



Nakajima Model I Ki-43 Hayabusa of the Headquarters chutai, 11th Sentai. This fighter was shot down by a No. 4 Squadron Wirraway on 26 December, with the loss of pilot Fuji'i Hiroichi.



Pilot Officer John Archer and observer Sergeant James Coulston in Wirraway A20-103 after shooting down a Ki-43 on 26 December. The forward fuselage of A20-103 is preserved at the Australian War Memorial.

from No. 582 *Ku*, with the encounter representing one of four attempted interceptions of B-24s and B-17s throughout the day.

The night of 26/27 December saw the Fifth Air Force strike Rabaul for the first time in some weeks as a Christmas Day raid by 11th BG Fortresses from Guadalcanal had reported the harbour full of ships. After flying through heavy cloud three separate 43rd BG B-17 formations struck the harbour between 0101 and 0240 on 27 December. The total force comprised 18 bombers which unloaded 138 x 500-pound bombs into the harbour as well as eight clusters of incendiaries over the town.

The Fortresses made individual runs from 5,000 feet in the face of dozens of searchlight beams and flares fired from ships in an effort to ruin the night vision of the attacking crews. Major Edward Scott claimed to have left a cargo ship burning and other crews observed two smaller vessels to be on fire. The 5,859-ton IJA transport *Italy Maru* carrying a load of aviation fuel was