

CHAPTER 20

FROM AITAPE TO WEWAK

IN mid-1944 General Blamey had committed the 6th Australian Division to relieve XI American Corps at Aitape in the Mandated Territory of New Guinea. The R.A.A.F's Northern Command, with headquarters at Madang, was to support the 6th Division, employing the Beauforts of No. 71 Wing and miscellaneous aircraft of the United States Combat Replacement and Training Centre, over which Northern Command had operational control.

Of the Japanese in the Mandated Territory, those remaining of the *XVIII Army*, were disposed in two main areas. Some 16,000 were on the coastal plain between the Danmap River and the mouth of the Sepik and on Kairiru and Muschu Islands. Some 5,000 were scattered through the villages in the highlands south of the Torricelli and Prince Alexander Ranges. The main enemy concentration to the south of the ranges was at Maprik. The remaining 3,000-odd, mainly base troops, many unarmed, were in the villages in the valley of the Sepik.

The Torricelli and Prince Alexander Ranges were the dominant topographical features in the area where the campaign was to develop. The Torricellis are from 4,000 to 5,000 feet high and consist of a series of rugged and heavily wooded ridges cut by deep gorges. The northern slopes fall away steeply to a narrow coastal plain. To the south, where the mountains dip down into the valley of the wide Sepik River, the slope is more gradual.

The coastal plain varies in width from twelve miles around Aitape, to three miles at Wewak. It is cut by numerous rivers and streams, which, after the rains, flood quickly, making passage from east to west difficult. Communications to the south are hampered by a confused series of ridges and gorges, all heavily timbered. The foothills merge into sparsely-wooded grasslands and farther south the grasslands meet the swamps which extend north from the Sepik. These swamps cannot be crossed except where tongues of dry land reach the Sepik itself. The Aitape-Wewak area, in common with the rest of the island areas north of Australia, did not lend itself easily to surface communication, and therefore posed a difficult supply problem to which the answer, especially in the inland area, was aircraft transport.

The Americans, as has been shown, did not intend to undertake a campaign to wipe out the enemy remaining in New Guinea. When General Adachi, commander of *XVIII Japanese Army*, had attacked their base at Aitape in August 1944, the Americans had inflicted heavy casualties. Since the enemy's withdrawal after this defeat, there had been little contact between the opposed forces. Most of the XI American Corps was entrenched behind barbed wire round Aitape itself with one regiment stationed forward at the Driniumor River.

General Adachi considered that Japanese military honour had been satisfied after his attack on the Americans at Aitape and ordered the remnants of his force to withdraw. His new operational objective was to turn his whole force into infantry and defend the Wewak-But area and to dispose part of the *41st Division* south of the Torricelli mountains.¹ The *51st Division* would defend Wewak and the lower reaches of the Sepik; the *20th Division* would defend the two But airfields and the *41st* would be responsible for preventing the enemy approaching from the west and south of the Torricellis.

After the failure of his offensive, Adachi's main problem was to feed his army. The coastal area produced little food and only an occasional submarine brought supplies from Japan. Consequently a considerable force of Japanese had been established in mountain villages among native gardens. In the Aitape operations the two divisions engaged (the *20th* and *41st*) were reduced from about 17,000 to about 9,000. Both divisions had lost a majority of battalion commanders and many of the officers and almost all the men became weakened in mind and body because of malnutrition, malaria and other illnesses. "From about the end of September to the middle of October 1944 some units had a daily death rate as high as 10 to 30 per cent. . . . Stragglers and casualties starved to death."² Lieut-Colonel Yasuzo Shibazaki, an engineer, who reported after the war on Japanese conditions at Wewak, said:

Around July and August 1944 our food supply, even to our construction units, began to seem scarce. The enemy had begun their raids on Wewak and supply depots were being destroyed. Shipping was completely cut by the air raids. The early part of March 1944 saw the last ships come in from the mainland [of Japan]. After that, I cannot remember any ships coming in with supplies. By this time the entire Japanese forces in New Guinea were low on food—some were not only low but had nothing left. Since August 1944 we had been living on food made from a type of palm tree very common in New Guinea—we called it "sago" palm. . . . Of course we got tired of it, but it kept us alive. Many of the men became bloated with this starchy diet. Some died. The natives called this food "sac sac". It seemed that they ate it a lot too. The water along the coast was not good. Some of our men died after drinking it. From August 1944 until the end of the war we lived under these conditions . . . our road building work was abandoned because all our trucks were broken down and lost. But this did not mean that the battle was to stop. The enemy continued fighting. All the unit headquarters were under constant raids beginning with *XVIII Army Headquarters* and the headquarters of the *20th*, *41st* and *51st Divisions*. Every raid brought about twenty planes, fighters and bombers included. The headquarters were scattered over a large area, with Wewak the centre.³

Australian troops began arriving at Aitape in October 1944. At this time, the American forces there were training for operations in the Philippines. The perimeter around the airfield at Tadi was only lightly manned and the outposts on the Driniumor River and at Babiang were not in contact with the enemy. By 28th October a squadron of the 2/6th

¹ Japanese Monograph No. 39 (GHQ Tokyo).

² Japanese Monograph No. 39 (GHQ Tokyo).

³ Interrogation (Historical Div, GHQ Tokyo).

Cavalry Regiment, the 2/10th, was at Babiang and another squadron, the 2/9th, had occupied Aiterap, Kamti and Palauru. From these outposts the 2/9th patrolled the trails leading south over the Torricellis but made no contact with the enemy. The 2/10th which patrolled in the coastal area west of the Danmap River had numerous clashes with enemy patrols and killed seventy-one Japanese.

