THE FOUNDATIONS OF VICTORY: THE PACIFIC WAR 1943–1944

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Preface

Public awareness of our military history contains some interesting gaps, and understanding of many issues often lags still further behind. Thus popular attention to the Great War focusses on Gallipoli but downplays the Western Front, and mostly ignores the campaigns in the Middle East. In the Second World War, most Australians are aware of the fighting on the Kokoda Track in 1942 but know nothing of the subsequent fighting in New Guinea in 1943-1944, or of how the one relates to the other or how both fit into the wider Allied war against Japan.

The Australian victory in Papua and the frustration of the Japanese advance on Port Moresby was a necessary condition for the campaigns that would follow, but by itself the Kokoda campaign could not ensure the defeat of Japanese aggression and ambitions in that part of the world. The fighting in Papua in 1942 was gruelling and difficult, with the climate and terrain posing problems as great as the Japanese, but the complexity of the operations that followed was an even greater order of magnitude. Although the United States had entered the war after the attack on Pearl Harbor, and although US forces built up slowly in the Southwest Pacific Area in the course of 1942-1943, significant US ground forces did not take the field until the fighting for Gona-Buna-Sanananda in early 1943 and the majority of ground forces in New Guinea remained Australian until well into that year. Even when American preponderance of force in the theatre became obvious in 1944, the Australian Army still had to find many of the solutions to the difficulties it faced from within its own resources. There is much about the Army’s performance in the war against Japan that possesses an epic quality, and the campaign in New Guinea in 1943-1944 is an essential part of that story.

The essays in this volume were originally presented as papers to the Chief of Army’s annual military history conference in 2003. The theme reflected a feeling that the New Guinea campaign has been unjustly overlooked, both within the Army and more widely. A tough campaign against a skilled and tenacious enemy in a difficult environment within our own region resonates strongly in the present as we continue to face numerous challenges in an unstable international and regional order, a judgment perhaps confirmed since by its selection as a principal case study for those senior officers attending the Higher Command and Staff Studies course at the College of Defence and Strategic Studies at Weston, ACT.
In the opening essay, Joan Beaumont addresses the issue of the marginalisation of the New Guinea campaign in collective memory and its invisibility in our national memorialising. Successful campaigns, she suggests, command less attention because they appear to throw up fewer challenges. The later stages of the war are perhaps also more closely associated with those who were victims of the Japanese—especially prisoners of war—than with those who triumphed over them. That victory was by no means a given, as Edward J. Drea demonstrates in his chapter on the intense preparations that preceded the campaign. Both sides responded to the outcome in Papua by reinforcing, re-equipping and training fresh forces for the next stage of the struggle, and Drea depicts this as ‘a time of equilibrium’ in which the result could potentially have gone either way as Australians, Americans and Japanese sought to negate the advantages enjoyed by the other.

This was an important period for the subsequent strategic direction of the war against Japan, as David Horner argues: the first nine months of 1943, he concludes, saw ‘the intermeshing of Australia’s national policies, Allied grand strategy, theatre military strategy, operational concepts and operational planning’. In many ways, this laid the basis for the conduct of Australia’s war through to final victory in 1945. John Coates analyses the outcome of that complex process on the ground in New Guinea itself and argues, contrary to some Australian popular perceptions, that MacArthur handled the conduct of the campaign well. Three elements essential to that success are discussed in the succeeding chapters by John Moremon, Albert Palazzo and Ross Mallett: doctrine and training, which drew on the lessons of the Papuan campaign the year before; force structure and organisation, designed to ameliorate the tensions over manpower facing the government through the creation of the jungle division in 1943, which increased tactical flexibility and eased the problem of resupply; and logistics, in which the Army made enormous advances in the course of 1943.

MacArthur declared that victory in New Guinea was dependent on resolving the ‘logistic problem’; in short, the Australians and Americans got it right while their Japanese foes were increasingly at its mercy. In an important chapter drawing on Japanese records, Kazumi Kuzuhara demonstrates the appalling difficulties faced by Japanese forces in New Guinea, battling geography, an increasingly dominant enemy, and the shortcomings of their own systems. For them the campaign would exceed ‘what could be expected of any human being’, in the words of the commander of the Japanese 18th Army, Lieutenant-General Adachi.

Four factors, amongst others, helped to explain the demoralisation of the Japanese and the increasing desperation of their material circumstances. Sebastian Ritchie reminds us of the pivotal role of airpower in support of the ground forces, not only in New Guinea but everywhere in the Asia-Pacific region, as the strength of Allied air forces
increased while that of the Japanese withered. Despite the difficulties it faced, allied intelligence greatly outstripped the capabilities of the Japanese in ‘knowing the enemy’, as Alison B. Gilmore shows in her study of the Allied Translator and Interpreter Service (ATIS), a joint and combined Australian-American unit that successfully reflected the truly allied nature of the anti-Japanese struggle. Tropical disease, like the jungle that seemingly nurtured it, was neutral, striking each side equally, but the Allied medical service were better prepared to meet the challenge intellectually and technically, even if such advantages were insufficient to overcome complacency over such issues in some of the senior ranks. John Pears’ chapter is thus a cautionary tale. By the latter part of the New Guinea campaign, the Australian soldier had well and truly taken the measure of his Japanese opponent, and while this was tinged with a certain racism consistent with the times it had moved on from the notion, common in the early part of the Pacific War, of the Japanese ‘superman’. This newfound estimation might range from according the enemy respect as a ‘good soldier’ to dismissing him as a ‘fanatic’, but in general Australians knew that they would have the better of their enemy, even if they did not always relate this to the material preponderance they enjoyed over the Japanese forces.

This volume provides a snapshot of the state of current knowledge about the war in New Guinea, and suggests at the same time the many areas that await further research and publication. It draws attention to the difficulties faced by the Australian Army and Australian soldiers in the most trying of circumstances; to the achievements that flowed from their courage, ingenuity and adaptability, and the resource and technical advantages they came to enjoy; and to the hopeless courage of their Japanese enemy.

As always, we are indebted to Roger Lee and his staff at the Army History Unit for their sterling efforts in organising the conference. We thank the speakers for their participation and for their patience in answering queries in the course of revising their papers for publication, and we acknowledge with gratitude the efforts of Margaret McNally and Jeff Doyle in their respective contributions.
Contributors


Lieutenant General John Coates, AC, MBE (Retd) served in the Australian Army for forty years, retiring as Chief of the General Staff in 1992. He was educated at Ipswich Grammar School, Queensland, and the Royal Military College Duntroon, from which he graduated in 1955. He returned later as its Commandant. He served on exchange with both the United States Army at Fort Hood, Texas, and the British Army as a tank squadron commander in Germany in 1966-67. He commanded a Cavalry (Armoured Personnel Carrier) Squadron in South Vietnam 1970-71 and served as Brigade Major 1ATF, for which service he was made a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE). He was made a Companion of the Order of Australia (AC) in 1992. He is a graduate of the University of Western Australia and has a post-graduate degree in history from the Australian National University. He is the author of *Suppressing Insurgency* (1993), *Bravery Above Blunder: the 9th Division in New Guinea in 1943-44* (1999 in the Australian Army History Series), and *An Atlas of Australia’s Wars* (2001, in the ‘Australian Centenary History of Defence’).

Peter Dennis is professor of history at the University of New South Wales at the Australian Defence Force Academy. He has been associated with the Army History Conference since 1995, and most recently was joint editor of the seven-volume ‘Australian Centenary History of Defence’ (2001). For more than a decade he has worked on developing the First AIF database.

Edward J. Drea graduated from Canisius College in Buffalo, New York. Following military service in Japan and Vietnam, he received his master’s degree from Sophia University, Tokyo, Japan, and his PhD in history from the University of Kansas. He taught at the US Army Command and General Staff College and the US Army War College and served as the Chief, Research and Analysis Division, US Army Center of
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Allison B. Gilmore is Associate Professor of History at The Ohio State University at Lima. She is a graduate of the University of Nebraska and The Ohio State University, and the author of *You Can’t Fight Tanks with Bayonets: Allied Psychological Warfare against the Imperial Japanese Army in the Southwest Pacific* (1998). Her research on the contributions of Japanese POWs to psychological operations has been published by the *Pacific Historical Review*. She is currently working on a book tentatively titled *Linguists at War*, which analyses the roles and mission of the Allied Translator and Interpreter Section, an inter-service, Allied intelligence agency comprised of Japanese linguists who performed a multitude of intelligence functions during the Pacific War and the occupation of Japan. Professor Gilmore teaches courses on American history and US military history. She was awarded the Ohio State University at Lima Distinguished Teaching Award in 1999, and The Ohio State University Alumni Award for Distinguished Teaching in 2000.

Jeffrey Grey is professor of history at the University of New South Wales at the Australian Defence Force Academy. His publications include *A Military History of Australia* (2nd edn, 2001) and *The Australian Army* (2001, vol. I in ‘The Australian Centenary History of Defence’). In 2000-2 he was Major General Matthew C. Horner Professor of Military Theory at the United States Marine Corps University, Quantico, Virginia.

David Horner is the professor of Australian defence history in the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at the Australian National University. A graduate of the Royal Military College, Duntroon, the Australian Army’s Command and Staff College, the University of New South Wales and the Australian National University, he served as an infantry platoon commander in Vietnam and had various regimental and staff appointments until he retired from the Army as a lieutenant colonel in 1990. He is the author or editor of 24 books on Australian military history, strategy and defence, including *Crisis of Command* (1978), *High Command* (1982), *SAS: Phantoms of the Jungle* (1989), *Inside the War Cabinet* (1996), *Blamey: The Commander-in-Chief* (1998), *Defence Supremo* (2000) and *Making the Australian Defence Force* (2001). He is the editor of the Australian Army’s military history series and has been the historical consultant for various television programs. As an Army Reserve colonel, from 1998 to 2002 he was the first Head of the Australian Army’s Land Warfare Studies Centre.

Mark Johnston was born in Hobart in 1960. He is head history teacher at Scotch
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College, Melbourne. His doctorate concerned the experiences and outlook of Australian soldiers in the Second World War. He has published four books: *At the Front Line: Experiences of Australian Soldiers in World War II* (OUP, 1996); *Fighting the Enemy: Australian Soldiers and Their Adversaries in World War II* (2000); *That Magnificent 9th: An Illustrated History of the Ninth Australian Division, 1940-1946* (2002); and, with Peter Stanley, *Alamein: The Australian Story* (2002). He maintains contact with many veterans, and is currently working on a history of the 7th Australian Division.

**Lieutenant Commander Kazumi Kuzuhara** was born in 1950. From 1983 he attended the Staff College of the Ground Self Defence Force (GSDF) and in 1993 became 11th Tank Battalion Commander (Armour). In 1995 he was appointed military history instructor at the Staff College of GSDF. Following this appointment he became a Researcher at the National Institute for Defense Studies Military History Department. He is currently Associate Professor at the National Defense Academy in Japan.

**Lieutenant General Peter Leahy AO** was appointed Chief of Army in June 2002. He graduated from the Royal Military College, Duntroon, in 1974, and was posted to the Royal Australian Infantry Corps. From 1987 to 1990 he was the Australian Exchange Officer at the United States Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, where he instructed in Joint and Combined Operations and Counter-Revolutionary Warfare and completed a Master of Military Arts and Science degree. For his services as an instructor he was awarded the US Army Meritorious Service Medal. In 1993 he was Military Assistant to the Chief of the General Staff, and in 1994-5 he was Director of Army Research. In 1997 he was promoted to Brigadier and posted as Commander of the 3rd Brigade, the Australian Defence Force’s Ready Deployment Force, and in 1999 he was appointed Chief of Staff at Headquarters Australian Theatre. He is a graduate of the Australian Army Command and Staff College, the United States Command and General Staff College, the British Higher Command and Staff Course, and is a Fellow of the Australian College of Defence and Strategic Studies.

**Ross Mallett** hails from Melbourne. He has a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Melbourne, a Master of Business Administration from Monash University and a Master of Arts (Hons) from the Australian Defence Force Academy in Canberra, submitting a thesis on Military Technology and the Australian Army in World War One. Ross toured the First AIF battlefields in Europe in 1995. He also created an online Order of Battle of the units of the First AIF. He now lives in Canberra where he works as a software engineer for Search Software America. He is currently working on a PhD thesis on the logistics of the South West Pacific campaigns of 1943-45.

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Albert Palazzo completed his BA and MA degrees at New York University before going on to finish a PhD at The Ohio State University. His publications include *Seeking Victory on the Western Front: The British Army and Chemical Warfare* and ‘The Way Forward: 1918 and the implications for the future’ in Peter Dennis and Jeffrey Grey (eds), *1918: Defining Victory*. He is author of several books, including *Defenders of Australia: the History of the Third Division*, *The Royal Australian Corps of Transport: a history of Army Transport, 1973-2000* and *The Australian Army: a history of its organisation 1901-2001*.

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Peter Stanley is Principal Historian at the Australian War Memorial, where he has worked since 1980. He has contributed to the development of many of the Memorial’s temporary and permanent exhibitions, most recently the Second World War gallery and the exhibition *Stolen Years: Australian prisoners of war*. He has written fifteen books. His most recent books are *Alamein: the Australian Story* (2002, with Mark Johnston), in the Oxford Army History Series and *For Fear of Pain: British Surgery 1790-1850* (2003). His current project is a book on the Gallipoli campaign, ‘Quinn’s Post’.
Introduction

Lieutenant General Peter Leahy

This is the tenth Chief of Army’s Annual Military History Conference and as such is something of a landmark in the study and discussion of Australia’s military history. In his address to the opening of the first conference in November 1994, the-then Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant General John Grey, identified a number of reasons for launching a history conference series, reasons that seem as pertinent today as they did then. While he acknowledged generally the importance of history in the planning of future directions for the Army, it was his specific reasons that have a particular resonance today. General Grey’s first reason was that he wanted to demonstrate the Australian Army’s commitment to the preservation, interpretation and promulgation of its history. He went on to explain that while the Conference was one initiative, it was only one in a series of innovations, including the very successful history research grants scheme, that he was introducing to achieve this goal. Linked to this reason was his strong commitment to the continuing education of Army’s officers, particularly in their understanding of their chosen profession, the profession of arms. A regular conference such as this fits in well with both those reasons, offering as it does a chance for the Army to explore topics of specific relevance to its continuing evolution, to bring in experts who could give Army a broader perspective on these topics than was regularly available and bring together Army’s ‘best and brightest’ in an atmosphere of questioning and learning.

After ten years of conducting military history conferences, how have we done? The answer would seem to be that by all objective measures, we have succeeded in meeting General Grey’s aims. The published proceedings of the conferences provide an accessible, high quality reference source for anyone interested in aspects of the Australian Army’s evolution and experience. Proceedings are available in our staff colleges, service establishment libraries and more widely to the general public. Several have gone to reprint and the interest from overseas has been high for a product that is primarily about our own army. The most compelling measure of success however, is attendance. This conference is now recognised as being the largest military history conference—and probably the largest history conference—held in Australia and one of the largest regular military history conferences held worldwide. While many of the
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attendees are serving or former military personnel, the regular attendance by a wide range of non-army people is particularly gratifying. At a time when the profession of arms is in competition with the commercial world for recruits and when the public’s impression of the army alternates between admiration for our soldiers’ efforts in operational areas and concern generated by sensational media stories about misconduct or inappropriate behaviour, it is reassuring to know there is an expanding body of well-informed citizens who understand the army, its heritage and the pressures under which it operates and who value it for its contribution. I think Army has gained much from its small investment in these Military History Conferences.

Turning now to the topic of this year’s conference. The subject for this year owes much to Dr Peter Stanley and his concern over the abysmal level of general understanding of the Australian Army’s achievements in New Guinea, especially in the years immediately after the repulse at Imita Ridge of the Japanese land invasion via the Owen Stanleys. I think it was Peter who coined the phrase ‘the Green Hole in Australia’s military history’. Any perusal of any military publisher’s catalogue reveals an almost complete lack of books on the New Guinea campaigns after the Kokoda campaign. Some specialist Australian publishers in recent years have attempted to fill the void but the fact remains that by comparison with scholarly works on the various European theatres and the Pacific War, the New Guinea victories are unknown and unstudied. When the extent of the Army’s achievements in the years 1943–44 is understood, this lack of interest is completely inexplicable. Apart from some temporary setbacks during the course of a battle, the Australian Army was not pushed back by the Japanese Army in New Guinea after September 1942.

The campaign in New Guinea was a long, difficult and bloody affair. There is a tendency to see it as a dour slogging match between two essentially infantry forces. There is also the very British-like irony in that while the average Australian has probably heard of the Kokoda Track, a battle characterised by retreat, poor organisation and support and excessive reliance on the personal courage of the individual soldier, he or she has probably not heard of, for example, the attack on Lae twelve months later. Yet Lae was a masterpiece of planning and execution. It involved air and naval forces, paratroops and an entire air-landed division. It was only the third amphibious landing in the history of the Australian Army. And it required the closest co-operation between US and Australian forces. Apart from some unfortunate ‘friendly fire’ from overly-enthusiastic US pilots, the whole operation went completely to plan. The battle for Lae, like so many of the battles in the campaign, deserves much closer attention, from authors seeking new and original material, from academics seeking to explain significant developments that had an impact on the conduct of the war and, indeed, from defence planners of today. As a successful exercise in complex operational planning, it is difficult to think of a better example than Lae.
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But, as I have suggested, Lae was not the first example of the Japanese being defeated by an Allied force that had learned how to use the jungle to its own benefit nor was it the last. The importance of Lae as the example lies in how so many of the combat skills essential to success came together so effectively. Nine months earlier, just down the coast at Buna and Gona, many mistakes were made, in tactics, in command and coordination and in preparation. By the time of Lae, not only had many of these type of errors been eliminated in the rugged fighting in the battles around Wau and Salamaua but the Allied High Command had grown confident enough in the ability of its own troops that it was prepared to embark on an operation as complex as that employed in the capture of Lae. Which leads to the question: ‘why were the Allies so confident and so effective?’ As I said, it was less than twelve months since the battle-hardened Japanese had been pushing poorly trained Australian militia back from one defensive position to the next. What was it that occurred in 1942 that saw 1943 and 1944 become the years in which Japanese military power in the Southwest Pacific theatre was vanquished?

Clearly, the infantry itself learned to fight in and use the jungle to its advantage. But, that is only a small part of the renaissance. Other, equally important, innovations had to occur as well. This campaign demonstrated, probably more importantly than ever before, the central importance to campaigning of logistics. Aerial resupply and the innovative air transport of combat troops into remote localities enabled extended operations in the challenging New Guinea terrain away from the coast. Armour and artillery had to learn new skills to provide critical combat support in terrain that even a year earlier was regarded as impossible. The contribution of the medical services was a major factor in victory and one that is rarely recognised today. How many realise that during the battles for Milne Bay, Buna, Gona and Sanananda, the Australian battalions were losing hundreds every week to malaria: at its worst the losses were equivalent to a battalion each month. Sickness exceeded combat casualties by a factor of more than ten. In learning to control malaria and other jungle illnesses like scrub typhus, the medical services made a direct and enduring contribution to the Army’s combat power. (Which contrasted starkly with the Japanese, for whom tropical illnesses remained a major cause of loss until the end of the campaign.) The army had to adapt, it had to absorb the experiences of others and it had to innovate. The fact that it was the Japanese who were forced to retreat from Lae, from Madang and from Wewak, is testimony to the army’s capacity to absorb lessons and change its methods to adapt to new circumstances.

These are all interesting historical facts, worthy of study in their own right. But there are other reasons, of particular relevance to today’s army, for promoting interest in and understanding of these old campaigns. While recent operations have well demonstrated the army’s ability to fight as part of coalition forces far removed from Australia, there are other developments reminding us that our region—our own backyard, if you will—is not the benign stable strategic environment we would like. The recent announcement of
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Australia’s participation in what will be a peace-making role in the Solomons is evidence that the army must be able to operate in our local region. How much have geophysical conditions changed in New Guinea? I would suggest not a lot. If the Australian Army had to fight there in 2004 would there be nothing to learn from these 1943 experiences? The answer is, I think, obvious. I suggest that we would find much in common with our fathers’ and grandfathers’ experiences. We could draw considerable advantage from understanding and exploiting their experiences. Hopefully, we could avoid making the same mistakes. This is the big advantage understanding that the study of our history can give us—the ability to avoid making the same mistakes.

There are many threads to understanding the conduct of the campaign and the successful conversion of the allied forces into successful jungle fighters. One of the more critical issues, however, was learning to work with allies. Both the US and the Australians had to adapt to each other’s ways at every level of contact. The success of the campaign is testament to how well they achieved this. This capacity is just as important today as it was in the critical years of the Pacific war.
The Pacific War of 1943-44, and particularly the campaigns in New Guinea, have been marginalised in the Australian national memory of war.¹ Teaching the history of the Second World War to undergraduate students over the past decade, I have been struck by the almost complete ignorance of these campaigns. When asked to recall battles in which the Australian defence forces fought during the twentieth century, students inevitably answer, ‘Gallipoli’, a battle which has acquired a hegemonic place in the national memory of war. If pressed a little further, they might remember Villers-Bretonneux or Pozières, and—when moving on to the Second World War—Kokoda, Changi, the Burma-Thailand railway, and possibly even El Alamein. But the names Huon Peninsula, Finschhafen, Sio, Sattelberg, Madang, Ramu Valley, Markham and Ramu rivers, Wewak and the Bismarck Sea, have no resonance. Buna and Gona, one student surmised, might be in Vietnam.

As Peter Stanley observed in 1993, the New Guinea campaigns of 1943-44 are also something of ‘a green hole’ in Australian military historiography.² In the decade since Stanley coined that memorable phrase, Lieutenant General John Coates has published his passionate defence of the 9th Australian Division’s campaigns on the Huon peninsula,³ and his superb *Atlas of Australia’s Wars* in *The Australian Centenary History of Defence*

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1. I am using ‘national memory’ in the sense of ‘collective memory’, or ‘a social framework through which nationally conscious individuals can organise their history’, as opposed to ‘mass individual memory’ which is the ‘recollection of events which individuals actually lived through’: Jan-Werner Müller, ‘Introduction’, in Müller (ed.), *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge university Press, 2002), 3.


series. The latter devotes considerable space to the land, naval and air actions in the South West Pacific Area in 1943 and 1944. But with the exception of studies of the Battle of the Bismarck Sea by Lex McCauley and Alan Stephens, not a great deal more has been done to fill the ‘green hole’ of Australian military historiography.

Nor have the campaigns of 1943-44 figured prominently in the growing calendar of public ritual and war commemoration in Australia. The last two decades of the twentieth century witnessed an extraordinary growth in the memory of war, not only in Australia but globally. The reasons for this are complex, and the subject of considerable debate internationally. In Europe, where the Holocaust was initially at the heart of the concern with memory, the end of the Cold War is thought to have ‘unfrozen’ memories of the past that had formerly been constrained by ideology and the rigid dichotomies of East–West enmity. Moreover, new agendas of national building in the former Soviet empire have led to the ‘return’ of the past: that is, the mobilisation of collective memories in order to create founding myths, assert new minority identities and provide social cohesion during the painful dislocations accompanying the conversion from centrally planned to market economies. The ‘memory boom’ has also been encouraged by a fin de siècle mood: a need, as not only the twentieth century but also the millennium closed, to make sense of what the British historian Eric Hobsbawm has called the ‘age of catastrophe’.

This period coincided with the ageing of the victims of the Holocaust and the veterans of the two world wars. Both generated a sense of urgency and anxiety about the loss of memory based on personal recollection—an urgency most notable, in Australia’s case, in the news media’s semi-hysterical countdown to the death of the last Anzac in 2002.

For Australia also the mood of national reflection was accentuated by the bicentenary of white settlement in 1988, and the centenary of federation in 2001, both of these being occasions for celebratory nationalism and identity building. Australian governments (both Labor and non-Labor), and official agencies such as the Australian War Memorial and the Department of Veterans’ Affairs created a new ritual of war commemoration. This included a plethora of anniversary celebrations, of which the ‘Australia Remembers’ campaign of 1995 was the most elaborate; regular pilgrimages of veterans and politicians to battlefields and former prisoner-of-war camps; and the creation of new museums and memorials at, for example, the Western Front, Kokoda, Hell Fire Pass, Sandakan, Anzac Parade, Canberra, and late in 2003, Hyde Park, London. In essence, as Jan-

Werner Müller has said, “‘communicative memory’, that is, living oral memory based on personal recollection, is passing into ‘cultural memory’—with ‘cultural memory’ now commonly understood as the cultural representations which lack the immediacy of first-hand recollection’.9

However, very little of this commemorative activity has been focussed on northern New Guinea, with the exception of Buna and Gona which have been incorporated into the commemoration of Kokoda. Even Ross Bastiaan, that remarkable ‘carrier of memory’10 who has created and placed some 137 bronze plaques at sites of significance to Australia’s war history across the world, has placed only two plaques in northern New Guinea. Moreover, even the plaques at Wewak are advertised on the relevant web site as being in memory, not of the 1943-44 campaigns but rather the final campaign of 1945, and of Ted Kenna VC. In contrast, there are sixteen Bastiaan plaques worldwide that commemorate the Gallipoli campaign; fifteen large and small plaques on Kokoda (including one at each of Buna, Sanananda and Gona); and seven on the Burma-Thailand railway.11

What explains this neglect of the campaigns of the South West Pacific campaigns of 1943 and 1944? Perhaps it relates to a sense of place. No one who visits Gallipoli fails to comment on its topography and the extraordinary physical power that the landscape exerts on the visitor or pilgrim. Corregidor, the island fortress at the mouth of Manila Bay and the scene of great suffering of US and Japanese troops during the Pacific War, has a similar, palpable sense of the presence of the dead. Is one of the reasons that naval and air actions, such as the Battle of the Bismarck Sea on 2-4 March 1943, lack a hold on the public imagination because they lack this sense of place? The sinking of a ship leaves only an empty expanse of ocean that could be anywhere in the world. There are no ruins, no lasting scars of battle on the landscape, as on the Western Front in France. Similarly, air offensives, such as the strategic bombing offensive against Germany, another relatively forgotten campaign in Australian national memory, left only visual images of black skies and flashes of light—except, of course, for scenes of devastation in the cities of Germany which are too morally complicated to be the stuff of celebratory mythology.

10. I owe this term to the French historian, Henry Rousso and his influential The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), 219-21. Carriers of memory, Rousso argues, divide into ‘official carriers’, that is, the ceremonies, monuments and celebrations organised by national or local governments; ‘organisational carriers’, who are groups who ‘sometimes become attached to a rather static image of the past, which they then promote actively as well as passively’; ‘cultural carriers’, who express often highly individualistic views of the past in a variety of media, including film, literature and television (their view is usually implicit rather than explicit); and finally ‘scholarly carriers’, who ‘reconstruct the facts and propose ways of interpreting them’.
11. Details of the plaques’ location and chronology of their development can be found on the Australian Bronze Commemorative Plaques web site: www.plaques.satlink.com.au.
Yet this is not an adequate explanation for the ‘invisibility’ of 1943–44. The terrain in which the campaigns of late 1943 were fought had a dramatic topography. It demanded physical achievements on the part of soldiers that easily matched those of the Kokoda Track. To quote a history of the 2/2nd Australian Pioneer Battalion that operated in the area of Shaggy Ridge:

The area was one of swift-flowing mountain streams, dense, dank rain forest and almost vertical mountain sides. Little was known of this crazily moulded terrain where foothills rise sheer from river beds to 5,000 feet—rugged mountains almost continually capped with rain clouds. Isolated ridges thousands of feet high, unnamed since the beginning of time.¹²

The going was painfully slow, as the leading company had to feel its way forward up the narrow ridge … In one spot that was almost impossible to traverse—a steep-sided cliff—they rigged lawyer vines between trees to act as a handrail and allow us to pull our- selves up.¹³

There is no inherent reason why the razor-back features of Shaggy Ridge and Mount Prothero should be less memorable than the now mythologised landscape of the Sphinx, Walker’s Ridge, the Nek, Chunuk Bair at Gallipoli—except perhaps, that the topography of New Guinea is culturally and physically remote. Was it too alien to engage a western imagination? A veteran of the 2/2nd Pioneer Battalion said recently that what he remembered most about the New Guinea campaigns was ‘the isolation’, the sense that he was fighting in a profoundly primitive country, disconnected from the world outside.¹⁴

Perhaps we need also to look to the nature of the fighting in 1943-44. Although the amphibious operations along the coast on north New Guinea were, as Edward J. Drea has said, a ‘series of breathtaking landings’, in a tradition of ‘classic manoeuver’, much of the campaign consisted of grinding attrition. It constituted a series of relatively low-level actions that require some specialist military knowledge to appreciate. For the lay person there is none of the awful simplicity of, say, the charge at the Nek on 7 August 1915, or the brutal simplicity of ‘going over the top’ on the Somme.

