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# Kiwi 'Drivers' and 'Lookers'

An Analysis and Examination of the Significant Contribution of New Zealand Fleet Air Arm Aircrew, of the British Pacific Fleet, to Allied Naval Operations 1944-1945

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
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## Abstract

This thesis addresses a neglected and under-researched area of New Zealand historiography in World War II: the contribution of New Zealand Fleet Air Arm aircrew serving with the British Pacific Fleet (BPF), from December 1944 to the end of hostilities with Japan in August 1945. The operational experiences, services and sacrifices of these airmen are examined within the wider context of New Zealand's diplomacy and strategy for the Pacific war. Three research questions are posited. First, what were New Zealand's different responses to Japanese military aggression in the Pacific, from 1941 to 1944, particularly in association with its allies? Second, what was the genesis of the British Pacific Fleet, and what were its structures and strategic functions? Third, in what ways did New Zealand aircrew contribute to the British Pacific Fleet's Air Arm operations from 1944 to 1945?

**In memory of my dearly loved eldest son,  
James David Lyon Thomson - 15 July 1983 to  
12 July 2011.  
Rest In Peace**

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## Introduction: Thesis Explanation and Discussion of Sources

During late 1945 Allied Prisoner of War Investigation teams began enquiries in Pacific and South East Asian territories previously occupied by Japanese forces. The investigators' focus was upon providing information of relief or closure to the relatives of Allied servicemen officially posted as 'missing' in the theatre, as well as bringing alleged war criminals to trial. Two New Zealand Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm pilots, Evan Baxter and John Haberfield, had been '... reported missing since 24<sup>th</sup> January 1945 ... their aircraft [having] failed to return to HMS *Illustrious* from an attack on [an oil refinery] at Palembang, Southern Sumatra'.<sup>1</sup> Information regarding the fate of the airmen was received from the Japanese military judicial authorities during enquiries made by the War Crimes Co-ordination Section, in Singapore, in late 1945.<sup>2</sup> These airmen were representative of a unique cohort of New Zealand World War II servicemen, whose history is yet to be fully researched.

This thesis addresses a neglected and under-researched area of New Zealand historiography in World War II: the contribution of New Zealand Fleet Air Arm aircrew serving with the British Pacific Fleet (BPF), from December 1944, to the end of hostilities with Japan in August 1945. The operational experiences, services and sacrifices of these airmen are examined within the wider context of New Zealand's diplomacy and strategy for the Pacific war. That a relatively small number of New Zealanders participated, on a global scale, does not diminish the historical significance of their contribution to the war against Japan.

Three research questions are posited. First, what were New Zealand's different responses to Japanese military aggression in the Pacific, from 1941 to 1944, particularly in association with its allies? This thesis begins by investigating the strategic situation, in 1941, of New Zealand in the Pacific, the objective being to understand the intersecting strands and overlapping spheres of New Zealand's

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<sup>1</sup> Admiralty to N.Z.N.B. 1287 OUT, 090518A/February, 9/2/45. 'Collated documents relating to the capture of Lts. Baxter and Haberfield and their subsequent execution by the Japanese', donated by D. Allison. RNZN Museum, Devonport, Auckland, New Zealand. FZP 0004/EZB 0018.

<sup>2</sup> New Zealand Naval Secretary to Mrs. M. Baxter, 4 February 1946, 'Collated documents ....'

diplomatic, political and military decision-making. Second, what was the genesis of the British Pacific Fleet, and what were its structures and strategic functions? Third, in what ways did New Zealand aircrew contribute to the British Pacific Fleet's Air Arm operations from 1944 to 1945?

There are four chapters: Chapter One analyses New Zealand's limited options and diplomatic frustrations in dealing with its major allies gripped, as it was, by fear of isolation and the threat of invasion by Japanese forces. Explanation of the strategic gestation, the composition and movement of the BPF, and the reasons why Sydney was chosen as its base, are outlined in Chapter Two. Chapter Three describes the airmen, aircraft and strategic purpose of the BPF and explains its activities from Ceylon (Sri Lanka), in late 1944 and early 1945, in preparation for the Fleet's main operations in the Pacific, later in 1945. Chapter Four is told from the New Zealand airmen's vantage point: this is marked by a shift in the register and tone of prose, to represent authentic and personal perspectives. Reflections upon the individual circumstances of particular 'Kiwi' pilots conclude this chapter. To borrow Prime Minister, Peter Fraser's words on the matter of New Zealand and the Pacific war, the naval airmen '... participated to the fullest possible extent'.<sup>3</sup>

However, telling the 'stories' of young men at war, as absorbing as they may be, has limited value unless broader historical circumstances are canvassed to provide context. Peter Fraser regularly voiced his intention, not always convincingly, for New Zealand to take the fight to Japan; he was thwarted, in part, by the logistics of the Dominion's geographical isolation and political marginalisation. Yet, pragmatism and the demographics of New Zealand's small population, alone, could not be held responsible for the military decisions the government made: New Zealand's largest military effort was deliberately maintained in Europe, not against Japan. It was not by design, but it is nevertheless the fact that New Zealanders of the Fleet Air Arm flew and fought over Japan in 1945, and not servicemen clad in Air Force blue or khaki.

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Fraser. 'Conduct of the War Against Japan', Note by the Joint Secretaries, Meeting of Prime Ministers, P.M.M. (44) 10, 16 May 1944, p.7. CAN A5954 CS 657/4.

## Sources

The research conducted for this thesis has had, in order, significant input from Australian, New Zealand and British primary source material. A thorough survey and reading of official histories, books of naval interest and scholarly works was completed in preparation for writing and was continued for subsequent review and reference purposes. As the BPF task force was Sydney-based, an Australasian perspective regarding the genesis of the task force and its operational activities has been adopted. Personal visits for research were made in 2010 to archive repositories in New Zealand and Australia and, in 2011, to the UK.

The National Archive of Australia and the Australian War Memorial in Canberra provided a comprehensive body of inter-dominion communication at prime-ministerial level regarding Australian attitudes to the war against Japan, as well as official positions on New Zealand's war-time decision-making and policy. These papers, typically telegrams, were cross referenced with British Cabinet papers held at the UK National Archives, London. The Australian War Memorial has graphic and pictorial information and national newspaper cuttings of BPF wartime activities that were useful. The Australian National Archive at Melbourne keeps naval records of the BPF's shipping movements from Sydney in 1944 and 1945 and has technical information detailing the task force's shore and air station arrangements and facilities.<sup>4</sup>

The New Zealand National Archive holds pertinent documents concerning Allied planning for the defence of the Pacific region, notably the 1941 Washington and Singapore meetings and New Zealand's participation in, and relationship to, those conversations. Papers relating to the report of the British Lethbridge Military Mission demonstrated forward planning for the Pacific war and for the possible inclusion of New Zealand and its forces. Where appropriate wartime articles from New Zealand newspapers have been referenced to demonstrate the propaganda reinforced connections between Pacific war events and public opinion. The National Library online site, 'Paperspast', provides an excellent reference resource, notably to World War II editions of Wellington's

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<sup>4</sup> The BPF established an administrative office in Melbourne in late 1944.

Evening Post.<sup>5</sup> In Auckland, a collection of New Zealand related Fleet Air Arm personal and squadron material, kept by the late David Allison, and intended for the collection of the Royal New Zealand Navy Museum at Devonport, Auckland, was accessed.

The Fleet Air Arm Museum, Royal Naval Air Station, Yeovilton, UK provided Fleet Air Arm squadron diaries, line books and fair flying logs with connections to New Zealanders, for examination. These items record combat and flying activities of squadrons, and diaries and line books were typically illustrated in a humorous, informal and personalised style. Likewise, the UK National Archives at Kew, London keeps similar material: records for those squadrons known to have had New Zealand aircrew were pre-ordered for reading. The document 'Operation Iceberg' located there, a carrier by carrier report of battle activities, was of immense value for tracking the BPF's key actions against the Sakishima Gunto and Formosa.<sup>6</sup>

The Supplement to the London Gazette, 2 June 1948 corroborated factual detail and the chronology of combat; this is referred to as the 'Admiralty Report' by veterans.<sup>7</sup> A number of biographies, written after the war, by participants are available and Fleet Air Arm veteran A.O. Masters' Memoirs of a Reluctant Batsman contains a number of compelling biographical narratives of New Zealand airmen of the BPF.<sup>8</sup> Admiral (commander First Aircraft Carrier Squadron) Vian's biography has informed and worthwhile commentary.<sup>9</sup> The personal comments of Ray Richards and the transcribed oral history of Derek Morten, both former pilots, have been invaluable for researching Chapters' Three and Four.<sup>10</sup> To avoid anachronism terms referenced and quoted from original personal and squadron records, are unaltered.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&cl=CL1.EP&e=-----10--1----0-->

<sup>6</sup> War History Case 7543, Operation Iceberg. ADM 199.595 NAUK.

<sup>7</sup> Supplement to the London Gazette, 'The Contribution of the British Pacific Fleet to the Assault on Okinawa, 1945', 1 June, 1948, pp.3289-3314.

<sup>8</sup> A.O. Masters, Memoirs of a Reluctant Batsman – New Zealand Servicemen in the Fleet Air Arm 1940-45, London: Janus Publishing Company, 1996.

<sup>9</sup> Sir Philip Vian, Action This Day – A War Memoir, London: Frederick Muller Limited, 1960.

<sup>10</sup> J.H. (Ray) Richards, Lieutenant (A) RNZNVR ONZM DSC. Interview Milford, North Shore, Auckland, New Zealand, 9 June 2011. Subsequent correspondence, 2011–2012. Derek Morten, Lieutenant (A) RNZNVR DSC MiD. Royal New Zealand Navy

Secondary source material falls broadly into three categories. First, works relating to New Zealand's World War II policy and politicians, concerning the situation of the Dominion within the British Empire at the beginning of the Pacific War. Paul Orders 2003 book Britain, Australia, New Zealand and the challenge of the United States, 1934-46 and Gerald Hensley's 2009 work, Beyond the Battlefield. New Zealand and its Allies 1939-45 offer recent interpretation.<sup>11</sup> By contrast wartime concerns are evident in F. L. W. Wood's March 1944 article, 'New Zealand in the Pacific War'.<sup>12</sup> Understanding the critical war leadership roles of Fraser and his Acting Prime Minister, Walter Nash, was aided by reference to two reputable works of historical biography.<sup>13</sup>

Second, a selection of scholarly books and journal articles, such as Christopher Thorne's Allies of a Kind and H. P. Wilmott's Grave of a Dozen Schemes. These reveal the layers and unravel the strands of the complex and intricate strategies underlying the major Allied decisions of the wider Pacific war. Analyses of Allied planning and decision-making for war with Japan are located in these two seminal works.<sup>14</sup> Thorne comprehensively explains the difficult, at times antagonistic, relationship between the UK and the US before, and during, the war with Japan. This discussion of diplomacy, finance, politics and military strategy is punctuated by several 'Australasian' chapters that align with the perspective of this thesis. Wilmott outlines the minutiae of British naval planning for war against Japan, within the context of the fractious relationship between the British Chiefs of Staff (COS) and Winston Churchill. Recent articles from the

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Museum Oral History. Transcript located at the NZ Fleet Air Arm Museum Reference Library, Remuera, Auckland.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Orders, Britain, Australia, New Zealand and the challenge of the United States, 1934-46. A Study in International History, Basingstoke/New York City: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. Gerald Hensley, Beyond the Battlefield. New Zealand and its Allies 1939-45, North Shore: Viking/Penguin Group (NZ), 2009.

<sup>12</sup> F. L. W. Wood, 'New Zealand in the Pacific War', Pacific Affairs, Vol.17, No. 1, (Mar., 1944), pp.38-48.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Ashby, 'Fraser's Foreign Policy', in Margaret Clark (ed.), Peter Fraser. Master Politician, Palmerston North: Dunmore Press Limited, 1998. Keith Sinclair, Walter Nash, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1977.

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Thorne, Allies of a Kind. The United States, Britain and the War against Japan, 1941-1945, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1978. H.P. Wilmott, Grave of a Dozen Schemes. British Naval Planning and the War Against Japan, 1943-1945, Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1996.

Journal of Military History, Diplomacy and Statecraft, The Journal of Strategic Studies, and the English Historical Review by Michael Coles, Thomas Hall, Chris Madsen and Nicholas Evans Sarantakes, respectively, focus on specific aspects of the contested Allied plans for the BPF.<sup>15</sup>

A number of books of general military interest, some written by ex-navy or enthusiast authors have value for the photographic, statistical and technical information detail they contain. David Hobbs' The British Pacific Fleet, published in 2011 and Peter Smith's 2001 Task Force 57 (Third Edition) compliment the earlier work of John Winton's The Forgotten Fleet and Samuel Morison's part-history of the United States Navy (US Navy), Victory in the Pacific.<sup>16</sup> The official history, 'With the British Pacific Fleet', The Royal New Zealand Navy, provides accurate data with reference to New Zealanders with the BPF.<sup>17</sup> An index of New Zealand BPF, Fleet Air Arm personnel has been collated as Appendix III.

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<sup>15</sup> Michael Coles, 'Ernest King and the British Pacific Fleet: The Conference at Quebec, 1944 ("Octagon")', The Journal of Military History, 65:1 (2001), pp.105-129. Thomas Hall, 'Mere Drops in the Ocean: The Politics and Planning of the Contribution of the British Commonwealth to the Final defeat of Japan 1944-45', Diplomacy and Statecraft, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2005, pp.93-115. Chris Madsen, 'Strategy, Fleet Logistics, and the Lethbridge Mission to the Pacific and Indian Oceans 1943-1944', The Journal of Strategic Studies, 31:6 (2008), pp.951-981. Nicholas Evan Sarantakes, 'One Last Crusade: The British Pacific Fleet and its Impact on the Anglo-American Alliance', English Historical Review, 121:491 (2006), pp.429-466.

<sup>16</sup> David Hobbs, The British Pacific Fleet. The Royal Navy's Most Powerful Strike Force, Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2011. Peter C. Smith, Task Force 57 - The British Pacific Fleet 1944-45, Manchester: Crécy Publishing, 2001. John Winton, The Forgotten Fleet – The British Navy in The Pacific 1944-45, New York City: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1970. Samuel Eliot Morison, History of United States naval operations in World War II, Volume XIV. Victory in the Pacific, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1975.

<sup>17</sup> S.D. Waters, 'With the British Pacific Fleet', The Royal New Zealand Navy, War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington: 1956, pp.367-389.



## **Chapter 1: *New Zealand Responses to the Pacific War 1941-1945***

In 1941 New Zealand had limited constitutional authority with regard to the conduct of its foreign affairs and decisions regarding matters of its defence were taken at Westminster. At the outbreak of World War II New Zealand, as member of the British imperial 'family', had dutifully and willingly supplied airmen, sailors and soldiers to support the 'Home' war effort against the Axis powers. Among those were volunteers for training with the Royal Navy and these Fleet Air Arm airmen are the research focus of this thesis.

This chapter examines New Zealand's efforts to influence and participate in strategic discussions held during 1941 by the 'Associated Powers', the UK, US and Dutch East Indies (DEI). These meetings, known as the Washington and Singapore Conversations, attempted to plan for threatened Japanese military expansion in South East Asia and the Pacific region. The subsequent advance of Japan, following spectacular military successes at Pearl Harbor and Singapore, left New Zealand and Australia scrambling to arrange and secure home defence arrangements, and both looked to the UK and the US for assistance. Prime Minister Peter Fraser left the main body of New Zealand forces, the Second Division, in North Africa, at the behest of Winston Churchill, and in doing so alienated Australia. A subsequent cross-Tasman rapprochement, in the form of the 1944 Canberra-Wellington Pact, antagonised the US, irritated the UK and led to the increased military marginalisation of New Zealand and its scant Pacific forces.

## **Section I: 1941- The Pearl Harbor and Singapore Crises**

Japanese aggression in the Pacific presented the Australian and New Zealand Prime Ministers with military and diplomatic crises. The humiliating destruction of HMS *Repulse* and *Prince of Wales* at Singapore on 10 December 1941 and subsequent defeat of all British forces there, by a Japanese army one third in size, reinforced anxieties quietly expressed earlier by the Dominions; the ability of Britain to defend its eastern outposts of empire was doubted. The fear of Japanese invasion was terrifying with both of the Dominions' best fighting men and equipment committed in North Africa. In 1939 the New Zealand Prime Minister, Michael Savage and his Australian counterparts, Lyons and later Menzies, exchanged telegrams regarding inter-dominion security and co-operation; an underlying uneasiness was evident regarding the 'Far Eastern Position'.<sup>1</sup> Of particular concern were Singapore's defence and the likelihood of a power imbalance occurring in the DEI, should the Netherlands fall to German conquest.<sup>2</sup> From 1941 Peter Fraser, the War Cabinet, Parliament and the Chiefs of Staff were jointly pre-occupied with both war in Europe and the immediate defence of New Zealand.

The Anglo-American Conversations (ABC), held in Washington from January to March 1941, was convened by the US most senior military leaders, General George Marshall and Admiral H. R. Stark. The Conversations had a broad scope but were principally intended to prepare for US participation in the war in Europe. British Commonwealth delegates were not invited to these discussions despite their interest, from a 'British' perspective, with the 'Grand Strategy and the Issue of Singapore'.<sup>3</sup> The British delegation, however, presented

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<sup>1</sup> Thorne, p.35. Assurances were given to both Australia and New Zealand: Following the 1937 Imperial conference: '... no anxieties or risks in the Mediterranean can be allowed to interfere with the dispatch of a fleet for the Far East' and again in 1939, '... it is our full intention to dispatch to the Far East a fleet of sufficient strength to make the position of any Japanese major expedition precarious'. Churchill, during later discussions with Fraser regarding the withdrawal of 2<sup>nd</sup> NZ Division from North Africa, repeated assurances of this nature.

<sup>2</sup> Documents on New Zealand External Relations Volume I. The Australian-New Zealand Agreement 1944, Robin Kay (ed.), Wellington: Historical Publications Branch/Department of Internal Affairs, 1972, pp.1-7.

<sup>3</sup> Maurice Matloff and Edward M. Snell, Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare 1941-1942, Washington DC: Center of Military History/United States Army, 1980, p.32.

three ranked strategic propositions to the US: first, the prioritisation of the European theatre, second the defeat of Germany and Italy and third the security of the Far East, including Australia and New Zealand, based upon the retention of Singapore.<sup>4</sup> The US accepted propositions' one and two but balked at the third knowing, full well, that it was a 'cardinal feature' of Britain's imperial defence and a symbol of its pride.

The British Grand Strategy for the 'Associated Powers' required the transfer of some powerful US naval forces to the UK's traditional east Asian sphere of influence. The British delegation reiterated Churchill's earlier comments to Roosevelt that the US Navy should feel free to use Singapore to '... keep the Japanese dog quiet in the Pacific'.<sup>5</sup> This contingency, it was argued, would hold Singapore, protect Australia and New Zealand and make the region safe from the Japanese Fleet.<sup>6</sup> The US delegates, deeply suspicious of British imperialism, were unconvinced by their logic and prioritised American influence in the central Pacific. The US Navy delegation, although aware of a 1938 commitment made by Roosevelt and Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, to permit Royal Navy and US Navy joint action in the Far East, opposed the British suggestion, arguing that Britain must take care of its own 'Asiatic' responsibilities. Even so, the British and Americans cooperated and accordingly the US committed 'sufficient' naval forces to the Atlantic, but only so as not to endanger its own vital Pacific interests. An agreement between the UK and the US for Atlantic arrangements was reached and Germany confirmed as the principal common threat. A British communiqué of 29 January 1941 concluded that forces should be used '... in [the] areas which are the most accessible to them, namely in the general area of the Atlantic'.<sup>7</sup> For all that, the US Pacific Fleet remained at Pearl Harbor while plans were made to divert only 'spare' US

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.34.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.35. Churchill - official message to Roosevelt on 15 May 1940. Quoted in full in Winston S. Churchill, The Second World War Volume II. Their Finest Hour, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1949, pp.23-25.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp.34-35.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.40.

Navy warships, to the Atlantic.<sup>8</sup> The naval status quo was undisturbed and Singapore remained vulnerable.

From 21 to 27 April 1941 a meeting was held at Singapore with American, Dutch and British military representatives, namely the American-Dutch-British (ADB) Conversations. Its purpose was: '[to] Plan for employment and disposition of forces in whole area Indian Ocean, Pacific and Australian and New Zealand waters before and after arrival of Far East Fleet, as agreed in Washington Conversations [sic].'<sup>9</sup> This Singapore meeting, the agenda previously set at Washington, reviewed contingencies in the event of a surprise Japanese attack.<sup>10</sup> Representatives from the 'Empire' attended this meeting and the New Zealand delegates were Commodore W. E. Parry RN, Air Commodore H. W. L. Saunders RAF and Colonel A. E. Conway. The sizable party of senior British officers contrasted to a smaller US delegation, comprised of relatively junior staff officers.<sup>11</sup> The delegates of the US Asiatic Fleet in Manila were not from Pearl Harbor or of the higher US Navy command.<sup>12</sup> The absence of American 'top brass' at this meeting with the Dutch military leadership, is puzzling as it had been obvious to the US that the DEI, with its vast oil reserves and natural resources, was of primary interest to Japan. In late 1940 Roosevelt had put an embargo on raw materials to Japan and later, at the end of July 1941, on oil.<sup>13</sup> General Hedeki Tojo, Japanese Prime Minister, had previously articulated that his nation's 'quest for autonomy' through access to oil 'in the end [came] down to the

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp.34-38.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.6.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.65.

<sup>11</sup> 'American-Dutch-British Conversations, Singapore 21<sup>st</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> April 1941', p.1. Defence of Pacific – General – American – Dutch – British Liaison in the Pacific. 1941–1945. ANZ EA 1 568/ 86/1/9 1.

<sup>12</sup> Memorandum, RJC 13/18/62, 19 July 1941 p.15. Commodore W. E. Parry RN, Chief of NZ Naval Staff, for Lieutenant-Commander R. J. Bailey RN, RNZN Staff Officer, Wellington. Parry briefed Bailey ahead of a meeting he was soon to have with Gordon Coates MP in San Francisco regarding the NZ War Cabinet's understanding of the ADB conversations' report. ANZ EA 1 568/ 86/1/9 1.

<sup>13</sup> Thorne, p.82. The US was reluctant to commit to direct military action in 1941 and under Roosevelt pursued economic sanctions against Japan in preference to conflict.

matter of the Netherlands East Indies'.<sup>14</sup> This threat was acknowledged in the 'Conversations' report: 'Japan's object is assumed to be to obtain complete political and economic domination of South East Asia and ... the Far East in order to secure control for herself ... sources of vital war supplies.'<sup>15</sup>

The Singapore Conversations attempted to second-guess Japan by adopting a range of military plans and defence lines to protect Malaya with British, Dutch and US forces. The 'routeing' of shipping to and from the Dominions to keep communication open with Europe was discussed and New Zealand was given a strategic role if the 'unthinkable' occurred: 'In the unlikely event of it proving impossible for the British Fleet to operate from Singapore, it will operate from bases in the Indian Ocean and Australian and New Zealand areas, disputing any further advance by the enemy.'<sup>16</sup> The 'Necessity for Collective Action' conclusions lacked a sense of urgency and awareness of the real Japanese military threat. Individual governments were left to distinguish between a 'direct act of war' on the part of the Japanese, or merely a 'minor incident'.<sup>17</sup> New Zealand, however, found some small comfort in the conclusion that attacks by Japan on Australia and New Zealand were 'ruled out'.<sup>18</sup>

The report outlined the broad deployment of the naval forces of the Associated Powers, in response to a 'direct threat' from Japan: 'Phase I' would exist '... from the outbreak of hostilities with Japan until the arrival of the British Far Eastern Fleet in the Eastern Theatre'; 'Phase II' prepared for events after the fleet's arrival, at which time the Royal Navy would take the offensive. At Singapore the Washington Conversations' Atlantic bias and priority of the European theatre were confirmed, and it was noted that the US Asiatic Fleet was confined to Manila. Nevertheless, two statements made were of assurance to the Dominions: It was concluded that '... it is essential to maintain [the US Pacific

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.52. General Hedeki Tojo, Japanese Prime Minister, 17 October 1941 - 22 July 1944. Japanese controlled oil refineries were targeted on several occasions in 1944 and 1945 by FAA squadrons - see Chapter Three, Section III.

<sup>15</sup> 'American-Dutch-British Conversations', II - Summary of Situation, Part 7, p.8, ANZ EA 1 568/ 86/1/9 1.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.22.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.9.

Fleet] in strength at least equal to the Japanese fleet, in order to hold our position in the Pacific and to act offensively against the Japanese'.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the US Pacific Fleet's responsibility to take offensive action against Japan, from Pearl Harbor, was established. In this event 'Australia and New Zealand [would] cooperate direct [sic] with the Commander in Chief of the United States Pacific Fleet'.<sup>20</sup> In summary, the Singapore conclusions were unsatisfactory and contradictory, placing Australia and New Zealand in a dangerous and defenceless void created by the separate and competing strategic interests of the UK and the US.

Diplomatic correspondence in mid-1941 between London, the Dominions and Washington, gives insight into New Zealand's precarious strategic situation then, in the Pacific. Cabled exchanges followed the Singapore meetings and indicate the Dominion's relationships with its wartime allies. Fraser left New Zealand on 3 May 1941 to visit the Middle East, the UK and the US and returned on 13 September, as the Pacific crisis intensified. Walter Nash, as Acting Prime Minister, oversaw the exchange of understandings made at Washington and Singapore and he appreciated the international situation. In early 1941 New Zealand lacked a representative in the US; Nash was appointed much later by Fraser and arrived in Washington in January 1942. In the meantime Fraser sent two members of the War Cabinet in May 1941 to the US: Gordon Coates and Frank Langstone, Minister of External Affairs, formed the 'Supply Mission'.<sup>21</sup> The pair was diplomatically unskilled, lacked authority and had limited access to direct channels to the US government.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.17. Paragraph 41. This 'fleet' was practically non-existent at the time of the report as the Royal Navy was fully committed to fighting the Axis forces in the Atlantic and Mediterranean. Only in the event of the actual Japanese crisis did the Admiralty send Force G, HMS *Prince of Wales* and HMS *Repulse* to Singapore on 2 December 1941 - no aircraft carrier support was available, disastrously so, as events turned out.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. Paragraph 42.

<sup>21</sup> Keith Sinclair, *Walter Nash*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1977, pp.211-213. The New Zealand Trade Representative in Canada went first to New York in February 1941 and later to Washington, to establish the New Zealand Supply Mission. <http://www.nzembassy.com/usa/relationship-between-new-zealand-and-usa/new-zealand-washi>, accessed 28 September 2010.

On 29 April 1941, Frank Knox, the US Secretary of State for the Navy ‘summoned’ the Royal Navy mission in Washington to hear a ‘proposition’. Knox, aware of the Washington and Singapore recommendations, suggested moving ‘... the greater part of Pacific Fleet into the Atlantic leaving in the Pacific forces [in the] of order of 3 or 4 battleships, 9 cruisers and 30 to 40 destroyers [sic]’. Knox and Stimson reasoned that in all probability the signal given to Japan by this proposed shift of powerful forces would act as a deterrent, that American entry in the war on Britain’s side would be seen as imminent and that the defeat of the Axis would be inevitable. Japan, it was argued, would avoid a Pacific war, wary of the Nazi Soviet Non-Aggression Pact and of Russian expansionism in the Pacific West.<sup>22</sup> Viscount Cranborne, the British Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, advised Fraser of this meeting, on 2 May 1941, and sought New Zealand and Australia’s opinion.

Cranborne wanted quick responses from the Dominions but produced a contradictory range of arguments for Nash’s consideration. Initially, Cranborne argued that the US proposition aligned with agreed arrangements, citing the Admiralty’s long-held view that the US Pacific Fleet was ‘... unduly strong for the tasks for which it was intended’. He quoted recent US opinion that a deterrent naval force of ‘... sufficient strength and the right composition’ only was adequate for the Pacific. This was clearly not what had been agreed at Singapore, however, where the terms ‘equal and offensive’ were applied. Moreover, Knox’ proposal was too much in favour of Britain’s immediate survival: the UK was at that time taking crippling naval losses in the Mediterranean and desperately needed the US as an ally. Understandably, Cranborne encouraged the US idea but suggested leaving three ‘deterrent’ US Navy aircraft carriers in the Pacific.<sup>23</sup> Australia’s Minister to the US, Richard Casey, was in Washington at that time and Nash received a telegram on 5 May 1941 from Arthur Fadden, Acting Australian Prime Minister, with his assessment. Casey described the US Navy’s Atlantic transfer plan as a ‘gamble’ and that it would place both Australia and

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<sup>22</sup> Cranborne to the New Zealand Prime Minister, 2 May 1941. Telegram, Commonwealth Government 308, New Zealand Government 171, p.1. ANZ EA 1 568/ 86/1/9 1.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp.1-2.

New Zealand in ‘considerable peril’. He implied that the architects of this ‘drastic proposal’ were Marshall and Stimson, the US Secretary for War, and he believed that they had ‘... written off [the] Philippines as indefensible’. From an Australian perspective this was unacceptable, leaving the DEI and beyond south, wide open to Japanese conquest.<sup>24</sup>

Nash replied the following day with a summary of New Zealand’s understandings. In his opinion the proposed US transfer of naval forces from the Pacific to the Atlantic would act as an ‘incentive’ to Japan, not a ‘deterrent’. He reminded Cranborne that Germany and Japan were allies. While Nash agreed with the British that the Atlantic was ‘the decisive theatre of the war’ and that the UK was the ‘first line of defence’, he questioned whether the US would commit to an ‘actual participation’ in the war and if so, would that not bring the German-Japanese Pact into effect? Furthermore, the US proposal would leave a ‘most inadequate force’, half the current size of the US Pacific Fleet and reduced by at least two aircraft carriers. In consequence Australia, New Zealand and the DEI would be without ‘reasonable protection’. Nash made reference also to the ‘Conversations’ and he was ‘much concerned’ with Singapore’s situation. Was there any guarantee of timely US assistance if New Zealand was threatened? He echoed Australia’s concerns that, ‘... the naval forces left in the Pacific should be sufficiently strong to resist potential Japanese aggression’, as agreed at Singapore. In conclusion, Nash ‘suggested’ that the British might ‘request’ that only four US Navy battleships and not eight, be transferred to the Atlantic.<sup>25</sup>

Cranborne responded on 11 May 1941 saying the British Mission in Washington would ‘strongly encourage’ the US proposal and that, on balance, the transfer would be a deterrent; more so than by keeping ‘... a very large United States fleet at Hawaii’. He conceded a minimum US Pacific Fleet size of ‘... not less than six capital ships and two aircraft carriers, the inclusion of the latter being

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<sup>24</sup> Acting Prime Minister, Australia to Acting Prime Minister, NZ, 5 May 1941. Telegram No. 160, pp.1-2. ANZ EA 1 568/ 86/1/9 1. Menzies returned to Australia in August 1941, to be ousted as PM by Fadden and his Country Party colleagues. Fadden did not last long, replaced by Labor’s John Curtin in October 1941.

<sup>25</sup> Acting Prime Minister NZ to Cranborne, 6 May 1941. Telegram No. 169 (repeated to Canberra No. 104), pp.1-6. ANZ EA 1 568/86/1/9 1.

of the greatest importance'. This information was passed in May 1941 on to the two senior New Zealand delegates sent earlier to Singapore, Parry and Saunders, for their appraisal.<sup>26</sup> During 1941 Britain reluctantly and pragmatically accepted growing American influence in strategy for the Far East and the Pacific. As 1941 passed, the plans made at Washington and Singapore fell gradually out of the 'Associated' powers' diplomatic exchanges.

True to hemispherical isolationism, and sensitive to domestic opinion, the US moved naval forces to the Atlantic from Hawaii, rather than to reinforce Manila or Singapore. From a New Zealand perspective, Singapore remained dangerously exposed to attack. On 21 May 1941 Nash cabled Cranborne to raise his concerns and expressed a lack of confidence in the Royal Navy's ability to release extra ships for Singapore. He made specific reference to the ADB report, regarding the US Pacific Fleet's intended 'equality' of size with that of Japan: the Admiralty's figure of six capital ships that Cranborne had referred to on 10 May was 'not in accordance' with the Singapore agreements, he argued. Significantly, Nash obliquely mentioned that New Zealand was contemplating direct contact with the US Pacific Fleet to arrange possible air and naval cooperation.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, Cranborne confirmed Nash's fears on 18 June 1941, announcing '... the movement of three United States battleships four cruisers and fourteen destroyers of the Pacific fleet through the canal ... in addition to one aircraft carrier and five destroyers which passed through a month ago [sic]'.<sup>28</sup>

On 18 July 1941, Nash gathered the New Zealand Chiefs of Staff, '... to discuss the Pacific situation, particularly with regard to cooperation with the

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<sup>26</sup> Cranborne to Acting Prime Minister NZ, 10 May 1941. Telegram NZ No. 190 (Aus. No. 332.) ANZ EA 1 568/86/1/9 1. In this message Cranborne alludes to diplomatic situations with Spain, Turkey and the despised Vichy regime. On September 1940 an accord was signed by Japan and the Vichy administrators of French Indochina, allowing 6000 Axis troops to be stationed in Indochina and up to 25,000 in transit. Neighbouring Thailand's fate was critical to Britain's defence of Burma, Malaya and Singapore. A demonstration of US power as an ally in the Atlantic may have given Pétain extra cause for thought, it was believed.

<sup>27</sup> Acting Prime Minister NZ to Cranborne, (repeated PM Australia, C-in-C Far East, British Ambassador, Cairo for Fraser), 21 May 1941. Telegram (unnumbered). ANZ EA 1 568/ 86/1/9 1. Commander J. P. Olding USN was appointed US Naval Observer in NZ in January 1941. Evening Post, 'Naval Observer', Volume CXXXI, Issue 21, 25 January 1941, p.12.

<sup>28</sup> Cranborne to Acting Prime Minister NZ, 18 June 1941. Telegram NZ No. 140, Aus. No. 422. ANZ EA 1 568/ 86/1/9 1.

U.S.A.’.<sup>29</sup> Parry briefed Nash, with information obtained from the Australian naval attaché in Washington, concerning a lack of ‘concurrence’ between the Royal Navy and US Navy over the Singapore agreements. Not one of the US or UK officials in Washington at the time, it transpired, had been delegated to Singapore. Nash cabled Coates and Langstone in Washington on 19 July 1943, advising that a naval delegate from Wellington, Lieutenant-Commander Bailey RN, had been sent to San Francisco. Coates arranged a meeting for Bailey and Casey with the Australian Naval Attaché. New Zealand’s position on Singapore could, as a result of their liaison, be better informed and represented to the British in Washington.<sup>30</sup>

Parry warned Bailey that Australia and New Zealand would be placed at risk by the apparent lack of Anglo-American naval ‘concurrence’. The US would not acknowledge Singapore as its responsibility and resisted being drawn westwards to defend British India. Parry believed, according to a US Navy memorandum of 21 April 1941, the Americans were unhappy about the unfair expectation placed upon them to take the offensive against Japan, leaving the British with a less onerous defensive role. Parry impressed upon Bailey that ‘we’, in the imperial sense, had made it clear that, once the Royal Navy arrived in Singapore, it would take offensive action. Bailey was tasked as emissary, with Australian support, to reconcile ‘... the American and British points of view regarding the defence of Australian and New Zealand waters’.<sup>31</sup>

This proposed lobbying was of little consequence as Roosevelt continued through 1941 with his policy of non-military and economic sanction-based strategies against Japan. A letter of 15 July 1941 from the British High Commissioner in Wellington, Sir Harry Batterbee, to Nash confirmed that the UK and US governments had reached understandings regarding the significance of the

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<sup>29</sup> Memorandum, RJC 13/18/62, 19 July 1941, p.1. Commodore W. E. Parry RN, Chief of NZ Naval Staff, for Lieutenant-Commander R. J. Bailey RN, RNZN Staff Officer, Wellington. ANZ EA 1 568/ 86/1/9 1.

<sup>30</sup> Acting Prime Minister, NZ, to Rangi, Washington, 19 July 1941. Telegram Most Secret. ANZ EA 1 568/ 86/1/9 1.

<sup>31</sup> Memorandum, RJC 13/18/62, 19 July 1941, p.2. Commodore W. E. Parry RN, Chief of NZ Naval Staff, for Lieutenant-Commander R. J. Bailey RN, RNZN Staff Officer, Wellington. ANZ EA 1 568/ 86/1/9 1.

Washington Conversations: ‘The United Kingdom Mission in Washington had previously been informed that “President Roosevelt has familiarised himself with the report and the United States joint Army and Navy plans” .... [The] President proposed to withhold formal approval at this time, but in case of war would expect to take appropriate action’.<sup>32</sup> Put bluntly, the US had shelved the ABC and ADB reports, in particular the key defensive needs and vital strategic position of Singapore.

In late November 1941 Royal Air Force reconnaissance aircraft identified Japanese amphibious forces moving towards the Kra Isthmus, on the Thai land-bridge. This had the potential to split Burma from Malaya. Admiral Stark was bound by Roosevelt’s non-intervention policy and specifically ordered units of the US Asiatic Fleet to take no action against Japanese shipping.<sup>33</sup> Fraser responded to this crisis in a cable to Cranborne on 1 December, confirming New Zealand’s loyal support as the emergency developed, although anxious and frustrated over the US’ apparent reluctance to defend Thailand. Fraser reminded Cranborne of the ‘ADB line of defence’ and undoubtedly, he suggested, a Japanese assault on the Thailand Isthmus should justify at least a British military response.<sup>34</sup> Japanese naval aircraft attacked US forces at Pearl Harbor on 7 December, the British at Singapore the following day and both, to use ADB terminology, were clearly ‘direct acts of war’. New Zealand declared a state of war with Japan at 11:00 on 8 December 1941, out of imperial solidarity and defensive self-interest. Following the surrender of Singapore on 15 February 1942, the ‘Conversations’ were briefly resurrected as the ‘American British Dutch Australian’ contingencies but were hurriedly abandoned amid the confusion, panic and shock following Japan’s astonishing military advances.

Documents referred to here, particularly those relating to the Washington ABC and Singapore ABD Conversations of 1941 reveal the character of New Zealand relationships with its allies at 7 December 1941. They were analogous, in

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<sup>32</sup> Sir Harry Fagg Batterbee, Office of the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom, Wellington to Acting Prime Minister, NZ, letter 15 July 1941. ANZ, EA 1 568/ 86/1/9 1.

<sup>33</sup> Documents, Kay (ed.), p.82. Cranborne to Prime Minister, NZ, 30 November 1941. Telegram No. 74 - conveying a report from the UK Ambassador at Washington.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.83-84. Prime Minister, NZ to Cranborne, 1 December 1941.

a manner of speaking, to a 'dysfunctional family': the head of the family remained the imperial matriarch Britain, weakened and aged but prestigious and diplomatically influential, often with the most persuasive voice. The US had become the patriarch, stern and growing evermore powerful, of actions rather than words, and not always the best listener. Closest in age and character was the Australian sibling, typically argumentative and assertive, demanding a place at the high table. New Zealand struggled to punch above its weight but stood resolute and loyal and with a keen eye for self-preservation.

## **Section II: 1942 - An 'Anzaxis'?**

This Section is an analysis of events and the decisions made during 1942 that, in combination, prevented New Zealand from greater participation in the war against Japan. The Pearl Harbor disaster forced Australia and New Zealand to adapt to a changed world order. The US had been grievously weakened but in the process had asserted and assumed the control and conduct of the Pacific war. Australia, and to a lesser extent New Zealand, the Commonwealth countries at most risk from Japanese aggression, had henceforth to accept a new protector.<sup>35</sup> The Dominions were anxious to retain that sense of 'British-ness' felt on both sides of the Tasman: this was more than simply an imperial trade connectivity, it was also a barely disguised but distanced sense of cultural and imperial superiority. Both countries juggled their British-ness with a new assertive American presence, although not always comfortably so.

The New Zealand government navigated these changed circumstances and responded to several diplomatic challenges. In 1942, both Dominions looked initially to tentatively formed arrangements for Anzac regional defence but by late 1942, the US established areas of military command, into which New Zealand was accommodated. In 1944, Australia and New Zealand moved closer to discuss South Pacific 'backyard' arrangements under the aegis of an Anzac body and this is discussed in Section III. New Zealand struggled to cope with international affairs outside its previous experience and consequently this limited its opportunities for engagement in the Pacific war.

Fraser gave an appreciation of New Zealand's military vulnerability to Churchill on 12 January 1942, before the fall of Singapore:

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<sup>35</sup> Lionel Wigmore, *Australia in the War of 1939-1945. Series 1 – Army. The Japanese Thrust*, Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1957, pp.151-510. Paul Hasluck, *Australia in the War of 1939-1945. Series 4 – Civil. The Government and people 1939 -1941*, Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1952, pp.524-588. Nearly 15,000 men of the Australian 8th Division were captured at the fall of Singapore, 15 February 1942, while 48,000 men of the 9<sup>th</sup> Division remained in North Africa. Moves to return the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7th Divisions began in December 1941. In February 1942 Darwin was bombed and in May and June shipping in Sydney Harbour was attacked by three Japanese midget submarines.

