

# MID-AIR BEAUFORT COLLISION

by Robert Kendall Piper, Canberra Member 13760.

During a flying programme and demonstration for accredited war correspondents and photographers, two Beauforts, from a formation of three, had a spectacular mid-air collision which was recorded on film. The accident occurred at 10 a.m. April 14, 1943, over Jervis Bay, N.S.W. All three torpedo bombers were from RAAF Station, Nowra.

The film sequence has been viewed on numerous occasions recently, including at the commencement of the T.V. series "THIS FABULOUS CENTURY". Also at the end of the three part documentary "WINGS OVER AUSTRALIA". Eric Bieve of Fox Movietone News was the photographer who captured the now famous tragedy on film.

Earlier in the morning the Beauforts had carried out a series of "dummy" runs and torpedo attacks against

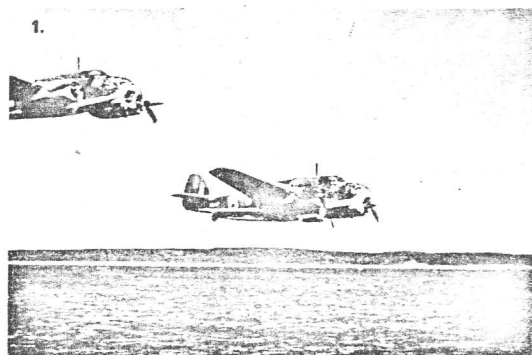
HMAS Burra-bra, on which the media were stationed. As a finale the three bombers commenced a high speed (185 knot) low level run past the ship and initiated a "Prince of Wales" breakup. (This manoeuvre consists of the lead aircraft climbing steeply after a high speed pass while his No. 2 and 3 in the formation execute steep climbing turns to the left and right)

However, in a combination of small errors, A9-268's (the Beaufort closest to the ship) left wingtip collided with the leader's (A9-27) tail as he pulled up vertically. The former immediately rolled over, struck the water nose first and disintegrated. A9-27 continued in a near vertical climb to 130 metres above the sea, stalled and fell vertically. All crew members on both Beauforts were killed and the wreckage sank to the bottom of the bay in 30 metres of water. The crews were:

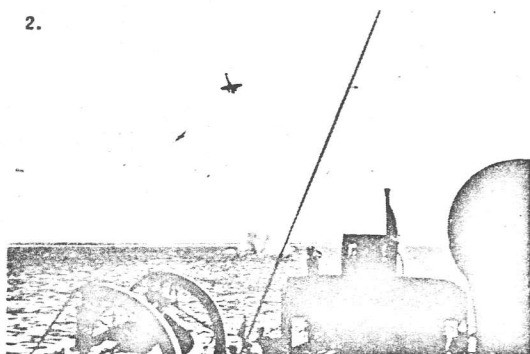
- A9-268 (Beaufort closest to the ship)  
 623 Flight Lieutenant D.G. Dey (Pilot)  
 408149 Pilot Officer R.L. Solomon  
 (wireless operator/air gunner)  
 407561 Pilot Officer J. Norman  
 (wireless operator/air gunner)  
 410093 Sgt. H.S.G. Richardson  
 (wireless operator/air gunner)  
 A9-27 (Lead aircraft)  
 408110 Flying Officer R.S. Green (Pilot)  
 409118 Flying Officer M.F. Hoban (Navigator B)  
 408077 Sgt. E.W. Sweetman (WOAG)  
 409976 Sgt. A.J. Bailey (WOAG)

Only Flying Officer Schlank, the captain of the third aircraft, and his crew returned that morning.

Last year the throttle quadrant from one of the bombers was recovered by divers and is now at the Naval Museum, Nowra.



1. Only 16 metres above the waters of Jervis Bay, N.S.W. A9-27 leads the tight "V" formation.



2. A9-268, after collision rolls over and hits the water nose first. A9-27, after climbing vertically to 130 metres, stalls and plunges down.



3. A9-27 at the moment of impact.

# Riddle of the missing death planes

By NOLA BATES

**RECENTLY, two RAAF officers on a venture-training project, spent a week scuba-diving off the NSW coast in a fruitless search for two missing bombers.**

The planes collided spectacularly in front of cameramen back in 1943 and local scuba divers have since, at times, sighted the wreckage.

In fact, a throttle quadrant from one of the aircraft was recovered some years ago and now resides in the Naval Museum at Nowra.

But despite a thorough underwater check of the area, to which they were directed by locals, the RAAF men found no trace of the aircraft.

Of course, tides, sand-drifts and the problem of deceptive distances at sea could have all influenced their search, and caused miscalculations.

The underwater hunt recalls an incident which has been seen on newsreels and which appeared at the beginning of the TV series *This Fabulous*

*Century* and at the end of the 3-part documentary, *Wings Over Australia*.

It happened on April 14, 1943.

