



Photo courtesy of Capt Stanley S. Nicolay  
*Three personalities of the Cactus Air Force pose after receiving the Navy Cross from Adm Nimitz on 30 September 1942. From left: Maj John L. Smith, Maj Robert E. Galer, and Capt Marion E. Carl.*

Marion Carl, now assigned to VMF-223, shot down three Japanese aircraft on 24 August to become the Marine Corps' first ace. Carl added two more kills on the 26th. The young fighter pilot found himself in competition with his squadron commander, as John Smith also began accumulating kills with regularity.

The 30th was a busy day for the Marine fighters on Guadalcanal. The previous day's action saw eight

Japanese aircraft shot down. However, by now, six of VMF-223's original complement of 19 Wildcats had also been destroyed or put out of action. The combat had been fast and furious since Smith and his squadron had arrived only nine days before. His young pilots were learning, but at a price.

One of the squadrons that shared Henderson Field with the Marines was the 67th Fighter Squadron, a somewhat orphaned group of Army Air Corps pilots, who had arrived on 22 August, led by Captain Dale Brannon, and their P-400 Airacobras, an export version of the Bell P-39. Despite its racy looks, the Airacobra found it difficult to get above 15,000 feet, where much of the aerial combat was taking place.

The 67th had had a miserable time of it so far because of their plane's poor performance, and morale was low. The pilots were beginning to question their value to the overall effort, and their commander, desperate for any measure of success to share with his men, asked Captain Smith if he and his squadron could accompany the Marines on their next scramble.

Smith agreed and on 30 August, the Marine and Army fighters—eight F4Fs and seven P-400s—launched for a lengthy combat air patrol.

The fighters rendezvoused north of Henderson, maintaining 15,000 feet because of the P-400s' lack of oxygen. Coastwatchers had identified a large formation of Japanese bombers heading toward Henderson but had lost sight of their quarry in the rapidly building wall of thunderclouds approaching the island. The defenders orbited for 40 minutes, watching for the enemy bombers and their escorts.

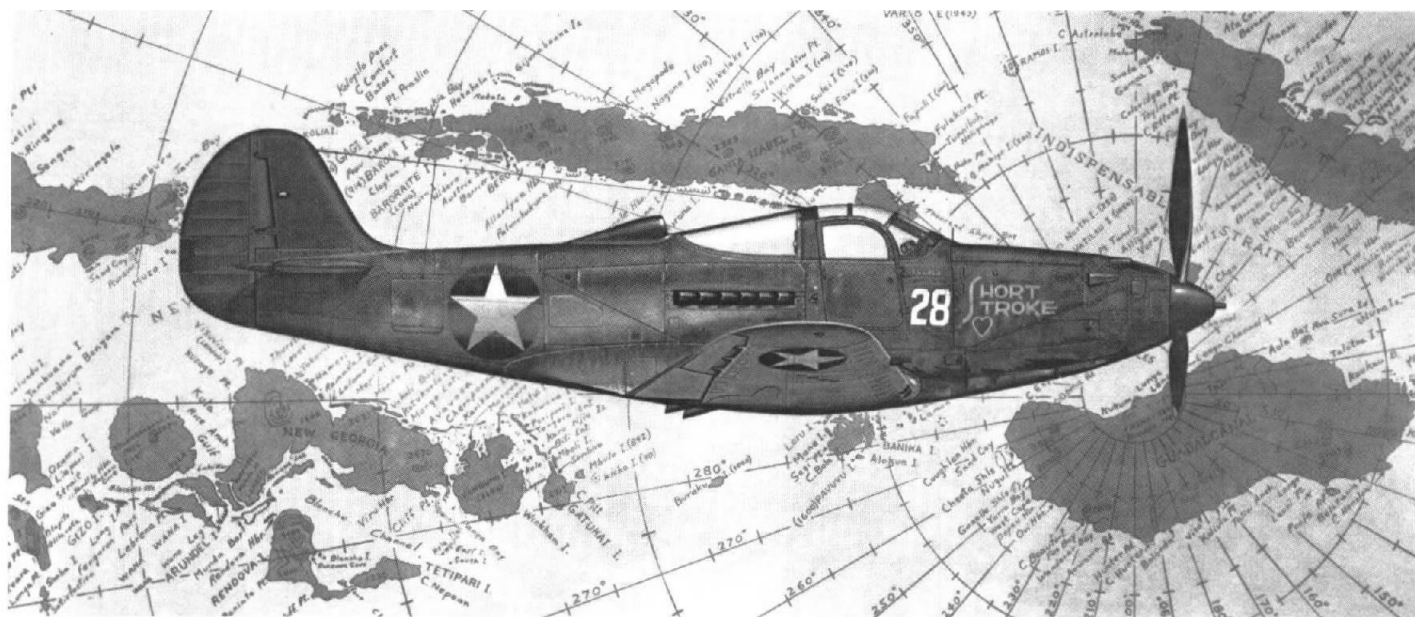
Suddenly, Captain Smith saw the seven Army fighters dive toward the water, in hot pursuit of Zeros that had emerged from the clouds. The highly maneuverable Zeros quickly turned the tables on the P-400s, however. As the Japanese fighters concentrated on the hapless Bells, the Marine Wildcats lined up behind the Zeros and quickly shot down four of the dark green Mitsubishis. The effect of the F4Fs' heavy machine guns was devastating.

