

CHAPTER 12

No. 10 GROUP AT NADZAB

THE success of the Allied campaign in the South-West Pacific in 1943 and the prospect of greater successes in 1944 pointed to the urgent need for reorganisation of the R.A.A.F. in New Guinea. It needed greater mobility. A new R.A.A.F. formation, or "air task force", was required which could move forward in jumps of 400-500 miles or more, fight the enemy, move rapidly forward and fight again, as General MacArthur's forces pressed on towards the Philippine Islands along the north New Guinea coast.

The war in the Pacific had entered a new phase. The enemy's outer defences were crumbling. Strong ground forces remained, but it was not MacArthur's intention to engage all of them. Having gained the approval of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he intended to move round certain heavily defended points—notably Wewak—in a series of advances which would gain him entry to the Philippines late in 1944.

The two R.A.A.F. organisations which controlled nearly all the experienced squadrons in contact with the enemy were North-Western Area and No. 9 Group. At the end of 1943 the North-Western Area force was committed to the dual task of defending northern Australia and aiding New Guinea operations by attacking the Japanese rear and flank. Earlier the R.A.A.F. had intended that No. 9 Group should be a mobile force capable of rapid movement, but in fact it was not. It had become a standard area force, similar to those of other R.A.A.F. areas on the mainland, and its mobility was limited. Air Vice-Marshal Bostock proposed that its name be changed to "Northern Area" so that its function would be better understood.

In September 1943 General Kenney asked Bostock to provide him with a mobile Australian force. By that time the R.A.A.F. had received more than 100 Vultee Vengeance dive bombers. It was therefore decided that the new force would consist of a dive bomber wing and a fighter wing, with their servicing and other necessary units. The fighters would protect the dive bombers during their attack missions. The group was to be ready for action at the end of 1943, and would probably be assigned to the New Britain area.¹

As Bostock pointed out in a letter to Air Force Headquarters, the essential features of this proposed new group were "compactness, high mobility and clean-cut channels of command from top to bottom". The commander of the group was to have the rank of group captain and the

¹ General MacArthur radioed to General Krueger on 7th November: "Because of anticipated decrease in long range pursuit aviation replacements, Air Force plans to station three RAAF short range pursuit squadrons and three RAAF dive bomber squadrons at [Lindenhafen, New Britain]. There is under consideration a proposal to move the 6th and 7th RAAF Mobile Construction units from [Goodenough] and [Kiriwina] to [New Britain] in order to increase the engineering force available." The purpose of the Lindenhafen force was to give added security to Vitiaz Strait.

wings were to be commanded by senior wing commanders. In order to "streamline" the wings and keep them down to a minimum of men and equipment, they were to be free of all services such as legal, hygiene, chaplains, provost, dental, pay and equipment. Both Bostock and Group Captain Packer, who commanded Forward Echelon,² emphasised to Air Force Headquarters that in planning the group they should concentrate on the fact that this was the "last chance to keep the R.A.A.F. always up with the advance towards Japan". This, they said, must be the prime consideration upon which planning should be based.

On 13th November Air Force Headquarters issued orders creating the new formation, which was to be known as No. 10 (Operational) Group. It was assigned as a subordinate force within No. 9 (Operational) Group. The units placed under the new group were:

No. 10 (Operational) Group Headquarters (Group Captain Scherger)

- No. 13 Signals Unit.
- No. 25 Stores Unit.
- No. 11 R.A.A.F. Postal Unit.
- No. 10 Replenishing Centre.
- No. 7 Transport and Movements Office.
- No. 2 Malaria Control Unit.

No. 77 Wing Headquarters (Wing Commander Fyfe)

- No. 21 Dive Bomber Squadron.
- No. 23 Dive Bomber Squadron.
- No. 24 Dive Bomber Squadron.
- No. 47 Operational Base Unit.
- No. 11 Repair and Salvage Unit.
- No. 23 Medical Clearing Station.

No. 78 Wing Headquarters (Wing Commander Brookes)

- No. 80 Fighter Squadron.
- No. 452 Fighter Squadron.
- No. 457 Fighter Squadron.
- No. 111 Fighter Sector Headquarters.
- No. 48 Operational Base Unit.
- No. 22 Repair and Salvage Unit.
- No. 24 Medical Clearing Station.

Some of these units were not yet in existence and had to be formed and ready for movement by 1st December. Shipping was asked for to transport the group from Brisbane on 1st December. Preparing the group within five weeks posed a difficult problem and in spite of great efforts the departure from Australia had to be postponed until 1st January 1944. This delay resulted in confusion in shipping arrangements. The difficulties caused by the rapid concentration of the units near Brisbane is well illustrated by the experience of No. 11 Repair and Salvage Unit (commanded by Squadron Leader Taylor³). The unit's historical record reported:

² Forward Echelon was an organisation representing Air Force Headquarters at MacArthur's headquarters.

³ W Cdr C. R. Taylor, 2408. Comd 11 RSU 1943-45. Regular airman; of East Kew, Vic; b. East Melbourne, 20 Feb 1913.

Arrangements for receiving and storage of the unit equipment at Meeandah were totally inadequate. This equipment, approximately 2,000 ship tons, was dumped in an open paddock sodden with recent rainfall and without any cover whatsoever. The camping facilities for our off loading party were a disgrace, filthy beyond description. The officer in charge of the party refused to house his troops there, necessitating their being conveyed to and from Sandgate, Queensland, each day. The unit quickly settled down at Coominya, where there was only one building which housed headquarters. Prior to arriving at this out of the way spot, we were advised that water for drinking and washing could be drawn from two dams located on the spot. This water proved to be useless, cattle being allowed to use the same for drinking; however we were able to locate an excellent well between Coominya and Lowood.

No. 21 Squadron experienced similar difficulties. There was no suitable site for a camp at Lowood and the whole of the squadron's equipment was dumped in a creek bed. After a few days, rain fell heavily, the creek overflowed and washed out the squadron's camp, ruining most of the equipment, which eventually had to be replaced. The Vengeance aircraft could not be kept serviceable for long in these chaotic conditions, with the result that the crews obtained very little practice before flying to New Guinea.

Of the six squadrons of the new group, No. 24 was already in the New Guinea area (Kiriwina) and No. 80 was at Townsville, Queensland. Nos. 452 and 457 were to move from the Northern Territory when relieved by two R.A.F. Spitfire squadrons (Nos. 548 and 549) which were leaving the United Kingdom during November for Australia. Nos. 21 and 23 Squadrons had to be ready to move from Lowood on 1st December.

Before the work of organisation had gone far ahead, it became clear that the two R.A.F. Spitfire squadrons which were to relieve Nos. 452 and 457 would not arrive from Britain in time. Kenney was anxious to have the group in action and directed that No. 75 Squadron which was at Goodenough and No. 78 at Kiriwina should be substituted. All the fighter squadrons would now be equipped with Kittyhawk aircraft and this would greatly simplify the supply and maintenance problems of the group.

