

AIR POWER

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History



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The Search for General



I Walker: New Insights



Richard L. Dunn

(Overleaf) B-17E (41-9234) that crashed near Wau, New Guinea, on January 8, 1943, after an attack on a convoy near Lae. This was part of the Lae convoy operation which began on January 5, of which Gen Walker's Rabaul mission was a part. (Photo from www.warofourfathers.com.)

THE IMPORTANCE OF ACTION AGAINST THE FIRST LAE CONVOY AND ACCURATE DETAILS OF WALKER'S MISSION ARE HARD TO FIND IN PUBLISHED ACCOUNTS

Brig. Gen. Kenneth Newton Walker, one of the architects of the prewar plan for strategic air war in Europe, and commanding general Fifth Bomber Command, went missing in action on January 5th, 1943, on an unescorted daylight bombing mission to Rabaul, New Britain. The B-17F in which the general flew, Walker, and the crew have never been found. He remains one of the highest ranking unrecovered officers lost in air combat in World War II. The search in the title of this article has multiple implications. First is the search for an accurate account based on credible evidence of Walker's mission and its importance. Then there is a recounting of the search missions that took place in 1943. Finally, mention must be made of the research under taken by an eclectic group of researchers to narrow the probable location of Walker's bomber; and, unfortunately the profound lack of actual searching and apparent lack of interest shown in the case by the Joint POW-MIA Accountability Command (JPAC). New insights come from previously unexploited sources: unpublished research results, diaries from participants on both sides, and, captured Japanese documents and media reports.

Most military historians have heard of the Battle of the Bismarck Sea and understand that it was seminal event in the history of air power. Most air power historians are aware of the airlift of Australian troops to Wau, New Guinea, which helped turn back a Japanese offensive in early 1943. General Walker's January 1943 mission to Rabaul targeted a Japanese convoy prior to the one in the Bismarck Sea Battle, was the first of a series of operations that thinned out Japanese reinforcements so that they were unsuccessful against Wau, led to the Bismarck Sea Battle, and, was part of turning the tide in the Pacific. The importance of action against the first Lae convoy and accurate details of Walker's mission are hard to find in published accounts that cover events of this period.

The Lae Convoy

At Lae there was an airfield which had been the headquarters of Guinea Airways, Ltd. before the war and which had been extensively used by the Japanese navy in 1942. Obscure as it was Lae had been the world's leading airport in terms of cargo tonnage in the 1930s thanks to hauling dredges, vehicles, and other heavy equipment (often broken down and welded back together on location) as well as subsistence supplies in support of gold mining operations in New Guinea's remote mountain



regions. It had also been the departure point for Amelia Earhart's last flight. At nearby Malahang was a disused pre-war landing strip cleared by Lutheran missionaries. Lae and more broadly the Lae-Salamaua-Wau area was one of the "strategic areas" which the Japanese army and navy agreed late in 1942 was needed to maintain Japan's position in New Guinea and prepare for future offensive operations. As 1943 began Lae and Salamaua were garrisoned by a weak force consisting of navy construction troops, a guard unit, and two platoons of a navy special landing party ("Japanese Marines") totaling about 1,200 men; usually 200 or so in the Salamaua-Mubo area and the rest near Lae.

Wau would be the forward defense line for Lae and Salamaua but Wau was a problem. At the center of the gold mining region, it was the base for Australian troops and native scouts that kept Lae and Salamaua under observation, occasionally clashed with Japanese patrols, and, had even raided the Japanese bases. Salamaua had an infrequently used landing strip. Wau's sloping mountainside landing strip had been the terminus of many of the pre-war flights from Lae, forty air miles distant but with jungle, ridges, gorges and mountains in between.¹

In the last days of 1942, just at the time Japanese army air units were arriving in Japan's

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(Above left) Brig. Gen. Kenneth N. Walker, taken in Washington, D.C. in 1942.

(Above) Aerial view of Rabaul, New Britain.

GIVEN THE DESPERATE STRAITS OF THE JAPANESE... GARRISON AT LAE THE IDEA THAT THE JAPANESE MIGHT TRY TO REINFORCE LAE WAS HARDLY SURPRISING

Southeast Area, Japan's strategic view changed dramatically. Departing from an offensive philosophy the Japanese Imperial General Staff decided to evacuate Guadalcanal and Buna, go over to the defense in the Solomons, and switch to an active defense and limited offensive in New Guinea. Both the army and navy recognized that in the Southeast Area (approximating the Allied Southwest Pacific Area) effective air power was the prerequisite for successful operations on land or sea.

The Japanese practiced "cooperation" rather than unity of command in the Southeast Area. It was, however, apparent to both the army and navy that circumstances had created new strategic realities among which was a line which must be held to maintain Japan's position in the area. This was the line: Lae/Salamaua-New Britain-northern Solomon Islands. This line famously called "the Bismarck Barrier" in Samuel Eliot Morison's book title would be fought over for the next year. The first order of business for the Japanese 18th Army and its supporting air force was to secure the Lae/Salamaua end of that line. Initial elements of the 51st Division were arriving at Rabaul by the end of 1942. Originally slated to be part of the 17th Army and go to Guadalcanal, the 51st was allocated to the 18th Army and assigned the mission of securing the Lae-Salamaua-Wau area.

To supplement intermittent supply by submarine and small transport vessels the Japanese were planning routes and coastal hideouts for *Daihatsu* motorized landing craft to transport troops and supplies from Rabaul to Lae. These routes had yet to be developed and their capacity would never be sufficient to sustain a large force. The decision was made to risk a convoy to transport substantial elements of the 51st Division, organized around a reinforced

infantry regiment and commanded by Maj. Gen. Toru Okabe, to Lae through waters known to be constantly patrolled by enemy aircraft. Supplies and support units were also on board, including an airfield maintenance battalion. The key to success by limiting losses en route was provision of air cover for the convoy sufficient to ward off attacks by aircraft and submarines.

Given the desperate straits of the Japanese at Buna and the weakness of their garrison at Lae the idea that the Japanese might try to reinforce Lae was hardly surprising to Allied intelligence officers. At the end of 1942 and beginning of 1943 the 300,000 tons of shipping at Rabaul (fifty large and medium cargo vessels, twenty small cargo ships and seventeen naval vessels including destroyers in one sighting report) reached an all-time high.² This plus increased scouting activities by Japanese floatplanes in the Huon Gulf also pointed to the possibility of a convoy. Finally radio intercepts not only confirmed that reinforcement would be attempted but pointed to the date of the convoy's departure.

