## CHAPTER 27

## NO "SECOND FRONT"

In surveying the effect of the Coral Sea and Midway battles on his own particular task, and in taking stock of the continuing Japanese threat, General MacArthur contemplated a variation in the strategic planning agreed to by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington. As their directive initially stated, his task was to "hold the key military regions of Australia as bases for future action against Japan and strive to check Japanese aggression in the South-West Pacific Area". On 6th May depressing news came from the Philippines. With all prospect of immediate aid gone and the capacity of his forlorn force completely exhausted, General Wainwright had surrendered. Those close to the Supreme Commander were aware that this news touched him deeply. Restive under the restraint that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had placed on his command, he proposed to Washington on 8th May that a "second front" should be developed in the Pacific. He believed that this would give Australia and India cover behind which they could build for an offensive and, his argument continued, it would aid the Russian war effort by forcing the Japanese to withdraw substantial forces that were keeping Soviet troops in considerable strength stationed in Siberia. But the Joint Chiefs of Staff, planning on a scale much vaster than that required for the Pacific alone, and maintaining their "Germany first" concept, ruled that there would be no second front against the Japanese.

With his strategic needs clearly in mind, MacArthur sought through General Marshall in Washington the addition of two aircraft carriers to the naval forces operating under Vice-Admiral Leary's command. The request was refused; there were now only three American carriers in the Pacific, and the British Admiralty, which had been asked to make up the deficiency from its force in the Indian Ocean, declined to do so because it was still acutely conscious of its vulnerability in that area.<sup>1</sup>

Early in June Japanese forces moved across from Tulagi to Guadalcanal where, on the Lunga Plain, they were preparing an aerodrome. This consolidation of the enemy forces called for counter action. But MacArthur's eyes were on New Britain and New Ireland, through which he proposed an assault with Rabaul as the objective. He argued that if forces were brought in from the Atlantic and Indian Oceans for swift and strong, though temporary, operations against the Japanese, his objective could be achieved. General Marshall favoured this plan and contemplated pressing the U.S. Navy to move two or three carriers from the Atlantic and the Royal Navy two or three from the Indian Ocean, all of them for operations against New Britain and New Ireland. He set his air planning staff

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Four months later MacArthur again sought naval reinforcements from Admiral Nimitz. He asked for the transfer to his own naval command of the somewhat aged battleships then operating in the eastern Pacific. He was told that these were unsuitable for operations in the SWPA.

to work examining the prospect of progressively achieving air superiority over the intervening land bases. This would mean providing for a rapid increase in air facilities in north-eastern Australia and in the Port Moresby area. With such air supremacy the recapture of Lae, Salamaua and Gasmata by airborne task forces might be possible. Allied fighters and bombers would be moved forward and an amphibious assault could then be made on Rabaul with support from both land-based and carrier-borne aircraft. Later in the month this plan was developed in Washington by the addition of a proposal that British forces should make an assault on Timor, supported by aircraft based in north-western Australia. The operations would be coordinated with one by an American task force moving against Tulagi while supported by at least two carriers and by land-based aircraft operating from north-eastern Australia, the New Hebrides and New Caledonia.

So far as the British forces were concerned, apart from the reluctance already expressed, the gravity of the situation in the Middle East precluded any such commitment in the South or South-West Pacific at this stage. The American Navy planners though agreeing that "unity of command was essential . . . feared that, if the high command were given to General MacArthur, he might dangerously expose the aircraft carriers . . . between the Solomons and New Guinea within range of land-based aircraft".<sup>2</sup>

Instead they proposed as a first step, the capture of Tulagi by South Pacific forces supported by MacArthur's forces. Here the rub between the two commands became apparent for, under his directive, Tulagi clearly was within MacArthur's command. That the navy regarded an operation against Tulagi as within their own area of command was indicated on 29th June when Admiral King proposed to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that Vice-Admiral Robert L. Ghormley, who on the 19th had been appointed commander in the South Pacific, should undertake the capture of Santa Cruz and Tulagi. MacArthur, it was to be understood, would take control in the succeeding stage—an assault on the enemy's bases in New Guinea and New Britain. But MacArthur feared that under this plan his army forces might be used for little more than garrison purposes. He opposed. too, suggested action against Timor, which could not be supported as could an operation in the New Britain area. He doubted whether Timor could be held in the face of opposition from the near-by Japanese bases which also made extremely hazardous the continuous control of the sea lane between Timor and Australia, control which unquestionably was essential to success. His own plan presupposed that the Allied forces would establish air supremacy. This, he felt, should overcome the navy's fears about their vulnerability in the waters between New Guinea and the Solomons. Apart from his strategic objections to the navy's plan Mac-Arthur was keenly conscious of the challenge to his command.

Even so the Joint Chiefs of Staff saw in King's concept the basis for a practical compromise, and on 2nd July they issued a directive which

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> John Miller Jr, Guadalcanal: The First Offensive (1949), p. 14, a volume in the official series United States Army In World War II.

set out a three-stage campaign and decided the command issue by moving westward to the 159th meridian the boundary between the South-West Pacific and South Pacific areas. This alteration, to date from 1st August, would bisect the Solomons and place the lower half, including Tulagi, under Ghormley's command. The first stage was to be the capture of Tulagi and Santa Cruz by Ghormley's forces supported by such air and naval forces as the South-West Pacific Command could afford. MacArthur would be responsible for the second and third stages, the second being the recapture of the upper portion of the Solomon Islands and of Lae and Salamaua. The third would be the recapture of Rabaul and adjacent bases in New Britain and New Ireland. The directive left the timing and the "passage of command" with the Joint Chiefs of Staff. MacArthur and Ghormley conferred on the projected campaign and both recommended that the offensive should be deferred because each command lacked the needed resources.

But, in the opinion of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, postponement was a risk they dared not take. The urgent demand was for an immediate invasion to stop the enemy's advance and provide a base from which to assail the Japanese stronghold at Rabaul. In this way the advantages gained from the Coral Sea and Midway battles could be turned to full account. MacArthur would be expected to do what he could to prepare for phase 2 of this offensive while assisting with phase 1. Here was no grand second-front strategy, but the prospect of a hard struggle, striking blows with what forces he had where and as he could, and for the immediate blows he was rather desperately in need of an air striking force with greater strength and greater capacity than what he now possessed.

To say that the American air component in MacArthur's forces in mid-1942 was suffering from "growing pains" is an understatement. The unhappy experience of No. 8 Squadron with their Dauntless dive bombers provided a case in point. On the last day of March they had flown to Port Moresby—the first American squadron to be based there—in unpropitious circumstances. Staging through Cooktown, they mistimed their arrival, an error said to have been due to overlooking the difference caused by daylight saving, and flew in over the New Guinea base in darkness and bad weather. Two aircraft crashed in landing and had to be written off. Quartered on Kila aerodrome they immediately prepared for action. Early next day, with six Kittyhawks as escort, they took off to attack Lae, but the target was obscured by clouds so they dropped their bombs on Salamaua without significant result. There was no enemy fighter interception on this the first close cooperation between a R.A.A.F. fighter unit and American bombers in action in the Pacific. Rather depressingly begun, the squadron's first operational tour in New Guinea provided few reasons for optimism. Their comparatively slow aircraft were short in range and vulnerable to fighter attack unless well protected by their own fighter escort, and the crews (pilot and observer-gunner) soon lacked confidence in them. The Dauntless was designed for carrier-borne operations and seemed unequal to the wear and tear of the New Guinea airfields. By 4th April there were only 12 in commission of 26 available. Yet the enemy was not responsible. In this tour in New Guinea the squadron lost only 2 aircraft in combat, while claiming 6 enemy aircraft destroyed on the ground and 2 shot down. When, at the end of May, the unit had completed two months of front-line operations it was withdrawn to the mainland; it had accomplished only four combat missions—a total of 29 sorties.<sup>3</sup>

An account of the lot of Flying Fortress crews of No. 19 Group in this period is also depressing. So great had been the strain imposed on these aircraft that, early in April, only six were in commission. During May and June the average number of these bombers that were combat-worthy at one time was only 17. Based on Townsville and most often staging through Port Moresby, the crews were away from their home base for between 36 and 48 hours at a time and usually were airborne for about 18 hours in that period—conditions that put a heavy strain on already weary men.

On the other hand the Marauder and Mitchell squadrons provided a more encouraging picture. The Marauder, though regarded by many as a difficult aircraft to fly—it "took getting used to" because its wing-span was considerably shorter than that of any other comparable aircraft<sup>4</sup> inspired confidence in its trained combat crews. The same was true of the Mitchell. These aircraft had good firepower, speed, and range, all qualities that made them especially acceptable against an enemy so well equipped with fighters as were the Japanese. At this stage, however, only 14 Mitchells had been gained from the order that was transferred from the Dutch when the Netherlands East Indies fell to the Japanese. Despite this, between 24th April and 4th July they were flown on 70 combat sorties. In the same period the Marauders flew 84 and the Fortresses 45 sorties. The Marauders were used to supplement the Fortress strikes on Rabaul. Staging through Port Moresby, the distance to the target was 1,200 miles and a 250-gallon fuel tank had to be fitted into the bomb bays to give them the needed range.<sup>5</sup> Between 6th April and 24th May Marauders completed 16 missions for a total of 80 sorties to Rabaul alone. For these attacks, which, after May, were discontinued for some months, the Marauder crews claimed bomb hits on 3 transports, 2 merchant ships and an aircraft carrier and the destruction of at least 16 aircraft on the ground and 10 in air combat.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> The American official historians, whose narrative has been used in this assessment, have written: "the A-24 was written off by AAF personnel as unsuited to the type of operations required in New Guinea, perhaps mistakenly in view of its subsequent record in Navy hands."—Craven and Cate, Army Air Forces in World War II, p. 478.

<sup>&#</sup>x27;For this reason operational training accidents were reported to be more frequent with the Martin Marauder than with other aircraft, and aircrew came to refer to them cynically as "Martin's prostitutes" because they lacked "visible means of support"!

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> The importance of Rabaul as a target is indicated by the number of strikes against it at a time when the AAF's striking capacity was so very limited. The first strike was made by 6 Fortresses on 23rd February; there were 5 Fortress strikes in March, 4 in April and 9 in May. Thenceforward the base was attacked with a regularity determined by Intelligence information indicating the arrival of Japanese reinforcements or the concentration of forces for some fresh assault.

Photographic reconnaissance showed that Allied bombing raids were doing little to hinder the enemy's airfield construction program. Their best effect, clearly, was to limit the number of aircraft the Japanese were prepared to risk at Lae and Salamaua—comparatively few bombers and rarely more than 40 fighters—though the fighter strength was still sufficient to take toll of attacking Allied aircraft. As an example, when 8 unescorted Mitchells attacked Lae on 24th May 5 were shot down and a sixth crashlanded in a damaged condition when it returned to Port Moresby.

Observers close to the scene found cause for anxiety in the depressed mood in which some of the American combat units were operating at this time, notably in or through the New Guinea area. In the judgment of the American official historians, there was an "unsatisfactory state of morale" in the U.S.A.A.F.

Virtually all operations were flown from areas that were remote from the more thickly settled sections of Australia; living conditions were primitive, the food was chiefly an unfamiliar Australian ration, the incidence of dengue fever and malaria was high, and facilities for hospitalisation and recreation were more than inadequate. In these circumstances, the strain of unusually difficult operations took a higher toll. Personnel who had fought through the Philippine and Java campaigns suffered effects of fatigue that at times approached a defeatist attitude; even those who had flown their first combat mission in April had to fight a feeling of disillusionment. Long overwater flights, the dropping of a few bombs with unobserved results, the loss of friends to combat and accident, the lack of opportunity for leave and rotation, the slowness of promotion, and a rather confusing system of operational control, all added up to a trying experience that seemed to have little if anything to do with the outcome of the war. Personal relations with the Australians were generally excellent, for the two peoples had much in common, but the American flyer tended to resent the extent of RAAF control and to find in its administrative forms, as with any unfamiliar Government form, a ready source of grievance. . . . Responsible officers were alert to these and other needs, and some of them had occasion for satisfaction with the progress made. Air Services still suffered because of an insufficient number of trained personnel and the necessity of resorting to cannibalizing aircraft in order to get spare parts, but through the agencies of the Australian Government an increasingly effective liaison had been established between the Allied command and Australian industry. Some parts and very helpful maintenance facilities, were now available from Australian sources. . . . 7

For their part the R.A.A.F. operational units, though they too, of course, had their grievances—chiefly expressed in the same and constant plea for "more and better" aircraft and other equipment—were in a stronger psychological state. They were fighting on and from their native territory with a strong leavening of combat-seasoned men among them; they were close to home and they still enjoyed (though it was soon to end) the psychological advantage of being more experienced in this combat zone than their American comrades-in-arms. On many matters of local importance, both in administration and operations, they were the authorities and to them the Americans had to defer. Whatever it lacked, the R.A.A.F. was virile, well-trained and proud. Confident of their own

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> In Darwin, where the Australian morale had been poor, it was American fighter units (No. 49 Pursuit Group under Lt-Col Paul B. Wurtsmith) who had done most to restore it.

