

CHAPTER 5

JANUARY TO JUNE 1943 • FACING THE JAPANESE

Batchelor airfield is located forty-two miles south-southeast of Darwin down the Darwin to Katherine Road. Initially constructed in 1933 as a commuter airstrip, it was named after a South Australian politician, Lee Batchelor. The land was acquired by the RAAF in July 1941 for defence purposes. During the war, the field consisted of two cross runways, one sealed of about 1,700 yards long and the other oiled gravel of about 1,000 yards. Only the northwest–southeast runway remains today. For war operations, the RAAF installed a control tower and there was accommodation, messing and minor maintenance facilities as well as refuelling available. From July 1941 to September 1942, it was home to the Americans, but when they left, it became available for No. 452 Squadron. On 17 January 1943 the squadron arrived.

Within a fortnight, No. 452 Squadron was told to move, this time further north to Strauss which was half the distance to Darwin. Strauss was somewhat rudimentary having a single 1,700-yard gravel runway facing north-south. It was constructed in 1942 and had little in the way of facilities. Built by the Americans, it was named after USAAF Captain Allison W Strauss, whose P-40 Warhawk was shot down into Darwin harbour during a Japanese raid on 27 April 1942. Known also as Humpty Doo or 27-mile strip, the airfield became home to No. 452 Squadron from 1 February 1943 to May 1944.

While Strauss was remote, No. 452 Squadron members made the most of it. Tent accommodation was shared under the cover of heavy canvas which mostly kept out the



An example of the basic airman's accommodation at Strauss. (Kenward collection)