

CHAPTER 2

THE ISLAND BARRIER

FOR many years Australians, uneasily peering northward, had comforted themselves with the contemplation of the great arc of islands which stretches from the Pacific by way of the island mass of New Guinea and beneath the centrepiece of the Philippines, through the East Indian archipelago to the Indian Ocean. These islands, particularly in the north-east, seemed a barrier to invasion. But few Australians had much knowledge of them, and the military leaders mostly shared the general ignorance. After the fall of Java in March 1942, the only places where fighting was taking place along this island barrier were Timor, where an Australian Independent Company was at large, and the Philippines.

When General MacArthur left for Australia on 12th March there was confusion in the Philippines over the command arrangements. He did not tell the War Department in Washington that he had divided the forces in the Philippines into four commands, which he planned to control from Australia, and of which Major-General Wainwright was to command only one—the troops on Bataan and small pockets holding out in the mountains of Luzon. Both President Roosevelt and General Marshall assumed that Wainwright had been left in overall command. He was accordingly promoted lieutenant-general and moved to Corregidor on the 21st. On the same day MacArthur informed Marshall of his own arrangements. Marshall considered them unsatisfactory and told the President so. Roosevelt thereupon made it clear to MacArthur that Wainwright would remain in full command.

Major-General Edward P. King took over Luzon Force from Wainwright. The total strength was then 79,500 of whom 12,500 were Americans. On 3rd April General Homma's *XIV Army* fell upon them with reinforced strength. The defence crumbled, and on the 9th King surrendered his force. On the same day Wainwright wrote to MacArthur that he considered "physical exhaustion and sickness due to a long period of insufficient food is the real cause of this terrible disaster". Some years later he wrote:

I had my orders from MacArthur not to surrender on Bataan, and therefore I could not authorise King to do it [but he] was on the ground and confronted by a situation in which he had either to surrender or have his people killed piecemeal. This would most certainly have happened to him within two or three days.¹

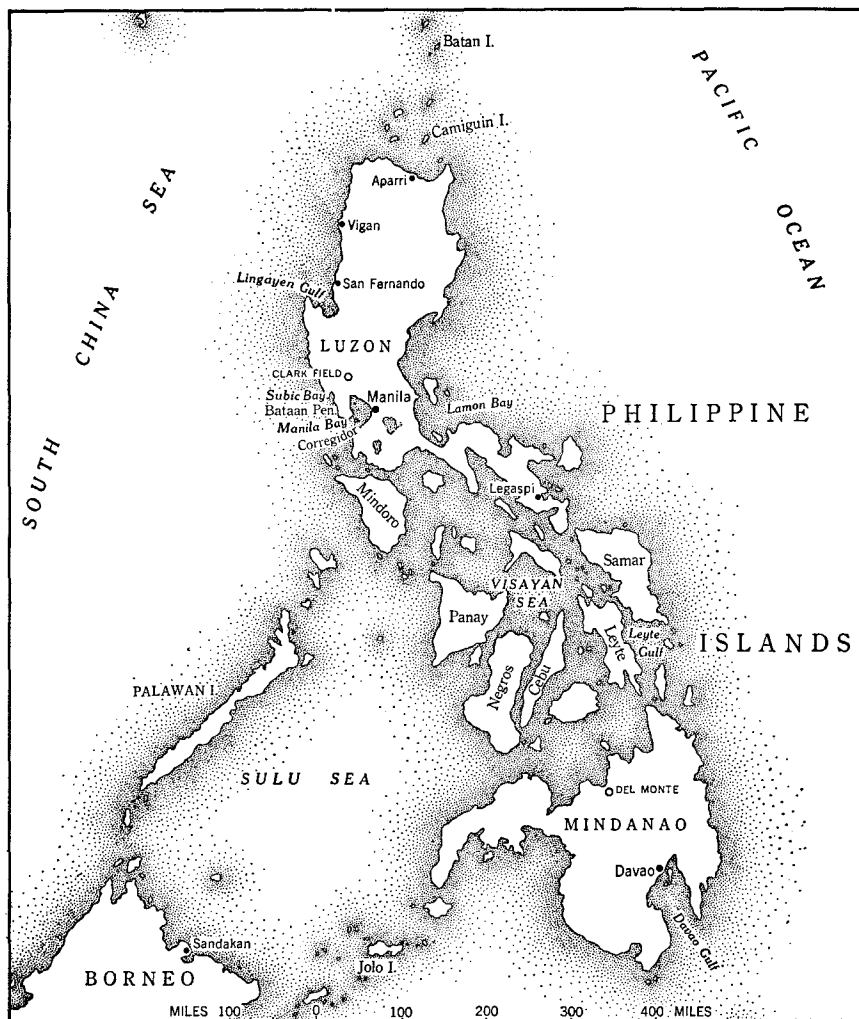
Up to this time the island fortress of Corregidor, where Wainwright had his headquarters, had been under heavy but intermittent aerial and artillery bombardment. The aerial bombardment had begun on 29th December but waned after 6th January, when Homma was left with only a small air force which he could spare for use against the island only in sporadic

¹ L. Morton, *The Fall of the Philippines* (1953), p. 456, a volume in the official series *United States Army in World War II*.



Papua and New Guinea

small attacks; the artillery bombardment began on 6th February from guns sited on the southern shore of Manila Bay. On 15th March it entered a new phase with thickened fire aimed at the four fortified islands in the bay, particularly the two southernmost ones. The shelling decreased once more as the Japanese prepared their final concentrations against



Bataan, there was a period of intensified air attack when air reinforcements reached Homma, then, with the beginning of April, there came a temporary respite for the island garrisons as the Japanese moved into Bataan. From the 9th onwards, however, Homma was free to throw all his weight against the islands, with guns sited on both sides of the bay.

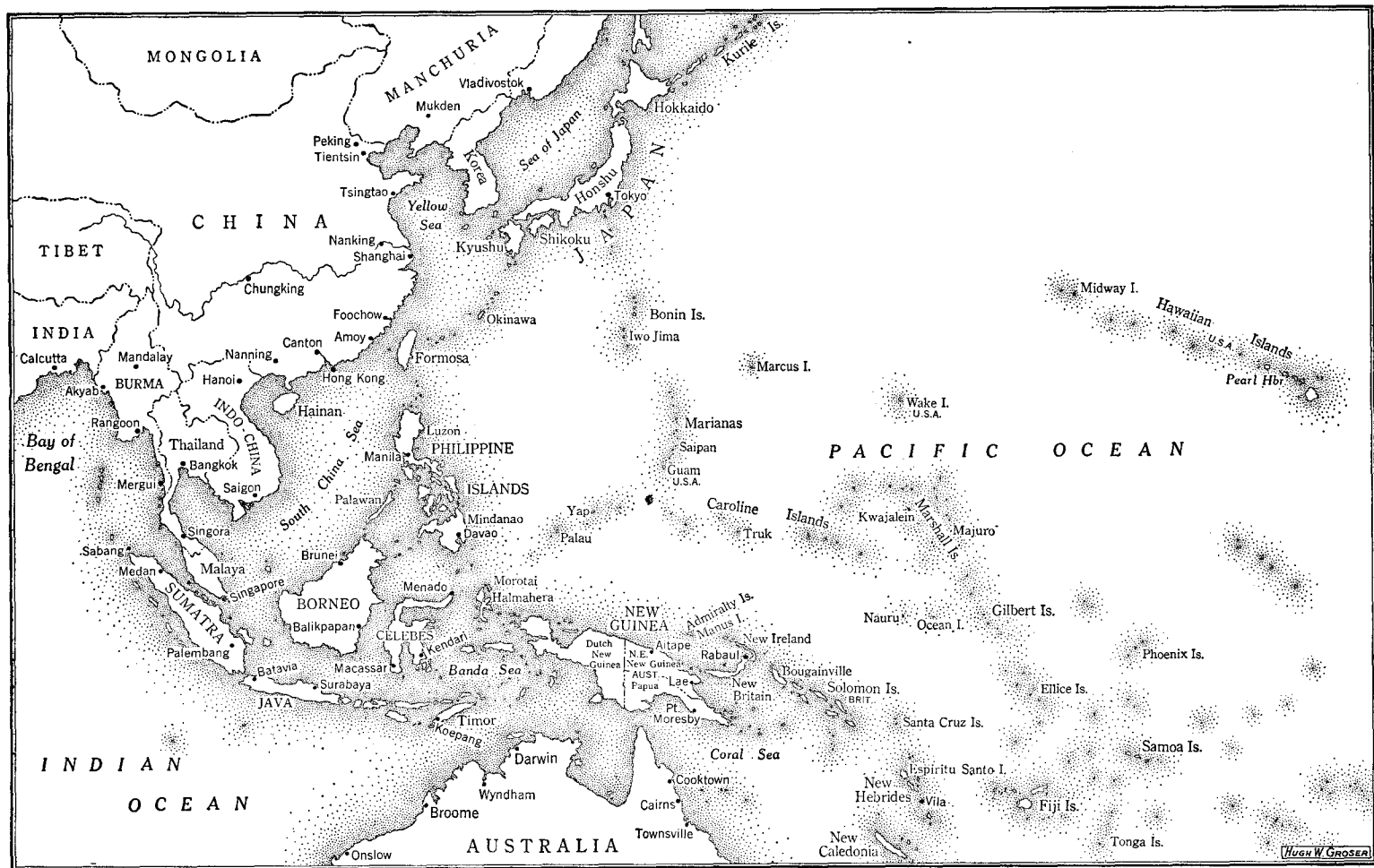
The shelling never really stopped. With over one hundred pieces ranging in size from 75-mm guns to the giant 240-mm howitzers, the Japanese were able to fire almost steadily. They destroyed gun emplacements, shelters, beach defenses, buildings—almost everything on the surface—at a rate that made repair or replacement impossible.²

At the beginning of May the Japanese guns and aircraft let loose their final fury. On the 4th some 16,000 shells fell on Corregidor from Bataan. The defenders (11,000-12,000 effectives after the Bataan surrender) had suffered 600 casualties since 9th April, and were shocked and weak; most of their coastal guns were destroyed. But on 5th May they sustained "the most terrific pounding" they had yet received. "There was a steady roar from Bataan and a mightier volume on Corregidor." That night Japanese troops landed on Corregidor. Though they fell into confusion during their approach and were met with stout resistance at some points, Wainwright decided on the morning of the 6th that further resistance would result in a wholesale slaughter of his men, particularly 1,000 who were lying wounded and helpless. He sent a message to President Roosevelt that he was going to meet the Japanese commander to arrange for the surrender of the fortified islands in Manila Bay.

