

RAAF LOG

first operation against the enemy. All members of the squadron were at the strip to watch the take-off. Six Beaufighters were to attack the villages of Bobonaro and Maobisse. The aircraft looked good as they rolled up for the take-off. The aircraft raced down the runway. The noise of the engines, which is never great, died quickly as they became airborne. The sound came back again, echoed in a muffled whirr from the low hills far from the end of the runway.

Read and Riding led the two flights on the first operation. The Japs received a sample of what the Beaufighters had in store for them, but it was a sad start for the squadron, for Riding and his navigator were lost when one wing of their aircraft plunged into a wave as they turned over the sea to go in to their target.

The first operation was followed by many strafing sorties in support of the A.I.F. force which was harassing the Japs in Timor. Buildings were shattered, stores destroyed, convoys burned, and many Japs killed in sudden vicious attacks which were over before the enemy knew that hostile aircraft were near them. It was difficult for the crews to observe the success of these attacks, but the men of the A.I.F. reported that the enemy suffered severe casualties.

The wisdom of selecting highly trained personnel now became very clear. Beaufighter crews soon learned about the tropical weather fronts which hover between Australia and the islands to the north. Great walls of cumulus clouds tower tens of thousands of feet. Their billowing white contours hide fierce and treacherous wind currents, while beneath them heavy rainstorms spill into the sea. It is black as night in the tropical fronts and the Beaufighters must fly through them and endeavour to keep formation. Only skilled pilots with many hours of formation flying are able to keep a tight enough formation to keep the striking force compact in these wide, murky, tropical fronts. Keeping together is the essential element for success in a strafing attack. The experienced pilots hold formation through all kinds of weather, and by sheer skill manage to come through weather fronts so thick that it is necessary to use navigation lights at midday. Moreover, their thorough training

enabled the pilots to make dangerous journeys along the valleys of Timor, following roads which wound through the mountains, keeping just above the trees to extract the most from surprise.

Navigators, too, are proven experts and are perhaps the hardest-worked and most versatile in the Service. Guiding a low-flying, fast-moving aircraft across hundreds of miles of water through some of the worst weather in the world, and directing it to within a few hundred yards of the target is an extremely difficult task. But the Beaufighter navigators do it, and their work does not end there. They are also radio operators, photographers, and gun loaders and gunners all rolled into one. Over the target they must take photographs, watch out for enemy aircraft attacking from behind, reload the guns when necessary, and act as air gunners, for in the Australian theatre, Beaufighters depart from standard and mount a rear gun. When all this is done the navigator pulls his tiny desk over his knees and begins plotting the homeward course. It is arduous, difficult, painstaking and exciting work.

After the initial operation, attacks on enemy-occupied villages became commonplace, but interest quickened with the discovery that the Japs were building a new air strip at Fuiloro, on the north coast of Timor. The Beaufighters were given the job of delaying work on the strip. Men, trucks, stores, fuel dumps, and road-making equipment were destroyed in many sorties. Attacks on Fuiloro became so frequent that air crews began to call it the "Milk Run" and every Beaufighter crew made at least five journeys to Fuiloro.

The real excitement began when the Beaufighters were ordered to attack concentrations of enemy aircraft. It was known that the Japs kept many aircraft at Penfoei, the aerodrome near Koepang, which is the main base in Timor. Penfoei, therefore, was target number one, and late in December six aircraft set out on one of the longest operational flights ever made by Beaufighters. Led by Flight-Lieutenant J. Bennett, the Beaufighters safely crossed the wide waters of the Timor Sea, skimmed across the tree-tops of Timor, and, swooping over the hills behind Penfoei, flashed line abreast down the aerodrome. In

BEAUFIGHTER BASH

I WENT on a "bash" with Wing-Commander F. W. B. (Bill) Mann to sample Beaufighting. I was quite prepared to go in my regular apparel. But no! This was a really serious business and I was dolled up in a dark-green "commando" outfit. They girdled me with a substantial belt from which was dangled revolver, jungle knife, rations, water bottle, and ammunition. Then I staggered into the parachute room where I was harnessed and loaded with 'chute and rubber boat. As I was handed into the truck I felt like turning it in. After all, I was only taking a flip for the fun of it. I laboured up the steps of the forward hatch and stood up in the small space behind the pilot surrounded by a veritable headache of wires, switches, pipelines, radio gadgets and other untouchables which didn't mean a thing to me. It was all very confusing. Anyway the target was still nearly 500 miles away and there was no sense in worrying yet.

We took off as thousands of planes have taken off. My only thought—that ten tons of Beaufighter takes a mighty lot of lifting.

I had been given a set of headphones, duly hooked up to the intercom., and when we were aloft the skipper checked the take-offs of the rest of the boys with his wireless navigator Ray Harber.

When we had formed, course was set and I spent quite a time peering over the pilot's shoulders, first to port and then to starboard, watching the other Beaus and giving the "thumbs up" signal to the nearest pilots who were plainly visible and thoroughly enjoying the run.

I searched the sea for fish or anything else that would absorb my interest for a while. There was nothing but blue sky above us and nothing but water below. Australia was a hundred and more miles behind and Timor was several hundred miles ahead. There was certainly a lot of sea about and nothing of anything else.

The silence on the intercom. was broken only by the pilot's requests for checks on course and several times direction was changed slightly to compensate for drift.

I slumped down in my harness and, using my raft as a seat and the 'chute as a pillow, endeavoured to get comfortable. But no matter which way I manoeuvred my frame the harness did most of the supporting and I just stayed uncomfortable.

"Forty minutes to go! Better get down on the deck" came over the phones from Ray, and I struggled into a standing position to see what it was all about. We came down to fifteen feet off the water. I leaned over the skipper's shoulders and saw that everyone had come down to approximately the same height.

The Beaus look good in formation—flying low—ready for business. The pilot pointed out that he was flying a good fifteen feet below any of the other boys. He said he always did that. He prided himself on being able to fly long distances at a lower altitude than anybody else in the squadron. Then I thought again of ten tons hurtling through the air at 250 miles per. And the large expanse of beautiful blue water so very close to our belly, the land so very far behind, the target so very far ahead, and the rubber dinghy behind me. Then for the first time I noticed that Bill Mann was really *flying* this kite. There was no "George" to do the work. This man in front of me had to work hard and intelligently to keep this kite on the job of getting to the target. He had to be 100 per cent awake. He couldn't afford to let up for a single second. He had to do this for four and a half to five hours if he wanted to get home.

"Ten minutes to go" comes over the intercom. from Ray. The skipper gets his gun-sight into position. His eyes rove around the cockpit checking all the gadgets that matter. He shuffles his body about until he has a position of readiness; he searches the skies ahead; he checks the cockpit gadgets again. Land appears on the horizon.

"Leader to formation! Close up line abreast."

Now we are in the centre of a line of seven Beaufighters skimming the sea towards what? Will the ack-ack be heavy? Last strike over this area "Tiny" Wilkins was holed and

parachuted out over Bathurst Island. Perhaps it will be one of those dull shows that the boys talk about. I'm really glad I was draped with knife, water bottle, rations, revolver and the rest of the gear. Anything can happen now!

The land seems to come at us and in a matter of moments our belly is brushing the treetops and the pilot is looking for something with head and eye movement as speedy as that of a timid lizard.

Hillocks are skipped with the rise and fall motion of the Big Dipper; steep banking turns are made round the close hills. We tip from side to side, rise and fall, swerve and straighten out, then shake like a wet dog.

There's a road. A deserted native village. A river with banks and bottom of a whitish clay. "China River," says Ray over the phone. More villages. A plantation. "That hill is higher than we are," you say to yourself. But we are up, over, and down at 300 miles per hour and again searching for targets before your mental crash has time to materialize.

One second you feel like a tourist—next you wonder whether you really are. The scene changes every split second. Ray says, "There's a speck about 2 o'clock—keep your eye on it." ("It's only a large bird," says Bill.)

We had been flying over Timor for twenty minutes and I was beginning to realize that I had enjoyed every thrilling minute of it.

"Betano should be two minutes ahead on —," announced Ray. Bill looked to his gunsight, and glanced around his gadgets again.

We were swooping down on a Jap patrol headquarters. The cannons gave a shuddering blast. A European-built hut with a native thatched roof. Another burst. A Jap astride a standing horse, talking to two white uniformed officers, disintegrated from the saddle. The horse bolted. The cannons blasted. A figure fell from the doorway. Bill lifted the nose of the Beau and we cleared the hut by a few feet.

"We'll give those —s a bit more," Bill says, as we bank and turn for another run, all the while doing evasive action and throwing me about like a cork bobbing on the water.

We fly over the trees and on to the target behind the protection of a hill. Up, over, swoop and then a quick burst again. A dozen figures rush for the house. Some are hit and fall. One is dragging himself along the ground. Two officers rush from the house, both are dropped. Tracers lash out in a shuddering blast and smoke starts to issue from the place. Not so bad, you think, as the Beau clears the house for the second time. Then you become conscious of the smoke and smell of gun-powder within the plane and you recollect that you have been in action. The Japs' only defence at this point was rifle-fire. Would there be heavy ack-ack at the next target? Will it be heavy or light? Thick or thin? Accurate?

I'm sure I can hear, almost feel, the trees brushing our belly. Who was it that told me about Phil Biven hitting a softwood tree over here, returning to his base with a sackful of bark and wood embedded in his Beau?

"Ray. Give me a course for —," the pilot says.

The coast comes into view again. Ray makes a visual check and advises that all the Beaus are present except "Wickie". "That silly little — must have made another run." Bill sights him a few miles to starboard.

"Leader to formation. Head for home on course —. Leader to formation. Head for home on course —."

We're down "on the deck" again. The tenseness of the twenty-three minutes over Timor, looking for something to shoot up and the deep-seated expectancy of the something that might happen, are gone. I relax and slump once more on to my raft and neither the hardness of my parachute pillow nor the goring gadgets of my harness prevent me from enjoying a sleep.

Bill explained later: The primary target was shipping, which had moved on in the night, and the boys were disappointed that only the secondary target of Betano was available. "Of course," he concluded, "we might have run into an opportunity target, such as another ship or a motor transport convoy. You never know your luck on this job. If you really crave excitement come with us on our next strike on Dilli or Lautem."

FLYING-OFFICER E. T. MILLINGTON

A19 - 19 Flying Officer J. D. Brannelly and Flight Sergeant B. McGrath

From the few records available, it appears that this crew spent some time on the night of 12th May, 1943, in searchlight co-operation with the Darwin defence.

On their return trip to Coomalie Creek they ran out of fuel and abandoned the aircraft, McGrath bailing out first, followed by Brannelly some minutes later, due to his hatch being jammed. This event happened about 0130 hours on 13th May, 1943.

Brannelly landed in a swamp of bamboo grass about twelve feet tall and water about four feet deep in a position reckoned to be about 15 miles from the coast. He stayed on his dinghy that morning and at first light, being unable to raise McGrath by shouting, started for the coast to the west of his position. He spent three days in the swamp. The water was drinkable and there were plenty of water lily bulbs. He broke out of the swamp and spent the next day in a dense jungle. Another day later he came on the estuary of the Daly River, which was alive with crocodiles. It took him four days to make it out to the sea in an old canoe he found and drifted until he ran into an Army search party.

After some time in an Army Hospital, he was flown south.

Like Wackett and Ritchie, they became lost due to wireless failure.

The position where Brannelly bailed out is 13° 40' south latitude, 130° 38' east longitude, about 30 NM from the mouth of the Daly River, 6 NM from the Daly River Police Station and about 37 NM west of Fenton.

The aircraft was found by Constable T. Fitzer on 14th November, 1943, burnt out and the wreckage spread over a large area. McGrath's navigation gear was found intact.