Making a second run, Captain Smith found himself going head-to-head with a Zero, its pilot just as de-

*A profile of Bell P-39 Airacobra by Larry Lapadura. "Short Stroke" operated from Henderson Field on Guadalcanal from late 1942 to early 1943. The aircraft's deceptively streamlined shape belied a*

*mediocre performance, especially above 15,000 feet. However, the aircraft was well armed and used with success as a ground strafers.*

Author's Collection





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 11984  
*Maj John L. Smith poses in a Wildcat after returning to the States. A tough, capable combat leader, Smith received the Medal of Honor for his service at Guadalcanal.*



Photo courtesy of Capt Stanley S. Nicolay  
*1stLt Stanley S. Nicolay beside a Wildcat, probably just before deploying to the Pacific in 1942. He eventually shot down three Betty bombers at Guadalcanal. Note the narrow track of the Wildcat's main landing gear.*

terminated as his Marine opponent. Smith's guns finally blew the Zero up just before a collision or before one of the two fighter pilots would have had to turn away. By the end of the engagement, John Smith had shot down two more Zeros for a total of four kills. With nine kills, Smith was the leading Marine Corps ace at the time. Fourteen Japanese fighters—the bombers they were escorting had turned back—had been shot down by the Marine and Army pilots, although four of the P-400s were also destroyed. Two of the pilots returned to Guadalcanal; two did not.

The Marine fighter contingent at Guadalcanal was now down to five operational aircraft; it needed reinforcement immediately. Help was on the way, however, for VMF-224 arrived in the afternoon of the 30th, after John Smith and his tired, but elated squadron returned from their frantic encounter with the Japanese fighter force. For their first few missions, VMF-224's pilots accompanied the now-veteran Rainbow Squadron pilots of VMF-223.\*

\* When it was first established on 1 May 1942, VMF-223 was called the "Rainbow" Squadron. In May 1943, it changed its nickname to the more Marine-like "Bulldogs."

Captain Galer's VMF-224 had no time to acclimate to its new base. (The day after its arrival, it was in action.) The squadron landed on the 30th in the midst of an alert, and was quickly directed to its parking areas on the field.

The next two weeks saw several of the Marine aviators bail out of their Wildcats after tangling with the enemy Zeros. On 31 August, First Lieutenant Stanley S. Nicolay of VMF-224 was on a flight with Second Lieutenant Richard R. Amerine, Second Lieutenant Charles E. Bryans, and Captain John F. Dobbin, the squadron executive officer. It was VMF-224's first combat mission since its arrival the day before. As the Marines struggled past 18,000 feet on their way up to 20,000, Lieutenant Nicolay noticed two of the wingmen lagging farther and farther back.

He called Amerine and Bryans but got no response. He then called Dobbin and said he wanted to drop back to check on the wayward Wildcats. "It's too late to break up

the formation," Dobbin wisely said. "There's nothing we can do." Nicolay closed up on Dobbin and they continued on.

