Managing Coomalie: a living history

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Abstract

The focus on the centenary commemorations of the First World War encourages reflection on the ways that Australians engage with and manage cultural heritage. Conflict sites such as those associated with war are frequently discussed in terms of their national heritage values, but what about the values of the sites to individuals? Coomalie was a Second World War airbase located in the Northern Territory, Australia. Most significantly, the airbase was saved by a private individual who now works to allow others to connect to the site to ensure that it maintains what the owner refers to as a ‘living history’ (R Luxton 2013, pers. comm., 17 January). Through the exploration of Coomalie, this paper will illustrate the importance of living histories in heritage management.

Introduction

On the 27th May 2015, I was lucky enough to present as part of a gathering of emerging heritage professionals on the theme of Conflict and Compassion. The symposium was a timely reference to the recent centenary of the Gallipoli campaign of the First World War with a varied range of papers that engaged with the broad topic. My interest in conflict heritage sites was first sparked when completing my archaeological honours dissertation on the management of World War II aviation sites in Australia and the Marshall Islands (Shanahan 2014). It was not however, until 2015 when I revisited Coomalie, a privately owned World War II Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) satellite airbase located in Australia’s Northern Territory, for the 70th anniversary of the end of the war, that I fully understood the importance of continuing narratives at these sites. The present owner of Coomalie, Richard Luxton, highlighted why he invested time and resources into the airbase and its history when he stated that his goal was to maintain a ‘living history’ at the site. It is the importance of living histories that will be explored in this paper using examples from the 70th anniversary commemoration event at Coomalie in 2015.

‘Living History’

‘Living history’ can refer to re-enactments and role-playing (first and third person), as well as the use and management of historic buildings and landscapes (Bigley 1991; Cohoon 2012; Jones 1995). The purpose of a living history narrative can be for the benefit of the wider public as well as for a local and engaged community. Living history sites can also be popular tourist destinations, for example Hadrian and his Calvary is a military re-enactment and exhibition that will be staged over a six month period in 2017 across the Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage serial property, and the ongoing re-enactments of the American Civil War and Pearl Harbor, are other examples of frequently visited living history sites (Bigley 1991;
Keating 2016). Anderson (1984) highlights the importance that living history sites hold and Jones (1995) underlines how living history allows managers to approach historic events and landscapes through such interpretive avenues as 3D photogrammetry, experiential archaeology, and virtual reality programs.

The drawcard for visitors to living history sites is that they encourage people to engage and experience both the tangible and intangible past (Cohoon 2012; Morris 1990). Bigley (1991) and Peterson (1988) argue that living history sites are a good medium for public education as well as an avenue for spiritual and emotional connections to the past. Schroeder (1985) however, cautioned against using living history as an avenue for teaching and suggested that these sites should be interpreted with information from other resources to ensure the accuracy of their interpretation. Schroeder’s (1985) warning is not without reason, as Anderson (1984) and Sheppard (2009) highlight how the information provided by many early living history museums could be overly romanticised.

To deal with the recognised limitations to the use of living history as an accurate and engaging teaching and interpretive medium, heritage professionals, must be aware of the bias that they individually bring to their research investigations, which can occur due to limited material available, as well as the purpose for which they are presenting the information. The portrayal of living history narratives should be subject to the same limitations of bias (Handler 1987). Further limitations of living history sites are the types of histories, historic events, and landscapes that can be presented as living histories. Certain horrific events should never be recreated as living history sites (Peterson 1988). For example, sites like Auschwitz and Nanking (Nanjing) are frequented yearly by large crowds, but should never have recreated aspects added to them. Furthermore, present debate surrounding World War II living history sites such as Pearl Harbor, questions whether there should be engagement with this heritage material while those who were present during the conflict remain alive? (Bigley 1991). While heritage professionals can want to save and record as much heritage as possible, there are those who do not wish to remember or share their wartime and other conflict narratives due to the nightmares that can resurface. Those in the heritage industry must respect these requests.

