



**HERITAGE
COUNCIL**
OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES – ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in November 1996 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

The documentation for this place is based on the heritage assessment completed by Irene Sauman, Historian and Laura Gray, Heritage and Conservation Consultant, in September 2004, with amendments and/or additions by HCWA staff and the Register Committee.

PRINCIPAL AUSTRALIAN HISTORIC THEME(S)

- 3.5 Developing primary production
- 5.8 Working on the land
- 7.7.3 Going to war

HERITAGE COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA THEME(S)

- 106 Workers (incl. Aboriginal, convict)
- 301 Grazing & pastoralism & dairying
- 501 World Wars & other wars

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE*

The Homestead (1903) of Corunna Downs Station is a unique building with Federation Bungalow style features constructed for North West conditions incorporating ant bed mud walls, an elevated roof for passive cooling and steel framing to prevent termite damage. (Criterion 1.1)

The remains of the Corunna Downs Wartime Airbase are a landmark and a representation of the form and aesthetic that is associated with the significant history of World War Two associations in the district. (Criteria 1.1 & 1.3)

The runways, taxiways, revetments, slab ruins and other elements that comprise Corunna Downs Wartime Airbase are significant elements in the remote landscape of the Pilbara. (Criterion 1.3)

* For consistency, all references to architectural style are taken from Apperly, R., Irving, R., Reynolds, P. *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture. Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, Angus and Robertson, North Ryde, 1989.

For consistency, all references to garden and landscape types and styles are taken from Ramsay, J. *Parks, Gardens and Special Trees: A Classification and Assessment Method for the Register of the National Estate*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1991, with additional reference to Richards, O. *Theoretical Framework for Designed Landscapes in WA*, unpublished report, 1997.

11.2 HISTORIC VALUE

Corunna Downs Station was part of the development of the pastoral industry in the Pilbara district and demonstrates the evolution of a pastoral settlement since 1891. (Criteria 2.1 & 2.2)

Corunna Downs Station has close associations with many Aboriginal people who worked and lived on the property, such as Daisy and Arthur Corunna, who were integral to the success and development of the pastoral industry in the North-West, and who featured in the story of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous relations in Sally Morgan's acclaimed work, *My Place*. (Criteria 2.2 & 2.3)

Corunna Downs Airbase was one of five airbases constructed in Western Australia north of the tropic of Capricorn during World War Two that were used for offensive purposes. (Criterion 2.2)

Corunna Downs Station is associated with pastoralists Dudley and Howden Drake-Brockman, who established the Station, homestead and farm buildings and ran the Station from 1891 to 1923, and with later owner Ernest Foulkes-Taylor (1924-1951). (Criterion 2.3)

11.3 SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11.4 SOCIAL VALUE

Corunna Downs Wartime Airbase has always been highly valued by the members of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) and the United States Army Air Corps (USAAC), particularly by those who served there during World War Two. (Criterion 4.1)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12.1 RARITY

Corunna Downs Wartime Airbase is a rare example in Western Australia of a strategic RAAF base established specifically as a heavy bomber base, and was the only airbase in the RAAF's Western Area which was used for a substantial number of heavy bomber operations during World War Two. (Criterion 5.1)

12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Corunna Downs Station is a typical example of a pastoral homestead group in the North West of the State that has continued to evolve over time, demonstrating a particular lifestyle for the owners and workers. (Criterion 6.1 & 6.2)

The various elements that comprise Corunna Downs Wartime Airbase are significant in the remote landscape of the Pilbara (Criterion 6.2)

Corunna Downs Wartime Airbase is representative of World War Two associations in the North West and as a reminder of the way of life for the forces personnel who were based there (Criterion 6.2)

12.3 CONDITION

Overall, Corunna Downs Station and Wartime Airbase is in fair condition. The station homestead group is occupied and maintained at an operational level. The Wartime airbase campsite, comprising concrete slabs, runways and taxiways, is not maintained.

12.4 INTEGRITY

Corunna Downs Station and Former Wartime Airbase has a high degree of integrity. The Station has continued its residential and pastoral functions since its establishment in 1891 except for a decade or so in the 1950s and 1960s. Although the Airbase is clearly not able to reinstate the original function, as a ruin the place informs of the original function.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

Despite incremental changes to the homestead over time, Corunna Downs Station has a moderate degree of authenticity. The remains of the Corunna Downs Wartime Airbase have a high degree of authenticity. Overall *Corunna Downs Station and Former Wartime Airbase* demonstrates a moderate to high degree of authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentation for this place is based on the heritage assessment completed by Irene Sauman, Historian and Laura Gray, Heritage and Conservation Consultant, in September 2004, with amendments and/or additions by HCWA staff and the Register Committee.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Corunna Downs Station and Former Wartime Airbase comprises Corunna Downs Station and the remains of Corunna Downs Wartime Airbase. Corunna Downs Station comprises the homestead (1903), adjacent kitchen building, ablutions, two bough sheds, Nissan hut plant room, on ground concrete water tank and corrugated iron water tank on steel stand, machinery shed, remains of workers quarters, shearing shed and quarters, cemetery, and site of the second (1897) homestead. Corunna Downs Wartime Airbase comprises the remains of the two runways/taxiways and revetments, the remains of the camp area in several concrete slabs, footings and remnants, and the site of the first (1891) homestead.