The recently arrived 11th *Hiko Sentai* (Flying Regiment, FR) of the Japanese army would have the primary responsibility for air cover. Navy bombers and fighters would attack Port Moresby to suppress Allied air power. Navy fighters would supplement the army fighters as circumstances permitted. Navy float planes or carrier bombers would fly anti-submarine patrols along the convoy route. The 11th entered 1943 with forty-nine Type 1 fighters (Ki 43) in commission. Three had been lost in combat and six had been damaged in combat or accidents and were temporarily or permanently unavailable.³ Forty-five were operational on January 5. When the navy risked denuding the Solomons of everything except for floatplanes and a handful of landplanes it could assemble as many as forty-five medium bombers and over sixty Type Zero fighters for operations from Rabaul and Kavieng for short periods. Army Type 1 fighters (Codename Oscar) were each armed with just one 12.7mm machine cannon and one 7.7mm machine gun. Navy Zeros (Zeke) were armed with two 20mm cannon and two 7.7mm machine guns.⁴

General George C. Kenney, Allied air commander and commanding general of the U.S. Fifth Air Force, laid plans to intercept and wreck the predicted convoy. He ordered a brief stand down from bomber operations to provide for rest and maintenance of his heavy bomber force. He ordered General Walker, his bomber commander, to prepare a maximum *effort* to strike Rabaul shipping on the morning the convoy was to sail. A coordinated strike with B-17s and B-24s flying from Port Moresby with another force of B-24s flying from Australia totaling more than twenty bombers would be the largest force ever to hit Rabaul in daylight. In recent months the Fifth Air Force had avoided attacks on Rabaul in full daylight. Most attacks took place at night with an occasional bomber completing its attack after dawn. Kenney directed that the bombers strike in the early morning.



(Left to right) Maj. Gen. George C. Kenney; Major-General C. A. Clowes; Brig. Gen. Kenneth N. Walker.

WALKER ORDERED AN ATTACK FOR MIDDAY AND, AS HE HAD DONE BEFORE, FURTHER IGNORED KENNEY'S WISHES BY GOING ON THE MISSION HIMSELF

But things did not go as directed. Walker disagreed with Kenney about an early morning attack. That would require a night take off and also make it unlikely his bomber force would arrive over the target in a compact formation. Walker ordered an attack for midday and, as he had done before, further ignored Kenney's wishes by going on the mission himself. The B-24s flying from Iron Range, Australia never made the trip due to bad weather. A small advance force of B-17s detailed for an airfield attack preceded the main force. The main force headed toward Rabaul in a formation consisting of six B-17s of the 43rd BG and six B-24s of the 90th BG. The B-17s carried 500-lb. bombs and the B-24s one thousand pounders.

Rabaul Mission

At Vunakanau southwest of Rabaul town the pilots of the 11th FR were assembled early on the 5th of January. Rain storms from the previous night had ended and clouds were slowly clearing. After paying homage to the Emperor they were briefed on their convoy cover assignments. The first shift of convoy cover would take off at noon (Tokyo time;

two hours behind local time). Shortly after dawn a flight under Lt. Kyoka Yanagawa took off as a security patrol over the airfield. Yanagawa's flight had landed and a second flight was about to take off when a report of approaching planes was received. Both flights scrambled.⁵ Four stand-by navy Zeros of Air Group 582 based at Lakunai airfield east of Rabaul town were also scrambled.⁶ Anti-aircraft batteries went on the alert.

Three B-17s from the 403rd BS had been sent to attack Lakunai the Japanese fighter base located on an isthmus between Matupi Harbor and Simpson Harbor, Rabaul's main anchorage but one bomber aborted. Despite multiple bomb runs the B-17s could not see the target. Shipping was observed but the number of ships seen from the bombers was considerably less than the number present. Even a couple hours after dawn significant segments of the two harbors were clouded over. A cable report specified 6/10 cloud cover. One post-mission report said "ground fairly well obscured by clouds."⁷ An anti-shipping mission flown at an early hour of the morning might well have been a washout due to cloud conditions.

Army Type 1 fighters and navy Zeros sighted the two B-17s northeast of Vunakanau. After finding their assigned target clouded over they headed for Vunakanau as an alternate hence their approach from northeast. As Japanese army pilots positioned themselves for attack their comrades on the ground were running for cover. The B-17s unleashed thirty-three one hundred pound bombs (seven hung up and were jettisoned later), that reportedly fell in the dispersal area at Vunakanau. Returning B-17 crews said that the Japanese fighters flew a parallel course with the B-17s but out of range until they pulled ahead and then turned in for head-on attacks.

Attacks began about ten miles south of Vunakanau. After their firing runs they broke away to the side or down. A couple firing passes from the sides were also noted. Action must have been hot, heavy and confusing for the B-17 crews reported that they encountered 12 to 15 fighters most identified as Zekes and during the course of their sporadic attacks shot down seven with others claimed as damaged.⁸ The Japanese army pilots reported that they had set one of the B-17s aflame and were sure it had crashed. Navy Zeros made no claims.⁹

Both B-17s headed toward the New Guinea coast sporting numerous Japanese bullet hits. Some Japanese fighters had also been hit but all returned to their bases. In addition to claiming seven victories some returning B-17 crewmen reported that a couple of their attackers were possibly Me 109's and even thought they had seen swastika emblems on their wings! Bomber crews had apparently not been briefed on a Japanese army fighter with a slim fuselage that was new to the area. The B-17F piloted by 1st Lt. Jean Jack eventually ditched adjacent to a small island off the New Guinea coast. The ditching went smoothly and entire crew survived including one man wounded in the fighter attacks. The B-17E flown by Capt. Eaton Hocutt had a broken oil line

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among other damage. It landed at an emergency strip near Buna.¹⁰ The crew was evacuated in a transport plane.

The interception began shortly before 0730 (Tokyo time) or 0930 per Allied reports.¹¹ Walker's formation had taken off nearly an hour earlier. Without going into detail regarding Walker's career suffice to say he was both a leading theorist and advocate of strategic bombing. Opportunities to prove the value of strategic bombardment in the S.W.P.A. Theater were few. Here, now, was the opportunity to disrupt an entire, major reinforcement convoy at its point of origin. One suspects that Walker might have considered this the pinnacle of his service with Fifth Bomber Command to this point.

Simpson Harbor, Rabaul town's inner harbor, was where the greatest concentration of Japanese shipping was located. Other anchorages were at the smaller nearby Matupi Harbor and few miles to the south across Blanche Bay at Keravia Bay. The approach flight of Walker's bombers would take them over Matupi Harbor to Simpson Harbor and as they turned south they would be able to observe ships in Keravia Bay as well. However, unknown to the Americans the convoy's cargo ships were not in any of those anchorages. The cargo ships had completed their loading by barge or from the single pier at Kokopo (Rapopo) on the Gazelle Peninsula where the bulk of the ground forces to be transported had assembled.¹² The ships were anchored close to the shore and were about fifteen miles from the main concentration of shipping near Rabaul town. This anchorage had been reported by reconnaissance planes in the weeks before the raid but only minor shipping concentrations had ever been seen there. Indeed, the five transport ships of the convoy not yet joined by their destroyer escort amounted to little more than five per cent of the shipping arrayed in greater Blanche Bay and its anchorages.

