

The

WHISPERER

The Newsletter of the Beaufighter and
Boston Association of Queensland

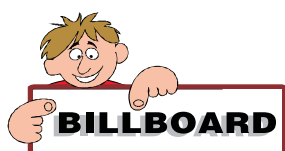
JUNE 2003

No. 1 Beaufighter Course - 5 OTU



If you can provide the name of any members of this course, please
advise the Hon. Secretary





VALE

S/Ldr Neville Dunlop passed away on 20th April 2003 after a short illness in Greenslopes hospital. Neville was 85 years of age, and though he was not in the best of health, it was expected that his stay in hospital would not be long before he was back. Unexpectedly he collapsed; and passed away suddenly.

President Ralph and members send their sincere sympathy to his wife Mary and her family.

Brisbane Anzac Day Parade 2003

The weather forecast for Brisbane prior to this year's parade was for showers developing to rain. It had rained for two days prior, and was raining on the night of the 24th. In spite of this there were only two very light showers and the weather was great for the parade.

In spite of this forecast numbers of participants and members of the public were up on last year. In accordance with the arrangement of positions in the march alternating yearly, the Air Force was the last cab of the rank for 2003. Initially there was a problem of our assembly location, which was easily resolved. The Commanding Officer of 219 Cadet Squadron had advised that two cadets from the squadron would attend to carry our banner. For an unknown reason only one cadet turned up and another had to be found before the start. Don Curran had agreed to replace the missing cadet, but fortunately we were able to obtain a replacement from some spare cadets on site.

A disappointing few members attended and this was the poorest attendance we have ever had. There were some eleven members there, five of whom were not able to march and took part in a vehicle. Included in this group were Charlie King, Stan Curran, Frank Beadle, Ron Snell from Townsville, and yours truly. There were six members for the marching squad and led once again by Bill O'Connor. In the squad was Jim Hamilton from Mackay, who was disappointed none of his particular squadron friends were present. In addition there were a couple of friends and two associate members. Some Air Force Cadets increased the squad. It was great that two members traveled all the way from North Queensland to take part. The occurrence of the following weekend being Easter certainly did not help with numbers. Regardless, I feel the time may have arrived that it will be necessary to have a serious look at our future participation.

Once again the system of placing vehicles in position with their units fell down badly again and the vehicle, a covered blitz buggy was placed behind three units after the Association. Last year the vehicle was placed behind the Beaufort Squadron. The normal practice of dropping off the members in the vehicle at the end of the march, where each had made personal arrangements to be picked up; fell down and we were taken all the way back to the starting point that caused quite a problem. This was eventually solved by the members being placed in some of the jeeps, which were the last section of the parade and went around for a second time and off loaded at the finish point.

It is usual for the presenters on the ABC's television broadcast to make reference to the leader and some quotes on the history of each unit. Once again zero reference. I have written to the committee about this. As I provide the necessary information in writing each year as requested by the Parade committee. A few of us went to Greenbank RSL for lunch and some convivial drinks.



CONGRATULATIONS

Three of our members have been awarded the Prime Minister's Centenary medal for services to the community. They are: Pres. Ralph Ind, Vice-Pres Bill O'Connor and Ken Clarke. Congratulations fellows, it is great to see you recognised for all the voluntary community you have done over the years.

Don Angus Memories

Continued from February 03 issue

While the unit was at Bohle River, transport was laid on to take us into Townsville after stand-down and bring us back when the picture or the dance ended. The trucks used to pick us up somewhere along the Esplanade, and we were guided to our Squadron vehicles in the pitch black by the cry "B-O-H-L-E-E- R-I-V-E-R-R". The 22 Squadron fellows identified their trucks with the call "H_-O-O-L-E-Y- D-O-O-L-E-Y-Y".

During our stay at Garbutt, Bruce Robertson and I drove round the Station in a W/T servicing truck. While we on the Station there were a couple of air raid alerts, and we had to black the place out, but nothing came of them.

I was sent down to the wharves to help load the ship and on 10th September the Squadron embarked first on the wrong ship, and then on the Taroona, which sailed early the next morning. About three days later about twenty of us were taken to Wards in an American C49 including our Equipment Officer and one of the Intelligence officers. We landed at Wards and no sooner had our feet touched the ground than Warrant Officer Good co-opted us to help his Advance Party in setting the camp up at June Valley.

We put up a tent to house the W/T Ops, and Padre Kirby eventually took over the one next door. I was never keen on him, for among other things, he was a parsimonious bloke. Most of us went to church every now and again because it was something to do, whereas my mate, Bruce Robertson a very clean-living bloke went to church nearly every time it was on. We were lying around in our tent one day when the Padre dropped in to pass the time of the day, and at one stage, looked at Bruce and said "I've never seen you at church".

Years later my wife bought a book written by Reginald J Kirby about the witches covens in England, and it the filthiest book I'd ever set eyes on at that time. That turned me off Kirby. He came from a high church in Victoria, and probably looked after elderly old ducks. Maybe I'm doing him an injustice and he wasn't the author of that particular book.

After Kirby, there was another Baptist minister, but he got sent back to Concord Hospital. At my suggestion, Mum and Dad used to visit him and take him some home cooked lamingtons and scones and generally befriend him. The Padre told them that he would write to me and let me know that my parents had been looking after him — but that letter never arrived. Neither did the next one he was supposed to have written to me. I didn't have much faith in Padres after that.

Before the kites got really active at Wards, we were

sent to work with a wireless crowd up on a hill beside the strip; there was a Signals Office up there, which we helped to run. It was in a big hut, with a generator outside. Because we used to communicate with the Moresby signals office over the air, I got to know the names of all the operators there, (one of them being Jack Cloake) and we used to visit them when we went into town.

