PAPUA

The U.S. Army Campaigns of World War II

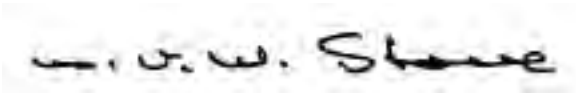
Introduction

World War II was the largest and most violent armed conflict in the history of mankind. However, the half century that now separates us from that conflict has exacted its toll on our collective knowledge. While World War II continues to absorb the interest of military scholars and historians, as well as its veterans, a generation of Americans has grown to maturity largely unaware of the political, social, and military implications of a war that, more than any other, united us as a people with a common purpose.

Highly relevant today, World War II has much to teach us, not only about the profession of arms, but also about military preparedness, global strategy, and combined operations in the coalition war against fascism. During the next several years, the U.S. Army will participate in the nation's 50th anniversary commemoration of World War II. The commemoration will include the publication of various materials to help educate Americans about that war. The works produced will provide great opportunities to learn about and renew pride in an Army that fought so magnificently in what has been called "the mighty endeavor."

World War II was waged on land, on sea, and in the air over several diverse theaters of operation for approximately six years. The following essay is one of a series of campaign studies highlighting those struggles that, with their accompanying suggestions for further reading, are designed to introduce you to one of the Army's significant military feats from that war.

This brochure was prepared in the U.S. Army Center of Military History by Charles R. Anderson. I hope this absorbing account of that period will enhance your appreciation of American achievements during World War II.



M. P. W. Stone
Secretary of the Army

Papua
23 July 1942–23 January 1943

On 7 December 1941, Japan turned its war on the Asian mainland eastward into the Pacific. Simultaneous attacks on Pearl Harbor, the Philippines, the Malayan peninsula, and other places surprised Allied governments and exposed serious weaknesses in Allied dispositions in the Pacific. At the outbreak of war in Europe in September 1939, Australia had sent most of its ground units to the British Commonwealth Forces in the Middle East. During the next two years the U.S. Pacific Fleet sent one-quarter of its ships to the Atlantic, and the U.S. Army continued mobilizing, although it would not be ready for an offensive mission until late 1942. Hastily gathering scarce units, the Allies tried to halt the Japanese at the Malay Barrier, the mountainous chain of islands stretching from Malaya through the Netherlands East Indies to New Guinea. But the pace and extent of Japanese conquests soon overran these preparations. The fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942 and the bombing of the Australian city of Darwin four days later shattered the Malay Barrier. Australia and New Zealand lay virtually undefended.

Strategic Setting

The arrival in Australia on 17 March of General Douglas MacArthur, ordered from the Philippines by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, signaled the start of a new phase in the defense of the Pacific. Instead of supplying and supporting its Allies, the United States would commit its own troops to the effort to halt the Japanese. A major area command, Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA), was created in April with General MacArthur commanding. An international command, SWPA had separate land, air, and naval forces, with commanders drawn from the two major contributing nations: Australian General Sir Thomas A. Blamey for Allied Land Forces, American Lt. Gen. George H. Brett for Allied Air Forces, and American Vice Adm. Herbert F. Leary for Allied Naval Forces. Allied Land Forces would consist of two Australian and two American divisions. Recalled from the Middle East, the 7th Australian Infantry Division arrived home at the end of March; the 6th Australian Infantry Division, the next month. Most of the U.S. 41st Infantry Division arrived in

Australia in early April. The U.S. 32d Infantry Division, originally slated for Northern Ireland, received new orders to join SWPA in mid-May with the rest of the 41st Division. Allied Air Forces would eventually consist of eight aircraft groups. Allied Naval Forces began with twenty-one surface warships and thirty-one submarines and could expect augmentation by American carrier task forces. Resupply of the Southwest Pacific Area would come from Hawaii through a line of island bases secured in February: Palmyra, Christmas Island, Canton Island, Bora Bora, Samoa, and the Fiji Islands.

Working with the Australian Chiefs of Staff, General MacArthur prepared a joint estimate of the situation. The Allies agreed that the Japanese advance would continue and that it would soon threaten the Australian supply line as well as the island nation itself. As General MacArthur viewed the situation, the best way to defend Australia was to meet the Japanese on New Guinea, and the way into New Guinea lay through Port Moresby, a harbor on the southeast Papuan coast lightly garrisoned by Australians. Accordingly, in early April MacArthur directed the reinforcement of Port Moresby.