Then there is the consideration that the New Guinea campaigns of 1943–44 may have suffered, in retrospect particularly, from the perception that they were not central to the grand strategy of defeating Japan. General Douglas MacArthur’s progressive

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¹³. Ibid., 229.
¹⁴. Interview of author with Bill Dowrick, Geelong, 30 June 2003.
marginalisation of Australian forces from the US triumphalist attack against the Philippines is now well known.\(^\text{16}\) Indeed, even in 1945 this marginalisation was the subject for considerable public debate within Australia itself.\(^\text{17}\) Perhaps for this reason the campaigns in New Guinea, even though they were the necessary precondition for MacArthur’s later successes, have slipped from the national memory. The Anzac legend has always been a means of enhancing Australian nationalism—and nationalism of a particularly chauvinistic and celebratory kind. It is noteworthy that the two battles that are at the core of Anzac mythology, Gallipoli and Singapore, are those which allow Australians to shift blame for military failure to Britain, the imperial power whose dominance had to be challenged, like the authority of a parent, if Australia were to engage in nation building. More particularly, both Gallipoli and Singapore can be attributed to Winston Churchill, whose attempts to divert Australian troops to Burma in the crisis of February 1942 make him a natural villain in the Australian nationalist narrative. Kokoda, meanwhile, also has the capacity to be constructed as a defining moment of Australian nationalism when the nation was ‘saved’ from invasion.

The New Guinea campaigns of 1943–44, in contrast, are tinged with the realisation that at this stage of the Pacific War Prime Minister John Curtin was surrendering a ‘measure of sovereignty’ to the United States.\(^\text{18}\) The centrality of the US alliance to Australian defence policy since 1951 presumably explains why official carriers of memory have been loath to articulate this view. Memory, it is widely recognised in the now massive scholarship on this subject, is often a means of legitimising present politics; it ‘shapes the frameworks for foreign and domestic politics’.\(^\text{19}\) The predominantly conservative governments of the postwar era have therefore not railed against MacArthur’s arrogance, as Prime Minister Paul Keating did against Britain, when in 1992 he marked the 50th anniversary of the fall of Singapore with accusations of British betrayal.\(^\text{20}\) Yet, if Australian criticism of the US handling of the wartime alliance has been muted, the sense of discomfort at the essentially anticlimactic nature of Australia’s role in the defeat of Japan remains.

Then there is the question of the human cost of operations in New Guinea. Because of the very success of the Battle of the Bismarck Sea and the Allied operations on the

\begin{itemize}
  \item David Horner has detailed this process in his many publications on high command during the Second World War: a succinct summary of his argument is to be found in ‘Strategic policy-making, 1943–45’ in M. McKernan and M. Browne (eds), \textit{Australia: Two Centuries of War and Peace} (Canberra: Australian War Memorial in association with Allen & Unwin, 1988), 272-95.
  \item See Peter Charlton, \textit{The Unnecessary War: Island Campaigns of the South-West Pacific, 1944-45} (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1983).
  \item Horner, ‘Strategic policy-making’, 272.
  \item Müller, ‘Introduction’, 2.
  \item Don Watson, \textit{Recollections of a Bleeding Heart: A Portrait of Paul Keating PM} (Milsons Point, NSW: Knopf/Random House, 2002), 15.
\end{itemize}
Huon Peninsula, the number of Australian casualties was low. John Coates has calculated that in the Lae offensive of September 1943 and the earlier fighting around Wau and Salamaua, Australia lost 1,231 killed and 2,867 wounded—as opposed to Japanese losses of around 35,000. One is reminded of a competition in the 1930s in Fleet Street, then the heart of British newspaper publishing, to find the most boring headline. The winner was ‘Small earthquake in Chile. Not many killed’. Irreverent though it may seem to say it, given the personal tragedy that every individual loss of life involves, in the memory of war, disaster and catastrophe seem to have a greater hold on the popular imagination than success.

The small loss of Australian life also means that there have been fewer carriers of the memory of the war in New Guinea. No memory of the past survives, at anything other than the level of the individual person, without some agency, some act of will. Gallipoli was immortalised by the writings of C.E.W. Bean, both as war correspondent and official historian. The Burma–Thailand railway entered Australian national memory so effectively because journalists and writers like Rohan Rivett and Russell Braddon, were determined that it should not be forgotten. Their books were enduring best sellers, as were those of the nurses interned in Sumatra. And of course the memory of the railway was immortalised globally by the book and film, *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. The campaigns of 1943-44 have had no such cultural carriers of memory.

For all these reasons, the conference at which the papers in this volume were presented was of great significance. It included representatives of government, the defence forces, veterans and academics. With so many different carriers of memory gathered together with the one purpose, the campaigns of 1943-44 might at last move

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Before Finschhafen: Preparing, Training and Equipping the Forces

Edward J. Drea

This chapter offers a context for the Finschhafen operations that are discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters, and in particular it deals with aspects that preceded the campaign, particularly unit reconstitution defined in its widest sense of rebuilding combat-worn formations, integrating replacements, and preparing, training, and equipping them for the next battle.

In early 1943, neither Japan nor the Allies had sufficient resources, logistic support, and personnel to gain the operational advantage. Only disease thrived in the fecund rain forests and it indiscriminately ravaged both sides. The issue in northeast New Guinea was in the balance. True, Japan could not hope to match the United States and Australia in the long run, and already the two-front war in New Guinea and the Solomon Islands had strained Japanese resources to their limit. In the short term, however, the Allies had also been badly hurt during the Papuan campaign as well as the Solomons fighting and were reconstituting their casualty- and disease-depleted ranks. Thousands of fresh Japanese troops were deploying from China via the Palaus to New Guinea while thousands of American reinforcements were arriving in Australia as each side was determined to regain the operational initiative. Simultaneously Australian ground troops were driving the Japanese back toward Salamaua, and Allied air power was scoring impressive victories.

It was a time of equilibrium in the Australian-American alliance as the United States depended on Australia. The Americans had neither the forces nor the equipment available and fit to move north with the mobility and celerity required. On 13 April, for example, General Douglas MacArthur, Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA), informed the American Joint Chiefs of Staff that his forces would be unable to take part in future operations without a long period of rest and preparation.  

The side better able to reconstitute, reinforce, and replenish its forces could strike first and likely break the deadlock by tipping the strategic balance in the theatre and the operational balance on the battlefield in its favour. Like most things associated with warfare, this was much easier said than done. Operations in June 1943 at Nassau Bay were touch-and-go at a time when a single setback would have discredited MacArthur, unraveled his grandiose plans to return to the Philippines, and relegated SWPA to a backwater permanently overshadowed by the Central Pacific offensive. MacArthur’s American forces had to be better prepared, better trained, and better equipped than they had been during their first encounter with the Japanese.

Warfare may be likened to a series of questions. Tactically, for instance, whether one moves left or right on the track may be a matter of life-or-death. Operationally, the place one commits one’s forces and strategically one’s purpose for doing so finds ultimate resolution with the subaltern or sergeant who decides which way to turn on the track. My point is that the fighting units have to get to that track prepared, trained, and equipped to make the proper decisions.

How did such an inhospitable place as northeast New Guinea become the site of a major land campaign? The simple answer is that New Guinea was in the way. In early 1942 the Japanese army had no intention of occupying New Guinea, but the imperial navy coveted the magnificent natural harbour at Rabaul, New Britain, to protect the southern approaches of Japan’s major naval base at Truk in the Caroline Islands. A domino mentality then took hold, reasoning if Rabaul fell then Truk would be next. So the Japanese had to protect the approaches to Rabaul and the navy proposed they do this by seizing Port Moresby. With luck, the navy could also sever the line of communication between Australia and the United States thereby neutralising Australia’s value as a base of supply and launching pad for future allied counteroffensives. The result in May 1942 was the Battle of the Coral Sea. After that setback the Japanese navy still had to defend Rabaul and for that purpose opted to establish air bases and strongholds on the north New Guinea coast to support the army’s move over the Owen Stanley Range to take Moresby by land. That too failed, ultimately culminating in a protracted slugging match from November 1942 into January 1943 for control of the Japanese air and staging base at Buna.

By January 1943 the Allies’ questions, and strategically these were MacArthur’s to resolve, involved the timing and location of their counterattack northward to retake the Philippines. Whereas the Japanese had needed coastal bases to advance south, any northward advance from the Australian base required advanced air and staging bases along New Guinea’s north coast. Combat troops had to seize potential base areas, engineer and support troops had to develop those bases, security forces had to defend the bases, technicians and specialists had to keep the equipment at those bases running,
in other words, thousands of troops were needed to carve out and sustain air and staging bases in the rugged terrain. Few would fight, but they depended on the support of many.

In March 1943 Tokyo decided to hold forward defensive positions and fight a protracted ground battle of attrition, the scenario the Allies wanted to avoid. At sea neither navy wanted to fight fleet actions in the restricted waters of the northern Solomon Sea much less force the straits between northeast New Guinea and New Britain. Besides the lack of manœuvre room which increased the danger of being trapped by enemy surface ships or submarines, naval task forces would be within range of aerial attacks launched by land-based aircraft.

Shipping and equipment were in short supply. The Allied amphibious landing at Nassau Bay on 30 June 1943 by a reinforced US infantry battalion was a shoestring affair, but even so it exhausted available theatre sealift and forced SWPA to press captured Japanese barges into service to carry the American units and their supplies to the landing area. Somehow the Allies had to create an amphibious force, organise, train, and equip the specialised troops necessary to conduct amphibious operations as they simultaneously constructed landing craft for the seaborne campaigns that would restore mobility and manœuvre to the theatre.

To illustrate the Allied effort, I am going to rely heavily on the US 32nd Infantry Division’s experience. The 32nd was a National Guard division, that is a territorial division, called into Federal service in October 1940. Training in the United States emphasised conventional not jungle warfare tactics as the division expected to fight in the European theatre. In late December 1941, the 32nd was listed for shipment to Ireland and by February 1942 the unit was on the US east coast awaiting movement when the US War Department suddenly diverted it to Australia because of the imminent Japanese threat.2

The division trained initially near Adelaide where the raw winter weather made conditions unsuitable for jungle training or for that matter much realistic field training. The division later displaced to Camp Cable south of Brisbane, but the move was so disruptive that little meaningful unit training occurred before the 32nd deployed to New Guinea. Training in Australia had consisted of a great many road marches, but few if any live fire exercises because of shortages of training ammunition, training facilities, and manœuvre ranges. Senior officers in the division felt its training would be ‘greatly accelerated’ and its ‘combat efficiency’ developed if they could obtain more ammunition for training purposes.3 None was available. Conditioning training was no

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substitute for live fire and manoeuvre field training, especially for units about to go into combat for the first time. Matters were not helped by the disruption that resulted when MacArthur, acting on General Sir Thomas Blamey’s suggestion, relieved the American commandant of the Joint Overseas Operational Training School in September 1942. Furthermore, intelligence about the enemy was spotty, and the division, regimental, and battalion commanders pleaded in vain for more information on Japanese tactics. In their ignorance, many GIs believed the Japanese would flee at the sight of American soldiers. Lieutenant-General Robert Eichelberger, the US I Corps commander, later recalled that MacArthur was eager to get American troops into action and consequently brushed aside the unpleasant fact that the 32nd was ‘not really ready’ to fight. So the officers and men of the 32nd Division learned their profession through bitter experience by suffering almost 800 dead and 2,200 wounded fighting near Buna.

As discouraging and debilitating as the battle casualties were the 7,920 cases of illness—half from malaria, the others from dengue fever, scrub typhus, respiratory infections, exhaustion, and so forth. These statistics indicate a lack of preventive medicine, and indeed medical stores, especially quinine sulfate and atabrine, were in short supply throughout the entire campaign. They also point to a poorly trained and disciplined unit that paid little heed to field sanitation. Their negligence was compounded by a chaotic logistics system. Supply lines, such as they were, became hopelessly tangled, and Japanese aircraft routinely interdicted attempts at seaborne resupply. Artillery and combat service support were nonexistent at Buna. A few platoons of engineers who joined the fighting did so without such basic tools as axes, shovels, picks, or assault boats. These items and heavy engineer equipment were supposed to follow the troops, but never did. Shore-to-shore movement to Buna degenerated into a fight between the US Army and the US Navy for control of the boat section hauling the men and supplies.

The lacklustre medical record was all the more surprising considering that the medical strength of a 1942 US infantry division was 1,019 officers and men, the third largest specialty after infantry and artillery at that echelon. Medical support at Buna did not repay the manpower investment and squandered innovative developments in field

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medical doctrine.

By late 1942 the chief surgeon of the US Army Services of Supply (USASOS) and US forces in SWPA had developed a new 29-man self-sufficient portable hospital. Four medical officers and 25 enlisted men could carry all the unit’s equipment, supplies, and rations into combat. The trade-off was that heavier medical and surgical equipment as well as supplies that could not be broken down and manhandled had to be left behind even though they would have been useful in the field. Unanticipated problems soon surfaced.

Medical supplies and equipment had to compete with ammunition, rations, and troops for scarce air cargo space on flights from the supply base at Port Moresby to the staging field at Dobodura. Cargo planes eventually hauled four tons of supplies for the three hospitals (or 68 pounds per man) to Dobodura, but because of their low priority the process took more than two weeks. The medical team then found the three attached portable hospitals too heavy to accompany the 127th Infantry Regiment, 32nd Division, to Buna. So on 10-11 December the 127th went into combat without medical support.

Back at Dobodura the portable hospital team sorted medical stores and equipment and eventually put together pack frames that they carried to the lines at Buna, seven and one-half miles away, every foot along jungle tracks or through marshy coastal swamp. The delay in receiving medical supplies, the time lost in sorting them, and the difficulty in portering them overland meant the medical ‘buildup accompanied the battle instead of preceding it’. Not until Christmas Day 1942 did the 3rd Portable treat its first battle casualty. According to doctrine, portable hospitals were supposed to render emergency life-saving surgical care for battle casualties, not treat routine or even serious wounds that second or third echelon hospitals could safely treat. In practice the surgeons treated everything from jungle foot to gunshot wounds at Buna. Throughout the campaign medical support was unavailable, misdirected, and inefficient.

The effects on the line units were predictable. The 2nd Battalion, 126th Infantry, 32nd Division, had nineteen officers and 585 other ranks the day it went into combat, 2 December 1942. Seventeen days later those numbers were roughly halved to ten officers and 283 others and by 5 January 1943 the battalion mustered five officers and 154 other ranks, a less than full strength infantry company. It had received no replacements throughout the fighting because none were available either in Papua or Australia. Nor as mentioned had it received much in the way of combat service support.

11. Report Buna Campaign, 51, CMH.
The 32nd’s poor combat performance and reports of battlefield cowardice coloured MacArthur’s view of the division for the rest of the war. Eichelberger, however, was optimistic that the surviving veterans would form a nucleus to rebuild the shattered unit from the bottom up based on their combat experience. ‘So many brave men have died or been injured, but when they return to duty there will be something solid to build on and these men have had their baptism of fire.’ After a brief period of rest, the Division began intensive training designed to fit replacements into its ranks, pass on to them the hard-won knowledge of jungle fighting and develop the infantry-artillery teams that proved essential to success in future battles.

Reconstitution

Relief of officers was and remains a standard US military practice to encourage better performance. MacArthur cabled US Army Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall, that the commander of the 32nd Division, Major-General Edwin Harding’s ‘desire to protect his officers caused him to excuse and explain failures rather than acknowledge the presence of such ineffectiveness’. SWPA’s acerbic Chief of Staff, Major-General Richard K. Sutherland, later explained more bluntly that the relief ‘was predicated on his [Harding’s] refusal to remove certain incompetent regimental and battalion commanders’. During the fighting Eichelberger discovered that the division chief of staff had falsified operational reports by claiming the Japanese had launched a major attack in order to conceal his own failure to advance. That officer’s incompetence was so well known within the division that his very name became a synonym for confusion.

At least one junior officer was later court martialed for cowardice in the face of the enemy, an extremely rare official admission of cowardice by the US Army. Reports of American soldiers throwing down their weapons and fleeing from battle further upset MacArthur. To prevent reoccurrences, ‘All commanders, in training and in battle, must

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14. Telegram, MacArthur to Marshall, No C-493, 19 February 1943, World War II Papers, OCMH Collection, USAMHI.
15. Transcript of interview of Richard K. Sutherland by Samuel Milner, 12 November 1946, World War II Papers, OCMH Collection, USAMHI.
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ruthlessly weed out incompetent leaders, and energetically seek out new leaders in their units. Failure to be “hard-boiled” in this respect will render a unit commander, otherwise capable, impotent to achieve the results desired. By the time the 32nd reassembled at Camp Cable, Queensland, they had a new division commander and a new division chief of staff. There were also wholesale changes in command at regimental, battalion, and company level, some because of well-deserved promotions, some because of casualties, others because of the relief, fairly or otherwise, of incumbents.

Combat experience and performance became yardsticks for promotion and the 32nd commissioned liberally from its enlisted ranks to capitalise on that hard-won battlefield experience. For example, 30 enlisted men from the 126th Infantry departed on 30 June for Officer Candidate School and after graduation they returned to the regiment to lead its platoons and companies. On the other hand, newly arriving junior officers and enlisted replacements were suspect. ‘Too many replacements’, a division staff officer later remarked, ‘were higher grades so we were overloaded with master sergeants and sergeants who could not be placed in command of a rifle company or platoon because their lack of combat experience meant the men did not trust them.’

Recognition and reward for combat performance became essential tools in rebuilding the unit. The 32nd’s new division commander, Major-General William Gill, determined that ‘[t]he men had to be cured in body and mind before any effective training for renewed combat could be accomplished’. For individuals who displayed conspicuous gallantry, Eichelberger or Gill or senior staff officers presided over award ceremonies and pinned decorations on veterans’ uniforms. Beginning on 9 March and continuing at irregular intervals into August, nearly 13,000 decorations were handed out to members of the division. One can argue that the American Army inflates awards, thus cheapening their overall value. After all, Eichelberger awarded the Silver Star and Purple Heart to the disgraced chief of staff. But the psychological effects of official recognition should not be underestimated. Updating Napoleon’s dictum that a soldier would fight long and hard for a bit of coloured ribbon, in mid-1942 Major-General Robert C. Richardson, who as General Marshall’s personal representative was then inspecting SWPA, had

18. Report Buna Campaign, 73, CMH.
19. Journal 126th Infantry Regiment, 1 January 1943-30 April 1943, folder 332-Inf 9126-0.7, box 9228, WWII Operations Reports 1940-1948, 32nd ID, 11-1-42 to 10-31-43, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland (hereafter Journal 126th Infantry Rgt, CP).
21. 32 ID History, 131.
23. Milner, Papua, 209; 32 ID Infantry Division, 84. The chief of staff did not receive the Purple Heart after all because he had not been wounded in action. Also see Mayo, Bloody Buna, 132.
urged MacArthur to adopt a generous policy of awards and ribbons to the men who
were actually fighting. ‘It costs nothing and is a marvelous stimulus to morale.’

The 126th Infantry Regiment paraded for a 9 March individual awards ceremony,
and the division honoured all its dead with a memorial service. Several days later it was
itself cited in General Orders for its role in the Papua campaign, receiving a Distinguished
Unit streamer for its regimental colours. Casualties returning to the unit received their
awards for valour in mid-July, and in mid-August Gill presented the Purple Heart to 114
returning officers and men who had been wounded during the Buna fighting. Five days
later 25 more soldiers received awards for valour. The medals and commemorations
were mostly deserved, and by publicly, officially, and repeatedly telling the soldiers that
they had accomplished something important they were also the Army’s way of restoring
pride and unit esprit for the task ahead.

I am not suggesting for a moment that these were starry-eyed veterans anxious to
have another go at the Japanese. US War Department observers pointed out that many
line officers and men ‘were more concerned about returning to the USA than they are
about getting on with the war. The general idea seems to be that they have been away
long enough and it’s someone else’s turn.’ On 4 March 1942, the entire 32nd Division
assembled at Camp Cable to be disabused of those notions. Gill expressed his pleasure
with his new command and then told them about their future. ‘This is not the end of it.
It has just started. This is a mean, long job. You have to teach the recruits based on your
combat experience.’ Friends of General Harding reported to him that, ‘The speech
was a fiasco … the entire 32nd boohed [sic] him, and … of course nothing could be
done about it as one can’t punish 10,000 or so men.’ Gill’s dash of cold water may
have been booed, but it also woke up the division to the reality that lay ahead of them.
The training program began two days later.

Training

After ‘weeding out’ the incompetents, trainers had to prepare the survivors and the
replacements for the next battle. The consensus among professional officers was that
the division’s previous training was unrealistic and unsuitable for the conditions and
the enemy the troops had faced. As Eichelberger had earlier written Sutherland, ‘We

Papers, USAMHI.
25. Journal 126th Infantry Rgt, CP.
26. Lt-Col. Frank J. Lawrence for Ground General and Special Staff Sections, HQ, AGF, 23 August 1943,
folder 10, box 51, Intelligence Reports: Numerical File, 1943-1946, RG 337, HQ Army Ground Forces,
CP.
27. Journal 126th Infantry Rgt, CP.
28. Anders, Gentle Knight, 278.
need corporals, sergeants, and Lieutenants with guts and training. Some have the former but the latter as I have pointed out before is sadly lacking. Marching along a road does not train men to advance into Japanese machine guns ... "29 Training Memorandum No. 3, I Corps, USAFFR, 14 February 1943, incorporated lessons learned as veterans and replacements were to be taught the techniques of scouting, patrolling, cover and concealment, night operations, combat firing, hand-to-hand combat, weapons maintenance, field sanitation, discipline and teamwork.30 That training was necessary in such basic skills suggests the extent of the deficiencies that existed in the division's training before their experience at Buna.

Training had to be more realistic to habituate the soldiers to the sounds, noise, and confusion of warfare. To create infantry-artillery teams, for instance, the infantryman had to become accustomed to following closely behind a rolling barrage and understand his margin of safety. It was a dangerous tactic learned only through repeated battle drills. So live overhead fire by artillery and mortars became a routine part of training exercises. Machine guns, concealed snipers on flanks, and pop-up targets appearing at close range on obstacle courses added surprise while using smoke and controlled explosions gave the soldiers some sense of the shock and confusion of battle. Professional officers certainly knew these basics and one observer reported, ‘I saw all these things done at the Australian Weapons School’.31 But it was not until 1943 that American units in Australia underwent such rigorous training. Squad-level tests in such basics as scouting and patrolling evaluated small unit teamwork and progress. Field training problems became the norm for the 32nd, something the division had not conducted since the Louisiana Manoeuvres in the United States in 1940. Training was hard and the new commanders tolerated no excuses for substandard performance. When instructors pronounced a field artillery battalion’s training performance unsatisfactory in their Camp Cable training area, the entire unit had to road march to I Corps Headquarters to train under the ‘close supervision’ of the I Corps Staff.32 The goal was simple, yet harsh. ‘The combat leader must use every means at his disposal to train his men properly before battle is joined, to bring his men into contact with the enemy in the best possible fighting trim and yet be tough minded enough to expend them unhesitatingly to achieve victory.’33

29. Letter, Eichelberger to Sutherland, 18 December 1942, Robert L. Eichelberger 201 File, CMH.
32. (G-3) to G-4/Cs, 2 March 1943, folder 370.5, box 671, G-3 General Correspondence, 1942-45, RG 496 Records of GHQ SWPA, CP.
33. Report Buna Campaign, 73.
Replacements

MacArthur had been clamoring for expedited shipment of replacements since the fighting at Buna began, and on 21 January 1943 Marshall informed him that 4,000 fillers (2,500 infantry) had departed for Australia the previous day. Another 2,000 (1,700 infantry) would embark the first week in February. During the spring and summer of 1943, the 32nd Division received 6,000 replacements. The first reached the unit on 9 March and were a mixed blessing.

Of the initial 1,486 replacements, 834 (56 per cent) were in the lower two (of five) mental alertness categories. That percentage was excessively high because according to the statistical distribution for the ‘White National Average’, only 33 per cent of the replacements should have fallen into those lower categories. A later group of about 2,500 replacements had an average Army General Classification Test (AGCT) rating of approximately 50 points when an AGCT score of 100 represented the median of all men tested and a score of 100 or over was needed to place the soldier in Classes I, II or the upper half of III. Because of the drain of Class I, II, and III men for the Army Air Corps and the technical services as well as a belated recognition of the need for more infantrymen, after March 1942 the US Army assigned a higher percentage of Class IV and V men to the Infantry Branch, 35.6 per cent of all Infantry before 1 March 1942 and 43.6 per cent after that date. The 32nd Division was seeing the results of that Army personnel policy and could do nothing about it. There were other problems with replacements and returnees.

Medical boards found some replacements ‘unfit for combat service’, and commanders regarded older replacements (over 38) ‘as liabilities rather than assets’. Returnees from hospitals were still physically weak and unfit for full duty. Aside from wounds, the after effects of hepatitis and malaria debilitated men and forced commanders to assign them to light duties for as long as six months to achieve a full recovery. The Amphibious Training Center, for instance, reported that during the 32nd Division’s training cycle the unit was as much as 30 per cent below strength because of recurrent malaria among its

34. Marshall to MacArthur, 21 January 1943, folder 370.5, box 674, G-3 General Correspondence, RG 496 Records of GHQ SWPA, CP.
ranks. ‘They were useless as combat soldiers’, a staff observer said. ‘They came back too quickly and others who were fit we did not get back quickly.’

Besides the replacement fillers, between May 1943 and January 1944, three US divisions and two regimental combat teams arrived in Australia or at Milne Bay, Papua New Guinea. The number of American troops in Australia doubled to 200,000 between July 1942 and July 1943 and passed the 300,000 mark in December 1943. All of these forces had to be trained to conduct amphibious operations.

**Amphibious Force**

Buna had shown that overland movement through New Guinea was arduous, time-consuming, and debilitating. Terrain fragmented large units nullifying the Allies’ advantages in firepower and mobility. The simplest and most direct route of advance along the New Guinea coastline was by water. It was also the most complicated militarily, requiring specialised training and equipment, specialised troops to handle shore-to-shore movement, and adequate numbers of service troops to accompany the task force into the combat zone to establish supply dumps and bases. Using combat troops for such purposes, as had to be done at Buna, was ‘wasteful to the point of negligence’. But service troops remained in short supply in SWPA well into 1943, forcing commanders to use infantry replacements extensively on fatigue details, labour battalions, or in provisional service units. SWPA somehow had to overcome these drawbacks and simultaneously develop amphibious expertise. This became the job of Amphibious Force.

Amphibious Force, Southwest Pacific (later Seventh Amphibious Force), was established on 10 January 1943. Its commander, Rear-Admiral Daniel E. Barbey, had to organise the amphibious force, train its navy and army components in amphibious operations, and move units to forward deployment areas. Training Directive of 8

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38. Memo, Col. Willis J. Tack and Lt-Col. Frank J. Lawrence for Ground General and Special Staff Sections, HQ, AGF, 23 Aug 43, fldr 10, box 51, Intelligence Reports: Numerical File, 1943-1946, HQ Army Ground Forces, RG 337 CP. The same conditions were true for the Australian 6th and 9th Divisions. Seventh Amphibious Force, ‘Command History, 10 January 1943-23 December 1945’, II-16.