The two young aviators had problems with their primitive oxygen systems and lacking sufficient oxygen, they possibly had even passed out in the thin air. Nicolay recalled,

We never saw Bryans again.

It was so senseless. I remember thinking that after all their training and effort, neither one of them ever fired a shot in anger. They had no chance. The oxygen system was just a tiny, white triangular mask that fitted over the nose and mouth. You turned on the bottle, and that was it. No pressure system, nothing.

Apparently, the two Marine pilots had been jumped by roving Zeros. Bryans was thought to be killed almost immediately, while Amerine was able to bail out. He parachuted to the relative safety of the jungle, and as he attempted to

return to Henderson Field, he encountered several Japanese patrols on the way back, killing four enemy soldiers before returning to the Marine lines.

Marion Carl, who had 11 kills, had his own escape-and-evasion experience after he and his wingman, Lieutenant Clayton M. Canfield, were shot down on 9 September. Carl bailed out of his burning Wildcat and landed in the water where a friendly native scooped him up and hid him from the roving Japanese patrols. (Canfield had been quickly rescued by an American destroyer.)

The native took the ace to a native doctor who spoke English. The doctor gave Carl a small boat with an old motor which needed some work before it functioned properly. With the Japanese army all around, it was important that the American pilot get out as soon as he could.

Finally, he and the doctor arrived offshore of Marine positions on Guadalcanal. Dennis Byrd recalled Carl's return on the afternoon of 14 September:

A small motor launch operated by a very black native with a huge head of frizzled hair pulled up to the Navy jetty at Kukum. The tall white man tending the boat's wheezing engine was VMF-223's Captain Marion Carl. He had been listed as missing in action since September 9th and was presumed dead....Carl reported that on the day he disappeared, he'd shot down two more Jap bombers. Captain Carl's score was now 12 and Major Smith's, 14.

Now-Major Galer scored his squadron's first kills when he shot down two Zeros during a noontime raid of 26 bombers and eight Zero escorts over Henderson on 5 September. VMF-224 went up to intercept them, and the squadron commander knocked down a bomber



National Archives photo 208-PU-14X-1 PNT

*A rare photo of an exuberant LtCol Bauer as he demonstrates his technique to two ground crewmen. Intensely competitive, and known as "the Coach," Bauer was one of several Marine Corps aviators who received the Medal of Honor, albeit posthumously, at Guadalcanal.*

and a fighter, after which he was shot down by a Zero that tacked onto him from behind and riddled his Wildcat. Recalling the action in a wartime press release, Galer said:

I knew I'd be forced to land, but that Zero getting me dead to rights made me sore. I headed into a cloud, and instead of coming out below it as he expected, I came out on top and let him have it....

Then we both fell, but he was in flames and done for. I made a forced landing in a field, and before my wheels could stop rolling, Major Rivers J. Morrell and Lieutenant Pond of VMF-223, both forced their ships on the same deck—all within three minutes of each other!

Two days after his forced landing, Major Galer had to ditch his aircraft once more after another round with the Japanese. His flight was returning from a mission when it ran into a group of enemy

bombers. He related that:

One of them fell to my guns, and pulling out of the dive, I took after a Zero. But I didn't pull around fast enough, and his guns knocked out my engine, setting it on fire. We were at about 5,000 feet, but I feared the swirling mass of Japs more than the fire . . . so I laid over on my back and dove headlong for some clouds below me. Coming through the clouds, I didn't see any more Japs, and leveled off at 2,000 feet. I changed my angle of flight and grade of descent so I'd land as near as possible to shore. I set down in the drink some 200 or 300 yards from shore and swam in, unhurt.\*

\*This was not the first time Galer had a watery end to a flight. As a first lieutenant with VMF-2 in 1940, he had to ride his Grumman F3F biplane fighter in while approaching the carrier *Saratoga* (CV3). The Grumman sank and stayed on the bottom off San Diego for 40 years. It was discovered by a Navy exploration team and raised, somewhat the worse for wear. Retired Brigadier General Robert Galer was at the dock when his old mount found dry land once more.



# The Aircraft in the Conflict

The U.S. Navy and Marine Corps were definitely at a disadvantage when America entered World War II in December 1941. Besides other areas, their frontline aircraft were well behind world standards.