<sup>7</sup> Craven and Cate, Vol I, p. 482.

professional capacity, some members of the force were disdainful of the "Yanks". They were critical of the Americans' failure on occasions to find the bombing target; they suspected that Flying Fortress crews bombed from high altitude because they were afraid to come lower; they were disparaging of the "softness in American morale". As the American historian quoted here has indicated, there was some justification for such criticism, but it was never expressed resentfully, or without consciousness of lapses in R.A.A.F. morale, by any who knew the reasons and the counter-measures that were being taken. Members of the R.A.A.F. readily praised American combat crews and ground staff who provided examples of courage and devotion to the task of fighting the Japanese, and they not only respected but virtually idolised such officers as Wurtsmith and Wagner, the American fighter group leaders, and Carmichael, the commander of No. 19 Bombardment Group.

Lack of reinforcements, and particularly aircraft replacements, a primary cause of the disturbed state of the U.S.A.A.F. at this time, was the subject of keenly expressed messages to Washington by both MacArthur and Brett. So far as the two commanders were concerned no direct public statement from them on this crucial subject had vet been made. Brett. however, at a conference in Townsville with war correspondents accredited to the command, spoke very freely of the lag in aircraft deliveries to the South-West Pacific and its consequences. Experienced correspondents pointedly questioned him as to whether some of his very frank statements, in which he was sharply critical of Washington policy, were "for the record". On each occasion the general answered with an emphatic "Yes". As was obligatory, the despatches written later by the correspondents were submitted to the publicity censors, who declined to accept responsibility for their publication and referred them to General Brett himself. The general ordered them to be destroyed, indicating at the same time some very limited terms in which his interview might be reported. One of the correspondents sent a carbon copy of his original despatch by safe hand to his office in Sydney with an explanation of the circumstances of its censorship. The office referred it to the censors at G.H.O. who, after some deletions from the text, including Brett's name and any hint as to its source, passed it for publication. Headed (across two columns) "Not Enough Planes in North; Qualities of the Zero Fighter; Allied Pilots Handicapped" the article appeared in a Sydney newspaper.8 In part it stated:

Until the flow of American aircraft into Australia becomes far greater, it is futile to think in terms of launching, much less sustaining, a large-scale aerial offensive against the Japanese north of Australia. Moreover, some types of American fighter aircraft are unsuitable for carrying out long-range bomber-escort duty. There is no question about the superiority of the Zero in operations of that character. . . . We cannot at this stage carry out sustained offensive operations against the Japanese, although the essential value of aerial operations lies in their offensive character. We cannot pass from the defensive to the offensive until aircraft reinforcements arrive in much greater quantities than is the case at present. It must

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> By Ray Maley, Sydney Morning Herald, 1 June 1942.

be borne in mind that the Japanese are able to employ fighter planes with a 1,400-mile range. The range of our fighters is approximately half that distance. The fact is that in Australia at present we do not possess a fighter capable of meeting the Japanese on equal terms as far as range is concerned. When we send fighters over as escorts on bombing missions we cannot do it without facing excessive losses. . . .

There need be no doubt about the final outcome of the air war in New Guinea. Meanwhile it must be understood that operations will be defensive in character as long as the long-range fighter and reinforcement position stays as it does at present.

Publication of this truthfully informative article represented a liberality in censorship on the part of General Headquarters to which the war correspondents were not accustomed. It had the effect of making public the burden of MacArthur's plaint and the censorship relaxation could be interpreted as showing some eagerness on the part of G.H.Q. to obtain indirect publicity for that plaint.

Another very real aspect of Allied Air Headquarters' concern about their aircraft strength at this time was the extremely high rate of loss from all causes. From April to mid-July American units lost a total of 171 aircraft—116 fighters and 55 bombers. Replacements received in May and June amounted only to 62 bombers; there were no fighter replacements. Of the losses, enemy action accounted for 61 fighters and 22 bombers in combat and one fighter and 10 bombers destroyed on the ground. Added to these was "the depressing total" of 54 fighters and 23 bombers lost in accidents. In the same period claims were made for more than 80 Japanese aircraft shot down with others destroyed on the ground and an unrecorded number of damaged aircraft which could not have made their way back to their bases.

On paper the Allied air force about which there was so much anxiety was reasonably strong. As listed on 31st June American air units were:

Bombers—5 groups (2 heavy, 2 medium, 1 light) Fighters—3 groups Transport—2 squadrons Ancillary—1 photo-reconnaissance squadron

Had these units been fact and not just figures, it is probable that MacArthur would have been able at least to match the Japanese air strength to which his air forces were opposed. As it was, one of the heavy bomber groups—No. 43—would not be ready for combat for several months, thus placing the burden on the weary veterans of No. 19 Group. Similarly, one of the medium bomber groups—No. 38—would not have its aircraft in commission until September. No. 22 (medium) Bombardment Group had been in operation since April; No. 3 (light) Bombardment Group, with which the remnants of No. 27 Group had been merged after the fall of Java, had three different types of aircraft—22 Dauntless dive bombers, 38 Bostons and 17 Mitchells. The fighters alone were up

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> This total did not equal the estimated allowable wastage of 20 per cent.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Craven and Cate, Vol I, p. 481.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Even then two of this group's squadrons were assigned to the South Pacific Area.

to strength; on 1st May they had been reported to be 100 per cent complete with a 50 per cent reserve. By July two squadrons of No. 35 Fighter Group's P-400's (Airacobras)—an early export model of the P-39 with somewhat inferior characteristics including a 20-mm cannon instead of the 37-mm gun—had moved to Port Moresby; the Kittyhawks of No. 49 Group were still defending the Darwin area.<sup>3</sup>

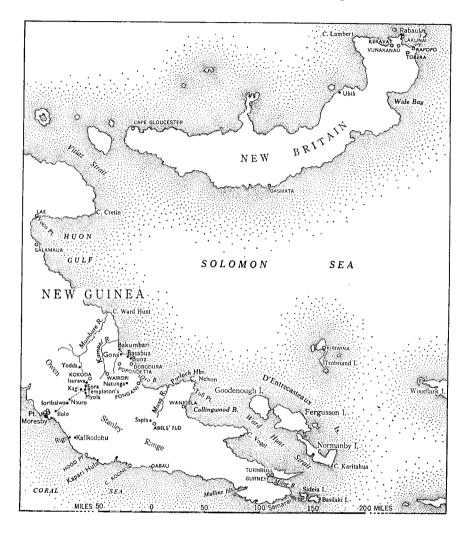
However, it was clear that the Japanese no longer dominated the air with the odds in both aircraft and in tactics heavily in their favour. And in spite of all their trials and problems and losses MacArthur's headquarters lived from day to day with understandable faith in American industry which must, in time, weight the scales heavily in their favour. The big question was—how long?

At the beginning of April the Allied air units in New Guinea were in almost daily contact with the enemy and the brunt of this day-by-day combat was being borne by the R.A.A.F's No. 75 (Kittyhawk) Squadron. Operating with 146 officers and men (56 members of the unit were still at Townsville awaiting transport) the unit had now recorded 343 hours of operational flying, 83 of them spent in combat sorties. Though numerically the scale of the battle was small it was always intense. Scarcely a day passed without battles over either Lae or Port Moresby, each raid being matched by a counter-raid. When not flying as escort for the Dauntless crews, or intercepting the enemy over their own base, the squadron was doing its best to help mount something of an offensive by engaging in low-level strafing attacks on grounded aircraft, anti-aircraft posts and stores dumps at Lae and Salamaua. Squadron Leader Jackson led 6 Kittyhawks against these targets on 4th April. Their gunfire set 4 enemy bombers and one fighter blazing and damaged 10 other aircraft, all of them on the ground at Lae. In combat on the 6th the squadron commander, after damaging two enemy bombers with his gunfire, was caught by a burst of Japanese fire which damaged his aircraft and forced him to land on a coral reef. Though his aircraft was lost he got ashore unharmed, using a life-jacket dropped to him by his brother. Operating with the Kittyhawks were two American pilots flying Airacobras (P-39's), the first of a number of American pilots sent to New Guinea to gain combat experience in the area. Each of the Americans scored hits on an enemy bomber.

On 10th April Squadron Leader Jackson failed to return from a reconnaissance flight over Lae, Salamaua and Nadzab. For days a depression hung over the squadron, but on the 18th word came from the New Guinea Volunteer Rifles that he was safe at Bulolo and was moving to Wau. A Dauntless from the American squadron was flown to Wau with Flying Officer Piper giving cover in a Kittyhawk, and Jackson was brought out

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> In manpower MacArthur's forces (on 10th July) included 87,539 American troops, 44,000 of whom were land forces; 19,700 were members of air units, and the remainder were depot troops.—From W. F. Craven and J. L. Cate (Editors), *The Pacific: Guadalcanal to Saipan August 1942 to July 1944* (1950), pp. 7-8, Vol IV in the official series *The Army Air Forces in World War II*.

in the Dauntless. As the two aircraft were about to land at the Seven Mile aerodrome three Zeros that had evaded the warning system appeared overhead. One of the Japanese pilots dived on the Dauntless and opened fire. A bullet took the tip off Jackson's right index finger. The American



pilot, Lieutenant V. A. Schwab, took evasive action and landed the Dauntless on an adjacent strip without further harm while Piper made a vain effort to intercept the Zeros.

Jackson later explained that while he was reconnoiting Lae on the 10th he had been attacked by three Zeros. Jettisoning the Kittyhawk's bellytank, he tried to evade gunfire but, unable to gain sufficient speed

to outstrip them, he accepted the alternative and turned to fight. After firing a brief burst at one of the Zeros his guns jammed and another Zero pilot caught him with a heavy burst of fire. Still under attack and with his aircraft virtually riddled by enemy bullets, Jackson "ditched" the Kittyhawk in the sea. Struggling free from the cockpit he feigned death by lying in the water supported by his life-jacket while the Zero pilots circled menacingly over him. They made no further attack, however, and, when they eventually disappeared, Jackson swam towards the beach. Two natives who had seen him crash waded out and brought him ashore and then guided him to Busama, a near-by village. While the other natives in the village were apparently debating what they would do with him the two who had helped Jackson ashore signalled to him to follow them and set out swiftly through the jungle. Jackson did as they bid but since he had kicked off his flying-boots when he freed himself from the wrecked Kittyhawk, he was travelling barefooted. The journey was made under continual threat from Japanese patrols, and at one point one of them came within earshot. But the stealth of the natives gave him protection and his own hardihood enabled him to keep moving. On the eighth day the little party reached Bulolo where a New Guinea Volunteer Rifles patrol was camped. Aided by the patrol, Jackson was carried on a stretcher into Wau whence he was flown out on the 23rd.

On the day that Jackson was reported missing 9 Kittyhawks had intercepted 7 enemy bombers and one Zero in the Port Moresby area. Flying Officer Atherton<sup>4</sup> shot down one of the bombers and 5 other enemy aircraft were damaged. All the Kittyhawks returned. The American dive bombers made successful attacks on Lae on the 7th and 11th, damaging anti-aircraft positions, setting fire to fuel, and exploding ammunition dumps. On the second of these attacks the Kittyhawk pilots who provided cover for the dive bombers met a large force of Zeros over the target. Piper shot down two and Flight Lieutenant Cox and Flying Officer Masters<sup>5</sup> one each. One pilot, Sergeant Brown, was forced down on a beach near Lae with a damaged aircraft. Shortly afterwards, in company with the pilot and observer of a Dauntless that had been shot down, he was taken prisoner. In a fierce encounter on the 13th, Pilot Officer Channon shot down one Zero and probably another and one Kittyhawk pilot, Flying Officer Davies,8 was shot down by Zeros. Squadron Leader Cresswell,9 the commanding officer of No. 76 Squadron, was killed

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> W Cdr G. C. Atherton, DFC, 408030. 25, 24 and 75 Sqns; Controller 9 Fighter Sector 1943; comd 82 Sqn 1943-44, 80 Sqn 1944; Wing Ldr 78 Wing 1944-45; CI 8 OTU 1945. Accountant; of Launceston, Tas; b. Launceston, 27 Sep 1919.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> F-Lt P. A. Masters, 407330. 4, 75, 86 and 80 Sqns. Public servant; of Burnside, SA; b. Mymensingh, India, 23 Dec 1920.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Sgt D. S. Brown, 401489. 22 and 75 Sqns. Salesman; of South Yarra, Vic; b. Castlemaine, Vic, 9 Dec 1916. Died while a prisoner of war 26 May 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> F-O O. J. Channon, 411286; 75 Sqn. Insurance clerk; of Goulburn, NSW; b. Wyalong, NSW 23 May 1917. Killed in action 24 Apr 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> F-O A. C. C. Davies, 406124. 23 and 75 Sqns. Clerk; of Nedlands, WA; b. Gnowangerup, WA, 24 Jan 1921. Killed in action 13 Apr 1942.