I first engaged with the term ‘living history’ in 2014 when Richard Luxton explained why he invested resources into the maintenance of Coomalie. Luxton strongly believes that the airbase should continue to be used for its historic purpose. Therefore, the agricultural areas of the airbase are still farmed, and the original 1940s airstrip remains active (R Luxton 2016, pers. comm., 7 April). The wartime past of Coomalie is remembered through visitation by veterans, their families and those with an interest in the site’s World War II narratives and through the continued use of the site as an Australian Defence Force training ground (R Luxton 2016, pers. comm., 7 April). An example of the latter includes the training of Australian Defence Force Cadets who have attended camps every year at Coomalie for over 25 years. Luxton invests time and resources into these events and proudly recalls a 13-year-old cadet who completed his first emergency landing at Coomalie when a fire began in the engine of his aircraft, and who now flies F/A-18 Hornets with No. 75 Squadron. Luxton argues that these new narratives are an important aspect of the continually evolving narrative of Coomalie (R Luxton 2015, pers. comm., 12 August).

Luxton does not want the site to remain in the past; rather he would prefer the future to present the past through interpretation (R Luxton 2016, pers. comm., 7 April). Interpretations of Coomalie’s past are illustrated to those who visit the site via a number of different mediums. These include the establishment of a photographic museum, re-enactment flyovers, informal site tours with Luxton, and the recording of historically accurate songs by local folk band The Fettlers. This approach to maintaining a living history is encouraged by Johnson (2010), who believes that the gap between the past and the future should be bridged.

Coomalie during the War

The Australian Government became aware of its limited defence after the Japanese air attack on Darwin at 09:58 on 19th February 1942. In order to address this defence deficit, the Australian Government, in 1942 resumed jurisdiction of private land and commissioned the Aerodrome
Development Plan (Alcorta 1991). The result of this plan was the construction of ten main
aerodromes between Darwin and Birdum (approximately 500 km south-east of Darwin). Each
aerodrome was then assigned two satellite bases within an 8-16 km radius (Alcorta 1991).
Coomalie was established 83 km south of Darwin as Batchelor Aerodrome’s satellite airbase.
No. 1 Airfield Construction Squadron established the main airbase and airstrip within 16 weeks,
thus enabling Coomalie to become operational in November 1942 (McDonald 1996; R Luxton
2013, pers. comm., 17 January). Coomalie is located east of the Stuart Highway and covers
10,000 acres (Figure 1).

No. 31 Squadron was the first Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) unit to arrive at Coomalie on
12th November 1942 and the airbase remained active until the end of the war on the 15th
August 1945 (McDonald 1996; R Luxton 2016, pers. comm., 7 April). In 1943, at the time
of highest capacity, Coomalie was home to approximately 2,000 personnel. The main units
stationed at Coomalie included No. 87 Squadron, No. 31 Squadron, 16th Battalion and No.
1 Photographic Reconnaissance Unit (R Luxton 2013, pers. comm., 17 January). The airbase
was often a transit base for those RAAF units and squadrons, like No. 34 Squadron who were
heading to Timor and Noemfoor Island to establish new airbases (R Luxton 2013, pers. comm.,
17 January). No. 87 Squadron is unique in that it was the only RAAF squadron established at an
active airbase during a conflict (R Luxton 2015, pers. comm., 14 August).

Between November 1942 and November 1943, there were six air raids over Coomalie by
Japanese Mitsubishi A6M Zero fighters. These attacks inflicted minimal damage to equipment
and personnel (Dunn 2011). The last attack on Coomalie was the last attack on the Australian
mainland and occurred at 05:00 on 12th November 1943 (R Luxton 2014, pers. comm., 2
March). Despite the lack of damage caused by the Japanese, 23 aircraft were grounded due
to operational incidents throughout World War II. One fatality occurred on 5th August 1945
when Squadron Leader Fredrick J. Gillespie died due to severe burns two days after his aircraft
abruptly veered off the airstrip and crashed during takeoff (Royal Australian Air Force, 1945).

Coomalie was home to the last operational RAAF mission from Australian shores on 15th
August 1945. On this day, William Alexander Maitland and William Herbert Reedy of No. 87
Squadron flew Mosquito A52-609 from Coomalie airstrip. Whilst over the Timor Sea, they
received a radio call declaring peace and flew back to Coomalie (Figure 2) (R Luxton 2013, pers.
comm., 17 January).
Coomalie post World War II

At the conclusion of World War II many air force, navy, and army bases were quickly abandoned and forgotten. In the Northern Territory, RAAF bases were rediscovered by the government in the early 1970s when road materials were needed for the construction of the Stuart Highway. Countless airstrips along the present day highway were destroyed and used for road materials (R Luxton 2013, pers. comm., 17 January). Fortunately, Coomalie airstrip was not destroyed during this process. It was not until 1976 however, when Luxton bought Coomalie that the 10,000 acre site became privately owned (R Luxton 2016, pers. comm., 7 April).