While we were with that wireless unit near the strip, one of our jobs was to lay telephone lines from woe to go. We were on shift- work while we were there, and the WOD (Ted Good) would get really annoyed when he found us sleeping in our beds at about ten in the morning; he couldn't accept that we weren't bludging about.

Later on, we went back to work with the Squadron, and set up a W/T section off a taxiway at the northern end of Wards. We had an AT5/AR8 set and kept a listening watch whenever the Beaufighters were out. It was entirely unofficial, and we did it for our own interest. We knew all the blokes and wanted to keep track of what they were doing; for instance, e heard what they were saying during the Battle of the Bismark Sea and of course whatever we heard was soon passed round the rest of the unit.

When the throat microphones were acquired for the Squadron, there was a lot of inter-comm and radio trouble. We eventually found that the wires between the mike and the on/off switch were snapping because they were made of brittle metal, so we replaced them with more flexible copper wire.

There was also a lot of trouble with the radio sets in the Beaufighters breaking down. We did a lot of tests and reckoned it was the heat and the humidity affecting the resistors in fact, Cress Clark put a blow-torch on one of them and took photographs to show what we reckoned was causing the failures. They were sent down south.

Another job that we had to do quite often was to replace the trailing aerial, which was torn off because the navigator hadn't wound it back in before the aircraft landed.

Colin Harvey was the Squadron Signals Officer, but there was a Warrant Officer Signals in charge of us. Corporal Sheerin was in charge of our particular section and when he left, George Burton Graham took over. He wrote "None Shall Survive", the story of the Bismark Sea, and had all the get-up-and-go you could ever imagine. The officers were supposed to be the only ones issued with pith helmets, but George managed to acquire one. When an American General stepped out of his aircraft at Wards, George, wearing his tiger-shooter, stepped up and, pretending to be a public relations man, said, "Corporal Graham, from the RAAF, sir. I'd like to get your story on your visit".

Continued on page 4

Continued from page 3

The CO was up there, and we were down here; he couldn't give a hang about anyone in his squadron except his aircrew and his aircraft. That's all he was interested in. I've seen him a few times since the war, but he's never acknowledged me; for the time he was in the Squadron, I doubt if he ever knew any of the airmen there. He was a good pilot, and that sort of thing, but he didn't worry too much about his troops, who didn't have much time for him. Gunner Norm Carroll 'acquired' an American jeep for the CO; he was a Motor Transport Driver in the Squadron. Years later Eric Lusk and I went into the clubhouse of the Bankstown Golf Club and saw a fellow standing at the bar, dressed in plus fours and smoking a fat cigar, who turned out to be Norm Carroll, the Captain of the Club. He was a real rough diamond.

I know that Norm who was a real rough diamond stole the jeep at Moresby, but I haven't any idea who pinched the one at Goodenough. That Jeep had a terrific lot of radio equipment fitted in the back of it, and the story was that a big operation against Rabaul was being held up because the radio gear was missing. Every unit on the Island was paraded and it was announced that the jeep was to be returned immediately, and that if anyone was caught with it they would be shot on sight. I know that one of the fellows in the Squadron took it, but I can't tell you who it was.

The blokes thought that Curly Wearne was all right, but that he was very much under the thumb of Black-jack. They all thought he was a reasonable sort of a bloke.

The Airmens' Mess was behind the Sergeants' Mess, and two of the cooks who prepared the meals for the three messes were known as Lola and Brenda. In my innocence, I never understood what was going on, that they were having a bit of a joke, dressing up with flimsy scarves.

The time that I realised the pair were fair dinkum was when little Ewen Blackman a baby-faced kid was sitting on his bed in our tent when the pair of queens came in, and one of them sat next to Ewen. After the four of us had been talking for a few minutes, the next thing I knew was that young Ewen leapt to his feet and shot off out of the tent as fast as he could run. What happened, I don't know, but young Blackie would never go near either Lola or Brenda again. There wasn't much variety in the meals, but my favourite was meat and vegetables. We always had plenty of dog biscuits and we also had a lot of bully beef, but the only way I could eat that was to smother it with pickles which I bought from the canteen. You know, I used to buy tins of Asparagus at that canteen and post them back to mum in Sydney. I used the cake tins that mum sent with home baked goodies, to pack the American cigarettes I sent home to my sister.

Some of the fellows made some good things out of perspex, but I was never very much good with my hands. I think my daughters have got one or two of the perspex 'foreigners' I made, using the clear perspex, and tooth-brush handles to provide a bit of colour.

When we were at Goodenough we lived on dog biscuits and baked beans for weeks on end, but the monotony was broken when the boys hi-jacked a fair few cases from the back of trucks taking the stuff from the wharf to No 11 DID, which was right next door to us. There was a sharp bend in the very narrow road, which was bordered with ten-foot high kunai grass, and the trucks had to very nearly stop to get round. Our fellows would hide in the grass at that spot, jump on the back of the truck, throw cases off to their mates, jump off, and whip the cases off to hiding places around the strip. So we lived very well for a few weeks after that.

Arthur Stone was a very strong bloke. His father was secretary of a cricket club and Arthur was a good cricketer too. I played as well, and we held our games on a bit of flat ground over the road at 22 Squadron's camp. Arthur was the mainstay of the 30 Squadron cricket team. In addition, he was the Squadron SP bookie and ran the two-up games, and any other gambling activities around the place.

I was mainly interested in baseball, which we used to play over at 22 Squadron. We had some good matches, including taking on the Yanks every now and again, but there were quite a number of times that their side didn't turn up. Maybe they couldn't find us. I was a pitcher, Frank Simpson was a catcher, so was Jack Hunter, and we roped in Gordon Kitching, an Australian Army Captain who was a friend of Jack Hunter.

