

CHAPTER 5

AIR SUPPORT DURING THE LAE-NADZAB-FINSCHHAFEN OPERATIONS

IN the South-West Pacific, the first stage of the ELKTON offensive had met with success and General MacArthur was now ready to push on with the second stage—the seizure of the Markham Valley, Lae, Salamaua and Finschhafen. His senior commanders had been ordered to prepare for this operation by a warning instruction issued on 6th May. He had directed General Blamey to group the five Australian divisions which were to take part into New Guinea Force, and General Krueger, commander of the Sixth American Army, to organise American troops into New Britain Force for the subsequent attack on western New Britain. Blamey was also later given an American parachute regiment (the 503rd) which was to jump into the Markham Valley behind Lae from transport aircraft and seize ground suitable for use as an airfield. When the airfield was ready, the 7th Australian Division would be flown in by air transports and attack the enemy at Lae from the west, while the 9th Australian Division attacked the enemy along the coast of Huon Gulf.

General Kenney's squadrons had been directed to support the troops by intensive air bombardment of Lae and Salamaua before and during their movement in landing craft along the New Guinea coast from Buna. In addition to directly supporting the Australian troops in the battles that lay ahead, the air forces were to blockade the Huon Gulf. No. 9 Operational Group would contribute by hammering the enemy bases, particularly air bases in western New Britain, and sinking barges, submarines or other Japanese vessels that attempted to carry reinforcements or supplies to the Japanese in the gulf area. As far as possible, the enemy forces in Lae were to be cut off from their main rear bases, and then destroyed by the Australian infantry. No. 4 Squadron, still engaged in the fighting round Komiatum and Salamaua, was given the task of observing enemy ground defences, artillery spotting and generally aiding the army during the campaign; and later No. 24 Squadron, armed with the new Vultee Vengeance dive bombers, was given the task of directly supporting the Australians.

Before the campaign began, further movements of No. 9 Group's units were to take place. General Kenney informed Air Vice-Marshal Bostock in June that, because of their nearness to each other, Goodenough Island and Milne Bay formed an "inter-linking defensive area", and he proposed that these bases be manned by R.A.A.F. fighter squadrons, and combined into an R.A.A.F. fighter area. Kenney said that these advanced areas were primarily directed against Rabaul. At the same time, further offensive action was to be taken against Wewak. Kenney proposed to use three, and possibly six, squadrons of the new Lightning aircraft to escort bombers

in these operations, because they were the most efficient machine for this purpose. The new No. 475 Fighter Group of the Fifth Air Force was then being equipped with Lightnings and would be available. If the R.A.A.F. manned Kiriwina with three fighter squadrons, Goodenough with two and Milne Bay with one, the Lightnings would be free for these operations.

These proposals called for two additional R.A.A.F. fighter squadrons for No. 9 Group, but Bostock informed Kenney on 17th June that, owing to shortages of men and aircraft, the R.A.A.F. could not supply them, and therefore the group could not accept the whole of this responsibility. Another squadron of Kittyhawks (No. 78) would be sent to New Guinea by October, but no further squadrons could be made available for some time. It therefore became necessary to use two American fighter squadrons to fill the gap.

On 30th July, Air Commodore Hewitt ordered Nos. 76, 77, and 79 Squadrons to move to Kiriwina by 15th August. The general control of all air units at both Goodenough and Kiriwina, including the supply of oil, petrol and bombs, was vested in No. 9 Group. No. 71 Wing was responsible for Goodenough and No. 73 Wing, which was to move from Port Moresby, for Kiriwina. Other units to move to Kiriwina were No. 46 Operational Base Unit and No. 6 Mobile Works Squadron. Small landing craft, and three transport aircraft supplied by the Directorate of Air Transport, carried the units from Goodenough to Kiriwina.

In contrast with Goodenough, which was mountainous, Kiriwina was flat, with coral cliffs reaching nowhere higher than 100 feet. There were about 8,000 natives who lived on taro, bananas, paw paws, pineapples and other crops grown on the rich soil of the island, in addition to rations brought from the south.

Why the enemy did not send bombers to Kiriwina in August and September to interfere with its development was mystifying to the Allies. Development proceeded practically unhindered, although heavy rain, unexpected difficulties with roads, and the slow arrival of heavy mechanical equipment delayed work on the airfield. However, the first Douglas transport landed on 2nd August and soon afterwards the R.A.A.F. began to move in. No. 6 Mobile Construction Squadron arrived on 3rd August to aid the Sixth Army engineers and began building camps, workshops and roads. Between 9th and 18th August, No. 79 Squadron arrived, and by 19th August, the Spitfires were ready to take the air against the enemy. The move of No. 77 Squadron was deferred because at the time there were not enough dispersal facilities. The squadron's transfer was cancelled altogether at a later stage because No. 78 Squadron was coming up from the mainland and it would save a double move if that squadron were to go direct to Kiriwina instead of taking the place of No. 77 Squadron when it moved to Kiriwina from Goodenough. By 17th August, 1,556 R.A.A.F. men had arrived at Kiriwina and at Goodenough the strength was 2,760. The movement of No. 76 Squadron was also delayed but it became operational at the new base on 10th September.

At Rabaul General Imamura had realised in May 1943 that the position of his ground forces in New Guinea was becoming acute. He was aware of the big concentrations of Allied shipping in Milne Bay and at Buna, and assumed that the Allies, taking advantage of the fact that much of the Japanese air and naval strength was engaged in the Solomons, would attack his New Guinea garrison.

Headquarters in Tokyo had suggested to General Imamura and Admiral Kusaka that the naval air force should remain to defend Rabaul and that the army air force should move its headquarters and squadrons to New Guinea and operate there in support of the ground forces. Imamura considered this arrangement would be better than having army and navy aircraft striking at the same targets and ordered the *Fourth Air Army* with its 10,000 aircrew and ground staff to move to Wewak. This order had been carried out by August 1943. The *6th Air Division*, with five fighter and three bomber groups, totalling 324 aircraft was established at Wewak, and the *7th Air Division* with a total of 156 aircraft established its main strength at But, a few miles farther along the north New Guinea coast. One-third of the *7th Division's* strength remained at Ambon and other airfields in that area.

The movement of these enemy aircraft to Wewak and near-by airfields had been observed by Kenney's reconnaissance aircraft and he ordered the Fifth Air Force to attack the Wewak airfields in great strength. The attacking aircraft used Marilinan airfield, forty miles from Lae, which had just been completed for use in the Huon Gulf campaign.¹ Forty-seven Liberator and Flying Fortress bombers began the attacks in the early hours of 17th August against some 200 enemy aircraft at Wewak, Dagua, Boram and But airfields. They caught the aircraft parked wing-tip to wing-tip on runways. At Boram sixty fighters and bombers were being warmed up with their crews in their places ready for take off. Some Japanese pilots tried to get into the air but were hit and burned with their aircraft. These attacks were followed at 9 a.m. by low-level bombing and strafing by Mitchell bombers protected by fighters. Only three bombers were lost and the raiders destroyed 100 enemy aircraft and large quantities of supplies, and inflicted casualties. From the scene of devastation revealed in photographs taken during and after these attacks it was clear to Kenney that his aircrews had delivered a highly-successful blow.

After the war Major-General Tanikawa of the *Fourth Air Army*, when questioned about this raid, said:

At the time of the air attacks on Wewak on 17th and 18th August our defences were not alert. We lost 100 planes including light bombers, fighters and reconnaissance planes. It was a decisive Allied victory. We were planning to regain the balance of air power and were making plans to bomb Port Moresby and other areas. A few days before our projected plan was to materialise, we were bombed at Wewak and our air power was severely crippled. Consequently our air power was rapidly diminishing and was unable to aid our ground forces effectively which, in the end, constituted one of our chief reasons for losing the war.

