

## Introduction

This volume aims to unravel the confusing world of IJN floatplane markings in the South Pacific theatre, termed the South Seas (*Nanto Homen*) by the Japanese. If the reader is confused by the constantly changing permutations and combinations herein, spare a thought for the author whose task was to unscramble them! By way of contrast, the tail codes of South Seas Zero units, sufficiently complicated by themselves, pale into relative simplicity when compared to the minefield of floatplane markings for the same theatre.

IJN floatplane operations throughout the South Pacific commenced in January 1942 and technically lasted until the cessation of hostilities, however these activities remain little acknowledged by history. Neither addressed adequately to date is their impact. Rufes and Petes were widely employed in the Solomons and were often misidentified by Allied aircrews as Zeros. Likewise in the same theatre the use of Petes and Jakes during night operations was substantial. Most floatplane activity had ceased by late 1943, leaving only a handful of stay-behinds operating from Rabaul and Kavieng, and even Kairiru Island off Wewak.

The mercurial nature of ever-changing floatplane tail codes reflected shifting command structures throughout the conflict. This permutation was further complicated when inventories and individual aircraft were traded between fleets and shore *kokutai*, reassigned to other theatres or ships, or absorbed into training units.

The blueprint for floatplane markings which set the stage for the early phase of the Pacific War was stipulated in the Combined Fleet regulations of 15 November 1940. These dictated, *inter alia*, that ship numbers within a ship squadron (*sentai*) were designated by Roman numerals in the format I, II, III and IV, etc. Critically, the designation and colour of all IJN ship-borne tail markings was determined at fleet level (see Chapter 16). Due primarily to the influence of China theatre operations, the directive also ordered that ship-borne aircraft (excluding those carrier-based) be camouflaged. The exception was three-seater reconnaissance floatplanes and observation seaplanes, thus explaining why Jakes and Petes first appeared in overall light cream. As usual, pesky exceptions pop up everywhere. For reasons best known to themselves, No. 21 Naval Air Arsenal at Sasebo which manufactured F1M2 Petes in addition to Mitsubishi, sprayed its Petes green at the factory from the first production model. This colour was an exception to the Mitsubishi light cream so ubiquitous to Petes during the first half of the conflict.

Floatplane codes were revised in Combined Fleet orders dated 14 July 1942, in which all Second Fleet air units were allocated red codes. This much affected the South Pacific's inventory as the 11<sup>th</sup> Seaplane Tender Division was transferred to the Second Fleet on this date, explaining the ubiquitous red tail codes until the division was disbanded on 15 April 1943.

Combat and operational losses extracted a relentless toll on floatplanes, resulting in wild fluctuations of the airworthiness and availability of the main types in service: the Jake, Pete, Dave, Rufe and Alf.

Seaplane tenders' logs reveal that the number of floatplanes requiring ship-borne service often