

Bostons, or A-20 Havocs as they were known by the Americans, flew with distinction as low level bombers and strafers with the RAAF. A robust, reliable and fast aircraft (over 300 mph) some sixty-seven saw service with 22 Squadron in World War II.

Beloved and trusted by their Australian crews they became a legend with their hit and run raids. Creating havoc amongst the enemy these sorties became known as "Boston Tea Parties".

Equipped with four .303 machine-guns fixed in the nose, another two with the rear gunner, one in the ventral position (rear underside) and often a "stinger" in the tailcone, none were lost in aerial combat. Quite a few, however, were to be brought down by flak.

On 3 November, 1943, Wing Commander (later Air Vice Marshal) Bill Townsend, then C.O. of 22 Squadron, and his wireless/air gunner Flying Officer David McClymont, were shot down by anti-aircraft fire into the sea off New Britain. After an incident filled three months of evading capture they were finally evacuated with a group of other American airmen by the U.S.N. submarine GATO.

Palmal plantation in Jacquinot Bay, on the south-east coast of New Britain, was the target of the day. Five Bostons were participating in a combined operation which included Beaufighters from 30 Squadron and a fighter cover of Kittyhawks from No. 77.

Each of the Bostons carried four 500 lb bombs for the destruction of a bridge. The all Australian group had earlier departed Goodenough Island at dawn and arrived over the plantation at 7.20 a.m.

Wing Commander Townsend's Boston, No. A28-29, was hit during a straight 260 mph pass over Palmal. Ack ack fire passed through the open bomb bay doors and exploded just as he was about to press the bomb release.

Flying Officer McClymont, who was facing rearwards in the back of the aircraft, heard a heavy thud behind him and felt a sting in his left elbow. A twin barrel 25 m.m. gun to the west of the target was believed to have scored the crippling hit.

The auxiliary bomb bay fuel tank was afire and the hydraulic, wireless and electrical systems were out too. Fuel cocks and controls just disappeared. FO McClymont saw the blaze raging forward of him and tried without success to unclasp a fire extinguisher.

Clipping his chest parachute on he then noticed that the Boston was too low to jump. He thought they might climb but instead the aircraft sank lower and lower so he braced himself for the inevitable impact.

The speed of the bomber luckily carried it some five miles along the coast beyond the plantation. WCCDR

Townsend held the plane off the water until it completely stalled then let it settle on the surface without any flaps and with the bomb bay doors open.

It was a beautiful landing about 200 yards offshore from the village of Molocut. The tail touched first, the Boston aquaplaned for 150 yards and then plunged to a sudden stop.

Fortunately there was a reef only six to eight feet below the sea and the RAAF plane settled with some of the upper fuselage still above the surface. Had the aircraft continued a further ten yards towards the shore it would have sunk in deep water.

Bill climbed out the hatch in the top of the cockpit and met up with Dave on the port wing. They threw the Type K dinghy down beside them and it inflated by itself. (A line attached to the plane automatically operated a valve when the rubber boat was removed from storage).

Launched from the trailing edge of the wing care had to be taken not to tear the dinghy on some of the jagged holes caused by the groundfire. The RAAF men, as they were in full view of the enemy plantation, hastily climbed aboard and headed for the shoreline. Despite their urgency the cumbersome craft still took some fifteen minutes for the trip. On the way in they recovered Dave's floating binoculars and pith helmet but lost one of the glove-type paddles halfway.

Where the Boston crew came ashore there was no beach, only a low three foot embankment with overhanging trees. On landing they retrieved the dinghy cord fishing lines, a rubber basket, ground sheet, 84 ozs of D rations and seven small tins of emergency drinking water. The dinghy was deflated by

Later they were to learn that a native chanced upon it soon after their departure and re-hid the evidence further back in the jungle. Subsequently it was never located by the Japanese. This same New Guinean also covered the RAAF men's tracks and had then tried to overtake them to act as their guide. He planned to take them to his Luluai (chief) but was unable to follow their footprints when they reached ground covered with a thick layer of leaves.

