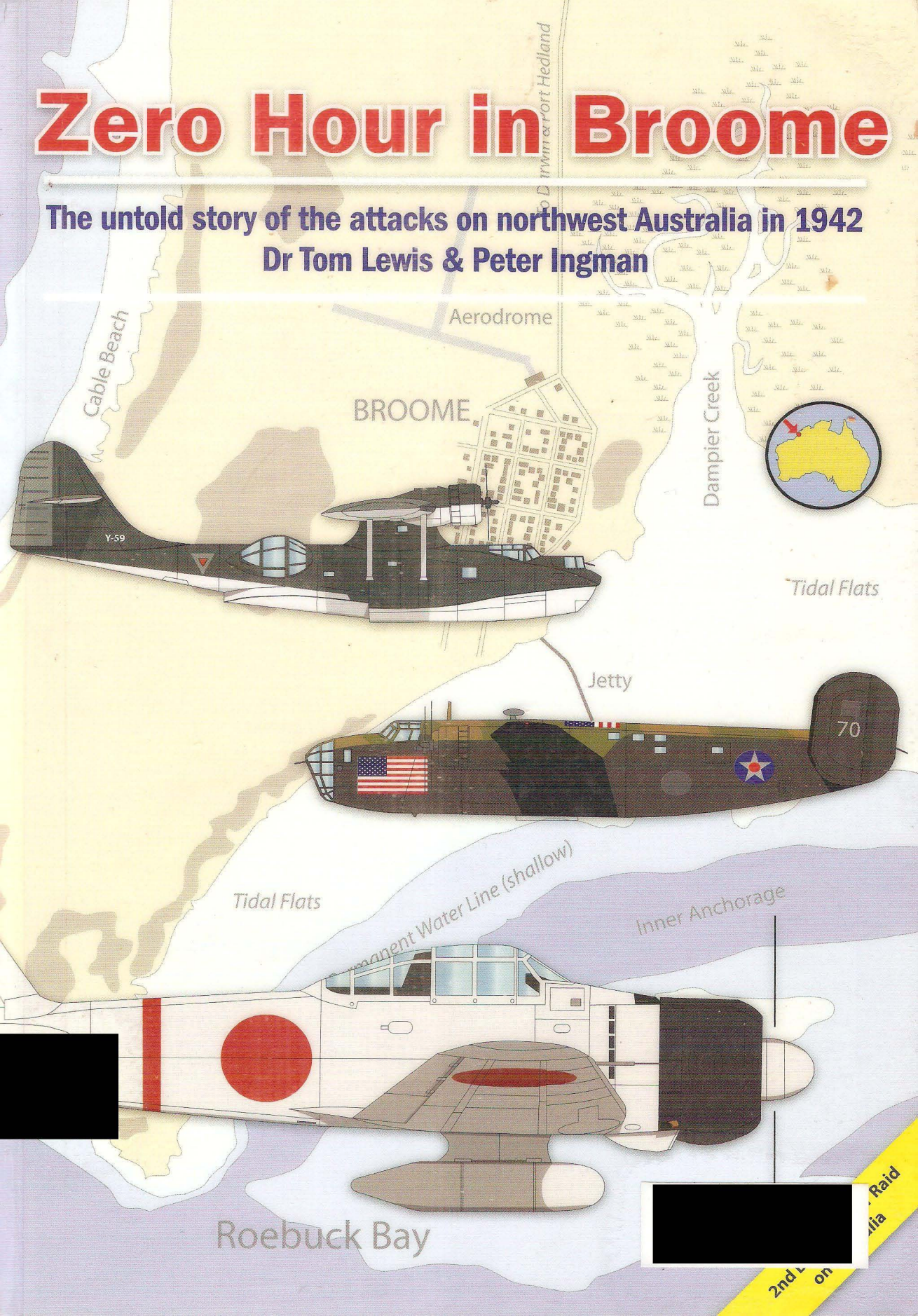


Zero Hour in Broome

The untold story of the attacks on northwest Australia in 1942

Dr Tom Lewis & Peter Ingman



Tidal Flats

Jetty

Tidal Flats

Permanent Water Line (shallow)

Inner Anchorage

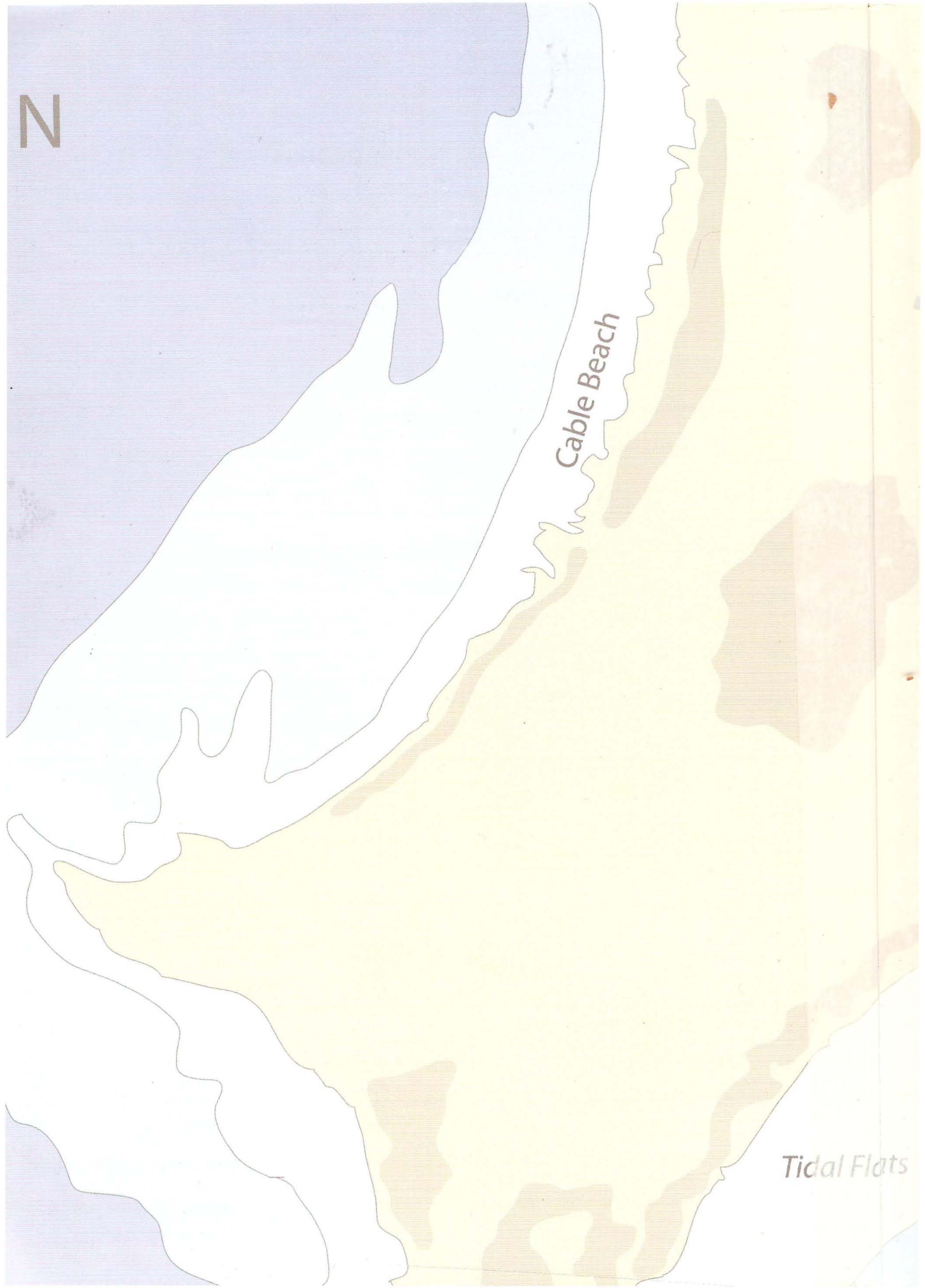
Roebuck Bay

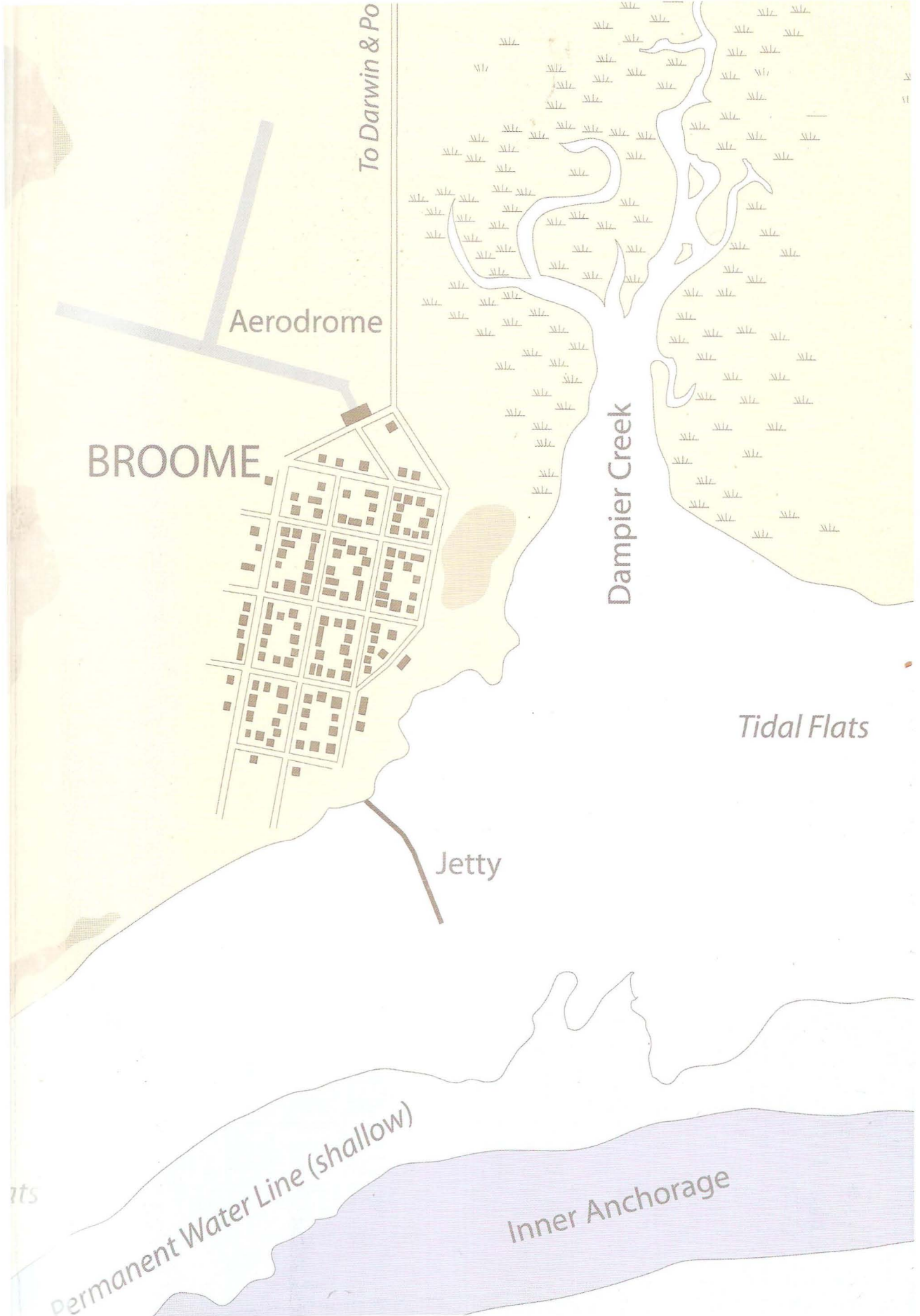
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Cable Beach

Tidal Flats





To Darwin & Po

Aerodrome

BROOME

Dampier Creek

Tidal Flats

Jetty

Permanent Water Line (shallow)

Inner Anchorage

Zero Hour in Broome

Dr Tom Lewis & Peter Ingman

Zero Hour in Broome

First published 2010

Avonmore Books
PO Box 217
Kent Town
South Australia 5071
Australia

Phone: (61 8) 8431 9780

www.avonmorebooks.com.au

National Library of Australia Cataloguing Data

Author: Lewis, Tom, 1955-

Title: Zero Hour in Broome: the untold story of the attacks on Northwest Australia in 1942
/ Tom Lewis & Peter Ingman.

Edition: 1st ed.

ISBN: 9780957735156 (pbk.)

Notes: Includes bibliographical references and index.

Subjects: World War, 1939-1945--Aerial operations, Japanese.

World War, 1939-1945--Australia.
Broome (W.A.)--History.

Other Authors/Contributors: Ingman, Peter, 1971-

Dewey Number: 940.544

Printed by Everbest Printing Company

Desktop Publishing by Diane Bricknell

Tom Lewis and Peter Ingman © 2010

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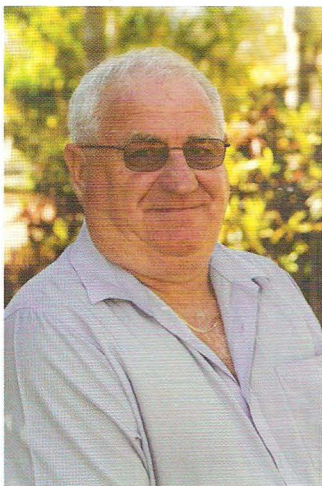
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Foreword

In February 1942 the northwest found itself literally on the front-line of the war with Japan, while the town of Broome became strategically significant in regard to the aerial evacuation of Java. The peak of events was the devastating 3 March air attack. Aside from this, however, the bigger picture across the northwest, as well as the later attacks on Broome, have received little attention since the publication of the Official History of the Second World War by the Australian government.

As well as activities of a military nature, various civilians made worthy but little known contributions during this period. For example, against the background of threatened invasion, many of the Asian population of Broome worked extraordinarily hard in re-building the airfield in just three days and then evacuating the lugger fleet. This was at a time when their families had not been evacuated with the white population. To have such activities on the historical record is a valuable addition to Broome's proud and diverse heritage.

I commend *Zero Hour in Broome* to anyone interested in the history of our region as well as the wartime history of those dark days of early 1942. In addition, Broome continues to celebrate its unique aviation heritage, so to have a strong aviation history element in this work is most welcome. *Zero Hour In Broome* will be an invaluable resource for many years to come.



A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Graeme Campbell'.

Councillor Graeme Campbell
President

Shire of Broome
Broome, Western Australia, May 2010



Western Australia showing military airfields and points of interest in early 1942. The “northwest”, as described in this publication, is generally taken to mean the area between Port Hedland and Wyndham.

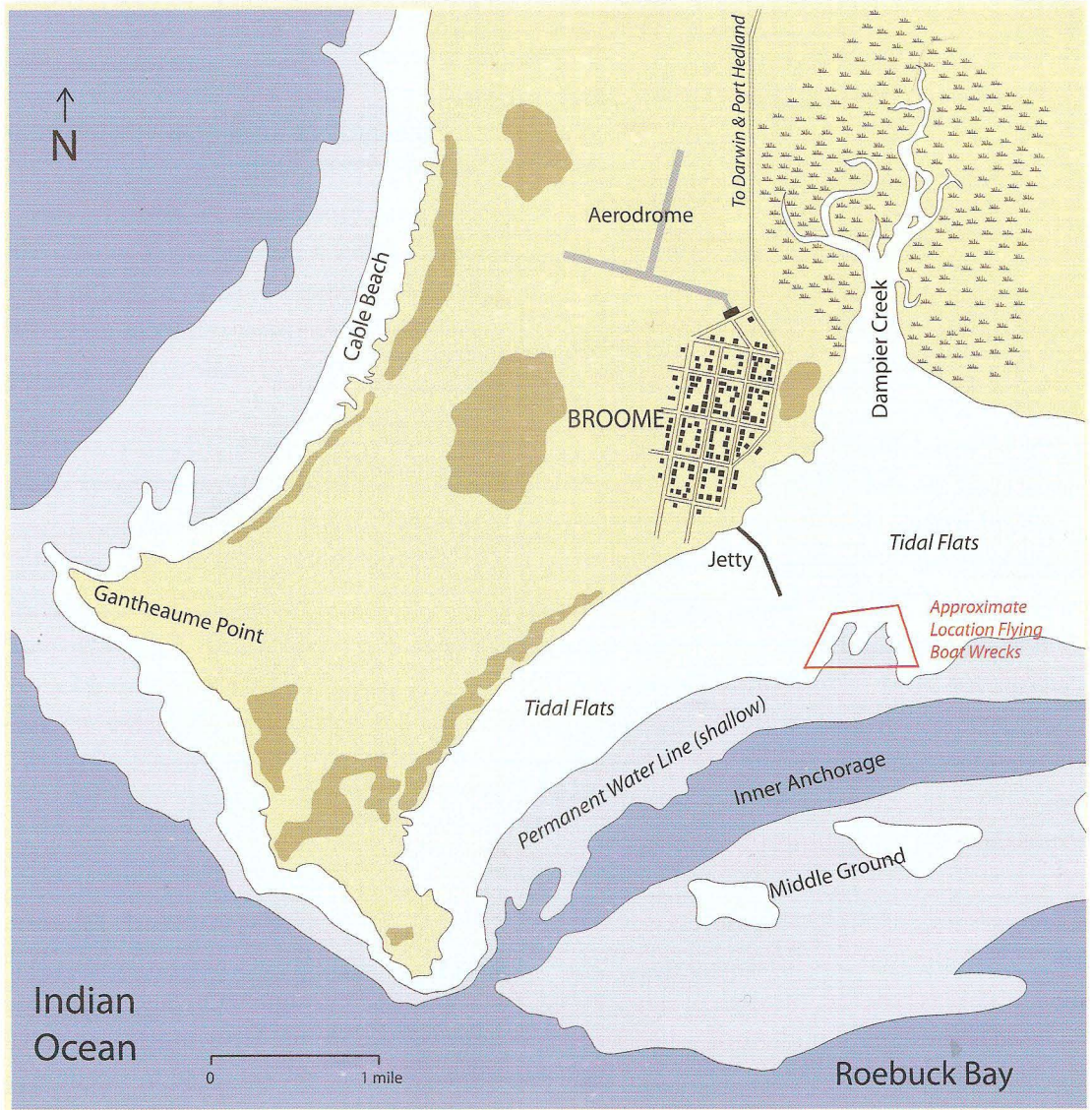
Introduction

Zero Hour in Broome is the product of a desire by the authors to examine the wartime events in northwestern Australia at the start of 1942, with an emphasis on early-war types of aviation. While key individual events have been examined in some detail by earlier researchers, this is the first publication to combine them under a broader perspective. The authors are indebted to the earlier work of Merv Prime and William Tyler in regard to the 3 March attack, and to Bill Loane in regard to the ship *Koolama*. As these writers in particular had contacted relevant veterans in the 1980s and 1990s, no attempt was made to replicate this.

Early on it became apparent that many aspects of the subject matter had been very thinly researched, to the extent that the Australian Official History of the World War II was a universal source. However, this version contained inaccuracies, the worst of which was a gross overestimation of the number of Dutch evacuees being airlifted through Broome. Another issue was the Official History giving disproportionate attention to the Qantas experience. While probably not the original intention, the result was a somewhat skewed version of events. Perhaps the most serious omission was the failure to convey the complete and total lack of organisation in regard to the flying boats, which contrasted with the reasonably efficient evacuation centre run by the USAAF in conjunction with land-plane evacuations. From a broader perspective, the lack of initiative conveyed by General Plant's short-lived Western Command is a key finding.

Coverage begins loosely with the start of the Pacific War but in particular from early February 1942 when the first Java-Broome flight was made. All of the Japanese aerial activity over WA during 1942 is covered, through to the third attack on Broome in August. On land the period covered is through to mid-April, when a reorganisation of the Home Army took place and 3 Corps took over in WA. Also, from that time invasion fears generally subsided. A fascinating selection of aircraft were involved in the northwest operations, and much detailed information has been provided in this regard. For some readers this may be a lesser interest, in which case the narrative can be read independently.

The authors wish to thank Kylie Jennings and the volunteers of the Broome Historical Society for providing free access to their archives. Thanks also to Brett Lappan at the Shire of Broome and David Vincent for providing aviation photographs; and Ron and Pat Lewis, and Kaylene Anderson for their comments on the draft. ♦



Broome and approaches, 1942, showing where the flying boats were destroyed.

Chapter 1

Broome Attacked from the Air

Just days after the Japanese forces had almost obliterated Darwin, they were planning to consolidate their success with another strike on Australia. To secure their right exposed flank as they drove for Java in the west and New Guinea to the east, they would wipe out any further threat in northern Australia.

Within hours of receiving the reconnaissance reports from Broome on 2 March 1942, Wing Commander Takeo Shibata, of the 3rd Air Wing of the Japanese Naval Air Force, had issued orders for a two-pronged strike. A squadron of nine Zeros, arranged in three flights each of three aircraft, would attack Broome. At the same time, another squadron of the same strength would attack the West Australian base of Wyndham, where it was suspected fighters were based.

In both cases the Zeros would be led by Mitsubishi C5Ms. These were single-engined reconnaissance aircraft with a second crewman for navigational and photographic purposes. The 3rd Air Wing had a small number of C5Ms on strength and they were often used as “guide” aircraft for the Zeros.¹

The Japanese had secured several new airfields in their successful strikes south. That night, ground crews toiled in primitive conditions at their Timorese base to get the strike force ready. The Zeros were fully fuelled and fitted with 320 litre drop-tanks under their fuselages. The gun magazines were loaded with 20mm shells into the wings and 7.7mm bullets into the fuselage just in front of the cockpit windscreen.²

At around 5am the pilots arrived and in the half-light the airfield was a bustle of activity as pre-flight checks were completed. Soon the pilots were being helped into their cockpits and the Nakajima Sakae 12 radial engines were started. Clouds of smoke poured from the exhausts as the engines warmed up. Rudders were tested left and right and ailerons up and down as the pilots checked that their control surfaces were working. After the final OK from the pilots, the ground crews pulled the wheel chocks away and waved their pilots off. Throttles were eased forward and wheels began to roll.

From one of the ex-Dutch airport buildings, Shibata watched as the pilots taxied. Soon, the

fighters were accelerating down the runway before taking to the air. All were off safely. Only a small formation, but there was an element of danger to any take-off at maximum weight. Shibata watched the formation disappear into the pre-dawn murkiness. The mission was his own plan, and his career and reputation would live or die on the turn of events. He'd sent his pilots on an unprecedented and exceptionally long-range flight which was mostly over water. In fact it was the longest fighter mission ever flown so far. It was a big risk, but so far in the war the Japanese had learned that such daring usually paid big dividends.

His nine pilots assigned to attack Broome were selected for their experience and skills. Seven of them had flown in the famed Formosa-Manila missions back in December, which involved fighters flying otherwise unheard of distances. These Manila missions had been a great success, but teams of staff officers had planned and calculated every aspect of the flights for weeks beforehand.³ Now he'd gone out on a limb to put together the Broome mission in a matter of hours, with the distance involved exceeding that of Manila.

Shibata must have wondered if there was some detail that he'd missed? If the pilots lost contact with the C5M leader, either during combat, bad weather or for some other reason, they'd have to get themselves back to base by dead reckoning. Even in clear weather this would be a tough task, as most of the flight was over open ocean. On sighting land there would not be much fuel remaining for the pilots to spend time identifying landmarks and finding the airfield. Also, they were still unfamiliar with the area. During the Manila mission naval vessels were stationed along the flightpath in case any aircraft had to ditch in the ocean. Here they had no such luxury between Timor and Broome.

The silver-grey monoplanes, carrying streamlined drop-tanks, and with the large red *Hinomaru* painted on the wings and fuselages, joined up in loose formation with the C5M guide plane, markedly different with its fixed, spatted undercarriage and no drop-tank. As a reconnaissance plane and without the weight of weapons, the C5M had enough internal fuel

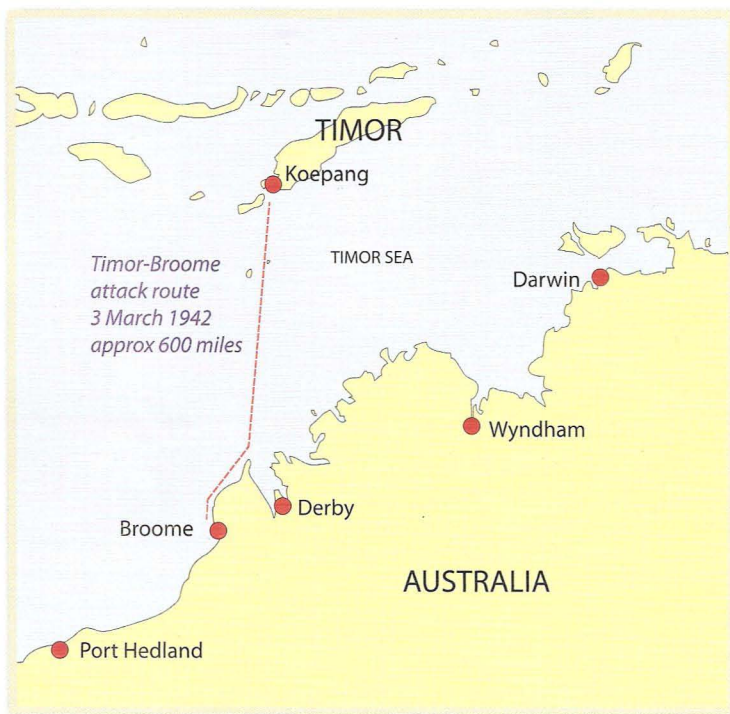


Zero fighter X-182 of the 3rd Air Wing being prepared for flight. (Authors' collection)

for the mission. With throttles well back the formation was flying at an economical cruising speed, less than half the maximum speed of the Zeros. This speed had been carefully calculated to ensure they would make the trip there and back, with an allowance for maybe 15 minutes over the target. As the formation left the Timorese coast and headed south over the Timor Sea, the pilots made sure they were drawing fuel from the external tank and settled into the routine scanning of the skies that kept a WWII fighter pilot alive: over a shoulder, across the instruments, across the horizon, over the other shoulder.

There were a couple of navigational landmarks south from Koepang. Within minutes the aircraft were passing over the small island of Roti just off the coast. After another forty minutes or so of flying over the open ocean the pilots noted the tiny sandy islets known as the Ashmore and Cartier Islands. From that point onwards the pilots were in the hands of the navigator onboard the C5M, Air Private Nagasawa. As the sun rose further to reveal a sparkling blue sea below, the engines droned on without incident for another ninety minutes or so. By now the sun was well up over the horizon on their left, and emerging as a dark blur in the distance came the great Australian landmass. As they approached Nagasawa would have been relieved to see several distinctive landmarks that confirmed their position as on course. Cape L  v  que could be made out, the tip of a huge north-pointing triangle named Dampier Land. Their position was made absolutely certain by this landmark, unlike any other along this coastline.

The navigator instructed his pilot to set course along the western edge of the Dampier Land triangle. At the base point of this triangle lay the target – Broome, which was on a small peninsula jutting into Roebuck Bay. The formation followed this coastline uneventfully for another half an hour. Now Broome itself could be seen in the distance, as the sun reflected off dozens of iron roofs. These were the only man-made structures of any kind the pilots had seen along miles of desolate coastline. It was now almost 9.30am, and the crew of the

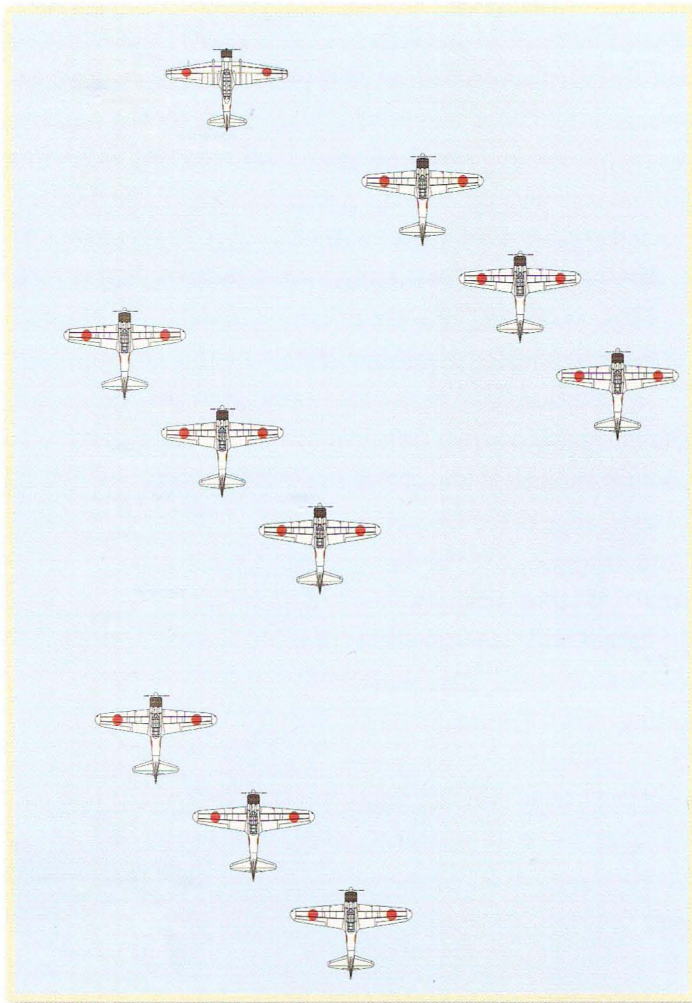


Flightpath of 3rd Air Wing Zeros on 3 March 1942.

C5M would have been pleased with their work. The aircraft formed into three flights. Now in a gradual descent above Cable Beach, the formation wheeled around the tip of the peninsula at Point Gantheaume. Far below they could see a long black crooked finger pointing directly from the township to the harbour. This was Broome jetty, with most of its length crossing muddy tidal flats and brown shallow water rather than blue water. There were many flying boats on the water, at least a dozen of them. This was the prey they had come for.

The formation, now in three “Vs” began the attack out of the sun. The drop tanks were released – not quite empty but they were too much of an encumbrance for combat manoeuvring. Lieutenant Miyano’s flight of three Zeros stayed circling above with the C5M, the pilots scanning the sky for enemy fighters. Sergeant Okamoto’s flight dived down to the harbour, while Warrant Officer Kudo’s flight made a wider sweep around over the mangroves towards the airfield. The broad flat overlapping runways were clearly visible alongside the town, just a mile or so away. On the airfield too there were multiple metallic glints – clear evidence of targets.

Few of those on the harbour were aware of the Zeros before they began firing. It was a peaceful scene below, as the flying boats rocked gently. Here and there people were sitting in doorways and peering out of hatchways.⁴ Several men were busy refuelling one flying boat from a lighter tied up alongside, the latter almost invisible under the mass of fuel drums on its deck. On the end of the long, narrow wooden jetty a crowd



The nine Mitsubishi A6M2 “Zero” fighters attacking Broome were arranged in three sections each comprising three aircraft. They were guided by a single Mitsubishi C5M2 reconnaissance plane which in the air was distinguishable from the Zeros by its long “greenhouse” canopy and fixed undercarriage. However in the vertical plane both the C5M and the Zero were similar as they had identical engines and wingspans.

of passengers was waiting to board a motor launch. Mid-way along the jetty an ancient miniature steam engine pulling a few flat-bed trucks slowly rattled along its tracks as it had done hundreds of times before. All of the flying boats were large machines, seemingly lying in a random pattern close to one another a few hundred yards from the end of the jetty. Most were dark coloured, with either two or three engines mounted on high wings. However two stood out from the others: these had four engines and unlike the other darkish aircraft, their natural aluminium finish was shining brightly against the glittering water. Also, with their wings high-set into the fuselages these were more modern looking than the others. These would be the first targets: it was one of these being refuelled.

Within seconds three Zeros were commencing shallow dives, and the sounds of gunfire heralded the arrival of war to Western Australia. It was easy work for the attackers. They didn't need gunsights for the stationary targets, the pilots could follow their machinegun fire from the two barrels right in front of their cockpits which fired through their propellers. As their bullets splashed into the water below, they knew exactly where they were firing at and with a light touch on the control columns they were able to walk their deadly streams of lead onto the targets. At this point a push of a second button produced a dull thudding as the 20mm cannons in their wings joined in. However the pilots had misjudged their first run, with just a few rounds hitting home for no apparent effect. They made a wide sweep over the harbour before starting another run. This time they made no mistake as their deadly fire hit home. These first two targets were loaded with fuel and exploded into flames. The pilots zoomed overhead and wheeled around for another strafing run, lining up on any of the darker-coloured machines with parasol wings. So many easy targets - it was a fighter pilot's dream come true.

Some of the flying boats were empty, some had just a few crewmen aboard. These men knew their machines intimately and were out of escape hatches within seconds. However a few of the Dutch naval flying boats had only landed a short time before and were packed full of evacuees, many of them women and children. The collective horror can only be imagined. Soon these scenes were hidden by clouds of smoke. With each pass the attackers made there were more flames, more



Broome from the air 1955, looking east. It would have looked very similar in 1942. Just outside the picture to the right is the long jetty, while to the left is the airport. The tidal creek adjacent to the airport is visible on the upper left. (State Library of Western Australia)



Broome jetty at high tide. The township lies to the left of the picture. On 3 March 1942 the flying boats were moored near the permanent water line, or at least another half jetty-length to the right of the picture. This structure was demolished in the 1960s. (State Library of Western Australia)

smoke, more devastation. Out of the chaos the Japanese pilots tried to pick out those flying boats still untouched. The cannon shells effortlessly punched through the thin metal skin of the thick upper wings. The fuel tanks housed inside the wings ignited – even empty tanks would explode as a result of the petrol vapour within. The more modern military flying boats had self-sealing tanks with foam liners which when penetrated by a bullet prevented fuel loss and explosions. These were effective during normal aerial combat, but not during this. Nothing could stop fuel tank explosions after dozens of hits, especially from the 20mm shells. The conclusion was foregone: every flying boat was aflame and wrecked.

Meanwhile, the other Zero flight was sweeping around to attack the airfield. Then the flight leader, Warrant Officer Kudo, caught a moving speck flying away from the harbour, and instinctively turned towards it. Within half a minute he had a small biplane in his sights. (From here we must imagine Kudo's thoughts.) The last thing he wanted was to spend ten minutes wasting precious fuel on a pointless dogfight while his comrades were shooting up important targets just over his shoulder. He rapidly overshot the turning biplane when suddenly a large shape flashed across his peripheral vision below. Kudo pushed the throttle forward to catch up with the new, much larger target. This was a large bomber that had taken off moments earlier from the airfield. Its main undercarriage was just coming up, and it was barely a few hundred feet off the ground. As it flashed over the coastline and then over the sparkling blue water below, the darkly painted aircraft was easily spotted against the bright background. It had black sides and a dark camouflage pattern on top, most unlike the other American aircraft Kudo had seen. It had four engines, which meant it was a heavy bomber, probably a B-17. Definitely a worthy target.⁶

Kudo swept in to attack from behind. He knew that B-17s were usually only encountered at very high altitude where the performance of the Japanese fighters was at their weakest and where the bombers were very fast. In these situations it was very difficult to shoot down such a target, but now Kudo had such a bomber virtually at sea level, where his fighter had the far better relative performance. Kudo remembered from his Philippines experience that B-17s had good beam defences but nothing in their tail. Thus an attack from dead astern was best. Within seconds Kudo was slightly above and behind the bomber, ready to make a shallow diving attack with his sights on the bomber's cockpit and engines.

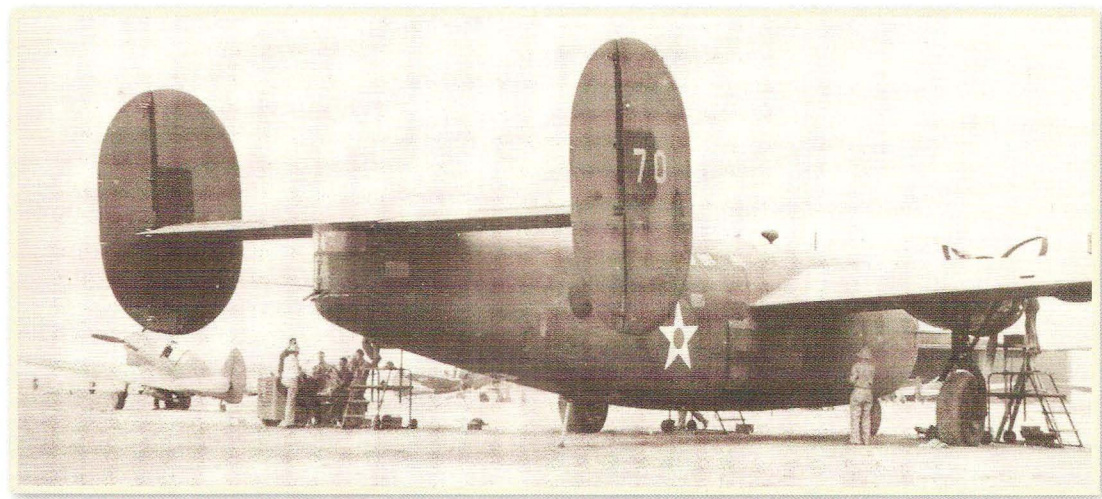


*A Zero drop-tank on display at Broome Museum.
(Authors' collection)*

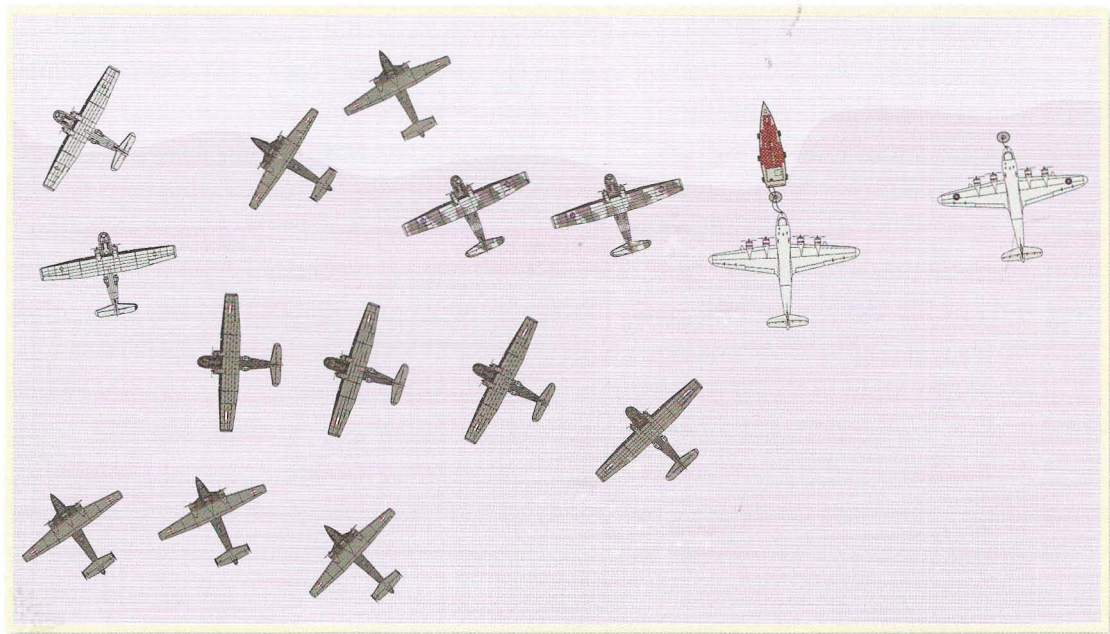
He commenced firing but most of his

stream of bullets was ahead of the target. He'd been too hasty, but would not make the same mistake again. As he wheeled around for another pass, the bomber took what evasive action it could. The pilots had pushed the throttles forward and were now literally skimming the waves, which narrowed Kudo's attacking options. The bomber was going fast and it took him some time to get into position. It was almost merged now with its shadow, as the whitecaps flashed underneath it. As he started another pass, he could see the beam machine guns were manned but not pointing directly at him. Now once again above and behind the bomber, he started firing and saw his own bullets strike behind the cockpit. He was starting to bank away when there was a sudden noise from underneath his engine and his plane shuddered. He saw in the tail of the enemy bomber a twin gun position. It was not a turret, but a firing position behind sliding doors. Kudo presented a perfect target as the enemy gunner fired directly into his plane. All this happened in just seconds. He was level with and turning away from the bomber, when a flash came from the enemy's fuselage as the bomb-bay fuel tank blew up. The front of the aircraft was engulfed in flames before it plunged into the sea seconds later. On hitting the ocean water poured in through the weak bomb-bay doors and the fuselage was split in two. The wings, heavy with the weight of the engines and pulled forward by their inertia, snapped off from the fuselage before cartwheeling into the ocean just ahead of the front and rear sections of the main body.

Kudo barely had time to comprehend what had happened. For the moment his engine was still running, so he turned northwards still barely above the waves. Some miles away on the horizon he could see a huge plume of smoke. He flew towards it, trying to join up with the C5M. But his own engine was smoking and he would have been losing oil pressure. He tried to gain altitude but as he did so his engine seized and within moments he lost control of the



USAAF B-24A 40-2370 at Amberley, Queensland in February 1942, just a short time before it was shot down off after taking off from Broome on 3 March. Twin Browning 0.30-inch machine guns are visible in the tail gun position, enclosed within a "sliding door" setup. Evidence strongly suggests that the attacking Zero which downed this aircraft was in turn itself shot down by these guns. (RAAF Official courtesy Tom Wood / David Vincent)



Target Rich Environment: A diagrammatic representation of the 15 flying boats moored in Broome at the time of the Japanese attack. Such a rich target was virtually unknown since the surprise attacks on the first day of the war.

aircraft. He was last seen flying low and trailing smoke. No-one witnessed his final fate, as the attackers above Broome were still busy with their deadly work, but as no body or debris was ever washed up, Kudo probably died as his Zero impacted with the ocean.

Minutes earlier and unaware of Kudo's fate, his two companions had zoomed low over the mangroves and were suddenly on top of the airfield. With fighter pilot instincts they scanned the area for enemy fighters taking off, but there was no sign of them, only large planes parked around the airstrip. The first target was obvious: three large four-engine planes parked together in the centre of the airfield. Below, they could see figures running into the scrub on the edge of the airfield. The people had just enough warning of the attack to get clear of the aircraft. The two pilots pumped cannon shells into the large planes which exploded in balls of fire. They saw a twin-engined aircraft with its props turning on a taxiway. The first strafing run overshot, with twin dust plumes racing along in the soil in front of the target. The Japanese fighter banked and turned with the second stream of bullets hitting home where the wings joined the fuselage. The plane caught fire and two bombs inside exploded. Within a few minutes all six of the planes on the airfield were in flames.

By now the harbour was a chaotic mess of smoke and flames. The water was black with oil floating on the surface, some of it on fire. Screaming wounded were everywhere. Towards the end of the attack the three top cover Zeros dived down to do their bit. They attacked the flying boats already on fire. All of the military targets were in flames.

Aboard the C5M Nagasawa was reminding them⁵ it was time to assemble for the flight home. As the squadron climbed up, he took photographs of the scene below. Soon eight fighters were circling around the C5M at an altitude of about 3,000ft. One was missing. They loitered in the area for a few minutes, but there was no sign of anyone else. There was nothing that could be done, and the squadron turned north and began following the now familiar coast of Dampier Land up towards its tip at Cape L  v  que.

Roughly half-way along the coastline was a dark-coloured aircraft flying towards them on a reciprocal course. The Japanese pilots were well trained and aware that such a target was the responsibility of Lieutenant Miyano's flight, which had flown "top cover" over Broome and had the most fuel remaining. As Miyano led his two wingmen down to investigate, they identified a camouflaged twin-engined Douglas transport. The Douglas was an easy target at its slow cruising speed, and was unaware of the presence of the Zeros until it was under attack. The first burst riddled the fuselage with bullets. Another burst hit the port wing, and the port engine caught fire. Luckily for those inside, however, they had the services of a quite extraordinary pilot. An ex-WWI Russian fighter ace with immense flying experience, Ivan Smirnoff commenced an almost vertical spiral dive. The three fighters followed the plane down and saw the crippled Douglas pull out of the dive just above a beach. The pilot made a safe emergency landing and the dazed and wounded passengers crawled out of the wreck. The Zeros each made a strafing pass, but, conscious of their limited fuel, they then flew off to join their companions.

Near midday the Japanese planes had passed the Ashmore and Cartier Islands and could now see Roti Island in the distance. Their base at Koepang was just beyond it. The squadron was now spread out over a large expanse of sky as each pilot tried to fly as economically as possible, regardless of formation. One of the stragglers was Private Matsumoto, who had been with the flight attacking the harbour. As one of the more inexperienced pilots, his fuel use had been higher than the others and now within sight of Roti Island his engine coughed and ran dry. Matsumoto successfully ditched his Zero in the ocean, climbing free before it sank.⁷

The Wyndham mission had returned safely some little time previously. While a much shorter task, it had also given Shibata anxiety as the pilots involved were less experienced. However, they had located Wyndham airfield, which was some distance from the town, destroyed a twin-engined biplane-transport on the runway and set fuel dumps ablaze. The pilots had thoroughly strafed some wooded areas adjacent to the airfield – it was felt that fighters would have been dispersed and hidden in this area. With plenty of ammunition remaining the squadron then flew over the township looking for military targets. A ship tied up to the wharf was strafed. Several large industrial buildings were also attacked. There was no defensive fire at all from the ground.

This report worried Shibata at first, as he wondered if fighters from Wyndham might have been absent intercepting the Broome attackers on their return flight. His thoughts were interrupted by the drone of Zeros and he went outside to see Miyano's squadron landing. He counted seven aircraft. Shibata was pleased. To lose only two aircraft on such a long and risky mission was a good result. Additionally one of the pilots, Sergeant Okazaki, had been wounded by defensive fire over the aerodrome. In fact all except one of the returning Zeros had been hit to some degree. Luckily the damage was generally minor – just a few bullet holes, most likely from uncoordinated small arms fire.

When Shibata heard the pilots' reports and later viewed the photographs, he realised how successful the strike had been. Over 20 large, multi-engined planes – mostly heavy bombers or flying boats – had been destroyed. This was far beyond the wildest expectations of anyone involved with the mission. Indeed, since the first day of the war even finding such numbers of large aircraft in one place was unheard of. For a both relieved and elated Shibata, the two daring raids had perfectly vindicated his arguments in favour of long range fighters. ♦

(Endnotes)

1 *Broome's One Day War: The Story of the Japanese Raid on Broome on 3rd March 1942*, Mervyn W Prime, Broome Historical Society, Broome WA, first published 1992 (an update of a work first published in 1985 as *W.A.'s Pearl Harbour* by same author). This source contains detailed information from the Japanese side in regard to Broome, including correspondence from Takeo Shibata and one of the pilots, Yasuo Matsumoto. Also see Shores, Christopher and Brian Cull, with Yashuo Izawa: *Bloody Shambles* Volumes 1 & 2, Grub Street, London, 1992. These two volumes contained detailed information regarding Japanese air missions in the early weeks of the war, including those of the 3rd Air Wing and the use of C5M reconnaissance planes to guide formations of Zeros.

2 *Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Aircraft*, Volume 4, No. 38, Mitsubishi A6M 'Zero' p745-752, Orbis Publishing Ltd, London, 1982.

3 Saki, Saburo, Martin Caidin, and Fred Sato; *Samurai!* First published 1957 (reprinted 2001 by ibooks, New York). Written by a Japanese fighter ace, Chapter 7 describes in detail the planning and execution of the Manila missions.

4 Various sources describe the conditions on Broome Harbour at the time of the attack, including Prime; also Tyler, William H, *"Flight of Diamonds" The Story of Broome's war and the Carnot Bay diamonds*, Hesperian Press, Victoria Park WA, 1987 and Wills, Juliet, *The Diamond Dakota Mystery*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest NSW 2006.

5 The C5M definitely had a radio, and it is believed the Zeros had only radio receivers. However, this has not been especially confirmed in regard to the Broome operations. It is possible that the Zeros may have had all of their radio equipment removed to reduce weight and maximise their range. If this is the case, communication must have been by visual means, with a heavy emphasis on the pilots being fully aware of the precise time they spent over the targets – something easier said than done in combat conditions.

6 During the fighting in the Philippines in December 1941 the only American four-engined bombers encountered were early model B-17s without tail gun positions. As a Philippine veteran, Kudo would have been aware of this. Later model B-17s and Liberators (both with tail guns) were introduced during the Java fighting, but Kudo's unit, being then relatively isolated in the eastern part of the NEI, had little if any experience against these later-model aircraft in air to air combat. What Kudo had actually encountered off Broome was a B-24A Liberator, which had a somewhat unusual tail-gun position behind a set of sliding doors. This surprise was most likely the cause of his downfall.

7 Matsumoto swam to a nearby island and was eventually rescued by a Japanese patrol boat over a fortnight later.

Mitsubishi C5M2 "Babs"

Specifications

Reconnaissance Aircraft

Propulsion: 1 x 950hp engine

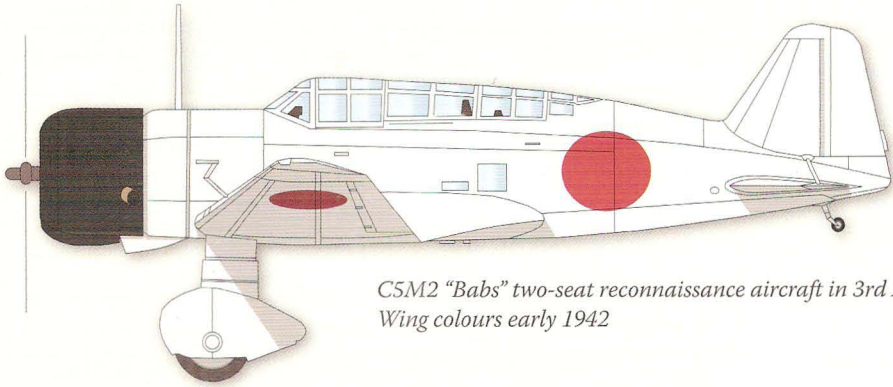
Speed: 298mph max; 199mph cruise

Range: 1,491 miles loaded

Weight: 5,071 lb max loaded

Crew: 2

Armament: 1 x 7.7mm Type 92 MG in rear cockpit.

*Notes: equipped with radios and cameras.*** the popular Allied code names for Japanese aircraft, such as "Babs", are used throughout even though these names were not introduced until well after the period described.*

C5M2 "Babs" two-seat reconnaissance aircraft in 3rd Air Wing colours early 1942

The C5M2 was a naval version of a single-engined Japanese Army reconnaissance aircraft. This in itself was highly unusual: naval reconnaissance planes were generally multi-engined, both for range and safety. They also tended to be armed to fulfil the broader "reconnaissance-bomber" function, while the C5M2 had no offensive armament at all. It was something of an anomaly, and was only used in very small numbers (just 30 C5M2s were built). The second crewman functioned as a specialist navigator and operated the radio and cameras.

Although it had a completely different airframe, the C5M2 shared some close similarities with the A6M2 Zero. Of a similar weight and size, both used identical Nakajima Sakae 12 engines. So it was straightforward for small numbers of C5M2s to be operated by Zero units. The 3rd Air Wing, for example, had an establishment strength of six C5Ms alongside almost 60 fighters. The C5Ms were used as navigation guides for long range Zero missions, partially because the land-based Zeros lacked radios. It was in this capacity that single C5M2s accompanied the Zero formations that raided both Broome and Wyndham on 3 March 1942.¹ Otherwise from Timor, C5M2s could also fly independent reconnaissance missions over northern Australia.

Over Darwin on 22 March 1942 USAAF P-40E fighters shot down a C5M west of Darwin. Both Japanese crewmen were killed: Petty Officers Shigiki Mari and Shinobu Nagasawa.² The latter had crewed the C5M over Broome on 3 March and had taken reconnaissance photographs of the burning flying boats.

With so few C5Ms built such losses could not be replaced. Neither was a new replacement introduced by the JNAF. Instead, from October 1942, Japanese Army Air Force Ki-46II "Dinah" reconnaissance aircraft began operations over northern Australia. The "Dinah" was a very worthy replacement, boasting an impressive top speed of 375mph.

(Endnotes)

¹ The crewmen of the C5M over Broome were: 1st Air Sgt. A. Hayashi (pilot) & 1st Air Pvt. S. Nagasawa (navigator)

² Alford, Bob. Darwin's Air War. Aviation Society of the Northern Territory: Winnellie, NT, 1991. (p.25)

Mitsubishi A6M2 "Zero"

Specifications

Long Range Fighter (single-seat)

Propulsion: 1 x 950hp engine

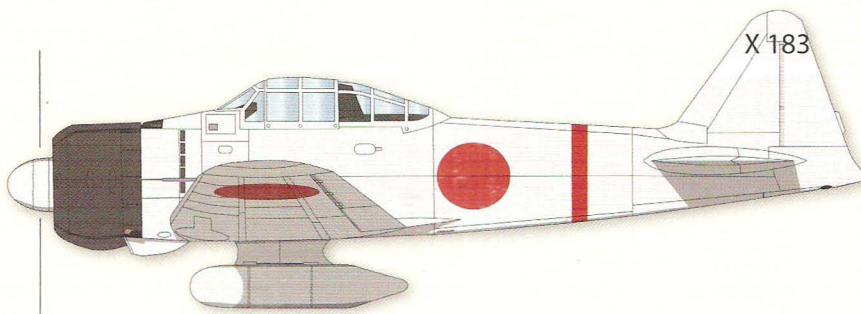
Speed: 331mph max; 207mph cruise

Range: 1,162 miles (internal fuel)

Weight: 6,165lb max

Armament: 2 x 7.7mm Type 97 machine-guns (fuselage); 2 x 20mm Type 99 cannon (wings).

Optional 330 litre centreline drop-tank and / or 2 x 60kg light bombs



A6M2 Zero of the 3rd Air Wing. The aircraft of this unit had a serial number prefixed "X". Combinations of coloured bands on the fin and fuselage identified sub-formations and flight leaders within the unit. This hypothetical aircraft "X-183" is representative of the 3rd Air Wing Zeros at the time of the Broome attack.

The famed Zero fighter had a reputation as being vastly superior to anything else in the skies of early 1942. Actually, the Zero was an unbalanced design that made many sacrifices to ensure light weight, hence maximising manoeuvrability and long range.¹ The 3rd Air Wing commanding officer who ordered the Broome strike, Commander Takeo Shibata, maintained that the single biggest advantage of the Zero was its long range.² Time and again this enabled Zeros to make devastating surprise attacks against the reeling ABDA forces in the first months of the war.

As noted in Chapter 2, the long range attributes of the Zero were proven on 8 December 1941 during unprecedented 1,000 mile missions from Formosa to Manila. Some sources overlook the Broome mission and mention that the next-longest Zero missions occurred between Rabaul and Guadalcanal in August 1942, a distance of around 1,100 miles.³ The Broome mission was longer still, at around 1,200 miles, but remains largely unheralded in this context.

The results of "Broome" must rate it as one of the most successful single-squadron actions of the Pacific War, with 22 large aircraft destroyed. A key aspect of the deadly effectiveness of the Zero in these attacks was its 20mm cannon armament, although to save weight only 50 rounds per gun were carried. These were heavy, slow-firing weapons not ideally suited to fast-moving aerial combat. Indeed, in aerial combat the great ace Saburo Sakai compared using the cannons to "trying to hit a dragonfly with a rifle".⁴ But the cannons came into their own against stationary, moored flying boats. The pilots would first fire the machineguns as targeting weapons, watching the splashes in the water to adjust their aim. Cannon fire was used only when right on target, and to deadly effect. Just a few shells were usually adequate to detonate a target's fuel tanks.

The attack on Broome was led by Lieutenant Zeniro Miyano, whose flight flew "top cover". Miyano was a natural choice, as he'd taken part in the long range missions to Manila early in the war.⁵ Miyano even had experience shooting at moored flying boats. On 12 December he'd led a mission against a flying-boat base near Manila, destroying several PBV-4s on the water. Thus Broome was "business as usual" for the experienced Miyano, who then led his "top-cover" flight in downing the KNILM DC-3 at Carnot Bay.

In fact six of the nine "Broome" Zero pilots, including all three flight leaders, had taken part in long range

Formosa-Manila missions on 8 and 10 December 1941. No doubt this experience contributed to the success at Broome mission, where the discipline in rationing ammunition and sticking to military targets was exceptional. In addition, the hairline nature of this mission was underlined when one Zero ran out of fuel and ditched just short of base. Notably, this was one of the less experienced pilots who had not flown the Manila missions. Slightly less discipline while flying over the target at full combat power would have surely led to other similar losses.

Most sources portray Broome as a one-sided affair, with the sole opposition coming from the redoubtable Gus Winckel. However, defensive fire was actually much more widespread as virtually all of the Zeros were hit to some degree. Most significantly, it appears that aerial combat between W/O Kudo's Zero and the B-24A *Arabian Nights* resulted in both planes crashing into the ocean.

Table: Zeros over Broome, 3 March 1942⁶

Flight	Aircraft		(1)		
1	A6M2 Zero	Lt. Z. Miyano	6	(3), (5)	Flight Commander; top-cover at Broome; then assisted downing of DC-3 at Carnot Bay. Miyano claimed a total of 16 planes shot down before he was killed in action while escorting dive-bombers near Guadalcanal on 16 June 1943.
	A6M2 Zero	3 rd Air Sgt. T. Kurano	2		top-cover at Broome; then assisted downing of DC-3 at Carnot Bay
	A6M2 Zero	1 st Air Pvt. Z. Matsumoto	0	(4), (5)	top-cover at Broome; then assisted downing of DC-3 at Carnot Bay
2	A6M2 Zero	Warrant Officer O. Kudo	(2)	(3), (5)	Shot down after engaging B-24A; killed
	A6M2 Zero	1 st Air Sgt. M. Okazaki	2	(3)	Attacked airfield; Pilot wounded
	A6M2 Zero	2 nd Air Sgt. S. Matsumoto	3		Attacked airfield
3	A6M2 Zero	1 st Air Sgt. J. Okamoto	2	(3), (5)	Attacked flying boats
	A6M2 Zero	2 nd Air Sgt. Y. Hashiguchi	1	(3), (5)	Attacked flying boats
	A6M2 Zero	1 st Air Pvt. Y. Matsumoto	(2)	(5)	Attacked flying boats; aircraft ditched short of base, Roti Is; survived WWII and corresponded with Broome historian Mervyn Prime in 1978.
In-dep.	C5M2 "Babs"	1 st Air Sgt. A. Hayashi (pilot) 1 st Air Pvt. S. Nagasawa (navigator)	-		Used as navigation / control aircraft & for photography.

(1) number of bullet holes in each aircraft caused by defensive fire at Broome

(2) pilot aware aircraft was hit by groundfire; number of hits unknown as a/c crashed or ditched

(3) flew in Formosa-Manila Mission 8/12/41.

(4) scheduled for Formosa-Manila Mission 8/12/41 but aborted.

