



Burma and India *1941–1945*

Australians in the Pacific War

Front cover

An all-Australian bomber crew of No. 99 Squadron, Royal Air Force (RAF), which was flying Wellingtons from a base in India. For full caption see page 45. (AWM SUK11770)

Title page

A Catalina flying boat of No. 205 Squadron, prepared for a long-range patrol over the Indian Ocean a few months before Japan's entry into the war. (AWM 009456)

Back cover

British ground staff of No. 607 Squadron manhandle a Spitfire bogged just off the runway at Palel, Manipur, India, during the 1944 monsoon. (AWM P02491.354)

Metric conversions of imperial measurements quoted in this text are approximate.

Unless stated otherwise, all squadrons noted are of the Royal Air Force.

ISBN 1 920720 80 4

© Commonwealth of Australia 2006

This work is copyright. Apart from any use as permitted under the *Copyright Act 1968*, no part may be reproduced by any process without prior written permission from the Commonwealth. Requests and inquiries concerning reproduction and rights should be addressed to the Commonwealth Copyright Administration, Attorney-General's Department, Robert Garran Offices, National Circuit, Barton ACT 2600 or posted at <http://www.ag.gov.au/cca>

Published by the Department of Veterans' Affairs, Canberra, December 2006.

Researched and written by Dr John Moremon
Text and photo editing by Courtney Page-Allen
Commissioning editor Kerry Blackburn
Map by Keith Mitchell

Printed on New Silk Gloss 300gsm (cover) and Euro matt Art 155gsm (inside),
by Pirion Printing

P01474 2006



Burma and India 1941–1945

Australians in the Pacific War



NEPAL

BHUTAN

CHINA

INDIA

Lhasa

Ledo

Dimapur

Kohima

Imphal

Bishenpur

Agartala

Salbani

Calcutta

Chittagong

Maungdaw

Buthidaung

Akyab

Ramree

Myebon

Prome

BURMA

Rangoon

Lashio

Monywa

Maymyo

Mandalay

Meiktila

Yun-nan-i

Kunming

FRENCH
INDO-
CHINA

THAILAND

BURMA-THAILAND
RAILWAY

Dawei

Ban Pong

Bangkok

Victoria Point

Vizagapatam

Bay
of
Bengal

Trincomalee

HMAS Vampire
HMS Hermes

CEYLON

Colombo

Koggala

Burma and India 1941–1945

It is often claimed, by veterans and also by some historians, that the Burma campaign of World War II was 'the forgotten war'. Waged against the Japanese in Burma, eastern India and southern China by predominantly Indian, Burmese, British, African, Chinese and American forces, it was considered by many to be a sideshow to the campaigns in Europe and the Pacific. The lack of recognition felt by veterans of the Burma campaign was, and remains, regrettable, for this was one of the longest and one of the most gruelling campaigns of the war. More than a million men served on the Allied side in this theatre, and casualties, through death, wounds, injuries and sickness, were heavy.

Probably fewer than 10,000 of those who played a part in the Burma campaign were Australians. Nonetheless, the campaign was noteworthy for Australians. By contributing men to this 'forgotten war', Australia could boast that it had met the enemy on every front of the Japanese southward advances. Australians who served South-East Asia Command (SEAC) and earned the Burma Star campaign medal (or a Burma clasp if they had previously earned the Pacific Star) were to wear this medal with pride.

Burma became a province of India in 1886 following the Third Anglo–Burmese War. Accompanying the Indian forces as a special-service officer was Captain Henry Parke Airey of the New South Wales Military Forces. He was severely wounded and became one of the earliest recipients of the newly created Distinguished Service Order and the first member of any Australian force to receive a gallantry award.

Burma continued to be administered from India until granted self-government in 1937. The Burmese were then given responsibility for local defence, including financing and raising armed forces; they continued to rely on guidance and assistance from British and Indian forces. The 1st Burma Division, which contained Burmese, Indian and British troops, was formed by early 1941, but was spread over different parts of the country. It was obvious that should an invasion occur, further assistance would be required.

Few Australians were in Burma before late 1941, except for some who were resident in the country or were members of the British or Indian forces. One was Group Captain ER Manning, an Australian in the Royal Air Force (RAF), appointed to the command of No. 221

Group, RAF. Born in Sydney, Manning had enlisted in the British Army and served during World War I as a cavalry officer and as a pilot, and was awarded the Military Cross; he continued serving after the war, and was awarded the Distinguished Service Order for command of a squadron against an uprising in British-occupied Iraq during 1924. He had retired from the RAF in 1935 and returned to Sydney, where he was a stock broker, only to be recalled to duty shortly before the outbreak of war in September 1939.

At the start of December 1941, Manning could muster sixteen Buffalo fighters of No. 67 Squadron,^{*} along with a portion of a light bomber squadron (with no aircraft) and six Tiger Moth biplanes of the Burma Volunteer Air Force. Unable to secure more squadrons, he ordered construction of all-weather runways at Mingaladon, the main airfield outside Rangoon, believing that they would be needed eventually.

The first sizeable group of Australians to arrive in Burma were some troops who had sailed from Singapore and landed at Rangoon on 3 August 1941. They were members of Military Mission 204, or Tulip Force, comprising forty-seven Australians and about 250 Britons. Keen to get away from the tedium of garrison duties in Malaya and Singapore, they had volunteered for a top secret mission and ended up at the Bush Warfare School at the hill station of Maymyo, Burma. They were not there to defend Burma, but rather were to train in guerrilla warfare so that when Japan entered the war they could then be sent into China to train Chinese guerrillas. The Australians lost their first man on 5 December 1941 when Warrant Officer Rolfe Barker died of typhus at Maymyo.

War against Japan

As war against Japan loomed, an Indian infantry division was rushed from India to boost the defences along Burma's eastern frontier. Japanese forces invaded Thailand and Malaya on 8 December 1941, with a view to capturing Singapore, and as part of that operation occupied a narrow area of south-eastern Burma. Victoria Point, the country's most southerly town, was occupied.

* Unless stated otherwise, all squadrons noted are of the Royal Air Force.

The army and air force commanders in Burma endeavoured to secure reinforcements, as an invasion was considered inevitable. Manning sought fighter and bomber squadrons, and aid came from an unexpected source. At the outbreak of war, a squadron of the newly formed American Volunteer Group (AVG), which became famous as 'The Flying Tigers', flying in Chinese markings, was training at a British airfield north of Rangoon in preparation for a move to China. The AVG Tomahawk fighters were welcomed, as they gave Manning hope of tackling air raids on Rangoon more effectively. However, he still had fewer than forty aircraft to operate over a defensive line stretching 1200 kilometres from the coast to the border with China. In all that territory there was a single radar station, troubled by faulty equipment, and a chain of observer posts undermined by unreliable telephone lines.

On 10 December, the commanding officer of the AVG, Colonel Claire Chennault, ordered a photo-reconnaissance of Bangkok, Thailand. It revealed dockyards 'jammed with enemy transports disgorging troops and supplies', and aircraft parked wing-tip to wing-tip on airfields. However, this did not necessarily indicate that an invasion of Burma was imminent, as Bangkok was used as a base for operations against Malaya. In any case, there was nothing that could be done, as Manning had no bombers. Chennault later declared that 'a kingdom was lost for want of a few planes'.

The first air raid on Rangoon occurred on 23 December. Buffalo and Tomahawk pilots claimed about a dozen Japanese aircraft shot down—a figure almost certainly inflated—for the loss of two American pilots. Damage to the city and airfield was heavy, with about one thousand civilians and a few military personnel killed. Flight Lieutenant GRF Burlinson, an Australian serving in the RAF Volunteer Reserve, having enlisted after advertisements were placed in Australian newspapers during 1941, described Mingaladon airfield as 'a devil of a mess'.

On New Year's Day 1942, Manning relinquished command of No. 221 Group to a more senior officer, but was retained as Senior Air Staff Officer. His foresight in constructing better runways was now paying off, as squadrons were on their way from the Middle East and the United Kingdom. Among the first to arrive, on 7 January, were sixteen Blenheim light bombers of No. 113 Squadron, flown in from Egypt. Half of the squadron's aircrews were members of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) who had graduated under the Empire Air Training Scheme. The RAF was now able to strike back, and in darkness the next

morning nine Blenheims took off and bombed Bangkok, dodging searchlights and anti-aircraft fire over the target area. Aircrews taking part included one all-Australian crew of Flying Officers GWN Bassingthwaighte (pilot) and DF Gordon (navigator) and Sergeant WJ McKerracher (gunner). All three would be decorated for service in Burma, but McKerracher was killed in an aircraft accident in India in 1944. Also taking part, in other crews, were Flight Lieutenant SF Lee and Flying Officer OL Loane, both destined to be killed in action during the course of 1942.

Invasion

Aerial reconnaissance and intelligence reports suggested that an invasion was now imminent. British Commonwealth and other European Allied residents who had not enlisted in the auxiliary forces were encouraged to do so. This included a number of Australians resident in the country. An example was a 25-year-old West Australian, Ernest 'Digger' Fraser, from Cottesloe and Kalgoorlie, who had been working in the tin mining industry in Thailand and Burma. He joined the Burma Volunteer Air Force on 20 January 1942 and, after training in India as a pilot, flew fighter-bombers.

On 22 January, Japanese forces advanced over the Thai–Burma border. Fighting was heavy. Many retreating troops were stranded when a division commander made the controversial decision to blow the Sittang bridge on 22 February, cutting their escape route. A counter-attack by British tanks was repelled. A further hoped-for reinforcement failed to materialise when the order of British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to send the 7th Australian Division to Burma was countermanded by the Australian Government and the division returned to Australia. In Burma a steady retreat was underway.

Two days into the campaign, the first Australians were killed when a crew in No. 84 Squadron set out from Mingaladon on a night bombing mission. Sergeants RA Headlam (pilot) and HC Odgers (navigator) and Flight Sergeant JM Farrer (gunner) were taking off in their Blenheim bomber when a wheel struck a bomb crater. Only Farrer was pulled out of the burning wreckage alive, but badly injured.

With Great Britain and China now allies, the troops of Military Mission 204 had left Maymyo on 25 January for China. The men undertook a long journey along the Burma

Road, from the railhead at Lashio in Burma to Kunming in the Chinese province of Yunnan. On arrival, they faced months of frustration, encountering a lack of commitment from the Chinese to train guerrillas, and with no opportunity for action. Acting Sergeant Cecil Martin died in China of typhus. The others were pulled out in September 1942, taking a couple of months to reach home, where the press dubbed them 'The Lost Legion of the AIF'.

With more air force squadrons arriving, there was increasing Australian participation in the campaign, as Australians were in most of the squadrons now arriving. The Blenheim-equipped No. 45 Squadron actually contained a majority of Australian aircrews. Also arriving at Rangoon were fighter squadrons, and one of the first to see action was Flight Lieutenant William Storey of No. 135 Squadron. He had never engaged in aerial combat before, but within days of arriving was 'scrambled' as wingman to a Battle of Britain veteran, Squadron Leader Frank Carey:

... just the two of us, and up we went and we got up through thin cloud at about 12,000 feet. Carey was climbing at full throttle and I was sticking to him as best I could and we got up to about 19 or 20,000 feet and we're looking down on this silvery topped flat cloud and suddenly 6 Japanese fighters appeared and they stood out silhouetted like black against the cloud. We heeled over and dived down on them and they saw us coming and went into the cloud. So we used our airspeed to gain height and went straight up to about 15,000 feet and waited, watching, and up they came through the cloud again and this time a couple got a bit separated and we went down on them ... so fast ... that I don't think either of us got a sight on these aircraft. So we went up again and came down the second time and by this time they were circling around waiting for us and we chose one each and I fired on mine and I saw a shower of stuff come off the cockpit. I assumed this was the Perspex canopy but because of the speed I was doing swept over him and climbed up again, and when we looked down no Japs at all. They'd all disappeared.

Although Storey did not observe the result, he had achieved his first aerial victory, as his victim was seen by others to crash on the airfield. He continued flying over Rangoon until early March, when it was abandoned as the Japanese were advancing on the city.

The loss of Rangoon on 8 March 1942 was a calamity for the Allies. By capturing the port and cutting the Burma Road, the Japanese had achieved their first objective in six weeks.

They pushed on. Three Australians of Military Mission 204 who had been left at Maymyo were caught up in the fighting. On 1 April, Private Bob Ward was in a group ambushed after a patrol across the Irrawaddy River; a British soldier who escaped reported seeing Ward in a line-up of prisoners 'on whom the Japs were practising with bayonets'. Two weeks later, Sapper Gil McRae was on a demolition job when a convoy was shot up, and he died of wounds on 18 April. Private Ken Bryson was captured and, with a cover story that he had escaped from Malaya, ended up in Rangoon Gaol with British, Burmese, Indian and Ghurkha prisoners of war.