As the bombers approached, the 11th FR at Vunakanau completed its preparation for its convoy cover mission later in the day. It continued to launch small flights for security patrols. Maintenance and repairs to fighters involved in the earlier interception were made. Fighters were serviced and made ready for action.¹³ The only sizeable navy fighter formation at Rabaul was Air Group 252. This unit was seriously under-strength, having lost the majority of its fighters destroyed on the ground at Munda during the last week of December 1942. A small contingent from Air Group 582 and at least one fighter from Air Group 253 were also at Lakunai. Japanese sources indicate there were just seventeen serviceable Zeros at Rabaul prior to the raid. That morning most Japanese navy fighters were at Buin (forty operational there on January 4th per Japanese data) in southern Bougainville 260 miles southeast of Rabaul while the main strength of Air Group 253 (twenty-three observed, January 3d) was at its base of Kavieng 140 miles northwest of Rabaul. If most of the fighters at Kavieng were operational this gave the Japanese about eighty operational Zeros out of a total strength of 102 reported early in the month.¹⁴

The navy's Bismarck Area Defense Force included 12.7cm anti-aircraft guns in its arsenal. Rabaul's army anti-aircraft defenses had recently been organized as the 19th Anti-Aircraft Command under Col. Nagaki Kawai. Scattered among Rabaul's harbor, airfields, and various support installations were AA batteries with a few dozen 12cm (actually 12.7cm), 8cm, and 7cm heavy AA guns, as well as AA units armed with a half dozen 40mm cannon, and a number of 20mm and 13mm (Japanese 13.2mm and captured U.S. 12.7mm) "machine cannon." Navy destroyers could add considerably to the array of land guns and most merchant vessels mounted some sort of AA defense.

Until the end of December the headquarters and all three firing batteries of Lt. Col Jiro Ohara's 50th Anti-aircraft Battalion had been situated near Lakunai airfield close to the flight path of the approaching bombers. But since the beginning of January Ohara's headquarters as well as one of his batteries and the battery of another AA battalion placed under his command had been positioned near Kokopo to cover the loading of the convoy. Another of Ohara's batteries was aboard ship destined for Lae. Only a single battery of 7cm AA guns of the 50th would be close to the flight path of the bombers as they approached their targets. Moreover, while the war diary of the 50th on other occasions notes air raid warnings received from the Toma radar station, on the 5th of January there is no indication of a radar warning being received.¹⁵ Other Japanese sources confirm that the raid achieved surprise.

Twelve bombers in close formation skirted Cape Gazelle southeast of Rabaul and laid a course for the ships in Matupi and Simpson harbors. The storms of the previous night had completely dissipated and only scattered clouds lay over the harbor while more clouds lay to the south constituting potential cover for the withdrawal of the bombers. There were targets enough for two or three times the number of bombers closing in on Rabaul. Peering through their windshields American pilots could see the many ships in Rabaul's inner and outer harbors. Ahead there were no fighters or anti-aircraft bursts. Contrary to General Kenney's concerns the bombing attack would not be disrupted by fighter interception.

There were three Japanese fighters aloft. Capt. Masayoshi Taniguchi's led a flight of three fighters providing security for Vunakanau. Taniguchi 1s patrol line took him near Simpson Harbor but he either did not see or did not recognize the approaching bombers as enemy before turning back toward the west. He was surprised to see fighters taking off from Vunakanau and only when he observed the bomb splashes and AA fire to the east did he react, too late to intercept as it turned out.¹⁶ Meanwhile, the warning went out to fighters at Lakunai and Vunakanau and anti-aircraft observers also saw the approaching bombers. No. 3 battery, 50th AA Battalion rushed to its guns. Before they could open fire on the formation it broke apart as bombers targeted individual ships. Instead of a formation the

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guns were confronted with a dozen targets on various courses. Some bombs had already been dropped before the guns got into action. Belatedly ships in the harbor were alerted. Some with steam up got under way; a few guns got into action, then more joined in to throw up a heavy barrage but only as the bombers withdrew. On the western side of Simpson Harbor the bombers were too high and out of range for the 15th Machine Cannon Company to engage.

B-17 and B-24 bombardiers made bomb runs from about 8,500 feet or a little higher on selected ships and toggled their bombs. Bombs were dropped on ships scattered throughout the anchorages. Many of the forty 500 and twenty-four 1000-lb. bombs fell close to ships. The B-24s claimed two hits on a ship and the B-17s claimed hits on nine including one on a destroyer and one on a cargo ship that broke in two.¹⁷ That was the 5,833 ton *Keifuku Maru* which had unloaded most of her supplies but was still doing so when bombs exploded on both sides of her amidships and buckled her plates.¹⁸ She had so little warning she never fired a shot in self-defense. Amazingly only one of her crew was injured. No other ships were heavily hit but bombs caused fragment damage and some small fires broke out. The fires, on at least six ships, were the apparent cause of American claims of hits on so many ships. There were also some crew casualties, twenty on one ship.

The American bombers now made their withdrawal trying to regain formation as they did so. Bomber crews could actually observe the fighters taking off from Lakunai when over the target and after their bomb runs some could see activity at Vunakanau. Japanese AA had made a poor showing. Most naval guns had gotten into action late. No. 3 battery of the 50th AA Battalion fired several rounds but reported no success. In exchange four of its enlisted men had received wounds from bomb fragments or rounds fired from the bombers. As the bombers withdrew the AA gunners saw Japanese fighters engaging. Looking back bomber crewmen could see the sky over the harbor belatedly coming alive with AA bursts. Photographs taken while the bombers were actually over the harbor show little evidence of AA fire.

Up to this point the raid could only be considered highly successful from the American point of view. Despite the weather related abort of the B-24s from Australia a sizeable force of bombers had taken Rabaul by surprise and in good conditions inflicted considerable damage. If Japanese losses were not what were claimed, they were not inconsiderable. One ship was sunk, half a dozen damaged plus miscellaneous damage to other facilities. Of course it was not then known that none of the ships in the convoy was among those damaged. Withdrawing to the south some of the bombers flew near Kokopo and sighted ships of the convoy without recognizing the significance of the sighting. A few bombs were dropped near the ships wrecking a landing barge and inflicting casualties among personnel in the area. Other than Walker, it is unlikely that the crewmen involved knew that rather than a

general shipping strike this was primarily an effort to disrupt a specific convoy.