The pastoral lease for land in the area of Corunna Downs Station was first taken up by John Withnell and William McLean in July 1886 and the Mackay brothers, Donald and Roderick Loudon, took up a holding in 1887. They were also involved in pearling at Cossack.¹ The Mackay's lease consisted of three parcels of 20,000 acres each.² They are reputed to have named the station Corunna Downs after the Battle of Corunna, which took place in Spain in 1809 between the British and a French force under Napoleon.³

In 1890, George Dudley (known as Dudley) and Alfred Howden Drake-Brockman (known as Howden) took up land on what is now Mt Edgar Station. They had been working for their uncle Edward Stone at Cooleetha Hill station to learn the pastoral industry. According to Drake-Brockman family history, Howden then selected the Corunna Downs land and named it from the poem he was reading at the time on the burial of Sir John Moore after the Battle of Corunna (Moore was the British forces leader).⁴ The leases of the Withnells and Mackays were registered to Dalgety & Co and worked by Dudley and Howden Drake-Brockman trading as the Brockman Brothers.⁵

Corunna Downs Station was located on an undulating plain bordered by hills that formed a watershed for the plain below. As well as surface water in numerous creeks, there was a supply of sub-artesian water. The first homestead at Corunna Downs (not extant) was established in 1891 at Bookageemoona, a permanent pool on Emu Creek, which was a tributary of the Coongan River.⁶ The house was typical of North West stations, being of granite and mud, the mud being of ground-up earth from ant beds (termite nest mounds).

1 Erickson, Rica, *Bicentennial Dictionary of Western Australians*, Perth, UWA Press, 1988, pp. 1993-94, 1997.

2 Pastoral leases 69/3, 69/5 & 69/6, correspondence between Ivy M. Formby of Port Hedland & Mrs R. Foulkes-Taylor, 8 October 1974, Battye Library private archives ACC 2522A.

3 Correspondence between Ivy M. Formby of Port Hedland & Mrs R. Foulkes-Taylor, op cit; www.napoleonicguide.com/battle-corunna.htm, 8 September 2004.

4 Drake-Brockman, Judith, *Wongi Wongi - to speak*; Hesperian Press, Victoria Park, 2001, p. 4. Judith was Howden's eldest daughter to his second wife.

5 DOLA correspondence file for pastoral lease 394/1165, SROWA, AN3/13 ACC 1657 Item 150/1891.

6 Battye, J. S. *The History of the North West of Australia: embracing Kimberley, Gascoyne and Murchison districts*, V. K. Jones & Co, Perth, 1915, p. 193. The name has also been written as Booketchemoonya and Boogageemoonya in various sources.

In 1895, the Pilbara goldfield was declared and the town of Marble Bar was established some 40 kilometres to the north. In 1897, a new homestead site was chosen about 10 kilometres east of Bookageemoona Pool and the brothers built a road from the site to Marble Bar. A new homestead (not extant) was constructed in granite and ant bed mud and had six rooms surrounded by verandahs, 'with the usual kitchen, offices, etc'. Lawns, flower gardens and a vegetable garden were established. A swimming tank, made up of a shortened corrugated iron tank sunk in the ground, was considered 'an immense boon to the inhabitants', while 'splendid date palms' gave a 'touch of Oriental richness to the landscape'.⁷ There was also a vegetable garden tended by Aboriginals Pompey and Paddy.⁸

Aboriginal workers were employed in most aspects of station work in the North West, working as stockmen, shearers, general farm hands and domestic staff. Pastoral stations thrived in the first half of the twentieth century on the inexpensive labour of the local Aboriginal populations.⁹

Dudley Drake-Brockman had married Amy Kate Whitfield and they had two children, a son and a daughter. In 1901, Howden Drake-Brockman married Eleanor Boddington. Eventually they occupied a second residence that Howden, with the help of the Aboriginal workers, built in 1903 near the 1897 homestead.¹⁰ This new residence (current homestead) consisted of two rooms with surrounding verandahs. The beginning of the enclosed verandah wings possibly date from the arrival of the children, John Birdwood (1909) and Beatrice (1911). An enclosure on one corner of the verandah is shown in the 1915 photograph in J. S. Battye's *History of the North West*. Howden also purchased a house, Lucknow, in Claremont as their metropolitan residence.¹¹

Dudley Drake-Brockman left Corunna in 1906 and moved to Northam. He died in May 1910, while visiting England for medical attention.¹² His wife Amy inherited his share of Corunna Downs and Howden and Dudley's cousin, Ernest Stone, joined her at Corunna to assist in the running of the Station. Ernest married Eleanor's sister, Violet Boddington, making him also Howden's brother-in-law.¹³

By 1915, Corunna Downs Station had been increased in size to 300,600 acres in one block. Merino sheep were run for their wool and the flock numbered almost 20,000 sheep. The wool clip was sent to London where it realized 11½d per pound. Between 1,000 and 3,000 head of beef cattle were grazed in the boundary paddocks for market in Fremantle. Over 200 horses were kept at any one time, both for market and use on the station, as well as herds of camels and donkeys for transport purposes.¹⁴

Eleanor Drake-Brockman died in Perth in August 1918, of pneumonia. Her children remained at Lucknow in the care of their aunt Violet Stone. In October

7 Battye, J. S. *The History of the North West of Australia*, op cit, p. 194 & 195.

8 Drake-Brockman, Judith, op cit, p. 6.

9 Detailed accounts of what the conditions werelike for the aboriginal workers at Corrunna Downs Station, particularly Daisy and Arthur Corrunna, can be found in Morgan, Sally, *My Place*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1987, pp. 154-332.

10 Morgan, Sally, *My Place*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1987, p. 178.

11 Battye, J. S. *The History of the North West of Australia*, op cit, photo p. 195; physical evidence; Jackson, Alan, *Brockman & Drake-Brockman Family Tree: The Australian branch 1830-1993*, Perth, A. Jackson, 1994, p. 107; Drake-Brockman, Judith, op cit, p. 14.

12 Battye, J. S. *The History of the North West of Australia*, op cit, p. 195; *Pilbara Goldfield News*, 7 May 1910, p. 7.

