



Condensed from "Fifth Air Force Light and Medium Bomber Operations During 1942 and 1943: Building Doctrine and Forces that triumphed in the battle of the Bismarck Sea and the Wewak Raid" by Major Timothy Gann, Air University, United States Air Force, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama.

WEWAK RAID

August 17, 1943

After the painful losses from the Battle of the Bismarck Sea, and the subsequent failed operations, the Japanese Imperial Headquarters was finally convinced to strengthen its air force units in New Guinea. Consequently the 6th and 7th Air Divisions and the 14th Air Brigade were sent in August to Wewak. Shortly after arriving it reached its peak strength of over 500 aircraft and 10,000 men. It included 8 fighter groups of 26 planes each, 5 bomber groups consisting of 36 planes each, and 5 reconnaissance squadrons of 12 planes each.

From March through July the Fifth Air Force had conducted mostly harassment strikes against enemy airfields along New Guinea's coast and the shipping between Rabaul and Wewak.

Further the premier attack aircraft, the light and medium bombers needed an emergency airfield halfway between Port Moresby and Wewak. Of equal importance, such an airfield could also house a fighter group, allowing the P-38s to provide escort for the bombers. Several sites were surveyed and in early June, Tsili-Tsili, (approx. near Menyamta) a small village lying about 60 miles west of Lae was selected.





"WEWAK RAID" cont. from page 18

Since this area was in range of enemy attack, a deception operation was devised. Construction was simultaneously begun on an airfield 100 miles northwest of Lae near Bena-Bena. This field was no more than a grass strip originally intended as an intelligence center and emergency runway. Natives made sure dust was raised, fires started and grass huts built to get the interest of the Japanese. True to form, on June 14th the enemy began almost daily bombing. By working around the clock, the airfield at Tsili-Tsili and the early warning network was completed. On July 26th the fighters arrived.

With the target date to attack Wewak set for August 17th, the efforts were further accelerated to supply the airfield at Tsili-Tsili. On August 15th, its location was finally discovered and attacked by 20-30 Japanese fighters and 12 bombers. 5th Air Force fighters rose to meet them and shot down all the enemy bombers but not before one crashed into the recently constructed chapel killing the chaplain and several men. At the time of the attack, twelve allied transports were in the landing pattern and Japanese Oscar fighters shot down two. On August 16th, 95 allied transports loaded with 13 55-gallon drums of gasoline each arrived making the airdrome ready to support the next day efforts. Once again Japanese fighters attacked while the transports were arriving, but this time no damage was suffered.

The first strike was with 50 heavy bombers the night of the 16th, with 48 reaching the 4 airfields at But, Boran, Dagua, and Wewak and dropped a combination of incendiary, parafrag and demolition bombs.



334 6th WEWAK (1-12-43) 12,300' 15

On August 17th between 0600 and 0630, 63 B-25s took off from Port Moresby and Dobodura. Due to a combination of bad weather and inability of ten of the aircraft to release their 300-gallon turret tanks, (a mandatory abort item) only 32 aircraft reached the target. The B-25s met light resistance indicating the heavy bombers had achieved their objective of paralyzing the enemy.



Arriving at the target at 0900 the B-25s commenced their attacks. 3 planes from the 405th reached Dagua and initiated their runs from 30-50 feet. The pilot report stated:

40-50 Dinahs, type 100 Helens and type 97 Sallys inadequately dispersed in twos and threes in clearing along southeast side of runway were bombed and strafed. Of these enemy planes 8 were reported definitely destroyed and 20 probably destroyed.

The 3rd Bomb Group's three squadrons also struck gold. The 90th claimed 15 destroyed at Wewak; the 8th claimed 40-60 destroyed at Boram; and the 13th claimed an additional 10 to 20 at Boram. The 3rd combat log summarized the attack:

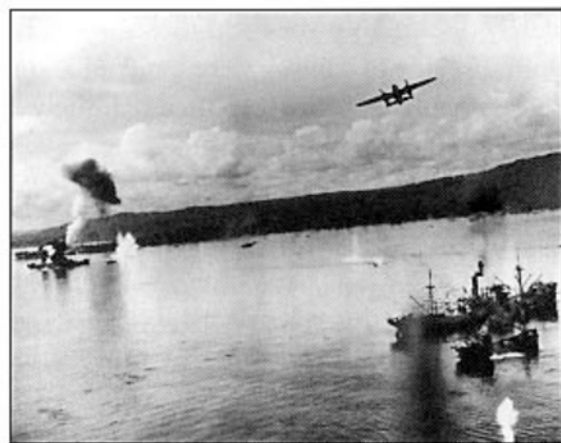
Boram, the principle target was the first to be hit. The formation of the 8th and 13th Squadron ships, led by Colonel Donald P. Hall, came around the ridge on to the target and took the Nips completely by surprise. Over 100 Japanese aircraft were lined up wing tip to wing tip; trucks were moving and personnel were busily at work. Co Hall made the first pass from 100 feet and his initial burst exploded a Betty Bomber. Our planes which followed bombed and strafed aircraft at the strip. When

*"WEWAK RAID" cont. from page 19*

they turned for another pass the parked planes resembled a powder train as fire and smoke swiftly moved down the line. Crews of numerous ships observed frag bombs exploding in and around the parked aircraft. They also saw an ammunition dump explode and two fuel dumps catch fire. The field was left in shambles; pieces of aircraft scattered all over the area.



The following day in an attempt to confuse the enemy, heavy bombers were scheduled to strike just before the B-25s arrived. Due to bad weather only 26 of the 49 bombers reached the target, bombing from high altitude to avoid the AAA and drop a combination of demolition bombs with instantaneous fuses and wire-wrapped bombs with extension fuses.



Moments after impact, 53 B-25s approached the complex. Once again, the medium bombers accounted for the majority of the damage. They concentrated on the airfields at But and Dagua along with supply dumps at Boram and shipping in the Wewak harbor. Despite constant harassment by Japanese fighters, B-25 crews claimed a total of 78 aircraft destroyed on the ground

and in the air. Additionally, three 1500 ton vessels and several barges were struck. By the end of the day of the estimated 225 enemy aircraft in the Wewak area, all but ten were left destroyed or unserviceable.

Bad weather on the 19th precluded flying, but on the 20th, B-24s with fighter escort bomber Boram at midday destroying several aircraft on the ground, The Japanese had resupplied their aircraft and 30-35 fighters intercepted the bombers. The P-38 escort having the upper hand in combat destroyed 19 with six others as probable. One B-24 was lost.

The 21st again saw the B-25s in action. Dagua and But were struck by 18 aircraft escorted by 60 P-38s, Thirty-four enemy aircraft destroyed on the ground, three in the air together with one power launch and four barges. The P-38s accounted for another 30 definite and 5 probable enemy destroyed.



The end results of the Wewak missions were summarized by General Whitehead in his report to General Kenney:

"We are highly pleased with this week's operation. According to our box score, our fighters shot down 71 enemy fighters and 12 enemy bombers definite and 12 more fighters probable. We lost 7 fighters and 2 others are missing. Our bombers certainly destroyed at least 150 enemy airplanes on the ground, shot down 26 enemy fighters and 11 more probable. We lost 3 B-24s and 2 B-25s as a result of combat."

After the war Major General Tanikawa of the Fourth Air Army confirmed the scale of devastation delivered to the Japanese air capability in New Guinea on the first two days of the attack.