

## **New Guinea: A Military Nightmare**

New Guinea's environment possessed countless hazards that threatened a GI's life and limb as much as Japanese bullets. The mountains were jagged and impassable, the coast and swamp and jungle-ridden expanse full of razor-sharp kunai grass up to seven feet high, and uncharted coral reefs skulked offshore, waiting to rip open landing craft bottoms like so many tin cans.

The wildlife complimented the terrain: man-eating crocodiles, three-foot long lizards, huge bats, and poisonous snakes. More irritating were the insects: mosquitoes, wasps, scorpions, centipedes, cockroaches, fleas, chiggers, leeches, ants and flies – that swarmed everywhere as if receiving orders directly from Tokyo. Most dangerous of all were the micro-organisms that thrived on the island, transmitting malaria, dengue and blackwater fevers, amoebic and bacillary dysentery, tropical ulcers, scrub typhus, and innumerable other exotic diseases that removed GI's from combat as effectively as a Japanese bullet.

The environment took its toll in other ways, including through torrential downpours that rotted everything from clothes to skin and rusted guns and other implements of war. Some areas received more than 100 inches of rain annually, and deluges continued almost daily through the May-October "dry season." The rain caused sluggish streams and rivers to rise with dirty, debris-ridden water that inundated camps and foxholes, turning them into foul-smelling bogs of mud for GI's to slog through and sleep in. When it was not raining, the scorching sun and high humidity made life just as wretched, like hot steam rising. Night brought some relief, but eerie animal sounds, cracking rotting wood, crawling insects, and condensed moisture dripping from trees punctuated the inky darkness, convincing more than one lonely sentry that all the Japanese in the world were just a few feet away. One journalist later remarked, "We who experienced New Guinea thought it was the ultimate nightmare country."

*MacArthur's Jungle War: The 1944 New Guinea Campaign*  
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