

# Introduction

Welcome to the labyrinth of both the glaring and subtle engineering and markings differences which characterised B-25 Mitchell operations in the Australia, New Guinea and Solomons theatres. Since the type's length of service herein spans the duration of the war, it thus follows that the Mitchell's markings regime encompasses evolving and wide-ranging features. This volume seeks to highlight the plethora and variation of markings which ensued, explain the evolution of hybrid markings systems, and clarify numerous profiles which regrettably continue to be inaccurately presented elsewhere. It is particularly pleasing to include Thirteenth Air Force and USMC PBJ Mitchell markings, of which so few are currently illustrated.<sup>1</sup>

The quintessential Mitchell mission of the Pacific War was the great Fifth Air Force attack on Rabaul of 2 November 1943. As they roared across the township, wharf and harbor areas, these Mitchells showcased the pinnacle of the nose art era in the theatre. In the mix were shark-noses, leering wolves, green dragons, black panthers, yellow tigers, eagle beaks and dark blue bats. All of these were mixed in with an assortment of art works ranging from mom's apple pie to almost every calendar pin-up girl imaginable. This spectacle was, by any measure, a theatre of the absurd. However, dreadful USAAF losses resulted in the costly mission being immortalised as "Bloody Tuesday". *Life* magazine appeared on US newsstands three weeks later. It contained an article describing the raid, together with a famous photograph of a Mitchell traversing Simpson Harbour which featured on the front cover.

Much publicity and inflated claims ensued in the US media about this attack, many of which continue to be lionised, however "Bloody Tuesday" was a Japanese victory by any measure. American planners did not know that significant carrier reinforcements had arrived at Rabaul the day beforehand. These combined with land-based fighter units to produce an unforeseen and overwhelming response. The low-level Mitchell strafers staged via Dobodura escorted by P-38 Lightnings, the lead formation comprising 35 strafers led by 345<sup>th</sup> BG deputy commander Major Benjamin Fridge. In the pell-mell confusion the Mitchells claimed 26 fighters shot down, alongside numerous claims of aircraft on the ground and seaplanes at anchorage. The Lightnings claimed 29 aerial victories, totaling 55 American aerial claims. The Americans lost eleven Mitchells and their crews from the combined formation of 3<sup>rd</sup>, 38<sup>th</sup> and 345<sup>th</sup> BGs, and nine Lightnings from the 8<sup>th</sup>, 49<sup>th</sup> and 475<sup>th</sup> FGs, a combined total of twenty aircraft. Many damaged aircraft were junked at Dobodura on return or damaged to varying degrees, and numerous crewmen were wounded.

The relevant Japanese operations documents show both sides badly overclaimed; American aerial kills were limited to fourteen, thus they claimed four times as many aircraft as they actually shot down. The Japanese carrier units lost nine pilots and the ground-based fighter units, Nos. 201, 204 and 253 *Kokutai*, lost five. A further six Zeros were lost to accidents and some Japanese pilots successfully baled out, including *Zuiho* pilot Lieutenant Fukui Yoshio who

---

<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the only Mitchell unit not illustrated in this volume is the Combat Replacement Training Center at Nadzab. A limited inventory of B-25s operated with the unit in various squadron legacy markings from early 1945 until end of the war.