13 Drake-Brockman, Judith, op cit, p. 6.

14 Battye, J. S. *The History of the North West of Australia*, op cit, p. 195.

1919, Howden remarried to Alice Gregory (nee Griffiths), herself a widow with a daughter and the family returned to Corunna Downs. Alice Drake-Brockman had grown up in Kalgoorlie and enjoyed station life and the company of the Aboriginal people who lived and worked there. When she returned to Claremont later in 1920 for the birth of her daughter Judith, fifteen-year-old Daisy Corunna travelled with her and became nanny to Judith and later also to Francis (1923) and Alison (1926) Drake-Brockman.¹⁵

The family spent time between Corunna Downs and Lucknow until 1923. That year, Howden Drake-Brockman and two of his brothers-in-law, Sir Waldie Griffith and Major Kenneth Robertson, married to two of Alice's sisters, went into partnership in Towera and Lyndon Stations, further south and inland from Carnarvon.¹⁶ The Drake-Brockman's left Corunna Downs in late 1923.¹⁷

The 13 separate leases that then comprised the 305,593 acres of Corunna Downs Station were combined into one lease, 2303/96, which was taken up in 1924 by Ernest Samuel Foulkes-Taylor.¹⁸ Ernest was born at York and after his education in England he became a mining engineer. He served with the Royal Engineers during World War One, when he was wounded. With his younger brother Charlie he held Glenorn Station, near Malcolm in the Eastern Goldfields before purchasing Corunna Downs. When Foulkes-Taylor took over Corunna Downs Station it was still a fully operational sheep station carrying 20,000 head of sheep, as well as 350 cattle, 125 horses, 175 donkeys and 8 camels.¹⁹

Isaac (Ike) Treloar, with his wife Allie, took up the position of manager at Corunna Downs in April 1926, and remained until June 1943. It is thought that the Treloars occupied the 1897 homestead, where they are reported to have entertained the women and children from Marble Bar in the cool tree-shaded garden while the Marble Bar cricket team played the Corunna Shearers' team.²⁰ During the first decade of Foulkes-Taylor's ownership the boundaries of Corunna Downs were altered and some land surrendered, leaving 290,329 acres, for which a new lease, 394/1195, was issued on 2 November 1936.²¹

Ernest Foulkes-Taylor was generally only at the Station during the winter months. In October 1942 he married Dorothy Nellie Boucher Hassell in Marble Bar, after which he spent more time at Corunna Downs.²² He was responsible for re-roofing the 1903 homestead, giving it the current roof shape.²³ This was almost certainly done sometime in the 1940s.²⁴ There probably hadn't been any reason to upgrade the place prior to his marriage.

15 Drake-Brockman, Judith, op cit, pp. 13-23; Daisy Corunna was the grandmother of Sally Morgan.

16 Drake-Brockman, Judith, op cit, pp. 24-30.

17 Drake-Brockman, Judith, op cit.

18 DOLA correspondence file for pastoral lease 394/1165, SROWA, AN3/13 ACC 1657 Item 150/1891.

19 Bill of sale, 11 April 1924, DOLA correspondence file, SROWA, Item 150/1891, op cit. According to Arthur Corrunna, when Foulkes-Taylor took over the station many of the Aboriginal station hands left for another station Hillside. From Morgan, Sally, *My Place*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1987, p. 187.

20 Mallett, Kathleen, op cit, p. 194.

21 DOLA correspondence file, SROWA, Item 150/1891, op cit; Lease 394/1165, Lands & Survey pastoral lease records, SROWA, CONS 5870/63.

22 Drake-Brockman, Judith, op cit, footnote, p. 5; Mallett, Kathleen, *To the Bar Bonded: A history of early Marble Bar*, East Pilbara Shire & Hesperian Press, 1992, p. 190.

23 Battye, J. S. *The History of the North West of Australia*, op cit, photo of the 1903 homestead, p. 195; Correspondence from Olive Janes to Mrs R. Foulkes-Taylor, 25 November 1974, Battye Library private archives ACC 2522A. Olive Janes was the wife of the manager at Corunna Downs in 1971-72.

24 Physical evidence.

Australia was at war with Japan from December 1941 and in the first half of 1942 there was a real threat of invasion from the Japanese and, in response, a number of airstrips were established in the North West to defend against air and sea attacks. By the latter half of the year, the threat of invasion had passed and Australian strategy had changed from defence to the offensive. Corunna Downs was chosen as the location for an airbase from which heavy bombers could undertake raids on strategic enemy targets without passing over other enemy held territory on the way.²⁵

A Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) survey party was sent to Corunna Downs in November 1942 to survey a site for a camp and runways for No. 73 Operational Base Unit. The site chosen was an existing airfield²⁶ adjacent to Bookageemoona Pool and the site of the 1891 homestead, where there was a well, windmill and tank for watering stock. Construction of the camp at the Airbase was first allocated to the RAAF's No. 2 Mobile Works squadron, who were in the process of moving from Pearce, Western Australia to Melbourne, but the work was later transferred to the responsibility of the Department of Interior in WA under the overall control of the Allied Works Council. On 4 January 1943 a contract was let to G. Bishop & Sons for construction of camp buildings. The contractors planned for six men to undertake the work initially, but the Department considered that 25-30 men were needed to get the work done in time.²⁷

Materials were transported to Meekatharra by train and then by truck convoy to Corunna Downs. Tons of timber, iron, cement and fittings were provided.²⁸ The largest building was the hospital, 120ft x 20ft with a 9ft wide surrounding verandah with a semidetached dental clinic, 40ft x 13ft both with concrete floors, iron roof and asbestos cement walls. The briefing room, 80ft x 18 ft and operations room, 40ft x 18ft was iron clad, as were all the other buildings on site. Six bomb shelters, 21ft x 14ft were provided, comprising concrete floor and iron roof but no walls. The kitchen was a 40ft x 18ft construction clad with iron and flywire. The three ablution buildings, 30ft x 12ft and six latrines of various sizes were ranged outside the three tent areas, which were sited according to rank. Reports on life at the Airbase refer to the servicemen sleeping in tents and photographs of the camp support this, but the list of buildings for disposal at the end of the war include four iron clad buildings, 50ft x 18ft with earth floors and two, 80ft x 18 ft with concrete floors, all designated for sleeping.²⁹ It is likely that transient personnel used the large sleeping huts. Alternatively they may have been used as accommodation during the wet season. However, further research is necessary to confirm this.³⁰

Other buildings included a hangar, sergeants' mess, boiler room and numerous storerooms. An additional contract was let in October 1943 for construction of six

25 Purser, Frank, *The Story of Corunna Downs: W.A.'s secret wartime air base*, [Bull Creek, Royal Australian Air Force Association, 1988], p. 3.