We have seen within a few short weeks the United States Navy crippled. We have seen the Philippines practically captured. We have seen Malaya in dire straits and Singapore in the greatest peril. We have seen the two magnificent ships which were sent out destroyed by the air arm in a few minutes. And we foresee for a considerable period ahead the Japanese in complete control of the Pacific.<sup>36</sup>

Fraser expressed concern with the UK's attitude to the Pacific war: '... to be completely frank, we have not always felt that the potential problems of the Pacific have had the importance attached to them in London ... that they have perhaps deserved'.<sup>37</sup> He asked Churchill to request Roosevelt to help establish an Anzac naval area, alongside the US Pacific Fleet. Inter-dominion exchanges on these proposals intensified in the wake of the Singapore defeat and before communicating again with Churchill, Fraser wanted to sound Australian Prime Minister, John Curtin, on the Anzac idea.<sup>38</sup> He welcomed the proposition but was concerned about the likely loss of local command. The Australian Chiefs, at a meeting in Melbourne on 17 January 1942, concluded that Australia required the combined Allied naval forces within the Anzac area for its defence, and '... a British Flag Officer appointed to [its] Command ....'<sup>39</sup> Curtin forwarded these suggestions to both Churchill and Fraser on 20 January 1942.<sup>40</sup> On 15 February 1942 the Royal Navy delegation in Washington decided that an Anzac force should come under the '... C-in-C US Fleet ... assisted by one or more Flag Officers named by Australia and/or New Zealand.' Accordingly, Vice-Admiral

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<sup>36</sup> Documents, Kay (ed.), p.127. Prime Minister, NZ to Cranborne, 12 January 1942, for the British PM.5788.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.123. Prime Minister, NZ to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, for the Prime Minister, UK.

<sup>38</sup> Prime Minister, NZ to Prime Minister, Australia. Cablegram 16 January 1942, Australian War Cabinet Agendum, Establishment of ANZAC Naval Area, Annex C, 19 January 1942. Future policy and strategy for conduct of war in the Pacific, Australian and New Zealand including establishment of Pacific War Council, Washington – Advisory War Council minutes, War Cabinet agendum, departmental notes, Jan-Mar 1942. AWM123 CS288.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., Report by Chiefs of Staff, 17 January 1942, Annex B. AWM123 CS288.

<sup>40</sup> Prime Minister, Australia to Prime Minister, NZ, 20 Jan 1942. AWM123 CS288.

Herbert Leary USN was appointed to the command in February 1942 and he briefed Fraser promptly on his role.<sup>41</sup> That his ‘Anzac’ forces’ prioritised task was the defence of Australia and New Zealand was well received in both Dominions.<sup>42</sup>

On 17 February 1942, two days after the capitulation of Singapore, Fraser contacted Churchill, seriously concerned for New Zealand’s immediate defence. As the UK was unable to supply urgently requested Spitfires, he accepted Churchill’s advice to seek American aid. The Dominion lacked a place at Allied discussions alongside the US, and had limited opportunities to influence Pacific strategy-making. Fraser was, though, aware that a Far Eastern Council had met on 9 February 1942, in London and he wanted Churchill’s assistance to bring New Zealand’s plight to Roosevelt’s attention, through this forum. Fraser foresaw Japanese advances into Burma and India and also south-east to Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand. It was evident that the Dominion was no longer war-isolated, a distant British outpost or merely a supplier of fighting men, mutton and wool.<sup>43</sup> With the country practically defenceless, Fraser looked forward and grimly articulated a will to take up the offensive in the Pacific: ‘... it seems ... the struggle for the Pacific will be one of considerable and indeed indefinite duration and we must set ourselves now to endure a long war ... to recover the ground we have already lost and in due course turn to the offensive against Japan itself’.<sup>44</sup> This latter objective proved to be a highly elusive military goal for New Zealand.

In Australia, Curtin lobbied for Anzac representation in Washington. He co-opted two New Zealand War Cabinet members, Gordon Coates and Daniel Sullivan, onto a committee, two recommendations of which were made at a

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<sup>41</sup> *Evening Post*, ‘Meeting the Japanese Threat’, Volume CXXXIII, Issue 34, 10 February 1942, p.4. Leary was quoted: ‘You have to be prepared for the possibility of Japanese attack ... this war is going to be a long drawn out affair, and how these Japanese are going to be pushed back I do not know, and I do not think any one can tell at the moment’.

<sup>42</sup> British Admiralty Delegation, Washington to Australian and NZ Naval Boards, 27 January 1942. AWM123 CS288.

<sup>43</sup> Prime Minister, NZ to Prime Minister, UK, copy to Prime Minister Australia, 17 February 1942. Cablegram No. 54. AWM123 CS288. Thorne, p.52. Although Fraser was not to know at the time, the Japanese had made long term plans for the invasion of both Australia and New Zealand – by 1942 the last two remaining ‘items’ on the Japanese list..

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

special meeting of the Advisory War Council held at Melbourne on 28 February 1942. First, to extend the Anzac area to, ‘... embrace the whole of Australia and its territories, New Zealand and the islands within the boundaries of the present Anzac area’. Second, plans for a UK, US and Anzac council to meet in Washington, chaired by Roosevelt and responsible for the higher direction of the Pacific war.<sup>45</sup> Curtin pressed for urgency and in a significant precedent, asked Fraser to forward the proposals as ‘a joint submission’ to Churchill and Roosevelt from both Dominions.<sup>46</sup>

Fraser responded that New Zealand was ‘in general agreement’ but ‘had the greatest difficulty’ with the ideas proposed for an Anzac council in Washington and wanted clarification. Was the proposed Anzac council in Washington to co-exist with a London Pacific War Council set up in February? If so, how were the inevitable policy differences, embarrassments or even ‘diametrically opposed’ conclusions to be resolved between the two bodies? Awkwardness would arise, he reasoned, if Churchill in London representing Australia and New Zealand was to override a decision made by an Anzac Council, chaired by Roosevelt in Washington. Or was the suggested council, Fraser asked, to be a direct London for Washington swap? He understood the advantages of such an exchange: ‘... [we have] no doubt whatsoever ... that the higher control of the war in this area could be more efficiently conducted from Washington than from London ... and would afford to us in Australia and New Zealand substantially better facilities for expressing our views to the Americans’.<sup>47</sup>

Fraser reminded Curtin of the reluctant acceptance by the Dominions of Churchill’s London-based Far Eastern Council earlier in February. Churchill had left Fraser in no doubt then that any transfer of Dominion accountability from London to Washington would be ‘a mistake’. Knowing New Zealand’s greater military commitment to the Middle-East and its dependency upon the UK, Fraser

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<sup>45</sup> Advisory War Council Minute, 28 February 1942, War Cabinet Agendum No. 118/1942. AWM123 CS288.

<sup>46</sup> Prime Minister, Australia to Prime Minister, NZ, 1 March 1942. Cablegram No. 80. AWM123 CS288.

<sup>47</sup> Prime Minister, NZ to Prime Minister, Australia, 3 March 1942. Cablegram No. 75, p.2. AWM123 CS288.

did not want ‘...to cause unnecessary ... resentment or dismay in London’. He also suggested that, and not wishing to ‘annoy both’, taking a sensitive approach to Roosevelt’s known aversion to a joint Allied command in Washington, was advisable.<sup>48</sup> Despite these reservations Fraser supported Curtin’s draft but cautioned: ‘... we feel ... strongly that it would be most unwise in the circumstances to communicate [the] text of this proposed communication directly to Roosevelt and that we forward it to Churchill in the first place with the request that he should place it before the President’.<sup>49</sup> Curtin accepted these suggestions and on 4 March 1942 sent an amended draft to Churchill explaining that the conclusions had been reached by the Advisory War Council after ‘... an exchange of views with the New Zealand Government’.<sup>50</sup> Fraser also sent Churchill New Zealand’s full endorsement of ‘Curtin’s telegram’.<sup>51</sup> The Pacific Dominions had, for the time, being acted in unison.

The Anzac discussions were of little immediate interest to Admiral King in Honolulu, the Anzac area being but one part of his vast US Navy command. Casey, in Washington, informed Canberra that King would be unlikely to take notice of the proposed Anzac ideas, especially if an Australian or New Zealander was placed between his command and Leary’s. Appointing General MacArthur as Anzac commander, as had been mooted, would likely antagonise King and prove fatal to the whole proposal, Casey added.<sup>52</sup> He advised Canberra of an ‘audience’ he was ‘granted’ with King on 7 March 1942. The admiral believed sharing control of the Pacific between London and Washington was ‘... cumbrous and not very satisfactory’. He thought Pacific operations should be a ‘direct American responsibility’, although he did repeatedly allude to the protection of ‘white’ Australia and New Zealand from Japan. King hinted that a larger south west Pacific command was planned, pushing US Navy supply bases west to Samoa and

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p.4.

<sup>50</sup> Prime Minister, Australia to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, for the Prime Minister, UK, 4 March 1942. Cablegram No. 166. AWM123 CS288.

<sup>51</sup> Prime Minister, NZ to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, for the Prime Minister, UK, 6 March 1942. Cablegram No. 124. AWM123 CS288.

<sup>52</sup> Australian Delegation Washington to the Prime Minister, Australia, 6 March 1942. Cablegram No. S404. AWM123 CS288.

south to Auckland and he wanted these under his command; Australia and the DEI under a separate, probably Australian command.<sup>53</sup>

Following Casey's advice, Curtin learned from Sir Earle Page, Australia's representative on the UK War Cabinet, of the British Chiefs' intention to draw an operational line between the Indian and Pacific Ocean areas. Curtin believed this would deny Australia command of its own territory, rendering his Anzac proposals redundant and he urged Fraser to '... keep as far as possible to the joint Australian-New Zealand plan'.<sup>54</sup> Washington's plans were not well understood by New Zealand although Nash learned on 19 March 1942 of Roosevelt's impending appointment of MacArthur to the command of all '... united nations forces in an area east of Singapore'. Fraser contacted Churchill and acknowledged the need for a '... unified control for the conduct of the war in the Pacific' and gave New Zealand's support for MacArthur's, as yet, unspecified command of the Pacific Area; he added that he should like to be informed of the Australian view.<sup>55</sup> Churchill had by that time been fully apprised of Roosevelt's '... purely personal views on organization': an Atlantic and European area under joint British-American command and a middle, or Mediterranean to India, area under sole British command. A Pacific area was to be established: 'The whole operational responsibility for the Pacific area will rest upon the United States. Decisions for this area would be made in Washington by the United States Chief of Staff and Advisory Council including Australia, New Zealand, Netherlands East Indies and China. The supreme command of this area will be American'.<sup>56</sup>

While Fraser was accommodating, Curtin was critically outspoken of Roosevelt's Pacific proposals and was concerned that his 'Advisory Council' would be merely consultative. Curtin was correct in as much as the Washington

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<sup>53</sup> Australian Delegation Washington to the Prime Minister, Australia, 7 March 1942. Cablegram No. S407. AWM123 CS288.

<sup>54</sup> Prime Minister, Australia to Prime Minister, NZ, 11 March 1942. Cablegram No. 92. AWM123 CS288.

<sup>55</sup> Prime Minister, NZ to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, for Prime Minister, UK. Cablegram No. 150. Cranborne was replaced temporarily as Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, by Clement Atlee on the 19 February 1942. AWM123 CS288.

<sup>56</sup> Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the Prime Minister, Australia, from the Prime Minister UK, 23 March 1942. Cablegram No. 335. 'Digest of telegrams recently exchanged between myself (Churchill) and the President ...' AWM123 CS288.

Pacific War Council, under Roosevelt, did become a forum in which the President aired his views and informed the delegates of decisions previously made by the US.<sup>57</sup> Curtin's objective had been to secure an Australian voice for the higher policy of the war in an Anzac area and told Fraser emphatically: 'We would not be content with an advisory body in Washington'.<sup>58</sup> However, the Australians in Washington and in London were pre-occupied with negotiations for the extrication of their Sixth and Seventh Divisions and were considering the same for the Ninth, from North Africa.<sup>59</sup> As a consequence Anglo-Australian relations were under severe strain. Fraser contacted Churchill on 24 March 1942, accepted Roosevelt's command proposals and urged '... the utmost expedition in bringing the arrangements into force'.<sup>60</sup>

The London Pacific War Council met first on 24 March 1942. Page recorded the UK Chiefs' approval of Roosevelt's three Allied commands, handing control of the Pacific war to the US.<sup>61</sup> Evatt, in Washington, informed Curtin that both the US and UK Chiefs, at a combined meeting of 25 March 1942 had further divided the Pacific theatre into two separate commands. The South West Pacific area, including Australia, was placed under MacArthur's US Army control; New Zealand under Admiral Nimitz within the US Navy's South Pacific command.<sup>62</sup> So ended the attempts to establish an Anzac zone - perhaps it had been naïve of the two Dominions, given the sheer magnitude of unfolding events, to expect an outcome substantially different. A press release by Roosevelt on 30 March confirmed arrangements for a Pacific War Council in Washington: the first

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<sup>57</sup> F. L. W. Wood, The New Zealand People at War. Political and External Affairs. The Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939-45, Wellington: Historical Publications Branch/Department of Internal Affairs in association with A. H. & A.W. Reed, 1971, p.220.

<sup>58</sup> The Prime Minister, Australia for Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, for the Prime Minister UK, 19 March 1942. Cablegram No. 209. AWM123 CS288.

<sup>59</sup> Australian Minister for External Affairs, Washington to Prime Minister, Australia, 29 March 1942. Cablegram No. PMS. 14. Australian delegate to Pacific War Council, London to Prime Minister, Australia, 25 March 1942. Cablegram No. P. 75. AWM123 CS288.

<sup>60</sup> Prime Minister, NZ to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, for Prime Minister, UK, 24 March 1942. Cablegram No. 159. AWM123 CS288.

<sup>61</sup> Australian delegate to Pacific War Council, London to Prime Minister, Australia, 25 March 1942. Cablegram No. P.75. AWM123 CS288.

<sup>62</sup> Australian Minister for External Affairs, Washington to Prime Minister, Australia, 25 March 1942. Cablegram No. PM.5. AWM123 CS288.

meeting was held at the White House on 1 April 1942 and representatives of Australia, Canada, China, the DEI and New Zealand attended. Roosevelt announced that ‘... the new council will be in intimate contact with a similar body in London’.<sup>63</sup>



The Pacific War Council, Washington D.C. 12 October 1942.  
Nash is at left, behind Roosevelt. (The Argus)

The first five months of 1942 were a catalogue of Japanese victories: Rangoon was lost on March 8, the DEI surrendered on March 9 and all US forces in the Philippines surrendered on 10 May. It was not until the US Navy’s resistance at Midway in June that the disastrous succession of defeats was arrested. Both Dominions were, by then, grateful of Roosevelt’s promise of a division each and Australia warmly welcomed MacArthur’s forces to Australia.<sup>64</sup> With arrangements for the Allied command of the Pacific war settled and the US

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<sup>63</sup> Australian Minister for External Affairs, Washington to Prime Minister, Australia, 30 March 1942. Cablegram No. PMS.16. AWM123 CS288.

<sup>64</sup> Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the Prime Minister, Australia, from the Prime Minister UK, 23 March 1942. Cablegram No.335. ‘Digest of telegrams recently exchanged between myself (Churchill) and the President ...’ AWM123 CS288.

unequivocally in charge of the war against Japan, Australia and New Zealand put aside disappointments with their Anzac plans and accepted new geo-political realities. Both governments had to address acute labour shortages, the consequence of fighting in Europe while simultaneously defending homelands. The two 'British' neighbours, separated by different Allied commands, struggled individually to take the offensive to the Japanese. In doing so, levels of inter-dominion tension increased.

### **Section III: *Anzac - A Troubled Pact 1943-1944***

Curtin and Fraser maintained the momentum of their inter-dominion discussions of early 1942. Articles in the Australian press in July 1942 announced the visit of Fraser for discussions with Curtin. Fraser's fulsome appreciation of the Australians' dogged efforts in New Guinea and his reference to the Dominions fighting 'shoulder to shoulder' was extensively reported.<sup>65</sup> As Anzac bonds were rekindled, Fraser, spoke to an Australian audience: 'The Pacific struggle is of tremendous importance in the war as a whole. Force of circumstance has compelled recognition everywhere of the immediate importance of the Pacific situation and the necessity for the greatest possible offensive movement in the Pacific'.<sup>66</sup>

It is helpful to consider this mid-war period, from an Australasian perspective, in three phases. First, in late 1942, strains between Curtin and Fraser, concerning the withdrawal of their respective divisions from North Africa threatened solidarity. Second, in the wake of the Dominions' exclusion from the Allies' Cairo conference of November 1943, a rapprochement was made as Fraser lent Curtin's 1944 Canberra Pact initiative his support. Third, during late 1944, as a consequence of Anzac declarations made at Canberra, the disapprobation of the UK and the hostility of the US, were brought to bear upon the recalcitrant Dominions.

In late November 1942 Fraser felt it prescient to raise with Churchill the matter of bringing the Second New Zealand Division home. On 19 November he summarised home labour shortages and suggested that '... the presence of one New Zealand division in this [North African] theatre ... a matter of diminishing importance.' He bluntly called for an Allied '... counter-offensive [against Japan] at the earliest possible date' adding that '... it is felt that the place of the 2<sup>nd</sup> NZ Division is here in the South Pacific'. Fraser emphasised the likely negative consequences, in terms of New Zealand public opinion, should the Australian

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<sup>65</sup> New Zealand War Period. CAN A5954 CS 2072/15.

<sup>66</sup> Daily Telegraph, 'New Zealand's P.M. Urges Offensive', 21 July 1942.

Ninth Division return and New Zealand's Second, not.<sup>67</sup> He also made an urgent appeal for '... forward [Allied] movements against Japan'.<sup>68</sup> Churchill and the US, to prevent any potential combined Australian and New Zealand break-in-ranks, persuaded Fraser with rhetoric and military argument, blended to make the case for leaving 'The Div' in Europe.<sup>69</sup> On 24 November Churchill replied: he '... should ... very much regret to see the New Zealand Division quit the scene of its glories', and added that Australia and New Zealand would be well advised to accept the opinion of the Americans on the matter.<sup>70</sup>

Churchill reluctantly acceded to Curtin's wishes and Fraser learned on 2 December of the UK's approval of the Australian Ninth Division's repatriation. Churchill told Fraser that this withdrawal made the retention of the New Zealand Division '... more necessary for us'; to relocate it, he claimed, would equate to a further 40,000 man loss in 'shipping-lift' of US troops from America to Europe.<sup>71</sup> The House met in closed session on 3 December 1942 and the following day Fraser informed Churchill of Parliament's decision to leave the Second Division in the Middle East. Fraser had accepted Churchill's 'facts' concerning the differences in the Australian and New Zealand situations, although he retained the right to raise the matter later. Again, he called for a substantial independent British contribution to an offensive against Japan.

Curtin greeted New Zealand's decision coolly and he reminded Fraser on 14 December 1942 of the Dominions' co-dependency.<sup>72</sup> Fraser was told that the New Guinea campaign was as vital to New Zealand's security as it was to Australia's; it had been sapping Australian manpower and he suggested that a New Zealand division would be of far greater use there against the Japanese, than in North

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<sup>67</sup> Documents, Kay (ed.), p.18. Curtin cabled Roosevelt on 16 November claiming decisions on strategy made by Churchill and the President had placed Australia's security 'at considerable risk'. Curtin sought the maximum strength of the Australian forces to be concentrated in the South-West Pacific Area '... to meet all the contingencies of the military situation in the Pacific'.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.7-10.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.15-16. Nash confirmed from Washington that General G. Marshall was opposed to the Australian withdrawal: '... every military argument is against the move'.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.14-15.

Africa.<sup>73</sup> Fraser explained the decision was not an act of disloyalty, plans were in motion to send a New Zealand division to New Caledonia and that Parliament's decision had been unanimous. Curtin's acknowledgement was a curt, single paragraph cable.<sup>74</sup> Churchill lobbied once more to retain the Second Division's services and appealed to Fraser on 3 May 1943, this time for the invasion of Sicily. Churchill appealed to the bond of Empire, referred to the New Zealand Division's 'shining place' among the 8th Army, saying that while he could '... replace the New Zealand Division with another ... it is the symbolic and historic value of our continued comradeship in arms that moves me'. Of course, he added, New Zealand could withdraw its troops if it felt that option necessary.<sup>75</sup> Parliament met on 21 May 1943 and, again persuaded by Churchill's re-presented rhetoric, agreed to the British request.

This acquiescence placed Fraser in an awkward diplomatic situation, having made direct statements to the UK and Australia about New Zealand's determination to be part of offensive action against the Japanese. However, given that the Dominion was dependent upon the UK and US for defence, the decision was understandable. In giving the 'The Div' priority, though, Fraser knew that the Third or 'Pacific' Division would inevitably be compromised, as replacements for Europe would be drawn at the latter's expense. Additionally, the growing US presence in the region and the demand for food production meant that the Third Division would in due course be tapped for labour. Fraser's decision, though, denied New Zealand a major ground role in the Pacific war and this strained his relationship with Curtin. Fraser was subjected to pointed Australian criticism during 1943 and suggestions of New Zealand backsliding. Australia, for example, took a sluggish eight months to reciprocate the appointment of Carl Berendsen, High Commissioner for New Zealand in Australia.<sup>76</sup> Berendsen noted Curtin's strong feelings at the time: '... it is tough that we should be asked to supply

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., pp.17-18.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p.18-20.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., pp.20-21.

<sup>76</sup> Daily Telegraph, 'No Provision for N.Z. Post', 30 September 1943. Carl Berendsen was appointed High Commissioner for NZ in Australia in February 1943. Australia took eight months to reciprocate, appointing Thomas D'Alton on 2 November 1943.

munitions to New Zealand while [its] troops are still in the Middle East.’<sup>77</sup> Curtin’s disappointment continued and on 1 June 1943, Fraser received a sharp, cutting statement from him claiming that ‘... for every soldier New Zealand keeps away from the Pacific theatre either an American or Australian has to fill his place.’ To further irritate and inflame trans-Tasman relations, Fraser initiated the reduction and eventual withdrawal of the Third Division from the New Hebrides (Vanuatu).<sup>78</sup>

The immediate threat of invasion to Australia passed by the end of 1943, with the US success at Guadalcanal, and the presence of MacArthur’s garrison. Curtin, boosted by Labor’s victory in August 1943, relaxed his obsessive fear of Japanese invasion and took comfort from Churchill’s elevation in status of the Pacific war, in May, to that of Europe’s. At that time Australian diplomacy was influenced by the ambitious Minister of External Affairs, Herbert Evatt, variously Australia’s representative in London and Washington. He adopted a legalistic, often blustering, style in pursuit of Australia’s interests; traits that did little to endear him to representatives of allied countries. He foresaw Australia’s place in the post-war Pacific and, with an eye to the spoils of war, anticipated an inflated regional role for his country, much to the alarm of the US and UK. His outlook reflected Australian concerns with a growing American presence in the South West Pacific.<sup>79</sup> MacArthur, for example, had made tactless comments earlier in 1942 suggesting that the ‘Australians would not fight’ in New Guinea; in due course these filtered through to Stimson in Washington who noted erroneously in his diary ‘... the feeble efforts of the Australian divisions.’<sup>80</sup>

Memories of the difficult Curtin-Churchill exchanges were fading by 1943, with a warmer pro-British feeling returning to Australia that aligned with Curtin’s determination to see the British flag flying in the region. Australia was

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<sup>77</sup> *Documents*, Kay (ed.), pp.28-29.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.35-38.

<sup>79</sup> Thorne, pp. 364-370.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p.265. British observers in 1943 found matters to the contrary – the US soldiers were ‘very poor indeed’ while the Australians were ‘first-class fighting men’. The head of the British military liaison mission to Australia in 1943, General Dewing, concluded that MacArthur was ‘working steadily to exclude the Australians from any effective hand in the control of land or air operations or credit them, except as a minor element in a U.S. show’.

concerned that the US might not necessarily leave captured territories in the Pacific but remain to exploit resources as reparations. An External Affairs memorandum of 15 April 1943 noted Australia ‘... might later need some European counter-weight to Asiatic or American influence’ and Evatt advocated Australian forward defence bases in New Guinea and Solomon Islands.<sup>81</sup> He presented to the Australian House, on 14 October, a paper on the ‘... problems of security, post-war development and native welfare ... in the South-West Pacific’ and added that ‘... permanent collaboration between Australia and New Zealand [was] pivotal’.<sup>82</sup> Here was Fraser’s opportunity to mend broken Anzac fences; Evatt did not need New Zealand military assistance, but he wanted its political support. Accordingly, on 19 November 1943 he invited Fraser and ‘at least two other ministers’ to a Canberra meeting, to be held by year’s end to address mainly post-war matters.<sup>83</sup>

As preparations for Canberra were finalised, proceedings of the November Cairo ‘Sextant’ conference reached the Dominions’ Prime Ministers via press reports, not through the customary diplomatic channels. The purpose of ‘Sextant’ was to plan the Allied war effort against Japan in South East Asia and the Pacific. Evatt was outraged that Chiang Kai-shek, Churchill, and Roosevelt had set the Pacific war’s agenda and had carved-up Japanese-held territory, without consulting Australia. Any reservations Fraser may previously have had about the Canberra meeting were put aside as a result of this diplomatic snub.<sup>84</sup> It was not, however, the substance of the Anzac Canberra meeting so much as the adverse reaction to it from the senior Allies, that is pertinent. Although the Australia–New Zealand Agreement ratified at Canberra on 21 January 1944, represented a muddled set of resolutions, it had been Evatt’s ‘show’, emboldened as he had

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.365-366.

<sup>82</sup> *Documents*, Kay (ed.), p.47.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.50-51.

<sup>84</sup> *Dominion*, ‘Pacific Possessions’, 30 December 1943. Fraser was at the time aware of the feelings of both the UK and US governments on post-war arrangements for Pacific Island territories. Fraser rebuked Nash for speaking publicly in Sydney in December 1943 on the matter and told him to discuss the matters privately only, with British and American leaders. Trevor Reese, *Australia, New Zealand and the United States: A Survey of International Relations, 1941-1968*, London: Oxford University Press. Issued under the auspices of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1969, pp.32-33. Sinclair, pp.231-232.

been by Curtin's full support: alongside the two Dominions' Prime Ministers, he enjoyed almost equal status at the conference. Fraser, for his part, tuned into Anzac sentiments and made soothing utterances that went some way to heal the strains of 1943. In so doing he was linked, by association, to what the Americans and British regarded as the precocious and untimely interference by Australia into the conduct of the Pacific war.<sup>85</sup>



Chiang Kai-shek, Roosevelt and Churchill at the Cairo Conference, 25 November 1943.  
(Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum)

Evatt's statement at Canberra on the future of island territories, then occupied by the US forces, was inflammatory. Most contentiously he called for an Anzac conference on security, post-war development and native welfare for the South and South West Pacific, to be held as soon as possible.<sup>86</sup> The British and the Americans read the Canberra Agreement and it received a mixed reception, by the US with barely disguised hostility. For the US the repeated and almost exclusive references to a British Commonwealth theme, were tactless and aggravating. Officially the agreement was greeted in London cautiously but viewed privately with some satisfaction as a strong voice from the two Dominions

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<sup>85</sup> Reese, *passim*.

<sup>86</sup> 'Current Notes on External Affairs', Vol.15, No.1, January 1944, Department of External Affairs, Canberra ACT, pp. 25-26. CAN A5954 CS 1340/5.

as a counterweight to growing US power in the Pacific. Moreover, Britain wanted the Commonwealth and Empire to amplify its voice and inflate its Pacific presence.<sup>87</sup> Political realities, of course, prevailed and that the Australian and New Zealand governments had met, without consulting London, was deemed unacceptable. With Germany undefeated and ‘Operation Overlord’ at a critical stage, US sensitivities were foremost. The Anzac prime ministers agreed to postpone their planned Pacific conference until after their London meeting, scheduled for May 1944.<sup>88</sup>

Evatt’s proposals came to the attention of Cordell Hull, US Secretary of State, much to his ire. His concerns were passed swiftly to Anthony Eden, British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and were raised in a UK War Cabinet meeting of 14 February 1944. Officials from the US Embassy in London had similarly communicated ‘... their misgiving about the advisability of calling an early conference ... of powers with territorial interests in the Pacific’.<sup>89</sup> Curtin and Fraser were left in no doubt that Roosevelt was hostile to the Canberra initiative and accordingly the pair was ‘invited’ to Washington, en route to the Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Conference in London:

We hope therefore that you will not take any steps towards calling such a conference until we have had opportunity to discuss these matters fully together personally. I understand that you may be coming to Washington within the next month or two. The President and I look forward with pleasure to seeing you ... for a full and frank exchange of views on all these problems.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Thorne, p.365. This greater Commonwealth and Empire strategising on the part of the UK played a significant part in the decision to form a Pacific Fleet, enabling British participation in the defeat of Japan, ‘alongside’ the US.

<sup>88</sup> War Cabinet, W.P. (44) 107. 14<sup>th</sup> February 1944, p.1. NAUK cab/66/47/7.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p.1.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p.2.

These misunderstandings coincided with a marked reduction in New Zealand's military engagement in the Pacific, as personnel were moved into domestic production to supply US forces. Furthermore, there is evidence that the US Navy, antagonised by the Canberra discussions, excluded third parties from military activities in the South West Pacific. Admiral King, for example, chose not to use Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) units in operations against the Marshall and Caroline Islands. In Washington, Nash reported that senior US officers had been offended by Canberra's future claims on Pacific islands so recently captured, at such high human cost. Knox, proprietor of the notoriously anti-British Chicago News, led a vocal Republican criticism of the Canberra plans.<sup>91</sup> Some time later, a new US diplomat arrived in Wellington on 17 August 1944: Sydney Greenbie, Chief of the Office of War Information for New Zealand.<sup>92</sup>

At the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' meeting in May 1944 Fraser distributed 'Notes on New Zealand's War Effort and Future Participation in Pacific War', a discussion of the human and material contribution by the Dominion to the war; only the USSR had given as many per capita as New Zealand, in terms of casualties. Now, a new phase of the war had reluctantly to be managed:

The emphasis has shifted ... as a result of the growing and urgent demands for foodstuffs for Allied forces in the Pacific and for the people of Britain. We have had to choose ... between reducing our armed forces and producing food .... Following upon the advice of the United Kingdom and United States Chiefs-of-Staff 11,000 men will be withdrawn from our Pacific Division ... for work on farms.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Reese, pp.40-43.

<sup>92</sup> 'American Interest in Dominion – Significant Arrival', Dominion, 18 August 1944.

<sup>93</sup> 'Conduct of the War Against Japan', Note by the Joint Secretaries, Meeting of Prime Ministers, P.M.M. (44) 10, 16 May 1944, p.1. Prime Minister's Visit Abroad, 1944 Conduct of the war against Japan – Notes of New Zealand's war effort and future participation in Pacific War. CAN A5954 CS 657/4.

Nevertheless, Fraser intended New Zealand ‘... to participate to the fullest possible extent in military operations in the Pacific’ and hoped that once the Second Division’s work was complete in Europe, it could be retrained and redirected against Japan.<sup>94</sup>

The Pacific conference proposed at Canberra was redundant by May 1944, when Churchill shared ideas for a post-war organisation with the Commonwealth Prime Ministers. Australia and New Zealand made arrangements for a second Anzac meeting in Wellington for late 1944. Australia’s perception of New Zealand’s military irrelevance at that time is revealed in dialogue between Canberra and Wellington. D’Alton, concerned about New Zealand’s military marginalisation in the Pacific, alerted Australian External Affairs to Wellington’s anxieties on 27 September 1944: ‘The New Zealand Government feel that they are not very well informed of Australia’s plans for ... the Pacific fighting and ... would welcome information’, and requested that the matter be added to the agenda for the Wellington meeting.<sup>95</sup> This was passed to the Defence Department in Melbourne, on 6 October. Francis Forde, Australian Minister for the Army, sought advice from General Thomas Blamey the Australian Commander-in-Chief and, in reality, MacArthur’s subordinate. Blamey’s response was a terse dismissal of New Zealand:

I spoke to the Prime Minister about ... having military representation at talks in New Zealand ... Militarily, of course, New Zealand is of very little interest to Australia. On the other hand Australia is of greatest interest to New Zealand ... any Australian military commitments should be solely designed to Australian requirements,

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p.7. High Commissioner for Australia in New Zealand to Acting Minister for External Affairs, Australia. Letter 1 June 1945. CAN A1066 CS Z45/6/6. Interestingly, Fraser came to encounter considerable domestic political opposition to such a suggestion later in 1945.

<sup>95</sup> W. D. Forsyth, Department of External Affairs, Canberra to the Secretary, Department of Defence, Melbourne. Letter, 6 October 1944. Conference between Australian and New Zealand Ministers on the future of the Southwest Pacific region – October 1944. File No.2. CAN A816 CS 104/301/1.

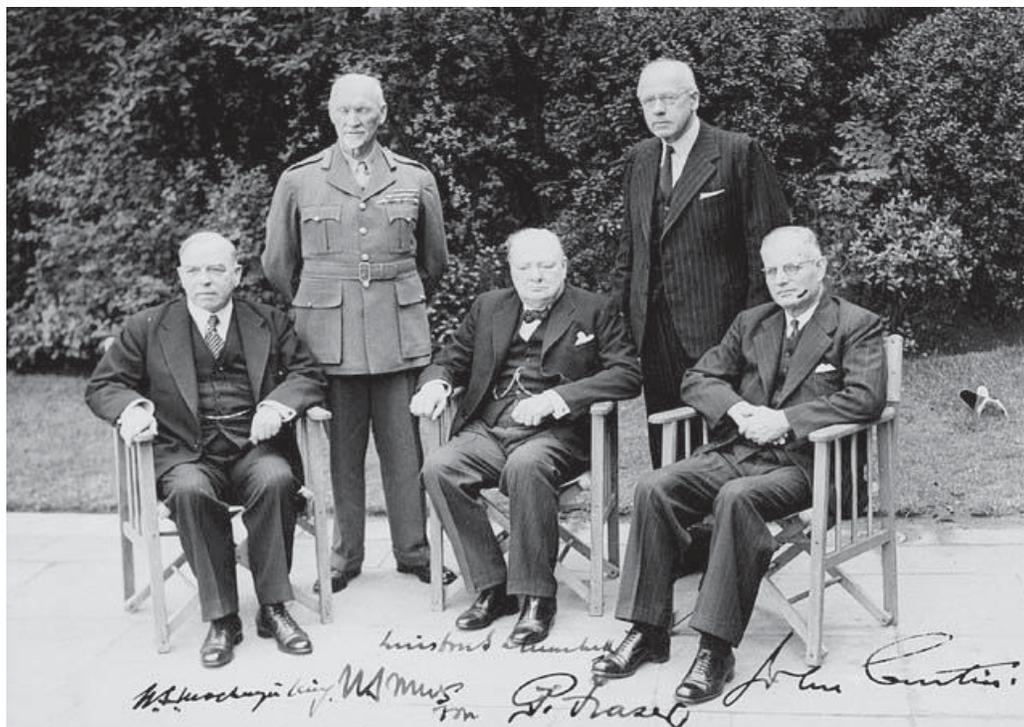
without any consideration to New Zealand .... In my view, the commitment by Australia to any protective requirements should be most carefully approached and we should not even inform New Zealand ....<sup>96</sup>

Clearly, Australia felt little need of New Zealand's assistance and under MacArthur was far closer to the war's frontline. New Zealand, a distant outpost of Nimitz' US Navy command, was no longer of political value with the Anzac discussions relegated to low priority. As the Pacific war advanced north Blamey suggested that sending a relatively junior staff officer to Wellington would suffice and, with that, the last wartime Anzac conference was held at Wellington in October and November 1944.<sup>97</sup> However, no resolutions were reached regarding the immediate military cooperation of the two Dominions, although D'Alton continued to press New Zealand's cause in Canberra for the remainder of the war. By late 1944 the number of US military personnel in New Zealand dwindled as the US Navy advanced towards Japan. Around that time, both the Australian and New Zealand Naval Boards began to receive signals, detailed supply inquiries and technical requests from the Admiralty, regarding their facilities. In January 1945 the first elements of the BPF arrived at Sydney: the Royal Navy had returned in strength to the Dominion.

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<sup>96</sup> General T. Blamey to Hon. F. M Forde, Minister for the Army. Letter 4 October 1944. CAN A816 CS 104/301/1.

<sup>97</sup> Prime Minister, NZ to Canberra. Cablegram No. 200, 7 November 1944. CAN A816 CS 104/301/1.



Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference (L-R): Mackenzie King (Canada), Smuts (South Africa), Churchill (United Kingdom), Fraser (New Zealand), Curtin (Australia). London, 1 May 1944. (Library and Archives Canada)

## **Chapter Two: *Contested Strategies and Logistic Realities***

Chapter One presented discussion of New Zealand's limited authority, during 1942-1944, to influence Pacific defence arrangements and wider war strategy. This lessened the likelihood of New Zealand's participation, as a minor ally under Nimitz, in Allied offensives against Japan. It was not considered probable even as late as 1944, that a British Fleet would enter the central Pacific to attack Japanese forces, let alone strike the Japanese Home Islands. Such were the vagaries of war planning, the competing strategic imperatives of allied nations and the capriciousness of politicians and their military leaders that the BPF was realised in 1945 at all, is remarkable. It is important, therefore, to establish the evolution of the naval task force from the historical context of the Allies' competing strategic agenda. It was explained earlier that Australia and New Zealand had, in accord, called for the return of the Royal Navy to the Pacific.<sup>1</sup> However, any decisions for Anzac involvement in a Pacific British naval force were made at the highest level and not by the Dominions' governments.<sup>2</sup> It was, in fact, the last minute turnabout offer by Churchill, at the 'Octagon' conference at Quebec in September 1944 that gave the go-ahead for the BPF.

The rationale for staging a British maritime offensive against Japan is examined in this chapter. Analysis is made of the decision by the UK to send, with US approval, a large naval task force to the central Pacific - a choice that emerged from competing plans to support Mountbatten's South East Asia Command (SEAC) and MacArthur's South West Pacific 'Middle Strategy'. A discussion of the Lethbridge Mission sent to the USA, the South Pacific and India in 1943, examines British efforts to learn US Navy logistics' best-practice, the regional geography of likely Pacific battle areas and to re-establish vital connections with the Pacific Dominions. To that end Australia and, to a much lesser degree New Zealand, were drawn into the Admiralty's improvised

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<sup>1</sup> Thorne, p.411.

<sup>2</sup> Thesis Appendix I. Curtin and Fraser were not present at 'Quadrant', snubbed at 'Sextant' and were not included in discussions until the Dominions' Prime Ministers' conference, London, May 1944.

logistical arrangements for basing the BPF at Sydney, c discussed as a conclusion to Chapter Two.

## **Section I: *Quebec, September 1944 – A Decision Made***

Anglo-American war-time relations regarding the Far East have been described as ‘chronically difficult’ with an undercurrent of mutual suspicion and, at times, contempt. For Churchill, in early 1944, the war’s ‘storm centre’ was Europe and he disliked the idea of large British forces ‘inactive in India’; the UK noted Nimitz’ astounding advances in the central Pacific with some concern. The US at times adopted the moral high ground by overstating the imperialist aims of its ally despite the hypocrisy of its own policies, most notably the ‘unequal treaties’ signed previously to secure American access to Chinese markets. Negative attitudes towards the UK in US press articles forecast the prospect of the US beating the Japanese single-handedly and contemptuously suggested British back-sliding; sentiments well entrenched within the US Navy. A suspicion of British imperialism was discretely expressed by Roosevelt in 1943 at the ‘Quadrant’ conference when he told Henry Morgenthau, his erstwhile ‘New Deal’ adviser, ‘... all they want is Singapore back’.<sup>3</sup> Publicly, of course, Roosevelt distanced himself from such un-diplomatic utterances and warned that anti-British attitudes would hamper productive relationships, in the post-war world.<sup>4</sup>

The discussions and decisions that determined British naval planning for the Pacific war spanned three major Allied conferences: ‘Quadrant’, ‘Sextant’ and ‘Octagon’. In August 1943 at ‘Quadrant’, Quebec, Britain although pre-occupied with fighting Germany, made an unspecified commitment to the war with Japan. On the last day of the meeting both allies agreed to bring detailed plans to ‘Sextant’, the next scheduled conference to be held at Cairo, in November. A US team with the assistance of three British staff officers was instructed to prepare a ‘Twelve Month Plan’ of strategic bombing for the Pacific; a British team with two US members assessed options for Allied operations within South East Asia.<sup>5</sup> The US Army Air Force (USAAF) estimated that the defeat of Japan could be achieved by October 1945, over a more realistic twenty-four month period. A successful US invasion of Honshu, the central and largest Japanese home island

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<sup>3</sup> Thorne, pp.401-405.

<sup>4</sup> Coles, p.112.

