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BEAUFIGHTERS OVER NEW GUINEA

No. 30 Squadron RAAF 1942-1943

GEORGE TURNBULL DICK

Royal Australian Air Force Museum

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PREFACE

WHEN office-bearers of No. 30 Beaufighter Association discovered that I was a writer who took a deep interest in Australian history, they invited me to compile a short history of the squadron in which I had served during the Second World War. It was assumed that adequate source material would be available in the archives of Government departments in Canberra. However, I found that very few official documents have survived the clearing-out campaigns since war's end.

The present work is built around three surviving sets of records—the Unit History Sheets, the Operations Record Book and Personnel Occurrence Reports. But the meagre entries therein needed to be expanded, explained and extended by other material if the account were to be made at all interesting. Accordingly, additional information was sought from ex-members of the unit, and resulted in an astonishing response.

Where practicable, the recollections of those who had served in the Beaufighter unit were recorded on tape, some sessions lasting for more than four hours. Other ex-members sent me their written reminiscences—some long, some short, but all providing interesting material about events and about their fellow-men.

So much material was amassed that a difficult decision about treatment became imperative. If the limit of 55,000 words were to be observed and the book dealt with Squadron affairs from its formation to its disbandment, many of the interesting details and sidelights would have to be omitted for reasons of space. Alternatively, if the the book were to cover a shorter time-span, it would allow the development of some of the more interesting aspects. After consultation, it was decided to adopt the latter course and limit the coverage of the present work to the period March 1942 to December 1943. A follow-on publication may eventuate.

A writer cannot make history; he can but reflect it. It is people who are the stuff of history and any account of the past ought to deal with the actions of individuals rather than present a mere calendar of events. Although the operational activities of the aircrew form the thread of this present account, the opportunity is taken to tell something about that group of men who have been so often ignored in so many unit histories — the groundstaff.

It is possible that there will be disputes about some of the incidental material, and some readers may contend that a particular event did not take place in the way it is presented. This may be due to the author's ineptitude in the use of descriptive prose. Yet it ought to be remembered that not everyone witnessing the same incident sees and interprets it in the same way as his neighbours. More to the point, only a few are blessed with a totally accurate recall of events which happened 50 years ago.

So that this work might be more readable, I have adopted an informal writing style: unless the context demanded it, I have avoided the use of Air Force ranks. I hope that readers will not be offended by my use of their diminutive Christian names.

While undertaking the research for this book I met and made new friends of ex-members of No. 30 Beaufighter Squadron and enjoyed their company. I was also delighted to renew the acquaintance of others who served in the Squadron at the same time as I did.

This Preface can but express gratitude for the opportunity to record something about what it was like to serve in an operational squadron of a Royal Australian Air Force squadron in the tropics.

George Turnbull Dick
Glenbrook
January 1993

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Very special mention must be made of those who kindly allowed me to read their personal diaries—Don Angus, Laurie Crouch, George Dusting, Keith Nicholson, Frank Sawtell and Harry Tayler. Their contemporary records were invaluable sources, shedding much light on the various events, circumstances and individuals.

I thank, too, Bob Piper of the Air Historical Section, Ian Affleck of the Australian War Memorial, Myles Harper of Frankston, staffs of the Royal Australian Air Force Museum, the Discharged Personnel Records section, the National Library of Australia and the National Archives.

Finally, I must thank my wife, Beryl, for the patience she exercised while I was engrossed in the research and writing phases and for acting as editor and lynx-eyed proofreader.

CHAPTER ONE

Fashioning a Superb Weapons Platform

THE outstanding fact about the Bristol Beaufighter is that this aircraft was by far the most heavily armed fighter in operational service with the Royal Air Force from the early months of the Second World War until the 1950s — when airborne missiles were introduced.

The aviation world accorded the Beaufighter special recognition and respect because:

- It was the airborne pioneer of Britain's nightfighter defence.
- It provided Coastal Command with a highly successful strike weapon in maritime operations.
- It gave RAF commands overseas a lethal low level instrument of destruction.
- It demonstrated its versatility when it was employed in roles never envisaged by the initial designers.

The Munich crisis spurred the Air Ministry staffs and aircraft designers into feverish activity and in October 1938 the Bristol Aeroplane Company at Filton in Gloucestershire made an extremely interesting proposal. At that time the company was tailoring off its production of the Blenheim IV aircraft and was starting the production line of the Beaufort bomber. Bristol designer Leslie Frise asserted that he could equip the Royal Air Force with long range fighters of decisive

striking power in double quick time by using many parts of the Beaufort.

Initially referred to as the Beaufort Fighter, the name Beaufighter was allotted to the aircraft design on 2 June 1939 but in time the aircraft was simply referred to as the Beau. Contrary to the French connotation of that nickname, the aircraft's lines were by no means beautiful or aesthetically pleasing. Rather, they conveyed a strong relationship to snub-nosed pugnacity and sheer brute force. It was indeed a pure fighting machine whose strength lay not only in the awesome weight and variety of armament it could bring to bear on the enemy, but in its ability to absorb tremendous physical punishment yet still touch down with a live crew aboard. A bare two months before Britain declared war on Germany, the Air Ministry issued Specification F17/39 and just two weeks after that document was issued, Bristol's chief test pilot, Cyril Uwins, took the first Beaufighter prototype on its test flight. His report about that flight on 17 July 1939 showed that the aircraft was blessedly free of major defects but his comment about its tendency to swing on take-off led to an increase in the area of the tail fin.

By the beginning of December the Filton factory had produced its 100th Beaufighter and by the following May 200 had been produced. Design modifications were introduced as a result of Service trials and operational experience, making the Beaufighter even mightier. Sergeants Hodgkinson and Benn of No. 219 Squadron achieved the first Beaufighter kill when they shot down a Dornier D017 in October 1940.

Neither the aviation authorities nor the aircraft designers had been alert to the need for a nightfighter when the Beaufighter was conceived. But that need became clear when the Luftwaffe began its night raids on Britain, for neither the Whirlwinds, the Boulton Paul Defiants nor the modified Blenheims were equal to the task.

However, the Beaufighter squadrons accepted that role; they were fitted with aircraft interception (AI) equipment and the crews underwent on-the-job training. They spared no

effort to master the demanding techniques of interpreting the AI equipment in the utter darkness of the night skies and of following the instructions of ground controllers who guided them to their targets and safely back to base. After frequent and rapid changes of course during a pursuit of a hostile aircraft, the navigator—whose attention had been concentrated on his AI screen—had little idea of his position and needed the controller's advice about returning to the home airfield. An important aspect, indeed a vital one, was the need to develop and practise teamwork between the pilot and the navigator. The entire complex system of Britain's night defence system relied upon trust and co-operation between pilot and navigator and between the aircrew and the ground controller.

Hitler's decision to launch his ill-fated invasion of Russia brought about a redeployment of his air forces and a consequent reduction in night raids against Britain. Some Beau-fighter squadrons were then switched from defensive to offensive roles and carried out intruder sorties over Europe by day and by night. Their primary objective was the interdiction of the French railway system but targets of opportunity were also attacked.

Britain's lack of a long range fighter inhibited the capabilities of Fighter Command as well as other Commands of the Royal Air Force. For instance, Coastal Command could not initially launch attacks against targets in Scandinavian waters because its existing aircraft had either insufficient range to reach distant objectives or insufficient armament to be pitted against Luftwaffe fighters. Beaufighters were pressed into service and, as the sea war went on, were modified by fitting additional fuel tanks, by adding a table and electronic equipment at the navigator's station and by installing bomb, torpedo and rocket racks. Beaufighters eventually became Coastal Command's principal strike aircraft and in their maritime role they nearly always had to press home their attacks into the very muzzles of densely clustered anti-aircraft guns—a tactic which demanded undiluted courage as well as determination

and skill on the part of both pilot and navigator. These men made a substantial contribution to Coastal Command's unceasing offensive and their operational activities played a large part in crippling Germany's merchant shipping and hampering the exploits of her Navy.

The Beaufighter was introduced to Middle East Command at about the same time as it was introduced to Coastal Command and the aircraft performed sterling work in the desert and in the Mediterranean, Greece, Malta and Italy. In North Africa the Beaufighter's ability to reach distant targets and its ability to use a withering battery of airborne weapons at low level made it one of the most feared engines of war in the Allied arsenal. Many, many sorties were mounted against German and Italian convoys trying to move war supplies to Rommel's Afrika Corps. In the lead-up to the crucial Battle of El Alamein, long range Beaufighters of No. 252 Squadron scored success after success against ships heading for Tobruk. Mounting shipping losses eventually forced the enemy to switch from sea supply to air supply but the ubiquitous Beaufighters wreaked havoc among Axis air transports trying to force their way through.

The crushing of Axis forces in and around the Mediterranean allowed the redeployment of modern aircraft to replace the outmoded and battle weary machines in India and Burma. Squadrons in those theatres were therefore equipped with the Beaufighter Mk VI which gave its best performance at low altitude and was thus ideal for the kind of operations into Burma. The use of large formations of aircraft was set aside in favour of sorties by either one or two aircraft which skimmed just above the tropical jungle or the dusty plains; at that height they were very hard to detect from above or below and consequently they achieved not only a degree of safety but the very important element of surprise. Because of the peculiar nature of its powerplant, the aircraft's approach was very nearly silent and thus provided little or no warning of the impending devastation about to fall on an unsuspecting target. This characteristic led to the Beaufighter being referred

to as Whispering Death—a most graphic sobriquet which was invented as a whimsy in an RAF Officers' Mess.

David Innes records that navigator Edgar Welch spoke of the absolute necessity for trust and teamwork between the two crew members, especially in view of the many solitary sorties undertaken by Beaufighters in the Indian sub-continent:

To complete 30 successful sorties together, a crew of two had to be complementary and reasonably complete and, on long range operations, under no need to ask any guidance of anyone. In Burma the navigation was mostly by dead reckoning, with none of the electronic aids used in Europe, but not difficult once it had been appreciated that the compasses would have considerable error after the cannons had been fired.

In our own territory there had to be a radio watch and, when returning in the dark, radio checks for bearings etc. Outside of our own territory there had to be a non-stop lookout for strange aircraft—Japs or Americans. The latter were so unpredictable that eventually we had an arrangement under which they operated in the morning and we in the afternoon/evening—yet they still managed to shoot down two of our Beaus into the Akyab swamps!

Approaching the target the guns and the camera had to be set ready and a check made that the right petrol tanks were in use—preferably the wing inners. In actual attacks, the pilots tended to become engrossed in their cannon shooting and temporarily ignored the world outside of the aiming ring.

In brief, pilot and navigator had non-stop activity and co-operation.

The 'bag' of No. 27 Squadron during just one month in 1943 included 44 locomotives, 43 items of rolling stock, 78 motor transport vehicles, 16 river steamers and 536 other river craft. Added to that was the destruction caused by single Beaufighters against a whole range of targets of opportunity—fuel storage tanks, makeshift hangars, supply dumps, living quarters, bridges, radio installations, and Japanese troops.

One aircraft chanced upon orderly ranks of enemy soldiers formed up on the parade ground of the largest air base in northern Burma participating in a ceremonial to honour Emperor Hirohito's birthday. They were just about to raise the flag when the pilot of the lone Whispering Death let loose with his cannons — one of the shells severing the flagpole and bringing the Rising Sun down over the bloodied bodies of the colour guard.

Conceived to meet Britain's urgent air defence requirement, the Beaufighter slid quite effortlessly and successfully into a wide diversity of roles and the crews of this utilitarian hybrid were justly proud of the splendid way in which it discharged all the tasks allotted to it.

During the war years, nearly 6,000 Beaufighters were produced at the various factories in England and these equipped 52 squadrons of the Royal Air Force, 14 squadrons of the Fleet Air Arm, 2 squadrons of the Balkan Air Force and 4 squadrons of the United States Air Force. A total of 217 British-built Beaufighters was exported to Australia, the first being delivered in March 1942.

In February 1939 the Royal Australian Air Force had drawn up an Air Staff Requirement for a fighter aircraft with which to arm its operational squadrons. Some three months later, at its weekly meeting at Victoria Barracks in Melbourne, the Air Board agreed to equip the RAAF with the British-built Beaufort Fighter but the outbreak of war in Europe meant that Britain could not fill the order at that time because she needed all the output from her own factories for the air war against Germany.

The European situation improved over the following two years to the extent that Australia was able to place an initial order for 54 Beaufighters for delivery by March 1942. By that time RAAF Headquarters had issued an establishment table for No. 30 Long Range Fighter Squadron to be equipped with 24 Beaufighters and orders were issued for it to be formed at RAAF Station Richmond, New South Wales, on 9 March 1942.

CHAPTER TWO

Work-Up to a War Footing

THE Squadron came into being at RAAF Station Richmond on Monday, 9 March 1942—the day on which the Japanese executed Coastwatcher P. Good for reporting the movements of their ships. That was also the day on which Allied aircraft at Port Moresby made their first strike against Lae which the Japanese had captured the previous day. They retaliated that night with an attack by 10 bombers but inflicted little more damage than the previous eight air raids.

Flying Officer Robert Goodsir of the Special Duties Branch was the only officer on the Squadron's strength on foundation day but a week later he was replaced by Flight Lieutenant Cecil Cowley. He was joined by Flying Officer Alex Spooner on Anzac Day and by Flying Officer John Mason on 22 May. A fortnight later that trio was joined by 10 other officers of the General Duties Branch. Fifty-five members of groundstaff musterings were posted in from No. 2 Aircraft Depot at Richmond on the Squadron's foundation day and these were followed next day by 38 airmen from other RAAF units.

As the Squadron had not received even one Beaufighter, there was very little work for the airmen to do within that unit. Nevertheless, the Station Warrant Officer found work for airmen arriving from beyond Richmond; for instance he sent the incoming cooks and stewards to work in the Sergeants'

Mess, carpenters to the Barracks Section, clerks to the Headquarters Orderly Room, aircraft hands to the Equipment Store and wireless operators to the Station Signals Office. No. 2 Aircraft Depot retained the Squadron's flight riggers, flight mechanics, engineering and airframe fitters as part of the Depot's work force for the time being.

Two of the first Beaufighters allotted to No. 30 Squadron were products of Bristol's factory at Filton and arrived at the port of Sydney as crated deck cargo. The Department of Main Roads had to modify the superstructures of some bridges to permit the low loaders to negotiate the road out to Richmond. On 11 April those two Beaufighters were delivered to No. 2AD where the men—including those officially belonging to No. 30 Squadron—had the difficult task of re-assembling an aircraft they had never seen or heard of before. A Bristol's representative was on hand to help them sort things out and create some order out of the confusion of sub-assemblies, parts, wiring harnesses and mechanisms. Aircraft A19-2 was allotted to the Squadron on 15 June. Aircrew and groundstaff arrived in increasing numbers during June and July, and by August the Squadron personnel strength was close to its target. The establishment provided for 389 men in four flights:

170 in Headquarters Flight

79 in 'A' Flight

79 in 'B' Flight

61 in Servicing Flight.

Many of the men came to the Squadron straight from their technical training courses; for instance, Ken Golledge arrived from Ascot Vale immediately after completing his training as a flight mechanic, Don Angus arrived from Point Cook immediately after completing his training as a W/T operator at Point Cook and Alwyn Green arrived immediately after completing his training as a flight rigger at No. 1 Engineering School. To familiarise all the technical airmen with the Beaufighter's features, many fitters were sent to complete a 'secret' course on the Hercules engine while others were sent

to learn about the Beaufighter airframe. Other airmen underwent No. 1 Beaufighter Conversion Course held within 30 Squadron at Richmond.

The Squadron establishment provided for 13 commissioned pilots, 12 airmen pilots and 24 NCO navigators. Peter Fisken was the first NCO navigator to arrive and the following day, 2 June, nine others arrived from No. 22 Squadron, which was also based at Richmond and was being re-equipped with A20 Boston Havocs. The day after that, eight commissioned pilots arrived after having completed a conversion course at No. 1 Operational Training Unit at Sale; these included Squadron Leaders Walker and Read, and Flight Lieutenants Uren and Little.

In July, Beaufort A9-79, fitted with dual controls, was temporarily allotted from No. 1 Aircraft Depot to No. 30 Squadron for pilot training at Richmond. By that time the Squadron had received a number of Beaufighters flown in from that Depot at Laverton. During June, Brian Walker, Dick Roe, John Mason and John Miles made delivery flights to the Squadron and by mid-year it was equipped with its complement of 24 aircraft.

Flight Lieutenant Bruce Rose, who had flown Beaufighters during operations in Britain, and Flight Lieutenant 'Handlebars' Ellis, an experienced Royal Air Force Beaufighter pilot, assisted in the conversions of Squadron pilots as well as provided a conversion-to-type for the Station Commander at Richmond—Group Captain Patrick Heffernan. Some of the pilots had flown Blenheims or Beaufighters overseas but others had flown only Avro Ansons or Airspeed Oxfords so that handling the heavier and more complex Beaufighter was a major experience for them. 'I'm not telling any lies,' said Jim Wilson, 'when I say that I saw a number of shaking and white-faced pilots after their first flight in a Beaufighter.'

The more capable pilots were frequently pestered by ground-staff who, never having been up in any kind of aircraft before, wanted a flight in a Beaufighter. Sergeant Wally Bell, an engine fitter, went with Des Moran-Hilford who was doing

local night flying in A19-6 on 21 July but he saw very little of the Hawkesbury district because of the wartime brown-out. Bruce Robertson went with George Sayer who took a Beau-fighter at tree-top height along the Hawkesbury, following every bend in the river and firing his weapons at a marker dropped in the sea. Bruce was exhilarated by the low level flight but nearly jumped out of his skin when the four cannons near his feet were fired.

For the first two years of its existence, No. 30 Squadron was equipped with the British-built Beaufighter 1C—a variant produced for Coastal Command operations. It was a mid-wing, twin engined, two-seater aircraft 12.70m long, 4.82m high with a wingspan of 17.63m. It incorporated light alloy extrusions and had a flush-riveted all metal stressed skin (with the exception of the elevator and rudder which had fabric coverings over metal frames). The cantilever type metal wings had detachable tips and accommodated the power plants. The engine mountings and the main units of the undercarriage were of steel forgings and tubes; those main units were of Vickers design, were fitted with tyres 106cm in diameter, and were retracted backwards into the engine nacelles by a single hydraulic jack. The tail unit was merely a fork accommodating a tyre mounted wheel which could be retracted forwards into a well.

The power plant consisted of two 1,670hp Bristol Hercules XVIII radial engines, each being of a two-row, 14 cylinder, air cooled, sleeve valve design incorporating a supercharger with a single-stage, two-speed impeller, a pair of magnetos, a Hobson float operated carburettor with twin air intakes and an electrical starting system. The three-bladed constant speed Hydromatic airscrews were 3.38m in diameter and had a clockwise rotation (viewed from the front).

Until the advent of the Hercules radials none of the Squadron's engineering staff had come across a sleeve valve aero engine before and their general unfamiliarity with the aircraft and its components brought the inevitable teething problems. For instance, on 4 July only five aircraft were

usable, the remaining 11 being unserviceable and, at the end of that month, 13 of the Squadron's 24 aircraft were unserviceable.

Although the Bristol representative had alerted the ground-staff to the possibility of finding metal fragments in the oil filters, these were seldom found, and they reasoned that this was because of the particular design for the operation of the sleeve valves—which were single sleeves rather than double sleeves. Nevertheless, these engines which had been designed in England, were not performing too well in Australia's different climatic conditions. An engine fitter, George Dusting, believed that the source of the trouble lay in the fuel system. 'The engines had a very complex carburetion system involving master control by a very beautifully made and intricate piece of machinery,' he said. 'Instead of the more common system of butterflies, those Hobson carburettors had a system of cams whose adjustment was very critical. I eventually found the exact settings and we had no more trouble on that score.'

The Squadron's work-up to operational status included circuits and bumps, formation flying, weapons exercises and cross country flights and was not without incident. Doug Langusch and Norm Greasley were killed when A19-12 crashed just north of Melbourne; Bill Willard and Ralph Nelson made a forced landing at Bourke when the starboard engine of A19-13 seized up; Earl Wild and Col Harvey experienced the drama of a power flick-roll and a series of raunching 5G pull-outs in A19-2 because of incorrect speed readings when the Pitot tube iced up; Ted Jones and Eric Richardson were in A19-7 which was badly damaged after doing a ground loop during a take-off on 17 July; Col Campbell and Jim Yeatman made a crash landing in A19-17 at Richmond because of an undercarriage failure and Bob Brazenor and Fred Anderson got to the stage of discussing bailing out during a night flight from Jervis Bay in bad weather and thick low cloud which made for uncertainty about their position.

Morning fogs at Richmond interfered with flying activities

to some extent during the winter of 1942 but the cold and wet weather had a greater impact on the health of the Squadron personnel. Morning sick parades were relatively well attended — with increased attendances every Tuesday, the day of the Station Commander's formal parade and march past. But the men were treated for only minor complaints and during four months, the Station Sick Quarters saw fewer than 20 Squadron members admitted. They included Roger Passfield, Athol Hewitt, Wally Byles, Charlie Devlin, Jack Williams, Harold O'Connor, and Dan Smith. Fortunately, Dan was discharged in time to get across to Mount Gambier for his marriage to Alice Watson about a fortnight before the Squadron moved north.

The majority of the groundstaff were single and possessed of the inclinations and interests of young and healthy males. Naturally, they were glad to get away from the Station's military environment and many of them patronised the local dances, racecourses, hotels and cinemas. The night after they arrived at Richmond, Russ Foster and two other armourers from Uranquinty went to Windsor's Regent Theatre to see *Confirm or Deny* in which a brave Don Ameche survived enemy bombs and blitzkrieg. Wirth's Circus was also in the district but not too many airmen could find six shillings for the entrance fee. However, some were able to afford a few pence for a glass of beer and for this they went across the road to the Clarendon Hotel, where the bar was presided over by the wig-wearing Ma Tunnel (who later married Robert Burchall, a No. 30 Squadron messman). Woe betide anyone caught there without a leave pass by Warrant Officer Leach, the more so if he were caught during working hours. Police Constables Hunt and Brooks saw that the landlord observed the licensing regulations but they did not seem overly concerned by the numerous men in uniform who were doing business with the SP bookmaker in the Hotel Fitzroy.

Because of the lack of work within the unit during the first month, airmen who had credits on their leave cards had no difficulty in getting approval to go home on leave. For the

period of their absence their paybooks were credited with a living-out allowance (in lieu of being provided with sustenance while in barracks) at the rate of one shilling and ninepence a day as Ration Allowance, and a further eightpence a day as Special Allowance. Airmen who were granted leave and paid those allowances included Corporal Gunton, and LACs Cather, Crouch, Dorrington, Foster, Hall, Pink, Taylor and Watson.

Quite a few of the navigators posted to the Squadron had just finished their training and recently been promoted to sergeant rank. After living in airmen's barracks and mess halls for over 12 months, they welcomed the facilities of the Sergeants' Mess at Richmond: a furnished single room, a pleasant dining room, a spacious anteroom and a bar—although that wasn't of great interest to young Fred Cassidy whose total alcoholic consumption to-date might have been two glasses of beer.

Other NCO aircrew were not quite so abstemious. On Saturdays, some of them—including Peter Fisken, Harry Suthons, Danny Box, Arthur Jaggs, and Archie Mairet—caught the train from Clarendon into Sydney where they gathered at the Long Bar of the Hotel Australia for a convivial afternoon session. There were also convivial evenings in the Sergeants' Mess at Richmond. At a games night shortly before the Beaufighter unit left Richmond, Warrant Officer Ted Good led his Squadron team to a win against the Aircraft Depot team led by Flight Sergeant Jack Cameron. The contests included billiards, snooker, darts, shove-halfpenny, and high-cock-alorum.

During the Squadron's work-up period at Richmond, 12 members took marriage vows; these included Bill Schofield, Albert Clarke, Daniel Smith, Alec Spooner, Ron Downing, Jeff Heath, Frank Sawtell and Jim Chirgwin. Jim married Muriel Ford just two days before joining the Squadron but Air Force authorities did the right thing and, while he was serving at Kiriwina, arranged for him to go back to Sydney on what was called 21 days Honeymoon Leave enjoyed, despite being 15 months late.

There were not many opportunities for Air Force personnel to mix with civilians in the Richmond area who, in any case, were knuckling down to wartime conditions on the home-front. They had to carry Identification Cards and produce Ration Books to buy clothing, tea, sugar, tobacco, and petrol although they could run their cars with charcoal burning gas producers. They could join the Volunteer Defence Force, help dig air raid trenches at the local schools or assist the National Emergency Service to form evacuation plans for the district. They were told that if the Air Raid Siren sounded they should throw themselves flat on the ground, support the body on the arms and keep the mouth open to minimise the effect of a bomb blast. They were also told what to do if an enemy aircraft landed in their backyard—disarm the crew, prevent destruction of the aeroplane or documents and then inform the authorities. They didn't need any pressure to take those things seriously because enemy submarines and enemy aircraft had breached the defences of their State capital.

During the night of Saturday, 30 May 1942, Lieutenant Susumi Ito flew his Japanese Navy floatplane on a reconnaissance mission over Sydney while his observer sketched the positions of HMAS *Canberra* and other vessels which could be targets for three midget submarines about to be launched. He was at the controls of a Yokosuka E14Y1, flying at about 90 knots and sometimes as low as 100 feet, was illuminated by searchlights several times and was wrongly identified as an American Curtis Seagull. The aircraft had been launched from a 2,550 tonne submarine a mere 50km north-east of Sydney. The Air Board reacted by requiring units—even those engaged in flying training—to carry out seaward searches and No. 30 Squadron devoted some time to that aspect. During July, for instance, it spent 112 flying hours on sea reconnaissance missions. In addition, the crews maintained a lookout during training flights which happened to be over the sea and accounted for 355 flying hours by the 29 pilots and 25 wireless air observers on strength during that month.

The Squadron Commander, Squadron Leader Brian Walker,

had encouraged his aircrews to sort themselves out into pilot/navigator combinations and most of them were satisfied and pleased with the arrangements they made. The pilots were quite busy learning about handling the Beaufighter but the navigators found very little to occupy them on the ground, although Len Greenhill and Harold O'Connor provided some informal navigation and radio training. All the navigators were wireless trained and although none of them had seen the Australian-designed AT5/AR8 radio equipment before, they soon mastered it and maintained satisfactory air communication with the civilian Aeradio network.

At the end of July 1942 Australia felt she was in a very threatened position; she had been shocked when Japanese aircraft raided Darwin the previous February, when three midget submarines fired torpedoes in Sydney Harbour at the end of May and when flying boats had dropped bombs on Townsville that very month. Australian forces had been forced out of Rabaul and Lae, Japanese ground forces were threatening Milne Bay and gaining the upper hand along the Kokoda Trail. In ordering the operational deployment of No. 30 Squadron to New Guinea the authorities were providing the frontline with its first Australian two-place ground attack aircraft and one which would inflict substantial damage on the enemy.

Following the receipt of instructions from Air Force Headquarters, the Commanding Officer issued a Secret Warning Order on 6 August, alerting his section commanders to prepare for a move. His subsequent orders dealt with administrative aspects of the impending move to an unspecified destination but as personnel were ordered to deposit their winter uniforms in the kit repository and were issued with active service kit for the tropics, the location of the Squadron's operational base was an open secret.

Flight Lieutenant Cyril Wearne despatched Ted Good, 10 airmen and 70 tents on a northbound train to set up a temporary camp at a site which would later be disclosed to him by telegram. On 11 August the Adjutant coordinated the

movement of heavy stores, equipment and vehicles to Windsor railway station where they were loaded on to a train. He also organised a parade of all non-aircrew personnel in front of No. 5 Hangar immediately after lunch, at which the flight commanders inspected the men to ensure that each was correctly dressed in a drab uniform, had a rifle, frog and bayonet (or pistol, for corporals and above), a kitbag, webbing knapsack, a steel helmet, a water bottle containing drinking water and a pack of emergency rations.

After a short address by Squadron Leader Walker, the men marched off, in column of route to Clarendon railway station, led by an RAAF Band playing the tune popularly known as 'We're a Bunch of Bastards' — chosen because it contained the phrase frequently used by the Commanding Officer. The route to Clarendon station was lined with airmen, airwomen, local civilians, parents, girlfriends and wives — including Dulcie Golledge, who wasn't to see her engine fitter husband for 15 months. Frank Simpson said, 'I felt pretty puffed up, for it was the first time I had marched in a squadron behind an Air Force Band. It was a real moving situation and we all felt very proud.'

The train with some 300 groundstaff on board, pulled out at 1.53pm, its coaches under the supervision of Pilot Officers George King, John Williams, Leslie Sims, Ernest Lee and Stan Hutchinson. It stopped at Gosford for dinner, Taree for breakfast, Kempsey for lunch and Grafton for dinner, arriving at Clapham station in Brisbane at 6.40am on 13 August. The men were accommodated in the tents of the Army Transit Camp at the Ascot Racecourse and, after an address by Brigadier McColl, boarded a narrow gauge troop train at 10pm on Friday, 14 August. On the trip to Townsville they stopped at Bundaberg for breakfast, Gladstone for lunch, Rockhampton for dinner and Bowen for breakfast, arriving at their terminus at 12.40pm on 16 August.

Cliff Maxwell had supervised his drivers and fitters in the loading of the Squadron's vehicles on to wagons and their goods train followed the passenger train up to Townsville.

Cliff Maxwell and his fellow corporal slept in the staff car whilst Alec Atkinson, Joe Erskine, George Hindmarsh, Jack Nichols and other transport personnel occupied the cabins of the other vehicles.

Squadron personnel spent two days at RAAF Station Garbutt, after which they moved to a nearby emergency airfield at Bohle River to occupy the tented camp established by Ted Good and his advance party. The Beaufighters arrived there on 18 August, some having stayed the night at Bundaberg so that pilots could show off their operational aircraft to their friends still flying Ansons at the Service Flying Training School there. According to No. 4 Operations Order, each of the 24 aircraft which flew to Bohle River from Richmond carried two airmen in addition to its pilot and navigator:

A19-1: Squadron Leader Read, Flight Sergeant Greenhill, Flight Sergeant Badman, AC1 Navin Sergeant Badman

A19-2: Pilot Officer Roe, Flight Sergeant Fisken, LAC Hughes, LAC Butler

A19-3: Flying Officer McKew, Sergeant Lasscock, Corporal Cowan, Corporal Marsden

A19-4: Squadron Leader Walker, Pilot Officer Mason, Flight Sergeant Thomas, Sergeant Hammond

A19-5: Flight Lieutenant Welsh, Sergeant Witheford, Sergeant Forde, AC1 Gazzard

A19-6: Sergeant Cummins, Warrant Officer Kirley, LAC Rawlinson, AC1 Jeffries

A19-8: Flight Lieutenant Little, Pilot Officer Spooner, Corporal Bell, AC1 Smith

A19-9: Pilot Officer Sandford, Flight Sergeant Jaggs, LAC Foster, AC1 Bond

A19-10: Flight Sergeant Campbell, Flight Sergeant Yeatman, AC1 Nott, AC1 Keating

A19-11: Sergeant Morgan, Sergeant Cassidy, LAC Meers, LAC Dusting

A19-13: Sergeant Vial, Sergeant Hanks, Corporal Maclean, Corporal Roberts

A19-14: Sergeant Butterfield, Sergeant Mairet, LAC Crouch, LAC Bartlett
A19-15: Flying Officer Brazenor, Sergeant Anderson, AC1 Carmichael, AC1 Breen
A19-28: Squadron Leader Parker, Warrant Officer O'Connor, Sergeant Davies, LAC Tayler
A19-33: Flight Lieutenant Uren, Pilot Officer Maguire, Corporal Bain, LAC Thompson
A19-35: Pilot Officer Stephens, Sergeant B Cameron, LAC Edwards, AC1 Collins
A19-36: Warrant Officer Hughes, Flight Sergeant Keller, LAC Fienberg, AC1 Nipperess
A19-37: Flying Officer Willard, Flight Sergeant Nelson, Corporal Beynon, LAC Watson
A19-38: Flight Lieutenant Wild, Pilot Officer Harvey, Corporal Schofield, LAC Edgar
A19-39: Sergeant Sayer, Flight Sergeant Shaw, AC1 Boyd, LAC Horne
A19-49: Flying Officer Jones, Sergeant Suthons, Sergeant Herron, AC1 Reinhard
A19-50: Flying Officer Moran-Hilford, Sergeant Richardson, AC1 Wilson, AC1 Bromilow
A19-53: Sergeant Downing, Sergeant Box, LAC Mortimer, LAC Baich
A19-54: Flying Officer Harding, Sergeant H Cane, LAC Park, LAC Morris

The Squadron was located at Bohle River instead of at Garbutt for security reasons as Kawansi flying boats had raided Townsville the previous month. Every afternoon two Beaufighters were located at Garbutt to enable a rapid scramble in the event of further night raids. Bill Willard and Ralph Nelson were scrambled twice at night but the 'raiders' turned out to be Flying Fortresses.

Bohle River was notable for its insidious and persistent red dust, its clouds of flies and its many goats, so the men got away as often as they could. Some paid two shillings for a launch trip across to Magnetic Island where they could frolic

in the warm water or quaff an ale or two at the hotel adjacent to the jetty. Others lost their money to the bookmakers at the dogtrack and sank a few tots of Beenleigh Rum. Others swept their partners round the floor at dances held at Heatleys in West End and others patronised the cinemas in town — one of which had a roof which could be slid open on a clear night. John Mason and Brian Walker occasionally met up with Squadron Officer Starke and some of the other WAAFS who staffed the Fighter Sector. Les Rawlinson thought that Townsville was like an unsavoury frontier town where nearly everyone needed to carry a gun and where fights were common. 'American Military Police swung their baseball bats at everyone in or near the fracas,' he said, 'no matter what uniform the brawlers were wearing.'

The flight commanders organised a continuation training programme for the aircrew, putting particular emphasis on low level flying and map reading in the mountainous country which was similar to that in New Guinea. Beaufighters and Bostons often practiced together and developed an effective technique for joint attacks. Squadron aircraft also visited the huge American base at Charters Towers where the aircrews discussed flying procedures and operational matters with Allied aviators. Sergeants Bill Cameron, Bill Clark and George Moore felt a little bit out of those activities — they were uncrewed navigators. George had arrived at Richmond the day before the main party left for the Squadron's northern destination, being straight from his bombing and gunnery course. The trio had been passengers on the long and exhausting train journey to Townsville and were to be passengers on the much more pleasant sea voyage to New Guinea.

On 3 September Squadron personnel attended a church parade to commemorate three years of war — it was a brief affair at which Brian Walker read the lesson. Seventeen members were unable to attend that parade for they were on board an aircraft bound for Port Moresby; that Advance Party was in charge of Pilot Officer King and included Ted Good, Don Angus, Ray Brockman, Ron Dorman and Bruce Robertson.

There was a pay parade after the church parade and, officially, nobody was supposed to leave the camp yet more than half the men managed to get away into town for what many considered might be their last experience of civilisation for some time. There is no record that any men from 30 Squadron were part of the long queue outside the Ford Street premises occupied by a pair of 'ladies of the night' and which was being kept in order by two Military Policemen. As he drove past the line-up of waiting clients, Les Cook wondered how many servicemen in the Townsville area were taking notice of the many posters which read: *Flies Spread Disease — Keep Yours Closed!*

During the first week of September the entire squadron was turned out for a kit inspection by Wing Commander Grant after which he stood on a small platform and gave a pep talk about health, morale, air raids and dealing with natives. The following week, stores, ammunition and equipment were taken to the wharf to be loaded on to the *Bontekoe Batavia* which the communist-led wharf labourers refused to load. Airmen were formed into loading parties and when they had put all the stores and supplies in the holds, personnel were embarked on the SS *Taroona*, a 5,355 tonne vessel which had been taken off the Bass Strait run to become a fast troop carrier for the Navy. Escorted by the Royal Australian Navy frigate HMAS *Swan*, she sailed for New Guinea at 6am on Friday 11 September with nearly 300 men of No. 30 Squadron aboard.

CHAPTER THREE

Early Days at Ward's Strip

AFORMATION of Beaufighters left Garbutt shortly after lunch on Sunday, 12 September and made landfall at Port Moresby some 3 hours 40 minutes later. Due to a misunderstanding, the formation landed at Waigani where Earl Wild managed to put the port wheel of A19-38 in a great mound of earth during his landing. 'By heavens,' said Col Harvey, 'it gave our Beaufighter a thumping great jolt—a lesser aircraft would have fallen apart.'

After Flight Commanders Peter Parker and Charles Read had sorted things out, the Beaufighters made the short hop to Ward's Strip where the men joined Equipment Officer Les Braund and the advance party. Next day the Commanding Officer made a reconnaissance of the area, selected a safer and more salubrious site in June Valley, about 4km to the west of Ward's, and arranged with Squadron Leader Maxwell Scott, Commanding Officer of No. 5 Mobile Works Squadron, to clear the site in preparation for the arrival of the sea echelon.