Although times recorded in official records are not always perfectly accurate both the 43d and 90th Bomb Group's recorded 1200 hours as the beginning of their bombing attacks.¹⁹ Bombing attacks must have commenced about that time or shortly thereafter and continued for several minutes. Petty Officer Makato Inoue of Air Group 253 who reported intercepting the bombers at 1010 was most likely the first Japanese fighter to contact the bombers. The 11th FR initially contacted the bombers several minutes later. A dozen or more army fighters scrambled and most engaged. A total of seventeen navy Zeros scrambled but the twelve from Air Group 252 after sighting the bombers lost them in the clouds and never engaged and only two of four from Air Group 582 did so.²⁰

A summary of the action from the perspective of the 11th FR was reported by Jusuke Nagai of the Japanese army press corps as follows:

At 10:18 a.m....13 Boeing and Consolidated bombers appeared...They were at an altitude of 3,000 meters. Our ground batteries sprang into action. Our Hayabusa craft rose to meet the enemy. They gave battle to the enemy as he was going to retreat in the face of intense fire from our anti-aircraft guns. Their attack came before the enemy had time to get into the formation in which they had come. There was a terrific fight. Soon it was over...one Boeing B-17 and one Consolidated B-24, [were] turned to masses of charred debris.

A formation of Hayabusa gave chase to two flying fortresses headed for the sea. One of the enemy planes started to dive, leaving a trail of black smoke. The other plane was seen to maneuver to give help to the comrade plane in trouble. Presently the enemy planes disappeared into a cloud bank.

Several days after the battle the American authorities announced that the commander of the American air force operating in the area had been killed in action. There is no doubt that the commander met with death in one of the planes which were shot down by our Hayabusa planes.²¹

The interception was reported in Allied Air Forces, South West Pacific, Intelligence Summary No. 68 as follows:

B-17s, during a successful raid on Rabaul shipping, 5th Jan. 1943, were engaged by 8 to 10 Type O SSF ZEKES and Type O SSF HAPS. One Japanese pilot made a desperate attack and others attempted single passes from above, but on the whole, the interception was pressed in a hesitant manner.

B-24s, co-ordinated with the B-17s on the mission, were attacked by 12 to 15 fighters, of which all except two were ZEKES. These two probable MIKES were painted various shades of green, and on the top of their wings were what appeared to be Swastika emblems. After leaving the target, interception continued sporadically at altitudes varying between 5,000 and 10,000 feet, but our crews received the



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impression that these Japanese pilots were inexperienced and not anxious for combat.

In general, attacks were from above and in front, with a few passes at the tail; no belly attacks developed. One ZEKE, coming from a 2 o'clock position, passed underneath and was set on fire by the B-24 tail gun. Another, approaching from 3 o'clock, was also hit by the tail gun and crashed into the trees. The tail gun of a third B-24 also destroyed a third enemy fighter.

From their perspectives both Japanese and Allied reports were generally accurate but biased by observations during frenetic combat. The B-24s reported fighter attacks began at 1205 earlier than any Japanese report and somewhat inconsistent with their reported location of the commencement of attacks being over the north shore of the Gazelle Peninsula. The B-17 report of attacks beginning at 1210 coincides with Inoue's report of engaging the bombers beginning at 1010 Japanese time. Most likely his was the first encounter. This place and time comports with Japanese anti-aircraft units observing fighters intercept the bombers before they disappeared from view to the south. The Americans were, of course, not specifically aware that the largest Japanese naval fighter unit at Rabaul, Air Group 252, as well as the majority of the Japanese army's 11th FR never engaged in the interception. One crewman noted in his diary that the preliminary raid by two B-17s might have thinned Japanese fighter opposition.

Available records are far from comprehensive but it is certain that the American bombers never fully reformed in a 12-plane formation and it is also certain the lead bomber, Walker's, was not the first to leave the target area.²² Consistent with Nagai's Japanese press report and American accounts at

least Walker's B-17 and some others lagged behind the main formation. Reports indicate a B-17 circled the harbor at lower than attack altitude before attempting to rejoin the formation. This was probably Walker's bomber observing and photographing bombing results. Some accounts suggest Walker's bomber had been damaged by AA fire but there is no way to verify this and the delayed AA reaction makes it less than likely. Walker's bomber may have appeared in distress merely because it was the lead bomber but left the target below and behind the other bombers.

Perhaps fifteen Japanese fighters assailed the bombers. On the navy side both Inoue and the pair from Air Group 582, Petty Officer Tatsuo Morioka and flyer Shinichi Hirabashi, returned to claim B-17s shot down. The Air Group 582 claim was for a bomber on fire and descending, not seen to crash but recorded as a definite victory. The 11th FR claims were approximately as noted in Nagai's story, namely one B-17 (by W.O. Hiroshi Kaminoto, 2nd *Chutai*) definite and one B-24 plus another indefinite. In addition they reported a bomber that disappeared into the clouds trailing black smoke from an engine.²³

The combat was sporadic but continued over an extended period of time. The diary of one Japanese army pilot, Sgt. Mitsuo Senoo of the 3rd *Chutai*, reported five attacks on the bombers ranging from south of Rabaul harbor out over the sea beyond Wide Bay. He initially attacked from the side with no effect. His second attack was from the vertical and he claimed to have knocked out an engine. His third attack was a steep frontal attack on a bomber that turned and descended into clouds at a relatively low level. Two additional attacks were ineffective due to oil on the windshield spoiling his



Brig. Gen. Walker in New Guinea.

**THE
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UNSCATHED**

aim.²⁴ American accounts indicate at least one B-24 was under attack for more than half an hour.

The Japanese did not get away unscathed. The Japanese navy Zeros all returned to base. The army fighters were not so fortunate. New comer 2d Lt. Hisashi Nagayo of the 1st *Chutai* never returned. Sgt. Maj. Haruo Takagaki of the 2nd *Chutai*, a high ranking ace from Nomonhan, bailed out of his damaged fighter and survived. Corporal Kiyomi also of the 2nd *Chutai* returned to Vunakanau badly wounded in a damaged aircraft. These losses tend to verify the claims of the 90th Bomb Group's gunners.

The American bombers did not get away unscathed either. The B-17F with General Walker, Maj. Jack Bleasdale, executive officer of the 43rd BG, and pilot Major Allen Lindberg, commander of the 64th BS on board was last seen entering clouds pursued by Japanese fighters with an engine on fire. The B-17, No. 41-24458 named *San Antonio Rose*, never returned and its wreckage and the body of General Walker have never been found. Captured documents and other information indicate that Bleasdale and co-pilot Capt. Benton Daniel bailed out inland from Wide Bay, were eventually captured but their subsequent fate is unknown and they were unlikely to have survived captivity. Most of the

bombers had received some hits from the reportedly "inexperienced" and uneager attacks. At least one badly damaged bomber was in distress as it made the homeward flight.