In 2011 Coomalie airbase officially received heritage listing and protection. The Northern Territory Heritage Advisory Council granted Coomalie airstrip and land 50 metres either side protection under the Heritage Act 2011. (Heritage Advisory Council 2010/2011; R Luxton 2013, pers. comm., 17 January). This heritage listing has enabled Luxton to apply for funding to manage the airstrip through clearing and repairing culverts as well as managing regrowth along the airstrip (R Luxton 2013, pers. comm., 17 January).

In addition to the airstrip maintenance, Luxton continuously maintains the taxiways, performs planned burning of the land and ensures all known areas of unexploded ordnance are fenced off for the safety of the site, animals and people (R Luxton 2013, pers. comm., 17 January). Additionally, Luxton has conducted thorough historical investigations for numerous reconstruction and restoration projects. In order to achieve a high level of accuracy, Luxton refers to old maps, photographs, reports and consults.
those who served at Coomalie before beginning any project (R Luxton 2013, pers. comm., 17 January). An example of a well researched project includes the reconstruction of Coomalie Chapel and the base movie cinema. The Coomalie Chapel reconstruction (Figure 3) has been well received by those involved with the site. Each year on the anniversary of the end of World War II, a service is held in the Chapel. In 2015, current members of No. 87 Squadron, family of those who served, and those with an interest in the continuation of the narratives at Coomalie attended and it was regarded as the highlight for those in attendance (R Luxton 2013, pers. comm., 17 January).

Commemorative events at the airbase have run since 1995 (50th anniversary of the end of World War II) and annually over 300 individuals visit the site. Luxton maintains that it is as important for veterans’ wives to visit as it is for the veterans themselves to revisit Coomalie. He suggests that it allows the wives to experience the place that they were getting letters from (R Luxton 2015 pers. comm., 12 August). The experience of those returning is an emotional one. Luxton recalls walking through the site with many who had served at Coomalie and watching them suddenly freeze and say, ‘I was here when the Japanese came through’ (R Luxton 2015, pers. comm., 16 August). Over the past decade, there has been a shift in those who visit Coomalie. Children and in some cases the grandchildren of those who served, are seeking out the site and thus ensuring the living histories continue to thrive. In 2005, the RAAF were involved with the 60th commemoration and issued an F/A-18 Hornet to fly over to enable a re-enactment of the last fly in at the conclusion of the war (Figure 4) (R Luxton 2013, pers. comm., 17 January).

Figure 4: Replica fly over to celebrate the last operational flight of World War II from Australia, returning to Coomalie when peace was declared (2005). Photograph courtesy of: Mosquito Aircraft Association of Australia.

70th anniversary commemoration event at Coomalie

The impact of an event like the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II was vastly different for each person involved due to their personal reason for connecting with the site and its narratives. An insight into the significance of a living history site is expressed below through reflections and shared conversations with the following people regarding why Coomalie is important to them.

Current No. 87 Squadron Personnel

No. 87 Squadron was disbanded in 1953 and it was not until 2006 that it was reformed as an air intelligence squadron. The Squadron Commanding Officer in 1953, Wing Commander (CO WGCDDR) Rick Keir, addressed a number of current No. 87 Squadron members during the
70th anniversary on Coomalie’s airstrip, stating, ‘you will remember this day for the rest of your life, because this is where you were born... you should now regard this as your spiritual home’ (T Burke 2015, pers. comm., 12 August). This statement by CO WGCDDR Keir shows the deep emotional importance of Coomalie for No. 87 Squadron. I had the opportunity to meet with the current No. 87 Squadron during the 70th anniversary commemorations as it was my role to provide tours for them with Lyn Hutton (descendent of a No. 87 Squadron member) and her husband Ross Hutton. It was whilst standing on the cement foundations of a No. 87 Squadron reconnaissance building that I first became aware of the impact the living history had on the current No. 87 Squadron men and women. One of the No. 87 Squadron personnel asked for further information about the building that once stood there and upon understanding the activities undertaken, he fell silent for a moment, before explaining that if he were alive at the time of the war, this is exactly where his current role would have seen him posted. Upon thanking Luxton for his maintenance of the site and its narratives, No. 87 Squadron members stated ‘everyone knows how significant this place is for us, it is something every No. 87 Squadron member should do: a pilgrimage to Coomalie’ (No. 87 Squadron 2015, pers. comm., 16 August).

