

SRH-308

FLEET RADIO UNIT DETACHMENT

COOKTOWN, AUSTRALIA

CERTIFIED TO BE UNCLASSIFIED  
by Director, NSA/Chief, CSS

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be a stylized name or set of initials, written over a horizontal line.

Date: 6 August 1984

REVIEWER'S NOTE:

This document was prepared as UNCLASSIFIED by Naval personnel who had access to classified records. The first review to verify the fact that the report does not contain sensitive information was conducted by personnel of the Naval Security Group. The original of this document was retained by them and has been placed in the NSG Repository, Crane, Indiana. A final review to insure releasability was conducted by NSA.

Fleet Radio Unit Detachment

Cooktown, Australia

NOTE: The attached document was prepared by Naval personnel with access to various historical records with the objective of bringing diverse records into a usable narrative history of a Naval activity. The document does not constitute an official Navy history and no claims are made regarding its completeness and accuracy. Prepared by NAVSECGRUDET Crane, Indiana  
28 March 1980

Fleet Radio Unit Detachment

Cooktown, Australia

In a memorandum for the Deputy Commander, U. S. SEVENTH Fleet dated 1 July 1943, it was stated that since the station established at Adelaide River had proven so successful and valuable, it was recommended that consideration be given to establishing a similar station in the northeastern part of Australia to cover the Solomons and Gilberts intermediate frequency traffic. The Australian Commonwealth Naval Board (ACNB) was establishing a small station at Townsville but it was felt that a station located further north would give better coverage. Since there was a regulation prohibiting the assignment of Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS) intercept operators further north than Townsville, it was proposed to investigate the establishment of a small U. S. Navy intercept station at Cooktown or Cairns. It was proposed that LCDR J. S. Holtwick, Jr. and Radio Electrician S. A. Burnett accompany CDR J. B. Newman, Director of Signals and Communications, RAN, on his planned inspection trip to Townsville for the purpose of going further north and inspecting the area around Cooktown and Cairns to determine their suitability for the establishment of an intercept station.

On 10 August 1943, LCDR Holtwick forwarded a memorandum to the Chief of Staff, SEVENTH Fleet on the subject of a proposed additional intercept station at Cooktown. RE Burnett had returned from conducting hearability tests at various sites and reported that the location at Cooktown offered the best receiving possibilities. From the tests, it was indicated that a large number of extremely valuable circuits, not intercepted elsewhere, could be intercepted with excellent results. LCDR Holtwick recommended that plans go forward to establish the station. Although some modifications would be required, buildings for the station were available in the form of a vacant convent which could be leased for a nominal amount. The lack of landline communications to Cooktown could be solved by extending an existing landline teletype circuit between the Fleet Radio Unit, Melbourne, and Townsville on to Cooktown. On



12 August, LCDR Holtwick was informed that a channel on an existing landline between Cooktown and Townsville which had previously be allocated to Allied Land Forces had been reassigned to the Cooktown station. It would be modified to permit the use of teletype and ready for use in about three weeks. This estimate proved over optimistic.

On 27 August, LCDR Holtwick forwarded a plan for the proposed U. S. Navy Supplementary Intercept Radio Station, Cooktown, to the Chief of Staff, SEVENTH Fleet. Subject to the approval of COMSEVENTHFLT, the Vice Chief of Naval Operations had approved the establishment of a U. S. Navy Intercept Station at Cooktown, Queensland. A survey of the area had established the most logical site for the station to be in the Sisters of Mercy Convent School which had been abandoned as a school in 1939. It was proposed that the station's initial complement would be a Radio Electrician and eight Radiomen during the installation period with another eight Radiomen to be assigned when the station was operational. A Ship's Cook and a Machinist's Mate or Shipfitter were requested from COMSEVENTHFLT for station logistic support. It was also proposed that RE S. A. Burnett be ordered in charge of the station.

On 4 September, COMSEVENTHFLT approved the establishment of the Cooktown intercept station and directed the Commander, Service Force, SEVENTHFLT to lease the property and begin construction using civilian labor since Naval personnel were not available. One civilian electrician and two carpenters made up the total work force which worked with and for RE Burnett. The coordinates for the Cooktown station were given as 15° 28' South 145° 13' East in an ADNC (OP-20G) memorandum dated 28 September 1943.

The name Cooktown rather belied its actual status. In 1943, it was the northernmost place on the peninsula still bearing the earmarks of civilization. At one time before the turn of the century, Cooktown was the port of arrival and departure for the Palmer River gold fields and a brief period of prosperity was enjoyed. With the influx of people associated with the gold rush, Cooktown soon had a population of some 35,000 people. The town soon boasted of 52 hotels on the main street and a great deal of development went forward. However, the gold field workings were based mostly on

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alluvial deposits which soon ceased to be a paying proposition and Cooktown never reached its planned level of development. No public utilities were ever installed. The little business remaining after the turn of the century was ruined by World War I. World War II caused a brief flurry when troops and equipment were deployed throughout the area for the defense of Australia but after the battles of the Coral Sea and the Owen Stanley Ranges, Cooktown returned to its status of a true ghost town. Fires and cyclones wiped out most of the principal buildings while those buildings remaining in any kind of shape had been torn down as salvage building material. Only three hotels remained standing but were in a poor state of repair and operation. The state maintained a police station and school which with the convent building, occupied by the intercept station, and the post office, were the only respectable buildings in town. The other buildings, both occupied and unoccupied, were returning to the soil through the ravages of time and white ants. A form of town administration provided a few feet of wharf, a small warehouse, a civilian hospital dependant upon the ability of the military to provide a doctor, and a sanitary collection service. Fire-fighting facilities consisted of an ancient, hand-drawn, hand-operated pumping tub built in England and manned by a force of call volunteers when within hearing distance.

