

**SOUTH PACIFIC**

**GUADALCANAL**

**NEW GUINEA**

**FIJI**

**NEW ZEALAND**

**AUSTRALIA**

**Prepared by Robert F. Linden**

**XIX-1**

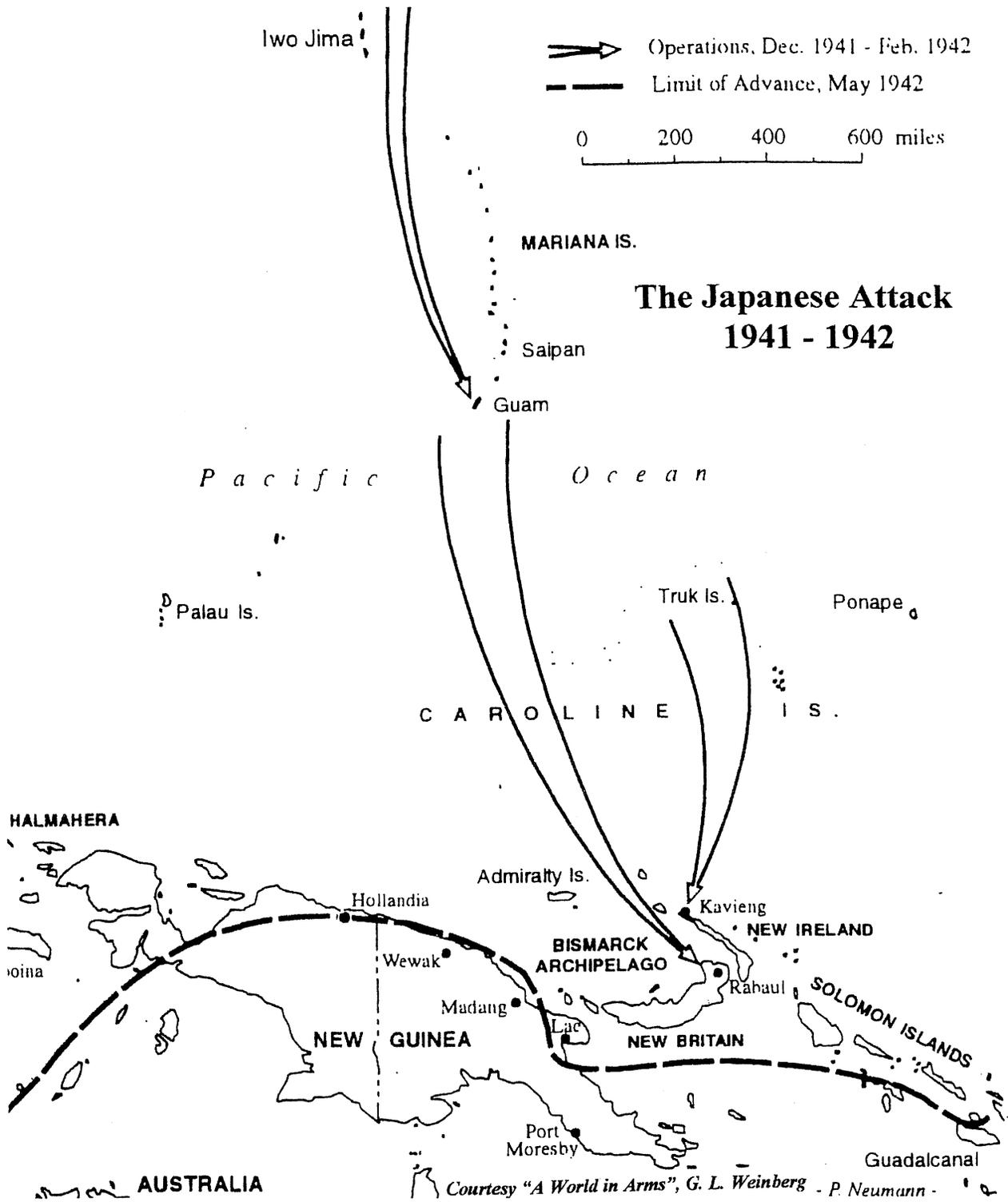


## South Pacific

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# South Pacific



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By the spring of 1942, with the conquests of Malaysia, Burma, China, the Netherlands East Indies and the Philippines, Japan had freedom of action in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean; an inexhaustible supply of food and raw materials to feed her war machine. In May of 1942 the Japanese launched the first stage of a three-fold operation to extend their perimeter. This stage was designed to begin the envelopment of northern and eastern Australia. They occupied the eastern Solomon Islands and began to build an airfield at Guadalcanal. Then a strong naval force escorted troop ships for an attack on Port Moresby in New Guinea. There followed the decisive naval battle of Midway. As a result the attacking force bound for Port Moresby was recalled.

General MacArthur had moved his headquarters from the Philippines to Melbourne, Australia. In northern Australia, Darwin was subjected to bombing raids from Timor in the Netherlands East Indies and midget submarines had raided Sydney's harbour. In these circumstances both the Australian and New Zealand governments sought radar protection from the British government. The RAF sent technical officers and airmen technicians to assist in siting, training and operation of these radars. Several RCAF radar officers and NCO technicians were among this group who went "Down Under".

*I enlisted as a WEM(R) on December 9, 1940. After Manning Depot in Toronto, I was posted overseas sailing on the GEORGIC arriving in Glasgow in early April. After three months training at Yatesbury I was posted to a CHL station at Cockburnspath (south of Edinburgh). I worked there both as a radar mechanic and a radar operator.*

*I was then posted in early February, 1942, destination unknown. I was with an RAF draft of five personnel with another Canadian, G.D. Wiltshire. We sailed from Liverpool to Halifax, and then went by train across Canada and the United States to San Francisco. Then by the Queen Elizabeth I to Sydney, Australia.*

