



11. Investigating and analysing Second World War operations

Air power was at the heart of many Second World War victories; subsequent strategic planning often depended on it. This session provides a glimpse of the breadth of aerial operations, the significance of air power in campaign victory, as well as the different ways in which operations can be analysed. This morning our presenters range far and wide as they share their analysis of some of the lesser-known aspects of Second World War aerial operations and activities in French Indochina, Malaya, Rabaul, the Northern Territory, rural New South Wales, and Scotland's Loch Striven.

Session Convenor: Kristen Alexander

1. Air War over Angkor: the Franco-Thai conflict and Japanese strategy in French Indochina prior to the war in the East.

Shaun Mackey- Cambodian Archaeological Lidar Initiative (EFEO)

In January 1941 the final stage of the Franco-Thai War was fought across French Indochina on land, sea and air. The nature of the air war focused on a reciprocal bombing campaign of military and urban targets. The Thai Air Force prioritised locations in Laos and Cambodia – including Siem Reap near the ancient monuments of Angkor. On one bombing mission, a light bomber of the Thai Air Force, the Japanese made and supplied Mitsubishi Ki-30, was shot down by aircraft of the French Armée de l'Air and crashed near Angkor Wat. By mid-1941 French Indochina had ceded several provinces to Thailand whilst now being under Japanese occupation. Indochina was transformed into a base from which Japan would later

launch a combined military strike against British, Dutch and Thai controlled territories.

The Franco-Thai war is a brief and little-known campaign within the Second World War. This paper will focus on aviation and its role in war and strategic war-planning. Evidence includes: Thai air-wrecks; sites of aerial bombing; aviation infrastructure; and, material remains. Air conflict at this period of Indochina's history reveals themes of nationalism, irredentism, militarism, and colonialism in Southeast Asia before Japan's attack on Allied powers on 7/8 December 1941.

2. RAAF Operations in Malaya, Singapore and the Netherlands East Indies, 1941 – 1942.

Peter Helson- Former UNSW@ADFA post-graduate student

In December 1941 the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) had four flying squadrons based in Malaya. The two fighter squadrons (Nos 2 and 453) were equipped with Brewster Buffalo aircraft and tasked with air defence and support for ground forces. The other two squadrons (Nos 1 and 8) were equipped with Lockheed Hudsons and their role was bombing, convoy escort, and reconnaissance. Both aircraft types were obsolescent designs that were inferior in performance to their Japanese counterparts and would prove to be inadequate for the operations assigned to them. Three RAAF squadrons were based in different locations in Malaya, while 453 was at Sembarwang in Singapore.

The squadrons suffered heavy aircraft losses as the Japanese quickly overran Malaya and then Singapore. The remaining aircraft and squadron personnel were withdrawn to Sumatra. The air campaign continued there, under the inspiring leadership of Group Captain (later Air Marshal Sir) John McCauley, who established a secret hidden airfield known as Palembang 2.

This air campaign has been described in official histories, personal accounts, and general campaign histories. To my knowledge there has not been a specific account of the RAAF's role in this theatre. It is hoped that this paper will lead to the compilation of such an account.

3. Conflict to Commerce – Comic Propaganda in WWII. A Case study of the Bombing of Rabaul.

Mark Nizette- Kokoda Initiative (PNG National Museum and Art Gallery) Presented by Dr Andrew Connelly.

As the world slipped deeper into WWII, the power of propaganda became recognised as key to domestic support, and to instil patriotic drive in the enlisted troops. Powerful posters

adorned buildings, cinemas screened successes from the front, and the comic industry boomed with stories of the War.

In the USA comics soon became a vital media to communicate selective messages to the people at home, and to the troops engaging the enemy. Initially, the messages of patriotism, moral right and strength were told through fictional characters such as Superman who gained popularity fighting for freedom against the Nazis. But some comics such as the aptly named True Comics and War Heroes sought out real life stories from the war and expertly drew sanitised renditions of the truth to sell to the people. Appealing to adult and child alike, the Government found itself with a powerful, cheap and accessible communications tool to stimulate productivity and support at home, and courage on the front.

This paper examines a case study of the bombing of Simpson Harbour in November 1942 by the US Fifth Air Force as told through the comic medium and archival research, and reflects on the sanitisation of history.

4. Investigating the systems and material remains of a three-dimensional battlefield

Daniel J Leahy- University of New England

Aviation has been an aspect of modern conflict since the earliest days of the twentieth century. During the First World War, military aviation pioneers began experimenting with ways of eliminating enemy aircraft from the skies, a process which resulted in the art of dogfighting and other forms of aircraft detection and anti-aircraft weaponry being developed. From early 1942, such methods and technology were being employed by a number of militaries on and over the Australian mainland.

Aviation archaeology investigates human involvement with flight through the analysis of related material remains. But as the saying goes, 'what goes up must come down', so much of the material remains relating to warfare in flight are now found at a location other than where combat actually took place. This paper will look at an example of air warfare that occurred over Australia's Northern Territory in 1943. It will discuss how modern technology applied to both the archaeological and historical record can shed light not only on the three-dimensional battlefield of the day but also the systems that were employed on a large scale to defend Australia during the Second World War.

5. The Bouncing Bomb Down Under

Michael Nelmes- Narromine Aviation Museum

"Tripe of the wildest description!" exclaimed Air Chief Marshal 'Bomber' Harris, Royal Air Force Bomber Command chief during the Second World War, when presented with the idea of a 'bouncing bomb'. Barnes Wallis' unique concept was strange, to say the least: a

spinning mine, dropped onto water from a low-flying aircraft, which skipped along the surface until hitting an enemy target. Nevertheless, the Upkeep mine was proven in Operation Chastise, the successful Dambuster attack on German dams.

In tandem with Upkeep, Wallis developed its little-known smaller cousin, codenamed Highball. A squadron of elite British (and some Australian) airmen was tasked with deploying it. This paper looks at how and why this unusual weapon came to Australia in late 1944 on a top secret mission to sink Japanese capital ships; and why, despite its airmen being fully trained and ready with a proven concept, Highball was never combat-tested. Despite a projected 50% loss rate in crews if the mission had gone ahead, the airmen were disappointed when their squadron was disbanded a month before war's end. Its Mosquito bombers were sold off in rural New South Wales to farmers, who stripped them of useful parts for their machinery and used them as novelty cubbyhouses for their kids.

The paper concludes with a postscript. In 2017 two of the trial Highball mines were raised from the bed of Scotland's Loch Striven, one of the lakes on which test drops were conducted. It is hoped that a third example of these 600kg mines can be recovered and brought to Australia.