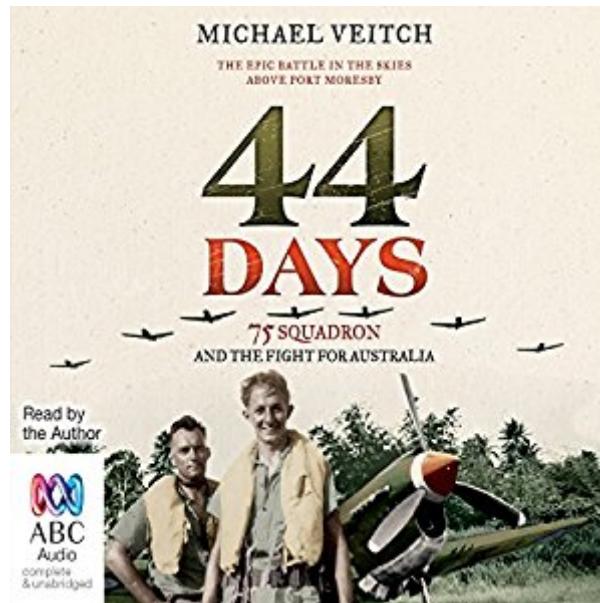




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# 44 Days: 75 Squadron And The Fight For Australia



## Synopsis

The epic World War II story of Australia's 75 Squadron - and the 44 days when these brave and barely-trained pilots fought alone against the Japanese. In March and April 1942, RAAF 75 Squadron bravely defended Port Moresby for 44 days when Australia truly stood alone against the Japanese. This group of raw young recruits scrambled ceaselessly in their Kittyhawk fighters to an extraordinary and heroic battle, the story of which has been left largely untold. The recruits had almost nothing going for them against the Japanese war machine, except for one extraordinary leader named John Jackson, a balding, tubby Queenslander - at 35 possibly the oldest fighter pilot in the world - who said little, led from the front, and who had absolutely no sense of physical fear. Time and time again this brave group were hurled into battle, against all odds and logic, and succeeded in mauling a far superior enemy - whilst also fighting against the air force hierarchy. After relentless attack, the squadron was almost wiped out by the time relief came, having succeeded in their mission - but also paying a terrible price. Michael Veitch, actor, presenter and critically acclaimed author, brings to life the incredible exploits and tragic sacrifices of this courageous squadron of Australian heroes.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I loved this book, all Australians should take the time to read it. 44 Days is totally factual, easy to read and packed with information. A fabulous historical record, of how close Aus was to destruction.

Like a lot of our war experience only the grit of the front line operatives got us through. Any contact with higher officers seems to do more harm than good

Papua New Guinea's main airport, at its capital of Port Moresby, is Jackson International Airport. Many of us know that Sydney airport is named after Charles Kingsford-Smith, an Australian aviation hero, but few would have heard of John Jackson, another equally deserving Australian hero. Squadron Leader John Jackson was killed in action whilst leading a small group of Australian fighter pilots of No 75 Squadron defending Port Moresby against a massive Japanese air threat in a 44 day period in early 1942. This book tells the story, largely unknown or forgotten today, of this extraordinary air campaign which literally saved Australia. Michael Veitch has had a lifelong passion for aircraft and aviation and has previously published a couple of other WWII aviation related books. He displays great depth of research and obvious affection for the subject. Although the events in 44 Days are adequately covered in official histories for those with the time and inclination to dig them out, Michael has done a great service to 75 Squadron's heritage, and general awareness, by breaking out the initial air defence of Port Moresby into a more readable format. Even though I'm a former Commanding Officer of 75 Squadron, with these events in my DNA, I was still turning pages to see what happened next. As we used to say, this book is a cracking good read. Michael has the happy knack of re-creating the period and making the reader feel right in the thick of the appalling conditions at the Seven Mile strip outside Port Moresby. The only consolation was that the Japanese at their bases north of the Owen Stanley Range endured equally appalling conditions. The Moresby air campaign is a tribute to Australian resilience, adaptability, and just plain old fashioned getting on with the job. It's easy to get angry about the squadron's apparent abandonment by higher HQ in Australia because of the atrocious conditions and slow logistics support. But things happened so fast in pure desperation, and everyone was totally committed to operations, that they just had to make the best of it. These days, instead of a single unsupported squadron, we'd normally deploy at least a wing, and usually a group, with plenty of capacity to oversee these issues. There are some obvious errors which will be corrected for the second edition. Sir Charles Burnett wasn't a Wing Commander when appointed Chief of Staff of the RAAF - he was a superannuated RAF Air Marshal, promoted to Acting RAAF Air Chief Marshal, a rank he subsequently retained and Darwin was bombed on 19 February 1942, not 19 January. Regarding the first bombing of Darwin, I'm surprised that Michael omitted mention of the courageous American force of eleven Kittyhawks from the 49th Pursuit Group which was entirely destroyed with two of its pilots killed. However, they did manage to shoot

down two Japanese bombers, the first enemy aircraft shot down over Australia. It isn't generally known that it was American pilots who fought and died defending Australia when it was attacked for the first time in its history. The satellite airfields of Strauss and Livingstone near Darwin were named in honour of the two American pilots killed. A small point perhaps, but it helps explain the continuing operational bond between Australia and the USA which some find puzzling. The book clearly shows how the initial, largely chaotic but ultimately successful air defence of Port Moresby had a disproportionate strategic effect. Moresby's complex of airstrips, ground installations and harbour facilities was absolutely vital for an Allied counter-attack, and by preventing Japanese air power from neutralising it, 75 Sqn and its Kittyhawks bought valuable time, but at great cost. The circumstances surrounding the death of the squadron's beloved CO, 'old' John Jackson, are particularly poignant. Another issue in '44 Days' is the elephant in the room really - is defence preparedness. In the mid-1930s the United States wasn't threatened by anyone, and was still suffering the lingering effects of the great depression. Yet it realised it had to upgrade its military capability in response to ominous developments in Europe, and it developed a range of modern fighter aircraft, including the P40 Kittyhawk. The lesson is clear. The best time to boost military capability is when you're not at war and have time. '44 Days' is an essential part of Australia's history, and one which should make us better remember our true heroes. I thoroughly commend this wonderfully readable book. Bill Evans

A great story about the men of 75 Squadron RAAF holding out against the Japanese at Port Moresby at the peak of Japanese dominance in early 1942. The story is well researched and interesting, and is written at a pace that keeps the readers interest. This book is clearly written for an Australian audience, and even as an Australian certain parochial passages like "Then next morning, 5 April, Jackson led a force of seven Kittyhawks to attack seven bombers and their escort in an intense air battle that rivalled the fiercest engagements of the Battle of Britain." can be frustrating to anyone who has a fairly broad knowledge of air warfare in the Second World War. It is particularly disappointing in an otherwise well written book that such a ridiculous comparison is made, given that 75 Squadron's story is compelling enough in it's own right, and such statements achieve nothing but to discredit the author. Other than that small point though, this is a great story and an entertaining read that is worth a look for anyone with an interest in aerial warfare in the Second World War.

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