



## Documentary Drama: 'Shady Lady' (2012)

(Narration: Michael Dorn)

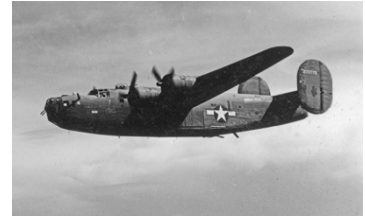


*This is the epic story of a B-24 'Liberator' bomber aircraft called 'Shady Lady', that took off from Darwin, Australia on Friday, 13th August 1943, on what was at that time, the world's longest ever attempted bombing mission. Under the command of 'Doug' Craig, 'Shady Lady' set off with 10 other aircraft to attack the oil refineries at Balikpapan, Borneo. With the target hundreds of miles behind enemy lines, this was an audacious attempt to strike back at the Imperial Japanese Army. 'Shady Lady' survived intense tropical thunderstorms, serious turbulence, heavy enemy anti-aircraft fire and was chased by Japanese Zero fighters - but never made it back to base. 'Shady Lady,' after 16 hours and 35 minutes in the air, ran out of fuel and was crash-landed in a saltpan, in the remotest part of Northern Australia. Local support from the Aborigines and a massive rescue mission amazingly saw 'Shady Lady' - fly again.*

## Documentary historical story overview

On 19 February 1942, 10 weeks after leading the attack on Pearl Harbor, Japanese bomber pilot Mitsuo Fuchida, flying from same aircraft carriers - attacked Darwin, Northern Territory, Australia. Captain Fuchida made sure they did not repeat the mistakes made at Pearl Harbor. The Japanese air raids on Darwin, often called the "Pearl Harbor of Australia" used more aircraft, sank more boats and dropped more bombs than at Pearl Harbor and dealt a psychological blow to the Australian population, just weeks after hostilities with Japan had begun.

Australia was determined to strike back and therefore welcomed the arrival to Australia in 1943, of the American 380th Bombardment Group and their long range B-24 'Liberator' bomber aircraft.



*B-24 Liberator*

The 380th was placed under the control of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) command in Darwin.

The B-24 was a heavy bomber, which ended World War II as the most produced Allied heavy bomber in history, and the most produced American military aircraft at over 18,000 units. It was the weapon needed to strike at the heart of the Imperial Japanese Army.

In evaluating how to strike back at the Japanese, RAAF intelligence knew that half of all lubricating oils used by the Japanese military and 60% of all their aviation gasoline came from refineries in Borneo. Hundreds of miles behind enemy lines and almost an impossible target to reach - but it had to be done. With a lot of luck, the B-24 bomber might just be able to reach the target, but would they be able to get back?

'Shady Lady' is the epic story of the B-24 bomber aircraft called 'Shady Lady', that set off from Darwin on Friday, 13 August 1943, on what was at that time, the world's longest ever attempted bombing mission of WWII, to the oil refineries at Balikpapan, Borneo.

'Shady Lady' with a crew of 10 and one RAAF photographer, was one of eleven bombers that chased the setting sun westward, past Timor, into heavily defended enemy territory.



*Doug Craig*

The crew of 'Shady Lady' under the command of First Lieutenant, Doug Craig, had a hazardous journey to the target. Flying through numerous tropical thunderstorms that caused severe turbulence and greatly hampered navigator, John Nash's ability to carry out celestial navigation. Despite all the odds, all 11 aircraft arrived individually at their target. 'Shady Lady' was the last to arrive and tasked with not only attacking the target but to also photograph it.

As she flew over her target for 45 minutes, searchlights tracked 'Shady Lady' to help the anti aircraft gunners destroy her. As anti aircraft fire exploded around 'Shady Lady' and rocked the aircraft violently, waist gunner S/Sgt. Maurice "Slim" Powers, with nerves of steel, decided to inject a little humor into the tense situation. He pretended to take a curtain call at his gun window. Much to the other gunner's amusement, he repeatedly bowed in the limelight, shouting "Thank you, Thank you very much."



*Maurice "Slim" Powers*

On her journey back to base, more tropical thunderstorms threatened to tear the wings off 'Shady Lady'. When day finally came, the 'Shady Lady' crew realised they were miles off course and had no choice but to overfly a main Japanese air base in Timor, if they had any chance of getting back to Australia alive.

Japanese fighters had no intention of letting 'Shady Lady' fly back in one piece. After an hour-long very stressful dogfight, that tested the crew to the very limit, 'Shady Lady' finally escaped and headed for Australia.

With fuel all but gone and running on empty, the aircraft was in a dire situation. The aircraft commander, was preparing to ditch the aircraft when the Northern coast of Australia was sighted.



*'Shady Lady'*

With just minutes of fuel remaining, the commander spotted a salt pan near the coast and prepared the crew for an emergency landing.

The commander had to land the aircraft in impossible circumstances, with no second chances. Apart from the nose wheel collapsing and the resulting damage to the front of the aircraft on landing, there were incredibly, no serious injuries.

It was 0945 hrs, sixteen hours and thirty-five minutes since their departure from Darwin. **This had become the longest ever aeroplane bombing mission in aviation history to that day.**

Miles from anywhere, the crew and aircraft had to now be rescued. Radio contact was eventually established with Darwin and provided the stranded airmen with the hope of rescue the following afternoon. This hope materialized in the form of Father Seraphim Sanz, the priest at a local mission.

A new race against time had started. The salt pan where 'Shady Lady' landed was due to flood soon as the season changed. Engineers were brought in to make temporary repairs to the aircraft in extreme conditions of heat, little water, and limited facilities. This was one of Australia's harshest locations. Under constant attack from thousands of 'sand flies' crews worked around the clock to fix and lighten the aircraft by removing unnecessary parts such as armament and ammunition.

New parts and fuel had to be brought to 'Shady Lady' and this was done by Aborigines who carried them over very difficult terrain for tens of miles.

With only days to spare, 'Shady Lady' was finally pushed back and prepared for what sadly became her final take-off.

'Shady Lady' was never to fly again in combat, too badly damaged from the crash landing.



*'Shady Lady' being pushed back for take-off*

Since 1996, the site where 'Shady Lady' landed has become an Australian Heritage Site with parts of the aircraft still there. Incredibly, the tracks from her landing are still visible, frozen in time due to the geological features of the area.

Lt. Craig later received the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) for his unique flying abilities. A Presidential citation was re-issued in 2011 and presented to Lt. Craig's widow in Sydney.

## **Production Details**

- Filmed in High Definition.
- Running Time: 87 Minutes.
- Dolby 5.1
- Digital Cinema Release Format – DCP (JPEG 2000).
- Orchestra music score.

## **Documentary accuracy**

Fact Not Fiction Films specialises in aviation related documentaries and always seeks to ensure the accuracy of its program content. In this regard for the 'Shady Lady' documentary, was based on research by historians Lindsay Peet, Glenn Horton and other historians and heritage consultants to ensure accuracy of the documentary and its narration.

## **Further Information**

Further details about the film are attached and also online at:

Website: <http://www.factnotfictionfilms.com/shadylady.html>

IMDB Pro: <http://pro.imdb.com/title/tt2056694/>

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Shady-Lady/167694323310763>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/#!/ShadyLady1943>

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