This proposal left the position in the south unresolved. There, beyond small landings and the establishment of a fairly static garrison at Davao, in Mindanao, in December, Homma had not been able to make any move. On the morning of the 10th, however, he began a series of landings with a force under Major-General Kiyotake Kawaguchi playing a leading part. By 9th May Brigadier-General Bradford G. Chynoweth's forces on Cebu (about 6,500 strong) were scattered and Chynoweth himself was in the mountains hoping to organise further resistance from there; on Panay Colonel Albert F. Christie with 7,000 men had fallen back in an orderly fashion into well-stocked mountain retreats from which he was preparing to wage guerilla war; on Mindanao the bulk of Major-General William F. Sharp's forces had been destroyed.

Wainwright made desperate efforts to avoid the surrender of the troops in the south. About the same time as he first broadcast a surrender offer from Corregidor he told Sharp that he was releasing to the latter's command all the forces in the Philippines except those on the four fortified islands in Manila Bay and ordered him to report at once to MacArthur. Almost at the same time Sharp received a message from MacArthur himself (sent in the knowledge of the Corregidor surrender but without knowledge of Wainwright's action in relation to Sharp) in which MacArthur assumed command of the Visayan-Mindanao Force. But when, in the late afternoon of the 6th, Wainwright was taken to meet Homma, the Japanese refused to treat with him except as the overall commander in the Philippines and sent him back to Corregidor to think the matter over. Late that night Wainwright told the local Japanese commander that he would surrender all the forces in the Philippines within four days. This decision inevitably led to great confusion in the south. Sharp, bewildered as to

² Morton, p. 538.



The Eastern Theatre

where his duty lay, finally made his own difficult decision and directed his subordinates to capitulate. Chynoweth was reluctant to do so and Christie, who was in a particularly strong position, bluntly questioned Sharp's authority to issue a surrender order and asserted that he did not see "even one small reason" why he should surrender his force, because "some other unit has gone to hell or some Corregidor shell-shocked terms" had been made.³

In the final event, however, the general surrender became effective, though the wide dispersal of all the defending forces throughout the islands delayed the process.

Although the reduction of the Philippines and the defeat of the American-Filipino army of 140,000 men, took far longer than the Japanese had planned, they did not allow the delay to hold up unduly their plans for a southward advance. Their main movement had swept round the archipelago and, by the time Wainwright surrendered, they were firmly established in New Guinea and at other points in the South-West Pacific adjacent to Australia.

Australia's main interest in the Pacific war was to be directed towards Papua and New Guinea in which, apart from their strategic importance, she had a direct interest through her responsibility for their government, but there were other Pacific islands to which she also had a responsibility, or which were of such significance in her planning that she was forced to interest herself in them.

Of these New Caledonia had seemed in 1941 and early 1942 to be one of the most important. The 2/3rd Australian Independent Company (21 officers and 312 men), which had been sent there in December, was powerfully reinforced on 12th March with the arrival of the major part of an American task force, commanded by Major-General Alexander M. Patch, consisting of two infantry regiments, a regiment of artillery, a battalion of light tanks, an anti-aircraft regiment, a battalion of coast artillery and a squadron of fighter aircraft. (Later, when the South-West Pacific Area was defined, New Caledonia was not included in it and the responsibility for its defence shifted entirely to America and New Zealand.)

Still farther out in the Pacific, about 2,200 miles north-east of Sydney and some 200 miles apart, lay Ocean Island and Nauru, both rich in phosphate deposits. Late in February Australian field artillery detachments which had been stationed there in 1941 were withdrawn in the Free French destroyer *Le Triomphant*, which made a quick dash first to Nauru and then to Ocean Island, took off those who were to leave and transhipped them to the Phosphate Commission ship *Trienza* which was standing by in the New Hebrides. The *Trienza* then cleared for Brisbane.

Small parties of Europeans remained on both islands—six on Ocean Island, seven on Nauru. The Administrator of Nauru, Colonel Chalmers,⁴

³ Morton, p. 579.

⁴ Lt-Col F. R. Chalmers, CMG, DSO. (South African War: Tpr 1st Tasmanian Contingent, Lt 4th Contingent.) (1st AIF: CO 27 Bn 1917-18.) Administrator of Nauru 1938-43. Of St. Helens, Tas; b. Hobart, 4 Jan 1881. Executed by Japanese 26 Mar 1943.

did not leave. He had served in the South African War, and in the 1914-18 War with the 27th Battalion which he commanded from October 1917 onwards. In a letter which he sent out by *Le Triomphant* to his Minister he wrote: "We will do our best here whatever may happen." Although his whole Administration staff volunteered to remain he kept with him only Dr B. H. Quin (Medical Officer), W. Shugg (Medical Assistant) and two volunteers from the Phosphate Commissioners' staff—F. F. Harmer and W. H. Doyle. Fathers Kayser and Clivaz, missionaries, also remained.⁵

South and south-west of Nauru and Ocean Island are the New Hebrides (under joint British and French control) and the Solomon Islands (a British Protectorate) where detachments of the 1st Independent Company had been stationed during 1941 to protect aerodromes and seaplane-alighting bases and to man observation posts; a secondary task was to train local inhabitants including natives to undertake these duties. In January 1942 the line manned by these detachments and the rest of the Independent Company ran in a north-westerly direction from Vila (New Hebrides), through Tulagi and Buka (Solomons), Namatanai and Kavieng (New Ireland) to Manus Island in the Admiralty Group. Thus, with the garrison at Rabaul, the 1st Independent Company constituted the Australian "advanced observation line".

After the war with Japan had begun the men of this company found themselves working closely with the well-planned naval coastwatching network in the islands—an organisation whose task in time of war was to report to the Navy Office instantly any unusual or suspicious happenings, such as sightings of strange ships or aircraft, floating mines, and other matters of defence interest. Among the coastwatchers were included District Officers, Patrol Officers, other officials, and planters, of the Territories of Papua and New Guinea and the British Solomon Islands.

Throughout these areas the occupation of Rabaul on 23rd January was the pivot on which the whole Japanese movement swung. The invaders had made air reconnaissance of the islands of practically the whole Territory of New Guinea—and much of the protectorate—beforehand. On the 21st they bombed Kavieng in New Ireland, Lorengau in the Admiralties, and Madang, Lae, Salamaua and Bulolo on the New Guinea mainland. On the same day that they landed at Rabaul they occupied Kavieng, and their aircraft raided the Trobriand Islands, off the south-eastern tip of the New Guinea mainland. On 3rd February they first raided Port Moresby from the air.

Bougainville Island in the northern Solomons, New Ireland, New Britain, the Admiralty Islands, and the eastern half of the mainland of New Guinea, with their many hundreds of adjacent small islands, were Australian territory. The south-eastern part of the New Guinea mainland and the

⁵ The Japanese occupied Nauru and Ocean Island on 26th August 1942. They brutally ill-treated the native populations and massacred some. On Ocean they murdered the six Europeans. Of the Nauru party they murdered Chalmers, Quin, Shugg, Harmer and Doyle in March 1943. Kayser and Clivaz were taken to Truk with some of the natives. Kayser died of his privations; Clivaz survived.

smaller islands off its coast formed the Territory of Papua. In 1884 Great Britain proclaimed a Protectorate over this area, and it became Australian territory in 1906. In the first weeks of the 1914-18 War an Australian military force had taken from the Germans the northern part of the eastern half of the New Guinea mainland, New Britain and the arc of islands running from the Admiralties to Bougainville. At the Peace Conference Mr Hughes had demanded possession of these island "ramparts" for Australia to keep them from "the hands of an actual or potential enemy". Australia was given a Mandate over them in 1920, and in 1921 a civil administration was established.

Papua included some 91,000 square miles of country, the Mandated Territory 93,000, lying completely within the tropics with the characteristic high tropical rainfall and hot-moist climate, though conditions in the high valleys and plateaus of the hinterland may be cool and bracing and the highest mountain areas are bitterly cold. The mainland is dominated by towering and broken mountains, the lower and middle slopes of which are covered densely with rain forests, the higher blanketed with moss. The backbone of the mountain system is the great central spine which runs in a general east-west direction and rises to 15,400 feet. A few of the islands are atolls but most are of the "high" type and share the mainland features—mountains, dense vegetation and rushing river systems.

In 1939 the European population of these Territories, living almost entirely on the coastal fringes, was about 1,500 in Papua and 4,500 in the Mandated Territory, their respective centres being Port Moresby and Rabaul. The native population was probably in the vicinity of 1,800,000—mostly primitive tribesmen, separated by a multiplicity of languages, cultures and social organisations; inter-tribal fighting was the rule among them and ceased only as European influence spread.

When the war came the local administrations in the two Territories, though separate, were similar in form. There were nine magisterial divisions in Papua, each under a Resident Magistrate with a small staff of Assistant Resident Magistrates and Patrol Officers to assist him. In the Mandated Territory there were seven Districts each under a District Officer assisted by Assistant District Officers and Patrol Officers. Although the local officials exercised both administrative and judicial powers over all individuals and activities within their districts, their most important and extensive duties related to natives and the development of areas of European control. Each Territory maintained a native police force officered by Europeans.

Thus far the comparatively short period of Australian administration in both Papua and New Guinea, the tremendous physical difficulties of the country, and the comparative slenderness of the Australian resources had combined to prevent the whole area from being brought under effective control. By 1939, for example, less than half the Mandated Territory was officially classified as "under control", about 18,000 square miles were considered to be "under influence" in greater or less degree, and some 5,500 of the remaining 36,000 square miles were classed as having

been "penetrated by patrols". But exploration and the spread of influence was being persistently carried out by hardy officers who had built up a fine record of peaceful penetration:

The patrols showed great restraint—the orders were rigid—in the face of frequent native hostility. Not a few officers and police were killed in open fights and ambush. Drawing-room pioneers understress the natural savagery of the New Guinea scene. The relatively peaceful spread of white influences over both areas was a remarkable achievement.⁶

Economic development was substantially limited to copra and rubber production in Papua, copra production in New Guinea and mining in both Territories—with the greatest mining development on the goldfields of the Bulolo Valley in New Guinea. There were more than 500 coconut plantations in New Guinea which produced 76,000 tons of copra for export in the peak year 1936-37. That year Papua exported 13,600 tons. In its best years the Papuan rubber industry could produce about one-eighth of Australia's requirements; in 1940-41 exports were 1,273 tons. Gold production in the two Territories between 1926 and 1941 was valued at about £22,580,000. Of this £19,000,000 was won in the Mandated Territory, most of it from the Bulolo Valley fields, which were almost completely dependent for service and maintenance upon aircraft, the use of which had been developed to a degree probably unparalleled in comparable circumstances elsewhere in the world.

