

77 Squadron RAAF



The RAAF's 77 Squadron and its P-40E Kittyhawk Is arrived at Darwin from its working up bases in eastern Australia on August 18, 1942, just before the American Fighter Group departed. Their base was one of the newly built airfields. Batchelor, south of Darwin. A month later the squadron was moved slightly north to Livingstone (formerly Humpty Doo), a strip named after Second Lt John Livingstone of the 9th Pursuit Sqdn, 49th Pursuit Group, USAAF. Livingstone was an early casualty of the Japanese raids on Darwin.

77 remained in the Darwin area until early 1943 when it was moved to New Guinea. In the meantime, it had seen very little action despite several attempted but unsuccessful night interceptions. Finally on November 23, the squadron got its first kill when the Commanding Officer, Sqdn Ldr Dick Cresswell, flying Kittyhawk A29-113 shot down a Mitsubishi G4M Betty bomber in the early hours of the morning. This was the first time an enemy aircraft had been shot down over Australian soil at night.

Cresswell's combat report below tells the story:

77 Squadron's only other direct engagement with an enemy aircraft was just before the unit's redeployment to New Guinea in January 1943. On this occasion - at night - Flt Lt J Cox fired at a Betty over Darwin but apparently caused no damage. Despite this general lack of action, 77 suffered the usual number of training accidents and incidents. One notable example was in September 1942 when a certain Pit Off John Gorton ran out of fuel in A29-60 and was forced to land on Melville Island, north of Darwin. Gorton and his aircraft were rescued a few days later and in 1968 that pilot became the Prime Minister of Australia.

77 Squadron's departure from Darwin signalled the end of any significant RAAF Kittyhawk activity in that part of the world. From January 1943 the area was defended almost exclusively by Spitfire squadrons and the Kittys' found themselves embroiled in battle in New Guinea and beyond.



S/L R.C. (Dick) Cresswell and his Aircraft

COMBAT (FIGHTER) REPORT

UNIT: 77 Squadron R.A.A.F.

Report
No. 4

Pilot: S/L R.C. Crosswell		Squadron: No. 77
Duty To intercept unknown number of enemy bombers approaching DARWIN		Place: BERRIMAH
		Date 23 / 11 / 42.
		Time: 0505 hrs. (local)
(1) Number, type and formation of our own aircraft taking part in attack: 1(one) P.40E	(2) Height when first sighting enemy: 22,500 feet	
(3) Position of enemy (relative to own aircraft) when first sighted: one o'clock-1000ft above	(4) Type of enemy aircraft: 3(three) "BETTYS"	
(5) Number and formation of enemy aircraft: Three in close Vic. travelling south	(6) Was own approach observed or unobserved: believed unobserved.	
(7) Type of attack delivered on enemy: First attack from below on port rear quarter firing at 200 yds, a raking burst across the whole Vic. Second attack on rear port quarter and followed through stern to starboard quarter.		
(8) Action by enemy: Opened fire from tracers seen to enter starboard engine and top of wing, which caught fire. Third attack made from above on starboard rear quarter. Tracers entered mid wing section. E/A exploded in air about 16,000ft.		
(9) Result of engagement, including own and enemy casualties: Bettys turned sharply to port when first attacked and in doing so starboard aircraft became detached. The remaining 2 Bettys returned fire from side blisters and rear turrets, fire erratic registering no hits. The detached aircraft was the one shot down.		
(10) Special comments: (See Instructions paras. 3 and 4.) Searchlights illuminated targets several times but P40 was never in a position to attack immediately. Contact was made visually guided by A.A. fire and searchlights. Clouds at 24,000 ft forming shadow screen. No lights showing E/A.		
IN THE CASE OF ESCORTED ENEMY FORMATIONS, THE FOLLOWING ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:— Airspeed during attack about 175 mph indicated E/A		
(11) Number, type and formation of escorting aircraft: airspeed estimated at the same figure.	(12) Position of escort relative to main force	
(13) Was attack directed against escort or main force:		
(14) Action taken by escort:		
(15) Action taken by main force:		
(16) Special comments: (See Instructions para. 5.)		

A total of 262 rounds were fired. During the second attack two guns only were firing, and finally only one. The failure was due to freezing.