During a flying program and demonstration for accredited war correspondents and photographers aboard a Navy vessel, three Beaufort bombers from the RAAF station at Nowra flew over the coastline.

Two of the aircraft in the formation had a spectacular mid-air collision which was recorded on film. Eric Bieve of Fox Movietone News was the photographer who captured the now-famous tragedy with his movie camera.

The crash occurred at 10 a.m., but earlier in the morning the Beauforts had carried out a series of "dummy" runs and mock torpedo attacks for the cameras.

As a finale, the three bombers commenced a high speed (185 knot) low level run past the ship and initiated a "Prince of Wales" breakup. (This

manoeuvre consists of the lead aircraft climbing steeply after a high speed pass while his No 2 and 3 in the formation execute steep climbing turns to the left and right).

However, in a combination of small errors the wingtip of A9-268 caught the tail of the leader (A9-27) as he pulled up vertically. The former immediately rolled over, struck the water nose first and disintegrated.

A9-27 continued in a near vertical climb to 130 metres above the sea, stalled and fell vertically.

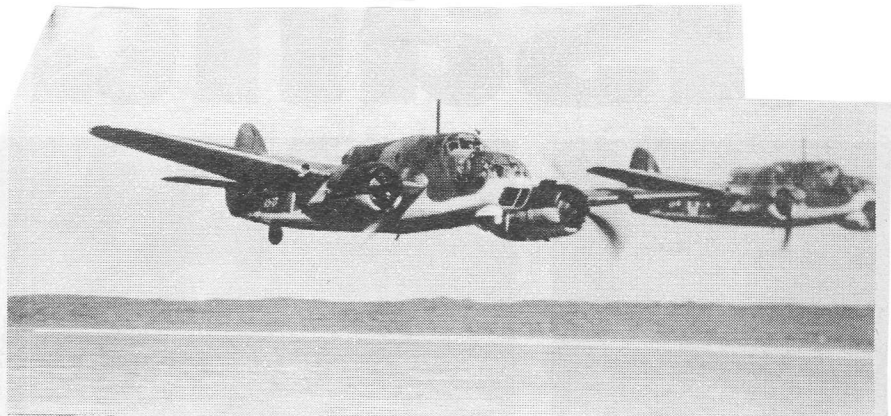
All crew members on both Beauforts were killed and the wreckage sank to the bottom of the bay in 30 metres of water.

The watchers were stunned and horrified, but nothing could be done. The crews were:

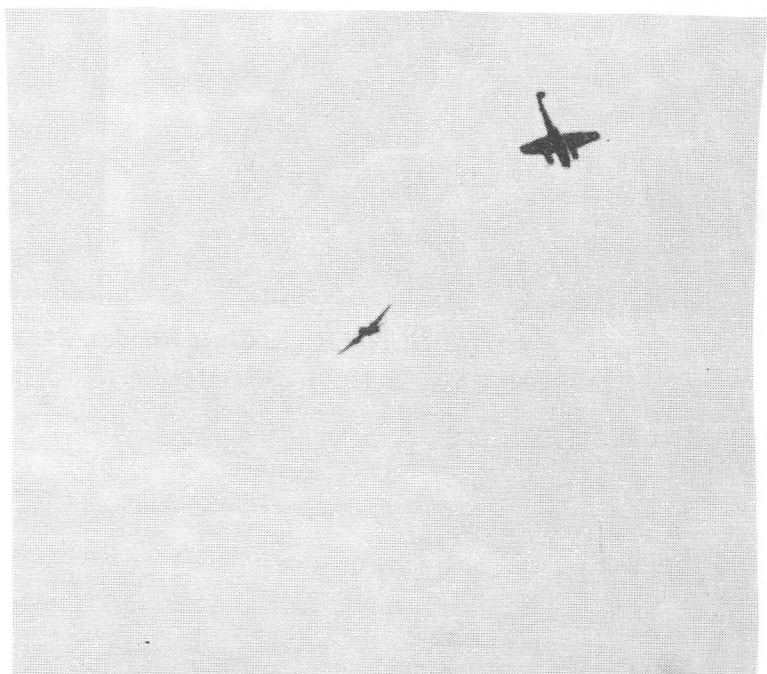
● In the lead aircraft, A9-27:

● In A9-268:  
Flight Lieutenant D.G. Dey (Pilot), Pilot Officer R.L. Solomon (wireless operator/air gunner), Pilot Officer J. Norman (wireless operator/air gunner), and Sgt. H.S.G. Richardson (wireless operator/air gunner).

Only Flying Officer Schlank, the captain of the third aircraft, and his crew returned that morning when a tragic page of pictorial history unfolded.



★ THE three Beauforts come in low and fast to execute a manoeuvre, with the lead plane climbing steeply and the other two climbing away to each side.





★ ABOVE: With its tail sheared off, it hit the water before the other splash had subsided.  
★ BELOW: It disappeared, with the first plane, into a watery grave, 30 metres down.