While the Allies rushed to strengthen Port Moresby, the Japanese acted on their own strategic assessment. They also considered Port Moresby the key to Australia. But before approaching the port city, the Japanese moved to finish a naval mission begun earlier. The *Imperial Japanese Navy* saw its strike against Pearl Harbor as only half of a two-part strategy. To secure exploitation of Burma, Malaya, and the Indies, the Japanese had to neutralize the British Eastern Fleet. For that purpose, a large Japanese naval task force left the southwest Pacific for the Indian Ocean in April. The Japanese succeeded in disabling the British Eastern Fleet, but in doing so they also gave SWPA an extra month to reinforce Port Moresby.

By 4 May, when a Japanese landing force embarked at Rabaul for Port Moresby, Allied air and naval forces had grown to decisive strength. The result for the Japanese was a major setback. As enemy troopships and an escorting carrier task force approached the eastern end of New Guinea, they were met by two American carrier task forces. In the ensuing Battle of the Coral Sea, the *Japanese Navy* lost so many ships that the landing force had to return to Rabaul. Though they lost more ships than the Japanese, the Allies won a strategic victory in the Coral Sea: the enemy had to reschedule its Port Moresby landing for July.

The Japanese had barely counted their losses in the Coral Sea when they met a much more costly defeat. In an effort to take Midway Island and the Aleutians, the *Imperial Japanese Navy* put to

gether a huge task force centered on four fast carriers. A unique message-interception effort code-named MAGIC enabled the Allies to learn of the enemy move toward Midway, and three American carriers were sent to intercept. In the sea-air battle that followed on 4 June, the Japanese lost all four of their carriers and hundreds of aircraft and pilots. The stunning defeat at Midway was more than a temporary setback. The *Japanese Navy* never replaced its carrier losses, and as a result its land operations thereafter suffered from a chronic shortage of naval and air support.

But two defeats in rapid succession did not end the threat to Australia. On 22 July a Japanese landing force under Maj. Gen. Tomitaro Horii slipped ashore at Basabua and made its way to Buna on the northeast coast of New Guinea. The landing itself came as a shock to SWPA headquarters, then considering the very same move. Even more disquieting was the discovery that the enemy had landed without air cover.

Operations

Anxious to take advantage of the victory of Midway, Allied staffs drew up an operations plan. Called the 2 July Directive, the plan laid down three tasks: 1. seizure and occupation of the Santa Cruz Islands, Tulagi, and adjacent areas; 2. seizure and occupation of the remainder of the Solomon Islands, Lae, Salamaua, and the northeast coast of New Guinea; and 3. seizure and occupation of Rabaul and adjacent positions in the New Guinea-New Ireland area. The U.S. Navy's South Pacific Area commander assumed the first mission; General MacArthur took up the latter two tasks. To support the Navy in the first task and to execute its own two tasks, SWPA created new commands, moved units closer to target areas, and continued airfield construction and reinforcement, especially at Port Moresby and at Milne Bay on the eastern tip of New Guinea. The U.S. 32d and 41st Infantry Divisions began jungle training, organized in a new corps under the command of Maj. Gen. Robert L. Eichelberger.

Short of aircraft carriers after Midway, the Japanese decided to attack Port Moresby by an overland advance from Buna instead of around Milne Bay by sea. This plan dictated a push through some of the most forbidding terrain in the world. The Papuan peninsula of eastern New Guinea is dominated by the Owen Stanley Mountains, a saw-toothed jungle range reaching a height of 13,000 feet. High temperatures and humidity near the coasts contrast with biting cold above 5,000 feet. Rainfall is typically torrential and can amount to as much as 10 inches per day during the rainy season. Tangled growth

General Blamey tours the battle area with General Eichelberger (left). (DA photograph)

requires a machete to cut through it. Knife-edged kunai grass up to 7 feet high, reeking swamps full of leeches and malarial mosquitoes, and a slippery ground surface under dripping vegetation add to the formidable obstacle course.

For the advance out of Buna the Japanese assembled a force of about 1,800 men augmented by 1,300 laborers from Rabaul and Formosa and 52 horses. This force proposed to cross Papua through the village of Kokoda, some 50 miles from Buna and over 100 miles from Port Moresby. Next to the village lay a facility highly valued by both sides: an airfield. Quickly moving inland, the Japanese met their first opposition late in the afternoon of 22 July. During the next two weeks, General Horii's troops defeated several Australian and Papuan units and took over the entire Kokoda-Buna Trail. When Horii received reinforcements on 18 August, he headed a well-supplied force of 8,000 *Imperial Japanese Army* troops and 3,450 naval troops.

