

CHAPTER 3

The 3rd Bombardment Group

Formed just after the First World War at Kelly Field, Texas, by October 1941 the 3rd Bombardment Group was located at Savannah Army Air Base, Georgia, and comprised the 8th, 13th, 89th and 90th Bombardment Squadrons. All squadrons were then operating A-20As except the 8th, which was equipped with A-24 dive-bombers. The Group arrived in Australia aboard the SS *Ancon* on 25 February 1942, and the 13th and 90th BS moved to Charters Towers, Queensland. In March 1942 a portion of the 27th BG, which had transferred to the Philippines just before the outbreak of the Pacific War, was assigned to the 3rd BG. On 2 April 1942 Major “Big Jim” John Davies, who had been the commander of the 27th BG in the Philippines, was appointed the 3rd Bombardment Group commander.

While officially designated the 3rd Bombardment Group (Light), throughout the duration of the Pacific War the group unofficially preferred its pre-war title, the 3rd Attack Group. In September 1942 the unit was redesignated the 3rd Bombardment Group (Dive), although by then no A-24 dive-bombers were being used in combat and the name was an administrative legacy. By May 1943 the designation 3rd Bombardment Group (Light) had been restored.

During 1942 the four squadrons of the 3rd BG operated a hybrid collection of A-20As, A-24s and B-25s. Combat operations commenced in New Guinea in April 1942 with the A-24s and B-25s and from this time the unit’s aircraft used Port Moresby as a forward base before returning to Queensland where the headquarters remained. The A-20A did not make its combat debut until 31 August 1942, briefly with the 8th BS before the 89th BS took responsibility for operations with the type.

In January 1943 the entire 3rd BG moved to Port Moresby, and two months later the unit’s A-20As and B-25s were instrumental in the decisive Battle of the Bismarck Sea. Throughout most of 1943 the group operated a mix of A-20As and B-25s. After its B-25s struck Rabaul in October / November 1943, all four squadrons converted to A-20Gs at Port Moresby. Soon afterwards the group moved briefly to Dobodura in January 1944 and was then based at Nadzab from late March.

The A-20Gs’ first combat assignment was supporting the Cape Gloucester landings in December 1943, and on 15 February 1944 all four 3rd BG squadrons attacked Kavieng. This was an ambitious long-range over-ocean mission for the A-20Gs, and on 19 February 1944 the A-20Gs attacked a Japanese convoy fleeing New Ireland. From March 1944 onwards the group’s attention switched to Japanese air bases around Wewak and on 3 April it participated in the first strafing attack against Hollandia. Then in the following month the A-20Gs supported the invasions of Wakde and Biak. Towards the end of 1944 the 3rd BG vacated eastern New Guinea and moved into the Netherlands East Indies.