The RAF and AVG continued harassing the Japanese, but mounting losses and spares shortages reduced the strength of the Allied air forces. In one incident, a Blenheim of No. 45 Squadron was attacked by as many as sixteen fighters within twenty-five minutes, but somehow got away; its Australian gunner, Flight Sergeant KA Gardiner, shot down one fighter but was wounded, and later ground staff counted fifty-seven bullet holes in the Blenheim's fuselage. Another member of the squadron, Flight Sergeant Phillip Graham, a reinforcement, flew just one sortie over Rangoon, and was preparing for another, when the airbase at Akyab was raided. Twenty-seven Japanese bombers 'blasted the hell out of us. Got ... all the fighters and all the bombers, except three Blenheims'. After this raid, at the end of March 1942, those squadrons still in Burma were withdrawn. Squadrons based in India continued attacking the Japanese, whose first offensive petered out with the start of the monsoon in May.

Ceylon

The island of Ceylon—now Sri Lanka—was a key British military asset in the Burma–India theatre, with a port at Colombo and naval base at Trincomalee. By the end of March 1942, the British Eastern Fleet had five battleships, three aircraft carriers, seven cruisers, fifteen destroyers, five submarines and several other naval vessels based there. In addition, dozens of merchant ships were present at any given time, loading and unloading troops and stores, or refuelling for voyages on to Australia and New Zealand to the east, or to the Middle East, Africa and the United Kingdom.

The island's defences boasted three fighter squadrons with Hurricanes and some naval Fulmar fighters, a light bomber squadron, and maritime patrol aircraft. The island also contained a sizeable army garrison, bolstered in late March 1942 by the Australian 16th and 17th Infantry Brigades. The Australian Government had refused to allow Australian troops returning from the Middle East to be diverted to Burma, which probably saved them from being decimated, but agreed to these two brigades being stationed at Ceylon until they could be replaced by British brigades.

On 4 April, the crew of a Catalina flying boat spotted a Japanese fleet, including aircraft carriers, about 550 kilometres south-east of Colombo. Warships put to sea, and aircrews were readied for action. On 5 April, Easter Sunday, more than eighty-five enemy aircraft were sighted approaching Colombo. In an aerial battle lasting more than an hour, the defending pilots and anti-aircraft gunners claimed at least nineteen Japanese aircraft shot down, but the same number of Hurricane and Fulmar fighters was lost. One Australian, Flying Officer GE Caswell of No. 30 Squadron, was shot down and killed after shooting down two Japanese aircraft.

The Japanese fleet spent several days hunting Allied warships and merchant ships in the Bay of Bengal. During this time, twenty-three merchant ships were sunk, but a bigger prize was the British cruisers HM Ships Dorsetshire and Cornwall, sunk by dive-bombers on 5 April. On 9 April, the Japanese aircraft carriers launched another raid, this time against Trincomalee. More than one hundred enemy aircraft were met by twenty-three fighters. Three Australians in No. 261 Squadron were among them: Pilot Officer LT Rawnsley shot down one aircraft and probably shot down another before he was shot up and crash-landed, being rescued by a British ground staffer while under fire from enemy aircraft; Flight Sergeant KAS Mann claimed one aircraft probably destroyed before he was attacked, and was forced to bail out of his burning aircraft; and Sergeant WE Pearce was shot down and killed.

Meanwhile, ten Blenheim light bombers of No. 11 Squadron set out to attack the Japanese fleet. One was forced to turn back with mechanical problems, and of the nine that pressed on, two had all-Australian crews and all but one contained at least one Australian crew member. Flight Sergeant Harvey Besley, not selected to fly on this mission, recalled watching them depart, 'with mixed feelings ... We knew it was very much a one-way ticket ...'

The bomber crews spotted more than forty warships and singled out an aircraft carrier. They were practically overhead, at 11,000 feet, when anti-aircraft gunners opened fire. No bombs struck the aircraft carrier, but on trying to get away they were attacked by enemy fighters. Five of the nine Blenheims were shot down, with all fifteen crew members killed, including nine Australians. The survivors attested to the bravery of these airmen, such as Sergeant MC Gray, who was seen firing his guns right up until crashing into the sea, and Flight Sergeant FJG Nell, who may have shot down two fighters before he was killed.

About 100 kilometres from Ceylon were the British aircraft carrier HMS Hermes and its Australian destroyer escort HMAS Vampire. They were spotted and came under attack from dive-bombers. Able Seaman Vince Cesari, a stoker in Vampire, was passing shells up to anti-aircraft gunners. He recalled bombs hitting the ship:

... they got nine direct hits and four near misses. Now of those nine direct hits, six of those went through the boiler rooms ... smashed the bloody steam lines and that, but didn't explode, actually, because she was that old and that thin, nothing much to her; semi-armour piercing bombs were going straight through her, but they were doing all the damage breaking the steam lines.

With power lost and the ship listing, Vampire's crew abandoned ship. The commanding officer, Commander WTA Moran, and six ratings had been killed or mortally wounded. Hermes was also sunk, losing nineteen officers and 289 ratings, which was more than a third of its crew; one of the dead was Lieutenant RW Close of the Royal Australian Naval Volunteer Reserve. The survivors spent about eight hours in the water before they were picked up, and a few more died of wounds, including one man from Vampire. Two other Australians, Ordinary Seaman NC Kerr and Able Seaman AM West, serving in HMS Hollyhock, were killed when the British corvette and a tanker it was escorting were sunk elsewhere.

Back at Trincomalee, air raids had inflicted considerable damage, with panic in civilian quarters. Fearing that an invasion was possible, Australian and other British Commonwealth troops stepped up construction of defences, and conducted further training in 'jungle warfare'. As it happened, these were the only major attacks on Ceylon. The garrison duties for the Australians came to an end in August when the brigades returned to Australia. In five months on Ceylon, nearly thirty Australian soldiers had died in accidents or from illnesses.

1942–44 campaigns

In December 1942, after the monsoon ended, British and Indian forces mounted the first Arakan offensive, intending to retake the coastal strip along the Bay of Bengal. The Japanese counter-attacked and recaptured the Allied gains of the previous months. In the north, American and Chinese forces were built up in preparation for an offensive. In a separate action, in February 1943, the 77th Indian Brigade, commanded by Brigadier Orde Wingate, struck deep into enemy territory. One third of the 'Chindits', as the force was known, failed to return, and many of those who did return were in dreadful physical condition. However, the Chindits provided a great propaganda boost to the Allied forces, showing that British and Indian troops could live, move and fight in the jungle as effectively as the Japanese.

By August 1942, the Australian presence in RAF squadrons was about 250 airmen. This represented more than 10 per cent of the aircrews, and in a handful of units Australians were in the majority. However, the RAF began committing more resources to the theatre, and the proportion of Australians was reduced. By July 1943, RAAF aircrews numbered about 330 (or about 8 per cent) of some 4000 British Commonwealth aircrews, which was enough for them to be present in 42 of the 52 squadrons. The presence of this number of men was sufficient for a RAAF Liaison Office to be established in India.

The range of aircraft flown by squadrons in which Australians served demonstrates the scope of their activities. By mid-1943, they were flying Dakota transports in support of troops and also on supply runs over 'the Hump'—the Himalayas—into China; they were flying Blenheim and Bisley light bombers, Wellington medium bombers, Liberator heavy bombers and Vengeance dive-bombers. They were flying Mohawk, Hurricane and Spitfire fighters, Beaufighter night-fighters and strike-fighters and Spitfire photo-reconnaissance aircraft. They were flying Beaufort and Hudson maritime patrol aircraft, Sunderland and Catalina flying boats, Lysander army cooperation aircraft, and even using Tiger Moth biplanes as air ambulances.

The RAF was constantly juggling resources to support the armies in Burma. For example, to support the Arakan offensive, most of the Hurricane fighter squadrons were sent to

Chittagong. This left Calcutta without fighter protection, and soon the Japanese launched night raids; more than a million panicked residents fled the city. Beaufighter night-fighters were rushed from the Middle East, and on 19 January 1943 Flying Officer Charles Crombie of No. 176 Squadron, with his English navigator, intercepted four bombers over Calcutta. Although their Beaufighter came under concentrated return fire and their starboard engine caught fire, Crombie closed on the formation and shot down a bomber; with flames pouring back from the damaged engine, Crombie ordered his navigator to bale out, then shot down a second bomber and badly damaged a third, before the petrol tank exploded. Crombie baled out, and was awarded a Distinguished Service Order.

On the Arakan front, Blenheim-equipped squadrons faced mounting difficulties, with fighters and ground fire accounting for many an aircraft shot down, and shortages of spares not helping. Flight Sergeant Besley, No. 11 Squadron, recalled:

Our planes were old, and we had quite a few accidents which were caused by faulty machinery. We lost two crews from faulty bomb release gear. We would go out on a bombing raid and drop our bombs—or think we had—but one bomb would hang up in the bomb bay and not release. We had no way of telling from inside the plane if all the bombs had released or not, and when the planes landed, the bump and vibration would cause the bomb to drop out. Twice this happened and, of course, the plane and crew were blown up.

Blenheim light bombers remained in front-line service until mid-1943, when the first Arakan campaign was drawing to a close. Eight squadrons were selected for conversion to Vengeance dive-bombers or Hurricane fighter-bombers. For the dive-bomber squadrons—Nos 45, 82 and 110—this meant dispensing with air gunners; for Hurricane squadrons—Nos 11, 34, 42, 60 and 113—it meant dispensing with air gunners and navigators. As a result, established crews were broken up, and many of the Australians who had been serving in these squadrons were dispersed to other units.

The fellow pilots of Australian Flying Officer David Nesbitt, who served with No. 5 Squadron, RAF, were English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish, Canadian, New Zealander, and even an American serving in the Royal Canadian Air Force. The ground staff were mostly British. Nesbitt explained that this resulted in:

... [a] very complete sense of isolation, in the national sense, not in the personal sense because you still had fifteen pilots on the squadron, so you know you had those as mates, and then there was ground crew as a back up. So one wasn't isolated on the basis of other human beings, but one was isolated in the sense that you were completely and absolutely removed from Australia.

Liaison Office staff toured the squadrons, handing out Australian Comforts Fund parcels and making checks on morale. They reported that generally morale was high if the squadron was actively participating in operations, as this kept the men busy, but it was never so high if the men were 'kicking their heels', as often occurred during bouts of bad weather. The problem worsened with the onset of each monsoon season, as there was less flying, and bad weather made 'home' far less tolerable. Squadron Leader MC 'Bush' Cotton, RAAF, commanding No. 17 Squadron, wrote home:

Everybody is living in tents and the other day it rained like hell and then blew about the same ... Words could not even remotely paint the picture of the chaos that ensued so I shall leave it to your imagination to picture a bunch of tents on a perfectly flat, clayey piece of land, after being rained on and then blown flat.

In late May 1943, with the monsoons at their worst, some squadrons were temporarily withdrawn from the forward area. Men found that serving in India did have certain compensations. Flight Lieutenant Robert Swift, No. 27 Squadron, a veteran of the North African campaigns, remembered that it was 'terribly pukka walla', with each aircrew allocated his own servant. For the majority of men, whether they were from the suburbs or the bush, this was something they had never seriously dreamt of. Strangely, the luxury and ostentation of service back in India did not help in maintaining morale. Liaison officers found that with flying hours reduced, morale reached a low point. Some men were averaging only ten to fourteen hours of operational flying per month.

For many men arriving in the theatre, there was added frustration as they became stuck in holding units. Shortages of aircraft and reduced flying hours in operational squadrons meant that turnover of aircrews was nowhere near as great as had been expected. Some men would spend many months waiting for a posting. The official historian described the plight of one of them, Sergeant EWP Martin, an air gunner, who reached India in August 1943 and was in a holding unit until January 1944. He was then posted to a ferry unit that

had no use for gunners! A rumour that men stuck in holding units would be sent back to England was greeted with joy—alas, it turned out to be only a rumour.

For airmen in squadrons converting to new aircraft, this period of relative inactivity was put to good use with conversion training. Several pilots who had flown Hurricanes on ground attack sorties in North Africa were posted to the squadrons in India to help in the training of pilots who had previously been flying twin-engine light bombers. Flight Lieutenant Ernest 'Ern' Frost of No. 113 Squadron remembered:

... it was our job to teach the ex-bomber boys what to do in a single engine aircraft. We must have done all right because we lost very, very few pilots ... through bad training or not being able to cope. They were all experienced pilots, but on a different aircraft, so they knew what flying was about ...