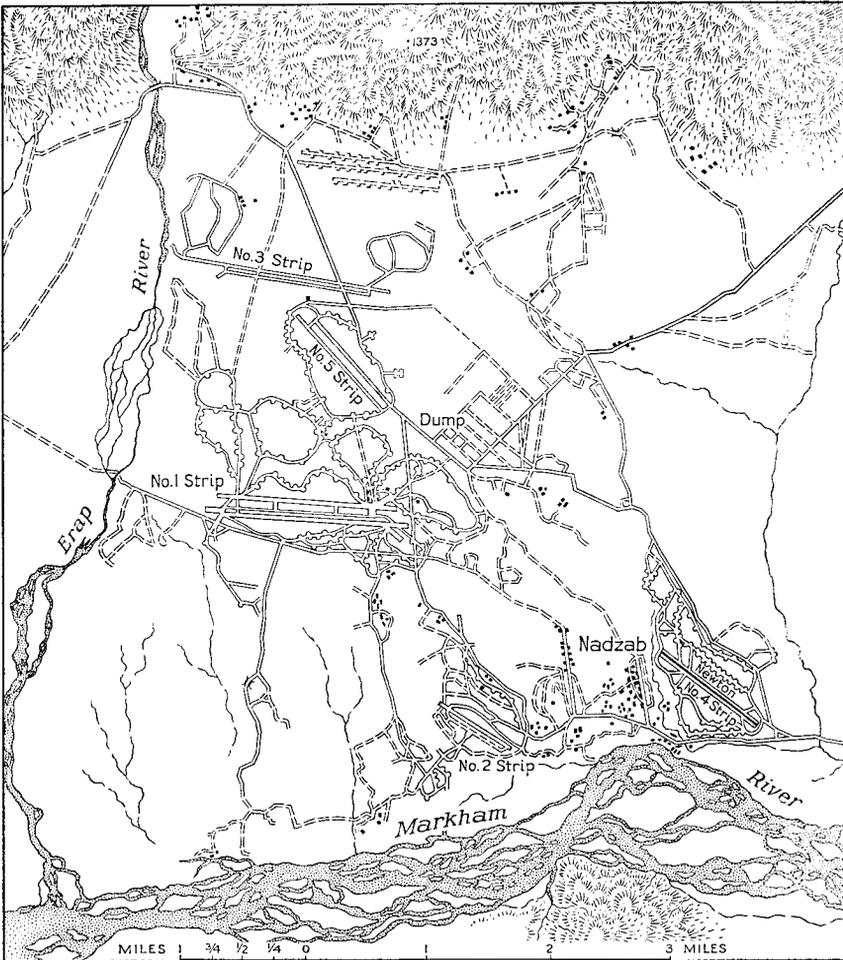
One of the last persons to be appointed to the group was the commander himself, Group Captain Scherger. Mr Curtin, in his capacity as Minister for Defence, approved of Scherger's appointment on 24th November. It was a mistake to delay the appointment of the commander until the organisation of his command was so far advanced that he was given no say in the selection of the staff with whom he was to work. However, Scherger got on well with the members of his staff, and they with one another. Group Captain Pearce was appointed senior air staff officer, Wing Commander Wight,⁴ senior administrative officer and Wing Commander Hammond,⁵ group equipment officer. Bostock impressed on Scherger the importance of good relations with the Americans and the

⁴ Gp Capt F. J. B. Wight, 30. Comd 1 EFTS 1939-40, 59 Sqn RAF 1941, 3 SFTS 1942, 8 SFTS 1942-43; SAO 10 Gp 1943-44, Regular air force offr; of Maryborough, Vic; b. 3 Aug 1905. Killed in aircraft accident 30 Jan 1944.

⁵ W Cdr W. L. Hammond, 1075; 10 Gp. Regular air force offr; of King's Park, SA; b. Adelaide, 9 Sep 1914. Killed in aircraft accident 30 Jan 1944.

need to ensure that by its efficiency in battle the group would earn a worthy place in the campaigns then contemplated.

General Kenney had planned to use No. 10 Group as a self-contained force to occupy an airfield in the Gasmata area on the southern coast of New Britain. It would have assisted No. 9 Group, which already had the responsibility of attacking and neutralising the Japanese in central New Britain. However, the Gasmata operation had been abandoned.



Early in December Scherger flew to Port Moresby to arrange the movement of his group to the battle area, and there he conferred with Brigadier-General Whitehead, the deputy commander of the Fifth Air Force. It was agreed between them that No. 10 Group would support the Fifth Air

Force in the Huon Gulf area and that the whole group would move into Nadzab and operate from No. 4 Airfield. In addition, the R.A.A.F's No. 4 (Army Cooperation) Squadron, which had been supporting the Australian ground forces throughout the Huon Gulf campaign, would be put under No. 10 Group's control. At Nadzab, Wing Commander Dale,⁶ the commander of No. 62 Airfield Construction Wing, which was busily engaged in construction work, informed Scherger that the No. 4 Airfield would be ready to take aircraft by 15th January, with sufficient dispersals for two squadrons. To speed up construction work, Scherger ordered carpenters, plumbers, general hands and labourers of his group to fly there as soon as possible. They left late in December and became the advance guard of the group.

In January the major units of the group began their movement forward by air and by sea from their island bases, or from the mainland. Amid brisk activity, parties on the mainland began embarking at Brisbane and Townsville. The Headquarters of No. 10 Group and main parties of Nos. 21 and 23 Squadrons boarded *Van der Lijn* at Brisbane, while at Townsville another 791 officers, non-commissioned officers and men of the group embarked in *Edward C. Baker*.

Meanwhile, the R.A.A.F. works squadrons which had been in the Lae-Nadzab area since early in December had completed the construction of No. 4 Airfield. This airfield was later named Newton Field after Flight Lieutenant Newton of No. 22 Squadron who had won the Victoria Cross for gallantry in this area. The construction squadrons building the urgently needed runways, roads and camps at Nadzab were Nos. 2, 6 and 7; No. 6 making taxiways and surfaced dispersal areas for aircraft, while Nos. 2 and 7 worked on the twin 6,000-foot runways. They cleared, graded and rolled the two strips, and finally surfaced them with gravel and bound them with bitumen. Altogether some 1,400 men were engaged in this work, aided by the advance parties of No. 10 Group units, which were moving in during the month. The work of these men was interrupted by occasional enemy air attacks, but no serious damage resulted and they completed their work ahead of the time set.

On 11th January two Kittyhawks landed on one runway at Newton Field, and on the following day Wing Commander Walker, commander of No. 78 Squadron, led twenty aircraft of his squadron from Kiriwina to Nadzab. Four days later, fifteen Vengeance dive bombers of No. 24 Squadron led by Squadron Leader Honey followed the Kittyhawks from Kiriwina to Nadzab. No. 10 Group was now ready to begin action with two squadrons.

On 13th January 1944, the day after their arrival at Nadzab, eighteen Kittyhawks of No. 78, led by Walker, carried out No. 10 Group's first war mission. Their assignment was to patrol the Upper Ramu Valley, the Bogadjim Road, and the north coast of New Guinea from Madang to

⁶ Gp Capt W. A. C. Dale, CBE, DSO, 260182. Asst Dir Works and Bldgs 1939-43; comd 62 Airfield Construction Wing 1943-45. Civil engineer; of Coonamble, NSW; b. Sydney, 18 Nov 1904.