After the No. 87 Squadron laid a wreath at the site of the only death at Coomalie during the war, the current members were approached by a member of the Mosquito Association of Australia, who simply thanked them for their commitment and hoped they lived long lives. I asked them about this statement and they said that despite many people wishing them long lives, the fact that they were actually standing where a previous No. 87 Squadron member had died while serving, made it so much more meaningful. They reflected that they had never experienced the emotions they did at Coomalie when they had been serving at other locations (No. 87 Squadron 2015, pers. comm., 16 August). Every current No. 87 Squadron member present at the commemoration in 2015 agreed that they would like the narratives at the site to continue so that their colleagues could have the opportunity to experience what they did (No. 87 Squadron 2015, pers. comm., 16 August). I believe that this stands as a testament to the importance of living history sites for current serving Australian Defence Force personnel.

Lyn Hutton

Lyn Hutton first visited Coomalie in 1998, however she did not return again until 2005 when she and her father attended the 60th anniversary commemoration. Her father was an electrical fitter during World War II for Mosquito aircraft in No. 87 Squadron. Speaking with Lyn in 2015, she recalled her father was ‘quiet and reserved’ during their visit and only really mentioned that his ‘tent site was opposite the Mess’ (L Hutton 2015, pers. comm., 12 August). During the 60th anniversary, Lyn’s father along with Tom, a navigator at Coomalie during the war, were given the opportunity by Richard Luxton to once again fly over Coomalie, this time in a Russian Yakolev Yak-52 aircraft—an experience that both men thoroughly enjoyed (L Hutton 2015, pers. comm., 12 August).

It was at the following 2006 commemoration event at Coomalie that Lyn became aware of the significance of the Coomalie community. Whilst watching the aircraft, Lyn discovered that someone who knew her father’s wartime best friend, John ‘Jack’ McAuley, was present. She had heard of Jack in stories her father had told and when she heard that she might be able to meet him she ‘waltzed down [the airstrip], almost in tears and full of emotion’ (L Hutton 2015, pers. comm., 12 August). It was not until February 2008 that she met Jack and took him back to Coomalie. She recalls he went with ‘his walking stick, he climbed the hill to find his tent site’ and ‘he was over the moon’ when he found it (L Hutton 2015, pers. comm., 12 August). In May 2008, both Lyn’s father and Jack met at Coomalie again after not seeing each other for 63 years. Since that moment, Lyn admits that Coomalie ‘means more to me now that I know more about it. It all starts to fit into place’. During the 70th anniversary commemoration, Lyn replicated a photo she had found where her father was washing his shorts when peace was declared. The photo was retaken at the time and date the original was, and Lyn explained that ‘she was so happy’ when Luxton showed her the original 33 gallon wash trough drums, with the plugs still in place. She reflected that despite telling her mother and sisters about what she has learnt about her father and where he served, they were not as excited by the information as she because ‘if you are not here, you are not connected with it’ (L. Hutton 2015, pers. comm., 12 August).
Lyn’s friend experienced similar feelings and a connection to the site when she first visited Coomalie. Her friend’s grandfather had been a transport driver for No. 31 Squadron. When Lyn gave him a tour of Coomalie he said that while ‘walking along in the bush, you just get so connected with it. You can almost visualise or hear what they went through’ (L Hutton 2015, pers. comm., 12 August). These emotive moments are what many descendants hope that others will experience when they visit. Lyn and her husband Ross have spent a lot of time at Coomalie assisting Luxton with managing the site, as well as photographing areas of interest for authors and historians who are unable to visit remote Coomalie. Lyn believes that ‘keeping the story alive’ is vital for Coomalie and she was happy to note that in 2015 those present at the commemoration event were able to share a lot more information, maps, references and photographs than at previous events. I asked Lyn what she hopes will happen with Coomalie if Luxton retires from managing it or even sells it? She said she was not sure what will happen but both she and Ross ‘will keep visiting every year for as long as they can’ (L Hutton 2015, pers. comm., 12 August).

I spent a lot of time talking with Lyn and Ross Hutton in 2015 at the 70th anniversary and their knowledge of the site should be acknowledged. It was not uncommon for them to take various people on tours of the site for Luxton throughout the commemoration. Their dedication to maintaining and building upon the living history of Coomalie’s wartime past was inspiring to witness.