Sqn Ldr B. B. Cresswell, 82. Comd 4 and 76 Sqns 1942. Regular air force offr; of Perth, WA; b. Fremantle, WA, 30 Nov 1912. Killed in action 17 Apr 1942.

while flying a 75 Squadron aircraft when Zeros intercepted him on the 17th when returning from an early morning reconnaissance over Lae. Cresswell's aircraft apparently crashed into a hill while he was diving through cloud. Flying Officer Woods, who was accompanying him, got back to the base though his aircraft was damaged. That day Flight Lieutenant Jackson shot down his third enemy aircraft and Masters and Flying Officer Tucker<sup>1</sup> shared another Zero, as did Flight Lieutenant Boyd<sup>2</sup> and Atherton next day when 8 Kittyhawks intercepted 8 enemy bombers with Zeros as escort over Port Moresby. In this action Sergeant Granville<sup>3</sup> was killed. Six days later the squadron lost 3 of 6 Kittyhawks which intercepted a large formation of Zeros over Port Moresby. Channon, who led a flight of four, was killed when his aircraft was shot down. Forced down, Flight Sergeant Butler<sup>4</sup> landed at high speed in a patch of kunai grass with his undercarriage still retracted, but he escaped injury. Flight Sergeant Crawford<sup>5</sup> also escaped when he was forced down into the sea several miles from Port Moresby after a bullet from an attacking Zero had shot off his throat microphone and seared his neck. In this combat Flight Lieutenant Jackson shot down another Zero.

It was obvious that without relief or reinforcement No. 75 Squadron could not survive much longer. On the morning of the 28th the unit's five serviceable aircraft took off to meet an enemy force of eight bombers with fighter escort. Squadron Leader Jackson led the flight, the other four pilots being Flying Officers Brereton,6 Cox, Masters and Sergeant Cowe.<sup>7</sup> They intercepted the Japanese bombers at 22,000 feet to find the Zeros flying in close cover except for two which were "standing off". In tight formation the five Kittyhawks made a rear attack on the bombers. The leading Zero dived on Jackson's Kittyhawk. To evade the attack Jackson stalled his aircraft and spun down, the other four pilots following his example. In the battle that followed Jackson and Cox both lost their lives, one of them having first shot down a Zero. Brereton's Kittyhawk was damaged and he was severely wounded, but he succeeded in landing safely. When Masters pulled his Kittyhawk out from its spin he found himself some distance out to sea to the south-east of Port Moresby. As he turned back to base he sighted what he took to be a submarine for which several Dauntless aircraft later searched in vain.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> F-Lt A. D. Tucker, 405432. 75 and 86 Sqns. School teacher; of Margate Beach, Qld; b. Brisbane, 5 Mar 1920.

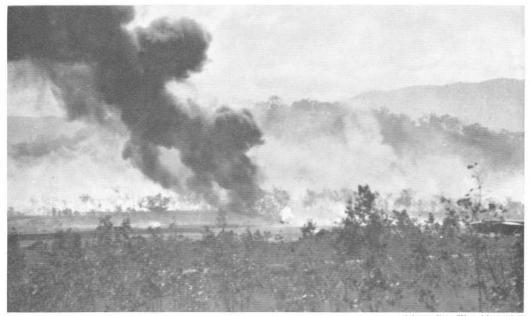
Sqn Ldr A. H. Boyd, 561.
 76 and 75 Sqns; comd 101 and 110 Fighter Control Units 1944;
 67 Sqn. Regular air force offr; of Delungra, NSW; b. Quirindi, NSW, 17 Mar 1916.
 Sgt R. J. C. Granville, 403923.
 22 and 75 Sqns. General merchant; of Double Bay, NSW;
 b. Parramatta, NSW, 17 Apr 1920. Killed in action 18 Apr 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> F-O M. S. Butler, 407220. 12, 75 and 23 Sqns. Agriculturalist; of Medindie Gardens, SA; b. Bournemouth, Eng, 27 Mar 1918.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> F-Lt R. W. Crawford, DFC, 402642. 12, 75 and 78 Sqns. Clerk; of Dulwich Hill, NSW; b. Sydney, 22 Nov 1921.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Sqn Ldr J. Le Gay Brereton, 260697. 75, 20, 11 and 38 Sqns. Clerk; of Sydney; b. Old Junee, NSW, 22 Dec 1919.

Sgt W. D. Cowe, 401769; 75 Sqn. Bank clerk; of Melbourne; b. Eccles, Scotland, 8 Jun 1921. Killed in action 28 Aug 1942.



(Australian War Memorial)

The seventy-eighth raid on Port Moresby, 17th August 1942. After a complete lull in attacks from 1st August the Japanese surprised the defenders. Dropping 150 bombs in perfect pattern on the Seven Mile aerodrome they destroyed 5 aircraft, severely damaged 11 others and wrecked the control tower and operations room.



(Australian War Memorial)

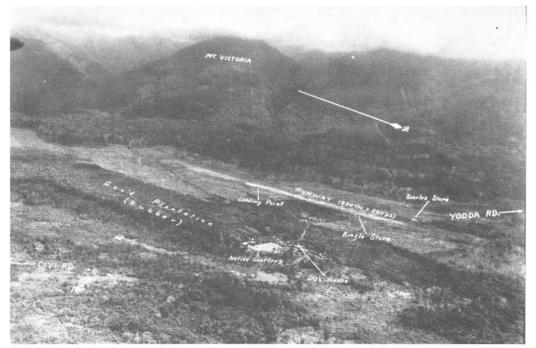
A petrol dump from which the Japanese had intended to fuel supporting armour in their assault on Milne Bay devastated on the foreshore by strafing from R.A.A.F. Kittyhawks. Near by is a destroyed landing barge. On 25th-26th August 1942, when the Japanese were making their landings, the Kittyhawks of Nos. 75 and 76 Squadrons sought out and destroyed at least 19 enemy barges carrying men and equipment.





(R.A.A.F.)

From the time of the Japanese occupation of Lae in March 1942 until its recapture by the 7th Division in September 1943 the R.A.A.F., and later Allied Air Forces, with fighters, fighter-bombers, medium and heavy bombers and flying-boats, maintained a persistent bombardment of the aerodrome and Japanese installations. In the upper photograph, a Boston comes in at tree-top level over a wrecked fighter in the right foreground, a parked Betty bomber in the centre, and dispersed Zero fighters in the background. The lower photograph shows a bombing attack on 7th August 1942, delivered at 3,400 feet.



Kokoda, 10th September 1942.

(R.A.A.F.)



A Douglas C-47 transport aircraft of Allied Air Forces dropping supplies to the 25th Brigade near Nauro in the Owen Stanleys in October 1942.



A Beaufighter of No. 30 Squadron (pilot F-O R. J. Brazenor; observer Sgt F. B. Anderson) flying along a valley in the Owen Stanley Range during an operation in late 1942. The photograph was taken by Sgt W. B. Ball in an accompanying Beaufighter.



All that remained of the Wairopi Bridge over the wide and swift-flowing Kumusi River after the bridge had been bombed and strafed by Allied Air Forces on 21st October 1942.

Next day, mourning the loss of their leader, the squadron warmly accepted his brother as their new commanding officer.

On the night of 28th April at 10.58 p.m. during the thirty-third raid on Port Moresby the Japanese bombers dropped, with their bombs, four packages each with a white streamer bearing the message:

Any person who has received this package is cordially requested to send it over to the Army Headquarters of Port Moresby.

Each package contained about 100 letters from military and civilian prisoners held by the Japanese in Rabaul.

On 30th April, having flown 638 hours for the month and having been reduced to three serviceable and seven unserviceable aircraft, No. 75 Squadron was relieved from the heavy responsibility for the air defence of Port Moresby: a responsibility the squadron alone had borne since 21st March, 13 days after the Japanese had landed on the north coast of New Guinea.

Relief came in the form of two American Airacobra units—Nos. 35 and 36 Squadrons of No. 8 Pursuit Group—whose 26 aircraft were led in to the base by Lieut-Colonel Boyd D. Wagner. Popularly known as "Buzz", this battle-seasoned fighter pilot from the Philippines campaign had been appointed director of pursuit operations in the Port Moresby area. He faced a heavy task, for the facilities available to him to service aircraft were little if any better than those of No. 75 Squadron and, in strength, his units had already suffered severely even before making contact with the enemy—11 Airacobras had been lost in transit from the Australian mainland. The Airacobra was noted for its structural strength, good fire-power, and its leak-proof tanks, but, as Wagner probably realised only too well from combat in the Philippines, and as the squadrons were to learn only the day after their arrival, when they lost four aircraft and their pilots in a strike against Lae, it was still no match for the highly manoeuvrable Zero. In this their first important engagement in the South-West Pacific Area the American pilots claimed three enemy aircraft shot down.

The now almost insignificant strength of No. 75 Squadron was reduced still further on 2nd May when their 3 combat-worthy Kittyhawks took off with 7 Airacobras to intercept a large formation of enemy aircraft. Sergeant Munro<sup>8</sup> was shot down in combat and a Kittyhawk piloted by Flight Sergeant West<sup>9</sup> crashed on take-off and had to be written off. Next day the squadron recorded the last operational sortic before being recalled; Tucker took off to join 8 Airacobras in intercepting 20 enemy bombers escorted by Zeros. But the weariness of machine as well as man was emphasised when engine trouble forced him to land without making contact with the enemy. Despite all their difficulties the squadron's mainten-

Sgt D. W. Munro, 405641; 75 Sqn. Bank clerk; of Brisbane; b. Brisbane, 10 Oct 1922. Killed in action 2 May 1942.

F-O H. G. West, 411561; 75, 77 and 80 Sqns. Farmer and orchardist; of Orange, NSW; b. Orange, 7 Sep 1920.

ance parties worked on so that when, on 7th May, the main strength of the unit embarked in the *Taroona* for Australia they had restored 3 of the 5 remaining Kittyhawks to flying, if not combat, condition. The commanding officer with three other pilots and a party of 27 ground staff remained to complete the task of handing over to the American squadrons. On the morning of the 9th the three airworthy Kittyhawks and several Dauntless dive bombers, also listed for return to the mainland, were on the Three Mile aerodrome when Zeros dived on them without warning. Two of the Kittyhawks and two of the dive bombers were damaged. Jackson took off in the remaining Kittyhawk and flew to Cairns. One of the other two was repaired and two days later it was flown to the mainland by Sergeant Butler.

In the 44 days in which they had been in operation from Port Moresby No. 75 Squadron pilots had destroyed 35 enemy aircraft (18 in combat and 17 on the ground), probably destroyed 4 and damaged 47 (29 in combat and 18 on the ground). Flight Lieutenant Jackson had shot down four aircraft. Piper was credited with three and a half, and Masters two. The unit had lost 12 pilots killed or missing (including one on attachment and one while ferrying an aircraft from Townsville) and 22 aircraft— 9 in known combat, 4 reported missing, 3 on the ground from enemy action, and 6 in accidents. Original and replacement aircraft provided for the squadron had numbered only 31 and of these 10 had been either destroyed or damaged by enemy action in the first three days. The strain was so severe that throughout the period the unit's daily average of combat-serviceable aircraft was only five. This was no reflection on the competence of the maintenance crews who worked almost without ceasing under extremely difficult conditions. Though the odds had been against them the balance in losses was substantially in the squadron's favour and, more important, they had defended the base valiantly, forcing the enemy's bombers to maintain a respectful altitude and accept a heavy price for their attacks.

To the troops on the ground the Kittyhawks and their pilots had a magical quality; they were ours. In a simple and naturally self-centred way the ground troops came to idolise the "Never-hawk" pilots. They did so from the moment, so soon after the squadron's arrival, when Wackett shot down the first enemy aircraft. An Australian war correspondent who watched this attack and saw the enemy bomber "streaming straight down the sky with a ribbon of white smoke behind it" expressed the release of pent-up feelings experienced by those on the ground when he wrote:

We onlookers fell on one another's necks, howling hysterically with joy. For miles around, men found that they had business at the airfield. They came roaring up the road on lorries, cheering and laughing. They stopped, poured out of the vehicles, and stood staring with a mixture of awe and disbelief at the fighters on the ground. . . .<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Osmar White, Green Armour (1945), p. 58.

