

Introduction

Generals Dwight Eisenhower and Douglas MacArthur both credited unglamorous resources such as the bulldozer and the Douglas C-47 Skytrain as quintessential platforms to winning the war. This same claim was arguably even more relevant for the C-47 in the Southwest and South Pacific theatres, especially in mountainous New Guinea where the terrain was ready-made for air transport. Indeed, aside from their incessant transport duties, C-47s were directly involved in two major combat operations in New Guinea: the defence of Wau and the paratrooper drop at Nadzab (see Chapter 1).

This volume focuses on the markings and histories of the twenty-one USAAF squadrons which operated by far the largest fleet of C-47s in the Southwest and South Pacific. From humble beginnings in the first months of 1942 when a handful of C-53s had arrived in Australia by ship, the fleet grew rapidly from late 1942 as factory fresh C-47s were ferried across the Pacific by newly raised squadrons. During 1943 this transport fleet saw much hard use with many accidents occurring. Then throughout 1944 most of these squadrons transferred north to the Philippines, although many aircraft remained frequent visitors to Australia right up until the end of the war in August 1945.

USMC units operated the C-47 throughout the South Pacific, principally in support of the Solomons campaign, with their aircraft designated as R4Ds. Other regional users were the RAAF, RNZAF, RAF and Netherlands East Indies transport units.

While the commonly understood stereotype might be of homogenous and sterile Olive Drab C-47 airframes, closer inspection reveals that markings details were both complex and ever-changing. Many of the USAAF C-47s were named by their crews and received highly individualised associated artwork.

I hope readers enjoy the 100 profiles and associated information in this volume, which gives colour and context to the many C-47s which criss-crossed southern skies so many years ago.

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