“THE JUNGLEERS”

The 41st Division in World War II’s New Guinea Campaign

Jungleers on Biak **by Keith Rocco**

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41st Infantry Division shoulder sleeve insignia

“The Sunset Division”

Edited by Connie and Dave Cole

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The 41st Division in World War II's New Guinea Campaign

During World War II, the 41st Infantry Division, known as the "Sunset Division", a division of the United States National Guard fought for three years as part of the New Guinea Campaign. The division was composed of National Guard regiments from the Pacific Northwest including Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming. The Division's soldiers saw active service in both World War I and II. The Division was composed of young men from farms and ranches, small towns, and larger cities. Many had joined the Guard to earn extra income to support their families during the hard times of the Depression.

The 163rd Regiment of Montana was founded between 1884 and 1887. It was deployed in 1916 to patrol the Mexican border after Pancho Villa's bloody raid on Columbus, New Mexico. The units were stationed in Douglas, Arizona and were called up for federal service during World War I but did not see action as a regiment; instead, its soldiers were assigned to other units as replacements for injured men.

The fall of France in June 1940 to the German Blitzkrieg injected urgency into National Guard training operations nationwide, and on 27 August 1940, Congress authorized inducting state National Guard units into federal service. Eighteen National Guard divisions nationwide were activated, including the 32nd (the "Red Arrow" Division) (Wisconsin and Michigan) and the 41st. On 16 September 1940, Congress authorized the first peacetime draft in United States history. When the divisions were federalized in October 1940, they were authorized at peacetime strength. Most units in the National Guard and the Regular Army prior to World War II, they were not at full strength nor were they provided with all the equipment they were authorized. Training for most soldiers was hurried and incomplete. At the time, National Guard units were not allowed to serve on active duty outside of the western hemisphere and draftees were inducted for a maximum of one year of service. On 7 August 1941, by a margin of a single vote, Congress approved an indefinite extension of service for guard members, army draftees, and reserve officers, regardless of the location of their service.

Given that Nazi Germany had conquered most of Europe by 1941, except for Great Britain, the young Guardsmen assumed they were preparing to fight the Wehrmacht. That changed suddenly on 7 December when Japan attacked the American Navy and Army forces stationed at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Italy and Germany declared war on the United States shortly after. The soldiers of both the 32nd and 41st Divisions received advanced training at Fort Lewis, near Tacoma, Washington. The soldiers of the 41st

Division were originally assigned to guard facilities along the Oregon and Washington coasts in response to the anticipated threat of a Japanese invasion.

Japanese forces rapidly advanced into the South Pacific, progressively occupying the Philippines, British Singapore in Malaya and Hong Kong in China, and the Dutch East Indies. The struggle for New Guinea began with the Japanese capture of the Australian protectorate of New Britain, approximately five hundred miles northeast of New Guinea in January 1942, a month after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Japan wanted Rabaul, Australia's administrative capital for New Britain, for its superb natural anchorage for its naval forces and the excellent sites it offered for airfields, as well. Japanese forces invaded Papua (eastern New Guinea) administered by Australia in January, and Dutch New Guinea (western New Guinea) in July. Japan targeted Port Moresby on the southeast coast of Papua, New Guinea, Australia's administrative capital for the colony which the Japanese viewed as the key for its plans for an Australian invasion. Capturing Port Moresby would take out the Allies' principal forward base and serve as a springboard for the invasion of Australia.

Japan was intent on cutting Australia off from its American supply lines via the Pacific, and Australia feared rightly that Japan was planning to invade. Japanese aircraft had already heavily bombed the town of Darwin and nearby areas on Australia's north coast beginning on 19 February 1942 with 188 planes launched from four carriers in the Timor Sea and made an additional 110 sorties in the region. The attacks killed 235 people and wounded 300 to 400 others. Eight ships, including three U.S. vessels, were sunk, and the town incurred extensive damage. The Australian raids resulted in a significant number of bombs being dropped, more than twice the amount during Pearl Harbor.

Prime Minister John Curtin demanded that British Prime Minister Churchill release Australian troops from the Mediterranean and North African front where they were fighting Italian and German forces under Field Marshal Rommel to return home to defend their homeland. In addition to the Australian forces fighting the Afrika Korps, many of its soldiers were serving in defense of the British Commonwealth in Malaya, particularly Singapore. With Australia's in-country military forces badly depleted, Prime Minister Curtin also contacted U.S. President Roosevelt pleading for American assistance.

On 23 February, President Roosevelt ordered General Douglas MacArthur to leave the surrounded island fortress of Corregidor in Manila Bay, Philippines, to go to Australia to take command of Allied forces in the Southwest Pacific region. The United States initially sent the 32nd and 41st Infantry Divisions from where they were completing training at Fort Lewis, Washington. The 41st Division, which includes Montana's 163rd Infantry Regiment, was the first contingent of American troops deployed overseas

during World War II. They arrived in Melbourne on 6 April, 1942, and subsequently relocated to Rockhampton on Australia's east coast for specialized jungle training.

The original Australian plan for response to the Japanese threat was called the Brisbane Line, which would have had Australian forces withdraw from its north coast to the south, creating a defensive front running east from Brisbane west to Australia's west coast. MacArthur rejected this defensive strategy and instead proposed an offensive plan to drive the Japanese out of New Guinea using Port Moresby as a base.

Overview of the New Guinea Campaign

New Guinea is the second largest island in the world. A Spanish explorer in 1545 thought the island's outline looked like an African guinea hen with the head to the west and tail to the east. "Papua" was a native term for the tail of a bird and was the name for the eastern half of New Guinea under Australian administration. New Guinea's north coast is almost 1,600 miles long. The Owen Stanley Mountain range spans the island from west to east with peaks up to 13,000 feet with steep slopes covered in dense jungle. The north side of the island, where most fighting occurred, receives 200 to 300 inches of rain yearly, leading to dense mangrove swamps and thick coastal jungle.

Disease thrives in the island's jungles including malaria, dengue fever, dysentery, and scrub typhus, along with infections caused by insects and snake bites. Temperatures reach mid-ninety's with humidity to match. Allied forces reported about 57,000 cases of malaria during the New Guinea campaign, victims of the island's fierce mosquitoes. Soldiers were told to stay in their foxholes at night, even if they had diarrhea, to avoid being accidentally shot by a startled comrade. As a result, foxholes were a cesspool of excrement and polluted water. Streams and swamps were infested with crocodiles and leeches. In summary, it was a truly terrible place to fight a war.

The military campaign in New Guinea has received limited attention from military historians. Few film documentaries or histories cover the brutal conflict there compared to the war in Europe or the island-hopping campaigns of the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps in the central Pacific. In addition to the horrendous terrain and almost continuous rainfall, soldiers on both sides had to contend with other challenges that made combat in Papua a living hell. The thick vegetation severely limited observation, making it difficult to effectively engage the enemy at a distance with supporting arms. The weather also complicated operations: at low elevations, the hot temperatures, humidity, and rainfall wore down combatants; at higher altitudes, the temperatures dropped to bone-chilling levels. Rainfall averaged ten inches a day, turning trails and fox holes into muddy bogs and swelling small streams into rivers. Soldiers could not stay dry, and their clothes and boots rotted off their bodies. Keeping weapons clean, lubricated, and functional was a continual challenge. Razor-sharp Kunai grass seven feet high cut skin, opening wounds that would not heal, and which attracted additional insect bites and

infections. Polluted water, leeches, snakes, land crabs, and diseases including mosquito-borne malaria, as well as dengue fever, dysentery, and attacks from other biting insects incapacitating the troops on both sides.

Nighttime was frightening whether you were a young man from Montana or Wisconsin, far from home and with unfamiliar night sounds. The night was very dark due to the dense jungle vegetation overhead. A soldier shared his wet foxhole with a buddy who you sat back-to-back, taking turns trying to stay awake. The night was full of strange sounds including unfamiliar birds and noises of land crabs rustling in the vegetation. The worst was during a heavy rain when the sound of rain drops concealed the sound stealthy Japanese crawling up to cut your throat, or at least that was what your imagination conjured. No one got much sleep.

In addition to the challenges presented by New Guinea's physical environment Allied soldiers faced the Japanese soldier, known for their sniping skills and camouflaged defenses. Japanese soldiers used vegetation interwoven through their clothing to blend in and built bunkers from thick palm logs covered with earth. Machine gun nests and knee mortar fire halted American attacks. Early in the New Guinea campaign, before bazookas or flamethrowers were available, Allied troops had to risk themselves crawling

The mindset of the Japanese soldier and their adherence to the Bushido military code also made them a merciless and fierce opponent. The Japanese saw surrender to an enemy as dishonorable and beyond contempt. The Bushido code helps explain the horrific treatment of the surrendered American and Filipino prisoners on the Bataan Death March. The Japanese frequently fought to the very last man when success was clearly impossible, when soldiers of other cultures would have given up. In some instances during the conflict, injured Japanese soldiers attempted to harm American soldiers who encountered them. For example, at a Japanese field hospital near Sanananda, wounded soldiers tried to shoot American soldiers. Additionally, there were cases where Japanese soldiers pretended to be dead and then used grenades when American soldiers approached them. Actions like these made it less likely for G.I.s to even try to take Japanese soldiers prisoner, further adding to the brutality of the combat in the Pacific War.

