

It was a bearable service, of course. It has been said, by someone, somewhere, that if a tactical unit was ordered to establish a base in the exact mathematical center of Hell's hottest inferno, that the move would be made, with the usual amount of griping . . . the word is not griping, of course . . . and that the unit would be operating smoothly on the hour and day ordered. This is not a fair comparison, perhaps, to either place. We have often wondered about the natives' attitude towards their island. Their long Sunday walkabouts might have a deep significance, an urge to go someplace, anyplace. . . . These opinions might have been influenced by the rumor that the terms of the Peace Conferences will force Japan to take New Guinea, making it mandatory that the Japanese live on the island, without any rotation of personnel to give them a chance to get back, even for thirty days, to the teapots of Tokyo.

It is the ideal place to fight the war, if the description can be regarded as a recommendation. It shall be the place to remember. There shall always be the distance, to remind us that we fought our part of this modern war in a theatre that removed us far beyond the most vaguely familiar and attested scenes of history.





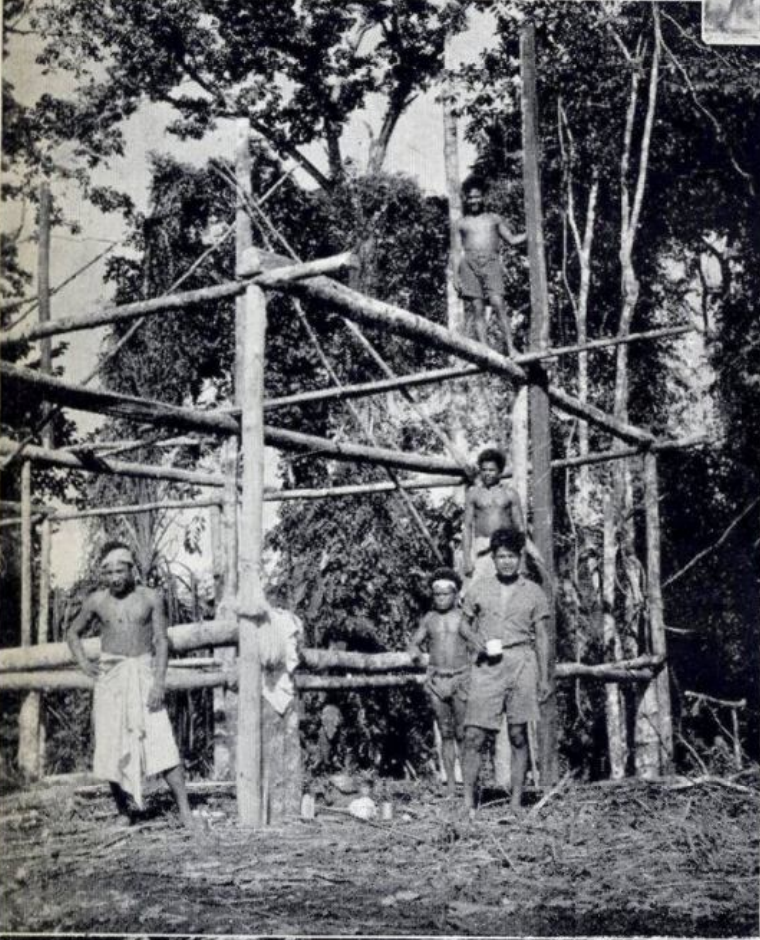


It has been a rough three years over here—and during that time we have often wondered at the inopportune fate which placed us in a land so primitive. The soldier does not complain. He grouses, gripes, utters bitter sentiments, but not with too deep a sincerity, because he knows it was only an accident of assignment, at a headquarters far up the line, which placed him in a sultry valley at the foot of ten-thousand feet of wet mountain, instead of in a quiet,