(5) flew in Formosa-Manila Mission 10/12/41

Also on 3 March 1942, eight Zeros, led by Sub-Lieutenant Toshitada Kawazoe, attacked Wyndham. These pilots appear to have been less experienced than Miyano's Broome attackers, as Kawazoe himself had not flown in the Formosa-Manila operations.⁷ However, Kawazoe was not without combat experience. In December 1941 he had led a raid against Lake Tondano which destroyed several Dutch flying boats.⁸ Although pickings at Wyndham were modest, Kawazoe and his men executed the mission successfully.

In addition to these raids, 3rd Air Wing Zeros were among a mixed fighter formation which downed the flying-boat *Circe* on 28 February. Also in that formation was the Tainan Air Wing, which included the famous ace Saburo Sakai. On this same day Sakai reported meeting a lone DC-3 transport over eastern Java.⁹ He pulled alongside and noticing a blonde-haired woman and child peering out of the window, he spared the aircraft.¹⁰

The day after the Broome raid, a follow-up strike was ordered but it evidently turned back due to bad weather. This comprised just three Zeros (eight had already been assigned to attack Darwin). On the next

day, 5 March, three Zeros were seen cruising over Wyndham, perhaps trying to draw up fighters that were suspected of being hidden somewhere below. A short time later, on 10 March, ten Zeros flew over Darwin, probably for the same reason. All of this activity was by the 3rd Air Wing in Timor, who were again active on 20 March. While accompanying bombers to Broome, Zeros strafed and destroyed the only aircraft present below, a Stinson Reliant. On the same day a pair of Zeros strafed the airfield at Derby, although there were no worthwhile targets there. On 23 March three Zeros strafed the airfield at Wyndham in combination with a bombing raid there. Following this the 3rd Air Wing Zeros mostly concentrated on escorting bombers to Darwin or defending their home airfields.

(Endnotes)

1 *These sacrifices included a lack of armour and self-sealing fuel tanks. Land based Zeros even lacked radios in order to save weight. Hammel, Eric. Carrier Clash The Invasion of Guadalcanal and the Battle of the Eastern Solomons August 1942. Zenith Press: St Paul MN, USA: 1999. p.12.*

2 *Prime, p.41.*

3 *Sakaida, Henry. Imperial Japanese Navy Aces 1937-1945. Osprey Publishing: Great Britain, 1998. p.24. also Hammel, p. 53.*

4 *Sakaida, Henry. Imperial Japanese Navy Aces 1937-1945. Osprey Publishing: Great Britain, 1998. p.24.*

5 *Shores et al, Bloody Shambles Volume 1, Grub Street: London, 1992. p. 171. Miyano had led the Zeros of the 3rd Datai, 3rd Kokutai (Air Wing).*

6 *Source of table: Japanese Navy records reproduced in both Prime & Shores et al, Bloody Shambles Volume 1.*

7 *Prime, p.4. Note that Prime spells the name "Kawazois" instead of "Kawazoe".*

8 *Shores et al, Bloody Shambles Volume 1, Grub Street: London, 1992. p. 205.*

9 *Evidently a KNILM DC-2 or DC-3, perhaps on an internal Java flight before departing for Broome.*

10 *Sakaida, Henry. Imperial Japanese Navy Aces 1937-1945. Osprey Publishing: Great Britain, 1998. p.28.*

Chapter Two

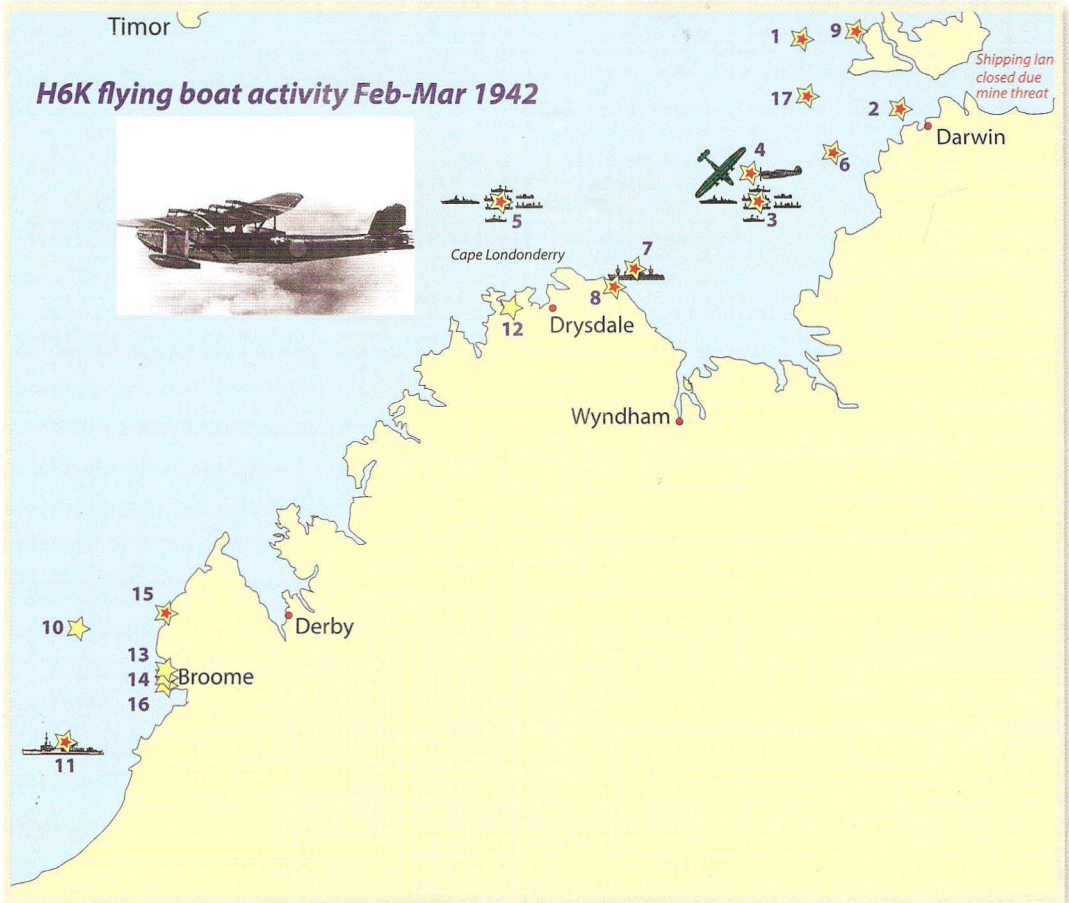
Through Japanese Eyes

The might of the Japanese war machine had first brushed against northern Australia in January 1942 when a squadron of minelaying submarines deployed into shipping lanes off Torres Strait and the approaches to Darwin. One of these 80-man submarines – the *I-124* – was sunk by the corvette *HMAS Deloraine* and other Allied forces just outside Darwin harbour on 20 January.¹ Although the war had neared Australian shores, the enemy was still some distance away. Landings were soon made at several centres in the Netherlands East Indies, as the Japanese began a lightning conquest. By early February, the Japanese had secured Ambon, 600 miles north of Darwin. From this base their aircraft were within range of northern Australia.

In early 1942 the advanced scouting for any Japanese naval operations was done by four-engined Kawanishi H6K flying boats – designated by the Allies as “Mavis”. The Japanese had excellent flying boats during WWII, having gained much knowledge from building British flying boats under licence in the 1930s. The H6K was a massive aircraft, with a wingspan of 131 feet. It had a somewhat ungainly appearance, with a parasol-type wing supported by a network of struts. However, its four powerful engines gave it a top speed of well over 200 mph – in contrast, the PBY Catalina had a maximum speed of about 175 mph.

Like most patrol planes, the H6K had an excellent endurance – around 2,500 miles when loaded – and could stay airborne for a long time, in certain conditions up to 24 hours. Usually the H6K carried a number of light bombs during its patrol missions and had a good defensive armament of machine guns in various positions plus a 20mm tail cannon.² For inexperienced attacking pilots an H6K might have looked like easy prey, essentially an old-fashioned flying boat. However it was relatively fast and the 20mm cannon was a nasty surprise for fighter pilots trying to get within machinegun range.

The Japanese advance was supported by four H6K units. One of the most important was the Toko Air Wing, which began the war with 24 H6Ks based in Formosa. These flying boats soon advanced to forward bases in the Philippines and then the Netherlands East Indies, undertaking various long-range patrol and bombing missions. By early February the unit had moved into Ambon with 19 flying boats in service. These began regular patrols out over the Timor Sea and to the Australian coast. On 15 February an H6K spotted the so-called



H6K attacks February-March 1942 (reported)*

1	8 Feb	British Sailor (aircraft type unconfirmed)
2	14 Feb	USS Peary
3	15 Feb	Timor Convoy
4	15 Feb	over convoy H6K intercepted by P-40: both shot down
5	16 Feb	Timor Convoy - squadron attack by 9 H6Ks
6	19 Feb	USS William B Preston
7	20 Feb	Koolama - 4 H6Ks, ship hit and disabled
8	21 Feb	Koolama - beached
9	22 Feb	HMAS Warrnambool
10	26 Feb	Qantas Flying Boat Circe (mid-air encounter)
11	27 Feb	USS Childs
12	28 Feb	C-53 crash site (Recon)
13	2 Mar	Broome (Recon)
14	3 Mar	Broome (Recon)
15	4 Mar	Carnot Bay - crashed KNILM DC-3
16	4 Mar	Broome (Recon)
17	5 Mar	HMAS Deloraine

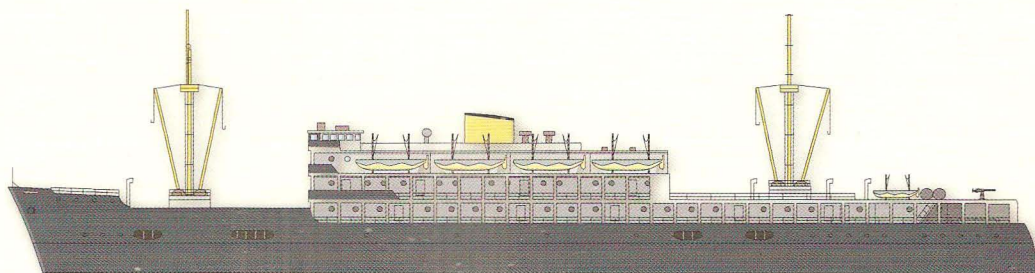
* most attacks occurred during reconnaissance missions.

“Timor Convoy” soon after it had departed Darwin, even though the convoy was staying as southwards as possible. The Allies knew from experience that once detected, air attack would inevitably follow. Even though the convoy was some distance from Darwin, a single American P-40E, piloted by a Lieutenant Buel, was able to intercept the flying boat. In the air combat that followed, both machines were shot down. At that time the convoy was probably closer to Wyndham than Darwin, and this incident probably contributed to a subsequent Japanese suspicion that fighters were based nearby.

Nevertheless, the following day the shadowing H6Ks were back on duty in the Timor Sea, by now far out of fighter range. Multiple air attacks on the convoy followed, including bombing by a formation of about 10 H6Ks. Although no ships were sunk the attacks forced the convoy to return to Darwin. Around this time, Japanese invasion convoys departed Ambon destined for Koepang and Dili in Timor. To protect against interference in this important operation, an extremely powerful group of Japanese aircraft carriers, comparable to the Pearl Harbor attack force, had assembled to the north. On 19 February the carriers sailed down into the Timor Sea and launched a devastating strike against Darwin, killing around 251 people and sinking 10 ships.³ The following day the Timor invasion forces landed and within days had driven the defenders into the hills.

The Japanese had achieved their aims. The conquest of Timor had severed the link between Darwin and Java. Now Java was isolated and would be taken, and eventually the conquest of New Guinea would follow. The carrier force would move west to support the Java operations.

Meanwhile, the dependable and wide ranging H6Ks of the Toko Air Wing had continued their patrol and screening operations over the Timor Sea. Most of the targets located were near Darwin and some of these were attacked by the flying boats. On 20 February the corvette *HMAS Warrnambool*, was rescuing survivors from a Philippine ship when an H6K attacked,



Koolama combined cargo / passenger vessel

4,068 gross tons Built: 1938 362 ft length x 54 ft beam

Owner: WA State Shipping Service Crew: ~90 Passengers: 100+ Speed: 16 kts

Armament (received in 1941): 2 x 0.303-inch Vickers MGs + 1 x 3-pounder (LA) gun aft

Modern vessel serving ports along the WA coast between Fremantle and Darwin. The isolated towns in the north west were highly reliant on both *Koolama* and her older sister-ship *Koolinda*.

but the bombs missed.⁴ On the same day, further to the west, a patrolling H6K spotted the Western Australian government supply vessel *Koolama*. Despite defensive fire from Vickers machine guns fitted to *Koolama's* bridge wings, the flying boat made an attack run and dropped three or four small bombs. Thanks to evasive manoeuvring by the ship's captain, the nearest landed harmlessly in the sea about 50 yards away.

Unfortunately for the *Koolama* and those onboard the ordeal was not over, for within an hour more H6Ks appeared overhead. Each of the attackers carried six 60kg bombs, and three of these hit the ship aft. *Koolama* suffered few casualties, but the bombs had damaged some key structural bulkheads. The normal freeboard of up to 18 feet was reduced to just five. Fortunately the engines were still working and the captain was able to steer to the nearest land, successfully beaching the ship in a remote part of the Kimberleys. A large number of *Koolama's* passengers subsequently walked overland to Drysdale Mission, while a small party of seamen stayed onboard the ship in an effort to make it seaworthy. The next day another H6K attacked the vessel with cannon fire and a few bombs, but despite the stationary target the bombs missed and no real damage was done.⁵

The H6Ks which attacked *Koolama* returned to Koepang, which had been newly occupied by Japanese forces earlier that day. Here the flying boats were met by support vessels providing mobile base facilities. By 23 February seven H6Ks were based in Koepang harbour. While flying boats operated from the harbour, there was an airfield near the city suitable for most types of aircraft. The occupation of Koepang was of enormous strategic significance. The Japanese now had a base hundreds of miles closer to Australia. Their combat aircraft could now range over much of the northern part of the continent, while their reconnaissance flying boats could penetrate even further south.

During the last week of February, Japanese interest was wholly focused on the invasion of Java. Two great invasion fleets had been assembled, and operations were at a high tempo as the Japanese sought to identify and destroy any forces that might stand in their way. This climaxed in the Battle of the Java Sea on 27 February when a multinational Australian British Dutch American (ABDA) naval force was soundly defeated. Two days later, on the morning of 1 March, the convoys landed with little opposition. Japanese air and naval forces were now focused on the area to the south of the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) to intercept the mass of ships evacuating Java. During this period, the newly arrived forces on Timor were settling in to their new bases.

Aside from the H6Ks of the Toko Air Wing, the other JNAF unit to arrive were the fighters of the 3rd Air Wing. On 23 February nine A6M Zeros and two C5M reconnaissance aircraft arrived at Koepang. Two days later these aircraft were on a patrol west of Timor when they spotted two surfaced submarines. Believing they were Dutch, the fighters strafed the

submarines which were actually the Japanese submarines *I-5* and *I-6*. *I-6* dived and escaped without harm, while *I-5* was damaged after a fire was started in the conning tower. On 1 March a merchant ship, the *Katsuragi Maru*, which was configured as an aircraft transport, docked at Koepang and delivered more A6Ms to the 3rd Air Wing. By this time the unit was near full strength and ready for offensive operations.⁶

Meanwhile the Toko Air Wing continued its reconnaissance operations over the Timor Sea, making sure no Allied naval units approached from the east to interfere with the Java operations. Actually, following the substantial raids on Darwin on 19 February there was very little naval activity in this region. Indeed, very little shipping at all routinely moved along the north-western coast of Australia, *Koolama* being one of the few. From their new base at Koepang the H6K patrols now covered the entire Kimberley region. On 26 February a USAAF transport aircraft got lost and made a forced landing on a beach in this area. Before they were picked up a few days later the crew saw Japanese patrol aircraft overhead. In late February a small number of USN seaplane tenders had gathered at Broome, but judging the location as too exposed, the ships were ordered south. On 27 February the *USS Childs*, an old WWI destroyer converted into a seaplane tender, was sailing from Broome to Exmouth Gulf when it was shadowed by a H6K. After a while the aircraft made an attack from the port beam and dropped its bombs. The *Childs* steered into the attack and the bombs missed. The flying boat then flew off to the north.⁷

Japanese eyes were on the northwest of Australia, and their forces would soon be ready to mount further attacks if necessary. So what did the Japanese know of the area and what did they expect? It seems very likely that the Japanese had good intelligence on the area, as before the war their fleets of pearling luggers were regular visitors to the coastline between Broome and Darwin - these luggers had returned to Palau by August 1941, although a "mother ship" visited Darwin as late as 29 October 1941. From the luggers Japanese Naval Intelligence would have known that there was very little of military significance along the north west of Australia, aside from Darwin to the east. Most significantly the Japanese would know that the massive tides in the northwest precluded the easy use of most of the ports. The luggers were closely watched by RAAF Hudsons, so from these flights the Japanese would have learned in some detail the locations of the RAAF Advanced Operating Bases which had been developed during 1940-1941. However, aside from occasional use by patrolling Hudsons and visiting Lockheed Electras of the local airline, the air facilities at Broome were hardly noteworthy. Up until December 1941 the very thought of an aerial route between Java and Broome would have been a far-fetched and extraordinary idea.

During 1941 the RAAF had built a "wireless telegraphy" (W/T) station at the Broome AOB, but as this needed trained coders and telegraphists, most of the time the facility was not manned. Especially as there was also a telegraph line for civilian communications, the normal amount

of radio traffic coming from Broome was a relatively small amount of civilian traffic. During February, the W/T traffic in Broome jumped significantly until it was a busy station, with a virtually constant stream of traffic. Most of this would have been coded and meaningless to an eavesdropping recipient. However, the very fact that it was coded inferred that it was military. Thus amidst all of the other streams of intelligence flooding in, the Japanese would have been alerted to an upsurge of activity in Broome.

There were no busy shipping lanes along the northwest “shoulder” of Australia, as the Java-Fremantle lane lay far to the west. Any traffic in this area would have indicated unusual activity. The bombing of the *Childs* near Broome on 27 February was one such indication. Otherwise a few other vessels were active in the area and may have been noted by Japanese reconnaissance. For example, the American steamship *Admiral Halstead*, carrying a partial cargo of aviation fuel, departed Darwin also on 27 February for Derby and Broome.⁸

The following day, 28 February, the Qantas Empire Flying Boat *Circe* was intercepted well south of Java on a course for Broome. This was perhaps the first indication for the Japanese that there was an air route between Java and Broome. No doubt Japanese reconnaissance aircraft and ships picked up other signs as well. Together with the unmistakable evidence via radio traffic, the Japanese could tell something unusual was afoot. Naturally, orders were given to investigate this further. Once again the flying boats of the Toko Air Wing were called into service. From 1 to 4 March H6Ks were ordered to conduct patrols extending to 600 miles south-west from Koepang. Essentially, this meant patrolling the Timor Sea as far south as Broome.

On 2 March an H6K circled over Broome at 13,000ft in broad daylight, noting the presence of eight large multi-engined aircraft on the airfield.¹ The flying boat was not fired on or intercepted, which indicated the town below was unprepared for air attack and probably defenceless. That night another reconnaissance flying boat made several low passes over the town, no doubt also confirming the presence of several large recently arrived seaplanes in the harbour.⁹

Such a number of large aircraft in one location represented a rich prize indeed, and the information was quickly relayed to Wing Commander Takeo Shibata, of the 3rd Air Wing, who was settling into the new base at Koepang with his force of A6M Zero fighters. Shibata grasped the importance of the reconnaissance report and ordered an immediate strike against

1 At this time there were probably four flying boats in the harbour (two USN PBV-4s and two Dutch Dorniers) plus a small SOC-3 floatplane. Although of no real consequence, this Japanese reconnaissance plane only noted aircraft on the airfield. Given the large tidal movements at Broome, the seaplanes were located a long way from the coastline, and may have been missed for this reason. Also, of the two jetties at Broome, one was a very small lugger jetty that was much closer to the airfield. This might have been mistaken for the major jetty, particularly given a restricted field of vision such as through binoculars. Otherwise, the seaplanes might have been well camouflaged against the ocean, as they were generally blue-grey in colour. Also, as they sat very low in the water, and with a high sun, they would not have had the distinctive shadows that land-planes generated.

Broome. Speed was essential as the large planes would be quickly dispersed following the sighting of the reconnaissance flight above Broome. Shibata relished the challenge - it could be argued that his background and experience were ready-made for the mission.¹⁰

Shibata had been a naval test pilot before the war and had played a big part in developing the long range characteristics of the Zero. Indeed, his view was that the Zero's long range was its best asset, and that other areas of performance should be compromised in favour of range. Given the glamour associated with the Zero early in the war it is often remembered as a nearly invincible machine. It was undoubtedly the best aircraft in its class in 1942, but it did have its shortcomings which were discovered in the months to come. Part of the reason for its success was its ability to constantly surprise the Allies and catch them unprepared. This it did wonderfully well, meaning that as a result of the Zero's excellent range it was fighting battles with the odds already far in its favour.

Perhaps the best known example of this was on the first day of the Pacific war. Zeros flying from Formosa used external fuel tanks to fly fighter missions to Manila, a distance of around 500 miles.¹¹ Allowing for combat, the fighters had to fly up to 1,200 miles in total, staying aloft for around eight hours. This was achieved by rigorous training in long distance flying and using various techniques to keep fuel consumption to an absolute minimum. Such far ranging operations were unheard of for fighters at the time, which were otherwise limited to operations close to their home airfields. The Zero squadron which attacked Broome was something of an elite in this regard – seven of the nine pilots had taken part in the Manila missions.

Allowing for navigation, the distance from Koepang to Broome is about 600 miles. With an allowance for combat over the target, the total distance flown during the mission was as much as 1,300-1,400 miles. Thus the Koepang-Broome mission exceeded even the famous Formosa-Manila missions in overall endurance. The mission would be to the extreme limit of the Zero's range, and was the longest mission flown by fighters up to that date. Such a feat would have been unimaginable just a few months beforehand. Indeed, those at Broome believed they were too far from Koepang to be raided. Contributing to this view was that because the Zeros were also flown from carriers, whenever they appeared it was inevitably blamed on a nearby carrier. To some extent this masked the great endurance of these fighters in the first months of the war.

The 3rd Air Wing was one of the two main Zero units which flew the Formosa-Manila missions from Formosa to Manila in the first days of the war. Since then the unit had advanced through the eastern NEI and with limited aerial opposition had little opportunity for further long range missions. With the 3rd Air Wing already at Koepang and ready for immediate action, there was no question of giving the mission to a bomber unit: Shibata was keen to make this mission

his own. Besides, experience had demonstrated that low level attacks were much more successful in destroying aircraft on the ground than high-level bombing. Aircraft are thin-skinned targets full of volatile material such as fuel and ammunition, so they are extremely vulnerable to strafing attacks. The Zeros carried two 20mm cannons (60 rounds per gun) and two 7.7mm machine guns (500 rpg). This armament was useful, with the 20mm cannons particularly effective for strafing attacks. However, there was only enough 20mm ammunition for a couple of short bursts, and the low muzzle velocity of the weapon meant that its effective range was little more than that of the machine guns. With only nine aircraft assigned to the mission, there was no room for wasteful use of ammunition, and Shibata ordered his pilots to avoid civilian targets. While a seemingly noble decision, the real motive was to ensure that the limited amount of ammunition hit military targets and that pilots didn't waste precious fuel lingering over the target zone. Indeed, it was evidence of the amazing skill and discipline of these particular pilots that not even a single round was noted as hitting anything but aircraft at Broome. The refuelling lighter *Nicol Bay*, for example, with drums of aviation fuel crammed onto her decks, was adjacent to the flying boats but was not hit during the attack. ♦

(Endnotes)

- 1 Lewis, Tom. *Sensuikan I-124*. Tall Stories: Darwin, 1997.
- 2 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kawanishi_H6K, accessed 24th September 2009.
- 3 Lewis, Tom. *A War at Home*. Tall Stories: Darwin, 2001. A figure of 251 is given in this book; there is some debate as to whether it should be 247 or as high as 260.
- 4 Gill, G. Hermon. *Royal Australian Navy 1939-1942*. Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1957. p.594.
- 5 Loane, Bill, *The Koolama Incident*, CDC Graphics (for author), WA, 1992; this source gives a comprehensive account of the ill-fated *Koolama*. The author was even able to contact the H6K pilot whose bombs struck the ship.
- 6 Refer to <http://www.combinedfleet.com/l-5.htm> & http://www.combinedfleet.com/Katsuragi_t.htm accessed 28th September 2009;
- 7 Messimer, Dwight R. *In the Hands of Fate, The Story of Patrol Wing 10, 8 December 1941 – 11 May 1942*. Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, 1985, p.266.
- 8 *Admiral Halstead* (3,289t; built 1920) was one of the few ships present in Darwin Harbour on 19 February 1942 to survive the raid relatively unscathed. This is all the more surprising given her cargo of 14,000 drums of aviation fuel. Just six of her crew were aboard at the time, and all received the (American) Merchant Marine Distinguished Service Medal for successfully defending the ship with just two machine-guns.
- 9 Note that H6K patrols continued after the Broome raid until at least 4th March. On that date a H6K bombed a wrecked Dutch DC-3 at Carnot Bay, north of Broome.
- 10 See Prime for Shibata's biographical details and correspondence from him.
- 11 Saki, Saburo, Martin Caidin, and Fred Sato. *Samurai!* First published 1957 (reprinted 2001 by ibooks, New York). Written by a Japanese fighter ace, Chapter 7 describes in detail the planning and execution of the Manila missions.

Kawanishi H6K4 "Mavis"

Specifications

Long Range Maritime Reconnaissance / Bomber flying-boat

Propulsion: 4 x 1,070hp engines

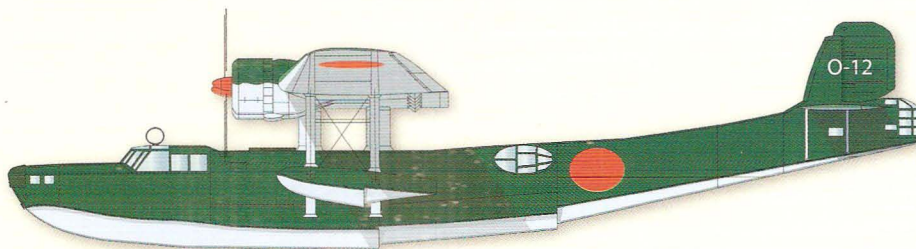
Speed: 213mph max; 150mph cruise

Range: 3,000 miles normal

Weight: 21,500 lb max loaded

Crew: 9

Armament: 4 x 7.7mm Type 92 MGs (bow position, L & R blisters & dorsal); 1 x 20mm Type 99 Model 1 Cannon (tail); plus up to 2,200lb of bombs or two torpedoes.



H6K4 "Mavis" flying boat. Aircraft of the Toko Air Wing carried the serial prefix "O". This depiction represents hypothetical aircraft O-12.

In early 1942 the Kawanishi H6K "Mavis" was the main flying boat used by the JNAF. An elegant parasol wing design, it was an enormous aircraft, one of the largest flying boats of its time. Their very long range and heavy armament made the H6K a very effective aircraft.

For a period during February and March 1942, H6K flying boats of the Toko Air Wing patrolled the northern Australian coastline on a near daily basis. Largely due to the successful screen put up by these flying boats, a reinforcement convoy bound for Timor was forced to return to Darwin in mid-February. During this operation, a P-40 from Darwin intercepted a H6K that was shadowing the convoy. As it fired on the big flying boat it too came under fire, probably from the 20mm cannon in the tail of the H6K. Both aircraft were shot down at the same time. The P-40 pilot, Lieutenant Buel, USAAF, was killed but some of the flying boat crew survived, eventually reaching Bathurst Island where they were taken prisoner.¹

A few days later, on 20 February, the motor vessel *Koolama* was spotted by a patrolling H6K as it rounded Cape Londonderry on its way to Wyndham. As the H6K circled the ship, a few rounds were fired from *Koolama's* antique 3-pounder gun. This was mainly for effect, as the gun could only be elevated to 15°. Potentially more effective were two Vickers machineguns mounted on either side of the bridge. But the civilian sailors manning the guns had only had very basic instruction on their use, and their firing was probably ineffective. The flying boat replied with machinegun and cannon fire, before making an approach and dropping three bombs. The captain, meanwhile, was steering an evasive course ("while trying not to be obvious about it") so that the nearest bomb fell harmlessly over 100 feet away. After shadowing the ship for a while longer, the flying boat flew away to the north.²

An hour later, at 13.30, three H6K flying boats were sighted. Evidently they had been alerted by the first H6K while already in the air. The planes, from Ambon, were led by Lieutenant Commander Tsunaki Yonehara. From a low altitude of only about 2,500ft they began a bombing run at the ship. After estimating the speed of *Koolama* and getting some idea of its manoeuvres, Yonehara released a single bomb as a "sighter". He did not expect it to hit, but to his amazement it did. At this time, the *Koolama's* captain ordered the crew to light oil filled drums that were placed around the deck. This was done to create smoke, and also the impression that the vessel was mortally hit.

Each of the H6Ks was carrying six relatively small 60kg bombs. With all of the smoke, there was much confusion, but all of the 18 bombs were subsequently dropped, of which two more hit the ship. Another

bomb crashed through one of the decks but lay unexploded inside the hull. In any event, within 30 minutes the flying boats quickly departed the area, as it was in the same vicinity that a H6K had been shot down by Buel a few days earlier. They left *Koolama* in serious difficulty, well down at the stern. The light bombs had done just enough structural damage to enable water to flow into the vessel's stern. The normal freeboard aft was 14-18 feet, but this was soon only five feet. Fearing the vessel would sink, the captain turned towards the nearby coastline where he skilfully beached *Koolama*, albeit in a very remote area. Fortunately, there were few casualties as a result of the attack among the considerable number of passengers onboard. They were taken off the ship to a camp nearby, and all would make it eventually to safety.³

At 11.30 the next morning another Kawanishi flying boat appeared, descending gradually as if feeling out the wreck for resistance. Then there was a long blast of machine-gun or cannon fire, following by the explosions of three bombs. Despite *Koolama* being a stationary target, they all missed. Fortunately the survivors' camp was some distance away, and was not detected by the aircraft. The captain had rigged the vessel to look like an abandoned wreck, with derricks hanging outboard and all the boats gone (they were at the camp or hidden nearby). This ruse seemed to work, as for the next week the vessel lay in the same position but was not attacked again.

After attacking *Koolama* on 20 February, the three H6Ks led by Yonehara flew into Dutch Timor's Koepang, which Japanese forces had only just occupied. The base was significant as H6Ks could now patrol along the north-west coast of Australia to Broome and beyond. Towards the end of February they began appearing in this area, as evidenced by the attack on *USS Childs* by a single H6K as it steamed from Broome to Exmouth Gulf. From 1 March, the flying boats began flying patrols from Koepang to 600 miles south-west, which essentially meant over the Timor Sea to Broome and back.⁴ It was reconnaissance reports from a H6K over Broome on 2 March that led to the raid the following day. Following that, H6Ks continued to roam over the area for several more days. On 4th March a H6K dropped some light bombs on the DC-3 wreck at Carnot Bay, and the next day another was seen as far south as Port Hedland.

However, Japanese attention was now turning to the central Indian Ocean, and by the end of March the Toko Air Wing had moved most of its strength there. Possibly the intention was to leave a small detachment in Timor, as towards the end of March RAAF Hudsons encountered up to six H6Ks in Koepang harbour. The Hudsons subsequently claimed at least two H6Ks destroyed and another four damaged, before the flying boat unit vacated the area altogether.

(Endnotes)

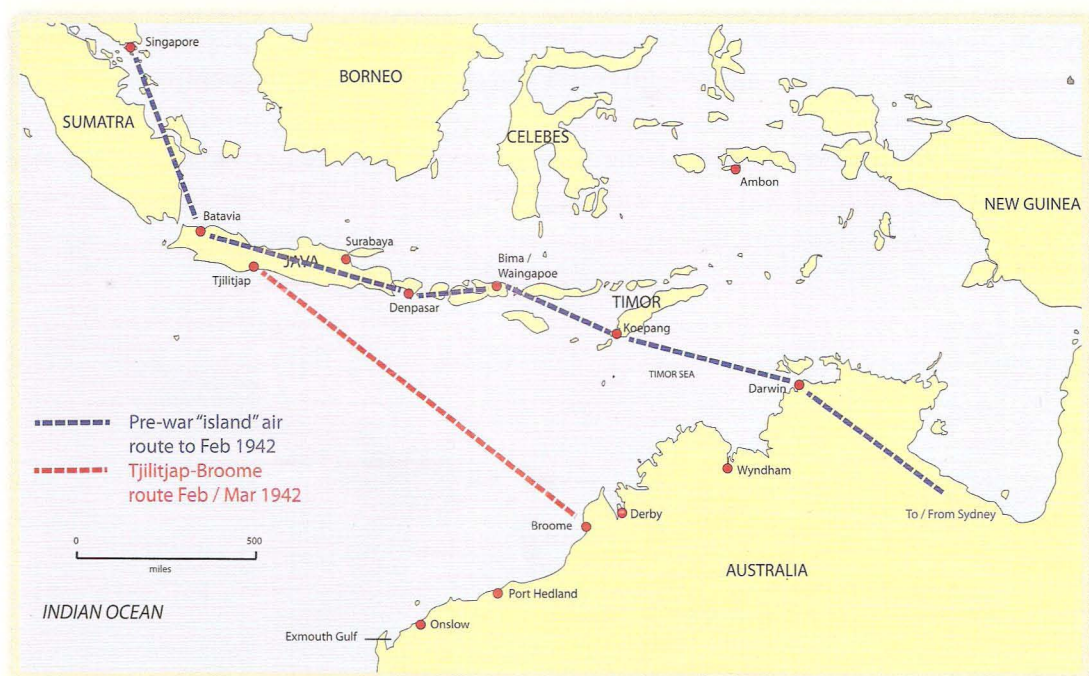
1. Shores et al. *Bloody Shambles Volume 2*, Grub Street, London, 1992, p.174-175. Five survivors were captured on Bathurst Island on 3 March, wrongly reporting they were from a sunken merchant ship, the *Myoken Maru*. AWM 78 400/2 Pt 4.
2. Loane, Bill. *The Koolama Incident*. CDC Graphics (for author): WA, 1992. This source is relied on in regard to the attack and subsequent loss of the *Koolama*. The author was in direct contact with the pilot of the H6K.
3. There is some controversy over the actions of some crew members who fell into disagreement with *Koolama's* captain. Loane, above, is recommended for further reading.
4. Prime, p.41.

Chapter 3

March 1942 - War in Western Australia

As news of the Pearl Harbor attacks ended 1941, the townsfolk of Broome had good reason to believe that the war would pass them by. Located on the lonely north-west shoulder of the Australian continent, Broome was far from international trade routes or anything else of strategic significance. The only local military activity was an occasional visit by an RAAF Hudson patrol plane, keeping an eye on local Japanese lugger movements. To enable this activity the RAAF had upgraded the civilian airfield and installed communications and refuelling facilities. Despite these upgrades, the base was only designed for use by no more than two medium aircraft each day.

But just at this time military planners were hinting at the potential strategic value of Broome.



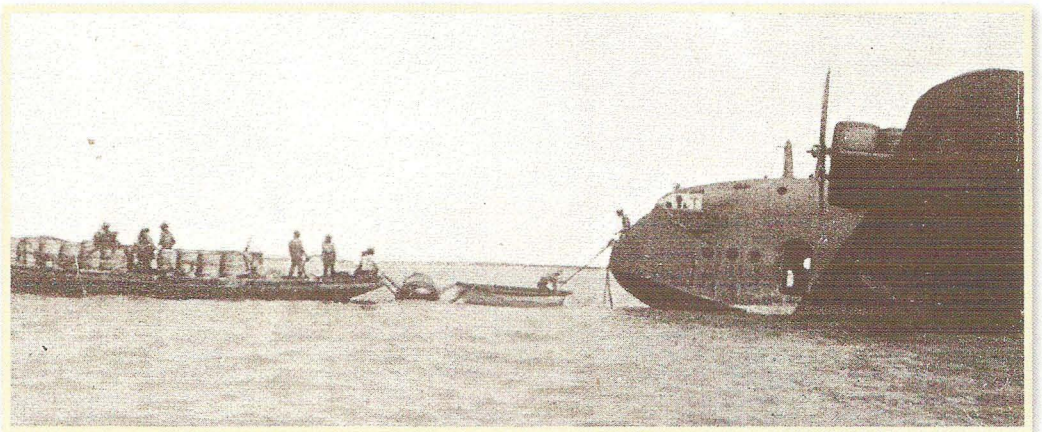
The reason why Broome became strategically significant. The established "island" route had a maximum over-water leg of 500 miles between Timor and Darwin. The new Java-Broome route was more than double this distance, all over-water. It was flown for the first time on 4 February by a KNILM DC-3. Qantas made the first flying boat flight over the same route four days later.

Following consultation with Australian officials in November 1941, the USAAF wanted Broome as an alternate base for hypothetical bombers operating from Timor. Over £50,000 was budgeted to extend the main runway at Broome and to construct taxiways and other facilities needed by the bombers. Some 75 American airmen would be based there to service visiting aircraft.¹

In due course these particular plans were not implemented. But the location of Broome as an alternate bomber base, particularly in regard to the Darwin area, was obvious. To operate safely, USAAF heavy bombers needed 5,000 foot runways, preferably sealed. These massive aircraft also needed plenty of taxiways, parking bays and turning areas, all properly engineered with at least eight inches of consolidated gravel support. Otherwise the bombers, being so heavy, would sink into the ground. Another requirement was 100-octane fuel, a different standard than that used by the RAAF.

In comparison, Broome had two 3,600ft runways (unsealed) with just four inches of consolidated gravel support, and there was little in the way of parking bays and taxiways. On the positive side, the site could be easily developed as it had excellent natural drainage. Also, there was a plentiful supply of gravel nearby which was needed to extend and strengthen the runway surfaces. In view of the rapidly developing strategic situation urgent action was needed. In this case the bureaucracy acted with commendable speed and before the end of December an airfield development contract had been let to Bell Brothers of Perth. Early in the new year the contractor was on site with trucks and earth-moving equipment.

Meanwhile the Japanese were advancing through South East Asia at an astounding rate. During January 1942 forward bases were acquired which allowed their fighters to range



Refuelling the Empire Flying Boat Coriolanus at Broome in late February 1942. On the left is the lugger modified by Qantas for refuelling duties. Its masts and other deck fittings have been removed to maximise deck space for fuel drums. However, the lugger still held only enough fuel for a single flying boat. In the centre is one of the moorings laid by the Nicol Bay. Note the calm seas – just a week beforehand Broome was being battered by cyclonic weather conditions. (Authors' collection)

over the "Island Air Route";² which linked Australia and the Netherlands East Indies. On 30 January the Qantas flying boat *Corio* was shot down near Timor. The Australian Department of Civil Aviation ("Aviat") ordered Qantas to cease using the Island Route, and "to organise immediately an effective connection with Java to the most convenient point on the West Australian coast."³

At this time there were no flying boat facilities along the WA coast.⁴ Broome was the obvious choice for such a base, as it was the largest town in the north-west. The distance between Tjilitjap, on the south coast of Java, and Broome was roughly 1,150 miles, all of it over water. This was more than twice as long as the longest over-water leg on the Island Route, but such flights were well within the capacity of the Qantas Empire Flying Boats.⁵

Not so easy, however, was the job of installing base facilities in Broome from scratch in such a short time. Beginning on 4 February, a number of Aviat and Qantas personnel trickled into the town to set up and operate the base. A pearling lugger was acquired for refuelling purposes. Otherwise just a single motor-whaleboat was acquired for water transport duties. A disused cottage was rented as a shore base, and passenger accommodation was available in local hotels. In this way a bare minimum of base facilities was set up.⁶

The first Qantas flying boat in Broome, *Corinna*, arrived on 8 February after an eight hour flight from Tjilitjap. It landed amid cyclonic weather conditions that had just descended on the town. Without the use of permanent moorings, *Corinna* had to rely on its own small anchor to secure itself and was in constant danger of being blown ashore. After a risky refuelling operation alongside the lugger *Corrina* departed for Sydney on 10 February. With continuing atrocious weather, it would be another week before the next flying boat arrived.

While Qantas was switching from the Island Air Route to fly Java-Broome direct, a parallel operation was undertaken by KNILM⁷ using land-planes. KNILMs airliners flew typical legs of up to 500-600 miles with their full load of passengers. To do this safely, especially given the unpredictable nature of tropical weather, a significant reserve of fuel was needed so most had an actual range exceeding 1,000 miles. This meant that a flight from Java to Broome was approaching the range limit of the KNILM planes. The lack of navigational landmarks over-water was an additional risk factor.⁸

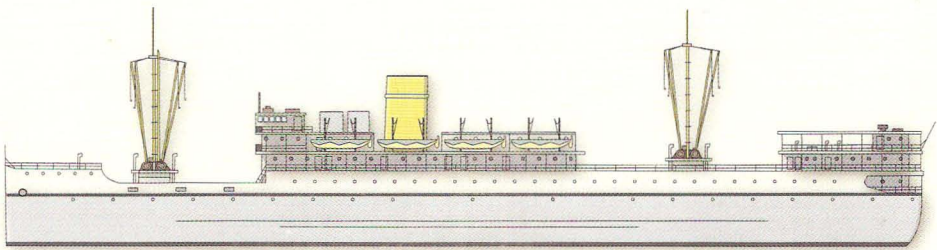
A proving flight from Java to Broome was made, without incident, on 4 February. The aircraft involved, DC-3 PK-AFZ, was specially fitted out for long range flying, and Captain Eddie Dunlop, was one of the most experienced Dutch pilots. The first westwards flight from Broome to Java was flown soon after this, but there was now a halt to operations for almost two weeks because of inclement weather conditions at Broome.⁹

By the middle of the month, Singapore had surrendered and the long distance Qantas route was permanently severed. More Qantas flying boats arrived in Broome from Tjilitjap, and a fleet of six was now in Australia. A new role was quickly negotiated for them. Qantas was contracted to provide an air service between Tjilitjap and Broome on behalf of the US Army.

Also at this time the Japanese moved to sever the Island Air Route permanently. Darwin was heavily attacked on 19 February, and Timor was occupied the next day. Together with air attacks on Java, these events were the catalyst for the execution of a KNILM evacuation plan. This plan had been drawn up following the successful proving flight to Broome early in the month. The primary goal was not to open up an evacuation shuttle service but to evacuate the valuable airliners themselves to avoid capture by the enemy. Accordingly, nine airliners arrived in Broome on 20 February.¹⁰

These airliners comprised six Douglasses and three Lockheeds. Such was the extreme and marginal nature of these flights, even with weight-saving measures such as the removal of all internal seating, most of the fleet was limited to carrying only eight passengers. Most of these planes continued on across the continent to Sydney despite their light loads. The flight to Sydney and back was a long one, usually lasting three-four days.

The reasons for this seemingly unnecessary flying to Sydney is unclear. It seems that not only were the Dutch trying to keep their airliners from falling into the hands of the Japanese, but that they did not want the Americans to have them either. Perhaps it was no coincidence that on 19 February, the same day that the KNILM evacuation began, American air force staff on Java "finally received authority to commandeer civilian planes".¹¹ Thus the airliners probably



Koolinda combined cargo / passenger vessel

4,371 gross tons

Built: 1926

330 ft length x 50 ft beam

Owner: WA State Shipping Service

Passengers: 162

Speed: 15 kts

Koolinda was the older sister-ship of *Koolama*. During the first weeks of the war *Koolinda* helped evacuate Darwin and also shipped south 228 Japanese internees from Broome. In February the vessel was fortunate to avoid the enemy. She slipped safely past Cape Londonderry and then passed *Koolama* a day before the latter vessel was attacked. Arriving in Broome on 20 February, *Koolinda* was held to enable 123 women and children to embark. It arrived safely in Fremantle a short time later.

made lengthy and unnecessary flights to keep them out of reach of the Americans, or to reduce the number of risky flights back into Java.

Indeed, only a handful of flights back into Java were made. For example, of the nine airliners that flew into Broome on 20 February, just one returned immediately to Java. This was DC-3 PK-AFV piloted by the famous aviator Captain Evert Van Dijk.¹² This flight was made safely, but another demonstrated the hazards of flying back into Java at such long range. DC-3 PK-AFZ departed Broome for Java on 26 February. Over Java it encountered bad weather and eventually crashed. Very soon after this incident, KNILM ceased flying back into Java altogether.¹³



Rare colour photo of USAAF B-17E bombers in formation. Over a dozen B-17Es identical to these made the evacuation flight from Java to Broome around 1st March, and two were still present on the airfield on the morning of 3 March 1942. (United States Air Force)

During February Broome had become a centre of ever increasing activity, and a general evacuation of women and children was ordered.¹⁴ A short time later the *Koolinda* departed Broome for Fremantle with 123 women and children onboard. Meanwhile, an aerial evacuation of the wider Kimberley region was begun. Some 150 evacuees were flown out of Derby and Wyndham by chartered airliners loading 30 women and children per flight.¹⁵

Mirroring the aerial activity between Java and Broome was a domestic shuttle operation mainly between Perth and Broome. These flights brought up military supplies for onward shipment to Java via the Qantas service. Evacuees, both domestic and international, boarded the empty planes flying south, which consisted of an odd assortment of mainly US military and Australian civil aircraft. However even these flights were not without risk. On 26 February a USAAF C-53 accidentally overflowed Broome just after nightfall. The plane was wrecked in a forced landing far to the north. Fortunately those onboard survived.

All of this activity was resulting in more wear and tear on the Broome runways, and somehow Bell Brothers contractors were trying to work amid the increased movements. The following report gave a snap-shot of conditions at Broome on 26 February:

The pilots ... consider the field at Broome very inadequate for heavy bombing aircraft....There is a definite tendency for the wheels to sink into the earth...No dispersion area around the field is provided. Much work is going on at the field making it difficult to manoeuvre aircraft without running the risk of bumping into something. The field is lacking in servicing, transportation and housing facilities.¹⁶

Just at this time the USAAF began to take an interest in Broome as a way of evacuating its heavy bomber force from Java. While these large aircraft could fly directly from Java to Darwin, there was a risk of fighter interception along this flightpath and Darwin had proven to be unsafe.¹⁷ The only real alternative was Broome, far to the south and seemingly safe from attack.

The Americans rushed three aerodrome engineers to Broome to report on its status. In fact they had the wider task of advising on whether to “materially develop” the northwest area for bomber operations or instead to evacuate further south.¹⁸ Broome airfield was exposed and completely undefended, and there were no dispersal fields nearby. The engineers visited nearby Derby and Wyndham airfields, but found them totally unsuitable. As a result, the USAAF would use Broome only as an evacuation stepping-stone and would properly regroup in Melbourne.

Fortunately a critical load of 100-octane aviation fuel was en route to Broome. This had been loaded on the elderly coastal steamship *Period* in Darwin, which sailed as soon as the cyclonic weather cleared. It arrived in Broome on 18 February, but the lack of wharf labour and the tides meant it was not fully unloaded for another six days.

On 22 February a USAAF Liberator arrived, carrying a number of staff officers from Java (evidently the B-24 was able to land on the “short” runway at Broome because of its light load). This was the very first of the huge four-engined heavy bombers in the northwest – all other flights had used airfields in the Darwin area. On this flight was Colonel Perrin, USAAF, tasked with organising an evacuation centre.¹⁹ What Perrin found was worrying. The contractors were on site at the aerodrome, but their work would not be finished for eight weeks. Of more immediate concern was the increasingly uneven and rutted runway surface. The problem was highlighted by Perrin’s Liberator, which had a tricycle landing gear that dug deeply into the soft surfaces. So serious was the problem that on 24 February an Aviat aerodrome inspector stated that the runways would be unserviceable within 48 hours unless urgent action was taken.

With conflicting demands for maintenance and development, the aerodrome contractor was becoming overwhelmed. They had heavy equipment, but to meaningfully accelerate the work, labour was needed. There were large numbers of Asian lugger crewmen still present in Broome. Perrin was able to redirect them to the airfield, and within a day or two 180 men were hard at work on the runways. The men were relatively well paid by the Americans, and by all accounts they did an outstanding job. Every daylight hour was spent working on the field, with meals served where the men worked.

Under Perrin’s direction an enormous amount was achieved in just a few days, roughly akin to

what would normally have taken two months. The main runway was extended to 5,000ft, and the already damaged and rutted surfaces were smoothed. The large bombers could now land at Broome, and to enable them to manoeuvre large turning circles were built. In addition, new taxiways and hardstand areas enabled dispersal off the runways. These surfaces were supported by an 8-9 inch consolidated gravel base, as opposed to the 4-6 inch previous standard. This work was begun around the 24 February and quickly got into full swing. Amazingly, the bulk of it was performed over the next three days. On 1 March the aerodrome handled its peak of 57 movements in a single day.²⁰

The site had been transformed into a facility that met every demand asked of it during the upcoming operations. Lieutenant Rouse, USAAF, commented that “This place looks like La Guardia Field at its busiest. The entire small aerodrome is covered with ships”.²¹ Commander Branson, RN, praised the “drome the Americans had built” (sic) as a “particularly fine one capable of handling the largest aircraft”.²² The race against time had been won in a most unlikely manner.

On 24 February, while the work was getting started, the first B-17 landed in Broome. It carried five USAAF officers, and Perrin gave each officer a particular responsibility: messing/rations, housing, aircraft servicing etc.²³ It was largely due to Perrin’s leadership and the initiative of these officers that a working evacuation centre was quickly up and running. Some supplies were flown up from the south, and the local Volunteer Defence Corps helped to draw on local resources. Accommodation was allocated from vacant housing, and a kitchen was set up in a school. In this manner food and shelter would be provided for hundreds of evacuees.

With the sure knowledge that Broome was available for evacuation, the USAAF was able to keep its combat planes fighting in Java right up until the Japanese landings on the island. The aircraft were supported by a skeletal ground staff, consisting of just enough men that

Nicol Bay auxiliary ketch / motor lighter

56t Built: 1925

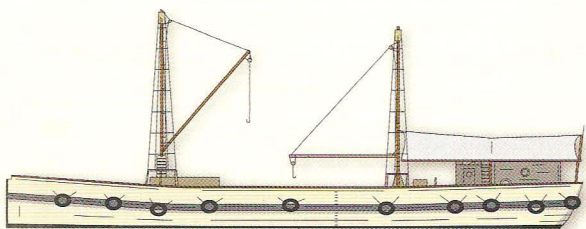
65.4 ft length x 20.5 ft beam

Owner: Cossack Lighterage Company

Crew: 6 Passengers: 16

Cruising speed: 8 kts (est)

Armament: nil

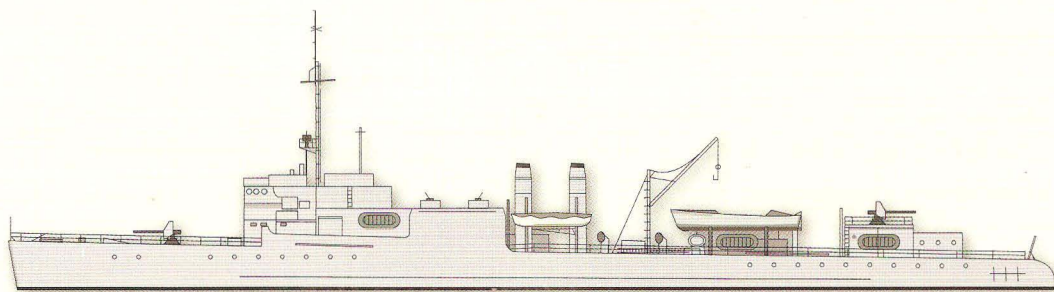


Nicol Bay was a purpose-built vessel used for lighterage along the north-west coast. It arrived in Broome on 17 February to set up permanent flying boat moorings for Qantas. However, it was quickly realised that *Nicol Bay* could function as a useful base ship for flying boats, as it could carry ten times more fuel than the single refuelling lugger already in use. *Nicol Bay* was requisitioned to ensure it remained in Broome to provide these services, but its civilian crew under master Captain Harold Mathiesen continued to operate the vessel.

could be flown out on the planes themselves. As soon as the runways at Broome were able to accommodate fully loaded bombers, aerial evacuation flights began on a modest scale. On 26 February two B-17s arrived in Broome with twelve passengers each. The following day saw more flights, now with up to 20 passengers squeezed into each plane.

On 28 February, about 450 USAAF men were still in Java. The Japanese invasion convoys were now approaching Java and landing operations would begin that night. The last few desperate air missions were flown, but the fate of Java now depended on the ground forces and the USAAF evacuation began in earnest. Virtually all of these men were flown out in heavy bombers on 1 March. The last batch of bombers did not leave until around midnight, which meant they would arrive in Broome after dawn on 2 March when other planes would have already departed the crowded field at first light. To ensure all of the men could be flown out on these final flights, the limit of 20 passengers per plane was ignored. Three LB-30 Liberators each carried 35 men, while five B-17s carried 31 men each. These planes lifted off from Jogjakarta airbase just as the Dutch engineers began blowing demolition charges.

So it was that the USAAF evacuation of Java was successfully completed using the makeshift facilities at Broome. In this way Broome had become established as the *de facto* evacuation destination. However, a flood of less well-planned flying boat evacuations was about to descend on the small town with horrific consequences.



USS Childs AVD-1 Destroyer-Seaplane Tender

1,900t	318 ft (length) x 31 ft (beam)	Max speed: 25 kts
Armament:	2 x 4-inch Low Angle guns 4 x 0.50 cal watercooled Browning MGs (AA)	
Capacity:	Designed to support up to 12 flying boats in forward locations, <i>Childs</i> carried 50,000 gallons of aviation fuel and other supplies, as well as two 30-ft launches for tending flying boats.	

USS Childs was built as a destroyer just after WWI before conversion into a seaplane tender. The result was highly successful, and more conversions followed including *USS William B Preston*. Both ships were present in Broome in late February 1942, although *Preston* was badly damaged. Subsequently *Childs* oversaw the successful evacuation of Java by USN PBVs into the relative sanctuary of Exmouth Gulf. *Childs* had enough capacity to have theoretically serviced the ex-Java flying boats of all nationalities, should they have been re-directed to Exmouth Gulf.

Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress

Specifications¹

Heavy Bomber

4 x 1,200hp engines

Speed: 317mph max; cruise 226mph;

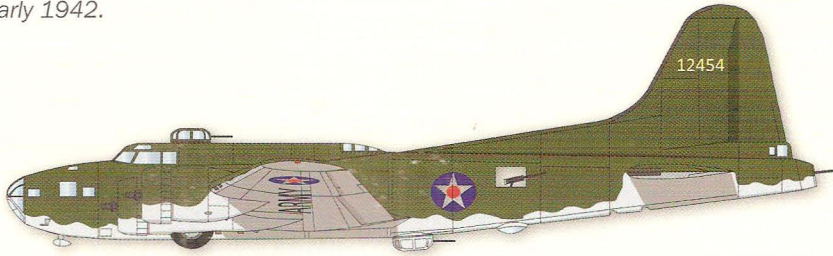
Range: 3,200 miles (ferry); ~2,000 miles loaded. Weight: 53,000lb max loaded

Crew: 8+

Capacity: max 20 passengers + crew (as bomber)

Armament: 4,200 lbs bombload in internal bomb-bay; 1 x 0.30-inch Browning MG (nose); 8 x 0.50-inch Browning M2 MGs (3 x twin in dorsal, ventral turrets & tail; single in L & R waist).

Notes: This was the first Flying Fortress model to be produced in quantity. Most importantly it introduced a tail turret. Fast and well armed, these were the best aerial weapons available to the ABDA allies in early 1942.



The two B-17Es lost at Broome were the 56th and 62nd B-17Es manufactured, and were fitted with a remotely controlled belly-turret, as illustrated here.

(Endnotes)

1. See <http://home.att.net/~jbaugher2/b17.html> (accessed 22 July 2009) for a breakdown of B-17 variants and their specifications.

Two days before it was raided, on the afternoon of 1 March 1942, Lieutenant-Colonel Legge of the United States Army Air Force, flew into Broome to take command of the evacuation centre.²⁴ His predecessor, Lieutenant-Colonel Perrin, also American, had done much in just a few days, from overseeing emergency expansion and repairs to the airfield to the establishment of the evacuation centre itself. Leaving Legge in charge at Broome, the more experienced Perrin flew south to Perth. From there he coordinated the trans-continental movement of ex-Java USAAF personnel and aircraft from Western Australia to Laverton air force base in Melbourne. Virtually all of this was done using Liberators and Flying Fortresses in a transport capacity.

In Broome Legge was in charge of all of the personnel moving through from Java to Australia. The short-lived ABDA alliance was still in force, and Broome was part of the northern Australian territory assigned to ABDA. Thus Legge had authority over all of the multinational forces moving through the small town. Technically this did not extend to the local defence forces or Australian civilians, and this was made known to him explicitly by some organisations, such as Qantas. In practice, the majority of those in the town extended every assistance to the American headquarters set up in the offices of the Broome Roads Board. This was centrally located, with both the airfield and the harbour a short distance away.

Consolidated B-24A Liberator

Specifications¹

Long Range Transport

4 x 1,200hp engines

Speed: 292mph max; cruise 228mph;

Range: 4000 miles (ferry); ~2,000 miles loaded.

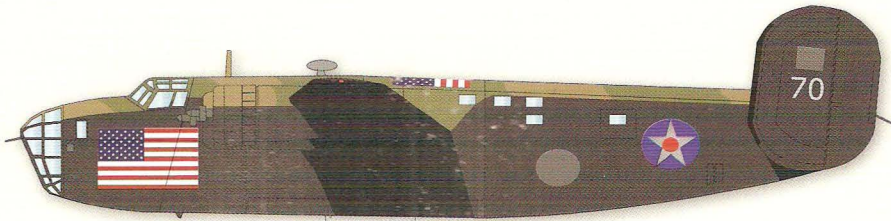
Weight: 46,400lb max

Crew: 6

Capacity: max 35 persons (incl crew)

Armament: no bombload; twin 0.30-inch MGs (tail); 4 x single 0.5-inch MGs (nose, belly, L & R waist)

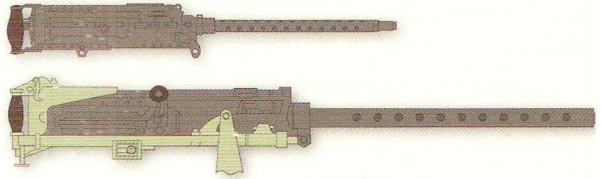
Notes: over 18,000 Liberator heavy bombers were built during WWII, but just nine "A" models were made. They were among the very first B-24s to enter service in 1941. Lacking bomb-bay mechanisms, they served as specialised transports, initially with Ferry Command. B-24As have a 3-ft shorter nose than the characteristic B-24, and lacked the gun turrets of later variants.