*The draft was attached to the RAAF, and, in May, opened the No 1 RIMU (Radar Installation and Maintenance Unit) at Croydon (Sydney). Initially the unit was commanded by S/L Mitchell, RAF. Almost immediately Wiltshire, P.D. Williamson, RAF, and I were each put in charge of a small (4 to 8-man) team of RAAF technicians with the assignment of installing radar stations around Australia. The stations were mainly CHL from Britain, but delays and losses at sea often meant that only part of the station would be available.*

*From June, 1942 until October, 1944, I was in charge of installation parties that installed 17 radar units from the tip of Cape York, all across the north coast to Broome, down the east coast to Geelong, across the south coast to Victor Harbour, and on the west coast from Abang to Geraldton.*

*Wiltshire installed his first station in Southern New Guinea (near Port Moresby), and then installed a dozen more. Williamson installed two or three stations, but was then assigned to a job developing and improving equipment.*

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*The installation teams generally consisted of one radar mechanic (team leader), an electrician, a motor mechanic, one to four tradesmen with carpentry, concrete construction, sheet metal working skills and sometimes a cook and one or two labourers. Almost without exception one or more team members would be changed between assignments. If all went well a radar unit could be installed in one month but, generally, it took six weeks from the time the equipment was landed, to when it was up, tuned in and taken over by the operating personnel.*

*I started the installation at Dunk Island January 12, 1943, and it was completed on January 25. Our orders were that no one except our installation party and the workers from Cairns were to set foot on Dunk Island. On either January 13 or 14 a sailboat approached. At that time there were only four of us in the party. The others had 303 rifles and I had a 38 revolver. There were about eight men on the ketch. The captain said that he wanted to come ashore. I explained our orders and with that he became hostile and threatened to have me court-martialed (or worse). He settled for having us deliver fresh water and some of our bread and left with further threats, physical and otherwise. I was perturbed, and three or four days later I got to Cairns and phoned my Headquarters but by then the whole thing had blown over. The ketch had been observing and disrupting Japanese activities and we should have hailed them as heroes. Often I felt remorse about this but such are the fortunes of war.*

*By 1944, some of the equipment being installed was some of the American very short wave (cm.). By this time the network around the Continent was virtually complete, and installation work tapered off.*