¹ Marilinan airfield site was chosen by General Savige to protect the flank of 3 Aust Div, after the area had been discovered during a fine 19-day patrol by 24 Bn AIF. This information was enthusiastically received by General Kenney and work on the airfield began immediately.

The Japanese considered that their high losses on the ground were due to inability to disperse their aircraft over a wide enough area, and this in turn to lack of machinery and heavy equipment at forward bases. During this period no fewer than 50 per cent of their aircraft losses were aircraft caught and destroyed on the ground. Many of them could not leave the ground because there was not enough maintenance staff to keep the aircraft in flying condition.²

In planning the Huon Gulf campaign General MacArthur assigned the blockade of the battle area as one of the principal tasks of his air and naval forces. The Australian squadrons in July and August were contributing to this purpose by their attacks on enemy communications between Rabaul and New Guinea. The Japanese were using large numbers of 50-foot barges along the coasts of New Britain, and across Vitiaz Strait to Finschhafen and Lae. Forty of these craft and fifteen smaller ones were capable of transporting 1,050 troops with guns, ammunition, fuel, food and water. At concealed staging points, 40 to 70 miles apart, the Japanese hid the barges under the low-hanging trees or bushes which fringed river mouths and harbours. Each barge carried a crew of seven men including four gunners who manned machine-guns and small cannon. In July, Allied reconnaissance had shown 300 barges in eastern New Guinea and western New Britain and it was assumed that the total in these areas was considerably more since many would be hidden from view during the day.

Kittyhawk pilots of No. 77 Squadron attacked five Japanese barges on 2nd August during a sweep along the south coast of New Britain between Gasmata and Jacquinot Bay, destroyed three and damaged two. Eighteen Kittyhawks took part in this sweep, led by Flight Lieutenant Sproule, who had been appointed to command the squadron the day before. When making a daring low-level attack near the Lindenhafen plantation, Sproule's Kittyhawk was hit by anti-aircraft fire and crash-landed on the beach. Sproule was missing when Bostons of No. 22 Squadron returned to the area in the afternoon and destroyed the crashed aircraft.

Nos. 22 and 30 Squadrons, now well established at Vivigani airfield, which had become the forward headquarters of No. 9 Operational Group, were directed to join in the attack on enemy barge traffic. The fire power of both Beaufighters and Bostons, especially the Beaufighters with their 20-mm cannon, made them well suited to this task and they were aided by the capture of a Japanese map of New Britain showing barge routes and hiding places. On 11th August three Bostons, in a sweep between Awul and Cape Bali, landed a bomb on the stern of a barge and left three others unserviceable. Barges, buildings and anti-aircraft positions near Palmalmal plantation were attacked by Beaufighters on 14th August, while the Bostons swept the area from Cape Bali to Gasmata. On 19th August, Beaufighters found two barges moored side by side to the jetty

² US Strategic Bombing Survey, *Interrogations of Japanese Officials*, Vol II, p. 404: Colonel Kaneko.

at Kalai plantation in Wide Bay. The barges were camouflaged with green foliage. The Beaufighters attacked and flames were seen coming from the barges. Altogether, during August, No. 30 Squadron, in addition to damaging ground targets, destroyed or damaged forty-one vessels. The squadron had adopted the tactics of using two Beaufighters to sweep an allotted part of the coast. The leading aircraft followed the outline of the coast at a height of about thirty feet and from 100 to 200 yards from the shore. From that height and position the observer could search for barges drawn in close to the shore and hidden under overhanging trees; all rivers were searched upstream as far as barges could go. The second aircraft followed the first at a height of 1,000 feet, and about 1,000 yards behind. From this position it could keep a lookout towards the sea and guard against attack by enemy fighters. At the same time it was in a good position to dive down and join the leader when a barge was found. Most missions were carried out at first light when the element of surprise was at its greatest, and occasionally sweeps were made on moonlit nights.

Both Bostons and Beaufighters returned to the attack on the Gasmata airfield on 23rd August. The Beaufighters were to strafe aircraft on the ground and installations, but saw no serviceable aircraft or enemy troops. They therefore fired their cannon and machine-guns at an anti-aircraft position and at the airfield area generally. Flight Lieutenant Craig, who led the Bostons, decided not to bomb the airfield because, to him also, it appeared unusable. He led them against the dump area where they dropped their bombs apparently to good effect.

The Bostons and Beaufighters attacked Gasmata again on 25th August, and on 29th August six aircraft from No. 22 Squadron took off from Vivigani to attack dumps at the mouth of the Anwek River and six Beaufighters found two barges side by side off Cape Beechey. After they attacked they saw one blow up and the other suffer damage. The Bostons scored a direct hit on a gun position south-west of Anwek River and were themselves fired on by anti-aircraft weapons which damaged three aircraft. A Boston piloted by Flying Officer Young³ had the hydraulic line shot out and the fuselage, tail and fin holed, and crash-landed at Vivigani. Flight Lieutenant Sladen's machine was also hit in the fuselage and a splinter from it wounded him in the back.

Except for No. 4 (Army Cooperation) Squadron, no Australian squadron took part in the ground campaign around Salamaua after the withdrawal of Nos. 22 and 30 Squadrons from Port Moresby and their transfer to Vivigani, but Fifth Air Force squadrons continued to pound enemy positions as the Australians and Americans advanced towards Salamaua. The 17th Australian Brigade captured Komiatum on 16th August and a battalion of the 162nd U.S. Regiment occupied near-by Mount Tambu on 19th August. By the beginning of September, Japanese

³ F-Lt A. C. Young, DFC, 406671; 22 Sqn. Farmer; of Aldersyde, WA; b. Cottesloe, WA, 3 May 1916. Killed in aircraft accident 10 Nov 1944.

resistance round Salamaua had been broken, and the Australians were ready for a final thrust into the wrecked town itself.

While the 3rd Australian Division and part of the 162nd Regiment were dealing with the enemy battalions at Salamaua, the 9th Australian Division had been embarked at Milne Bay for the amphibious assault on Lae, and the 7th Division was practising emplaning in air transports at Port Moresby ready for the invasion of the Markham Valley. The first objective in the campaign was the seizure of airfields, and this would be followed by the expulsion of the Japanese from the entire Huon Gulf area, enabling the Allies to dominate Vitiaz Strait between New Britain and New Guinea.

On 30th August, MacArthur set the day for the landing—4th September. While the Australian army busily prepared for the operation, the Fifth Air Force intensified its bombardments of targets at Lae, Finschhafen, Alexishafen, and Wewak. It had the main responsibility for air support of the landing, and also sent some of its bombers to aid the Australian squadrons attacking New Britain. The Australian squadrons increased their efforts in the air offensive, which was designed to so weaken the enemy in the air and on the ground, that he would be an easy prey to the attacking infantry.

On 1st September, No. 30 Squadron put all their available aircraft into the air. Led by Wing Commander Glasscock, twelve machines carried out a barge sweep from Cape Archway to Awul where a number of barges had been seen by a patrolling Catalina. They strafed three barges near Kalai plantation, leaving two burning, while another barge was left burning at Brown Island. A fuel dump near the jetty at Kalai was set on fire and an anti-aircraft gun silenced at Palmamal. Return fire from the enemy damaged two of the Beaufighters.

The Beauforts of No. 100 Squadron continued their daily searches for enemy submarines in the area through which the Lae convoy was passing, and the Australian Kittyhawk pilots stood by at Milne Bay, and Good-enough Island, ready to give fighter protection if called on.

The day before the Lae landing Glasscock's Beaufighters swept New Britain waters again, attacking barges. Squadron Leader Atherton,⁴ commander of No. 75 Squadron, on this day—the eve of the landing—was instructed to take photographs of Gasmata because it was feared that the Japanese might use the airfield there as a staging base for air attacks on the assault convoy. Atherton flew a specially-equipped Lightning fighter, a number of which had been allotted to No. 75 Squadron for reconnaissance purposes, but his camera failed to work and he returned without the photographs.