For unskilled labour, economic enterprises of all kinds relied almost completely upon the natives. Although there was a small body of casual labour working under verbal agreements most natives worked as indentured labourers under voluntary contracts of service (usually for three-year periods in New Guinea; 18 months to 2 years in Papua) which defined the conditions of their work and depended upon penal sanctions for their enforcement. In 1940 there were about 50,000 indentured labourers at work in both Territories—under a system, incidentally, which, it was becoming increasingly clear, would have to be superseded by a free labour system, despite the fact that

the protective legislation was of good model and by far the most important and well-policed body of civil law in the territories. Working under indenture was agreeable to the natives and had become of some positive social and economic importance to them. An increasing volume of labour offered itself without direct compulsion.⁷

There was little real general Australian interest in Papua and New Guinea before the war; little general appreciation of the fact that Australia was the major colonial power of the South-West Pacific; and virtually no military knowledge of the region and no appreciation of the tactical and logistical problems it would pose in war.

As far back as 18th March 1941, the War Cabinet had approved that women and children not engaged in any essential work in New Guinea and other Territories should be encouraged to leave unobtrusively for

⁶ W. E. H. Stanner, *The South Seas in Transition* (1953), p. 23.

⁷ Stanner, p. 46.

Australia. In November it was decided that further encouragement should be given to these people to leave, with a strong warning that it might not be possible to make any special arrangements in the event of war. On 11th December, the War Cabinet endorsed a decision of three days before that there should not yet be any compulsory evacuation of women and children from Papua and New Guinea. Next day they reversed this decision, and by 29th December about 600 women and children had left the islands and it was considered that the evacuation had been substantially completed. None the less a number of women (other than missionaries and nurses to whom the orders did not apply) still remained. As for the civil male population, a proportion was, for some time after the occupation of Rabaul, to constitute something in the nature of a leaderless and difficult legion although many civilians, both from inside and outside the Administration, were to render heroic service and those who were fit and eligible were gradually called up, or voluntarily enlisted, in various branches of the three Services.

On 8th December 1941 Brigadier Morris who commanded the 8th Military District (i.e. all troops in Papua and New Guinea) had been authorised to call up for full-time duty the New Guinea Volunteer Rifles (N.G.V.R.), a force manned by some of the local European inhabitants of the Mandated Territory. On 25th January, two days after the fall of Rabaul, the War Cabinet decided that all able-bodied white male British subjects between the ages of 18 and 45 should be called up immediately for service. But by this time civil control throughout the Mandated Territory had been disrupted and the Administrator, Sir Walter McNicoll, was on his way to Australia.

By this time also a difficult situation was developing in Port Moresby between the Administrator of Papua (Mr Leonard Murray⁸) and the army commander. Murray had been in the Papuan Administration for more than 30 years and was a nephew of the distinguished former Lieutenant-Governor of Papua, Sir Hubert Murray, who had built most carefully between 1908 and 1940 the form and tradition of the Papuan Service which his successor was now understandably reluctant to see submerged beneath the weight of a military administration. Morris was a regular soldier who had been in the Middle East in charge of the Australian Overseas Base before his appointment in May 1941 to command the 8th Military District. A gunner by training he was an unassuming and courteous man with a strong sense of duty and much sound common sense. He recognised bluntly the military necessities of the circumstances which had now developed.

The situation which arose between Morris and Murray was best exemplified by the difficulties which manifested themselves late in January over the calling up for military service of the local white residents. When, on 27th January, Morris issued the call-up notices to men in the 18 to 45

⁸ Hon H. L. Murray, CBE. Private and Official Secretary to the Lt-Gov of Papua 1916-40; Administrator of Papua 1940-42; attached Allied Geographical Section GHQ SWPA 1942-45. B. Sydney, 13 Dec 1886.

years age group his action inevitably caused the closing of the commercial houses and, just as inevitably, signified the actual if not the legal end of the civil administration and the substitution of the military commander as the supreme authority in Papua. The difficulties of divided control became accentuated and the processes of civil administration rapidly became more and more confused, particularly after Japanese air raids on Port Moresby on 3rd and 5th February which caused panic among the natives. After the second attack the civil administration was unable to maintain order in the town. On the 6th the Administrator was told that the War Cabinet had approved the temporary cessation of civil government in Papua. This decision was gazetted in Canberra on the 12th. The Administrator published a *Gazette Extraordinary* on the 14th stating that civil government had ceased at noon that day; he left for Australia on the 15th and, that day, Morris issued an order by which he assumed all government power.

Many of the functions of civil administration had to be maintained and it was necessary particularly to preserve, as far as possible, control of native labour. The authority of both the Government and the private employers had already broken down, or was fast doing so, in many areas, so that conditions of anarchy quickly developed among the natives of those areas. It was also most desirable that the Territories' production of copra and rubber should continue to the greatest possible extent. Early in March Morris posted most of the officers of both civil administrations, and many other men experienced in the Territories, to two new units—the Papuan Administrative Unit and the New Guinea Administrative Unit. Lieutenant Elliott-Smith⁹—formerly Assistant Resident Magistrate at Samarai who had been called to Port Moresby late in January to work on Morris' staff as a link between the military and civil authorities—organised the Papuan, and Captain Townsend,¹ formerly a senior District Officer in the New Guinea Administration, the New Guinea Administrative Unit. The two units were merged on 21st March and became the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit—Angau—to function as a military administrative unit for both Territories. At that time Angau was divided into a headquarters and two branches: District Services—to police the Territories and maintain law and order, regard the welfare of the native people, and to provide and control native labour; Production Services—to provide the food required by the natives, transport for the men of the District Services and those working the plantations, and technical direction for production.

The other forces which Morris commanded consisted in the main of the 30th Brigade Group. In February 1941 the Australian Chiefs of Staff had directed attention to the possibilities of a Japanese advance by way of New Guinea. Out of that had come a decision to send the 49th (Queens-

⁹ Lt-Col S. Elliott-Smith, PX134; Angau; CO 1 Papuan Inf Bn 1944-46. Resident magistrate; of Samarai, Papua; b. Ulverstone, Tas, 10 Aug 1900.

¹ Lt-Col G. W. L. Townsend, OBE, VX117176. (1st AIF: Lt 3 Army Bde AFA.) Angau and FELO. District officer; b. Sandgate, Qld, 5 Apr 1896.

land) Battalion to Port Moresby, where one of its companies had been since July. This battalion had been formed as a result of the division of the 9th/49th Battalion into its two original components; each battalion then completed its establishment with volunteers for islands' service. But the 49th contained a great many very young soldiers and, until well into 1942, was considered to be neither well-trained nor well-disciplined. At the time of the main party's arrival in March 1941, the Port Moresby defence plans centred on the Paga Coastal Defence Battery of two 6-inch guns. The defence of these guns was the basic task of the 1,200 men of the garrison. After the warning on 8th December by the Australian Chiefs of Staff that the Japanese would soon attempt to occupy Rabaul and Port Moresby, General Sturdee's assessment that the minimum strength required at each of these two places was one brigade group, and a decision that Port Moresby (and Darwin) must be considered second only to the vital Australian east coast areas, efforts were made to reinforce these outposts. The 39th and 53rd Battalions, and other units of the 30th Brigade, arrived at Port Moresby on 3rd January. But these reinforcements were also very raw and very young. (One calculation later placed their average age, excluding officers, at about 18½.²)

The 39th Battalion was a Victorian unit which had been formed in September 1941 from elements of the 2nd Cavalry and the 3rd and 4th (Infantry) Divisions; some units had sent good men to the new battalion, but others had taken the opportunity to "unload" unwanted officers and men. The commander, Lieut-Colonel Conran,³ who had served in the 1914-18 War, had tried to ensure that each of his companies would be commanded by an old soldier who would also have another veteran as his second-in-command. He had been vigorous in training. In November a spontaneous and widespread move by men in the battalion to enlist in the A.I.F. had been frustrated because recruits for that force were not then being accepted.

The 53rd Battalion, however, had had rather a different history. Up to November 1941 it had been part of the composite 55th/53rd (New South Wales) Battalion, but was then given separate identity, "specially enlisted for tropical service", and marked for movement to Darwin. In developing its separate form, however, it was made up from detachments from many units in New South Wales and (as often happened in such cases) was given many unwanted men from those units. At the time of its formation most of the men had had three months' militia training though about 200 of them had been called up as late as 1st October. As its embarkation date approached towards the end of December many of its members were illegally absent, bitter because they had been given no Christmas leave, so that, just before it sailed, its ranks were hastily filled with an assortment of rather astonished and unwilling individuals gathered from widely varied sources. Consequently it was a badly trained, ill-

² Report of Barry Commission on Cessation of Papuan Civil Administration in 1942.

³ Col H. M. Conran, ED, V50227. (1st AIF: Lt 23 Bn.) CO 39 Bn 1941 to May 1942; OC of Troop trains 1943-45. Horticulturalist; of Red Cliffs, Vic; b. S.S. *Gallia*, Irish Sea, 9 Jul 1889.

disciplined and generally resentful collection of men who landed at Port Moresby on 3rd January as the 53rd Battalion.

These three inexperienced and ill-equipped battalions—39th, 49th and 53rd—had the 13th Field Regiment and the 23rd Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery to support them. (The original establishment of the anti-aircraft battery was increased by the diversion to Port Moresby of additional anti-aircraft guns which had been destined for Rabaul so that, by March, it was organised on the basis of a fixed station of four 3.7-inch guns at Tuaguba Hill and three mobile 3-inch gun stations whose positions were changed frequently.)

