



FlyPast Spotlight

Bristol Beaufort

16 Pages in detail

- 66 Origin and history
- 68 In combat - the Bristol at war
- 74 Beaufort in profile
- 76 Men behind the machine



This month, the subject of our *Spotlight* is one of the relatively unsung warriors of World War Two, the Bristol Beaufort. Overshadowed by the Blenheim, its more famous sister, the Beaufort nevertheless saw considerable action in the Mediterranean, and was also operated extensively in the Pacific with the Royal Australian Air Force. It proved to be a surprisingly versatile machine and was used in several different roles, including mine-laying and as a dual control trainer. With new artwork and images from the archive, we examine this oft-forgotten Bristol.

Main picture
RAF Bristol Beauforts are prepared for action during World War Two.
KEY COLLECTION



The Bristol Beaufort

Above
Bristol Beaufort Mk.I
L9878 'MW-R' of 217
Squadron. BOTH KEY

Despite being somewhat overshadowed by its 'stablemates' – the Blenheim and the Beaufighter – Bristol's Beaufort was built in large numbers and served in several different theatres during World War Two. A twin-engined torpedo bomber, its design was influenced by that of the earlier Blenheim. The experience gained from building the latter meant that the development of the Beaufort was less protracted and produced fewer 'teething' troubles.

Nearly 2,000 of the distinctive machines were built, including around 700 manufactured in Australia. Beauforts served with Coastal Command and the Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm from 1940, and were extensively used in the Mediterranean, flying from Malta and Egypt.

The type also found great favour with the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), which used them in the Pacific until the end of the war. Although designed as a torpedo

bomber, the Beaufort proved to be fairly versatile and was more frequently employed as a conventional light bomber, or mine-layer.

Production

Slightly larger and considerably heavier than the Blenheim, the Bristol Type 152 replaced the former's Bristol Mercury engines with more powerful, sleeve valve Taurus units, after initial trials with the Perseus powerplant proved unsuccessful. The new aircraft was named after the Duke of Beaufort, whose ancestral home was located not far from Bristol's headquarters in Gloucestershire.

The design incorporated several refinements over the Blenheim and was easier to build in various sub-assemblies, meaning the work could be contracted out to other manufacturers. The first prototype was rolled out in mid-1938, but engine problems delayed the first flight until October 15 of that year. Further modifications were needed before

production began in November 1939, the first Beauforts reaching Coastal Command's 22 Squadron in January 1940.

Over 1,000 Taurus-powered Mk.Is were built in Britain – and these aircraft were constantly refined throughout their service. The original curved bomb-aimers' nose panels were quickly replaced by flat, non-distorting panels from the tenth production aircraft, and several different versions of the Taurus engine were utilised.

A total of 165 Mk.IIs were fitted with Pratt & Whitney R-1830 Twin Wasp radials which improved both maximum speed and the service ceiling. The Twin Wasps were not available in large numbers, so most subsequent Beauforts were Taurus-equipped. The final British-built version was the Pratt & Whitney-powered T.II, on which the turret was removed and the position faired over. Defensive armament also received major upgrades during the type's service 'life'.

SPOT FACT The Mk.IV was powered by two Taurus XX radial pistons

Origin & history

Australian-built versions were often known as DAP Beauforts as they were made at the Department of Aircraft Production (DAP) in Melbourne alongside those produced by various sub-contractors. The first DAP machine, A9-1, made its debut flight on May 5, 1941. The Australian aircraft featured a larger tailfin, different armament and a new array of aerals including the distinctive, diamond-shaped DF model which was fitted to the cabin roof.

Machine of war

Beauforts took part in several campaigns. Their first torpedo attack in RAF hands came on September 11, 1940, when aircraft targeted merchant ships off Ostend, Belgium. Torpedo strikes were also carried out on the German warships *Gneisenau* and *Scharnhorst* while both were at the port of Brest in France. The final major operation to feature Beauforts before they were moved to other theatres was an attack on the heavy cruiser *Prinz Eugen* in May 1942.

Units performed with some success in the Mediterranean, targeting and often crippling a variety of enemy vessels. The tanker *San Andrea* was sunk by two 39 Squadron Beauforts on August 30, 1942. Often operating



alongside other types of aircraft, or in conjunction with Royal Navy submarines, Beaufort crews played a significant role in impeding Rommel's supply lines. The last operational unit was 39 Squadron which exchanged its aircraft for Beaufighters in June 1943.

In RAAF hands, the Beaufort excelled. It equipped a total of 19 units, flying in the maritime patrol role as well as carrying out strike and bombing raids. Describing the

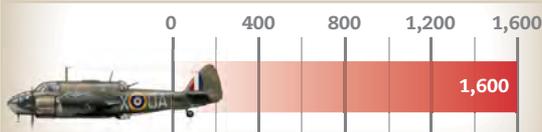
machine's role in defeating Japanese forces in the southwest Pacific, aviation historian William Green wrote that it was "probably of greater importance than any other single aircraft".

The type was very much a machine of war, and was deemed obsolete in peacetime. None remain airworthy today, though the Beaufort Restoration Group in Caboolture, Queensland is working hard to return Beaufort Mk.VII A9-141 (VH-KTW) to Australian skies. ●

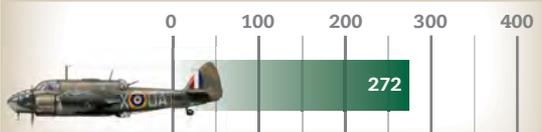
Above
The last Beaufort built in Australia, A9-700, flies over Sydney Harbour Bridge. This aircraft was struck off charge in August 1949.

Bristol Beaufort Mk.I

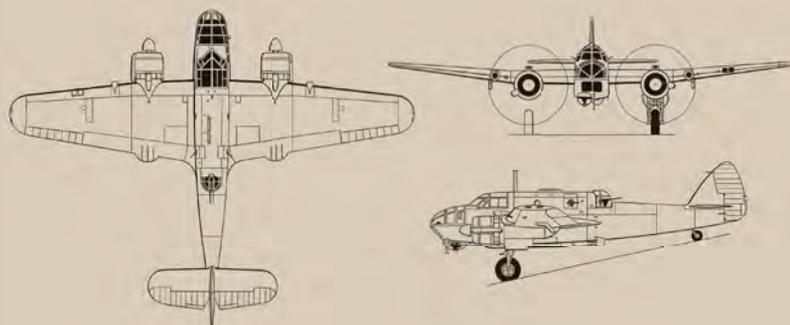
AT A GLANCE: RANGE (miles)



AT A GLANCE: SPEED (mph)



AT A GLANCE: CEILING (feet)



