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THE NEW GUINEA CAMPAIGN
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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the New Guinea Campaign from 24 January 1943 up until 31 December 1944.

In order to orient the reader, it will be necessary to briefly review the period from the first week in March 1942, up until 23 January, 1943.

It was during the month of March that the Japanese made their ~~first~~ initial landings in New Guinea, these landings taking place on the southeastern coast of New Guinea at Lae and Salamaua. Here they began to construct airfields and naval bases to facilitate further exploitations down the New Guinea coast.

Wishing to secure bases nearer the Australian coast, the Japanese in May 1942 sent an invasion force around the southeastern tip of New Guinea in the direction of Port Moresby. Attacked by American Naval aircraft and suffering defeat, the Japanese were forced to withdraw back to Lae. With this turning back, the Japanese southward advance was stopped and a base saved for use by the Allies in their advance through New Guinea. This was the first defeat suffered by the Japanese in New Guinea. (1)

The next move by the Japanese was down the coast where on 21 - 22 July they landed at Buna and Gona. The next month saw them push westward, across the Owen Stanley Mountains in an attack against Port Moresby. Another force was then sent against Milne Bay to the south and there landed troops. The attack against Port Moresby was turned back and the forces which had landed at Milne Bay were defeated by the Australians. This Milne Bay defeat was their first land defeat of World War II. (2)

The Japanese ~~that~~^{who} had attacked against Port Moresby were forced to

withdraw to positions at Buna and Gona. (3)

On 21 September 1942, the first complete unit of American infantry arrived in New Guinea to aid in the push against the Japanese entrenched in the Papuan Peninsula. This unit was the 128th Infantry, 32nd Division and ~~were~~ ^{was} flown up from Australia and landed at Port Moresby. This marked the beginning of the long bloody struggle by the American soldier against the impenetrable jungle and Japanese forces. (4)

Tropical diseases of every description are prevalent throughout the island and up until the arrival of American troops no measures for the prevention of malaria were practiced. Due to difficult terrain and heavy jungles, road systems at the beginning of the war were non-existent except in the vicinity of a few small posts. This made it necessary that all movement be made either by sea or air. (5)

With the aid of Australian troops, the 32nd Division began the attack against the Japanese at Buna on 19 September 1942. Here they saw some of the most difficult fighting to be witnessed at any time during the war. After fierce fighting the Battle of Buna was completed on 23 January 1943, and marked the beginning of the drive that was to force the Japanese from the island of New Guinea. (6)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

At the close of the Papuan Campaign, the Japanese held a position in the southwest Pacific that resembled a giant horse-shoe, one prong of this position being 600 miles from the other. The right prong consisted of the Solomon Islands, the bottom New Britain, and the left prong the eastern coast of New Guinea. Against this position, General Douglas MacArthur decided to attack in early 1943. His plans were to push up the eastern coast of New Guinea and secure Salamaua, Lae, Finschhafen, and Saidor. To accomplish this mission it would be necessary

(3) A-2, p. 3; (4) A-3 (5) A-4, p. 99; (6) A-3. P?

that the strong air and naval base at Rabaul, on New Britain, be neutralized. This mission was assigned to the 5th Army Air Force ^{WHICA} who for one year blasted this strongpoint day and night, thereby making it almost impossible for the Japanese to launch air attacks from that direction.

(7) (Map A).

Due to the lack of troops, supplies, and equipment under his command it was necessary that General MacArthur base all his plans on the element of surprise, secret intelligence information, and knowledge of the enemy. He could not afford to take chances on depleting his already small forces. His plans were to strike the Japanese where they were the weakest and confine their stronger forces in pockets from which they could not escape. He once stated to one of his general officers at Buna[?]: "Let us spill no unnecessary blood, I have seen too many men slaughtered in past wars through error and bad judgement." (8)

Another of General MacArthur's plans at this time was to deny the use of Bismark Sea as a route of supply by which the Japanese could supply and reinforce his troops at Lae and Salamaua. (9)

