

A29-354: The Second 'Little Audrey'

By Peter May



This photo appeared in Geoffrey Pentland's book, **RAAF Camouflage and Markings Vol 2.** (p 51.).⁵

Since the book was published there has been some doubt about the true identity of the aircraft in the picture, due perhaps to the errors made in the caption for the photograph. Pentland noted this was A29-435, however this airframe was never operated by 76 Squadron, and was a different model Kittyhawk, a P-40N-5-CU⁷, not the P-40M-10-CU⁶ seen in the picture itself. The nose art "Little Audrey" was well known to have been a feature of aircraft A29-347 coded SV-M. Was this aircraft A29-347 with changed codes of SV-K, or was it another aircraft with the cowls and artwork swapped?

The photo does not clearly show the serial (most likely it was over-painted) and therefore to answer this question requires a fair bit of patience to go through the detail.

The detail is linked to the re-equipment of 76 Squadron with the new P-40N-40-CU aircraft and the transfer of 76 Squadrons remaining P-40M's to the newly re-activated 86 Squadron.

As per page 42 of 86 Squadron Operational Record Book (ORB)²;

Macrossan 06/01/1945:

N.E.A. Signal 0 228 dated 4 Jan. 1945. "No 86 Squadron is to commence re-forming as from 10 Jan. 1945 (.) Squadron will be armed with 24 Kittyhawks Series M Aircraft."

RAAF HQRS Signal QO 376 dated 5 Jan. 1945 was repeated this Unit "20 P 40 N 40 Kittyhawks, A29-1100 – 1119 allotted 13 A.R.D. to 76 Squadron (.) For One T.A.F. RAAF Equal quantity of P 40 M aircraft allotted to Units under your command to 86 Squadron. One A.D. Ferry Flight to arrange ferrying of aircraft from 13 A.R.D. and aircraft selected for allotment by One T.A.F. to 86 Squadron.

First Tactical Air Force were, as per the above, tasked with selecting the well-used ex-76 Squadron P-40M aircraft and did so within a few days. The 86 Squadron ORB records the signal with the list of aircraft allotted.

Bohle River 13/01/1945:

Following signal from One T.A.F. RAAF received QO 80 dated 8 Jan. 1945.
"Following aircraft selected for issue to 86 Sqdn. A29-387, 350, 307, 335, 323, 332, 345, 338, 354, 341, 315, 377, 351, 361, 364, 366, 322, 324, 376, 342 (.)"

(Note: that airframe A29-347 was not in this list of P-40M's to be transferred.)

Further signals were received by 86 squadron on the 21/2/1945-

Bohle River 21/02/1945:

Following No. 2 A.D. Signal QF 980 19th Feb instructed ferry pilots at Noemfoor Island to ferry aircraft allotted from No. 76 Sqdn. to 86 Sqdn.

The 86 ORB entry for the 26/2/1945 records the receipt of the first batch of P-40M's that had made their way from Noemfoor Island, via Finschhafen, Port Moresby, to Bohle River.

Bohle River 26/02/1945:

Following P-40M aircraft piloted by No 2 A.D. ferry pilots arrived on allotment from 76 Sqdn. A29-377, 335, 342, 321, 361.

This list of arrivals does not mention one important piece of information. That five aircraft were received, but seven aircraft had set out from Noemfoor on 19th February 1945, or soon after. The two not listed had crashed on Dango Island (sometimes known as Daugo Island) on the 22nd February 1945 due to bad weather and not being able to make Jackson's strip. These were A29-354 and A29-315, flown by F/O L.S. Wright (410026) and W/O V.R.W. Andrews (401606) respectively ⁸.

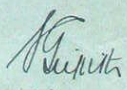
The confirmatory memorandum from No. 1 Aircraft Depot is shown below.

FROM: Headquarters, No. 1. AIRCRAFT DEPOT, R.A.A.F. LAVERTON.
 TO: Headquarters, No. 4. (MAINTENANCE) GROUP, R.A.A.F.
 38 Irving Road, TOORAK. 000100
 DATE: 15 APR 1945
 REF: 4/1/131 AIR (10)

CONFIRMATORY MEMORANDUM
 ACCIDENT TO KITTYHAWK AIRCRAFT A29-354 at
 DANGO ISLAND ON 22/2/45.