<sup>5</sup> Wilmott, pp.17-18.

could be secured by strategic bombing, it was concluded. China and Formosa were ruled out as air force bases, as the military resources required to secure these territories would be unavailable until the defeat of Germany had been achieved. As an alternative, the USAAF foresaw the use of the Mariana Islands as airfield bases once in American possession and by October 1943 China's strategic importance was given lower priority by US planners. This strategic marginalisation of China brought operation 'Culverin', a plan repudiated by the British Chiefs of Staff prior to 'Quadrant', back into the UK's consideration.<sup>6</sup>

Operation 'Culverin', various British plans for amphibious landings in northern Sumatra and Malaya, had several iterations between 1942 and 1944.<sup>7</sup> 'Culverin' re-entered Churchill's purview around October 1943 as China's strategic value waned and at the time Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten RN was appointed Supreme Allied Commander, south-east Asia (SEAC). Churchill believed 'Culverin' would enable the recapture of Singapore, restore imperial prestige and avenge a humiliating defeat. He was unsympathetic to operations in Northern Burma and unsupportive of US Army General Joseph Stilwell's campaign to advance from Myitkyina across mountains to join the Chinese Nationalist forces. Mountbatten produced the 'Axiom' report, a plan shaping SEAC's objectives so that favourable arguments for 'Culverin' would prevail. Churchill championed 'Axiom' and described 'Culverin' as a 'masterstroke', thus giving Mountbatten's command a focus point.<sup>8</sup> 'Culverin' had alternative and supporting code-named operations, located in the Bay of Bengal: all required military forces and resources completely beyond the means of the UK and the Chiefs fully appreciated that.<sup>9</sup>

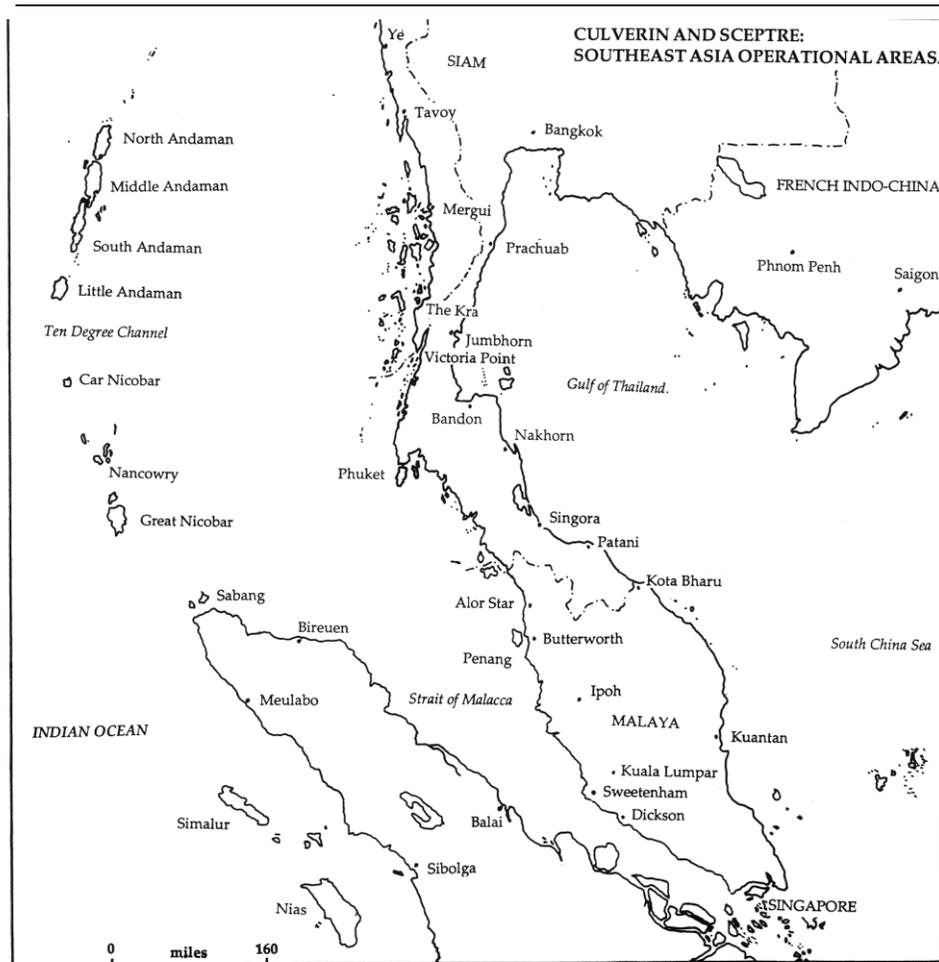
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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp.20-22. At the 'Eureka' conference in Tehran in late November 1943, Churchill and Roosevelt took great encouragement from Stalin's pledge to bring the USSR into the war against Japan. The Red Army would be used to steamroller Japan's armies occupying China. There was, in the light of this, no need for the US or GB to consider an invasion of China.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.xiv.

<sup>8</sup> Thorne, pp.409-410. Wilmott, p.35.

<sup>9</sup> Wilmott, pp.xiii-xv. 'Culverin': Proposed landings on the Andaman Islands ('Bucaneer'); at Arakan ('Anakim' and 'Pigstick'); Rangoon ('Vanguard') and the Kra Peninsula in Thailand ('Sceptre').



‘Culverin’ and ‘Sceptre’ (Wilmott)

Churchill visited Washington, from 1 to 12 September 1943, and overheard threads of US discussions concerning a possible British naval contribution to the war with Japan. Without consulting the Admiralty he offered a Royal Navy squadron for a four month Pacific tour of duty with the US Navy, an offer welcomed at the time by the Americans. The US calculated that in order to capture the Marianas, having three extra British carriers, as a contingency, might make the difference between success and failure; such inclusiveness on the part of the US Navy was to be rescinded by year’s end.<sup>10</sup> A Royal Navy squadron, it was proposed, would use the Panama Canal, join the US Navy in the Pacific and later

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp.28-31.

proceed to Ceylon for Mountbatten's use in 'Culverin'. The Admiralty advised Churchill that his offer was impracticable and so reluctantly, it was withdrawn.<sup>11</sup>

On his return to London Churchill returned to his 'Culverin' obsession and asked the Chiefs for an operation start date of early 1944. The Chiefs' meeting of 28 September 1943, held in Churchill's absence exacerbated divergences between the Prime Minister's strategy and that of his senior military advisers. The minutes recorded that in the Chiefs' opinion the British should await the US Twelve Month Plan report and be prepared to send a substantial naval force to the Pacific, if required.<sup>12</sup> However, Churchill's prejudices remained: uppermost were a mutual admiration of Mountbatten and an aversion to Upper Burma as a military priority; matters of imperial prestige and a determination not to be outshone by the Americans militarily. The Chiefs argued pragmatically, aware of Britain and the Empire's exhaustion and especially of its finite human resources. They knew that committing a naval task force to the Pacific alongside the US Navy would not be an unsustainable drain on diminishing manpower, would make an important contribution to an Allied victory and would not further cripple Britain financially. Moreover, the Chiefs had worked well alongside the Americans, respected their professionalism and, from that, knew the British military had a great deal to gain from the US Navy, even in a subordinate role.<sup>13</sup>

It was a blow to the Chiefs, therefore, when a draft copy of the US Twelve Month Plan was received on 7 November 1943 and they found, to their annoyance, it conveyed the US' expectation to defeat Japan in the Central Pacific alone. Furthermore, the Americans '... believed that the greatest contribution by

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<sup>11</sup> Michael Apps, *Send her Victorious*, London: William Kimber and Co. Limited, 1971, pp. 113-125. HMS *Victorious* was 'lent' to the US Navy in the Pacific at the time of Guadalcanal operations. Passing through the Panama Canal on 10 February 1943, the carrier left the Pacific on 25 August 1943.

<sup>12</sup> Wilmott, p.33.

<sup>13</sup> Chris Madsen, 'Dollars, Diplomacy and Fleets: John Maynard Keynes and Stage II Naval Requirements for the war against Japan', *International Journal of Maritime History*, 19:1 (2007), p.121. Cunningham was made aware of Congress' alarm at rising levels of Lend-Lease aid to the Royal Navy: the Fleet Air Arm, alone, requested 'Naval Fighter and Torpedo Aircraft' to the value of \$US 338million, in January 1945.

the British ... would be to undertake continuing offensive operations in the south-east Asia areas'. The hand of the US Navy it appeared was at work.<sup>14</sup>

Churchill infuriated the Chiefs further with a report dated 1 February 1944, clearly based upon 'Axiom', in which he repudiated the Combined British and American Chiefs' strategy that he and Roosevelt had earlier endorsed at 'Sextant'. This was an agreement to concentrate Allied, in other words US Navy, efforts in the central Pacific, with the possibility of only minor British amphibious operations on lower Burma. Churchill clung stubbornly to 'Culverin' even though he was advised that the commencement date would be spring 1945 at the earliest and Singapore recaptured, possibly, by as late as January 1946.<sup>15</sup> Roosevelt, alarmed, checked Churchill with a forthright warning on 25 February 1944: 'I fail to see how an operation against Sumatra and Malaya requiring tremendous forces can be mounted until the conclusion of the war in Europe ... I most urgently hope [for] a vigorous and immediate campaign in Upper Burma'.<sup>16</sup> This was Churchill's least favoured theatre of operations.

In February 1944 US carriers raided Japanese naval bases and warships at Truk in the Caroline Islands and as a result the Japanese fleet redeployed to Singapore. The British East Indies Fleet was at risk of a Japanese strike on Ceylon and a stock-take of the Royal Navy indicated that *Illustrious* was the only available reinforcement, as all other fleet carriers were then un-seaworthy. However, on 25 February the Chiefs met without Churchill to discuss arrangements to meet this expected threat; intelligence reports, however, established that the Japanese naval movement was primarily defensive. Admiral Andrew Cunningham, Chief of the Naval Staff, reassured his COS colleagues that defensive preparations, were in hand.<sup>17</sup> That day, and the day following, the

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<sup>14</sup> Wilmott, pp.38-39. Roosevelt responded to a UK letter seeking clarification over matters of British participation outlined in the draft Twelve Month Plan. His 'advice' ties in with King's readiness to supply US-made landing craft and maintenance vessels to Mountbatten. Refer Section II.

<sup>15</sup> Thorne, pp.410-411.

<sup>16</sup> Wilmott, p.55.

<sup>17</sup> Coles, p.108. Admiral Andrew Cunningham RN, from October 1943 First Sea Lord and Chief of the Naval Staff, described Churchill's 'Culverin' obsession as '... recapturing our own rubber trees'.

Chiefs held three meetings with Churchill, his mood fluctuating between anger and reason. Some progress was made in directing Far Eastern policy and, amidst the tense exchanges, three significant tactical developments emerged.<sup>18</sup> First, Churchill reluctantly conceded that ‘Culverin’s’ time of opportunity had passed. Second, Churchill’s notion of building an Eastern Fleet of strategic value was negated by the recently demonstrated passivity of the Japanese Fleet in the Indian Ocean. Third, Brooke played a skilful hand suggesting an alternative to the Royal Navy operating under Nimitz in the Pacific: he proposed the idea of British operations with MacArthur’s South West Pacific command, first in Borneo and then Malaya. This arrangement, Brooke argued, would establish a British and Australian command and so the ‘Middle Strategy’ entered discussions to further cloud decision-making.<sup>19</sup>

The deployment of the Royal Navy in the Central Pacific, as favoured by the Chiefs in 1944, faced opposition from both Churchill and the US Navy and so a ‘game breaker’ was required. H. P. Wilmott has argued that the ‘Middle Strategy’ was in essence a calculated, red herring device by which Australia, anxious for clear direction of its war effort, was lured into wider British plans for participation in the Pacific conflict. The ‘Middle Strategy’ would be dropped as a serious proposition once its ‘nefarious purpose’ of securing Sydney as a British naval base, had been achieved. Furthermore, the Chiefs knew that Australia would inevitably be unable to contribute significantly to the ‘Middle Strategy’.<sup>20</sup> Even so, and amid the heated February COS’ discussions, Brooke championed the rights of Australia and New Zealand to be consulted about the Pacific war and on 26 February he suggested a naval mission be sent to Australia, that March.<sup>21</sup>

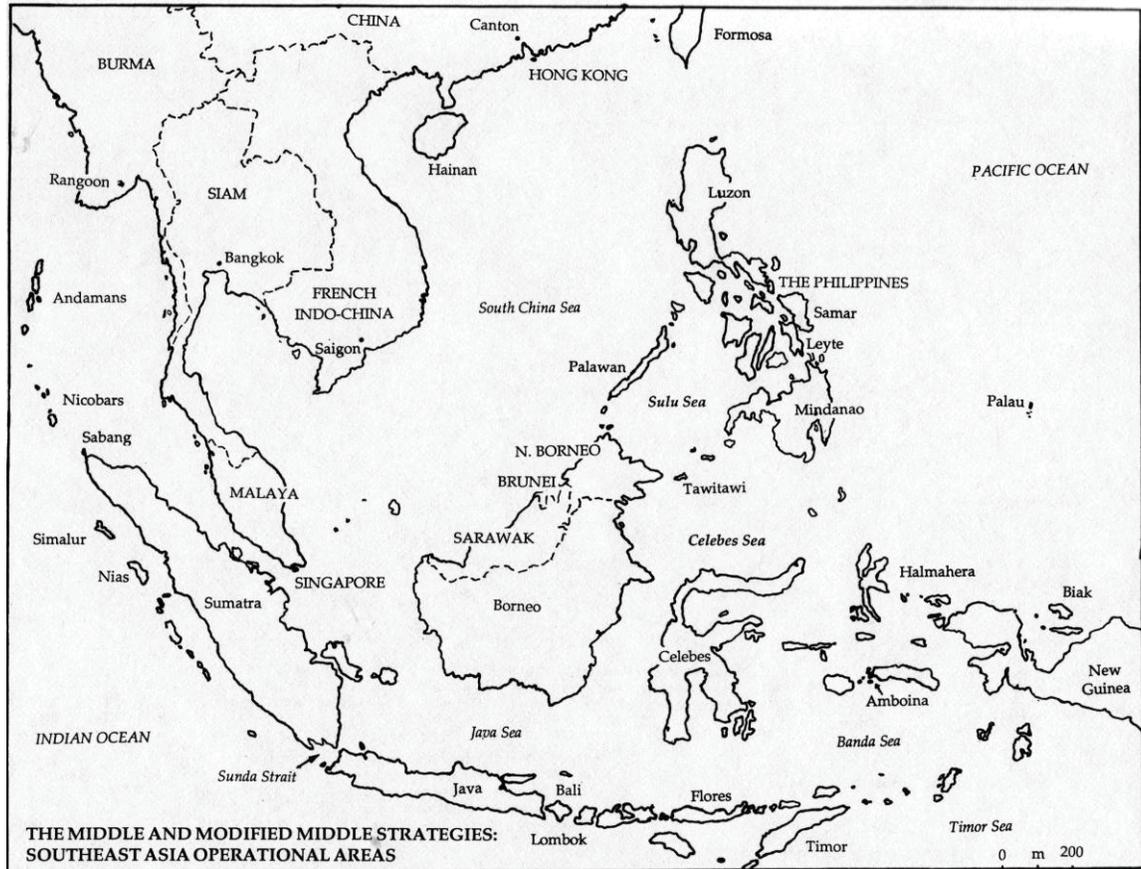
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<sup>18</sup> Wilmott, pp.57-61.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp.61-65.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.95. ‘Conduct of the War Against Japan’, Note by the Joint Secretaries, Meeting of Prime Ministers, P.M.M. (44) 2, 3 May 1944. By late 1943 only 10.5% of the male Australian population aged between 14 and 40 years was not involved in the services or war work.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.65.



The 'Middle and Modified Middle' Strategies (Wilmott)

On 5 September 1944 Churchill and the Chiefs boarded the *Queen Mary* for the 'Octagon' conference in Quebec to present Roosevelt, and the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, with finalised British proposals for the war against Japan. Churchill, irascible throughout the passage, was distracted by rumours of imminent German defeat and at one stage asked Cunningham if the ship could be turned about if required.<sup>22</sup> The UK's Pacific policy was still unresolved prior to the first plenary session on 13 September, despite seven meetings on-board ship and at Quebec. The Chiefs were able, finally, to bring Churchill to their view that planned Culverin-like operations for lower Burma could wait for the end of the European war. On 9 September, the British team proffered a Royal Navy fleet for

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<sup>22</sup> Diary of Admiral Andrew B. Cunningham, 1883-1963, 5 September 1944. Andrew Cunningham papers in British Library, London. [http://www.fpp.co.uk/History/Churchill/Admiral\\_Cunningham/diary\\_1944.html](http://www.fpp.co.uk/History/Churchill/Admiral_Cunningham/diary_1944.html), accessed 18 Feb 2011.

MacArthur's South West command, within the 'Middle Strategy' and this received a mildly enthusiastic welcome from the Americans.<sup>23</sup>

This tentative US acceptance presented the Chiefs with a diplomatic challenge as they themselves were not genuinely committed to the 'Middle Strategy'. However, the situation, if handled adroitly, carried the germ of a solution that could give the British a significant naval role in the central Pacific, alongside the US Navy. This required a manipulation by the Chiefs of what Churchill's anticipated formal responses to the Americans at 'Octagon', might well be. For the Prime Minister to ungraciously abjure the MacArthur option would have seemed churlish and also inconsistent, given that the 'Middle Strategy' was a British initiative. However, the Chiefs persuaded Churchill that deployment with MacArthur was, really, a slight to British prestige and would sideline the Royal Navy to a strategic backwater.

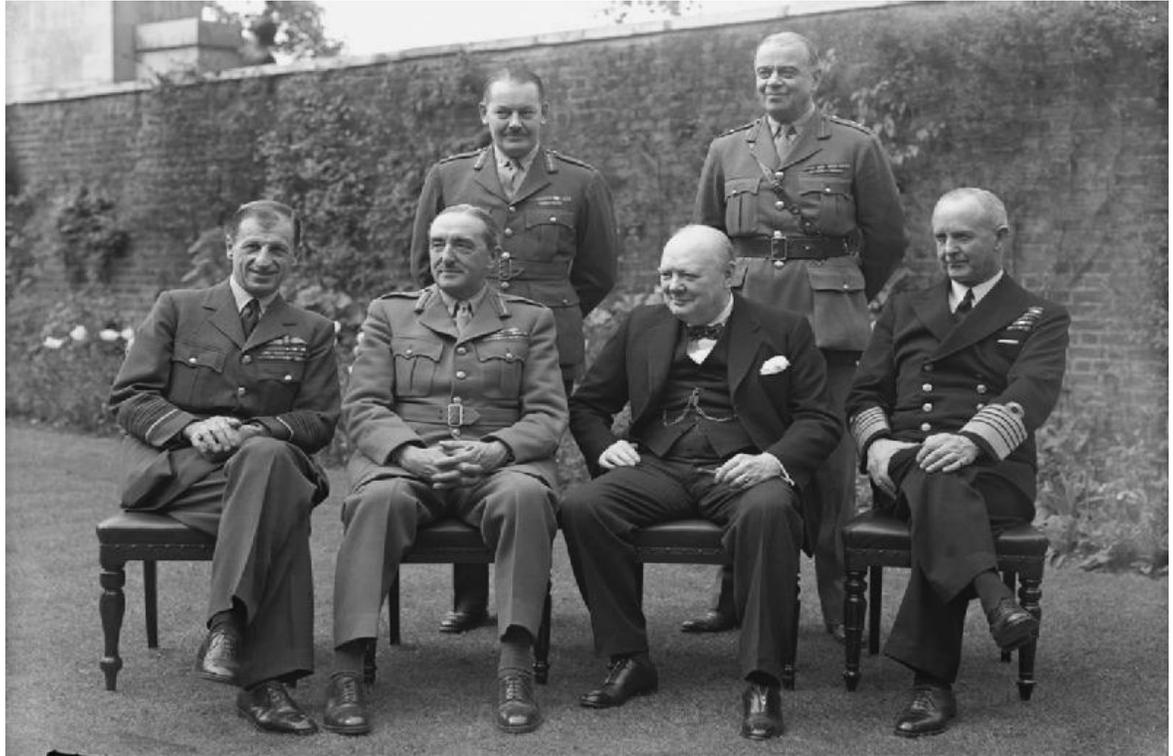
So, on 12 September Churchill, 'all smiles and friendliness' and in a 'mood of sweet reasonableness', advised the Chiefs that a British fleet would indeed participate in final operations against Japan; it had become a matter of national honour and accordingly, the next day, he made the 'right' offer to the US.<sup>24</sup> Cunningham's diary for Wednesday 13 September recorded the event: 'Plenary meeting at 11:30. PM led off & gave quite a good review. He offered the British main fleet for operations against Japan in the Central Pacific & it was at once accepted by the President [sic]'.<sup>25</sup> Admiral King insisted that the British Fleet be entirely self-sufficient.

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<sup>23</sup> Coles, pp.115-116. US military policy on the South West 'Middle Strategy' was inconsistent. King initially supported a limited role for the British via the Australian recapture of Borneo but he also raised fears of British imperial incursion into the oil rich Dutch East-Indies. MacArthur needed and wanted Royal Navy forces under his command. King, stoked MacArthur's anti-British prejudice in a letter of 21 July 1944, outlining the UK's ambitions on territories then under MacArthur's command; his enthusiasm for British military assistance waned thereafter.

<sup>24</sup> Sarantakes, p.436. Brooke, and Cunningham's diary observations of 12 September 1944. Churchill reasoned that a refusal on the part of the US would, in political terms, give the UK the moral high ground. Wilmott, pp.126-133.

<sup>25</sup> Cunningham Diary, 13 September 1944.



The Chiefs of Staff (COS) at 10 Downing Street 7 May 1945. Seated from left: Marshall of the RAF, Sir Charles Portal, Field Marshall Sir Alan Brooke, Churchill, and Admiral of the Fleet, Sir Andrew Cunningham. Standing: Maj. Gen. Leslie Hollis and Gen. Sir Hastings Ismay. (IWM H.41834)

## **Section II: *The Lethbridge Mission***

By mid-1943 Britain was able to divert some military resources from the European theatre and prepare plans for an offensive against Japan. The Lethbridge Mission was a proposal of the Chiefs and was comprised of professional officers of all three services.<sup>26</sup> Although the team was led by Major-General J.S. Lethbridge, Royal Engineers, the mission was driven by Admiralty inquiries of logistical and technical interest to Royal Navy planners. In this regard Cunningham's leadership was influential. Previously Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean, he had ordered the Fleet Air Arm attacks that had contributed decisively to the destruction of the Italian fleet in early 1943; he understood the potency of maritime air operations, as well as the technological limitations of the Fleet Air Arm. In addition he developed a high opinion of the US military as Eisenhower's Supreme Commander of operation 'Torch', the Allied landings in North Africa in 1943. From Cunningham's professional experience, two elements emerged in his planning, as he considered the Royal Navy's possible engagement in the Pacific. British aircraft carriers needed to extend operational capability working alongside the US Navy and he had a high regard for the efficiency and expertise of the Americans. Brooke was also intent on British forces directly engaging the Japanese, alongside the US, as the most direct way of ensuring the capitulation of Japan and to ensure that Lend-Lease facilities were extended well after hostilities ended.<sup>27</sup>

The Lethbridge Mission's formation coincided with the 'Quadrant' conference, was in the field at the time of 'Sextant' and its findings should have been used to inform British planning and decisions made before the 'Octagon' meeting, of September 1944. The Mission's report confirmed and informed the Chiefs' views with regard to the war with Japan and its findings are instructive. Since 1939 the Royal Navy had been fighting the Axis' forces in the Atlantic, the North Sea and the Mediterranean in a type of naval warfare fundamentally

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<sup>26</sup> J.E. Stephenson, Dominions Office, to Sir Harry F. Batterbee, High Commissioner for the UK in NZ, 10 July 1943, 'Missions – British military mission to Pacific and India – 1943', ANZ N1/682/22/5/10. Madsen, 'Strategy ....', p.951.

<sup>27</sup> Sarantakes, p.433.

different logistically to that to be conducted the Pacific Ocean. The Royal Navy was acutely aware of the growing technical expertise of the US Navy and ways that American industrial production was directly applied to the prosecution of the Pacific war. Cunningham wanted to understand how King supplied Nimitz' integrated amphibious forces in the Pacific for months at a time, thousands of miles from home ports, on such a massive scale.

The Mission's senior naval representative, Rear-Admiral F.H.W. Goolden RN, had a long list of logistical and technical questions of the US military. The Lethbridge team arrived in New York on 4 August 1943 and Goolden travelled immediately to Washington DC. At that time King was in Quebec encouraging British 'Culverin' plans, keen to keep the Royal Navy out of the Central Pacific.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, Goolden wasted no time in gathering first-hand information by close observation of the US military and through consultation with experts. The Mission had seven areas of investigation: 'Logistics Plans and Organisation; Command Arrangements; Main and Advance Bases; Afloat Sustainment; Maritime Air Operations; Amphibious Operations and Manpower'. The aim of '... investigating ... the most effective and economical prosecution of all-out war against Japan' was the Mission's guiding statement.<sup>29</sup>

Goolden was accompanied by a relatively junior Fleet Air Arm officer, Lieutenant-Commander H. R. B. Janvrin RN. It is important to emphasise how far behind the US Navy the Royal Navy had fallen in maritime air capability, by 1943, even after four hard years of war during which the Fleet Air Arm had performed with distinction. The service was handicapped by a critical shortage of trained officers, as well as by obsolete and unsuitable aircraft. Janvrin had trained late as an observer in 1938 and he typified the lack of naval seniority within the air branch, despite being a veteran of the 1940 attack on the Italian fleet at Taranto.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, the US Navy had seized the opportunity, provided by de-

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<sup>28</sup> Madsen, 'Strategy ...', pp.959-960.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., passim. The mission's detailed terms of reference, itinerary and personnel were set out in a memorandum provided by the Dominions' Office of 10 July 1943. ANZ N1.682/22/5/10.

<sup>30</sup> [http://www.unithistories.com/officers/RN\\_officersJ.html](http://www.unithistories.com/officers/RN_officersJ.html). Accessed 13 January 2011. The Japanese Imperial Navy took keen note of Fleet Air Arm tactics, techniques and technology deployed against the Regia Marina Italian, in planning their attack on Pearl Harbor. Taranto is

restrictions on aircraft carrier construction contained in the 1922 Washington and 1930 London Naval Treaties, to extensively develop their air arm.<sup>31</sup> Janvrin was specifically tasked to exploit this American expertise.

Goolden's team, with aviation expert Captain Robert Blick USN as liaison officer, soon arrived on the US West Coast. Blick arranged to use a transport plane so that they could tour the huge US Navy and Marine Corps bases along the coast, from San Diego to San Francisco. It became apparent to Goolden, with the loss of Hong Kong and Singapore, that none of the remaining British-occupied Asian and Pacific territories, including those in India, could provide the port, dry dock facilities or the technically skilled workforce to match the American amenities he observed in California. Goolden consulted with the senior Royal Navy liaison officer there, Commander B.V. Wilson RN, and they concurred that it was beyond Britain's resources alone, to build up an Indian Ocean fleet, with sufficient sea-borne air power, to push back the Japanese in South East Asia.<sup>32</sup>

Goolden visited US Navy headquarters in Hawaii in September 1943 and observed first-hand Nimitz' unified command in operation.<sup>33</sup> The team's introduction to Pearl Harbor was made easier by having another embedded Royal Navy liaison officer there, who had built-up excellent relations with the US Navy. Goolden learned that Nimitz' island-hopping successes were attributable to the American's control of all sea, air and marine forces and this enabled advanced logistical planning. The British team continued to Noumea via San Diego and arrived on Monday 4 October 1943 to meet Admiral W. J. Halsey USN. He outlined to the Mission his successful integration of US forces with New Zealand

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relevant in having shaped Cunningham's appreciation of the importance of the air arm in modern naval warfare. Angelo N. Caravaggio, 'The Attack at Taranto - Tactical Success, Operational Failure', *Naval War College Review*, Summer 2006, Vol. 59, No.3.

<sup>31</sup> Patrick J. L. Thomson, 'A Background, Survey and Analysis of the New Zealand Naval Board's Recruitment Scheme F for the provision and training of New Zealand personnel, as candidates for service as Naval Airmen in the Air Branch of the Royal Navy, during World War II', Massey University, BA Hons., 2009, p.9.

<sup>32</sup> Madsen, 'Strategy ....', pp.960-961.

<sup>33</sup> Wilmott, p.45. The notion of a unified US command did not extend to relations between the US Navy in Pearl Harbor and MacArthur's SW Pacific US Army command: 'a theater tantamount in US naval terms to a leper colony'.

army and air force units, in the South Pacific.<sup>34</sup> Halsey's model of organisational efficiency was in stark contrast to the muddle Goolden was to witness soon after, during a visit to Mountbatten's SEAC headquarters in early 1944.

In India, structures appeared dysfunctional and evidence of competing agenda was apparent; there were few signs of an integrated command. In terms of preparing a British amphibious assault on Sumatra and Malaya at that time, Mountbatten had few allies, despite Churchill championing his cause. Goolden's team arrived in the turbulent wake of the resignation of the Commander-in Chief of the Eastern Fleet at Trincomalee, Admiral Sir James Somerville RN. Somerville had refused to allow Mountbatten, 'The Young Pretender', any operational control over his warships. As a consequence Mountbatten was forced to rely heavily upon elements of the Royal Indian Navy for support.<sup>35</sup> The Admiralty remained firmly opposed to 'Culverin', despite King's agreement to supply 94 US landing craft and an offer to release five fleet repair ships for Mountbatten's use, in November.<sup>36</sup>

The Mission assessed potentially valuable and available forward, main base facilities, essential for any British offensive against Japan. Critically, Singapore was in Japanese hands and this denied the Royal Navy use of a floating dry-dock; all US naval dock yards at the time were at full capacity refitting British shipping under Lend-Lease. Alexandria, following the defeat of the Italian fleet, had some extra dock yard capacity, but was hardly close to the Pacific. Durban and Vancouver, two other possibilities, were remote and Ceylon lacked skilled ship workers. Goolden had observed US Navy 'SeeBee' construction battalions in California and understood the Royal Navy had no such equivalent to build its advanced bases. Therefore, with few alternatives, he selected Sydney as the most suitable location for a main British naval base in the Pacific.<sup>37</sup> This choice

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<sup>34</sup> Report from Rear Admiral F.H. Goolden from Navy Office Wellington to the Secretary of the Admiralty, Whitehall, 19 October 1943. ANZ N1/682/22/5/10.

<sup>35</sup> Thorne, p.415. Brooke, in a diary entry of May 1944, noted that 'Winston is determined Mountbatten must be given an operation to carry out; Andrew Cunningham (now first Sea Lord) is equally determined that Mountbatten should not control the Eastern Fleet ...' Somerville became head of the British Naval Mission in Washington in late 1944.

<sup>36</sup> Madsen, 'Strategy ....', p.972.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp.964-967.

acknowledged that the Royal Navy would have to fight without advanced bases and therefore rely entirely upon replenishment at sea; the concept of the Pacific 'Fleet Train' was advanced. These understandings were based upon Goolden's full appreciation that the Royal Navy could not replicate the US Navy's sophisticated fleet supply operation linked, as it was, by an extensive network of US-held shore bases. Although he identified the need for a Royal Navy fleet train, he knew that, irrespective of how it was to be deployed, Britain was critically short of merchant shipping for the purpose.<sup>38</sup>

Janvrin went to Washington as a maritime aviation investigator and, as the Fleet Air Arm had already liaised with the US Bureau of Aeronautics, this enabled him to meet the 'right' people quickly. Janvrin's priority was to ensure the supply of American naval aircraft, specifically the Grumman Avenger bomber, and Grumman Hellcat and the Chance Vought Corsair fighter. At Nimitz' headquarters in Pearl Harbor he noted that a 'Commander Air Pacific' directed operations to ensure that spares, aircraft replacements and fresh aircrew were supplied to the fleet. Goolden travelled throughout Solomon Islands accompanied by Blick and Janvrin during early October 1943, to see US bases.<sup>39</sup> Janvrin appreciated US methodology but knew that the Royal Navy could not be as profligate with machinery, or as generous in rotating aircrew in theatre, as the US Navy was. He noted, too, Sydney's proximity to five suitable airfields inland where maintenance, rest and training for the Fleet Air Arm could be provided on similar lines to those US Navy models of operation he had seen recently.<sup>40</sup>

The Lethbridge mission flew from Noumea to New Zealand, courtesy of the RNZAF; Goolden, Lethbridge and Air Commodore McLean RAF travelled together, arriving in Wellington on 16 October 1943. Their arrival, along with group photographs of US and New Zealand officers, was reported in the local

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp.967-969. Admiral King's generosity supplying naval support vessels to SEAC was in stark contrast to his insistence on the BPF being wholly self-sufficient.

<sup>39</sup> Report from Rear Admiral F.H. Goolden, ANZ N1.682.22.5.10.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp.969-971.

papers.<sup>41</sup> It is interesting that the press had earlier covered the team's work as well as Peter Fraser's announcement of the imminent arrival of the mission.

Newspaper coverage was in essence a propaganda exercise but the article was a means of officially encouraging national discussion about the direction of the war against Japan. To this end, Fraser was quoted repeating part of Churchill's London Guildhall speech of 30 June 1943: '... when Germany has been crushed in Europe every man, every ship, and every aeroplane in the King's service that can be moved to the Pacific will be sent, and there maintained in action for as many years as are needed to make the Japanese, in their turn, submit or bite the dust'. Fraser added that the Mission's work was clear evidence of British 'positive action' in the war with Japan, in full cooperation with the United States.<sup>42</sup>



20 October 1943. 'MILITARY MISSION VISITS NEW ZEALAND ... with New Zealand chiefs of staff in Wellington. From left, back row: Colonel R. Robbins (America), Colonel C. de Ware (America), Lieutenant-Colonel D. Curme (Britain), Lieutenant-Colonel D. Andrews (Britain). Front row: Rear-Admiral F.H.W. Goolden (Britain), Commodore Sir Atwell Lake (NZ), Major-General J.S. Lethbridge (Britain), Lieutenant-General E. Puttick (NZ), Air Commodore L.L. McLean (Britain), Air Vice-Marshall L.M. Isitt (NZ).' (New Zealand Herald)

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<sup>41</sup> 'Military Mission - Members Arrive in New Zealand – Problems of the Pacific', Dominion, 18 October 1942. 'British Mission – War Against Japan – Pacific Problems Studied', Evening Post, 19 October 1943.

<sup>42</sup> 'War on Japan – British Mission in the Pacific', Dominion, 1 October 1943.

### **The Return of the Royal Navy to Sydney (and Auckland)**

Frostiness still characterised Anglo-Australian relations in early 1944 prior to the Quebec 'Octagon' meeting, and the naval mission to Australia, initiated by Brooke, took until the end of May 1944, to report. Its terms of reference were not established until discussions between Curtin and Churchill were completed in London at the Dominions' Prime Ministers' Conference. On 2 May 1944, in Curtin's absence, the Australian Advisory War Council met Rear Admiral C.S. Daniel RN, the senior Admiralty planner sent to investigate suitable Australian facilities for a British Pacific naval base. He advised the Council that Cunningham and King had met to discuss Royal Navy movements and added, inaccurately, that it had been the American admiral's idea to send his team to Australia. Daniel identified two British possibilities for the Council's consideration: 'Culverin' type south-east Asian plans or alternatively, cooperation with the US Navy in the Pacific to advance through the Philippines to Hong Kong, Formosa and Japan. Daniel, as the Chiefs' representative, not surprisingly preferred option two and painted Australia as a 'Pearl Harbour' for the Royal Navy.<sup>43</sup>

Curtin contacted Forde, his deputy Prime Minister, from London on 30 May 1944 to outline recent discussions with Churchill. Curtin wanted to know the Royal Navy's expectations of Australia ahead of scheduled talks in Washington. He resurrected the ideas of an Anzac command from 1941 and suggested Forde raise the possibility of integrating the Australian naval staff, with Daniel's team.<sup>44</sup> Curtin was also evidently worried about Australia's diminishing financial, human, and material resources. He met the Combined Chiefs of Staff in Washington, later MacArthur in Brisbane and he cabled Churchill on 4 July 1944 with his concerns. Australia's shortages were exacerbated by too many military commitments Curtin claimed, he was impatient for direction and confirmed the Dominion's preference for MacArthur's Philippine offensive planned for September. He told Churchill

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<sup>43</sup> Advisory War Council Minute, Canberra, 1352, 2 May 1944. Statement by Rear Admiral C. S. Daniel RN. 'Basing of British Fleet on Australia'. CAN A2684 CS 1496 Part 1.

<sup>44</sup> Curtin to Forde, 30 May 1944. Cablegram I.20284/281/279/282. SC 45. CAN A2684 CS 1496 Part 1.

that if Britain in view of the continuing European war was unable, however, to send air and land forces to the Pacific, a Royal Navy task force could ‘... spearhead ... the campaign ... to place the Union Jack in the Pacific alongside the Australian and American flags’. He saw no difficulty in basing such a force on Australia.<sup>45</sup>

On 7 September 1944 Curtin notified the Advisory War Council of a cable from Churchill in Quebec: British policy makers had, in agreement with the US, placed South East Asian operations on hold in favour of a central Pacific offensive. The ‘bulk’ of Royal Navy forces built up in the Bay of Bengal would move to the Pacific for main operations under US Navy direction and, as well, a ‘British Empire task force’ would support MacArthur’s offensive. The plan at this stage was still contingent upon US approval. Curtin irritated by this lack of consultation, confirmed Australia’s preference for the ‘Middle Strategy’. The Council also noted that the joint British and Australian naval investigation into the feasibility of basing British forces on Australia, was complete and in London.<sup>46</sup> Curtin, nonetheless, contacted MacArthur on 27 September 1944, evidently relieved to have had the positive news from Quebec: ‘Mr. Churchill had ... offered a British Fleet capable of fighting a single-handed action against the Japanese fleet, to share in the main operations, and this has been accepted’.<sup>47</sup> Formal British confirmation of Australia’s role in war preparations arrived from Churchill on 8 November 1944:

I wish to inform you of arrangements ... for the command, deployment and administration of the fleet which is being sent to the Pacific in accordance with the decisions of the Quebec Conference. Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser ... is being appointed commander of the British Pacific fleet. He hopes to arrive in Australia with some of his staff in the near

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<sup>45</sup> Curtin to Churchill, 4 July 1944. Cablegram Prime Minister’s Department 7/301/32 0.18038/42/43. CAN A2684 CS 1496 Part 1.

<sup>46</sup> Advisory War Council Minute, Canberra, 1406, 7 September 1944. Strategy for War Against Japan. CAN A2684 CS 1496 Part 1.

<sup>47</sup> Curtin letter to MacArthur, 27 September 1944. CAN A2684 CS 1496 Part 1.

future ... to discuss the arrangements for the maintenance of his fleet. He will be letting you know in due course the exact date of his arrival.<sup>48</sup>

Newspapers on both sides of the Tasman had learned of this significant development and published articles forecasting Admiral Fraser's likely pugnacious contribution to the war with Japan: 'Pacific Will Feel Fraser's Punches'; 'Pacific Fleet Has Surprises for Japanese, Says Admiral' and 'Fraser's Fleet For Pacific Campaign'. These were typical headlines run in December 1944.<sup>49</sup> Away from the chauvinist articles, however, the sober reality of the financial cost in particular to Australia, emerged. Details of the likely charge to the Dominion were considered at a meeting of the Advisory War Council on 14 December 1944, where the cost of equipping, feeding, fuelling, repairing and servicing the BPF was estimated to be £23 million, with an Australian personnel requirement of 4600 men and 1300 women estimated.<sup>50</sup> In February 1945, Prime Minister Fraser advised Australia that New Zealand could provide the Fleet with prepared dockyard and repair facilities, at Auckland, Wellington, Lyttelton and Port Chalmers. Unfortunately, vessels larger than cruisers could not be accommodated, thereby excluding the Royal Navy's fleet carriers and battleships from New Zealand docks.<sup>51</sup>

The Japanese press took the view, intelligence sources reported, that the creation of the BPF was clear evidence of the toll taken by their warships upon the US Navy. Desperately weakened, the Americans had had, they claimed, to call upon their junior partner, Britain, for naval assistance; an ally only too keen to reclaim its imperial possessions.<sup>52</sup> By November 1944 the first elements of the

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<sup>48</sup> Churchill to Curtin, 8 November 1944. Cablegram I.39962/61. SG. 544. CAN A2684 CS 1496 Part 1.

<sup>49</sup> Sydney Morning Herald, 11 and 30 Dec 1944. Evening Post (Wellington) 12 December 1944.

<sup>50</sup> Advisory War Council Minute, 1461, Canberra, 14 December 1944. CAN A2684 CS 1496 Part 1.

<sup>51</sup> Fraser to Australian Government, 22 February 1944. Cablegram I.7082. CAN A2684 CS 1496 Part 1.

<sup>52</sup> Foreign Office (Research Department), Weekly Political Intelligence Summary No.272, 20 December 1944. CAN A2684 CS 1496 Part 1.

BPF arrived in Ceylon and, in Melbourne, Daniel established the administrative offices for the new task force.