Japanese naval air strength at Rabaul, with that at Wewak, was the chief threat to the 9th Division's convoy now approaching the beaches at Lae. Earlier, General Kenney had told General MacArthur that he did not have sufficient air strength to handle the enemy aircraft both at Wewak

⁴ W Cdr G. C. Atherton. 408030. 25 and 24 Sqns; comd 75 Sqn 1943, 82 Sqn 1943-44, 78 Wing 1944-45, 8 OTU 1945. Accountant: of Launceston. Tas; b. Launceston, 27 Sep 1919.

and Rabaul, and that he proposed concentrating everything on Wewak right up to the date of the landing.⁵ He had been very successful in destroying enemy air power at Wewak, but his plan to ignore Rabaul was a risk which was received in some quarters with misgiving. However, Kenney used up considerable effort in keeping western New Britain airfields out of commission and this would interfere with enemy Rabaul-based fighters operating in the Huon Gulf area. On the eve of the landing reconnaissance aircraft reported the Cape Gloucester airfield in order and Kenney dispatched twenty-one bombers against it on 2nd September and again on the 3rd.

That night all available Australian Catalinas of Nos. 11 and 20 Squadrons made harassing attacks on Lakunai and Vunakanau airfields at Rabaul where a total of 200 enemy aircraft had been counted. (The Catalinas had been engaged in minelaying operations in the Netherlands Indies but this work was interrupted for the Rabaul operation.) On the morning of 3rd September, five Catalinas of No. 11, led by Wing Commander Green, and four from No. 20, led by Wing Commander Stilling,⁶ took off from Cairns harbour. They were heavily loaded with bombs and their orders were to refuel at Milne Bay and then strike at Japanese aircraft on the airfields and in dispersal bays, prolonging their attacks for as long as possible so as to disturb the sleep and nerves of the enemy. Stilling arrived over the target first and dropped his bombs across the centre of the Vunakanau airfield. The defenders were caught unawares and his machine was not fired on by anti-aircraft weapons. However, the defences were thoroughly alert when Squadron Leader Vernon, who attacked Lakunai airfield in a gliding approach from 10,000 to 5,500 feet, came in to attack. His Catalina was illuminated by a searchlight immediately he passed over Rabaul town, and within a few seconds eight other searchlights flashed on to his Catalina. Anti-aircraft weapons then opened fire and the searchlights held the aircraft as it attempted to bomb the target, dazzling the crew. Vernon and his crew escaped, however, and his bombs fell south-east of the town area. Three of the Catalina force bombed Vunakanau, and another attacked Rapopo airfield because clouds hid Vunakanau when it reached Rabaul.

On 4th September naval guns struck first at the Lae beach defences near Hopoi, and at 6.30 a.m. the 20th Australian Brigade landed without opposition except from seven light bombers which attacked the landing craft half an hour later, followed by twenty bombers which scored hits on escorting naval vessels. The absence of strong and sustained enemy air opposition indicated the success of Kenney's efforts to isolate the battle area.

While American bombers struck along the beach near the landing area at 7.30 a.m., ten Beauforts of No. 100 Squadron and three Bostons of No. 22 continued the bombardment and machine-gunning of Gasmata airfield to make sure that the enemy could not use it for staging attacks

⁵ *General Kenney Reports*, p. 274.

⁶ W Cdr S. G. Stilling, DFC, 39579 RAF. 205 Sqn RAF; comd 20 Sqn 1943. Regular air force offr; of Sydney; b. Sydney, 16 Jan 1912. Killed in action 1 Oct 1943.

against the Australian infantry. The Beauforts dropped twenty-two bombs on the runway, some of which were set to explode after 6, 12 and 36 hours' delay, and the Bostons followed with demolition bombs which they dropped from low levels. The enemy replied with anti-aircraft weapons and shot down a Beaufort, killing the crew.

Throughout 4th September the men of the 9th Division met no opposition from the Japanese troops round Lae, but early that afternoon the Japanese naval air service sent 18 light bombers, and 58 fighters of the 25th and 26th Air Flotillas from Rabaul, to raid Allied shipping in the Huon Gulf.

At 1 p.m. the *Reid*, a unit of the 5th American Destroyer Squadron which had been stationed off Finschhafen to locate raiding aircraft with radar equipment, detected aircraft flying over the spine of New Britain. In charge of the fighter-director team in *Reid* was Wing Commander Conaghan⁷ of No. 9 Group, who had earlier suggested this method of obtaining early warning of enemy fighter attacks on the beach-head, and the vessels offshore. The R.A.A.F. at Vivigani was warned of the approach of the enemy force, as were the Americans at Dobodura. Twenty-three aircraft of No. 76 Squadron, which was on emergency stand-by at Vivigani, took off soon afterwards, led by Wing Commander Arthur, wing leader of No. 71 Wing, but returned at 3 p.m. having failed to find the enemy aircraft despite searching for some time round Gasmata. Meanwhile three Lightning squadrons of the Fifth Air Force were directed to the enemy force by Conaghan, and a series of actions took place in which a large number of Japanese aircraft were destroyed. The enemy, however, managed to damage several L.S.T's which were off Cape Ward Hunt.

While these fights were taking place three Bostons of No. 22 Squadron again raided Gasmata dropping all their bombs on the airfield runway after which they were satisfied it could not be used by aircraft. To round off a day of intense air activity by Australian and American airmen, twelve Beaufighters of No. 30 Squadron conducted a successful sweep of New Britain waters. They found and attacked no fewer than thirty Japanese barges, four of which were set alight by cannon fire. They also fired their cannon at Cape Gloucester airfield and saw a surfaced enemy submarine which crash-dived before they could attack.

The Bostons returned to Gasmata at dawn next morning and found that the enemy had carried out repair work overnight. They dropped bombs which struck the centre and eastern end of the runway where the repairs had been made. It was vital that this airfield should be kept out of action because, on this morning of 5th September, transport aircraft were to drop the American and Australian parachute landing force

⁷ W Cdr H. A. Conaghan, DFC, 458. Comd 1 Fighter Sector 1942-43, 3 and 9 Fighter Sectors 1943, 109 Mobile Fighter sector 1943-44; 8 Sqn 1944-45; comd 100 Sqn 1945. Regular air force off; of Coolangatta, Qld; b. Tweed Heads, NSW, 15 Sep 1917. Killed in aircraft accident 27 Aug 1954.

Some months later Rear-Adm Crutchley, commanding the Australian Squadron, said: "Wing Commander Conaghan has done outstanding work with the Navy in the New Guinea area, both with Fifth Destroyer Squadron and with Task Force 74. There is no doubt in my mind that the present liaison and close cooperation between the Naval and Air Forces in this area were started and have been built up largely by Conaghan."

at Nadzab, and aircraft were to set down part of the 7th Division as soon as a landing field could be made ready. Beauforts of No. 100 Squadron were therefore ordered to follow the Bostons and press home their attacks on Gasmata. Ten of them, led by Flight Lieutenant Woollacott and protected above by eight Kittyhawks of No. 76 Squadron, arrived on the scene just after 7 a.m. An earlier visit of the Bostons had put the enemy defences on the alert. The Beauforts had five tons of bombs to drop, and they approached in a shallow dive starting at about 3,000 feet and coming down to 1,500. This was a dangerously low level for slow aircraft, but the Australians had often bombed this airfield and had not before met strong opposition. On this day, however, the enemy was waiting and opened up with a sudden and unexpectedly heavy box-barrage. It was impossible to avoid this deadly fire, but the pilots gamely sent their Beauforts through it. Five aircraft were immediately hit. Woollacott's machine was among these, but, although it was in flames, he gallantly continued his run and his four bombs exploded on the runway. The aircraft crashed immediately, and Woollacott and his crew (Flight Sergeants Sugg⁸, Williams⁹ and Pedler¹) were killed.

