

## INTRODUCTION TO SECOND EDITION

I am pleased to present an updated version of a book I first started researching in 1990 when I discovered that the biggest weather-related loss in aviation history had slipped quietly into a half-century void. Whilst the individual units involved recorded the day's events as they pertained to them, no overview had ever been compiled. So, in the end I wrote the account because no-one else had.

The genesis of this book can be traced to a composite list of aircraft lost that fateful day, provided by Bruce Hoy<sup>1</sup> when I visited his Brisbane home in 1990. Afterwards I received information from many quarters, including dozens of mission veterans, then still alive and happy to recount their experiences. The text for the first edition was drafted in 1991 at Bang Seray, Thailand, whilst I took respite from my duties at the Australian Embassy in Bangkok. Since publishing the first edition in 2000 I continued to collect further photos and material. This expanded and updated edition incorporates considerable new material, including rare photos. Digital graphics enable us to see accurate replicas of the participant aircraft. Assembling the logistics of the mission constituted a complicated jigsaw, down to identifications of individual aircraft and crews.

I avoided passing judgement or making assumptions in the narrative; it is unfair to judge any event by contemporary standards. Aviation and navigation technology of the time was basic by today's standards. Continuous reference to units and aircraft by military terminology is hard to avoid. A minimum amount of such references, tedious as they will doubtless be to many, are unavoidable to make sense of the day's complex movements.

I was made privy to a collection of personal letters written by the families of those who lost loved ones to Black Sunday. In the interests of privacy, I have published none of these. Of this and related material I will say however that the extent to which truth inevitably surfaces fifty years later surprised me. Since the first edition several MIA cases have been resolved. All save one appear straightforward cases of having been swallowed by the storm or captured by the Japanese.

That exception continues to be the crew of 387<sup>th</sup> BS A-20G *The Texan*, Captain Frank Smart and gunner Sergeant Mike Music. On this matter I overturned every clue including relevant captured Japanese diaries. Japanese units in around Saidor were scattered, emaciated and undisciplined. Unless direct confrontation arose, they had no reason to harass two Allied airmen so close to a US base. Perhaps both men lost their weapons in the ditching, or they were rendered unserviceable. Perhaps they drowned while trying to cross a flooded river or stream, of which several were in the area. Nonetheless, their

---

<sup>1</sup> Bruce Hoy was employed as the Director of the Papua New Guinea National Museum in the 1980s.