

The

WHISPERER

**The Newsletter of the Beaufighter and
Boston Association of Queensland**

SEPTEMBER 2001



President Ralph Ind presenting Doug McMillan with a RAAF plaque, made by Stan Curran, for his assistance to Peter in producing *The Whiperer* at the BBQ.

Visit to Harts Flying Fighters Museum

A combined visit with members of Logan RAAFA, and cadets from No 219 Squadron Air Cadet to Hart's Flying Fighters Museum on Saturday 7th of 2001 attracted some 50 attendees. This museum is located at the corner of Wirraway Street and Beaufighter Avenue, and contains 22 World War Two Aircraft, restored to flying condition. The aircraft are displayed in a new hanger, which was opened to the public some four months ago.

We had a hiccup at the start of our visit, because the museum was not opened for our arrival. After a wait of some 30 minutes an employee of the museum arrived and opened up for us. We had a good look around at aircraft from USA, Russia, America, Australia, and a mock up of a Japanese Zero, all wonderfully well presented. Outside the museum a Russian Mig was mounted on a high pole in a flying attitude.

Before our departure, Logan RAAFA President Eric Cavanagh presented the museum with a framed

certificate of thanks, and a RAAFA plaque. This plaque was made by a member of our Association, Stan Curran.

We then proceeded to the Air Cadet's building, also located at Archerfield for a barbecue. The barbecue was prepared by the cadet's parent's group, and was a huge success, Juicy steaks and sausages together with onions, followed by a variety of cakes and sweets. All present voted the barbecue as great.

We met with Bob Haduczok, F/Lt (AIRTC), the Squadron's Commander his staff and many of the cadets. President Ralph, then presented another Stan Curran made RAAF plaque, to Mr Dugald McMillan, thanking him for his assistance in publishing the "Whisperer".

19 Flight carried our Banner in both the RAAF Birthday celebrations March, and the Anzac Day Parade. It is our intention to develop a closer association with the Flight, which will be led by Vice President Bill O'Connor, as Cadet Liaison Officer. A cash trophy of \$250, plus a plaque will be awarded, by us, to the top cadet each year.



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Dear Members and Friends

I am sorry I was not able to help swell our numbers marching on Anzac Day.

As I have explained to you previously, as President of the Local RSL Sub-Branch I am required to lead the march through Surfers Paradise. However those who know me well enough will be aware my heart is on the Day.

Previously, Peter said he was attempting by fair means or foul, to lift the number marching under our Banner and he certainly succeeded. My thanks to him and all of you and your friends and relations who marched. It was also very pleasing to see the numbers of children involved, My youngest grandson marched with me wearing his father's medals.

Our Banner was ably borne by members of 19 Flight QAIRTC (now 219 Squadron) who hopefully will be in a position to assist us every Anzac Day from now on.

All Peter's efforts for us to present the framed copy of Eddie Morton's print to Harts Flying Fighters

Museum at Archerfield ended up a bit of a SNAFU. After waiting some considerable time, after the allotted hour, to gain admittance to the premises we were advised that the proprietor was en-route to Dubbo, even though he was well aware of our intentions. After inspecting the aircraft on display we left, with the print - more about it's future from Peter.

We were hosted by members of 219 Squadron QAIRTC and were treated to a very nice BBQ, to which Logan Branch of the RAAFA, contributed \$300, whilst we contributed \$100 to help defray the costs.

I would like to thank those of our members who are continuing to supply Peter with some very interesting stories for publication in the Whisperer. I would be very grateful if the flow of such articles continues, as it makes Peter's job as editor so much easier. I know that you will agree with me, that he has set a very high standard in our magazine, of which we are all very proud- thanks once again Peter

Regards

RALPH

George Robertson with motor of Clarrie Glasscok's and John Cain's A19-133, in Onosa oil palm plantation at Kimbe, Western New Britain, PNG , 35 kms from Hoskins airstrip.

Photo courtesy of George Robertson



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New Britain Revisited

Fred Hargensheimer wrote to George Robertson on 2nd July 2000. The following is a copy of that letter.

Dear George.

New Britain Revisited arrived in the Mail yesterday. What a stirring report!!! I read the booklet from cover to cover in one sitting. Each word, every picture brought back memories from over 50 years ago.

After photographing Cape Glouster I ran into rough weather en route up the north coast to Rabaul. I was still in the soup at 32,00 feet. I dropped down to the deck looking for a smoother flight. Circled the old Government station at Talasea and then broke out into clear skies and sunshine around Lolabau Island. Decided that 4,000 feet was not a good place to be in enemy territory. As I began to climb back up I spotted the new emergency strip at Ubili, levelled off for a photo run and also make me a good target. Moments later the port engine burst into flame and it was time to depart.

Recently we locate the Japanese pilot who was driving the twin-engine Ki-45kai that plunked a cannon into my F-5 (F-38 photo recon). Unfortunately he is very ill with Alzheimers disease. I correspond with his wife who does not speak or write English, but I am able to get help in translating.

I wish I could have arrived in PNG ten days earlier and witnessed the unveiling of the outstanding War Memorial at the San Remo Club in Kimbe. In the 1970's my wife and I attended many great parties at the San Remo.

In 1943 I got my first glimpse of a "Whispering Death" while standing on the beach at the village of Nantambu (Nee Ea Ea) waving a lap lap trying to catch the attention of the pilot. Later, after I joined the Coastwatchers under Major Skinner I had the pleasure of watching a Beaufighter shoot up a Japanese barge hiding in the mangroves at the beach. After the war I met the navigator, Keith McCarthy, who showed me a picture taken during the attack. My first contact with Keith was through amateur radio.



Did we meet in the 1960s when we stopped to refuel at Rockhampton and join Dave and Sue McClymont for lunch? Several years ago my wife and I visited Palmalmal plantation at Dingo.

Thank you again George for the treasured report

Editor's Note.

Fred Hargesheimer, Bill Townsend and David McClymont were rescued by an American submarine some three months after they had been shot down. They crossed from coast to coast in New Britain with the Coastwatchers and friendly natives, the main chief's name was Golpak, who was later made a member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE), for his service to the allies.