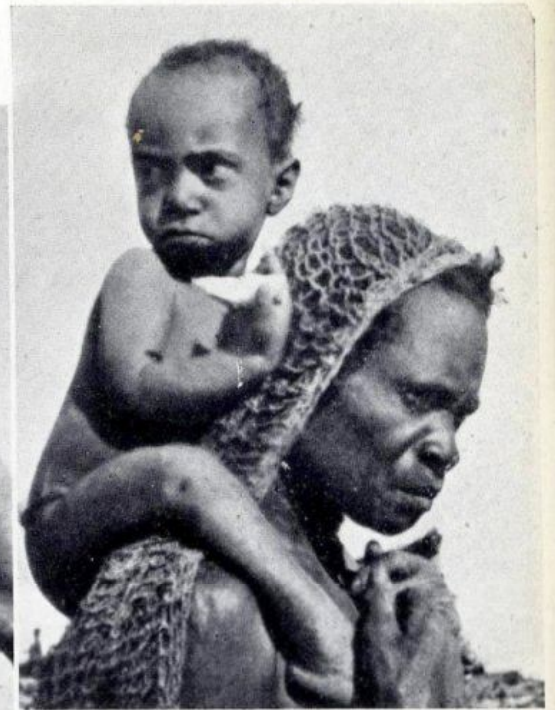
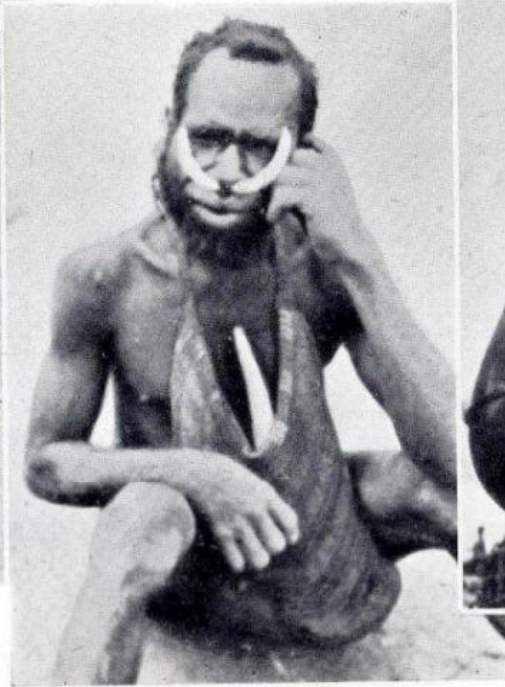
stenographer-studded office in a base section. All the same—but each man to his own convictions.

These are the belles of our island. Their pictures have been featured, not to satisfy any questioner who might insist that women simply cannot be quite so immodest. . . . It is not immodesty, on their part, for the climate is against clothing, and a thousand generations of acceptance makes their undress as natural to them as the smartly turned out Easter-parades on Fifth Avenue and Michigan Boulevard. Not at all—this page is merely to silence the writers of those subway-minded letters, which spoke meaningfully of the South Sea women. . . . This is what we mean by an inopportune fate.





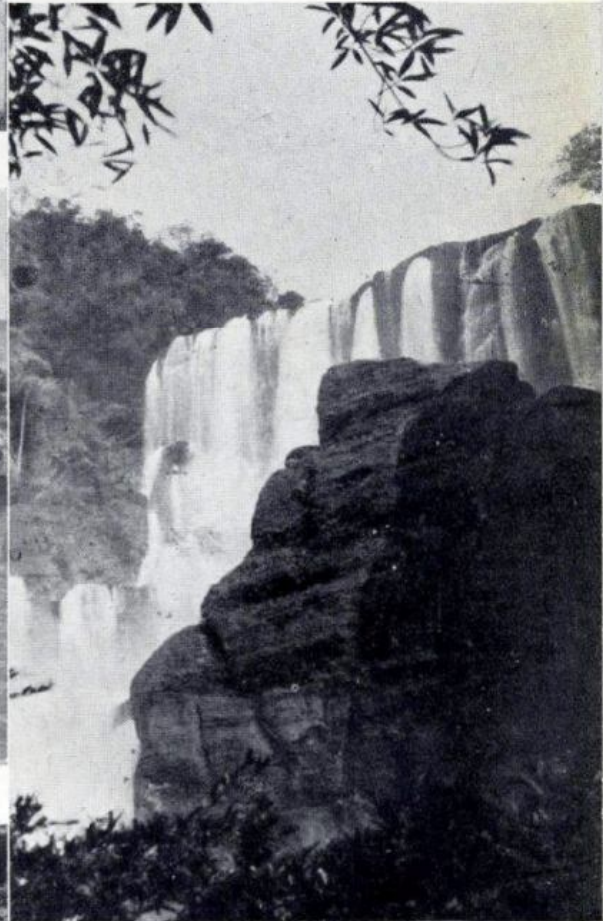
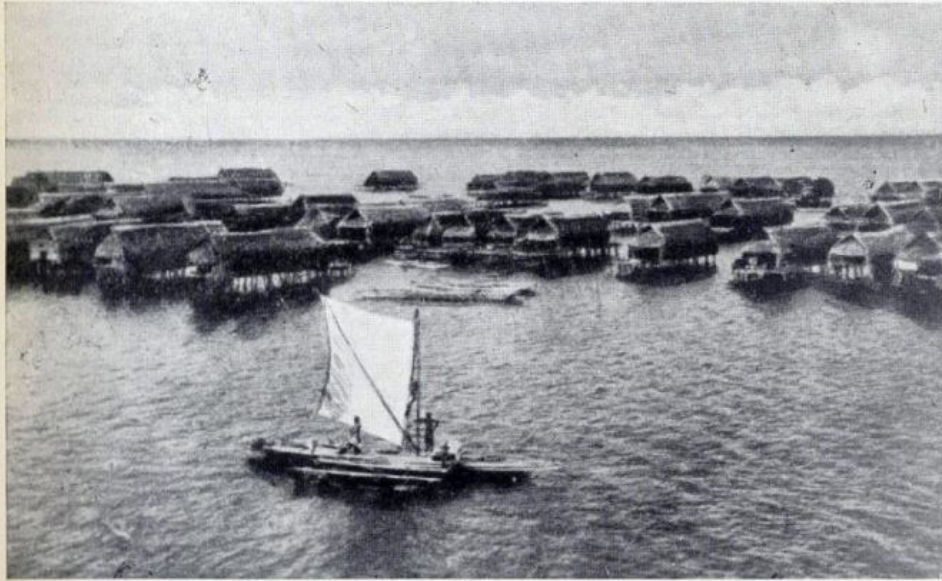
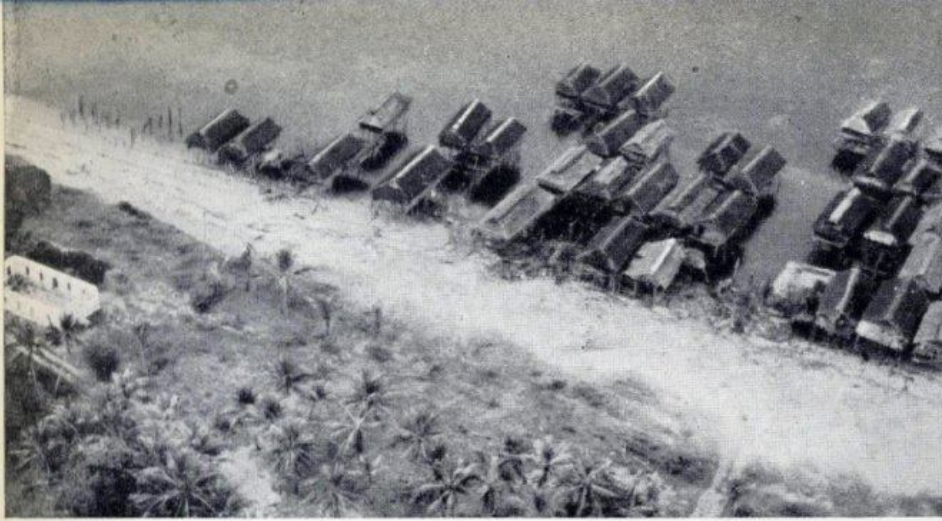
ANT'S NEST!!