Until September the Beauforts of No. 71 Wing at Aitape had been under the operational control of Air Commodore Cobby's No. 10 Group. However, because the wing was not to go forward to Morotai, it was detached from this group and returned to the operational control of Northern Command. Its primary role was to provide support for the 6th Division.

Under the command of Wing Commander Moran until October 1944, and thereafter Wing Commander Cooper,⁴ Nos. 8 and 100 Squadrons of this wing continued to carry out attacks on dumps, airfields, and troop concentrations of the Japanese *XVIII Army* in the Wewak-But area. In September 1944 they mounted 595 sorties and in October 306.

Although the aircraft and aircrew position of the Beaufort squadrons was satisfactory, much of the wing's equipment, including 146 vehicles, remained at Goodenough. Air Commodore Lukis reported that, because no shipping space had been allotted for trans-shipment to Tadj, many of the vehicles "are gradually being claimed by jungle". In October 1944 No. 37 Operational Base Unit arrived at Tadj, but as no tentage, equipment or resources of any kind came with the unit, it could not operate immediately. When, after much delay, ships were provided for moving equipment, they were held up for weeks in the roadstead off Aitape waiting to be unloaded. There was frequently a high surf running and, as there were no port facilities, unloading was often interrupted.

When the American No. 305 Aerodrome Squadron was withdrawn from Tadj the resources of the R.A.A.F. wing were inadequate to provide airfield services. All petrol had to be pumped from drums into tankers and this resulted in delay in refuelling visiting aircraft. In spite of difficulties and shortages, however, the wing continued to operate satisfactorily.

In September an advanced party of No. 7 Squadron arrived at Aitape. This squadron, equipped with Beauforts, had been under orders to move to Aitape since July. Ten R.A.A.F. Dakota transports were used to transport the main party and squadron equipment which were moved from Higgins to Aitape between 21st and 26th October in forty-eight trips. After the movement of the main party, nineteen Beauforts of the squadron were flown to Aitape in two echelons, with additional personnel and equipment. Twelve Beauforts made the trip on 29th October, carrying forty-five passengers and considerable freight in addition to the crews. On 1st November the remaining seven aircraft left Higgins with twenty-eight passengers and equipment. The entire move had been carried out

⁴ W Cdr E. W. Cooper, AFC, 260093. Comd 73 Sqn 1943, 7 Sqn 1944, 71 Wing 1944-45. Wholesale fruit merchant; of Ashfield, NSW; b. Summer Hill, NSW, 29 Mar 1915.

by air. The squadron was declared operational at Tadjì on 3rd November and that day nine of its Beauforts bombed targets of opportunity between Niap and Wewak.

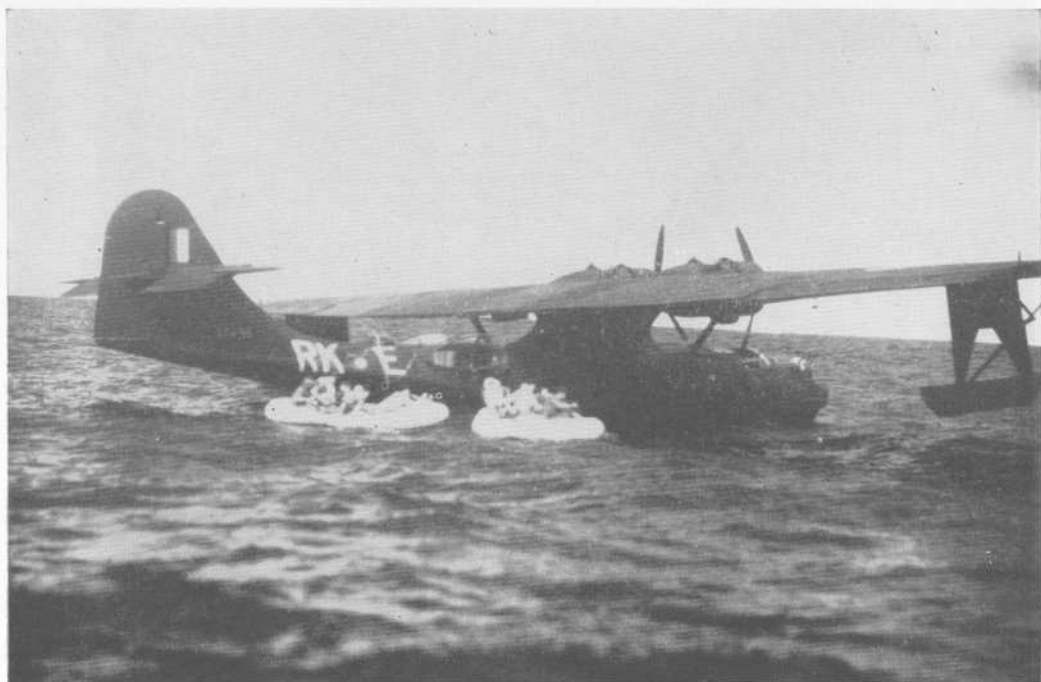
In preparation for its task with the 6th Division, No. 71 Wing was further reinforced by a flight from No. 4 (Army Cooperation) Squadron, which began operations early in November 1944. In addition to its primary role of supporting the operations against the *XVIII Army*, the Beaufort wing had the task of carrying out anti-submarine patrols in the Hollandia-Wewak area. Hollandia was an important American base and had to be well protected, and there were signs that Japanese submarines were still operating in the area. A surfaced transport submarine was sighted offshore from the But airfield on 6th November. A striking force of Beauforts was sent from Tadjì the same afternoon to attack the submarine and also about 35 motor trucks seen near But airfield, but neither target could be seen when the Beauforts arrived over the airfield. The target area was, however, well plastered with bombs.