Saidor, and to machine-gun any target that presented itself; but the main purpose of the flight was to give the pilots an idea of the country over which they were to operate. For most of the flight cloud and rain shut out the ground and no machine-gunning was carried out. Two of the Kittyhawks were forced to land at Saidor with electrical defects, but later flew back safely to Nadzab. By the afternoon the weather had improved and the Kittyhawks were loaded with bombs and sent out to bomb Erima plantation, seventeen miles south of Madang, which was being used by the Japanese as a staging point for supplies and ammunition destined either for the Ramu Valley or the Rai coast. The Kittyhawks bombed the target and met no opposition from the enemy. They bombed it again the following day and again on 15th January. Mitchell bombers of the Fifth Air Force also attacked Erima on this day.

On 16th January the target was Yaula, near the upper end of the Bogadjim Road. Boomerangs of No. 4 led twelve Kittyhawks from No. 78 to an attack on motor transport dispersals. The Boomerangs dived towards the target, machine-gunning it with tracer ammunition to indicate it to the Kittyhawks. The Kittyhawks then followed them down, dropping their bombs and machine-gunning. Ten of their twelve bombs landed on the target. On the return flight to Nadzab some of the Kittyhawks dived to tree-top level to machine-gun Japanese-occupied villages at Kwato, Old Yaula, and Daumoina, while the others flew at 6,000 feet to protect the low strafers from possible enemy interference. Again Fifth Air Force Bostons and Mitchells bombed and strafed in the same area.

After the fall of Nadzab, Lae and Finschhafen the 7th Australian Division had pushed on rapidly up the Markham Valley. Its drive was so successful that by December the division had reached the Shaggy Ridge area, forcing the Japanese back towards Bogadjim. No. 4 Squadron R.A.A.F. had continued to lead-in attacks made by squadrons of the Fifth Air Force which were supporting the Australians on the ground.

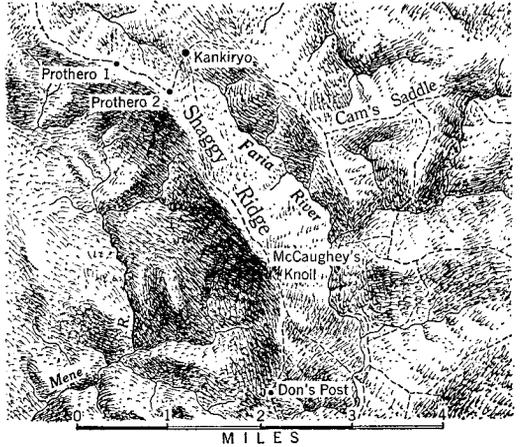
On 2nd January, as mentioned earlier, part of the 32nd American Division had landed at Saidor on the Rai coast; and on 15th January Sio was taken. The 5th Australian Division then took over the advance. The Australians were to push up the Rai coast to link with the Americans at Saidor, while the Americans moved along the coast to Astrolabe Bay and Bogadjim, where they would link with the Australians moving on the inland route.

General Vasey had been drawing all his close air support from the Fifth Air Force and did not feel inclined to transfer this responsibility to No. 10 Group when it arrived at Nadzab. In January his troops were faced with a difficult task in capturing Shaggy Ridge and his plans called for heavy air attacks by the Fifth Air Force. A number of the support missions was assigned to No. 10 Group.

One object of the Shaggy Ridge attack was to remove a Japanese threat to the important Allied air base near by at Gusap, on the bank of the upper Ramu Valley, which was the base nearest to Hollandia where the Japanese maintained strong air units. Vasey planned a three-pronged

assault. One prong would be against the twin mountain features known as "Prothero 1" and "Prothero 2", the second against the ridge itself, and a third along the Faria River valley; D-day was 20th January. Air support was to be given before and during the assault and all available 25-pounder guns were to help in the destruction of the enemy defences.

On 17th January, three days before the main attack, to be carried out by the 18th Brigade, Scherger directed Nos. 24 and 78 to bomb and strafe the Kankiry saddle in the Shaggy Ridge area. This was to be No. 24's first mission for No. 10 Group and it was part of the softening-up program. The Kittyhawks were to escort the Vengeances and in addition carry their own bomb load. The two squadrons took off from Newton Field at 10 o'clock in the morning and over Gusap were joined by two Boomerangs of No. 4 which were to lead them to the Kankiry feature. The Kittyhawks scissored



4,000 feet above the Vengeance formation. The Boomerangs went in to the attack first, followed by the Vengeances, which dropped nine tons of bombs and then machine-gunned. The Kittyhawks then carried out similar attacks.

Next morning Mitchells of the Fifth Air Force bombed the ridge and No. 78 flew overhead to protect them from possible enemy interference. These attacks were repeated in the afternoon and again the Kittyhawks of No. 78 gave protective cover.

On 19th January, the eve of the 18th Brigade's assault, eleven Kittyhawks covered a strike by twelve Vengeances on the same target. This attack was not successful, bombs landing up to 800 yards from the target. The artillery was to fire smoke shells to indicate where the bombs were to be dropped, but before they could do so the Vengeance pilots had seen smoke billowing out from the jungle and had begun their attack. It looked as though the Japanese had anticipated the bombing attack and fired their own smoke shells to draw the attack away from their positions.

Heavy rain fell on the night of 19th-20th January, the eve of the assault, increasing the difficulties of the 18th Brigade. No. 10 Group had been assigned the task of hitting the first objective, Cam's Saddle, where an estimated 200 Japanese had been seen. Twelve Vengeances led by Honey took off at 10 a.m. accompanied by Kittyhawks. The weather was still bad and Honey had difficulty in finding the target, which was hidden

behind clouds and rain squalls. While the Vengeances were circling the target waiting for the ground troops to fire their smoke shells, the enemy began firing at them. Twenty minutes passed before the pilots saw the smoke shells and immediately afterwards they began the attack, diving 1,000 feet through clouds to ensure accuracy. This time there was no failure. They dropped 22 bombs, 14 of which fell directly on the target. Then a company of the 2/10th Battalion advanced west along the saddle and, after minor skirmishing, cleared the enemy from the feature. Part of the 2/12th Battalion which attacked "Prothero 1" came under fire from a 75-mm gun at point-blank range and this held up their advance. However a company of the battalion, after a stiff climb, rushed the gun position and captured it.

The next objective of the 2/12th Battalion was "Prothero 2" some hundred yards farther on. Vengeances escorted by Kittyhawks attacked this target before the assault on 22nd January. Honey took off at 9.50 in the morning followed by ten other Vengeances and eleven Kittyhawks. They dropped 11 tons of bombs on the target, again with great accuracy. Then a company of the 2/12th advanced again, ousting the Japanese from the feature, and, pushing farther along Shaggy Ridge, seized McCaughey's Knoll. By 23rd January the fight for Shaggy Ridge had been won, and by 26th January Kankiryō Saddle was in Australian hands.

On 23rd January the Vengeances, again accompanied by No. 78, aided operations near Kesawai, where the 15th Brigade was raiding the Japanese right flank as a diversionary action for the main Shaggy Ridge operation.

