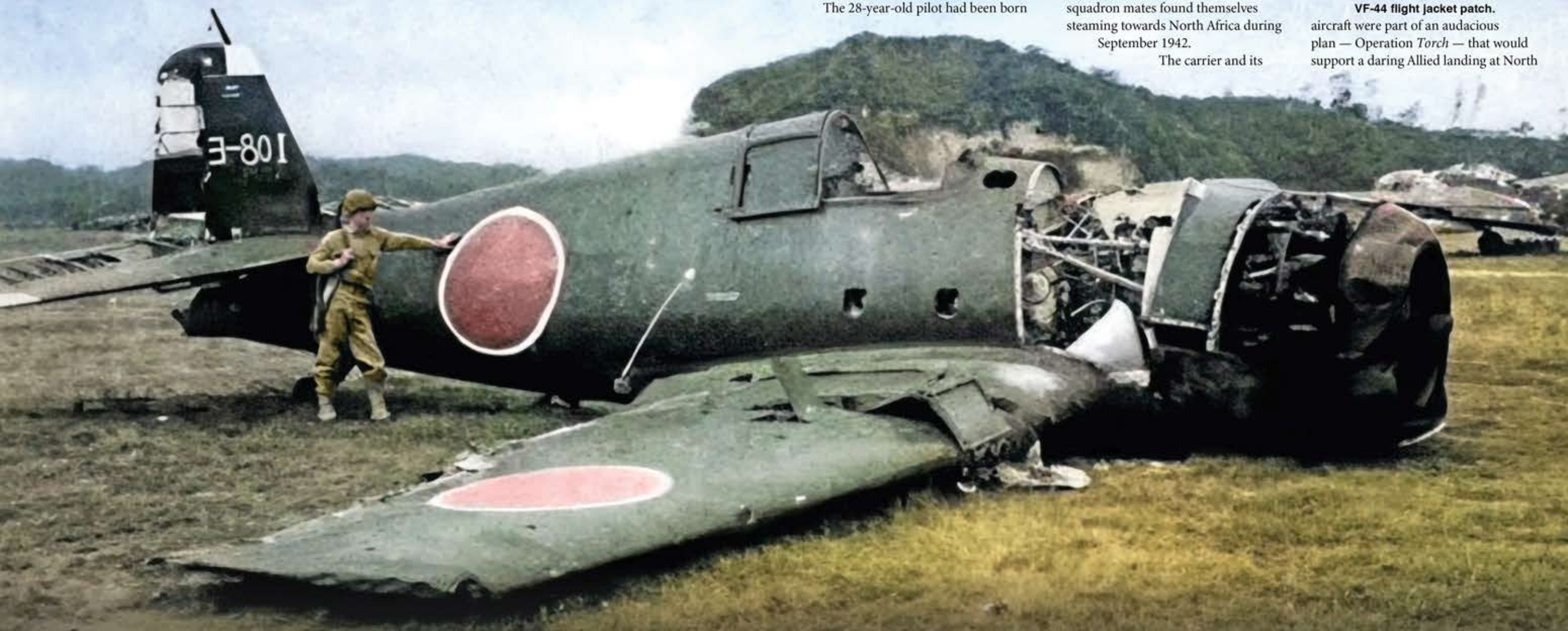


HINOMARU HELLCAT

HOW A GRUMMAN F6F-5 WAS CAPTURED BY THE JAPANESE. ITS PILOT WAS UNIQUE IN NAVY HISTORY — BEING THE ONLY AVIATOR POW HELD BY THE JAPANESE AND GERMANS
BY MARSHALL WAINWRIGHT



For Hellcat pilot Charles Valentine August, history appeared to be repeating itself — and not in a good way. The date was 4 January 1945 and American forces were hitting the Japanese hard, destroying a huge variety of targets as an iron fist closed around the Home Islands. On this particular early morning, Cmdr. Malcom T. Wordell had planned to lead a flight of Grumman F6F-5 Hellcats from the deck of the USS *Langley* (CVL-27) so that the fighters could escort six TBF-3 Avengers that would be attacking targets at Kobi on the island fortress of Formosa.

After briefing, the pilots manned their aircraft and August strapped into the cockpit of F6F-5 BuNo 71441. The 28-year-old pilot had been born

in Royalton, Illinois, but his family moved to Whittier, California, and he would go on to study at the University of California. On 16 October 1940, August had registered for the draft that was now in place and this led him to a commission as a lieutenant (junior grade). As a young man, he was always interested in aviation so he applied for flight school and was accepted, beginning his training at NAS Corpus Christi as part of Class 3-A.

Passing through flight school with no problem, August was awarded his wings of gold and assigned to VF-9. At that time, the fighter squadron was flying the stubby Grumman F4F-3 Wildcat from the USS *Ranger* (CV-4) and August along with his fellow squadron mates found themselves steaming towards North Africa during September 1942.

The carrier and its



VF-44 flight jacket patch. aircraft were part of an audacious plan — Operation *Torch* — that would support a daring Allied landing at North

Hellcat BuNo 71441 shortly after it had been discovered by Marines at the sprawling Japanese base at Yokosuka. Although records for this aircraft while in Japanese hands appear to have been destroyed at the end of the war, it is thought the F6F-5 had been flown by the enemy until it was damaged in another crash-landing.