B-24A 40-2370, which was shot down off Broome on 3 March 1942. Pre-December 1941 it had received large American flags as neutrality markings. These were probably painted over by the time of the Broome operations.

Comparison of the Browning 0.30-inch (above right) and Browning 0.50-inch (below right) aerial machine guns.

B-24As had single 0.50s mounted in the nose, belly and waist positions and twin 0.30s in the tail behind a set of sliding doors. It was the latter guns that probably downed a Zero off Broome.



In 1941 the B-24A was the best transport aircraft available to the USAAF. Seats had been installed in place of the bomb-bay so that a couple of dozen passengers could be transported very long distances. These aircraft were increasingly wide ranging. In September 1941 two B-24As flew to Moscow and effectively circumnavigated the world. However, a limitation was the need for long, well-engineered runways (in Broome the B-24As sunk into the soft runway surfaces and created deep ruts).

After the Pacific War began, one of the B-24As was used in Australia as the personal aircraft of Major-General Brett. It was joined by three B-24As sent from the US. All four saw extensive use flying senior officers between southern Australia and Java, while urgently needed supplies were flown as far afield as the Philippines. Three of the pilots in particular (Funk, Hutchison & Davis) were described as "indefatigable" in flying virtually non-stop during this hectic period.

The arrival of such large and modern aircraft at RAAF bases was something of a novelty at this time. On 27 February 1942 a B-24A landed at Pearce airbase, distracting the trainees of Number 5 Initial Training School so much that lessons ceased for the day and they were given a close inspection of the aircraft.²

All four B-24As combined to fly around 100 evacuees out of Java on the night of 28 February. Other known movements are Appendix 4. Three of these planes were lost at Broome, one after aerial combat with a Zero. As detailed in Chapter 3, the B-24A tail gunner is believed to have shot down the Zero in return.

The stream of American bombers fleeing invasion from the north were crammed full with personnel. After they refuelled at Broome, they took off for the south with reduced numbers of passengers onboard. Other evacuees had reached Broome by Qantas flying boats, various Dutch aircraft, and around a hundred had arrived on a naval seaplane tender. Others were Australian civilians from outlying settlements in the north-west. In this manner a pool of a few hundred evacuees had built up, and for the first two days of March more people were coming into Broome than were leaving.

Legge, described by one Java veteran as “a new man out from the States”²⁵ and by another source as “melodramatic”, became convinced that Broome was the target for enemy subterfuge.²⁶ The town was hot and uncomfortable at night, with insects making sleep difficult for those in makeshift accommodation. Many slept in hallways or on verandas. During the night of 2 March a Japanese reconnaissance plane circled the town. This put many present on edge, fully expecting a Japanese raid followed by an invasion. The plane was overhead for sometime, circling low and waking up the entire town. Within a few minutes Legge and other USAAF men were in the main street looking up into the darkness. They could clearly see, just a few hundred feet (around 50 metres) above them, a huge twin-tail Kawanishi flying boat with pale undersurfaces and red circles painted under each wing. Just then, from nearby on one horizon came the distinctive white flashes of a signalling lamp, interrupting the darkness.

“Damn it!” Legge might have said as his men gathered around him. “There’s some fifth columnists at work, sending messages to the Jap plane!” He and a few of his officers took their pistols and some torches and began searching, ready to shoot any signaller they found.²⁷ But the signalling soon stopped and the enemy plane departed. Later it was discovered the signalling was from RAAF men at the airfield, worried a friendly plane was about to crash into their 150 foot radio antenna mast.

As dawn broke further sounds of aircraft approaching were heard but these were expected. Soon, through the early morning haze, the familiar silhouettes of further passenger aircraft could be seen, flaps and undercarriages down, making their final approaches to the main 103 degree runway. As their tyres hit the ground clouds of dust were thrown up from the unsealed surface.

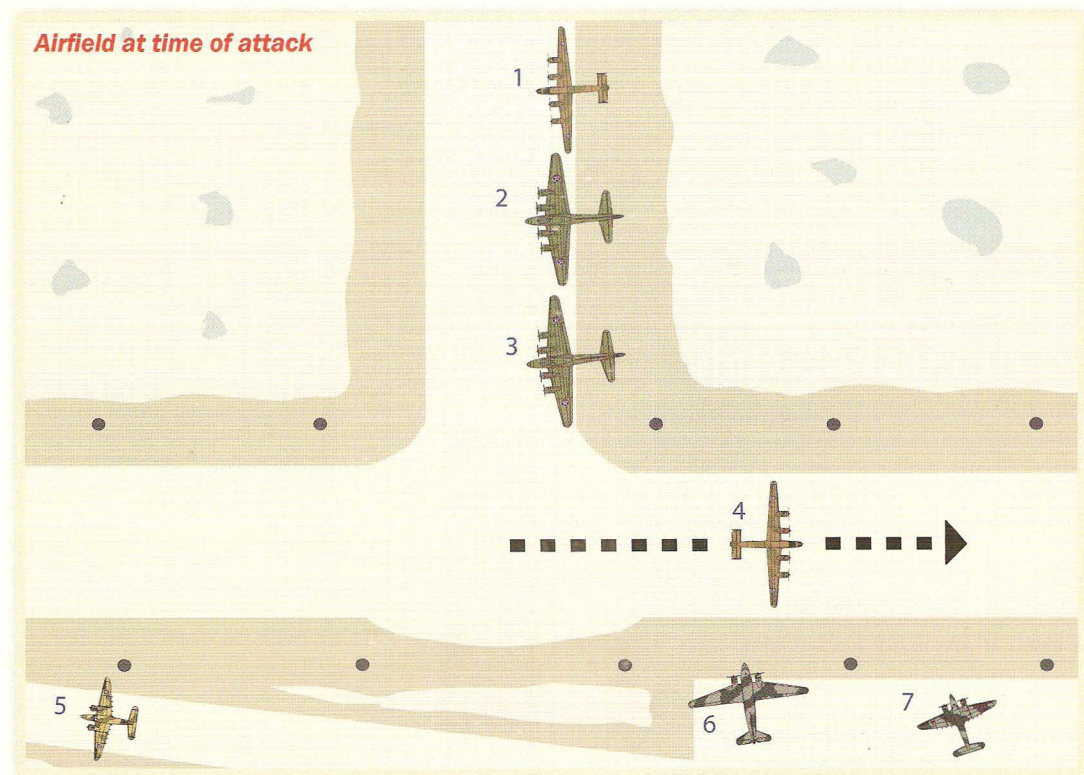
Within minutes the planes taxied to a stop, doors opening and short



Colt MG40 7.7mm aircraft machine gun, one of several such weapons held by the Broome Museum. This is identical to the weapon used by Gus Winckel on 3 March 1942. When fired from aircraft the barrel is designed to be cooled by the slipstream. In Winckel's case it would have been too hot to hold after just a few seconds of firing. He rested the barrel on his forearm which was badly burnt. (Authors' collection)

metal stairways unfolding. War-weary passengers disembarked, utterly exhausted from a lack of sleep in the uncomfortable cabins. Broome was a strange sanctuary, all red dirt scrub and heat with a few iron roofs here and there in the distance. There was little on the aerodrome to indicate they were anywhere at all. Some other planes and odd stacks of fuel drums were all that could be seen in most directions. A few brown-skinned workmen were spreading gravel on one side of the runway, beside a truck and roller, both filthy with dust. On the door of the truck, through the dust could be read the name of the contractor "Bell Bros." Aside from this activity, in one corner of the vast area there were signs of civilisation: an iron hangar, some newly-built air force huts and the tall metal-lattice radio mast, fastened with long oblique cables. Just beyond this area was the town itself, literally adjacent to the airfield.

Most people were surprised to be greeted, not by an Australian, but by one of the young USAAF lieutenants in charge of the evacuation centre.²⁸ As the crew of the aircraft stayed with the plane to supervise refuelling, the evacuees, mostly too tired to talk, were driven away in a motley collection of local civilian vehicles. After a short drive through the broad dusty



This diagram represents the relative positions of aircraft on Broome Aerodrome at approximately 9.30am 3 March 1942. The B-24A "Arabian Nights" is taking off on the main runway, while the other large bombers present are parked on the second runway.

1. USAAF B-24A 40-2374

3. USAAF B-17E 41-2454

5. RAAF Hudson A16-119 (stopped while taxiing)

7. ML-KNIL Lodestar LT-918

2. USAAF B-17E 41-2449

4. USAAF B-24A 40-2370 Arabian Nights (taking off)

6. KNILM DC-3 PK-ALO

streets of the town, the people were brought to a schoolhouse where they sat on children's benches and were fed by elderly Australian army cooks. For most of the civilian evacuees this was their experience of Broome. But after the stress of leaving Java, they did not complain. They were happy to be doing nothing and to at least be en route to somewhere far away from the war. After an hour or two, they were loaded back into their aircraft. All were flown south; many then went east. However, other aircraft and flying boats came in overloaded, or returned directly to Java. In this way a growing number of mainly military men were billeted around the small town until they were allocated to a flight south. The hotels had been overfilled for days so many private houses were now used, their owners having evacuated south themselves.

In the Broome Roads Board building, Legge and his small staff sorted through passenger lists of various incoming aircraft, and prioritised those flying out. The process was fairly chaotic as every incoming aircraft brought new and unheralded priorities. Thankfully, the last American aircraft had arrived from Java on the morning of 2 March, some 24 hours previously. Some of the last American planes out of Java had brought out wounded men from the Java military hospitals, moved as late as possible. Indeed the USAAF evacuation had been efficient: just a handful of airmen were left behind and that was because their wounds were too serious for them to be moved. There were still a few of these newly-arrived wounded men waiting for a flight south. Legge had been at the hospital the previous evening, and it was agreed to put them all aboard the same aircraft with a doctor accompanying them. The most suitable aircraft for this task were the handful of B-24A Liberators, configured solely as transports (the

other LB-30 Liberators and B-17 Flying Fortresses used at Broome were bombers often used as transports). A B-24A, named²⁹ *Arabian Nights* by its crew, had flown the last mission over Java during the night. It had flown from Broome to Jogjakarta air base – where the last US planes had flown out the night before – but after circling the field for a while, in the absence of signals from the ground, the pilots had reluctantly turned back.³⁰ Indeed, the Dutch had blown up the base and there was nowhere else the large US planes could fly into. Those in Broome were not unhappy that *Arabian Nights* had returned empty, for it could now fly the



Gus Winckel (far right) in 1942 with two companions. Although Winckel's brave stand with a machine-gun at Broome is much celebrated, his efforts as a pilot were perhaps more significant. Winckel was one of the "elite" Dutch Lodestar pilots and among the very few to make flights back into Java after the Japanese landings there. He flew virtually non-stop for more than three consecutive days at the height of these operations. (Australian War Memorial P04304.001)

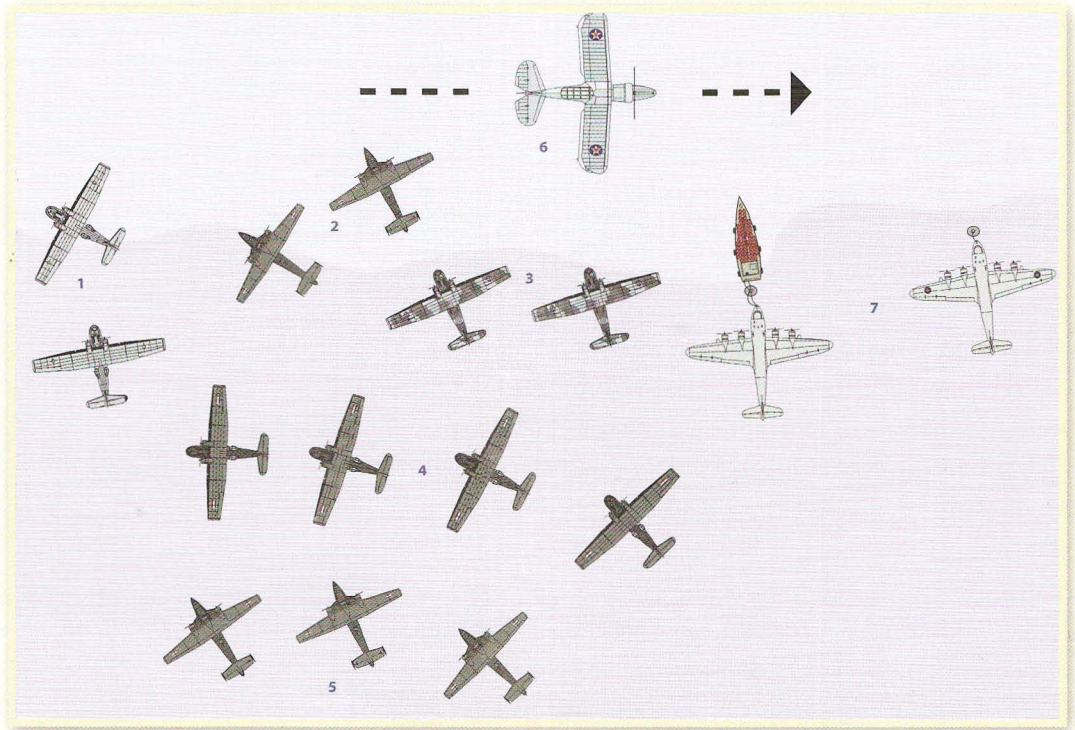


Remains of Gus Winckel's Lockheed Lodestar LT-918, destroyed on 3 March 1942. (Australian War Memorial P02039.001)

wounded men south. Legge's people typed up the necessary paperwork. The B-24A would need refuelling but would leave as soon as possible that morning.

The USAAF evacuation of Java was now complete. Just two B-17s were still on the airfield undergoing minor maintenance work, one of them named *Craps for the Japs*, the other unnamed. Alongside these were two other large four-engined planes: *Arabian Nights*, and another (unnamed) B-24A. A few smaller Dutch aircraft had arrived from Java, including a Lockheed Lodestar, a Douglas DC-3 and an unusual Douglas DC-5 with tricycle undercarriage. Also present was a RAAF Hudson from Perth that had flown up the day before. This was not involved in the evacuations and was preparing to fly an anti-submarine patrol that morning.

There were still hundreds of men at Broome, and Legge knew it would be a few more days until they were flown out. If most of the big bombers flew back from Melbourne, they could

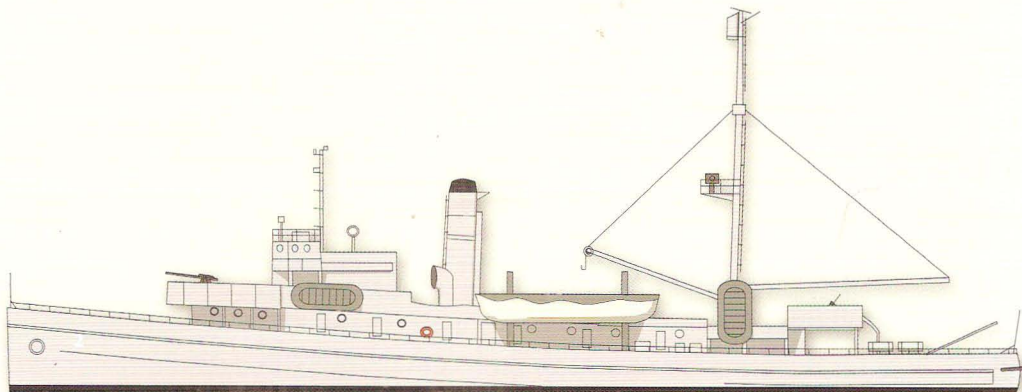


Broome Harbour: approx. 9.30am 3 March 1942

This diagram is a representation of the moored flying boats in Broome harbour just before the Japanese attack. In reality they would have been distributed over a much wider area.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Two RAF Catalinas of 205 Squadron | 2. Two MLD Do-24s of GVT.7 |
| 3. Two USN PB4-Ys of PatWing10 | 4. Four MLD PB4-Ys of GVT.17 |
| 5. Three MLD Do-24s of GVT.6 | 6. Lamade's SOC-3 floatplane (ex-USS Houston) just after take off |
| 7. Two Empire Flying Boats. The Qantas flying boat <i>Corinna</i> is being refueled by Nicol Bay. The RAAF flying boat <i>A18-10</i> is depicted at the other permanent mooring. | |

NB: the Dutch casualties occurred in the seven newly arrived flying boats of (4) and (5) above.



USS Heron AVP-2 Small Seaplane Tender

1,350t 188 ft (length) x 35 ft (beam) Max speed: 14 kts

Armament: 2 x 3-inch AA guns 4 x 0.50 cal MGs

Capacity: Designed to support up to 6 patrol planes. Carried 30,000 gallons of aviation fuel.

Built as a WWI minesweeper, *USS Heron* was later converted into a small seaplane tender. Upon arriving in Broome *Heron* did not service flying boats but instead assisted the damaged *Preston*.

lift well over half of the men remaining. Otherwise there were plenty of other smaller, twin-engined aircraft flying shuttles back and forth from Broome. The end of the evacuation was in sight. However, the appearance of the enemy reconnaissance aircraft over the town had worried many present. Most of the Java veterans, particularly the Dutchmen, warned that a raid was soon to follow. As a precaution, Legge gave the order for the airfield to be cleared by 10am. The reasoning was that an attacking formation of Japanese aircraft could only fly during the day, and the nearest possible bases in Timor or other islands were a good four or five hours flying away. Thus attacks would only come in the middle of the day, and 10am seemed a reasonably conservative time.

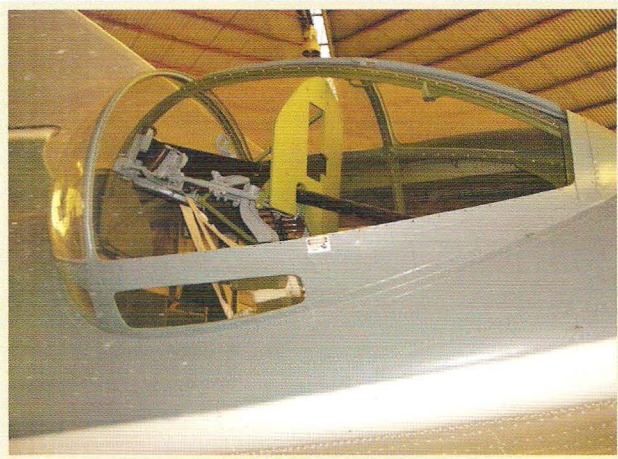
Thus this was the general position in Broome on the morning of 3 March 1942. The big problem was that Legge's organisation extended only to the airfield, not the flying boat base. There would soon be more flying boats in the harbour than ever before. These aircraft had come to Broome because Qantas had successfully flown Java-Broome shuttles with its Empire Flying Boats, and was operating a makeshift base there.³¹ The Broome base was well managed by Captain Lester Brain of Qantas, an aviator and flying boat captain of extensive experience. Indeed, Brain, Qantas' chief aviator, was quite possibly the most experienced pilot in Australia at the time.³² Careful and meticulous, he took special pride in the planning and execution of operations and as a result had a first class safety record. He was wary of some of the famous names in aviation, who he saw as overly impulsive risk takers. Brain, careful not to overstep the bounds of his authority, was under the direct control of the Department of Civil Aviation. He had received clarification that he was to cooperate with the Americans but not to take

orders from them: indeed, he was formally advised that they had “no authority” over his flying boats.³³ This rather suited him as he knew more about local conditions than anyone else. Indeed, operating from their own rented house, the Qantas staff had little to do with the Americans who were primarily concerned with land plane operations.

It was in Brain's nature to note the holes in the parallel military organisation. He contrasted the rather *ad hoc* system for incoming military flying boats at Broome with his relatively efficient set-up. Qantas had its own flying boat moorings and had secured the use of local vessels for servicing the flying boats. This included a pearling lugger minus its masts, loaded with drums of fuel and used for refuelling the Qantas flying boats, although it could only carry enough fuel for a single flying boat at one time. Re-loading of the lugger with fuel drums was done from the end of the long jetty, but only during high tide. For these reasons initial operations at Broome were rather inflexible, and flying boats could expect to spend one to two days there.

Brain had arrived in Broome on 21 February. This was well before military flying boats began arriving in Broome and hence his small organisation oversaw all of the aerial activity in the harbour. The only exception was a tiny SOC-3 observation floatplane that had flown off the cruiser *USS Houston* in mid-February. Lacking the range to join *Houston* in Java, it remained tied up to the jetty for a couple of weeks, becoming strangely synonymous with the heightened activity around it.³⁴ To the orderly mind of Lester Brain, the presence of this aircraft must have been a daily reminder of the military's sloppy management. To him and others it simply appeared to have been forgotten about. But in February 1942 very few people had the “big picture” as censorship and military secrecy reigned supreme. Indeed, *Houston* (maintaining radio silence) had cruised off Broome at one stage waiting for the SOC-3 to return. Unfortunately the aircraft never made the rendezvous as the instructions had been delayed by Broome's inadequate military communications facilities.

In mid-February Broome suffered a fortnight of severe weather as a result of regional cyclones. For a while there was doubt as to whether flying boats could continue to operate from Broome. An absolute necessity in such conditions was the laying of permanent flying boat moorings right out in the harbour proper beyond



A “blister” gun position on the side of a PBY-5 Catalina flying boat, with its 0.50 calibre machine gun in the stowed position. A good field of fire is provided downwards and to the rear, but such weapons would have been of limited value in combating overhead attacks while the flying boat was moored (the large wing would have also restricted the field of fire). (Authors' collection)

Dornier Do24K-1

Specifications

Patrol Bomber / Reconnaissance Flying Boat

3 x 875hp engines

Speed: 195mph max; 150mph cruise

Range: 2,049 miles

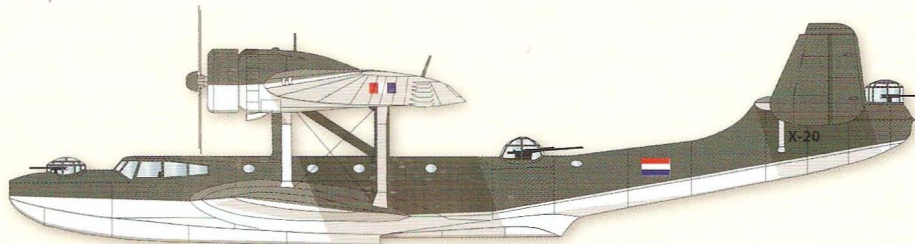
Weight: 35,715lb max loaded

Crew: 6

Capacity: 20+ passengers (as transport)

Armament: 2 x 7.7mm Browning MGs (nose & tail turrets); 1 x 20mm Hispano-Suiza cannon (dorsal turret); up to 2,642lbs of bombs or other stores.

Notes: although the Do-24 was a highly successful design used by German forces extensively. MLD aircraft were specially fitted with American engines to ensure commonality with the ML-KNIL fleet of Martin bombers. A total of 37 had been delivered to the NEI before Germany invaded The Netherlands in 1940 and deliveries were halted. Numbered X-1 to X-37, they were known as "X-boats",



A MLD Do-24 "X-Boat" in markings as per the example currently on display at the Dutch Air Force Museum, Soesterberg, The Netherlands, which is assumed to reflect the actual markings circa March 1942. In late February 1942 Dutch aircraft replaced their distinctive orange triangle roundels with red, white and blue Dutch flags as shown here.

Being a widely spread chain of islands, the NEI was ready-made for flying boat operations, and the MLD was the biggest flying boat operator in the region. In December 1941 eight GVTs (small "squadrons" each operating three aircraft) flew 24 Do-24s and provided reconnaissance throughout the islands. The remaining Do-24s were in reserve or used for training.

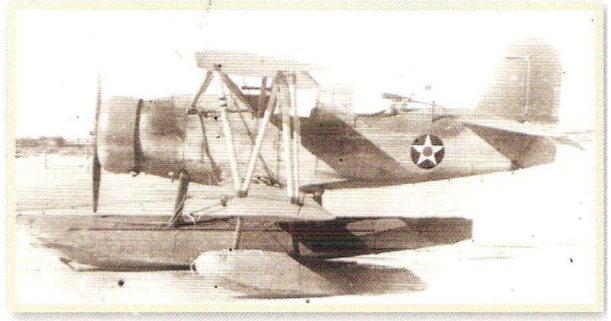
The Dutch crews were well trained and had some successes against the enemy. However the big planes were difficult to conceal, and like all flying boats were vulnerable on the ground. When Java itself was bombed the MLD training school was evacuated, and five of the oldest Do-24s flew out to Broome in February. Then following the invasion of Java on 1 March the MLD operational squadrons began to evacuate. Three Do-24s of GVT.6 flew into Broome on 2 March (one landed at Port Hedland first). None of these carried civilians. That night four more Do-24s (of GVT.7) departed Java, carrying family members of the crews. The next morning two of these arrived in Broome just before the attack, while the other two landed to the south. Both of the former flying boats were destroyed, along with the three empty machines that had arrived the day before.

the tidal flats. The need had been foreseen and some RAAF moorings had been shipped to Broome earlier in the month. However when these were unloaded, with their heavy deep-sea anchor chains, they were far too large to be laid by pearling luggers, which were the largest vessels in Broome. For this reason the *Nicol Bay*, a 56 ton auxiliary ketch, arrived from Port Hedland.³⁵

It was ironic that *Nicol Bay* could only make the voyage to Broome when the weather had cleared. The moorings were laid, although there was now less need as conditions remained

fine. However nobody involved with the modest vessel could ever have forecast the pivotal role it would play. As a specialised lighter, the *Nicol Bay* had ample deck space and could hold enough fuel drums there for at least 10 flying boats. A refuelling method was developed whereby flying boats tied up astern to the vessel, and a hose was passed over. Indeed, as the *Nicol Bay* also had a cook and accommodation facilities, it was an ideal base ship for flying boats. Various services could be provided in deep water regardless of tidal movements.

The *Nicol Bay* was requisitioned by the RAAF as of 26 February to ensure it remained in Broome solely for this work. Although it was nominally under military control, it continued to function with civilian crew under their Norwegian master, Captain Mathiesen. Mathiesen simply provided services to whoever requested them – there were no other command systems in place.^{36, 37}



Rare and previously unpublished shot of Lt Lamade's SOC-3 floatplane resting on the tidal flats in Broome. The jetty can be seen in the background. This was the only aircraft to survive the attack of 3 March. (courtesy John Fisher via Charles Schaedel / David Vincent)

Although the *Nicol Bay* solved many of the major difficulties at Broome, there still remained a gross shortage of water transport. Just one small motorboat had been acquired by Qantas. Usually a small fleet of such a craft was needed at each flying boat base. Aside from the obvious transport role, these craft were needed for servicing the flying boats and providing control services. The latter role included surveying the alighting area for floating debris. However with no craft available such services could not be provided at Broome. The lack of small craft combined with the tidal difficulties also meant that there was no easy means of communication between the shore and flying boats moored out in the harbour. Hence until the crews themselves came ashore, which could be a very lengthy process, there was simply no way of co-ordinating flying boat services. Little wonder then that Brain had no wish for incoming military flying boats to further complicate his already delicate set-up.

During the last week of February, a handful of war-weary United States Navy PBV flying boats turned up in Broome, one from Darwin and the remainder from Java.³⁸ Also without warning came six flying boats of the Dutch naval air arm – the MLD.³⁹ These were mostly old Dorniers carrying instructors and personnel from the flying boat training school, the first MLD unit to be evacuated. As Java had not yet been invaded there was no great urgency in Broome at this time. These aircraft could afford to linger in the town for a couple of days as improvised servicing methods were sorted out. Without the presence of *Nicol Bay*, there could have been much more serious delays.

Just at this time three American naval vessels arrived in Broome. To most onlookers it must have looked like warships had arrived to defend the town. Actually these were converted ex-WWI destroyers and minesweepers that were now used as seaplane tenders, providing many of the same services that *Nicol Bay* had just begun offering. One of these ships, the *USS William B Preston*, had been badly damaged during the Darwin raid. It was ordered south under the care of *USS Heron*. This left the capable *USS Childs* to provide flying boat services at Broome, clearly needed given that a dozen USN and MLD machines had suddenly accumulated on the harbour.

As the USN officers surveyed the situation they no doubt noted the useful basic facilities that Brain was working with to serve the Qantas flying boats. This included all of the miserly water transport available in the town. Although the exact details are unknown, it appears that Brain was unwilling or unable to cooperate with the Americans. He certainly sent messages to Aviat in Sydney complaining about the requisitioning of Qantas equipment. The situation was quickly resolved when the USN decided to move elsewhere. The commander of *Childs* believed that Broome was a far too exposed location for a base, and decided to move south to Exmouth Gulf. Regardless of how much Brain's lack of cooperation influenced this decision, clearly he had not hit it off with the USN. Quite probably the USN was unwilling to give a civilian real insight into their operations and intentions, while Brain himself would have felt seriously off-sided as the capable and experienced local.

Despite these frosty relations, the *Childs* left its ship's boat at Broome as a general aid to the flying boat base. It was to prove invaluable in the days to come. Otherwise by February's end there was a brief lull in flying boat operations. Most of the USN PBVs had gone either to Exmouth Gulf or back to Java, while all six of the MLD flying boats with the instructors onboard had continued towards eastern Australia. All of this activity had occurred parallel to but completely independent of Legge's Evacuation Centre which was concerned solely with land-plane operations. Also sudden developments in relation to Qantas operations kept Brain fully occupied. Nobody seemed to know or care that there was no organisation to govern the movements of military flying boats at Broome, an oversight which would have fatal consequences.

By 28 February the Qantas shuttle service between Java and Broome had been functioning for a week, with virtually daily flights taking place. It was being paid for by the US Army, mainly to fly urgently needed supplies into battle.⁴⁰ One flying boat flew almost two tons of machineguns into Java. However, by the time the service was up and running the Americans were planning their evacuation.

Brain was ordered to cease the services on 28 February. The final two flying boats had departed Java that morning. One of them, *Corinthian*, landed at Broome safely but the second flying

boat, *Circe*, never arrived. Passengers onboard *Corinthian* had reported seeing enemy fighters in the distance when still south of Java, so her downing was suspected but further confirmation was lacking.⁴¹ More recent research, however, has confirmed that *Circe* was shot down.⁴² This was a major blow to Qantas, as just a month earlier another of the precious Empire Flying Boats, *Corio*, had been shot down off Timor.

Lester Brain was now weak from a bout of dengue fever. Although this was an affliction common to many of those at Broome at the time, the stress and worry of losing *Circe* cannot have helped. It is unclear how Brain's illness affected either his decision making or the control of the Qantas operations. There was still plenty of demand for the services of the Qantas Empire Flying Boats, partly because no RAAF flying boats were operational in the area.

For the next couple of days the Qantas aircraft flew search and rescue operations. Some of these daylight flights extended into areas frequented by the enemy: the civilian machines performed quasi-military operations. Evidently this was noticed by the RAAF, for a flying boat was being despatched from the east. This machine was also an Empire Flying Boat, one of several requisitioned from Qantas for RAAF service. Its first mission was to pick up a group of RAAF personnel stranded behind enemy lines on Timor.⁴³ Given the massive raid on Darwin, it was felt safer to operate from Broome. For these reasons there were two Empire Flying Boats present on the morning of 3rd March: one Qantas and one RAAF.

Despite the loss of *Circe*, the cessation of Qantas services was well timed as the Japanese landed on Java the very next day, early on the morning of 1 March. It was that morning and the next morning that the land-plane evacuations peaked as the USAAF evacuated Java. The Japanese landings also triggered the evacuation of military flying boats from Java.

The MLD was a highly professional organisation, and had been the biggest operator of flying boats of any of the powers fighting in NEI. The MLD flying boats were organised into small squadrons, each of three aircraft. The first squadron to evacuate, GVT.6, arrived with its three Dorniers in Broome on the morning of 2 March. This was the only MLD evacuee squadron to arrive without any evacuees of any kind.⁴⁴ The aircrews would have been exhausted from non-stop combat operations, and two of the aircraft were splinter damaged from bombing attacks. Because of the lack of water transport, it was probably these Dorniers that were closest to the jetty and at low tide described as "lying on the sea bed."⁴⁵ It was sometime before Mathieson was able to refuel these three flying boats, the task not being completed until well after dark that evening. There has been some suggestion that because these Dutch aircrews were up late celebrating, they were unable to fly out early the next morning, but it is more likely they were simply waiting for orders.⁴⁶

That same day, 2 March, a general evacuation of all MLD aircraft was ordered, either to Ceylon

Consolidated PBY-4

Specifications

Patrol Bomber / Reconnaissance Flying-Boat

2 x 1,050hp engines

Speed: 175mph max 113mph cruise (later versions)

Range: 2,520 miles

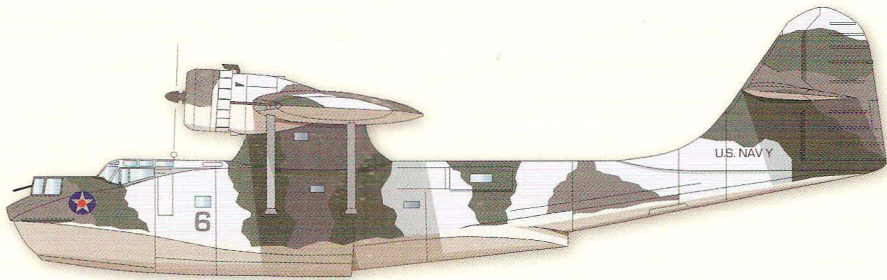
Weight: 35,420lb max loaded (later versions)

Crew: 7

Capacity: 25 passengers (more in emergencies)

Armament: 2 x 0.30 cal MGs (bow & ventral); 2 x 0.50 cal MGs (L & R waist); up to 4,000lb of bombs or depth charges on under-wing racks.

Notes: the PBY series was an American flying boat design begun with the PBY-1 in 1936. Upgrades were introduced via the PBY-2, 3, and then the PBY-4 in 1938. Only 32 PBY-4s were made. They were distinguishable by their lack of "bubble" waist blisters (introduced on the last three PBY-4s only). However, lacking armour and self-sealing fuel tanks, they were vulnerable to enemy fighters.



PBY-4 "6" as destroyed at Broome March 1942. According to American sources, PBY-4s of PatWing10 were painted in a unique 3-tone camouflage scheme, as depicted here.¹

By December 1941 all PBY-4s were serving with PatWing10 in the Philippines. Designed for long range ocean patrols, PBY-4s were not designed to cope with enemy fighters, and they suffered heavily at the hands of wide ranging Zeros. The worse loss occurred on 12 December when seven were strafed and burned at their moorings. Soon PatWing10 had withdrawn to the NEI, where despite ongoing losses the PBY-4s continued to perform their core reconnaissance duties. During January 1942, a squadron of newer PBY-5s largely replaced the dwindling number of worn PBY-4s. These older aircraft were the first to evacuate from Java, and four PBY-4s had reached Broome by 26th February. Two were left there and both were destroyed in the raid on 3 March.

(Endnotes)

1. Dorny, Louis B. *US Navy PBY Catalina Units of the Pacific War*. Osprey Publishing: Oxford, 2007. P.12.

or Australia. The squadrons were to evacuate as many pilots, aircrew and ground personnel as possible from the main base at Morokrembangan. During the day, most of the remaining flying boats were flown to secondary bases on lakes and rivers and hidden until nightfall. That evening they prepared for departure, with the aircraft now heavily loaded with women and children. These were the close families of the aircrews themselves and were some of the few civilians permitted to evacuate Java at this time.

In the few hours after dawn on 3 March six of these MLD flying boats landed at Broome. There were four PBY-5 Catalinas from GVT.17, and two Dorniers of GVT.7. In combination with the three Dorniers of GVT.6 that had arrived the day before, there were now nine MLD

flying boats at Broome. The six recently arrived machines were full of some 200 passengers and could not have arrived at a worse time. With a serious lack of water transport at Broome and no base organisation of any kind to greet them, it is of little surprise that they were still full of passengers when the raid began.¹

There were two other Catalina flying boats at Broome that morning, both of 205 Squadron, RAE, originally based at Singapore. In general, British units were now withdrawing westwards to Ceylon. 205 Squadron only had two Catalinas remaining, and as one of them was nominally unserviceable, it was decided to fly it to Australia which was much closer than Ceylon. This aircraft arrived in Broome during the afternoon of 2 March. The other aircraft was being used for operations, and missed a signal ordering it to Ceylon. Instead it followed the other Catalina, flying overnight and landing in Broome the next morning shortly before the attack.⁴⁷

At one stage during the afternoon of 2 March there were probably only four flying boats at Broome.⁴⁸ By 9am the following morning there were 15. This was completely unplanned, and there was no system to cope with it. Most significant were the six newly arrived Dutch flying boats, each packed with 30 or more passengers, many of them women and children. There was little that the flying boat crews could do except wait, hoping that one of the few motor launches would soon make its way to them. Even then things were chaotic, as no-one was really in charge. The few boats were making plenty of trips between the flying boats and the jetty, which was crowded with people, without accomplishing much, in contrast with the airfield where as many planes as possible were being cleared before 10am. A few men were onboard the single RAAF flying boat preparing for the mission to Timor, while nearby, the single Qantas machine was being refuelled from *Nicol Bay*.⁴⁹ The only movement was that of the SOC-3 floatplane, which was taxiing away from the jetty prior to taking off. The pilot had finally received orders to fly south: *USS Houston* had been sunk.⁵⁰

Legge and his men were receiving reports, via hearsay, of incoming flying boats. This was worrying, but for the Americans (and the Dutch) flying boats were a naval responsibility. They were a different service and in a completely different command within the ABDA organisation. Legge did not have a geographical command –he had a particular job to do under air force orders and authority. Also, the Qantas personnel had made it clear to Legge they were running their own show. This was fine to him, they seemed to be doing a good job and he respected their professional pride. Besides the navy seemed to know what they were doing. For a couple of days Admiral Purnell had even set up a naval headquarters in a rented Broome house⁵¹ for use when the US naval seaplane tenders were in harbour. Two of these were ex-WWI destroyers and to a layman had the appearance of warships. They gave a sense

1 One of the mistruths propagated about Broome is that many of the civilians slept on the flying boats overnight. Obviously some of the people had been in the flying boats for a few hours since landing, but none of them overnight. The source of this appears to be an aside that early in the Qantas operations the crew of one flying boat slept in the cabin one night rather than walk through half a mile of mud to the jetty, and then another long walk to their accommodation.

of security, and a sense that the navy had things covered. Legge was told all of this on arrival. The navy had gone somewhere further south, and had taken most of the flying boats with them, or so it seemed. Anyway, Legge's evacuation centre would co-operate as best it could, and accept any evacuees from the odd flying boats that might still come in. Otherwise the USAAF operated independently of the naval services at Broome, and had no contact with them.⁵²

Besides, Legge and his men had their hands full with their own operations. At Broome Hospital he met Captain Charles Stafford, US Army, who had been serving as a flight surgeon in Java with the 7th Bombardment Group. Just a week before Stafford had taken care of a badly wounded group of American sailors, some with serious burns. They would probably have languished in a Dutch hospital and been captured, but Stafford stayed alongside them and amid chaotic scenes at the docks personally saw them safely onboard an evacuation ship.⁵³ Now Stafford had another group of wounded Java airmen under his care. With the help of Legge and his men, the wounded were moved from the hospital in their collection of civilian cars and driven onto the tarmac. Stafford was supervising their loading into the fuselage of *Arabian Nights*, and was making sure they would be comfortable for the long flight to Perth.

As this was going on, a camouflaged Dutch DC-5 roared down the runway and took off overhead. Soon the careful loading of the B-24A was complete. In recent operations B-24s had carried as many as 35 passengers, but given the extra space needed for the wounded, this flight would only accommodate 20. However Stafford was satisfied his most needy patients were all onboard, and he probably welcomed the thought that later that day they'd all be arriving at a modern hospital in Perth. The hatches closed and the four big Pratt & Whitney Twin Wasp radial engines burst into life one by one.⁵⁴

So it was that the *Arabian Nights* reached the top of Broome's main runway and commenced the take-off run. The passengers were in good hands. The pilots, Major Kester and Captain Ragsdale, were both long-time veterans of the USAAF Ferry Command, and had enormous experience in long range flying in all conditions. With the four throttles pushed forward, the big B-24A began accelerating down the runway. As it did so the pilots passed a RAAF Hudson taxiing in the opposite direction.⁵⁵

But the great tragedy was about to begin. Of a total of 23 aircraft present either on the harbour or the airfield, the humble SOC-3 was the only one to survive. It was lucky to get clear just as the Zeros appeared overhead. As the sound of aero engines was hardly unusual in Broome at the time, very few people on the harbour noticed the attackers. Most of those that did so assumed they must be friendly aircraft. However, the first sign of their real intentions was when each of the nine attackers jettisoned their drop-tanks over the harbour entrance. Some people thought bombs were being dropped. Then three attackers, now visible as sleek grey

Consolidated PBY-5 Catalina

Specifications

Patrol Bomber / Reconnaissance Flying Boat

2 x 1,200hp engines

Speed: 175mph max; 113mph cruise.

Range: 1,895 miles (loaded)

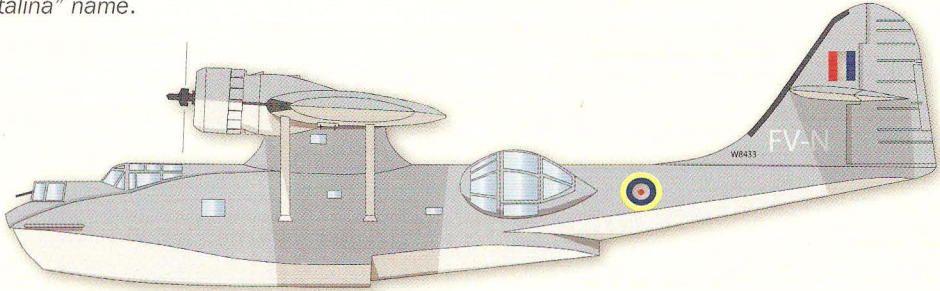
Weight: 35,420lb max loaded

Crew: 7

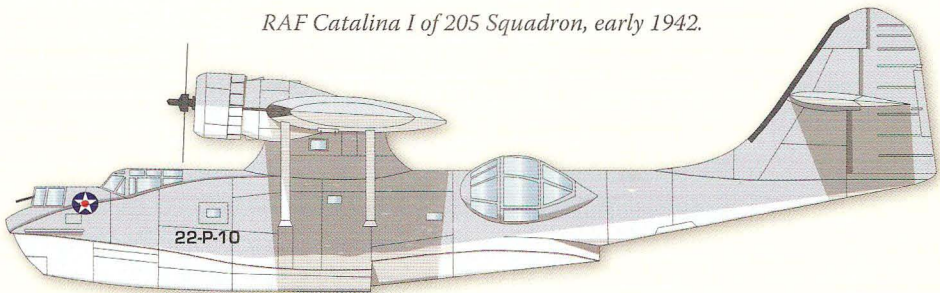
Capacity: 25 passengers (more in emergencies)

Armament: (USN) 2 x 0.30 cal MGs (bow & ventral); 2 x 0.50 cal MGs (L & R waist "blisters"); up to 4,000lb of bombs or depth charges on under-wing racks.

Notes: the PBY-5 was the first major production version of the PBY, with '00s made from 1940. Compared to the PBY-4, the PBY-5 introduced more powerful engines and the distinctive waist blisters. The RAF ordered PBY-5s under the name Catalina I, and in 1941 the USN also adopted the "Catalina" name.



RAF Catalina I of 205 Squadron, early 1942.



PBY-5 of VP-22 in standard USN colour scheme.

United States Navy

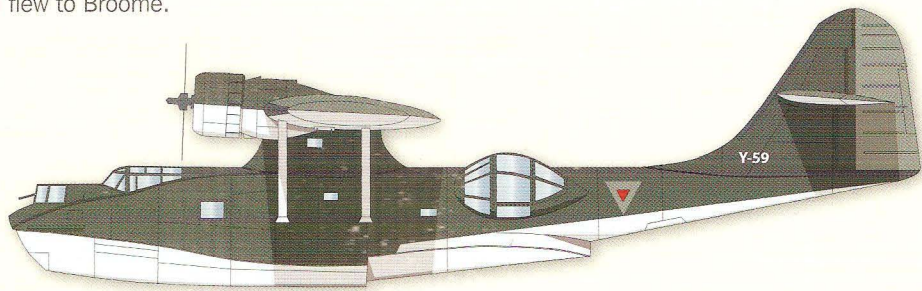
In December 1941 about 50 PBY-5s were serving in Hawaii, alongside older PBY models, but many were wiped out in the Pearl Harbour attacks. At Naval Air Station Kaneohe Bay, the morning of 7 December saw PBYS either moored in the bay, on the ramp being prepared for flight operations or in nearby hangars. At 7.52am a formation of nine Zeros, mirroring exactly the force used at Broome, appeared overhead and began a series of low-level strafing attacks, destroying over 30 PBYS.¹ This was comparable to Broome where 22 large multi-engined aircraft were lost.

In January 1942, one squadron, VP-22, reinforced PatWing10 with over a dozen PBY-5s. Their performance was better than the existing PBY-4s, but they still lacked the all important self-sealing tanks and protective armour. Losses continued, with just a handful of PBY-5s surviving to reach Exmouth Gulf, Appendix 4.

United Kingdom: Royal Air Force

The RAF PBY-5 was named the Catalina I, differing mainly in having British armament. This comprised six Vickers machine-guns, including twin guns in each of the waist blisters. Some of these early Catalina I's re-equipped 205 Squadron at Singapore. Some 12 hours before the Pacific War actually began on 7 December, one of these Catalinas was shot down with the loss of all eight crew. It was the very first aircraft shot down in the Pacific War.

After significant losses in the first weeks of the war, three 205 Squadron Catalinas withdrew to Java in February 1942. Foreseeing the need for evacuation, the squadron's commanding officer, Wing Commander RB Councill, took an interest in an unserviceable 549-ton RAF supply vessel called the *Tung Song*. Councill organised some RAF tradesmen to hastily repair the vessel. Subsequently *Tung Song* sailed on 2 March, carrying 195 men, mostly from 205 Squadron. Six days later the vessel arrived at Exmouth Gulf, where fuel drums were hauled out of the forward hold and used to replenish the main tanks.² *Tung Song* subsequently arrived in Fremantle, carrying the last organised group of air personnel to evacuate Java. Meanwhile, the fate of the squadron's Catalinas (Appendix 4), two of which flew to Broome.



MLD PBV-5s were delivered with large orange-triangle roundels on the fuselage, and an orange-painted rudder. When war began these markings were later toned down, as shown here. The triangle marking was later replaced again with a tri-colour Dutch flag.

Dutch Naval Air Force MLD

In 1940, the MLD ordered 36 Consolidated Model 28-5MNE flying boats, equivalent to the PBV-5. With "Y-" prefixed serials, they were known as "Y-boats" in Dutch service. Delivery was still underway when the Pacific War began, so these were the newest flying boats in the region and were fitted with self-sealing fuel tanks. As the MLD lacked aircrews, several PBV-5s were given to the RAF and USN. A single "Y-boat" evacuated via Broome with the MLD training school. Early on 3 March four PBV-5s from squadron GVT.17 arrived in Broome packed full of 140 civil and military passengers. All were lost in the raid and many of the 52 Dutch killed that morning were onboard. A handful of other MLD PBV-5s trickled into Australia which were later flown to Ceylon.

MLD PBV-5s were delivered with large orange-triangle roundels on the fuselage, and an orange-painted rudder. When war began these markings were later toned down, as shown here. The triangle marking was later replaced again with a tri-colour Dutch flag.

Royal Australian Air Force

The RAAF received 18 Catalinas in 1941, operating them mainly off the eastern seaboard. These too suffered at the hands of the enemy, with less than a dozen remaining by March 1942. Evidently due to this scarcity, none were sent to WA at this time.

(Endnotes)

1. Trojan, Dave. *They Stood the Watch...The Story of Patrol Squadron Eleven at NAS Kaneohe Bay*. Staff Historian, Hawaii Aviation Preservation Society, Hawaii.
2. Some sources suggest *Tung Song* was diverted to search south of Broome for two lost flying boats on 4 March (i.e. Shores et al p.324). However, it appears to be confused with Nicol Bay which probably conducted this search, as it sailed from Broome to Port Hedland on this day. (See Lovell, Ron & Hugh Campbell. *The Unsung Tung Song*. The Journal of the Royal Air Force Historical Society No. 16. Royal Air Force Historical Society: UK, 1996. Chapter 3, p. 111-118.)

monoplanes, dived towards the harbour and began strafing runs. The first targets picked out were the largest, the two four-engined Empire Flying Boats. Lines of bullets raced across the water as the machineguns concentrated on their targets, culminating in the silver aluminium skin of the Allied aircraft.

The two big silver planes didn't burst into flames on the first passes. This gave the defenders a chance to react, and where it seemed feasible crewmen manned their guns. All of the military flying boats were armed with defensive machine guns, and some of the Dorniers had 20mm cannons. Unfortunately these were mostly mounted for aerial combat and had poor or inappropriate fields of fire when on the ground. Deflector shields designed to protect against the slipstream were now obstructions. The RAAF Empire Flying Boat may have been the best equipped for the situation: it was an ex-civil machine and various machinegun positions had been improvised, including two openings on top of the fuselage. These were simple positions, using 1920s era Scarff mountings and Lewis machine guns, and gave fairly unrestricted fields of view. Thus the very simplicity of this set-up enabled some defensive fire to be given. A witness later remarked: "I had admiration for the crew of the RAAF flying boat who manned guns prior to evacuating their Empire boat, which was the first attacked on the harbour".⁵⁶

The situation was quite hopeless and by the third pass the attacking pilots had well and truly corrected their aim. Bullets and 20mm cannon shells tore through the aircraft. Cannon shell holes literally chopped off the starboard wing, which fell off and floated away as it slowly sank. As a result the flying boat tilted left, resting on its port wing outrigger float at a dangerously unstable angle. One of the crewmen, Corporal Ireland, rushed to the flight deck to retrieve an emergency rubber dinghy, being slightly wounded and then burned as the flying boat burst into flames. Ireland managed to jump into the sea and the dinghy inflated. The other crew members had already dived overboard and joined Ireland in the dinghy. This probably saved their lives as they were over a mile from the shore with a strong ebb tide running, making conditions dangerous even for strong swimmers.⁵⁷

Some of the Dutch seaplanes, including at least one Dornier, managed to return fire from their moorings.⁵⁸ In the flying boats crowded with passengers, crewmen were blocked from reaching their gun positions, and then had little room to operate them properly. On board the newly arrived RAF Catalina, Lance Corporal Bowden was blocked from the ammunition pans by a woman frozen with fear. By the time three crewmen had thrown her into the water and the Lewis gun was made ready, the flying boat was on fire and the men jumped clear.⁵⁹ To further lessen the defences, many guns had been stowed for the comfort of their passengers during the long flights. On some of the Catalinas, the blister positions had been opened and the guns trained abeam so the passengers could sit on the barrels and get some fresh air.⁶⁰ Clearly, the MLD flying boats in particular were not in a fighting condition.

Both the Empire Flying Boats were now well ablaze. Alongside the Qantas machine, Mathieson and his deckhands desperately cut the lines that were securing *Nicol Bay*. The ketch's 70hp Bowman petrol engine started without difficulty, and her master began to manoeuvre away from danger. As the Zeros swept overhead, Mathieson felt his vessel a very conspicuous target, with 180 bright red fuel drums on his deck.

On the end of the long jetty a group of civilians was crowded. They had been about to board the Qantas flying boat. Within seconds they had scattered and most found cover under the jetty, even though it was piled high with drums of aviation fuel. Much to the relief of everyone present, none of the attackers' fire came anywhere near them during the ordeal.

Now the newly arrived RAF Catalina was hit, five crewmen being killed instantly. Of the men that escaped the burning wreck, one was a Sikh of the Indian Air Force who was a non-swimmer. But after being helped by others and apparently safely clinging to floating debris, he disappeared and drowned.⁶¹

The harbour was filling with thick black smoke, and the water around each flying boat was an expanding circle of oil and fire. After jumping from the burning wrecks survivors, choking with oil, were struggling to keep their heads above the water. Many of those with bullet wounds or burns quickly drowned in the strong tidal currents. As the flying boats burned their bulkheads failed, and the wings broke off. The hulls, punctured by gunfire or warped and melted by the flames, slowly took on water and sank. Those in deep water sank more intact as the water doused the flames; those closer in rested on the muddy floor and burned to the waterline, only charred skeletal wings or tail structures remaining.

Those in town were drawn to the foreshore by the noise, others had a view from their verandas and windows. But the action was over a mile away over the tidal flats and shallow water. There was little that could be done. Thick columns of black smoke were twisting upwards. Fifteen flying boats lay burning and sinking: nine belonged to the MLD (five Dorniers and four PBV-5s), two were RAF (two Catalinas / PBV-5s), two were USN (old PBV-4s), and two were Australian (Empire Flying Boats: one Qantas, one RAAF).

Those on the airfield had been lucky. They'd had sufficient warning of the attack to get clear. Just as *Arabian Nights* was accelerating down the runway, a few of the men on the airfield picked out the specks of the Zero squadron in the distance, high over Cable Beach. The harbour attack began before any of the enemy reached the airfield. In fact the Zeros detailed to attack the airfield had been distracted first by the SOC-3 biplane and then by *Arabian Nights*, which they pursued. It was some minutes before the flight re-appeared, this time just two strong. *Arabian Nights* and an attacking Zero fighter had mutually shot each other down.⁶²

Realising the danger, two USAAF officers roared down the runway in a jeep yelling at the men working on the grounded planes to get clear. Most ran to the nearby scrub which offered concealment. A few weapon pits had been built, and provided welcome cover for some. Others found cover in a number of huge empty concrete stormwater pipes. There was no-one aboard any of the planes on the airfield apart from the Hudson, about to follow the B-24A in taking off. However the pilot had forgotten his maps and codebooks and the

plane was stopped while he made the long walk back to the operations hut. Meanwhile the three crewmen inside saw the approaching Zeros attacking the large heavy bombers first. The turret gunner in the Hudson had thoughts of fighting it out, but another crewman had cut the engines and the turret needed power to operate. All three joined the pilot in the nearby scrub.⁶³

Within seconds the three big planes parked together in the centre of the airfield – two B-17s and a B-24A – were in flames. As the Zeros banked and turned they selected the remaining targets. The Hudson with its props still turning was attacked, but the burst was too high and hit the taxiway in front of the aircraft. On the next pass the pilot didn't make the same mistake, with his bursts hitting the port wing root. Yet another pass was made with the hapless Hudson now in flames, and it was at this time that its two bombs exploded. It took only minutes for the other two planes present, a Royal Dutch East Indies Airlines DC-3 and a Dutch East Indies Air Force (ML-KNIL) Lodestar to suffer the same fate.