The Japanese did not suffer similarly, however, for they were busy building up their arsenal as they sought sources of raw materials they needed and were prepared to go to war to acquire. Besides possessing what was the finest aerial torpedo in the world—the Long Lance—they had the aircraft to deliver it. And they had fighters to protect the bombers. Although the world initially refused to believe how good Japanese aircraft and their pilots were, it wasn't long after the attack on Pearl Harbor that reality seeped in.

In many respects, the U.S. Army Air Force—it had been the U.S. Army Air Corps until 20 June 1941—and the Navy and Marine Corps had the same problems in the first two years of the war. The Army's top fighters were the Bell P-39 Airacobra and the Curtiss P-40B/E Tomahawk/Kittyhawk. The Navy and Marine Corps' two frontline fighters were the Brewster F2A-3 Buffalo and the Grumman F4F-3/4 Wildcat during 1942.

Of these single-seaters, only the Army's P-40 and the Navy's F4F achieved any measure of success against the Japanese in 1942. The P-40's main attributes were its diving speed, which let it disengage from a fight, and its ability to absorb punishment and still fly, a con-

fidence builder for its hard-pressed pilots. The Wildcat was also a tough little fighter ("built like Grumman iron" was a popular catch-phrase of the period), and had a devastating battery of four (for the F4F-3) or six .50-caliber machine guns (for the F4F-4) and a fair degree of maneuverability.

Both the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy also had outstanding aircraft. The Army's primary fighter of the early war was the Nakajima K.43 Hayabusa (Peregrine Falcon), a light, little aircraft, with a slim, tapered fuselage and a bubble canopy.

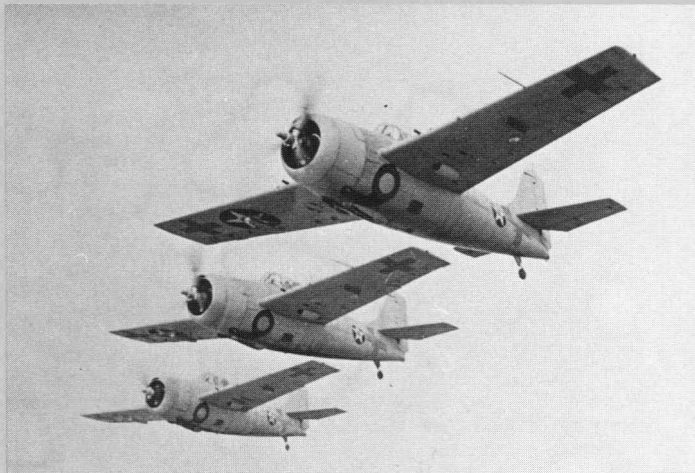
The Navy's fighter came to symbolize the Japanese air effort, even for the Japanese, themselves. The Mitsubishi Type "O" Carrier Fighter (its official designation) was as much a trend-setting design as was Britain's Spitfire or the American Corsair.

However, as author Norman Franks wrote, the Allied crews found that "the Japanese airmen were...far superior to the crude stereotypes so disparaged by the popular press and cartoonists. And in a Zero they were highly dangerous."

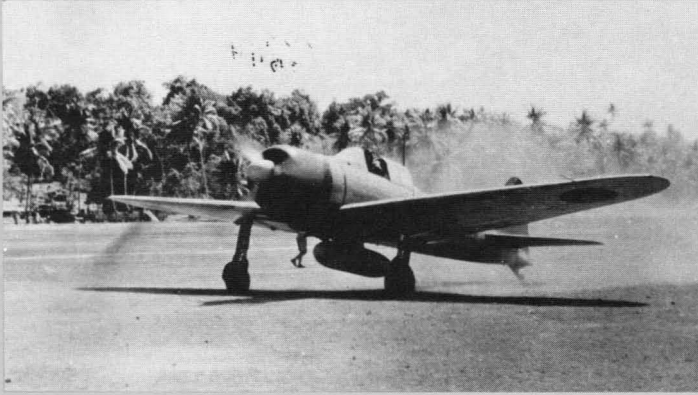
The hallmark of Japanese fighters had always been superb maneuverability. Early biplanes—which had been developed from British and French designs—set the pace. By the mid-1930s, the Army and Navy had two world-class fighters, the Nakajima Ki.27 and the Mitsubishi A5M series, respectively, both low-wing, fixed-gear aircraft. The Ki.27 did have a modern enclosed cockpit, while the A5M's cockpit was open (except for one variant that experimented with a canopy