Spasmodic but effective anti-aircraft fire from Boram brought down three low-flying aircraft of the Combat Replacement and Training Centre on 10th and 11th November. After the captain of one of these had "ditched" his Mitchell in the sea, the members of the crew managed to climb into a dinghy. They paddled desperately to prevent themselves drifting shorewards. A Beaufort of No. 71 Wing was sent immediately to prevent the enemy sending out boats to capture the Americans. Meanwhile, a Catalina from Madang was to rendezvous over the area with twenty-two Beauforts drawn from Nos. 7, 8 and 100 Squadrons. The Catalina (captained by Flight Lieutenant Wood⁵) landed right under the Japanese guns while the Beauforts heavily bombed the Japanese gun-positions. The bombing was so effective that not a shot was fired from the enemy shore. The six Americans boarded the Catalina, which then took off.

The 6th Division's campaign in November developed into two simultaneous drives, one along the coast, the other inland towards Maprik. In the coastal sector the 19th Brigade was given the initial task of cutting the enemy's communication route to the inland area. This route ran through the villages of Abau-Malin, Walum and Amam. After cutting this line the brigade was to destroy all enemy forces between the Danmap River and the line Abau-Malin. By early December the enemy had been cleared from the area between the Danmap and the Danmul Rivers and, on 17th December, a company of the 2/4th Battalion crossed the Danmap and patrolled along the coastal track against only slight opposition.

Meanwhile, to the south, the 2/6th Cavalry Regiment, working with Angau detachments which had been long in the area, had gained control of the Tong district where the only enemy met were stragglers and small foraging parties. The largest enemy concentration south of the divide was

⁵ F-Lt I. J. L. Wood, DFC, 414977. 20 Sqn, 8 Communication Unit and 111 ASR Flight. Instructor and inspector in agriculture, Territory of New Guinea; of Carinda, Qld; b. Ipswich, Qld, 26 Aug 1914.



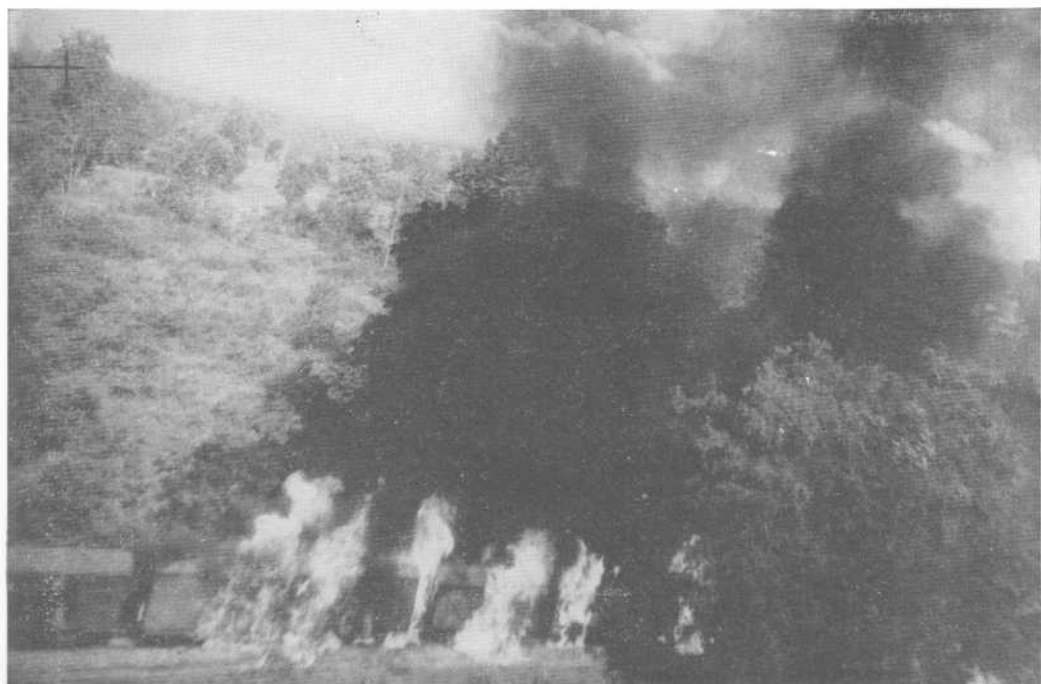
(R.A.A.F.)

A Catalina of No. 43 Squadron captained by F-Lt B. Ortlepp rescuing the crew of a Catalina of No. 42 Squadron which had to alight on the open sea while carrying out a minelaying operation on 14th January 1945.