Late in May flights of No. 35 Fighter Group equipped with Airacobras began to relieve the pilots of No. 8 Group who had now been in action since the beginning of the month. That the strain on the fighter pilots had been heavy was indicated by the number of enemy raids on Port Moresby during May—21. These had ranged from minor attack to one in which the Japanese had used 34 bombers and 15 fighters, their bombs and gunfire disrupting the water-supply and destroying the fuel dumps and three fighters on the ground. It was estimated that in the course of the month more than 40 enemy aircraft had been destroyed, but the Airacobras too had paid a cost—to the end of May between 20 and 25 had been lost in combat, 8 in forced landings and 3 on the ground.

There was at this time only one region in New Guinea where Allied troops were in direct contact with the enemy. This was in the jungle and rain forest between an imaginary line from Wau to Bulolo and the coastline between Lae and Salamaua. Here "Kanga Force", as it was known, was engaged in guerilla warfare. The veterans of this force were the New Guinea Volunteer Rifles stalwarts who had taken to the jungle after their demolition work at Lae and Salamaua in the face of the Japanese landings. Fresh blood had been provided by the men of the 5th Independent Company, commando-trained troops who, except for a party that had made the journey overland from Port Moresby as a test, had been flown in to Wau 300 strong, on 22nd May, by the American No. 21 Troop Carrier Squadron, four of whose aircraft were supplemented by two chartered Australian National Airways DC-3's. For this swift movement the Airacobras had provided fighter cover. The airlift, which was accomplished without incident, was the beginning of a ferry service that for many months to come was to operate into Wau's somewhat hazardous hillside aerodrome with its runway dropping 300 feet in its 3,300 feet length—the farthest north Allied air supply terminal. Forward of Wau Kanga Force patrols fought not only the enemy but the jungle itself with its intense humidity, interminable mud, malaria, dysentery, tropical ulcers and the exhaustion that came of it all. It was these troops who struck by night at Salamaua and elsewhere, slaying and retiring, in punishing raids that helped to wear down the enemy.

While the steady development of Allied air activity in the Port Moresby area meant that the aerodrome received special attention from raiding Japanese bombers, the harbour also offered attractive targets on occasions. This was proved on 16th and 17th June when attacking aircraft concentrated on Allied shipping and particularly the motor vessel *Macdhui* then discharging cargo. In the attack on the 16th the Japanese bombers scored direct hits on the vessel causing some damage and several casualties which included the ship's surgeon, Dr C. Tunstall, who was killed. But when the raid ended *Macdhui* was still afloat and the damage was judged repairable. Next day the raiders returned and renewed their assault on the harbour. Their pattern bombing was extremely accurate and the damaged *Macdhui* again became the principal victim. Several bombs hit

the vessel, which still had inflammable and explosive cargo in her holds, and serious fires broke out. It was soon apparent that she was doomed and her commander, Captain J. Campbell, who had remained on the bridge throughout the attack, gave the order to abandon ship.

Three R.A.A.F. medical officers, in company with several orderlies, had been watching the attack from the hospital on the hillside overlooking the harbour. Aware that Dr Tunstall had been killed the day before, they hurried to the waterfront and set out in a launch towards the burning ship. Seeing the Macdhui's boats putting off laden with men they realised that the ship was being abandoned. The helmsman of the launch was ordered to stand off, but at that moment a man was seen waving feebly from the ship's stern rail. Immediately the launch was brought under Macdhui's stern to where a Jacob's ladder was hanging over the side. One of the doctors, Flight Lieutenant Bond,2 followed closely by three orderlies, climbed to the deck where they found a steward, William Drury, lying gravely wounded. He had dragged himself to the rail in an endeavour to attract attention. While the ship blazed fiercely forward of where they worked. Bond and the orderlies tended the wounded man and then, using a mattress dragged from the crew's quarters aft and a coil of rope, they improvised a sling in which they lowered the patient into the launch, following him with all speed and getting the launch clear of the ship's side just as her cargo began to explode. Drury was taken to hospital where, next day, he died from his wounds, Macdhui, burning fiercely, drifted in the harbour until eventually she grounded in shallows where she became a burned-out hulk.

Under pressure of heavy and more frequent enemy air attacks on Port Moresby the vulnerability of the Catalina base in the harbour was emphasised. In June Bowen, south of Townsville, was selected as a reasonably well located and much safer base for their operations, and Nos. 11 and 20 Squadrons moved to that port. Meanwhile (on 29th May) the Catalina crews had made their first attack on their recently evacuated advanced base at Tulagi. For this and subsequent attacks on Tulagi the flying-boats alighted for refuelling at Belap Island, off the northern tip of Noumea. A U.S. Navy seaplane tender, the Curtis, was based at Noumea at the time and on this first Tulagi raid the R.A.A.F. aircraft were joined by three American Catalinas. Inexperienced in the area, none of the American crews found the target. The Australian crews showed special zest in attacking Tulagi. Four aircraft raided it on the night of 1st June and again on the nights of 25th and 26th June, descending to low level for gunnery attacks after dropping their bomb-loads. One crew member in an aircraft piloted by Squadron Leader Chapman even used a Tommy-gun. Reports suggested that in the raids on the 25th and 26th about 600 Japanese troops were killed. The raids were so successful that they were repeated as often as other operational responsibilities permitted.

Sqn Ldr J. A. Bond, 261488. 1 RAAF Hospital, RAAF Stn Port Moresby, 21 Base Wing, 2 OTU, 11 Sqn and 2(T) Gp. Medical practitioner; of Bathurst, NSW; b. Bathurst, 7 Sep 1915.

An incident after one of these raids led to the deletion of the red circle in the rondels of all R.A.A.F. aircraft. Returning from the attack on the 26th, one of No. 11 Squadron's aircraft, captained by Flying Officer Seymour,3 came in to alight on Havannah Harbour at Efate. Ground control at the Noumea base had reported the Catalina as an unidentified aircraft and the pilot of an American Navy Grumann Wildcat fighter was ordered to investigate it. The red circles on the Catalina's wings were so distinct that the American pilot mistook them for Japanese markings and, all too promptly, attacked. The fuel tanks and port aileron of the Catalina were damaged by the Wildcat's gunfire and two bullets passed through the main crew compartment, one of them close behind the head of the second pilot, Sergeant Bramell.<sup>4</sup> Seymour held the Catalina steadily on its glide and brought it down safely on the harbour. After the damage had been temporarily patched, Seymour flew his aircraft to Noumea where mechanics from the American tender Curtis made effective repairs.

In this period, Lae, Salamaua and Rabaul were also targets for Nos. 11 and 20 Squadron crews. On the night of 27th June two of their aircraft. one piloted by Squadron Leader Atkinson and the other by Flight Lieutenant Higgins were over Lae and Salamaua continuously for four hours. The report of the operation stated that the aircraft had dropped "eight 500-lb bombs, twenty 20-lb fragmentation bombs and four dozen empty beer bottles". On the well-established principle that the greater the disturbance to the enemy's sleep the lower would be his morale the crews added the bottles to the bomb-load, throwing them out at intervals between bomb release and so adding to the sound effects, the noise they made being something between a shrill whistle and a scream.<sup>5</sup> Another and more official way of attacking the enemy's morale was the practice adopted by the Catalina squadrons (as it was by other bomber units both Allied and Japanese) of dropping bombs fused for explosion after six to twelve hours' delay. On 30th June three Catalinas took part in a coordinated attack against Lae with a formation of American Mitchell bombers of No. 13 Bombardment Squadron which had staged through Port Moresby for the purpose.

In this period No. 32 Squadron was based with its Hudson aircraft at Horn Island, a place of considerable value as a staging point between the Australian mainland and New Guinea and also as a reconnaissance base. It was for this last purpose that the Hudsons were based there. In June's 30 days the squadron made 52 seaward reconnaissance and patrol flights in addition to many convoy protection sorties. These usually monotonous and always exacting tasks were interspersed with occasional and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Sqn Ldr R. M. Seymour, DFC, 406062. 11 Sqn and Trans Pacific Air Ferry Service; comd 43 Sqn 1945-46. School teacher; of Busselton, WA; b. Busselton, 3 Sep 1918.

F-Lt J. B. C. Bramell, 411279. 9, 11 and 38 Sqns. Assistant Resident Magistrate; of Papua; b. Belmore, NSW, 19 Dec 1912.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> This practice was also adopted by other RAAF squadrons as circumstances permitted.

unexpected diversions as when, on 11th June, Squadron Leader Pedrina evacuated personnel from Wau and the crew of one Hudson piloted by Flying Officer Halliday<sup>6</sup> made the most of a chance to change their role to the attack and shot down a four-engined flying-boat which they encountered on their patrol route to the south of New Britain. On the 13th an aircraft flown by Flight Lieutenant Manning<sup>7</sup> attacked and sank a wooden vessel off Siberi Island and machine-gunned the village. Another variation was provided by supply-dropping sorties, notably to a naval coastwatcher on Bougainville.

Growing air activity on Horn Island had not escaped the attention of enemy reconnaissance aircraft. On 11th May the base received its fourth air attack when 9 bombers, accompanied by 4 Zeros, destroyed a quantity of equipment. On 7th June, at midday, 16 bombers dropped between 180 and 200 bombs on the R.A.A.F. station. The tented camp, buildings and equipment were extensively damaged and three airmen in the camp were wounded. Though this raid suggested that a determined effort was being made to make the Torres Strait base unusable, no further attack was made on it until 30th July when a lone bomber on armed reconnaissance succeeded in damaging five of No. 32 Squadron's Hudsons in the dispersal area. Another single-aircraft attack was made two days later. This was ineffectual, the bombs falling harmlessly into the sea. It was virtually the last air attack on Horn Island.8

The Australian-built Beaufort made its first bombing attack—the task for which it had been designed—on the night of 25th June. The first unit to receive the new aircraft was No. 100 Squadron R.A.A.F. The number was derived from the R.A.F. squadron that had fought with forlorn distinction in Malaya until its obsolete Vildebeeste aircraft and most of its pilots had been lost. The Australian unit had been formed at Richmond as recently as 25th February, and in March Squadron Leader Balmer was appointed its first commander. From within both the R.A.A.F. and the aircraft industry the squadron was to be watched with more than ordinary interest because now, it seemed, Australia's capacity to produce a first-line aircraft was being put to the test. The unit had moved to Mareeba, inland from Cairns in May. From there, on a rapidly growing airfield that was to accommodate American as well as Australian bombers, the crews gained their operational grooming on reconnaissance patrols, and it was from Mareeba that they staged on their first strike. Several aircraft had been sent to Port Moresby for what was known as an orientation course to acclimatise the crews and watch the behaviour of their aircraft in equatorial conditions. Two of these crews, one captained

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> F-Lt L. Halliday, 406480. 32 Sqn, 380 Gp USAAF and 23 Sqn. Advertising manager; of Perth, WA; b. Perth, 14 Nov 1919.

W Cdr L. W. Manning, DFC, 290489. 7, 32, 6, 24 Sqns and 528 Sqn USAAF. Regular air force offr; of Peppermint Grove, WA; b. Perth, WA, 16 Apr 1917.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> On the night of 28th June 1943, almost a year later, a single enemy bomber, apparently on reconnaissance, was picked out by the Horn Island searchlights. It jettisoned its bombs into the sea and flew away. This was the last Japanese aircraft over north-eastern Australia.

by Squadron Leader Sage<sup>9</sup> and the other Flight Lieutenant Douglas,<sup>1</sup> were temporarily based on Port Moresby when the order was given to strike at an enemy ship reported to be approaching Lae. On the 25th June Balmer led a flight of five Beauforts to the New Guinea base. That night, with Sage and Douglas taking their aircraft in to Salamaua on a diversionary strike, the other five Beauforts took off at intervals of 20 minutes with Balmer's aircraft leading. It was moonlight and the weather was reported to be clear over the target area. At 9.45 p.m. Sage and Douglas bombed the Salamaua isthmus area from 1,500 feet and then raked the ground installations and the buildings known as Chinatown with gunfire. Douglas' aircraft returned safely, but at 10.44 the operations room at Port Moresby received a message from Sage asking for a bearing. The aircraft then appeared to be about 60 miles north-west of Port Moresby. That was the last that was heard from it: Sage and his crew, Flying Officer Wormald,<sup>2</sup> Flight Sergeant Patterson<sup>3</sup> and Sergeant Desmond,<sup>4</sup> were lost.

