

A Gentleman and a Rascal



LAURA COLE

Autobiography
by
Brian Buzzard

A Gentleman and a Rascal

**An autobiography
by
Brian Buzzard**

CHAPTER 12

My time on Liberator Heavy Bombers

Front Cover: I wish to thank artist Laura Cole for her kind permission to use the second painting from the triptych **Kimberley Grasses**.

Disclaimer: Every effort has been made to contact the people mentioned in this book, we apologise if any omissions have been made.

**Copyright 01997
Brian Buzzard
All rights reserved**

CHAPTER 12

My time on Liberator Heavy Bombers

I was informed that I was being transferred to Liberator Bombers with Bob Hirst, the captain of the crew. I had flown in Catalinas a lot with Bob and I knew that I was going to be with a very good, experienced pilot. He had been seconded to the RAAF from Qantas Airways because he had experience on British Sunderland flying boats before the war. He applied to fly on the Liberators because he realised that it would be four engine planes which would be used in civilian service after the war. Bob was like many of us who felt sure that he was going to get through the war. His theory proved to be correct because in most cases after the war, the Catalinas were scrapped and Liberators, which had been stripped of armament and equipment, were used for passenger and freight carriers for some time. Bob returned to Qantas and eventually took up a major position with the company. I did not want to leave the Catalinas, but after all that time in the RAAF, I had learnt to do as I was told and not to ask questions. In June, 1944, we flew to Port Moresby to do a conversion course on Liberators, with an American training unit. Some weeks later we were sent to Fenton Field, an American airbase, one hundred and twenty miles south of Darwin in the Northern Territory, to join the American 380 Bomb Group. We did thirteen bombing raids with them to get experience, before we formed our own squadron. In comparison to life at the Catalina bases, which were usually situated on the water, quite often near townships, the Fenton Field Base was in the middle of nowhere.



Liberator crew. Brian, 1st back left. Bob Hirst, 2nd right front. Colin Flood, 3rd back right.

We lived in tents and had few entertainments except those which we invented for ourselves. At that stage of the war, confidence was high because we were bombing the hell out of the Japanese bases in Sumatra, Java and Timor.

One day at Fenton I had an enjoyable visit with a cousin of mine named John Brown. He had hitch-hiked down from Batchelor Airfield about sixty miles north of Fenton, and the same truck was going back later that day. It was good to see him and I opened up the fridge, which was in our tent, to remove some of our saved up bottles of the amber fluid. I would rather not comment on how we acquired the fridge or some of the fine timber which we used to make a top deck to the tent. I slept up there under the stars to avoid the heat. As lunchtime approached I kept chewing it over in my mind how I was going to get him into our mess because John was a Sergeant. The other three aircrew officers in our tent were all wilder than me. Two of them had been through the mill on Lancasters, bombing Germany, and Fred Thompson, the other member of our tent had been with me on Catalinas. After a few beers, I mentioned that I would take John down to meet our Sergeant crew members and that they could take him to the Sergeant's Mess. Flight Lieutenant Bob Appleton, our bomb

aimer from Sydney said " No, bugger that idea, here is one of my shirts. " It had officers epaulets on the shoulders. "We will make him an officer for the day. " John joined us for lunch and no one was any the wiser. I did not see John again until after the war and he recalled the incident.

John decided to join the priesthood. He went to Rome and America to do his studies which took about eight years. When he finished he was a priest in the Franciscan Order. He was given jobs all over Australia, one where he was in charge of delinquent youths at a government reform school in Melborne. He is still sent out on special jobs, to give retreats. The last one was in Geraldton. He calls to see me regularly and gives me his special blessing, and arranged with the Manning Catholic priest to come over to the TPI Hostel to give me communion every Sunday. The Franciscans must be a very good crowd because they look after their priests. He has had a couple of holidays back in Rome and in the United States where he did his training. John is a very sincere person and has earned his retirement pleasures. He is a great Docker's man and so am I.

Fred Thompson, who shared our tent at Fenton was also an "early bird" on Cats. At Rathmines, he was in the group which was called together in the common room to listen to an Airboard high ranker tell about 20 of us that had been selected to crew the RAAF's latest acquisition, the Liberator. He went on to tell us that because of our previous experience and the fact that the Liberators were built by the Consolidated Aircraft Company of the USA and had the same radio navigation aids, engines, pilot and engineers cockpit instruments as the Catalina, we had been specially selected for the important job of crewing Liberators. He went on to say how costly the Liberators were and that he knew that with us they would be in good hands. We knew that it was all bulldust but did not have any option but to accept the transfer as being all in a day's work.