The *Taroona* tied up at the Moresby wharf on 5.30pm on Monday, 14 September and all her passengers were disembarked without incident. The *Taroona's* captain did not want to be tied up to the wharf overnight in case the Japanese decided to raid the port so he pulled out to sea before the Squadron's vehicles, tents and other stores could be unloaded.

Adjutant Wearne instructed Cliff Maxwell and his men from the Transport Section to remain at the wharf overnight so as to be on hand when the vehicles were unloaded next morning.

Army trucks took the other personnel on a night time drive from the wharf through the town and along the dusty, winding road to their interim camp at the northern end of Ward's Strip. After a meal of curried rice the airmen spread their ponchos on the ground under the open sky and tried to sleep, although many were bitten by vicious mosquitoes, worried about snakes and alarmed by rumours about Japanese infiltrators.

Captain Nakashaki of the Japanese 44th Mountain Artillery Regiment was elated when he looked south from his forward position in the Owen Stanley Range. His diary entry on that occasion reads: 'Over there was Port Moresby, the object of our invasion, which has become an obsession. Officers and men embraced one another, overcome by emotion. At night we could see the lights of Moresby.' The newly arrived Air Force personnel were able to sleep a little easier within a few weeks, for Captain Nakashaki and his compatriots were gradually pushed back along the Kokoda Trail.

The day after their arrival the men breakfasted on pork and beans and then got to work erecting their tents at the new campsite in June Valley, pestered by flies and hampered by teeming rain which made it awkward to handle the sodden canvas. Afterwards, they put up other tents to accommodate the technical sections and flights at Ward's. Engine fitters who helped to establish facilities at the strip included Merv Ashard, Ken Beck, Sid Cross, Gwynn Davies, Les Davis, Harry Deacon, Russ Edgar, Arthur Ferrier, Don Flemming, Jack Horler, Alec Jenkins, George Latham, Lou Lothian, Ray Maddox, Ken Morley and Bob Wighton. One of the airmen wrote: 'At the end of the day and buggering about in the dark, I flopped on my allotted ground space, caked in mud, unshaven and stinking like a sewer.' A series of explosions sent some of the men running for the hills, thinking that the enemy was bombing the strip, while others—including Pat

Cowan and Frank Forde—hastily moved the Beaufighters away from flying fragments emanating from what turned out to be an ammunition dump set alight by a grass fire.

For the most part, each pilot and his navigator shared a tent, irrespective of rank. Navigators who were involved in putting up their canvas shelters included Danny Box, Bill Cameron, Hedley Cane, Fred Cassidy, Peter Fisken, Arthur Jags, Bill Keller, Allan Kirley, Ted Lassock, John Maguire, Alec Spooner and Jim Yeatman.

Twelve aircraft of No. 30 Squadron (now under the operational control of 5th Air Force) were sent out on the unit's first strike from its operational base. They were ordered out on 17 September to destroy barges which were landing troops and supplies at beaches near Sanananda and Buna and whose destruction would help men of the 7th Division who were beginning to push the Japanese forces back towards Kokoda. Peter Welsh and Clif Witheford were bitterly disappointed because A19-5 developed trouble and they were unable to take part in that air operation. When the other crews landed at Ward's they were accorded a heroes' welcome by the groundstaff who were anxiously awaiting the safe return of the Beaufighters from their first whack at the enemy. The Air Officer Commanding No. 9 Operational Group sent a congratulatory message and General MacArthur's signal called the attack 'a honey'. No Beaufighters were lost on that strike yet the captured documents of No. 1 Battery, 47th Japanese Anti-Aircraft Battalion record that it had destroyed four Beaufighters.

That night Moresby suffered its eightieth air raid, a bomb exploding in the vicinity of Ward's Strip, injuring two Americans in an ambulance and four others in a truck. Allan Pivott was in the shower when he heard aircraft approaching but, as a pay clerk, he didn't have the experience to distinguish the sounds made by enemy or Allied aircraft. Moreover, the alarm about the attack was not given until the raiders were overhead by which time Allan and others had sped away from the camp area as fast as their legs would carry them. That raid

motivated the men to dig slip trenches beside their tents and the Barracks Store was soon deprived of its stock of picks and shovels.

Beaufighters were ordered out next day to hit the mule trains taking supplies from Buna to the enemy troops opposing forward movement of Australian units. Des Moran-Hilford and Bill Clarke nearly came to grief in A19-50 but Des managed to drag his Beaufighter up and just clear a hilltop during his recovery from an attacking dive. The same crew was involved in another incident on 23 September when they endured the first attempt by Japanese fighters to shoot down a Beaufighter. The incident took place near Buna when two of the six Zeros escorting a formation of dive bombers got on the tail of A19-50 but Moran-Hilford outdistanced them when he dived down to sea level and pushed his throttles fully forward. Captured Japanese documents contain a disgusted reference to the lack of success on the part of their fighters.

George Moore flew with Len Vial in A19-37 on that mission, alongside Mos Morgan and Fred Cassidy in A19-35. As a result of George's information about the intense ack-ack fire in the target area, Archie Mairet ensured that his name was on the Mission Board for a repeat attack that afternoon.

George Sayer and Archie Mairet perished when A19-1 was shot down by anti-aircraft fire at Buna. George had flown Hurricanes in the Middle East, been in Russia with an RAF fighter squadron, was with an RAF bomber squadron in Singapore when it fell, got across to Java and then spent 44 days in a lifeboat before reaching the Northern Territory. When he joined No. 30 Squadron at Richmond and crewed up with Archie Mairet, he had already flown more than 900 hours and taken part in 43 operations. 'What a crying shame,' said Fred Cassidy, who had experienced his first flight in a Beaufighter flown by Sayer, 'that after surviving so many overseas operations, he should go for a Burton on his first job out of Moresby.' In its records the Japanese anti-aircraft battery noted that it had used a two-second fuse setting, had scored a direct hit with its shell, examined the wreckage and

listed the equipment it contained. When the Allies recaptured Buna our soldiers found the aircraft's wreckage in a mangrove swamp; it was clear that A19-1 had crashed into the ground with great force, disintegrating and then burning.

By the end of September the men had brought a great deal of order to their camp. They had erected a marquee to serve as a mess for all officers and aircrew, another for the senior non-commissioned officers and another for the airmen. Bill Branchthwaite, Duncan Hattrick, Charlie Mills, Bill Newton, Bob Vidler and a team of other cooks had mastered the mobile Wiles Cooker and did their best to concoct something palatable from the dreadful tinned stuff provided by the Army as 'rations, troops, for the use of. Under arrangements made by the Caterer, Bill Grogan, transport drivers collected the rations from the Army depot at Murray Barracks on the outskirts of the township.

Stan Hutchinson and Laurie Smith had helped to erect tents to accommodate the Operations and Intelligence Sections and had put up others to serve as a crew room and as a briefing/debriefing room. Don Angus and his fellow wireless operators had strung telephone wires from the camp down to Albert Lee's engineering 'office' and to the Operations Section set up by Les Sims and Harry Underwood near the control tower. Assisted by Ewen Blackman, Neville Britton, Ray Bockman and Bruce Robertson, he had established the wireless section in a tent near a taxiway at the northern end of Ward's Strip and had set up an AR/8 radio receiver so that they could maintain a listening watch whenever the Beaufighters were out on operational or non-operational flights.

The adjutant had secured the services of a dozen or so natives and turned them over to Karl Williams with instructions to use them to hack the kunai grass, keep the dust down around the tents and carry out general clean-up activities throughout the camp. The adjutant, who had high standards of personal conduct, was horrified to see the natives stand and empty their bladders when and where they felt like it so he lined them up and, having no knowledge of Pidgin English,

addressed them in his usual formal style of language, finishing up with the admonition that 'promiscuous urinating by indigenous personnel must be terminated forthwith.'

Corporals Wisely and Fraser, together with LACs Bayes, Burleigh, Hagle, Hurst, Nancarrow, Steen, Willis and gangs of other guards had the unenviable task of digging latrine trenches and because it was difficult to handle their picks and shovels in a short trench, they dug trenches to accommodate wooden six-holder thunder boxes. Privacy was not a consideration so the structures were not given partitions or outer walls. However, a roof was necessary to provide shade from the burning sun and to give protection against tropical downpours. These latrines served a number of social purposes since their users could pass on news from home, peddle the latest local rumours, express their feelings about the 'shiny bums' and others in authority and rail against the standard of their food and living conditions.

Les Braund and his men had at last collected most of the packing cases containing the Squadron's supplies and had opened the Equipment Store for business. The two carpenters, Sid Edgar and Bill Balderston, had used what tools and material they could lay their hands on to fashion numerous items which made camp living more pleasant and comfortable. The Barracks Store had doled out hundreds of bedframes, palliasses, mosquito nets, hurricane lamps and fly-sprays. Bill Marsh, the Squadron's Medical Officer and nursing orderly John Farquhar had set up their sick quarters in tents on the rising ground behind the messes and seen to it that their ambulances contained items which might be needed if a Beaufighter were to crashland on Ward's Strip.

Cliff Maxwell had pushed Lyall Bunn, Jim Nichols, Keith Rose and other motor transport fitters and drivers very hard in order to provide his mechanics with some shelter from the blazing sun or pelting rain while they worked on the repair and maintenance of the Squadron's vehicles. The sheets of corrugated iron used on the roof of the transport shed had been acquired from a helpful Army driver with whom Cliff



Cliff Maxwell and members of his Transport Section, Goodenough, October 1943. (Courtesy Cliff Maxwell)

had become quite chummy. A number of 200 litre drums had been positioned outside some of the accommodation tents and it was the task of Joe Erskine, who had previously been with No. 22 Squadron as a transport driver, to fill the water tanker at Murray Barracks and regularly replenish the drums and other water storage facilities. The trip to Murray Barrack was cancelled after Don Joyes used his water divining skills to locate an on-site water supply and this was later piped to header tanks at the show block and the kitchen.

John Hunter had found his L.C. Smith typewriter and Gestetner duplicator and churned out a number of Daily Routine Orders. One of the early issues reminded personnel to carry their gas masks at all times whilst the issue of 27 September informed them that the government had just introduced daylight saving. Hunter also compiled Personnel Occurrence Reports and the first one he issued in New Guinea promulgated the posting of W/T Operator George Shearing from Headquarters North Eastern Area.

Adjutant Wearne had arranged for the erection of a flagpole outside his Orderly Room and maintained normal routine by hoisting and lowering the RAAF Ensign at the appropriate

times. At a morning parade he harangued the men about orders from higher formation that every airman had to wear webbing equipment and a steel helmet and had to carry a rifle and full water bottle to and from his place of duty. At his parade on 29 September the Adjutant referred to the need for everyone to wear a shirt in the Mess, to write fewer letters home, to maintain calm during an air raid and to be of good cheer despite the many war-related difficulties of life in tropical New Guinea.

Karl Williams had been appointed as Defence Officer and while teaching a group of clerks about ground defence tactics he accidentally discharged a loaded automatic weapon, the bullet narrowly missing one of the students. Karl had quite a large responsibility for he was in control of 59 guards—the largest number of any mustering within the Squadron. He had instituted a system of passwords, selecting words such as 'riff-raff' or 'regular' in the belief that Japanese infiltrators were unable to properly pronounce such words. His men were responsible for local ground defence and the security of the Beaufighters parked on Ward's Strip.

'Ward's' referred to the general area west of the Seven Mile Strip and whose defence had been allocated to Lieutenant Colonel K.H. Ward of the 53rd Battalion; hence the airfield facility built by No. 5 Mobile Works Squadron took on the name of Ward's Strip because it was located within the colonel's area of responsibility. That RAAF works unit had landed at Moresby with 250 men, two bulldozers, two tractors, two graders, six carryalls, 23 tipper trucks and a Barford-Perkins roller of 1890 vintage and hoed into the construction task to such a degree that the strip was open to traffic 21 days after work began. The unit also constructed the parallel taxiway, the many dispersal bays for RAAF aircraft and the linking taxiways. The men did a terrific job with inadequate equipment and under horrendous conditions; they are justifiably proud of their wartime achievements, the more so because Ward's was reputed to be the only strip in New Guinea that didn't fail in bad weather.

When the rear party arrived from Townsville and reported to the Disciplinary Warrant Officer, Ted Good directed them to read the instructions pinned to a noticeboard. In summary, they read:

- Put oil on your boots or they'll rot.
- Inspect your boots for crawlies before you put them on.
- If it rains, belt in your tentpegs and slacken the ropes.
- If it gets hot, roll up the tent walls.
- If it blow a 'Guba', belt in your tentpegs, lace up the flaps and tie down the walls.
- At night, keep your tin hat and boots near your bed.
- If there is a raid, don your boots and tin hat (at least) and jump into your slit trench.
- Don't forget the password for the day.
- Develop an ability to get to the latrine in the dark.
- Don't throw lighted cigarette butts in the kunai grass.

Practically everybody smoked. In his study of the American armed forces, Paul Russell wrote: 'A serviceman who didn't smoke was looked on as a freak and it was axiomatic that smoking, if a silly, dirty and costly pastime, was venal rather than fatal. Nobody called it an addiction nor did they call a fag a coffin nail. The authorities regarded cigarettes to be absolutely indispensable to high morale.' Turf and Craven A cigarettes were thought to be the premier brands while Capstans, Raleighs and Twenty Grand were regarded as inferior. Alan Laing bought a pipe at the Canteen because he thought it would make him look older; he smoked Temple Bar, Havelock, Champion or Red Ruby tobacco. The latter was supplied in a round tin with a snap-on lid, inside of which was a rubber seal; this airtight container was particularly useful in the humid tropical conditions.

The Canteen was just a few metres away from the Orderly Room in which Max Annetts, Alan Laing, Reg Crowl and John Hunter were working. It could always supply the basics: washing powder, toothpaste, toothbrushes, sticks of shaving soap, writing paper, envelopes, pen nibs, Stephen's blue/black



*Quartet of pipe smokers, Goodenough, September 1943.
(Courtesy John Laverty)*

ink, Bex Powders, Wax Vestas, Bryant & May's matches and Lifebuoy soap, which Fred Cassidy disliked as it was made of strong carbolic. The Canteen also stocked necessities such as Bickfords Sal Vital, Gillette razor blades, Wrigley's chewing gum, California Poppy pomade, Brylcreem, Zig Zag cigarette papers and a cigarette rolling machine.

During October the Beaufighters flew many missions against the enemy. On the first day of that month six aircraft were sent out to attack a cluster of small boats at Salamaua:

- Brian Walker and John Mason — A19-4
- Dick Roe and Peter Fisken — A19-2
- Peter Parker and Harold O'Connor — A19-29
- Mos Morgan and Fred Cassidy — A19-35
- Ross Little and Alec Spooner — A19-8
- Bill Willard and Ralph Nelson — A19-11.

Bill Willard's starboard engine was hit by an enemy shell but he managed the extremely difficult feat of getting his stricken aircraft up to 15,000 feet to get across the threatening ridges of the Owen Stanley Range. During his landing approach at Ward's, the dud motor was still windmilling and

to the anxiously waiting engine fitters it sounded like a broken down concrete mixer. The Engineer Officer found that the enemy's shell had torn away the cowling and the heads of the two lower cylinders but had not exploded. The engine was treated rather gingerly until the armourers had removed the 'Made in Japan' missile.

Eight days after that episode the Beaufighters joined Mitchells of the 90th Bomb Group in an attack on the Japanese aerodrome at Lae with top cover provided by Aircobras of the 35th Fighter Group. Intelligence about Japanese activity in and around Lae was provided by Flight Lieutenant Leigh Vial, a cousin of one of 30 Squadron's pilots. He maintained a lonely vigil on the high mountains overlooking the enemy positions and month after month eluded their patrols and survived the terrible steamy conditions of the leech infested jungle. He transmitted his information to No. 10 Signals Unit in Moresby and this was used by the Air Staff at No. 9 Operational Group to decide what attacks should be made by RAAF aircraft.

The Group had been formed at Moresby as a subordinate unit of North Eastern Area Headquarters, Townsville, and had operational command of the RAAF squadrons at Port Moresby and Milne Bay. Its other units in the Moresby area included No. 42 Operational Base Unit, No. 10 Signals Unit, No. 15 Repair and Salvage Unit, No. 3 Medical Receiving Station, No. 4 Replenishing Centre and No. 4 Fighter Sector.

The Fighter Sector staff were pleased when Earl Wild, a 30 Squadron pilot who had contracted malaria and was temporarily unfit for flying, was posted in as an air controller. Earl was on duty on 9 November when Eric Lansell and Harold O'Connor led an armed reconnaissance of the Buna area in A19-36 during which two of the fuel tanks were holed by enemy fire and the navigator wounded in the left thigh. Earlier that day he had flown with Peter Parker in A19-28 and their aircraft had been hit by machinegun fire during an attack on enemy lines of communication to Kokoda. On that day, and the next, the Beaufighters contributed to the defeat

of the Japanese at Oivi and Orari, an action which allowed the 16th and 25th Australian Brigades to start their push towards Buna. Lieutenant Sakamoto was killed in the defence of Gorari and his captured diary recorded that Australian troops had encircled his position 'while all morning their planes have bombed and strafed us.'

The Squadron's second operational tragedy occurred on 13 October when Tom Butterfield and Rupert Wilson, in A19-68 and flying in the wing position to Ron Uren, crashed into a hill after strafing enemy ground forces near Kokoda. Butterfield had joined the Squadron at Richmond the previous June on posting from No. 1 Operational Training Unit at Sale; Wilson had joined about a fortnight later on completion of his navigator training at No. 2 Bombing and Gunnery School, Port Pirie. He had graduated with two other navigators who were to lose their lives in operations with No. 30 Squadron — Stewart Cameron and Norm Greasley.

Beaufighters were sent up on a standing patrol over Moresby on 24 October and the 3rd Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Group reported that:

The RAAF arranged for two Beaufighters to patrol from 7pm to lam. The hours were well chosen for at 1930 three enemy planes raided the Seven Mile drome. The tactics were for one Beaufighter to patrol 2 miles to the east and one to patrol 2 miles west. No AA to engage. Searchlights to illuminate. Our searchlights failed to pick up the targets mainly owing to their extreme height and cloud. The Beaufighters were too close in and the searchlights were confused by their sound.

Peter Parker and Ron Uren, in A19-28 and A19-33 respectively, would not have been at all impressed by that Army officer's criticism of their efforts. One of the Squadron's diarists wrote: 'There was a lot of confusion upstairs last night. The Japs sailed serenely over the target and straight out again while our boys covered miles searching for them. Parker caught a glimpse of one and swung in behind, but the Jap plane disappeared into thick cloud at that moment.'

On 27 October, Ted Jones and Eric Richardson were killed when A19-49 was hit by anti-aircraft fire during a strike against Lae which was led by Peter Parker and Harold O'Connor in A19-28. Other crews saw smoke streaming from the damaged engine as the Beaufighter belly flopped into shallow water near the shore, saw it recover momentarily and then crash into the ocean about 300 metres out to sea. Ross Little and Alec Spooner were in A19-8 which sustained damage to a fuel line but they got back to base and landed safely.

Fred Anderson was flying with Bob Brazenor in A19-15 on that mission which was written up by the war correspondent for the *Sun*. He told that newspaper's readers that he had met Bob about a year ago in a cold, windswept fighter station in England where he had also met five other pilots of No. 30 Squadron—Dick Roe, Jack Sandford, Gwynne Hughes, Bob Cummins and Len Vial. He went on to say that whilst the aircraft had been used in England as a nightfighter, it was being used in New Guinea with outstanding success in low level strafing, 'a task for which its tremendous firepower makes it eminently suitable.'

The Beaufighters continued to strafe targets of opportunity in the Buna area and flew 38 sorties in the four days after Lieutenant Sakamoto's death at Gorari. On some of those sorties they were accompanied by American Mitchells and Martin Marauders (which earned a fearsome reputation as widow-makers). It was during an operation in company with a formation of Marauders that Col Campbell and Peter Fisker received hits in the fuselage of A19-50. The aircraft was not badly damaged but the report in the *Age* said that Campbell out-fought and out-thought the stubbornly pursuing Zero for 15 minutes.

Gwynne Hughes and Bill Keller achieved the distinction of standing a Beaufighter on its nose in the grey clay along the side of Ward's Strip when they landed there after a joint attack on Japanese anti-aircraft installations at Buna on 22 November. One of their tyres had been badly damaged by

enemy fire. The *Age* reported that Hughes had been jumped near Buna and that:

For nearly 20 minutes the two planes screwed and twisted crazily as the Beaufighter scooted inland with the Zero pilot trying frantically to bring his gunsight to bear. Then down from the sky above roared an American Boston with guns blazing. The Zero faltered as bullets ripped into it, turned over and dived into the ground. Although slightly wounded, Hughes brought his bullet-ridden aircraft home safely.

Since his arrival in New Guinea, Gwynne Hughes and other pilots had observed that the Squadron had been favoured with fine weather—prevailing southerly breezes, moderate temperatures, cool nights, some light rain. However, frequent heavy showers at the end of November brought frustration to the airmen engaged on repair and maintenance tasks and since those had to be carried out in the open, the men were forever dragging canvas covers on or off the aircraft. George Dusting, who was carrying out a 120-hourly inspection of A19-3, wrote that on 16 November: 'There was a frantic scurry to put the covers on just before 5.30 when there was a terrific downpour. We made a miserable sight huddling under the kite, watching a few chaps splashing about in their glistening wet capes.'

Moresby's inclement weather didn't interfere with air operations which were now directed against the Japanese aircraft and installations at Lae. Petty Officer Sakai, the first Japanese fighter pilot to shoot down a Fortress, had arrived at Lae in April when he and 29 others were transferred from Formosa. In his book *Samarai* he wrote: 'I groaned when I circled the field. Where were the hangars, the maintenance shops, the control tower? Where was anything but a dirty, small runway?' Their command post had curtains for walls, they had only three vehicles, including a fuel tanker, and 23 pilots and other NCOs had to share the single shack, lit by candles. They had no early warning radar and their anti-aircraft defences were manned by 200 naval ratings.

Anti-aircraft defences were active when Beaufighters and Bostons went to Lae on 18 November and during that attack the fuselage of A19-33 (Ron Uren and John Maguire) was holed and the hydraulics of A19-4 (Brian Walker and John Mason) were shot out, resulting in a superbly handled wheels-up landing at Ward's by the Commanding Officer. A19-10 (Col Campbell and Jim Yeatman) didn't reach the target because of mechanical trouble and it, too, made a wheels-up landing at Ward's.

Sunday, 21 November, was a day of incredible activity with 104 Allied fighters and bombers hammering Buna and Gona, the latter being captured by Australian forces some 24 hours later. The Beaufighters did a particularly fine job during their strike against Lae, the abbreviated mission report noting that:

Two Zekes caught fire after strafing and pieces were seen to fly from a third. Four Zekes were strafed near the south east end of the runway. Three or four Zekes were airborne at 2,000 feet. A19-9 (Ross Little and Alec Spooner) attacked a Zeke which was attacking two other Beaufighters: its engine was smoking as it turned away. A19-5 (Len Vial and Ralph Nelson) put a one-second burst into a Zeke which had climbed under its nose to attack another Beaufighter in front but was itself hit by anti-aircraft fire in the port nacelle and tyre. A19-15 (Bob Brazenor and Fred Anderson) was hit in the tail-wheel by machinegun fire.

All available Beaufighters joined with 45 Fortresses, 44 Mitchells, 28 Marauders, a number of Bostons and a squadron of Aircobras in concerted attacks against Japanese targets on 24 November for which the Wirraways of No. 4 Squadron provided the spotting. Sergeant George Anderson and his team of armourers did a sterling job in attending to the Beaufighter's cannon and machineguns, which fired 26,000 rounds of 20mm ammunition and 35,000 rounds of 7.7mm that day.

The Beaufighter's four cannons were mounted on the floor of the fuselage, the breech blocks being midway between the navigation station and the armour plate doors. For most of the aircraft operating out of Moresby, the rounds were carried in 12 removable drums, four being mounted on the cannons and eight being held by storage clips on the sides of the fuselage. Each drum weighted about 26kg and contained enough rounds for about three bursts of fire. It fell to the navigator to remove the empty drums and replace them with full ones.

Fred Anderson found that changing the drums in the air gave him a most torrid time. He had to uncouple his seat harness, free himself from any belted ammunition dangling from the rear gun, stow away his maps and other navigation gear, lock his table in the 'Up' position, have a quick look around for enemy fighters and then crawl forward. He then had to free the empty drum, preventing it from rolling around the floor and smashing into his knees, lift a full drum off its stowage and lock it onto the cannon. And he had to do that for each of the four cannons. At the time he would be draped about with a web belt to which was attached his revolver and holster, an ammunition pouch, a water bottle, a jungle knife and a survival kit. Moreover, he would be trussed up in a tight-fitting parachute harness over which would be strapped the most awkward lifejacket ever designed.

The navigator had to get the four new drums on the cannons in time for the pilot to fire them on the next pass at the target and had to do all that while coping with the effects of several 'G' and an aircraft being put through a steep climbing turn as it pulled away from the target. No wonder the navigators cursed the cannon arrangements in the early Beaufighters. Mild-mannered Bob Hasenohr came near to blasphemy after badly skinning his knuckles while manually cocking the cannons. Bill Davis normally flew in a Beaufighter fitted with automatic binfeeds and became quite worried when he had to fly in one fitted with drums; he was an accomplished pianist and was concerned that he might lose a finger while manipulating the drums or the cocking lever.

Squadron navigators had mixed opinions about the armour plate doors located about halfway between the navigator and his pilot — some liked them open, others liked them shut. Col Harvey wasn't at all happy about them being shut because he was then unable to see what was happening up at the front end and the forward view during an attack was always exiting. Jim Yeatman also liked to have them open, for he then had a reasonable view through the front window of what the aircraft was doing during a take-off or a landing. On the other hand, John Bell liked to have the doors closed if for no other reason than he simply wasn't all that interested in what his pilot, Sid Wallace, was doing in the front cockpit. He went south after a very short tour. Harold Kelly replaced him in the crew and took it upon himself to close the doors when they were chased by Zeros, 'in the belief that their fire might eliminate me first, in which case that was that. But if they missed me and got Scotty through the open doors . . . then that meant the end of both of us.'

It is a tribute to the groundcrews that despite the heat, dust, rain, appalling working conditions and their rather primitive tools and facilities, they kept so many aircraft serviceable and ready for operations. All of them slogged away at their various jobs — the engine and airframe fitters/riggers/mechanics, the instrument technicians, the wireless musterings, the electricians and the men of the armament section. All of those were most ably supported by the many others in the administrative trades including the clerks, transport drivers and fitters, cooks, messmen, stewards, storemen, nursing orderlies and guards.

Although the Squadron had nearly 40 men on strength it was a pretty lean unit when compared with American flying units. The Fifth Air Force Statistics Book shows that 89 men were required to keep one American aircraft operational: 5% for aircrew, 21% for maintenance, 15% for clerical, 11% for ground transport, 11% for supply, 4% for messing plus men for medical support, military police and other miscellaneous activities.

CHAPTER FOUR

Tree-Topping Wave-Hopping Warplanes

A BARE fortnight after No. 30 Squadron's arrival in New Guinea, War Correspondent George Johnston wrote: 'The strength of Moresby is staggering — thousands of motor trucks, new roads everywhere and seven magnificent airfields. We could put 100 fighters in the air against a Jap raid. Huge forces of modern bombers [are] now here.' Despite the nature of the target offered by that concentration of military installations and units, the Japanese inflicted surprisingly little damage during more than 100 raids. The first one involved six flying boats which attacked at 3am on 3 February 1942, and according to George Johnston 'one man [was] killed by a flying stone while diving into a trench.'

On the fifth raid when they dropped 15 daisy-cutters he said there had been negligible damage, and on the eighth raid when 80 bombs were dropped they had 'damaged two tents and ripped guttering from a roof.' On the thirteenth raid by eight bombers, he said that the bombs were scattered indiscriminately but caused absolutely no damage. On the eighty-third raid against Moresby, one bomber came in just after sunset and put his bombs in the scrub and there was no damage then either.

Elton Marsden, an airframe fitter and a foundation member of the Squadron said: 'After the first half-dozen raids brought

no damage or injuries, we became quite blase.' Jack Rawlinson considered the attacks to be merely nuisance raids designed to interfere with the men's sleep whilst John Dunstan maintained that the raiders never caused much damage. 'There was seldom any danger so most of the fellows just stood outside their tents and watched the show—the searchlights, the illuminated enemy planes and the tracers from our own guns.' The fire from our anti-aircraft guns was often somewhat wide of the mark, and the men of No. 30 Squadron were prone to shout directions to the distant gunners—'A little bit to the left, mate . . . A little more . . . To the left, you bloody drongo!'

Arthur Jaggs wasn't all that anxious to dive into his slit trench and would only do so 'if it looked like they were going to have a go at the camps in our valley.' Young Fred Cassidy disliked the discomfort of his trench so he and Mos Morgan took their canvas chairs outside to watch what was going on—the searchlights and the anti-aircraft puffs providing them with an interesting spectacle. Another navigator, George Carnegie, also dragged out his chair and 'watched the entertainment as if it was a football match.' Harry Suthons was disinclined to move from his bunk at all when the Red Alert was sounded and only if things got serious did he forgo a session of spine bashing to crawl underneath his iron bedstead.

Most of the men slept in the raw and diving into a trench while only half awake could result in extensive scratches and abrasions to the skin. It could also provide a rude shock and bring a man into instant wakefulness if the trench were half-full of water. Moreover, a naked man who disturbed the red spiders, centipedes and other creepy crawlies could get painful bites in sensitive parts of his anatomy. Bob Bennett guarded against that by using his 'flammerwoofer' every afternoon to burn out the unwanted guests. There were other totally unexpected guests too—like the small crocodile at the bottom of the trench into which George Allum jumped one night when half asleep. He jumped out again pretty smartly.

A medium anti-aircraft unit occupied the top of Ugava

Hill which was immediately behind the Squadron's camp whose tents, buildings and vehicles were lacerated or punctured by shrapnel from that Unit's Bofors. The falling shrapnel does not appear to have injured anybody but a few of the men received heart-stopping frights when bits of flying metal struck their steel helmets. Reg Crawl popped his head up out of the trench when he thought the action had subsided only to have his helmet nearly knocked into space by a chunk of shrapnel. Doug Raffin's blood ran cold when something hit his helmet with a tremendous thump but was relieved to find that it had been caused by Bob Hasenohr bashing his tin hat with a rock. Bob was somewhat amused by his victim's reaction.

There wasn't much in the way of amusement or entertainment for the military personnel in Moresby. One of the main after-hours activities enjoyed by the men of the Beaufighter Squadron involved walking up the road to see the movies at No. 22 Squadron's camp. The Bostons had arrived at Moresby late in October, occupied a campsite near that of No. 30 Squadron and erected a cinema screen at the foot of a natural amphitheatre. Films shown there during the closing weeks of 1942 included *Sinners in Paradise*—a very old movie which starred John Boles and Madge Evans, *They Knew What They Wanted* starring Charles Laughton and Carole Lombard and *Picadilly Jim* which was billed as a romantic comedy.

Frank Sawtell didn't intend to put on a comedy turn for his companions' amusement when he fell into an air raid trench while they were returning to camp after a show at the Mobile Works Squadron cinema. A few weeks later he was at an American open air cinema when a parked vehicle rolled down the slope of the amphitheatre scattering the audience and causing them to 'stampede worse than any cattle rush I have ever seen.' On New Year's Eve Don Angus and other airmen from the Squadron's Wireless Section went across to 22 Squadron's camp to hear a band concert and see a few rounds of boxing. Tom Phelan, a Canadian boxer who had joined the RAAF and was on the messing staff of the Beaufighter

squadron, often acted as referee for such contests and inveterate gambler Cliff Clohesy always managed to win a fistful of pound notes from American soldiers and aviators when his friend officiated in the ring.

On the night of 5 December the entire crew of a battle damaged Fortress were killed when their aircraft, returning from an attack on Rabaul, crashed into a hill beside Ward's Strip. 'It burst all over the hill. I never saw such a mess,' wrote George Dusting. A few days later he went to the crash site looking for a few aluminium scraps: 'There are still some pieces of men lying about. They are not very fussy about collecting them,' he wrote.

Correspondent Johnston reported that there were pieces of bomb casings and splinters of shrapnel everywhere after three bombers carried out a moonlight attack on Jackson's Strip. And there were even more bits and pieces lying about after the ninety-first Japanese raid on Moresby when two bombers blew up the ammunition dump of the 808th American Engineers on 30 November and destroyed a number of brand new vehicles.

The official vehicle establishment of No. 30 Squadron when it left Richmond was two utility vans, two panel vans, one saloon car, two refuelling tankers, two ambulances, seven tractors and three motorcycles. Nevertheless, the 389 men on the personnel establishment never seemed to have transport problems in New Guinea. Keith Eddison rode a motorbike everywhere, often at speed and often with his navigator on the pillion clinging on for dear life. Whenever Alan Laing could get away from his duties in the Orderly Room he borrowed a Harley Davidson and toured the military area. Ted Good, who had been taught to ride a motorbike by Jack Thorne, occasionally took a bike and sidecar to visit a cousin in the 3rd Australian LAA Group. Phil Edwards was wont to sign a truck out in the evenings to take the aircrew to the pictures — and invariably got himself lost. Eric Lusk often rode an Indian down to the strip when he did the pre-flight checks required by his pilot, George Gibson. Because Brian Walker

preferred to ride his motorbike everywhere, his navigator, John Mason, had almost exclusive use of the staff car.

No. 30 Squadron became known as the Hydraulic Squadron because its men would 'lift' anything—including motor vehicles and motorbikes. Joe Erskine claims that before leaving Townsville some of the airmen 'lifted' an American jeep, an Australian Army utility and two BSA motorbikes. Arthur Ferrier has it that he, Pat Cowen and Ron Morrison snaffled a motorbike for Brian Walker on the understanding that nothing would be done about the jeep they had already 'lifted' for themselves. Don Bain is reputed to have 'acquired' a motorbike while he was on detachment at Milne Bay and freighted it back in USAF transport as official RAAF cargo. Jim Wilson was given a motorbike by a friendly supply sergeant in one of the American depots but Adjutant Wearne insisted that it be left outside his Orderly Room for his use. Ken Delbridge saw three NCOs hide a jeep in the tall kunai grass near the shower block and assumed an air of injured innocence when a brace of American MPs questioned them about a stolen vehicle. The Don Rs delivering classified envelopes to the Intelligence staff always wheeled their machines into the tent because the bikes of two previous riders had disappeared when they had been left unattended outside. Ron Morrison recalls that Don Bain gave Dick Beynon some tips about ways of 'acquiring' a personal machine and, lo, another bike was outside their tent the very next morning.

Wally Navin, later Mentioned in Despatches, was nearly as effective as Don Bain in getting his hands on items that his comrades wanted in order to make their work easier or to make their living conditions more pleasant. He shared a tent with three other airmen: Jack Collins, who nearly fell out of a Beaufighter when its floor hatch flew open during a test flight; Lou Nott, who incurred the displeasure of Ted Good because the pull-through was missing from its stowage in the butt of his rifle and Harry Edwards, who was upset because the needles in his housewife had gone rusty.

The Squadron's Medical Officer, Flight Lieutenant Bill



*John Farquhar, 'Doc' Marsh, Leo Poole, Moresby, April 1943.
(Courtesy John Farquhar)*

Marsh, strictly supervised the work of the camp hygiene squad and saw that they cleared the grease traps at the kitchen, burned out the latrine pits with a mixture of diesel oil and kerosine and paid particular attention to the inside of the wooden boxes that straddled the pits for that was a

favourite haunt of Red Back spiders. Spiders, centipedes and the like also tended to hide inside a boot or shoe so it was always a wise precaution to shake shoes before putting them on. Adjutant Wearne omitted to do that and when Bill Marsh dashed over to the source of agonised screams during the night he found quite a large centipede hanging on to the end of the Adjutant's toe. He was in considerable pain and had to be given a shot of morphine which put him out for a few hours but, according to some of the men, not for long enough.

Bill Marsh was universally liked and respected. He had joined the Squadron at Richmond, travelled in the train to Townsville and sailed to Moresby in the *Taroona*. He was dismayed when he saw the campsite selected by the advance party at Ward's Strip: it was in rough, low-lying country, close to a stinking swamp, infested by flies during the day and by mosquitoes after dark. He heartily approved of the new campsite in June Valley where he set up his Sick Quarters on the rise behind the messes. He was ably supported by his four nursing orderlies—John Farquhar, Lionel Poole, George Hamer and Leo Sheekey.