*The first production model of Grumman's stubby, little Wildcat was the F4F-3, which carried four .50-caliber machine guns in the wings. Its wings did not fold, unlike the -4 which added two more machine guns and folding wings. These F4F-3s of VMF-121 carry prewar exercise markings.*

Author's Collection



*The Wildcat was a relatively small aircraft, as were most of the prewar fighters throughout the world. The aircraft's narrow gear track is shown to advantage in this ground view of a VMF-121 F4F-3.*



Author's Collection

*This A6M3 is taking off from Rabaul in 1943.*

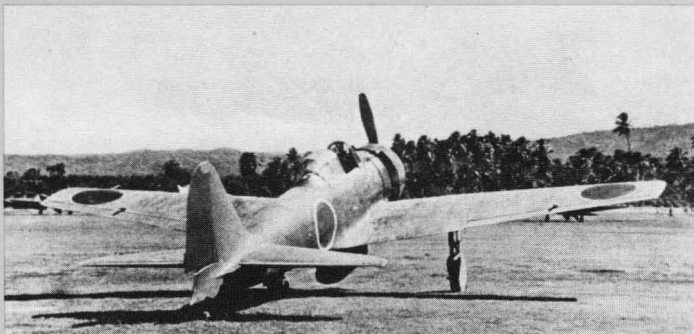
which was soon discarded in service.) A major and fatal disadvantage of most Japanese fighters was their light armament—usually a pair of .30-caliber machine guns—and lack of armor, as well as their great flammability.

When the Type "0" first flew in 1939, most Japanese pilots were enthusiastic about the new fighter. It was fast, had retractable landing gear and an enclosed cockpit, and carried two 20mm cannon besides the two machine guns. Initial operational evaluation in China in 1940 confirmed the aircraft's potential.

By the time of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the A6M2 was the Imperial Navy's standard carrier fighter, and rapidly replaced the older A5Ms still in service. As the A6M2 proved successful in combat, it acquired its wartime nickname, "Zero," although the Japanese rarely referred to it as such. The evocative name came from the custom of designating aircraft in

*The Zero's incredible maneuverability came at some expense from its top speed. In an effort to increase the speed, the designers clipped the folding wingtips from the carrier-based A6M2 and evolved the land-based A6M3, Model 32. The pilots were not impressed with the speed increase and the production run was short, the A6M3 reverting back to its span as the Model 22. The type was originally called "Hap," after Gen Henry "Hap" Arnold, Chief of the Army Air Force. Arnold was so angry at the dubious honor that the name was quickly changed to Hamp. This Hamp is shown in the Solomons during the Guadalcanal campaign.*

Author's Collection



Author's Collection

*Brewster's fat little F2A Buffalo is credited with a dismal performance in American and British service, although the Finns racked up a fine score against the Russians. This view of a Marine Brewster shows the aptness of its popular name, which actually came from the British. Its characteristic greenhouse canopy and main wheels tucked snugly into its belly are also well shown.*

reference to the Japanese calendar. Thus, since 1940 corresponded to the year 2600 in Japan, the fighter was the Type "00" fighter, which was shortened to "0." The western press picked up the designation and the name "Zero" was born.

The fighter received another name in 1943 which was almost as popular, especially among the American flight crews. A system of first names referred to various enemy aircraft, in much the same way that the postwar NATO system referred to Soviet and Chinese aircraft. The Zero was tagged "Zeke," and the names were used interchangeably by everyone, from flight crews to intelligence officers. (Other examples of the system included "Claude" [A5M], "Betty" [Mitsubishi G4M bomber], and "Oscar" [Ki.43].)

As discussed in the main text, the Navy and Marine Corps Wildcats were sometimes initially hard-pressed to defend their ships and fields against the large forces of Betty bombers and their Zero escorts, which had ranges of 800 miles or more through the use of drop tanks.