**Ian Madden**

Until he visited Coomalie in 2013, Ian Madden knew nothing about his father’s war service, except that he flew as a RAAF pilot. Ian only knew of Coomalie because he had seen the name in his father’s flight log after he had passed away. Whilst Ian was visiting the site in 2013, Luxton arranged for pilot, Steve Allan, to fly Ian over the airbase. Ian proudly told me in 2015 that when they took off from Coomalie airstrip Steve said ‘you realise you are now in your Dad’s airspace’ and as they landed he said ‘this is the view your Dad had every time he landed’ and Ian immediately began to cry. Since that flight, Ian admits ‘it has now totally obsessed me’ (I Madden 2015, pers. comm., 12 August). He began researching his father’s war involvement and was surprised to learn that his father flew 263 individual aircraft during the war and was one of the original ‘Coomalie Charlie Commandos’. This meant that he was one of the first people to arrive when the airbase became operational and assisted with the construction of a number of buildings at the airbase. Ian has gone beyond researching his father and now maintains the No. 31 Squadron Association website, marches with his father’s squadron on Anzac Day and has expanded his research to include as many as 25 units that were based at Coomalie during World War II (I Madden 2016, pers. comm., 19 April). Ian hopes that someday more people will be able to ‘go through the same type of emotions I have’ when they visit Coomalie because there is nothing like being able to have ‘the tangible evidence [of your fathers past] in your hand while standing on site and imaging what it was like’ (I Madden 2015, pers. comm., 12 August). The resources that Ian has placed into the site and researching Coomalie’s narratives are examples of the impact living history sites can have on those who become actively involved with them.

**Horton Brothers**

Peter and Richard Horton are two of four brothers whose father served as a navigator for No. 31 Squadron at Coomalie. Their father, Harry Horton, arrived at Coomalie in February 1943 and flew with pilot ‘Reg’ Kilpatrick. Together, Horton and Kilpatrick survived two crashes at Coomalie; one while landing and one on takeoff. They remained ‘the best of mates for the longest time’ (R Horton 2015, pers. comm., 12 August). Unfortunately, the Hortons’ father passed away when he was 50 years old and it was not until 2011 that Peter and Richard became connected with their father’s wartime past. Richard spoke fondly of having their father’s original logbook and first approaching Luxton to visit the site. Not too dissimilar to my first visit, Luxton spent seven hours giving Richard a tour of the site.

The Horton brothers have also met Ian Madden and the three men have been able to ‘finally get the history together and that really means something’ (R Horton 2015, pers. comm., 12 August).
Whilst sharing their connection with Coomalie, Richard Horton reconfirmed the importance of the living history at the site: ‘this is a really special place, there is no doubt about that, and when you realise that your Dad flew from here... it really means something... it has been so good to sit here with everyone else and reminisce. Welcome to real life history’ (R Horton 2015, pers. comm., 12 August). The impact the living history narrative at Coomalie has had on the Horton brothers has not only resulted in further research being undertaken, it has also witnessed the formation of friendships with other descendants of No. 31 Squadron and this shared narrative is something that will increase the chances of the stories being remembered.

Jordan Gannaway

Jordan Gannaway is an Australian Army Reserves member and attended the 70th anniversary due to his interest in the site. While Jordan is not a descendant of those who served at Coomalie, he is actively involved with his family’s wartime history. This involvement with his family’s wartime past as well as his current posting with the Australian Defence Force provided him with some background to experience the living history of Coomalie. Jordan became aware of Coomalie through the research that I was undertaking for my honours dissertation. I often discussed the data that I had collected at Coomalie with Jordan and how it differed or was similar to other World War II sites throughout Australia. During a visit to Coomalie, Jordan marvelled at how incredible it was that the descendants of those who served at Coomalie could see firsthand where their family members were during the war. He explained that Coomalie was a different experience for descendants because most World War II sites are now commercialised and he believes that those sites do not feel genuine, while Coomalie does (J Gannaway 2015, pers. comm., 13 August).

Jordan believes that the important thing for Coomalie is the far-reaching community that it has built up because of the maintained living history. Upon being asked what he would like to see happen with the site in the future, he replied:

I think a group trust needs to be established. It will be hard, but the trust will have to walk the fine line of trying to meet the wishes of the families and the Australian Defence Force. Therefore, it is probably best for it to remain private. I fear that if not, it will become commercialised and they would try to make it more interesting for those who do not have connection to the site and its narratives. (J Gannaway 2015, pers. comm., 13 August)

Shared memories

On Wednesday 12th August 2015 a replica mess dinner was held. The dinner was hosted by Lyn and Ross Hutton and was set up on the No. 87 Squadron officers’ mess concrete foundations. At the end of dinner, everyone was given the opportunity to tell their Coomalie story. A selection of these stories has been discussed above. This shared story-telling allowed for the exchange of information and emotions, and throughout the following week of celebrations at Coomalie maps, photos and drawings were also shared.