First Conference of the Staff of British Pacific Fleet, Melbourne, 13 December 1944. Vice-Admiral C. S. Daniel is seated. (AWM 017874)

### Section III: *The Genesis of the British Pacific Fleet 1944-1945*

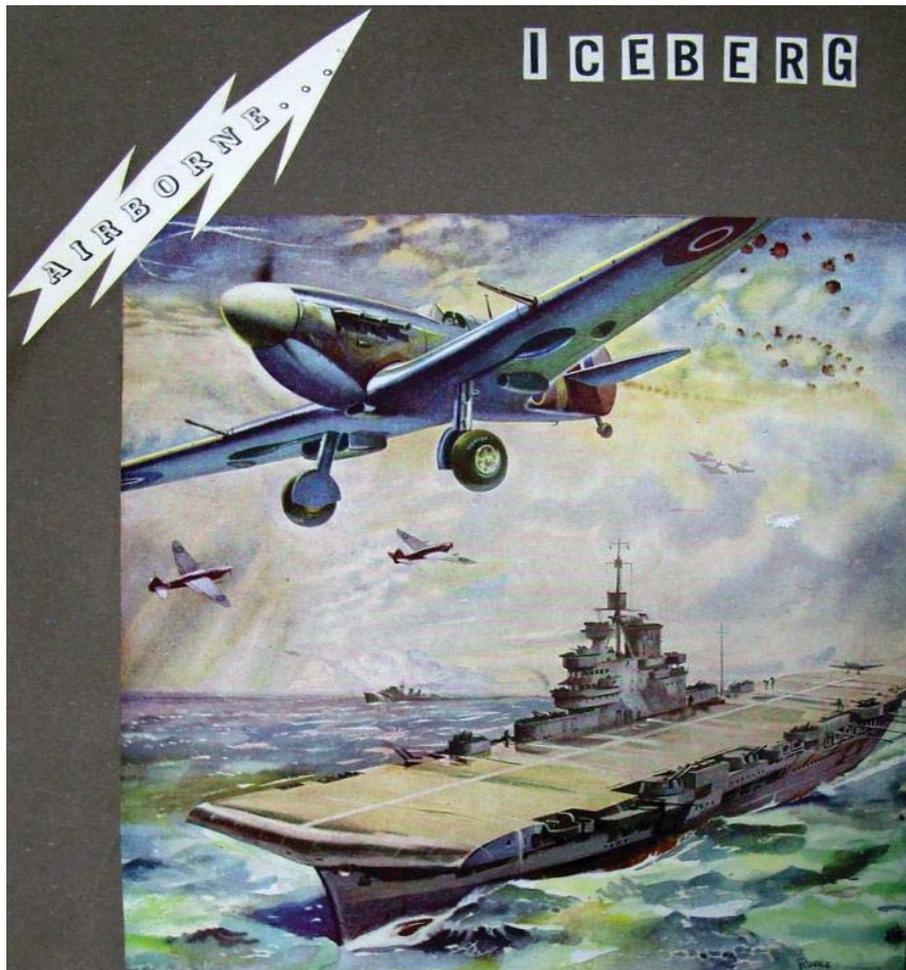


Illustration 894 (Seafire) Squadron Line Book 1945 (FAAM)

Admiral King, Roosevelt's Chief of Naval Operations questioned the Royal Navy's ability to operate in the Pacific. He represented an anti-British sentiment within the US Navy and believed that the defeat of Japan was an exclusive American right to avenge Pearl Harbor and restore the 'honor' of the service. The BPF was based in Sydney from January 1945 under the command of Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser RN. Although the Dominions were excluded from the '... higher direction of the Pacific War [and] left ignorant of Allied policy-making', the Fleet was welcomed to Australia, and by New Zealand: Fraser visited Wellington in

February 1945.<sup>53</sup> The return of the Royal Navy to the Antipodes was also a morale boosting reconnection to the UK and, symbolically, marked the end of the immediate Japanese threat of invasion. The Royal New Zealand Navy contributed HMNZS *Gambia* and *Achilles*, the hospital ship *Maunganui* and two repair ships, *Kelantan* and *Arbutus* to the BPF, a naval force drawn from the Empire and Commonwealth. Suggestions have been made that British Commonwealth forces played little more than a ‘peripheral role’ in the final phase of the Pacific war, an initiative dismissed as ‘...opportunistic and too little too late’ and from a purely military point of view, the US could have completed the defeat of Japan alone and would probably have preferred to have done so.<sup>54</sup>

Even so, the BPF started life as an independent task force when Fraser was appointed Commander-in-Chief designate, in October 1944 and took temporary command of the Eastern Fleet until a sufficient number of capital ships arrived from ‘Home’ waters, to form the nucleus of the new fleet.<sup>55</sup> The subsequent arrival of senior specialist naval officers in Ceylon was indicative of the forthcoming power and size of the BPF. Its strike-force, the First Aircraft Carrier Squadron (referred to hereafter as the Carrier Group), was under the command of Admiral Sir Philip Vian RN and he and Fraser had similar reputations as tough and battled-hardened navy fighters. Both HMS *Indomitable* and *Victorious* were at Trincomalee, Ceylon by October and had recently attacked Japanese targets on Car Nicobar, in the Andaman Islands. Other vital appointments were those of Daniel, chief administrator for requisitioning in Melbourne, and Vice-Admiral Fisher RN, commander Fleet Train.

There were two issues of greatest concern to Fraser and his team at the outset of planning. To equip, train and work-up the inexperienced Fleet Air Arm squadrons to combat readiness within the Carrier Group, in unfamiliar conditions and to provide the at-sea logistical sustenance for the Fleet, for weeks at a time.

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<sup>53</sup> Reese, p.19.

<sup>54</sup> Orders, p.130. *New York Post* naval correspondent quoted in an article, ‘British Fleet Viewed as Handicap?’, *Evening Post*, Vol. CXXXIX, 10 March 1945, p.7. “We have a lot of fast, last-minute ships to hurl against Japan ... Our naval men think they can do a better job alone without being slowed down by what is left of the British Fleet.”

<sup>55</sup> The Australian Naval Board was given details in January 1944. Telegram, Admiralty to A.C.N.B., 2 January 1944. MEL MP1185/8 CS 2026/ 8/638.

The US Navy was the acknowledged expert in this area, whereas it had been a matter of pre-war neglect for the Royal Navy. The British lacked the experience, equipment, and shipping essential for a long range and endurance fleet deployment and this was, without doubt, the greatest single cause of scepticism within the US Navy, regarding the capability of the Royal Navy in the Pacific. As the BPF was to come under Nimitz' direction, Fraser's naval seniority, and naval protocol, prevented him from remaining with the Fleet. He established his command in Sydney on HMS *Duke of York* while the sea command of the Fleet was delegated to Vice-Admiral Sir Bernard Rawlings RN, on the battleship HMS *King George V*. Rawlings was given a series of codenamed operations to complete, to progressively raise the BPF to combat readiness in theatre, thereby to demonstrate the Royal Navy's value as a strike force to the US Navy. From Sydney, Fraser travelled vast distances to meet senior US commanders, notably Nimitz at Pearl Harbor and MacArthur in the Philippines, to press the Royal Navy's case and to obtain a clear role for his Fleet. Fraser also carried out a substantial amount of public relations' work during public speaking visits to New Zealand and particularly in Australia, around that time.

The BPF's primary function was to air-deliver ordnance on selected Japanese targets and this marked a fundamental change to Royal Navy strategy, determining the composition of the Fleet and Fleet Train: warships other than fleet carriers were utilised in defensive screens, the auxiliary carriers as logistical support for the Fleet Air Arm. During the operational life of the Fleet, battleship and cruiser squadrons detached from the Carrier Group on only two occasions to bombard land targets. In May 1945 *King George V* and *Howe* pounded Japanese airfields on Miyako and Ishigaki in the Sakishima Gunto. Later battleship bombardments of mainland Japan, in July and August 1945, were undertaken only when the Japanese air threat had been nullified or bad weather prevented flying off aircraft.<sup>56</sup> The aircraft carrier was pre-eminent and consequently became the prime target for enemy attack, most notoriously from Kamikase aircraft.

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<sup>56</sup> Smith, p.127, pp.158-162.

The BPF was the largest single naval force to be assembled by the Royal Navy. Even so, by April 1945 the Fleet came within Nimitz' Pacific area and in the chain of command was directly under Admiral R.A. Spruance USN. Without diminishing the size and scale of the Royal Navy's operation, it is important to appreciate that at least eight other comparably sized naval and amphibious task forces in the Central Pacific were, at the time, under Spruance's command.<sup>57</sup> In March 1945 the decision was made by the US Navy to incorporate the BPF into the US Fleet as Task Force 57: the '5' referred to the US Fifth Fleet and the '7' to the BPF. In later operations against the Japanese Home Islands in July 1945, the BPF was re-designated Task Force 37, when Spruance passed his command to Halsey's Third Fleet. The integrated BPF had rapidly to adapt and use US Navy coded signals, a system entirely different to that used by the Royal Navy.

Despite an enormous logistical handicap, supply and shipping shortages, the Carrier Group was not technically inferior to the US Navy in its fighting capability or the quality of its warships and aircraft, and included six fleet carriers: HMS *Victorious*, *Formidable*, *Indefatigable*, *Indomitable*, *Illustrious*, and *Implacable*, only four of which were on station at any one time. British carriers had a tactical and technical advantage over the US Navy counterparts by virtue of their armoured decks. While this significantly decreased below deck hanger space and aircraft complement, it meant that Royal Navy carriers withstood direct Kamikase attacks much better. Critically, flight decks were cleared faster and strikes resumed within hours. To illustrate, *Illustrious* carried 36 Corsairs and 16 Avengers during operation 'Iceberg' strikes whereas the USS *Hancock* carried up to 90. The US Navy carriers had armour plate at the waterline only, to protect the ships 'vitals', and this enabled greater aircraft capacity in larger hangars. However, a direct enemy strike on a US Navy carrier would likely take the ship and all its aircraft out of line, permanently. To compensate for this vulnerability, US Navy carriers bristled with anti-aircraft guns whereas the Royal

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<sup>57</sup> The Naval Historical Society of Australia Inc., 'The British Pacific Fleet 1945', Monograph No.13 – Lecture to the Society by Lt. Cdr. W.O.C. Roberts RAN, May 1983, Illustrations & Appendix added 1991 by Lt. (E) J.R.W. Richmond, RN, p.16.

Navy was still desperately re-equipping Pacific bound ships with scarce 40mm Bofors guns, to replace the lighter 20mm calibre Oerlikons.

Fleet Air Arm involvement was not restricted to the six large fleet carriers: four light carriers, *Colossus*, *Glory*, *Venerable* and *Vengeance*, were available by July 1945. Of great logistical importance, however, were eight escort carriers *Striker*, *Arbiter*, *Chaser*, *Ruler*, *Slinger*, *Speaker*, *Vindex*, *Fencer* and *Reaper*.<sup>58</sup> These converted merchant vessels, fitted with a flight deck, ferried replacement aircraft to and from the Carrier Group and were vital for air defence cover for the Fleet Train. At 'VJ' Day the BPF comprised, in addition to carriers of all types: four battleships, *Duke of York*, *King George V*, *Anson*, and *Howe*; 11 light cruisers including *Achilles* and *Gambia*; four fast minelayers; an auxiliary Anti-Aircraft ship; two destroyer depot ships; 41 destroyers; 30 frigates and sloops; 26 submarines and 15 minesweepers. The Fleet was very much a Commonwealth force of officers and ratings and vessels of all shapes and sizes were drawn from the Royal Australian, Canadian and New Zealand Navies.<sup>59</sup>

The movement of the Fleet was dictated by the high speed and course of the carriers. These were the enemy's prime target and had regularly to turn into wind to fly off or land on aircraft for training, reconnaissance, patrol and strike operations. Escorting battleships, cruisers, destroyers and submarines maintained defensive pickets in a specific pattern. A screen to protect vessels from air attack was formed: concentric circles about 900 meters apart were numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 and so on with the carrier or battleship to be protected, in the centre, at point zero. An escort would rotate around the target ship as a point of reference. Should a carrier have to move out of its designated circle into an adjacent ring, then a destroyer would follow its target ship, ready to assist as a 'plane guard', picking up any aircrew who 'went over'. The task force was, consequently, an incredibly thirsty 'machine' in both ship oil and aviation gas and required the Fleet Train to be one nautical step ahead of it, at all times.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Escort carriers were given the US Navy designation CVE.

<sup>59</sup> Smith, pp.178-183.

<sup>60</sup> Roberts, p.2.

At Quebec, King was unequivocal in his expectation that the Royal Navy was to be entirely self-sufficient in the Pacific. In reality the Royal Navy was critically ill-prepared in this regard, despite its claims to the contrary. Having made a huge maritime contribution to the Allied invasion of Normandy the Fleet Train had, by necessity, to be scraped together from whatever naval auxiliary and merchant shipping that remained literally afloat. If the BPF itself was a Commonwealth force, then the Fleet Train was a truly international, cobbled together flotilla. In the words of an Australian destroyer officer, this was a force drawn of every nationality and rank and included,

Norwegian masters and Chinese deckhands, Dutch mates and Lasker firemen, Captains R.N. and Papuan winchmen ... there was a Panamanian collier, a Dutch hospital ship, a Panamanian tanker, Norwegian and Belgian ammunition ships. Some ships were brand new, others 30 years old. There were floating repair ships, floating docks, and latterly, a floating brewery. There were accommodation ships and net layers, salvage tugs, water distilling ships, aircraft ferry ships, aircraft maintenance ships, and armament stores, air naval stores, and victualling [sic] storage and supply ships ....<sup>61</sup>

Still, the Royal Navy looked enviously upon the Americans' ability to fuel, maintain and supply with purpose-designed US Navy ships, under a single navy discipline and with English as the common language. The technology gap between the navies' logistical services was exemplified in the matter of refuelling at sea. Royal Navy ships refuelled from slow merchant vessels using a buoyant hose astern method; the US Navy, a much faster line abreast method. The sluggish British technique increased warships' vulnerability to attack and, significantly, increased the overall time the task force was 'off-strike'. Carriers,

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p.4.

typically, dropped back for oiling after three or four days on strike, taking up to two days to complete the job. The extent of damage inflicted upon ships and aircraft by the enemy and typhoons also determined how long the Fleet could remain on station, usually not more than four weeks. From a Fleet Air Arm perspective, replenishment was the opportunity to take on replacement aircraft and to get ‘flyable duds’ off to repair ships.<sup>62</sup> The Royal Navy had no equivalent of US Navy Seebecs to construct forward bases so the unexpected offer from the US to use Manus, ironically in the British Admiralty Islands (Papua New Guinea), was accepted.<sup>63</sup> Ulithi in the Caroline Islands (Palau) was the home of the US Third Fleet and it was from there, in July 1945, that the BPF left to join the US Navy as Task Force 37. The Fleet had to operate 3500 nautical miles from Sydney, so efficient at-sea fleet replenishment was vital and it was one of the Royal Navy’s greatest technical achievements in World War II that the Fleet Train, so ably supplied by Daniel and marshalled by Fisher, succeeded in doing so.

The BPF was based in Sydney from January 1945 but it is probably fair to say that Australia, as a whole, was as much a home for the task force. A series of ‘restricted’ information sheets issued by Fraser’s office in Sydney was widely distributed to commanding officers to encourage ‘... free discussions among ships’ companies’. ‘How the BPF Works’ described how the materiel of war reached the fleet; the bulletin explained to naval ratings ways the fleet was fed and clothed and how Fleet Air Arm aircraft were maintained and supplied to carriers from Australia.<sup>64</sup> Three variants of floating store ships in the Fleet Train were listed: Naval Store Issuing Ships, for destroyers and escorts and Air Store Issuing Ships, from which carriers could draw replacements and parts; battleships and cruisers were supplied from larger Naval Store Carriers. Aircraft, stripped down entirely to the fuselage and armaments, were all sourced from the UK, including types of American origin.

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<sup>62</sup> Smith, pp.96-97.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., pp.56-57.

<sup>64</sup> ‘How the British Pacific Fleet Works’, B.P.F./11M/9, 8 February 1945. MEL MP1185/8 CS 1804/4/81.

All replacement aircraft supplied were assembled in Australia at Mobile Naval Air Stations (Monabs), self-supporting wheeled units that included tented accommodation and mobile bakeries, shipped from the UK to Australia as 'kitsets'. These were set up at Schofields and Warwick Farm, Sydney; Bankstown, Jervis Bay and Nowra NSW; Maryborough, Queensland and Archerfield and Meeandah, Brisbane. A Transportable Air Maintenance Yard, planned for use immediately behind front line squadrons, was also prepared at Archerfield. Specialist Maintenance Parties were located at Monabs and comprised technicians for particular aircraft, ready at a moment's notice to move into theatre. Likewise, armaments' specialists of Mobile Aircraft Torpedo Maintenance Units serviced, for example, the ordnance of Avenger squadrons. A Flag Officer Naval Air Stations, Australia was, in the words of Admiral Fraser, responsible for producing '... all the aircraft, all the aircrews, and the organisation to enable the combined Fleet Air Arm strength to hit the "Jap" really hard in Japan itself or in any of the territory he still occupies'.<sup>65</sup> Most squadrons spent time at these naval air stations during 1945 and aircrew have kept lasting memories of their Australian interlude.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.



New Zealand naval airmen were nearly all young volunteers who had joined a Royal Navy recruitment scheme organised throughout the Dominion for training with the Air Branch of the Royal Navy, in the UK. The attraction to the New Zealand government was that this air training was entirely under-written by the UK government, without charge to the Dominion. For the trainees, the recruitment scheme offered travel overseas, flying training, a commission and an age of entry three years lower than that of the army. By 1944 hundreds of New Zealand pilots and observers were in carriers and squadrons throughout the Royal Navy, by which time a most of its obsolete pre-war aircraft had been replaced with modern naval bombers and fighters. Due to the Lend-Lease arrangements the FAA was able to take delivery of US designed and manufactured aircraft such as the Avenger, Corsair and Hellcat, which were modified for use with British carriers. British designed and manufactured aircraft, such as the Firefly and the less than robust Seafire, were also used in the Pacific theatre.

The Carrier Group, initially formed around *Indomitable* and *Victorious*, increased gradually in size and operational capability from its base in Trincomalee, Ceylon. The first preparatory operations were made on Japanese-held oil refineries in Sumatra, code-named operations 'Outflank' and 'Meridian', from December 1944 to the end of January 1945. Their purpose was to work up carriers and squadrons, in combination with the Fleet Train, to longer and heavier strikes to garner orders from Nimitz for a role of high strategic value. 'Outflank' and 'Meridian' are explained with direct reference to the participation of New Zealand airmen using squadron records kept at the time.

## Section I: *New Zealand Naval Airmen*



New Zealand trainees at a depot camp, Lee on Solent (HMS Daedalus), 1940-1941 (FAAM)

New Zealanders had been inducted into the Fleet Air Arm since 1940, along a recruitment pathway known as Scheme F. In July 1938, the Admiralty had indicated its intention to draw upon the Dominions for recruitment to meet the expanding manpower needs of the service. A short service commission scheme had been ‘promulgated’ in which the Royal Navy had ‘... under consideration the possibility of providing an improved facility for candidates from the Dominions as officers of the short service Air Branch of the Royal Navy’.<sup>1</sup> This was revised in 1939 with the recommendation that candidates, after selection by New Zealand naval authorities and medical examination by RNZAF boards, would be provided passages to the UK for training and a commission for the Air Branch.<sup>2</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Scheme “F”’, Narrative Completed June 1947, D. F. Dunlop,’ ‘Recruiting before the War’, Dominions’ Office Letter NZ No.165 to Governor General 26 Jul 39, 13/28/20 Pt.1. ANZ N 15 (Box 11).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Inskip to Gov. Gen., letter 26 Jul 1939. Sir Thomas Inskip, UK Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs 1939.

precedent of air force medical examinations of naval aircrew applicants was established and entrants aged as young as 17½ years, were eligible to apply.

By 1939, many young men in New Zealand had had some recent experience of military training with school cadet corps or as members of Territorial Army units. Some, keen for adventure and anxious to go overseas, were frustrated by the Army enlistment age of 21 years. Others were less than enchanted with the prospect of army life and disinclined towards service in infantry units. By World War II a sizeable number of men were determined to fly on active service, most obviously in the Air Force which, in September 1939, had also set a lower enlistment age of 17½ years,. The Air Branch of the Royal Navy provided additional opportunities for overseas service for those who found the waiting list for the RNZAF frustratingly slow. During the war Scheme F provided 37 drafts of volunteer airmen for the Royal Navy in the UK. On arrival the airmen would be put through rigorous training as naval ratings at HMS *St. Vincent* in Portsmouth, before being assessed for specialised training as either pilots ('drivers') or observers ('lookers'). Trainee pilots graduated through Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced flying schools. Depending on aircraft type these were located at airfields in either war-torn England or Canada, and after 1941 in Michigan and Florida, at US Navy flying schools. Observers completed longer training courses in the UK and Trinidad. After receiving a commission and wings, and attending a 'knife and fork course' in naval etiquette, new Sub. Lieutenants' RNZNVR were posted to a squadron and carrier, or a naval air station.<sup>3</sup>

Over 1200 New Zealanders ... volunteered for flying duties:  
760 became pilots, observers or telegraphist air gunners ...  
making up 10% of [Fleet Air Arm] aircrew – by far the  
largest of any Commonwealth country outside Britain. In the

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<sup>3</sup> Thomson, *passim*.

British Pacific Fleet the proportion of New Zealanders was higher still ....<sup>4</sup>

Few Australians served in the Fleet Air Arm at the time of the BPF's main operations and in May 1945 there were just six Royal Australian Naval Volunteer Reserve pilots or observers on loan to the entire service. Admiral Fraser requested 50 redundant Royal Australian Air Force pilots per month for training in 1945 but due to acute labour shortages, the Australian government agreed to 12 only. Many of these airmen were trained by experienced New Zealanders but did not have the opportunity for combat service with the BPF.<sup>5</sup>

The Dominion's contribution was acknowledged by the Admiralty and reports of New Zealanders' participation in Fleet Air Arm operations were published in home newspapers during 1943. Fraser and Jordan attended a 'knife and fork' course for officers at the Royal Naval College, Greenwich on 9 May 1943. The Prime Minister had the opportunity to speak there to a number of the New Zealand candidates present and responded encouragingly to the proposition that '... New Zealand should have its own squadron'.<sup>6</sup> In 1944 Cranborne also recommended that '... in recognition of the valuable services rendered by New Zealanders to this vital arm of the Royal Navy the Admiralty suggest the formation of a fighter squadron manned entirely by pilots of the R.N.Z.N.V.R. It is proposed to mark No. 808 for this purpose'.<sup>7</sup> The recommendation coincided with Fraser's visit to the UK for the Prime Ministers' Conference and while he approved, the plan was impractical. When pressed by the Navy Office in Wellington, later in February 1945, the Admiralty responded:

At the present time there are only a few New Zealand pilots in 808 Squadron. The chief reason for this is that all

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<sup>4</sup> David Allison, Flying Navy. New Zealanders who flew in the Fleet Air Arm and the Roll of Honour of those who died in action on active service, Auckland: Fleet Air Arm Museum of New Zealand, 2009, p.30.

<sup>5</sup> Cranborne to Australian War Cabinet, Telegram 164, 19 May 1945. CAN A5954 CS 588.6

<sup>6</sup> Dominion, 'New Zealand Fleet Air Arm', 10 May 1943.

<sup>7</sup> Cranborne to Jordan, letter 4 May 1944. ANZ AAYT 8490 NI403 13.28.20 9

New Zealanders are now pilots of experience, and it has constantly been necessary to move them to other squadrons where a certain proportion of experienced pilots are required. Therefore, it is impossible just now for the Admiralty to man this squadron fully by New Zealanders.<sup>8</sup>

The experience of these men had become vital to the performance of frontline Fleet Air Arm squadrons: in April, July and August 1944 New Zealand naval airmen took part in crippling attacks on the German pocket-battleship *Tirpitz*, which was finished-off later by RAF bombers in November. With this home threat eliminated, the Admiralty sent *Indefatigable* and *Illustrious* to join *Indomitable* and *Victorious* in Ceylon, in November and December 1944. By 1945 New Zealand Fleet Air Arm aircrew were trained and thoroughly integrated within the Carrier Group's 34 squadrons, 'working up' to operational readiness for war in the Pacific.

During the BPF's campaigns over islands and seas, regular exercises and operations were conducted at the very limits of human endurance and technical capability. New Zealand veterans of the BPF speak with conviction of the awareness they had of their part in pioneering and conducting a new form of British aircraft carrier-based maritime warfare, in the Pacific theatre. Training and the esprit de corps of ship and squadron fortified aircrew morale in this regard, enabling them to strike hard at the enemy, under exceptionally hazardous conditions. Ray Richards, a Corsair pilot of 1844 Squadron, recalled his sense of motivation as young pilot:

I had no feelings of animosity. If anything I regarded the enemy pilot as a competitor that I had to beat in a contest. Ground ack-ack gunners had to be dealt with before they dealt to me. I had been trained over two years to fly

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<sup>8</sup> H. Skinner, Naval Affairs Office London to Naval Secretary, Navy Office, Wellington. Memorandum 3864, 26 February 1945. ANZ AAYT 8490 NI403 13.28.20 9.

efficiently, which included combat in the air and air-to-ground attacks. Duty and patriotism were not talked about or thought about.<sup>9</sup>

The ‘Air Branch Boys’ were not professional airmen and saw themselves as a unique group, within the wartime Royal Navy. In Richard’s words, ‘It was a life of danger, privilege and pride. Such an opportunity may never occur again – “the amateurs ruled the waves”’.<sup>10</sup> The vast majority of New Zealand airmen was temporally commissioned as Sub-Lieutenant (A) and typically attained the temporary seniority of Lieutenant by war’s end.<sup>11</sup> A small number of New Zealanders held flight leadership roles and the rank of temporary Lieutenant Commander, but for the most part leadership roles were reserved for British Royal Navy or Royal Navy Reserve (ex) professional officers.<sup>12</sup> New Zealanders were valued for their cool-headedness, dogged front line flying expertise and technical skill.

Chapters explaining combat operations have been sourced primarily from Admiralty reports, Fleet Air Arm squadron diaries, operational logs, line books and fair flying logs. For the most part these were compiled or written by pilots or observers, shortly after operations. Wartime records retain a sense of immediacy and given the circumstances were often written in engaging prose. Such records are not necessarily the stuff of plain facts and figures: a vivid image of the three dimensional nature of air warfare over the Pacific Ocean, the jungles and islands of Sumatra, and the aerodromes of Formosa and industrial Japan can be drawn. This was warfare fought in conditions of an elemental nature, aircrew were exposed as much to the hazards of cloud, mountain or typhoon as they were to Japanese aircraft and flak attack. Accounts of aircrew returning to find the flight deck in chaos after an accident, or the gruesome results of a Kamikase strike strewn about, were indicative of the deadly nature of these operations.

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<sup>9</sup> Richards, Interview 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> (A) – Air Branch.

<sup>12</sup> Thesis Appendix III.

By contemporary standards the archaic and occasionally gauche aircrew ‘lingo’ appears stilted and overly jingoistic. At the time, though, this jargon and black humour was used to make light of all too frequent flying hazards, injuries and fatalities; informal squadron line books featured tales of characters and high jinks. Sydney, for example, with its clubs, dances and sports’ facilities was a favourite ‘run ashore’ for the BPF airmen. Richards remembered that sense of comradeship well:

The New Zealand aircrew were all of a kind; they were our mates, who had been together in a larger or smaller company for a year or two. The other significant units were the squadron, and the ship’s company-wardroom and hangar, which the Kiwis tended to dominate. Post-war I asked a Scottish pilot what news he had of the Brits we had flown with from *Victorious*. He replied “All my wartime friends were Kiwis.”<sup>13</sup>

Cartoons, illustrating near-death scrapes were a means by which this cohort of young airmen, in their twenties, coped with the anxieties of combat. Men exhibiting fear or appearing not to be up for the job were considered, not necessarily unsympathetically, to be a little ‘twitchy’. Richards explained his personal responses to pre-operation anxiety:

Anxiety and doubt arrived in the night before a dawn take-off from the carrier. I negated those feelings with a sleep-inducing bottle of beer. Prior to take-off all thoughts were directed to the assembly of the four carriers 200 aircraft in the attack formation, then we were too busy maintaining position en route to the target and scanning sea and sky, then

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<sup>13</sup> Richards, Interview 2011.

land and sky, then target and sky. [It was] Business as usual.<sup>14</sup>

A linear narrative of all New Zealanders' involvement here is impractical. This is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of all New Zealanders of the BPF, but a perspective nonetheless. The objective is to demonstrate, within the overall framework of the Fleet's operations, ways New Zealanders lived, worked, flew, fought and, in too many cases, were killed or injured in Fleet Air Arm actions. Oral histories, interviews and biographies will explain their routine participation in preparatory and major operations: 'Robson'; 'Lentil'; 'Meridian'; 'Iceberg'; 'Inmate' and over the Japanese Home Islands. Airmen will be shown to have served in all six Royal Navy fleet carriers: *Formidable*; *Illustrious*; *Implacable*; *Indefatigable*; *Indomitable* and *Victorious*. Furthermore, that New Zealand 'drivers' and 'lookers' were represented in most naval air squadrons and aircraft types: Avengers, Corsairs, Fireflies, Hellcats and Seafires.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

## **Section II: Aircraft**

The Carrier Group embarked around 700 aircraft in total, with more in held in reserve at Australian Monabs and this enabled the task force, at the height of operations, to range and fly off up to 250 aircraft at one time.<sup>15</sup> New Zealand aircrew served with 28 of the 34 front line squadrons of the BPF, and with those assigned to escort carriers with the Fleet Train. Squadrons usually had a ‘home’ carrier but in many cases operational priorities or difficulties meant that aircraft had to land on or fly off, another ship. By late 1944 the Carrier Group was equipped with five types of combat aircraft: three of American, and two of British, design and manufacture.

The British Westland-Supermarine Seafire F Mark III was a compromised Spitfire variant, converted for maritime and carrier operation with folding wings and a 90 gallon ‘slipper’ drop fuel tank was fitted for increased range. Seafires were an agile and rewarding aircraft to fly but were unable to carry ordnance of any weight and lacked the range and endurance of a purpose designed carrier aircraft. Seafires were employed primarily for Combat Air Patrols or CAPs providing fighter cover over the task force and the Fleet Train, to intercept incoming enemy aircraft or ‘Bogeys’ as they were termed. Seafires were used in the escort role only when close to the Japanese Home Islands. The aircraft were not robust enough for carrier work and a frail under-carriage was often damaged when landing on.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, cockpit visibility was poor due to a large engine cowling situated in the direct line of vision between pilot and batsman on deck, upon whom the pilot was dependent for a safely arrested landing.

The Fairey Firefly Mark 1 was a British designed and manufactured single engine, folding wing, naval reconnaissance fighter designed originally for anti-submarine work. It was crewed by a pilot and a rear-facing observer, had four 20mm cannon and could carry eight 60lb high velocity rockets (RP). This ordnance could be exchanged for two 45 gallon drop fuel tanks for extended

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<sup>15</sup> Roberts, p.3.

<sup>16</sup> Vian to Rawlings, 7 April 1945, 0109/12/354, ‘Reports on the Proceedings of Operations Iceberg 1 and Iceberg 2’. War History Case 7543. Operation Iceberg. NAUK ADM 199/595. Vian noted, in some detail, the ‘unsuitability’ of the Seafire.

range. The Firefly had a maximum speed of 300 mph and a ceiling of just over 29,000 feet. The cockpit of a Firefly was well positioned so that the pilot had a better and safer view over the leading edge of the wing. BPF Fireflies were used as strafing 'Ramrod' fighters, to shoot down barrage balloons, the steel hawsers of which could slice through the wings of attacking aircraft, and to take out highly accurate Japanese anti-aircraft installations with rockets.

American manufactured aircraft supplied, under Lend-Lease, to the Fleet Air Arm were not interchangeable with US Navy variants, as the Royal Navy generally made major modifications to oxygen systems, wing length, gun sights and communication systems. However, there were three American aircraft on front line service with the Fleet Air Arm and these proved to be vitally important to the operational capability of the Carrier Group. The Grumman Avenger TBF was a robust and reliable torpedo-bomber and first entered service as the Tarpon in 1943. From 1944 the Fleet Air Arm re-equipped with 222 Mark III Avengers; such was the demand that, in 1945, the RNZAF transferred 48 of their redundant Avengers to the Royal and US Navies in the Pacific. The Avenger was not a genuine dive bomber but was used by pilots to glide-bomb targets, such as the oil refineries at Palembang and especially to pummel the Japanese coral shell airfields of the Sakishima Gunto. The Avenger was crewed by a pilot, an observer and a telegraphist/air gunner. This aircraft had a large bomb bay and could carry a torpedo or a pay load of one ton, of single or multiple bombs. The Avenger had forward firing armament as well as two rear firing turret operated machine guns.

The Grumman Hellcat and Chance-Vought Corsair were the Carrier Group's front line fighter aircraft. These were reliable and rugged US made naval aircraft with excellent endurance and strike capabilities. The Fleet Air Arm began to re-supply its BPF squadrons with the Hellcat II over the period January to May 1945. The first of these aircraft had been designed and produced in 1943 as a single seat fighter to take on the Japanese Zero; it was faster by 30 mph and became the most lethal Allied fighter of World War II. While a stubby appearance was aesthetically unappealing, its ability to carry 2000lbs of bombs or six 5 inch, wing-mounted rockets, made it a highly effective fighter-bomber for destroying

Japanese shipping and as a ground attack weapon. The single-seat Corsair fighter, known as the ‘Whispering Death’ from the wing noise on dive attack, was armed with four 20mm cannon and had a 2000lb bomb pay load. It had a distinctive long ‘corn cob’ nose and gull wing profile; the nose presented the pilot with severe visibility problems when landing on deck. Fleet Air Arm Corsairs’ wings were clipped by eight inches, to fit in the narrower hangar confines of British carriers, and were the aircraft flown the most, by New Zealand pilots.<sup>17</sup> Ray Richards reflected on the challenges of flying this aircraft:

The long Corsair nose was the dominant difficulty, because there was no straight-ahead pilot vision unless the plane was flying straight and level. In carrier landings the plane had to descend at 82 knots in a half-circle approach, to keep the batsman in view. The pilot cut the throttle at the end of the descent, [and at] the last seconds of seeing the batsman [saw] his crossed bats ....<sup>18</sup>

Richards pointed out the qualities that, in his experience, made the Corsair such a good combat aircraft up against Japanese fighters over Sumatra:

The Corsair was a very rewarding aircraft to fly because mastering it brought confidence and care. It was the fastest, the

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.fleetairarmarchive.net>, ‘Naval Aircraft Database’. Accessed, 21 and 22 June 2011. Seven Seafire squadrons were in front line service with the BPF. ‘Home’ carriers’ names in parentheses: 801 and 880 (*Implacable*), 809 and 897 (*Unicorn*), 885 (*Ruler*), 887 (*Indefatigable*), and 899 (*Chaser*). Four Firefly squadrons: 1770 and 1772 (*Indefatigable*) and 1771 and 1790 (*Implacable*). Six FAA Avenger squadrons: 820 (*Indefatigable*), 828 (*Implacable*), 848 (*Formidable*), 849 (*Victorious*), 854 (*Illustrious*) and 857 (*Indomitable*). Five Hellcat squadrons: 888 (*Indefatigable*), 892 (*Ocean*), 1839 and 1844 (*Indomitable*) and 1840 (*Formidable*). 11 Corsair squadrons: 1830 and 1837 (*Illustrious*), 1831 (*Glory*), 1833 (*Illustrious*), 1834 and 1836 (*Victorious*), 1841 and 1842 (*Formidable*), 1846 (*Colossus*) 1850 (*Vengeance*) and 1851 (*Venerable*). Smith, Appendix 3, pp. 184-185.

<sup>18</sup> Richards, Interview 2011. Crossed bats meant cut engine – Royal Navy Deck Landing Control Officers adopted the US Navy system of batting in 1943 but, unlike the American system, was mandatory not advisory.

pilot was protected by armour slabs of steel, the range was up to seven hours, its emergency sea-landing qualities were good and Japanese fighters were outwitted by Corsair diving attacks with fast getaways, height recovery and another dive. Its armour helped when attacking ground targets, which often resulted in bullet-holes that would have downed a Japanese plane. For better vision approaching and taxiing on the deck the Hellcat was superior.<sup>19</sup>

In May 1945 Admiral Fraser asked the New Zealand government for the transfer of eight RNZAF Corsair squadrons, including pilots for retraining, to the Fleet Air Arm. This demand had been created by ‘a world shortage of Corsairs’ although the exchange did not eventuate, as the war ended well before complicated administration problems were resolved.<sup>20</sup>

During the most intensive phases of air strikes, squadron sub-groups of two to three aircraft, known as flights, were shackled and ‘ranged’ on the flight deck and flown off in order of the tasks designated for each aircraft type. Seafires would generally be allocated CAPs duties whereas fighters such as Corsairs flew off as escorts for bomber strikes. Ramrods were combined fighter and bomber sorties, to first destroy Japanese aircraft or ‘Bogeys’ in the air and on the ground, prior to bombing select targets. Fireflies were given specific targets on account of their rocket ordnance, in addition to fighter escort. Fleet Air Arm targets were typically oil refineries, airfields, general infrastructure, merchant vessels and warships. The heaviest bombing was carried out by Avenger and Hellcat squadrons and supporting Ramrod or escort fighter aircraft would contribute by strafing targets, should the situation permit. Slower Avengers generally flew off first, and the escort and Ramrod flights were expected to catch up. Carriers and some cruisers carried the Supermarine Walrus rescue plane, affectionately known

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> C-in-C, B.P.F. to Admiralty, c. NZNB. Memorandum 170850/May, 18 May 1945. NAUK. ADM 1/17387

as the ‘Shagbat’, most notably a brace flown by Royal Australian Air Force pilots, and provided a reassuring rescue service to ditched aircrew.<sup>21</sup>

Bogey aircraft were referenced by a bizarre coded terminology based on US Navy practice. This was, in all probability, a combination of the need to demystify the potency of the enemy and the reluctance of the English speaker to recognise the phonetics of Japanese. Enemy bomber aircraft were allocated ‘girls’ names and fighters, ‘boys’. Thus the BPF engaged five army and navy bomber variants named Betty, Dinah, Frances, Jill, Judy and four fighter types, the Nick, Oscar, Tojo and Zeke.<sup>22</sup> Pilots and observers used this nomenclature in their references to enemy aircraft in combat radio communication, official reports, squadron diaries and line books. However, it was when the Fleet came close to Japan that it came under the greatest threat: the increasingly desperate and destructive Kamikase, or Divine Wind, suicide aircraft attacks.

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<sup>21</sup> ‘R.A.A.F. Pilots with British Fleet’, Sun, 24 April 1945.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, pp. 185-186, Thesis Appendix II.

### **Section III: *British Pacific Fleet Strategies – Preparatory Operations***

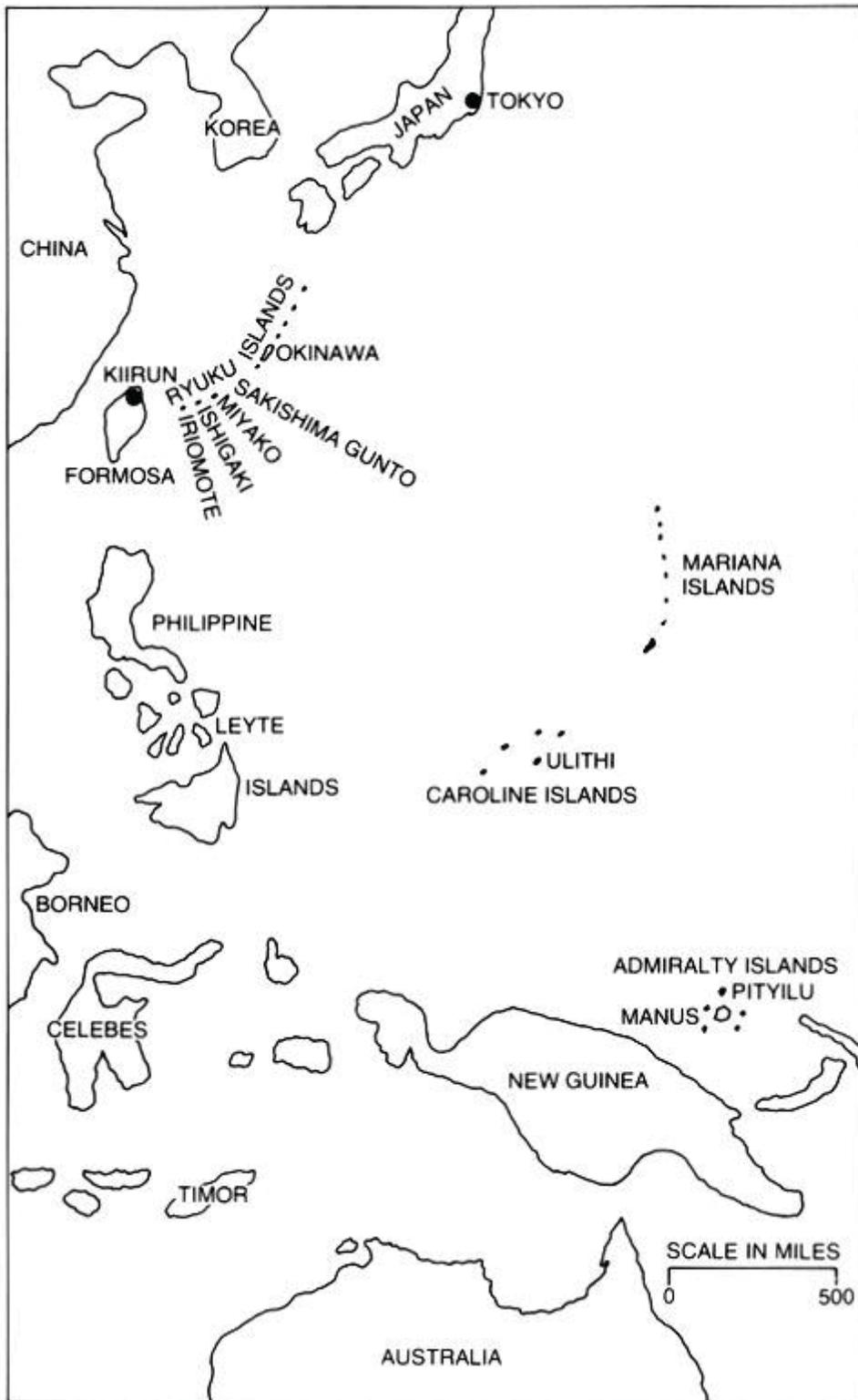
Admiral Fraser flew from Ceylon to Sydney, and onto Pearl Harbor to seek operational orders for the BPF on 4 December 1944. In Hawaii, Nimitz and Spruance assured Fraser of the future inclusion of his fleet within US Pacific operations, although a specified operational role was not granted until March 1945. After returning briefly to Sydney, Fraser visited MacArthur and the US Seventh Fleet in action in the Philippines in January 1945.<sup>23</sup> The US Pacific strategy for the conquest, invasion and unconditional surrender of Japan was two pronged and may be said to have produced two geo-strategic camps: the ‘Boninites’ and the ‘Luzonites’.

