



*Bristol Beaufort A9-203 which was one of the eight No. 100 Squadron torpedo bombers that was launched early on 3 March to strike the Japanese convoy bound for Lae.*

the expected bombers, whilst ships' captains remained wary of more torpedo attacks.<sup>1</sup> On the open decks of the transports, troops were summoned into defensive positions with loaded rifles, ready to contribute to any fight with their small arms.

With the luxury of having several days to prepare, ADVON headquarters had assembled the largest mixed strike group yet seen in the New Guinea theatre, using most of the aircraft available at Port Moresby.<sup>2</sup> Listed in the table below are 100 aircraft of five different types from a dozen squadrons which participated in the attack.<sup>3</sup>

### **3<sup>rd</sup> March morning strike group**

28 P-38s	9 <sup>th</sup> FS, 39 <sup>th</sup> FS
17 B-17s	63 <sup>rd</sup> BS, 64 <sup>th</sup> BS, 65 <sup>th</sup> BS, 403 <sup>rd</sup> BS
7 B-25s	71 <sup>st</sup> BS
6 B-25s	13 <sup>th</sup> BS
12 Beaufighters	No. 30 Squadron
6 B-25s	405 <sup>th</sup> BS
12 B-25s	90 <sup>th</sup> BS
12 A-20As	89 <sup>th</sup> BS
Total: 100 aircraft	

The assembly and coordination of so many aircraft from a dozen separate units represented a challenge, but for the past several months virtually every unit involved had regularly participated in mixed strike missions, often targeting Lae. The fighter squadrons in particular had been closely cooperating with both bombers and transports often on a daily basis, although such missions are not usually mentioned in these pages unless Japanese aircraft were encountered. Hence the crews were well drilled in the coordination required on this morning, and the absence of the shorter-ranged P-39s and P-40E/Ks reflected understanding by Fifth Air Force planners that time was needed to achieve the coordination required.

<sup>1</sup> The unsuccessful Beaufort attack contributed to this mindset.

<sup>2</sup> Excluded were P-39s, P-40E/Ks, Bostons and nine 90<sup>th</sup> BG B-24s. The P-40E/Ks and Bostons were used for separate missions over Lae.

<sup>3</sup> Other sources differ slightly on these totals, with some as low as 90 aircraft. However, the total of 100 is confirmed from contemporaneous Allied intelligence logs. There may be some minor differences depending on interpretation, for example seven 405<sup>th</sup> BS B-25s were assigned to the attack but one didn't participate due to mechanical failure. Also, a thirteenth Beaufighter flown by Wing Commander Walker trailed the main Beaufighter formation from above to observe proceedings.