

CHAPTER 6

9 – 18 APRIL: THE DEATH OF YAMAMOTO

The recent bad weather extended into 9 April when there were no offensive operations by either side in the Solomons. By this time VMF-221 had eight F4Fs in commission, and some of these escorted a “Dumbo” PBY search and rescue mission to New Georgia in the afternoon. During the return flight Lieutenant Connolly experienced a loss of oil pressure that forced him to bale out over the Russell Islands. He was quickly picked up by a PT boat.

The night of 9-10 April saw six 23rd BS B-17s and one B-24 sent out to bomb Buin, but the crews were unable to find the target because of heavy cloud and returned to Henderson Field with their bomb loads. The following day, 10 April, was also quiet although Cactus Air Force took the opportunity to ferry two large formations of SBDs back to Espiritu Santo, for maintenance and crew rotation. The first formation of 24 took off at 0915 and were followed by the second formation of 21 VMSB-233 dive-bombers, with both following B-24s acting as guide planes. Flying in the opposite direction on this day 25 VMF-122 F4F pilots arrived at Fighter Two.

Meanwhile at Efate on 10 April VMF-123 was conducting strafing practice over the ocean with its Wildcats when a fatal accident occurred. At 1100 First Lieutenant Warner L Morse Jr lost control of his fighter at high altitude and dived into the sea.

There was nocturnal activity in the early hours of 11 April when two “Black Cats” dropped six 500-pound bombs over Vila, while three 307th BG Liberators unloaded 28 x 500-pound bombs over Buin.

Meanwhile Cactus Air Force had received coastwatcher reports of Munda being used by Japanese aircraft on 7 April. As detailed in the previous chapter, a relatively small number of aircraft had used it as an emergency landing ground after Attack X (two Zeros and six Vals). Nevertheless, Cactus Air Force decided the runway needed to be bombed to prevent it being used in such a fashion again.



*VMSB-234 SBDs
being prepared for a
Guadalcanal ferry
flight at Turtle Bay,
Espiritu Santo, in
April 1943.*