

CHAPTER 30

ADVANCE TO BUNA

TENSION in the Milne Bay area having subsided, the focal point for G.H.Q.'s main anxieties was now the fighting on the Kokoda Track, where depleted and weary elements of the 21st Australian Brigade had now been reinforced by the 25th Brigade, but the strength to turn the Japanese back seemed still to be lacking. The Japanese commander, Major-General Horii, leading the men of the *South Seas Detachment* into battle in person, was obviously striving hard to make good the advantage he had gained. In a series of fierce attacks his troops, by 20th September, had forced the Australians back from Ioribaiwa to Imita Ridge, about 30 miles from Port Moresby.

The struggle was bitter, but General Rowell was confident that the enemy could be held until the reinforcements that were arriving could be brought into action. Though supply was still a crucial problem, he recognised that the farther the enemy's lines of communications extended across the mountains the more vulnerable they became to the weakness from which his own troops had been suffering and, conversely, the less severe his own problem of supply became. But the battle in the mountains was only a part of Rowell's command responsibilities. As he outlined it, his primary task was "the retention of Port Moresby as an air operational base". This demanded adequate protection against sea-borne attack, but "the needs of the situation to the north" had forced him to draw away more and more troops until he had but one battalion (and it was engaged in unloading ships) where, to be secure, he needed not less than a division with a complement of tanks.¹

Some anxiety had been expressed at meetings of the War Cabinet and the Advisory War Council about the situation in New Guinea and, at the request of the Minister for the Army, Mr Forde, General Blamey had gone to Port Moresby on 12th September to confer with Rowell. He returned two days later and said both publicly and to the Advisory War Council that he shared the confidence of Rowell and the other commanders in the field that the Japanese would not be able to take Port Moresby from the land. Blamey made his report to the Council on the 17th. That evening, however, General MacArthur informed the Prime Minister that, far from sharing the Australian commander's confidence, he was considerably worried by the situation in the Owen Stanleys and blamed the Australian troops for lack of efficiency. He told Mr Curtin that he had resolved to send American troops to New Guinea and asked him to agree to Blamey's immediate return to Port Moresby to take

¹ Headquarters 6th Division AIF was now established at Port Moresby but only its 16th Brigade, which arrived on 21st September, was to be available. The 17th Brigade was on its way to Milne Bay and the 19th was in the Darwin area.

command personally so that he could "energise the situation". Curtin assented and Blamey had no choice but to agree.

MacArthur's doubts about the fighting capacity of the Australians on the Kokoda Track, and about Rowell as their commander, had been supplemented, if not inspired, by General Kenney after a visit to New Guinea at the beginning of September. "I told General MacArthur," he wrote later, "that I had no faith in the Australians holding Kokoda Gap. The undergrowth at that altitude was sparse and the Nips would move through it and around the Aussies and work their same old infiltration tactics." Some days later Kenney, at a further interview with MacArthur, elaborated these doubts. In his own record of the discussion he states: "I told the General that I believed we would lose Port Moresby if something drastic did not happen soon. . . . I believed that Rowell's attitude had become defeatist and that this attitude had permeated the whole Australian force in New Guinea."²

Perhaps it was typical of the ebullient, egocentric Kenney that he should make a snap judgment on a land-force situation for which he had no direct responsibility. Yet his ignorance of the nature of the battle and of the country in which it was being fought was lamentable in the commander responsible for air support. His unjustified and ill-timed criticism of Rowell is of consequence here because of the influence it must have had on MacArthur's judgment. The facts at the time and subsequent events disprove the charge against Rowell, and the Australian troops engaged in that battle would have been expressively derisive about Kenney's impression of the Kokoda "Gap".

In a letter dated 11th September, the Commander-in-Chief had told Blamey that he intended to execute a flanking movement with the 32nd American Division which, in a march across the mountains, would be able to intercept the Japanese as they fell back from Kokoda. By this means the Japanese forward troops could be "liquidated" and the Allied forces could then concentrate on the reduction of Buna. This concept originated, of course, before MacArthur told Curtin of his concern about the Australians' "lack of efficiency".

A key to success in any such operations, as it already was to the success of the Australians' campaign in the Owen Stanleys was the availability of transport aircraft. By mid-September Kenney's air force had on hand only 41 of 78 transports that had been assigned and of these about 15 were of use only for spare parts. But Kenney, with strong backing from MacArthur, kept up the pressure for the promised aircraft and succeeded in inducing the Operations Division of the War Department's general staff to release two additional squadrons.³ The possibility of investing Lae

² *General Kenney Reports*, pp. 89 and 94.

³ Despite this, Fifth Air Force did not obtain its quota of transport aircraft until late in November. One of the new squadrons, now termed troop carrier squadrons, with 13 Dakotas (Douglas C-47s) arrived in mid-October. The second was "intercepted" by General Harmon for the Guadalcanal operations in which 7 of the aircraft with their crews were engaged for more than a month before being freed to continue their flight to Australia.—Craven and Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, Vol IV, pp. 113-4.

and Salamaua by landing airborne troops in the vicinity, was investigated about this time at Blamey's suggestion, but the acute lack of aircraft of the type essential for the task, and MacArthur's misgivings because of the enemy's command of the sea, stayed development of the plan. Nevertheless Kenney was closely examining MacArthur's plans for "enveloping" operations.

As early as 18th August Kenney, remembering Group Captain Garing's advice about the suitability of the Wanigela Mission area, had flown over the site which he later described as "a natural", adding, "we could land there any time and occupy and supply the place by air".⁴ Further, on the same flight he had made a survey of the coastal fringe to the north-east with the same quest in mind. Then, on 8th September, he was back in Brisbane outlining to MacArthur with obvious enthusiasm his own plans for the occupation and development of air bases from Wanigela to the Buna-Gona sector with particular emphasis on the value of the Dobodura plain a few miles south of Buna. Here he envisaged the establishment of a major air base. This would permit him to extend the range and bomb-loading of his aircraft and to avoid the always exacting climb over the Owen Stanley Range with its all-too-frequent barrier of thunderous weather. The Wanigela base, he reported to MacArthur, could be quickly developed by putting in advance parties in light aircraft, setting natives to work cutting the kunai grass, and then flying in troops—at the rate of 1,000 a day if need be—and supplying them by air with food and ammunition. MacArthur, though impressed by Kenney's lively conception, was still cautious. He replied that he was "not ready yet for the Wanigela thing". He was, in fact, planning the larger diversionary operations he had outlined in his letter to Blamey. Brig-General Hanford MacNider, commanding the first detachments of the 126th U.S. Regiment to arrive in Port Moresby, had been ordered to prepare for this operation. He therefore sent out a patrol to reconnoitre the route from Rigo, on the coast about 45 miles south-east of Port Moresby, across the southern slopes of the Owen Stanleys, north-east over the range itself to the headwaters of the Kumusi River and then north-west along the course of that river to meet the Kokoda-Buna track at or near Wairopi to the east of Kokoda.

Rowell, who discussed these plans with MacNider, had little faith in their ultimate value. He later recorded that since MacNider was acting on G.H.Q. orders he could not veto the proposals, but he would not countenance the diversion of facilities from the main task, which was to drive the Japanese back along the Kokoda Track.

Meanwhile the main troops of the 126th and 128th Infantry Regiments of the 32nd U.S. Division were being prepared for the move from the Australian mainland to Port Moresby. At a staff conference at General Headquarters on 13th September Kenney had asked MacArthur to let

⁴The site was first found by F-O L. Halliday of No. 32 Squadron on 15 June 1942 when obliged to make a forced landing in a Hudson while on patrol from Horn Island. Halliday reported it as a good emergency "wheels down" landing ground. Garing then inspected the site and thereafter reported it to General Kenney.

him fly the first regiment in to New Guinea. The Commander-in-Chief asked how many men he would lose and received the reply that they had not yet lost a pound of freight on that route and that "airplanes didn't know the difference between 180 pounds of freight and 180 pounds of infantryman".⁵ He was given a company to fly to Port Moresby "to see how long it took and how the scheme worked out". MacArthur's staff were very dubious, but, on the morning of the 15th, 230 troops of the 126th Regiment together with their small arms and packs were embarked in Douglas and Lockheed transports at Amberley and all were safely carried to Port Moresby that day. Though he sent the rest of the 126th by sea, MacArthur was now convinced; he instructed Kenney to collaborate with the recently arrived American corps commander, Lieutenant-General Robert L. Eichelberger, in arranging for the air transport of the 128th Regiment beginning on 18th September. By direct appeal to the Minister for Air, Mr Drakeford (who was also Minister for Civil Aviation), Kenney was able to commission 12 airliners from the civil airline operators for a week. He ordered that all bombers coming from maintenance workshops anywhere in Australia after overhaul should be assigned to troop transport tasks and any suitable aircraft arriving from the United States should be temporarily commandeered, together with their civilian ferry crews, to lend additional aid. The lift was carried out at the rate of about 600 men every 24 hours, and by 24th September the last of the regiment had been landed at Port Moresby, two days before the men of the 126th Regiment arrived by sea.

The achievement was notable not only for its complete success in difficult circumstances in which service and civil organisations had to be coordinated at short notice, but as the first major movement of American troops by air since the war began. MacArthur was pleased and now agreed that Kenney should have his way with the Wanigela project. The use of Wanigela as an air transport staging point had much to commend it since, with no fighter base on the northern side of the Owen Stanleys, air cover could not be provided for the slow-moving coastal transport which was so very vulnerable to enemy sea and air attack.

Blamey arrived in New Guinea to take command on 23rd September. On the 25th he flew to Milne Bay and went on to reconnoitre the Wanigela Mission area. Approving the site, he advised MacArthur that there would be little risk of enemy interference if the operation to establish a base there was carried out promptly. Subject to a check on the entire plan by Kenney, MacArthur, on 2nd October, approved Operation HATRACK, as it had been named. One effect of this decision was to limit the planned overland movement by the 32nd Division, only one battalion of which would now be sent on the exacting march against the Japanese flank.

With his limited resources in aircraft, Kenney's air transport task would now be immense. "For the moment air supply is paramount," Blamey

⁵ Kenney, pp. 97-8.

wrote to MacArthur. In this letter, dated 5th October, he reported that at a conference attended by Walker, Harding, MacNider and Lieut-General Herring (who had succeeded Rowell as the commander of New Guinea Force), it had been determined that, with the Kokoda front, Kanga Force, HATRACK and the 32nd Division's overland operation, the front-line troops to be supplied would number approximately 7,000 and the essential carrier lines still needed would add 3,900 natives to the total.⁷ The total average daily air transport requirements (not including reserves) was 102,000 pounds. The successful establishment of a small-ships supply line from Milne Bay to Wanigela (which might always be precarious), the improvement in the situation when Kokoda aerodrome could be reopened and aircraft land there, so saving approximately 30 per cent of their loads (the estimated loss in dropping supplies), and the landing of aircraft at Wau (to supply Kanga Force) would reduce the minimum daily weight for air transport to 61,900 pounds.