The enemy soldiers, after searching the area, later suggested to the villagers that the "four" airmen must have been taken by sharks!

Bill and Dave, as soon as they touched solid ground, headed straight into the jungle at right angles to the shoreline. After only a hundred yards they encountered a new wooden bridge and a road. Sprinting quickly across this the pair re-entered the undergrowth and headed north-west, deliberately avoiding any native tracks sighted. During this time they found propaganda leaflets in Pidgin English that had been dropped earlier by allied aircraft. That day was spent climbing over a 1,000' range.

The first night in the jungle both men had a little of their emergency rations and then wrapped themselves in a groundsheet to try and keep warm. Each was sopping wet and to top this off it rained heavily until dawn.

Early next morning (4 November) they kept to their heading of north-west and found a small track but soon left it. That night the pair built a lean-to and tried to light a fire but the wood was too wet.

After the second day the Boston crew began to encounter moss forest and walking was much more difficult. Travelling along the ridges proved easier

than walking in the gullies. During the third day they thought they saw a native hut about a mile away. When the pair set off towards it the building could not be found.

It started raining in the mountains every afternoon about three even though this was the dry season on the south coast of New Britain. At that time the escapees would stop and build a small shelter for the night. This usually took some one and a half hours.

During the trek most of the streams were not flowing. Water was obtained from bamboo and pools along the creek beds. Food supplies were rationed to make them last as long as possible. Nothing could be found to eat in the jungle even though the Boston crew carried the survival booklet FRIENDLY FRUITS AND VEGETABLES.

Quinine, for malaria prevention, was taken regularly each day and iodine used on all their cuts to prevent infection. Mosquito repellent was initially applied to exposed skin though was found not necessary after the second day. Once the men ascended to altitude in the high country these insects did not bother them.

On the sixth day (8 November) Bill and Dave scrambled down the side of a very steep mountain and found a wide dry rocky creek bed below. This they followed southward for 2½ days before encountering a four hundred foot waterfall. The pool at the base provided an ideal place for their first real bath and clothes wash.

An abundance of dry driftwood was nearby and used to light a fire and boil the billy. Small speckled fish 3" or 4" long swam around but the Australians were unable to catch them. They also tried boiling wild taro, both leaves and bulbs, but the end result was completely unpalatable.

On 13 November the pair discovered an overgrown native garden from which more than a hundred bananas and a few pawpaws were recovered. All were green but Bill and Dave didn't worry as they planned to cook them before eating. In part payment a razor blade (a valuable trade item in the islands) was left stuck in the trunk of one of the trees.

The following day, shortly after noon, the RAAF crew carefully approached a native village. It was raining heavily at the time and quite cold at the high elevation. The Australians were well received by the somewhat amazed inhabitants. Using the aircrew survival book Bill and Dave suggested food, water and

Heading

"Boston Tea Party"

A28-29

who they would eventually see. Their path was the previously used dried up creek bed.

From village to village the men were handed back towards the coast. Native scouts travelled ahead to ensure that the pair didn't accidentally bump into a Japanese patrol. Eventually Bill and Dave arrived at a coastal village and here were advised that they were now to meet the paramount chief of the district.

The party, on their way to the meeting, detected a canoe approaching and hid in the undergrowth. To the Boston crew's surprise, when the canoe paddled into the mouth of the river, there was Numba Wan (No. 1) himself sitting in the bow. He was proudly wearing an AIF cap and sweater, red lap lap and had a magnificent .44 Winchester rifle across his knees. His first words were that he was "Frend bilong Australia tru".

Gopak was his name and he had seen the Boston set down on the reef. He took the Australians to his village, named Sali, and had a special hut built close to his own on the perimeter of the settlement. The men were supplied with saucepans, plates, knives, forks, a hurricane lamp, blankets, pillows and a small kettle. All had been "salvaged" by him from a plantation home hurriedly evacuated by its previous white owners.

