

# A WAR DIARY

by

Lieutenant Richard R. Birnn

This is the diary of a young military pilot which vividly exposes the needless waste and hazard that a nation faces when it fails to make timely provision for war.

Lieutenant Richard R. Birnn entered the service as a flying cadet July 1, 1940. He was commissioned in February 1941, and assigned to the Philippines with the 27th Bomb Group shortly before Pearl Harbor.

He crashed and was killed in Brisbane Harbor, July 4, 1942 while testing an A-20, equipped with eight 50-calibre forward firing guns. After the acceptance tests he was to fly this plane to his combat base at Charters Towers, Queensland with the 3rd Bomb Group.

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San Francisco, California

1 November 1941

We sail today. We flew out here from Charlotte a few days ago. Yesterday they pushed a boxcar, loaded with officers' baggage, into the Bay. The salt water sure made a mess of things. I lost plenty, — a brand new \$75.00 wardrobe trunk, clothing and, also, a new shotgun.

We sailed at noon today on the President Coolidge. A wonderful ship. Couldn't see the top of Golden Gate Bridge for the fog.

At sea, en route to Hawaii

3 November 1941

Beautiful weather and calm sea. Coolidge is a luxury liner; — two swimming pools, gym, huge sun deck. We have a beautiful cabin with large closets and bath. Movies every night. What a life! This ship, being the flagship of the American President lines, is noted for its fine food. We eat like kings. I am eating enough for four men.

Honolulu

6 November 1941

Arrived at Honolulu at dawn. These islands are the most beautiful things I have ever seen. We are being allowed to go ashore, but sail again this afternoon. Took a trip around the island. What a place to live in; — climate wonderful, water perfect. Wish I could stay here. I don't want the Philippines; — nothing there.

At sea, — en route Philippines

16 November 1941

Stopped at Guam this morning while Army transport, now assigned to our convoy, unloads food and takes on water. Navy planes patrol around us, on lookout for subs. Guess we will go to war with Japan someday.

Manila, P. I.

20 November 1941

Arrived Manila this afternoon. Typical large native population city. Lots of smells. We are staying at Ft. Wm. McKinley, — an infantry post in the outskirts of Manila. Men living in tents, — officers in empty quarters.

We have no planes, — supposed to come later.

Not much to do. Go into Manila often. Things very cheap over here. Doing all my Christmas shopping in Chinese shops, — beautiful stuff.

Ft. McKinley, P. I.

26 November 1941

Got my flying time in today, — flew B-18 from Nichols to Clark and back. Jap situation looking worse, — don't think our planes will arrive in time. Hope the Japs don't attack P. I. as we're not prepared, — hopelessly short of combat planes.

W A R ! ! !

Ft. McKinley, P. I.

8 December 1941

Just heard the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor. Looks bad!

Well, it's here! Word just came in that Baguio and Clark Field have been bombed, — Clark almost wiped out, — and here we sit with no equipment.

Why didn't they send more planes to the Philippines? They knew this was coming.

Sent some of the new pilots to Nichols Field. Going to use them in pursuit. Won't let any of the bi-motored pilots go, — figure we might be needed. Probably be transferred to a bomb group as our planes haven't arrived. Funny they never built any bomb shelters on McKinley, — only two.

Eight crews from our group were to go out to Nielson Field tonight. They were going to bomb Jap bases on Formosa with B-18's. Having to use B-18's would be suicide. The crews later returned, — no planes, — all were destroyed on Clark Field.

Nothing to do — so went to a movie on the post.

Ft. McKinley, P. I.

9 December 1941

Awakened at 3:15 by bombs. Japs just bombed Nichols Field, — which is close to McKinley. Could see the flashes. All over the post the Philippine soldiers started firing their 30-cal. machine guns: Had red tracers. Very pretty, but no damn good. Was to keep planes from flying over post. Silly! Some bombs dropped very close. Went back to bed.

In the morning found Japs had hit Nichols Field and destroyed hangars. Also hit the P. A. A. radio station near McKinley. Was issued a service type gas mask.

Had two more raids near us at 10:45 A.M. Ibea, a small pursuit field, has been completely wiped out. Japs dropped tons of bombs on it. At noon bombs hit in officers' mess, — killed lots. Some of the men are now assigned to our group, — they're all bomb happy. Almost everyone has moved and is living in the jungle at the edge of the post.

At Ibea some of the pursuit boys were flying over the field while it was being bombed. First they knew of the raid was seeing the bombs hit. Several were killed in planes on the ground and one while landing.

The attack on Clark the previous day destroyed one-half of our B-17's; the rest luckily were south in Mindanao.

I have \$438.00 in the Philippine Trust Company, — hope it doesn't fold.

Ft. McKinley

10 December 1941

Had two warning sirens last night, — no planes.

Japs invading Northern Luzon, — using some parachute troops.

Sent fifteen of the new boys over to Nichols to fly P-40's. I, with seven of my classmates, went over to Nielson Field to replace the first bunch sent over to fly P-40's, — claimed these boys did not have enough experience.

Air raid a few minutes after arrival. Jumped in a drainage ditch. Watched P-40's and Japs dogfight. Headed for a culvert when bombers came over. One, with wheels down, strafed me, — heard bullets strike the ground where I had been. One bomb landed nearby, — shook the ground. Planes strafed the field and burned General Brereton's new transport. This ship was to take us to Clark Field. Nichols Field was also badly damaged again. Cavitte Naval Base was almost completely wiped out.

The air was full of Jap planes.

After the attack we returned to McKinley. That night we went up to Clark in a reconnaissance car. Hard to find in a blackout. Arrived and slept on ground. Ten pilots went along.

Clark Field

11 December 1941

Spent day doing nothing. Dug a foxhole and fixed up bunk under a tree. We are in the woods that contains headquarters. Hear rumors that A-24's and A-20's arrived by boat. I doubt it.

Clark Field

12 December 1941

Very quiet this morning. Low clouds and light rain. No fun living in the open. Talley and I went to enlisted man's barracks 1/3 mile away for a shower. Now deserted, — been bombed several times. Heard air raid warning, — ignored it because it was too cloudy for a raid. Heard second warning as I finished dressing. Went outside and saw nine bombers in a "V" formation. Ran for cover, — ran like we had never run before. Finally had to drop to the ground when the bombers got too close. We hugged the ground. Bombs, dropped in train, straddled us. Just lucky. Ground sure shook, — so did I.