The Japanese Campaign Against Port Moresby via the Kokoda Trail

In the Southwest Pacific Area, the Japanese Army's strategic goal was the capture of the Papuan capital city of Port Moresby. By taking it, the Japanese hoped to sever the sea lines of communication and supply between the U.S. and Australia. Japan's first attempt to take Port Moresby was by sea, launching a strong naval task force from the Japanese base at Rabaul via the Coral Sea. However, the Japanese were dealt a surprising setback by a combined U.S. and Australian cruiser force May 8 and 9, 1942 although the U.S. lost the carrier Lexington. The damage to aircraft carrier *Shokaku* and

aircraft losses on *Zuikaku* at the Battle of Coral Sea prevented their participation at Midway on 4-7 June where Japan lost four fleet aircraft carriers. The Japanese loss of naval superiority in the *Battle of Coral Sea* forced them to attempt to seize Port Moresby by land. The subsequent *Battle of Midway* was considered a turning point in the Pacific naval war.

Typical Conditions in New Guinea Jungle near Buna

While Navy and Marine Corps operations at Guadalcanal were underway, another major Allied ground campaign was developing in Eastern New Guinea under the command of General Douglas MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Forces. His headquarters prepared plans to secure Eastern New Guinea (Papua) and to establish bases from which operations against the Lae-Salamaua area and New Britain could be mounted.

However, before these plans could be implemented, the Japanese moved onto the north coast of Papua to begin an attempt to take Port Moresby by an overland attack via the Kokoda Trail. On 21 July, the Japanese began putting 11,000 troops ashore near

Buna and Gona. This surprised MacArthur who had planned his own landing there to construct an airstrip to support his own campaign on the north shore of New Guinea. From here, a month later, after constructing bunkers and other defensive facilities as a base, Japanese troops began an overland march via the Kokoda Trail, an extremely difficult route defended by Australian infantry.

MacArthur's intelligence staff discounted the feasibility of the Japanese plan because the extreme difficulty of the steep and arduous jungle route. However, the Japanese again surprised MacArthur and on 26 July had captured the Australian base at Kokoda manned only by a company sized unit. The defending Australian unit was hampered by the extreme difficulty supplying food, ammunition, and equipment up a steep climb from Port Moresby, one hundred miles to the south. Most of that material had to be carried in by native porters. The Australian battalion which had marched from Port Moresby to defend the trail was gradually pushed back by the larger Japanese force, which outnumbered them by a three to one ratio.

By mid-September, the advance of Japanese elements was less than 35 miles from Port Moresby. The Japanese, however, by this time, were exhausted by disease and by the difficulties of their arduous advance up and over the Owen Stanley Range, low on supplies, and nearly starving. Allied aircraft had constantly harassed the Japanese column by strafing and bombing attacks. Unable to continue, they halted and a week later were ordered to withdraw toward Kokoda. By early August, the Allies had secured the mountain village of Kokoda and were using its airfield to push the Japanese back down the Kokoda Trail toward Buna.

Pursued by two Australian infantry brigades from Port Moresby, the Japanese fell back the Kokoda Trail to Buna and Gona, where by 18 November 1942, they had assembled about 7,500 men. A drive in November by the newly arrived 127th Infantry Regiment further pushed back the Japanese and in late December, the Japanese had been pushed out of Buna into Sanananda.

The Battle for Milne Bay

Another component of the Japanese plan for capturing Port Moresby was to outflank it from the east by an amphibious operation to seize Milne Bay which lies at the very east end of New Guinea. The bay is roughly ten by twenty miles in size and surrounded by thick jungle on both sides and abuts 4,000-foot mountains. The bay's head is swampy due to 200 inches of annual rainfall. The Australians had a small base at a former coconut plantation with a nearby airstrip (Number 1). American engineers were building two new airstrips, one on either side of the headquarters.

Australians on the Kokoda Trail

The Allies had a total force of 7,500 troops there to defend the Milne Bay base in recognition of the importance they placed on the site. In addition, the Australians had a wing of Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) P-40 Curtiss Warhawk fighter-bombers stationed at the Number 1 airstrip and could call upon B-17s at Port Moresby, if needed. The Japanese believed, incorrectly, that there were only two companies of Australian troops there. The Japanese had two separate landing forces, totaling 1500 men. Things started going wrong almost from the beginning. The smaller force was resting at Goodenough Island on 24 August and was surprised by P-40s which destroyed all of their landing craft, stranding the landing party. The main landing party came ashore successfully on 25 August except that it was five miles east of where it was supposed to land. On August 26, 1942, the Japanese began their effort by putting 1,900 men ashore there. The RAAF planes destroyed most of the Japanese supplies stored on the beach and B-17s damaged a landing transport. Even so, the Japanese landed an additional 1,000 soldiers that day and 750 on the 29th.

Milne Bay Airstrip

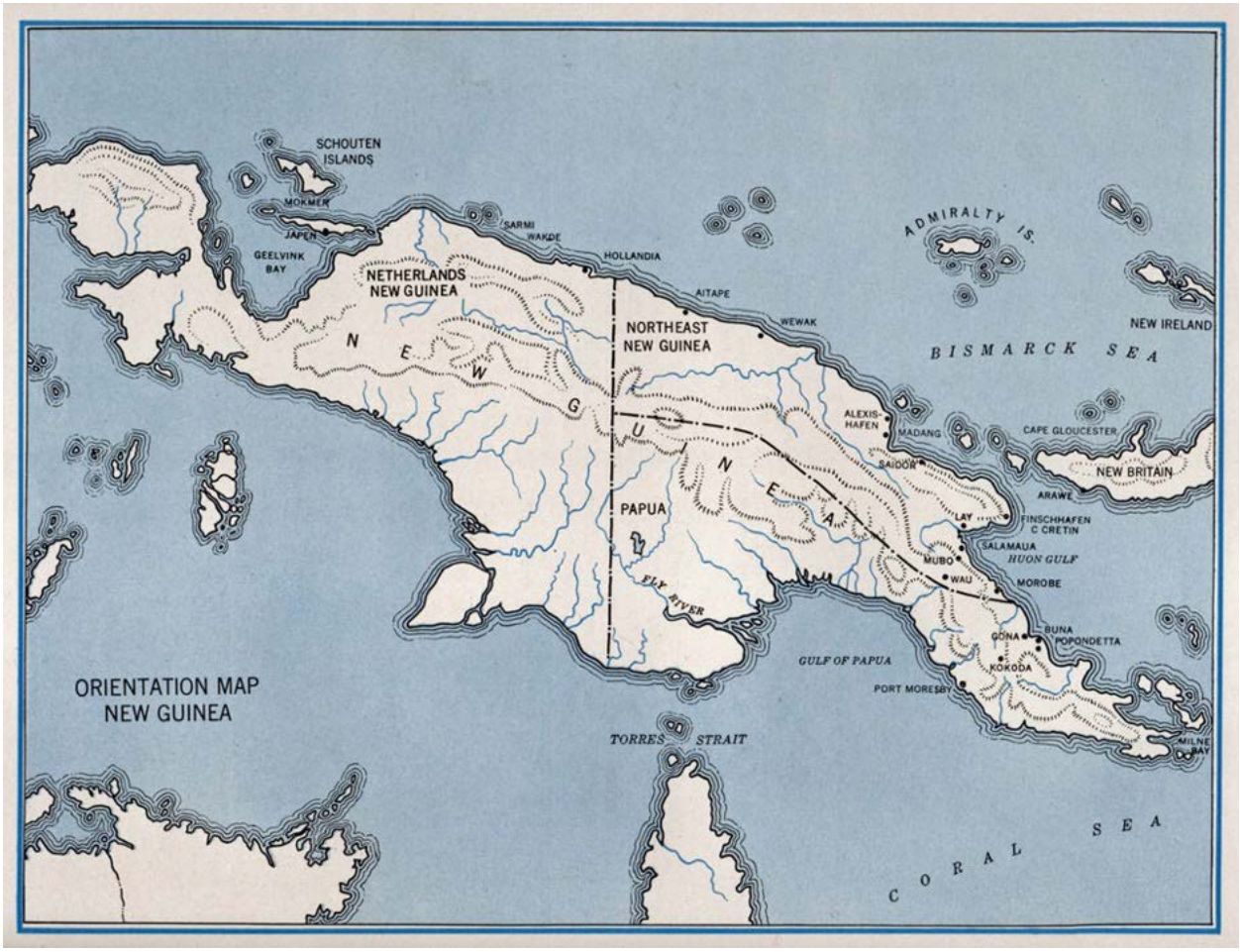
The Australian commander, General Clowes, underestimated the number of enemies he was facing, sent only a battalion forward who were overwhelmed by the Japanese who pushed past them. On 29 August, the Japanese arrived at Airstrip Number 3 which had been only partially graded but it offered a good defensive barrier over 2,000 yards long. Clowes positioned two battalions here, aided by the U.S. engineers and an anti-aircraft unit manning 37mm guns. He also had his medium range artillery zeroed on the landing strip. As a result, when the Japanese made a frontal assault on the 30th of August, they were cut to pieces. The Japanese evacuated their 1,300 remaining troops on 4 and 5 September having lost about 600 killed. In addition, those crippled by wounds and disease were combat ineffective for months.