There was an observer in the Squadron who was also involved in gambling, but I think his main interest lay in poker. That was Sergeant Bell.

One of the other observers in the Squadron Phil (Dit) Edwards was a mad morse man, he was one of those blokes who used a fancy key, the kind that went from side to side instead of up and down. He could go like the clappers.

There was a 30 Squadron band, not a professional outfit, you understand, but they mainly gave us some jam sessions in somebody's tent. Chris Clarke Owen Fenwick was on the piano, but where he got that from I don't know; Bruce Robertson used a cup to simulate the sounds of a didgeridoo, and we used to have sing songs around the camp lines: we had a lot of fun that way.

Jim Davidson brought a big band up to New Guinea and put on a great performance at one of the camps closer to town.

We used to go down to the Motor Transport Section and ask where the pictures were on that night they seemed to know all that sort of thing, for there was a show on somewhere every night of the week. When only a few

Continued on page 5

Continued from page 4

fellows wanted to go to see one of them, I used to take the jeep, and if nobody else was interested I took either the jeep or the Harley Davidson motor bike. The roads were nothing but mud holes after rain, and there were times when I skidded in the mud and because the bike was so darned heavy I had to wait until someone else came along and lifted the bike off me.

When we went to the pictures after heavy rain at Kiriwina, we got rid of the pools of surface water by jamming a bayonet into the ground, wriggle it around, and after we pulled it out, the water would drain away just like down the bathroom pipe after you pulled the plug out. The water would run down through the hole in the packed surface soil and into the coral below. There was some headquarters outfit at Townsville; when we were at Goodenough there were a lot of complaints about the food there and some high-ranking officer Air Commodore Hewitt got up from his breakfast, flew over, abused the lot of us for complaining, and then flew back to have another good meal at Townsville.

Hon. Sec. Visits Memorial



Peter visited the Beaufighter Boston Assoc. Memorial at the Qld. Air Museum at Caloundra on November 2002.

It is still in good condition and well looked after.



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Dear Members

As I have mentioned over the past few years as President of Surfers Paradise RSL Sub-Branch I am required to lead both the Dawn & the Civic services at Surfers. It is with great regret that I am not able to be present at the Anzac Day March in Brisbane & be with the Association. However even if I had been in Brisbane the number of members marching under our banner would still have been very small.

I am afraid the old quotation "They shall grow not old as we that are left grow old" unfortunately appears to becoming rather pertinent to many of our members.

This non attendance of some members at various Association functions is very noticeable on occasions such as eg. presentation days at RAAF Amberley, RAAF Commemoration Eucumenical Church Service at St. Lucia, the Passing Out Parade & other functions of 219 Sqdn AAFC. & very importantly our recent AGM & BBQ. Naturally this lack of attendance is very distressing particularly to Peter who is himself not a well man but nevertheless puts a tremendous effort into keeping this Assoc. alive.

I believe it is time we were completely honest with ourselves & ask the question "In view of the disappointing attendance of our members at the 2003 Anzac Day March in Brisbane how can we justify the place allocated to us in the Parade?" My view is that we should give serious consideration to not participating as an Assoc. in future Anzac Day Marches in Brisbane because of the age & infirmity of many of our members but that we should concentrate our efforts on the other functions enumerated above.

Please contact Peter with your thoughts ASAP.

On an other tack, our congratulations must go to our worthy Patron Sir James Killen KCMG on his award of the Centenary Medal.

Regards

RALPH

INCENTIVE

. . .and if you screw up just this much, you will be flying a cargo plane full of rubber dog poop out of Hong Kong

Air Boss Johnstone from Top Gun

NO MEAN FEAT

A LITTLE OF 30 SQUADRON AND A WHOLE LOT MORE

Inspired by Fred "Beaufighter" Cassidy's tireless devotion to posterity's cause

Written by "Blackjack's" daughter #2 - Linda Dean:

"Glen Luna" Stuart Town 2820 Phone : (02) 6846 8349

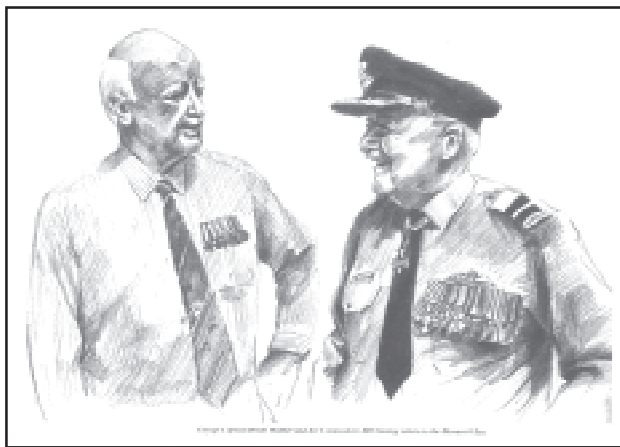


Illustration - Jeff Isaacs

March the 3rd 2003 commemorates sixty years since the turning point of the Pacific war, the forgotten Battle of the Bismarck Sea. Few people know now what a close run bet was preserving the Australia we love all so well, with other nations powerful tales media omissions and the years combine depriving our national identity of an icon belonging in southern skies. The icon is the Beaufighter: a formidable WWII aircraft that was vital to our defence.

Fred Cassidy was a 20 year old radio operator/navigator/observer, six months into his first tour of Beaufighter operations when with pilot Mos Morgan in A19-50 they rendezvoused with 30 Squadron 6,000 feet, above Cape Ward Hunt. B25's already circled 700 feet below them as echelons of strike aircraft galvanised the sky, the assembling armada an indelible sight.

