



The Aces of Fighting 17: VF-17's Top Guns in World War II

Lee Cook

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They were called the deadliest fighter squadron in action in the South Pacific; U.S. Navy Fighting Squadron Seventeen, famous with their Skull and Crossbones insignia, became one of the most successful squadrons of WWII. Flying the new Chance Vought F4U Corsair, which at the time of its introduction into service, was the most powerful fighter in the U.S Navy in World War II.

Flying missions to one of the Japanese strongholds in the South Pacific, Fighting 17 shot down 152 Japanese aircraft in aerial combat in only 76 days. The squadron had more aces (thirteen) than any other squadron at that time with Ira "Ike" Kepford the leading Navy ace at the end of his tour with sixteen aerial victories. Two more went on to reach ace status with Fighting 84, and at the end of the war Fighting 17 had the top four Navy Corsair aces. "Ike" Kepford, Roger Hedrick, Tom Blackburn, and John M. Smith were respectively the Navy's first, second, third, and fourth leading Corsair Aces.

One of the outstanding contributions made by Fighting 17 was providing proof under battle conditions of the suitability of the F4U Corsair for carrier operations as they were the first into combat flying off a carrier with the F4U.

Lee Cook, author of *The Skull and Crossbones Squadron - VF-17 in World War II*, and *Fighting 17 - A Photographic History of VF-17 in World War II* and leading authority on Tom Blackburn's *Fighting 17*, after seventeen years of meticulous original research presents this new book.

The book was greatly enhanced by considerable Fighting 17 family member involvement. They have supplied original material and photographs that have not previously appeared in published works. *The Aces of Fighting 17* has a detailed biography of each ace that served with Fighting 17 and has a host of hitherto unpublished photographs covering the squadron's aces.

This is the story of the best of the best, the elite, the aces of Fighting 17.

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