

# 23 Squadron Association (Qld) RAAF DAUNTLESS

→ NEWSLETTER

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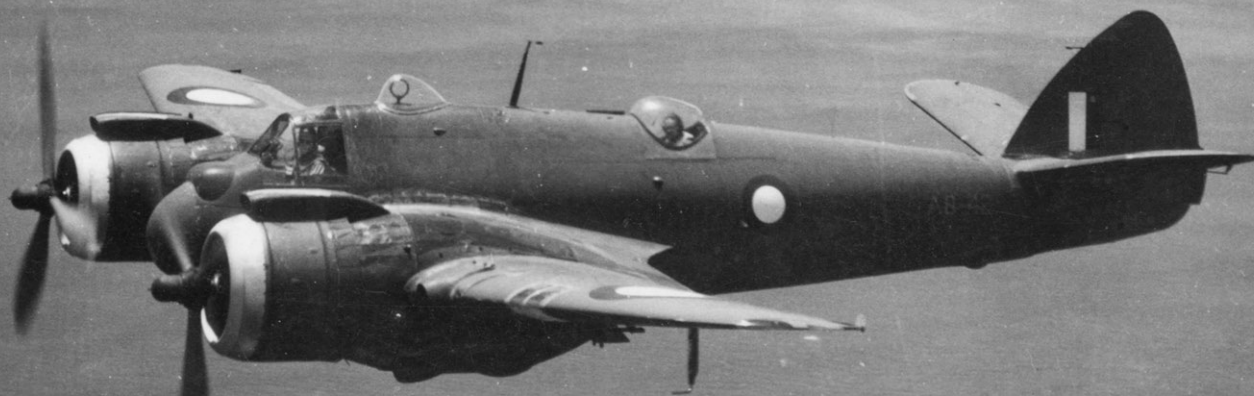
## SPECIAL FEATURE

Join the crew of an RAAF  
Beaufighter on a search and  
destroy mission of enemy  
shipping in Timor waters



*"Boring in at better than 300 mph, sitting  
behind four cannons, and six machine guns,  
one has a wonderful feeling of confidence."*

*Cec Taylor*



**It's Your Newsletter - Contributions Always Needed**

# Whispering

## Death & Company

an original story  
by  
**Flying Officer Cec Taylor**

foreword  
**Sgt Don Taylor**  
illustration & layout  
**Peter Hughes**



*It was the Japs themselves who dubbed our Beaufighter long range strafing planes "Whispering Death".*

*Speeding out from their bases in North Australia these 300 miles-an-hour aircraft became synonymous with sudden death to the Japanese on the islands to the north of our continent.*

*Their two powerful engines were silenced down to a whisper as they stalked their prey just over the tops of the trees - or attacked shipping on the waterline.*

*No allied aircraft struck such terror into the hearts of the Japanese as the Australian-manned Beaufighters.*

*Their sobriquet, "Whispering Death" was most apt.*

*It was good to see two ex telecommunication technicians, Don Taylor and Derry Savage, turn up at the AGM. Following the meeting Don told me of his father's Beaufighter experiences and I asked if he would send me the story.*

*I am sure you will enjoy the foreword by Don Taylor and story by his father Cec Taylor, of what it was like to undertake a mission in an RAAF Beaufighter.....Ed.*

This article called "Whispering Death & Company" was written by my father Cec Taylor, who at the time was a Flight. Sergeant (Navigator) with 31 (Beaufighter) Sqn. based at Coomalie Creek, NT. during 1943-1944.

The "base" was only one of many airstrips hastily built beside the Stuart Highway, Northern Territory. and used by the Beaufighter Squadron to attack the invading

Japanese primarily on Timor at the time.

The following article was first published in the Brisbane Courier Mail dated June 15, 1944, My father was always extremely proud of this and was always very proud of being a member of the squadron during and after the war.

He enlisted in the RAAF on 1.2.1942 just 18 days before the first Darwin raid and 14 days before Singapore fell where his brother Roy was taken prisoner and subsequently died on the Burma railway of illness contracted at the hands of the Japanese.

