

## Introduction

This *Volume Five* in Avonmore Book's *Pacific Profiles* series focuses on Vought Corsair markings as they pertain to the Solomons theatre and Rabaul campaign, particularly during the first year of combat commencing in February 1943. These early markings have to date been mostly poorly presented with the exception of the more popular units. Oddly, most USMC Corsair squadrons which fought in this theatre have received scant recognition for doing so. A selection of Corsair histories gives the distinct impression that VMF-214 (*Black Sheep*) and VF-17 (*The Jolly Rogers* – a USN squadron) were the mainstay Corsair units which is not the case. On the other hand, most USMC and USN Corsair units are given capacious coverage of their participation in the 1944 and 1945 Philippine and Japan campaigns, which in general saw comparatively less aerial action than in the Solomons. Accurate markings of some Solomons-based units are hard to find; if this volume can partially redress the balance, then that is for the good.

The history of the Corsair is lopsided by false mystique, none more so than the type was nicknamed the “Whistling Death” by harried Japanese. The relentless reiteration of this claim has acquired the status of fact. However, the Japanese equivalent exists nowhere in Japanese literature, wartime records or even POW interrogations. The moniker was in fact concocted by Vought's publicity department and has been misattributed ever since.

Another patent falsehood is that the type attained an extraordinarily high kill advantage against its nemesis - the Zero fighter - from day one. This purported favourable ratio, credited to technological superiority, appears in some publications as high as eleven to one! Yet for its first year of aerial combat commencing in February 1943, the Corsair and Zero attained kill ratios of close parity against each other. This comparison is drawn from an evaluation of both Corsair and Zero fighter unit records, both of which are detailed and accurate. Surprisingly, the Corsair's technical superiority cost it dearly; its differentiated hydraulics interwoven with complex control, electrical and ancillary systems resulted in a heavy burden of field maintenance. Combined with its temperamental engine, more Corsairs were lost to operational or mechanical misfortune than to aerial combat. This undesirable state of affairs is rarely acknowledged in most histories.

The myth of the alleged outstanding Corsair scores has gained historical traction because Western historians continue to accept US combat claims at face value instead of consulting the meticulous unit records of the alleged victims. This is partially excusable as the theatre's Japanese adversaries involved a surfeit of different aircraft types, units and commands which can be difficult to align with particular combat incidents. To add to the confusion, Allied command structures rarely coordinated combat results at unit level, in a contest where combat scores were sources of spirited competition and coveted morale. Neither were other competing claims such as those made by ships or anti-aircraft units, given serious attention. Therein lie the key reasons behind the Corsair's inflated combat credits, however less obvious ones contribute too.