The mounted constable found the aircraft the day before the Army and reported that, in his opinion, if McGrath landed in the swamp without his dinghy, there would be little hope of finding him alive, as the swamp extended for miles in all directions.

I quote from the constables report-

"This country, in May, would be one sheet of water for miles, and is thickly covered with dense swamp bamboos and cane grass, about six feet high and a thick top growth of lilies. I have often, during my patrols to the Daly River, endeavoured to get through, or swim out through these lilies for ducks that were shot, but it was nearly impossible and should F/Sgt McGrath have landed in this in his clothes, boots and parachute, especially at 1.15 a.m., his chances of making high ground would be very remote."

During the search of the crash site, a tracker with Constable Fitzer found a Japanese compass, half buried in the dirt, about a mile from the site. The compass was handed to the Army and sent south for inspection and evaluation.

The crash of A19 - 19 has never been published, but is mentioned in the Squadron daily diary kept by Orderly Room at the time.

The above information has been taken from a letter from F/O Brannelly to Mr. McGrath, father of B. McGrath, after he was discharged from hospital. Also available is correspondence from the McGrath family and Dept. of Defence, Air Force Office Historical Officer R. K. Piper. Also a copy of a letter from Mounted Constable F. C. Fitzer at Daly River Police Station to Superintendent of Police, Alice Springs, C.A., dated 16th November, 1943.

Flying Officer J. D. Brannelly died in 1982.

BEAUFIGHTER A19 - 156
MK XI Delivered to RAAF August 1943
Delivered to 31 Squadron 23rd November 1943

This aircraft was one of eight Beaufighters which departed Drysdale strip at 1100 hours 6th April, 1944 and proceeded to Semau Island at Southern tip of Timor on a shipping strike.

A camouflaged 160 foot oil tanker was sighted by the crew and the strike leader notified. A19 - 176 (leader) and A19 - 156 attacked the tanker in Pelican Bay and destroyed it, but on pulling away from the target, A19 - 156 was caught in an area of light intense 20mm ack-ack fire and hit in the starboard engine which failed almost immediately. On setting course away from enemy land, the aircraft was lightened by firing off all the cannon and machine gun ammunition. Whilst still at low level and flying on the port engine, the port fuel pressure light came on, the motor coughed and lost power, although the inner tank had been selected and contained 170 gallons of fuel. The fuel pressure light went out when a cross feed to the starboard tank was employed. A later attempt to feed from the port tank was unsuccessful. After firing off all the ammunition, some petrol was jettisoned, as with the feed from the port tank unserviceable there was insufficient fuel to attempt to reach the mainland.

Course was then set for Cartier Island, 160 nautical miles due south of Koepang, at position 12° 30' south latitude, 123° 33' west longitude. Cartier Is. Scott Reef and Ashmore Reef had been recently surveyed as possible forced landing sites.

A belly landing was made at 1345 hours. A hole was found just above the starboard engine flame damper, but the rest of the engine could not be examined due to the position of the aircraft/

The crew, F/O D.B.Strachan and F/Sgt J.L.Brassil, kept occupied by dismantling all the instruments, clocks, radio, compasses, plastic wing tips and placing them in the dinghies, with the nose camera and code book. They then adjourned for a swim in the channel between east and west Cartier Is.

When a Catalina of 43 Squadron arrived shortly before 1800 hours, the crew commenced to walk to rendezvous with the Catalina, about 1 mile from the Beaufighter, over rough coral which broke and entered their boots. They also towed and carried the three dinghies. On reaching the edge of the coral after 1800 hours, it was now dark, and the crew unknowingly walked off the edge and lost part of the booty. They swam out to the Catalina and were bundled into the aircraft through the nose turret and the starboard waist position. However, the Captain did not want to risk his aircraft on the coral in the dark, so the dinghies were knifed, the only items salvaged were the nose camera and two aircraft clocks. A19 - 156 was set on fire by the top cover and destroyed.

On Tuesday, 3rd December 1968, HMAS Advance left Darwin for Ashmore Reef and Cartier Island. On 7th December the crew landed on West Cartier Island and commenced to remove the propeller, the request for removal being made by Mr. Sam Calder M.P., parliamentary member for the Northern Territory, on behalf of the Alice Springs Sub-Branch of the R.S.S. & A.I.L.A.

The propeller was refurbished by Connellan Airways in Darwin and is mounted outside the Alice Springs RSL Club.

A plaque inside the club is inscribed in part-

"To Airmen - the airscrew on the memorial outside was taken from a Beaufighter aircraft which landed in Alice Springs before operating from Coomalie Creek, N.T. On 6th April, 1944, the RAAF attacked Semau Island and A19 - 156 was hit by AA fire and was forced to land on Cartier Island, a tiny atoll south of Semau. The crew was rescued by a Catalina of 43 Squadron".

From Don Winter

Bluey (Roy) Sparks and his mate (I can't recall his name), both of orderly room, started it off. As we originals of 31 all know Bluey Sparks was a first class pianist. I think he and his mate may have had some connection with vaudeville or the stage prior to enlistment. They decided that we of 31 at Coomalie Creek should put on a concert or stage show. The boys rallied round and finally came up with enough items to put on a concert.

The recreation hut was full to capacity and overflowing on the big night. I recall seeing a few nursing sisters, probably from Bachelor hospital, sitting in the better seats.

Among the acts that night, I remember 'Bones' Rienhardt as a comedian, not that he needed a stage. Bones was always raising a laugh. Max Pearce of instrument section sang a song accompanied on our acquired piano by Lindsay Stephens (radio section).

There was also a sketch produced by Bluey. In the sketch, three of the lads acted as patients in a hospital ward, and I played the part of the nurse.

When the curtain parted, the scene was a hospital ward with three patients sitting up in their sick beds, and the nurse being busy about the ward and having a certain amount of trouble with a slipped boob. Suddenly one of the patients grabs at his stomach and with a look of pain hops out of bed and dashes to a door marked 'TOILET'.

(End of Scene 1)

Scene II - one hour later.

The nurse returns to the ward and finds that the patient who had dashed to the toilet was still not back in his bed. The nurse goes to the toilet door and knocks and enquires why the patient is still in the toilet.

The muffled answer came back. 'No paper?'

The nurse said 'Haven't you got a tongue in your head?'

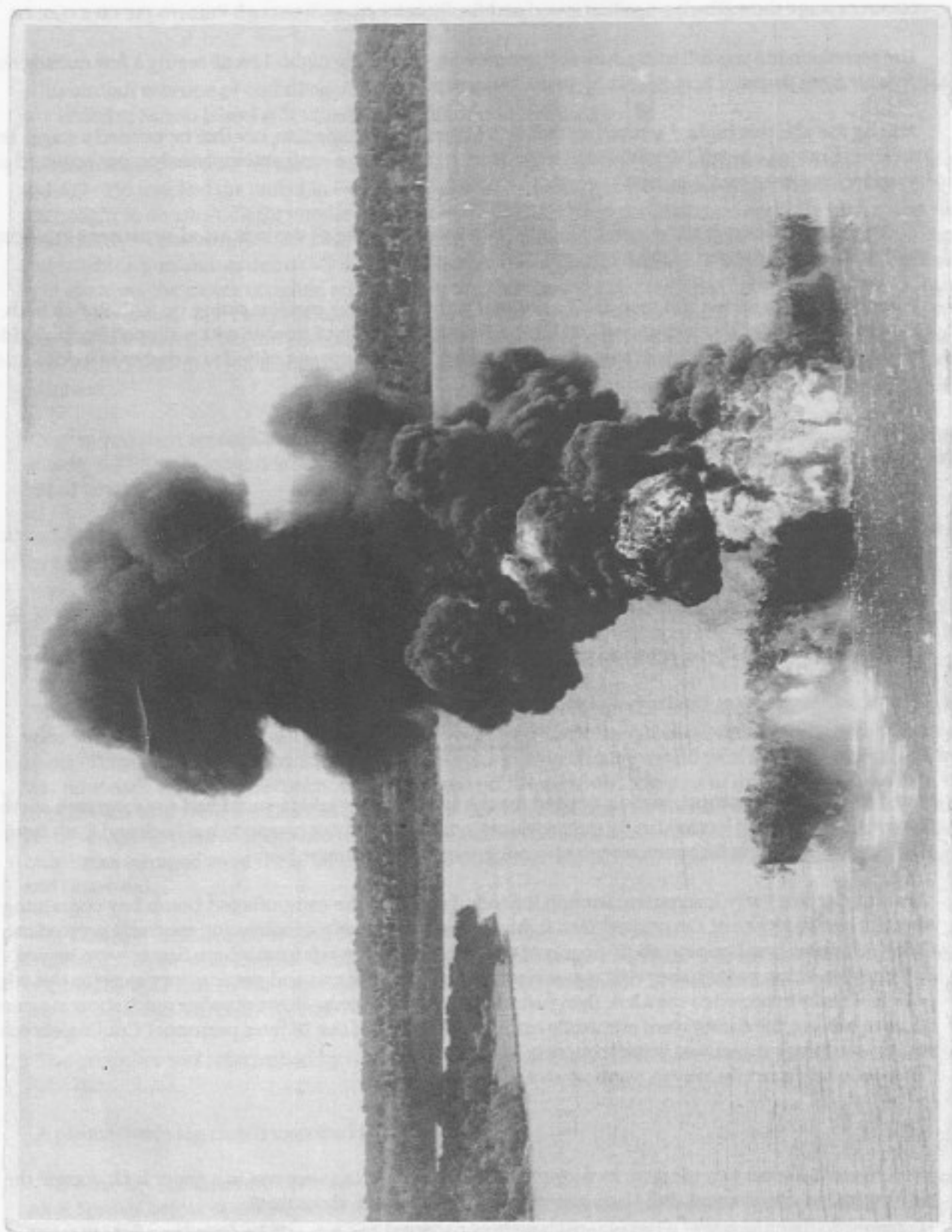
The patient replied 'Yes, but I'm not a bloody contortionist?'

I gathered up the appropriate tools needed for the job in hand, making sure I had not forgotten anything. 'Trapper' Drysdale had lectured us on our arrival at Coomalie about not having to run back and forth from section to aircraft for tools forgotten, and so save our energy in the extreme heat.

Leaving Service Party Instrument Section, I headed down to the camouflaged bomb bay containing the aircraft I was to work on. On coming into sight of the aircraft a rather frightening spectacle greeted me. Alf Carey, armourer, was hopping about on top of one wing of the aircraft from where flames were issuing. The flames were licking along the wing top around the petrol tank cap and getting very close to the engine nacelle. I really expected to see a low flying armourer at any moment. However, after much shouting, cursing and arm waving, the flames were eventually extinguished. One of our 2E fitter personnel, Cpl. Englebrecht, in his very sardonic manner was heard to mutter:

'That definitely is not the way to warm up an aircraft engine.'

At Coomalie, I seem to remember two very senior officers getting very wet in a water tank outside the air-men's mess hut one evening. Bill Mann may remember something about that!!



Burning Japanese Fuel Barge after attack by Darcy Wentworth & Bob Miller, and Dave Strachan & Jack Brassil - See story next page

Diving pair unlocks war hulk secret

A DARWIN couple has solved a 48-year-old mystery by discovering a buried "treasure" in waters near an Indonesian fishing village.

Three Drysdale-based 31 Squadron Beaufighter pilots sent the war-time Japanese fuel barge 12 metres under, off Semaue Island on April 4, 1944.

Until late August, its final home was known only to local fishermen who told of seeing "windows in the water".

The second Beaufighter was forced to flee the area codenamed Pelican Bay at the time of the attack suffering damage from ground fire.

"They were successful in the attack in that they caused damage, but were never able to really confirm the result," exploration diver Jack Edmunds, 56, of Muller, said.