By mid-August the two adversaries were inadvertently helping each other by relying on poor intelligence assessments. Caught offguard by U.S. Marine landings in the Solomons, General Horii had to spread his resources over two fronts, Guadalcanal and Buna. But the

Allies underestimated the Japanese determination to build up a large force at Buna and push overland to Port Moresby. Brig. Gen. Charles A. Willoughby, MacArthur's intelligence chief, repeatedly discounted an enemy attack through the mountains because of the difficult terrain and climate. As a result, the Allies continued reinforcing small units on the trail, and the enemy continued overrunning them.

With the Japanese well established at Buna and Kokoda, SWPA reorganized to counterattack on two fronts: along the Kokoda Trail and 200 miles east at Milne Bay. Three Australian brigades with American reinforcements strengthened the two fronts. At Milne Bay the Allies assembled a force of some 7,500 troops, including three companies of U.S. engineers and a battery of U.S. airborne antiaircraft artillery. Named Milne Force, this two-brigade concentration took positions around two Allied airfields. On the night of 25–26 August the Japanese landed 1,500 men six miles east of the airfields. Spearheaded by two light tanks, the Japanese mounted night assaults on the 26th and 27th, and reached Airstrip No. 3. Milne Force stiffened its line and then pushed the enemy into a general retreat. On 4 September the Japanese called in the *Navy* for evacuation. In this first Allied ground victory—and first significant American action in Papua—Milne Force killed 600 of the enemy, while losing 322 dead and 200 wounded.

Along the Kokoda Trail the Allies found a different situation. Instead of continuing their drive toward the certain capture of Port Moresby, the Japanese stopped at the village of Ioribaiwa, thirty miles short of their objective. Surprised at the sudden halt, the Allies soon learned that the Japanese agreed with their own strategic view: that success on New Guinea was directly related to success on Guadalcanal. The Japanese drive against the U.S. Marine beachhead in the Solomons had been repulsed, and on 18 September General Horii received orders to withdraw to Buna for a possible reinforcement of the *Imperial Japanese Army* forces on Guadalcanal. Once again the enemy had given the Allies time to regroup.

General MacArthur took advantage of the victory at Milne Bay and the enemy withdrawal from the Kokoda Trail to draw up a comprehensive plan to clear New Guinea of the enemy. SWPA's 1 October plan called for a series of sweeps and envelopments along three axes of advance that would position Allied forces for an attack on Buna in mid-November. On the first axis, the 7th Australian Infantry Division would move up the main trail from Port Moresby, cross the Owen Stanley Range through Kokoda, and occupy Wairopi, only twenty-five miles from Buna. On the second axis, the American 2d

"Jungle Trail" by Franklin Boggs. Thick jungles of the Southwest Pacific Area made resupply an arduous process. (Army Art Collection)

Battalion of the 126th Infantry, setting out from Port Moresby, would turn inland at Kapa Kapa and move through the mountains to Jaure on a track parallel to, but thirty miles southeast of, the Australians. On the third axis, the 18th Australian Infantry Brigade, fresh from victory at Milne Bay, would sweep the north coast of the island and meet the U.S. 128th Infantry, airlifted from Port Moresby, at Wanigela. The two units would then cross Cape Nelson and stage at Embogo for the assault on enemy lines less than ten miles away.

The 1 October plan was marked by the innovation which would characterize MacArthur's leadership throughout the Pacific War: resupply by air. Once units entered the jungled mountains, resupply became a major problem. The Australian practice of relying on the strong backs of New Guineans did not solve the problem, since the bearers usually deserted when they suspected enemy presence. The Allies settled on the airdrop. Expanding its range as fast as new airfields could be constructed, the Fifth Air Force proved invaluable in overcoming the obstacles of sea distance and rugged terrain. Crates of food and supplies were pushed out the hatches of low-flying C–47s over breaks in the jungle ceiling. Though not perfect—hungry, diseased troops sometimes saw crates of food, medicine, and ammunition fall down mountainsides just out of reach—the airdrops continued and improved as aircrews gained experience.

An innovation in resupply by sea also helped. Despite Japanese command of the seas in the Solomons-New Guinea area—the U.S. Navy had withdrawn from the area in late October after losing an aircraft carrier and seeing another badly damaged—the Allies were asked to take advantage of the shallow coastal waters of New Guinea. In their advance from Milne Bay the Allies moved troops and supplies by fishing boats, tuggers, rowboats, and even outrigger canoes.

The 7th Australian Infantry Division initiated the 1 October plan by attacking toward Kokoda. At three places Japanese rearguard units set up blocking positions along the trail, and at all three the Australians, supported by Fifth Air Force bombing and strafing runs, enveloped and overran the enemy. On 2 November Kokoda and its airfield were back in Allied hands, and on the 13th the 7th moved fifteen miles ahead to Wairopi, only twenty-seven miles from the Buna perimeter. Japanese troops scattered northward toward Sanananda, where they set up a coastal strongpoint the Allies would have to attack later. But they were off the Kokoda Trail.