At 10a.m. Flying Fortresses began the first tactical run from 7,000 feet as the Beaufighters began a shallow dive for a low level frontline approach. Ed Lerner's 90th Squadron of converted B25C-1s followed the Beau's in 2nd echelon right formation while the 3rd echelon of mast height assault the 89th's dive-bombers approached from the south. With the fighter cover of Lightnings, over 90 aircraft closed north towards the convoy of enemy ships.

Meanwhile, on board the ships below, all seemed well. The convoy's command briefed the assembly on deck gearing up for Tokyo's imperative of a swift efficient debarkation that previous convoys to Lae had used effectively. This convoy's 6,000 troops, their equipment and fuel would in just a few short hours consolidate the strategic potential of 51th's Division units already landed in New Guinea.

After Australia's successful defence of Kokoda and Allied success at Buna with heavy expenditure upon the troops, Tokyo's continued thrust toward Australia would find an exhausted resistance in New Guinea. Be that as it may as the unsuspecting Lieutenant Hashimoto announced that early morning air raids on Moresby had neutralised any air attacks, his surprised assembly spotted B 17's above, and the address continued, Beaufighters descending and, with rippling apprehension on board, an unprecedented swarm of aircraft from all directions prompting the officer's obligatory action swung into defence.

The destroyer's big guns fired at the B17s, while the smaller guns targeted the low front line assault. Command ordered an evasive tactic of out maneuvering and gunning procedure at which their battle crews were skilled. From 500 feet above sea level the Beaufighters dropped below the flak to where the ship's bow shielded them and at 220 knots closed some distance before banking right.

Holding formation in line abreast, the Beau's rounded the convoy's leading, left flank evading tracers with speed and low altitude: and found themselves flying through a shower of potential death by friendlies, the 39th Squadron fighter's drop tanks. Moments before and directly above, the Lightnings had engaged the arriving Zeros in combat. The destroyers below powered confidently after the Beaufighters in an evasive maneuver against the torpedoes of low flying broadside Beaufort attacks. They had made a fatal miscalculation of weapons capability.

Behind their long curving wakes the transports were unprotected. Two flights each of 6 Beaufighters banked left avoiding the warships and came in at the less heavily defended transports, climbed and split off into pre-selected diving attacks, the four 20mm cannons and six .303 machineguns of each aircraft opening up.

Devastating firepower was concentrated into the bridge to eliminate the command structure, anti aircraft positions and decks flailed, clearing defences, confusion reigning for incoming waves of machine gunning B25C-1's mast height bomb drops in a text book operation of "Bull" Garing's ambitious plan in unrelenting waves of synchronised mast height high level attack.

Within moments the Beau's were flying through an arsenal of 1,000 & 500lb allied bombs and/or their waterspouts from the conventional bombers B25s and B 17s on runs above. Outside his cupola a moment turned

Continued on page 7

Continued from page 6

into eternity as a skip bomb captured Fred's gaze flying parallel beside he and Mos. Pre-empting collision or harm amidst the swarming attack about the ships relied on the observer's keen sense of self preservation. In A19-5 braced behind "Torchy" Uren, the intrepid Australian cameraman, Damian Parer shooting for the Dept. of Info. saw horizon, sea, a destroyer, black puffs of ack ack, tracers whip by then a cargo ship and the shock, shudder and jar of the cannons opening up prior to a gut-wrenching, knee buckling, G defying lift up over the masts for an eyeful of arcing sky while navigator, Dave Beasley, reloaded a salvo for the next run of attack.

The battle hardened cameraman whose footage of Kokoda lives on as a focus for the Australian identity rode the adrenaline and exhilaration of the ultimate weapons platform the Beaufighter, throughout the most decisive 20 minutes of Australia's struggle against invasion. Meanwhile, one well respected RAAF analyst waited on the bedrock confidence that astute men are able to provide in any event.

Group Captain "Bull" Garing was the RAAF lynchpin that galvanised support of the USAF from U.S. Generals, Ennis Whitehead and George Kenney for an audacious battle plan. Three squadrons at the core of attack grounded his plan with their outstanding valour plus, now, with the ever diminishing supply of aircraft the moment had arrived that only with concentrated use of air power in a joint operation could the enemy's gathering strength at Lae be stopped.

Successful destruction of the convoy would place a double edged sword into Allied hands with the hope of aircraft replacements to the Pacific arena from Britain and the U.S. as with Japan's control over her supply routes broken troop reinforcements would grind to a halt and so prove the Pacific well worth supporting.

"Bull" Garing was intimate with Australia's strategic position within air-sea operation and honed by combat in England had returned prior to Pearl Harbour via the U.S.A. to set up the first war room in Australia. He was in Townsville when General Kenney arrived to set up the 5th U.S. Air Force. Later, with 9 Operational Group in New Guinea he'd helped orchestrate the first defeat of a Japanese invasion force where incidentally Beaufighters first saw combat at Milne Bay in August of '42.

From September onwards Army/Air cooperation lent their air attacks to embattled troops along the Kokoda track. The Japanese called the Beaufighter attacks "Whispering Death" for their deadly stealth. Flying low through the rugged terrain, enemy positions below the trees were hit with pinpoint accuracy. Shipping into Buna and Lae was also regularly strafed in support of Australian and by November, Allied troops.