WAU

The small Australian occupied village of Wau, located 150 miles to the north of Port Moresby and 60 miles west of Salamaua, had not been considered by the Japanese as being a threat to their stronghold at Salamaua until after the fall of Buna[?]. This old gold-mining village, with airstrip, was being reinforced by Australian troops and the airstrip put into serviceable condition for ~~the~~ use as a supply base and outpost. Two large trails led from Wau over mountains and through the dense jungle into Salamaua. These trails offered excellent routes of approach over which troops might attack. In order to eliminate this threat the Japs launched an attack against this area on 27 January 1943. The small

(7, 8, 9) A-5. P[?]

force of Australians stationed in the area was able to hold off the enemy until the 17th Australian Brigade arrived on the airfield just as the Japs were making their main effort. The Australians jumped from their planes and immediately took up the fire fight. After organizing, they counterattacked against the Japs and by 3 February had completely defeated the enemy. (10)

Although the Japs were driven out of the Wau area the counterattack was continued with increasing momentum until Salamaua fell in September. (11)

It will be well for the reader to keep in mind this counterattack as it is to be the key to the fall of Lae.

BISMARCK SEA BATTLE

After the completion of the Papuan Campaign, the Japanese began to realize the danger of assaults against Lae and Salamaua. Every attempt was made to reinforce these bases by convoy from the north. In January 1943, large numbers of troops were landed by high speed convoy at Lae and Salamaua without suffering losses. This made the Japanese overconfident and again in March ^{they} sent another convoy in the same direction. This time the 5th Air Force was ready. A B-24, flying north of New Britain, sighted this group of ships and notified Air Force Headquarters that a convoy of 17 ships ^{was} ~~was~~ sailing for Lae.

From 1 March through 4 March this convoy was followed and attacked. Bad weather prevented the Allied planes from destroying the enemy on the first day of contact, but on 3 March they succeeded in sinking most of the convoy. (12)

After action reports show that 63 enemy aircraft and 15,000 troops were lost by the Japanese during this action. (13)

WOODLARK - KIRIWINA

Woodlark and Kiriwina, located off the southeastern coast of New Guinea, were the first Japanese garrisons to fall to American Amphibious forces. (14)

(10) A-6; ^{P?} (11) A-2, p. 6; (12) A-1, p. 174; (13) 10-7, p. 25;
(14) A-1, p. 176.

Protected by cover from the air, and from attacks by naval craft, the 112th and 158th RCT's landed on Woodlark and Kiriwina Islands on 30 June 1943. No opposition was offered by the Japanese and the assault forces quickly secured the airfields on the islands.

Experience gained in this amphibious assault was of great help in the planning of future operations.

LAE - SALAMAUA

During the month of May 1943, the Australian Army, commanded by General Sir Thomas Blamey, was given the mission of capturing Lae and Salamaua. (16)

In order that the Japanese not discover that his stronghold at Lae was to be attacked, the Australian counterattack against the Japanese at Wau, which began on 3 February 1943, was continued and pressure placed against Salamaua. It was decided that by placing pressure against Salamaua, the Japanese would be required to reinforce this area with reserves from Lae. Should this happen the base at Lae would be weakened and any large scale preparations for the Lae attack would be mistaken as reinforcements for Allied troops pushing against Salamaua. Instructions were issued to allow Salamaua to remain in Japanese hands until an all-out assault against Lae had begun. (17)

This plan of deception worked perfectly and from Milne Bay and Buna the Australians moved against Lae. The Japanese believing that this move was more reinforcements heading for Salamaua, disposed ~~his~~ ^{Their} forces ~~for~~ accordingly and on 4 September the 9th Australian Division landed on the beaches 16 miles east of Lae.

Except for light enemy air attacks the 9th was in no way opposed in the landing. After organizing, one brigade began to push up the beach and another toward Lae through the jungles, forming a two brigade front.

The next day, 5 September, the American 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment consisting of 1800 paratroopers and 25 Australian artillerymen

(15) A-8; (16, 17) A-2, p. 4-5.

with two broken down 25 pounder field guns, was loaded into 82 transport aircraft at Port Moresby. The mission of the 503rd was to drop by parachute on Nadzab and secure its airfield in order that the 7th Australian Division might be transported from Port Moresby by air and landed in the Markham Valley. (18)

At 1030 hours 5 September, the paratroopers landed by parachute and without opposition secured the Nadzab airstrip and by the next day the strip was ready for incoming aircraft. On 6 September, the 7th Division was loaded into aircraft at Port Moresby and made the greatest airborne movement of troops in the southwest Pacific in flying from Port Moresby to Nadzab. (19)

The mission of the 7th Division was that of attacking Lae from the west at the same time the 9th Division was pushing against this strongpoint from the east.