In all calculations it was necessary to recognise that frequently there would be days when bad weather would completely prohibit flying. The weaknesses in the air supply organisation which Rowell had found were being countered only after much trial and error, the finding of a solution being quickened by an urgency that often was desperate. Priority for the next day's operations, which was decided daily, was based on signalled statements of holdings in the forward areas. If the number of aircraft fell short of requirements these priorities had to be adjusted. New Guinea Force Headquarters was now advised by direct telephone call of the departure of each aircraft. Yet in spite of these efforts, as late as 7th October, Major-General Allen,⁸ commanding the 7th Division now pressing northward across the Owen Stanleys, reported that the weakness in the air dropping program was causing the "gravest concern". This was a highly disturbing reminder of the situation almost two months earlier when lack of supplies had forced the withdrawal of troops from battle. Allen's message warned: "Unless supply etc. dropping of 50,000 pounds daily, plus additional to build up reserve is assured, complete revision of plans will have to be made and large proportion of troops withdrawn to Imita Ridge position. Any attempt then to hold a determined enemy advance . . . and to occupy Kokoda will be jeopardised beyond all reason." The warning was well heeded; the air supply program was increased and the risk of withdrawal was averted.⁹

⁷ It was calculated that without air supply the maintenance of troops in action between Uberi and Kokoda alone would require the services of 10,000 carriers. For a detailed analysis of the army supply situation at this time, see D. McCarthy, *South-West Pacific Area—First Year*, pp. 260-2, in the army series of this history.

⁸ Maj-Gen A. S. Allen, CB, CBE, DSO, VD. (1st AIF: 13 Bn and CO 45 Bn.) Comd 16 Bde 1939-41; GOC 7 Div 1941-42, 6 Div 1942-43, NT Force 1943-44. Chartered accountant; of Sydney; b. Hurstville, NSW, 10 Mar 1894. Died 25 Jan 1959.

⁹ In the background of this aerial supply service was a new supply organisation, the Combined Operational Services Command, the establishment of which had been ordered by MacArthur on 5th October. COSC was designed to meet the administrative difficulties of supply. Placed under the control of the Commander, New Guinea Force, it included all Australian Lines of Communications units and the United States Service of Supply. It was responsible also for all coastal seaborne supply lines. See McCarthy, pp. 350-1.

Meanwhile an advanced party of the Australian Army, including a detachment of engineers, had been landed at Wanigela where, with the aid of natives, they had burned off the kunai grass on the selected aerodrome site and cleared a runway. Blamey had already ordered Clowes to prepare the 2/10th Battalion at Milne Bay for an air move to the new base and, on 5th October, the day the II Battalion of the 126th U.S. Regiment began their trans-mountain march from Kalikodobu, near Rigo, the air lift to Wanigela had begun. In two days the Australian battalion and a battery of American .5-inch anti-aircraft guns had been flown in. The task was given to No. 21 U.S. Transport Squadron which made 60 sorties, one crew completing five return flights between Laloki airfield near Port Moresby, and Wanigela, in one day. Fighter cover was provided throughout the operation, all enemy airfields were under close reconnaissance and light-bomber units were on stand-by for concentrated attacks on Lae and Salamaua should any special enemy air activity be reported. While the troops disembarked and stores and equipment were unloaded the transports' engines were kept running so that they were ready for immediate take-off. Equipment and stores were camouflaged or hidden when unloaded. The entire operation was performed without a hitch. General Harding of the 32nd Division was so impressed by the efficiency and speed with which HATFORCE was established that he immediately sought information on the possibility of securing other aerodrome sites closer to Buna. The proposal received support from both Whitehead and Walker and, with the aid of a New Guinea-born missionary, Mr Cecil Abels, who knew the country well, a reconnaissance was made. Abels, assisted by natives, then made a preliminary landing strip at a point about four days' march from Sapia, midway across Papua. Moving northwards from this landing ground, named Abels' Field, American engineers spent several weeks, clearing strips as they went until they reached the coast where, in the vicinity of Pongani, they had, by 4th November, cleared a runway as the beginning of another important base.

It was hoped that, once established in the forward areas round Buna, the Allied troops could be maintained by a sea shuttle-service drawing on supply dumps at Wanigela or Porlock Harbour. It had been laid down that air transport would not be demanded if supplies could be maintained by sea. But Allied Air Forces could not provide air cover for this sea lane and Whitehead warned the army that failure to keep the small ships under cover in daylight might result in the elimination of the flotilla.

MacNider, appointed to command HATFORCE, had been given three immediate tasks: establish Wanigela as a sea and air supply base, "exploit" forward towards Buna by both sea and land, and develop a small-ships supply service between Wanigela and Pongani. The significance of Wanigela was thus emphasised and, despite misgivings at New Guinea Force Headquarters about the risk of attack from the sea, the movement there of substantial supplementary forces was undertaken. On 14th-15th October the 128th U.S. Regiment and 2/6th Australian Independent Com-

pany were flown from Port Moresby to join HATFORCE. Almost immediately the men of the 2/6th set out overland for Pongani. Soon after they had crossed the Musa River heavy flood waters blocked the route and the 128th Regiment, thus cut off, was obliged to make use of two 20-ton luggers that had arrived from Milne Bay. On 18th October they began a coastal ferrying movement to Pongani with approximately 80 troops on board. The luggers were intercepted and attacked by an "un-identified" bomber which later proved to be an American Mitchell, the crew of which mistook the luggers for enemy craft. The attack was tragically successful. There were several casualties and one of the luggers was extensively damaged. The ferrying, however, continued for several days until the 128th Regiment had been moved.

The progress of the II Battalion of the 126th Regiment through the mountains was slow and arduous and the task of dropping supplies to them extremely difficult. Parachutes were limited in number and were reserved for ammunition, medical supplies and other fragile goods; the rest were wrapped in blankets which were bound by wire and tossed free from the aircraft. So great was the demand for supply aircraft that at times bombers were being impressed, the Mitchell becoming one of the most successful. Experience proved that on such missions the best dropping altitude was between 400 and 500 feet; higher altitudes led to inaccurate dropping and at lower levels there was a marked increase in the amount of damage caused to free-falling bundles. Damage to ammunition so dropped created a special problem; the troops sometimes found it faulty, with serious results.

This movement of forces to the northern coastal area added notably to the air defence responsibilities of the Allied Air Forces. Kenney saw clearly that if the Japanese air units, now fairly effectively suppressed, could gain fighter bases closer at hand, he could very quickly lose the superiority he had gained.

In the latter part of October an Australian force (2/12th Battalion and attached troops) was given the task of "cleaning-up" Goodenough Island where there was a Japanese force who had been on the island since No. 76 Squadron had destroyed their barges on the eve of the battle for Milne Bay. The operation proved difficult because of the ruggedness of the country and the sharp resistance of the Japanese. The encounter cost both sides some casualties before the Australians mastered the situation on 23rd October.¹ Thereafter the Australian troops set about constructing an air strip at Vivigani. The small garrison then set to work to build "ghost" camps with tents, dummy buildings, false weapon pits and gun emplacements, anything in fact that their ingenuity could devise to create the impression that the island was occupied in strength.

A similar, though lesser, operation had been undertaken on 21st-23rd September on the north-eastern coast of Normanby Island where sur-

¹ The Japanese force had been maintained by submarines which had taken off their sick and the men wounded in the Kittyhawk pilots' attack. After the action with the Australian occupation force, the surviving enemy troops escaped by night in two barges, crossing to Fergusson Island where they were picked up by a Japanese cruiser and taken to Rabaul.

vivors from the enemy destroyer that had been sunk in the combined attack by Allied aircraft on 11th September had got ashore. Some prisoners were taken, but the enemy's main party retreated into wild country in the interior of the island where they could not be located without considerable military effort and so they were abandoned there. Kittyhawks from No. 75 Squadron had provided air cover for this operation—their last sorties before moving to Horn Island.

Meanwhile the 7th Australian Division had advanced over the Owen Stanleys to Kokoda and beyond. Horii's hungry and depleted force had been ordered to fall back to the north coast and on 28th September the 25th Brigade found the Japanese positions at Ioribaiwa abandoned. The Australians pressed northward. There was hard fighting round Templeton's Crossing; this rearguard was forced back and by 22nd October the troops faced strong defences at Eora Creek. It took until 28th October to overcome these; on 2nd November Kokoda was reoccupied and next day supplies were dropped there and the airfield was being put in order.

In this phase air support operations were more positive, as when the 2/33rd Battalion pressed towards Templeton's Crossing while bombs from Allied aircraft fell ahead of them, and when aircraft tried to strafe the Japanese positions at Eora Creek immediately ahead of the Australian troops. Though their fire fell too far back to affect the immediate issue, this was encouraging proof that air support was at hand. At 9.45 a.m. on 5th November the first Dakota aircraft landed at Kokoda. Several more followed. All carried rations, clothing and medical supplies; the sick and wounded could now be flown back to Port Moresby.

At Myola the situation had been very different. Here 438 sick and wounded men waited to be evacuated. Engineers had prepared a landing strip and by the end of October it had been possible to land a Stinson aircraft on it. This was followed, in the early days of November, by several more light planes and a few patients were flown out, but Whitehead and Garing ruled against a large-scale air lift with the aircraft then available. There was natural disappointment and some criticism of this decision but the wisdom behind it was borne out when, five more suitable aircraft having been obtained, an attempt was made to operate a medical air evacuation service. A single-engine Stinson and a tri-motor Ford both crashed at Myola soon after beginning operations and each of the other three aircraft—two Stinsons and a Dragon Rapide—crashed soon after arriving in New Guinea. Of the two aircraft that did land, the Ford evacuated eight and the Stinson about 30 patients before they were wrecked. Even so it was clearly impossible to operate such a service with a reasonable margin of safety.

For the air units supporting the Australians fighting on the Kokoda Track one of the chief objectives was the disruption, if not the destruction, of the Japanese supply lines. A key target in these operations was a suspension bridge across the turbulent Kumusi River at Wairopi in the

valley below Kokoda.² The location deep in the valley, and the nature of the target itself, called for great flying skill and accuracy in bombing and gunnery, with a considerable margin still left for luck. Airacobra pilots had made the first of what was to be a long series of attempts to wreck the bridge when, on 1st August, they had dropped 300-lb bombs without success. As attack after attack was made the bridge would sometimes be damaged and the movement of enemy supplies hindered, but the Japanese repaired it as assiduously as spiders repairing cobwebs.