Smoke and flame were also pouring from Warrant Officer Wiggins² Beaufort and it crashed into the sea; and a third Beaufort, piloted by Flying Officer Anderson, was missing after the attack. The other aircrews believed that this aircraft crashed into the hills seven miles north-east of Gasmata where fire and smoke were seen soon afterwards. A fourth, piloted by Flying Officer Walsh³, was badly damaged but the pilot managed to get it back to Vivigani. As a tyre had been shot away, it ground looped on landing and was destroyed. The crew, however, escaped injury. A bullet damaged the controls of Flying Officer Morton's⁴ Beaufort, but he, too, managed to reach Vivigani, with the surviving members of the mission. The loss of four crews in two days and damage to other Beauforts had seriously reduced the strength of No. 100 Squadron.⁵

Later in the morning No. 30 Squadron also lost a crew when Japanese fire struck a Beaufighter piloted by Flying Officer Woodroffe⁶ and navigated by Flight Sergeant Brooks⁷ while it was attacking the Cape Gloucester airfield. It crashed into a hill, killing both airmen.

⁸ F-Sgt J. A. Sugg, 416085; 22 and 100 Sqns. School teacher; of Blackwood, SA; b. Wagin, WA, 8 Oct 1918. Killed in action 5 Sep 1943.

⁹ F-Sgt H. J. Williams, 408311; 14 and 100 Sqns. Electrical mechanic; of Launceston, Tas; b. Launceston, 20 Feb 1923. Killed in action 5 Sep 1943.

¹ F-Sgt W. T. Pedler, 416608. 71 Sqn, 2 Air Ambulance Unit, 100 Sqn. Farmer and grazier; of Koolunga, SA; b. Blyth, SA, 28 Jul 1922. Killed in action 5 Sep 1943.

² W-O C. B. Wiggins, 405335. 6, 7, 14 and 100 Sqns. School teacher; of Gatton, Qld; b. Gatton, 29 Mar 1915. Killed in action 5 Sep 1943.

³ F-Lt C. S. Walsh, DFC, 406065; 100 Sqn. Bank clerk; of Cranbrook, NSW; b. Southern Cross, WA, 26 Apr 1912.

⁴ F-Lt A. H. Morton, DFC, 406947; 100 Sqn. Student; of Trayning, WA; b. Trayning, 8 Apr 1919.

⁵ W Cdr D. W. Colquhoun, reporting on this sqn to RAAF Cd on 18 Sep, wrote: "Of 14 crews, the CO is medically unfit and departing south, four have completed their operational tour and the medical officer is grounding them at the beginning of next month, four are GR trained and posted to No. 6 Squadron, which leaves five effective crews in the unit with 17 aircraft available."

⁶ F-O H. M. Woodroffe, 407542; 30 Sqn. Analyst; of Mitcham, SA; b. Pt Augusta, SA, 30 Sep 1917. Killed in action 5 Sep 1943.

⁷ F-Sgt J. L. Brooks, 43250; 30 Sqn. Stores clerk; of Warwick, Qld; b. Brisbane, 13 Feb 1923. Killed in action 5 Sep 1943.

At about 10.30 a.m., forty-eight American Mitchells, followed by Bostons, Liberators and Flying Fortresses began the bombardment of Nadzab and Heath's Plantation. A smoke screen was then laid from the air. Hidden by this screen and protected above by 146 American fighters, 96 transports flew into the valley, and from them the American 503rd Parachute Regiment, with a detachment of the 2/4th Australian Field Regiment dropped to the ground. The sappers of the 2/2nd Australian Pioneer Battalion and the 2/6th Australian Field Company, which had been flown to Tsili Tsili airfield earlier, made their way overland to the Markham River, and crossed into Nadzab as soon as they saw the paratroops land.

General Kenney, in a letter to General Arnold, described the operation:

You already know by this time the news on the preliminary moves to take out Lae, but I will tell you about the show on the 5th September, when we took Nadzab with 1,700 paratroops and with General MacArthur in a B-17 over the area watching the show and jumping up and down like a kid. I was flying number two in the same flight with him and the operation really was a magnificent spectacle. I truly don't believe that another air force in the world today could have put this over as perfectly as the 5th Air Force did. Three hundred and two airplanes in all, taking off from eight different fields in the Moresby and Dobodura areas, made a rendezvous right on the nose over Marilinan, flying through clouds, passes in the mountains and over the top. Not a single squadron did any circling or stalling around but all slid into place like clockwork and proceeded on the final flight down the Watut valley, turned to the right down the Markham and went directly to the target. Going north down the valley of the Watut and Marilinan, this was the picture: heading the parade at 1,000 feet were six squadrons of B-25 strafers, with the eight .50 calibre guns in the nose and sixty frag bombs in each bomb bay; immediately behind and about 500 feet above were six A-20's, flying in pairs—three pairs abreast—to lay smoke as the last frag bomb exploded. At about 2,000 feet and directly behind the A-20's came 96 C-47's carrying paratroops, supplies and some artillery. The C-47's flew in three columns of three plane elements, each column carrying a battalion set up for a particular battalion dropping ground. On each side along the column of transports and about 1,000 feet above them were the close cover fighters. Another group of fighters sat at seven thousand feet and, up in the sun, staggered from fifteen to twenty thousand was still another group. Following the transports came five B-17's, racks loaded with 3,000-pound packages with parachutes, to be dropped to the paratroopers on call by panel signals as they needed them. This mobile supply unit stayed over Nadzab practically all day, serving the paratroops below, dropping a total of fifteen tons of supplies in this manner. Following the echelon to the right and just behind the five supply B-17's was a group of twenty-four B-24's and four B-17's which left the column just before the junction of the Watut and the Markham to take out the Jap defensive position at Heath's Plantation, about halfway between Nadzab and Lae. Five weather ships were used prior to and during the show along the route and over the passes, to keep the units straight on weather to be encountered during their flights to the rendezvous. . . .

The strafers checked in on the target at exactly the time set, just prior to take off. They strafed and frag bombed the whole area in which the jumps were to be made and then as the last bombs exploded the smoke layers went to work. As the streams of smoke were built up, the three columns of transports slid into place and in one minute and ten seconds from the time the first parachute opened the last of 1,700 paratroopers had dropped. At the same time nine B-25's and sixteen P-38's attacked the Jap refueling airdrome at Cape Gloucester. One medium bomber and one fighter on the ground were burned and three medium bombers and one

fighter destroyed in combat. Two ack ack positions were put out of action and several supply and fuel dumps set on fire. Simultaneously also, ten Beauforts, five A-20's and seven P-40's from the R.A.A.F. put the Jap refueling field at Gasmata out of action. No air interception was made by the Japs on any of the three missions. Our only losses were two Beauforts shot down by ack ack at Gasmata.

The 9th Division clashed with the Japanese defenders early on the 6th September, but were making rapid progress along the coast towards Lae. In the afternoon of that day, eighty enemy bombers and fighters were over Nadzab and Lae. One enemy force machine-gunned the 9th Division's headquarters. The enemy aircraft were engaged by American Lightnings which claimed the shooting down of eight for a loss of one Lightning. The Japanese attacked again in the air the following day.

At 2 p.m. on 7th September enemy fighters opened fire on two Bostons of No. 22 Squadron, five miles south of the New Britain coast. The Japanese fighters were flying line astern as they approached to within 400 yards and attacked from the side. The Boston pilots turned their aircraft head-on towards the fighters firing their machine-guns and then escaped into clouds. Neither the Bostons nor the Japanese aircraft were hit.

The Bostons continued the bombardment of Gasmata on 7th September and landed bombs within ten yards of a gun position. They discovered a small enemy vessel on which they obtained direct hits with two bombs which, however, did not explode.