"They lost an aircraft and had taken an intense risk in attacking," he said of 31 Squadron members Dave Strachan and Jack Brassil.

"For them it was important."

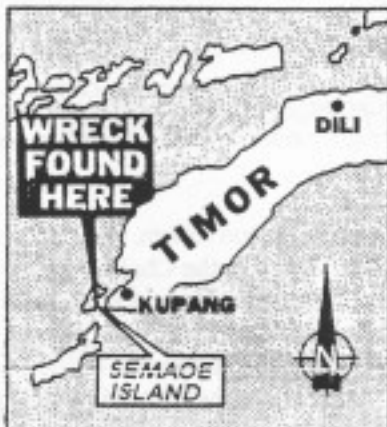
Gleaned

Two months ago, Mr Edmunds and wife Joy used information gleaned from other divers and local fishermen to end the mystery.

The wreck of a 50 metre Japanese World War II fuel barge had been transformed by "nature from something ugly into something beautiful".

"It's encrusted with coral and there's a myriad of fish that have made the hulk home," the self-confessed creature-of-the-deep worshipper said.

Mrs Edmunds described how she amazed an eerie atmosphere filming the



By **CHERIE BEACH**

wreck by "not knowing whether people died when it sank".

The NT Scuba Diving Club publicity officer, Mr Edmunds said: "I was confident we would find it when we left Darwin because we had the information."

"Other scuba diving groups had searched the area and accepted guidance from the locals but it was not accurate."

"Perhaps their inability to communicate was a disadvantage."

Fisherman first directed the couple and Pilot Water Sport proprietor Graeme Whitford to rock-covered coral.

"It looked good on the depth sounder, but when we dived it became clear it was not the wreck," Mr Edmunds said.

"We were disappointed and told the fishermen they could do better."

"They giggled a bit and pointed into the distance so we headed there instead and soon came across the stern of the hulk."

"The water was full of silt because of a very low tide



□ A photograph taken from the nose of the Beaufighter during the attack

and we didn't hold much hope of seeing anything."

"As we came closer we could see the shadowy hulk sloping away into a deeper part of the channel in an upright position."

"It was very exciting."

The couple returned to Darwin and sought the help of historian John Hasbell to



□ Jack and Joyce Edmunds preparing for their favorite pastime — scuba diving

Cartier Island later that day.

The barge was trying to hide from air attack in the Semaue Island bay's 12 m to 20 m deep channel.

It was covered with netting and tree branches for camouflage.

Mr Edmunds said part of the cover remained.

"The wreck is surprisingly intact, but there is evidence of an explosion amidships and the buckled plates of the hull tell of the heat generated by the fire," Mr Edmunds said.

"Some cannon holes can still be seen."

Crew

"I wondered how the crew on board handled the holocaust at the time."

But what happened to the crew is still unknown.

"We weren't prepared enough to dive inside the wreck," Mr Edmunds said.

"That is a specialised area and you must be prepared safety-wise."

"The exchange of fire left both sides disadvantaged."

"Maybe once more it points out the futility of war."

confirm the identity of the hulk.

A few weeks later in a letter confirming the identity of the wreck Mr Brassil, of Terrigal, New South Wales, told how he almost ended up in the bay during the attack.

"We drew ground fire and had to lighten the aircraft

which meant our ammunition had to go," he said.

"David had to fire all the ammunition which nearly stalled the aircraft as we were flying on only the port engine."

The pair had been led into attack by 31 Squadron leader Darcy Westworth and was rearmed from

In August, 1992, a retired RAAF officer and his wife found the fuel barge in the channel in Pelican Bay, Semau Island, just where it sank on 6th April, 1944. The barge is sitting upright in water varying from 12m. to 20m. Some of the camouflage cover still remains, and it appears to have suffered an explosion amid ships, the buckled plates of the hull tell of the heat generated by the fire. Some cannon holes can still be seen in the hull. It is encrusted with coral and there is a myriad of fish that have made the hulk their home.

A report of the squadron's attack and the dive by members of the N.T. Scuba Diving Club has been published in the Sunday Territorian, October 25th, 1992.

A confirmation of a 'sink' for 31 Beaufighter Squadron.

During HMAS Advance's time at Ashmore Reef and Cartier Island, the crew spread around 'Australian trade-marked cans' to establish Australia's continued sovereignty over the islands with regard to their remoteness off the Australian coast.

Early in 1993, while collecting items for inclusion in our Squadron album, the Department of Territories advised me that Cartier Island, Ashmore and Scott Reefs are close to the Challis and Jabiru oil and natural gas fields, and are patrolled regularly by ships of the Royal Australian Navy. I wrote to the RAN in Darwin and asked if it would be possible for 'this civilian' to go with one of their ships on patrol. They agreed to my request and subsequently asked if I could board HMAS Launceston in Darwin at 1000 hours on Monday 19th July, 1993. I hastily agreed and contacted the ship and was told that they would be only too glad to have me on board and land me on the island to photograph A19 - 156 as she is now. Then they would divert to Broome and land me there or I could stay on board for the remainder of their patrol of some 2-3 weeks.

During my conversation with the navigator, who produced his charts, I was advised that Cartier Island was a bombing and gunnery range used by the RAAF. This was confirmed during a telephone conversation with the Wing Commander Armament Ranges at Glenbrook N.S.W. Air H.Q., and that there were still many unexploded armaments on the island and that it would be very dangerous to approach the island. Reluctantly, I contacted the ship again and had to agree to cancel the trip.

Another alternative was suggested by an officer of HMAS Launceston. "As well as an RAN presence around the oil field, the RAAF Orion Squadrons of 92 Wing, based at Edinburgh, fly patrols over the area as required. Also Coastwatch, based at Darwin and Broome, patrol the area."

A letter to 92 Wing has brought a reply that they no longer (i.e. the RAAF) patrol the area and only visit when on exercises or as requested. However, a letter to Coastwatch of Australian Customs Service, who do the coastal surveillance in the north, has brought a promising response, and they, on one of their patrols, will take pictures of the area.

J. L. Brassil

EXTRACT FROM A LETTER (undated) FROM BILL SUGDEN TO LEN CLARKE (Medical Orderly). COOMALIE, 1943.

"Saw quite a few of the old 31 Sqdn gang over there (W.A.). Hughie Leech (Bill Read's nav.), Sid Sippe (wheat farmer), Ron Provost, got a bit bright with the latter two on occasions. Over here in Victoria there are quite a few I still see: namely Pat Boyd (now married and full captain with TAA), Lee Archer (RAAF test pilot on jet aircraft), Les Peltzer (equipment officer, now has a pub in Mildura), Dave Wyatt (wireless - who has a real estate business), Johnnie Klug is still a mine surveyor at Broken hill, Dave Doughton - one of Melbourne's crack golfers, also Mick Bradley (who was wed.), he is trying to get 31 Sqdn. Association together.

Back to W.A. - I forgot to mention I ran into Dick Wallace (ops. room), Frank Stewart (engineer officer), he has a cordial factory, Captain Ernest Lee-Steere, Doc Corlis' mate, Jack Gibbings (Harry Moo's pilot) was an announcer with the ABC.

I often have a laugh when I think back over some of the old happenings, such as the night the Sgt Electrician got bitten by a snake and just as Geoff was fixing him up we got a raid - then the way Les Peltzer always pushed his frame into our trench instead of his own - when the raids were on and all the lights out and a firefly fluttered past, some wise guy would always call out 'put that bloody light out' - Jack Fullerton - the defence - less officer, who got into such a panic the night we all thought the Japs had broken through and it turned out to be the Yanks having some New Year celebrations."

STORIES

from Dave Annandale

An amusing incident that was not so funny at the time.

A member of our ground crew, riding on the back of a transport truck, going out to the strip one morning, was bitten by something while sitting on his tin hat. He was taken to R.A.P. and on taking off his shirt and throwing it on the floor, out runs a whopping big centipede. Apparently it had crawled up the leg of his shorts and taken a bite at the first thing it found. The medico examined a very swollen piece of his anatomy and prescribed an aspirin and told him he would be OK.

To his horror, every time he got under a hot shower, his piece of anatomy would swell to enormous proportions, much to the wagging of his shower mates. Glad to relate that after a few weeks it resumed its normal size.

from Harry Gare

While at Point Cook, I had the job almost everyday of occupying the navigator's table, with a set of sub-standard instruments, to do in-flight calibration checks on the test flip of an 'Aggie', freshly assembled out of packing cases.

After a while, at Coomalie Creek, I had the urge to go up again, and the opportunity arose one day when one had been in servicing party for a 240 hourly and had to be test flown.

What I didn't know was that a gunnery exercise was included in the test. It was one of the older ones with magazines instead of belt fed cannons and the observer gave me the job of changing the magazines.

After a lot of rough flying and laying on my guts with cordite fumes blowing back over my face, I was feeling

a bit seedy and decided I would go and sit on the bulkhead behind the pilot to watch the last shoot. He came down in a screaming dive blasting the target and a big anthill. As he pulled out I realised that I had sat on the buckle of my parachute harness and the G's were holding me down hard on it.

That night in the shower, there was a queue up to see the bruise on my arse. They say it was like a kangaroo coming down under a parachute. Everybody could see the joke except me.

After 'Trapper' Drysdale had gone south, we had a new engineering officer, if I remember correctly F/O Hanrahan. One night I was with him as his orderly sergeant. We had a big old Dodge command car to do the rounds of the guards.

Now these guards had come from some battle zone or other and were very trigger happy. Many a poor old kangaroo that went bounding around during the night copped it, because he didn't know the password.

Mr. Hanrahan was a trifle hard of hearing and when we were heading back to camp, thinking we had done all the guards, I tapped him on the knee and said 'Sir, we have been challenged again'. Too late! there was a crack and we had a neat hole through the canvas hood. The guard sergeant had posted one extra guard and forgot to tell us!

About 12th Aug. '42, whilst a corporal at Point Cook, I was called to the orderly room for posting to a new unit, but as no one was too sure where, I was given a movement order to Eastern Area H.Q. for myself and five airmen. Having got all our clearances, we set off for Point Piper.

At Albury we met up with another mob of postings and their officer asked to see our movement order. He said he knew all about it and ordered me to take my party off the train at Wagga.

My blokes were most unhappy about this as two of them wished to visit relatives in Sydney. The other three had never been to Sydney. I had and they wanted me to show them around.

I thought I was fireproof because my movement order was signed by an officer of higher rank, but we took the precaution of making ourselves scarce in washrooms throughout the train before it got to Wagga.

We were not well received by the RTO, who told us to remain at Central Station, and he would put us on a train back to Wagga that evening. However, we blew through and the two did their visiting and I took the three on the Manly ferry and around Sydney.

That night we were loaded into the oldest dog box carriage the NSW Railways could find and the next day fitted into our rightful places in 31 Squadron, and we all knew what a fine unit it turned out to be.

At the big reunion in '81, Alf Carey came up to me and shook hands and said how much he and the others had appreciated that day in Sydney.



BEAUFIGHTERS

one lightning strike they burned five bombers, damaged thirteen other aircraft, blew up a petrol dump, and shot up transport, personnel and the barracks area.

So complete was the surprise that Jap bombers were caught on the runway with engines running, and crews were casually walking to others. Ack-ack guns did not begin to fire until the Beaufighters were racing away from the target. Penfoei, like all important enemy aerodromes, was stiff with light ack-ack, but this did not deter the Beaufighters in their audacious attacks. Ack-ack was increased at Penfoei, but the Beaufighters came back, and it was against this target that they scored their greatest success. Led by Wing-Commander Read, eight Beaufighters destroyed or damaged twenty-three enemy aircraft. A magnificent team of fliers accompanied the leader. In a few seconds they transformed Penfoei into a shambles of burning and wrecked aircraft and motor transport and damaged buildings.

