

STORM OVER THE PACIFIC

THE SAGA OF THE 318TH FIGHTER GROUP AT WAR - PART TWO
BY STEVE BLAKE

Brigadier General Ernest M. "Mickey" Moore, the CO of VII Fighter Command, arranged to have three dozen of the 21st Fighter Group's new, very-long-range (VLR) P-38Ls in Hawaii — and a few of its pilots — temporarily transferred to the 318th Fighter Group on Saipan. They arrived there on 11 and 12 November after 3500-mile ferry trips across the Central Pacific. Although they were integrated into the Group's three squadrons, since they would be flying separate missions from the P-47s they were designated the Provisional Lightning Squadron. Two of the 21st FG pilots, 1st Lts. Fred C. Erbele Jr. and Bill Eustis, both now TDY (on temporary duty) with the 333rd FS, had flown P-39s with their 72nd



Some of the P-47s were brought down into the hangar deck but it was a tight fit aboard *Natoma Bay*.



Thunderbolts begin to be positioned aboard *Natoma Bay* on 1 June 1944 in Pearl Harbor.