The 15th and 17th Australian Brigades attacking with the 162nd Infantry, 41st American Division, against Salamaua had held up their drive until the assaults against Lae were under way. On 11 September an all-out drive was successfully made and the town, ^(SALAMAUA) fell into allied hands. (20)

As the 7th Division was pushing against Lae from the west, the 9th was making progress from the east. Heavy fighting was encountered by both divisions, but by 16 September the 7th was able to enter the town from the east and at 1100 hours the 9th entered from the west, thereby successfully completing the Lae - Salamaua operations. This operation also eliminated the last serious threat to the southwestern areas of New Guinea. (21)

A list of instructions issued by the commander of the 5th Japanese Infantry Division at Salamaua on 17 July 1943 well expressed the importance of Lae and Salamaua to the Japanese. The list was captured

(18) A-9 (19, and 21) A-2, p. 32-60; (20) A-8, ^{P7} (21) A-10.

after the fall of Salamaua and reads as follows: "The Lae - Salamaua area is at the very limit of this decisive struggle between Japan and America and upon the decision of this fight the whole fate of our Empire depends." (22)

FINSCHHAFEN

The 9th Australian Division was allowed very little rest after the fall of Lae. On 17 September, orders were issued for an amphibious operation to be made 6 miles north of Finschhafen. The purpose of this operation being that of clearing the Japanese forces from the Huon Gulf area and constructing ^{an} air and naval base from which nearby New Britain might be attacked.

On 22 September, elements of the 9th Division made their second amphibious operation and landed 6 miles north of Finschhafen, on the south side of the Song River. Strong enemy opposition was encountered but was soon silenced by heavy naval bombardments. Due to improper information regarding the landing areas, some units were grounded on sandbanks and suffered casualties from fires on the beaches. Inspections of the enemy beach fortifications revealed 10 strong and well constructed bunkers located at the landing point. (23)

After encountering some of the strongest resistance to be offered by the Japanese in their defense of New Guinea, the Australians were able to get within artillery range of Finschhafen by the evening of 25 September. During the same day, word had reached the assault force C. P. that the enemy had landed troops behind the advancing Australians. Actions were taken to prevent a surprise attack from the rear, but upon close investigation it was found that the information was false. Advances were continued and on 2 October 1943, Finschhafen fell into the hands of the Australians.

Fighting in the areas around Finschhafen continued until 25 November. The completion of this campaign forced the Japanese from the

(22) A-10; (23) A-2, p. 63-108.

Huon Gulf area. Bases, both air and naval were established at Finschhafen, and from there operations against New Britain, Aitape, and Hollandia were later launched.

SAIDOR

At the close of the Papuan Campaign, the American 32nd Infantry Division was returned to Australia for rest, rehabilitation, and re-organization. After a long period of rest, the 126th RCT was assigned the mission of making an assault landing against the Jap garrison at Saidor, approximately 150 miles northwest of Finschhafen. This operation was to be the first in which units from the 32nd would have adequate artillery support, attached service troops, and ^{adequate} individual equipment. (24)

On 2 January 1944, the 126th RCT landed at Saidor, after heavy naval and air bombardments. Very light opposition allowed the combat team to press rapidly inland and by nightfall of D-Day secure a vital airfield. By D plus 5 the Americans had extended the beachhead to a distance of 6 miles in depth and 9 miles in width. The enemy had little desire to contest the expansion of this beachhead, therefore the only contact made with the enemy consisted of clashes between patrols. Each attempt made by the Japs to defend the trails leading up into Madang was met with defeat from artillery fires and infantry. The same was true when the Jap engineers attempted to cut new trails through the jungles and mountains. Patrols from the RCT continued to push the enemy far up into the rugged mountains where thousands died from tropical diseases, starvation, and American weapons. Exactly what casualties the Japanese suffered in these mountains will never be known.

