

THE DOUGLAS BOSTON IN RAAF SERVICE

Beaufighter “Whispering Death”. Both myths were borne and perpetuated from well-earned RAAF pride. On the other hand, Newton’s tragic end led to an unintended RAAF public relations crisis involving influential players. These include, *inter alia*, the Australian Minister for Air, Arthur Drakeford, General MacArthur’s Chief of Military Intelligence, Major General Charles Willoughby, and the US Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, later of Vietnam fame. This event also needed telling.

Bill Newton’s loss over Salamaua, his subsequent execution and Victoria Cross are outlined in considerable minutiae in numerous publications, yet key details from the Japanese perspective remain either mistranslated or absent. No English-language account, for example, mentions that the navy officer supervising his interrogation, Lieutenant Commander Muchaku Denmei, spoke excellent English which was polished during his time as attaché to the Japanese Embassy in Washington in 1938-39. Such detail is surely owed to history.

It is useful to understand why the RAAF Bostons wound up attacking relative “backwaters” in New Guinea, New Britain and the NEI, whilst Fifth Air Force units were more active on the front line. The answer is not straightforward, and it is glib to lay blame on General Douglas MacArthur’s preferences and politics. The reasons involve instead a combination of RAAF strategy in New Guinea, RAAF subservience to USAAF command and the RAAF command crisis compounded by Australian politics. However, this author contends that RAAF targeting was not necessarily against “backwaters”, as often portrayed. *Au contraire*, the damage inflicted on Japanese targets in New Britain bolsters the RAAF record of achievement. The background to the Japanese inter-island logistics and why they attracted the attention of RAAF Bostons is intriguing. Factors include, *inter alia*, supply lines via a civilian fishing fleet commandeered from Japan and a limited flotilla of reluctant destroyers, submarines and barges. Once again, in order to understand this campaign fully, we need to consult Japanese records.

Some missions were more symbolic than substantial, and neglected by history, these also need explanation. No. 22 Squadron’s final mission over New Britain, for example, took place late on 24 June 1944 when three Bostons covered the extraction of Australian soldiers by the destroyer HMAS *Vendetta*. Air cover was provided alongside four RAAF Kittyhawks. This final mission symbolically included A28-11, one of the original DB-7Bs to arrive in Australia. It also included A28-34, a former Fifth Air Force A-20A on its first and only mission with No. 22 Squadron.

No. 22 Squadron’s later 1944 role in the NEI has been rarely examined in detail. In particular, the spate of A-20G losses in September 1944 has received only cursory coverage, yet these losses were significant.

On 22 January 1945 a pair of A-20Gs departed Morotai for a liaison flight to Archerfield, marking the last operational flight made by Bostons in RAAF service. An era had come to an end. The saga of the Boston in RAAF service is thought-provoking, colourful and pertinent to Australian history.

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