On 7 November, RE S. A. Burnett forwarded a letter summarizing action to date in rehabilitating the Convent buildings. Electrical work was complete and carpenter work was progressing rapidly. The radio room and sleeping quarters were ready for use and it was expected that the galley and mess area would be finished in a week. About 30% of the material requested for the station had arrived; the most important items yet to arrive were those needed to furnish the sleeping quarters, galley and mess. Upon receipt of these items and the two generators, the station would be ready to receive the first group of personnel and equipment. The basic ration furnished American Forces could be drawn from the Australian Army Supply Corps which, if satisfactory, would greatly simplify the supply problem. Otherwise, rations would have to be drawn from the Naval Supply Depot, Navy 144, at Cairns, on a weekly basis which would require

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greater refrigeration and storage space for perishable supplies. A problem area mentioned by RE Burnett was that of water. The region was experiencing the most prolonged dry spell in twenty years but he was of the personal opinion that there was never much water in the area. A truck and a 500 gallon water cart were to be provided to haul water from the river about nine miles away and it was hoped that the Convent well and rain storage tanks would be of use during the rainy season. Another problem area was the landline between Cooktown and Townsville. When arrangements had been made to reallocate an Australian military channel on the line to the Navy, it was apparently not realized that the line terminated some six miles from the Convent. As a result, no manpower or materials were available to extend the line to the station but efforts were being made to correct the situation. Generators to provide the station's own electricity had been requested but no information was available on their arrival. On the personal side, RE Burnett reported he was living at the Commercial Hotel and eating in a small cafe since the hotel served neither meals nor beer, for that matter. The menu at the cafe consisted routinely of locally butchered beef and, occasionally, eggs but no vegetables or fruit of any description were available locally. In an effort to vary the menu, RE Burnett wrote that he went fishing one Sunday and caught a five pound fish on the first cast, a seven pounder on the second cast, an eighteen pounder on the third cast, and hooked into something so big on the fourth cast that he and a bystander together could not land it. A meal of fish was enjoyed that evening.

In a 15 November letter, RE Burnett mentioned that the nearest U. S. military mail service was located at an airstrip some nine miles away with no regular transportation between the town and the airstrip. Mail service in the town was provided by the Australian government. He also reported that he had arrived in Cooktown on 20 October for a two-day survey and inspection; subsequently returning on 28 October to oversee construction of the station. He provided a recap of work to date and projected the mess and galley would be ready for outfitting and use on 21 November. Local U. S.



military authorities were less than optimistic about the station procuring the required generators as well as a stove and refrigerator.

On 29 November, the Officer in Charge, Fleet Radio Unit SEVENTH Fleet informed COMSEVENTHFLT that the ACNB reported no knowledge of the decision to provide a channel for the Cooktown station on the existing Townsville-Melbourne landline and was request-  
int the documents pertaining to the decision. FRU7THFLT requested COMSEVENTHFLT  
initiate the necessary action to have the required switching arrangements installed  
and to extend the landline the necessary six miles to the station. However, on the  
same date, the Australian Navy requested the Director-General of Post and Telegraphs  
proceed with the installation of the necessary switching arrangements at Townsville.

On 5 December, RE Burnett reported steady but slow progress was being made and  
all of the work required to put the former Convent buildings in shape had been completed  
Everything was now awaiting receipt of the necessary materials and equipment to put  
the station in commission. Three shipments had been received; 3 November - five tons,  
17 November - six and one-half tons, and 3 December - two and one-half tons totaling  
about 30% of the small tools and maintenance equipment, 50% of the galley and mess  
equipment as well as mess tables, lockers, benches, and some radio room furniture.  
No word had been received on the generators, refrigerator, stove, truck, and numerous  
other items and the situation wasn't being helped by the problem of supply being bounced  
between the Public Works and Supply Departments. The fact that everything being shipped  
from the Naval Supply Depot to the station was coming in on a privately owned diesel  
launch and the Navy was allocated space for only about eight tons every other week  
was also a serious problem. In addition, the launch reportedly wasn't big enough  
to carry the station's truck, generators and other pieces of large equipment. The  
matter of extending the landline to the station was still up in the air with no one in  
the area seemingly knowing anything about the project. The area was still without rain  
and most residents were surviving only by hauling water since most wells had gone dry.

On 10 December 1943, RE Burnett reported by letter that all of the Convent buildings



scheduled to be used by the station were ready for occupancy but items such as the generators, stove, refrigerator, and bunks still had not been received. Action was underway to procure these items but no information had been received to indicate when they could be expected. A truck had supposedly been turned over to the Naval Supply Depot at Cairns for shipment to the station but it was not known when shipment might occur. A 300 gallon water trailer had been received, however. Action had been started to extend the landline to the station and would be accomplished as soon as labor and material became available. No further progress could be made on the station until the material and supply requisitions which had been submitted to the Naval Supply offices at Cairns and Navy 134 (unlocated) were filled.