On this day also, the Beaufighters attacked six barges. Two days later, on 9th September, Japanese fire holed five Beaufighters engaged on a barge sweep. In the afternoon of the same day two Beaufighters were sent to examine at close range Japanese progress in building a road from Cape Archway towards Gasmata. Each Beaufighter carried an army officer as well as its normal crew of two. One of the Beaufighters piloted by Flying Officer Newman⁸ with Flying Officer Binnie⁹ as navigator and Captain Gill¹, an army observer, was forced into the sea near Palmalmal plantation after being hit by anti-aircraft fire. The other Beaufighter stayed overhead while fuel supplies lasted and saw the three men in the water without apparent injury. For three days Beaufighters and Bostons searched for them. The day after the crash they were seen in a dinghy. Food and a second dinghy were dropped and they paddled towards it and waved, but subsequent searches revealed no further trace. On 11th September a Seagull amphibian of No. 1 Rescue and Communication Squadron, piloted by Flying Officer Bonython,² with Flying Officer Kelley³ of No. 30 Squad-

⁸ F-O J. R. Newman, 404733; 30 Sqn. Clerk; of Brisbane; b. Ayr, Qld, 1 Jun 1920. Killed in action 10 Sep 1943.

⁹ F-O W. G. R. Binnie, 43912; 30 Sqn. Commercial traveller; of Brisbane; b. Brisbane, 1 Dec 1915. Killed in action 10 Sep 1943.

¹ Capt T. F. Gill, SX4550. 2/27 Bn; attached 30 Sqn. Chartered accountant; of Largs Bay, SA; b. Largs Bay, 18 Aug 1914. Killed in action 10 Sep 1943.

² F-O R. G. Bonython, 416822. 9 Sqn, 1 Rescue and Commn Sqn. Clerk; of Marden, SA; b. Rose Park, SA, 12 Nov 1915. Killed in action 11 Sep 1943.

³ F-O R. A. Kelley, 1432. 4, 24 and 30 Sqn. Regular airman; of Northgate, Qld; b. Punchbowl, NSW, 16 Mar 1917. Killed in action 11 Sep 1943.

ron as navigator failed to return to base during the search and was not seen again.

The Bostons ran into more trouble on 12th September, when a flight of four bombed Gasmata Island. Flight Lieutenant Dawkins⁴ machine was hit by enemy fire and force-landed on the sea 35 miles south of Gasmata. The crew escaped into a dinghy but were not seen again. Another Boston piloted by Pilot Officer Riley,⁵ who dropped his bombs on the target, failed to return and nothing further was seen of him or his crew. Flying Officer Rowell's aircraft was hit in the pilot's cockpit and crash-landed at Vivigani, but the crew escaped uninjured.

The mounting Australian losses were increased on 19th September when the commanding officer of No. 30 Squadron (Wing Commander Glasscock) and his navigator (Flying Officer Cain⁶) were killed in an attack on enemy barges, dumps and anti-aircraft positions near the airfield at Cape Hoskins. Glasscock's Beaufighter was hit and crashed. (The wreckage of the aircraft was found by American soldiers when they later occupied this area.)

On 1st September, a detachment of No. 4 Squadron, comprising ten pilots and a navigator, had flown eight Boomerangs and two Wirraways to Tsili Tsili to take part in the Lae-Nadzab campaign in direct support of the 7th and 9th Divisions. Each division was to have four Boomerangs and a Wirraway at its disposal for reconnaissance, supply dropping, ferrying officers, and strafing. The squadron's aircraft were kept at constant stand-by at Tsili Tsili and generally the time between receipt of a request for a mission and the arrival of the aircraft over the target was forty minutes. It was found that tactical reconnaissance had to be carried out at an altitude of not more than 200 feet over the jungle and frequently enemy small-arms fire struck low-flying Boomerangs.

The 7th Division had pushed rapidly from Nadzab to the outskirts of Lae which they reached on 14th September. The Japanese, with their communications between Lae and Finschhafen cut by the 9th Division, realised it was impossible to hold Lae, and General Adachi, commander of the *XVIII Army*, ordered the *51st Division* at Lae to withdraw. This withdrawal had begun on 8th September and on 13th September infantry of the 7th Australian Division captured enemy papers giving details of his evacuation plans and routes. Major-General Vasey⁷ asked No. 4 Squadron to deliver a copy of the translated document to Port Moresby for action by New Guinea Force. In the meantime, Major-General

⁴ F-Lt H. B. Dawkins, 280791; 22 Sqn. Clerk; of Gawler, SA; b. Gawler, 15 Apr 1917. Died while POW 22 Jul 1944.

⁵ P-O E. G. T. Riley, 411522; 22 Sqn. Salesman; of Hurstville, NSW; b. Gordon, NSW, 11 Oct 1917. Killed in action 12 Sep 1943.

⁶ F-O J. J. Cain, 1446; 30 Sqn. Cinematographer; of Long Gully, Vic; b. Bendigo, Vic, 16 Dec 1918. Killed in action 19 Sep 1943.

⁷ Maj-Gen G. A. Vasey, CB, CBE, DSO. (1st AIF: 2 Div Arty and BM 11 Inf Bde.) AA & QMG 6 Div 1939-41; GSO.1 6 Div 1941; comd 19 Inf Bde 1941; GOC 6 Div 1942, 7 Div 1942-44. Regular soldier; of Melbourne: b. Malvern, Vic. 29 Mar 1895. Killed in aircraft accident 5 Mar 1945.

Wootten⁸ moved the 2/24th Battalion and 2/4th Independent Company from the fighting in preparation for a move to cut the Japanese escape route. The papers were given to Flying Officer Staley⁹ who, in spite of heavy rain, took off at 10 p.m. from Tsili Tsili in a Wirraway. The rain and wind continued and at Dobodura an enemy aircraft was in the area causing an alert at the airfield and preventing him from landing. He tried to go on directly to Port Moresby but the weather made it impossible for him to find his way through the "gap" in the Owen Stanley Mountains, and returning to Dobodura he waited for a night fighter to land. A flare path was lit and he was able to follow in on the night fighter's tail. Bad weather continued, but Staley refuelled and took off again determined to get to Port Moresby. This time he succeeded in finding the "gap" and he delivered the papers at 1.30 next morning. As a result Wootten was ordered to hasten the movement to block the escape route, so the 2/24th Battalion was ordered to recross the Busu River immediately and march rapidly northwards in order to cut all routes from Lae through the Musom area. However, the bulk of the enemy forces had escaped for the time being up the Busu River. Some 6,400 of them reached Kiari on the north coast, after losing approximately 2,000 from cold and starvation in the trek over the ranges.

The 7th Division occupied Lae on 16th September, but had to withdraw because the 9th Division was shelling it from the east. Efforts by the 7th to communicate with the 9th to stop the shelling failed, but finally a Boomerang of No. 4 Squadron got word through and the shelling ceased. Lae had been completely shattered by the constant air attacks and, when it fell on 16th September, the occupying troops found smashed houses, wrecked trucks, aircraft and gun posts; and fox holes filled with Japanese bodies. The enemy had also withdrawn from Salamaua, and this town had been occupied by the Australians on 11th September.

Late in August, General Kenney had asked for a squadron of Australian dive bombers to be sent to New Guinea for use against difficult "pin-point" targets in the Huon Gulf area, and No. 24 Squadron had been hurried from Bankstown, New South Wales, where it had been training its aircrews in the new Vultee Vengeance aircraft, to Tsili Tsili. The squadron, commanded by Squadron Leader Honey,¹ arrived at Tsili Tsili, which was also occupied by the No. 4 Squadron detachment and a number of American squadrons, on 2nd September. By 7th September it was in action against the Japanese. The squadron's mission was intended to be a temporary one and little or no equipment was sent with the aircraft. This later proved a source of considerable difficulty when it was decided to retain the unit in New Guinea, and delay occurred in bringing up the main body of the squadron.

⁸ Maj-Gen G. F. Wootten, CB, CBE, DSO, ED. (1st AIF: 1 Bn and BM 11 and 9 Inf Bdes.) CO 2/2 Bn 1939-40; comd 18 Inf Bde 1941-43; GOC 9 Div 1943-45. Solicitor; of West Wyalong and Mosman, NSW; b. Marrickville, NSW, 1 May 1893.