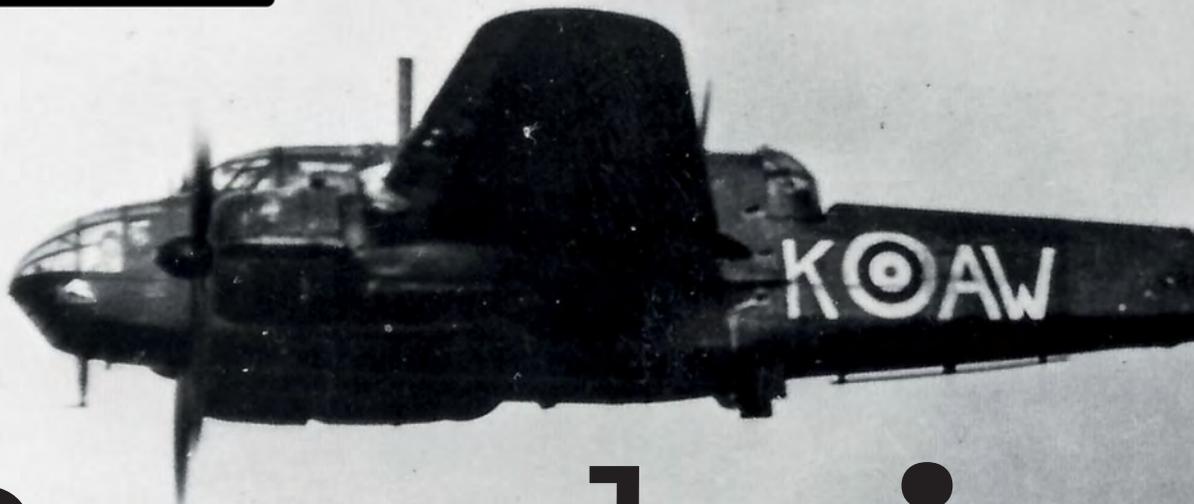
- Construction:** A total of 1,180 were built in Britain, and 700 were made in Australia.
- First Flight:** The prototype first flew on October 15, 1938, with the first Australian aircraft flying on May 5, 1941.
- Powerplant:** Two Bristol Taurus II, III, VI, XII or XVI 14-cylinder sleeve valve radial engines, typically developing 1,130hp (843kW) each.
- Dimension:** Span 57ft 10in (17.6m). Length 44ft 2in. Height 14ft 3in. Wing area 503 sq ft (46.7m²).
- Weight:** Empty 13,107lb (5,945kg). Loaded 21,230lb.
- Performance:** Max speed 272mph (420km/h) at 6,500ft (1,981m). Service ceiling 16,500ft. Rate of climb 1,200ft per min. Range 1,600 miles (2,600km).
- Armament:** Three 0.303in Vickers machine guns (two in turret, one in port wing). Later models had six guns (two in nose, two in turret, one in port wing and one in entry hatch). Bomb load 2,000lb or one 1,605lb 18in torpedo.
- Crew:** Usually four.

Note: performance and weights varied according to role and configuration.



Spotlight

Bristol Beaufort



Bravely in

Above
Torpedo-armed 42 Squadron Beauforts, including W6498 and W6532, heading for Norwegian waters on February 8, 1942.

VIA R C B ASHWORTH

Top right
The badge of 42 Squadron features the Greek god Perseus, the slayer of monsters, against a globe. The motto 'Fortiter in re' translates as 'Bravely in action'.

When war broke out in 1939 the RAF had two torpedo bomber squadrons in Britain, both of which were flying antiquated Vickers Vildebeest biplanes.

Those of 42 Squadron at Bircham Newton in Norfolk, under Sqn Ldr Alan Waring, were placed on standby for an attack in January 1940. One of 42's pilots, Sgt Llewellyn-Thomas, recalled the moment with some trepidation: "Torpedoes at the ready – operation cancelled. Thank God!"

Three months later 42 Squadron began converting to Beauforts,

a huge leap in performance and complexity. The unit was still training when the German assault against France and the Low Countries began on May 10. Mining German waters began soon afterwards, the Beauforts of 22 Squadron, based at North Coates on the Lincolnshire coast, taking on the task.

The Beaufort's main role was to attack the warships of the Kriegsmarine, the Germany navy, and 42's first chance came on June 21. After supporting the invasion of Norway, and helping to sink the carrier HMS *Glorious*, the battlecruiser *Scharnhorst*, with an

escort of six destroyers and motor torpedo boats, was sailing off the Norwegian coast.

Detached to Wick in northern Scotland, 42 Squadron was not torpedo-trained on its new mounts, so it was to strike at this formidable force in daylight with each of its nine Beauforts apparently carrying two 500lb semi-armour-piercing bombs.

Led by Sqn Ldr George Smith, they set off in mid-afternoon unescorted, flying in three 'vics' at 1,000ft (304m) on the Beaufort's first shipping attack. Approaching the Norwegian coast southwest of Bergen, they climbed and soon

2/42



Action

Andrew Thomas chronicles the hazardous operations of 42 Squadron against German warships

spotted the *Scharnhorst* group. At 16:25 hours Smith led his flight into a dive in the face of an intensive anti-aircraft barrage, although none were seriously hit.

Several bombs were seen to strike, but appeared to bounce off the vessel's armour. Later investigation suggests the Beauforts were carrying general-purpose rather than armour-piercing bombs!

As the Beauforts departed they were engaged by Messerschmitt Bf 109s of II/JG 77. Smith's air gunner, LAC Begbie, claimed one shot down – but Fg Off W Barrie-Smith's L9810 was shot down in flames as was Plt Off Alan Rigg's

L4501, and all four on each aircraft were killed.

Flt Lt Dermott Wright's section was also hit by the '109s as they flew out of their attack and Fg Off Jack Seagram's crew in L4486 were lost. The final section, led by Flt Lt Mark Ballion, all survived.

It was a terrible blow for the squadron on its first 'outing'. The next day all Beauforts were grounded for modifications to their gun turrets and troublesome Bristol Taurus engines. Operations did not resume until the end of August, by which time bombing invasion barges in the Channel ports had become the priority.

Return to torpedoes

On the evening of October 10, 1940, 42 Squadron returned to torpedo operations. Flt Lt Hibberd and Fg Off



G Rooney DFC attacked shipping off Boulogne, both successfully dropping their torpedoes, but Hibberd's exploded short.

Both were set upon by four Bf 109s and Rooney's L4491 had its hydraulics and turret put out of action ➔

SPOT FACT Some Australian Beauforts were fitted with ASV radar aerials on the rear fuselage

while he was wounded. Hibberd's aggressive flying drove the fighters off. Rooney's co-pilot, Fg Off A H 'Junior' Simmonds, himself wounded, carried out a wheels-up landing at Thorney Island in Hampshire.

Some two weeks later 42 Squadron sank one ship and damaged a second off Norway – but at the cost of two Beauforts (L9813 and N1159), downed by patrolling Messerschmitts of II/JG 77.

Bad weather in January and February 1941 severely limited operations but March's were more successful. In May, 42 Squadron was on a high state of readiness during naval engagements with *Bismarck*, although it was fog-bound at Abbotsinch for much of the time.

Right
At one stage 42 Squadron named its aircraft according to the individual letter: 'AW-C' was 'Churchill'.
42 SQN RECORDS



Above
Beauforts carried the torpedo semi-recessed in the bomb bay. HMP

Right
Beaufort I N1001 of 42 Squadron, named 'Eve', completed 72 operations between November 1940 and April 1942.
VIA R C B ASHWORTH

Direct hit

In early June 1941 the heavy cruiser *Lützow* sailed from Germany for Norway with an escort of destroyers. Following an 'Enigma' signals intercept the Admiralty was aware of her movements and, among others, Beauforts of 22 and 42 Squadrons stood standby in Scotland.

On the night of June 12 the ship was spotted off Egersund and 13 Beauforts of 42 Squadron left Leuchars along with five from 22 Squadron at Wick. At 02:18 on the 13th, F/Sgt Ray Loviett in L9939, who had become separated from the formation, sighted *Lützow* and took it by surprise.

He recalled: "We came down to a few hundred feet above the sea. I put the nose down and saw the battleship in my sight. I pressed a button on the throttle which released the torpedo and away it went."