In August 1944, Saipan in the Mariana Islands was captured after a long and bloody assault on the Japanese occupying forces.<sup>24</sup> In February 1945 Luzon, the most northerly of the main Philippine islands, was under US control and this effectively laid out two direct lines of advance upon Japan itself. The first ran almost due south from Tokyo Bay to the Marianas, along the line of islands known as the Nanpo Shonto, of which the Ogasawara Gunto was the most southerly group. These had been termed by European cartographers as the ‘Bonins’, the most southerly of which was 615 miles north of Saipan. For the most part, the Bonin Islands are tiny volcanic atolls but the islands of Chichi Jima and Iwo Jima were large enough for airfield construction. To the west Japanese-occupied Formosa (Taiwan) was a vital military staging post through which reinforcements, especially aircraft, were moved between Japanese-occupied China and Japan. The Nansei Shonto, known to Europeans as the Ryukyus, formed an arcing 600 mile line from the Sakishima Gunto group in the south to the Japanese island of Okinawa in the north: the direct route to the Japanese main island of Honshu.

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<sup>23</sup> MacCarthur was keen to court and interest Fraser in the possibility of the BPF’s contribution to his US and Australian amphibious operations in the South West Pacific. After the ‘most cordial’ of meetings with MacCarthur at Leyte, Fraser asked to ‘see for himself’ how the US carriers withstood Kamikase attack. On the morning of 6 January 1945, while on the bridge of the USS *New Mexico*, a Kamikaze smashed into the port side of the bridge, the massive explosion killing about 100 men; Fraser escaped without a scratch. Hobbs, (2011), pp. 31-32. Smith, pp.74-75.

<sup>24</sup> The strategic value of the Mariana Islands as a USAAF base was discussed in Chapter Two.



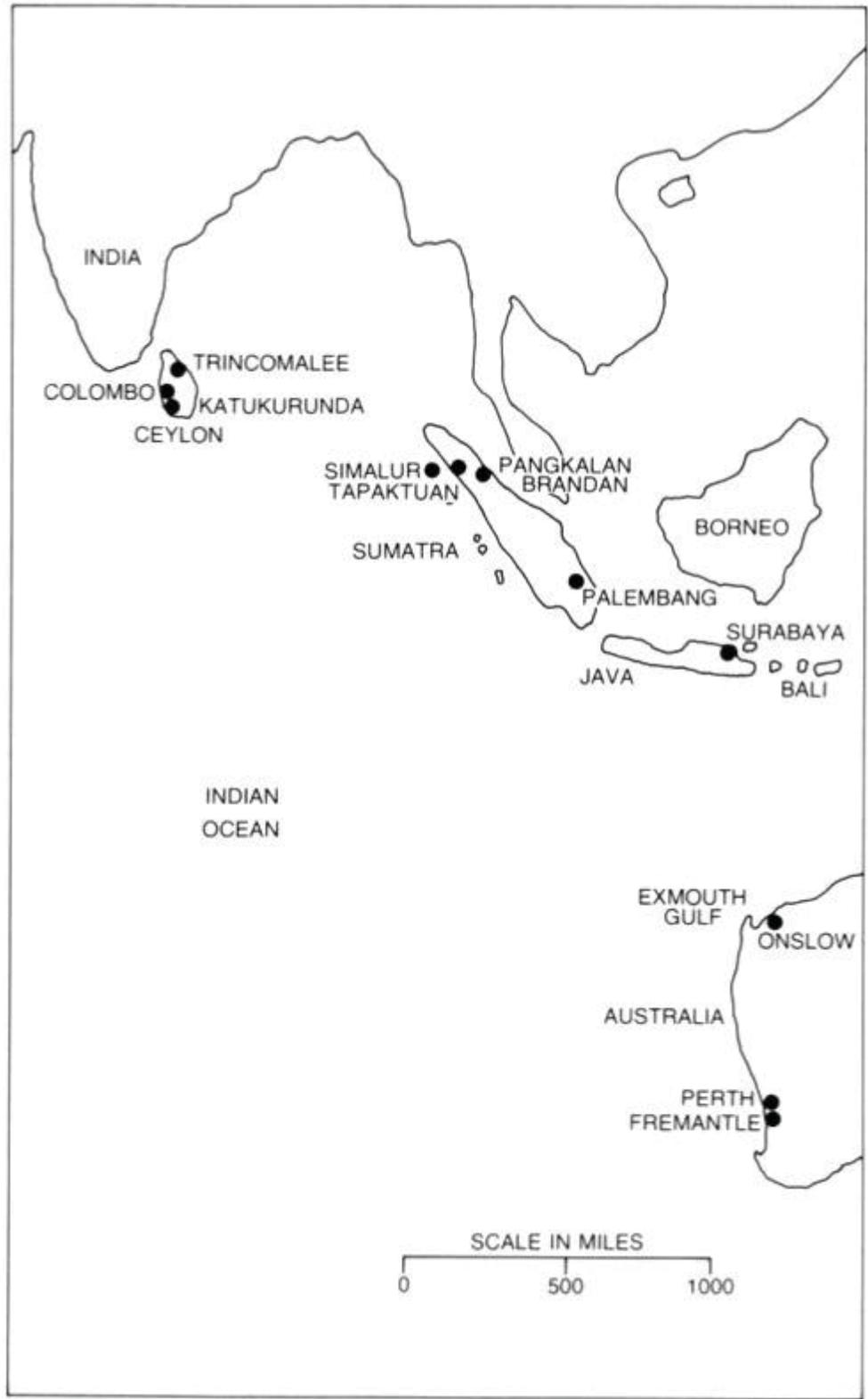
The Western Pacific and Japan (Judd)

At San Francisco, from 29 September to 1 October 1944, King presided over discussions in the wake of 'Octagon' in which Nimitz and Spruance together, and MacArthur presented each case for the two alternative prongs' of attack. MacArthur's offensive was given priority and once Luzon was secured, the Ryukyus would be within striking distance of the Philippines; Spruance promoted Okinawa as a strategic acquisition of high value. On 3 October, King presented the Combined Chiefs in Washington with this plan of attack. Once Luzon fell the US Navy would have to split its vast assets to capture the targeted Bonin Islands first, by 20 January 1945, and positions in the Ryukyus second, by 1 March 1945. As the same combined US forces were going to have to achieve both goals and despite the massive resources of the US Navy, the Americans would be stretched by this double strategic objective. Hence the mobilisation in March 1945 of the BPF designated Task Force 57, for operation 'Iceberg' strikes on the Sakishima Gunto.<sup>25</sup>

Prior to these decisions, however, the British Carrier Group had had to learn to strike the enemy hard and repeatedly in what would prove to be to an air battle of attrition. Vian, not Rawlings, took responsibility for directing air operations, adopting the US Navy model of command. The Fleet Air Arm was accustomed to operating carriers close to land but Pacific operations were daunting, because of the vast distances and long sorties flown by squadrons. Vian ensured that amid all the 'big' discussions with the Americans, systems were put in place with the US Navy submarine lifeguard service for the recovery of ditched Fleet Air Arm aircrew. From Ceylon, in December 1944, a series of codenamed operations were undertaken to enable the Fleet to progressively move from limited hit and run strikes to extended round-the-clock action, as exemplified by the US Navy. Initially Royal Navy engagements were short and characterised by early withdrawal for oiling, before returning to Trincomalee for refitting, replenishment,

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<sup>25</sup> Morison, pp.3-5.

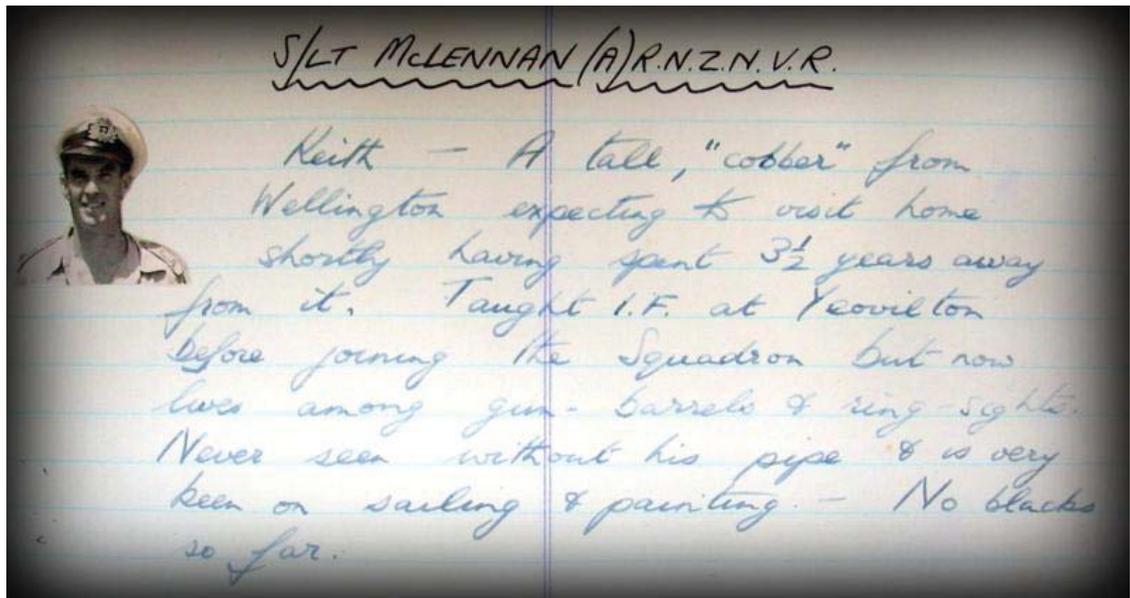


The Indian Ocean (Judd)

and training. Vian ordered two carrier strikes from Ceylon in late 1944 and early January 1945, codenamed 'Robson' and 'Lentil' respectively, and collectively as operation 'Outflank'. These renewed earlier attacks by the Eastern Fleet in 1944 upon Japanese targets in Sumatra and began on 20 December when *Indomitable*, *Illustrious* and escorts moved to the mouth of the Malacca Straits. The Fleet refuelled at sea and launched a strike of 27 Avengers and 28 Corsairs and Hellcats against the Japanese-held oil refinery at Pangkalan Brandan.<sup>26</sup>

### Operation 'Robson'

1844 Squadron equipped with Hellcats, had embarked in *Indomitable* in July 1944 and later took part in the Eastern Fleet's operations against Car Nicobar Island in September. Three New Zealand pilots were identified in the squadron Minute Book at that time: Arthur Andrew, Keith McLennan and Jack Ruffin.<sup>27</sup>



1844 Squadron (Hellcat) Minute Book (FAAM)

<sup>26</sup> Naval Air Squadrons involved: Avenger 854 and 857, Corsair 1830 and 1833, and Hellcat, 1839 and 1844. 'December 20<sup>th</sup> - D-Day' - 1844 Squadron (Hellcat), Minute Book Dec '43 to Nov '45, FAAM Bk's 3/193.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

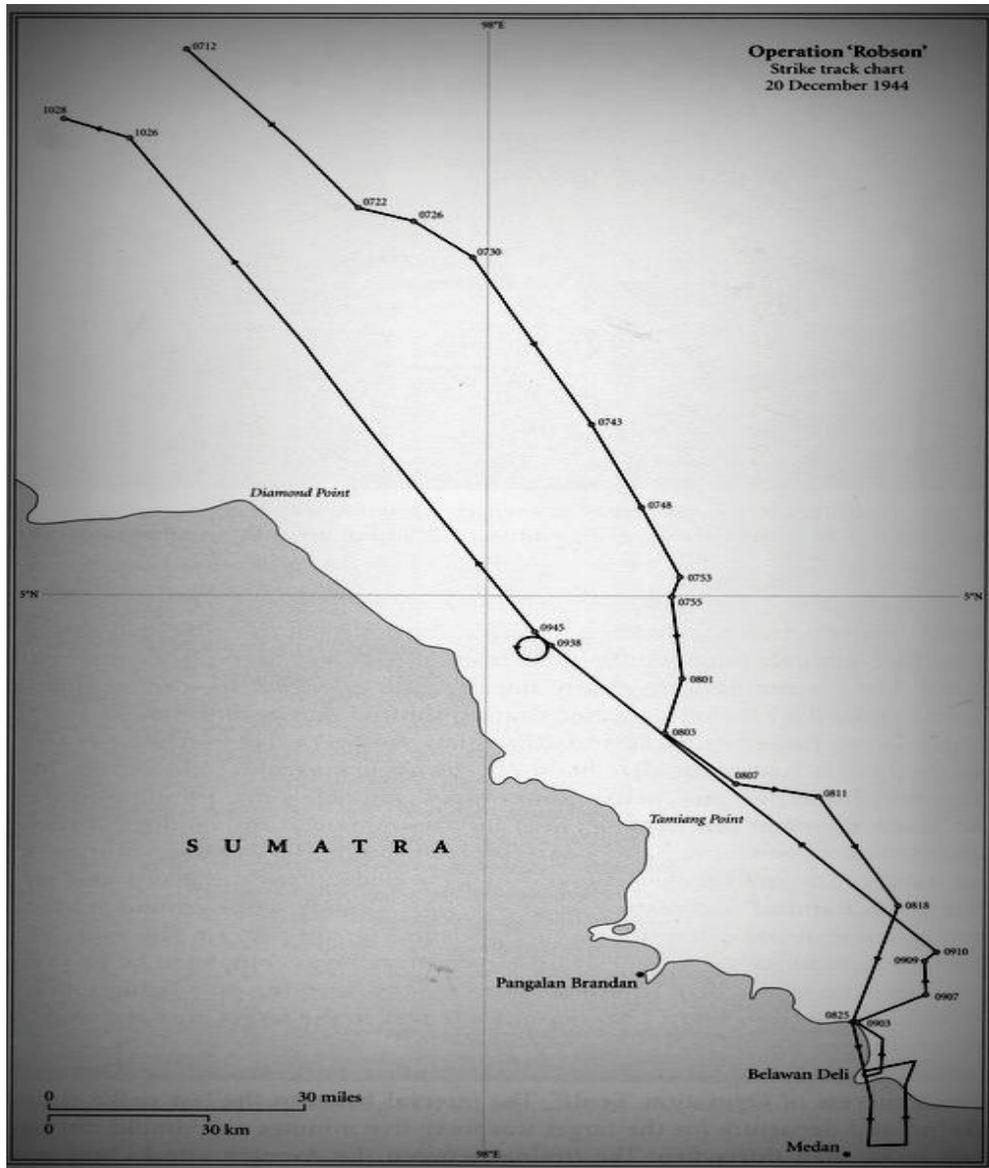
1844 squadron was briefed for Avenger escort cover for 'Robson' and as this was the first single action of the Carrier Group, operational methodology was by trail and error; squadrons had yet to learn new roles and embed tactics. On Sunday 17 December *Indomitable* was at sea with *Illustrious*, three cruisers and five destroyers. Four Hellcats were at deck readiness by 14:00 and aircrew gathered at 14:30 for the first briefing. The target for the Avenger raids would be Pangkalan Brandan, on the east coast of Sumatra, and the Fleet moved between the Nicobars and Sabang, to the entrance of the Malacca Straights. The following day the weather was calm enabling a rendezvous with a Fleet Train 'oiler'. From 08:00 on Tuesday, flight activity stepped up with two Hellcats airborne all day on 'Anti Snooper Patrol' and the Fleet arrived to the south of the Nicobars by 19:30; that night the squadron diarist noted that aircrew were 'to bed early'.<sup>28</sup>

On Wednesday 20 December poor weather delayed, until 06:35, a ranged strike of 28 Avengers from *Indomitable* and *Illustrious*, each carrying a four 500lb bomb pay load. 1844 Squadron contributed 16 Hellcats to the escort and returned at 10:30 with '... very dismal gen ... the target was Harry the clamp box [obscured] ... so [we] bombed the harbour of Belewan-Deli instead'. The Squadron encountered foul weather, aircraft separated and the Hellcats individually 'beat up' an oil storage tank, although three English pilots 'shared a Sally'. Following the main operation, the Hellcats formed a patrol as the Fleet 'went balls out' due west to find better weather. Further strafing runs by 1839 Corsair and 1844, Hellcat, Squadrons were ranged and at 16:40 they 'streaked' off to Sabang. Corsairs laden with belly tanks took off first but were overhauled by the Hellcats, despite the former jettisoning their 'empties'. At landfall a jetty and harbour were spotted with moored barges and junks so pilots '... all had a good squirt and experienced no flak'. One Hellcat attacked a dispersal hut at an aerodrome, shot up a '... Rising Sun Emblem at Khotaraja [and] flattened the local NAAFI Manager and his cobbles'. Another Hellcat pilot made an emergency landing on *Indomitable* with fire in the cockpit and the squadron

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 17, 18 and 19 December 1944.

diarist noted the end of a ‘... not too successful day’.<sup>29</sup> The Fleet returned to Trincomalee that evening having completed Vian’s air strikes for 1944, although 1844 Squadron was soon to be in action again, in January 1945, for operation ‘Lentil’.<sup>30</sup> ‘Robson’ had shown up the extent to which the BPF was restricted to improvised, short range and endurance ‘hit and run’ tactics.



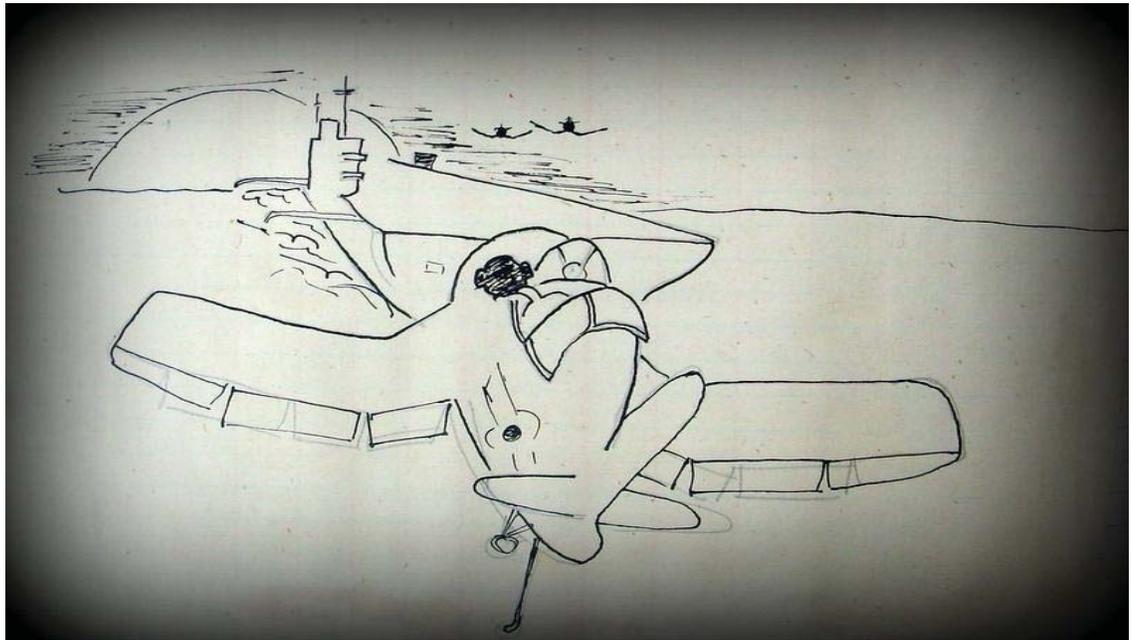
‘Operation Robson’ (Hobbs, 2011)

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 20 December 1944.

<sup>30</sup> Waters, p.369. During ‘Lentil’ Sub.Lieutenant Keith A. McLennan MiD (2) ‘... was the leader of a flight which shot down three Japanese fighters and shared in the destruction of a fourth. McLennan himself shot down one and shared a second.’

## Operation 'Lentil'

1834 Corsair Squadron embarked in *Victorious* on Saturday 12 February 1944 and later took part in the April attacks on *Tirpitz*. Following raids on Car Nicobar in September and dockyard work in India, *Victorious* arrived in Trincomalee on Friday 29 December 1944, in time for operation 'Lentil'.<sup>31</sup> 1834 Squadron had a large complement of New Zealand pilots: Neal Brynildsen, Bernie Finch, Raymond Jamieson, John Maybank, Ray Richards, Ken Seebeck, Alan West, Graham Wiley and Edward Wright. The Squadron Diary for 1 January 1945 to 25 March 1945 was compiled by Ray Richards and is a lively and detailed record of flights, events and the strikes made during operations 'Lentil' and 'Meridian', and exemplifies the role of Corsair squadrons within the Fleet.<sup>32</sup>



Sketch, 1834 Squadron (Corsair) Line Book (FAAM)

'Lentil' commenced on 2 January 1945 with *Victorious* joining *Indefatigable* and *Indomitable* in the Carrier Group. 1834 Squadron pilots were briefed on the morning of Thursday 4 January 1945, as the carrier lay off the West

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<sup>31</sup> Apps, pp.157-161.

<sup>32</sup> 1834 (Corsair) Squadron Diary 1/1/1945 to 25/3/1945. Compiled by Ray Richards. New Zealand Fleet Air Arm Museum Reference Library, Remuera, Auckland.

Coast of Sumatra. 15 Corsairs were serviceable and 19 pilots available, including Brynildsen, Richards, West and Wiley. Fine weather at sea and cloud over the Sumatra mountains, was reported, with a low haze over the inland plains. The plan was to strike the Japanese controlled oil refinery at Pangkalan Brandan and the port of Belawan Deli. Avengers from *Victorious* and *Indomitable* and rocket-armed Fireflies from *Indefatigable* made up the strike force. 1834 Squadron joined Hellcats from *Indomitable* for top cover and for preliminary strafing sweeps. The Corsairs formed up first, in two flights, with eight Hellcats of 1844 Squadron alongside, the carriers 40 miles off the coast. The aircraft flew at ‘zero’ feet until ten miles off the Sumatra shoreline then climbed rapidly at 150 knots, to clear the Barasan Mountains at 8,000 feet. Richards noted: ‘There were scattered clouds all over the mountains but not enough to cause any inconvenience. There would have been more than inconvenience for any unfortunate pilot who had to bail out over this country – the mountains were covered with the thickest jungle any of us had seen and escape would be most unlikely’.<sup>33</sup>

Once over the range, the plains lay before the pilots, covered in haze; poor visibility made the identification of Bindjai airfield impossible and it was missed. The plan had been for Corsairs to strafe the target with Hellcats as top cover and then to move to Medan airfield for the aircraft to swap roles. The Hellcats, however, dispersed and in doing so missed ‘the easiest Bogey ever’: Richards and another pilot, pulled up from a second strafing attack and ‘... shot it down inflames ... with its undercart down ... a very easy shot’. Three aircraft, believed to be Dinahs and Sallys, were destroyed on the ground and hangars and oil installations set on fire. Bindjii was strafed thoroughly, as were the airfields at Troeman and Tandjoengpoera, with few signs of Japanese military aircraft apparent.<sup>34</sup>

With Richards as flight leader, six Corsairs and one Hellcat reformed shortly after, strafed the harbour at Belawan Deli and damaged small ships. Flying north, two 1834 Corsairs shot down a Sally which crashed into the jungle; the

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<sup>33</sup> 1834 (Corsair) Squadron Diary, 4 January 1945.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

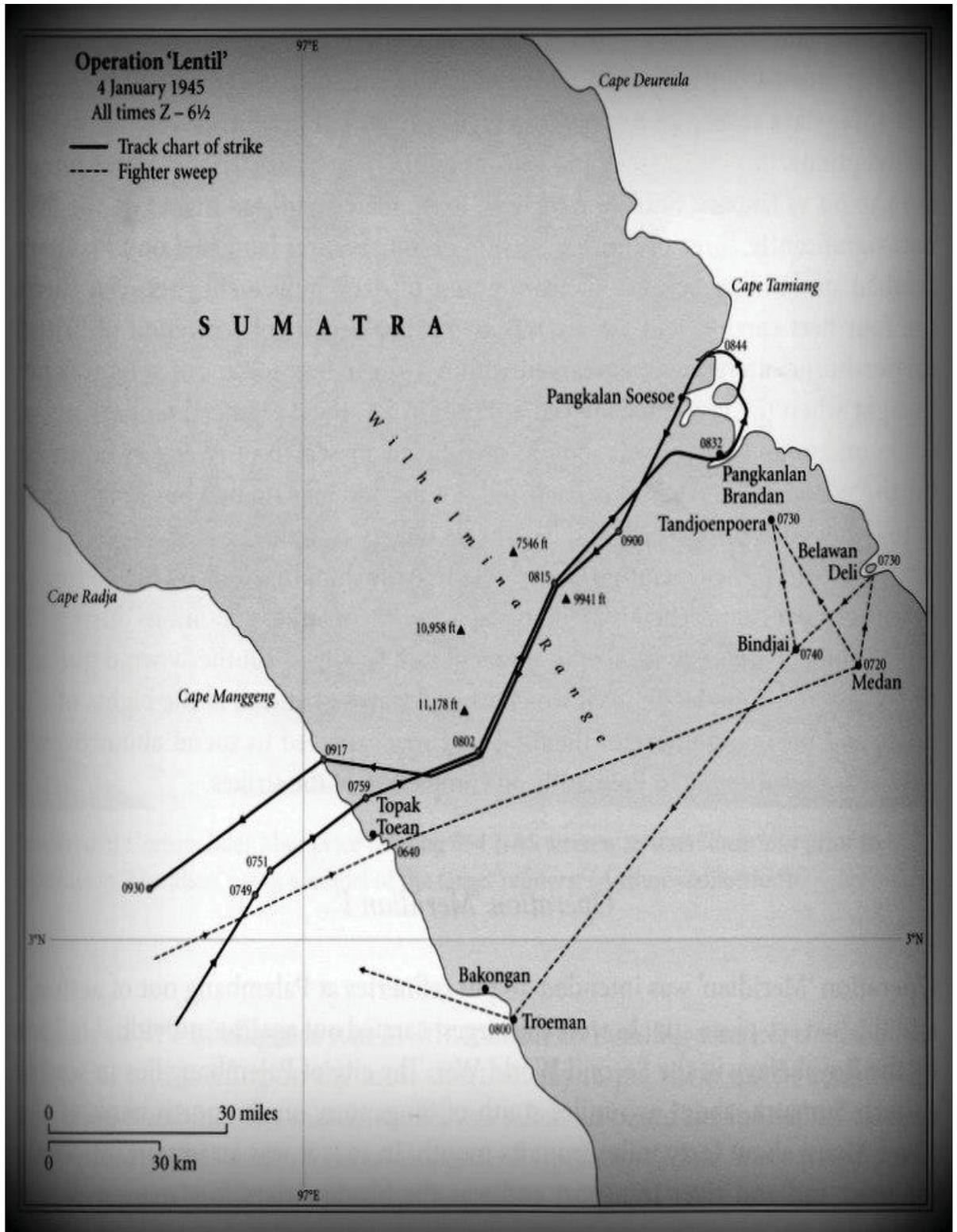
aircrew were seen fighting each other for escape as the aircraft plummeted to the ground. A further attack on Tandjoengpoera went to plan before all the Corsairs returned to *Victorious*; there had only been moderate flak over the three main targets although at least four aircraft were hit and damaged. In the afternoon the squadron escorted Avenger and Firefly raids to the oil refinery where ‘... the bombing was excellent and the target very thoroughly damaged [and] escorting Corsairs and Hellcats shot down 7 Jap fighters for no loss’. 1834 Squadron flew CAPs until dusk, at which time the carriers moved south between the islands of Lassin and Babi, to the west, and Tungku and Bangkaru to the east, less than 30 miles apart.<sup>35</sup>

At the conclusion of ‘Lentil’ operations *Indomitable* and *Victorious* returned, on Saturday 6 January, to Trincomalee, ahead of the monsoon season. Pilots used this time to practise dogfights and new tactics learned from the Sumatra raids. On Tuesday, Vian visited *Victorious* in dock and spoke with Richards and the ‘... pilots who had [had] interesting experiences during the operation’. On Thursday Mountbatten, too, came aboard to wish the ship luck with ‘Admiral Fraser in the Pacific’. Seebeck returned to the Squadron at this time, while Vian granted Wright immediate leave for New Zealand after 3½ years’ service overseas. 1834 Squadron obtained a full allocation of updated Corsairs while in Ceylon and, when *Victorious* left Trincomalee on Monday 15 January, had a full muster of 20 pilots.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 6 to 11 January 1945. Richards, Interview 2011. Richards recalled that Vian requested the senior Fleet Air Arm officer to ‘... show me the killers’ in reference to the Corsair pilots’ recent ‘Lentil’ achievements. Ray dismissed the ‘killer’ tag and insisted that FAA pilots were concerned only with successfully completing missions.



Operation 'Lentil' (Hobbs, 2011)

The Fleet outgrew East Indian facilities and left Trincomalee on 16 January 1945. *Illustrious* joined *Indomitable*, *Indefatigable* and *Victorious* for the long passage south-east to Australia. The Fleet Train left ahead on 13 January to assemble at a fuelling area south of Sumatra, to join auxiliaries sent up from Fremantle. The passage to Australia provided two valuable combat opportunities for the BPF. First, the Fleet Train could demonstrate that it had the capacity to keep the Task Force at sea and on strike, for long periods. Second, that the Carrier Group could deliver a heavy blow of critical value to the wider Pacific strategy, upon a high value enemy asset. Accordingly, the Fleet was ordered to destroy two vital Japanese-held oil refineries at Palembang, in Sumatra. Together the refineries of Pladjoe and Soengei Gerong, five miles to the east, provided two thirds of Japan's aviation fuel. While 'Robson' and 'Lentil' had been short endurance and range air operations, overall 'Outflank' had established the prototype pattern of bomb sortie and Ramrod, used in future BPF strikes.<sup>37</sup> Ray Richards recalled: '... [the] sea-to-land attacks of the British Far East Fleet [had been] more training exercises than destroying major Japanese installations. They were the build-up to the two vital raids on the Palembang refineries, which supplied the major oil needed by the Japanese navy, army and air force'.<sup>38</sup>

### **Operation 'Meridian I'**

Operation 'Meridian' commenced on 24 January 1945 and of necessity had two phases. During 'Meridian I' 48 Avengers, each armed with four 500lb bombs, raided Pladjoe as Corsairs and Hellcats formed the high cover escort and follow up Ramrods. The four carriers lacked sufficient deck ranging capacity for a simultaneous strike on both refineries, meaning 'Meridian II' subsequently lost the element of surprise. Moreover, limited deck space meant staggering flights for both operations. Slower, bomb-laden Avenger sorties, for example, were ranged and flown off first, CAPs and escort fighters second, to catch up. Problems arose when the deck had to be cleared to allow damaged aircraft to land on and pre-

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<sup>37</sup> Smith, pp.72-76.

<sup>38</sup> Richards, Interview 2011.

ranged flights were delayed. Both of the Palembang targets were a daunting prospect for aircrew: the aircraft flew 100 miles at low level over dense Sumatran jungle, climbed rapidly and steeply to clear the 11,000 feet high Barisan Mountains, to reach the heavily defended refineries.<sup>39</sup> For ‘Meridian’, *King George V*, *Indefatigable*, Vian’s flagship *Indomitable*, *Illustrious* and *Victorious* were collectively designated Task Force 67.

On Tuesday 16 January, *Victorious*’ captain, Rear Admiral Denny, gave aircrew the details of the operation, for execution en route to Freemantle.<sup>40</sup> US Superfortresses had failed, in April 1944, to knock out the Japanese controlled oil refineries at Palembang, believed by aircrew to be the ‘... largest single source the Japs [had] for oil’. Over the next two days aircrew attended intelligence lectures and gathered codes, diagrams, maps, and vectors for the Palembang strike. On Saturday 20 January aircraft were ranged while a preliminary briefing was held in the wardroom. The main strike of Avengers and Fireflies, escorted by Corsairs and Hellcats, would bomb and rocket the oil refineries at Palembang; simultaneously a strike would sweep and strafe the enemy’s airfields and targets adjacent. If opposition proved to be stubborn on the first day, a second Ramrod would be required and, as the two oilfields lay either side of the Moesi River, attacks over two days were anticipated. The Fleet had severe fuel restrictions and was limited to operations of no more than three consecutive days’ duration.<sup>41</sup>

Richards summarised the ‘top down’ and ‘need-to-know’ process by which pilots were briefed for operations: ‘Our intelligence briefing relating to strategy was minimal, which was the way the RN operated. One day at a time. Our initial confidence in senior officers was neutral; they had to prove themselves.’ Carrier life was very trying and uncomfortable: ‘Life at sea on *Victorious* was hot and humid, water was short, food was often ersatz, powder or dried fruit and vegs [sic], two bunks in a one-bunk cabin, lack of library, movies, radio, newspapers, etc. It was like a second-class young gent’s club, without frills

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<sup>39</sup> David Hobbs, ‘The British Pacific Fleet’, *The British Pacific and East Indies Fleets. ‘The Forgotten Fleets’ 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*, David Brown (Ed.), Brodie Publishing Ltd: Liverpool, 1995, pp.70-71.

<sup>40</sup> *Victorious*’ captain was Rear Admiral M. M. Denny CBO DSO RN

<sup>41</sup> 1834 (Corsair) Squadron Diary, 16 to 20 January 1945.

or privacy'.<sup>42</sup> On the eve of 'Meridian I', Sunday 21 January, 1834 Squadron met and prepared for a Ramrod strike with Corsairs of 1833 Squadron from *Illustrious*.<sup>43</sup> Pilots anticipated catching up and passing the first ranged Avengers quickly over the mountains, then proceeding to cover the airfields.



Corsair "7T" of 1834 being moved on *Victorious*, 1945  
(<http://www.fleetairmarchive.net>)

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<sup>42</sup> Richards, Interview 2011.

<sup>43</sup> 1833 Squadron (Corsair), Record of Events, 15/7/43 to 26/6/45 & 15/8/47 to 31/10/52. FAAM 1994/155/002. New Zealand pilots in 1833 Squadron were: Mathew Barbour, Evan Baxter, Don Cameron, Adrian Churchill, Jim Clarke, Geoff Hartshorn, Ben Heffer, and John Parli. Adrian Churchill of 1833 Corsair Squadron claimed one Tojo on 29 January. On 24 January 1945 Dick Mackie of 1839 Squadron, flying Hellcat JV141 116/W, shot down a Japanese Ki44 aircraft at Palembang, <http://www.fleetairmarchive.net/Squadrons/1839.html>, accessed 12 March 2012. 'Meridian' was a costly strike for New Zealanders: Evan Baxter of 1833 and John Haberfield of 1839 Hellcat Squadron were shot down and captured by the Japanese.

Foul weather, however, disrupted the following two days and aircrew were put on one hour's notice; Wiley and Seebeck were placed on the sick list and were unfit for flying duties that day.<sup>44</sup>

On Wednesday 24 January *Victorious* lay 40 miles off the Sumatra Coast and 180 miles from Palembang, the weather was fine and clear, with a little cloud over the mountains. Cloud was 'five tenths' at 1,000 feet over low land so targets would be visible and the cover over the plains would assist the return of the aircraft. Halfway through ranging an Avenger crash-landed and the delay effectively gave the land-based Japanese fighters time to 'scramble'. Richard's Corsair, part of the Ramrod, climbed easily to 5,000 feet to clear the mountains, spotted the landmark Ranau Lake to starboard, and descended to ground level close to the first aerodrome. Once Lamback airfield was identified, the flight made a 90° turn and oil derricks could be seen several miles to port. The Corsairs dropped their belly tanks and began to attack Lamback No.1, an airfield captured by Japanese paratroops in 1942. No Japanese aircraft were found but two squadron aircraft collided, killing one pilot, although the other aircraft was able to limp home.<sup>45</sup>

No. 2 Lamback airfield '... was on the other hand packed with aircraft – Nicks, Dinahs, Tojos and Oscars ... crowded in hangars'. Richards recorded that the flight leader did most damage jettisoning his drop-tank, causing a ground fire and as a result the Squadron claimed six enemy aircraft destroyed. A Corsair from 1830 Squadron was seen to crash in flames and Richards commented afterwards, that it was '... unnecessarily dangerous to fly through light flak with a belly tank'. The Squadron reformed at ground level in three sections and set course for Talangbetoetoe airfield, a few miles north of Palembang. Eight Corsairs climbed to top cover, as the other two sections attacked the airfield. Few signs of Japanese aircraft were visible and it was assumed that most had been scrambled to attack Fleet Air Arm aircraft bombing the refineries. Nevertheless, five Japanese aircraft were destroyed despite moderately intense and accurate flak, '... particularly well

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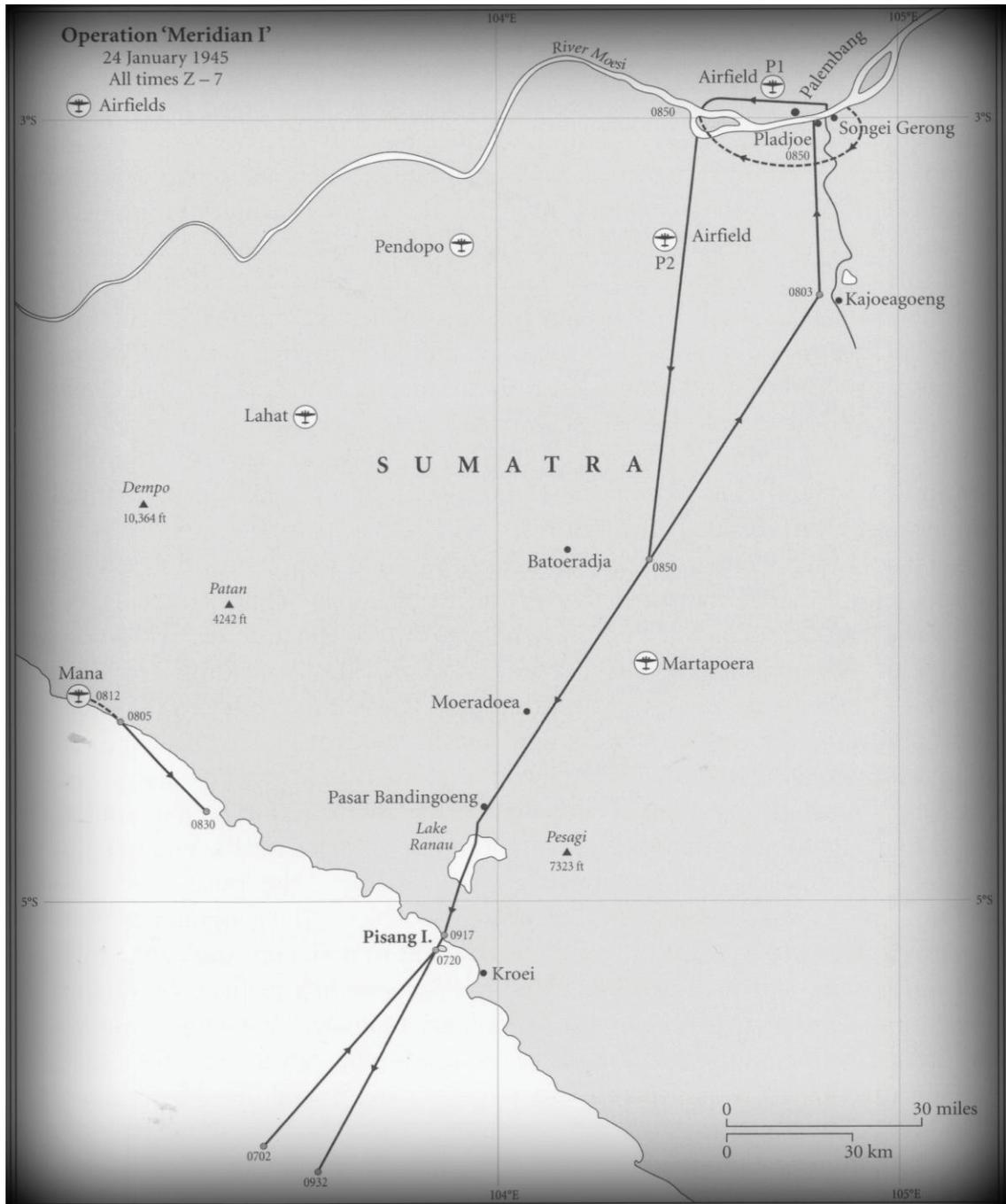
<sup>44</sup> 1834 (Corsair) Squadron Diary, 21 January 1945.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 24 January 1945.

directed over the airfield'. The combat intensified as Richards and one other Corsair pilot attempted to '... out-climb a Tojo, while two Nicks broke off and a further three Tojos joined the circling, high altitude Japanese aircraft'. A Corsair pilot put a two second burst into the cockpit of an Oscar which fell through the sky, as the remaining enemy aircraft disappeared into thick cloud. One other Tojo was shot down by Richards over the airfield, the pilot seen to bail out. That day 11 pilots fired their cannon and the Squadron expended 10,259 rounds of ammunition in total. At the debriefing the following afternoon, during a Kamikase alert, a Press Communiqué confirmed Vian's preliminary assessment that oil refining had been considerably damaged.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 24 January 1945.