39. The 24th Infantry Division arrived at Rockhampton on 8 September 1943; the 1st Cavalry Division arrived in Australia during July 1943; the 6th Infantry Division disembarked at Milne Bay on 31 January 1944; the 158th Regimental Combat Team (RCT) arrived in Australia in January 1943; the 112th Cavalry RCT in May 1943; and the 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment in November 1942. Personnel figures are derived from Fact Sheet, ‘Strength in Australia, about 15 March 42’, Geog Australia 320.2, CMH. In July 1942 there were 95,248 US Army troops (including Army Air Force) in Australia and New Guinea. By July 1943 that number was 200,841 and by December 1943 307,141: letter, OCMH to State Department, 3 November 1952, Geog Australia 320.2, CMH.

40. Report Buna Campaign, 84.

41. Memo, Tack and Lawrence, 23 August 1943, CP.
February 1943 charged Seventh Amphibious Fleet with all amphibious training except
that necessary for shore-to-shore operations of Special Engineer Brigades, discussed
below.\textsuperscript{42}

On 1 March 1943, Southwest Pacific Amphibious Force established Amphibious
Training Command, together with a number of specialist schools, at Port Stephens
where the Royal Australian Navy had an amphibious training base, with other amphibious
training centres at Port Philip Bay, and Cairns.\textsuperscript{43} Training was divided into two
segments. First the command trained the division’s line and staff officers from division through
battalion echelon in the theory and practice of amphibious operations. The officers then
rejoined their units to lead them in practice landings during four weeks of intensive
training to develop battalion, regimental, brigade, and divisional combat teams. The men
were taught as units to embark, proceed overseas, and land on hostile shores as Corps
officers and mobile teams of instructors critiqued their performance at every step. Each
unit went through a complete rehearsal before launching an operation. The 7th Division
AIF was supposed to be first in the course, but its reconstitution was proceeding slower
than expected so the 32nd Infantry Division inaugurated the Amphibious Training Center
between 16 June and 28 August 1943.\textsuperscript{44} From the beginning, however, the lack of proper
equipment and especially the lack of the necessary numbers and types of amphibious
transports and landing craft severely handicapped the training schedule.

SWPA had received a small number LCTs and smaller landing craft in December
1942 as part of a pool of ships for use in training Army troops in amphibious techniques.
Barbey, however, needed a greater variety of amphibious ships, but due to a world-wide
shipping shortage they were not immediately available. The few vessels in Australia
needed major overhaul, but the Australian shipyards were already overloaded and
amphibious shipping had a low priority.\textsuperscript{45} Commander-in-Chief, US Fleet, did assign LST
(Landing Ship Tank) Flotilla Seven to SWPA, and its ships arrived at intervals between
April and July 1943. While the larger LSTs, many loaded with smaller LCPs (Landing
Craft, Personnel), were welcome, Barbey needed APAs (Amphibious Transports) or
AKAs (Attack Transports) for realistic troop training. He had one dilapidated troop
transport. US Fleet parted with that ship only because it leaked so much oil that enemy

\textsuperscript{42} Seventh Amphibious Force, ‘Command History, 10 January 1943-23 December 1945’, I-1 and II-10,
Pentagon Library, Washington, DC.

\textsuperscript{43} Maj.-Gen. Hugh J. Casey (ed.), \textit{Engineers of the Southwest Pacific 1941-1945: Reports of Operations:
United States Army Forces in the Far East, Southwest Pacific Area, [and] Army Forces Pacific, II,

\textsuperscript{44} Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, \textit{Reports of General MacArthur: The Campaigns of MacArthur
in the Pacific} (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1966) I: 107; Seventh Amphibious Force,
‘Command History, 10 January 1943-23 December 1945’, I-4 and II- 11/12.

\textsuperscript{45} Daniel E. Barbey, \textit{MacArthur’s Amphibious Navy: Seventh Amphibious Force Operations 1943-1945}
(Annapolis, MD: US Naval Institute, 1969), 34.
submarines could easily follow its oily trail to the task force.\textsuperscript{46} Sailors made do by jury-rigging the leaky old ship into an ersatz AKA and also rigged LSTs with debarkation nets to allow troops to practise climbing up and down cargo nets from the improvised transports to the awaiting landing craft.\textsuperscript{47} Three Australian passenger ships converted to Landing Ships, Infantry (LSI) supplemented these training devices, but during much of 1943 ships were constantly engaged both in training an average of 20,000 men per month and in moving units and supplies to operational areas. Finally a scarcity of combatant ships left officers receiving instruction in the techniques of naval gunfire support without any opportunity to direct live fire exercises with warships.\textsuperscript{48} They would learn that difficult job on invasion beaches.

Equipment dictated tactics. Without large attack transports SWPA had to rely on beaching type ships—LSTs, LCI, and the LCTs—to move north to New Guinea. These vessels were slow, difficult to manoeuvre, and extremely vulnerable to hostile fire. So Barbey relied on surprise and stealth for his initial landings. Landing craft put ashore at lightly defended or unguarded beaches at dawn about two hours before high tide. To maintain the element of surprise no preliminary aerial attacks and a minimum of naval gunfire support preceded the landings. Planners identified locations without strong enemy defences or strong points and used a four-hour window to land troops and equipment because the thin-skinned ships had to make a quick getaway to escape the inevitable enemy air raids.\textsuperscript{49}

The specialised organisations and boats needed to lift troops to the landing areas came from an unlikely source. In July 1942 there were about 8,000 US Army engineers in Australia who, with the exception of combat engineers undergoing much specialised training in Australian schools, were building a base infrastructure, not training. Despite SWPA’s repeated requests, the War Department sent no more engineers to the theatre that year.\textsuperscript{50} During 1943, however, Army engineer strength increased fivefold to about 40,000 and overall engineer strength in theatre (Australian and American) more than doubled to 84,000 as various Australian Army schools provided specialised training to the American engineers. Among the reinforcements that arrived in Australia in January 1943 was the US Army 2nd Engineer Special Brigade, a unit especially created to support amphibious operations.\textsuperscript{51}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{46} Barbey, \textit{MacArthur’s Amphibious Navy}, 39.
\bibitem{48} Ibid., I-2-4 and II-16.
\bibitem{49} Barbey, \textit{MacArthur’s Amphibious Navy}, 36-7 and 43-4.
\bibitem{50} Casey, \textit{Engineers of the Southwest Pacific}, II:30.
\bibitem{51} Ibid., 113.
\end{thebibliography}
The US Army went into the amphibious role in March 1942 when the Services of Supply (SOS), acting on War Department orders, instructed the US Army Corps of Engineers to establish an amphibious command capable of conducting shore-to-shore operations. The newly-activated unit began training in June 1942 on the east coast of the United States, where exercises soon demonstrated that shore-to-shore operations required an Army engineer shore regiment and an Army boat unit to preserve unity of command at the waterline. These specialised units, originally designated Engineer Amphibian Brigades, became Engineer Special Brigades (ESBs) in 1943 with a TO&E of slightly more than 7,100 officers and other ranks equipped with 300 landing craft. After the Allied strategic decision not to mount an amphibious assault on Nazi occupied Europe during 1942, however, no one seemed to know what to do with the ESBs. From SWPA MacArthur had complained to the War Department that shortages of light shipping, barges, and landing craft available in Australia hampered preparations for his future operations. Marshall seemed to solve both problems by sending the ESB to Australia. Getting the troops to Australia was relatively easy, but transporting their equipment, particularly their landing craft, seemed impossible. Landing craft were bulky, awkward, and large which restricted the number of vessels that any one ship could carry. Their unusual shape and dimensions precluded stacking them in a cargo hold and any other method resulted in wasted cargo space, something no one could justify at that stage in the war. As a result in early January 1943 SWPA had only 76 landing craft on hand. The US Navy promised to send 60 landing craft and crews to MacArthur each month, but at that rate it would take more than one year to assemble enough shipping to lift a single division. A simple but brilliant solution was found—prefabricate the plywood-hulled boats in sections in the United States and ship the disassembled parts to Australia. The innovation allowed 1,000 disassembled boats to be loaded efficiently in a single ship’s cargo hold.

The Navy had considered this possibility, but discarded it because there were no facilities in Australia to reassemble the dismantled boats. US Army planners remodeled a plant in Brisbane to do the work. Operated by a US Army engineer unit with the assistance of civilian specialists from US commercial ship builders such as Higgins and Chris-Craft, by March 1943 the assembly line was capable of producing 300 boats per month. Brisbane was building and launching MacArthur’s navy.

Meanwhile since July 1942 Major-General George Kenney had rebuilt the American Air Forces in Australia in much the same fashion as Eichelberger later reconstituted the

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ground units. Kenney ruthlessly dismissed senior air commanders and those he deemed ‘worn out air crews’ or rear area ‘dead wood’. Even before arriving in Australia, he was determined to fire most of the American general officers serving in Allied Air Forces. One senior officer, he remarked, ‘will never realize that we are at war’ while another was simply bewildered by combat operations. Besides the generals, Kenney dismissed about 40 colonels and lieutenant-colonels and one captain. Responding to a request for future duties for two of the dismissed officers, Kenney wrote, ‘Have no recommendation for assignment … unless you have vacancies for police and prison officers.’

Kenney, like Eichelberger and Gill, made extensive use of awards and medals for flight crews to rebuild morale and rekindle an offensive spirit. He showed up at remote forward bases, awarding medals and giving animated pep talks to encourage air and ground crews to do more by telling them that their efforts mattered. Besides the psychological approach, his staff strengthened air base defence in the forward areas by adding better early warning systems and coordinated anti-aircraft artillery fire. They oversaw improved sanitation for purposes of malaria control in northern Australia and New Guinea and arranged for better food distribution to get variety into the men’s monotonous diets. They slashed red tape and simplified spare parts requisition procedures that previously took a month to get a part from a depot 100 miles away.

In short, Kenney and his staff implemented numerous highly visible reforms that had an immediate, tangible, and positive effect on troops’ daily existence.

Kenney streamlined command and control by eliminating layers of headquarters and duplicative administrative functions. Operations orders previously had to pass through four layers of command before reaching the air squadrons. By creating the 1st Air Task Force in March 1943, Kenney organised an advanced headquarters that was flexible in size and could be assigned specialised aircraft depending on the mission as determined by the advanced headquarters’ commander. Centralised command and control at forward headquarters allowed crews to plan missions together and gave Kenney the flexibility and concentration of airpower that air commanders always boasted about but rarely achieved.

He was also a persistent advocate for SWPA, constantly nagging Army Air Forces commander General Henry (Hap) Arnold in Washington, DC, for more aircraft. The 5th Air Force was short 224 aircraft and in May 1943, but Kenney’s energy accelerated deliveries of P-38s to June rather than the original September date. More medium bombers arrived and the rate of replacement aircraft also doubled.

54. Ibid., 43.
55. Ibid., 116-19.
Like so many airmen of his generation, Kenney believed in an independent air force, and his innovations in SWPA predated, but were consistent with, Army Air Force doctrines of the air commander exercising centralised control of all available airpower. One naval officer later wrote that Kenney was ‘a cocky individual, thoroughly competent in his own field and highly regarded by his men, but not interested in any phase of warfare that was not centered around an airplane, particularly a bomber’. Kenney was narrowly focused, but his intensity and commitment had put together a lethal air arm by January 1943.

**Intelligence**

Intelligence had not performed well at Buna in 1942 and the major role it would play in the later New Guinea campaigns was not readily apparent in early 1943. The United States Army depended heavily on Australian intelligence organisations during 1942 and 1943. One thinks of the early warnings provided by coastwatchers in the islands as well as dependence on ANGAU teams in New Guinea. The American Army also relied on its Australian ally for developing expertise in signals intercept and traffic analysis of Japanese army, army air force, and naval land-based air force radio communications. Australian operators were far ahead of the arriving American intercept operators whom they taught and trained in the techniques of intercepting Kana Morse among other specialities. Cryptanalysis, at least for the ground and air forces, was a combined affair run from Central Bureau, Brisbane, where Australians and Americans deciphered the Japanese Army’s Water Transport cipher in April 1943. This system carried message traffic concerning Japanese Army merchant shipping which facilitated interdiction of convoys bound for New Guinea ports. Central Bureau’s work complemented that of the US Navy’s Melbourne intercept and decryption facility where cryptanalysts worked Japanese mainline naval message traffic. Both centres processed and passed critical deciphered intelligence to the theatre commanders. Tactical intelligence was less adept, for major discrepancies between SWPA’s American G-2 and his Australian counterpart involving methodology and assessment seriously affected the analysis of raw intelligence data and were never totally resolved, as Finschhafen would demonstrate.

**Conclusion**

Preparing, training, and equipping the forces during 1943 laid the groundwork for the campaigns that would take Finschhafen and points north in New Guinea in 1943 and beyond. Training never solved all the problems or answered all the questions to eliminate the inevitable surprises of combat. But it did develop commanders who displayed

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flexibility and innovation. They were risk takers and they trained junior officers and NCOs who were fighters. Looking backwards it is easy to suggest that it was a foregone conclusion. After all, the Japanese just could not match the Allies in material production, technology, and equipment. Such an interpretation does a disservice to the men and women who participated in those campaigns of 1943. They did not know the future as we know the past. They found themselves in an uncertain present and could only look forward to an unknown future. They made do with what they had and under appalling physical and psychological conditions carried the fight to a tenacious and fanatical foe who asked no quarter and gave none. They were in the forefront of operations run on a shoestring where a single setback might have ended the campaign. For them it was a close run thing, and we should remember that as we go on to examine their lasting accomplishments at this critical juncture of the war in the Southwest Pacific.
It is a truism that war is an intensely human activity. For many participants, and even innocent bystanders, it is a tragedy of misery and suffering. More positively, as we know, battles are usually won by the courage and initiative of individual combatants. But at the levels of strategy and operations the personalities, ambitions and values of the principal commanders exert an even greater influence on the final outcome. At these levels, human relationships are often decisive. For example, Australia’s involvement in the 2003 Iraq War was largely determined by the personality of the Prime Minister, John Howard, and its conduct owed much to close involvement of the Chief of the Defence Force, General Peter Cosgrove.

The story of Australia’s strategic and operational planning in 1943 is the story of six men—two American generals, two Australian generals and two Australian civilians. The American generals were General Douglas MacArthur and his air force chief, Lieutenant-General George Kenney. MacArthur was one of the towering figures of military history. Imperious, believing in his own destiny, he was a brilliant manipulator of the media and a clever political general. He was the Allied Commander-in-Chief of the Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA), which included both US and Australian forces.

He was not one to share the limelight with anyone else, and George Kenney knew it. Kenney was an innovative air strategist, but was prepared to present his ideas gently to MacArthur through MacArthur’s headquarters staff. Soon MacArthur relied on Kenney for advice on matters of strategy as well as the conduct of the air war, and they talked long into the night about operational matters. More importantly, Kenney made him believe in the Air Force, whereas previously he had mistrusted it.

The Australian generals were General Sir Thomas Blamey and Lieutenant-General Edmund Herring. Blamey dominated the Australian Army almost as much as MacArthur dominated the Southwest Pacific Area. Tough, experienced and ruthless, Blamey also
had a high opinion of his own worth. Although MacArthur was the principal military adviser to the Australian government, Blamey held tightly to his role as the government’s principal Australian military adviser, believing that it was in Australia’s best interest for him to do so. But Blamey was trying to do too much. He commanded both the Australian Army and the Allied Land Forces. Because he could not undertake all these tasks simultaneously, he delegated responsibility for planning to Herring, who deputised for him as Commander of New Guinea Force. Herring was a capable citizen soldier. An outstanding barrister, he could master a brief, but lacked Blamey’s depth of military knowledge. Blamey also had a highly competent chief of staff, Major-General Frank Berryman, but as we will see, Blamey’s desire to fill several positions was to cause problems at the operational level.

The Australian civilians were the Prime Minister, John Curtin, and the Secretary to the War Cabinet, Sir Frederick Shedden. Curtin was the leader of a Labor government that had come to power in October 1941 and was generally suspicious of the military. Curtin was also the Defence Minister, but although conscientious he had little knowledge of military affairs; he relied heavily on MacArthur for military advice and on Shedden for advice on strategic policy. Shedden was also the Secretary of the Defence Department and while apparently self-effacing, had assiduously gathered control of all the bureaucratic machinery for the conduct of Australia’s war, and believed that he had a better grasp of strategic affairs than any of Australia’s military leaders. He was the link between MacArthur and Curtin. Between them, Curtin and Shedden determined Australian strategic policy.

Australia’s military operations in 1943-1944 were the largest and most complicated ever undertaken by its military forces. Between 22 January 1943, when the fall of Sanananda marked the end of the Papuan Campaign, and 24 March 1944, when Australian patrols entered Madang to signify the end of Australia’s New Guinea offensives, Australia deployed five divisions in operations that included amphibious landings, parachute drops and air landings. Although the Australians were part of a coalition with the US, they had a large degree of autonomy in the conduct of their own campaigns. Nonetheless, General MacArthur’s directives set the shape of the campaign and strongly influenced its conduct. The orchestration of the sea, land and air forces of the two nations was an outstanding achievement. Not everything, of course, ran smoothly, but in the big picture the victories of 1943 set the foundation for the larger victories of the following two years.

The size and complexity of the campaign required much detailed planning and coordination. At the theatre strategic level, MacArthur, with broad strategic direction from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had to plan, direct and conduct a series of military campaigns across a wide geographic area stretching from the Solomons to New Guinea. At the operational level, Blamey had to plan and conduct a series of subordinate campaigns
in New Guinea. But the offensive also had implications for Australian strategic policy, and while it was still being fought, the Australian government had to make decisions about the balance of the Australian war effort to sustain future operations. This policy was determined by four of our key personalities—Curtin, MacArthur, Blamey and not least, Shedden.

The Australian campaigns in New Guinea in 1943 and 1944 can be divided into three phases. The first phase, from January to August 1943, was the planning and preparation phase. During this time there were actually quite a few operations, including the advance of the 3rd Division from Wau to Salamaua and the important battle of the Bismarck Sea, but generally the Australians planned and trained for the coming offensive. The second phase, from September 1943 to April 1944, consisted of offensive operations, and included the capture of Lae and Salamaua, the seizure of Finschhafen and Sattelberg, the thrust into the Ramu Valley, the storming of Shaggy Ridge, and the coastal advance to Madang. Of course there was also plenty of planning in this phase. In the third phase, from April to October 1944, the main Australian forces were withdrawn from operations, with the Americans taking over the prime offensive role.

This chapter focuses on the first phase and Lieutenant General Coates deals with the second and third phases in the following chapter. I have divided my chapter into four sections: MacArthur’s strategic plans; the Southwest Pacific Area command structure; Blamey’s operational plans; and the government’s strategic plans.

**MacArthur’s Strategic Plans**

From the time when he arrived in Australia in March 1942 and particularly from the time of his appointment as Commander-in-Chief Southwest Pacific Area the following month, General MacArthur had always intended to lead an offensive north to regain the Philippines. It was immaterial to him that the Allied Combined Chiefs of Staff meeting in Washington had agreed that the first priority was to ‘beat Hitler first’. He was determined to win sufficient resources to enable him to mount an offensive, and he was at least partly successful. Hence on 2 July 1942, following the US victory at the Battle of Midway the previous month, the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, acting on behalf of the Combined Chiefs, issued a directive ordering MacArthur to conduct offensive operations with the ultimate object of seizing and occupying the New Britain-New Ireland-New Guinea area.

The Japanese beat the Joint Chiefs and MacArthur to the punch. The Japanese landed in Papua, and it took MacArthur’s forces—mainly Australians—until January 1943 to drive the Japanese into the sea at Sanananda. The Japanese also thrust south through the Solomons to Guadalcanal, and it took a similar period before the predominantly
US naval forces of South Pacific Command defeated the Japanese on Guadalcanal and obtained control over that island in February 1943.

The Papuan campaign was not the high point of MacArthur’s military career. He underestimated both the strength of the Japanese offensive and the difficulty of operating in the difficult terrain and climate of New Guinea. Further, he believed that after his failure in the Philippines he was on the brink of being dismissed from his command. It was imperative to achieve victory in Papua before Admiral Bill Halsey won at Guadalcanal. For MacArthur, the US Navy was almost as much a foe as the Japanese. The irony was that in Washington, President Roosevelt and the Joint Chiefs were determined to pursue the beat Hitler first strategy, and it was only the urging of the hated Chief of US Naval Operations, Admiral Ernest King, that gave offensive operations in the Pacific some measure of priority.

Thus while Australian and American troops were conducting what MacArthur optimistically called ‘mopping up’ operations in Papua, he announced that his forces had annihilated the enemy there, and he turned his attention to planning the next offensive phase.1 In the seven months since the Joint Chiefs had ordered the Pacific offensive, Allied forces had captured all of north Africa, and Allied leaders were gathering in Casablanca to plan the next stage of the war. MacArthur responded with urgent messages to Washington demanding additional forces for a renewed offensive. He enlisted Curtin’s assistance and the Australian government sent pleading requests to London and Washington, but to little avail. On 29 January the Australian government was informed that at Casablanca the Combined Chiefs had reduced the Pacific war to fifth on the list of priorities, after the Atlantic, Russia, the Mediterranean and the United Kingdom. The good news was that the directive of 2 July 1942 to capture Rabaul remained unchanged.

MacArthur and his staff had been continually refining his offensive plans, and on 28 February he released a new plan, called Elkton II, that concluded that he needed an additional five divisions and almost 2,000 more aircraft. Meanwhile the Joint Chiefs had called a conference in Washington to coordinate the operations of the Southwest and South Pacific Areas. MacArthur sent his chief of staff, Lieutenant-General Richard Sutherland, and his air chief, Kenney, to Washington to plead his case.

On 28 March the Joint Chiefs issued their directive for offensive operations in the South and Southwest Pacific. The Joint Chiefs were unable to provide all the forces required by MacArthur if he were to take Rabaul, and the aim was modified to that of containing the Japanese forces by maintaining the initiative, and preparing for the ultimate seizure of the Bismarck Archipelago. This was to be achieved by establishing

airfields on Kiriwina and Woodlark Islands, seizing both sides of the Vitiaz Straits, and advancing through the Solomons to southern Bougainville. The Joint Chiefs agreed to supply MacArthur with two more divisions of ground troops, 524 additional combat planes and 336 non-combat planes.

MacArthur did not easily accept this directive and persuaded the Australian government to send messages to Washington and London, asking for more forces. When Churchill and the British Chiefs arrived in Washington for a meeting with Roosevelt and the US Chiefs in May they agreed to provide sufficient resources to the Pacific and the Far East to enable commanders to apply ‘unremitting pressure’ against Japan, but the basic policy of defeating Germany first remained.  

In their directive of 28 March the Joint Chiefs had given MacArthur the following tasks:

1. The establishment of airfields on Kiriwina and Woodlark.
2. The seizure of Lae, Salamaua, Finschhafen, Madang and western New Britain (Cape Gloucester).
3. The seizure of the Solomon Islands to include the southern portion of Bougainville.  

The third task was given to the forces of Admiral Halsey’s South Pacific Area operating under MacArthur’s strategic direction.

MacArthur developed this directive into a campaign plan, known as Elkton III, which he issued on 26 April 1943. The scheme of manoeuvre was a series of amphibious operations, and to implement this plan he divided his force into four task forces, not counting the South Pacific forces. The first task force was New Guinea Force, under General Blamey. This was composed mainly of Australian Army units, but included some Americans, and had the task of seizing Lae, Salamaua and the Huon Peninsula up to Madang. The second task force was New Britain Force under Lieutenant-General Walter Krueger. This was an American force based on the newly-formed Sixth Army, and had the task of seizing the islands of Kiriwina and Woodlark and the western end of New Britain. The third task force was the Allied Naval Forces, under Vice-Admiral Arthur Carpender. Its task was to support the operations of the preceding two task forces, defend forward bases, protect the lines of communication and transport the land forces for their amphibious landings. The fourth task force was the Allied Air Forces

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3. Ibid., 398.
4. GHQ SWPA Elkton III Plan, ibid., 677.
under Lieutenant-General Kenney. Its task was to destroy enemy aircraft and shipping, support the two land task forces, support the defence of the forward bases and provide air transport for the land forces.

Kenney’s influence was clear. Back in October 1942 he had written to General Hap Arnold, the chief of the US Army Air Forces, to describe his concept of operations:

The artillery in this theatre flies, the light mortar and machine guns, the rifle, tommygun, grenade and knife are carried by men who fly to war, jump in parachutes, are carried in gliders and who land from air transports on ground which air engineers have prepared. These engineers have landed also by parachute and by glider, with airborne bulldozers, jeeps and light engineer tools … the whole operation preceded and accompanied by bombers and fighters.

He continued that the Pacific consisted of islands that were merely aerodromes from which modern firepower was launched. Sometimes they were true islands like Wake or Midway, sometimes the ‘islands’ were localities on large land masses such as New Guinea. The only practicable way to get from one to the other was by air or water. He explained that each was ‘garrisoned by a small force and each can be taken by a small force once local air control is secured. Every time one of these islands is taken, the rear is better secured and the emplacements for the flying artillery are advanced closer and closer to Japan itself.’

Kenney had already appreciated that the most effective way to conduct the war was not by confronting the main Japanese land forces, but by seizing airfields, preferably in areas where the Japanese were weakest. MacArthur accepted this strategy. In essence, MacArthur’s campaign for the advance from New Guinea to the Philippines became one based on a maritime strategy. However, MacArthur had only a relatively small navy. Instead, his main striking force was his air force, based on jungle airstrips rather than on aircraft carriers. The role of the army was to seize and hold the areas for the airstrips and for the naval anchorages and bases. We now know that in pursuing this strategy MacArthur was assisted by signals intelligence in selecting areas that were held lightly by the enemy. But this did not mean that the army had a lesser role; many divisions and much hard fighting would be needed.

The Command Structure

To understand the Australian Army’s role in the 1943 campaign it is necessary to appreciate the Allied command structure. MacArthur exercised command through General Headquarters (GHQ SWPA) that was initially located in Melbourne and later moved forward to Brisbane. GHQ was supposed to be both a joint and combined headquarters, but it was staffed primarily with US Army officers.

MacArthur had three principal subordinates—the commanders of the Allied Naval, Land and Air Forces. The commanders of the Allied Naval and Air Forces were US officers. MacArthur had not been satisfied with these initial appointments; he replaced the incumbents, appointing Vice-Admiral Arthur Carpender and Lieutenant-General George Kenney in their stead. General Blamey was Commander Allied Land Forces, although as noted, he was also Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Military Forces.

MacArthur was most reluctant to place US forces under an Australian Army commander, even though in mid-1942 the Australian Army had some thirteen divisions in Australia and the Americans had two under-trained divisions. MacArthur preferred to operate through task forces; but General George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff US Army in Washington, directed him to appoint Blamey as Commander Allied Land Forces. Before long MacArthur began to institute arrangements to make Blamey a task force commander. Finally, in September 1942 during the Papuan campaign he arranged to have Blamey ordered to New Guinea to take command of New Guinea Force. After the campaign Blamey returned to Australia to resume his post as Commander Allied Land Forces and to attend to his many responsibilities as commander-in-chief of the Australian Army.

In preparation for the coming offensives MacArthur now began to restructure the command arrangements, and on 11 January 1943 he asked Marshall to send Lieutenant-General Walter Krueger from America ‘to give the US Army the next ranking officer below General Blamey in the Allied Land Forces which is not now the case and is most necessary’. Soon after Krueger’s arrival MacArthur formed Alamo Force to conduct the operations of the Sixth Army, which was to be commanded by Krueger. There were not yet enough troops to form a US army in Australia, but Krueger, who also commanded Alamo Force, ‘realised that this arrangement would obviate placing Sixth Army under the operational control of the Allied Land Forces’. Krueger’s deputy chief of staff commented later that Alamo Force was created ‘to keep the control of Sixth Army units away from General Blamey’. This new command system was, in the words of the Australian official historian, Gavin Long, achieved ‘by stealth and by the employment of subterfuges that were undignified, and at times absurd’.

Headquarters Sixth Army was an administrative headquarters and did not come under Blamey’s command. At this stage the Sixth Army consisted of the 1st US Corps, under Lieutenant-General Robert Eichelberger, and this included the 32nd and 41st US Divisions. The latter division was in New Guinea where it came under New Guinea Force. Krueger’s command also included the 1st Marine Division, which, after service in Guadalcanal, had been sent to Australia for rest and retraining. The addition of the Marine Division gave MacArthur a formation that was trained and experienced in amphibious warfare. Under MacArthur’s revised command arrangements, the only way that Blamey could command US units and formations would be if they were specifically placed under his command, as had happened with the 41st Division. Additional US army units would arrive during the year; by early 1944 there would be seven infantry divisions, three separate regimental combat teams and three engineer special brigades.

