

Introduction

This volume is the fourth in the *Pacific Adversaries* series, a concept which relates accounts of aerial warfare by aligning combatants and their adversarial circumstances. The stories are selected because the relevant records can be matched for an accurate accounting of both sides. The actual outcomes are often at odds to the exaggerated claims made upon which most histories have relied to date. Furthermore, each account furnishes photographic or other evidence sufficient to depict accurate profiles of the participants.

This volume focuses exclusively on confrontations which occurred in the Solomons theatre in 1943 and early 1944, a byzantine theatre and era indeed. Its complexity is due to the variety and number of different units, aircraft types, and commands involved. Furthermore, there was a high degree of interconnectivity between these combatant entities and sympathetic local villagers, Australian coastwatchers, and a host of non-aviation commands including seaborne ones. This labyrinth of convolution between such disparate actors is why this theatre is so unique and, to a large degree, baffling. Allied air warfare histories about this theatre to date often focus on individual actors or commands, with little consultation of other players, particularly Japanese ones. Others obviate key factors working in the background. This is a recipe for inexactitude, and much of what has been portrayed thus far needs correction.

Once Guadalcanal fell in February 1943, the IJN chose to defend the Solomons with air power. For the rest of the year it deployed an eclectic inventory of fighters, bombers, flying boats, floatplanes, reconnaissance aircraft and land-based carrier aircraft to achieve this goal which ultimately most knew they would lose. Whereas the year of 1942 is the quintessential year of defending Guadalcanal, 1943 is the year the US showcased its burgeoning air power and took the fight back to the Japanese.

As elsewhere in the Pacific, the 1943 Solomons theatre underlines the preponderance of the flawed optimism common to both sides: the over-claiming of aerial kills. Although IJN combat records from the period are detailed and accurate, almost no Western authors consult them. On the other side, few Japanese researchers comprehend or are able to align Allied records. This is almost excusable for the Solomons theatre, given the number and diversity of players. Yet a cursory study of combat claims suggests that the 1943 Solomons aerial campaign requires re-assessment. One consequence is that both Allied and Japanese “ace” registers would be downgraded, with the multiple disqualifications on both sides which would ensue. Controversial perhaps, but history is entitled to impartiality, and the records are there.

Never before have adversaries been so meticulously matched in this theatre. A final caveat is that the theatre’s intricacy is a particular challenge for authors, as a surfeit of detail risks dragging the reader into a quagmire of minutiae, more to the taste of some than others. The text can be accused of over-indulging in detail, however a lesser understanding of the many