

The Empire Strikes South Japan's Air War Against Northern Australia 1942-45

Review by John Baxter

There have been several books recalling the events in which Australia came under attack from the Japanese during World War II. Some of the more recent publications have updated previous information as more wartime archive material becomes available. This book falls into the latter category to a very large extent and then goes further, much further. Author Dr Tom Lewis OAM has researched much from the Japanese side and this information augmented from a manuscript of Japanese air actions by well known Australian authority and aviation historian Bob Alford presents a new look at all, and I mean all, Japanese air attacks upon Australia.

Timely, in that it's the seventy-fifth anniversary of the major attack on Darwin of 19th February 1942, this new book details all air raids on Australia in chronological sequence for the states of Western Australia and Queensland, plus of course, the Northern Territory. It's an important work, extensively researched and a very worthy addition to the Australian military history section of my library. While this book is not as extensive in some areas as the detail in Kevin Gomm's 'Red Sun on the Kangaroo Paw' which publication restricted its contents to raids only on Western Australia, 'The Empire Strikes South' covers every combat mission on Australian soil launched from the north – an important difference. And each complements the other.

Lavishly illustrated with 5 colour photos, 24 b&w photos, 3 maps and other illustrations plus most importantly the impressive artwork - 6 colour three-views, 20 colour profiles and two special commissions all by Michael Claringbould ('Eagles of the Southern Sky' illustrator) within its 207 pages, so it's still a very well illustrated work covering 208 Japanese combat missions. In addition, there are very interesting chapter endnotes, appendices plus seven and a bit pages worth of sources. Quite a lot to be going on with, as they say.

It's no frills stuff – no elaboration, just a day by day rundown of what happened, why, who took part and the results and efforts used to both attack and defend northern Australia. There's no doubt there is tremendous waste in war and this also shows through in crew losses, equipment losses, damage to ports and airfields and losses on the ground. Poignant at times and yet straight forward in outlining the types of aircraft involved in each mission and the pilots or aircrew where known and that's almost every mission. It's good stuff.

Ok, crunch time – it it worth it? Oh yes! But, you've probably already figured that out. Now, I'll admit I'm a little biased as I've found Avonmore's publications on Australian military history enjoyable and enlightening. But that aside, there is no other listing of all the combat missions over Australia during World War II (ok, I hear the sceptics point out the Yokosuka E14Y 'Glen' flights over Tassie, Melbourne and Sydney, but they weren't raids or recon in the sense of this book). I found this title informative, easily readable, choc full of facts and objective! So yes again – it's very well worthwhile.

This is a great book for any aviation enthusiast and especially for one who is interested in Australia's aviation or military history and it's available at a very competitive price. You can purchase it from Hyland's Bookshop in Melbourne hylandsbookshop@gmail.com or 03 9654 7448 and Avonmore Books in South Australia, www.avonmorebooks.com.au or 08 8431 9780 for about \$35 (plus postage where applicable). ISBN 9780994588913.

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