Fred Hargesheimer raised funds in the USA to provide some practical recognition to the community which had saved their lives. Bill Townsend also raised money in Australia. The result was the erection of the Airmen's Memorial School at Ewasse PNG, which was supervised by Fred.

Courtesy George Robertson

Two pilots who were shot down in World War II join hands in their first reunion with the submarine commander who rescued them. Retired Rear Adm Robert Foley, left, then lieutenant commander and skipper of the sub GATO, is greeted by W.E. Townsend, Air Vice Marshal and Deputy Chief of Staff of the Royal Australian Air Force and Fred Hargesheimer who was shot down on Nov 5 1943.

Per Ardua Ad Astra

THE KOOKABURRA IS LOST



The Kookaburra was ill equipped a compass wasn't fitted. Hitchcock had one but it was unreliable. It didn't seem to concern Anderson very much he had always navigated by using landmarks, following telegraph lines, roads and railway lines. There was no radio, little food, not much water and only a few tools.

They took off on 4 April 1929 heading for Broken Hill and arrived there that night. Anderson sent a telegram. "Arrived here safely 6.55 Sydney time, half hour after sunset. Experienced strong headwinds all the way, low misty clouds necessitating landing at Blaney for two hours. Been in air nine hours engine and machine functioning perfectly. Unless lucky enough to get following wind to-morrow will only be able to reach Oodnadatta instead of Alice Springs.

Sorry regards Keith Anderson."

Anderson was bending the truth a little. He had flown to the left of Bathurst and had landed near a town to check his position it was Blaney

Two employees from Blaney Motors saw them approach for landing and met them. One a salesman Dick Jackson the other an apprentice mechanic Len Bell. Dick Jackson was a former war time pilot, he was delighted to meet them, he noted the Kookaburra had bent the tail skid on landing, so while Len straightened the skid he took them home where his wife cooked them a hot meal. Hitchcock was feeling the cold so Jackson loaned him his old wartime flying jacket. As stated in the telegram they were only on the ground for two hours.

On take off the next day their heading was for Alice Springs but with the faulty compass they flew way off course and eventually sighted Port Augusta they had travelled west instead of north-west. They managed to reach Maree that night.

Leaving at dawn next day for Alice Springs they had only reached Algebuckin south of Oodnadatta when the engine noise changed. Hitchcock was in the front cockpit only a couple of feet behind the engine. It was an upright air-cooled engine with exposed tappets. He could see that the tappet lock nut had come loose and the tappet was vibrating badly. With only 75% power the overweight aircraft was forced down.

A prospector Martin Kromer later reported that he was with friends when he was surprised to see an aircraft with a spluttering engine landing. He was amazed to find the pilot only had a vague idea where he was.

Kramer said the pilot asked the mechanic to get the tools and the mechanic said that they had been stolen at Richmond. He then said that he saw the mechanic use a chisel for a screwdriver and a corkscrew for a hammer to tighten a tappet.

At Alice Springs Anderson found a telegram from The Department of Aviation telling him not to proceed but he ignored it. He sent a telegram to Cantor telling him he was going to fly direct to Wyndham the next day.

When Anderson took off from Alice Springs the aircraft was 195 kilos overweight. with fuel. They had few tools and not much food and water.

Bob Hitchcock in the front seat could see the tappet working loose again he knew that overweight, as they were it would not be long before they were forced down again.

The inevitable happened they came down again, they were completely unaware of their position. It transpired they were 128 kilometres southeast of Wave Hill cattle station.

Anderson had landed in a turpentine scrub. Much later I flew over the area and it didn't look too bad from the air.

Hitchcock soon repaired the engine. They set about to clear a runway; they only had their bare hands and a pocketknife. They started a fire to burn off some of the scrub it eventually burnt out ten square miles.

The short runway and their narrow tyres in the sandy soil made take off impossible.

About the time when Hitchcock and Anderson were dying of thirst and trying to clear a runway. Kingsford-Smith and his crew were eating crawling shellfish to survive. The most disgusting and irresponsible newspaper reporting occurred in the annals of Australian aviation.

Perhaps Ulm who had been heard to say that if Kingsford-Smith were ever lost it would create immense publicity had innocently started it. Anderson had been heard to say he knew where they were, of course he had monitored the radio reports he knew the country very well and he was probably in a better position than most to make a calculated guess.

A largely circulated newspaper "The Smiths Weekly" of all names, claimed the forced landing was a publicity stunt there was a public furore.

THE SOUTHERN CROSS IS FOUND

On April 12 two days after Hitchcock and Anderson were forced down Len Holden in the Canberra found the Southern Cross John Stannage the radio operator tapped out the message, "Found Found. All safe." They all appeared well and food was dropped to them.

When Kingsford-Smith returned to Sydney where a few weeks before a cheering crowd of about 10,000 had given him a tumultuous farewell, he was now greeted by a hostile jeering mob. Appalled by the abuse and insults Smithy tried to explain that the episode had been genuine. The more he talked the louder became the shouting and abuse. Public opinion with the help of Smiths Weekly had condemned Smithy and Ulm as cheats.

Lester Joseph Brain was a very capable pilot who had joined Q.A.N.T.A.S. later Qantas. Brain had had extensive flying experience over desert country. Four years previous he had been engaged to search the Northern Territory and Western Australia for Lasseters lost gold reef. Finally he was convinced that no such reef existed. It is such a large area that there are still some people to-day who believe a reef is there.

The pride of Qantas was a De Havilland DH 59 J powered with a Bristol Jupiter 450HP engine and a cruising speed of 110 MPH. The fastest and long distance plane operating in Australia. It had been named the "Atlanta".

The Defence Department and Air Board gave formal instructions to Qantas to join in the search for the Kookaburra. Lester Brain was chosen as the pilot. Like most aircraft at that time the Atlanta was not fitted with a radio. Brain immediately requested that one be fitted.

