



Before They Were the Black Sheep: Marine Fighting Squadron VMF-214 and the Battle for the Solomon Islands

Carl O. Dunbar

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Wartime letters of a New Englander's journey from innocence to elite fighter squadron pilot

“A must-read for young Navy and Marine Corps officers as they enter aviation training.”—
Lt. Gen. Robert F. Milligan, U.S. Marine Corps (retired)

“An intriguing look at Marine aviation in World War II by a sensitive and intelligent pilot; few narratives provide as much insight into the intensely personal feelings of a pilot in combat.”—Walter Boyne, author of *The Influence of Air Power upon History*

“Offers a compelling look into the world of a young man who left the comfort of civilian life to become a pilot in one of the best known combat fighter squadrons of the Pacific War. Lt. Carl O. Dunbar Jr.'s letters home remind us of the personal side of the Second World War.”—Michael H. Creswell, author of *A Question of Balance*

Before the Marine Fighting Squadron VMF-214 became known as the Black Sheep squadron led by “Pappy” Boyington, this air group was already flying missions from Guadalcanal. Commissioned in 1942, the squadron was originally known as “The Swashbucklers.”

Lt. Carl Dunbar was one of the squadron's original pilots, and his letters home describe the training and living conditions he faced as a Marine in the Pacific theater during the early years of World War II. Dunbar ultimately flew eighty-two missions during the Solomon campaign, and this volume includes his private logbook.

Like many veterans, after returning to the United States Dunbar rarely spoke about his wartime service. Only after his death did his son Peter discover this trove of material, and his commentary provides context for each of his father's letters. Both personal and universal, this volume offers a glimpse of what life was like for a man with a great sense of loyalty and compassion caught up in the war of his generation.

Peter M. Dunbar is a lawyer and partner with the Tallahassee-based firm of Pennington, Moore, Wilkinson, Bell and Dunbar and serves as an adjunct professor of law at Florida State University.

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