



Two US air crews being briefed for one of the longest reconnaissance flights of the war, 2,700 miles. (Painting by William Edwin Pidgeon, *The Australian Women's Weekly*, 25th Dec 1943, page 11.)



Sgt Klovoissis, Lt Craig and Capt Oman in the briefing room, Fenton. (Dick Dakeyne Collection.)

On the 13th August, **Balikpapan**, a major oil-refining town on the East Coast of Borneo, was raided at night by twelve planes. They found the place completely open with all the lights on and the oil refinery working flat out. Balikpapan had been established as a huge oil refinery by Dutch Shell before the war and was captured and taken over by the Japanese in early 1942.

The next day, one plane carried out a recco, took photos, and found the harbour full of boats, so a second night raid was made on the 17th. My crew flew on the second Balikpapan raid on the 17th and the plan was that half our planes were to bomb the refinery and the other half were to bomb shipping. Our allocation was shipping, with our instructions being to fly around the harbour, find the biggest ship, and drop our bombs on it.



Remains of the pilots' briefing room, Fenton camp. (Photograph: Craig Bellamy.)

This was the first time our bombardier had ever tried skip bombing, let alone at night. We went in very low over that ship and dropped our bombs. The bombs missed – fortunately. If they had hit the target we might have been brought down with the explosion, we flew so low. One of our crews doing the same thing at **Macassar** a month later, hit the ship below them and the explosion took them out, too. We didn't know how dangerous it was. Later they put delayed action fuses in the bombs.

So, from the bombing point of view this trip was a failure, but the RCM results were a success, as I managed to pick up the details of several new radar stations on both the way up and back.



"Half a Ton of Love to Tojo." We normally carried 500 pound bombs, but this time we carried particularly large 1,000 pound bombs. (Photograph: Dick Dakeyne.)