Just as the attack was beginning, the ML-KNIL Lodestar pilot, Lieutenant Gus Winckel, was able to grab one of the two Colt 0.303-inch defensive machine guns that had been temporarily mounted in the rear cabin of the plane, together with an ammunition box holding 400 rounds. (Some sources claim he was cleaning the gun at the time.) As the first Zeros came in low he prepared to fire at them but the gun had no mount and it is impossible to fire machine guns with any accuracy "off the hip". Winckel was determined, however, and positioned himself next to the hangar. He tried to use the corner of the building as a sideways mount, but this was frustrating as it was only useful in one direction. The Lodestar was less than a year old; the fastest transport aircraft around and their pilots were something of an elite group within the Dutch services. Winckel had spent 600 hours in his plane in the last three months, and described it as being like his sister or mother. Seeing his beautiful aircraft go up in flames, Winckel was enraged and rushed out into the open. He mounted the barrel of the gun on one forearm and fired with the other. Aircraft machine guns have thin barrels and fast rates of fire as they rely on slipstreams for cooling. Apparently he was burnt severely, almost to the bone. One witness said "I don't think he did any damage but we all felt much better for his efforts."⁶⁴ Given the difficulties of firing a machinegun in such a manner, this was probably the most likely outcome. Nevertheless, it is probable that he hit one or more of the attacking Zeros. Private Matsumoto's Zero was shot through the "body tank" over the airfield and later ditched before reaching its base.⁶⁵ After this incident, Winckel became widely known as "Wild Bill".⁶⁶

Aside from Winckel, some of the men around the airfield fired at the attacking planes with their revolvers, a futile act born more out of frustration. Also present were a handful of RAAF guards and the local men of the Volunteer Defence Corps, all armed with .303-inch rifles. Some of their shots probably hit: Japanese records show that of the seven Zeros that returned to base, six had some form of bullet damage and one of the pilots was slightly wounded.⁶⁷ ♦

(Endnotes)

- 1 NAA File: *United States and British Empire landing grounds in Pacific. Air defence in Far East - United States proposals. War Cabinet Agendum No. 334/1941* Series number A5954 Control symbol 555/7 Barcode 652163
- 2 See Map on page 33.
- 3 Bennett-Bremner, E. *Front-Line Airline, The War Story of Qantas Empire Airways Limited*. Angus & Robertson Ltd: Sydney, 1944. (p.79).
- 4 The RAAF's flying boats operated mainly on the east coast and at Port Moresby.
- 5 The main barrier to long distance over-water flying at this time was the practices of the aircrews rather than the available technology. It was the pressure of war that resulted in enormous advances in such flying. In 1943 Qantas began non-stop Perth – Ceylon flights: the longest scheduled air service ever flown (3,000 miles in 24 hours). Catalinas were used, a pre-war design.
- 6 NAA File: *Broome WA - Provision of flying boat moorings* [3.00 cms] Series number MP203/1 Control symbol 135/102/214 Barcode 12011735. This is the main source regarding the Broome base.
- 7 Royal Dutch East Indies Airlines
- 8 As the aircraft flew by dead reckoning they rarely arrived directly over Broome itself. The flight of DC-3 PK-AFV on 3rd March is well documented (it was shot down at Carnot Bay). This aircraft made landfall perhaps 80-100 miles to the north of Broome. This was probably typical and added significantly to the actual distance flown.
- 9 NAA File: *Shipping and aircraft register departures [Broome]* Series number E1029 Control symbol VOLUME 1 Barcode 431514; this file contains details of KNILM aircraft movements during February 1942.
- 10 Shores et al, p.204.
- 11 Edmonds, p.366-367. The Americans had a chronic shortage of transport aircraft at this time.
- 12 Van Dijk was a co-pilot alongside Charles Kingsford-Smith during his east-west crossing of the Atlantic in the “Southern Cross” in 1930.
- 13 Alongside the KNILM airliner flights, towards the end of February Dutch military Lockheed Lodestars began a nightly service between Bandoeng and Broome.
- 14 Hasluck, Paul. *The Government and the People 1942-1945, Australia in the War of 1939-1945, Series Four Civil, Volume II*. Australian War Memorial: Canberra, 1962, (p.144). The evacuees were mainly or wholly of European origin.
- 15 NAA File: *Evacuations from North Western Australia - Wyndham, Derby and Broome* Series number A433 Control symbol 1942/2/794 Barcode 74053
- 16 NAA File: *Station Headquarters - Intelligence reports from Squadrons & Intelligence* Series number A11163 Control symbol 36/14/ AIR PART 2 Barcode 3429790; *Pearce Intelligence Report 61*;
- 17 A USAAF LB-30 was among the aircraft destroyed there on 19th February.
- 18 NAA File: *Broome Aerodrome - Construction of Runway etc. (Job No.552)* Series number K1141 Control symbol S1941/42/35 Barcode 863791
- 19 Colonel Edwin S Perrin was one of the highest ranking USAAF staff officers in the region. In January, along with Generals Brett, Brereton and Barnes, Perrin represented the US in a conference with Australia. In May Perrin became Deputy Chief of Staff in the Allied Air Forces organisation. But Perrin was closely associated with Brett, who was replaced by MacArthur, so he accompanied Brett back to the US. By 1943 Perrin was a Brigadier General, and later served as Deputy Chief of the Air Staff.
- 20 Gillison, Douglas. *Royal Australian Air Force 1939-1942, Australia in the War of 1939-1945, Series Three Air, Volume I*. Australian War Memorial: Canberra, 1962, (p.464).
- 21 Tyler, Appendix G, Rouse Diary.
- 22 NAA File: *Report on visit to Broome & Nth. West Areas by Cdr. Geoffrey Bronson (Royal Navy)* Series number A1196 Control symbol 37/501/109 Barcode 200691
- 23 Edmonds, Walter D. *They Fought With What They Had*. Little Brown: Boston, 1951. (p.434).
- 24 Tyler, Legge interview, Appendix G;
- 25 Hasluck, p.146; & Tyler, Kurtz interview, Appendix G;
- 26 Edmonds, Walter D, *They Fought With What They Had*, Boston, Little Brown, 1951, p.345n says in early 1942 Legge was nominally in charge of a Fighter Group that was to be built up at Darwin. This never eventuated, with just one of the provisional squadrons fighting in Java for a short time. However, this very well researched source adds that Legge's role in this period is “difficult to define”. He thus appears to be an officer entrusted with a non-existent unit, perhaps evidence that his command ability was not well regarded relative to his peers.
- 27 Tyler, Rouse interview, Appendix G;

- 28 Edmonds, p434, gives details of the seven USAAF lieutenants running the evacuation centre and their individual responsibilities.
- 29 Livingstone, Bob, *Under the Southern Cross: the B-24 Liberator in the South Pacific*, Turner Publishing, USA, 1998, p.155 for details of individual aircraft and names, incl *Arabian Nights*.
- 30 Edmonds, p.434.
- 31 Bennett-Bremner, E, *Front-Line Airline, The War Story of Qantas Empire Airways Limited*, Angus and Robertson Ltd, Sydney, 1944; this source has a specific chapters on the Java-Broome shuttle flights and Broome itself.
- 32 Cadigan, Neil, *A Man Among Mavericks, Lester Brain: Australia's greatest aviator*, ABC Books, Sydney 2008; Pre-war, Brain had become something of an unlikely media star through his successes in locating aviators Jim Moir and Harold Owen who had gone missing in their Vickers Vellore aircraft while crossing the Timor Sea during a pioneering flight from England. Brain found the men at a remote lighthouse in Arnhem Land. Before that, Brain had found the wreck of the missing *Kookaburra* aircraft in very remote country north-west of Alice Springs. Both searches were keenly followed by the media.
- 33 Tyler, Brain diary, Appendix A;
- 34 Tyler, Lamade interview, Appendix G;
- 35 The *Nicol Bay* (56 tons) is often described as a pearling lugger (which were much smaller, usually 15 tons) or lugger "mother ship". Actually, the vessel was specially designed for lighterage duties at Cossack and had no connection with the pearling industry. *Nicol Bay* was built in Perth in 1926.
- 36 NAA File: Broome Air Raid – 3rd March 1942; A9695, 68 Barcode 30045065 included statements by the master of *Nicol Bay* and a description of refuelling difficulties.
- 37 Tyler includes a short biographical note of Mathieson and a picture of him at the wheel of *Nicol Bay*.
- 38 Messimer, Dwight R, *In the Hands of Fate, The Story of Patrol Wing 10, 8 December 1941 – 11 May 1942*, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, 1985; this source is relied on in regard to operations of the United States Navy.
- 39 Womack, Tom, *The Dutch Naval Air Force Against Japan*, MacFarland & Company, Inc., North Carolina, 2006; this is the main source in regard to the Dutch Naval Air Force (MLD), derived from the term "Marine Luchtvaart Dienst".
- 40 This is another strange coincidental factor that led to the Broome disaster. Qantas's "customer" for these shuttle services was the US Army. Within the American military services flying boats were a naval responsibility. Thus Qantas could operate easily alongside the US Army / US Army Air Force without a duplication of responsibilities. When the USN arrived in Broome its interests clashed with this cosy arrangement. The USN may have been keen to avoid a clash not so much with Qantas but with the US Army by proxy.
- 41 Searches were flown along the route but nothing was ever found. *Circe* had simply disappeared, along with its four Qantas crewmembers and 16 passengers. Even at the time of the RAAF Official History being published in 1962 this remained a mystery.
- 42 Shores, Christopher and Cull, Brian with Izawa, Yashuo, *Bloody Shambles* Volume 2, Grub Street, London, 1992, p.241: Japanese pilots specifically reported downing a four-engined flying boat south of Java, which was most likely *Circe* (the Dorniers or Catalinas in the area having three and two engines respectively). However, there remains some confusion: the source reports *Circe* was intercepted by aircraft returning from a strike on the *USS Langley* on 27 February. However, *Circe* was definitely lost on 28 February. Such inconsistencies in records are not uncommon, however it does draw into question the association with the *Langley* strike as *Langley* was wrecked but not sunk by the strike on the 27th. Later that day she was sunk by friendly warships. Not knowing this, possibly the Japanese launched a repeat strike on the 28th, and it was these aircraft which found and shot down *Circe*.
- 43 Humphries, Colin. *Trapped on Timor*. Self-published, Victor Harbour: South Australia, 1990. (p.106)
- 44 Womack, p.136.
- 45 Gillison, Douglas. *Royal Australian Air Force 1939-1942*. Australian War Memorial: Canberra, 1962. (p.464)
- 46 NAA File: Broome Air Raid – 3rd March 1942; A9695, 68 Barcode 30045065
- 47 Shores et al *Bloody Shambles* Vol 2 p. 302-303 gives an account of how these two RAF Catalinas arrived at Broome.
- 48 Refer to the Aircraft History section for individual movements. These were two USN PB4Y-4s and two Dorniers. Of the three Dorniers that flew in on 2nd March, one actually flew to Port Hedland first and thus arrived in Broome quite late.
- 49 NAA File: Broome Air Raid – 3rd March 1942; A9695, 68 Barcode 30045065
- 50 Tyler, Lamade interview, Appendix G;
- 51 Messimer, p.264.
- 52 Tyler, interview with Lieutenant Col Minahan, USAAF p. 75 "...the various groups remained separate. The United States Army Air Corps did not particularly mix with the Navy ... or anyone else". The boundary of responsibilities was further confused because in Dutch and American service, flying boats were a naval responsibility. For the Australians and British, they were operated by the air force. However the RAAF never had a flying boat base at Broome, and its sole flying boat present had only just arrived when the raid occurred. This important delineation between the airfield and the flying boat base has not been discussed in other sources.
- 53 See Wikipedia entry for "Charles A. Stafford" http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_A._Stafford; accessed 24th September 2009;

Stafford was posthumously awarded the Silver Star for these efforts in Java.

54 The B-24 pilots disliked Broome, as their tricycle undercarriages tended to sink into the soft surfaces, despite the best efforts of groups of Asiatic workmen who set to work on the runways every time the big planes took off. Given the extraordinary range of the B-24As, their pilots clocked up far more hours than comparable "combat" pilots flying bombers or fighters. Since arriving in Australia weeks beforehand they had flown non-stop between Java and south-eastern Australia. Although they were transport pilots they were constantly taking many of the same risks as the heavy bombers. For this reason the B-24As retained a useful defensive armament of 0.5-inch machine guns, including waist guns in the left and right fuselage and twin 0.5-inch guns in the tail. Overall the B-24As didn't have the normal overall olive-green appearance of the B-17s. Instead they had a British-style bomber camouflage with all-black under surfaces and sides, and a dark camouflage pattern on the top. This is because the aircraft were being built to British orders but after Pearl Harbor everything in American factories was held for use by the home forces.

55 Tyler, Minahan interview, Appendix G; this gives an accurate position of the aircraft on the airfield when the attack began.

56 NAA File AWM 54 625/3/7; Statement by Wing Cmdr F.V. Sharpe, 20 Dec 1944;

57 Prime & NAA File: Broome Air Raid – 3rd March 1942; A9695, 68 Barcode 30045065; the dinghy was only built to hold 5 persons, but the men rescued several Dutch survivors from the sea until 13 in all came ashore with the dinghy. Corporal Ireland was awarded the British Empire Medal for his bravery.

58 Womack, p.138; also Tyler also mentions that "gunners aboard the flying boats had put up some answering fire, before being ... blown to pieces".

59 Wills, Juliet, *The Diamond Dakota Mystery*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest NSW 2006, p.30-31.

60 Ibid, p.20.

61 Shores et al *Bloody Shambles* Vol 2 p. 313

62 Most recent sources have contributed the loss of a Zero at Broome to a Dutch pilot, Gus Winckel who, as will be described, fired a machine gun from the airfield. Japanese sources confirm that Warrant Officer Kudo's Zero was lost during the mission, and it has been credited to Winckel because the RAAF Official History states that his act was the only defensive fire during the action. This is, however, not true. The B-24A was well armed, and the one survivor described how those onboard struggled to "swing" the waist guns and get them into action, given the passengers crowded into the fuselage (Tyler). This confirms defensive action was taken, and these particular factors would not have restricted the tail gunner. Further, Japanese sources confirm Kudo attacked the B-24A and was lost sometime during the mission (Prime). Creditable sources on the airfield claim that two Zeros initially attacked, indicating that Kudo's was lost by the time they reached the airfield (AWM 54 625/3/7). More circumstantial is the fact that the attacking Zeros of the 3rd Air Wing had been in aerial action mainly in the first days of the Philippines campaign, against B-17s without tail guns. Thus it is possible that Kudo made a tail attack (not distinguishing the fairly new B-24, which had not fought in the Philippines, from a B-17) and was surprised by the tail gunner. In addition, after the attack there were strong beliefs in Broome that a Zero had been shot down somewhere, although this definitely did not occur over the airfield or the harbour. Tyler appears to push the boundaries of artistic licence in stating that Kudo's Zero was "blown to pieces" over the airfield while it rather dubiously scattered "fragments far out to sea" – none of the witnesses at the airfield or harbour saw any evidence of any planes being hit. This takes nothing away from Winckel's action (see below), and virtually all the Zeros were, surprisingly, hit by defensive gunfire, which was evidently much more significant than what the Official History suggests. Among the most significant evidence of all, seemingly ignored by the official historian and other researchers, is a report by the Broome Police Inspector written just after the raid which states that two Zeros were shot down: one by a four engined bomber and one by a Dutchman with a MG. This indicates that the survivor from the B-24 (Donoho) reported the destruction of the Zero by his plane. (see manuscripts held in Broome Museum).

63 NAA File: *Report on destruction of A16-119 at Broome, 3 March 1942* Series number A9695 Control symbol 70 Contents date range 1942 - 1942 Barcode 30045068 also see Prime, main narrative.

64 Tyler, Legge interview, Appendix G.

65 Prime, p. 40; letter from Matsumoto. As discussed above Winckel is generally credited with downing Kudo's Zero, however it seems much more likely that Kudo was downed in aerial combat with the B-24A and that Winckel hit other Zero(s).

66 See Prime, Tyler and other sources. Virtually all accounts of the Broome raid include versions of Winckel's brave action, the information here is a balanced account of all of these, weighted heavily to those written at the time.

67 Prime, see table with details of all Japanese pilots and aircraft taking part in the attack. Of the seven Zeros which returned to base after the attack, six of them had between one and six bullet holes.



Wreckage of a B-24 destroyed during the raid. The vehicle in the background appears to belong to MacRobertson Miller Aviation, although all such civilian vehicles were by then being used by the military. (Courtesy Russ Rayson via David Vincent)

Chapter 4

3 March 1942 - Other Events

Largely due to the advance warning, but also because of the attacker's orders to ignore civilian targets, there were no casualties on Broome airfield. Offshore, however, the B-24A *Arabian Nights* had crashed in flames and split in half on impact with the ocean. Most of the men had survived the crash to be thrown clear into the sea. Dr Stafford was last seen desperately trying to group them together amid the wreckage, which quickly sunk.¹ These men, especially those already wounded, probably drowned soon after this. Their privations and suffering will never be known. None of their bodies were ever recovered.² There was only one survivor, who battled the strong currents for over 24 hours before finally coming ashore the following evening. Even then it was sometime before he found civilisation. He was found walking down one of the runways naked and near exhaustion. One other man had also reached the shore, but he was found on a beach in a coma and never recovered, dying in hospital.

Otherwise, all of the other casualties occurred in the flying boats. About 30 people were entombed in the wrecks or swept away by the currents, their bodies never found. The actions of those in a handful of watercraft was crucial in rescuing the 150 or more survivors now in the water. *Nicol Bay* picked up the majority of the survivors, and Mathieson was later decorated by the Netherlands Government for his actions. Also aiding in the rescue work were the one or two other small powered vessels present, including the motor launch from *USS Childs* and the modified Qantas refuelling lugger. Such was the large area over which the people were now spread, others held onto inflatable dinghies, like the one launched from the RAAF flying boat by Corporal Ireland. Meanwhile, Captain Brain had made it down to the waterfront and with the help of another airline official managed to get a small rowboat out and rescued several more people, including a woman swimming while desperately trying to hold her baby up above the water.

Some of the vessels took survivors to a nearby mangrove beach, others to the end of the jetty, quickly disembarking their passengers so the vessels could return to pick up more survivors. Here and there isolated groups of people were swimming, and some reached the muddy shore or jetty in this way. The first batch of survivors onto the jetty, including the wounded, were loaded onto old flatbed railway trucks that were driven by a tiny steam locomotive. This was just as well, for the jetty was very long. Although barely faster than walking pace, at least

the train saved the exhausted survivors a long walk and took them to the main street of the town. Some of the people were still in a state of shock, or deliriously wandering around for no purpose. In organising and providing care for the survivors, Legge was helped by workmen from the airfield as well as the American air force men in the town. They had a lot of trouble communicating with the Dutch survivors, few of which could speak English. Many of the young children were without identification and were too traumatised to speak. Eventually a Dutch woman took them under her care.³

There were relatively few wounded for the rescuers to collect. Probably those that were wounded by gunfire or from the explosions were unable to support themselves in the water and soon drowned. Nevertheless, some wounded were treated on the beach, and then at the local hospital, by the only civilian doctor in town, Dr Jolly, and a USAAF medical officer, Dr Dimmock. According to one source, they “did wonders” and only one person died of their wounds.⁴ The local hospital was otherwise deserted, the nurses having evacuated with the women and children a week beforehand.

Those on the boats began the task of recovering the bodies. Some were so badly burned or mutilated to be unidentifiable. Some 15 or so women and children’s corpses were collected and brought into the town on the flatbed trucks. Following this, one Dutch serviceman buried his wife and three children. The VDC buried most of the rest, including more bodies washed up in the days following the raid.^{5, 6}

After the Zeros made a final sweep over Broome before forming up and departing northwards, quiet descended on the town. The burning aircraft made little noise, although thick black clouds of acrid smoke were pouring out of each wreck as if to compensate. Every now and then would be bangs from exploding ammunition within the wrecks. With this as a backdrop, the ant-like activity of rescue efforts was taking place. But unknown to those present, the carnage had not been limited to Broome harbour.

As detailed earlier, just as the raid was beginning, a hundred miles to the north an ex-Java KNILM DC-3 had made landfall near the top of Dampier Land. It then began following the coastline to Broome and was unlucky to cross exact paths with the returning Zero formation. A flight of the fighters detached and attacked the DC-3 over Carnot Bay, riddling the fuselage



Looking down the length of Broome jetty, with the old locomotive visible on the left. These flatbed trucks carried corpses back into the town after the 3 March 1942 raid. This photo was taken about a year later, by which time an anti-aircraft machine-gun position has been constructed behind the sandbags shown. (Australian War Memorial 051751)



Wrecked KNILM DC-3 on the beach at Carnot Bay. It had been skilfully crash-landed after being shot up by Zeros. At the time of landing the port engine was on fire, but this was doused by the surf. For this reason and because of limited fuel onboard after the long flight from Java, it did not completely burn out like the aircraft on Broome aerodrome. (Broome Museum)

with bullets. The DC-3 was put into a spiral-five and then skilfully crash-landed by its expert pilot, Captain Ivan Smirnoff. Several of the four crew and eight passengers had been wounded by gunfire. Four of these passengers died: two members of the MLD plus a woman and her infant son. Meanwhile the others took stock of their surroundings in the inhospitable terrain and awaited rescue. The following day, in a demonstration of Japanese aerial superiority in the region, the DC-3 wreck was bombed by a Japanese Kawanishi patrol plane.⁷

Even further to the northwest the Japanese had struck at Wyndham in a concurrent raid that morning. Mirroring the raid at Broome, eight Zeros and a single C5M had also been used.⁸ In reality this was a weaker squadron as the pilots, led by Sub-Lieutenant Toshitada Kawazois, were much less experienced than the elite men trusted with the ultra long range flight to Broome.⁹ Nevertheless this group also departed Koepang at first light that morning and crossed the Timor Sea, with their arrival over Wyndham timed to coincide with the Broome attack at about 930am.

In the vast expanse of land between Broome and Darwin, Wyndham stood out as a military target mainly because of the complete lack of anything else of interest in the region. Located

at the southern end of the long and narrow Cambridge Gulf, Wyndham was a dusty frontier town lacking the cosmopolitan flavour of Broome with its pearling heritage. The small township featured a port and a large meatworks, with the airfield seven miles away. Soon after Darwin was bombed, the evacuation of women and children was ordered. Around 70 were flown out in two specially chartered Australian National Airways DC-3s. Because of its close proximity to Timor, Wyndham was strategically located and evidently the Japanese suspected that fighters were based there.

Indeed the RAAF had developed Wyndham as part of their Advanced Operational Base program during 1940-41, and three intersecting runways had been built in an "A" pattern. This may have looked threatening from above to prowling Kawanishi patrol planes, but there were problems with the site due to the surrounding marshy ground and risks of flooding during certain times. The RAAF had abandoned plans for major operations at Wyndham and as a result two of the runways were permanently obstructed with logs, leaving just one in use.¹⁰ Only small twin-engined planes and Wirraways from Darwin routinely used this remaining strip.¹¹ Otherwise the "base" comprised just a few huts housing radio facilities and fuel drums stored in the open, with a handful of RAAF men stationed there.

In the lead-up to 3 March a mini-drama had been unfolding in the normally sleepy Wyndham area. This concerned the super-human efforts by the captain and a handful of crew to get the *Koolama* seaworthy again, which had been disabled then beached after being bombed by Kawanishi H6K flying boats in Joseph Bonaparte Gulf some days previously. Ultimately these efforts were successful, and after a short voyage *Koolama* dropped anchor at Wyndham jetty on the evening of 1 March 1942.

However *Koolama* was barely seaworthy and listing badly, needing continuous pumping as seawater seeped in through her damaged hull at an alarming rate. After arriving alongside Wyndham jetty there had been some success in unloading the military material onboard the ship as well as the heavy deck cargo, which included valuable earthmoving equipment originally destined for Darwin. This work was continuing early on 3 March. The large ship was very conspicuous at the jetty, and enemy reconnaissance planes were often overhead. Thus there was extreme urgency in unloading and then proceeding with whatever minimum level of repairs were necessary.



Wyndham town and jetty, pre-war. A large meatworks nearby was the main industry in the town. (State Library of Western Australia)

Meanwhile, most of the 180 passengers and crew onboard had been left in very

remote country where the vessel had originally been beached. In due course most of these people walked overland to Drysdale Mission. After the Qantas services to Java had ceased, one of the flying boats, *Camilla*, departed Broome on 2 March to search for *Koolama*. Not finding the vessel at its reported location in Joseph Bonaparte Gulf, while landing at Wyndham the crew were surprised to find *Koolama* alongside the jetty.¹² After getting the correct location of the *Koolama* survivors' camp, *Camilla* flew there the following morning and embarked 24, before taking off for Broome. *Camilla* was lucky to avoid the fate of the Dutch DC-3 at Carnot Bay, as Sub-Lt Kawazois' formation of Zeros must have passed very close to it on their way to and from Wyndham.

Camilla was one of three transport aircraft active around Wyndham that morning. A MacRobertson Miller Airlines Lockheed Electra had landed at the aerodrome around 9am.¹³ While it was being refuelled, an RAAF DH-84 Dragon landed. With struts and bracing wires prominent, the biplane contrasted sharply with the modern and streamlined Electra. As if to avoid such company, the Electra was on its way just a few minutes later, leaving a cloud of red dust to settle on the runway. Those onboard the Electra were also very lucky to avoid interception as within minutes the Zeros had arrived over their target.

It appears that as at Broome, a top cover flight circled overhead with the C5M, at least for the start of the raid. The attack on the airfield was opened by a flight of three Zeros strafing with their cannons and machineguns at very low level. Another two Zeros then joined the attack. The DH-84 was the obvious first target. Fortunately, the crew and passengers were able to get well clear as bullets and shells ripped through its fabric covered surfaces. The machine appeared unharmed momentarily, but soon a wisp of smoke appeared followed by flames. It would completely burn itself out. While this target had the attention of the Zeros, those few people present took cover in nearby scrub and there were no casualties.

The pilots then turned their attention to the single civilian hangar and a few buildings. All were strafed but the damage was largely superficial. The radio hut was surrounded by earth walls designed to protect against bomb splinters. The unprotected top of the hut was hit but the bullets struck at a flat trajectory and very high up, so none of the radio equipment was damaged. Alongside a water tank was holed and emptied. The Japanese pilots then found other targets in the form of the fuel dumps in far corners of the airfield. A 73 octane tank and fuelling equipment was destroyed. A few dozen drums owned by Vacuum Oil Co were destroyed as was almost half of a recently established US fuel dump. Soon thick clouds of dark smoke billowed into the air as the fuel drums exploded and burned.

However, the attackers ignored some very large and obvious fuel dumps around the field in favour of a very thorough strafing of the bush in the north-east corner of the aerodrome.¹⁴ It appears they believed fighters or possibly other aircraft to be dispersed and hidden there.

Possibly they depleted their ammunition with so much strafing of the bush, that they were unable to destroy the remaining fuel dumps.

Another flight of Zeros raided the wharf area of Wyndham, a mile from the town. So sudden was the appearance of the attackers that the handful of men working aboard *Koolama* had no time to get clear. They took what cover they could below decks, while those ashore dived under the jetty. On land most of the strafing was directed at the large meatworks buildings, although some other structures were also hit. Adjacent to the meatworks was the jetty, where *Koolama* made a prominent target. Bullets and shells hit her hull and steel superstructure but no apparent damage was done. The attack was over quickly, and no one was injured. Unlike Broome, there was no defensive fire from the ground at all.



Koolama turning over and sinking alongside Wyndham jetty.
(Authors' collection)

Although the Zeros were now gone from Wyndham (all arrived back in Timor safely), their raid would have a very serious indirect consequence. At the wharf an isolated raid by a few fighters made little sense. Those present felt sure further bombing attacks would follow. Thus everyone was ordered off *Koolama* with the intention of resuming work late in the day. But very soon the ship began taking on a serious list. She was secured with as many lines as could be found. These soon grew taut and such was the force that the jetty itself was pulled out of alignment before the lines broke and *Koolama* slowly keeled over into the muddy water. No doubt the Zero pilots would have been elated to learn from subsequent reconnaissance reports that they had apparently sunk the ship.

The actual damage inflicted on *Koolama* during the 3 March attack has never been determined, but was probably only superficial. It appears that during the confusion of clearing the ship just after the raid the electric pumps were inadvertently turned off (there had been plans to switch the pumps from the ship's power to that of the meatworks). As a result of the existing damage, the ship took on so much water that it became unstable.¹

Despite the paucity of targets at Wyndham, the Japanese remained wary of the location and kept a close eye on it. RAAF intelligence noted that the Wyndham Postmaster continued to report Japanese activity "all through March".¹⁵ Quite possibly the belief in fighters being based in the region may have persisted. Two days after the attack, three unidentified aircraft were seen above Wyndham. These were probably a flight of Zeros looking to draw up fighters or strafe other aircraft, but with nothing detected they did not risk coming down low to attack.

¹ *Koolama* remained a serious obstruction to navigation at the port for the duration of the war and afterwards. Part of her hull was visible at low tide, and various attempts at salvage were attempted. However these proved impossible as the great bulk of the ship would swing through the mud at a great angle with every tide, making any activity extremely dangerous. Additional complications were at least one unexploded bomb still in her hull. Eventually, a longer pier was built to bypass the wreck. *Koolama* remains there, six metres underwater, to this day.

Meanwhile back in Broome clean up and recovery efforts were continuing late in the morning of the raid when aircraft engines were again heard overhead. However, this time it was the familiar sound of the MMA Electra which had got away from Wyndham just before the raid there. The pilot, Jimmy Woods, was a long-serving local who knew the area intimately. He'd criss-crossed the rugged Kimberley Plateau in the past week to assist with the evacuation of civilians from the area. Now on approach to Broome he recognised unfamiliar columns of smoke on the horizon and circled cautiously some miles inland over the desert. Only after making radio contact did he make his approach. Wood was the first pilot to land at Broome after the raid. He could see several wrecks still smoking but none of them were on the main runway.

Most of those at Broome were in a state of shock, but Woods was determined to help as much as possible. After a quick conference with Legge, Woods was instructed to load the highest priority evacuees. He would shuttle as many as possible south to Port Hedland, and then return for more. On his first flight some 22 women and children – some injured – were packed aboard the small plane, more than double its normal capacity. He would return in a few hours, and thanks to Wood's solo effort the most urgent of the civilian evacuees were taken to Port Hedland, including virtually all of the wounded. He made at least three return flights. His last turn-around at Broome was made in near darkness, and one of his propellers clipped the wreckage of a B-17. This buckled the ends of the propellers, and normally would have grounded the aircraft. The intrepid Woods took a hacksaw to trim an identical few inches off each prop. No one even knew if the plane would fly, but it did claw itself into the air after a long take-off run, and carried another load of people to safety at Port Hedland. Woods' efforts and selfless determination had a big impact, as he single-handedly cleared most of the women and children remaining at Broome that day. Post-war, he was decorated by the Netherlands government, becoming a Knight of the Order of Orange Nassau.¹⁶



The stricken B-24A which had crashed during take-off from Broome on the night of 3 March. This photo appears to have been taken during the panic the following morning, just before the plane was set on fire. The tail guns appear to have been salvaged. (Australian War Memorial P02039.002)

A second Lodestar, piloted by Sergeant Major Kranenburg, had been scheduled to fly with Winckel's Lodestar. However it was delayed in taking off from Bandoeng, and by the time it approached Broome black smoke was sighted on the horizon. Kranenburg flew around for as long as possible, before landing at the last minute on empty tanks, arriving soon after Woods' Electra. Gus Winckel joined this crew and flew a load of wounded to Perth via Port Hedland. As many people as possible were fitted in the aircraft, including

a few brave souls who climbed into the windowless and cramped baggage compartment. Winckel continued to fly this plane virtually non-stop for the next two days, bringing evacuees south.

Another aircraft due into Broome that morning was the Qantas flying boat *Camilla*, which was carrying a party of *Koolama* survivors. While airborne the crew received warning of the attacks and flew low circuits inland from Derby until receiving the all clear. *Camilla* flew into Broome harbour about an hour after the raid. Carefully taxiing through the still smoking wrecks, the aircraft tied up to the jetty as the flying boat moorings had been sunk. Many of those present were convinced the low-level raid would be followed by high-level bombers in the afternoon, as had happened at Darwin. Needing fuel, *Camilla* was taken to a tidal creek, which offered some concealment and dispersal, and refuelled there from a lugger. Such was the fear of attack, the flying boat departed immediately for Port Hedland without passengers, intending to return at first light the next morning.¹⁷

As the first messages about the attacks were received in the south, there was not a lot that could be done. Already aircraft were operating at full capacity flying shuttles between Broome and Perth, and now these were more important than ever. Colonel Perrin was at Pearce air base near Perth and was instrumental in organising the USAAF response. Instructions were sent for the fleet of big bombers, then flying to Melbourne, to return as quickly as possible. A couple of aircraft then at Pearce also flew north. One of these was another B-24A, loaded with a RAAF doctor and medical supplies. Another was a twin engined USAAF C-39. Both arrived in Broome late that afternoon. Obviously more people could be moved from Broome via multiple short trips to Port Hedland than via a single long trip to Perth. However, USAAF aircraft could not use Port Hedland because there was no 100-octane fuel there, and the runways were not large enough for B-17s and B-24s.

That evening, the B-24A from Pearce landed at Broome bringing two RAAF officers to assist with the evacuation, along with Flight Lieutenant W Hamilton Smith, a RAAF doctor. Smith attended to a child's head wound, and then went to the hospital where he found Drs Jolly and Dimmock attending to the few casualties remaining. Interestingly, Smith reported that there was not a "vast amount of work left to be done" as the relatively few wounded had already been evacuated by air. However his presence



A Liberator on Broome airfield, after being set alight by its crew on 4 March. It would normally have been repaired but such was the expectation of an imminent enemy invasion that the valuable plane was destroyed to prevent capture. The Australian War Memorial identifies this shot as having been taken during the attack the day before. However, there are no photos of the other burning aircraft and the accompanying photo (above) could only have been taken on 4 March. (Australian War Memorial P02039.003)

de Havilland DH-84 Dragon

Specifications

Passenger Transport Aircraft

2 x 130hp engines

Speed: 128mph max; cruise 109mph;

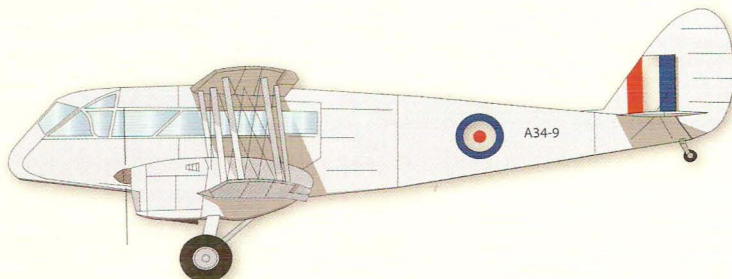
Range: 545 miles

Weight: 4,200lb max loaded

Crew: 1

Capacity: 6-8 passengers + crew

Notes: the DH-84 was a successful 1930s airliner. Many were used by the RAAF for training but their ability to land on short, rough fields made DH-84s ideal as communications aircraft in Australia's north.



DH-84 Dragon A34-9 destroyed on 3 March 1942. Later in the war RAAF Dragons were camouflaged, but earlier wartime photos show the aircraft in a natural finish, as A34-9 is depicted here.

DH-84 Dragon VH-URF had a long association with the Kimberley region, being based there as an airliner in the late 1930s. In May 1941 it was requisitioned by the RAAF, receiving the military registration A34-9. By early 1942 it had returned to the northern area.

On the morning of 3 March, A34-9 landed at Wyndham where a Lockheed Electra was being refuelled. The Electra flew off just minutes before the attacking Zeros arrived, so the DH-84 was probably just about to be refuelled itself. With no other aircraft present, the hapless biplane was the prime target of repeated strafing attacks. It soon caught fire and was completely burnt out. There were no casualties.

Two RAAF DH-84s were based in Pearce, and after the Broome raid they made regular visits to Broome and the surrounding area. RAAF authorities were sensitive about sending modern transports, such as DC-2s, into Broome after the attack there. It would seem that DH-84s were seen as somewhat expendable in this regard.

was welcomed by those remaining in Broome as the other two doctors departed soon after the raid. Subsequently Smith stayed in Broome for the next couple of weeks, cleaning up the hospital and gathering supplies in preparation for another raid.¹⁸

That evening was a panicky one in Broome, as people got over the shock of the raid and thought about its implications and their own position. There was no road out of Broome, and the feeling of isolation led many to feel as though they were trapped. Fortunately, those remaining in Broome had leadership: that of Lt-Col Legge. This would be criticised later, but there is no doubt the Americans were marshalled under him and working efficiently. The Dutch left in Broome, probably around 100 allowing for a few dozen that had already flown out, fell in under him as did most of the VDC men and civilians left in Broome. Only the 20 Qantas men were largely independent, and the dozen or so RAAF men at the airfield

were occupied with their own duties, such as running wireless telegraphy communications. Among the flurry of messages sent that day was one from Broome to RAAF Western Area Headquarters. The first line advised the number of Dutch seaplanes that had been destroyed. The second line of the message read:

EVACUATION WANTED 676 MEN ADVISE.¹⁹

Even though no general evacuation of Broome had been ordered, the message is notable for its tone of suggestiveness to higher authority.

Such was the keenness to fly out, the B-24A that had arrived that afternoon was refuelled and prepared for an immediate return flight. The pilot, Lieutenant Matthews (another Ferry Command pilot), was lacking a co-pilot so Lieutenant Evans, whose B-17 had been destroyed, volunteered. Along with the flight crew were about 30 passengers. These appear to have been priority military evacuees rather than civilians, and included the crew of the destroyed Hudson. It is likely that crews of other destroyed aircraft were onboard also, possibly with the intention that they could assist with further shuttle flights from the south in other aircraft. It was risky taking off from Broome at night, but the B-24A had the range to reach Pearce where there were night landing facilities, and the sooner it departed the sooner it would be back.

As the B-24 began speeding down the runway, it took a slightly diagonal track with its wheels locked into deep ruts. Increasing speed and vibrating madly over the unsealed ground, it lifted into the air on the edge of the runway. But the right landing gear clipped a 44-gallon drum that marked the runway edge. In an instant the aircraft yawed right and then nosed into the ground, as the nose undercarriage was possibly being retracted and had collapsed. As it slid along at an oblique angle, the weak bomb-bay doors crumpled on impact with the ground and dirt and sand flew up into the fuselage. But the fuel tanks did not rupture and there was no fire. The aircraft came to a halt in the desert scrub with its tail up in the air. There were no injuries, but the front entry hatch was unable to be used and to exit the plane the passengers had to jump some distance from the tail hatch, some receiving leg injuries in the process.

This was a serious accident, but the majority of the aircraft such as its wings, engines and tail structure remained undamaged. It was definitely repairable, otherwise parts of the plane, especially the four engines, were enormously valuable for use in other aircraft. However, Legge and others firmly believed that they had only hours to get out of the town before the Japanese arrived. In this atmosphere Legge was determined to carry out the “scorched earth” policy which was the only Australian defence policy relevant for the region at the time.²⁰ Thus the damaged B-24A was set on fire the following day, making it an indirect victim of the Japanese raid. It was the third of the huge B-24As to be lost at Broome.²¹ ♦

(Endnotes)

- 1 Partly in recognition of these efforts as well as his earlier deeds, in 1944 the U.S. Army hospital ship *Charles A. Stafford* was named in his honour.
- 2 Refer to Appendix 1 for a full casualty list.
- 3 Tyler, Legge interview, Appendix G.
- 4 Tyler, Rouse diary, Appendix G, entry for 3rd March 1942.
- 5 Wills gives some detailed personalised accounts of the experiences of various Dutch personnel at Broome. This is sourced from written accounts of the Broome raid held by the Broome Historical Society.
- 6 Refer to Appendix 1 for a full casualty list.
- 7 Wills gives a full account of the subsequent saga in regard to this group marooned at Carnot Bay, in *The Diamond Dakota Mystery*. As the name implies, aside from the story of survival of the eight survivors, the DC-3 also carried a valuable quantity of diamonds, en route The Commonwealth Bank, in Sydney. After lengthy proceedings most of the diamonds were eventually recovered.
- 8 According to Prime there were eight A6Ms in the Wyndham raid. *Bloody Shambles*, Vol 2 p.313 says that the eight A6Ms were led by a C5M, which is more likely and is quoted here. The use of this number rather than the usual nine Zeros is an indication that one of the aircraft could not be made ready for the mission in time.
- 9 Kawazois, for example, had not participated in the long range Formosa-Manila missions in December 1941.
- 10 Unused airstrips were routinely obstructed to prevent theoretical surprise use by enemy transport aircraft carrying paratroops.
- 11 Conceivably, the single-engined Wirraways may have been mistaken for fighters by Japanese reconnaissance, or via reports from their lugger fleets before the war began.
- 12 This was one of several examples of actions taking place on the basis of old information during the Broome operations, and underlines the severity of the communications problems there.
- 13 This was one of two Electras operated by that airline that served the northwest. Such was the essential nature of these services, the planes were not requisitioned during the war by the RAAF despite their obvious military value. See the Aircraft History section for more information.
- 14 AWM 54, Control Symbol 625/3/7; report by F/L C.V. Bell, Staff Officer Intelligence, North Western Area; 5th March 1942.
- 15 AWM 54, Control Symbol 625/3/7; report by F/L C.V. Bell, Staff Officer Intelligence, North Western Area; 5th March 1942.
- 16 See <http://www.airwaysmuseum.com/Lockheed%20DL-1A%20Vega%20VH-UVK%20&%20Jimmy%20Woods.htm> accessed 24th September 2009; article titled *Capt. Jimmy Woods & Lockheed DL-1A Vega Special VH-UVK*.
- 17 Bennett-Bremner, p.97.
- 18 NAA File AWM 54 625/3/7 Report from F/Lt W.H. Smith on Broome medical arrangements at time of first enemy raid by Zeros.
- 19 NAA File: Enemy Air Attacks - Broome WA Series number A1196 Control symbol 15/501/247 Barcode 199863
- 20 Also consistent with the scorched earth policy, a day later Legge was keen to "blow the 'drome". See Chapter 5.
- 21 Livingstone, p.20.



A view of Broome pre-war, described as neat-looking by at least one evacuee visitor. The long jetty can just be made out top left, which was at the far end of the town and linked by the mini-railway. With more than 100 European women and children and over 200 Japanese internees sent south, there was plenty of vacant housing for evacuees in February-March 1942. (State Library of Western Australia)

Chapter 5

Evacuation

On the evening following the raid, those present in Broome were still getting over the shock of it all. Many of the senior officers and officials gathered in the Broome Roads Board offices, where pessimism reigned. According to Capt Brain, Lieutenant-Colonel Legge was “very peeved” and did little to boost the confidence of those remaining in the town when he loudly exclaimed, in his typical colourful language, “Give us 24 hours to get out of this goddamn place and you can have it!”¹

This expressed the sentiment of many present. Despite the heat, the blue skies and the sparkling sea, Broome had become a dark place for most of the servicemen there. Many were veterans of the Philippines and Java and were somewhat conditioned to conflict. However the deaths of women and children made a special impact. Among the United States Naval personnel present was Al Armbruster, from one of the two PBV-4s destroyed. He was on the jetty at the time of the raid and later helped to stack bodies onto a flatbed rail car “like cordwood”. Armbruster probably summed up the feelings of many when, many years later, he described 3 March 1942 as “the most horrible day of the war”.²

At 4.10am on the next morning - 4 March - a Japanese patrol plane cruised over the town, not so subtly reminding everyone that Broome was virtually defenceless.^{3,4} Earlier, very faintly against the horizon, ship’s smoke was seen. Legge’s proclamation that this was a “Nip cruiser” did little to calm the situation.⁵ Given that Broome was still in the ABDA area, his authority over local affairs was unclear in an emergency situation, and it is possible that he genuinely believed the fate of the town was in his hands.⁶ While he was in Broome he was unarguably the ranking officer, and compared to the elderly local VDC officers would have appeared dynamic if not charismatic. Thus in the absence of other leadership, Legge’s influence ruled supreme for a few days.

As promised, at first light the Qantas flying boat *Camilla* returned from Port Hedland. It was immediately loaded with evacuees, prioritised by Qantas rather than Legge. Almost all of the 17 Qantas staff were included. Alongside them were 19 USN men from the two PBV-4s lost during the raid.⁷ *Camilla* departed for Port Hedland just after 7am. Brain, who remained in Broome, was still wary of Legge’s authority, and noted that he had no reason to accept “... instructions other than direct from Aviat”. Despite the catastrophe that had occurred, Brain

appeared committed to this stance, perhaps somehow wanting to isolate his own organisation from the surrounding military debacle. Indeed, he appeared to note reluctantly that "it seems that we are required to co-operate with the Americans"⁸

Daylight brought renewed activity to the airfield. The most noticeable arrivals were the big four-engined B-17 Flying Fortresses and a handful of LB-30 Liberators.⁹ Most flew directly

BROOME BOMBED BY JAPS

Machinegun Raid at Wyndham

Broome and Wyndham, in North-West Australia, were almost simultaneously attacked by Japanese aircraft yesterday morning, stated a RAAF war communique issued by Mr Drakeford, Air Minister, last night.

The attacks were directed at aerodromes and grounded aircraft. No bombs were dropped at Wyndham, where the attack was made by machinegun and cannon fire. It is reported that bombs were dropped at Broome. Some damage was caused at both towns. There were no casualties at Wyndham.

Details of the attack on Broome are not yet complete, but no casualties are reported.

GROWING SERIOUSNESS

Referring to the raids on Wyndham and Broome, Mr Forde, Army Minister, said last night — "I have received information to the effect that Wyndham was attacked by Japanese aircraft today, and another message received indicated that enemy aircraft had also raided Broome and bombed the aerodrome."

"For security reasons I cannot give any further information. These raids show the growing seriousness of the war as it affects Australia. Bombing attacks on our own soil bring the war nearer to Australian citizens. Three of our towns in the north-west have now been attacked by the Japanese, and we must be prepared for further attacks. These attacks should make us all the more determined to put every ounce of energy into the war effort, to which everyone in Australia should make his maximum contribution."

MENACE TO CAPITAL

Late last night, Mr. Curtin, Prime Minister, issued a state-

ment on the raids.

"Australia had to make in a short time all preparations to meet the enemy on her own territory," he said. "Darwin, Wyndham, and Broome were 3 important strategic points in the security of Australia as a whole. I have long been impressed with the menace to the population in our larger capitals which the northern part of Australia would constitute if the enemy were able to use it as a base. If the enemy becomes established in the north, his hitting power at the largest centres of population and economic activity becomes all the more dangerous. It is with air power that this is done."

Mr. Curtin said he hoped a long while ago that Australia would look on air power as among its more formidable arms. The enemy realised the importance of Australia as a base for the Allies. This was the reason for the Japanese haste to get in quickly. Australia was vital to the United Nations. It was imperative to hold it, and this demanded a concentration of energy and total effort not yet displayed. The fighting power and the working power of the nation had to be organised in a mobilisation so complete that every person had his or her allotted task.

"I make no bones about this declaration," Mr. Curtin said. "The nation is at war, and everything in it therefore has to be devoted to the purpose of war."

Headline from The Argus newspaper, Melbourne, 4 March 1942. This is how most Australians learned of the Broome and Wyndham raids. Virtually no detailed information was released, with the newspaper cryptically reporting that "there were no casualties at Wyndham" and that "no casualties are reported" at Broome.

south with 20-25 passengers to Pearce air base outside Perth, and then east to Laverton air force base in Melbourne. Some of the long range Liberators, flew directly to south-eastern Australia over the desert. As a number of these planes arrived in Broome quite late in the day they were not refuelled and ready to go until nightfall. However such was the urgent desire to leave that a flarepath was lit for night take-offs. A good portion of the USAAF men in Broome, most likely over 200, were flown out on these planes on 4 March. The movements were controlled by Colonel Perrin at Pearce, where, among other things, the communications were better than at Broome.¹⁰

Parallel to the USAAF flights were those of sundry smaller twin-engined aircraft. A miscellany of Dutch civil and military aircraft had flown into Broome since late February. Few of these were actively engaged in the Broome-Perth airlift as many had flown passengers to Sydney. Some were making their way back to Broome, but the return trip to Sydney could take smaller aircraft as long as 4-5 days. Thus just a handful of smaller planes were actively ferrying Dutch civilians, and other non-USAAF evacuees such as RAF and RAAF personnel, to Port

Consolidated LB-30 Liberator

Specifications

Heavy Bomber

4 x 1,200hp engines

Range: 4000 miles (ferry); ~2,000 miles loaded.

Crew: 6+

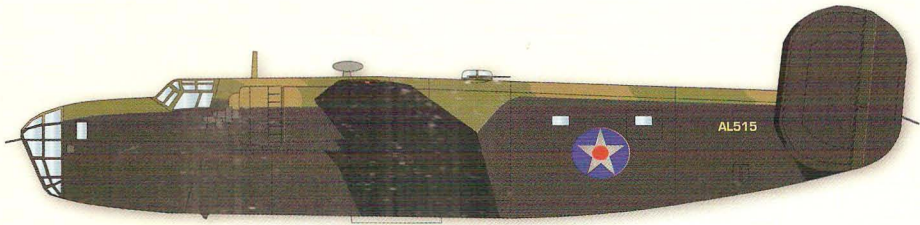
Armament: 8,000-lb of bombs in bomb-bay; 8 x 0.50-inch MGs (twin: dorsal turret & tail; single: nose, belly, L & R waist)

Speed: 263mph max

Weight: 64,000lb max loaded

Capacity: max 35 persons (incl crew)

Notes: "LB-30" was an early export version of the B-24. After Pearl Harbor, the USAAF requisitioned a number of RAF LB-30s direct from the production line. Fully combat-capable as bombers and introducing a dorsal turret, LB-30s had self-sealing fuel tanks but lacked armour. Performance was hampered by the lack of turbo-superchargers, common on later Liberators.

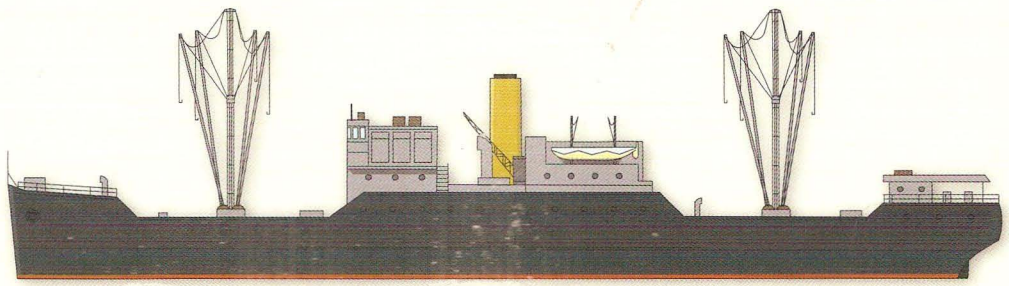


LB-30 Liberator AL515 as it appeared during the Broome operations.

While preparing to reinforce Java, there were not enough B-17Es available for the 7th Bombardment Group, so one squadron was equipped with LB-30s. They were the first American Liberators to see combat, flying a number of bombing missions. By late February LB-30s were mostly used as transports, as they were more capable than B-17s in this role. On 1 March two LB-30s preparing to depart Java for Broome were strafed and destroyed. Just three LB-30s evacuated to Broome, but were not present during the raid on 3 March. Following this, they assisted with the USAAF evacuation from Broome to Melbourne.

Hedland. There were also one or two USAAF Douglas transports contributing, such as a lone C-39, for example, which flew from Broome to Pearce on 4 March. A single Australian National Airways DC-2 had been chartered for these operations and had just arrived in Perth. During the course of 4 March, it spent over 12 hours in the air, flying to Port Hedland to pick up 15 evacuees, some of them wounded. The DC-2 landed in Perth around midnight but on the instructions of Lt-Col Legge had actually redirected it there instead of Broome. It eventually landed in Perth around midnight. In addition, that afternoon the flying boat *Camilla* had been ordered to fly wounded evacuees from Port Hedland to Perth rather than return to Broome.¹¹

Following the raid on 3 March, the Dutch headquarters at Bandoeng in Java were advised of the attack and were instructed to route incoming aircraft to alternate fields at Derby or Port Hedland. In the event, none of the planes leaving Java were flown into Derby, which was north of Broome, and badly waterlogged. Most pilots tried to reach Port Hedland, although a few landed on secondary fields elsewhere, such as sheep stations, because of a lack of fuel or faulty



Admiral Halstead cargo vessel (USA)

3,289 gross tons	Built: 1921	335 ft length x 46 ft beam
Cruising speed: 9½ kts	Armament:	2 x Machine-Guns

The *Admiral Halstead* was in Darwin Harbour when the Japanese attacked on 19 February. Although laden with 14,000 drums of aviation fuel, the crew put up enough of a fight with the ship's machineguns to deter the dive bombers. After the attack most of the cargo was unloaded in Darwin. At this time it was possible that USAAF bombers would use bases in the northwest, needing large quantities of fuel. So carrying part of her original cargo *Admiral Halstead* sailed as far as Cape Londonderry, escorted by the corvette *HMAS Warrnambool*. Fortunately Lieutenant Davis saw how dangerous it was for *Admiral Halstead* to stay in port and directed her safely to the south.

navigation. At least one further KNILM plane appears to have flown directly into Broome. This was a DC-2 with only just sufficient range, arriving around 4 March. It was refuelled without difficulty and continued on to Sydney, being the last land plane out of Java to arrive at the pearling town.¹²

A good number of evacuees left by sea. They crammed themselves onto the decks of the *Nicol Bay*, which sailed for Port Hedland with the evening outgoing tide. This group numbered about 100, and included most of the remaining Dutch survivors from the flying boats, a mix of civilians and servicemen. Some American naval personnel also departed in this way, together with men from the RAF Catalinas.¹³ By nightfall more than half of all those waiting to be evacuated had been, or were about to be, flown out to safety.

A Royal Australian Navy reservist officer, Lieutenant Davis, had been urgently flown to Broome in early February to assist with the evacuation of the pearling lugger fleet.¹⁴ Davis proved to be a valuable "cool head" in Broome at this time, and also assumed the role of acting naval officer in charge of the port. However the familiar story of poor communications and a lack of coordination by higher command almost led to another disaster. *Admiral Halstead* was a 3,289 ton American freighter that had been one of the few vessels to survive the Darwin raid - something of a miracle considering her cargo of 14,000 drums of aviation fuel. Much of this cargo was subsequently offloaded at Darwin in the week following the raid, but it was then realised that the stock of 100-octane fuel at Broome might be inadequate for the coming Java evacuation operations. Also the USAAF was considering permanent operations from the northwest, so more 100-octane fuel would be needed. At the end of February *Admiral*

Halstead sailed westwards from Darwin with a partial load of aviation fuel. A RAN corvette, *HMAS Warrnambool*, escorted the merchantman past the focal point of Cape Londonderry.¹⁵ The escort detached at dusk to leave *Admiral Halstead* to make her own way along the rugged Kimberley coastline under the relative safety of darkness. On 2 March the merchantman put into Derby, probably due to out-of-date orders as aviation fuel was never needed there. *Admiral Halstead* would have been a sitting duck for enemy aircraft in such a location but her captain was determined to follow his orders. So on 3 March, at the time of the Broome raid, the merchantman was slowly making its way around Dampier Land for Broome.

It was after the raid that Davis realised the risk that *Admiral Halstead* would take in approaching Broome. If she did arrive, unloading would have been time consuming and labour intensive, further complicated by tidal considerations. Davis made further enquiries with Legge's officers about the actual fuel status at the airfield. Fortunately, there was just enough fuel to complete the evacuation flights. Armed with this information, Davis sought to broadcast an emergency warning message to *Admiral Halstead* to avoid the port. However he did not have the relevant codebooks so the message would need to be *en clair*. But Davis did not want to alert the enemy to the presence of the ship by addressing it specifically. Instead a general warning message was broadcast for shipping to stay clear of the port.

However, *Admiral Halstead's* captain was determined to fulfil his mission and came into Broome anyway early on 4 March.¹⁶ A near comical situation now developed as the ship anchored in the deep channel a mile from the jetty. There were no boats available to



Pre-war shot of a typical Broome pearling lugger crew. Note a man in a diving suit right of centre. Aside from a single European (probably the master or owner), the remainder of the crew is a mixture of Asians. While those of Japanese descent had already been interned, it seems the presence of the remaining Asian population rather spooked Lieutenant-Colonel Legge, USAAF, who wrote a report accusing various Broome identities of having Japanese sympathies. (State Library of Western Australia)

approach the ship, and no way of signalling it. A string of signal flags were flown by *Admiral Halstead* but nobody on the jetty could read them without the proper handbook. Eventually the ship came right alongside the jetty. The captain was very relieved when the situation was explained and he cast off and went back out to sea immediately. Nevertheless, his insistence on coming in was much admired by those present.¹⁷ Somehow the ship was missed by the ever-present Kawanishi patrol planes and arrived safely in Fremantle a few days later.

On 4 March the Prime Minister said in regard to Broome: "It is utterly untrue that the loss of life was very heavy as a result of the raids on Wyndham and Broome ... while losses have been incurred, the raids were not of a kind to give the satisfaction to the enemy which he expected".¹⁸ Such comments were designed to prevent southern public panic, which the government seemed to fear more than anything else. Locally bodies were still being recovered from the mangroves.

Almost nothing had been done for the defence of Broome since the Pacific War began.¹⁹ Virtually the only "reinforcements" from the south were a small detachment of army engineers, under the leadership of Lt. Cook, RAE. These men were tasked with organising demolitions of the airfield and other installations in accordance with the "scorched earth" policy.

Especially given that the women and children had already been evacuated, it is hardly surprising that those remaining in Broome had no real confidence in the authorities' capacity to manage their futures. In particular, how could the authorities, hundreds of miles to the south, order a general evacuation in time to give them a chance to escape? A main worry for the townsfolk was the possibility of the town itself being cut-off as it lay in the middle



Perhaps the most unusual aircraft type involved in the evacuations was the rare DC-5. Seen here during a refuelling stop at Cloncurry is KNILM DC-5 PK-ADB, circa 1941. This was probably its only visit to Australia prior to evacuating via Broome in March 1942. (Courtesy Ben Dannecker Collection via Ron Cuskelly)

Lockheed Model 14 Super Electra

Specifications

14-seat Airliner

2 x 900hp engines

Speed: 250mph max at 5,800ft; cruise 215mph

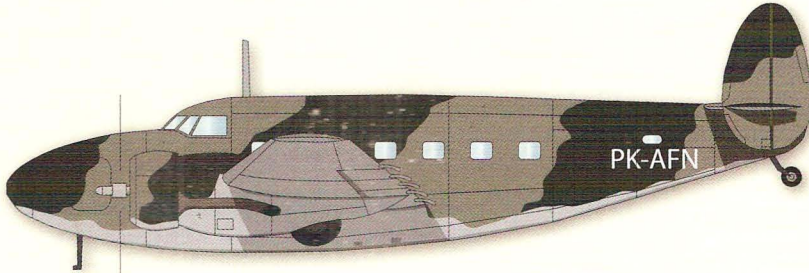
Range: 2,125 miles (max); 850 miles (loaded) Weight: 17,500lb max loaded

Crew: 2

Capacity: 14 passengers + crew

Notes: the Model 14 Super Electra was designed to compete with the Douglas DC-3. Both types had seven rows for passenger seats, but the Lockheed was narrower, with only two seats abreast instead of three. As a result the Super Electra had limited commercial appeal.

KNILM



Camouflaged KNILM Super Electra

KNILM's four Lockheed Model 14s came under military control when war began and were camouflaged. One was damaged during a strafing attack on Kemajoran Airport on 9 February. The other three Model 14s all evacuated to Broome on 20 February, while the damaged aircraft was repaired and flew out later.

W.R. Carpenter & Co.

In 1941 Lockheed Model 14 Super Electra VH-ADT entered service on the "Carpenters" route from Sydney to Rabaul. This route was interrupted by the Japanese occupation of Rabaul in January 1942. Starting on 23 February 1942, VH-ADT was chartered by the Australian government for the northwest evacuations.

of a small, narrow peninsula. They had a point. The airfield was located at the neck of the peninsula, with the one road out of town running along the airfield boundary. As had happened in Timor, Sumatra and elsewhere, Japanese paratroops could occupy the airfield virtually without warning, thus blocking the single escape route. Convinced that the enemy would land at any time, an overland evacuation convoy was organised by elements of the population. This seemed to have semi-official status in the eyes of Legge, as some Americans joined the convoy. Other sources claim these were "American deserters" who were too afraid to wait an additional day for air evacuation. According to one USAAF man, Frank Kurtz, Legge said: "we expect planes in between now and midnight, but we don't know how many. We're compiling a priority list, but if your name isn't called by 2 o'clock, I advise you to get out of here quick, the best way you can, even if you have to walk – and it's a long walk".²⁰

Kurtz then says he was one of nine whose name wasn't called and who decided to join a civilian contractor "who offered us a lift". The contractor was Bell Brothers, of Perth, who

Lockheed Model 10 Electra

Specifications

10-seat airliner

2 x 450hp engines

Range: 713 miles

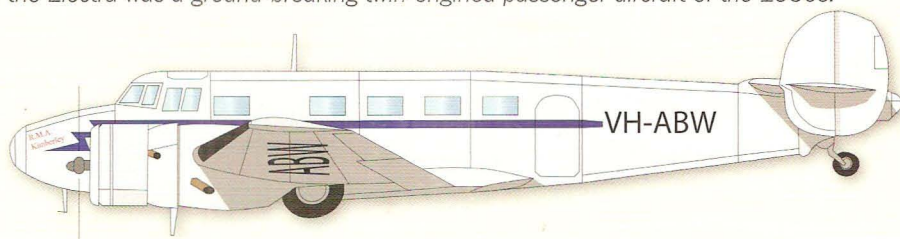
Crew: 1-2

Speed: 201mph max;

Weight: 10,500lb max loaded

Capacity: 10 passengers + crew

Notes: the Electra was a ground-breaking twin-engined passenger aircraft of the 1930s.



MMA Electra VH-ABW which flew out wounded civilians from Broome to Port Hedland after the raid on 3 March 1942.

In early 1939 MacRobertson Miller Aviation introduced two Lockheed Model 10-A Electras for their Perth-Darwin route, which took two full days to cover 2,300 miles and 12 stops. One of these aircraft played a central role in the Broome operations. Another local operator was Ansett, which used Lockheed Model 10-B Electras on routes in eastern Australia. Two aircraft were diverted to the northwest in early 1942.

had arrived in Broome at short notice to work on the airfield. The men had brought with them a number of large trucks which were now allocated to the convoy. According to Kurtz there were five Ford trucks between 30 Bell Brothers men. In addition there were a number of townspeople with their own vehicles. They set off but it was to be hard going. Some 300 miles south of Broome is Port Hedland, but in between lies the Great Sandy Desert – a huge blank space of nothingness on the maps. Along the coast were a very few sheep stations, but the road simply ran out 20 miles south of Broome. The convoy ran into enormous difficulties, and had to manhandle trucks through sand and around saltwater marshes. Although some fresh kangaroo and sheep meat was obtained along the way all other supplies had to be carried on the vehicles themselves. About 100 miles south the convoy ran into near-impassable floodwaters at Anna Plains. Within 48 hours most had returned to Broome. A few persevered and eventually reached Port Hedland.²¹

In the eyes of Lester Brain, the Americans in the convoy were “deserters” and the local component a “nervous rabble”.²² No doubt a careful man like Brain would have looked critically on such a hastily conceived and impulsive operation that locals should have known was futile anyway. There were a number of more level-headed townspeople who remained and kept some of the services running, such as the post-office and one or two private businesses. However for a few days even these people left for bush camps in the morning, returning to the town late in the afternoon. The reasoning was that any air attack or paratroop landing would occur in the middle of the day given the hours of daylight the planes would need to fly from

Timor. It was assumed some warning would be given of a seaborne landing, and people kept their bags packed to leave at a moments notice. Many built bush camps had supplies hidden for such an eventuality.