At frequent if irregular intervals Allied airmen continued their efforts. Machine-gun and cannon fire and bombing did no more than damage it. A R.A.A.F. Kittyhawk pilot flew in and dropped a bellytank of petrol near one of the supporting trestles and endeavoured, without success, to burn it down by igniting the fuel with gunfire. Even heavy bombers were called on, four Flying Fortresses dropping 20,000 pounds of bombs in an attempt to smother the bridge with explosives. The crews reported it to be "sagging, but not destroyed". This attempt was repeated without success and then the task was passed to the Mitchell medium bombers whose crews, between 3rd and 18th October, made 19 sorties. Finally, after the last of these attacks, a photo-reconnaissance pilot brought back the photograph that had been awaited for so long—a picture of the Kumusi at Wairopi showing the trestles on either bank of the river, but no bridge!³

During the stand at Imita Ridge and the subsequent advance to Kokoda the air force had been battering the enemy's base on the north coast. Thus on 17th September, five days after No. 30 Squadron reached Port Moresby, its Beaufighters had been sent to attack a concentration of enemy barges at Sanananda Point and along Buna beach. The Beaufighter was new to the Japanese for whom the experience was a particularly bitter one. As the aircraft left the target, three of the barges were blazing fiercely, and others were seen to be on fire with their cargoes exploding. A pall of black smoke told of the damage that had been done. MacArthur sent a congratulatory message to the squadron on the success of the raid, ending with warm informality: "It was a honey!" The enemy's supply line on the Kokoda Track, the runway at Buna, store dumps, buildings, troop and gun positions, waterfront buildings and jetties at Lae, and coastwise patrols in search of small sea-going craft all provided targets for the Beaufighter crews. The squadron's first loss occurred on 23rd September when seven aircraft attacked anti-aircraft positions at Buna. An aircraft piloted by Flight Sergeant Sayer⁴ with Sergeant Mairet⁵ as his observer,

² The name Wairopi was a pidgin English corruption of "wire rope"; the bridge was suspended from wire ropes.

³ Between 20th September and 20th October 80 aircraft sorties (38 by Airacobras, 19 by Mitchells, 15 by Kittyhawks and 8 by Flying Fortresses) were made in attacks on the bridge in which 76,000 pounds of bombs were dropped and more than 28,000 rounds of cannon and machine-gun ammunition fired.

⁴ F-Sgt G. W. Sayer, 400212. 8, 84 Sqns RAF and 30 Sqn. Industrial chemist; of Toorak, Vic; b. Footscray, Vic, 6 Jun 1913. Killed in action 23 Sep 1942. (Sayer, who had served in the Middle East, was making his forty-ninth operational flight and had been one of a party who, in March, had escaped from Java to Australia in an open boat.)

⁵ Sgt A. S. Mairet, 35940; 30 Sqn. Mine overman; of Glen Davis, NSW; b. Pillely, Yorkshire, Eng, 12 Jun 1912. Killed in action 23 Sep 1942.

was shot down by ground fire. In the course of this attack the Beaufighter pilots noted that about 75 per cent of the Japanese barges along the beaches in the area had been sunk.

On the same day, while a second formation of six Beaufighters was making an offensive sweep along the coast to Sanananda, nine enemy dive bombers escorted by six Zeros were sighted over Buna by the crew of one of the Beaufighters—Flying Officer Moran-Hilford⁶ (pilot) and Sergeant Clark⁷ (observer). Moran-Hilford turned his aircraft towards the Zeros and then dived almost to sea-level at 260 knots. Within a mile the Beaufighter had out-distanced the Zeros. The sturdiness of the Beaufighter was also noted with satisfaction on 1st October when Flight Lieutenant Willard⁸ (pilot) and Flight Sergeant Nelson⁹ (observer) flew back across the Owen Stanley Range on one engine after the other one had been stopped by fire from an anti-aircraft battery at Sanananda. The first strike made by the squadron in cooperation with American squadrons was made on 9th October when nine Beaufighters joined with a formation of Mitchells in a heavy attack on Lae in the course of which debris flying from an explosion in a dump near the wharf area struck a Beaufighter but the aircraft was not seriously damaged. On the 13th, Sergeant Butterfield¹ (pilot) and Sergeant Wilson² (observer) were killed when, while strafing enemy positions in the Owen Stanleys, their aircraft crashed into a hill near Kokoda. Again on the 27th another crew—Flight Lieutenant Jones³ (pilot) and Flight Sergeant Richardson⁴—were lost when their aircraft crashed into the sea off Voco Point near Lae. Other pilots saw a trail of smoke coming from one of the Beaufighter's engines as it went down.

The fighting in the Owen Stanleys culminated in a particularly fierce engagement round the villages of Oivi and Gorari where the Australians, commanded by General Vasey, delivered the final blow. While this battle was at its height on 9th-10th November, American Bostons of No. 89 Squadron gave the Australians close bombing and gunnery support while fighter-bombers strafed the Oivi-Gorari track, and loosed 80 20-lb bombs on the enemy's positions. These, however, were so well covered that effective penetration was very difficult.

⁶ F-Lt D. J. Moran-Hilford, 3613. 30 and 31 Sqns. Regular airman; of Melbourne, b. Canterbury, Vic, 3 Jan 1916.

⁷ F-O W. G. Clark, 40775. 30 and 100 Sqns. Insurance clerk; of Springvale, Vic; b. Footscray, Vic, 29 Apr 1923.

⁸ F-Lt W. E. Willard, 472. 30 and 31 Sqns. Regular air force offr; of Waverley, NSW; b. Sydney, 4 Feb 1921. Killed in action 30 Aug 1943.

⁹ F-Lt R. T. Nelson, 5832. 21, 22, 30 and 36 Sqns. Railway employee; of Punchbowl, NSW; b. Merriwa, NSW, 18 Aug 1920.

¹ Sgt T. I. Butterfield, 416205; 30 Sqn. Share farmer; of Wunkar, SA; b. Renmark, SA, 24 Jul 1915. Killed in action 13 Oct 1942.

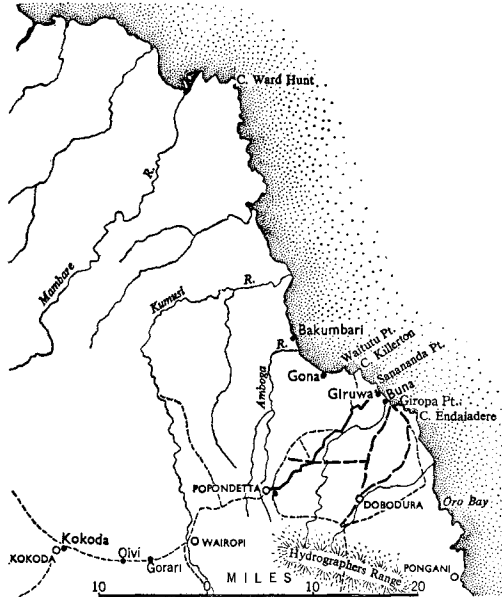
² Sgt J. R. Wilson, 40196; 30 Sqn. Clerk; of Brighton, Vic; b. Oakleigh, Vic, 24 Jul 1922. Killed in action 13 Oct 1942.

³ F-Lt E. A. Jones, 270808; 30 Sqn. Bank officer; of Morningside, Qld; b. Brisbane, 8 Oct 1914. Killed in action 27 Oct 1942.

⁴ F-Sgt E. R. Richardson, 22750. 22 and 30 Sqns. Clerk; of Toowoomba, Qld; b. Toowoomba, 6 Jul 1920. Killed in action 27 Oct 1942.

Strong indirect support was being given meanwhile by No. 30 Squadron's Beaufighters which made repeated low-level sweeps over Popondetta, Soputa, Sanananda Point, Buna, Giropa Point, and along the coast over the mouths of the Amboga and Mambare Rivers and by Mitchells which bombed the Buna building area and aerodrome.

When defeat finally came in the Oivi-Gorari sector on 13th November, Horii, with most of Yazawa's surviving troops, unable to cross the Kumusi because the bridge had been destroyed, attempted to raft down the river to the sea. Horii himself, with a number of his staff, was drowned in the racing flood which also claimed many of his troops; others were shot by Papuan Infantry Battalion patrols who kept a close watch near the river's mouth.



New Guinea Force Headquarters now arranged for the dropping of supplies on a patch of kunai grass near Wairopi. On the 14th aircraft flew in and dropped steel wire rope and tools. The engineers had also requested that empty drums be dropped for use in their difficult bridging operations but the pilots thought that the risk in dropping these through the slip-stream of their aircraft was too great. Despite the lack of drums the engineers spanned the stream first by flying-foxes and then with a small suspension bridge which enabled the Australian troops to cross and pursue the fleeing Japanese.

It was at this stage that the naval battle of Guadalcanal was fought, as already noted, with considerable losses to both sides, but with a crippling result for the Japanese land forces who were deprived of heavy reinforcements when, on 14th-15th November, eleven of their transports were sunk. The significance of this naval engagement was expressed in a captured Japanese document which summed it up with the comment:

It must be said that the success or failure in recapturing Guadalcanal Island, and [the outcome of] the vital naval battle related to it, is the fork in the road which leads to victory for them or for us.

At Port Moresby the R.A.A.F's No. 9 Operational Group had been working at full pressure during these operations and in close harmony

with Whitehead's Advance Echelon of the Fifth Air Force. As Garing saw the group's purpose it was that of a mobile task force for service with the forward elements of the main Allied forces—a role for which he, as commander, was admirably suited. In organisation, as he saw it, the immediate objective was a seven-squadron formation.⁵ At the end of October he had under his command only four of these units—a torpedo-bomber unit (No. 100 Beaufort Squadron), a long-range fighter unit (No. 30 Squadron), an attack bomber, or, as the R.A.A.F. termed it, "intruder" unit—No. 22 (Boston) Squadron only then moving in from the mainland—and a general reconnaissance unit—No. 6 (Hudson) Squadron which had moved from Horn Island that month. The other three squadrons Garing considered necessary to give his force tactical balance were a dive bomber unit, and two escort fighter squadrons, one for medium-altitude and one for high-altitude operations.⁶

In No. 1 Rescue and Communication Flight, the R.A.A.F. in New Guinea had its most unusual operational unit. Its strange assortment of light aircraft was as varied and as appropriate to its task as was the flying record of its commander, Squadron Leader Pentland.⁷ A pilot with the R.A.F. in the 1914-18 War, in which he was credited with having shot down 23 German aircraft, Pentland at 48 was probably the oldest R.A.A.F. pilot serving in an operational area. Between the wars he had flown as a pilot with the original Australian National Airways, which was owned and operated by Charles Kingsford-Smith and Charles Ulm, and was himself later closely identified as a pilot with the development of commercial flying in New Guinea, the stimulant to which was the need for air transport to the goldfields round Wau and Bulolo. Leading his unit, Pentland was now flying to and from remote, often improvised, air strips some of them inaccessible to other types of aircraft and pilots less skilled in flying in this tropical mountainous country with its vagaries in weather. He organised the successful rescue of the crews of an American Marauder and three Dauntless dive bombers which had crash-landed in the Upper Ramu Valley, and the evacuation of civilians and troops. Under Pentland's direction aerial surveys were made from which light aircraft and emergency air strips were constructed at Bena Bena, Abau, Kulpi, Hood Point, Cape Rodney, Huiva and Rami. By the end of 1942 the unit had carried about 15,000 pounds of supplies to outposts, had rescued 75 civilians and servicemen, and had carried many sick and wounded troops.