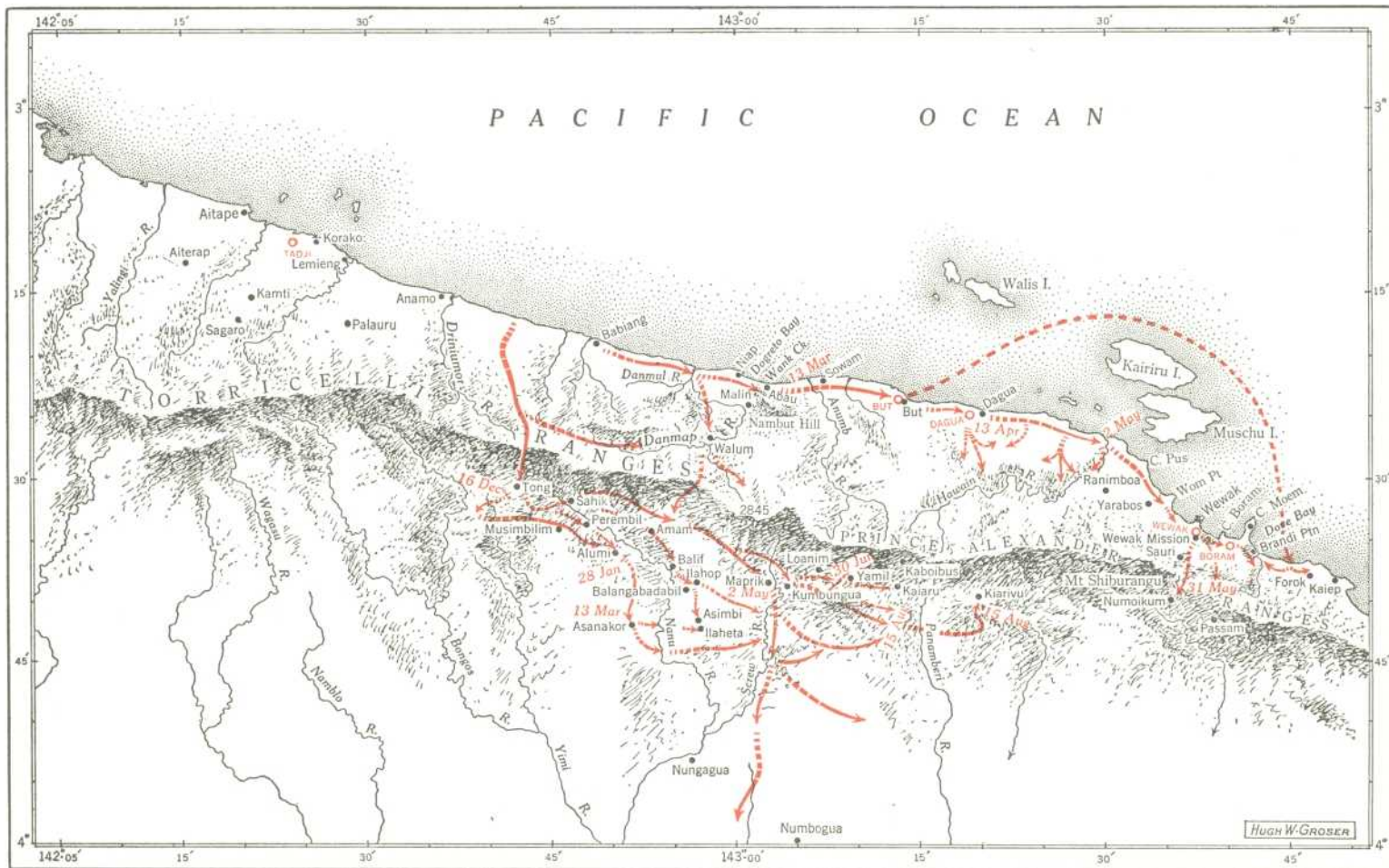
(No. 54 Squadron Diary.)

Spitfires of No. 457 Squadron based at Sattler, Northern Territory, flying in formation on 20th January 1945.



(R.A.A.F.)

Attacks by Beaufighters on two forms of Japanese supply lines. Top: A paddle-steamer is strafed along the water-line and set on fire. The success of this method of attack can be seen from the wreck of the paddle-steamer *Shwelan*, which, after a previous attack, has been burnt out and has gone aground. Lower: A train carrying oil and petrol is set on fire north-west of Kokkogon in 1944. Burning petrol can be seen flowing out of the damaged trucks.



Aitape-Wewak operations.

at Maprik. Late in December Brigadier Moten's⁶ 17th Brigade moved into the area and began a series of patrol operations. There were a large number of native villages connected by a maze of tracks and in these villages were small detachments of Japanese who lived on food from the natives' gardens.

In support of these operations, No. 71 Wing's three squadrons flew a total of 492 sorties in November and 515 in December. Maprik was heavily bombed by all three squadrons in November, as was Ranimboa village, ten miles west of Wewak. The Beauforts also bombed Walum, Dagua, Tong, But and Sahik villages during November. In December Musimbilim and Perembil villages were the most frequently hit. All three squadrons bombed these villages, Perembil being bombed on 26th, 28th, 29th and 31st December.

In January No. 71 Wing flew 561 sorties, of which 106 were anti-submarine patrols. Stores, ammunition and fuel dumps were seen at Cape Moem during the month, and on the 17th, 18th and 19th Nos. 8 and 100 Squadrons made concentrated attacks in this area, destroying many of these targets.

By January the aircrew position in No. 71 Wing, which in September 1944 had been satisfactory, had deteriorated, and crew strengths were barely two-thirds of the establishment. Because of this, and unduly low stocks of fuel and bombs in the area, it was not possible to increase the operational effort of the wing.

On 12th January an enemy submarine sank an American tanker in Humboldt Bay and the United States Seventh Fleet called on No. 71 Wing to carry out air search operations. The Seventh Fleet was concerned about the submarine threat to Hollandia, which at this stage was a major port for the departure of convoys to the Philippines and the transfer of fuel from overseas tankers to tankers for forward movement. Representations made by the R.A.A.F. to the Seventh Fleet that "anti-submarine searches be reviewed, and if possible eliminated" met with a refusal. Not only did these patrol duties strain the resources of No. 71 Wing but the situation was aggravated by the difficulty, common in other areas, of obtaining precise information on shipping movements.

