When Intelligence Made a Difference

— WORLD WAR II —

Intelligence in the Southwest Pacific Campaign

Peter C. Oleson

While the Solomons campaign, which was hastily organized in the summer of 1942, was intended to blunt the Japanese expansion into Melanesia in the southern Pacific, by 1943 allied forces had transitioned to the offensive in both the Solomons and the Southwest Pacific campaign.[1] The Japanese were defeated on Guadalcanal by the end of 1942 and withdrew. While Japan had also seized much of the northern coast of New Guinea in mid-1942, its offensives were blunted by Australian and US Army forces in the late summer and fall. After that Japanese forces were on the defensive.

In April 1942, the Joint Chiefs in Washington decided to establish two separate commands in the Pacific: Navy Admiral Chester W. Nimitz was commander-in-chief of the Pacific Ocean Area (POA) and Army General Douglas MacArthur was commander-in-chief of the Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA). Each reported directly to the JCS in Washington. This resulted in two commands competing for scarce resources (the European theater had priority) and often arguing over Pacific strategy.[2]

In parallel with the Solomons, MacArthur's forces were to attack the Japanese from the south with the aim of striving for the Philippines, as MacArthur publicly promised that he would return.[3] The US's Pacific strategy also envisioned a more direct route westward from Hawaii across the Japanese held islands. MacArthur argued against this, but the newly formed US Joint Chiefs of Staff overruled him.[4]

THE NEW GUINEA CAMPAIGN

The Japanese invaded New Guinea in late January 1942 and completed its occupation of the northern portion of the island by March. The southern portion, including the major city of Port Moresby, was Australian territory. Port Moresby, Australians' most forward base, could be used by Japan for an eventual invasion of Australia itself.

The planned Japanese seaborne invasion of Port Moresby, however, was called off after the 7-8 May Battle of the Coral Sea, in favor of a cross island attack. The Japanese strategy was revealed in a decrypt by the Fleet Radio Unit Melbourne (FRUMEL), a joint US, Australian, and British COMINT unit supporting MacArthur.[5] Attempting a cross island land offensive in August over the Owen Stanley mountains, the Imperial Japanese Army advanced to within 20 miles of Port Moresby before being routed by Australian forces. Despite FRUMEL's warning, the Allies' intelligence appreciation of Japanese capabilities at that time was poor as evidenced by "MacArthur's intelligence chief [Brig. General Charles A. Willoughby, who] repeatedly discounted an enemy attack through the mountains because of the difficult terrain and climate."[6]

Alerted again by FRUMEL in mid-July the Australians reinforced its garrison on the eastern tip of New Guinea at Milne Bay. Knowing Japanese intentions, the commander of Allied Air Forces under MacArthur, then Major General George Kenney, USAAF, ordered

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1. This article is a continuation of the series addressing the role of intelligence in the Pacific during World War II. See RADM T. A. Brooks, "Stealing the Japanese Codebooks or One Peek is Worth Two Finesses," *The Intelligencer*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Fall 2019); and this author's previous articles in *The Intelligencer*: "Japanese Intelligence for the Attack on Pearl Harbor," Vol. 25, No. 3 (Winter/Spring 2020); "The Doolittle Raid," Vol. 26, No. 1 (Fall 2020); "The Breaking of JN-25 and Its Impact in the War Against Japan," Vol. 26, No. 2 (Winter/Spring 2021); and "Across the Pacific: The Role of Intelligence in the Solomons Campaign, 1942-44," Vol. 27, No. 1 (Winter/Spring 2022).
2. Charles R. Anderson, Edward J. Drea, and Stephen J. Lofgren. *US Army Pacific Campaigns in World War II*, Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1992, p. 77.
3. MacArthur, the retired US Army Chief of Staff (1930-1935), was appointed Field Marshall of the Philippine Army. In July 1941 he was recalled to US Army active duty.
4. The JCS during World War II was an informal, uncodified group. Admiral William Leahy, President Roosevelt's military advisor, served as chairman. Other members included General George G. Marshall, Chief of Staff of the US Army; Admiral Earnest J. King, Chief of Naval Operations and Commander-in-Chief of the US fleet; and General Henry (Hap) Arnold, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Army for Air and Chief of the Army Air Corps.
5. The COMINT tipoff of Japanese intentions to seize Port Moresby is addressed in the author's earlier article "The Breaking of JN-25 and its Impact in the War Against Japan," *The Intelligencer*, Vol. 26, No. 2, Winter/Spring 2021, pp. 79-84. See also John Prados. *Combined Fleet Decoded: The Secret History of American Intelligence and the Japanese Navy in World War II*, Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1995, p. 318.
6. Anderson, et al, p. 113.
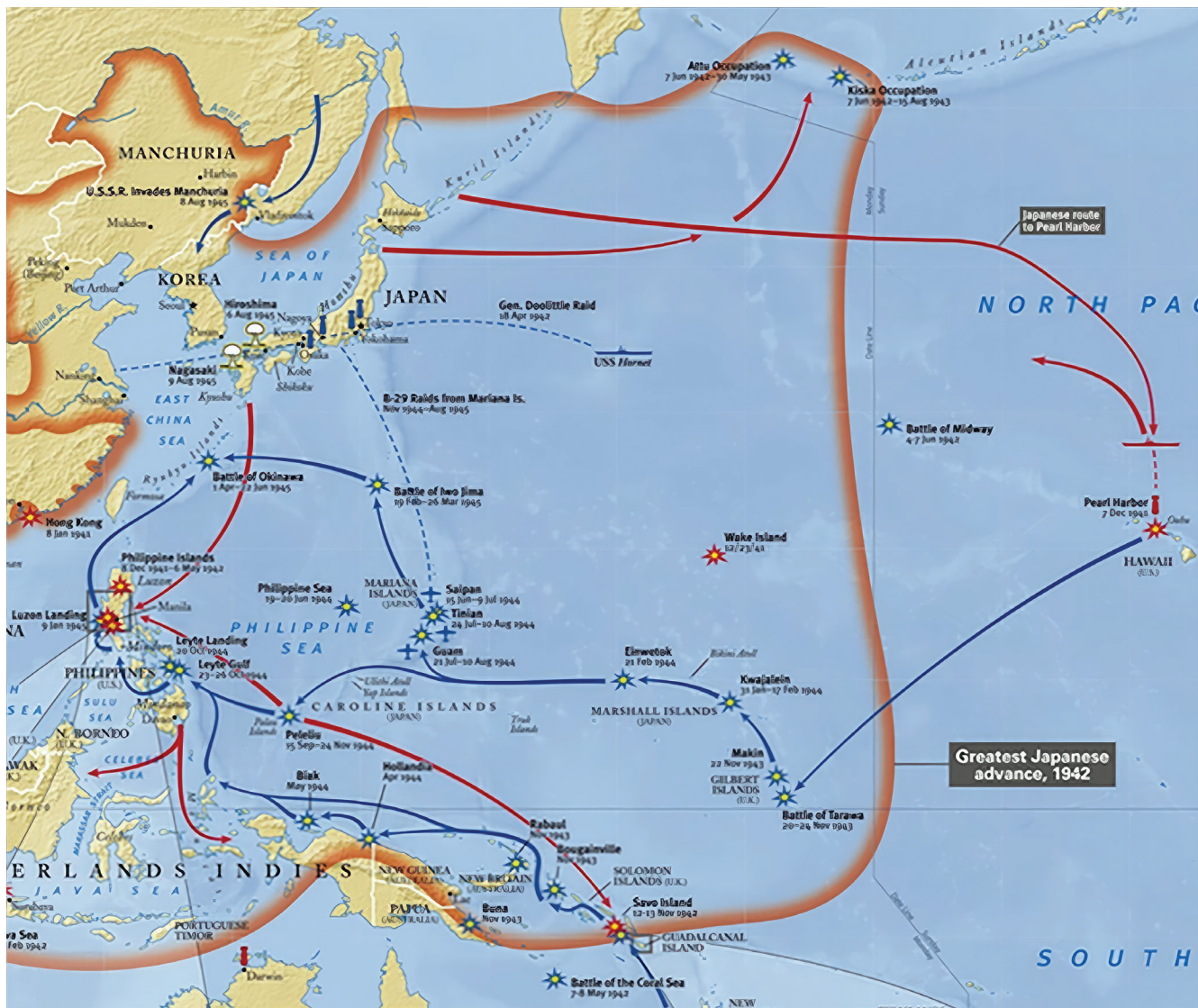
The Pacific Theater in World War II
America at War, World War II, The Pacific Theater, Equater Maps, © International Mapping

