

# Honour for brave crew

Just over fifty years ago, on December 1, 1942, three Japanese Zero fighters took on a RAAF Beaufort bomber in what appeared to be an uneven contest.

When the engagement ended, two Zeros had been shot down and the third had broken off the action.

The incident returned to the spotlight recently at the RAAF Headquarters Logistics Command Officers' Mess in Melbourne, where a commemorative luncheon was held.

Three of the four crew members of Beaufort A9-38 attended. The navigator, PLTOFF Peter May, could not be located.

The wartime engagement provided a tremendous lift in morale for the entire Beaufort force and became the subject of a painting in 1986 by Athol Snook, a fellow

May, Norm Mann and Frank Nolan. I only flew the aeroplane," Reg said.

"The main concern was to get away from those fighters. I put on climb power to get into the clouds, and it was due mainly to Frank, Norm and Peter that we got out of it."

The action took place off the southern coast of New Britain where they spotted four Japanese destroyers, after which they were instructed: "Shadow to end of endurance, open attack, return to base."

They were starting their bomb run when SGT Norm Mann shouted: "Three enemy fighters to port."

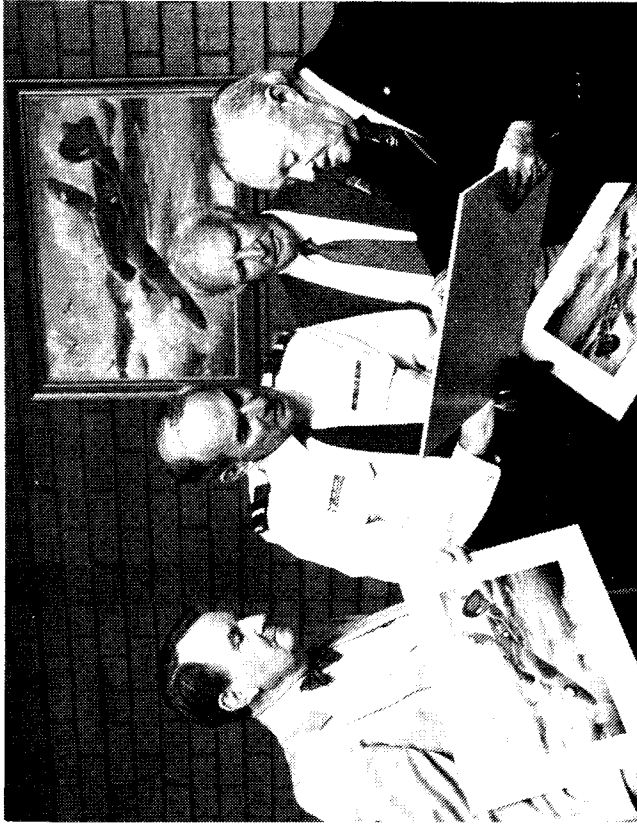
SGT Frank Nolan opened the beam hatch and manned the Vickers machine gun. After the

Zeros swung alongside and conducted an inspection, they banked and came at them head first, tracer bullets whipping above and below the Australian aircraft's wings.

Reg said PLTOFF May got in the first burst of fire against the Zeros from the nose. Norm Mann fired his Vickers guns and scored some hits, but the enemy aircraft dived away.

Frank Nolan fired at one of the Zeros blowing off part of the wing and most of the fuselage.

Little did the Japanese pilot know that Frank was a terrific shot, never having missed a duck season opening since he was 12, and more often than not winning the 'kitty' which the duck shooters put together for the biggest



AIRCDRE Belton presents Norm Mann (left), Frank Nolan and Reg Green with prints of Athol Snook's painting, which hangs on the wall behind them.

aged Zero, but Japanese records years later showed that two Zeros had been lost.

All four members of the crew were mentioned in despatches and in 1943, Reg was awarded the rare Con-

probable and one damaged merchant seamen from a sunken ship.

spicuous Gallantry Medal. This award was for the Zero action, and for attacking with his Beaufort a swarm of enemy fighters strafing merchant seamen from a sunken ship.

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