In January the shortage of fuel caused a restriction of operations for three weeks until a ship carrying fuel arrived. Northern Command warned on 2nd February that anti-submarine patrols and support for the 6th Division would have to cease on 8th February because of lack of fuel, but the arrival of further supplies prevented a breakdown.

Enemy resistance to the 6th Division at Malin and Balif was increasing and it was expected that there would be a greater call from the army for bombing effort. Allied Air Forces therefore made further representations to the Seventh Fleet concerning the shipping cover at Hollandia, pointing out that R.A.A.F. forces at Tadj were fully employed in supporting the land forces in the Wewak area and were in the area for that particular

⁶ Brig M. J. Moten, CBE, DSO, ED, SX2889. CO 2/27 Bn 1940-41; comd 17 Bde 1941-45. Bank officer; of Woodville, SA; b. Hawker, SA, 3 Jul 1899. Died 14 Sep 1953.

purpose. Air cover was absorbing a great part of the R.A.A.F's effort at the expense of support for the ground forces. Again a request was made that "day and night staging patrols 100 miles seaward of Hollandia may be reduced and eliminated". The Seventh Fleet finally agreed, "in view of . . . reduced likelihood of submarine attack" and the wing was able to increase its bombing effort in support of the 6th Division.

On its coastal advance during January, the 19th Brigade had moved at a steady pace, clearing its way against light opposition. Heavy rains which fell late in January flooded the coastal rivers, particularly the Danmap, destroying bridges, causing loss of lives by drowning and temporarily halting the advance. Because of the destruction of the bridges, supplies had to be brought forward by landing craft to Dogreto Bay. This flooding also adversely affected units of No. 71 Wing at Aitape, where roads became impassable.

Late in January the 19th Brigade was relieved by the 16th. Soon after the relief the 2/1st Battalion of this brigade patrolled along the coast as far as the north-west slope of Nambut Hill, where it clashed with the enemy. On the night of 29th-30th January a strong enemy attack on an Australian position on the north-western slope of this hill was repulsed. The Australians then made an attack on the enemy positions on the hill on 4th February, but they, in turn, were repulsed.

The 6th Division called for air support. On 5th February eight Beauforts of No. 8 Squadron, led by Wing Commander Hall,⁷ bombed the hill after the infantry had indicated the target with smoke bombs. Next day Boomerangs of No. 4 Squadron bombed and strafed the enemy positions and the following day Beauforts from Nos. 7 and 8 Squadrons attacked. After these air attacks, the infantry advanced and captured two enemy positions on the north-west slopes.

A total of more than 100 sorties were flown by the Beauforts in support of the 6th Division during their operations against Nambut. In the latter stages of the attacks, the Beauforts, using 500-lb bombs with rod extensions, were bombing on mortar smoke indications laid only 150 yards from the ground troops. The infantry made a surprise attack on 16th February against the highest point on the hill and were successful. After further air strikes by Nos. 7 and 8 Squadrons, two more enemy positions were captured and by 19th February Nambut Hill was clear. The coastal advance, which at this time had reached Wank Creek, could now be continued. Against minor resistance the 2/2nd Battalion occupied positions on the But airfield on 16th March and, by the 19th, the But area was clear of the enemy.

To the south the 17th Brigade had been given the task of capturing Maprik and continuing the advance to the east. The main enemy force was at Maprik, but farther south were many isolated parties in prepared defensive positions based on gardens. By 8th February the 17th Brigade had cleared all the Balif villages, almost without opposition. A small

⁷ W Cdr O. B. Hall, DFC, AFC, 260239. 6 Sqn; comd 34 Sqn 1943, 8 Sqn 1945. Airline pilot; of Bellevue Hill, NSW; b. 18 Jun 1908.

airfield was prepared at Balif for Auster aircraft which were then used to move wounded to Aitape. Beyond Balif patrols met strong enemy opposition and the army called on No. 71 Wing for frequent air strikes. The general advance on Maprik began on 8th March. Moving southwards from the Balif area, the ground forces occupied Balangabadabil, Asimbi, Ilahop and Asanakor.

Meanwhile, No. 71 Wing had turned the major part of its Beaufort strikes against the Japanese defence positions west and north of Maprik. All three Beaufort squadrons took part. The enemy replied feebly with light anti-aircraft and small arms fire.

On 13th March a Beaufort of No. 100 Squadron (captained by Flight Lieutenant Fowler⁸) exploded in mid-air over a target at Maprik West, killing the entire crew. Six Beauforts led by Wing Commander Conaghan, commanding officer of No. 100 Squadron, were in the strike and Fowler's aircraft was seen to explode as it released its bombs. Three days later Conaghan led six more Beauforts on a strike and another aircraft, captained by Squadron Leader Dey,⁹ blew up in similar circumstances over the target.

Because of this second accident, a flight of No. 8 Squadron Beauforts out on a mission was ordered not to drop its bombs. No further bombs were to be carried by No. 71 Wing until an investigation by a committee of experts. The committee came to the conclusion, after carrying out flying tests in aircraft carrying bombs and components, that the tail unit of 100-lb bombs was weak and did not correctly perform the function of arming the tail pistol. As a result, this type of tail pistol was withdrawn from service for modification, and the wing resumed bombing operations on 26th March.¹ On that day the three Beaufort squadrons combined in a maximum strike on the Japanese mountain defences in the Maprik area.

In April 1945 No. 71 Wing continued its bombing onslaught on enemy-held villages in the Maprik area. On 3rd April eight Beauforts of No. 8 Squadron, led by Flight Lieutenant Fryar,² bombed and strafed villages half a mile west of Maprik. On the same day three Beauforts of No. 7 Squadron bombed in the same area.