The Australians lost 122 men killed and 198 wounded. However, the Allied naval forces in combination with the fighter and bomber forces at Milne Bay prevented any future Japanese landings in the area. According to Samuel Eliot Morison, the noted U.S. Navy historian:

> *… The Battle of Milne Bay was carried out mostly at night under pouring rain. The Aussies were fighting mad, for they had found some of their mates tied to trees and bayoneted to death, surmounted by the placard, "It took them a long time to die."*

The Battle of Milne Bay was a small one as World War II engagements went, but very important one. This was the first time that a Japanese amphibious operation had been thrown for a loss."

Map of New Guinea



<u>The Battles for Buna and Gona</u>

The first American troops (the 41st and 32nd Infantry Divisions) arrived incrementally in Australia to reinforce Australian defenders worn out by months of tough jungle combat with the 41st Division arriving first. A new Corps command to include the two divisions was organized under Lieutenant General Robert Eichelberger, a creative and competent leader. Eichelberger had a varied military experience having served in Siberia post-Worl War I and in China, had been awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and Medal for his Siberian service, attended the Command and General Staff

School, Army War College, served as Secretary to the Army General staff headed by General MacArthur, and as superintendent of West Point.

G.I.s Approach a Japanese Bunker on the Buna Front

Upon arriving in Australia Eichelberger's principal responsibility was to prepare the I Corps divisions for combat. The commander of the 32nd Division was Major General Edwin Harding, a West Point classmate of Eichelberger. The 41st Division was commanded by Major General Horace Fuller, also a West: Point classmate of Eichelberger and a close friend. Rockhampton, one hundred miles north of Brisbane where MacArthur's headquarters was, was chosen as a training site because its climate, terrain, and vegetation was considered closer to what the new U.S. soldiers would encounter in New Guinea. Eichelberger and his staff found both divisions poorly prepared for combat. The 41st Division, while highly rated, had never conducted maneuvers with live ammunition and most of the soldiers had never fired their weapons. The 32nd Division was under strength by 5,000 men and many of the officers were over age and under trained. Before shipping out to Australia, the division was moved cross country several times leaving little opportunity for training. Once it arrived in Australia it was moved twice again, leaving limited opportunity for training.

Eichelberger had observed Japanese troops in action in Siberia and found them to be superb in weapons handling, in excellent physical condition, and able to endure physical hardship. The Rockhampton training emphasized night fighting skills, scouting and jungle warfare tactics. Increasing the importance of the training, the Japanese the G.I.s would go up against had already had two to three years combat experience in China and Malaya. Eichelberger informed MacArthur that the men of his divisions were in no way ready to fight the Japanese in jungle warfare conditions. He found that their greatest deficiency was in the basics, including patrolling and scouting. The 32nd had conducted only one night exercise in 20 months. He created a rigorous physical fitness program to make sure his soldiers had stamina for tough combat. He stressed live fire exercises which conditioned his men for the noise and confusion of combat and use of their weapons. Unfortunately, two regiments of the 32nd had already been deployed to New Guinea before they were exposed to the enhanced jungle warfare training program.

With reports that many of the Japanese were exhausted from their Kokoda Trail experience and sickness, General MacArthur decided to seize the initiative and attack the Japanese bases at Buna and Gona. Buna was a small Australian government outpost near a native village while Gona was an Anglican mission ten miles northwest of Buna. MacArthur's plan called for the Australian 7th Division to seize Gona while the 32nd Division's two regiments would assault Buna, soon to be known as "Bloody Buna." Unfortunately, MacArthur's intelligence regarding the Buna situation was faulty. His Intelligence Officer, General Charles Willoughby, was inadequate to the task during virtually his entire service in New Guinea. He informed MacArthur that Buna had only 1,500 exhausted survivors from the Kokoda Trail debacle, while in reality, there were 8,000 Japanese, including 2,500 fresh replacements. Eichelberger pleaded with MacArthur and his manipulative Chief of Staff, General Sutherland, to let him or his staff visit the front to see the conditions his soldiers would face and observe the Japanese tactics. His requests were denied. He was told that his job was to train G.I.s and to stay out of New Guinea. Based on Willoughby's intelligence, Sutherland and MacArthur expected a quick victory.

In *Forged by Fire*, John Shortal explains that the Battle for Buna is studied today by the Army Staff College for its mistakes. MacArthur faced three major challenges: his ineffective staff, inadequately trained troops, and strained relations with Australian allies, largely due to his arrogance.

MacArthurs's U.S. forces began their assault on the Japanese at Buna ill-equipped and ill-prepared. MacArthur sent the two least trained regiments of the 32nd Division to attack the Japanese forces at Buna. In addition to their other handicaps, these

regiments were sent in without their mortars and artillery. The Japanese units they were facing were experienced veterans of the campaigns in China, Malaya, and the Philippines. These two regiments had little more than basic training at Fort Lewis, Washington before they were sent to Australia and no experience at all in jungle combat. They were one of the first units shipped to Australia and as a result missed the opportunity to experience the advanced training designed by General Eichelberger and his staff at Rockhampton.

Buna was the site of a former coconut plantation. The Japanese had been busy after they arrived constructing bunkers of palm tree logs and were effectively camouflaged with fast growing vegetation. The inexperienced American soldiers could seldom see the Japanese positions before they almost stepped on them. The actual fighting began 2 November under the command of U.S. General Edwin Harding. At the end of November, Eichelberger met with MacArthur in Port Moresby where MacArthur, in his melodramatic fashion told Eichelberger, “I want you to take Buna or not come back alive.” Eichelberger was a known quantity to MacArthur as he had served for years as his aide when he was Army Chief of Staff in Washington, D.C. Eichelberger was shocked at the manner in which he received his orders. Normally a new commander would receive instructions that described the mission, the situation, and the recommended plan of action. Eichelberger had been shut out of what was happening at Buna by MacArthur’s staff for weeks and knew nothing about the disarray at the front.

After arriving at Buna the next day, Eichelberger met with the 32nd’s commander, General Harding who he had known for 37 years since their West Point days. Contrary to MacArthur’s advice to avoid any contact with the Australians, he also reached out to the Australian commander, General Herring, and broke the ice by expressing his desire to cooperate with him and the Australian forces in the Buna campaign. After arriving Eichelberger had two members of his 1st Corps staff, Colonels Martin and Rogers, inspect the front and report back to him. They found that the battlefield terrain presented real obstacles. The front was a huge, impassable swamp in front of the Japanese positions. The only access to the Japanese defenses was via narrow corridors on raised ground which the Japanese could cover with their bunkers and interlocking machine guns which would make frontal attacks suicidal.

Martin and Rogers interviewed the 32nd G.I.s and found serious morale problems. Few of the soldiers were taking control of their assigned positions or did not know even what areas they were to defend. Regimental commanders and subordinates did not even know where their men were. The soldiers were dirty and unkempt, many with shaggy beards. Physically, the men were gaunt and were, according to Eichelberg’s medical staff, starving; they had not had a warm meal in over ten days and were surviving on

two cans of rations per day, not enough calories to keep a soldier fit for combat. There was ample food stored at the U.S. airstrip, but it was not being distributed to the units. Many soldiers suffered from malaria and diarrhea. They discarded their packs with food, ammunition, and entrenching tools to lighten their loads, making it difficult to dig deeper foxholes or new ones. Native porters wore clean uniform shirts from discarded packs, while soldiers were in dirty and ragged clothing.

The 32nd had suffered substantial losses during the first few weeks of combat. Their morale was poor, their food was poor, they were hungry, and they were increasingly sick, in part because they were undisciplined in taking their atabrine anti-malarial tablets. Their boots were rotting on their feet, and their clothes were deteriorating in the heat and wet. The soldiers themselves displayed a complete breakdown of discipline and courtesy toward their superior officers.

Eichelberger and his staff agreed this was a nightmare situation. Eichelberger told the 32nd's commander, General Harding, that his regimental commanders had to be dismissed but he refused. Eichelberger said he had no choice but relieve them and Harding as well. He replaced the regimental commanders with officers from his 1st Corps staff that he had confidence in. He brought in officers from his Australia units to replace poor performers, including the supply and planning staff. He called a two-day halt in fighting to give the men adequate rest and to address the problems they had seen, including giving the men their first hot meal they had received in days. He and his officers "laid down the law" in presentations to the troops to re-establish discipline and to try to install a sense of pride in the division, including addressing their appearance and the poot state of their equipment and weapons.

G.I.s Manning a .50 Caliber Machine Gun at the Buna Front

General Herring, the Australian and Eichberger's commander, inspected the division and was impressed by the transformation. He agreed to loan the division seven tanks Eichelberg had requested of MacArthur to help deal with the Japanese bunkers and assigned one of his Australian battalions and his best combat officers to assist Eichelberger. Eichelberger requested and received additional food, weapons, ammunition, and supplies from MacArthur, including flame throwers to deal with the bunkers and pillboxes. He and his officers began accompanying his G.I.s on patrols to demonstrate that they were leading from the front and expecting their officers and non-coms to do the same. The division's soldiers had only been trained in making frontal assaults which was a gift to the Japanese defenders in their bunkers. Eichelberger started an "on the battlefield" jungle warfare training program on infiltration and flanking tactics that slowly bore fruit.