The airlift of units to and along the northeast coastal axis went smoothly. In the first week of October an Australian battalion flew to Wanigela on the east side of Cape Nelson, and two weeks later the 128th Infantry flew from Port Moresby to Wanigela. Since these units stood vulnerable to attack from enemy-held islands to the north, SWPA directed an assault on Goodenough Island, closest to New Guinea, by another Australian battalion from Milne Bay. After a firelight with a small enemy force preparing to leave, the battalion secured the island.

The Allied ground advances across Cape Nelson and up the Kapa Kapa–Jaure axis proved severe trials of endurance. Moving across the base of Cape Nelson, the 3d Battalion of the 128th Infantry soon found itself floundering through the knee-deep mud of a malarial swamp. The unit abandoned its planned route and made directly for the coast. When the battalion reached its objective of Pongani by sea on 28 October, many of its men were suffering from malaria and other fevers.

In a twelve-day march from Kapa Kapa to Jaure the men of the 2d Battalion of the 126th Infantry struggled against the worst conditions New Guinea could offer. The heat, the sharp kunai grass, the leeches and fever-bearing insects, and the slippery trail broke down discipline, and the troops discarded large amounts of equipment to lighten their loads. The ration—Australian bully beef, rice, and tea—made some sick, and diarrhea and dysentery claimed many. Five days of steady rain from 15 October made heating food and boiling water impossible and forced the men to wade through neck-deep water when crossing streams. At higher elevations the battal-

ion found razor-backed ridges so steep that the men had to cling to vines to maintain progress. One group stumbled and slid 2,000 feet downhill in forty minutes; it took eight hours to recover the distance. The terrain even forced a change of leaders. The battalion commander suffered a heart attack on the trail and was evacuated to Port Moresby. On 25 October the lead company reached Jaure, its troops starving and sickly, their clothing in tatters, and their motivation to meet the Japanese in dire need of restoration.

On hearing of the condition of the 2d Battalion after its crossing of the Owen Stanleys, the 32d Division commander, Maj. Gen. Edwin F. Harding, was determined not to allow any of his other battalions to become so debilitated by the terrain of New Guinea. He requested that the rest of his troops be airlifted to the north

slope of the mountains; Blamey and MacArthur quickly approved. In an intelligence gift to the Allies, a missionary had come forward with news of an airfield near Fasari, a village about forty-two miles south of Pongani. Beginning 8 November the 126th Infantry flew to Fasari and Pongani, and then moved inland to Bofu, fourteen miles from the Buna perimeter. At the same time, the 128th Infantry moved up the coast from Pongani to Embogo, only seven miles from the enemy. Meanwhile on the Kokoda Trail, the 7th Australian Infantry Division pushed the enemy down the mountains toward the coast. The Allies were trapping the Japanese against the sea.

Retreating enemy forces set up a beachhead defense stretching some sixteen miles along the coast and seven miles inland. The Japanese held several important locations within their perimeter: Gona Village, the west anchor of the enemy beachhead; Sanananda Point in the center; Duropa Plantation, the eastern anchor of the beachhead; Buna Village; Buna Mission, the prewar Australian administrative center; and two airfields. Also inside the perimeter lay more swamps and streams than appeared on Allied maps and more enemy troops than SWPA estimated. In a major intelligence blunder, Allied staffs told frontline commanders that they faced no more than 1,500 to 2,000 enemy and could expect the Japanese to surrender about 1 December. In fact, some 6,500 enemy held the beachhead.

SWPA planned a straight-ahead assault on Buna-Sanananda across a front of some twenty miles. The Girua River divided the area of operations into two roughly equal parts, with Maj. Gen. George A. Vasey's 7th Australian Infantry Division on the left, or west, and Harding's U.S. 32d Division on the right. Over General Harding's objection, the U.S.126th Infantry reinforced the Australian 7th. Since the 32d Division had only two regiments instead of three when the assault began, the transfer of the 126th meant a 50 percent loss of fighting capacity. Harding could send only one regiment, the U.S. 128th, against Buna, and he would have no division reserve.

The attack began the morning of 16 November on both sides of the Girua. On the left, the 7th Australian Infantry Division met no enemy opposition the first two days but found other problems nearly as serious. The Australians soon outran their supply line and had to go on short rations; heat exhaustion and the myriad fevers of New Guinea steadily reduced troop strength. When the first shots were exchanged on the 18th, the troops found that every approach avoiding the swamps and streams brought them into enemy machine-gun-fire lanes. Despite this formidable defense, and without artillery support, the Australians pushed ahead. In three days of fighting they lost 204

dead and wounded, and they were still in no position to take Gona. Two days later, after brief air and artillery preparations, troops of the 7th reached the innermost defenses of Gona but were quickly pushed back. On the division's right a separate thrust at Sanananda fell short, though troops managed to set a roadblock behind the enemy.