The Brewster Buffalo had little to show for its few encounters with the Japanese, which is difficult to understand given the type's early success during the Russo-Finnish War. The F2A-1, a lighter, earlier model of the -3 which served with the Marines, was the standard Finnish fighter plane. In its short combat career in American service, the Brewster failed miserably.

Thus, the only fighter capable of meeting the Japanese on anything approaching equal terms was the F4F, which was fortunate because the Wildcat was really all that was available in those dark days following Pearl Harbor. Retired Brigadier General Robert E. Galer described the Wildcat as "very rugged and very mistreated (at Guadalcanal)." He added:





Photo courtesy of Robert Mikes

*The A6M2-N floatplane version of the Zero did fairly well, suffering only a small loss in its legendary maneuverability. Top speed was somewhat affected, however, and the aircraft's relatively light armament was a detriment.*

Full throttle, very few replacement parts, muddy landing strips, battle damage, roughly repaired. We loved them. We did not worry about flight characteristics except when senior officers wanted to make them bombers as well as fighters.

The Japanese also operated a unique form of fighter. Other combatants had tried to make seaplanes of existing designs. The U.S. Navy had even hung floats on the Wildcat, which quickly became the "Wildcatfish." The British had done it with the Spitfire. But the resulting combination left much to be desired and sapped the original design of much of its speed and maneuverability.

The Japanese, however, seeing the need for a water-based fighter in the expanses of the Pacific, modified the A6M2 Zero, and came up with what was arguably the most successful water-based fighter

*A good view of an early F4U-1 under construction in 1942. The massive amount of wiring and piping for the aircraft's huge Pratt & Whitney engine shows up here, as do the Corsair's gull wings.*

Author's Collection



of the war, the A6M2-N, which was allocated the Allied codename "Rufe."

Manufactured by Mitsubishi's competitor, Nakajima, float-Zeros served in such disparate climates as the Aleutians and the Solomons. Although the floats bled off at least 40 mph from the land-based version's top speed, they seemed to have had only a minor effect on its original maneuverability; the Rufe acquired the same respect as its sire.

While the F4F and P-40 (along with the luckless P-39) held the line in the Pacific, other, newer designs were leaving production lines, and none too soon. The two best newcomers were the Army's Lockheed P-38 Lightning and the Navy's Vought F4U Corsair. The P-38 quickly captured the headlines and public interest with its unique twin-boomed, twin-engine layout. It soon developed into a long-range escort, and served in the Pacific as well as Europe.

The Corsair was originally intended to fly from aircraft carriers, but its high landing speed, long nose that obliterated the pilot's view forward during the landing approach, and its tendency to bounce, banished the big fighter from American flight decks for a while. The British, however, modified the aircraft, mainly by clipping its wings, and flew it from their small decks.

Deprived of its new carrier fighter—having settled on the new Grumman F6F Hellcat as its main carrier fighter—the Navy offered the F4U to the Marines. They took the first squadrons to the Solomons, and after a few disappointing first missions, they made the gull-winged fighter their own, eventually even flying it from the small decks of Navy escort carriers in the later stages of the war.

*The Marine pilot of this F4U-1, Lt Donald Balch, contemplates his good fortune by the damaged tail of his fighter. The Corsair was a relatively tough aircraft, but like any plane, damage to vital portions of its controls or powerplant could prove fatal.*

Author's Collection





National Archives 80G-54284

*This "bird-cage" Corsair is landing at Espiritu Santo in September 1943. The aircraft's paint is well-weathered and its main gear tires are "dusty" from the coral runways of the area.*



National Archives 80G-54279

*1stLt Rolland N. Rinabarger of VMF-214 in his early F4U-1 Corsair at Espiritu Santo in September 1943. Badly shot up by Zeros during an early mission to Kahili only two weeks after this photo was taken, Lt Rinabarger returned to the States for lengthy treatment. He was still in California when the war ended. The national insignia on his Corsair is outlined in red, a short-lived attempt to regain that color from the prewar marking after the red circle was deleted following Pearl Harbor to avoid confusion with the Japanese "meatball." Even this small amount of red was deceptive, however, and by mid-1944, it was gone from the insignia again. Note the large mud spray on the aft under fuselage.*

Besides the two main fighters, the Army's Oscar and the Navy's Zeke and its floatplane derivative, the Rufe, the Japanese flew a wide assortment of aircraft, including land-based bombers, such as the Mitsubishi G4M (codenamed Betty) and Ki.21 (Sally). Carrier-based bombers included the Aichi D3A divebomber (the Val) which saw considerable service during the first three years of the war, and its stablemate, the torpedo bomber from Nakajima, the B5N (Kate), one of the most capable torpedo-carriers of the first half of the war. The Marine Corps squadrons in the Solomons regularly encountered these aircraft. First Lieutenant James Swett's two engagements on 7 April 1943 netted the young Wildcat pilot seven Vals, and the Medal of Honor.