On the 10th, 11th and 12th April all three Beaufort squadrons of the wing were bombing and strafing around Maprik. On 22nd April thirty-three Beauforts from the wing combined in a three-squadron strike on a Japanese headquarters four miles east of Maprik. No. 100 Squadron, led by Wing Commander Conaghan, attacked first with ten Beauforts which dropped bombs on and strafed the target. One of the ten aircraft

⁸ F-Lt H. J. Fowler, 415636. 14 and 100 Sqns. Bank clerk; of Kalgoorlie, WA; b. Subiaco, WA, 10 Sep 1921. Killed in action 13 Mar 1945.

⁹ Sqn Ldr P. A. Dey, 402853. 456 Sqn, 276 Sqn RAF, and 100 Sqn. Audit clerk; of North Sydney, NSW; b. North Sydney, 13 Jun 1921. Killed in action 16 Mar 1945.

¹ No. 100 Sqn lost another two Beauforts in a mid-air collision on 2 April, shortly after the aircraft had taken off on a bombing mission. The aircraft, which crashed into the sea, were piloted by F-Lt's I. H. Fielding (of Mentone, Vic) and E. E. Crisp (Boulder, WA). W Cdr Conaghan, who was leading the mission, ordered the remaining aircraft to return to base. Searches were made but, although wreckage was found, there was no sign of any survivor.

² F-Lt B. E. Fryar, 417172. 32 and 8 Sqns. Bank clerk; of Rose Park, SA; b. Rose Park, 14 Aug 1922.

was piloted by Group Captain Hancock, who on 1st April had assumed command of No. 71 Wing from Wing Commander Cooper. Then Nos. 7 (Wing Commander Barton³) and 8 (Wing Commander Hall) attacked the target. After bombing, the Beauforts strafed the area. The strike was later reported by the army to be successful.

The final ground attack on the Maprik villages was made by the 2/7th Battalion, and by 21st April they had been cleared of the enemy, who began to withdraw in the north. This withdrawal was followed up by the 2/6th Battalion and, by 24th April, the Japanese had been cleared from the western banks of the Screw River. Up to this time a total of 539 Japanese had been killed while the Australian losses had been 31 killed and 73 wounded.

At the end of April the advance continued in the coastal area. It was expected that enemy opposition would be strong, but in fact it was weak and this drive made rapid progress. With little ground opposition there were few calls from the army for close-support air strikes, so that the Beauforts were engaged in strikes well ahead of the advance. They bombed heavily at Brandi Plantation, Cape Moem, Kairiru Island, Cape Wom and Boram.

The condition of the Japanese soldiers became progressively more wretched. The extremely crude diet and illness greatly lowered their strength and the hopelessness of their position lowered their morale. There were cases of insubordination, murder and stealing, chiefly of food. There were some who even surrendered to the Australians.

On 30th April General Blamey, at a conference with senior officers at Lae, approved a detailed plan for the capture of Wewak and the destruction of the Wewak garrison. The plan included heavy air strikes by the R.A.A.F. and the Combat Replacement and Training Centre. The 19th Brigade would seize and occupy Cape Wom and Yarabos, secure the flank at Ranimboa, and then destroy the enemy in the Wewak Point-Cape Moem area and capture Sauri village. In order that the enemy would not escape to the east "Farida Force", composed of the 2/6th Cavalry Regiment with supporting arms, was to land at the eastern end of Dove Bay, establish a beach-head and cut the Wewak-Forok road.

The squadrons at the disposal of No. 71 Wing were given the task of "softening up" targets at each objective area and of achieving their maximum operational effort on D-day (11th May), in support of the amphibious operation at Dove Bay and the simultaneous advance of the troops moving along the coast to Wewak. To increase the striking power of the wing, detachments from Nos. 6 and 15 Beaufort Squadrons were added to No. 71 Wing. A detachment of six Beauforts from No. 6 Squadron under Wing Commander Waddy had arrived at Tadjj on 28th April, while another eight aircraft from No. 15 Squadron, under Group Captain Primrose, reached Tadjj on 4th May. They were to serve under No. 71 Wing until 11th May.

³ W Cdr J. O. F. Barton, 266. 7 Sqn; comd 32 Sqn 1944, 7 Sqn 1944-45. Regular air force off; of Scone, NSW; b. London, 3 Apr 1918.

Group Captain Hancock called his squadron commanders together and told them that it was necessary to cut down on current operations so as to conserve fuel, bombs, supplies, and get as many as possible of the Beauforts serviceable in preparation for the offensive. From time to time there had been heavy anti-aircraft fire from the Wewak area and since close-support operations would be flown at a low level, there was a possibility of losses from enemy anti-aircraft fire. The 19th Brigade was to advance along the coast from the mouth of the Hawain River, towards Wewak. This move would begin on 3rd May. Before and during the offensive air support was to be on an imposing scale.

On 1st May three squadrons of Beauforts (Nos. 6, 8 and 100) bombed on the route of the advance at Cape Wom and Brandi Plantation. On the following day Nos. 6 and 7 Squadrons, using seventeen Beauforts, struck at Cape Pus, where they hit gun emplacements, while No. 8 Squadron again bombed Brandi Plantation. Next day (3rd May) No. 7 Squadron was detailed to destroy an enemy pill-box one mile and a half south of Cape Pus. The strike was led in by Flight Lieutenant Tutt⁴ and bombs from three of the Beauforts straddled the target while others fell harmlessly in the sea. Other Beauforts this day bombed Cape Wom, Brandi and a village on Kairiru Island.