26 Department of Civil Aviation Data Sheet for Landing Ground No. 705 Corunna Downs, W.A., Issue 4, July 1942

27 National Archives, Corunna Downs file, Series K273, Item 1942/28, 1942-82, including maps of the site.

28 National Archives, Series K273, Item 1942/28, op cit.

29 2-page list of buildings for disposal, National Archives, Corunna Downs file, Series PP36/1, 19/3/33 Part 1, 1946-1963.

30 Email to HCWA dated 16/3/05 from Graham Horne on behalf of the Defence Heritage Committee of the National Trust of Australia (WA)

bomb stores and a pyrotechnic store. The work was undertaken by Ronald John Davies in a four week period.³¹

The runways at Corunna Downs Wartime Airbase were enlarged by the Main Roads Department. ³² The runways measured 5,000 and 7,000 feet and were 150 feet wide. Eighteen hideouts and splinter proof revetments were provided along two looped taxiways off the northern end of the runways. A revetment is basically another name for a retaining wall, which in this case protected the earthworks which hid the aircraft. The heavy bombers were hidden in enclosed hideouts.³³

It is difficult to ascertain the actual costs of the works. Air Board Agendum No. 7034 dated 6 March 1946 is probably close with approximate final figures £97,320 for 'Airfield and Dispersal works', £14,526 for buildings and £14,288 for engineering services, camouflage and acquisition of land, a total of £126,134.³⁴

All the buildings were covered with camouflage netting and spinifex but the best camouflage for the site was the natural heat haze, which made sighting the place from the air extremely difficult. Pilots generally followed the Marble Bar-Port Hedland Railway and the roads when flying back to the Airbase, so difficult was it to locate. Hidden around the perimeter of the Airbase were army posts equipped with Bofors guns.³⁵

The first landing at Corunna Downs airbase by a four-engined aircraft was on 24 January 1943, when a C-87 (civilian version of the B-24 Liberator) of United Airlines paid a short visit.³⁶

The first operational flight out of Corunna Downs took place on 13 March 1943 when a B-24 of the 90th Bombardment Group, United States Army Air Forces (USAAF), piloted by Lieutenant John Arant, carried out a 14 hour daylight photographic reconnaissance flight over Surabaya in east Java and over Bali. This flight secured excellent photographic coverage which was used as the basis of targeting Surabaya for the rest of the war.³⁷ This flight set the pattern for all subsequent operational flights from Corunna Downs by having the heavy bombers stage in from their home bases – in this case in the Northern Territory (NT).³⁸

The next two B-24 sorties from Corunna Downs were at the end of May and involved armed reconnaissances of east Java by aircraft from the NT-based 380th

31 2-page list of buildings for disposal, National Archives, op cit.

32 Main Roads Department (Wartime Aerodromes), File 73/1943, Corunna Downs Aerodrome, SROWA, Acc 1140. RAAF Historical, *Introduction, bases, supporting organisations, vol. 1 of Units of the Royal Australian Air Force*, AGPS, Canberra, 1995, pp. 62-63.

33 Correspondence 8 June 1943 and plan for revetments, hideouts and taxiways, National Archives, Corunna Downs Air Aerodrome, Series K1141, 01941/42/543, 1942-48, op cit.

34 National Archives, Series A705/1, Item 171/106/380.

35 Cafarella, Antonio, *Corunna Downs: The invisible WW2 airfield*, South Australia, Antonio Cafarella, 1998, p. 6.

36 Rhoades, W.E., *Flying Macarthur to Victory*, Texas A&M University Press, College Station, Texas, 1987, pp. 67-8.

37 Woods, W.E., *Legacy of the 90th Bombardment Group*, Turner Publishing, Kentucky, 1994, p. 47.

38 Powell, A.I., *The Shadow's Edge*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Victoria, 1988, p. 163.

Bombardment Group, USAAF.³⁹ This Group was to be associated with operations out of Corunna Downs up to late December 1944.

July saw the first proper bombing raid when six B-24s made a 14 hour night raid on Surabaya.⁴⁰

This was followed in November with three night raids on east Java and Bali with up to 27 B-24s being involved.⁴¹

January 1944 saw a single B-24 make a 17 hour armed reconnaissance flight to Japanese-occupied Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean.⁴²

In March 1944, it was thought that a Japanese fleet was going to attack Western Australia. It was necessary to find the ships and to track them down the coast. All of the relevant coastal airfields were closed due to a cyclone, Corunna Downs alone remained open. Over a period of eleven days a pool of four B-24s based at Corunna Downs, carried out reconnaissances behind the cyclone – nothing was sighted.⁴³ During this period two night raids over east Java and Bali were mounted by up to 19 B-24s.⁴⁴ These two raids coincided with the Allied landing at Kavieng on the north coast of New Guinea.

In May 1944, in support of Operation Transom (a daylight raid by Allied carrier aircraft on Surabaya Harbour) 7 B-24s made a night attack on Surabaya Harbour, adding to the fires started earlier in the day.⁴⁵

The final 380th Bombardment Group raid from Corunna Downs was in December 1944 when 24 of its B-24s attempted to attack power stations and other targets in east Java.⁴⁶ They were accompanied by six B-24s of the RAAF's No. 24 Squadron also based in the NT. This raid coincided with the Allied landing on Leyte in the Philippines. There were no B-24 losses from Corunna Downs during the time the USAAF used it nor were there any operational casualties amongst the crews.