A construction of a to-scale Mosquito silhouette by the Horton brothers and Ross Hutton was completed over the week long commemorative event. This silhouette was ceremonially burnt at the site, at the time and date that those celebrating the end of the war in 1945 had burnt a Mosquito aircraft. The milkwood tree that grew from the ashes of the Mosquito burnt in 1945 was lit by floodlights throughout the burning event. To add to this, a local folk band The Fettlers with Sand Williams sang, ‘Three Mosquitoes’—a song they wrote about the final month of World War II at Coomalie. This was experienced by descendents of No. 31 and No. 87 squadrons, current No. 87 Squadron members, Luxton and I, and all in attendance will long remember it.

James Wright of the Batchelor Museum, expressed the importance of these events and the continuation of Coomalie’s living history when he said:

You introduce somebody to some of the history that is here, that is a part of them and their family and it makes the whole damn thing worthwhile. Richard has captured all
of this here and retained it so that we can be here now and do the exact same thing again. (J Wright 2015, pers. comm., 12 August).

It is encouraging for the future of the site that those in the community are so actively aware and engaged with Coomalie’s living history, while also appreciating the impact that such a site can have on those who are actively involved. The fostering of such an approachable community will ensure that those with an interest in the site will be able to access the narratives it has to offer for the foreseeable future.

Potential Research

There are multiple potential research opportunities at Coomalie. Luxton demonstrated this when he gave me a tour of the gun testing ranges. He said that despite owning the site for so long, it took him ten years to locate them (R Luxton 2015, pers. comm., 13 August). While visiting anti-aircraft gun sites at Coomalie in August 2015 with Jordan Gannaway, Lyn and Ross Hutton, and Ron and Robyn Hickman, we discovered a metal sheet that had been pressed with the date, names, and service numbers of those who had once called that area their tent site. This information was recorded and has since enabled the narratives of these two men, Jones and Martinovitch, to once again be remembered. Other options for further study of Coomalie include the expression of interest in voluntary projects to conduct surveys and take photographs of Coomalie to produce 3D models and overlaying maps using a process known as photogrammetry. These would further assist Luxton in locating any as yet unrecognised building foundations.

Finally, despite first becoming interested in Coomalie’s narratives for my archaeological honours dissertation regarding the management of World War II sites, I have since returned and maintained contact with Luxton and others I have met at Coomalie. It is hoped that connections such as mine will enhance the continuation of shared knowledge as well as encouraging all involved to continue researching and presenting information about the site and those who served there throughout World War II.

Conclusion: the future of the living history at Coomalie—a continuing narrative

The history of Coomalie is both a tangible and intangible resource that should continue to be available to future generations, researchers, family members and those with an interest in the past. The narratives of those who have benefited from Coomalie as a living history airbase, as shown above, demonstrate how people are engaged with its continuing story. Today, the quality and quantity of information available for No. 31 Squadron is the result of Ian Madden engaging with his father’s past. Additionally, the reunion of wartime friends, Richmond Searle and John ‘Jack’ McAuley after 63 years, is due to Lyn and Ross becoming active members of the Coomalie community. There are many future projects that will eventuate due to Coomalie’s active living history and the impact the site has on those who become involved with its narratives. In order for these to continue, Luxton will remain actively involved, but many at the 70th Anniversary commemoration expressed anxiety regarding what will happen if Luxton steps back from managing the site. I spoke with Luxton in 2015 regarding the future of the site and he has already begun thinking about the future of Coomalie’s living history. Ideally, he would establish a board or trust of pilots, archaeologists, historians, council, defence personnel, family and friends of those who served at Coomalie (R Luxton 2015, pers. comm., 13 August). His rationale for such a diverse group is that he fears one group may not be able to continue the narratives in the same manner. If the site was restricted to having one group in control of its future, Coomalie may experience an increase in people visiting the site who are unaware of its wartime past, and who may endanger this living history narrative for others. Due to Luxton’s aspirations for Coomalie’s future as a living history site, it is hoped by all those involved with the site, that the narratives will remain accessible for future generations of all those who have a heartfelt interest in its continuation.
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