
The Round Tablette

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Welcome to the March program for the Harold C. Deutsch World War II Roundtable. Tonight's speaker is James Campbell, author of *The Ghost Mountain Boys*. He and veterans of the 32nd Infantry Division [ID] and the South West Pacific Area will discuss the New Guinea Campaign.

The Japanese southward advance was interrupted by the Battle of the Coral Sea and the Battle of Midway. The Japanese canceled plans to land at Port Moresby, and began movement overland. This New Guinea campaign was part of Gen. Douglas MacArthur's plan to leapfrog around concentrations of Japanese forces up the island towards the Philippines.

Movement in New Guinea was bedeviled by the horribly mapped – if at all – country that lacked roads, necessitating going through swamps infested by crocodiles and disease-carrying mosquitoes. The only redeeming feature was that the Japanese were themselves equally beset.

The Papua New Guinea campaign (July 1942-January 1943) started when Japanese Major General [MG] Horii Tomitoro pushed up the Kokoda Trail across the Owen Stanley Range towards Port Moresby, the Australian port on the south coast. The 7th ID (Aus) and 32nd ID (US) under MG Edmond Herring, with air superiority, stopped them. Initial Allied operations were hampered by limited intelligence and the poor analysis provided by Brigadier General [BG] Charles Willoughby (MacArthur's G2).

Displeased, MacArthur criticized the Aussie withdrawal on the Kokoda Trail. Now he sent Lieutenant General Robert Eichelberger, a resourceful, lead from the front officer, as the new I Corps commander. In December, engineers constructed an airfield near Buna and supplies were flown in. The Aussies brought in some light artillery and light tanks which proved helpful against the enemy. Buna finally fell on 23 January 1943.

The Japanese landed at Milne Bay (on the eastern tip of the island) on 25 August 1942. Attacked by Aussies, who were supported by air, the Japanese withdrew 11 days later with nearly 50% casualties. For both sides, the Guadalcanal campaign took resources and men from New Guinea. Under both Allied pressure and orders from higher, Horii withdrew over the Stanleys to Oivi-Gorari where the 7th Infantry Division [ID] (Aus.) flanked them into a river. Horii drowned shortly after this, while crossing the Kumusi River.

Landing at Buna with engineers to build a road, the Japanese found that impossible and the force dug in. In November, the Aussies went for Buna over the Kokoda Trail and the 32 ID went along the coast, using a collection of miscellaneous vessels for lift. Because charts were poor and reefs common, the US Navy refused to support the operation. Both Allied forces lacked artillery, and the 32nd ID lacked training in combat or jungle operations. Disease was rampant and supplies short on both sides.

In 1943, the 18th Japanese Army, was activated for New Guinea and some 200,000 men were sent to the island and Guadalcanal. By July 1943, Gen. George Marshall suggested to MacArthur that he leapfrog Rabaul – and at the Quebec Conference he and Halsey ordered to skip that Japanese fortress. By October, the Japanese strongholds in eastern New Guinea fell, and in December VII Amphibious Force of 7th Fleet landed the 1st Cavalry Div., and then 1st Marine Div. landed at Cape Gloucester in CARTWHEEL. By March of 1944, Rabaul was isolated.

In April 1944, the 24th and 41st IDs (US) landed at Hollandia and Aitape in western New Guinea, encircling Gen. Imamura's 2nd Area Army (US: 100 KIA; JPN: 5000 KIA). Wakde's soils were inadequate to support heavy bombers so 41st ID took Biak in May-June at high cost (2700 US, 10000 JPN casualties). By July 1844, Japanese forces on New Guinea were routed and

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operationally unimportant. This sets the stage for the advance on the Philippines.

Air operations with 5th Air Force were key to MacArthur's leaps. The operational range of his heavy bombers and fighters determined where the next beach head would be. Most landings were lightly opposed – another criteria for selection.

MG George Kenney took over 5th Air Force in September, 1942. He worked hard to provide air support to land and naval operations. On taking command, he “house-cleaned” 5th AF, sacking several generals in the process. He armed B-25 Mitchell light bombers with 8 x .50 machine guns in the nose and 2 x .50 in turrets to suppress flak and the planes for low level strafing and bombing. He also introduced “skip bombing” against Japanese ships using 500 pound bombs.