We looked for sarongs, but the usual find was a bulky pile of grass skirts, or a brown cloth, surrounded by variously-colored naked children all dyed a coffee hue by dust, the sun, and parental inclination. It must be general knowledge to the world, by this time, that the South Sea islands are not all langorous days on coral-trimmed beaches, but the pendulum of public knowledge has swung almost to the other extreme and might again be as inaccurate.

The natives of New Guinea are fascinating. Their habits, foods, superstitions and beliefs do not coincide with the white man's—of course, but their island does not encourage health, or vigor, or ambition. The white man has never gone forward to open roads to the inaccessible interior, to drain the swamps, to carry the gospel to half-primitive tribes battling for existence against the natural hazards of their savage island. The Australian government, before the war, had its handful of picked administrators in New Guinea. The missionaries of the various faith were there—and it was not unusual to meet a dark-skinned boy, wearing a jungle flower in his great mop of hair, who would shyly inform you that his name was Eliza or John or Joseph, because he was a mission-boy. It is known that many of the tribes we met during our time on the island were only a generation, or a half-generation away from the interesting ceremonials centered around a feast of long-pig. They must have been puzzled by the strange customs of the white man, who worked so hard, and in such mysterious ways, to destroy the enemy. Their own manner of war was simple, and very direct.

The natives of New Guinea have been of incalculable value to the allies. They have performed every task assigned, within their strength and ability. They have come forward, voluntarily, to give assistance to lost flyers, infantry units, engineers fighting their road through the uncharted jungle. They carried wounded men down the Kokoda trail with such gentleness that an Australian soldier found the words to describe them . . . "And the look upon their faces made you think that Christ was black". They might be primitive people, with the most simple of faiths and the most incomprehensible customs, but they are very human, very alive, and sensitive to life. This war has at least given us the knowledge that it does not matter which stage of human progress a tribe or nation might occupy, for they will know the value of life and will gain the most out of it, according to their own standards.



Two and one-half years overseas . . . with time to go . . . gave us the opportunity to observe that Hollywood and the Travel Agencies were wrong. The natives and their villages were picturesque, if judged by the standards set up by persons paid to use rose-colored, scented glasses, but in actuality, there was something lacking. We never discovered a lack of primitive sanitation, of course, or naked children or unfriendly, snarling native dogs, or solemn-faced

hitchhikers along the road, with dusky thumbs hopefully asking for a lift to save long miles. It became quite commonplace, in the long run . . . but someone should have a long serious talk with the men responsible for enticing descriptions of swaying palm-fronds, golden-skinned women, and the musical rumble of surf against a lonely sand shore. . . .