In early 1945 it appeared as if Corunna Downs role as a heavy bomber staging base was completed. However, in January the RAAF's No. 25 City of Perth Squadron was issued with B-24s and moved from Pearce to Cunderdin. For its first raid from Corunna Downs in March 1945 it made a successful daylight

39 Fain, op. cit., p. 11. Horton G.R. & Horton, G.L., *King of the Heavies*, The Authors, Minnesota, 1983, pp. 18-19; Horton, G.R., *The Best in the Southwest*, Mossie Publications, Minnesota, 1995, pp. 26-8.

40 Fain, op. cit., pp. 13-14. Horton & Horton, op.cit., p. 24. Horton, op. cit., p. 59. Odgers, G., *Air War Against Japan 1943-1945*, Australia in the War of 1939-1945, Series 3 (Air), vol. IV, Australian War Memorial, ACT, 1957, p. 66.

41 Fain, op. cit., pp. 13-14. Horton & Horton, op.cit., pp. 30-32. Horton, op. cit., pp. 116-18. Purser, F., *The Story of Corunna Downs*, Royal Australian Air Force Association, Bull Creek, WA, n.d. (1987), p. 6.

42 Miller manuscript, 1962.

43 Horton, op. cit., pp. 196-201. Leggoe, J., *Trying to be Sailors*, St George Books, Perth, WA, 1983, pp. 114-15.

44 Horton & Horton, op. cit., p. 58. Horton, op. cit., pp. 199-201. Craven, W.F. & Cate, J.L. (eds), *The Pacific: Guadalcanal to Saipan August, 1942 to July 1944*, Vol 4 of the Army Air Forces in World War II, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1950 (1983 reprint), p. 601.

45 Craven & Cate, op. cit., p. 626. Horton & Horton, op. cit., p. 64. Horton, op. cit., p. 227. Odgers, op. cit., p. 230. Purser, op. cit., p. 6.

46 Fain, op. cit., p. 45. Horton & Horton, op. cit., pp. 75-76. Horton, op. cit., pp. 290-91.

shipping strike in the Alas and Lombok Straits.⁴⁷ The Squadron was to stage to Corunna Downs four more times before the end of the war.

Late April saw four night raids against Japanese airfields in east Java (Malang and Madioen) and Bali (Denpasar) with up to eight B-24s being employed.^{20⁴⁸} These operations were in support of the Allied landing on Tarakan Island off the eastern coast of Borneo.⁴⁹ On the first raid of this second deployment one B-24 had to ditch near a Japanese-occupied island: the crew members were captured but survived the war.⁵⁰

Early in June 1945, the Squadron carried out five consecutive night harassing raids against Malang airfield.⁵¹ These operations were in support of the Allied landings at Labuan and Brunei Bay on the west coast of Borneo.⁵²

During late June and early July six night harassing raids were launched against two Japanese airfields at Malang and Tandjeong Perak in east Java in support of the Allied landings at Balikpapan in eastern Borneo.⁵³

The fifth and final deployment of No 25 Squadron to Corunna Downs was in early August 1945, and saw two daylight raids against the harbour at Banjeowangi at the extreme eastern tip of Java, the last raid taking place one day before the first atomic bomb was dropped on Japan.⁵⁴

A total of 213 operational heavy bomber sorties (entirely by B-24 Liberators) were flown out of Corunna Downs during 1943-45 for the loss of one heavy bomber:

| | |
|-----------------------|-----|
| USAAF | 142 |
| No. 24 Squadron, RAAF | 6 |
| No. 25 Squadron, RAAF | 65 |

At the peak of activity in 1945, there were around 300 personnel at the Base. The intense heat and a diet of tinned food was detrimental to the health of the servicemen many of whom were only posted to Corunna for a six month tour, while others were there for much longer. Boredom was a major factor of life, with recreation consisting of open air pictures, swimming in the creek pools and an occasional visit to the Ironclad Hotel in Marble Bar.

All bombing operations from Corunna Downs involved staging heavy bombers in from their regular bases. With maximum bombing efforts, such as in November 1943 and December 1944, there would have been upwards of 400 transient personnel (both aircrew and key support personnel) at Corunna Downs for several days in addition to the Operational Base Units personnel.⁵⁵

47 Mallard, P., *No. 25 City of Perth Squadron*, The Author, n.p. (Cremorne, NSW), 1996, pp. 42-44. Odgers, op. cit., p. 405. Purser, op.cit., p. 8. 'Cunderdin Liberator Squadron gave Japs a hammering,' *Sunday Times*, 26 August 1945.

48 Mallard, op. cit., pp. 44-50. Odgers, op. cit., pp. 454-55. Purser, op. cit., p. 10. *Sunday Times*, loc. Cit.

49 Odgers, op. cit., p. 455. Purser, op. cit., p. 10.

50 Mallard, op. cit., pp. 87-95. Odgers, op. cit., p. 455.

51 Mallard, op. cit., pp. 50-56.

52 Odgers, op. cit., p. 466. Purser, op. cit., p. 10.

53 Mallard, op. cit., pp. 56-62. Odgers, op.cit., pp. 475-76. Purser, op. cit., p. 12.

54 Mallard, op. cit., pp. 65-67. Purser, op. cit., p. 12. *Sunday Times*, loc. Cit.

55 Email to HCWA dated 16/3/05 from Graham Horne on behalf of the Defence Heritage Committee

As well as the army presence, ancillary RAAF units stationed at Corunna Downs included No. 2 Air Ambulance Unit (January 1944-December 1944), equipped with Avro Anson aircraft, No. 7 Communications Unit (March 1944- 1945?), No. 4. Medical Receiving Station with several male nurses (October 1943-December 1944) and No. 325 Radar Station (May 1943-December 1944), which was located about 7 kilometres from the Base. Commanding officers were Flight Lieutenant Sutton (1942-43), Flight Lieutenant F. Jolly (1943-45) and Flight Lieutenant Solomon (1945-46). The functional life of Corunna Downs Wartime Airbase ended with the Japanese surrender on 14 August 1945, and the official closure took place on 14 January 1946.⁵⁶