Got up and moved farther away. Then nine more bombers came over. Clark is right on the edge of a mountain range. The bombers whipped around the mountains, just under the clouds, and were on us before we could do anything. We hit the ground again.

Rather nerve-racking to lie in the open and wait for bombs to hit. They get closer and closer. The ground started to shake and the explosions hurt our ears. When this attack had passed, we saw nine others off to the side.

Walked back to HQ. through tank area. Noticed that the bombs hit in this area. One bomb hit a gun emplacement,—killed everyone. Saw other wounded men being carried away.

Bomb hit a B-17 on the field. They seem to know when we have anything on the field.

Back in Hq. area found a bomb had hit 50 feet from my bunk. I am moving out. They know this is Hq.

Japs strafed when they came over. AA got a couple of ships. We had no pursuit up.

Ordnance setting off duds now. They give no warning—just the explosion. When one goes off nearby, everyone hits the dirt. Gets a little nerve-racking.

Japs now have an air base in the Northern part of Luzon.

Our bunch is getting administrative jobs since all the planes are burned. We're doing the jobs the pursuit outfit was doing here. They moved into the hills.

Shrapnel sure is mean looking,—jagged edges and sharp as a knife. Hope I get to finish this diary.

Clark Field

13 December 1941

Yesterday we moved to an open field which has very high grass. Of course, last night it rained. No raincoat. Gets kind of wet with just one blanket over you. Water collects in pools on your cot.

Awakened this morning by planes. Directly overhead were Jap dive bombers with fixed landing gears. Looked exactly like a P-26. They sure were low. We ran to a trench.

Some of these dive bombers strafed a B-8 being towed across the field. The two officers in the B-18, Heiss and Timlin, left the plane and started running. Bullets kicked up the dirt all around Timlin, but he wasn't hit. His lucky day.

When raid was over went to mess for breakfast. At 8:45 A.M. had food on my plate when siren went off. Set plate down figuring I'd be back shortly. At 11:20 I'm still in a foxhole. Japs have been over us continuously. Gosh, they have dropped a lot of bombs. Three of us are in a hole the size of a footlocker. The C. O. won't let any one of us out. He's afraid the Japs might see and bomb us. Now 11:30. About to starve. Last raid very close,—shook ground.

Now 11:50. Another raid,—no bombs. Heard bombs hit very far away. The Japs must have bases very close to run so many raids. So far they have met no resistance. That accounts for their boldness.

I don't think the people in the U. S. realize how bad the situation is. If they could only spend one day here, things might be different. Better watch out or this place will be another Crete.

Lots of recon planes flying overhead.

Another raid. Plenty of bombs. Guess they are trying to wear us out. Had one bath since I arrived in this place,—sure dirty.

Finally got to eat at 1:30,— a ham sandwich. They didn't get a chance to cook anything.

Don't see how this Squadron prepares such good food. Really marvelous. That helps morale. We need good food as we have to run such a long distance when air raids come. We carry a pistol, water bottle, web belt, gas mask, steel helmet and mess kit,— obstructions to fast running.

We are spending the day in an open field with a stream through it,— several miles from the field. Why spend a day on the field? We have nothing to do in the daytime,— we only work at night.

Clark Field

14 December 1941

Rained heavy all last night: water just poured through my blanket,— waterlogged this morning.

Took over a new job last night,— have the alert alarm crew. Stay up in the tower on the field from 6-12 P.M. When I see a plane or planes I must first determine whose it is and then, if it is going to come here. When the alarm is given you have to pick up three phones and warn everyone,— then turn on the siren,— then flash a red light around camp. By then the bombs are very close. You then run down a long flight of stairs, out of the hangar and into a trench. It is the most dangerous job on the field. Whipple and I have it. We take alternate shifts. Only had three sandwiches all day yesterday. Very quiet all day. Saw 27 planes heading for Manila. They didn't drop bombs on anything important. Never bomb ships in harbor. May expect to capture them. Have more than 57 transports in Manila Bay now.

Clark Field

15 December 1941

Have seen a lot of bombers this A.M. They just circle and go off someplace. Just had another raid,— hit hangar line again. Glad I'm not on duty in the tower now. — I have the other shift. Another raid, but don't know where the bombs dropped. Our food is getting cold again.

Too much rain! We have all moved to a house on Ft. Stotsenberg. It is connected with Clark. The Jap is hard pressed for targets,— he's bombing recon cars.

Clark Field

16 December 1941

Arose at 5:00 A.M. and went on duty. Missed breakfast and lunch,— if the bombs don't kill me, starvation will.

Good news! Just told we were returning to Ft. McKinley. Boy, am I glad!

Arrived at dark and told to get ready by 9:45 P.M. Going to fly down to Australia in a C-39. Things move fast in this army. Our A-24's are in Australia. Will assemble them and return immediately to P. I. Should be a nice trip.

Left Nichols Field in flight of one C-39 and two B-18's at 3:45 A.M. Arrived Del Monte, Mindanao 7:15 A.M. Very cold, rough and dreary trip. Members of our party are: Walker, West, Talley, Mangan, Townsend, Salvatore, Doan, Rogers, Lowery, Davies, Bachus, Rose, Briegg, Timlin, Heiss, Schmidt, Golusha, Summers, Hambraugh, Tubb, Strauss, Mahoney, Keenan and Hoffman.

Del Monte

17 December 1941

Very rugged country here. Much like Hawaii. One of the few fields not yet bombed by Japs. Spending day at Del Monte Club, 3 miles from field. Nice club,— tennis, swimming, golf, wonderful meals and cheap. Right in center of huge pineapple plantation,— free pineapple juice. Too bad we can't stay over,— we're pulling out for N. E. I. at 4:00 A.M. Sleeping at the club till then.

Del Monte

18 December 1941

Took off at 4:00 A.M. No seats in C-39. Be too bad if we were jumped by Jap pursuit. No guns on this plane. That's the reason for early morning take-off.