I was in a different crew to Fred, but was with him in 20 Squadron in Cairns when his crew took off one afternoon to drop supplies to the AIF commandoes in the Solomon Islands, a trip of about sixteen hours, plus the time taken to do the job. Supply dropping can be very hazardous

because you can only do it at night so that the Commando positions are not disclosed. It also needed a moonlight night to get down to about one hundred and fifty feet. It took a fair while because we only had a small area in which the troops and not the Japanese could get the supplies, otherwise they had to be dropped in the jungle where they would be difficult to find. Fred's aircraft had nearly completed the drop when the weather closed in on them. It can do that very quickly and without warning in the tropics. While trying to get out of the valley without any vision and relying on some prayers to the chap above, who does not always seem to listen, Fred's aircraft hit a hill and half the crew were killed. They must have been in the right area because the Commandos heard the loud noise and realised what had happened.

They searched the area where the explosion had come from and where they could see the flames. They found five men including Fred still alive. They took them to their headquarters where they were given first aid and they went back to the crash the next day to bury what they could find of the rest of the crew's remains. One of those saved, died the next day. Two others who were unable to walk properly were captured by the Japanese when they raided the commando base. They were probably executed by the Japanese bastards, as most airmen were. We had come to hate them with a passion. Fred lived and fought with the AIF for about two months before he was eventually taken off the island by an American submarine and was offloaded at Townsville some three weeks later. All together he was missing for over eleven weeks.

The squadron had written the crew off as missing, presumed dead, and Airboard had notified their next of kin. Fred and I shared a room at the Oceanic Hotel which the RAAF had taken over for accommodation, but not the bar thank goodness. I packed all of his personal effects and sent them to his wife in Adelaide with a note of condolence. We drank all of his saved up grog and another bloke had been put in his room with me. Imagine our surprise when he walked into the hotel some weeks later. We all had a great celebration in the downstairs bar. The reason we did not know of his rescue was because the AIF Commandos and the submarine

were on radio silence, except for really important messages. War can be very cruel to the ones you leave behind at home and I often wondered how my mother managed to smile when she had three sons and a son-in-law away, all in the RAAF, three of them in aircrew. I still keep in touch with Fred who returned to work at the Adelaide Nail and Rope Company where he had worked as an accountant before the war.

While we were attached to the American bomber group at Fenton, the CO of the unit, Captain Cesario, came to our tent and asked my skipper, Bob Hirst, if he could borrow me for a day, because he had heard that I was a West Australian. The "bush telegraph" had informed them that the ship, Kybra had just called at Broome with a cargo of goods which included a large supply of beer and spirits. The CO wanted to know if I knew Broome and the liquor supply store, Streeter and Male. I knew Male because I had played football against him when I was at Christian Brothers College in Perth and he was at Guildford Grammar. They wanted me to go over to Broome with them to buy some grog.

We set out next morning on a navigational exercise. We had half a dozen of their navigators on board who needed to get some experience. The Americans were rather hopeless at navigation and tended to rely on the radio to get from point A to point B. They had not been taught astro-navigation by the stars and were in trouble when they had to fly at night over the northern parts of Australia, where radio silence was observed because of the proximity of the Japanese bases. I was their wireless officer for the day. When we landed in Broome we were greeted by the RAAF Commanding Officer (CO) who controlled Broome Air Base. We had loaded up with six cases, not cans, of cigarettes which were to be used to barter for the jeep and truck we needed to move the supplies. Each case contained fifty cartons of cigarettes in packets of twenty. We gave a few cartons to the RAAF CO and he lent us his vehicles and drivers to take us into Broome to the liquor store where we continued our bargaining. More cigarettes were handed out before we loaded the truck with beer and whisky.

I renewed my acquaintance with young Male and he took us, as his guests, to the Roebuck Hotel. At the hotel we managed to exchange a few more cartons of cigarettes for some scotch whisky. We took our load back to the Liberator and managed to fill the plane with thirty six cases of Swan lager, each holding five dozen bottles per case, wrapped in straw in deal boxes. The rest of the liquor was in smaller cartons and the whole amount filled the plane completely. We thanked our RAAF friends for their assistance and set off back to Fenton. I was told to relay a message to Fenton, "Navigational exercise successful". All together it took six hours, twenty five minutes flying time. We took the plane up to twenty five thousand feet and by the time we got back to Fenton, the booze was nice and cold. It did not last long because there were a lot of men there with a long thirst. Liberator Bombers use a hell of a lot of fuel so I imagine that it was a rather costly exercise, to fly to Broome and back, all at the expense of the American taxpayer.

