

200 Flight RAAF and "Z" Special Unit 200 FLIGHT RAAF AND "Z" SPECIAL UNIT

In June 1944 it was decided that the Allied Intelligence Bureau (AIB) and the Services Reconnaissance Department (SRD) should have an RAAF unit allocated to it to assist it in delivering agents and supplies of the Australian Army's "Z: Special Unit by parachute into enemy territory.

Consequently 200 Flight RAAF was formed as a Special Duties (SD) unit at Leyburn, 37 kms from Toowoomba, on 20 February 1945. Leyburn is located between Toowoomba and Warwick. 200 Flight was equipped with Liberators to allow them to carry the planned cargoes and achieve the duration range into enemy territory.

The US 380th Bomb Group were also working with special operations.

"Beautiful Betsy" of the 380th Bomb Group drooped wooden paratroop dummies from its rear hatch in secret trials.

Experiments with wooden dummy paratroopers had been carried out at Adelaide River, Batchelor and Richmond in late December 1943 using a 380th Bomb Group Liberator piloted by USAAF Captain Craig and RAAF Flight Lieutenant F. Cook.

The trials eventually determined that the best exit point from the aircraft was from the crew hatch in the fuselage floor just behind the waist gunner's position. A 1.5 meter iron ramp resembling a slippery slide was fitted by 4 Repair and Salvage Unit. The ramp was hinged to allow the hatch to be closed.

The waist guns, mounts, armour and ball turret were also removed. The trials were filmed from a Curtiss Falcon aircraft flying behind the Liberator.

Supplies for the secret agents were dropped in "storpedoes" which were six foot long tough cardboard cylinders reinforced with metal straps. They carried supplies, radio sets and weapons. The "storpedoes" were held in the bomb bay of the Liberator.

Two 24 Squadron RAAF Liberators were initially assigned to 200 Flight to assist the Liberator from the 380th Bomb Group in training with "Z" Special Unit members at Leyburn. A frame was built at Leyburn for practice jumps and training flights commenced in late February 1944. By that time there were five Liberators involved in 200 Flight's secret operations.

Once 200 Flight was fully operational, it had six Liberators and 9 eleven-man crews with about 450 ground staff.

In the middle of March 1944, two Liberators (A72-159 and A72-192) Captained by the Commanding Officer, Squadron Leader H.G. "Graham" Pockley, DFC & Bar, and Flight Lieutenant Frank Ball, left Leyburn for McGuire Field on the Mindoro Island in the Philippines for their first mission. Two days later they took off to drop some "Z" Special "Semut 1" agents into Borneo. The mission was aborted due to low cloud. A second attempt on 21 March also failed due to bad weather.

Finally on 24 March 1944 they were able to drop eight "Z" Special Unit men into Borneo. The two aircraft on this final attempt were A72-159 and A72-191. The latter aircraft did not return from this mission. It is believed that it may have been shot down by a vessel that it was seen to be attacking. 200 Flight's Commanding Officer was the pilot of the missing A72-191.

200 Flight RAAF lost 3 aircraft during its operations, along with 46 men which included "Z" Special agents.

Section 2: Oral Histories

The following statements, reminiscences and oral histories were collected from a number of people both in and previously from the village. The author has no reason to doubt the validity or accuracy of the statements but the reader should remember that they have been rendered from individual memories. The topics have been listed here alphabetically and not in the order they were collected. Information on each topic may have been provided by more than one person