Aircrew had to take quinine tablets and everybody else had to regularly take atebirin tablets. It was thought that aircrew should avoid atebirin because it might have an adverse effect on the heart. Some airmen tried to avoid taking atebirin because it turned their skins yellow and might adversely affect their virility but the Medical Officer stationed supervisors in the Airmens' Mess to ensure that every man swallowed his tablet. Despite that, Roy Brockman contracted a very serious bout of malaria and spent some weeks in the Army General Hospital at Koitaki. On the other hand, Ron Dorman managed to avoid swallowing an atebirin tablet during his tropical tour and never contracted the disease. The men were also encouraged to swallow salt tablets to replace the body salt lost through sweating. Fred Cassidy disliked these intensely and had attacks of nausea and retching after taking the tablets as directed by the Medical Officer.

The Medical Officer and the Padre had much in common

as far as their work within the unit was concerned and Norman Reeve thoroughly enjoyed Bill Marsh's company and their discussions about events in June Valley. Norman had arrived from Amberley on 7 October. He secured agreement to preach a sermon at the Commanding Officer's weekly parade but only after promising Brian Walker that it would always be a short one. He conducted Sunday morning church services, ran discussion groups in the evenings and gave advice and comfort to those who came to his tent. He wandered round the workplace and round the men's tents in order to have a chat. He preferred to let them do most of the talking and found, for the most part, that they wanted to talk about their wives, families, girlfriends and what was going on back at home. He became a good listener.

The Padre spent some of his time writing to the fellows' wives, just to let them hear something about their husbands from somebody else in the unit. He knew from their feedback that they appreciated his efforts. Many of the aircrew gave him letters addressed to their families and asked him to post them home if they failed to return from an operation. Usually they contained messages along the lines that although the signatory fully expected to survive, if that were not the case he wanted it known that his last thoughts would be of the recipient of his letter.

When Norman was sent south with a serious bout of malaria his place was taken by Reginald Kirby who had been the minister of the Collins Street Baptist Church in Melbourne. George Carnegie thought that the new Padre 'had the gift of the gab,' spending a lot of time visiting men in their tents and talking to the aircrew about their operational experiences. But those activities appeared to be related to collecting material for a book he was writing and which eventually appeared as a thinly disguised account of happenings within the Beaufighter unit to which he was posted for chaplaincy duties. Few of the Squadron personnel regarded the book in a favourable light. He failed to attract many to his Sunday services. Half-a-dozen of his would-be congre-

gation walked up the road to attend the services conducted by Padre Begby at No. 22 Squadron. And another group walked down the road to No. 42 Operational Base Unit where there was a likeable Salvation Army captain.

When, on 1 December, the captain of an RAAF Beaufort reported that four enemy destroyers were steaming towards Buna, six Beaufighters were ordered out to suppress the ships' anti-aircraft fire while Fortresses were to carry out a bombing attack. But the Americans did not show up at the rendezvous so another flight of Beaufighters was sent out to make a night attack, the targets to be illuminated by flares dropped from a Hudson. At the debriefing, pilots expressed displeasure about the orders for that mission: their night vision was so affected by the bright light of the flares and the flashes from their own cannons that they were unable to descend lower than 1000 feet to make their strafing runs, were unable to distinguish the destroyers clearly, were unsure about their aircraft's attitude in relation to the horizon and were not aware of any results they had achieved.

Harry Suthons and Eric Lusk, indeed nearly everyone in the Squadron, were aware that two of the cooks were gay. 'But they were really nice guys who went out of their way to be helpful,' said Eric. 'They both got terribly emotional when we lost a crew to enemy action.' When Ron Morrison was Orderly Sergeant and made the standard enquiry about complaints at the evening meal, both 'Lola' and 'Brenda' complained that the Canteen did not stock their favourite brand of lipstick. In their spare time they baked scones and cakes for hospital patients.

Other men made 'foreigners' to fill in their spare time. The most popular craft activity involved fashioning brooches and other trinkets from perspex retrieved from crashed aeroplanes. Joe Arthur mounted an RAAF cap badge in perspex, Cyril Green elected to try mounting American aircrew brevets and Eric Turnbull tried his hand at making desktop holders for photographs. A few others turned these spare time activities into small money-making ventures. American servicemen had

wallets full of dollars and eagerly bought the pendants, brooches, bracelets and other trinkets which Ted Bicknell made from conch shells. They willingly paid \$50 American for the bracelets he made from silver sixpenny pieces which he flattened, shaped into rectangles, polished and linked together. Eric Hughes made perspex brooches from mmy badges. He dipped a small piece of perspex into boiling water, impressed the face of the metal badge into the back of the perspex and removed it when it had cooled. He shaped the perspex, bevelled its edges, applied coloured paints to the rear of the impression, attached a spring-pin and finished off the brooch by polishing it with fine steel wool and Five-in-One tooth-paste which arrived in Red Cross parcels.

There were other entrepreneurs in No. 30 Squadron. Cliff Maxwell sold cigarettes by the carton, Les Bromilow sold American clothing, Cliff Clohesy sold the occasional bottle of whisky (sent from Australia in a hollowed-out loaf of bread) and Don Bain was the recognised provider of anything that anybody required. Don Joyes equipped himself with a tattooing outfit and advertised his services to the Americans in Moresby.

Discussing his time with No. 30 Squadron in Moresby, Fred Anderson said: 'Our own soldiers often complained that we were never around when they were in a tough position and they probably doubted that their own Air Force was even in New Guinea. So we were sent over to the Buna area to show the troops that the RAAF was actually in the theatre and to show them just what a Beaufighter could do. It was all low level stuff and when we landed we found some leaves and branches in our undercart.' A few days earlier a Beaufighter had misread the Army's target marking signals and strafed a company of Australian troops, 'without causing any casualties,' wrote George Johnston, 'but causing a great deal of profanity.'

J.R. Hardie reported that because of the impassable terrain, the Australian 39th Battalion was halted on a little beach to the north of Sanananda on Thursday morning, 3 December, when an unfortunate incident occurred:

Further up the coast some Beaufighters were strafing the beaches and a sunken Japanese transport suspected of being an off-loading point for supplies. I remember saying that I hoped those RAAF blokes knew we were on that beach. Just then, one of the Beaufighters straightened up to sweep along the beaches, and the next minute, flame from the front of him — he'd opened up with his guns and strafed virtually the whole battalion!

I can't understand how we got out of it so lightly. Providence must have been with us. I was sitting on a fallen coconut tree with about six others in line with this plane. When he opened up with his machine guns we all took off. But there were bullets hitting the ground all around us as we ran, and I thought that as it wasn't much use running, I might as well stop. So I stopped and the plane flew past. And out of it all, 'A' Company had only one chap hit, and the rest of the Battalion only had four wounded.

Late in December Padre Kirby dished out parcels sent up by the Australian Comforts Fund and the men were most appreciative of the preserved fruit, cigarettes, sweets and homemade fruit cakes. However, many of them agreed with Jeff Heath who wondered if the woolen balaclavas and mittens in the parcels meant that the donors knew that No. 30 Squadron would be moving from the tropics to a cold weather base. The men were luckier than those in other RAAF units at Moresby because 85% of the shipment had been pillaged. The Fund's representative in Moresby described the thieves as 'the worst type of Fifth Columnists' and implied that Australian wharfies were responsible for the theft of nearly 80,000 cigarettes as well as crates of other welfare items.

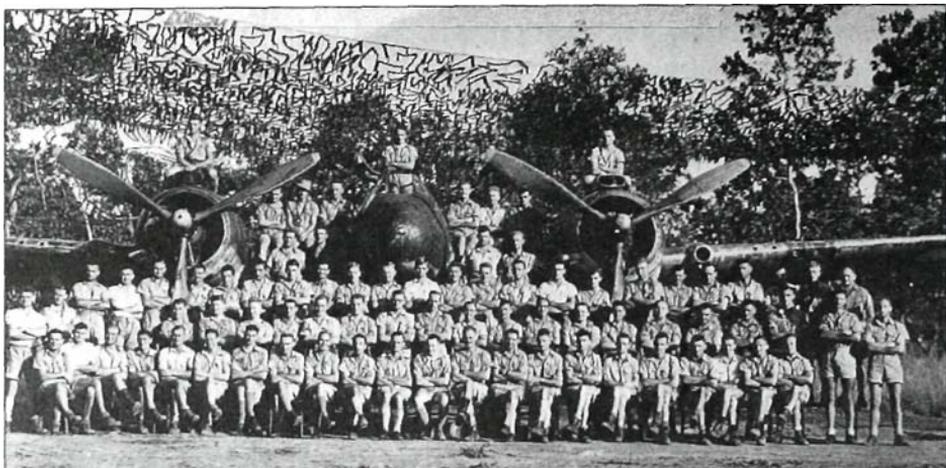
Christmas Day was not entirely work-free. Eric Lansell and Harry Suthons (A19-30) led Jack Sandford and Arthur Jaggs (A19-32), as well as Ron Downing and Danny Box (A19-53), in a strike against targets on the Kumusi River. The remainder of the Squadron turned out for a church parade at 7.30am, dressed in boots, khaki shorts, shirts, stockings, steel helmet

and webbing belt, gas mask, rifle and side arm. The Commanding Officer read the lesson after which Padre Kirby preached a thankfully short sermon. The officers and senior NCOs gathered in the Airmens' Mess to serve them lunch — roast pork, roast turkey, apple sauce, diced potatoes and green peas followed by tinned fruit salad and cream and fruitcake. 'Wonder of wonders,' said Colin Horne, 'there on the table were enough bottles of beer to let us have one mug each, being provided by the aircrew in appreciation of our efforts.'

Owen Fenwick played suitable sentimental songs on the Beale piano borrowed from the nearby Works unit and his musical offerings were enhanced by the efforts of Alf Hunt and Cecil Mitchell. Afterwards, Owen was invited to entertain the Sergeants at their Christmas lunch, during which he accepted more than a glass or two of some villainous alcoholic brew. And after that, he was invited to entertain the officers and aircrew at their Christmas dinner, during which he accepted a glass or two of port; according to his tent-mates, he was completely legless by mid-evening. Young Fred Cassidy did not quite get to that stage as he managed to lurch across to the tent occupied by the wireless operators, being stark naked at the time.

By the end of that year there had been some changes in the Squadron. Peter Parker had gone to Eastern Area Headquarters, Charles Read had gone to take command of No. 31 Beaufighter Squadron, Des Moran-Hilford and Bob Harding had gone to No. 5 Operational Training Unit, Earl Wild had gone to a Fighter Sector, Wally Badman had gone to Rescue and Communication Squadron, Dave Haddon had gone to 33 Squadron, Len Greenhill had gone to Townsville and Sid Virgin had gone to 21 Base Wing. Norm Fraser had replaced Bert Lee as Engineer Officer and Reg Kirby had replaced Norm Reeve as Padre.

Five new crews had joined the Squadron since its arrival in New Guinea: Bob Bennett and Phil Edwards, John Drummond and Ron Allen, George Drury and Dave Beasley, George Gibson and Eric Lusk, Gwynne Hughes and Bill Keller. Three



Norm Fraser, Engineering Officer, and his Servicing Flight, Moresby, February 1943. (Courtesy Ron Morrison)

uncrewed navigators had arrived during that time: Ron Shaw, Les Hanks and Ron Sillett as well as two uncrewed pilots, Bob Cummins and Eric Lansell. Eric had collected a Beau-fighter from Laverton but when about half-way between Charleville and Townsville on the delivery flight he became quite distressed with an attack of malaria. Bob Bennett, who was also going to No. 30 Squadron on posting in that aircraft, managed to take over: 'I had the difficult job of hauling Eric out of the pilot's seat and getting in it myself, not an easy task in that small space, and made much more difficult because of the need to operate the aircraft's flying controls as well.' Eric probably had contracted that febrile disease while he was with a Hudson squadron in Malaya and it may have been because of his medical condition that he was repatriated from New Guinea after a four month tour.

As the result of recommendations made by the various flight and section commanders, a number of the men had been promoted to fill the vacancies in the Squadron's Establishment Table:

- To Temporary Flight Sergeant—Max Annetts, Gwynn Davies, Andy Herron, R.H. Johnston and John Wilson.
- To Temporary Sergeant—Don Flemming, W.F. Higgeson, Alan Laing, Bill Schofield and Abe Warhurst.

- To Temporary Corporal—J.E. Dunn, W.S. Harman, D. Hattrick, S.B. McVernon, C.H. Metters, K. Morris, W.K. Morley, T. Phelan and W.I. Taylor.

In the closing days of December two airmen were committed to the Naval Stockade for punishment: Joe Erskine drove Adjutant Wearne, his Disciplinary Warrant Officer, and the two offenders there in the staff car. An armourer had been awarded seven days detention by the Commanding Officer for being absent without leave on Boxing Day, an offence under the Air Force Act, Section 15(2) and another armourer had been awarded 28 days detention by the Commanding Officer for being improperly in possession of a Colt revolver, the property of Flight Sergeant Arthur Ferrier. He had been charged under Section 40 of the Air Force Act.

Max Annetts and Bill Madden considered laying a charge against Don Joyes for destroying Air Force property. Don had cut a large poster of film star Carmen Miranda from a tarred-paper dividing wall and the resulting hole allowed Adjutant Wearne to see and hear what was going on in his Orderly Room. Despite that close watch, the staff managed to alter their personal records and give themselves increased leave entitlements. Harry Underwood hadn't been able to take leave between his posting from Townsville and his arrival at the Squadron as its Cypher Officer and was made even more unhappy by being appointed as Canteen Officer. However, he consoled himself with the thought that he would not receive the same number of complaints as Bob Harding, who had been promulgated as Officer-in-Charge of the Airmens' Mess.

No. 30 Beaufighter Squadron had flown 302 hours during December and had fired nearly 155,000 rounds of ammunition at the enemy during that month. Praise was heaped on the Squadron in an article in the *Sun* under the headline 'Grim Killers of Japs — Beaufighter's Record':

When the full story of the Japanese back-to-Tokyo is written the part played by Australian-manned Beaufighters in the New

Guinea campaign will provide some of its most shining chapters. Americans who have flown alongside these devil-may-care young Australians have applauded their dash, disregard of the odds, and determination in driving home an attack.

The story of the tree-topping wave-hopping Beaufighters begins in the rain, mud, slime and malaria of Port Moresby in September. Although inadequately sheltered, tormented by mosquitoes and improperly fed, the Beaufighter boys had their aircraft ready in three days for the first of hundreds of devastating sorties. The amazing firepower of the Beaufighter has probably inflicted more Japanese casualties than any other type of aircraft. It can deliver more than a third of a ton of lead every minute and can concentrate more canon and machine gun fire than can a Fortress or a Liberator.

The Japs began a very costly acquaintance with the Beaufighter when the AIF was smashing its way towards Buna. The soldiers told the Beaufighter pilots the location of the enemy troops, and the co-operation was so harmonious that although the aircrews never saw the Japanese in the jungle, they killed them in their hundreds. Following through, our Army lads found the areas strafed by the Beaufighters to be littered with enemy dead. Through the festering jungle, over which the aircraft flew low enough to set the tree-tops quivering, the Beaufighters left a long trail of enemy dead, of blasted installations, silent anti-aircraft positions, mangled equipment, and charred equipment.

The history of the Beaufighters is rich with colourful personalities such as Wing Commander 'Blackjack' Walker, George Sayer, and 'Torchy' Uren. But no story of these aircraft is complete without referring to their navigators, who are noted for their skill and versatility.

CHAPTER FIVE

Bully Beef & Dog Biscuits

THE New Year was ushered in by heavy rain and the firing of nearly every ack-ack gun in Moresby plus thousands of automatic weapons, rifles and handguns. The 43rd Engineering Regiment contributed to the rowdy occasion by detonating sticks of gelignite whilst trucks sounded their horns and the ships in the harbour blew their sirens. At the No. 30 Squadron camp the occasion was marked by the consumption of jungle juice brewed especially to mark the event and, judging by the noise emanating from the tents occupied by Norm Carroll and other transport drivers, theirs was a particularly potent concoction. A few hours after breakfast on New Year's Day a signal came in from Air Force Headquarters to say that commissions had been granted to three aircrew — Harry Suthons, Len Vial, and Col Campbell—providing the excuse for more celebrations.

Although by official edict no unit in New Guinea had a wet canteen and the island was supposed to be dry, it was standard practice for every Beaufighter being ferried up from Australia to bring a small supply of liquor. The amount had to be small because priority was given to urgently needed aircraft spares and to desperately needed fresh fruit and vegetables. The aircraft brought a few bottles of spirits rather than the bulkier crates of beer.

Self-help became the order of the day and homemade 'jungle juice' became the flavour of the month. Every second tent seemed to contain some bubbling brew made from raisins, currants, dates, coconut milk or whatever else could be added to give it more punch. Some brews were potent and disgustingly awful, some were likened to camel urine and were so bad that even the most hardened imbibers would boast about how glad he would be when he got to the bottom of his enamel mug.

Bill Madden was the principal brewer in the tent occupied by the Orderly Room staff — Alan Laing, Max Annetts and Jim Turner. According to Alan, Bill's product was ghastly stuff but it certainly was highly intoxicating. Bill Marsh was well aware of the cause when airmen presented at his morning sick parades with what they called upset stomachs. He was very concerned when he learnt that a group of airmen in another unit had set up a small distilling plant — their product was not only very alcoholic but very dangerous because its high methyl alcohol content could cause blindness.

Novice brewers Bob Cummins and Allan Kirley got a concoction fermenting in a kerosine tin but unfortunately screwed the cap down with the result that the whole lot exploded and blew out the canvas side of their tent during the night.

A friendly technician brought a bottle of jungle juice to Cress Clarke's birthday gathering and after seeing that all his guests were served, Cress happened to look at the bottle. A host of maggots was wriggling about in the bottom. Not wishing to offend the donor, he surreptitiously upset the bottle and let it roll away, thankful that he had noticed the squirming mass before taking a drink himself. He thought it best not to inform the imbibers that there was anything amiss and they all professed to have enjoyed the celebratory occasion.

After slogging away in the tropical heat some of the men looked forward to relaxing with a mug of fruit juice laced with a tot of jungle juice but it sometimes happened that those quiet occasions developed into nights of noisy revelry as

more and more of the mixture was consumed. In time, some sentimental ballads would be sung, perhaps followed by some of the current hit tunes and, at a later stage, by the kind of songs usually sung at all-male gatherings. Authorities believed that the coarseness of servicemens' songs helped the men to relieve stress and release some of the pent-up hostility they might harbour towards the organization that had separated them from their families and deposited them in some ghastly hole far from their homes. Unable to control their own lives, they turned to ribald song to express their contempt for their superiors and the inanities of service life.

In a message to his superiors in Washington during January 1943, General MacArthur said that he didn't have enough ground or air forces to implement his planned onslaught against the Japanese in the South West Pacific Area. 'The air force as now constituted is not sufficient to support the offensive which is contemplated,' he said. 'Our experience in offensive operations over the enemy's territory . . . through the most difficult tropical weather provides ample substantiation that existing strength is capable of only a short intensive effort.'

Nevertheless, the Air Staff at Operational Group saw to it that the Beaufighters kept up the pressure against the Japanese and on the second day of the New Year sent them on a joint mission against small boats near Lae. On the return flight the seven Beaufighters separated in order to make individual crossings of the Owen Stanley Range which was capped by towering cumulus clouds. Squadron personnel at Ward's were dismayed when Dick Roe and Peter Fisker failed to appear that afternoon but it transpired that the pilot had insufficient oxygen for a high level flight through The Gap so had gone down to Gurney and stayed there for the night.

The following day three Beaufighters were sent to a suspected seaplane base and the day after that seven aircraft expended 1,400 rounds of 20mm and 15,000 rounds of 7.7mm in an attack on an enemy camp near Mubo. Aircraft were sent out again on 5 January to strafe barges and targets

of opportunity between Salamaua and Lae and were sent out again on the two following days.

Eric Lansell and Harry Suthons in A19-30 led 10 other Beaufighters to attack barges near Lae on 8 January but the aircraft had to wait until the Mitchells, Bostons and Marauders had dropped all their bombs. In the meantime, a Beaufighter element went to Lae aerodrome and destroyed one of the two Zekes parked on the east side of the runway. Another six Zekes tried to intercept the Beaufighters but were driven off by the the Lighting top cover, which shot down two of the enemy fighters. At the debriefing back at base the crews told Stan Hutchinson that they had seen three transport vessels, three destroyers and one cruiser.

Later that day Ross Little and Alec Spooner in A19-28 led eight Beaufighters in another attack on Lae, the abbreviated mission report noting that:

Enemy fighters made individual attempts to intercept and three Beaufighters were attacked. A19-33 [Uren and Maguire] hit by a .5 from a Zeke. A19-38 [Gibson and Lusk] and A19-50 [Morgan and Cassidy] hit by a .5 too. Night fighters near control tower left burning, two fighters on opposite side of runway were hit, four other fighters, previously strafed, were strafed again, a serviceable Betty on the taxiway was strafed and left smoking, eight tents behind the Terrace and six men at the north-east end of the strip were strafed. An ammunition dump exploded after strafing.

Eric Lusk, who was the navigator of one of the three aircraft attacked by the enemy that day, had this to say:

We had flown out past Salamaua after our attack at Lae, right down on the deck — in fact we were so low that if our undercart had been down we would have drenched our tyres with sea water . . . Around about Salamaua I saw about six Zeros in a dive towards us and when they levelled out they were only a few hundred yards behind us. George Gibson had turned the taps full

on and we scooted away flat out, being chased and fired at every now and then for about 30 miles. That they couldn't catch us gave me a lot of confidence in our Beaufighter and in my pilot.

Jack Sandford and Arthur Jaggs were in A19-32 which, in company with two other Beaufighters doing an armed reconnaissance along the coast from Salamau on 12 January, fired at a collection of camouflaged small craft hidden by overhanging trees. At the debriefing they made no claim about damage they might have inflicted but the next day the following signal was received from General Whitehead:

A reliable source states that 'During the strafing of East Island on the morning of 12 January the aircraft's accuracy was deadly. Several small craft were damaged and smoke was seen rising from the hideout.' This is one of the quite frequent occasions on which the pilots have seen no movement or effect of their attack and would probably consider their mission was of no value, whereas in fact it was most successful. Whitehead.

Just two days after that encouraging message the Squadron's morale plummeted when Bruce Stephens and Stewart Cameron were killed shortly after taking off and signalling that they were returning to base because of a faulty rudder control. During the attempt to land, A19-14 crashed into the ground about 100 metres from where Bruce Robertson and other men from the Wireless Section were laying telephone cables at the end of Ward's Strip. With three other Beaufighters, led by Cec McKew and Ted Lasscock, the crew of the crashed aircraft had been going to participate in a barge sweep along the coast from Salamaua. Bruce Stephens had joined the Squadron at Richmond after finishing his Beaufort conversion course at East Sale. He and Stewart had taken part in the Squadron's second mission after its arrival in New Guinea, when a formation of Beaufighters had strafed mule packs carrying supplies to the Japanese in their push from Kokoda to Moresby. At his death, he had flown 21 operational sorties

and these included attacks on shipping from Rabaul, ack-ack at Buna, barges near Sanananda, Lae and the Kumusi River and aircraft on the ground at Lae.

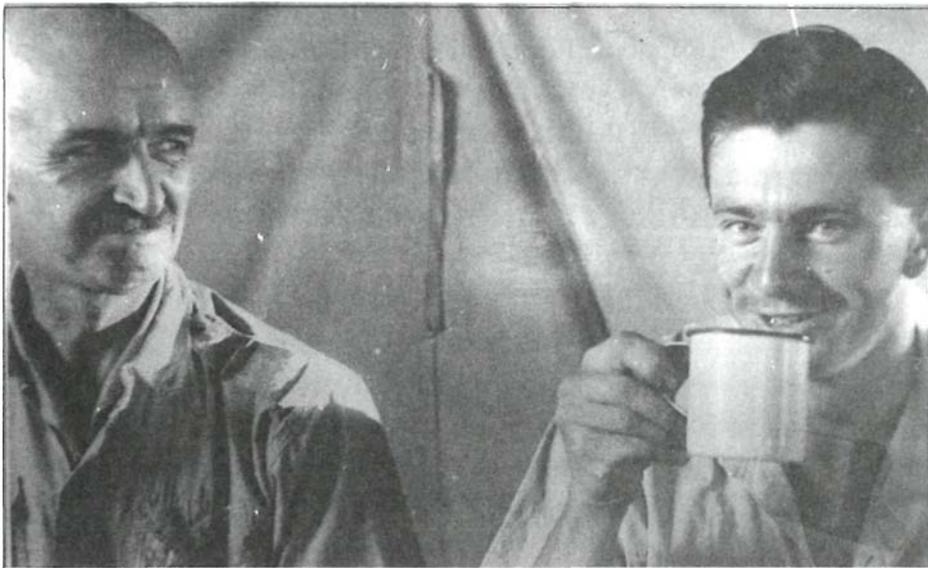
Stewart had arrived at Richmond about 10 days later than Bruce, after graduating as a Wireless Air Observer on completion of his course at No. 2 Bombing & Gunnery School, Port Pirie. He had confided in Joe Green (one of the mechanics on his aircraft) that when the Squadron was being formed at Richmond he had been aware that Bruce might not be a top-notch pilot. He had elected to fly with him as a navigator because he regarded him as a delightful person whose company and friendship he would enjoy—both in the air and on the ground.

Stewart's death was particularly distressing to Fred Anderson for he and Stewart had gone through their wireless, navigation, gunnery and Beaufighter training together. Bruce, who was a rather clever chap, had taken Fred under his wing and had given him private tuition in mathematics and navigation. Fred was down at Ward's Strip with two other navigators when the fatality occurred. 'The Beaufighter just blew up,' Fred said, 'as we stood near the strip watching it, all helpless as they burned to death—a dreadful sight which I'll never ever forget.'

Flight Lieutenant Cyril Wilfred Wearne was appointed as the senior member of the Committee of Adjustment to deal with the personal and public effects of the aircrew who had perished in that aircraft accident on 15 January. The squadron commander had a high regard for his Adjutant who had been a public servant in the New South Wales Department of Agriculture before the war. Adjutant Wearne willingly and conscientiously took much of the routine administrative work on his shoulders, thereby allowing Brian Walker to devote more time to flying and operational matters.

There weren't too many in the Squadron who disliked the Adjutant, although most of them thought he tended to be rather stiff, was a stickler for 'good Air Force order and discipline' and did everything according to Kings Regulations

and Air Force Orders. John Mason had a lot of time for him but believed that because the Adjutant was older than nearly everybody else, he may have felt unable to join in the demanding activities of the young members of aircrew. Fred Cassidy thought that the Adjutant was nothing short of a gentleman, who was never heard to say a hard word about anybody. In his opinion the Squadron was most fortunate in having such an able man in charge of administrative matters and that Flight Lieutenant Wearne was a 'great opposite number for Wing Commander Walker.'



'Split Pin' Wearne, Adjutant, and John Mason, navigator, Moresby, December 1942. (Courtesy Brian Walker)

Variously known as 'Curly' or 'Split Pin' because of certain physical characteristics, the Adjutant had a deep, booming voice and nearly everybody in the camp area could hear him call out from his tent about a message that he wanted circulated — 'Pass the word, Mr Good. Pass the word.'

Disciplinary Warrant Officers seldom win popularity tests within their units but Ted Good, who had joined the Squadron at Richmond on posting from No. 5 Service Flying Training School at Uranquinty, was not regarded as being a hard, heavy-handed or over-bearing individual. Ron Morrison got on reasonably well with him, as did Andy Herron and Wally

Bell. So did Alan Laing whose work in the Orderly Room brought him into close contact with Mr Good—a stocky fellow who always wore a forage cap, set centrally on his head and tipped forward.

Bruce Robertson considered that although the Warrant Officer was something of a rough diamond and could make it quite clear that he was the boss around the unit, he was a good-hearted chap. Nevertheless, the sight of Bruce and other wireless operators lying in bed at 10am offended him, even though he was well aware that the fellows had been on a late night shift.

The Warrant Officer had an exceptionally good memory and not only knew everyone in the Squadron but also knew what everyone was up to. For instance, he knew that Cliff Clohesy ran a two-up school behind the messes but turned a blind eye to that activity after he had satisfied himself that the game was straight-up.

Neither Warrant Officer Good nor Flight Lieutenant Wearne were at all amused by the action taken against an unpopular member of the Squadron by John Laverty and John Evans. They secreted a contact strip on the seat of a thunderbox and wired it to a megga they borrowed from their radio section. When the victim lowered his bare behind on to the seat, the perpetrators furiously wound the handle of the instrument, 'giving him quite a tingle in his exposed rear,' according to the airmen hidden in the nearby kunai grass. A week or so after that incident, a member of the hygiene squad tossed the usual mixture of diesel oil and kerosine down the pit. Forgetting the explosive nature of the mixture, he leaned over the hole in the box as he tossed the match down and was lucky to lose only his eyebrows.

Operational activity continued on Monday, 18 January, when the Commanding Officer led 14 of his Beaufighters in yet another attack on Lae. They started widespread fires in the coconut plantation opposite Jacobsen's Plantation and as the aircrew could see thick black smoke rising into the air when they were nearly 40km away about an hour later, they

believed they had blown up a large fuel dump. After that attack, Brian Walker (A19-75) sent eight aircraft back to base while he led George Drury and Dave Beasley (A19-34) and John Drummond and Ron Allen (A19-48) in an attack against enemy troops seen on Mangrove Island. The Mission Report read as follows:

Approached Lae from Markam Valley. After run over target by our first flight, 3 shots fired by heavy ack-ack from western end of strip as an Air Raid warning. Light, inaccurate Bofors fire from north-eastern end of strip. Moderate amount of machinegun fire from the foreshore terrace and the eastern end of the strip. Widespread fires started among the trees opposite to Jacobsen's. It appeared to be a large fuel dump and was seen an hour later from 25 miles distant to be still burning. The strip areas at Diddyman's and Jacobsen's were both well strafed, as well as possible serviceable fighters in No. 4 blast bay, and a pile of boxes between bays No. 3 and 4 were strafed. Results not observed. No other serviceable aircraft in the area. At Malahang, two groups of huts two miles north-east of the strip were strafed, as well as some trucks about one mile north of the strip. Results not observed. Sighted one dummy and two unserviceable Zekes in a clearing at the north end of the strip. Nil activity seen during coastal reconnaissance via Finschaven to Wild Bay. Roads near Finschaven appear well used. The strip had two bomb craters in the centre and did not appear to have been used recently. Expended 2,000 rounds 20mm, 10,500 rounds 7.7mm.

Firing the 20mm cannons affected the magnetism of the blast tubes. Dealing with Beaufighter operations in Burma, David Innes wrote 'The effect of firing cannons and machineguns was considerable on the aircraft compasses, throwing them out by some 50 degrees at times.' Col Harvey reported a similar effect on aircraft in his squadron but found that if, after an attack, the cannons were fired while heading north, the compasses might return to normal. If that action failed then the navigator had to go through the dreary chore of

adjusting the compasses on the ground — a task for which the help of George Carnegie was especially valued.

A few navigators became upset when their aircraft missed their destinations and blamed their pilots for not maintaining the compass heading they had been given. However, the fault lay not with the pilot but with the large jungle-knife strapped to his lower right leg — an excellent position for that magnetised hunk of metal to interfere with the pilot's magnetic compass. Chas Harris found that strapping the knife to his left leg solved that particular problem.

In a barge sweep along the coast from Salamaua on the 23 January, Ron Downing and Danny Box in A19-53 attacked five difficult-to-see and well camouflaged barges but couldn't call the other Beaufighters in to finish the job because of a radio failure. A week later, Ron Downing and Danny Box were involved in a more dramatic incident while attacking Japanese ground forces attempting to capture Wau. An Australian Army unit had marked the target area with smoke bombs and Downing's attack with his 20mm incendiaries blew up a large ammunition dump, throwing up a huge amount of debris in his path. In consequence, A19-53 came home with one large hole and 58 smaller ones in the starboard mainplane and many more in the fuselage.

Gwynn Davies and Wally Edwards soon got their Servicing Flight fitters and riggers on the job of replacing the damaged wing, amid a degree of discontent which had spread through the Squadron's groundstaff who thought that the posting authorities had forgotten them entirely. The Squadron had been in New Guinea for some considerable time before the official word came through that they would have to spend 15 months there before being relieved.

The first rumour to surface suggested that the men would go home in three months but as time went by and successive rumours did not result in southern postings, some men became quite depressed, an attitude which worsened after periods of intense activity and putrid weather. The men of the Servicing Flight often slogged away at their work down on

the strip from 7am to 6.30pm and most of them agreed with Roy Meers who couldn't make out why 'Air Board doesn't recognize our hard work and get us out of this place.' They were not to know that the paucity of personnel resources acted against their early repatriation; in March 1943, for instance, No. 9 Operational Group was 1,072 airmen below its authorized strength, a figure which increased to 2,005 by June of that year.

The men were also unhappy about the poor standard of their meals; they were of the opinion that the quality and variety of food served to them in New Guinea was little different from that doled out to their fathers at Gallipoli. Most of the stuff was either tinned or dehydrated — bully beef, meat and vegetables, frankfurts, herrings in tomato sauce, peas, potatoes, carrots, and egg powder (for which a number of powdering plants in China had been dismantled and re-assembled in Australia) and dog biscuits. The latter were about 75mm square and 6mm thick, with a texture and taste resembling chipboard and unless thoroughly soaked in tea or gravy they could damage the plate and teeth of anyone wearing dentures.

The meals were grossly deficient in nutritional value but it was their monotony that caused rumblings of discontent — the more so because the men believed that other Australian Army and Air Force units were getting better fare. Tom Mitchell, an experienced cook of many years standing, maintained that the rations provided to the Squadron by the Australian Army at Moresby were the poorest he had ever come across, and commented:

Tinned bully beef or tinned mutton — fair quality; could be used cold or in stews, casseroles, hash or fritters. Tolerated by most men.

Tinned meat and vegetables — fair quality (known as virgin meat and a reward was payable if any meat was found).

Tinned herrings in tomato sauce — were heartily disliked by everyone. (Known as pregnant goldfish.) Often smothered in

fresh onions and tomato paste and covered with mashed potatoes.
Tinned bacon — passable.
Tinned butter — rancid, unusable.
Tinned corn — not at all popular.
Tinned sausages — often blew up in the heat.
Tinned fruits — excellent; everybody liked them. These fruits were served with 'cream' made from dried milk and cornflour.
Dried cabbage — very good.
Dried peas — quite good.
Dried carrots — good; eaten (reluctantly) by aircrew because they were said to improve eyesight.
Dried potatoes — lousy; covered in a glue-like substance and had always to be soaked for eight hours before use.
Dried milk — good.
Jam — melon, plum and apricot — well liked.
Golden syrup — popular.
Rolled oats — used for morning porridge; liked by a fair few.
Egg powder — served as scrambled eggs with tomato sauce; not very popular.

Sergeant Bill Grogan, although a competent NCO in charge of the catering arrangements, could do little to improve the standard of meals, nor could his cooks devise ways of making the rations supplied to them into palatable and diverse meals. Bill Dorrington, Duncan Hattrick, Charlie Mills, Bill Newtown and Robert Vidler were among the cooks who worked in the messes at June Valley.

Tom Mitchell looked after the lunches served to the groundstaff down at Ward's Strip. He started his day at 4am by kick-starting the motorbike and using its headlights to provide illumination in the oil-fired mobile kitchen outside the Airmens' Mess. Then he prepared breakfast for the day cooks, prepared the midday meals he would be serving down at Ward's, took the meals down to the strip, cleaned up when lunch was over and knocked off at 2pm.

Resourceful airmen discovered an Army supply depot at the 19 Mile and, by various ruses, acquired a variety of tasty



*At the mobile kitchen on Ward's Strip, Moresby, February, 1943.
(Courtesy John Mason)*

comestibles for themselves. Don Angus was delighted when he 'acquired' five cases of tinned tomatoes and two cases of tinned peaches but another airman was dismayed to discover that he had 'acquired' four cases of tinned carrots. On another occasion a group of the Squadron's musicians volunteered to put on a show for the staff at the depot and while they were on stage entertaining the soldiers their raiding party was at the back of the depot loading case after case of goodies onto their truck. 'We enjoyed many suppers after that,' said the leader of the foray, 'and relished the asparagus, apricots, pears, peaches, pineapples, and plums—topped off with Nestles cream or condensed milk.'

The men recognized that the messing staff did their best with the rations provided and were aware that there was a limit to the ways that bully beef or tinned herrings could be served up, as indicated by the following verse attributed to 'Blackie':

We know how he'd wish to improve the goldfish he has to dish
up for our tea,

And we know he can't fashion better meals from our ration or give us fresh fish from the sea.

'Tis the silliest of sooks that would curse our real treasure, and bring smaller measure-

So .. . never go crook at the cooks.