Broome had been heavily bombed and strafed only days before we arrived there, sinking flying boats in the water and destroying Hudsons, DC3's and Liberators on the air field. Twenty six aircraft were destroyed including ten flying boats. Most of the civilians had been evacuated and that is why they had a surplus of grog in town. We did our job rather quickly and did not dally over lunch because we did not want to be there if the Japanese came over again to bomb the town and our Liberator on the airstrip. There were many humorous incidents during the war, a lot of them about food. On the whole, food was wholesome but boring. When we were stationed up north we mostly had dehydrated and canned foods which in the wrong hands could be pretty dreadful. The cooks were well trained, but as with all jobs, there were those who had a feel for it and those that did not. Eating good, tasty food depended on the supplies available and the skill and the attitude of the cook. It was the custom for the orderly officer of the day to visit both the airman's and the sergeants mess each day to enquire if there were any complaints. One day he came around and said he had a question to ask about the cook, because the cook had laid a complaint and was upset. The question asked was, "Who called the cook a bastard?" and a voice replied, "Who called the bastard a

cook?" It was much more difficult to adjust to the food after the war because of the rationing and scarcity of certain food items.

In my opinion, flying in Liberators was a much more hazardous job than on Cats because we did most of our bombing and reconnaissance flights in the Liberators in daylight. The Japanese fighter planes were not very effective at night because they were not equipped with radar like our planes were. But in daylight they were a different proposition. They were as good as or better than any fighters had by the RAAF. The only fighters at that time able to compete with them was the British Spitfire which did a good job defending Darwin late in the war. Then, for some reason, they were stationed at Exmouth Gulf when the war had shifted one thousand miles away towards Sumatra, Java, the Celebes, Borneo and close to the Philippines.

We also had great respect for the Japanese naval anti-aircraft fire which we called "ack-ack" for short. The shore based army ack-ack was no great detriment to us because, as the popular saying at the time was, "They couldn't hit a bull in the arse if they were leaning on it". We had a couple of nasty experiences with their navy when we bombed Mangapat in the Celebes. I was not with my regular crew and aircraft. I was on loan for the day because Fred Thompson caught a wog and was grounded. Changing crews always puts a hoodoo on you and none of us liked to have to go out with a different crew. I was forced to do quite a lot of it as I was in charge of the WAG's in the Squadron and could never get anyone else to volunteer. It was not that they were scared but because of the hoodoo. There was quite a lot of Japanese shipping in the harbour, including a heavily armed cruiser with a high range of ack-ack. It was April, 1944 and as we passed near the harbour to get to our target we were caught in a wall of ack-ack. When you are bombing a target it takes quite a few minutes, which felt like hours, of straight flying at a certain speed at the same height, to give the bomb aimer a chance to line up his bomb sight, and to bomb accurately.

We were riddled with .5 size bullets but fortunately there were no heavy shells, although they were exploding all around us. Thank God they did not hit the wings or we would have gone up in flames because our wings carried the fuel. One incendiary bullet landed in my radio set in front of me. It put the radio out of action but did not explode into flames as it was supposed to do. I kept that bullet for some years, but eventually gave it to a chap named Ian Murray who farmed at Toodyay, because he was getting together a collection of war relics. I also gave Ian some Japanese counterfeit Australian pound notes which had been printed ready for the invasion of Australia. Our tail gunner did not fare so well, he copped a bullet right in the fleshy part of his bottom. It must have nearly spent its force because we were at a height of about nine thousand feet. It was still embedded in his bum and hearing his calls for help over the intercom, the skipper kept talking to him to calm him down until we got well away from our target. It was only then that myself and another crew member grabbed the first aid box and dragged him out of his turret. Getting him out of the turret was a hell of a job because he was a big lad and he was semi-conscious with a loss of blood and was unable to help us much.

The beer and scotch run to Broome.

Date	Hour	Aircraft Type and No.	Pilot	Duty	Reasons (including results of bombing, gunnery, exercises, etc.)	Time carried forward	
						1070.45	1388.45
						Flying Times	
						Day	Night
5-8-44	0630	B2A-171	CPT. CESARIO	NAV TRIP	FENTON - BROOME	3.15	
5-8-44	1300	B2A-171	CPT. CESARIO	"	BROOME - FENTON	3.45	
7-8-44	1030	B2A-247	F/L HIRST	FERRY TRIP	FENTON - DARWIN	4.5	
13-8-44	0730	B2A-790	F/L HIRST	* RAID	DARWIN, NAMLEA (TURNED BACK)	3.35	
17-8-44	1430	B2A-56	F/L HIRST	C & L	DARWIN LOCAL	1.30	
19-8-44	0700	B2A-222	F/L HIRST	* SHIPPING RECCE	DARWIN BOEROE ISL.	9.20	
23-8-44	0700	B2A-475	F/L HIRST	* BOMBING RAID	DARWIN LANGESER	7.00	
26-8-44	0900	B2A-125	F/L HIRST	* BOMBING RAID	DARWIN LAMPA (LASSON)	8.15	
31-8-44	0700	B2A-790	F/L HIRST	* BOMBING RAID	DARWIN LIANG CAPE CARTER	9.00	
TOTAL FOR AUG						46.25	