"I made a sharp turn to port and opened my engines flat out. The rear gunner shouted: 'You've hit it!' I flew round in a circle and sure enough there was plenty of smoke and a patch of foam on the ship's track."

The torpedo had hit the port side, sending a violent shock through the

"We came down to a few hundred feet above the sea. I put the nose down and saw the battleship in my sight. I pressed a button on the throttle which released the torpedo and away it went"



ship which took on an immediate list. *Lützow* limped back to Germany for repairs which took six months.

Shipping strikes

Sgt Norman Morison received an immediate DFM for sinking the 370-ton *Vestkyst* off Mandal, Norway, at dawn on July 25, 1941. As the crew turned for home two Bf 109s of JG 77 pounced, but they shot down that flown by Lt Minz. In a remarkably chivalrous gesture the other pilot saluted the Beaufort crew

before turning for home.

The squadron sank five small ships during October, all by using bombs. In the mid-afternoon of the 14th, three of its Beauforts (N1163 – W/O Woodward, AW243 – Fg Off Pett and X8929 – Plt Off Sellick) from Leuchars attacked two enemy merchant vessels with torpedoes near Obrestad, Norway. In poor weather and in the face of heavy fire, Sellick's torpedo hit home. Woodward followed but was shot down.

On December 11, AW243, flown



by Plt Off Oliver Philpot DFC, was shot down during a shipping strike off Norway, and he became a prisoner of war (PoW) along with two others of his crew. He made a 'home run' back to Britain in the famous 'Wooden Horse' escape of October 1943.

Stalking 'Prinz Eugen'

From early 1941 a powerful naval force comprising the battlecruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* with the heavy cruiser *Prinz Eugen* had been sheltering in the French port of Brest. A Beaufort of 22 Squadron torpedoed the *Gneisenau* in April (see pages 74-75) but by the end of the year intelligence believed the ships would attempt to break out back to Germany.

Masked by foul weather and under heavy escort, the enemy squadron sailed through the Straits of Dover on February 14, 1942. Led by Sqn Ldr W H Cliff, 42 Squadron's formation never had the opportunity to attack.

Having escaped from Brest, *Prinz Eugen* sailed for Norway. While searching for her on the 22nd, Cliff's crew were forced to ditch. Thanks

Zealander Sqn Ldr Johnny Dinsdale in AW307 headed up the Beaufort element. At 20:15 F/Sgt Manning, flying AW315, spotted *Prinz Eugen* and the Beauforts swung into action against heavy fire from the ships and escorting Bf 109s.

Manning was the first to drop but the CO's aircraft along with AW373 flown by Fg Off Birchley and Fg Off Archer's AW383 were quickly shot down.

The second element went in with P/O McKern dropping his torpedo from 1,200 yards (1,100m) at 20:22 at just 70ft, despite being attacked on the run in by a Bf 109, which his gunner drove off.

Although nine torpedoes were delivered and two hits claimed, none



to 'Winkie', one of the Beaufort's carrier pigeons, they were located and rescued. A torpedo from the submarine HMS *Trident* meanwhile managed to heavily damage the German ship.

By early May emergency repairs had been completed and the *Prinz Eugen* prepared to return to Germany. On the 16th she sailed from Trondheim, setting in train a large British operation. She was sighted off Mandal the following day and among the forces despatched were a dozen torpedo-armed Beauforts of 42 Squadron with an escort of six Blenheim fighters and four Beaufighters.

Led by 42's CO, Wg Cdr Mervyn 'Willie' Williams in AW375, New

struck home. The CO, the sole survivor from his crew, became a PoW and later received the DSO for his leadership during the ill-fated raid.

Fighters continued to harass the Beauforts as they withdrew and one gunner beat off repeated onslaughts for more than 30 minutes. Following behind, the Beauforts of 86 Squadron lost four aircraft.

Three days later 42's Beauforts set out for Norway again to try to locate their old foe the *Lützow*. They were not successful and the warship berthed safely in Trondheim.

This was the unit's swansong over the Channel and North Sea. In June its Beauforts headed east, bound for Ceylon and action against a different enemy. ●

Left
Beaufort AW243, the last Mk.I built, was shot down on December 12, 1941 when flown by Plt Off Oliver Philpot of 'Wooden Horse' PoW fame. R H LOVIETT VIA ROGER HAYWARD

Below left
Sgt Nichol's 42 Squadron crew preparing for take-off on May 20, 1942 from Leuchars in Beaufort W6476 to search for the 'Lützow'. W H SHEARSMITH

Below
A destroyer in the foreground makes smoke as the 'Prinz Eugen' opens fire on 42 Squadron's Beauforts. 42 SQUADRON VIA R C B ASHWORTH

SPOT FACT The Australian Mk.IX was an unarmed transport with a redesigned centre fuselage

Jungle Warr

Right

A pair of Beaufort Vs led by A9-177 of 14 Squadron RAAF, mid-1943. VIA DAVID VINCENT



Below right

The victorious 7 Squadron crew of June 18, 1943. Left to right: Fg Off Basil Walters (observer), Fg Off Peter Hopton (pilot), Fg Off Brian Salter (gunner), F/Sgt Ron Stoner (wireless operator). RAAF

Below

A 7 Squadron Beaufort resupplying troops in thick jungle at Babieng, New Guinea, on November 20, 1944. The canisters were named 'storepedoes'. RAAF

Only a handful of Australian-built Beauforts had been delivered to the RAAF before the Japanese assault against Malaya in December 1941. An initial order had been placed for 180 Pratt & Whitney Twin Wasp-powered versions, 90 of which were destined for the RAF in Singapore, never to be delivered.

The first RAAF Beaufort unit, 100 Squadron, formed at Richmond, Victoria, on February 28, 1942 and in March Wg Cdr John Balmer became commanding officer.

The type's operational debut came on the night of June 25 when Balmer led five aircraft against a Japanese landing ship off Lae in northern New Guinea.

Despite having a faulty bomb release, the CO attacked three times in the face of heavy fire and hit the target twice. Beauforts flown by Flt Lt Thompson and Sqn Ldr Bernard also struck the vessel which was left on fire and apparently sinking. While making a diversionary raid on Salamaua – with another flown by Flt Lt Douglas – Sqn Ldr Sage's T9604 was lost on the return journey, the first RAAF Beaufort to fail to return.



Torpedo debut

Off the New Guinea coast near Buna on November 24, 1942, nine Beauforts of 100 Squadron launched the unit's first torpedo strike on the previously damaged 2,000-ton Imperial Japanese Navy destroyer *Hayashio*, which later sank. Another Beaufort hit and severely wrecked the torpedo boat *Hiyodori*.

Sgt Duncan's crew had to force-land near Cape Vogel and managed to make their way out to fight again, and



the CO's Beaufort crash-landed at Jackson's Strip, Port Moresby.

A week later Sgt C R Green's crew in A9-38 was shadowing a Japanese destroyer force when, two hours into the patrol, three A6M 'Zeros' engaged the Beaufort. In what would normally be a one-sided fight the 'Aussie' crew turned the tables and Green's gunners shot at two of the Zeros, probably destroying one and damaging another while the third broke off the fight.

In early January 1943 a Japanese convoy made it through to the harbour at Lae and, on the 7th and 8th, RAAF Beauforts attacked the ships, Sqn Ldr Douglas hitting one of the vessels. The next night, in a torpedo strike by six aircraft, Flt Lt C S Hamblin claimed a hit on a light cruiser. Two Beauforts crashed in bad weather on the return to Milne Bay.