The defeat of the enemy forces on Shaggy Ridge gave security to Gusap airfield and Kenney was able to proceed with plans to use this base for the next phase of the air war in the South-West Pacific. Essentially the Markham Valley-Upper Ramu Valley campaigns were undertaken to provide Kenney with convenient places for the establishment of his growing air forces. As soon as these two valleys had been seized and made secure the strategic purpose of the ground operations was achieved.

Twenty-three Kittyhawks of No. 75 Squadron had arrived at Nadzab from Dobodura on 19th January and the next day this squadron began operating with No. 10 Group. Twelve machines led by Squadron Leader Kinninmont escorted thirty-seven Mitchells in an attack on Hansa Bay. Afterwards they flew along the coast machine-gunning anything that appeared of use to the enemy. They fired on a lugger and eight barges and on stores at one end of Nubia airfield, and machine-gunned the jetty and a large building on Karkar Island. The enemy fired on them from the ground, but no enemy aircraft attempted to interfere with the sweep. On 24th January the Vengeances and two squadrons of Mitchells were sent to bomb buildings at the south end of Gragat Island near Madang. Kittyhawks of both Nos. 75 and 78 escorted them. Four of the Kittyhawks returned with the Vengeances after they had attacked while the rest of the Kittyhawks remained and machine-gunned buildings on the island.

In the last week of January, General Whitehead directed No. 10 Group to provide fighter aircraft for the "Valley Patrol". The purpose of this

patrol was to protect the Markham Valley between Gusap and Lae from surprise air attacks. The enemy was still sending occasional raiders into the valley and because of the high mountains on either side the radar stations set up could not detect the raiders until it was too late. It was therefore necessary to have fighters patrolling continually. The patrol would fly during the hours of daylight at 16,000 feet and sometimes another flight would fly at a lower level.

The routine "valley patrol" duty and the task of escorting R.A.A.F. and American bombers on their missions became the principal duties of the squadrons of No. 78 Wing. Pilots began to criticise the American command for assigning the R.A.A.F. fighters to these tasks. Scherger, commenting on this later, said: "Not unnaturally our pilots became 'browned off' with this task and became rather critical of the American Command, which in their opinion was giving all the interesting work to American pilots and none to them. This however was not so, as Major-General Whitehead insisted that all new fighter units take over this patrol as a probationary task."⁷

Operations of No. 10 Group continued until 27th January without loss of life to aircrews. On that day, however, No. 75 lost two pilots during attacks on islands near Madang. Four of the Kittyhawks dived on Jomba Island firing their machine-guns. The section leader (Flying Officer Hunt⁸) collided with Pilot Officer Stirling's⁹ aircraft which was directly below him. The planes exploded in mid-air, killing both pilots.

The Vengeance squadron gave support to army forces on 29th January when they attacked a Japanese position at Orgoruna which was holding up the advance. They dropped bombs and then strafed Orgoruna village. Kittyhawks of No. 78 went with the Vengeances and also carried bombs which they dropped on the target. Two of the Vengeances had engine trouble and one was forced to crash-land on the banks of the Markham River, ten miles from Nadzab. The crew (Pilot Officer Stevens,¹ pilot, and Flight Sergeant Main,² observer) escaped injury, and food and equipment were dropped to them for two days before they were rescued.

On the last day of January No. 24 was assigned to destroy the Gori River bridge at Bogadjim. Escort of eight Thunderbolt aircraft of No. 35 American Squadron was provided. Six Vengeances were to take part but one blew a tyre during take-off, while two others failed to find the bridge. However, the other three, led by Flight Lieutenant Lewis,³ after finding the bridge, began diving on it from 2,500 feet. Japanese anti-aircraft guns opened fire on them but the Vengeances dived through it

⁷ Air Cmdre F. R. W. Scherger, Report on No. 10 Gp.

⁸ F-O S. B. Hunt, 412078; 75 Sqn. Grazier; of Euroa, Vic; b. Gladesville, NSW, 2 Apr 1918. Killed in action 27 Jan 1944.

⁹ P-O J. McL. Stirling, 405427; 75 Sqn. Jackaroo; of Pittsworth, Qld; b. Pittsworth, 8 Apr 1921. Killed in action 27 Jan 1944.

¹ F-Lt L. A. Stevens, 405608; 24 Sqn. Stockman; of Richmond, Qld; b. Hughenden, Qld, 12 Feb 1917.

² F-O H. G. Main, 413217; 24 Sqn. Student; of Portland, NSW; b. Hurstville, NSW, 27 Apr 1922.

³ Sqn Ldr R. L. Lewis, DFC, 406166. 602 Sqn RAF and 24 Sqn; comd 24 Sqn 1944. Farmer; of Kojonup, WA; b. Auga, Central Provinces, India, 10 Dec 1912.

to release their bombs at between 400 and 800 feet. Four of the 500-lb bombs hit the bridge and destroyed it. Two more exploded at the southern approach where there was an anti-aircraft position, which was silenced. The fragments from the 500-lb bombs struck two of the Vengeances as they pulled out of their dives. After destroying the bridge the Vengeances machine-gunned the road leading to the bridge and the near-by village of Baumonna.

On 30th January Kenney had returned to Brisbane after having attended conferences in Washington and Pearl Harbour. He had been able to obtain a further two groups of bombers and it was also decided that the Thirteenth Air Force, which had been operating under Admiral Halsey in the South Pacific Area, would be placed under his control. South Pacific Area Command was to be disbanded as there would be little more for it to do after Rabaul had been isolated and neutralised. By the end of 1943 the Fifth Air Force had already grown to 78 squadrons, compared with 36 on 31st March 1943. In the same period, because of commitments under the Empire Air Training Scheme to send aircrews and ground personnel to other theatres, the R.A.A.F. in the South-West Pacific had only grown from 34 squadrons to 45.

General Kenney wanted the Wewak air bases kept down in preparation for the Admiralty Islands operation and as soon as he returned from Washington ordered the Fifth Air Force to bombard the four airfields there. Kittyhawks of Nos. 75 and 78 as well as American fighter squadrons were to give close escort to the Mitchells and Liberators assigned to these attacks. Twelve Kittyhawks of No. 75 led by Kinninmont and twelve from No. 78 led by Walker provided cover for three squadrons of American Mitchells on 3rd February. Both R.A.A.F. squadrons, after taking off from Nadzab, made a rendezvous with the Mitchells at 10.45 a.m. over Gusap airfield. They then accompanied the Mitchells to But airfield. The Mitchells flew just above the jungle when approaching But, while the Kittyhawks flew at between 4,000 and 5,000 feet. No enemy planes attempted to interfere. Kenney described the action as follows:⁴

Right behind the heavies and just over the tree tops came sixty-two B-25's [Mitchells] escorted by sixty-six fighters, which kept on going and swept over But and Dagua. The strategy worked. The Nip behaved perfectly and had his planes lined up nicely, most of them with the engines turning over, crews in their seats and mechanics standing by, when the storm hit them. At But and Dagua alone, sixty Nip planes were destroyed on the ground while the fighters shot down another sixteen in air combat. We had no losses.