As he was leaving the target the leader asked his navigator, Flying-Officer J. Marr, how many Beaufighters were following him. Marr replied: "There aren't any Beaus, but two Zeros are coming like hell."

The chase lasted across Timor and one hundred miles out to sea before the Zeros turned for home. Total score for the day was five bombers and seven fighters destroyed and nine fighters and two bombers damaged. All this was achieved in twenty seconds of furious firing.

Meanwhile, other targets were being found for the Beaufighters. Jap floatplanes had been worrying Allied shippings in the Arafura Sea, and it had been discovered that they were based at Dobo in the Aru Islands. The Beaufighter "boys" believed they could do something about the floatplanes, so very early one morning Read set out alone to make an experimental attack. He reached Dobo at dawn. A single floatplane was resting on the water. One burst of thirty rounds and the floatplane was burning, and Read was racing for home.

After that Jap floatplanes suffered heavily. No matter where the enemy tried to hide them the Beaufighters found them and left a trail of fire and destruction. Savage brilliantly led a particularly successful attack when ten

floatplanes were destroyed in ten minutes of hectic strafing.

Besides going to enemy hide-outs, the Beaufighters take their turn at watching over convoys for which Jap floatplanes come searching. They have shot down one floatplane over a convoy and many times the enemy has been driven away before launching an attack.

Small enemy craft move in constant fear of the lightning attack and the terrifying armament of the Beaufighters. Fire from one Beaufighter will cut a small craft in halves and sink an 800-ton vessel. Scores of small craft have been sunk or burned.

Many superb fliers have flown Beaufighters into action from the North-western area. They have been in many sticky spots where Japs have mounted ack-ack especially against Beaufighters. Increasing fighter opposition has added to the difficulties of their tasks. Even though the initial advantage of surprise has passed, and the enemy is using every possible means to stop them, the Beaufighters continue to burn and destroy. Every Beaufighter crew has taken part in brilliantly executed and successful attacks.

Read is an inspiring leader and likes to regard his award of the D.F.C. as a compliment to the great work of his squadron rather than as an individual honour. Savage has taken part in more operational sorties than any other pilot flying Beaufighters from the North-western area, and Flying-Officer J. Kearney holds the record for the number of enemy planes destroyed. His score is nine destroyed and six damaged. Flight-Sergeant E. J. Barnett is known to his friends as "Basher", a grand man in a fight. He has the reputation of being the only pilot who has made two passes at Penfoei on the same raid. He blew up an ammunition dump and the explosion shot his aircraft so high into the air that he decided it was a pity to waste such height, so dived and made another attack.

Some of the crews have almost unbelievable experiences to relate. After one strafing operation over Timor, only two of four aircraft returned to base. Little hope was held for the safe return of the others. But the crews did get back. Flying-Officer G. Gabb and his navigator, Sergeant D. A. Webb, were forced down in the sea off Timor. They swam ashore,

RAAF LOG

were picked up by A.I.F. troops, and finally came back to Australia. The other crew, Flying-Officer L. A. Wilkins and Sergeant W. H. Byrnes, tried to fly their damaged aircraft back to Australia with its elevator shot away. While Byrnes ran back and forth along the fuselage, trying to keep the aircraft stable, Wilkins managed to fly on. They reached Bathurst Island before the Beaufighter became so unmanageable that they had to bale out. Wilkins landed on the shore—Byrnes fell into the sea. Both were rescued and came back to fly on more strikes against the Japanese.

In their nine months of war against Jap bases, the Beaufighters have proved to be magnificent aircraft. The damage they have done to Japanese personnel, stores, buildings, and equipment cannot be accurately assessed; but their score of enemy aircraft destroyed or damaged is sufficient testimony to their greatness.

Fifty-eight enemy aircraft destroyed—sixty-one damaged—Beaufighter losses minor. That is the Beaufighters' score after nine months of smashing attacks.



"HEY, GERT! AINT YER OVERDOING THIS HIGH ALTITUDE BUSINESS?"

This story taken from publication 'RAAF SAGA'

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BEAUFIGHTER A19 - 70 MK 1C

Delivered to RAAF 6:10:42
Delivered to 31 Sqdn 11:12:42

The aircraft suffered engine failure and crash landed at Point Steward on 11th January, 1943. Ken Blundell was pilot. Bill McKinnon advises that when he went out to pick up the repaired Beaufighter, a trip which took all day, the aborigines who had been watching over the aircraft, put on a corroboree for him as a 'birdman', with the shape of the aircraft daubed on their chests.

He flew the aircraft back to Pell strip on 24th July, 1943.

On 17th September, 1943 returning from a strike to Taberfane, where it suffered anti aircraft damage in the port motor and starboard wing, the crew, Bill Mann and Ray Harber landed in a swamp 28km SW of Millimgimbi. The aircraft was converted to spares, but the wreck is still in its position, 18/20 NM SW of Millimgimbi near Blyth River, 12°08'S Lat. 134°36'E Long.



Bill Mann inspecting damage to starboard wing





THE DAY WE FIRED THE ROCKETS

by F. L. W. Stewart

Engineering Officer 31 Squadron

Rockets and the principle of rockets is very old. The Chinese had them many centuries ago, and in fact Marco Polo is credited with bringing the knowledge of them to the Western World from China in the late 12th Century. From memory, although I wasn't there at the time, the Chinese used rockets as a fireworks display in much the same way as British children celebrated Guy Fawkes Day.

It was left to an enterprising scientist, Sir William Congreve to develop the war rocket back in 1805, and it was used against the French in the Napoleonic Wars, with middling success.

The Soviet used them extensively on the Russian Front against the Nazis. They had a particularly lethal weapon, a wheeled vehicle with about twenty rockets attached, colloquially known as Stalin's Organ'. These organs did a frightful amount of damage when fired at oncoming troops and armour.

Sometime early in WWII someone in England hit upon the idea of fitting the Beaufighters with rockets to use against trains, naval vessels or any exposed targets. The projectile was equal to a 6 inch naval shell and a salvo of eight could do an awful lot of damage to a German troop train or torpedo boat steaming up the channel.

It wasn't long before the idea caught on in the RAAF and one day in 1944, several truck loads of strange looking equipment arrived at 31 Squadron base at Coomalie Creek, N.T.

As engineering officer of the squadron, I was let into the secret and was informed that these plates, about four feet square, were to be attached to the underside of the Beaufighter mainplane and then rocket rails fitted to the plates. This then was the launching platform for the aerial rockets.

As it was, the Beaufighter was a pretty lethal weapon, what with 4 x 20mm Hispano cannon and a nest of machine guns, the Beau packed a rather solid wallop. Add a few decent sized bombs and the Japs didn't think too kindly of the Beau.

Pending the arrival of the instructional staff, we set about fitting these ugly looking plates to a few aircraft. They certainly made the Beau a lot less easy to fly, so we proceeded with extreme caution. The next step was to find out if we had fitted the equipment correctly and that the rockets would actually leave the rails.

So one bright morning around August, 1944, we trundled a Beau along one of the back roads behind servicing party area and pointed it towards the bush. The made road ran out a few yards ahead, but there was a track that led up a hill and into the next valley.

I posted a few chaps up on top of the hill to keep a lookout while we prepared the aircraft for firing and when we were ready we recalled them by Aldis lamp. When they were safely back in our area, we started the engines and with Sid Sippe at the controls, we revved up the engines until it was blowing a fair breeze over the mainplane and making quite a lot of noise. The tailplane was anchored to a large cement block.

Of course, it was quite a gala atmosphere around the aircraft. We had collected up every available fire extinguisher which were strategically placed around the Beau, just in case the damned things didn't leave the rails and started a fire.

The rockets, eight of them, were fitted with concrete practice heads, which weighed approximately 50 pounds. Anyway, when everything had settled down and all the 'observers' were in place, the pilot pressed the switch and with a God Almighty swish, the rockets took off in a cloud of smoke towards Queensland, or anyhow, out that way somewhere.

We stopped the engines and examined the aircraft. No damage, so the multitude dispersed to their allotted tasks. With a few 'official' observers we jumped into a truck and proceeded up the hill to inspect our handiwork. About 30-50 minutes must have elapsed from the time of firing until we set off in the truck. By this time the NT bush had returned to its peaceful quietude. Not a leaf stirred.

From the firing site to over the next valley must have been a couple of miles and the going was pretty rough, so total elapsed time from firing to when we reached the top of the hill must have been 60 minutes.

The concrete heads certainly did their work. They had cut down trees that would have done a Gippsland timber getter proud. And there right in the middle of it all an Army patrol had just arrived and were preparing to boil the billy, and would we care for a cuppa?

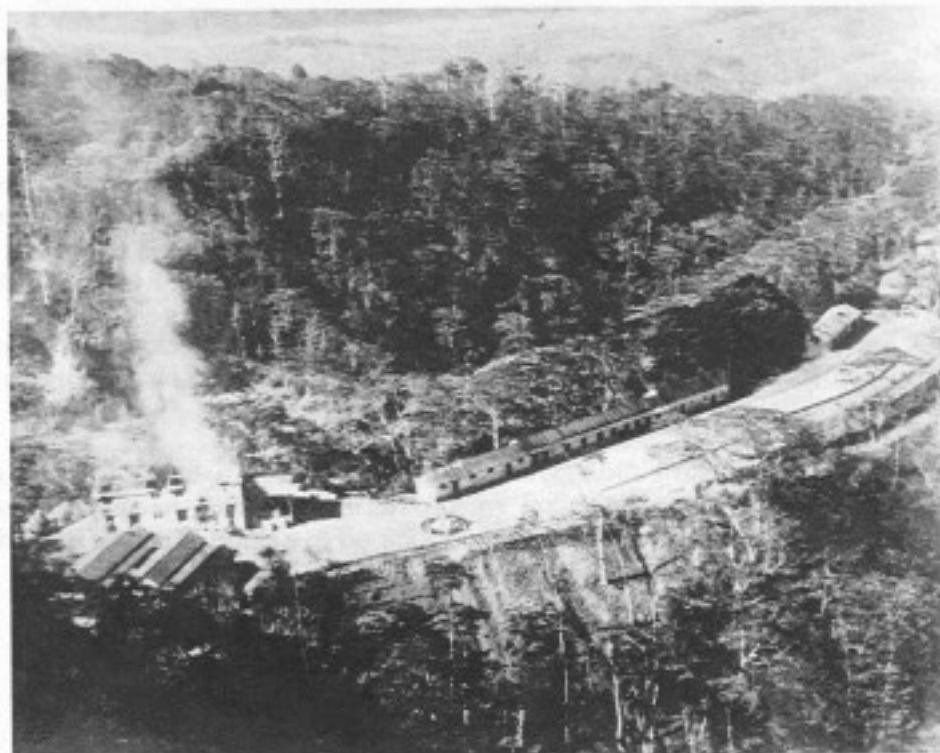
I diplomatically made some enquiries and was told that the patrol had just that minute arrived and that this was a nice clear spot for lunch. Wonder how all the trees were chopped down? Must have been that thunderstorm and lightning the night before, I suppose! None of our party let on and the Army Patrol went one way and we back tracked over the hill to Coomalie Creek, offering a silent prayer up to the saints that protect us from courts martial.

Later on, we took off those ugly ungainly launching plates and fitted the American Zero length rocket launchers. Suitable targets were few and far between in our area and our boys were much happier with the conventional ballistic equipment.

The natives of Moratai were welcome to our original rocket launchers. They would make great barbecue plates.

In Frank's accompanying letter, he advises that his mate Bill Lyons was in the Army Patrol. The patrol heard aircraft noises and a lot of banging and crashing, but didn't pay a lot of attention, hence the thought of thunder and lightning activity at the time, and anyway, those airforce blokes were always doing some crazy thing or another. The army patrol had never heard of rockets and the bits of concrete laying around must have fallen off the back of a truck.