*It is interesting to note the reason why Wiltshire and I were posted to Australia. The Australians did ask for RAF personnel, because RCAF were not supposed to be in Australia. At our first station "Down Under", Bradfield Park, the "brass" asked the RAF for an explanation, and confined Wiltshire and me to barracks. After a week, with a great show of "force", S/L Mitchell, wearing sidearms, and accompanied by two armed sergeants, took custody of us, and whisked us to his new unit. Here we were given our first assignments to install CHL radar units.*

*The enquiry to the RAF re the Canadians took over two years before an official answer was received. It stated that individual cards of the radar mechanics were all filed together whether they were RAF or RCAF. The cards were the same size, and basically the same format, but with one major difference. The surname of the RCAF personnel was in the same "box" as the county of origin of the RAF personnel. The second major difference was that the RAF cards were white, and the RCAF cards were blue. To this confusion add a colour-blind posting clerk, who picked five radar mechanics, three with white cards, and two blue. The two blue cards were supposed to be FROM Cheshire and Wiltshire. We were the only RCAF radar mechanics in Australia from April, 1942 until late in 1943. A news reporter for the Sydney newspaper got our story of the RAF posting saga. He splashed it across the bottom of the front page of the paper. The top RAAF brass at Canberra threatened us with a court martial but our CO, Wing Commander Preston, had sufficient pull (and sense of humour) to have it quashed.*

**Charles A. Cheshire, Nanoose Bay BC**

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### New Zealand, Fiji, the Solomon Islands and Guadalcanal

The naval, air and land battles around the islands of the Coral sea started with the Japanese advance in 1942 and went on until mid 1944. The Coral sea is bound on the west by Australia, the north west by New Guinea, due north by the Bismarck archipelago of New Britain and New Ireland, and the north east and east by the Solomon Islands. Like the war in the North African desert the battle saw-sawed back and forth. The bloody land, sea and air battles for control of the Island of Guadalcanal had the same significance to the war in the South Pacific that El Alamein had to the war in the North African desert.

After the fall of Singapore and Corregidor, the victorious Japanese army and fleet swept down through the Dutch East Indies, (now Indonesia) and established a major base for the Japanese 8th army at Rabaul, on the Island of New Britain just off the north east coast of New Guinea. In May, 1942, as part of their strategy to strike further south and capture Port Moresby in Papua, New Guinea, the Japanese began construction of an airfield on the island of Guadalcanal.

In July, the 1st U.S Marine division landed in Guadalcanal with complete surprise and captured the airstrip. The Japanese just melted into the jungle. Now began a six-month campaign which was fought in the dank and malodorous jungle. Throughout August and September the 17,000 marines were only strong enough to hold a narrow strip 7 miles long and 4 miles wide. It was not until January, 1943, that the Japanese were defeated. They vacated the island on the 6th February 1943.

" If our ships and planes had not been victorious in this battle (the sea battle of Guadalcanal on the night 12/ 13 November, 1942) if we had lost it, our troops on Guadalcanal would have been trapped like the troops on Bataan. We could not have reinforced them or relieved them.... Unobstructed the enemy would have driven south, cut our supply lines to New Zealand and Australia and enveloped them." Admiral William Halsey. U.S.N. (1)

After clearing the Japanese from Guadalcanal, General MacArthur with practically his own private navy pushed up past New Guinea and into the Philippines, and Admiral Nimitz with practically his own private army, the Marine Corps, worked their way west through the islands of the Pacific. This converging strategy isolated the Japanese garrison at Rabaul where it was contained in vicious jungle warfare by the Australian Army.

Early in January 1943, as a result of delays in the delivery of American ground radar equipment in the Pacific, the Commander-in-Chief Pacific Ocean Area asked the New Zealand Government to supply a British radar set manned by New Zealanders for use in the forward area. The equipment was available in New Zealand, and the Government agreed to hand over one GCI set to the Americans and to supply the necessary men to install and operate it.

1.) Bryan, J. and Halsey, W "Halsey's Story. McGraw, 1947.

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### Dispatch of #52 Radar Unit to Guadalcanal.