On 5 December, the division made coordinated flanking attacks on the Japanese positions with Eichelberger's new officers leading their units to demonstrate what was expected of them; some of them were wounded as a result but the point was made. General Eichelberger was right up front patrolling with his men. His personal leadership resulted in the destruction of several bunkers and drove a wedge between Buna Mission and the Buna Village which separated smaller isolated units from the Japanese main headquarters at the Mission. He initiated nighttime patrols for the troops to more effectively eliminate Japanese bunkers and other defenses using mortars and flamethrowers. He also continued to relieve the weaker, older officers and non-coms and replaced them with younger, more fit, and aggressive leaders. This earned the

soldiers' respect and gave his men a new-found sense of pride and confidence. It also earned Eichelberger increased respect from MacArthur.

One of Eichelberger's continuing problems was that MacArthur simply did not understand jungle warfare. MacArthur was a highly distinguished combat leader during World War I, earning six Silver Stars for his exemplary bravery in leading troops against German positions. However, in World War II he was more noted for not visiting the front to personally view the conditions his men were fighting under. During his time on Corregidor, he only visited his troops on Bataan once, earning the nickname "Dugout Doug" from his men. The demands he made on Eichelberger, and other commanders suggested that he really had little understanding of the unique challenges his men faced of close quarters combat in the hot, humid terrain and vegetation against a highly skilled, determined enemy. He continually pressed his subordinates to attack more quickly when it simply was not feasible. His mental image of battle conditions seemed frozen in time based on his World War I experience and thus his advice and demands often did not fit jungle war reality. Adding to his misunderstanding of battle conditions was the frequently inaccurate reporting he received regarding Buna and Gona conditions from his staff, particularly his Chief of Staff Sutherland and Intelligence Chief Willoughby. MacArthur added to the antagonism of the fighting men on the front lines when his headquarters at Port Moresby drafted press releases that implied that MacArthur was at the Buna front personally leading his troops when he never once went there,

A native helps a wounded soldier back to an aid station at Buna.

By November, the rest of the U.S. 32nd Infantry Regiment was near the front, and on November 19, together with the Australians, began attacks against the firmly entrenched Japanese. The G.I.s were shocked to find the Japanese were in almost impregnable positions. In fact, the Japanese had more soldiers than the Allies. On 21 November MacArthur ordered General Harding to "Take Buna today at all costs." The 32nd attacked repeatedly but was repulsed each time. In the next ten days the division suffered 492 casualties and was unable to penetrate the Japanese fortifications. In the next two months, the Japanese moved an additional 3,000 fresh troops in by small craft, while the Allies committed three more Australian infantry brigades, an Australian cavalry regiment, a Papuan infantry battalion, the rest of the U.S. 32nd Infantry Division, and the 163rd U.S. infantry regiment of the 41st Division.

In December 1942, MacArthur decided to commit more American troops to the Battle of Buna-Gona. On 14 December 1942, Colonel Jens Doe's 163rd Regimental Combat Team of the 41st Division was alerted. The first elements flew over the Owen Stanley Range from Port Moresby to Dobodura on C-47s on 30 December. The 163rd joined Australian Major General Vasey's 7th Division.

The elements of the 163rd Regiment entered the struggle for the defense of Port Moresby at Dobadura 2 January 1943 and fought continuously from Buna along the

Sananda track on the north coast of Papua until 22 January. Doe was eager to attack the Japanese. His Australian superiors thought he was underestimating the enemy but gave him the go-ahead. As a result, the 163rd was thrown back by enemy fire. After more hard lessons in warfare against the Japanese, Doe later assumed command of the Sananda Front on 3 January 1943.

Gona finally fell to the Australians on 9 December 1942 and Buna Village to the Americans on December 14. The Americans took the fortified administrative headquarters at Buna Mission on 2 January 1943, while the Australians moved into Sanananda on 18 January. By 22 January, the last resistance in the Buna-Gona area was over. The elements of the 163rd Regiment entered the struggle for the defense of Port Moresby at Dobodura 2 January 1943, and fought continuously from Buna along the Sanananda track on the north coast of Papua until 22 January 1943.

The Japanese had decided to withdraw from the area more than three weeks earlier, at the same time they had written off their efforts to take Guadalcanal. The Allies' capture of Guadalcanal and Papua ended the six-month effort to block the Japanese drive south.

Major General George Alan Vasey, commanding the 7th Australian Division (left), chatting to Colonel Jens A. Doe, commanding the U.S. 163rd Infantry Regiment (center), and other Australian officers at a unit headquarters in the forward area during the advance to Sanananda.

Sananada

Colonel Doe of the 41st Division's 163rd Regiment assumed command of the Sanananda Front on 3 January 1943.

Reporter George Weller of the *Chicago Daily News tried to describe the Japanese defenses at Sanananda:*

> *The Japs knew every square inch of the jungle country. The trails were wet from the constant rain and dripping foliage. The Japs were dug in with snipers in the trees and firing lanes for machine guns. The jungle was a tangle of swamp and jungle vines with the Japanese impossible to see. Their bunkers had been built of palm logs with steel doors, months before the Americans got there and were so overgrown with fast growing vegetation that they were invisible. The bunkers were arranged in circular patterns with connecting fields of fire. A squad could walk into a trap and not even know it. This psychological weight of knowing that the Japanese were likely just yards away weighed on the soldiers' minds, creating tremendous tension, keeping everyone on edge.*

After two weeks at Sanananda, Colonel Doe, tired of the deadly game of hide and seek, decided to attack. According to Martin Kidston's *Poplar to Papua*, Doe was no greenhorn. He had graduated from West Point in 1914 and commanded a machine gun battalion at St. Mihiel and Argonne in France in World War I. The regiment laid down an artillery barrage in preparation for moving forward. Unfortunately, the timing was off to take on the Japanese position and instead they hit each 163rd company separately, resulting in several casualties.

A young lieutenant, Harold Fisk in the 163rd, shot a Japanese soldier while on patrol with an Australian squad. Four days later he disappeared. His body was found later tied to a lattice with his legs removed, apparently cannibalized. During the Sanananda fight, a company of the 163rd encountered a Japanese field hospital. As they approached it, they were fired on by Japanese patients and had several casualties. Infuriated, the GI's machine gunned the hospital area killing all the Japanese. From then on, they were called the "Butchers of Sanananda" by "Tokyo Rose."

On 10 January, a patrol discovered that the Japanese had evacuated the Buna-Gona area. The Japanese troops had been starving and there was evidence of cannibalism of some American dead. The Japanese had left their sick and wounded behind to fight a delaying action. Based on this intelligence, the Australian commander Vasey ordered an immediate attack. By afternoon, the Americans killed 152 Japanese and wounded six. Several enemy bunkers were taken by hand-to-hand combat by the Americans and

Australian units. The next day the Allies attacked again and killed 525 Japanese; on the next day, another 69 Japanese were killed. After three weeks of fighting in January 1943 Montana's 163rd lost eighty-five killed, sixteen other deaths, 238 wounded and 584 sick for a total of 923 casualties.

The 162d Regiment, 32 Division (Wisconsin and Michigan National Guard) relieved the 163d in the Sanananda-Killerton-Gona area and the outpost area at the mouth of the Kumisi River. In February 1943, the 163rd leapfrogged along the coast in the Morobe area, and fought the long Salamaua campaign, 29 June 1943 to 12 September 1943. The 163rd left for Australia, 15 July 1943 for rest, reinforcements, and refitting. A period of patrolling and training followed while elements of the regiment later advanced against stiff resistance to the Kumisi River in February.

The following summary is from the Australian War Memorial regarding the Battle for Sanananda:

> *Following the fighting on the Kokoda Trail, Japanese forces occupied a series of well-sited, heavily constructed and cleverly concealed defensive positions in the Buna, Gona and Sanananda area. Australian and United States troops reached the three enclaves in mid-November 1942 but early efforts to take them were unsuccessful and costly. The three positions were sited on high ground, forcing the attackers into waterlogged swampy country.*
>
> *Like Buna and Gona, the first two enclaves to fall, Sanananda was the scene of fierce and costly fighting. The 16th Australian Brigade made the first attempt. Suffering heavy casualties and widespread illness they made little headway. Further attempts by the 126th American Regiment and the 30th Australian Brigade also failed, leading the Australian commander, Major General George Vasey, to suspend operations until reinforcements arrived from Port Moresby.*
>
> *Even then the attackers were unable to make significant progress while continuing to suffer heavy casualties. It became clear that frontal assaults were doomed, attacks on Sanananda were halted while Buna was overcome. Once Buna fell on 2 January Australian and United States units resumed their attack, this time using several different approaches.*
>
> *Vasey's 18th Brigade began their advance on 12 January making little progress and losing more than 100 men killed or wounded. Despite the attackers' lack of success, the Japanese began to withdraw from their forward positions that night. Allied patrols began to report that other Japanese positions had also been*

abandoned. Fighting continued, however, and a further six days passed before Sanananda village was in Allied hands. The surviving Japanese troops were now surrounded and after three more days of fighting the last organized resistance was overcome. The battle cost some 2,100 Allied casualties and the lives of more than 1,500 Japanese soldiers.

The Battle of Wau

Wau is a village in the interior of the Papuan Peninsula, about 30 miles southwest of Salamaua (see New Guinea map). An airfield had been built there during a gold rush in the 1920's and 1930's. About 5,400 survivors of the Japanese defeat at Buna-Gona moved into the Salamaua area to defend the airstrip. The Australian 7th Division decisively turned back the Japanese assault during the Battle of Wau, 29-31 January 1943.