The Japanese continued their air attacks on Moresby installations during January. The Lightnings drove a flight of attacking aircraft away on the night of 13 January but they were unable to take-off in time to make an interception for the formation which came over two nights later. Enemy bombs landed about 200 metres away from the Squadron Operations Room and behind the hill at the eastern edge of the campsite. Although the Air Raid alarm was given the following night, no enemy aircraft appeared. However, the alarm sounded on five separate occasions on the night of Saturday, 23 January, the first being at 10pm and the last being at 5am the next morning. They made their next attack on 25 January when they dropped daisy-cutters on Jackson's Strip and demolished a DC3 loaded with stores that the 'biscuit bomber' was scheduled to drop to forward Australian troops. 'The ack-ack gave the raiders hell,' wrote one of the airmen, 'and the searchlights picked them up nicely. One shell burst between two of their machines and separated them rather forcibly. It was a pretty sight but the time was 3.30am, the mossies were bad and the shrapnel was fallings, so we didn't appreciate the show.'

Searchlights and guns were active again at 3.30am on Wednesday, 27 January when three bombers delivered an attack that had serious consequences for No. 30 Squadron. George Dusting wrote in his diary: 'The lights picked them up right over our heads and we could hear a Lightning screaming in from behind them. The Japs let go their bombs right over our heads and they fell fair and square in our "A" Flight dispersals.' In the early light of dawn nearly everyone went down to the strip to see what had happened. Beaufighter A19-55 (which Len Vial and Ralph Nelson had come to

regard as 'their' machine) went up in smoke from a direct hit whilst three others were damaged by flying shrapnel; A19-28 was badly damaged and was sent to No. 15 Repair and Salvage Unit but the Squadron was able to repair A19-34 and A19-73. The former had been flown by George Drury and Dave Beasley earlier that week in a barge sweep near Salamaua and was written off about two months later after crashlanding on return from a strike against Gasmata. A19-73 was also written off some months later when it crashed into the sea during a weapons exercise against the Moresby wreck.

Alan Laing, a flight mechanic from Gulgong, feared for his life every time he had to assist Sergeant Wally Edwards to test a petrol tank taken from a battle damaged Beaufighter. The sergeant first filled the tank with water so he might visually detect any holes, after which he applied a naked flame to the filling hole to determine if the tank held any petrol fumes. If it did, it would explode.

Living in a small tent for so long meant that each occupant had to be accommodating as far as the wishes, temperaments and sensitivities of the others were concerned. In most cases, those who shared such cramped living quarters enjoyed the companionship of the others and became good friends. Jack O'Donnell (a flight rigger from Molong) shared a tent with Ken Walker (an airframe fitter from Gosford), Athol Hewitt (an instrument maker from Hobart) and Ken Golledge (an engine fitter from Maitland). These four became firm friends and made their tent a pleasant and comfortable place in which to spend their off-duty hours.

After their evening meal, which included roly-poly and mock custard, Phil Edwards, Ron Allen, Jack Evans, Bruce Robertson, Don Angus, nearly all the aircrew and many of the airmen, went to Murray Barracks on 29 January to see Captain Jim Davidson's production *All In Fun*. The company had been a great success when it had toured Egypt, Palestine, Syria and Transjordan, where it had been known as the Middle East Concert Party.

Rex Dawe compered the two-hour show and its 21 items of

song, dance, sketches and 'swing' were enthusiastically applauded. Corporals Laurence Brooks, John Willard and Jack White were the principal vocalists whilst Staff Sergeant Fred Meredith was the comedian in the party. Sergeant Wally Portingale's swing band kept the tempo fast and smooth and their efforts greatly contributed to a highly successful and well-received show. Professional finish was apparent in the lighting and the stage effects as well as among the talented artists.

There were talented musicians serving in No. 30 Squadron, too. Owen Fenwick was an accomplished pianist and in 1942 entertained members of the three messes at their Christmas dinners. Cec Mitchell was an excellent saxophonist who had been a member of the Australian Broadcasting Commission's saxophone quartet. Alf Hunt did duty as a percussionist, having been a drummer in a town band in northern New South Wales. Cress Clarke had learnt to play the saxophone by ear and had taken his instrument to New Guinea; he was accorded the privilege of playing with the professionals in Tom Davidson's band during its tour of military units in New Guinea. Bill Davis — a navigator who flew with Fred Catt — was another outstanding pianist who had a particular interest in jazz and an intimate knowledge of the music of Fats Waller. Abe Warhurst, one of the senior armourers in the Squadron, had taken his piano accordion to Moresby and often delighted audiences in June Valley with some lively music. And the man who could very nearly make his guitar talk was one of the Squadron's cooks — Duncan Hatrick. John Butler, who was a member of the Electrical Section, thought he had a good voice and would burst into song at the drop of a hat, entertaining his tent-mates with operatic airs, popular ballads and top-of-the-charts numbers. In addition to singing the occasional topical ditty in the Airmens' Mess or at concerts held at the Mobile Works camp, Frank Simpson played his ukelele/guitar with amazing zest.

Every now and then these musicians would get together for impromptu sessions in the June Valley camp; sometimes they

went to other units and performed from the backs of trucks or from impromptu stages. Flying Officer Leslie Sims had been a musical arranger with the Australian Broadcasting Commission and was most helpful to the musicians in the Squadron. Bruce Robertson and Ewen Blackman were the principal vocalists although they were sometimes joined by Duncan Hattrick.

During the short break in the train trip from Richmond to Townsville, Cress Clarke and Alf Hunt had wandered into the Brisbane City Hall and found a piano behind some curtains in the auditorium. Cress sat down at the keyboard and his impromptu playing was accompanied by Alf Hunt who kept up the beat by thumping on the seat of a wooden chair. When a stagehand drew back the curtain the airmen were surprised to find that the auditorium was filling with people arriving for a community singing concert. The embarrassed musicians were given a round of applause and quickly left the stage. In New Guinea, one of the No. 30 Squadron officers arranged for them to play at the Moresby Officers' Club two nights a week in return for meals ordered from the Club's menu—roast pork, baked potatoes, fresh fish, apple pie and cream, chilled paw paw and other delectables. If General Herring was dining at the Club they made a point of playing the number he had requested at their first performance — 'The Anniversary Waltz'.

Two of the navigator fraternity were also able to turn out some music. Fred Anderson had taken a hand-wound gramophone with him to the war zone but had omitted to take a supply of records. He had only two vinyl 78rpm platters — 'Lead Kindly Light' and 'Abide With Me'. Bob Hasenohr had taken a portable HMV gramophone with him but he had an even more limited record collection than Fred — 'The Anniversary Waltz'. Every time Bruce Robertson hears that number he is reminded of the young South Australian lad who played it nearly every evening until he was fatally injured in a Beaufighter crash on Ward's Strip.

The situation at the strip was gradually improving. Sergeant Anderson, assisted by LACs Burton, Clifford, Dawson, Farren,

Hamilton, McKenzie, Rapsey, Samuels and others, had managed to establish a reasonable set-up for their Armament Section. Flight Sergeant Lockwood, assisted by Sergeant Robinson, LACs Carman, Joyes, Kean, Lambert, Leverett, Roach, Walsh and others had achieved a similarly satisfactory set-up for their Electrical Section. Additionally, they had installed some home comforts—including a shower unit, which they obligingly shared with the fellows in the adjacent photographic section. Don Joyes had constructed a box which incorporated a number of appropriate switches, sockets and meters and which, when plugged into a Beaufighter, could give him an overall picture of the aircraft's electrical health.

The men of Servicing Flight were still working as hard as ever. Cliff Cotterill, George Dusting, Alf Fienberg, Don Fleming, Eric Hughes, Alec Jenkins, Viv Mansell, Charlie Metters, Kitch Morris, Eric Tuckwell and Wally Rhodes were, at various times during the month, engaged in the servicing and maintenance of A19-6, A19-9, A19-10, A19-27, A19-37 and A19-38. George Dusting was responsible for the cylinder and oil group of A19-9. The engine fitters working on A19-37 found that the new motor they were supposed to instal was corroded so they used a motor from A19-28 — one of the aircraft that had been damaged in the raid on 28 January. Tropical downpours continued to inhibit progress and there were times when the men felt as if they were sloshing about in a sodden cowyard.

Aircraft refuelling had been a problem during the Unit's first few months in New Guinea. The Squadron had brought two refuelling tankers to Moresby and while these may have been suitable for a flying training school, they were totally inadequate in an operational environment where up to 14 aircraft might have to be refuelled after returning from a mission. The situation was exacerbated at Moresby because, initially, petrol had to be hand-pumped from 200 litre drums into the tanker — an extremely slow process which adversely affected aircraft turnaround time. Corporal Roger Passfield, one of the unit's aircrew, had appointed himself as a

tanker driver and fulfilled his responsibilities diligently and cheerfully. He was later Mentioned in Despatches for his untiring efforts in that regard.

The Squadron still had to use the hand-operated wind-up aircraft jacks and these had the disadvantage that if one of the operators wound his handle a bit faster than the other, the apparatus would jam, usually meaning that they had to start all over again and try to keep in step. During one of his visits to a Liberator squadron Jim Wilson picked up a pair of hydraulic jacks which he believed were 'surplus to their requirements' and these made the job easier and faster.

CHAPTER SIX

Life at the June Valley Camp

JANUARY 1943 had been a popular month for senior officers to vacate their offices in Melbourne and inspect RAAF units in New Guinea. Visitors to the Squadron included Air Vice-Marshal Jones, Chief of the Air Staff, Air Commodore Lachal, Director of Postings, Air Commodore McCauley, Group Captain Wiggins, Director of Signals and Wing Commander Lightfoot, Director of Armament. Norm Fraser made a point of telling his technical airmen that the visitors were conscious of the long hours and hard work that the airmen put in to keep their squadron at peak operational efficiency.

During February the Squadron mounted 69 operational sorties against the enemy. On the first, third, fifth, thirteenth and twenty-second of the month they carried out armed reconnaissance sorties of coastal areas occupied by the Japanese and although they met no air or ground opposition, they brought back useful intelligence information which indicated an apparent drop in Japanese activity in those areas.

Three Beaufighters went to Wau on 3 February where the Army fired three smoke bombs into the target area and a Wirraway from No. 4 Squadron fired tracer bullets to indicate the target to be attacked. Three Beaufighters went out on a similar mission on 20 February but the Wirraway did not put in an appearance. The Army unit contacted the formation

leader by radio and told him that as the attack on the primary target was impractical, he should proceed to the secondary target. However, the leader (Ross Little and Alec Spooner in A19-8) found that he couldn't fly along the valley leading to that target because of low cloud so the formation returned to Ward's.

Six Beaufighters took off from Ward's at 1.20pm on Saturday, 6 February with orders to strafe grounded aircraft on the aerodrome at Lae: Ross Little and Bill Cameron (A19-8), Ron Uren and John Maguire (A19-33), Bob Bennett and Phil Edwards (A19-10), Bob Brazenor and Fred Anderson (A19-15), Len Vial and Ralph Nelson (A19-24) and Jack Sandford and Arthur Jaggs (A19-32).

The pilots did not see any serviceable aircraft on the strip so they strafed everything and anything they could find. However, the Japanese defences were still active. A19-8 was holed by 12.7mm ack-ack in the starboard fuselage, A19-32 was holed in the mainplane and A19-15 lost an engine over the target and had a trim tab shot away by 12.7mm ack-ack. Bob Brasenor had to make a forced landing in a small clearing in the jungle near Dobodura. The crew were taken back to Ward's for the night and after the mechanics had made the necessary repairs, Ron Uren went across and flew the aircraft back to Moresby.

Brian Walker in A19-3 led another four aircraft in an attack on enemy barges and enemy land targets near Lae on the morning of 17 February. That afternoon the Commanding Officer was passed a signal which had been originated by the Army's observation post in the hills near Lae: 'The boys did a good job this morning.'

Two days later another seven Beaufighters joined with a formation of Bostons in a joint strike against troop concentrations in the Malahang area. A number of Mitchells were just leaving the target area as the Beaufighters and Bostons arrived and the pilots of two of the Beaufighters mistook two Mitchells for Japanese bombers. They fired on them at maximum range but ceased firing when they recognized the

other aircraft. The Mitchells were not damaged. Two Zekes were airborne near Malahang but they made no attempt to intercept either the Bostons or the Beaufighters. The radio gear in A19-9 (Bob Brasenor and Fred Anderson) failed before the aircraft reached Malahang so the pilot turned away and flew it back to base.

A19-9 crashed and burned during the take-off for that mission against Malahang but neither Col Campbell nor Jim Yeatman were hurt. The IFF equipment had exploded and the pilot hurriedly put the Beaufighter down in the belief that one of his tyres had blown. That equipment was installed in Allied aircraft and transmitted a coded signal which allowed a ground radar station to Identify it as Friend or Foe (IFF). To prevent the enemy from recovering a set from a crashed aircraft, the IFF equipment contained an explosive charge designed to detonate on severe impact—such as would occur in a crashlanding in enemy territory. To guard against accidental destruction there were standing instructions that required the Beaufighter navigator to isolate the electrical circuitry just before landing—that had not been done at the end of A19-9's previous flight.

Radar mechanics John Evans and John Laverty were responsible for the servicing and maintenance of the IFF equipment. Neither had been given an official course of instruction on IFF and the equipment was apparently so secret that not even the technicians were permitted to have a copy of the technical manual. Hence they had no clear idea of what might be causing a high unserviceability rate or of what remedial measures they should apply. It so happened that an unserviceable set was inadvertently left sitting out in the sun and when tested after lunch it was found to be working quite satisfactorily. The two radar mechanics eventually determined that moisture was adversely affecting the circuitry and they adopted appropriate modifications.

The main aim of the Japanese forces in New Guinea in the early months of 1943 was the reinforcement of their bases at Lae, Salamaua, Madang and Wewak and the securing of that

general region with the ultimate objective of launching a gloriously successful attack on the large Allied base at Moresby.

Fortunately, no bombs ever fell on the Squadron's camp in June Valley, where the living conditions were gradually improving. No. 5 Mobile Works Squadron had installed pipes which brought water to its own campsite as well as those of other RAAF units in the Valley. The personnel of No. 30 Squadron had been provided with an ablution block which had a sloping concrete floor, 10 overhead shower roses, a footbath containing a strong solution of Condy's Crystals and, because nurses drove past on their way to No. 3 Medical Receiving Centre, a malthoid screen was nailed along the side of the block which faced the road. The nurses changed shifts at 3pm every day and Eric Lusk recalled that the less inhibited fellows made a point of strolling across to the shower at about that time with their towels draped around their necks rather than their waists.

The Squadron Medical Officer held his Sick Parades every morning but for the most part the men presented with only minor ailments although skin complaints could be quite difficult to clear up. Some of the men ignored the standard preventive measures and became infected with foot tinea which sometimes spread to their groins and armpits—in which case they shuffled around like bandy jockeys with arms spread out as if they were about to take-off. Men were scared of getting the crabs and although shaving his pubic hair was devoid of any entertainment value for the victim it did provide an amount of ribald humour for the onlookers.

Bill Marsh could accommodate a few short term bed patients in his Sick Quarters; in the first few months the longer term patients were sent to the Station Sick Quarters at Port Moresby. In November 1942 there was great excitement when No. 3 Medical Receiving Station was established just a few hundred metres up the road from No. 30 Squadron's camp in June Valley. The five RAAF nurses on the staff there were the first white women the men had seen since they left Australia in September. Squadron personnel who were tended

by those nursing sisters during the early months of 1943 included Ken Agnew, Bill Colthorpe, Cliff Cotterill, Charlie Devlin, Sid Edgar, Wally Edwards, Joe Erskine, John Farquhar, Rus Foster, George Graham, Alwyn Green, Don Joyes, Cliff Maxwell, Charlie Metters, Tom Rooney, Bill Schofield, Vic Whitfield and Jim Wilson.

When Air Commodore Cobby came over from Townsville to inspect RAAF units in New Guinea he directed unit commanders to tighten up their discipline and their anti-malarial measures. Previously, members of No. 30 Squadron had been allowed to grow beards because water was scarce, new razor blades were unobtainable, chin rashes were prevalent and facial hair protected fair skins from sunburn. When, in obedience to the Air Commodore's direction, the Adjutant introduced daily parades he ordered the men to remove their whiskers straightaway and remain cleanshaven in accordance with the Air Force regulation. He also stressed the need for strict observance of anti-malarial measures, insisting that nobody should shower after sunset, that everybody should take atebirin tablets every Wednesday and Saturday and that everybody should wear trousers and long-sleeved shirt after dusk. But, as Group Captain Wiggins discovered during his visit, some airmen had to continue wearing shorts as long trousers were in short supply in every Equipment Store.

As Director of Signals, Group Captain Wiggins' duties at Air Force Headquarters did not include a responsibility for postal services but he was no doubt fully aware that mail from home was an important factor in maintaining the morale of men in the fighting units.

Sid Virgin had set up his tent as the Unit Post Office near the Transport Section; it had a bench along the front and was backed by a set of pigeon holes. Everyone looked forward to getting letters from home and although the service was somewhat irregular, the Post Office was besieged by hopefuls when the word went round that Sid had collected a bag of incoming mail. Hometown newspapers were always welcome and issues of *Truth* were passed from hand to hand until they

disintegrated. Some of the men liked to read the *Australian Women's Weekly* while others preferred to read *Man*, *Lilliput* or *Argosy*. Nearly everybody wanted to get hold of *Esquire* with its drawings by Varga of languorous, scantily-clad girls with shapely long legs and precisely delineated breasts.

Of special importance were the parcels of food sent up by the womenfolk at home. Ken Golledge had quite a number of aunts who kept him well supplied with homecooked fruit-cakes and other delectables. Eric Lusk also received cakes from his family and friends and, as was the custom, shared them with other aircrew in the Squadron. The friends of Cliff Clohesy sent him loaves of bread—hollowed out so that each could comfortably accommodate a bottle of whisky. When Don Angus had consumed the cake sent by his mother, he packed the caketin with cigarettes and posted the parcel to his sister in Australia. From time to time he sent his mother tins of asparagus he bought from the Squadron's canteen in June Valley. Early in December the Field Post Offices became swamped with parcels being sent to mothers, sisters and sweethearts; for the most part these contained model lakatois (native boats), grass skirts or green coconuts.

For security reasons all outgoing mail had to be censored. Adjutant Wearne distributed the unsealed envelopes to the officers every day but they very rarely had to use scissors or razor blades to excise incautious operational remarks. This was similar to the Japanese situation for the Military Police reported to 8th Army Headquarters in 1943 that the censorship situation in New Guinea, New Britain and the Pacific Islands was satisfactory. Of 124,700 items of mail examined by censors, 11 had breached the rules about demoralizing or homesick remarks and only five had contained references to minor items of intelligence.

Whenever a Beaufighter was scheduled to be flown south, the men engaged in a frenzy of letter writing and they would then approach the crew to post the letters when the aircraft arrived in Australia. Since their letters wouldn't have to be screened by censors the men felt free to express themselves,

their feelings, attitudes and intentions in explicit detail, knowing that their correspondence would not be read by their officers in the unit.

Living conditions for officers and other ranks were improving. Les Braund's equipment staff had managed to secure a few of the canvas flys stored at Murray Barracks as part of the War Establishment of the Papuan Infantry Battalion and the airmen had erected these as annexes to their tents, thus making things slightly more comfortable for the inhabitants. Athol Hewitt, an instrument repairer from Hobart, was one of those who had visited the pit from which the Works Squadron obtained its material for surfacing the strip and had spread gravel screenings on the floor of his tent. Although most of the tents were lit by kerosene lamps, a few fortunate occupants had acquired Coleman pressure lamps. Bob Cummins and Alan Kirley had such a lamp in their tent and because it provided such good illumination their tent was the venue for many card games. The Orderly Room clerks, Bill Madden, Max Annetts, Jim Turner and Alan Laing, also had a Coleman lamp in their tent adjacent to their workplace. Harry Whitton, who shared a tent with other airframe fitters, had acquired a Coleman lamp from a Supply Sergeant in one of the American units at Schwimmer. While he was pumping it up one night the thing exploded and threw flames all round the tent. Fortunately, it was only a flashflame so neither the tent, the occupants nor their gear was affected in any way.

The airmen working down at the strip were quick off the mark when American aircraft crashed at Ward's, and they soon removed all the usable gear — including aircraft batteries. Quite a number of tents at the June Valley campsite were lit with battery power and it was a common sight to see airmen lugging their batteries across to the Transport Section after breakfast so that they could be re-charged while they were at work.

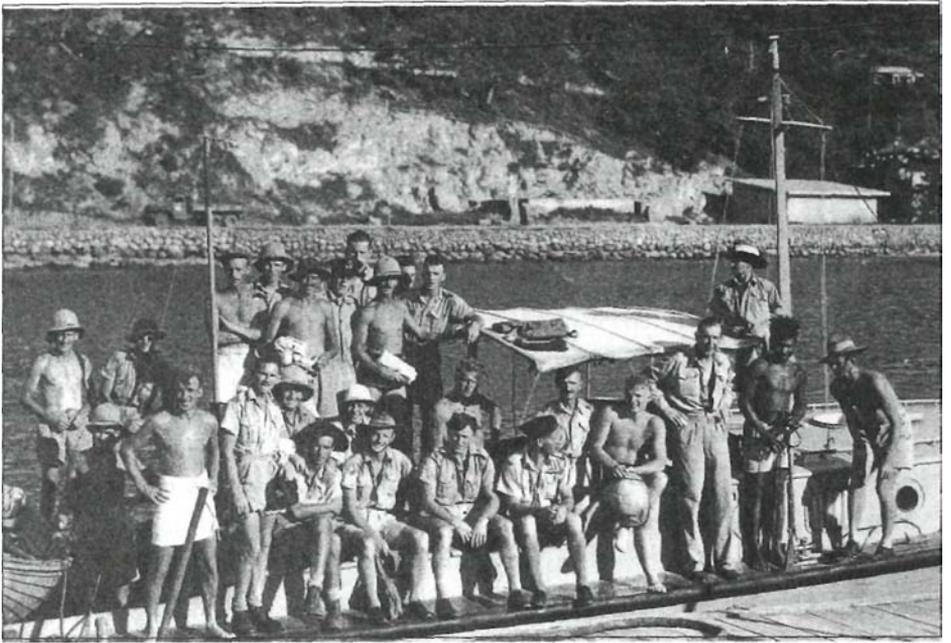
The Operations Room, the messes and some tents were served with electricity from a do-it-yourself generating system. Jim Wilson had taken one of the blue Maple-Leaf tabletops

into Moresby one afternoon and had picked up a generator abandoned near the bombed-out Hotel Moresby. He had later secured a brand new Ford V8 motor in its crate from an American supply outfit and had acquired a V8 chasis on to which he and Wally Edwards had mounted the motor and generator. Airmen from the Electrical Section procured wire and fittings from some friendly source and wired the selected tents to the generating plant. Because of the shunt switch which was installed on the control panel, either all the lights in all the tents had to be on or all of them had to be off.

Tents were being made comfortable in other ways. Discarded packing cases were used to construct makeshift furniture as neither tables, chairs nor lockers were provided as Air Force issue. Several men tried to brighten up the areas around their tents by growing flowers whilst Jeff Heath and Andy Herron were among those who tried, unsuccessfully, to raise some fresh vegetables.

Those who visited Hanaubada or other nearby villages would often return with fresh fruit, husked coconuts, tropical papayas and huge bunches of bananas, which they bought from the natives. Some members of the Squadron risked the wrath of the authorities when they went fishing in Fairfax Harbour, using sticks of gelignite rather than baited lines. One of the armourers had to be rushed back to shore with an ear problem after an occupant of the launch tossed a stick of gelignite into the water without realising that his mate was underwater collecting the stunned fish.

Providing it had no operational tasks, the RAAF Marine Section was always willing to make a launch available to take aircrew or groundstaff out on a fishing trip or across to one of the delightful islands in the Harbour where they could relax in the buff on the sandy beaches or disport themselves in the warm, shallow water. On their off-duty days Jim Wilson and his fellow flight riggers visited the enclosed swimming baths near the Burns Philp wharf whilst Allan Laing and his flight mechanic mate, Viv Mansell, often walked and swam at Ela Beach. A particular spot on the Laloki River became a



*Aircrew leaving for an outing on the Harbour, Moresby, January 1943.
(Courtesy Dave Beasley)*

favourite with Squadron aircrew and groundstaff alike and was frequently visited by Gwynn Davies, Glen Stoneham and Ron Morrison. Expeditions to Rouna Falls were also popular for that locality was much cooler than the Squadron's camp and standing under the chilly cascading water was a bracing and refreshing experience for the weary men.

Few airmen were inclined to engage in active sport because of the stifling heat and energy-sapping humidity during the day. Don Angus managed to get a baseball team together but the Squadron players didn't have much success against the team from the American 101st AA battery, whose pitcher had played for the Chicago Red Sox. One of the Squadron's guards organised a couple of cricket matches against an army unit based at Bootless Bay but neither side distinguished itself in either bowling or batting. After-hours recreations within the camp included a variety of card games such as poker, twenty-one hundred and bridge, as well as board games such as chess, draughts and Chinese checkers. Some of the men enjoyed playing battleships and cruisers, whilst those who

wished to either occupy their time or add to their piggybank could attend the evening two-up sessions run by Cliff Clohesy.

At least one of the Squadron's official or unofficial vehicles left the camp every night to take fellows to see movies supposed to be showing at some particular unit but it depended on the accuracy of that word-of-mouth information and the driver's knowledge of roads and unit locations whether the men actually saw that movie that night. All the screenings were made at open air cinemas equipped with nothing more than a screen and a makeshift shed for the projector. Patrons brought their own seats such as kerosine tins, wooden packing cases, or small fuel drums—and when the projectionist had to change reels everyone stood up to stretch themselves and ease the pressure on their backsides. When the sound or image went awry the projectionist became the subject of loud catcalls which, for the most part, were good natured and kept the crowd entertained until the show resumed. Cinema audiences never let even a tropical downpour interfere with their night's entertainment; they sat hunched on their makeshift seats while water streamed off their tin hats and down their necks inside their rubber capes which they tried to make into small tents by spreading their arms akimbo. Because of the noise made by the rain pelting on the tin hats, rubber capes, nearby tents and the iron roof of the projection box, the sound track was virtually inaudible. It was difficult to light an already damp Bryant and May's wooden match in the pouring rain so it became the custom for anyone who managed that task to pass his lighted cigarette butt to his neighbour, who then passed his butt to his neighbour and so on.

An Air Raid Yellow warning would turn the heads of the audience towards the north to look for the incoming planes which were usually lit up by the searchlights. If the audience calculated that the bombers were passing them by, most of them stayed—even if a little nervously. But if they thought that their locality was threatened by the attack there was a mad scramble to vacate the place, since the unit's slit trenches could not accommodate such a crowd of visitors.

After the evening meal on April Fool's Day some of the men walked up the road to see Joe E. Brown in *The Gladiator*, which was to be screened at No. 22 Squadron's outdoor cinema. But urgent messages from those fellows brought nearly everyone across from the No. 30 Squadron camp and for their benefit the projectionist had to re-run the Cinesound newsreel, for it contained Damien Parer's shots of the Beaufighters engaged in the Bismark Sea Battle.

No. 9 Operational Group had sent Beaufighters out on 34 sorties on 3 March and the following day to participate in the destruction of the Japanese convoy bringing supplies and reinforcements from Rabaul to its beleaguered troops in New Guinea. In the ensuing Bismark Sea Battle eight enemy transport vessels and four destroyers were sunk during repeated attacks by Fortresses, Liberators, Catalinas, Mitchells, Bostons and Beaufighters — which were given the flak-suppression task so that the other aircraft could concentrate their attention on accurate bomb aiming.

The first day's engagement provided excitement for everyone involved — the Liberators and Fortresses doing the high level bombing, the Mitchells and Bostons doing the lower level bombing, the Lightnings providing top cover and the Beaufighters making low level strafing runs. In the first few minutes one of No. 30 Squadron's pilots disposed of a shipborne ack-ack gun and its crew whose attention had been focussed on the high level bombers and were totally unaware of any low flying aircraft. Dick Roe and Peter Fiske in A19-87 were right over another vessel and about to pull up from their strafing run when a 226kg bomb exploded directly underneath and tossed the Beaufighter into the sky. It then lurched towards the water, recovered, straightened up and went on towards another target. That explosion had come from a bomb dropped by a Mitchell and made quite a large dent in the belly of A19-87.

George Drury and Dave Beasley in A19-11 were attacked by Zeros just as they were about to strafe one of the transports in the by now dispersed convoy but George followed

standard procedure, got down on the water, 'opened up all the taps' and outdistanced the pursuing fighters. When that pair of Zeros gave up the chase, they pulled away in a half-roll and tried to position themselves on the tail of A19-10 flown by Bob Bennett and Phil Edwards. But Bob had anticipated that sort of action and he too was skimming the water at maximum speed, being able to draw away from them. One of the pursuers then managed to get on the tail of A19-53, flown by Ron Downing and Danny Box, and fired on them from less than 50 metres. The Beaufighter's fuselage was holed, the port engine was stopped, the starboard engine was making unhealthy noises, Ron was wounded in the left shoulder and Danny was hit in the thigh and the wrist. Despite these difficulties, Ron, shepherded by two other Beaufighters, managed to get his stricken aeroplane to Poppondetta where he made a spectacular belly landing.

Ross Little and Alex Spooner, in A19-8, spotted another Zero which was pursuing a Mitchell and they opened fire with their cannon and machineguns when about 200 metres away from the Japanese fighter. Ross succeeded in his intention of drawing the enemy away from the Mitchell but the Zero climbed skywards, let Ross pass underneath him and then did a half-roll to get behind and make a dead astern attack on the Beaufighter. Alec Spooner had the satisfaction of returning the enemy's fire with his own machinegun—Alec had been responsible for designing the fitment of a rearward firing Browning 7.7mm into the navigator's rear cupola.

The fuselage of Beaufighter A19-24 (Len Vial and Ralph Nelson) was damaged by bullets which ricocheted down the length of the cabin and nicked a piece out of the navigator's shorts, without damaging other vital equipment. Ralph adopted the tactic which Len Greenhill said had proved effective in the Sunderlands of No. 10 Squadron, and flicked a red Aldis lamp at his pursuer in the hope that the enemy pilot might think the flashes came from a rear firing gun in the Beaufighter. The Zero did break off his attack but whether he did so because of the red flashes is of only academic interest to Ralph.

Bruce Robertson had hooked up a loud speaker to the AR/8 radio receiver so that he, Don Angus, Ewen Blackman and other wireless operators could hear the voice transmissions of aircraft involved in the Bismark Sea affair. But the word soon spread and a considerable crowd of groundstaff from Nos. 6, 22 and 30 Squadrons gathered around the Wireless Section's tent to hear what was happening to their aircrews and to follow the progress of the battle. But the terse messages they heard could not convey a real understanding of what it was like to be on board an Allied aircraft. That is more vividly given by George Burton Graham, a wireless technician who joined No. 30 Squadron in May 1943. In his book *None Shall Survive*, George relates how cine photographer Damien Parer fared when he flew with Ron Uren and Harry Suthons in A19-5, straddling the well behind the pilot:

Parer is standing behind 'Torchy' and all he can see for a time is the horizon streaking past the nose, then a lot of water, and then the plane straightens. You've gone around behind the warships, but they're still banging away with their big guns, pom-poms and ack-ack. You can see tracers whipping by. A cargo ship is in the sights. She is camouflaged and has goalpost masts. She looks blurred at first, but then comes into focus. The first thunder of fire [from the cannons] gives you a shock. It jars at your feet, and you see the tracers lashing out ahead of you, and orange lights dance before your eyes [as the bullets strike] on the grey structure of the ship. You keep on following the tracers to the ship, but before you get there 'Torchy' eases back the stick and you feel the tearing at your stomach and your knees want to buckle with the terrific strain of the pull-out. You have to hang on to the framework behind the pilot—and the ship becomes a dark mass. Again you see a lot of sky . . .

By this time, Damien says, you're feeling pretty good. It's all so wonderful and powerful and smooth that you get a sense of jubilation and exhilaration. You take a deep breath and press hard on your stomach. Your perspiring hands take a fresh grip on the grating. You can smell the fetid stench of gunpowder in your

nostrils. Then the plane is banking round again and a fresh target is lining up in the sights. It straightens up and you are in that terrific rush of power again. You're going in—hard and furious. The great hull of the ship is looming up at you, grey and black and forbidding. Again the guns begin their violent stammer, again the flashing out of tracers. The shuddering beat of the explosions gives the scene a grey flicker. The acrid smell is in your nostrils. You seem suspended in an unwholesome moment of fear and delight as you watch the stream of bullets whang over the decks. You see the black smoke rising and you are still diving to meet it until everything is a black smudge—and you say a quick prayer. And then you feel that wrench upwards again and the plane sweeps miraculously up. And the ship passes below the fuselage in a dark blur.

According to Arthur Ferrier, Damien was bubbling with excitement having shot hundreds of feet of a most thrilling and exhilarating episode of the air war against Japan. Everyone in the Squadron was elated by the many stories told by the crews after their debriefing by the Intelligence staff and, even though the Bar could only dispense non-alcoholic drinks, the atmosphere in the Aircrew Mess showed that the young aviators were all keyed up by the events of the day.

Damien was living next to the tent occupied by Ralph Nelson, a navigator who had been with Len Vial in A19-24 that day. While they were concentrating on a game of pontoon in the light of a kerosine lamp, Damien took photographs of two other navigators who had been involved in that operation—Peter Fiskén and Arthur Jaggs.

Jack Sandford and Arthur Jaggs (A19-32) led two other Beaufighters on a strafing mission against targets near Salamaua on 13 March. On the day after that Ron Uren and Bill Clarke, (A19-5), led two more aircraft on another mission in the same area. However, because of low clouds they could make only 10 strafing runs against the target. Nine Beaufighters joined a force of 16 Liberators in an attack on

Madang on 18 March when they thoroughly strafed the strip area before the Americans dropped their bombload. The Beau fighters went on to Alexishaven where they poured round after round of 20mm into the Japanese headquarters near the Cathedral, the power house, the sawmill, the jetty and its installations. The navigators on that mission were Dave Beasley, Ron Binnie, Bill Cameron, Fred Cassidy, Phil Edwards, Eric Lusk, Ralph Nelson, Alec Spooner and Harry Suthons. Their aircrew category up to that time had been Wireless Air Observer but in March it was changed to Navigator (BW) as they had qualified in air navigation, bombing, gunnery and wireless operating.

Many of those who had attended the Signals School at Point Cook had been trained on wireless equipment imported from Britain — the 1082 Transmitter and the 1083 Receiver. But because this became difficult to obtain the Director of Signals at Air Force Headquarters initiated a project which led to the issue of a specification for an airborne general purpose set. Amalgamated Wireless of Australia secured the contract to produce the AT5/AR8 combination which was tested in a Hudson at Richmond in 1940. That equipment was subsequently installed behind the navigator's chair in both the British and Australian series of Beau fighters. It provided facilities for intercom between the crew, for transmission by continuous wave, modulated continuous wave, voice and pulse. The transmitter covered 2 bands, 140kcs to 500kcs and 2mcs to 20mcs, while the receiver covered the band between 140kcs and 20mcs. Some of the ground stations which were mentioned during operational briefings in mid 1943 were:

- Moresby — CW Callsign — 3X3: Voice Callsign — GLOOMY. Primary Frequency — 6870kcs. First Alternate — 6700kcs. Second Alternate — 6390 kcs.
- Milne Bay — CW Callsign — 1V5: Voice Callsign — GOSLING. Frequencies as for Moresby.
- Horn Island — CW Callsign — 8L8: Voice Callsign — CHICKEN.

- Moresby H/F D/F — CW Callsign — 9G9: Voice Callsign — CRYSTAL. Frequency 5050kcs (0800-1900k)
- Aeradio Callsigns: Milne Bay — VZKF. Moresby — VZPY. Townsville — VZTV
- Homing Beacons: Milne Bay (KF) — 1455kcs. Moresby (PM) — 270kcs. Horn Island (HD) — 280kcs.

The Squadron Signals Officer, Colin Harvey, maintained that the AT5/AR8 gear, which was fitted with more than 70 knobs and switches, was rather overwhelming for some navigators and that about half of it was redundant because the Beaufighters flew at such low level during their operations in the New Guinea area. The M/F transmitter was rarely used. There was no radio compass or automatic direction finding facility so that the M/F receiver—with manual loop and manual sense—had to be used. M/F direction finding on the short, fixed aerial was a useful facility but when the navigator was strapped in his seat it was impossible for him to reach the Transmit/Receive switch. The sets had a crystal control facility but no crystals had been made for the frequencies used by the Fighter Sectors with which the Beaufighters were required to communicate.

Because of strict radio silence Beau fighter crews transmitted very few messages, either by voice or by key, in their operational area.

The W/T Operators and the Wireless Maintenance Mechanics formed the Wireless Section which was situated near the aircraft dispersal bays at the end of Ward's Strip. The Section included: Don Angus, Ewen Blackman, Ray Brockman, Neville Britton, Frank Eckhold, George Graham, Bruce Robertson and George Shearer. The men of the section were responsible for looking after the radio gear in the Beaufighters. After one of those aircraft had stood in the tropical sun for even a few minutes the external metal surfaces became extremely hot to the touch and the conditions inside a closed-up aircraft were nearly unbearable. When Bruce Robertson hopped in an aircraft after lunch in order to check the equipment with a

wavemeter, the perspiration ran down his face, chest, arms and legs in a continuous stream. He thought that the aircraft's internal temperature might have been close to 50 degrees Celsius that afternoon.