The unit formed at Palmerston North and was trained and ready to go overseas in the middle of February. As there were no controllers in New Zealand with GCI experience, the Americans sent a party of three officers and a senior NCO, headed by Major E.C. Best, USMC, to help train the unit. Major Best recommended that an American fighter squadron, which was waiting at Hawaii to proceed to Guadalcanal to work in conjunction with the unit, should be sent to New Zealand to practice co-operation with it. The recommendation was endorsed by Air Headquarters on the grounds that even a few weeks' training in New Zealand would greatly benefit both the pilots and the controllers. The proposal was turned down by CINCPAC, who instructed that training should be co-ordinated with the calibration of the equipment on its operational site.

An advance party left New Zealand for Guadalcanal by air towards the end of February to select a site for the radar station. It was led by Squadron Leader Banwell, a New Zealander who had taken part in much of the early research in the development of radar in Britain and had been lent to New Zealand to help in its development there. In the next few months he did invaluable work in the siting of radar units in the Solomons. Another officer with the party was Flight Lieutenant C.A. Mills, RCAF, one of a number of Canadian officers and NCOs who were lent to the RNZAF to help to develop the radar organisation. The three American controllers and ten RNZAF airmen went at the same time, while the one New Zealand controller, Flight Lieutenant Hesketh, had flown to Guadalcanal a few days before.

The main body, consisting of the Adjutant, Pilot Officer Graham, and thirty-three airmen travelled by sea in the USS George Clymer. The unit landed at Guadalcanal on 1 March and immediately started work on the installation of its equipment and the provision of accommodation. This entailed clearing a site, laying concrete foundations and building huts. American troops helped to pour concrete and erect a Quonset hut. All the other construction work was done by unit personnel with the assistance of two Works men sent up from Santo. The work was completed in three weeks and on 21 March the unit became operational. The American fighter squadron from Hawaii, No 6 Night Fighter Squadron, under the command of Major S. Wharton, equipped with P70 Havocs, was flown in and the unit and the squadron set to work to evolve a suitable technique of co-operation.

The New Zealand GCI set was the first of its kind in the South Pacific. For the first two days after the Americans had landed on Guadalcanal in August 1942, fighter direction had been carried out from the USS Chicago and fighter cover had been flown from the carriers Saratoga and Enterprise. When the ships withdrew from the area the Americans had neither fighters nor radar.

By 20 August F4Fs and SBDs were based at Henderson Field but no adequate provision had been made for fighter direction. A search radar model SCR 270-B was put into operation in September and was used for this purpose. The type was satisfactory in giving warning of the approach of hostile planes but was not suitable for plotting heights and tracks accurately, so that the American pilots in the air could seldom be vectored exactly on to the enemy. This limitation was more

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apparent after the middle of November when the Japanese began frequent night raids. For night-fighter control the SCR 270-B was inadequate.

The arrival of the RNZAF unit in March 1943, therefore, filled an important gap in Guadalcanal's defences. The GCI set could give the accurate readings, particularly in altitude, which were necessary for night interceptions. The set was maintained operational by RNZAF personnel. United States Army, Navy and Marine, as well as New Zealand controllers directed the fighters.

The unit's first major operation took place on 7 April when the Japanese sent over a large formation of dive-bombers and fighters in a daylight raid. The unit gave accurate plots and heights to the Island Fighter Control, information which contributed largely to the Japanese loss of thirty-three planes reported as shot down by American fighters. After the battle it received a letter of commendation from COMAIRSOLS for its share in the day's work.

In the last big daylight raid on Guadalcanal, in the middle of June, the unit was equally successful. Nearly all the Japanese aircraft which took part were claimed as having been shot down, and most of the plots on which the fighter direction was based were passed to Island Fighter Control by the unit. After June there was progressively less enemy activity. The unit had no further opportunities to gain spectacular victories; but it had achieved its objective, as its presence was one of the contributory factors in keeping the Japanese away from Guadalcanal.