Fish were supplied courtesy of the local enemy garrison. The Japanese regularly gave Gopak's men dynamite to blast with for them. However, the Sali men only handed in part of the catch and were greatly amused to supply the rest to the RAAF crew. A pig was also killed once a week and so the downed airmen ate well.

Bill and Dave's supply of quinine eventually ran out.

Malaria was now a very real possibility back in the coastal village. Gopak quickly and deviously rectified the problem. He sent a small native boy to the nearest Japanese camp with a message that he himself was sick and asking for medicine. The kind enemy soldiers gave the runner some thirty quinine tablets and a supply of aspirin as well.

Local Japanese, however, began becoming suspicious about this time. Somebody had spilt the beans. Soldiers began questioning the natives on the hiding of two white men in the jungle. They even quoted their surname. The enemy's doubts were further raised when Gopak failed to attend their summons for a meeting.

There was a narrow escape from capture on 4 December. Just before dawn the Japanese swept into the village and attempted to round up the entire population. Gopak's young son came running up to the RAAF crew shouting, "Japan e kum, Japon e kum".

The enemy soldiers later freed some of the villagers and sent them into the surrounding country to search for their chief and the Australians. Gopak had insisted the men flee barefoot in order to disguise their tracks. As a result both Bill and Dave had their feet badly cut by the coral on a peninsula where they took refuge.

Accompanied by Gopak's ten year old daughter the three fugitives established a rough camp in the first range of hills back off the coast. Four days later this too was attacked. At sunrise pro-Japanese police boys approached and fired shots into nearby huts. The

submarine GATO commanded by Captain R.J. Foley. Once aboard the Australians were given the Six "B" treatment — bath, bandage, bread, butter, bouillon and bed.

Picked up with Bill and Dave were six other allied servicemen. They included Major A.W. Roberts, AIF (ANGAU), who was a coastwatcher; as well as four U.S. Army P-38 Lightning pilots and one B-17 Fortress crewman, the sole survivor from his bomber.

Gopak continued to be a special problem to the Japanese throughout the war. After the conflict his fame grew and he became a successful businessman. He was also awarded the MBE.

When he died in 1959, aged about seventy, his many friends in Papua New Guinea and Australia, assisted by the Royal Air Force's Escape Society and numerous personal contributions erected a small memorial at Jacquinot Bay. This occurred on 6 May 1961 close to the old man's village of Sali.

Some 350 children hummed a moving tune and nearby the new Gopak Memorial School was dedicated. Its first teacher was none other than the great leader's son Koulia. The same person who eighteen years earlier as a child had sounded the warning to the RAAF crew from 22 Squadron.

In that remote part of the world the local people were shown that the loyalty of the paramount leader Gopak was not forgotten. Indeed the "frend bilong Australia tru" will long be remembered.

premature shooting enabled the group once again to flee to safety.

A small cave in the side of a hill was the next refuge for the four over the following nine days. Gopak still had his .44 Winchester. At dusk each day he would creep down to the nearby village garden, make a reconnaissance of the area, and gather food. His daughter would only cook at night so not as to expose their position.

Just before Christmas, after an exchange of notes, the RAAF men trekked over the Nakanai mountain range. Here they linked up with an Australian coastwatcher group on 20th led by Major Ian Skinner. The surveillance party was high in the mountains on the north side of the island and had been there for some time reporting on the enemy activities below.

Bill and Dave, while with group for some six weeks, acted as aircraft plotters. The party was constantly on the move to evade the Japanese who by this time were more anxious to eliminate the coastwatchers than to capture the airmen.

Evacuation arrangements were finally made for the RAAF crew. To reach the rendezvous in time involved walking for three days and nights. It also included a dangerous daylight crossing of Open Bay while lying concealed in the bottom of canoes.

After three months on enemy held New Britain the Boston crew were finally retrieved on the night of 5 February 1944. Their rescuer was the U.S. Navy



WGCDR Bill Townsend (left) and FLGOFF Dave McClymont in the jungle on New Britain (1943)

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