

A Gentleman and a Rascal



LAURA COLE

Autobiography
by
Brian Buzzard

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CHAPTER 7

My first taste of war

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.

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CHAPTER 7

My first taste of war

The first Catalina I was allocated to, was shot up and sunk by the Japanese, on the water at Pott Moresby while all of our crew were ashore. That was half the squadron destroyed, because, on the day before, three others had been sunk and we lost three or four others in the Battle of the Coral Sea. Because the Battle of the Coral Sea was raging at that time, it was decided that we should retreat with the remnants of the squadron to Cairns, away from the fighter attacks. While we were moored in Port Moresby, we remained "sitting ducks". With the arrival of some more Catalinas from America, we were able to operate efficiently again. The Japanese had taken Rabaul, the north coast of New Guinea and, at around the same time, the Solomon Islands. The Japanese were defeated for the first time when they tried to capture Milne Bay. My brother Millar, who was on Hudson Bombers at the time, was in the thick of the action at Milne Bay.

At that time, while out on patrol in our Catalina, covering the convoy of troops and supplies making its way to Milne Bay, we landed, picked up and brought back to Townsville for interrogation by the army, three Japanese prisoners of war. I will never forget my first bombing raid. It was in the Solomon Islands at a place called Buka. It had been built by the Japanese and was a fairly large base. We dropped eight, two hundred and fifty pound bombs on their new buildings. There was not so much heavy ack-ack but we had trouble keeping out of their search lights. We had to make three runs over the target before we could drop all the bombs. I was sure glad to get back to Cairns as that had been my christening for action against the enemy. That mission continued, non-stop for nineteen hours and twenty five minutes.

On many occasions, we were short of bombs and on some occasions we only took a half load of two hundred and fifty pound bombs which were attached under our wings. However, because we were always short of

bombs, we were regularly loaded up with empty beer and cool drink bottles which were dropped over the Japanese air-raid trenches. The main idea was to go over a Japanese base, particularly over the sleeping quarters and the slit trenches where they went to during a bombing raid, to keep the bastards awake half the night. The beer bottles made a hell of a whistling noise which was not able to be distinguished from the noise made by a twenty five pounder. The slit trenches were usually flooded with about six inches of water and were full of mosquitoes. That was the case with our own trenches as well. It was at those times that the troops, both Japanese and ours were most likely to catch malaria, which many of them did. A base with half of the troops down with malaria could not operate, and when many of those bases in New Guinea and Borneo were retaken by the AIF or by American troops, they found that the Japanese were in a very low state of health and full of malaria. Hygiene was a very low priority for them and their medical supplies were very meagre.

In contrast to the Japanese and with the Americans, the Australian troops were very strict on hygiene and toilet facilities. The toilets were built well away from the camp and were disinfected regularly. Our troops were also issued with Atebrin tablets to combat malaria. It had a very good success rate. You could always pick a man who had been on Atebrin for a few months because he went a similar colour to the Asian races and from a distance you could not pick the difference. Any troops who arrived back in Australia after about nine months in the Islands were the same colour as the Japanese. It took about two or three months for the colour to fade from the skin when you went off the Atebrin.

Atebrin seemed to do its job and keep malaria away but the Dengue Fever had nothing to combat it and you were put into a makeshift RAAF hospital to recover. I became ill with it in Cairns and could not fly for three weeks. It is worse than malaria because you shiver and shake and have hallucinations. When you stop sweating after about two weeks, you finally seem to be on the mend and are able to eat your first small meal. All through the illness you have an insatiable thirst and despite all of the liquids you take, it never seems to quench that thirst. Because the Cairns

and Townsville hospitals were both full of Dengue Fever patients, during the last week of the illness I was sent to a private home where a kindly woman nursed me like a child and I eventually got over it. The best part about the illness is that you never get it again like you do with malaria. We were told that the system builds up an immunity and it would be a very long time before you could get it again. Thank goodness I had only one bout of it, because I just wanted to die then.

After twelve months up north and on completion of one thousand and five hours flying time in Catalinas and fifty six operational flights against the Japanese, I was transferred back to Rathmines. It was there that I met my wife-to-be, Don Dymock. She was introduced to me by Noel McKnight, my cousin, who was a pilot with the Mariners Aircraft and stationed at Rathmines. I was very attracted to her, so we started going out together.