On 16 December, CDR E. S. L. Goodwin at FRU7THFLT informed RE Burnett that a 15 KVA diesel generator, earmarked for the station, was in Australia and had been ordered shipped to the station via Cairns. It was also planned to send a 5 KW gasoline generator as a back-up generator. FRU7THFLT had initiated action to have the final six miles of landline constructed and RE Burnett would not have to take further action himself on this item. This and a subsequent letter mentioned a comment by RE Burnett that the landline circuit would be shared with the Royal Australian Air Force although original plans called for the U. S. Navy to have exclusive use. RE Burnett was directed to look into the matter and advise FRU7THFLT as to the exact status of the line since it was considered that sharing would not be satisfactory.

On 21 December, the station was assigned the mailing address "Fleet Radio Unit Detachment, Navy #813".

In a 30 December letter from FRU7THFLT to the Commander, Service Force, SEVENTH Fleet, CDR Goodwin reported it was estimated that the Fleet Radio Unit Detachment, Navy #813, Cooktown, would probably be commissioned in January 1944. It was requested that one Ship's Cook and one Machinist's Mate be allocated for the station but that orders for the personnel be held in abeyance pending the exact date of commissioning. Personnel ordered to Cooktown were to carry full field equipments including bedding,



helmets, gas masks, canteens, and pistols. The uniform for the station was khaki while dungarees were permissible for working dress; blues were considered unnecessary.

In a 2 January 1944 letter, RE Burnett reported most of the items requested as the initial outfitting of the station had been received. Six radio receivers had been received in good shape but the station was still lacking some items of mess equipment plus the truck, refrigerator and generators. A galley range had arrived and a concrete pad had been constructed for the generator. RE Burnett emphasized that the station would have to be self-supporting before any personnel could be ordered in since there were no other places where the men could find adequate messing and berthing facilities. RE Burnett would have to place orders with the local Australian Supply Depot two weeks in advance to ensure that adequate food stocks were on hand when station personnel finally arrived. Antenna materials had not yet been received but this was considered a minor problem because antenna installation could be accomplished easily once the materials were on hand. The station had received sufficient furnishings to provide accommodations for 24 men.

In another progress report dated 15 January, RE Burnett reported receipt of more small items but yet no word on the shipment of the truck, generators or refrigerator. The truck was considered essential since the water trailer could only be moved by truck and the nearest source of water, since the well was dry, was the river nine miles away over rough, hilly roads. Other supplies would have to be hauled from one to five miles to the station. The work on the extension of the landline circuit had apparently progressed well as RE Burnett reported that it could be hooked up whenever the station was ready. The line would be shared with the RAAF using a double pole, double throw switch controlled by the RAAF. When required for U. S. Navy traffic, the switch would be thrown in the RAAF communications spaces and the station would have exclusive use of the circuit. RE Burnett recommended using a Model 19 teletypewriter with tape punching equipment since communications time would be limited and traffic should be



cleared as rapidly as possible.

On 23 January, FRU7THFLT requested COMSEVENTHFLT issue permanent orders assigning RE Burnett to duty as Officer in Charge, Fleet Radio Unit Detachment, Navy #813. It was also requested that, upon completion of teleprinter school, RMC S. H. Winchester, USN, be ordered to the station. It was projected that he would be on board Cooktown about mid-February.

On 24 January, CDR E. S. L. Goodwin informed RE Burnett that FRU7THFLT was not satisfied with the arrangements to share the communications circuit with the RAAF since the original agreement called for exclusive Navy use. Officials of the Australian Postmaster General's office were looking into the situation.

On 10 February, RE Burnett forwarded another informal progress report by letter. Small items of equipment continued to arrive. It had been learned that the antenna materials had been shipped to Milne Bay, in error, and had promptly disappeared. Everything had been reordered but not yet arrived. A generator and a refrigerator had been requisitioned from the SeaBee unit at Cairns and shipment was expected soon. Apparently, RE Burnett was working alone at this time because he stated he considered the installation of the 2600 pound galley range alone and unaided, to be the greatest triumph of his career. Two items of concern remained. One was the lack of any word on the truck for the station. It was considered essential since the station would be responsible for its own garbage and trash disposal, procurement of firewood for the galley, daily mail runs to the airstrip, hauling of supplies, and, during the dry season, daily trips to haul water. The other concern was the communications circuit. The local Postmaster General's office had been requested to comment on the situation and had responded that they could switch the Navy station into the line with an hour's notice as a shared line with the RAAF. No response had been received from Australian officials to this report. RE Burnett also expressed the hope that the cook assigned to the station would be very good as talent and expertise would apparently be required to make something out of the Australian rations until supply arrangements had been made



with the Supply Depot at Cairns.