Next day the air bombardment at Wewak was resumed and again the Kittyhawks of Nos. 75 and 78 provided close escort. Kinninmont reported seeing sixteen enemy aircraft when the Allied formation reached Wewak. They circled about twenty miles south-east of the target and then headed out to sea. There was no contact.

⁴ Kenney, p. 351.

No. 24 was taken off operations at the end of January and for two weeks in February the crews carried out much-needed training exercises at Lake Wanum. Scherger had found that not all his aircrews were trained well enough to be put into action immediately. All crews had graduated from R.A.A.F. Operational Training Units on the mainland, but these units were all in the southern part of Australia where weather and other conditions affecting operations were very different from those in New Guinea. Scherger wrote later:

We were obliged to spend a good deal of time on training particularly when the group first moved to New Guinea and the need for forward Operational Training Units became more and more pressing as time went on. . . . In the systems of operational training there was a marked difference between the American and Australian methods. The Americans did some operational training back in America, but most of this type of training was done in New Guinea and the operational training crews were "blooded" by attacking relatively innocuous targets in Japanese held territory which had been by-passed. . . . Of the two systems there is again little doubt that the American system was the superior and if R.A.A.F. units are employed outside Australia in the future, it will be necessary to provide operational training units not far from the tactical zone.

No. 10 Group gained in strength on 9th February when eighteen machines of its second Vengeance Squadron (No. 23) landed at Nadzab from Lowood (Queensland). A familiarisation flight was flown by the squadron on 10th February, and the next day it carried out its first operation with No. 24. The American units at Saidor reported that Japanese troops were using native villages along the Rai coast as staging points in the flight towards Bogadjim. They called for bombing attacks on the villages of Yoga Yoga, Tarikngan and Gwarawan, south of Saidor. Six Vengeances of No. 23 led by the commanding officer, Wing Commander Philp,⁵ and six from No. 24 led by Lewis, took part in the mission. They were given an escort of four Kittyhawks of No. 75 and four Thunderbolts of the Fifth Air Force. The American ground forces reported that 300 Japanese left Tarikngan village just before the attack. Another 99 left immediately after the attack. Yoga Yoga village was demolished, several direct hits being scored.

Attacks on the remnants of the Japanese *20th Division* retreating westward, and on airfields at Alexishafen and Madang, were the main duties of the Vengeances in February. By 18th February the aircraft of the remaining Vengeance Squadron (No. 21) had arrived at Nadzab and the whole of No. 77 Wing was then operational. No. 21 carried out its first mission on 22nd February when three of its aircraft accompanied Nos. 23 and 24 in an attack on barge hideouts on the Wagol River, Madang.

On 24th February the Vengeances extended their attacks as far west as Hansa Bay. Twenty-three aircraft of Nos. 21 and 23 escorted by twelve Kittyhawks of No. 75 were sent to dive-bomb anti-aircraft positions there. Two sections of the Kittyhawk squadron attacked first, machine-gunning the anti-aircraft positions from tree-top level. They continued

⁵ W Cdr T. R. Philp, DFC, 270531. 12 Sqn; comd 23 Sqn 1943-44. Station overseer; of Indooroopilly, Qld; b. Townsville, Qld, 17 Dec 1917.

on to Nubia airfield strafing targets of opportunity. The strafing run did not silence the anti-aircraft guns at Hansa Bay, and when the Vengeances began their attack they were greeted by heavy Japanese fire. No. 21 suffered no hits from the enemy guns but No. 23 lost two machines. One piloted by Flying Officer Burnell,⁶ with Captain Watson,⁷ an army liaison officer, as his observer, failed to pull out of its dive and crashed into the water about 300 yards from the target. Another Vengeance, with Flight Sergeant McDonald⁸ as pilot and Flying Officer McAllister⁹ as observer, did not return to base after being hit by the anti-aircraft gunfire.

MacArthur's swift move to the Admiralty Islands on 29th February made it imperative that enemy airfields at Alexishafen and Madang should be incapable of use for staging in enemy attacks against the landing force, and No. 10 Group squadrons as well as the Fifth Air Force were directed to carry out heavy attacks on these points. The all-out effort of the Vengeances had begun on 26th February. Twelve aircraft each from Nos. 21 and 23 attacked No. 1 Strip at Alexishafen, while twelve from No. 24 concentrated on Madang. These attacks were repeated next day and on 28th February a total of 33 Vengeances escorted by 29 Kittyhawks of No. 78 and the newly-arrived No. 80 Squadron combined in a 62-plane strike on both strips at Alexishafen and one at Madang. Buildings in the Madang township and near-by islands were also heavily machine-gunned. The Kittyhawks as well as the Vengeances carried bombs which were dropped on the airfields, digging up the runways and destroying buildings and stores. The Vengeance crews considered that the airfields were out of order before their attacks began as no attempt had been made to repair the damage caused by previous bombing. The Madang strip was covered with bomb craters filled with water. As there was little risk of interference from enemy fighters, No. 24 pilots stayed over Madang for twenty minutes, strafing buildings in the township and the small islands off the coast.

The total number of sorties flown by No. 10 Group during the month of February was 1,467, comprising 62 missions. A total of about 210 tons of bombs was dropped. No. 78 had flown 1,007 hours. The rate of effort by this squadron was considerably above the 600 hours per squadron which was the normal operating effort for R.A.A.F. fighter squadrons.

No. 10 Group had based its organisation on that of the R.A.F. rather than that of the American Fifth Air Force with which it was working so closely in New Guinea. It was, however, imperative that the R.A.A.F.,

⁶ F-O N. G. Burnell, 409289; 23 Sqn. Clerk; of Ivanhoe, Vic; b. Berri, SA, 11 Dec 1922. Killed in action 24 Feb 1944.

⁷ Capt W. P. Watson, NX112723. 30 Bn, 50 AALU. Bank clerk; of Cremorne, NSW; b. North Sydney, 26 Mar 1919. Killed in action 24 Feb 1944.

⁸ F-Sgt F. G. McDonald, 418154; 23 Sqn. Clerk; of Hawthorn, Vic; b. East Malvern, Vic, 29 Sep 1922. Killed in action 24 Feb 1944.

⁹ F-O C. McAllister, 23352; 23 Sqn. Steward; of Wilston, Qld; b. Brisbane, 29 May 1921. Killed in action 24 Feb 1944.

which was the smaller force, should adapt its methods to the Fifth Air Force so that the two could work together effectively. Briefing rooms, operations rooms and procedures had to be made interchangeable. Whitehead demanded a vast increase in the flying effort by the R.A.A.F. units and his demands forced a decision that No. 10 Group should reorganise. Scherger described later how this problem was met:

On the rather inflexible "planned flying planned maintenance" adapted from the R.A.F. by our technical people, it was estimated that only 600 hours per month per squadron could be flown in the fighter wing—whereas we were being called on to fly up to 1,500 hours per month per squadron. It was remarkable at the time that the maintenance men we had were quite capable of dealing with the extra maintenance, but the provision of spares, particularly of spare engines, and the number of pilots allotted to each squadron was nowhere near adequate for this amount of flying. After considerable interchange of signals with R.A.A.F. Headquarters, the Deputy Chief of the Air Staff personally visited the Group (Air Commodore McCauley arrived at Nadzab on 4th March) and was convinced by General Whitehead that either our units flew the hours required of them or they would not be given aerodrome space in the forward areas. As a result of this visit, the number of pilots per squadron was increased to thirty and the number of aircraft to twenty-four, with a further thirty-six in immediate reserve at a repair and service unit. It was gratifying to find later that the steps taken by Air Force Headquarters to build these units to a level where they were capable of rates of effort comparable with those of the Americans, resulted, later in the year, in the squadrons of No. 78 Wing consistently outflying similar American units.