The Japanese decided to make another all-out effort to take Wau. About 6,900 troops aboard eight transports, escorted by eight destroyers, left Rabaul on 28 February. Things started going wrong for the task force almost immediately when an Allied scout plane spotted the slow-moving ships. By the time the Allied bombers and U.S. Navy PT boats finished their work on 3 March, the Japanese had lost all eight transports and four of the destroyers. The remaining destroyers with about 2,700 troops limped back to Rabaul.

Three factors contributed to the disaster for the Wau task force. First, the Japanese drastically underestimated the strength and ability of the Allied air forces. Second, the Allies had become convinced that the Japanese were planning a major effort to attack Wau, in part thanks to Allied *ULTRA Enigma* code intercepts, and had increased their air reconnaissance. Most important, the bombers of Lieutenant General George Kenney's 5th Air Force (aka "MacArthur's Air Force") had been modified to allow more aggressive tactics. The noses of several Douglas A-20 Havoc light bombers had been refitted with eight 50-caliber machine guns for strafing slow moving ships and barges. Their bomb bays were adapted to carry 500-pound bombs for the new "skip bombing" method. This involved dropping conventional bombs on the sea surface to bounce them into a ship's hull, like the technique used by British bombers on the Ruhr River dams in Germany. These aerial tactics were continually employed on Japanese shipping throughout the New Guinea campaign.

The Battle of Aitape

41st Division Landing at Aitape

On 22 April 1944, the 163d Regiment of the 41st Division formed the backbone of a 22,500-man force under General Doe for a landing on Aitape. The mission was to seize the airfields while the remainder of the 41st Division came ashore at Humboldt Bay near Hollandia. Hollandia and the Cyclops and Sentani Airdromes fell after ineffectual Japanese resistance, and the Division patrolled and mopped up until relieved on 4 May. Most enemy forces had moved to Wewak; the operation was so successful that the Aitape airfields were in operation for fighter aircraft two days later.

32nd Division (Red Arrow) at Aitape

Learning by Doing

As part of their learning process, the U.S. Army had to develop new ways of sustaining their forces in the field. Transport of food, ammunition, wounded and sick was exhaustingly difficult and time-consuming, forcing troops to backpack food, water, and ammo in extreme heat and humidity, wearing soldiers down even further. The high heat and humidity turned food rations rancid, leading to the need for development of more appropriate jungle rations. Creative use of canoes, airdrops, mules, and invaluable assistance from native porters kept supplies moving forward and the sick and wounded back to medical care.

The Army's entry into the fight for Papua had been costly, but the" Jungleers," as they became known, learned a great deal from the hard school of grueling experience. The Papua veterans paid a price; two-thirds suffered from debilitating sickness. Artillery gunners learned new ways of providing effective support. Evolving bombing techniques highlighted the strategic importance of airfields and support. MacArthur's "leapfrog" strategy saved Allied lives by avoiding Japanese strong points, favoring enemy bases with existing air strips or firm ground for new airfields to advance the war effort.

One of the more creative innovations involved some of the 230 Native American members of Montana's 163rd Regiment of the 41st Division. There are nine tribal nations located in Montana. Although kept as a military secret for years it is now being revealed that approximately 48 members of the Assiniboine, Crow, and Sioux tribes serving in Montana's National Guard regiment served as ad hoc "Code Talkers." The Montana soldiers would frequently pick up a field telephone and hear Japanese voices in the background. The soldiers came up with the idea of having native speakers from the same tribe on each end of the line to converse in their mutual language regarding military issues or strategy.

Sea Bee (CB) Construction Battalion Engineers constructing a critical jungle airfield

The Air War in New Guinea

The soldiers serving in New Guinea also learned to appreciate the critical value of airfields even though they were difficult to construct and maintain in the marshy, wet conditions along the coast. They played a vital role in providing necessary food, ammunition, and other supplies to the Allied units scattered along the New Guinea coast and in transporting personnel for replacements and wounded needing medical care. They were also invaluable in providing support for combat operations and keeping MacArthur's leapfrog strategy moving forward.

The success of the New Guinea campaign owed much to the creative air war techniques of General George Kenney's 5th Army Air Corps pilots flying Boeing B-17's

and Consolidated B-24 Liberators. The planes, using delayed action bombs to attack Japanese port facilities and airfields, often left runways unfit for use their and damaged aircraft unable to fly.

A-20 “Havoc” in action at Bismarck Sea

The agile Douglas A-20 Havocs proved an ideal weapon for pinpoint strikes against aircraft, hangars, supply dumps, and barges. Their heavy forward firepower (8 nose mounted .50 caliber Browning machine guns) could overwhelm shipboard antiaircraft defenses and at wave-top level (resembling a torpedo run) they could skip their bombs into the sides of transports and destroyers with deadly effect. The captains of Japanese ships often assumed the approaching aircraft were making torpedo runs and turned their vessels bow-on to the aircraft in defense, making the strafing from nose guns far more devastating and often leaving them even more vulnerable to follow-up skip-bombing runs. Skip bombing proved deadly against cargo ships and destroyers used to transport supplies and troop reinforcements.

For example, during the Battle of the Bismarck Sea in March 1943, Allied pilots destroyed a large Japanese convoy attempting to transport troops and supplies from the major naval base at Rabaul on the island of New Britain to Lae, New Guinea. Approximately 3,000 troops died, and essential supplies were lost when American aircraft sank 12 of the 16 ships in the convoy, disrupting Japanese plans to challenge Allied forces. With their air and naval forces destroyed and ground forces isolated, the Japanese in New Guinea no longer were a serious threat. The Japanese concluded that the risks involved in trying to resupply or reinforce their forces several hundred miles away on New Guinea through Allied air and naval attacks were no longer feasible. This ended the Japanese drive south and their efforts to reinforce their isolated New Guinea bases. The line of communications to Australia was now secure.

North American B-25 Mitchell Bomber in Action

Kenney's North American B-25 Mitchell's cut off Japanese supplies through aggressive low altitude aerial attacks on Japanese cargo ships and barges. Called a "ship destroyer," the B-25 was a perfect low level attack plane that pilots called a "delight to fly." Numerous aircraft were equipped with 75mm cannons in their noses to effectively engage barges and cargo ships through strafing operations. The B-25s were the same planes used for the famed Doolittle Raid on Tokyo in 1942.

MacArthur's leap-frog strategy and Admiral Nimitz's "island-hopping" approach bypassed Japanese strongpoints, leaving forces stranded and lacking essential supplies. Nearly 90% of Japanese losses in New Guinea were attributed to disease and starvation rather than combat.

North American Mitchell B-25s banking for a bombing run

In addition to the important role of General Kenney's air force in blocking the Japanese efforts to reinforce the outposts in New Guinea, the Navy's patrol torpedo (PT) boats also played a critical part in harassing and crippling the Japanese efforts to resupply their troops by barges at night. The aggressive night patrolling by PT boats contributed greatly to strangling the enemy garrisons stationed on the northern New Guinea coast. The speedy PT boats with their twin .50 caliber Browning machine guns and .20 mm anti-aircraft guns or .37 mm cannons were very effective in blocking Japanese attempts to maintain their scattered strong points. According to the Stephen Taafe, author of *MacArthur's Jungle War*:

> *The PT boats played a dangerous cat-and-mouse game with enemy planes and shore batteries, and they contributed greatly to the strangulation of the Japanese on the island. For instance, off of Aitape, American PT boats destroyed 115 barges attempting to supply General Adachi's isolated 18th Army, at the cost of only one of their own lost to enemy fire.*

General Walter Krueger, the irascible and stubborn German-born commander of MacArthur's land forces, and the 6th Army, also known as Alamo Force, made use of PT boats to support his "Alamo Scouts", almost a precursor to today's SEAL (Sea, Air, Land) teams. Krueger used these brave sailors to scout potential landing sites for amphibious operations. The Alamo Scouts would launch from submarines or PT boats and paddle rafts ashore to reconnoiter sites to determine the presence of Japanese

troops and estimate their number, if possible. Scouts checked coral reef water depths to ensure they weren't obstacles for landing craft, avoiding issues like at Tarawa where Marines waded a half mile in neck-deep water under heavy machine gun fire. The scouts would also take soil samples from beaches and possible sites for air strips. These were very high-risk endeavors. The scouts were sometimes captured, tortured, and killed. On at least one occasion they were not picked up again after their visit ashore because of Japanese patrols and were captured. On another scouting mission they were turned in by natives and killed.

The Navy learned new naval gunfire techniques to effectively target Japanese shipping. and mounted rocket launchers in the bows of landing craft to support amphibious operations. The Army and Navy adapted to "amphibious landing" methods, developing LVI ("Alligators") and DUKW vehicles for better transport of personnel and supplies, particularly over coral reefs, and wounded back to ships for medical care. Proper preparation, training, and equipment became essential for infantry in challenging conditions. Lessons from New Guinea were shared to train soldiers and marines in jungle combat and amphibious landing tactics against the resilient Japanese forces. Marc Bernstein in his book *Hurricane at Biak* noted:

> *General MacArthur reported that in 112 amphibious landings in the Southwest Pacific between October 1942, and July 1945, there were only 235 casualties (or about two per landing) in the ship-to-shore phase. In 103 of the operations, the actual landing was achieved without a single casualty.*

G.I.'s land on shore in New Guinea amphibious operation

January 1943, The Fork in the Road

The American Joint Chiefs of Staff eventually concluded that the physical and human costs associated with landing and besieging "Fortress Rabaul" would be prohibitive. They determined that the Allies' strategic objectives could be more efficiently accomplished by neutralizing and bypassing the stronghold. This revised strategy was endorsed by the Allied leaders at the Quebec Conference in August 1943.