During the first half of 1943 COMSOPAC (Admiral Halsey) asked for additional New Zealand radar units to be sent to the forward area, complete with technical personnel and operational research workers. There were difficulties in supplying manpower from New Zealand, but since national prestige was involved the New Zealand Chiefs of Staff decided that the request should be fulfilled. Accordingly, in the latter half of the year, a number of other units, equipped with two additional GCI and four COL sets, were formed and sent to the forward area.(1)

\* \* \* \* \*

*I enlisted as LAC WEM(R) in the RCAF on November 8, 1940 and after basic training in Toronto I was posted overseas on the LEOPOLDVILLE arriving at Liverpool about January 11, 1941. On completion of training at Yatesbury, after a short stay at a CHL radar station at Bempton, Yorkshire I was transferred to 73 Wing Headquarters at Malton.*

*Early in 1942 I and a few others were posted to New Zealand. We left Liverpool on the DOMINION MONARCH with three thousand British troops who disembarked at Bombay. After Bombay we sailed to Perth/Freemantle, Australia for a one-day stop. From there we went to Sydney where we almost arrived at the same time as two midget Japanese submarines which managed to get into Sydney harbour. They were captured by the Australians, with little damage done.*

1.) Ross, J.M.S. "Royal New Zealand Air Force, Second World War, 1939-1945.

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*We arrived in Auckland, New Zealand, about June and I was sent to a radar station just outside of Auckland. There I worked with the installation team and since I was the only one with operational experience I became their "expert". We did have some difficulty in getting the CHL operational since the equipment had not been properly prepared for transportation to the tropics. There was considerable arcing in the high voltage transformers and they had to be rewound.*

(Ed note: most radar equipment, in the early days, was shipped as deck cargo, so that if necessary it could be dumped overboard quickly. Unfortunately, much of the equipment suffered from salt water damage.)

*After this experience, the installation team and I went to other sites. After two more installations I was sent to a station in Nelson (South Island N.Z.) to take charge, as a corporal no less. I was soon made sergeant and in May 1942 I was commissioned.*

*Later in 1943 I was the Officer Commanding a unit that was sent to Guadalcanal (Solomon Islands) in the South Pacific.*

**Wilton Stott,  
Victoria, BC**

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*In September, 1942, I was posted to New Zealand with two other RDF officers, A.W. "Poush" Poushinsky from Winfield, Alberta, and an RAF officer, F/L Waters. Waters was a CH specialist, Poush's speciality was CHL and mine was ground radar for use in fighter controlling, basically CHL and GCI. We sailed from the UK to New York, and the convoy went to Guantanamo Bay. At this U.S. base I was lucky enough to get ashore to carry out some calibration on the CHL they had recently installed. The convoy then proceeded to Panama and then alone across the Pacific. We arrived in Auckland in late October. The RCAF in Ottawa had no record of our postings.*

*My posting to the RNZAF headquarters was to handle all GCI activities under their control, as well as the CH's from New Plymouth South. The RNZAF had several radar stations, British built CHL units, basically covering the approaches to Auckland and Wellington. After a short stay in Headquarters in Wellington, Poush and I went on tours of these coastal stations. Poush went north for the Auckland stations and I visited those covering Wellington. This was when we found RCAF NCO's in charge of the stations. Wilton Stott of Victoria, B.C. was one of these.*

*The first real business after inspection and calibration visits to most of the operational sites in the south, was the training of a GCI, No. 52 Radar Unit, to be seconded to the US Marine Corps in Guadalcanal. The recommendation for the use of British radar was made by a U.S. Marine officer, Major Best, USMC, who had flown with the RAF in the UK prior to Pearl Harbor.*

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*We trained Fighter Controllers, Mechanics and Operators on the equipment, and developed our own equipment and personnel lists to keep the station operational. Once the unit was trained the equipment was broken down and packed for shipment. A "transportable" unit in the true sense of the word, shipped in packing cases to be re-assembled on site. The personnel and technical equipment went by one ship, tents, kitchens, etc in a second. All equipment was American to keep up the U.S. image. The only way we had of getting RNZAF markings was to liberate them from our last posting en route. This included borrowing the station flag from the base in Wellington.*

*I was promoted to Flight Lieutenant and posted as Commanding Officer of No. 52. Major Best was the officer commanding the controllers who were not part of the Unit's strength. RNZAF notified the RCAF in Ottawa of this promotion and this started a long series of correspondence about Canadians serving with the RNZAF that was not entirely resolved until I returned to the UK in 1944 and sorted out the mass of paperwork about all six of us.*

