

INTRODUCTION

This fourth volume of the *South Pacific Air War* series chronicles air war in New Guinea for the eleven weeks from 19 June until 8 September 1942. It can be read alone or as a continuation of the first three volumes that spanned the first six months of the Pacific War, culminating in the Battle of the Coral Sea.

The earlier three volumes cover a broad area of conflict in the wider South Pacific, continued in this volume until 7 August when the American invasion of Tulagi and Guadalcanal took place. From that date fighting in the South Pacific divides into two distinct fronts: New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. Subsequent coverage of both fronts becomes too unwieldy in a single and highly detailed narrative, hence after 7 August all Solomon Islands operations are discontinued from this volume, including Allied units operating from neighbouring island groups such as New Caledonia, the New Hebrides and Fiji. However, regular general references are made to the Solomons fighting as it impacted on the availability of Japanese airpower at Rabaul.

The eleven weeks covered by this volume was a critical period during which the strategic situation in New Guinea grew vastly more complicated. As the Allies secretly developed a major new base at Milne Bay on the eastern tip of Papua, the Japanese landed at Buna and began an overland assault over the Owen Stanley mountains. Then, in late August, the Japanese launched a two-pronged amphibious campaign to capture Milne Bay. While there had been virtually no land fighting at all up until June, by September land forces were engaged in an epic and bloody struggle that would continue in New Guinea until the end of the war in 1945 with the Wewak land campaigns.

The land struggles in this volume were launched in an environment of Japanese naval supremacy, albeit one in which their airpower was initially much depleted by the evolving conflict in the Solomons. Interestingly, and unlike the periods covered in the previous three volumes, no aircraft carriers appeared in New Guinea waters during this June – September period. Instead the land-based air forces were depended upon by their respective commanders more than ever. These air forces would need all their enterprise and ingenuity to meet the ever-increasing demands of the new and fast-changing environment.

Never before has this campaign been chronicled in such detail, with Allied accounts matched against Japanese records for a truly factual account of the conflict.

Michael John Claringbould & Peter Ingman
Canberra
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