

Introduction

Welcome to the treacherous complexity of the USAAF P-40 series which served in Australia, New Guinea and the South Pacific.¹ Given that the type's length of service spans the entire duration of the Pacific War, the markings varied through numerous changes of those times. This volume seeks to clarify these markings through the inclusion of a suite of new profiles which showcases the diversity which ensued.

It must be underlined that, whilst both the RAAF and RNZAF operated P-40s in substantial numbers, neither of these services are represented in this volume which focuses exclusively on USAAC/USAAF units. Similar to Japanese practice, individual fighters were flown by different pilots as the needs of the day dictated. In practical terms airframes were assigned to crew chiefs rather than pilots. In the SWPA, USAAF P-40s mostly engaged the Japanese Army Air Force (JAAF), whilst in the SOPAC theatre they fought almost exclusively Japanese Navy units, the rare exception being JAAF involvement in the January 1943 Operation *Ke* campaign over Guadalcanal. Some familiar fighters of the "aces" are included; however, these pilots did not always fly their particular "assigned" fighter all the time. Relevant to the SWPA and SOPAC theatres, actual losses confirmed in Japanese operations logs indicate on average that US claims can be divided by three to four, each circumstance of course being individual. Note that Japanese combat claims were even more ambitious.

When the Australian government foresaw the collapse of the Netherlands East Indies (NEI), it first sought US government agreement to purchase "Tomahawks" with no P-40 model quoted. Thereafter a request was made for "Kittyhawks" on 31 January 1942. Both types had proven combat credentials earned from both RAF and RAAF service in the Middle East, noting that No. 3 Squadron, RAAF, was the first Australian squadron to fly the Kittyhawk Mk 1 from December 1941. The British P-40E-1 export version performed badly above 14,000 feet and was accordingly viewed poorly by the USAAC. The last P-40E-1 was delivered in June 1942. No P-40B Tomahawk found its way to Australia or the Pacific, although for some reason one set of stray wings did.

The Warhawk was the first modern fighter to enter service in the early NEI and Philippine theatres, followed by the Australian theatre before the type became ubiquitous in the Pacific. Following the invasion of the Philippines, subsequent batches of P-40Es were delivered to Java in small numbers via Australia, several of which later re-appear in USAAF and RAAF Pacific squadrons. Due to the heavy USAAC losses incurred in the Philippines and Java, in April 1942 P-40E airframes which had originally been earmarked for RAAF usage were "repossessed" by the USAAF and reassigned to the 49th PG at Darwin. These airframes constituted payback for 81 P-40E/E-1s issued earlier from the US Foreign Aid "Project X" inventory.

By September 1942 combat losses saw the 49th FG Warhawk inventory reduced to 64, a reduced number from the group's official allocation of 80. Their replacements led to further markings

¹ For the purposes of this volume the South West Pacific Area (SWPA) means Australia and New Guinea, while SOPAC refers to the adjoining South Pacific theatre. The USAAF Fifth Air Force served in the SWPA while the Thirteenth Air Force served in SOPAC.