

Introduction

Welcome to the markings of IJN land-based units which served in the South Seas. Importantly, note that this volume excludes floatplane and Zero units, as both are covered separately in *Volumes Five* and *Eight* of this *Pacific Profiles* series. Included are bombers, transports and flying boats along with a handful of more esoteric types such as Irving night fighters and reconnaissance and dive-bomber Judys. Several aircraft and IJN units are covered for the first time, such as one of the pair of Yokosuka Naval Technical Department Bettys which visited Rabaul in April 1942 to undertake technical research (see Profile 69). Other rare units to receive coverage for the first time include No. 151 *Ku*, a dedicated reconnaissance unit; and Val *kokutai* Nos. 965, 552, 31 and 701 *Ku*, the last of which operated Nells later in the war.

The *Pacific Profiles* series covers only South Seas IJN units as, in the opinion of this author at least, this theatre was the key one in which the future of Japan's struggles occurred. All of these *kokutai* at some stage operated from Rabaul. At times some units based in the Central Pacific also strayed into Rabaul and the Solomons, or at least their aircraft did. These are covered too.

I was emboldened to explore IJN markings more broadly when it became clear that no accurate profile existed of the most famous Betty of all; the bomber in which Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku, commander of the Combined Fleet, was shot down over Bougainville on 18 April 1943. This Betty was administratively assigned to No. 705 *Ku*'s No. 5 *Buntai*, and as such had a narrow white split stripe across the fin, confirmed by post-war photos taken at the site (see Profile 82), a key detail omitted to date. Other renditions incorrectly illustrate a tail prefix, which was painted out for security reasons. Most paintings of the bomber are also inaccurate, the most glaring of which portrays Yamamoto's bomber in the pre-war two-tone "China Scheme" camouflage! The Mitsubishi manufacturer's number (known since the 1960s), indicates it was a new overall green Model 11 with a truncated tail, having been delivered to Rabaul only a few weeks before its demise. Even the name of Yamamoto's pilot is published incorrectly in Western histories which state his name as Kotani Takeo (or vice-versa depending on surname order), whose rank varies according to each publication. In fact, the relevant aviator was FCPO Kotani Takashi (小谷立), whose first name was Takashi, not Takeo, as hand-written in the unit's operations log. With such fundamental errors being repeated in Western histories, imagine the errors which lurk elsewhere pertaining to more esoteric IJN markings and history.

IJN Markings

The markings of Imperial Japanese Navy aircraft, whilst complex, nonetheless conformed to strict methodology. The Japanese fondness for order and numbers is inherent in these systems. The key to understanding them revolves around their placement in the Combined Fleet and Department of Navy's operational and administrative structures, alongside commensurate Orders of Battle. Further guidance is offered by breakdowns within the units themselves, and the numerous markings edicts and directives which were promulgated and revised throughout the conflict. Disturbing this order however are the incessant restructuring of these ORBATs,