Operation 'Meridian I' (Hobbs, 2011)

### Operation 'Meridian II'

For 'Meridian II' aircraft followed the same course overland on 29 January as before to bomb Songei Gerong, shadowed and attacked this time by Japanese interceptors. By now the enemy was thoroughly prepared and released barrage

balloons at 3,000 feet to disrupt the Avengers' glide-bombing approaches. During this second phase of operations 43 Avengers dropped 172 500lb bombs and Fireflies were detailed to attack the enemy's anti-aircraft and balloon defences, although their rockets proved to be less than effective.<sup>47</sup>

Oiling took place on Friday and Saturday before *Victorious* moved to flying off positions for 'Meridian II', scheduled for Monday 29 January. 1834 Squadron was briefed and placed on standby for the sole target of Talangbetoetoe airfield, while 1830 Squadron's 17 pilots were ordered to attack Lambak again, separately. 1834's Corsairs, belly tanks fitted, were to make three, four-aircraft flights and, being the last aircraft ranged for this main strike it was expected that the element of surprise over the target would be lost to them. *Victorious* lay 40 miles off the South West coast of Sumatra and scattered cloud covered the sea. The mountains were clear and although thick clouds again covered the plains, the targets were not obscured. Richards, Seebeck, West, Wiley and 13 other pilots flew off in three sections as 'Yoke Ramrod'; Brynildsen remained unfit for flying duties that day. No emergency landings interrupted flying off this time and the Corsairs were able to reach Ranau Lake before the main strike force had formed. Pilots scanned the ground for signs of the New Zealander Evan Baxter of 1839 Squadron in *Victorious*, who had baled out on the 24 January, but no signs of his aircraft were seen.<sup>48</sup>

The Corsairs dropped to 'zero' feet over the plain with only a small clearance above the trees and progressed at 200 knots towards the target Palembang, to starboard. Swamps and '... native huts perched on stilts in the Moesi River' were below. 'Talangbetoetoe was hit according to schedule' but few enemy aircraft were seen; one Nick was destroyed and hangars and the control tower were shot up. Flak was light but hit several aircraft causing damage. Strafing was temporarily interrupted with a report of an unseen Bogey, while at the same time two Tojos climbed at the sight of the Corsairs. After ground strafing, another another was seen at 3,000 feet and chased, although the

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<sup>47</sup> Hobbs, (1995), pp.70-71.

<sup>48</sup> 1834 (Corsair) Squadron Diary, 25 to 29 January 1945.

Squadron was unable to ‘close its height advantage’. The Japanese aircraft returned, coming down in a head-on diving attack to score several hits on Richards, at which point the engagement was broken off.<sup>49</sup>

1834 Squadron patrolled west of the aerodrome and encountered another Tojo and this was attacked by three pilots including Richards, and shot down; one pilot’s 20 second continuous burst damaged his guns. The engine of another Corsair was damaged by anti-aircraft fire and had to be escorted to a position north of Palembang to ditch close to an Anti Submarine Patrol Service co-ordinate. Richards wrote in the log later that, ‘... on leaving [the] target area it could be seen that the Avengers had done a fine job of diving through a double barrage of balloons and flak to hit the pin-point targets of Songei Gerong Refinery. It was blazing furiously as we set course for home!’ The last Tojo encountered that morning closed in but avoided engagement and 1834 Squadron returned to *Victorious* safely.<sup>50</sup>

That same afternoon the Fleet was attacked by seven Japanese torpedo planes, Sallys and Bettys, and while the low-level flying skill of the Japanese was commended, the futility of the attack and the inexperience of the pilots, was noted. 1834 Squadron flew CAPs during these raids and Seebeck and West patrolled until dusk to intercept any ‘snoopers’ getting through the thick cloud. Late in the day Vian expressed satisfaction with the damage done to Pladjoe and Songei Gerong and cancelled the third scheduled strike. 8,321 rounds of ammunition had been expended during aerial combat by 1834 Squadron, although some pilots were keen to use tracer for future air-to-air engagement. The accidental firing of ammunition in a hangar damaged four of the squadron’s Corsairs that day and completed ‘Meridian’ operations for 1834 Squadron, on a sour note.<sup>51</sup>

The Fleet Air Arm claimed 140 enemy aircraft destroyed during ‘Meridian’, at a cost of 29 airmen lost and 41 aircraft destroyed. Accurate and effective Avenger bombing put the refineries out of action for two months and

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 29 January 1945.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

reduced subsequent production to one third, at a critical stage of the war. The facts of life regarding the Pacific war became painfully evident during the 'Meridian' operations. Japanese resistance was, and would be, brutally relentless: stung by the carriers' strikes, enemy aircraft attacked the task force at sea on the 29 January. As a portent of future logistical problems, the carriers struggled to take on sufficient fuel at the rate required to maintain station. At the completion of the strikes Task Force 63 continued to Fremantle and onwards to Sydney, arriving on 10 February 1945, there to await Fraser's orders.<sup>52</sup>

By February 1945 news of the BPF had appeared in New Zealand newspapers in which the earlier exploits of individual Kiwi Fleet Air Arm aircrew with the Eastern Fleet had been proudly reported.<sup>53</sup> Articles also reflected a general anxiety felt that future British involvement in the Pacific might be merely peripheral.<sup>54</sup> There was also a broader, surprisingly candid, discussion of how the Royal Navy could be best deployed within Nimitz' rapidly advancing war and some suggestions for New Zealand's contribution.<sup>55</sup> Newspapers reflected the generally held view, in early 1945, that the 'Jap' would fight to the death and that an invasion of 'his' home islands was inevitable.<sup>56</sup> Admiral Fraser made a flying visit to Auckland on 5 February 1945 before 'motoring' down two days' later to Wellington, to meet Peter Fraser and the War Cabinet. At the Wellington Town Hall Admiral Fraser announced that the BPF was 'here to get on with the job', while his work behind the scenes secured consignments of New Zealand meat, fresh food and general supplies for Sydney, in the face of stiff US competition.<sup>57</sup> As a symbolic demonstration of Royal Navy power and prestige the battleship

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<sup>52</sup> Hobbs, (1995), pp. 70-71.

<sup>53</sup> 'N.Z. Zealanders There', Evening Post, Volume CXXXVIII, Issue 98, 23 October 1944, p.5.

<sup>54</sup> 'Given Minor Role', Evening Post, Volume CXXXIX, Issue 57, 8 March 1945, p.7.

<sup>55</sup> 'N.Z. Facilities Servicing of Ships – British Pacific Fleet', Evening Post, Volume CXXXVIII, Issue 156, 30 December 1944, p.8.

<sup>56</sup> 'Grim Year at Hand Admiral Nimitz Promises', Evening Post, Volume CXXXIX, Issue 2, 3 January 1945, p.5.

<sup>57</sup> 'Admiral Fraser Civic Reception', Evening Post, Volume CXXXIX, Issue 32, 7 February 1945, p.6. Morison, p. 163.

*Howe* made a morale boosting eight day visit to Auckland on 2 February, to coincide with Fraser's short public relations' tour.<sup>58</sup>

### **Australian Interlude**

*Victorious* crossed the equator and arrived in Freemantle on Sunday 4 February, where the airmen were issued Australian money and thankfully found a cold beer in the Officers' Club ashore. On Saturday 10 February as the ship approached Sydney, 1834 Squadron flew off to HMS *Nabbington*, a partially completed Monab at Nowra, where the 'troops' were accommodated in tents. The Squadron Diary noted the 'main event of the day' for the Kiwi pilots there: telephoned news from Sydney confirmed that all RNZNVR pilots, not due long-service leave, were to be flown to and from New Zealand, on Admiral Fraser's Liberator, on a special 14 day leave. Richards, West and Wiley would be away from 11 to 26 February meaning that the other pilots would be left in New South Wales to appreciate the '... very commendable spirit shown by the younger feminine population towards everyone in blue or white'. The furlough men returned on 26 February, after an 8½ hour flight by Dakota; 'Wiley, West and Richards [had] enjoyed themselves thoroughly', the diary recorded. *Victorious* departed Sydney on Tuesday 27 February, '... with great regret ... the destination of the Fleet ... a big mystery'. The carrier moved past New Guinea and reached Manus on Wednesday 7 March, where 1834 Squadron began its preparations for action with Task Force 57 and operation 'Iceberg'.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> 'The British Battleship *Howe* entering Auckland Harbour recently', Evening Post, Volume CXXXIX, Issue 43, 20 February 1945, p.6.

<sup>59</sup> 1834 (Corsair) Squadron Diary, 1 February to 7 March 1945.

## **Chapter Four: *British Pacific Fleet - Main Operations***

During its main operations the Fleet left, and returned to, Australia from bases at Manus, Ulithi and Leyte to strike Japanese targets in the Sakishima Gunto, Truk, Formosa, and the Japanese Home Islands. The definitive period of the campaign for the BPF was the ‘Iceberg’ operation in the Central Pacific as Task Force 57, alongside Spruance’s Fifth US Fleet. ‘Iceberg’, described as ‘... a war of attrition ... which, like all toe-to-toe slogging matches, [had] neither glamour nor spectacle’, had two distinct phases: 26 March to 20 April and 1 May to 22 May, 1945.<sup>1</sup> On 18 March the US Navy had taken severe losses at Okinawa and several American carriers had been critically damaged off Kyushu, the most southerly of the Japanese Home Islands. The BPF left Sydney on 27 February following the Fleet Train that had left in advance, with the escort carriers *Striker* and *Speaker*, to fuel CAPs and provide anti-submarine patrols. Task Force 57 arrived at Manus on 7 March, received its orders and was formally welcomed into the Fifth Fleet by Nimitz, on 16 March, during exercises off Manus.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter examines ‘Iceberg’, the bombing of the Sakishima Gunto and Formosa, from the perspective of 1841 Squadron’s operations from *Formidable* during April and May 1945, at times in close formation with 1842, another Corsair squadron, both well represented by New Zealand pilots. The close reference to 1841 Squadron’s diary is intended to give a strong impression of the daily pressures and routines associated with the intense schedule of combat and patrol flights maintained by pilots during this most critical phase of operations. Similarly, the alignment of 1771 Firefly Squadron’s documented activities to the Fleet’s raids on the Japanese Home Islands later, lends an authenticity and immediacy to the narrative. The final section of this chapter describes the particular personal circumstances of a select number of New Zealand airmen, demonstrating the hazards and brutality that they were subjected to, and the courage and dignity they displayed, in carrying out their duties.

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<sup>1</sup> Roberts, p.5.

<sup>2</sup> Smith, pp.104-106.

## **Section I: Operation 'Iceberg' - The Sakishima Gunto and Formosa**

On 26 March the Carrier Group was ordered to proceed at 23½ knots from Ulithi, in the Caroline Islands, to a strike area south west of Okinawa, some 80 to 100 miles off selected targets.<sup>3</sup> According to Vian's account '... the objective of the British Task Force in "Iceberg" was the neutralisation of the Nansei Shonto group of airfields; that is, to deny these airfields to enemy aircraft who might be staged through from China and Formosa to attack the Okinawa Invasion Forces'. The Fleet arrived in the forward area where Vian assumed tactical command and patrols, fighter sweeps and bomber strikes were flown off.<sup>4</sup> Thereafter, the carriers worked a two day strike, and two day replenishment cycle, in rotation with four US Navy carriers *Santee*, *Suwanee*, *Chenango* and *Steamer Bay*.<sup>5</sup>

'Iceberg I' operations, from 16 March to 20 April 1945, were planned to destroy or disable six Japanese airfields located on Miyako, Ishigaki and Miyara and this proved to be a frustratingly difficult task to achieve. The airstrips were constructed of crushed coral and shell that was easily and quickly repaired overnight by maintenance gangs. To compound the problem the Fleet Air Arm lacked a genuine night-fighter to attack and disrupt the airstrip repairs after dark. Aircraft had to return daily to bomb the same airfields and the enemy cleverly used dummy aircraft as 'flak traps' to draw aircraft off-target. According to Vian, this was '... an unsatisfactory type of operation from the air point of view – much flak and few worthwhile targets'.<sup>6</sup> Task Force 57 strikes typically followed the

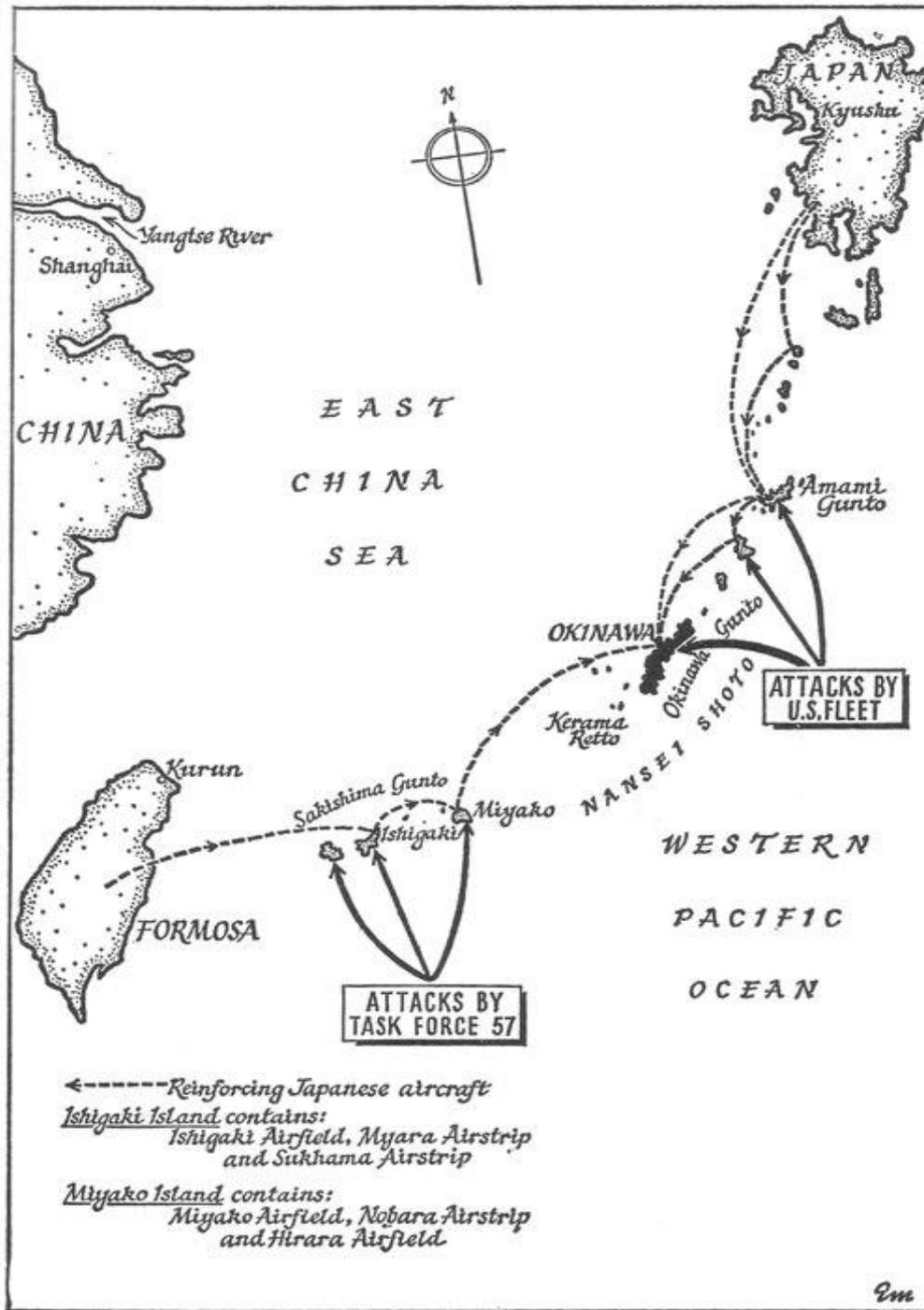
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<sup>3</sup> The Carrier Group comprised: *Indomitable* (29 Hellcats and 15 Avengers); *Victorious* (37 Corsairs, 14 Avengers, and two Walrus); *Indefatigable* (40 Seafires, 20 Avengers and nine Fireflies) and *Illustrious* (36 Corsairs and 16 Avengers).

<sup>4</sup> Vian to Rawlings, Enclosure No. 1, 7 April 1945, 0109/12/354, 'Reports on the Proceedings of Operations Iceberg 1 and Iceberg 2'. War History Case 7543. Operation Iceberg. UKNA, ADM 199/595. Vian noted delays in refuelling the carriers' aviation fuel - also that maintaining high speed, Kamikase attacks, spares shortages and high seas had placed great stress upon aircrew and ships' companies and reduced efficiencies. The lack of Royal Navy night-fighters was commented upon.

<sup>5</sup> Hobbs, (1995), pp.71-72.

<sup>6</sup> Vian to Rawlings, 7 April 1945, 0109/12/354, 'Reports on the Proceedings of Operations Iceberg 1 and Iceberg 2'. War History Case 7543. Operation Iceberg. UKNA, ADM 199/595.



Operation 'Iceberg' (Smith)

with intelligence of intense flak. Two bomber strikes of 24 Avengers and four fireflies, with an escort of 16 fighters, were ranged at 09:20 and 12:20 and attacked airfields at Hirara, Nobara, Ishigaki and Miyara. When primary targets

had been hit, flight leaders had discretion to make secondary attacks on coasters, sampans and the like. A third strike was ranged at 15:20 that day but it was not uncommon for the Carrier Group to complete four strikes in a day on the Sakashimas.<sup>7</sup>

From 1 April, in a biting reaction to the US invasion of Okinawa, Task Force 57 came under intense aerial attack, frequently from Kamikase. At dawn on 1 April, a Zeke, after a feint attack on *King George V*, dived on the port quarter of *Indefatigable*. At 07:27, in spite of the combined efforts of the ship's 'pom-poms' and a Seafire, the Kamikase struck '... abreast the foremost barrier at the junction of flight deck and island.' Remarkably at 07:42 fires had been extinguished and by 08:00 Seafire flights resumed. The Kamikase's 500lb bomb caused considerable '... minor damage ... by blast and splinters' killing three officers and five naval ratings.<sup>8</sup> At 15:15 on 6 April, *Illustrious* narrowly averted catastrophe when a 'radial engined Judy' diving through 40° and spotted only 10 seconds from the ship, was damaged critically by a seven second burst of fire. The Kamikase aircraft clipped the ship's island structure and hit the sea where its bombs detonated on impact. As an indication of the 'twitchiness' of the ship's anti-aircraft gunners, a Seafire approaching the carrier shortly afterwards, received almost the same treatment. The carrier was withdrawn on 9 April for temporary repairs at Leyte, due to below water damage, and was replaced by *Formidable* on 14 April.<sup>9</sup>

In *Formidable*, 1841 Corsair Squadron's pilot roster included the New Zealanders Jeffrey Bastien, Bob Glading, Geoff Hartshorn, Don McLisky and Flight Leader Derek Morten. These airmen served with other New Zealanders of 1842 squadron: Len Martin, John Middleton and Ian Stirling.<sup>10</sup> 1841 Squadron had also taken part in July attacks against *Tirpitz* in Norway and *Formidable* had not arrived in Ceylon until February 1945, when it proceeded to Sydney and later,

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Enclosure No. 2, 7 April 1945, 0109/12/354. UKNA ADM 199/595.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., Enclosure No. 7. *Indefatigable* No. 104/1234/00190/8, 2 April 1945, 0109/12/354. UKNA ADM 199/595.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., Enclosure No. 7. *Illustrious* 04/C, 14 April, p. 3. UKNA ADM 199/595.

<sup>10</sup> 1841 Squadron (Corsair) Diary 17/1/45 to 23/7/45. Compiled by Sub.Lieutenant Alan Maitland RNVR (d. 10 August 1945). Transcribed FAAM Letters 92.72(P).

on 26 March, to Manus. From there a course set for the Philippines was announced by Captain Ruck Keen and, because ship communications were being converted to the American CINPAC system, most on board expected the carrier would operate alongside the US Navy.<sup>11</sup> On Friday 30 March, as *Formidable* approached Manus Harbour, a pilot of 1842 ‘pranged his Corsair’ and knocked off the under carriage leg, during routine flights. By evening, however, the carrier was at anchor inside the reef with men ‘bathing over the side’. Junior Fleet Air Arm officers invited the Captain to a ‘spontaneous’ party that evening at which, according to the Squadron Diary, the ‘worst offenders’ were McLisky and Morten.<sup>12</sup>

*Formidable* weighed anchor on Easter Sunday, 1 April, bound for the Philippines. On Tuesday, Glading, McLisky, Morten and other pilots took their Corsairs up to 25,000 feet to test cockpit oxygen systems at extreme altitude, an excess of which caused some ‘hilarity’ and also panic when it was realised during the test that a number of ‘... kites had less than 20 gallons [of fuel] left’. A hangar accident occurred later when a parked Avenger’s guns were fired accidentally and three aircraft were written-off. At 11:30 on Wednesday, the Philippines hove into view as Bastien and Glading led dingy drill on the quarter deck. By late afternoon *Formidable* had joined *Unicorn*, *Uganda* and numerous US Navy vessels inside the Northern Bay of Leyte Island; various Allied aircraft - Avengers, Beaufighters, Corsairs and Lightnings, flew over to have ‘a look’. Aircrew were granted a 90 minute ‘run ashore’ and found the island to be ‘... a combination of native and American ... the natives inclined to be friendlier than the Americans’.<sup>13</sup>

During the weekend of 6 to 8 April briefing and training continued: lectures on aircraft homing were given and Glading was commended for his work testing radios, beacons and headsets. Bastien, however, was taken to a US hospital

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<sup>11</sup> Morten, p.43. Ruck Keene was an ex-submariner who took flying lessons to better understand Fleet Air Arm operations. He was a hard taskmaster but intensely loyal to his aircrew. Vian moved his flag from *Indomitable* to *Formidable* on 25 May 1945. It was clear that Vian and Ruck Keene disliked each other, as their heated arguments were overhead on the bridge through the voice pipes. CINPAC was the US Navy’s encoded radio system used by the US 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Fleets.

<sup>12</sup> 1841 Diary, 30 March 1945, p.15.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 April 1945, pp.16-18.

ship for treatment of tropical eczema. After Sunday divisions (religious parades) Ruck Keene, attended by three US Navy officers, apprised the ship's company of the major battle taking place off the Ryukyu Islands, where the Japanese battleship *Yamata* and 'two or three cruisers' had been sunk. *Formidable*, he announced, would leave to join the main fleet around 12 April and so the Squadron prepared a 'ground school programme' of work for the next few days. Aircrew spent the remainder of Sunday sleeping or relaxing.<sup>14</sup>

The Fleet had been hindered by bad weather, heavy seas and hampered by slow refuelling but, thanks to the escort carriers' good work, lost aircraft were replaced efficiently. Even so, the Task Force was requested to redirect its offensive from the Sakishimas to Formosa. On 8 April Spruance lost the USS *Hancock*, a timber-decked carrier, to Kamikase attack and so looked to Rawling's carriers' demonstrated ability to withstand such strikes. The BPF's targets on Formosa were the hornets' nests of Kamikase airfields that had inflicted such grievous damage on the US Navy at Okinawa. Task Force 57 was overdue for major replenishment but nevertheless Rawlings agreed to a series of interdiction strikes, on airfield targets and railways, on 12 and 13 April. The Carrier Group claimed 16 Japanese air 'kills' at the cost of three of its own aircraft during these operations. However, fierce Japanese resistance further depleted the US Navy's carriers and on 16 April, Task Force 57 resumed strikes on the Sakishima targets, critically short itself, by then, of aircraft.<sup>15</sup>

The mood on *Formidable* changed abruptly on the afternoon of Monday 9 April, the ground school was cancelled as the carrier mobilised at short notice. Ruck Keene addressed the pilots and observers: 'Well chaps, we're off! No drinking tonight, all right!! Don't forget to know your R.T. [radio] procedure. I'll skin the Pilot who leaves his transmission on, alright?!' Over the next week pilots 'ran up' their aircraft in the expectation of flying up to 50 to 60 hours per month. The rendezvous time with the main Fleet was unknown but pilots began to carry life jackets at all times, located jungle suits, backpacks and water bottles and

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 6 to 8 April 1945, p18.

<sup>15</sup> Hobbs, (1995), pp.72-73.

‘Action Stations’ signals were tested. There was no flying on Tuesday, but notably a representative of the Chance-Vought aircraft company (manufacturer of the Corsair), Jack Kennedy, came aboard.<sup>16</sup>

On Thursday 12 April, *Formidable* and *Speaker* passed the northern tip of Formosa at high readiness into cooler temperatures where a patrol was flown by Morten’s flight. Some experimentation with ‘squirts’ or accelerated take-offs had been planned, but at 14:30 *Formidable* was still tied up with a tanker. Readiness was lowered and pilots were allowed to leave their aircraft. Accelerated take-offs proved problematic as the shoulder packs provided for pilots got in their way and prevented the cockpit seat head-pad doing its job. Pilots were equipped with full issue US backpacks that included a water bottle, canvas, poncho, maps, jungle guides and a Mae West; cockpit stowage became a problem, putting the ‘Pilot’s nose too close to the gun sight!’<sup>17</sup> Flying continued on 13 April, standby was at 05:30 and Avengers were accelerated at 08:00 hours. The first radio contact with the main Fleet was made by a flight from 1841 Squadron, including McLisky and Glading’s aircraft. The rendezvous was expected at 16:00 so CAPs were up from dawn until dusk. That evening a memorial service was held on the flight deck, to mark the ‘tragic death’ of Roosevelt, and on Saturday ‘*The Fighting Lady*’, a movie documenting life in a US Navy carrier, was shown. The Squadron diarist recorded that ‘prangs of injured aircraft’ returning from strikes in the Marianas were ‘especially spectacular’. Ruck Keene announced later that evening that *Formidable* would go into action on Monday, although he did not disclose the targets.<sup>18</sup>

Vian landed on the carrier on Sunday 15 April, to meet Ruck Keene and later he spoke with aircrew. 1841 Squadron was given the escort role and was told to avoid the ‘crime’ of leaving the flight ‘to knock down the odd Jap’. McKlisky, not favourably disposed to long spells of patrolling, expressed his anxiety about the unlikelihood of getting his ‘first kill’.<sup>19</sup> The ‘Troops’ were hard-pressed on the

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<sup>16</sup> 1841 Diary, 9 to 10 April 1945, p19.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 12 April 1945, p.20.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 13 April 1945, p.p.20-21.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 15 April 1945, p.21.

flight deck arming aircraft, cleaning cockpit covers and fitting belly tanks; H-Hour was set at 06:00 next morning and the pilots' briefing for 04:30. Eight strikes were planned on the Sakishima Gunto for 16 and 17 April, flown off 80 miles to the south-east, to bomb airfields at Ishigaki and Myako. The Avengers' objective was to destroy ground aircraft, hangars and installations. Eight Corsairs from 1841 Squadron, including Glading and McKlisky, belly tanks fitted, were flown off first at 06.30. They maintained a patrol at 4,000 feet until 10:00 when a replacement flight took over while the Avengers' strikes were pressed home. A few raiders were tracked on the ship's raider but no interceptions were made. Dusk fell at 19:00 and the Squadron's collective disappointment was voiced that night in the diary: 'Most of the squadron types [were] browned off with the fact they had been appointed C.A.P. and had little to do except stooge over the Fleet'.<sup>20</sup> Unlike 1842 squadron, 1841 Corsairs had not been adapted to carry a 500lb bomb-load and were not, therefore, Ramrod capable.

The Squadron's combat patrols continued on Tuesday 17 April in company with Hellcats and Seafires. Morten's flight was away first at 05:55 and back up again at 10:00, although a 'big flap' appeared likely when he was forced to land on *Victorious*, due to hydraulic problems. However, he returned at 15:30 bringing news of two lost pilots from *Victorious*, adding to grim reports of a lost Avenger from *Formidable*, over Myako. Bombing was completed for the day and while further Avenger strikes were cancelled, the hazards of naval flying continued: 'Considerable excitement was caused when 1842 Pilots landed on with 500 lb bombs which they had been unable to drop: one bomb fell off on landing and rolled up the Flight Deck to the island. Everyone went flat for a second, and then [Lt. Commander] Hawkes ran up and handled it with great calm – who would be an A.G.O.?' (Air Gunnery Officer).<sup>21</sup> Operations continued, Morten's flight provided cover on Wednesday but when the opportunity arose pilots slept or read the mail brought up from Leyte by the Fleet Train.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 16 to 17 April 1945, pp.21-23.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 17 April 1945, p.23.

On Friday 20 April, Avengers returned to strike the Sakishima and Morten's flight was first up to 10,000 feet with four Corsairs from 1842 Squadron above them at 20,000 feet. On their return, dense cloud meant that the pilots could only locate the Fleet by air direction radar; one Avenger crew was lost in choppy seas, but were fortunately picked up by the US Navy and reported as being 'safely in our hands'. During the weekend of 21 and 22 April the Fleet withdrew south to the Philippines. On Sunday 22 April *Formidable* was at anchor alongside *Indefatigable*, *Illustrious*, *Indomitable*, *Victorious*, *Unicorn*, *Speaker*, *Striker* and *Fencer* at Leyte. The 'Iceberg I' phase had concluded and marked a breathing space in the offensive.<sup>22</sup>

Squadrons worked a less formal, lower readiness 'tropical routine' at Leyte and inter-wardroom visits around the Fleet were encouraged. Airmen from *Illustrious* were the first to call on *Formidable*, taking a clock from the ante room and the bell clapper from the quarter deck, for souvenirs. Aircrew seized such opportunities for a few drinks and some 'high jinks', in part to cope with anxiety or to maintain the adrenalin 'buzz' of active service. Squadron solidarity was an important justification for wardroom pranks as well, and senior Fleet Air Arm officers would condone and, on occasions, join in such activities. McLisky, an arm injured in a 'recreational' incident, was sent back to New Zealand by Ruck Keene for recuperation, with a letter for his prompt return written to Vian.<sup>23</sup>

Bastien returned to the squadron at Leyte and by 30 April, 1841 Squadron mustered 20 pilots. *Formidable*, its deck cluttered with belly tanks, joined the restored carriers *Indefatigable*, *Indomitable* and *Victorious* and the escort battleships' *King George V* and *Howe* for operation 'Iceberg II'. The Fleet left San Pedro on Tuesday 1 May, due north, and aircrew assumed that their role would be to spot-range for the battleships' big guns off either Formosa or the Sakishima. On Wednesday, though, a practice strike was ranged of 48 Avengers, 64 Corsairs, 12 Hellcats and '... various odd Fireflies and Seafires'. Beacon cards, shackle groups, Identification Friend or Foe code numbers and call signs

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 20, 21 and 22 April 1945, p.24.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 23 to 24 April 1945, p.25.

were issued to pilots by 14:00. The practice took an ‘unacceptable’ 45 minutes to form up and radio discipline was poor; aircrew were told to improve or likely repeat the ‘... shambles of Palembang!’<sup>24</sup>

The Carrier Group resumed pounding airfields on the Sakishima on 4 May. The same rate of attrition and cycle of air strikes, up to five sorties per day, with combat and anti-submarine patrols maintained. The Fleet ‘steamed’ into wind at rates up to 32 knots, strikes were flown off and fighters sent to intercept any incoming Bogeys caught on radar. Flight decks were cleared for the ‘lame ducks’ as the warships’ ubiquitous and deafening anti-aircraft gunfire burst all around and it was not uncommon for ships and aircraft to be damaged by ‘friendly’ crossfire. The carriers came under concentrated attack from Bogeys and the stresses of intense combat, constant danger and difficult seas combined to create an environment in which accidents were ready to occur.<sup>25</sup>

For 1841 Squadron, ‘Iceberg II’ began on early on Friday 4 May with a patrol ranged at 05:30. At 10:45 Morten, Glading and Hartshorn were vectored to 20,000 feet to intercept a Bogey 40 miles westward. The Squadron Diary takes up the narrative: ‘It must have been at that time – around 11.45, that the ship was attacked by two suicide bombers, because for a long time we received no further vector and were steadily flying towards China ... we were unaware that the ship had been hit, and it was not until the two flights were ordered to land on other carriers that we realized something was wrong’.<sup>26</sup> *Formidable* and *Indomitable* came under simultaneous, intense Kamikase attack at around 11:30 on 4 May. At 11:31 *Formidable* was hit by a Zeke diving at a great height; *Indomitable* was struck three minutes later also by a Zeke and a narrow miss followed at 11:42, causing minor damage only. *Formidable*, however took severe damage:

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 30 April to 1 May 1945, pp.27-28.

<sup>25</sup> ‘The British Pacific Fleet in Action 1945. Lt. Reynolds at Okinawa.’ AWM F03631(Film). Reynolds ‘home’ movie is captivating viewing. Aspects of life with Task Force 57 and the Pacific air war are captured in detail. The silent footage was edited, sound effects and commentary added and used in two Moveitone News films for public showing in 1945: ‘Exclusive: British Fleet Engages Enemy in Pacific’ and ‘First Pictures of British Carrier Task Force in action of Ryukyu Islands’. Both short films used jingoistic and derogatory language viz. the Japanese enemy, appropriate to the mood of the time.

<sup>26</sup> 1841 Diary, 4 May 1945, p.29.

... 8 [were] killed and 47 wounded; 1 Corsair and 10 Avengers damaged, beyond repair; flight deck holed 2 feet square, indentation 10 feet square and 2 feet deep at the centre; [an] armoured deck splinter passed through hangar deck ... to the centre boiler room where it caused slight damage and loss of steam, and finally pierced the inner bottom.<sup>27</sup>

By 17:00, with the boiler repaired, the ship was back up to 24 knots and the bomb hole sufficiently patched up to land on 13 Corsairs. Glading and Morten, forced to land on *Indomitable*, returned later that evening to *Formidable* when the flight deck became serviceable and Hartshorn returned from *Victorious*, the next day. When the attack occurred, the carrier had been alone with eight destroyers, as *King George V* and *Howe* had left to bombard Japanese islands; on learning of *Formidable's* vulnerability, the battleships returned swiftly. Two further Avenger strikes were put up that day and later sailors on *Formidable* witnessed gunners on *Illustrious* and *Victorious* mistakenly shooting down a Fleet Air Arm Hellcat. An Avenger and a Corsair of 848 and 1841 Squadrons, respectively, were lost that day, before the '... Task Force retired during the afternoon'.<sup>28</sup>

Saturday 5 May was used for 'plugging holes' in *Formidable's* flight deck and both 1841 and 1842 Squadrons kept eight aircraft at readiness from first light to dusk. In the afternoon, the ship's radar picked up a Bogey:

... finally the enemy aircraft was sighted at one o'clock. It was rather a case of who got there first and S/Lt. 'Chiefy' Stirling [RNZNVR] made in Lt. Hammy Gray's cab .... Only a two second burst from 10° deflection was sufficient to cause the Nip to explode and Stirling, still with high closing speed, flew through the pieces. The pilot was seen about

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<sup>27</sup> London Gazette, 1948, pp.3305-3306.

<sup>28</sup> 1841 Diary, 4 May 1945, p.30.

10,000 ft on the end of his parachute, but he was allowed to float down to the sea. Good Show! At last *Formidable* fighters get their first Jap!<sup>29</sup>

The 26 casualties from the Kamikase attack of the 4 May were by that time ‘spread around the ship’ and later transferred by bosun’s chair to a destroyer, when *Formidable* withdrew to oil and to collect replacement Avengers. The squadron diary recorded that ‘... all runways on [the] island aerodromes had been left unserviceable’ and a tally of eight enemy aircraft was destroyed and four damaged. In total Task Force 57 had lost 12 Avengers, two Corsairs; one Hellcat and a Seafire were casualties of the Fleet’s own guns. *Formidable* was back on station on Tuesday 8 May to resume bombing Okinawa and at 05:45 Glading’s four Corsairs left to patrol in dense cloud and to cover Avengers.<sup>30</sup>

On Wednesday 9 May the ‘Suiciders’ continued to press home attacks on the carriers and inflicted serious damage, the Fleet was by then 120 miles off the islands. At around 16:50 *Victorious* received three Kamikase attacks in rapid succession, the first of which holed the flight deck and damaged a hangar lift; the second damaged arrestor gear and four Corsairs. Three men were killed and 19 were wounded, four seriously. A Kamikase pulled out from the carrier to attack *Howe* but was destroyed by the ship’s gunfire. The carrier’s capacity to fly off sorties was severely restricted as a consequence.<sup>31</sup> Morten’s flight from *Formidable* was up at 05:45 for an uneventful patrol in solid cloud cover from 8,000 to 2,500 feet. The punishing flying routine continued and that afternoon at 15:45, Glading and Hartshorn’s flight climbed to 10,000 feet to join Hellcats and Seafires. They had seen little of the Japanese during the Avengers’ strikes and 1842 Squadron’s strafing, but at ‘... around 16:15 the storm was let loose’. As photo reconnaissance aircraft were being ranged, a fourth Kamikase struck and

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 5 May 1945, p.31.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 8 May 1945, p.32.

<sup>31</sup> London Gazette, pp.3307-3308.

the ‘... Big Red Flag [was] displayed from the bridge ... [meaning] Everyone on the Flight Deck Take Cover! ....’<sup>32</sup>

Everyone did! The guns opened up on enemy a/c ... closing very rapidly; at one time ... three being engaged. The action commander ... stated that our guns had shot down one (would-be) suicide, and that another had crashed into *Indomitable*. Quite suddenly – with no more than an ‘Oh My God!’ from the commentator and a long silence, came our turn .... it was a Betty which came in low from the stern and struck the Flight Deck at a ... shallow angle, in the centre of the deck, in front of the first Corsair on State 11 (by this time negat [minus] Pilot!).<sup>33</sup>

Fire parties went to work on burning Corsairs, six of which went over the side and the deck was cleared to land on eight more. ‘Little was found of the Betty’ as it had been repeatedly hit, and although it may not have been carrying bombs, ‘a few bits of Jap’ were discovered. One person was killed and four injured on *Formidable*’s deck in the attack.<sup>34</sup>

Thursday 10 May marked ‘VE’ Day and after 1841 Squadron pilots completed swapping ‘flyable duds’ for fresh Corsairs from *Speaker*, the Fleet order went out at 18:00 to ‘splice the main brace’ and there were many ‘... neaters ... and rum quite sufficient to start the ball rolling’, in the Fleet’s wardrooms and mess decks to mark the occasion.<sup>35</sup> On Saturday 12 May the Fleet moved to a position 120 miles south-east of the Sakishima where *Formidable*’s deck was once again patched. There had been little ‘action’ for the pilots of 1841: ‘So far most of the thrills have been on the deck!’ Patrols were up at 05:35, 09:10 and at 11:05 Morten’s flight escorted 18 Avengers against Hirara airfield on

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<sup>32</sup> 1841 Diary, 9 May 1945, p.33.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. The aircraft claimed to have been hit by *Formidable*’s guns, in fact struck *Victorious* but causing a minor fire.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 10 May 1945, p.34.

Miyako Island strafing the ground, after photographing bomb damage.<sup>36</sup> The Fleet moved north on Sunday to a position 120 miles east-south-east of Miyako to avoid any Japanese submarines reported to be in the area.



Clearing the deck on *Formidable* (NAUK)

Not all of the hazards that aircrew were exposed to were flight-related as the events of 14 May demonstrate. *Formidable* joined the Fleet Train and transferred about 100 500lb bombs to *Indefatigable*. At 10:00 ‘eight fighter boys and two Avenger Pilots’, including Morten and Stirling, were transferred by ‘skeleton chair’ to the destroyer *Quality*, to be taken to *Striker* to collect eight

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 12 May 1945, p.35.