On the information available it seemed that the enemy ship would be close to Lae by the time the Beauforts began reaching the target area. Balmer anticipated that the ship's captain, when he realised that Salamaua was under attack, would alter course to the east to avoid detection. Estimating the ship's speed at eight knots Balmer then plotted a course for it and adjusted his own accordingly. At 10.30 p.m. the Beaufort came out over Huon Gulf and proved Balmer's prediction completely accurate: directly beneath them the enemy ship could be seen steaming on the moonlit waters of the gulf. Lining up the target in the moon path, Balmer dived to 50 feet and made his bombing run but the bombs failed to release. A second run was made with the same result. The enemy's antiaircraft fire had intensified but, determined to strike, Balmer made a third run. This time the aircraft was at 100 feet. Instead of chancing the faulty release gear, he jettisoned the bombs so that all dropped at once. As he pulled away from the target his rear gunner reported two flashes from the ship indicating that it had been hit. The second Beaufort, piloted by Flight Lieutenant Thompson, made two low runs over the ship and scored a direct hit each time, and the third aircraft, captained by Squadron Leader Bernard, also scored a direct hit. The ship now appeared to be disabled and sinking. Bernard's aircraft had been severely damaged by anti-aircraft fire and the crew doubted whether they would reach Port Moresby, but

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Sqn Ldr C. W. L. Sage, 255. 6 and 100 Sqns. Regular air force offr; of Mathoura, NSW; b. Fitzroy, Vic, 20 Mar 1915. Killed in action on night of 25-26 Jun 1942.

 $<sup>^1\,</sup>W$  Cdr L. A. Douglas, DFC, 403. 1, 100 and 13 Sqns; comd 2 Sqn 1945-46. Regular air force offr; b. 1 Jun 1919.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> F-O J. A. Wormald, 402812; 100 Sqn. Salesman; of Vaucluse, NSW; b. Sydney, 24 Sep 1918. Killed in action on night of 25-26 Jun 1942.

F-Sgt C. F. Patterson, 401048, 100 Sqn RAF and 100 Sqn. Clerk; of Brighton, Vic; b. Calcutta, India, 24 Nov 1917. Killed in action on night of 25-26 Jun 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Sgt D. W. Desmond, 405839; 100 Sqn. Clerk; of New Farm, Qld; b. Toowoomba, Qld, 20 Jan 1923. Killed in action on night of 25-26 Jun 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> W Cdr R. H. Thompson, DFC, 260285. 3 and 100 Sqns; comd 100 Sqn 1943-44, 14 Sqn 1944-45. Apprentice carpenter; of Kirribilli, NSW; b. Sydney, 7 Jun 1918.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Sqn Ldr C. S. Bernard, 259. 7 and 100 Sqns. Regular air force offr; of Hamilton, NSW; b. Botany Bay, NSW, 11 Sep 1916. Killed in action 28 Sep 1942.

Bernard nursed it home and made a successful wheels-up landing. The pilots of the other two Beauforts, Flight Lieutenant Ryan<sup>7</sup> and Flying Officer Elcoate,<sup>8</sup> attacked Lae, dropping their bombs on what was known as the "Terrace", where the main Japanese anti-aircraft batteries were placed. Both aircraft returned safely. Next day a reconnaissance crew reported that the ship had been sunk but this was never confirmed.<sup>9</sup>

In North-Western Area in the second quarter of 1942 the enemy's pressure had been as unrelenting as in the New Guinea area, though there had not been the same frequency of attack and the fighting had not been at such close quarters. Japanese tactics were to conduct harassing raids against the bases in the north; Darwin, of course, received the greatest concentration of attacks. Nine enemy bombers had penetrated 180 miles inland to Katherine on 22nd March, the same day that the American Kittyhawks made their first interception. But, though the formation was large for such a task, it was more an armed reconnaissance than a raid: only one stick of bombs had been dropped and that from high altitude. An aborigine was killed, another wounded and some damage was done to the aerodrome. Wyndham had its second raid on the 23rd when seven bombers blasted the aerodrome leaving a chain of about 30 large craters, but there was no other damage. About an hour later three enemy fighters on a marauding flight came in low over the aerodrome, firing their guns. The effect was negligible.

On 25th March Air Commodore Bladin replaced Air Commodore Wilson in command of North-Western Area. On the previous day Central War Room had issued a significant warning in a situation report. In part this read:

Recent Intelligence indicates the concentration of five aircraft carriers in the Celebes area, including two new arrivals from Japan; also the presence of a number of military landing craft and a probable landing-craft carrier at Koepang. This . . . with air raids on the northern part of Australia and information of an operation timed for the end of the month, gives indications that an attack on Australia from the Netherlands East Indies area may occur by the end of the month.

The effect of this signal was to establish invasion as an imminent possibility and in such circumstances, as mentioned earlier, absolute control of land, sea and air forces in the area passed to the commander of the land

W Cdr J. P. Ryan, 290621. 8 and 100 Sqns; comd 6 OTU 1943-44, RAAF Stn Darwin 1944-45. Dental surgeon; of Perth, WA; b. Kalgoorlie, WA, 24 Sep 1916. Killed in aircraft accident 11 Sep 1945.

<sup>8</sup> F-O R. T. W. Elcoate, 712; 100 Sqn. Hardware salesman; of Cloncurry, Qld; b. Echuca, Vic, 21 Feb 1918. Killed in aircraft accident 12 Jul 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>There was some confusion in the recording of the result of this attack. RAAF squadron and base records credited Balmer, Thompson and Bernard with the sinking of the ship which in some reports is referred to, incorrectly, as the Tenyo Maru. Post-war investigations by the US Joint Army-Navy Assessment Committee which were made with reference to enemy records, do not account for any ship having been sunk in this attack. The Committee's records show that, in all, three enemy vessels were sunk off Lae up to this time (25th June 1942). These were: Kongo Maru, 8,624 tons, and Tenyo Maru, 6,843 tons, both sunk by USN carrier aircraft on 10th March 1942, and Taijun Maru, 1,274 tons (by USAAF aircraft) on 11th April 1942. Sunk off Salamaua on 10th March by USAAF and USN carrier aircraft jointly was Yokohama Maru, 6,143 tons.

forces. Consequently General Herring, 1 recently arrived from the Middle East, who had just been appointed to command the land forces in the Darwin area, called Bladin and the Naval Officer-in-Charge, Commodore Pope,<sup>2</sup> into conference. As a result Air Headquarters was established beside Herring's headquarters at a point on the road 18 miles south of Darwin. Communication with the airfields was by temporary field telephone plus a wireless mounted in a lorry. The army formations took up battle stations in the headquarters area and to the north and west. Dawn and dusk air patrols to seaward were maintained to give warning of the approach of an enemy convoy and the single-engined Wirraways operated in-shore patrols in case commando parties were landed. Plans were made to move all air force units from the forward area; even Batchelor, 55 miles to the south, was not considered entirely safe and plans were made to station the fighters on claypan flats near Adelaide River, where fuel, oil and ammunition were placed. If invasion had taken place the one arterial road would have been crowded with army troops moving up, and therefore a separate north-south route for air units was reconnoitred.

Whether the other evidence was convincing or not, the air raids on Darwin and adjacent bases certainly suggested some special enemy purpose. Between 28th March and 27th April there were nine Japanese air attacks in the Darwin area. In two of them there was no interception by the American Kittyhawk pilots, but for the other seven the enemy paid a big price: 17 bombers and 11 fighters destroyed, 2 bombers and 4 fighters probably destroyed and one bomber damaged. Their loss in aircraft crews was therefore very severe. Two of the bombers were shot down by the guns of the anti-aircraft batteries, but the American fighter pilots accounted for all the other enemy aircraft destroyed. Eight Kittyhawks were lost in combat, and one was damaged, and three pilots were killed. Casualties on the ground totalled four R.A.A.F. airmen and one American serviceman killed and 12 R.A.A.F. airmen wounded. Damage caused by these raids was not very extensive, the most severe being on 2nd April when a bomb hit a tank with storage for 200,000 gallons of fuel from which about 30,000 gallons were lost, and on the 27th when buildings and water and power supply lines at the R.A.A.F. Station, Darwin, were damaged by bomb hits.

The invasion threat provided very good reason, if one were needed, for a swift stocktaking by the new air commander. Bladin found that the ability of his units to move, or, indeed, to operate on their air strips, was gravely affected by the lack of light vehicles. Aircrew and mechanics had partly remedied the lack of airfield runabouts by piecing together parts from motor vehicles found lying about after the departure of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Lt-Gen Hon Sir Edmund Herring, KCMG, KBE, DSO, MC, ED. (1914-18: RFA in France and Macedonia.) CRA 6 Div 1939-41; GOC 6 Div 1941-42, NT Force 1942, II Corps 1942, I Corps and NG Force 1942-43, I Corps 1943-44. Chief Justice of Victoria since 1944, Lieut-Governor since 1945. Of Melbourne; b. Maryborough, Vic, 2 Sep 1892.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Rear-Adm C. J. Pope, CBE. RN 1902-19; transferred RAN 1919. (HMAS Sydney 1914-19.) Comd HMS California 1939-41; NOIC Darwin 1942, Fremantle 1943-46. Of Sydney; b. Tring, Eng, 2 Mar 1887. Died Aug 1959.

civilians from Darwin, and General Herring made scores of utilities available to the R.A.A.F. (the U.S.A.A.F. had ample jeeps, command cars and specialised vehicles).<sup>3</sup>

In addition Bladin found that the air units were scattered from Darwin to Daly Waters, communications were poor and the radar early-warning system was inadequate to give the Americans enough time to fly their relatively slow-climbing Kittyhawks to the height of the incoming enemy fighters and bombers. No. 808 U.S. Airfield Construction Squadron hurriedly constructed two new airstrips for the American fighters. These were made by the ingenious method of choosing stretches of the north-south highway which ran north-west and south-east (the directions of the two prevailing winds), widening them, and providing dispersal areas round a camp site at one end and round petrol and ammunition stores at the other. Batchelor was further developed for the third U.S. fighter squadron.

The Hudson squadrons were moved forward again, in May, from Daly Waters, No. 13 going to Hughes and No. 2 back to Darwin, with its head-quarters at Rapid Creek where the men could bathe and at the same time live a few miles from the main Japanese target—R.A.A.F. Station, Darwin.

Combat training, rifle shooting, and route marches with full equipment were initiated for air force men. Airfield guards were grouped into one unit and given infantry training, sections alternating between guard duty at outlying airfields, radar stations and so on, and periods with the training unit. The early-warning system was expanded as new sets became available. To improve the warning system the Australian Navy placed a ship on patrol on the direct route to Koepang. In a lull in the raids (between 5th and 25th April) a second R.D.F. station was installed at Point Charles on the western extremity of the entrance to Port Darwin. The suitability of this equipment for tropical service was questioned but it certainly increased the early-warning capacity of the defences.

Few in number and lacking fighter cover, the crews of the Hudsons of Nos. 2 and 13 Squadrons continued to reconnoitre enemy ports for signs of the assembly of convoys and to strive to prevent the enemy from consolidating their newly-won bases on Timor and Ambon. Koepang, with its harbour and aerodrome facilities, was obviously a primary target but the aircraft also made raids on Ambon and Dili, and made supply-dropping sorties to aid the R.A.A.F. rear party and the 2/2nd Independent Company which continued to fight the Japanese in Portuguese Timor. Long-range reconnaissance flights to enemy bases such as Kendari were beyond the capacity of the Hudsons, though one crew, airborne for nine hours and a half, reached Sumbawa Island on one sortie. For attacks on Koepang the bomb-load was limited to 1,000-lb and for Ambon to only 500-lb. The enemy bombers, for their part, could carry a bomb-load of 2,000-lb for an attack on Darwin.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> North-Western Area was constantly clamouring for much-needed stores and equipment at this stage. In an effort to stir RAAF Headquarters into action Wing Commander K. T. Nicklin, RAF, the senior equipment officer, sent off the following signal: "Request urgent air despatch 5000 pairs shorts, khaki drill to cover 5000 bare bottoms now held in this Command." A sharp rebuke promptly arrived from Melbourne, but the shorts soon followed.

The enemy aircraft carrier movements that caused anxiety in Australia, as indicated by the Central War Room's warning, did not in fact become an actual threat to the North-Western Area; the enemy's purpose lay elsewhere. The activity of enemy fighter aircraft from Penfui showed that the Japanese had quickly repaired the damage caused by R.A.A.F. and A.I.F. demolitions. On one sortie in March the crew of a Hudson captained by Flying Officer McCombe, made the first (and unsuccessful) attempt to drop supplies to the R.A.A.F. party on Timor, and then reconnoitred Penfui. They returned to report 36 enemy aircraft lined up on the aerodrome. Rather over-optimistic plans were made for an Allied attack. Heavy bombers were to come from the south and special fighter cover was to be provided for these aircraft while they refuelled at Darwin.