Morris also had two units of local origin which spread wide as a reconnaissance screen. The first was the Papuan Infantry Battalion (P.I.B.), consisting of Papuan natives, led by Australian officers and a number of Australian N.C.O's. The nucleus of this battalion had been formed as one company in June 1940, through the efforts of Major Logan,⁴ a Papuan police officer, who became its first commanding officer. Soon after Japan came into the war Logan was succeeded by Major Watson,⁵ a bluff outspoken man, quick in thought and speech, who had been with the P.I.B. since its formation. He had served as a young artillery officer in the old A.I.F. and had won a reputation for great personal courage. He was one of the old hands in New Guinea, had "made his pile" in the gold rush days and was disappointed that only a few of his junior leaders were New Guinea identities. Most of them had been brought in from various units serving in the Moresby area—notably from the 49th Battalion—as the second and third companies were formed during 1941. Since the value of this unit was seen to lie chiefly in its knowledge of local conditions, and its main role would be scouting and reconnaissance in which the bushcraft of the natives could be used to the fullest extent, the disadvantages of having officers and N.C.O's who were not experienced in the country were obvious. Morris, however, soon had the Papuans operating in the role for which they had been enlisted and, by February, Lieutenant Jesser⁶ and his platoon were patrolling the Papuan north coast from Buna to the Waria River, while other platoons were screening lines of possible approach closer to Port Moresby.

The second local unit was the New Guinea Volunteer Rifles. So scrupulous had the Australian Government been in observing its undertakings to the League of Nations that, until the beginning of war in 1939, it had refrained from making any defence preparations whatever in the Mandated Territory. Shortly before that, however, returned soldiers took a vigorous lead in demanding that at least some effort should be made to arm and train those residents who wished to be better prepared to defend themselves and their homes. Colonel J. Walstab, the Chief of Police, was

⁴ Maj L. Logan, P3. (1st AIF: Lt 1st Div Train.) CO 1 PIB 1940-42. Government official; of Port Moresby, Papua; b. Maidstone, Kent, England, 7 Feb 1892.

⁵ Maj W. T. Watson, DSO, MC, DCM, NX144850. (1st AIF: AN&MEF; Lt 6 Bty 2 AFA Bde.) CO 1 PIB 1942-44. Gold miner; of Columbiano, Ohio, USA; b. Nelson, NZ, 10 Nov 1887.

⁶ Maj H. J. Jesser, MC, QX53205; 1 PIB. Railway employee; of Brisbane; b. Rockhampton, Qld, 11 Apr 1917.

one of the leaders of this movement and, largely because of his efforts, it was finally decided to form a militia-type battalion in New Guinea.

Army Headquarters issued the necessary authority on 4th September 1939 for the raising of what was to become known as the N.G.V.R. But the members were to be volunteers, who would be unpaid until they were mobilised, and warlike stores would not be issued to them direct as to an army unit but through the Administration police force. Nor was their strength to be more than about half the normal strength of a battalion although the original limit of 20 officers and 400 other ranks was raised to 23 and 482 by June 1940. These numbers were to provide for a headquarters, headquarters wing, machine-gun section and one rifle company (less two platoons) at Rabaul; a rifle and a machine-gun company at Wau; one rifle company each at Salamaua and Lae; machine-gun sections at Kokopo (near Rabaul), Kavieng and Madang.

The early days of the battalion were marked by vigour and enthusiasm with the old soldiers taking a leading part. Two regular instructors were sent from Australia and travelled from centre to centre introducing modern training methods. By mid-1941, however, the battalion had lost much of its zest. Many of the youngest and most ardent members had gone away to the war. Particularly on the goldfields, those who remained were finding the difficulties of getting from their scattered and often remote homes to the training centres increasingly irksome, and were disappointed at the seeming scarcity of stores and ammunition for training.

In September, Captain Edwards,⁷ who had been one of the most enthusiastic of the mainland volunteers since the creation of the battalion, was promoted to command the unit and set up his headquarters at Bulolo. He was already on full-time duty and so could concentrate on his unusual task which required him to be adjutant as well as commander. To help him Warrant-Officer Umphelby,⁸ one of the regular instructors, was promoted lieutenant and made quartermaster. Several of the men (notably Sergeant Emery⁹ and Rifleman Vernon¹) were available full time. By December Edwards' mainland strength was 170 to 180. Although immediately after Japan entered the war Morris was authorised to place the battalion on full-time duty only a comparatively small group was then called up and it was not until 21st January that the battalion was actually mobilised.

At the beginning of January the air force based on Port Moresby had only two squadrons of flying-boats, with a protective reconnaissance role. At the end of the month there were only 6 Hudsons, 4 Wirraways and 2 Catalinas there and General Wavell would not, either then or in mid-February, consent to divert American Kittyhawk fighters (P-40s) then

⁷ Col W. M. Edwards, CMG, MBE, NGX455. (1st AIF: 13 Bn; Capt British Army.) CO NGVR 1941-44; Comd Pacific Islands Regt 1944-45. Labour superintendent; of Lae, TNG; b. Enmore, NSW, 27 Feb 1896.

⁸ Maj D. H. Umphelby, VX114300. NGVR and various Base Sub-Area appts. Regular soldier; of Toorak, Vic; b. Toorak, Vic, 10 Oct 1905.

⁹ Lt R. E. Emery, MM, NG2001. NGVR and Angau, Planter; of Madang, TNG, and Campbelltown, SA; b. Kapunda, SA, 19 Nov 1908.

¹ Rfn R. E. Vernon, NG2003; NGVR. Prospector; of Black Cat Creek, TNG; and Brisbane; b. Brisbane, 20 Nov 1909. Killed in action 19 Jul 1942.

available in Australia and destined for ABDA Command. At this same time the naval organisation in Papua-New Guinea consisted of shore installations only. In the wider naval plan it seemed unlikely that a sufficiently powerful naval force could be concentrated off the east coast of Australia to prevent a Japanese move against Port Moresby.

Fortunately for the Australians there came a pause in events between late January and early March while the Japanese organised their next major moves forward. In New Guinea the obvious immediate objectives were the four most important European centres along the mainland coast —Wewak, Madang, Lae and Salamaua. In all of these the bombing of the three last-named on 21st January set off a series of extraordinary events.

Wewak was the administrative centre of the Sepik District (the largest of the New Guinea Administration districts) which stretched from the Dutch border eastward along more than one-third of the Mandated Territory coastline and south as far as the Papuan border. It took its name from the Sepik River which flowed through its centre from Dutch New Guinea to the sea between Madang and Wewak. Between the coast and the river the country was made forbidding by the rugged Bewani and Torricelli Mountains. South of the river lay the almost unknown heart of New Guinea, shut in by the Central and Muller Ranges running from east to west, heaving their broken heights to 13,000 feet and more, enclosing the Papua-New Guinea border between them. But it was the river itself which gave the district its distinctive character. In its course of some 700 miles it spread into seemingly limitless swamps, flowed deeply through a main channel a quarter of a mile or more wide in places, and bore with it masses of debris and floating islands of tangled grass and scrub. Crocodiles infested it, and hordes of mosquitoes bred there. The sago-eating people who lived along the river were of smouldering temperament and oppressed with witchcraft and superstitious fears. Traditionally they were head-hunters. In the big houses which were the ceremonial centres of each village, they hung by the hair long rows of heads, each head dried and smoked and with the features modelled in painted clay.

District Officer Jones² was in charge of the Sepik District. He had been an original Anzac at 19 years of age, and had gone to New Guinea soon after his return from the 1914-18 War. He was a big man with a ruddy complexion and an unhurried manner. At the beginning of January he had worked out an escape route for the people of his district to follow if they were cut off by sea and air: by way of the Sepik, the Karawari (a tributary of the Sepik), overland to the Strickland River and on to Daru on the south coast of Papua. In determining this route he heeded the advice of J. H. Thurston, who had been one of the pioneers of the Morobe goldfields and later pioneered the fields near Wewak, and Assistant District Officer Taylor,³ who had already, on a great patrol, covered much of the country through which the proposed route passed.

² Lt-Col J. H. Jones, PX128. (1st AIF; Sgt 2 Fd Amb.) Angau. District officer; of Sepik River District; b. Liverpool, Eng. 7 May 1895.

³ Maj J. L. Taylor, PX68; Angau. Assistant District Officer; b. Sydney, 25 Jan 1904.

After the news of the bombings of 21st January most of the 30 or 40 private European people in the district gathered in the camps which Jones was preparing and stocking on the Karawari and there awaited further instructions about evacuation. By mid-February, however, they were restless and began to leave the Karawari for Angoram, the Administration post on the Sepik, about 60 miles from the river mouth. Most believed the overland trip which Jones had planned for them to be impossible. About this time some hopes developed that it might be possible for them to be flown out to safety, but these were disappointed. On the 19th Jones ordered Rifleman Macgregor⁴ (of the N.G.V.R. Madang detachment), a pre-war Sepik recruiter and trader who had been using his two schooners on the river on evacuation tasks, to take the Administration launch *Thetis* and four schooners out to Madang. This Macgregor did, accompanied by four other Australians (to supplement the boats' non-Australian crews). They reached Madang safely and, under orders from Sergeant Russell⁵ who was in charge of the N.G.V.R. there, worked bravely from that point, either crossing to New Britain to assist survivors from Rabaul or building up stores along the route to the Ramu and assisting parties into that area. Jones meanwhile had sent word to Angoram that he proposed remaining at Wewak with some of his staff and that the rest of the Administration staff would remain on duty in the district.

At this time the behaviour of the Assistant District Officer at Angoram began to disturb Jones and, on 10th March, he told Taylor to take over. The Angoram officer's mind had, however, become unhinged. He refused to leave his station, and armed and entrenched about 40 of his native police; on the 20th he fought a pitched battle for more than two hours with Taylor and the party with him, shot Taylor and drove him and the rest of the Europeans away from the station.

Next day Jones arrived on the river. He then planned to attack the station with the help of seven other Europeans and seven natives. On the 23rd they closed in on the station. But the Assistant District Officer there had shot himself dead and his police had fled. Jones then left Assistant District Officer Bates⁶ in charge at Angoram and departed for Wewak on the 24th.

Scarcely had Jones gone than Bates had word that some of the rebel police had killed Patrol Officer R. Strudwick on his way down from the Karawari to Angoram. Later rebel police also killed three European miners, two Chinese and many natives, ravaged a wide area, fomented local uprisings at some points and caused serious disorders among the natives generally before they themselves were finally killed or apprehended.

