

BOMBER COMMAND SPECIAL SOUVENIR ISSUE

www.aeroplanemonthly.com USA \$6.75 Canada C\$8.95 (GG70382) AUGUST 2002 £3.30 PRICE HELD



AEROPLANE



Short

Stirling

First of the RAF's "Heavies"

■ **Database**

Stirling history, service, flying — and the project to recreate one

■ **Rolling a Lancaster**

Test pilot Alex Henshaw on his unusual way of demonstrating the Avro bomber's manoeuvrability

■ **Bomber chronicle**

The Bomber Offensive month-by-month

PLUS
Pull-out
centrespread
poster

COLLECTORS' ISSUE



**BOMBER
COMMAND**

AEROPLANE MONTHLY



6 42633 92312 9

\$6.75 PRINTED IN THE UK



Aircraft preservation comment and analysis, with **PAUL COGGAN**

COMMENT

Contact!

IN RECENT WEEKS there has been a flurry of communications flying backwards and forwards regarding the “mysterious disappearance” of several historic airframes from Papua New Guinea. For some years now there has been a terrific internet resource called Pacific Wrecks (as you would imagine, the address for this site is www.pacificwrecks.com). It contains the Pacific Wrecks database, a resource started and run by Justin Taylan from Hyde Park, New York. The site also offers a free monthly email newsletter about World War Two Pacific discoveries and issues. The site has been online for five years and offers a wealth of information and photographs on Pacific-related information from collaborators, veterans and historians worldwide. A new venture is the *Pacific Ghosts* CD, a copy of which I have seen, and it is excellent (visit www.pacificghosts.com).

THERE ARE STILL MANY aircraft in PNG and recent news reports promulgated through the world wide web indicated the sighting of a P-38 on a low-loader in Melbourne, Australia! Since this sighting there have been further reports about the export (some of which allege this was an illegal act) of two P-38 Lightnings and it is understood an Australian national has been arrested in connection with this attempted export, from near Arufi in the Fly River Delta. The wings and booms from the P-38 were seized last March in Lae, apparently marked for export to Australia. As this column was being written they were being transferred to the control of the PNG Museum. However, it is understood that export of two other aircraft from PNG did take place earlier in the year. Through the good offices of Justin and the Pacific Wrecks database, reports were received that two Lightning airframes were stolen (i.e. removed without permit from the PNG Government) from the Saidor area and then transported to Lae before being forwarded to a suburb North of Melbourne. Further reports received from several independent and reliable sources have suggested the aircraft were exported to the USA early this year.

MY VIEWS ON PROVENANCE do not meet with everyone’s approval. Though I personally would like to see wrecks in PNG legally recovered and restored for future generations to enjoy, I do have some sympathy with the view expressed by many others that it should be left to the people of PNG to decide the fate of Pacific wrecks, and no-one has the god-given right to recover (without permit) and plunder these aircraft for personal gain. Had they been recovered and exported legally, it would be a different matter: one we could all applaud. Such clandestine efforts may provide us with exciting “eye candy” for the future, but the methods used to obtain the aircraft will, in my opinion, bring the warbird movement in general into disrepute. The latest report from Pacificwrecks.com indicates that the authorities in Papua New Guinea believe the two airframes exported without permit are P-38J-15 42-103988 *Jandina III*,

which crash-landed at the emergency strip at Saidor — this aircraft had 19 “kills” at the time of its loss and was the personal mount of Jay Robbins, who amassed a total of 22 kills and later served as a lieutenant general in Strategic Air Command. It is understood the second aircraft was P-38F-5 Serial Number 42-12652 which also force-landed not far from Saidor. This aircraft is documented as being assigned to 39th FS on September 17, 1942, and possibly assigned to pilot Ken Sparks.

MIXED VIEWS ARE BEING EXPRESSED about the situation in PNG and further reports indicate there has been a massive amount of activity surrounding dozens of aeroplanes in the past 18 months, including razorback Thunderbolts and historic P-40s. Under the War Surplus Material Act 1952 and as amended, the government of Papua New Guinea has legal right over every item of war surplus material lying within its country, on land and in the sea, according to one eminent museum curator. According to other recovery specialists the Papuans have been removing some of the aircraft and selling them at scrap metal values. So what do you think? Should the wrecks be left alone, or should they be recovered, whether the government sanctions such movements or not?

MY MAIN CONCERN is that such illegal activities will result in historic airframes being lost as their identities are concealed to hide the fact they were illegally exported. It is unclear at this point which aircraft have been approved for recovery by the PNG government and which have not, but this is not fiction — aircraft, and some historic ones at that, have been dug out of one of the well documented burial grounds and are both recognisable and remarkably intact. Ironic, isn’t it, when we have current owners painting warbirds to represent historic aircraft and now we may have very historic aircraft painted to conceal their provenance. No doubt there will be developments over the coming months and the site to watch on this subject is www.pacificwrecks.com. Justin Taylan should be commended for his impressive efforts.



ABOVE Justin Taylan’s Pacific Wrecks database — a comprehensive source of information.

This month:

- Pacific Wrecks database
- P-38 plunder
- Provenance and paint-schemes

■ PAUL COGGAN joined the RAF in 1973 in the trade of air traffic control. After various assignments, including postings to RAF Wittering, RAF Watton (Eastern Radar) and then 12 Sqn Operations at RAF Lossiemouth, he resigned from the RAF in 1986 to start his own publishing company. He has been researching and writing about warbirds for almost 30 years.

To contact Paul, e-mail pac@warbirdguru.com or write to him via *Aeroplane* Editorial, King’s Reach Tower, Stamford St, London SE1 9LS, England