The Markham Valley . . . and Rouna Falls, separated by 16,000 feet of mountain range. The Markham River leads down from abrupt, smooth-coated hills which are the final steps towards the sea of a series of savagely serrated ranges in the interior of New Guinea. The river's descent is appallingly swift, as if the brown water was intent upon ripping away the very heart of the land through which it rushed. The final miles of the Markham River, from the air, give the illusion that the river bed is one immense, ever-growing delta. . . .

Rouna Falls are on the road to Koitaki Plantation. A road runs into those hills now, but during the first months it was a nerve-racking journey over a narrow, quarter-built trail that caused the big plantation to appear a sanctuary. They are narrow, white-coated falls, going a vertigo-like distance into a high-walled bed of ravine. . . .

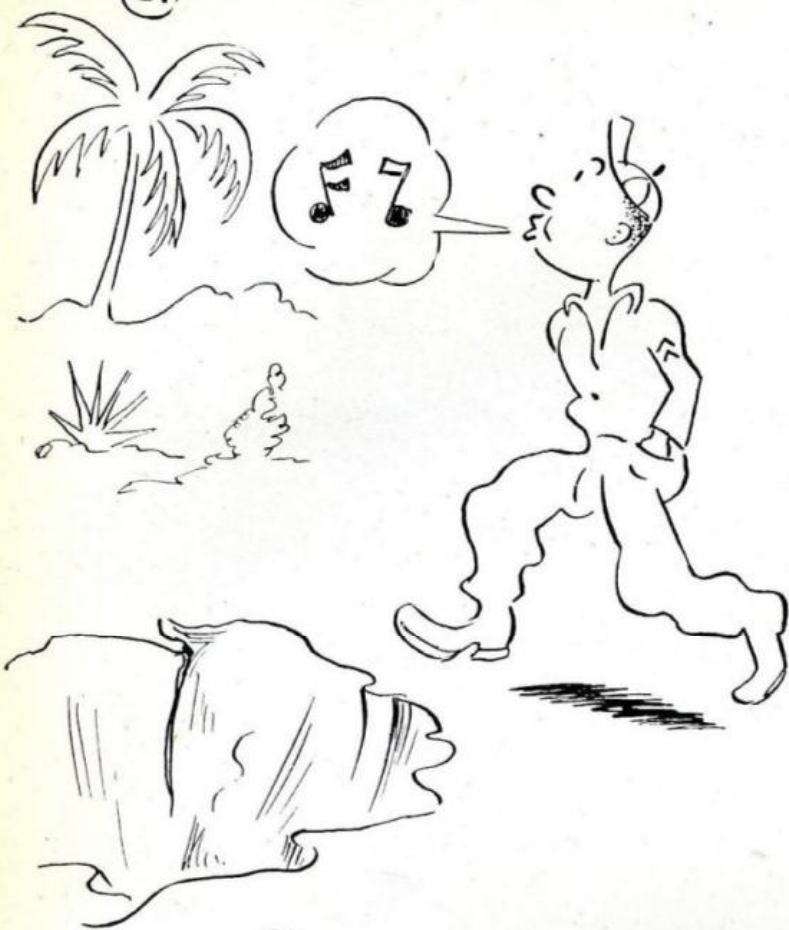




"WE KNOW THERE ARE TWO SIDES TO EVERYTHING
—BUT MAYBE HOLLYWOOD IS'NT RIGHT."



1.



2.



3.





"COME AROUND TOMORROW
AN' I'LL FINISH THE JOB!"

BENSON

"WELL, IT RAINED AGAIN LAST NIGHT"



FADINA



A trail, working painfully along the narrow top of a ridge, disappearing beneath the jungle growth to show again, briefly, to the camera before it goes from sight. This was a hard-fought trail. There are few pictures as typical of the impossible terrain the island forced upon the fighting forces. Men moved along this trail, with guns, ammunition, leaned-down supplies. They flanked the trail, when it was possible, against the deadly ambush, or they merely walked forward, ready for anything that might come. It generally did. The camera does not show the lung-bursting pitch of the climb, or the soft earth that turned to gumbo when the rains set in, and it cannot tell of the heat, the insects or the strange quiet of the jungle. Our A-20's hit this trail often. It was an important target.

HEADQUARTERS
ADVANCE ECHELON
FIFTH AIR FORCE
APO 713 UNIT # 1

21 February 1944.

AG 201.22

SUBJECT: Commendation.

TO : All Units, Fifth Air Force, New Guinea.