preemptive airstrikes on the Japanese forward airfield at Buna, which severely limited Japanese fighter support for its amphibious assault on Milne Bay. The Japanese badly miscalculated Australian forces, which between 25 August and 7 September 1942 defeated the initial invasion force of Japanese marines (special naval landing forces – SNLF) and subsequent Japanese Army reinforcements.[7]

At this time Allied intelligence was in its infancy. Historian Edward Drea in his book *MacArthur's ULTRA* referred to "ULTRA's trials and errors."[8] While long distance Japanese Navy communications were routinely intercepted, low power Japanese Army regimental-level communications were difficult to intercept and used a three-digit code that was unique to each unit, requiring each to be separately broken. "[P]aradoxically, Japanese high-level communications were less secure than the low-level ones…"[9]

In 1942, MacArthur was wholly dependent on naval COMINT as Japanese Army codes had not been broken.[10] Sketchy information on Japanese Army ground units often led ULTRA analysts to identify regiments as divisions making order of battle estimates "tenuous at best and unreliable at worst…"[11] But

7. Milne Bay later became the major support base for the Allied push up the northern coast of New Guinea. Peter Brune. *A Bastard of a Place: The Australians in Papua – Kokoda, Milne Bay, Gona, Buna, Sanananda*. Crows Nest, New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, 2004.
8. ULTRA was the codeword assigned to intelligence derived from the cryptanalysis of intercepted enemy communications. The US adopted the security system devised by the British to protect the sensitivity of the fragile intelligence source.

9. Edward J. Drea. MacArthur's *ULTRA: Codebreaking and the War against Japan, 1942-1945*, Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1992, p. 34.
10. Drea, p. 36.
11. Ibid, p. 51.

Japanese Navy messages often revealed Japanese Army plans. However, even with ULTRA intercepts "rarely were the enemy's intentions self-evident."[12] This led US commanders to often have differing interpretations.

While cryptanalysis was tenuous, "[t]raffic analysis provided... enormously useful, and otherwise unobtainable, intelligence." Radio intelligence traffic analysis primarily used direction-finding and message externals, such as addresses, frequency, timing, etc. to discern enemy positions, movements, and intentions.[13]

Japanese defenders was severely underestimated. Maps of the area were inaccurate and lacked detail. Aerial photos were not generally available to commanders in the field... Scanty and inaccurate intelligence led MacArthur to believe that Buna could be taken with relative ease" and he pressured field commanders to advance more quickly. "MacArthur's pressure has been described as lengthening the battle and increasing the number of casualties." "He replaced the commander of the Army's newly arrived 32nd Division due to high casualties and failed advances."[15] The battle lasted

Buna – Sanananda – Gona campaign
16 Nov 1942 – 22 Jan 1943
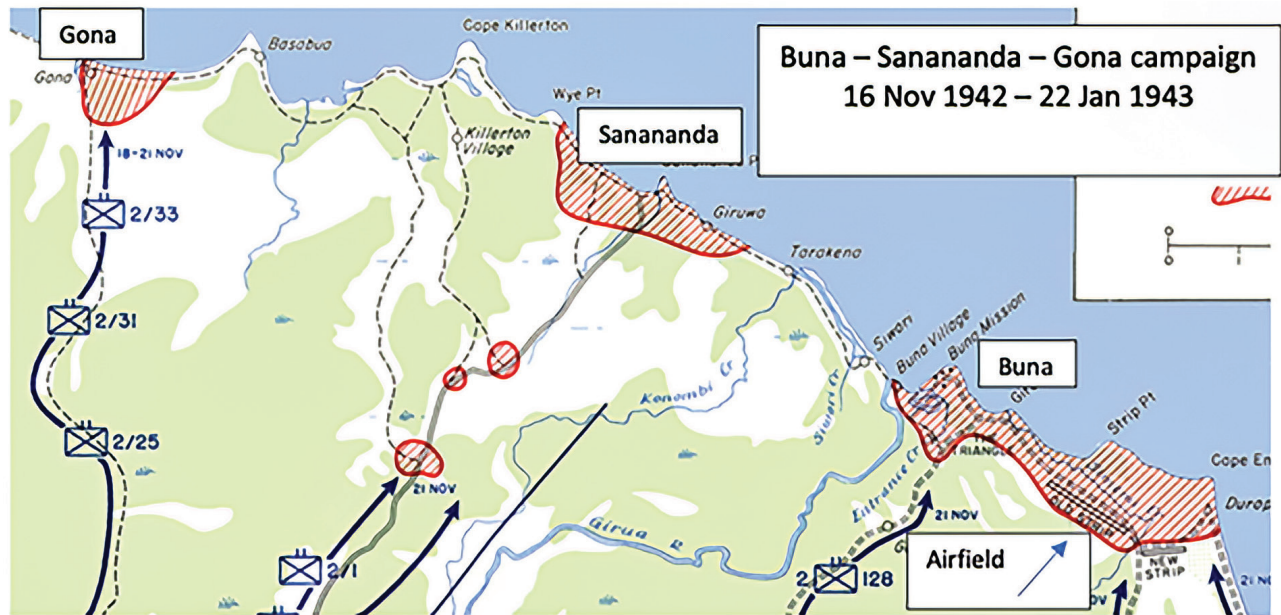
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Buna–Gona