A shot up B-24 of the 400th BS limped toward New Guinea with one engine out and rather than try to cross the mountains diverted to Milne Bay on the far southeast tip of New Guinea. Although records are not complete the stranded aircraft apparently sat in the dispersal area there for nearly two weeks before being destroyed in a Japanese bombing raid as was the B-17 which made an emergency landing near Buna. Ultimately the two raids cost the 5th Air Force two B-17s which went down on the day of the raid and a damaged B-17 and B-24 later destroyed on the ground. It would be more than nine months before the 5th Air Force again attempted a daylight raid on Rabaul and on that occasion the bombers were accompanied by a fighter escort.

In the hours after the shipping strike eleven American bombers made their way toward home and as described above some in better shape than others. In the early afternoon the 11th FR took up its assignment of covering the convoy as it left Rabaul. The various *chutai* mounted nine or more fighters per shift. The afternoon passed without an encounter with enemy planes. Despite the effort devoted to the bombing raid there was a B-17 prowling along the southern coast of New Britain on armed reconnaissance. Through the vagaries of timing, position or the intervention of cloud cover it did not find the convoy. The B-17 dropped five bombs on the airstrip at Gasmata and three others at Lae.²⁵

In the days that followed the convoy was tracked and repeatedly attacked on its way to Lae. One ship was sunk en route. The infantry battalion on board suffered hundreds of casualties and when the survivors reached Lae or returned to Rabaul they were essentially *hors de combat* lacking heavy weapons and in many cases without personal arms. A second ship was disabled and beached in Lae harbor. Much of its cargo was lost as was a portion of the supplies landed from other ships.²⁶ Throughout the operation Allied attacks were often mounted in uncoordinated, piecemeal fashion. Fighter escorts sometimes failed to stop Japanese fighters from disrupting bomb runs. Lessons were learned and corrective actions would be applied in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea. One of those lessons was that ships of the convoy could not be distinguished from other shipping while in harbor.

Among the mysteries about the mission led by General Walker is that only twelve heavy bombers participated. That was too few to take full advantage of the numerous targets in Rabaul's various anchorages as well as stand a good chance of actually hitting ships detailed for the convoy. The failure of the B-24s from Iron Range to join in is understandable. Their airfield was water logged from tropical downpours. However, there were at Port Moresby a dozen B-17s from the South Pacific's 11th Bomb Group. They arrived for a week's temporary duty on December 29th and had flown only two

AMONG THE MYSTERIES ABOUT THE MISSION LED BY GENERAL WALKER IS THAT ONLY TWELVE HEAVY BOMBERS PARTICIPATED

THE NOON STRIKE CAUGHT THE JAPANESE BY SURPRISE AND ... MAY HAVE CAUSED WALKER TO THINK IT SAFE TO CIRCLE THE TARGET AREA

missions during their stay. Some pilots from the 43rd BG thought they had been ordered to fly the January 5th mission. On January 5th they flew from Moresby to Guadalcanal. Whether they were actually considered for the January 5th mission or whether an extension of their stay in order to participate was requested, indeed the exact circumstances of their departure on the day of that critical mission, is yet to be determined. What makes the question of their departure more remarkable is the fact that they were sent to Port Moresby in significant part to raid Rabaul; the one B-17 raid on Rabaul from Guadalcanal on 25 December 1942 was flown with reduced bomb loads, only six B-17s of eleven taking off made it to the target where minor damage was inflicted on two cargo ships.²⁷

A summary of the most credible evidence regarding the attack is as follows. The Allies learned of a Japanese convoy operation which would bring major reinforcements to New Guinea. General Kenney planned to break up the convoy in port by conducting a day raid on Rabaul. As originally planned this would be the largest daytime attack ever carried out against Rabaul. However, part of the planned force was diverted by weather at its base. Twelve heavy bombers made the strike. Kenney and his bomber commander disagreed on details namely whether to attack at dawn when Kenney thought there was less likelihood of fighter opposition disrupting the bombing or noon when the bombers were more likely to arrive in formation and hit their targets in concentrated fashion. Later Kenney would characterize Walker's execution of a noon strike as disobedience of his orders. By personally going on the mission Walker further "disobeyed" Kenney's orders as he had done many times previously without suffering adverse physical or administrative consequences. Early morning weather conditions at Rabaul might well have interfered with a dawn attack. Japanese army fighters were on alert beginning at dawn.

The noon strike caught the Japanese by surprise and bomb runs were carried out without fighter opposition and initially with no anti-aircraft fire. This may have caused Walker to think it safe to circle the target area for observation and photographing results. Walker's bomber trailed the main formation leaving the target area. Fighters intercepted the bombers south of the target over the Gazelle Peninsula. In a running fight south of Rabaul to and over Wide Bay a number of bombers were hit. Both U.S. and Japanese witnesses saw a bomber which was undoubtedly Walker's descend into clouds with its left outboard engine smoking or on fire. Two men are known to have survived from the B-17; both bailed after the bomber entered the clouds and landed inland from Wide Bay in difficult jungle country in which each wandered for many days before being captured by the Japanese.

The search

In the hours after the last of the returning bombers was accounted for it became evident that

Walker and B-17F *San Antonio Rose* was missing. Royal Australian Air Force searchers and reconnaissance planes were quickly alerted to search the route to Rabaul and in the Trobriand Islands between New Guinea and Rabaul. According to General Kenney's account which apparently relates to the sixth a "report came in during the evening that Walker's airplane was down on a coral reef in the Trobriand Islands off the eastern end of New Guinea. I told General MacArthur that as soon as Walker showed up I was going to give him a reprimand and send him to Australia for a couple weeks." MacArthur responded "All right, George, but if he doesn't come back, I'm going to send his name to Washington recommending him for a Medal of Honor." Walker's biographer, Martha Byrd, makes much of Kenney's supposed anger at Walker for attacking at noon rather than dawn and personally flying the mission. She gratuitously adds "officially" to reprimand. Kenney had previously determined that Walker was overly tired and intended to send him to Australia for a rest. We have only Kenney's account and Byrd's interpretation of what transpired between Kenney and Walker since Walker never returned.²⁸

Kenney relates the following morning that an Australian flying boat rescued the B-17 crew from the "reef in the Trobriands" (actually Urasu I. south of the Trobriands) and discovered it was Lt. Jack's crew and not Walker. Kenney lost hope at this point. "I was certain that his plane had been shot down in flames and unless the crew bailed out they were gone." Despite this additional search missions were ordered. Moreover, there was a convoy to find and attack. Walker's biographer apparently relying on Kenney's personal papers rather than his published book or official records erroneously asserts that when the convoy was spotted "no Allied forces were available to attack it" because of the effort devoted to the search for Walker.