The beer and scotch run to Broome with the American :
C/o Capt. Joe Cesario

Bill Hunt
Flt

Liberator Heavy Bombers, operating out of Truscott, near Kalumburu Mission in the Kimberley.

Date	Hour	Aircraft Type and No.	Pilot	Duty	Time carried forward		
					13/7-35	342-30	
					Flying Times		
					Day	Night	
1-3-45	1340	A73-69	P/L HIRST	TRAVEL	FENTON TO TRUSCOTT	03.30	
2-3-45	0715	A73-69	P/L HIRST	BOMBING RAID	TRUSCOTT - BANJENANGI TRAVEL-TRUSCOTT	11.50	
3-3-45	0920	A73-69	P/L HIRST	TRAVEL	TRUSCOTT TO FENTON	02.15	
4-3-45	0700	A73-64	P/L HIRST	PRACTICE BOMBING SHIPPING REEF	FENTON LOCAL	04.15	
9-3-45	0440	A72-55	P/L HIRST	BOMBING RAID	FENTON - BEOGISA BANGAI MINES	12.00	02.10
12-3-45	1850	A72-72	P/L HIRST	TRAVEL	FENTON - TRUSCOTT		
13-3-45	0705	A72-72	P/L HIRST	BOMBING RAID	TRUSCOTT - MARIN - TRUSCOTT	09.10	
14-3-45	0910	A72-72	P/L HIRST	TRAVEL	TRUSCOTT - FENTON	03.25	
15-3-45	1010	A72-56	P/L HIRST	TEST SHIPPING REEF BOMBED S.D	FENTON - LOCAL	01.05	
17-3-45	0640	A72-63	P/L HIRST	TRAVEL SHIPPING REEF & RAID	FENTON - BORGES ISL - DARWIN	12.00	
18-3-45	1330	A72-64	P/L EVANS	TRAVEL SHIPPING REEF & RAID	DARWIN - FENTON BORGES	00.45	
25-3-45	0645	A72-55	P/L HIRST	TRAVEL SHIPPING REEF BOMBED S.D	BORGES ISL - PASANBATA	12.00	01.00
28-3-45	0420	A72-69	P/L HIRST	BOMBING RAID	FENTON - EAST ALBERTS ISL - MADE-MESE	12.00	01.00
TOTAL FOR MARCH						82.15	4.10
<i>K. G. Bradman of O.C. 'B' Flight.</i>							
Total Time						1399.40	346.40

1629-85

Operating out of Morotai South of the Philippines.

Date	Hour	Aircraft Type and No.	Flak	Duty	Time carried forward	
					Day	Night
2-4-45	0640	A72-69	F/L HIRST *	SHIPPING-RECCO	1200	01.15
3-4-45	1830	A72-69	F/L HIRST *	BOMBING. PAR.	04.10	
6-4-45	0455	A72-69	F/L HIRST *	BOMB CRUISER		
6-4-45	1745	A72-69	F/L HIRST *	TRAVEL.		
10-4-45	0850	A72-69	F/L HIRST *	TRAVEL.		
13-4-45	0730	A72-69	F/L HIRST *	BOMBING RAID		
16-4-45	0715	A72-69	F/L HIRST *	BOMBING RAID		
19-4-45	0730	A72-69	F/L HIRST *	BOMBING RAID		
30-4-45	0730	A72-74	F/L HIRST *	BOMBING RAID		
26-4-45	0815	A72-69	F/L HIRST *	BOMBING RAID		
28-4-45	0830	A72-69	F/L HIRST *	BOMBING RAID		
<i>K. G. ... OC 3rd Lt.</i>						
TOTAL FOR APRIL					83.55	01.15
Total Time					1483.35	347.55

1746.20

1399.40 346.40

Flying Times

Day Night

447... (including results of bombing, gunnery, exercises, etc.)