MacArthur also instituted significant changes to his naval command structure. The first of these took place in January 1943 when Rear-Admiral Daniel Barbey took command of the newly formed Seventh Amphibious Force. His task was to begin amphibious training, build up the naval amphibious force and help plan the forthcoming operations. The second change was the appointment of the Chief of the Australian Naval Staff, Admiral Sir Guy Royle, as Commander Southwest Pacific Sea Frontiers. Royle became responsible for the close naval defence of Australia including the conduct and protection of coastal convoys around Australia, thus releasing Admiral Carpender to concentrate on naval support to MacArthur’s offensive. Carpender’s force was now known as the US Seventh Fleet. The arrangement was analogous to the air forces, in which Air Vice-Marshal William Bostock, Air Officer Commanding RAAF Command, was responsible for the air defence of Australia, while Kenney concentrated on offensive operations in New Guinea. Australian Navy and the Air Force units deployed to the New Guinea area served under the American commanders there.

In planning these operations MacArthur, at his headquarters in Brisbane, worked closely with his Naval, Land and Air commanders—Carpender, Blamey and Kenney—whose headquarters were also in Brisbane. The headquarters of New Guinea Force was in Port Moresby. As mentioned, Blamey was supposed to be Commander New Guinea Force for the offensive, but until he arrived, Lieutenant-General Herring filled this position. Also in Port Moresby was Brigadier-General Ennis Whitehead, the commander of Advanced Echelon Fifth Air Force, who commanded the actual air operations in New Guinea and worked closely with the staff of New Guinea Force in planning future operations.

Remarkably, Royle’s appointment is barely mentioned in the naval official history. For a description of the appointment see National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA), Melbourne, MP1587, IT296B.
The extent of Blamey’s responsibilities as Commander-in-Chief Australian Military Forces can be appreciated by considering the organisation of the Australian Army. Blamey had two headquarters. His main headquarters, at Victoria Barracks, Melbourne (known as Land Headquarters or LHQ), looked after training, organisation and all aspects of administration. His advanced headquarters (Advanced LHQ or Landops) at St Lucia in Brisbane kept in close touch with MacArthur’s GHQ. It concentrated on operational matters. The main formations of the Australian Army in April 1943 were as follows:

First Army (Lieutenant-General Lavarack)—Toowoomba, Queensland
   4th Division (four brigades)
   3rd Armoured Division (two brigades)
Torres Strait Force
II Corps (Lieutenant-General Morshead)—Barrine, Queensland
   6th Division (two brigades)
   7th Division (three brigades)
   9th Division (three brigades)
Second Army (Lieutenant-General Mackay)—Parramatta, New South Wales
   1st Division (three brigades)
   3rd Army Tank Brigade
III Corps (Lieutenant-General Bennett)—Mount Lawley, Western Australia
   2nd Division (three brigades)
   1st Armoured Division (two brigades)
Northern Territory Force (Major-General Allen)—Darwin
   12th Division (three brigades)
New Guinea Force (Lieutenant-General Mackay, acting)—Port Moresby
   3rd Division (one brigade)
   5th Division (two brigades)
   11th Division (two brigades)
LHQ Reserve
   3rd Brigade—Adelaide, South Australia
   4th Armoured Brigade—Singleton, New South Wales

As can be seen, this force comprised twelve divisions, mostly deployed for the defence of Australia. In addition, in each state and territory there were lines of communications areas that included base logistic and administrative units. Further, a large number of schools and other training organisations reported directly to Land Headquarters. In April 1943 the army numbered almost 500,000 men and women. By contrast, the American Army in the Southwest Pacific Area numbered about 110,000.8

It can also be seen that in April 1943 Lieutenant-General Sir Iven Mackay, GOC 2nd Army, was acting GOC New Guinea Force as Herring was on leave. New Guinea Force was an army-level headquarters. The 3rd Division (with only one brigade at this stage) was at Bulolo, where it controlled operations between Wau and Salamaua. The 5th Division was at Milne Bay and the 11th at Port Moresby. Also under New Guinea Force was the 41st US Division at Oro Bay on the north Papuan coast, and another US regiment near Port Moresby. Later, as the time for the September offensive approached, the 7th and 9th Divisions would be deployed to New Guinea and would come under the reformed 1st Australian Corps. At this point, Herring would assume command of the corps and Blamey would take over New Guinea Force.

When Blamey moved forward to Port Moresby he would leave the Australian Army in the capable hands of the Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant-General John Northcott, located in Melbourne. But there was never any doubt that Blamey remained commander-in-chief, and important decisions were still referred to him. At the political level, however, Blamey’s position was under challenge. When he had been commanding in Papua between September 1942 and January 1943 certain administrative glitches had appeared in Australia, and on his return Curtin had challenged him over these, pointing out that they had been caused by Blamey’s dual role as commander-in-chief of the Australian Army and Commander Allied Land Forces. Already, MacArthur had advised Curtin that Blamey should command just the Australian home forces and that Lieutenant-General Sir Leslie Morshead—the hero of Tobruk and El Alamein and now about to take command of the 2nd Corps on the Atherton Tableland—should command the Australian expeditionary force. Indeed it is possible that Curtin was considering replacing Blamey with Morshead as commander-in-chief, but according to Morshead’s widow, Morshead rejected the proposal because he did not want to become involved in the political intrigue or heavy administration involved in the position. Blamey handled this crisis in typical fashion: he went fishing at Womboyne Lake for a week. But the implications of his dual position were not lost on him. He was determined to keep his time at Port Moresby to a minimum, and this was to have implications both in the planning and conduct of the offensives.

**Blamey’s Operational Plans**

It was not until 6 May that GHQ issued a warning order to LHQ directing New Guinea Force to capture Lae and Salamaua, secure airfields in the Huon Peninsula-Markham Valley area for use by the Fifth Air Force, and seize the north coast of New Guinea as far west as Madang. Blamey’s chief of staff, Major-General Berryman, immediately

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stepped up the planning at Landops. A model of the Lae-Salamaua area was constructed in a secure room at St Lucia, the windows were boarded up, and two guards were on duty day and night. On 10 May Herring arrived from Melbourne where he had been on leave. Herring was to be Blamey’s deputy as GOC New Guinea Force and, in conjunction with Berryman, was to plan the operation.

Blamey arrived from Melbourne on 15 May and next day he had a long conference with Herring and Berryman around the Lae-Salamaua model. They agreed that Major-General George Wootten’s 9th Division would conduct an amphibious landing near Lae. Meanwhile, Major-General George Vasey’s 7th Division would march overland from Wau to Lae, and Major-General Stan Savige’s 3rd Division, already located around Wau, would advance through the mountains towards Salamaua. It soon became apparent that a further operation would be needed. Since the maximum range of the landing craft carrying troops for the assault on Lae was 60 miles (100 km), it was necessary to establish a shore base within that distance, and Blamey suggested Nassau Bay. Further, its capture would ease the 3rd Division’s supply difficulties in its advance towards Salamaua. MacArthur readily agreed to the use of an American regiment. The landing was to take place on 30 June, the same date as not only the landings on Kiriwina and Woodlark, but also Halsey’s landing on New Georgia in the Solomons.

The key to success was the 3rd Division’s role. In February, Blamey had recommended that Salamaua not be captured before the fall of Lae, and Elkton II stated that Salamaua was to be captured six weeks after Lae. As Herring put it, Blamey ‘wanted the operation against Salamaua to serve as a cloak for our operations against Lae, and to act as a magnet drawing reinforcements from Lae to that area’.12

On 17 May Blamey issued formal orders for Operation Postern, and next day both he and Herring flew north to inspect the troops on the Atherton Tableland. From North Queensland Herring continued on to Port Moresby, and took over from Mackay as GOC New Guinea Force on 23 May. Back in Melbourne, in mid June Blamey received a disquieting letter from Berryman, who was visiting Port Moresby, stating that Herring’s plan seemed to indicate that Salamaua was to be captured. Blamey wrote to Herring stressing that Salamaua was not to be taken before Lae. Herring replied that he had no intention of diverting from the original plan and that Berryman’s letter had given the wrong impression. Nonetheless, Berryman had detected that something was amiss, and indeed Savige wrote later that he ‘knew nothing about the use of Salamaua as a magnet

to draw Japanese forces from Lae’. On the contrary, Savige thought his mission was to attack Salamaua, or as Herring interpreted it, ‘he rather went his own sweet way’.  

In fact, pressure was mounting on Blamey to authorise an early attack on Salamaua. On 10 June Major-General Whitehead, commanding the Advanced Echelon Fifth Air Force in Port Moresby, urged Kenney to persuade Blamey to capture Salamaua ‘right away’. Kenney replied that he had discussed it with Blamey, but the Australian general feared that if he did so he would not have enough troops left to capture Lae later on. This task would then fall to Krueger’s Americans. Blamey, however, wanted Australian troops to capture Salamaua, Lae and Finschhafen and land on New Britain. As Kenney noted in his diary:

Blamey is on the books as land-force commander and he wants to be in that position until we go into the Philippines. He hasn’t too much faith in the fighting ability of our infantry and from the results to date I can’t blame him … Sutherland and the rest of the GHQ staff don’t like the Aussies and would like to sidetrack Blamey and let Krueger or some American (Sutherland would like the job) run the show.

Gen. MacArthur senses all the jealousies and ambitions in the picture and is not shutting his eyes as to the relative combat ability of the Aussies and Yanks. Of course he would like to have Salamaua right now but he knows that the Aussies are better combat troops today and that he will need them all the way to the Vitiaz Straits.

On 20 June, after discussing the capture of Salamaua with Herring, Kenney recorded that ‘I offered to slug the place to death and lay a carpet of bombs all the way to the place’. He thought Salamaua could be taken in three days and Lae soon after. Kenney continued:

The GHQ gang all think that it will be September or October before we can start an amphibious expedition and Christmas before we capture Lae. At this rate we will all die of old age before the war is over. Herring grins and agrees but says he can’t capture Salamaua unless Gen Blamey orders it … Herring is OK. He realizes that saving time also saves lives by ending the war that much quicker, but Blamey is the stumbling block. I’m afraid he is jealous of Herring.

Kenney had jumped to false conclusions. Blamey knew how difficult it would be to dig the Japanese out of their defensive positions and he was wary of trusting the air force’s claims that their bombers could destroy the Japanese defences. He also knew it would

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15. Kenney Diary, 10 June 1943, Papers of General George C. Kenney, Office of the Air Force Historian, Bolling Air Force Base, Washington, DC. Lieutenant-General Richard Sutherland was MacArthur’s chief of staff.
be some months before sufficient supplies could be built up to support an operation involving three divisions. Kenney’s claim that Blamey was jealous of Herring is hard to accept; Blamey was never one to under-rate his own capabilities.

By 23 June Blamey was at Atherton for a conference with Morshead, Berryman and Herring, who flew across from Port Moresby. Blamey assured himself that Herring understood that Salamaua was not to be captured before Lae and that all was going smoothly for the landing at Nassau Bay. Visiting the 7th Division, Blamey learned that its commander, Vasey, was unhappy about his troops marching overland from Wau to the Markham Valley and he proposed that the 503rd US Parachute Regiment seize an abandoned airstrip at Nadzab with a parachute drop. Vasey’s division would then fly in and advance on Lae from the west. Blamey obtained MacArthur’s approval for this change of plans. When the staff realised that the 9th Division’s ‘shore to shore’ move was beyond the scope of the 2nd US Engineer Amphibious Brigade MacArthur approved the use of Barbey’s 7th Amphibious Force, thus eliminating the need for many of the intermediate bases. 17

Blamey was back in Melbourne by 30 June when the first troops of the 162nd US Regiment began to tumble from their landing craft in heavy seas at Nassau Bay. All was confusion, but there was little resistance and soon the beachhead was established. Meanwhile, the troops of Alamo Force stormed ashore on Woodlark and Kiriwina Islands where they were welcomed by the small force of Australians that had been there for some time.

If Blamey and the Australians could permit themselves some wry observations about the Woodlark-Kiriwina operation, their attention was on the Salamaua operation. On 5 July MacArthur visited Port Moresby and instructed Herring that he wanted Salamaua taken ‘as early as possible’, offering Herring the remainder of the 162nd US Regiment to assist with its capture. Herring accepted the extra troops, realising that in any event he could not capture Salamaua for some time, but wrote anxiously to Blamey asking him to speak to MacArthur. The first opportunity came at MacArthur’s major planning conference in Brisbane on 15 July, where the assembled officers agreed that the target date for the major offensive, including the landing at Lae, would be 1 September. Blamey raised the issue of not taking Salamaua before Lae, but was not satisfied with the reply. Next day, Herring forwarded his operational plan to GHQ. Meanwhile, from Port Moresby Whitehead again wrote to Kenney, urging the early capture of Salamaua and claiming that he and Herring had prepared a plan. 18

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18. Herring to Dexter, 21 January 1952, AWM67, 3/167 part 3, and Herring to Blamey, 6 July 1943, AWM, 3DRL6643, 2/170.2; Notes of Conference, GHQ, 1700, 15 July 1943, AWM, 3DRL6643, 2/43.632; Whitehead to Kenney, 18 July 1943, Kenney Papers.
Herring returned to Port Moresby and a few days later Blamey joined him for a series of conferences from 21 to 25 July. Blamey was still not satisfied with MacArthur's views about the capture of Salamaua, and on return to Brisbane on 28 July he raised the matter again. This time MacArthur agreed that the attack should ‘not be pressed to finality unless a favourable opportunity occurs to capture Salamaua but to be conducted so as not to prejudice, delay or divert troops’ from the Lae operation. Despite this directive, as the 3rd Division closed in on Salamaua MacArthur, Kenney and Whitehead sensed the possibility of a quick victory. Afraid that things might get out of hand, Berryman, who had remained in Port Moresby, visited Savige on 19 August to ensure that Salamaua was not captured before the Lae operation. Berryman explained that Major-General Milford and the 5th Division headquarters would shortly be relieving Savige for the final advance to Salamaua. There had been considerable dispute between Savige and Herring over the handling of the campaign. Blamey had a soft spot for his friend, Savige, and probably thought that after several months on operations he needed a rest. Savige was bitterly critical of Herring and his staff for initiating his relief.\(^\text{19}\)

As the date for the offensive approached, on 15 August Blamey flew north to Port Moresby to take personal control. It was agreed that the 9th Division would land at Lae on 4 September, and the 7th Division would begin its airdrop at Nadzab the following day. On 20 August, Blamey formally assumed command of New Guinea Force, and Herring took command of the 1st Corps. That same day, Milford took over the Salamaua campaign from Savige. Two days later Herring flew across the Owen Stanley Ranges to the 1st Corps advanced headquarters at Dobodura.

On 25 August Blamey went out to Jackson’s aerodrome to welcome MacArthur who established an advanced headquarters in Port Moresby. MacArthur was adamant that the coordination of the operations of the naval and air forces and New Guinea Force could be carried out by no-one but himself: ‘Any attempt to delegate this responsibility would, I am sure, result in ultimate confusion.’\(^\text{20}\) Subsequent events, after MacArthur and Blamey had both returned to Australia, were to show that centralised coordination, with no delegation, could lead to possible disaster. But that was in the future. The planning phase for the September offensive was over.

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19. Notes of Conference, GHQ, 28 July 1943, AWM, 3DRL6643, 2/43.632; Berryman Diary, 28 July 1943; Papers of Lt-Gen. Sir Frank Berryman, AWM, PR84/370; Blamey to Herring, 30 July 1943, AWM, 3DRL6643, item 2/170.2; Comments on Official History, Savige Papers; G.M. Keating, “‘The Right Man for the Right Job’: An Assessment of Savige as a Senior Commander”, BA (Hons) thesis, UNSW/ADFA, 1995.
The planning and conduct of the campaign was not without its difficulties. Blamey’s plan to delay the capture of Salamaua is a case in point. After the success of the Lae operation MacArthur was quick to claim credit for the idea, but Berryman knew the truth. On 4 September he wrote in his diary:

The landing was a surprise and effected without opposition—a vindication of C-in-C [Blamey] and my judgment in adhering to plan to bypass Salamaua. Herring and [Fifth US Air Force] wanted to alter plan and take out Salamaua—that would have ruined surprise and spoil the manoeuvre. I was surprised at Herring after having agreed to our plan, being so easily swayed from it by 5AF.

Blamey recalled: ‘The greatest pressure was put on me to force the Salamaua position but I was lucky enough to stick to my plan to bypass Salamaua before’ the capture of Lae. Herring concluded that by reinforcing Salamaua, the Japanese commander played into the Allies’ hands. ‘By the time he realised his mistake it was too late.’

The Government’s Strategic Plans

While MacArthur and Blamey were busy planning their New Guinea offensive, they could not ignore the fact that their plans relied heavily on men and materiel that were made available by the Australian government. As early as January 1943 it was clear that Australia could not continue to maintain the army at its present strength as well as providing MacArthur with the necessary food and other supplies to sustain his forces. The Australian government needed to make some careful judgements about the balance of the nation’s war effort.

Anxious to prepare for the coming offensives, on 8 February the Prime Minister, John Curtin, asked MacArthur what forces he would require to fulfil his directive. Possibly because he was still negotiating with Washington, MacArthur offered no reply, but whatever the outcome might be, Curtin knew that it would pose a heavy burden on Australia, and on 12 February he told Blamey that Australia had ‘reached the maximum of her manpower, material and financial resources’. He asked Blamey to ‘drop a few hints’ to MacArthur about American extravagance. Blamey had little success, and eventually he suggested that Curtin approach MacArthur directly on the matter.

22. Berryman Diary, 4 September 1943.
23. Blamey to Sturdee, 16 September 1943, AWM, 3DRL6643, 2/6.1.
26. Minutes of Prime Minister’s War Conference, Canberra, 12 February 1943, NAA, A5954, 4/6; Blamey to Forde, 10 May 1943, NAA, A5954, 291/6.
In the meantime, on 13 April, once MacArthur had told him what tasks were in store for the Australians, Blamey reported to the War Cabinet that to provide the offensive force of three divisions, which MacArthur envisaged, and to maintain home security, Australia would require nine infantry divisions, two armoured divisions, one armoured brigade and one army tank brigade. If further manpower could not be released from industry, ‘then the force being prepared for offensive operations should be reduced by an infantry division’. In view of the improving strategic situation, Blamey considered that it was now ‘a justifiable indeed an unavoidable risk’ to reduce the forces in the areas remote from the enemy.  

When the War Cabinet considered this report on 30 April it requested the Defence Committee to review the exact strengths of the three Services that could be maintained if 10,000 persons per month were available. It also recommended that Curtin ask MacArthur whether the offensive force could be reduced by one division. The Defence Committee reported on 6 May that it could only determine the size of the forces once it had ‘an authoritative and comprehensive review of the existing strategical situation’. This could only be provided by MacArthur. The military leaders were arguing that if Australia were to have a major role in the coming offensives then the Services needed the necessary manpower. Some politicians and bureaucrats, however, saw Australia’s most important duty as the supply of food and war equipment. But whatever alternatives were followed, if Australia’s overall contribution to the war were not reduced there would be a further decline in civilian living standards. It is clear that the War Cabinet did not know quite what to do. While it is possible to criticise the petty squabbles between various government departments, the heart of the problem was that MacArthur wanted as many combat troops as possible, as well as supplies and war materiel for his US forces.

In an effort to resolve the impasse, towards the end of May the Defence Secretary, Shedden, visited MacArthur in Brisbane, and explained that the manpower situation had ‘reached saturation point’. MacArthur, however, still wanted an offensive force of three AIF divisions: ‘Anything less would be incompatible with Australia’s status and destiny as a Pacific power and would not guarantee her the same voice in the Peace Councils, to which she is entitled.’ He promised to present Curtin with a strategic appreciation that might make it possible for the demands for local defence to be reduced. In the meantime Blamey told Curtin that if the situation continued it would ‘virtually remove Australian forces from active operations and result in Australian personnel being employed to render service to the US Forces’. Shedden responded by reiterating his request to MacArthur to indicate in his strategic appreciation that the improvement in security of Australia

might allow a ‘relatively small reduction to be made to the great number of men in the land forces’. To do so would furnish ‘Mr Curtin a remedy for some of his problems which at present otherwise appear insoluble’.  

MacArthur took his cue and when he met the Prime Minister in Sydney on 7 June told him that ‘the threat of invasion to Australia had been removed’. After outlining his plans for the offensive, MacArthur turned to the problem of balancing the war effort. He opposed Blamey’s idea that the Americans should provide many of their own services, but he realised that Australia could not continue to provide troops, munitions, aircraft and food at the present level. He therefore suggested that Australia should maintain its military effort until Rabaul was captured. Then its military commitment could be reduced to a land and air expeditionary force, enabling resources to be devoted to food production. Three days after the conference Curtin released a statement that he did ‘not think the enemy can now invade this country’. The way was now clear to determine the balance of the war effort.

Curtin set the process in train when, at a meeting of the War Cabinet on 13 July, he said that the time had come to review the war effort and that the adjustments had to ‘be governed by operational considerations determined by the strategical policy’ of General MacArthur and ‘by the physical capacity of the Commonwealth to complete the programmes within the requisite time’. For a start he recommended that the navy be maintained at its existing strength. The army should provide three infantry divisions for offensive operations and ‘adequate forces for defence of Australia and New Guinea and for relief of units in New Guinea’. The air force should be maintained ‘at the strength authorised under the 72 squadron programme to the extent to which aircraft can be provided’. Manpower considerations were to govern the final size of the forces, and also the provision of munitions, other supplies, works and essential services. The War Cabinet adopted these recommendations as principles, and also decided that MacArthur should be asked to provide Americans to relieve Australians of some of the maintenance services and work projects they were carrying out on behalf of the US forces.

By this time the government was in the midst of an election campaign, but the discussions over manpower issues continued. For example, on 5 August Curtin wrote to MacArthur to ask whether American personnel could take over some of their


30. Minutes of Prime Minister’s War Conference, Sydney, 7 June 1943, NAA, A5954, 2/5; Strategical Situation in Southwest Pacific Area—Prime Minister’s Statement of 10th June, Advisory War Council Minute 1204, 16 June 1943, NAA, A5954/46, 815/1.

administrative tasks. MacArthur replied on 24 August, the day before he flew north to Port Moresby, that he would like to make his forces independent of civilian support, but this ‘could be achieved only at considerable cost to the military effectiveness of my command’. If additional service and maintenance personnel were brought from America without an increase in shipping then fewer combat troops could be sent. The alternative would be for Australia to provide sufficient combat troops, but he understood that there was not sufficient surplus manpower in Australia to permit such an increase. Curtin merely commented that the provision of Australian resources was ‘one of broad policy’, to be considered ‘on the basis of the principles governing the nature and extent of the Australian War Effort’.32

The government now realised that, if the questions raised with MacArthur were to be carried further, it would have to gather the necessary manpower statistics. But it was not until 21 September, four weeks after MacArthur’s reply, that Curtin forwarded a copy to Blamey. Blamey knew that it was time to put aside his operational responsibilities and return to the strategic arena, and on 23 September he flew back from New Guinea, leaving Mackay in charge there. On 27 September Blamey informed Curtin of the continuing difficulties being experienced in restricting American demands. Meanwhile, various government committees such as the Defence Committee (dominated by the Service chiefs) and the War Commitments Committee (consisting of munitions bureaucrats and the Service chiefs) had been trying to find a solution.33 These two committees failed to agree, and Shedden put his own staff to work. On 30 September he presented a detailed review of the manpower situation. It was this review plus the reports of the various committees that formed the main topics when the War Cabinet met in Canberra on 1 October 1943.34 General Blamey and Lieutenant-General Northcott were present to give their views.

After a discussion lasting five and a half hours the War Cabinet largely approved the proposals that had been written by Shedden and presented by Curtin. The War Cabinet agreed that by June 1944 20,000 men should be released from the Services, 10,000 men should be released from munitions and aircraft industries, and that the monthly intake into the Services should be fixed at 5,000 men and women. But apart from stabilising the RAAF at its ‘present strength’ in Australia at 48 squadrons, there was no commitment to reducing substantially the forces fighting in the Southwest Pacific Area.35

33. Curtin to Blamey, 21 September 1943, NAA, A5954, 306/3; Minutes of Prime Minister’s War Conference, Canberra, 27 September 1943, NAA, A5954, 4/2; Minute by Defence Committee, 9, 11, 13 September 1943, NAA, A2670/1, 389/1943; War Commitments Committee Report on Man Power Situation, 14 September 1943, NAA A2670/1, 379/1943.
35. Minutes of War Cabinet Meeting, Canberra, 1 October 1943, NAA, A5954, 809/2.
The War Cabinet affirmed two key principles:

(1) It is of vital importance to the future of Australia and her status at the peace table in regard to the settlement in the Pacific that her military effort should be concentrated as far as possible in the Pacific and that it should be on a scale to guarantee her an effective voice in the peace settlement.

(2) If necessary, the extent of this effort should be maintained at the expense of commitments in other theatres. In the interests of Australia and the British Empire in the Pacific, it is imperative that this view should be accepted by the United Kingdom and the other Dominions especially New Zealand and Canada.

The official historian, Paul Hasluck, described the War Cabinet’s claim that Australia needed to maintain forces as a guarantee of an effective voice in the peace settlement as ‘a new and opportunistic principle’, pointing out that till now, the security of Australia and limits on manpower had governed the Australian war effort.\(^{36}\)

While this criticism has some validity, it fails to link the government’s prevarication to the advice tendered by MacArthur to Shedden in May and to Curtin in June. MacArthur had used terms almost identical to those now enunciated as government policy, and in July Curtin had stated that the Australian war effort would be ‘governed by operational considerations determined by the strategical policy’ of General MacArthur.\(^{37}\) Although MacArthur had claimed that it was in Australia’s interests to provide a substantial striking force, by October he was already making plans to reduce the Australian offensive role.

Blamey knew that this was the case, but nevertheless believed that Australia should continue to provide a substantial military commitment, warning Curtin on 12 July that ‘any reduction in the strength of the striking force below three divisions [would] greatly weaken Australia’s place in determining the future’ and that such a reduction was ‘most undesirable in the national interest’. On 27 September Blamey told Curtin that the operations in New Britain would be by American forces ‘to strengthen a claim to retain New Britain in the post war settlement’.\(^{38}\)

Blamey’s views had been expressed by the Defence Committee in its report to the War Cabinet, and as a result the government’s policy statement of 1 October included the sentence that MacArthur was to be informed of

limits to which commitments can be accepted by the Commonwealth Government for United States Service requirements and of the alternative choices which such limits impose.

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Further, while Blamey agreed with MacArthur’s assertion that Australia could not provide additional combat forces, he reminded Curtin on 5 October that if the Americans continued to send combat forces without maintenance personnel then Australia would have to disband further combat formations. He continued:

The issue which has arisen is that General MacArthur has been asked to relieve us of a burden which is causing a reduction in our force, and in reply takes the view that not only should the burden continue to be borne but that it should be increased.

Blamey advised that since MacArthur was disinclined to respond to Curtin’s request, the Prime Minister should take up the matter with the US government.39

Having decided on a course of action it remained for the government to obtain the concurrence of the British and US governments and cooperation from MacArthur. Eventually MacArthur accepted, as inevitably he had to, ‘that it was for the Australian Government to decide the nature and extent of its war effort’.40 It was not until Curtin, Blamey and Shedden visited Washington and London in April and May 1944 that the US and British governments gave their concurrence to the new shape of the Australian war effort.

The decisions of the War Cabinet on 1 October were fundamental to the balance of Australia’s war effort for the remainder of the war. While the War Cabinet had not displayed a complete grasp of the problem and had not performed particularly well, it was nevertheless frustrated by the arrangement established the previous year whereby strategic matters were in the hands of General MacArthur.