On 23 February, RE Burnett reported that things had taken a definite turn upward. On 16 February, the supply boat had arrived carrying a 15 KVA gasoline generator and a 125 cu.ft. reefer box which had been released from the 55th Construction Battalion at Cairns. Also arriving on the 16th was RMC Winchester. The generator and the reefer box were quite heavy and RE Burnett reported that it strained local resources to get the equipments moved from the boat to the station and installed. However, everything was working fine and the generator, "...lit things up like a Christmas tree." The generator soon became a back-up generator because on the 22nd, they received word that a second generator had arrived. This proved to be the diesel generator mentioned in FRUTTHFLT's memorandum of 16 December 1943. A disturbing note was a tag found on the generator indicating that it had been damaged in shipment but had been forwarded on without an estimate of damage. Fortunately, the damage turned out to be comparatively minor. The generator had apparently been dropped in shipment and the radiator had been knocked slightly out of alignment; a problem which was easily corrected. On 21 February, installation of two communications lines; one telephone and the other for the teletype circuit, was completed into the station but no word had been received regarding sharing or not sharing the teletype line with the RAAF. The missing antenna insulators had arrived with the diesel generator so work was to be started immediately on the antenna installation. The galley, mess, and barracks and washrooms were now complete and ready for use. Arrangements had been made with the local Australian Military Forces to deliver fuel and supplies to the station for the time-being. Arrangements for supplementary rations, canteen supplies, etc., would have to be worked out with the Supply Officer at Cairns. There was a possibility that a local dairy would be operating soon which would provide a source of safe milk. RE Burnett reported that the installation crew, the Machinist's Mate and the Ship's Cook could be used as soon as they were available. He also recommended that two Ship's Cooks be assigned to the station vice the one planned. Due to the lack of near-by medical and dental 0010



facilities for other than emergencies, RE Burnett recommended that personnel assigned to Cooktown not have any serious physical defects or need dental care.

On 5 March, RE Burnett reported that repairs to the diesel generator's radiator had been effected but the generator could not be started because the starter batteries had not arrived in the shipment. It had initially been thought the engines could be cranked by hand but, when attempted, it proved too stiff to turn over. The gasoline generator was operating smoothly as was the refrigerator. All of the equipment had arrived without instruction books and most without spare parts but efforts were being made to acquire same. Upon unpacking the six Kingsley receivers, it was found that they had been shipped without earphones which had been subsequently requested. Completion of the antenna installation was expected sometime the following week.

On 9 March, FRU7THFLT requested COMSERVFORSEVENTHFLT ship one Model 15 teletype-writer to FRUDET Cooktown as soon as possible. This teletype would subsequently be replaced by a Model 19 when one became available. An additional Model 15 teletype would have to be supplied to the Royal Australian Naval W/T Station, Townsville for installation on the other end of the Cooktown-Townsville circuit.

In a 12 March FRU7THFLT memorandum to FRUDET Cooktown, CDR Goodwin informed RE Burnett that FRU7THFLT had again been informed by the Australian Postmaster General that the station's teletype channel would not be shared with the RAAF. The RAAF line would be physically shared but the communications circuit carried on the line would be exclusively assigned to the station. Transfer of the Ship's Cook and the Machinist's Mate had been requested and the remainder of the station's personnel would be transferred in about two weeks. If operations began at the station before the teletype installation was complete, RE Burnett was directed to forward the intercept via air when safe U. S. Army or Naval air transportation was available or, if none was available over a long period of time, he was to destroy the material locally and wait until the teletype line was operational.

On 12 March, FRUDET Navy #813 submitted a letter to the Supply Officer, Service

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Force, SEVENTH Fleet requesting that the station be included in the U. S. Army ration plan being established for the area. RE Burnett reported that the Base Commander, Base Section 2, U. S. Army, had organized a rationing plan for U. S. Army troops in the area which would be of greater benefit than any previous system and it was understood that detached Navy units in other areas had been included in U. S. Army Base Section rationing plans.

On 14 March, a letter was forwarded to the station from the Australian Military Forces Hirings Office in Cairns stating that a claim by the Sisters of Mercy for 149 Pounds had been accepted for the Convent but that the expense of repairs made to the buildings could be deducted from the claim if RE Burnett would provide a list of such repairs as had been or were to be made. On 16 March, the station provided a list detailing the repairs. They consisted largely of rewiring and replacement of electrical fixtures, repairing and replacing window glass and screens, repairing plumbing and plumbing fixtures, and repair of walls and ceilings where required. The value of the repairs was not listed.

As of 16 March, RE Burnett reported the only major items outstanding were the requirement for a battery to start the diesel generator and the lack of a truck or other means of transport. The antenna system had been completed and all station wiring was finished and checked out. Some old batteries had been procured from the Army for the diesel generator but until a means could be found to recharge them, they were of no value. There were no battery charging facilities in the area because everything in the way of power was based on portable lighting plants. The Model 15 teletype had been received, installed and checked out in-house. As soon as the landline arrangements were finalized, the teletype could be hooked up and communications initiated. Mail delivery had been very sketchy for some time and, in fact, there had been no mail service at all for some time due to the airstrip being closed due to heavy rains. As soon as communications were operable and the station personnel arrived, the Fleet Radio Unit Detachment Navy #813, Cooktown, would be ready to become operational.