After his training as a navigator he began his tour of duty with 31 Sqn. approx. 30.9.43 and completed 18 missions to 27.6.44. His regular pilot was Phil Quance who is still living in Sydney and whom I visited recently, on my way to inspect

l to r - pilot Sergeant Phil Quance and navigator Sergeant Cec Taylor of 31 Squadron. Photo after graduation to Aircrew 1943

a restored Beaufighter at the Air Museum at Moorabin, VIC.

My father Flight Sergeant Cec Taylor was commissioned as a Flying Officer on the 31.12.44, a fact he took tremendous pride in, having come from very humble working class stock.

He joined the Citizens Air Force as an Officer in January 1945. This led to his influencing my decision to join 23 Sqn. in 1960 until 1977-17 years.

Cec Taylor died prematurely in 1974, aged 56 yrs.



Sergeant Don Taylor (1972)  
Telecommunications SNCO  
No 23 Squadron RAAF Amberley





*Northern Territory. October 1942. Advance party of No. 31 (Beaufighter) Squadron RAAF detraining at Adelaide River. Note type of cattle truck in which service personnel are carried from Larrimah to Darwin. AWM photo*

***Cec Taylor takes up the story, the place is Coomalie Creek - the scene Cec and his pilot Phil Quance are playing cards.....Ed.***

It was good and hot. The iron roof did little towards keeping out the heat. Somebody was trying to coax Vera Lyn to sing "That lovely weekend" for the umpteenth time and she was working under difficulties with the needle on its hundredth record.

"I'll make it six hearts" said Bill, as he deftly flicked the ash off his cigarette. "Six hearts" says Phil, "Well I'll go seven spades". "In that case, I'll pass", says cunning old Flossie (probably sitting on the fence with a hand full of spades). I opened my mouth to say "No trumps", when the speaker in the corner of the mess crackled, and we listened as the voice droned: "Attention all personnel: Attention all personnel ....

The following aircrew report to Operations Room immediately". Forgotten were the cards. "Even money I get a Guernsey" says Bill. "Yeah, me too" says Phil. It was on alright!

As the names came over the loud speaker, I speculated as to what our target might be, and the thought of that long trip over the water bored into my mind.

The boys grabbed their flying gear, and soon we were listening to the C.O. giving us details of our target: "Well gentlemen your target today is, shipping in this harbour." We knew what he meant as he pointed to the map that the Intelligence Officer had pinned up on the wall for reference. The particular place indicated had four or five nests of heavy ack-ack batteries protecting it; but it was our job to go in at tree top level and bash the shipping.

After more minute details, as to position of ships, the proximity of the target to an enemy air strip, possibility of interception by enemy fighter aircraft etc., the Old Man's query, "Any questions?"



*Ground crew stand in front of a line-up of Beaufighter aircraft of No. 31 Squadron RAAF. photo AWM (Australian War Memorial)*

seemed almost facetious after such a thorough briefing. As usual, we had the G.G. straight, for no one spoke. "Cripes I mustn't forget to grab a new map. The one I had last time's ripped. Better take a spare log too." "Well that is all" said the C.O. "Good luck gentlemen, and good results"

In a matter of minutes we were on the strip where our planes were parked ready for the job. The ground crews had them in perfect condition. Even as we were arriving the boys were putting the finishing touches to the polishing.

"T for Teddy - Doug Got all your gear?."

"G for George -Don't forget your Mae West Phil".

Everybody settles in their cockpits. There's routine checks to be made. "Contact port and starboard" comes from forward. A couple of rasping coughs are the labour pains that announce the birth of power in our engines. The roar subsides to a steady purr as the seconds tick by to "take off". Suddenly my thoughts turn to home, and I realise that it is my young son's birthday (*Ed. note that son is Don Taylor*). I wonder if he will be sick from eating too much. Now it's our turn. "OK Phil take her away"



*Coomalie Creek, NT. December 1943 - Cec Taylor was one of five men in his squadron with the surname Taylor. pictured is. Flying Officer (Squizzy) Taylor of No. 31 (Beaufighter) Squadron RAAF wearing his full flying equipment sitting back under his aircraft before climbing aboard. AWM photo*