1. The following communication received from the Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, and the Commanding General, Fifth Air Force, in regards to the recent Kavieng operations, is published for the information of all concerned, and is to be posted on all Command, Wing, Group and Squadron bulletin boards:

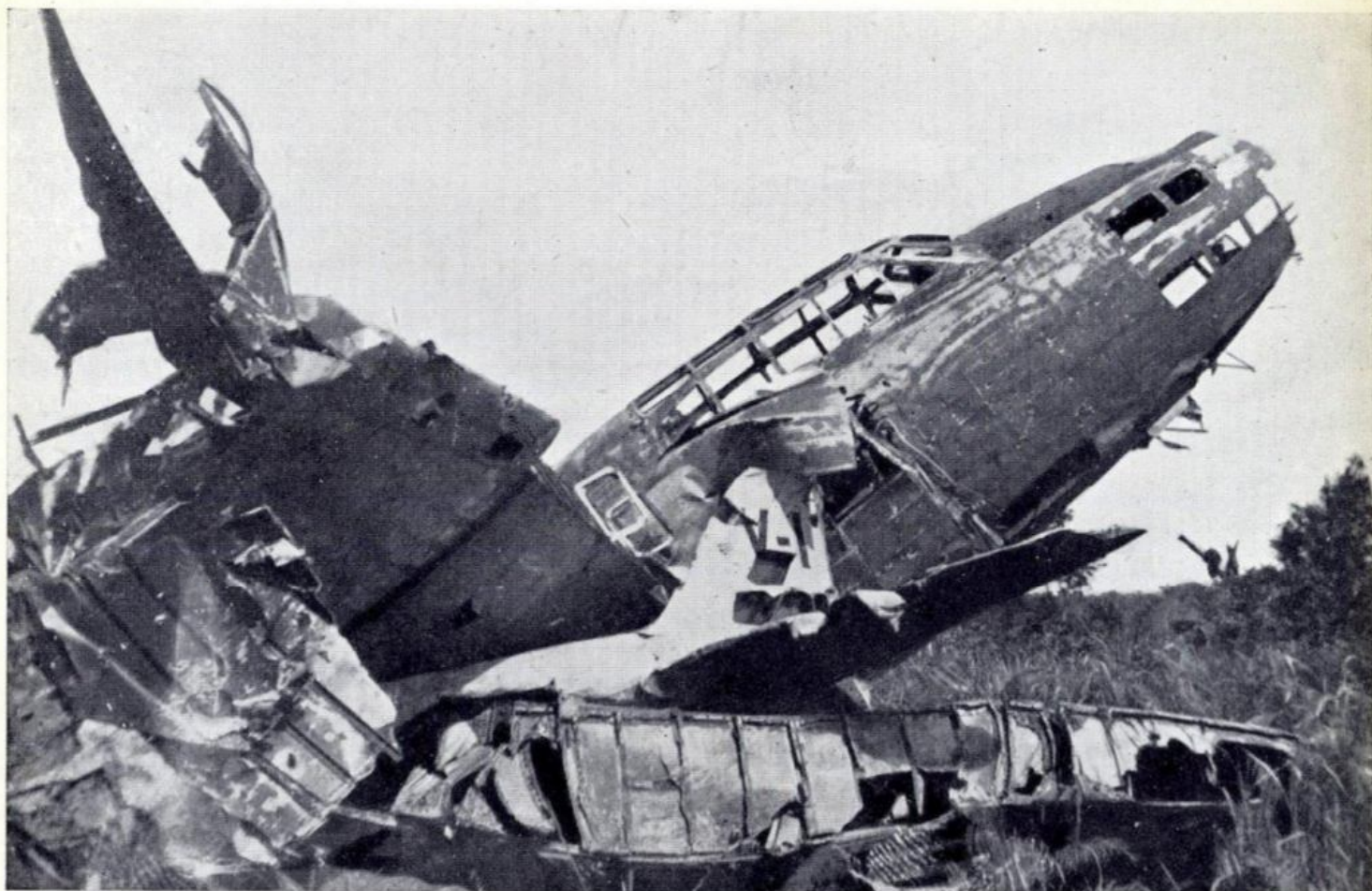
TO: COMAFADVON FIVE

FROM: KENNEY

"MESSAGE WHICH FOLLOWS PARAPHRASED FROM GENERAL MACARTHUR FORWARDED WITH MY OWN HEARTY CONGRATULATIONS QUOTE GENERAL KENNEY, FOR YOURSELF, GENERAL WHITEHEAD AND THE OFFICERS AND MEN CONCERNED EXTEND MY HEARTIEST ADMIRATION AND COMMENDATION FOR SPLENDID STRIKE WHICH DESTROYED KAVIENG CONVOY PD IT RECALLS ONE YEAR AGO OUR EPIC DESTRUCTION WROUGHT IN THE BATTLE OF BISMARCK SEA UNQUOTE"

2. The undersigned adds his heartiest congratulations to all ranks for their part in this daring action.

ENNIS C. WHITEHEAD,
Major General, United States Army,
Deputy Air Force Commander.