On 9 January, the 128th RCT reinforced the 126th and pushed across the Mot River. From here they pushed up the coast and inland, driving the Japs from six villages. During this same day, patrols from the 126th RCT had succeeded in capturing the village of Sel, southeast of Saidor, and there joined with Australian patrols from the Ramu Valley.

(24) A-3, p. 11-13.

The 2nd Battalion, 126th RCT made a shore-to-shore landing 20 miles up the coast from Yami at Yaula Plantation on 4 March, and by 14 April joined forces with the Australians to the north.

This operation successfully cut off the remainder of the 18th Imperial Army that was being forced from the Huon Peninsula by the Australians. (25)

AITAPE - HOLLANDIA

The next plan of attack formulated by the allies was that of striking at Hansa Bay, 120 miles up the coast from Saidor. These plans were soon discarded and on 15 March 1944, others drawn up. The new plans called for strikes at Aitape and Hollandia, 400 miles up the coast from Saidor, by-passing Madang, Hansa Bay, and Wewak. (26)

Before the actual assault against these two Jap strongpoints could be made it, was necessary that the enemy airforce in the area be neutralized. The 5th Air Force was assigned this mission and for a period of six weeks pounded all Jap bases between Madang and Hollandia prior to the landings and continued until the enemy air force was destroyed. (27)

During the period of bombings by the air force, the ground troops under General Eichelberger were making preparations for the assaults. Units to participate in these landings were from the 24th and 41st Divisions, reinforced by artillery and other special troops. This force, less one regimental combat team from the 41st Division was to assault Hollandia and secure the area.

The RCT that had been pulled from the 41st was placed under Brig. General Gene Doe and was assigned the mission of securing Aitape. Later this RCT was relieved by the 32nd Division under the command of Maj. Gen. William H. Gill. (28)

During the night of 19-20 April, the huge convoy assembled west of

(25) A-3, p. 11-13; (26) A-11, p. 557; (27) A-1, p. 179; (28) A-12 p. 11.

the Admiralties and upon turning in the direction of its objective made feints as if to land at Madang and Wewak. The Japs had been expecting the Allies to make their next assault against Madang and Wewak and by taking such deceptive measures it was felt by the allied commander that the enemy would pull troops from Hollandia and Aitape to reinforce areas where it was expected that the assault forces would land. (29)

Prior to the landings on 22 April, naval carrier-base planes heavily bombed the Hollandia area, destroying many gun emplacements that protected the beaches. As the naval craft came within range they too pounded the enemy with heavy shellings. Troops were put ashore at Humboldt and Tanahmerah Bays, but due to the complete surprise caused by the landings, enemy opposition was not encountered. By 24 April, Hollandia and its three airfields were in the hands of the Americans. (30)

At the same time that the assault against Hollandia was being made, forces were going ashore at Aitape, 125 miles down the coast. Landing against very slight opposition, this RCT quickly overran the two airstrips on the island. These two strips were to be used to provide air protection for the forces located at Hollandia. (31)

This operation caused the isolation of 50,000 Japanese in the Mandang, Hansa Bay, and Wewak areas. All routes of communication, both by air and sea, were closed by the Navy and air forces. Realizing that the enemy could not offer any organized offensive threat, General MacArthur decided to allow them to remain bottled up and die of diseases and starvation. (32)

WAKDE

The next landing made by the allies was staged from Humboldt Bay on 15 May 1944 and landed in the Ararah area. The object of this landing (29-31) A-12, (32) A-1 p. 179.

was to proceed to Wakde and secure its airfield. For a period of 10 days prior to the Wakde landing the 5th Air Force had reported the absence of ack-ack. Nevertheless the island was bombed for a period of 24 hours by naval, air forces, and 4.2 mortar fire which came from Isoemanai Island. On 17 May the 163rd RCT landed on Wakde beaches under light enemy fires. Had heavier enemy weapons been used, the casualties of the assault forces would have been much greater than that of 1 killed and 2 wounded. These three casualties were all company commanders. Only 2 of the 4 available tanks were able to get ashore. They were of particular value in that their psychological value was as great as their value in the elimination of pillboxes. Fierce fighting continued for a period of 2 days and on 18 May, the airfield was secured. The next day light bombers and fighter aircraft were operating from Wakde against the enemy to the west. An inspection of the island after this operation revealed that the fortifications consisted of 102 well constructed bunkers, 18 machine guns, and hundreds of rifles. Casualties numbered 803 Japanese killed, 20 Americans killed and 26 wounded. (34)

