

## CHAPTER 7 : THE NAMA-NAMBA MAN

### *Hien found in the Mountains*

**New Guinea Highlands, 24 July 1943**

*In 1976, deep in the New Guinea Highlands, the remains of a Japanese fighter pilot were exhumed under the supervision of Australian patrol officer Rick Giddings. His report stated that the fighter had an inline engine, indicating it was Kawasaki Ki-61 Hien. Some queried the conclusion, as they contended that no Japanese fighters had operated so far into this remote part of New Guinea, but Giddings was right.*

**I**n fact, an Australian infantry patrol had first surveyed the wreckage on 25 July 1943, led there by local tribesmen who had witnessed its demise. The fighter had crashed fourteen miles northwest of the mountain village of Asaloka (also known as Asaroka) and was overall dark green. However, what was the fighter doing in this obscure location?

By mid-1943 the war had mostly been fought in the coastal regions of New Guinea and had side-stepped the remote New Guinea Highlands. This was a massive area, rich in agriculture and heavily populated, but was geographically distinct from the remainder of Papua and New Guinea. Indeed, many parts of the Highlands had only experienced first European contact in the decade before the war.

However, the Highlands lay directly south of important Japanese bases on the northern coastline of New Guinea, and during 1943 the Japanese Army was increasingly wary of growing Allied activity there. In January 1943 some Australian commandos, known as Bena Force, had been established at the pre-war grass airfield at Bena Bena which had been developed to allow C-47 transport flights from Port Moresby.

At this time American interest in the area was for relatively mundane reasons: to grow fresh vegetables that could be flown to Port Moresby for military consumption. A US engineering detachment was sent to survey locations for airfields, assisted by photography from F-5 reconnaissance Lightnings. A site at Goroka (spelt Garoka on WWII maps) was chosen as most suitable, and accordingly on 12 June 1943 USAAF engineers arrived and commenced upgrading the existing grass airfield.

To try to divert attention from the Goroka development, the Australians cleared strips of kunai grass at Asaroka to make it appear to the airborne Japanese observer that it was being developed. They also built fires, struck tents and hung clothes out. Finally, hundreds of Chimbu tribesmen tramped through fresh grass areas at Asaroka so that obvious development could be seen from the air. This was done to divert attention from the airfield under construction at