Flew directly over a Jap carrier. Glad it was still dark. Went to sleep on the cold bare floor. Bitterly cold, and me with only a raincoat. Must be getting hard. Never could have done this a few months ago.

Had to pass up Terakan, Borneo as it was closed in, and go on to Balikpapan. Arrived there almost out of gas. Poor country for forced landings, no emergency fields. A forced landing means the finish. Had to make plenty friendly signs on approaching for landing. The Dutch are plenty cautious and the field is barricaded. They are, also, very gracious and hospitable.

Balikpapan

19 December 1941

Left Balikpapan at 9:00 A.M. and headed out to sea. Heading for Makassar in Celebes,— also Dutch. Will spend the night there. Looks like we'll spend Christmas in Australia,— suits me fine. At least we won't have to dodge bombs there. Arrived at 3:00 P.M. Modern Dutch town,— one of the best in the Dutch East Indies. The airport is heavily fortified with pillboxes, trenches and barbed wire barricades.

Makassar, Celebes

20 December 1941

Left at dawn today. Arrived in Koepang, Timor at 10:30 A.M. stopping only to take on gas. Aussies moved into this Dutch airport last week. They have Lockheed Hudsons and lots of armored cars on the field. We are back in the air with a long over-water haul ahead,— four hours over water before we again sight any land. One of the B-18's is having trouble. It is throwing oil from the left engine and the oil pressure has dropped to forty pounds.

The B-18 finally made it. We all landed at Darwin Airport. Port Darwin is hardly a town at all. Morale very poor here. They have some Lockheed Hudsons here and an armed BC-1. They think it is hot stuff. I don't know why. What I can't figure out is why we never plan ahead and have things ready. Take the Philippines,— not enough pursuit to defend one airport. They knew this was coming and yet, only a few outmoded planes were there. Why not send first-class equipment instead of A-24's, P-40's and B-18's? They could have changed the story.

Port Darwin

23 December 1941

After a two-day layover we left Darwin at dawn this morning in an RAAF Sunderland. This is a four-engined flying boat somewhat similar to our clipper. This is a slow ship,— flew 9½ hours to make 1100 miles. We finally arrived and spent the night in Townsville after stopping twice along the way for gas.

Townsville, Australia.

24 December 1941

Left at 4:00 A.M. Will be in Brisbane by 1:00 P.M. Will get to spend Christmas in a fair-sized town.

Arrived in Brisbane, — 3rd largest city in Australia. Looks like an old-fashioned city. Not many cars. Not one good-looking gal in a thousand. Perhaps I'm setting my sights a little high.

We (27th Group) had a cocktail party Christmas night. Not many had dates. I did — blind. Wish I had been. Sat around and sang songs, — Christmas and others. Hotel very modern and cheap, — food excellent.

Saw a ship unloading practice bombs, — at least 20,000 of them. We need live bombs, and planes to fly them.

Things look bad for the Philippines. Can't see how our few planes can help. Just be a sacrifice. Hong Kong has fallen.

Am now Group Executive. Have another officer to help. Our hotel room is our office, — not so hot.

Most of the men are at the fields, putting our planes together. We sit here in the hotel, read and listen to the radio, — rather dull existence. Still seen few good-looking girls. They don't seem to grow down here.

Brisbane

1 January 1942

Transferred to Amberly Field, 45 miles from town. Sure is hot here, — just like a blast furnace. We are checking trainees out in our planes, — boys just out of flying school. We are rushing them through course. Take them up and shoot one landing, — then put them in the front cockpit and ride around with them. No fun. No instruments in rear cockpit, — and it sure is hot.

Guess we'll pull out of here when we get everyone trained.

Amberly Field

7 January 1942

All our planes are now in commission and we are flying and checking the trainees off. Flew some practice dive bombing this morning, — will drop some live bombs after lunch. All work stops at 10:00 A.M. for tea. What a custom, — upsets our training program.

We sleep on little cots with no springs and mattresses made of burlap and filled with straw, — jolly living.

Well now that the Japs have taken Manila, I guess I lose all my possessions. Only have summer uniforms with me. No fun to lose all you own when you can't replace it. Wonder if it's worth it? Sleep in the open, — eat rotten food — work like h—.

Get nothing in return — can't get mail or send any out. Everyone except our families knows where we are. If we get back we'll be wrecks and the army won't want us. Guess my morale is a little low.

Still having strikes down here, with the Japs at their back door. What a place!



Amberly Field

18 January 1942

Talked to a fellow who just came down from Manila. Really sounds bad. What forces are left are now on Bataan Peninsula. We still hold that finger of land and Corregidor. Air Corps troops, which are without planes, are fighting with the Infantry. Too bad, — they'll be wasted. They have an air strip on Bataan and are doing some flying from it. I know what they're thinking, — that we'll soon be coming back with lots of planes to reinforce them. We can't do that, — we can't get up there, — and, if we could, we'd have no bases. Really feel sorry for them, — know they are helpless. We'll probably finish up somewhere in the NEI, — Java most likely.

I guess the Japs will soon take Malay Peninsula. Looks bad now. Been bombing Borneo and Celebes. Guess they'll go to work there soon, and also invade.

Heard a lot of B-17's and B-24's are flying in. Good news, we could use some medium bombers too. Sure are getting a lot of P-40's, — just boatloads pouring in. Wonder what's wrong with the P-38's and P-39's?

Amberly Field

23 January 1942

Went out on a search mission, out to sea about 50 miles. We had a sub scare, but didn't find him. Are continuing training and getting A-24's checked out, — some electrical parts were missing.

Brisbane

8 February 1942

Had dinner with Cecil Brown, the C. B. S. commentator. Quite an interesting and well-informed fellow, — really knows his war. He was on the Repulse when it was sunk, along with the Prince of Wales, from an air attack with torpedoes. Told us the fall of Singapore was coming soon.

Brisbane

14 February 1942

Left Brisbane today. Going up to Java with our A-24's, — loaded up with food and candy. Hope the Japs don't arrive first.

14 February 1942

Brisbane

Got to Charleville, gassed up and took off. Engine started missing,—cut the throttle and landed. Had no brakes,—almost went through a fence. Engine was using excess oil and fouled up plugs. Wrong type plugs anyway. Am left behind.