Battle of Buna-Gona
November – 23 January 1943

After routing the Japanese forces outside of Port Moresby, in mid-November the Australian Army, now reinforced by US troops, pushed northeastward across the Kokoda track to retake Buna, Gona, and Sanananda in Australian administered New Guinea on the north coast of the island.[14] But intelligence on the Japanese and understanding by senior US officials was largely lacking. Major General Richard Sutherland, MacArthur's chief of staff, "had 'glibly' referred to the Japanese coastal fortifications as 'hasty field entrenchments.'" The strength and combat effectiveness of the

two months until 23 January 1943. "The resolve and tenacity of the Japanese in defense was unprecedented and had not previously been encountered."[16]

"Buna was ... bought at a substantial price in death, wounds, disease, despair, and human suffering."[17] "[T]he Papuan campaign was one of the costliest Allied victories of the Pacific war in terms of casualties per troops committed."[18] "Military intelligence... failed to provide a true understanding of the

12. Ibid, p. 36.
13. Ibid, p. 39.
14. Following Germany's defeat in World War I, German New Guinea was placed under Australian administration by a League of Nations mandate.

15. Lex McAuley. *To the Bitter End: The Japanese Defeat at Buna and Gona, 1942-43*, Sydney, Australia: Random House, 1992. Also see *Papuan Campaign: Buna-Sanananda Operation 16 November 1942 – 23 January 1943*, Washington, D.C.: United States Army Center of Military History, 1990. *https://web.archive.org/web/20141213023816/http://www.history.army.mil/html/books/100/100-1/CMH_Pub_100-1.pdf* .
16. *https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Buna–Gona* .
17. Robert L Eichelberger. *Our Jungle Road to Tokyo*, Charleston, SC: Arcadia Press, 1950.
18. James Campbell. *The Ghost Mountain Boys: Their Epic March and the Terrifying Battle for New Guinea – The Forgotten War of the South Pacific*. New York: Crown, 2007.

MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Campaign, 1943
Map from Wikipedia. Annotations by author.

enemy…" One prime example was about the strength of the Japanese Army at Buna.[19]

During the battle for Buna and Gona, on 16 December an ULTRA intercept revealed a revised Japanese strategy for New Guinea—to build a defense in depth, based on airfields from Buna west to "Madang, Wewak, Hollandia, Wakde, Moemi and other enclaves."[20] Airfields were crucial for both adversaries. Following its capture Allied engineers repaired the airfield at Buna to allow forward basing of fighters and attack aircraft.

The Japanese Eighth Army on New Guinea urgently needed reinforcement of men and materiel.

Logistics were problematic for both the Allies and Japanese. The Allies initially relied on airdrops (which had only a 50% success rate) until a resupply base at Oro Bay was established. "Because of the distances involved, The Japanese army on New Guinea could be reinforced only by daylight convoys."[21] Japanese attempts to resupply its forces by sea were increasingly turned back by Allied airpower. As had happened on

Guadalcanal in the end Japanese forces were starved into submission.[22]

Battle of the Bismarck Sea
2-5 March 1943

In January 1943 the Japanese Eighth Area Army at Rabaul ordered reinforcements to Lae. Forewarned of an impending convoy by decrypted Japanese naval messages, MacArthur's air chief, now Lieutenant General George C. Kenney, sent repeated air attacks against the enemy ships, sinking two troop transports, damaging another, and killing 600 Japanese soldiers. Only one-third of the intended reinforcements reached Lae, and these salvaged only half of their equipment. Without reinforcements, a desperate attack at the end of January to retake the airfield at Wau failed. The defeated Japanese remnants fell back into the jungle, slowly giving ground toward Lae.

Besides COMINT, advanced warning of Japanese reinforcement convoys from Rabaul came from the Allied coastwatcher network, called "Ferdinand," which grew to about 800 personnel in the Solomons

19. Anderson, et al, p. 124.
20. Drea, p. 55.
21. Ian W. Toll. *The Conquering Tide: War in the Pacific Islands, 1942-1944*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2015, p. 224.

22. Frank Bartholomew. "Japanese Cannibalism in New Guinea." *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Australian Associated Press, 24 April 1945, p. 3.

and Southwest Pacific campaigns.[23] "Beyond their tactical reports... the coastwatchers' finest service was to shield, albeit unknowingly, the ULTRA secret in the Southwest Pacific Area."[24]

"On February 19, 1943, U.S. Navy cryptanalysts [at FRUMEL] handed MacArthur solid intelligence that the enemy was planning another major transport to the Lae – Salamaua area in early March." Later also detected via SIGINT were "Japanese floatplane activities characteristic of preparation for convoy movement."[25]

Through the afternoon of 1 March, the overcast weather held at which point everything began to go wrong for the Japanese. The winds changed direction and the slow-moving task force was spotted by an Allied scout plane. "Kenney threw every available US and Australian aircraft into a three-day struggle from 2 to 5 March, known as the Battle of the Bismarck Sea."[26] US Army Air Force A-20 Havoc medium bombers and new B-25s had eight 50-caliber machine guns for strafing ships and 500-pound bombs for "skip bombing" into the sides of a ship. This proved highly effective. One survivor described the aircraft as the "most terrifying."[27] All eight transports and four destroyers were lost. "Of the [Japanese Army] 51st Division's 6,912 troops, about 3,900 survived, but only 1,000 soaked, oil-stained, and dispirited officers and men reached Lae."[28] A few Japanese were rescued for interrogation purposes. The "[d]estruction was so complete that the strategic initiative in New Guinea passed forever from Japanese hands.[29]

Despite the disaster of the Bismarck Sea, the Japanese did not give up on recapturing Wau and blunting the Allied offensive. The remote but crucial airfield lay 25 miles south/southeast of the port town of Salamaua. Admiral "Yamamoto decided to use Japanese airpower to blunt the anticipated American offensive... he authorized Operation I-Go, a massive air attack on Allied forward positions..."[30] Heavy Jap-anese air attacks were launched from Rabaul versus Guadalcanal on 7 April and on 11-12 April versus New Guinea. The Allies were alerted once again by intercepted communications and radar, and Operation I-Go failed to achieve its objective.