Soon the squadrons equipped with Hurricane fighter-bombers—'Hurribombers'—were ranging over the front-lines, attacking Japanese campsites and supply dumps, road transport, bridges and any other targets of opportunity. They were joined by Vengeance dive-bombers, which proved more effective in this theatre of war than they did in other theatres. Increasingly, these aircraft were used for close air support of Allied troops, with precision bombing of targets a short distance from troops who were being readied to make attacks. They could also be called to the assistance of troops coming under heavy Japanese attacks.

With more squadrons and better equipment, the RAF established air superiority, which enabled the ground forces to step up fighting in late 1943 and into 1944. Many strikes were made against Japanese positions and supply lines. For example, Beaufighters of Nos 27 and 177 Squadrons ranged over wide areas attacking steamers and launches hugging the coast or steaming along rivers, vehicles on roads and tracks, locomotives using the railways, and storage huts and camps. Their successes can be illustrated with results for June–November 1943: for 31 aircraft lost, the Beaufighters destroyed 160 sampans and damaged 2624, destroyed 12 power-driven watercraft and barges and damaged another 193, destroyed 9 locomotives and damaged 143, destroyed 27 carriages and damaged 464, and destroyed 42 vehicles and damaged 142.

In addition, Wellington and Liberator bombers were striking deeper into enemy territory, including Rangoon. Liberators based in Ceylon were also mine-laying, attacking shipping and flying long-range reconnaissance missions.

In February and March 1944 the Japanese launched the U-Go Offensive against British and Indian forces in the Arakan, entered India and besieged Kohima and Imphal. The Japanese used their well-trying tactic of encirclement, but this time the British and Indian troops stood firm and were supplied from the air. For nearly three weeks in February 1944, in the Battle of the Admin Box, the Japanese were unable to overrun the 7th Indian Division's Administrative Area, mainly defended by support troops, and could not stop the 5th Indian Division breaking through mountain passes to relieve the box defenders.

Kohima was besieged for two weeks in April but heavy fighting continued as the Japanese dug in and defended the positions they had captured. On the British 2nd Division Memorial at Kohima Cemetery is the epitaph written in 1916 by English classicist John Maxwell Edmonds (1875–1958):

When you go home
tell them of us and say
for your tomorrow
we gave our today

The Japanese attack at Imphal in April failed but the Allied forces supplied by air remained surrounded even after the monsoon season began. It was not until 22 June that the siege of Imphal was lifted.

Indian Ocean

Although the threat of a major Japanese fleet operation had subsided after the raids on Ceylon in April 1942, the British Eastern Fleet remained an important asset. The fleet was required to counter Japanese and German submarines, which ranged across the Indian Ocean, and surface raiders; the fleet would later be needed to support an Allied thrust along the Burma coastline. The Royal Australian Navy maintained a presence in the theatre, with warships attached to the Eastern Fleet, until the last months of the campaign.

During the second half of 1942, enemy raiders and submarines sank several merchant ships south of India. During July, the Japanese raiders Hokoku Maru and Aikoku Maru, operating out of Penang on Malaya's west coast, sank several ships and took a number of crews and passengers as prisoners of war. The German raider Michel also ventured into the Indian Ocean, sinking at least two ships, before returning to the Atlantic. One of the few naval battles in the Indian Ocean during the war occurred in November 1942 when an Australian-built corvette, Her Majesty's Indian Ship Bengal, being delivered to India, and the Dutch tanker Ondina encountered the Hokoku Maru and Aikoku Maru; although outgunned, and damaged, both the corvette and tanker survived.

An area of particular concern was the shipping lane into and out of the Persian Gulf, in the western Indian Ocean, as Japanese submarines threatened Allied tankers and freighters. Most of the Australian corvettes sent into the Indian Ocean during 1942 were employed in this area at one time or another. They would return to India, escorting convoys and minesweeping. By June 1943, no fewer than thirteen Australian corvettes were operating with the Eastern Fleet: HMA Ships Bathurst, Burnie, Cairns, Cessnock, Gawler, Geraldton, Ipswich, Launceston, Lismore, Maryborough, Tamworth, Toowoomba and Wollongong. They ranged widely over the Indian Ocean, as far west as East Africa, and also north, with several venturing into the Mediterranean and taking part in the Sicily landings. This latter operation was a relief for the crews involved, for as one of the men, Able Seaman Reginald Lewis of the Lismore, recalled:

I was happier up in the Mediterranean than down there [in the Indian Ocean] I think because there was more action ... Some of the convoys on the Indian Ocean were pretty boring. We might go a whole convoy and not even have a submarine 'contact' or anything, not even have a possible.

For many men, their memory of the Indian Ocean would be endless days of convoy escorts, with little or no action on most voyages. However, the role they were playing was vital. They saved shipping from attack, and in doing so saved lives. The same could be said of the 'N' and 'Q' Class destroyers that were operating out of South Africa and Kenya, escorting convoys in these areas and out across the Indian Ocean—although at least off Africa there was somewhat more action, as German submarines also ventured into the area.

In September 1943, the requirement for convoy escorts and minesweeping in the Indian Ocean increased when five German U-Boats (survivors of eleven dispatched from Europe) were sent into the Indian Ocean to form the 'Monsoon Group', to operate alongside Japanese submarines out of Penang. Their first intended victim was a Norwegian tanker, which was damaged by a torpedo, and later escorted safely to Aden by Tamworth. Over the following year, Allied merchant ships and warships would be subjected to a greater number and frequency of attacks.

In October 1943, Burnie, Tamworth and the Indian corvette Bengal engaged a submarine about 450 kilometres east of Aden. Burnie and Bengal were escorting an eastbound convoy while Tamworth was escorting a westbound convoy. They happened to be passing each other when a tanker was struck by a torpedo. Burnie raced towards the submerged submarine, with torpedoes narrowly missing it, and began depth-charging. Two heavy explosions were heard, and a column of water rose up on the port side of the corvette, but it could not be ascertained whether the submarine was destroyed.

A confirmed 'kill' occurred on 11 February 1944 when Ipswich and Launceston, along with the Indian gunboat Jumna, were escorting a convoy from Colombo to Calcutta. They were about 30 kilometres off Vizagapatam when a torpedo struck a freighter. Ipswich picked up a solid echo on its Asdic radar, and along with Launceston began depth-charging. A large amount of oil came to the surface, and several underwater explosions were detected. The corvettes had sunk the Japanese submarine RO-110.

Tragically, the next day there occurred the heaviest loss of life in the Indian Ocean during the war, when the British troopship SS Khedive Ismail was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine. The ship, carrying 1511 crew and passengers, sank rapidly, with 1297 men and women losing their lives. The majority were East African troops. Of seventy-seven servicewomen, just six survived. One of the dead was a South Australian, Sister Patricia Cashmore, who had sailed from Australia in 1939, planning an extended working holiday, and was in South Africa when the war started; she had subsequently joined the East African Military Nursing Service.

During April 1944, the crew of Gawler witnessed the aftermath of another tragedy, after a British merchantman carrying ammunition blew up in Bombay harbour. Eighteen merchant ships and three Indian warships were sunk or damaged beyond repair, and about

330 people were killed. Gawler arrived a week later, and supplied working parties to help in the clean up of the damaged dockyards and residential areas around the harbour.

In May 1944, the threat in the Indian Ocean declined markedly. Fewer Japanese and German patrols were being made, and the Allies had sunk or damaged several submarines and raiders. In late 1944, the Australian corvettes started returning to Australia, where they would be attached to the British Pacific Fleet.

Victory in Burma

After repelling the last Japanese offensive, the 14th Army maintained pressure on the enemy, even through the 1944 monsoon—during previous monsoons, both sides had ceased offensive operations. On the southern and central fronts, British, Indian and East African forces pushed towards the Chindwin River; on the northern front, American, Chinese and Kachin forces also advanced.

In the north, the Chindits were employed again, as the 2nd Long Range Penetration Group. Some Australians flew in support of the advance on Moguang, including transport aircrews. Flying Officer Richard Ridoutt, No. 117 Squadron, recalled flying in troops, mules and drums of petrol on night sorties over a ten-day period:

... a number of airstrips were hacked out of the jungle and ... we landed by moonlight on these strips. We were never quite sure whether the Japs were in charge of the strip or whether the Brits were in charge of the strip where we landed. They were so close, the Japanese would attack them during the day and take it over and then the British would counter-attack during the afternoon, so we could come in and land by night.

Others went in on the ground as air liaison officers. Most of the latter had flown operationally, such as Flight Lieutenant LG George, who had piloted Blenheims and now manned a communications post in contact with ground attack aircraft. Another was Flight Lieutenant AC Roberts, who had flown Hurricanes and now was a forward observation officer moving with the Chindits, advising aircraft of targets.

The forces in the south made two thrusts across difficult country to reach the Chindwin River. Despite foul weather, RAF squadrons flew in support of this offensive on every day

of the 1944 monsoon except for one. Not all squadrons could be employed, as there was a shortage of all-weather airfields in the forward areas. This enabled the withdrawal of seventeen squadrons to re-equip with better aircraft, with nine Hurricane squadrons receiving Thunderbolts to be flown also in the fighter-bomber role, four Vengeance dive-bomber squadrons converting to Mosquito light bombers, and two Wellington medium bomber squadrons converting to Liberator heavy bombers. All would be ready for the main offensive in the dry season.

For squadrons still flying, monsoonal weather imposed severe tests on airmanship. Cloud, with rain squalls and heavy winds, often blanketed areas. The slightest error in piloting or navigation could result in an aircraft spinning out of control or slamming into a mountain. In one of the worst instances, on 10 August 1944 sixteen Spitfires of No. 615 Squadron entered a violent storm, and eight crashed; four pilots were killed, including three Australians—Squadron Leader David McCormack DFC & Bar, Flying Officer MTW Pain and Warrant Officer AL Chappell. Another who experienced the drama of losing control was Flight Lieutenant Ern Frost, flying in a Hurricane:

When it happened I was probably at about 8000 feet, I suppose. Well I lost a hell of a lot of height in this inverted spin and I thought, 'Jesus, I must be falling a fair way', and I decided to go over the side. I don't know what height it would've been but I wasn't in the 'chute for very long ... It was one of those things, I had to make the decision: do I stay with the aircraft or do I get out? Well it went through my mind 'there's no way I'm going to stabilise this', I was upside down and I didn't know where I was and I was losing height, and the longer I stayed there the less chance I had.

Fortunately, Frost was over Allied territory. He parachuted out safely and was picked up and delivered back to his squadron.

The number of Australian airmen serving in South-East Asia Command reached a peak in July 1944, with 1091 airmen on strength, of whom 590 were in operational squadrons. This was partly due to the formation of several more Liberator squadrons, which were flown in strategic bombing, minelaying, maritime patrol and special duties missions. Their targets included Rangoon and Bangkok, and also the Burma–Thailand Railway, which had been completed by prisoner of war and slave labour in 1943. Japanese fighters could still be encountered over the target areas, and anti-aircraft fire also claimed a number of aircraft.

As Liberator bombers carried a crew of 10–12 men, casualties could be notable if just one or two aircraft were lost. For example, on 1 November 1944, a Liberator of No. 357 (Special Duties) Squadron failed to return from a sortie over the Burma–China border, and four Australians—Flight Lieutenants OS Shave DFC, SD Titterington DFC, RCJ Powell and AG Carlton—were among the experienced crew lost.

As the monsoon ended in November 1944, the Allied forces further stepped up their offensive in Burma, and air force squadrons were required to increase their attacks on Japanese bases, supply lines and forward positions. Increasingly, fighter-bomber pilots were called upon to provide close air support to British, Indian, African and other troops—softening up Japanese positions with precision bombing and strafing ahead of infantry attacks on them. In addition, transport squadrons flying Dakotas were called upon to drop supplies and parachutists over the forward areas.

In December, the final Arakan offensive began, with a British–Indian thrust along the coast of Burma. This opened up the possibility of naval support, and several Australian destroyers were called in for this role. These included HMA Ships *Napier* and *Nepal*, which formed part of the fleet supporting the 74th Indian Brigade’s advance. On 14 December, sitting off the village of Thabyndaw, *Nepal* engaged the enemy for the first time in the war, with the commanding officer reporting that ‘the largest Australian flag was displayed at the foremast and the first round went off with a cheer’. Next afternoon, *Napier* and *Nepal* shelled enemy positions again and, at the request of the army, returned after dark to continue shelling. The destroyers took turns returning to Chittagong to refuel, and each engaged more targets.

The advance was more successful than anticipated, and plans to capture Akyab were brought forward. On 2 January 1945, *Napier* and *Nepal* embarked more than 400 troops each and, with an assortment of other craft loaded with troops, arrived off the island. *Napier*, as Headquarters Ship, stayed in visual signal touch with the flotilla of landing craft taking the troops ashore, while *Nepal* patrolled off the harbour. Lieutenant-Commander JM Ramsay, RAN, of *Napier*, claimed the honour of being the first into Akyab township; he was landed from a motor launch, found no sign of life, and raised a small Union Jack up a telegraph pole on the wharf. This operation was followed by another successful assault on Myebon, in which *Napier* took part.