There were two potential routes to defeat Japan: the Central Pacific route from Hawaii through Japanese Mandates, controlled by Admiral Nimitz of the U.S. Navy, and the Southwest Pacific route from Australia through New Guinea to Japan, overseen by General MacArthur of the U.S. Army.

The situation offers a demonstration of how human personality can impact even the directions of a world war. The human factor became involved because Admiral Ernest King, Chief of Naval Operations and a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), was Admiral Nimitz' commander. Admiral King intensely disliked General MacArthur and believed the Pacific War should have been solely a Navy operation. He used his position on the Joint Chiefs to try to steer Pacific war strategy to attack Japan by bypassing the Philippines and following a route past Formosa instead. This would have crushed MacArthur's dream of fulfilling his "I Shall Return" pledge to liberate the Philippine people from Japanese oppression.

MacArthur was frustrated by King’s refusal to assign aircraft carriers for his advance along New Guinea's north coast. His amphibious landings and jungle airstrips substituted as bases for General Kenney’s 5th Air Force, facilitating the Sixth Army’s march westward. MacArthur was determined to return to the Philippines after his dishonorable departure from Corregidor. To advance toward Japan and possibly invade the Philippines, maintaining momentum parallel to Nimitz's Central Pacific progress was essential. This drove him to push his commanders for rapid execution of his strategy against Japan, urging them to defeat, circumvent, or isolate Japanese forces. He made a bold request to the JCS for a significant 600-mile leap along New Guinea's coast to Hollandia. Biak was crucial in his plan to fulfill his "I shall return" pledge and restore his honor.

The “Jungleers” ordeal - The Battle of Biak, 27 May - 20 Aug 1944

In Spring 1944, the 41st Division, including Montana's 163rd Regimental Combat Team, faced one of their hardest battles of the New Guinea Campaign on the island of Biak. The airfields on the island of Biak were a key objective for MacArthur’s strategy for returning to the Philippines. Biak had three large airstrips that were long enough and firm enough with a coral base to handle the Army Air Corps “heavies,” the big B-17 and B-24 bombers to pound Japanese bases all the way to the Philippines and for the preparatory bombing for a major amphibious assault.

After MacArthur's surprise long leapfrog attack towards Hollandia, every day of delay taking Biak was an ordeal for him. MacArthur’s attack on Hollandia was a great shock to the Japanese. Following that it seemed obvious to them that the next Allied attack would be Biak, the next logical steppingstone to the Philippines because of its three excellent airstrips. The island assumed greater importance because MacArthur’s engineers discovered that the soil on all three of the air strips at Hollandia were not firm enough to bear the weight of the heavy Army Air Corps bombers: B-17s and B-24’s. General Kenney wanted Biak, too. Biak lies roughly 1180 west of Wakde and 300 miles west of Hollandia. It is also about 900 miles south of Mindanao in the Philippines, a major Japanese Navy base, a round-trip distance reachable by B-17’s.

Note the machete on the right soldier's pack for cutting through thick jungle cover.

41st Division Itinerary

The bombing of Biak began 28 April 1944 by B-24s of the Fifth Air Force which hit Mokmer airdrome (see map). Throughout May, B-24s targeted gun emplacements, supply storage areas, and airdromes. The Hurricane Task Force (28,000 men) under the Sixth Army (Alamo Force) served under Lt. General Walter Krueger with Major General Horace Fuller as commander of the 41st Division, which formed the core of the Force.

Biak is approximately 45 miles long by 20 miles wide and surrounded by a coral reef. The shore rises to 330 feet on the ocean side and 160 feet facing the New Guinea coast. The island is characterized by elevated areas covered with tall rainforests, along with parallel ridges and limestone mountains situated in the northwest. The balance of the island is mostly flat. According to Marc Bernstein, author of *Hurricane at Biak*, the island "had all the makings of an infantry officer's nightmare." From high coastal positions, the Japanese could effectively target American G.I.s while staying protected. A reporter for 'Yank" magazine said it was an environment hosting "malaria, dysentery, yaws, tropical ulcers, mosquitoes, flies, and crocodiles." Sixty miles southeast of the Equator, it was hot and dry with no surface water sources.

Fifth Air Force commander General Kelley knew there were 21 Japanese airfields within flying distance of Biak. HIs hope was to be able to base fighter aircraft on Wakde to provide cover for the landings and combat strikes to support infantry on Biak. This was critical because the only other air support for Biak would have to come from Hollandia, 300 miles away. This meant that Wakde would have to be fully operational by 27 May. These tight planning margins concerned some naval staff because it was calculated that elements of the Japanese fleet at Davao, Mindanao in the Philippines could arrive at Biak in 31 hours at 25 knots.

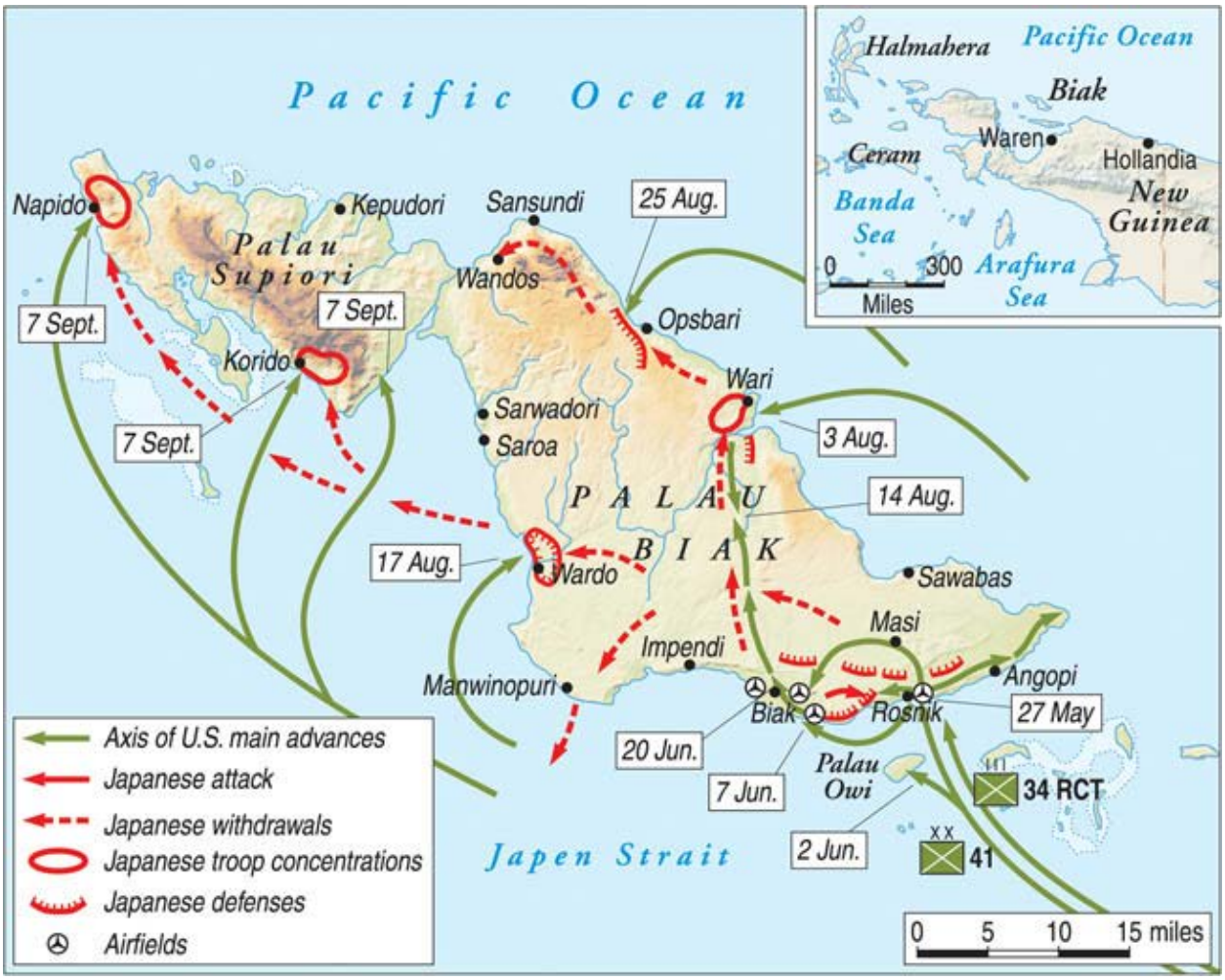
ULTRA (code breaking intelligence) interceptions identified 2,500 of the Japanese 36th Division's 222nd Infantry Regiment on Biak, considered a crack, hard-core unit with combat experience in China and notorious for committing atrocities. Troops from this division were from the same division that the 41st battled in brutal combat at Wakde.

MacArthur would normally avoid fortified situations like Biak, but he needed its airfields. His staff scheduled the assault date for Wakde for 17 May and Biak for 27 May thinking ten days would allow for the amphibious shipping used for assaulting Wakde to also be available later for Biak, as well. However, it took two days of tough fighting to pry almost 800 Japanese from their bunkers and coral caves on Wakde. The 163rd had little time to recover from the Wakde battle before being sent to reinforce Biak.