Meanwhile practically all the other European residents of the district,

⁴ WO R. Macgregor, NG2168. (1st AIF: Pte 36 and 34 Bns.) NGVR and Angau. Recruiter and trader; of Madang, TNG; b. Parish of Cumberland, NSW, 13 Jan 1893.

⁵ Lt G. Russell, NGX425. NGVR; Angau. Business manager; of Madang, TNG; b. Darlington, Eng, 6 Jun 1904.

⁶ Maj C. D. Bates, MC, PX129; Angau. Assistant District Officer; of Rabaul, TNG; b. Uitenhage, South Africa, 4 Aug 1907. Died 1 Jan 1954.

except the Administration staff, had set out finally to get clear of the approaching Japanese. On his arrival on the river Jones had sent about 12 of them off in the schooner *Nereus* with instructions to land at Bogadjim and make their way overland to safety from that point. After the fight at Angoram Thurston took a party as far as they could travel by water up the May River to start overland thence for Daru through the mysterious breadth of New Guinea. At the end of April, 8 Europeans and 82 natives, they struck into the mountains on foot.⁷

Jones and his men then busied themselves with the long task of bringing the renegade police to book and restoring order among the natives who had become disaffected—and with the general task of maintaining their administration.⁸

Meanwhile, in the adjoining Madang District, the civil administration was interrupted by the bombing of Madang on 21st January. Most of the civil population of the town then gathered at a pre-arranged assembly point about two miles to the south. Next day they set out on foot along an evacuation route which had been planned previously. Within a fortnight most of them arrived at Kainantu (in the Central Highlands due south of Madang). There they remained, comfortably situated, until the fit men of military age among them were ordered to report for military service and the others went on to Mount Hagen to be flown out to Australia.

When Madang was thus evacuated Sergeant Russell assumed control of the town, but he and his few men were in a most difficult situation after the civil authority over the natives disappeared and when several more bombing raids during the ensuing weeks intensified the confusion. When District Officer Penglase⁹ arrived to take charge of the district on 24th May he noted:

Natives [had] found themselves in circumstances to which they were not accustomed. Overnight, the Government, with its benevolent policy in which they had the greatest confidence and respect, no longer functioned. Roads, gardens and villages were neglected, and some natives, hitherto residing in villages near Madang, evacuated and moved to safer locations in the bush. Vast numbers were passing through the district from Morobe and other places of employment, whilst others were travel-

⁷ Thurston and his whole party arrived safely at Daru on 21st September.

⁸ On 19th May Jones heard that the Japanese had occupied Hollandia, the capital of Dutch New Guinea. He decided to visit the area and discover the exact position for himself. On 25th May, with three NGVR men (Sergeant Russell and Riflemen J. West and A. W. Esson) who had come from Madang, and ten native police, he left Wewak in a small motor vessel. From Wutong (on the border) he sent scouts towards Hollandia. On their return these reported that the Japanese had been at Hollandia but had gone again. Jones and his party then sailed into Hollandia Harbour on the afternoon of the 28th. They set up a flagpole on the jetty and ceremonially hoisted the Australian Blue Ensign. "The local populace appeared to be impressed with this ceremony," Jones wrote later. "Our reception could not be termed cordial, in fact their general demeanour appeared sullen, but this may be a wrong impression as it is possible that our appearance was such a surprise that they were, shall we say, flabbergasted and were in doubt as to what was going to happen." The Australians then began a tour of inspection of the town while "a large crowd of Asiatics followed in our wake". A Javanese medical officer told them that the Japanese had come there on the 6th in an aircraft carrier and two destroyers and landed several officers and about 200 marines. The Japanese raided the Government stores, killed all the livestock they could find, "drank the town dry" and then went away taking with them the Dutch Controleur, his wife and child and a Dutch priest, and saying that they would be back in three weeks. The Australians hauled down their flag at 6 p.m. with the same formality with which they had raised it and sailed at 7 p.m. They narrowly escaped capture by a Japanese destroyer on their way back to Wewak.

⁹ Maj N. Penglase, NGX301; Angau. District officer; of Wau, TNG; b. Echuca, Vic, 23 Jan 1902.

ling to the Markham, Finschhafen and Waria, spreading the most impossible rumours. Japanese bombs had struck fear into their very hearts and they were bewildered and apprehensive about the future. In addition the town had been looted, plantations were deserted and practically every unprotected home had been ransacked. In this connection it can be said that the natives were not only responsible. The District Office had been demolished, all records destroyed and the safe blown open and robbed of its entire contents of value. Missionaries, however, had remained at their respective stations and were exercising their influence in an endeavour to maintain control of the natives, and members of the New Guinea Volunteer Rifles also did good work in this respect. . . . The only [Administration] officers remaining in the District on the 24th May were Lieutenant J. R. Black¹⁰ at Bogia, who had not received any instructions and decided to remain at his post, and Lieutenant R. H. Boyan who was actively engaged assisting in the evacuation of troops from New Britain.

During this January-May period events in Lae and Salamaua moved more swiftly than elsewhere in the Mandated Territory. The Japanese needed Lae to build into a forward air base and they needed Salamaua to make Lae secure. The two towns were the air and sea points of entry into the forbidding country of the great goldfields area of New Guinea.

The inland town of Wau was the centre of that area. Primitive tracks converged on it from the mouth of the Lakekamu River on the southern coast of Papua and from Salamaua and Lae on the north-east coast. But the country through which these tracks passed was an upheaved mass of twisted mountains, rising and sprawling seven and eight thousand feet above the level of the sea, the peaks cloud-covered, mists swirling away from the slopes and summits as the sun rose. Lonely winds blew among the trees which spread like a tumultuous ocean of green as far as the eye could reach. There was the noise of many waters falling or hurrying through deep ravines. The mountains were the homes of wild tribes.

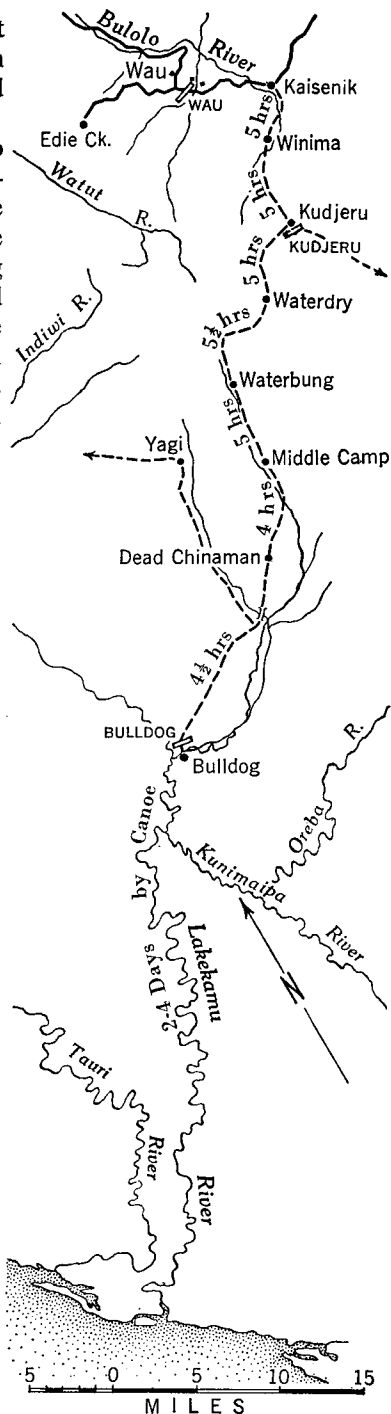
On the southern coast the Lakekamu River mouth was 150 miles north-west of Port Moresby, 12 to 15 days' journey by land, up to 24 hours' by small lugger or schooner. Bulldog was 50 miles up river, slightly east of north from the mouth. Then over broken ridges and mountain crests and slopes, a difficult way wound generally still northward to Kudjeru, 35 miles as the crow flies, but up to a week of exhausting climbing and walking.¹ From Kudjeru to Wau by way of Kaisenik was two days' fairly comfortable walking. This was the only feasible overland route from Port Moresby to Wau. But the general area through which it passed from Bulldog to Kudjeru was the sinister "Baum country", scarcely known,

¹⁰ Lt-Col J. R. Black, PX130. Angau and BBKAU, Assistant District Officer; of Bogia, TNG, and Mount Compass, SA; b. Adelaide, 12 May 1908.

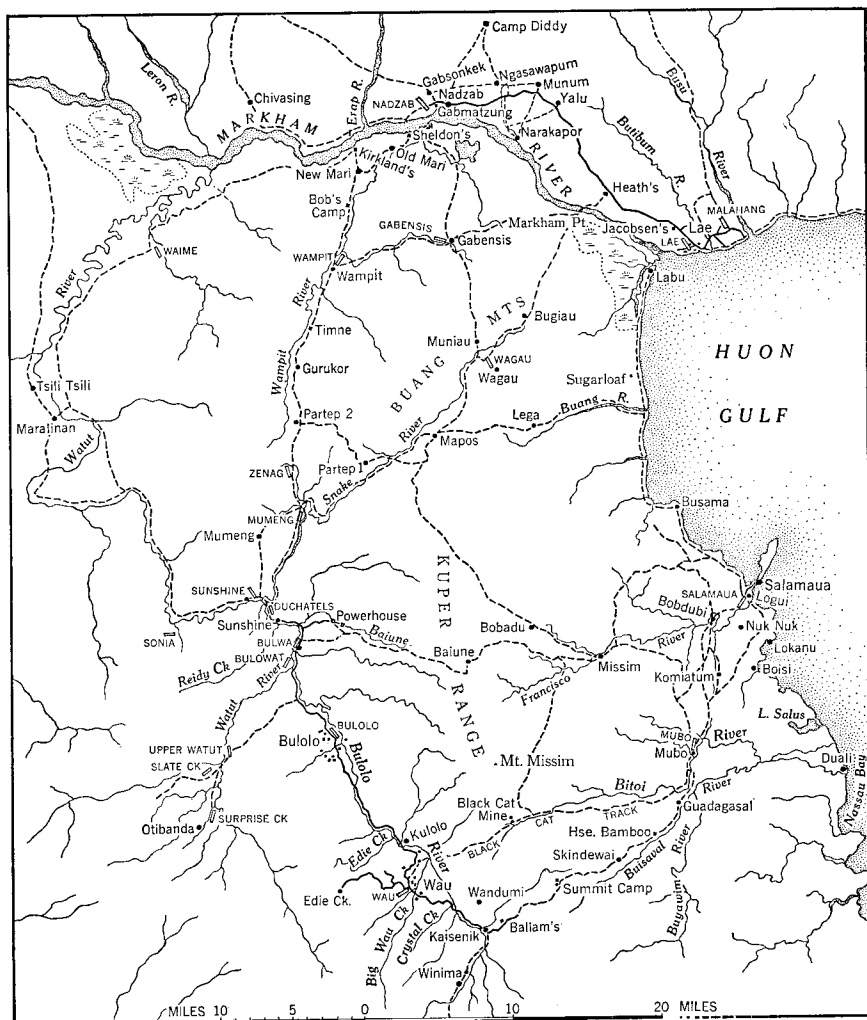
¹ The mountains in New Guinea were so rough and the tracks so primitive that the only practicable way generally of indicating distance was through "walking time". This would, of course, vary greatly according to the capacity and condition of the walker and the load he carried. In pre-war New Guinea, however, it was rare for a European to carry anything except perhaps a stick and a firearm when he travelled in the bush. Where walking times are referred to throughout this narrative, therefore, they are (unless it is otherwise stated) intended to indicate the times which would be taken by an unburdened European, used to walking in the mountains and travelling at what would be regarded by pre-war residents as an average rate. Heavily burdened soldiers, not used to the New Guinea mountains, might normally take about three times as long to cover the same distances. When moving tactically through areas where enemies were present, or sick or exhausted by operations, bad food or lack of food they would probably take much longer again.