BIAK

The Hollandia operation left the allies in control of 3 excellent airfields, but none of which could support heavy bombers. This made it necessary for the bombers to be operated from 400 miles to the southeast in their attacks on the Japanese bases west of Hollandia. Reconnaissance was made to locate airfields that could be used for this purpose and the nearest was at Biak, 350 miles to the west. Without proper planning and preparation, the 41st Division, less the 163rd RCT, staged from Humboldt Bay and landed under cover of naval and air preparation in the vicinity of Bosnek on 27 May 1944. (35)

The mission of this assault force was to destroy the enemy and secure the three airfields. Prior to D-Day the Japanese had placed 9,842 troops on the island and had begun construction on the three airfields.

(34) A-12, p. 8; (35) A-1, p. 180.

The plan of defense in case of an invasion was to defend these airfields and other key points along the beaches with heavy artillery pieces and automatic weapons. Concrete pillboxes were constructed along the beaches and the caves inland fortified. A battery of mountain guns, 3 inch AA guns, 4-120mm naval dual purpose guns, and large numbers of mortars protected these positions. The greatest mistake made by the island commander was that of not constructing his defense in depth and placing of mines and barbed wire on the beaches. After the landing of the American forces, one regiment struck inland to secure the airfields and the other pushed up the beach. Very little opposition was encountered before D plus 3. At this time the Americans were within 3 miles of the airfields. Here the enemy struck and forced the allied troops to withdraw 2000 yards.

On D plus 2, one battalion of Americans were isolated from the other U.S. forces and for two days repulsed enemy attacks which were supported by 7 Japanese tanks. Heavy fighting continued causing heavy loss of life for both sides. The enemy tanks were destroyed by 5 U.S. medium tanks and on D plus 3 the battalion was evacuated by water. On 6 June, the 41st Division was able to secure Mokmer airfield. Reinforcements consisting of the 163rd RCT and the 34th Infantry were sent in to aid the Americans on D plus 19. By D plus 24, the enemy had been pushed back from the airfields and retired to cave positions in the hills. Here they were attacked by the Americans and by use of gasoline dumped into the cave openings and ignited, the positions were destroyed. The Japanese commander, Colonel Kuzume realized that the struggle was hopeless and committed hara-kiri, but not until after he had instructed the remainder of the enemy to attack the American lines. This they did and by doing so lost 150 men. This ended the coordinated enemy resistance on Biak and brought the total number of Japanese casualties up to 1,800. (36)

(36) A-13, p. 1-18.

NOEMFOOR

Noemfoor, located 100 miles west of Biak was the next Japanese garrison to fall into Allied hands. On 2 July, 1944, the 158th RCT landed on the northwest part of the island. Little opposition was offered by the enemy and after slight opposition Kamiri airfield was seized on D plus 4. Reinforcements consisting of the 503rd Parachute RCT was dropped on Kamiri airfield. (37)

During this drop many of the jumpers were injured due to the low altitude which the planes were flying as they approached the drop zone. Only 4 of the members of the stick jumping from the lead plane were able to go into action. (38)

The seizing of Noemfoor again advanced the allied control and added three airfields from which the enemy at Sansapor could be easily bombed.

SANSAPOR

In keeping with the mission of extending allied control westward, the occupation of Sansapor was planned and executed. On 30-31 July, the 6th Infantry Division (minus the 20th RCT) landed. (39)

These landings extended allied control another 200 miles westward and completely neutralized the remainder of the enemy forces in New Guinea. (40)

Little opposition was offered by the Japanese and soon airfields had been constructed in the vicinity of Cape Sansapor. Inland ambushes were set for the enemy trying to escape from the peninsular westward. (41)

MOROTAI

The 31st Infantry Division, reinforced by the 126th RCT, operating under XI Corps, landed on the island of Morotai on 15 September 1944. (42.)

