

## CHAPTER 11

### 341<sup>st</sup> Fighter Squadron “The Black Jacks”

The first Thunderbolts to arrive in New Guinea did so on 14 July 1943. Comprising a mixed batch of twenty five 348<sup>th</sup> FG fighters, nearly half of the contingent was from the 341<sup>st</sup> FS which moved its headquarters to Durand ‘drome, Port Moresby, about a week later. From there it commenced a series of familiarisation and C-47 escort operations to Wau, Nadzab and Marilinen alongside the group’s other two squadrons. On 13 December 1943 all three of the 348<sup>th</sup> FG squadrons were ordered to move to Finschhafen. The 341<sup>st</sup> FS later took up station at Saidor on 27 March 1944, then Nadzab #3 briefly before it left the main New Guinea theatre for Wakde in Dutch New Guinea on 22 May 1944. Major David Campbell took the 341<sup>st</sup> FS to New Guinea and was replaced by Major John Moore on 15 November 1943.

On 11 October 1943, 341<sup>st</sup> FS operations officer (and soon to be squadron commander and promoted to major) Captain John Moore was among a quartet of P-47s led by 348<sup>th</sup> FG commander Lieutenant Colonel Neel Kearby which undertook the first Thunderbolt mission over the Japanese base of Wewak. A total of nine victories was distributed between the Thunderbolts for which Kearby was later awarded the Medal of Honor. In fact, the Thunderbolts shot down only two Ki-43-II, but these were both high-profile officers being Captain Koyama Shigeru, commander of the 68<sup>th</sup> *Sentai*’s first squadron, and Lieutenant Colonel Teranishi Tamiya, the commander of the 14<sup>th</sup> Fighter Brigade.

On 7 November the 341<sup>st</sup> FS and the 342<sup>nd</sup> FS encountered particularly fierce resistance from Ki-43-II *Hayabusa* in a fight which spread from Nadzab to Saidor. The 341<sup>st</sup> FS shot down four *Hayabusa* against no Thunderbolt losses: 13<sup>th</sup> *Sentai* pilots Lieutenant Sakata Koichi and Sergeant Major Suzuki Sozaku together with Sergeant Toda Shiro of the 248<sup>th</sup> *Sentai* and Sergeant Shimanto Kikuo of the 59<sup>th</sup> *Sentai*.

On 1 December 1943 the 341<sup>st</sup> FS, alongside 36<sup>th</sup> FS Thunderbolts, escorted 90<sup>th</sup> BG Liberators to Wewak at medium altitude. Approaching the target, they were met by about 20 Ki-61 *Hien* and 30 Ki-43-II *Hayabusa* from the 59<sup>th</sup> and 248<sup>th</sup> *Sentai* in separate formations. With then escorts flying higher than the Liberators, there was a communications misunderstanding as to the formation’s sequence and timing over the target. As a result, the rearwards bombers were attacked in a series of proficient and determined climbing attacks and three Liberators were downed.

The 341<sup>st</sup> FS incurred its first loss occurred at Cooktown, Australia, during a delivery flight when a new P-47D-2 was destroyed during a ground collision on 18 July 1943. The squadron lost a total of nineteen Thunderbolts in New Guinea, of which four were combat-related. The other fifteen were due to various causes including mechanical failure, bad weather, and landing and take-off accidents. Four of these losses were accidents at Durand ‘drome. Poor fortune followed the 341<sup>st</sup> FS when Lieutenant Samuel Galik was killed in a landing accident during the