



*A Marauder with its striped rudder clearly visible at Townsville in April 1942. It sits alongside a 49th Fighter Group P-40E.*

Just after dawn on the following morning, 7 April, the A-24 strike that had originally been intended for 5 April, was launched. At 0615, eight A-24s took off from Kila, with First Lieutenant Robert Ruegg leading Lieutenants Virgil Schwab, Henry Swartz, Raymond Wilkins, Edward Chudoba, Donald Anderson, Gus Kitchens and Donald Emerson. Escort was provided by six No. 75 Squadron Kittyhawks, which departed Seven-Mile at 0610.

Meanwhile at Lae, Kawai had carefully planned an ongoing chain of seven two-hour defensive patrols, each to be conducted by pairs of Zeros. It appeared the Kittyhawks would have work to do in protecting the dive-bombers; however, as the strike group approached Lae, the fickle New Guinea weather again intervened. Probably due to cloud cover at various levels, the two Zeros flying the first patrol of the day, piloted by FPO3c Tan Sachihisa and FPO2c Miya Un'ichi, failed to pick up the approaching attackers. Neither did the Kittyhawks spot the Zeros, and at this stage the Australian pilots also lost contact with the A-24s. Having limited fuel, the Kittyhawks had no option but to return to Seven-Mile.

So it was that the A-24s arrived over Lae at 0735 alone but unmolested, and from 13,000 feet they saw five Zeros and seven bombers parked on the 'drome below. Each A-24 was lugging a single 500-pound bomb and two small 25-pound incendiaries. Ruegg led them down in a long line, with the Americans claiming to have destroyed all of the bombers present. Several bombs landed accurately, reflecting the training and experience of pilots such as Ruegg with prewar experience. The Japanese recorded nine aircraft hit in this attack: a largely unreported victory for the A-24s. Exactly how many operational bombers were present is unclear – certainly a few (including G3M2 Nells from No 1 *Ku*) would have been staging through, or were based at Lae to fly sector patrols, while others may have instead been performing transport or liaison duties.

After their dives, the Banshees swept out over Huon Gulf before taking up a heading for Port Moresby and seeking a mutually supportive defensive formation that made best use of their rearward-facing twin machine guns. However, both Tan and Miya had seen the dive-bombers and commenced their attack in time to chase the last few A-24s as they pushed over in their