On the morning of the 6th the 11th FR had 41 aircraft operational and the first fighters were up by 0600 hours. Japanese pilots were conscious that in the attack on the 5th interception had taken place only after bombs had been dropped. That must not happen to the transports they were guarding. In the first daylight hours no enemy planes appeared. In fact the only other planes seen was a mass formation of forty-four navy bombers and dozens of Zero fighters passing over the convoy on its way to attack Port Moresby. This attack was aborted by weather. Navy fighters reported encountering a B-24 over Wide Bay on their return flight and claim to have shot it down. The B-24D of 1st Lt. George Rose was detailed to search for General Walker along the New Britain coast. Rose's Liberator failed to return.²⁹

Several B-17s and B-24s were sent out to track the convoy during the morning and carry out attacks as opportunity presented. One of these was a B-24D flown by 1st Lt. Walter Higgins. When Higgins left cloud cover to make a bombing run on the convoy Type 1 fighters of the 11th FR's 3rd *Chutai* attacked. Unit leader 1st Lt. Hiroatsu

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Hirano pressed an attack dangerously close to the bomber both aircraft being damaged. Additional damage was then inflicted on the B-24 by Sgt. Major Koibuchi and the bomber was reported as destroyed. Hirano's damaged fighter made an emergency landing at Gasmata where its wing was found stained red. In Japan it was widely reported that Hirano had pressed his attack so closely that his enemy's blood stained his fighter.³⁰ If there was a red stain most likely it was hydraulic fluid. In any event Higgins bomber limped away from the fight with a damaged engine that eventually caught fire. He ditched near a small islet some miles from Kawa Island.³¹ Another B-24 flown by a fellow pilot of the 321st BS, James McMurria, spotted the Higgins crew. For a time it was thought Walker had been found but when an R.A.A.F. flying boat arrived it confirmed that the survivors were not from Walker's plane.

In addition to attacks by individual B-17s and B-24s the convoy was attacked by five B-26s. A B-17 led fifteen P-38s, seven with bombs, to the convoy. All the bombs missed but the P-38s claimed nine Japanese fighters in air combat.³² Only one Japanese fighter went down and its pilot was rescued by ships of the convoy. The B-17 was badly shot up.

Combat over the convoy reached its height on January 7th and 8th and eventually petered out as the convoy made its return trip to Rabaul on the 9th and tenth. Despite General Kenney's belief that Walker would not return additional search missions were flown. Details of one of these missions came to light as recently as May 2014, when a member of a B-17 crew provided details to Douglas Walker.

Former Technical Sergeant Herbert Billington flew on what he believes was the last search mission flown by the 43rd BG looking for Walker. The crew flying the mission was a volunteer crew available for special missions under Col. Roger Ramey the group's commander. According to Billington the crew was at a de-briefing of the January 5th mission and heard what the returning crews reported. On the final search mission with Ramey in the right seat next to pilot Lt. Fuller, Billington flew as flight engineer directly behind the pilot and co-pilot. The purpose of the mission was to retrace the flight track of *San Antonio Rose* from just south of Rabaul to the point where it went into the clouds and then search the likely crash site. According to Billington the *San Antonio Rose* "went into the clouds just south of the north side of Wide Bay and did not go down in the water but went inland through the clouds. We picked it up at the same point and were in and out of clouds as I am sure was S/R. We made a lot of looking all up and down the area about 2+ hours." Billington who went through the de-briefing of the January 5 mission and flew the special mission as just described emphasizes his firm belief that the *Rose* did not go down in water but inland from Wide Bay.³³

Translations of Japanese interrogation reports on Bleasdale and Daniel were reproduced in the Allied Translator and Interpreter Section's Enemy Publication No. 280. Bleasdale and Daniel are not

actually named in the translated interrogation reports but from Japanese press reports and radio broadcasts it is known that both survived and were captured by the Japanese. From context they are clearly identified with two of the interrogation reports collected in EP No. 280. Both reports describe events leading to their capture. "This PW, flying a B-17 attacked Rabaul but our fighter planes attacked and damaged his left engine. Losing altitude his airplane circled southward. Realizing his danger PW took to his parachute over the mountains north of Wide Bay."³⁴ Both men wandered through the jungle for nearly three weeks before being captured by the Japanese who had a detachment at Zungen on Wide Bay.

Weeks earlier hope of finding Walker and the rest of the *San Antonio Rose* crew had been all but given up. On January 11th Walker's family was notified and it was officially announced that Walker was missing. Western New Britain was invaded in December 1943 and during the following year much of the island was occupied by Allied forces. Rabaul held out until final surrender in 1945. Post war there were a couple expeditions to the Powell River area looking for downed Allied aircraft and aircrew remains. Some aircraft wreckage was found but Walker's B-17 was not among them. The Powell River is little more than ten miles from the Kol Mountains which as noted below is the most likely crash site of Walker's aircraft. However, the country is particularly rugged. Unaided ground searches would be very challenging and aerial surveys using visual observations are likely to reveal little.

The Research

In January 1944 a year after the crew of B-17F 41-24458 was declared missing the Adjutant General's Status Review and Determination Section concluded that crew members may have survived a crash landing or parachuted from the stricken plane. They might have become unofficial prisoners. They "may reasonably be presumed to be living" and thus were continued as missing in action.³⁵

In September 1945 a Missing Personnel Investigation Unit arrived at Rabaul with the occupation forces. It found that local natives had generally assisted the Japanese and were unlikely to have aided downed airmen. Japanese records on prisoners had been thoroughly destroyed. During their work the Unit reached the conclusion that a presumption of death should be applied to men reported missing over New Britain.

The Status Review and Determination board reviewed the case once again in December 1945 this time with the input of information from prisoners who had survived captivity at Rabaul as well as other information that had come to light such as Bleasdale having been taken prisoner. It concluded that the crew members could not be presumed to be alive.

In 1948 the Secretary of the Army requested the Command in the Pacific to make an effort to

A U.S. B-25D Mitchell bomber executing a low level attack on Japanese shipping, Rabaul, 1943.



THE STORY OF WALKER'S LAST MISSION AND HIS LOSS DID NOT COMPLETELY FADE AWAY... DOUGLAS WALKER, THE YOUNGER OF GENERAL WALKER'S TWO SONS, HAS PURSUED THE CASE IN HIS RETIREMENT

locate missing planes and if possible determine the fate of their crews. The 604th Graves Registration Company conducted an investigation of the several hundred aircraft missing over New Britain and adjacent waters. The unit discovered a number of remains. Their physical search included villages surrounding Wide Bay. The only information relevant to Walker's crew came from a Belgian priest Father Poncelet who had himself been a captive in Rabaul. According to the unit's report Poncelet stated that Capt. Daniel had been brought to his POW camp early in 1943.