THE JAPANESE IMPERIAL AIR FORCE

THERE it is, shattered nose pointing at the sky which it shall never know again, wings torn from the fuselage by the shattering power of an Allied bomb . . . all the power and glory of empire, dead and smashed, in the rank kunai of a New Guinea valley. This ship had come a long way to fight, to justify its existence, and this is the way it ended. On the ground, thousands of miles away from the narrow, blinded islands which gave it birth . . . its crew dispersed into the hills in futile retreat, its mission uncompleted.

In the beginning, there was a different story. They had the wings and the power, and we were held to a single strip at Port Moresby, defended by two squadrons of fighters under the command of Colonel Buzz Wagner—short on equipment, men, planes.



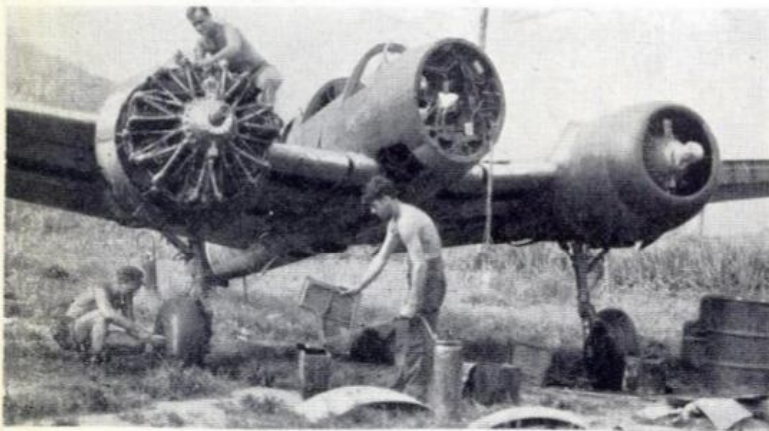
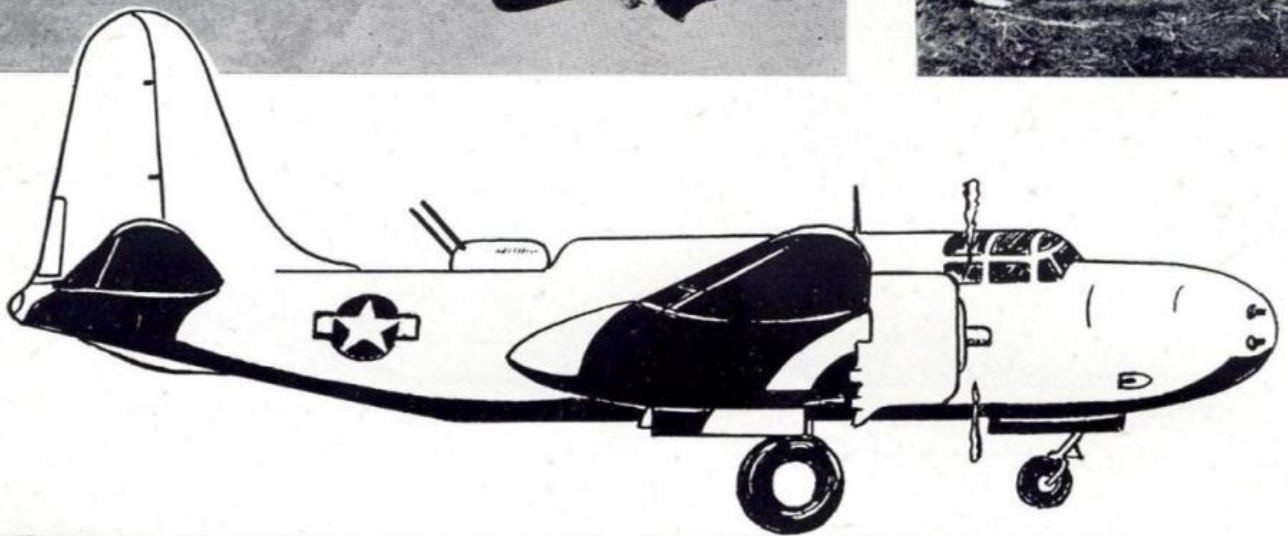
The 3rd Group staged its first missions out of Moresby . . . where the 8th Squadron threw its A-24's into the fight against amazingly unbelievable odds . . . a short, tragic gesture. Our A-20's were not ready for combat, but the men were, and it was the kind of war which saw A-20 pilots and gunners making the Coral Sea flight to the staging area at Moresby in B-17's and B-25's. . . . As the Cajun expressed it: "six Mitchells returned safely, escorted by Zeros". . . .