A week later Admiral Yamamoto flew to Rabaul to inspect Japanese forces and on 18 April while enroute to Bouganville in the Solomons his aircraft was shot down in an ambush that was the result of his travel plans being intercepted.[31]

Improved intelligence

Like on Guadalcanal, on New Guinea inadequate maps forced tactical commanders to blindly advance in heavy, almost impenetrably rough jungle terrain with flooded streams impeding infantry and impossible for vehicles. Aerial photography could not penetrate the heavy canopy and failed to detect Japanese strong points. "... terrain was a commander's nightmare" as it precluded Allied commanders concentrating forces.[32]

However, at sea aerial reconnaissance proved its worth. For example, "[b]ecause air patrols were routine, [Kenney] used aerial reconnaissance to locate the Lae [convoys] without revealing the advanced knowledge available from the broken codes."[33]

As Allied COMINT improved, it contributed more and more to Allied operations and strategy.

Cryptanalysis of Japanese communications differed greatly from that of the Nazi's Enigma machine. For one, the Japanese "developed a form of Morse code which used a syllabary of seventy-three kana, each with one or two suffixes that might alter its meaning," making translation challenging.[34]

MacArthur's command was supported by the Central Bureau, a joint US-Australian SIGINT organization under command of the US Army. Its mission was to focus on Japanese Army and air forces. Central Bureau, located near MacArthur's headquarters in Brisbane, was linked to FRUMEL in Melbourne and to the Navy's Station HYPO in Hawaii and both the Navy's OP-20-G and the Army's Signal Intelligence Service in Washington, DC. Raw intercepts and decrypted Japanese naval messages were shared among them. However, MacArthur's relations with

23. Prados, pp. 235-6.
24. Drea, p. 54.
25. Prados, p. 450.
26. https://stationhypo.com/2020/02/19/february-19-1943-u-s-navy-cryptanalysts-provided-solid-intelligence-to-gen-macarthur/#more-11693.
27. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Guinea_campaign#Holding_Wau, citing Samuel Eliot Morison, "Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier," Volume 6 of *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, 1950*, pp. 58-62. See also Timothy D. Gann. *Fifth Air Force Light and Medium Bomber Operations During 1942 and 1943*, Maxwell AFB: Air University School of Advanced Airpower Studies, June 1993. *https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA425693.pdf*.
28. https://stationhypo.com/2020/02/19/february-19-1943-u-s-navy-cryptanalysts-provided-solid-intelligence-to-gen-macarthur/#more-11693 . Also see Toll, p. 224.
29. Drea pp. 61, 71.
30. Craig L. Symonds. *World War II at Sea*, Oxford: Oxford University

Press, 2018, pp. 407-8.
31. See Peter C. Oleson. "When Intelligence Made a Difference: Across the Pacific: The Role of Intelligence in the Solomons Campaign, 1942-44", *The Intelligencer*, Vol. 27, No. 1, Winter/Spring 2022.
32. Anderson, et al, p. 164.
33. Drea, pp. 69-70.
34. Kana is the Japanese system of syllabic writing. Prados, p. 9.

December 1943 – March 1944
Map https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Sio
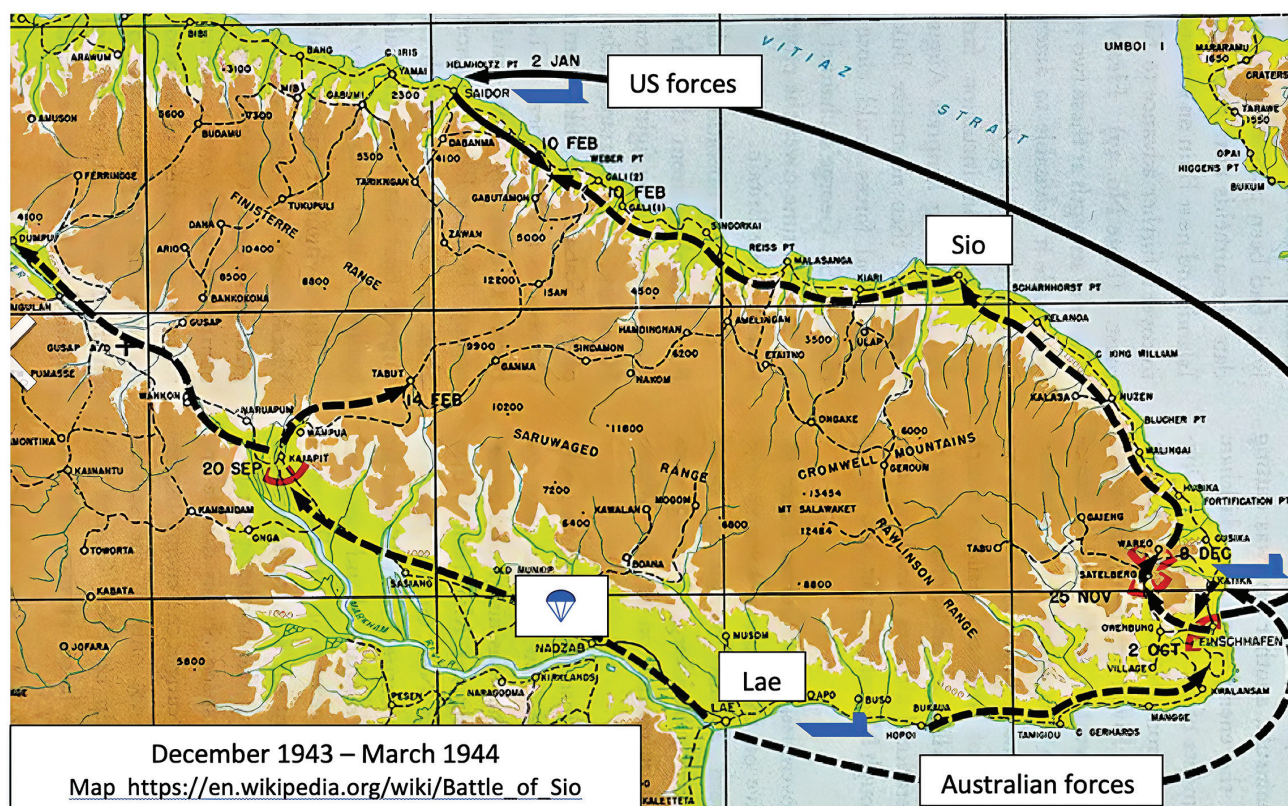
Huon Peninsula