CELEBES - TIMOR AREA

FENTON LOCAL

SOMBRA STRAIGHTS - 2 LIBS SAMPAN

TRUSCOTT - FENTON

FENTON - (PITOE) MOROTAI

MOROTAI - TANARU NE BORNEO

MOROTAI - TAARAN AIR WELLS BORNEO

MOROTAI - TARRAKAN

MOROTAI - MANGGAR STRAID BALINPAPAN

MOROTAI - MAPPANGAT (CELEBES)

MOROTAI - FOMANI "

TOTAL FOR APRIL

Total Time

1483.35 347.55

Liberators covering the A.I.F. landings in Labuan, Brunei Bay from Puerto Princesa Philippines.

Date	Hour	Aircraft Type and No.	Pilot	Duty	Time arrived forward	
					Day	Night
3-6-45	1200	A72-53	FL MOORE	TRAVEL	6:00	184 6-10
7-6-45	0615	A72-71	FL HIRST *	BOMBING RAID	5:10	247.55
8-6-45	0900	A72-109	FL HIRST	TRAVEL A.I.F. COVER	5:10	
10-6-45	0900	A72-78	FL HIRST *	COVERING BUENAVISTA BAY	10:05	
11-6-45	0900	A72-56	FL HIRST *	COVERING LABUAN ISL	10:00	
13-6-45	0815	A72-68	FL HIRST *	COVERING LABUAN ISL	5:45	1:30
14-6-45	1145	A72-179	FL HIRST	TRAVEL BALIKPAPAN	4:50	
16-6-45	0700	A72-60	FL HIRST *	BOMBING RAID (LABUAN)	10:40	
17-6-45	0700	0700	FL HIRST *	BOMBING RAID	10:00	
20-6-45	0850	A72-161	FL HIRST *	BOMBING RAID	7:40	
25-6-45	0700	A72-72	FL HIRST *	BOMBING RAID	9:40	
28-6-45	0645	A72-105	FL HIRST *	BOMBING RAID	10:30	
TOTAL FOR JUNE					95:20	1:30

Total Time 1893.35 349.35

When we got him out, we pulled his pants down and put a pad and plenty of flavine from the first aid box on to the wound. We held it there tightly to stop the flow of blood. We gave him a few pain killers to help him until he got back to Morotai where there was an ambulance waiting to take him to the Morotai Base Hospital. They sent him back to Darwin on the first aircraft going south. I understand that he recovered well because the doctors managed to get the bullet out of him. After a few months he was back in the squadron again. I did not see him again after his ordeal because I had been posted back to Australia.

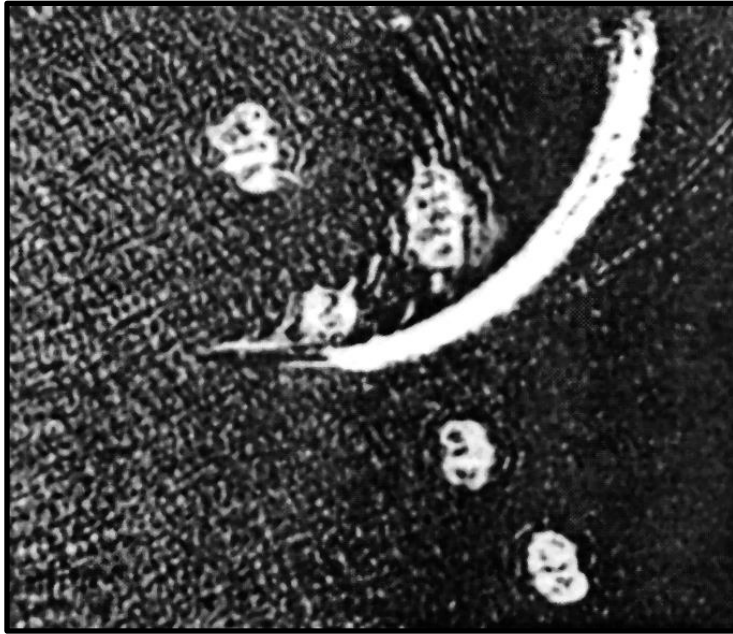
On the 6th April, 1944, nine Liberators were sent out from Fenton Field to attack a cruiser near the island of Soemba, not far from Bali where the Japanese had a fighter squadron at Denpasar airstrip. The Japanese navy was evacuating troops out of Timor when one of our aircraft spotted them just as they were leaving Timor. A Catalina was alerted to shadow them constantly. The Japanese convoy consisted of a cruiser named the Isuzu, a couple of destroyers and a few flack, ack-ack, ships. Our job was to get the cruiser which had been reported by our intelligence to be carrying most of the evacuee soldiers. We found the convoy without much trouble because a Catalina was still shadowing it and it was able to give us the longitude and the latitude. The flight commander had instructions to make two runs over the cruiser to drop half our bombs each time. Some "shiny-bum" officer in headquarters must have made that decision because it was suicide. Approaching the target in close formation you become "sitting ducks" for the naval ack-ack and to make matters worse, a number of Japanese fighters came out and attacked us, shooting one Liberator down. I saw five chaps get out in their parachutes but the plane burst into flames, so six men went down with it.