20 February 1942

Charleville, Australia

Seventeenth Squadron arrived yesterday. Am going North with them today. Next stop, Cloncurry.

Arrived Cloncurry after flying over the worst country I've ever seen,—all desert with no check points. Lost two planes on the way up. Dengue fever is bad here—Hope I don't catch it.

21 February 1942

Daily Waters

Arrived here today. More desert but worse. Think we'll stay here a while,—they're having daily bombing raids at Darwin. Three days ago they almost wiped out Darwin with heavy raids,—50 bombers at a time. They caught B-24's, P-40's and Hudsons on the ground. They know how to shoot down B-17's,—make frontal attacks.

22 February 1942

Daily Waters

This place is really a hole. Hasn't rained in months and the ground is baked—I'm sleeping on it. The temperature is always above 100°. The

flies are horrible,—they don't bite, just cover you and crawl. Have to wear a face net,—but can't put that over my food. No messing facilities.—food is bad. These Aussies just don't know how to eat,—no vegetables, no eggs, no taste.

We're losing our A-24's fast. Of the original 53 we now have only 22 that are flyable,—and this before we've had a day of combat.

24 February 1942

Daily Waters

Got a report the 91st Squadron (dive bombers) went out from Java and sank five ships—good score, lost two planes. Other bombers sank lots more.

C.O. of our Squadron went to India to take charge of light bombardment. Wish I could have gone. We're doing no good sitting here without planes. Heard they have some B-25's in Melbourne.

1 March 1942

Daily Waters

Still holed up in Daily Waters. Three officers of the 27th Bomb Group just arrived from the Philippines. They came in by sub.—took eight days. They were sure royally fed while aboard the sub. They were Bender, MacAfee and Stafford.

Can't understand why Colonel Davies hasn't sent for us;—we're doing no good here.

3 March 1942

Bachelor. Australia

Was flown here in an O-47 A today. Living here a little better than what we left. Still would take a lot of improvement to make it good.

Here's a laugh. Headquarters at Darwin sent all A-24's out on a patrol mission. If they had met any Zeros, which were all around the place, a slow underarmed ship like the A-24 wouldn't have had a chance.

6 March 1942

Bachelor

We were ordered out of Bachelor,—feared a Jap raid. Went South to Katherine. We are being rationed with 808th Engineers. First good food we've had for weeks. Same rations as the Australians,—but its prepared for eating.

Have a nice clear river nearby that we spend all day in,—nothing else to do,—we have no planes.

9 March 1942

Katherine

Left Katherine this morning. Arrived Bachelor and then told to go to Daily Waters. Wish they could make up their minds,—trouble is we get orders from three different sources.

10 March 1942

Daily Waters

Have a water famine here.—food just as bad. Our A-24's are going out fast,—now only 11 out of 53 fit for combat. Only one-half of a Squadron ever got in combat. Wish they'd do something with us.—we can't win a war sitting in Daily Waters.

Our morale is really shot.—we're losing interest in everything. With three times as many pilots as planes, and those planes not good for combat, its hard to keep our interest up.

Colonel Davies and four others went South to get some more dive bombers,

—they're no good. Why don't they send us some planes we can fight with?

Heard the 3rd Group is in Australia with new planes. They always got the breaks. And to think I used to belong to that group,—sure wish I were still with them. Here in the 27th, with 80% of our pilots qualified to fly fast bi-motored planes, we're assigned this antiquated trainer. Been in Zone of Combat since war declared and haven't flown a combat mission yet.

14 March 1942

Daily Waters

Still at Daily Waters. A B-17 just came over and crashed.—it had three engines out. Crew were lucky to get out alive,—not much of the ship was left for salvage.

Yesterday three B-17's flew up from Melbourne. All three flew over the field but couldn't see it. Two got back to Melbourne, one made an emergency landing. They were told that Daily Waters is on a railroad,—nearest one is 90 miles. Wonder anyone gets anywhere with the maps and information they furnish here.

17 March 1942

Daily Waters

Twenty P-40's came through today,—started out with 27. One of the pilots, just out of flying school, rolled his P-40 just over the field and into the ground. Just doesn't pay to get hot. We are ordered back to Bachelor. Wish one of these orders would sometime have a meaning.

18 March 1942

Bachelor

Only 16 of those 27 P-40's left. General MacArthur came through the other day,—didn't stop at Darwin as the papers said. Said he would never fly again in one of those noisy B-17's. Brought out two truckloads of furniture and a Chinese servant. Plenty of furniture and servants here. Why

didn't he bring out pilots and trained mechanics? Guess that's the privilege of a General.

19 March 1942

Bachelor

The 27th got orders to leave for Townsville today. This is one time I don't mind moving. Don't like to sleep on open ground in temperatures as hot as Hades,—without water.

20 March 1942

Townsville

Arrived at Townsville via Cloncurry. My plane is in really bad shape. Every time I take off I don't think I'll make it,—but it's better than staying behind. Only 11 of our planes are still flying. Nice field here,—paved runways, and camouflaged.

The 3rd Bomb Group is here. A good setup. They don't have any ships so they can work on ours. Soon as my plane stopped rolling 10 mechanics started working on it. They were really eager. They hadn't seen a plane for three months and sure wanted to work.

So far I've had 3 planes. All the motors went out in less than 70 hours on each. Something wrong when new motors go out for excessive oil consumption.

Hope we get assigned to the 3rd Group. They have only 9 pilots per group, of which only 5 are experienced. We're a group of experienced bi-motored pilots flying advanced trainers that some crackpot figures can be used in combat. Would sure like to have him here.

28 March 1942

Charters Towers

Am assigned to the 3rd Group,—makes me happy. A bunch of pilots just went south to get some B-25's.

31 March 1942

Charters Towers

Just got checked out in B-25. Good

plane but A-20A flies better. Am the 90th Squadron,—a good outfit with a bunch of old friends.

A-24's went North today,—hope they do some good.

Our B-25's really belong to the Dutch. They bought them and are as mad as hornets;—but we're better equipped to fly them;—and I guess that's war.