PINNED DOWN ON THE BEACH OF WAKDE ISLAND BY JAP FIRE. U S Army Photo 157-3

Army intelligence regarding Japanese troop strength was confused right up to the date of invasion. Aerial photographs showed little activity on the island (probably because it was underground). General Willoughby, MacArthur's intelligence chief, was notoriously inaccurate with his estimates of enemy strength during previous operations. Even though an intercepted Japanese message listed Biak troop strength at 10,800 men, Willoughby estimated enemy numbers at half that and forecast a week-long operation. He projected the G.I.s would encounter "stubborn, but not serious enemy resistance."

In fact, on 27 May there were about 12,350 Japanese on Biak including 10,400 army troops, 1,950 navy personnel, and several hundred Formosan forced laborers. The Japanese slipped an additional 1,100 troops onto Biak during June in three increments from nearby islands. Willoughby was the same "intelligence" officer who said the assault on Wakde would be a 'walk on" and that the island appeared unoccupied. The 163rd's Montanans were bitter because they had lost 41 killed and 107 wounded. They killed 759 Japanese, capturing only 4 prisoners.



Biak Island, Dutch New Guinea (now Indonesia)

On Biak, Colonel Kuzume, island commander, had both his own army and navy forces to supplement the 222nd amphibious force, as well as a light tank company. Japanese air forces could offer little support because, even though they had sufficient aircraft by this point in the war, they had lost 70% of their experienced pilots. The Japanese saw Biak as a delaying action to buy time for building up their defenses in the Philippines.

The overall landing force for Biak included 22,074 combat troops (15,100 from the 41st Division), and 6,506 service troops. On 27 May 1944, the experienced veterans of the 41st, known as the “Jungleers”, made up originally of National Guardsmen from Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana initially landed unopposed on Biak on a beautiful, clear, sunny day. B-24 bombers hit the island a few minutes before the landing. Because of the excellent airfields on Biak’s south shore, the Army chose it for the amphibious landing. Eleven Navy destroyers hammered the island’s shorelines.

However, they received no return fire. It was a Japanese feint: the 41st, which had earned its “Jungleer” nickname in New Guinea’s fetid jungles, was about to enter its toughest fight of World War II, even worse than Buna. Oregon’s 162nd and Washington’s 186th Infantry regiments were moving inland toward the airfields and in the open when the enemy struck. Despite the heat and steep terrain, water had to be rationed to only one canteen every 24 hours per soldier. Between the heat and dehydration, the G.I.s were quickly exhausted.

The landing operations did not go according to plan. Strong tidal currents carried the landing craft away from their designated landing beaches; however, the units reorganized themselves and moved to their properly assigned mission locations. A coral reef off the landing beaches made conventional landing craft infeasible. Instead, they used amphibious LVIs {armored, wheeled vehicles called “Alligators”) and DUKWs.

The Japanese were so surprised by the landings that they were too disorganized to provide much initial resistance on the first day. The first organized Japanese resistance was encountered by the 162nd Regiment about 7,000 yards west of Bosnek (see map) at the Parai Defile. Troops of the Japanese 222nd Regiment were located on the ridges behind Bosnek allowing them excellent observation of the G.I.s below and concealment in the vegetation, coral caves, and crevices. The soldiers below could not effectively fire on the Japanese above while the Japanese were able to cover the American troops with devastating fire.

The major landing beaches were from the three airfields between the villages of Biak on the west and Rosnik on the east. The airfields were Sorido (west), Mokmer (middle), and Bosnek (east) with Mokmer the major facility. The capture of Mokmer was especially difficult due to the proximity of high coral cliffs that offered excellent cover for Japanese heavy guns. The soldiers used LVI’s (Alligators) and DUKWs which were able to crawl over the reef, land troops, and return to the LVT’s for more men and supplies. All 12,000 troops as well as artillery, and 12 Sherman tanks were unloaded from the LVT’s on 27 May, termed Z Day.

The troops began moving toward the airfields the next morning. Soldiers from the 162nd regiment were within 200 yards of the Mokmer airstrip when the Japanese opened up with machine guns and mortars. Coral caves, roughly a quarter mile north and above the airstrip, formed natural defenses for the Japanese. Another section of caves to the west known as the Parai Defile was fortified with pillboxes. The combination of these excellent natural and man-made fortifications held up the advance toward the airfields for nearly a month. It became obvious that the engineers could not move onto the airfields for repair work until the Japanese could be driven out of the caves that overlooked the landing beaches and air strips, The proximity of the G.I.s to the cave

area made it too dangerous for naval gunfire to take out the caves. The only option was to withdraw the 162nd soldiers by landing vehicles and moving them down the beach 500 yards out of the line of fire,

The photo shows American infantrymen and supporting Sherman tanks advancing through the jungle on Biak below the Mokmer airstrip in June 1944. The Japanese who occupied the island put up a tenacious defense, fortifying many caves on the island and forcing the Americans to dig the enemy out or seal them inside with flamethrowers or explosives.

This was the first tank-on-tank battle in the Pacific War, which occurred on Biak when Japanese Type-95 tanks attempted to attack the beachhead. The following morning the Japanese launched an infantry attack supported by six light tanks. However, four Sherman medium tanks from the 603rd Tank Company had moved up from Bosnik like the cavalry to the rescue. The Japanese Type-95 tanks with 37mm cannons did little damage to the Shermans, while the Shermans' 75mm rounds blew right through the Japanese tanks. One Sherman, hit by a lucky shot, had its gun turret jammed in place.

The clever driver backed into a shell hole to elevate the tank and cannon so the gunner could bring his gun to bear on the Japanese tank and knock it out.

The caves offered the Japanese a network of bunkers for targeting and firing on G.I.s before disappearing. They used machine guns, mortars, and artillery in this tactical setup. These caves were more than just holes in the coral hills. The Japanese had several hundred Formosan forced laborers who had modified the caves for defense and survival. Some caves had electric lights, wooden floors, kitchens, and even multi-levels with field hospital areas. A series of constructed tunnels connected the caves and led to exits hidden by vegetation. The Japanese used them effectively for weeks to ambush G.I. patrols. The deeper caves also had freshwater springs to supply their troops, unlike the parched and dehydrated American G.I.s.

American Sherman tanks advancing against Japanese positions on Biak Island. New Guinea, July 1944

The 163rd Infantry Regiment (Montana) was sent for on Wakde to join the difficult fighting. They arrived on 1 June after only a few days' rest from two days of tough fighting. They captured the Mokmer airfield on 7 June, but it was of little use to Kenney's Air Force because artillery and mortar fire from the Japanese caves above made it

impossible for engineers to repair the damage from pre-invasion air force bombing and naval gunfire.

Unhappy with the slow progress, General MacArthur replaced General Fuller on 15 June with Lt. Gen. Robert Eichelberger, who suggested new strategies to attack the Japanese positions. Eichelberger promoted Brig. General Jens Doe to command the 41st Division. Doe had been commanding the 163rd Regiment and had previously served under Eichelberger at Buna. According to Eichelberger's memoir, *Our Jungle Road to Tokyo*, Doe was a stubborn, argumentative officer but a good fighter and leader. He was well regarded by his men for leading from the front. Eichelberger was also known as "MacArthur's Fireman" for putting out hot combat situations. According to Marc Bernstein, author of *Hurricane at Biak*, Eichelberger "was MacArthur's ideal field commander…he was both innovative and something of a risk taker but still thorough in his preparation…." The day after he arrived on Biak, he ceased all combat to give his men a rest and so he could move forward to inspect the Japanese positions, as he had on Buna. As a result, he ordered all combat commanders to do the same so they could understand better what their troops were up against. He also suggested some different tactics for dealing with the various Japanese strong points he observed.

Brigadier General Jens A. Doe took command of the U.S. 41st Infantry Division on Biak after the division's original commander, General Horace Fuller, was relieved of duty.

On 16 June, the 2nd Battalion, 186th Infantry, attacked to close a gap between their regiment and the 162nd. The battalion overran dozens of machine gun nests, log bunkers and even a naval gun installed in a cave.

Their successful action opened the battle's second phase when they discovered a second major cave and tunnel system. The soldiers now got to work clearing the Japanese caves and tunnels by whatever means they had including flamethrowers, satchel charges, and grenades. The flamethrowers required extreme care because the flames could bounce off cave walls toward the operator. The fire streams couldn't reach deep into the caves with turns designed to deflect the flames.

The G.I.s carried Jerry cans of gasoline and poured gas into the openings and set them on fire. Sometimes the soldiers could hear loud explosions when the fire reached ammunition stored below. One cave was particularly difficult to neutralize. Some engineers hauled up 850 pounds of dynamite and lowered it into the cave with a winch. The explosion caused a very large cloud of dust and smoke and the sound of rock falling below. Enemy fire from that cave was no longer a problem. By the end of June, the caves in the area were cleared and the Mokmer airfield could begin landing fighter planes.

Lt. Gen. Robert Eichelberger
Eichelberger also served with distinction in the Philippine Campaign as 8th Army Commander.