On 1 October, the day that the government determined its future war policy, Lieutenant-General Sir Iven Mackay, accompanied by Morshead (who was to take over from Herring) flew to the recently captured town of Lae to meet with Generals Herring, Milford, Vasey and Wootten. There, Mackay confirmed the shape of the remaining campaign. The campaign still had more than six months to run. But MacArthur was already making sure that the Australians would never again play the central role in his offensive operations. The War Cabinet decision of 1 October ensured, however, that Australia’s forces would continue to contribute to the Allied war effort. Australia would not only have a voice in the peace settlement, but also gain recognition as a valued Allied partner. The echoes of this policy can be found in the reasons for committing Australian forces to overseas military operations over the following sixty years. The first nine months of 1943 had seen the intermeshing of Australia’s national policies, Allied grand strategy, theatre military strategy, operational concepts and campaign planning. Decisions in all these spheres laid the foundation of victory in the next two years.

39. War Cabinet Minute 3065, 1 October 1943, NAA, A5954, 809/2; Blamey to Curtin, 5 October 1943, NAA, A5954, 306/3
40. Notes of Discussion with the Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, Brisbane, 29th November to 1st December 1943, NAA, A5954, 2/6.
The War in New Guinea 1943-44: Operations and Tactics

John Coates

All wars are conducted at four levels simultaneously: political, strategic, operational and tactical. The emphasis in this chapter is on the operational and tactical aspects of the campaign, although there is inevitably some overlap with other chapters. I will be concentrating on the operational level, especially the disparity between Japanese methods and those of the Allied coalition partners in this conflict, Australia, the United States, and a small Dutch force. I should also point out that a New Zealand force that included the 3rd New Zealand Division (Major-General Barraclough) supported Admiral Halsey’s operations in the adjacent South Pacific Area. My purpose is to analyse the campaign at the operational level of war from the commencement of CARTWHEEL—the multi-faceted operation along two converging thrust lines that aimed originally at an assault upon and reduction of Rabaul—to the final operation at Sansapor in the Vogelkop Peninsula, the extreme western end of New Guinea. In the process of course, although CARTWHEEL was originally intended to stop at Madang, other factors caused a change of plan. A spectacular intelligence find at Sio; massive reinforcement of MacArthur’s force once Admiral Halsey’s thrust north from the Solomons was no longer needed; and the progressive attrition of Japanese forces by Australian and American action, were some. As a result, MacArthur’s RENO IV plan of moving on past the Vogelkop Peninsula to the Philippines was permitted to continue.

Rather than trying to treat in detail the more than twenty operations in this campaign, which began at the end of June 1943, I intend to pursue a number of themes drawn from the nature of the fighting, and illustrate them where necessary by referring to individual operations in the sequence.

1. John Miller Jr, CARTWHEEL: The Reduction of Rabaul (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1959), is the standard account. CARTWHEEL was based on MacArthur’s Elkton III Plan and after approval by the Joint Chiefs of Staff was coordinated with V-Adm. Halsey, the Commander, South Pacific Area. The ‘Plan of Maneuver’ is described by Miller on pp. 25-31 and includes a chart of the sequence of operations.
The first theme concerns the relative strengths, Japanese and Allied, at this stage of the war. By mid-1943 it had undergone a radical transformation as the Japanese war machine, with its aggressive command and fine cutting edge, was forced to adapt to the infinitely more difficult task of defending a forward perimeter of 22,000 kilometres of island-studded ocean, hinged in the north at the Aleutians and in the west in Burma, against two coalitions, predominantly British on the Asian mainland, but overwhelmingly American everywhere else.

The second theme is the style of fighting including the tempo of operations, especially assault landings, which changed dramatically as Allied forces mastered the art and the Joint Chiefs revised the Pacific strategy as events unfolded, particularly the decision to ‘neutralise’ and by-pass Rabaul rather than attack it head-on. Of great significance within this theme are both the ‘intelligence war’, which was won convincingly by the Allies, and at least as important, the ‘logistic war’ in which after slow starts by both sides, the Allies overcame their difficulties, whereas the Japanese did not. Therein lay the most important single factor in the campaign.

The third theme, which is a characteristic of US planning in this theatre is, or was, the idea that a string of sequential operations could be conducted according to a rigid timetable. It contrasts the ‘top-down’ approach used by MacArthur and his staff with the ‘bottom-up’ (or decentralised) approach, characteristic of then British Commonwealth armies including Australia. My criticism here is that in certain instances (e.g. Finschhafen), the US approach directly retarded the pursuit of operations, and caused problems that could have been avoided. Principal among the differences was General MacArthur’s omnipotent notions of generalship, and his assertion of total top-down control from the summit. Indeed, given the particular circumstances of his appointment as C-in-C South-West Pacific area and his immense horizontal span of control, I believe he kept the reins too tightly unto himself at too many levels, and too rigidly. A necessary caveat to that theme must be the fact that he won the war in his theatre; and furthermore that, he exerted influence in a way that probably no other individual, with the possible exception of General George C. Marshall, could have done.

Fourth, this campaign demonstrated unmistakably that nothing is more irrelevant in a vast theatre like the Pacific than an outposted army that has been almost completely denuded of its air and naval support. When Rabaul surrendered at the end of the war, more than 90,000 soldiers, sailors, marines, and armed labourers became prisoners of war. They had neither serviceable aircraft nor ships, except for a few powered barges.

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2. There was a Japanese barrackroom saying that was brought to my attention by Dr Ed Drea that went, ‘Heaven is Java; hell is Burma; and no one comes back from New Guinea’. Lt-Col. Kengoro Tanaka, who was one of Adachi’s senior staff in HQ XVIIIth Army, has estimated that of 35,0000 Japanese servicemen who took part in the Papua New Guinea-Solomons campaigns only 13,0000 survived: Kengoro Tanaka, *Operations of the Imperial Japanese Armed Forces in the Papua New Guinea Theater During World War II* (Tokyo: Japan Papua New Guinea Goodwill Society, 1980), ii.
They had been existing on what food had been stored, on what they could obtain from the local people, or what they could cultivate themselves, and for eighteen months they had done nothing to further Japanese war aims except continue to exist. Elsewhere, Japanese soldiers lived in isolation for years in remote places, not knowing that the war had ended.

Fifth, as the war moved into 1944 and Allied combat strength increased exponentially, important elements within the Allied force were displaced to make way for what by now was a totally mobilised United States. Its consequences were felt more keenly by the Australian Army and the Royal Australian Air Force than by the Royal Australian Navy, in which area because of US Navy suspicions that MacArthur might misuse forces directly assigned to him, resources had been held back and Australian naval forces were integrated with American until the end of the war. Not so the Australian Army and air force. As operations progressed towards Japan, those services felt that they were being given second string roles, which, in a country that was eager to have a voice in the final settlement of the war, and which for long had been fighting above its weight, was a distinct setback to morale.

The final theme is that, like previous conflicts, this was a war of perceptions; and for perceptions to strike home, commanders need an image and the means to project one. In addition to his super-ego, MacArthur’s method was complete control of information going outside his theatre and, in a pre-television, pre-multi-media age, he was hugely successful in this. Any correspondent or broadcaster had first to submit material for public consumption to the GHQ Censor. If the material did not accord with MacArthur’s daily communiqués, it was struck out. In consequence, the communiqués were not just information, they were holy writ for a world audience. Whatever the attributes of Douglas MacArthur—and much about him was genuinely impressive—he remains one of the best-packaged figures in military history.

The sequence of CARTWHEEL operations as they actually occurred in practice involved thirteen separate and sometimes simultaneous operations over eight months. The second map (p. 51) shows the continuing landing operations in the South-West Pacific theatre until the end of July 1944. This shows the major operations only, although there were several lesser operations that were worthy in themselves.

**Relative Strengths**

Japanese forces arrayed against MacArthur and Halsey in mid-1943 came under *Eighth Area Army* commanded by General Hitoshi Imamura with headquarters at Rabaul. He controlled two armies: *XVIIth Army* (6th and 38th Divisions), commanded by Lieutenant-General Haruyoshi Hyakutake with headquarters at Buin on Bougainville; and *XVIIIth Army* (20th, 41st, and 51st Divisions), commanded by Lieutenant-General
Hatazo Adachi, headquarters at Madang. Hyakutake was responsible for the Solomons, Bougainville and New Britain, Adachi for New Guinea. Japanese armies did not include corps and as such were generally smaller than western armies, although their percentage of rifles and bayonets was larger. Again, Japanese forces did not include a separate strategic air arm: aircraft belonged either to the Imperial Japanese Army or the Imperial Japanese Navy.

The 6th Air Division, with headquarters at Rabaul, generally operated in New Guinea under the tactical direction of the XVIIIth Army. Also operating from Rabaul was the land-based XIth Air Fleet. Its control rested with South-Eastern Fleet commanded by Vice-Admiral Jinichi Kusaka. His force was mainly for patrol duties and escort and consisted of cruisers, destroyers, submarines, transports, and naval base forces. It did not include large surface units like battleships and carriers. Large scale naval operations were carried out by either the IIIrd or Combined Fleets, both then based at Truk in the Caroline Islands.

The Allied Land Forces under General MacArthur as C-in-C South-West Pacific Area (SWPA), were regrouped into two main bodies for the CARTWHEEL Operations: ‘Alamo Force’, the code name for the United States Sixth Army (Lieutenant-General Walter Krueger), contained two US divisions and part of a third; the Australian element was New Guinea Force. It was nominally five divisions, later six, of which three, the 6th, 7th and 9th were Australian Imperial Force (AIF). In reserve were three US divisions, an American parachute regiment (the 503rd), and the Australian 1st Armoured Division (AIF). Two effects of consequence need to be noted. Australia, which earlier in the war was maintaining more than twelve divisions, reduced the number to six ‘Jungle’ (i.e. light scale) divisions. In contrast, US divisions in SWPA increased dramatically; for example, after the conclusion of the Admiralties operation in March 1944, five divisions from Admiral Halsey’s command were transferred to MacArthur virtually at a stroke.

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3. By August 1943, the entire 4th Air Army was concentrated at Wewak where it was attacked and half destroyed by Gen. Kenney’s Allied Air Forces.

4. The strength of the Eighth Area Army was between 80,000 and 94,000 soldiers, sailors, marines, and armed workers. It could be reinforced by about 60,000 within three weeks. About 320 combat aircraft were immediately available and 270 others could be flown in within 48 hours. Gavin Long, The Six Years War (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1973), 290.

5. The number of Australian divisions altered greatly during the war. In 1942 Australia had maintained twelve divisions and elements of others; by September 1944 the number had reduced to eight, in 1945 down to six. Of 32 Australian infantry brigades that had existed in 1942, two AIF brigades had been lost in Malaya, one AIF brigade in Timor, Ambon and Rabaul; three militia brigades were disbanded in 1942, three in 1943, three in 1944 and a further one in 1945. Chief among the reasons—apart from battle losses—were the requirements of the Australian Support Area, the requirements of industry and the massive losses due to sickness from operations in New Guinea and the islands. Gavin Long, The Final Campaigns (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1963), 34-5.

6. For example, between March and September 1944, four additional corps were added to MacArthur’s force. He then commanded eighteen American divisions, compared with seven (counting those in the South Pacific) a year earlier. Long, The Six Years War, 404.
A second effect was that, with General MacArthur’s creation of ‘Alamo Force’ in February 1943, General Blamey ceased effectively to command the American element of the Allied Land Forces, although formally he continued to hold that responsibility.7

Allied Naval Forces were commanded by Vice-Admiral Arthur Carpender (later Vice-Admiral Thomas C. Kincaid). His command, the US 7th Fleet, included the 7th Amphibious Force (Rear-Admiral Daniel E. Barbey). Also available, though belonging to the US Army’s Corps of Engineers, was the 2nd Engineer Special Brigade (followed later by the 3rd), in essence a ‘brown-water’ equivalent of Barbey’s force, and indispensable for coastal, shore-to-shore operations. For much of the coming campaign, the RAN’s main strength was grouped into Task Force 74 (Vice-Admiral Victor Crutchley VC RN). Its composition varied, but was built around the two heavy cruisers Australia and Shropshire and a US cruiser.8 It carried out many pre-landing and covering bombardments during the campaign.

Both air forces (and a Dutch element) came under General George C. Kenney who commanded the US Fifth Air Force. Most Australian squadrons in action against the Japanese came under RAAF Command (Air Vice-Marshal Bill Bostock). Kenney’s employment of the RAAF was more intense in the earlier months of the war than later. There were two reasons for this. The size of the US force which later came to include both the 5th and 13th US Air Forces was massive; and second, the new aircraft acquired by the RAAF (like the Vultee Vengeance dive-bomber) were less capable and less versatile than aircraft like the P38 Lightning and the Republic P47 Thunderbolt, with which the US forces were equipped. Furthermore, Bostock’s relationship with Air Vice-Marshals Jones was marred by so much friction that Kenney tended to use the RAAF less effectively than the quality of its crews and pilots should have ensured, and the RAAF’s command schism had much to do with this. Of very considerable value, both to deceive the Japanese as to Allied plans, and also to harass them, were RAAF operations out of the North-Western area from a group of airfields between Darwin and Katherine into the Banda Sea, including Catalina mine-laying operations as far afield as Balikpapan.

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7. Between February and April 1943 the HQ of the US Sixth Army arrived in Australia. Both Krueger and Willoughby have commented on the reasons for designating it Alamo Force, which were that Alamo Force as a ‘task force’ could legitimately be commanded directly by MacArthur, not through Blamey’s HQ Allied Land Forces. David Dexter, The New Guinea Offensives (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1961), 221-2.

Logistic support generally followed national lines: American under the US Army Services of Supply (Major-General Richard J. Marshall), Australian under its own Lines of Communication force which had been grouped under a Combined Operational Service Command during the Papuan campaign.

**Style of Fighting and Tempo**

David Horner has commented on the key Allied planning conferences at Casablanca and Quebec, and the Pacific Military Conference, all of which when combined gave General MacArthur his orders to the end of 1943, and the means to carry them out. Sufficient for my purpose here is to reiterate a single important facet of the CARTWHEEL strategy, which, in a curious way, dovetailed fairly neatly into a major change in Japanese strategy.

A principal consequence of the Quebec (QUADRANT) Conference of Allied leaders was that Rabaul was not to be directly assaulted: instead it was to be isolated and ‘neutralised’. Yet for months after that decision was made, General MacArthur insisted obdurately that its seizure was essential to his plans. Nevertheless, the Quebec decision stood, which, given the formidable size of the Japanese garrison and its highly-developed defences, was just as well. The Joint Chiefs further agreed that after CARTWHEEL MacArthur and Halsey should neutralise New Guinea as far west as Wewak. They should also capture Manus and Kavieng for use to support further advances. Once these operations were successfully concluded MacArthur was to move west to the Vogelkop Peninsula. As an additional sweetener to MacArthur, Marshall told him that once there, his next logical objective would be Mindanao in the Philippines.

All this, coming at a time when MacArthur had only recently been dissuaded from insisting that Rabaul had to be directly assaulted, saved the Allies thousands of casualties. In John Robertson’s words: ‘Thus MacArthur, who gained something of a reputation in Australia as originator of the bright idea of countering Japanese garrisons by deftly by-passing them, was in fact stopped by his superiors from launching a full-scale frontal assault on the enemy’s strongest point of all.’

The manner in which Japanese strategy meshed with the Allied plan is as follows. *Eighth Area Army* had been established under Imamura on 9 November 1942 with the intention of better coordinating the defence of New Guinea and the Solomons against the Allied counter-offensive which, unless checked, threatened not only Rabaul, but the *Combined Fleet*’s base at Truk. Adachi, his principal subordinate in New Guinea, had, since the bridgehead battles at Buna-Gona-Sanananda, followed by the multiple reverses

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Japanese Absolute National Defence Zone
at Wau, the battle of the Bismarck Sea and the continuing threat to Salamaua, acted as an imperial dike-fixer, trying to stem the Allied tide, while hoping the dam would not burst. On 1 August 1943, he wrote to Imamura, that in his opinion, ‘the projected Bena Bena-Hagen operations [against Australian Independent Company harassing attacks] should be secondary to the defence of Lae-Salamaua and the Huon Peninsula area. Finschhafen was to be treated as the most important area’,\(^\text{11}\) where he could he set about reinforcing these areas and pre-stocking them. However, both Adachi’s and Imamura’s intentions were overtaken by a new directive from Tokyo.

On 30 September 1943, in a revision of strategy discussed before the Emperor, a new ‘Absolute National Defence Zone’ was decreed, which placed Rabaul and most of New Guinea forward of that line. It did not mean that Rabaul and other areas including Lae, Finschhafen, Sio, and Wewak would cease to be of account; indeed, their defence was to be redoubled. It did mean, however, that Rabaul would no longer be the key south-eastern bastion of the Japanese security perimeter, and would not therefore be reinforced in the relatively lavish way it had before the strategy was changed. Thus fortuitously, MacArthur and Halsey had a wasting target in front of them that, except in a minimal way, would not be reinforced as its assets were written down.

**Progress of CARTWHEEL**

Once begun, the CARTWHEEL operations received few setbacks against a Japanese foe that, while stretched, was capable of dogged defence and sudden ripostes. TOENAILS, the American landings on New Georgia in Admiral Halsey’s South Pacific Area, is but one example.

The planning and subsequent course of this operation illustrated several things: how much the conduct of operations in the Pacific were an enforced trade-off between MacArthur’s determination to return to the Philippines via the north coast of New Guinea and Admiral King’s equal determination (in the absence of unity of command in the Pacific), to accelerate Nimitz’s central Pacific thrust; the danger, when allocating resources, of trying to adhere to a too-rigid timetable; and, the equal danger of stipulating that a relatively weak ‘best case’ force be used when experience at Guadalcanal—and similar Australian experience on the Kokoda Track—had already made clear that it was better to over-estimate Japanese strength and determination, than the reverse.

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These operations began on the night 29/30 Jun 43 with simultaneous landings at Kirinina and Woodlark Islands, Nassau Bay on the north coast of New Guinea, and New Georgia in the Solomon Islands. The landings in the Trobriands by US troops were unopposed. The US troops at Nassau Bay were met by Australian guides. CARTWHEEL concluded in Apr 44 when Australian troops secured Madang and Alexishafen, by which time Gen MacArthur had initiated his RENO IV plan with an amphibious landing at Hollandia.
In the original planning sequence, TOENAILS was meant to follow the successful conclusion of the Huon Peninsula campaign which, on the ground, was planned to be a predominantly Australian operation. Instead, it was brought forward (largely because General Marshall in Washington realised that if he was to stay on friendly terms with Admiral King he had better agree that TOENAILS commence at the same time as the first operations in SWPA, i.e. Woodlark/Kiriwina Islands and Nassau Bay commencing 30 June 1943).

The planning process miscalculated the immensity of the task and misread the ability of the combined Japanese garrison to extract maximum delay and cause casualties to the attackers. What started as a single division operation with a timetable to completion of six weeks (with the stipulation that in the six weeks, not only was New Georgia to be captured, but also Faisi in the Shortlands and Buin in Southern Bougainville) became, instead, a four division operation that took four months just to capture New Georgia alone. Moreover, US casualties were extraordinarily high for such an operation: 1,094 dead and 3,873 wounded; and what was to become almost standard for operations in the jungle, non-battle casualties, that is, casualties from sickness and accidental wounding, exceeded battle casualties by at least four to one.

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12. The lack of progress of operations on the island so alarmed General Harmon, the Commanding General US Army forces in the South Pacific Area that, with Admiral Halsey’s concurrence, he ‘reassigned’ both Major-General Hester, Commander 43rd Division, the original landing force commander, and Rear-Admiral Richmond K. Turner (who had commanded the amphibious force at Guadalcanal). Miller’s description of events in the 169th Regiment, 43rd Division, is informative: ‘... it is possible that the 169th was a badly shaken regiment before the [Japanese] attack began ... when the Americans thought there were Japanese within their bivouacs, there was a great deal of confusion, shooting, and stabbing. Some men knifed each other. Men threw grenades blindly in the dark. Some of the grenades hit trees, bounced back, and exploded among the Americans. Some soldiers fired round after round to little avail. In the morning no trace remained of Japanese dead or wounded but there were American casualties; some had been stabbed to death, some wounded by knives. Many suffered grenade fragment wounds, and 50 percent of these were caused by fragments from American grenades. These were the men who had been harassed by Japanese nocturnal tactics on the two preceding nights, and there now appeared the first large number of cases diagnosed as neuroses. The regiment was to suffer seven hundred by 31 July,’ Miller, CARTWHEEL, 112-13. Col. Franklin T. Hallam, surgeon of the XIVth Corps who arrived in New Georgia on 14 July, considered that ‘war neurosis’ was a ‘misnomer in most instances’, because men suffering simply from physical exhaustion ‘were erroneously directed or gravitated through medical channels along with the true psychoneurotics and those suffering with a temporary mental disturbance currently termed “WAR NEUROSIS”’. Ibid., 120-1. Hallam found that units with poor leaders were more apt to have trouble than those in which the standard of leadership was high. In some units there was a direct correlation between the incidence of mental troubles among the leaders and among the led. He also noted that men with borderline physical defects—eye, teeth, joint, weight, and feet defects, did not break, but did some of the best fighting. Miller, CARTWHEEL, 121-2.

13. Japanese casualties were not known but the US Army’s XIVth Corps HQ which was brought in to coordinate the occupation of New Georgia claimed 2,483 enemy dead. Miller, CARTWHEEL, 187.
More favourably, two events in the South-West Pacific just before this illustrated how far matters had moved from the triumphant Japanese landings that had occurred in New Guinea in February-March 1942 almost eighteen months before, to where events now stood in the second half of 1943. First, a brilliant series of air attacks by Kenney’s Allied Air Forces against four Japanese airfields around Wewak during 17/18 August 1943 destroyed or seriously damaged more than 100 Japanese aircraft of the 6th and 7th Air Divisions. The attacks, coming as they did only two weeks before the Australian 9th Division’s landing east of Lae, and the 7th Division’s air-landing at Nadzab, ensured that Allied operations in the Solomon Sea would not face the devastating attacks from the air that had overwhelmed the Japanese 51st Division’s convoy during the Battle of the Bismarck Sea in March 1943.

Second, a striking feature of the war at sea at this time was the flexibility enjoyed by the Allied navies compared with a year earlier. Then, in November 1942, Admiral Carpender, the Allied Naval Forces’ commander, had refused to bring even destroyers north around the tail of New Guinea into the Solomon Sea to support the Australian-American ground operations against Buna, Gona, and Sanananda. His concerns were the Japanese air threat and poor navigation charts. The first use of destroyers in those enclosed waters before the amphibious landings at Lae and Finschhafen, was a harassing bombardment of Finschhafen on 23 August 1943. As S.E. Morison, the US official naval historian, pointed out, it was, for the South-West Pacific campaign, ‘the first time a naval bombardment had been scheduled in 18 months ground fighting’.14 The bombardment began at 1.20 a.m. 23 August, using the Finschhafen-Kakakog area as a general target; the four ships fired 540 rounds of 5-inch gunfire but without demonstrable results. Still, the fact that it could be undertaken at all without Japanese interference was significant in itself.

**Differences in Command and Staff Procedures**

Before considering the first significant Australian operations within CARTWHEEL, namely the Huon Peninsula campaign, and the Markham-Ramu Valley operations which were concurrent, it is important to refer to command and staff differences between US and Australian methods in planning and procedures and to Blamey’s last significant opportunity to influence Allied strategy.

General MacArthur’s communiqués of this period give the impression that operations under the CARTWHEEL rubric all went according to plan. That was not the reality. A principal source of contention that surfaced in serious form during DIMINISH, the capture of Finschhafen, emphasised the difference between the United States and

Australian staff systems. Essentially MacArthur’s GHQ worked to a highly centralised ‘top-down’ approach in its staff procedures and planning, whereas the Australian approach was to decentralise the working process to subordinate formations, then progressively coordinate on the way up. That is, Blamey, the responsible land commander, having put out a directive, left it to Herring commanding 1st Australian Corps to do the detailed planning in concert with the 7th and 9th Divisions’ staffs. The quite different approach to planning came to light when MacArthur’s G3, Brigadier-General Chamberlin, found that Major-General Berryman, Blamey’s Chief of Staff, could not tell him details of plans after POSTERN (the operation to capture Lae), which Chamberlin considered a major flaw.

Probably no stage of the CARTWHEEL operations is more evocative of the need not to make a rigid plan than the Lae to Finschhafen sequence. The GHQ plan predicted six weeks for the capture of Lae: it took less than two; in contrast, the Finschhafen operation that followed—which GHQ also predicted would be a ‘pushover’ and for which it allowed a fortnight—took more than two months of bitter fighting before it was secure. Before examining the latter operation, it is necessary to go back to an important conference that took place on 3 September, on the eve of the Lae landing.

In MacArthur’s planning, part of his instructions to Blamey had been ‘to seize the north coast of New Guinea to include Madang’. Blamey’s planners, in accordance with Australian staff procedures of working ‘bottom-up’, had given detailed orders for the Lae operation only, on the basis that there was little point in making detailed plans as far forward as Madang because circumstances would undoubtedly change. In this Blamey was subsequently proved to be right, but MacArthur insisted that ‘in order to allow for the timely concentration of troops and supplies, he was to proceed to prepare plans to seize Finschhafen and Madang’.

Blamey’s appreciation, prepared by Major-General Berryman, his chief of staff, was that the Australian force should move north-west from Lae into the Markham-Ramu Valleys; in a sense leaving future coastal operations to secure Finschhafen to be decided after Lae was captured. In a letter to MacArthur dated 31 August 1943, Blamey proposed that the capture of western New Britain should precede that of Madang. His reasoning was that the Japanese would react violently to any attempt to seize the (to them) vitally important Vitiaz-Dampier straits separating New Britain from the mainland, and thus the prudent course would be to seize and control both sides of those straits before proceeding to Madang. If not, an Allied ground force advancing along the coast clear

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15. Ibid., 122-48. MacArthur’s GHQ, in contrast to SHAEF in Europe (Eisenhower) and SEAC (Mountbatten), was not only an all-American HQ, it was also all-Army. This suited MacArthur, but made his GHQ less effective than it might otherwise have been.

16. Miller, CARTWHEEL, 190.
of the straits would present an exposed flank to surface, submarine, and air attack; and in any case, the capture and development of Lae airfield would bring Cape Gloucester on New Britain closer to air cover than would an airfield at Madang. These and other matters were thrashed out at the September 3 conference at Port Moresby. Present were MacArthur, Blamey, Sutherland, Chamberlin, Carpender (with Captain Steinhagen of Allied Naval Forces), Kenney, Whitehead, and Berryman. The result was that MacArthur accepted Blamey’s advice. Essential air support would be provided by the Australian seizure of an airfield at Dumpu in the Ramu Valley by 1 November 1943, which would give Kenney’s Allied Air Forces both an airfield and radar base in the surrounding hills. Both sides of the straits would be controlled by landing operations at Cape Gloucester, and probably Saidor on the mainland. It was the last time that Blamey was to be allowed to decisively influence the course of operational strategy as MacArthur’s Land Forces Commander.

The Huon Peninsula and Markham-Ramu Valley Campaigns

To paraphrase the elder Moltke, ‘no plan survives first contact with the enemy’; that axiom applied here. Lae, the first major CARTWHEEL operation in SWPA, and also the first Australian amphibious assault-landing since Gallipoli, went in on 4 September 1943, when troops of the 9th Australian Division landed 30 kilometres east of the town at ‘Red’ and ‘Yellow’ beaches. There was no Japanese opposition at either beach and no shots were fired in anger until the evening of the second day. A day later, the 503rd Independent American Parachute Regiment (plus some Australian gunners with their guns) dropped at Nadzab, in a classic operation to secure an airfield in enemy controlled territory. Again, there was no opposition. Thereafter, the Australians built upon that success by air-landing a brigade of the 7th Division at Nadzab, to be reinforced later. Elements of both divisions then advanced on Lae from opposite directions, the 9th Division being impeded by eight rivers that crossed its front, including the Busu, which was in flood.