In the Battle of the Bismarck Sea, 2-5 March 1943, Kenney's aircraft were instrument in sinking all 8 transports and 4 destroyers in the attack force. His forces destroyed much of Japanese aviation assets on the ground, notably 100 planes at Wewak on 17 August 1843.

Further Readings:

James Campbell, *The Ghost Mountain Boys: Their Epic March and the Terrifying Battle for New Guinea* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2007)

Stephen R. Taaffe, *MacArthur's Jungle War: The 1944 New Guinea Campaign* (Lawrence KS: University of Kansas Press, 1998)

Joseph W. Rutter, *Wreaking Havoc: A Year in an A-20* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2003)

Robert Eichelberger, *Our Jungle Road to Tokyo* (Nashville, TN: Battery Press, 1989)

Walter Krueger, *From Down Under to Nippon: The Story of the Sixth Army in World War II* (Washington: Zenger Publishing, 1979)

Steve Birdsall, *Flying Buccaneers* (New York: Doubleday, 1977)

Southern Cross is the account of the New Guinea campaigns written by the Chief of Staff of the 18th Army, Lieutenant General YOSHIHARA Kane. The translation was done by Doris Heath, online at <http://ajrp.awm.gov.au/ajrp/ajrp2.nsf/pages/NT00002DB6?openDocument>

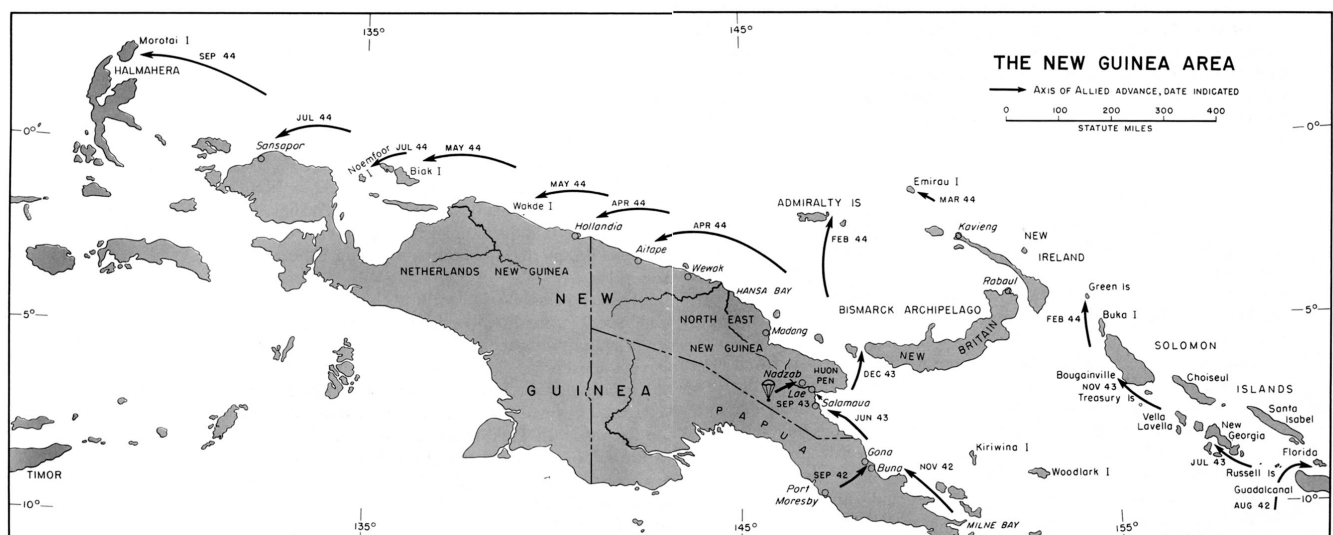
War Department Historical Division, *Papuan Campaign: The Buna-Sanananda Operation (16 November 1942-23 January 1943)* <http://www.history.army.mil/books/wwii/papuncamp/papcpn-fm.htm>

Reports of General MacArthur at <http://www.history.army.mil/html/bookshelves/resmat/ww2apt.html#>

WWII CAMPAIGNS: New Guinea, 24 January 1943-31 December 1944 at <http://www.history.army.mil/brochures/new-guinea/ng.htm>

Round Table Schedule 2010

8 April 10	Invasion of Anzio
22 April 10	Normandy Then & Now
13 May 10	Flying the Hump



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