



*American Curtiss P-40E Warhawks of the 7th Fighter Squadron in early April 1942. Two weeks beforehand they had been in action over Horn Island, and were the first Allied land-based fighters to see combat in the South Pacific.*

En route, two P-40Es aborted due to technical difficulties. Another aircraft, P-40E serial # 41-5572, collided with an obstacle at Cairns airfield on the afternoon of 9 March and was written off. The pilot, James Hutchison, was only slightly injured. As a result, just nine P-40Es arrived at Horn Island that same day. Given the basic conditions and lack of ground support, Morrissey was understandably cautious and limited his pilots to flying two-aircraft patrols while maintaining visual contact with the base.

On 14 March, eight No. 4 *Ku* G4M1 Bettys departed Vunakanau at 0810, led by the *buntaicho* Lieutenant Yamagata Shigeo. They were destined for Horn Island in what would be the landmark first attack on Australia from within the South Pacific theatre. However, the Bettys first made a detour to Lae, where they flew a starboard holding turn while a dozen Zeros took off and joined them. The fighters were neatly divided into two *chutai* as follows:

*Kawai chutai*

No. 1 *shotai*: *chutaicho* Lieutenant Kawai Shiro, Yoshimura Takuro and FPO3c Kikuchi Keiji.

No. 2 *shotai*: *shotaicho* FPO1c Yoshino Satoshi, FPO2c Ito Tsutomu and Sea1c Kokubun Take'ichi.