

Introduction

This second volume of the *Pacific Profiles* series has the objective of portraying, as accurately as possible, the colours and unit markings of Japanese Army Air Force bombers and support types in the New Guinea theatre from 1942 to 1944. This objective is ambitious. As explained in *Pacific Profiles Volume One*, identifying JAAF unit markings in many cases can be a dark and hazardous art. Despite official yet ambiguous guidelines, such markings remained the prerogative of individual units, and as such largely lay within that narrow domain where they stayed. The colours and camouflage schemes provoked by this hostile theatre arguably produced the most diverse, yet haphazard, patterns in any air force of the Second World War. This created circumstances whereby markings of unrelated units could and were often similar. No official co-ordinated or centralised databases were compiled for JAAF unit markings.

However, this commonality is shared to some extent with the markings of its American counterpart in New Guinea – the USAAF Fifth Air Force. While certain theatre markings such as white wing leading edges and tails applied to single-engine fighters were officially decreed, the colourful heraldry systems and nose-art applied within squadrons were not. Most USAAF fighters in the theatre also had unique “buzz” or squadron numbers applied, and many of the bomber units applied unique alphabetic letters. No co-ordinated official lists for these exist either.

A paucity of adequate reference material has impeded past attempts to properly catalogue JAAF markings, especially the plethora of bomber, reconnaissance, transport, command, maintenance, air photo and liaison units in the wide theatre. Imaginative extrapolation and colour-guessing has created and sometimes consolidated false myths still perpetrated to this day, including markings which did not, in fact, exist. Often colours have been decided from monochrome images, a tempting but imperfect occupation.

Four decades of collecting material on this arcane subject has proved rewarding. Few publications, including Japanese-language ones, agree on interpretations, colours or even unit assignments. New Guinea, it seems, remains a lost theatre for the JAAF. The complexity of JAAF bomber and support operations in this challenging realm saw them operate alongside an eclectic inventory of fighters, covered in detail in *Pacific Profiles Volume One*.

Overpowering Allied technology and numbers eventually expelled the Imperial Japanese Army's 4th Air Force from the theatre. Thousands died in a jungle retreat. An inflexible Tokyo high command, far removed from the daily low-level terrors of Allied bombings, nonetheless ordered some units to withdraw their aircraft from Hollandia to Manila just in time.