Navy-run FRUMEL were frosty. FRUMEL's rules were to only brief MacArthur and his chief of staff, not his G-2 intelligence chief.[35]

Central Bureau did not break any high-level Japanese Army codes until mid-1943. In April it and the Army's Signal Intelligence Service together successfully broke the Japanese Army's Mainline Code and its Water Transport Code. This opened up valuable intelligence on planned convoys and reinforcement of Japanese forces on New Guinea, a valuable gift to Allied air forces and PT boats.[36]

"MacArthur's preference was clearly slanted toward visual reconnaissance, including both aerial and coastwatcher sources; he seldom passed on SIGINT-related intelligence received from FRUMEL."[37]

"The rigidity inherent in Japanese operations led to repeating patterns that could be analyzed and predicted… [e]ven when communications intelligence failed to discover the Japanese intentions, American commanders could often foretell when, where, and how the enemy would mount his next assault."[38]

Historian John Prados noted in his history, *Combined Fleet Decoded*, "…standard, old fashioned combat intelligence—such as interrogation of prisoners and capture of documents—was far more valuable to the intelligence effort in the Pacific than has ever been recorded."[39] A paucity of Japanese language speakers at the start of the war prompted the recruiting of Nisei (second generation Japanese immigrants to the US) into the Army's Military Intelligence Service, especially those from Hawaii.[40]

Quebec conference
17-24 August 1943

At Quebec the Allies decided not to take the major Japanese fortress at Rabaul on New Britain island. Rather, understanding through COMINT the dispositions and strengths of the Japanese stronghold, the Allies decided on a strategy to reduce Rabaul's offensive capabilities through constant air strikes.[41]

35. Central Bureau contained a small naval SIGINT unit. David Dufty. *The Secret Code-Breakers of Central Bureau*. Melbourne, London: Scribe, 2017, p. 120.

36. Jean Bou. *MacArthur's Secret Bureau: The Story of the Central Bureau*. Loftus NSW Australia: Australian Military History Publications, 2012; and Drea, pp. 61-2 and 75-6. The Japanese Navy's water transport code had been broken when US Navy divers "salvaged the Japanese Navy's 'S' code books" from a submarine sunk off Darwin in January 1942 (Drea, p. 74).

37. Frederick D. Parker, *A Priceless Advantage*, Center for Cryptologic History, National Security Agency, footnote 42, p. 19.

38. Toll, p. 189.

39. Prados, p. xxiv.

40. Ibid, p. 417.

41. Allied intelligence has estimated that 38,000 Japanese troops were

"It was one of the most important strategic decisions of the Pacific war."[42] The JCS had already decided on a "dual advance in the South Pacific."[43] (See map "The Pacific Theater in World War II.")

Wewak

The Japanese continued to build up its airpower on New Guinea. On 16 August aerial reconnaissance of Wewak confirmed ULTRA intelligence, that as many as 10 Japanese flying regiments were forward deployed. On 17 August, 47 Allied bombers made a pre-dawn surprise attack on the main base at Wewak and its satellite airfields that caught the Japanese unprepared. They lost 170 out of 200 planes on the ground. With no functional radar and relying almost completely on a visual warning system, the Japanese did not have sufficient time for aircraft to take off or be taken under cover. The Allies could thereafter conduct air operations virtually uncontested as far west as Aitape.[44]

Up the coast

By mid- to late 1943 "virtually all Japanese Army forces entering the theater were being funneled to New Guinea to oppose MacArthur" to the detriment of forces defending the northern Solomons.[45] In December Japan started repositioning five divisions from China to Pacific islands.[46]

After the Japanese counterattack at Wau failed at the end of January 1943 and its forces withdrew, Australian forces continued to slowly push up the coast toward the major Japanese bases at Salamaua and Lae fighting a series of battles. At the end of June US forces conducted an amphibious landing at Nassau Bay and established a logistic base. The Japanese reinforced Salamaua taking troops from Lae. On 4 September, in the first significant amphibious operations by Australian forces, the Allies capture Lae. US parachutists captured the major airbase at Nadzab, upriver from Lae, to fly in Australian forces to cut off retreating Japanese.[47] Salamaua was captured on 12 September.[48]

After Salamaua MacArthur's forces, mostly Australians, "bogged down at Finschhafen, where he had expected a walkover."[49] Finschhafen, a Japanese strongpoint on the tip of the Huon Peninsula, was finally captured after a surprise 21 October Australian amphibious landing.[50]

The Huon Peninsula campaign benefitted from intelligence analysis of the Japanese supply system. Appreciating that the Japanese Army was dependent upon a coastal logistics network, nighttime PT boat operations and daytime aerial patrols interdicted Japanese supply barges. The Allies also targeted food centers used by the Japanese. Japanese POWs confirmed that their logistics were devastated by these efforts.[51]

On 2 January 1944 an unopposed Allied landing at Saidor encircled the Japanese at Sio that fled into the jungle. An intelligence "watershed occurred when the Australians captured the Japanese Twentieth Division's entire cryptologic library... until the end of the war, the Allies read approximately 2,000 [Japanese Army] messages a day."[52] "Central Bureau had an intact version of the four-digit mainline Japanese army code... [which] provided Central Bureau and Arlington Hall with an "embarrassment of riches."[53]

