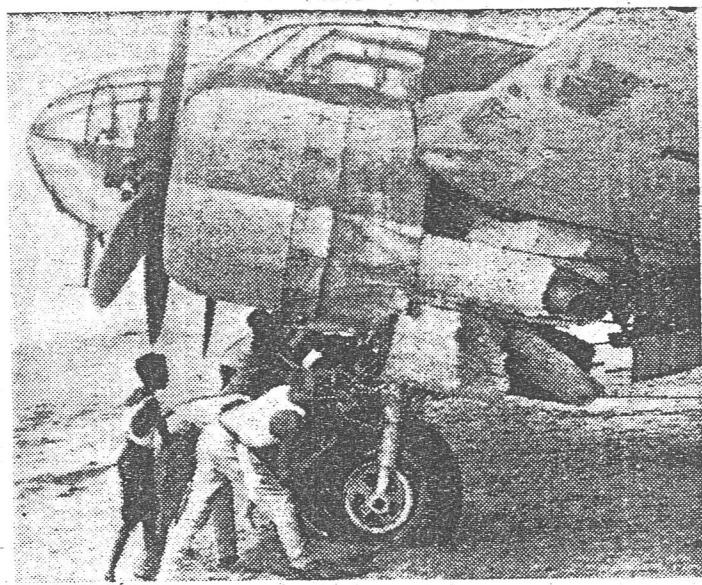


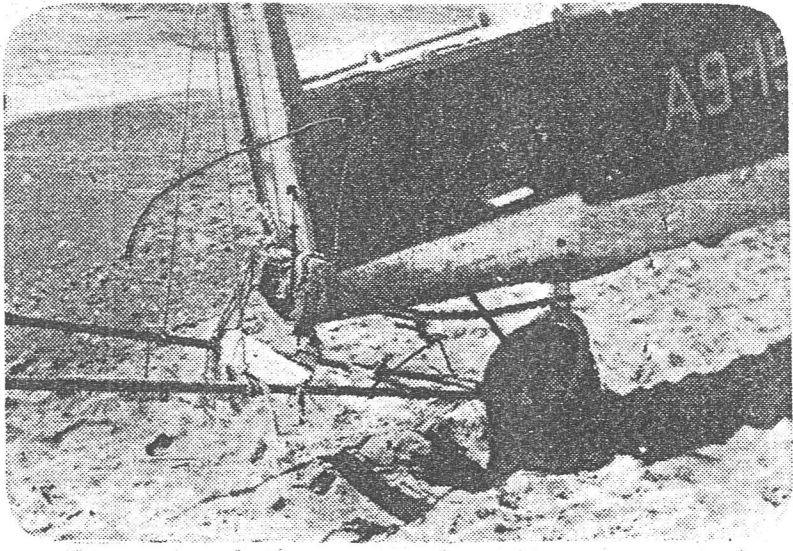
Aborigines Lend A Hand In Salvage Of Beached Beaufort "Up North"



THIS BEAUFORT bomber, lost in heavy weather, was forced to land on a strip of beach near a sky-watching post "up north." Found wandering in the rain by station personnel, the crew was brought in and their plight reported. While salvage men were on their way the tide came in covering the nose of the plane. Here aborigines are seen inspecting the undercarriage after the tide had receded.

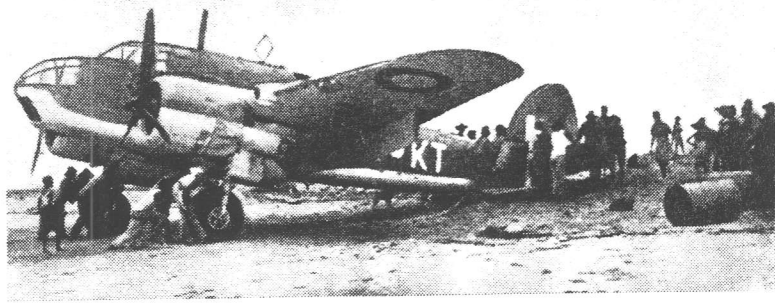


AIR FORCE PERSONNEL, sent to salvage the plane, decided it had to be moved eight miles along the beach to solid ground before it could be dismantled. This was done by a willing team of about 150 aborigines — men, women and children, some of whom are seen above taking off part of the tail unit. Right: To guide the plane during its eight-miles' journey, this device was fixed to the tail.



BEAUFORT SALVAGE

In the Far North aborigines helped the VAOC to salvage a Beaufort. They worked with a song and saved £30,000.



ONE wet morning the watchers at a North Q'land VAOC post looked at the sky.

At about 11.30, the drone of an aircraft was heard and up went the cry "Plane." The aborigines about the place have wonderful hearing and usually the observers have at least 5 minutes notice before the plane is seen.

Today, the aircraft was overhead before the observers knew it; but the plane could not be seen through the overcast and it was heard circling for nearly half an hour and in that time it was seen only once. "That chap is looking for the strip" said the Chief Observer (Mr F. Cane) to his wife.