These amphibious operations preceded a larger operation to capture Ramree Island. The plan was to take the northern part of the island and construct airfields so that transport aircraft could maintain troops during the 1945 monsoon season. On the night of 20 January the assault convoy sailed from Chittagong, with Napier carrying the Admiral's Flag, and early on the following day the warships bombarded Japanese defences. Napier was one of several ships engaging gun positions, which were also bombed and strafed by Liberators and Thunderbolts. Also taking part in this action was HMAS Norman, which was part of the escort screen for an aircraft carrier. On reaching the forward area, Norman stood by, but was not required to engage enemy positions. After returning to Akyab for refuelling, Norman and Nepal were allotted to support another landing at Cheduba Island, just beyond Ramree Island, and this time Norman helped soften up the Japanese defences.

The Australian destroyers were pulled out of the Burma campaign shortly afterwards, and headed home, where they joined the British Pacific Fleet. The last to see action in the campaign was Nepal, which engaged enemy positions in the first days of February 1945.

Further north, Allied forces crossed the Irrawaddy River during January–February 1945, with almost continual support from the air forces. Thunderbolt pilots were engaged in many 'cab-rank' sorties, in which they circled the battlefield ready to be called in by the army to attack enemy positions. Other aircrews continued attacking enemy positions and the supply lines and bases. Missions included long-range bombing sorties by Liberators, out as far as Sumatra.

The Allied advance on Rangoon became a race against the monsoon. Heavy fighting for the city was expected, but in the end the capture of Rangoon proved to be an anti-climax. The Japanese withdrew on 25 April 1945, although this was not immediately apparent to the Allied forces. As well as the land advance, a fleet was approaching the city. Early on 1 May, a pilot flying over the city reported that there was a sign on the roof of Rangoon Gaol saying that the Japanese had gone. They had taken many of the prisoners of war held there since 1942, but left many behind. The senior officer among the prisoners of war, Wing Commander Lionel Hudson, RAAF, ordered the signs painted on the roofs; he was keen to avoid Allied bombs hitting the gaol, which had been hit a number of times over the previous three years, killing dozens of prisoners of war, including one Australian airman, Flying Officer KM White of No. 62 Squadron. Not until the following day was the message taken seriously, and bombing of the city ceased. The liberation of Rangoon was completed by 5 May 1945.

Early in 1945, the Indian Army had requested some Australian officers to serve in the theatre as jungle warfare instructors, as a British mission to New Guinea had concluded that the Australian Army had done especially well in adapting to jungle warfare. Several officers were dispatched, but few, if any, had reached combatant units in Burma by this stage of the campaign.

With the war in Europe having ended on 8 May, the Australian Government ordered that all RAAF aircrews serving overseas, including those in South-East Asia Command, were to be 'replaced by RAF personnel as soon as possible'. This policy was implemented the following month, when there were just short of 1000 Australian airmen in the theatre. The first to be withdrawn in June were fighter pilots, who were still supporting the army in the mopping-up battles that followed the capture of Rangoon; they were followed by heavy bomber crews, and then transport crews. Most were stuck in India until the end of September 1945, when a draft of 595 men sailed for home, followed by another 255 men in December. Others drafts followed, with the last twelve men, being members of the closed-down Liaison Office, departing in February 1946.

The Burma campaign, which drew to a close with the war's end on 15 August 1945, was a long commitment for Australian forces. Whilst they were a distinct minority in Burma, Australians had been present in virtually every phase of the campaign. The cost exceeded 200 lives in the RAAF—on operations, or in non-operational flights back in India—with smaller numbers for the Australian Army and Royal Australian Navy. The dead rest in war cemeteries located in modern day Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Thailand, while those with no known grave are commemorated on the Singapore Memorial to the Missing or, for the Navy, the Plymouth Naval Memorial in England.

References

Most of the Allied countries that participated in the campaign have volumes of their official war histories that cover or touch on this campaign. The most comprehensive coverage is in the British official history, especially four volumes of S Woodburn Kirby's *War Against Japan*; there is also the Indian official history, with four volumes of *The Official History of Indian Armed Forces in the Second World War* dedicated to this campaign, and the United States armed forces official histories, especially the US Army's three volumes on China–Burma–India operations.

Australian official history volumes that have sections on Australians in the Burma campaign and in the Indian Ocean are: Douglas Gillison's *Royal Australian Air Force, 1939–1942* (Canberra, 1962); George Odgers' *Air War Against Japan, 1943–1945* (Canberra, 1957); G Hermon Gill's *Royal Australian Navy, 1939–1942* (Canberra, 1957); and Gill's *Royal Australian Navy, 1942–1945* (Canberra, 1968). The Australian War Memorial, which is the publisher of the official histories, has also made them available on their website: www.awm.gov.au

A good account of the campaign, from a commander's perspective, is Field Marshal Viscount (William) Slim's *Defeat Into Victory* (London, 1956). Louis Allen's *Burma: The Longest War* (London, 1984) has long been considered a standard text, by a veteran of the campaign. There are also Raymond Callahan's *Burma 1942–1945* (London, 1978); Donovan Webster's *The Burma Road: The Epic Story of the China–Burma–India Theater in World War II* (New York, 2004); and Jon Latimer's *Burma: The Forgotten War* (London, 2005).

The British and Indian armies' experience of jungle warfare in Burma is explained in Tim Moreman's *The Jungle, The Japanese and the British Commonwealth Armies at War, 1941–45: Fighting Methods, Doctrine and Training for Jungle Warfare* (London, 2002). This book includes a good explanation of the campaign, as well as jungle warfare in Malaya and New Guinea. One of a number of books on the air war is Air Commodore Henry Probert's *The Forgotten Air Force: History of the RAF in the War Against Japan* (London, 1995).

A number of memoirs by Australians who served in Burma or in the Indian Ocean have been published. Those from which quotes were drawn in this book are Harvey Besley's *Pilot, Prisoner, Survivor: Six Years in Uniform* (Toowoomba, 1986) and MC 'Bush' Cotton's *Hurricanes Over Burma* (Bathurst, 1995). Also of interest are some of the naval unit histories, especially those of corvettes and of the 'N' Class destroyers, while William Noonan's *Lost Legion: Mission 204 and the Reluctant Dragon* (Sydney, 1987) tells the story of the Australians in Tulip Force.

Another source of personal stories is the Australians at War Film Archive (www.australiansatwarfilmarchive.gov.au). Several quotes in this book were drawn from this archive, including those of Vince Cesari, Ern Frost, Reginald Lewis, David Nesbitt, Richard Ridoutt, William Storey and Robert Swift.





A Catalina flying boat of No. 205 Squadron, prepared for a long-range patrol over the Indian Ocean a few months before Japan's entry into the war. (Australian War Memorial [AWM] image 009456)



Soldiers of Military Mission 204 prepare to leave the Bush Warfare School at Maymyo, Burma, for China, in January 1942. The intention was to instruct the Chinese in guerrilla warfare.

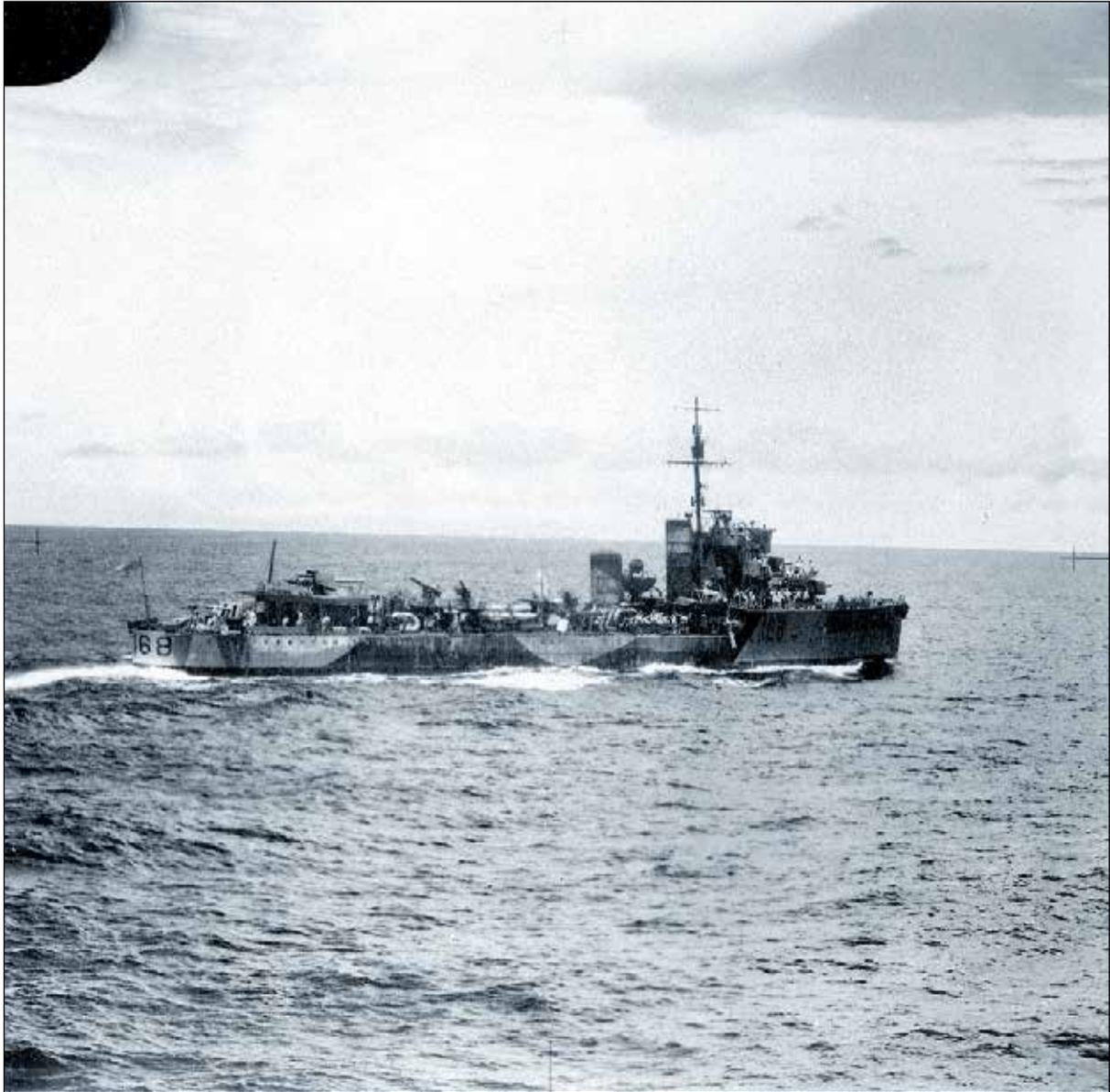
(AWM P00765.001)



Troops of the 7th Division, Australian Imperial Force (AIF), returning from the Middle East in February 1942, are welcomed by the Ceylon Tea Propaganda Board. Thousands of Australians passed through Indian ports during the world wars. (AWM 030137/04)



Members of Military Mission 204, during their long road journey into China, right 44-gallon petrol drums to be reloaded onto a truck that had overturned. (AWM P00765.002)