Some of our big shots must be going nuts. A certain staff colonel had an order cut making the 3rd Group an Infantry unit because we had no planes. It was our luck that the order was cancelled, and he was removed. His mind must have got a little foggy.

The staff in various headquarters work from 8:30 to 4:30 and then complain about the heavy work they have to do. In spite of them I hope we win the war. There are some good men in the staff,—they do all the work.

Just got ordered south to Brisbane to get a B-25. We now have the B-25, A-20, and A-24 in the group. Quite an assortment of planes.

3 April 1942

Brisbane

Arrived here today but no B-25. Sat opposite a staff major at luncheon today,—made me a little sick with his talk. He kept complaining about the food and service, which, to me, was really good. Found he had never been farther north than Brisbane. Wish he could have been with us and eaten the slop we had to. I'll never complain about food anymore if I ever get out of the Northern Territory,—and I'll forget that experience just as soon as I can.

Funny thing about food, when it's bad you never hear men talk about women,—just the steak and ice cream they're going to consume when they get to where that type of food is being served. Women seem to rank second to food as man's first love.

11 April 1942

### Brisbane

Got orders to get back to Charters Towers.—big mission coming off. The mission is up to Philippines,—hope I get to go.

12 April 1942

### Charters Towers

Taking off tonight for Mindanao to run bombing raids from there on Japs in Northern Philippines.

Took off but never did get assembled,—black as pitch. We straggled into Darwin from dawn to about two hours later. Some of the pilots found themselves flying out to sea when dawn broke. No reliable maps to navigate by and no landing aids at Darwin.

We're gassing up to take right off, but I'm not going.—lost one of my tires in landing here. Hope replacement gets here in time for me to take off tomorrow with the others that are being left behind. The next leg will be a 1600 mile trip over water and Jap bases. Too bad if Del Monte, Mindanao, is closed in when planes arrive.—they'll have no alternative field that they can get to.

13 April 1942

### Darwin

No tire yet. Schmidt and I are getting disgusted.—spare tires should have been here before we arrived. We just operate without any timely planning,—and that's not good. Got a bunch of good P-40 pilots here,—all just out of school but they're packing up experience. The other day they caught 7 Jap bombers and shot them all down.—good going.

This field is suffering from alert jitters,—anything brings on an alarm. One of our own planes, an Australian Whirraway, easily recognized, flew over the field and brought on a full-scale air alert. Perhaps I'll be jittery too if I stay here much longer. But right now it's really funny to see them run

for cover when the alert signal goes off. I run, too, but I'm not jittery yet.

Morale and spirit are low here. Their only concern is about getting out. They don't seem to have any interest in improving their food and living conditions, and they're both bad. While they have to live here they should do a little to make things better. Believe it would give a healthier outlook on life.

14 April 1942

### Darwin

Too late now to go on the P. I. mission. The ship bringing our tire is missing. Patched up my own and ran a search for the missing plane,—found it out of gas, in the only open field in that part of the country. They were lucky boys (Petrie and Hall).

The group got back from P. I. this afternoon without losing a ship. They got shot up a bit, but the small bullets the Japs use won't go through the gas tanks.—25 caliber. They pulled a lot of raids which didn't do much damage,—need more practice.

Each ship came back loaded with pilots. Even though the bombing missions may not have been too successful, bringing out these pilots made the operation worth it. They brought out about 33 officers and men,—not a very big salvage from the 1500 that were in the 27th Bombardment Group.

19 April 1942

### Charters Towers

Returned here yesterday. Was alerted at 1:00 A.M. to fly to New Guinea to fly a recon mission. Gassed at Port Moresby and took off at 9:00 A.M. to reconnoiter the N.E. coast of New Guinea.

Saw lots of beautiful islands with native buildings and white beaches,—just like you see in the movies. Couldn't go back to Moresby until after 3:00 P.M. as the Japs raid the field almost daily.



22 April 1942

Landed at Moresby, gassed, and took off for Townsville. Lucky to get in at Townsville,—all other fields were closed and it was after dark. Townsville just happened to be open. Tired of riding my luck. Had 17 hours of almost continuous flying,—less time out for gassing.

20 April 1942

Townsville

Headed back for Moresby today. Arrived and spent the night under the wing of my plane.

Took off at dawn to patrol. They briefed me that there were no mountains in New Guinea higher than 14,000 feet. I flew by one with my altimeter reading 16,500. New Guinea is just a mass of mountains,—90% of the country is wild. Lots of gold and lots of mining camps,—some above 13,000 feet.

Covered the N.W. corner of New Britain, then New Hanover and part of New Ireland. Saw two large Jap transports in the Harbor. Flew around them but got no A.A. fire. Went across the channel to Kavieng. Saw nothing at the airport but some Jap activity in town.

On the way home flew over Solomons and took pictures. Then turned out to sea and flew over Lae, which was heavily infested with Japs. Just as we got over the field I saw five Zeros climbing up to meet us,—never seen airplanes climb so steeply. Some nearby clouds offered me some cover and I got into them as fast as I could. No fun being caught out alone by Zeros.

Pictures turned out O.K. We saw 21 Jap planes on the field.

After gassing at Moresby we returned to Townsville with an overall flying time of 27 hours out of 60. Moresby considered too dangerous to return overnight.

Townsville

Returned to Moresby. Took off the next morning to patrol the Rabaul area. This is the strongest Jap base in this part of the world,—located on the N.E. corner of New Britain. B-26's bombed the docks just before we arrived,—which helped to warm things up for us.

As we approached we saw 3 B-26's pass under us being chased by 4 Zeros. There were plenty of clouds so we were not seen. A few minutes later we saw more Zeros, but gave them the slip in the clouds. We covered the Rabaul-New Ireland area always taking advantage of clouds. We picked up three transports off Rabaul Harbor, took pictures from low altitude of York Island, just off the mouth of the harbor. On our last trip over we got some A.A. fire which put a small hole in our tail and then saw a Zero closing in.

We took to the clouds and headed for home. While passing over the St. George Channel we picked up a surfaced submarine. We strafed it and it immediately disappeared beneath the surface. Hope we sank it or, at least did some major damage. Had a lot of fun this day.

24 April 1942

Charters Towers

Came in here today.—could do with a little rest. We've lost 3 B-25's to weather. Moresby closed in and they had to land in open water.