The Japanese were not inclined to give up Biak easily and, in fact, made three different efforts to reinforce their troops there. During the first two weeks of June, they slipped about 400 troops onto the island from the 221st Infantry. In late June they moved 500 soldiers from the 219th Infantry from the nearby island of Noemfoor to Biak followed by 200 more men from the 222nd. The 41st Division faced growing difficulties as American losses from combat and sickness weakened their efforts to eliminate the Japanese.

Not all the Japanese waited in the caves for the Americans. On the night of 21-22 June, 109 Japanese officers and men made a banzai attack on the 186th Regiment's outposts defended by just 12 men with machine guns. One Japanese soldier jumped in a foxhole with a G.I. and released a grenade. All the other 11 Americans survived, while all 109 Japanese died. There were other apparently coordinated attacks on American positions the same night. One squad was reported to have killed nearly 200 Japanese during the attack on their position.

The last major point of resistance was called the "Ibdi Pocket", a well-fortified natural defensive position along the coastal ridge above the landing beaches midway between Biak and Bosnik (see map), about 4,000 yards east of the "Parai Defile." The 163rd was assigned to eliminate that group of stubborn Japanese. The attack began in mid-June and continued until the end of July. They fired over 20,000 105mm artillery shells and as many 60mm and 81mm mortar shells into the Pocket. The 163rd renewed their attack on 11 July using artillery, aircraft, Sherman tanks, flamethrowers, and bazookas. Any of the bunkers and pillboxes that remained were blown up with TNT. Even so, some 200 fanatic, die-hard 222nd soldiers managed to escape into the thick jungle at higher elevations.

After retreating from a barrage of Japanese hand grenades, American combat engineers return to the mouth of a fortified Japanese cave on Biak. Often the engineers used satchel charges to seal the entrances to the many caves on the island, trapping the enemy occupants inside.

By 20 June, all three airfields were finally captured but there was still a sizable number of Japanese on the island. It was estimated that there were still about 4,000 Japanese in caves near the original landing beaches or in the heavy jungle cover, By 5 July most of these caves were also cleared, using similar techniques, as well as artillery and fire from the Sherman tanks. The soldiers of the Hurricane Task Force continued aggressive patrols to seek out the remnants of the remaining Japanese. By August, the three airstrips were being used by medium and heavy bomber groups for sorties on other Japanese outposts in the region.

The American forces on Biak kept up their offensive through the month of July. The caves were not cleared until 27 June, and not until 20 August would the fight for Biak be declared over. Nearly 500 Americans were killed on Biak and more than 2,400 wounded while another 1,000 were taken out of combat by disease. Japanese

casualties were up to 6,100 killed, 450 captured, and an unknown number of wounded and dead from the destruction of the caves and bunkers. It is estimated that only 10 percent of the Japanese defenders survived.

The 41st Division fought as a whole unit for the first time, overcoming over ten thousand entrenched Japanese forces in intense heat and severe water scarcity, exhausting the attacking troops. It took until 20 August to officially terminate the “Hurricane” campaign that had begun with the beach landing on 27 May 1944.

Biak had three aerodromes, American construction engineers developed southern Biak into a large airbase and staging area for the Philippine campaign. The Biak operation was a success, which was all that mattered to the military planners. U.S. Navy historian Samuel Eliot Morison wrote in his series: *History of US Naval Operations in WWII Vol. 8: New Guinea & the Marianas 3-8/44*:

> *MacArthur’s prompt and vigorous invasion of Biak proved to be a serious embarrassment to the enemy on the eve of the Battle of the Philippine Sea. That alone made the operation worthwhile; but in addition, Biak became an important Allied air base for the subsequent liberation of the Philippines.*

In his memoir, *With the 41st Division in the Southwest Pacific*, Francis Catanzaro quoted a letter written to members of the 41st Division at the conclusion of the Biak Campaign General Doe thanked the Division for its performance during the fight for Biak. In assessing the role of the infantry, General Doe wrote:

> *No other task in the Division is comparable to the load carried by the infantry soldier. He is our only reason for existence. He is the man who captures and holds the ground. He carries the fight to the enemy. The infantry soldier was the one who met in hand-to-hand combat the crack troops of the Japanese, threw him from his positions, destroyed him, and gave us our victory, To these men we are eternally grateful and pride rises in our hearts that is going to carry us on from victory to victory in the future.*

During the Battle for the Southwest Pacific, the 41st Division included many men from Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming who had enlisted or were drafted into their States’ National Guard. Many ended up serving for over five years; taking them from small towns, farms, and ranches to training in Australia, tough jungle combat, and post-war occupation duty in Japan. Battles fought for the Southwest Pacific involved some of the fiercest fighting of World War II in some of the most extreme

conditions. About 13,000 Japanese died in the New Guinea conflict while about 8,500 Allied soldiers fell, including 5,700 Australians.

In addition to the New Guinea Campaign, the 41st Division had a major role in the liberation of the Southern Philippines, including the Palawan, Zamboanga, Eastern Mindanao, and Sulu Archipelago operations. The division ended its active service with the post-war occupation of Japan.

Today, the proud heritage of the “Jungleers” is continued by Oregon’s 41st Infantry Brigade, Washington’s 81st Infantry Brigade, and by Montana’s 163rd Infantry Regiment.

General Robert Eichelberger and General Douglas MacArthur

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INSIGNIA OF THE "SUNSET" DIVISION

Insignia: 163rd Infantry Regiment

Montana National Guard

Coat of Arms

Motto: "Men, do Your Duty"

- The palm tree represents 1899 Philippine service,
- the giant cactus reflects 1916 Mexican Border duty and
- the fleur-de-lis reflects service in France during World War I.
- Blue and white are the colors associated with Infantry and
- represent the unit's service during World War II.

Timeline of the New Guinea and Philippines Campaigns for the 41st Division

- The 41st Infantry Division arrived in Australia, and beginning 7 April 1942, commenced intensive training, particularly focusing on preparations for jungle warfare.
- In December 1942, General Douglas MacArthur decided to commit more American troops to the Battle of Buna-Gona, alerting 163rd Regimental Combat Team, under the command of Colonel Jens Doe, on 14 December 1942.
- The 163rd Regiment entered the struggle for the defense of Port Moresby, at Dobadura, 2 January 1943, and fought continuously along the Sanananda track on the north coast of Papua until 22 January.
- On 10 January, a patrol discovered that the Japanese had evacuated. The Japanese troops had been starving and there was evidence of cannibalism of some American dead. The Japanese had left their sick and wounded behind to fight a delaying action. Based on this intelligence, the Australian commander Vasey ordered an immediate attack. By afternoon, the Americans killed 152 Japanese and wounded six. Several enemy bunkers were taken by hand-to-hand combat by the Americans and Australian units. The next day the Allies attacked again and killed 525 Japanese; on the next day, another 69 Japanese were killed.
- After three weeks of fighting in January 1943, Montana's 163rd lost eighty-five killed, sixteen other deaths, 238 wounded and 584 sick for a total of 923 casualties.
- The 163rd left for Australia, 15 July 1943 for rest, reinforcements, and refitting.
- A period of patrolling and training followed while elements of the regiment later advanced against stiff resistance to the Kumisi River in February.
- The 162d Regiment (Wisconsin and Michigan National Guard) relieved the 163rd in the Sanananda-Killerton-Gona area and the outpost area at the mouth of the Kumisi River. In February 1943, the 163d leapfrogged along the coast in the Morobe area, and fought the long Salamaua campaign, 29 June 1943 to 12 September 1943.
- On 22 April 1944, the 163d Regiment formed the backbone of a 22,500-man force under General Doe for a landing on Aitape. The mission was to seize the airfields while the remainder of the 41st Division came ashore at Humboldt Bay near Hollandia. Hollandia and the Cyclops and Sentani Airdromes fell after ineffectual Japanese resistance, and the Division patrolled and mopped up until relieved on 4 May. Most enemy forces had moved to Wewak; the operation was so successful that the Aitape airfields were in operation for fighter aircraft two days later.

Landing at Aitape

- The 163rd landed against slight opposition at Arara, 17 May, and consolidated the Arara and Toem area. The regiment took Wakde Island on 18-20 May.
- The 41st Division invaded Biak Island on 27 May, and a period of brutal jungle fighting followed. Elements landed at Korim Bay and Wardo, 17 August, to prevent an enemy escape, and conducted patrols and scouting. On August 20, 1944, the "Hurricane" Campaign to capture Biak was declared ended.
- On 8 February 1945, the 41st Division arrived at Mindoro, Philippine Islands. On 28 February, the 186th landed on Palawan Island, completing the occupation by 8 March.
- The rest of the 41st landed at Zamboanga, Mindanao, on 10 March, initially against light resistance. The enemy subsequently fought fiercely until overcome early in April. Elements took Basilan Island unopposed, on 16 to 30 March, Sanga-Sanga, on 2 April, and Jolo, on 9 April.
- While elements fought northwest of Davao, the rest of the Division continued patrolling and mopping up activities in the Southern Philippines until the Japanese surrender.
- The Division was assigned to occupation duty in Japan in the Hiroshima area until deactivation.
- The 163rd landed against slight opposition at Arara, 17 May, and consolidated the Arara and Toem area. The regiment took Wakde Island on 18-20 May.
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- While elements fought northwest of Davao, the rest of the Division continued patrolling and mopping up activities in the Southern Philippines until the Japanese surrender.
- The Division managed post-war occupation in Hiroshima until it was deactivated.