

COST OF WAR

ILLUSTRATING THE HUGE LOSSES OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR, WE PRESENT A FURTHER SELECTION OF SHOT-DOWN, WRECKED, AND CAPTURED AIRCRAFT FROM OUR FILES

BY MICHAEL O'LEARY

American Intelligence officers examine the remains of a Mitsubishi A6M Zero on battle-torn Wake Island on 4 September 1945. The heroic defense against the Japanese invasion that began in conjunction to the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor helped rally the American public. Prior to the enemy attack on the island, about 1200 civil employees of the Morrison-Knudsen Civil Engineering Company (see related article in this issue) were carrying out improvements and defensive modifications on Wake. These men were veterans of such amazing projects as Boulder Dam. The Marines on the island gave the enemy a series of humiliating defeats and this caused senior naval aviator Cmdr. Winfield Cunningham to radio, "Send More Japs!" Of course, with very limited resources, there was no way the Navy and Marines could withstand the constant barrages and bombings and the survivors surrendered on 23 December. "Remember Wake Island!" became a rallying cry and as the war progressed, Americans carried out occasional attacks against the enemy but Wake was mainly bypassed. Around 100 of the civilian workers were retained to perform repairs for the Japanese (the rest being sent to POW camps with few surviving). Feeling that his manliness had been insulted by American air raids, Capt. Shigematsu Sakai had all civilians murdered. One escaped (his name never discovered). He carved the message "98 US PW 5-10-43" on a coral rock near where the victims had been buried. He was later captured and Sakai personally cut off his head to the roaring approval of his drunken officers. However, this unknown prisoner's message allowed the Americans to learn of the murders and later execute Sakai. American attacks had reduced Japanese aircraft on the island to rubble and there was nothing to do with them except to note what was left. The Zero had been knocked out of action by American bomb blasts and the flimsy nature of the aluminum skin is shown to advantage.

The remains of a US Marine Corps VMF-211 Grumman F4F-3 Wildcat were used by the Japanese to form part of a defensive barrier. Unfortunately, no thought was given about returning this significant artifact from one of America's most heroic early WWII battles back to the USA.



Surrounded by rusty exhaust collectors, a Marine photographer took this detailed photo of the hinomaru on a lesser damaged Zero.