Soon we're airborne and closing up in formation. Gone are the thoughts of home now... Work to be done:... Job ahead.... Those little yellow b's..... As I figure out courses, airspeed etc. I find time to enjoy the fresh coolness of the atmosphere, so different from the ground.... Drift checked ... altitude right... airspeed OK.... The sea looks so blue as we leave the coast and head for enemy occupied territory. Who was it said "Time drags?" Water, water as far as I can see. Blue shades intermingling with the green... the black shadows where the magnificent white billowy cumulus clouds cast their silhouettes.... Funny how one can see the natural beauty in such ordinary matter-of-fact things under such circumstances. It takes war, in all it's stark realities, and gambling with death to make one really appreciative of the seemingly small things of nature. With a "How long to E.T.A?" from Phil, my thoughts are rudely broken and I come back to the more serious job-of-the-moment. "Forty minutes to go - time to get on the deck Phil," I reply.

From two thousand feet, we slide down to twenty feet from the deck. Everything is keyed up now... The cannons are cocked and ready for

use.... I'm swinging my rear gun to and fro as I search the sky. We don't want to be jumped.... The formation is packed in tight, and looking out through my cupola I see the other boys hugging the water until it seems as if their propellers must touch it.

Here lies the reason for the success of the "Whispering Death". Coming in so low, with our wonderful Bristol Hercules engines whispering, we're on the Nip before he knows it. What a feeling of confidence it inspires in one to see the formation skimming the water. How awe inspiring it must look to the Jap, to see us cut across his own stamping grounds on the tree-tops with our guns belching.

Momentarily I let my gaze drop to watch the water flashing by



*An RAAF Beaufighter on take-off*

beneath us and marvel at my pilot's judgement. It's good to know you have such dependable and daringly skilful men in your team. After all, this is really like a football game - it is teamwork that works out in the end.... twenty minutes to go!. wonder if the ack-ack will be as severe as we think? -. supposing we get hit in the petrol tank! What if a motor fails - remember how old Mac went in..... cut it out! Everything will turn out OK..... ten minutes to go! - we'll get those ships no matter what happens. They'll have to be good to hit us with their ack-ack - What's that?. A damn bird! Gosh they look like aircraft! - wish the sun wasn't so strong. - the Nip usually comes in down sun, so I must keep watching.... Five minutes to go - this is it, nearly there! come on you yellow b'ds .... Let's see how you are going to like this party. This is going to be another installment on account' - credit my brother.

We cross the coast with a surge of power as the throttles are increased. Trees flash past beneath us so close I could reach out and touch them. Our nose is depressed and I hear the cannons crack out their song of death. Hope there's no stoppage. Its bloody hard to re-cock them when the kite's bouncing around. Then I see a target just as we skim over it. A Jap building, smoke pouring out of it, and two forms lying prostrate outside. Still one minute to go to our real target. A quick look ahead - there they are - three big ships anchored in the harbour with small craft unloading them.





*Beaufighter mast height attack on enemy shipping - AWM photo*

A hurried look up in the sky to see that there's no Nip aircraft, and I watch the target come into our sights. There is another plane ahead of us, strafing the ship, his cannon shells exploding on the deck like a million red lights and pieces flying off the sides. Now Phil is firing. One long burst and the ship's bridge is almost obscured by the brilliant explosions, smoke and flame. As we close in, it looks like we must surely hit the ship's superstructure dead centre. The stick comes back and we clear the vessel by the narrowest margin.

Now, for one fleeting second, I can see the damage wrought by our concentrated fire power. The bridge is smoking and hungry tongues of flames are licking the superstructure. Around one gun position I see three forms slumped over their shield. I spy several yellow figures crouched together in the well deck and automatically give them a squirt from my Browning as I whiz past. My vision is blurred as we take violent evasive action from any possible following fire from our victim. A

voice breaks through the crackling in my headphones - "Leader to formation - transport over to our port - turning left - over". Yes there it is. We do a very steep turn to port and our wingtips create some beautiful vapour trails.