The R.A.F. system was suitable for conditions in Great Britain where there was no shortage of airfield space, but in New Guinea where forward airfield space was limited, squadrons had to be prepared to maintain a higher rate of effort. So long as such space was limited, Whitehead would not be prepared to make space available for three Australian squadrons when one American squadron could produce the same operational effort. Indeed, Scherger considered that had No. 10 Group not been brought forward to Nadzab when it was, Whitehead would not have called it forward at all because by February airfield space there was at a premium.

The Americans had a different system of changing and replacing their men. The R.A.A.F. system was based on a tropical tour of 9 months for operational aircrew and from 15 to 18 months for ground staff. American aircrews served a period of about 6 months of operations followed by a 2 or 3 weeks' rest period on the Australian mainland, followed by a further 3 months' operations and again a further break on the mainland. After a period of about 18 months' service the aircrews would be sent back to the United States for at least 4 weeks. Scherger considered the American system the better.¹ He wrote:

The American system was, of course, infinitely superior to ours in that unit spirit and morale, operational efficiency and indeed all round efficiency was increasing the whole time, whereas under our system, personnel were constantly changing and efficiency could not reach the highest level. It presented one with an efficiency graph much like the serrated edge of a saw—with an infinite number of peaks and troughs but with none of the peaks very high.

¹ There was by no means unanimity in the RAAF on the question of tours of duty

In the first week of March, the Fifth Air Force was engaged both directly and indirectly in support of the invasion of the Admiralty Islands. Heavy raids continued against Alexishafen and Madang which the enemy might use for staging air attacks. The Vengeance squadrons, escorted by Kittyhawks, took part in these operations.

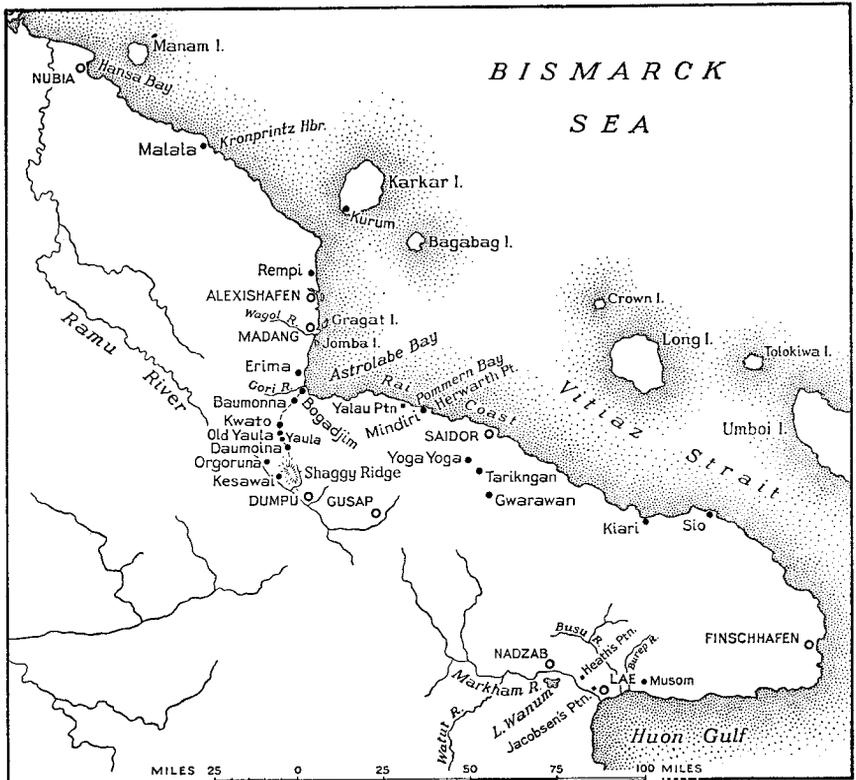
On 2nd March 24 Vengeances escorted by 12 Kittyhawks of No. 80 bombed and strafed targets on Karkar Island. The Vengeances dive-bombed villages and a mission at Kurum and then strafed with both rear and front guns. The pilots saw no signs of enemy activity except slight anti-aircraft gunfire. Reaching the target at 11 a.m. No. 23 climbed to 13,000 feet, manoeuvred into line astern and then dived towards Kurum Mission. One section of the covering force of Kittyhawks followed the dive bombers in a strafing attack on the mission. On the way back to base the Kittyhawks saw and attacked two barges which they left in a damaged state. Nos. 75 and 78 were to escort American Liberators to Hansa Bay that day, but neither squadron was able to find the Liberators at the rendezvous point. No. 78 arrived three minutes ahead of the time appointed for the rendezvous and circled for about 33 minutes waiting for the Liberators. Wing Commander Walker decided not to wait any longer and the squadron flew along the New Guinea coast strafing any targets they could find. The pilots strafed villages near Madang and two barges at the mouth of a river. At Malala near Kronprinz Harbour one of the Kittyhawks (Flying Officer Weber²) was hit by ground-fire. Weber was attacking barges at the time and then turned his attention to the strong anti-aircraft position pressing his attack to a very close range. His machine began to burn, a wing fell off, and the aircraft exploded 100 feet above the ground, finally crashing near the anti-aircraft post. Weber was the first member of this squadron to lose his life.

On 5th March there was to be another landing of American infantry at Mindiri on the Rai coast midway between Saidor and Bogadjim and No. 10 Group was assigned to soften the landing area by bombing and strafing. Nos. 23 and 24 began the bombardment on 3rd March when they concentrated their attacks on Mindiri village and a camping area at Herwarth Point nearby. The escorting Kittyhawks also carried bombs which they dropped on the targets. Next day the main target was an enemy camp in Pommern Bay in the same area. All three Vengeance squadrons escorted by the Kittyhawks of No. 80 bombed the target in the morning. They returned to base, refuelled, bombed up again, and returned to the same target in the afternoon. On this day No. 10 Group flew a total of 93 sorties against Mindiri, dropping 35 tons of bombs and firing thousands of rounds of ammunition. They suffered no losses from enemy fire, although one of the Vengeances was damaged in a forced landing on the way back to base. Next morning the Americans landed without opposition at Mindiri. The attack was preceded by further air attacks by American Boston bombers and naval bombardment. The

² F-O E. H. Weber, 404864. 23, 83 and 78 Sqns. Clerk; of Rockhampton, Qld; b. Rockhampton, 8 Jun 1922. Killed in action 2 Mar 1944.

Americans seized the Yalau plantation soon after the landing and within a few days occupied Mindiri village, where large quantities of enemy supplies were captured.

