



***Brutal War: Jungle Fighting in Papua New Guinea, 1942***

**By James Jay Carafano**

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Reviewed by

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Discussions of ground combat in World War II often highlight the fighting in North Africa, the Western Allies' liberation of France, or the titanic struggle on the Eastern Front. When ground combat in the Pacific Theater is discussed, the focus is typically on the Marine Corps' epic assaults on islands like Tarawa and Iwo Jima or the liberation of the Philippines under the towering, although controversial, General Douglas MacArthur. Although some books about early struggles of the U.S. Army in the Pacific exist, like Eric Bergerud's *Touched with Fire: The Land War in the South Pacific*, the topic still has not been explored as thoroughly as the aforementioned campaigns. With his recent book *Brutal War: Jungle Fighting in Papua New Guinea, 1942*, author James Jay Carafano brings the 1942 campaign in Papua New Guinea front and center. Carafano, a national security expert and former U.S. Army officer who earned a Ph.D. and master's degree from Georgetown University, brings together the American, Australian, indigenous, and Japanese viewpoints in this interesting and well-written book.

Carafano begins with a chapter outlining the strategic setting for the Papuan Campaign, starting with the Allied agreement on a strategy of defeating Germany "first" while also resourcing campaigns to repel Japanese advances and then proceed through the Pacific against Japan itself. He considers the competing goals of the Australians, British, Japanese, and Americans at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war and concludes that none of the warring powers were prepared for the combat they would face on Papua. None of the armies sufficiently trained their forces for the rough topographic and extreme environmental conditions found there, nor did they plan how to effectively sustain their forces under those conditions. The forces of each nation would have to try to fight in the midst of solving these problems.

At the strategic and operational levels, Carafano gives a good summary of the goals and issues facing each side. The Japanese viewed control of Papua, especially the seizure of Port Moresby on the island's southern shore, as crucial to maintaining pressure on Allied lines of communication with Australia. The island was also a key position for a perimeter defense of Japanese gains made thus far in the war. Meanwhile, the Allies sought to retake Papua to reduce the threat to Australia, lay the ground for future offensives, and gain crucial positions to isolate and/or reduce the large Japanese base at Rabaul.

After setting the strategic stage for the fighting on Papua, Carafano discusses the specific conditions which made the fighting there so brutal. While the jungle flora, steep topography, and wet conditions created problems in merely moving troops and supplies, the numerous diseases present — from scrub typhus to malaria — served to rapidly reduce the fighting strength of the Australian, American, and Japanese armies alike. The need for manual labor to move supplies, equipment, and casualties in places where there were

no roads brought many of the indigenous peoples into the story of the campaign as porters and stretcher bearers. With potential great power conflict in tropical regions, current Soldiers would do well to understand the challenges of operating in severely restrictive jungle terrain as outlined in *Brutal War*.

The next five chapters delineate the struggles of the fighting forces on both sides to maintain their fighting strength at the end of overstretched lines of communication on jungle paths with numerous non-battle injuries. Commanders faced dilemmas when deciding whether to attack to achieve their objectives while running the risk that further advances risked culmination due to lack of supplies. While the Australians found themselves conducting a fighting retreat at the beginning of the campaign, the Japanese, woefully short on supplies, were forced to abandon the advance towards Port Moresby. The direct leadership of officers such as Australia's William T. Owen and Arthur Key and U.S. I Corps Commander LTG Robert Eichelberger inspired their men to overcome numerous hardships in turning the tide of the campaign in the Allies' favor. Carafano does an excellent job explaining the decisions facing commanders at the time and offering balanced assessments of their, and their units', performance. Crucially, he argues against traditional narratives that the Japanese were suffering from "victory disease," instead noting that Japanese commanders in several instances took honest appraisals of their limitations but often had little choice other than to keep fighting under suboptimal conditions.

Carafano's book would be useful to military professionals because it highlights the importance of understanding specific aspects of the terrain on which one is going to fight while also pointing out the pivotal role logistics has in driving the nature and even success or failure of a campaign. The lack of preparation for the campaign by all belligerents — whether it be in training, terrain analysis, logistics, or command and control — provides a cautionary tale to leaders at all levels of command. Additionally, the different perspectives of the belligerents and civilians in the war are also important. Besides a few typos, the book could benefit from a few more maps with the narratives on the actual fighting. But these are minor critiques. Ultimately, *Brutal War* offers a concise account that reflects good scholarship and brings greater attention to a campaign that is too often forgotten in the United States.