New Britain

MacArthur always wanted to capture Rabaul on New Britain for its harbor and four airfields, but was overruled by the JCS.[54] During 1943 small parties of the AIB were landed on New Britain to gather intelligence and rescue downed Allied airmen. The Japanese attempted to hunt down the coastwatchers and AIB patrols, committing atrocities against civilians who assisted them. The AIB also trained and equipped New Guineans to serve as guerillas, which led to a low-intensity campaign against the Japanese garrison. However, it also sparked tribal warfare with

on New Britain; later it was revealed the number was closer to 70,000.
42. Symonds, p. 480.
43. Ibid, p. 476.
44. *https://stationhypo.com/2020/02/19/february-19-1943-u-s-navy-cryptanalysts-provided-solid-intelligence-to-gen-macarthur/#more-11693*; Drea, p. 82.
45. Prados, p. 501.
46. Anderson, et al, p. 48.
47. Lae was later developed into a major Allied airbase and Australian submarine base.
48. Toll, p. 239.
49. Anderson, et al, p.171.
50. Finschhafen became one of the largest Allied support bases thereafter. Toll, p. 239.
51. John Coates. (1999). *Bravery Above Blunder: The 9th Division at Finschhafen, Sattelberg and Sio*. Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 236.
52. Sharon A. Maneki, "The Quiet Heroes of the Southwest Pacific Theater: An Oral History of the Men and Women of CBB and FRUMEL," *United States Cryptologic History*, Series IV, World War II, Volume 7, National Security Agency: Center for Cryptologic History, reprinted 2007, pp. 23 & 28; and Dufty, pp. 259-60.
53. Drea, pp. 92-3.
54. Symonds, p. 487.

the guerrillas attacking villages they believed to have collaborated with the Japanese.[55]

In mid- and late December Allied landings were made on the remote western end of New Britain at Arawe and Cape Glouchester to secure the straits between the Solomon and Bismarck Seas and harass Japanese forces.[56] Intelligence to inform these plans came from Marine and Alamo Scout[57] patrols which were landed in New Britain between September and December, as well as from aerial photography. Following the landings, there was only limited fighting on New Britain. Japanese forces largely chose to avoid combat and withdrew towards Rabaul.[58]

Admiralty Islands

The 160 Admiralty Islands form the northern edge of the Bismarck Sea and are 360 miles northwest of Rabaul. Their seizure ensured that Rabaul was cut off from reinforcement or evacuation. The Japanese, however, had reinforced the Admiralties with its major airbases. On 24 January 1944 Allied air forces destroyed a squadron of Japanese aircraft that had deployed to Los Negros two days previously and detected by COMINT.[59]

Aerial reconnaissance had indicated that the main island, Los Negros, might have been evacuated. But most defensive positions went unrecognized by photo interpreters. MacArthur's intelligence chief, Major General Charles Willoughby, citing ULTRA and AIB reports, estimated that there were 3,000 to 4,000 defenders. An advance scouting party reported that the island was "lousy with Japs." Nonetheless, on 29 February a reconnaissance-in-force landed observed by MacArthur who was off-shore on board the USS *Phoenix*. The islands were fiercely defended. Fighting on Manus island continued until mid-May.[60]

"The value of the Admiralty Islands to the Allies was enormous." Their capture sped up the Allied advance by months. "… [A]ircraft based there ranged over Truk, Wewak, and beyond… [and] as a naval base… they combined a fleet anchorage with major facilities."[61]

In September 1943 SIGINT revealed that Japan had adopted a new strategy to reinforce a new "absolute defense line" to include western New Guinea and the Dutch East Indies with reinforcements coming from Manchuria. According to historian Ian Toll by the "end of 1943, Allied victory in the South Pacific appeared certain."[62]

FINAL NEW GUINEA CAMPAIGNS

Hollandia

MacArthur was in a hurry. His campaign was moving at a "snail's pace" compared to "Nimitz's island-hopping campaign" which had advanced 2,000 miles from the Gilbert Islands to the Marshalls from November 1943 to February 1944. MacArthur seemed to be in a "strategic backwater."[63] He decided on a bold move to jump to Hollandia in Dutch New Guinea, 450 miles west of Saidor. ULTRA was critical to MacArthur's decision, as it gave him a detailed understanding of Japanese deployments, strengths and weaknesses.[64] Past experience meant "[t]he Allies could prepare for the daring Hollandia invasion with full confidence in ULTRA's unequivocal picture of their enemy."[65]

The Japanese anticipated an attack on Wewak, just 240 miles from Saidor and tried to reinforce its positions. An allied deception plan, involving PT Boat activity, air attacks, aerial reconnaissance, and empty rafts left on beaches by submarines, was intended to suggest an invasion of the Madang area.[66]

In February and March 1944 at least 12 Japanese freighters were sunk by airpower or naval action, often tipped by ULTRA.[67] On 30 March and 3 April Allied air raids destroyed the concentration of Japanese aircraft at Hollandia. And on 22 April in "Operation Reckless"

55. The AIB was formed by the Australians and included Australian, New Guinean, and Dutch East Indies troops. Besides reconnaissance, it conducted guerilla warfare and psychological operations. It Z-Force in a commando raid on Singapore in late 1943 sank six Japanese cargo ships (Prados, p. 416).
56. Office of the Combined Chiefs of Staff. Quadrant Conference: August 1943: Papers and Minutes of Meetings. Department of Defense (United States), 1943, p. 67.
57. The Alamo Scouts were a US Army reconnaissance and raider unit reporting directly to MacArthur's headquarters. *https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alamo_Scouts*.
58. Allied intelligence at the time had underestimated Japanese strength on the island, believing it to be held by around 38,000 men. While this was incorrect by a factor of two, Allied assessments of Japanese intentions were more accurate, with planners believing that the Japanese would adopt a defensive posture. *https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Guinea_campaign* .
59. Anderson, et al, p. 231.
60. *https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/wars-conflicts-and-operations/world-war-ii/1944/admiralty-islands.html*; "Gamble at Los Negros: The Admiralty Islands Campaign, 29 February 1944," Naval