Beaufighters had finally arrived from England throughout 1942, after a wait of several years. They

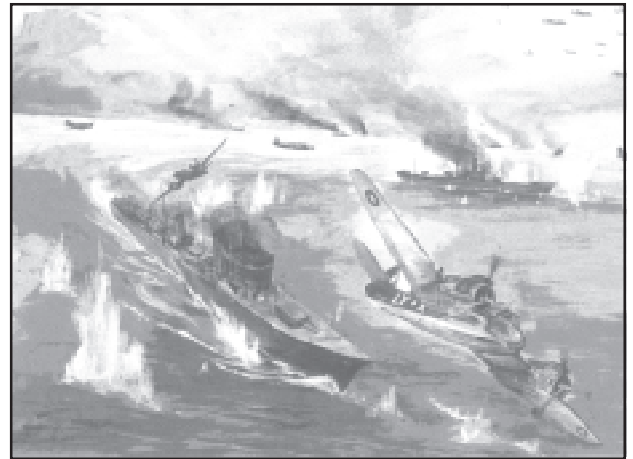


Illustration - Jeff Isaacs

equipped two squadrons for a period that beggars a tribute to the maintenance wizardry of crews that kept both squadrons active. 30 Squadron was first formed at Richmond and sent straight to Moresby arriving in synchronicity with the Japanese 44th Mountain Artillery Unit to the ridge above the Allied bastion. 30 Squadron's huge success depended on a highly skilled two man crew within a utilitarian close-knit squadron structure. Under the unorthodox leadership of Wing Commander "Blackjack" Walker, ground and aircrews developed genuine bonds of friendship based on mutual respect borne of the commander's multi tasking priorities. He wanted his crews to survive.

The Beaufighter was built to take punishment and still fly. Her twin Hercules sleeve-valve engines were quiet on approach, with the power to outrun a Zero at sea level. She was the most heavily armed aircraft of her day. 30 Squadron became imbued with their commander's death defying charisma.

"Blackjack" Walker was a peerless aviator, aircraft buff and inspired instructor of methods still in use who regularly flew the gauntlet beyond an aircraft's design limitations. His friendly rivalry forged strong bonds of friendship between Australian and American aircrew. Of note is an ongoing joust between he and Major Ed Larnier aimed at flattening the other's tent with the well placed downdraft of wind off the wing.

"Blackjack" was the one man Garing could rely on to take his plan from the feasible, through a rehearsal stage to the cutting edge of mast height attacks that made the Battle of the Bismarck Sea the devastating blow that "Bull" Garing had envisaged. After just 20 minutes, 7 transports and 4 destroyers were either sunk or left sinking. Throughout 1943 and on into '44 the Japanese were pushed out of New Guinea and then from Rabaul with the swift-striking Beaufighters playing a major role. The USAAF benefited from the strategic information sent by coast watchers, from behind the enemy line. "Ultra's" code breakers another Australian capability also provided intelligence that made the allied war effort

Continued on page 8

Continued from page 7

extremely effective, and radar jamming operators a later development.

When the all conquering General Douglas Macarthur took off through the Pacific with the comprehensive record of what his leadership lacked, lie denied acknowledgement where such was due, and held the records that held the proof. Added to the burden of decent men affected by the gamble of war on lives is the action in time that allows one person to deny a nation her rightful pride.

A comprehensive perspective of the Australian war effort, like the skeleton in a charlatan's closet, could well hide in the Macarthur archives in the U.S.A for in the meantime, logbooks, memoirs and disjointed Australian records hints of extraordinary achievement that Macarthur truly held back on.

Beaufacturers served Australia with distinction:

From 1942 through to the end of 1944 30 Squadron moved from New Guinea through the Solomons across to what is now Indonesia and up into the Philippines. 31

Squadron began their service under Squadron Leader Rose in November 1942 from their base on the north west of the continent. Long range missions over vast tracts of open sea to Timor and beyond tested the most experienced crews. In March 1943 the very month of the Battle of the Bismarck Sea England aero-graphed design blueprints so that Australia could manufacture her own supply.

In November 1943 the first Australian-built Beau' flew into combat. The Australian Beaufacturers were built to Australian specifications that enhanced her performance beyond the original design.

Our population of 6 million produced 365 Beaufacturers in all at the rate of one a day with spares, no mean feat, and a symbol from which to derive a great sense of pride.

Fred Cassidy is just one veteran who dearly wants future generations of Australians to have pride in what his generation of Australians achieved and believes that our Government's endorsement of his "beloved" Beau' is a solid step towards that end.

KIMBE MEMORIAL

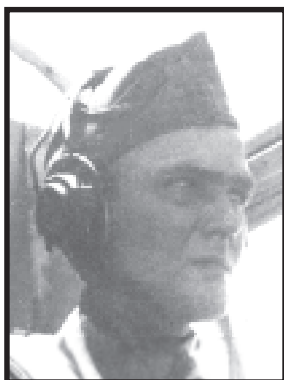
I have received correspondence and e-mails from George Robertson concerning the addition of an additional plaque to the Kimbe Memorial. The plaque was to remember F/O Ron Bonython, who was the pilot of the Seagull which joined in the search for A19- 132. Observer Ray Kelly from 30 Squadron crewed the aircraft which failed to return from the search.

Ron's name was omitted inadvertently from the original plaque and George designed a separate plaque, which was placed on the Memorial early in April, and unveiled and dedicated during this year's Anzac Day Service at Kimbe. Wreaths were laid for 22, and 30 Squadrons during the service.

George advises that he has a few dollars remaining from donations received from 30 Squadron Association and the relatives of the men who lost their lives. The Beaufacturer and Boston Association provided the plaque that was designed by George. He advises he will use this surplus to further his search for A19-33, and the remains of the crew Pilot Harold Woodruffe, and Navigator John Brooks This is now the only Beaufacturer and crew which crashed in New Britain that have not yet been found, in spite of some pretty accurate locations provided by the crews who flew on the same mission.



To date the RAAF has refused to do a land search, which would be very difficult in spite of this pretty accurate information.



