

Jungle gives up first to fall

As the first Australian-built bomber lost in the New War. It disappeared in about trace.

Next 44 years, aircraft A9-52 and her crew members lay under jungle on a plateau at Taipini, about 90km north-west of Moresby.

Moresby's camouflage paint merged with the terrain, and the years painted grey the heads of the hundreds of Beaufort bombers in the same home.

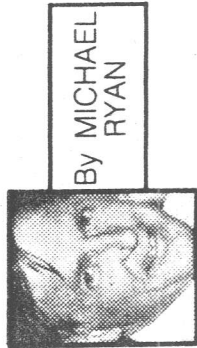
Last November natives of Taipini found the wreck. And in January an American helicopter in to confirm the find.

The crew, Squadron Leader Peter, Pilot Officer J.A. Wormald, Sergeant C.F. Patterson and Sergeant G. D. ... will be buried with full military honours at Lae later this year.

Authorities, sensitive for the heirs, this week to talk about the lost bomber.

Squadron Ldr Sage, was born in ... and was a regular air force man ... He was 27 when he took off on his first mission on June 25-26, 1942.

Peter Wormald was 23, a salesman in ... Sydney. Sergeant Patterson, ... Calcutta, worked as a clerk in ... Victoria, before joining the RAAF. ... Moresby of Toowoomba had only a few years in civvy life as a clerk in Brisbane.



By MICHAEL RYAN

before he went into the air force. He died at 19.

The faded number A9-52 indicated that this was the 52nd Beaufort bomber built at Fishermen's Bend and Mascot by those efficient aircraft-makers who turned out 700 Beauforts by war's end.

The twin-engined Australian bomber was a cousin of the British Blenheim. It had a range of 1000 miles with nearly a tonne of bomb load, or 1600 miles unloaded. The Beaufort reached top speed of 259 mph and had a ceiling of 25,000 feet. She packed nine machine guns firing 303 bullets.

100 Squadron was formed only in February of 1942 at Richmond base, moved to North Queensland in May, and was flown to Port Moresby for the first testing of Australia's first home-built front-line aircraft.

On the night of June 25-26, Squadron leader Sage and Flight lieutenant Snowy Douglas took off from Moresby in their two Beauforts for a diversionary strike on Salamaua.

Five other Beauforts were making the main strike at a Japanese ship at sea off Lae. RAAF official historian Douglas Gillison recorded: "It was moonlight and the weather was reported to be clear over the target area."

At 9.45 p.m. Sage and Douglas bombed the Salamaua isthmus area from 1500 feet and then raked the ground installations and the buildings known as Chinatown with gunfire.

"Douglas's aircraft returned safely, but at 10.44 the operations room at Port Moresby received a message from Sage asking for a bearing. The aircraft then appeared to be about 60 miles north-west of Port Moresby. "That was the last that was heard from it: Sage and his crew were lost."

The feint flight was intended to divert the enemy ship's captain. When he saw that Salamaua was under attack he would sail east to escape detection, it was calculated.

The prediction proved completely accurate. The main wing of Beauforts caught the ship spot on and three of them scored direct hits, sinking it.

They were turning for home, jubilant over the first Beaufort proving, about the time that their mates aboard A9-52 ploughed into the mountainside at 7000 feet.

It is understood that Gage's call for "a bearing" asked a searchlight to be trained skywards in Port Moresby. There were no space-age navigational systems on the skyways of World War Two.

Athol Snook of Doncaster joined 100 Squadron as a navigator later in 1942. He flew hundreds of missions in Beauforts out of Milne Bay that year and next.

Mr Snook recalls those trials by night, full of tension.

"The New Guinea weather took more of our planes than the enemy," he said. "When you

think of it, these young men the year before were at school, in offices and on farms ... all of a sudden they find themselves flying highly technical machines in conditions that would strain experienced airmen.

"The mountains and the weather are against you all the time. Once you have engine failure you're at their mercy." Picturing the fate of A9-52, Mr Snook said: "It would probably be cloudy, they would certainly be flying blind, on dead reckoning. Going over the Owen Stanleys spine they would either fly direct for Moresby or else angle course to miss mountains.

"They would fly straight into a blind hill with cloud over it."

Mr Snook sang praises of the Australian made Beaufort. "Our workers built 760 of them," he said. "The planes were an enormous credit to this country."

About 60 Beauforts had their turrets cut off and were turned into "Beaufreighters."

President of the Beaufort Squadrans Association, Mr Ted Sedunary of Blackburn, said 600 Australian sub-contractors built the 39,000 components that went into each Beaufort aircraft.

"Our Beaufort Squadrans Association would welcome the men and women who built the Beaufort aircraft to join our association (Telephone 877 6430)," Mr Sedunary said.

● The month after '52' disappeared, Japanese land forces began their drive over the Owen Stanley ranges.

"Beauforts harried Japanese shipping and deterred them from sending troop reinforcements," Mr Sedunary said.

3

Military honors for bombers

THE crew of an RAAF bomber lost over PNG in 1942 is to be buried with full military honors nearly 45 years later.

The bodies of Squadron Leader CWL Sage, Pilot Officer J A Paterson and Flight Sergeant D W Desmond will be interred at a graveside ceremony at Lae War Cemetery at 10am today.

Their aircraft, Beaufort A9-52 of 100 Squadron RAAF, crashed into a thickly jungled hillside near Tapini, north-west of Port Moresby, while returning from a raid on Japanese positions around Lae on June 27, 1942. The overgrown wreckage was discovered by Goilala tribesmen last November.

An RAAF team recovered the bodies in January. The men will be honored with a full, graveside military funeral.

A 48-strong detachment comprising a firing party, escort, bearers, porters, drummers and buglers would be flown to Lae from Australia for the ceremony.

The relatives of Squadron Leader Sage, Pilot Officer Wormald and Sgt Desmond had been located and some would attend the service.

However, air force investigations had been unable to trace relatives of Sergeant Patterson.

2.4.87 POST-COURIER (NEW GUINEA)