

The date of 2 September 1943 saw the destruction of a convoy in Wewak Harbor, after which *Tokyo Sleeper* returned with a slash eighteen inches deep in the leading edge of one wing, and pieces of a Japanese radio antenna. On this mission, barrage balloons were encountered for the first time in the SWPA. The rest of September 1943 culminated in the occupation of Lae and Salamaua, with almost daily raids. October 1943 saw the beginning of a consolidated campaign against Rabaul, and on 2 November 1943, **Grass Cutter** participated in the devastating low-level raid against shipping in Simpson Harbor at Rabaul.

During the last month of 1943, U.S forces landed on New Britain, and the 38th BG repeated steady bombing and strafing missions, before U.S Marines landed. Eighteen months after **Grass Cutter** arrived in New Guinea, only eleven men of the Group's original aircrew contingent remained in theatre, being the Group Commander, two Group Operations Officers, two Squadron Commanders, one Squadron Operations Officer, the Group Bombardier, one Group Navigator, and two enlisted men. Sixty one original members had been killed or were missing in action whilst another seven had been lost to operational mishaps, including weather losses. The squadron historian records that, "All in all, over the period, it these old veteran planes and men as well, continue like the postman their daily rounds, come hell or high water. And the boys new and old alike, to fly for old Warriors. They are considered lucky ships. And, perhaps they are". **Grass Cutter** is profiled as she entered combat at Moresby in September 1942 prior to the removal of its lower turret by 4th Air Depot at Townsville.

99. North American B-25D Mitchell serial # 44-87100 *Sticky Kitty*
 17th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron
 1st Tactical Reconnaissance Group



The 17th TRS arrived at Dobodura, New Guinea in late January 1944, equipped with twenty-six D-25 model Mitchells. These later D models were unique insofar as they had the open side gun ports which appeared on the later J models. The unit departed Laurel, Mississippi, in November 1943, and called themselves the 'Wreckoneers'. Their assignment was armed reconnaissance, and one of their first combat missions took place on 5 February 1944 against Muschu Island and Kairiru Islands, just off the Japanese stronghold of Wewak. A trio of 17th TRS Mitchells participated, led by Squadron Operations Officer, Captain Bert Smiley, flying *Sticky Kitty*, and accompanied by 1/Lts Glen Pruitt and Herbert Young. The three headed for the target westwards along New Guinea's coastline, via Karkar Island.