The Walker case was officially closed on July 20, 1949 by action of the Board of Review of the Headquarters American Graves Registration Service. Walker and the other members of the crew with the exception of Bleasdale and Daniel were determined to be non-recoverable. The board proceedings note multiple locations recorded for the last sighting of the B-17 apparently concluding it was last seen "just east of Vunakanau" at 5,000 feet with its left outboard engine smoking and under attack by fighters. As demonstrated in the narrative above the earliest fighter action *began* after the bombers exited from Blanche Bay roughly due east from Vunakanau. Another location mentioned was ten miles south of the northern end of Wide Bay (from Walker's Form 371, Data on Remains not yet Recovered or Identified). While navigator 1st Lt. John Hanson's form 371 placed the last sighting as over Keravia Bay. On this inconsistent and shoddy note official interest in the fate of General Walker and the crew was at an end.

The story of Walker's last mission and his loss did not completely fade away. It was documented in George C. Kenney's *General Kenney Reports* (original publication 1949; reissued by Office of Air Force

History in 1987) which has been quoted in the narrative above. Unofficial research in the case has been conducted by a number of individuals notably Gene M. Monihan who has uncovered numerous fascinating details directly or tangentially related to Walker's loss. After a career with the CIA, Monihan has spent decades delving into notable air missions and personalities of World War II. His research is noted in the acknowledgment section of numerous books. Monihan's research is expressly dealt with in the Walker biography by Martha Byrd, *Kenneth N. Walker: Airpower's Untempered Crusader* which was issued by Air University Press in 1997.³⁶

Douglas Walker, the younger of General Walker's two sons, has pursued the case in his retirement. Doug Walker has had a number of interactions with JPAC, the Pentagon's organization charged with accounting for missing military personnel and other organizations with related responsibilities. The high point of Doug Walker's contacts with the MIA accounting agencies came in 2003 when Johnie E. Webb, Army Identification Laboratory deputy commander, stated in a letter that his organization had personnel in New Guinea and that "we hope the research will lead us to conducting a field investigation which could possibly lead to an excavation of his [General Walker's] site should the evidence support such activity"³⁷ No work was ever done in eastern New Britain and JPAC has since dealt with Walker in what might be described as a bureaucratic and reactive mode. When provided with a plausible reconstruction of the path *San Antonio Rose* took after leaving the target JPAC responded in 2007 with a lengthy "analysis" of available "evidence" which included many of the canards and obviously inconsistent reports mentioned in the 1949 Board of Review decision. JPAC even cast



The last photo of Brig. Gen. Walker in New Guinea.

IN RECENT YEARS DOUG WALKER HAS BEEN THE CENTER OF GRAVITY PULLING TOGETHER THE EFFORTS OF A NUMBER OF RESEARCHERS

doubt on the fact (possibly not aware of Japanese press reports, broadcasts and interrogation reports) that Bleasdale and Daniel had survived and parachuted over land hence finding that its flight path crossed the mountains north of Wide Bay no more than speculation.³⁸ JPAC conveyed its impression to Doug Walker that General Walker's bomber most likely went down at sea in Wide Bay or beyond and there is no way to find it or recover any remains of the crew. As with the 1949 AGRS Board of Review the case is essentially closed.

In recent years Doug Walker has been the center of gravity pulling together the efforts of a number of researchers interested in the Walker case. In addition to Monihan this group includes a Japanese diplomat whose career included service in Papua New Guinea (PNG), the daughter of a 5th Air Force pilot who has visited PNG several times and documented a number of B-17 crash sites, an expert in gee-spatial remote sensing, and other distinguished professionals including Dr. David Lindley.

David Lindley (B.Sc. first class honors, Ph.D., University of South Wales) is an Australian geologist whose experience includes 35 years of fieldwork throughout PNG. During that time he trekked and mapped extensive sections of eastern New Britain, the Gazelle Peninsula in particular. He lived in Rabaul for 18 years and was a founding board member of the East New Britain Provincial Government's War Museum. His interest in WWII recoveries evolved from search and recovery of several allied crash sites during mineral exploration activities. He has direct experience in the search and recovery of crash sites throughout New Britain. His first-hand knowledge of weather conditions and terrain, trekking and mapping (during mineral exploration) of many rivers and creeks on Gazelle Peninsula has enabled him to make significant contributions to research related to the search for the *San Antonio Rose*. He speaks fluent New Guinea Pidgin English.

Lindley was able to create a reconstruction of the flight path of the *San Antonio Rose* which other

members of the Walker team consider to be highly credible.³⁹ Lindley's reconstruction makes note of the fact that during the northwest or "wet" season in the early part of the year of the year clouds typically build up into solid formations over the northwest-facing mountains of New Britain but not over the open sea on the lee side of the island. Over the sea the skies may be entirely clear or covered by only sparse cloud cover while nearby northwest-facing mountainous land masses are typically entirely socked in. Lindley's personnel experience is also confirmed by satellite imagery.

Applying this knowledge to the narrative of the Walker mission described above it can be seen that *San Antonio Rose's* disappearance into clouds strongly suggests she was over land and most likely over mountains. This observation is consistent with the PW interrogation of the airmen that bailed out of the B-17. To further the point, if after disappearing in clouds near the north end of Wide Bay the B-17 had then turned and proceeded out over the waters of Wide Bay, she would have broken free of the cloud cover. However, shortly after the B-17 was lost from sight in clouds both the American bombers and some of the Japanese fighters flew over Wide Bay. In stark contrast to multiple credible reports of a stricken bomber disappearing into clouds there are no reports from either side of seeing a B-17 with a smoking engine emerging from clouds, descending toward the bay.

Lindley's reconstruction of the flight path takes the bomber from the mountains north of Wide Bay, down the Mevolo River Valley to the Kol Mountains an area of extremely rugged terrain. The Kol Mountains or a nearby area is the most likely crash site of *San Antonio Rose*. Finding wreckage in that region or other territory inland from Wide Bay would not be a simple task. At a minimum it would probably take an aerial survey utilizing advanced state of the art sensing equipment followed up by a ground search when the remote sensing equipment indicates a potential target.

JPAC in conjunction with the Office of Naval Research sponsored experiments with a Multi-band Synthetic Aperture Radar (MB-SAR) mounted in a Pilatus aircraft over the Central Province and Morobe Province of PNG during late 2013.⁴⁰ As this article is written the process of doing ground follow up to verify if the targets indicated by remote sensing are indeed World War II wrecks is in progress.

