

## CHAPTER 9: MALLALA 1942–45

On 23 February 1942, 41-year-old Wing Commander William Raymond Garrett took over command of No. 6 Service Flying Training School (6SFTS) from Wing Commander Brearley and would stay in the position for eighteen months. Garrett had graduated as a pilot at Point Cook in 1926 and subsequently flew as a commercial pilot but remained an RAAF reservist. An effective leader, who was also somewhat enterprising, Garrett built an overhead projector, from spare parts in the Mallala workshops, for use with aircraft recognition silhouettes. During his time at Mallala, Garrett was awarded the Air Force Cross.

War conditions saw some 4,000 feet of trenches dug at Mallala in early 1942 and anti-aircraft posts built. Flights were made over the South Australian coast to check “brown out” conditions. Other wartime duties for 6SFTS Ansons between 1942 and 1945 included army cooperation/searchlight practice flights over Adelaide, dummy Adelaide air raids by formations of aircraft for Air Raid Precautions practice, meteorological flights and photographic sorties. Occasional naval cooperation flights were also flown.

In March 1942, a contingent of 123 men from the evacuated Royal Netherlands East Indies Air Force training school arrived at Mallala. Their tenure at Mallala was brief, however. The following month, they left to join a Dutch training school formed in Jackson, Mississippi, using American aircraft supplied under lend-lease.

Adding to the international flavour, also in March, more than 200 Royal New Zealand Air Force personnel arrived at Mallala. They were from No. 488 Squadron, a fighter unit equipped with Brewster Buffaloes that had evacuated Singapore following the loss of its aircraft. Within a few days, the New Zealanders departed Mallala to continue their journey home.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, at Amberley in Queensland, No. 3 Service Flying Training School (3SFTS) had

been operating in an environment relatively close to hostilities in New Guinea and Far North Queensland (where Horn Island had been attacked). The base was used to house large numbers of American airmen and had also become an assembly and test centre for newly arrived Curtiss P-40E fighters. Accordingly, it was decided to close 3SFTS and split the assets and personnel between No. 1 Service Flying Training School (1SFTS) at Point Cook and 6SFTS at Mallala.

Some 304 personnel (including 80 trainees) and 49 Ansons from Amberley were earmarked for 6SFTS, with the transfer completed by early April. As noted in Chapter 5, No. 67 (R) Squadron was also transferred to Mallala as part of this move. Along with the Ansons, at this time 6SFTS also received several Airspeed Oxfords and CAC Wirraways (about a dozen of each) as well as an additional Moth Minor and a Gipsy Moth. These aircraft were likely from 3SFTS, but 6SFTS had no use for most of them and they were soon transferred elsewhere. The sole exception was the Gipsy Moth which appears to have been retained as a base communications aircraft.

As April 1942 continued, 6SFTS was coping with the sudden expansion caused by the absorption of the aircraft and personnel from 3SFTS. By the end of the month, personnel strength stood at 1,753 (256 trainees). Anson strength was 118 with aircraft split between Nos. 1 and 2 Maintenance Squadrons. However, the construction of workshops and engineering facilities was still behind schedule and, as such, aircraft serviceability dropped to around 50% or even less at times. These problems were exacerbated by prevalent dust, referred to as “the dust havoc”, that severely affected the serviceability of engines. In late May, civilian experts had arrived to give advice on developing a grassed aerodrome surface.

Some of the maintenance facilities, including those involved with doping and instrument repair, were still not properly commissioned by mid-1942. Some of the instruments were sent to the Australian National Airways workshops at Parafield for repair, but the timely return of these was deemed to be “unsatisfactory”.

---

<sup>1</sup> Another Buffalo fighter unit evacuated from Singapore was No. 453 Squadron, RAAF, which arrived in Adelaide on the liner *Orcades* on 14 March. Within days the unit was disbanded, but unfortunately there are no records of where the personnel were billeted.