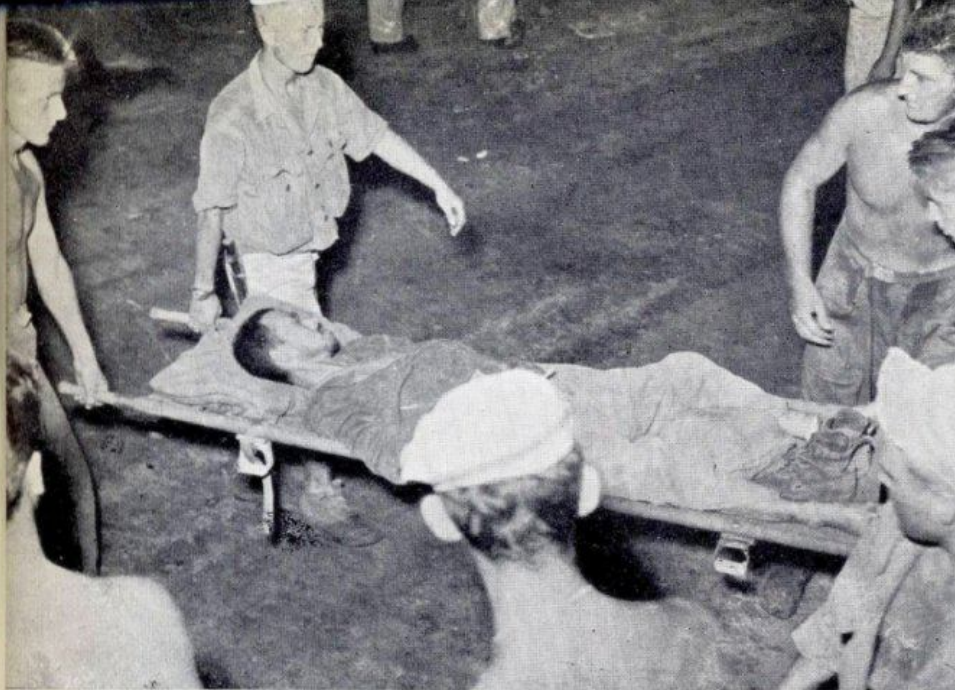
The Japanese had their own staging areas of Lae and Salamaua, where the Betty's and the Nell's used to come in overnight, to take off for the forty-five minute run to the under-staffed stronghold of Port Moresby. We usually had a warning, if the weather or the Nips had not prevented the Australian's Golden Voice from making his observations and sending his report across the Hump. It was the usual routine, for the opposing forces to be working over the opposing areas simultaneously. The American ships were always off the ground early, making the run down the rough, short strip during the last moments before dawn, bomb load so heavy that they would run clear beyond the end of the strip through the tall grass before their wheels picked sluggishly away from the ground. The Japanese usually made their first strike at seven-thirty, and must have known that their own strips were being pounded by our small formations of 17's, 25's and 26's. The men of the Japanese Imperial Air Force in New Britain and New Guinea must have then first known the premonition of their end.

The 89th has gathered its share of scalps. Lae, Salamaua, Gasmata, Kavieng, Wewak with its Borum Strip, Alexishafen, Hollandia . . . the Japanese have paid the toll of war to the low, thundering rush of strafing ships. We have found their air force stacked neatly beside the runways in the formation which is the straffer's dream . . . they have been hidden away in camouflaged revetments where they had to be hunted down through the intense fire of ground guns . . . they have been caught taking off, to finish their run in flames. If an enemy air force can be destroyed on the ground, it is not the quick, primitive victory of a fight in the skies, but it leads to the ultimate victory.

The Battle of the Bismarck Sea is regarded as a determining factor in the fight for the air over New Guinea. Later during the year came the devastating strikes at Wewak and Rabaul, until it must have been obvious to even the most casual student of our own private war that the percentages were at last in our favor. These pictures give clear evidence of the manner in which it was done. Their ships lying ruined, earth-bound, in untidy heaps of alloyed scrap metal. Their supply dumps gone up into expensive flame. Their service squadron areas bracketed and blasted, again and again, by accurate bombing and withering strafing that made impossible the one thing any airplane needs . . . careful and thorough maintenance. The results are clear. . . .

The Japanese newscasters of Radio Tokyo always announced the loss of an aircraft with the words, "and one of our aircraft has not yet returned to its base". They must have found it difficult to find an equally convenient phrase to describe the Imperial Eagles which failed to get off the ground.





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GUNNER



War is an untidy business, and the narrow beaches of the tropical islands do not provide conditions even remotely approaching the ideal. A strip of sand, twenty or thirty yards wide and a mile long. Deep sand, washed by the tide, soft beneath the weight of trucks and jeeps and bulldozers. A narrow landing strip, with the big ships nuzzling easily against the shore and the great task of unloading underway the instant the big doors opened and the heavy chains dropped the short, steep ramp to earth.