In the American sector even more trouble developed. Hoping to use the coastal waters on its right to relieve problems of supply and troop exhaustion, the 32d Division loaded its ammunition, rations, radios, and heavy weapons on luggers. After questionable planning, the heavily laden boats set out with no air cover. Japanese Zeroes soon spotted the boats and in strafing attacks sank all but one. Now the 128th had to push on without prospect of resupply, and on the 19th took its first fire from nearly invisible defensive positions. Two days later Fifth Air Force planes twice bombed the 128th Infantry troops, killing ten and wounding fourteen. Despite these setbacks, the 32d Division mounted several local and three major attacks against Japanese positions. The return of the 2d Battalion of the 126th Infantry to American control on 23 November raised hopes of success, but the 32d Division failed to dislodge the enemy.

The November attacks revealed with painful clarity a Japanese strength: tenacity in defense. This strength reflected both a selfless fanaticism in support of imperial expansion and a mastery of field engineering. The Japanese simply made better use of the local terrain. Aware of the high water table of New Guinea coastal areas, the Americans relied on the fact that the enemy could not construct below-ground defenses. The Japanese proved the fallacy of Allied thinking by cutting trees and raising berms above ground, then concealing strongpoints with kunai grass and tying them together with interlocking fields of fire. As a result, approaching troops could not see the enemy bunkers until they were only about twenty feet away, by which time the Japanese had opened fire. Without armor or heavy artillery and air support, infantrymen could only crawl up to

American and Australian casualties, with Papuan litter bearers. (DA photograph)

each bunker and jam hand grenades into firing slits, a process both slow and costly in casualties.

The Southwest Pacific Area was deeply concerned at the failure of the 32d Division's November attacks. Two weeks of offensive operations had produced 492 American casualties, and the enemy still held its positions. Staff officers wondered how much longer the underfed and diseased troops could keep fighting the Japanese and the climate of New Guinea. The international alliance that SWPA represented also showed strain, as Australians and Americans traded disparaging comments on their respective fighting abilities.

Changes were called for, and General MacArthur set them in motion. Summoning General Eichelberger, he bluntly told the corps commander, "Take Buna or don't come back alive!" Eichelberger immediately went forward to see conditions for himself. The enemy in front of the 32d Division now held a pocket stretching some four miles from Buna Village on the left to Duropa Plantation on the right. The fighting concentrated at two points along the enemy line, Urbana front on the extreme left and Warren front on the extreme right. Observing Urbana front on 2 December, Eichelberger found

that the troops were exhausted, starved, feverish, and in tatters. Even worse, they had lost spirit, with some beginning to believe that the Japanese in their heavily timbered bunkers were unbeatable. Too many troops sat in rear-echelon aid stations on "rest" status. Although the I Corps commander considered the American troops still able to mount attacks, he saw much evidence that seemed to confirm the rumor he had heard in Port Moresby: that the 32d Division was near the breaking point.

Eichelberger neither hesitated nor let personal feelings stand in his way. He immediately relieved General Harding, an old friend from the West Point class of 1909, as well as the commanders of both the Urbana and the Warren fronts. Preparations for the next round of attacks then went forward with several reasons for optimism. After more than a month of operating under combat conditions, the supply situation had improved noticeably. The troops had more food and some time to rest, and as a result their morale rose. The combat support situation, too, had improved. Eichelberger could expect more bombing sorties from Fifth Air Force and more artillery preparation. Best of all, the Americans could attack behind a spearhead of five Bren gun carriers, tracked vehicles with machine guns that might at last give the infantry an effective weapon against the nearly impregnable enemy bunkers.

The attack began in both the Australian and American sectors on 5 December. It soon developed into another Allied disaster. Within twenty minutes all the Bren gun carriers had been knocked out, and attacking infantry stalled all along the line. Now Eichelberger had experienced for himself the Japanese tenacity in defense. He ordered the troops on the Warren front to maintain positions and conduct local patrols, but the Urbana front remained very active. Showing the persistence necessary to match that of the Japanese, the 2d Battalion of the 126th mounted twelve attacks against enemy bunkers during 8-11 December, but it could not break through. For the first time, however, the Americans had a fresh reserve to draw on. With the recent arrival of the 127th Infantry, the 32d Division finally had its full complement of three infantry regiments. The 3d Battalion of the 127th now took over on the Urbana front.