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In his letter of 27 March, RE Burnett indicated that they had experienced few dull moments since his last report. On a personal note, he mentioned that he was back up and around after a five day bout of flu and dengue fever. Winds of gale force had carried away the windmill which powered the pump for the well and had torn off a few sheets of corrugated iron and some screens. Fortunately, the antenna system experienced no damage. In addition to the winds, a large house located near the convent had burned to the ground. This had been particularly dangerous since there were no fire-fighting facilities of mention in the area and no water to spare to fight the fire had the means been available. The landline for communications was still a problem. A workman from the Postmaster General's office and the local linesman spent four days achieving telephone communications over the circuit after which they departed assuring RE Burnett that the circuit was intact. However, teletype communications had never been successfully established. The explanation was that they didn't know where the line was to terminate on the other end and, therefore, there wasn't a compatible teletypewriter with which to establish communications. Further testing was stalled by the refusal of the Australian Military Forces to permit further work on the line until they had all of the information regarding the intended use of the line whereupon the technician from the Postmaster General's office packed up and left leaving the station with the knowledge that while line continuity existed in the circuit, there was no certainty that teletype communications could be established. Shipment of material via Army or Navy air transport was also impossible since there was, at the time, no Navy air transport at all and no Army system operating with any degree of safety or schedule. On the plus side, batteries for the diesel generator had been located and the generator was operating successfully. This was fortunate because the gasoline generator was suffering the infirmities of overwork and needed to be taken down for a long overdue overhaul.

On 28 March, RMC William (n) Scullion, -USN, received six RIP-5 typewriters for delivery to the Fleet Radio Unit Detachment, Cooktown. In delivering the RIP-5's,



RMC Scullion also reported on board for duty along with a draft of eleven other Radiomen on 5 April 1944.

The request for authorization for FRUDET Cooktown to draw subsistence from the Army was forwarded by COMSERVFORSEVENTHFLT to the Commanding General, U. S. Army Services of Supply, APO 501, on 24 March, and the request was approved authorizing the station to draw rations for a maximum of 16 men.

On 12 April, RE Burnett reported that orders on an SC2 and a MM3 had been received but the men had not yet reported. On 17 April, the station was going to organize its own mess because adequate messing facilities were not available locally. The food supply of the cafe could not keep up with the food demand of the crew. Station personnel would be employed to cook pending the arrival of the Ship's Cook under orders to the station. There was no further word on either the communications circuit or the truck. A kit of recreation and athletic gear was requested for the station. On 15 April, the Senior Medical Officer at Cairns was requested to provide a medical supply kit based on an estimated complement of 25 officers and men.

On 19 April, RE Burnett reported that work had resumed on the communications circuit and progress was being made. The weekly supply boat had arrived without the Ship's Cook and Machinist's Mate. RE Burnett reported the station was getting along well in the interim but he had not realized that when the mess was started, he was the only one who could cook. He remarked that it was the first time in the Navy that he had served a plate of food, let alone cook it. The station was able to procure only Australian Military Forces field rations; for example, one and one-half pounds of coffee per week to serve 16 men. The otherwise strict diet was supplemented somewhat by whatever station personnel could beg, borrow, or steal plus a few purchases on the open market. U. S. Army personnel in the area were also living on Australian rations as the proposed Army supply plan had not yet been implemented. A few magazines had found their way to the station and were enjoyed by all hands but recreation equipment was limited, at the time, to an old piano which apparently no one could play. Word



had been received that a truck had been allocated for the station but there was no word on when it might arrive. Apparently to break the monotony, RE Burnett began referring to the station as "Possum Trot" which he later changed to "Coon Holler".

On 8 May, RE Burnett reported that work was still being performed on the communications circuit. A Postmaster General representative had come to the station to conduct an "official test" which resulted in his statement that the line was not in condition to carry teletype communications and that a linesman would have to come up and go over the line again. A quick trip to Navy 144 at Cairns to conduct some business resulted in RE Burnett's discovering that they were about to ship the station a vehicle that would have been more of a liability than an asset. Some "horse trading" produced a truck, a five-ton 6x6, suitable to the station's needs. Since the supply boat couldn't carry anything larger than a Jeep, RE Burnett looked into the possibilities of traveling overland; a distance of some 550 miles. He was strongly advised against it for at least another six weeks because of the rainy season. Even the Postmaster General linemen were still riding horses whenever they had to go into the bush to check out telephone and telegraph lines. The truck had eight rear drive wheels and two in front but even with chains on all wheels and in compound low, local opinion was that the truck would never make it through the bush. Neither the cook nor Machinist's Mate had arrived and RE Burnett reported he was getting tired of cooking. He did have one less mouth to feed, however, since the RAAF doctor had put him on a liquid diet to clear up some stomach problems. The supply situation was improving significantly in the area of both provisions and other supplies. Mail was still a problem from the standpoint of slow delivery and frequent mis-routings.

In June, it was decided to bring the truck to Cooktown. From discussions with local Cooktown people, it was decided to try the overland route since all agreed that the country would be quite good for travel. However, no one had any idea of the trials and tribulations in store for the expedition consisting of RE Burnett, RMC Scullion and RM2 Dillard. Fortunately, RMC Scullion had had seven years of specialized automotive