Memoirs of The Late Bob Wemyss

Continued from March issue

Not all the Squadron had moved to Tadj; quite large number had remained at Kiriwina, and in time they loaded all our stores and heavy equipment on to an American Liberty ship and sailed up to Noemfoor. The Tadj people nearly 200 personnel all told flew up to the new operational base and the Squadron was established on Noemfoor on 4th August 1944. When the Beaufighters arrived the crews found that the campsite had been partly cleared and the camp was beginning to take shape. 'Woody' and I were told to get a tent from a pile near the Barracks Section, put it up and settle in. Eventually we had quite a comfortable establishment with a wooden floor raised on stumps, although the area was never flooded because the water simply drained away through the coral and the whole site was quite clean. Bert Moody and Bill Aitcheson were our tent-mates for a few weeks.

Peter Bird was the Squadron's Medical Officer, and I found him to be a very pleasant young man. He told me that he knew very little about practical medicine and patient treatment. He'd finished medical school and had done very little more than prescribe for coughs, colds and dirty holes. He was despairing a little bit that his skills were rather limited and that he had had no opportunity for developing them. I don't recall that I ever had an occasion to report to the MO while I was in the tropics.

The Dental Officer attached to our Squadron was John Cole - another very pleasant fellow. He treated me while I was at Noemfoor and one of my molars blew up. He decided not to fool around, so took it out. Fortunately, I never had to have any of my teeth drilled with that awful pedal operated drill such as I had seen in my teenage days in the surgery of the dentist at Winton.

All the officers and all the aircrew used the Aircrew Mess, which was accommodated in a large marquee. There was a very pleasant atmosphere in the Mess amongst all its members and this camaraderie must have benefited the Squadron in its operational role. I was aware that there was not the same feeling among the aircrew of No 22 Boston Squadron, whose camp was near ours, and where the NCO aircrew had to use the Sergeants' Mess.

I filled in some of my spare time at Noemfoor playing cards, bridge and Chinese Checkers; Ralph Clay,

Ron Graham, and myself had a regular thing going. Of course there was the movies they were always on somewhere around the Island, and there were visiting entertainment shows, such as Bob Hope, Frances Langford, and a female dancer called Thomas. Occasionally we had Chips Rafferty and his concert party and during one of their visits they put on a very rude version of Cinderella, at which our Padre was most displeased. It was a gem.

Some of the less than polite songs we sang in our off-duty time included "It's Hard to go Wrong in the Kunai", "You Should Have Been Here for the Do, Boys", "Beaufighter Bastards" and "We're Here on Noemfoor Isle Never Mind". Bert Braithwaite sang the latter song in the Mess one night and it apparently offended Jack Sandford and Ron Rankin for they got up and walked out the Mess straightaway.

When Selwyn, the Adjutant went south, Carey Thompson appointed me as Adjutant and Canteen Officer. I found that the Canteen had little cash in hand and I wanted money to buy stock to replenish the shelves. I didn't have that kind of dough, but I knew that my fitter IIE Darkie Nolan had made a substantial amount by making foreigners which he sold to the Yanks. He agreed to loan me a great roll of guilders and I undertook to repay him. However, I went south at short notice and clean forgot all about that loan, and found out later that Darcy had had great difficulty getting his money out of the system especially as there was no documentary evidence about the loan.

While the Squadron was operating from Kamiri Strip the aircraft were fitted with rocket rails and began training with those weapons. A team under Flight Lieutenant Lavery flew up from one of the Aircraft Depots in Australia to show the groundstaff how to handle the rockets. I fired rockets on only one or two sorties, and I'm not sure that other pilots used them very often.

Some pilots found that the Beaufighter was not a particularly easy aeroplane to fly, and became quite apprehensive at take-off and landing. Added to the discomfort of life in rather primitive conditions in the tropics were the tensions brought on by flights over unfriendly territory and attacks against defended targets. It was inevitable that the less robust individuals would feel stress and try to avoid any kind of air activity. There was one pilot who would go down to Kamiri strip every day and spend the entire time staring at the brilliantly white coral. The medics eventually had to send him home because of eyesight problems, even though it was known that it had been deliberately induced to avoid further operational service.

While we were at Noemfoor No 30 Squadron was one of the RAAF units that was transferred to the Operational Command of 1st Tactical Air Force, which was gearing up for the Borneo landings. American units

Continued on Page 10

Continued from Page 9

had captured Morotai Island from the Japanese, and our Beaufighters flew there on 15th November 1944. While taking off from Kamiri strip in A19-206, Reece Porch swung, just managed to avoid the control tower but skidded along on its belly. Reece and his navigator, Mark Harty, were killed, but the two groundstaff who were sandwiched in the fuselage between tents and other gear, were not seriously injured. I was about 300 metres away when the aircraft hit the ground and ran towards the crash. I think it was a guard who got there just before me and had pulled Mark out of the burning plane; Mark's skin peeled off as his rescuer removed his Mae West. The fuel had flooded into the front cockpit and poor old Reece was fried. A horrendous affair. When it burned out there was just a trunk left.

Early in the piece I had some pangs about killing other people with my weapons, but I suppose I became conditioned to it after a while and it never worried me from then on. Probably because the killing wasn't on a man-to-man or face-to-face basis; it was what you might call remote control. 'Woody' Woodgate had a narrow escape when a light ack-ack shell came up through the floor of the aircraft and just missed his back because he had the seat swivelled round and was leaning towards one side of the aircraft while taking a photo of the target we had just attacked. That was the only damage we sustained from an enemy, but it was damaged by a shell from a friendly. My fitter found an unexploded 20mm shell just near one of the fuel tanks, and we reasoned that it must have been a ricochet from one of the accompanying Beaufighters while strafing that day's target.

I must have something of a fatalistic streak for I never worried about being taken prisoner after a crash in enemy territory or of being killed outright in a crash although I had a dread of being burnt to death. If the circumstance ever arose that my Beaufighter became unflyable and I had to put it down, given the choice I would have preferred to make a ditching at sea rather than crash land in the jungle. Although the Beaufighter went down awfully fast when it hit the water, it seemed to me that the crew had a good chance of surviving that crash, and the experience was that most of the fellows who ditched were picked up.