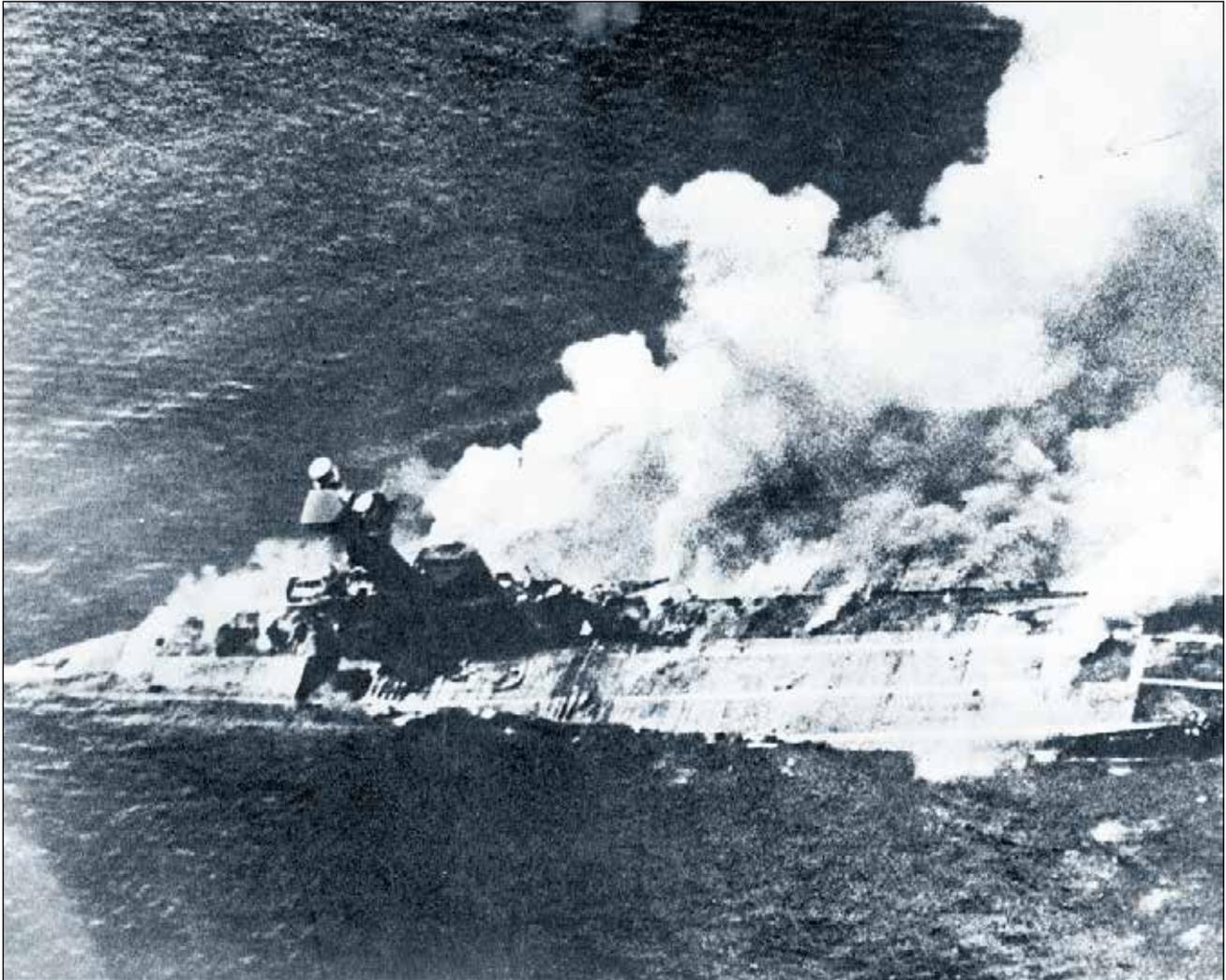


The destroyer HMAS Vampire in the Indian Ocean on 4 April 1942, five days before she was sunk in the Bay of Bengal while escorting the British aircraft carrier HMS Hermes.

(AWM 301604)



During the retreat across Burma in early 1942, aircrew of No. 60 Squadron pack suitcases ahead of their evacuation. The man standing at left, wearing a cap, is Phil Graebner, observer, and kneeling at the suitcases are Cliff Briggs and Ken Gardiner, air gunners. (AWM P02028.024)



HMS Hermes sinks on 9 April 1942. She was attacked and struck about forty times by Japanese naval aircraft. Roughly half the ship's complement was killed, including Lieutenant Rex Close, Royal Australian Naval Volunteer Reserve, 37 years old, from Bellerive, Tasmania. (AWM 302403)



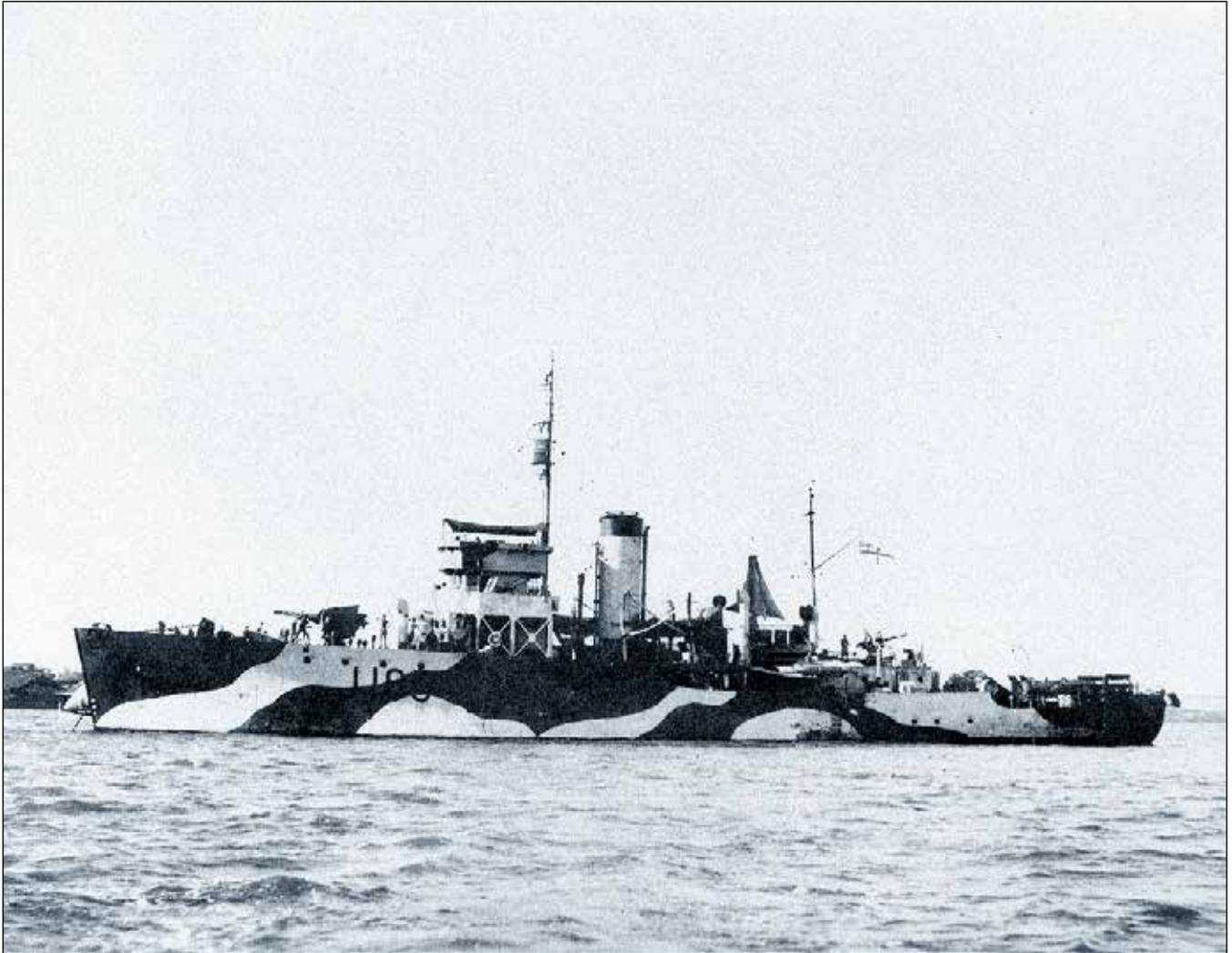
Troops of either the 16th or 17th Brigades, 6th Division, AIF, lined up on 'Sunshine Parade' on Katukurunda aerodrome, Ceylon, June 1942. They spent five months on the island, constructing defences and training in 'jungle warfare', before going on to serve in New Guinea. (AWM 064678)



Off Akyab, Burma, in November 1942, Blenheims of No. 60 Squadron level out for a mast-head attack on a Japanese coaster. (AWM 128141)



Shell Oil Company representatives inspect part of the bullet-riddled mast of the company's tanker Ondina. Attacked by Japanese raiders in the Indian Ocean on 11 November 1942, the badly damaged ship was abandoned but stayed afloat. The crew reboarded the vessel and sailed back to Fremantle. (AWM 042449)



The corvette HMAS Maryborough, anchored off Cochin, India, in December 1942. She spent several months escorting shipping between Colombo, Bombay and the Persian Gulf before heading to the Mediterranean in early 1943. She later returned and spent another year on convoy escorts before moving on to the Pacific. (AWM 300996)



Four Australian pilots of No. 79 Squadron pose with a Hurricane adorned with a kookaburra motif. From left: Warrant Officer GE Hopwood and Flying Officers RK Love, RL North and BP Bidstrup. (AWM SUK12309)



Able Seaman RA Rickard of the corvette HMAS Tamworth shoulders the Lee Enfield rifle of Constable Mallawa of the Ceylon Police Force. (AWM 304680)

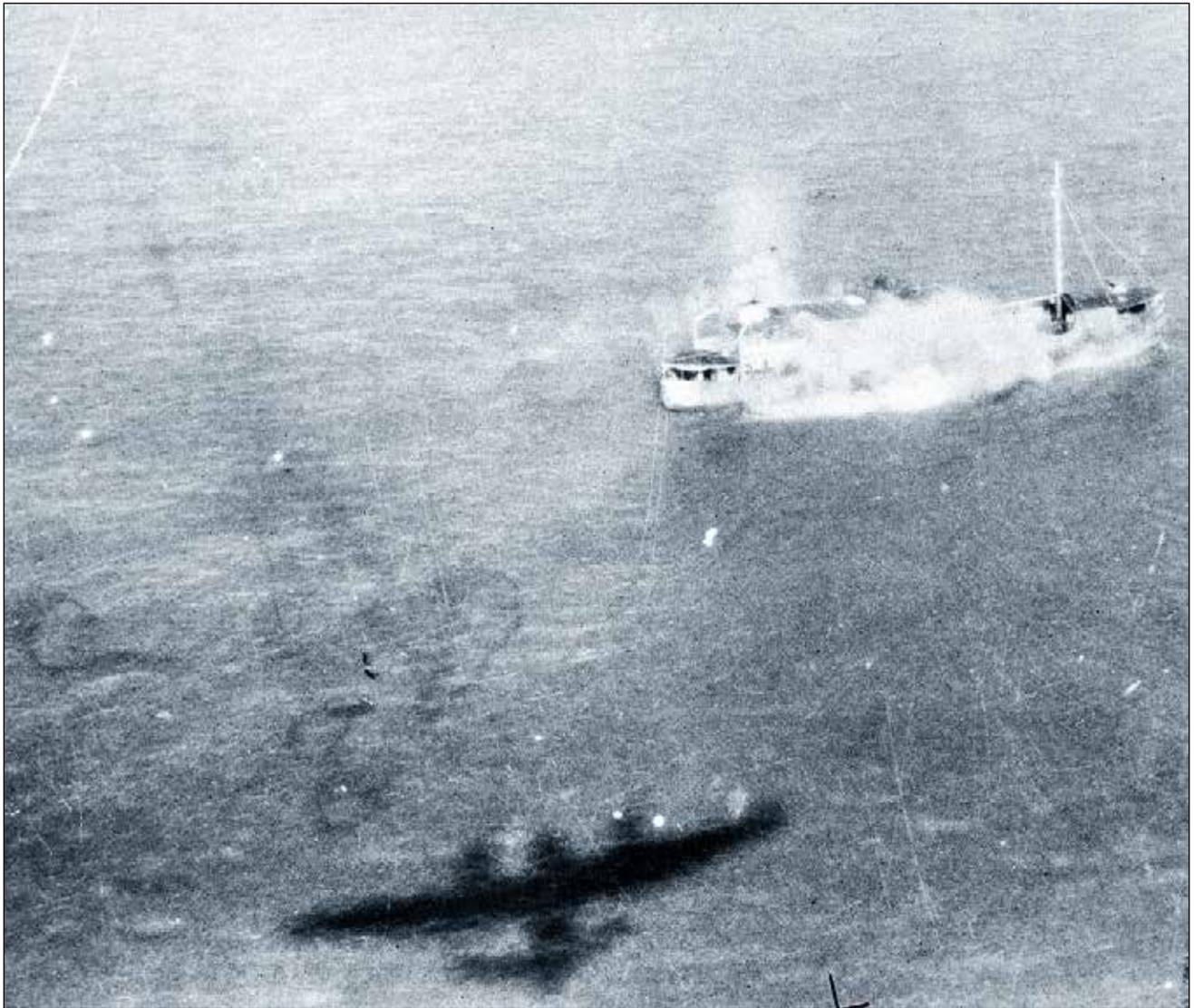


A Hurricane dives on the Tiddim Road, Burma, while attacking a bridge. Armed with four cannons and with a 250 lb [115 kg] bomb slung underneath each wing, 'Hurribombers' flew far and wide over the forward area, attacking enemy transport and troop positions.

