

CHAPTER 20

Kisarazu/No. 707 Kokutai

The Kisarazu and Kanoya *Ku* were the oldest bomber units in the IJN, both of which had operated Nells in the China theatre. When the Kisarazu *Ku* was re-equipped with the modern G4M1 Betty it was initially established as a land-attack training unit operating from Kisarazu Air Base on the southern shore of Tokyo Bay. It was reorganised into a combat unit during the IJN restructure of 1 April 1942, and assigned the tail code prefix “R” to represent the second *Romanji* syllable in the name Kisarazu, as “K” had already been allocated to the Kanoya *Ku*. The restructured *kokutai* was assigned to the 26th Air Flotilla under commanding officer Captain Konishi Yasuo.

The original inventory assignment was three full *chutai* of 27 bombers plus three spares. An advance detachment of five Bettys arrived at Kavieng from Truk on 21 August 1942, from where it conducted a two-hour familiarisation flight the next day, thus constituting the unit’s first South Seas mission. The first mission from Vunakanau, Rabaul, took place two days later with a full *chutai* of nine bombers raiding Guadalcanal. The following day fifteen Bettys returned to the same target led by *hikotaicho* Lieutenant Nabeta Miyoshi. By the end of the month the full *kokutai* of three *chutai* had arrived in the South Seas with a small detachment *in situ* at Kavieng to conduct patrols.

Thrown immediately into the Guadalcanal campaign, the unit’s losses were straightaway grievous. It lost six bombers to combat in its first month of operations, and ten more throughout September and October. During the late 1942 IJN restructure it was rebadged as No. 707 *Ku* on 1 November after which on 11 and 12 November it lost six more Bettys to combat. This meant that by mid-November its total losses to combat were 22 Bettys, with two more claimed by accidents. With its inventory reduced to a handful, it was decided to disband the unit as a fighting force. Accordingly on 1 December 1942, No. 707 *Ku*’s six remaining crews and Bettys were incorporated into No. 705 *Ku*, and No. 707 *Ku* was officially decommissioned.

Markings

The entire initial Kisarazu *Ku* Betty inventory consisted of early Model 11s in the brown and green *kumogata* camouflage scheme with a white fuselage band denoting assignment to the 26th Air Flotilla. The three *chutai* adopted the following tail codes and markings:

No. 1 *Buntai/Chutai*, R-301 to R-320 (no tail markings)

No. 2 *Buntai/Chutai*, R-321 to R-340 (one medium-width white horizontal tail stripe)

No. 3 *Buntai/Chutai*, R-341 to R-360 (two medium-width narrow horizontal tail stripes)

The No. 705 *Ku* mission log shows that five of the six surviving Bettys amalgamated from No. 707 *Ku* on 1 December 1942 were R-302, R-305, R-308, R-333 and R-338. These aircraft were later renumbered by No. 705 *Ku*, but it is possible some retained their original numbers.