29 April 1942

Charters Towers

Headed back to Moresby to recon again. Covered the South Coast of New Guinea on the way. Saw a flare just off Amazon Island,—investigated and saw three men in a small boat. Buzzed them and dropped a note that I had their location and would report.

They could be the crew of one of the ships we had lost to bad weather. Three of them, all inexperienced had been forced down by bad weather while enroute to Moresby. Its a wonder that we don't lose more. We're always fighting weather. without much of a weather service to help us.

30 April 1942

#### Port Moresby

Another patrol. Flew to Buna Bay, to Woodlark Island, to Bougainville, to New Britain—then back to Buna Bay. While over Buna Bay was hopped by 5 Zeros. Didn't have enough gas to dive down to sea level and head for the open sea, as I had to cross over mountains. So started climbing at full throttle; leveled off at 12,000 feet. On the way up we shot down two Zeros,—one each by the upper and lower gunners. The bombardier got a broadside on a Zero with his 30 caliber and it moved out and didn't attack again.

When I reached some clouds I went straight into them. There were supposed to be mountains in them, but I had to get away. The Zeros did not follow us in.

Really funny how one reacts to an attack. I would look out and see a Zero start his pass, his tracers were streaming in front of my face; he continued the attack until you could see his face,—yet it never occurred to me that I could be hit. I did, however, get a delayed reaction after it was over. I think it was a miracle that they didn't shoot us down. No fun being caught alone by a flight of Zeros.

I returned to Charters Towers the next day for repairs. Almost got caught by the Japs at Port Moresby,

—took off 5 minutes ahead of a raid.

4 May 1942

#### Port Moresby

Back at Moresby,—arrived at dark yesterday. Took off at 6:30 A.M., had to stay out until 2:30 P.M.—makes a gruelling flight. Covered Lae, then New Britain, then Bougainville. Didn't see a check point for 3:45 hours. Then I mistook a large Jap carrier and 2 heavy cruisers for islands. Went in to investigate. They spotted me and started to zig and zag. At the same time Zeros began taking off from the carrier, so I headed away at full throttle. A little later I picked up two subs and one sub tender. I couldn't stop to strafe and expose us to the Zeros which couldn't be too far away.

At the New Guinea coast I ran into a front which I couldn't fly over, and which was so rough that I couldn't fly through. By heading northwest toward Lae I finally found a hole which let me fly across the mountains, partially on instruments at 16,500, and then land at Moresby during an alert. It was quite a day.

I, myself, had caused an alert a few days before when the 5 Zeros hopped me. Some town in the mountains had reported that one bomber escorted by five Zeros was headed for Moresby. I was in the bomber but the Zeros were not giving me friendly escort. They shot us full of cannon holes.

The carrier we saw today was later destroyed in the Battle of the Coral Sea.\*

Have now flown for seven straight days with an average of over seven hours a day.

\* The Battle of the Coral Sea was fought three days later, May 7-8, 1942.

Charters Towers 5 May 1942

Came back here today exhausted. Guess they never heard of pilot's fatigue. I think I have it.

Rose went out today to locate carrier and send a homing signal so B-17's could bomb it. He located the carrier, stayed near it for better than an hour, but B-17's never came. They didn't get out of Townsville. Too bad—it was a grand opportunity for the big boys.

Charters Towers 6 May 1942

No rest for the weary. Went down to Charleville today and brought back a plane. Landed after dark. No fun flying in a blacked-out country after dark with no navigational aids.

Charters Towers 7 May 1942

This takes the cake. Got up at 3:15 A.M. to run another recon from Townsville. Don't know how much more I can take before I crack.

Charters Towers 8 May 1942

Off on another recon today—8:00 hours of open water flying. With so many pilots around, why do three of us do all the recon flying? Perhaps when we wear the ships out we'll get a rest.

Walker just got chased by Zeros from Lae to Moresby. He was badly shot up and crashed on a reef. The ship caught on fire but he managed to pull his C-P and two gunners out. The two gunners died. His one hand

was badly cut. He got a D.S.C. for that—he earned it.

Charters Towers 9 May 1942

Something must be wrong. The sun is up and I haven't been given a mission.

My mission was a little late; it came at 5:00 P.M. Someone sighted an unknown carrier, so I'm ordered out to look it over—some job for darkness and bad weather. I had to return before finding the carrier because of motor trouble. I hate to have motor trouble foul a mission after I'm on it. It would have been pleasing to have it develop before take-off. That wouldn't upset my rest too badly.

Charters Towers 10 May 1942

Another recon from Townsville. I was up at 3:00 A.M. as usual and flew for 8 hours. I think I'll set a record for continuous flying.

Charters Towers 11 May 1942

Going to Moresby today to arrive at dark for a recon flight tomorrow morning. I'm the number one man in the Squadron in flying time.

Port Moresby 12 May 1942

Flew a recon to Lae, New Britain, Bougainville, Woodlark and back to Moresby—1600 miles. Saw nothing new.

Port Moresby 13 May 1942

Flew a repeat of yesterday; total time 12½ hours. Weather fair with



a few scattered clouds. Not enough for cover. Saw nothing new. Been kind of leary of Lae since I got jumped there by five Zeros. Go over at 16,000 feet. Gives me a little better chance to get away.

Port Moresby 13 May 1942

Part of this recon covers an island just east of New Ireland. This territory is heavily occupied and under continuous Jap patrol. It's a poor place to be caught in a clear sky. When the skies are cloudless I approach with caution; I don't take foolish chances. The Zero is well armed and is plenty fast. To be caught here with no cloud cover could easily prove a suicidal venture. We'd get no profit from that.

I'm getting a little tired of this run, I've made it on four previous occasions. But they're never the same; the weather and the enemy see to that.

Got back to Moresby, gassed and took off for Charters Towers. Got here plenty tired.

Still no promotions. They're getting them in the States and in rear echelons. They might let a few of them leak through to those who are doing the fighting. But it doesn't seem to work that way.

Charters Towers 15 May 1942

Off again this time for some fun. We're going to do a bombing mission on Lae. Taking off at dawn tomorrow. B-26's will strike first. Arrived at Moresby at dark.

