



THE JAP

ZERO

The main stinger of the Jap air force proves to be no mystery after all.

By JOHN HENNESSEY WALKER

SOON AFTER the attack on Pearl Harbor Americans began hearing about a Japanese warplane called the Zero. It had an unusual name, it was virtually unknown, even to aircraft experts, and almost immediately it began to take on an air of sinister mystery.

Information now available shows there was no good reason for the mystery, although the plane has been a big factor in the Jap drive.

The Zero has no secret weapons or engineering developments. It is simply a pretty good pursuit or fighter. The ship shows no striking originality of design and is constructed to standards of sturdiness and mechanical refinement below the best American, British or German practice. Nevertheless, it is admirably suited to its special tasks at the places and times the Nips have chosen to do their fighting.

Gun Arrangement Obsolete

One confusing factor about the Zero has been that the plane apparently is turned out in several versions, the chief variance being in the engine types and the guns the planes carry. The basic model, however, has two 20-millimeter quick-firing automatic cannon in the wings and two 7.7-millimeter (rifle caliber) machine guns housed in grooves on the upper side of the plane's nose and synchronized to fire through the propeller. That arrangement of machine guns is regarded as obsolete and highly unsatisfactory by all other top-grade air forces. In actual combat United Nations pilots have found that the 20-mm guns are the Zero's really dangerous sting.

This Zero plane is a single-seater, low-wing monoplane, 28.4 feet long and with a wingspread of 39.4 feet. In the most familiar version it is powered by a radial air-cooled engine, a fairly close copy of an American Pratt & Whitney motor. The engine is a twin-row type with 14 cylinders, and develops 950 to 1200 horsepower.

Definitely a light plane, the Zero weighs only 5140 pounds fully loaded. This gives it extra speed and climbing ability, but makes it vulnerable to enemy fire. The Zero's pilot and fuel tanks have no armor protection, and airmen concentrate on these.



There was no basis for the notion that the Jap plane was put together with plywood and fabric to save weight. Good quality duralumin is used in the plane's construction, although in thinner sheets than we would allow.

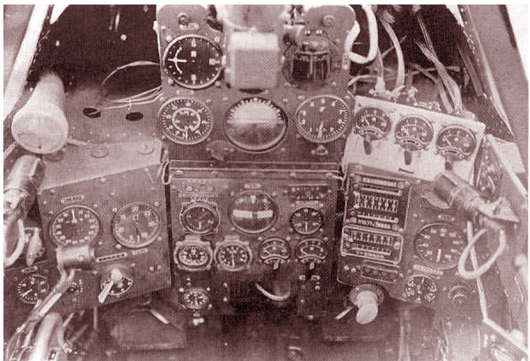
Licut. Col. Boyd (Buzz) Wagner, outstanding U. S. fighter pilot, after inspecting several wrecked Zeros, commented that the wings and fuselage were made in one piece, which meant that if a wing were damaged the whole assembly would have to be replaced. Wagner said the landing gear was well made and the entire ship was flush-riveted to hold down air resistance.

The Zero was first developed for the Japanese Navy and can be flown from carriers or land bases. The Mitsubishi Company, one of Japan's largest manufacturing concerns, is credited with the plane's development. *Zero* is a model designation, indicating that the plane entered service in 1940, the year 2600 in the Japanese calendar.

Early reports of the Zero's speed were exaggerated. At normal flying weight it can do about 315 mph at 10,000 feet—perhaps a bit more if the motor is well tuned up.

The latest-type U. S. pursuit planes outclass the Zero in armor protection and general sturdiness, carry heavier guns and are much faster at medium altitudes. Our P38 (Lockheed Lightning) and P39 (Bell Airacobra) in particular have top speeds of 400 mph and carry a 37-mm. automatic cannon and four or more machine guns. The new P47 (Republic Thunderbolt) is reported to be even faster and equipped with power enough to meet and beat the Zero and other enemy fighters at top altitudes.

The Jap plane's great virtues are its climbing ability (service ceiling is 36,000 feet) and its extreme maneuverability. As one U. S. pilot commented: "They can go up like an express elevator and turn on a thin dime. Best thing to do with a Zero is make one pass at the bastard, and if you don't get him the first time just keep right on going, fast."



RADIO CONNECTIONS are built into this part of Zero's instrument panel. U. S. flyers say Zero has adequate instruments, but "nothing extra."

PM

Tuesday, September 8, 1942

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