In the Australian sector, the 7th Infantry Division kept up the pressure, assisted by Americans from the 126th Infantry who were showing commendable tenacity themselves in holding a roadblock before Sanananda against repeated Japanese attacks. On 9 December the 7th built up enough momentum to push through the enemy defenses and take Gona Village, the western anchor of the Japanese perimeter. The Australians had given the Allies their first major vic-

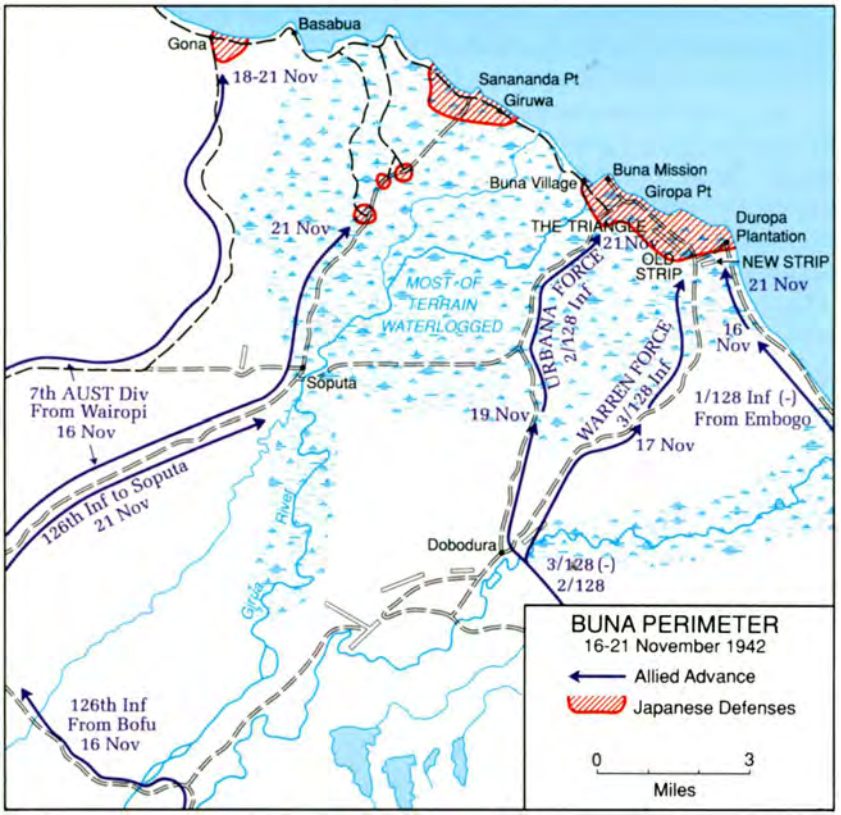
Coconut log bunker with fire trench entrance in the Buna Village area. (DA photograph)

tory since Milne Bay in early September. Good news soon followed from the Urbana front. On 14 December the U.S. 3d Battalion overran Buna Village, pushing the remaining enemy into Buna Mission.

After the failure of the 5 December attack, Eichelberger decided that to have any chance of success he would have to change tactics. Fortunately the supply establishment at Port Moresby supported his determination: the tanks Harding had requested in November were finally on the way forward. They would spearhead the attack over the drier terrain of Warren front. With the new tanks came two fresh Australian battalions to reinforce the U.S. 128th Infantry. Australian Brigadier George F. Wootten would command the next series of Warren front attacks.

Anticipating Allied attacks, the Japanese conducted resupply missions by sea at night. Despite the best efforts of the Fifth Air Force, the enemy managed to put ashore during December about 1,300 fresh troops with supplies at several points west of Gona. These troops then made their way at night to Sanananda and Buna Mission.

The attack from Warren front began early on 18 December. Following a ten-minute air and artillery preparation, Wootten sent his



new combined arms team ahead. The tanks immediately proved their worth by allowing infantrymen to get inside the enemy perimeter where, by enveloping successive bunkers, they overcame the opposition. The Allies had finally evolved the tactic to defeat Japanese bunker complexes. Over the next ten days the Warren force swept westward along the coast and reclaimed two airfields.

On the Urbana front, where the terrain did not support tanks, the fighting remained a desperate tree-by-tree, bunker-by-bunker struggle. Extremes of heroism were called for, and the troops responded. On the day before Christmas, Company I, 127th Infantry, had just cleaned out an enemy bunker only to be pinned down by a supporting strongpoint nearby. When 1st Sgt. Elmer J. Burr saw a hand grenade land next to his company commander, he immediately threw himself on it and absorbed the explosion with his own

body. For his heroism Sergeant Burr received the first Medal of Honor awarded in the campaign. Later the same day Sgt. Kenneth E. Gruennert of Company L, 127th Infantry, volunteered to knock out two enemy bunkers that were holding up his company's advance. Crawling forward alone, he killed all the enemy in the first bunker by throwing grenades through the firing slits. Although severely wounded, Gruennert bandaged himself and set out against the second bunker. Throwing his grenades with great precision, the sergeant routed the enemy from their position. But before he could call his comrades forward, he was mortally wounded by snipers. For eliminating these two bunkers Sergeant Gruennert received the second Medal of Honor of the campaign.