and what knowledge there was of it had been gained from events which marked well its own savage nature and that of the people who lived there.

Hellmuth Baum was a German who refused to surrender when the Australians first seized New Guinea. He disappeared into the mountains where he wandered barefoot for years among the natives, learned their ways and languages and prospected for gold. He reported himself when the war ended and then continued his wanderings and prospecting. He was a gentle and just man. In 1931 Kukukuku natives, welcome in his camp at the headwaters of the Indivi River (a tributary of the Lakekamu), treacherously killed him. One struck him a terrible blow on the head with a stone club. They cut off his head with one of his own axes and then disembowelled him and sang over the remains. Quite methodically they began clubbing his carriers to death. They killed seven of these but a number escaped. When the District Officer (Eric Feldt—who later directed the coastwatchers after the Japanese invasion began) received this news, he took a patrol towards the scene of the murders but the country largely defeated him. Penglase, then an Assistant District Officer, led a series of remarkable patrols into the area during the year October 1931-October 1932 to try to arrest the murderers and find practicable routes through the baffling country. His patrols were attacked by the natives and suffered hardships among the rugged and inhospitable mountains but, as a result of these trips, Kudjeru was established as a "jumping-off" point from the Wau side and the line of a primitive route between Kudjeru and Bulldog was established.



To the north-east of Wau was the Buisaval Track, which followed the surveyed route of a proposed road from Wau to Salamaua. First it led south-east along the Bulolo River to Kaisenik then swung north-east to Ballam's, climbing a steady grade which passed over dry and sun-drenched



Wau-Salamaua-Lae area

kunai ridges. It was three to four hours' walk from Wau to Ballam's. From Ballam's to the summit of the main range lying between the Bulolo Valley and the coast it was about three hours' comfortable climbing, for the first hour over more dry kunai ridges but then through cool, damp mountain bush. From the summit the track dropped for three hours in a steady downhill grade to the north-east, through bush and over many

sparkling streams to Skindewai. Thence it continued for three to four hours to House Bamboo, over rougher ways and precipitous mountain sides, falling down to the deep valley of the Buisaval River which the track paralleled. Then it climbed sharply to the Guadagasal Saddle, precipitously below which on the east, down the tangled and rushing mountain, the Buisaval raged into its junction with the Buyawim River and, equally close in the plunging depths on the other side, the Bitoi River swept into the so-called Mubo Gorge (a valley of narrow river flats between steep mountains). From the Guadagasal Saddle the track leaped down into the Mubo Gorge, and within 40 minutes, crossed the Bitoi by a swaying kunda² bridge and junctioned with the track which ran from Wau to Mubo by way of the Black Cat Creek and the Bitoi River. The village of Mubo was less than half an hour's walking along the bed of the Bitoi. From Mubo the track turned due north out of the depths of the Bitoi River system, over three to four hours of exhausting climbing, before it broke forth into the harsh kunai country, into sight of the sea far below, and into the village of Komiatum. There was then nearly two hours' travel down and across hot and thirsty ridges before the track ran into the steaming, green, flat country at Nuk Nuk, and so quickly down the last reaches of the Francisco River, across it into the village of Logui and on to the narrow isthmus on which Salamaua lay.

The Black Cat Track left the Bulolo River just north of Wau, climbed to the head of the Black Cat Creek, then followed the Bitoi River to junction with the Buisaval Track near Mubo. It had been the original route from the coast into the goldfields of the Bulolo Valley but, by the time the war came, was rarely used. A little farther down again along the Bulolo was the beginning of another track, but this was even more undeveloped and more rarely used than the Black Cat Track. It struck north from Wau to the village of Missim then turned east to follow the Francisco River to its mouth less than two miles from Salamaua.

From Wau a motor road ran north-west down the valley of the Bulolo River, after about twelve miles passing through the Bulolo Gold Dredging Company's township of Bulolo, running on to Bulwa and thence to Sunshine. From that area two main tracks branched. The one turned north-east over scorched and broken kunai ridges, becoming alternative tracks which followed either the valley of the Snake River or the high ground east of it and converged at Mapos. The Snake Valley provided easier going, the alternative route a good path but arduous travelling over timbered ranges, down and up steep gorges. From Mapos the track provided hard climbing over the Buang Mountains, then fell steeply to Lega and down the valley of the Buang River to the river's mouth. Generally these tracks would mean five or six days' strenuous walking from Wau. They had been favoured routes into the goldfields when gold first boomed at Edie Creek and along the Bulolo.

The second track led to Lae over some 80 miles. After crossing the

² A type of very strong vine, very common in the mountains of New Guinea. It is the rattan of commerce.

Snake it climbed steeply over grass ranges to Zenag, then dropped down the divide between the watersheds of the Snake and Wampit Rivers. It followed the course of the Wampit to its junction with the Markham, but threw off a branch at Wampit which struck east to the Markham through Gabensis. Down the broad Markham Valley from Nadzab a road some 26 miles long ran to Lae, through sun-drenched kunai grass and stony river flats.

On 21st January, just about noon, Patrol Officer Pursehouse³ reported from Finschhafen that some 60 Japanese aircraft were headed towards Lae and Salamaua. These divided and simultaneously struck hard at the two little towns, and at Bulolo, where five fighters, flying just above the ground up the valley, destroyed three Junkers, but, turning east again before they reached Wau, missed five aircraft on the field there.

The people at Lae got Pursehouse's warning and took cover, but the attackers left destruction and confusion behind them. As they flew away two Australian Wirraways from Rabaul dropped down out of the clouds where they had remained concealed and landed on the airfield among the wreckage of seven civil aircraft which had been on the ground when the Japanese arrived. Half an hour after the raiders went, Major Jenyns,⁴ second-in-command of the N.G.V.R. who had arrived just before the raid, went to see the Administrator, Sir Walter McNicoll, who, with a small group of senior officials, had been working from Lae for some time in anticipation of the final transfer of the capital from Rabaul. The Administrator was sick and weak from a difficult and protracted illness. He agreed with Jenyns that a state of emergency existed and told him to "take over" with his soldiers. Most of the civilians then moved out of the Markham Valley.

At Salamaua (where Pursehouse's report had not been received) the raiders took the town completely by surprise. They destroyed one R.A.A.F. and 10 or 12 civil aircraft on the ground. Despite the intensity and efficiency of the attack, however, there was only one Australian casualty. Kevin Parer (member of a well-known goldfields family and brother of Ray Parer who had been one of the England-Australia air pioneers) was in his loaded aeroplane, its engine running ready for take-off to Wau, when the Japanese struck. He was shot dead. Another pilot had just landed and, all unsuspecting, was taxiing to the hangar. Suddenly bullets were ripping through his plane and it was on fire. He dropped out of it and rolled into the kunai grass. After the raid all business in the town stopped and most of the European population (of whom there were probably 70 to 80 left at this time) "adjourned to the pub" to discuss the situation.⁵

³ Capt L. Pursehouse, PX178. Naval Intelligence (Coastwatchers); Angau; "M" Special Unit 1943-44. Patrol officer; of Finschhafen, TNG and Goulburn, NSW; b. Goulburn, 4 Nov 1912. Killed in action 17 Jan 1944.

⁴ Maj E. W. Jenyns, NGX350. (1st AIF: Lt 26 Bn.) NGVR and Angau. Gold miner and planter; of Lae, TNG; b. Beaudesert, Qld, 7 Sep 1893.

⁵ Account by Rfn H. W. T. Forrester.

Penglase, District Officer in charge of the Morobe District, whose headquarters were at Salamaua, had with him at this time R. Melrose, the Director of District Services and Native Affairs in the Administration. The Salamaua people heard nothing from Wau and Bulolo and feared that those centres had suffered heavily. They saw black smoke rise and hang over Lae but could not get in touch with the people there. They expected further attacks and, on the night of the 22nd, the civil population withdrew to a camp previously prepared in the bush outside the town. On the 23rd Melrose picked up enough news on a small wireless set to know that the Japanese were then at Rabaul.

There was general agreement that a Japanese landing at Salamaua was imminent and that all civilians should leave as soon as possible. But Penglase and Melrose were in a difficult position. Assuming, as they did, that all air traffic out of Wau had been immobilised, they decided that there were only two ways of escape: on foot, south to Port Moresby—and Penglase, one of the very few men who had experienced the rigours of that terrible country south of the Bulolo, felt that the old and the sick among them would never survive the journey; or by sea, down the coast, in the only two small craft and canoes available—a risky prospect in view of the known presence of large numbers of Japanese aircraft and the probable presence of hostile surface craft. Finally, however, they decided that Melrose, who was himself suffering from heart trouble, would take out by sea those who were obviously unfit for the overland trip (and the one woman among them, Sister Stock from the Salamaua hospital, who had been most steadfast) while Penglase led the rest towards the Lakekamu. The two parties set out on 24th January.

