

INTRODUCTION

This volume is the second in a trilogy that chronicles aerial warfare in the South Pacific during the critical six-month period from Pearl Harbor in December 1941 until the Battle of the Coral Sea in May 1942. The latter is often depicted as a standalone naval action, which it was not. The full picture must include the situation regarding land-based aviation, both Allied and Japanese. This aspect substantially influenced the strategies of both sides, and explains the condition and disposition of both sides when the crucial carrier battle unfolded.

This second volume begins with the stunning 10 March US Navy carrier strike against Lae and Salamaua, which caused the Japanese to pause their advance until their own carriers were available. Instead, they tried to grind the Allied forces at Port Moresby into submission through an unrelenting air assault by their Betty bombers and superlative Zero fighters.

After a long wait, Allied land-based fighters finally arrived in the form of Royal Australian Air Force No. 75 Squadron Kittyhawks. These were backed up by a growing, but assorted, collection of United States Army Air Force bombers, including A-24 Banshees, B-17 Flying Fortresses, B-25 Mitchells and B-26 Marauders (the latter two types making their worldwide combat debut over the skies of New Guinea). Together, this motley force took the fight to the Japanese during March and April 1942, resulting in a complex aerial campaign that saw units from both sides reach exhaustion.

Never before has such a detailed chronicle of this air war been published, and for the first time Allied accounts are matched with Japanese records. The result is both thrilling and surprising, with the resulting dispositions of the air forces of both sides setting the scene for the Battle of the Coral Sea in May. Depicted with precise colour heraldry, this volume can be trusted as the most accurate and detailed account of the March–April 1942 South Pacific campaign produced to date.

Michael John Claringbould
Peter Ingman

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