Brain set off from Eagle Farm at 0600 hours on April 19 only 13 hours after receiving his instructions. At 2.30pm they landed at Longreach. Next morning they flew past Camooweal and on to Brunett Downs. The wireless set was working well. They left next morning April 21, arriving at Newcastle Waters 80 minutes later and were airborne again at 11.05 am on route for Wave Hill cattle station. About 50 miles west of Newcastle Waters Brain saw smoke in the southwest about 60 miles away. He knew that country very well, there was no habitation there even the aborigines rarely visited the area it was so desolate. He veered off to the left to have a look at it. From about 25 miles off he could see a burnt patch, as he got closer he could see an object on the ground closer inspection showed it to be the Kookaburra. In hindsight he couldn't have gone more direct to it. Flying low they could see a body under a wing. They dropped food and water. Brain knew he couldn't land so went on to Wave Hill.

At this stage the story may seem to be chronologically out of order. I have to go back to April 10 when the Kookaburra was forced down.

The Minister of Defence ordered the RAAF to conduct a search. The RAAF had DH 9A bombers powered by 400 HP water-cooled engines.

Flt Lt Brian Eaton "Moth" Eaton to his friends, led the flight of two aircraft. They took off two days later on 12 April from Laverton. It was a lesson to the RAAF, they had no maps of the Australian outback and at low altitude the heat reflected from the desert sand caused the engines to overheat. To keep the engines cool they had to fly at high altitude.

Eaton landed in the main street at Oodnadatta and taxied up to the pub. His aircraft had a leaking fuel tank to repair the tank the wings had to be removed to solder the leaking seam of the tank. There wasn't many of them but the whole town assisted with the repair. They were able to be on their way again in 17 hours.

While at Oodnadatta Eaton wired Air Board for three more aircraft. The three back up aircraft were led by Sgt Eric Douglas. The five aircraft met at Alice Springs. Just before Tennants Creek Eaton's engine overheated and he was forced down. Neither Eaton nor his mechanic Sullivan was hurt though the aeroplane was a write off.

Luck was with them they had been flying along the overland telegraph line. The other plane saw them land and were unhurt, they reported the incident to Tennant Creek. Eaton and Sullivan commenced to walk to Tennant Creek and were met by two locals in a buckboard.

The pilots had been dropping messages prepared in bags to the homesteads asking if anyone had seen a monoplane flying over. They gave instructions how the people on the ground could signal a reply.

They learned that the Kookaburra had flown over Morton's homestead north of Ryans Well flying in a northwesterly direction ten days ago.

At Tennant Creek they heard that Lester Brain had found the Kookaburra. Another DH 9A was left at Tennant Creek with an unrepairable engine. The three remaining RAAF aircraft went to Newcastle Waters and met Brain who led them to the crash site.

Near the crash site Lester Brain noticed a blow hole he became very interested in it as he thought it may contain water.

To be continued in the next issue.



***Caldwell
over
Darwin***

Sent in by
Tony Nye

GREAT CREW WORK

No. 455 Squadron RAAF was officially formed in England on 6th June 1941, and was the first RAAF Squadron to join Bomber Command, operating Hampdens. The Squadron operated these aircraft for two and one half years, and in December 1943, were posted to coastal command and re-equipped with Beaufighters. Navigator, . Vic Pearson and his pilot, Ted Collaery were posted to the Squadron on 25th April 1944 from 9 OTU Crosby-on-Eden in Wales. The Squadron was operating from Leuchars in Northern Scotland. as part of 18 Group Coastal Command.

They took part in low flying and formation practice, with other crews. where it was practice to determine the height flown by using the radio altimeter. On one occasion on returning to base, the Commanding Officer greeted them by saying "If you ever fly at that height again I will shoot you down myself".

On 29th June 1944, Ted Collaery and Vic Pearson flew their eighth operational sortie with the Squadron which was an E- Boat Patrol, from Dunkirk to The Hook of Holland. Six Beaus from 455 and five Beaus from 489 RAF Squadron, at dawn, located an enemy convoy of two minesweepers, two armed trawlers, and nine other small unidentified small ships, making for harbour at the Hook Of Holland. The leader of the formation, F/LT John Pilcher decided that bombs were useless against such a target, and they were quickly jettisoned and the formation positioned themselves for an attack with cannon. The attack left one minesweeper burning and scored many hits on other vessels.

F/O Ted Collaery's Beau was hit by flak, damaging the starboard engine. Collaery reported the hit, feathered the engine and set course for base. They were now free from flak but not from danger. The Squadron's Operations Record Book says....though he maintained height on one engine for a short while, he was soon compelled to ditch. Vic Pearson recalls, "I had managed to get an SOS out before we ditched, and gave our position". He got out of the aircraft, and launched the dinghy. He says, "I went forward to the pilot's hatch to help get him out...he was struggling to get free. I don't know why I couldn't get him out. We may have taken a hit in the nose and damaged the cockpit where his feet were. The plane was sinking and Collaery was fighting to be freed. The commanding Officer, Jack Davenport later wrote that, "F/O Pearson persisted in his attempts to free his pilot until eventually the aircraft sank beneath him". he was only twenty-five kilometres off the enemy coast, Vic Pearson was kept company by relays of Beaufighters from the Squadron, led by S/Ldr Colin Milson, by three aircraft from the New Zealand Squadron, and by Thunderbolts from the United States Army. The air-sea rescue launch finally arrived at Great

PETER's PAGE

Yarmouth at 5pm, some eleven hours after the ditching. Vic Pearson went on the standard two weeks "survivor's leave" then reported back to his squadron. He went on to navigate for another eight 455 Squadron pilots before.

the end of the war. For this and later work in 455 Squadron, Vic Pearson was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. The Recommendation reads ... Despite his harrowing ordeal he returned to his unit, and was back on operations within six weeks. Rather than have an adverse effect upon this navigator, his experience made him keener to engage the enemy

The attack left one minesweeper burning and scored many hits on the other vessels.

On 4 April 1945, eight rocket equipped Beaus from 455 Squadron, and six cannon firing Beaus from 489 Squadron (as anti-flak escort) located a three thousand ton ship unloading at Aardal, a small port at the extreme eastern end of Sogne Fiord, a large Norwegian Fiord, where the vessel was located some 160 kilometres inland. It had been reported that the vessel was carrying heavy water for the use in manufacture of atomic weapons. The 455 section of the strike force was led by F/O Steve Sykes and his Nav, Vic Pearson.