During February a few hundred Aborigines had been evacuated from Broome to the remote Beagle Bay mission, some 80 miles to the north. Probably the forgotten group of people amid all the accounts of Broome at this time was the Asian population. Generally they lacked the resources to move elsewhere, but probably followed the actions of other residents in “going bush” during daylight hours. Up to 200 Asian men had been employed by the Americans maintaining the airfield, but most became linked in some way to the fate of the lugger fleet. As the aerial evacuation drew to a close, more of these labourers returned to working under the instructions of Lieutenant Davis to make the lugger fleet seaworthy.²³

At this time, Legge was involved in yet another spy hunt. Evidently, the Asiatic heritage of Broome had him seeing fifth columnists everywhere. For example, one prominent local business was reported for displaying a pre-war Japanese sign. However, the spark for the investigation was “a radio operator from the 7th Bomb Group in one of the local taverns drinking beer” who heard a radio transmitter being operated by one of the mixed race locals (the full-blood Japanese had all been interned). After an investigation by his officers, a shop-owner named Mr Ellis was named. When this was reported to the local VDC intelligence officer, Captain Goldie, he replied, somewhat naively in the circumstances, that “Mr Ellis was



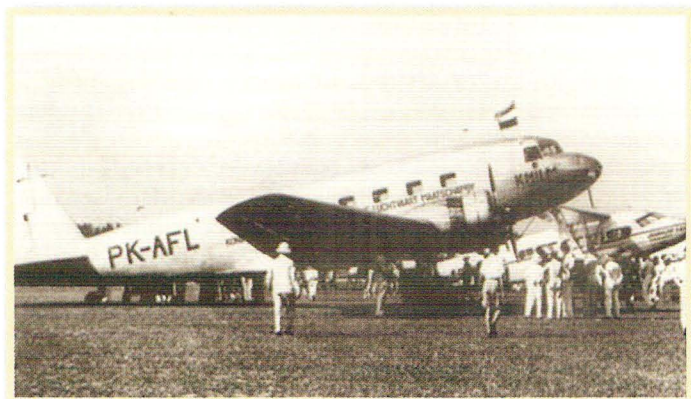
Lockheed Electra pilot Jimmy Woods, seen here relaxing in front of a typical Broome residence before the war. Following the attack, Woods bravely made repeat flights into Broome to bring out the highest priority evacuees, such as wounded Dutch civilians. One of the most well known figures in Western Australian aviation, Woods' career spanned several decades. (State Library of Western Australia)

too nice a man to do anything like that.” As soon as he left Broome, Legge submitted a report to intelligence headquarters. With Keystone Cop overtones, the report ended by casting Captain Goldie himself under suspicion, suggesting he had “very strong Japanese sympathies”.²⁴ There is no evidence that any of this material was acted upon – or taken seriously – after Legge’s departure from Broome.

At 9pm that evening came news of an extraordinary survival feat that diverted everyone’s attention away from spy-hunting. At the airfield, American airmen working in the open lighted hangar were shocked to see a single naked figure walking with some difficulty down the middle of the runway towards them. The man was Sergeant Melvin Donoho, USAAF, and he was blistered, badly sunburnt and near exhaustion. Donoho had been aboard the doomed B-24A *Arabian Nights*. Surviving the sinking several miles offshore Donoho and one other airmen, Sergeant Willard Beatty, began swimming together in the direction of smoke on the horizon, which they correctly assumed was Broome. However, they barely made progress against the strong tidal currents, and Donoho had to support Beatty, who was weakening. Finally, after over 24 hours in the water, the lighthouse at Gantheaume Point came into view. Late that afternoon Donoho decided to swim on by himself to get help, coming ashore that evening. After following a rough track he was guided towards the airfield by the glow of the runway flarepath. After being fed and clothed Donoho was able to report to Colonel Legge.²⁵

At first light the next morning, a search party set out. They soon found Beatty, washed up on Cable Beach in bad condition. He was quickly flown to a hospital in Perth, but by then he had lapsed into a coma, and he died soon afterwards. Earlier, Legge had asked Brain if the flying boat *Camilla* could be flown up from Port Hedland to conduct a search. However, Brain argued, with some good reason, that the idea was impractical. During the night there were still some large bombers in Broome, and Brain suggested that one of these should delay its departure

until daylight and conduct a small search. However, so jittery was the atmosphere at Broome, Legge was unwilling to do even this. The plane had crashed relatively close inshore so it was decided to mount a search using the small motor launch left by *USS Childs*.



KNILM DC-2 PK-AFL seen during peacetime. This was the last land-plane to fly Java – Broome on 4 March (other flights now went to Port Hedland). Aircraft without the range to reach Australia, such as the de Havilland biplane airliner in the background, were destroyed by the Dutch to prevent capture. (Authors’ collection)

At 4am on 5 March the launch departed, with four men onboard including Brain and Flight Lieutenant Smith, the

Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation Wirraway

Specifications

2-seat trainer,
general purpose aircraft

1 x 600hp engine

Speed: 220mph max;
182mph cruise

Range: 720 miles

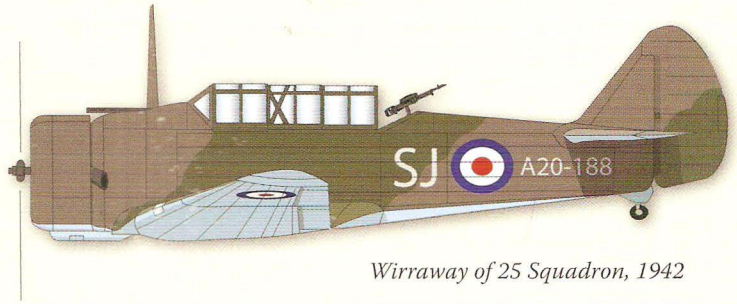
Max load: 6,450lb

Crew: 2

Capacity: nil, or 1 passenger in lieu of rear crewman

Armament: 2 x forward-firing 0.303-inch MGs; 1 x flexible 0.303-inch MG (rear cockpit); up to 1,000lb of bombs on underwing racks (normal load 500lb)

Notes: Built locally, in early 1942 Wirraways were the RAAF's primary single-engined warplane, equipping several front-line squadrons. While clearly unsuitable as a fighter, Wirraways had potential as light attack aircraft or even dive bombers.



Wirraway of 25 Squadron, 1942

RAAF

Two Wirraway squadrons operated in the northwest of Australia: 12 Squadron at Darwin, NT, and 25 Squadron at Pearce, WA. Wirraways were rather short ranged but the foresight of building the coastal network of AOBs permitted them to deploy virtually anywhere for short periods. 12 Squadron was regularly active at Drysdale and Wyndham in the far north of WA. In March 1942 two Wirraways were lost in the vicinity of the latter base. From Pearce, starting in mid-March a detachment of 25 Squadron Wirraways was stationed at Geraldton for the purpose of conducting daily coastal patrols north to Onslow. In fact, just days after the Broome raid, on 6 March, two Wirraways had arrived in Broome.¹ As described in Chapter 5, the Wirraways located the survivors of the DC-3 wreck at Carnot Bay.

(Endnotes)

¹ Tyler, Brain diary, Appendix A. Strangely, this mission is not mentioned in 25 Squadron records.

recently arrived RAAF doctor. Outside the harbour the small launch fought adverse tides and winds. It was not built for the open ocean and soon was low in the water with waves coming over the bow. The men began bailing, but conditions became worse. They shipped a big wave that stopped the engine and submerged the boat. It was now foundering and with water up to their waists, the men managed to get three 200kg drums of fuel overboard. After further vigorous bailing, the launch righted itself and the boat continued, reaching the area where the B-24 went down, where the searchers found various items of wreckage and debris from the wreck. A wide area was searched including the beaches, but no sign of any survivors was found before the launch eventually returned to Broome at noon.²⁶

The jetty was strangely deserted. The USAAF evacuation had been largely completed earlier that morning. During the day a Flying Fortress arrived from Melbourne and two Liberators came in from Perth. They flew out virtually all of the remaining evacuees, with just Legge and a few other Americans remaining.²⁷ Another Japanese reconnaissance aircraft flew over the

town, putting those present even more on edge.²⁸ It probably sighted no aircraft, as by now friendly pilots were careful to remain at Broome either only during the hours of darkness or for brief daylight turn-arounds avoiding the middle of the day.

On the afternoon of 6 March, the last B-24A then in Australia (after three had been lost at Broome), arrived from Melbourne. Legge and another USAAF man, Jack Berry, boarded this aircraft and departed, concluding the American evacuation. Legge's diary entry states: "Jack and I planned to set some charges on the runway, blow it and walk out after dark. We had two rifles, plenty of ammo, two canteens each and enough food for about a week. We would head for a cattle station that we'd heard about, some 40 miles up the Fitzroy River. We might find out how 'roo tasted....about 1700 hours..a B-24 arrived..I was never so glad to see a bomber in my life. It saved us a long walk."²⁹

Legge's suggestion is mere melodrama. Lieutenant Cook and his men, in late February, had indeed been organising some means of airfield destruction but had been ordered to cease work by the Americans. Possibly Legge had given orders to resume this work, but the method for demolishing an aerodrome was time consuming and labour intensive and there is no evidence it had been significantly begun. Dozens of narrow holes eight feet deep had to be drilled at regular, 300ft spacings along the runways and filled with 50lb waterproof bags of gelignite. A 1-inch wide conduit would be slipped down the hole into the charge and the hole filled in, with the conduit end 1-inch below the runway surface. All of this had to be done carefully to avoid the explosives being water damaged and/or to avoid the hole caving in while the runway was in use. Then when it was time for detonation, another time-consuming operation was needed: a detonator lowered down each conduit, attached to a fuse, the end of which was exposed above the surface. There was no electric detonation system, so "blowing the 'drome" was a lengthy operation, with each charge having to be fired by hand.³⁰ Actually, two days beforehand, whilst the land convoy was getting underway and morale at Broome was pessimistic, the intention to demolish the aerodrome late on 5 March became widely known, via an "Aviat" official, who'd been in Broome in regard to the airfield work. The Air Board was notified of these plans and sent back messages in very definite terms stating the "'drome" was not to be demolished except under immediate threat of occupation and then only under the orders of the regional air force commander.³¹

The other event that occurred on 6 March was the arrival of two RAAF 25 Squadron Wirraways that had flown up from Pearce.³² Although remembered more as a training aircraft, at the time Wirraways were Australia's front-line single-engine warplanes. They were camouflaged, armed with multiple machine guns and could carry bombs. For these reasons, they probably provided some peace of mind for those still at Broome, as tangible evidence that they were not completely forgotten by the forces in the south. This is especially true for the small group of RAAF men manning the airfield and the radio station there. These men were among the brave

minority that remained at their posts after the raids and after the Americans had flown out.³³ Normally the Wirraways did not venture much further north than Geraldton. However, it would seem they were despatched to Broome after signals were exchanged about the need for conducting an inshore search for the ill-fated *Arabian Nights*. By the time they arrived in Broome, the despatch of the launch on the previous morning had confirmed there were no other survivors. But there were other missing aircraft in the area, including MLD Dorniers south of Broome, as well as the downed KNILM DC-3 at Carnot Bay, 60 miles to the north. That afternoon Flight Lieutenant Macdonald led the two Wirraways to the Carnot Bay crash and dropped supplies together with a note reading: "Rescue group will be with you tonight with food and medical aid, much luck, Macdonald RAAF".³⁴

That night the search party found the survivors and led them back to Beagle Bay Mission. From there they were driven to Broome and after medical treatment were eventually flown to Perth via Port Hedland.

Earlier on 6 March, Captain Brain had seen the distinctive silhouette of a Catalina flying boat overhead. Later, he was surprised to "come across" the Dutch crew as they wandered through the deserted streets of Broome.³⁵ In the circumstances, it was perhaps strange that Brain and the other six Qantas men present did not provide services to the flying boat. They were actually in the process of planning their own departure, and had packed up their equipment in the expectation of flying out on a MMA Electra due in later that afternoon.³⁶ In the meantime, Brain invited the Dutchmen into the Qantas cottage for "morning tea". These men were from the MLD squadron GVT.5 and had departed Tjilitjap the night beforehand.³⁷ Brain was surprised to hear that Tjilitjap was still in friendly hands, as it indicates further evacuation operations would have been possible since 3 March. This meeting was also something of a coincidence, for the pilot Captain Burgerhout, was known to Qantas for rescuing the survivors of the flying boat *Corio* off Timor back in January. Nevertheless Burgerhout and his men did not remain long in Broome and had departed for the south by lunchtime.

Later that day a message arrived from Colonel Perrin, advising that the Electra would continue on to Darwin instead, and that the flying boat *Camilla* would return to Broome to pick up the Qantas personnel there.³⁸ The following afternoon *Camilla* arrived as promised and Brain left with most of his staff, flying to Port Hedland.

Also on 7 March two further MLD Catalinas flew into Broome. Both of these had been in a bad condition on Java. One was an old USN PBV-4 abandoned as not airworthy just days before at Tjilitjap. However, many skilled hands were available to help repair the battered flying boats, and after some difficulty both eventually made the flight to Broome, packed with mainly military evacuees. Such were the primitive conditions of these flights that one had no radio and no maps aside from an Australian Railways Company tourist map. One also arrived

without an anchor, and the crew obtained one salvaged from the Broome wrecks. Both flying boats took on enough fuel to get them to Port Hedland.³⁹ These were the very last evacuee planes to come into Broome.

After Brain left, it signalled the end of the period of strategic significance for the pearling town. The next day Java surrendered, and Broome's location no longer had any relevance apart from in relation to the defence of Australia itself. The last word from Java came from a commercial radio station, just before it was destroyed: "We are shutting down now. Good-bye 'till better times. Long live the queen!"⁴⁰

This was the beginning of a strange period of existence for Broome in a virtual "no-mans-land". Upon reaching Port Hedland, Brain was of the opinion that "10 armed men could capture Broome today".⁴¹ Another assessment was that "two transports of parachute troops could take Broome".⁴² Nobody was asking for resources to mount a serious defence – Brain, for example, thought that one "carefully selected officer" and a garrison of 100 men would do the job of ensuring demolitions at the right time.

Actually no one was in command of the ground forces in the northwest from 25 February until 8 March because of misunderstandings surrounding the bizarre "ABDA territory" arrangement. Following this, the General Officer Commanding, Western Command, was nominally in charge but was strangely determined to do nothing about the northwest whatsoever. His view was that any resources of any kind allocated would be to the detriment of defences in the south. This was a flawed and overly dogmatic view, and fortunately Western Command was soon replaced and policy changed from one of determined ignorance to active interest in the region.⁴³ ♦

(Endnotes)

1 Tyler, Brain diary, Appendix A.

2 Messimer, p.277

3 Tyler, Brain diary, Appendix A.

4 Japanese patrol planes were roaming around the region at will. Some hours later that morning a Kawanishi H6K flying boat dropped five light bombs on the wreck of the KNILM DC-3 at Carnot Bay. Some of these did not explode, either because of the soft sand or because they were duds (Prime, p18). At least one of these bombs was recovered in the 1970s.

5 Hasluck, Paul. *The Government and the People 1942-1945*. Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1970. See p.146 where this statement is taken as evidence of Legge's overly panic-driven leadership. However, in Legge's defence, powerful Japanese naval forces were not far away in the Indian Ocean at the time. Not only was Broome defenceless, but no reconnaissance was being undertaken of the northwestern area, so if unexpected smoke did appear it was not unreasonable to allow the possibility of it being enemy. An excessive amount of hindsight appears to be at play in casting this judgement on Legge. Another factor to consider is the apparent Australian necessity for finding a scapegoat to help explain the disaster at Broome.

6 The ABDA Command closed down in practice on 25th February, as Java was virtually the only territory remaining to be defended. However, it is a seemingly forgotten technicality that Broome remained a part of the ABDA territory after this date until Java surrendered on 8th March 1942. Nominally, Legge commanded any forces in Broome formally allocated to ABDA, while "local defence forces" remained in local command. It is unclear if this delineation was properly understood by any of those present, even those in high command. Refer to NAA File 'ABDACOM' - An official account of events in the South-west Pacific Command - January to February 1942 Series number A816 Control symbol 37/301/267 Barcode 3365569

- 7 If there was a lack of cooperation between Brain and the USN before 3 March, this atmosphere seems to have softened somewhat after the raid.
- 8 Bennett-Bremner, p.97 & Tyler, Brain diary, Appendix A.
- 9 The LB-30 was a sub-type of the B-24 Liberator built for the British but rushed into USAAF service after Pearl Harbor. Curiously, these entered American service under their British designation and with RAF serial numbers. Refer to the Aircraft History section for further information.
- 10 See NAA Files incl RAAF Unit History Station Pearce Feb 39-May 52 Series number A9186 Control symbol 236 Contents date range 1939 - 1952 Barcode 1359864 for details of some of the individual aircraft movements taking place.
- 11 NAA File: U.S. Evacuation - Broome Series number MP115/1 Control symbol 8/115/186 Barcode 646284
- 12 see NAA File VAN DER HORST Hendrik: Nationality - Netherlands: Date of Birth - 31 October 1896: Arrived per PK-AFL Series number B6531 Barcode 6548827: a personal immigration file that contains details of the flight and aircraft ex-Java via Broome to Sydney. Several dozen of these records have been located and used in this research for compiling flight details for individual aircraft.
- 13 Tyler, Brain diary, Appendix A.
- 14 See Chapter 7.
- 15 This is near where *Koolama* was bombed. H6K patrol planes were active here, and it was also a likely spot for enemy submarines.
- 16 Smoke from *Admiral Halstead* was probably the "Nip cruiser" that had so alarmed Legge and others, as Broome is far from any shipping lanes. She was probably waiting offshore for adequate tides before coming into the harbour.
- 17 Tyler, Brain diary, Appendix A.
- 18 Tyler, main narrative "The Aftermath of the Raid".
- 19 There were about eight RAAF guards and a few dozen elderly men of the Volunteer Defence Corps at Broome. The sole weapons available were a limited number of .303-inch rifles and two Thompson sub-machine guns, although a number of machineguns were being salvaged from the plane wrecks and made operational by the VDC armourer, with no mounts and very little ammunition.
- 20 Tyler, Kurtz interview, Appendix G. This statement has to be questioned given the small quantity of Americans that joined the convoy and the fact that not much later that afternoon Legge was turning back small planes heading for Broome and advising them to pick up evacuees from Port Hedland instead. However, the motives for desertion in such a location are questionable, and although Kurtz was initially charged with desertion on return to his unit in Melbourne, he was apparently able to explain himself. It is notable, however, that in his diary entry for 4 March Brain refers to the Americans in this convoy as deserters.
- 21 *ibid*, Kurtz interview, Appendix G.
- 22 *ibid*, Brain diary, Appendix A.
- 23 NAA File: [Compensation for Pearling Luggers Lost or Destroyed (Situation at Port Hedland and Broome) Report on the situation in North Western Australia by G. Branson][2.5 cm] Series number MP138/1 Control symbol 603/217/1470 Barcode 338449
- 24 NAA File: NAA File AWM 54 625/3/7; Report by Lieutenant Colonel Richard Legge, Air Corps, 5th March 1942.
- 25 Edmonds, p.438; However all sources in regard to Broome contain elements of Donoho's survival story in various degrees of detail.
- 26 Prime, p.13.
- 27 *ibid*, Legge diary, Appendix G. Legge states that himself and one other officer, Jack Berry, were all who remained in Broome. This was something of an overstatement, as a dozen RAAF men were left manning the airfield, in addition to sundry VDC men and civilians who remained in the town. The statement can be read as ambiguous and possibly meaning they were the last Americans there.
- 28 *ibid*, Legge diary, Appendix G.
- 29 *ibid*, Legge diary, Appendix G.
- 30 NAA File: Demolition of Aerodromes in Dangerous Areas - Policy Series number A1196 Control symbol 15/501/205 PART 2 Barcode 199844
- 31 NAA File: NAA File AWM 54 625/3/7. Message from Airboard to Broome A110 3/3/42.
- 32 Strangely, 25 Squadron records contain no specific information in regard to this mission.
- 33 Actually, when the airfield contractor's personnel left in the land convoy with most of the trucks, two trucks were left at the airfield for the use of the personnel remaining there in case an immediate getaway was needed. Thus the situation of the men at the airfield was not identical to that of those in the town proper.
- 34 Wills, p.94-95.
- 35 Tyler, Brain diary, Appendix A.
- 36 *Ibid*, Brain diary, Appendix A.

- 37 Womack, p.141.
- 38 Tyler, Brain diary, Appendix A.
- 39 Womack, p.142-143; during this narrative the distance from Tjilitjap to Broome is mistakenly described as 1,800 miles. It is, in fact, more like 1,000 miles.
- 40 Edmonds, p.439.
- 41 Tyler, Brain diary, Appendix A.
- 42 NAA File: Enemy Air Attacks - Broome WA Series number A1196 Control symbol 15/501/247 Barcode 199863; see report by Group Captain Warren, RAAF Meteorological Service;
- 43 These command issues are discussed in detail in Chapter 8.

Chapter 6

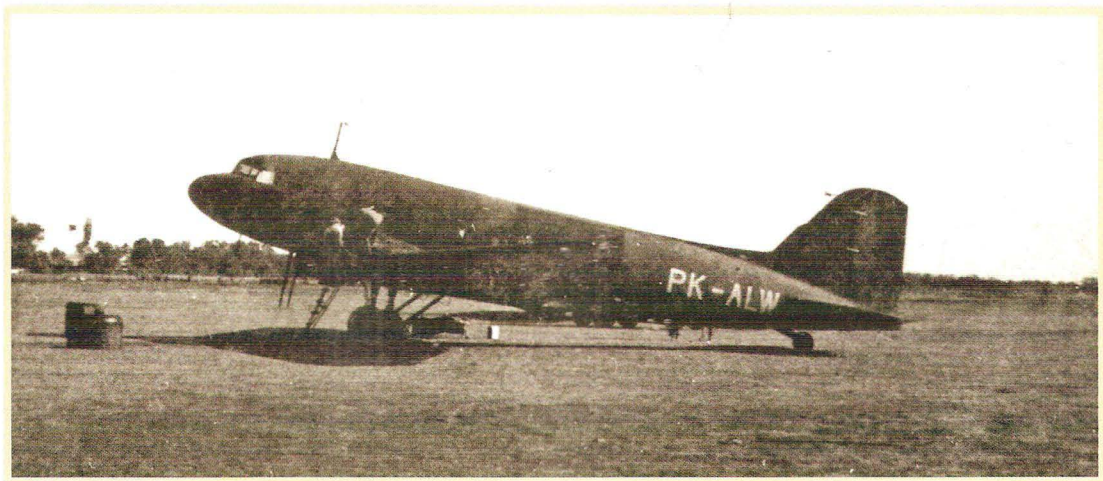
From Broome to Port Hedland

With the last USAAF flight having departed on 6 March, after the surrender of Java two days later, Broome became something of a ghost town. The very last evacuees to come into Broome were the eight survivors from the DC-3 shot down at Carnot Bay. They arrived by truck from the mission at Beagle Bay around the same time as some alarm was being caused by the sight of strange vessels entering the harbour. As they neared the jetty Dutch ensigns could be seen flying from their masts. The arrivals were the small 60 ton auxiliary minesweepers *Rindjani*, *Merbaboe* and *Smeroe*. Powered with American diesel engines, they had been built in Java just before the war. Armed only with machineguns, the small ships took on fuel and supplies at Broome before going further south. Together with other Dutch ships, they would be integrated into local naval forces at Fremantle and elsewhere.¹ Perhaps surprisingly, these three small vessels were the sole naval evacuees to arrive in the northwest.²

As a result of the Japanese raids, evacuation activities moved to Port Hedland, about 300 miles south-west of Broome. This town was only about a third of the size of Broome. A handful of pearling luggers were based there, and the town was important as a centre for the surrounding pastoral country. It did boast a small railway, which ran inland to the mining town of Marble



*A pre-war shot of Port Hedland – about a third the size of Broome. It was similarly ill-equipped to handle a sudden deluge of evacuees amid invasion fears.
(State Library of Western Australia)*



Rare shot of KNILM DC-3 PK-ALW at the time of the evacuation operations (probably in Australia given the windmill in the background). This was the last civil aircraft out of Java, arriving in Port Hedland on 7 March carrying the new NEI Governor-General, Dr van Mook. This historic aircraft survives to this day at the Queensland Aviation Museum. (Courtesy Don Beames via David Vincent)

Bar. From a strategic perspective, Port Hedland was advantageous in that it was geographically distinct from Broome and the northwest region. Separating Port Hedland and Broome was the Great Sandy Desert. As those in the emergency “land convoy” from Broome had found out first hand, the Desert was near impassable. In the eyes of the authorities in the south, Port Hedland was much less vulnerable to attack or occupation than Broome. While Broome airfield was rated as “Priority 1” for demolition purposes, Port Hedland’s was only rated as “Priority 3” which was the lowest rating and equal to that given to the airfields in Perth.³

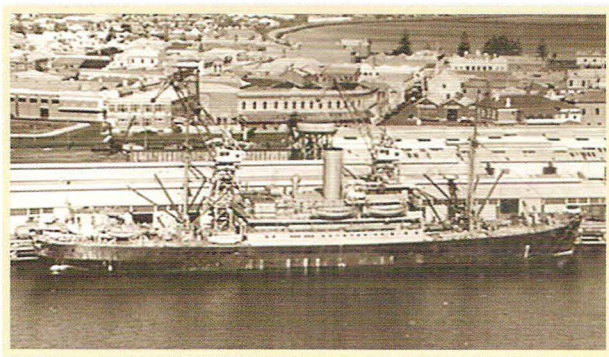
Like Broome, Port Hedland had an RAAF Advanced Operational Base which at least had the basics such as fuel for servicing passing aircraft. However, there was no 100-octane fuel as needed by USAAF aircraft and the runways had not been lengthened to take heavy bombers. For these reasons the USAAF avoided Port Hedland completely, and the evacuees who arrived were non-USAAF: Dutch women and children, for example, were flown there immediately after the Broome raid in Jimmy Woods’ Lockheed Electra and other smaller aircraft. Another 100 evacuees arrived on the *Nicol Bay*. Others — Qantas staff and American naval personnel — arrived on the flying boat *Camilla*.

Following the news of the Broome raid, most of the remaining flights out of Java headed for Port Hedland instead. Port Hedland was not significantly further from Java than was Broome, and was still within the range of most aircraft. There were fewer geographic landmarks near Port Hedland than Broome, and none of the aircraft coming from Java had particularly detailed maps. Thus, unable to find the town and low on fuel, a number of these aircraft put down at remote sheep stations. Fortunately none were lost. Although Port Hedland was nominally too small for heavy bombers, a single B-17E Flying Fortress did land there. This aircraft had been

abandoned by the USAAF at a Java Air Depot due to battle damage. It was repaired and made the flight on three engines with a civilian pilot at the controls and 20 passengers onboard.⁴ An older model B-17C was salvaged by Dutch air force personnel and also successfully flown out. It put down at a small satellite strip near Geraldton.⁵

All of the other aircraft flying into Port Hedland were smaller twin-engined types. By this time virtually the only planes still flying out of Java were military, flown by pilots skilled enough to fly out in darkness. Among the Dutch aircraft, most were ML-KNIL Lodestars, although a single Martin 139 bomber also made it.⁶ Some of the Lodestars landed in remote locations. When this happened, other aircraft were usually quick to fly in enough drums of fuel to get the aircraft to the nearest major airfield. Three RAAF Lockheed Hudsons also flew out, landing at remote strips in the vicinity of Port Hedland.⁷ These were the only RAAF aircraft to fly out of Java, and brought news of groups of RAF and RAAF men waiting at secret locations on the south coast of Java for a flying boat to pick them up. Sadly, in the light of the Broome disaster there was no stomach for any further operations with any element of risk and no rescue efforts were made.

Some of the last evacuee aircraft on Java were held in secret locations for flying out at the last possible moment. These planes had usually fuelled up at a major airbase under the cover of darkness, and were then hidden near makeshift airstrips on highways or other locations. In this way they avoided detection and certain destruction by the enemy. One of these planes was the KNILM Douglas DC-3 PK-ALW, which was hidden for several days on a highway outside Bandoeng, along with three Lodestars. Early in the morning of 7 March, the NEI Governor, Dr Van Mook, and other personnel boarded the DC-3. Piloted by a Captain Dunlop, the aircraft arrived safely at Port Hedland some seven hours later. This was the last civil aircraft to leave



The black-hulled merchant vessel Centaur, which served between WA ports and Singapore. Just days after Admiral Halstead had arrived in Broome to deliver aviation fuel that was not needed, Centaur was on schedule to do the same thing. Fortunately it was recalled. Later converted into a hospital ship, Centaur was controversially sunk by a Japanese submarine with heavy loss of life in 1943. (Australian War Memorial 302795)

Java.⁸ Flying the last Lodestar out of Java was the indefatigable Gus or “Wild Bill” Winckel, who had become famous at Broome just a few days earlier.⁹ As an elite Dutch pilot, Winckel was able to fly back into Java at night. For this reason he was one of the very few to fly Broome-Java westwards after the Japanese invasion on 1 March.

Maybe 300-400 evacuees moved through Port Hedland in the week from 3 March. Perhaps 100 flew in direct from Java while the remainder arrived on the Nicol Bay or from Broome by

Avro Anson

Specifications

Training / Reconnaissance Bomber aircraft

2 x 350hp engines

Speed: 188mph max (7,000 ft); cruise 159mph

Range: ~600 miles with load

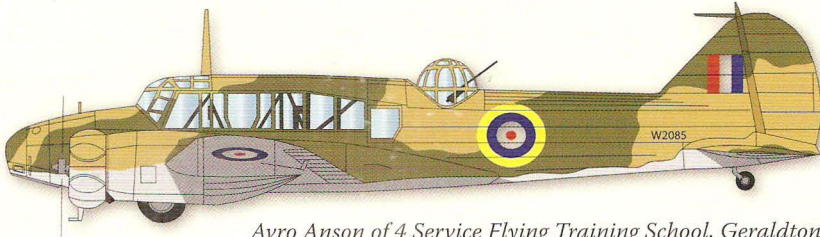
Weight: 8,500lb max loaded

Crew: 3-4

Capacity: ~4-6 passengers + crew

Armament: 1 x 0.303-inch Vickers (forward firing) MG; 1 x 0.303-inch Vickers MG (turret); 360-lb of bombs in small bomb bays.

Notes: the Anson originally entered RAAF service as a maritime reconnaissance aircraft, although it could only carry light bombs over a short distance. More significantly, vast numbers of Ansons were used as part of the Empire Air Training Scheme. They also served as communications aircraft later in the war. Over 1,000 served with the RAAF.



Avro Anson of 4 Service Flying Training School, Geraldton, in 1942.

In 1941 the small country airstrip at Geraldton was transformed into a major EATS base, where 4 Service Flying Training School operated around 100 Ansons. This was a busy airbase: over 2,000 flights per month were made there in early 1942. It was run efficiently and boasted a very low accident rate. Against this structured environment, the sudden activity of the Broome operations made a stark contrast. Various tattered ex-Java aircraft, many with visible bullet holes, stopped by at Geraldton on their way south.

It is difficult to understand why the substantial Anson fleet was not utilised in the Broome evacuations (see Chapter 8). Just a few Anson flights have been confirmed, which were possibly the result of local initiative. One source mentions Ansons returning to Geraldton with evacuees and “quite a number” of injured, so possibly more missions were flown.

air. There had been no evacuation of women and children as there had been in Broome, so conditions in Port Hedland were more crowded. There were only two hotels and no vacant homes. Brain, who slept on the floor of a local stock agent’s house, described Port Hedland as being “terrifically hot and humid”.¹⁰ Others commented on the abundance of sand flies and mosquitoes.

Under the fear of invasion, the evacuation of Broome had been effectively completed within 48-hours of the 3 March raid. There was never the same urgency in regard to Port Hedland, although enemy reconnaissance aircraft over-flew the town on 5 March.¹¹ While there was never the same fear of imminent invasion, neither was there an abundance of targets at Port Hedland to tempt the enemy. Most of the flying boats in the region had been destroyed at Broome, and the four-engined bombers were now gathering in Melbourne. Another consideration was that Port Hedland was a lot further from Timor than Broome, and out of range of even the long-range Zeros.¹²

Port Hedland was weakly defended by just a few RAAF guards and about 40 VDC men. However, Hedland was even more deficient in leadership than Broome. There was only one VDC officer, who may have been somewhat less than military in bearing, being described in reports as “Mr Taplin”.¹³ The 46 year old Lieutenant Taplin drove one of the few trucks in Port Hedland and also oversaw the local wharf labourers. As these were essential services, it left little time for his military role.¹⁴ Aside from Taplin, there was a junior officer at the RAAF base who was fully occupied as the duty cypher officer. This was the sum total of the military leadership at Port Hedland in early March 1942. With a few hundred evacuees suddenly descending on the unprepared town, another mini-crisis was brewing.

It was in these circumstances that finally some initiative was shown by the southern authorities. In fact although the crisis was primarily an army and air force responsibility, it was the Royal Australian Navy that reacted, sending up, in Brain’s words “quite a senior officer ... to check up on the position on the northwest coast and to issue any necessary orders on the spot.”¹⁵ This was Commander Geoffrey Branson, RN, normally the maintenance Commander of *HMAS Leeuwin* naval base in Fremantle who proved to be an intelligent and astute observer of the situation.¹⁶

Branson departed Geraldton early on 6 March, having secured the temporary service of an Avro Anson. The flight stopped at Carnarvon and Onslow for refuelling. At these bases Branson was astounded to learn that the RAAF establishment at each Advanced Operational Base was just three personnel – essentially security guards or caretakers. He was to recommend an officer “commandant” be appointed to each base. At Port Hedland the situation was “chaotic” in many ways and it took Branson at least 24 hours to get a grasp of the problems first hand. The following morning, 7 March, saw the arrival of the last few aircraft from Java, including the NEI Governor’s DC-3. Branson described in one of his reports:

A tremendous amount of refugee air traffic was arriving from Java, there was no one taking charge of the town, stocks of aviation spirit were dangerously low, petrol was being wasted in a panic evacuation of the town, the doctor had gone to Marble Bar, wounded were arriving from the north and everyone was giving contradictory orders.¹⁷

As Branson was arriving, a supply ship – the *Centaur* ¹⁸– was just leaving Port Hedland. Incredibly, the *Centaur* was sticking to a pre-arranged schedule to unload aviation fuel in Broome, where the ship would be under high risk of attack and where the fuel was no longer needed anyway.¹⁹

It was fortunate that Branson arrived when he did, as via a message to the Navy Board he was able to recall the *Centaur* to Port Hedland.²⁰ Subsequently it was organised for the VDC men to unload the fuel drums – a lengthy process – and they were then loaded onto rail cars and

dispersed at locations along the Marble Bar line. Meanwhile, arrangements were made to send fuel from the south by road. On 11 March, a 43-vehicle petrol convoy arrived at Geraldton RAAF base and unloaded a small quantity of 100-octane fuel for USAAF use at Carnarvon, although by this time USAAF traffic had virtually ended.²¹

However, fuel was but one of the problems Branson faced on arrival. Perhaps the most serious was that although wounded had been prioritised for evacuation from Broome to Port Hedland just days before, the local doctor had gone inland to Marble Bar, fearing invasion. This was because the local VDC officer, Taplin, had apparently ordered an evacuation of the town. Branson quickly countermanded this, and also quickly deduced that the VDC were badly led, unaware of their powers in such an emergency, and that Taplin himself was well out of his depth.

With so much activity going on in the small town, there was no system to keep track of who owed what to whom, while various goods and services were being issued to military evacuees. In his first message to his superiors Branson said the most urgently needed personnel were a medical officer and an accountant. There was also a financial problem of a more practical nature. The sudden influx of personnel had caused the town to, quite literally, run out of money. Branson arranged for the Union Bank to get a supply urgently flown up.

Of the few level heads in Port Hedland, and doing much to keep the town functioning was the Dalgety Stock and Station²² agent, Mr Dawes. It was in Dawes' house that Brain stayed, and Branson credits him with working 20 hour days during this period and being "a tower of strength". This reflects poorly on the other services and their lack of initiative in responding to a wartime emergency. Some days later, having visited Broome and attended to problems there, Branson reflected that "I have had to administer the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Civil Aviation departments as they have no responsible officer in the district."

On 8 March, Java surrendered. Branson flew up to Broome where a meeting was convened of all the senior officers present: the VDC commander, Captain Macnee, and the VDC Intelligence Officer, Captain Goldie. Also present were Flight Lieutenant Hall, Lieutenant Cook of the Royal Australian Engineers, Lieutenant Davis, RANVR and G.S. Fanning, Inspector of Aerodromes, Department of Civil Aviation. Most of these were fully occupied with their executive duties and poorly positioned to take charge of more. For example, Hall



Lieutenant D.L. "Beau" Davis, RANVR, who had extensive experience as a lugger master pre-war. He was sent to Broome in February 1942 and almost single-handedly arranged for the evacuation of the large lugger fleet. He later commanded two luggers that were put into naval service to patrol the northwest. (Australian War Memorial 058163)



The impressive sight of a fleet of luggers assembled off the Broome foreshore. Around 45 were assembled in Broome and made seaworthy during March and April 1942. (State Library of Western Australia)

was in charge of Broome AOB and the signals office there, Cook was busy preparing demolition charges across the entire region and Davis was fully occupied getting 45 luggers crewed and ready for sea.

The two VDC Captains, Macnee and Goldie, both in their mid-50s, had had distinguished military careers throughout WWI. Macnee had served in the 10th Light Horse Regiment, and had been decorated at Gallipoli.²³ Goldie was also a Gallipoli veteran, and had served in militia forces prior

to WWI, as well as the Broome Rifle Club.²⁴ During WWI he'd been wounded both in Gallipoli and France. Presumably from these records those in the Army's Western Command felt that they would be up to the job at Broome. However, on closer inspection, neither man had much experience at officer level, having been commissioned from the ranks.

During his meeting with these men, Branson learned the full truth of what had taken place since the raid. Many of the VDC ranks had fled, but probably the most serious dereliction of duty was that of the Admiralty Reporting Officer, Mr Lawson, who had joined the land convoy and taken the code books with him. Branson also advised that the provision of seawards reconnaissance in the area would go a long way to restoring the confidence of the citizens. Regular RAAF patrols of the northwest had ceased in December 1941, and the local people felt "abandoned" by the air force.

Branson had to return quickly to Port Hedland but his presence in Broome had allowed some decisions to be made which at least ensured conditions did not deteriorate further. However, he thought Broome needed to be consolidated and managed from Port Hedland. The town remained dysfunctional, with most of the population expecting an enemy invasion. The Army remained strangely inactive, but the reports of Branson, Brain and various others were now being widely circulated and read by the higher authorities. Indeed, this led to the rather extreme action of the Chief of the Air Staff sending the following message to his Army equivalent:

I think the action necessary comes under your jurisdiction, and would suggest that a capable officer with a few troops from your Western Command or 7th Military District would stabilise the situation and re-establish control. I quite realise that proper

defensive measures are not possible, but this need not prevent some immediate action to meet this emergency.²⁵

These were strong words given it was the Air Force telling the Army what it should be doing. Meanwhile, the aerial evacuation of Port Hedland continued, using civilian aircraft. Although some of the Dutchmen, such as “Wild Bill” Winckel, were exceptionally brave and would accept any mission, others were disillusioned after the fall of Java. Two KNILM Douglas transport pilots were ordered to fly missions to Port Hedland from Perth. Both were very reluctant to put themselves and their aircraft at risk, and only departed after much persuasion. However, on reaching Geraldton, one pilot became too sick to continue, and the other aircraft apparently had engine trouble. Both returned south.²⁶

The loss of these two modern 21-seat airliners put a much larger load on the other aircraft flying between Port Hedland and Perth, which were mainly 10-seat Electras and 14-seat DC-2s. A few RAAF planes – Ansons and a DH.84 Dragon – also contributed. By mid-March, three civil aircraft with a capacity of 34 passengers were still under the control of Western Command for these duties.²⁷ But this was nominally the end of the Broome aerial operations. The aircraft were now re-assigned to a new requirement that would absorb the bulk of Australia’s air transport strength. This was the airlift from Brisbane to Darwin of the US 102nd Coast Artillery (Anti-Aircraft) Regiment, complete with its guns and ammunition. This was the first aerial movement of a complete Allied land unit in the Pacific war, and the speed of the

advance was to give raiding Japanese aircraft a nasty surprise. While the science of military air transport was still in its infancy, the operations in Broome and the northwest, and now the east, were a first step in helping to demonstrate the future.

Meanwhile, probably the only external officer to remain at Broome throughout this entire period was the versatile Lieutenant Davis. He had just managed to get 45 luggers afloat in Broome harbour when his Asian crewmen were called away to



Part of the collection of wrecked aircraft components on display at Broome Museum (others are held privately). A considerable amount of useable material was salvaged from the aircraft wrecks and packed onto the lugger fleet for the voyage south. These are among the items left behind and are all visibly damaged or corroded. (Authors' collection)

Douglas B-18 Bolo

Specifications

Medium Bomber

2 x 930hp engines

Speed: 217mph max; cruise 167mph

Range: 1,200 miles loaded.

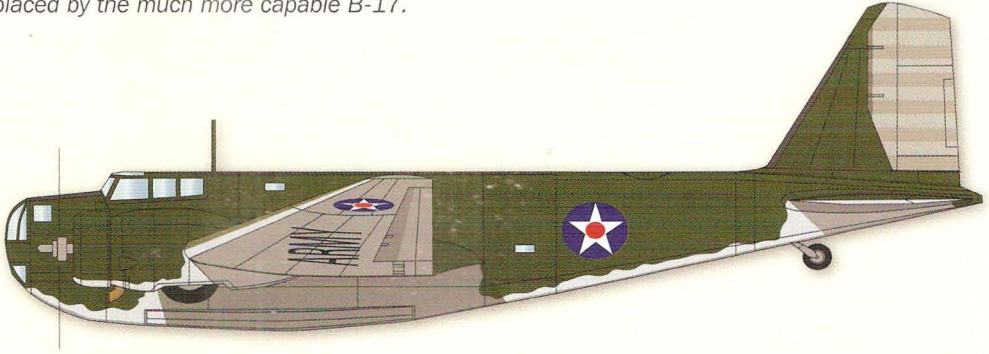
Weight: 21,130lb max

Crew: 6

Capacity: ~10

Armament: 3 x 0.30-inch. MGs; 4,400 lbs of bombs

Notes: The B-18 was a medium bomber based on the proven DC-2 airliner (it had a DC-2 wing, tail and engines). It was a cheap, low-risk aircraft that only saw brief front-line service as it was quickly replaced by the much more capable B-17.



USAAF B-18 as seen in WA during the evacuation operations. The peacetime red and white striped rudder has been painted over.

By late 1941 a number of B-18s were still in service in the Philippines. Obsolete as bombers, they served usefully transports. Just two survived to reach Australia and at least one of these is known to have participated in the Broome operations.

work on the airfield. Davis was now trying to persuade them to return as many were hiding in the bush outside Broome. In fact on 11 March Davis reported that morale was even worse among the coloured population than the white. While Davis worked, various messages came from the Naval Board in regard to the luggers. In the sudden new situation which Australia found itself following entry to war against Japan, small coastal craft were desperately needed. Among the various demands was that the best of them be sent to Darwin, where they were urgently needed as harbour lighters. Following this came enquiries asking how many luggers could be sailed to far away Colombo. Such enquiries were unrealistic and only made matters worse as the crewmen were afraid to sail north, and none had experience sailing across the ocean. Fortunately for Davis, common sense prevailed and his advice for an immediate goal of sailing the fleet south to Port Hedland was accepted.²⁸

In peacetime, fitting out the luggers was a normal seasonal activity, albeit a complex one taking some weeks. Firstly crews needed to be signed on to each vessel for the season, and then repairs needed to be carried out to the engines and hulls, followed by the masts and sails. While this work was underway the crews needed to be fed and sheltered. Finally, stores were needed to ensure the vessel could remain at sea in most situations.

Underlining all of this was extensive clerical work as most of these goods and services were customarily provided on credit. The major missing link for Davis was the lugger masters, many of whom were Japanese – now interned. Other European masters had evacuated or joined the services. Davis had to learn quickly, as well as instil confidence in the crews to get them working with him. The naval bureaucracy was also demanding detailed records of the amounts spent on each vessel and their inventories, so that each could be requisitioned from their owners.

The luggers became relevant for another role at this time. The RAAF personnel at Broome were busy salvaging as much as they could from the various plane wrecks. The only fire-fighting equipment at Broome airfield had been fire extinguishers, so the aircraft fires were left to burn out and usually there was little remaining. However, one of the B-17s had its complete tail structure intact as well as at least one engine. Commonly salvage items were wing-tips, tail-wheel assemblies and propellers. Around 20 machine-guns were also salvaged. The flying boats had the problem of salt-water corrosion, but weapons were quickly recovered from those wrecks. Many other items, such as anchors, were also recoverable. Tons of valuable aircraft equipment was saved and loaded onto the lugger decks for transport south.²⁹

While this work was going on the morale of the local people was not improving. Even the more level-headed among them were demoralised. From their point of view almost nothing had been done since the raid, and the town had been left to its own devices. The final straw was a plan to withdraw the RAAF doctor, Flight Lieutenant Smith, who had arrived after the raid. Although he had few patients to treat since that time, he had been gathering medical supplies and preparing for further injuries in the event of another raid. An evacuation committee was formed that issued something of an ultimatum to the authorities; its telegram reading: “Unless Protective Forces And Doctor Are Forthcoming Immediately An Organised Evacuation Will Be Ordered.”³⁰

This proved to be something of a hollow threat, but along with the many other messages flowing out of Broome, it finally led to an appreciation of the situation by the Army Headquarters. Action was underway. ♦

Short S.23 Empire Flying Boats

Specifications

Long Range Flying Boat Transport

4 x 920hp engine

Range: 2,690 miles (light load only)

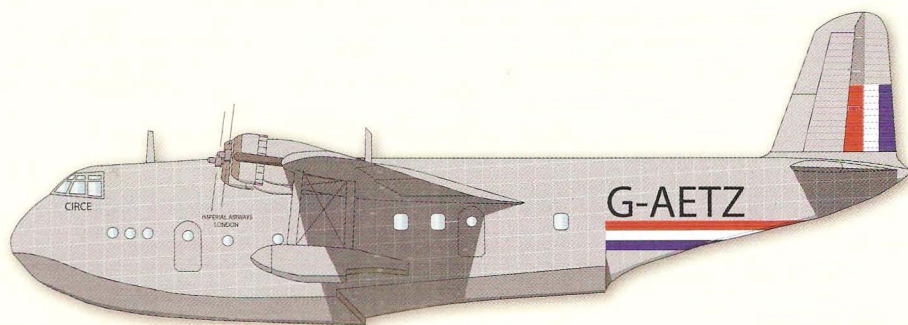
Crew: 4

Speed: 200mph max; cruise 165mph

Weight: 40,500lb max loaded

Capacity: 16 passengers + 3,000lb mail (see note below)

Notes: the "Empires" were developed in Britain in the 1930s to provide long range airmail services, particularly to Australia. Known as the "C class" (each had a name beginning with "C"), they proved very successful. Crews strictly abided by the manufacturer's loading / range limitations. But in wartime it was realised that these figures were overly conservative and much larger loads were possible; e.g. Empire Flying Boats evacuating Rabaul flew out up to 50 men each.



Empire Flying Boat Circe which was shot down while flying to Broome on 28 February 1942.

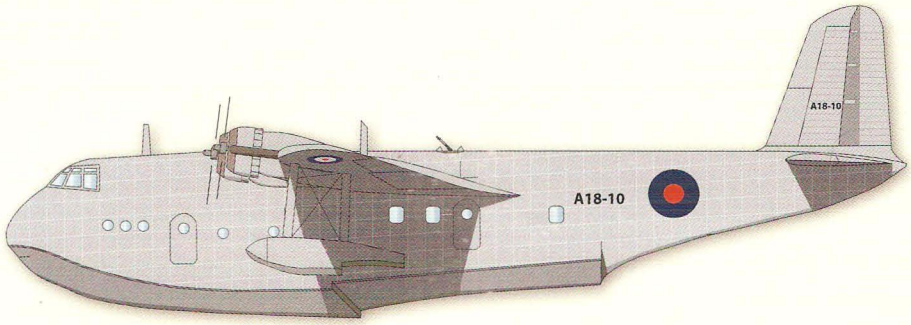
Qantas

Qantas flying boat crews bravely maintained the long distance route out of Australia early in the Pacific War. But when Singapore surrendered, six civilian Empire Flying Boats were "stranded" at the Australian end of the now severed long distance route. All were quickly assigned to a new Java-Broome service. Return flights were made on a near-daily basis during the last week of February, although with the loss of *Circe*. Overall these flights brought just 83 evacuees out of Java, which would appear to be a modest contribution. For unknown reasons most of these flights took place with only partial loadings. From 1 March a number of Empires remained in the northwest flying sundry search and rescue and transport missions. As a result *Corinna* was destroyed in Broome on the morning of 3 March.

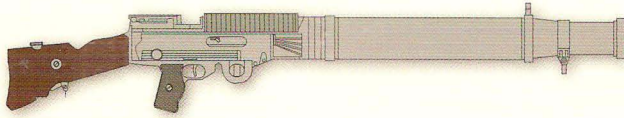
RAAF

Four Qantas Empire Flying Boats were pressed into RAAF service in 1939-1940. They were fitted with underwing bomb racks, and Lewis machine guns were mounted in top and side hatches. By 1942 they were mainly used for transport.

An RAAF Empire Flying Boat, A18-10 (ex-*Centaurus*), arrived in Broome on 1 March 1942. Its RAAF pilot, Flight Lieutenant Keith Caldwell, an ex-Qantas captain, had been tasked with rescuing a group of RAAF men from Timor. In order to make the return flight, fuel drums were stowed inside the aircraft. After take-off on 2 March the fuel drums were shifting around inside the fuselage, making flying dangerous. By the time these had been properly secured it was too late to depart.¹ The next morning some of the crew were onboard (the Captain and co-pilot were ashore and had been obtaining floor strengthening planks earlier that morning) when the attack began. As noted in Chapter 3, the crew gave some defensive fire before the machine was destroyed. RAAF Corporal Ireland was decorated for his bravery while evacuating the aircraft. He probably saved several lives after retrieving a rubber dinghy from inside the cabin while under fire.



RAAF Empire Flying Boat A18-10



Lewis machine gun. One of these old weapons was probably used to defend A18-10 on 3 March.

(Endnotes)

¹ Humphries, Colin. *Trapped on Timor*. Self-published: Victor Harbour, SA, 1990. p.106. There appears to be some confusion in regard to the date on which this mission was scheduled. According to the RAAF Official History (p.422), a rendezvous was expected at Kapsali on 1 March "but the flying boat failed to appear". Another contributing reason was that fuel had not been prepared on arrival at Broome as was expected (Capt Caldwell believes it had been stolen by Qantas!).

(Endnotes)

- 1 <http://www.netherlandsnavy.nl/> link to "Smeroe-class auxiliary minesweepers" accessed 29th September 2009; also, according to Wills, p.101, these vessels were "four fast torpedo boats." Clearly this is wrong as regards the type of vessel, but it suggests there may have been a fourth. Another, much larger, Dutch minesweeper to arrive in Australia at this time was the *Abraham Crijnsen*, which later served with the RAN. The website <http://www.netherlandsnavy.nl/> has it arriving in Geraldton on 15th March, however.
- 2 A few weeks later, on 2 April 1942, six Dutch soldiers (3 Lts, 3 Sgts) arrived in a lugger at Cape Leveque. They were all from Timor, having left in a small motorboat. This broke down and was abandoned at Cockatoo island, Yampi Sound. From there the men continued their voyage in an old lugger. They arrived in Broome by truck on 5 April, probably the very last evacuees of any kind to arrive there. (Police Inspector reports, Broome Museum).
- 3 NAA File: *Demolition of Aerodromes in Dangerous Areas* - Policy Series number A1196 Control symbol 15/501/205 PART 2 Barcode 199844; actually after the Darwin raid on 19th February, Port Hedland was hurriedly upgraded to "Priority 2".
- 4 Edmonds, p.432-433.
- 5 Shores et al, *Bloody Shambles* Volume 2, p.323; also refer to the Aircraft History Section for more detail on individual movements.
- 6 Ibid, p.337.
- 7 Gillison, p.442.
- 8 <http://www.qam.com.au/aircraft/dc-3/chron.htm> accessed 29th September 2009; amazingly this same DC-3 is still in existence today at the Queensland Air Museum. More information about the particular aircraft's history can be found via www.qam.com.au.
- 9 Shores et al, *Bloody Shambles* Volume 2, p.337.
- 10 Tyler, Brain diary, Appendix A.
- 11 NAA File: *Report on visit to Broome & Nth. West Areas by Cdr. Geoffrey Bronson (Royal Navy)* Series number A1196 Control symbol 37/501/109 Barcode 200691
- 12 Port Hedland could have been bombed by H6K flying boats, but after the surrender of Java these began leaving the region. Long range land-based bombers would not be operational from Timor until later in the month.
- 13 Taplin had only an "honourary" commission in the VDC. AWM52 1/7/35 WA Line of Communication Area, Area General Staff Branch, April-May 1942.
- 14 See NAA File *Taplin Leonard Thomas Eaton*: Service Number - W74516 : Date of birth - 16 Dec 1895. Taplin had an interesting background. He'd enlisted during WWI as at the age of 19 years, giving his trade as "electrical engineer" and joined an engineer unit as a sapper. Later in the war he transferred to the Australian Flying Corps becoming a pilot / lieutenant. He spent some months as a German POW in 1918, and probably as a result of conditions in the camps was invalided out of the service the following year with 100% disability.
- 15 Tyler, Brain diary, Appendix A.
- 16 NAA File: *Report on visit to Broome & Nth. West Areas by Cdr. Geoffrey Bronson (Royal Navy)* Series number A1196 Control symbol 37/501/109 Barcode 200691; much of the information about conditions in Port Hedland is taken from this file.
- 17 Ibid; letter from Branson to Australian Commonwealth Naval Board 7th March 2009;
- 18 *Centaur* (3,222t; built 1924), served between W.A. ports and Singapore. Later she was converted into a hospital ship and was controversially sunk with heavy loss of life by a Japanese submarine off Brisbane on 14 May 1943.
- 19 Remaining at Broome were 6,000 gallons of 100-octane fuel and 5,000 gallons of 87-octane fuel. In the context of the American evacuations, the normal fuel load for a B-17E was about 2,500 gallons of 100-octane. The fact that extra fuel was now viewed as a liability at Broome confirms that there were no plans to use the location as a forward air base.
- 20 The arrival of *Centaur* at Broome in these circumstances would have mirrored the experience of *Admiral Halstead* several days earlier; and once again underlines the complete lack of any senior-level presence in the region.
- 21 NAA File: RAAF Unit History sheets (Form A50) [Operations Record Book - Forms A50 and A51] *4 S Flying Training School Feb 41 - Jun 43* Series number A9186 Control symbol 480 Barcode 1360163
- 22 "Stock and station": general agricultural agents for both buying and selling supplies and produce from and to farmers.
- 23 See NAA File *Macnee Harry Maclachlan*: Service Number - W47617: Date of birth - 14 Feb 1887.
- 24 See NAA File *Goldie Louis John*: Service Number - W93626 : Date of birth - 05 May 1887; Prior to WWI, while in Sydney for a four-year apprenticeship, Goldie had served in the Australian Garrison Artillery, and had a tattoo of that unit's emblem on his forearm. Goldie was Jewish, and had changed his name from Goldstein. After WWII Goldie was engaged in long running legal proceedings against the Commonwealth in relation to compensation for war damage. He died of a heart attack while attending the RAN office in Fremantle in 1950.
- 25 NAA File: *Enemy Air Attacks - Broome* WA Series number A1196 Control symbol 15/501/247 Barcode 199863
- 26 Tyler, Brain diary, Appendix A; this action was probably a catalyst for the forced purchase of these aircraft by the USAAF soon after.

- 27 AWM52 1/1/1 Army Headquarter Units – LHQ etc; message 19th March 1942 from Army Melbourne to Milcommand Perth; capacity of 34 passengers equates to, for example, 2 x Electras & 1 x DC-2;
- 28 NAA File [*Compensation for Pearling Luggers Lost or Destroyed (Situation at Port Hedland and Broome) Report on the situation in North Western Australia by G. Branson*] Series number MP138/1 Control symbol 603/217/1470 Barcode 338449. One of the original ideas for employing the luggers was as lighters in Darwin harbour. After the lugger-lighters were loaded they would be left near the shore at high tide. When the tide went out, the lugger-lighters would rest on the muddy tidal flats for unloading. This idea persisted for some weeks until someone in naval headquarters realised that the luggers did not have flat bottoms, making the idea unworkable for obvious reasons.
- 29 NAA File: *Broome - salvage of equipment from [21 pp]* Series number A705 Control symbol 73/6/1111 Barcode 3208259
- 30 NAA File: *Threatened evacuation of Broome March 1942* Series number A816 Control symbol 14/303/69 Barcode 170112; 19th March 1942, Memorandum to Dept of Defence Co-ordination from Dept of Navy, including copy of message from Broome sent by Lieutenant Davis.

Chapter 7

Attacked Again

On 20 March a long-awaited Army officer was flying to Broome to function as a “commandant”. Major Clifford B. Gibson in civilian life had been a well-known Perth solicitor, including an eight-year stint as Crown Prosecutor in the 1930s.¹ His broad experience of people and the community generally made him a good choice for the role. Gibson would provide much needed leadership and his presence would do much to restore confidence in the battered northern town.

The RAAF was averse to sending any of its aircraft to Broome, believing that the risk was too high. However, there was a real urgency about getting Gibson to his post. So the Army chartered a Stinson Reliant aircraft from Airlines (WA) Ltd. The pilot was Captain Charles Snook, who had founded the company in 1935. In 1941, Snook had volunteered for service, and his unique expertise was called upon to set up an Air Training Corps. Subsequently Snook headed up the Western Australian Wing, Royal Australian Air Force, Air Training Corps.