On 22 March Brian Walker and Bill Cameron (A19-3) led nine other Beaufighters across a large stretch of the South Pacific Ocean to the southern coast of New Britain where they were to co-operate with a large formation of Liberators in an attack on Gasmata. As usual, the Beaufighters went in first and then the Americans pounded the place with their 900kg bombs. The bombing and strafing attacks were highly successful and the raid severely affected the enemy's ability to mount air attacks on Allied units in New Guinea. But it was not without cost to No. 30 Squadron. A19-34 (Harold Berg and Harold Kelly) was hit in the port tyre by machinegun fire but because the crew—who were on their first mission—made a good landing at Ward's the aircraft was soon repaired and back in service.

Three other aircraft were holed by 12.7mm bullets—A19-8 (Ross Little and Alec Spooner), A19-74 (Bob Harding and Hedley Cane) and A19-87 (Dick Roe and Peter Fisken). And once more George Drury came home in A19-11 with palm fronds hanging from its fuselage. The common view among the groundstaff was that George's height perception became impaired during his low level run across a target and that this arose because of some distortion to his eyesight caused by the different refractive values of his spectacles, his gunsight and the one-inch bulletproof glass windscreen.

Three crews returned to Ward's in aircraft that had not been damaged by enemy activity at Gasmata: Ron Uren and Harry Suthons (A19-5), Sid Wallace and Ron Binnie (A19-32) and George Gibson and Eric Lusk (A19-37).

During that sortie the ammunition expenditure for the Squadron was 18,000 rounds from the 7.7mm machineguns and 8,500 armour-piercing, ball and high incendiary rounds from the 20mm cannons.

Following the issue of the weekly Government Gazette



*Beaufighter A19-11 after a daylight raid, Ward's Strip, 12 April 1943.
(Courtesy George Dusting)*

soon after the Bismark Sea Battle, the entire Squadron was turned out for a parade on 26 March where they heard the announcement that six commissioned pilots and one commissioned navigator had been decorated. The Commanding Officer, Wing Commander Brian Walker, had been awarded the Distinguished Service Order. His two flight commanders — Squadron Leaders Ross Little and Ronald Uren — had each been awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross. Flying Officers Colin Campbell, Alexander Spooner, Jack Sandford and John Maguire were also each awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross.

Just on noon of that day, Short Sunderland flying boat A18-14, under the command of Flying Officer Cowan, alighted in Port Moresby after a five hour flight from Townsville. That aeroplane brought seven crews to replace crews which would go south on completion of their six month operational tour. The new crews were:

- Flight Lieutenant Maurice Ball and Flight Sergeant Greg Hardman.

- Flight Lieutenant Keith Eddison and Sergeant Max Allott.
- Flying Officer Keith Nicholson and Sergeant Kenneth Delbridge.
- Pilot Officer Douglas Raffin and Pilot Officer George Dick.
- Flight Sergeant Charles Harris and Sergeant Donald Miller.
- Sergeant Edward Woolcott and Sergeant Robert Hasenohr.
- Sergeant Harold Tapner and Flight Sergeant Robert Thomas.

Four days after their arrival, Chas Harris and Don Miller had lucky escapes on their very first flight from Ward's when A19-96 crashed during a take-off for a local area familiarisation exercise. Because the aircraft had been parked out in the open, the cockpit temperature was suffocatingly high and all the interior surfaces were scalding hot to the touch. So Chas opened his top hatch while taxiing but forgot to close it before take-off. He tried to shut it as the aircraft was lifting off, at which time the Beaufighter headed off towards the scrub at tree-top level. The port wing stalled, the nose dropped, the aircraft momentarily recovered and then the right wing stalled. T was doing a bit of praying from there on and that alleviated my fear to a great extent,' Don said. 'As we hit the trees there was an almighty scraping along the side of the fuselage and the limb of a tree, about as thick as a man's upper arm, rammed through the port side of the cockpit. If our aircraft had been a few centimetres lower as we skidded through the undergrowth, Chas would have been impaled.' The starboard motor was knocked out and went rolling along on its own and then the tail unit broke off and careered forwards. Don slammed his upper body down to the level of his navigation table and thus avoided having his head sliced off as his cupola was sheared off.

Bob Bennett saw the accident and thought at the time that it had occurred because the pilot had been accustomed to take-offs and landings on an all-over field; using a single runway for the first time presented a hazard, especially in a cross wind. Bob had adopted the practice of taking off with the starboard throttle slightly in advance of the other in order to counter the Beaufighter's tendency to swing to starboard.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Moresby Attacked by 100 Aircraft

THAT the first Thursday in April was April Fool's Day was assuredly not relevant to the orders which called for a co-ordinated attack on a Japanese convoy that had left Kavieng and might be heading towards New Guinea. Eight Beaufighters were to be involved as well as squadrons of Fortresses, Liberators and Mitchells. The operation was called off when the shadowing Fortresses sent a negative report so the Beaufighters went to Dobodura, landing there at 6.40pm.

Lae was the next target assigned to RAAF Bostons and Beaufighters. On 4 April No. 30 Squadron aircraft made 36 strafing passes during that mission and damaged every building at Heath's Plantation. In a flight that lasted four and a quarter hours, eight Beaufighters and a formation of Mitchells went on yet another mission over the Owen Stanley Range on 9 April. The primary target was given as Amron Mission, the secondary target was Alexishaven:

- Brian Walker and Bill Cameron (A19-3)
- Ross Little and Alec Spooner (A19-8)
- Ron Uren and John Maguire (A19-5)
- George Gibson and Eric Lusk (A19-38)
- Keith Eddison and Max Allott (A19-24)
- Dick Roe and Col Harvey (A19-87)

- Ed Woolcott and Bob Hasenohr (A19-37)
- Chas Harris and Don Miller (A19-15)
- Doug Raffan and George Dick (A19-32)

All the buildings at the primary target and at the nearby meteorological observation post were strafed and left burning. The Japanese headquarters buildings, the powerhouse and the sawmill at Alexishaven were also strafed and left smoking. Three loaded barges were attacked, two being sunk and one left burning. A launch on the island opposite the jetty and two barges covered with tarpaulins and palm fronds in the nearby river were thoroughly strafed.

When the Beaufighters arrived at Madang they saw that five grounded aircraft which had just been attacked by the Mitchells, were burning. In the north-east corner of the field they saw two grey bombers, one of which had black swastika markings. When they left the area a huge petrol fire in the dock area was still blazing furiously; the aircraft had destroyed a grounded single-seater aircraft and had expended all their cannon ammunition.

During April the groundstaff had problems with the Mk 6 engines of the replacement aircraft arriving in Moresby from the mainland so Norm Fraser was delighted when one of the men in Servicing Flight sectionised a junk head and discovered the cause of the trouble. Servicing Flight was responsible for a variety of technical matters including aircraft repairs, aircraft maintenance and inspections when the aircraft had logged 40, 80, and 120 hours of flying. Wally Edwards, an engine fitter, and Andy Herron, an airframe fitter, kept their men hard at work in order to achieve a quick turnaround so that the Beaufighters could be returned to the flight lines and available for operational flying without unseemly delay.

In the first few weeks of April the men of that Flight worked on A19-93, the first Beaufighter to arrive at Moresby with a dihedral tailplane, on A19-38 which Brian Walker was to ditch on Pyramid Reef a few weeks later and on A19-11 which George Drury had managed to decorate with the tops

of palms trees and other foliage. They had also repaired A19-8, the airscrew of which was damaged during an attack on Lae by Ross Little as well as A19-5 which needed a new gill ring before Ron Uren could take it up again and A19-11 which needed a new port airscrew seal after George Drury brought it back for a landing a few minutes after taking off for a strike against Madang on 9 April.

Three days later the men were just about to take their morning smoko when the Air Raid alarm was sounded. Henry Cornieliusen, a gunner in the 3rd LAA Regiment, said that the warning system involved a Yellow Alert (20 minutes warning) and a Red Alert (5 minutes warning). Warning messages emanated from No. 4 Fighter Sector and were based on information fed to it by a Radio Direction Finding station and by Army lookouts dispersed along the Owen Stanley Range. When Mowbray Ship or other operators at the Ward's telephone exchange were advised about impending raids they passed the information on to the RAAF units.

Outlying military units got their warnings when an anti-aircraft gun fired three deliberately spaced shots—a signal which was taken up by the many owners of small arms to ensure that everybody got the message. At some late hour one dark night it so happened that three servicemen had concluded their business at the unit's latrines and had then slammed down the wooden seats in succession — bang . . . bang . . . bang. Those three noisy claps caused their sleepy-eyed comrades to respond by scurrying for their slit trenches amid much cursing of the Japanese which later included their three fellow soldiers.

On the morning of the big Japanese raid, the groundstaff needed no urging to take cover—they reckoned that the attack must be a serious one as it was the first time the 30 Squadron area appeared to have been singled out for a daylight attack. Moreover, they had inspected the after effects of a previous raid when the enemy's daisy-cutters had sheared off all the saplings, shrubs and kunai grass about 40cm above ground level. And on another occasion when they arrived at

their workplace the morning after a similar raid they found that their enamel mugs, left hanging on tentpoles, were riddled with holes.

As it neared Moresby the enemy force of 45 bombers and 60 fighters split into three formations—the most westerly formation of nine bombers concentrating their attack on Ward's. When Owen Fenwick and George Dusting saw the size of the raid, and that a bomber formation was heading straight towards them, they vacated the Beaufighter's dispersal area at speed and kept on going until the bombs began to fall. 'And then we fell flat on mother earth in some mud right near an AA gun,' George wrote. 'The whole world seem to be going up in smoke, flame and noise.' The enemy dropped a string of 40 daisy-cutters as they flew across the northern end of the strip—the first one exploded near 'B' Flight and the last one near 'A' Flight.

A newly arrived flight rigger had reported to Ron Morrison just before the alarm was sounded, and within a quarter of an hour he was subjected to a raid involving more than 100 aeroplanes. Ron saw that the young lad was scared stiff and took the trouble to calm him down and get him into a shelter. George Allum, who could have been a model for a Bondi lifesaver poster and was well-known for his fatherly interest in native children, speculated about how to cover his vital parts with just one size 7 steel helmet and decided that he needed at least two.

Jim Wilson was descending a hill behind an American truck when the Red Alert sounded: he saw the driver leap out of the cab and head for the scrub, letting his bomb laden truck career down the hill and slam into a culvert with an almighty crash but without disturbing even one of the 114kg bombs on board. After Jim had hurriedly parked his vehicle and joined the black American, he remarked on the stupidity of abandoning the truck and letting it get badly damaged. To which the American driver replied, 'Man, Uncle Sam's got plenty of trucks, but there's only one of me.'

Because of the noise of two engines being given a ground run, Eric Hughes wasn't aware of the impending raid until Flight Sergeant John Wilson yelled at him and three other fitters to take cover. They raced to their trench but its sides had collapsed and it was little more than a shallow depression. Nevertheless, the four men dived in headfirst and pressed their bodies down hard into the sloppy mud and slimy water, thus avoiding being sliced by the myriad shreds of deadly shrapnel. Elton Marsden and Wally Navin had dug their trench at some distance from the bay which accommodated A19-3, on which the two airmen were working at the time of the alert. They scampered for their trench where Elton pressed his face down solidly. 'I was eating the dirt at the very bottom of the trench,' he said. 'I thought my time had come when my tin helmet was struck by a piece of flying shrapnel, giving quite a sharp "ding" and scraping some paint off.'

A19-50 was a total write-off—it had received a direct hit and became nothing more than a smoking shell. The fuselage of A19-37 was punctured by dozens of small holes—it had recently been flown by Ed Woolcott and Bob Hasenohr in an attack against Alexishaven. The fuselage and wings of A19-11 were similarly holed—that aircraft had been flown by Keith Nicholson and Ken Delbridge in a raid on Madang with a formation of American Liberators. The fourth Beaufighter to sustain damage from shrapnel that day was A19-5 but Norm Fraser's men were able to repair it in time for George Gibson and Eric Lusk to take it out on a strafing mission about 10 days later.

During the raid a rather twitchy Adjutant had been skittering around the June Valley camp on his long, thin legs, with his helmet planted firmly on his bald head, the haversack containing his gas mask strapped to his chest and brandishing his Smith & Wesson while booming out: 'Don't panic! Don't panic! I'll shoot the first man that panics!' John Laverty believed that one or two airmen had their rifles trained on the Adjutant in case he really did go off the deep end.

At the evening meal Frank Simpson delighted the airmen in their Mess by reciting a piece of doggerel, which included the following:

One day the Japs sent bombers, to belt us for a row,
But the boys stood fast beside their kites, prepared to face the
foe.

While miles away at camp, they say, old 'Splitpin' lost his cool,
And said if one man panicked, he'd shoot the bloody fool!

Operational Group released the Squadron from active status until it had repaired the damaged aircraft. Beaufighters were next ordered out on 23 April with directions to strafe the tracks being used by the enemy in the vicinity of Komiatum. Four of 'B' Flight's aircraft took off from Ward's at 11.54am and were away for two hours 45 minutes. They were led by George Gibson and Eric Lusk in A19-5. Others on that mission were Joe Newman and Ron Binnie (A19-90), Keith Eddison and Max Allott (A19-3), with Harold Berg and Harold Kelly (A19-74). Those aircraft made a total of 18 passes in the target area, including attacks on the wireless station. A rumour went around the strip that an aircraft had been lost that day but the waiting groundstaff were greatly relieved when the four Beaufighters appeared shortly after 2pm. Elton Marsden was particularly pleased to see A19-3 fly over Ward's—he had applied the camouflage paint to it in the hangar at Richmond, flown in it to Bohle River and again on the flight to Moresby. He and Wally Navin had come to regard it as 'their' aircraft and had kept it in the tip-top condition prescribed by its usual pilot—Cec McKew.

News had also come in about a Short Sunderland Empire flying boat. The report asserted that it had ditched and sunk about 35km south of the Basilisk Light and that the crew, all the mail and 22 RAAF passengers had been lost. Doug Raffin and George Dick took off in A19-6 at 6.15am on 23 April and carried out a parallel track search from the given data. But they received a recall message after flying for about 40

minutes because another aircraft had found the flying boat on a reef. Although none of the mail was reported to have been recovered, 18 of the passengers were rescued.

Ten days later Adjutant Wearne arranged for the entire Squadron to turn out for a formal parade—not to commemorate Anzac Day but to mark Easter Sunday. The printed Order of Service listed the sequence of events: The National Anthem, an Invocatory Prayer, General Confession, the Apostle's Creed, Hymn No. 88 ('Abide With Me'), The Lesson (Wing Commander Walker), Chaplain's Address (Reverend Kirby) and the Blessing. The Commanding Officer then addressed his men concerning the major part the unit had played in the war against Japan and the future prospects for Beaufighters in the New Guinea campaign. Five of the pilots on that parade received postings to southern units during the last week of April: Bob Brazenor, Jack Sandford and Col Campbell (to No. 5 Operational Training Unit), Cec McKew (to School of Army Co-operation) and Dick Roe (to Townsville Personnel Pool). Five navigators received postings out of the Squadron at the same time: Arthur Jaggs, Jim Yeatman and Fred Anderson (to No. 5 Operational Training Unit) and Peter Fiskén and Bill Clarke (to Townsville Personnel Pool). Replacement navigators were Keith McCarthy, Bill Coleman, John Hullin and Bernie Le Griffon whilst the incoming pilots were Bill Boulton, Bob Mills, Noel Webster and Bill Cosgrove.

While Bill Cosgrove was on his way north he met Col Campbell and Jim Yeatman in the bar of the Queens Hotel in Townsville. The two tour expired aircrew gave Bill Cosgrove a bottle of whisky to give to their good friend Arthur Ferrier. When this was handed over in June Valley, Bill magnanimously offered to help Arthur to dispose of it. Wally Bell also offered his help. By the time the trio got to the bottom of the bottle they were in a most mischievous mood and entertained themselves and the rest of the camp by hiding behind different tents and yelling out at the top of their voices 'Blackjack's a bastard. Blackjack's a bastard.' Next morning the Adjutant ordered them to line up outside the Commanding Officer's

tent immediately after breakfast in full kit — webbing, haversack, sidearms, and steel helmet. They were left standing in the hot morning sun for nearly an hour while Brian Walker dealt with some files on his desk, giving the miscreants an occasional glance. The three non-commissioned officers had such thick heads that they had no clear recollection of exactly what their Commanding Officer said about the previous evening's affair but they assumed that his words were far from polite.

There was good news for some. Eight airmen learnt that they had become fathers since leaving Australia:

- Eric Horne's daughter, Patricia Margaret, was born on 17 August 1942.
- Corporal Gallary's daughter, Judith Ann, was born on 4 January 1943.
- Corporal Hine's son, Leslie David, was born on 24 January 1943.
- Bill Stein's daughter, Helen Dawn, was born on 29 January 1943.
- Andy Herron's daughter, Barbara Constance, was born on 27 January 1943.
- Corporal Hunter's daughter, Jacquiline, was born on 1 May 1943.
- Bill Schofield's son, Colin George, was born on 10 May 1943.

Bill Marsh was promoted to Squadron Leader rank in May 1943 and must have decided to pass the news on to each member in person; he made everybody call at his Sick Quarters for a TAB booster that day. His needlework produced the usual crop of sore arms and severe headaches but those were relatively minor compared with the sufferings of the batch of men attended to by a visiting dentist who drilled holes, inserted fillings, pulled teeth and attended to dental hygiene. His pedal-operated drill was especially disliked.

On 2 May George Gibson and Eric Lusk flew A19-107 from Garbutt to Ward's loaded with fresh meat, tomatoes

and oranges as well as some beer and spirits. Five nights later there was a wild party in the Aircrew Mess during which Eric helped three others to seize the Commanding Officer, remove his pants and toss them up into the rafters. Brian Walker laughed at the time but the following morning he told the four perpetrators that although they had gone a little too far, he was putting the incident down to their exuberant spirits.

When 10 Mitchells and eight Beaufighters attacked Madang on 8 May they were intercepted by Japanese fighters but only A19-74 (Keith Nicholson and Ken Delbridge) was damaged. Because of the intensity of the anti-aircraft fire they made only one run across the target during which the fuselage of A19-32 (George Gibson and Eric Lusk) was holed by ground fire. The aircraft then flew along the coast and attacked a 1,000 tonne transport vessel which was crowded with troops. Nineteen Beaufighter sorties against Gasmata were ordered for 13 and 14 May. On their first attack they strafed a bomber on the ground and another which was resting on trestles. There were no enemy aircraft at Gasmata on the second attack but the anti-aircraft positions at the eastern end of the strip were strafed as well as a hut containing about 20 belly tanks, a six-metre open boat and a rubber dinghy containing three men.

When an enemy convoy was reported to be near Arawe, Fortresses, Mitchells and Beaufighters were dispatched to deal with it on 15 May but it was not at the given position. During the return flight, Bill Cosgrove and Bernie Le Griffon (A19-111) sighted a 75 metre submarine on the surface. The pilot dived steeply from a great height, gave a long burst, saw his cannon shells hit the vessel at the waterline below the conning tower and saw sailors fire four shots from the vessel's forward gun. On his second run the pilot raked the submarine from stem to stern but by that time the enemy vessel had started to submerge. Wau was subjected to a heavy bombardment by Fortresses on 17 and 18 May as a consequence of the decision by Generals MacArthur and Blarney to seize the Nassau Bay area as a curtain raiser for the assault on Lae.

Bostons and Beaufighters attacked enemy troops at Nassau Bay on 23 May and friendly forward soldiers reported that the aircraft had inflicted considerable casualties.

The planning staff issued orders for Fortresses, Liberators, Lightnings and Beaufighters to attack Lae on 25 May but because of bad weather the operation was re-scheduled for the following day. This involved staging through Dobodura:

- Keith Eddison and Max Allot (A19-7)
- Bob Bennett and Phil Edwards (A19-87)
- Bill Cosgrove and Bernie le Griffon (A19-24)
- George Gibson and George Carnegie (A19-101)
- Maurice Ball and Greg Hardman (A19-6)
- Bob Mills and Bill Coleman (A19-106)

They failed to rendezvous with the other formations because of refuelling difficulties at Dobodura so that when they got near Lae four Zeros were waiting for them and as the Lightning top-cover had left the Beaufighters prudently decided not to press on with their attack. George Carnegie flew with George Gibson that day. He had crewed up with Ron Downing at Richmond but because of hospitalization at Concord, became a spare navigator when he rejoined the Squadron in New Guinea. He flew as an extra navigator with Bob Cummins and Alan Kirley on a barge sweep near Salamaua and with John Drummond and Ron Allen when they attacked targets in the Mubo area. On 8 May he flew with Keith Eddison in an attack on Madang when Max Allott was medically unfit; Captain John Court, the Army Liaison Officer was a passenger on that flight. George was scheduled to fly with Keith Eddison for the attack on Lae on 27 May but Max Allott came to George's tent the previous evening and said that as he was now recovered, he would fly with his own pilot the following morning.

Max Allott flew with his pilot on the early morning strike on Lae when their Beaufighter (A19-24) was shot down by anti-aircraft fire. Damien Parer had intended to fly in that

aircraft but withdrew at the last moment. Others in the formation that day were:

- Maurice Ball and Greg Hardman (A19-6)
- Bob Bennett and Phil Edwards (A19-87)
- Chas Harris and Don Miller (A19-15)
- Bill Cosgrove and Col Harvey (A19-102)
- John Drummond and Ron Allen (A19-3)

Keith Eddison was in the lead aircraft and, in company with Chas Harris, intended to strafe the anti-aircraft positions as they ran across the strip. He led the formation down the Markham Valley at low level and then increased his height to about 1,000 feet just before he reached the small hill near Jacobsen's Plantation. The Beaufighters met intense fire from the ground as soon as they breasted the hill and commenced their dive for their strafing runs. Col Harvey believed that the pilot of the lead airplane was hit at that stage because the aircraft just kept flying on, getting lower and lower, until it hit the ground and went 'whoomph'; Bob Bennett was on the other side of the strip and glimpsed a flash of flame as something exploded on his port side, which he thought might be an ammunition dump. Maurice Ball caught a brief glimpse of his leader's aircraft crashing into the ground after it was hit.

Bill Clarke was another spare navigator in the Squadron; he flew with a number of pilots and completed 18 operational sorties before returning to Australia on 22 April at the end of his operational tour. He flew as the navigator on three sorties with Des Moran-Hilford during September, five with Cec McKew during October followed by seven with Dick Roe during October and November. He came back from one operation covered in gore and feathers—his cupola had been smashed by a birdstrike. During his last operational sortie he had a bird's eye view of the Battle of the Bismark Sea from the navigator's cupola of A19-3 flown by his Commanding Officer.

Bill Cameron and Eric Lusk were uncomfortable occupants of the rear cupola for they were both tall fellows and were

forever scraping their heads against its inside or bumping them against its interior rim when they bent down to adjust the radio gear. On the other hand, men of shorter stature — such as Don Kirkwood and Fred Cassidy — would sometimes sit on a parachute pack in order to secure an unimpeded view of the countryside through their perspex cupola.

Getting to and from targets on the north coast of New Guinea did not call for any great navigation skill and few observers bothered to maintain a still air plot. Eric Lusk never did so and wasn't aware that anyone else did except, perhaps, the navigator in the lead aircraft. Harold Kelly was never in a lead aircraft and was thus never responsible for getting a formation to its target on time. But being a conscientious and meticulous young fellow, he kept a still air plot going all the time, as well as marking his actual position, derived from visual observations. Fred Cassidy also maintained a dead reckoning plot during every operational flight. He and Mos Morgan got together before take-off and worked out a complete and thorough flight plan which took account of



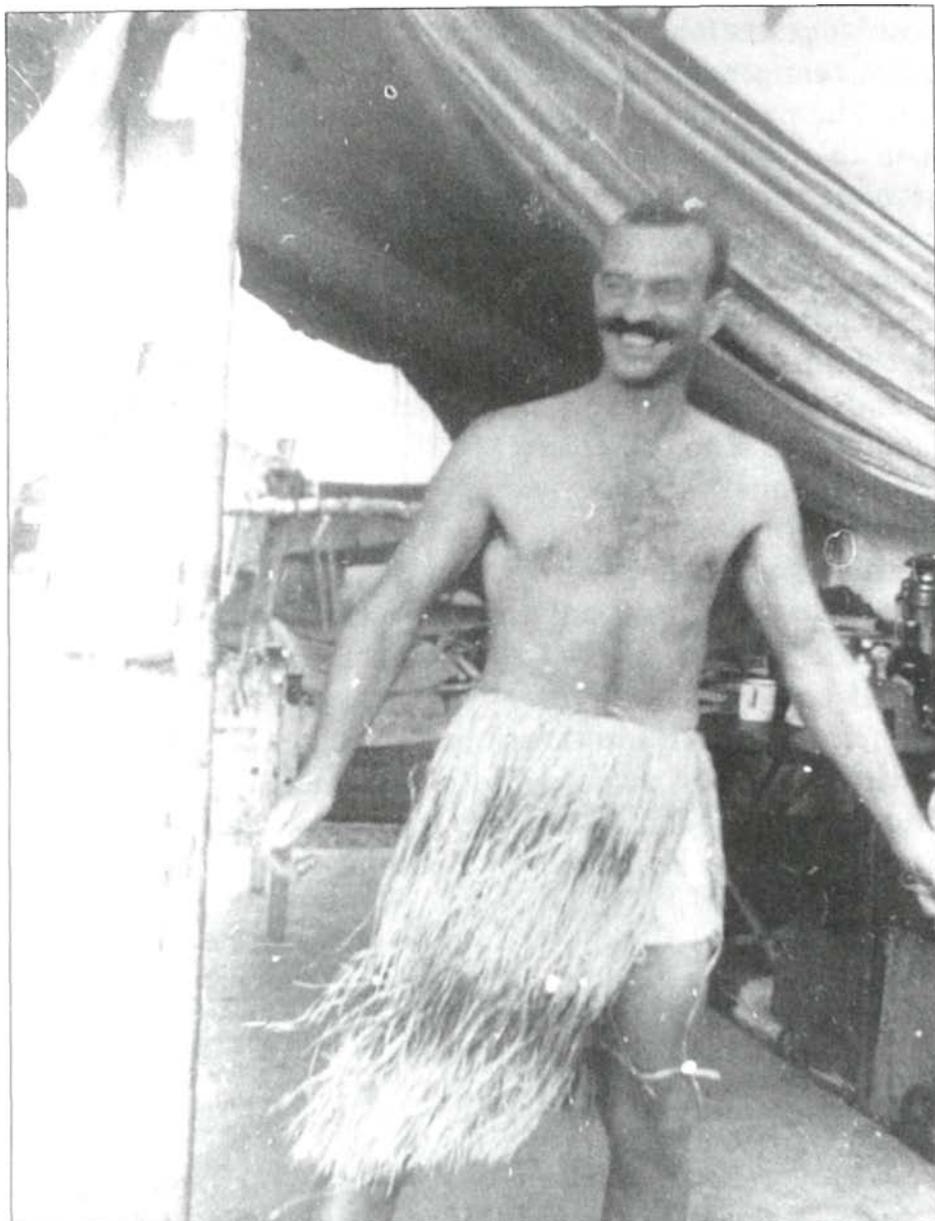
Fred Cassidy, navigator, and his pilot, Mos Morgan, Moresby, January 1943. (Courtesy Fred Cassidy)

possible places for an emergency landing, navigational hazards, prominent geographical features and what landmarks to look for. The paucity of topographical information on the aeronautical charts of the day did not augur well for highly accurate navigation but the Beaufighter crews were much better off than other aviators in the area. When Lieutenant Marion Kirby and the 80th Fighter Squadron arrived in New Guinea the only maps the pilots had were from the National Geographic magazine showing the coastal outline and a few inland peaks. Their standard procedure after an attack on Buna was to fly on a heading of 180 degrees until they saw the sea and turn right for Moresby if they saw reefs at the coastline.

Brian Walker flew out of Moresby in a Beaufighter when he left No. 30 Squadron during May and as he had not signed the official Form EE/77, Arthur Ferrier chased him as he taxied out to the strip, waving the book at him. But the Commanding Officer just grinned at him, gave a rude signal and took off. Arthur described it as a typical action, appropriate for a non-conformist who felt compelled to flout rules he considered to be irksome and nothing more than bumph.

Years later, Brian Walker told a reporter that although he loved flying there were times when he and the Air Force had some disagreements. 'I should have been tossed out, actually,' he said. 'I was court martialled twice for "minor misdemeanours" and lost a bit of rank but you couldn't say that life wasn't exciting.' During his aviation career he was involved in 10 accidents and walked away from them all.

After an attack on Lae in A19-4 on 18 November 1942 he had to make a belly landing at Ward's because enemy anti-aircraft guns had shot out his hydraulics. He and his navigator, John Mason, walked away from that Beaufighter. Later, when the engine of A19-38 failed during a test flight he had to splash the aircraft into the shallow water on Pyramid Reef, not far from Moresby. He and his navigator, Bill Cameron, swam around until picked up by the rescue launch. His unconventional ways brought a measure of dislike from some



'Black Jack' Walker, Commanding Officer, in entertainment mode, Moresby, December 1942. (Courtesy Brian Walker)

quarters and a deal of approval from others. He fussed over his aircrew, with the sole object of keeping his pilots and navigators at a high level of proficiency in order to secure maximum destruction of enemy targets by his squadron. His drive for maximum effort had its effect on the aircraft

maintenance technicians, who worked long hours in unbelievably difficult conditions to give their Commanding Officer sufficient serviceable aircraft for the assigned operational tasks. They often thought their efforts were not fully appreciated but they were greatly encouraged by the remarks made by the Governor General, Lord Gowrie, when he visited the Unit on 27 May.

Brian Walker's outstanding flying ability was admired by everyone and his displays in the skies over Moresby were conversational topics among aircrew and groundstaff alike. Eric Lusk called him a gifted aviator whose consuming interests were aircraft and flying anything he could get his hands on. John Mason, his normal navigator, recalled the day they crossed the Owen Stanley in cloud:

Just as we lined up to get through the Gap we flew into thick cloud. There was no room to turn round so Brian maintained his heading for the Markham Valley, pushed his throttles as far forward as he could and, at full bore our poor aircraft was just hanging more-or-less vertically on its props. He took the Beau right up beyond 13,000 feet—a superb piece of flying. Had I been with any other pilot I'm sure we'd have been finished.

New crews were introduced to the tactics used within the Squadron by taking part in a mock operation which ended with a weapons attack on the wreck in the Harbour. This was the hulk of what had been the British freighter, *Pruth*, which had left San Francisco early in November 1927 with a cargo of galvanized wire, automobiles and oil. She had called at Samarai to pick up copra and was putting in to Port Moresby when she ran aground. Captain Hudson felt he could move off alone at the next high tide but a severe tropical gale blew the vessel onto the reef where she still lies.

On 31 May, seven of the new crews were briefed to take six Beaufighters out on a mock operation, culminating in a line astern attack with cannons and machine guns on the wreck of the *Pruth*. Bob Harding and Hedley Cane were to fly A19-73

and take another crew—Frank King and John Tyrell—as passengers. For the weapons portion of the exercise, Bob Harding, the leader of the second formation, was briefed to attack the midships portion while the pilot in the following aircraft was to attack the bow of the wreck. That pilot was closely watching the aircraft in front and saw that his formation leader was heading towards the ship's bow, which meant that he could be hit if the following aircraft pressed on with the attack. 'I chose not to fire my guns,' said Doug Raffin. 'I had my leader clearly in view and saw that he wasn't going to clear the ship at all, being at deck height and coming up fast on the big mast poking up into the sky. The next thing I saw was a sheet of flame from the starboard engine, after which the Beaufighter flipped over onto its back and plunged into the sea.' The starboard mainplane of A19-73 was sheared clean off when it hit the ship's mast and sailed up into the air. 'A good part of my vision from the cockpit was obscured as it whipped past my aeroplane,' he said.

The two pilots in the lead aircraft, Harding and King, were killed in that tragic accident. King's tour of duty in New Guinea had lasted exactly three days. Amazingly, the two navigators, Cane and Tyrell, managed to free themselves from the submerged Beaufighter and were picked up by an RAAF rescue launch. That lucky pair spent three or four days in hospital having some minor cuts and bruises attended to.

May had been a busy month for the men in Servicing Flight; they had worked long hours to finish aircraft inspections and to complete repairs on battle damaged aircraft. Their tasks had included work on A19-73, which had been flown by Bob Harding and Hedley Cane on a barge attack on 27 April and needed adjustments to its boost pressures, on A19-74 which was slightly damaged on 8 May during the attack on Madang and on A19-106 which was last flown by Doug Raffin and George Dick during the attack on Gasmata on 12 May. In addition, they had carried out unit acceptance checks on A19-7, A19-101 and A19-107 which had been ferried up from Forest Hill.

The Japanese had continued to send aircraft to Moresby during May but they did little damage.

A reconnaissance aircraft appeared on 13 May and the next night a flare and about 12 bombs were dropped. Two nights later the enemy made three raids on Moresby during which they dropped flares, fired guns at the searchlights and dropped a few bombs. Harry Tayler was at the pictures at the time but went up a nearby hill to get a better view of the raid and the action of the American fighters which chased the intruders away.

Some 25 bombers and 50 fighters were intercepted and turned back from Moresby by Allied fighters just before the men of No. 30 Squadron stood down for lunch on 17 May. There was another alert on 20 May and on 26 May two more reconnaissance aircraft came over Moresby at a great height. Following the alert on 29 May all Beaufighter crews were put on aircraft standby but they were not scrambled because the raid did not develop.

During the last week of May Les Braund began the issue of green mosquito nets which offered greater protection than the white ones because of their smaller mesh and that sparked a latrine-ogram to the effect that the Squadron was moving to Dobodura. This was a most unwelcome prospect for it was a most unattractive and unhealthy place where nearly every serviceman had dermatitis and where malaria was rife. Eric Lusk and others had spent a night in open sided huts of an American unit there and as they had no nets the mosquitoes made a feast of them. 'Twenty-one days later, bingo!' said Eric, 'I was slapped into hospital with malaria, along with about two thirds of the others in the party.'

George Drury and Dave Beasley had been taken to that airfield after extricating themselves from A19-75 which had crashed in nearby marshy lowlands. Enemy groundfire had severed a fuel line and the pilot had tried to reach Dobodura on one motor. They brought back highly uncomplimentary reports about the place, particularly about the perpetually wet conditions. Later, the Beaufighter flown by Col Campbell

and Jim Yeatman got bogged in the parking area to the side of the strip and during their stay they were accommodated in a hospital tent where the legs of the camp stretcher sank some 20cm into the squelchy ground. On another occasion Ken Golledge and Frank Simpson were passengers in a Beaufighter returning to Moresby, when John Drummond and Dick Roe took off from Dobodura together. Dick's aircraft was slightly ahead and his wheels threw up slush from the waterlogged strip onto the front windscreen of the accompanying aircraft. As a result John Drummond did not have clear forward vision and his aircraft ploughed through the top foliage of some trees at the end of the strip. Ken Golledge recalls that Frank Simpson was an extremely worried man for a minute or two.

Len Vial and Ralph Nelson had landed at Dobodura in A19-55 after an attack on Salamaua on 11 February and, because of cloud build, had not been able to get back to Moresby. During their forced stay they were accommodated by an Australian Army unit. 'We were prevented from going down to the river during daylight as the Japanese soldiers on the other side had machineguns trained in our direction,' Ralph said. 'We could go down there at night for a wash but we had to follow a path formed by white tapes. I really learnt to respect those AIF blokes who nonchalantly smoked and talked while enemy bullets zapped through the trees.'

Bill Boulton and Harold Kelly in A19-27 led six other aircraft out of Moresby, through The Gap, and down to Dobodura where they stayed overnight on 1 June in order to be ready for an early take-off the next morning. The Operations Order issued by No. 9 Operational Group directed that the Beaufighters attack the plantations, tents, huts, houses and supplies at Bogadjim which, it was thought, might be occupied by about 600 men. The briefing sheet given to the crews at the briefing in June Valley was signed by the Squadron's Operations Controller, Flying Officer G. W. Holmes, and included the following information:

- Beaufighter Callsigns: (CW) Q8R: (Voice) UCALLY
- Authentication Word: CREPUSCULAR
- Fighter Callsigns: HONEY
- Oro Bay Sea Rescue: MARGIN (on 766kcs)
- Bomber Command: YSZ (on 6165kcs)

Airmen who went on that detachment were entitled to crew pay at the rate of two shillings a day and included Don Bain, Bill Bartlett, Dick Beynon, Ben Blohm, Les Bromilow, John Butler, Andy Cowen, Jim Dunn, Alwyn Green, Stan Jeffries, Trevor Hardy, Roy Meers, Ron Morrison, Geoff Muncaster, Jack O'Donnell and Jim Ryan.