1. Reference is made to No. J. A.D. E/E 24 No. 9 17/45
2. The aircraft was one of a flight of seven P.40's being ferried from Noemfoor to No. 86 Squadron, Boeli River. The formation was divided into two sections - F/LT D.R. AUSTIN (408630) leading the first section of four aircraft and F/O L.S. WRIGHT (410026) the pilot of A29-354 leading the second section of three aircraft. Unable to obtain an escort from Finchafen to Port Moresby, F/L AUSTIN decided, having received a favourable weather report, to make the trip unescorted, and a further report was received when 40 miles from Moresby that the cloud base at Jackson's was 2-2500 feet. Bootless Inlet was reached and although the coastline was clear there was no break through the weather into the strip. Having informed Jackson's Tower of the position, F/L AUSTIN was instructed to fly straight up Bootless Inlet. F/O WRIGHT was instructed to form his section into line astern.
3. F/O WRIGHT failed to pick up the leading section and on entering the cloud, hit a slipstream and decided to turn out of the cloud, this he did and came out of the cloud over the water. No. 2 of this section came out with F/O WRIGHT but No. 3 flew on through the cloud and landed at Jackson's Strip. F/O WRIGHT made another attempt to fly up Bootless Inlet on instruments but did not break cloud so turned back again. He was joined by W/O ANDREWS (No.2.) and after circling around in the clear decided he would have to make a forced landing on Dango Island. as at this time he was very low in fuel and would be unable to make any strip in the Moresby Area as the weather showed no signs of improving.
4. F/O WRIGHT made three runs across the beach and decided to make a normal wheels down landing, but after running normally for 2-300 yards, the aircraft swung down the slope of the beach and the starboard wheel caught the water at the side of the beach overturned the aircraft in about three feet of water.
5. W/O ANDREWS executed a belly landing alongside F/O WRIGHT, both pilots were uninjured.
6. The information was supplied by F/LT AUSTIN, F/O WRIGHT and W/O ANDREWS.
7. The accident did not occur in operations.
8. The accident was caused by unexpected deterioration of weather conditions and the pilot's inability to cope therewith.
9. Pilot's particulars:-

(a) Name	F/O L.S. WRIGHT (410026)
(b) Total Flying Hours	904.20
(c) Flying Assessment at S.F.T.S.	ABOVE AVERAGE
(d) Flying Assessment at O.T.U.	AVERAGE.
(e) Flying Assessment at present Unit.	AVERAGE.


 (S. de B. GRIFFITH) Group Captain
 Commanding, NO. ONE AIRCRAFT DEPOT
 R.A.A.F. LAVERTON

Knowing the date of the ferry flight and the P-40M's that took part, the 76 Squadron individual aircraft codes that those aircraft would have been wearing are as follows:

A29-361 SV-S

This aircraft was relatively well known in 76 Squadron service. It was coded SV-Y for a long time and was named "AVAGROG". On the 6th October 1944 Sgt Furze landed A29-361 downwind without flaps, overshot the end of the strip, ground looped and wiped off the undercarriage. It was coded SV-Y at this point, but when it returned to 76 Squadron on the 6th December 1944, the code painted was now SV-S. Pilot VL Saal (434654) flew A29-361

many times in January and February 1945. He marked down the codes as **SV-S** on these occasions in his log book ⁹.

A29-377 SV-P

A late-comer to 76 Squadron, it first arrived 22nd June 1944. It suffered an undercarriage collapse on the 1st October 1944. It was repaired and back on operations by the 19th October 1944 with Jim Morris recording a flight in his log book as SV-Z ¹⁰. The aircraft was sent to 22RSU on the 20th December 1944 for an engine change and 240HR service. It was returned by the 8th January 1945 as a replacement for A29-321. A29-321 was coded SV-P until that point, and when A29-377 replaced A29-321 it also was coded as **SV-P**.

