

# *So Long Henry Bear*

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## *PREFACE*

### *The Far East 1941*

The Vickers Vildebeest biplane, RAF torpedo bomber of obsolete mark, lumbered low over the causeway, leaving the island on its starboard bow, heading for its target, a line of Japanese troop transports, surging down from the north.

Eager for action, tired of kicking their heels around Changi, the two-man crew were in buoyant mood. With a couple of Brewster Buffaloes providing top cover, what on earth was there to worry about? Visibility was like crystal, and there was no sign of yesterday's thunderheads.

Pilot Officer Lance Donald handled the biplane, "My Old Lady," as he referred to the Beast, with practised nonchalance. He didn't need to have a smoke, but all the same, he accepted a Player's Navy Cut from his crewman. Lance's crewman was Flight Sergeant Sam Speller, known to one and all as Tiny, on account of his height and second row forward bulk.

The two men had flown together ever since the balloon had gone up, and before. Back in Blighty, Lance had even visited Sam in his East End of London home, to meet Sam's mother and Aunt Mabel.

And it was by chance that Lance was thinking about that visit, when the world blew apart. At one moment they were sailing along without a tremor of turbulence; the next, they were bouncing all over the sky, desperately evading the enemy.

The enemy in the shape of a pair of Imperial Navy Zeros, came at them from nowhere or rather, from out of the sun. Like a couple of dancers disciplined in the art of some lethal ballet, the fighters circled, then plunged