The Beaufighters left Dobodura at 6.30am, thoroughly strafed the village of Bogadjim and its environs and landed at 10.10am. They refuelled, took some of the groundstaff on board, returned to Moresby and landed there at 2.10pm on 2 June.

Villages in the Markham Valley were strafed by a formation of Beaufighters led by Maurice Ball and Greg Hardman (A19-6) on 8 June. They were strafed again by another formation led by Bill Boulton and Keith McCarthy (A19-7) on 11 June. A19-101 (Joe Newman and Ron Binnie) developed hydraulic trouble and as the pilot could not get his undercarriage down he had to make a belly landing at Ward's.

The Army Liaison Officer briefed nine crews about the villages of Kiapit and Boana which they were to attack on 15 June. The participants were to be:

- Maurice Ball and Greg Hardman (A19-6)
- Ken Wilson and George Moore (A19-97)
- Bob Mills and Bill Coleman (A19-104)
- Bill Cosgrove and Bernie Le Griffon (A19-111)
- Chas Harris and Don Miller (A19-15)
- Doug Raffan and George Dick (A19-106)
- Ed Woolcott and Bob Hasenohr (A19-93)
- Keith Nicholson and Ken Delbridge (A19-74) [Reserve.]



*George Dick, navigator, Milne Bay, July 1943.
(Courtesy George Dick)*

Keith Nicholson had started his take-off when Ed Woolcott was about halfway down the strip. He saw Woolcott's starboard tyre burst, the aircraft list to one side and slide along on a propeller and engine cylinders fly through the air. He was horrified to see A19-93 somersault, crash to earth towards the end of the strip and burst into flames. Keith flew through the smoke of the wreckage and took his place in the formation. The sight of his two friends being incinerated had upset him considerably and when his starboard engine began to leak oil as he neared the Owen Stanley Range, he decided to abandon the mission and return to base. The Medical Officer was down at the strip as was his custom and the crash so horrified him that for a second or two he sat rigidly in his ambulance with his hands gripping the steering wheel. Ed Woolcott was killed instantly and his body was consumed by flames so intense that the fire crew were unable to get close to extinguish them. The rear fuselage of the Beaufighter did not burn; it was thus possible to gently extricate the unconscious navigator, place him on a stretcher where he was briefly examined by Bill Marsh and John Farquhar who then rushed him to No. 3 Medical Receiving Station. Bob Hasenohr died

three days later from massive internal injuries he received when his body crashed forwards into the edge of his navigation table.

All aircrew and many groundstaff attended the funeral services conducted by Padre Kirby. By the end of the war nearly 4,000 servicemen had been buried in Bomana Cemetery—a tranquil oasis of green in the brown hills about 20km from Port Moresby.

When No. 15 Aircraft Repair Depot handed over A19-102 on completion of major repair work, Maurice Ball elected to take it for a test flight on Saturday 19 June. He went through all the cockpit checks at the end of the strip and as everything seemed to be perfectly in order he went ahead with the take-off. However, he was unable to get the tail to lift so as he went down the strip he kept easing the throttle forward, giving a bit of forward stick as well as a bit of forward trim tab. The aircraft eventually got into the air, still in the tail-down position and went upwards—just like an elevator—at a little above stalling speed. He realised that the aircraft simply wasn't flyable and appreciated that the correct thing to do was to get back on the ground. So he just cut the motors and dropped like a brick onto the strip. Being very nearly at the end of the strip he followed the correct procedure and collapsed the undercarriage, expecting that one leg would fold up before the other thus putting the aircraft into a ground loop and incurring little damage other than bent airscrews. However, both legs came down together and the Beaufighter skidded along the last few metres of the runway, skipped over a ditch and rammed into an earth embankment. The two fitters who were standing behind the pilot's seat scrambled over him, opened the top hatch and were out and away within a second or so of the impact. Maurice was slightly injured when his forehead struck the gunsight but he was able to undo his harness, climb out of the burning aircraft and get clear in case it exploded. His navigator, Greg Hardman, was not injured in the accident but Bill Marsh took both men in the ambulance to his sick quarters where they were examined and treated.

Investigation showed that the control wires to the trim tabs had been reversed.

By the middle of the year, Corporal Pivott had made new entries in the paybooks of airmen who had been reclassified. Few of them had bothered to adorn the sleeves of their shirts with metal propellers—the visible indicator of their new status as Leading Aircraftmen. They included:

- Fitters IIE — Agnew, Cotterill, Deacon, Edgar, Fenwick, Horler, Jenkins, Rundmann, Smith L. and Wighton.
- Fitters IIA — Kay, Nipperess, Rowley, Scrimshaw, Tuckwell, Walker and Wohlfart.
- Flight Riggers — Ampt, Coates, Devlin, Gazzard, Horne A., Horne E., Navin and Rhodes.
- Flight Mechanics — Allen, Armstrong, Bourne, Brennan, Edwards, Golledge, Jeffries, Keating, Laing, Lovett, McNaught, Muncaster, Parker and Reinhard.
- Fitter Armourers — Blohm, Bond, Byles, Collins, Gemmell, Kenny, Lahne, McIntosh and Rapsey.
- W/T Operators — Angus, Blackman, Bockman, Britton and Robertson.
- Wireless Maintenance Mechanics — Clarke, Dorman and Hunt.
- Electricians — Joyes, Lambert and Leverett.
- Mess Stewards — Fitzpatrick and Smith M.
- Instrument Repairer — Wolff.
- Photographer — Williams.
- Storekeeper — Russell.

Four Beaufighters fulfilled No. 30 Squadron's last operational mission from Ward's when they joined with RAAF Bostons in an attack on enemy ground troops on 18 June. Because of the ridges, ravines and mountain slopes, the Beaufighters had to attack downhill at Kitchen Creek and uphill at Stoney Creek — a tactic that was capably handled by Maurice Ball, Bill Cosgrove, Bob Mills and Arthur Thompson. Australian groundtroops reported that the strafing was extremely accurate.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Rain, Rain, Rain

IN their push towards Australia during 1942 the Japanese had taken control of New Britain and the northern part of New Guinea with the intention of capturing Port Moresby. Elements of General Hyakutake's Seventeenth Army were to attack over the Owen Stanley Range and the Navy's Kawaguchi Force was to take Milne Bay which would be useful as a strategic air and naval base for a flanking attack on Moresby.

Japanese headquarters had issued a general order for their Milne Bay operation: 'At the dead of night quickly complete the landing and strike the white soldiers without reserve. Unitedly smash to pieces the enemy lines and take the aerodrome by storm.' Rhetoric such as this was characteristic of many of the enemy's general orders.

Two Japanese cruisers, three destroyers, two submarine chasers and two transports came through the entrance to the Bay and landed enemy soldiers on its northern shore. They were engaged by elements of Milne Force which consisted of 18th Brigade of the 7th Division AIF and the 7th Militia Brigade. RAAF Kittyhawks, operating from Gurney in the most appalling conditions, provided close support; at times they were firing their guns before their undercarriages were fully retracted. Nearly 300 of their gun barrels were worn out after firing some 200,000 rounds of ammunition.

But the invasion failed. Field Marshal Slim later wrote: 'It was the Australian soldiers who first broke the spell of the invincibility of the Japanese Army.'

The Americans had put 1,600 of their engineers ashore at Milne Bay and these had constructed No. 1 Strip—Gurney, named after Squadron Leader C.R. Gurney, a well known QANTAS pilot on Empire flying boats. This strip was inland from the head of the bay and was virtually a swamp laid with a matting of interlocking steel plates forming a runway 1500m long and 24m wide. At first the Kittyhawk pilots found it extremely difficult to control their aircraft, skidding and sliding along the slippery metal planks and sometimes swinging off the runway to bog in the soft mud where groundstaff sweated in the slush to manhandle them back on to the runway.

Heavy rain fell non-stop for hours on end. The torrential downpours covered Gurney Strip with so much water that waves rose in front of Kittyhawks when they landed. It was not until the American engineers designed a kind of bulldozer operated squeegee to sweep away the liquid mud that the strip was safe for strangers.

Three of No. 30 Squadron's Beaufighters were among the first batch of strangers to use that strip. Led by Ted Jones, they flew from Bohle River, through Cairns, and landed at Gurney on 6 September with orders to assist in the operational activities of Nos. 75 and 76 Kittyhawk Squadrons and the Hudsons of No. 6 Squadron. When the crew of one of the Hudsons reported sighting a Japanese cruiser and destroyer near Normanby Island, just across the Ward Hunt Strait from Milne Bay, Beaufighters, Beauforts and Hudsons, with Kittyhawks as top cover, were ordered to attack those vessels on 7 September. Unfortunately, A19-13 (Len Vial and Les Hanks) ran off the slippery metal strip during take-off, hit the wingtip of a parked Hudson and demolished both aircraft.

The Squadron's first operational mission was undertaken by Ted Jones and Harry Suthons (A19-49) accompanied by George Sayer and Ron Shaw (A19-53). They were assigned

the task of strafing the enemy ships so that the bombers would have a clear run for the release of their weapons. However, neither of the warships was seriously damaged by the bombing attack.

Harry Suthons noticed that people were surprised to see his aircraft land at Gurney. It transpired that a Kittyhawk pilot had reported seeing his aircraft in flames at the target area and had assumed it had been shot down. What the fighter pilot had seen were the vivid flashes from the four 20mm cannons in the nose of the Beaufighter.

Next day the two Beaufighters rejoined the Squadron at Bohle River but flew back to Milne Bay the following Friday when aircrew, aircraft and groundstaff of 'A' Flight arrived there on detachment from North Queensland. The only operational work given to the detachment during its 14 day stay at Milne Bay was an occasional reconnaissance sortie of the islands in the D'Entrecasteaux Group.

In the meantime, the rest of the Squadron had moved out of Queensland and were now at their operational base at Port Moresby. Four of the Squadron's groundstaff—Flight Sergeant Herron, Sergeant Hammond, Corporal Sawtell and LAC Rhodes—were sent to Milne Bay to remove the usable equipment from A19-13. They did not blow the aircraft up, as had been the original intention, because the wreckage was taken over by a detachment of No. 15 Repair and Salvage Unit.

Because things at the June Valley camp and down at Ward's Strip were shaping up reasonably well, the Commanding Officer decided to replace the 'A' Flight crews and aircraft with crews and aircraft from 'B' Flight. The new detachment was to leave for Milne Bay on 25 September and was to include:

- Cec McKew and Ted Lasscock (A19-3)
- Col Campbell and Jim Yeatman (A19-10)
- Earl Wild and Col Harvey (A19-38)
- Des Moran-Hilford and Bill Clarke (A19-50)
- Jack Sandford and Arthur Jaggs (A19-39)

On the morning of their departure there was a cross wind at Ward's and as Jack Sandford's aircraft lifted off it started to drift to starboard. Some men from a works unit who were doing some airfield maintenance had parked a truck very close to the strip's edge and its cabin was struck by the Beaufighter's starboard wheel. The wheel twisted through 90 degrees and bent backwards, damaging the wing's trailing edge. Ron Morrison, an airframe fitter, was standing behind the pilot and saw the worker on the back of the truck make a beautiful swallow dive into the dirt when he saw the aircraft heading straight for him. The pilot got his machine airborne, made a circuit and confirmed that he would be unable to use his flaps or his undercarriage. He made a flawless belly landing on the dirt emergency strip at Ward's. Unfortunately, the workmen were also excavating a drainage ditch across that strip and had thrown up a metre high pile of earth alongside it. 'The Beaufighter hit that at about 90 knots,' Ron Morrison said. 'She stood up on her nose, crashed back onto the deck and the interior was filled with choking dust. The bottom hatch blew open, flipped me across Sandy, and after both struggling out through the top hatch, we ran away like hell.' The aircraft's back was broken and it was a complete write-off.

The day after the other four Beaufighters of the detachment arrived at Milne Bay they were sent out with a No. 6 Squadron Hudson piloted by Sergeant W.A. Wheeler on an anti-shipping strike. Col Harvey, who had not been able properly to celebrate his birthday the day before, had intended to do a classic intercept plot but decided against that. Instead, he estimated the enemy ship's position, flew an appropriate course and hit his objective on the nose. The four Beaufighters made their strafing runs first, recording many hits on its superstructure which was on fire when the formation retired.

The 'B' Flight detachment at Gurney was not over-burdened with work. The crews completed 10 reconnaissance sorties, usually by a single aircraft, of the Louisiade Archipelago between 10 and 18 October but they had nothing significant to report. Between 12 and 16 October they mounted nine

sorties against Kila Mission and enemy encampments on Goodenough Island.

Because of unserviceability, two of the aircraft scheduled to attack Goodenough targets on 30 October didn't take-off (A19-3, Cec McKew and Ted Lasscock and A1930, Eric Lansell and Harry Suthons). Those that undertook that strafing mission were:

- Brian Walker and John Mason (A19-4)
- Peter Parker and Harold O'Connor (A19-28)
- Ron Uren and John Maguire (A19-33)
- Dick Roe and Bill Clarke (A19-55)
- Col Campbell and Cliff Witheford (A19-10)

The Commanding Officer had flown down from Moresby to see how his detachment was faring and following his report to Group Captain Garing at No. 9 Operational Group, the personnel and aircraft were withdrawn to their operational base at Ward's Strip. No more Beaufighter operational sorties were mounted from Milne Bay during the next eight months, although the Squadron was involved in travel flights to Gurney and Turnbull.

In June 1943 Bill Boulton and Dave Beasley made a travel flight to Milne Bay and Goodenough with the Air Officer Commanding as passenger. The normal procedure after take-off from Turnbull was to fly eastwards for about 35km, round the northern finger of land and set a northerly course. 'Maybe Bill wanted to impress Air Commodore Hewitt,' said Dave, 'for as soon as he got his wheels up he turned sharply to port and tried to literally claw his way up the steep side of the mountain range forming the northern spine.' Dave had his eyes glued to his airspeed indicator, whose needle was hovering around the 90 knots mark. 'How we never slipped backward or stalled during that frighteningly steep climb I'll never know.'

No. 30 Squadron sent a detachment down to Milne Bay on 29 June 1943: five Beaufighters took 10 groundstaff as passengers; the remainder went down in two Dakotas. Wally

Crouch was aboard 'Sleepy Saloon', whilst others were aboard 'Dear Mom'. The groundstaff party consisted of:

- Engine Fitters: Flight Sergeant Ferrier, Sergeants Cowen and Beynon, Corporal McMahon and LACs Deacon and Maddox.
- Airframe Fitters: Flight Sergeant Forde, Sergeants Schofield and Morrison, Corporals Meers and Mortimer and LAC James
- Flight Mechanics: LACs Armstrong, Edwards, Golledge, Home, Keating, Maddock, Rawlinson and Smith.
- Flight Riggers: LACs Carmichael, Collins, Gazzard, Navin, Ryan, Simpson, Webster and Woodhead.
- Fitter Armourers: Corporals Crouch, Hansen, and Mackenzie, LACs Blohm, Collins, Kenney and Rapsey.
- Armourers: Sergeant Forrester, Corporals Eakins, Ellis, and Foster, LACs Gemmell, Hardy and Smith.
- Instrument Repairers: LACs Hewitt and Thompson.
- Wireless Maintenance Mechanic: Corporal Dorman.
- Electricians: LACs Bromilow and Butler.
- Radar Mechanic: Corporal Evans.

Ken Golledge and the Army Liaison Officer were detailed to go down to Milne Bay in the aircraft piloted by Ted Marron. The officer turned up at the aircraft with his tent, camp stretcher, typewriter, steel cabinet, assorted boxes and personal gear. After all that was stowed on board, a truck arrived with crates of canteen supplies for the detachment. Although the pilot managed to get his heavily-loaded Beau-fighter off the strip at Ward's, he had a deal of difficulty in bringing it to a stop on the slippery and much shorter Turnbull Strip.

On the first night at Milne Bay a few desultory shots from Smith & Wesson pistols were fired at the hordes of flying foxes which flew into the camp area at dusk. The next night there were even more pistol shots, accompanied by rifle shots, and by the fourth night the air was rent by a veritable fusillade of shots. A notice in Routine Orders stipulated that

the firing had to stop. Some nights later Don West accidentally discharged his pistol while it was being cleaned and the shot alarmed the black Americans in a nearby tent; they must have thought that their production of jungle juice was under threat. According to Don nearly every soldier in that American engineer's camp had a still going, and they were all making what they referred to as 'moonshine likker.'

The day after the Beaufighters landed at Turnbull three successive details, each consisting of two aircraft, were sent out on convoy escort duties. The convoy consisted of two destroyers and six landing ships tanks of the 4th Echelon, en-route to Woodlark Island in connection with Operation Chronicle. Similar sorties were mounted on the 1, 2, 10, 12 and 14 July. Because of bad weather the four aircraft involved in the mission on 14 July had to land at Vivigani, the newly constructed airfield on Goodenough Island. These were:

- Mike Burrows and Alf Burgoyne (A19-33)
- Bob Mills and Bill Coleman (A19-104)
- Bill Cosgrove and Bernie Le Griffon (A19-111)
- Sid Wallace and Harold Kelly (A19-107)

Air activity over the next six days virtually ceased due to appallingly bad weather in the whole area. There were occasions when the rain was so heavy that Keith Nicholson had to shut down his engines or delay his take-off until he could see the other end of Turnbull Strip. On 10 July he was waiting for the deluge to abate so that he could get away on convoy escort duty when the sight of a bunch of bedraggled seagulls walking along the strip prompted his navigator, Ken Delbridge, to question why they were trying to fly when even the seagulls had given it up.

But the hazards of a take-off in poor weather were relatively minor in comparison to re-entry of the Bay from the China Strait. The Bay was just 11km wide at its entrance and extended westwards for some 32km. The three strips were at the head of the Bay, near the village of Gili Gili. High and heavily-wooded mountains pressed in from three sides, leaving

only a narrow coastal strip soggy with sago palms and mangrove swamps. Some of the summits within 10km of the strips were more than 8,000 feet above sea level. Thick low cloud, heat generated mists or torrential rain made for greatly reduced visibility from the air. Tracking up the Bay through the storm cells was a nightmare and the crew exposed themselves to great risk if they relied too heavily on the radio beacon which was meant to guide them up the centre of the Bay. Moreover, crews were always conscious of the ack-ack batteries positioned along the north and south coastal strips. The batteries would be tracking an aircraft they couldn't see for the murk and might fire if they suspected that the unseen aircraft was a Japanese raider.

Milne Bay was wet, wet, wet and the aircrew had no difficulty in believing that the rainfall was 10 metres a year. The military installations there were overshadowed by the ominous mass of the Stirling Range and other fearsome looking mountains. Heavy rain swept down their steep slopes and invariably brought flash flooding to the creeks and rivers that emptied into the Bay and as these were often preceded by a wall of water, a man was usually stationed up-river to sound a warning. Since the camps, military installations and the strips were in low lying areas not far from the shoreline, that warning was necessary to ensure that equipment was stowed on racks or shelves at least 45cm above ground level.

Soldiers seldom wore their rubber capes since they preferred to get soaked by clean rain rather than by rivers of perspiration. Many of them wore gas goggles to protect their eyes from the stinging attack of wind-driven rain. Young pythons often deserted their waterlogged homes of decaying coconut husks and sought out the warmth of men in their beds. During night time storms it was common to hear the screams of startled airmen as they vacated their beds and hurtled out of their tents, leaving their unwelcome visitors in total possession.

In the early hours of 13 July, Col Weill and Don Kirkwood — who had been on convoy escort duty the previous day — were brought to startled wakefulness by a screaming airman. One

of the airframe fitters — believed to be Ron James — had run into their tent yelling that a slimy snake had slithered down his chest and curled up in the warm space between his legs. Neither the pilot nor the navigator volunteered to oust the reptile from the airman's tent.

The tents were spread under the coconut palms of a Lever Brothers' plantation, and the detachment was parented by No. 100 Squadron, known as the Fiery Mo Squadron, commanded by Wing Commander Bill Lear. George Robertson found it difficult to detect more than a few fair hairs on the upper lips of the young officers trying to emulate the luxuriant gingery red growth sported by their Commanding Officer. Bill Lear's insistence on stringent precautions resulted in a decrease in the incidence of malaria but Arthur Ferrier considered the place to be unhealthy for other reasons; one of his men was having a smoke in the shade of a palm tree when a sizeable nut dropped off, smashed into his right elbow and broke his arm in three places.

The foul weather forced the men of the Beaufighter detachment to stay in their tents for most of the time and although cards and other indoor games occupied them for a day or so, they soon became bored and took to their cots. This short essay by Milton Howard was pinned up on the noticeboard in the crew room until it was ripped down by a senior officer:

Spine bashing is an art. If it is to be practised to the finest degree, it involves talents both physical and mental. It is not sufficient merely to assume a horizontal posture and let it go at that. To secure maximum gratification while in the prone position the mind should be completely relaxed and conscious of the sheer joy of sprawling on the chosen spot in blissful abandon. The more daring exponents, however, find the relaxed style to be dull and uninteresting.

The most widely used equipment is, of course, the common camp stretcher. That is excellent for the novice. However, the superior class of spine bashers often take great pains to construct a personal couch on which to recline, using material such as

camouflage netting, discarded canvas, or chicken wire. Spine bashing hours are controlled by either personal taste, hours of work, level of supervision, the climate, the perambulations of the Disciplinary Warrant Officer or local conventions. Some forward units do not have sufficient spine bashing facilities for everyone, so they display notices restricting their use to 30 minutes per session.

While spine bashing is frowned on by stoics as destroying both body and soul, there is much to be said for it from the point of view of personal morale. To the dilettante it may perhaps be just a physical escape from the trials of Milne Bay. But to the true artist it remains a consummate physical and mental recreation which is highly suitable for those days of rain, rain, and more rain.

Even when it was not raining the air was moist and clammy. Shirts, socks, singlets, slacks, towels and bedding were always damp. Writing pads were so soggy that ink applied from the bottle with a steel pen nib smudged on the page. Envelope flaps became firmly stuck down. Leather boots, belts, wallets, pouches, rifle slings, bayonet scabbards and suchlike acquired a repulsive coating of mildew or green mould. Les Bromilow threw away two leather watchface covers because the straps had rotted and had absorbed the pervasive Milne Bay odour as well as his own sweat. Frank Forde tossed away the shaving brush given to him by his father when the bristles fell out because the moisture had loosened the glue.

The prevailing conditions also affected aircraft equipment. John Butler worked valiantly to keep all the electrical systems dry. John Evans worked equally hard to prevent moisture from affecting circuits in the IFF gear. Ron Dorman had great difficulty in maintaining the AT5/AR8 radio equipment at peak performance—the rubber seals around the navigator's cupolas in A19-33, A19-54 and A19-107 were perished and could not prevent water from dripping down on to the wireless sets. Col Harvey set up radio communications between Turnbull and Ward's Strips but the reception was weak,

perhaps because of the meteorological conditions and the nature of the intervening terrain. Don Angus closed down the watch on the fifth day.

When the weather improved to the extent that flying could be resumed from Turnbull Strip, two Beaufighters flew across to New Britain on 20 July to make a visual and photographic reconnaissance of Gasmata. The report brought back by Clarrie Glasscock and Ray Kelley (A19-104) and the accompanying crew, Keith Nicholson and Ken Delbridge (A19-74), indicated that the Japanese base was being strengthened. As a result of that intelligence, Air Commodore Hewitt ordered the largest mission by Australian aircraft up to that time and issued orders to five of the squadrons in No. 9 Operational Group:

- No. 22 Squadron — 6 Bostons
- No. 30 Squadron — 8 Beaufighters
- No. 75 Squadron — 24 Kittyhawks
- No. 77 Squadron — 14 Kittyhawks
- No. 100 Squadron — 10 Beauforts

Each of No. 77 Squadron's Kittyhawks, which staged through Goodenough for this mission, carried six 18kg bombs. The aircraft were to carry out low level bombing and strafing after the heavier bombers had done their work but, to their dismay, thick cloud and heavy rain prevented them from reaching the target area.

No. 22 Squadron had been withdrawn from support of the Army at Mubo and had moved to Goodenough during July. Their Bostons took off from Vivigani at 6.44am on 22 July for the attack on Gasmata, where they destroyed the building which housed the wireless installation, machinegunned the station and fired at everything that moved. They were still hammering away when the eight Beaufighters arrived so it was some time before they could start on their strafing attack. Their crews reported that low cloud and poor visibility prevented them from observing the results of their actions but they believed they had scored a considerable success. The

ground defences had been stirred up by the time the Beau-fighters arrived, but they sustained only minor damage:

- A19-104 (Bob Mills and Bill Coleman) was holed by 12.7mm bullets.
- A19-106 (Col Wein and Don Kirkwood) was holed by 12.7mm bullets.
- A19-111 (Len Hastwell and Don West) was holed by 12.7mm bullets.
- A19-74 (Keith Nicholson and Ken Delbridge) had under-carriage trouble.
- A19-54 (Graeme Hunt and Arthur Hodges) had about 45cm of its port wingtip blown off by medium ack-ack.

On his return to Turnbull, Graeme came in too fast and didn't touch down until he was past the Duty Pilot's tower and heading for the river at the western end. So he applied his brakes and then ground looped two or three times on the slippery steel planking. He and his navigator were badly shaken by the episode but the pilot managed to avoid further damage to his aircraft.

Maurice Ball was chosen to lead the next mission. 'I only did one job that required a night take-off, [and] that was on 23 July when I took off from Milne Bay to do an armed reconnaissance from Jacquinot Bay to Gasmata.' There was heavy cloud when he and Greg Hardman left Turnbull in A19-104. Vivid flashes of lightning lit up the clouds as they flew towards their landfall in New Britain and passed through the front. 'It was as rough as hell,' Maurice said, 'to the extent that my wingman [Ken Wilson and George Moore in A19-53], instead of flying alongside, flew just above and behind, where it was easier to follow the erratic movements of my aircraft caused by the storm's turbulence.'

An early morning reconnaissance of the coast of New Britain by two Beaufighters on 25 July brought further success as shown by the abbreviated Mission Summary:

At 0640 sighted a 150 ton enemy ship 5 miles north-east of Cape Cunningham. A19-132 [Joe Newman, Ron Binnie and Col

Harvey] attacked it across the beam with a burst along the waterline to the deck. An explosion occurred as the Beaufighter passed over, and grey smoke billowed out. The explosion rocked the ship and it eventually stopped. A19-87 [Ted Marron and Vern Gollan] attacked from the stern, causing fires near the deckhouse. Lifeboat was lowered, strafed, riddled. Both aircraft made further runs and when they left, the ship was wallowing and sinking. Ship may have had wooden hull. It carried oil drums on deck.

An attack on Ring Ring Plantation was ordered on 26 July. Eight Beaufighters joined with a formation of Bostons and although they encountered ack-ack fire at Gasmata, the only aircraft to sustain damage was A19-107 (Sid Wallace and Harold Kelly). Each of the No. 30 Squadron aircraft involved in the attack that day made at least two runs across the target, during which the huts behind the jetty were thoroughly strafed. The aircraft landed at Turnbull at 5.20pm after a flight lasting four hours 40 minutes.

That afternoon two aircraft were sent off on an armed reconnaissance of the coast from Jacquinet Bay to Gasmata, during which the navigators (Alf Burgoyne in A19-33, and Bill Coleman in A19-87) took a considerable number of photographs which were of great interest to the intelligence officers. Six aircraft went out the following morning to attack, in conjunction with Beauforts of No. 100 Squadron, a number of beached vessels near Cape Ludtke.

The Squadron had a rest for the next three days. On Thursday 29 July three Beaufighters carried out an early morning barge sweep from Aloe Passage to Lindenhaven without result. The Squadron's last operation out of Milne Bay was to be a barge sweep from Cape Archway to Gasmata by Graeme Hunt and Arthur Hodges in A19-132 with Ken Wilson and George Moore in A19-53. They took off at 4am on 1 August. 'We ran into the most severe and frightening electrical storm that I've ever seen in all my life,' said George. 'We were very, very lucky to come out of it alive, find our way

to Goodenough, and put ourselves on the ground.' Ken had flown operationally in the Middle East but his experience of the storm was so unnerving that he took himself off flying duties and returned to Australia later that month.

With the lodgement of Admiral Halsey's marines on Bouganville, the remaining portions of the plan determined by General MacArthur in February 1943 (Plan Elkton) were to push the enemy beyond the Sepik River and to capture bases in New Britain. The achievement of those objectives would permit the mounting of further operations westwards along the New Guinea coast and then northwards to the Philippines. The General had abandoned his original plan of capturing Rabaul in favour of neutralising it but he still thought it necessary to land in west New Britain, for that would effectively break the Bismark barrier and give him control of the Vitiaz Strait.

RAAF squadrons were scheduled to play a large part in operations against the Japanese in New Britain and some were ordered closer to that island; the lesser distance to targets would enable an increase in weapons loads and allow aircraft to be given fighter cover for some of their operations.

No. 30 Squadron was ordered to move to Goodenough Island.

CHAPTER NINE

Operations from Vivigani Strip

ING Commander Glasscock had known about the proposed move to Goodenough but the formal instruction was not issued until 12 July. Although classified, everyone in the unit knew that they would soon be leaving Moresby and had begun to sort out what to take and what to leave behind. In the event they took practically everything—not just the official RAAF equipment but things such as their homemade furniture, disused crates, empty barrels, pieces of metal and lengths of timber.

RAAF units were not mobility conscious at that stage and had little or no experience of the logistics task associated with rapid deployments. Dealing with movements which took place after the capture of Cape Gloucester, George Odgers wrote that commanders had to discard many of the odds and ends which had been 'collected by a continuous process of scrounging and magpieing.' Air Commodore Scherger was quite ruthless in seeing that units did not amass equipment which merely bogged them down and made them more or less static. He considered that scrounging was 'a characteristic only of a Service which has been, or is, starved of adequate supplies for all its requirements.'

The June Valley campsite became littered with piled crates and loose equipment relevant to a unit of over 400 men and

some 24 aircraft based in a war zone. Jim Shawcroft, a golf professional from Geelong, sought the aid of Bud Russell and other stores personnel in compiling a movement schedule but a heavy afternoon storm on 24 July had them scurrying around the site throwing tarpaulins over the stacked equipment. After the living tents were struck and the kitchens were closed down, the 12 men of the rear party — which included Joe Erskine and George Disting — were moved to temporary accommodation at No. 42 Operational Base Unit in June Valley. The remainder were taken to Konedobu. Cliff Clohesy said that although their eventual destination was supposed to be a closely guarded secret, each of the trucks that left the Squadron's now vacant campsite had the words 'Curly's Circus Goes To Goodenough' chalked on its side. Adjutant Wearne was not at all amused.

The sea echelon was accommodated for the night with No. 62 Works Wing where they slept on the ground in some old tin huts. The Adjutant ordered all personnel to turn out for a parade at 1.30pm on Sunday, 25 July; after an inspection of kit, small arms and gas masks, the men were taken to the wharf in trucks, marched across the *Peter Sylvester* and on to the *West Cactus*. Don Angus failed to be impressed by their evening meal — soup, minced beef, beans, cheese and the inevitable dog biscuits. Parties of Australian soldiers and American servicemen, bound for Milne Bay, also boarded the ship during the night. Few of the airmen were able to sleep because of the grinding, squealing and thumping noises made by the ship's winches being used to load more cargo into the holds.

The vessel pulled away at 6.25am the following morning. It turned out to be a blustery day, with low clouds and a choppy sea; many of the passengers became seasick and the rails were lined by glassy-eyed airmen who appeared to be taking interest in the heaving water below them. Four of the unit's guards — Bill Haupt, Ralph Lizaars, Wally McIvor and Bill Pringle — felt rather superior to their fellow passengers, for their stomachs were not affected by the ship's motion.

Harry Tayler, who had been a member of a pre-war Citizen Military Forces unit, stood amidships and was intrigued by the flight patterns of the American Mitchells which flew over and around the ship and the Corvette on escort duty.

Life on board what the airmen believed to have been a cattle ship was rough in the extreme. The men were accommodated down in one of the cavernous, hot, noisy and airless holds where the conditions were so bad that many of them elected to sleep in the open up on deck. The only space that Eric Hughes could find in the dark was beside the ship's rail, which was nothing more than a pair of wire hawsers. He was lucky that the ship didn't roll too much during the night, else he might have been tipped overboard.

The airmen were served hard tack during the voyage, whereas the American passengers were not only eating better meals provided by the ship's kitchen but were consuming between meals snacks from tins of emergency rations. They didn't care for the plain biscuits in those rations so they tossed them down to the hungry airmen on the deck below. Geoff Muncaster remarked that the incident reminded him of feeding time at the zoo.

When the *West Cactus* anchored off Goodenough Island at 3pm on Wednesday, 28 July, the men had to disembark via a steep and swinging ladder and jump onto a rising and falling pontoon. The smallest man in the squadron mis-timed his jump, landing on the bobbing pontoon when it was at the bottom of a wave trough, and letting go of his rifle which dropped into the deep water of the anchorage. Adjutant Wearne was persuaded not to put the distraught young man on a charge for losing his weapon.

On 2 August the sea echelon was joined by the Milne Bay detachment and on that day the Squadron despatched seven Beaufighters from Vivigani Strip on operational sorties to New Britain. Two aircraft went on an early morning barge sweep — Bill Cosgrove and Bernie Le Griffon (A19-106) with Graeme Hunt and Arthur Hodges (A19-132). Later that day, an attack was made on Gasmata by Bostons, Kittyhawks and Beaufighters:

- Clarrie Glasscock and Ray Kelley (A19-55) strafed an ack-ack position between the runway and the sea.
- Maurice Ball and Greg Hardman (A19-106) silenced an ack-ack gun.
- Bob Mills and Bill Coleman (A19-104) attacked an ack-ack position at the northern end of the runway.
- Mike Burrows and Alf Burgoyne (A19-33) strafed an ack-ack position at one side of the runway.
- Joe Newman and Ron Binnie (A19-132) fired into the dispersal area at the western end of the runway.

The entire Squadron was accommodated with No. 41 Operational Base Unit while its own camp was being developed. No. 5 Mobile Works Squadron cleared and levelled the sites on which native style huts were erected for the messes, the sick quarters and the operations/intelligence sections. The Squadron occupied its new campsite on the seaward slope of a hill at the northern end of Vivigani Strip on 23 August, whereupon the men got to work to make their tents more comfortable. John McRobbie and Clive Cooke were among those who smartened up the external appearance by constructing a rock bordered garden bed. Jeff Heath made another unsuccessful attempt to get crops of pumpkins and tomatoes from seeds sent up by his sister whilst Don Joyes, an agriculturalist, planted some banana shoots near his tent.

Goodenough is about 38km in diameter from north to south and has a line of six peaks near its centre, the highest being Mount Vineuo at 2,536m. The river valleys are deeply etched into the volcanic massif and their extremely steep sides are internationally known features of the island. On the island's eastern side is a 5km wide coastal plain of raised coral reef. Vivigani Strip was built on that plain close to the shore of Bola Bola Bay, with its white coral runway bearing 170/350 degrees. Most of the wartime military establishments were scattered between the strip and Mud Bay, the pre-war focus of European settlement, which possessed two small jetties. The island is heavily wooded and Joe Green recalls seeing Adjutant

Wearne's astonishment when he first saw the place. In the belief that the Squadron was moving to a bare desert island, the Adjutant had insisted that every scrap of wood be removed from the June Valley camp and taken on board the *West Cactus*.

Beaufighters had been to Goodenough before. Peter Parker and Harold O'Connor (A19-28) with Ron Uren and John Maguire (A19-33) had attacked targets on the south of the island during their detachment at Milne Bay the previous October. Some 300 Japanese had been marooned at Kila Mission after the Kittyhawks of No. 76 Squadron had destroyed their barges on the eve of the enemy's attempt to capture Milne Bay.

The planners at No. 9 Operational Group were anxious for the Beaufighters to mount maximum effort against enemy barges and aerodromes in New Britain immediately. But there were delays. Gwynne Davies, Andy Herron and Wally Bell were concerned that the area allotted to the Squadron's aircraft was not quite finished, hence the Beaufighters had to be parked close together along one of the taxiways pending completion of the dispersal bays. They were also concerned that Servicing Flight was unable to set up its workshops until certain earthworks had been completed and a bulldozer had carved out a road through their area and down to the wharf. When some sort of order was eventually established the groundstaff were able to start their inspections of A19-87 and the repair of other Beaufighters which had major unserviceabilities.

Bill Cosgrove, a one time player with the Richmond Football Club, regarded A19-111 as his aircraft and its nose bore a painting of a tiger's head—the symbol of his erstwhile club. But as the groundcrew were not able to repair a sheared tail wheel pin in time for him to fly that aircraft on a operational sortie set down for 11 August, he went off at 4.55 that morning in A19-74.