Sub-hunters

The RAAF Beaufort force gradually expanded and from

September 1942 both 7 and 14 Squadrons began flying long-

iors

The Australians used Beauforts extensively against the Japanese. **Andy Thomas** explains

range patrols over the Arafura and Coral Seas.

Crews occasionally saw enemy aircraft and on June 18, 1943, during a morning anti-submarine patrol 70 miles north of Wessel Island, a 7 Squadron crew spotted an Aichi E13A *Jake* floatplane through a gap in the clouds. Fg Off Peter Hopton closed beneath its tail and from 200 yards (182m) fired a five-second burst – as did the observer, Fg Off Basil Walters, with the nose guns. The floatplane's starboard wing root caught fire and it crashed into the sea.

More units were slowly equipped, with 32 Squadron receiving Beauforts in April 1943. Anti-submarine patrols flew from Camden near Sydney, from where on June 17 Plt Off Harrison's crew attacked a Japanese submarine: they *may* have sunk the Kaidai class I-178.

In August, 6 Squadron at Milne Bay became operational on Beauforts; and 8 Squadron began operations from

Goodenough Island the following month when it bombed Gasmata on New Britain.

Wg Cdr Geoff Nicoll, 8 Squadron's CO, led a dozen Beauforts in a dawn raid on Rabaul on August 13, torpedoing and sinking the 6,000-ton *Keisho Maru*.

On October 22, a combined operation by Beauforts of 6, 8 and 100 Squadrons hit the light cruiser *Kiso* off Cape St George. The resulting fires took a day to control before the vessel was towed to Truk for repair.

Another torpedo strike led by Flt Lt Quinn in A9-247 on the night of November 5/6 damaged the light cruiser *Noshiro*. The next day the squadron mounted the RAAF's final successful torpedo attack when Fg Off Atkins in A9-248 may have sunk a 300-ton minesweeper.

All-out offensive

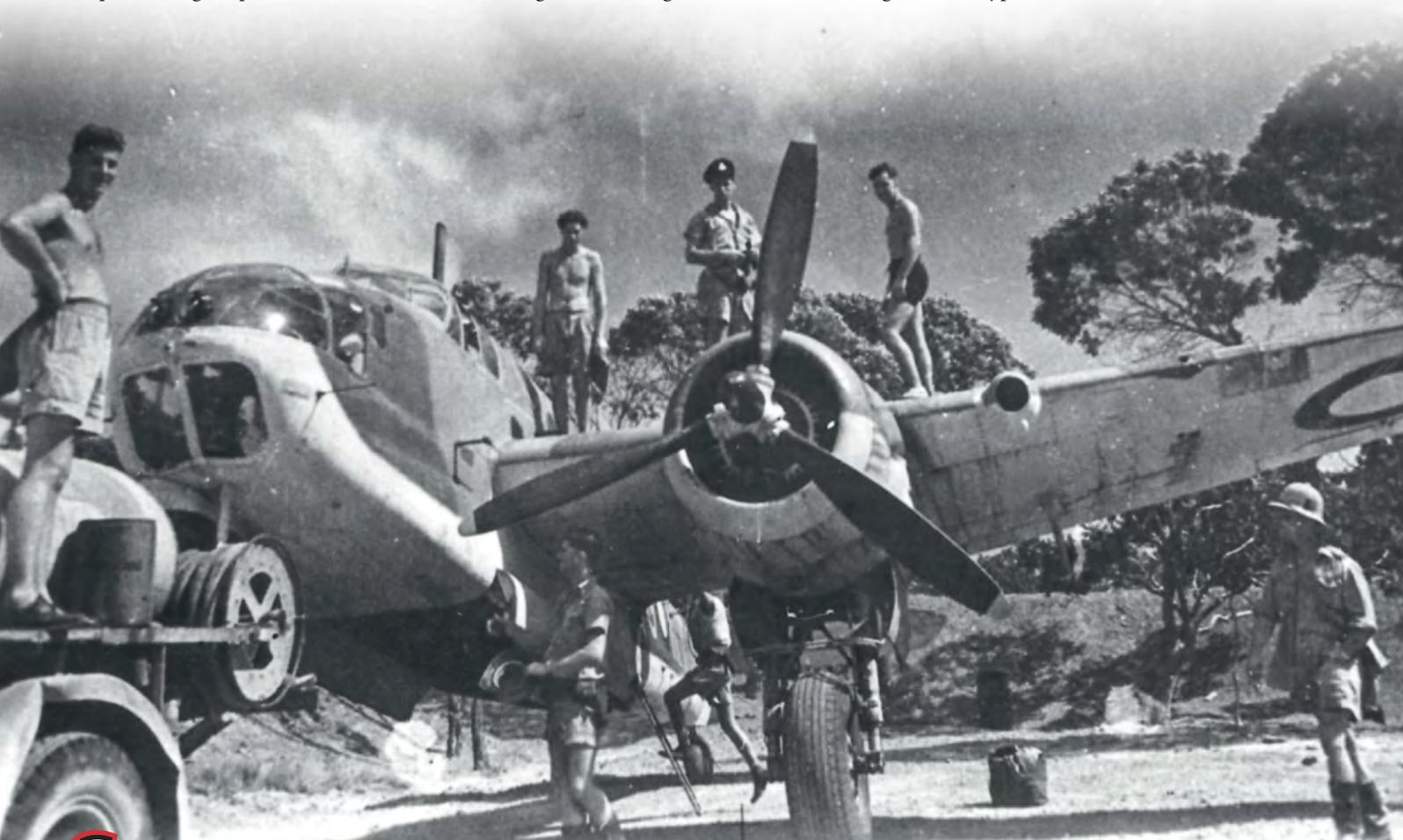
RAAF Beauforts then concentrated on bombing raids. During

December 1943 and January 1944, 71 Wing's aircraft raided the Japanese garrison at Rabaul, setting the tone for the following year – with, for example, an all-out offensive against Wewak on the north coast of New Guinea in September.

Other Beauforts continued anti-submarine patrols around the Australian coast, including 14 Squadron's, commanded by Wg Cdr Charles Learmonth. Sadly, during an exercise off Rottnest Island near Perth on January 6, 1944, his Beaufort crashed; today's RAAF base on the Exmouth Gulf is named after him.

Australian Beauforts played a major role against the Japanese in the South West Pacific and no fewer than 19 squadrons flew the type; some only as partial equipment. One commentator wrote that its contribution was "probably of greater importance than that of any other single aircraft type". ●

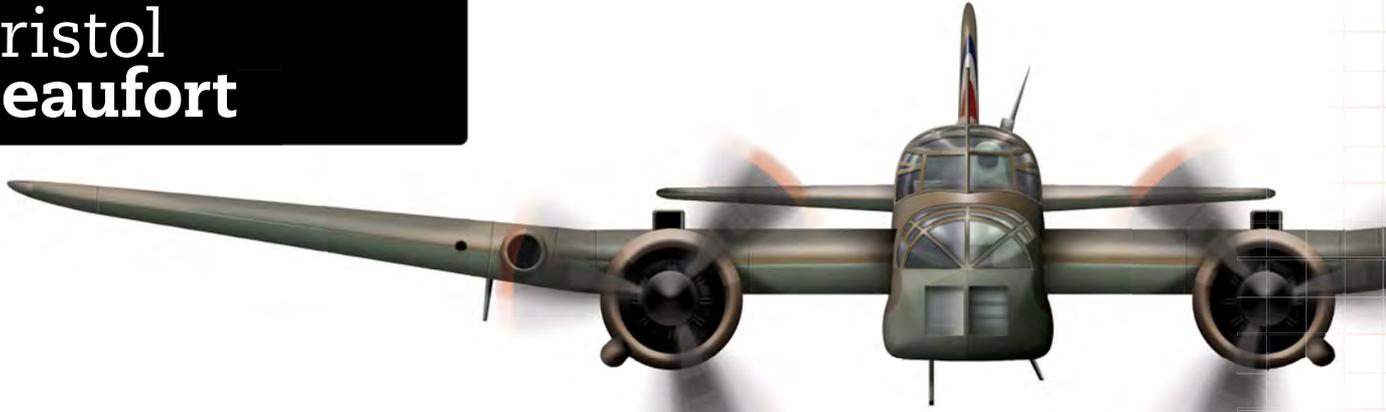
Below
Refuelling Beaufort VIII A9-296 of 7 Squadron RAAF at Horn Island after its crew had shot down a 'Jake' on June 18, 1943.
RAAF