17. Miller, CARTWHEEL, 215-6 and 273, pointed out that Chamberlin, MacArthur’s G3, reversed himself on the question whether both sides of the Vitiaz Strait needed to be held. Blamey had put the matter realistically in his letter to MacArthur of 31 August 1943 by pointing out that ‘the Land Forces might anticipate much more vigorous assistance from the Naval Forces if we control Vitiaz Straits [sic] from both sides’. A[ustralian]W[ar]M[emorial] DRL 6643, Item 2/43.
18. During the later stages of the conference after Blamey had carried his point about controlling both sides of the Vitiaz-Dampier Straits before proceeding up the coast, Blamey elected to ‘push his luck’, as Horner puts it, to suggest that the Australian 6th Division take over the assault landing task at Cape Gloucester—already allotted to Alamo Force—and that US troops rather than Australian take over the back-area garrison tasks in places like Port Moresby. David Horner, Blamey: The Commander-in-Chief (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1998), 419-20. MacArthur was not having any of this. Indeed, the coming series of operations were to be the last in which Australian ground forces predominated.
19. The crossing was successful but the 2/28th Battalion that made it suffered thirteen drowned. It also lost 25 per cent of its Bren guns and many other weapons and equipment. Coates, Bravery Above Blunder, 63-6.
Lae Landing
Lae pointed up a number of deficiencies, especially in planning. Wootten’s advance was steady but slow. It was hampered by a lack of coastwise logistic support; by the fact that heavy stores continued to be landed at the two original beaches rather than keeping up with his advance; by the nature of the terrain and river obstacles; and by his own caution in not swinging the 2/4th Independent Company wide to the north, which David Dexter, the official historian (himself a special forces soldier), criticised. He reasoned, fairly, that this was exactly what an Independent Company was trained to do, and it was what it wanted to do. Had it been allowed to do so it would have found an earlier crossing over the upper Busu, which would have speeded up the 2/24th Battalion’s movement, instead of which it was stopped cold for five days. It would also have detected the Japanese withdrawal, which in turn might have helped Wootten to trap at least part of the Japanese garrison.

There were three controversies about the Lae operation. First, which was the first formation to enter Lae, the 7th Division or the 9th? The subject habitually generates a lot of heat among veterans. The general consensus among historians is that elements of the 7th Division entered Lae in the morning of 16 September 1943: the 9th Division that afternoon. Far more important was the second controversy: why, with two divisions, a parachute regiment and other assets, did the Australians not destroy the Japanese garrison, rather than allow it to escape? It deserves brief discussion.

In military parlance there is a key tactical difference between ‘capture’ and ‘destroy’. Lieutenant-General Herring’s orders called for the capture of Lae—that is, to take it, hold it, and secure it for the advantages it provided as both port and airfield. To ‘destroy’ the Japanese garrison, he would have had to deny them a means of escape; that is, cut them off. This he did not do. There is no evidence from his plans that he contemplated doing so, and with the memory of the bridgehead battles at Buna, Gona, and Sanananda relatively fresh in his mind, he might have thought such an outcome possible only with horrendous casualties and therefore to be avoided. Blamey sensed the possibility of so doing after the Japanese order to evacuate Lae had been captured and translated. But efforts to do this were too little and too late.

Seen from GHQ, Chamberlin, whose criticism was that the Australians had been unnecessarily cautious, had cause to believe that he was right when he contended that the Australians should have acted more decisively and not allowed the Japanese garrison to escape to fight another day. Yet the criticism failed to accept the difficulties of terrain and weather (this part of New Guinea receives 5,000mm, or 200 inches, of rain a year and September is the wettest month), which also had a similar effect on American operations in New Georgia, not concluded until October. Wootten was also hamstrung in his inability to get his heavy equipment forward quickly. What is also curious is that there were no other active operations in the theatre at that time making
competing demands on Barbey’s amphibious force. A similar situation was about to occur at Finschhafen but with results far more dire than at Lae because there, as will be seen, the Japanese elected to fight it out.

The third controversy was whether Lae should not have been assaulted directly, rather than landing 30 kilometres away on the east side of the Busu River, which was known to be turbulent and a genuine obstacle. The most articulate criticism of this decision came from Rear-Admiral R.D. Tarbuck, who was Admiral Carpender’s naval liaison officer at GHQ and served also as MacArthur’s chief naval adviser. He made a general criticism that Army mentality failed to see oceans as highways rather than obstacles, and a more specific criticism that Chamberlain had failed to consult him in the planning process. Yet his criticism failed to address the circumstances at that time. His admonition of Chamberlin was wrong because Herring’s 1st Australian Corps and New Guinea Force were the operational planners, not GHQ. His second, that Lae should have been assaulted head-on, fails to recognise the relative sparseness of the available fire support at that time in the war, rather than later (for example, the OBOE operations in Borneo in 1945 where the specialised means like flame-throwing tanks and sheer weight of pre-landing and assault bombardment were massive), when more lavish means enabled him to write as he did. In the planning for Lae, a landing point east of the Busu was chosen to get it out of artillery range of the Lae defences and in a reasonable area of beach and hinterland so that a beach-head could be developed. The only gunfire support available was potentially from six destroyers and, as Wootten’s report showed, no one could tell him what ships would be available until ‘about a fortnight’ before the operation was due to take place. Moreover, since Barbey had told him he could not guarantee to make a landing at the correct beach until twenty minutes after sunrise, any landing closer to Lae would have been in the teeth of the defences of an alert garrison.

Concurrent with the Lae landing was the beginning of the Markham-Ramu Valley campaign. In the discussions during the September 3 conference it was warmly supported by General Kenney, who was eager to build airfields in the upper reaches of the valleys in range of fighter aircraft covering forthcoming operation into southern New Britain and the coast around Madang. Dumpu was sought as a base and developed as one; Gusap eventually supplanted it in importance. The surrounding high country was needed for radar sites, and it was to have become the main approach to Madang over the mountains.

It led to one of the toughest, short campaigns in Australian military history, because to prevent an Allied force from crossing the mountains the Japanese had skilfully prepared defences on what became known as Shaggy Ridge.

Shaggy Ridge. Its long knife-edge summit made it difficult to displace the Japanese defenders, who had been well dug in. (AWM 062337)

Following the captures of Nadzab and Lae, the move into those valleys began when the Australian 2/6th Independent Company (Captain G.G. King), was flown into a rough strip in the Markham Valley by Dakota aircraft. The company moved quickly overland to Kaiapit, where, on 19 September, it surprised and defeated the Japanese garrison. A rough airstrip was developed very quickly with the help of native labour, and the 21st Brigade of Vasey’s 7th Division was flown in. The brigade then moved north to dominate the country immediately around Dumpu.

This part of the campaign illustrates both the difficulty, but also the flexibility, of Allied strategy. For, with the Japanese vainly trying to defend each outlying redoubt in turn, a principal Allied problem was which thrust line could be developed the more readily. The difficulty of developing operations in the Markham-Ramu Valleys was that the force had to be supplied exclusively by air and by native porter. In addition, the Japanese had developed a skilful defensive position on Shaggy Ridge, a six kilometre

21. King’s brief orders from Vasey were: ‘Go to Kaiapit quickly, clean up the Japs and inform Div.’ Dexter, The New Guinea Offensives, 417. His more specific instructions were to ‘occupy Kaiapit as quickly as possible and prepare a landing field 1,200 yards long, suitable for transport aircraft, as well as carry out limited patrols and destroy any enemy in the area’. In a brilliant small action on 19-20 September, King’s force (190 men) killed over 214 defenders including ten officers and 30 NCOs. Equipment captured included nineteen light and heavy machine guns, 150 rifles and twelve swords. With the help of local labour they prepared a rough strip and troops of the 2/16th Battalion began flying in on 21 September.
long knife-edge with steep slopes on either side, that effectively barred the best route over the mountains to the coast plain.

Operations around the coast were easier because ships could carry much greater tonnages and the 7th Amphibious Force, which was complemented in capability by Engineer Special Brigades, could run supplies and evacuate casualties either by day or night over open beaches. It was also found that aircraft could operate from Finschhafen more effectively to hit targets in southern New Britain (when its pre-war airfield was re-developed in early December) than from Dumpu in the Ramu Valley; although both airfields, including even larger facilities at Gusap, were all useful to give flexibility in a country notorious for low cloud, sudden storms, and generally appalling weather conditions.

Eventually, Australian operations forced the Japanese off Shaggy Ridge and Kankiryo Saddle at its far end, and troops advancing across the mountains towards Bogadjim met up with the Americans who had exploited north from Saidor. The Shaggy Ridge operation is a minor epic in itself. However, quicker success was achieved by moving around the coast, which also had been given higher priority in resources.

Lae’s relatively easy success caused MacArthur to accelerate DIMINISH (Finschhafen), by landing at Scarlet Beach only six days after the fall of Lae. The troops of the 20th Brigade (Brigadier Victor Windeyer), went ashore at 4.45 am on 22 September 1943. The landing was notable for several things.22

Like Gallipoli it was in the wrong place and jumbled, a possibility that Windeyer had anticipated and had warned his commanding officers accordingly. Nevertheless, the operation was successful, and Finschhafen with its important harbour and airfield was captured on 2 October.

At that point however, the fighting really began in earnest. Finschhafen was overlooked by the twin peaks of Sattelberg (in German, ‘saddle mountain’) 975 metres high, and the Japanese, now reinforced by the 20th Japanese Division, were about to contest the landing with the intention of throwing the Australians back into the sea. It is worth noting that when the Australians landed at Scarlet Beach, the Japanese garrison on Sattelberg was half a platoon; within three weeks it was larger than a division.

Three brief comments about DIMINISH. First, the claim—advanced by a number of respected writers—that MacArthur pounced on Finschhafen to forestall a Japanese build-up is not supported by the evidence.23 Neither he nor Brigadier-General C.A. Willoughby,

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22. I have covered the landing in detail in Bravery Above Blunder, Chapter 3, 70-95.  
The Landing at Scarlet Beach
his G2 or Chief of Intelligence, knew of Japanese plans to reinforce Finschhafen with a fresh division. And, long after evidence to the contrary was unmistakable, they continued to argue that the area was of declining importance to the Japanese.²⁴

Second, Willoughby’s assessment of Japanese strength at Finschhafen was out by a factor of more than ten. He assessed the Japanese strength at 350: the actual figure was 5,000, which built rapidly to 12,000 when Katagiri’s 20th Japanese Division arrived at Sattelberg, still undetected by Allied intelligence.

Third, because MacArthur’s GHQ thought that this phase would be a ‘pushover’, he decreed that only a brigade group could be used. By capping the force in this way, he virtually ensured that the 9th Division could not take Sattelberg on the run before the Japanese occupied it in force. It also meant that a reinforced four brigade force had finally to be used to capture the area and evict the Japanese. And it took much longer. After Sattelberg, the 9th Division pursued the 20th Division, and other remnants, 100 kilometres north to Sio on the Vitiaz Strait. It occupied Sio on 15 January 1944.

As with all conflicts many lessons were learnt during this campaign:

• If an assessment concluded that an assault landing required a brigade, the brigade should be reinforced by an additional battalion to protect the beach-head. This was done later at Tarakan, but Windeyer received no such help at Scarlet Beach.

• Part of Willoughby’s low assessment of enemy strength at Finschhafen depended on the fact that aerial photography could only detect a single ‘visible gun’ near the harbour. But Willoughby was in a position to know better. At that time Kenney’s 5th Air Force had only one aircraft in the whole theatre for photo-reconnaissance of the type needed for beach landings, and the demands on it were heavy.²⁵ Willoughby also knew how cleverly the Japanese had mastered the art of camouflage and how difficult it was for aerial surveillance and photography to penetrate jungle canopies. At Munda, which Admiral Halsey’s forces had captured a month earlier, the Japanese had secretly constructed a complete airfield by rigging cables to the tops of palm trees to conceal their preparations. They cut the trunks away and left the cables holding up the tree tops. Underneath, they had made a runway and dispersal bays, which they were then able to bring into use quickly, to the surprise of Halsey’s command.

• This campaign, and Halsey’s, demonstrated that a battalion, especially one occupying ground in a malarious area, needed to be relieved after no more than three months

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²⁵. Quoted in ibid., 131.
of operations. The 2/43rd Bn at Finschhafen for example, lost the following in that
time:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Officers</th>
<th>Other ranks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evacuated sick</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>577</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Killed In Action</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Died Of Wounds (not incl. elsewhere)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wounded</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wounded (remained on duty)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>35</strong></td>
<td><strong>723</strong></td>
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(i.e. its casualties were higher than its original strength, 35 officers and 671 other ranks, when it first landed at Scarlet Beach).26

- This was Barbey’s fourth amphibious landing, but only the first opposed landing. During the course of the war he executed 56 such landings and, like everybody else, he was on a learning curve at the beginning. Scarlet Beach was not one of his best. As well as the troops ending up in the wrong place, the bow guns of his LCIs fired indiscriminately and were more of a hazard to the Australian troops than the Japanese. Also, ship to shore communications were non-existent. Windeyer had to go through Wootten’s HQ at Lae to talk to Barbey: it should have been direct.

- Logistics and fire support. The principal Japanese problem was how to keep open strategic communications and logistic support within the vast arena that they had first occupied. After 1942, every month that went by saw their outposts weaker than before. In New Guinea, they were not able to match the Allies in the means available for either air or sea transport support, and their systematic brutality towards the indigenous population (with rare exceptions), ensured that the latter were never available as a major labour and carrying force as they were to the Allies. During DIMINISH, they were forced to use their artillery as assault guns on a ‘one round for one target’ basis from positions so far forward that the guns and their crews were relatively easily picked off. After the battle of the Bismarck Sea their ability to run supplies to New Guinea from distribution points at Rabaul and Kavieng was greatly curtailed. When they tried to move supplies by powered barge to Finschhafen, for example, they were attacked by the Allied air forces during the day, and at night

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26. The US experience was similar. In two divisions studied by by US psychologists in the spring of 1944, 66 per cent and 41 per cent of the infantrymen had been sent to a malaria treatment centre at least once. Further, if a division remained in combat more than three months, the laws of probability suggested that every one of its 132 second lieutenants would be killed or wounded. Quoted in Ronald H. Spector, Eagle Against the Sun: The American War With Japan (New York: Free Press, 1985), 383.
by US PT Boats and Australian Fairmiles in operations that became an art form.\footnote{27} During operations around Sattelberg, supplies were twice dropped by air, and there was foraging from native gardens, which were limited. Rations according to the official Japanese account ‘were one third of the standard daily amount’.\footnote{28} Artillery and mortar ammunition was similarly restricted.\footnote{29}

- The subject of fire support was contentious on both sides. Some spectacular statements by senior men in New Guinea were found subsequently to be wrong. General Kenney, for example, had earlier made over-enthusiastic claims for air attack against precision targets. At Buna, he had written to General Arnold in the United States, neither tanks nor heavy artillery had any place in jungle warfare. ‘The artillery in this theater’, he added, ‘flies’.\footnote{30} Nevertheless, the results at Sattelberg were not impressive even after frequent attacks over five days. One bomber commander boasted: ‘With sixty-three airplanes, loaded with four one-ton bombs each[,] we removed the Japanese by removing the top ten feet of the mountain and all that had sat upon it. The Aussies then got on with the war.’\footnote{31} But Sattelberg had finally to be taken by Australian infantrymen winkling the enemy out of concealed positions one by one. The most realistic after-action assessment came from the Japanese themselves:

> We had no advance knowledge of the November 17 attack on Sattelberg or of the use of tanks until they appeared before our positions … The preliminary air bombardment affected morale but actual casualties numbered less than thirty. Air strafing accounted for not more than ten casualties around Sattelberg as we were well dug in … Artillery bombardments were very effective, they not only inflicted many casualties but disrupted lines of communication, causing much confusion.\footnote{32}

- Cross fertilisation between adjacent theatres did not work as it might have done. Despite the fact that MacArthur’s GHQ had responsibility for ‘strategic coordination’ with Admiral Halsey’s South Pacific Area, not a lot of lessons were

27. According to the XVIIIth Army’s own calculations, to supply 10,000 men for one month (and more than 12,000 were forward of Sio at this time), required 1,500 cubic metres of cargo space which translated into 150 large-type barges, just for supplies alone. However, in a seven-week period (2 October-25 November 1943), PT boats and Fairmiles operating at night destroyed 44 barges and damaged four. Allied daylight air attacks also caused casualties that were harder to quantify: 18th Army Operations, 42-5.
28. Ibid., 218.
29. By Sattelberg the Japanese artillery had 135 rounds per gun [rpg] for the type 94 mountain gun, 78rpg for the type 41 gun, and 36rpg for the infantry gun (70mm). In addition, there were 102rpg for the 81mm mortar. However, because the Australian 2/32nd Bn had cut the Japanese MSR at Pabu, almost none of this ammunition could be replenished. Coates, Bravery Above Blunder, 218; 18th Army Vol. 2, 99.
31. Papers of Brig.-Gen. Ennis C. Whitehead (USAF); Carl D. Camp, B24 Pilot, 320th Bombardment Squadron, Box 1, quoted in Coates, Bravery Above Blunder, 210.
32. AWM54, Item 779/3/119, Interrogation of Lt-Gen. Adachi and staff; Coates, Bravery Above Blunder,
exchanged between the two theatres. The single weapon that would have served the Australian 26th Brigade to great advantage when it was toiling up Sattelberg was the flamethrower, which Halsey’s forces had been using for some time. It was not made available to this brigade until it landed at Tarakan in the next campaign in 1945. Instead, an early type of multiple rocket launcher, which could be fired from a landing craft or the back of a Jeep and was demonstrated to the Australians by its American crew, was not seen as useful. It was inaccurate, its range was short, and transporting it round the muddy, slippery tracks of New Guinea was not viewed as a practical proposition by the Australians.

**Speeding the Pace**

Successful landings by the US 112th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division (at this time an Infantry Division), at Arawe on New Britain Island, where an airfield and PT Boat base were subsequently developed, followed by the 1st Marine Division at Cape Gloucester, meant that both sides of the Vitiaz-Dampier Straits bottleneck were now securely held. Then, on 17 December, General Krueger’s Sixth Army was given orders to capture Saidor, ahead of the advancing 9th Australian Division, and behind the withdrawing Japanese 20th and 51st Divisions. MacArthur was clear as to the purpose of this landing:

General MacArthur intended that this withdrawal should cost the enemy as high a price as possible … [he] described the predicament of the Japanese when he reported: ‘We have seized Saidor on the north coast of New Guinea. In a combined operation of ground, sea and air forces, elements of the Sixth Army landed at three beaches under cover of heavy air and naval bombardment. The enemy was surprised both strategically and tactically and the landings were accomplished without loss … Enemy forces on the north coast between the Sixth Army and the advancing Australians are trapped with no source of supply and face disintegration and destruction.’

Unfortunately, the reality did not match this grandiose claim. For reasons that have never been explained satisfactorily, Krueger’s troops from the US 32nd Division did not put themselves across the Japanese escape route, which was adjacent to them, and easily reached by aggressive patrolling, let alone artillery cut-off. The magnitude of the mistake was increased by the fact that the Saidor landing (code-named MICHAELMAS), was potentially capable of trapping two Japanese divisions, not just one. The Australian 6th Division was to fight these same Japanese troops (reinforced later to 35,000) in the Aitape-Wewak area, until it cornered them in Adachi’s ‘last stand area’ behind Wewak in the final weeks of the war.

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However, events were now speeded by a calculated gamble on MacArthur’s part that came off. For some time Kenney’s airmen had been reporting an almost complete absence of opposition to air patrols on Los Negros Island, the largest in the Admiralty’s group, 580 km north-west of Rabaul. MacArthur ordered a reconnaissance-in-force, and on five days’ notice a reinforced regiment of the 1st Cavalry Division was landed unopposed at Hyane Harbour. Despite subsequent, stern resistance from the 4,000-odd Japanese on the island, the landing succeeded. Not only did it now completely isolate Rabaul (further north, the Combined Fleet had evacuated Truk), but a fighter base that was rapidly built there extended the range of fighter cover along the New Guinea north coast to beyond Wewak. In strategic terms, this bold stroke by MacArthur, in seizing the Admiralty Islands two months ahead of schedule, prompted the Joint Chiefs to reassess Pacific strategy.

Fortuitously for MacArthur’s cause, it coincided with an intelligence coup by Australian troops of massive proportions. At Sio, an Australian engineer with a mine-detector searching for mines and booby traps along a stream, located a tin trunk half-buried in the mud. It had taken water, and its contents, a large number of books with their covers torn off, were wet. The discovery was reported to an anonymous intelligence officer who, to his everlasting glory, recognised it to be cryptographic material of the highest importance. The find was sent to the Central Bureau in Brisbane where the staff dried the books page by page. Then, in association with the United States Army’s Signal Security Service at Arlington Hall, Virginia, the intelligence organisation was able to decrypt the material and so penetrate the Japanese Army’s most sensitive communications. And whereas in January 1944, 1,846 Japanese Army messages, mostly in the less secure Water Transport Code, had been decrypted, the Sio find enabled 36,000 to be decrypted in March 1944 alone. The possession of this most valuable resource enabled MacArthur to begin his spectacular run of bypassing leaps, beginning with Hollandia-Aitape in April 1944, secure in the knowledge derived from ULTRA that he knew as much about local Japanese dispositions and strengths as it was possible to know.

The successive events of these first four months of 1944, virtually transformed the nature of the Pacific War. The Sio find made MacArthur’s by-passing leaps to Hollandia-Aitape (codenamed RECKLESS) possible, because the Joint Chiefs were able

34. Kenney was wrong. There were about 4,000 Japanese troops in Los Negros although they lacked immediate air support. On this occasion Willoughby was right and he had a detailed picture of the Japanese garrison based on ULTRA decrypts. The US 1st Cavalry’s 1,000-man reconnaissance-in-force had to be speedily reinforced. Eventually, after several severe actions the 1st Cavalry had killed 3,300 Japanese. Only 75 surrendered. Around the disputed airfield, 400 Japanese bunkers were discovered, seventeen times the number identified by trained photo-interpreters. Edward J. Drea, MacArthur’s Ultra: Codebreaking and the war Against Japan, 1942-1945 (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 101-5.

35. Drea, ‘Great Patience is Necessary’, 94, and interview. A harrassed Japanese staff officer sent the book covers to the rear, pretending that the library had been destroyed, which it had not.
The Advance to Sio

The map shows the advance to Sio on 15 January 1944. Key events and movements are marked, including the route taken by 2/11th Bn during the advance. The text explains that while the terrain was difficult, the Japanese were not offering effective resistance.

Key Points:
- SOLOMON SEA
- CROMWELL MOUNTAINS
- Huon Peninsula
- Fortification Point - 20/21 Dec 43
- Gusika - 5 Dec 43
- The text describes the progress of the advance by 9th Div. The battalion designations indicate the leading battalion at each stage. The tanks of 3rd Div for Tank Bn were unable to go beyond Goemeta Point, where a gorge 50 m deep was insurmountable. By then, the Japanese were not offering effective resistance.

The quote from Private P.A. Forbes states: "Ill effects of 2/11th Bn duration were: Hulka Creek was an indescribable scene. Naked enemy dead everywhere. Bullies were killed in a slumbering state. 40 dead in one small cave. None had been buried. The area was foul and nauseating."

Additional Details:
- In early Dec, 80th Jpn Regt at Kukula and 79th Jpn Regt in the Lake area were ordered to withdraw. 97th Regt and HQ 30th Jpn Div by inland tracks to Kukula and Sio. 96th Regt to cover withdrawal of the former, then to withdraw itself via Kukura and the coast. The 11th Bn, 28th Regt was ordered to cover the withdrawal of 25th Div along the coast.
to endorse the plan on soundly based intelligence, rather than relying on MacArthur’s forcibly expressed intuition. The success of RECKLESS was followed quickly by Wadke Island-Sarmi (codenamed TORNADO) on 17 May; by HURRICANE against Biak Island on 27 May; followed by Noemfoor Island close by on 2 July. As Admiral Barbey pointed out, by the time of the Biak-Noemfoor operations the principal concern among American commanders was less the Japanese air attacks, which continued, although more sporadically and with fewer planes than before, but instead, the more likely possibility that MacArthur’s inexorable drive along northern New Guinea would precipitate a major clash at sea with part of the Japanese fleet. In fact, after Hollandia and while operations at Biak were taking place, the Mobile Fleet (an element of the Combined Fleet), had received orders, and was on the point of interceding at Biak, when Admiral Spruance’s 5th Fleet landing at Saipan—much closer to the Japanese home islands—deflected it and brought on the biggest carrier-vs-carrier action of the war in the Battle of the Philippine Sea. It also underlined the Joint Chiefs’ notion that two thrusts in the Pacific were better than one because they kept the Japanese command on the horns of a dilemma. And, with the—by now—excellent understanding between Admiral King and General Marshall, they were made mutually supporting, with benefits to both.

MacArthur’s operations to the end of 1944, received two setbacks: one was at Biak, the other an attempt to slow the pace of US operations by Lieutenant-General Adachi’s now by-passed XVIIIth Army at the Driniumor River, between Wewak and Aitape. At Biak, the Japanese command demonstrated that, even within a rapidly deteriorating strategic situation, inspired local leadership was capable of a riposte that for a time at least could bring the juggernaut to a halt.

Because MacArthur, throughout this campaign, did not have aircraft carriers of his own, such support had either to be borrowed from Admiral Nimitz, or he was forced to use abandoned Japanese fields or construct his own to protect landings and project power further afield. Carrier support was not available for Biak. He needed to capture at least

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36. While most landings were a persistent quest for fighter airfields to cover bombing operations, the need for a new heavy bomber base further west than those at Nadzah, Los Negros, and Hollandia—subsequently found to be unsuitable because of the soft soil—was important to cover future operations in the Vogelkop, Morotai and the Halmaheras. This led, after Wakde Island-Sarmi was found to be equally unsuitable, to the assault on Biak, whose coral and limestone deposits were excellent for airfield construction. I have since landed on Mokmer strip in a C130, which approximated the weight of Second World War heavy bombers like the B17 and B24. Generally, the airfields on the island are excellent.

37. A different view was expressed by British opinion at conferences like Casablanca and Quebec that because they divided the force, the two thrusts might be subject to defeat in detail. In part, that possibility always existed, although British views were coloured overwhelmingly by the ‘beat Hitler first’ principle of not seeing too much drained away to the Pacific. By early 1944, Japan was so stretched and the Americans so strong that this possibility scarcely existed.
The advance along the north New Guinea coast
one of three fields on the island. Like Finschhafen, Allied estimates of Japanese strength were out by a factor of at least six. Against figures of ‘not heavily held’ up to 2,000, there was a balanced force that included 10,000 troops, light tanks, field and anti-aircraft artillery, aviation engineers, four seaward-firing 4.7-inch guns and a 6-inch gun, a naval guard unit, and a naval base special force of 1,500 men under Rear-Admiral Sadatoshi Senda. Both Senda and the army commander, Colonel Kuzume, had read the tea leaves of coastal and island hopping very well and Kuzume, hoping to deny the airfields as long as possible from his strong defensive position based on a massive labyrinth of coral caves overlooking Mokmer the main field, burnt his regimental colours and held out to the last. His strong defence bought the Japanese cause more than a month of time and inflicted many casualties. It also caused General Krueger such frustration that he sent in General Eichelberger to replace General Fuller, the commander of the US 41st Division, in order to speed the pace of operations.

