



*Inside the USAAF Officer's Club at Strauss, 1942. (Bob Alford)*

Melbourne hospital, he was assigned to the European theatre where he became a leading American ace. He was shot down and killed by American anti-aircraft fire on Christmas Day, 1944.

Three days later, on 15 July, a reconnaissance of the Darwin area was flown by a Babs escorted by four Zeros, all from the No. 3 *Ku*. The aircraft departed Koepang at 0900 and were over Darwin at 1250. However, radar had seen them coming, with the aircraft plotted at 332 degrees and 74 miles out at 1157 Darwin time.

Twenty P-40s were scrambled to intercept. Three Zeros were reported directly over Fannie Bay at 1202 Darwin time before they flew away. However, no interception was made, and the Japanese aircraft landed safely back at Koepang at 1430.

With the Takao *Ku* tied up with supporting the operations in the Tanimbar and Aru Islands, the Japanese commenced harassing night raids by one or two *shotai* of Bettys over Darwin. The first came on 25 July following a directive to attack outlying islands in the Arafura Sea, while Darwin was to be attacked from that date.

The attacks commenced with a raid on the RAAF base, civil aerodrome and military installations by two *shotai* of Bettys led by Lieutenant Tanemasa Hirata on the night of 25 July. The AA searchlights were unable to illuminate the aircraft and the AA batteries did not engage as a result. Unhindered, the Bettys released their bombs and returned to Timor. The bombs released by one *shotai* landed in The Narrows area between the RAAF base and the civil aerodrome, hitting the water pipeline and dislocating power and telephone lines. The bombs released by the other *shotai* were scattered harmlessly over Bynoe Harbour.

The following night, 26 July, two *shotai* of Takao *Ku* Bettys each dropped 27 x 60-kilogram