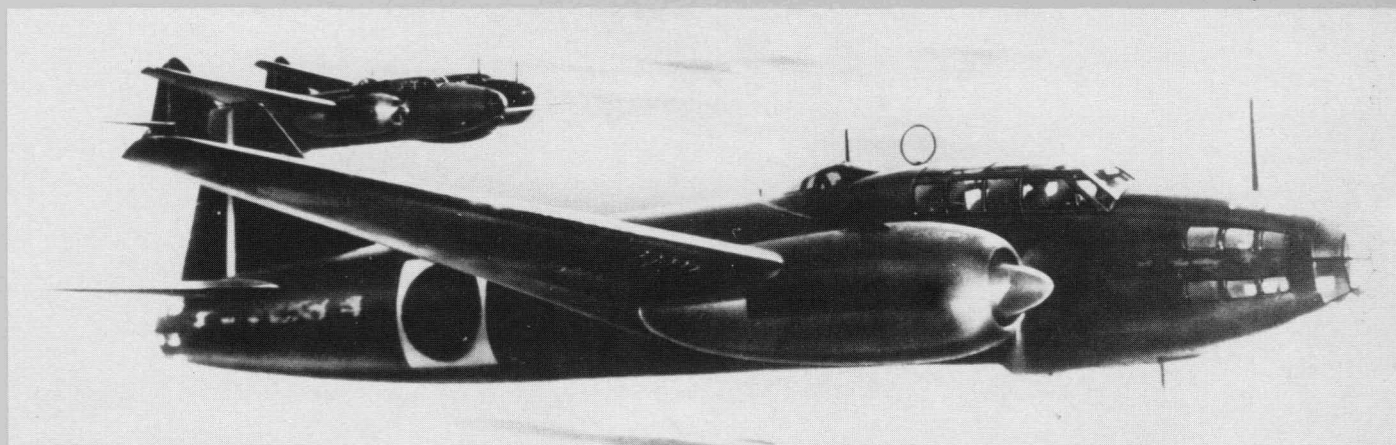
Although early wartime propaganda ridiculed Japanese aircraft and their pilots, returning Allied aviators told different stories, although the details of their experiences were kept classified. Each side's culture provided the basis for their aircraft design

*Mitsubishi G4M Betty bombers, perhaps during the Solomons campaign. Probably the best Japanese land-based bomber in the war's first two years, the G4M series enjoyed a long range,*

philosophies. Eventually, the Japanese were overwhelmed by American technology and numerical superiority. However, for the important first 18 months of the Pacific war, they had the best. But, as was also the case in the European theaters, a series of misfortunes, coincidences, a lack of understanding by leaders, as well as the drain of prolonged combat, finally allowed the Americans and their Allies to overcome the enemy's initial edge.

*but could burst into flames under attack, much to the chagrin of its crews. The type flew as a suicide aircraft, and finally, painted white with green crosses, carried surrender teams to various sites.*

*Photo courtesy Robert Mikesh*



Galer would also be shot down three more times during his flying career—twice more during World War II and once during a tour in Korea.

The last half of September 1942 was a time of extreme trial for the Cactus Air Force (Cactus was the codename for Guadalcanal). Some relief for the Marine squadrons came in the form of bad weather and the arrival of disjointed contingents of Navy aircraft and crews who were displaced from carriers which were either sunk, or damaged. *Saratoga* (CV3) and *Enterprise* (CV6) had been torpedoed or bombed and sent back to rear area repair stations. The remaining carriers, *Hornet* (CV8) and *Wasp* (CV7), patrolled off Guadalcanal, their captains and admirals decidedly uneasy about exposing the last American flattops in the Pacific as meaty targets to the numerically superior Japanese ships and aircraft.