On the morning of 8th March, thirty-six Vengeances of all three squadrons took off from Nadzab and flew to Rempi village ten miles north of Alexishafen. The weather was so bad that No. 23 was unable to attack Rempi village and dropped its bombs well to the north. The other two



squadrons were able to make an attack by approaching in a shallow dive. Some of the bombs fell in the sea but most fell in the target area, which had already been damaged in earlier attacks. Enemy anti-aircraft fire tore holes in four Vengeances of No. 24, but the damage was not serious.

This was the last mission of the Vengeances in the Pacific war. They were ordered to attack the same target next morning but bad weather prevented them leaving Newton airfield. In the meantime on 8th March MacArthur's headquarters had directed that all Vengeance squadrons were to return to Australia and that the three Kittyhawk squadrons of the group were to withdraw to Cape Gloucester. The sudden decision caused

surprise and speculation in No. 10 Group, which had been in action as a task force at Nadzab for only six weeks. Air crews and ground units had had barely sufficient time to settle in.

Air Commodore Scherger was in Australia at the time and Group Captain Pearce had the responsibility of commencing the withdrawal. He signalled Scherger on 9th March telling him he had been ordered to withdraw but that he would not do so until he received confirmation. Pearce, anxious to know the reasons for the decision, tried to see Whitehead to get more information, but was told that Whitehead had left instructions "not to be disturbed". Tremendous effort had gone into building No. 10 Group into an efficient force and high hopes had been held for its future. It is, therefore, not difficult to imagine the keen disappointment felt by all hands at Newton Field. However, most of the Vengeance crews realised the shortcomings of the aircraft they flew and were resigned to the decision. Scherger signalled Pearce next day directing him to proceed with the moves as ordered. He added that the withdrawal had been proposed by Allied Headquarters and that R.A.A.F. Command had also agreed.

Three factors lay behind the withdrawal of the Vengeances. Firstly, the Vengeance was an inefficient war machine compared with the more advanced aircraft available to Kenney by March 1944. Secondly, the Fifth Air Force had received large reinforcements of modern aircraft from America and more were coming (by 31st March it had 82 squadrons). Thirdly, there was an acute shortage of airfield space to accommodate the squadrons which Kenney now wished to use in knock-out attacks on the Wewak-Hollandia areas.³ The Vengeances did not have sufficient range to reach Wewak or Hollandia. The R.A.A.F. pilots and observers in these machines were excellent though some were still not fully trained. But there were repeated cases of engine failure with Vengeance machines. Their pilots had difficulty in getting them off the ground with a full load. At Newton Field they were using the full length of the 6,000 feet runway before becoming airborne. Kittyhawk aircraft could carry the same bomb load and in addition carry out ground-strafting. They could fight their own way back to base without the cover needed by the Vengeance which had to have fighter protection when attacking targets where enemy fighters might be met.

The Australian Government spent a large sum of money on Vengeances. When they were first ordered, however, there was an acute shortage of machines and the Government had to take what was offering. Only five had arrived by May 1942 and they did not come forward in substantial numbers until April 1943 by which time the crisis they were designed to meet had passed. Although it was an American machine, the American Air Force did not use it in combat. According to the historians of the

³ Following are comments by Air Cmdre Scherger on airfield congestion: "From the very commencement of the New Guinea campaign, it was never possible to make available airstrips in the forward zone anywhere near adequate for the number of operational aircraft available. . . . There was no airstrip space available at Nadzab to any but the most virile units, and only then if they were armed with efficient aircraft. The Vengeance units would have gone if they had been American—it was merely the yardstick of efficiency which decided the question."

American Army Air Force, dive bombing was not favoured by that force in any case. They wrote: "Dive bombing, early advocated by Mitchell and fundamental to Navy tactics, found little support in the Air Corps."⁴

General Kenney informed Air Vice-Marshal Jones that he no longer intended to use Vengeances in operations in the South-West Pacific Area. Jones immediately signalled the R.A.A.F. representative in Washington directing him to cancel the "assignment and delivery" of the Vengeance aircraft—about fifty-six—ordered but not already shipped from the United States.

It was Kenney's intention to move a group of long-range Lightning fighters, capable of reaching Hollandia, into Newton Field and No. 77 Wing had to make way for it. The Kittyhawks of No. 78 Wing also had to leave Newton Field, to take the place of the No. 8 Fighter Group which had been supporting the 1st Marine Division on New Britain and which was now moving to Nadzab. The Lightnings were having difficulty in operating from Cape Gloucester airfield because mud was splashing up through the steel mat of the runway. Although it had a lesser range, the Kittyhawk was more rugged in construction and could operate under the conditions at Cape Gloucester. To compensate for the loss of the three Vengeance squadrons and keep the group up to strength, Kenney directed that No. 77 Wing Headquarters was to remain assigned to No. 10 Group and take control of three squadrons of No. 9 Group. The three squadrons were Nos. 22 (Boston), 30 (Beaufighters) and one Beaufort squadron.

Concurrently with the withdrawal of No. 10 Group from Nadzab, Kenney was reorganising areas of responsibility. On 26th February he had issued instructions that by 1st March, Bostock's command was to take over control of No. 9 Operational Group, but not its tactical units (except one Beaufort squadron).⁵ At the same time he extended the responsibility of R.A.A.F. Command to include the Port Moresby-Milne Bay areas, for which, up to then, the Fifth Air Force had been responsible. This was an extension of the area system of command prevailing on the mainland of Australia. Bostock was to take over anti-submarine patrol and passive defence measures and set up at Port Moresby operational training facilities for R.A.A.F. crews who were to join operational squadrons in the South-West Pacific Area.

After this reorganisation, Bostock, on 2nd March, informed Air Force Headquarters that he desired the title of No. 9 Group changed to "Northern Area" and the title of No. 10 Group changed to "Tactical Air Force, R.A.A.F.". He also proposed "to seek the approval of the Commander, Allied Air Forces, for the transfer of the maximum number of squadrons from the defensive areas to the Tactical Air Force". The effect of this policy would be to reduce No. 9 Group to a line of communication area similar to those in Australia, and build up No. 10 Group to a large mobile tactical force. Jones would not agree to the changes of title. Jones also wrote to Kenney on 8th March stating that "so far as this Headquarters

⁴ Craven and Cate (Editors), *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, Vol I, p. 598.

⁵ *AAF, SWPA, Ops Instructions No. 45*, issued 26 Feb 1944.

is concerned, the whole of the R.A.A.F. units in New Guinea are under the command and administrative control of the A.O.C. No. 9 Group Air Commodore F. W. Lukis, and it is not intended for the present to change this arrangement”.