A29-342 SV-Z

Another well-known P-40M that was one of the original aircraft allotted in April 1943 to 76 Squadron. This aircraft carried the name "Daisie Noela" and nose art featuring a kangaroo dropping bombs. It was coded SV-G from the start until it went to 22RSU on the 22nd November 1944 for an engine change. Returning on the 20th December 1944 as a replacement for A29-377. Like A29-377 before it, A29-342 was coded **SV-Z**. A code which it kept until its demise in a mid-air collision whilst flying with 86 Squadron on the 9/3/1945.

A29-354 SV-K

Another aircraft allocated to 76 Squadron in April 1943. It served as SV-T from the beginning until it too went to 22 RSU on the 8th December 1944. A29-354 returned to 76 Squadron service on the 2nd January 1945. The photo of SV-K shown on page 1 of this article does not clearly display a serial number to confirm the identification, however A29-354 was likely coded **SV-K** somewhere between 2nd January 1945 and the 4th February 1945. It was coded **SV-K** on the 19th February 1945 as per the photos following on page 5, but again, the serial does not show. It was forced landed on Daugo Island on the 22nd February 1945 as outlined above with L.S. Wright at the controls.

A29-335 SV-E

Received by 76 Squadron 22nd October 1944, it was coded **SV-E**. Photographic evidence as per photos following confirms this detail for the ferry flight to 86 Squadron. It was still coded this way when it collided in mid-air with A29-342 on the 9th March 1945.

A29-315 SV-N

Received by 76 Squadron 15th November 1943. There is log book and photographic evidence from March 1944 that this airframe was coded **SV-N**, a code it still retained until it was forced landed on Daugo Island on the 22nd February 1945 in company with A29-354.

A29-321 SV-M

Another aircraft received by 76 Squadron on the 15th November 1943. It was noted in Jim Morris's log book in May 1944 as **SV-V**, and again as **SV-V** in October 1944. It had an accident on the 21st October 1944 but was fixed quickly and returned by the 2nd November 1944, but re-coded **SV-P**. It was placed in the hands of 22RSU 8th January 1945 as a replacement spare, but regardless of being held by 22RSU ¹² flew ops in January 45 with 76 Squadron as **SV-P**. A29-321 is recorded in the log book of VL Saal on the 6th January 1945 for a practice bombing as **SV-P**. It was returned to 76 Squadron more officially when A29-317 **SV-M** crashed at sea on the 7th February 1945 (A29-317 having replaced A29-347 as **SV-M** 3rd November 1944). A29-317 was requested to be written off on the 9th February 1945 and the Status Card ¹³ records the request to replace the aircraft with A29-321.