When Frank told Lyons after all these years how close they had become to being names on a War Memorial, his opinion of the RAAF wasn't at all enhanced and said, 'I always knew you blokes in the Air force were a bit nutty'.



Result of First Rocket Strike by RAAF in SWPA at Jap occupied buildings at Hatidela, Timor on 16-11-44

REPORT OF OPERATION C0029 of 16th November, 1944 on JAPANESE OCCUPIED BUILDINGS at HATOELIA, TIMOR.

Minimum of 6 Beaufighters to carry out RP attack. One B25 will accompany the Beaufighters to obtain full photographic record of attack. This RP strike, the first time rockets had been used in this theatre of operations, was led by S/Ldr P. Boyd, with Group Captain Eaton, OC 79 Wing in attendance.

The attack was made in pairs, four runs over the target being carried out. R/P's were launched in pairs. Hits were scored by all duties and rockets were seen entering the base of the building, the sides and ends and as well two R/P's scored direct hits on the roof. Violent explosions followed these hits and the target partially hidden by flying debris and dense masses of dust and smoke. No 1 duty's rockets undershot on the first run, but these scored direct hits on a large building which was in line with the main target. After the fourth run had been completed and all rockets expended, a fifth and final run was made, the Beaufighters coming in low and strafing with cannon fire.

All duty's reported considerable damage to the structure of the main target. Adjacent buildings had also been damaged and one reported on fire.

There were no casualties, one aircraft received a .5 bullet hole in the starboard exhaust manifold. All aircraft returned safely.

ARTICLE FROM 'WINGS' MAGAZINE SUMMER 1990

by Ed Simmons *The RAAF on Bathurst Island*

"Corporal Bill Woodnutt received the British Empire Medal for rescuing the navigator from a a

ARTICLE FROM 'WINGS' MAGAZINE SUMMER 1990

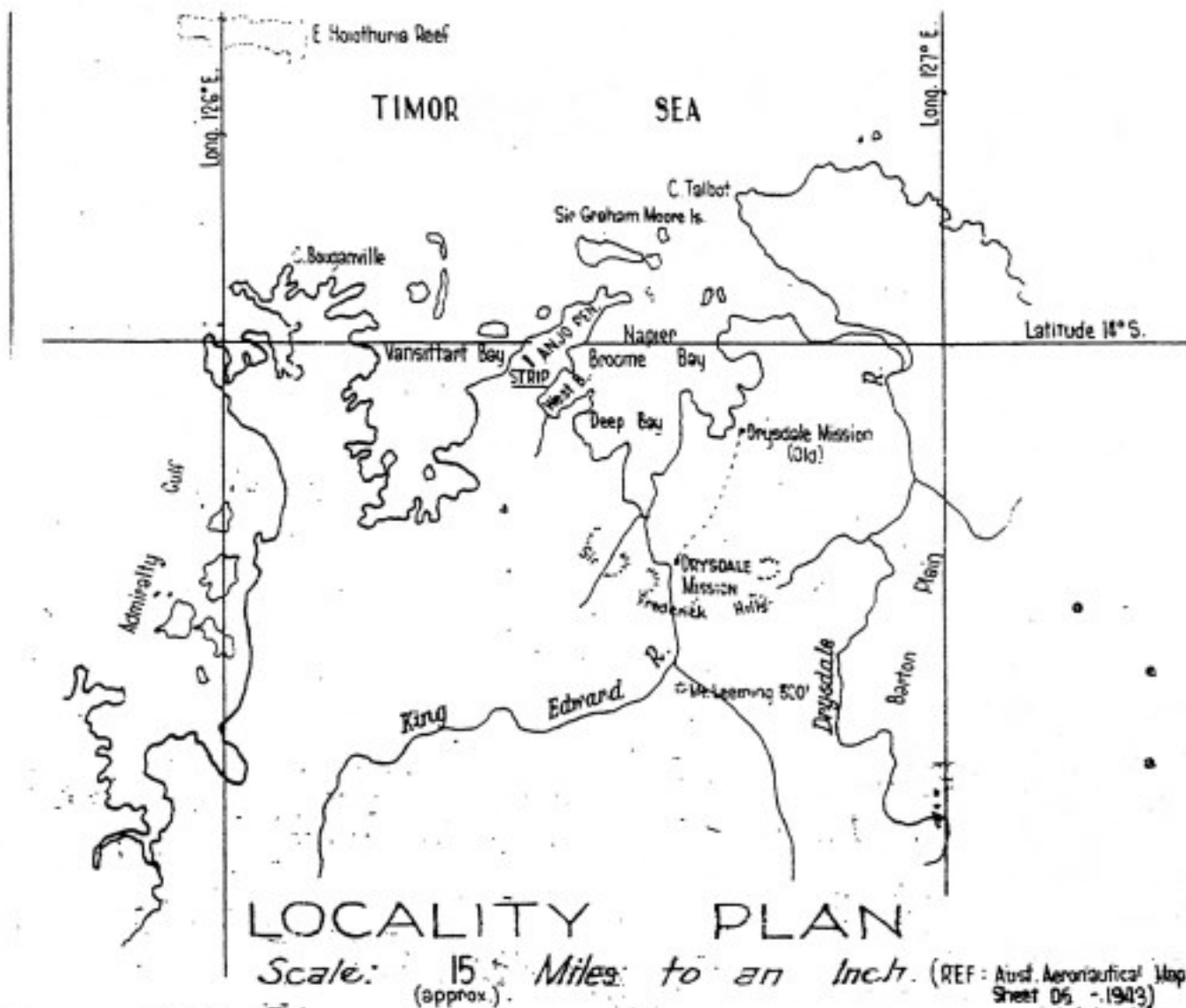
by Ed Simmons *The RAAF on Bathurst Island*

"Corporal Bill Woodnutt received the British Empire Medal for rescuing the navigator from a a crashed Beaufighter, who was floating in his Mae West well out to sea near Quiparelli (Bathurst Is.). Bill took a rubber dingy through the surf in crocodile and shark infested sea, loaded the semi conscious navigator into the dingy and towed it back to land - in all about an hour's swim.

Due to secrecy which then enveloped coast watching and radio location as it was then called, the news release attributed the rescue to commandos."

The crew who bailed out were: F/O I. Wilkins, who landed in a swamp and Sgt. W. Byrnes (Navigator) from A19-71.

Acknowledgement for this article is made to 'Wings' Magazine.



**DRYSDALE MISSION STATION AIRSTRIP
KALUMBURU BENEDECTINE MISSION**

On 25th May, 1940, an RAAF officer proceeded to Drysdale Mission, south of West Bay, W.A., and examined both strips of the airfield.

"The NW/SE runway has been cleared and is ready for use. It is 1144 yards in length, clear of obstructions at both ends. The surface is smooth, although sandy, and could be used by a fully loaded Hudson aircraft.

The NE/SW runway is incomplete and no aircraft should attempt to land or take off along it. No petrol or oil is available at the mission."

Drysdale was subsequently operated by the RAAF as 58 Operational Base Unit, and stocks of fuel and bombs were landed.

The first aircraft of the RAAF to operate from Drysdale were Wirraways and Avro Ansons of No. 12 Squadron.

By March/April 1943, the airstrip was in constant use by all medium type aircraft of the NW Command, either refuelling on the way to or on the way home after missions.

On 23rd September 1943, 22 enemy aircraft bombed and strafed the airstrip and Mission, with the most damage being done to the Mission Station.

The squadron continued to use Drysdale and the last use of the strip was made by a B25 Mitchell on a reconnaissance mission on 6th July, 1944. It was then that operations commenced at Truscott airfield on the Anjo peninsula in Western Australia.



Showing Rocket Rails , Motors and Practice Heads

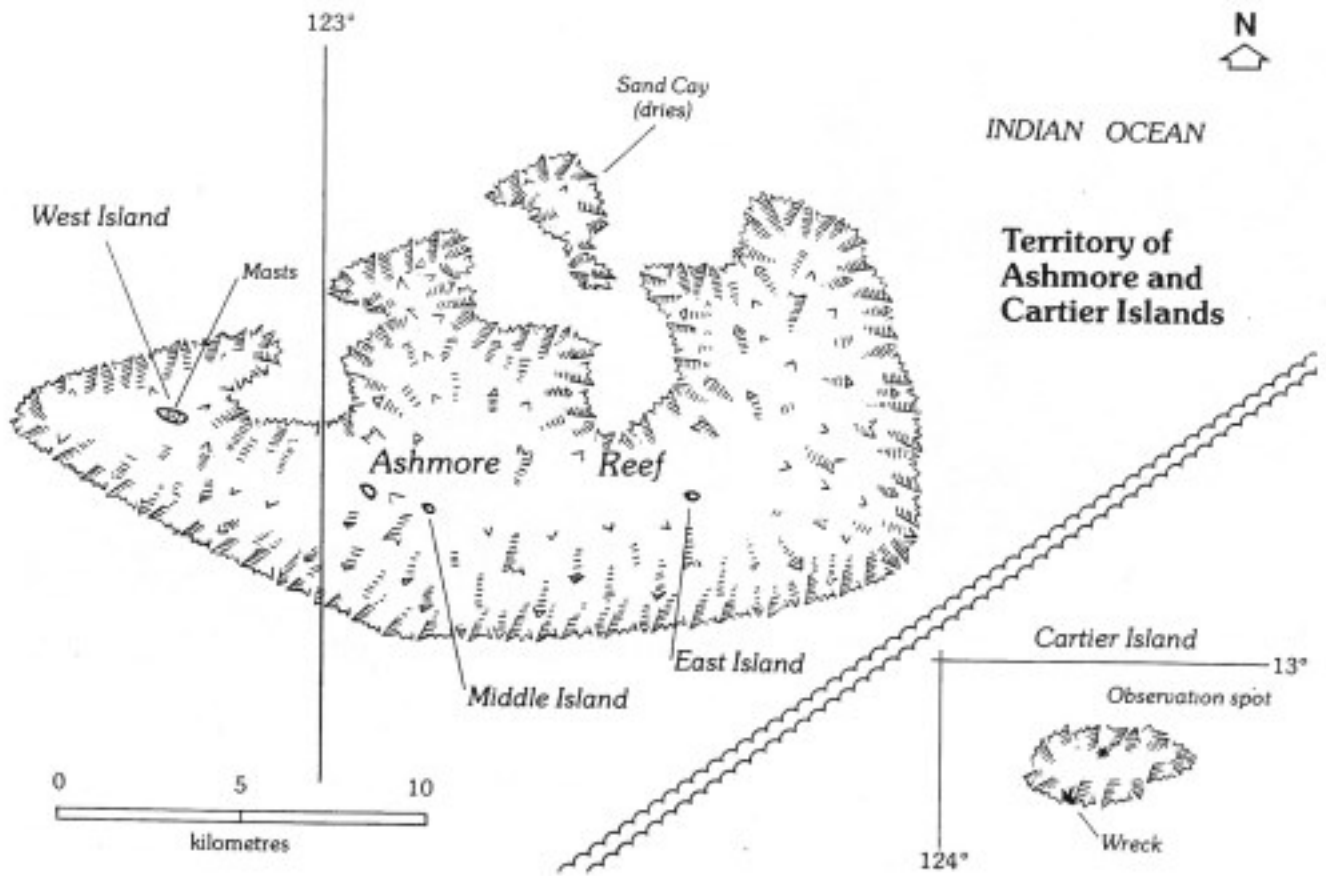
5564 Beaufighters built in Britain:

of these 450 had Merlin Engines and were used as night fighters and 2205 were Torbeaux aircraft with Hercules engines.

583 Beaufighters assembled or built in Australia:

of these 218 were imported from Britain and designated A19's, 365 were built by DAF and designated A8's, but only 364 delivered to RAAF.