He crashed into the sea about 2km beyond the strip and between Vivigani Anchorage and Bola Bola.

Later that day, George Dusting saw the badly broken-up Beaufighter from the air; it was lying on a reef in about a metre of water. Examination of the controls suggested that the pilot might have taken off with his propellers in the wrong pitch. Those aircrew not engaged on flying duties, and many of the Squadron's groundstaff, attended Bill's funeral on the island at 5.45pm that day. The body of the navigator, Bernie Le Griffon, was never recovered.

Flight Sergeant William Nicholas Pax Cosgrove was no novice pilot. This 'Letter to the Editor', signed by VX of Richmond, appeared in a Melbourne sporting newspaper:

Recently, after three years service in Abyssinia, Irak [Sic], Syria, Libya, Egypt and Java, the death in New Guinea of a particularly intrepid airman was announced. At the time of his passing he held the exalted rank of flight sergeant!

Behind his impressive list of campaigns there stand over 60 operational sorties and all the flying hours associated with them. They were gained when the roar of the Luftwaffe and Nippon air forces mocked the skies with their air ascendancy. When in Java, the Japanese ground forces finally captured his drome. Although suffering from a bullet wound, he escaped to trudge through tortuous territory to a seaport 50 miles away. There, with 11 other fliers, he commenced a 44 day journey in an open boat to Australia.

Apart from his flying ability he was marked as 'above average'. He was the possessor of a fine personality.

Although Goodenough was a most attractive location and there were good prospects for interesting ground and air activities, the morale of the men declined for one main reason — the poor quality of the food. Because of a breakdown in the ration supply arrangements, the meal situation for the first few weeks was deplorable. Don West was one of the many who were disgusted. 'Whether you were on a job or had a rest day,' he said, 'you'd sit down to breakfast in the Mess and they'd serve you with six miserable sticks of asparagus

sitting on a piece of dry toast alongside a slice of greasy fried bully beef.'

The story going the rounds at the time was that the barge bringing the rations from the Army depot in New Guinea had run aground near Milne Bay. But Captain Gill, an Army Liaison Officer, believed that the Australian Army had shucked off supply responsibility for units located outside of New Guinea. The men would have accepted their normal but unappetising scale of rations since it was normal for any military situation to be fouled up (SNAFU) but there was general discontent because things were really fouled up (TARFU).

From about the first week in August, the Americans took on the supply of rations to Australian units on Goodenough. The steep and winding road to their depot went past the Squadron's camp and by a variety of ruses the airmen saw to it that fewer cases were on the trucks when they arrived at the depot than when the trucks had picked up their loads from the supply ships. The general scheme involved one or two airmen to get the black American truck driver to slow down or pause at some strategic spot during the ascent, at which time a boarding party would leap onto the back and toss out a dozen or so cases to the runners, who had the job of hiding the loot in the long kunai grass.

The cases would later be broken open and the tinned goods shared out among the participants. American Military Police never found where the stolen rations were hidden. In a number of instances they had been hidden in pits under the tent's floorboards and the location of tins of sausages, bacon, peaches, plums, cream or whatever, were shown on a site plan. Doug Raffin and George Dick shared a number of appetising suppers with their groundcrew, who retrieved the desired items from their in-ground pit.

Only five days after the tragic accident to A19-74 and its crew, A19-130, flown by the Commanding Officer, crashed into the sea off a nearby small island. That Beaufighter had recently arrived from Forest Hill and after Servicing Party had

completed their acceptance checks, Wing Commander Clarrie Glasscock took it up on a test flight on 16 August. He took his brother, Wing Commander J.H. Glasscock, and his navigator, Flying Officer Ray Kelley, in the aircraft.

Group Captain McLachlan ordered Kittyhawks, Spitfires and Beaufighters to carry out searches around Goodenough when he learned that the Commanding Officer was overdue. During a circuit of nearby Fergusson Island, Maurice Ball sighted the aircraft lying in about 10m of water in Hughes Bay on the northern coast of Fergusson. He sent a radio message that the three officers were on the beach and appeared to be uninjured; they were rescued, taken back to Goodenough and given a medical examination by Bill Marsh. The two brothers had intended to go to No. 5 Mobile Works Squadron that evening to see a show by a visiting USO party but that was cancelled because of heavy rain.

Quite presentable open air entertainment venues had been built at their camps by Nos. 5 and 7 Mobile Works Squadrons and as these had been fitted out with rows of planks, there was no need for anyone to take his own seat. Some of the movies screened at The Rex included *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, *Born to Sing*, *Casablanca*, *Million Dollar Playboy*, *One-Way Ticket*, and *Lucky Partners*.

Gary Cooper was the star performer of a USO concert party that entertained the servicemen on the island, and whose turns were thoroughly enjoyed by Ray Bourne, Trevor Hardy and Max Boyd. Another USO party of singers from the Metropolitan Opera delighted an audience with their performance at No. 5 Mobile Works Squadron's theatre on 7 October. There was a concert at No. 77 Squadron's camp on 4 October by a visiting troupe and at a concert held at No. 7 Mobile Works on 16 October, two musicians from No. 30 Squadron — Cress Clark and Alf Hunt — entertained the audience with popular numbers. George Drury, who was doing a second tour in the tropics as a Beaufighter pilot, brought the house down with his comedy turn.

An election for the House of Representatives and half the

Senate was held on 21 August and military authorities made special arrangements for Australian servicemen to vote. The Squadron's camp was declared as a polling place and four officers sat at tables on sloping ground near the strip to handle the ballot papers. Adjutant Wearne flitted from table to table in his role as supervisor and general answerman.

Only three missions were mounted against defended Japanese air force installations during August—all of them against Gasmata. Five Beaufighters went there on 2 August, three on 23 August and three more on 25 August. However, the Squadron undertook 52 barge sweep sorties around New Britain during the month. Allied reconnaissance during July and August showed that there were some 300 barges in eastern New Guinea and western New Britain and it was assumed that many more were hidden along the usual routes.

Compared to the risky but exciting tasks carried out by Allied medium and heavy bombers, attacking a small barge may have seemed small beer to some critics of the Beaufighter squadron and its activities. In his admirable story of the Kittyhawks in the Pacific War, John Vader wrote: 'Probably the simplest and easiest action to accomplish—the destruction of barges—was the most strategically damaging to the enemy.' He pointed out that the destruction of seven barges at Goodenough in July 1942 cancelled the overland flank attack on Milne Bay. Furthermore, the destruction of other barges during the landing within the Bay spoiled the ship-to-shore ferrying facilities, thereby reducing the enemy's on-ground capability and adversely affecting the recovery of his defeated forces.

As a result of discussions among the aircrew, the Beaufighters on barge sweeps now flew in pairs: one aircraft followed the shoreline at a height of about 33 feet while the other stayed about 330 yards out to sea and at a height of about 980 feet. That flight pattern increased the chances of detecting barges hidden under trees and made for a better attack run by the second aircraft. Intelligence staff at the Operational Group were able to nominate useful search areas

because they were in possession of a captured Japanese map of New Britain on which were drawn the active barge routes and their hiding places.

During the month of August there had been some personnel changes:

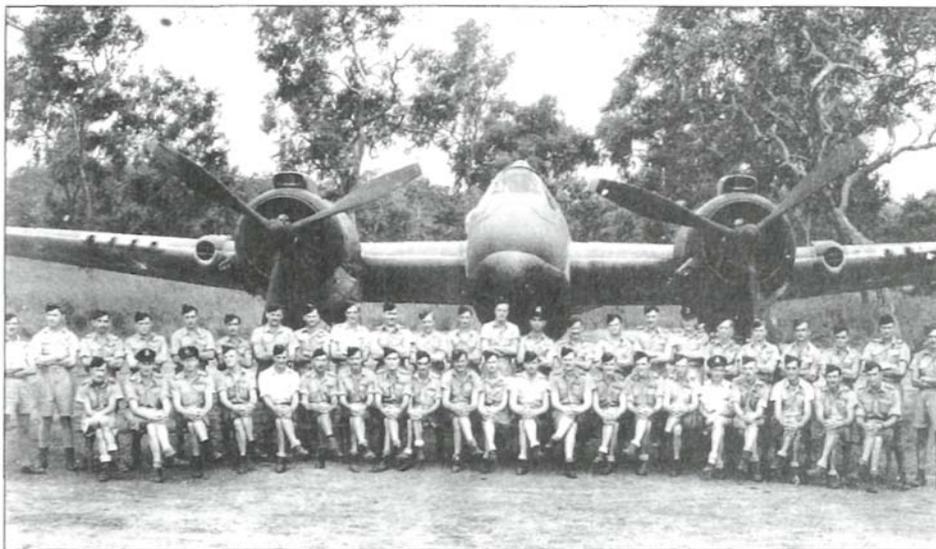
- Gwynne Hughes had been granted a commission.
- Ron Binnie and George Dick had been promoted to flying officer rank.
- Ken Delbridge, Vern Gollan, Harold Kelly, Don Kirkwood, Don Miller, George Moore and Col Wein had been promoted to flight sergeant rank.
- Ken Barber, Theo Boehm, John Brooks, Fred Catt, Bert Claire, Bill Davis, Bob Maguire, Bill Masterton, Les Turnbull and Harold Woodroffe had been posted in for flying duties.
- George Moore, Charles Williams and Ken Wilson had been posted south on the expiration of their tropical tours.
- Having passed their trade tests, three airmen had been remustered: LAC Lawrence from Messman to Motor Cyclist, LAC Sharpe from Guard to Motor Cyclist and AC1 Baird from Armament Assistant to Shoemaker.

A number of senior officers visited the Squadron during August: Group Captain Charlesworth (of Forward Echelon), Group Captain Knox (Director of Works and Buildings), Squadron Leader McFadyen (Area Provost Marshal) and Squadron Leader Angus (of North-Eastern Area Canteen Services). The Bar Officer noted that the visitors had not performed the usual courtesy of contributing to his limited bar stock; perhaps they were unaware that as a result of a quiet word to the staff of the Aircrew Mess, they were served sub-standard meals during their stay.

As at 31 August 1943 the Squadron had 16 Beaufighters on strength (of which 10 were serviceable) and 26 aircrew (of which 23 were available for flying duties). That was an improvement on the situation which had existed on 17 August, when only four aircraft went out in response to

the order from No. 9 Operational Group for all available Beaufighters to carry out a barge sweep. They were to sweep from Cape Gouffre to Cape Bushing and then from Heldsbach to Langemak Bay:

- Clarrie Glasscock and Col Harvey (A19-97)
- Len Hastwell and Don West (A19-104)
- Sid Wallace and Harold Kelly (A19-54)
- Doug Raffin and George Dick (A19-90)



Clarrie Glasscock, Commanding Officer, and his aircrews, Goodenough, September 1943. (Courtesy Vern Gollan)

Two aircraft that had been nominated to be part of the formation, A19-33 (Bill Boulton and Keith McCarthy) and A19-87 (Graeme Hunt and Arthur Hodges), had engine trouble and did not get away. The other aircraft were airborne by 4.51am, and landed by 9.06am, having expended 1,000 rounds of 20mm and 3,000 rounds of 7.7mm ammunition. Extracts from the narrative report suggest that the Japanese were using fewer barges or were taking greater pains to hide them:

Landfall was made at Cape Pedder. While searching the Itni River near Cape Bushing, W/Cdr Glasscock, F/O Wallace and

F/O Hastwell attacked a barge which, on closer inspection, appeared unserviceable.

W/Cdr Glasscock attacked a barge in a small bay just north of Heldsbach. The barge appeared serviceable before the attack, and was empty. It was partly on the beach on the west side of the bay. Nil personnel were observed. The barge is claimed as damaged.

F/O Raffen sighted 5 or 6 well camouflaged barges moored to the south bank of the Mape River (Langemak Bay) about two miles from the mouth. The barges were spread over an area of 3-400 yards under the overhanging trees. Due to heavy camouflage, it was impossible to tell if loaded or otherwise. F/O Raffen made several runs over three of the barges, but due to the awkward position of the others, could not attack them. Hits were observed, and after the attack, slight smoke could be seen. The three barges are claimed as damaged.

In Finschaven Harbour two Japs were sighted in a rowing boat. F/O Raffen was about to turn and attack them when he sighted the barges in the Mape River and proceeded to attack them.

Arthur Jordan took over as Adjutant early in September when Cyril Wearne was posted south, an event welcomed by many of the airmen for it meant a suspension of daily parades. The following week a posting came through for Ted Good. 'Ted deserves credit for his work under difficulties,' wrote one of the armourers. 'He was a man of compassion and always did his best with the funeral arrangements—often under extreme difficulties.' His place as Disciplinary Warrant Officer was taken by Henry Ross who thought that things were too slack in the Squadron and decided to throw his weight about. He told the airmen that their air raid trenches were most unsatisfactory and ordered the men to make the trenches 'four-be-four, by four-be-four, by four-be-four, before next Monday.'

General MacArthur had decided that the invasion of the Markham Valley would start on 4 September 1943; his first

aim was to capture the airfields and then expel the Japanese from the entire Huon Gulf area. Accordingly, elements of the Fifth Air Force intensified their bombardment of targets at Wewak, Alexishaven, Lae and Finschaven, whilst RAAF squadrons increased their offensive efforts.

During September the focus of No. 30 Squadron's attention was the enemy barge traffic along the northern and southern coasts of New Britain. Operations Orders were prepared for 103 sorties by Beaufighters but four aircraft developed un-serviceabilities before take-off and the men were disappointed at not achieving a century score for the month. However, the Squadron claimed 33 barges destroyed and 51 damaged in that period.

Significant results were expected from the mission involving 12 aircraft sent to the Wide Bay and Cape Orford areas on 1 September to hunt for 40 barges seen the previous evening by a Catalina. They didn't find that number of enemy craft but they did destroy or severely damage six in the Wide Bay area that were not effectively camouflaged. During an attack on Palmal Plantation, A19-111 (Keith Nicholson and Ken Delbridge) was hit in the tailplane by medium ack-ack—probably a Bofors. When the aircraft landed at Vivigani after a flight of four hours 20 minutes, both crew members were able to stand erect with their heads and shoulders through the hole.

At the debriefing Keith Nicholson used the target map to point out to the Intelligence Officer the position of the gun that had caused the damage to his aircraft. Joe Newman vowed that on his next operation he would blow that gun and its crew to smithereens.

Joe Newman, Ron Binnie and Captain T.F. Gill, an Army liaison Officer, were in A19-132 when they went on a reconnaissance mission on 9 September. Their aircraft was hit at Palmal by what Ken Delbridge believed was the very gun that had put the shell through the tail of A19-111. Joe Newman ditched at 06.55S 151.53E. Arthur Thompson and Peter White (A19-133) saw the men in the water, apparently

uninjured. Towards dusk, Bill Boulton and Keith McCarthy (A19-7) dropped a large dinghy which the men climbed into, and circled the area until their fuel situation became critical. Len Hastwell and Don Miller were sent off at 8.20pm to cover the survivors and drop a dinghy if Bill Boulton had not been successful. The improvised and untried method of launching the flares they were given didn't work—they simply plummeted into the dark ocean. 'From the ditched aircraft's last known position we did a parallel track search at about 50 feet, using our headlights,' Len said. 'That was entirely fruitless. But we had to try. The poor fellows in the water might have seen us but we had no real hope of seeing them.'

Eleven Beaufighter sorties were mounted on 10 September, when supplies of food and other items were dropped to the survivors. Although bad weather caused the abandonment of Beaufighter searches the following day, a Seagull from No. 1 Rescue and Communication Flight went out to recover the survivors. Ray Kelley, a Beaufighter navigator who normally flew with Clarrie Glasscock, went in that amphibian. The aircraft and crew simply disappeared. The three occupants of the ditched Beaufighter also disappeared. Two empty dinghies were seen near Cape Beechey and it is presumed that the three officers perished at sea.

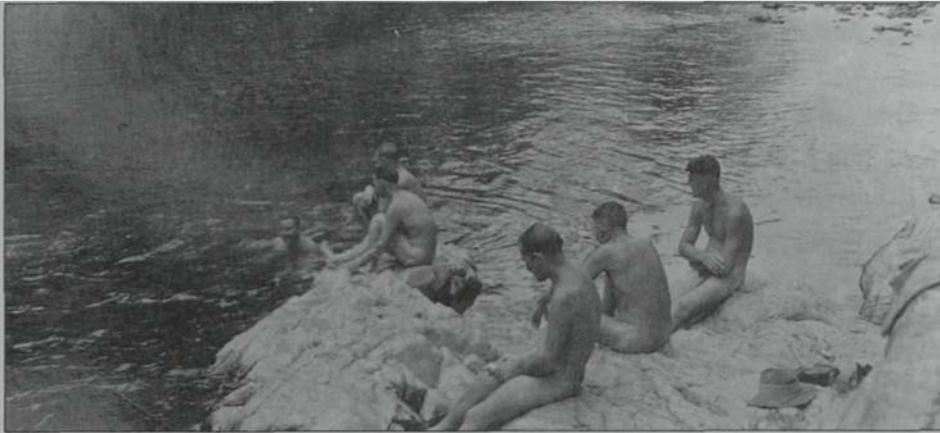
Another Beaufighter went into the sea off the southern coast of New Britain just 10 days later. At 6.50am on Sunday, 19 September, three crews took off from Vivigani:

- Clarrie Glasscock and John Cain (A19-133)
- Peter Fisher and Stan Lutwyche (A19-90)
- Harold Tapner and Bob Thomas (A19-54)

During the attack on stores and supplies near the Cape Hoskins airfield, A19-133 was hit by ack-ack fire and retired seawards, at which time Harold Tapner and his navigator saw it crash into the sea. Back at Vivigani, Col Harvey was listening to the radio and heard Clarrie call out on the intercom, 'Come up front, laddie. I've been hit.' Col had made about 40 trips in Wirraways with Clarrie when they

had been together in Darwin and because Clarrie's normal navigator had just been lost in the Seagull which disappeared during the search for Joe Newman, it had been Col's intention to fly on the sortie to Cape Hoskins. But the previous evening John Cain had asked to go—he was a spare navigator and hadn't been on an operation for some time.

A request from an injured pilot for his navigator to come forward and help when their aircraft was about to splash into the sea would be disconcerting for people who normally flew together. 'But,' said Col, 'for this young lad it must have been an awful situation. Maybe he did get up front but found there was nothing he could do for the pilot or the aircraft.'



*Skinny dipping at the rock pool, Goodenough, September 1943.
(Courtesy Reg Crowl)*

For everybody in No. 30 Squadron, Goodenough's great assets were the marvellous swimming holes close to the camp. Fed by water that tumbled down a mountain stream and cascaded over a waterfall, those pools were in constant demand for laundering, abluting, swimming or just larking about. After a dip the men luxuriated in the pool's environs, stretching out on the huge, warm rocks and dozing in the sun. Nobody bothered about a swimming costume.

A path from the villages higher up the mountain passed along the eastern edge of the pools and this was in use throughout the day by young, nubile native girls. It was some

time before the men discovered that there was no need for them to dive into the pool for reasons of personal modesty, because their bodies were not reacting in the way that virile males normally reacted at the sight of semi-naked females. Adjutant Wearne and caterer Bill Grogan had some difficulty in convincing the men that the cooks were not lacing the tea urns with bromide. That was something of a perennial popular rumour in all Services: the cooks were supposedly under orders clandestinely to doctor the men's victuals in order to lessen their libido, dampen their lust and render them more docile and easier to control.

By now the cooks had learned to ignore the men's rude remarks about their parentage, their personal habits and their products at mealtimes, as the following illustrates:

I'm Johnno the cook, and I ain't going crook,
At the job that I've got with the Beaus.
But there's some things that I ought to say with a snort,
It's the curse of my life—so here goes.

They reckon my cookin' won't keep them good lookin'
Call me names that I cannot admire,
They fill up their mugs (the great hungry lugs)
And question the truth of my sire.

Well, I'm doin' me best to bring comfort and rest
To the stomachs of guys from the Strip,
But with Bull-em-a-cow and other tough chow
Me culinary art's on the slip.

I serve it up cold, make it up in a mould
And enhance it with onions and spice,
I bake it and boil it and even uncoil it
But, I know that it never tastes nice.

On one occasion everyone in the Squadron did go crook at the cook but it may not have been the writer of the above piece of doggerel. They were inflamed because of what a cook did to

some fresh eggs. Chas Harris and Don Miller had ferried a Beaufighter up from Forest Hill, picked up 60 dozen fresh eggs at Amberley and deposited them in the kitchen on arrival at Goodenough. Every man in the unit was literally drooling at the thought of sitting down to two lovely fried eggs for breakfast instead of the unappetising scrambled egg slop made from egg powder that they had been served for the last 12 months. When they lined up for breakfast they found that the duty cook had done the unthinkable with the fresh eggs. He had scrambled them!

John Johnston, a fitter DMT, was a great asset to the Squadron for he could turn his hand to just about anything and could fabricate useful pieces of equipment from bits of scrap wood, wire and metal. John had a steam ticket and used to work in the engineroom of the *Taroona* during its voyages to and from Tasmania. When some of his fellow transport drivers found a wrecked Japanese barge on the beach at Goodenough he installed a Morris engine, bored a hole through the barge's thick hull and fitted a steel driving shaft to a damaged propellor he had picked up around the island. During the journey from Brisbane to Townsville he had joined with Ted Kachel, a one-time train driver, to give the Queensland Railway employees a spell from their duties for an hour or two.

One of the major events in No. 30 Squadron's calendar of activities was its participation in the attack on the enemy's major stronghold at Rabaul on 12 October. So that they could take their place in the allotted stream, Beaufighters and Bostons were ordered to fly out of Goodenough the previous day. As Arthur Thompson positioned A19-157 for take-off the nosewheel of a bombed-up Boston which was rolling down the runway, collapsed. Laurie Crouch was standing in the Beaufighter's well, and his diary recorded the event: 'The plane flipped over on its back. Two gunners got out but the pilot was trapped. The plane caught fire and exploded in a huge ball of fire. Not a good prelude to our take-off. We flew over the smouldering funeral pyre.' Harry Tayler was standing

in the well of A19-139 and saw the crash over his pilot's shoulder. 'I urged Cyril Cornish to get us off the ground as quickly as possible,' he said. 'He managed to do just that but I could see the strain he was under for the sweat just poured out of him.'

At the time of that planned raid the Japanese had about 330 aircraft in New Britain and they had five good aerodromes in the Rabaul area. Tobera, which was to be the Beaufighter's target, had been completed barely two months before the raid and had an 1100m concrete runway as well as revetments for 75 fighters.

Rabaul bristled with nearly 370 ack-ack guns.

An Allied force of 308 aircraft assembled at Dobodura. Dust raised by Mitchells delayed the take-off of the 13 Beaufighters:

- Bill Boulton and Keith McCarthy (A19-54)
- Jim Emmerton and Alf Burgoyne (A19-147)
- John McRobbie and Clive Cooke (A19-103)
- Ken Barber and Bert Claire (A19-139)
- Fred Catt and Bill Davis (A19-107)
- Chas Harris and Don Miller (A19-104)
- Graeme Hunt and Arthur Hodges (A19-111)
- Cyril Cornish and Harry Braid (A19-138)
- Arthur Thompson and Peter White (A19-157)
- George Robertson and Rex Pitman (A19-120)
- Ted Marron and Vern Gollan (142)
- George Drury and Dave Beasley (A19-134)
- Dick Stone and Ted Morns-Hadwell (A19-97) [Reserve]

At about 10.45am, when the other 296 aircraft were heading home, the 12 Beaufighters were approaching the target area at sea level and met two squadrons of Mitchells head-on. The Mitchell pilots thought the aircraft ahead were Sallys and one of them fired a burst which passed between the aircraft flown by Chas Harris and Fred Catt. Bill Boulton made radio calls which prevented further firing.

The formation leader had his Beaufighters flying in echelon

to the left and increased his speed as he neared Tobera airfield. But George Robertson's aircraft wasn't able to reach that speed. He was number 11 in the formation so he and his wingman (possibly Dick Stone) fell behind the others. Fred Catt thought that the attack on Tobera wasn't as successful as it might have been because the leader took the formation in at low level all the way, and all the pilots could do was to press the trigger and spray the general area as they hurtled over the airfield. 'To make a proper attack,' he said, 'you've got to get up as you near the target area, select a particular target and then dive on it, holding your fire until you're really close.'

George Drury and Dave Beasley took off from Dobodura with the formation but turned back when the pilot had to shut down his port motor because of a serious oil leak. The place of their disabled aircraft was taken by Dick Stone and Ted Morris Hadwell in A19-97.

That crew was lost that day.

Hunting for barges continued during October. Ten Beau-fighters went out on 2 October, another six on 4 October and four more on 23 October. The Squadron mounted 67 anti-barge sorties during that month, having swept areas near Cape Cunningham, Cape Deschamps, Cape Archway, Cape Hoskins, Cape Orford, Cape Koas, Lindenhaven, Rangombol, Deception Point and Ubili.

Part of the entry for 2 October in the diary kept by one of the airmen in the Squadron reads: 'Great day for the Squadron. Two of our kites were looking for barges when along came a Betty bomber [which they fired on]. She just blew apart in the air. First kite we have shot down in actual air combat.' He was referring to the action near Cape Beechey involving Arthur Thompson and Peter White in A19-137, with Ted Marron and Vern Gollan in A19-142.

Snippets of other diary entries give some idea of what was happening on the ground during October:

3rd: Night raid. Grandstand view of stick of bombs bursting along strip. Holed an Anson.

7th: Started digging slit trench, but it's heartbreaking getting through the hard ground and huge rocks.

8th: A couple of Japs dropped daisy cutters. We listened to the radio messages between ground control and our fighters. Petrol tanker blown up. 2 Beauforts damaged.

11th: A Boston crashed and burnt at take-off. Her bombs blew up. Pilot killed. Navigator screaming inside.

14th: Best news that some of our technical men have got their postings.

15th: An alert this morning.

16th: Raining like hell. Transport is a nightmare. Trucks slide all the way down the hill. Almost impossible to get them up again. Have to walk.

18th: Got Yankee issue of cigarettes, tobacco, soap, toothpaste, etc. tonight.

21st: Terrific burst that old timers of 5MWS, 22 and 30 going home by boat at end this month.

22nd: Clearing natives from our vicinity. Mysterious lights seen from mountain. Japs suspected.

23rd: Dive bomber sneaked in about 6am dropped one bomb near boat in harbour.

26th: Dawn alert. I don't like them. Why can't they come over when the moon is bright?

27th: This place is getting me down. Why don't they send our relief?

28th: Counted 68 Liberators going over towards Rabaul.

31st: Saw a good race between Beau and a Boston this evening. Boston won by a short head. But they're going to run it over.

As the diarist noted, Goodenough had a number of air raid alerts while No. 30 Squadron was based there. Crews were brought to standby status on 22 August because intelligence suggested that the Japanese were about to launch an attack. Then on 24 August all military personnel were ordered to wear their steel helmets and to carry their gas masks as it was thought that enemy planes would be attacking with chemical bombs. On 22 September unit commanders were warned that the Japanese might launch an assault by paratroopers. Red

Alerts were given on 27 September, 3, 5, 9 and 10 October. All turned out to be false alarms but a few bombs were dropped in a night-time raid on Vivigani Strip on 8 October during which two Beauforts of No. 8 Squadron were damaged and a petrol tanker was destroyed.

Two Beaufighters took off from Vivigani Strip on 11 October, the day before the big raid on Rabaul. Fred Catt and Bill Davis, (A19-107), and Jim Emmerton and Alf Burgoyne (A19-147) were detailed to attack Palmal Plantation. Because they had to fly around a number of rainstorms on the outward leg, they made landfall right over the target instead of a few kilometres north. 'We had to fly straight over it at 500 feet,' Fred said. 'There was nothing else we could do — and they were throwing everything up at us. I flew on, got up to 5,000 feet, turned, dived and strafed them — going like hell. I finished up almost flying down the barrel of one of the guns that was blazing away at us. I pulled out at about tree-top height so suddenly that both motors cut out. That frightened hell out of me.'

The cannons in many of the Beaufighters had been fired so often that wear and tear was beginning to show; Jack Dunstan, Rus Foster and Russell Hall were among the armourers who inserted 38mm spacing washers in the return springs in order to increase the tension. Jack Rutherford had been detailed to help in that, as well as in the task of repairing a defective Plessey belting machine which had been in use since January. Instead, he went around the unit getting his clearances because he had been posted south on 18 October. Others whose outwards postings were effective on that day included George Anderson, Bob Burchall, Sid Edgar, Peter Hansen, Jim Robinson and Jim Wilson.

During the preceding two weeks the strength of the transport section had been reduced when 10 of its drivers had been posted back to Australia: John Colohan, Roy Cordell, Malcolm Crowe, Alan Grant, Milton Hughes, Barrie Kitt, George Maddelena, Bill Owens, Les Parker and George Williamson. While the Squadron had been in the tropics it had had three different Warrant Officer Engineers. Joe Newland had replaced

Dave Haddon when he left to fill a technical post at Air Force Headquarters early in 1943 and in December Joe went to No. 10 Repair and Salvage Unit, being replaced by Fred Lynch from that unit. As for the medical orderlies, a short time after Harold Mayo arrived in on posting from No. 41 Operational Base Unit, George Hamer received news of his outwards posting. However, he was dismayed to discover that instead of going to a home unit, he was going to Goodenough W/T Station.

In what was to be the last-but-one mission from Vivigani, the Commanding Officer led nine other Beaufighters against targets at Palmal Plantation on 3 November. Bostons of No. 22 Squadron led by their Commanding Officer and Kittyhawks of No. 77 Squadron also took part. During the heavy strafing and bombing of the target area, a Japanese 25mm shell hit the leading Boston, exploded in the bomb bay and the pilot had to land on a submerged coral reef about 60m off shore. George Robertson, who was flying A19-120 in that attack, recalled that Wing Commander Bill Townsend and Flying Officer Dave McClymont were not injured, got ashore, were befriended by natives, stayed in New Britain for some three months and were picked up by an American submarine.

The following day Wing Commander Jim Emmerton was posted from No. 30 Squadron to be temporary Commanding Officer of No. 22 Squadron. Jim had been on the air staff of No. 9 Operational Group, had been appointed to command No. 30 Squadron on 7 October, had crewed up with Alf Burgoyne and flown seven Beaufighter missions with him — including the concerted Squadron effort against Tobera. He lost his life soon after taking command of the Boston squadron at Goodenough.

The Unit Diary notes that on 6 November the sea echelon left Goodenough for Kiriwina, which was to be the Squadron's new operational base. George Dusting's diary notes that: 'Nos. 6 and 100 Squadrons arrived [at Goodenough] this afternoon and took over our dispersal area. The placed is covered with bloody Beauforts now.'

CHAPTER TEN

Christmas at Kiriwina

MAJOR General Richard Sutherland, General MacArthur's Chief of Staff, had suggested that an airfield be built on Kiriwina in order to provide an advanced base for Allied fighters to attack enemy installations and shipping in and around New Britain and to provide a degree of support for Admiral Halsey's operations in the Solomons.

Two destroyers of the United States Navy and a fleet of landing ships put men of a Regimental Combat Team ashore at dawn on 24 June and they were followed by men of the 158th Regiment. Two airfields were planned: one in the centre of the island and to the west of Muiau Bay would be known as South Drome and that at the northern tip of the island would be known as the North Drome.

The slow arrival of the heavy airfield construction equipment and the heavy rain which fell on Kiriwina in the weeks after the American landing prevented completion of the airfields by the planned date. However, the North Drome was finished by 19 August so that No. 76 Squadron could begin operations from its new base.

When the bulk of No. 30 Squadron's stores, supplies and equipment had been loaded onto the SS *Han Yang* at Goodenough, personnel were embarked in accordance with lists prepared by Flying Officer Robinson, Pilot Officer

Grant, Warrant Officer Good and Flight Sergeant Annetts. The ship, which was a decrepit cargo vessel and most unsuitable as a people-mover, pulled away from the island at 6.30am on Saturday, 6 November, and steamed off towards the north.

Apart from the thumping of the ship's engine and the various alarming squeaks and groans as her plates came under tension, the short voyage passed without incident. Neither the captain nor the crew appeared in any way concerned about the possibility of Japanese aircraft or submarines launching an attack on their unescorted vessel. However, some of the Air Force personnel were rather apprehensive about that possibility and they engaged in animated discussions about whether it was better to stay below deck where they would be protected against the bullets of a strafing aircraft or to stay above deck where there were better prospects of survival if the hull were to be holed by a torpedo.

In the event, most of them tried to get some rest after the hard labour involved in preparing for their departure and they made the best of a day in the sunshine and bracing sea air. Gwynn Davies stretched out on the bonnet of a jeep on the forward deck while Cliff Maxwell and other transport drivers dozed off in the cabs of their vehicles. Eric Hughes found a bit of shade on the deck and mused about the treatment he had been given by a visiting dentist at Goodenough. It wasn't that the dentist was rough in his manner—he just didn't have adequate equipment. 'Every visit was a misery,' said Eric. 'Not only was he unable to give injections to ease the pain but he used a drill operated by a foot pedal and the differing speeds at which he pumped away with his foot brought indescribable agony to the poor fellow sitting on an empty packing case.'

Eric had shared a tent with Alan Laing who was also on board the *Han Yang*. Alan was thankful that this was to be a short journey and he would not have to suffer the same miserable conditions he had experienced on the *West Cactus* when she had taken the Squadron from Port Moresby to Goodenough.

Plenty of cordial was available on the *Han Yang* and that was drunk in preference to tea since the latter had a most peculiar taste. The water used for the teamaking was drawn from the ship's tanks and the men believed that these had not been flushed for quite a long time. The messing staff provided sandwiches made from bread baked the day before and with a choice of three fillings—bully beef, beetroot or melon jam.

All hands had to help in getting the unit's stores and supplies off the ship immediately she berthed, having taken just on 10 hours for the voyage. Tenders took the men in relays to the Transit Camp at No. 46 Operational Base Unit where they were given a scratch meal and lists of working parties were drawn up so that the vessel could be unloaded on a shift basis. Although a considerable amount of heavy equipment had to be unloaded, the parties were glad that Beaufighters were not using bombs—they had seen the men of No. 22 Squadron engaged in that back-breaking task in the hot sun.

Pilot Officer Arthur Jordan had flown across from Goodenough with an advance party of 16 other ranks and had started on the layout of the new camp at the site nominated by No. 73 Wing. As Adjutant, he was aware that unit morale was at a low ebb, mainly because of long service in a tropical theatre of war. He knew that as far back as August, some of the men had made bets that the original members would start going back to Australia on the 20th of that month—that being the first anniversary of the Squadron assuming a 'war footing' at Bohle River. When that didn't occur the men had then set their sights on going home in time to have Christmas with their families. However, those hopes were dashed when Air Board decided that the tropical tour for airmen was to be 15 months. These badly typed verses were pinned next to Unit Routine Orders on the newly erected noticeboard at Kiriwina:

A 12 month station, rumour said, Our hearts beat wild with
glee,
Till Daily Routine Orders showed, Air Board had bunged on
three.

Fifteen months, devoid of leave, from Garbutt to Papua,
The order came from Shiny Bums, filled with bull manure.

Safe in far off Melbourne, in a little world, so small,
Where such a thing as rec leave, doesn't worry them at all.
Where the war is fought from eight till four, and red tape flies
about,
They warm the seats of swivel chairs, and work our welfare out.

Come up here and join us, when the moon is full and bright,
And the Japs are up above you, several times each bloody
night.

And when the morning's dawning, when you're tired, grimy, and
done

And you find there's still no posting. Don't think it's bloody
fun.

The Adjutant prepared for the arrival of 10 Beaufighters coming from Goodenough on 12 November bringing the Medical Officer, an Intelligence Officer, an Operations Officer and 21 groundstaff. One of the airmen who travelled to the new base in A19-34 reported that the pilot of his aircraft had to circle nearby Kaileuna Island until a rainstorm moved away from Kiriwina and he was able to land there. Shortly after lunch Warrant Officer Newland, LAC Don Angus and another 42 airmen disembarked from Dakota A65-17 (flown by Flight Lieutenant Beasdon), which had brought them up from Goodenough. The following day two more Beaufighters arrived and another Douglas transport landed with two photographers and their demountable Photographic Section.

No. 30 Squadron was now under the command of No. 73 Wing which had been formed at Port Moresby the previous February. At Goodenough the Wing had been commanded by Group Captain Dougald McLachlan; at Kiriwina it was commanded by Group Captain Gordon Steege.

After the destruction of the Bismark Sea convoy in which No. 30 Squadron had played such an important part, the Japanese had increased their use of barges to move reinforce-

ments and supplies. But these became special targets of the Beaufighters whose crews became adept at spotting the camouflaged craft hidden under the trees along the shores of New Guinea and New Britain, and whose devastating fire could render them unseaworthy. Because there were seldom any workshop facilities at their favourite hiding places, the barges which were damaged could rarely be repaired and were usually abandoned. The loss of so many barges had quite a serious effect on the enemy's ability to keep his forces at proper strengths and to provide them with an adequate supply of ammunition, petrol, food and other necessities. Moreover, in the belief that the Allies intended to capture Rabaul, the Japanese retained men there who might otherwise have been sent to other locations.