By 28 December the Warren force closed with the Urbana force and accomplished a complete envelopment of the enemy. In coordinated attacks from 31 December to 2 January, the two forces met and flushed the Japanese from the jungle. As the Japanese swam toward remaining enemy enclaves to the west, machine guns fired on them from the beach, and aircraft came in for strafing runs.

Now only Sanananda remained in Japanese hands. This lone enemy bastion consisted of one prepared position on the coast and several pockets of troops who had retreated from Gona and Buna. Units participating in the final offensive were now augmented by the U.S. 163d Infantry, the first regiment of the 41st Division to see action in the Pacific. Over the next twenty days the Allies overcame Japanese resistance with repeated artillery barrages, tank assaults, and infantry envelopments. The only slowdown in the Allied advance occurred when the enemy knocked out three tanks with special ammunition—ammunition that intelligence officers had reported as totally expended. The poor state of the enemy contributed as much to their defeat as did the Allies' gradually improving tactics. Without resupply for weeks, Japanese troops had only a few cartridges per man, and their rice ration ran out during the second week of January. When Allied troops broke through the last enemy defense line, they found evidence of cannibalism. Japanese resistance at Sanananda came to an end on 22 January, six months to the day after the Papua Campaign began.

Analysis

The United States Army learned much from the Papua Campaign but at a high cost. Allied losses totaled 8,546 killed and wounded. Of those, the 32d Division lost 687 killed in action and

2,161 wounded or lost from other causes. The lack of leaders experienced in jungle fighting accounted in part for these losses. Because the campaign was the Army's first in a world war tropical theater, everyone involved had to learn while under fire. The last combat experience of the Allied leaders had ended in 1918. The Australians had spent recent years in the Middle East. Only General MacArthur, with years of duty in the Philippines, brought to the campaign any familiarity with jungle fighting, but as theater commander he exercised leadership far from the front. The necessarily trial-and-error tactical approach of the Allies in the early stages of the campaign inevitably delayed the victory.

The campaign also made serious training deficiencies obvious. The beginning of the campaign revealed that the American troops were insufficiently hardened for extended forced marches, poorly schooled in the techniques of night patrolling and assaulting fortified positions, and unprepared for operations in a tropical environment. Too much had to be learned by experimentation, such as how to read terrain to avoid swamps or how to identify locations of enemy bunkers and fields of fire. In future campaigns American troops would have to complete arduous marches like that over the Owen Stanley Mountains and still be able to mount assaults or turn back enemy counterattacks. Some of the deficiencies in training could be laid to the radical changes in deployment plans experienced by the 32d Division. After its training on the east coast had been interrupted by orders to board ship for the British Isles, the division was turned around and sent cross-country to the west coast to embark for the Southwest Pacific. In Australia the division again started a training schedule, only to see it too interrupted when the Japanese advanced toward Port Moresby. Although SWPA staff officers considered the 32d Division not yet ready for combat, they rushed the unit to New Guinea. For the 32d Division there had been too much time spent in transit and not enough in actual training.

Combat support in nearly all facets fell short of needs during much of the campaign. Military intelligence, the basis of all operational planning, failed to provide a true understanding of the enemy on New Guinea. In two notable failures, SWPA underestimated the Japanese determination to take Port Moresby and, later, the number of enemy troops at Buna. These two errors led to the unrealistic expectation that the campaign could be completed by 1 December. Also, for too long MacArthur believed better leadership could overcome any obstacle presented by enemy or terrain.

Another glaring lack was operational fires to support attacking infantry. Ground officers argued long and loud against the prevailing SWPA attitude on artillery support, an attitude summarized by General Kenney when he said, "The artillery in this theater flies." The result of this bias in favor of air power was a chronic shortage of on-call artillery fire that made the work of attacking infantry units much more difficult. During the failed November attacks, the 32d Division on the Warren front had only eight Australian 25-pounders and two 3.7-inch mountain howitzers in addition to the 60-mm. and 81-mm. mortars normally carried by battalions, and on the Urbana front it had only four 25-pounders in addition to the mortars. Only one 105-mm. howitzer was used during the entire campaign.