Source: "Beauford, Beaufighter and Mosquito in Australian Service" by Stewart Wilson.



TERRITORIES OF ASHMORE AND CARTIER ISLANDS

Ashmore Islands (known as Middle, East and West Islands) and Cartier island are situated in the Indian Ocean some 850 km. and 790 km. west of Darwin respectively. The islands lie at the outer edge of the continental shelf. They are small and low and are composed of coral and sand. Vegetation consists mainly of grass. The islands are uninhabited.

Great Britain took formal possession of the Ashmores in 1878 and Cartier was annexed in 1909. By Imperial Order in Council of 23rd July, 1931, the islands were placed under the authority of the Commonwealth of Australia. The islands were accepted by Australia through the Ashmore and Cartier Islands Acceptance Act, 1933 under the name of the Territory of Ashmore and Cartier islands. The Territory was subsequently annexed to the Northern Territory. With the granting of self government to the Northern Territory on 1st July, 1978, the administration of the Islands became the direct responsibility of the Commonwealth Government.

The Islands in the Ashmore Reef area abound with bird life. Turtles are plentiful at certain times of the year and beche de mer is abundant. In recognition of the environmental significance of the area, the reef was, in 1983, given the status of a nature reserve under the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1975. Regular visits are made to the reef by officers of the Australian National parks and Wildlife Service.

Indonesian fishing boats have traditionally entered the area, and fish in Territory waters under an agreement between the governments of Australia and Indonesia. To prevent infringement of landing rights or destruction of protected wild life, the Department of Territories has established an Australian presence in the Territory during the fishing period of March to November each year. Ships of the Royal Australian Navy visit the islands periodically and aircraft of the Royal Australian Air Force and Civil Coastal Surveillance Service make aerial surveys of the islands and neighbouring waters.

The Jabiru and Challis oil fields in the Timor Sea lie within the adjacent areas of the Territory of Ashmore and Cartier Islands as defined in the Petroleum (Submerged Lands) Act, 1967. In July 1985, production licences were awarded over the Jabiru field to a consortium led by BHP Petroleum Pty. Ltd. Production commenced in August, 1986 at a rate of some 13,000 barrels a day. Jabiru is one of the most interesting offshore areas on the Australian continental shelf.

The Challis field has shown useful quantities of oil and significant quantities of natural gas. Development of the Challis fields is not expected to occur for two or three years, and much will depend on international oil prices.

Browse Islet and Scott Reef are part of the state of Western Australia.

*** Acknowledgement is made to the Departments of the Arts, Sport, Environment and Territories for permission to reproduce the foregoing information.

MILLIMBIMBI - 59 Operational Base Unit

A small tree covered island approximately 250 miles east of Darwin, separated from the mainland by a narrow channel of water, and was strategically placed for operations north of the continent and for the protection of shipping plying between Darwin and the east coast of Australia.

In 1941 it had a small airstrip which was extended and another strip, longer, was added at 90° to the first.

On 10th May, 1943, five Spitfires of 457 Squadron were scrambled after an alarm was sounded, but the cause turned out to be two Beaufighters returning after an abortive raid on the Aru Islands.

Nearby radar was tracking incoming aircraft which turned out to be nine Zero's. The two Beaufighters A19-72 and A19-16 were strafed by the Zero's, A19-72 being destroyed and A19-16 damaged.

TRUSCOTT AIRFIELD - 58 Operational Base Unit

11th July, 1944 - 24th March, 1946
14°05' Slat. 126°23' ELong. Altitude 150'

Truscott airfield is named after the famous ace 'Bluey' Truscott, killed at Exmouth Gulf, Polshot now Learmouth, on 28th March, 1943, and is located on the Anjo Peninsula, W.A. It is a remote area, isolated from the mainland by a steep mountain range, so most stores and equipment had to be flown in or shipped to neighbouring West Bay.

On 6th July, 1944, the last operation by 58 O.B.U. from Drysdale Mission was carried out. Over the next few weeks the unit was moved by land and sea to Truscott, a task made more difficult by the shortage of motor transport.

On 20th July, 1944, a Japanese reconnaissance plane was intercepted and shot down by three Spitfires of 54 Squadron. The 27th July, 1944 also saw the commencement of a period of full scale operations which continued until August, 1945. During this time intense bombing and strafing raids were undertaken by Beaufort, Mitchell B25, Liberator B24 and Beaufighter aircraft, as well as Catalina aircraft operating from West Bay. Other units at Truscott were:

14 Mobile Works Squadron
14 Airfield Construction Squadron
No 154 Radar Station
No 319 Radar Station

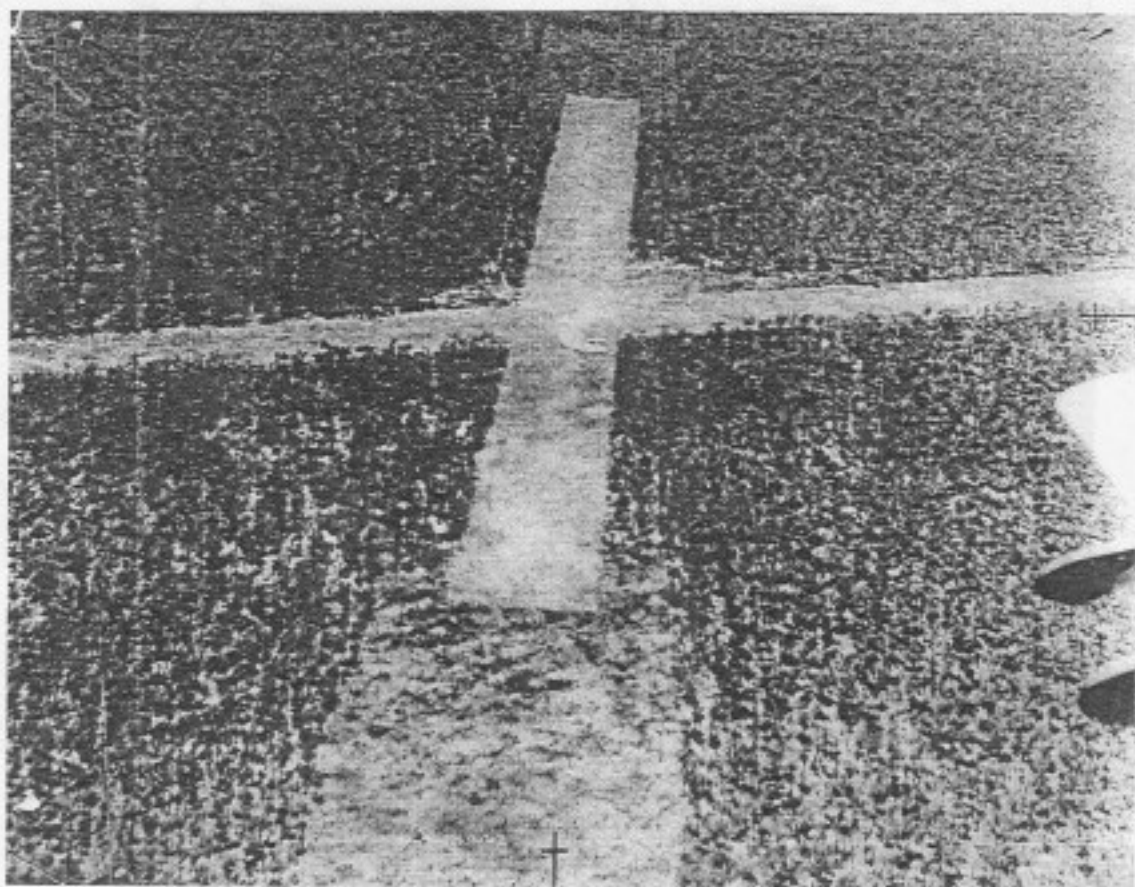
Location: 3 miles west of West Bay on Anjo Peninsula and 20 miles NW of Drysdale River Mission

The Strip: 8,000 ft of steel mat on dirt, bearing 125° magnetic.

*** Acknowledgement is made to Santos and Truscott Tribute Committee for reproduction of above and following information. Our thanks to Wing Commander C.J. Basejou A.M. for information provided.

MILLINGMEI Is., N. T.

Living Quarters 20-2-40



Landing Ground 4-12-40
(by 14 Squadron)

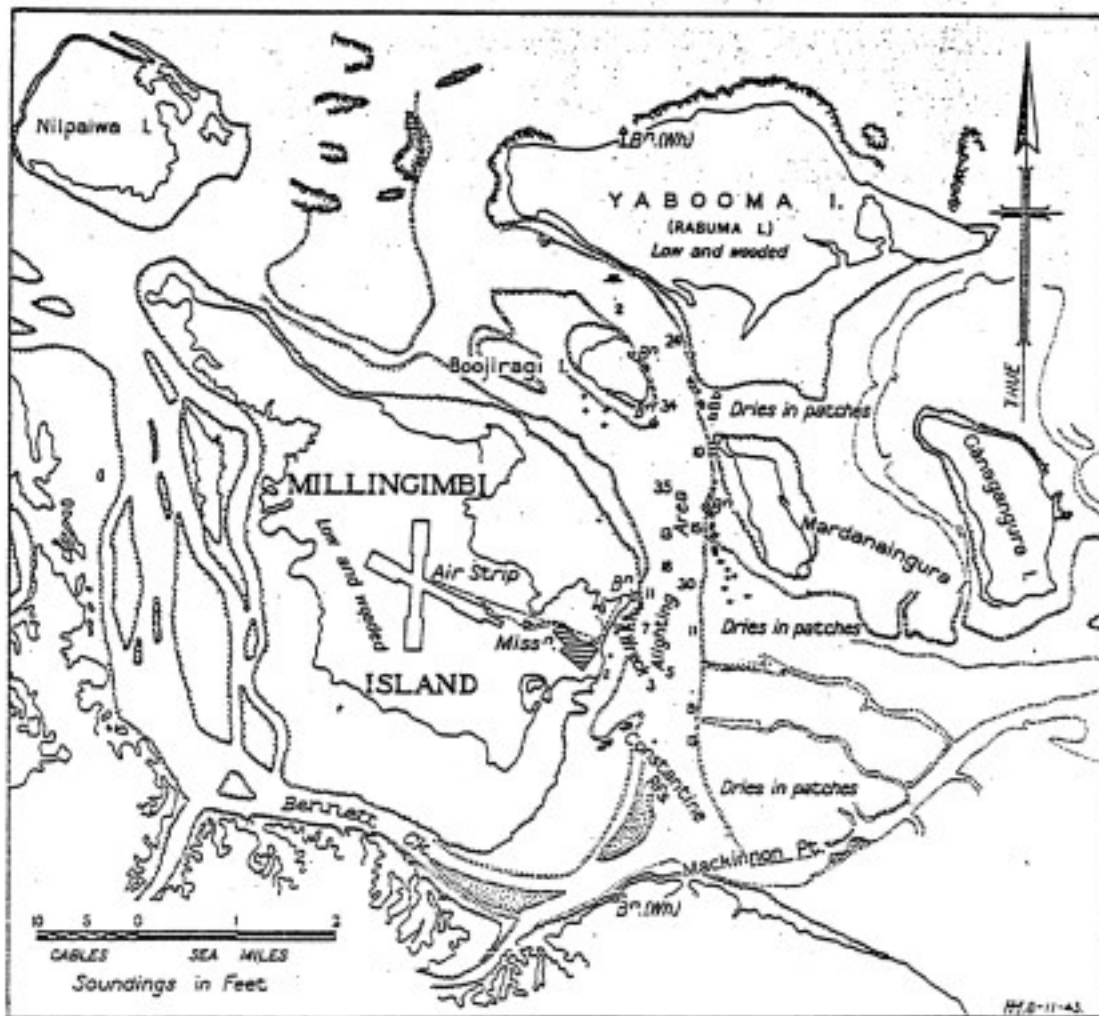


Milingimbi Drome, N.T. 21-2-41 (13 Squadron)



