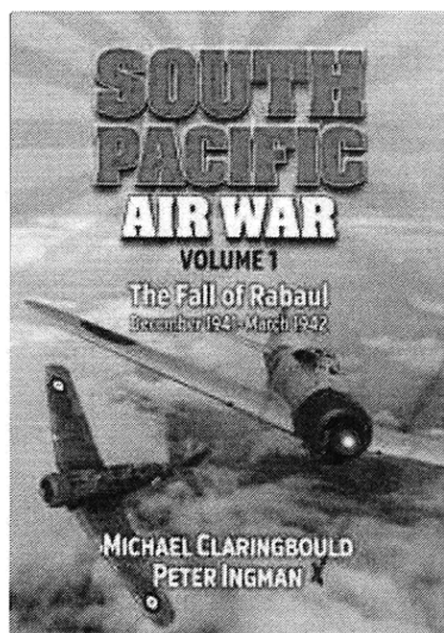


Burgers and the Truck’, deserves to be anthologised in any modern collection of outstanding literary journalism, while the ‘Epilogue’ is stunningly insightful and an unmitigated indictment of a government ethically and morally bankrupt enough to subject its own young men to death and maiming for no legitimate political reason. If the current incumbent of the White House is serious in his promise to ‘make America great again’, he and his minions will have to look further afield than the state of their nation during the Vietnam War. They might at least start by reading *Hue 1968*.

Paul Skrebels

**Michael Claringbould and Peter Ingman, *South Pacific Air War Volume 1: The Fall of Rabaul December 1941-March 1942*, Avonmore Books, Kent Town SA, 2017. ISBN 9780994588944. Softcover, 252 pages, fully illustrated in colour and B&W with photos, profiles, maps and diagrams. RRP \$39.95. Available from [www.avonmorebooks.com.au](http://www.avonmorebooks.com.au)**



Peter Ingman and Avonmore Books have been involved in a project to examine in detail the air war with Japan for some years now. Following on from studies of the Japanese attacks on Broome and Darwin comes this analysis, *The Fall of Rabaul*, which announces itself as the first in a series dealing with the campaign in the South Pacific. In this volume, co-authors Ingman and Michael Claringbould take the story from the lead-up to Japan’s involvement in WW2 to its landings at Lae and Salamaua in New Guinea in March 1942 and the proposed interception of the Japanese fleet by the US Navy’s Task Force 17. The authors’ focus is solely on the activities in the region bounded by the southern edge of the Japanese Mandates down to Fiji and across to Papua and New Guinea and the Queensland coast during the period under question, of which the capture of Rabaul on New Britain in late January was the key event.

Given such a vast area of operations, obviously the employment of air power was an essential component of both sides’ conduct of the campaign. After outlining the resources available to the Royal Australian Air Force and the Imperial Japanese Navy air arm, the authors embark on a comprehensive account of the moves and counter moves by both sides as they carried out reconnaissance, bombing and interdiction missions over and around Rabaul. In seeking to discover and blunt Japanese designs on this crucial deep-sea port, the few RAAF Wirraways, Hudsons and Catalinas were usually outmatched by the more numerous IJN Nell, Betty, Claude and Mavis aircraft, and this was without taking into account the formidable Zero fighter, which was only just beginning to make its presence felt in the region. But – and this is the book’s chief strength – the view we are provided from Japanese sources reveals that all was not smooth sailing for them either, and that the willingness of the RAAF to maintain pressure on its opponents did have an effect on the decisions made by the IJN regarding the campaign.

*The Fall of Rabaul* is not all just about the air war, though. Inevitably, both sides’ navies come into play, as indeed do the land forces involved. There is a very interesting description of the activities and fate of Lark Force, the Australian garrison of Rabaul built around the 2/22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion AIF which, controversially, was left to face the full brunt of the

‘sledgehammer to crack an egg’ (as some Japanese themselves described it) employed by the invasion force in taking the island. The loss of the Lark Force POWs in the torpedoing of the *Montevideo Maru* provides a tragic postscript to the whole story. Nor is the account confined to the Australian war effort; equally inevitably, the Americans enter the fray, and in dramatic fashion, as in the US Navy VF-3 squadron’s Wildcats’ destruction of the IJN No.4 Kokutai’s attack on the USS *Lexington* on 20 February, which is deftly constructed and skilfully narrated.

Readers familiar with Avonmore’s previous productions will not be disappointed by this one either. In addition to the many useful and delightful aircraft profiles, maps and tables we have come to expect and appreciate, *The Fall of Rabaul* is punctuated by colour recreations of aircraft of both sides on operations, which add considerably to the appeal of the book. However, it is in the quality and originality of its research and findings that make *The Fall of Rabaul* a ‘must have’ for anyone interested in almost any aspect of the Second World War. I look forward to future volumes in the *South Pacific Air War* series.

**Paul Skrebels**