⁵ Letter from CO No. 9 Ops Group to HQ North-Eastern Area, 27 Oct 1942.

⁶ Ancillary units in the group included No. 4 Fighter Sector and No. 10 Signals Unit, both based on Port Moresby. There were six subsidiary RAAF radio stations in the New Guinea area—Nos. 29, 37, 40, 50, 138 and 305. Other ancillary units that were administered by a Base Wing (No. 21) included No. 33 Transport Squadron (at Ward's), and three operational base units—No. 41 at Eleven Mile, No. 42 at Ward's, and No. 43 at Gurney, Milne Bay. No. 3 Medical Receiving Station, one of the "pioneering" medical units in New Guinea, was performing service of inestimable value. Planned as a mobile, self-contained specialist hospital unit its army parallel was the casualty clearing station.

⁷ Sqn Ldr A. A. N. D. Pentland, MC, DFC, AFC, 271547. (1914-18: 12 LH Regt and 19 and 87 Sqns RAF.) Instructor at elementary flying training schools 1940-42; comd 1 Rescue and Communication Flight 1942. Pilot and later planter; of Goroka, TNG; b. Maitland, NSW, 5 Aug 1894.

Air support with a variation—tactical reconnaissance, the oldest type of air support in military history—was actively reviewed in New Guinea about this time. On 27th September, on the eve of his departure from New Guinea, Rowell informed Blamey that there was a need for army-cooperation aircraft working continuously on tactical reconnaissance. He recommended that at least one flight of No. 5 Army Cooperation Squadron, and a squadron of Bostons, be sent to Port Moresby. Brigadier-General Walker said that he could accommodate these units and Blamey supported the recommendation.

On 6th October Blamey made a similar request: for an army-cooperation squadron armed with comparatively slow aircraft. He quoted Walker as suggesting a squadron equipped with Wirraways, Boomerangs and Tiger Moths. Next day he learnt that No. 4 Squadron, with Wirraways, would be sent to Port Moresby as soon as possible. This proposal met with some opposition at General Headquarters. The Wirraway, it was held, was obsolete, and if intercepted by Japanese fighters casualties would be high. The most reliable observation could be obtained by modern fighter aircraft operating in flights of three, and such aircraft would be able to meet enemy aircraft in combat. Blamey agreed that the evidence indicated the unsuitability of the Wirraway but said that this type would be acceptable if none more suitable was available. An answer to this problem, he said, might be the re-equipment of No. 4 Squadron with the new Boomerang aircraft that the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation was then producing, but the squadron was required urgently. MacArthur told Blamey that he had been informed that it was unlikely that Boomerangs would be available for service within three months and the squadron, equipped with Wirraways, would therefore be transferred to New Guinea as early as possible.

The first three aircraft reached Port Moresby on 7th November, one of them flown by the squadron's commander, Squadron Leader Quinan.⁸ By the 21st, the unit had been established at Berry aerodrome, outside Port Moresby, with 18 Wirraways on its strength. Its tasks were aerial reconnaissance, photography, artillery spotting, message and supply dropping, strafing and dive-bombing and distribution of propaganda leaflets. To this "maid-of-all-work" list was added weather reconnaissance which, in fact, was the object of the first sorties flown. Supply dropping, so vital to the Australian troops on the Kokoda Track, was very largely dependent on favourable weather. Wirraway pilots therefore sortied in the Kokoda Gap—the true gap, which was an air route between the mountain peaks at an altitude of 7,500 feet instead of about 12-13,000 feet, the altitude that was needed to pass over the main range. Here they circled, signalling weather reports back to base and advising New Guinea Force Headquarters whether it was safe for aircraft to land at Kokoda. The squadron's first accident report was filed on 21st November when the crew

⁸ Sqn Ldr G. J. Quinan, 129. 4 Sqn; comd 4 Sqn 1942, 5 Sqn 1942-43. Regular air force offr; b. 16 Apr 1915.

of a Wirraway on reconnaissance over Wairopi, Flying Officer Saunders⁹ (pilot) and Flight Sergeant Bain¹ (observer), were forced to make a crash landing on the Wairopi strip. The aircraft was completely wrecked but the crew escaped injury and walked to Kokoda whence they were brought back to Port Moresby. On the 24th the squadron was given its first attack mission: two flights of three aircraft, each carrying two 250-lb bombs and 1,200 rounds of .303-inch ammunition, strafed and dive-bombed targets in the Gona area. One aircraft returned with engine trouble but the other five completed their task effectively.

The Goodenough operation fitted the pattern of Kenney's plan which, under the code-name GULLIVER, he proposed to MacArthur in a letter on 2nd November, the day Kokoda was re-occupied. His eagerness to prove the validity of his air-war concept was intense. Both tactically and strategically his mind was actively probing the future, in which the elimination of the Japanese on the Papua-New Guinea north coast was but a first step:

Tanks and heavy artillery can be reserved for the battlefields of Europe and Africa (he wrote with typical overstatement in a letter to General Arnold on 24th October). They have no place in jungle warfare. The artillery in this theatre flies, the light mortar and machine-guns, the rifle, tommygun, grenade and knife are the weapons carried by men who fly to war, jump in parachutes, are carried in gliders and who land from air transports on ground which air engineers have prepared. These engineers have landed also by parachute and glider with airborne bulldozers, jeeps and light engineer tools . . . the whole operation preceded and accompanied by bombers and fighters. . . .

He had watched the Japanese use island bases to devastating effect and he firmly believed that he could use them better than they. In the same letter to Arnold he declared:

In the Pacific theatre we have a number of islands garrisoned by small forces. These islands are nothing more or less than aerodromes, or aerodrome areas from which modern fire-power is launched. Sometimes they are true islands like Wake or Midway, sometimes they are localities on large land masses. Port Moresby, Lae and Buna are all on the island of New Guinea, but the only practical way to get from one to the other is by air or by water: they are all islands as far as warfare is concerned. Each is garrisoned by a small force and each can be taken by a small force once local air control is secured. Every time one of these islands is taken the rear is better secured and the emplacements for the flying artillery are advanced closer and closer to Japan itself.

This, then, was the backdrop to Kenney's GULLIVER plan: strong fighter bases at Milne Bay, on Goodenough and in the Buna area; bases that, though primarily for fighters would also have accommodation, as had Port Moresby, for the staging of all classes of bombers, whose range would be extended and bomb-loads increased.

⁹ Sqn Ldr T. H. H. Saunders, 406960, 4 and 5 Sqs. Warehouse assistant; of Cottesloe, WA; b. Cottesloe, 11 Nov 1922. Killed in aircraft accident 15 Mar 1952.

¹ Sgt D. E. W. Bain, 21899; 4 Sqn. Clerk; of Marrickville, NSW; b. Glasgow, Scotland, 3 Sep 1916. Killed in action 11 Dec 1942.

MacArthur cautiously gave his consent to GULLIVER as a basis for future planning. Part of that initial plan was already well in hand. Milne Bay had been transformed. Engineers, medical officers and administrators had cooperated to conquer the mud, malaria and confusion that had so recently threatened to deny victory to the defenders. No. 1 and No. 3 Strips had been developed as originally planned. No. 2 Strip presented insuperable drainage problems and was abandoned, but another was developed in its place so that the base now had three good runways with revetment areas. By 3rd November there were three American squadrons (two fighter and one heavy bomber) and one Australian unit—No. 100 (Beaufort torpedo-bomber) Squadron—based there. These, with the various ancillary units, were as much as the base could accommodate, although No. 6 Squadron, then based at Port Moresby, maintained a detached flight there to reduce the range for their vital long-range reconnaissance flights. For the rest, formations of bombers frequently staged through the base on long-range missions.

A few days after the defeat of the Japanese at Oivi-Gorari the 16th and 25th Australian Brigades were marching on Sanananda and Gona respectively, and the Americans of the 32nd Division were moving against Buna from their airfield to the south. At this stage Beaufighter attacks were being made at low level over strongly fortified enemy positions for the specific purpose of diverting the fire of the anti-aircraft batteries from Marauder formations that were following in to make low-level bombing attacks. Wing Commander Walker, in his tactical appreciation for November, noted that, although on these operations the Beaufighter crews had not themselves encountered heavy fire from the ground batteries, it appeared that they had put the enemy gunners on the alert for the impending bombing attack. Thus, instead of diverting the fire, the Beaufighters were increasing the risk run by the bomber crews. Accurately timed dawn and dusk attacks, he reported, appeared to be the most effective way of employing strafing aircraft over well-defined positions.

In the November operations the most spectacular and profitable attacks were those made on grounded aircraft and aerodrome installations at Lae. On the 17th six Beaufighters, with fighter cover, surprised the Japanese and before their batteries were properly in action two Sally bombers were attacked and a number of troops running from them for cover were killed; four Zeros were hit—one when attempting to take off—and an encampment at the north-west end of the aerodrome was thoroughly strafed. Next day eleven Beaufighters followed a formation of Bostons from No. 89 Squadron in to the target in another attack on Lae which had comparable results. On this second attack Walker's aircraft, in which the observer was Flying Officer Mason,² was hit in the tail by a bursting shell. Walker got the aircraft back to base and made a successful wheels-up landing without further serious damage. Another aircraft had to make a crash landing. No member of either crew was injured.

² F-Lt J. W. Mason, 263498. 12 and 30 Sqns; Staff Offr Navigation RAAF HQ 1943-44, Overseas HQ 1945. Bank clerk; of Parkes, NSW; b. Yass, NSW, 6 Nov 1916.

After a similar operation over Lae on the 22nd three of six unescorted Beaufighters that made the raid were attacked by Zeros from whom they were able to draw away in straight and level flight at almost sea level at an indicated speed of between 255 and 260 knots. Later the same day, after a similar attack in which the American Bostons took part, Zeros again intercepted. On this occasion a Beaufighter manned by Flight Lieutenant Little³ (pilot) and Flying Officer Spooner⁴ turned on a Zero that was attacking two other Beaufighters. Little's cannon fire caught the enemy aircraft, which was last seen trailing smoke from its engine. In a dawn attack on Lae on 29th November in collaboration with No. 89 Squadron Bostons the first two of four Beaufighters taking part were over the target before the Japanese ground batteries opened fire; evidence that supported Walker's submission on the timing of these attacks.

A contribution quite as notable as that of No. 30 Squadron was now being made by the more recently arrived intruder squadron, No. 22, armed with Bostons. A ground party which arrived at Port Moresby on 19th October had a camp ready close to No. 30 Squadron's camp near Ward's aerodrome when the aircraft arrived early in November. The immediate operations program closely resembled that for No. 30 Squadron with which the new unit therefore had much in common: the principal distinction for operational purposes was that the Boston carried bombs and had a crew of three whereas the Beaufighter relied on heavy fire-power from cannon and machine-guns and was manned by a crew of two. Even so the range of targets provided for the Bostons was practically identical with that for the Beaufighters.

