

Introduction

Amidst the enormous numbers of American aircraft that fought in the Pacific War, it is often forgotten that two British designed types served operationally with the RAAF in large numbers. A combined total of some 1,280 Beauforts and Beaufighters were delivered to the RAAF and served with fifteen wartime squadrons plus a variety of training and support units.

From late 1942 both types were on the frontlines of the war with Japan. The Beaufort initially had a niche as a torpedo bomber, a role not otherwise undertaken by US Fifth Air Force squadrons in the New Guinea theatre. The Beaufighter found its own niche as a heavily armed low-level attack fighter and became a key component of Allied strike missions. Both types played important roles in the landmark March 1943 Battle of the Bismarck Sea.

Subsequently the Beaufort made its mark throughout Australia, New Guinea and the Netherlands East Indies as a light bomber, a maritime patrol aircraft and by undertaking numerous support activities. The Beaufighter also served across these theatres, often undertaking coastal sweeps to hunt Japanese barges. Later versions introduced the use of rocket projectiles by the RAAF.

Overall, the contributions of Beauforts and Beaufighters to the RAAF war effort was immense. Unfortunately, some 600 young men lost their lives flying them both in combat and due to a myriad of accidents, many in Australian training units. Beaufighters also had a postwar role, and perhaps surprisingly the last was not retired from service until 1957.

Also remarkable was the fact that most Beauforts and Beaufighters were Australian produced, an exceptional technical and industrial achievement that can only be lightly touched on in a book of this format.

Note that all the profiles herein are based on photographic evidence and are reasonably true and accurate representations of the aircraft, given limitations of surviving images and documentation.

I trust this volume of *Pacific Profiles* provides an accurate overview of wartime RAAF Beaufort and Beaufighter operations and brings new life to their story from so many decades ago.

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