

Introduction

This volume is the second in the *Pacific Adversaries* series which relates detailed stories of aerial warfare in the South Pacific by aligning combatants. The stories are chosen because the relevant Japanese and Allied records can be matched for an accurate accounting. Often the actual outcomes are at odds to the exaggerated claims made by both sides upon which most traditional histories have relied to date. Furthermore, for each of the chosen stories photographic or other evidence enables accurate profiles of the aircraft involved.

Through these chosen snapshots, *Pacific Adversaries* will portray the South Pacific conflict as accurately as possible. This second volume focuses exclusively on confrontations with the Japanese Navy Air Force (JNAF) in New Guinea and the Solomons, known to the Japanese as the “South Seas”. The first volume focused on combat with the Japanese Army Air Forces.

The JNAF operated from ships, carriers and land bases with an eclectic inventory of fighters, bombers, flying boats, floatplanes and reconnaissance aircraft. These deployed widely with distinct and dissimilar doctrine, command structures and aircraft designs compared to their army counterparts. Yet, precious little record of JNAF operations appears accurately in the English language. The rich and colourful history of the JNAF is more curious than associated falsehoods and myths which continue to persist.

The JNAF first appeared in the South Pacific in December 1941 and was at the vanguard of offensive efforts during the course of 1942. Following the bloody Guadalcanal campaign, the JNAF fought a largely defensive war in New Guinea and the Solomons against increasingly powerful Allied forces. Perhaps surprisingly, right through to the end of 1943 the JNAF offered significant resistance to the Allies and never ceded air superiority in the vicinity of its key base of Rabaul. Only in 1944, when units were withdrawn to the Central Pacific and the Philippines, was the JNAF presence in the South Pacific finally wound down to just a token force.

Never before have such snapshots matched adversaries so meticulously, from which the reader will draw their own assessments. I hope you enjoy these narratives which shine light on key events in Pacific skies so many years ago.

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