There was an exception to that when Flight Lieutenant Plowman borrowed my aircraft A19-171, LYX and had to make a ditching in Gelvink Bay on 10th September 1944. The navigator got out, but when he turned round the aircraft had sunk - taking the pilot with it.

While the Squadron was at Morotai we were sent out to Palu on the West coast of the Celebes to intercept the Japanese float-planes which were said to be there at dusk. However, they weren't there that evening so we strafed the accommodation area and started a few fires -

all of which brought out the flying foxes. I flew through a whole patch of them and got the windscreen and leading edges spattered with their blood.

Night fell on our way back to Morotai and when our ETA came up and there was no sign of the base, Woody rang from his navigator's station to say that he hadn't a clue where we were. I said we ought not to muck about and told him to get on the radio to the ground Direction Finding Station and send a Mayday. He kept transmitting that emergency message for some time without result. In the meantime I was trying to decide what to do. I reasoned that I could bail out of the bottom hatch and might survive if I hit water since I had a one-man dinghy strapped to my behind. But the navigator's dinghy was a separate pack which he would have to hang on to during his parachute descent; His chances of doing that appeared to be minimal. However the D/F station eventually came on the air and gave us a course to steer for Morotai and we made a night landing without further incident. Later, I went round to the ground station and thanked the Negro operators for saving our lives.

Our camp at Morotai was a couple of miles inland from Pitoe and Wama strips, and became most unpleasant and muddy when it rained.

The strips ran roughly east-west and were parallel to the southern shore; our aircraft were dispersed at the eastern end of the strips. RAAF Kittyhawks were lined up along the length of the fighter strip.

Wing Commander Carey Thompson had taken over as Commanding Officer early in October 1944. About six weeks or so after assuming command, and when we were based at Morotai, he invited some Army nurses round to the camp where he and a couple of his mates were to entertain them. This was somewhat resented by a couple of those who hadn't been invited to the affair who decided to express their displeasure by burning down the toilet which Carey Thompson had had constructed near his tent without being seen. Which we did. But burning a toilet down became the fashion, for night after night there were flashes of flame as others were set on fire.

Officially, we weren't supposed to have any liquor on the Island; all the Messes were dry. But, of course, there were ways around that. Everyone was a bit steamed up that night because someone had got hold of some medicinal alcohol and mixed it with a good dollop of citric powder. And boy, it was just dynamite. Ralph Clay's navigator, Kim Mackenzie, crawled on his hands and knees from the Mess past my tent to his own, which was close to mine.

At Morotai we went on to American rations and that included a couple of bottles of beer per man Pabst Blue Ribbon

To be continued

To War & Beyond

By Ken Stone

At the beginning of 1941 the first recruits to the Australian division of the Empire Air Training Scheme had completed their training, so at the end of February the newly graduated W.A.G.s, Observers and Pilots embarked for the Middle East on the Aquitania. They would serve in that theatre of war with R.A.F. squadrons, excited at the prospect of adventure, but incognizant of the perils of war. This is the story of a few of the early graduates and their R.A.F. comrades, a story of valour, fortitude and resourcefulness. Sgt. Peter Haynes, a 2 Course Wireless Air Gunner, was posted to 211 Sqdn flying MarkIV Blenheim aircraft, and based at Wadi Gazouza in the Sudan. The other aircrew to various R.A.F. Squadrons involved in the Middle East War.

Following the invasion of Malaya by Japanese forces on December 7th and 8th 1941, Britain decided to reinforce the R.A.F. forces in the Far East with the addition of two Blenheim squadrons from the Middle East.

84 Sqdn R.A.F. and 211 Sqdn R.A.F., both containing larger proportion of R.A.A.F. aircrew, were withdrawn from the Western Desert, re equipped on an increased establishment for transfer to Malaya. Peter Haynes and his Observer, now without a pilot following an aircraft crash, were at the Middle East Personnel Pool at Casaferite where they joined F/Lt J. Owen R.A.F. their new pilot, and their two other crews were posted to 84 Sqdn commanded by Wing Commander J.R. Jeudwine R.A.F. The squadron departed Heliopolis mid January, bound in stages for Singapore. The new crews went to Habaniya near Baghdad, where they and three ferry crews picked up six Blenheim aircraft to follow and join the squadron. The ground staff departed by ship. The defensive situation in Singapore had rapidly worsened. On January 16th Allied Headquarters decided that all bomber units would be transferred south. Enroute from the Middle East, 84 Squadron was diverted to Sumatra, 16 Blenheims arrived at Palembang 2 on January 23rd.

On reaching Rangoon, the reinforcement flight was briefed to fly directly across the sea to Sabang, a tiny island off the northern tip of Sumatra. (Their next staging point). This was to reduce the risk of interception by Japanese fighters, but it would also add to the distance to be covered, and leave the aircraft dangerously short of fuel. The monsoon weather was also at its worst. One of the ferry pilots, Rayski, an extremely experienced Polish pilot, quickly recognised the folly of this plan, but was unable to change the briefing. He did however convince F/Lt Owen who flew with Rayski to Sabang round by the coast of Burma, reaching Singapore the next day. The others never did. Owen and crew then joined 84 Squadron on Palembang 2, which was a large

aerodrome, but it had no A.A. defences, and few troops were available for the defence of the area against invasion. There was no radar, little radio capability, and a volunteer observer system. Warnings were consequently erratic. Enemy naval activity ensured that practically all equipment designed for Sumatra went astray. Japanese paratroopers captured Palembang 2 on February 20th, but 84 Sqdn had already moved to Palembang 2, and had on February 16th evacuated to Kalidjta on Java. From there they operated under further extreme conditions against invading forces and convoys till on March 1st the aerodrome was overrun by Japanese tanks. Of the 400 ground crew of 84 Sqdn, 170 reached Kalidjta just three days before the aerodrome fell to Japanese forces, the survivors soon were prisoners.