Kenney replied on 15th March informing Jones that “no assurance could be given that R.A.A.F. units may not be quickly switched from one operational headquarters to another”. He wrote:

The operational control of all R.A.A.F. units North and East of the revised boundary line is invested in the Deputy Commander, Fifth Air Force. The contention of your Headquarters that all of the R.A.A.F. units in New Guinea are under the command of the Air Officer Commanding, 9th Operational Group, leads to a question as to the practicability of such an arrangement. This headquarters must continue to dispose its tactical units in accordance with the tactical situation and no assurance can be given that R.A.A.F. units may not be quickly switched from one operational headquarters to another. Every effort has been made to preserve the combination of R.A.A.F. units in the 9th and 10th Operational Groups. However, recent tactical changes tended to modify the original composition and roles of the Operational Groups in New Guinea. The Deputy Commander, Fifth Air Force, is directly responsible for air force offensive tactical operations in New Guinea. To perform this function the Deputy Commander effects an organisation and makes changes therein subject only to the supervision of the Commander, Allied Air Forces. The disposition of Air Commodore F. W. Lukis is, of course, at your discretion. The manner of obtaining administrative control of R.A.A.F. units in New Guinea must be worked out by your Headquarters. If arrangements which you effect are disturbed by our operational requirements, it can only be pointed out that the dual system of operating R.A.A.F. units has that inherent disadvantage. However, there can be no doubt that tactical requirements must be given primary consideration.

This headquarters is well aware of the limitations of the Air Officer Commanding, R.A.A.F. Command to provide certain communications, operational facilities, maintenance of airdromes etc. As previously pointed out in past correspondence this headquarters will require the Air Officer Commanding R.A.A.F. Command to perform certain operational tasks with the intention that the means to carry out these commitments must be arranged for by the Air Officer Commanding, R.A.A.F. Command. . . . If it is impracticable for your Headquarters to give effect to the wishes of the Commander, Allied Air Forces, this headquarters will expect to be informed fully in order that substitutive arrangements can be effected. All dealings of an operational nature involving R.A.A.F. units are conducted by this headquarters, through the Air Officer Commanding R.A.A.F. Command and your Advanced Headquarters, Brisbane, is kept informed as to all contemplated moves involving R.A.A.F. units.

Further to your letter only one operational group to conduct R.A.A.F. offensive operations is currently required. This is being accomplished by placing R.A.A.F. units for this purpose in 10th Operational Group at Cape Gloucester. The garrison at Manus Island is primarily a fighter sector which will be scaled down as the tactical situation dictates to permit further forward movement of R.A.A.F. units.

Since Kenney had operational control, his wishes on the tactical disposition of R.A.A.F. squadrons in New Guinea prevailed. But these differences of view on the control and organisation of the R.A.A.F. again emphasised the difficulties met from time to time as a result of the dual control of the R.A.A.F. units on operational duty in the South-West Pacific Area. The lamentable situation arose at this time whereby Jones, after consultation with the Government, issued an organisation memorandum on

11th April changing the name of No. 9 Group to "Northern Command", when Bostock two days earlier had directed that for "all operational purposes" No. 9 Group Headquarters was to be "regarded" as "HQ, Northern Area". The name which the formation was to bear was a matter of little moment. But the fact that such a small matter could not be easily settled indicated the flaw in the organisation of the command of the R.A.A.F.

The packing and movement of the units of No. 10 Group from Nadzab had begun immediately. Bewildered equipment officers who had not yet completed straightening out the chaos caused by the hurried mobilisation and movement from Australia, were now faced with the task of moving again.

The Vengeance squadrons had been grounded on 9th March, but the Kittyhawks had remained operational and on 11th March they provided protection for the American air transports which now shuttled to and fro carrying No. 10 Group to Cape Gloucester and the American units from Cape Gloucester to Nadzab. It took 122 aircraft loads to move the advanced parties of No. 78 Wing. The movement of these parties began on 11th March and was completed by 15th March. The Kittyhawks of No. 80 Squadron arrived at Cape Gloucester on 14th March followed by No. 78 on the 16th and No. 75 on 18th March. The Vengeance aircraft of all three squadrons had already left for Australia on 13th March. Their ground staffs were to follow by sea at a later date.

This rapid move was a test of mobility and the group passed the test well, although commanders had to cast aside a lot of useful odds and ends which had been collected by a continuous process of "scrounging" and "magpieing". Scherger stated that he "had to be quite ruthless in seeing that units did not collect a mass of equipment which although possibly useful, merely bogged them down to an extent which rendered them virtually static". "It was quite amazing to notice," he continued, "that American units never made the least attempt to 'scrounge' equipment or material, and there is little doubt in my mind that 'scrounging' is a characteristic only of a Service which has been or is starved of adequate supplies for all its requirements."

On 17th March, R.A.A.F. operations began from Cape Gloucester when seven Kittyhawks of No. 80 attacked Garove Island, north of New Britain. They approached the island at 10.30 a.m. flying at 8,000 feet, formed up in line astern losing height to 1,500 feet, and dropped their bombs on the island between the factory and a jetty. The Kittyhawks then separated making individual strafing runs at a low level on the jetty, the factory and Japanese seen among the coconut trees. The Kittyhawk pilots then returned to Cape Gloucester and in the afternoon four more machines, led by Squadron Leader Jackson, who also took part in the morning raid, reconnoitred the Hoskins airfield area, strafing a barge and villages.

The Kittyhawks' work at Cape Gloucester included missions in support of the 1st Marine Division, assisting American patrol torpedo boats, and

giving fighter cover for convoys to and from the Admiralty Islands as well as fighter protection of the Cape Gloucester base.

The first mission by No. 78 Squadron from Cape Gloucester on 18th March was Garove Island where it bombed and strafed barges, anti-aircraft positions and buildings. On this day "B" Flight of No. 4 Squadron equipped with five Boomerang aircraft and one Wirraway, arrived at Cape Gloucester commanded by Flight Lieutenant Watchorn.⁶ Under the direction of the Sixth American Army this flight began plotting Japanese troop movements along escape routes from Arawe and Gasmata to the Gazelle Peninsula, and locating bivouac areas, barge hideouts and staging points.

On 25th March thirty-seven Kittyhawks of all three squadrons combined in attacks on what was believed to be a Japanese headquarters in the Hoskins area. The area was thoroughly bombed and strafed, but the results of the attack could not be accurately assessed.

On the morning of 27th March four Kittyhawks of No. 78, on a sweep for enemy barges, attacked two American patrol boats in error. The patrol boats opened fire on the Kittyhawks when they began to strafe, but one of the boats sank and the other blew up. Of the boat crews 4 were killed, 3 were missing and 5 wounded. The Kittyhawk pilots saw the Americans swimming towards the shore while others clung to a dinghy. They then realised their mistake and one of the pilots threw a dinghy out to them. A court of inquiry held later showed that the cause of this unfortunate incident was that the pilots had not been told that Allied surface vessels would be engaged in operations on that morning during daylight. Delays in the R.A.A.F. signals and cypher organisation had prevented the information reaching the operations room of No. 78 Wing in time for the pilots to be briefed.

Operations of No. 78 Wing continued at a high rate of effort until the end of March and into April, when the wing was ordered to prepare for yet another move. Whitehead had assigned them a role in the Hollandia-Aitape landings which were to take place on 22nd April. In order to prepare for this duty, operations from Cape Gloucester were cut to a minimum.

⁶ F-Lt F. A. Watchorn, DFC, 400848. 5 and 4 Sqns. Clerk; of Frankston, Vic; b. Moonee Ponds, Vic, 3 Oct 1921.