In 1949, the Commonwealth Department of Civil Aviation compulsorily acquired the site of Corunna Downs Wartime Airbase with 576 acres of land from Ernest Foulkes-Taylor, who was paid £394 for the land and improvements such as fencing, well, mill tank and trough, and allowed access to the site for use of the well.⁵⁷ The buildings were disposed of, and had all been removed by 1950.⁵⁸ Several of the smaller buildings were re-erected at the 20-Mile Sandy State Battery, south of Marble Bar, where they were used as offices.⁵⁹ Lease of the Airbase was offered to Corunna Downs Station, but Foulkes-Taylor declined, stating that he did not have sufficient labour for maintaining the airstrips.⁶⁰

Ernest Foulkes Taylor died on 17 August 1951 and was buried in the Station cemetery. In January 1953, the Station lease was acquired by Francis Joseph and Muriel Ettie Kelly, from Dubbo in New South Wales. Times were hard for North West stations at the time and the Kelly's turned to mining to earn an income. Frank worked at the Halley's Comet Mine, just south of Marble Bar.⁶¹

In 1958, the Department of Civil Aviation decided it had no requirement for the Airbase and offered it to the Station. Kelly did not want it, as the Marble Bar airstrip was only 25 miles distant and the civil airline wanted a guaranteed yearly freight of £300 or a landing fee of £5 before it would run a service to Corunna Downs. The Airbase at this time was described as 'just a strip of weathering tar'.⁶² Corunna Downs Wartime Airbase was acquired by the State Lands Department for £72, which was the amount initially paid to the State for the compulsorily acquisition of the land in 1943.⁶³

In the 1960s, Corunna Downs Station remained unstocked as the Kelly's did not have the capital to restock the place. In 1968, they were forced to surrender the lease. It was most likely during this post-war period that the 1897 homestead fell into ruin and the gardens deteriorated through lack of maintenance.⁶⁴

of the National Trust of Australia (WA)

56 Purser, Frank, op cit, pp. 6, 12-13.

57 National Archives, Series K273, Item 1942/28, op cit; Commonwealth Gazette, 10 January 1949, for De Grey Location 12.

58 Correspondence between the Dept of the Interior and Ernest Foulkes Taylor, National Archives, Series K273, Item 1942/28, op cit.

59 Mines Department, *Annual Report*, 1947-48, p. 46.

60 Correspondence between the Dept of the Interior and Ernest Foulkes Taylor, National Archives, Series K273, Item 1942/28, op cit.

61 Mallett, Kathleen, op cit, p. 194; DOLA correspondence file, SROWA, Item 150/1891, op cit.

62 Correspondence from Frank Kelly, 8 March 1958, National Archives, Series K273, Item 1942/28, op cit.

63 National Archives, Series K273, Item 1942/28, op cit. Information in the file dated 1982 was sealed and unavailable for research.

64 Correspondence between Ivy M. Formby of Port Hedland & Mrs R. Foulkes-Taylor, op cit.

Subsequent lessees of Corunna Downs Station were Drillwell Pty Ltd (1970), Zara Pastoral Company Pty Ltd (1972) and Kenneth and Margaret French of Panorama Station (1985).⁶⁵

In 1983, Corunna Downs Station and Wartime Airbase was classified by the National Trust and the following year was nominated for the Register of the National Estate.⁶⁶ The current owner of Corunna Downs, Laurence Anthony (Tony) Glenn, took over the Station in 1991.⁶⁷

There are several graves in the cemetery at Corunna Downs Station. They are: James Fielding, a miner who died of unknown cause on 8 January 1897, aged about 60; George Anderson, a station hand who died from natural causes, 9 August 1912, aged 60 and whose grave is marked by an iron cross hung with horseshoes; Thomas Weatherall, a miner, who died from neuritis and respiratory paralysis on 14 April 1914, aged 49, and Ernest Samuel Foulkes-Taylor, who died on 17 August 1951, aged 62.⁶⁸ Two more recent burials have been for the parents of current owner Tony Glenn.⁶⁹ The physical evidence indicates that only five of the six graves can be identified and it is supposed that the visible graves are of the burials dating from 1912.

The 1891 Corunna homestead at Bookageemoona Pool was a ruin by the early 1920s. A photo of Howden and Alice Drake-Brockman at the site at that time shows only a few sections of badly weathered ant bed mud wall still standing.⁷⁰ Only the site of the 1897 homestead and garden remains, with one lone date palm marking the place. Part of the shearing shed which appears in the 1915 photograph in *History of the North West* may still exist, but in a refurbished state with steel replacing the original timber construction. All other original timber farm structures have been replaced with steel because of the termite presence.⁷¹

In 2004, Corunna Downs Station is an operational beef cattle station while the Wartime Airbase remains unused. The Corrunna Downs Airbase is included in tourist brochures for Marble Bar produced by the Marble Bar Tourist Association.⁷²

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Corunna Downs Station and Former Wartime Airbase comprises Corunna Downs Station and Corunna Downs Wartime Airbase, located approximately 40 kilometres south of Marble Bar in the Pilbara region. The Wartime Airbase is located approximately 10 kilometres north west of the Corunna Downs Station along a dirt track.

Corunna Downs Station comprises the homestead, adjacent kitchen, ablutions, two bough sheds, Nissan hut plant room, machinery shed, remains of workers quarters, shearing shed and quarters, various minor sheds, on-ground concrete water tank and corrugated iron water tank on steel stand, cemetery, and site of the second homestead.

65 Crown Lease 483/68.

66 HCWA database.

67 Crown Lease 483/68.

68 Coate, Yvonne & Kevin, *More Lonely Graves*, Perth, Hesperian Press, 2000, pp. 8, 128, 133-34, & 408.

69 Information provided during physical inspection.

70 Drake-Brockman, Judith, op cit, p. 32. Howden died in 1928 so the photo predates this.

71 Battye, J. S. *The History of the North West of Australia*, op cit, p. 195; physical evidence.

72 *Western Australia: Marble Bar, 'Come and Be Surprised at Marble Bar'*, Marble Bar Tourist Association.