The action at the Driniumor River, which has been described comprehensively by Ed Drea in a Leavenworth Paper, was anticlimactic, in that Adachi’s XVIIIth Army was by July 1944, hopelessly cut off from logistic support by the landings at Biak and Noemfoor, yet paradoxically, full of lessons for any army in a jungle campaign against a desperate foe, especially when its higher command has access to a priceless tool like ULTRA, which its opponent does not have. MacArthur’s extensive use of key ULTRA decrypts here underlines the difficulty descending levels of command have when senior commanders are reading the enemy’s mail at the strategic level of war and know his plans, yet the tactical information which those on the ground are gleaning from the less spectacular, but frequently more immediately relevant and timely information from patrol contacts, surveillance, captured letters and the like is overridden by the urgency to get on. In this instance, matters were aggravated by the fact that MacArthur knew that the Joint Chiefs were, at that very moment, more inclined to bypass the former’s beloved Philippines in favour of a more direct thrust to Formosa, and he wanted Krueger, commanding the Sixth Army, to ‘get this New Guinea thing’ cleaned up as quickly as possible. The US force at the Driniumor finally won by hard fighting and overwhelming

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39. Drea makes a telling point about higher strategy exerting great (and unhelpful) pressure on the commander of PERSECUTION Task Force (Maj.-Gen. Hall) to, in turn, pressure junior commanders to conclude matters faster, which was then done but with greater casualties than otherwise would have been the case: ‘MacArthur was pressuring his subordinates to conclude the Aitape campaign rapidly in order to demonstrate the efficacy of his strategic concepts and thereby win presidential endorsement for his Philippine plan.’ Ibid., 96.
The final operations in New Guinea: Noemfoor, where US parachute troops of the 503rd Regiment were used for the second time in the New Guinea campaign; and Sansapor in the Vogelkop where the Sixth Army was again able to land between two known (through ULTRA) positions of Japanese strength; Manokwari to the east where there were some 15,000 troops of the 35th Division, and Sorong to the west where there were about 12,500 troops, were tough local actions. Finally, the US Sixth Army completed the Vogelkop operation on 31 August 1944 and elements of it then landed unopposed on the island of Morotai in the Moluccas on 15 September. Not only was Morotai then developed as an important mounting base for operations in the Philippines, it became the base for the Australian series of OBOE landings in Borneo from May to July 1945.

Conclusion

It had taken the Allied forces under General Douglas MacArthur six months to recover Papua from the Japanese; then a further nine months to ‘neutralise’ Rabaul and clear north-east New Guinea. However, in the period following of less than three months, the South West Pacific’s forces completed an advance of 2,250 km from the Admiralties to the Vogelkop, and north-west to the Moluccas. From a Washington perspective, MacArthur had caught up, he was no longer dragging his feet.

An American historian has put the New Guinea campaign in this perspective:

“It is really the story of two Allied armies fighting two kinds of war—one of grinding attrition and one of classic maneuver … The series of breathtaking landings, often within a few weeks of one another, were the fruits of the Australians’ gallant efforts in eastern New Guinea.”

40. One of the US Army’s shortcomings at this stage of the war was its neglect, both in official doctrine and training, of the need to patrol vigorously. In this matter it differed substantially from both Japanese and Australian practice. Maj.-Gen. Hall concluded that the troops of the 112th Regimental Combat Team at the Driniumor exhibited similar tendencies to the 32nd Division at Buna: ‘most of the troops just hid out and then returned without doing anything’. In an unpublished paper on US Army and Imperial Japanese Army doctrine during the Second World War, Ed Drea refers to a 16 July letter from Hall to Gen. Kreuger in which he complains that ‘it is too late here to teach the principles of patrolling but we are still trying to do it’. Drea goes on in the same context to state that, ‘American tactics were stereotyped, massive artillery shoots followed up by cautious infantry probes. Indeed artillery support was profligate [at the Driniumor], the largest expenditure to date in the Southwest Pacific Theater.’ He also makes the point that ‘American infantrymen were not the tactical equals of their Japanese counterparts.’ Edward J. Drea, ‘US Army and Imperial Japanese Army Doctrine During WWII’ (unpub. MS,1992), 1, 12, and 13. Quoted by permission of the author.

It is interesting to speculate on what might have been the outcome had not the two principal allies in the South-West Pacific, the United States and Australia, complemented each other’s strengths while reducing each other’s weaknesses, in the way they did. Until the end of 1943 the brunt of the conflict on the ground was borne by the three experienced AIF infantry divisions and a number of militia brigades. There was unpalatable but genuine truth in Blamey’s statement of late 1942 that the American division at Buna (the 32nd Division), was ‘definitely not equal to the Australian militia’. That the US Sixth Army was given time and opportunity to orientate and prepare itself for jungle war was almost solely due to the fact that most of the ground fighting was carried by the Australians for the first two years. Lieutenant-General R.L. Eichelberger, the US Corps commander at Buna, admitted this, whereas MacArthur’s excessive vanity and ethnocentrism prevented him from doing so. At the same time the Australian troops could have achieved very little had they not had massive American support in the areas of logistics, sea and air transport, and offensive air and naval support. The degree of cooperation could have been greater still, had the two countries’ commands been less divided.

The eventual success of the American-Australian-Dutch coalition grew out of the particular nature of the Pacific War. Before December 1941, Australia had not featured in United States’ planning considerations (i.e. the ORANGE series) for a possible war against Japan. Necessity changed that. After Pearl Harbor, and General MacArthur’s ejection from the Philippines, a new strategy was needed to provide the United States with a secure base from which to launch a counter-offensive. That Australia quickly became that base sprang from a coalescence of different forces that traditionally were not noted for integration of effort: the perspicacity of General Marshall (and his assistant as the head of the War Plans Division, Brigadier-General Dwight Eisenhower), that resurgent action should begin from Australia; and a parallel set of conclusions by Admiral Ernest J. King, the newly-appointed Commander-in-Chief, United States Navy, that the lines of communication that linked the United States to Australia had to be kept open so that the Pacific Fleet, that had lost so heavily in the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, could again be built up to challenge and defeat Japanese naval strength.

General MacArthur, though a beneficiary of these insights—which he was never prepared to acknowledge—nevertheless was peculiarly suited to carry out the role that he was called upon to perform. His previous experience as the United States Army’s Chief of Staff, political connections and personal prestige that might have amounted to a challenge to President Roosevelt’s position, and immense ego coupled with a single-minded determination to return and liberate the Philippines, gave impetus to a strategic approach via the north coast of New Guinea that would otherwise have lacked a champion. He capitalised on whatever advantages a secondary approach appeared to offer, and the dialectic worked for him. The fact that a divided approach gave the
Japanese the potential for successive counterstrokes against each thrust in turn was never seriously entertained. And, as the power of a fully mobilised United States was brought to bear, it ceased to matter. Instead, and certainly in MacArthur’s eyes, overwhelming strength possessed a virtue of its own, and he made the most of it.
No ‘Black Magic’: Doctrine and Training for Jungle Warfare

John Moremon

In the official history of the New Guinea offensives, doctrine and training hardly rated mention. These issues did not sit well in a volume that, David Dexter wrote, was ‘the story of the front line—if operations along a gloomy jungle track, or on a rain-drenched razor-back, or in the stifling kunai can be so described’. Only recently has this neglect begun to be rectified. Tim Moreman has analysed the British Commonwealth’s armies’ experiences of jungle warfare in South-East Asia and the Pacific; while John Coates has delivered an excellent case study of the 9th Division’s campaign in New Guinea including discussion of doctrine and training. Others have focussed on the earlier Malayan and Papuan campaigns. Coates has concluded that even with these campaigns behind it, ‘the army remained in the trial and error stage of training and doctrine’. Not until November 1944 was the first detailed manual for tropical jungle warfare printed. Yet progress was still made in the period in question. Doctrinal errors from the Papuan campaign were rectified and a sound system of training set in place.

Before 1942, there was little or no institutional knowledge of ‘jungle warfare’ or the territories of Papua and New Guinea. As Moreman has noted, the conduct of jungle warfare ‘was largely alien territory to the officers and men of the pre-war … Army’. Its special characteristics were not covered in Field Service Regulations, the ‘tactical bible’ of the British Empire’s armies, with only a few hard-to-access manuals on bush/forest/jungle warfare produced for colonial forces in Africa and Burma. The arc of islands stretching across Australia’s north, regarded as an ‘island barrier’, also was little

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4. Ibid., 52–3.
5. Moreman, ‘The Jungle, the Japanese and the Australian Army’.
known. The official historian of the Papuan campaign, Dudley McCarthy, noted that ‘few Australians had much knowledge of them, and the military leaders mostly shared the general ignorance’. 6

In early 1942 officers returning from the Middle East and others in Australia sought information on jungle warfare, Japanese tactics and ‘the islands’ from any sources including escapers from overrun territories. Their impression was that ‘with respect to the training necessary for jungle warfare and as required to counter those [tactics] of the enemy we have a lot to learn and the sooner we learn it the better’. 7 Historians and veterans agree that the immediate response was inadequate. With no real knowledge of the islands, commanders and staff could give troops only simple ideas about jungle warfare. An infantryman recalled that the ‘hairy goat capers of running up & down’ timbered mountainsides in northern New South Wales and Queensland ‘did nothing for us tactically but we were very, very fit physically’. 8 On the Kokoda Track, Australians were shown to be ‘novices at jungle warfare’. 9 Many experienced ‘feelings of claustrophobia’ and they struggled to adapt tactically. Even the 16th Brigade, which spent five months on Ceylon training in jungle and rubber plantations, was, in retrospect, only ‘slightly jungle minded’. 10 McCarthy summed up this period thus:

The ignorance of New Guinea which prevailed in army circles until the year was well under way resulted in losses of life which could have been avoided, in wasted effort and tactical reverses … [also] the lack of training and discipline in some militia units resulted in unnecessary deaths and inefficiency in battle. On the other hand there was an amazingly quick and thorough adaptation to the demands of tropical and bush warfare by individuals and units whose previous experience had been in no way related to this type of operation … 11

The Army would prepare for its second island campaign with the knowledge gained, at great cost, in the first.

Perhaps the most important advance in doctrine and training after the Papuan campaign was simply to reaffirm the importance of doctrinal handbooks and training manuals. In addition to the ‘bible’, Field Service Regulations, or FSR, the arms and services had supplementary training manuals. For the infantry, the leading manual was

6. Dudley McCarthy, South-West Pacific Area—First Year: Kokoda to Wau (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1959), 34.
Infantry Training: Training and War (1937), commonly referred to as I.T. 1937 or I.T. 37. Also important was Training Regulations (1934), which laid down the training framework and suggested methods of instruction. These had stood the Army in good stead but in 1942, as officers struggled to conceptualise ‘jungle warfare’, with many thinking it was something altogether new, the handbooks and manuals were not so well utilised. Training was shaped by hastily produced memoranda and pamphlets based on reports from key escapers including Brigadier Ian Stewart, former commander of the 2nd Battalion, Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders, and Major-General H. Gordon Bennett, commander of the 8th Division, Australia Imperial Force.12

No directives were issued to discount doctrinal handbooks and training manuals, but pamphlets and training memoranda on jungle warfare produced in 1942 referred to them only rarely. In October 1942 Brigadier Selwyn (‘Bill’) Porter, 30th Brigade, criticised the implication: ‘Of late, every manual, text-book and report reeks of the implied doctrine: “the Jap does it this way, so we must”’.13 Battalions had begun converting to ‘light infantry’, with emphases on reduced motor transport and greater tactical mobility, in answer to (and replicating) Japanese tactics. Exercises resembled actions fought in Malaya, with ‘defending’ troops deployed in thick scrub flanking roads and ‘attacking’ troops encircling them.14 Porter wrote that the focus on this earlier campaign and enemy doctrine blurred British/Australian doctrine:

There can be NO doubt that every campaign has its own local colour, which is blindingly vivid to the participant who knows NO other campaign; and, even to the seasoned campaigner, tends to unbalance the bases which should exist in every tactician’s mind and which have existed in our FSRs for so long.15

The end of the Papuan campaign provided an opportunity, through conferences and reports, to collate, evaluate and disseminate lessons. Several reports on operations stressed the need to refocus on the tried and tested doctrinal handbooks and training manuals. Lieutenant-Colonel A.G. Cameron, 3rd Battalion, wrote that ‘although

12. See John Moremon, “‘Most Deadly Jungle Fighters’?: Australian infantry in Malaya and Papua, 1941–43’ (BA (Hons) thesis, University of New England, 1992), 33–38; and Moreman, ‘The Jungle, the Japanese and the Australian Army’. Bennett’s Army Training Memorandum (War) (Australia) No 10, or Notes on Japanese Tactics in Malaya and Elsewhere and Tactics to Counter–Attack and Destroy the Enemy, was more widely distributed (one per ten officers) and of greater value than is perhaps popularly believed. Although some senior officers refuted his claims that the report was used ahead of the Papuan campaign, several reports mentioned its suitability. For example: ‘enemy tactics in the Maroubra [Kokoda] campaign did not vary to any great extent to those accounts of which have already been published, notably in ARMY TRAINING MEMO (Aust) No 10 and TACTICAL METHODS 1942’. The latter was an American–produced pamphlet. HQ 9th Div, ‘Owen Stanley – Buna Operations: Information gained on the enemy’, 1 May 1943, in HQ 9th Div—G Branch War Diary, AWM52 1/5/20 April–May 1943 Appendices.
15. Porter, ‘Notes on recently expressed concepts of tactics’.
lessons may be learnt from notes such as [those issued after Singapore], our existing text books provide a sound basis for infantry training’.\(^\text{16}\) Captains I.B. Ferguson and D.N. Fairbrother, 2/2nd Battalion, reiterated that although there were ‘special aspects of jungle warfare needing specialised training, the fundamentals laid down in I.T.37 still apply’.\(^\text{17}\)

There was also broad agreement among senior officers who stressed that the principles of war were not altered. Early in 1943, the Directorate of Military Training produced a draft pamphlet stating that jungle warfare was a specialised form of warfare requiring detailed tactical guidelines and methods. Major-General George Vasey, General Officer Commanding, 7th Division, responded by warning against the ‘tendency of clouding “Jungle Warfare” with too much Hoodoo’. He argued that ‘jungle warfare’ was not fundamentally different from other forms of warfare.\(^\text{18}\) Major-General A.J. Boase agreed:

> an endeavour has apparently been made to embody the tactical principles and methods enunciated in ‘FSR’ and ‘Infantry Training’. It is submitted that this is beyond the scope of a pamphlet of this nature. It would be better to concentrate on emphasising the differences in applying those principles and methods under jungle warfare conditions, rather than to endeavour inadequately to include normal aspects of tactical training which are dealt with in existing manuals. Where necessary, reference to the relevant sections of other training manuals could be included.\(^\text{19}\)

Moreman has suggested that prewar regulars, many of them graduates of Staff College at Camberley or Quetta, were more inclined to point out the principles of war as enunciated in *Field Service Regulations*.\(^\text{20}\) They were so successful that a British observer of Australian training in 1943-44 noted: ‘The Australians go so far as to say that *Field Service Regulations* is the “Bible” and contains “all the answers”.’\(^\text{21}\) This was reflected in pamphlets issued to formations training in 1943: ‘Tactics in the Jungle are not “BLACK MAGIC”. Certain special trg is needed and certain special emphasis on particular principles of war is needed, but the fundamentals laid down in Inf Trg still apply.’\(^\text{22}\)

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18. Vasey to Adv LHQ (DMT), 13 March 1943, AWM54 937/3/33.
22. ‘Jungle warfare extracts’, nd [post Papuan campaign], AWM54 923/1/5.
Having chosen to adapt established doctrine, the Army also then adapted force structure. The introduction of jungle divisions, with supporting arms and services pared back, was a direct consequence of experience in Papua. Midway through that campaign, Porter had predicted this because, he argued, the ‘dictates of past local colour’ invariably produced changes in structure, equipment and tactics:

After the Libyan campaign, we increased our mobility with wheels and tracks. After Syria, we experimented with pack transport and added fire power suitable to that terrain. After Malaya, we set about equipping for flat jungle country with roads. After the Owen Stanley incident, I expect we will enter the plains on foot, carrying a mountain battery or two.23

He was correct in that infantry divisions were rejigged as jungle divisions with (even lighter) ‘light infantry’ and transport and artillery cut to the bone. The official historian, Gavin Long, discussed this with at least one American officer, Brigadier-General Jens A. Doe. Doe believed that in formulating doctrine the Australians did not balance the lessons of Papua adequately. He believed they drew too heavily on the experience of mountain warfare on the Kokoda Track while discounting, to a degree, lessons from Buna where artillery was more decisive.24 The Australians were compelled to become more adept ‘jungle fighters’ whereas Americans made greater use of artillery to pound enemy positions. As Stephen R. Taaffe has noted, ‘The American assaults did not exhibit much finesse at the tactical level, but it was hard to argue with their success’.25 Long responded to Doe’s comments by noting that there was a certain practicality to Australian force structure and doctrine—the army simply did not possess the logistic resources to maintain equipment and artillery comparable to the US Army’s.

Rebuilding and retraining of formations in 1943 was a major undertaking. The 7th and 9th Divisions had lost heavily in Papua and Egypt, respectively, and militia brigades also had been decimated by combat and tropical diseases in Papua. John Laffin, who served in the 2/31st Battalion, explained the necessity for retraining, particularly in light of jungle warfare:

a veteran battalion needed retraining, as men who had recovered from illness and wounds rejoined it and reinforcements marched in. After a long period in action and under active service conditions soldiers become careless and forget their training, especially those parts of it which involve operations as an entire unit. In the Kokoda and Gona fighting no battalion was ever together as a complete unit. The various companies could rarely manoeuvre together and even the platoons of a company were separated from one another … In addition, while the battalion had been on active service, new weapons had come into use, as had fresh doctrines about operations.26

23. Porter, ‘Notes on recently expressed concepts of tactics’.
The 2/16th Battalion’s historian suggested that, perhaps with the setbacks and heavy casualties of Papua in mind, this period of rebuilding and retraining was also seen as one in which troops could ensure more effective and less costly fighting next time: ‘the veterans ... approached jungle training much in the mood of specialists anxious to become perfectionists.’

Virtually all reinforcements to combat units in 1943 had been introduced to jungle beforehand—some in action, having come from disbanded militia battalions, and others at the jungle warfare school established at Canungra in the Macpherson Ranges, Queensland, in November 1942. The school had three wings comprising a reinforcement training centre, an independent company (commando) training centre, and a tactical school for junior officers. Well regarded from the start, it improved as more jungle-experienced instructors arrived.

The reinforcement training centre at Canungra was, in essence, a finishing school for recruits destined for the fighting arms. Infantry training had been centralised with all recruits now passing through this establishment at the end of basic training; and no longer were they virtually guaranteed a posting to a unit raised in their home State. Centralised training was brought in for all arms and services. At Canungra, recruits were introduced to ‘jungle’ but, in accordance with *Infantry Training*, were not expected at this stage to perfect tactical drill. An instructor explained:

> We try to give him an insecure sense of his security in jungle warfare against the Jap. We teach him the difficulties and the measures to overcome them and then train him to use his thinking processes and moral courage in the application of those measures. However, he must be impressed with the fact that only the highest order of mental and physical alertness and condition will insure his survival.

The emphasis was on getting recruits used to jungle and the noises of battle in it. One man who passed through the course in early 1943, Harry Pugsley, left a vivid account of the assault course completed in the last days:

> Before us lay a fast running stream in which pre-set charges of explosives went off around us with a roar throwing up huge columns of water as we raced through them. Next was the most dangerous section—through a portion of rain forest in which hidden figures of Japanese soldiers cut from sheets of flat iron suddenly appeared briefly, for us to fire at, some of us with rifles, others with Owen sub-machine guns. We were in full battle dress,
being yelled at by our instructors … while all the time heavy machine-guns were firing on fixed lines over our heads [and] … mortar bombs were dropped before us … 30

Pugsley commented that ‘we rookies reckoned we had earned a “returned from active service badge” after safely completing the “blood and guts” course’. 31

Most were posted to a unit on the Atherton Tableland. They continued training with the men whom they would fight alongside, perfecting tactical drill. No longer were men fresh out of basic training sent to units in the field. In Papua, hundreds had arrived to reinforce depleted units—a system that had functioned for many years. It worked in some instances; for instance, the 39th Battalion took in 300 reinforcements after returning from the Kokoda Track, but it had almost two months to finish training these men and weed out ‘dead wood’ before going back into action. 32 Lieutenant-General Iven Mackay, General Officer Commanding, New Guinea Force, explained that sending reinforcements to units in the forward area was not expected to cause a serious problem because one lesson of the First World War ‘was that efficient battle experienced units could quickly absorb large reinforcements and still maintain their fighting efficiency’. 33 Brigadier George Wootten, a veteran of that war, kept his 18th Brigade going at Buna and Sanananda by absorbing about 600 reinforcements. However, although ‘very welcome’ and they ‘pulled their weight’, to some extent they just made up the numbers. They were psychologically, and probably tactically, ill-prepared. 34 Brigadier Ivan Dougherty, a young brigade commander, refused to take a batch who arrived just before his 21st Brigade emplaned for Gona because he ‘knew what they would be like’. 35 Ferguson and Fairbrother declared such reinforcements liabilities: ‘they have not the faintest idea of the elementary principles of Jungle Warfare. The worth of reinfts would be increased 100% if they were trained with the Bn.’ 36

The major challenge was to produce divisions capable of jungle warfare and trained ‘in a common mould’. 37 The Papuan campaign had also showed up the shamefully inadequate training of militia units, several failing in battle or suffering unsustainable casualties. On the Sanananda Track the 36th, 49th and 55th/53rd Battalions suffered casualties relative to some of the worst on the Western Front a generation earlier. Porter

31. Ibid.
34. W.B. Spencer, In the Footsteps of Ghosts: With the 2/9th Battalion in the African Desert and the Jungles of the Pacific (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1999), 135, 149.
reported that they went into action:

NOT fit for war … What success these units achieve or may achieve is due to a percentage of personnel who are brave in the extreme; and, is the result of unskilful aggression. Unfortunately, the latter personnel have been almost exterminated … The remainder lack confidence in themselves and their weapons, and they lack discipline, due entirely to lack of training and, in some cases, cowardice.38

Poor training had resulted in setbacks and more lives lost than was necessary. For practical and political reasons, this could not happen again. A concerted effort was made to produce ‘one army’, rather than the split AIF/Militia forces with markedly different standards of training. Many militia units were designated ‘brackets AIF’ units—for instance, the 58th/59th Battalion (AIF)—denoting that over half their men had volunteered for the AIF and were no longer militiamen. Theoretically, they received standardised training.

Another key development was selection of a new training area. In November 1942 Lieutenant-General S.F. Rowell, former commander of New Guinea Force, had reported: ‘The only way to train for jungle operations is to train in actual jungle … Unless troops live under conditions under which they have to fight, they will be dominated by their environment.’39 General Blamey ordered a reconnaissance of the Atherton Tableland in northern Queensland. It was ideal, being relatively close to New Guinea, reducing transit time; with rugged country suitable for jungle and mountain training; and a relatively healthy climate (free of malarial mosquitoes).40

Access to the Atherton Tableland and the lessons of the Papuan campaign made training markedly better and less narrowly focussed on ‘jungle warfare’ than the year before. In April 1943 Lieutenant-General L.J. Morshead issued a II Corps training directive making it clear that while formations would train in jungle they would still be ‘well fitted to undertake operations in any type of country’.41 Laffin described one area as ‘near-jungle … we advanced along open valleys, with protective platoons moving along the hills on either side’; this proved good preparation for the Markham Valley.42 Other parts of the Atherton Tableland were ‘luxuriously clothed in rain forest’.43

41. II Corps Training Directive No 1, 14 April 1943, quoted in Coates, Bravery Above Blunder, 48.
43. Uren, A Thousand Men at War, 186.
only units to train extensively in tropical jungle in this period were those positioned in reserve in New Guinea, with several battalions training in and around Milne Bay.

For the men of the 9th Division, with battle experience only in North Africa, training for jungle warfare could be perplexing but they set about mastering it. Coates noted that the division was indeed fortunate in that months of training in well-chosen jungle-clad country ‘represented a luxury that previous groups of Australians who had been rushed to New Guinea to stem the tide could not afford’. They could also draw on the experiences of men who had fought in Papua. Brigadier D.A. Whitehead recalled that contact with assorted groups enabled him and others to grasp that it wasn’t all just ‘jungle’: ‘one group had fought in the mountains: the other along the plain. What they were telling us differed markedly. Eventually, we made up our own minds.’ They did so in part by turning to Field Service Regulations and its principles of war to devise training programs:

These principles are applicable to operations in any theatre of war ... Knowing these principles and appreciating that non-observance of any of them may lead to failure in battle and often to disaster, commanders of all ranks should be able to understand more clearly the requirements of battle and organise their training accordingly ... The battle must be fought in accordance with these fundamental principles. THE OBJECT OF TRAINING IS SUCCESS IN BATTLE.

Pamphlets stressed that with the close confines and limited visibility of jungle all ranks needed to achieve exceptionally high standards in tactical drill:

Complete confidence in one’s self, one’s weapons and one’s leaders is very necessary to overcome the fear of the unseen. Necessity for a battle procedure, fully understood by all ranks, cannot be over emphasised. Pl and Coy control are essential, but the balance of responsibility devolves more heavily than ever upon the Sec Comd and on PTE BROWN himself.

This accorded closely with objectives in Infantry Training, which was to produce through individual and collective training a ‘formidable fighting man’, alert, confident in his use of weapons, able to stand fatigue, highly disciplined, determined, inquisitive, self-dependent, but always acting as one of a team.

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44. Coates, Bravery Above Blunder, 49.
46. 2/17th Battalion training memorandum quoted in What We Have ... We Hold!: A History of the 2/17 Australian Infantry Battalion 1940–1945 (Balgowlah, NSW: 2/17 Battalion History Committee, 1998 edn), 192.
47. ‘Jungle warfare extracts’.
Also progressively added to training programs was greater cooperation between the arms and services—including cooperation with armoured units and aircraft, especially important as close air support would partly make up for reduced artillery support. The 9th Division also commenced training in amphibious operations, with units sent to Trinity Beach near Cairns for introduction to landing craft, laying the foundations for amphibious doctrine and cooperation with American naval forces.\footnote{49} Infantry battalions preparing for the New Guinea offensives were thus probably more highly and technically trained than any had been before.

The Army would continue analysing and disseminating lessons from every subsequent campaign. However, most of the key aspects of jungle warfare had been realised by early 1943 and appropriate doctrine and training programs were introduced. Self-assurance was noted by a member of the British Military Mission 220 sent to assess operations in the South-West Pacific Area:

>The Australians have seen more fighting against the Japanese than anybody else, and are morally absolutely on top. They are confident, man for man, they can beat the Japanese anywhere, and at any time. Their ideas on training are eminently sound, and they have all facilities for training large numbers.\footnote{50}

Reports on operations in New Guinea in 1943-44 declared that the Army had got it right. Of the Markham-Ramu Valley campaign, the 18th Brigade stated: ‘It is not considered that the operation brought to light any new lessons of importance, though many lessons of previous operations were again emphasised.’\footnote{51} A 9th Division report on the Huon Peninsula declared: ‘Owing to the lack of any real opposition there are few tactical lessons to be gained from these operations. What there were only went to confirm previous experience in jungle warfare.’\footnote{52}

The conclusion was that doctrine and training for operations in ‘the islands’ had been righted. The perplexity evident before the Papuan campaign, and mistakes during it, did not recur. Although refinements could be made in most areas, from tank and air support to logistics, the Army effectively had mastered jungle warfare. Reports from even later campaigns put this down to ‘the well tried principles of war and the accepted tactical teachings ... there is no “black magic” in jungle fighting’.\footnote{53}

\footnote{49. For amphibious training and also the early difficulties of inter–Allied cooperation in relation to these operations, see Coates, \textit{Bravery Above Blunder}, 54–60.}
\footnote{50. Maj.–Gen. J. F. Evetts, Military Mission 220, quoted in Moreman, ‘The Jungle, the Japanese and the Australian Army’.}
\footnote{52. ‘Account of Operations 9 Aust Div. for capture of Lae 4 Sept 43–16 Sept 43’, AWM54 589/7/34.}
\footnote{53. 17th Brigade, ‘Report on Operations in the Aitape–Wewak area November 1944–August 1945’, 15 October 1945, AWM54 630/7/23 Part 1.}
Considering the relatively small size of the Australian Army, the Second World War proved a turbulent period for its senior officers. During the conflict the nation’s political and military leaders faced a number of pressing and conflicting challenges that affected the army’s organisation, and forced them to constantly monitor and modify its development. The war saw an unprecedented expansion of the army’s size, as well as a great increase in its commitments and capabilities. The force’s growth was also unsustainable, however, and over-expansion necessitated a painful, yet managed, correction in the conflict’s final years.

The crisis year was mid-1942 to mid-1943 when the stresses of manpower overreach, strategic commitment and operational realities forced the army’s leaders to address fundamental issues of organisation. To negotiate this crisis the army introduced a new structure for its combat divisions. This novel organisation, which was to be known as the ‘jungle division’, represented the first time in the Australian Army’s history that it fielded a formation whose specific purpose was to meet Australian strategic, operational, and tactical requirements. The adoption of the jungle division was a marked departure from imperial models upon which the force had previously relied for the organisation of its units and formations. The jungle division standard was a success, and as a result of its adoption Australia was able to continue to project military force in New Guinea and the nearby regions, despite its declining manpower pool.