As Sykes flew through the entrance to Songe Fiord shore base flak batteries hit his plane. Despite the danger he stayed in formation, and led on up the long fiord. The target steamer was riding high in the water, and lying very close to a concrete wharf. Ship and shore batteries put up a heavy barrage, as the strike aircraft attacked, John Ayliffe who was also an Outrider that day, but managed to join the attack, said "The Fiord at Aardal is very narrow narrow, and is surrounded with mountains 1400 feet high. The attack had to be carried out with aircraft diving down in line astern".

Although wounded, Sykes stayed to lead the attack, and was hit again, suffering a compound fracture to his left arm and flak wounds to one leg. His navigator Vic Pearson said, "Flak burst at the port side close to the pilot's window, and not only was he sprayed by shrapnel, but also with small pieces of perspex from the window".

With difficulty, Sykes pulled his plane out of the dive, away from the steep sides of the fiord and turned for home. Pearson crawled forward from his navigator's compartment to help. He says "I put a tourniquet on his left arm and plugged the worst wound, and gave him a shot of morphia. He made no complaint, although it was bitterly cold, and he was determined to get back to base. Standing behind him, I did my best to steer the Beaufighter, but he had to work the rudder himself, although his left leg was well peppered".



As Outrider, Jack Cox and Allan Ibbotson watched the attack, and saw several hits on the target above and below the waterline. When they turned for home Ibbotson saw a Beaufighter to starboard, with the cockpit light on. He said "I received an Aldis signal from this aircraft (from Pearson) that his pilot was injured. I was instructed by my pilot to let them know that we would escort them; and was also instructed to radio a coded message to Base, stating that we were escorting an aircraft with an injured pilot. Soon after I received a coded message to alter to "low" frequency and broadcast frequently to enable the Warwick (Air Sea Rescue) aircraft to home in on us so that they could release their airborne dinghy, should a ditching become necessary. We were also instructed to alter course and head for Sumburgh, which was a much closer landfall for the troubled crew.

All the way back to Sumburgh, Pearson stayed in the cockpit with his pilot and tried to keep him warm by holding his own flying jacket over Syke's shoulders. As they prepared to land Pearson worked the hydraulic controls and engine throttles for his pilot. Sykes made an excellent one-handed belly landing. Their escort, Jack Cox, had to circle Sumburgh for about thirty minutes while Sykes was taken from his plane and the aircraft cleared from the runway. Sykes had dozens of shrapnel in his arms, legs and body and several fractures above the elbow of his left arm. For his action, he was recommended for the immediate Award of the Distinguished Flying Cross. Pearson was also recommended for the Distinguished Flying Cross. The recommendation reads:

He held himself responsible for guiding and keeping his pilot in formation with the escort aircraft although it was a dark night. This officer, since losing his original pilot, F/O Collaery, has flown on operations with eight different pilots of this squadron. His keenness, capability and willingness to fly with any pilot have been an outstanding feature of his Operational work on this squadron.

Vic Pearson returned home, then decided to stay in the Air Force, and spent much of his time in 87 Squadron, engaged in survey operations. He was awarded a Commendation for Meritorious Service in the Air for that work. His last posting was as Administration Officer of Number One Squadron at RAAF Base Amberley in Queensland, which was re-equipping with the F-111 bomber.

Editor's note

He became one of the early members of our Association when it was formed.

Courtesy Wing Commander Ian Gordon RAAF, author of the history of 455 RAAF Squadron, "Strike and Strike Again".

GEORGE ROBERTSON'S SEARCH FOR THE WRECK OF BEAUFIGHTER A19-33



At 0840 hours on the 5th September 1943, six 30 Squadron Beaufighters took off from Vivigani strip on Goodenough Island PNG. Their mission was an offensive barge sweep on the New Britain coast from Cape Gloucester to Wilson Point.

Two of the crews were briefed to break formation and carry out strafing runs on the Japanese held Cape Gloucester strip. They would then rejoin the formation at Borgen Bay. These two were A19-138 F/Lt Mike Burrows (Pilot) & F/O Alec Burgoyne (Nav), and A19-33 F/O Harold Woodruffe (Pilot) & Sgt John Brooks (Nav).

After both aircraft had carried out their strafing runs on the strip, damaging one aircraft, Mike Burrows observed that A19-33 was trailing smoke. Both aircraft made it to Borgen Bay where A19-33 was seen to crash into the jungle and burn fiercely, at the bottom of a small hill 2 miles SE of the village of Sarke, near Natamo, Borgen Bay.

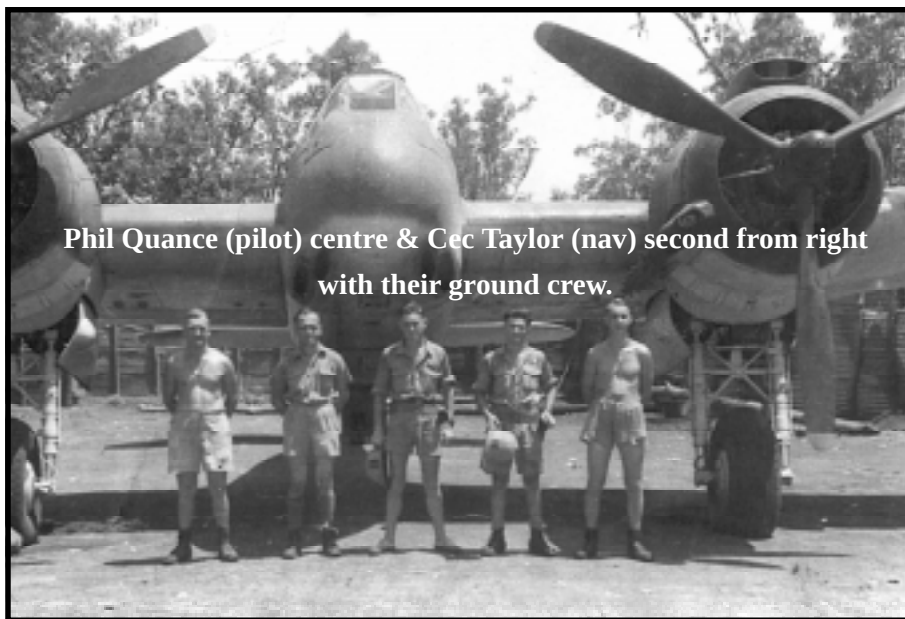
F/Lt George Robertson (DFC) (Pilot) & Sgt Rex Pitman (Nav) flew in the offensive barge sweep section of the mission, which resulted in destroying 4 barges, at the NE end of Borgen Bay, which were left burning. For a number of years now George has been trying to locate the site of the wreck of A19-33 and the remains of the crew