Milingimbi, 1990 - Courtesy Ron Lambert, 457 Squadron

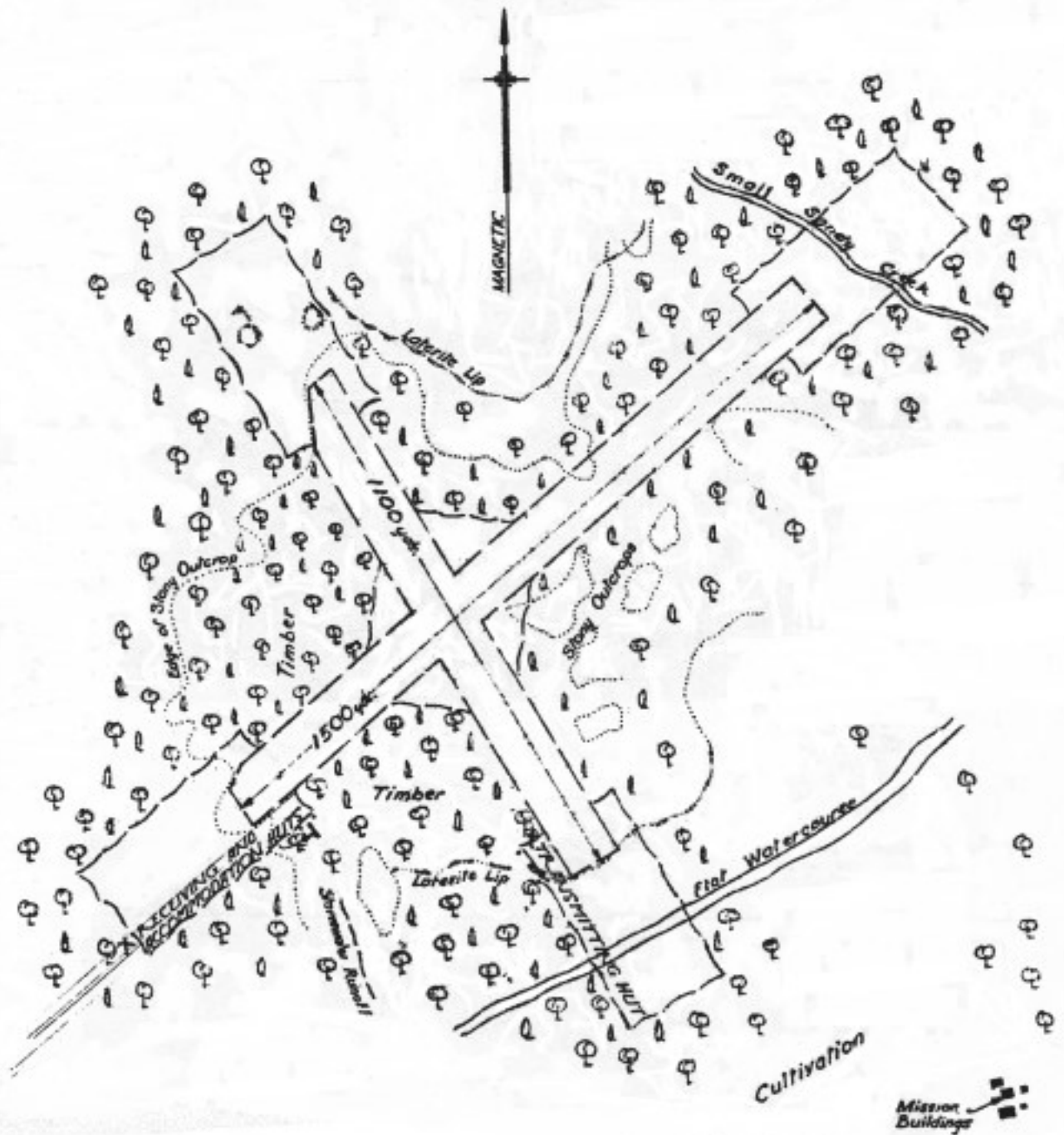
MILLINGIMBI I. N.T.



Drawn by R.A.A.F. Map Section

RAAF HISTORICAL SECTION
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE
AIR FORCE OFFICE
A-LG-02
RUSSELL OFFICES
CANBERRA A.C.T. 2600

SCALE 1" = 1,000 FEET.



DRYSDALE RIVER MISSION
WEST AUSTRALIA

CALOOMBOOROO WATERHOLE
(King Edward River)

39/40/457



A19-172 destroyed at Milingimbi



Unserviceable Spitfire of 457 Squadron, used to relay radio messages -
Milingimbi, 10-5-43. Burning Beaufighter in background

TRUSCOTT



Truscott before commencement of rebuilding, July 1969 for Santos

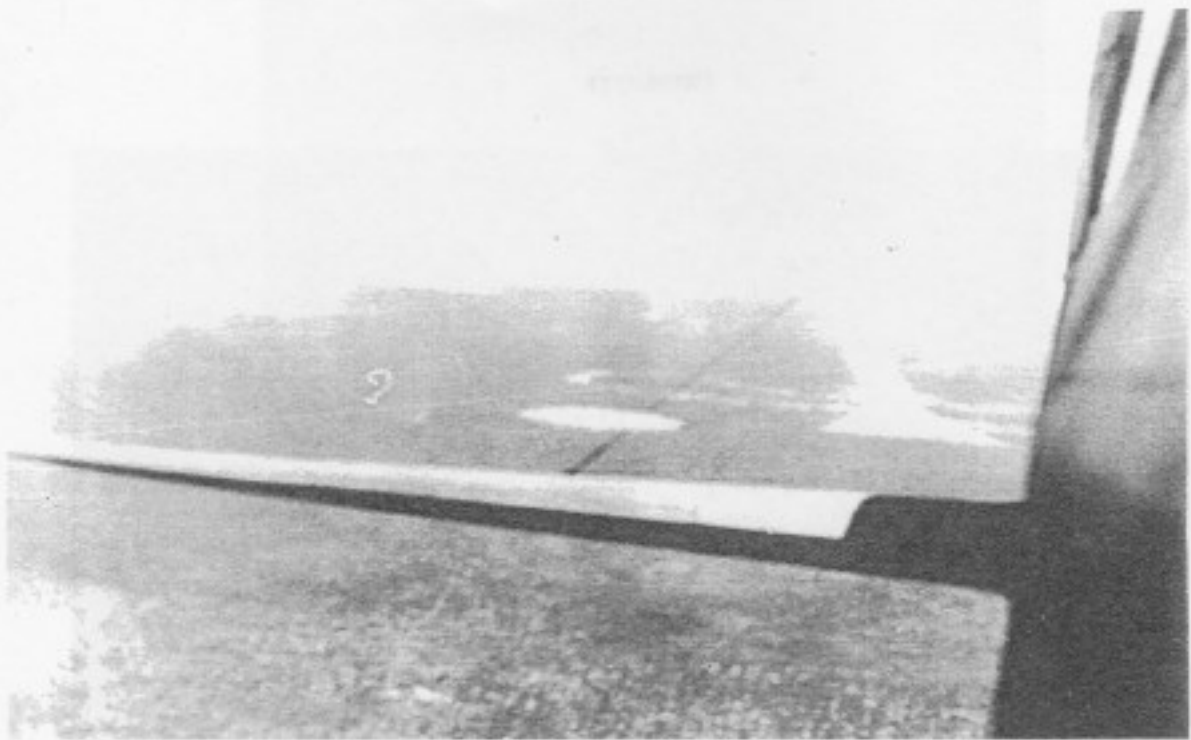


TRUSCOTT



Completed September, 1989





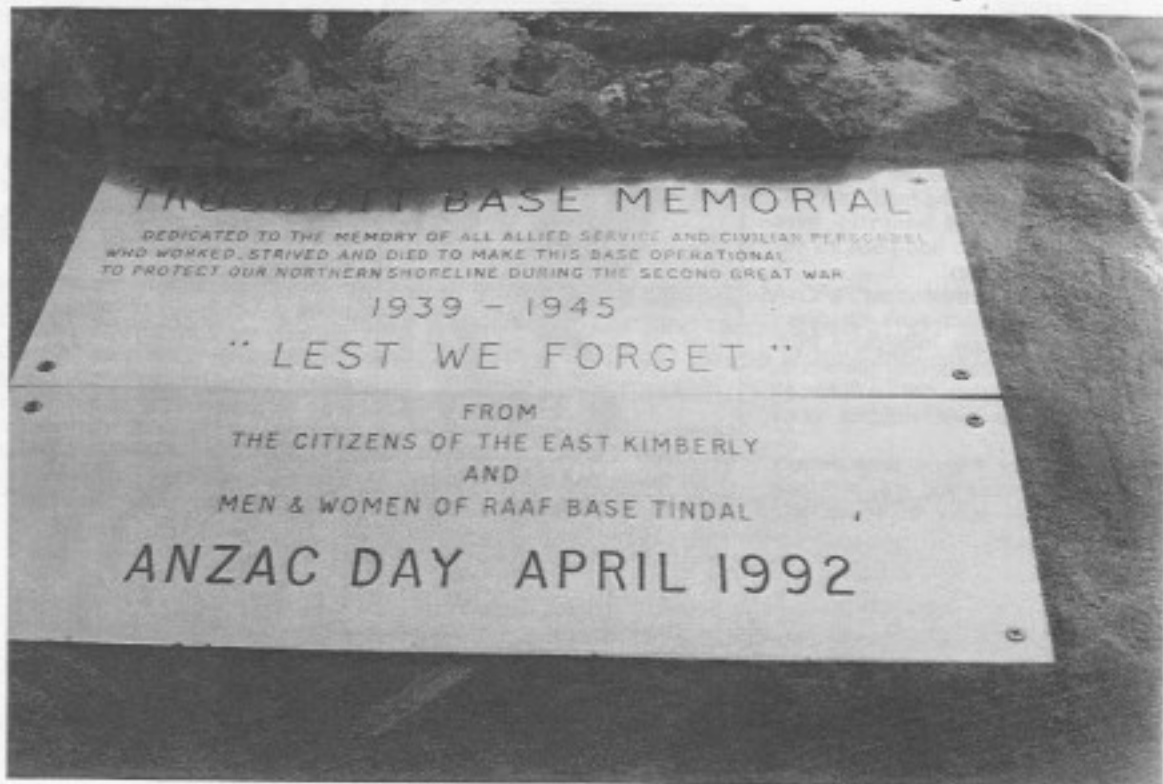
H/F D/F Site - Truscott



Duty Pilot's Tower



Memorial erected to the crew of B24 Liberator A72-1160, which crashed on take off 25-5-45. Photo's taken at Dawn Service 28-4-92. Courtesy H Young



Patients, friends pay respects to Dr Corlis

Geoff Corlis was more than a doctor — his Maryborough patients regarded him as a friend, a gentleman, a confidante, even a life-saver.

The depth of their feelings has really only come to light this week, as cards and phone calls of sympathy and support flood in to his widow June, and family.

Dr Corlis died on Sunday after a long and at times painful illness. He was 78.

Dr and Mrs Corlis came to Maryborough in 1946 to set up a practice — at the time there were only four other general practitioners in the town. And Maryborough is where the couple stayed, raised their four children, and built up a successful, busy practice.

It was only when he became too ill about two years ago that Dr Corlis retired.

His daughter Virginia said medicine was more than a career for him, it was a labour of love, a way of life.

At Wednesday's funeral and in the days before and after, it became obvious that he had been much more than the family doctor.

Some cards of sympathy were from people who had been his patients for 45 years.