Spotlight

Bristol Beaufort



Low-level Raider

Andy Hay artwork of a Beaufort flown by a Victoria Cross recipient

Artwork
Bristol Beaufort Mk.I N1016 OA-X of 22 Squadron, based at St Eval, Cornwall, flown by Fg Off Kenneth Campbell VC on April 6, 1941.
ANDY HAY-2017

In the early years of World War Two, Bristol Beauforts and Blenheims were often tasked with engaging enemy shipping. Crews undertook numerous extremely hazardous sorties, sometimes flying at low level against well-defended convoys and harbours. Casualty rates among air crews were high, and acts of notable valour frequent.

One such act occurred on April 6, 1941, when Fg Off Kenneth Campbell and his 22 Squadron crew pressed home an attack on the German battleship *Gneisenau*

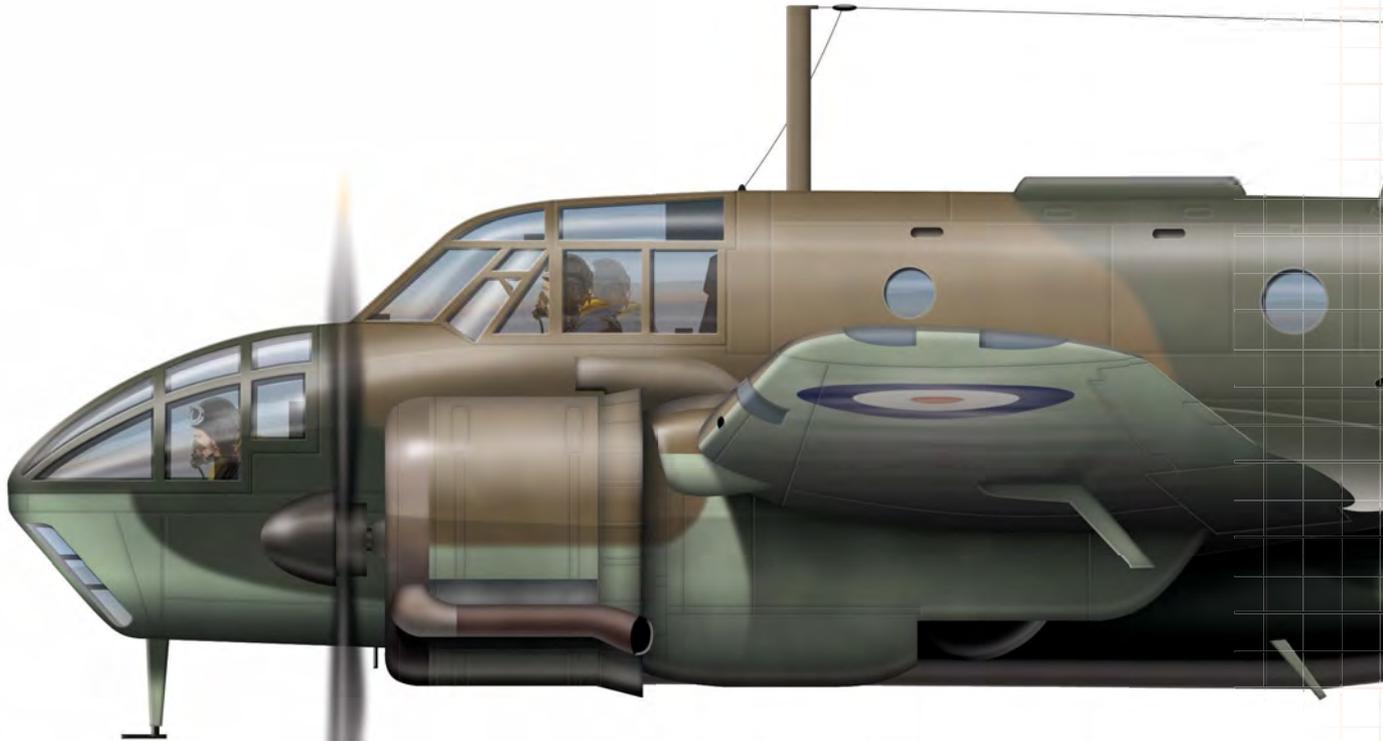
in northern France's Brest harbour. Needing to launch his torpedo from a height of just 50ft, Campbell's aircraft – Beaufort N1016 – was picked out by concentrated anti-aircraft fire. Much of this was coming from the mole (a defensive structure) at which his target was moored.

Campbell nevertheless persevered, his torpedo striking the enemy vessel below the waterline and causing enough damage to put it out of action for around six months.