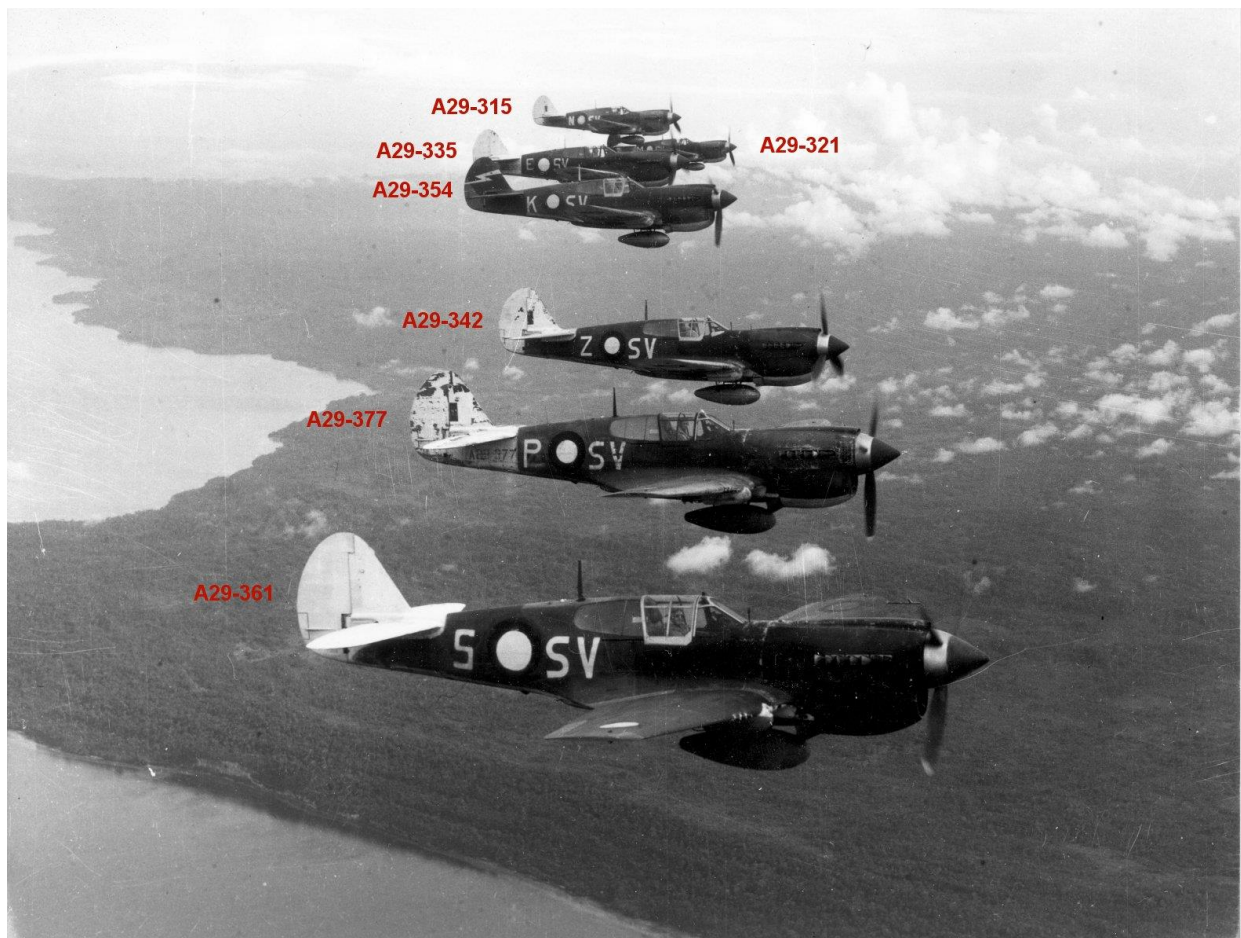
Photographic evidence as per photos following confirms this for the ferry flight to 86 Squadron, A29-321 was now **SV-M**.

In summary, No.1 Aircraft Depot was instructed to ferry seven airframes from Noemfoor through to Bohle River, and the airframes and squadron codes at the time were as follows:

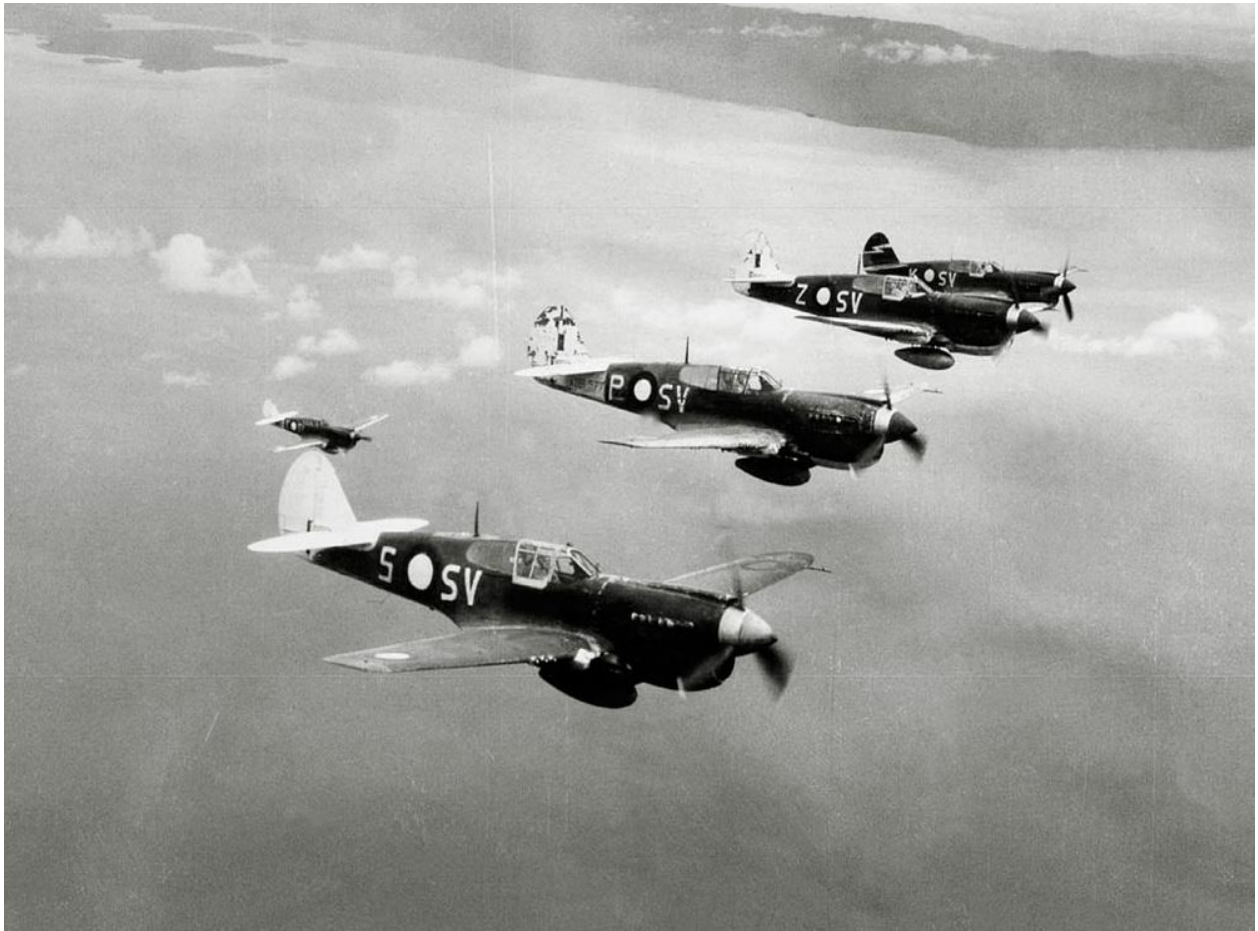
A29-361	SV-S	A29-377	SV-P
A29-342	SV-Z	A29-354	SV-K
A29-335	SV-E	A29-315	SV-N
A29-321	SV-M		

After reviewing the 76 Squadron Operations Record Book ³, particularly the A51 forms, it is reasonably clear that this exact formation was not put up while in 76 Squadron service (This includes if A29-354 was swapped for A29-347). The Operations Record Book for 76 Squadron is very detailed during this period and includes operations, training and travel. The only time it appears this combination of aircraft flew together is for the ferry flight from Noemfoor to Bohle River, thus the photograph below is able to be matched up with the details of the ferry flight. This photo was taken over Geelvink Bay and it provides the major clue that **SV-K** is almost certainly to be A29-354, not A29-347.

Most photographed on the 19th February 1945 or soon after and shows all seven of the formation of ex-76 Squadron P-40M's being ferried to their next allocation, 86 Squadron.



There were other photographs taken in series including the following picture.



The conclusion, after matching up the formation photographs to the ferry flight documents, the codes that each aircraft was likely to be displaying in late February 1945, and the ORB information, is that the photo posted on Page 1 of this article; is that 'Little Audrey' SV-K most likely is A29-354 and not A29-347. The cowl panels had been swapped between the two aircraft at some point.

When did the cowl panels get exchanged between A29-347 and A29-354 and A29-354 transform into the second 'Little Audrey'?