training since subsequent events required him to spend about as much time under the truck as riding in the cab. The Supply Depot at Cairns provided all of the service overhaul and maintenance within their means including the outfitting of the "expedition". Since there would be no garages along the way, everything down to the smallest detail had to be planned and packed aboard. Road information was furnished by the Australian Army and the North Queensland police. Maps were provided and route was marked out but they were less than accurate. It was finally impressed upon the "expedition" that road knowledge north of Cairns came only through experience. Air distance from Cairns to Cooktown was ninety miles, by water 105 miles, and by overland bush tracks passable by pack horse only throughout the greater portion of the year, 550 miles. This was, of course, the route which had to be followed. The route went west and south from Cairns through Mareeba, Dimbulah, Carbonate Creek, Solanum, Boonmoo, Petford, Lappa Junction, Koorboora, Alma-Den, Chillagoe, Mungana, and then north through the Walsh River crossing, Wrotham Park Station, Mitchell River, Mount Mulgrave Station, Palmerville, Palmer River crossing, Kennedy River, Big Kennedy bend, Fairlight Station, Fairview, Laura, and finally east to the coast to travel the last 67 miles by rail to Cooktown. They dug their way through miles of sand, shoveled yards of dirt and gravel, and cut down enough trees to aid the national reforestation program. Many of the towns existed in name only, being ghost towns, while others such as Wrotham Park and Mount Mulgrave were cattle stations of three to six thousand square miles. There were such outstanding places as Boonmoo where they were told road information would be available from what proved to be a non-existent population, spots where it was necessary to patrol a mile or more ahead of the truck to find a way through, the Palmer River crossing where the bank crumbled beneath the weight of the truck leaving them hanging over a cliff for two days until the arrival of jacks from a station 75 miles distant, the Big Kennedy Bend where the truck bogged down body deep and refused to move until help was obtained after a long night's trek on foot, and the Fairview repeater station where rain had washed out the track and caused three rivers to rise above their normal ford



depth to impassable depths. Their arrival in Laura and subsequent trip to Cooktown over the last 67 miles by rail on a flatcar was, small wonder, considered the most enjoyable part of the trip.

On 29 June 1944, LTJG R. S. Katzenberger, USN, was issued orders that upon detachment from the Fleet Radio Unit Detachment, Adelaide River, he was to proceed to the Fleet Radio Unit Detachment, Cooktown, for duty as Officer in Charge in relief of RE S. A. Burnett. LTJG Katzenberger reported to Cooktown on 13 July and assumed command on 16 July. RE Burnett was ordered to FRU7THFLT for further transfer.

In a document dated 1 August 1944, a description and background of the buildings and ground occupied by the Cooktown station was given. The property and buildings leased by the U. S. Navy reportedly consisted of all of that real property owned by the Sisters of Mercy, Roman Catholic Diocese of Cairns, Queensland, identified as Allotments 14 to 17 inclusive, Section 13, Cooktown, County of Banks, Parish of Cook. The property was bounded on the north by Furneaux Street and on the west by Helen Street. The rear property line extended from Furneaux Street nearly north and south. Buildings on the property consisted of the Convent itself, a three-story brick and wood building with a mansard roof containing 16 rooms, an adjoining building of wooden construction consisting of four rooms used for a recreation hall, mess, galley, and laundry room, and St. Mary's High School which was of wooden construction consisting of two rooms. The high school building was not used by the station. All buildings were reported to be in very poor condition due to termites and weather. (For a more complete description of the Convent, see Appendix A.)

It is not known when the Cooktown station went operational but it could not have been too long before action was initiated to disestablish it. FRUMEL's 300329Z AUG 44 stated, in part, "In pursuance projects decided during visit of Director of Naval Communications request COMSEVENTHFLT initiate following (a) issue necessary orders to LT Raymond Sylvester Katzenberger, Officer in Charge, FRUDET Cooktown to decommission

that Detachment...". CCMSEVENTHFLT directed CCMSEVFORSEVENTHFLT to take action. On 19 September, communications and power were secured and all personnel were transferred on 22 September 1944. (For a list of personnel assigned to FRUDET Cooktown, see Appendix B.)

The last reference noted to the intercept station at Cooktown is found in a FRU7THFLT addenda to a FRUMEL News Letter dated 24 February 1945 which states that the Cooktown intercept station was disbanded early in October 1944 with the equipment distributed between the station at Adelaide River and Melbourne. The mission of the Cooktown station was apparently solely intercept because, although a reference to the possibility of establishing an HFDF station at Cooktown was noted in early correspondence, FRUAD's 050127Z OCT 44 states, in part, "...while on subject, request NEGAT (Washington) note that there is not, never has been and probably never will be a direction finder at Cooktown."



REPORT COVERING COOKTOWN, QUEENSLAND AS THE PROPOSED

LOCATION FOR AN ADVANCED FRU DETACHMENT

DESCRIPTION OF BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS.

The property upon which it is proposed to locate the Cooktown unit is known as the Sisters of Mercy Convent School. This school comprised a group of buildings self contained on its own property. Activity of the school reached its peak during Cooktown's "Golden Age", since that time activity has dwindled through the years until the school was evacuated in 1939.

The school is comprised of the following buildings and facilities in varying stages of repair. A large two story brick building with finished off attic, a wooden school building, three small sheds, old engine house and two outhouses employed as lavatories. Cooking and messing facilities existed in a wooden annex in the rear of the two story brick building. A tennis court and well with windmill tower is located at one end of the building.

It is proposed to occupy the two story brick building and its adjoining annex as radio station, living quarters, galley and mess hall. This building is arranged as follows; First floor, entrance hall and main stair case, school rooms and chapel, Second floor, two large dormitorys, hall and stair case to the attic, two large porches at front and rear, four individual rooms and the washroom and showers, Third floor, consists of an attic finished in wood beneath a large flat dormer roof. The attic is divided into three rooms, the center room being the largest into which the stair case from the second floor is terminated. The other two rooms are end rooms and are partitioned off from the center room. A small bath facility is also built into this attic. There are four dormer windows in the center room and three each in the end rooms. Under one of the dormers is located the water tank which feeds the showers and wash room on the second floor.