Port Moresby 16 May 1942

Didn't get away at dawn, weather too soupy. Left at 8:00 A.M., crossed mountains to the south and tried to get to Lae, which was socked in. Finally found a passage on the shore line, got a look at Lae but couldn't make a good visual bombing run. Don't think we did too much damage.

Saw some Zeros take off to meet us, but they never engaged.

Moresby 17 May 1942

Spent the night at Moresby and took off for Charters Towers at dawn. Arrived O.K.

Charters Towers 18 May 1942

Good deal—going out to a ranch for a few days rest. Sure can use—only got 120 hours in last 28 days—mostly combat. While combat doesn't worry me, it sure wears me down. I don't lie awake after a mission has been flown, but I sense that they fag me down. I can easily see how one's nerves can crack. Some of the boys worry a lot and you can see their mental attitude changing. I try not to think of things that have happened. When a bad experience is over, it's over, and is best forgotten.

I have already lost two of my best friends but I try to keep that out of my mind. War is hard enough when you keep looking ahead; it's worse if you keep refreshing memories of past misfortunes.

The worst part of a mission is the approach to the target; that's when the cold sweat breaks out. Later you're too busy avoiding pursuit and getting away. The pursuit attack doesn't scare you—it's too impersonal. I never think that one of the bullets being aimed at my ship could hit me. It's probably a protective attitude that nature gave us.

However, I'm ready for my rest tour on a ranch. This ranch is owned by Mr. McConechy. When we arrived I was surprised. I expected to rough it. But what a place—comfortable beds and delicious meals. Mr. "Mac" said he didn't have a large place, only 700,000 acres—1091 square miles.

We went riding and hunting at our

leisure. No limit on ducks, pigeons, doves and wild pigs—and they were all good eating. He had a stable full of good riding horses.

We had a wonderful time—just what we needed. It sure did wonders for me. We had lots of fishing too.

Our party was composed of Lowery, Rose, Timlin, Dean and myself.

Charters Towers 23 May 1942

Back for duty. Lowery, Timlin, Keel, Dickinson and myself are going on another raid on Lae.

Took off from Charters Towers for Cooktown at 4:00 A.M. Never did get assembled—too dark. Gassed at Cooktown and took off for Moresby. Loaded at Moresby with one-half cluster incendiary bombs and the other half demolition. Went in low again. Capt. Lowery, who was leading, always goes in low. This low attack is bad; A.A. is very effective and enemy pursuit can intercept you a lot quicker.

We headed north and then came down the Markham Valley on our approach. We saw Zeros taking off before we got to the target. They came straight on to attack. The A.A. threw up a screen of fire right in front of us. This A.A. fire screen stopped before we got there. It would have been heavy fire to fly through.

About that time I noticed that Keel's right engine was streaming oil. Either a Zero or AA must have hit him.

When we had dropped our bombs we dove for the water. We leveled out and slowed down for Keel. There were 10 Zeros on us. Keel finally dropped behind and two Zeros got him. He was seen to smoke up and crash in the water just opposite Solomon.

A few Zeros continued the attack while the others flew on ahead to pre-

vent us from heading into shore. One Zero climbed to about one thousand feet above us and dropped a huge aerial bomb. It went off right in front of our formation without doing any damage. It looked like a mammoth 4th of July fire display.

As we passed in over the shore at Buna Bay, this same Zero made a series of frontal attacks from treetop level. On one of these attacks his fire hit Dickinson right on the nose, stopping the left motor and killing his co-pilot.

We slowed up for him and he started climbing above us but, as he could not clear the mountains on one engine, headed back toward Buna Bay. We returned to Moresby.

This Zero was pumped full of lead and probably went down.

Moresby 24 May 1942

After spending the night at Moresby we loaded up with bombs and gas and returned to Cooktown. Here we are to form up with 6 other planes for another low altitude attack on Lae. This will make a force of nine as only three of us are left.

Cooktown 25 May 1942

Got ready to go. We like a dope got off the edge of the runway and got stuck up to the top of my wheel in mud. That put me out of this mission. It was a stupid stunt. We worked all day and got it off at 5:30 P.M. Will return to Charters Towers tomorrow.

Charters Towers 26 May 1942

Returned here today. Found everybody excited. Soon found out what the trouble was. Of those 8 ships that raided Lae, only three returned. A low altitude attack on a well defended target is not good. Our ships are too vulnerable to both the A.A. and to Zeros.

Charters Towers 27 May 1942

Talley, Timlin, Good were the only ones to return. They were jumped by 30 Zeros. Lowery and Wilson went down in flames. The formation was split up. Rulinson and Hesselbarth went into the clouds and didn't come out. Shearer also disappeared. The remaining three returned to Moresby. Talley's landing gear collapsed on landing. He brought in a badly shot-up plane. He had a bullet crease in his head. They're lucky to be alive.

Charters Towers 28 May 1942

Morale is low. The Lae mission was quite a blow. We are an old outfit and everyone knew each other very well. Col. Davies phoned General Brett and told him we needed him up here right away.

I got made operations officer. Really interesting in time of war.

Charters Towers 29 May 1942

General Brett arriving tomorrow. Hope he brings our promotions. That might help a little.

Charters Towers 30 May 1942

General Brett arrived. He made a speech for us. Also brought up a bunch of citations, those that have been in for a long time. Maybe we'll get some promotions, for those of us who live, if we suffer another Lae-type catastrophe. Guess it takes something like that to get action.

Charters Towers 31 May 1942

Attended a meeting with General Brett. He knows my father and asked if I might be his son. I replied that I was, and I hope that I registered my pride. He said that the group could send back a few of its most experienced crews to the States and that trained crews would come over from the States to replace them. I sure would like to go back. I feel that I've done enough for a while. If they

keep us here long enough, no one will return. You can't stay in the thick of this battle for long and expect to survive—the odds are too strongly against you.

Rumors are floating around that everyone who was in the Philippines is going back to the States. That's too good to be true.

Charters Towers 1 June 1942

Well, I finally caught Dengue Fever. What a windfall. Sure I suffer from terrific headaches and all my joints ache, but I'm getting a rest.

They really take care of you here. It's an American Hospital and it really treats a patient as a patient. The nurses are really good. Not like anything I have ever seen.

