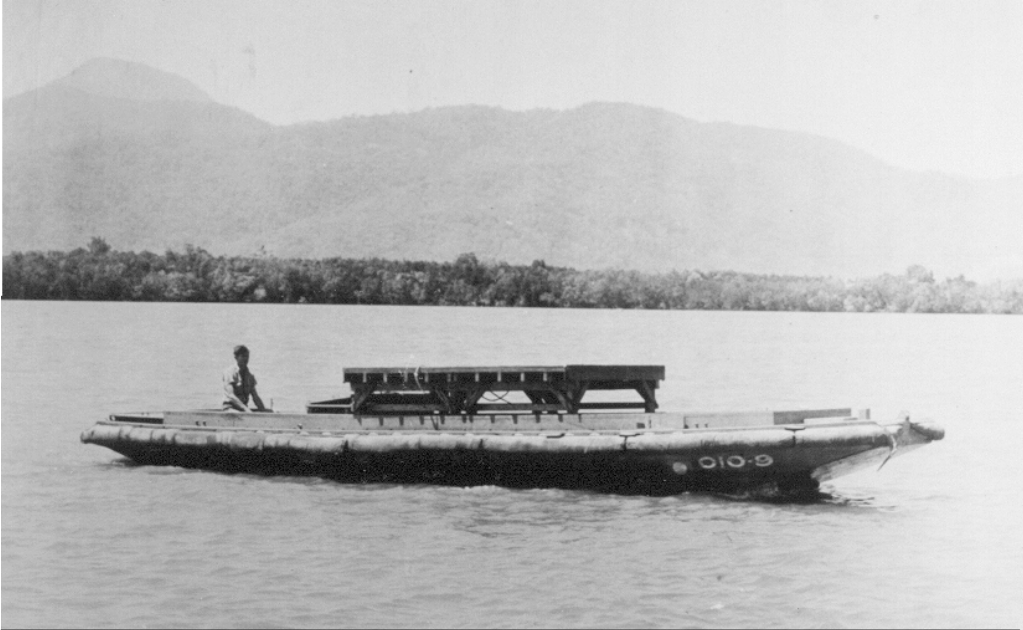
Frank spoke glowingly about FLTLT Jim Hewett, his Commanding Officer at Cairns.

In due course Frank joined a large group of Marine Section personnel being posted south, but because of severe flooding their train was diverted via Longreach.

For a short period Frank spent time on a RAAF Target boat at Panesville in Victoria. On occasions this was a "dicy" occupation, whether by design or intention, practice bombs being dropped by Beaufort pilots, often came precariously close.

Frank was then posted back to his home State (W.A.) and continued to operate with the Marine Section (No.82 OBU) at Crawley Bay, University of WA boat shed, on the Swan River.

Their vessel was a 60 foot Torpedo Recovery Boat that had three straight 8 Chrysler Royal engines driving three screws.



Bomb Scows had to be handled with great skill to bring them along side the easily damaged hull of a flying boat, especially in conditions of opposing winds and tides.
(J.Hewett)



RAAF Armourers loading bombs or mines was made even more difficult when tides and winds were opposing.
(J.Hewett)



Frank Purcell (left with RAN hat) Charles Avant (owner of hat) and Wally Elliott enjoy a day out in Cairns. (F.Purcell)



Marine Section being posted south had their troop train diverted through Longreach because of severe flooding. (Frank Purcell)

Crew

Coxswain	Warrant Officer W.Jack Clayden.
Wireless Op.	Sergeant P.Sinclair
Crewman	Corporal G.Goodall
Engineer	A/Sergeant Frank Purcell.

Much of their work entailed transporting supplies and personnel to Rottnest Island some twelve miles off the Port of Fremantle to a small Marine Section stationed there. On one eventful trip to the island an oil pipe line fractured on one of the engines. With oil under pressure Frank was liberally sprayed with oil while trying to hand hold the fracture together. Delays in having a replacement pipe line delivered to the island meant an idyllic couple of days lounging in the sun. Why the Coxswain didn't return to the mainland on two motors wasn't revealed but a terse radio message from the Commanding Officer ordered them to return even if they had to fly the boat back!

At the end of the War Frank applied for discharge and in civilian life completed a:

"Certificate of Competency as Engineer" Oil-Engine

Armament Section Cairns

Warrant Officer John (Jack) Armour, was in the Armament Section of No.20 Squadron in Port Moresby, Bowen and Cairns had the following to say about his long association with the Marine Section.

"The Armament Sections of all flying boat squadrons were closely associated with the Marine Sections. The Crash Boats, Work Boats and Bomb Scows were our transport from the wharf to the aircraft.

Bomb Scows were the water "trucks" carrying bombs, flares, ammunition etc. to the aircraft- all these items were fully armed- that is the bombs were fitted with detonators and ready to function after the removal of a safety device.

The Marine Section Crews were highly skilled manoeuvring the Bomb Scows to the Catalinas without the slightest bump, allowing for tide and wind to a position under the wing for loading the aircraft. The usual load in the early days of 1941-1942 was 16, 250 lb bombs, then later 8, 500lb bombs then 2000 lb mines."

"The Butter Box"

Somehow the Armament Section "acquired" their own water taxi, and general work boat, with a Chrysler car engine, still fitted with its gear box and clutch. It was known as "the Butter box" but its ultimate fate is still a mystery.

Signed Jack Armour.



"Butter Box" the "acquired" Armourers' private water taxi. Questions are still asked 50 years later as to the fate of their taxi. (Jack Armour)



Corporal Jack Purcell wearing the flat hat of the Marine Section, on arrival back in his home State of Western Australia.

(F.Purcell)