Due to the rising ground surrounding the harbour, Campbell

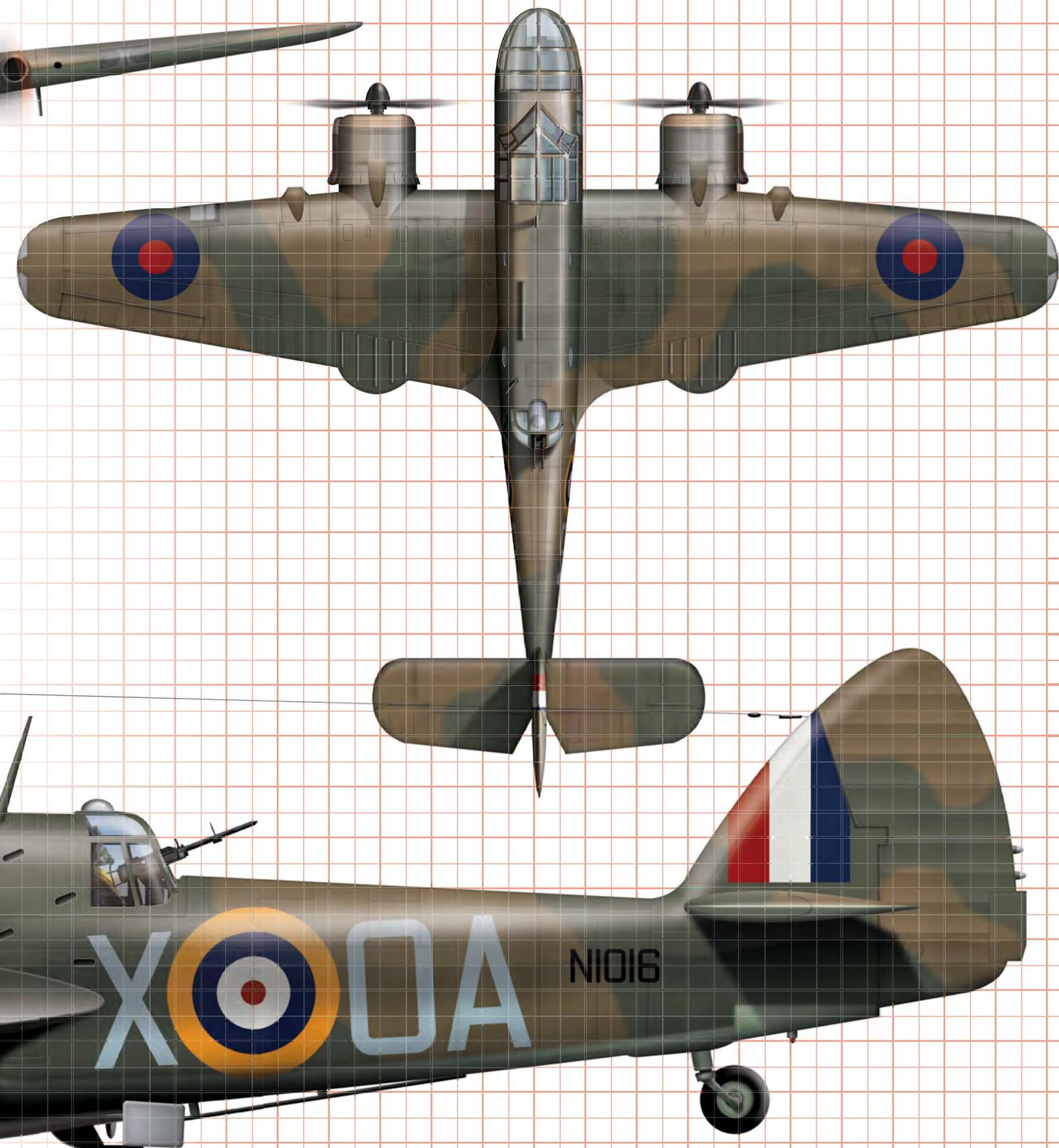
was then obliged to attempt a steep banking turn, making his Beaufort a slow and vulnerable target in the sky. Hit by flak, the machine was brought down. Campbell and his crew – Sgts James Scott DFM (navigator), Ralph Hillman (wireless operator) and William Mulliss (air gunner) – were killed.

News of the raid was relayed to the British by the French Resistance, leading to the pilot being posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross. All four aboard N1016 were buried by the Germans with full military honours.



SPOT FACT Beauforts first served with the Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm in 1940

**Beaufort
in profile**



1,103 Taurus-powered Mk.IIs were built



Spotlight

Bristol Beaufort



Bombs, Mines and Torpedoes



Croydon-born Lloyd Morgan enlisted in March 1940. After completing his training as a pilot, he attended a course at 2 School of General Reconnaissance at Squires Gate, near Blackpool, where he flew Avro Ansons and Blackburn Bothas. A posting to St Eval in Cornwall to join 217 Squadron and convert to the Beaufort followed.

Morgan joined the unit just as a concentrated period of attacks

against the German battlecruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* came to an end. His first operations were patrols in the Bay of Biscay in case the warships attempted to break out of the French port of Brest and make for Germany.

A number of 'Bust Patrols' were also flown by Morgan and his crew. These were daylight sorties along the French coast to Ushant flying at 500ft (152m) with a full load of bombs, looking for enemy coastal shipping.

Over the next few weeks 217's Beauforts were heavily engaged in 'Gardening'; dropping mines in the entrances to the Biscay ports. The 1,500lb Mk.I mine was dropped from heights that varied from around 100 to 1,500ft.

Throughout June and much of July 1941, most of Morgan's flying was Gardening from low-level at night in the approaches to Brest, Lorient, St Nazaire and La Rochelle.

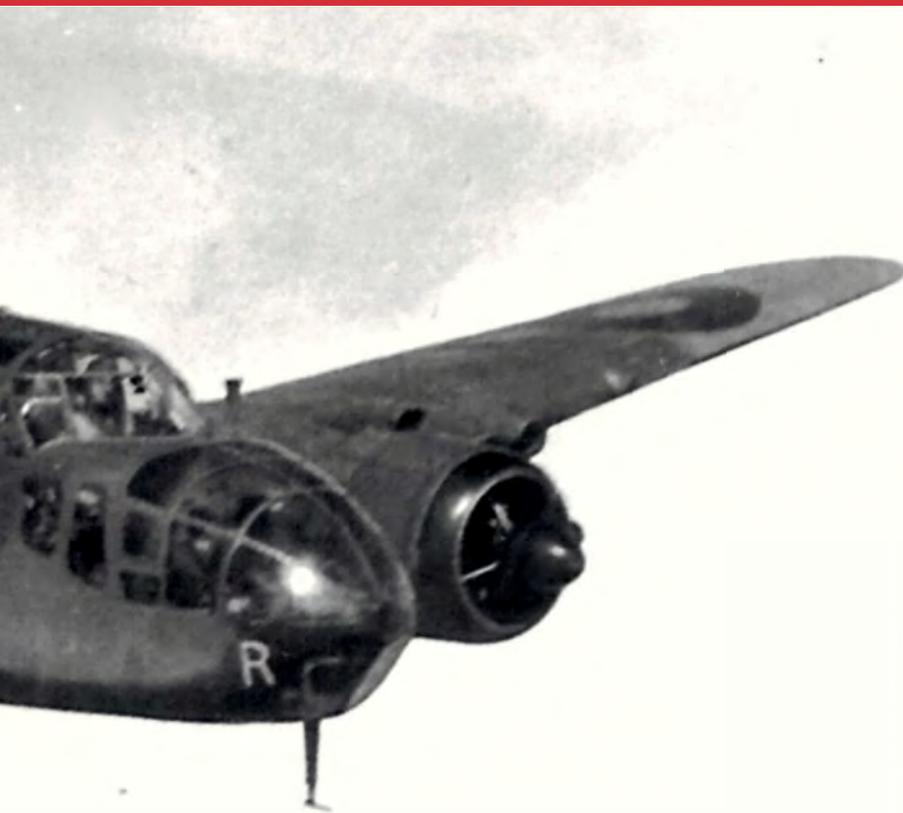
Towards the end of July, there was a diversion when intelligence reports indicated that *Scharnhorst* appeared to be preparing to sail from

As They Flew Over France

V SIGN WAS FLASHED TO R.A.F.

Flying over France on their way to attack the industrial and shipbuilding centres of Nantes and St. Nazaire during the night, Beaufort aircraft swept so low over towns and villages in the brilliant moonlight that people rushed from their homes to flash the Victory sign on pocket torches.

One pilot said: "We saw cottage doors being thrown open. Lights streamed out, and silhouetted in the beams were men and women peering up at us. Many of them flashed the letter V on their torches."



listened to the BBC and were telling the RAF crews that they were giving them hope. The signal was widely reported by the national press.

In addition to the mine-laying against the Biscay ports, bombing continued with more ordnance dropped on the docks. These sorties and attacks against shipping caused heavy casualties and Morgan lost many of his friends.

Beaufort teacher

In October 1941 the squadron started to receive the Beaufort II powered by 1,200hp (895kW) Pratt & Whitney Twin Wasps, a significant improvement on the earlier Mk.I. There was also a move to Thorney Island on the Hampshire coast.

