

Introduction

This volume is the first in the *Pacific Profiles* series. The objective of is to portray, as accurately as possible, the colours and unit markings of Japanese Army Air Force fighters in New Guinea. This objective is ambitious. A paucity of adequate reference material has impeded past attempts. Imaginative extrapolation and colour-guessing has created past myths which continue to be perpetrated to this day, including markings which did not, in fact, exist. Various other researchers have concluded colours from monochrome images, a tempting but blemished occupation.

The motivation for the efforts in this volume stem back to a late afternoon in August 1976 when an irritable priest at Alexishafen, on New Guinea's northern coast, reluctantly allowed me to scour and photograph Japanese aircraft wrecks on the mission's land. There was no shortage of relatively intact airframes, but one in particular, a three-bladed Oscar, intrigued me. The remnants of its tail insignia were still extant, alongside a stencilled manufacturing number on the rear fuselage. Curiosity caused me to start collecting all material on this arcane subject, but this was frustrating. Few publications, including Japanese-language ones, agreed on interpretations, colours or even unit assignments. New Guinea, it seems, was the lost theatre for the JAAF, a service with a rich and colourful history but about whom many falsehoods persist.

The JAAF entered the theatre with reluctance, as will be explained. The complexity of JAAF operations in this geographically diverse and challenging realm saw it operate, alongside an eclectic inventory of fighters, a wide range of bombers, transports, reconnaissance aircraft, civilian airliners, and even attack aircraft. The second volume of *Pacific Profiles* will feature these non-fighter types.

In the South Pacific the JAAF experimented with technical and ordnance modifications, including the use of German Mauser cannon shipped to Japan aboard an Italian submarine. Its aircraft, born from a French design heritage, bore no resemblance to those of its naval cousins. Neither were its pilots prepared for the harsh tropical environment, yet they adapted well. Ultimately it was overpowering Allied resources and airpower which expelled the JAAF's 4th Air Army from the theatre. Thousands of airmen perished during a desperate jungle retreat. Against this background an inflexible Tokyo high command, far removed from the daily low-level terrors of USAAF strafers, found time to admonish field commanders for events far removed from their control.

It's hard not to smile when reading the final section of the interrogation of Lieutenant Oishihashi Masao, the adjutant of the 77th *Sentai*, where he rails against his Tokyo superiors. Angry that they had sent his unit into an unwinnable war, he robustly announced his intent to return to