Corunna Downs Wartime Airbase comprises the remains of the two runways, taxiways, 18 hideouts, and revetments, the remains of the camp area comprising several concrete slabs, footings and remnants, and the site of the first Corunna Downs homestead.

Corunna Downs Station is located on a rise in the undulating pastoral environment of the Pilbara landscape. Entry from the north, along a rugged dirt track, passes stock yards on the east side and then the shearing shed another 500 metres on the west side before the track swings around in a curve up the hill to the east, where the plant room is on the left in the slope below the homestead that is also on the east of the access road. The homestead yard is fenced and mostly grassed. A gate gives access to the yard with the water tanks on the immediate right (south), the homestead ahead on the east and the kitchen on the right (south), connected to the homestead by verandahs.

The homestead is mostly surrounded by lawns. The north side overlooks horse yards beyond the fenced grassed area, with a bough shed in the northeast corner. East of the homestead, directly central from the east end, is an east-west aligned ablution facility with a verandah along the north side. Behind the ablution facility is the hot water 'donkey'. There is another bough shed and animal pens on the southeast periphery of the grassed area on the south side of the homestead. The kitchen forms a closure on the west side of the yard. An opening in the south fence gives access to a number of sheds along the east side with various remnants of equipment skirting the track to the open fronted machinery shed 50 metres to the south. From the machinery shed, the remains of the workers quarters are located a further 50 metres to the northwest, and in a line back to the homestead yard gate entry there is the site of the original homestead garden, marked by a pygmy date palm or cycad (*Phoenix* or *Cycas* sp). Approximately 1 kilometre to the south west of the homestead group is a small cemetery with five graves. The two south graves, side by side, are delineated by white stones around each grave. The east grave has a head marker of horseshoes. Behind those graves, on the south side, is a plaque marking the grave of Ernest Foulkes-Taylor, 1951. Behind that, on the south, within a fenced area are the two unmarked graves of the existing owner's parents.

Corunna Downs Station homestead displays some characteristics of Federation Bungalow style. The place is a ground-hugging, single storey building with surrounding verandahs, simple massing and broad roof planes, and constructed of natural materials. The elevations are well proportioned. The homestead makes some concessions to the climate with the elevated roof facilitating airflow above the ceilings of the homestead. Similarly the use of steel framing is a response to the voracious termites in the region.

The footprint of Corunna Downs Station homestead is a single rectangular pavilion with surrounding verandahs under the main roof. The east and west ends of the verandah have been enclosed. The interior layout of the homestead comprises the original two rooms on an east-west alignment with north and south verandahs along each frontage. Both rooms connect to the verandahs with French doors, standard doors and windows, and the rooms have an internal connection. Each of the rooms connect to their respective verandah enclosures that each comprise three rooms. The verandah roof on the south side is extended and connects to the kitchen verandah. The detached ablution structure on the east and the kitchen on the southwest support the homestead function.

Corunna Downs Station homestead is a single-storey compressed ant bed mud construction (main 2 rooms) with extensions and various repairs in formed

concrete, including sections along the top of most of the ant bed mud walls. Separate from the wall construction is a galvanised steel pipe structural framework that supports the roof above the wall structure. The hipped roof is clad with corrugated iron and features a semi circular ridge vent, and a curved edge around the perimeter of the roof, in horizontal galvanised iron sheeting. The kitchen and parts of the ablution facility are off-form concrete construction, with the remaining walls of corrugated iron. The kitchen has a hipped roof with break pitch verandah surround, and the ablution facility has a barrel vault roof clad with corrugated iron and a skillion verandah along the north side.

The expansive concrete verandahs of the homestead are included under the main roof supported by round galvanised posts. The only remaining timber elements are the French doors and four panel doors that open onto the verandahs, and the interior connecting door. Flush panel doors are in place in the extensions. The original timber framed windows have been replaced with c.1940s steel framed casement windows. The interior walls are the same surfaces as the exterior walls; painted rough ant bed mud for the two main rooms and off-form concrete for the verandah rooms. The ceilings in the main rooms (rooms 1 & 2) are lined with decorative pressed metal sheeting. The steel roof frame is also evident on the interior, with posts at regular positions around the walls, support elements under the ceiling, and posts in the main space of the room. The corner verandah rooms (rooms 3, 5, 6 & 8) have flat ceilings lined with ripple iron, and the centre verandah rooms at each end (rooms 4 & 7) are lined on the rake with battened asbestos sheeting supported by exposed galvanised rafters.

The two main rooms have no original or other fittings. The kitchen has recent fittings, the bathroom has c.1970s basic fittings, and the laundry shows remnants of c.1940s fittings.

The outbuildings have steel frames. The bough sheds have concrete floors and chicken wire netting over the steel frame. The remaining outbuildings are clad with corrugated iron. The machinery shed has a sprung barrel vault roof, and much of the north side is open. The shearing shed has a gable roof, and is entirely clad with corrugated iron. The original off-form concrete walls of the former workers quarters remains insitu, adjacent to corrugated iron clad ablutions.

Corunna Downs Station is generally in fair condition with no specific issues requiring attention.

The function of a pastoral homestead and operation has been largely uninterrupted since the establishment of the station and therefore Corunna Downs Station has a high degree of integrity.

Considerable changes have taken place over the years to ensure the ongoing use of the place, including the replacement of timber framings, the extensive steel framework supporting the roof and the room enclosures under the verandahs. However, the place is substantially intact and demonstrates a moderate degree of authenticity.

A track, 10 kilometres in a north west direction from the homestead, ends on the south end of the north-south or 107° runway of the Corunna Downs Wartime Airbase. The expansive compacted stone surface runway extends northwards for a length of 1650 metres (5000 feet) intersecting with the main runway at about 1000 metres. The east-west or 165° runway intersects at an obtuse angle and extends to the west (west north west) for 2300 metres (7000 feet), with 100 metres east of the intersection. Both runways are 45 metres wide. Some low

level shrubs and spinifex has regenerated within the runways, particularly along the edges.

