

## Introduction

The diary of Warrant Officer Nemoto Kumesako is a historical gem. It offers both an intimate and rare perspective of a Imperial Japanese Navy floatplane pilot early in the war, along with insights into Japanese thinking of the times. These early advances in the war were feats of considerable distance and ambition, although the incumbent technology at this distance on both sides can seem almost Steampunk.

Having spent much of my life in the Pacific I can only marvel at the distances travelled and the campaigns incurred. Today, the logistics and expenses of getting a biplane to the remote atoll of Kapingamarangi are inconceivable. The determination and skills required to navigate small floatplanes around such vast distances are considerable, and would not be contemplated today without GPS, let alone proper instrumentation. However, and surprisingly, Nemoto makes no mention of these intimidating challenges in his diary, such was the training and expectations levied upon him by his masters.

Nemoto defies every stereotype of the Japanese aviator, certainly the ones placed in front of me as a child in Papua New Guinea. Nemoto prides himself in his worldly credentials, helped by a cosmopolitan attitude then fostered within the IJN, which may surprise many. We can be sure that few other IJN pilots read Tolstoy's *War & Peace* in German for recreation. Nemoto tiptoes between the unsympathetic fates occasionally meted out to other innocents.

His fastidiousness with entering correct times and dates is a gift, and happily enable easy matching against Allied records. He never complains about his superiors or military life *per se*, and looks down on his Imperial Japanese Army counterparts, views not unique for an IJN officer. He worries about the welfare of his family and aging mother. He loses his cap on one flight and leaves his spare uniform aboard the seaplane tender *Kiyokawa Maru* when it returns to Japan for repairs. He likes the Japanese comedian Roppa and thinks, at least early on, he is fighting Vickers Wellingtons. His insights into the Tolai inhabitants around Rabaul are condescending but tainted with sympathy, and he believes they will be happier and better off under the dawning Japanese empire. He views the Japanese struggle against the British imperialists as both righteous and virtuous. Nemoto, a man of his times, has been much moulded by his military education for which he expects little in return.

Nemoto participated in many of the early Pacific War campaigns. This fact alone, combined with his unique insights, make his diary incomparable. He travelled vast distances yet regretted every time he was separated from his mother ship, the *Kiyokawa Maru*. His writing style is cultivated and matter of fact, tinged with insight and limited passion. He never envisaged it would wind up in the wrong hands, and for this reason we profit from its frankness.

I much enjoyed re-creating and illustrating Nemoto's adventures, as well as interweaving miscellaneous associated topics around the main narrative. My prying sense of humour is deliberately on display, done so to make a point, although I am first to admit some of these are obscure. Nemoto's end was as swift as it was unexpected. I hope I have done justice to him and his times, and I hope you enjoy my interpretation of his memoirs.

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February 2021