When we made the first run to drop half the load of bombs we only had near misses, so we circled around to prepare for the second run when we were attacked again by the fighters. We claim to have shot down three of their planes but on the way in for the second bomb drop, the fighters got another one of us. It was reported that six managed to jump out of the

second plane in their parachutes and the others went down with the plane when it also caught on fire. We had more success on the second run because we hit the Isuzu. We did not sink her but we damaged her enough to force her to sail at a considerably reduced speed. We heard that an American submarine sank it later that night in the Sunda Straits.

Our next job was to see what we could do for our eleven mates in the water who were all equipped with Mae-west life jackets, which we all wore when we were going over targets in the ocean.

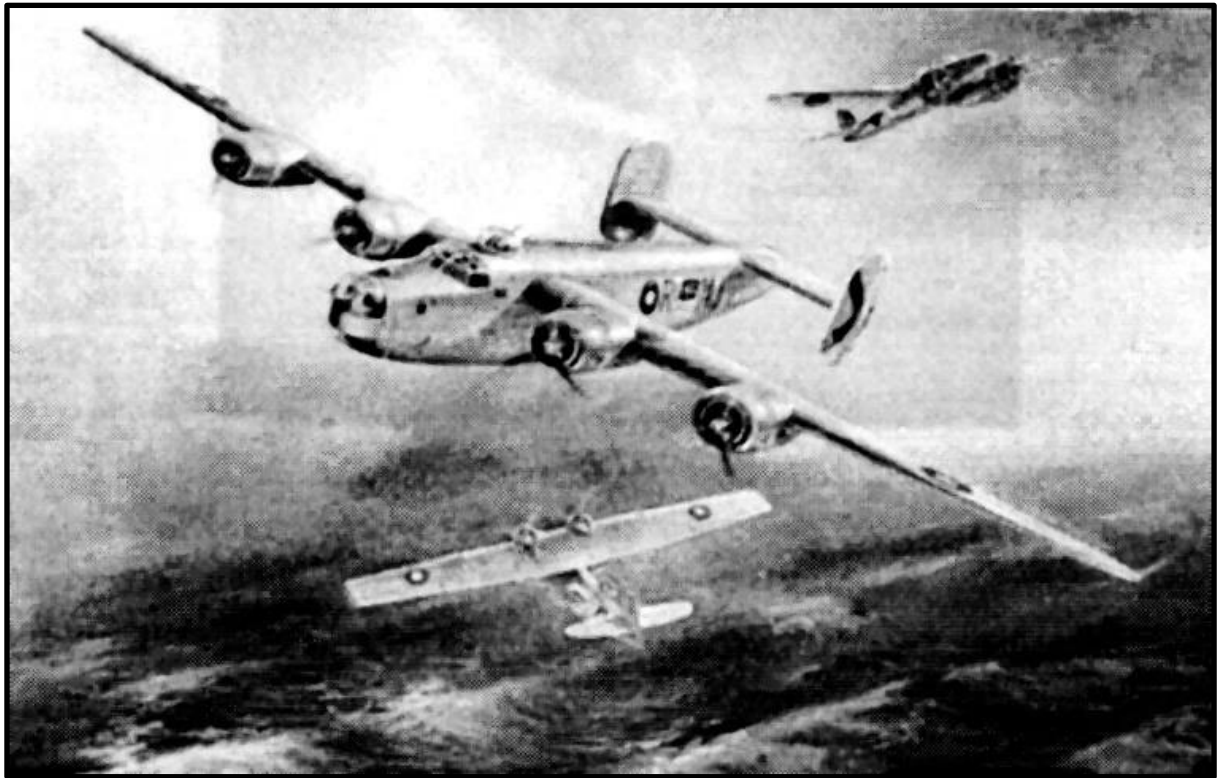
The Liberators dropped their own rubber dinghies which should have opened up when they hit the water. Another crew member and I got ours out, but it takes time because it is packed away and you had to open the bomb bay doors and stand on a twelve to eighteen inch platform and hang on to anything you could find, otherwise you could easily go out with the dinghy. Because we were flying at only two to three hundred feet, we saw one survivor swim towards and get into the one we had managed to throw out. It was the only dinghy anyone got into because some of them did not open. The survivors were stretched out over at least ten miles of water and when the sea became rough it was impossible to throw the lifeboats out accurately. After the show was over, we discovered that it was Keith Shilling, a school teacher from WA, who had the luck to have ours dropped right near him and have it open as expected.



