

The RAAF Pilot & the Death Railway

The first aircraft from the RAAF lost in the Pacific theatre was a Lockheed Hudson; and it was lost before the bombing of Pearl Harbour. It was from 1 Squadron RAAF whom had been serving in Singapore and Malaya at the time and stationed at Sembawang Singapore. Hudson's were used by the RAAF as bombing aircraft, in reconnaissance roles to air-sea rescue and as transporters.

Hang on – before Pearl Harbour? Wasn't Pearl Harbour the trigger for WW2 in the Pacific? War in the Pacific began fully with the surprise attack on the American Fleet stationed there on 7 December 1941 – 8 December 1941 on the other side of the International Date Line.

However the first action against the Japanese was in Malaya (now Malaysia) on the north-east coast at Kota Bharu was an hour before the attack on Pearl. The aircraft A16-19 Hudson (involved in that action) was shot down defending the Malayan coast against the Japanese.

In 1976 a local Malay fisherman located and retrieved one of the engines. All crew were killed on impact with exception of the co-pilot Flying Officer (FLGOFF) Dowie, the sole survivor who was thrown through the roof of the Hudson breaking his spine in the process.

'The aircraft crew on its last flight on 8 December 1941 were: Pilot, Flight Lieutenant J C Ramshaw; Co-Pilot, Flying Officer D Dowie; Wireless Air Gunners; Flight Sergeants G S White and J C Coldrey.'
(AWM)

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He found a native fishing boat and was adrift for several days before being apprehended by the Japanese. He was taken to Singora (Thailand), Saigon and later Changi POW Camp – he was interrogated by the Kempetai (Japanese Military Police) during this time as well. Blindfolded he was thrown off the truck carrying him to Changi Prison – his fractured spine still had not been medically treated.



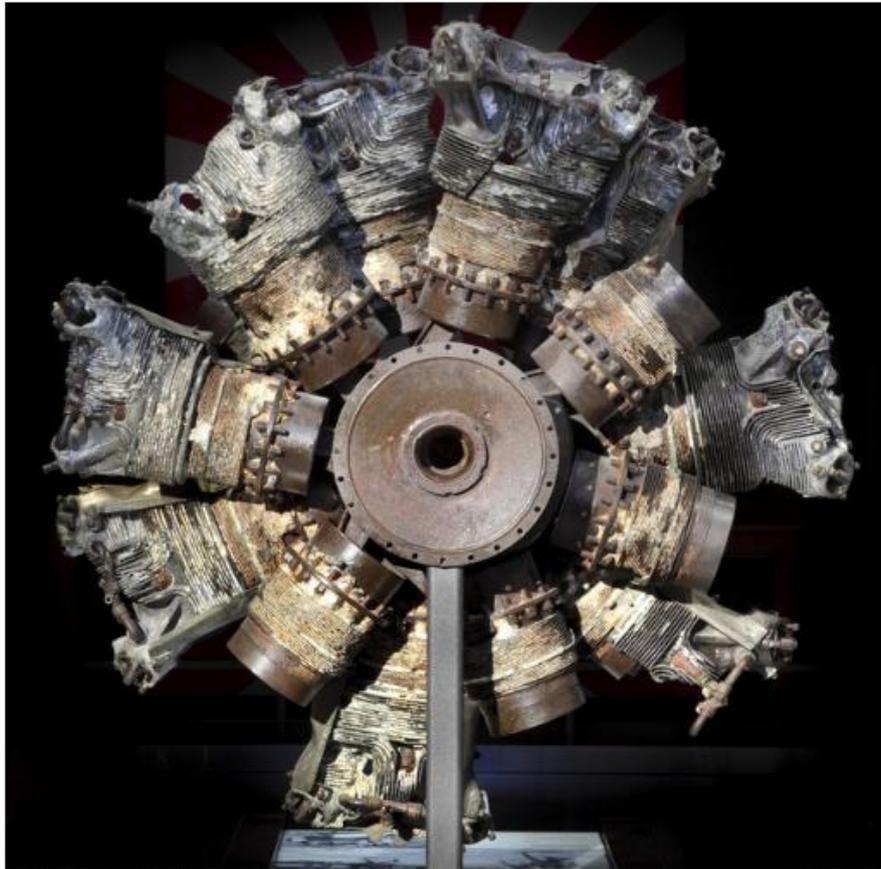
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Port Side, Pratt & Whitney Twin Wasp Aero Engine from Lockheed Hudson A16-19

FLGOFF Downie went from Changi POW Camp with H Force under Lieutenant Colonel Oakes with a party of 3,270 men; including 260 Officers who were also made to work on the line. Of the total number who left, 27.4% never returned; of that 27.4% - 179 were Australians.

H Force worked in various areas of the railway and supplemented F force further up the line at Koncoita; they also worked on Hellfire Pass and the Three Tier Bridge – these two sites we will visit on tour.

FLGOFF Dowie returned to Changi in October 1943 and saw out the remainder of the war in Singapore. He survived the war and studied medicine becoming the Director of Medical Services with the Department of Social Security in South Australia.

In 2003 he visited the Australian War Memorial to inspect the two Pratt and Whitney Engines on display there from his aircraft A16-19 – Lockheed Hudson.

Death Railway

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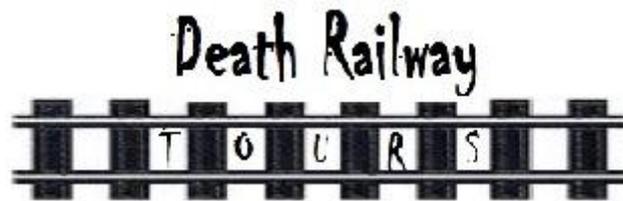
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Photo taken in 1976 of the Pratt & Whitney port side engine; the founder is on the right of the picture - Mr Abdul Rahman Bin Win Harum.

So not only did FLGOFF Dowie and his crew fight the Japanese before the attack on Pearl; he survived the crash landing of his Hudson and also the interrogation of the Kempetai Military Police along with the hardships and deprivations of the Thai-Burma Railway.

Hats off to you sir.



References

Australian War Memorial

http://www.mansell.com/pow_resources/camplists/death_rr/movements_1.html