Prior to the landing very heavy air assaults were made against the Halmareras and Ceram in order to neutralize the Japanese air forces.

(37) Capt H. C. Hill; (38) Capt M. L. Smith; (39) A-8; (40) A-1, page 181; (41) Capt Rainville; (42) A-8, *Pages not numbered*.

The invasion forces were protected by 2 heavy cruisers, 3 light cruisers, 10 destroyers, and six aircraft carriers. (43)

Light enemy air and ground opposition was encountered by the allies and upon landing suffered only one casualty. That being an officer's broken leg. By the end of D-Day the one and only airfield had been taken and repairs begun. (44) The operation combined the Central and South Pacific forces and was the last operation by American troops before their entry into the Philippines.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In making a study of this campaign, it is my opinion that the strategy of the Allies showed full appreciation of the decisive importance of air power. Each offensive move had the primary aim of securing air bases from which new enemy strongholds could be reached, cut off from supplies and reinforcements by sea, made useless for use ~~AS A BASE~~ ^{FOR} enemy air operations, and then by-passed. Once firmly established, a forward air base could effectively cover the next bound in the offensive. By these techniques, ground assaults made against enemy strongholds were reduced to a minimum.

The enemy garrisons which had been by-passed offered no great threat as they were not capable of organizing for offensive actions. Had attempts been made to reduce these enemy strongholds by force rather than by by-passing it would have unquestionably caused heavy loss of lives. The Japanese could not hold in force all the coastline of New Guinea, therefore it was often that the Allies could pick lightly defended objectives in their advance to the north. General MacArthur's policy of striking the enemy where they were weakest and then confining their stronger forces in pockets from which there was no escape no doubt shortened the war by many months, if not by years. Had he followed the tactics as used in the Papuan Campaign, that of attacking through the Jungles and mountains rather than by amphibious operations, it is (43) A-1, p. 182; (44) A-18.

doubtful that his small forces would have succeeded in reaching Hollandia.

A great deal of credit is due to the 5th Air Force and Navy for the manner in which they carried out the tasks of denying routes of communications to by-passed enemy garrisons.

Considering the number of aircraft lost by the Japanese in the New Guinea Campaign, the results were far from profitable. ^{ENEMY} Aircraft replacements to the combat zones never reached their destination as planned. This was due to constant air and submarine strikes by the Allies. Diseases caused the death of many of the Japanese pilots and this, combined with heavy operational losses, resulted in such large losses that it was impossible to get replacements from the limited resources of Japan.

Proper planning, preparations, and estimate of enemy capabilities were not given before the attack on Biak. Had these been done it is probable that the island could have been secured with a minimum of effort. The direct opposite of this was brought out in the Hollandia operation. Here great numbers of troops and amounts of supplies were used to accomplish a mission that could have been carried out with a much smaller force.

The use of 503rd Parachute Regiment as reinforcements was not required during the Noemfoor operation. Had it been necessary to send in more troops to accomplish the mission, it would have been more economical to have used amphibious means. Also the altitude from which the paratroops jumped was unsafe and resulted in numerous injuries.

To sum up the results of this campaign: The completion of the New Guinea Campaign marked the successful execution of the primary mission of the southwest Pacific Forces, which was to extend Allied control up the New Guinea coast, then westward, and establishing along these routes air and naval bases from which assaults could be launched against the Philippines and then Japan itself.

LESSONS

Some of the lessons emphasized by this campaign are:

1. Adequate and detailed planning is essential in amphibious operations.
2. Close supervision and control is essential in all echelons of command.
3. Surprise is an absolute essential when attempting amphibious landings.
4. That parachute troops can be successfully employed in tropical areas.
5. The use of armored vehicles in jungle warfare is applicable but is limited by ground conditions.
6. When necessary, large numbers of enemy troops can be bypassed and made non-effective.
7. Air, ground, and naval coordination is essential to long range operations.
8. That air superiority is essential to the success of any large scale operation.
9. That tropical diseases are at times as deadly as the enemy rifle.
10. Before any operation, the capabilities of the enemy should be considered and plans made accordingly.
11. When only limited forces are available it is best to strike the enemy at his weakest point rather than at his ~~more strategic and~~ heavily fortified positions.