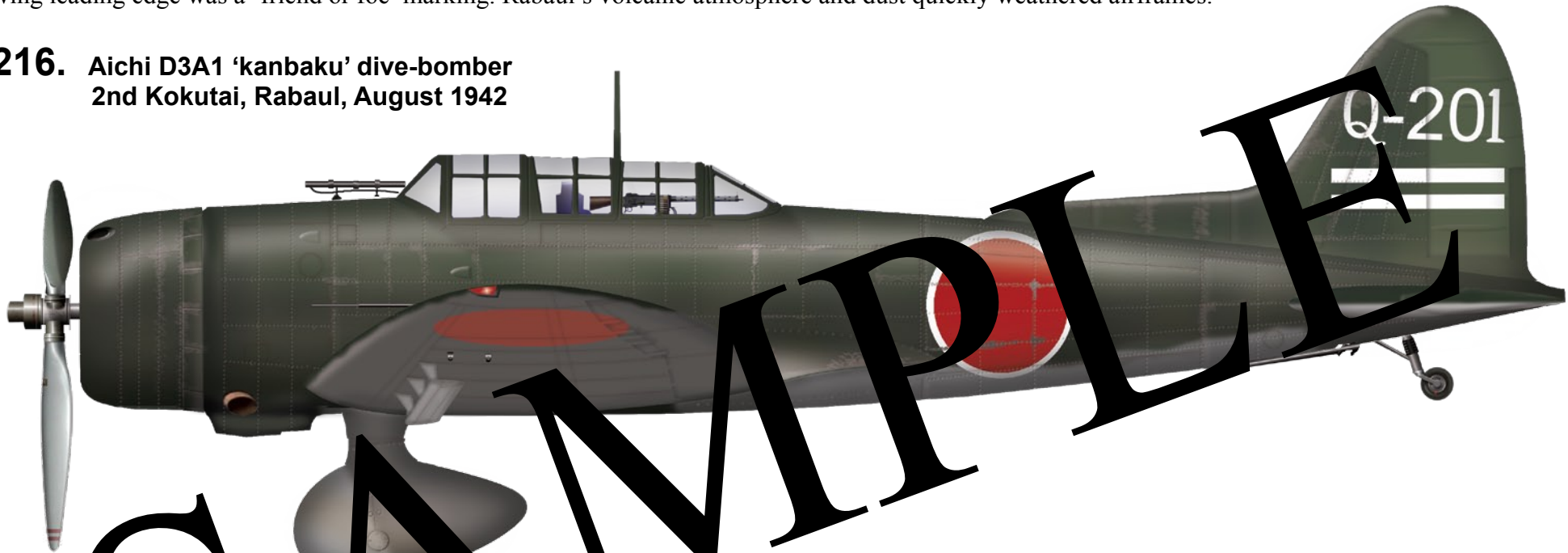


This 'Irving' night-fighter with tail code U1-20 served with the 251st Kokutai at Lakunai, Rabaul in mid 1943. Note the angled protruding pitot tube under the fuselage, installed on the night-fighter version. This allowed clear line-of-sight through flat Perspex panels on the nose's underside, so the pilot could aim the downward-firing oblique cannon. The Tainan Kokutai became the 251st Kokutai in November 1942 during a reshuffle on Navy air units, with prefix 'U1' replacing the 'V'. Note that the hinomaru has a white band, and is positioned quite away further back along the fuselage, as per factory markings. The yellow wing leading edge was a 'friend or foe' marking. Rabaul's volcanic atmosphere and dust quickly weathered airframes.

**216. Aichi D3A1 'kanbaku' dive-bomber  
2nd Kokutai, Rabaul, August 1942**



On 7 August 1942, the Japanese navy launched nine Aichi D3A1 'Val' dive bombers (kanbaku) on a mission against Guadalcanal shipping from which they could not return. The mission had no 'kamikaze' intentions; rather it proceeded on the basis that after the attack the aircraft would be ditched offshore Bougainville as they lacked the range to return to Rabaul. The crews were courageous, for they flew the mission without fighter escort. In the end, only three of the nine crews would survive the day. Commander and survivor of the fated mission, Lieutenant Fumito Inoue, flew this kanbaku on the day. After a successful ditching, Inoue and his observer were collected by a flying boat and returned to Rabaul. He kept flying kanbaku with the 2nd Kokutai until 7 December 1942, when he was badly wounded over Buna, and invalided back to Japan. Inoue was one of the few Japanese kanbaku aviators to survive the New Guinea theatre, many of whom were shot down by Fifth Air Force pilots. The two white horizontal stripes on the kanbaku fin indicate the Western equivalent of a squadron leader.