Turning into a dirt track on the south, 500 metres or so along the main runway, the base camp area is located along the west side of the ironstone hill and bounded to the south west by Emu Creek. The base camp area is not defined. There is random evidence in the form of several rectangular concrete slabs, ceramic drainage pipes and remnants such as ammunition boxes. Mining activity has taken place at the site since the late 1940s and disrupted many of the remnants of the base camp area. The most significant slab is raised from the ground, but the room layouts are evident by the remains on the site.

From the base camp area, northwards, a track (former aircraft taxiway) leads off the east-west runway to another track that sweeps to the north and back around to the runway. Along the track are a number of revetments in varying stages of disintegration. The revetments are semi-circular forms of mounded earth where the aircraft were parked within the semi-circular space. The walls of the revetments have eroded. From the east-west runway, the track leads north to intersect with the main Corunna Downs access road, and northwards to Marble Bar.

As an abandoned site, Corunna Downs Wartime Airbase is in fair condition and retains a high degree of integrity and authenticity.

13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION

There are 79 homesteads on the Register of Heritage Places and 25 buildings of earth or mud construction, including eleven homesteads representing most areas of the State.

Tambrey Station Homestead Ruins (1743), southeast of Roebourne are the remains of the 1893 ant bed mud brick homestead built by William Cusack. The place comprised two rooms with surrounding verandahs. It had arched openings and no door or window frames. The homestead and timber and iron farm buildings are in ruins. The place is on the State Register.⁷³

Also in the North West is *Wallal Downs Station Group, Broome* (0305) comprising stone homestead, shearers' kitchen-dining room and two tanks. The station was established about 1900 and the buildings constructed by three soldier settlers in the 1920s. The place is interim registered.

Cooya Pooya Homestead (03376) comprises a stone homestead (c.1907), kitchen and shearers' kitchen with extensive additional use of concrete in the 1940s to counter cyclone and termite damage. The homestead is rectangular and all rooms open onto the surrounding verandahs. The buildings have been vacant since 1982, when the property was purchased by the Water Corporation, and are subject to vandalism. The place is on the State Register.⁷⁴

Mangowine Homestead, Nungarin (01923) is an 1874 mud brick construction in fair condition with two associated graves. It is on the State Register. *Golden Valley, Balingup* (0707) is a rendered mud brick homestead built in the 1880s, and has considerable garden plantings. The place is on the State Register. Other mud brick homesteads include Southampton Homestead, Balingup (0710)

73 HCWA assessment documentation.

74 HCWA assessment documentation.

built in 1862, and Boolardy Homestead Group, Pindar (01698) dating from c.1875, which has a large collection of intact farm buildings.⁷⁵

The various branches of the Brockman and Drake-Brockman families have been associated with a number of properties. *Moondah Homestead* (3721, registered) was built for William Locke Brockman at Gingin in the 1850s, while Warren House, Pemberton (1727) was the home of Edward Reveley and Capel Carter Brockman. The Brockmans at various times occupied *Earlsferry*, *Bassendean* (00128, registered); *Minninup Homestead*, *Minninup* 00440, registered); Reinscourt (ruins), built by Vernon Bussell at Cattle Chosen; Beachgrove Homestead, Busselton (Register of the National Estate & Classified by the National Trust); and, Beachborough, Northam, which was built by Dudley Drake-Brockman c. 1906 before he left for England.⁷⁶

Only one other Wartime airbase is entered on the State Register. *Cunderdin Airfield* (04570) was a RAAF training base established in 1940. It comprises the runway and ten remaining buildings of the original 47 permanent and 20 temporary structures. Two US LB30 Liberator bombers were stationed at the airfield in the first half of 1942 from where they undertook long range ocean patrols. The place remains in use as a civil airfield and gliding club base.⁷⁷

Truscott Airfield which is located in the northern Kimberley was constructed in 1944 to extend the bomb-line over the Netherlands East Indies. It was an airfield capable of handling fully laden B24 Liberator bomber. It was established after the Kalumburu Mission was the target of a Japanese bombing attack in 1942, which killed the Mission superintendent and several residents, including three children.⁷⁸ B224 Liberator bombers and Spitfires fighters flew missions from Truscott. There are a large number of aircraft and vehicle wrecks at the site, in various stages of dismantlement. Most of the building materials have been removed leaving the concrete slabs. The original layout of the site is apparent. Because of this and its large artefact remains Truscott is entered on the Register of the National Estate as an indicative place and is classified by the National Trust.⁷⁹

Comparable airbases specifically constructed in the northern half of Western Australia during World War II are Drysdale (Kalumburu Mission) (1940), Learmonth (1943), Noonkanbah (1943), Yanrey (1943) and Truscott (1944). Of these, Noonkanbah (No. 75 Operational Base Unit) is closely comparable and was intended to be a heavy bomber base. It was constructed along similar lines to Corunna Downs, including having air warning radar and anti-aircraft defences. Noonkanbah does not seem to have been used for operational flights.⁸⁰

Corunna Downs Station is an uncommon mud brick homestead from the early 1900s remaining in the North West. Corunna Downs Wartime Airbase is a rare example of a World War Two RAAF airbase established as a heavy bomber base in Western Australia.

13.4 KEY REFERENCES

-
- 75 HCWA database.
76 HCWA database; Jackson, Alan, op cit, pp. 171-177.
77 HCWA assessment documentation, 04570.
78 Beasy, J. & Beasy, C. *Truscott*, Australian Military History Publications, Loftus, NSW, 1995, p. 2
79 HCWA database; Register of the National Estate database.
80 Peet, L. *World War II Military Aviation Sites Survey*, 1996

National Archive files relating to Corunna Downs airbase as referenced in the footnotes.

13.5 FURTHER RESEARCH

The archaeological significance of the 1891 and 1897 homesteads sites.

Department of Planning and Infrastructure File 00946-1946-01RO “Acquisition and Disposal of Corunna Downs Aerodrome De Grey Location 12”.