The ground floor of the building is used largely for the storage of religious articles formerly used by the school. More than ample space exists on the second floor for all living quarters and the attic is amply large and well suited to the radio installation.

This building is in a fair state of repair, replacement of window glass, door hardware and certain plumbing repairs being all that that is necessary with the addition of light and power wiring. No part of the original thirty-two volt battery lighting system would be useful. Wiring and electrical fittings are in a bad state of repair and not intended for use with a system other than the original installation. Due to the lath and plastered walls and the extremely high metal sheathed ceilings the same difficulties will present themselves in the electrical installation as usually present themselves in the modernization of all old buildings.



REPORT COVERING COOKTOWN, QUEENSLAND AS THE PROPOSED

LOCATION FOR AN ADVANCED FRU DETACHMENT, (Cont'd.)

COOKING AND MESSING FACILITIES.

A wooden annex adjoins the rear of the main building. This building is partitioned off into four rooms, a large mess hall, small dining room, galley and a wash house in an extremely poor state of repair. It is suggested that the galley and small dining room be renovated as necessary. The large mess hall used as a recreation room and whatever use may be made of the wash house for laundry purposes. The galley is equipped with a large chimney, the base dimensions of which are six feet by two feet. By extension of the fire base out into the galley a few feet either by means of a concrete or metal sheet ample safe space obtains for a large combination wood or oil stove.

There are no sink or drain facilities installed in the galley. A small sink is located in the building but no piping runs made. Storage water tanks are located in the rear of the building but are not piped, water being drawn off by means of spigots. No trouble would be experienced in making the sink and drain installations.

A large storage cabinet is installed in the galley. With the exception of window glass, wiring and the plumbing mentioned all that is required to renovate these rooms is paint, lye water, soap and effort. No screening exists in any of the buildings.

SHEDS AND OUTHUSES.

There are three small sheds, two-out houses and the old engine house located in the rear of the convent yard. No one of the sheds is large enough to accommodate the contemplated power supply. Since all the out buildings have dirt floors their use is limited to certain forms of storage only. Of the two outbuildings employed as lavatories only one is useable, the other having fallen apart through lack of repair. The possibility of jacking up the roof of one of the sheds suggests its use as a garage. Attached sketch shows the most suitable site for an engine house. This location is far enough removed to reduce objectionable noise levels both electrical and aural.

WATER SUPPLY

There is no town water supply in Cooktown, wells and rain water storage tanks are relied upon entirely. The convent school water supply is based largely upon storage tanks filled during the rainy season by means of a maze of rain gutters of somewhat doubtful continuity. There are six one thousand gallon storage tanks located in the rear of the galley. These tanks have no piping runs and water is drawn off by means of spigots. There is no direct connection between these tanks and the well.



REPORT COVERING COOKTOWN, QUEENSLAND AS THE PROPOSED

LOCATION FOR AN ADVANCED FRU DETACHMENT, (Cont'd)

WATER SUPPLY (Cont'd.)

The well on the premises is a bricked up shaft six feet in diameter driven to a depth of thirty-five feet. Sounding during the first week in August revealed a depth of six feet of water and silt. The windmill is a Chicago built Aeromotor and is at present out of commission. During its operating days it pumped water to a two hundred and fifty gallon open top tank installed beneath one of the attic dormers. This tank supplies the showers and hand basins located in the second floor washroom. At one time a small line fed a fifty gallon metal lined wood tank which supplied the small bath in the attic. This pipe has been disconnected. The overflow from the two hundred and fifty gallon attic tank runs out into the main roof into the rain gutter system.

Mr. Jack Welch, the local plumber, was contacted in connection with the windmill and well. It appears that the windmill has been out of commission for some time due to wearing out of parts concerned with the driving gear which are no longer obtainable. Also there are times when insufficient wind obtains to turn the mill. The report of Mr. Welch on the well covering a number of years is to the effect that the well might be depended upon to furnish two hundred and fifty gallons of water per day during the dry season. The bottom of the well rests upon hard pan and may be difficult to drive to a greater depth. This well is considered fit for drinking but due to the possibility of contamination it is considered advisable to either boil the water or chlorinate. Silt removal and cleaning of the well may be accomplished through the town council at a cost of two pounds per working day. Labor of two men is required.

It is recommended that a pump be provided pumping water direct to both attic and gallen tanks. Since the attic pipe line is already in place an additional run of one hundred and fifty feet of two inch pipe would permit a direct galley tank. It would be a comparatively simple matter to reinstall one or two of the one thousand gallon tanks known to be in good condition on the roof and thus provide a good head of water for all purposed including limited fire protection.

Most of the rain gutters are badly rusted out and all of the tanks need emptying and cleaning. All of the tanks contain large amounts of dirt, paint flakes and rust. Wire brushing and treating with potable water tank paint would insure satisfactory tank operation for some time to come.

INVENTORY OF USEFUL FURNITURE.

An inventory of furniture not in storage for safe keeping revealed the following items.

<u>Item</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Bad</u>
Tables, large, dining	3	3
Chairs		12
Lockers, clothing	12	
Benches, mess	12	



REPORT COVERING COOKTOWN, QUEENSLAND AS THE PROPOSED

LOCATION FOR AN ADVANCED FRU DETACHMENT, (Cont'd)

INVENTORY OF USEFUL FURNITURE, (Cont'd,)

All beds on the premises are too short to be of use being child sizes only. There are many closets and cabinets which would be useful for storage located in all parts of the building.