In the chaos to follow personnel commandeered any available form of transport and assembled at the town of Bandoeng. From there the aircrews and some ground staff were sent to Tjilijap, a port on the east coast, for evacuation by ship, and so a party of 60 aircrew and 5 ground crew set out for Tjilijap travelling through the lush green country seemingly all at peace. Then a heavy black cloud appeared on the horizon with columns of blackness rising up into it. Then a growing column of natives, men, women and children clutching hastily assembled bundles passing in the opposite direction. A flood of humanity in a hurry. Pressing on, the party reached the hollow shell of a town. The harbour was a sheet of flame; the docks jammed with burning wrecks; all the result of a Japanese air raid that morning. A convoy just departed, 5 ships in all had been sunk without a trace of wreckage, as had the U.S. aircraft carrier Langley approaching the harbour with reinforcements. No hope now for evacuation. Unknown to the party the S. S. City of Manchester had been sunk off the coast a few days earlier, it had been on the way to assist with the evacuation.

The party gathered in a warehouse clear of the inferno to rest and plan. At a meeting with senior officers W/Cdr Jetidwine offered the choice, guerillas in the hills, or escape to Australia. The latter was a unanimous choice so then began the search for suitable craft, and the collection of supplies for the journey.

S/Ldr Taylor with F/Lts Wyllie, Holland and Owen were sent across the river to see what was available there. When they did not return on time Jetidwine and party continued their search, a small motor boat and two ship's lifeboats was the best available but no sign of S.Ldr Taylor and party. The plan then was to have the motor boat tow the two lifeboats until fuel was exhausted and then to proceed by sail. Provisions were gathered from

Continued on Page 12

Continued from Page 11

abandoned stocks and loaded on board. Sixty two airmen set out on the first leg of the journey, towed down the river by the motor boat. On reaching the open sea the plan was found to be impractical owing to the crowded state of the boats and the inability of the motor boat to make much progress. In the process of landing in a cove to replan, one lifeboat and the motor boat were wrecked.

It was decided that the remaining lifeboat with a crew of 12 should try to reach Australia and get help for the people left behind. The Commanding Officer and Pilot Officer C.P. Streatfield were the only two with sailing experience, Pilot Officer Turner was chosen as navigator as he could handle a sextant and Squadron Leader Passmore as 2 I C and purser and to look after rationing of food. The remainder of the party was chosen from the Australians, as it was felt that they should be given the chance of reaching their home country. Sgt P. Haynes was one of the Australians chosen together with P/O M. S. McDonald and Sgts G. W. Sayer, N. N. Cosgrove, A. C. Longmore, J. Lovegrove, A. Snook and P.M. Corney all R.A.A.F. It was calculated that the nearest Australian port was Toebourne, nine hundred and fifty nautical miles away on the N. W. coast of Western Australia. It was hoped to cover the journey in 16 days, but double this time was allowed for in the estimates of food and water. And so it began: Twelve men, three water casks and seven tubs each containing approximately 12 gallons, canned food, biscuits. American canned beer and cigarettes all crammed in to a 30ft open lifeboat which they named Scorpion from the motto and the badge of 84 Squadron. Left behind in the hope of rescue to follow were 50 mixed aircrew and ground staff.

Extracts from the log kept by Wing Commander Jeudwine tell some of the trials to follow:

On March 7th the Scorpion and crew set out for Australia, relying on sails, oars and providence. Food and water and cigarettes rationed, within two days the crew were suffering from cramped positions and sunburn. At 1545 on March 9th a Japanese submarine surfaced about a mile astern and approached within 100 yards. An officer with binoculars from the conning tower scrutinised the Scorpion and occupants. A rating was standing by the 6-pounder gun forward and another manning a machine gun on the tower. It seemed the end was nigh but after describing a half circle round the boat the submarine made off to the east and submerged. Upon sighting the submarine the Commanding Officer issued a can of beer to each, in case they were captured if the submarine turned out to be American and therefore dry.

A heavy thunderstorm fully replenished all the water casks. The crew were able to drink a lot of water which revived them considerably. A tot of whisky was issued to combat the soaking rain. The whisky enabled everyone to sleep in the most extraordinary postures. On the third day bathing was adopted as a daily practice when possible and as exercise a swim once around the

boat. Each thunderstorm caused damage to the ailing rudder, causing problems to repair and delays in progress.

Saturday March 14th: An extra ration of water from a barrel into which a cake of lifebuoy soap had fallen a few days previously. This was intended as a laxative as we had no number 9's on board and most of the crew suffering from constipation. Results not all we hoped for. Crew becoming more acclimatised to living in an open boat, morale generally high. Days of slow progress, regular repairs to rudder, after 15 days estimated to be about halfway to Roebourne, another foul night, but everyone taking it well. Still think it is a case of "where ignorance is bliss". Am later proved right. After 19 days a check of rations shows the tinned fruit and some of the rations going bad through heat, rust and being shaken about. In view of our drift, the uncertainty of our position and our lack of progress, generally things are starting to look most unpleasant. A blissful air of unconcern reigns forward. April 9th: Becalmed, a young whale about twice the size of the Scorpion surfaced nearby and decided to give us a close inspection. Most frightening to have the tail out the front and the head just aft of the rudder, luckily after looking at the Scorpion for about half a minute it submerged. Thursday April 16th Sgt Corney swore he smelt spinifex on the dawn breeze, soon he had everyone smelling something but personally put it down to the Purser who suffers from flatulence. However everyone was cheerful. Plans for first meal ashore widely discussed.



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