**The cruiser Isuzu takes evasive action against the falling bombs.
Ref: SEA Magazine p.24.**

We had been in touch with the shadowing Catalina and had reported all that had happened. They came to pick up as many of the boys as they could. The Catalina (Cat) landed and managed to rescue only three. The first was Keith Shilling because they were able to spot him easily in the yellow coloured rubber dinghy. Those that were left in their Mae-weests were hard to see in the rough sea. The Liberators kept flying round and round the Cat to keep it protected from the fighters who were still attacking.

One fighter got through our cordon and strafed the Cat on the water. It caught on fire but the Cat crew and three Liberator (Lib) survivors got out in their dinghy as well as the one in which Keith Shilling was found. Keith had been badly burnt before he bailed out of the Lib so the Cat crew stripped him of all of his clothes to try to ease his pain. He told me later that he was literally thrown out of the Cat stark naked and that the salt water did not help. He remembers the Cat skipper calling out to him, "Swim you bastard, swim. " It was fortunate that another Catalina was in the area, on its way back to base after doing another job close to us.



**Liberator protecting the flying boat. Top right, Japanese Zero.
Middle, Liberator Bomber. Bottom, Catalina.**

They were stationed at West End which is on the tip of Truscott airstrip in the Kimberleys near Kalumburu Mission. It took a bit over an hour to get to us. The seven Libs that were left continued to protect the crew of the Cat and its three Lib survivors. We kept flying around and around at about three hundred feet in a tight formation of two or three. Fortunately the Japanese fighters must have run out of fuel and returned to Denpasar I said a lot of Hail Mary's during that time. It was the longest hour I have ever spent. All the crew prayed to the bloke up above to help us, although some did not admit it. I never ever met an atheist in any crew in the RAAF.



**"Warrant Officer Keith Shilling...
his guardian angel worked overtime."**

Ref: SEA Magazine p.22.

The second Catalina crew had Alex Cumming, who is a farmer at Byford, as its engineer. While we were waiting for the other Cat to arrive, I had a talk with my skipper, Bob Hirst, whom I had flown with on many occasions in Catalinas. I could see that the ocean was getting rougher and I asked

him could he land the Catalina in this sea. He said that he would not like to, but in the circumstances he would have a go. When the second Cat arrived, it landed as near as it could to the dinghies which had been tied together. When it hit the water it must have jumped thirty or more feet into the air and then it settled down into the sea. I thought that it could have easily broken its back because they can crack nearly in half if they are not handled properly on a rough water landing. It taxied up to the two dinghies and picked up the survivors. Unfortunately, they had no chance of seeing the others who were still in the water in their Mae-wests, because the ocean was too rough and a few fighters had returned to add to our problems. We flew along both sides of the Cat until it got well on its way towards Darwin. We had only just enough fuel left to get home to Fenton.

MINE LAYING MANILLA BAY PHILIPPINES

4 December 1944

25 Catalinas from 4 squadrons, No's 11, 20, 42, 43 left Darwin. (No 11 squadron flew from Rathmines N.S.W. for the operation, refuelled at Darwin and joined the other three.)

All aircraft refuelled at Woendi (near Biak) en-route to Jinamoc (Leyte Gulf) Philippines, carrying new type American mines capable of operating in up to 30 fathoms of water.

The crews left Jinamoc with very little information as to the defence of Manilla, or amount of distribution of shipping in the harbour relating to the mine-dropping operation.

All aircraft serviceability was extremely good, only one aircraft failed to participate. Our 11 squadrons returned to Rathmines each six aircraft had flown near 9000 miles (14,463 km) thus making it the longest single wartime operation carried out by the R.A.A.F., and as far as records show the longest mission by any allied aircraft during the war.

