

A9-486 HAS RETIRED



The 486th Australian Beaufort looked the same as any other when she rolled out of the factory for testing. But a great career awaited her.

By a WINGS Staff Writer

OCTOBER 29, 1943. Captain Tom Young, Beaufort Division's test pilot, put A9-486 through the severe test through which a Beaufort must go before being passed as battle-worthy. Two days later, F/O L. W. Evans flew A9-486 for 25 minutes, and Sgt J. Madden flew her for 70 minutes as RAAF acceptance pilots. Then AID inspector N. Waugh filled in his Form 25 and passed the Beaufort officially to the RAAF.

Her first operation

Two days before Christmas 1943, F/O Barry Fuller, of Sydney (now in civil airways) flew A9-486, covering a convoy proceeding from Milne Bay to Oro Bay.

This was her first operational flight.

The Beaufort was now a fully-fledged member of a RAAF squadron, and took her place in the dispersal bays among intrepid numbers which had bashed Gasmata by day and Rabaul by flak-blazened night.

Soon A9-486 was initiated into the select Rabaul-by-night committee. F/Sgt J. ("Junior") Borbridge, of Western Australia (since commissioned) flew her on a night visit to Ropopo aerodrome near Rabaul.

After Rabaul had been taken over as a target by Solomons-based US Liberators early in 1944, the Australian-built Beauforts were given the job of keeping the Gasmata and Cape Hoskins airstrips unserviceable, and smashing at the Japs wherever they could be found.

Veteran of 139 bombing strikes, Scotty's Homin' Pidgin has done her last operational tour. But the usefulness of this famous Beaufort is not over. Soon she will be touring Australia to raise funds for the Third Victory Loan.

A9-486 was regularly in the line-up of Beauforts that daily rolled around the wide taxiways of Vivigani airstrip and queued up ready for the light from the duty-pilot's tower.

Many of her squadron's pilots and crews used her and learned that she was a reliable character who always gave a steady, trustworthy performance.

She was flown by F/Sgt Ron Caffin, of Melbourne, F/O L. M. McLaren, of Largs Bay, Adelaide (since reported killed), F/O Ray Smith, of Brisbane, and F/Sgt Bert Godfrey, of Sydney.

She attacked supply dumps, stagings and installations at the request of the US Marines who had moved in to Talasea on March 10, following the successful progress made after the Arawe and Cape Gloucester landings.

In one week, A9-486 figured in raids on Bertha Channel (piloted by P/O Geoff Liddell, of Melbourne, once, F/O McLaren once, and F/O Laurie Glenn, of Perth, once), on Hospital Point (piloted by McLaren), Gavuvu (by Liddell), Talasea (by F/Sgt Henderson).

Other targets hit during March by A9-486 were Kamalgaman anchorage area (flown by F/Sgt Godfrey once, and F/O Tony Treverton of Sydney, once), Ubili plantation (by F/Sgt Alan Ditchburn, of Melbourne), Kalai plantation (by F/Sgt Ross Geue, of Adelaide), and Pondo sawmill (flown by F/Sgt John Pressey, of Hexham, NSW).

In April, the Beauforts moved from Goodenough Island to Nadzab, to make

a series of effective strikes in the Wewak area.

Day after day, flights took off from the famous Newton airstrip, completed early in the year by a RAAF works squadron, and flew down the Ramu Valley to plaster But and Dagua.

They kept them unserviceable in the face of strenuous work by Jap engineers to get an evacuation or reinforcement strip into operation.

Here again, A9-486 took her place in the perfect Beaufort formations that formed up each morning in the busy skies over Nadzab. Sometimes, they were top-covered by US Lightnings.

The Beauforts were right on the map during these busy days and their bombing was classed as "super." In some of their raids, after dropping their bombs on pin-point targets, they came down to tree-top height and strafed buildings and dumps, copying the famous habits of their robust brothers, the Beaufighters.

Many pilots

A9-486 was in these daily strikes and hitting hard with the rest of the squadron. She was flown by Geoff Liddell, Alan Ditchburn, Barry Fuller, "Junior" Borbridge, and "Blue" Bale. On May 12, 15 and 16 she was flown by F/O McLaren, in attacks on Boram strip and Boiken radio station installations.

On May 20, when a squadron of Beauforts was sent out on a mission of targets-of-opportunity in the Wewak area, McLaren flew another Beaufort, 581, which was shot down while strafing But Mission. The only survivor

was F/O Ray Graetz, who spent eight days behind the enemy lines before being rescued by a US patrol boat.

Moving up to Tadjil strip in June, the Beauforts, cooperating with RAAF Beaufighters and US Airacobras, assisted in smashing Japanese forces and supply dumps massing close to the thinly-held perimeter. A9-486 was taken over by P/O Bill Scott, of East Malvern, Vic, who named her the "Homin' Pidgin."

But she was still flown by many other pilots. During July, when the Australian squadrons were making day and night strikes against troop concentrations, supply dumps and headquarters buildings at Matapau, Dandriwad, Yakumul, Niap, Suain, Jalup, etc, A9-486 was flown by Fuller, Thompson, Wright, McNaughton, Liddell, Stern-dale and her nominal "owner," Bill Scott.

Her busiest days

On July 27, the squadron made 56 sorties in one day between 0905 and 1724 hours, and dropped over 100,000 lbs of bombs. During this day "Scotty" and his "Homin' Pidgin" flew four strikes and dropped 8,000 lbs of bombs.

Other pilots who came into the life of A9-486 were F/O K. J. Hovenden, of Victoria (since killed in flying accident), P/O Beer, F/Sgt Pearce, F/Sgt Page, W/O Forrest, F/O Chapman, P/O Maynard, F/O Polkinghorne, F/O Fowler and S/Ldr Kessey.

During these hectic days when each Beaufort squadron broke all-time records in numbers of sorties and strikes, A9-486 made 23 strikes in one fortnight. In the big RAAF do against the Jap counter-drive to smash through the perimeter towards Aitape, when 872 of the enemy were killed from the air, A9-486 flew her heaviest schedule.

In November, the famous "Homin' Pidgin" returned to her old hunting grounds when RAAF Beaufort squadrons cooperated with ships of the Royal Australian Navy in a heavy bombardment of Wide Bay, New Britain.

These attacks smashed enemy troop concentrations and defences ahead of the advancing Australian ground forces who had already landed at Jaquinet Bay.

Beaufort A9-486 has at last been turned over to a RAAF Repair and Salvage Unit at her New Guinea base.

She has not been a spectacular machine in the Air Force sense. She has flown no DFC winners. She has had no prangs. She has shot down no Zeros. She has simply carried out a solid job—the kind of plugging job that has beaten the Japs in New Guinea and New Britain.