One woman wrote that Dr Corlis had saved her son's life many years ago. Some calls came from people he brought into the world, and who had then turned to him to deliver their own children years later.

The large funeral drew former patients, young and old, and their families — many of whom told

Mrs Corlis of the doctor's caring qualities and genuine concern. They told family members of the devotion he had for his wife and children.

As a member of Legacy, Dr Corlis also devoted many hours to caring for the widows and children of servicemen killed in action.

A past president said that when Dr Corlis joined in 1949, Maryborough Legatees accepted responsibility for about 80 young widows and 110 very young children. Dr Corlis took on the task of the medical care of each of them.

Government assistance was non-existent, and Dr Corlis and his colleagues tended to the widows and their families' needs medically and surgically, and gained for them specialist and hospital care at no cost to the families or to Legacy.



Dr Geoff Corlis. . . devoted to his family and a friend to his patients.

Mrs Corlis said this week that not even she had known the full extent of her husband's work for Legacy.

For many years Dr Corlis was the Commonwealth and State governments medical officer and pensioner referee in Maryborough.

He was born Geoffrey Charles Corlis in Lismore on March 18, 1914, the eldest of three children.

His father was a senior surveyor for the government, and the job took the family all over New South Wales.

Dr Corlis, a keen sportsman, studied medicine at Sydney University. He graduated in 1939 and was accepted as a junior, and later senior, resident doctor at St Vincent's Hospital, Sydney.

He met June in February 1941, and they were married in September the same year. But they spent much of the first few years apart as Dr Corlis entered the RAAF, serving as a flight lieutenant and later squadron leader for the 31 Beaufighter Squadron. He served in Tarakan, Morotai and Borneo.

On his return from the war, he was senior medical officer at the Amberley Air Base before he moved to Maryborough and was discharged.

In 1955 he took one year off to travel to London to undertake post graduate work in Guys Hospital.

In a eulogy at Wednesday's funeral, son Alan said: "Dad will long be remembered as a devoted husband, and brother, a wonderful father and grandfather, a special friend and a caring family doctor, and will be sadly missed by us all."

31 Squadron Association

Taberfane, Kai Islands Operation June 1943

Successful Raid

Somewhere in Australia, Sunday - Seven enemy float planes were destroyed and two damaged when Beaufighters raided Taberfane, Aru Islands*, at dusk last night. Two luggers lying offshore were strafed, and on one there was a large explosion.

Pilots and observers who took part in the raid included:

<u>Pilot</u>	<u>W/T Navigator</u>
F/L Joe Stanley	Hayden Thorncroft
F/L Mal Forbes	Dudley Erwin
F/O Ken McDonald	Frank Magee
F/Sgt J. Muggleton	E. V. Hunt
F/Sgt E. (Basher) Barnett	Pat Lennon
F/O Bill MacKinnon	C. D. Wright
F/O Bob Ogden	Jack West

Flying Officer Forbes, who was on his first operational flight, and shot down a float plane, said:- "I turned towards him and let go at 200 yards. I saw chunks falling off him as he passed through my sights, and then burst into flames. I had to turn to avoid him and next I saw was a column of smoke from the bush slightly inshore."

Eight planes were on the water's edge. Six were left burning fiercely, and the other two were riddled with holes. Flying-Officer MacDonald destroyed three. Flight-Sergeant Muggleton one, and Sergeant Bennett and Flight-Lieutenant Stanley, who led the attack, one.

Flying-Officer Ogden strafed two luggers. Flying-Officer Hunt said:- "The Japanese must have been working on aircraft, possibly refuelling, because as I came back for a second run I could see them scooting across the beach for safety."

The enemy planes were all single-engined, four of them being Zeros with floats. All our planes returned, the only damage being a single dent on the wing of Flight-Sergeant Muggleton's plane, which was caused when he brushed over the top of a coconut palm.

Report on Raids

The following communique was issued yesterday at General MacArthur's head quarter:- NORTH-WESTERN SECTOR. Kai Islands - Taberfane. Our long range fighters, in a surprise low-level attack on the enemy sea plane base, destroyed six float planes at their moorings and damaged two others. A single enemy float plane, attempting interception, was shot down.

* Note incorrect location in News report.

THREE OF OUR AIRCREW ARE MISSING

On 24th September, 1944, two Beaufighter aircraft of 31 RAAF Squadron did not return to their base at Coomalie Creed in the Northern Territory. A19 - 192 was crewed by P/O Lloyd Ritchie and W/O Bob Warner and A19 - 208, crewed by S/Ldr Wilbur Wachett and P/O Keith Noble.

By September 1944, enemy forces north of Australia were experiencing a desperate supply situation, promoted by a wide front of Allied forces offensive operations. Concentrated harassment of enemy shipping and facilities in the NW area became vital to a swift victory over the enemy.

Special forces were infiltrated beyond the enemy front line in the East Indies and Catalina flying boats based at Darwin were heavily committed to special forces operations and mine laying sorties, which effectively restricted enemy shipping.

Many of the long range Catalina sorties, with flight durations of 20 hours, necessitated escort protection from daylight to dusk from enemy aircraft in areas beyond the range of single engine aircraft.

31 Squadron was tasked to escort Catalina operations in the area of Servea and Nila Islands, approximately 420 NM north of Darwin, from 23rd to 26th September, 1944. The crews departed Coomalie on 24th September.

On the return trip 192 and 208 crossed the N.T. coast near Cape Hotham, 60 NM NNE of Darwin. It has been ascertained that Noble was experiencing wireless equipment trouble and formatted on Ritchie.

Smoke from the end of the dry season grass fires, which rage through the N.T. coastal areas in September, added to the black night, and with no landmarks visible, crews were totally dependent on their aircraft instruments.

The two aircraft had been detected by radar and as soon as it was realized that they were lost, all bases between Darwin and Fenton switched on their airdrome lights and searchlights were displayed.

Shortly after crossing the coast, the aircraft turned east and at one time were plotted by Fighter Sector on a course of 040°T at a speed of 160 knots. After circling over the region of the South Alligator River for more than an hour, both aircraft turned south west towards Fenton, as Warner had picked up a homing beacon. Wachett followed Ritchie for a while, but again turned east. Both aircraft were being tracked by Fenton, but no communication was made with either. Ritchie did not reach Fenton as he ran out of fuel over Brock's Creed, 23 km. short of Fenton. Both aircraft then disappeared from the radar screens.

Warner bailed out first, the aircraft circled past him at low altitude, and impacted shortly after with a resounding crash only a short distance away. Warner landed safely in the darkness and was found next morning near the Adelaide River - Pine Creek railway line.

Acting on his information, the wreckage of A19 - 192 was found approximately three miles north of Brook's Creek rail siding. 31 Squadron Engineering Officer Frank Stewart and his party set out from the Brook's Creek detention camp and drove to the wreck site in about three hours. There was no sign of P/O Ritchie or his parachute at the crash site. Although vehicle travel along dry grass flats is possible, the terrain where A19 - 192 crashed is heavily vegetated, with basalt rock out-croppings, some to a height of 30 feet above the flats. To the northeast, rocky hills rise 200-300 feet above craggy watercourses and dense scrub.

It has been quoted that the greatest enemy of aircrews in North Western Australia was not the Japanese but the unpredictable weather and harsh land or sea survival conditions.

No trace of P/O Ritchie has ever been found.

The search for the wreck of A19 - 208 continued for several days, but no ground signal was sighted in what is now described as 'one of the more rugged areas of Kokadu National Park'.

The ground and air searches for A19 - 208 proved to be fruitless. One ground party from a commando unit resting at a camp on the Mary river heard an aircraft about 10.00 p.m. and knew from experience that it was in trouble. They were ordered to search to the south of their camp and were out for three days in some frightful country. One of their party died as a result of the ordeal and others had to be medically treated on their arrival back at camp.

A crew of 31 Squadron enjoying the pictures at Adelaide river were recalled to base to do a square search on the night of the 26th.

In October 1945, the wreckage of A19 - 208 was discovered by a cattleman at the intersection of Coirwong Creek and Goodparla Creek. The aircraft was nose first into the creek bank and the density of the surrounding timber would make it impossible to be sighted from the air. The crash site is 19 km. north of Goodparla Station and 14 km. from the nearest point of the track that runs from Burrundie to Oenpeli Mission on the Arnhem Plateau. The crash site is also 124 km. ESE of Coomalie Creek and 103 km. NNE of Fenton.

An investigation by a RAAF party reported that both crew members had vacated the aircraft prior to impact. A further search by NT Police and trackers could not find any trace of the airman.

In January, 1946, Mounted Constable T.C.Fitzer with aboriginal trackers searched creeks and tracks within a 15 mile radius of the wreck, interviewed stockmen, aborigines, shooters and prospectors, but to no avail.

In March - April, 1946, Mounted Constable Morey, with trackers made another search of the area. He set fire to the grass to enable a thorough search. On the second day he found a parachute and dinghy made into a shelter, with some empty ration tins on top of a rough rocky ridge, about 400 yards due east of the crash site. He presumed it was a survivors camp and that they were reasonably fit to scale the ridge. It appeared that the survivor/s had camped there a number of days before venturing to find a way home. A thorough search in all directions of the camp did not find a clue as to which direction the survivors may have gone.

Seventeen months after the crash, the three missing airmen were presumed dead.

On Friday, 1st August, 1980, a party left Alice Springs to set up a memorial at the crash site, where a party from Darwin met them.

On arriving at the crash site, they found the aircraft nose into the creek headed easterly and a 300 yard timber trail caused by the shallow descent of the aircraft still evident as reported by M/C Morey in 1946. The aircraft was a wreck. Some evidence existed that an attempt had been made to remove the port engine from the wing, without success. The aft fuselage beyond the navigators cupola had been removed by the Darwin Aviation Museum enthusiasts and it rests in their museum. The rest of the aircraft was full of compacted silt, the starboard engine had been wrenched clear of its mountings and was under the leading edge of the wing. The forward section of the cockpit and fuselage was gone. The flood waters over the years had damaged or removed the upper wing skin and the leading edge, the port undercarriage and wheel could clearly be seen still within the nacelle. Oxidization had set in. The roundel had faded, but a perfect circle could still be seen.

The memorial was assembled - consisting of a four foot semi-circular steel plate, which was anchored into the ground by four 20 inch steel pegs. A three foot pylon of thick glass panels is attached to the plate.

On Sunday, 3rd August, 1980, a memorial service was held for the two airmen. Two visitors' books were signed by those present - representatives of Alice Springs and Darwin RSL, Northern Territory Branch of the Air Force Association, Central Australian and Darwin Aircraft Museums and members of the Wackett family and other interested parties. The master visitors book was to be at the unveiling of the relic of the Beaufighter at the Central Australian Aviation Museum at Alice Springs on the 24th September, 1980 - 36 years after the crash, to be signed by those present, thence forwarded to Sir Lawrence and Lady Wackett. The second visitor's book will remain in the pylon of the memorial for signatures by visitors.

The wreck has since been removed to the Darwin Aviation Museum.

The memorial is 125 yards south of the crash site, between four stout gum trees (3 bloodwood and one ghost). Two of the bloodwoods guarding the memorial have been inscribed with the initials of the two air-

men. The memorial is also set in such a position, that to look over the memorial sighting equidistantly between the two northerly bloodwoods, would give one a bearing to the aircraft, or would have before it was removed.

Other aircrew on the same escort mission also experienced the same hazy conditions on their return to Coomalie, but were luckier.

*** The above information has been extracted from the article by John Haslett, (*Beaufighter 208*). The pictures have been supplied by John Haslett and the Wackett family.





Search Party assembling for A19-208



Alan Cobb, Fred Anderson (at radio) & Sid Green



A19 - 192



A19 - 208



Memorial set up by the Wackett family