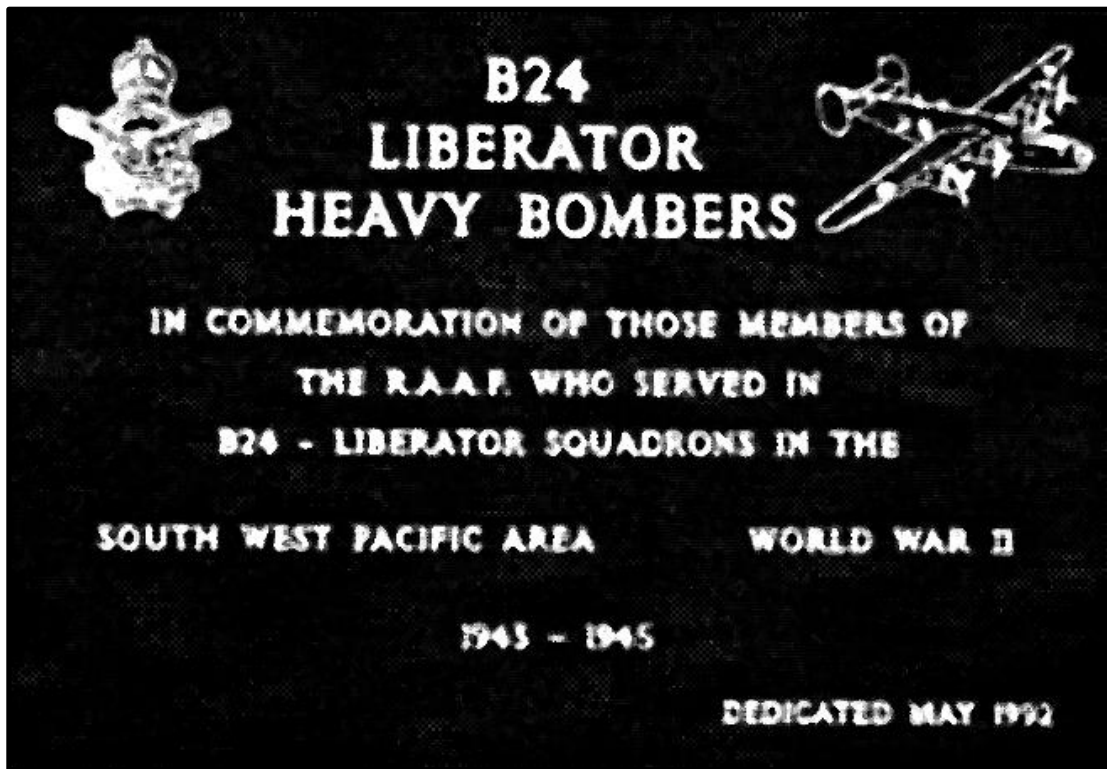
One aircraft failed to return A24-64 from 43 squadron.

Missing crew members:

J.H. COX, H.C. ROBERTS, R.C. HARBOUR, R.H. BROADSTREET,
F.N. SILVESTER, D.J. ALBERT, H.S. GOODCHILD, J.C. Mc DONALD,
J.R. ROBERSTON.

Report on one of the wartime exercises. I do not take any credit for this remarkable feat except help to train some of the wireless-operators.

It was a sad day for us because we lost nineteen out of the twenty two crewmen manning the aircrafts, but everyone had done their best. For nine or ten men who went down in the planes, it was virtually instant death, but for the others who were floating around in their Mae-weests it would have been a horrible death. They would have been eaten by sharks or they would have been shot in the water by the sadistic Japanese fighter pilots for target practice. It would never have happened in Europe because there was an unwritten law never to fire on your enemy bailing out in a parachute or in the water. Memories of leaving those mates, some of whom you trained with and flew with in action on many a rough trip and became as close as brothers, and can never be erased from my mind. "Lest we forget. " I know that Keith Shilling and Colin Flood feel the same. You cannot ever forget them. That night in Fenton, we drank all of our saved up beer and spirits to drown our sorrows and to have a wake for the ones we left behind. Keith Shilling was sent back to WA to have his burns treated and as soon as he was passed fit he was sent back to the squadron. I often see Keith at Liberator squadron lunches at Bull Creek, WA. We made him an honorary member of the Catalina Club because he is one of the only chaps in the world to have been rescued twice in one day by a Catalina. I also meet Alex Cumming at our Catalina meetings, but we rarely discuss the incident. Keith knows that I was instrumental in throwing him the dinghy and I jokingly always hold it over him that he owes me a favour when I need some help or advice. He is a great bloke and worth saving. Since he retired from the Education Department he is always willing to help out many charitable organisations and he is a good friend.



The plaque at Darwin to commemorate the crews of the liberator bombers.

In 1992 accompanied by Andrew, my eldest Grandson, I attended a ceremony in Darwin at which a plaque was unveiled and dedicated to the RAAF crews who gave their lives on Liberators in the South West Pacific. It was held in conjunction with the American 380th Bomb group with whom most of us spent some time in training and operations. Over fifty Americans came out and attended the function. I only remembered two of them as it was over fifty years since I had seen them and a great number had passed on.