After the air attack on Cape Pus of 3rd May, the 2/4th Battalion of the 19th Brigade began the advance. The men occupied Cape Pus without meeting enemy resistance. The following day, after a strike by twenty-nine Beauforts, the 2/4th occupied Cape Wom and the stage was set for the attack on Wewak itself.

On the morning of 5th May the Beauforts struck at the northern quarter of Wewak Peninsula, bombing dug-in positions. Others hit Cape Moem and Muschu Island. On the following day Tutt led a strike of Beauforts from No. 7 Squadron against what was believed to be the headquarters of a Japanese general, while others continued the bombardment of Wewak Peninsula.

As D-day approached the bombardment by the Beauforts increased and, on the morning of 9th May, 50 Beauforts were concentrated on Sauri village and Sauri Hill, and another 57 struck on the neck of Wewak Peninsula later in the day. The Beauforts were from all five squadrons, and in addition two Boomerang aircraft of No. 5 Squadron strafed targets of opportunity. All aircraft engaged in these operations hit the allotted areas. Some of the explosions caused numerous landslides, which buried enemy soldiers in underground tunnels and passages constructed in cliff faces along the shoreline.

On 8th May twelve Beauforts of Nos. 15 and 100 Squadrons had carried out further bombardments on Wewak Peninsula, after which the 2/4th Battalion, supported by tanks, advanced to within a mile of Wewak Point, where it engaged and overcame strongly-built enemy defences. On 9th May the efforts of No. 71 Wing reached a peak with 109 bombing and

⁴ F-Lt A. F. Tutt, DFC, 400108. 12, 24, 82, 1 and 7 Sqns. Store assistant; of Hawthorn, Vic; b. Palmerston North, NZ, 14 Feb 1915.

strafing sorties, of which 107 were flown by the Beauforts and two by Boomerangs of No. 5 Squadron. This effort was supplemented by C.R.T.C. aircraft which struck heavily at gun positions on Cape Moem with 12 heavy bombers, 12 mediums and 12 fighters.

On 10th May forty-five Beauforts were employed on a triangular area enclosing known gun positions near the Wirui plantation, destroying at least one 75-mm gun and blowing up a fuel dump. On the same day twenty Beauforts in two formations, led by Hall and Waddy, struck at gun positions on a ridge near the Boram airfield. It was a five-gun position which had been a target for bombing for eighteen months, in spite of which it occasionally fired on Allied aircraft. (When the ground troops reached the position some days later, only one gun was standing.)

After the Beaufort attacks on 10th May the 2/4th Battalion attacked again with tank support in heavy rain. The enemy resisted, but within two hours and a half most of the Wewak Peninsula was in the battalion's hands, with the remnant of the enemy holed-up in caves and pill-boxes in the north-eastern corner, from which they were cleared the following day.

Farida Force had been ordered to land at Dove Bay on 11th May, for the purpose (the reader will recall) of cutting off the enemy from escape to the east. No. 71 Wing had prepared a force of more than sixty Beauforts and Boomerangs to assist the landing. Of these, thirteen from No. 7 Squadron were placed on air alert and would be called on to carry out any tasks which became necessary during the operations. The remaining Beauforts from the other four squadrons were to carry out pre-arranged strikes on enemy positions and huts on a ridge 1,000 feet high, commanding the landing beach area. These Beauforts began taking off from Tadjj at dawn, but, owing to low cloud, rain and poor visibility, only nine of them were able to see the target, which they bombed, destroying five huts. Of the remaining Beauforts, fifteen from No. 100 Squadron and seven from No. 8 Squadron bombed the coastline near the Brandi Plantation. Another eight from No. 15 Squadron attacked Forok village, while eight from No. 6 dropped bombs on Kaiep village, demolishing eleven huts.

The assault troops were transported from But in two corvettes, and five miles out from Dove Bay they were transferred to landing craft. Before the landing the cruisers H.M.A.S. *Hobart* and H.M.S. *Newfoundland*, the Australian destroyers *Arunta* and *Warramunga*, and the sloop *Swan* carried out a naval bombardment which was directed by pilots of No. 5 Squadron (Flying Officers Syle⁵ and Kidman). At 8.30 a.m., when the bombardment had ended, Farida Force landed and quickly secured a beach-head against negligible opposition. Only one man was wounded. Shortly after the landing the Air Coordinator (Flight Lieutenant Tutt) called for seven aircraft of the air alert squadron to attack a hill feature which was believed to have enemy defence positions overlooking the

⁵ F-O G. A. Syle, 431339; 5 Sqn. Ban^c clerk; of Oakleigh, Vic; b. Oakleigh, 18 Apr 1925. Died of illness 15 Aug 1945.

beach-head. The remaining six aircraft were rapidly concentrated on a target of opportunity—an enemy force moving away from the coast—and they successfully bombed this enemy force within four minutes of the first sighting. By the time these attacks had been carried out, Beauforts from Nos. 8 and 100 Squadrons, which had bombed earlier in the morning, had returned to base, refuelled and rearmed, and a force of twelve machines had relieved No. 7 Squadron on air alert over the beach-head.

Next day eight Beauforts from No. 15 Squadron dropped eight tons of bombs on enemy positions half a mile south of Brandi Plantation, and twelve from No. 8 Squadron attacked targets in the same area. On 14th May twenty-one Beauforts from Nos. 8 and 100 Squadrons attacked enemy positions at Kumbungua (east of Maprik), destroying thirteen huts.