Soon afterwards the Control Post radio advised that a plane was down on the beach some miles north of the post.

A boat complete with medical kit, food, and hot drinks was ready to leave within half an hour. However, just as Mr Cane was about to step into the dinghy, another cry went up "White men coming." The crew of the plane had met one of the station hands who was out spearing fish.

They were wet and weary but after hot baths, a change of clothing and hot tea and scones, they told how they had seen the house momentarily through a break in the clouds. Then on seeing the beach, they had decided

to put down as there was less than 30 minutes' fuel supply left.

The beach at this point was only 30 yards wide at low tide, but such a good landing was made that the crew had not even got wet feet out of it.

Returning to the wireless, the observers reported, "We have them here and all are safe. We are now going to see what we can do about the plane."

"Okay" came the reply, "the crash launch has left here and they expect to get to you about eight tonight. Have flares burning at the anchorage and the plane, in case they miss the house."

Horses were brought and off they started on a 9 mile trip in the rain.

As they approached the spot where the plane had been left, there was a groan from the pilot. "What's the matter?" they asked. "I thought I'd left the plane high and dry but I hadn't considered the north-western tides and surf."

The aircraft was now in the surf, its nose almost under the waves and the tail almost out of sight, dragged down by quicksands.

"She's a write-off now," said the pilot. So work was started to take out the instruments, wireless and guns.

After salvaging all moveable parts, the party waited until 4 am for the crash launch to arrive, but as it did

not turn up they all returned to the house and to bed.

At 8.30 the crash launch arrived with 11 on board—15 extra for breakfast. When they set out to look at the Beaufort they found that it had gone down still further into the treacherous sands.

It was decided that with the aid of all the aborigines who could be mustered, it might be possible to drag the plane clear of the sands and up to high ground above the tides. Later that night with all available ropes and over 100 aborigines and 3 whites, the plane was moved 20 feet. Three times the ropes broke during 9 hours of hard gruelling work. Back at the station it was greeted by the crew of the crash launch which had been forced back by wind and high seas.

An early tea that night was interrupted by a cry of "Launch coming" and another launch bigger than the first with 7 on board arrived at the anchorage. The new arrivals joined in the meal, making 22 visitors in all—more than had ever sat down at one time in the history of the homestead.

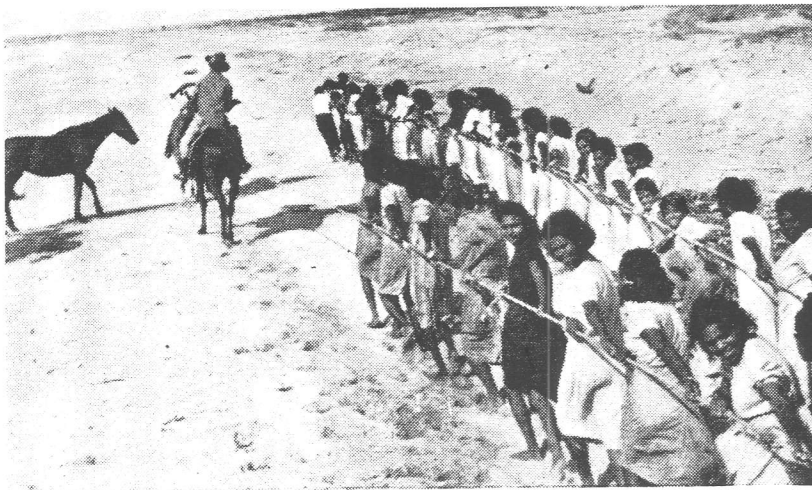
The R & SU officer decided that it would be impossible to load the parts of the plane if taken to pieces where it was and that it would be necessary to haul it along the beach for about 8 miles. That night it was moved 3 miles but then had to be left as the tide was coming in and softening the sand. A bullock from the station was killed, roasted and eaten barbecue style on the spot where they camped till morning.

The next night, still in teeming rain, the rescuers made their third try, and this time were determined to move the plane just where they wanted it—over 7 miles of beach and a creek. Four ropes were made fast and 130 aborigines comprising 100 odd women and children and 30 men, stretched along them. To help the work along when they became discouraged the LAC started a song and with will and determination, they started to pull. The black stockmen lent their horses but as these had not been broken to harness, they had to be used the same way as cattle are bronced on the run. Needless to say the men rode while

the women did the work. As the party sang and cheered, the plane moved along the beach and bounced over the creek.

Then with the help of 6 aborigines and the LAC, the R & SU officer set to work dismantling the plane. Within 6 weeks all the components were ready to be shipped to base for overhauling and reassembling. Loading presented its own problems and some of the ways and means used would have seemed very novel where cranes and lifts are available. However, nothing was broken or lost and today this Beaufort flies again—a clear £30,000 saved for the RAAF by the co-operation of the VAOC outpost and its willing dark-skinned helpers.

The abos received their reward in unexpected fashion when a few weeks later a sister Beaufort from the same



WINGS 1.2.1944