

The Early Months: Training Young Airmen

The Hitoyoshi Naval Air Corps was established when the base launched operations in February 1944. More than 6,000 teenage soldiers, some as young as 16, enlisted with the hope of becoming pilots. Due to a critical lack of planes and fuel, however, the training regimen was redirected to aircraft maintenance, disappointing many of the trainees. The few who received flight training were given lessons on the Type 93 biplane Akatombo (Red Dragonfly), a full-scale replica of which is displayed in the museum foyer.

Back-breaking Biofuel Production

Museum exhibits include the uniforms, records, and illustrated diaries of some of the trainees who served here. As Allied attacks on Japan intensified, and planes became increasingly scarce, the young men at Hitoyoshi found themselves with little to do that was flight related. Many were ordered to assist in producing oil from large pine roots, a laborious

process that required shredding the wood before distillation. This pine-oil fuel, while incompatible with existing plane engines, was intended for use in the Kikka, an experimental jet aircraft that flew for only 12 minutes on August 7, 1945, just days before the war ended.