Just heard tragic news—my airplane burned up on the ground. Really liked that ship—one of the fastest in the group. Also one of the best flying. Three of the men working in the rear were badly burned. Gas exploded around the rear turret when someone turned on the main line switch.

My gunner Swain is in the hospital here too. He has a bad heart. Too bad, as he's the best gunner we have.

Charters Towers 4 June 1942

Still in hospital. Just heard good news—Shearer and his C-P, Farr, are O.K. They were shot down on the raid where we lost 5 out of 8 planes.

Charters Towers 6 June 1942

Got out today. Weak and no appetite. You're no good for two weeks after an attack of Dengue.

Have an American café here now—serve real hamburgers that sure taste good. Only place in Australia to get them. The Aussies don't go in for good food.

Charters Towers 9 June 1942

Heard Rulinson's C-P (also shot down in the big raid) is O.K. He

parachuted. Maybe some of the others are still living.

Charters Towers 12 June 1942

No missions for the last week. They ran one while I was in the hospital, which was a flop. B-25's were supposed to go in first, bomb off to the side and draw the enemy pursuit away while the B-26's hit the field from low altitude. The B-26's were late and the B-25's, running from the zeros, passed near the B-26's coming in. The Zeros jumped the B-26's—they're a lot easier to shoot down. Our ships were shot up pretty badly—wasted a lot of planes.

Also the pursuit were supposed to be there to take on the Zeros. They didn't show up and the Zeros had a field day.

Shearer came back tonight. Looks bad. Had Dengue and they treated him for malaria. He said after his other engine failed, he hit the water. A Zero, with his wheels down, circled them, then strafed them a few times while they were swimming in the water and left. Didn't hit anyone. After that they swam to shore and some natives took them to a New Guinea Volunteer Riflemen's Camp at Wau. Twelve days later a plane came and picked them up.

Wau is only 60 miles from Solomon but the country is so wild that the Japs can't get in to take it.

These N.G.V.R.'s stalk the Jap fields and report everything that takes place. They have no radio, so make all of their reports by runners. They're a hardy group with lots of courage. They stalk right onto the Jap fields at night and get very reliable information. They help our operations a lot.

Wau is a modern town of 5,000 right in the mountains. It is a rich gold-producing region but can only be reached by air. The Japs have

never bombed it.

The N.G.V.R. say that the crews of several of our crashed planes have refused to be rescued by natives. They were afraid of them. They should have been briefed that the natives here are friendly. Besides, in order to live, they had to take that chance.

Charters Towers 13 June 1942

Our group has done a pretty good job with these B-25's, which we had never flown until they were assigned to us here. So far we've shot down 24 Jap planes—these are all positives—the plane must be seen either to explode or crash. The probables are about 57 more.

Just got orders to Brisbane to pick up an A-20-A in about a week. I'll get another rest cure.

Flew down in the ship Talley had on the big raid. It was full of cannon holes and couldn't retract the wheels. It was a mess.

Brisbane 16 June 1942

What a fat-cat life for the lucky people that stay here all the time, and they complain. They should come up and do a tour in the combat zone. It would give them a little better sense of values.

Can't get any issue clothing—they say I have to buy it. They're still on a peacetime basis down here. I can't buy a new wardrobe every time I lose it to enemy action—they don't pay us that kind of money. I'll have to do more living in flying togs.

Flew an A-20-A for the first time in nine months. I had forgotten how easy that airplane is to fly, really maneuverable and fast.

Brisbane 25 June 1942

Flying down to Melbourne to ferry an A-20 back here to have guns installed. Going down in an A-20.



Melbourne 26 June 1942

Arrived here last night. Had a hard job getting a room. This is U.S. Army headquarters and, consequently, very crowded. They jam the movies.

Am flying an A-20 to Amberly at Brisbane today and coming right back to pick up another.

Just checked on our promotions. Found out that they promote a certain number in each group. We get the raw end of that one. Ninety-five percent of our group are old pilots, but we have to share promotions with the newest and greenest groups, regardless of length of service. It doesn't make any sense.

Went out to the airport to get our planes. They knew we were coming but the planes hadn't been touched. These planes were given to the Dutch in exchange for the B-25's we took from them. The Dutch gave them back to us—they don't like them. They are very funny people. They fired the guns on the A-20's and never cleaned the barrels. Now, three weeks later, they are ruined. We'll have to replace them all.

Australian mechanics never hurry. My booster was out and it took the day to get it replaced. Flew up to Sidney, landed after dark, and spent the night.

Brisbane 27 June 1942

Flew in here from Sidney this afternoon. Lucky to get away from Sidney while my plane was still flyable. They tore it down and it took most of the day to get it back in order. They dropped Hall's belly tank, so we had to drain it before we could hook it back on. Spent a gruelling day. But Sidney is a nice town—most modern

town in Australia. Very different from the rest of Australia.

Melbourne 30 June 1942

Came back here today in a C-47. Arrived after dark. Bad as the worst—no heat. They charge you to build a fire in your room, if the room has a fireplace. Getting used to it now—sleep well in a cold room.

Sidney 1 July 1942

Arrived Sidney O.K. These A-20's are sure in bad condition. Saw a ferry pilot and sent my address home with him. The lucky dog!

Brisbane 2 July 1942

Arrived here late today from Sidney.

Keep hearing that the Japs wouldn't accept the surrender of Corregidor in P.I., 10,000 people there. Reports say they finally massacred all but 1500. If that is true, we might just as well accept their rules of warfare. If they're going to shoot our men in parachutes, strafe us while we're in life boats or swimming in the water, there's no good reason why we shouldn't do the same. Guess I'm getting war-minded.

These A-20's are being fitted with 4 more fixed forward-firing guns, making a total of 8. It will be a powerful strafing ship. This addition will give it a total of 14 guns.

Am taking my ship out tomorrow for a final testing before heading back to the combat zone.

*On 4 July 1942, while conducting final tests on his A-20 in preparation for returning to the front, the author, Lieutenant Birnn, crashed in Brisbane Harbor and was killed. The Diary he left behind is in its way a memorial to him and to his comrades, the men who truly fought and won the war.*