(AWM SUK13215A)



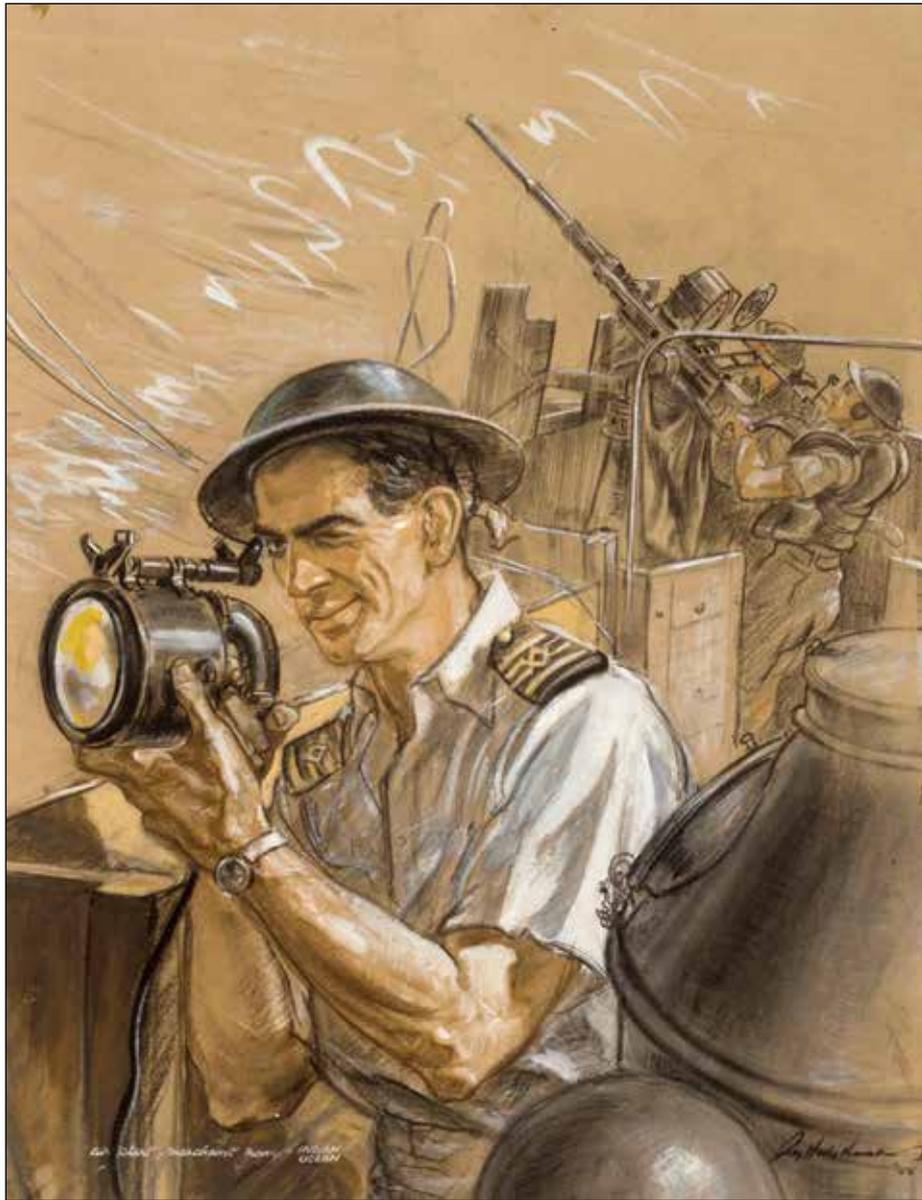
British ground staff of No. 607 Squadron manhandle a Spitfire bogged just off the runway at Palel, Manipur, India, during the 1944 monsoon. (AWM P02491.354)



The shadow of a Beaufighter slides across the sea during an attack on a Japanese merchant vessel off Elephant Point, Burma, in mid-1944. Cannon shells can be seen bursting along the hull. (AWM SUK12576)



The funeral for RAAF Warrant Officer Keith Knodler of No. 30 Squadron at Bangalore, India. An experienced pilot, he was killed in a flying accident on 14 August 1944, at the age of twenty-one, while his squadron was converting from 'Hurribombers' to new Thunderbolt fighter-bombers. (AWM P02490.001)



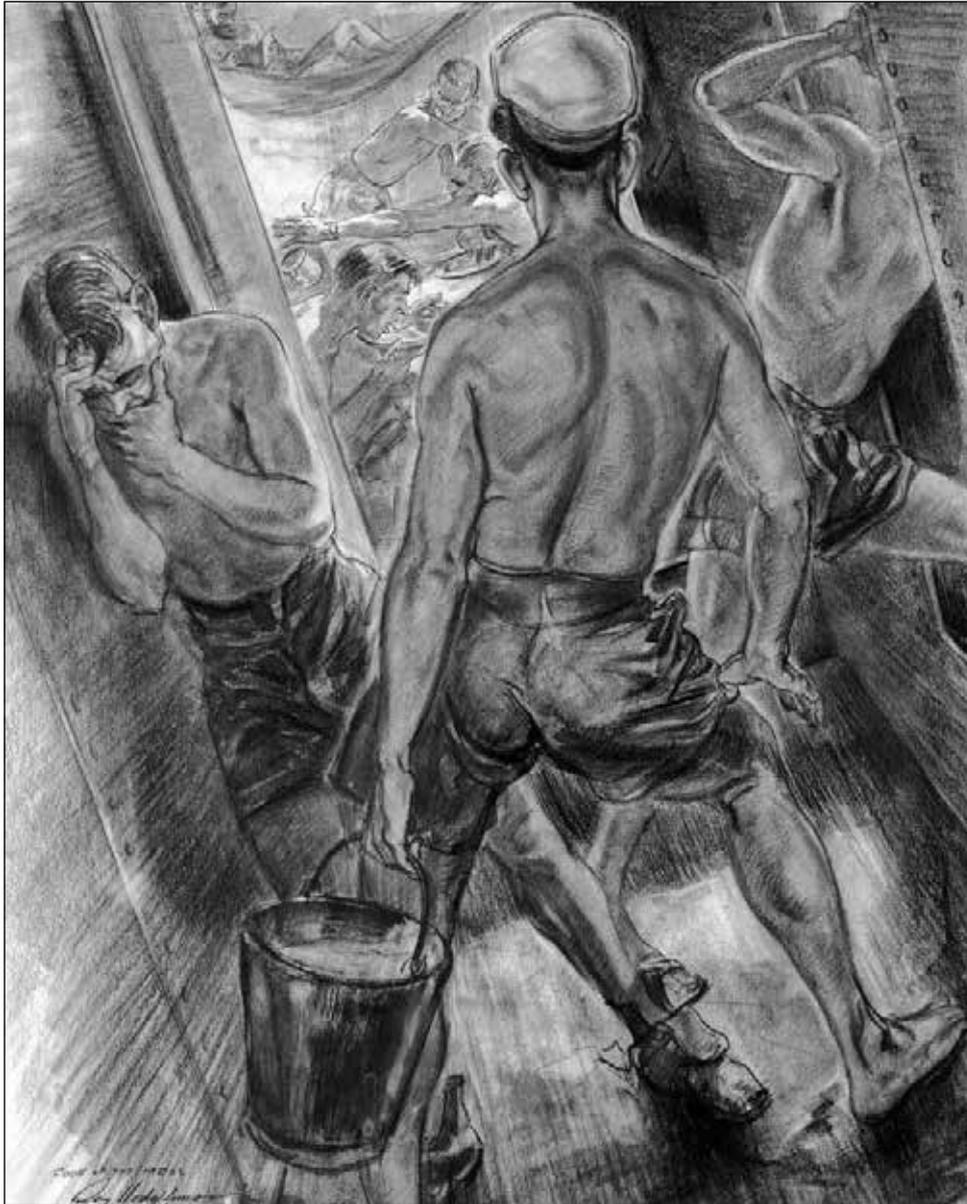
Bridge, MS Bardistan (Captain William Ellis), by Roy Hodgkinson, 1944, Indian Ocean: charcoal with coloured crayons heightened with white, 41.6 x 32.2 cm. Ellis uses an Aldis lamp to signal another ship at sea. (AWM ART23150)



Souvenir hunters, by Roy Hodgkinson, 1944, Ceylon: charcoal, 49.9 x 60.1 cm. Sailors on leave in market area, Columbo, Ceylon. ([AWM ART22772](#))



Corvettes in Colombo Harbour, by Frank Norton, January 1944, Ceylon: pen and black ink, brush and wash on paper, 20.9 x 29 cm. In harbour at the time were HMA Ships Lismore, Cairns, Launceston and Ipswich, of the 21st Minesweeping Flotilla. (AWM ART21097)



Rough going in an Australian corvette, by Roy Hodgkinson, 1944, Ceylon: coloured crayons, 48.4 x 40.6 cm. This drawing was made in Colombo, Ceylon, after Hodgkinson was sent to India to record the experiences of Australians in this campaign. ([AWM ART22773](#))



Australian Navigator (Pilot Officer Alan Stephens), by William Dargie, 1944: oil on canvas on wood panel, 58.2 x 42.6 cm. Stephens was serving in No. 215 Squadron, RAF, flying in Liberators, when he sat for Dargie; he had also flown in Blenheims with No. 34 Squadron and Liberators with Nos 355 and 159 Squadrons. (AWM ART23580)



An all-Australian bomber crew of No. 99 Squadron, which was flying Wellingtons from a base in India. From left: Flight Sergeants RNB McIntyre, HT O'Neill and S Elliott, Warrant Officer RA Innes and Flight Sergeant MG Carmody. (AWM SUK11770)

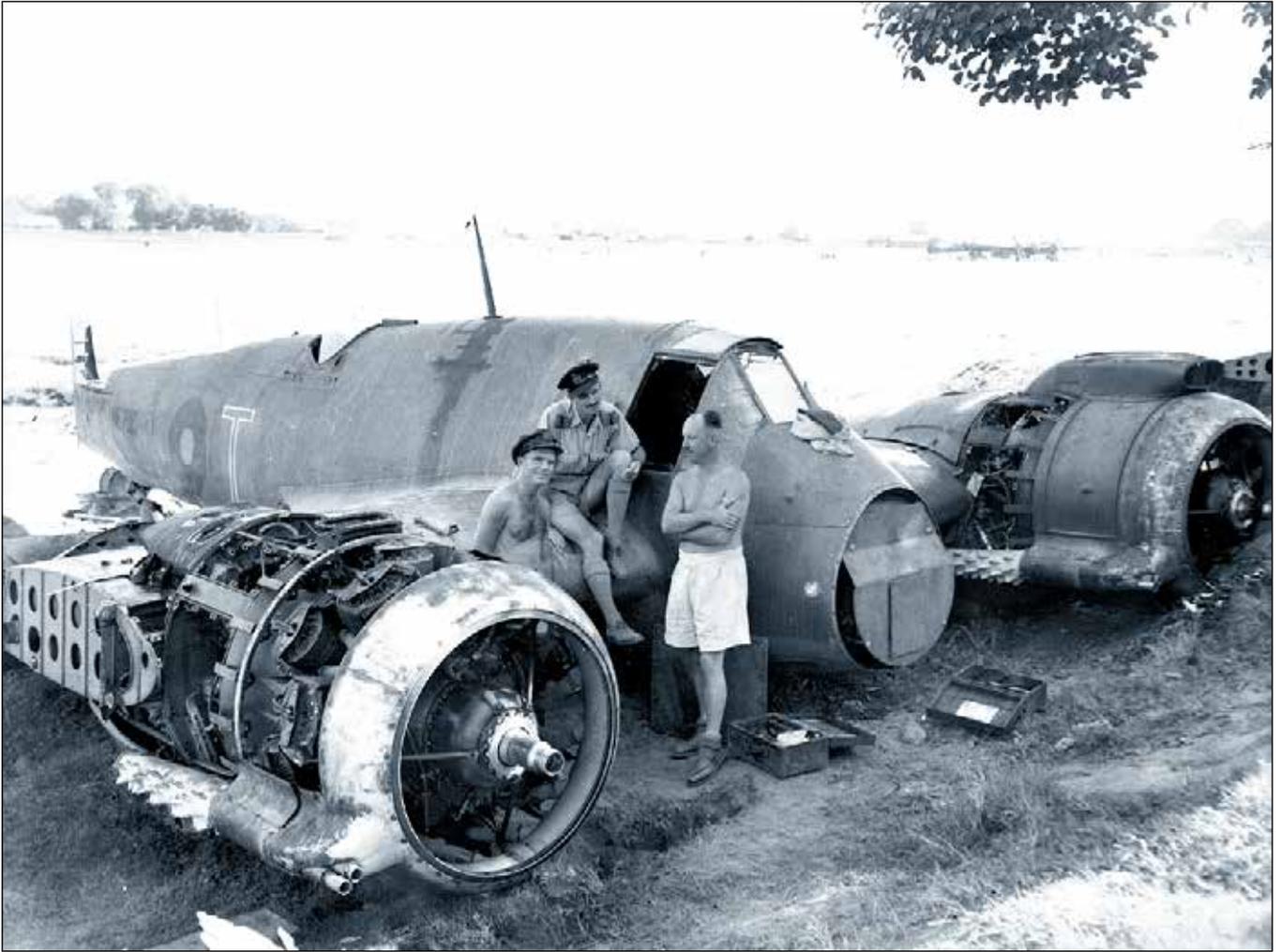


Warrant Officer Reg Postle, No. 356 Squadron, lights a cigarette for his cousin, Warrant Officer Jim Postle, No. 355 Squadron, at Salbani, India, after a bombing raid. The Queenslanders were both W/AGs (wireless/air gunners) flying in Liberator bombers.