Early in its service career the squadron, commanded by Squadron Leader Bell, suffered severely from the loss of nine of its aircrew and three of its aircraft as a result of three successive explosions while the Bostons were making their bomb runs. The first of these occurred on 11th November when an aircraft piloted by Flight Lieutenant Morgan was engaged in practice bombing over a wreck that lay just outside Port Moresby Harbour. At the time the accident was unexplained, as was the loss of the second aircraft. One of five Bostons that were on a bombing and strafing raid over Buna aerodrome on 26th November, this bomber, piloted by Squadron Leader McDonald,⁵ had just begun its bomb run when it was blown to pieces by an explosion that at first was thought to have been caused by anti-aircraft fire. Three days later when about to bomb ground positions in the Gona area, the third Boston, piloted by Flight Lieutenant Bullmore,⁶ blew up in almost precisely similar circumstances. On each occasion the bomb-load had been the same—20-lb

³ W Cdr R. A. Little, DFC, 290491. 30 Sqn; comd 1 Sqn 1945. Regular air force offr; of South Perth, WA; b. Perth, 11 Jun 1916.

⁴ F-Lt A. H. Spooner, DFC, 3490. 12, 30 and 37 Sqns. Regular airman; of Perth, WA; b. Northam, WA, 20 Dec 1918.

⁵ Sqn Ldr K. R. McDonald, 250430; 22 Sqn. Commercial traveller; of Mulwala, NSW; b. Corowa, NSW, 5 Feb 1917. Killed in action 26 Nov 1942.

⁶ F-Lt H. J. Bullmore, 402045; 23 Sqn RAF and 22 Sqn. Grazier; of Nowra, NSW; b. Sydney, 29 Jun 1915. Killed in action 29 Nov 1942.

fragmentation bombs. This fact linked with the fact that the first aircraft had been lost in practice, so eliminating any question of ground fire as a cause, led to the conclusion that the bombs were so light that, when released into the slipstream in a cluster, one or more would be blown back against others and, by concussion, the whole load would be detonated into a fierce explosion in which neither the crew nor the aircraft could possibly survive. The loading of these bombs was immediately discontinued and the absence of any further explosions of the kind was accepted as proof of this theory. An operation in which bombs of the same weight were used without disastrous results for the *Bostons* was undertaken on 16th November when three aircraft dropped 16 20-lb bombs directly on the stern of a wrecked ship off Waitutu Point that was thought to be used by the Japanese as a stores depot.

G.H.Q. Operations Instruction No. 12, dated 1st October, had assigned to the R.A.A.F. general reconnaissance, bomber and torpedo squadrons the responsibility for keeping open the sea lanes to New Guinea; for "effecting the maximum possible dislocation" of Japanese shipping, supply lines and sea communications; and for maintaining constant reconnaissance of all "hostile sea approaches to New Guinea within range". The burden of this huge task was shared by No. 6 Squadron and No. 100 Squadron. In addition to daily searches, the two units conducted innumerable anti-submarine patrols on which crews were airborne for many hours. The strain imposed by these long-range operations, flown practically without navigation aids, frequently through rain storms and heavy cloud, over sea and land that was under enemy control, was very great. Yet, supported by ground staffs as enduring as themselves, the crews maintained an almost inflexibly high standard and achieved considerable success.

At times the tedium of their long "clearing" searches was sharply interrupted, as when, on 26th September, three Hudson crews in the vicinity of Woodlark Island sighted an enemy ship of about 500 tons that was believed to have a radio station on board. Two of the aircraft, one piloted by Flying Officer Shore, and the other by Flight Lieutenant Hitchcock, promptly dropped eight 250-lb bombs, each aircraft obtaining a near miss. The ship appeared to have stopped so the Hudson crews flew in to strafe it. Later in the day another Hudson piloted by Flight Sergeant Wheeler,⁷ having led four Beaufighters of No. 30 Squadron to the disabled ship, dropped four 250-lb instantaneous bombs from 1,000 feet, and scored two direct hits and a near miss; these blew away the bridge and mainmast and appeared to hole the hull at water level. The Hudson and the Beaufighters then attacked with machine-gun and cannon fire setting the ship on fire and sinking a lifeboat with four men in it. A reconnaissance crew next day reported no sign of the ship which was presumed to have sunk.⁸

⁷ F-Lt W. A. Wheeler, DFC, 404841. 6 and 32 Sqns. Salesman; of Lismore, NSW; b. Sydney, 31 Jan 1911. Died 22 Aug 1958.

⁸ The sinking is not recorded in the Joint Army-Navy Assessment Committee's post-war record of shipping losses.

On the night of 3rd-4th October Wing Commander Balmer, commanding No. 100 Squadron, led ten of his Beaufort crews on one of the unit's most ambitious, exacting and, as it proved, disappointing attack missions. The target, a concentration of enemy ships sheltering in waters near Buin-Tonolei, off the Shortland Islands, was to be attacked with torpedoes by moonlight. Airborne about 1 a.m., the formation set out on its flight of 420 nautical miles, flying at 1,000 feet in moderately fine weather. Approaching the target rain squalls were encountered, in the last of which, apparently, two aircraft lost contact and the remainder were separated into two flights, one of which entered the target area to the east of the Shortlands and the other (as planned) to the west. It was now about 4 a.m. Height had been reduced to about 200 feet and navigation and formation lights had been extinguished. The eight aircraft went in to attack, flying independently, each crew looking for its own target. Seven each found a ship and released their torpedo. At least four of these were observed by the rear gunners of the aircraft from which they had been dropped to be making good runs towards their targets. No hits were observed but the moon had become clouded and the crews considered it improbable that they had missed completely with all torpedoes. Two cruisers opened fire belatedly, indicating that the enemy had been unaware of the Beauforts' approach. One enemy fighter was seen but there was no interception. To their disappointment at the apparent failure of the strike there was added for the crews a personal bitterness; four of their comrades—Flight Lieutenant Stumm (pilot), Flying Officer Hendy⁹ (observer) and Sergeants Hale¹ and Walker² (wireless air gunners)—did not return. With their aircraft they were posted missing and presumed lost. None of the other crews had any sure knowledge of their fate. The failure of the mission, on which the Beauforts had flown 950 nautical miles, was enquired into closely and a detachment of the squadron was withdrawn for further torpedo training. Even so it was agreed that the failure was due to defects in the torpedoes rather than lack of efficiency on the part of the crews.

Throughout October the long reconnaissance flights continued. Occasionally there was action. Over St George's Channel, near Rabaul, on the 11th a Hudson crew captained by Flight Lieutenant Manning made a spirited attack on a 10,000-ton ship that had been converted into an aircraft tender and had a full deck cargo including at least 12 Zeros. From 900 feet the Hudson crew obtained two direct hits and one near miss with 250-lb bombs. The ship lost way and dense smoke rose from her decks.

First priority in operations necessarily was given to attacks on enemy ships approaching Buna. The Japanese missed no opportunity to take

⁹ F-O K. R. Hendy, 408652; 100 Sqn. Journalist; of Melbourne; b. Geelong, Vic, 20 Jun 1915. Killed in action 4 Oct 1942.

¹ Sgt C. C. Hale, 405679; 100 Sqn. Butcher; of Capella, Qld; b. Barcaldine, Qld, 19 Mar 1921. Killed in action 4 Oct 1942.

² Sgt A. A. Walker, 406907. AIF and 100 Sqn. Engine fireman; of Victoria Park, WA; b. Esperance, WA, 5 May 1917. Killed in action 4 Oct 1942.

cover when the weather and darkness offered it. For this reason the more aggressive of the American heavy bomber captains were bombing from low levels. A somewhat extreme example of this was provided on 24th November when Captain Kenneth McCuller, the commander of one of seven Flying Fortresses sent to attack five Japanese destroyers in the Huon Gulf, made his first bombing run at only 200 feet. When anti-aircraft shells hit and started a fire in the tail of the aircraft, McCuller pulled out while the tail gunner smothered the flames, and then turned in for another attack. On this run three members of the crew received slight wounds. In a third run an engine was hit. Still McCuller kept on bombing. In the fourth attack a second engine was put out of action. The crew claimed hits on at least two destroyers. That night 9 Beauforts from No. 100 Squadron were sent out from Milne Bay on a combined bombing and torpedo strike against these ships, each of five carrying a torpedo and each of four two 500-lb and two 250-lb bombs.

It was a difficult assignment—the first of its kind for the squadron. Four aircraft failed to find the target in the darkness and cloud. One crew found a destroyer on fire with other destroyers standing by and made a torpedo attack but observed no results. The crews of two other Beauforts also sighted three destroyers on one of which a direct bomb hit was claimed. The remaining two Beaufort crews also reported sighting a burning destroyer which was later seen to blow up. This was later proved to have been one of the destroyers attacked by the Flying Fortress; McCuller's determination had paid a deferred dividend. One of the Beauforts, piloted by Sergeant Duncan,³ did not return. Next day it was learned that Duncan had put the aircraft down near Cape Vogel, on the shore of Collingwood Bay, and that, though injured, the crew were able to make their way to Wanigela. Early in the day the enemy destroyers were assigned to Hudsons of No. 6 Squadron also as a target. The commanding officer, Wing Commander Barlow,⁴ led six aircraft off to find them. Barlow was forced by mechanical trouble to return and make a crash landing at the Seven Mile—now known as Jackson's—which he did without injury to crew or himself. The other five crews found the probable target area weather-bound and so did not sight the enemy ships.

For No. 100 Squadron the night's operation was preceded by an incident in which quick and courageous action by the squadron torpedo officer, Pilot Officer Temple,⁵ and men of his section prevented disaster. One Beaufort, in which a torpedo had been mounted, caught fire when the engines were started up in the dispersal bay before moving out for take-off. Temple and his assistants ran to the burning aircraft and at considerable risk removed the torpedo from its rack.

³ F-Lt J. R. Duncan, 406777. 7 and 100 Sqns. School teacher; of Terwonga, WA; b. Wabin, WA, 18 Oct 1920.

⁴ Gp Capt A. A. Barlow, 250159. Comd 2 AOS 1941, 1941-42, 6 Sqn 1942-43, 1 SFTS 1943, 6 SFTS 1943-44, 7 OTU 1944-45. Commercial pilot; of Hobart; b. Melbourne, 23 Dec 1907.

⁵ F-O R. A. J. Temple, MBE, 1102. Comd 1 TMU 1942. Regular airman; of Williamstown, Vic; b. Williamstown, 18 Jan 1914.

If they were unable to sink the ships with which the Japanese were striving to reinforce their Buna-Gona beach-head, Allied aircraft on long-range armed reconnaissance were certainly checking them. At the end of November these aircraft forced four enemy destroyers (later known to have been carrying 800 troops) to turn back to Rabaul after they entered Vitiaz Strait.⁶ Early on the morning of 2nd December the crew of a Beaufort piloted by Sergeant Green⁷ found four destroyers well south in the Bismarck Sea and approaching Buna. Base Operations at Milne Bay instructed Green to "shadow to the limit of endurance and attack". Green shadowed the destroyers but, after two hours, when about to make an attack, his aircraft was itself attacked by three Zeros. His gunners claimed one probably shot down and one damaged before the enemy pilots broke off the fight.