Crossing the Pacific Australia to America.

American crew in a transport plane
with seats along the sides, no heating.
We nearly froze until given blankets at our first stop.
Quicker than a Cat only 40 hrs 20 mins flying time.

| | | | | | |
|-------------|------------|--------------|--------|--------------------------------------|-------|
| 1-6-43 0730 | LIB 124027 | CPT. FRENG | TRAVEL | AMBERLEY - PLEINGES DE-GUICAS - 0.35 | 4.00 |
| 1-6-43 0910 | LIB 124027 | CPT. FRENG | TRAVEL | PLEINGES DE-GUICAS - NAWADI (FIJID) | 4.20 |
| 2-6-43 0410 | LIB 124027 | CPT. FRENG | TRAVEL | NAWADI - CANTON ISL. | 5.50 |
| 2-6-43 1950 | LIB 124027 | CPT. FRENG | TRAVEL | CANTON ISL. HAWAII | 1.00 |
| 2-6-43 1920 | LIB 124027 | CPT. VAUGHAN | TRAVEL | HAWAII - SAN FRANCISCO | 5.50 |
| | | | | TOTAL FOR | 17.35 |
| | | | | NE | 22.45 |
| | | | | <i>for Seocullo \$4</i> | |

Extracts of Log Book
October 1942 - January 1943

| Date | Hour | Aircraft Type and No. | Pilot | Duty | Remarks (including results of bombing, gunnery, exercises, etc.) | Flying Times | |
|----------|------|-----------------------|-------------|---------------|---|--------------|-------|
| | | | | | | Day | Night |
| 3-10-42 | 1410 | PBY-A2422 | F/O SHIELDS | LANDINGS | BOWEN - LOCAL | 2.00 | |
| 17-11-42 | 1415 | PBY-A2422 | F/O SHIELDS | PATROL | SUBUN A LAE SALAMOR AREA CAIRNS | 7.15 | 12.00 |
| 20-11-42 | 1445 | PBY-A2422 | F/O SHIELDS | PATROL | MILNE BAY MUON GULF-CAIRNS | 7.40 | 12.00 |
| 26-11-42 | 1355 | PBY-A2424 | F/O SHIELDS | PATROL | BUN A - LAE AREA | 7.35 | 12.00 |
| 28-11-42 | 1420 | PBY-A2424 | F/O SHIELDS | PATROL | CAIRNS MUON GULF-CAIRNS | 6.00 | 12.00 |
| 30-11-42 | 1430 | PBY-A2424 | F/O SHIELDS | TEST | CAIRNS - LOCAL | 2.00 | |
| 1-12-42 | 1345 | PBY-A2424 | F/O SHIELDS | OPERATIONAL | CAIRNS - MUON GULF - BOWEN | 8.25 | 11.00 |
| 2-12-42 | 1355 | PBY-A2424 | F/O SHIELDS | TRAVEL BLIGHT | BOWEN - CAIRNS | 2.35 | |
| 3-12-42 | 1420 | PBY-A2424 | F/O SHIELDS | BOMBING RAID | CAIRNS - KAVIENG-CAIRNS | 7.00 | 11.00 |
| 6-12-42 | 0945 | PBY-A2424 | F/O SHIELDS | TEST FLIGHT | CAIRNS LOCAL | 0.45 | |
| 6-12-42 | 1445 | PBY-A2424 | F/O SHIELDS | BOMBING RAID | CAIRNS KAVIENG CAIRNS | 7.05 | 11.00 |
| 9-12-42 | 0555 | PBY-A2424 | F/O SHIELDS | CONVOY PATROL | CAIRNS OPERATION CAIRNS | 13.35 | |
| 11-12-42 | 1343 | PBY-A2424 | F/O SHIELDS | ASY PATROL | CAIRNS MUON GULF CAIRNS | 8.35 | 11.00 |
| 13-12-42 | 1420 | PBY-A2424 | F/O SHIELDS | CONVOY PATROL | CAIRNS OPERATION HORN IS | 6.35 | |
| 15-12-42 | 0720 | PBY-A2424 | F/O SHIELDS | CONVOY PATROL | HORN IS OPERATION HORN IS | 12.05 | |

| | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---|-------|-------|
| 9-1-43 | 1400 | PBY A24-24 | F/O SHIELDS * | OPERATIONAL | CAIRNS - PORT MORESBY | 5.50 | 11.00 |
| 9-1-43 | 2005 | A24-24 | F/O SHIELDS * | Bomb Convoy | PORT MORESBY - GASMATA - MILNE BAY | 1.05 | |
| 10-1-43 | 0900 | A24-24 | F/O SHIELDS * | OPERATIONAL | MILNE BAY - CAIRNS BACK OVER OWEN-STANLEY RANGES | 4.05 | |
| 12-1-43 | 1420 | A24-24 | F/O SHIELDS * | A.S.V. PATROL | * CAIRNS HUON GOLF - MORESBY | 6.30 | 11.00 |
| 13-1-43 | 0850 | A24-24 | F/O SHIELDS * | OPERATIONAL | MORESBY - CAIRNS | 4-10 | |
| 15-1-43 | 0630 | A24-27 | FLY. TAMBLYN | TRAVEL FLIGHT | CAIRNS - BOWEN | 2.35 | |
| 22-1-43 | 1030 | .14 | S/O HAMPSHIRE | TRAVEL FLIGHT | TOWNSVILLE - CAIRNS | 1.30 | |
| 24-1-43 | 1405 | A24-24 | F/O SHIELDS * | A.S.V. PATROL | CAIRNS - BUNIA - LAE - GASMATA | 8.50 | 11.00 |
| 27-1-43 | 1125 | A24-24 | F/O SHIELDS | TRAVEL FLIGHT | CAIRNS - BRISBANE | 8.00 | |
| 28-1-43 | 0905 | A24-24 | F/O SHIELDS | TRAVEL FLIGHT | CAIRNS - BRISBANE - RATHMINES | 3.15 | |
| 28-1-43 | 1430 | A24-24 | F/O SHIELDS | TRAVEL | RATHMINES - ROSE BAY | 08.45 | |
| 29-1-43 | 1005 | A24-24 | F/O SHIELDS | TRAVEL | ROSE BAY - LAKE BOGA | 3.20 | |
| TOTAL FOR JANUARY | | | | | | 94.10 | 58.05 |
| T. K. [Signature] | | | | | | | |
| NO. 20 SQUADRON, R.A.A.F. | | | | | | | |

Crossing the Pacific in a Catalina.
 Flying time altogether 67 hrs 25 mins.
 One flight San Dregoto Honolulu, 22 hrs 30 mins non stop.

| Date | Hour | Aircraft Type and No. | Pilot | Duty | Time carried forward | |
|---------|------|-----------------------|-------------|----------------|----------------------|--------|
| | | | | | Day | Night |
| 9-7-43 | 1345 | PBY-08489 | PLT BOLITHO | TEST FLIGHT | 1 20 | 266.30 |
| 9-7-43 | 1805 | PBY-08489 | PLT BOLITHO | FERRY - TURNED | 2 00 | 2.85 |
| 14-7-43 | 0930 | PBY-08489 | PLT BOLITHO | TEST | 4 50 | |
| 15-7-43 | 1115 | PBY-08489 | PLT BOLITHO | TEST | 50 | |
| 15-7-43 | 1640 | PBY-08489 | PLT BOLITHO | FERRY | 12 30 | 10.00 |
| 17-7-43 | 0910 | PBY-08489 | PLT BOLITHO | FERRY | 9 40 | |
| 17-7-43 | 1935 | PBY-08489 | PLT BOLITHO | FERRY | 6 55 | 10.00 |
| 19-7-43 | 1430 | PBY-08489 | PLT BOLITHO | TAXY | 20 | |
| 20-7-43 | 1710 | PBY-08489 | PLT BOLITHO | FERRY | 9 00 | 10.00 |
| 21-7-43 | 1400 | A2-18 | PLT LENNON | TRAVEL | 1 30 | |
| | | | | | 4 85 | 22.05 |
| | | | | | 05 | |

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

SAN DIEGO - LOCAL
 BACK - SAN DIEGO
 SAN DIEGO - SANTA BARBARA
 SAN DIEGO - LOCAL
 SAN DIEGO - KANEHOE
 KANEHOE - PALMYRA ISL.
 PALMYRA - SUVA
 SUVA - LOCAL
 SUVA - RATHMINES
 RATHMINES - ROSE BAY

for Catalina 5/2