(AWM SEA0014)



RAAF Warrant Officer FJ 'Honk' Kevin of No. 258 Squadron taxis his Thunderbolt to a dispersal bay at Ratnapalong in the Arakan, Burma, December 1944. He was mostly flying ground attack sorties. (AWM SEA0046)



Three airmen and a 'cannibalised' Beaufighter at Chiringa in the Arakan, Burma, December 1944. Left to right: Flying Officer Thomson of No. 27 Squadron, which specialised in ground attack, Flight Lieutenant Ferguson of No. 176 Squadron, which operated as night-fighters, and Flight Lieutenant OE Simpson, RAF. Thomson and Ferguson were members of the RAAF.

(AWM SEA0052)



RAAF Pilot Officer Gordon Webb of No. 34 Squadron uses a portable typewriter on which he wrote travel articles in his spare time. He was based at Assam, India, flying Hurricanes in late 1944. (AWM SEA0055)



In a shot that appears to have been posed for publicity purposes, RAAF Warrant Officer Bill Wells of No. 681 Squadron is met at Calcutta, India, by British ground staff who remove cameras and film magazines from the Australian's Spitfire on his return from a reconnaissance sortie. (AWM SEA0065)



RAAF Flying Officers Norman Bain and Dudley Eve of No. 45 Squadron sabotage their Blenheim bomber after ditching into the Irrawaddy River in February 1942. The all-Australian crew, which also included Flying Officer George Kemp, lost two aircraft in the space of a week.

(State Library of Victoria Argus newspaper image an012125)



Two Australians assist Ghurkha troops with their harnesses during parachute training in Burma. Flight Sergeant JC 'Jack' Mayo of No. 62 Squadron, at left, and Flight Sergeant Ivor Evans of No. 436 Squadron, Royal Canadian Air Force, squatting, were seconded as jumpmasters for the Ghurkhas' first airborne operation in January 1945. (AWM P02018.400)



RAAF Flying Officers DG Goodall and FW Johnston of No. 22 Squadron run for shelter during a sudden shower at Kumbhirgram, Assam, India, in January 1945. One of the squadron's Beaufighters is behind them. (AWM SEA0070)



RAAF Flight Lieutenant Jack Nankervis of No. 45 Squadron climbs into a Mosquito at Kumbhirgram, Assam, India, in January 1945. (AWM SEA0082)



Australians of No. 45 Squadron at tiffin (lunch) at Kumbhirgram, Assam, India, in January 1945. Seated, from closest to camera: Flying Officer Pete Ewing, Flight Lieutenants Herb Wilson and Arthur Huon, and Flying Officers HM Nicholls and JO 'Joe' Cartledge. Ewing, Nicholls and Cartledge would each be awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. (AWM SEA0088)



Australian members of a Liberator crew of No. 99 Squadron return to Bengal, India, from a long-range night bombing raid in Burma. From left: Flying Officers Matt Adam, bomb aimer, Alex Clouston, navigator, and Don Ludbey, pilot. (AWM SEA0113)



RAAF Flying Officer Colin Woolford, a navigator in No. 99 Squadron, washes in a portable canvas bath outside his quarters at Dhubalia, Bengal, India, after a raid on 13 January 1945. Eight days later, Woolford and the eight Englishmen and two Scotsmen in his crew were killed in a collision over the Bay of Bengal. Two Australians were among the twelve killed in the other Liberator. (AWM SEA0107)



Sailors of the destroyer HMAS Napier pose with a Japanese 37 mm gun captured by Royal Marines whom the Australians had transported and supported in a landing at Myebon, Burma, in January 1945. ([State Library of Victoria Argus newspaper collection image an014726](#))



Leading Aircraftmen JA 'Snow' Wardlaw (left) and HK 'Johnno' Johnston, of the RAAF Liaison Office, India, remove their shoes before entering the Taj Mahal, Agra, India, while sightseeing in February 1945. (AWM SEA0138)



The RAAF XI cricket team which played the second South-East Asia Command England–Australia test at New Delhi, India, in February 1945. The Australians lost their first encounter in 1944, but on this occasion won by ten wickets. They were led by a former test captain, Flight Lieutenant Vic Richardson, who had played nineteen test matches for Australia during 1924–36, including five as captain of the 1935–36 tour of South Africa. (AWM SEA0130)

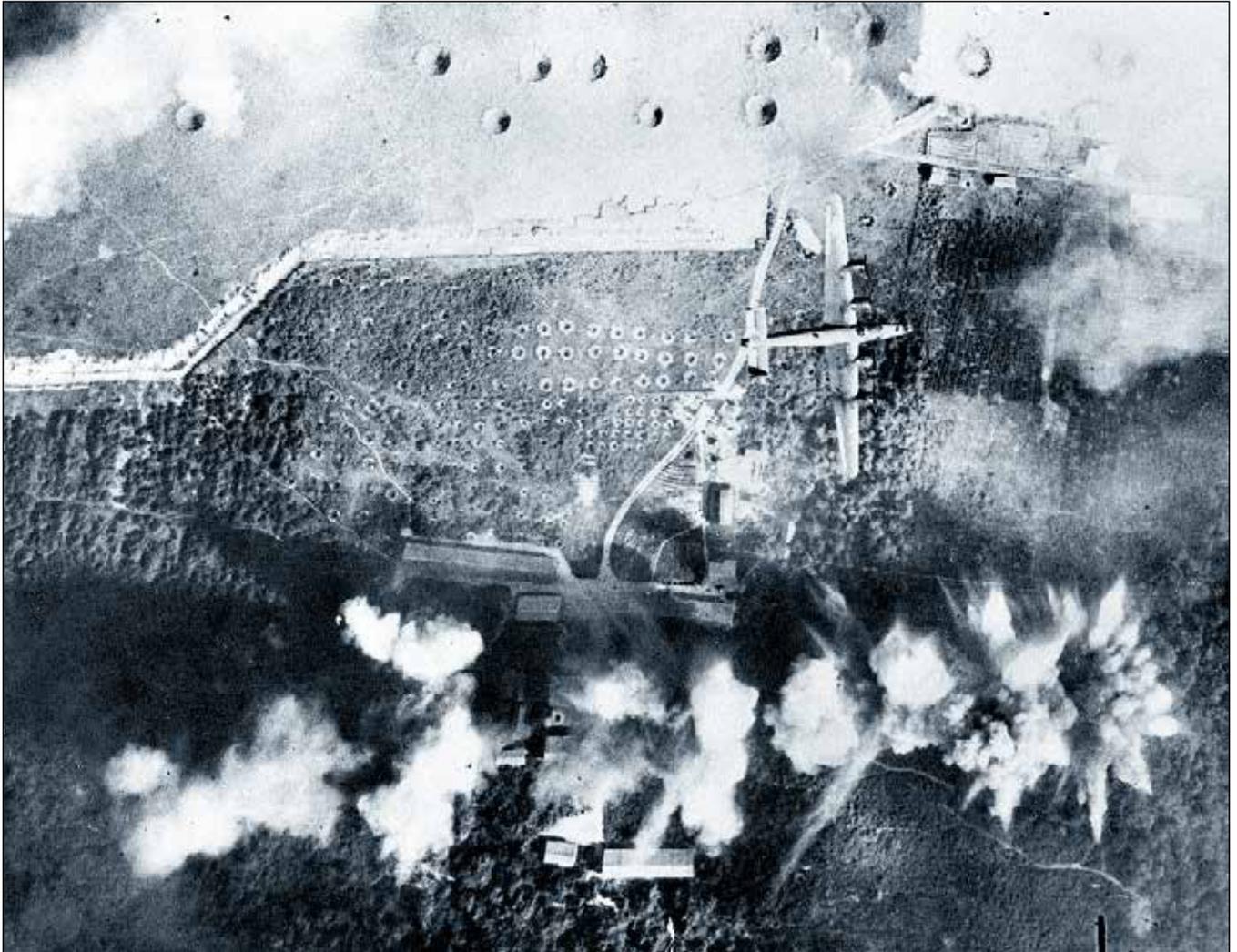


A motorcycle makes a convenient map table for a British Army air liaison officer (centre) to show the drop zone to RAAF Flying Officer Don Wilson (left) and Flight Lieutenant Duncan Robertson, the Operations Officer of No. 117 Squadron. (AWM SEA0150)

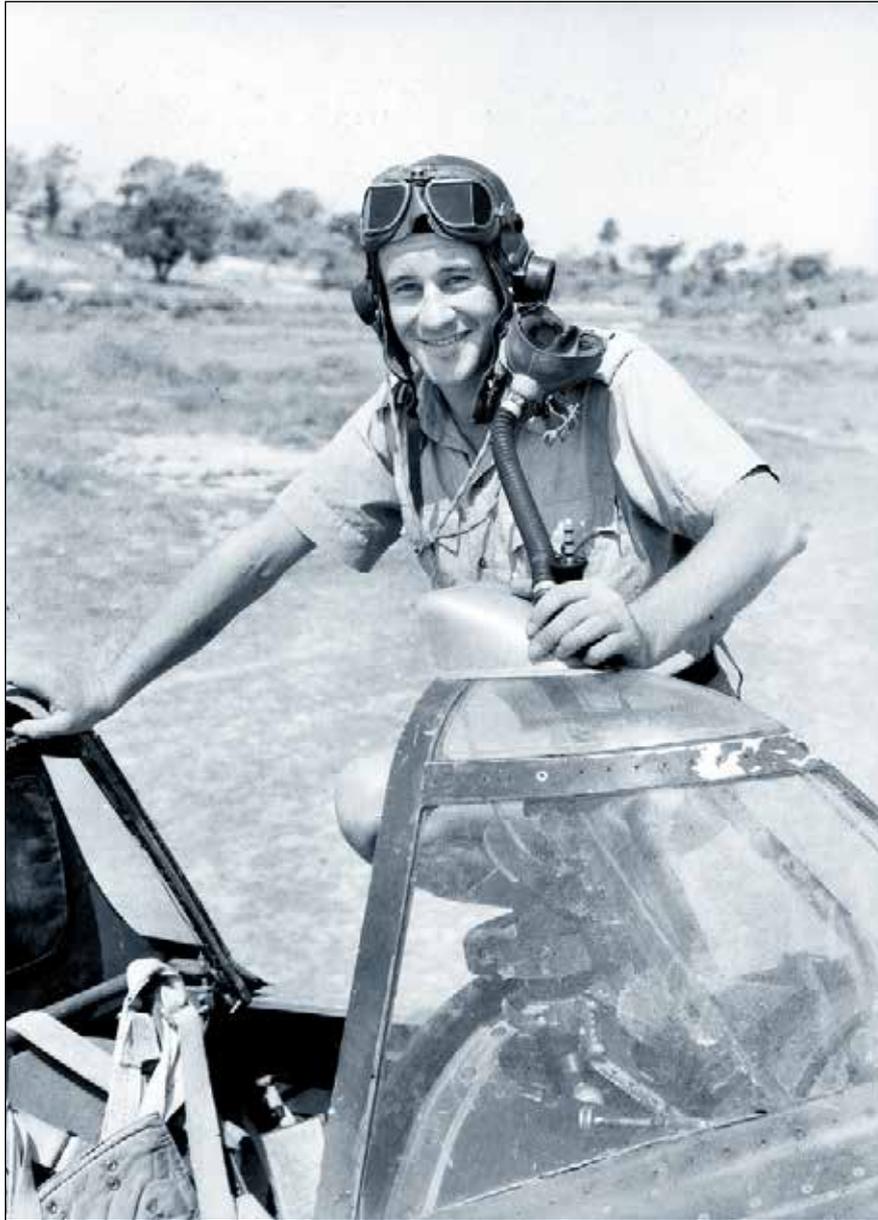


Two Australians inspect bomb-blasted buildings in Monywa, central Burma, in March 1945, during the final Allied advance across Burma. From left: Flying Officer JR Wolfe, RAAF Public Relations photographer, and Warrant Officer Lawrence Benfield, pilot of No. 60 Squadron.