⁹ F-Lt E. R. Staley, 401679. 5 and 4 Sqns. Farmer; of Natya, Vic; b. Bristol, Eng, 14 Aug 1911. Killed in action 31 Dec 1943.

¹ W Cdr B. Honey, DFC, 260429. Comd 24 Sqn 1943-44. Manufacturer's representative; of Darling Point, NSW; b. Sydney, 13 Oct 1914.

The Fifth Air Force sent the squadron to attack bridges on the Bogadjim road to hinder the enemy's reinforcement of his garrisons in the area. Their first task was assigned on 7th September, but bad weather forced the aircraft to return after jettisoning their bombs. Their fuel was almost exhausted but luckily American Lightnings deducing that they were having difficulty in finding their base guided them to Tsili Tsili where they landed safely. The Vengeances completed their task next day, but were in trouble again when American vessels fired on them and American fighters were sent up to shoot them down. Fortunately the fighters were recalled before they opened fire.

The Lae-Nadzab operation was a great success. In a swift 12-day campaign which gave the Australians possession of Lae, with its shipping facilities and Nadzab with its great promise as an air base, the 7th and 9th Divisions had suffered only 700 battle casualties, including 77 officers and men killed. With the help of air power, the normally difficult rear attack had been accomplished. Land, sea and air weapons had been skilfully combined in a well-planned military operation to which the weakened enemy could give no answer.

To exploit the success at Lae, General MacArthur now ordered the Australians to move into the Kaiapit and Dumpu areas. This move would block Japanese penetration southward through the Ramu and Markham valleys, and push the fighter aircraft line further towards the Japanese air bases at Wewak. Kaiapit was seized on 20th September by the 2/6th Commando Squadron and, with the enemy in retreat, the 7th Division pushed on up the Ramu towards Gusap and Dumpu.

The ease with which the Australians had taken Lae and Nadzab led to a hurried change of plans. The attack on Finschhafen could be made immediately, and accordingly, on 20th September, General MacArthur approved the I Australian Corps' suggestion that troops of the 9th Division should land at Finschhafen on 22nd September. The capture of this port would be the first step towards gaining control of the Huon Peninsula and dominating the New Guinea side of Vitiiaz Strait. The landing was to be protected overhead by intensive efforts of General Kenney's squadrons which would not only strike at targets in the immediate battle area, but again fan out towards New Britain and beyond the Markham to attack the enemy's lines of supply and reinforcement.

In mid-September the American squadrons attacked Wewak and the Cape Gloucester airfield which lay on the western tip of New Britain across Vitiiaz Strait from Finschhafen, while the R.A.A.F. was engaged against Cape Hoskins and Gasmata. The Vengeances of No. 24 Squadron attacked targets close to Finschhafen itself, which also received attention from American squadrons. Fourteen Vengeances from the squadron took part in the air bombardment of Finschhafen on the morning of 18th September, diving down to within 1,500 feet to drop 500-lb bombs on gun positions and buildings, after which they machine-gunned targets, firing 7,000 rounds of ammunition.

The Finschhafen landing was timed for the early morning of 22nd September; the previous day squadrons of American heavy bombers raided Cape Gloucester airfield, while three Bostons and ten Beauforts of No. 9 Group bombed Gasmata, dropping twelve tons of bombs on or near the runway again for the purpose of ensuring the enemy could not stage aircraft there for attacks on the beach-head the following day. The Beauforts, five of which were from No. 8 (Torpedo) Squadron, just arrived in the New Guinea area, attacked before dawn. The Bostons attacked later and one aircraft, while returning to base discovered a 300-foot submarine, loaded with supplies, south of Gasmata. The Bostons strafed the submarine and its deck cargo before it crash-dived.

The Beauforts of No. 8 Squadron were led by their commanding officer, Wing Commander Nicoll. No. 9 Group had been greatly strengthened by the arrival of this additional squadron from the mainland and the conversion of No. 6 Squadron from Hudson aircraft to Beauforts. No. 8 Squadron had been given Beauforts in March 1943 and went through a rigorous training as a torpedo squadron. After some service at Townsville, Queensland, and long delay awaiting sea transport, the entire squadron was moved to Goodenough and began operations in September.

On 21st September, the Vengeance squadron had attacked again, this time at Tami Islands, a few miles off the coast from Finschhafen, where their task was to destroy an enemy radio-location station. They made six direct hits on this station and when the army occupied the island later, it was discovered that the station had been destroyed. Machine-gun nests had also been blown up and many dead Japanese were found.

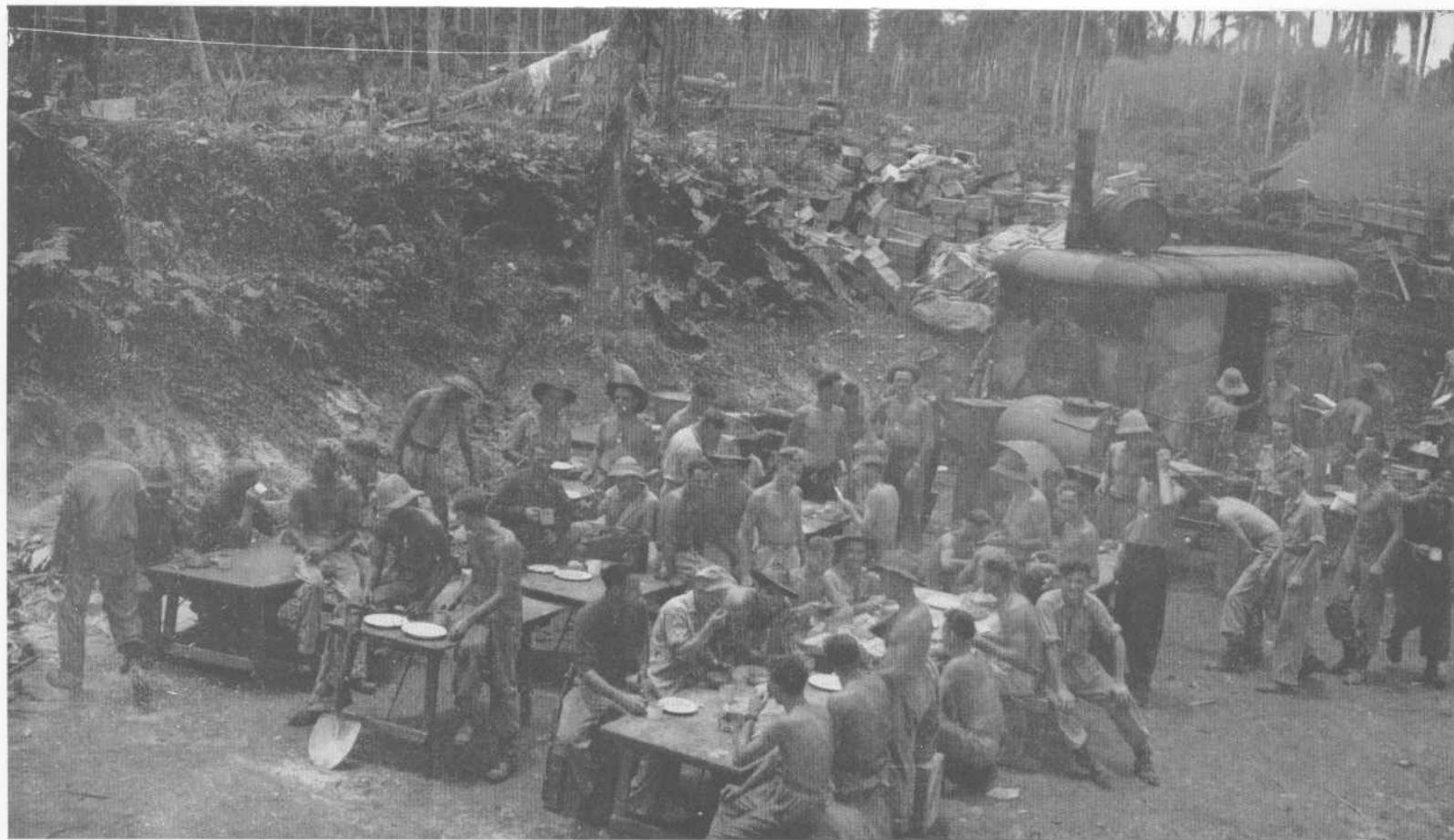
The enemy expected an attack on Finschhafen and Major-General Yamada was ordered to try and hold the port or at least delay the advance. Late on 21st September enemy aircraft attempted to bomb barges at the mouth of the Burep River, where the Australians were embarking for Finschhafen, but were driven off by American fighters, sent to the area by the fighter-director ship *Reid*. The following day the 20th Brigade of the 9th Division made its landing on Scarlet Beach, just north of Finschhafen. Some six hours after the landing the Japanese mounted their greatest air counter-attack in the South Pacific since the one on 30th June at New Georgia. They sent about 70 fighters and bombers which attacked shipping and beach positions between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. The attackers were beaten off by 90 patrolling American fighters which claimed destruction of about half the enemy force.