After their departure the only Europeans left in the town were six air force men, who were manning a signals station, and five or six of the N.G.V.R. with Sergeant Phillips⁶ directing them. Among the N.G.V.R. was Rifleman Forrester,⁷ who, with two or three others, had been on full-time duty in Salamaua since about mid-December preparing barbed wire and machine-gun posts.

In the days immediately after 21st January Phillips and his men were kept busy refuelling R.A.A.F. aircraft of which about four or six called most days. This was hard work as they had to do it from drums and natives were not always available to help them. The raid had frightened the natives, Administration control had disappeared, prisoners had been released from the gaol and some of them had secured arms, disorder was rife. Some little time after the civilians left, one of the R.A.A.F. pilots reported Japanese shipping which might have been moving towards Lae and Salamaua. When the N.G.V.R. relayed this to Port Moresby they were told to destroy all they could of Salamaua but not to leave until they were sure that occupation was imminent. That evening they threw petrol over the main offices, the stores and the hotel and burnt them.

⁶ Capt R. H. D. Phillips, NG2296. NGVR and Angau. Cashier; of Kila, TNG; b. Sydney, 12 Sep 1904.

⁷ Rfn H. W. T. Forrester, MM, NG2053. (1914-18: 3rd Canadian Div Sig Coy.) NGVR and Angau. Gold miner; of Salamaua, TNG; b. London, 9 Aug 1891.

Meanwhile, a scratch N.G.V.R. platoon under Lieutenant Owers,⁸ a surveyor with New Guinea Goldfields, had set out from Wau soon after the raid by way of Mubo, not knowing whether the Japanese had landed at Salamaua. As these men plodded towards the top of the range they passed groups of dispirited civilians making a slow way inland through the mountains and bleak bush which were foreign to most of them. With these were some N.G.V.R. men who, confused as to where command lay in the suddenly changed circumstances, had joined the civilian exodus. Corporal McAdam,⁹ a large, quiet forester with a battered nose who considered a man a weakling who could not do twenty miles a day in the mountains for days on end, pushed ahead of the rest of the platoon. From Salamaua he sent word of the situation back to Owers and some days later the platoon arrived at the isthmus to find the small group there in difficulties among disorderly natives.

Behind Owers' platoon Umphelby set out over the Buisaval Track about mid-February with the rest of his company (which included a medium machine-gun platoon). Before leaving Wau they requisitioned anything they thought might be useful to them. In appearance they were a motley group, wearing a medley of their own clothing and army uniforms, their equipment mostly of the 1914-18 War leather type, emu feathers in their hats. They had no steel helmets, no entrenching tools, and, except for a few made at the Bulolo workshops, no identity discs. All carried packs and haversacks, their packs weighing between 40 and 50 pounds. None of them had ever carried such loads before in their walking through New Guinea; in pre-war days, it had not been considered possible (or seemly) for a white man to carry even the smallest load in the mountains. Even in war many of them considered that they could not operate without their "boys" and so, when they reported in for service, brought their "labour lines" with them. Umphelby's company formed a "pool" of such natives and thus 70 "boys" or more moved with them in a long line. The company was typical of the N.G.V.R. They had knowledge of the problems of New Guinea, the terrain and of natives. Like the Boers in South Africa nearly half a century before, they had come together from their isolated homes to fight, but each yielded only as much of his own individuality as he thought fit. There were many of enthusiasm and great courage among them, but they had had little training which would fit them to operate as a coherent unit; their average age was about 35; their supply services were sketchy, and to provide food was always a problem.

Umphelby made Mubo his headquarters. He mounted two Vickers guns on a ridge commanding the entrance to the valley from Salamaua. In the days which followed he kept one platoon at Salamaua, changing it from time to time, disposed the rest for the protection of his base, and kept them at hard training and reconnaissance patrolling. One task of the Salamaua platoon was to watch for the approach of the Japanese. They

⁸ Capt N. Owers, NGX369. NGVR; Survey Corps; IORE NG Force, I Corps, II Corps. Licensed surveyor; of Wau, TNG; b. Inverell, NSW, 12 Apr 1907.

⁹ Maj J. B. McAdam, MM, NGX431. NGVR; Angau; CRE NG Forests 1944-45. Forestry officer; of Wau, TNG; b. Lancs, England, 6 Feb 1910.

manned Lookout No. 1, a camouflaged platform in a lofty tree on Scout Ridge (as it later came to be known), just south of the mouth of the Francisco River; this had been established immediately after the raid. Other tasks were to collect information and gather stores from the abandoned town—sugar, rice, tobacco and tinned goods—to send back to Komiatum and Mubo where supply dumps were being established.

At the beginning of March there came to the platoon at Salamaua a grim little band led by Captain A. G. Cameron. They were thirteen survivors from the 2/22nd Battalion which had been at Rabaul. Their leader was a ruthless and able soldier who, as a fugitive after the fall of Rabaul, had been in touch with General Morris' headquarters at Port Moresby, giving news of the disaster and of the movements of his fellow fugitives. Morris had ordered him to come out of New Britain if he felt sure that he could not engage in guerilla activities there, and Cameron had done so in a 21-foot boat with a two-stroke engine, bringing twelve men with him.

Meanwhile Edwards had increased his small local detachment at Lae to a company with Captain Lyon,¹ who had recently returned from a school in Australia, in command. Lyon spread three platoons from Lae to Wampit building up stores dumps. On 7th March five aircraft raided Lae, which had been laid waste and was almost empty. Lyon then got word that a big convoy was headed in his direction. He himself stayed in the town with four men to await events while the rest of his men, making for Nadzab, prepared to destroy the one remaining petrol dump—at Jacobsen's Plantation, about two miles from Lae in the Markham Valley, where 15 cars also awaited destruction. At 4.45 a.m. on the 8th Lyon was awakened to hear the noise of Japanese coming ashore. He had a lorry waiting. He and his men, accompanied by three natives, then turned their backs on the lost town, and went up the main road towards Nadzab.

That morning the Japanese landed also at Salamaua, where the bulk of the N.G.V.R. platoon fell back across the Francisco River leaving behind a few men, with whom were Cameron and several 2/22nd Battalion survivors, to demolish the aerodrome and fire the petrol dump. As Cameron and his runner, Lance-Corporal Brannelly,² were falling back, Brannelly shot an enemy soldier at point-blank range—probably the only Japanese casualty from land action in the landings either at Lae or Salamaua. After the rear party had crossed the bridge over the Francisco, and when the Japanese appeared on its approaches from the Salamaua side, the N.G.V.R. men destroyed it. Most of them then took the track back to Mubo.

From late January to early March Wau had become an evacuation centre. After the January bombings most of the European and Asian civil population of the goldfields gathered there feeling that they had only a limited time to get out of the threatened area. They were joined by the

¹ Maj H. M. Lyon, NX151701. NGVR; Angau; 1 NGIB. Store manager; of Lae, TNG; b. Glasgow, Scotland, 14 Aug 1907.

² L-Sgt T. A. V. Brannelly, VX12987; 2/22 Bn. Labourer; of Clifton Hill, Vic; b. Bacchus Marsh, Vic, 21 Dec 1918.

civilians from Lae who came in on foot under the leadership of E. Taylor³ (Assistant Director of District Services and Native Affairs in the Administration) and the overland party from Salamaua whom Penglase had diverted to Wau when he discovered, after pressing ahead of the rest, that that town was still intact. On his way out by air the Administrator had appointed the senior Assistant District Officer there (McMullen⁴) Deputy Administrator, and Assistant District Officer Niall⁵ was helping McMullen. They managed to get some of the displaced people out to Port Moresby by air with hardy pilots flying aircraft which, in some cases, they would not normally have been permitted to take into the air. Soon, however, it was evident that no more unescorted air traffic could be allowed in and out of New Guinea; the R.A.A.F., hard pressed, could not supply fighters to assist and the air line closed.

After the arrival of the Lae party Taylor took charge of an improvised refugee camp which was set up at Edie Creek. He was a man highly respected and of great experience in New Guinea. As the senior Administration official on the spot he felt a deep responsibility for the people in his care and was determined to prevent them falling into the hands of the Japanese. And most of these people themselves were restless and were ready to face the hardships of travelling over unknown or little known country rather than accept capture. The advice of Penglase and three local surveyors (Ecclestone,⁶ Fox⁷ and G. E. Ballam) was therefore sought. They decided that Fox and Ballam should head a party to blaze the track to Bulldog and locate and build camps between Wau and Bulldog each capable of housing 40 people; that, three days in their rear, parties of carriers, each under an Administration official, should begin leaving Wau daily to build up food stocks at each camp. In the meantime the authorities at Port Moresby had been asked to arrange to provide food at, and sea transport from, the mouth of the Lakekamu for 250 people from 25th February. Fox and Ballam led their party out on 9th February. There were three other Europeans, 70 native carriers and five native policemen. They carried out their task but the plan to maintain supplies along the route was not realised and the parties of evacuees leaving Wau subsequently carried their rations with them and supplemented them from a dump which had been built up at Kudjeru. Penglase and Ecclestone led one of these parties to Bulldog and then returned to Wau. Taylor took approximately 60 European and Chinese men out from Edie Creek on 7th March. In this fashion all the refugees reached Port Moresby safely.

March, however, brought other troubles to the goldfields. On the morning of the 1st, nine bombers struck at the centres there, and, heavily, at

³ Lt-Col E. Taylor, MBE, NX163949; Angau. Assistant Director of District Services and Native Affairs; of Lae, TNG; b. Mt Morgan, Qld, 25 Sep 1889.

⁴ Col K. C. McMullen, NGX371. Angau; Directorate of Research LHQ; BBICAU. Assistant District Officer; of Wau, TNG; b. Sydney, 17 Nov 1904.

⁵ Maj H. L. R. Niall, CBE, NGX373; Angau. Assistant District Officer; of Wau, TNG; b. Coolah, NSW, 14 Oct 1904.

⁶ Capt J. W. Ecclestone, NG3501. Angau; RAE (Forestry) 1944-45. Surveyor; of Lae, TNG; b. Karlsruhe, Vic, 15 Apr 1898.

⁷ Maj C. W. G. Fox, P454. Angau; RAE (Forestry) 1944-45. Surveyor; mining warden and forestry inspector; of Wau, TNG; b. Albury, NSW, 8 Dec 1901.