The accuracy of an enemy night bomber did not help. We missed his visit, but that big pool of stagnant water up there was a constant reminder of the presence of war. But we had countless and sensational proofs of the accuracy of our own ships . . . the balance sheet showed heavily in our favor, and proved again that the Japanese have suffered a hundred Verduns in this war of the Southwest Pacific.



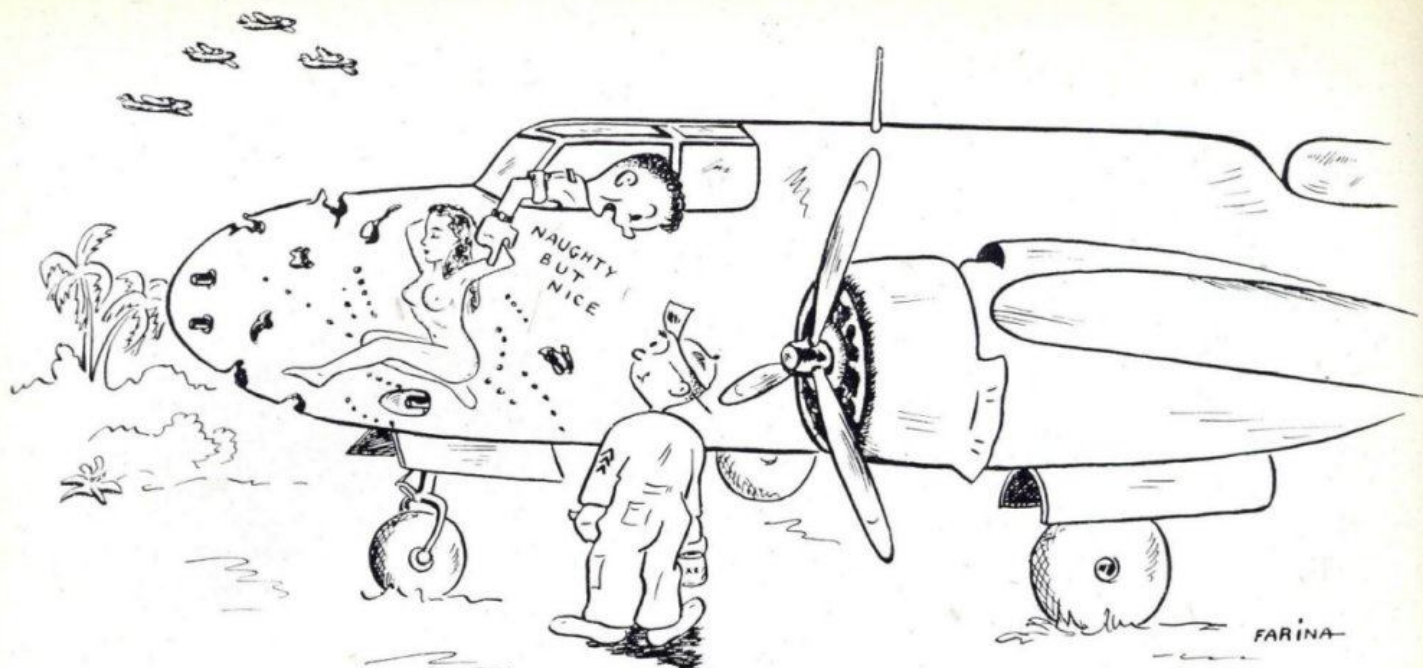


This is the equipment of war. Supplies, some undamaged and unused. For a brief time, Hollandia was the Mecca of the souvenir hunters. The disappointment was general, however, when the quality of the Nips' rolling stock was discovered to be poor, of definitely inferior construction. There was food, cigarettes, engines, instruments, ammunition dumps—every conceivable item needed by an army on active service, but they could not take it with them. Not over the narrow, intricate, steep trails that led back into the hills, to nowhere.

An outstanding characteristic of the Japanese in this section was their back-breaking dugout, bomb shelter and drainage system. There was not a single grass-thatched building in the service squadron areas which did not have its hand-dug shelter for protection against the attacks of the Fifth Air Force ships. The buildings had wooden floors, with escape hatches leading into deep pits that must have been sharp consolation during the tree-top attacks of the roaring A-20's. Six fifties firing forward are not encouraging.

The Nips used shelter and concealment to the final degree, but the cameras revealed their secrets, and after the photographs had been interpreted and analyzed, the strikes began. There is nothing that will stand up beneath the destructive force of precision-placed bombs. It was the constant hammering at their service areas which kept the Japanese ships on the ground, open to the final assault from the air which blanketed out this part of their air force, and permitted the landing to be made with a fantastically small loss on our ground forces.





"BENSON, - TAKE THAT OFF - IT ATTRACTS TOO MUCH ATTENTION!"

