

Extracts from

**AIR WAR
AGAINST JAPAN
1943-1945**

by
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**CANBERRA
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tock, adding that MacArthur had opposed this on the ground that Hewitt was not an "adequate replacement". Drakeford replied next day defending Hewitt, pointing out that he had rendered excellent service and that "the present position may be largely, if not entirely, due to some temporary physical stress brought about by the strain of his important duties as A.O.C. of No. 9 Group".

Rabaul, even after many Allied attacks, was still immensely strong, and continued to be a serious threat to Halsey. The Beauforts of No. 6 Squadron bombed Vunakanau airfield on the night of 10th November. Conditions for bombing were perfect and the crews could clearly see the airfield and dispersal bays from 10,000 feet.

In response to a request from Halsey, Admiral Nimitz had sent him three more aircraft carriers (*Independence*, *Essex* and *Bunker Hill*) and aircraft from these together with those from *Saratoga* and *Princeton* made more attacks on Rabaul on 11th November. Some of Kenney's bombers joined in also, and, although bad weather greatly hampered the operation, preventing a coordinated attack, the carrier aircraft sank a destroyer and damaged other ships. Admiral Kurita was forced finally to withdraw his naval task force from Rabaul and every one of his ships that could steam returned to Truk. Admiral Koga recalled the remaining carrier air groups and sent them back to Japan for reorganisation into other units. Halsey had won the day. Bougainville was safe.

Hewitt had sent two more heavy night attacks against Rabaul on 14th and 17th November, using his three squadrons of Beauforts. He directed Beauforts of No. 6 Squadron to bomb shipping in the harbour on 14th November. The pilots found three groups of ships, one in the west side of Simpson Harbour, one in the centre of the harbour and the other off Lakunai. They made two hits or very near misses on a motor vessel and two direct hits on the stern of an 8,000-ton ship. Flight Lieutenant Oates scored the two hits on the 8,000-ton ship. He singled out his target and made a gliding approach from 10,000 feet, clearing Talili Bay by 400 feet and dropping to 150 feet over the harbour. His first four bombs entered the water running up to the side of the vessel and the last two entered the vessel. Later that night seven bomb-carrying and five torpedo-carrying Beauforts of No. 8 Squadron led by Flight Lieutenant Dorward⁶ also attacked the harbour. One of the Beauforts was lost. The Beauforts of No. 100 Squadron which also attacked the harbour could not see the result of their efforts.

⁶ Sqn Ldr E. A. Dorward, 251607. 23, 32, 8, 35 and 37 Sqns. Airline pilot; of Brighton Beach, Vic; b. Brighton, Vic, 26 Apr 1910.