Corsairs and two Avengers. *Striker* used a four man ‘canvas bucket’ and when its lashings tore away, four pilots in flying gear and Mae Wests, Morten included, ended up in the sea. In due course the destroyer stopped and lowered its boat and the ‘soggy’ aircrew was dragged back on board *Striker*. By 17:30, though, *Formidable*’s flight deck was cleared once again for landing on replacement aircraft.<sup>37</sup> Operations from the carrier resumed on Thursday 17 May with two Avenger strikes and again 1841 Squadron flew combat patrols. That afternoon Glading and Hartshorn, part of a five Corsair flight over Ishigaki and Irimote, ‘... found two heavily camouflaged barges/small ships [and] ... Strafed to their heart’s content – five runs in all!’ After four bombing runs the Fleet withdrew and Morten’s flight at 10:00 was the last of *Formidable*’s patrols for the day.<sup>38</sup>

The carrier took further critical damage on 18 May; this time it was self-inflicted. The events of that day, referred to as ‘Black Friday’, were described in disheartened detail by the squadron diarist:

It is ironic that after being hit by two Japanese suicide bombers, and getting away with it quite well, that far greater damage should be done to the ship on a non-operational day, and moreover by the direct action of one of our own armourers ... the starboard guns of Corsair 121 fired directly into the petrol tank of an Avenger in B Hangar, only sixty feet away. Fire broke out immediately.... A Hangar contained about 26 500lb bombs, while unfused still presented a considerable danger. It took a long time to put out the fire.<sup>39</sup>

Of 18 Corsairs, only six were left undamaged while 1842 Squadron’s remaining six, on deck, were unscathed; 848 Squadron had only two serviceable

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 14 May 1945, pp.36-37.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 17 May 1945, p.38.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 18 May 1945, p.39. London Gazette, 1948, records that the accidental discharge exploded ordnance on another parked Avenger.

Avengers remaining. The damage to stores, including parachutes, was extensive and it became obvious that *Formidable* would take no further part in 'Iceberg II'. Both Corsair squadrons pooled aircraft and spares and provided CAPs for the next few days. Aircraft capacity was reduced further on Sunday 20 May, when Hartshorn went 'over the side': his aircraft engine 'cut badly when airborne' after flying off, due probably to water from fire hoses in the fuel tank. Quick wittedly, he 'pulled up his legs' before ditching and was '... over the side before the aircraft sank .... As the ship passed he was obviously ok and gave a friendly wave! ....' Hartshorn was picked up shortly after by the shepherding destroyer *Quality*, '... no doubt none the worse for his experience' and returned to *Formidable* the next day.<sup>40</sup> *Victorious*, also, had taken serious damage to its arrestor cables and barriers the day before when a Corsair crash landed, killing five and as a result *Formidable* allowed several of its displaced aircraft to land on.<sup>41</sup> The flight capacity of these two carriers, representing half of the Carrier Group was significantly reduced and, to make matters worse, *Indomitable* was damaged by a collision with the destroyer, *Quilliam*, in dense fog on 20 May.<sup>42</sup>

On Monday 21, May Ruck Keene confirmed that the carrier could take no further part in the Sakishima operations. Patrols were ranged in passage to Manus but due to the intense tropical heat pilots were allowed out of cockpits for a flight deck 'stroll'. A severely battered *Formidable* arrived at Sydney on 30 May 1945. The Squadron Diary noted: 'The New Zealanders Morten, Glading, Bastien and others from 1842 spent a day or two in Sydney waiting ... to go home [and] off they went to God's own country .... Around 21<sup>st</sup> they came back by ship in company with Dutch nurses ....' On 29 June, 1841 Squadron having replenished, re-equipped and retrained at Nowra, rejoined the refitted and repaired *Formidable* at sea, bound for Manus and the Japanese Home Islands.<sup>43</sup>

The main Carrier Group continued with 'Iceberg' operations until 25 May, with the final strikes launched on Miyako and Ishikaki that day. A thoroughly

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<sup>40</sup> 1841 Diary, 20 May 1945, pp.40-41.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 17 May 1945, p.38.

<sup>42</sup> *London Gazette*, pp.3311- 3312. Morison, p.226.

<sup>43</sup> 1841 Diary, 19 May to 29 June 1945, pp.40-49.

battered, but proven, Task Force 57 returned to Manus and then 'home' to Sydney for urgently required major repairs and replenishment. The 'balance sheet' for 'Iceberg' read: 62 days at sea during which time five fleet carriers were in action; 5335 sorties were flown, 2073 of which were offensive but, tellingly, 3262 defensive; 958 tons of bombs had been dropped, 500,000 rounds of aircraft ammunition expended and 950 rockets discharged. In terms of preventing the staging of Japanese aircraft through the Sakishima Gunto, 42 Japanese aircraft were destroyed in air combat and 100 on the ground. In addition 30,000 tons of enemy shipping was estimated to have been sunk. These successes were achieved at a cost of 160 naval aircraft destroyed in the air, by accident or by Kamikase. The cost in lives was 44 men killed aboard ship and 41 aircrew lost.<sup>44</sup> This 'account' is clear evidence of the attrition of the fighting and Spruance expressed the US Navy's gratitude directly to Rawlings, for the work of the BPF.<sup>45</sup> Task Force 57 had so effectively maintained '... the southern shield against air attacks from the Sakishima Gunto', he said, that by 25 May, so few Japanese aircraft were operating out of the cratered airfields of the Ryukyus that no further bombing was required.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Hobbs, (1995), p.73.

<sup>45</sup> Smith, p. 142. By way of comparison, and to gain some idea of the scale of Pacific operations, US Navy Task Force 58 directly assaulting Okinawa took on, at sea, some 19,297 500lb General Purpose aircraft bombs. Morison, pp.166-167.

<sup>46</sup> Morison, p.266.



An Avenger of 857 Squadron returns from the Sakishimas lands, with one wheel down to make an almost perfect landing on *Indomitable*. (Evening Post, Volume CXL, Issue 56, 4 September 1945, p.6. IWM A29172)

## **Section II: *Over the Japanese Home Islands***

1771 Firefly Squadron re-embarked in *Implacable* at Scapa Flow on 5 December 1944. Two New Zealand airmen served in the squadron during the BPF operations: observer Richard Greenway and pilot Alan Waddell. *Implacable* arrived at Colombo on 6 April 1945 and from 8 May, the Squadron trained ashore at Jervis Bay, New South Wales. It landed on the carrier later and *Implacable* arrived at Manus on 25 May. The carrier, as a late arrival to the Pacific, needed combat experience urgently to hone operational tactics: a sideshow attack, on the Japanese-held island of Truk, was chosen for this purpose.<sup>47</sup> *Implacable*, the sixth of the BPF fleet carriers, supported by the escort carrier *Ruler*, took part in operation 'Inmate' in the Western Carolines, before it joined the Fleet. Although long since isolated and by-passed by the Pacific war, Japanese forces congregated in the lagoon at Truk presented a sizable threat.

'Inmate's' objective was the elimination of enemy aircraft, aerodromes, radar installations and any shipping left intact after months of bombing by US Liberators and Thunderbolts. Resistance was forecast to be light and recent raiders had seen only one Zeke and one 'possible' Dinah. Flak was predicted to be moderate, but accurate, over the main target Dublon, the facility for a '... once formidable Japanese fleet'. Six strikes were planned from *Implacable* for Thursday 14 June. Greenway was observer for the squadron's Commanding Officer, Lt. Commander W.J.R. MacWhirter, and their Firefly led 'Strike Able' Ramrod. Throughout 1771 Squadron's BPF operations – where MacWhirter went, so went Greenway. The first flights were ranged forward and as the Fireflies carried eight 60lb rockets each aircraft required the 'accelerator' to assist flying off. The accelerator's trolley malfunctioned and hit a propeller, a piece of which severed the leg of a deck officer. As a result two Fireflies were 'struck down', an Avenger put over the side and Waddell, delayed, flew off with 'Strike Charlie' at 12:15.<sup>48</sup> At 07:45 MacWhirter escorted two Avengers to the barrier reef, then broke away to attack a radio station on the eastern tip of Moen Island. His cannon

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<sup>47</sup> 1771 Squadron (Firefly) Operational Log, NAUK ADM 207.44.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 June 1945.

failed to operate, although a Firefly close by scored a ‘near miss’ on a Nick, with its rockets. MacWhirter’s cannon failed once again on a second pass and the aircraft took 20mm flak damage to the port wing’s leading edge, before the aircraft returned safely. Waddell’s four-Firefly ‘Strike Charlie’ attacked Moen II, a well camouflaged airfield and, as targets were difficult to identify, ammunition was expended on coastal batteries on the way ‘home’.<sup>49</sup>

The following day ‘Strike Able’ took a ‘watching brief’ on coastal defence guns that threatened the cruisers *Achilles*, *Newfoundland*, *Swiftsure* and *Uganda*. In the event, the warships bombarded the shore guns before turning away, leaving the Fireflies to find their own targets. No coastal shipping presented so the strike rendezvoused, attacked the radio station and returned to the carrier after making ‘... plenty of strikes with 20mm and good hits with RP.’ ‘Strike Baker’ attacked the ‘last remaining serviceable oil tank in Dublon’, the Squadron’s last action of ‘Inmate’. Although the tank was hit, aircrews were disappointed that a dramatic fire had not erupted, but nevertheless they were relieved that the flak had been light. During the short ‘Inmate’ operation, the squadron ‘expended 9,000 rounds of 20mm’ and logged ‘68 [hours], of which 41.30 were “straffing etc”, 22 “escort” and 4.30 “air combat”’. Even so, all aircrew were ‘... feeling rather depressed at the lack of targets’.<sup>50</sup>

Overall, from 14 to 15 June, Avengers, Fireflies and Seafires flew 216 sorties during ‘Inmate’, with the loss of only one aircraft. Opposition was light enabling some Avenger night flights and, unusually, Seafires were employed in an improvised dive bombing role. *Implacable* withdrew to Manus on 17 June to join Task Force 37, as the Carrier Group formed around the flagship *Formidable* with *Victorious* and *Indefatigable*. *Indomitable* remained in Sydney for a refit, intended to lead an 11<sup>th</sup> Aircraft Carrier Squadron with the four recently arrived light fleet carriers, *Colossus*, *Venerable*, *Vengeance* and *Glory*.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 15 June 1945.

<sup>51</sup> Captain P.M.C. Vincent CBE RN, ‘“Inmate” – For Want of a Split Pin ...’, *The British Pacific and East Indies Fleets*. *The Forgotten Fleets’ 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*, David Brown (Ed.), Brodie Publishing Ltd: Liverpool, 1995, pp.78-79.

Sydney provided replenishment for carriers and ships as well as recreation and training for airmen and sailors. While carriers were repaired and refitted, squadrons flew off to the Australian Monabs to debrief, to integrate and work-up replacement aircrew, and to socialise 'ashore'. By 21 June enemy resistance on Okinawa had ceased and a hard and bloody invasion of the Home Islands was expected, in order to secure an unconditional Japanese surrender. The airmen and sailors of the BPF leaving Sydney on 23 June 1945, to join the US Third Fleet off Honshu, made assumptions, some born of experience, some fed by rumours and others by fact, regarding their impending engagement with the Japanese. Intelligence reports suggested that Japan had withheld some 7,000 Kamikase aircraft for the defence of the homeland and that US medical services had made plans for Allied casualties in excess of one million.<sup>52</sup> Certainly there was genuine anxiety over the fate of captured Allied aircrew and their probable mistreatment by an increasingly desperate enemy. The final operations were not code-named and the Fleet Air Arm flew off the first direct strikes against Japan on 17 July, closely integrated with a concentration of ships and aircraft of four other US Navy task forces.

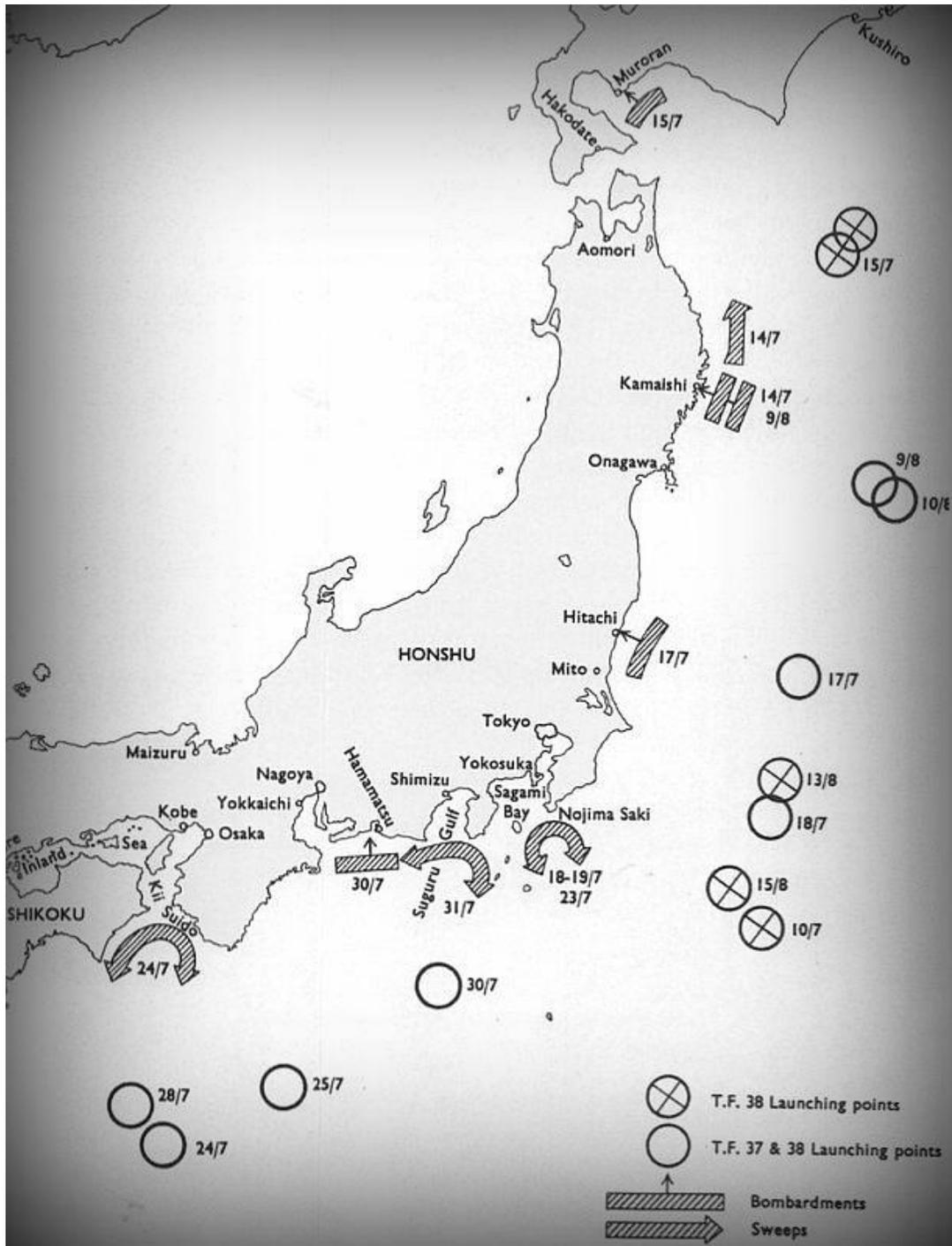
*Implacable* joined the Carrier Group on Saturday 30 June for operations over the Sendai area of Honshu, Japan. 1771 Squadron's principal targets were airfields at Masuda, Sendai and Matsushima. On Tuesday 17 July, MacWhirter and Greenway flew off at 03:50 with six Fireflies and were, by 04:50, over the Japanese coast - the first British aircraft, and New Zealander, to fly over Japan in World War II.<sup>53</sup> No Japanese aircraft were found at Masuda so buildings, coastal shipping, hangars and railway lines were strafed. Other strikes went north to Sendai where three Sallys were attacked and sent 'up in flames nicely'. Low enemy flak at Matsushima was ineffective and Firefly strafing with 20mm cannon and rockets on the radar station at Kinkasan and at Ohara 'hit fair and square.' The flight, guided by the 'Tomcat' navigation beacon, returned to *Implacable* safely, the '... whole party considered [to be] good fun' despite flying debris, and

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<sup>52</sup> Roberts, p.10.

<sup>53</sup> 801 Squadron (Seafire) Line Book, 1945 Vol.II FAAM. 801 Seafire Squadron also claims this distinction in its Line Book. Unfortunately no flying off time is given.

mud from low level attacks, that damaged nearly every aircraft. MacWhirter's Firefly had been hit by a .303" calibre bullet that came to rest in his Mae West.<sup>54</sup>



Final Operations against Japan in July and August 1945 (Hobbs, 2011)

<sup>54</sup> 1771 Operational Log, 17 July 1945.

Relentless bombing pressure was applied to the Japanese airfields. At 11:40 on Wednesday 18 July, eight Fireflies led by MacWhirter and Waddell, were vectored to airfields at Konoike 12 miles north of Choshi and 40 miles north-east of Tokyo. After 40 miles of low flight, the cloud cover down to 300 feet cleared and Choshi appeared in blue skies ahead. The aircraft climbed to 7,000 feet but a circuit revealed only dummy aircraft and wrecks below; Japanese expertise in camouflage and the ‘dispersal game, was effective. Heavy flak was encountered and, as well, Waddell’s plane took damage to the aileron and radiator from a small bullet.<sup>55</sup>

*Implacable* withdrew next day to refuel and returned on Tuesday 24 July to strike air installations at Kobe, Kure and Nagoya in Shikoku. MacWhirter and Waddell’s flight was sent that afternoon to locate shipping in the Bay of Uno, south of Okayama in Southern Honshu. A Japanese escort carrier had been seen earlier that morning but, after arriving at Uno, the only obvious target was an 8,000 ton merchant ship that was blasted with ‘only’ 20mm cannon. Due to the long range of these missions, 1771 Squadron’s Fireflies had to forsake rockets for drop fuel tanks. Later, the Squadron Log noted criticism of the Avengers’ bombing accuracy and rated the strike ‘tactically poor’; in its defence, the Avenger was never designed as a dive bomber.<sup>56</sup> In the wider campaign that week, six Avengers, two Corsairs and two Fireflies achieved a Fleet Air Arm ‘first’, on 24 July, when attacking and crippling a Japanese carrier, the *Shimane Maru*. Elsewhere, squadrons bombed enemy shipping, airfields and railway facilities in the Tokyo Plain area, flying a total of 416 offensive and defensive sorties.<sup>57</sup>

1771 Squadron escorted Avengers the next day and at 08:45 MacWhirter’s Firefly and seven others flew off with visibility down to 500 feet and so climbed to 2,500 above Honshu (Waddell did not fly that day). The Fireflies lost contact briefly with the escorting Seafires but regrouped for the intended attack on shipping in the Seto Inland Sea. The Above Ground Level controller warned them

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 18 July 1945.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 24 July 1945.

<sup>57</sup> Hobbs, (1995), p.74.

to clear heavy flak over Osaka and Kobe. Turning south, MacWhirter and Greenway set a small coaster on fire with 20mm cannon while one other Firefly 'beat up a lighthouse'. The Squadron Log again noted the Avengers' 'abortive bombing' and 'disorganisation' and a hint of frustration marked the day's entry: '... once again no R.P. carried – fuel consumption too high for slow escort work. A Great pity as we could have achieved so much more with them'. The next two days were lost to oiling, further adding to the Firefly aircrews' frustrations.<sup>58</sup>

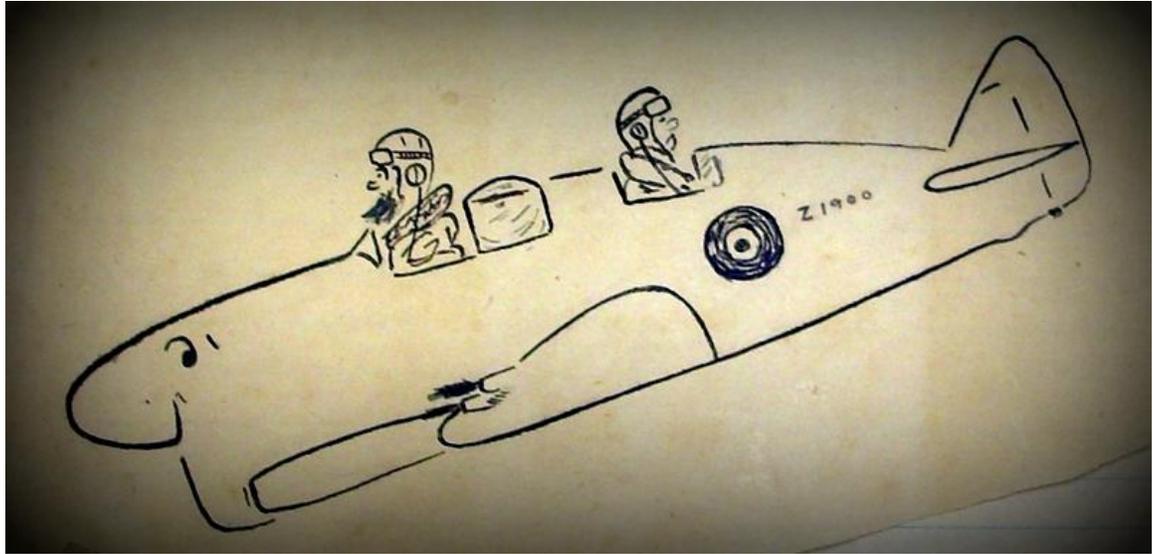
On Saturday 28 July, an intended strike on Habu, a port on Innoshima Island 30 miles east of Kure, flew off at 08:45: MacWhirter and Greenway led eight Fireflies, 18 Avengers, 12 Seafires and four Corsairs to a point south of Shikoku. Their aircraft dived from 10,000 feet with the Avengers, while the other Fireflies kept top cover. Many large merchant ships in the harbour were bombed and a 'sugar dog' coaster was strafed with 'flaming success'.<sup>59</sup> A Japanese submarine surfaced but by then the Fireflies had expended their 20mm ammunition and were unable to attack it. The Squadron picked up the main returning strike force 40 miles south, down the Shikoku coast and latched onto the 'Tomcat' beacon for direction home. Code letters sent to aircraft from the 'base' beacon read incorrectly in cockpits and *Implacable* was found only by 'encountering' the US Fleet and a swarm of its Hellcats. The flight landed on at noon, after completing a 'Good morning's damage'. Waddell went up at 14:30 on escort and strikes against shipping in Sato, on the South-West Coast of Honshu but visibility was reduced to half a mile and the flight's rendezvous was poorly executed. Other than shooting up a few junks, the strike was unsatisfactory, especially as two aircrew ditched, although both were safely recovered. The day ended with renewed 1771 Squadron gripes, directed at alleged ill-disciplined Avenger 'R/T [radio] noise'.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> 1771 Operational Log, 25 July 1945.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 July 1945.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*



'Nightmare for Japan': Illustration 1770 Squadron (Firefly) 'Official Diary'. (NAUK)

The Squadron's gruelling schedule was exemplified by flying operations completed on Monday 30 July 1945. Poor weather portended the tropical typhoon that was shortly to hammer the Fleet over the following days. MacWhirter led eight Fireflies off at 08:30 to Maizuru, on the North Coast of Honshu, assigned an escort and Ramrod round trip of 400 miles; 45 gallons extra fuel was required, not rockets. North of Osaka, low cloud disappeared, and despite some flak separating the Avengers at Miyazu Wan, MacWhirter's flight strafed destroyers and a 'sugar dog' at the target. Heavy flak was encountered over the industrial area south of Kyoto but all aircraft returned safely to *Implacable*. A second strike at 14:00, reduced to five Fireflies by deck accidents, was led by MacWhirter and Greenway, and included Waddell. The flight was vectored to Maizuru through 'flak alley' south of Kyoto, to attack shipping. Criticism of other squadrons' efforts was again vented in the day's log entry: The Corsairs' bombing had been poor and the returning Avengers, apparently weighed by 'unreleased bombs', had been slow to catch up. Nevertheless, this had been the longest mission yet undertaken over Japan and 1771 Squadron aircrew '... found it ... incredible ... that the enemy should allow us to fly over his country at will to bomb and strafe his war potential'.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 30 July 1945.

Task Force 37 withdrew from the operational area on 30 July when sorties were, again, disrupted by a violent typhoon.<sup>62</sup> Although back on station by 3 August, Halsey ordered the Fleet, ‘... to withdraw 100 miles to the south, because of an imminent special operation’. Flying did resume on 8 August and strikes against shipping in the harbours of northern Honshu were pressed home. August 9 was the most intensive single day of air activity and also the most expensive in lost aircrew, in the short operational life of the BPF: 14 separate strikes and 407 sorties were flown. Five enemy destroyers and a number of smaller craft were sunk or disabled and 64 Japanese aircraft were destroyed.<sup>63</sup>

1771 Squadron flew on Thursday 9 August, after the typhoon, with the Fleet located 150 to 180 miles off Japan. The Squadron Log noted: ‘... the Yanks [had] dropped the first of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and the political aspect was receiving attention’. However, the punishing flying schedule resumed and MacWhirter and Greenway’s flight left at 08:10 for a Ramrod sortie. Eight Fireflies made landfall at Masuda, attacked previously on 17 July, then turned north for Matsushima airfield. By this time the aircrew were well aware of Japanese tactics and a US intelligence ‘flash’ warned of enemy aircraft dispersed five miles to the north. A number of Sallys and several other aircraft types concealed in ‘revetments’ were thoroughly strafed and all Firefly 20mm ammunition was expended in the process. The build-up of Allied aircraft had become conspicuous and aircrew observed that morning, ‘... Yank strikes of up to 70 planes’.<sup>64</sup>

At 14:10 seven Fireflies left to catch-up and escort Avengers to Yamada in northern Honshu but the formation broke up amid the ‘... hundreds of other airborne a/c in the traffic patterns’. Landfall was made south of the target, where small lagoons spread along the coast below and, twenty miles out to sea, ‘... an enormous fleet was intercepted – Yank [with the] odd British ship ... a bombardment fleet.’ Flying over Kamaishi, the Fireflies turned north, ‘... the town burning well from naval bombardment [and] the smoke, which rose to 6,000

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<sup>62</sup> Hobbs, (1995), p.74.

<sup>63</sup> Roberts, p.11.

<sup>64</sup> 1771 Operational Log, 9 August 1945.

ft. smelled very pleasantly of burning wood'. Yamada was sighted and MacWhirter's 'explosive' attack on a destroyer was filmed by Mr. Prentiss, a cameraman of Gaumont British from another Firefly.<sup>65</sup>

On Friday 10 August strikes and escorts, including eight 1771 Squadron Fireflies, flew to Koriyama and Yamachi airfields north of Tokyo; MacWhirter's plane acted as the Above Ground Level control that morning. His Firefly, and one other, missed radio redirection to bye-pass Yamachi and so strafed railway buildings, lines and trains there. Later they damaged '... a considerable number of bi-planes' at the undefended Koriyama aerodrome, where two Fireflies from 1772 Squadron were later shot down. MacWhirter and Greenway were 'home' by 12:00 and off at 14:15 again for shipping sweeps and strikes, eastward to Yamada. Making landfall at Kinkasan, the Corsairs, Fireflies and Seafires left the Avengers and 'examined' every harbour up the coast, only to find smoking evidence of previous attacks. Four Fireflies, after attacking a 'sugar dog' located north of Kamaishi, and one at Toni Wan, returned independently and were '... intercepted as bogeys ... by four Hellcats of the USMC which caused some concern'.<sup>66</sup>

1771 Squadron's Log entry accurately recorded that hostilities were ending: 'At this time the armistice with the Japs. is imminent – the atomic bomb on Hiroshima – no wonder we were warned in briefing to keep clear of this town – and the entry of Russia into the war seems to have impressed them and it appears that we stop fighting. Anyway the typhoon is again menacing and it is reason enough to lay off'. An atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki on 9 August and the following day all Allied aircraft were able to roam the skies of northern Honshu at will. Halsey kept the US Third Fleet on station to pin down any Japanese air elements still intact. Exhaustion had now set in for the BPF and the Fleet Train, completely over-extended, could no longer fuel and victual all four carriers on station. On Sunday 12 August, *Implacable* with *Formidable* and

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 10 August 1945.

*Victorious* turned south for Manus and on Friday 24 August, the carrier entered Sydney Harbour, 'midst roars of applause'.<sup>67</sup>

*Indefatigable* was left behind in the much reduced Task Force 38.5 to bear witness to the death throes and surrender of the imperial Japanese forces. The US Navy fuelled this reduced task force and on 15 August *Indefatigable* flew off what would be the final dawn strikes. A dogfight ensued when Avengers were intercepted by ten Zeros, eight of which were shot down by Searfires flying a patrol. At 07:00 a ceasefire was ordered and all Fleet Air Arm aircraft were recalled, ending all combat operations of the BPF in World War II.<sup>68</sup> In September 1771 Firefly Squadron was disbanded after scarcely 20 months service.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> 1771 Operational Log, 12 to 24 August 1945.

<sup>68</sup> Roberts, p.11. Hobbs, (1995), p.74.

<sup>69</sup> 1771 Operational Log, 14 September 1945.

### **Section III: *Courage, Daredevils and POWs***

In this maritime war of attrition, Fleet Air Arm aircrew flew punishing daily flight schedules; squadron fair flying logs gave precise detail of pilots' and observers' hours, aircraft identification numbers and flight activities. New Zealand observer Lew Martin's 828 Avenger Squadron served in *Implacable*, at the same time as the Fireflies of 1771. During the period 18 March to 14 June 1945, including operations for 'Inmate', Martin flew off and landed on 15 times, six occasions for bombing strikes and, in total, 25 hours flying time. 828 Squadron rotated its aircraft and it was unusual for aircrew to fly the same Avenger consecutively, although Martin was fortunate to fly with the same pilot over this period.<sup>70</sup>

Fair flying logs can also reveal, amid the dryly detailed comings and goings of aircraft, clues to particularly tragic individual events. New Zealand observer John Webb, of 1770 Firefly Squadron in *Indefatigable*, flew in both operations' 'Lentil' and 'Meridian'. 1770 Squadron's fair flying log is a record of Webb's last flight on 29 January 1945 and written in the column headed 'NATURE OF FLIGHT', is 'Meridian II'. At 07:30 Webb and his pilot, Lieutenant Levitt, flew off aircraft 'M', part of a six Firefly flight. Handwritten in the log, in stark red, inky letters alongside their aircraft, and under 'TIME ...IN AIR', is the word 'MISSING'.<sup>71</sup> Firefly 'M' went down that day in an attack on the 40 Japanese defensive barrage balloons released high above the refineries at Palembang.<sup>72</sup>

Avenger observer Daniel McAleese, an Irish born New Zealand airman, was killed during 'Iceberg I' operations. 849 Squadron, in *Victorious*, had been bombing airfields and towns on the Sakishima Gunto and on 12 April, their strikes were redirected to Formosa. Bad weather and dense cloud cover made this difficult operation even more dangerous. The targets were, in order, Matsuyama, Schinchiku and, as a back up, Kiirun Harbour. This was a daunting mission with a flight of 200 miles over land bristling with heavy and accurate flak. The Avengers flew round the northern tip of Formosa and, because cloud prevented

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<sup>70</sup> 828 Squadron (Avenger), Fair Flying Log, commenced 9/3/44. FAAM 1995/231/0001.

<sup>71</sup> 1770 Squadron (Firefly), Fair Flying Log, commenced 4/5/44. FAAM B0 007E.

<sup>72</sup> 1770 Squadron (Firefly) Official Diary. NAUK ADM 207.42.

identification of the primary targets, the Avengers turned early for home. Kiirun Harbour was attacked, and a chemical factory and new dry dock close by were seriously damaged. The Squadron Operations' Book recorded that day: 'It is regretted the following casualties were suffered:- Sub Lieutenant (A) D. McLaughlan D.S.C., RNVR; Sub Lieutenant (A) D. McAleese RNZNVR and Leading Airman G. P. Claughan.' McAleese was recovered from the Avenger and admitted to Keeling Military Hospital on 12 April. He had severe injuries to his arms and legs and despite two blood transfusions, died at 07:30 on 13 April 1945. The other men were still in the Avenger when its ordnance exploded.

Daniel McAleese was a devout Catholic and in an earlier letter to his sister from *Victorious* of 31 January, he wrote that it was 'quite a rarity' to find a Roman Catholic priest aboard ship. Censorship prevented any disclosure of military detail or his location but the letter remains a moving testament to the fears held by young naval airmen:

... [my faith] was quite a consolation to me about nine o'clock yesterday morning when I found myself going through Japanese anti-aircraft fire and balloon barrage and at the same time being hunted by their fighters. I said an Act of Contrition over that place [Palembang] ... the best I have ever made. Several of my friends did not come back and a good few others had holes in their aeroplanes .... The priest and I have become very good friends ... and have a yarn or argument ... three or four evenings a week ....<sup>73</sup>

Significantly, the last New Zealand serviceman killed in combat during World War II was observer Glen McBride, shot down over Japan on 10 August 1945.<sup>74</sup> McBride's situation was illustrative of tensions within the relationships of

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<sup>73</sup> 'Sub-Lieutenant (A) Daniel McAleese RNZNVR', unpublished memorial booklet, 1996. New Zealand Fleet Air Arm Museum Reference Library, Remuera, Auckland.

<sup>74</sup> Dominion, 10 August 1995, p.7. Sub. Lt. (A) Thomas Chalmers Glen McBride RNZNVR was shot down during a strike on Koriyama airfield, 100 miles north of Tokyo. Two FAA pilots were

aircrew during combat operations. A pairing of incompatible personality types could be problematic in multi-crew aircraft. According to 1772 Squadron records, McBride and his English pilot Glyn Roberts were ‘...killed on [10 August 1945] when their Firefly was lost while attacking Koriyama airfield ... no one saw them go down, no one knows what really happened. Their bodies were never recovered’.<sup>75</sup> It was claimed later by Roberts’ nephew, that a Major E. H. Powell, of a US Army War Crimes’ Investigation team in Japan, found evidence in the locality of the crashed Firefly: rumours of an execution, two shallow graves, the burnt out aircraft and the sale of a Rolls Royce aero engine to a local fishing company. However, Powell died in the 1960s and no war crimes were ever substantiated, in part because of official Japanese obfuscation.<sup>76</sup>

Fellow Kiwi observer Ian Darby was a close friend of McBride in 1772 Squadron and he spoke later of his old friend and critically of his pilot, Roberts: ‘Glen was scared out of his mind and his pilot didn’t help at all. I admire Glen’s courage; he could have asked for a transfer I suppose or seen the CO and sorted something out’. A 1772 Squadron history noted that McBride ‘... found Glyn’s fearlessness difficult to fly with’. Also, with regard to McBride’s friendship with Darby: ‘Ian and Glen found such a strong bond between them and he felt extremely deeply about Glen’s death. His feeling about Glen’s pilot, Glyn, is maybe still strong in him .... Glen was the stuff of easy-going charm and Glyn, the stuff of carefree dare devils ... he was not the type of pilot for Glen’.<sup>77</sup>

The reckless pilot, though, had far greater freedom to operate in single seat fighters. New Zealander Adrian Churchill was senior pilot of 1833 Corsair Squadron, in *Illustrious*. On 7 April, during ‘Iceberg I’, he led a single strike against Ishigaki airfield in Formosa and after two strafing runs his aircraft was hit

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killed in August 1945 during training in the UK prior to the official Japanese surrender of 2 September 1945. Sub Lt. (A) Clutha Campbell Libeau RNZNVR (d. 21 August 1945) and Lt. (A) Matthew Cameron Farrer DSC RNZNVR (d. 27 August 1945). Allison, pp.278-283.

<sup>75</sup> The Friendly Squadron. 1772 Naval Air Squadron 1944-1945. A story told by members of a naval air squadron & members of the families of those who have died, Teddy Key (Ed.), Square One Publications: Upton on Severn, 1997, pp.244-245.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p.267.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.222-224.

by flak and crashed into the sea.<sup>78</sup> Churchill had a reputation as a ‘... daredevil – a potential Victoria Cross if ever there was one’. Moreover, his commanding officer in *Illustrious* had cautioned him prior to the strike: he knew of his ‘... foolhardy exploits and warned him before take off not to take more than one strafing run over the airfield’. Churchill spurned the advice and returned ‘... like a bat out of hell for a third pass ...’ and as a consequence received a second Mention in Dispatches, posthumously.<sup>79</sup>

Close to Japan, airmen became acutely aware of the likely hazards awaiting them if shot down and captured. Ditching and parachuting were survival techniques prepared and trained for. However, a fate dreaded most was to be captured by a desperate enemy and imprisoned as a POW in a nation under attack; Japan was not a signatory to the 1929 Geneva Convention. On 10 August 1945, Morten of 1841 Squadron led a flight of 12 Corsairs inland from Sendai, Japan. His aircraft was hit at 12,000 feet by one flak shell: ‘I got it, it exploded underneath me and damaged the petrol system ... I had petrol flowing in the cockpit’. Morten had enough fuel to maintain flight height and engine power for another three or four miles, off the Japanese coast. He made a belly landing with wheels up, as ‘... there was no way I was going to jump out in a parachute’. The Corsair floated for one or two minutes and this enabled Morten to inflate his dingy. After floating for several hours the rescue submarine USS *Peto* surfaced 50 ‘yards’ away. The Fleet sent an amphibious aircraft but as ‘...the Americans had never seen anything like a Walrus [the *Peto*] crashed dived’ on its approach. Morten remained in the submarine for a fortnight where they lived ‘... far better than we did on the carrier’ and was taken to Guam and in due course returned to the Royal Navy.<sup>80</sup>

Don Cameron, a New Zealand Corsair pilot of 1834 Squadron, was returning to *Victorious* after a second run on an airfield on Ishigaki Island, close to Okinawa, on 10 May 1945. After a ‘... terrible bang the aircraft seemed to

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<sup>78</sup> 1833 (Corsair), Squadron Record of Events, 15/7/43 to 26/6/45 & 15/8/47 to 31/10/52. FAAM 1994/155/002. Allison, p.263.

<sup>79</sup> Masters, p.202.

<sup>80</sup> Morten, pp.40-42.

jump sideways', dropped to 2,500 and ditched violently in the offshore swell.<sup>81</sup> Cameron struggled to inflate his dingy, was washed ashore and out again, where he was pulled into a Japanese boat, with blows to the head and eye. He was handcuffed, blindfolded and thrown onto the 'unyielding tray' of a truck. Following a 'meal' of hot radish flavoured water and rice, questioning by his captors commenced. The interrogating officer used handcuffs to bash the unblindfolded Cameron, so violently that the socket bone above the eye was fractured. Days passed as he heard his Fleet Air Arm comrades high above, bombing and strafing. A thwarted escape with an American prisoner resulted in relocation to an island for Kamikase pilots and there he was forced to gesticulate flying techniques to the trainees and was beaten for his efforts.

Cameron was taken next to Taipei and he recalled events triggered by an air raid siren: 'We were placed in a hole in the floor and left to ourselves. If you have ever been on the receiving end of a bombing attack, let me assure you, that it is only the bombs that don't hit you that whistle' After the raid '... a crowd formed around us and were waving in a threatening manner ... a path was cleared ... not wide enough for us to escape numerous blows to the head and back'.<sup>82</sup> The same day he was taken to a public place and pushed into a bamboo crayfish cage and jabbed in the body, face and rectum by giggling school children. Cameron's only source of water came from rainfall and '... for the first but not the last time, [I] blubbered like a big kid'. Afterwards, he was moved to a four storey prison and during a US Liberator raid made his escape through a hole in the damaged roof. Dropping 'parachute style' to the deserted streets, he spent a cold night among the cabbages in a field nearby. Uncovered the next morning by soldiers from an adjacent camp, he was taken for interrogation once more: '... silent tears ran down my cheeks. I thought this is the end now ... they won't forgive me my escaping ....'<sup>83</sup>

Cameron was passed into the custody of the Japanese Navy. The value of briefing airmen on a daily basis was borne out as he was able only to tell literally

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<sup>81</sup> 'Lieutenant (A) Donald Camreon MiD', in Masters (ed.), p.259.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p.266.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p.270.

all he knew; questions answered were rewarded with a 'tiny biscuit'. When later he asked why he had been slapped across the face, he was told: '... you very bad mannered, sit in front of captain and cross your legs'.<sup>84</sup> Blindfolded and handcuffed again, Cameron was told he was to be taken to Ofuna, the Japanese Navy's interrogation camp. The flight to Japan, along the Chinese coast, was necessarily indirect with many stops; at one, a civilian approached and assaulted the enemy prisoner. Arriving at Yokusa Naval Air Station he was thrown onto the tray of a truck and once more 'bounced' to further interrogation. Cameron remained in solitary confinement there, with a 'meal' of a bowl of rice and boiling water, three times daily; prisoners would be assaulted every time a new guard entered a cell. By then he had little grasp of the passage of time but in August,

... the camp commandant congratulated [the prisoners] on winning the war ... aircraft dropped food and clothing to us. We were told to stay put as the population might not know the war was over and we could be attacked. Men gorged on canned chicken, vomited and gorged again.<sup>85</sup>

Cameron had been a POW for the period 10 May to 27 August 1945. When a Royal Australian Navy medical team carried out health checks on the liberated prisoners his body weight was 7 stone and 12lbs (50kg); he had weighed 12 stone 3 lbs (77.5kg) when shot down. Don Cameron returned to Sydney in *Indefatigable* and following a discussion with Vian, accepted his invitation for regular post-war Fleet Air Arm service, despite the horrors of his recent imprisonment.

