

## INTRODUCTION

complexity. Between December 1941 and October 1942, a substantive total of 571 P-40E and E-1 British lend-lease variants was delivered to Australia. By May 1943 the Fifth Air Force had only 54 of this original allocation of early model Warhawks remaining on strength, and by 1944 this total had been reduced to a handful serving in support and ancillary roles, including as two-seat trainers.

The competing demands of RAAF squadrons and high operational accident rates in all units led to considerable inventory exchanges between Warhawk units. Such exchanges continued at feverish pace throughout 1942, resulting in widespread ramifications for markings. These in turn have resulted in considerable markings confusion. The Fifth Air Force created a maintenance headquarters, the Fighter Replacement Pool, specifically to coordinate these transfers. In July 1942 the pool relocated to Garbutt near Townsville from Williamtown in New South Wales. During the move all USAAF Brewster Buffalos on charge were given to the RAAF, however its CW-22 Falcons and refitted P-40E/E-1s moved north with the unit. A subsidiary joint RAAF/USAAF replacement pool was subsequently established at Charleville, north Queensland, to assist with this process.

Many of the early P-40E series airframes left in Australia following the 49<sup>th</sup> FG's move to New Guinea at the end of 1942 were reallocated to the RAAF or subsidiary USAAF units via these facilities. When the Garbutt operation expanded in late 1942 to include yet more maintenance units, it was renamed the Fighter Command Replacement Center (FCRC). The move to New Guinea of the 49<sup>th</sup> FG's three squadrons further complicated markings matters. The 7<sup>th</sup> FS was the exclusive beneficiary from an October 1942 shipment of 35 new P-40K-5s, although some were retained at Townsville's FCRC alongside a suite of refitted P-40E/E-1s. In December 1942 when the 9<sup>th</sup> FS converted to the Lockheed Lightning, its entire Warhawk inventory was transferred to Townsville. This transition incurred rancor when a contingent of former ex-Java 17<sup>th</sup> PS pilots was assigned into the 9<sup>th</sup> FS and given the first P-38s as soon as they became available. This left many of the squadron's Darwin-veteran pilots languishing in Townsville throughout October 1942 lamenting the loss of their P-40s. Finally, informed that the P-38's entry to combat had been delayed, the 9<sup>th</sup> FS then took most of its Warhawks to New Guinea too. In the event, the final 9<sup>th</sup> FS Warhawk combat took place on 31 December 1942.

Meanwhile up in New Guinea, new P-40 airframes were transferred to the 8<sup>th</sup> FS via the FCRC's maintenance group, the 45<sup>th</sup> Service Group, resulting in mixed 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> FS inventories. Then, by mid-1943 in New Guinea, the 7<sup>th</sup> FS was reassigned former 8<sup>th</sup> FS refits to replace its dwindling supply of P-40K-5s. The last P-40E to see combat in New Guinea was operated by the 7<sup>th</sup> FS, being P-40E-1 ET494 flown by Second Lieutenant Logan Jarmen. He claimed a bomber on 14 July 1943 when flying this fighter, the last "E" model to make a combat claim.

We now turn to the SOPAC theatre where the short-fuselage P-40F-1 with its distinctive square-shaped cowl without top air scoop first appeared in the New Hebrides in November 1942. These were followed by the extended fuselage variant P-40F-15 in June 1943. The "F" model series with its unique Rolls-Royce engine installation presented several engineering challenges, however no "F" models made it to the SWPA.