Back at Port Moresby six Beaufighters took off to attack the ships jointly with a formation of Flying Fortresses, but the rendezvous, for some reason not explained, was not kept and the ships were not sighted. That night, with a Hudson piloted by Squadron Leader Colquhoun accompanying them to illuminate the target with flares, the Beaufighters found the destroyers. The crews reported that the glare from the flares and the flashes from their own cannon were so strong that the pilots could not clearly see the target and so were forced to make their attacks from the unusually high altitude of 1,000 feet. The results were not observed. As the Beaufighters were leaving the target area six Beauforts came in to make a torpedo attack by the light of flares. Flying Officer Forrest⁸ sighted three or four destroyers and released a torpedo from 200 feet at 1,200-yards range and at least two other torpedoes were released. An explosion reported later by one of the Beaufighter crews gave the impression that an aircraft piloted by Flight Lieutenant Birley⁹ had scored a hit and he and his crew were credited with a "probable". Three Bostons of No. 22 Squadron attacked with bombs earlier in the night without noticeable result.

Though most disappointing, these attacks did have the effect of forcing the destroyers to move north to the mouth of the Kumusi River where they disembarked the men into barges before withdrawing, still in darkness. Early next morning the Beaufighter crews were able to make up for their lack of success in their night attack. Flying low along the coast they caught the enemy barges before they had beached, and, with a deluge of cannon and machine-gun fire, sank several barges and killed many troops, the number of enemy dead being estimated at 300.

Again, on 10th December, Allied aircraft intercepted and turned back to Rabaul another enemy convoy—six destroyers—which, however, sortied

⁶ This convoy had left Rabaul on the night of 28th-29th November.

⁷ F-Lt C. R. Green, CGM, 416212. 100 and 8 Sqns. Student; of Lenswood, SA; b. Forest Range, SA, 23 Apr 1918.

⁸ F-O D. J. Forrest, 406837; 100 Sqn. Farm machinery mechanic; of Cottesloe, WA; b. Perth, WA, 16 Apr 1920. Killed in action 21 May 1943.

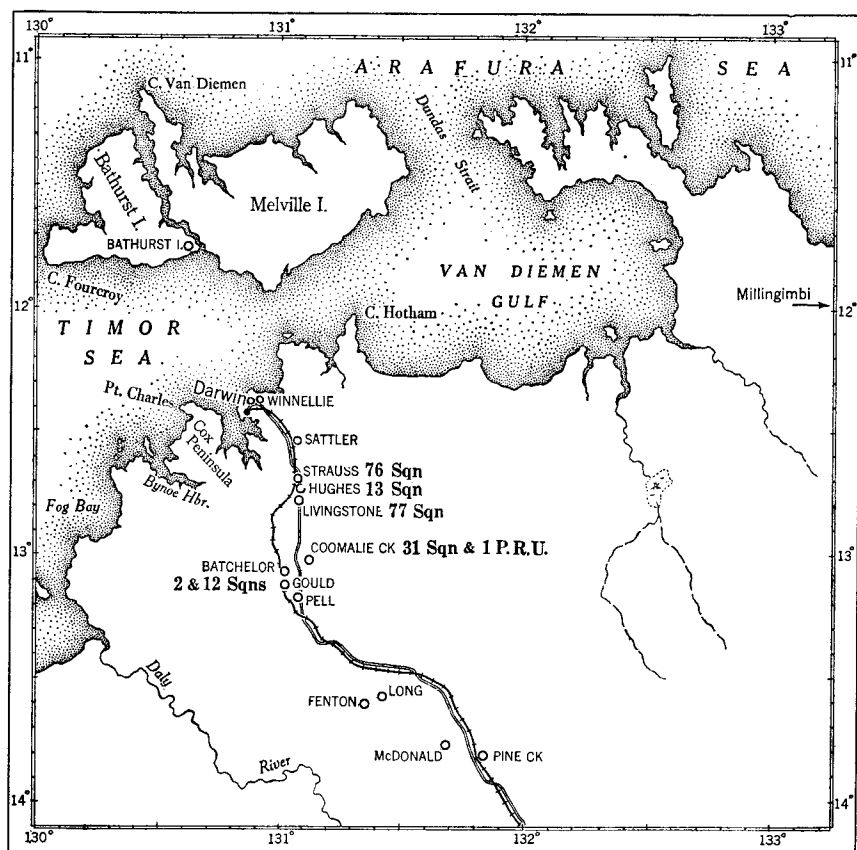
⁹ Sqn Ldr H. E. Birley, 260631. 13 and 100 Sqns; RAAF Cd 1945. Accountant; of North Sydney; b. Sydney, 22 Mar 1915.

once more on the 12th, and reached the mouth of the Mambare River before daylight on the 14th. On this occasion low overcast and some rain aided the Japanese but some warning of the approach of the ships was received in the operations room at Port Moresby and seven Bostons of No. 22 Squadron and a formation of Flying Fortresses took off to attack. Both formations bombed and one destroyer was believed by the crews to have been damaged. The aircraft then turned their attention to the beach-head where the enemy troops were already ashore and where the waterfront was littered with hurriedly piled equipment and stores while drums lashed together pontoon-fashion floated in the water alongside beached barges. Thereafter throughout the day formation after formation of Allied aircraft attacked—Australian and American Bostons, Beau-fighters, Mitchells, Marauders and Airacobras. Great damage to the beached equipment was done by bombs and gunfire and barges were sunk. Heavy and medium bombers sought out and harassed the ships of the retiring convoy. In this one day Allied aircraft made 96 attack sorties against the enemy's new beach-head and spent thousands of pounds of bombs and more than 130,000 rounds in gunnery—the Beaufighters alone fired 2,500 rounds of 20-mm and 71,000 rounds of .303-inch ammunition. Even so, the Japanese had achieved their immediate objective; they had put ashore another 800 troops without any great loss of life.

In North-Western Area during August the two hard-worked Hudson squadrons—Nos. 2 and 13—had continued their task of harassing the enemy's bases in the islands north of the Arafura and Timor Seas, and supporting the guerilla force on Timor. The need for support for Sparrow Force was now more urgent than ever because in August the Japanese opened a determined offensive aimed at enveloping and destroying the Australian-Dutch force. Several converging columns of enemy troops were on the move and a party was landed at Beco. The convoy which carried these Japanese troops to Beco provided the Hudsons with a good target. Wing Commander McFarlane led nine Hudsons of No. 2 against two ships escorted by a destroyer off Suai in the early morning of 7th August. The squadron attacked from 6,000 feet and one transport was set on fire. On the 10th nine Hudsons of No. 13 attacked three transports off Beco. They made three direct hits on a ship of 4,000 to 5,000 tons and two direct hits on a smaller one, which probably sank. Two Hudsons then bombed and probably hit a destroyer which was towing a small motor vessel and caused it to cast the towed vessel off. On the 13th No. 13 bombed barges at Beco.

During the remainder of August Hudsons were over Timor almost every day dropping supplies and attacking Japanese positions. Thus on 21st August five Hudsons of No. 2 set out to support the hard-pressed troops on Timor by attacking Maubisse. Bombs were dropped on the town and the Hudsons then reconnoitred the roads in the area. Two

Zeros attacked and set on fire a Hudson captained by Flying Officer Wadey,¹ who was able to bale out before the machine crashed into the side of a hill. This Zero then made seven unsuccessful attacks on the Hudsons which all remained in close formation except for one captained by Flying Officer Badger, who flew towards thin cloud, pursued by the second Zero. Badger evaded the Zero by flying low along the valleys until he reached the sea. There the Zero attacked again but was shot down



Squadron dispositions, December 1942

into the sea at 50-yards range. Wadey, badly burnt, was found by natives who carried him in a chair to men of Sparrow Force; later he was returned safely to Darwin.

After a pause of more than three weeks Japanese aircraft were over the Darwin area nine times in the last nine days of August. On the 23rd 27 heavy bombers struck Hughes, destroying fuel and ammunition

¹ F-Lt S. G. Wadey, 407068. 6, 14 and 2 Sqns. Accountant; of Adelaide; b. Adelaide, 2 Apr 1918.

dumps and two aircraft. The bombers were escorted by from 12 to 20 Zeros which were engaged by 18 Kittyhawks of No. 49 Group. The American Kittyhawks scored their greatest success so far, and claimed 8 fighters and 4 bombers shot down. For the remainder of August the Japanese confined themselves to minor raids, all by night.

On 9th September the 2/4th Independent Company was ordered to Timor to reinforce the 2/2nd and its attached troops. The main body of the new company left Darwin in the destroyer *Voyager* on 22nd September and began to unload at Betano next day. She went aground and on the 24th Japanese bombers attacked. Later in the day the crew were taken off by two corvettes and the stranded vessel was destroyed.

The movement of Japanese shipping throughout the area was now providing frequent targets. Five Hudsons of No. 13 Squadron attacked two 300-ton ships off Tanimbar Island on the morning of 13th September, scoring a direct hit on one of them, which rapidly began to sink.

On 14th September three Hudsons of No. 2 led by McFarlane dive-bombed a ship off Saumlaki. McFarlane's bombs fell within 10 feet of the vessel. As the second Hudson was attacking, the third one, captained by Flying Officer McDonnell,² was hit by anti-aircraft fire and hurtled into the sea. The other aircraft attacked again and one of McFarlane's bombs hit the ship.

Three Hudsons of No. 2 Squadron bombed Dili on 25th September. One of them, with a hitherto untried crew led by Flying Officer James,³ arrived over the target four minutes after the others and was attacked by two Zeros, James dodging from one cloud to another. After some minutes one Zero made a belly attack but was shot down by Sergeant Reilly.⁴ Five minutes later over the sea north of Dili a second Zero was shot down by the turret gunner, Sergeant Reen.⁵ Two Zeros continued to attack.

Thirty minutes after 1st attack (says the squadron diary) main wing tanks were practically empty, belly gun out of ammunition, also side guns, and a few minutes later turret reported to be unserviceable. Flying Officer James then dived for water on southerly course levelling out several feet above water, side gunner meanwhile taking 100 rounds from front guns. Zigzagged across Wetar Strait, side gunner using short bursts to ward off attacks from stern quarter. Turret gunner reported port gun serviceable again and fired short burst into Zero attacking from starboard quarter. Zero broke off attack and headed for Dili. Our aircraft on reaching coast of Timor flew through valleys close to ground and . . . Zero could only attack from dead astern. The turret gunner [Reen] was compelled to load port gun by hand, with the result that he tore most of the skin off his hands. . . . He was only able to fire single shots and odd bursts up to 5 rounds. . . . Zero was shaken off,

² F-O K. L. McDonnell, 401656; 2 Sqn. Van driver; of Hawthorn, Vic; b. Dubbo, NSW, 20 Dec 1916. Killed in action 14 Sep 1942.