A29-347 was flown by a 76 Squadron pilot Kevin Donald on the 1st February 1945 for a watercraft sweep for a duration of four hours and five minutes³. Gorong, Glebe Isl. Cape "Nogdopdo" (spelt Cape Ngolopopo in the Unit History) describing the areas covered, but Kevin Donald's comments for the logbook¹¹ entry are interesting;

"A/C holed engine cowl, light AA. Halmerheras. Jap boat destroyed. Jetty Strafed in Sts. Pranged Val on reef - 100 yards N. B24 in 20' of water."

The damage to the engine cowl noted above may have necessitated a repair or replacement set at this point giving an opportunity to swap cowl panels, but I have no further evidence available, other than the above comment and so this is speculative.

Kevin Donald also flew A29-347 on the 14th February 1945 and 16th February 1945. Both these times he noted the code as **SV-G** in his logbook ¹¹. This is within days of the ferry flight taking place, and adding further strength that the cowl panels were swapped, and that it is A29-354 as SV-K in the photo and not A29-347.

Returning to the photo that appeared on page 51 of Geoffrey Pentland's book, **RAAF Camouflage and Markings Vol 2**.



The caption by Geoffrey Pentland of this photo reads;

Taken at Hollandia later in 1944, this is the second 'Little Audrey', SV-K, A29-435, also in foliage green, earth brown and sky blue, but minus the regulation white wing leading edge and empennage. From left to right were "Mustard" Keen, Dan Austin, Vic Andrews, "Dinga" Bell and "Tiny" Wright.

This caption has elements that are both right and wrong. The photo was more probably taken on or around the 18th at Noemfoor. The aircraft is likely A29-354, not 435 - a likely dyslexic error in a log book or poor memory perhaps. The pilots are identified by nickname and surname only. Four pilots in this picture have been positively identified, and they are not 76 Squadron pilots, but No.1 Aircraft Depot ferry pilots.

Dan Austin = Daniel Richard Austin (408630)

Vic Andrews = Victor Reginald Waldemar Andrews (401606)

"Dinga Bell" = Charles Nevill Ker Bell (417328)

'Tiny Wright' = Lloyd Stanley Wright (410026)

Far right, with his hand on the blast tube of the port outboard fifty calibre machine gun is 'Tiny Wright', the six foot three inches, Lloyd Stanley Wright (410026) ¹⁵. The pilot that was responsible for the belly landing of A29-354 on Daugo Island.

Sources/ References

1. Peter F. Howard, *86 Squadron 1943-45 Men, Kittyhawks and Mustangs*, Peter F. Howard, Adelaide, 1999.
2. RAAF – No 86 [Fighter] Squadron – Unit History Sheets: NAA: A9186, 116.
3. Operations Record Book (Forms A50 and A51), 76 Squadron: NAA: A9186, 100.
4. RAAF Historical Section (1995). *Units of the Royal Australian Air Force. A Concise History. Volume 2 Fighter Units. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.*
5. RAAF Camouflage & Markings 1939-45 Vol 2, Geoffrey Pentland, Kookaburra Technical Publications, Melbourne, 1989.
6. ADF-Serials website listing P-40M model Kittyhawks <http://www.adf-serials.com.au/2a29d.htm>
7. ADF-Serials website listing P-40N model Kittyhawks <http://www.adf-serials.com.au/2a29e.htm>
8. Kittyhawk A29 [Accidents Part 9]: NAA: A9845, 155.
9. Flying Log Book V.L. Saal (434654).
10. Flying Log Book J.K. Morris (433266).
11. Flying Log Book K.J. Donald (424389).
12. Status Card; A29-321: NAA :A10297, BLOCK 215.
13. Status Card; A29-317: NAA :A10297, BLOCK 215.
14. WRIGHT, Lloyd Stanley - (Pilot Officer); Service Number - 410026; File type - Casualty - Repatriation; Aircraft - Kittyhawk A29-354; Place - Northwest Point Daugo Island; Date - 22 February 1943: NAA: A705, 166/44/11
15. WRIGHT LLOYD STANLEY : Service Number - 410026 : Date of birth - 15 Jun 1921 : Place of birth - SHEPPARTON VIC : Place of enlistment - MELBOURNE : Next of Kin - WRIGHT JOYCE: NAA: A9300, WRIGHT L S.