On October 29, eight Beauforts attacked Nantes with bombs and dropped leaflets. This followed the execution of 42 hostages with the threat to shoot a further 50 in German retaliation for the assassination of Lt Col Karl Holz, the military governor of Nantes. Morgan later learnt that the other hostages had been spared. It was the pilot's last operation on 217

Graham Pitchfork charts the careers of three Beaufort pilots operating in Britain, North Africa and the Pacific

La Pallice. On July 24 Morgan flew one of the eight Beauforts, each carrying a 2,000lb 'Magnum' mine. During the attack they met heavy anti-aircraft fire, dropping their payload in the dock area.

The following day *Scharnhorst* sailed and Morgan was in a formation of six sent to attack but poor weather thwarted their attempts and the battlecruiser made Brest safely.

Low-level raids

Morgan was piloting one of three Beauforts tasked with bombing docks and shipping at St Nazaire on the night of September 28, 1941. Poor weather thwarted the raid so Morgan and his crew headed for the alternate target, the oil refinery at nearby Donge.

On the approach a night-fighter attacked the Beaufort. Morgan dived to 100ft, while his gunner opened fire and the enemy veered away. The gunner then destroyed a threatening searchlight.

Pressing on from 700ft, the observer, Plt Off Roy Nesbit (who later became

a highly-respected aviation historian and author) was able to obtain a direct hit with the two 500lb and three 250lb bombs, and one 25lb canister of incendiaries. The resulting explosion shook the low-flying 'Beau'. The second Beaufort added to the conflagration but the third failed to return.

Two nights later, Morgan and his crew were detailed to carry out a night raid on the Kuhlmann chemical works in Nantes. On the approaches to the Loire estuary, a night-fighter attacked from ahead. Morgan dived to 150ft and headed out to sea before he made a second attempt.

Intense light flak was encountered but Nesbit fixed their position in the hazy conditions and released the bombs from 700ft; the explosion rocking the aircraft violently. The crew observed the collapse of a tall chimney followed by a large fire, which could still be seen 20 miles away on the homeward journey.

As the crew headed for the French coast, winking lights were flashed in Morse, dit-dit-dit-dah 'V-for-Victory'. The oppressed French people had

Squadron.

It was announced on November 8 that he had been awarded an immediate DFM. In March 1942 King George VI presented it to him at an investiture at Buckingham Palace.

After training as a flying instructor, he was commissioned and spent a year teaching pilots to fly the Beaufort. In June 1943 he joined the newly formed 684 Squadron flying Mosquitos on long-range photographic reconnaissance operations from airfields near Calcutta, India.

After almost a year of continuous missions, Morgan was rested and instructed at a flying school at Poona before returning to the UK. He was released from the service in May 1946.

He enjoyed a long career in civil aviation and retired as a senior training captain with British Airways when he was 55. He then flew BAC One-Eleven twin-jets with Air Malawi for a further five years.

He was a stalwart of the Beaufort Aircrew Association and was its treasurer for several years until it disbanded in 2011. Lloyd Morgan died in 2013.

Above left
A Beaufort of 217 Squadron.

Far left
Lloyd Morgan, 217 Squadron Beaufort pilot.

Left
One of the newspaper articles reporting the V-for-Victory sign displayed after the raid on St Nazaire of September 28, 1941.

SPOT FACT Designer Roy Fedden created the low drag cowlings to accommodate the Taurus engines



This page, clockwise from right
Ground crew of 217 Squadron having a well-earned tea break at St Eval.

Daffurn (standing left) and his crew.

Lionel Daffurn in desert 'rig'.

A Beaufort of 39 Squadron off the coast near Benghazi.

“The crew observed the collapse of a tall chimney followed by a large fire, which could still be seen 20 miles away on the homeward journey”

Taranto fleet

A student at London University, Lionel Daffurn enlisted in the RAF Volunteer Reserve in October 1939 and trained as a pilot. After flying Ansons and Blenheim IVs on convoy patrols over the North Sea he was sent to Egypt in November 1941. Converting to the Beaufort, he joined 39 Squadron at Shandur which was

conducting torpedo training and practising formation attacks. The unit later moved to Sidi Barrani.

On the evening of June 14, 1942 reconnaissance aircraft spotted the Italian fleet near Taranto and heading south. They were likely to come within range of the Sidi Barrani-based Beauforts by the following morning.

Twelve crews gathered for a very

early morning brief when their charismatic leader, Sqn Ldr Pat Gibbs, simply said: “You will see cruisers and destroyers on the way in. Ignore them and go for the battlewagons, follow me.” With that, the Beauforts, each carrying a torpedo, took off at 06:15 hours and headed for the target. They flew at very low level off





Above
A 39 Squadron Beaufort in a makeshift blast pen at Luqa, Malta.



Left
A torpedo dropped from a Beaufort scoring a hit in the Mediterranean.

some degree of control, the fighters closed in and the fuselage and engines were repeatedly hit.

Suddenly, the fighters broke off and Daffurn turned the badly damaged Beaufort and headed for home – a two-hour flight. Unable to jettison the torpedo, Daffurn struggled to keep control but they eventually reached base, making a successful belly landing. The crew had survived to fight another day.

Four others from the formation were forced to turn back and only five made the attack. Despite being badly damaged, they all survived and managed to reach Malta. The Italian fleet suffered no damage but it sailed back to Taranto and was rarely seen in the Mediterranean again.

'Rommel's Last Tanker'

It was soon apparent that the Beauforts flying from airfields in Egypt were having to operate at extreme range, so regular detachments were sent to Malta where they joined forces with 86 and 217 Squadrons. The three units would attack in wing strength on what became known as 'Armed Rovers' under the dynamic leadership of Pat Gibbs, who later became the film critic of the *Independent* newspaper.

Daffurn flew on daylight torpedo raids when nine Beauforts were escorted by up to 16 Beaufighters. Enemy shipping was engaged off the Greek coast and others on passage from Brindisi to Benghazi or Tobruk carrying supplies to Rommel's panzer divisions in North Africa.

Back in Egypt, Daffurn was commissioned and flew anti-shiping patrols. In late September, the majority of 39 Squadron's Egypt-based crews were transferred to 47 Squadron, which was just re-equipping with the Beaufort.

Daffurn took part in 47's first major success. In October 1942 Beauforts took off to search for the *Prosperina* carrying urgently needed fuel for Rommel on the eve of the Battle of El Alamein. The vessel was found, and it sank after a direct hit from a torpedo. Dubbed 'Rommel's Last Tanker', its loss was a major blow to the operational capability of the Axis at a crucial time.

Daffurn remained on 47 Squadron for a further six months, flying from Misurata in Libya on anti-submarine and anti-shiping patrols as the Allied armies advanced towards Tunisia. Finally, the unit converted to Beaufighters.

This heralded a long career for Daffurn on the type in the Middle East and then with the Dallachy Wing in Scotland.

Lionel Daffurn was awarded the DFC. He left the RAF at the end of the war to take up holy orders.

Coral Sea strikes

Charles 'Chas' Walsh, who came from a small town near Perth in Western Australia, enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) on June 20, 1940 as an airman pilot. After completing his training, he spent two years flying Ansons and Hudsons.

With a considerable amount of experience in twin-engined types, ➔

the north coast of Libya, fearful that enemy fighters on the landing grounds would be alerted and engage the Beauforts. Two hours in, disaster struck when a force of Messerschmitt Bf 109s, en route to Crete, spotted the formation and attacked.

Two Beauforts were shot down and the formation was soon scattered. The more powerful Mk.IIs pulled ahead but Daffurn and his crew, in a Mk.I, found themselves at the rear of the force.

