Beyond Pearl Harbor: The Untold Stories of Japan's Naval Airmen by Ron Werneth

The Pacific Air War Through Japanese Eyes!

This book is the story of the air war in the Pacific through the eyes of the last surviving Imperial Japanese Naval aviators of World War II, chronicled through never before published first-hand accounts, wartime diaries, and private photographs. Living in Japan for over half a decade, the author befriended the survivors of Pearl Harbor, Midway, Guadalcanal and Iwo Jima to gather this trove of stories and images. Meticulously translated and painstakingly researched, all of the veterans accounts in this book are supported by both official Japanese and Allied records, together with first-hand narratives of American and British participants in these pivotal, historic battles.

My Personal Review:
For decades, our knowledge of the life and times of Imperial Japanese Navy pilots was pretty much limited to the Saburo Sakai story. In recent years authors like Henry Sakaida, Osamu Tagaya, Christopher Shores, Ikuhiko Hata and Yasuho Izawa have redressed that deficiency through authoritative books detailing the combats of IJN pilots and units. A brand new addition to that short list is Ron Werneth's impressive BEYOND PEARL HARBOR, fresh off the Schiffer presses. This is one impressive book, folks! Anyone interested in the Pacific air war will want to pick up a copy!

BEYOND PEARL HARBOR relates the firsthand experiences of 17 IJN pilots and/or maintenance personnel. Six flew or serviced Val dive-bombers; eight, Kate torpedo bombers; and three, the fabled Zero fighter. Several saw combat prior to 7 December 1941. Following the Pearl Harbor attack, almost all took part in the early carrier battles (Coral Sea, Midway, etc.). Subsequently they were transferred to new units, served as instructors, etc. The most famous of the 17 is probably Val pilot Zenji Abe.
Having said that, Werneth's book deserves six stars for a whole buncha reasons. First and foremost, it offers an unparalled insider's look at a little-known subject. Werneth's depth of IJN knowledge and skill as a writer are everywhere evident in the book. He interweaves authoritative historical commentary within each individual's account, setting the stage for that person's war story and supplementing their comments with "what-actually-happened-when" details. Another plus: those Japanese-to-English translations are first rate; kudos to Keigo Nakahama. Photo coverage is superb; dozens of nicely reproduced black & white and color photographs, maps and aircraft profiles.

Short and sweet: BEYOND PEARL HARBOR is military aviation history/research at its best. This book is worth every cent of its $59.95 price-tag. Highly recommended.

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P.S. Great job, Mr. Werneth!

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