The exercise for George so far has been a very difficult one. He has supplied RAAF Headquarters in Canberra with details of the crash site after months of research and consultation with friends in New Britain, who have been very co-operative. Unfortunately RAAF HQ requires visual sighting and identification of any wreck as being an RAAF aircraft, before it will actively take part in the search for the wreck and its crews remains.

George has recently been advised by a friend in Kimbe WNB that locals in the Sarke Village area talk of an aircraft suspended between two trees, found by timber workers several years ago. To obtain further information on this aircraft requires a search by helicopter, but George says this is far too expensive. He has some helicopter friends at Kimbe who are willing to help, but he will have to wait until they get a job in the area, and then may then be able to stretch the time enough for them to do a search. George writes that he believes he has reached a stage in his search where more finance than he is personally able to provide, and where some manpower and authority in the area are necessary to produce a successful outcome.

WHISPERING DEATH & COY.

By F/O Cec Taylor. 31 Squadron



Phil Quance (pilot) centre & Cec Taylor (nav) second from right
with their ground crew.

for no one spoke.... Cripes I must not forget to grab a new map. The one I had last time ripped. Better take a spare log too.

"Well that's all" said the C.O. Good luck and good results" In a matter of minutes we were on the strip where our planes were parked ready for the job. The ground crews had them in perfect condition. Even as we were arriving the boys were putting the finishing touches to the polishing. "T for Teddy - Doug Got all your gear? ". "G for George - Don't forget your Mae West Phil". Everybody settles in their cockpits.

It was good and hot. The iron roof did little towards keeping out the heat. Somebody was trying to coax Vera Lyn to "That lovely week end" for the umpteenth time and she was working under difficulties with the needle on it's hundredth record.

"I'll make it six hearts" said Phil, as he deftly flicked the ash off his cigarette." Six hearts" says Phil, "Well I'll go seven spades". "In that case, I'll pass, says cunning old Flossie (probably sitting on the fence with a hand full of spades). I opened my mouth to say "No trumps", when the amplifier in the corner of the mess crackled, and we listened as the voice droned: "Attention all personnel: Attention all personnel.... The following aircrew report to Operations Room immediately". Forgotten were the cards. "Even money I get a Guernsey" says Phil. "Yeah, me too" says Phil. It was on alright.

As the names came over the loud speaker, I speculated as to what the target might be, and the thought of that long trip over the water bored into my mind. The boys were grabbing their flying gear, and soon we were listening to the C.O. giving us details of our target." Well gentlemen your target today is, shipping in this harbour. We knew what he meant as he pointed to the map that the Intelligence Officer had pinned up on the wall for reference. The particular place indicated had four or five nests of heavy ack ack batteries protecting it. It was our job to go in at tree top level and bash the shipping. After more minute details, as to position of ships, the proximity of the target to an enemy air strip, possibility of interception by enemy fighter aircraft etc. The Old Man's query 'any questions?' seemed almost facetious after such a thorough briefing. As usual we had the G.G. straight,

There's routine checks to be made. "Contact port and starboard" comes from forward. A couple of rasping coughs are the labour pains that announce the birth of power in our engines. The roar subsides to a steady purr as the seconds tick by to "take off". Suddenly my thoughts turn to home, and I realize that it is my young son's birthday. I wonder if he will be sick from eating too much. Now it's our turn. "OK Phil take her away"

Soon we're airborne and closing up in formation. Gone are the thoughts of home now: work to be done: job ahead. Those little yellow b's. As I figure out course and airspeed etc. I find time to enjoy the fresh coolness of the atmosphere, so different from the ground. Drift checked - altitude right - airspeed OK. The sea looks so blue as we leave the coast and head for enemy occupied territory. Who was it said "time drags"? Water, water as far as I can see. Blue shadows intermingling with the green, the black shadows where the magnificent white billowy cumulus clouds cast their silhouette. It's funny how one can see the natural beauty of such ordinary matter of fact things under such circumstances. It takes war in all it's stark realities, and gambling with death to make one really appreciative of the seemingly small things of nature

With a "How long to E.T.A.?" from Phil, my thoughts are rudely broken and I come back to the more serious job of the moment thoughts. "Forty minutes to go. Time to get on the deck" I reply. From four thousand feet, we slide down to twenty feet from the deck. Everything is keyed up now. The cannons are cocked and ready for use, and I'm swinging my rear gun to and fro as I search the sky. We don't want to be jumped. The formation is packed in tight, and looking

out through my cupola I see the other boys hugging the water until it seems as if their propellers must touch it.

Here lies the reason for the success of the "Whispering Death". Coming in so low, with our wonderful Bristol Hercules engines whispering, we're on the Nip before he knows it. What a feeling of confidence it inspires in one to see the formation skimming the water. How awe inspiring it must look to the Jap, to see us cut across his own stamping grounds on the tree tops with our guns belching.

Momentarily I let my gaze drop to watch the water flashing by beneath us and marvel at my pilot's judgement. It's good to know you have such dependable and daringly skilfully men in your team. After all, this is really like a football game, it is teamwork that works out in the end. Twenty minutes to go. I wonder if the ack will be as severe as we think?. Supposing we get hit in the petrol tank - what if a motor fails-remember how old Mac went in, They'll have to be good to hit us with their ack What's that?. A damn bird. Gosh they look like aircraft, I wish the sun wasn't so strong. The Nip usually comes in down sun, so I must keep watching. Five minutes to go, this is it. Nearly there, come on you yellow....