History and Heritage Command; *https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/wars-conflicts-and-operations/world-war-ii/1944/admiralty-islands.html*; *https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Admiralty_Islands_campaign*.
61. *https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Admiralty_Islands_campaign* .
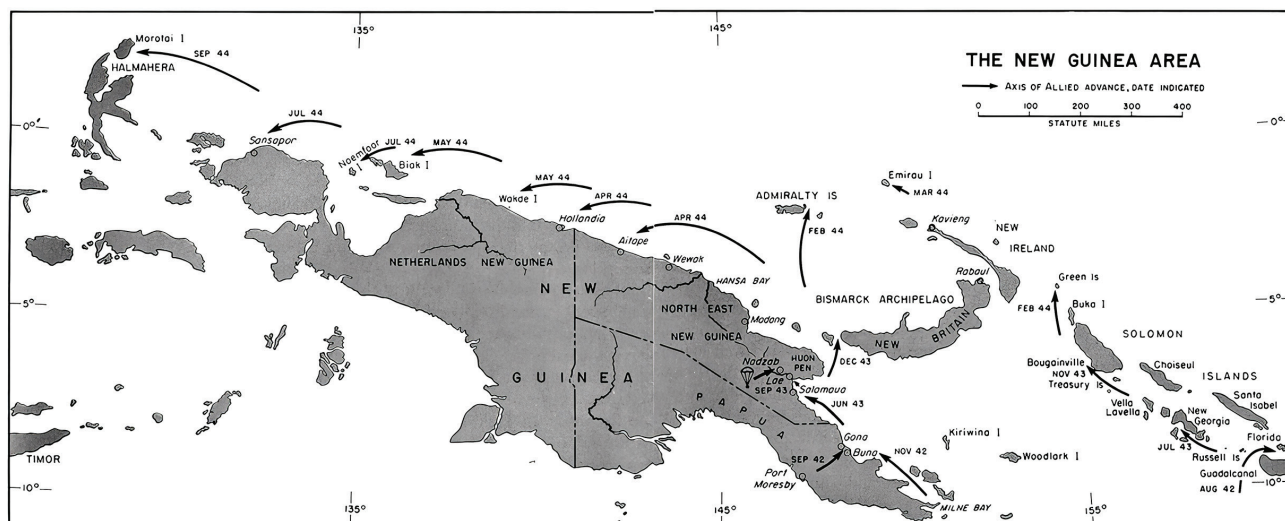62. Toll, pp. 218, 242.
63. Drea, pp. 94-5.
64. Ibid, p. 96.
65. Ibid, p. 104.
66. Ibid, pp. 116-7.
67. Ibid, pp. 106-7.

New Guinea Operations, 1942-44
From American Military History, US Army Center for Military History, © 1989

the Allies invaded Aitape and Hollandia, bypassing the Wewak stronghold. SIGINT had indicated both were only lightly defended.[68] However, Aitape became a drawn-out slug fest, a month-long battle of attrition. The Japanese were stronger than intelligence had indicated.[69]

The successful operations at Aitape and Hollandia "culminated two years of dreadful attrition warfare fought in reeking jungles…"[70]

Biak Island

Biak Island, 100 miles north of Geelvink Bay in western Dutch New Guinea, was a major Japanese stronghold between MacArthur and the Philippines. It had a major Japanese airbase within range of other fields on New Guinea. Allied knowledge of the island was poor. The Alamo Scouts could provide "little detailed information" on the enemy. While it was known that the Japanese had reinforced the island, the garrison was "thought to total about 4,400 men." Little was known about the island's coral reefs, tides or currents. The Allied landing craft during the 27 May assault were displaced by the strong current, putting the initial troops ashore in the wrong location. While the landing was a tactical surprise, the operation, planned to take ten days, quickly bogged down with heavy losses on both sides in the face of "fanatical opposition."[71] During the operation the Allies were hampered by a lack of SIGINT, as they

could not decipher the Japanese Army's 3-digit code. Allied intercept positions were too far away to hear its low power signals.[72,73]

"The invasion of Biak had a wide significance. The Japanese had wanted to… trigger a major naval battle…" They tried to reinforce Biak using destroyer/transports but were discovered by airborne reconnaissance and turned back on 3 June by Allied air attacks. A final attempt involved the giant Japanese battleships Yamato and Musashi. But on 15 June Nimitz's invasion of Saipan in the Mariana Islands "posed a much more serious threat to the Japanese Home Islands," and Operation A-Go was shifted to the Philippine Sea.[74]

On 30 July 1944 in far western New Guinea the "…final assault landing… took place at Sansapor… between two known Japanese strongholds on the Volgelkop Peninsula."[75] MacArthur's attention turned to the Philippines.

CONCLUSIONS

The New Guinea campaign did not involve as many naval engagements as did the Solomons cam-

68. Anderson, et al, p. 175.
69. Ibid, p. 181.
70. Ibid, p. 105.
71. Ibid, p. 134.

72. Ibid, p. 135.
73. Robert Ross Smith. "Biak: The Plan, the Landing, and the Enemy, Chapter XII, The Approach to the Philippines," *The War in the Pacific, US Army in World War II, https://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USA/USA -P-Approach/USA-P-Approach-12.html.*
74. The Battle of the Philippine Sea of 19-20 June 1944 was a disaster for the Japanese Navy. Three carriers were lost and much of their remaining air groups' pilots were lost. The Japanese carrier force was never again a real threat. *http://www.historyofwar.org/articles/campaign _new_guinea.html* .
75. Anderson, et al, p. 182.

paign. Most combat involved small unit infantry clashes and Allied airpower against Japanese logistics efforts. American radar-controlled naval gunfire proved devastating. Only the largest Japanese Navy ships had radar; others relied on night optics that had limited range and were affected by weather.[76] Through "adroit use of radar for range finding and fire control… an American ship could land the first salvo… without the benefit of searchlights or flares" that would alert the target.[77]

"American planners underestimated the task they faced in conquering New Guinea, miscalculating both the strength of Japanese defenses and the severe hardships that jungle fighting would impose…"[78] Geospatial intelligence was lacking. Aerial imagery was often incapable of detecting Japanese fortifications and positions. Reconnaissance was effective at sea, especially when queued by SIGINT. Coastwatchers and the AIB were helpful in forewarning of Japanese convoys and air attacks.

Strategic SIGINT was an important element in understanding Japanese order of battle and devising the strategy to bypass certain strongholds. US commanders knew the strengths, the organization, and the supplies of island strongholds. Once their offensive capabilities, usually aircraft, were destroyed the strongholds were impotent. Bypassing Japanese island strongholds, such as Rabaul, stranded as ineffectual large numbers of Japanese forces that withered from lack of sustainment, hunger, and disease.[79]

MacArthur sometimes used ULTRA effectively; other times he ignored it and proceeded with plans despite what ULTRA revealed about the Japanese.[80] "MacArthur was a deeply flawed man whose Olympian ego and garish vanity warped his perceptions…" according to historian Ian Toll.[81] MacArthur used ULTRA to argue for more resources from General Marshall and the Joint Chiefs.[82] Lieutenant General Kenney on the other hand routinely used ULTRA effectively to plan Allied air operations.