³ F-O R. R. James, 408811. 4, 6 and 2 Sqns. Store manager; of Shepparton, Vic; b. Shepparton, 13 Apr 1912. Killed in action 28 Apr 1943.

⁴ F-Lt H. Reilly, 414081. 2, 73 and 7 Sqns; Instructor 1 OTU 1944-45. Clerk; of Mackay, Qld; b. Ipswich, Qld, 19 Jul 1920.

⁵ Sgt P. S. Reen, 412185. 7, 6 and 2 Sqns. Student; of Casino, NSW; b. Toowoomba, Qld, 15 Mar 1918. Killed in action 28 Apr 1943.

but midway across island showed up again 50 yards astern and turret gunner immediately fired short burst of 5 rounds into motor. Zero pulled away sharply and broke off engagement. . . . Proceeded at 0 feet towards Darwin, no further attack, the whole engagement taking 45 minutes.

In addition to James, Reilly and Reen, the crew included Sergeants Ryan⁶ and Keech.⁷

No. 77 (Kittyhawk) Squadron had been formed at Pearce, Western Australia, in March 1942 and had been stationed in Western Australia until August when it began to move to North-Western Area. As had happened in the previous month, the Japanese did not launch a raid on North-Western Area until towards the end of September. On the 25th Berrimah and Livingstone were bombed, but little damage resulted. There were minor raids on the next two nights. All of No. 77 Squadron had now arrived and its commander, Squadron Leader Cresswell,⁸ tried to intercept these night raiders. On the 25th he fired bursts at one of the bombers but evidently did not hit it.

In October Air Commodore Bladin's force was considerably strengthened by the addition of a second Kittyhawk squadron—No. 76—and No. 31 Squadron equipped with Beaufighters.

On Timor the Japanese continued to press the 2/2nd and 2/4th Independent Companies hard. The 48th Japanese Division was arriving and would be complete early in November. Bands of natives led by Japanese were harassing the Australians and their native allies, and much of the effort of Nos. 2 and 13 was now aimed at discouraging the hostile Timorese and encouraging the friendly ones. Among the bombers' main targets were Aileu and Maubisse on the main Japanese line of advance southward from Dili, and the airfield at Koepang.

Three Hudsons of No. 2 Squadron (now commanded by Squadron Leader Moran¹) attacked Koepang airfield from 16,500 feet at midnight on 24th October causing a big explosion. Next morning three other Hudsons were sent against Penfui. Two aircraft dropped their bombs on the runway but Pilot Officer Dunning's² Hudson lost formation while over the target and was not seen again.

Japanese bombers attacked Darwin several times in October but never with more than three aircraft, except on the 27th when nine bombers struck at the town. In that month Batchelor and Pell were bombed for the first time.

⁶ P-O R. D. Ryan, 404989. 7, 6 and 2 Sqs. Clerk; of Woolloongabba, Qld; b. Brisbane, 31 Dec 1916. Killed in action 28 Apr 1943.

⁷ F-Sgt K. G. Keech, 8966. 24, 6 and 2 Sqs. Insurance representative; of Lismore, NSW; b. Orange, NSW, 10 May 1917. Killed in action 28 Apr 1943.

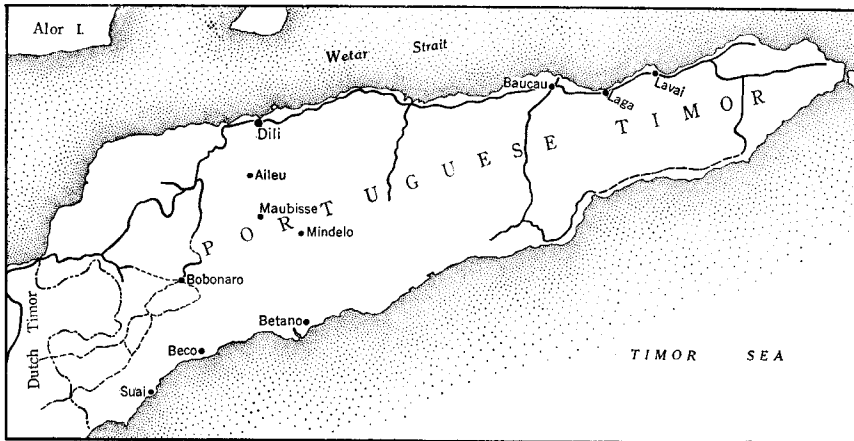
⁸ W Cdr R. Cresswell, DFC, 402. Comd 77 Sqn 1942-43; CFI 2 OTU 1943-44; Wing Leader 1 Fighter Wing and comd 81 Wing 1944; Wing Leader 81 Wing 1944-45; comd 77 Sqn 1950-51. Regular air force offr; of Potts Point, NSW; b. Launceston, Tas, 27 Jul 1920.

¹ Gp Capt R. H. Moran, 83. Sigs Offr Central and Southern Areas 1940-42; comd 2 Sqn 1942-43, 13 Sqn and RAAF Stn Canberra 1943, 76 and 71 Wings and Aitape Air Task Force 1944; SASO Western Area 1944-46. Regular air force offr; of Narre Warren, Vic; b. Melbourne, 13 Sep 1914.

² P-O R. K. R. Dunning, 407317; 2 Sqn. Bank clerk; of Kimba, SA; b. Ramco, SA, 15 Oct 1916. Killed in action 25 Oct 1942.

November saw a big increase in the activity of the squadrons in North-Western Area. The Beaufighter squadron (Squadron Leader Read³) went into action, and visiting American Marauders from No. 22 Bombardment Group lent support over Timor. No American units now remained except No. 43 Service Squadron, to maintain the Kittyhawks, and since mid-October area headquarters had been entirely staffed by Australians.

On the night of 1st November 6 Hudsons of No. 13 Squadron and 9 American Marauders struck at Bobonaro and Dili in support of the commandos. On the 3rd 8 Marauders and 5 Hudsons bombed Dili, and, on the next few nights, targets at Bobonaro, Maubisse and Aileu were



hit. On the 17th the Beaufighters were over Timor for the first time, while Hudsons from Nos. 2 and 13 bombed Maubisse, Dili, Bobonaro, and Baucau.

This increase in the number of sorties against Japanese forward positions and bases in Timor, and particularly the strafing of road convoys by the Beaufighters, greatly encouraged the troops on the ground. The 2/2nd Independent Company had been in action for nine months and it was now decided to relieve them and at the same time bring off 190 Dutch troops and 150 Portuguese civilians. This led to a series of events in which the R.A.A.F. squadrons were closely involved. The plan was that the patrol boat *Kuru* (55 tons) and corvettes *Armidale* and *Castlemaine* should between them put ashore about 60 Dutch troops and take off the Dutch troops and Portuguese civilians at Betano on the night of 30th November and return for the Australians on the night of 4th December.

Castlemaine and *Armidale* were attacked by Japanese bombers on the morning of the 30th, and attacks continued at intervals throughout the day. They dodged the bombs, however, and Beaufighters of No. 31 Squadron arrived and drove off a force of 8 bombers and 6 fighters.

³ Gp Capt C. F. Read, DFC, AFC, 220. 30 Sqn; comd 31 Sqn 1942-43, 1 SFTS 1943-44, 77 Wing HQ 1944-45. Regular air force off; of Vaucluse, NSW; b. Sydney, 9 Oct 1918.

Kuru arrived at Betano, waited some hours for the corvettes, and, when they did not arrive, took aboard 77 Portuguese civilians and set out for Darwin. *Armidale* and *Castlemaine* were off Betano soon afterwards but when they received no reply to their signals they departed without putting their troops ashore. After dawn next morning *Kuru* met the corvettes and transferred her passengers to *Castlemaine*. Soon enemy bombers appeared. *Castlemaine* set about searching for two airmen from a missing Beaufighter, leaving *Armidale* and *Kuru* to complete the Timor operation, working independently.⁴ Soon *Armidale* and *Kuru* were being attacked by bombers and at 3.15 p.m. *Armidale* was torpedoed and sunk, 350 miles from the Australian coast.

Some of the crew including the wounded set off for Darwin in the ship's motor-boat; 79 remained on an improvised raft and later managed to make use of a damaged lifeboat. For the next 10 days the Hudsons were busy searching for survivors, and, when they had been found, dropping supplies to them and guiding other naval vessels to them. It was not until the 9th that the corvette *Kalgoorlie* found the lifeboat; the raft was never found.

On three trips from the 10th to the 19th December the Dutch destroyer *Tjerk Hiddes* took the Dutch troops and the 2/2nd Independent Company off Timor. The route taken by the *Tjerk Hiddes* was worked out by the R.A.A.F. on the assumption, which proved correct, that Japanese air reconnaissance would adhere to its usual time-table.

In the last week of November the Japanese carried out three fairly heavy night raids on Darwin. Again and again in the last few weeks fighters of No. 77 Squadron had tried to intercept night raiders. On the night of the 23rd when 18 medium bombers were over the town, the squadron's persistence was rewarded: Squadron Leader Cresswell shot down a bomber, and later the wreck and the bodies of the nine members of the crew were found. On the 26th and 27th 12 Japanese bombers struck Hughes and Darwin, and at Hughes damaged two Hudsons.

The enemy was now bringing more aircraft forward to the Timor airfields. Whereas in November reconnaissance showed 62 aircraft in Celebes and 29 in Timor, in December there appeared to be 42 in Celebes but 62 in Timor; and there were signs that the Japanese were making a new airfield at Fuloro 60 air miles closer to Darwin than Dili was. Henceforth Fuloro became a main target for the Hudsons and Beaufighters.

The Beaufighters of No. 31 were now most active. On the 18th two of them sank a sailing vessel 25 miles north-east of Portuguese Timor. They opened a heavier offensive against Fuloro and the Lavai-Laga area on 23rd December, and shot down one Japanese fighter.

On 24th December Nos. 2 and 13 Squadrons sent out four Hudsons to attack a destroyer and four transports off Lavai. No hits were scored

⁴ The two airmen, P-O J. M. Morrison (pilot) and Sgt A. F. Forrest (observer), were never found.

but one Hudson of No. 13 Squadron, captained by Flying Officer Thomson,⁵ was shot down. On the next two days No. 31 put 10 Beaufighters into the air to attack barges, stores and troops at Lavai and Laga.

Moran led out six Hudsons of No. 2 Squadron on the 27th to bomb stores at Lavai. While making their bombing run they were attacked by three Zeros but continued to the targets. One flight then proceeded to attack a second target but was again set upon by the Zeros which damaged one Hudson. This flight jettisoned its bombs. The first flight was then persistently attacked by the Zeros which shot down Flying Officer Johns⁶ aircraft in flames. The Zeros continued to attack for the next 15 minutes. As Flight Lieutenant Robertson's⁷ Hudson was approaching cloud cover and flying at 400 feet above the sea the belly gunner put a long burst into a Zero at 50-yards range. The Zero was last seen falling away in flames. All the surviving Hudsons but one were hit but all returned safely.