An additional American Kittyhawk squadron had arrived on the 17th. but no heavy bombers came, and the operation fell to the lot of the Hudson crews-to "all available Hudson aircraft less one" as the order stated. This in fact meant three aircraft and the result was poor indeed for two of them failed to reach the target because of bad weather. Next morning a better effort was made and six Hudsons bombed the Japanese base, starting fires that were still visible when the aircraft were 50 miles away on their homeward flight. They had encountered heavy anti-aircraft fire and some fighter interception and one Hudson piloted by Flying Officer Venn<sup>6</sup> was damaged and had to ditch in the sea off Cape Fourcrov on Bathurst Island. A ship picked the crew up but the aircraft was lost. On 19th and 20th March patrolling Hudsons reconnoitred Saumlaki in the Tanimbar Islands. On their second visit they dropped some bombs because reports had been received that the Japanese were establishing a base there. Seven sorties were flown against Penfui on the night of 21st-22nd. One Hudson crew captained by Flight Lieutenant Dunne saw their bombs hit the runway and start fires in the barracks area. On the 22nd a Hudson crew claimed the first Zero to be shot down over Koepang by the R.A.A.F. Next day McCombe and his crew sortied over Timor in another attempt to drop supplies (medical stores and radio batteries) to the men of the 2/2nd Independent Company. The stores were not found and the batteries were broken. Three Flying Fortresses staged through Darwin for a strike on Penfui on the 26th. They took off from Darwin, as did three Hudsons, but the American crews failed to find the target and the Hudson crews bombed it without any observed results. Next day three Hudsons attacked Tenau, scoring a direct hit on a 7,000ton ship and probably destroying one of four moored seaplanes. On the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> The Central War Room's Intelligence report was accurate. It was Admiral Nagumo's carrier force—Akagi, Kaga, Soryu and Hiryu—which had returned to Kendari where, on 24th March, they were joined by the 5th Division (Shokaku and Zuikaku). Sending Kaga back to Japan for repairs and supplies, Nagumo had sortied with 5 carriers into the Bay of Bengal, as already described.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Sqn Ldr I. A. McCombe, DFC, 250813. 23 and 2 Sqns, 380 Gp and 24 Sqn. Share farmer; of Casterton, Vic; b. Casterton, 7 Nov 1912.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> F-O J. H. Venn, 406063. 7 and 2 Sqns. Insurance clerk, of Perth, WA; b. Dardanup, WA, 29 Sep 1921. Killed in action 13 May 1942.

last day of the month four Hudsons led by Flight Lieutenant Dalkin<sup>7</sup> returned from Penfui with a better report; they had destroyed at least 6 grounded aircraft, damaged 4 flying-boats moored in Koepang Harbour, scored two near misses on ships and damaged shore installations. Hudsons captained by Flight Lieutenant Black<sup>8</sup> and Flying Officer Sharp<sup>9</sup> on 1st April destroyed six and damaged six more grounded aircraft on Penfui aerodrome. Crews captained by Dalkin and Flying Officer Rule<sup>1</sup> repeated the attack on the night of 3rd-4th April, the score being four destroyed and two damaged.

For these attacks an advanced operational base had been developed near Drysdale Mission, the crews operating from there refraining from using their radio in the vicinity and attacking at first or last light or in moonlight to reduce the risk of attracting enemy fighters. The pilots who had operated from Penfui were able to give valuable aid. But it was altogether a heavy task for which the combat-weary crews and aircraft were only just equal in staying power. In somewhat forlorn terms Air Commodore Bladin reported to R.A.A.F. Headquarters on 6th April: "No information has been received of the likelihood of this area receiving some of the B-17's reputed to be due to arrive at the rate of two a day and of the B-25's and B-26's also due to arrive." He also noted the need for a special photographic reconnaissance aircraft and asked that two such—preferably American Lightnings—should be allotted.

The supply sorties to Timor were being continued but still without much success. A Hudson crew captained by Flying Officer Badger<sup>2</sup> tried again on 5th April, over Point Kurus, but the parachute broke away from the package, which was not recovered. Attempts by two other Hudson crews to supply the R.A.A.F. party on the island were more successful. The crews added to this operation an attack on Penfui aerodrome where they started fires in the barracks area. Similar attacks were made on Penfui on the nights of the 12th and 13th. One of the Hudson crews, captained by Flight Lieutenant Blanchard,<sup>3</sup> failed to return from a reconnaissance on the night of 23rd April—another grim reminder of the enemy's fighter activity.

When it was evident that no invasion was imminent General Herring moved his headquarters to a point near Batchelor and Air Commodore Bladin moved his, on 11th May, to Berrimah. Bladin's main concern was

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Gp Capt R. N. Dalkin, DFC, 260612. 2, 7 and 13 Sqns; Operations Offr North-Western Area HQ 1942-43; Chief Instructor General Reconnaissance School 1943-44; liaison duties Bomber Cd RAF 1944-45. Merchandise manager; of Salamaua, TNG; b. Northumberland, Eng. 21 Feb 1914.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Sqn Ldr I. O. Black, 248. 13, 6 Sqns and 529 Sqn USAAF; comd 21 Sqn 1944-46. Regular air force offr; of Camberwell, Vic; b. Camberwell, 12 Jun 1917.

Sqn Ldr A. J. Sharp, DFC, 402140. 7, 2 and 15 Sqns. Farmer and grazier; of Forbes, NSW; b. Sydney, 21 Feb 1916. Disappeared on flight off Queensland coast, 11 Mar 1945.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> F-Lt V. A. Rule, DFC, 407851, 13, 21 Sqns and 528 Sqn USAAF. School teacher; of Wayville, SA; b. Adelaide, 23 Oct 1914. Died 12 Nov 1958.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> F-Lt N. T. Badger, DFC, 407161. 6 and 2 Sqns and 528 Sqn USAAF. Horticulturist; of The Range, via Willunga, SA; b. Unley, SA, 27 May 1916. Killed in action 8 May 1944.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> F-Lt R. J. Blanchard, 260776. 7 and 13 Sqns. Mechanical engineer; of Coogee, NSW; b. Sydney, 22 Mar 1916. Killed in action 23 Apr 1942.

to locate his headquarters somewhere along the main telephone cable which ran between R.A.A.F. Station, Darwin, and his wireless station, 11 miles to the south; thus he would not have to rely on temporary land lines which were often accidentally cut by vehicles. Some months later, when the army had provided reliable land lines on poles, the two headquarters came together again.

In accordance with the policy of integration Bladin placed all units concerned with fighter defence under the operational control of Colonel Wurtsmith. Bladin advised Wurtsmith that experience had shown that the Japanese were unlikely to make simultaneous low-flying and high-flying raids or make two raids in quick succession and consequently the risk could be taken of sending up the fighters in maximum strength to meet the first enemy force showing on the radar screen. Also the Japanese seemed to prefer daylight take-offs and landings and therefore arrived over Darwin late in the morning or early in the afternoon.

Under Colonel Wurtsmith's experienced and realistic command, No. 49 Group had completely re-established confidence. To the end of April the Americans had lost 8 Kittyhawks and 3 pilots for an estimated enemy loss of 38 aircraft and 135 crew. In this period the heaviest Japanese assault on Darwin had been made with 24 bombers under cover of 9 fighters approaching from Bathurst Island at 26,000 feet on the 25th. Wurtsmith had been able to counter this with 50 Kittyhawks whose pilots claimed 11 enemy aircraft without loss to themselves.

Throughout May the enemy did not attack Darwin but in June they endeavoured to make up for this by a concentrated series of attacks on four consecutive days. Three of these raids were made by 27 bombers with an escort of 18 or 20 fighters. Their main targets were the R.A.A.F. aerodrome and Darwin itself. Considering the weight of the attacks the cost to the defenders was light—16 casualties (4 killed and 12 wounded) on the ground and some damage to installations. The month's air operations showed an enemy loss of 13 aircraft against 9 lost by No. 49 Group. With a good morale and reasonably good facilities, for which Wurtsmith's drive and enthusiasm were largely responsible, a very satisfactory aircraft serviceability rate was achieved. Usually there were 60 Kittyhawks in commission, which meant that Allied fighter pilots were now going into combat knowing that they were not likely to be outnumbered. To this they added the value of experience. After each battle a tactical "autopsy" was held. From these they learned, as the American Volunteer Group and the R.A.F. in China and Burma had learned, that it was futile to engage in individual dog-fights with an enemy whose aircraft could fly faster. climb higher and generally out-manoeuvre their own. They adopted the two-plane element—one covering the other against surprise attack—and used their own advantage in better fire-power and better diving speed in shoot and retreat tactics. Diving into an enemy formation with guns firing, they would strike and continue diving at a speed the Zero could not match. The general build-up of the fighter defence organisation, with its radar stations, fighter control centre and its American Kittyhawk squadrons, gave the added security which enabled the air commander to reorganise and build up hitting power without grave hindrance.

Reconnaissance showed a substantial concentration of enemy ships at Ambon and nine Hudsons from No. 2 Squadron were assigned to attack them. Led by Squadron Leader McFarlane, eight aircraft took off before dawn on 13th May. Approaching the target area the formation divided into two flights. One flight of five-piloted by McFarlane (leading), Flight Lieutenant Fraser,4 Flying Officers McCombe, Sharp, and Venn-crossed the Ambon coast to the south-east of the town and, flying just above the hilltops, opened out to sweep low over the bay. The Japanese were surprised. There was no fighter interception and the Hudsons were over their targets before the anti-aircraft batteries opened fire. Each of the five captains selected a different ship, flying in at little more than mast-height to release their loads of four 250-lb general purpose bombs (fused for 11 seconds' delay). As they struck they were followed in by the other three aircraft—piloted by Flight Lieutenant Dalkin (leader), Flying Officer Alcock<sup>5</sup> and Pilot Officer Jaques<sup>6</sup>—who had approached from the east, and each of whom attacked from 1,000 feet with five 250-lb S.A.P. bombs (with one-second delay fuses). The bombs from Venn's aircraft scored a direct hit on a 3,000-ton ship in which there was an immediate explosion. At such low altitude the crew had no chance to escape; caught directly in the blast of the ship's explosion, their aircraft disintegrated. All its crew were killed. The ship appeared to be sinking when the other aircraft left the target area after having scored direct hits on two other vessels of about the same tonnage. A near miss on a 5,000ton ship was also claimed.7

A similar attack was made on 22nd May by eight aircraft drawn from both Nos. 2 and 13 Squadrons. McFarlane again led the attack. On this occasion the Japanese had some warning and the Hudsons were received with a heavy anti-aircraft barrage and by enemy fighters which attacked immediately and shot down two of the Hudsons, one piloted by Flying Officer Brooks<sup>8</sup> of No. 13 Squadron and the other by Pilot Officer Allchin<sup>9</sup> of No. 2 Squadron, who had been unable to remain in formation. The rear-gunner in a Hudson piloted by Sharp shot down one attacking Zero and two others that were hit by fire from the Hudsons' guns broke off combat.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup>F-Lt S. J. Fraser, DFC, 524. 7 and 2 Sqns. Stock and share broker; of Melbourne; b. Melbourne, 10 Dec 1914. Killed in car accident 10 Oct 1942.

F-O J. E. Alcock, 408056. 7, 2 and 13 Sqns. Bank clerk; of Launceston, Tas; b. Deloraine, Tas, 30 Jan 1918. Killed in action 1 Oct 1942.

F-Lt G. A. F. Jaques, 260806. 7, 6, 13 Sqns and 65 Sqn USAAF. Articled clerk; of Sydney;
 b. Sydney, 7 Aug 1921.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup>The American Joint Army-Navy Assessment Committee did not confirm the sinking of any enemy ships as a result of this attack.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> F-O P. G. Brooks, 407219. 7, 6 and 13 Sqns. Bank clerk; of Cootamundra, NSW; b. Adelaide, 26 Aug 1917. Killed in action 22 May 1942.

P-O G. W. Allchin, 401321. 7 and 2 Sqns. Commercial artist; of St Kilda, Vic; b. Ballarat, Vic, 28 Aug 1916. Died while prisoner of war 22 Nov 1942.

About this time welcome aid was given by Flying Fortresses of No. 19 Group at Townsville. Six of these heavy bombers staged through Darwin on 18th May to bomb shipping in Koepang Harbour. The result was not observed. Two days later five Fortresses bombed grounded aircraft and anti-aircraft gun positions at Penfui, leaving several aircraft and fuel dumps burning.

The warning facilities in the Darwin area were now improving. In June three additional R.A.A.F. radio location stations (Nos. 31, 105 and 109) were formed. The Japanese aircraft strength on Timor, Bali and Ambon was now reported to be 57 fighters, 69 bombers and four observation aircraft, with a heavier concentration of aircraft at Kendari, which suggested that the weight of the Allied air attacks was sharply limiting the number of aircraft they were prepared to risk at their forward bases. but later in the month there was a determined effort to reinforce Dili: 50 aircraft and 1,000 troops were reported to have been brought in. Another report stated that 400 troops were moving from Koepang to Atambua in Dutch Timor. On 2nd June when four Hudsons from No. 13 Squadron were over the target at Atambua to discourage such reinforcement, two of them collided. One, piloted by Pilot Officer Gill,1 crashed and the crew was presumed lost. The pilot of the other Hudson, Flight-Lieutenant Trewren,<sup>2</sup> succeeded in bringing his aircraft back to base although it had been severely damaged. The Fortresses of No. 19 Group again bombed Kendari on 30th June and destroyed a number of grounded aircraft. One of the Fortresses, damaged by anti-aircraft fire, was lost when it crashed only 20 miles from Darwin on its way back.