*Wasp* took a lurking Japanese submarine's torpedoes on 15 September while covering a convoy. Now only *Hornet* remained. Navy planes and crews from *Enterprise*, *Saratoga*, and now *Wasp* flew into Henderson Field to supplement the hard-pressed Marine fighter and bomber squadrons there. It was still a meager force of 63 barely operational aircraft, a collection of Navy and Marine F4Fs and SBDs, Navy Grumman TBF Avenger torpedo bombers, and a few forlorn Army P-400s. A few new Marine pilots from VMF-121 filtered in on 25 September. However, two days later, the crews from *Enterprise's* contingent took their planes out to meet their carrier steaming in to arrive on station off Guadalcanal. As the weather broke on the 27th, the *Enterprise* crews took their leave of Guadalcanal.

The next day, the Japanese mounted their first raid in nearly two weeks. Warned by the coast-

watchers, Navy and Marine fighters rose to intercept the 70-plane force. Now a lieutenant colonel, Harold "Indian Joe" Bauer was making one of his periodic visits from Efate, and scored a kill, a Zero, before landing.

A native of North Platte, Nebraska, Bauer was part-Indian (as was Major Gregory "Pappy" Boyington). A veteran of 10 years as a Marine aviator, he watched the progress of the campaign at Guadalcanal from his rear-area base on Efate. He would come north, using as an excuse the need to check on those members of his squadron who had been sent to Henderson and would occasionally fly with the Cactus fighters.

His victory on the 28th was his first, and soon, Bauer was a familiar face to the Henderson crews. Bauer was visiting VMF-224 on 3 October when a coastwatcher reported a large group of Japanese bombers inbound for Henderson. VMF-223 and -224 took off to intercept the raiders. The Marine Wildcats accounted for 11 enemy aircraft; Lieutenant Colonel Bauer claimed four, making him an ace.

On 30 September, Admiral Chester Nimitz, Commander-in-Chief, Pacific, braved a heavy rainstorm to fly in to Henderson for an awards ceremony. John Smith, Marion Carl, and Bob Galer, as well as some 1st Marine Division personnel, received the Navy Cross. Other members of the Cactus Air Force, Navy and Marine, were decorated with Distinguished Flying Crosses. Nimitz departed in a blinding rain after presenting a total of 27 medals to the men of the Cactus Air Force.

### *Combat in October*

October was a pivotal month for the air campaign on Guadalcanal. It was a time when the men who had arrived in August were clearly at the end of their endurance, for sick-

ness and fatigue hit them after they had survived Japanese bullets. However, new squadrons and crews were arriving, among them VMF-121, led by Major Leonard K. "Duke" Davis. His executive officer, Captain Joseph J. Foss, would soon make a name for himself.

Foss came from Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and as a boy had developed a shooting eye which would stand him in good stead over Guadalcanal. He enlisted in the Marine Corps in February 1940 and received his wings of gold 13 months later. Originally considered too old to fly fighters (he was 27), he was ordered to a photo reconnaissance squadron in San Diego. However, he kept submitting requests for transfer to fighters and was finally sent to VMF-121.

A few days after arriving at Henderson, Foss scored his first victory on 13 October. As an attacking Zero fired and missed, Foss fired his guns sending the enemy fighter down. Three more Zeros then attacked Foss, putting holes in his Wildcat's oil system. The newly blooded pilot had to make a deadstick landing back at Cactus Base.

Other veterans of the campaign had not stayed idle. Major Smith of VMF-223 had taken his squadron up on 2 October against a raid by Japanese bombers and fighters. The Zero escorts dove on the climbing Navy and Marine Wildcats, quickly shooting down two fighters from VMF-223. Smith exited a cloud to confront three Zeros. He blasted a fighter into a ball of flame. However, the two remaining Zeros got on his tail and peppered the struggling little blue-gray F4F with cannon and machine gun fire. Listening to a repaired radio from a damaged SBD back at Guadalcanal, the crews of Dennis Byrd's VMSB-232 heard Captain Carl call to his skipper. "John, you've got a Zero on your tail!" "I know, I know," Smith