Three Bf 109s closed in and the gunner opened fire only for his guns to jam. The wireless operator left his position to man the single gun on the port side but, after a few bursts; he was badly injured by shrapnel.

Daffurn maintained a violent weave when the aircraft suddenly lurched and the rudder bar became virtually useless. As he struggled to maintain

SPOT FACT Though larger, the type's overall structural weight was less than that of the Blenheim

Below
A Beaufort of 100 Squadron RAAF at a jungle strip.

Walsh completed torpedo-dropping training in May 1943. He went on to join 100 Squadron operating the Australian-built Beaufort VII.

Based at Gurney at the head of Milne Bay in New Guinea, 100 Squadron was part of Allied Air Forces, South-West Pacific Area. It was one of nine units forming 9 (Operational) Group commanded by Air Cdre J E Hewitt RAAF when General Douglas MacArthur, the commander of South-West Pacific Command, began his advance in the southwest Pacific.

The Japanese relied on shipping to re-supply the many islands they occupied, while the Allied advance was heavily dependent on amphibious and naval support.

Consequently, a great deal of 100's activities was geared towards attacking enemy shipping and supporting Allied operations.

Walsh flew his first 'op' on June 18 when he completed a six-hour anti-submarine patrol over the Coral Sea.

Convoy patrols, shipping reconnaissance and air sea rescues followed. By mid-July, it had become apparent that the Japanese were reinforcing Rabaul and other key positions in the south of New Britain. Reconnaissance had identified increased activity on the Japanese-held airfield at Gasmata

and on July 21 ten Beauforts of 100 Squadron deployed to the advance airfield at Vivigani on Goodenough Island.

The following morning, in poor weather, Walsh and nine other crews took off to attack Gasmata. Two squadrons of Curtiss Kittyhawks provided top cover.

The Beauforts were the third force over the target, by which time the cloud base had lowered significantly. However, the ten crews dropped 15,000lb of bombs on the runway in a series of low-level attacks before strafing buildings and enemy gun positions.

Five of the ten Beauforts were hit by anti-aircraft fire but managed to return. At the time, it was the largest single RAAF strike that had been undertaken.

Assault on Lae

As a prelude to an advance on Rabaul, MacArthur's troops had seized islands in the Solomon Sea and these provided good advanced landing grounds, including one on Kiriwina. This enabled air operations against New Britain, and raids on the Japanese strongholds in northern New Guinea were intensified.

Walsh and his fellow crews staged many anti-submarine and convoy-protection patrols in support of the large-scale movements at sea by Allied forces. With the amphibious landings at Lae, which was close to the previously

attacked Gasmata, planned for September 4, 1943, the patrols became even more vital.

The assault on Lae began with a naval bombardment and Walsh flew an armed reconnaissance sortie. Ten aircraft of 100, together with Douglas Bostons of 22 Squadron, mounted a major raid on Gasmata in an attempt to prevent the Japanese Naval Air Service from interfering with the landings.

A dawn recce revealed that the enemy had made repairs to the runway overnight. It was vital that the airfield should be kept out of action because Allied transport aircraft were to drop an American and Australian parachute force at Nadzab, near Lae.

At 07:00 on September 5, ten 100 Squadron Beauforts, led by Flt Lt Woollacott, and with a top cover provided by eight Kittyhawks of 76 Squadron, set out for Gasmata. An earlier visit from Bostons had alerted the enemy air defences and they were at a high state of readiness.

The Beauforts planned to approach in a shallow dive from 3,000ft and release the bombs at 1,500ft. This tactic had worked well on earlier attacks when the opposition was light.



This time the enemy gunners were waiting.

Woollacott dived first but his aircraft was soon hit and set on fire. Nevertheless, he pressed on and dropped his bombs on the runway before his blazing Beaufort crashed, killing him and his crew. A second Beaufort was hit and crashed into the sea, and a third was seen leaving the area on fire and this failed to return.

Walsh dived on the target and his machine was hit and badly damaged. With one engine out of commission, he managed to coax it back to Vivigani where he made a crash

Beauforts to the forward airfield at Vivigani on September 21.

Later that night he led five aircraft to the enemy airfield. The Australian aircraft dropped 12 tons of bombs with delayed action fuses ranging from 12 seconds to 36 hours.

The Japanese air units on Rabaul had to be neutralised as MacArthur was mounting a campaign towards the Caroline Islands where adequate anchorages – needed for the eventual recapture of the Philippines – would become available.

Late on October 12, Walsh led a small force of Beauforts to attack an ammo dump at Cape Hoskins on

Harbour. On the night of November 14, it was 100 Squadron's turn to attack the shipping in company with the Beauforts of 6 and 8 squadrons.

Outstanding example

Rabaul continued to be a serious threat to the US-led Allied landings and it came under constant attack by the Beaufort units. However, Walsh was coming to the end of his tour, during which the squadron had sustained heavy casualties.

On the night of November 17, 1943, he flew his last operation when he carried out a night attack against dispersals on the outskirts of Rabaul.



Centre left
Chas Walsh RAAF.



Left
RAAF Beauforts head out over the Solomon Islands.
ALL VIA AUTHOR

landing. Walsh and his crew escaped unhurt but the aircraft was wrecked and could only be used for spares.

The raid on Gasmata proved very expensive for 100 Squadron. Four aircraft and three crews were lost and most of the remaining six Beauforts had been damaged. However, the strikes had been successful and the aircraft based at Gasmata were reduced to just a minor role in support of Japanese ground forces.

By September 15, Lae and Salamaua were in Australian hands. With this rapid success, MacArthur brought forward the date to take the important port of nearby Finschhafen.

Rabaul action

The Australian landings were planned for September 22, 1943 and the Beauforts of 100 Squadron, together with a small force of Bostons, were tasked to re-attack Gasmata to suppress any enemy air activity. Walsh, who had just been made a flight commander, took a force of five

New Britain, dropping a mixture of 500lb and 250lb bombs.

On the 20th, Allied intelligence learned that an enemy convoy, which included two cruisers, was heading for Rabaul from Truk. Three RAAF Beaufort squadrons were tasked to attack the convoy and Walsh flew one of the nine aircraft of 100 Squadron.

Taking off just after midnight on the 21st from Kiriwina, the Beauforts found the ships at 04:15. Beauforts of 6 and 8 Squadrons dropped torpedoes and those of 100 Squadron attacked with bombs against very heavy anti-aircraft fire. Three large flashes were seen on the port side of one of the cruisers with men seen jumping into the water.

Walsh led four night strikes against the enemy airfield at Vunakanau and dumps around Rabaul. On November 9, with seven other crews of 100 Squadron, he again dropped bombs on the area but this time as a diversion for a torpedo attack against Japanese naval targets in nearby Simpson

Shortly afterwards, the Bismarck Barrier was broken and the Allied advance towards the re-occupation of the Philippines gathered momentum.

In six months, Walsh had accumulated 220 operational hours and had flown 46 missions, including 12 strikes against very heavily defended targets. It was later announced that he had been awarded the DFC. The citation concluded: "He has been an outstanding example to all other members of his squadron".

For 18 months, Walsh was an instructor on 1 Operational Training Unit at East Sale training Beaufort crews. He later left for Canberra where he converted to the US-built North American B-25 Mitchell before joining 2 Squadron to fly operations over Borneo.

Walsh was released from the RAAF in January 1947. The rigours of war in New Guinea and Borneo had left its mark on Chas Walsh – he suffered from ill health later in his life and died in 1980. ●