Neither the Japanese Navy or Army ever realized that their codes were broken. They always blamed Allied long-range aerial reconnaissance, coastwatchers, technologically superior Allied radar, spies, and scouts. Despite an investigation of compromised codes following the shootdown of Admiral Yamamoto's plane, the Japanese Navy concluded it was an accident.[83] Also, by April/May 1943, "every major movement of [the Japanese fleet] was tracked and reported by submarines."[84]

Prados observes in his *Combined Fleet Decoded* that the Americans learned "that a synergism existed between the different kinds of intelligence reporting, and that a multidimensional intelligence effort would be greater than the sum of its parts."[85] But US intelligence organizations often competed and failed to cooperate, and Army – Navy disagreements persisted throughout the war.

Prados opined that the Pacific "war entered a new phase in the Fall of 1943, in which American industrial power made itself the engine of victory. Intelligence continued to be important, guiding Allied operations, preventing major disasters, and in particular providing marching orders for the submarine forces that brought the Japanese Empire closer and closer to the edge of the abyss. But intelligence no longer made the difference between victory and defeat."[86]

The New Guinea campaign lasted from January 1942 until the end of the war when the last 13,000 elements of the Japanese Army surrendered in September 1945. The campaign was one of the longest of World War II.[87]

See Table of Significant Events
in the Southwest Pacific at right

Peter C. Oleson is the senior editor of The Intelligencer.

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83. Shockingly, "…[W]hen the Japanese Army's code breakers not only managed to decipher American machines at times, but discovered that the Americans were reading Japanese naval codes, the army failed to provide the navy with either the means to break these codes or the warning that its own codes had been compromised." The Japanese Navy did not know until 1945 that the Japanese Army had broken US ciphers. Ken Kotani. *Japanese Intelligence in World War II*. New York: Osprey Publishing, 2009, pp. vii, 72 & 88.
84. Toll, p. 453.
85. Prados, p. 242.
86. Ibid, p. 523.
87. *http://www.historyofwar.org/articles/campaign_new_guinea.html*.

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76. Symonds, p. 478.
77. Toll, p. 186.
78. Anderson, et al, p. 221.
79. *https://stationhypo.com/2018/07/10/high-quality-comint-vital-to-decision-making-new-guinea/#more-9710* .
80. Drea, p. 59.
81. Toll, p. 217.
82. Drea, p. 48.

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS IN THE SOUTHWEST PACIFIC

— 1942 —

January 23	Japanese forces seize Rabaul on New Britain, which becomes Japan's major headquarters for the southern Pacific.
19 February	Japanese air raid on Darwin in northern Australia.
8 March	Japanese seize much of the northeast coast of Papua New Guinea including Lae and Salamaua.
18 March	General MacArthur named commander of the Southwest Pacific Theater.
24 March	Admiral Nimitz names commander of the Pacific Theater.
4-8 May	**Battle of the Coral Sea** frustrates Japan's strategy to invade Port Moresby in Australian New Guinea by sea.
4-5 June	**Battle of Midway** results in a decisive defeat for the Imperial Japanese Navy. Thereafter the Japanese were largely on the defensive in the Pacific.
21 July	Japanese forces seize Gona in the north coast of New Guinea.
30 July	Japanese forces advance overland on the Kokoda track across the Owen Stanley mountains to attack Port Moresby on the south coast.
7 August	**US Marines invade Guadalcanal** in the Solomons Campaign.
25 August	Japanese forces attack Milne Bay on easternmost New Guinea in an amphibious operation. Australian and US forces hold and defeat the Japanese by 7 September.
26 September	Australian forces rout the Japanese Army 30 kms north of Port Moresby.
16 November	**Battle of Buna-Gona**. Joint US-Australian operation to recapture Buna-Gona. Buna captured on 6 December, Gona on 6 December.
31 December	Japanese start to withdraw from Guadalcanal.

— 1943 —

23 January	Allies defeat the Japanese Army at Sanananda, New Guinea.
2-5 March	**Battle of the Bismarck Sea**. US Army Air Forces destroy a Japanese convoy reinforcing Lae, sinking all 8 transports, 4 of 8 destroyers, 20 aircraft, and over 2,000 troops of the Japanese 51st Division.
18 April	Tipped by COMINT, US Army Air Force P-38 fighters, equipped with additional fuel tanks, shoot down IJN commander Admiral Yamamoto's plane over Bougainville in the Solomons.
30 June	Allied amphibious landing at Nassau Bay, south of Salamaua, New Guinea.

17 August	Allied air forces attack the major Japanese air bases at Wewak destroying many planes on the ground.
4 September	Allied forces recapture Lae and Salamaua.
5 September	Allied airborne operation captures the airfield at Nadzab, west of Lae.
22 September	Australian forces land at Finschhafen, Australian New Guinea.
16 October	Another heavy Allied air attack on the main Japanese airbases at Wewak.
15 December	US troops invade the Arawe Peninsula on New Britain Island' southern coast, starting to surround the major Japanese stronghold at Rabaul.
26 December	US Marines capture Cape Gloucester on the northwest end of New Britain Island.

— 1944 —

2 January	US Army troops capture Saidor on the north coast of New Guinea.
19 February	Japan withdraws most aircraft from Rabaul due to overwhelming and constant Allied air raids.
20 February	**Destruction of Rabaul**. US Navy and Army Air Force planes destroy the Japanese base at Rabaul on New Britain Island, effectively neutralizing the Japanese forces there.
29 February	US troops invade the Admiralty Islands and capture Los Negros.
19 – 20 March	US Marines capture Emirau in the Bismarck Islands, cutting off the northwest approaches to Rabaul.
22 April	Australian and US troops conduct surprise landings at Aitape, Australian New Guinea, and **Hollandia, Dutch New Guinea**, cutting off 50,000 Japanese troops.
25 April	Australian troops capture Madang.
17 May – August	Allies attack Wakde. Stubborn Japanese resistance continued for weeks.
11 – 23 May	Australian Army defeats the remnants of the Japanese Army cut off at Wewak.
27 May – 22 July	Allies seize **Biak Island** off the north coast of New Guinea with its three airfields. They also capture Noemfoor Island, Dutch New Guinea.
30 July – 31 August	Allies bypass Japanese strongholds and land at Cape Opmariz and Sansapor on the Volgelkop Peninsula, Dutch East Indies. This was the final assault of the New Guinea campaign.
20 October	US 6th Army invades Leyte, Philippines.