The Imperial Legacy

When the Second World War spread to New Guinea and Papua in 1942 the Australian Army had had limited experience with the peculiar requirements of tropical warfare. The breadth and cost of this ignorance was aptly demonstrated in Australia’s first encounter with the Japanese in Malaya. Successes did follow in 1942, but the Australian Army that stopped the enemy at Milne Bay and Kokoda, and which forced it from Gona, Buna, and Sanananda, remained one that had been designed to fight in the open spaces of a European or North African theatre of operations, instead of the confined, rugged, oppressive tropics of the New Guinea jungle.
It would be tempting to allocate blame for the army’s organisational unreadiness for the campaign in New Guinea. After all, in 1920 the army’s senior officers had identified Japan as the Commonwealth’s ‘only potential and probable enemy’. To these officers the Japanese threat appeared even more grave after the First World War than before. In the settlement of the First World War Japan retained control of the German Pacific island territories that it had occupied, under a League of Nations’ mandate. Australia governed the former German colony of Papua under a similar arrangement, making the two future antagonists into neighbours with only 1,300 kilometres of ocean separating Truk and Rabaul. Throughout the interwar period the army’s senior officers continued to highlight the threat of Japan in their relations with the government, although only in the context of continental security and invasion defence, not from the perspective of protecting the territories of New Guinea and Papua.

Interwar strategic policy also suggested the possibility of a future tropical role for the Australian Army. Australia’s adherence to the Singapore strategy implied that the most likely destination for the expeditionary division, as called for by Plan 401, was Malaya. However, in the face of this acknowledged threat, other aspects of interwar policy assured that Australian defence planners directed their efforts towards more traditional theatres of operation, even if they had been inclined to examine jungle warfare.

From this distance it is perhaps necessary to recall that in the era of the two World Wars the Australian Army was not an independent institution. Instead, it was one branch of an imperial association whose members subscribed to common military policies and principles. The cornerstone of the Commonwealth’s interwar security policy was the Singapore strategy, an imperial policy that incorporated the Commonwealth’s defence within the broader defence requirements and responsibilities of the Empire.

The Australian Army operated within this federation and, as such, conformed to imperial decisions and protocols in training, weapons and equipment, administrative and staff procedures, and officer education. The objective was to enable the British Army to incorporate readily contingents from the Empire into an imperial army. Another vital area in this interoperability was Australia’s acceptance of British Army organisation and establishments for its units and formations. The Australian government accepted the concept of interoperability at the 1909 Imperial Conference in London, and reaffirmed

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3. For a discussion of the Singapore strategy and the consequences it held for Australian defence see John McCarthy, Australia and Imperial Defence, 1918-1939: A Study in Air and Sea Power (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1976), and Ian Hamill, The Strategic Illusion: The Singapore Strategy and the Defence of Australia and New Zealand, 1919-1942 (Singapore: Singapore University Press,
it at subsequent meetings. At the start of the Second World War, the organisation of the Australian Army was based on an imperial model designed by British officers in London.

Ironically, despite its commitment to Empire, the Australian Army had not kept current with organisational developments in Britain. In the late-1930s the British made significant modifications to their divisional structure, particularly in the infantry and artillery arms. This resulted in a British Army that emphasised material and firepower, whereas the Australian Army’s variant remained manpower intensive. When the Australian Imperial Force (AIF)’s 6th Division arrived in Egypt it had to undergo a reorganisation to conform to the current British standard. The key changes were that the division reduced each brigade from four to three battalions and reconfigured the artillery from three brigades of four batteries, each with four guns, to three regiments of two batteries each of twelve guns. The two armies’ battalion and company organisations also differed. Upon reorganisation in the Middle East the 6th Division shed soldiers but acquired vast quantities of motor vehicles, and new unit types such as a motorised reconnaissance regiment and an anti-tank regiment. This pattern of response to changes in the British divisional standard continued while the AIF remained in the Middle East. For example, in September 1941 the Australian Army increased the scale of its divisions to include a light anti-aircraft regiment. Although slower to adapt, and while missing some support arms, the Citizen Military Forces (CMF) of the Home Army in Australia also converted to the new British standard.

**New Guinea**

The Australian infantry brigades and divisions that met and defeated the Japanese in New Guinea in 1942 fought with the same organisation that the AIF had employed in the Middle East. Its unsuitability for tropical warfare was readily apparent, and before the year’s end the Commander-in-Chief Australian Military Forces, General Thomas Blamey, had given consideration to a major reorganisation. This would lead to the creation of the Australian ‘jungle infantry division’.

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5. For a comparison of the two divisional standards see ‘Numbers Required for an Australian Corps of Two Divisions, Corps Troops, and Line of Communication Units: British Organization, War Cabinet Agendum No. 22/1940’, 10 February 1940, National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA), Canberra, A2671/1, item 22/1940.
6. ‘Future Establishment and Organization of AIF’, 1 September 1941, Blamey Collection, AWM, 3DRL6643, item 4/15.
7. Blamey to Curtin, 4 December 1942, Blamey Collection, AWM, 3DRL6643, item 2/12.
For the Australian Army there were three key considerations that made the British standard division organisation unsuitable for tropical warfare. They were:

1) The environmental nature of the area of operations;
2) The logistic challenges of the area of operations; and
3) Australia’s growing manpower shortage.

Combat in the South West Pacific Area was fundamentally different from that which the AIF had experienced in the Middle East. Whereas European theatre commanders conceived operations on the scale of divisions or corps, with the full array of support arms, battle in the closed jungle of New Guinea took place largely at the lower end of the military spectrum. It was through the aggressive patrolling of small parties of infantrymen that Australia came to dominate and control the jungle. When set-piece battles did take place, they were almost always at the company or battalion level, with support provided by a unit’s own mortars and machine guns or a handful of attached guns. Even on the rare occasions when a brigade conducted a coordinated attack, such as the 26th Brigade’s assault on Sattelberg in November 1943, its commander, Brigadier David Whitehead, assigned his battalions different lines of approach and communication. In effect, each battalion fought its own battle, isolated from the remainder of the brigade by dense jungle, steeply-sided ridges and ravines, and swollen rivers.  

The terrain of New Guinea limited operations in ways that were not applicable to a European-style theatre of operations. Even if the Australian Army had had the ability to bring forward a division’s full establishment, such as its motorised reconnaissance regiment, it would have been unlikely that the additional strength could have been deployed and manoeuvred to advantage. For example, it was only the availability of easy coastal replenishment that permitted the 9th Division to deploy an entire field regiment during the Finschhafen campaign, and reinforce this with a further field regiment and a letter battery of 155mm howitzers. This was a condition not easily replicated elsewhere in New Guinea. The 3rd and 7th Divisions, for example, during their respective campaigns around Wau/Salamaua and the Markham/Ramu Valleys, relied upon tenuous lines of communication via the air. As a result of their isolation, and difficulty of moving of troops and supplies, these formations made do with far less fire power than that which the 9th Division enjoyed.

Related to the adverse environment of New Guinea was the difficulty the Australian Army faced in providing troops with an appropriate logistical system. Formations organised on imperial lines imposed a level of wastage that the Australian Army could

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not maintain. The British had expected to employ their infantry divisions in regions that possessed well-developed transport and distribution infrastructures, and terrain features with a high mobility potential. For a commander to apply the full combat power of a British standard division required an enormous logistic capacity, as well as an ability to manoeuvre and concentrate offensive power. Unlike the open vistas of the Libyan Desert, the rugged and closed nature of New Guinea’s terrain, and the virtual absence of roads, rail and port facilities, placed severe limits on a force’s logistic capacity, and a commander’s ability to concentrate and shift a formation’s combat power. These limitations made the jungle into an infantryman’s battleground. The other arms were of some use and were indeed used, but they could be brought forward in limited numbers and manoeuvred and sustained only with the greatest difficulty. The reality was that in New Guinea much of the combat power of a division organised on the British standard was unemployable. As a result, instead of contributing to battle, large sections of Australian imperial-organised divisions languished in base areas, such as Port Moresby, where they consumed scarce logistic and administrative resources and clogged the line of communications.

In late 1942 Australian planners made several observations that affected the utility of formations assigned to New Guinea.

- There was a tendency for large numbers of units, or portions of units, to congregate in rear areas.
- The virtual absence of roads in New Guinea created major difficulties for the provision of logistic support. The lack of roads meant that the delivery of supplies had to depend on aerial and water-borne transport, local labour and a limited number of light vehicles, principally jeeps.
- The dependence on aircraft and small boats for troop and supply movement greatly limited the number of soldiers that the army could transport and support, and kept forward deployment to the bare minimum.
- The New Guinea environment severely constricted the number of supporting arms and units that could be brought forward and sustained to assist the infantry.9

The last major factor influencing the decision to change divisional organisations was the need to bring the army’s size and the Commonwealth’s manpower supply into balance. At its peak the Australian Army fielded a force of eleven infantry and three armour/motor divisions. This greatly exceeded prewar projections of the maximum strength that the army could maintain. The course of the war proved the prewar planners correct. In addition, casualty rates in New Guinea from combat and disease were higher

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than anticipated and exceeded the force’s intake rate. Malaria, in particular, was a great scourge. By the end of 1942 Blamey had accepted that the army had to contract if units were to avoid a downward spiral in their effectiveness from insufficient manpower. He recognised that the army would have to reduce its order of battle if it was to maintain a combat capable force, otherwise the force would consist only of hollow shells. The first formations to go were the 4th Division and the 14th Brigade.

Further exacerbating the army’s manpower situation was the intention of the government of John Curtin to implement a program of deliberate withdrawal of soldiers from the ranks of the armed forces in order to rebalance the Australian economy. This was a part of the government’s plan to provide for more civilian needs. The first demand, on 1 October 1943, was for 20,000. Additional requests followed, and by the war’s end the army had released over 100,000 men.

Blamey had little choice but to steer the army’s contraction. Part of the balancing process was achieved through the periodic disbandment of formations, and the reallocation of their members to surviving units. However, another option besides disbandment existed, which could ease the contraction and permit the army to retain a larger overseas order of battle for offensive action. Since the army could send forward only a part of a division’s strength, it could achieve economies in manpower by reorganising the division standard in order to eliminate waste. This would free up trained soldiers as replacements for battle-weakened units, or for reassignment to other tasks. The effect would be a more efficient utilisation of the army’s increasingly scarce personnel resources and a better management of its logistic system.

**Forming the Jungle Division**

In February 1943 the Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant-General John Northcott, issued a directive outlining the army’s divisional requirements for the rest of the war. There were to be three types of divisions: armoured, standard infantry and jungle infantry. Originally there were to be five jungle divisions, but this was subsequently raised to six. Those chosen were the 3rd, 5th, 6th, 7th, 9th, and 11th Divisions—three AIF and three militia. These were to become the army’s attack force, and only they served overseas and fought the Japanese. Blamey kept the army’s other infantry

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10. Blamey to Curtin, 4 December 1942, Blamey Collection, AWM, 3DRL6643, item 2/12; and ‘War Cabinet Agendum: Reorganization of the A.M.F.’, 12 April 1943, Blamey Collection, AWM, 3DRL6643, item 4/15.
11. For a discussion of Curtin’s efforts to balance the Australian war effort see Paul Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1942-1945* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1970), 371–442.
14. ‘Reorganization of Infantry Formations in the A.M.F.’, 13 February 1943, AWM54, item 721/2/11, part
divisions on the British standard, although they became increasingly irrelevant as the threat of invasion receded and their strength and combat capability declined. In the end, the home army reverted to a garrison role and was incapable of offensive action. The force’s three armoured divisions, of little use in jungle warfare, suffered a similar fate. Before the war’s end, Blamey had disbanded all of them and only small armour elements served overseas.

Three principles underlay the design of the jungle division’s organisation. They were:

- The creation of a flexible organisation that was capable of various groupings.
- The elimination of all units, subunits, transport and equipment which were not essential for operations in jungle conditions.
- The centralisation of certain divisional, corps and line of communication units in a central New Guinea pool for allocation to jungle division headquarters to meet special requirements.¹⁵

Table 1 outlines the principal differences between the British standard infantry division and the new Australian jungle infantry division.

### Table 1: Comparison between British Standard Infantry Division and Australian Jungle Infantry Division

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>British Standard Infantry Division</th>
<th>Australian Jungle Infantry Division</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infantry</td>
<td>– 3 infantry brigade headquarters</td>
<td>– 3 infantry brigade headquarters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– 3 infantry brigades, each of 3</td>
<td>– 3 infantry brigades, each with 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>battalions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>– 1 division carrier company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavalry</td>
<td>– reconnaissance regiment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artillery</td>
<td>– HQ RAA</td>
<td>– 1 Field Regiment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– 3 field regiments, each of 3</td>
<td>– 1 light anti-aircraft battery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>batteries</td>
<td>(airborne)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– 1 anti-tank regiment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– 1 light anti-aircraft regiment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– 1 survey battery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineers</td>
<td>– HQ RAE</td>
<td>– HQ RAE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– 1 field park company</td>
<td>– 1 field park company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– 3 field companies</td>
<td>– 3 field companies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– camouflage training unit</td>
<td>– camouflage training unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signals</td>
<td>– divisional signals</td>
<td>– divisional signals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹⁵. Ibid.
¹⁶. Data taken from organisational charts of Jungle and Standard Divisions in AWM54, item 721/2/11, part 3.
Table 2 outlines the units eliminated from the British standard division organisation.

**Table 2: Units Eliminated From British Standard Division**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arms Type</th>
<th>Unit Eliminated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Headquarters</td>
<td>– light aid detachment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavalry</td>
<td>– cavalry regiment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artillery</td>
<td>– headquarters RA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– two field regiments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– anti-tank regiment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– two light aid detachments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signals</td>
<td>– cavalry regiment signal troop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– signal sections for two field regiments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– signal section for anti-tank regiment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– light aid detachment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>– mobile bath unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordnance</td>
<td>– division ordnance field park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AEME</td>
<td>– divisional workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– five light aid detachments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the jungle division kept a nine battalion structure, the infantry underwent an internal reorganisation. The British standard infantry battalion contained numerous vehicles and support weapons that the division could not profitably employ in New Guinea. The jungle battalion establishment first eliminated the unit’s anti-aircraft and carrier platoons. It then consolidated the redundant carrier platoons into a divisional carrier company that the formation’s commander could allocate as required. In compensation for these reductions the battalion received a medium machine gun platoon. Overall, the modifications reduced the battalion’s strength by 107 men, from 910 to 803.18

While the most obvious effect of the reorganisation was the elimination of two-thirds of the division’s artillery, the changes also had a significant effect on the division’s support arms. For example, the changes reduced the number of AASC personnel by nearly half, from 1,061 to 555.19 The consequent reduction of vehicles throughout the organisation also had a flow on effect on its repair and maintenance organisation. As a result the army disbanded the division workshop, replacing it with an independent brigade group workshop. The AAOC’s division ordnance field park became a brigade group formation.20

Overall, an Australian jungle division had approximately 4,000 fewer soldiers than one organised on the British standard. Its logistic requirements were reduced even further by a proportionally greater reduction in vehicles.

Table 3 outlines the 6th Division’s order of battle after its reorganisation in early 1943.

Table 3: Order of Battle—6th Division as a Jungle Formation21

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Unit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Headquarters | – Headquarters 6 Australian Division  
– 6 Division HQ Def & Emp Platoon                                    |
| Artillery | – 2/1 Field Regiment  
– 2/43 Light Aid Detachment                                                      |
| Engineers | – Headquarters RAE 6 Division  
– 2/1, 2/2, 2/8 Field Companies  
– 2/22 Field Park Company  
– 2/80 Light Aid Detachment  
– 6 Australian Division Camouflage Training Unit                                      |
| Signals   | – Signals 6 Australian Division                                                                |

ORGANISING FOR JUNGLE WARFARE

Table 3 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infantry</th>
<th>– Headquarters 16 Infantry Brigade: 2/1, 2/2, 2/3 Battalions; 2/45 Light Aid Detachment – Headquarters 17 Infantry Brigade: 2/5, 2/6, 2/7 Battalions; 2/46 Light Aid Detachment – Headquarters 30 Infantry Brigade: 2/22, 39, 49 Battalions; 306 Light Aid Detachment – 6 Australian Division Carrier Company</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pioneer</td>
<td>– 2/4 Pioneer Battalion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AASC</td>
<td>– Headquarters 6 Australian Division AASC – 2/155 Australian General Transport Company – 2/5 Australian Supply Depot Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>– 2/1, 2/2, 2/12 Field Ambulance Companies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordnance</td>
<td>– 2/119 Australian Independent Brigade Group Ordnance Field Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AEME</td>
<td>– 2/119 Australian Independent Brigade Group Workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay</td>
<td>– 6 Australian Division Field Cash Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provost</td>
<td>– 6 Australian Division Provost Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postal</td>
<td>– 6 Australian Division Postal Unit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Units surplus to the 6th Division after its conversion to the jungle standard were:

- 331, 2/40, 2/49, 2/42, Light Aid Detachments
- Headquarters RAA 6 Division
- 2/2 Field Regiment including signal section
- 2/1 Anti-Tank Regiment
- 2/6 Survey Battery
- 6 Division Mobile Bath Unit
- 6 Division Ordnance Field Park
- 6 Division Mobile Laundry
- 6 Division Workshop.

The designers of the jungle division organisation understood that the new design produced a lightly armed formation whose dominant arm was the infantry. This was a shift in combat capability and represented the creation of a new dimension in Australian force-of-arms. Unable to maintain a heavy force, the Australian fighting troops became essentially a light infantry force, not dissimilar to the approach to war employed in future conflicts in Malaya, Borneo and Vietnam.

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22. Ibid.
Northcott accepted that even in the jungle there would be occasions when a division could employ additional assets. To this end, the jungle reorganisation assigned a variety of support arms to corps or line of communication areas. Corps commanders could assign these units to divisions or brigades whenever the situation permitted their employment. The corps level units included assets such as armoured regiments, commando squadrons, additional field regiments, survey batteries, anti-tank regiments, airborne anti-aircraft batteries and machine-gun battalions. The available line of communication units included light and heavy anti-aircraft batteries, general transport companies, mobile bath units, independent workshops and independent ordnance field parks.24

The availability of this pool of units meant that Australian formations had to be highly flexible. Brigade and division headquarters had to have the ability to command and employ a wide variety of units. For example, when the 7th Division began the valley campaign in 1943 it first employed the 2/6 Independent Company to seize the airstrip at Kaiapit. It was only after this point that the division’s commander, Major-General George Vasey, sent forward the 21st Brigade.25

Another target of the jungle division’s planners were the formation’s vehicle establishment. Vehicles were a particular target because the environmental conditions of New Guinea made their employment difficult. Keeping them on a division’s establishment placed strain on a formation’s supply and repair organisations, and also increased pressure on the overall line of communication. Consequently, planners ruthlessly culled vehicles from unit establishments. Individual units had to justify every vehicle, and the divisional AASC element was reduced to a single transport company.

So extensive were the reductions that units no longer had the ability to move all of their personnel and equipment with integral transport. Most units faced a discrepancy between the weight of the equipment and supplies on their establishment and the lift capacity of their remaining vehicles. An infantry brigade group, for example, had a lift requirement of 387 tons (consisting of war equipment, stores and first line ammunition but not including the weight of vehicles, trailers and artillery guns) but a lift capacity of just 162 tons. Instead of moving all of its first line kit on its own, the plan was that a unit would receive an allocation of additional vehicles from the division’s transport pool when required.

While the effect on the infantry, for example, was severe, the new arrangement accepted the operational reality of the New Guinea jungle. The infantry were the division’s forward edge, and where the transport and distribution infrastructure was at its

most primitive. The jungle organisation left battalions with almost no transport because in most cases they would not be able to employ any. Now more than ever, the infantry depended upon their own backs, or that of native labour, for their mobility.\textsuperscript{26} Table 4 outlines the personnel and vehicle establishments for some jungle division units as of 1944. It also highlights the difference between a unit’s lift requirement and capacity.

Table 4: Jungle Division Personnel and Vehicle Establishments, Including Lift Requirement and Capacity—1944\textsuperscript{27}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit Type</th>
<th>Personnel</th>
<th>Jeeps</th>
<th>Trucks</th>
<th>Lift Need (in tons)</th>
<th>Lift Met (in tons)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brigade Headquarters</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commando Squadron</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infantry Battalion</td>
<td>835</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brigade Workshop</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Aid Detachment</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Ambulance Company</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once implemented the jungle division organisation did not remain static, and periodically the army reexamined the issue. In most cases the existing decisions remained in place. Representatives of the artillery and the engineers, for example, argued fruitlessly for additional resources within the division for their arms.\textsuperscript{28} More successful were the advocates of a divisional dental unit. Northcott had eliminated dental staff from the jungle division’s medical services. Instead, dentistry became a corps responsibility, and the scheme allocated four dental units to a jungle corps. The intention was that a corps commander would attach these to a division headquarters on an as-needed basis. The army initially reconsidered this arrangement in December 1943, but decided to continue with it. However, the ad hoc nature of dental support forced a further review. In April

\textsuperscript{26} ‘Staff and Logistic Table, Units of Infantry Brigade Group – Jungle Division’ (1944), AWM54, item 422/7/8.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{28} ‘Field Artillery Jungle Division—Artillery Organisation, 1944’, AWM54, item 75/7/5, and ‘Employment of M.T. with Division RAE Units for Jungle Warfare’, 22 April 1943, AWM54, item 422/7/8.
1944 the Land Headquarters reversed its previous decision and added a dental unit to a jungle division’s organisation.29

Overall, the general trend was downwards with every revision, however, as higher command eliminated additional troops and vehicles from the jungle division’s organisation. In October 1944 the infantry battalion establishment, for example, was just 738 soldiers on the jungle assault scale.30

By the end of 1944 the army had introduced a further refinement by developing a second scale for its jungle divisions. They were now to operate on two establishments, light and assault. Light was the normal organisation but for deployment onto active operations a jungle division divested itself further of personnel and vehicles in preparation for battle. The rationale for this distinction is not entirely clear, but it probably recognises that even in a jungle division there were soldiers and equipment that while useful for periods of rest, refit and training could be removed for operations without any loss of combat effectiveness. Tables 5 and 6 outline the two types of jungle division structures for some unit types.

Table 5: Jungle Division Organisation—Light Scale31

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit Type</th>
<th>Personnel</th>
<th>Jeeps</th>
<th>Trailers</th>
<th>Trucks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Field Battery</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Company</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infantry Battalion</td>
<td>774</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Ambulance Company</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military History Section</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>nil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

29. ‘Composition of a Jungle Corps’, 29 March 1944, and ‘Proposed Inclusion of a Dental Unit in OOB of a Jungle Div.’, 24 April 1944, NAA, Melbourne, MP742/1, item 240/2/378.
30. ‘Light and Assault Scales, I Australian Corps (Jungle Division)’, 21 October 1944, AWM54, item 917/6/12.
31. Ibid.
Table 6: Jungle Division Organisation—Assault Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit Type</th>
<th>Personnel</th>
<th>Jeeps</th>
<th>Trailers</th>
<th>Trucks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Field Battery</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Company</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infantry Battalion</td>
<td>738</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Ambulance Company</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military History Section</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>nil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The new organisation also required some tinkering in order to balance establishment and capabilities. In June 1944 the army concluded a study into the supply of ammunition in the field. The report observed that the division’s existing transport capacity could not lift all of its first line scale. Instead of adding more transport, the report recommended a reduction in the allocation of ammunition. It called for an approximate 25 per cent reduction in small arms and mortar ammunition, kept 25-pounder ammunition at the same rate, and recommended a 50 per cent increase in grenades.

New Capabilities

This chapter has concentrated its attention on the jungle division’s organisation, but while this was the major reform of the war, it was not the only modification in the force’s field organisation. Changes in the strategic situation, following the spread of the war to the Pacific, forced the Australian Army to develop new capabilities if it was to wage battle effectively against the Japanese. The area most affected was that of logistics. As this is the specific subject of another chapter, this essay will only touch lightly on the topic. However, it is appropriate to mention here briefly some of the modifications the army made to its logistic organisation.

Traditionally, Australian forces have gone to war with a limited logistic capability. In colonial era conflicts and in the First World War, Australian troops depended on the British Army for much of their support. This was also the case in the Second World War, especially in North Africa. However, when the war spread to the Pacific, Australia had to

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32. Ibid.
33. ‘Supply of Ammunition in the Field’, 2 June 1944, AWM54, item 21/14/5.
provide for a greater proportion of its support requirements from its own resources.

In the Southwest Pacific Area the United States did—in part—fulfil Britain’s role as logistic big brother. Yet, from the perspective of Washington the region was a distant, minor theatre of a global conflict. In addition, in 1942 and 1943 Australian troops bore the principal burden of the allied war effort in the Southwest Pacific Area, awaiting the American build-up. However, even after the South West Pacific Area’s commander, General Douglas MacArthur, had acquired great American strength, Australia continued to receive limited access to allied logistic support. For MacArthur, New Guinea was merely a stepping stone in his return to the Philippines, which was his true objective. He did not see a need to devote more than the bare minimum of resources to what was always in his mind a backwater. The campaign, therefore, was fought on the cheap—both in manpower and supply.

The need to provide for greater support from its own resources led to the Australian Army’s development of two new capabilities. These were air dispatch and water transport. Both would play major roles in overcoming New Guinea’s poor transport infrastructure and allowed the army to wage battle in remote and inaccessible reaches of New Guinea.

Australia conducted its first air supply drops in July 1942 during the Kokoda campaign. Throughout the Wau-Salamaua campaign of 1943, Kanga force, and then 3rd Division were dependent on aerial drops for much of their supply. Over the course of the war the army raised three air maintenance companies. Similarly, since the Royal Australian Navy was unable to provide for the army’s riverine and blue water supply needs the army assumed the task itself. In late 1942 the army formed a Directorate of Water Transport (Small Craft) under the control of the Royal Australian Engineers. At its peak the engineers operated a fleet of 1,900 watercraft varying in size from small launches to ocean-going vessels.34

**Conclusion**

By the end of 1942 the leaders of the Australian Army knew that they faced major problems which if not corrected would reduce the force’s future effectiveness. Manpower limitations, a harsh operational environment, and severe logistic deficiencies imperiled the army’s ability to wage battle against the Japanese. Among Blamey and Northcott’s responses was the decision to recast radically the organisation of the force’s combat troops. The result was the jungle infantry division, Australia’s only home-grown combat formation.

The new organisation eliminated wastage which the army could not afford to bear. It streamlined rear areas, freed troops for reassignment, and reduced logistic overheads, while also allowing commanders to project and sustain their division’s critical combat elements. For the nation, it meant the army would be able to field the required six divisions to the war’s end. By contrast, the United States Army never embraced the need to create special formations for war in the tropics, and used the same division design in New Guinea and France. The Americans did raise a light jungle division—the 71st Infantry Division—but it served in Europe and only after reorganisation on to a heavier scale. The critical difference between the two nations’ approaches to war was that the United States could bear a level of wastage which Australia could not.

The Australian Army would have faced an interesting organisational dilemma if the Allies had had to assault the Japanese home islands. The Australian Jungle Division was too light for the intensity of resistance that would have greeted the invaders. Instead, the allies would have required the full weight of combat assets available to the armies of the Second World War era. If the Australian Army had been called upon to join in the conquest of Japan it would have first had to reorganise its contribution onto a heavier scale.

The jungle division did not long survive the war’s end. The reorganisation of the Citizen Military Forces saw the Australian Army readopt a British-style model for its infantry divisions. The Cold War and the threat of the Soviet Union assured a continued focus on heavy formations. Though forgotten, the jungle division organisation showed that Australia’s military leaders had the ability to design novel solutions to unexpected problems. In 1943, the growing dominance of the Australian soldier over his Japanese opponent showed that the army had learned and inculcated the tactical lessons of 1942. The development of the jungle division and the reorganisation of the army demonstrated that the army had also learned and responded to the organisational lessons.