The reduced number of barges despatched from Rabaul during the latter weeks of 1943 normally contained only freight and the crews took great pains to hide their craft to make them difficult to detect from the air.

No. 30 Squadron began its operational activities from its new base at Kiriwina on 14 November when Chas Harris and Don Miller (in A19-90) and Dick Destree and Ed Mann (in A19-33) carried out a reconnaissance of Montague Harbour. General MacArthur had planned for his forces to capture Arawe the following day as that would provide General Kenney with an airfield on the south coast of New Britain. It would also provide the United States Navy with an excellent harbour from which its PT boats could operate in the Vitiaz Strait.

Beaufighter crews operating from Kiriwina were disappointed with the low tally of enemy barges that they destroyed or damaged. But their many sorties along the coastal areas of Japanese held territory had the effect of interfering with barge movements, thereby weakening the offensive capability of the enemy forces in New Britain as well as lessening their defensive capability. Those factors contributed to the success of the American Marines in taking Cape Gloucester—once a very important airfield in the Japanese scheme of things.

The decreased need for Beaufighter activity in the New Britain area, and what was seen by staff officers at Air Force Headquarters as a diminishing risk to aircrew, led to a change in the length of operational tours in the tropics. Aircrew tours were increased by 50% and became nine months in November 1943. At the same time, the authorities made it possible for aircrew to take mid-tour operational leave (with pay). Fred Catt, Bill Davis, Peter Fisher, Stan Lutwyche, Bob Maguire and Les Turnbull were the first members to take advantage of that opportunity and left Kiriwina on 17 November for an absence of at least 17 days (including appropriate travelling time). The Commanding Officer, Bill Boulton, went on 'Short Operational Leave' from Kiriwina and Bob Maguire was appointed to the temporary command of the Squadron. Ken Barber left Kiriwina the day after Bill Boulton's departure and married Marion McDonald at Scots Church, Melbourne during his short absence from the tropics.

During the remainder of November the aircraft made only 17 operational sorties and these were the usual barge sweeps along the coasts of New Britain:

- 15th — Cape Archway area: A19-120 — George Robertson and Rex Pitman; A19-154 — Ken Barber and Dick Walton.
- 15th — Langunen Point area: A19-7 — Theo Boehm and Bill Masterson; A19-141 — Rod Albrecht and John Carroll.
- 15th — Cape Hoskins area: A19-157 — Arthur Thompson and Peter White; A19-154 — Ted Marron and Vern Gollan.
- 17th — Wide Bay area: A19-147 — Bob Maguire and Les Turnbull; A19-130 — Cyril Cornish and Harry Braid; A19-7 — Colin Wein and Don Kirkwood.
- 17th — Cape Hoskins area: A19-90 — Chas Harris and Don Miller; A19-103 — Murray Towill and Pat Sweeney;
- 25th — Cape Hoskins area: A19-54 — Bob Walker and Jim Howell; A19-139 — Percy Coates and Charles Chappie.
- 26th — Rangombol Point area: A19-134 — John McRobbie and Arthur Hodges; A19-154 — Gordon Lucas and Bill Yates.

- 27th — Arawe area: A19-3 — Bill Boulton and Keith McCarthy; A19-147 — Bob Walker and Jim Howell.
- 29th — Cape Hoskins Area: A19-154 — Ted Marron and Vern Gollan; A19-Dick Destree and Bill Mann.

At 8.40am when the two Beaufighters conducting the barge sweep along the coast near Cape Hoskins on 25 November were near Bangula Bay, Bob Walker and Jim Howell saw that the port engine of A19-139 was smoking. The aircraft, then at about 1968 feet, went into a roll, turned over on its back, crashed into some tall trees and exploded on impact. The pilot of the accompanying aircraft circled the burning Beaufighter for about 10 minutes but saw no signs of Percy Coates or Charles Chappie. They were both listed as Missing on Operations against the Enemy, in Squadron Personnel Occurrence Report No. 21/43.

As a general rule each pilot had his own aircraft and groundcrew and many of the aircrew spent some time helping the fitters in their maintenance tasks. This enabled the pilots and navigators to learn more about their Beaufighters and promoted a degree of camaraderie between the aviators and their crews. When Norm Fraser went south on 25 November his place was taken by Ray Wheatley who introduced the garage system of aircraft maintenance, which was most unpopular. 'He had one group doing 40-hourly inspections and another doing 80-hourlies,' said Len Hastwell. 'But for five consecutive operational sorties there wasn't an airmen in sight when we got down to the strip and we had to prepare the aircraft ourselves.' In consequence of the many complaints from his fitters and from the aircrew, Ray ordered the reintroduction of the previous system.

During the barge sweep in the Arawe area on 27 November, Bill Boulton sank an empty lifeboat tied to the jetty at Cape Merkins. Further round the coast he saw a single fully equipped Japanese soldier walking along the beach and he blazed at him with cannons and machineguns.

All available Bostons and Beaufighters were ordered to make a first light take-off on 30 November and attack enemy

installations on Garove Island — one of the Vitu group located about 150km north-east of Cape Gloucester. Eight Beaufighters left Kiriwina but they ran into very bad weather before they reached New Britain and had to turn back. A19-53 was last seen just as the Beaufighters encountered a severe rainstorm when they were about 65km south-west of Gasmata and heading for their home base. That afternoon four Beaufighters went out looking for the missing aircraft. They conducted a parallel track search, 3km apart, on a course of 320 degrees True, to a depth of 65km, after which they turned round and flew a reciprocal course. The only sighting was made by George Walker in A19-20. He saw a small yellow object in the water which could have been a half submerged dinghy. Eight aircraft went out the following morning but saw nothing of the missing aircraft or its crew. Gordon Lucas and Bill Yates were subsequently deleted from the Squadron's list of effective aircrew.

As a result of a letter from the Chief of the Air Staff, the Minister for Air informed Prime Minister Curtin that Air Vice-Marshal Jones had found much dissatisfaction about matters within No. 9 Operational Group during his recent tour of New Guinea units. He believed that morale and discipline were suffering as a result of Air Commodore Hewitt's style of administration. The Prime Minister agreed that Air Commodore Lukis should replace Air Commodore Hewitt as Air Officer Commanding. George Robertson and Rex Pitman were given the task of flying the incoming and outgoing Air Officers on visits to RAAF units at their forward bases in the South West Pacific Area. The pilot took engine fitter John Rawlinson in the aircraft and flew the party to Goodenough, Nadzab, Gusap, Dumpu, Lae, Finschaven, Dobodura, Milne Bay and Port Moresby. George remembers the occasion for four events:

- Seeing five or six waterspouts simultaneously while flying over the ocean to the south-east of Cape Gloucester.
- Listening to stories at Dumpu and Gusap about Japanese

pilots firing at a Spitfire pilot while he was hanging in his parachute after bailing out.

- Overhearing a discussion between a pair of American fighter pilots about whether his Beaufighter was a friendly or a hostile.
- Beating up the strip at Dobodura — with two very senior RAAF officers standing immediately behind his shoulder:

I completely forgot that there were two air commodores standing in the well behind me as I sent my aircraft screaming down the USAAF strip at Dobodura — with nothing on the clock but the maker's name — then pulling back on the stick and zooming up to about 1,000 feet in a steep left hand climbing turn, at which time I glanced over my shoulder and, horror of horrors, glimpsed a tangled mass of arms, legs and air commodore's braid in the well behind me.

As might be expected, that young pilot got a dressing down but no disciplinary action was taken — perhaps Air Commodore Hewitt had remembered times when he had performed similar manoeuvres (but at much more modest speeds) when he was in the Fleet Air Arm.

To make the Beaufighters more versatile the Air Force authorities decided to give them a bombing capability so a rack which could accommodate either a 113kg bomb, or a cluster of smaller bombs, was fitted under each wing. The weapons on each rack were released simultaneously to prevent drag occurring on one side of the aircraft. Ron Downing and Bruce Tiller became quite worried when only one of the bombs carried by their aircraft dropped away when the pilot fired the release button. Although he tried a number of in-flight manoeuvres, he wasn't able to dislodge the remaining weapon. To make matters worse, the tail section of the bomb blew off and the crew thought that the weapon might be armed and would explode if the bomb came unhooked during the landing.

Ron set that Beaufighter down on the runway very, very gently.

Joe Arthur was the armourer for that aircraft and he was responsible for attending to the weapons hang-up. Although the aircrew and groundstaff rapidly vacated the area around the dispersal bay, Joe found that there was no need for them to be concerned as the weapon wasn't dangerous. All he had to do was unscrew the piston and withdraw the fuse. Those bombs used vanes as their arming device, were tail-fused and fitted with an impact fuse so that they exploded only when they hit an object solid enough to impel the striker forward. They were thus prevented from exploding when they came into brief contact with something soft — such as tree foliage.

Each of the Beaufighter's racks could be fitted with a cluster of six 9kg bombs, each cluster being encircled by a metal band which was discarded when the cluster was released. These were anti-personnel bombs, more generally known as daisy-cutters since on impact they spread a great deal of shrapnel at ground level. They were quite simple weapons and fitted with very sensitive detonators so that they would explode when they hit something substantial. They would not do much damage if they penetrated the ground and then exploded.

Fred Catt had an experience similar to that of Ron Downing. When he and Bill Davis carried out a practice bombing attack on a wreck, the navigator thought he had seen both bombs explode in the water. Fred did a 'shoot-up' of the camp before landing and wondered why everybody was running away as he taxied down the strip. When he got out of his aircraft he saw that one of the bombs was hanging from the underside of his starboard wing. The pilot and the navigator disappeared from the scene pretty smartly.

Practically every tent had an apparatus outside which enabled the occupants to boil up their clothes in a kerosine tin or boil up water for a brew of tea, although by then coffee was becoming rather popular. This device was known as a 'choofer'. It consisted of a container to hold the petrol and to which a small diameter brass tube — retrieved from a crashed aeroplane — was fitted. The tube was formed into a coil, its

end was pinched together to form a seal and it was then punctured with fine holes a few centimetres apart—like an old gas ring. To get the thing going, petrol was allowed to flow down the tube and then a match was tossed towards the centre of the coil. This lit the raw fuel flowing out through the holes, until the flames heated the coil to a degree at which the fuel in it was vapourised. From then, pressure built up in the tube and the gas escaped at increased force — as it does in a primus. The initial yellow flame gave way to bursts of blue flame, much hotter, and the device began 'choofing' as the pressure built up and then eased off.

It seemed that every American unit had its own open air cinema, its own 16mm projector and a regular supply of relatively recent Hollywood productions. The entertainment they provided during November and December included: *Star Spangled Rhythm* at the Star and Garter, *Reveille with Beverley* at the Hubba Hubba, *Reap the Wild Wind* at the Grass Skirt, *Lucky Partners* at the Coconut Grove, *One Way Ticket* at the Samboogie, *Son of Fury* at the North Shore, *Eagle Squadron* at the Mosquito, *Holiday Inn* at the Shangri La, *Ship Ahoy!* at the Scorpion and *Random Harvest* at the Rex.

Because Kiriwina was so flat the aerial of the radar unit could not be positioned at any great height. Even so, the controllers at No. 114 Fighter Sector were confident of their ability to detect all incoming raiders, irrespective of their height. In order to test that claim, Group Captain Steege briefed two crews, Len Hastwell and Doug Miller, and Cyril Cornish and Harry Braid, to return from a particular barge sweep at very, very, low level. The Squadron pilots gathered around the plot board in the Operations Room and the navigators dispersed themselves along the strip to watch the reaction of the ack-ack gunners.

The pilots' approach to their home base was in accordance with their briefing and as Len Hastwell began to taxi towards his dispersal bay after an uneventful landing he saw the ack-ack gunners streaking towards their gunpits. A few seconds

earlier the duty controller had told the visitors in his Operations Room that he would be getting a plot on the returning Beaufighters at any moment. He was more than a little put out when Arthur Thompson told him that he had just heard both of the aircraft landing.

Everybody in the Squadron agreed that the camp at Goodenough had been much better than the one they now occupied at Kiriwina. At Goodenough all the tents were on the side of a hill, were exposed to cooling sea breezes and had a fantastic view out over the ocean. 'To sit outside the Mess or your tent and see the moon come up over the water on a still, tropical night was sheer magic,' according to Ron Morrison. Kiriwina, being a flat coral island, could not offer such an entrancing prospect from any of the RAAF camps. These were all located amid coconut palm trees and scrubby jungle undergrowth and were spread out along the road that ran from the strip to the interior of the island. Frank Simpson thought that Kiriwina was the worst place he had ever served in. He had flown up there from Goodenough in the Beau-fighter crewed by Ted Marron and Vern Gollan and he had a particular aversion to the glare of the coral down at the strip and the aircraft dispersal areas.

No. 30 Squadron's camp was situated about 4km along the main road and lay between two native villages. Mobile Works Squadron personnel had erected substantial tropical style buildings for the messes and other principal buildings but personnel were accommodated in tents. Most of the tents were the usual Australian style with a horizontal ridge pole and covered with an extra fly. However, some were American style bell tents with dark, heavy canvas and a central upright pole. These were heartily disliked because the interiors became stifling hot. Normally, four airmen were billeted in an Australian style tent, whilst six airmen occupied each bell tent. The tents stood under the coconut trees and were dispersed around the campsite. Some were lit by the unit's generating plant but most were lit by Coleman pressure lamps. Teddy See was responsible for bringing a number of

Coleman lamps to the two-up game that was held near the Sergeants' Mess. Ted Bicknell and Les Tye had a personal electric light installation in their tent, made from a generator they had salvaged from a crashed Liberator and a 12 volt battery they had secured from an American ack-ack unit.

The showers were positioned beside the road that ran through the camp so that the tanker could easily replenish the water storage tanks. Ross Squire often complained about the hardness of the water and the difficulty of raising a lather with ordinary soap. Native girls often gathered under the palm trees oppsite the showers and giggled at the sight of naked white men drenching themselves with water. Steve Lambert was acutely embarrassed by their presence.

Arthur Stone, who was regarded by Don Angus as the mainstay of the Squadron's cricket team, was the local SP bookmaker and ran his shop under the trees just behind the Sergeants' Mess every Saturday afternoon. A small group of hopeful punters joined him there to listen to the race broadcasts on a facility provided by Warrant Officer Chris Wilson and others in the Wireless Section. Arthur shared a tent with Albert Parker who had joined the Squadron at Kiriwina on posting from No. 5 Aircraft Depot, Forest Hill.

Unlike No. 5AD, the Beaufighter squadron did not have a Spud Murphy on its strength but it did have its own collection of nicknames: Ack-Ack Kenny, Baldy Balderston, Blackjack Walker, Boong Williams, Brenda McVernon, Bulldozer Drury, Bunny Albrecht, Caesar O'Connor, Cassanova James, Cotterpin Jordan, Dinger Bell, Dit-Dah-Dit Edwards, Doovah Marsh, Fantasia Bourne, Gentleman John Mason, Gunner Carroll, Happy Rhodes, Jeep Wilson, Lola Lane, Mastermind Edwards, Narc Hocking, Pappy Allum, Pop Loane, Professor Proctor, Shagger Bain, Scotty Wallace, Snowy Hewitt, Splitpin Wearne, Tiny Boehm, Titter Simon, Torchy Uren, Traveltalk Lovett and Two-Eggs Hunter.

Athol (Snowy) Hewitt wholeheartedly agreed that the tropical storms at Kiriwina were frighteningly violent. The wind screamed through the tops of the palm trees, the rain

pelted down and drummed on the tent canvas, the sky lit up with vivid flashes of lightning and the ears were assailed by tremendously loud crashes of thunder. Ron Morrison saw a tall coconut tree uprooted and tossed around like a matchstick just outside his tent. Lightning struck the metal ring fixed to the canvas hole at the top of a bell tent and the entire structure was dashed to the ground — causing great panic and alarm among the occupants. However, none of them were injured.

The occasional enemy aeroplane put in an appearance over the island during the latter part of November. The Japanese staged a minor raid the night that Fred Catt and Bill Davis arrived from Goodenough in their Beaufighter. As there weren't any slit trenches at that time, Fred felt a little safer when he put an enamel plate over his head. Trenches hadn't been dug because the coral was so very hard and, in any case, the daily downpour would soon fill up any hole in the ground. The general hands who had to dig the latrine pits testified to the difficulty of using pick and shovel in order to excavate a hole in the coral.

Jim Blair, an instrument maker who had joined the Squadron a few days after it had moved up from Goodenough, was very keen on hiking and at every opportunity he took his knapsack and went for long walks to visit the native villages. He liked to talk to the natives and was keen to learn something about their customs and culture. He handed out tins of bully beef to those who were prepared to discuss such matters with him. 'Kiriwina was a beautiful place,' he said, 'and I was thrilled to be there.' Many others heartily agreed with him, especially those who spent their off-duty time lolling about on the sandy beach near the strip or swimming in the refreshing water which was sheltered by an offshore coral reef. One of the flight riggers (thought to be Keith Carmichael) was the envy of other swimmers because he had acquired a pair of the fashionable boxer style moygashel swimmers from a recently arrived American soldier serving with an ack-ack unit.

The island was infested with rats. They would, and did, eat

anything. Nothing in the tent was safe from them — clothes, boots, belts, papers, books. They had a special liking for fur felt hats. Hugh McDowell got fed up with the number of rats that ran around his tent at night so he spent some time in his armament workshop fabricating a rat-trap. This was simply a tin with a wide mouth funnel so fixed that once the rat went down the funnel into the tin, it couldn't get out again. Hugh and his tent-mate, John Laverty, baited the trap with pieces of dog biscuit and cheese. Their maximum catch during any one night was 21 rats.

Bob Butler spent many hours tramping around the island collecting some of its large butterflies — taking care to avoid the large spiders which spun their sizeable webs across tracks and pathways.

Everyone had to take care that mould did not accumulate on their personal possessions. Chas Harris controlled mildew growth on his boots and other leather items by applying copper sulphate which he had brought up from the mainland.

By the beginning of December American forces had captured Gasmata, Arawe and Cape Gloucester where the enemy had nearly 6,000 men. The sizeable Japanese stronghold at Rabaul was not then in Allied hands but its importance had been greatly diminished by heavy air attacks by Liberators, Fortress, Mitchells and RAAF Beauforts and Catalinas. Although the barge traffic around the coast of New Britain seemed to have ceased, the staff planners at Operational Group wanted to ensure that not a single craft could reinforce or re-supply any of the enemy pockets. Hence, Beaufighters were ordered to carry on with their barge sweeps, as shown below:

- 5th — 2 aircraft: Alder Bay to Lindenhaven
- 10th — 2 aircraft: Rangombol Point to Cape Hoskins
- 10th — 2 aircraft: Langunen Point to Cape Borgen
- 11th — 2 aircraft: Lindenhaven to Cape Borgen
- 13th — 3 aircraft: Rangombol Point to Cape Hoskins
- 13th — 2 aircraft: Cape Hoskins to Rangombol Point
- 15th — 3 aircraft: Arawe to Lindenhaven

16th - 3 aircraft: Rangombol Point to Cape Hoskins
 17th - 4 aircraft: Wanamula Point to Cape Hoskins
 18th - 3 aircraft: Rangombol Point to Cape Hoskins
 19th - 3 aircraft: Rangombol Point to Cape Hoskins
 19th - 3 aircraft: Pulie River to Lindenhaven
 19th - 3 aircraft: Cape Archway to Lindenhaven
 20th - 3 aircraft: Pulie River to Lindenhaven
 20th - 3 aircraft: Cape Borgen to Lindenhaven
 21st - 3 aircraft: Cape Borgen to Lindenhaven
 21st - 3 aircraft: Roebuck Point to Cape Borgen
 22nd - 3 aircraft: Rangombol Point to Cape Hoskins
 22nd - 3 aircraft: Cape Borgen to Lindenhaven
 22nd - 3 aircraft: Cape Borgen to Lindenhaven
 24th - 3 aircraft: Rangombol Point to Cape Hoskins
 25th - 3 aircraft: Cape Borgen to Lindenhaven
 26th - 3 aircraft: Rangombol Point to Cape Hoskins
 27th - 3 aircraft: Rangombol Point to Cape Hoskins
 27th - 3 aircraft: Cape Borgen to Cape Hoskins
 27th - 3 aircraft: Rangombol Point to Cape Hoskins
 28th - 3 aircraft: Rangombol Point to Cape Hoskins
 29th - 3 aircraft: Rangombol Point to Cape Hoskins
 30th - 3 aircraft: Rangombol Point to Cape Hoskins
 31st - 3 aircraft: Cape Borgen to Gasmata

The operations summaries for every one of those 86 sorties contain three significant words — 'Nil barge sightings.' However, those reports show a sudden increase in the number of aircraft that didn't get off the ground or turned back soon after take-off because of engine or radio problems. The entry for 6 December shows that A19-153 and A19-3 were the first aircraft to return to base that month because of equipment malfunctions; a further nine aircraft aborted their sorties during the next few weeks. It is possible that the replacement groundstaff who had begun to arrive during November had not yet become as familiar with the Beaufighter and its equipment as the men who had been looking after the aircraft for the previous 15 months.

During the barge sweep between Wanamula Point and Cape Hoskins on 17 December, Don Eisenhower and Bruce Tiller (in A19-54) saw Colin Wein and Don Kirkwood (in A19-141) investigate a burnt out hulk near Cape Koas and then make a run over it. At the time, Don had dived down to give close examination to a nearby stretch of the coastline and when he recovered and looked around he could see no sign of A19-141. He searched that area thoroughly and then searched the coast as far as Patanga, but neither he nor his navigator saw any sign of A19-141 or its crew. Ray Wheatley, the Engineer Officer, and Bill Boulton, the Commanding Officer, suspected that Col Wein might have been fatally injured through the malfunctioning of the weapons system. They recalled that some days previously a pilot had sustained an injury to his foot during a cannon attack. It had been assumed that the injury had been caused by small arms fire from the ground. The Engineer Officer arranged for the armament section to carry out some test firings and it was found that every now and then a 20mm shell would explode just beyond the cannon port and in line with the pilot's position. Further examination showed that some of the ball ammunition did not have the correct size of charge and thus travelled down the gun barrel at a slower than normal speed. It was then hit by the immediately following round and exploded.

No further problems arose after the Squadron stopped using American made 20mm ammunition.

Towards the end of December Padre Ivor Church distributed parcels provided by the Red Cross and the Australian Comforts Fund. They had been packed some three months earlier and had spent a week or so in the hot hold of a cargo ship engaged in conveying supplies to Australian military units in the Pacific. Albert Parker put his parcel aside with the intention of having the pleasure of opening it on Christmas morning. He was extremely disappointed to find that the cake in his parcel had gone mouldy and was quite inedible. He sat opposite Don Angus for the Christmas dinner, which was served in the Airmens' Mess by the officers and senior non-



*Christmas dinner in the Airmen's Mess, Kiriwina, December 1943.
(Courtesy Cress Clarke)*

commissioned officers. The cooks had made a special effort for that meal, which consisted of onion soup, roast turkey, seasoning, baked potatoes, baked swedes, beans and carrots. That was followed by plum pudding and custard, fresh fruit, chocolates and candy. Jugs of fruit cordial were on every table, and the men could quench their thirsts with the liquid from a large canvas water bottle containing more fruit cordial—to which Bill Marsh and his medical staff had added a quantity of pure alcohol.

The long awaited postings had begun to come through and the exodus of the original members began, continuing until February as suitable replacements became available. Those posted south at that time included:

- To No. 1 Embarkation Depot: Wally Ampt, Bill Bartlett, Don Flemming, Russ Hall, Athol Hewitt, Charlie Metters, John Pickering and Harry Tayler.
- To No. 2 Embarkation Depot: Norman Carroll, Jim Dunn, Roy Eakins, Joe Erskine, Eric Forrester, Alwyn Green, Jeff Heath, Wally Navin, Lou Nott, Jack O'Donnell, Frank Simpson and Jim Wilson.

- To No. 3 Embarkation Depot: Lionel Gutteridge, Peter Hansen, Harry Whitton and Jim Chirgwin.

Earlier, a popular magazine had featured a story about one of the unit's clerks, and this was the accompanying text:

Sergeant Jim Chirgwin was in New Guinea for 15 months. He watched his RAAF squadron deliver blow after blow against the Japs. He followed the mounting toll of smashed enemy aircraft: He saw courageous young airmen leave the base never to return. He sweated in steamy tropical jungles. He heard bombs shatter the night silence and listened to the staccato cacophony of our ack-ack. War was the background for his thoughts and hopes — thoughts of his wife, Muriel, whom he had married two days before being posted to the famous Beaufighter Squadron.

Then came the good news. He was granted 21 day's leave. His first action was to send Muriel a telegram and his next was to check over the unit's flying times with Flying Officer Bill Holmes in their field office before catching a transport plane south — still hardly believing his luck.

There was good news for other airmen too: Some of them found that their paybooks had been adjusted to reflect their entitlements for two shillings a day Crew Pay for the occasions on which they had gone as part of the Beaufighter detachments to Milne Bay in June and to Dobodura in October. The pay clerk also spent some time with the pay records of officers, who were now entitled to three shillings a day as a Field Allowance.

The news for others serving at RAAF units on the mainland was not at all cheerful for they were informed that they had to forgo Christmas with their families and report to the Beaufighter squadron at Kiriwina on Christmas Eve. Those unhappy men included Tom Bastin, Ken Cole, Alf Cox, Allan Goodridge, Sydney Holland, Charles Honeysett, Roland Hughes, Jim Masters, Les Monley and Ed Rooney.

In his account of the airmen who gave such sterling service

and the flying personnel who flew their superb weapon of war against the enemy, War Correspondent George Johnston wrote this in the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

Designed originally as nightfighters for the defence of London, these 10 gun 'planes, with their high speed and silent approach, have proved perfect for ground strafing raids on enemy positions, grounded aircraft and coastal shipping. Since their arrival the Beaufighters have made hundreds of sorties and I don't think that at any time they have attacked from a higher level than a couple of hundred feet.

I know exactly what the Japanese must feel like, because whenever the Beaufighters take-off or come in, they zip over the top of our camps, clearing the tentpoles by just a few feet. And you can't hear them coming until they're right on top of you.

This method of attack calls for plenty of courage and plenty of cool flying skill, because when an outfit like this proves itself at this type of air warfare it gets a lot of sticky jobs such as drawing the fire of ack-ack guns away from the attacking bombers, sneaking across enemy airfields to shoot up grounded aircraft (a job that can be done very efficiently with the enormous hitting power of six machine guns and four cannon) and strafing Japanese troops from the tree tops, when even a fluke shot from an ordinary rifle might spell disaster for pilot, observer and 'plane.

NOMINAL ROLL

Agnew, K.E.	Beasley, D.I.	Bunn, L.W.
Albrecht, R.D.	Beck, K.S.	Burchall, R.
Allen, R.F.	Begby, Chaplain.	Burgoyne, A.G.
Allen, W.T.	Bell, J.P.	Burleigh, D.J.K.
Allott, R.M.	Bell, W.D, MID.	Burrows, M.J.
Allum, G.R.	Bennett, R.G.	Burton, F.R.
Ampt, W.T.	Berg, H.L.	Butler, J.G.
Anderson, F.B.	Beynon, R.W.	Butterfield, T.I.
Anderson, G.R.	Bicknell, E.E.	Byles, W.J.
Angus, D.D.	Binnie, W.G.R.	Cain, J.J.
Annetts, M.T.	Blackmn, E.T.	Cairn, J.J.
Archer, ?	Blohm, B.E.	Cameron, J.
Armstrong, D.J.	Bockman, R.J.	Cameron, S.F.
Arthur, J.C.	Bond, C.L.	Cameron, W.B.
Ashard, E.M.	Boulton, W.T.M.	Campbell, C.A.
Atkinson, A.G.	Bourne, R.H.	Cane; G.H.
Badman, A.W.	Box, D.K.	Carman, A.H.
Baich, L.	Boyd, M.L.	Carmichael, K.J.
Bain, D.E.	Braid, H.V.	Carnegie, G.C.
Baird, W.C.	Branthwaite, W.	Carroll, N.
Balderston, W.L.A.	Braund, L.L.	Cassidy, EG.
Ball, E.M.	Brazenor, R.J.	Cather, J.C.
Bamford, C.S.	Breen, K.J.	Chappie, G.H.
Barber, K.H.	Brennan, F.H.	Chirgwin, H.B.
Bartlett, W.H.	Britton, N.S.	Clarke, A.
Bastin, T.W.	Bromilow, L.J.	Clarke, J.C.
Bayes, R.H.	Brookes, J.L.	Clarke, W.G.

Clifford, W.H.	Edwards, G.P.	Hammond, J.
Clohesy, C.J.	Edwards, H.B.	Hanks, L.J.
Coates, J.H.	Edwards, W.H.	Hansen, P.J.
Coates, P.J.	Eisenhauer, D.W.	Harding, W.T.R.
Cole, K.	Ellis, H.J.	Hardman, C.G.
Coleman, W.S.	Emmertson, J.G.	Hardy, T.H.
Colethorpe, W.E.T.	Erskine, D.O.	Harman, W.S.
Collins, V.J.	Evans, J.	Harris, C.D.
Cook, L.A.	Farquhar, J.	Harvey, C.G.
Cooke, J.	Farren, T.	Hasenohr, R.
Cornish, C.H.	Fenwick, O.	Hattrick, D.
Cosgrove, W.N.	Ferrier, L.A.	Haupt, W.R.
Cotterill, C.	Fienberg, A.	Hayle, M.J.
Cotton, H.J.	Fisher, P.N.	Heath, J.
Cowen, A.N.	Fisken, P.N.	Heffernan, P.G.
Cowley, C.	Flemming, D.R.	Herron, A.C.
Cox, A.M.	Forde, D.F.	Hewitt, A.J.
Cross, S.R.	Foster, G.R.	Hewitt, J.E.
Crouch, L.A.	Fraser, N.E.	Higgerson, W.F.
Crowl, R.W.	Fraser, W.L.	Hindmarsh, G.G.
Cummins, R.N.	Gallary, W.E.	Hine, E.
Davies, C.G.	Garing, W.H.	Hinks, F.C.
Davis, L.A.	Gazzard, F.I.	Hodges, A.G.
Davis, W.R.	Gemmell, K.R.	Holland, S.J.
Dawson, A.T.	Gibson, G.W.	Holmes, C.W.
Deacon, H.B.	Gibson, W.R.	Honeysett, C.J.
Delbridge, K.G.	Glasscock, C.P.	Horler, J.R.
Destree, L.A.H.	Gollan, V.C.	Horne, A.C.
Devlin, C.	Golledge, K.R.	Horne, E.E.
Dick, G.T.	Good, E.P.	Howell, J.H.
Dorman, R.C.	Goodridge, A.P.	Hughes, E.G.
Dorrington, W.C.	Goodsir, R.A.	Hughes, E.R.
Downing, G.R.	Graham, G.B.	Hughes, R.J.
Drummond, J.A.	Grant, K.J.	Hullin, J.H.
Drury, E.G.	Greasley, N.E.	Hunt, G.
Dunn, J.E.	Green, A.C.	Hunter, H.W.
Dunstan, J.	Greenhill, A.L.	Hunter, R.
Dusting, L.G.	Grogan, W.J.	Hurst, F.A.
Eakins, R.O.	Gunton, H.G.	Hurst, A.J.
Eckhold, F.E.	Gutteridge, L.	Hutchinson, S.R.
Eddison, E.K.	Haddon, D.W.	Innes, D.
Edgar, R.A.	Hall, R.H.	Jaggs, A.E.
Edgar, S.W.	Hamer, G.O.	James, R.A.
Edmonds, L.F.J.	Hamilton, G.R.	Jeffries, S.E.

Jenkins, A.L.	Maddox, R.E	Navin, W.
Johnston, J.A.	Maguire, ER.	Nelson, R.T.
Johnston, R.H.	Maguire, J.P.	Newham, H.C
Jones, E.A.	Mairret, A.S.	Newland, J.G.
Jones, G.	Mann, E.S.	Newman, J.R.
Jordan, A.T.	Mansell, V.	Newton, W.
Joyes, D.L.	Marron, E.M.	Nichols, J.H.
Kachel, E.V.	Marsden, E.D.	Nicholson, K.G.
Kay, W.	Marsh, W.B.	Nipperess, S.J.
Kean, R.B.	Mason, J.W.	Nott, L.R.
Keating, M.L.	Masters, J.A.	O'Connor, H.B.
Keller, W.D.	Masterton, W.E.	O'Donnell, J.A.
Kelley, R.A.	Maxwell, C.	Park, C.J.
Kelly, H.P.	Mayo, H.A.	Parker, H.
Kenny, A.A.	McCarthy, J.K.	Parker, P.A.
King, EC.	McDowell, H.D.	Passfield, R.S.
King, G.T.	Mcintosh, G.G	Phelan, T
Kirby, R.	Mclvor, W.T.	Pickering, J.H.E
Kirkwood, D.C.	McKenzie, E.L.	Pink, M.T.T.
Kirley, A.L.	McKew, CO.	Pitman, R.W.
Lahne, H.J.A.	McLachlan, D.	Pivott, A.H.
Laing, Alan D.	McLean, N.B.	Poole, L.C
Laing, Allan.	McMahon, R.J.	Pringle, W.S.
Lambert, S.	McNaught, K.R.	Raffen, D.G.
Lane, R.	McRobbie, J.	Rapsey, E.A.
Langusch, L.D.	McVernon, S.B.	Rawlinson, L.J.
Lansell, E.V.	Meers, R.B.	Read, C.F.
Lasscock, E.D.	Metters, C.H.	Reade, B.J.
Latham, G.M.	Miller, D.M.	Reeve, N.F.
Laverty, J.F.	Mills, R.E.F.	Reinhard, W.M.
Le Griffon, B.A.	Mills, C.H.	Rhodes, W.J.
Lee, E.A.	Mitchell, C.L.	Richardson, E.R.
Leverett, M.E.	Mitchell, T.C.	Roach, J.F.
Little, R.A.	Monley, L.S.	Roberts, NT.
Lizars, R.A.	Moore, G.B.	Robertson, D.B.
Lockwood, R.W.	Moran-Hilford, D.J.	Robertson, T.G.
Lothian, L.A.	Morgan, M.L.	Robinson, J.E.
Lovett, A.R.	Morley, W.K.	Roe, R.H.
Lucas, G.A.	Morris, K.	Rooney, E.P.
Lusk, E.G.B.	Morris-Hadwell, E.B.	Rooney, T.M.
Lutwyche, S.E	Morrison, R.K.	Rose, B.F.
Maddalena, G.R.	Mortimer, CO.	Rose, K.E.
Madden, W.G.	Muncaster, G.T.	Ross, H.L.
Maddock, T.S.	Nancarrow, R.T.J.	Ross, H.L.

Rowley, G.C.
Rush, A.J.
Russell, W.J.
Ryan, J.P.
Samuels, C.D.
Sandford, J.
Sawtell, E.A.
Sayer, G.W.
Schofield, W.J.
Scott, M.
Scrimshaw, R.N.
See, E.H.
Sharpe, H. St A.
Shaw, R.A.
Shawcroft, C.J.
Sheekey, L.E
Shearan G.E.
Sillett, R.C.
Simpson, R.A.
Sims, L.E
Smith, D.
Smith, D.G.
Smith, L.A.
Spooner, A.H.
Steen, W.J.
Stephen, B.R.
Stone, A.S.
Stone, R.D.
Stoneham, G.H.
Sullivan, P.L.
Suthons, H.C.

Sweeney, P.J.
Tapner, H.J.
Tayler, H.W.
Taylor, J.
Taylor, W.I.
Thacker, R.S.
Thomas, B.L.
Thompson, A.A.
Thompson, E
Thomson, J.
Tiller, B.W.
Towill, M.E.
Tuckwell, E.L.
Turnbull, L.J.
Turner, J.
Tyrrell, J.
Underwood, H.J.
Uren, R.E
Vial, L.
Vial, L.S.
Vidler, R.A.
Virgin, S.W.
Walker, B.R.
Walker, K.C.
Walker, R.J.M.
Wallace, S.
Walsh, J.E
Warhurst, A.
Watson, G.
Wearne, C.W.
Webster, L.C.

Webster, N.W.
Wein, C.E.
Welch, E.
Welsh, P.L.
West, D.D.
Wheatley, R.G.
White, P.J.O.
Whitfield, V.
Whitton, H.T.S.
Wighton, R.A.
Wild, R.A.
Willard, W.E.
Williams, C.A.
Williams, G.E
Williams, J.K.G.
Willis, G.P.
Wilson, C.N.E.
Wilson, J.R.
Wilson, J.W.
Wilson, K.P.
Wisely, S.J.
Wishaw, D.K.
Witford, C.H.
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Wolff, B.W.
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