I can't help but marvel at the perfect formation flying and the speed at which the transport seems to be rushing up to meet us. That old

tub is throwing everything but the kitchen sink in our direction, but boring in at better than 300 m.p.h., sitting behind four cannons, and six machine guns, one has a wonderful feeling of confidence. Soon the white tracer and spasmodic orange flame from the transport are hidden in the midst of our exploding cannon shells. We haven't pulled out of our run yet and that horrible feeling again



*RAAF Beaufighter attacking Japanese ship. AWM photo*



*Beaufighter A19-82 at Coomalie Creek NT circa 1943-1944 - Phil Quance (pilot) centre and Cec Taylor (navigator) second from right - both holding pith helmets - with ground crew. Quance & Taylor completed eighteen operational missions. The aircraft was to crash land later (flown by another crew) and was salvaged for parts.*

that we must hit the ship as we hurtle towards it.

But "F" for Freddie responds beautifully to the touch and we lift up and over, we then zoom down again to water level. Now I can hardly see anything as the smoke rises from our target and there's still three more Beaus to have a go at it - you beaut!. As I look there's a terrific explosion - someone has hit a 'soft spot' and a huge orange flame leaps from the ship with great clouds of dirty black smoke. The Beaus are lost from sight, then through the smoke one of them appears. I am sure he must have taken the vessel's wireless aerial with him.

Something made me look upwards into the sky, don't ask me what, and then I saw them, four dots on the horizon, enemy aircraft. A quick twist of the wrist and I'm screaming on the R/T "Enemy aircraft!, six o'clock, at two thousand feet!". Then again more intelligibly as they become more visible, "Four twin engine enemy aircraft at six o'clock at two thousand feet".

"Leader to formation close up line abreast." The throttles are pushed

forward and I feel a mighty surge as the Hercs bring in few more horses and we are soon in our position. My lips are dry and caked as I sight my gun on the enemy leader - waiting for him to come in - "come on you yellow ... come and get it". They seem to be hesitant about engaging us (probably have recognised us as "Honourable Beaufighters". Here they come! They're diving in, concentrating on our leader in "A" for Annie. Rat-a-tat-tat, my gun is jumping in my hands as bullets wing their

way towards the yellow sons of Nippon. I can see the tracers from the other Beau's rear guns, criss-crossing at the rear of mine, just in front of the Nip plane. Ha Ha, they don't like that. They break away at four hundred yards, their fire falling in the front of "A" for Annie. They're going for height - well let them. What the hell!. They're slow rolling, and going to come in head on - these must be new pilots, they don't realise our forward fire power. Even money there'll be widows in Tokyo tonight.



*A19-82 following a crash landing was salvaged for parts*



Now their number one is screaming down in a dive - "Leader to formation - come on up - elevate your nose - they're ours" The Nips tracer is clearly seen as he closes in. Then "A" for Annie's cannon bark. For a moment it looks like they have no effect. Then bits fly off the Nip's wing and fuselage - his motors catch fire as a wing section breaks off and out of control he plunges into the drink. I catch a glimpse of him as we career over the spot, where wreckage and oil burning on the water is the only trace of the Nip.

The other three pull out very steeply, just above us, manoeuvring into position for a tail attack. This time they keep their distance. I guess seeing their leader going in, must have shaken them up a bit. We can't afford to turn around to chase them, for we still have a two hour trip to make base.

We leave the coast with the three Nips still on our tails, trying to decide whether to have another 'go' or not. Beyond them I can see the high columns of black smoke ascending from the wrecked ships. Here they come again, we are at only three quarter power to conserve our petrol, but we're in a pretty tight defensive formation.... 800 yards... 600 yards... right... my tracer is flying away. They're coming in a tighter formation this time... too much deflection, I'll ease off a bit... I'm hitting him!... I'm hitting him!... The sky is full of tracer from the concentration of fire from the rear guns. Too hot for old Nip. Yes, he's dropping behind now, they're still there, but becoming very small dots now. As I watch, they wheel about and head back for their base to lick their wounds.