Investigations into the fate of the pilots Evan Baxter and John Haberfield, reported missing over Southern Sumatra, took some years to complete by naval authorities and for the information that was gathered to be passed on to the men's families. According to the New Zealand Naval Secretary, writing to Baxter's

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p.271.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p.274-275.

father on 12 February 1945, his son had been ‘... reported missing – but seen to land safely’ in Sumatra.<sup>86</sup> By July 1945 the Baxter family had still to receive any confirmation about their son’s situation and wrote expressing their anxiety to the Minister of Defence, Frederick Jones: ‘We have got in touch with the Navy and Red Cross. Could you advise if we can do anything further?’<sup>87</sup> However, inquiries into the missing men’s situation were in progress by that time, as explained much later in a letter of 4 February 1946 to Mrs. Baxter, from the Naval Secretary:

When Japan capitulated organisations were set up by the Admiralty in the Singapore Area, together with a New Zealand team known as the Prisoner of War evacuation Flight, whose duties were to interrogate released prisoners of war and arrange their repatriation and to endeavour to trace the fate of those missing. Before departure for this area, the New Zealand team was given full details of the Royal New Zealand Navy personnel who were recorded missing in operations against Japan.<sup>88</sup>

The interrogating team was lead by Lt. Commander Pritchard RN and enquiries began in Palembang in September 1945. Testimony from a Chinese prisoner by the name of Koh, who had been released on 20 February 1945 in Sumatra, was of particular value in tracing Haberfield’s movements. Koh claimed that it had been the ‘... town topic that the photograph of a well-built, blindfolded pilot prisoner was exhibited for propaganda purposes – by the display of the newspaper Palembang Sumboeng’. Descriptions of the pilot tallied with that of Haberfield. Koh also gave evidence that this pilot was admitted to Palembang prison on or about 1 February 1945 and during interrogation was denied food and

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<sup>86</sup> New Zealand Naval Secretary to Mr. J. J. Baxter, 12 February 1945. ‘Collated documents ....’

<sup>87</sup> Mr. J.J. Baxter to Mr. Jones, Minister of Defence, 26 July 1945. ‘Collated documents ....’

<sup>88</sup> New Zealand Naval Secretary to Mrs. M. Baxter, 4 February 1946. ‘Collated documents ....’

water. After seven days the prisoner airman was taken, blindfolded, to an unknown destination.<sup>89</sup>

The investigators continued their inquiries in Singapore and interrogated senior Japanese military officers alleged to be involved with POW crimes. Baxter, Haberfield and eight other pilots had, in fact, been sent as prisoners to Outram Road Gaol, in Singapore from Java in February 1945.<sup>90</sup> However, Major Kataoka Toshio, a military judicial officer, gave false information to the interrogators in order to divert blame away from his department. He claimed that the British officers had been sent to Japan by ship which had been subsequently sunk by Allied bombing in the middle of March 1945. Initially, Pritchard accepted this information but after some weeks and further enquiries, the Japanese ‘let the cat out of the bag’. An interrogation of General Atsuka, Chief of the Judicial Department for the Japanese 7<sup>th</sup> Army Area on 25 December 1945, confirmed that the prisoners had been executed. Warrants for the arrest, in Singapore, of Major Toshio and Captain Ikeda were issued the same day but ‘the culprits’, however, were located on 26 December 1945 having committed suicide.<sup>91</sup> Major Toshio gave a full account of the fate of Baxter, Haberfield and the other officers in a will he left:

We took nine prisoners from Outram Road in a lorry to the beach at the northern-most end of Changi and executed them with Japanese swords. The bodies were put in a boat prepared beforehand and sunk in the sea with weights attached. Now that the responsibility must be borne out publicly I hereby pay for my deeds with my suicide.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> ‘RNZN Report on Execution of Fleet Air Arm Pilots, including two New Zealanders’, ‘Collated documents ....’

<sup>90</sup> Air Department Memorandum for Naval Intelligence, Navy Department, Wellington, 6 February 1946. ‘Collated documents ....’

<sup>91</sup> New Zealand Naval Secretary to Mrs. M. Baxter, 24 August 1946. ‘Collated documents ....’

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

In a letter of 29 January 1946, Frederick Jones informed Haberfield's sister '... that your brother, together with eight other officers, was executed by the Japanese on Changi Beach on ...Singapore Island'. Jones, ending any lingering hopes the grieving families may have kept for the survival of their sons, added: 'All the islands of the Dutch East Indies capable of supporting life have been thoroughly searched by the Allied Naval, Army and Air Force Prisoner of War Investigation Teams, and there is now no possibility of any further survivors being located there'.<sup>93</sup> The exact date of the executions is unknown but is given officially as 31 July 1945.<sup>94</sup> These horrific deaths establish beyond doubt that New Zealanders of the Fleet Air Arm confronted, and in many cases endured, the brutality associated with Japan's dogmatic defence of occupied Indonesia, the Sakashima Gunto, Formosa and, especially, of the Japanese Home Islands.

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<sup>93</sup> F. Jones, Minister of Defence to Mrs. G. K. Murdoch, 29 January 1947. 'Collated documents ....'

<sup>94</sup> Admiralty Docket NID 04306/46, cited in letter, D. Hobbs FAAM UK to D. Allison FAAM NZ, 18 January 2000. 'Collated documents ....'

## **Conclusion**

Before addressing the three central research questions, a recapitulation of the ambit of this thesis will aid its conclusion. The objective is to raise the historical profile of New Zealand airmen of the BPF and their achievements during World War II. An analysis of the prevailing diplomatic, military and strategic circumstances and the decisions made by New Zealand in relation to its allies, in response to the Pacific war, has been presented as a survey. As well, the origin and composition of the BPF as a military entity has been examined. This research has demonstrated that while New Zealand naval airmen of the BPF may not have been numerically significant within the greater context of the Dominion's war effort, they participated in a highly successful series of Fleet Air Arm operations. Within the wider strategy of the Pacific war their service contributed to the defeat of Japan. According to Spruance, the BPF had, by the conclusion of 'Iceberg' operations, effectively interdicted the supply of enemy aircraft from China, the Sakishima Gunto and Formosa to Japan. By August 1945, aircrew of Task Force 37 were able to roam at will in the skies above Japan and had difficulty in finding military or infrastructural targets, of any consequence.

The first matter to be addressed is: why was New Zealand restricted to such a minor military 'backyard' role in the Pacific war? New Zealand was, naturally, concerned about Japanese military aggression, particularly threats to the Asia-Pacific region. Its anxiety about the Dominion's isolation and the vulnerability of Singapore had been expressed to the British government, following inter-dominion discussions with Australia, well before the war. By 1941, New Zealand, without an independent foreign ministry, proactively sought the implementation of defence agreements and contingencies drawn up at the Singapore 'Conversations'. The UK and US' determination to defeat Germany, as a priority left Singapore negligently exposed to Japanese attack, despite reassurances to the contrary. New Zealand and Australia correctly foresaw that

the door to the DEI, and its oil riches and south beyond, had been left open for the Japanese.<sup>1</sup>

In 1941 New Zealand's best fighting men and equipment were in North Africa as the likelihood of Japanese invasion increased. At the same time the UK and the US ignored the Singapore recommendations to keep the 'bulk' of the US Navy's forces in the Pacific. Attempts by Australia and New Zealand to form a local Anzac naval command were in vain and subsumed by much greater strategic forces controlled by Churchill and Roosevelt. Undoubtedly, Fraser was confronted and torn by hard decisions and he faced defending New Zealand with one division, alone. He looked first to the UK for support, expressed the Dominion's disappointment at British ineptitude but, unlike Curtin, acceded to British and American pressure and left the Second Division in North Africa. This decision put a 'man-power squeeze' upon the short-lived Third 'Pacific' Division, condemned it to general garrison work and inevitably it was brought home for demobilisation. Likewise RNZAF squadrons in the Pacific were limited to operations in Fiji, Noumea and Solomon Islands, as designated by the US.<sup>2</sup>

In hindsight it is difficult to assess whether the return of the 'The Div' to New Zealand would have increased the likelihood of a greater combat role for New Zealand forces in the Pacific. By 1942 the US had divided up the Pacific into its own spheres of operation and it is reasonable to conclude that the Second Division, had it returned, would have been used to reinforce the Third Division, or with the Australian Army in locations behind the main US Pacific offensives, either for rearguard duty or in mopping-up operations. MacArthur relegated Anzac forces to a minor role and the Royal Navy's appeal, to him, was only as a means to his Philippine ends. That the RNZAF had, by 1945, 48 spare Avengers and eight redundant Corsair squadrons, is evidence of New Zealand's military marginalisation, in the Pacific.

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<sup>1</sup> The Fleet Air Arm was ordered to destroy Japanese-held oil refineries, in Sumatra in 1944 and 1945.

<sup>2</sup> ' "Most Important" Feeding of U.S. Forces Admiral Calhoun's Advice', Evening Post, Volume CXXXIX, Issue 131, 5 June 1945, p.7.

Fraser incurred a deal of criticism from a hard-pressed Curtin and suggestions of a lack of aggression by New Zealand, in the Pacific war. While US protection of both Dominions were gratefully accepted, the ‘Sextant’ ‘snub’ brought Australia and New Zealand together diplomatically by this mutually felt affront. Evatt’s Canberra ideas brought, as a consequence, the disapprobation of the US government upon both Dominions. As a result any possible military contribution, however small, by New Zealand forces in the US controlled Pacific war became unlikely. A resigned Fraser told the Commonwealth Prime Ministers in May 1944 that the Dominion would henceforth be concentrating its war efforts upon growing food. By August 1945 Fraser, confirmed that New Zealand’s probable future participation in the Japanese war would be minor: two infantry brigades and some elements of the RNZAF for an air component of a British Commonwealth force. At the same time he acknowledged the contribution that the BPF was making as a part of the ‘British’ effort to defeat Japan.<sup>3</sup>

It was unlikely in early 1944, that a British Pacific naval offensive against Japan could be organised, let alone prosecuted; the US Navy jealously guarded and regarded this as its responsibility. Competing military agenda and personal rivalries had to be overcome before the BPF could become a military reality. The most significant impediment to this was the impasse between Churchill and the UK Chiefs, concerning strategy for the Far East. Churchill, averse to operations in India and upper Burma, championed Mountbatten’s unrealistic operation ‘Culverin’, what he believed to be the means of Singapore’s recovery. Wiser counsel prevailed in arguments put forward by Brooke and Cunningham, both of whom sought British Pacific operations alongside the US Navy. Tensions also existed across the highest level of US command: King was not prone to advance the cause of the Royal Navy and encouraged operation ‘Culverin’ in an attempt to keep the Pacific British-free. To compound matters inter-service rivalry between the US Army and US Navy, personified by MacArthur and King, complicated decision-making. The mooted ‘Middle Strategy’, an offer of Royal Navy and

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<sup>3</sup> The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, 4 August 1945. Documents. Relating to New Zealand’s Participation in the Second World War 1939-45. Volume III, Wellington: War History Branch, Department of Internal affairs, 1963, p.491-492.

Australian forces to assist MacArthur's conquest of the Philippines, was skilfully used as a bargaining chip by the British Chiefs. This was declined but the subtle manoeuvre ensured that the Royal Navy took a prominent part in the assault on Japan: a role which would develop it technically, enhance its reputation, would not (hopefully) cause embarrassment, and would not place an insuperable financial burden upon a bankrupted nation. Churchill, too, came round to this view in October 1944 at Quebec.

The Lethbridge Mission acquired logistical expertise and information directly from observing the US Navy, including its air operations, in the Pacific and fed this knowledge to British planners. In this regard the Fleet Air Arm was able to re-equip with US naval aircraft and improve its combat capabilities. When the team visited India, a yawning gap was revealed between the quality of Mountbatten's command and that of Halsey. Contacts were re-established in the Dominions and India, and drew these outposts into Pacific war planning; Sydney's candidature as the fleet's only viable base emerged. Plans for a Pacific naval task force were advanced in spite of the desperate shortage of merchant and specialist vessels for the Fleet Train. New Zealand offered naval facilities, while the administrative office for the BPF was opened in Melbourne. A press campaign involved the Australian and New Zealand public with carefully released bulletins that described a great, comforting British fleet returning to the Antipodes. For their part, admirals' Fraser, Rawlings, Vian, Fisher and Daniels had to meld this nascent naval task force from aircraft, personnel, and ships in a staggered release from the war in Europe.

By 1944 most squadrons had a contingent of New Zealand airmen, many of whom had acquired several years' flying experience gained through combat service in the Atlantic, Baltic, Mediterranean and North Sea theatres, as well as earlier strikes on Indonesia. The first drafts of Scheme F arrived in the UK in 1940 and flight training continued throughout the war, including the BPF's period of operations. In October 1944 the fleet-to-be, based at Trincomalee, awaited orders for its future direction against Japan. By marshalling scarce resources and acquiring new and better aircraft the Carrier Group worked-up to combat

readiness alongside escort warships and with the support of the Fleet Train: operations 'Outflank' and 'Meridian' established effective bombing tactics, flight routines and increased the strike force's endurance in the air and at sea. Squadron records illustrate that New Zealanders were integrated in, and instrumental to, this process. Above all Vian wanted to prove the strike power of the Carrier Group to the US Navy and in this objective, he succeeded.

Task Force 57 covered the southern flank for the successful US invasion of Okinawa during 'Iceberg' operations and were arduous and demanding. Aircrew were required to operate during all daylight hours, flying escorts and patrols, bombing and strafing coral shell aerodromes and infrastructure on the Sakishima Gunto and Formosa. Repeating sorties day in, day out, on the same targets was demoralising. Heavy seas and foul weather, alone, created dangerous flying conditions: ranging close formation flights on decks full of aircraft up to eight times daily, increased the risk of accidents. Aircraft were maintained under the most trying of circumstances and aircrew were acutely tuned to potential mechanical or hydraulic failures. The Japanese were clever and well organised in their efforts to minimise the efficacy of Fleet Air Arm attacks and used camouflage and aircraft ground dispersal, to good effect; hawser balloons were used to protect vital targets and their flak defence was accurate, effective and frequently lethal. As Task Force 37 moved closer to the Home Islands several Royal Navy fleet carriers were severely damaged by Kamikase aircraft, as Japanese resistance became desperate.

New Zealand airmen were a distinctive national cadre within the Carrier Group's squadrons. They had a well earned reputation as courageous and technically skilled pilots and observers and were proud to serve in the Fleet Air Arm, as New Zealanders, for the recognised status and opportunities for adventure that it brought. As a cohort of young officers at war, the New Zealanders' enthusiasm stood out, as well as a healthy disrespect for unnecessary formality: squadron line books and diaries are punctuated with profiles of lively Kiwi characters. These men enjoyed life to the full and flying very demanding

naval combat aircraft, with all its inherent dangers, was undoubtedly an activity with an 'adrenalin buzz' not easily to be found in civilian life .

New Zealand pilots and observers were not, of course, all of a stereotypical 'Kiwi' stamp. Pilots such as Adrian Churchill, were most certainly courageous but in the view of their senior officers, prone to recklessness. Daniel McAleese's correspondence poignantly documents one young man's struggle with fear in carrying out his duty, guided as he was by his religious faith. Don Cameron endured extreme cruelty and privation as a Japanese POW but survived his ordeal. Glen McBride, a recently married and easy-going man, slightly older than most, was at times terrified to be an observer for a pilot hell-bent on earning a decoration. Most tragically was the fate of the two Hellcat pilots, Evan Baxter and John Haberfield, beheaded on the orders of Major Toshio on Singapore Island, probably in July 1945; as these facts took so long to establish, a terrible ordeal was extended to the families of the two pilots, as they clung for months to hopes for their survival. It is possible that McBride and his pilot endured the same illegal, inhumane and terrifying fate at the hands of their Japanese captors, as befell Baxter and Haberfield.

Squadron line books and diaries read for research used a characteristic, at times school-boyish, jingoistic terminology. Despite this and given the circumstances and time, overt or odious references to nationalism or patriotism are not pronounced. Aircraft, mishaps and squadron characters and their high jinks and amorous antics feature more prominently. Pilots, especially, were competitive, and unashamedly sought to destroy the enemy, the 'Jap'. A strong loyalty to comrades or the 'Joes', their aircraft, squadron and carrier is apparent. When possible the airmen recorded carrier life humorously and optimistically, not always sure if the next day would come to pass.

One of New Zealand's numerically smallest military groups of World War II was engaged in the most highly demanding and technologically advanced form of warfare: aero-maritime combat. That the supply of aviation fuel was denied to Japan at a critical time of the Pacific war following operations 'Outflank' and 'Meridian', is testament to the efficacy of their courage and flying skill. Richard

Greenway of 1771 Squadron was the first New Zealander to fly in combat over Japan in World War II and this is of significant historical importance. New Zealand naval airmen operated in Japanese airspace around the time and place of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in August 1945, the climax of the global conflict. There is no doubt that these New Zealand airmen, 'on loan' to the Royal Navy, represented the Dominion and played a major role in the success of the Carrier Group's operations and significantly contributed to the Allied victory over Japan.

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## Glossary

ABDA:	American-British-Dutch-Australian 'Conversations' early 1942
Accelerator:	Flight deck catapult
ACS:	Aircraft Carrier Squadron. E.g. 1ACS, 11ACS
ADB:	American-Dutch-British Conversations 21 to 27 April 1941
Advisory War Council:	Australian government wartime body
'ANZAXIS':	Closer wartime diplomatic cooperation between Australia and New Zealand via Canberra and Wellington meetings
Associated Powers:	Association of the UK and the Commonwealth, USA and Dutch East Indies prior to Japanese entry to WWII
'Axiom':	Mountbatten's 1944 report supporting operation 'Culverin'
Belly Tanks:	Drop-able aircraft fuel tanks
BPF:	British Pacific Fleet
'Bogey':	Enemy Aircraft (See Index I p.154)
CAP:	Combat Air Patrol
Canberra Pact:	Australia-New Zealand Accord, 12 January 1944
Carrier Group:	BPF 1 <sup>st</sup> Aircraft Carrier Squadron
CCS/ JCS:	US Combined/Joint Chiefs of Staff
Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference:	London May 1944 (or Dominions')
COS:	UK Chiefs of Staff (or Aus/NZ)
DEI:	Dutch East Indies (Indonesia)
Divisions:	Navy: Sunday religious parade and service
DLCO:	Deck Landing Control Officer or batsman
'Ditching':	Forced sea landing
'Driver':	Familial: FAA pilot
E(I)F:	Eastern or East Indian Fleet
FAA:	Fleet Air Arm
FFL:	Fair Flying Log
Fleet Train:	RN logistical and technical flotilla for BPF
'Flyable Duds':	Aircraft sufficiently airworthy for repair or replacement
'Grand Strategy':	Britain's Far Eastern imperial strategy
HMS:	His Majesty's Ship
HMNZS:	His Majesty's New Zealand Ship
Into wind:	Required for flying off and landing on aircraft
Kamikase:	Japanese suicide mission: 'Divine Wind'
Landing on:	Aircraft deck landing

Line Abreast:	Efficient USN method of refuelling at sea
Line Astern:	Inefficient RN method of refuelling at sea
Mae West	British issue airmen's life-jacket
MiD:	Mention in Dispatches (British military decoration)
'Middle Strategy':	Alternative to operation 'Culverin': proposed British support of General Mac Arthur's campaign to recover the Philippines
NAS:	Naval Air Squadron/Station
Observer:	FAA navigator and radar/radio operator. Familial: 'Looker'
Operation 'Culverin':	Proposed British landings in Northern Sumatra and Malaya, with sub-plans: e.g. 'Buccaneer', 'Anakim', 'Pigstick', 'Sceptre' and 'Vanguard'
Pacific War Council:	Originally Far Eastern Council, London. Later a Washington Pacific War Council was chaired by Roosevelt
POW:	Prisoner of War
RAAF:	Royal Australian Air Force
RAF:	Royal Air Force
'Ramrod':	FAA combined escort, strafing and bombing fighter strikes
RAN:	Royal Australian Navy
Ranging:	Flight-deck pre-arrangement of aircraft
RANVR:	Royal Australian Navy Volunteer Reserve
RNZAF:	Royal New Zealand Air Force
RN:	Royal Navy
RNZN:	Royal New Zealand Navy
RNZNVR:	Royal New Zealand Navy Volunteer Reserve
R/T:	Radio Transmission. 'Noise': excited, inter-aircraft communication during operations
'Scheme F':	Admiralty FAA recruitment scheme for WWII NZ aircrew trainees
SEAC:	South East Asia Command (Mountbatten)
SeeBee:	USN naval assault engineers
Shackle groups:	Aircraft were shackled (secured) and ranged in flight groups, on deck
Shipping lift:	Transfer of personnel from one military theatre to another
'Sugar Dog':	Small Japanese coastal vessel
'VJ':	Victory against Japan
TAG:	Telegraphist/air gunner
Task Force 37:	BPF with US Third Fleet, 17 June 1945 to 6 August 1945
Task Force 38.5:	Remnant of BPF with HMS <i>Indefatigable</i> in Japan, August 1945
Task Force 57:	BPF with the US Fifth Fleet, 2 March 1945 - 22 May 1945
Task Force 63:	Temporary designation for BPF during operation 'Meridian'

Task Force 111.2:	Breakaway BPF task force used for 'Inmate'
TBF:	FAA Grumman Avenger: RN code
'Troops':	Familial: FAA maintenance crew, petty officers and ratings
'The Div':	Colloquial - Second New Zealand Division
TOMCAT:	Navigation beacon giving ship vector to returning aircraft
'Twitchy'	Familial: nervous, jitters
UK:	United Kingdom
USAAF:	United States Army Air Force
US:	United States
USMC:	United States Marine Corps
USN:	United States Navy
Vector:	Air height, position and direction coordinate
War Cabinet:	NZ cross-party administration 16 July 1940 to 21 August 1945

## Appendix I: Timeline of Related Allied WWII Conferences

Location & (CODE NAME)	Location	Dates	Major Participants:	Major Results
US - British Staff Conference (ABC-1)	Washington, D.C.	January 29 – March 27, 1941	American, British, and Canadian military staff	Set the basic planning agreement for the US to enter the war
Quebec Conference (QUADRANT)	Quebec, Canada	August 17 – 24, 1943	Churchill, Roosevelt, King	D-Day set for 1944, reorganization of South East Asia Command, secret Quebec Agreement to limit sharing nuclear energy info
Cairo Conference (SEXTANT)	Cairo, Egypt	November 23 – 26, 1943	Churchill, Roosevelt, Chiang Kai-shek	Cairo Declaration for post-war Asia
Tehran Conference (EUREKA)	Tehran, Iran	November 28 – December 1, 1943	Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin	First meeting of the Big 3, plan the final strategy for the war against Nazi Germany and its allies, set date for Operation 'Overlord'
Second Cairo Conference (SEXTANT)	Cairo, Egypt	December 4 – 6, 1943	Churchill, Roosevelt, İnönü	Agreement to complete Allied air bases in Turkey, postpone Operation Anakim against Japan in Burma,
British Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference	London, England	May 1–16, 1944	Churchill, John Curtin (Australia), Peter Fraser (New Zealand), Mackenzie King (Canada) and General Jan Smuts (South Africa).	British Commonwealth leaders support Moscow Declaration and reach agreement regarding their respective roles in the overall Allied war effort.
Second Quebec Conference (OCTAGON)	Quebec, Canada	September 12 – 16, 1944	Churchill, Roosevelt	Decision to offer and accept the BPF. Morgenthau Plan for post-war Germany.

## Appendix II: Japanese Aircraft - 'Bogeys'.<sup>1</sup>

'Betty':	Mistubishi G4M 1 and G4M 2 Navy Type 1 land attack plane. 6/7 seat land-based bomber.
'Dinah':	Mitsubishi Ki 46 Army Type 100 command reconnaissance plane. Three seat fighter/ground attack, low-wing monoplane.
'Frances':	Yokosuka P1 and P1Y 1s 'Milky Way' navy model II land-based bomber. Three seat mid-wing monoplane - 'white light' night fighter, bomber, torpedo bomber or dive-bomber.
'Jill':	Nakajama B6N I and B6N 2 'Heavenly Mountain' navy models 11 and 12, carrier-borne attack plane. Three seat mid-wing torpedo and reconnaissance monoplane.
'Judy':	Yokosuka D4Y1 and D4Y 1c 'Comet' navy type 2 model 11, carrier-borne two seat bomber/reconnaissance plane.
'Nick'	Kawasaki Ki45 twin-engined fighter.
'Oscar':	Nakajama Ki 43 'Peregrin Falcon' army type 1, single-seat fighter monoplane.
'Tojo':	Nakajama Ki 44 'Demon' army type 2, single-seat heavy interceptor fighter monoplane.
'Zeke or 'Zero':	Mistubishi 'O' navy type single-seat fighter, including a Kamikase suicide version.

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, Appendix IV, p.185. Hobbs, 2011, Glossary, pp. XVI-XVII.

### Appendix III: New Zealand Fleet Air Arm personnel of the British Pacific Fleet, December 1944 to August 1945

Name	Rank	Squadron	Aircraft	Carriers & Operations,	Decorations
Alexander, D. J. (Doug)	Sub.Lt. (A)	P: 887	Seafire	<i>Indefatigable</i> : BPF Japan d.30/07/45	MiD
Anderson, D.G. (Don)	Sub.Lt. (A)	P: 801	Seafire	<i>Arbiter, Implacable</i> : BPF Japan	
Andrews,	Sub.Lt. (A)	1844	Hellcat	<i>Formidable</i> : 'Outflank', 'Meridian'	
Armstrong, W. A. (Bill)	Sub.Lt. (A)	O: 820	Avenger	<i>Indefatigable</i> : BPF Japan	
Ball, R. F. (Ray)	Sub.Lt. (A)	P: 885	Hellcat	<i>Ruler</i> : BPF Japan	
Banks, D.W.	Sub.Lt. (A)	O: 1772	Firefly	<i>Indefatigable</i> : BPF Japan – ditched/pilot killed	
Barbour, M. (Matthew)	Lt. (A)	P: 1833	Corsair	<i>Illustrious</i> : 'Outflank', 'Iceberg'	
Bastien, J. (Jeffrey)	Sub.Lt. (A)	P: 1841	Corsair	<i>Formidable</i> : 'Iceberg', Japan	
Baxter, Evan J.	Sub.Lt. (A)	P: 1833	Corsair	<i>Illustrious</i> : 'Outflank', 'Meridian'. Shot down, captured, executed.	d. 31/07/45
Bell, J. W. (Jock)	Lt. (A)	P: 820	Avenger	<i>Indefatigable</i> : BPF Japan	
*Bowles, W.G. (Walter)	Lt. (A)	P: 885	Hellcat	<i>Ruler</i> : 'Iceberg', BPF Japan	
Bradley, A.W. (Brad)	Lt. (A)	P: 899, 894	Seafire	<i>Chaser, Indefatigable</i> : 'Iceberg'	
Brynmildsen, N. (Neal)	Lt. (A)	P: 1833, 1834	Corsair	<i>Illustrious, Victorious</i> : 'Outflank', 'Meridian'	
Byrne, D. S. (Derek)	Sub.Lt. (A)	P: 1831, 1833	Corsair	<i>Glory, Illustrious</i> : 'Outflank'	
Cameron, D. (Don)	Lt. (A)	P: 1833, 1834	Corsair	<i>Illustrious, Victorious</i> : 'Iceberg'.	POW MiD

Churchill, A.H. (Adrian)	Lt. (A)	P: 1833	Corsair	<i>Illustrious</i> : 'Outflank', 'Iceberg' Shot down.	MiD(2) d. 07/04/45
Clarke, J.H. (Jim)	Lt. (A)	P: 1833	Corsair	<i>Illustrious</i> : 'Outflank', 'Iceberg'	
Curran, R.G. (Roger)	Lt. (A)	P: 849	Avenger	<i>Victorious</i> : 'Meridian', BPF, Japan	DSC
Darby, T.I. (Ian)	Sub.Lt. (A)	O: 1772	Firefly	<i>Indefatigable</i> : BPF Japan	
Direen, A.W. (Bill)	Lt. (A)	P: 1836	Corsair	<i>Victorious</i> : 'Meridian'	
Dixon, J.T. (Jeffrey)	Lt. (A)	P: 888	Hellcat	<i>Indefatigable</i> : BPF Meridian	
Dixon, P.J. (Pete)	Lt. (A)	P: 880	Seafire	<i>Implacable</i> : BPF Japan	
Drummond, G.L. (Red)	Sub.Lt. (A)	P: 849	Avenger	<i>Victorious</i> : BPF Japan	
Dyson, N.W. (Noel)	Lt. (A)	P: 818 DLCO	Barracuda	<i>Formidable, Illustrious, Victorious</i> : BPF Japan	
Evans, D.K. ('Denny')	Lt.Cdr. (A) CO	P: 1836	Corsair	<i>Illustrious, Victorious</i> : BPF Japan	DSC
Finch, B.L. (Bernie)	Sub.Lt. (A)	P: 1834	Corsair	<i>Victorious</i> : BPF Japan	
Finlayson, G.W. (Graham)	Lt. (A)	P: 854	Avenger	<i>Unicorn, Illustrious</i> : 'Meridian'	
Fitzpatrick, D.V. (Don)	Sub.Lt. (A)	P: 849, 828	Avenger	<i>Victorious, Implacable</i> : 'Meridian', BPF Japan	
Forsyth, J.P. (John)	Sub.Lt. (A)			BPF Palembang	
French, A.J. ('Charlie')	Sub.Lt. (A)	P. 1836, 1845	Corsair	<i>Victorious</i> : 'Meridian'. <i>Glory</i> : RAAF Maryborough, MiD	
Glading, R.H. ('Bob')	Sub.Lt. (A)	P: 1841	Corsair	<i>Formidable</i> : 'Iceberg', BPF Japan	DSC MiD
Glazebrook, G.M. (Garry)	Sub.Lt. (A)	P: 801	Seafire	<i>Implacable</i> : BPF Japan	
Graham, David Neil	Lt. (A)	P. 880	Seafire	<i>Implacable</i> : BPF Japan	MiD
Greenway, R.H.	Lt. (A)	O: 1771	Firefly	<i>Implacable</i> : 'Inmate', BPF Japan	MiD

Grimmett, B.R. (Basil)	Sub.Lt. (A)	P: 1846	Corsair	<i>Collusus</i> : BPF Australia
Haberfield, J.K.T (John)	Sub.Lt. (A)	P: 1839	Hellcat	<i>Indomitable</i> : 'Outflank', 'Meridian' Shot down, captured, executed. d. 31/07/45
Hartshorn, C.G. (Geoff)	Sub.Lt. (A)	P: 1833, 1841	Corsair	<i>Illustrious, Formidable</i> : 'Outflank', 'Iceberg', BPF Japan
Heffer, F.B. (Ben)	Lt. (A)	P: 1833	Corsair	<i>Illustrious</i> : 'Outflank', 'Iceberg' DSC
Holdaway, L.W.	Lt. (A)	P: 820	Avenger	<i>Indefatigable</i> : 'Iceberg' MiD
Holden, G.M. (George)	Lt. (A)	P: 1846	Corsair	<i>Collusus</i> : BPF Australia
Jamieson, A.I.R	Sub.Lt. (A)	P: 1834	Corsair	<i>Victorious</i> : BPF Japan
Johnston, J.W. (Johnny)	Lt. (A)	P: 899, 894	Seafire	<i>Chaser, Indefatigable</i> : BPF Japan
Kingston, P.B. (Peter)	Sub.Lt. (A)	P: 1772	Firefly	<i>Indefatigable</i> : BPF Japan
Knight, C.O. (Jack)	Sub.Lt. (A)	P: 1844	Hellcat	<i>Indomitable</i> : BPF Japan
*Lang, H. (Sam)	Lt. (A)	P: 885 (senior pilot)	Hellcat	<i>Ruler</i> : 'Iceberg', BPF Japan
Leighton, C.H. (Claude)	Lt. (A)	P: 880	Seafire	<i>Implacable</i> : BPF Japan
Mackie, R.F. (Dick)	Lt. (A)	P: 1839, 1844	Hellcat	<i>Indomitable, Formidable</i> : 'Outflank', 'Meridian', 'Iceberg', BPF Japan
MacLeod, A.S. (Alister)	Lt.Cdr. (A)	P: 887, 894 (CO)	Seafire	<i>Indefatigable</i> : 'Outflank', 'Iceberg', BPF Japan DSC
Macrae, A.B. (Alexander)	Lt. (A)	P: 1839	Hellcat	<i>Indomitable</i> : 'Iceberg' DSO
Marks, F. E.(Ernest)	Sub.Lt. (A)	P: 757	Corsair	<i>Unicorn /RNAS Puttalum</i>
Martin, L. (Len)	Lt. (A)	P: 1842	Corsair	<i>Formidable</i> : BPF Japan
Martin, L.E (Lew)	Lt. (A)	O: 828	Avenger	<i>Implacable</i> : 'Iceberg', 'Inmate'

Masters, A.O. (Cappy)	Lt. (A)	P: DLCO, 1845	Corsair	<i>Indefatigable</i> : 'Iceberg', RAAF Maryborough
Maybank, J.W. (John)	Sub.Lt. (A)	P: 1834	Corsair	<i>Victorious</i> : 'Iceberg', BPF Japan
McAleese, Daniel	Sub.Lt. (A)	O: 849	Avenger	<i>Indefatigable</i> : 'Outflank', 'Meridian', 'Iceberg' d.12/04/45
McBride, T.C.G (Glen)	Lt. (A)	O: 1772	Firefly	<i>Indefatigable</i> : BPF Japan d. 10/08/45
McLennan, K.A. (Keith)	Lt. (A)	P: 1844, Instructor	Hellcat	<i>Indefatigable, Indomitable</i> : 'Outflank', 'Meridian' MiD(2)
McLisky, D.H.P. (Donald)	Lt. (A)	P: 1841	Corsair	<i>Formidable</i> : 'Iceberg', BPF Japan DSC
Middleton, J.A	Sub.Lt. (A)	P: 1842	Corsair	<i>Formidable</i> : 'Iceberg', BPF Japan MiD
Moncur, D. (David)	CPO	P: 885	Seafire	<i>Ruler</i> : 'Iceberg', BPF Japan
Morrison, E.A. (Ed)	Lt. (A)	P: 814	Barracuda	<i>Venerable</i> : BPF Hong Kong
Morten, Derek	Lt. (A)	P: 1841	Corsair	<i>Formidable</i> : 'Iceberg', BPF Japan DSC MiD(2) Sea rescued USN.
Mullen, D. (Des)	Sub-Lt. (A)	O. 1772	Firefly	<i>Indefatigable</i> : BPF Japan
Nash, J.B. (Johnny)	Lt. (A)	P: 1836	Corsair	<i>Victorious</i> : 'Iceberg', BPF Japan
O'Neill, B.F. (Burnie)	Lt. (A)	P: 1772	Firefly	<i>Indefatigable</i> : BPF Japan. Shot down baled out over Korijama airfield, POW
Parli. J.A. (John)	Lt. (A)	P (Instr.): 1833	Corsair	<i>Illustrious</i> : 'Outflank', 'Meridian', 'Iceberg' DSC
Patrick, C. (Charles)	Lt. (A)	P: 887	Seafire DLCO	<i>Indefatigable</i> : BPF
Percy, W (Bill)	Lt. (A)	P: 1840, 1839	Hellcat	<i>Speaker</i> : BPF cover fleet train. <i>Indomitable</i> : Australia DSC
Petrie, K.F.B (Bruce)	Lt. (A)	P: 820	Avenger	<i>Indefatigable</i> : 'Meridian', 'Iceberg', BPF Japan
Queree, W. R. (Bill)	Sub.Lt. (A)	P: 1840, 1844	Hellcat	<i>Speaker</i> : BPF cover fleet train. <i>Indomitable</i> : 'Iceberg'

Quigg, B.D.E. (Des)	Lt. (A)	P: 1831, 1830	Corsair	<i>Illustrious</i> : 'Meridian', 'Iceberg' <i>Glory</i> : BPF Australia
Reynolds, A.H. ('Spike')	Sub-Lt. (A)	P: 854.	Avenger	<i>Illustrious</i> : 'Outflank', 'Meridian', 'Iceberg' MiD
Rhodes, H.A. ('Dusty')	Lt. (A)	P: 1836	Corsair	<i>Victorious</i> : 'Meridian', 'Iceberg', BPF Japan DSC & Bar MiD
Richards, J.H. ('Ray')	Lt. (A)	P: 1834, 1836	Corsair	<i>Victorious</i> : 'Outflank', 'Meridian', 'Iceberg' DSC
Ritchie, M.I (Mick)	Lt. (A)	P: 1833	Corsair	<i>Illustrious</i> : 'Meridian', 'Iceberg'
Roy, Peter	Lt. (A)	P: 820, 857.	Avenger	<i>Indefatigable</i> : 'Outflank'. <i>Indomitable</i> : 'Meridian', 'Iceberg'
Ruffin, J.C. (Jack)	Lt. (A)	P: 1844	Hellcat	<i>Formidable, Indomitable</i> : 'Outflank', 'Meridian', 'Iceberg', BPF Japan
Seebeck, Ken	Lt. (A)	P: 1834, 1833	Corsair	<i>Victorious</i> : 'Outflank', 'Meridian'. <i>Illustrious</i> : 'Iceberg'
Sheeran, J. (Jimmy)	Sub-Lt. (A)	P: 801	Seafire	<i>Implacable</i> : 'Inmate', BPF Japan
Spence-Wright,	Lt. (A)	P. 1845 (Senior Pilot)	Corsair	<i>Glory</i> : RAAF Maryborough.
Stalker, H.E. ('Horrie')	Lt. (A)	P: 849	Avenger	<i>Victorious</i> : 'Meridian', 'Iceberg' MiD
Stirling, I.F. ('Chiefy')	Lt. (A)	P: 1842	Corsair	<i>Formidable</i> : 'Iceberg' Shot down, ditched, US submarine rescue
Stringfield, M.F. (Mike)	Lt. (A)	P: 1840, 888, 1844	Martlet, Hellcat	<i>Speaker</i> : Fleet Train Cover. <i>Indefatigable</i> : 'Meridian'. <i>Indomitable</i> : 'Iceberg'
Stubbs, C.M. (Chris)	Lt. (A)	O: 849.	Avenger	<i>Victorious</i> : 'Meridian', 'Iceberg'
Thompson, A.R. (Rod)	Sub-Lt. (A)	P: 1840, 1839	Hellcat	<i>Speaker, Speaker</i> : Fleet Train Cover. <i>Indomitable</i> : 'Iceberg' Shot down by BPF/rescued by destroyer
Vincent, S.A. (Syd)	P.O.	TAG: 849	Avenger	<i>Victorious</i> : 'Meridian', 'Iceberg', BPF Japan
Waddel, A.S. (Alan)	Sub-Lt. (A)	P: 1771	Firefly	<i>Implacable</i> : 'Inmate', BPF Japan

Wallis, R.	Lt. (A)	P: 888	Hellcat	<i>Indefatigable</i> : 'Meridian'
Webb, J. F.	Lt. (A)	O: 1770	Firefly	<i>Indefatigable</i> : 'Outflank', 'Meridian'. d. 29/01/45
West A. J (Allan)	Sub-Lt. (A)	P. 1834	Corsair	<i>Victorious</i> : 'Outflank', 'Meridian', 'Iceberg'
Whyte, R.L. (Roderick)				Palembang
Wiley, Graham 'Kanga'	Sub-Lt. (A)	P. 1834	Corsair	<i>Victorious</i> : 'Outflank', 'Meridian', BPF RAAF Maryborough
Woodroffe, S.G.	Lt. (A)	P: 820	Avenger	<i>Indefatigable</i> : 'Iceberg', BPF Japan
Wright, E.H.S. ('Spence')	Lt. (A)	P: 1834	Corsair	<i>Victorious</i> : 'Outflank', 'Meridian', BPF Sydney

\*With Pacific Fleet – New Zealand Pilots' Evening Post, Vol. CXXXIX, Issue 91, 18 April 1945, p.5.  
Two New Zealanders, Lt. (A) Hugh Lang RNVR (Senior Pilot) of Palmerston North and Lt. (A) G.W. Bowles of Auckland, were reported with BPF at an aerodrome for carrier-based aircraft on the East Coast of Australia. Both were reported as RNVR but were in fact, RNZNVR.

#### Appendix IV: Table of the British Pacific Fleet's Air Arm Operations, December 1944 to August 1945

Operation	Date	Target
'Outflank':		
'Robson'	20 to 22 December 1944	Pangalan Brandan, N Sumatra
'Lentil'	4 to 6 January 1945	" " "
'Meridian I'	24 January 1945	Palembang oil refineries, SE Sumatra: Songei Gerong & Pladjoe
'Meridian II'	29 January 1945	" " " " "
'Iceberg I'	17 March to 20 April 1945	Sakishima Gunto and Formosa: Airfields
'Iceberg II'	4 May to 27 May 1945	" " " " "
'Inmate'	12 to 16 June 1945	Truk, Caroline Islands
Strikes against the Japanese Mainland	17 June to 15 August 1945	Honshu, Kyushu: airfields, shipping and infrastructure.