Secret WWII intelligence unit still flies under radar

A MILITARY historian is calling for the legacy of a secret intelligence unit that operated in the Territory during World War II to be honoured on Anzac Day.

Charles Darwin University PhD candidate Craig Bellamy said the unit’s war efforts were not widely known, largely because its missions were top secret at the time.

Field Unit 6 was one of the first airborne radar detection units in the country, operating from Fenton Airfield in the Katherine region from May 1943 until August 1944. Mr Bellamy said the unit successfully discovered many Japanese radar sites on islands north of Australia and provided vital information on Japanese radar to the Allies.

“Unfortunately, there is little information about the unit in the official records of the National Archives of Australia or the Australian War Memorial,” Mr Bellamy said.

He said Field Unit 6 was unique in that it was multinational, with Australians working together with American, New Zealand and British servicemen.

“The Australians felt so privileged to be part of this specialised intelligence unit,” he said.

“It was very uncommon for Australians to work as closely alongside Americans during the war as the personnel in this unit did.”

The unit was also multiser-
vice, consisting of army, naval and air force personnel.

Mr Bellamy said the unit’s missions were dangerous, with two killed in its first month of operation, a high attrition rate for a small unit of up to 10 military personnel.

These military specialists flew long-range Liberator (B-24) bombers with the United States Army Air Force’s 380th Bombardment Group during their missions to detect Japanese radar sites.

Mr Bellamy recently completed his honours thesis at CDU, titled Radar Countermeasures Development in Australia: A case study of multinational co-operation in World War II. He is now undertaking a PhD on Section 22, the intelligence group Field Unit 6 was operated under.

Last year, Mr Bellamy co-edited an account of one of the Australian radar countermeasures operators based at Fenton, the late Dick Dakeyne DFC, titled Radar Gunner.

PhD candidate Craig Bellamy says the war efforts of Field Unit 6 are still widely unknown.