

# THE FORGOTTEN FIFTH

## Chronology 5

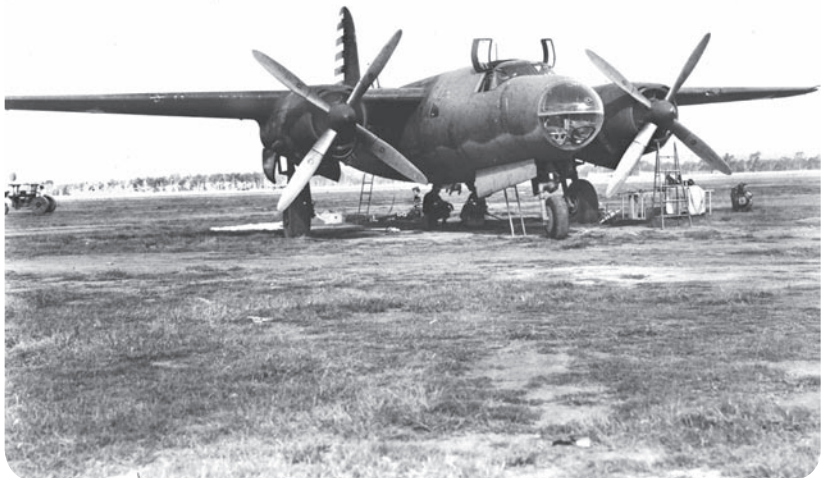
The legendary Major Paul ‘Pappy’ Gunn, appears to the right, outlining proposed modifications to interested Fifth Air Force officers, including ‘Chuck’ Howe, sitting on the jeep. Gunn toured forward bases in his personal converted strafer which he nicknamed *Pappy’s Folly*, being B-25C #41-12437 which had been diverted from the Dutch Air Force. A cowboy’s speech caption on the side of Gunn’s Mitchell read, “*And that’s plain English*”. Gunn became a legend for several reasons, including the fact that his wife and four children survived Japanese imprisonment in Java. Gunn’s professional strength was his vision of turning medium bombers into strafers, or what the Fifth’s Commander, General George Kenney, would term ‘commerce destroyers’.



Gunn’s personal disdain for slide-rules and engineers as protagonists to his cause was well-known, and it was Gunn who became instrumental in providing the Fifth with its low-level hammer. His most famous retort was when a visiting General from Hawaii, who upon inspecting the numerous and bulky guns bolted to the nose of *Pappy’s Folly*, had the audacity to inquire as to the location of the airplane’s centre of gravity. Gunn’s short response was, “*Hell General, I threw it out with the ballast*”. After the war, Gunn’s family was happily released from detention, but during a post-war tour of the North American Aircraft Corporation factory he confided to technical representative Jack Fox that in early 1942 he had considered “*appropriating*” a B-25 from Australia in which to return to the Philippines and rescue his family. Realizing that his scheme constituted little more than a desperate ploy, his better judgement fortunately prevailed. Thus the Fifth came to profit from the fine engineering mind of this determined, talented and practical man (*Author’s collection*).

## Chronology 6

One of the first Marauders to land in Australia is seen here, at Archerfield Drome near Brisbane, complete with pre-war striped rudder markings. The 22nd Bombardment Group’s initial operations were not without problems in the unfamiliar New Guinea terrain. On 8th April 1942, 2/Lt Hayes became lost during a delivery flight and forced-landed near Kerema in a vast swampy delta. All crew were rescued, but pieces of B-26 #40-1417 still lie intact where it came to rest. Because each Marauder had its own eccentric flying peculiarities, each crew was assigned their own aircraft



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on 9th April 1942, this plan was changed to attacking shipping in Philippine's waters three days later. Commanded by Brigadier-General Ralph Royce, the Mitchell strike force was complemented by three Fortresses. The first leg staged from Brisbane to Darwin, thence to Del Monte Field on Mindanao. From here the Mitchells struck Nichols Field, Davao and Cebu. All eventually returned safely to Darwin, and a few days later were transferred to the 3rd Attack Group. Incredibly, all save one of the original ten were lost within the next twelve months as the 3rd Attack took them to war - one crashed at night into Mt Bartle Frere near Cairns, two were shot down over Lae, *Mortimer* went missing over the Coral Sea, *Lounge Lizard* and another were destroyed whilst attacking an enemy cruiser, one went missing in bad weather near Port Moresby, and another was destroyed in a landing accident. That flown by 'Pappy' Gunn for the mission was later named *Red Headed Gal*, but she disappeared in January 1943, her wreckage subsequently located in 1957 in the higher reaches of New Guinea's remote Bubu Valley (*Laverton collection*).



### Chronology 10

Colonel 'Big Jim' Davies led the 12th April 1942 'Royce' mission, and can be seen facing the camera, hands on hip in centre, facing forward. The Mitchell in the background is *Algonquin*, B-25C serial #41-12485. Early wartime days were particularly difficult for Davies' 3rd Attack Group Mitchells. The Group initially furnished its 13th and 90th squadrons with Dutch Air Force contract B-25s, delivered to Australian wharves in crates. After assembly they were flown to Charters Towers, but the first three to arrive were damaged in landing accidents. One stalled too high

during approach and damaged the wingspar, the second collapsed its undercarriage and skidded off the runway, whilst the third blew a tire.

The Group would maintain a contingent at Charters Towers throughout two years – from March 1942 to March 1944. The Group's first B-25 mission, staged through Port Moresby, was flown against Gasmata on 6th April 1942. All aircraft returned safely except one, badly shot up and written off back at Seven-mile, Port Moresby. The Group's first operational loss occurred in Australia on 21st April 1942 when a returning B-25C flew into the side of Mt Bartle Frere near Cairns. Under the command of Captain Glenwood Stephenson, the aircraft was returning at night from a Coral Sea patrol, and flew into a blind valley which leads to the peak. The mountain is steep and heavily timbered, and it took eight days before the wreck could be successfully reached. Three days after the loss, three 90th Squadron B-25Cs disappeared in stormy weather whilst training off Port Moresby. And, a month after this, on 24th May 1942, the 13th Squadron suffered its biggest loss of the war when Tainan Kokutai A6M2 fighters picked off five of seven B-25Cs attacking Lae at tree-top height. One loss was attributed to pilot error when, with persistent fighters lining up on its tail, it banked too steeply. The wing dug into the ocean and the B-25C cartwheeled and disintegrated. The 3rd Group's early days were tough ones - of its original cadre of seventy-four officers, only eleven would survive the war (*Steve Birdsall*).