During June Intelligence reports suggested that the Japanese intended to occupy Tual, on the south of the main island in the Tanimbar Group, and Dobo in the Aru Group. Apart from their proximity to Darwin these bases, and particularly Dobo, were contiguous to Dutch New Guinea where some furtive Japanese activity was reported. The Hudson operations continued throughout July with such variations as four sorties early in the month in support of Sparrow Force which was still fighting its own independent war with great tenacity. Buildings, barracks and shipping at Dili and Atambua were bombed and machine-gunned. Three Fortresses helped on 3rd July by destroying with bombs several aircraft on the ground at Penfui.

On the 25th July the Japanese resumed their raiding of Darwin and made five successive daily attacks with small bomber formations without escort. The damage was slight. No. 49 Group Kittyhawks did not intercept on any of these raids. On the 30th the enemy made two attacks, for the second of which the Kittyhawk pilots were airborne and waiting. Soon after midday 27 bombers and between 15 and 20 fighters struck at Darwin. The American pilots shot down 6 Zeros and 2 bombers and probably

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> P-O R. L. Gill, 406841. 7 and 13 Sqns. Insurance clerk; of Perth, WA; b. Murray Bridge, SA, 5 Jul 1922. Killed in action 2 Jun 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> W Cdr L. R. Trewren, 387, 14 and 13 Sqns. Controller 9 Gp 1943-44; comd RAAF Stn Port Moresby 1945-46. Regular air force offr; of Melbourne; b. Bendigo, Vic, 6 Aug 1913.

destroyed 3 fighters and 3 bombers in addition to damaging 5 other aircraft, but two fuel dumps were destroyed, and power, water and telephone services were disrupted for a time.

Operations in North-Western Area were now entering a new phase: one in which there would be a continuous increase in strength and efficiency both on the ground and in the air, with the accent less on defence and more on offensive operations against any Japanese forces within reach. With the arrival of No. 1 Mobile Works Squadron it became possible to prepare a series of airfields to accommodate new squadrons, particularly of bombers. South from Darwin, airfields were built or extended at Livingstone, Strauss, Sattler, Hughes, Batchelor, Coomalie, Pell, McDonald, Manbulloo, Fenton, Tindal, and Daly Waters. Coastal bases were made or enlarged at Truscott near the Drysdale River Mission, Millingimbi, Groote Eylandt and Gove. The Gove project was originally ordered by Allied Air Headquarters to enable a force of six bomber squadrons to operate over the western approaches to Torres Strait against a possible invasion force using that route. A site was found after much searching and earth-moving equipment was moved in with much difficulty. The project was not finished until the possible need had passed, but the base was extensively used at a later stage of the war.

At or near the north-south chain of airfields the various ancillary units were established. For example, there were repair and salvage units at Manbulloo and Pell, a medical receiving station and stores depot at Daly Waters, a personnel depot at the railhead at Birdum. The men worked long hours day and night to establish these facilities and to improve their living conditions and, as they watched the plan developing, their spirits rose.

R.A.A.F. unit movements in the period included No. 12 Squadron (Wirraways) to Pell; No. 34 Transport Squadron to Hughes; and No. 2 Air Ambulance Unit to Manbulloo.<sup>3</sup>

There was an interlude late in July that brought consciousness of the war in the air more sharply into focus for the Australian people. On the night of the 25th-26th at 11.35 p.m. Townsville had its first air raid warning. At 12.40 a.m. three Kawanisi flying-boats made a nuisance raid over the town, now the most important Allied air base in Australia. The enemy aircraft dropped six bombs over the harbour, all of them falling into the sea several hundred yards from the wharf area. Searchlights picked out the flying-boats, but there was no attempt at fighter interception. Again, at 2.25 a.m. on the 28th, a single enemy flying-boat jettisoned a stick of eight bombs harmlessly in the foothills of the Many Peaks Range outside the town, drawing 72 rounds of fire from the defenders' anti-aircraft guns. Six Airacobras unsuccessfully attempted interception. Townsville had its third raid at 2.27 a.m. on the 29th when, once more,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> American Air Force units serving in the area were now: No. 49 Fighter Group (Nos. 7, 8 and 9 Squadrons), No. 49 Interceptor Control Squadron and the ground echelons of Nos. 71 and 64 Bombardment Squadrons.



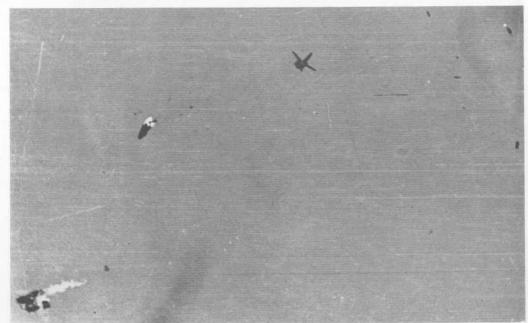
(Allied Air Forces, S.W.P.A.)

An aerial photograph of the country between Oivi and Myola. The rough terrain and unstable air conditions presented hazards for low flying, and the thickness and sameness of the vegetation made difficult the task of bombing and strafing enemy positions and dropping supplies to the forward troops.



(Australian War Memorial)

A Wirraway of No. 4 Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron diving to strafe tree-tops in which Japanese snipers were concealed during the fighting in the Buna-Gona area.



(Australian War Memorial)

One of three Bostons of No. 22 Squadron lost over the target area in Papua between the 11th and 29th November 1942. The loss of the aircraft was caused by the release of the bomb-load—clusters of 20-lb fragmentation bombs. On leaving the bomb bay the first bombs would be flicked back against the fuselage by the slipstream and would explode. This would set off the remainder of the load causing a shattering explosion. The aircraft shown above was attacking Buna strip on 26th November.

a single four-engined flying-boat appeared. It released seven bombs, six of which went harmlessly into the sea and the seventh exploded close to the racecourse without causing more damage than a few broken windows. On this occasion four American Airacobra pilots attempted to intercept and one closed with the enemy aircraft sufficiently to open fire on it. Though the fire from one of the fighters appeared to hit the flying-boat, it escaped apparently without any serious damage and the operator of No. 1 Wireless Unit at Townsville later heard the flying-boat's crew calling Rabaul and asking for a flare-path on the harbour.

The enemy's raids in this area ended on the night of 31st July when another single aircraft flew over the Mossman district near Cairns and dropped a single bomb which exploded 20 yards from a house and injured a child—the first civilian air-raid casualty on the east coast of Australia. While these raids caused a certain amount of movement by civilians away from the "danger area", on the other hand they had a rather stimulating effect; servicemen, and women and civilians, most of whom remained in the city, gained a sense of having a more personal share in the war effort.

Side by side with G.H.Q's efforts to advance the claims of S.W.P.A. to more aircraft, there was the independent and smaller, though no less vigorous, effort of the Australian Government. In May Mr Curtin was strongly advocating, both to Washington and London, the allocation of a sufficient share of the available aircraft to enable the R.A.A.F. to meet its current establishments and its planned expansion. To this end he sent the Attorney-General and Minister for External Affairs, Dr Evatt, as his special emissary to the United States and the United Kingdom. In Washington Dr Evatt gained an attentive hearing and an allocation of additional aircraft.<sup>4</sup>

In London later Dr Evatt took his plea direct to Mr Churchill. It was a double plea: he sought Spitfires for the R.A.A.F. and an aircraft carrier for, or to serve with, the R.A.N. At Mr Churchill's invitation Dr Evatt accompanied him on a four-days tour of northern England and with him addressed a public meeting at Leeds, where references to Australia caused a demonstration of great warmth. Dr Evatt explained that it was soon after this demonstration that Mr Churchill decided that three fully-equipped Spitfire fighter squadrons should be sent to Australia. This decision, which was kept a close secret for some months, was made as a "special contribution" to Australia.<sup>5</sup>

With his plea for an aircraft carrier Dr Evatt, despite Mr Churchill's sympathetic consideration, was not successful. Mr Churchill's interest in the request was expressed in a minute dated 17th May which he directed to the First Lord of the Admiralty and the First Sea Lord, saying:

Dr Evatt has made me the strongest appeals about an aircraft carrier. We had, of course, promised them *Hermes*, but she was sunk on our business before being

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup>At the end of May aircraft ordered from the United States but not yet delivered included: 92 Catalinas, 689 Kittyhawks, 370 Vultee Vengeances, 143 Fortresses, and some transports.

The details of this contribution were first made known to the Australian public on 4th March 1943 in statements to Parliament by Mr Curtin and Dr Evatt. Two of the squadrons were RAAF, EATS units—Nos. 452 and 457—and the third a RAF squadron (No. 54).

sent to them. You now tell me that they said they did not want her. Have you seen, however, the long telegram which Dr Evatt has received from Mr Curtin, in which the need of two aircraft carriers is stressed? I carefully avoided making the slightest promise but I have been wondering whether the Furious could be spared. Will you let me know what are your plans for her? . . . I recognise the fact that the Americans have withdrawn Wasp (from the Atlantic) and that this makes our position more difficult, and of course Wasp is a reinforcement for the Pacific. We have to consider our permanent relationship with Australia and it seems very detrimental to the future of the Empire for us not to be represented in any way in her defence.

But the Admiralty could not meet the British Prime Minister's wishes—a carrier could not be spared.

While Port Moresby was and had to remain the key New Guinea base for the Allied forces, G.H.Q. were well aware of the need of a base on or near the south-eastern extremity of the island. Its purpose would be to command strategically the island-studded Solomon Sea, shorten the flight range to the Solomons and New Britain targets (while avoiding the need to cross the Owen Stanleys), provide a harbour base for seaborne operations up the northern coast of New Guinea, and particularly to deny to the enemy the obvious advantages they would gain from establishing a base of their own in this part of New Guinea. At the beginning of June a survey party was sent to this area to select a site for the base. They found their task difficult; much of the low-lying jungle terrain on the coast was criss-crossed with waterways denying suitable runway sites and the island's mountain spine reached uncomfortably far down to the sea. The first site proposed was at Mullins Harbour on the south side of the "tip of the tail", but further survey showed a better place at the head of Milne Bay which bifurcates the tip itself. Here there was a deep and wellsheltered anchorage with sufficient flat land adjacent. An area of 1,600 acres of this land, won from the jungle by coconut planters, was known as Gili Gili.

The survey completed, orders were given for the immediate construction of the base, in the plan for which provision had been made for three runways. American engineer troops began disembarking at Milne Bay on 29th June and soon the 7th Australian Brigade group was established there. With an annual rainfall of about 106 inches the low-lying land was frequently boggy and heavy transport was almost useless until roads had been formed. The humidity was extreme and malaria-carrying mosquitoes abounded. At frequent intervals the cloud base came down so low that the area was completely closed in. In spite of the difficulties the work went on. The first R.A.A.F. parties arrived in the transport Swartenhondt. Among them were the installation section of No. 37 Radar Station, in charge of a R.A.F. officer, Flight Lieutenant Day<sup>7</sup> and a signals installation

W. S. Churchill, The Second World War, Vol IV, p. 770.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> F-Lt G. A. Day, 89592, RAF, 548 Sqn RAF; Instructor 1 and 8 EFTS's 1942-43, 57 OTU 1943-44. Flying instructor; of Hitchin, Hertfordshire, Eng; b. Hitchin, 15 Dec 1915.

party under Pilot Officer Knife.<sup>8</sup> Within a few days the signals unit, having battled with the ill-effects of rain and humidity, was in partial operation—partial because security forbade transmission at this stage. The siting of the radar station had its special problems; materials were limited and members of the unit had to go to Samarai on "scrounging" expeditions before the station was finally erected.

Poor communications in the S.W.P.A. placed a serious restriction on the receipt of Intelligence information and G.H.Q. therefore made extremely heavy demands on the Allied Air Forces for long-range reconnaissance of the enemy bases. This had the effect of draining the striking power of the Flying Fortress units—the only heavy bombers the A.A.F. possessed. An entire squadron, No. 435, was now completely employed on these operations, though their sorties were made on armed reconnaissance and attacks were made when opportunity offered. For the same reason there was a heavy drain on the "strike" capacity of No. 3 Group's Mitchells, particularly during the Coral Sea battle. In May the crews of these aircraft flew 120 photo-reconnaissance sorties.