Just a few days earlier Gibson had reported to Western Command Headquarters at Swan Barracks and been briefed about his role. He most likely read as many relevant files as he could but there may have been further preparation in the hours spent together in the aircraft cabin with Snook during the trip north. Although most of Snook’s experience had been in the southern part of the state, like most regional pilots he knew a great deal about the remote parts of WA and the key issues of isolated communities.

After stopping overnight en route, the Reliant arrived at Broome at 9.45am on Friday 20 March. Both Snook and Gibson would have been keen to find out how Broome was now situated after the raids. The brief classified reports Gibson had been given listed the aircraft destroyed but few other details. Indeed, Western Command seemed quite determined in doing as little for Broome as possible. It had been explained to Gibson that good military strategy was to concentrate forces in one point. If light forces were scattered in each of the northern towns then not only would they be easily defeated one by one by an enemy who could choose where to attack, but the core body of forces in the south would be weakened. Gibson would command the local VDC men and exercise control over broader issues as they arose. A key brief was to restore confidence among the civilian men remaining in the town providing essential services. Otherwise he was to ensure that vital infrastructure could be

blown up at short notice in the event of an enemy landing – an inherent contradiction in organising demolitions and at the same time restoring morale.

As the Reliant landed at Broome, here and there charred remains of burnt-out aircraft could be seen, having been swept off the runways. These were the only signs of “war”, together with occasional pools of blackness on the runways themselves where the planes had burnt out, slowly being re-coloured by newly overlaid lines of sand and dust.

Almost at the same time an aircraft approached from the north at an altitude of 10-12,000 feet, as estimated by Snook. It flew directly overhead – a single-engined monoplane, probably a C5M “Babs”, and soon flew back to the north, definitely an enemy reconnaissance plane of some kind. So uncanny was its appearance just 15 minutes after the Stinson had landed Snook wondered if somehow the enemy had learned of their itinerary.

Snook and Gibson moved off to confer with some RAAF personnel. After some discussion, the consensus of those present was that an attack the following day was a possibility. With no flying boats in the harbour and no large planes on the airfield, the next target might be the town itself. Whatever happened, Broome remained utterly defenceless against air attack. At the very least slit trenches had been dug near the airfield buildings, giving the personnel there some protection.

Gibson was picked up by a VDC driver in a requisitioned car and taken into the town, while Snook began some basic checks on the Reliant after its long flight. Otherwise the area was quiet, with no other aircraft present. Just three weeks beforehand around 200 Asian workers had laboured around the clock to get the runways ready for the huge American bombers.



A Mitsubishi G4M “Betty” bomber of the Japanese Naval Air Force. In 1942 bombers such as this, or the older G3M “Nell”, were responsible for attacking Wyndham, Broome and Port Hedland. Although little damage was done, the bombing was accurate and demonstrated that the Japanese could hit these targets at will. (Australian War Memorial P02888.002)

Around 10.45 massed aircraft engines began to be heard from the north. There was no fighter or Anti-Aircraft defence for the airfield, and those present could do little more than note the position of the nearest slit trench and wait. As the aircraft got closer they could be identified as seven twin-engined bombers, either Mitsubishi “Bettys” or “Nells”. The men made for the slit trenches as the bombs were falling. Several “sticks” were released, a few dozen bombs, mostly small, 60kg light weapons falling a good half mile from the trenches. The bombs exploded in quick succession in

a long straight line across the middle of the airfield.

But the attack so far had achieved very little. The defenders could find, and quickly fill in, the long trail of small craters just a few feet in diameter. This ran in a line straight through the middle of the two main runways, far away from the undamaged installations in the southern corner. But the body of one fatality would be found. This was a Malay man who had been walking near the perimeter. An unoccupied house nearby also caught fire.



*Derby aerodrome ("6 Mile") during a 1950s flood. It had been a RAAF Advanced Operational Base just a decade beforehand, and was strafed by Zeros on 20 March. Because it was so prone to water damage it was hardly used in 1942, and obstructions were placed on the runways to ensure enemy aircraft did not land there. Here the aerodrome has been improved by way of a bitumen seal on key "hard-standing" surfaces.
(State Library of Western Australia)*

The big surprise, however, was yet to come. The bombers were not alone. Barely had the dust cleared, when two Zeros swept across the airfield at just 100 feet. The stationary Reliant was their only target, and an easy one. It was immediately hit and caught fire. The Zeros flew off as quickly as they had appeared. The RAAF men tackled the blaze with fire extinguishers but were only partly successful. The next day Snook was able to salvage a portion of the engine as well as the propeller. They were duly loaded on a lugger for the trip south.

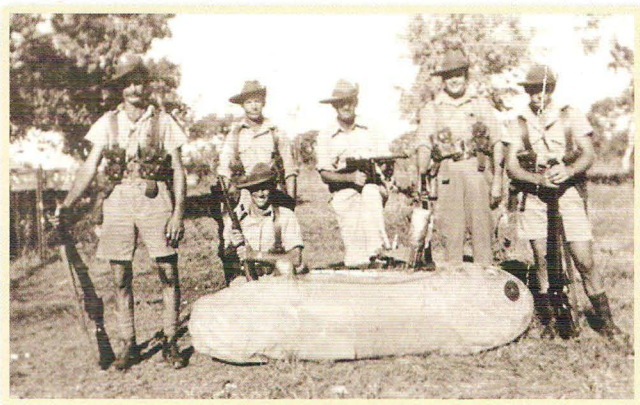
On Friday 20 March, Broome had not been the only location raided in the northwest. Across Dampier Land and on the far side of the Fitzroy River was the town of Derby. Here, another Advanced Operational Base had been built by the RAAF on the site of the existing civil aerodrome. However, because of its proximity to Broome – about 100 miles away – it had not been used very much. Thus when two Zeros appeared there were no aircraft present and few ready targets. The airfield buildings were strafed with little damage done. None of the handful of RAAF guards present were injured.

Japanese air units on Timor were now making almost daily raids on northern Australia. Two days after Broome and Derby were attacked, a similar force of seven bombers and three fighters attacked Katherine and Darwin.² On this same day, newly arrived USAAF P-40 fighters enjoyed their first "kill" over Darwin, shooting down a C5M "Babs". Both of the crew

were killed, including the navigator, Nagasawa, who had flown in the C5M over Broome on 3 March.³ The next day, 23 March 1942, seven bombers attacked Wyndham. Again, several sticks of bombs were dropped leaving a line of 30 craters across the airfield. The damage was easily repaired. An hour later, three Zeros came in low over the airfield, firing their guns but doing little damage.⁴

The Japanese would continue their raids against Darwin, but soon decided they had done enough against the northwest. The raids on 20 March against Broome and Derby represented the southernmost appearance of Japanese fighters for the remainder of the war. Although little damage was done the raids were more about sending a message that the Japanese could hit each of the targets at will. The Japanese commanders in Timor were likely satisfied this show of strength had succeeded. As their reconnaissance aircraft roamed over the region, there was never any sign that the bases were being used for any significant military purpose. The coastal fields, built for the purpose of maintaining patrols, were now too exposed for operational use. The Japanese had not invaded the northwest. They did not have to: the threat of their air power on Timor was enough to prevent the bases being used for offensive purposes.

For the next few months, there was little for Japanese reconnaissance aircraft to report as Allied aircraft only visited the northwest bases in small numbers, for short durations and rarely in the middle of the day. During this time the enemy reconnaissance aircraft probed further south, and soon staged a demonstration raid on a more southern target. This took the form of an attack against Port Hedland, which became the southernmost target bombed by the Japanese. The assault occurred during the night of 29-30 July, when a "V" formation of nine bombers made a northwesterly run over Port Hedland airfield, dropping bombs from about 15,000 feet.⁵ The formation then flew away to the north-east. A large quantity – around 39 – of light bombs were dropped, some of which failed to explode. A mix of ordnance was likely used, including some of the "daisy-cutter" anti-personnel type. These exploded alongside a large number of army tents used for accommodation. The tents were "riddled" with shrapnel, but as the soldiers were lying full-length on the floor at the time only a single soldier was killed: hit in the back by a bomb splinter.



Men of the Derby Volunteer Defence Corps posing with a long range fuel tank jettisoned by a Zero that strafed Derby aerodrome. A typical variety of VDC uniforms can be seen. One man has a Thompson sub-machine gun while the others are armed with rifles. Such small VDC detachments represented the entire army presence in the northwest in early 1942. (State Library of Western Australia).

A runway at Port Hedland was temporarily put out of service because of bomb craters. The single aircraft present on the airfield, a USN Catalina amphibian, was on the far side of the field and was undamaged. After this raid, Japanese bombers continued to roam freely over the northwest on reconnaissance missions. Because of the exposed locations of the coastal bases, which the Japanese had shown that they could strike at will, it was decided, most likely by the RAAF, to build a series of “secret” inland bases. This was easier said than done. There were plenty of suitable sites, but no suitable roads with which to supply the bases, and road building would attract the attention of enemy reconnaissance planes. The solution was to build a base at Corunna Downs, a remote location about 30 miles from the mining town of Marble Bar. The old railway from Port Hedland to Marble Bar would be used to bring in supplies to the base. Development began in earnest later in 1942, and the base was used by Liberator bombers to attack the NEI the following year.⁶ Other inland sites under consideration in early 1942 were Noonkambah and Hall’s Creek. Some fuel was moved to these inland locations from coastal bases, namely Derby and Wyndham, but they were never developed to the extent of Corunna Downs.⁷

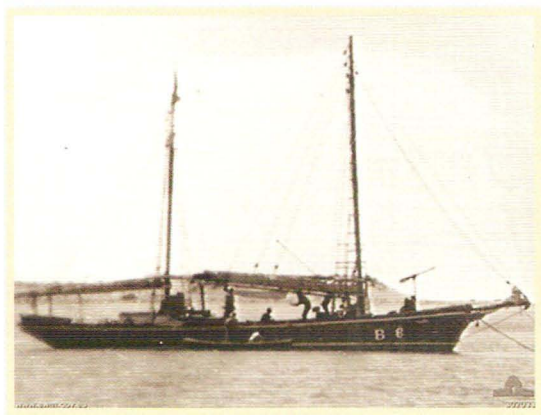
A month after the bombing of Port Hedland, Japanese bombers struck the northwest again. This was the third raid on Broome, during the night of 26 August. A stick of bombs was dropped, leaving a line of craters about 500 yards in length. Similar to the earlier raids, small bombs of up to 60 kg in size were used. Army searchers counted 18 craters and found three unexploded bombs. It was believed that the attack was aimed at the jetty, but the bombs landed about ½ mile short in scrub. The only damage done was to the telegraph line connecting the lighthouse and the post office. An initial report suggested two seaplanes flying at up to 10,000 feet were responsible, but a later version suggests the number and type of planes was unknown. However, it is probable that two or three “Betty” bombers were involved. The *modus operandi* was very similar to the earlier raids and at this time formations of two or three such bombers were raiding Darwin at night.⁸

Although this was the last raid of 1942, Japanese aerial activity over the northwest continued. By this time, USN Catalinas were regularly patrolling along the coast to the north of Broome. On occasion the Catalinas crossed paths with Japanese aircraft. After a Japanese bomber fired on a Catalina in September, two RAAF Hudsons were sent north to Port Hedland in an attempt to intercept the attackers. Twice the Hudsons encountered “Betty”-type bombers, and on one occasion gunfire was exchanged during a short chase.⁹ However shortly afterwards, towards the end of 1942, Japanese operations over the northwest effectively ceased for a few months because of the wet season.

Following his arrival Major Gibson had slowly helped the town to achieve some measure of stability. But Gibson himself would have been unaware of the controversy surrounding Broome at high level - Western Command was unwilling to send any resources to the town.

In fact just after the fall of Java, Army Headquarters in Melbourne had sent a consignment of automatic weapons to Western Command, with the strong inference¹⁰ that this would allow immediate shipment of weapons from Perth to Broome. However no action of any kind was taken. Indeed, the salvaged machineguns held in Broome had not even been mounted during the attack which destroyed Snook's Reliant (all but a couple had been sent south). Even after this second raid Western Command was only prepared to send up ammunition from relatively limited VDC stocks. On 2 April, 600 rounds of 0.5-inch ammunition was sent to Broome by air. Half of this was to be retained at Broome to be used with a single salvaged machine-gun, while the other half together with the other salvaged Browning machine-gun was to be forwarded to Wyndham.¹¹ (It is a ridiculous and miserly amount, but correct. 300 rounds would have been exhausted in just a few bursts, barely enough to cope with single strafing Zero. Along with the failure of quick defence measures such as mounting and siting machineguns against further raids, it may simply reflect the disorganisation and lack of facilities such as welders and capable personnel.)

Otherwise, Western Command's interest in the northwest was limited to inland areas. Two officers were sent overland, via rarely used desert tracks to Hall's Gap, arriving around 15 April.¹² From this inland area of the Kimberleys, they were instructed to organise and train Kimberley Sector VDC men as commandos. Presumably the logic here was that any Japanese occupation would be limited to coastal towns and aerodromes. So guerrilla forces could be maintained inland in the rugged Kimberleys, for observation and strikes against the occupied areas. It was probably this group that was named the Northern Australia Field Security Section, as authority was given for it to be added to Western Command's Order of Battle at this time. Almost certainly the initiative for forming these groups was coming from Army Headquarters, which was pressing Western Command to take such action.¹³¹⁴



The lugger Heather which was evacuated from Broome in March 1942. It was subsequently retained at Port Hedland and used by the RAN to patrol the northwest coast. It is pictured serving in this role, with a machine-gun mounted forward. (Australian War Memorial 302033)

Virtually the only other military activity in the northwest was in regard to the demolition program. With most of the key infrastructure "wired" for demolition if needed, a sizeable job arose in destroying unseaworthy luggers. As they were wooden they were simply burnt on the beach. A great many derelict, unidentified vessels were probably destroyed at this time, because many disappeared off WA shipping registers before or during WWII and never re-appeared. The army detachment formed for this work was called, in rather ominous-sounding military jargon,

the Special Duties Unit.¹⁵

Aside from the destruction of unseaworthy vessels, the fleet of domestic pearling luggers, mostly located at Broome, needed withdrawal. Although seemingly harmless enough, all of these craft were of military significance. Being sturdy and robust wooden vessels, their shallow draft allowed them close to shore. Most had diesel engines, but otherwise they could be towed short distances in potential amphibious operations. Easily hidden, the Japanese had often used such vessels in their operations. Thus the fleet in the northwest was a dangerous military liability.

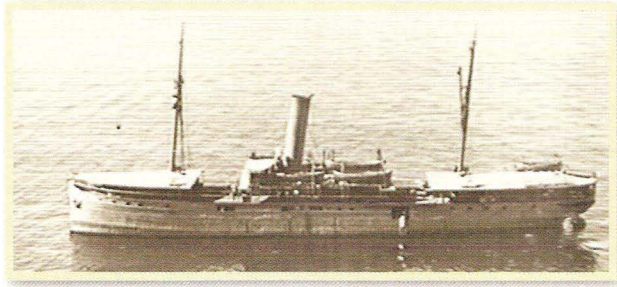
Actually before the northwest itself was under threat, the RAN was eying the luggers for employment as harbour vessels in Darwin and elsewhere. An officer from Melbourne, Lieutenant D.L. "Beau" Davis,¹⁶ RANR, was flown to Broome. He arrived on 9th February and found the lugger fleet laid up for the off season. On 17 February there was a neap tide and around 45 luggers were floated off from their lay-up positions. However, each of the craft were no more than bare "hulls and poles". They remained in the harbour where each would need considerable fitting out to enable them to sail elsewhere. As noted in Chapter 6, it was decided to get the entire fleet south to Port Hedland by the end of March as an immediate goal. The least seaworthy craft would be destroyed.

The problem for Davis was organising crews for the luggers, who were mostly Asian residents of Broome. Because there were few masters available who usually organised crews, and because the crews would only work under the same system of bonds which were used in peacetime, it was a time consuming process. Progress was interrupted by the USAAF evacuation through Broome when all of the crewmen were employed as airfield labourers. Most of these men had returned to the luggers by mid-March. Much progress was then made.

Aside from derelict vessels, over 20 were destroyed at Broome, or further up the coast at Cape L  v  que.¹⁷ Most of the others had put to sea during March, with crews confident they could take them as far south as North West Cape. However disaster struck as many ran into cyclonic conditions near Port Hedland on 25 March – the lack of experienced masters on each vessel greatly multiplied their difficulties. Five vessels were completely lost, although the crews are



After evacuation from the northwest virtually all of the luggers were put to use in some way. Here eight are visible supporting 1942 army exercises in the Abrolhos Islands, near Geraldton, WA. An American PBY flying boat is passing overhead. Ironically, the luggers had been removed from the northwest to prevent the Japanese using them in a similar fashion. (Australian War Memorial P01588.017)



The ancient steamship Giang Ann (1,063t) was built in 1902 for the Dutch KPM line. Purchased by a Singaporean company in the 1930s, it arrived in WA as a refugee ship in early 1942. Evidently deemed expendable, it successfully voyaged to Broome in late April. Along with large quantities of marine supplies, it also brought out the last batch of evacuees, including the inmates and warders of Broome gaol. (Australian War Memorial 303329)

understood to have been saved. At least another dozen luggers had been scattered along the coast with some degree of damage. Two shipwrights were flown up from Perth to Port Hedland in an attempt to salvage as many vessels as possible. Despite working in difficult conditions due to the extreme tides (i.e. often at night or in waist-deep water), these men did an amazing job in patching up virtually all of the damaged vessels. Just one was stripped and burnt.¹⁸

Meanwhile, Commander Branson himself again went to Broome on 3 April to work with Davis in clearing the remaining luggers. Rapid progress was made and by mid-April only four remained at Broome, to sail within days. Virtually all of the remainder were south of Port Hedland, making for Onslow. Thus a potentially dangerous military resource had been cleared from the northwest, mostly due to the determined efforts of Davis and the crews. Originally, Davis had identified 45 luggers at Broome. However others had been laid up in various creeks and inlets along the coast, while more still were based as far south as Onslow. As they swept the coastline southwards, over 80 luggers were eventually accounted for.

Sailing southwards from Onslow was a particular challenge. Luggers were not built for winter seas or southern latitudes, so it was important to get them south before winter set in. However there was a delay at Onslow as navigators were needed who “knew the way south”. Plus after the cyclone at Port Hedland, many of the crews were understandably lacking in confidence in their ability to tackle southern conditions and navigate unfamiliar waters. Indeed, on 7 May the lugger *Langdon* was wrecked on a reef. Nevertheless, the plan was to get the entire fleet to Fremantle, and by mid-May all were on the way except for two, *Heather* and *Myrtle Olga*. Underlining the military usefulness of the luggers, both were retained at Port Hedland to form a Northwest Patrol.

Most of the relatively few other vessels along the north west coast at this time were moved south by their owners. An interesting exception was the 96 ton steam-lighter *Silver Star*, which was sunk by the RAN in Cossack Creek, becoming the largest vessel to be deliberately destroyed. This vessel had an interesting life, having originally entered service in 1906 as a luxury river ferry on the Swan River. After serving for some years in Albany, in the 1930s she was converted into a lighter for service at Cossack which had no deep water port. With its shallow draft *Silver Star* was ideal for this purpose, and would have had military value in

the same role.¹⁹ However, she was sunk because of a fear she could be used by the enemy in the case of an invasion. It is possible the RAN had little faith in those present to carry out duties properly if a real emergency did occur. All destroyed craft were “requisitioned” by the government and therefore paid for, although some owners disputed the payments for years afterwards in the courts.

By the beginning of June the vessels were slowly arriving at Geraldton, although one was wrecked there. Another four were lost in a gale off Perth three weeks later as they tried to reach Fremantle. Over half of the original fleet of 80 had been burnt or lost during the voyage south. Most of the remainder of these versatile craft served in some way for the remainder of the war. Several operated an army ferry service to Rottnest Island. Another batch were used as Boom Defence Vessels by the RAN at Fremantle. Others joined the Naval Auxiliary Patrol at secondary ports such as Bunbury and Geraldton. Just one was used as a naval diving boat which reflected the original use in the pearl industry.

It is interesting to note that during an army exercise later in 1942, a fleet of nine luggers was used to transport members of the 2nd Infantry Brigade to the Abrolhos Islands, off Geraldton. Ironically, they had been removed from the northwest to prevent the Japanese from using them in this same way.

After the luggers had left Broome, several hundred tons of ships stores and fuel remained at the port. Although shipping was now banned as far north as Broome, this consignment was valuable enough to warrant the risk of collecting it. However the WA State Shipping Company was not willing to risk its remaining 4,000 ton motor vessel, *Koolinda*. Instead, the company chartered the small 1902 Singaporean steamship *SS Giang Ann* (1,063t). It made the uneventful voyage in late April.²⁰

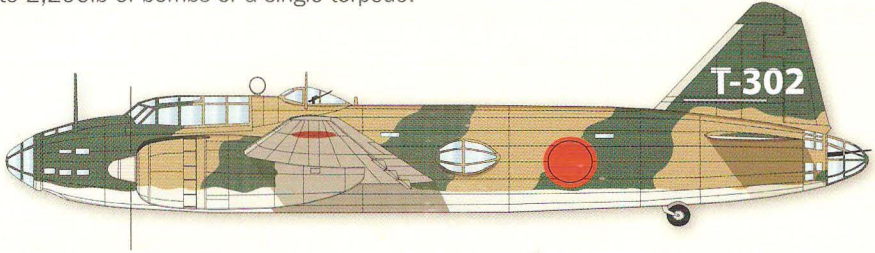
After this vessel had departed Broome, it marked an end of an era for the pearling town. The luggers, the crews and the shore support stores, accumulated over many years, had now all gone and would never return post-war. Also closely identified with Broome’s heritage was its iconic wooden jetty. This narrowly escaped destruction at this time because it was felt the act would have an overwhelmingly negative effect on morale.²¹ Actually, the worst was now passed and Broome’s time in the wilderness was almost at an end. The army in WA was being reorganised around a dynamic new commander who would take an active and first-hand interest in the northwest. ♦

Mitsubishi G4M1 "Betty"

Specifications

Long Range Bomber

Propulsion: 2 x 1,530hp engines Speed: 265mph max; 196mph cruise
 Range: 2,664 miles loaded Weight: 20,940 lb max loaded Crew: 7
 Armament: 4 x 7.7mm Type 92 MGs (nose, dorsal, L & R blisters); 1 x 20mm Type 99 Cannon (tail); plus up to 2,200lb of bombs or a single torpedo.



A G4M1 of the Takao Air Wing as operated from Timor in early 1942. An odd feature of the "Betty" was the circular left-side fuselage door at the exact position where the red hinomaru was painted.

The Mitsubishi G4M1 "Betty" was a land based bomber used by the Japanese Naval Air Force. In December 1941 it was still a new design. Because of the design of the rear gun position, the fuselage did not taper in the normal way, but remained almost cylindrical throughout its entire length. This led to the nickname of hamaki (cigar). The G4M1 was designed to bomb targets at a range of 1,000 - 1,500 miles. Allied bombers flying these same missions were large, four-engined aircraft (B-17s and B-24s weighed, fully loaded, over 50,000-lb). The G4M1 had only two engines and an all up weight of 21,000-lb. In short, the designers had made a lot of compromises to ensure the G4M1 was light enough to preserve its long range capability with just two engines. There was no armour protection for the crew and no self-sealing fuel tanks. The weight saving measures extended such that when loaded with bombs, the bomb-bay doors were permanently removed, only being attached for ferry or training flights. As a result, G4M1s could attack targets at what were regarded as extreme ranges in early 1942, appearing without warning from any direction. Bombing from medium to high altitudes, the aircraft were out of range of most ground defences and were usually quick enough to get away before the defenders could react.

These tactics worked perfectly when Tokao Air Wing G4M1s first attacked targets in north-western Australia.¹ On 14 March 1942, 18 G4M1s from this unit moved into a new base in Timor, and were immediately in action against Darwin. Then on 20 March Broome was bombed, followed by Katherine on 22 March and Wyndham on 23 March. In each of these raids airfields were attacked with dozens of light bombs. With no target aircraft present, little real damage was done. However, the raids demonstrated that the JNAF could hit these locations at will. Aside from airfields in the Darwin region, this strategy deterred the active use of these bases by the RAAF.

After March most offensive missions were against Darwin. Otherwise the bombers flew surveillance patrols over the entire region, using their long range to good effect. There were a handful of further missions against the northwest in the second-half of the year. On the night of 29 July, Port Hedland was attacked. The bombs hit the airfield but the lack of target planes present meant damage was limited. A smaller raid was carried out against Broome on the night of 26 August, with the jetty apparently targeted, but the bombs fell short.

Other raids against northern Australia, particularly those in 1943, are outside the bounds of this publication. But in summary the vast majority of bombs dropped on northern Australia during the war were courtesy of G4M "Betty" bombers.

(Endnotes)

¹ General source for the Takao Air Wing is Cea, Eduardo. *Aircraft of the Imperial Japanese Navy. Land-based aviation, 1929-1945 (I)*. Originally published in Spanish by AF Editores: Spain, undated. English translation by Sally-Ann Hopwood.

Douglas DC-3 / C-53

Specifications

Medium Transport

2 x 1,100hp engines

Range: 1,025 miles*

Crew: 2-3

Speed: 224mph max; cruise 150mph;

Weight: 25,000lb max loaded

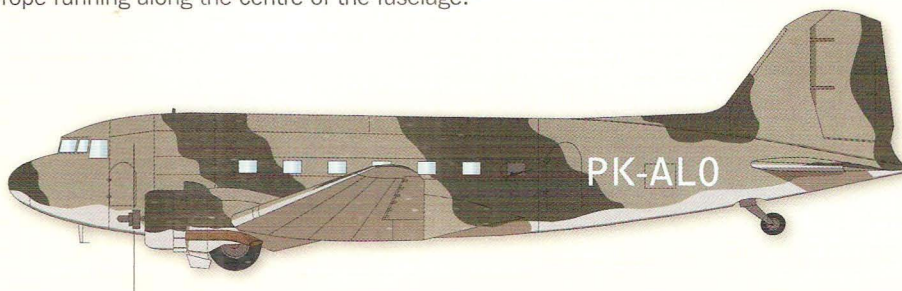
Capacity: 21 passengers (normal, seated)

Notes: the DC-3 was a pre-war airliner that subsequently became one of the best known aircraft of all time. The DC-3 outsold rivals such as the Lodestar because it was wide enough to seat three abreast: e.g. 21 passengers (7 x 3) as opposed to 14 (7 x 2). The DC-3s discussed here were generally early versions somewhat less capable than the mass-produced C-47 Dakota.

* effective range, loaded. Ferry range was up to 1,600 miles.

KNILM

In 1940 KNILM took over seven DC-3s from its European parent airline, KLM. Used for the long distance Europe-Java-Australia route, they carried 11 passengers in luxury sleeper-seats. However, when the Pacific War began these airliners were camouflaged and modified. The bulky sleeper-seats were removed and extra fuel tanks were installed. The only means of passenger restraint was just a single rope running along the centre of the fuselage.¹



KNILM DC-3 PK-ALO shown camouflaged and with a MG in the rear window. It was destroyed at Broome on 3rd March 1942.

By late January 1942 two KNILM DC-3s had been lost to enemy action. To provide some means of defence for the remaining DC-3s, machine guns were mounted in the rear windows. The field of fire was very limited, and in practice the guns were virtually useless. They did, however, give the aircrews some peace of mind.

In early February Captain Dunlop made the first flight from Java to Broome in a DC-3, beating Qantas by a few days. Successful flights in the opposite direction followed, although there was then a lull in activity due to the cyclonic weather around Broome. These flights were significant milestones as they were both long ranged and mostly over-water, leaving little margin for error. Indeed, each DC-3 was limited to just eight passengers, a very light load. More importantly for KNILM, these flights created a means to evacuate the valuable airliners themselves.

On 19 February KNILM began its evacuation of Java, with all five DC-3s arriving in Broome the next day. But just one aircraft flew straight back to Java. Despite their light loads the other four continued via Cloncurry to Sydney. This was a long journey, and for this reason relatively few flights back into Java were made. The additional dangers of flying in that direction were illustrated on 26 February when PK-AFZ departed Broome for Java. It encountered bad weather and could not find its destination airfield, eventually crash-landing due to a lack of fuel.

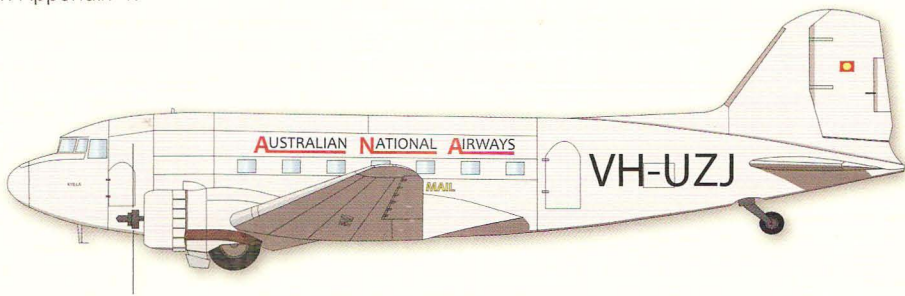
Just two days later the Japanese invaded Java. Of three KNILM DC-3s on the island at this time, two flew out on the night of 2 March. One landed at Broome the following morning only to be destroyed a short time later by attacking Zeros. The other was unlucky to be intercepted by the same Zeros on their way back to Timor. The pilot, Captain Smirnoff, skilfully crash-landed the battered plane. This particular DC-3 would become known as the "Diamond Dakota" because of the mysterious fate of a

valuable consignment of diamonds onboard.²

The final DC-3 remained hidden alongside some ML-KNIL Lodestars. At 1am on 7 March it departed carrying several important passengers including Dr H van Mook, a senior government official. This was the last civilian aircraft to leave Java, and after a seven hour flight it landed safely at Port Hedland. Perhaps fittingly, the pilot was Captain Dunlop, who had made the first Java-Broome flight a month beforehand. Commenting on the worsening operating conditions he said: "What we used to call impossible is now only just difficult."

Australian National Airlines

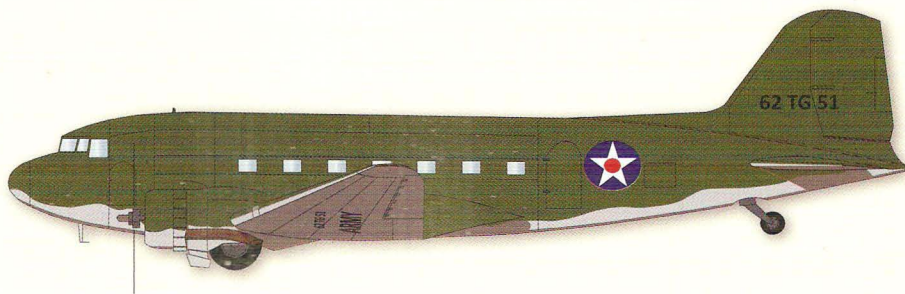
From time to time the Department of Civil Aviation directed civil aircraft to perform special tasks of behalf of the government, such as flying military supplies into Darwin and possibly Broome. Two Australian National Airlines DC-3s were mobilised to assist in the evacuation of the north-west in late February 1942. The movements of one of these aircraft, VH-UZK, are known in some detail and are given in Appendix 4.



Australian National Airlines DC-3

United States Army Air Force

The C-53 was a military version of the DC-3 with more powerful engines. It was a pure personnel transport, lacking modifications for carrying freight. Five C-53s arrived in Australia in late 1941. For the next few months they formed the core of the local USAAF transport force, which otherwise consisted of a few older planes from the Philippines.



USAAF Douglas C-53 transport.

(Endnotes)

1 Cuskelly, Ron. Doug's Doug. *Air Enthusiast* No. 70 July-August 1997. The article appears on the Queensland Air Museum webpage <http://www.qam.com.au/aircraft/dc-3/dougDoug.htm> accessed 12/07/09.

2 After a lengthy saga most of the diamonds were eventually recovered by the authorities. See Tyler or Wills for the whole story.

Stinson Reliant

Specifications

Five-seat light aircraft

1 x 245hp engine

Speed: 152mph max;

Range: 650 miles

Weight: 4,000lb max loaded

Crew: 1

Capacity: 4 passengers + pilot

Notes: the Stinson Reliant was a general purpose civilian aircraft built in many different variants prior to WWII.



Stinson Reliant VH-UTW destroyed at Broome in March 1942. Stinson aircraft had bright colour schemes (the colours here have been interpreted from black and white photos). During 1942 Australian civilian aircraft were camouflaged, but this policy had probably not been instituted when this aircraft was destroyed.

(Endnotes)

- 1 Tyler, see personal notes in Chapter "Smirnoff – The Diamond Carrier".
- 2 These raids were almost certainly undertaken by the same aircraft and pilots. The bombers over Katherine dropped a large number (84) of 60kg bombs as had been dropped at Broome. In a similar outcome, little damage was done and just one man died. See *Darwin's Air War*. Aviation Society of the Northern Territory: Winnellie, NT, 1991. (p.25) .
- 3 Ibid, p.25.
- 4 Gillison, p.554.
- 5 Western Area RAAF Report on Bombing of Port Hedland 29 July 1942 (Weekly Intelligence Summary No 83), AWM52, 1/7/35, WA Line of Communication Area General Staff Branch June-July 1942.
- 6 Odgers, George. *Air War Against Japan 1943-1945, Australia in the War of 1939-1945, Series 3 (Air), Volume III*. Australian War Memorial: Canberra, 1957. (p.66).
- 7 NAA File: *Defence Situation at Broome & North West Coast*; Series No. A663 Control symbol O66/1/608 Barcode 81455
- 8 These details are mainly from RAAF Intelligence Summary No. 87, 1st September 1942. Prime (p.27) says that a single seaplane was responsible but gives no other details, including the date of the raid.
- 9 Vincent, David. *The RAAF Hudson Story, Book One*. self-published: Highbury, South Australia, 1999. (p202-205).
- 10 The "inference" is made from a communication from GOC Western Command via telephone with Army HQ Melbourne. The contents of the call are not recorded but was in relation to defence of WA against air attack. Referring to the phone call, an army document notes official action to send 60 Bren guns to WA, as well as US and AIF Anti-Aircraft units. As Army HQ amended the Order of Battle of Western Command to include a "North West Field Security Section" we draw the inference that the Bren guns were shipped so that Western Command could ship its own automatic weapons to the Broome area immediately. Actually, no action was taken. It was not an "order" to Western Command but the HQ advising what it wanted done. As will be seen, the GOC Western Command was soon replaced due to this failure to act.
- 11 AWM52 1/7/35 WA Line of Communication Area, Area General Staff Branch, April-May 1942.
- 12 ibid.
- 13 AWM52 1/1/1 Army Headquarter Units – LHQ etc; March 1942.

14 Attempts to raise commando-type groups in the northwest would be largely derailed by a wider argument of whether or not to establish a regional Aboriginal military unit. There were, after all, just a few dozen European men mostly of old age and ill health remaining in the region and many were already serving with the VDC. On the other hand there were at least 1,000 young and able Aboriginal men available. Despite the successful service of Aboriginals elsewhere in Australia at the time, vested pastoral interests in the region opposed the use of these men, believing it would lead to an organised Aboriginal labour movement post-war. The pastoral industry at the time was largely dependent on cheap Aboriginal labour. For a more detailed description of this debate, see: Hall, Robert A. *The Black Diggers: Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in the Second World War*. Allen & Unwin: Sydney, 1989.

15 McKenzie-Smith, Graham R. *Australia's Forgotten Army, Volume 1 The Ebb and Flow of the Australian Army in Western Australia – 1941 to 1945*. Grimwade Publications: Chapman, ACT, 1994; (p.21).

16 Davis was a fine choice for this job, as he had years of experience in the Broome pearling industry including seven years as master of his own fleet of six luggers. Davis also had a knowledge of several local Aboriginal languages. Later he set up the North West Patrol using two armed luggers to patrol the coastline between Broome and Darwin. His ongoing contact with the Aboriginal population was integral with maintaining the patrol. Hall, p.105.

17 Refer to Appendix 4 for a list of individual luggers and their fates.

18 NAA File: *[Compensation for Pearling Luggers Lost or Destroyed (Situation at Port Hedland and Broome) Report on the situation in North Western Australia by G. Branson]* Series number MP138/1 Control symbol 603/217/1470 Barcode 338449

19 See <http://www.museum.wa.gov.au/collections/databases/maritime/shipwrecks/shipdetail.asp?ID=1344> &Shipname=Silver; accessed 6th October 2009; for the ship's entry in the Western Australian Maritime Museum's Wreck Database. The remains of the ship's boiler are still visible today.

20 The *Giang Ann* might have been something of a lucky vessel at this time. In February she had come safely out of Java to Fremantle in company with *Ping Wo* towing *HMAS Vendetta*. Almost a year later, on 30 January 1943, *Giang Ann* was sighted off the NSW coast by the submarine *I-21*. A torpedo was launched but it exploded prematurely and the ship escaped. Post-war *Giang Ann* was sold to Hong Kong interests. Her luck ran out soon after when she struck a mine in a Chinese river and sank.

21 The long jetty was removed in the 1960s when a modern structure was built further away from the town.

Chapter 8

Avoiding the Blame

By April 1942 there were deep concerns in many quarters in regard to the defence of Western Australia. There were few resources to defend the northwest, the “scorched-earth” policy was being mismanaged, and military authority was largely absent. The role of civilians in what was essentially a war zone had not been properly defined. The lack of control meant that demolitions were unlikely to be successful in the event of an enemy landing. The situation forced calls for action, particularly from WA Premier J.C. Willcock and his State Government.¹ These calls coincided with the circulation of reports written by the likes of Brain, Branson and Snook which gave officials a view of the real situation.

After a meeting bipartisan delegation from the WA Parliament in early April, the Prime Minister, John Curtin, assured Premier Willcock that he had met General Blamey twice to discuss the issue.² Curtin said that Blamey was “... fully seized of the situation and regards it as a matter of great responsibility for him.”³ The real news, however, was that Blamey was replacing Western Command with a new army organisation, within the context of a complete overhaul of forces nationally. This strong decision was made within days of Blamey’s return from overseas.



Prime Minister Curtin inspecting troops in Perth in 1942. A West Australian (he held the seat of Fremantle), Curtin had a direct personal interest in the defence of WA. (Australian War Memorial 028738)



Seen at Maylands aerodrome, Perth, during a visit to WA in 1943 is General Thomas Blamey, Commander-in-Chief, Australian Military Forces (far right). Within days of being appointed to this role in March 1942, Blamey engineered a major reorganisation of the home army. The defence of WA became the responsibility of Lieutenant-General Gordon Bennett (second from left) who took an active interest in the northwest. The other men present are Brigadier Hoad and Air-Commodore Brownell. (Australian War Memorial 052337)

The General Officer Commanding Western Command, Major-General Eric Clive Pegus Plant defended his lack of action in regard to Broome in a letter of 11 April 1942, responding to the Branson reports. But just four days later Western Command was reorganised into 3 Corps and Plant was replaced as GOC by Lieutenant-General Gordon Bennett.⁴

Immediately Bennett's presence was felt in WA. He presided over a meeting of local leaders, including Premier Willcock, and a number of important decisions were made. Normal civilian life would continue only as far north as Port Hedland. The army would bring troops up to that point and investigate what defence resources were available for the area. If any single action defined the different approach taken by Bennett compared to Plant, it was a visit made by the former to the northwest. Barely a fortnight after taking over command of 3 Corps, Bennett began an inspection trip that included Port Hedland, Broome, Derby and Wyndham.⁵ Morale and confidence across the northwest rose accordingly. The subsequent history of 3 Corps is beyond the bounds of this narrative.

This sudden burst of activity after Bennett's appointment stands in stark contrast to the three and a half months of Plant's command beforehand. Indeed, Plant proved to be completely out of his depth in the role. How did he get to be appointed to this important post? Plant had been serving in the Middle East when he was recalled in December 1941 to help lead the home army. At this time Plant's star was very much on the rise, and he appeared to have all the credentials

needed for a senior role. He had extensive experience in WWI, and at 51 years of age he was still at an acceptable age for high command.⁶ Also, Plant was a professional soldier – one of the few that had served throughout the lean inter-war years.⁷ He had excellent contacts throughout the service, and was also a beneficiary of a policy whereby staff officers received operational commands.⁸ After Plant gained highly regarded operational command experience during the Syrian campaign in 1941, he looked to have all of the qualifications required to be a senior commander. To put this further into perspective, among the small group returning to Australia alongside Plant were the likes of Clowes, Robertson and Savage, all of whom would finish the war with strong records as operational commanders.⁹

Although Plant was initially suitable on closer inspection his record was rather less than an ideal for high command. Among other things, impressive service records from WWI were not necessarily a useful indicator for WWII. Very different skills were needed than was the case in the enormous, slow moving, pyramidal structures that characterised the armies of WWI. Another factor was that unlike many of his contemporary regular army officers, Plant had not been commissioned from Duntroon.¹⁰



Studio portrait of Major-General Eric Clive Pegus Plant, who was General Officer Commanding Western Command during the first quarter of 1942. Although seemingly well qualified, he failed to exercise any initiative in regard to the emergency situation in the northwest. Perhaps as a result, his Western Command position is not mentioned in his abbreviated Official History biography despite it being the most senior post he held. (Australian War Memorial P02193.001)

On arrival in W.A. by air on 4 January 1942, Plant was given command of the newly formed Western Command. In a certain respect this role mirrored Plant's experience, as the core force in W.A. was a single militia infantry brigade. In conventional terms, Plant could only hope to provide for the defence of the greater Perth area. Accordingly, his efforts were spent training units there. But in January the Minister for the Army announced there would now be two chiefs for the Home Forces: a single commander responsible for eastern and southern Australia, while Plant, now a Major-General, would be responsible for Western Australia.¹¹ In just weeks Plant had risen from the command of a Brigade within a large army organisation to be head of a strategically important geographic command, reporting to Army Headquarters, Melbourne.

Unfortunately, Plant did nothing whatsoever in regard to the remote north. Despite the Japanese threat, the scattered VDC forces were left as they had been in 1941, with the same standing orders. Plant had no regular, direct communication with these forces. The understanding was that the northwest could not be defended, and that a "scorched earth" policy would apply.

Accordingly, Plant despatched teams of Army engineers to the northwest to prepare demolitions. This was done, but so weak was the command and control in the area that it is unlikely the demolitions would have been successful in the event of an enemy landing.

Underwriting this unhappy position were the poor levels of liaison and communication between Plant's Western Command and civil authorities and other services. For sometime the army had been building a sizeable garrison in Darwin, and various wartime regulations had come into force there. However, Darwin was controlled by a Commonwealth Administrator, which greatly simplified these dealings. For Plant, the complicating factor was the WA state government. Without agreement with the state government, Plant's legal power was undefined. He failed completely to address these issues. Plant also had poor liaison with the other services.¹²



Map of the ABDACOM Area. The Australian section was designated the "Darwin Sub-Area". When ABDACOM was dissolved in late February the "Darwin Sub-Area" remained for political reasons. Confusion at many levels resulted and no one was in active command of the local defence forces in the northwest during the Java evacuation period.

Things changed quickly after the fall of Singapore, but Plant failed to appreciate the serious threat developing to the northwest. He also failed to appreciate the change in circumstances when Java was isolated, which gave Broome strategic value, albeit for a limited time. Thus for a two or three week period from mid-February, the scorched earth policy did not apply, as Broome was needed to facilitate the evacuation of Java. Although few resources were available, there were many empty planes travelling north to Broome which could have transported a light security force, for example.

One complicating factor in regard to Broome was the assignment of the northwest to ABDA. This has generally been of little historical relevance. Darwin was included for obvious strategic reasons: it was the only defended base in northern Australia. However Darwin was only useful

if the Timor Sea was controlled, and this was the basis for extending the ABDA area from Darwin itself right across the northwest coast of Australia. In practice, this was intended for naval and air reasons; there was never any plan to actively defend this zone with ground forces. Thus under Directive 10 (b) of the ABDA agreement, this territory was defined, somewhat misleadingly from an Australian perspective, under the name "Darwin Sub-Area". ABDA records explicitly state that: "land forces in the Darwin sub-area were only under ABDACOM control for 18 days from 8th–25th Feb".¹³ On 25 February, ABDACOM ceased operations and the defence of Java was handed over to the Dutch. However, the Darwin Sub-Area remained in the ABDA territory after this date, until the fall of Java on 8 March. There was no military reason for this, instead, as one political figure explained, the idea was "... that the ABDA area will fade out gradually and not be suddenly extinguished. All of these arrangements appear to us to give Java the best possible chance to hold on and the fullest margin of United Kingdom moral support to the Dutch in their difficult position."¹⁴

Even before 25 February there was never any intention for ground forces in the northwest to be controlled externally. They were supposed to report to an "Australian General commanding" in Darwin. However, in an almost unbelievable misunderstanding, Land Headquarters believed that all units in the area were under the operational control of ABDA from 25 February until 9 March, while the maintenance of the VDC units in WA would remain the responsibility of Western Command.¹⁵ The result of this military-bureaucratic mess was that when Broome was facing attack, there was no-one commanding the ground forces there.

Although this suggests a problem at Army Headquarters, it would have been clear to Western Command that the final days of ABDA was a political invention that would soon come to an end. Plant's total lack of action or interest in regard to the northwest remains unexplained. Even the reports of Branson did not trigger any immediate action. More serious was the message from the Chief of the Air Staff to the Army's Chief of Staff on 9 March.¹⁶ By this time, officers at Army Headquarters in Melbourne began to take a closer interest in how the northwest was being handled by Western Command.

On 12 March Plant talked by telephone with Army Headquarters. There is no record of the phone call, but there seems little doubt that Plant excused his initial inaction because of a lack of resources. Perhaps surprisingly, Army headquarters responded strongly. Firstly, Western Command would be sent 60 Bren guns as an immediate measure. Secondly, American and Australian anti-aircraft units would be sent to Western Command as quickly as possible. One US Army Anti-Aircraft Regiment would sail ex-Brisbane for Fremantle on 13 March. It consisted of twelve 3-inch AA guns, forty-eight 0.50-inch MGs, and four 37mm light AA guns. One Australian AIF Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, less one battery, consisting of 24 x Bofors AA guns, would travel by rail from Adelaide. The Brens were a small order but one with an inference that they were being released to allow Western Command to send a "Field

Security Force” to the northwest armed with automatic weapons.¹⁷

These were major AA reinforcements that would make Fremantle the second most heavily defended centre in Australia after Darwin. The instructions from headquarters were that these reinforcements would be used both for the protection of Fremantle and for “operational aerodromes”.¹⁸ The inference was that they could be deployed at AOBs to the north as the situation dictated. But it would be weeks before the units arrived. However, Plant was slow in enacting these plans. Despite empty aircraft travelling north to bring back refugees, no defences as outlined above were present at Broome on 20 March when Zeros again strafed the aerodrome. Zeros also strafed Derby and Wyndham with no opposition.

This must have been the last straw for many in high command, as reports were now freely circulating in regard to the lack of military control in the northwest. After being prompted to comment at least twice, it was not until 11 April that Plant finally sent a response to Army Headquarters, titled “Report by NOIC Broome”. Of course the hapless Commander Branson this refers to was only the messenger. In reality Plant was defending his handling of the wider situation. He lists a total of 10 points, which are summarised below in italics, with comments following:¹⁹

1. *The region concerned was part of the ABDA area, and thus not under the control of Western Command.* Although this misunderstanding was not of Plant’s making, he was still geographically responsible for the entire area. It should have been clear that ABDA never had any meaningful interest in the northwest and that it would soon revert to Western Command, but Plant took no action of any kind.
2. *The VDC forces in the area were issued with their full entitlement of rifles and small arms ammunition.* This was the situation when Plant assumed command, and it seems the VDC standing orders of December 1941 were never modified. For Plant to make this statement in his defence is strange, as it really underlines his lack of activity in this regard.
3. *On the night of 8/9 March, the area reverted to the control of Western Command. Small detachments of troops were sent north to cope with the extra duties caused by the influx of Dutch refugees.* It is difficult to understand what is being referred to here. Only the RAAF sent up any personnel in response to the refugee inflow. The army may have sent a few troops up to Port Hedland, but none went to the northwest during the period in question. In any case, by 9 March the refugee crisis was well past its peak.
4. *The only means of transport was by air. Plant details the need for removing the ex-Koolama passengers and 200 civilian evacuees from the north, and claims ‘everything*

possible was done with the means at the disposal of this command". The civilian evacuation is probably mentioned because it was done under an order signed by Plant, as GOC Western Command. However, the idea came from leaders in Broome itself.²⁰ Aside from those evacuated from Broome on *Koolinda*, the remainder left by air and were processed by the American-run evacuation centre in Broome. As Plant implies, these operations added to the strain of resources alongside the Java evacuation, but it is difficult to credit Western Command with any major role in these operations.

5. *Plant details the troops available to him for the defence of the Perth area, and claims that providing any defence of the northwest would have absorbed all of this force. Plant's final sentence reads: "furthermore, no authority had been given to place troops in this area".* This statement, more than any, shows how out of touch Plant was. It is of no surprise that he was replaced within days of making it. Firstly, no-one was advocating any "defence" of the northwest in a conventional sense, only a presence that would ensure command and control. Secondly, Plant *was* the authority for the defence of WA, he did not need to get it from elsewhere – he didn't have the initiative to properly exercise such a command.
6. *Major Gibson is now stationed at Broome, and duty officers have been appointed at most of the other northern ports.* This action was welcome and immediately helped restore stability to Broome. It could have been done weeks beforehand, however, and was probably implemented only because of direct instructions from Army HQ.
7. *In accordance with Army HQ instructions "guerrilla sections, equipped with trucks, LMGs, sub-machine guns and explosives, are now operating throughout ... inland areas of the north and northwest".* This statement is carefully worded. It does not give an indication of the size or exact position of these forces. They were probably only then being organised, again as a result of instructions from Army HQ.²¹
8. *Machine-guns salvaged from destroyed aircraft have been mounted for the protection of Broome and Port Hedland against strafing aircraft.* None of this was done at the initiative of Western Command. The fact that Plant feels it is of significance here shows that Western Command should really have sent up machineguns for the temporary defence of Broome. While this was not done with the promised 60 Bren guns being sent from Melbourne defies explanation.
9. *Unless direct orders are received to do so, it is not intended to send any other Army personnel, other than the Northwest Field Security Section, to the northwest, as it is considered unsound to disperse forces in that area where sufficient strength cannot be maintained at any one point to ensure effective resistance to enemy attack.* Plant clings to

this dogma in his defence, and misses the point entirely. The “Northwest Field Security Section” was probably the invention of Army Headquarters. Plant takes no credit for it and it probably only existed on paper in early April. It was later incorporated in the new northwest strategy implemented by 3 Corps in May. It is unclear if it is distinct from the forces referred to in (7) above.

10. *“In conclusion, it is desired to submit that if the decision to send Commander Branson to the Northwest had been notified to this Command, a certain amount of the confusion that did exist in that area for a period might have been avoided, as this officer was issuing instructions, which could not help conflicting with those sent from these Headquarters, with the result that the people in the north were uncertain where they stood and whose orders they should carry out.”* This is an astoundingly childish statement for an officer of Plant’s seniority. It is clear that Branson, on reaching both Port Hedland and Broome, immediately consulted the local army leaders, the VDC men. It is difficult to find an example of Branson’s orders which conflicted with those of Western Command, mainly because the latter was not actively in control of the situation. Branson’s reports were highly embarrassing because they highlighted this. Plant tries to deflect this by accusing Branson of not liaising effectively.

General Blamey returned to Australia onboard the *Queen Mary*, which anchored off Fremantle on 23 March. A naval launch came out to meet the ship. Onboard was Plant, who delivered a letter from Prime Minister Curtin which appointed Blamey as Commander-in-Chief, Australian Military Forces.²² Blamey spent the next two days in Perth before flying to the eastern states. No doubt he spent most of this time with Plant, who probably made a poor impression on Blamey. Given the attitude and outlook shown in the letter above, those in Army Headquarters must have also lost confidence in Plant by this time. In fact Western Command was the peak of Plant’s operational career. He was never again given an active command, finishing the war in the relative obscurity of first the Victorian then the NSW Line of Communications Area.²³

Perhaps strangely, given the wholesale failure of Plant’s Western Command, the entire episode remains virtually unknown, mainly because of the rather uncritical tone of the Official Histories as noted earlier.²⁴ The entry for Plant in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Online Edition, runs to six paragraphs focusing mainly on his WWI and inter-war career. It notes that after returning from the Middle East, Plant “headed (from January 1942) Western Command, again as a temporary major general...”²⁵ There is not even a hint that Plant did not perform well in this role, but in closing it notes that Plant was a “... thoroughly professional officer with a flair for training and administration.” Again, this infers that Plant did not have the broad range of skills needed for an operational command.



A Bren light machine-gun mounted as an anti-aircraft weapon in Exmouth Gulf, WA, 1943. In March 1942 Army Headquarters despatched 60 Bren guns to Western Command, probably in the understanding that some would be sent to the north-west to defend against strafing aircraft. (Australian War Memorial 058307)

The technicality that probably “saved” Plant’s reputation was the misunderstanding in regard to the ABDA Command – a gross error by Army Headquarters. The error meant that many senior staff officers had a motive for not revisiting the wider problems surrounding “Western Command”. After the Darwin bombing a formal inquiry was quickly set up by the government, but nothing of the kind ever happened in regard to Broome. Another factor here was Blamey who, as one commentator noted “always felt a certain loyalty to those officers who had served their country long and well, and through no fault of their own found themselves in situations that they were not

equipped to handle”.²⁶ This comment probably equates to a fair assessment of Plant’s situation.

Putting the Army aside, how was the performance of the other services at Broome? In many respects the Broome operations were “air”, and thus the performance of the RAAF was important. However, most of the air units in the northwest, particularly those coming from Java, were still under ABDA control, and not a direct RAAF responsibility. Nevertheless, the RAAF still had a direct interest via its bases there, and should have seen the need for action post-ABDA. Perhaps the RAAF’s best contribution was via its forward-thinking policy of building the AOBs in 1940, which enabled the aerial evacuations to take place. In addition, the RAAF was more pro-active than the Army in sending up resources to its bases in response to the changing strategic situation. For example, all units at Broome were dependent on the RAAF W/T capability.

The RAAF “managed” events from their faraway headquarters – never did they consider placing an officer on the spot, as a local counterpart to Lieutenant-Colonel Legge. Reports were continually relayed – therefore slowly – between the sub-commands and headquarters for action. In January 1942, the AOBs in the northwest, including Broome, became the responsibility of RAAF North West Command based in Darwin. This was to align the command with ABDA territory, even though from a local perspective it made more sense to align Broome with Perth. Although most issues in regard to Broome were relayed via RAAF Western Command in Perth, technically North West Command was responsible. Confusingly, the Army’s Western Command covered Broome but RAAF’s Western Command did not.

The result of this muddle was that the actions of the RAAF lagged some distance behind



A 40mm Bofors gun of 8 Battery, 2/3 Light Anti Aircraft Regiment, AIF, protecting the American flying boat base on the Swan River in 1942. This unit was among the anti-aircraft reinforcements ordered to WA shortly after the first raid on Broome. Before long its Bofors guns were positioned as far north as Geraldton, Onslow and Exmouth Gulf. (Australian War Memorial P01260.021)

the actual situation. For example, the single RAAF Empire Flying Boat at Broome had been sent there to pick up evacuees from Timor, invaded almost two weeks beforehand. The real need emerging was for more evacuation flights to Java. The RAAF failed to act in this regard, either with additional aircraft of its own or with the provision of flying boat facilities for other users. However, during the Broome operations the RAAF base at Pearce did undertake maintenance and engine overhauls for Dutch and US aircraft. In the eyes of the RAAF this was a significant contribution to the evacuations.²⁷

Otherwise RAAF's Western Area Command had few resources to contribute. During the peak of the

Java evacuations, the Americans asked repeatedly for aircraft to assist in the airlift. When this was referred to headquarters, the standard reply was "unable to assist, all aircraft on operations."²⁸ While this was certainly true of the relatively few aircraft assigned to WA, the RAAF did have numerous transport aircraft used for training. Two of these (DC-2s) had been sent to Broome in late February to pick up ex-Java RAAF men from Broome. No further aircraft were sent at the height of this emergency, which brings into question exactly how informed RAAF Headquarters was of the situation. Without an officer on the spot, their real-time knowledge was limited to what could be gathered from brief coded telegraphic messages.

While the Americans were being told that the RAAF had no transport planes available, it must have been a strange experience when they stopped-over at or overflew RAAF Geraldton base during the Perth-Broome shuttle flights. This was not an operational base, but one set up to support the Empire Air Training Scheme. There were around 100 twin-engined Ansons based here, maybe half operational at the time.²⁹ These aircraft could have been useful for transporting at least six passengers in an emergency. That these aircraft were not utilised for these operations underlines the inflexibility of the RAAF.³⁰ It is hard to believe that training operations could not have been postponed for a few days while instructors or senior students flew shuttles from Broome or Port Hedland to the south.

The Geraldton base was very well managed and undoubtedly its junior officers would have been keen to assist in any way possible (Branson commended his RAAF pilot who performed well in an *ad hoc* role of controlling air traffic at Port Hedland). The reason why these resources were not readily available in an emergency was ingrained in the RAAF structure. Just weeks after the Broome operations, General Brett, USAAF, was organising the Allied Air Forces organisation. Although general co-operation between the Australians and Americans

was “excellent”, Brett complained that he never had full control of the RAAF “due mainly to political interference and sabotage”.³¹ Brett was likely referring to the RAAF division between its operational and training arms. It meant that the likes of the Geraldton base, despite its obvious operational significance, remained largely unavailable to operational commanders.

There is also evidence that RAAF Western Area Command was not a properly responsive organisation as is needed in wartime. This message was sent from RAAF Western Area headquarters on 4 March: *“To Airboard from Western Area. US Army have requested assistance search for survivors Liberator shot down off Broome. Unable comply as aircraft this area cannot be released from role. As position is in Northwestern area suggest they be instructed cooperate US Broome”*³²

Amazingly, this message is a refusal to help in an urgent search and rescue situation, with the premise that *“aircraft this area cannot be released from role”*. Wiser heads prevailed and overruled with aircraft found for the mission. Within two days two Wirraways from Pearce had reached Broome. They were too late to search for the Liberator survivors, but they dropped supplies and messages to the DC-3 survivors at Carnot Bay.³³

The other “service” worthy of comment in regard to Broome was “Aviat” (Department of Civil Aviation). Overseen by the experienced and knowledgeable Brain, the Qantas flying boat base at Broome was under the direct control of Aviat. Brain seemed very keen to prevent his organisation working too closely with the military. This attitude is puzzling, given the circumstances, and reflects a mindset more accustomed to staying with the narrow boundaries of bureaucracy than exercising initiative. The war emergency also seems to be slow to register. In his diary Brain gives weight to such issues as the provision of laundry and morning and afternoon tea. More significantly, nowhere did Brain attempt to pool resources with the military. He even complained when the United States Navy requisitioned a newly acquired motorboat, even though Qantas only needed it “in case of needing to change an engine”.³⁴

Brain never even hinted at providing services for non-Qantas flying boats. As he was the senior representative of either Qantas or Aviat on the ground, only on his recommendation would such action be approved. Given that Qantas had a monopoly on flying boat services at Broome, this attitude is difficult to understand given the unfolding emergency and the needs of other incoming flying boats.