In the absence of heavier artillery, tanks would have greatly aided infantry advances in the early months of the campaign. Attacking troops badly needed a weapon to help them overcome well-prepared Japanese defensive positions, and tanks would have been the best choice. Despite the swampy terrain, tanks had shown their value in the December attacks on the Warren front. At the very least, tanks held the promise of reducing, in a matter of minutes, enemy positions that could for days hold units armed only with rifles and hand grenades. In November General Harding requested tanks he knew to be at Milne Bay, but instead he received only the ineffective Bren gun carriers. Not until late in the campaign did SWPA send tanks to the battlefronts.

Air support was also inadequate, and it was often poorly coordinated with ground units. Not only did aircraft bomb friendly units several times, they also on occasion missed targets entirely. The Fifth Air Force also gave a low priority to the protection of supply lines, with the result that coastal tuggers were run ashore or sunk on several occasions. At the same time, however, air squadrons performed valuable service in delivering fresh troops and supplies over the Owen Stanleys to battlefronts and in evacuating the sick and the wounded to Port Moresby. Troop airlifts allowed entire regiments to minimize the debilitating effects of mountainous terrain and tropical climate.

Naval gunfire and aircraft could have partially compensated for the lack of artillery and land-based air support, but the enemy's presence and a support mission in the Solomons reduced the availability of such support. Twice Navy ships withdrew from the southwest Pacific area in response to the Japanese fleet movements. Both of these withdrawals reflected the Navy's reluctance to expose its carriers and transports to enemy air squadrons based at Rabaul. General MacArthur opposed the withdrawals because they exposed friendly units ashore to enemy

Disabled Bren gun carriers at Duropa Plantation. (DA photograph)

air attack and delayed ship-to-shore movement of troops and supplies. In search of more reliable air and amphibious support, MacArthur decided to organize a new unit for future campaigns: the engineer special brigade. These brigades would soon carry troops and equipment ashore, organize beaches, and construct airfields.

The generally unreliable supply situation during the campaign seriously damaged troop morale, already threatened by the climate of New Guinea. Troops who had to carry most of their supplies on their backs, who opened tins of meat only to find it rancid, who could not drink the water all around them because they had no purification equipment, and who ran out of ammunition soon became exhausted, demoralized, hungry, and vulnerable to disease. The 32d Division's experience with illness shows how the climate became an adversary itself. Of the 10,825 men in the division, 7,125 became sick at some time, an extraordinary rate of 66 percent.

Airdrops and coastal vessels introduced more supply problems than they solved. The best solution was more airfields closer to battlefronts. When engineer special brigades became available for future campaigns, aircraft could bring fresh supplies to engaged units even if the battle raged only a few hundred yards ahead. Resupply

pauses after assaults could be much reduced, allowing attacking infantry to maintain pressure on the enemy.

The Papua Campaign made clear that U.S. Army units committed to combat in the summer of 1942 were insufficiently trained, equipped, led, and supported in comparison to an enemy that had been fighting for five years. Under the imperative of combat, new leaders had emerged, and new battle tactics and support techniques had been developed. But the Army would not have long to wait or far to go before testing its new leaders, tactics, and techniques. The Japanese had been defeated at the eastern end of Papua, but they had not abandoned New Guinea. Sizable Japanese forces remained at several points west of Buna, and reinforcements and supplies were still coming in from Rabaul. The next battle was only days away.

Further Readings

Readings on the Papua Campaign are generally broad in scope but few in number. The views of the top American commanders are presented in Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences* (1964); in Robert L. Eichelberger and Milton Mackaye, *Our Jungle Road to Tokyo* (1950); and in the published letters of General Eichelberger: Jay Luvaas, ed., *Dear Miss Em* (1972). A sketch of the top Australian commander during the campaign, General Sir Thomas A. Blamey, and of his relations with MacArthur, is to be found in William F. Leary, ea., *We Shall Return!: MacArthur's Commanders and the Defeat of Japan, 1942–1945* (1988). A popular account, and one with personal anecdotes from all ranks, is Lida Mayo, *Bloody Buna* (1974). A concise description of the battle for Buna and professional analysis of its lessons is Jay Luvaas, "Buna, 19 November 1942–2 January 1943: A 'Leavenworth Nightmare,' " Chapter 7 of Charles E. Heller and William A. Stofft, eds., *America's First Battles, 1776–1965* (1986). The most exhaustive treatment of the campaign remains Samuel Milner, *Victory in Papua* (1957), a volume in the series United States Army in World War II.

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Cover: *Troops of the 3d Battalion, 128th Infantry, 32d Infantry Division, cross a stream near Boreo, assisted by Papuan volunteers.* (DA photograph)

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