



A16-64, which failed to return from the dangerous reconnaissance flight ordered for 19th January 1942, is seen here on an unspecified date at RAAF Darwin. This Hudson was one of the first four received by No. 13 Squadron and the first to be sent out from Darwin on a patrol; that was on 17th June 1940. It remained with the squadron until it was lost, the third loss that month to enemy fighters. Flt Lt Willing, the aircraft captain on the last flight, had been a foundation member of No. 14 Squadron in Western Australia in February 1939 and remained with that unit for almost two years until posted to No. 13 Squadron as OC 'B' Flight in January 1941. (courtesy State Reference Library of the Northern Territory)

Ryland and Scott began their trip back on the 25th, the same day that evacuation plans began to be put into effect at Babo which the Dutch had since decided to leave.

Some remaining Dutch personnel and the small RAAF party were flown out by Arch Dunne during the evening of the 25th after explosives had been set off to render the expensive facility unusable to the Japanese. The runway from which they took off was blown-up later whilst the second runway, construction of which was mentioned in Forgan's letter, was presumably similarly sabotaged against further use.

Forgan ended the letter home, already referred to, with the following account of the flight to Darwin:

In the first place we overloaded the crate and it was three chances out of four that we would not get off. We made it somehow and took 20 minutes to get 1,000 ft up. About two hours from Darwin we discovered we might not have enough juice due to [an] oversight of the tanks being [a] new type (self-sealing) and not so big in contents. By skilful navigation and running his engine on [the] leanest mixture we made it in five and a half hours with less than 30 gallons left, sitting it down gently in the dark. So we made it.⁸⁰

It was Arch Dunne's later recollection that there was a lot less than 30 gallons of fuel left.

It turned out that one of the fuel tanks had leaked and, shortly after Dunne changed tanks, it was empty.

Here I was, with only four hours of fuel for a four hour flight, and on top of that I'd used full take-off power at Babo for about 20 minutes. I didn't have spare fuel for any tricky situations. We used the fuel analyzer to lean out the mixture to the point of almost cutting out the

engines. Just nursed it along. I didn't do too much dodging through the weather ahead, just keeping it straight and level.

We came over Darwin in the dark, and up came the searchlights. Just what I didn't want, with all the fuel gauges showing empty. I tried keeping my head down to dodge the strong light. Eventually they went out one by one, and I put it down as quickly as possible. As we taxied, one engine stopped. After halting, the ground staff checked and found just three gallons of fuel left - good for less than five minutes in the air.⁸¹

E. F. "Ric" Robins, one of Dunne's wireless air gunners, identified the aircraft used on this flight as one of the new Mk IVs, A16-123. This was flown back to Ambon from Darwin early next morning. The crew and aircraft remained on standby for a quick take-off but were caught on the ground without warning in a strafing attack by three enemy fighters. As a result, whilst no personnel were injured, three Hudsons, including A16-123, were destroyed and another damaged. Whilst, again, a victory for the Japanese, this time it came at a cost, as one of the attackers was definitely shot down, probably by an RAAF-manned gun post. Research in more recent times has identified the pilot as PO1C Yoshikane Sasaki of the 3rd Air Group; it had been Sasaki who had claimed the destruction of Willing's Hudson less than a week earlier.

Ryland and Scott overnighted at Koepang on the 25th and flew on to Laha next day, probably after the raid mentioned. Ryland noting in his log book about the three Hudsons destroyed there. Since the raid of the 15th, there had been another two more significant raids on Laha and the naval base at Halong, on the 23rd, the second two days later. Although there had been little damage to aircraft or runways on either occasion, three US