In summary there were significant failures of command in the Broome area, with a faulty structure allowed to persist even following the disastrous raids which killed significant numbers of people. It is not surprising though that no-one was held to account for the mess. Even privately-held investigations and allegations of failure are not conducive to good morale in neither the armed forces or the civilian population in wartime. ♦

Curtiss SOC-3 Seagull

Specifications

Two-seat Scout / Observation Aircraft

1 x 600hp engine (SOC-1)

Speed: 165mph max; 133mph cruise.

Range: 675 miles

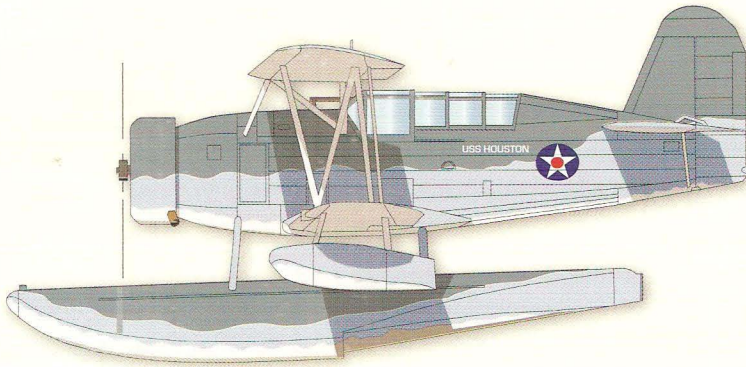
Weight: 5,437lb max loaded

Crew: 2

Capacity: nil

Armament: 2 x 0.30-inch MGs (fixed forward firing & rear seat flexible mount); external racks for light bombs

Notes: a mid-1930s scouting / observation aircraft carried by cruisers. Launched with a catapult, the biplane wings could be folded back for shipboard stowage, and the rear cabin fairing retracted in "turtleback" fashion to give a field of fire for the rear gun.



Lamade's SOC-3 floatplane off USS Houston that arrived in Broome in February 1942.

On 16 February 1942, the cruiser *USS Houston* was escorting a small convoy bound for Timor. After enemy aircraft were sighted, a SOC-3 piloted by Lieutenant Lamade was catapulted off the ship. With combat expected, Lamade would not be able to re-embark on the cruiser. So after a quick glance at a map he chose to head for Broome. After a few hours over unfamiliar territory he arrived over Broome harbour just as he ran out of fuel, making a safe "dead-stick" landing there. Lamade and his rear-seat observer, Tubbs, were the first foreign military visitors to Broome.

After refuelling with a hand pump, the men waited for news of their ship. A few days later the seaplane tender *USS William B Preston* arrived in Derby, after narrowly escaping being sunk during the Darwin raid. Keen to get a message transmitted by the vessel, Lamade flew the short distance to Derby where he was fired on by the jittery *Preston*. Eventually the message was passed and Lamade returned to Broome. Actually around this time *Houston* spent a day cruising in the ocean not far from Broome in a failed attempt to rendezvous with Lamade. Due to the poor communications at Broome Lamade did not get the relevant message in time.

Houston sailed for Java, and Lamade's SOC-3 spent over a fortnight in Broome. Finally with news of *Houston*'s loss on 1 March, Lamade was ordered south. On the morning of 3 March, Tubbs was weak with dengue fever and had to be lowered into the back seat. Lamade got his anchor up as the tide came in and as soon as there was enough water he took off. It was at this moment that the Zeros arrived over Broome. Luckily they were distracted by larger targets, which was very fortunate as Tubbs was too weak even to operate the gun in the rear seat. The SOC-3 made it safely to Exmouth Gulf and met *USS Childs*. On 7 March it arrived in Perth.

Douglas DC-2 / C-39

Specifications

Short Range Transport

2 x 975hp engines

Speed: 210mph max; cruise 155mph;

Range: 900 miles

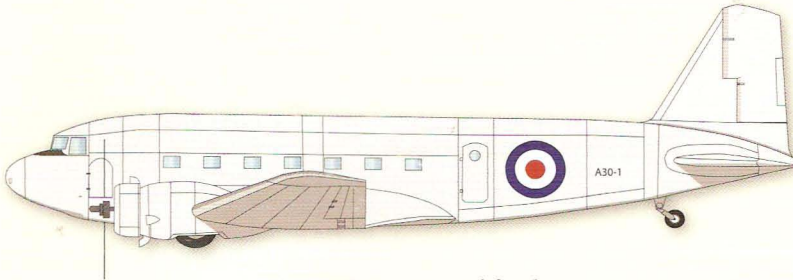
Weight: 21,000lb max loaded

Crew: 2

Capacity: 14 passengers (normal, seated)

Notes: the DC-2 was a pre-war airliner dating back to 1934. Although completely overshadowed by the more capable DC-3, the DC-2 provided an important transport capability early in the war when resources were scarce.

RAAF



RAAF DC-2 in natural finish.

The RAAF purchased ten DC-2s from Eastern Airlines of America in 1941. Initially allocated to various training schools, the DC-2s also undertook transport missions. During one such mission on 26 January 1942 a DC-2 was shot down between Java and Timor. On 26 February the Chief of the Air Staff ordered two RAAF DC-2s (and a civil Lockheed 10) to Broome to convey 50 newly arrived ex-Java RAAF men back to Melbourne. The RAAF was careful to specify that the two DC-2s would not come under the control of Colonel Perrin, USAAF, while in Broome. This was the only such mission flown by the RAAF during the evacuations, although a DC-2 visited Broome again in April (see aircraft history section).

KNILM

Soon after the Japanese landings on 1 March, two KNILM DC-2s made single one-way evacuation flights to Broome, although they barely had the range to do so. Underlining the marginal nature of these flights, one of them force landed through lack of fuel on reaching the Australian coast, but it apparently escaped damage.

Australian National Airways

An Australian National Airways DC-2 arrived in Perth late on 3 March, evidently on a routine schedule. It was immediately diverted to the northwest to assist with the evacuations as well as other errands as noted in the aircraft history section.

United States Army Air Force

Mating aspects of both the DC-2 and the DC-3, the C-39 was sometimes called the "DC-2½". Because it had a third crewman (radio operator / loadmaster), it could only seat 12 passengers. C-39s were thus best utilised carrying cargo. A single USAAF C-39 assisted in the Broome operations as noted in the aircraft history section.

Douglas DC-5

Specifications

16-passenger airliner

2 x 850hp engines

Speed: 230mph max; cruise 202mph;

Range: 1,600 miles

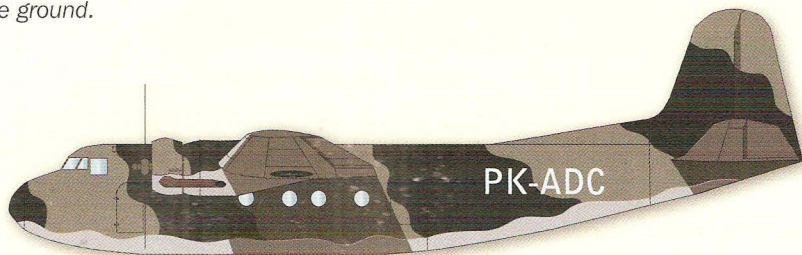
Weight: 20,000lb max loaded

Crew: 3

Capacity: 16 passengers

Armament: none

Notes: Only a very small number of DC-5s were made, with KNILM the sole civilian customer. A key feature was its tricycle undercarriage, which greatly eased loading as the aircraft remaining horizontal while on the ground.



Camouflaged KNILM DC-5

KNILM

While most of the KNILM fleet evacuated to Broome on 20th February, the DC-5s remained in Java where they provided short range air services. They were possibly needed for military use.

Another factor was the DC-5s' tricycle undercarriage, which was not suited to the soft and rutted Broome runways. But following the Japanese landings on 1 March the Broome runways had been much improved and three DC-5s made the evacuation flight without incident. At least one DC-5 carried 16 passengers, which was double the number carried by the DC-3s along the same route.

(Endnotes)

- 1 NAA File: *Defence Situation at Broome & North West Coast* Series number A663 Control symbol O66/1/608 Barcode 81455
- 2 Blamey was Australia's most senior military commander and had been in charge of the AIF in the Middle East. On arrival back in Fremantle on 23 March he was appointed Commander-in-Chief, Australian Military Forces and subsequently became, under MacArthur, Commander, Allied land Forces. McCarthy, p.24-27.
- 3 Ibid, letter from PM Curtin to Premier Willcock 6 April 1942.
- 4 Lieutenant-General Gordon Bennett was a controversial figure, discussion of whom is beyond the bounds of this narrative. However, Bennett had commanded the AIF 8th Division in Malaya and controversially escaped to Australia when Singapore fell and his men went into captivity. Bennett was convinced his experience in fighting the Japanese was needed in Australia, and Blamey appointed him to 3 Corps. See Clisby, Mark. *Guilty or Innocent - The Gordon Bennett Case*, Allen and Unwin: Sydney, 1992. Also for a summary of Bennett himself [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gordon_Bennett_\(general\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gordon_Bennett_(general)) accessed 6th October 2009.
- 5 AWM52 1/4/12 Corps Units, 3 Corps General Staff Branch, May 1942 Pt 1. During the three and a half months Plant was with Western Command, there is no record of him visiting the northwest.
- 6 See Horner, Introduction p.xxi, for a discussion of the ideal age for Australian commanders at this time. Plant was older than the ideal for brigade command, but about the norm for division-level command (see also Horner, Appendix 2, p.285).
- 7 Plant volunteered for the AIF in 1940 as a Lieutenant-Colonel. To give an idea of how small the interwar Army was, in 1929 there were only 25 staff corps officers in total ranking as Lieutenant-Colonel or above. Grey, Jeffrey. *The Australian Army, The Australian Centenary History of Defence, Volume 1*. Oxford University Press: South Melbourne, 2001.
- 8 Horner, p.13.
- 9 All of these men were of comparable age to Plant. However, Plant served until 1946 but never rose further than Major-General, while the others all rose to the higher rank of Lieutenant-General. More significantly, all of the other three had extensive and varied operational

- careers, including divisional commands (Clowes was also well known for his role during the Battle of Milne Bay). McCarthy, p.13.
- 10 Horner, p.273.
- 11 McCarthy, Dudley. *South West Pacific Area First Year Kokoda to Wau, Australia in the War of 1939-1945, Series 1 (Army), Volume IV. Australian War Memorial: Canberra 1959. (p.76).*
- 12 In Syria the role of the air power was minimal, so Plant's sole operational experience lacked exposure to other services.
- 13 NAA File: 'ABDACOM' - *An official account of events in the South-west Pacific Command - January to February 1942* Series number A816 Control symbol 37/301/267 ATTACHMENT 7 Barcode 3365569
- 14 Message from the Right Hon. Sir Earl Page, London, to the Australian Prime Minister, 28th February 1942.
- 15 AWM52 1/1/1 Headquarter Units, Land Headquarters et al, February 1942.
- 16 See Chapter 6.
- 17 AWM52 1/1/1 Headquarter Units, Land Headquarters et al, February 1942. At this time authority was given for Western Command to raise a "Northern Australia Field Security Force".
- 18 AWM52 1/1/1 Headquarter Units, Land Headquarters et al, March 1942.
- 19 NAA File: *Threatened evacuation of Broome March 1942* Series number A816 Control symbol 14/303/69 Barcode 170112; a copy of Plant's response to Branson's reports is found in this file. Note that the original contains 11 points rather than 10, one being an introductory statement which is not repeated here.
- 20 Hasluck, p.144.
- 21 As noted in Chapter 7, these plans soon stalled because of opposition to the recruitment of Aborigines.
- 22 Hetherington, John. *Blamey The Biography of Field Marshall Sir Thomas Blamey*. Cheshire: Melbourne, 1954. (p.133-134).
- 23 This obscurity was relative only to the context of those seeking a senior operational command. Plant commanded first the Vic L.o.C. Area in 1942 and then the NSW L.o.C. Area from 1943-1946. These were still high level roles within the Army, overseeing thousands of men. Among other things, in this role Plant oversaw the Cowra breakout by Japanese POWs. However, Horner (p.270) indicates that such roles were a fate for failed Generals: e.g. Blamey was dissatisfied with Maj-Gen Stantke as Adjutant-General, so he was sent to Brisbane as GOC Queensland L of C Area.
- 24 McCarthy, p.13; Hasluck, p.144; It is of anecdotal interest that Plant's short biographical summary, a feature of all volumes of the Official History, ignores his three and a half months as GOC, Western Command, despite it being the highest position that he reached. Meanwhile, space is found to mention his command of "Rear Echelon AIF ME", a role he performed for just three months.
- 25 See <http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/A160010b.htm> accessed 9th October 2009.
- 26 Horner, p.84.
- 27 NAA File: RAAF Unit History sheets (Form A50) [Operations Record Book - Forms A50 and A51] *Headquarters Western Area* Series number A9186 Control symbol 164 Barcode 1359516
- 28 NAA File: *South Western Area Combined Headquarters Log Book* Series number K809 Control symbol 1 Barcode 509340
- 29 As at 28 February 1942, 4 Service Flying Training School at Geraldton had on strength 97 Ansons as well as four single-engined aircraft. Some of the Ansons had been received in poor condition and there was a chronic shortage of spare parts. So 55 of the Ansons aircraft were unserviceable on that date. RAAF Unit History sheets (Form A50) [Operations Record Book - Forms A50 and A51] *4 S Flying Training School Feb 41 - Jun 43* Series number A9186 Control symbol 480 Barcode 1360163
- 30 At least two Ansons did fly some missions towards the end of the operations.
- 31 AAF in Australia Summer 1942, p.72.
- 32 NAA File: *Enemy Air Attacks - Broome WA* Series number A1196 Control symbol 15/501/247 Barcode 199863
- 33 An anecdote in regard to the RAAF's use of training aircraft is relevant here. After the Broome operations transport aircraft were in urgent demand for use in New Guinea and elsewhere. Virtually every civil aircraft had been requisitioned and was serving with the RAAF or the USAAF. At Nhill, Victoria, two DH-86 12-seat airliners were supposedly used for navigational training. When Captain Brain of Qantas visited he checked the log books and realised they were only flown for about three hours per month, mainly because the pilots were unfamiliar with the type. Brain sent in a request to the RAAF, explaining that they could be used for eight hours per day up north. However the RAAF replied that the aircraft were essential for training and were not available. Eventually, by referring the RAAF hierarchy to the log books, Brain was able to secure the use of the aircraft for transport missions. The event shows that the mindset of many RAAF staff officers, was, by nature, unresponsive to operational needs. Cadigan, Neil. *A Man Among Mavericks Lester Brain: Australia's Greatest Aviator*. ABC Books: Sydney, 2008. (p.156-157).
- 34 Tyler, Brain diary, Appendix A.



Dr H.J. van Mook, Governor-General of the Netherlands East Indies, disembarking from a Dutch Lodestar in Melbourne. Van Mook arrived in Port Hedland on the last civilian plane to leave Java. However at that particular time Governor-General van Starckenborgh Stachouwer was still the head of government in the NEI. He remained behind and surrendered Java to the Japanese, perhaps believing that life might be bearable under Japanese occupation. Van Mook, a senior colonial official, then became Governor-General in exile. (Australian War Memorial 140460)

Chapter 9

The Java Evacuation Myth

The fighter strike on Broome was the second most deadly air attack on Australia during WWII. An obvious first resource for historians analysing both the attack and the wider role of Broome at the time are the Australian official war histories. The RAAF Official History has several pages on the subject, while that of the Army contains a couple of paragraphs and the naval history barely a sentence.¹ There are also a few pages of discussion in the civil series.² These Official Histories are well respected and much care was taken in their compilation. Partly for this reason, the RAAF History was not published until almost two decades after the war, in 1962. Despite the care taken, these volumes are not without their inaccuracies. The danger is that such false “facts” become perpetuated in subsequent historical works and are thus widely accepted given the gilt-edged reputation of the original source.

The treatment of Broome in the official histories is a case in point, and one particular perpetuation can now be revealed as a myth. This is in regard to the evacuation of Java. According to the RAAF Official History, over a two-week period in 1942 between 7,000 and 8,000 passengers passed through Broome, which had become “... a clearing station for thousands of refugees from the Netherlands East Indies...”³ Such statements are a myth because they overstate, to the order of four to five fold, the quantity of passengers passing through Broome and because there never was any general evacuation of the N.E.I.

Indeed, very few Dutch civilians were evacuated through Broome at all. These myths have been perpetuated because of a complete absence of alternative sources, and have thus contributed to a very misleading historical picture of the Broome operations. Some examples⁴ of these perpetuations are as follows:

- Prime, p.3: “ ... more than 8,000 refugees from the then Dutch East Indies staged through Broome ...”
- Tyler, p.2: “... approximately 8,000 refugees passed through the little town in the feverish days before the raid.”
- Womack, p.136: “And with as much as 57 aircraft carrying 8,000 evacuees arriving in a single day...”
- Wills, p.14: “In the ten days before Java fell, 8,000 Dutch and Allied civilians would be

airlifted off the island, with most passing through the once-remote town.”

- Messimer, p.263: “As many as 57 planes per day were arriving in Broome, and in one day nearly 8,000 people.”
- Cadigan, p.144: “... refugees from Java, of which more than 8,000 passed through (Broome) over 10 days from 21 February ...”

Dutch Evacuation Policy in the NEI

In 1942 the Dutch were very much a minority population in the NEI, outnumbered by many millions of native inhabitants. It is estimated that just before the war began there were about 80,000 Europeans and some 200,000 Indo-Europeans in the NEI, the vast majority of them on the island of Java.⁵ However, there are no precise figures. As the Dutch had been in the NEI for centuries, defining the “white” or European population was beset with difficulties. Many of the Dutch families had very deep ties with the local community going back generations. Any hypothetical evacuation policy would have had to make a clear definition of “European” – such a policy would have been politically divisive as racist and totally impractical. Quite aside from these considerations, it is doubtful if the majority of Dutch would have left anyway if given the choice.



NEI Army soldiers, most of whom were Indonesians. The potential evacuation of Europeans was a highly sensitive issue for this force. While many Dutch sailors and airmen evacuated Java, the entire army remained behind to “fight to the death”. It resisted for barely a week before laying down arms to avoid futile bloodshed. (Australian War Memorial 029296)

The NEI was made up of many islands, several of them very large. The Dutch wanted to make invasion of the outer islands as costly as they could via the use of their air and naval forces, but only Java was seriously defended by land forces. Java was by far the most populous and important island, as well as housing the Dutch colonial government. The Dutch colonial regime desperately tried to shore up the loyalty of the non-European population by projecting the Japanese as a mutual enemy. Authorities insisted the island would “fight to the last”. Any evacuation of Europeans would have undermined this policy and also led to the quick collapse of the largely Indonesian-manned army. Additionally, any such evacuation would have made tenuous a return of the European population post-war.

Very few Dutch had the option of evacuating. They were legally bound to remain. For example, all men aged 18-45 were conscripted into the military. Likewise most of the working-age women

had official employment as nurses, telephone exchange operators, administrators, etc, and all government employees were expected to remain at their posts during the war. Otherwise, for those few families not bound by these circumstances, tough laws were introduced to deter evacuation. For example, it was made illegal to transfer money overseas. Right up until February 1942 the KNILM air service connecting Australia and Java was continued. However, air travel remained out of reach of most people, and only a few dozen evacuees would have arrived via this service.

After the fall of Singapore on 15 February, the general consensus among senior British and American officers was that the defence of Java was a lost cause, and whatever extra forces were cast into battle would be a futile sacrifice. This was a sensitive matter within the ABDA alliance, as the Dutch were obviously putting all of their effort into a last-ditch defence and expected the full support of their allies. Likewise, the Allied governments did not want a Dutch surrender, which would play into the hands of the Japanese. The political message was outright war, but the military reality was different: no new forces would be sent to Java.

It was a short step of logic to look at salvaging what was already there before it was too late – would the war be better served by withdrawing units intact to continue the war from India or Australia? The resulting policy was one whereby non-Dutch forces would continue fighting so long as their efforts were “effective”, after which they could evacuate. In regard to air and naval forces, this meant evacuation as soon as the Japanese had landed on Java. As a result of this policy all of the USAAF units on Java were able to evacuate safely to Australia, mainly through Broome, even though they were in action right up until the landings.

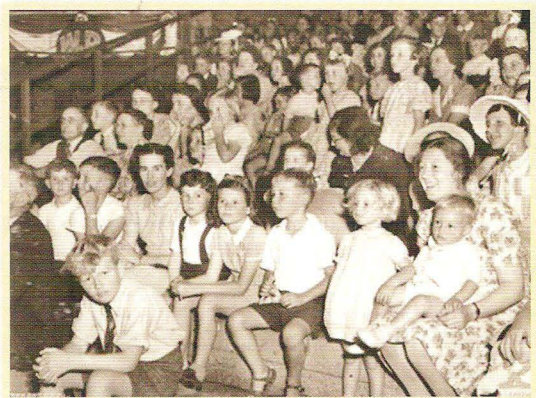
With this background, some exceptions appeared to the Dutch non-evacuation policy. The NEI was a rich country so there was plenty of money to fund a huge arms build-up, mainly equipping the navy and air elements. These forces, made up of well-trained technical personnel, now with combat experience, also gave a very good showing of themselves against the Japanese.

So the entire Dutch air force academy, comprising several dozen training aircraft plus hundreds of students and their instructors was successfully evacuated by ship. The naval air arm then flew its oldest flying boats to Australia, carrying its training school staff and instructors. These were the most successful evacuations as they were planned well before the Japanese landings.⁶ Then perhaps seeing the logic of the USAAF evacuations, the Dutch government authorised the evacuation of some of the most highly trained aircrews.

The evacuation of the aircrews created some opposition as men were forcibly separated from their families. Priority was given to bachelors, but the most skilful and experienced airmen tended to be older, family men. In response, official policy was modified to permit

evacuation of such family members. The result of these new policies was that most civilian aerial evacuees were the immediate families of aircrews.⁷ Virtually all of the military evacuees were from the ML-KNIL or the MLD. No members of the NEI land army were evacuated by air.

The discipline of the Dutch units was excellent. In most cases combat missions were flown up until evacuation. There were relatively few if any unauthorised evacuees, although officers probably turned a blind eye to some family-member passengers on military aircraft, especially when the policy was being formulated. Some of the evacuees were the wives and children of KNILM pilots.



Dutch evacuee children watch a circus performance in Melbourne in 1944. Many of the children that were flown out of Java were the sons and daughters of Dutch airmen. (Australian War Memorial 140296)

With the benefit of hindsight and with full knowledge of the horrors of Japanese rule, it is easy to assume that the final days in Java were chaotic as citizens tried to beg, borrow or steal a way out. But at that time there was little reason to suspect what was to come. After all, the Dutch homeland in Europe had been under Nazi occupation since mid-1940. Certainly the people lacked freedom, but the overall conditions must have seemed liveable to the average citizen, most of whom continued to occupy their own homes and worked in their same jobs. Thus regardless of the constant official rhetoric about a fight to the death, many of the Dutch citizens were accepting of the future. Some may have been tired of the war and its hardships, and were ready for peace, even under Japanese rule. The future was to be grim however: very few Europeans had anything close to a normal life under Japanese occupation. Seemingly for racial reasons only, some 100,000 people, mainly women and children, became POWs in the NEI for the duration of the war.

So now we turn to the myths propagated in relation to the aerial evacuation of Java via Broome:

Myth 1: The General Evacuation of Java. There was never any general evacuation of Java, rather a series of separate operations by various military units and two airlines. As there was no general evacuation, there was never any grand marshalling of resources to fly out as many people as possible. Indeed, many of the flights from Java to Broome were first and foremost about evacuating the aircraft rather than the passengers onboard. There were relatively few “shuttle” flights back to Java. This is contrary to the official history which states that “...every aircraft available that could carry passengers over the route was brought into service...”⁸

Myth 2: 7,000 - 8,000 Persons Evacuated via Broome. The number of evacuees moving through Broome is grossly overstated. The actual number of Java evacuees who were flown into Broome is closer to 1,350.⁹ In addition to this were a few hundred who arrived by sea (*USS Childs*) or who were domestic evacuees moving through Broome. Another 300 or so flew into Port Hedland, Exmouth Gulf and other centres.

Myth 3: Most of the evacuees were Dutch civilians. This assumption is probably made because Dutch civilians were unlucky enough to make up the bulk of casualties during the raid on 3 March. In fact Dutch civilian evacuees numbered only about 300, virtually all of whom were close family members of Dutch aircrews. Most of the other evacuees were either USAAF personnel (550) or Dutch servicemen (450).¹⁰

Why have these myths survived for so long? First, because these operations do not fall within the boundaries of any particular military campaign or study. After this brief period of strategic significance the northwest became something of a “no-man’s-land” in military terms with limited strategic value or interest. Second, because of the lack of proper command and control at Broome by the Australian authorities, boosting the apparent success of the evacuation has perhaps reduced scrutiny of these events and protected those accountable. And lastly, the north-west of Australia is still a remote unknown country for most Australians, even 70 years beyond its darkest days. Thus ridiculous assertions of the region accommodating so many thousands of evacuees over just a few days have remained unquestioned.

Exmouth Gulf Questions

As detailed in Chapter 3, three United States Navy seaplane tenders arrived in Broome towards the end of February along with some PBY flying boats of Patrol Wing 10. The USN considered setting up a base in Broome before quickly deciding to move instead to Exmouth Gulf. According to sources written after the war, the USN was concerned about Broome’s “exposed location” and hence correctly anticipated the upcoming raid.¹ However a more human factor might have directly involved Brain. Perhaps his legalistic and uncooperative attitude helped the USN decide they would be better off starting with a clean slate at a new location. Nevertheless, Patrol Wing 10 subsequently evacuated Java safely via the Tjilitjap-Exmouth Gulf route. Several return flights were made, with the last two PBYs arriving safely in peaceful Exmouth Gulf on the morning of 3 March. Their fates contrasted completely with that of the mostly Dutch flying boats that instead flew into Broome at the same time.

From an Australian point of view Exmouth Gulf and Broome are a long way distant. However, Exmouth Gulf is only slightly further from Tjilitjap than Broome, and easily within flying boat range. For these reasons Exmouth Gulf should have been an obvious destination for military flying boats departing Java in the first days of March 1942. However, the Java evacuations

1 E.g. see Messimer

were characterised by a chronic lack of liaison between the various services of different nationalities, and probably for this reason the individual flying boat captains were unaware of the Exmouth Gulf option.

The presence of the USN in Broome and its shift to Exmouth Gulf is not mentioned in any of the Australian Official Histories.² This is very curious as the evacuations from Java either to Broome or Exmouth Gulf would appear to be directly comparable. The presence of this alternative suggests that with proper command and control of the military flying boats much of the Broome disaster could have been avoided. ♦

2 Gillison, Douglas. *Royal Australian Air Force 1939-1942, Australia in the War of 1939-1945, Series Three Air, Volume I*. Australian War Memorial: Canberra, 1962, (p.463-468); McCarthy, Dudley. *South-West Pacific Area First Year Kokoda to Wau, Australia in the War of 1939-1945, Series One Army, Volume V*. Australian War Memorial: Canberra, 1957, (p.76-77); Gill, G. Hermon. *Royal Australian Navy 1939-1942, Australia in the War of 1939-1945, Series Two Navy, Volume I*. Australian War Memorial: Canberra, 1957, (p.634).

Lockheed Hudson

Specifications

Reconnaissance-Bomber

2 x 1,050hp engines

Speed: 222mph max; cruise 155-191mph;

Range: 925 miles (loaded)

Weight: 19,500lb max loaded

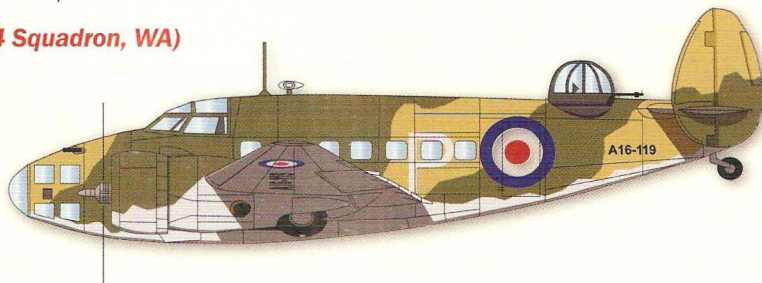
Crew: 4

Capacity: 12+ passengers (emergency loadings)

Armament: 1,600lb of bombs in internal bomb-bay; 4 x Browning 0.303-inch MGs: 2 in upper nose and 2 in dorsal turret.

Notes: the Hudson was a militarised version of the Model 14 Super Electra. It lacked outstanding features but was modern, reliable and gave excellent service. By the start of 1942, the RAAF had taken delivery of 152 Mk IV Hudsons, in fact the earliest version. They bore the brunt of Australia's fight against the Japanese in the first months of the war.

Hudsons (14 Squadron, WA)



Hudson Mark IV A16-119, which was destroyed at Broome.

Hudsons from Darwin had regularly patrolled along the coast to Broome before the war, but these flights ceased in December 1941. It was not until the latter half of February 1942, that 14 Squadron, based at Pearce, was compelled to send Hudsons northwards.

On 23 February a Hudson flew from Pearce via Broome to Drysdale, and the next day established communications with the disabled *Koolama*. On 2 March another Hudson flew northwards from Pearce conducting a search for a missing USAAF C-53. The aircraft, piloted by Wing Commander Lightfoot, departed at dawn and searched along the coast via Onslow to Broome. The particular Hudson was A16-119, an almost new Mk IV. It was equipped with long range fuel tanks and was carrying bombs. Because of the seniority of the pilot and the bombs onboard, there was probably a secondary reason of providing A/S cover in the area.⁴

Indeed, Lightfoot may well have been intending to cover the *Admiral Halstead* which was due to arrive in Broome.

Regardless, the following morning in Broome Lightfoot and his crew got ready for flight. Around 930am they were onboard and taxiing towards the top of the runway, when Lightfoot realised he'd left his map-books in the briefing hut. Stopping on the taxiway, he exited the aircraft and began the 300 metre walk back to the hut. Moments later Zeros swooped overhead and began strafing. Briefly, the American co-pilot, Harkin, was all for taking off, but the W/T Operator, Simpson, knew it was suicide and switched off the engines. This also cut power to the turret, so the gunner, Owens, joined the other two in scrambling out. They found cover in nearby scrub and watched the attack. The Zeros were flying so low they were clipping the tops of bushes as they flew by, and the men made the futile gesture of firing their service revolvers at the attackers.

Within minutes a Zero made a shallow dive over the tail of the Hudson, firing a burst which struck the ground about 30 yards ahead of the aircraft. The fighter made a left circuit, and dived on the port quarter, with the burst striking the port wing root. Flames appeared immediately, as the aircraft was full of fuel. Two more attacks were made and soon the aircraft was blazing furiously. About a minute later the bombs onboard exploded. The debris continued to burn for about half an hour, until the Hudson was completely burnt out. Only the wingtips were salvageable.²

The day after the loss of A16-119 another 14 Squadron Hudson was involved in an unusual incident. A16-122 was on a seawards patrol northwest of Perth when it spotted a surfaced submarine and flashed recognition signals. The submarine crash-dived, so the pilot attacked, dropping two 250-lb bombs. The first bomb landed just where the conning tower had disappeared a couple of seconds earlier. The pilot was confident he'd hit the sub, but it was actually American. Both periscopes were damaged beyond repair as a result of the attack, but there were no casualties.³

Later in the year Japanese bombers were frequent visitors to the northwest area on reconnaissance missions. After one of them attacked a patrolling Catalina, Hudsons of 14 Squadron were sent north and attempted to intercept the enemy, getting very close on at least one occasion.

Hudsons in Java

Attrition was heavy amid Hudson squadrons during the Java campaign, and by mid-February 8 Squadron (RAAF) and 62 Squadron (RAF) were disbanded. Among RAAF men evacuated at this time were 50 from 8 Squadron who were evacuated by air to Broome in late February. They flew via KNILM airliners and USAAF Liberators.⁴

The sole Hudson operator in Java was now 1 Squadron (RAAF). It was assigned a base at Semplak, but during two very costly enemy attacks over a dozen Hudsons were destroyed. From this point on the squadron struggled to maintain even a couple of serviceable machines. After the enemy landed successfully in Java on 1 March, the aircrews prepared to fly to Australia. The Mk IV versions barely had the range, so they were loaded with tins of petrol in the cabin. A crude refuelling technique was developed, running a hose out of a fuselage window to a wing tank. This proved successful, although with the additional fuel in the cabin and due to concerns about the airworthiness of the aircraft themselves, only six men could be carried (four crew and two passengers). The first Hudson flew out on the night of 4 March, followed by two more on each of the two following nights.

These Hudsons brought details of RAAF air and ground crews waiting in Java near the coastal airfield at Pameungpeuk, and expecting evacuation flights to be made from Australia. Unfortunately no effort was ever made and soon after the Dutch surrender on 8 March these men went into captivity.

(Endnotes)

1 There is some confusion over the purpose of this Hudson. According to Prime, it was "... en-route to Darwin ... for a bombing raid on the Jap held islands to the north." No evidence for this statement has been found. Rather, the Hudson was most likely carrying two 250-lb "anti-submarine bombs" (as carried by the Hudson which attacked the US sub on 4 March – see above). A RAAF witness at Broome (F V Sharpe) states that the Hudson "... was doing anti-submarine patrols from Broome at the time". (AWM 54 625/3/7).

2 NAA File: Report on destruction of A16-119 at Broome, 3 March 1942; Series number A9695; Control symbol 70; Barcode 30045068

3 NAA File: Report of Attack on U.S. Submarine by Hudson Aircraft A16-122 on 4th March 1942; Series number A1196 Control symbol 60/501/97.

4 Vincent, David. *The RAAF Hudson Story Book One*; published by author, Highbury, South Australia 1999. p.125

Lockheed Model 18 Lodestar

Specifications

Fast Military Transport

2 x 1,200hp engines

Speed: 253mph max; cruise ~200mph;

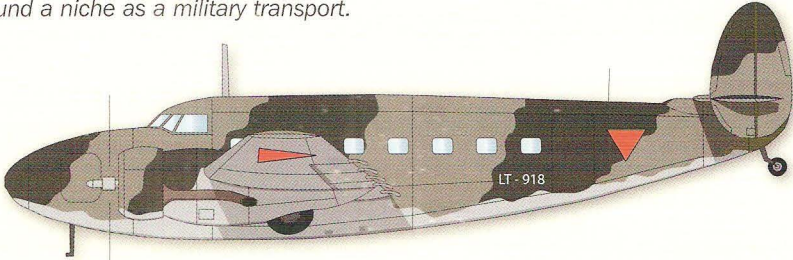
Range: 1,600 miles

Weight: 21,500lb max loaded

Crew: 3

Capacity: 14 passengers + crew (normal, seated)

Notes: the Model 18 Lodestar was a Model 14 with a stretched fuselage. Although uneconomic in commercial markets compared to the wider DC-3, the Lodestar was the fastest transport aircraft of its time and found a niche as a military transport.



ML-KNIL Lodestar LT-918 which was destroyed at Broome on 3 March 1942.

The ML-KNIL received 20 new Lodestars in 1941. Unusually for a transport aircraft, their performance was superior to that of the ML-KNIL's twin-engined bombers. For this reason potential pilots were selected from the pool of bomber pilots already proficient in twin-engined flying, and Lodestar pilots became something of an elite group – one source suggests that the best ML-KNIL pilots were flying Lodestars.¹ When the war began Lodestars were constantly shuttling between various locations within the NEI and the pilots were soon logging over 200 hours per month. Best used as fast passenger transports, the Lodestars flew as far afield as Australia. But as the military situation worsened, they were increasingly making daring flights right under the noses of the enemy, either delivering arms and ammunition or evacuating outlying settlements.

Nevertheless, by late February 1942 seven of these precious aircraft had been lost either to enemy action or accidents. Some of them had been armed with machineguns in the rear cabin windows, but the real answer was to increase night operations. From late February Lodestars began a nightly Bandoeng-Broome service, and in this way the fleet gradually accumulated in Australia.

A few Lodestar flights were made back into Java even after the Japanese landings there. These were wholly dependent on the local knowledge of the pilots and their ability to fly at night. One of these outstanding ML-KNIL pilots was Flight Lieutenant Gus Winckel, who arrived in Broome on the morning of 3 March. Winckel's Lodestar was strafed and destroyed, but he retrieved a machine gun from the rear cabin and used this against the attackers. Winckel secured the use of a second Lodestar that had been delayed in leaving Bandoeng and landed in Broome after the attack. He was then flying almost constantly up and down the WA coast before covertly slipping back into Java on 5 March, joining two other Lodestars and a KNILM DC-3 in hiding on a road near Bandoeng. On the night of 6 March they made the flight to Port Hedland. These were the last organised military flights out of Java.

Winckel's experience may have demonstrated that more flights could have been made if there was an organised evacuation operation. In this context the Lodestars are remembered bitterly by one RAF fighter pilot who became a prisoner of war in Java. He stated that "Some of (the Dutch) even stole the Lockheed Lodestars that were supposed to be our transportation and used them to fly their wives and children out to Australia".²

(Endnotes)

1 Hurst, Doug. *The Fourth Ally, the Dutch Forces in Australia in WWII*. Self-published: ACT, 2001. NEI. This source draws on first hand information from Lodestar pilot Gus Winckel.

2 Cull, Brian and Sortehaug, Paul, *Hurricanes Over Singapore*, Grub Street: London, 2004. p.186.

Martin Model 139 WH-3

Specifications

Medium Bomber

2 x 900hp engines

Speed: 260mph max; 193 mph cruise;

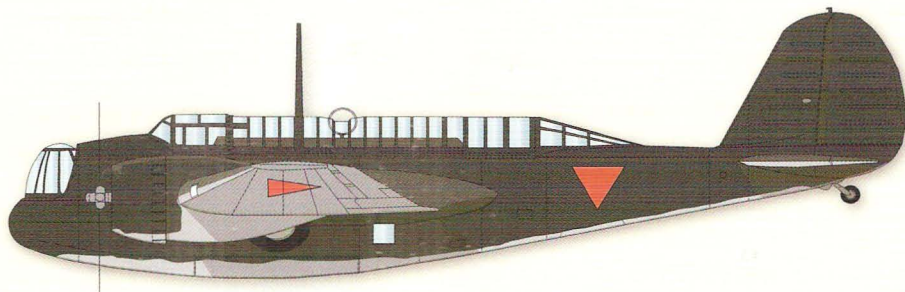
Range: ~1,200 miles

Weight: 16,400 lb max loaded

Crew: 4

Armament: 1 x 0.30-inch MG nose turret, 1 x 0.30-inch MG dorsal, 1 x 0.30-inch MG ventral; 2,260lbs of bombs in bomb bay.

Notes: originally built by the Glenn L Martin Company, the NEI purchased over 100, designated "Model 139". The last was delivered in 1939, when these bombers represented a potent deterrent. These were known as "Glenn Martins" in Dutch service.



Martin 139 WH-3 of the ML-KNIL. A single example evacuated to Australia in March 1942.

Netherlands East Indies ML-KNIL

"Glenn Martins" had some modest successes against the enemy early in the war, but when they ran into Japanese fighters they suffered heavily. Of 118 Martin 139s operated by the ML-KNIL, just a single example evacuated to Australia. It is difficult to understand why more were not flown out, especially given that the Japanese captured over 20 Martin 139s intact. In fact, so many were captured that an entire squadron was sent to Japan's ally, Thailand, which already operated the type.

But the situation was not as simple as it seemed. For example, after the surrender of Java, an officer from 205 Squadron, RAF, wished to fly out a Martin 139 but was restrained by fellow officers who feared reprisals against the remaining POWs.¹

(Endnotes)

¹ Shores et al. *Bloody Shambles*, Vol. 2., p.439.

(Endnotes)

- 1 Gillison, Douglas. *Royal Australian Air Force 1939-1942, Australia in the War of 1939-1945, Series Three Air, Volume I*. Australian War Memorial: Canberra, 1962, (p.463-468); McCarthy, Dudley. *South-West Pacific Area First Year Kokoda to Wau, Australia in the War of 1939-1945, Series One Army, Volume V*. Australian War Memorial: Canberra, 1957, (p.76-77); Gill, G. Hermon. *Royal Australian Navy 1939-1942, Australia in the War of 1939-1945, Series Two Navy, Volume I*. Australian War Memorial: Canberra, 1957, (p.634).
- 2 Hasluck, Paul. *The Government and the People 1942-1945, Australia in the War of 1939-1945, Series Four Civil, Volume II*. Australian War Memorial: Canberra, 1962, (p.144-147);
- 3 Gillison (p.464). The source of this estimate of 7,000 to 8,000 persons is a statement by a Mr J.T. MacKenzie, Acting Secretary of Broome Roads Board, who was present during the raid. However the use of this estimate by the Official Historian is hard to understand, as the man had no official credentials as an informed observer and made the statement some two and a half years after the events. Further, the statement appears to be unsupported by evidence of any kind. The statement can be found in the Australian War Memorial file AWM 54 625/3/7. It is difficult to believe that the historian was unaware that this was not a highly inflationary figure. Alongside, this estimate, the RAAF Official History states that as many as 57 aircraft arrived in Broome in one day. This is somewhat misleading in the context of the Java evacuations. Alongside the Java-Broome flights, there were at least an equal number of Perth-Broome flights by a largely different fleet of aircraft. In addition, smaller aircraft flew into Broome from other locations such as Wyndham and Derby with civil evacuees, and some also flew a Port Hedland-Broome shuttle which involved multiple trips each day. Probably no more than 25 flights arrived from Java during any one day at the peak of the evacuations.
- 4 All are major sources, see bibliography. Note that a couple of these sources make an error in interpreting the “8,000 refugees” as per day instead of over a 10-day period.
- 5 Hurst, Doug. *The Fourth Ally, the Dutch Forces in Australia in WWII*, self-published: ACT, 2001. NEI population estimates and information regarding evacuation policy in this chapter is from this source.
- 6 Excluding various ships and naval vessels which were obviously able to sail out under their own power.
- 7 Womack, Tom. *The Dutch Naval Air Force Against Japan*. MacFarland & Company, Inc: North Carolina, 2006. (p.133) differs , saying that “Admiral Helfrich strictly forbade the navy to evacuate non-military personnel, including the men's family members”. However, according to Hurst, it was this policy that was modified to accommodate the family members of aircrews. Exactly when or how this change happened is not known precisely, but it must be noted that among those flying into Broome on flying boats full of civilians was the MLD commanding officer himself. Womack comes to a similar conclusion in a further discussion of this matter (p.136).
- 8 Gillison, p. 464.
- 9 See Appendix 3 for detailed estimates of evacuee numbers.
- 10 See Appendix 3.

Afterword

Today Broome is a modern town which in the dry season bustles with tourists. A few artefacts from the sunken flying boats can be found around the town. However the best collection is held in the museum situated in the old Customs House. Otherwise a major tourist attraction is the remains of at least six of the sunken flying boats in Broome harbour, which can still be seen during extremely low tides. The site is protected under the Heritage of Western Australia Act 1990.¹

In 2003, a series called *The Shipwreck Detectives* was produced for ABC Television. One episode, called *The Bay of Fire*, was about the Broome flying boat wrecks. Using a towed side-scan sonar device, it is understood that all of the wreck sites permanently underwater were identified for the first time. A number of veterans including Andy Ireland, who was onboard the RAAF Short Empire flying boat, and a number of Dutch airmen (including Gus Winckel) were flown to Broome and their commentary was featured on the program.

These days, before the afternoon heat, tourists and locals spend leisurely mornings at Town Beach overlooking the pristine waters of Roebuck Bay. A weed-covered embankment on a tiny peninsula is all that remains of the old railway and the wooden jetty that once stretched half a mile into the bay. The atmosphere is completely peaceful, as it was that March morning when the flying boats, sitting low in the water and resting on their outrigger floats, gently rocked in the calm seas before the terror unfolded.

Another reminder of those times is the main runway of Broome International Airport, which is in the same place as it was in 1942, uniquely situated within the town itself. This airport has given the town a unique element of aviation in its heritage which continues to be celebrated today. Broome's residents strongly support the present location of the airport despite the obvious noise and safety concerns, and plans to relocate it have been shelved.²

So while spending 30 minutes in present-day Chinatown, odds are that a handful of modern turboprop aircraft will pass overhead on final approach to the main runway just a few hundred yards away. The quiet buzz of the modern engines is but a gentle reminder of yesteryear. The

1 Information on the nature of the wrecks can be found in a pamphlet published by the WA Maritime Museum titled "Broome's World War II Flying Boats".

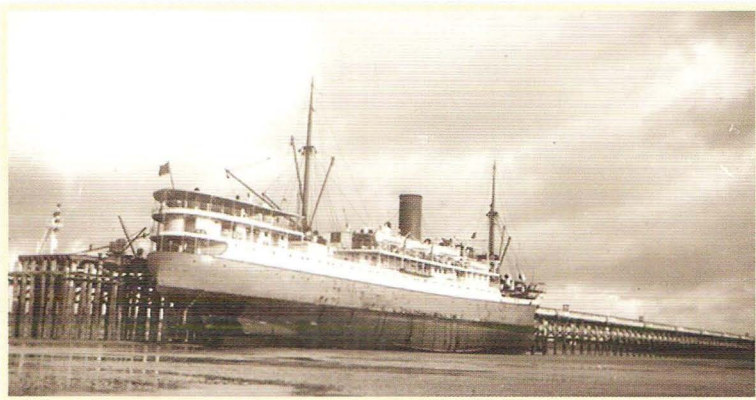
2 Broome Airport Master Plan, Broome International Airport Pty Ltd, 2008, p.16.

same location once witnessed the thundering roar of radial piston engines and the smell of “avgas” as massive B-17s or B-24s, flaps and landing gear lowered, made identical approaches.

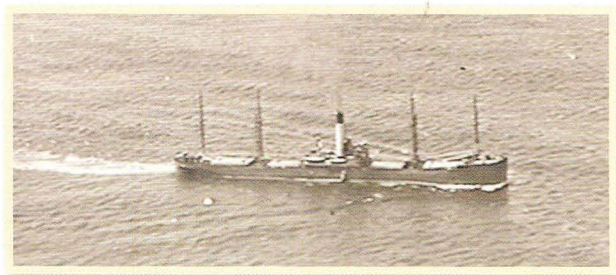
The 3 March attack remains the second most deadly air attack on Australian territory, but for many years no memorial existed recording each of the victims. This was particularly significant as the bodies of the majority of those killed were never found. On Anzac Day 2000, a memorial was unveiled listing those killed during the attacks on 3 and 20 March 1942. Situated in Bedford Park, the site fittingly overlooks the waters of Roebuck Bay, the last resting place for many of the victims.



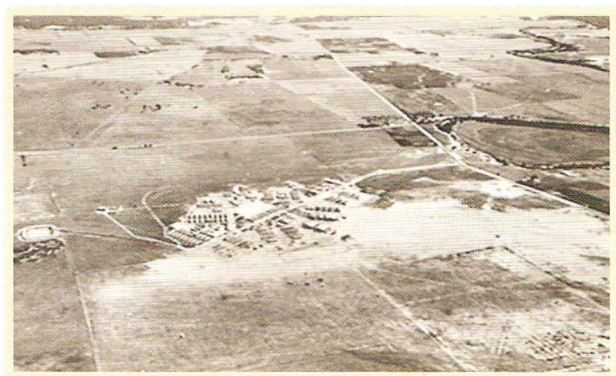
Cattle at Broome meatworks post-war. The many thousands of head of cattle in the northwest were a potentially significant military resource. They were to be driven elsewhere as part of the “scorched-earth” policy. (State Library of Western Australia)



WA government supply vessel Koolinda, lying on the mud alongside Broome jetty in 1939 and demonstrating the tidal extremes in the north-west. (State Library of Western Australia)



The old Australian coastal steam ship Period (2,791 gross tons; built 1907), which was hurriedly loaded with aviation fuel in Darwin in mid-February before arriving in Broome just before the aerial evacuations began. Due to the tides and a lack of wharf labour, Period was in Broome for almost a week unloading the fuel, finally departing on 24 February. (Australian War Memorial 303780)



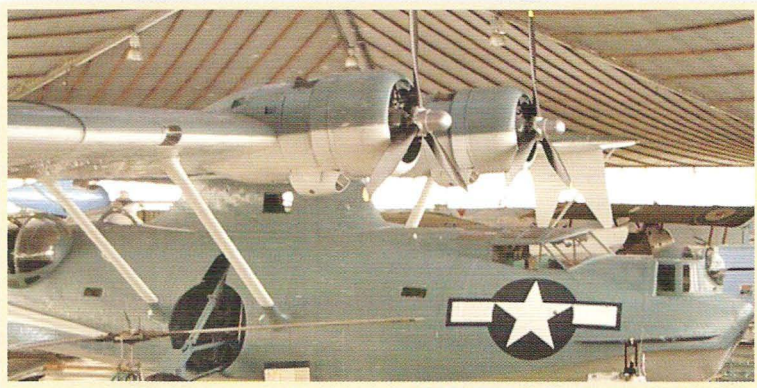
RAAF Geraldton in 1942. This was a large, modern base which was home to over 100 aircraft, mainly twin-engined Ansons. In the context of a chronic lack of air transport resources, it is difficult to understand why the base resources were not called on to assist during the evacuation operations. (Australian War Memorial P01164.016)



The original Dutch war cemetery in Broome in 1948. Most of the bodies were later re-buried in Perth, while two were re-interred in Indonesia. (State Library of Western Australia)



Present day street sign on a busy access road to Broome airport, evidence of the town's rich aviation heritage. (Authors' collection)



The PBY-5A Catalina which forms the centrepiece of the South Wing of the Aviation Heritage Museum of Western Australia in Perth. This beautifully restored aircraft is an impressive sight and a reminder of the flying boats that operated from the Swan River during the war. However it also serves a wider purpose: no aircraft is more relevant for remembering the events of Broome in 1942 than the Catalina. The museum itself is highly recommended – for further information refer to its website www.raafawa.org.au. (Courtesy Aviation Heritage Museum of Western Australia)

There was one other factor of strategic importance to the northwest in 1942. Very rich reserves of iron ore were known to exist at Cockatoo and Koolan Islands in Yampi Sound, about 200 miles northeast of Broome in the Western Kimberleys. These resources were particularly attractive as large ships could virtually berth alongside the deposits to load ore. Just before the war, these reserves at Yampi Sound together with the Middleback Ranges (near Whyalla, South Australia) represented Australia's only known commercial grade iron ore deposits. In 1936 a Japanese-backed consortium bought mining leases and made plans to develop a working mine to export ore directly to Japan. American engineers surveyed the site and some preliminary work was done, incurring significant Japanese expense. Given the Japanese government's strict rationing of its currency reserves, such a foreign investment project was highly significant at this time.¹

However, in May 1938 the Australian government outlawed the export of iron ore from Australia. The main factor was probably a simplistic and highly protectionist industry policy, but underlying the decision was a fear of Japanese expansionism and a distrust of their real motives. The Japanese were deeply frustrated by this decision, and saw it as a major barrier to friendly relations with Australia.²

Some development of Yampi Sound continued, on behalf of companies such as BHP who controlled other mining leases there. In early 1942 the site was evacuated,³ so it was not until after the war that exports eventually began from the area.⁴ In retrospect, the Yampi deposits could have created a motive for the Japanese to occupy the northwest. After all, their motive for occupation of the NEI was resource access. If the war had gone differently in 1942 perhaps such a scenario could have emerged. ♦

(Endnotes)

1 See Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website www.dfat.gov.au historical documents section, 1938 correspondence between Mr Torao Wakamatsu, Japanese Consul-General in Sydney, and Mr J. A. Lyons, Prime Minister of Australia.

2 The proposed investment was portrayed within the context of Japanese expansionism. The activities of Japanese-controlled pearling luggers across northern Australia were mentioned as an existing example.

3 See Appendix 3 for details of marine vessels evacuated from the area.

4 Such is the richness of the reserves that mining activities continue to this day.

Appendices

APPENDIX 1 – CASUALTY LISTS

PASSENGERS LOST ABOARD QANTAS FLYING BOAT *CIRCE*, 28 FEBRUARY 1942

Purton, William Bloxam	Qantas Captain, RAAF Reservist Flight Lieutenant
Bateman, Mervyn William	Qantas First Officer
Oates, Herbert George Anzac	Qantas Radio Operator
Hogan, James Lionel	Qantas Purser
16 unknown passengers	(probably miscellaneous civilians)*

* the identity of these passengers remains obscure. Searches of the (American) Defense Prisoners of War / Missing Personnel Office databases indicate that no American servicemen were missing on this date. One source records these 16 passengers simply as “US Army loadings”. In the absence of names, there must be some doubt whether 16 passengers were actually carried (few if any of these flights carried a full passenger loading). It is known the aircraft was heavily loaded with other cargo.

Source: NAA File Series number A705 Control symbol 53/1/957 Barcode 1054259

KILLED AT BROOME 3 MARCH 1942, DUTCH SERVICEMEN & CIVILIANS ONBOARD MLD FLYING BOATS:

Albinus, CFJ	Serviceman	
Amsterdam (child 1)	Civilian	
Amsterdam (child 2)	Civilian	
Amsterdam (child 3)	Civilian	
Arentz (child)	Civilian	
Arentz, Mrs JM	Civilian	
Blommert, Sgt J	Serviceman	
Borsh-Bass, Mrs J (36 y.o.)	Civilian	buried Perth War Cemetery Dutch Annex
Borsch, Lt M	Serviceman	
Borsch, H (child)	Civilian	
Brandenburg, WA (child)	Civilian	
Brandenburg, Sgt LC	Serviceman	
Brandenburg-Trumpie, Mrs AM (30 y.o.)	Civilian	buried Perth War Cemetery Dutch Annex
de Bruijn, AA (4 y.o. child)	Civilian	buried Perth War Cemetery Dutch Annex
de Bruijn, H	Civilian	
de Sera, HR (22 y.o.)	Serviceman	buried Perth War Cemetery Dutch Annex

HebliJ (child)	Civilian	
HebliJ, Sgt HJ	Serviceman	
Heidsieck, L (25 y.o.)	Civilian	buried Perth War Cemetery Dutch Annex
Hendrikse, Capt-Lt PJ (52 y.o.)	Serviceman	buried Perth War Cemetery Dutch Annex
Hendrikse-van der Putte, JJAP (28 y.o.)	Civilian	buried Perth War Cemetery Dutch Annex
Hoogvliet-Duijtshoff, Mrs JC	Civilian	
Keekstra, Cpl A	Serviceman	
Kramer-Matt, WJ	Civilian	
Kramer, A (17 y.o. child)	Civilian	buried Perth War Cemetery Dutch Annex
Kramer, Staff Officer AC	Serviceman	
Kuin, E (5 y.o. child)	Civilian	buried Perth War Cemetery Dutch Annex
Kuin-Sturk, AMD (29 y.o.)	Civilian	buried Perth War Cemetery Dutch Annex
Lacomble-Silvergieter-Hoogstad, LE	Civilian	
Lokman, HA	Serviceman	
Lokman, J (child 1)	Civilian	
Lokman, J (child 2)	Civilian	
Lokman, J (child 3)	Civilian	
Lokman, Mrs	Civilian	
Piers, C (14 y.o. child)	Civilian	buried Perth War Cemetery Dutch Annex
Piers, F (7 y.o. child)	Civilian	buried Perth War Cemetery Dutch Annex
Piers-Morien, Mrs CGE (42 y.o.)	Civilian	buried Perth War Cemetery Dutch Annex
Schraver, Cdr J	Serviceman	
Schraver-Kam, MC	Civilian	
van Aggelen, Sgt JG (32 y.o.)	Serviceman	buried Perth War Cemetery Dutch Annex
van Aggelen-van Kooten, JA (32 y.o.)	Civilian	buried Perth War Cemetery Dutch Annex
van Emmerik, BAP (child)	Civilian	
van Emmerik, Sgt B	Serviceman	
van Houten, CL	Serviceman	
van Schargen, H		
van Spreeuw, Cpl EGA	Serviceman	
van Tour, C (8 y.o. child)	Civilian	buried Perth War Cemetery Dutch Annex
van Tour, I (12 y.o. child)	Civilian	first buried at Fisherman's Bend*
van Tour, Sgt A (35 y.o.)	Serviceman	buried Perth War Cemetery Dutch Annex
Vermey, J (child)	Civilian	
Visser, FJ (child)	Civilian	
Wolters, Pvt JH	Serviceman	

Source: 52 persons as named on the Allied War Memorial, Bedford Park, Broome.

17 of these persons are buried at the Perth War Cemetery Dutch Annex as indicated

* according to Prime (p.25), the body of 12 year old Ina van Tour was recovered by an old Malay man who buried her in the mangroves at Fishermans Bend. The body was later re-buried in Broome, but is not included in the list of those at Perth War

Cemetery Dutch Annex (presumably her sister, eight year old Catharina van Tour, is one of those at PWCDA).

The bodies of the other 34 were never recovered.

Almost half of those killed (at least 20) were children, and many others women.

NB lists in Tyler and Prime are slightly different. Most, but not all, of the differences can be attributed to duplications of the same person with different spellings of their surname. For this reason the Allied War Memorial is relied upon, as it is also the most recent source.

DIED AT CARNOT BAY 3 – 6 MARCH 1942, DUTCH SERVICEMEN & CIVILIANS

Blaauw, JFM	Serviceman	Body repatriated to Indonesia, post-war
Hendriksz, Lt DA (27 y.o.)	Serviceman	Body repatriated to Indonesia, post-war
van Tuyn-van Gelooven, Mrs MAT (25 y.o.)	Civilian	buried Perth War Cemetery Dutch Annex
van Tuyn, JAC (1 y.o. boy)	Civilian	buried Perth War Cemetery Dutch Annex

Source: Allied War Memorial, Broome

UNKNOWN DUTCH CASUALTIES / TOTAL DUTCH TOLL

“unknown Dutch Lady 1”	Civilian	buried Perth War Cemetery Dutch Annex
“unknown Dutch Lady 2”	Civilian	buried Perth War Cemetery Dutch Annex
“unknown Dutch Lady 3”	Civilian	buried Perth War Cemetery Dutch Annex
“unknown Dutch Child 1”	Civilian	buried Perth War Cemetery Dutch Annex
“unknown Dutch Child 2”	Civilian	buried Perth War Cemetery Dutch Annex

These five unknown persons are buried at the Perth War Cemetery Dutch Annex. However, it is not clear if these are unidentified or unidentifiable. If the latter they could possibly include some of the 35 persons named above for whom no body was recovered. Otherwise, the sum of those Dutch confirmed killed at Broome (52) and Carnot Bay (4), above, is 56, but may be as high as 61 if the unidentified bodies above are included.