The latest information available is that JPAC has no current plans to continue MB-SAR sensing in PNG or to conduct any kind of investigation for potential crash sites in East New Britain Province. Such an investigation might result in the discovery of the wreckage of the *San Antonio Rose* as well as remains of Walker and eight other members of the crew. It would almost certainly discover some hitherto undiscovered crash sites dating to World War II. Unfortunately JPAC simply seems to have no interest in undertaking such a project. Meanwhile JPAC is active in PNG but the usefulness and cost of its efforts are being seriously questioned.⁴¹ ■

1. For strategy and general background see Milner, *Victory in Papua* (US Army, Chief of Military History, 1957); Miller, *Cartwheel: The Reduction of Rabaul* (CMH, 1959); Craven & Cate, *The Pacific: Guadalcanal to Saipan, August 1942 to July 1944* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1958); and, Morison, *Breaking the Bismarck Barrier* (Little Brown, Boston, 1950). For background on Lae see Gwynns-Jones, "New Guinea's Great Aerial Gold Rush", *Air and Space* (1986).
2. Allied Air Forces, S.W.P.A., Intelligence Summary (ISUM) No. 65.
3. 11th FR Situation Report, 31/12/1942 (14th Air Force Language Officer translation); other strength reports for 11th FR are from Southeast Area Operations Record, 18th Army (US Army, Chief of Military History, Japanese Monograph No. 37).
4. For Japanese air operations see Southeast Area Air Operations Record, Nov. 1942 - Apr. 1944 (CMH, Mono. 32); Mono. 37 (note 3, *Ibid.*); Southeast Area Naval Operations, Part 1 (Mono. 98); Outline of Southeast Area Naval Air Operations, Part 3, November 1942-June 1943 (Mono. 122); Southeast Area Operations Record Part 4, November 1942-August 1945 (Mono. 127).
5. Nagai, *Nippon Times* {3/12/1943}, "Brilliant Record Won in South Pacific Area by Army Winged Units".
6. Unit Mission Record (*Kodochocho*), Air Group 582, available at Japan Center for Asian Historical Research website <http://www.jacar.go.jp> (Translation of this and other mission records by Osamu Tagaya or via Justin Taylan).
7. Cable report (09091641/L), Advanced HQ, 5th Air Force; Consolidated Mission Report, crew of 1st Lt. Jean A. Jack (1/9/1943).
8. Allied Air Forces, SWPA, ISUM No. 68.
9. Note 6, *Ibid.*
10. Cable report (note 7); crew evacuated by transport: diary of Sgt. Haymond Quillen, 403rd BS (International History Research Associates archive via Edward Rogers).
11. Note 8, *Ibid.* Field Diary and Battle Reports, 50th Field A/A Gun Battalion (Nov. 1942-Jan. 1943), Allied Translator and Interpreter Section (ATIS) Enemy Publication (EP) 22.
12. Operations orders (various dates), 102d Infantry Regiment, in ATIS EP No. 116.
13. Note 5, *Ibid.*
14. Izawa, *Rikko and Ginga* (unpublished manuscript in possession of the author); Intelligence Center Pacific Ocean Areas, Air Target Bulletin No. 1, Rabaul: Lakunai, Malaguna, Vunakanau (1/12/1943); see also notes 4 and 6,
15. Field Diary and Battle Reports, 50th AA Gun Battalion (Note 11); Bombers "arrived without warning..." (POW Interrogation Report No. 57, ATIS serial 99, PW No. JA 145427).
16. E-mail from O. Tagaya (20 May 2014) with abstract of Tanaguchi auto-biographical information; Claringbould, "Rabaul's Ultimate Mystery: The Loss of Brigadier-General Kenneth N. Walker", *The Daedalus Flyer* (2002). Tanaguchi's three fighters were apparently observed by the B-24s (Report, Mission IV, Allied Air Force Field Order, Mission M-4, Jan. 1943).
17. Note 8, *Ibid.*
18. Imperial Japanese Navy in WWII, (CMH, Mono. 116); S.W.P.A., ISUM 140 (quoting PW Interrogation report).
19. Note 8, *Ibid.*
20. Note 6, *Ibid.*
21. Note 5, *Ibid.*
22. The navigator of Walker's wingman states Walker's bomber led the bombing run but the No. 2 plane was the first off the target (diary of Francis G. Sickinger, 64th BS, I.H.R.A. archives via E. Rogers). Sickinger also states his B-17 was not intercepted by Japanese fighters until well clear of the harbor.
23. Mission details from the Japanese side from Tagaya e-mail (note 16); e-mail Harumi Sakaguchi to Douglas Walker (2/18/2009); notes 5 and 6, *Ibid.* Claringbould (note 16).
24. Mitsuo Senoo diary abstract via H. Sakaguchi (note 23); the memoir of another 11th FR pilot, Hironjo Shishimoto, describes a similar scene (quotation in e-mail H. Sakaguchi to D. Walker (7/24/2008).
25. Note 8, *Ibid.*
26. Details in various intelligence reports of the 51st Division (*Moto Heidan*), ATIS EP 44.
27. Salacker, *Fortress Against the Sun*, p. 304 (Combined Publications, Pennsylvania, 2001); diary of Lt. J. Castro, 42d BS, via E. Rogers. Interestingly on this same day five B-17s escorted by six P-38s flying from Guadalcanal attacked Buin in southern Bougainville. Eight Japanese fighters intercepted. The B-17s escaped harm but two P-38s were lost. Four Japanese dive bombers escorted by Zeros attacked Allied ships near Guadalcanal and damaged New Zealand cruiser Achilles.
28. References and quotations attributed to Kenney from Kenney, *General Kenney Reports* (Duell, Sloan & Pearce, NY, 1949); references to Martha Byrd/Walker's biographer from Byrd, *Kenneth N. Walker: Airpower's Untempered Crusader* (Air University Press, 1997).
29. Data at <http://www.Pacificwrecks.com/date/1943/1-43.html>.
30. Note 5, *Ibid.*; Note 29, *Ibid.*
31. Note 29, *Ibid.*
32. Note 8 *Ibid.*
33. E-mail Herbert Billington to D. Walker (5/15/2014).
34. Intelligence Record No. 14, Interrogation of Allied PW (2/26/1943), ATIS EP 280; Both Bleasdale and Capt. Benton Daniel were named as the subjects of interviews by journalists in broadcasts from Japan recorded by the Foreign Broadcast Intelligence Service (initially on 11/3/1943, transcripts in National Archives, RG 263). A press account which from context references Bleasdale was published in *Nippon Times* (1/19-20/1944), "U.S. Flying Fortress Claimed Mediocre".
35. Thanks to Gene M. Monihan for collecting the full text of the administrative documents discussed in this section and summarizing them in "Circumstances Surrounding the Fate of Brigadier General Kenneth N. Walker and the Crew of San Antonio Rose" (unpublished monograph in possession of the author).
36. Note 28, *Ibid.*
37. Ltr., U.S. Army Central Identification Laboratory (9/4/2003) to D. Walker.
38. E-mail, JPAC J2 (C. McDermott) to D. Walker (7/19/2007).
39. Lindley provided comments on the description of his reconstruction and certain geographical references in this article, e-mail D. Lindley to author (6/10/2014).
40. U.S. Embassy, Papua New Guinea, "U.S. Team Uses New Radar to Search for WWII Wreckage" (Press release, 12/12/2013).
41. Cole, "Cost and value of New Guinea road trigger probe of JPAC", *Honolulu Star-Advertiser* (5/27/2014).