(AWM SEA0185)



A Liberator bomber of the RAF flies over railway sidings at Na Nien, Siam (Thailand), on 19 March 1945, after earlier aircraft had dropped their bombs over the target area. This long-range mission from bases in Burma took some seventeen hours, flying about 4000 kilometres. (AWM P02491.310)



RAAF Flying Officer Jim Oliff of No. 123 Squadron climbs into the cockpit of his Thunderbolt fighter-bomber. Flying mostly close air support of ground forces, he was subsequently decorated with the Distinguished Flying Cross. (AWM SEA0199)



RAAF Warrant Officers John and Alf Payne of No. 615 Squadron play chess at an airfield in Burma in March 1945. The twins managed to enlist, train and serve together. One was shot down during the Burma campaign, but he returned safely, and both survived the war.

(AWM SUK14088)



Australian actress Marie Burke sings to air force personnel, including Australians, at a forward airstrip in Burma in April 1945. (AWM P02491.027)



Flying Officer WE Walsh, a navigator in No. 229 Group of Transport Command, navigates during a crossing of 'the Hump'. These flights, delivering supplies to China, were made at high altitude to clear the Himalayas, necessitating the use of oxygen masks. (AWM SUK14224)



Dropping supplies by parachute (Flying Officer Francis Hudson and Pilot Officer William Gerard), by Roy Hodgkinson, 1945: crayon, 51 x 66 cm. Hudson and Gerard were serving in No. 117 Squadron, RAF, and were depicted pushing supplies out of a Dakota. ([AWM ART24310](#))



Navigator in Catalina (Flying Officer William Lynch), by Roy Hodgkinson, 1945: crayon heightened with white and with sanguine conte crayon, 50.2 x 38.8 cm. Lynch was serving in No. 205 Squadron, RAF, based at Koggala, Ceylon, which conducted anti-submarine patrols, air-sea rescues, and occasional courier flights to Australia. (AWM ART23166)



Pilot in cockpit of Thunderbolt (Warrant Officer Russell Precians), by William Dargie, 1945: oil on canvas on hardboard, 45.5 x 39.2 cm. Precians was serving in No. 258 Squadron.

(AWM ART22390)



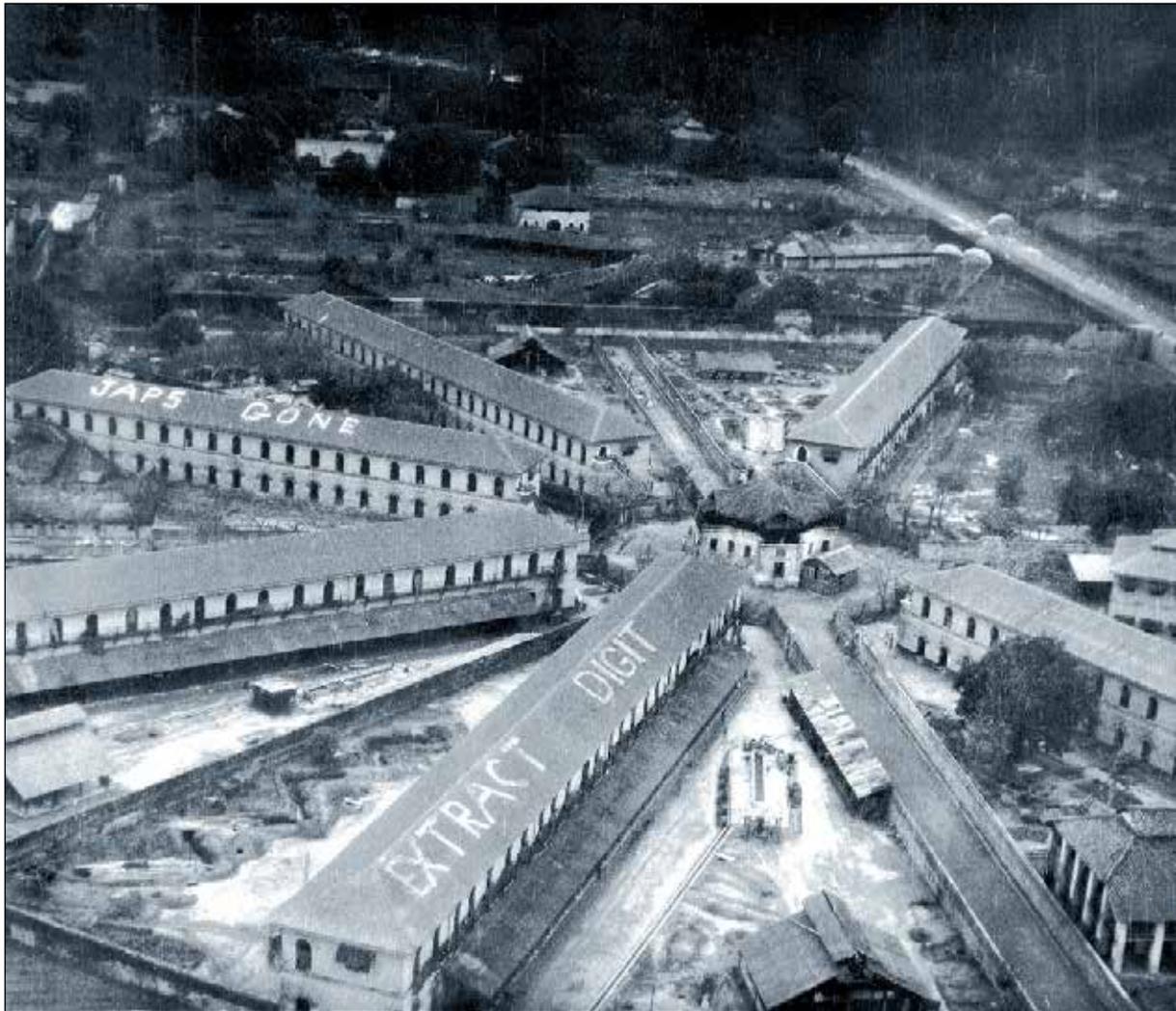
Australian pilot tests his engine and controls (Flight Lieutenant James Franks), by William Dargie, 1945: oil on canvas on hardboard, 39.2 x 45.4 cm. Franks, depicted with a member of his British ground crew, was serving in No. 134 Squadron, flying Thunderbolts. ([AWM ART22388](#))



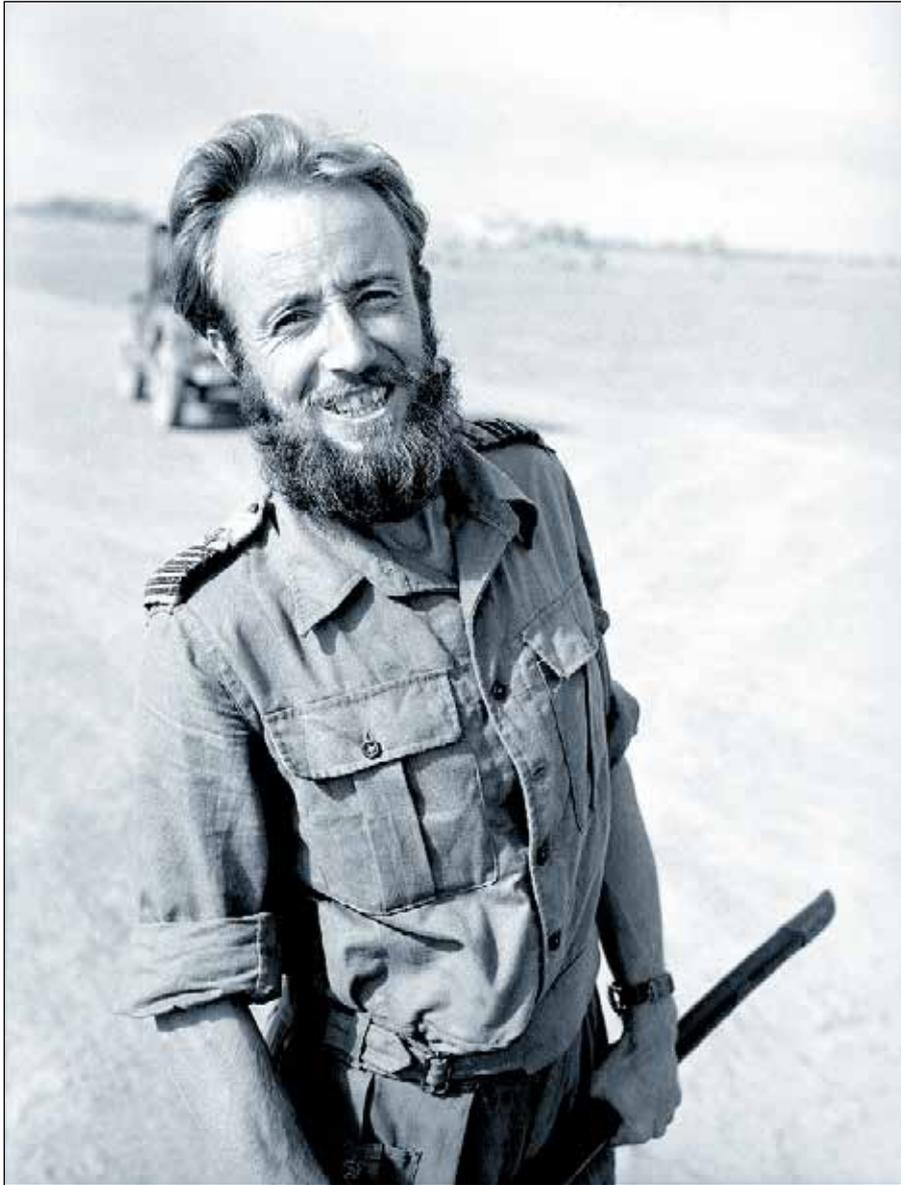
Wing Commander William McLean, by Roy Hodgkinson, 1945: coloured crayons, 32.4 x 47.3 cm. McLean commanded No. 117 Squadron, flying Dakota transports in support of Allied troops. He was decorated with the Air Force Cross, then the Distinguished Flying Cross, and lastly the Distinguished Service Order, for his service in Burma. ([AWM ART24267](#))



Incident during monsoon, Kyaukpyu (Squadron Leader Terence Roberts and Flying Officer Owen Sanders), by Roy Hodgkinson, 1945: crayon and charcoal with wash, 51 x 68.3 cm. Roberts, who was decorated with the Air Force Cross, and Sanders were flying Dakota transports with No. 117 Squadron. ([AWM ART24312](#))



Rangoon Gaol, where many Allied soldiers and airmen captured in Burma were held. After Rangoon was abandoned by the Japanese in early May 1945, the prisoners painted 'Japs Gone' and 'Extract Digit' on the rooftops to advise that there was no need to attack Rangoon and that the Allies should hurry to rescue the prisoners, some of whom ran out to wave at the Liberator bombers that dropped food and medical supplies. (AWM P02491.065)



Perhaps the best-known Australian prisoner of war released at Rangoon was Wing Commander LV 'Bill' Hudson. He was commanding No. 82 Squadron when he crashed behind enemy lines in December 1944. He was a relative newcomer, as many of the inmates, including a few of the Australians, had been imprisoned there since 1942. (AWM SEA0241)



Clowning around, Flying Officer JR Wolfe, RAAF Public Relations, tries a local custom during his assignment to record the activities of Australian airmen serving in the Burma campaign.

(AWM SEA0251)



A British war artist sketches an Australian serving in No. 152 (Hyderabad) Squadron, flying Spitfire fighters during May 1945. (AWM SUK14352)



Left to right: an Indian servant pours char (tea) for Corporal Bert 'Tony' Roach, Corporal Jim Dewar, Pilot Officer Rupert Osborne and Corporal Frank McKinnon. Roach, Dewar and McKinnon were with the RAAF Liaison Office in India, while Osborne was a pilot who went on to serve in No. 232 Squadron. (AWM SEA0124)



A multinational crew of No. 354 Squadron, flying Liberator bombers out of Ceylon on maritime patrol and bombing missions, returns from a 24-hour flight to Malaya. From left: Pilot Officer MM Ramsay, Flight Sergeants DF Mackie, RA Feather and SS Williams, Flying Officer WS Frey, Flight Lieutenant MP McKellar, Flying Officer P Carter and Flight Sergeant BT Glazebrook. Mackie and Feather were British, McKellar was Canadian, and the other five were Australian. (AWM SEA0271)



Australians who had served in India and Burma crowd the deck of the SS Sontay as it pulls into the wharf at Adelaide. They had sailed from Calcutta, India, on 17 October 1945, the first large contingent of Australians from South-East Asia Command to return after the end of the war. (AWM P02516.001)



Returning home from war service, Flight Lieutenant AE Graham of Melbourne meets his young son. Graham enlisted in November 1941 under the Empire Air Training Scheme, and returned home in late 1945, taking his discharge in early 1946. ([State Library of Victoria Argus newspaper collection image an014702](#))





Australian Government
Department of Veterans' Affairs