The Darwin base had been steadily strengthened in the second half of the year. By December so many maintenance, radar and other units had arrived that No. 24 Base Wing and No. 34 Radar Wing were formed to relieve area headquarters of direct responsibility for them. On 24th December the squadrons were deployed thus:

Airfield	Squadron	Aircraft
Batchelor	No. 2	18 Hudsons
"	No. 12	6 Wirraways and 18 Vengeances
Hughes	No. 13	18 Hudsons
Coomalie	No. 31	24 Beaufighters
	No. 1 P.R.U.	{ 1 Wirraway 4 Buffaloes 2 Lightnings 6 Lancers
Livingstone	No. 77	24 Kittyhawks
Strauss	No. 76	24 Kittyhawks

No. 12 was now being equipped (as indicated) as a dive-bomber squadron. No. 18 (Netherlands East Indies) Squadron, with Mitchells, was now arriving at McDonald, and would undertake its first sorties on 19th January. More important, Liberators of No. 319 Bombardment Squadron U.S.A.A.F. were soon to take up permanent residence at Fenton, whence they would greatly extend the reconnaissance and increase the striking power of the force.

Early in January it was decided to withdraw the 2/4th Independent Company from Timor. This operation went smoothly, the destroyer *Arunta* on 9th-10th January embarking all the troops except small Intelligence parties, which were removed next month.

⁵ F-O G. P. Thomson, 405889; 13 Sqn. Shipping clerk; of Kedron, Qld; b. Brisbane, 10 Sep 1918. Killed in action 24 Dec 1942.

⁶ F-O M. W. Johns, 407242; 2 Sqn. Clerk; of Reade Park, SA; b. Kadina, SA, 12 Aug 1919. Killed in action 27 Dec 1942.

⁷ F-Lt J. W. Robertson, 250658. 8, 14 and 2 Sqns; Instructor 1 OTU and General Reconnaissance School 1943-44; 1 TAF 1945. Builder; of Brighton, Vic; b. Melbourne, 16 Aug 1917.

Throughout January the bombers and the Beaufighters continued their attacks on Fuiloro. Three aircraft of No. 18 (Lieut-Colonel B. J. Fiedeldij) probably shot down two out of five interceptors over Fuiloro on the 20th, and another flight probably shot down a Dave over Dobo that day. No. 18 undertook their first squadron project on 23rd January when nine Mitchells were over Dili, but poor visibility prevented the release of their bombs.

During January the Liberators hit Ambon, and went as far afield as Macassar, Kendari, Sumba Island, Manokwari and Ternate. No. 31 Squadron achieved perhaps its greatest success so far when it sent five Beaufighters to Penfui where they hit what seemed to be an ammunition dump—the explosion hurled fragments to 1,200 feet—and set three aircraft on the ground on fire and probably damaged others.

In the first half of February the Hudsons, Mitchells and Beaufighters struck hard at the flying-boat base at Dobo, aiming at stores, buildings and the jetty. By 15th February half the town seemed to have been gutted. On 18th February six Mitchells of No. 18 fought off interceptors over Dili for 45 minutes, one Mitchell and one Japanese aircraft being shot down. Late in February intercepted Japanese wireless traffic suggested that a very large Japanese air formation, probably of bombers, was moving south from Kendari. They might be going to New Guinea or they might be going to Timor; Timor was considered the more likely. North-Western Area Headquarters worked out the probable Japanese flight plan, assuming that it would follow the usual pattern, and that the enemy's intention was to make a heavy raid on Darwin. It was decided that the earliest time that the Japanese could attack would be in the daytime on the 28th or the following night, and Bladin decided to strike at the enemy early in the morning of the 28th. On the afternoon of the 27th the Beaufighters were sent off to the sandy air strip near Drysdale Mission to await a signal to take off to attack aircraft at Penfui as soon as wireless interception indicated that the enemy force was arriving there. The plan worked perfectly. The Beaufighters were loosed, and eight of them destroyed 12 aircraft on the ground and damaged 10 others. Two or three Zeros intercepted and damaged two Beaufighters, but they got home safely. The surviving Japanese bombers did not attack Darwin.

A powerful reinforcement was now arriving in North-Western Area. As mentioned, Mr Churchill had agreed, on 28th May 1942, to send three Spitfire squadrons to Australia. The squadrons chosen were No. 54 R.A.F. and two Australian E.A.T.S. squadrons, Nos. 452 and 457, both of which had been formed in England in June 1941, and had seen distinguished service. The arrangement was that each squadron would receive 16 aircraft as initial equipment and replacements at the rate of five aircraft per squadron per month.

The equipment of the squadrons had been delayed as an outcome of Rommel's successful offensive in North Africa in May and June 1942. At that time 42 Spitfires—almost enough for the initial equipment of

the three squadrons—were at sea off the West African coast. The Dominions Office, on 24th June—Tobruk had fallen on the 21st—asked Mr Curtin to allow the aircraft to be unloaded at Freetown and flown to Egypt, another consignment being sent to Australia later. After having sought MacArthur's advice Curtin refused to agree on the ground that Australia's needs were no less urgent than those of the Middle East. However, the British Government controlled the ship, and refused to accept Curtin's refusal.

The men of the squadrons had reached Australia in August, and the second consignment of aircraft followed fairly promptly. By October 71 Spitfires had arrived and 33 more were on the water, so that initial equipment plus nearly four months' replacements were in sight. The squadrons were then training at Richmond, where they were grouped as No. 1 Fighter Wing, in which was incorporated a Mobile Fighter Sector Headquarters.

The arrival of the three squadrons in North-Western Area gave a great lift to the spirits of everybody in the Darwin area. The wing was commanded by Group Captain Walters and the wing leader was Wing Commander Caldwell,⁸ who had proved himself the most deadly Australian fighter pilot in the Middle East. No. 54 Squadron R.A.F. was led by Squadron Leader Gibbs⁹ and Nos. 452 and 457 by Squadron Leaders Thorold-Smith¹ and James² respectively. Before the new squadrons had been fully established in the area No. 77 sailed for Milne Bay by way of Townsville. The Spitfires drew their first blood on 6th February when Flight Lieutenant Foster³ of No. 54 shot down a Dinah 35 miles west-north-west of Cape Van Diemen. The squadrons were now disposed with No. 54 at Darwin, No. 452 at Strauss and No. 457 at Livingstone, eager to engage the Japanese bomber forces, but in February no raiders appeared over the Darwin area.

Throughout March the Hudsons, Mitchells and Beaufighters continued their attacks on Fuiloro, Dobo and other bases, and on ships. The Liberators attacked shipping as far afield as Ambon and Dutch New Guinea. Late in the month Mitchells of No. 18 scored well against enemy fighters. A single Mitchell damaged one of three Zeros over Kaimana Bay on 24th March, and in an epic duel with two Zeros in the same area on the 30th a Mitchell shot down one Zero and probably the other.

The Spitfires had their first big clashes with the enemy in the first half of March. On the 2nd, 16 Japanese aircraft attacked Coomalie,

⁸ Gp Capt C. R. Caldwell, DSO, DFC, 402107. 250 Sqn RAF; comd 112 Sqn RAF 1942, W Ldr 1 Wing 1942-43; comd 1 Wing 1943, 80 Wing 1944-45. Commission agent; of Rose Bay, NSW; b. Sydney, 28 Jul 1911.

⁹ Sqn Ldr E. M. Gibbs, DFC, 43200, RAF. 608 Sqn RAF; comd 54 Sqn RAF 1942-44. Regular airman; of Biggin Hill, Kent; b. Whittington, Staffordshire, 14 Jul 1912.

¹ Sqn Ldr R. E. Thorold-Smith, DFC, 402144; comd 452 Sqn 1942-43. Medical student; of Manly, NSW; b. Manly, 30 Jun 1920. Killed in action 15 Mar 1943.

² W Cdr K. E. James, 408021. 457 Sqn; comd 457 Sqn 1942-44, 85 Sqn 1944-45, 79 Sqn 1945. Draftsman; of Launceston, Tas; b. Ballan, Vic, 27 Mar 1920.

³ Sqn Ldr R. W. Foster, DFC, 80815, RAF. 605 and 54 Sqs RAF. Clerk; of London; b. Battersea, London, 14 May 1920.

damaging some aircraft. Spitfires of No. 54, two of them piloted by Group Captain Walters and Wing Commander Caldwell (soon to succeed Walters in command of the wing) intercepted. Caldwell was credited with bringing down one Zero and one Kate and Squadron Leader Gibbs one Zero.

On the 7th No. 457 Squadron had what its diarist described as its "first Australian bleeding". At 11 a.m. four aircraft were scrambled to intercept Japanese aircraft reported to be over Bathurst Island. They were ordered to 15,000 feet and found a Dinah heading for home over the sea about 15 miles from Darwin. Flight Lieutenant Maclean⁴ and Flight Sergeant McDowell⁵ each made two attacks at close range and the enemy plunged into the sea burning fiercely.

The second and last raid in March and the 53rd raid on the Darwin area occurred on the 15th. The Japanese formation consisted of three large sections of bombers in line abreast escorted by Zeros in threes about 2,000 feet above the bombers and a mile in front of them. There seemed to be 20 to 23 bombers and a slightly larger number of fighters. The raiders were intercepted by the whole wing and a general dogfight followed over Darwin harbour. The Spitfires shot down seven aircraft and probably damaged seven others. Flying Officer Goldsmith⁶ of No. 452 destroyed a Betty and a Hap. Four Spitfires were lost, but the only casualty was Squadron Leader Thorold-Smith, commander of No. 452, with which he had served with great distinction in its first and brilliant tour of duty in Fighter Command, Great Britain, from July 1941 to March 1942. Later in the month command of the squadron was taken over by Squadron Leader MacDonald⁷ who had served with No. 67 Squadron R.A.F. at Singapore, and who, before coming to No. 452, had commanded No. 12 Squadron at Batchelor.

⁴ F.Lt D. H. Maclean, 404652. 457 Sqn; comd 457 Sqn 1945. Planter; of Rabaul, TNG; b. Strathfield, NSW, 18 Dec 1916.

⁵ P-O F. R. J. McDowell, 403070; 457 Sqn. Wool classer; of Oatley, NSW; b. Waverley, NSW, 4 Feb 1917. Killed in action 6 Jul 1943.

⁶ Sqn Ldr A. P. Goldsmith, DFC, DFM, 402500. 234, 242 and 126 Sqs RAF, 452 Sqn. Public servant; of Artarmon, NSW; b. Waverley, NSW, 25 Apr 1921. Died 25 Mar 1961.

⁷ Sqn Ldr R. S. MacDonald, 270812. 67 Sqn RAF and 25 Sqn; comd 12 Sqn 1942-43, 452 Sqn 1943-44. Grazier; of Clermont, Qld; b. Rockhampton, Qld, 7 Apr 1916.