An Australian War Memorial file prepared post-war records a figure of 59 Dutch dead, although this figure may have relied on the same list as originally used by Prime and Tyler which has since been revised vis the Allied War Memorial, Broome. (AWM54 812/3/15 Barcode 474664)

KILLED AT BROOME 3 MARCH 1942, ONBOARD RAF CATALINA

Garnell, Hugh (UK)	RAF #70897	32 y.o. Flight Lieutenant
Ellerby, Henry (UK)	RAF #541218	23 y.o. Flight Sergeant
Markland, William Gibbons (UK)	RAF Volunteer Reserve #1055984	20 y.o. Sergeant
McKiernan, Christopher (UK)	RAF Volunteer Reserve #965540	21 y.o. Sergeant
Morris, John (UK)	RAF Volunteer Reserve #1351858	20 y.o. Leading Aircraftman
Singh, Man Mohan (India)	Royal Indian Air Force	Flying Officer

Source: Allied War Memorial, Broome; confirmed via searches on Commonwealth War Graves Commission database, July 2009.

B-24A ARABIAN NIGHTS 3 MARCH 1942 SHOT DOWN OFF BROOME**Pilot & Co-Pilot**

Kester, Edson E	0-022354	Major, "Army Air Corps" / USAAF (ex-Ferry Command)
Ragsdale, William P, Jr	0-022514	Captain, 10th Ferry Squadron, USAAF

Other Aircrew / Wounded Passengers under care of Captain Stafford

Beatty, Willard J	6256686	Sergeant, 17th Pursuit Sqn, 24th Pursuit Group, USAAF (<i>official date of death 3.7.42</i>)
Bunardzya, Nicholas D	6999625	Private 1st Class, Headquarters Sqn, 19th Bomber Group, Heavy, USAAF
Cliff, Howard C	7021697	Staff Sergeant, "Army Air Corps" / USAAF
Foster, Samuel Fred	6252463	Sergeant, "Army Air Corps" / USAAF
Gordon, Joseph N	34044808	Private, 52nd Signal Battalion, US Army
Johnson, Clarence B	20911984	Private, 43rd Materiel Sqn, 32nd Air Base Group, USAAF
Keats, Poad	0-421213	1st Lieutenant, USAAF
Markey, Harry W	0-021663	Captain, 11th Bomber Sqn, 7th Bomber Group, Heavy, USAAF
McDonald, Hubert	14029544	Corporal, "Army Air Corps", USAAF (believed aircrew 19th BG)
Petschel, Howard K	0-412158	2nd Lieutenant, HQ 7th Bomber Group, Heavy, USAAF
Rex, John M	6581412	Staff Sergeant, "Army Air Corps" / USAAF
Sheets, Richard G	13000321	Private, USAAF
Stafford, Charles A	0-022686	Captain, 7th Bomber Group, Heavy, US Army Medical Corps
Steinmetz, Leo D	6914316	Staff Sergeant, "Army Air Corps" / USAAF
Taylor, Jack T	18034892	Corporal, "Army Air Corps" / USAAF
Taylor, Richard L	0-427045	2nd Lieutenant, "Army Air Corps" / USAAF
Westcott, Elvin P	6386186	Staff Sergeant, "Army Air Corps" / USAAF ("aerial engineer")

19 names are listed above. The one other passenger, Sgt Melvin O Donoho (#18003946), survived after more than 30 hours in the water. Sgt Beatty made it to shore with him, but lapsed into a coma. He was flown to Hollywood Hospital, Perth, where he died. Official date of death is given as 3 July 1942. He is still officially recorded as missing because his place of burial is unknown.

Source: Allied War Memorial, Broome; Note that various sources, including the RAAF Official History (Gillison, p.467) maintain that 33 men were aboard the B-24A. Comprehensive searches of the database held by the United States Defense Prisoner of War / Missing Personnel Office (<http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo>) by the authors in August 2009 confirm that the above 19 men is the precise and correct casualty list. They are all listed as "missing" on 3 March 1942. No other relevant US servicemen are listed as missing on that date.

BROOME RAID 20 MARCH 1942

Abdul Hamed bin Juden	Malay ("Indonesian Dutch") civilian	Buried Perth War Cemetery Dutch Annex
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Source: Allied War Memorial, Broome

PORT HEDLAND RAID 30 JULY 1942

Adams, John	W55686	19 y.o. Private, Australian Infantry	Buried at Geraldton War Cemetery
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Source: Commonwealth War Graves Commission

SUMMARY

Total re Broome attack 3 March 1942

Broome 3 March – MLD Flying Boats	52
Broome 3 March – RAF Catalina	6
Broome 3 March – B-24A	19
Carnot Bay	4
Total:	81 + up to 5 (or more) unknown

Others:

Circe 28 Feb	20
Broome 20 March	1
Port Hedland	1

APPENDIX 2 – EVACUEE ESTIMATES

When researching aerial evacuee numbers, one fact becomes quickly apparent. Like fighter pilot claims, there is a very-human tendency to over-estimate evacuee numbers. Everyone on a crowded plane, even the aircrews, over-state the actual passenger numbers. Then authors choose to report only the highest numbers in order to dramatise their narratives. In this way what was once extreme becomes the norm.

In regard to Broome, most attention has been focused on the newly arrived flying boats on 3 March aboard which most of the casualties occurred. While these flying boats were loaded with around 30 passengers each, this was the exception rather than the norm. No other flying boats arrived in Broome full of civilians, while most of the KNILM airliners were limited to just eight passengers per trip. The pilots, nervous about the long over-water flight to Broome, tended to under-load their aircraft.

It has been possible to construct a detailed estimate of evacuee numbers on a flight by flight basis, which can then be cross-checked via other known parameters. This information is summarised below for each category of evacuees:

DUTCH CIVILIANS

One key source regarding evacuees is the National Archives of Australia database. Among records held are individual Customs entry forms for Dutch civilian evacuees. These records do not include members of the military, unaccompanied children nor those identified as "multiple-entry" by customs (such as airline crews).

Given the "thousands of refugees from the Netherlands East Indies" as reported by the RAAF Official History in particular, it was expected a comparable number of names would be found via the NAA database. Instead, less than 250 names have

been identified, all of whom arrived in Western Australia between 20 February and 13 March. Adjusting for unattached children and certain aircrew entrants, it can be estimated that around 300 Dutch civilian evacuees reached Australia by air during the period in question)of which 250 arrived via Broome).

DUTCH MILITARY PERSONNEL

Approximately 350 Dutch military evacuated via Broome, and another 90 via Port Hedland and elsewhere, for a total of 440. Around 250 were from the ML-KNIL (Dutch air arm), and this roughly equates to the number of Dutch aircrews known to be in Australia in 1942. The other 190 were from the MLD, 90 attached to the MLD training school which evacuated in February. The remainder arrived on the Dutch flying boats.

USAAF PERSONNEL

There were 1, 250 USAAF men in Java and most (an estimated 700) were taken out on the *Abbekerk*. 550 were flown out via Broome. This is consistent with the knowledge that 260 USAAF men were evacuated on the last eight bombers to leave Java on 1 March, during the operational peak.

OTHER AERIAL EVACUEES

The estimate for sundry other aerial evacuees is 200. Some 83 were flown out on Qantas flying boats, and some 50 RAAF men of 8 Squadron on Dutch and American transports. The remainder include 25 RAF men aboard the two 205 Squadron Catalinas. Around 30-40 USN men flew into Broome on PatWing10 PBYS.

SUMMARY

Aerial Evacuees from Java to Broome

Dutch Civilians	250
Dutch Military	350
USAAF	550
Others	200
Total	1,350

This compares to the Official History estimate of 7,000 – 8,000 aerial evacuees via Broome.

Other evacuees at this time were:

Seagoing via <i>USS Childs</i>	120
Domestic aerial evacuees	150
Dutch civilian via Port Hedland & elsewhere	50
Dutch military via Port Hedland & elsewhere	90
USN via Exmouth Gulf	100
Other sundry RAE, RAAF, etc	50
Subtotal	560

Grand total evacuees 1,910

APPENDIX 3 – LUGGERS AND OTHER VESSELS IN THE NORTHWEST

LUGGERS

The table below lists 79 luggers that were accounted for by the RAN in early 1942. The vast majority were based in Broome and had numbers prefixed with a “B”. A handful were based in other ports and were prefixed “O” (Onslow) or “C” (Cossack). It appears that this policy covered the coast as far north as Cape L  v  que. Obviously many vessels based in southern WA were unaffected and are not listed. Some vessels normally based in the northwest had found their own way to Darwin or elsewhere at this time and are also excluded.

Many of the luggers had been laid up for years and were in poor condition. These were deemed too expensive to make seaworthy and were destroyed as part of the “scorched earth” policy. In addition to those listed, there were another 50 or so registered to owners in the northwest pre-war, many of which were not removed from the WA shipping register until a tidying up process took place in the 1980s. Many had probably been laid up before WWII and effectively left to rot. No doubt many in this category were unidentifiable and burnt on the beaches (they were most likely not recorded to avoid compensation claims).

In the table below, luggers have been cross-referenced with entries on the WA shipping register to give a build date and gross tonnage. However these should be used with caution as most luggers were extensively re-built over the years. While virtually all are described as “2-masted schooners”, the variation in gross tonnage gives an indication of the heterogeneous nature of these vessels. Underlining their military value, most found wartime employment with either the army or the RAN. Others were laid-up for the duration of the war in Fremantle.

Name	No.	Year	Tons	Fate
<i>Agatha</i>	B98	1902	14.1	sailed to Fremantle; used by Army Ferry Service (Fremantle – Rottnest Island);
<i>Aronina</i>	B96	1901	12.7	destroyed at Broome February 1942; (same as <i>Archina</i>)
<i>Aumeric</i>		1912	14.4	taken over by army at Broome / eventually destroyed ??
<i>Aurora</i>	B9	1903	15.3	destroyed by RAN at Broome 10/3/42
<i>Blanche</i>		1902	12.5	destroyed at Cape Levanque by military
<i>Boyd</i>	B27	1911	12.4	sailed to Fremantle; used as Boom Defence Vessel;
<i>Bronlan</i>	B16	1910	11.9	wrecked at Jurien Bay 30/6/42, total loss
<i>Bulletin</i>		1911	12.6	destroyed at Broome 2/42 by RAN
<i>Catherine R</i>	B21	1909	8.63	sailed to Geraldton; used by Naval Auxiliary Patrol, Geraldton; Commissioned 15/10/43
<i>Catlope</i>	O20			destroyed by Navy at Onslow
<i>Centurion</i>	B72	1903	13.9	destroyed by RAN at Broome 10/3/42
<i>Charlie</i>	B97	1904	12.4	total loss in cyclone at Port Hedland 25/3/42
<i>Claudius</i>	B52	1910	14.9	wrecked at Scarborough; 30/6/42; total loss
<i>Crane</i>		1899	13.8	destroyed 3/42 by RAN, probably at Broome
<i>Diangen</i>		1914	12.1	destroyed at Broome 3/42, burnt on beach by military
<i>Donna Verona</i>	B105	1900	14.2	destroyed by RAN at Broome 10/3/42
<i>Douglas</i>	B4	1903	12.9	destroyed by RAN at Broome 10/3/42
<i>Dove</i>	B29	1888	15.5	destroyed at Cape Levanque by military;
<i>Edgar Norman</i>	B46	1912	12.6	destroyed by RAN at Broome 10/3/42
<i>Editha</i>	C19	1903	12.7	no details war service; lost off Cape Hay, NT, 5/63.

ZERO HOUR IN BROOME

Name	No.	Year	Tons	Fate
<i>Emlyn Castle</i>	B7	1914	13.9	sailed to Fremantle; used as training ketch by RAN; beached at North West Cape with bad leak 11/60; was broken up by waves & a total loss.
<i>Empire</i>	B81	1902	12.2	destroyed by RAN at Broome 10/3/42
<i>Esquimeau</i>		1911	12.7	destroyed by RAN at Broome 10/3/42
<i>Experience</i>	B42	1904	12.1	wrecked at Scarborough; 30/6/42; total loss
<i>Fleetwing</i>	B41	1904	12.5	total loss in cyclone at Port Hedland 25/3/42
<i>Florrie</i>	B106	1925	14.1	sailed to Fremantle; RAN torpedo carrier 11/43;
<i>Foxworthy</i>	B26	1910	12.7	destroyed by RAN at Broome 10/3/42
<i>Francis</i>	B137	1903	13.1	also <i>Frances</i> ; sailed to Geraldton; served with RAN as "requisitioned lugger"
<i>Galle</i>	B164	1904	12.2	sailed to Fremantle; ex- <i>Helen</i>
<i>Gerado</i>	B102	1913	14.5	destroyed by RAN at Broome 10/3/42; had been used to fuel flying boats;
<i>Gladys Olive</i>	O22	1911	12.9	destroyed by Navy at Onslow; also <i>Lady Olive</i>
<i>Gloria</i>	B68	1903	13.2	sailed to Geraldton; used by Naval Auxiliary Patrol, Geraldton;
<i>Heath</i>	B94	1903	15.1	total loss in cyclone at Port Hedland 25/3/42
<i>Heather</i>	B6	1911	12.8	retained Port Hedland, RAN North-West Patrol; described as "best lugger in Broome"
<i>Hilda</i>	B10	1903	15.1	sailed to Bunbury, where used by Naval Auxiliary Patrol
<i>Ida Lloyd</i>	B93	1911	12.3	sailed to Fremantle; used by Army Ferry Service (Fremantle – Rottnest Island);
<i>Juntie</i>	B11	1930	14.1	total loss in cyclone at Port Hedland 25/3/42
<i>Karang</i>	B84	1917	14.7	destroyed by RAN at Broome 10/3/42
<i>Kavite</i>	B100	1902	18.2	sailed to Geraldton; later in RAN service as misc ketch; broke up & sank Port Hedland 1960.
<i>Kea</i>	B71	1903	12.8	destroyed by RAN at Broome 10/3/42
<i>Kim</i>	B54	1908	12.6	sailed to Fremantle; used as Boom Defence Vessel;
<i>La Grange</i>	B2	1910	13.8	sailed to Fremantle; used by Army Ferry Service (Fremantle – Rottnest Island);
<i>Langdon</i>	B3	1920	16.3	wrecked at Fraser Island Reef; 7/5/42; total loss, 5 men drowned;
<i>Maisie</i>	B24	1903	15.9	sailed to Geraldton; used by RAN; sold overseas 1968
<i>Marguerite</i>	B23	1911	12.1	sailed to Geraldton; also <i>Marguerite Ethel</i> ;
<i>Maria</i>	O3	1902	12.4	destroyed at Onslow by RAN early 1942
<i>Marion</i>		1898	11.5	destroyed at Cape Levanque by military
<i>Maritana</i>	O4	1902	12.6	destroyed by Navy at Onslow;
<i>Marmont</i>	-	1903	12.4	sailed to Geraldton; destroyed by fire when beached Dampier Creek, Broome 7/63.
<i>Mildred</i>	B91	1899	11.6	sailed to Geraldton; to RAN,
<i>Mina</i>	B5	1900	15.2	sailed to Geraldton; 10/43 RAN auxiliary Boom Defence Vessel;
<i>Muriel</i>	B90	1901	21.3	total loss in cyclone at Port Hedland 25/3/42;
<i>Mutiara</i>	O1	1901	12.3	destroyed at Onslow by RAN in early 1942; also spelt as <i>Nutiara</i>
<i>Myrtle Olga</i>	B28	1910	14.2	retained at Port Hedland, RAN North-West Patrol, later based at Drysdale Mission
<i>Niobe</i>	B66	1902	12.4	sailed to Fremantle; post-war was rebuilt and re-named <i>Niobe Queen</i> . Heavy seas drove her onto the Zuytdorp Cliffs in 6/74 & a total loss.
<i>Nollie</i>	-	1910	14.2	noted as "remaining Port Hedland 5/42". Possibly transferred Dutch Navy c1943.

ZERO HOUR IN BROOME

Name	No.	Year	Tons	Fate
<i>Oberon</i>	B101	1900	12.3	sailed to Geraldton; wrecked in 1956.
<i>Olive</i>	B92	1901	12.7	destroyed by RAN at Broome 10/3/42
<i>Orontes</i>		1903	12.2	destroyed at Cape Levanque by military
<i>Otto B</i>	B95	1933	14.6	sailed to Fremantle; used as Boom Defence Vessel; possibly foundered c1943
<i>Patricia</i>	B73	1911	13.2	sailed to Geraldton; also " <i>Patricia Mcd</i> ", presume same vessel;
<i>Peggy</i>	B99	1903	12.8	sailed to Fremantle; used as diving boat by HMAS Leeuwin navy base;
<i>Post Boy</i>	B8	1900	13.5	sailed to Geraldton; "B8" use by Army during Albrohos Is op, 1942 ; abandoned Broome 1962.
<i>Princess Mary</i>		1911	12.9	destroyed at Cape Levanque by military 3/42
<i>Reliance</i>		1903	19.1	destroyed by RAN at Broome 10/3/42
<i>Retreat</i>		1910	12.5	taken over by army at Broome; fate unknown
<i>Robinor</i>	B22	1911	13.0	sailed to Geraldton; served with RAN
<i>Rosa</i>		1890	11.1	destroyed at Cape Levanque by military 3/42
<i>Rosef</i>	B69	1903	12.2	sailed to Geraldton; used by RAAF there, for supplying coast-watching posts;
<i>Southern Cross</i>	O5	1903	12.6	destroyed by Navy at Onslow
<i>Swallow</i>	C22	1903	12.5	Geraldton; used by Army around Abrolhos Is late 1942; in 1945 used by the RAN for Services Reconnaissance Dept (SRD) training; abandoned Broome 1958;
<i>Swan</i>	B47	1899	10.0	wrecked at Cottesloe 30/6/42
<i>Sydney Henry</i>	B116	1914	16.5	destroyed by RAN at Broome 10/3/42
<i>Theo</i>	B74	1908	12.5	wrecked at Geraldton; 2/6/42; total loss; dragged its moorings & smashed on breakwater
<i>Thistle</i>	B12	1909	12.7	to Fremantle; Army Ferry Service (Fremantle – Rottnest Is); abandoned Augustus Is 1962.
<i>Tiram</i>	O2	1903	12.1	destroyed by Navy at Onslow
<i>unnamed</i>	O21			destroyed at Onslow
<i>Winnie</i>	B1	1903	13.2	sailed to Fremantle; used as Boom Defence Vessel;
<i>Zephyr</i>	B49	1898	12.9	sailed to Fremantle; Army Ferry Service (Fremantle – Rottnest Island);

OTHER VESSELS IN NORTHWEST EARLY 1942

The following vessels were discovered during research for this publication. Most found some military application.

Name	Year	Tons	Type	Fate
<i>Nicol Bay</i>	1925	56	Auxiliary Ketch; 70hp petrol engine	Owned by Cossack Lighterage Company, was built especially for lighterage duties in the northwest. Summoned to Broome 2/42 to lay flying boat moorings. On arrival was realised as ideal as a flying boat "base ship" and requisitioned for that purpose. Crew of five, including a cook, under Norwegian Captain Harold Matheison. Accommodation for 16 persons, but most importantly could hold over 200 drums of aviation fuel, or enough for about 10 flying boats. <i>Nicol Bay</i> arrived in Broome 17/2/42. It laid flying boat moorings before being in constant use refuelling flying boats until 3/3. Avoided being hit & rescued many survivors immediately afterwards. On 4/3 sailed for Port Hedland with 100+ evacuees crammed on deck, and searched the coast for air crash survivors as she went. Later served as a Boom Defence Vessel in Fremantle. <i>Nicol Bay</i> was lost in Yampi Sound in 1959.
<i>Silver Star</i>	1905	96	Ferry / powered lighter; 51hp steam engine	Began service as a luxury Swan River passenger ferry, proving uneconomic. Sold to an Albany harbour transport business. Much use during WWI. In 1935 sold to the Cossack Lighterage Company. Cossack (near Roebourne, about 150 miles south of Port Hedland) had no deep water port and the shallow draft of the <i>Silver Star</i> made it a useful lighter. Converted at Fremantle, with the addition of cargo holds & steam derricks. Served until the war, often loaded heavily with bales of wool which were taken to ships lying out in the bay. With shallow draft and lighterage fit, there was no question of it evacuating south in heavy seas. As part of the "scorched earth" policy, sunk by RAN, circa 3/42.
<i>Yampi Lass</i>	1912	45	63-ft supply vessel; 40hp engine	BHP-owned supply vessel based at Cockatoo Is, Yampi Sound. Evacuated from the mine site around 20/1/42 to Darwin and commissioned as <i>HMAS Yampi Lass</i> . On 19/2 was being used by a dive team in Darwin Harbour. Later used for harbour towing. 4/43 ran ashore in Darwin & was destroyed.
<i>Lady Mitchell, The</i>	1931	15.5	43-ft launch	Motor launch built Geraldton 1931; owned by Wyndham Meatworks; taken over by the Australian Army during WWII; destroyed by fire at Wyndham
<i>Lady Jane</i>	?	?	28-ft launch; 2 x Ford Marine engines	28-ft BHP-owned "Ford A-type" launch used in Yampi Sound. With the evacuation of the mining site 1/42, sailed to Derby. Used briefly by Customs then offered for sale by BHP, who had no use for it. Qantas were interested in use at Broome but before they could inspect it in Derby the emergency ended. Apparently too small to sail directly to Broome as was suggested that it be loaded onto a steamer for transport from Derby to Broome. Fate unknown.
<i>Teresita Moa (Little Flower)</i>	?	?	Lugger	Lugger owned by Benedictine Mission at Drysdale. Not on WA shipping registers, but seems mission permitted to keep the vessel. Assisted <i>Koolama</i> survivors 2/42 & aircrew of a force-landed USAAF B-24 8/43.
(unidentified)	?	?	Lugger	Abandoned Cockatoo Is, Yampi Sound when discovered by party of Dutch soldiers who had sailed from Timor. They transferred to the lugger when their motorboat broke down and sailed it to Cape Lévéque. Fate unknown.
(unnamed)	?	?	24-ft launch	24-ft launch being urgently reconditioned in Broome by Streeter & Male on behalf of Qantas; could carry 15 persons with bags or 21 persons without; unclear if ready for service before emergency ended.
(unnamed)	?	?	14-ft whaleboat; 4½hp Chapman engine	14-ft whaleboat with small inboard a 4½hp Chapman engine; owned by Broome Freezing & Chilling Works and rented to Dept of Civil Aviation for £3 / week from 9/2/42 – 23/3/42. Much use shuttling passengers between Broome jetty & moored flying boats. Then used by the Army until recovered by owner 21/5 in poor condition.
(unnamed)	?	?	Ship's motorboat (USS Childs)	The seaplane tender <i>USS Childs</i> left its motorboat in Broome to service flying boats. This small vessel saved many lives on 3/3/42. Two days later conducted a search for survivors of the B-24A shot down off Broome.

APPENDIX 4 – AIRCRAFT MOVEMENTS

This Appendix lists known movements by individual aircraft participating in the Broome operations (although for many aircraft only limited information is available). Most are listed by serial number or civil registration, with constructors number (c/n) indicated where known.

AVRO ANSON (RAAF)

- W2078 6/3/42 departed Geraldton (Pilot: F/L Harber), three crew & passenger Cmdr Branson; → Carnarvon → Onslow → Port Hedland (evening). Conditions chaotic & Harber helped clear the air traffic (commended by RAN at prompting of Branson). 8/3 Harber flew Branson → Broome → Port Hedland; picked up evacuees (incl RAF Wing Cmdr) → Carnarvon → Geraldton.
- W2132 8/3/42 departed Geraldton (Pilot: Flt Lt Little) passenger Flt Lt Bothroyd (medical) → Carnarvon → Onslow → Port Hedland. At Carnarvon a tail wheel burst on landing. Subsequently arrived Port Hedland, presumably after receipt of tail-wheel from Geraldton. 11/3 Bothroyd returned in the aircraft → Onslow → Carnarvon → Geraldton.

BOEING B-17 FLYING FORTRESS (USAAF)

- 40-2072 B-17C; Damaged, used as transport, then abandoned at Andir Air Depot. Repaired by Dutch airmen & flown out of Java. 6/3/42: landed Kojarina satellite strip near Geraldton. Aircraft in poor shape. 12/3: 9 USAAF men (Capt Hughes & eight O/Rs) flown there by Lodestar. B-17 repaired, → Geraldton. 16/3 → Ceduna → Laverton. Newly re-engined as transport - Godman: "the ship is considered a lemon by all pilots" counted over 400 bullet holes. Also wings structurally bent during a dive. 40 killed when crashed Mackay 14/6/43 (Aust worst aviation disaster).
- 40-3079 B-17D; *The Gazelle*; uncertain if participated in Broome ops; Noted Laverton 3/42; crashed Daly Waters, 14/3/42.
- 40-3097 B-17D; *The Swoose*; combat damage 1/42. Rebuilt in Melbourne as transport using tail of 40-3091, so probably Melb during Broome ops. Became Gen Brett's personal transport. Survives today in USA.
- 41-2417 B-17E; *Monkey Bizz-Ness*; flew last Java bombing mission 1/3, tail-wheel damaged by AA fire. Crew fashioned wooden skid braced with cable, expecting to hold together for take-off only. Consequently pilot Lt McPherson flew to Darwin's long sealed runway instead Broome. Skid worked perfectly so flew to Melbourne.
- 41-2449 B-17E; Flew Java bombing missions to 1/3/42; destroyed on ground Broome 3/3.
- 41-2452 B-17E; 2/3/42: Broome → Pearce; returned Broome post-raid & → Geraldton → Pearce 5/3. 7/3 Pearce → Parafield → Laverton. 11/3 to Batchelor Field. Scheduled to fly Phil mission but engine trouble.
- 41-2453 B-17E; *Algene Key*; 26/2/42: Java → Broome; 11/3 Laverton → Batchelor Field, NT. 12/3 → Del Monte, Phil. (pilot: Pease); returned Aust with 16 evacuees;
- 41-2454 B-17E; *Craps For The Japs*; destroyed on ground Broome 3/3/42
- 41-2458 B-17E; *Yankee Didler*; 4/3/42 Maylands → Pearce;
- 41-2460 B-17E; combat damage 25/1/42; 3/42 at Andir Air Depot where T / Sgt H Hayes, USAAF, began repairs on best of three shot-up B-17Es. With aid of locals ready 4/3. Civilian pilot GL Cherymisin & Lt SJ Kok ML-KNIL, co-pilot (neither had flown a B-17 before). Zeros strafed the base, so wheeled under trees for further repairs. That night took off on three engines, with Kok lighting the instrument panel with a flashlight; 21 people onboard, incl Cherymisin's Dutch wife; → Port Hedland AM 5/3. Overnight for engine repairs before flying south.
- 41-2461 B-17E; *El Toro*; 2/3/42: Broome → Pearce; 5/3: Broome → Pearce; 1253h 6/3 Pearce → Parafield.
- 41-2462 B-17E; *Tojo's Jinx*; 7/3/42: Maylands → Pearce → Parafield;

- 41-2464 B-17E; *Queenie*; flew Java mission 28/2/42 so must have flown via Broome shortly afterwards.
- 41-2472 B-17E; *Guinea Pig*; 3/3/42 Maylands → Pearce; 5/3 Broome → Pearce; 2152h 6/3 Parafield → Laverton “crew 15”;
- 41-2481 B-17E; *Topper*; in Java mid-Feb; not confirmed Broome; probably already in Aust e.g. for overhaul;
- 41-2486 B-17E; *Lady Lou*; 1/3/42 Broome → Pearce; 11/3 Melbourne → Batchelor Field; 12/3 departed Batchelor for Phil (Pilot Capt Adams) but returned to base with engine trouble.
- 41-2489 B-17E; *Suzie Q*; flew Java mission 1/3/42; must have evacuated via Broome that night;
- 41-2497 B-17E; *Tojo's Nightmare*; arrived Java 17/2/42, damaged in landing accident & didn't fly combat missions; relegated to transport duty & first B-17 into Broome 24/2, at least two further flights Java → Broome; 2/3 Maylands → Pearce.
- 41-2505 B-17E; 1/3/42 Broome → Pearce; crashed New Guinea 25/4/42.
- 41-2507 B-17E; Java missions to 1/3/42; last B-17 out of Jogjakarta that night (pilot Vandevanter); → Broome 2/3, → Pearce same day; 11/3 Melbourne → Batchelor; 12/3 Batchelor → Del Monte, but arrived after dark & crashed (pilot Godman);

CONSOLIDATED B-24A LIBERATOR (USAAF)

- 40-2370 B-24A; *Arabian Nights*; 1/42 one of three B-24As sent US → Australia; regular Aust - Java transport missions; 27/2 (pilot Lt Kester) Broome → Pearce (25 passengers); 28/2 Pearce → Broome → Jogjakarta; 1/3 early AM: one of four B-24As departing Jogjakarta loaded with evacuees; Sunrise: → Broome, then → Pearce, arriving PM with two other B-24As. 2/3 return flight Pearce → Broome; then Broome → Java; arrived over Jogkakarta at night (last USAAF mission over Java). circled 30 mins but seeing no signal fire returned empty. 3/3 dawn: → Broome; serviced immediately then loaded with wounded incl surgeon, Capt Stafford. Approx 0930h after take-off climbed through 300-400 ft intercepted by Zero (W/O Kudo). Air-to-air engagement followed; both B-24A & Zero crashed as a result. The former broke up on impact seven miles off coast. Some survivors were thrown clear, with Capt Stafford last seen trying to rally them. Two men, Sgt Donoho & Sgt Beatty, fought strong tides for over 30 hours before reaching land, however Beatty died soon afterwards. 48 hrs after the crash a search found debris but no other survivors. 19 killed.
- 40-2373 B-24A; 9/41 to Soviet Union with Hariman Mission; 7/12/41 in Cairo, used by Major General GH Brett (Chief of Air Corps). 12/41 (pilot: Captain PF Davis) → India → China → Singapore → Java. 1/42 – 2/42 serves mainly as transport for Gen Brett in Aust / NEI. 28/2 → Jogjakarta; 1/3 very early AM: one of four B-24As departing Jogjakarta loaded with evacuees. Sunrise: → Broome, then → Pearce, arriving PM with two other B-24As. 3/3 - following news of Broome raid departed Pearce carrying RAAF doctor & medical supplies, arriving Broome late in the day (pilot: Lt Matthews). For the return flight south, Lt R W Evans (pilot of B-17 destroyed that morning) volunteered as co-pilot. At dusk, ready to depart with 30 people onboard took off diagonally across the flarepath; starboard undercarriage, only partially retracted, hit a 44-gallon drum & the aircraft “dived into the ground & scooped up dust through the bomb bay”. An engine caught fire but was immediately extinguished. The nosewheel was retracted or collapsed - some crewmen broke legs jumping out of the tail hatch. 4/3: For fear of invasion captain ordered the aircraft burnt. Some equipment was salvaged beforehand.
- 40-2374 B-24A; 9/41 to Soviet Union with Hariman Mission; 1/42 one of three B-24As sent US → Australia; 1/42 – 2/42 regular Aust - Java transport missions. 28/2 arrives Jogjakarta; 1/3 very early AM: One of four B-24As departing Jogjakarta loaded with evacuees. Sunrise: arrives Broome, then → Pearce. PM: Arrived Pearce with two other B-24As. 2/3 flew Pearce – Broome; 3/3 at Broome: Loaded with fuel, strafed & burnt out.

40-2376 B-24A; *Old Bag of Bolts*; 1/42 one of three B-24As sent US → Aust; one of two that arrived via African route; Flew General Wavell into Java. 24/1/42 (pilot: Lt B Funk) departed Java with a LB-30, → Darwin. Loaded with 0.50 cal ammo & medical supplies. 25/1 Darwin → Del Monte. 26/1 Del Monte → Darwin carrying 42 evacuees. 27/1 Funk returned aircraft to Malang. 18/2 Brisbane. 19/2 Enroute to Darwin, received radio msg re Darwin attack, diverted Daly Waters. 20/2 Gen Hurley met Funk at Daly Waters, & → Sydney; 28/2 → Jogjakarta; 1/3 very early am: One of four B-24As departing Jogjakarta loaded with evacuees. Sunrise: arrives Broome; 2/3 → Melbourne, probably with men of 7th & 19th Bomb Groups. 3/3 in Melbourne at time of Broome raid. 4/3 – 5/3 → WA. 6/3 1700h Funk arrives Broome in B-24; Flies last US personnel out to Melbourne, incl Lt-Col Legge. 7/3 At Laverton (Melb); 8/3 Laverton → Pearce. 9/3 (Funk) Pearce → Cunderdin; 10/3 0635h (Funk) Cunderdin → Pearce; then (Funk; crew 6 passengers 13) Pearce → Laverton. 5/5/42 Ditched Yu Is after failed Philippine evacuation flight.

CONSOLIDATED LB-30 LIBERATOR (USAAF)

- AL508 2/3/42 Java → Broome (early AM) → Pearce; back to Broome after raid; → Pearce 5/3. 6/3 (pilot Capt Crowder) departed Pearce with 34 onboard. → Parafield (overnight); 7/3 → Melbourne; crashed Essendon 18/5/42.
- AL515 Last LB-30 to depart Java (Capt Helton), → Broome AM 2/3/42, → Pearce (same day); back to Broome after raid, → Pearce 5/3. Left Pearce 6/3 for RAAF Laverton (probably in company with AL-508, above).
- AL521 18/2/42 Java → Darwin (carrying Gen Hurley); destroyed Darwin raid 19/2. This a factor why USAAF chose to evacuate via Broome rather than via Darwin.
- AL533 1/3/42: Jogjakarta: damaged beyond repair by strafing Zeros while preparing to fly Broome
- AL570 1/3/42: departed Java; 2/3 → Broome; later noted Maylands. 10/3 Pearce (Capt McDuffy; five crew; three passengers) → Parafield (overnight). 11/3 0500h departed → Laverton.
- AL573 delayed USA missed Java campaign. 1/3/42: → Sydney via Pacific route; 4/3 → Broome & assisted evacuation.
- AL609 1/3/42: Jogjakarta: damaged beyond repair by strafing Zeros, while preparing to fly Broome

CONSOLIDATED PBY-4 (USN)

- P-6 (Bu No 1227) ex-102-P-26; night of 25/2/42, evacuated Admiral Purnell, his staff & 50 pieces of luggage Java → Broome. Destroyed Broome 3/3, (pilot: Lt (jg) IW Brown).
- P-7 (Bu No 1237) ex-101-P-13; by 22/2/42 unfit for patrols; at dispersal base eastern Java. 23/2: 39 people onboard & loaded with PatWing10's records. Wings, tail & hull full of holes & starboard engine loose in frame. Pilots W Deam & I Brown took off on third attempt, but → Broome safely. Probably dragged anchor & collided with Empire Flying Boat 25/2; destroyed Broome 3/3 (pilot: Lt (jg) LC Deede).
- P-3 (Bu No 1215) 26/2/42 Java → Broome (Lt Hyland, 17 onboard); 1/3 at Exmouth Gulf; departed with two PBY-5s, flying throughout night, → Tjilitjap (dawn). Starboard engine would not start. As both engines needed to get airborne, all passengers, including PatWing10 c/o, Capt Wagner, boarded a PBY-5 & made Exmouth Gulf safely. Before leaving crew disabled P-3 by smashing instrument panel & cutting rudder cables. Discovered by MLD crew under Lt Rijnders, who began working on it (they gave it MLD s/n Y-3). Both sabotage & engine problems repaired by working three days non-stop. Loaded with evacuees it became airborne with no radio, a damaged compass & a tourist map. Rijnders found Broome next morning & landed safely. Became RAAF A24-28.
- P-5 (Bu No 1216) (pilot: Lt (jg) Hoffman) Java → Broome 26/2/42; → Java, flying missions next three days. 2/3 Hoffman flew Admiral Glassford & other senior personnel → Exmouth Gulf. 3/3 → Perth. Became RAAF A24-29.

CONSOLIDATED PBY-5 (USN)

- 22-P-10 (Bu No 2292) pilot Lt (jg) R LeFever, on patrol during Darwin attack 19/2/42 & only PBY based there to survive. From Darwin → Derby, met damaged tender *USS William B Preston*. Then → Broome → Java. 1/3 0340h departed Java → Exmouth Gulf (32 onboard); → Java that night; 2/3: daylight hours in hiding Java. Night departure with PatWing10 staff onboard, → Exmouth Gulf 0600h 3/3; then → Perth.
- P-46 Damaged PBY-5 22-P-12 at Surabaya 2/42. Meanwhile, Dutch PBY-5 Y-72, shot down over Java 5/2/42. Fuselage taken to Surabaya by truck. PatWing10 mechanics then joined Y-72 fuselage with wings of 22-P-12. Resulting hybrid designated "P-46"; Departed Java 0540h 1/3 (approx 32 onboard) → Exmouth Gulf; at 2000h that evening → Java; 2/3 daylight hours in hiding Java. Departed Java that night (26 multinational passengers incl 4 Admirals). → Exmouth Gulf 0600h 3/3, then → Perth;

CONSOLIDATED CATALINA I (RAF)

- W8433 (FV-N) Last operational RAF Catalina in Java, flying missions to 2/3/42. Missed order to Ceylon, instead following "FV-W" to Broome. 2/3 (evening) departed Tjilitjap (pilot: F/L Tambllyn + six crewmen + a second seven-man crew as passengers + three unidentified, incl an "unofficial" Dutchwoman); 3/3 → Broome just before attack, crew & passengers were still inside. Lance-Corporal Bowden tried actioning gun but ammunition blocked by fearful Dutchwoman; thrown into water but flying boat on fire. Five killed. One drowned. Among wounded were Bowden & Sgt Pozzi (broken arm).
- W8423 (FV-W) Condemned unserviceable with bullet hole through airscrew. Carried just two passengers (Wing Commander Councill & navigator) & seven crew on evacuation flight. Departed dawn 1/3/42 (pilot: F/ L Lowe) → Broome safely (some sources have this flight on 2/3 instead). Destroyed Broome 3/3.

CONSOLIDATED PBY-5 "Y-BOATS" (MLD)

- Y-45 6/3/42: Pilot Lt AW Witholt waiting for evacuee officer party. 8/3 Failed to arrive, so departed Java (the day of surrender). Onboard crew + ML-KNIL pilot + wife. After picking through punctured fuel drums to find fuel, → Padang, Sumatra (arriving evening). Picking up the Padang harbourmaster, then → Cocos Is, hull damaged on reef, Witholt beaching & saving the PBY. With native help, holes patched with cement & planks of wood. Three days for cement to dry - take-off: 14 hours later → Perth.
- Y-49 Java → Broome with training school; probably arrived 24/2/42;
- Y-59 GVT.17; Arrived Broome early 3/3/42 carrying 30+ persons. Destroyed in raid.
- Y-60 GVT.17; Arrived Broome early 3/3/42 carrying 30+ persons. Destroyed in raid.
- Y-62 damaged 22/2/42 & flown out of MLD base at Surabaya before properly repaired. Tjilitjap → Broome (7/3 morning);
- Y-67 GVT.17; arrived Broome early 3/3/42 carrying 33 persons. Destroyed in raid.
- Y-70 GVT.17; arrived Broome early 3/3/42 carrying 30+ persons (pilot: Lt-Cmdr AJ de Bruijn). Among passengers was Captain Hendrikse, temporary commander of the MLD, wife & seven MLD officers & families. Destroyed in raid.
- Y-71 Java → Broome (early 6/3/42; pilot: Lt Burgerhout); carrying men from GVT.5.

DE HAVILLAND DH-84 DRAGON (RAAF)

- A34-9 (c/n 6045) 34 Squadron; ex-VH-URY; destroyed Wyndham 3/3/42

A34-5 8/3/42 Dragon A34-5 (pilot: F/L Winter) → Geraldton → Pearce; 11/3: (F/L Winter, crew one passengers two) Perth → Geraldton (overnight); 12/3 → Carnarvon → Onslow → Port Hedland → Broome; 14/3: (F/L Winter) ex-Broome → Geraldton → Pearce; 17/3: (F/L Winter crew one) ex-Pearce → Geraldton, en route Broome via Port Hedland; 20/3: (F/L Winter) → Geraldton ex-Carnarvon & northern ports, refuelled & → Pearce.

DORNIER DO-24K-1 "X-BOATS" (MLD)

X-1 GVT.7: arrived Broome early 3/3/42. Reported 40-45 passengers but probably less; destroyed that morning.

X-3 GVT.6: badly splinter damaged; arrived Broome 2/3/42. Destroyed while empty 3/3/42.

X-5 evacuated with MLD training school via Broome 2/42, approx 15 passengers. Became RAAF A49-1.

X-7 evacuated with MLD training school via Broome 2/42, approx 15 passengers. Became RAAF A49-2.

X-8 evacuated with MLD training school via Broome 2/42, approx 15 passengers. Became RAAF A49-3.

X-9 evacuated with MLD training school via Broome 2/42, approx 15 passengers. Became RAAF A49-4.

X-10 evacuated with MLD training school via Broome 2/42, approx 15 passengers. Became RAAF A49-5.

X-20 GVT.7: arrived Broome early 3/3/42, carrying a number of civilians. Destroyed that morning.

X-23 GVT.6: badly splinter damaged; arrived Broome 2/3/42. Destroyed while empty 3/3/42.

X-24 GVT.7: arrived over Australian coast 3/3/42. Running out of fuel force-landed Eighty Mile Beach, near Wallal, 150 miles south of Broome. Damaged on landing, although flyable. Refueled from civilian vehicles at Wallal. Took-off & located X-36 nearby. Loaded crew of X-36 (which was burnt), & → Perth. Became RAAF A49-6.

X-28 GVT.6: arrived Broome 2/3/42, carrying crew & perhaps extra squadron personnel. Destroyed while empty 3/3/42.

X-36 GVT.7: arrived over Australian coast 3/3/42. Running out of fuel force-landed Eighty Mile Beach, but ran aground on reef. Transmitted distress call, received by X-24 (above), which landed nearby. Russian pilot directed loading of wreck with flammable materials such as mattresses; set alight, both crews departing on X-24. Later that day, Electra pilot Jimmy Woods spotted wreck & dropped supplies. 7/42: plane reported seeing three engines & a wing at low tide (106 miles south of Broome).

DOUGLAS B-18 (USAAF)

At least one B-18 involved in Perth–Broome flights, being photographed at Maylands. Soon afterwards after departing Geraldton forced to shut down one engine a short distance from Port Hedland. Losing height and virtually out of fuel, overshot runway Port Hedland after making emergency down-wind landing; probably remained for some days in early March before repairs undertaken. This aircraft either s/n 37-16 (→Pearce 13/3), or possibly 36-343.

DOUGLAS DC-2-115G (KNILM)

PK-AFK (c/n 1375) Java → Broome ~ 2/3/42; → Sydney 4/3.

PK-AFL (c/n 1376) Bandoeng → Broome 4/3/42 (eight passengers), then → Sydney; possibly returned WA as → 14/3 Sydney (with passengers). Survives today; apparently undergoing restoration in Sydney.

DOUGLAS DC-2-199 (AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL AIRLINES)

VH-UXJ (c/n 1561) → Perth (late 3/3/42). Departed Perth early 4/3, (carrying urgently needed radio operator for Broome), → Port Hedland (late PM). On instruction USAAF Broome, loaded 15 evacuees, incl injured, at Port Hedland., then → Geraldton → Perth (midnight). Flying time 12 hrs; charter cost £314. 5/3: Western Command

requested fly three army officers & radioman to Port Hedland, + naval officer & telegraph operators to Port Hedland, Broome & Wyndham. 8/3 Maylands → Geraldton (19 army personnel onboard) → northwards. ~11/3 flew Carnot Bay survivors Broome → Port Hedland. Probably one of three civil aircraft assigned these ops until mid-March.

DOUGLAS DC-2 (RAAF)

RAAF DC-2s mostly used by Wireless Air Gunnery Schools, but some ad hoc transport missions. Two RAAF DC-2s (identity unknown) → Broome late 2/42 to load ex-Java RAAF men & → Melbourne. 4/42: A30-10 transported W/T equipment & salvaged gear Broome → Pearce. Air Board insisted aircraft arrived dusk & departed dawn, as precaution enemy air activity during day.

DOUGLAS C-39 (USAAF)

38-505 (c/n 2062) → Broome late 3/3/42 (after raid). 4/3 Broome → Pearce; 6/3 Broome → Pearce; 7/3 Pearce → Port Pirie.

DOUGLAS DC-3-194B (KNILM)

PK-AFV (c/n 1965) *Pelikaan*. Flew regularly → Australia (Darwin) from 6/40. Final arrival Darwin 3/2/42; → Sydney & then 7/2 first Broome → Java. KNILM evacuation: Java → Broome 20/2 (three civilians). 20/2 Broome → Batavia, empty (pilot: Evert van Dijk). 22/2 Java → Broome (four civilians). Apparently delayed Broome, as departed Sydney 25/2 (pilot: Evert van Dijk). 27/2 → Broome; 28/2 → Java 28/2 (pilot: Smirnoff); spent period in hiding following enemy landings; 2/3 → Bandoeng, passengers boarded midnight. 3/3 0115h departed Bandoeng (pilot: Smirnoff, three KNILM crew, six military & two civilian passengers). Approaching Broome intercepted by Zeros; crashed-landing Carnot Bay. Four killed.

PK-AFZ (c/n 1981) *Emoe*. Flew regularly → Australia (Darwin) from 5/40. Last arrival Darwin 27/1/42 (eight passengers). Returned Java for first Java → Broome flight 4/2 (pilot: E Dunlop); → Sydney 5/2, then delayed in Australia, probably due weather Broome. Possibly Cloncurry 16/2; 17/2 Broome → Java. KNILM evacuation: Java → Broome 20/2 (eight civilians). 21/1 Broome → Sydney; departed Sydney ~24/2, → Daly Waters → Broome. 26/2 departs Broome for Java, carrying urgently needed supplies. Over Java, Semplak airport closed bad weather; eventual force-landing near Djambi, aircraft written off.

PK-ALO (c/n 1937) KNILM evacuation: Java → Broome 20/2/42 (eight civilians). 21/2 Broome → Sydney (pilot: Smirnoff), then → Broome & → Batavia 24/2 (pilot: Smirnoff). 26/2 → Broome (five+ civilians). Probably → Sydney; then → Java ~1/3; in hiding before departing Bandoeng 0045h 3/3 (pilot: Evert van Dijk); → Broome 0830h 3/3 & destroyed there.

PK-ALT (c/n 1941) *Torenvalk*. KNILM evacuation: Java → Broome 20/2/42 (seven civilians). 21/2 Broome → Sydney (pilot: de Roller); → Broome → Java 25/2 (pilot: de Roller). 28/2: Java → Broome (seven+ civilians). Probably → Sydney, before returning to fly WA shuttles. Known → Geraldton 7/3 with military load for Broome. 8/3 Departed Geraldton, destination unspecified. Probably one of the two Dutch Douglas' their pilots refused to fly north from Geraldton at this time.

PK-ALW (c/n 1944) *Wielewaal*. On return Middle East, → Medan, Sumatra 14/2/42 (pilot: Evert van Dijk); heavy sleeper-seats removed, enabling 36 women & children → Batavia 15/2; KNILM evacuation: Java → Broome 20/2 (eight civilians). 21/2 Broome → Sydney 21/2 (pilot: Blaak). Returned Broome; probably to Batavia 25/2 (pilot: E

Dunlop); By 3/3 hidden alongside highway near Bandoeng, awaiting evacuation of Governor, Dr van Mook.
Departed 0100h 7/3 (pilot: E Dunlop, eight+ civilians + van Mook). Flight 7 ½ hrs → Port Hedland → Perth 7/3.
This aircraft survives today at the Queensland Aviation Museum.

DOUGLAS DC-3-232 (AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL AIRLINES)

VH-UZJ (c/n 2002) flew evacuees from Wyndham 2/42.

VH-UZK (c/n 2003) chartered for evacuations 22/02/42: Sydney → Darwin; then flew evacuees Wyndham → Broome → Perth; 26/2 (pilot: Capt Baker) Maylands (carrying army personnel) → Geraldton (overnight); 27/2 assists with Broome → Perth flights, before → Adelaide 1/3; departed Adelaide 0440h 2/3 (15 personnel) → Darwin; → Adelaide, departing early 4/3 for Broome under instruction Lt-Col Legge; Alice Springs 5/3 advised not needed Broome; → Adelaide 5/3; → Melbourne → Sydney 6/3. Army charter cost £3,119.

DOUGLAS C-53 (USAAF)

41-20066 (c/n 4836) 2/42: Perth-Broome shuttles; 25/2/42 departed Broome (24 evacuees, mainly women & children) → Geraldton (overnight); 26/2 Geraldton → Maylands (evacuees disembarked); departed northwards & endeavoured to reach Broome that evening; but Broome accidentally overflowed in darkness; ran out of fuel & crash-landed 400 miles north of Broome. 1/3 After some confusion Qantas flying boat located & picked up four crewmen.

DOUGLAS DC-5-511 (KNILM)

PK-ADB (c/n 428) Java → Broome; → Sydney 3/3/42;

PK-ADC (c/n 424) Java → Broome 3/3/42 (departed just before raid); → Sydney 4/3 (16 passengers).

PK-ADD (c/n 426) Java → Broome; → Sydney 3/3/42

LOCKHEED HUDSONS (RAAF)

A16-115 (14 Sqn) 23/2/42 Pearce → Broome → Drysdale; exchanged signals with disabled *Koolama*, on return trip picked up some ex-Java RAAF men for the trip south.

A16-119 (14 Sqn) arrived Aust 12/41; assembled & to 14 Sqn, Pearce, 2/42; 2/3 Pearce → Onslow → Broome; destroyed Broome 3/3.

A16-89 (1 Sqn) → Java early 5/3/42 (six onboard) missed Port Hedland & landed at Roebourne after 11 hr flight.

A16-26 (1 Sqn) → Java early 6/3/42 (six onboard) missed Port Hedland & landed at landed in salt-pan at Mardie, 50 miles north Onslow, puncturing a tyre. 14 Sqn's A16-115 flew from Pearce with spare tyre, fuel & new pilot, enabling A16-26 fly out. A couple of days later A16-26, now with local knowledge, returned to north of Onslow to assist Dutch Lodestar LT908.

AE488 (1 Sqn) ex-RAF; → Java early 7/3/42 (six onboard); ran out of fuel as reached Port Hedland but landed safely.

LOCKHEED MODEL 10A ELECTRA (MACROBERTSON MILLER AVIATION)

VH-ABW (c/n 1131) busy, prominent role in evacuations. 19/2: Broome → Port Hedland → Perth; shuttling evacuees Broome → Perth; took supplies & personnel north; 1/3 Perth → Darwin (overloaded). 3/3: return leg; narrowly missed raids Wyndham & Broome; first into Broome after attack, loading 22 Dutch women & children; → Port Hedland; ferried

evacuees Broome → Port Hedland; evening: clipped propellers at Broome. Pilot Jimmy Woods continued flying on much shortened propellers. "Aviat" described as "commandeered by the US Army" for use around Port Hedland.

6/3 2120h → Broome; 7/3 to pick-up stranded evacuees Anna Plains on return leg from Broome.

LOCKHEED MODEL 10B ELECTRA (ANSETT AIRWAYS)

VH-UZO (c/n 1107) participated in evacuation of Broome. *

VH-UZP (c/n 1109) participated in evacuation of Broome. *

* one chartered 26/2/42 to transport ex-Java RAAF men Broome → Melbourne, alongside two RAAF DC-2s.

LOCKHEED MODEL 14 SUPER ELECTRA (KNILM)

PK-AFM (c/n 1411) 20/2/42 Java → Broome (ten civilians); 21/2 Broome → Sydney (pilot: van Balkom). 4/3 → Sydney.

PK-AFN (c/n 1414) 20/2/42 Java → Broome. 21/2 Broome → Sydney (pilot: Ekels). Departed Sydney ~ 24/2, → Daly Waters (~. 25/2) → Broome 26/2. 1/3 Java → Broome (ten civilians, incl three "Ekels" children, possibly pilot Ekels still with aircraft).

PK-AFP (c/n 1442) 9/2/42 damaged strafing attack Kemajoran, Not evac to Aust until after Jap landings, → Broome ~2/3; → Sydney 3/3 (six civilians). Damage probably never properly repaired; crashed 10/42 then two yrs being rebuilt "after suffering severe gunfire damage", in reference to original damage; scrapped 1945.

PK-AFQ (c/n 1443) 20/2/42 Java → Broome (eight civilians); 21/2 Broome → Sydney (pilot: Dunlop). Passenger list appears incl Dunlop's wife & child. 4/3 → Broome while flying WA shuttles (probably the "KNILM Lockheed" noted these duties after Broome raid). 5/3 0430h Broome → Port Hedland, carrying evacuees.

LOCKHEED MODEL 14 SUPER ELECTRA (WR CARPENTER & CO)

VH-ADT (c/n 1409) chartered evacuations 23/2/42 – 6/3/42. 25/2: Sydney → Brisbane → Darwin → Broome (two passengers to Broome incl Qantas pilot). From Broome → Perth → Adelaide. 2/3 departed Adelaide, for Broome via Darwin. Grounded Alice Springs engine trouble. Broome emergency past, so → Concurry → Sydney for engine change. charter cost £1,206; 45 ½ hrs.

LOCKHEED MODEL 18-40 LODESTAR (ML-KNIL)

LT907 departed Java early AM 6/3/42 (seven+ civilians) → Port Hedland → Pearce → Maylands (all 6/3).

LT908 7/3/42 one of three Lodestars departing hidden highway airstrip near Andir (seven+ civilians); landed in remote location north of Onslow. Assisted by Hudson A16-26 (presumably brought fuel). → Perth 8/3.

LT909 7/3/42 one of three Lodestars departing hidden highway airstrip near Andir (six civilians, incl five infants). Arrived probably Port Hedland → Perth (same day).

LT914 Java → Australia: no confirmed movements;

LT915 Java → Australia: no confirmed movements; destroyed Darwin 3/42

LT916 11/3/42 Mascot → Laverton. 12/3 Laverton → Parafield. At Mascot 16/3.

LT917 Java → Australia: no confirmed movements;

LT918 Java → Broome AM 3/3/42 (Winckel); destroyed during raid. Crewman, Charlie van Tuyn herded passengers into safety of nearby concrete pipes. Wife & son were killed at Carnot Bay.

LT919 Java → Australia: no confirmed movements;

- LT921 Java → Australia: no confirmed movements;
- LT923 5/3/42 flew Broome – Pearce – Maylands.
- LT924 4/3/42 Java → Perth probably via Port Hedland, (ten civilians); → Java ~ 5/3; one of three Lodestars departing hidden highway airstrip near Andir 3am 7/3 (Winckel; 14 passengers, incl six high-ranking RAF / RAAF officers); →Port Hedland → Perth 7/3.
- LT925 26/2/42 Java → Broome (seven+ civilians). 5/3 Broome → Pearce →Maylands. 8/3 → Geraldton refuelled & → Maylands.

MARTIN MODEL 139 WH-3 (ML-KNIL)

- M585 (c/n 843) departed Andir 7/3/42 (pilot: Lt PJP van Erkel) with nine onboard → Geraldton 8/3, probably via Port Hedland. Flown nine hrs from Java landed w. 30 mins fuel left. → Maylands same day.

SHORT EMPIRE FLYING BOAT (QANTAS EMPIRE AIRWAYS)

- Corinna* G-AEUC 8/2/42 Batavia→Tjilitjap→Broome; 1/3: Darwin → Broome; 2/3 departs Broome unsuccessful 10 hr search for *Circe*; 3/3: destroyed at Broome.
- Camilla* G-AEUB 16/2/42: Java→Broome; 18/2 Broome→Darwin; 28/2 ex-Sydney → Broome (with spare engine); 2/3 departs Broome, searches unsuccessfully for *Koolama*, →Wyndham, found *Koolama*. 3/3 departs Wyndham, picks up 24 *Koolama* survivors → Broome (soon after raid). Refuels → Port Hedland (as follow-up raid feared). 4/3 → Broome (early AM) loaded evacuees, → Port Hedland → Perth. 7/3 → Broome, loads QEA staff & equipment, → Port Hedland (7.30pm). 8/3 Port Hedland → Perth; 11/3 Perth → Port Hedland (with explosives for demolitions); not airworthy for regular work, so Port Hedland → Albany → Adelaide → Geelong → Sydney 18/3.
- Clifton* G-AFPZ 18/2/42 Batavia→Tjilitjap→Broome; → Darwin 22/2;
- Circe* G-AETZ 21/2/42 at Broome; 22/2 Broome→Tjilitjap; 24/2: Tjilitjap→Broome; 25/2 Broome →Tjilitjap; 26/2 Tjilitjap → Broome; 27/2 Broome → Tjilitjap; 28/2 departs Tjilitjap for Broome; shot down by Zeros. 20 killed.
- Corinthian* G-AEUF 21/2/42 ex-Sydney → Broome; 24/2 Broome→Tjilitjap; 25/2 Tjilitjap → Broome; 27/2 Broome → Tjilitjap; 28/2 Tjilitjap → Broome; 1/3 departs Broome, locates C-53 wreck & picks up four survivors; then → Darwin → Karumba → Townsville; crashed Darwin harbour 22/3/42
- Coriolanus* G-AETV 23/2/42 Broome → Tjilitjap; 24/2 Tjilitjap→Broome; 26/2 Broome → Tjilitjap; 27/2 Tjilitjap → Broome; 28/2 departs Broome for Tjilitjap, recalled by radio; searches unsuccessfully for missing C-53; 1/3 departs Broome for Sydney but → Wyndham (engine trouble); two days repairs; 3/3 departs two hrs before Wyndham raid.

SHORT EMPIRE FLYING BOAT (RAAF)

- A18-10 (ex-*Centaurus* G-ADUT) RAAF 33 Sqn; 2/42: Townsville - Port Moresby patrols. 1/3/42 Darwin → Broome; 2/3/42 aborted mission to Timor due to poorly stowed fuel drums. 3/3/42 part crew onboard when attack began; A18-10 first attacked; cannon fire chopped off starboard wing as crew escaped by inflatable dinghy. Loaded with fuel A18-10 soon in flames; sank at moorings.

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VIDEO

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Few Australians would be aware that the second deadliest air attack on Australia occurred in the northwest at Broome on 3 March 1942. That day a squadron of Zeros flew a daring and ultra-long range mission from Timor – the longest fighter mission ever flown. The timing was perfect – several flying boats packed full of evacuees had just landed. Over 80 people were killed, many of them Dutch women and children, and 22 large aircraft were destroyed.

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Peter Ingman, the grandson of an original Gallipoli Anzac, lives in Adelaide, South Australia. With a background as a business executive, Peter has had a life long interest in military history and his aviation in particular. Research and compiling aircraft history sections for *Zero Hour in Broome* taken him to previously undiscovered sources across Australia.

ISBN 978-0-9577351-5-6

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