In an effort to prevent the staging in of more enemy planes from Rabaul to the battle area, 12 Kittyhawks of No. 76 Squadron, which was now based at Kiriwina, were sent that afternoon to dive-bomb Gasmata airfield. Led by Arthur they were armed with 500-lb demolition bombs, five of which they dropped near the airfield. They struck at Gasmata again at 6.30 next morning with twelve bombs which they dropped from as low as 2,000 feet. Only four, however, hit the target and three were



Refuelling a Beaufighter of No. 30 Squadron in mid-1944.

(R.A.A.F.)



On 8th March 1944, soon after landing in the Admiralties, ground staffs of No. 73 Wing at mess in a revetment built by the Japanese to protect their aircraft from bombing.

(R.A.A.F.)

seen to drop harmlessly into the sea. Flight Sergeant Roantree,² one of the pilots, did not return to base and searches later revealed no trace of him or his aircraft. He was the only pilot lost by No. 76 Squadron during its stay at Kiriwina. The Beauforts of No. 8 Squadron had also attacked the Cape Hoskins airfield at dawn on this day, losing one crew, captained by Flying Officer Spooner.³

Although the Allied air bases at Goodenough and Kiriwina had become well-established and were a direct threat to Rabaul, the enemy by the end of September had still not sent their squadrons to attack them. The Australian fighter pilots who were responsible for the defence of this base were not therefore experiencing any air-to-air fighting. Enemy aircraft were frequently discovered on raids in the direction of Dobodura, but they were always too far distant for interception by the Australian pilots. Long periods of inactivity were becoming irksome to the fighter men, and some who had served in the Middle East earlier in the war and were familiar with the use of Hurricane fighters as light bombers asked that their machines be fitted with the necessary racks for carrying bombs.⁴

Wing Commander Garrison,⁵ the armament officer of No. 9 Group, arranged for the necessary bomb racks to be fitted. After initial difficulties this was done and the Kittyhawk pilots were trained in the technique of bombing, although some at first were dubious about carrying bomb loads over water and considered that, with a live bomb under the wings, take-off was dangerous. Occasionally bombs had broken loose during take-off and skidded along runways.

In low-level attacks fighter-bombers were less vulnerable to ground fire than Beauforts because of their superior speed, and before long proved their value in the new role. Not only would the pilots have more to do, but the fighter-bomber was economical because it could both fight and bomb, and needed only one man as crew. Light bombers, although they had three or four men in the crew, had the advantage of being able to bomb more accurately from greater heights and could also, of course, carry a bigger bomb load a longer distance than the fighter-bomber.

The activities of No. 9 Group during September had been intense and varied. The Beaufighters made 130 sorties in this period, during which they claimed destruction of 33 barges and damage to 51, in addition to strafing airfields. The efforts of the three Beaufort squadrons were limited by the necessity of making daily flights in search of enemy shipping or convoying friendly ships. They were even used at times as transports. Losses of the group during the month had been heavy—6 Beauforts with

² F-Sgt M. Roantree, 422300; 76 Sqn. Clerk; of Cremorne, NSW; b. Sydney, 6 Dec 1922. Killed in action 22 Sep 1943.

³ F-O F. S. Spooner, 402682; 8 Sqn. Clerk; of Beecroft, NSW; b. Sydney, 21 Aug 1918. Killed in action 23 Sep 1943.

⁴ On 11 March 1942 Sqn Ldr Caldwell, who then commanded 112 Sqn RAF, dropped the first bomb from a Kittyhawk. "Since then," wrote Roderic Owen (in *Desert Air Force*), "aircraft originally designed as fighters had been carrying greater and greater bomb loads. As the Kittyhawk became outmoded as a fighter, the process of converting them to fighter-bombers was continued."

⁵ Gp Capt A. D. J. Garrison, 148. Armament Offr North-Eastern Area 1942, 9 Gp 1943; comd Air Armament School 1944-45. Regular air force offr; of Point Piper, NSW; b. Brisbane, 23 Jun 1915.

5 of their crews, 3 Beaufighters and 3 crews, and 3 Bostons and 2 crews. The growing strength of the attacks by the Fifth Air Force and No. 9 Group was indicated by the increased tonnage of bombs dropped. In June a total of 518 tons had been expended, compared with 2,286 tons in September.

In October, No. 30 Squadron continued barge sweeps around the New Britain coast, but with less success since the enemy was now sending fewer barges to New Guinea. On 2nd October two Beaufighters on a barge sweep overtook a Betty bomber flying within a few feet of sea level. The Beaufighters decided to attack it and took up positions on each side of the enemy, taking it in turns to fire. Pilot Officer Marron⁶ hit the rear gunner, putting the rear gun out of action. This enabled Flight Lieutenant Thomson⁷ in the second Beaufighter to make a full astern approach. He opened fire at 200 yards and closed to 150 yards after which the Betty burst into flames and nose-dived into the water from 70 feet. Two days later, the same two Beaufighters again out on a barge sweep were attacked by Zeke fighters, seven miles from Brown Island. They evaded the fighters by diving to sea level where they drew away at a speed of 250 knots.

With a big force of aircraft in the Rabaul area, the enemy had become more active in the air early in October and another attack was made on an aircraft of No. 9 Group on 8th October. It was a Beaufort, captained by Flying Officer Barr,⁸ on an armed search over the Solomon Sea, flying at 1,500 feet. Six enemy fighters were seen approaching at 3,000 feet, so Barr jettisoned his bomb load and turned towards clouds for cover. The fighters rapidly drew level, however, two coming in from port and four from starboard. They then attacked alternately in pairs, but the attacks were poorly executed and the enemy fighters as they turned away exposed their bellies to fire. Machine-gun bursts from the Beaufort's turret entered an Oscar which fell away smoking, and a Zeke appeared to drop, out of control, when hit by another burst of fire. The duel lasted 37 minutes and the aircraft was holed in the tailplane and fuselage in 17 places but was able to make its way home.

This success was a fine example of crew coordination, perfected by hours of practice in operational squadrons.

From the moment when the turret gunner (Flying Officer Haseler⁹) sighted the enemy fighters he virtually controlled the aircraft (wrote Barr later), giving a brief commentary on what was happening, and ordering turns in the direction of the attack. The only time I, as captain, took complete control was when it appeared certain we were to be rammed head on. The Beaufort's front-firing guns, four .303 Brownings, eliminated this Zero from the attacking force, and once again the

⁶ F-Lt E. M. Marron, DFC, 401987; 30 Sqn. Salesman; of East St Kilda, Vic; b. Melbourne, 30 Jul 1917.