Let's see how you are going to like this party. This is going to be another instalment on account... credit my brother.

We cross the coast with a surge of power as the throttles are increased. Trees flash past beneath us so close I could reach out and touch them. Our nose is depressed and I hear the cannons crack out their song of death. Hope there's no stoppage. Its bloody hard to re-cock them when the kite's bouncing around. Then I see a target as we skim over it. A Jap building, smoke pouring out from it, and two forms lying prostrate outside. Still one minute to go to our real target. A quick look ahead, there they are, three big ships anchored in the harbour with small craft unloading them.

A hurried look up in the sky to see that there is no Jap aircraft, and I watch the target come into our sights. There is another plane ahead of us, strafing the ship, his cannon shells exploding on the deck like a million red lights and pieces flying off the sides. Now Phil is firing. One long burst and the ship's bridge is almost obscured by the brilliant explosions, smoke and flame. As we close in, it looks like we must surely hit the ship's superstructure, dead centre. The stick comes back and we clear the vessel by the narrowest margin.

Now, for one fleeting second, I can see the damage wrought by our concentrated fire power. The bridge is smoking and hungry tongues of flames are licking the superstructure. Around one gun position I see three forms slumped over their shield. I spy several yellow figures crouched together in the well deck and automatically give them a squirt from my Browning as I whiz past. My vision is blurred as we take violent

evasive action from any possible following fire from our victim. A voice breaks through the crackling of my headphones -"leader to formation - transport over to our port - turning left-over". Yes there it is. We do a very steep turn to port and our wingtips create some beautiful vapour trails.

I can't help but marvel at the perfect formation flying and the speed at which the transport seems to be rushing up to meet us. That old tub is throwing everything but the kitchen sink in our direction, but boring in at better than 300 m.p.h. sitting behind four cannons, and six machine guns, one has a wonderful feeling of confidence. Soon the white tracer and spasmodic orange flame from the transport are hidden in the midst of our exploding cannon shells. We haven't pulled out of our run yet and that horrible feeling that we must hit the ship as we hurtle towards it.

F for Freddie responds beautifully to the touch and we lift. Up and over we zoom, then down again to water level. Now I can hardly see anything, the smoke rises from our target and there is still three more Beaus to have a go at it - you beaut!. As I look there's a terrific explosion, someone has hit a soft spot and a huge orange flame leaps from the ship with great clouds of dirty black smoke. The Beaus are lost from sight, then through the smoke one them appears. I am sure he must have taken the vessel's wireless aerial with him

Something made me look upwards into the sky, don't ask me what, and then I saw them, four dots on the horizon, enemy aircraft. A quick twist of the wrist and I'm screaming on the R/T "enemy aircraft, six o'clock, at two thousand feet. Then again more intelligibly as they become more visible, "four twin engine enemy aircraft at six o'clock at two thousand feet".

"Leader to formation close up line abreast. The throttles are pushed forward and I feel a mighty surge as the Hercs bring in few more horses and we are soon in our position. My lips are dry and caked as I sight my gun on the enemy leader, waiting for him to come in. "come on you yellow ... come and get it". They seem to be hesitant about engaging us (probably have recognized "Honourable Beaufighters". Here they come. They're diving in, concentrating on our leader in A for Annie. Rat a tat-tat, my gun is jumping in my hands as bullets wing their way towards the yellow sons of Nippon. I can see tracer from the other Beau's rear guns, criss-crossing at the rear of mine, just in front of the Nip plane. Ha Ha! they don't like that. They break away at four hundred yards, their fire falling in the front of A for Annie. They're going for height, well let them, what the hell. They're slow rolling, and going to come in head on, these must be new pilots, they don't realize our forward fire power. Even money there'll be widows in Tokyo tonight.

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Now their number one is streaming down in a dive - "leader to formation - come on up - elevate your nose - they're ours" The Nips tracer is clearly seen as he closes in. Then A for Annie's cannon bark. For a moment it looks like they have no effect. Then bits fly off the Nip's wing and fuselage, his motors catch fire as a wing section breaks off, and out of control he plunges into the drink. I catch a glimpse of him as we career over the spot, where wreckage and oil burning on the water is the only trace of the Nick. The other three pull out very steeply, just above us, manoeuvring into position for a tail attack. This time they keep their distance. I guess seeing their leader going in, must have shaken them up a bit. We can't afford to turn around to chase them, for we still have a two hour trip to make Base.

We leave the coast with the three Nips still on our tails, trying to decide whether to have another go or not. Beyond them I can see the high columns of black smoke ascending from the wrecked ships. Here they come again, we are at only three quarter power to conserve our petrol, but we're in a pretty tight defensive formation, 800 yards... 600 yards... right my tracer is flying away. They're coming in a tighter formation this time... too much deflection, I'll ease off a bit, I'm hitting him, I'm hitting him. The sky is full of tracer from the concentration of fire from the rear guns. Too hot for old Nip. Yes, he's dropping behind now, they're still there, but becoming very small dots now. As I watch, they wheel about and head back for their base to lick their wounds.

The island is gradually disappearing in the distance and we climb for height. I realize how dry my mouth really is, where's the water bottle? Ah, that's good. Any holes in us?. No everything is fine. It is getting cooler now, 4000, 5000, 6000 feet. Again I notice those big curiously shaped, but exquisitely beautiful cumulus clouds fly past us like huge snowy eiderdown quilts. My thoughts run ahead to those at Base. Our ground crew who will be eagerly waiting to see us touch down safe and well, and the Intelligence Officer with his interrogation, millions of questions, describing the scenes all over again in detail, the number of rounds fired, how was the wireless, and so on. The reaction is setting in, a feeling of being very tired.

Gee, the water looks very beautiful, such a deep blue. It was like that on my honeymoon. Gosh those were the days, wishful thinking. Land will be coming up soon, good old Australia. Ah! There she is. Well it is all over now bar the shouting. Tomorrow we will read the official communique. Our long range fighters strafed and sank, two four thousand ton transports. One enemy fighter destroyed, and one damaged. All our planes returned safely.