*I flew north with the advance party in early February, to find a site ready for installation. In the advance party were Major Best and F/L Hesketh, RNZAF, as controllers and civilian expert, John Branwell, a New Zealand scientist, who had taken part in much of the early research in the development of radar in Britain. Branwell was given the honorary rank of Squadron Leader since we were moving into a forward area. He was attached, as supernumerary, to my unit to examine the operation of the radar equipment under the expected severe tropical conditions in order to determine if changes would be required on any future units.*

*An almost ideal operational site was found about midway between Henderson and Lunga airfields. When the crew arrived, the ship with the tents, etc. had been sunk, but the technical equipment was brought ashore and installed after burying demolition bombs under the site. We had to install all communication links, radio for the aircraft and telephone to the fighters, a wing of U.S. Marine Corsairs with no radar.*

*Being a new type installation it was of interest to all the brass. General Patch made the mistake of asking one of my RNZAF Fighter Controllers if we needed anything. He was told all support equipment had been lost. As a result, his adjutant and the controller visited U.S. Army camps to get the replacement materiel. The adjutant was very upset as the standard US answer would have been "no problems". I found the US forces far less concerned for the care of their men than the British Forces.*

*When the Air Wing moved the station was supported by "Havocs" night-fighters belonging to the U.S. Army Air Corps. The station had good success once the interference from US radar was resolved by giving me authority to close down any station that interfered with our operations.*

*After five months of operation my radar sergeant and I took a Commando course with Fijian commandos. Over the next few months we undertook the siting and installation of radar stations*

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*on islands such as Malaita, New Georgia, Kolombangara and Tulagi. In several cases the stations were sited prior to the U.S. landing to secure the sites.*

*I returned to New Zealand in September, 1943, to go to Australia to arrange the meeting of the radar nets of Halsey's and MacArthur's commands on Bougainville. But instead of going to Australia, I ended up in hospital with a critical case of malaria. Posted back to the UK at the request of the RAF based on having done combined operations with American forces, I sailed from Auckland in early 1944 to San Francisco on a Liberty ship. My draft, virtually all Sergeant pilots, were in accommodation over a cargo of pickled hides. The stink became too strong in the tropics and I finally got them out and into acceptable accommodation by describing them as WO 3's and officer cadets. This caused consternation with the Royal Artillery officer who met the ship in 'Frisco, until he saw the accommodation.*

*As the senior Air Force officer crossing the continent, I was made draft conducting officer for a draft of Aussies and New Zealanders across the States. Thereby hung a story of a trail of bottles and missing people with all personnel finally catching up in New York. We had two wet cars at the end of a very dry U.S. troop train.*

**Charles Mills  
Hamilton, ON.**

Editor's note. F/L Charles Mills was Mentioned in Despatches for his tour of duty with the RNZAF.

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*Poush came to Christchurch at Wigram Airforce base which was located on the outskirts of that city and was the home of the RNZAF Electrical and Wireless school. It was here that I first met Poush and I believe that it would be about the time that I took a special electronics course at Canterbury University College prior to my transfer to the position of Equipment Officer, which was a cover designation for Radar Officers. This would be about the end of 1942. I can't confirm that Poush actually taught a course while there.*

*Some time after that I was posted to No. 60 Radar Squadron in Auckland. Poush followed me and I accompanied him on a tour of the Radar stations in the northern part of the island. Norfolk Island, although Australian, was the site of an RNZAF Radar Station, and Poush would have visited it at some time when with 60 Squadron. I was posted to 61 Squadron in Guadalcanal about mid 1943, and when I returned to 60 Squadron from outstations early in 1944 Poush was there as CO. I returned to New Zealand shortly afterwards and did not see Poush again in wartime. 61 Squadron headquarters was near Henderson Field on Guadalcanal and all the RNZAF Radar stations in the Solomons were under its control.*

**A.W. Poushinski  
by S/L Roy Anstice, RNZAF (retd) Dunedin, New Zealand -  
papers of Mrs A.W. Poushinsky, Ottawa, ON.**

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