The island is gradually disappearing in the distance and we climb for height. I realise how dry my mouth really is, where's the water bottle? Ah, that's good.... Any holes in us?.... No, everything is fine. It is getting cooler now,

4000... 5000...6000 feet. Again I notice those big curiously shaped, but exquisitely beautiful cumulus clouds fly past us like huge snowy eiderdown quilts. My thoughts run ahead to those at Base - our ground crew who'll be eagerly waiting to see us touch down safe and well.... the Intelligence Officer with his interrogation.... millions of

questions, describing the scenes all over again in detail.... the number of rounds fired.... how was the wireless, and so on. The reaction is setting in - a feeling of being very tired.

Gee, the water looks very beautiful, such a deep blue. It was like that on my honeymoon. Gosh they were the days - wishful thinking. Land will be coming up soon, good old Australia. Ah! there she is.

Well it is all over now bar the shouting. Tomorrow we will read

the official communique - Our long range fighters strafed and sank, two four thousand ton transports

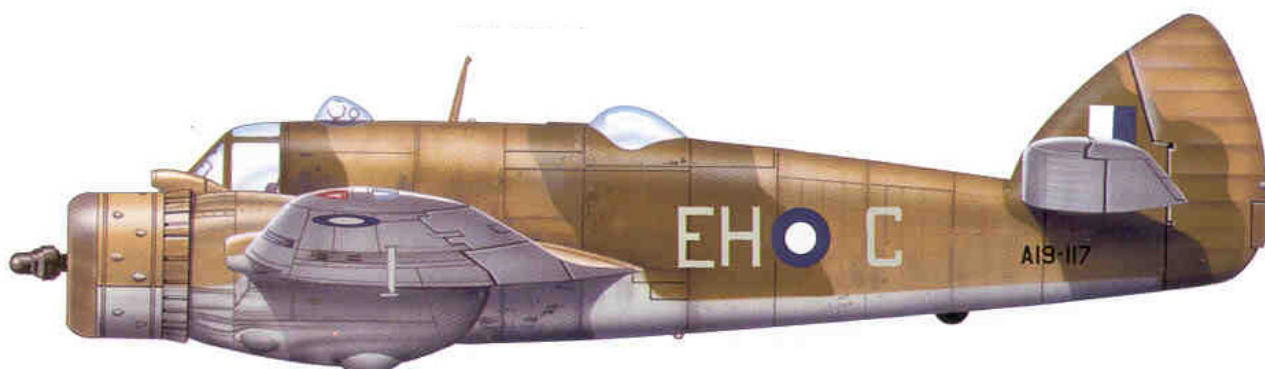
One enemy fighter destroyed, and one damaged. All our planes returned safely.

Another contract carried out successfully by "Whispering Death and Company".



*This photo is from an original brought back from duty by Cec Taylor well before it appeared in Parnell's book "Whispering Death". Cec Taylor is on the far right (firearm on hip). His own words taken from the original read "Photo taken by USA war correspondent of members of crew being interrogated by intelligence officer after arrival back from enemy strike - my first op."*

## A Beaufighter Mk 21 of No 31 Squadron RAAF during April 1944



Powerplant: Two 1,400 h.p. Bristol Hercules XI fourteen-cylinder air-cooled engines.

Wing Span: 57ft 10in (17.62m)

Length: 41ft 4in (12.60m)

Max Speed: 321 mph (518 km/h) at 15,800 ft (4,815m)

Armament: Four 20mm Hispano cannon in nose and six .303in Browning machine guns in wings.

Accommodation: Pilot, Navigator/Gunner

Recognition: Sleek fuselage with large triangular tail. From the side the cockpit is partially obscured by the large engines. Wings mounted well-forward on the fuselage with the engines protruding prominently from the leading edge.

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*Whilst researching the Beaufighter story I came across the following poem that one Beaufighter pilot always carried in his pocket on a mission, it was written by Canadian Flying Officer Ernest Raymond Davey...Ed.*

Almighty and all-present power,  
Short is the prayer I make to Thee;  
I do not ask in battle hour  
For any shield to cover me.  
The vast unalterable way,  
From which the stars do not depart,  
May not be turned aside to stay  
The bullet flying to my heart.  
I ask no help to strike my foe;  
I seek no petty victory here.  
The enemy I hate, I know  
To Thee is dear.  
But this I pray: be at my side  
When death is drawing through the sky;  
Almighty God who also died,  
Teach me the way that I should die.