So heavy was the burden of No. 435 Squadron that a flight of 4 aircraft and 8 crews was detached to Port Moresby to permit the extension of their reconnaissance sorties to 4 instead of 2 a day. A notable addition to the photo-reconnaissance strength was made in April when a flight of No. 8 Photo Squadron, commanded by Major Karl Polifka, arrived from the United States. An expert in this field, Polifka undertook a systematic mapping program operating with special cameras mounted in a modified Lockheed Lightning fighter, the first of these twin-fuselage aircraft to arrive in the South-West Pacific. Stripped of its guns and all unneeded weight the Lightning gained altitude, speed and range; on these the pilot had to rely. Almost single-handed Polifka covered a large part of eastern New Guinea and New Britain. In June the remaining two flights of the squadron arrived to share this valuable service.

The Japanese, meanwhile, had satisfied their need of staging points along the New Guinea coast of Vitiaz Strait, the seaway between New Guinea and New Britain. On 10th March they had seized Finschhafen at the southern end of the strait near Cape Cretin. Then followed the occupation on 30th April of Alexishafen at the northern end of the strait, and of Madang next day. On 6th May the enemy took possession of Hollandia in Dutch New Guinea.

If the Japanese command needed bases on the north coast of New Guinea so too did MacArthur, and one of Polifka's most important tasks at this stage was to survey the coastal area between Oro Bay and Cape Ward Hunt for suitable sites. The choice was an area in the vicinity of Buna where there was a Government station; there was also a mission at Gona, 12 miles to the west. It was low-lying country at the mouth of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> F-Lt C. E. Knife, 265120. North-Eastern Area HQ Det. Milne Bay; SSO North-Western, Eastern and Southern Area HQs; 12 and 11 Sigs Units, 1st TAF. Sales manager; of Sydney; b. London, 17 Jul 1904.

Giruwa River—coconut plantations and expanses of kunai grass flats flanked by swampy land drained into the sea by several streams.

In a memorandum dated 15th July the Supreme Commander outlined his plan—code-named Providence—for the establishment of the new base. D-day for this operation was to be between 10th and 12th August. A lightly-equipped army force—a company of the 39th Battalion—moved from Port Moresby over a tortuous jungle trail leading north-east over the Owen Stanley Mountains. It was to go to Buna, there to be joined by a naval force that would move up the coast in light vessels from Milne Bay. Together these troops would prepare for the arrival of a larger occupation force. Anti-aircraft guns would be mounted and the whole operation would be given fighter protection by the squadrons based on Port Moresby. The immediate purpose of Providence was to provide facilities for 2 fighter squadrons and eventually for 3 interceptor fighter and one longrange fighter squadrons with advanced base facilities for 2 heavy-bomber squadrons.

Early on the morning of 19th July a Flying Fortress crew on reconnaissance reported an enemy seagoing force in the vicinity of Rabaul. Next day the Japanese struck at Port Moresby with a force of 26 bombers and 15 fighters. In the afternoon of the 21st an enemy float-plane reconnoitred and strafed the Buna foreshore and a naval bombardment followed. The convoy sighted near Rabaul on the 19th was now off the coast near Buna, and was reported to comprise one cruiser, 2 destroyers, 2 transports and small craft. Late in the afternoon one Fortress and 5 Marauders struck at the enemy ships, the Marauders bombing from about 6,000 feet. One direct hit on a transport was observed. Another formation of 5 Marauders followed, but it was then too dark for them to find the ships. Under cover of night the Japanese put a force ashore at Gona without opposition. Early next morning American bombers and fighters struck again. The enemy had no fighter cover but the guns of their warships kept 10 Fortresses at more than 25,000 feet and their bombs fell harmlessly. Five Mitchells and 6 Marauders also attacked and failed to hit the ships, but the crew of a single Marauder later claimed a direct hit, and a Fortress crew who attacked from much lower altitude than the other heavy bombers claimed two direct hits on a transport. Airacobra pilots who had given unneeded cover to the bombers raked the enemy landing barges and supply dumps on the beach-head with gunfire, killing, they believed, a number of enemy troops. The only R.A.A.F. crew to take part in these attacks was one from No. 32 Squadron captained by Flight Lieutenant Manning whose bombs fell just short of the target.

By 11 a.m. on the 22nd the Japanese ships, with the exception of one transport that had been sunk by the bombers, were steaming northward after having landed a substantial body of troops and their equipment.<sup>9</sup>

The sinking of this transport was confirmed. She was the Ayatosan Maru.

The composition of the force put ashore was later shown to be the I Bn, of the 144th Regt, most of the 15th Independent Engineer Regiment, detachments of the 55th Mountain Arty and 47th Fleld AA Arty, a company of the 5th Sasebo Naval Landing Force totalling 2,000 men, 100 Formosans of the 15th Naval Pioneer Unit, 1,200 conscripted Rabaul natives, and 52 horses.

American medium-bomber crews and Airacobra pilots were back over the beach-head during the day, bombing and strafing shore targets and small craft still in Buna Bay and on the following day two R.A.A.F. Catalinas captained by Squadron Leader Chapman and Flying Officer Higgins, began a series of harassing raids which Nos. 11 and 20 Squadrons maintained until the end of the month, the crews spending as long as five hours over the target, two aircraft between them dropping 7,736 pounds of "daisy cutter", general purpose, and incendiary bombs from about 2,000 feet in day and night attacks.

On 30th July a No. 32 Squadron Hudson crew captained by Manning made that unit's last combat sortie in New Guinea when they attacked enemy positions in the Buna area. In this period the Hudson crews had been busy dropping supplies to Kanga Force and to the troops now engaged in the grim task of countering the enemy's advance patrols who already were pressing along the track that led to Port Moresby. These supply-dropping sorties, in which the aircraft were dubbed "bully-beef bombers" and "biscuit bombers" by the men of the army, were the beginning of an extremely hazardous and exhausting series of operations that were to be continued by a variety of Allied transport aircraft for months to come. Within a week of their landing in the Buna area the fresh Japanese troops, suitably equipped for rapid movement in the jungle, were threatening Kokoda and by the 29th, they had forced "Maroubra Force" back and taken Kokoda.

In the days preceding the Japanese occupation of Kokoda, aircraft from the American transport squadron, aided by Hudsons of No. 32, were landing vital supplies on the small airstrip that served that base. Their crews scarcely knew from day to day which force held it—the Australian or the Japanese. Two days after Kokoda fell the enemy air units delivered their 77th attack on Port Moresby.

On 25th and 29th July more enemy transports were reported to be headed south from Rabaul. Attacks were made on the convoy by Fortresses (which on this occasion bombed from 2,000 feet, and claimed direct hits on one transport) supported by R.A.A.F. Hudsons and Catalinas and, as the ships came nearer the New Guinea coast, by American Dauntless dive bombers. None of these attacks held the enemy force in check; reinforcements were landed at Buna without serious hindrance. The operation was ill-fated for the Dauntless crews. Seven aircraft crossed the Owen Stanleys on the 29th to strike at the convoy, now close in-shore. On this occasion the enemy had strong fighter cover. The dive bombers' own fighter cover, apparently unable to stay with their much slower charges, had become separated from them at the crucial time. The Zero pilots struck and five of the Dauntless aircraft went crashing into the jungle or the sea. One, riddled by gunfire, was nursed by its pilot until it

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> By 21st July No. 21 Troop Carrier Squadron had been reinforced by No. 22 Squadron. These units were listed at that date as having 32 aircraft but the record is confused and it seems probable that this total included No. 32 Squadron's Hudsons then still engaged in supply-dropping.

reached Milne Bay and only one returned to Port Moresby unharmed. From that time on the role of the Dauntless was strictly non-combatant.

Failure on the part of the A.A.F. to prevent the two enemy forces from reaching Buna reflected unfavourably on General Brett, who, as commander, was obliged to accept both the responsibility and the criticism entailed. Clearly there was dissatisfaction over the results of the Allied air attacks. Not only had the Japanese succeeded in landing their force but they had done so at the very site chosen for MacArthur's base. As G.H.Q. saw it, the evidence weighed heavily against the air commander. Intelligence officers at G.H.Q. had indicated, as early as 23rd May, that Buna was an enemy objective, and they had predicted an attempt by the Japanese to land there on or about 16th July. The enemy convoy had been sighted ten hours before the landing took place, yet, G.H.Q. asserted, "we were able to deliver only five B-26's at the decisive point". Whatever influences this criticism may have exerted, it had been clear to those close to the two commanders that Brett had never held the full confidence of the Supreme Commander.

Though his period of command under General MacArthur had been comparatively brief Brett had faced many difficulties, not the least among which was the awkward relationship that had existed between himself and the Supreme Commander. His own expression of this awkwardness, publicly stated after the war, and the record of events concerning the relationship, leave the impression that the two men were professionally and personally incompatible. Brett recorded that General Patrick Hurley, a former United States Secretary for War and, for a brief period, an officer on his staff, after meeting MacArthur on his arrival in Australia, told Brett privately that the new commander was antagonistic to him. Hurley had said that he could not suggest the cause. This was borne out, Brett indicated, when MacArthur, on leaving his train at Melbourne to assume his new role as Supreme Commander, appeared to snub him—the man who until then had been the senior commander in the South-West Pacific. Brett's record of the occasion states that, in response to an inquiry as to whether he wished to be accompanied to his hotel, MacArthur had answered with a brief "No" and had driven off. Later, when Brett and Royce called formally on MacArthur, they were not admitted. "We left our cards," Brett wrote, adding that Royce had remarked, "You'd think we were orderlies. Or don't we belong to the right fraternity?"

Royce (Brett wrote) put his finger on it right there. We didn't belong. No one belonged except those who had been with MacArthur in the Philippines. . . . MacArthur's staff officers reflected his attitudes. If they did not they were not with him very long.

Brett noted that it was not until eight days after MacArthur's arrival in Melbourne that the Supreme Commander consented to see him. When he did he found MacArthur pacing the floor. "As he talked he walked back and forth," Brett stated, "his nervous energy driving him into continual

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Craven and Cate, Vol IV, p. 25,

motion.3... MacArthur went into a dissertation on the air forces. It was evident that he had nothing but contempt and criticism for them. 'They lack discipline, organisation, purposeful intent,' he said." In Brett's assessment the key to this reaction was that the Philippines campaign had been lost; though "through no fault of his". "Defeat raked his spirit raw. Besides he was abnormally sensitive to criticism. The Supreme Commander was depressed and unhappy over having left his men in Bataan and Corregidor."

The interview ended on a friendly note. MacArthur applauded Brett's wish to go immediately to Townsville, there to assume command of the Allied Air Forces, and warmly wished him good luck.

But (wrote Brett) it didn't work out quite that way. General MacArthur did not have a full appreciation of air operations nor did he have an officer on his (immediate) staff sufficiently conversant with such operations to execute proper planning. Since he was prone to make all decisions himself, depending only on his immediate staff . . . commanders were not conferred with prior to . . . decisions. Lack of command and staff meetings resulted in directives difficult to interpret. Orders were issued without discussing them with those who had to carry them through and who, presumably, had the most specialized knowledge of the subject. I found it hard to tie in orders which were issued and found the same reaction from Admiral Leary and Australian General Blamev.4

There is no record available to indicate specifically MacArthur's attitude to Brett in the light of the criticism that followed the Japanese landing at Buna. But that is of no consequence for already he had been in communication with the War Department on the subject of his air command and, as early as 7th July, action had been taken to provide a replacement for Brett. From a list of possible candidates submitted to him by the War Department, he had chosen Major-General George C. Kenney, an officer with an impressive record both of promotion and achievement. The succeeding action was prompt. Kenney reached Australia on 28th July. A week later he assumed command of the Allied Air Forces, South-West Pacific Area.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Australians serving at General MacArthur's headquarters came to know his dramatic floor-pacing habit. It was seen in its most impressive form perhaps at his rare and notable press conferences. At one such conference at GHQ Brisbane late in 1943, the 30 or more war correspondents and officers present rose as the general made an impressive entry—bare-headed, grave, distinguished-looking, immaculate. His right arm was raised in salute. There was no other introduction. Pacing to and fro almost the length of the conference room, MacArthur immediately began to declaim his statement of the military situation. His phrasing was perfect, his speech clear and unhalting, except for pauses for dramatic emphasis; the correspondents took notes but there was no interruption of any kind. The conference room had become a stage, MacArthur the virtuoso, the other efficers the "extras" in the cast, and the correspondents the audience. It was a dramatic occasion. The statement ended, the general again raised his right arm in salute and strode from the room followed by one or two staff officers. The conference was over. One man alone had spoken—the Supreme Commander. There was no questioning, no opportunity to clarify the meaning of the statement. It had come direct from the lips of General Douglas MacArthur, and as such it was, evidently, beyond question.

4 Lt-Gen George H. Brett (with Jack Kofoed), "The MacArthur I Knew" (True, Oct 1947).