Another contract carried out successfully by "Whispering Death and Company".

HOW GOOD WERE BEAUFIGHTERS? IS NUMBER 13 UNLUCKY?

By Lester Cox

This is not an event in action - just a story of survival. After training in Beaufighters at 5OTU Williamtown NSW, I and my navigator F/SGT Allan Jaques were posted to Number 22 Squadron, flying American Bostons. S/LDR Bill Newtown VC's Squadron.

Unknown to me, between the time I left Williamtown and when I arrived at Noemfoor, 22 Squadron was virtually wiped out at Morotai, by the Japanese Air Force.. It was 26th December 1944 when I arrived at Noemfoor, and from the first aircrew I met, I asked "Where are the Bostons today?" The answer was "Mate, we ain't got any Bostons left, but we are being re-equipped with Beaufighters". As Allan Jaques went on leave before posting to 22 Squadron, he did not arrive when I did, so I teamed up with navigators who would fly with me until Allan arrived.

On 10th January 1945 I was ordered to fly to the American base at Hollandia in New Guinea, to retrieve an unserviceable Beaufighter, No A8-42. Sgt Cameron was my navigator and LAC Wood a mechanic. The three of us set out on a very eventful journey. We hitched a ride in Beaufort A9-613 flown by F/OFF Mitchell (pilot) W/OFF Dempster and P/OFF Liston which took three hours.

On landing at the American Base the three of us were left to, our own devices to find A8-42. Here I must add, that the USA base at Hollandia was swarming with aircraft, Mitchells, Lightnings, Kittyhawks, and Mustangs to name but a few. There were aircraft everywhere. There was not one Australian serviceman at the base, so the three of us with our meager kitbags, and LAC Woods with a box of spanners etc, decide to use our gift of gab to inquire how to find A8-42.

First stop for me was the duty pilot's tower. From memory the very first pilot I spoke to did not know anything about the Beaufighter, nor did his crew. However, eventually I found a fellow who knew that a strange aircraft was a couple of miles away, on the abandoned Japanese strip, not far from the PX store, and sure enough we saw A8-42, lonely and abandoned. We did not know that it had made a forced landing at Hollandia, with hydraulic problems - that was all.

In researching A8-42's history we found it was issued to 22 Squadron on 4th October 1944, so I now assumed it was being ferried to Noemfoor, sometime in November 1944. It certainly looked as if it had been there for quite a while because the main tyres were partly flat, the flaps sagging etc. Not a pretty site at all, but there was worse to come.

We had no accommodation, no friends, and little money. We talked to, and asked some Americans to find

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The Beaufighter's Debut

There she stood, sturdy, powerful fearsome surrounded by an enthusiastic crowd. Most of us admired from the outside only as only those with influence or possessed extreme cunning got inside. Pilots, engineers fitters, riggers, armourers, and signal mechanics were in attendance, and they probed and tinkered and adjusted until they had brought her to a state of good-tempered serviceability. Then they all tip toed quietly away for, like all young monsters in unfamiliar hands, she showed promise of being temperamental. Even Mick Wheadon, the Flight Sergeant in charge, was said to have been walking away backwards from the Presence.

For the gunners, however, there was a shattering disappointment. Where the turret should have been there was nothing but a plain dome of perspex. Here was our dream fighter. But where were the four guns in the turret in the back that could fire four free guns into the belly of an enemy bomber? There was not even a single free gun with which we could foster our delusions of usefulness.

Eventually I managed to elbow my way through the crowd and get to the aircraft. Just aft of the perspex dome a panel in the bottom of the fuselage hinged downwards leaving open the back entrance. I ducked down, set my feet on the steps cut in the panel and climbed in.

Right in front of me there was a very serviceable swivel seat, set high up under the dome, with backrest and safety harness, and scooped out to take a one man dinghy. This was a good start

I squeezed past the seat, swiveling it around, and found Sandiferd, one of our oldest gunners from the point of service in the Squadron, red in the face, sitting on the catwalk that led forward. Stan Hawkes, another of our senior gunners, was standing behind him, bent down under the curving roof, with a stopwatch in his hand.

'Where's the turret that we have heard so much about? I demanded. Sandi was breathing hard. 'We've had that' he grunted. The only gunnery we are likely to get will be this job'. He pointed to a row of 20mm ammunition drums set in the racks above his head on either side of the catwalk. 'From now on we are just powder monkeys.

Stan said. 'We're having a go to see how long it takes to reload.'

Sandi chuckled. 'Wait until Tommy catches a sight of this lot!' he commented. He patted something set in the floor. It was dim in the tunnel-like fuselage, but as my eyes became accustomed to the half-light I saw them: four solid great cannon, firmly set in place just below the floor level! Their massive breeches gleamed with evil beauty. 'Four twenties!' Sandi gloated. 'They ought to do a bit of no good to somebody...if we ever catch anybody!'

In spite of my disappointment over the turret, my gunner's heart warmed at the sight. My face must have shown it, because when I looked up Stan was smiling.

'How's the reloading going?' I asked.

Sandi was nursing one of the drums. 'These things weigh sixty pounds each' he said. 'God knows what it's going to be like hauling them out of the racks and fitting them on the cannon with all you kit on, oxygen tubes and phone cords and all.... and in the dark, with the pilot going into a tight turn just as you get it off the rack,' Stan added, 'That'll make it weigh a lot more. Probably go straight through the floor if it doesn't chop your fingers off near the breech'.

I went back aft and wriggled into the seat under the dome and swung around to look out over the tail. There was a fine unobstructed view all round above the horizon, and with a little squirming you could even see into that old Blenheim danger spot below and behind. The radar equipment appeared to be a new version of what we had in the Blenheims, with the box suspended from the low roof just behind the dome. One could look into its rubber visor or keep a visual watch over the tail with only a slight movement of the head.

I looked around inside, and found there were catches to release the whole dome in the case of ditching or a belly landing. The bottom hatch, through which I had entered, was opened automatically by the slipstream at the turn of a lever. There was an altimeter and an air speed indicator: and bless my frozen feet, there was a hot air duct discharging into the gap from the starboard side.