SANITARY FACILITIES.

There are no town operated facilities for disposal of refuse. Garbage must either be burned by the unit or trucked out to local farmers operating pig farms. Clean refuse and cans after burning out and flattening must be trucked to the town dump. There is no sewerage system and all outside toilet facilities are under the control of the town. The local health board prohibits the use of pit or trench privies.

A sundryman is maintained by the town and all persons are required to make use of the service. The sundryman attends to the emptying and cleansing of the buckets and returns them in a sanitary condition at a cost of one shilling, seven pence per bucket. Estimated of the number of buckets and the required frequency of emptying must be furnished the local board of health.

TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS.

There are no locally operated transportation facilities available. Military trucks are very few in number due to the shipping problem. Cooktown is served almost entirely by waterborne transport. One small diesel tug operates between Cairns and Cooktown making one trip per week. There are no rail or vehicular roads connecting Cooktown with the south. The U.S. Army Air Transport Command takes care of personnel transport, mail and small quantities of freight. Five to seven northbound flights refuel at the Cooktown military strip each morning. Returning on the southbound leg of the flight planes stop at Cooktown only on signal. The Cooktown military strip is located nine miles from the town. Civil airways operates a very limited service between Cairns and Cooktown two or three trips weekly. A few passengers and small quantity of freight is accommodated. A small gas engine driven passenger car operates inland from Cooktown to the town of Laura, a distance of sixty-seven miles.

POWER

There are no lighting and power facilities.

TELEPHONE

The PMG operates a small local system with a few lines available. Pole lines run through the street upon which the convent school is located. The telephone system is a bit sketchy there being but few subscribers and all based on the country party line.

HOSPITAL FACILITIES.

Limited civilian and military medical facilities are available.



REPORT COVERING COOKTOWN, QUEENSLAND AS THE PROPOSED

LOCATION FOR AN ADVANCED FRU DETACHMENT, (Cont'd)

HOSPITAL FACILITIES, (Cont'd)

The civilian hospital has no resident physician nor has Cooktown. Military physicians serve according to their availability. At present the RAAF provides a doctor.

GENERAL HEALTH.

Cooktown health conditions are good. No outbreaks of contagious disease have occurred in recent years. According to the local pharmacist no malaria exists locally, the only recorded cases having been brought into Cooktown from other districts. Common colds and occasional cases of dengue fever being the chief affliction. The climate is good the year around and Cooktown prides itself in the number of people who go into retirement locally.

FIRE PROTECTION.

Fire fighting equipment consists of one ancient hand drawn, hand operated pump. Lack of water precludes extensive fire protection.

RECREATION FACILITIES.

A splendid bathing beach is located fifteen minutes walk from town. This beach is clean tide water and no cases of ear fungus or other ailment have ever been reported. A small sports park provides a soft ball playing field and a tennis court in fair state of repair. Moving pictures are shown Monday, Wednesday and Saturday nights. There is a dance of sorts on Friday night. No military wet canteen is provided. Two small pubs have beer on tap one day a week.

CANTEEN FACILITIES.

Provided in a limited manner by the RAAF and AMF. No American canteen facilities are available.

<u>NAME</u>	<u>RANK/RATE</u>	<u>DOR</u>	<u>SVC</u>	<u>SVC/FILE NR</u>	<u>REPORTED</u>	<u>TRANSFER</u>	<u>REMARKS</u>
AICHELE, Charles John	RM2		USNR	646-37-54	5 Apr 44	Sep 44	
BOWER, Gordon Irving	RM2		USN	224-57-94	5 Apr 44	Sep 44	
BURNETT, Sidney Addison	RE		USN	156999	28 Oct 43	16 Jul 44	Officer in Charge
DILLARD, Everett Allison Norman	RM2		USN	662-06-80	5 Apr 44	Sep 44	
DUKE, Carson Raymond	SC2		USNR	658-06-67		Sep 44	
GALLOWAY, Wilmer James	RM3		USNR	621-72-96	5 Apr 44	Sep 44	
KATZENBERGER, Raymond Sylvester	LTJG LT		USN	196925	13 Jul 44	Sep 44	Officer in Charge
KEEFER, David Neale	RM2		USN	300-80-33	5 Apr 44	Sep 44	
NEELS, William "B"	RM3		USNR	554-20-67	5 Apr 44	Sep 44	
SCHALLER, Michael George	RM2		USNR	622-58-47	5 Apr 44	Sep 44	
SCULLION, William (n)	RMC		USN	402-80-33	5 Apr 44	Sep 44	
SMITH, Keith Wheeler	RM2		USNR	652-05-71	5 Apr 44	Sep 44	
SMITHERS, Harry Aurther	RM2		USN	376-58-28	5 Apr 44	Sep 44	
TAYLOR, Robert Howard	RM2		USNR	664-14-81	5 Apr 44	Sep 44	
TUCKER, William Clarence	MM3		USNR	663-26-12		Sep 44	
WALKER, William Ralph	RM2		USNR	662-55-76	5 Apr 44	Sep 44	
WINCHESTER, Samuel Harrisson	RMC		USN	243-47-67	16 Feb 44	Sep 44	