

INTRODUCTION

This sixth volume of the *South Pacific Air War* series chronicles the air war in New Guinea from 1 January until 31 March 1943. It can be read alone or as a continuation of the first five volumes of the series which span the first thirteen months of the Pacific War up until the end of 1942.

The fifth volume of this series was published in 2022, following which the authors spent two years writing the first three volumes of a companion series, *Solomons Air War*. This reflects the fact that after the American invasion of Guadalcanal on 7 August 1942, the Solomons became a separate and distinct theatre from the Allied perspective, and two distinct campaigns were fought in the respective South West Pacific Area (New Guinea) and South Pacific Area (Solomons) commands.

Note that the New Guinea/Solomons boundary was often blurred around southern Bougainville, with SWPA units often venturing into the northern Solomons. Likewise Allied air units from Guadalcanal sometimes ventured into New Guinea air space. However, from the Japanese standpoint there was no geographical delineation between these areas, all of which formed their single "South Seas" theatre. Indeed, regular reference is made to events in the Solomons in this volume which affected the availability of Japanese air units for New Guinea operations.

The authors are pleased to return to the New Guinea theatre after a two-year hiatus, especially following much encouragement from readers worldwide to continue the series into 1943. The period chronicled is a fascinating one that culminated in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea, one of the landmark engagements of the Pacific War that cemented the ascendancy of Allied air power in the SWPA.

The period also saw the Japanese successfully extricate themselves from the mire of Guadalcanal, theoretically shoring up resources for New Guinea, including freshly arriving JAAF units. As this volume demonstrates, there was still enormous fight in Japanese air units at this time. Indeed, after a disastrous early January mission that saw the loss of Brigadier General Kenneth Walker, the Fifth Air Force would not dare to bomb Rabaul in daylight for many months.

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.

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