⁷ Sqn Ldr A. A. Thomson, DFC, 281731. 30 and 37 Sqns. Commercial pilot; of Gladstone, Qld; b. Gunnedah, NSW, 5 Nov 1918.

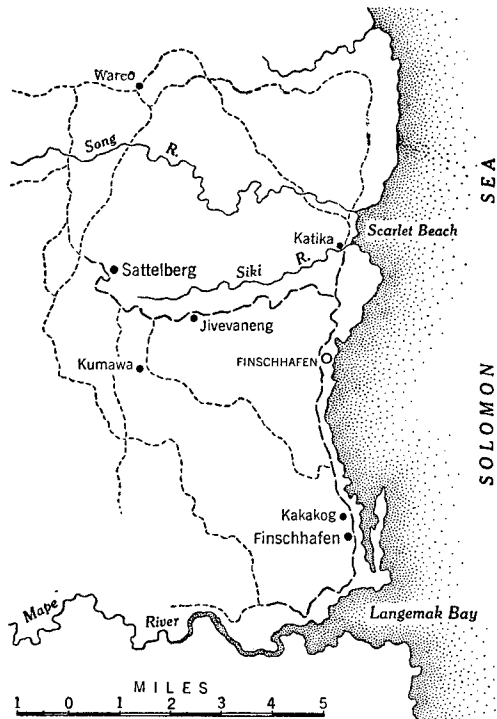
⁸ F-Lt W. A. Barr, DFC, 415572. 32 and 6 Sqns. Student; of Bullfinch, WA; b. Southern Cross, WA, 21 Jan 1919.

⁹ F-Lt J. Haseler, DFC, 405970. 32 and 6 Sqns. Salesman; of New Farm, Qld; b. Brisbane, 1 Sep 1912.

control was back in F-O Haseler's hands. Much assistance was given by the navigator, F-Lt Blythe,¹ who by curt signs kept me in touch with progress, and by Sgt Williams,² manning the waist guns.

On 11th October enemy float-planes escorting a convoy of six ships in St George's Channel attacked another patrolling Beaufort from No. 6 Squadron. The Beaufort, piloted by Flying Officer Hales,³ was on the usual daily patrol when it saw the convoy 30 miles away. Hales headed his Beaufort towards the convoy and while the enemy air escorts were on one side of the convoy he dived from the other side towards a 2,000-ton vessel on which he scored a direct bomb hit amidships. It listed 50 degrees, righted itself and caught fire. Hales having used up his bomb load headed for base. The enemy aircraft pursued him but he shook them off.

After the landing at Scarlet Beach the 20th Brigade marched towards Finschhafen against stiffening enemy opposition. The R.A.A.F. dive bombers, now based at Dobodura where some of the administrative and servicing officers and men of the squadron had arrived, were called on again and again to strike at enemy ground positions. On 28th September, in the afternoon, twelve of them came down in their 300-mile-an-hour dives to bomb the shores of Langemak Bay. The target was hidden by clouds of dust and smoke after their attack and the pilots could not therefore report the results, but the 9th Division later told them that the attack had been "most effective". By 1st October, the army had closed for the final assault on Finschhafen. This assault was preceded by attacks of No. 24 Squadron dive bombers and Bostons of No. 89 American



¹ F-Lt T. C. Blythe, 411437. 32 and 6 Sqs. School teacher; of Markwell, NSW; b. Wauchope, NSW, 14 Aug 1915.

² W-O R. J. Williams, 416304. 7 and 6 Sqs. Firewood merchant; of Brompton Park, SA; b. Broken Hill, NSW, 28 Sep 1918.

³ F-Lt S. G. Hales, DFC. 415029. 14, 6 and 37 Sqs. Bank clerk; of Swanbourne, WA; b. Swanbourne, 19 Mar 1922.

Squadron, which frequently aided the ground troops with close-support bombing. The Bostons attacked first at 10.30 a.m. followed by the Vengeances, one of which dived so low that it was struck by a splinter from one of its own exploding bombs. The artillery, meanwhile, had been pounding the target and the 2/13th Battalion attacked Kakakog with success at midday, losing ten men killed, and on the following morning at 11 Finschhafen was in Allied hands.

In late September and early October the enemy had been increasing the number of his aircraft at bases in New Britain-New Guinea, and in this period his air attacks became more frequent, though they were far below the strength of the initial raids at Finschhafen on 22nd September. As well as regularly attacking the troops at Finschhafen, the enemy for the first time began to take an interest in the R.A.A.F. bases at Kiriwina and Goodenough which now experienced a number of raids. No. 305 Radar Station at Kiriwina located a small raiding force of six aircraft when it was still 115 miles out on 5th October. This force attacked at 7.50 that night killing three men and injuring another fifteen. Goodenough Island was attacked the same night by enemy aircraft but no damage or casualties resulted. During the week 8th-15th October, the enemy raided Finschhafen, Goodenough, Dobodura, Woodlark Island, Kiriwina again, and Lae.

The frequent presence of enemy fighters during this small-scale enemy air offensive, made it necessary to send eight Kittyhawks of No. 77 Squadron to Nadzab where they were given the task of flying as escorts to the No. 4 Squadron flight supporting the 7th Division. They began this flying duty next day when four Kittyhawks escorted two aircraft from No. 4 on a tactical reconnaissance in the Markham Valley, but no enemy fighters were encountered. On 6th October, the Kittyhawks were ordered to attempt an interception of a Japanese general who was believed to be flying from Wewak to Rabaul. Led by Flight Lieutenant Kinross,⁴ the Kittyhawks circled over Karkar Island across which the general was believed to be passing, but no aircraft was seen, and they returned to Nadzab. Little of moment occurred while the Kittyhawks were at Nadzab and they were withdrawn to rejoin their squadron at Goodenough on 19th October.

Soon after the 9th Division occupied Finschhafen, the Japanese, who had been rapidly gathering a force of about 10,000 men round Sattelberg and Wareo, became active. A company was isolated by the enemy at Jivevaneng and ran out of supplies and ammunition. Wirraways of No. 4 Squadron were sent on 4th October to drop grenades and Owen gun ammunition together with orders from the commander of the 9th Division to withdraw. The company withdrew the same day, rejoining its battalion by making a detour round the enemy's position. Three companies of the 2/3rd Pioneer Battalion were also isolated west of Katika but No. 4

⁴ Sqn Ldr I. R. Kinross, 250731. Comd 77 Sqn 1943-44, 1 Sqn 1945. Clerk; of North Brighton, Vic; b. Caulfield, Vic, 2 Apr 1921.

Squadron located them and dropped messages with instructions for them to return to the Australian lines.

The Japanese were pressing hard on the 2/17th Battalion's positions at Kumawa on 6th and 7th October and on the two following days Australian Vengeances and American Bostons bombed and machine-gunned the enemy's local main base at Sattelberg. The position of the Australians was becoming precarious, and the 24th Brigade was brought in to strengthen them and prepare to meet the expected enemy counter-attack which began on 16th October when the Japanese, disregarding losses, heavily attacked the 2/17th Battalion. Next day, heralded by air bombardment, enemy troops in barges attempted to land at Scarlet Beach but were defeated and withdrew. Again on 17th October Wirraways had to drop ammunition and food to isolated companies. Fierce fighting continued for several days and another Australian brigade, the 26th, was brought in. The enemy sent daily air missions to bomb the infantry, while American Mitchells and Bostons joined the Vengeances in aiding the infantry, the Mitchells attacking on the 18th, and the Bostons and Vengeances on the 19th October. By 25th October, the enemy attacks had been broken and Finschhafen was safe. Counted enemy dead totalled 679, not including many already buried, while the 9th Division, between 16th and 28th October, suffered 228 battle casualties of which 49 were killed in action. With the enemy counter-attack defeated, Finschhafen could now be developed as an air base to give protection for the next stage of the advance towards Rabaul.