To the end of May a total of 1,458 sorties were flown in support of the advancing Australian troops. The total of bombs dropped by these aircraft was 1,236 tons. There was a continued shortage of bombs in the area and at the end of May the position had become acute. Not only did the shortage cause a curtailment of effort, but many bombs proved defective. Hancock wrote in his tactical appreciation for June 1945: "The shortage of bombs and ammunition has been very acute, stocks reaching the lowest level for the past seven months. Effort has been reduced to a fraction of our capacity, and confined to targets of vital importance only." To overcome the shortage the wing used Japanese bombs in considerable numbers, but unfortunately only about 60 per cent of these were effective. A shortage of fuel aggravated the situation. Hancock in July reported:

We have, at the moment, sufficient stocks for only three days operations with no prospect of early replenishment. Unless our effort is once more to be restricted, ample provision should be made immediately, and at least one month's reserves built up.

In the ground fighting at Wewak there was little more than mopping up to be done after the landing on 11th May at Dove Bay, and by 13th May the 6th Division had completed the occupation of the Wewak area. By 16th May it had occupied Cape Boram and a week later it controlled Cape Moem. On 23rd May the junction of the Wewak and Dove Bay forces took place on the coast at Brandi Plantation.

It was obvious that the enemy had withdrawn his main body inland towards the mountains, leaving a comparatively small force to defend the coastal sector. As the Australians advanced inland resistance stiffened, and it seemed likely that the enemy intended to make a big effort to defend high ground along the tracks leading inland. This proved to be so. Between 22nd June and the early part of July 1945 units of the 6th Division fought a bitter battle to capture Mt Tazaki and Mt Shiburangu, which were a few miles inland from Wewak and dominated the entire sector. The enemy was strongly entrenched and in a position to block the movement of the Australians along the tracks leading to Numoikum and Passam villages.

In June the Beauforts bombed dozens of enemy-held villages and positions both in the Wewak sector and inland. The enemy was being compressed into a smaller and smaller area and the intensity of the air bombardment was becoming greater.

Mt Tazaki fell to the 2/4th Battalion on 22nd June. The 2/8th Battalion had been assigned the task of taking Mt Shiburangu and on 16th June, after supporting bombardment by Beauforts of Nos. 7 and 100 Squadrons the battalion attacked a position, "Hill 2", a half-mile north of this feature. After a five-hour fight the battalion took Hill 2. No. 71 Wing was now called on for a heavy strike on Mt Shiburangu. Hancock assigned his three Beaufort squadrons to attack positions on the mountain on 26th June. Hancock, at the controls of a Beaufort, joined No. 7 Squadron in the attack, which began at 8.10 a.m. Some of the bombs dropped by this squadron had been captured from the Japanese and failed to explode, but all the others landed just north of the point where the mortar smoke bombs exploded. No. 100 Squadron, led by Squadron Leader Dewar,⁶ was next over the target at 8.20 a.m., followed by No. 8 Squadron led by Hall. No. 8 Squadron dropped 1,000-lb bombs on top of the ridge indicated by the mortar smoke. They also dropped Japanese bombs, most of which failed to explode. One bomb hung up in one of the Beauforts, but this was later jettisoned on Kairiru Island. Next day all three Beaufort squadrons bombed again, on the same target. Again, some of the bombs failed to explode, but those that did were mainly on the target.

Covered by these heavy air strikes and by constant fire from batteries of artillery, the 2/8th Battalion attacked. After four hours fighting against stiff resistance, Mt Shiburangu fell. By 5th July patrols of the 2/8th Battalion linked up with the 2/4th Battalion moving from Mt Tazaki. Thus the whole of the militarily-important high ground running from Sauri village, through Mt Shiburangu to Mt Tazaki was under Australian control, making Wewak safe and opening the way for a drive to the south. By 7th August the 16th Brigade, which had relieved the 19th Brigade on 29th July, had cleared the Numoikum villages after determined enemy resistance.

Meanwhile, the 17th Brigade had managed to gain a strong foothold among the Yamil group of villages, six miles east of Maprik. By 1st July all villages of the Yamil group had fallen and the 17th Brigade began a drive on Kaboibus which was captured on 2nd August. The improvement in the supply situation in July had permitted a wide out-flanking movement which resulted in the capture of Kiarivu on 9th August by the 2/7th Battalion.

The last strike by No. 71 Wing was against a village target in the Kiarivu area. News of the surrender arrived on the morning of 15th August, just after the Beauforts had made their attack. A total of thirty Beauforts from Nos. 7, 8 and 100 Squadrons took part. Immediately

⁶ Sqn Ldr J. S. C. Dewar, 290613. 14 and 6 Sqns; comd 100 Sqn 1945. Barrister and solicitor; of Perth; b. Perth, 24 Mar 1911.

after they had completed the strike, the senior controller reported over the radio-telephone: "The following signal has just been received from Command Headquarters in plain language: 'Emergency immediate—Cancel all operations against enemy forthwith including missions now airborne.'"

For several days after the end of the fighting, aircraft of No. 71 Wing were engaged in dropping surrender leaflets to the Japanese forces informing them of the capitulation.

The Japanese situation after the fall of Koboibus had become extremely critical and, on 30th July, General Adachi had issued an operations order to the remnants of his three divisions, calling for a "last stand" at Numbogua, where the army was "to die in honourable defeat". The enemy had been greatly troubled by natives friendly to the Australians, who had sent information about the Japanese, with the result (the Japanese reported) that "enemy planes bombarded every new location established for headquarters". A Japanese colonel (Shibazaki) said, some time after the fighting had ended, that the Australians showed much kindness towards them, which was much more than they had expected.