Squeezing past the others, I went forward along the catwalk, stooping under the low roof, through a pair of armour plate doors, and into the pilot's compartment. His seat was in the centre. His windscreen was one large sheet of bullet resisting glass sloping back fairly close to his face, there would be no mad craning and peering trying to see out, with the glow from the instruments reflecting back from half a dozen panes. Perspex panels gave a clear view to both sides and up through the roof.

Getting out in an emergency, I found, would be a bit of a gymnastic feat for the pilot. There were parallel bars set up high, one on each side, by means of which the pilot, having collapsed the back of his seat by pulling a lever, could swing himself up and back and down on to a forward escape hatch, hinged like the one at the back. When shut, this hatch formed the floor of a small well between the pilot's seat and the armour plate doors, with enough room for a passenger to stand and look out forward over the head of the pilot.

I pulled the hatch open, dropped out on to the ground, and walked around to the front of the aircraft. She was good, whichever way you looked at her, sturdy and aggressive, although perhaps a bit heavy. But the two giant hercules engines with which she was powered, air-cooled and close cowed, with their huge propellers, sweeping through a wide arc, could lift any thing. From the tip of that forked aerial at the nose to the shapely rudder, she was a beauty. I knew that somehow, as gunner, powder monkey, operator, or stowaway, it did not matter which, I just had to fly in her.

C F Rawnsley & Robert Wright.

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us a tent to sleep in, and I must say the Americans could not do enough for us. We met a lot at the PX store, and they asked me what I was going to do with the Beaufighter. I said "When we fix the hydraulics, I will fly it to Noemfoor".

The Americans looked at me and said "Buddy, there is no strip here any more, and there is no way to taxi it to the new strip, two miles away".

With that information we began to survey the situation. We borrowed a Jeep, and drove along the roads to the usable strip and sure enough there was no way to get the Beau over to the main strip. What we decided to do, was first of all fix the aircraft. LAC Wood and I (I cannot recall his or Sgt. Cameron's first names) set about to do a check of what to do.

Soon it was established that there was no hydraulic oil in the system, very little fuel in the tanks, the batteries were flat and so were the tyres. Otherwise the Beau was OK, but still nowhere to take off when it was fixed, if ever. Soon, when the news of our predicament filtered through the American base, it was quite amazing how we were offered help. We were offered some hydraulic oil first and foremost. LAC Wood worked very hard I helped him, and from memory St Cameron was our scrounge master. We eventually had the hydraulic pump working, then bled the system. We were able to get the batteries charged, and then I started the engines to get the hydraulics working. We could not test the undercarriage because we had nothing to lift the aircraft. LAC Wood and I were confident that all would work.

During all the time we worked to get the hydraulics working and the engines running, we were besieged by American air crews, wanting to know all about Beaufighters, because virtually none of them had seen a Beau. "Who is the pilot?" as I had no rank nor wings whilst working - soot and grease all over us. Their next question "OK buddy - what are you going to do when you fix it?"

I must say at this stage I had surveyed the area thoroughly, while we scrounged oil, fuel, food and shelter. I had found a road that served the PX and outlying areas, and found a straight stretch of road through some timber, then a clear run for about 800yards, then it went into a row of palm trees. The road was narrow and graveled, but not very rough. I knew I could not taxi to the main strip, so I devised a plan. I walked the road and decided I would taxi the Beau close to the timber and get it towed as far as it would go backwards into the timber. Once there, I would hold the Beau on the brakes, with the engines warmed up - put down 20 degrees of flap, and slowly rev the engines until the tail was bumping. When this happened, I would release the brakes and if the aircraft ran straight and I had rudder control, I would put on full power. When I felt the aircraft wanting to fly I would lift it off and then put the column forward

and bounce the Beau as high as it would go and lift it off and then lift the undercarriage and hopefully clear the palm trees at the end off the road.

I went to the American Base and told the duty pilot at the time what I proposed doing. He consulted a higher ranked officer who in turn, told somebody else and eventually the answer was "No way". I had to try to talk them into letting me try to do it as I wanted to get the three of us out of there fast.

The word got around that the mad Australian was going to fly that big aircraft off the road. A lot of the air force pilots at Hollandia came out to see us and the advice was "Buddy, we fly Lightnings and Mustangs etc, and there is no way you'll get that plane into the air".

I still did not have permission, so we got the Beau ready. Just enough fuel to get to Noemfoor - no unnecessary items to take and once more I contacted the American "Brass". They eventually said "You do it, we take no responsibility".

The three of us decided to try it the next day, which was 13th January 1945. The word spread like wildfire, with the help of a jeep, we set out for the take off plan. As I have previously stated the plan - it worked perfectly. The Beau did not swing, the engines gave full power and I did bounce it into the air. The undercarriage retracted perfectly, and I just brushed the trees as I climbed away. I guess I must have breathed a sigh of relief but at the time I was 21 years old and not a nerve in my make up, but now writing about it at the age of 78 I wonder if I was really a fool to try that.

When I got full control of A8-42 in the air, and checked all the systems go, I dive bombed the hundreds of Americans, especially their pilots at the PX store but not for long as I did not want to push our luck too far. So headed for Noemfoor, arriving exactly two and one half hours later.

On landing and back to quarters I was informed by the Orderly Room, I was posted to 31 Squadron at Morotai and left Noemfoor on 22nd January 1945. My research has shown that A8-42 served with 22 Squadron until 11th June 1945 when the starboard engine failed on take off. It crashed into the sea at the end of the strip. It was at Sanga Sanga and the pilot F/O Scott was killed. The 11th of June 1945 was also the day my aircraft A8 - 39 - and A8 -191 collided on take off and both crashed into the sea at Sanga Sanga with three lives lost. Fortunately I was on mid ops leave at that time.

After 56 years I would like to know if F/O Mitchell, of 22 Squadron is still alive, also navigator P/O Cameron and LAC Wood.

I am sure that many of the Americans who witnessed the take off of A8- 42, who survived the war would have no doubt told the story I am writing about now, to many of their friends during and after the war.

Couresy "Wings" Spring Edition 2001