Wau. When, a week later, news of the landings at Lae and Salamaua reached Major Edwards at N.G.V.R. Headquarters, he moved from the Bulolo to the Watut and reported to Port Moresby that he was preparing to destroy all the important installations from Wau to Baiune (the great Bulolo Gold Dredging "power house" area on the Baiune River). Because of his lack of suitable portable radio equipment the move cost him communication with both his forward positions and Morris' headquarters and he remained out of touch until the 16th. The drone of many aircraft passing above him but hidden by rain and low clouds suggested the possibility of parachute attacks, of which very lively apprehensions were common throughout the whole valley at this time. On the morning of the 9th he gave orders for demolitions to begin. The two main power stations at Bulolo and Baiune and the main bridges at Wau and Bulolo were then put out of action. (Bombs had previously set off demolition charges which had been placed ready in the main Bulolo workshops.) Vehicles throughout the valley which might be useful to the invaders were immobilised.

During the next week Edwards had no news until the 16th. On that day a runner came to him with news from the coast (which he believed) that the invaders were preparing to move out from Lae up the Markham and that a platoon which had previously been sent from Lae to the mouth of the Buang River to cover that line of advance had been surprised by Japanese raiders. Thereupon he ordered his forward men to fall back. When, however, he realised that he had made a mistake he sent Umphelby and his company back to Mubo, established N.G.V.R. Headquarters firmly at Reidy Creek (four miles from Bulwa) with Jenyns in charge, and himself took command at the Lae end where his main centre was set up at Camp Diddy.

But the Japanese, it seemed, were in no hurry to push inland. Their first definite move in that direction came from Salamaua on 18th March, ten days after the landings. That day about 60 Japanese led by 4 natives, marched to Komiatum, destroyed the N.G.V.R. stores dump there, and returned to Salamaua. On the Lae side the invaders kept to the township area for several weeks, getting the aerodrome into order and establishing base workshops and dumps.

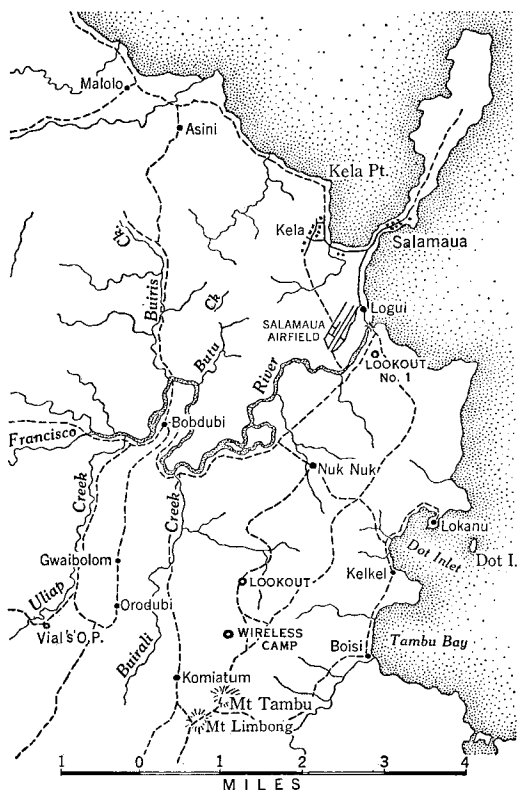
The Japanese pause gave the New Guinea men time to meet new problems. Their supply systems which depended on long carrier lines began to work better, communications, medical and other services were put on a sounder basis, a school of instruction was established at Wau, scouting parties began to slip up to and through the fringes of the Japanese positions, and vitally important observation posts, some of which had been prepared and were operating before the invasions, were manned.

In the Salamaua area Lookout No. 1 which had been abandoned after the Japanese arrival was reoccupied in April by the men of one of the newly-formed N.G.V.R. scout sections, under McAdam, now a sergeant.

When the first confusion which followed the arrival of the Japanese was dying down Edwards had told McAdam that information of what the

invaders were doing at Salamaua was vital. McAdam said he would get it if he were allowed to pick his own men. He chose Jim Cavanaugh,⁸ a forester like himself but younger in the service, fair haired and blue eyed; Geoff Archer,⁹ a welder with the Bulolo Gold Dredging Company and a wanderer by instinct; Bert Jentzsch,¹ older than the others, a mine manager; Gordon Kinsey,² Bob Day,³ and Jim Currie.⁴ These were all men who loved the bush and had an instinctive understanding of its ways.

McAdam began his move forward on 30th March. He made very quick time to Mubo and went on to get the latest information from Pilot Officer Leigh Vial,⁵ a promising young Assistant District Officer who had escaped from New Britain after the occupation of Rabaul, became one of the coastwatchers, and was installed by Umphelby's men in a lofty lookout about eight miles in a bee-line south-west of Salamaua. (For some six months his quiet voice was to be heard regularly at Port Moresby reporting full details of Japanese aircraft landing at, taking off from and passing over Salamaua.) Leaving Vial, McAdam then began to edge his lookouts and his base camps closer and closer to the Japanese until within a short time his men were on the watch from the original Lookout No. 1 just below the mouth of the Francisco. Although scarcely a movement in Salamaua escaped them, for



Salamaua observation posts

⁸ Lt J. Cavanaugh, NGX276. NGVR and RAE (Forestry). Forester; of Wau, TNG, and Lismore, NSW; b. Murwillumbah, NSW, 3 Jun 1914.

⁹ Capt G. R. Archer, MC, NGX257. NGVR; "Z" and "M" Special Units. Gold miner; of Hampton, Vic; b. Murrumbidgee, Vic, 7 Dec 1913.

¹ Cpl A. E. Jentzsch, NG2235. NGVR; Amenities Service. Mine manager; of Wau, TNG; b. Wycheproof, Vic, 24 Apr 1893.

² Lt J. G. Kinsey, NGX362. NGVR and Angau; 1 NG Inf Bn. Building contractor; of South Johnstone, via Innisfail, Qld; b. Geelong, Vic, 10 Feb 1912.

³ Lt P. R. H. Day, NGX453. NGVR and Allied Geographical Section. Gold miner; of Bulolo, TNG; b. Fremantle, WA, 28 Feb 1904.

⁴ WO2 J. W. Currie, NG2183. NGVR and Angau. Gold miner; of Wau, TNG; b. Barwon Downs, Vic, 6 Nov 1901.

⁵ F-Lt L. G. Vial. RAAF (Coastwatchers) and FELO. Assistant District Officer; of Rabaul; b. Camberwell, Vic, 28 Feb 1909. Killed in action 30 Apr 1943.

some time they were hard put to make the best use of the information they gained because their communications system was primitive. In their early days their nearest wireless was at Mubo. Ingeniously and, having no maps, through the exercise of magnificent bush sense, notably on Cavanaugh's part, they linked their various lookouts and camps with a telephone network contrived mostly with salvaged wire taken from abandoned camps, and burnt transformers from Wau, and sent their reports back to Mubo by runner. (Later the wireless was brought from Mubo to Wireless Camp—just forward of Komiatum—and information from the observation posts was telephoned to Wireless Camp and radioed back to Port Moresby in a few minutes.)

They were continuously watching, scouting tirelessly into the very fringes of the garrison area itself. They survived by adapting themselves completely to their new circumstances, with cool courage, intelligence, physical hardihood and superb bushcraft. McAdam said later:

We only used our own tracks and we took pains never to mark the main tracks so that, whenever we saw them, they were a book telling us what the Japs had been doing. . . . Our tracks were so lightly marked that it took a good bushman to find them. We left no marks in that forward country. We walked carefully on roots, stones. We had the heels taken off our boots. Where necessary we walked our natives behind us to put their tracks over ours. . . . We went there with three automatic revolvers only one of which we could rely on. We couldn't carry our rifles because they caught in the bush so, in forward scouting in pairs, we took a pistol each, the good one and one uncertain one. Our sole defence was our speed. We could see a Jap before he could see us and if we had 10 yards' start we could get away. What I wanted was a Tommy-gun so that our forward scouts could put the Japs flat and so get a 10 yards' start on them. All the four months I was there we were unable to get a Tommy-gun. There were about six in N.G.V.R. but we didn't have one.

The Japanese, however, knew they were there and after scouts (mainly Currie and Archer) had operated from the old Lookout No. 1 for about a month a Japanese patrol came searching for them. The searchers actually passed beneath the telephone line but did not see it. They condemned the local natives for assisting the Australians. Mainly to avoid further trouble for the natives McAdam withdrew his men from the old No. 1 soon afterwards.

At Lae less spectacular but more important work of a similar kind was going on—more important because Lae was the main Japanese base on the Huon Gulf and from it the main Japanese air strength operated. Before the Japanese occupation Sergeant Mitchell,⁶ an amateur wireless operator, had been installed on Sugarloaf, a conical hill overlooking the Huon Gulf, 9 miles south of Lae. On his set, which had been built up from civilian sources, he was in touch with both Wau and Port Moresby. He wirelessed to Port Moresby a full description of the landings on the 8th March. About noon that day, however, he saw a Japanese gunboat patrolling below him and, suspecting that it was using direction-finding apparatus to pinpoint his position, then closed his station.

⁶ WO2 D. McR. Mitchell, NG2129; NGVR. Mine manager; of Bankstown, NSW; b. Parramatta, NSW, 24 Apr 1911.

After 8th March when Captain Lyon was established at Kirkland's, on the south bank of the Markham, he sent a party to find a suitable site for an observation post on Markham Point, a high bluff on the opposite side of the Markham from Lae and about 8 miles from the town. It offered excellent observation of Lae and of the whole Huon Gulf area, marred only by the fog and cloud which closed Lae for days at a time.

Other watching posts were established along the Markham which, although of briefer life, provided more excitement for the men manning them.

Early in April the N.G.V.R. built and manned a post just north-east of Heath's Plantation which was about seven miles from Lae on the road to Nadzab. About the middle of the month they ventured as far as Jacobsen's Plantation. Thence, from a near-by post, they could watch Japanese moving along the road and keep the aerodrome under observation. But as there was no signalling equipment at the observation post, and it took about nine hours for a runner to reach Camp Diddy by a back route through Yalu, the observations from Jacobsen's lost much of their value.

Individuals of the N.G.V.R., however, were thrusting even farther forward than this. Phillips (who had come across from Salamaua) and Corporal Clark, one of five New Guinea Volunteers of that name, actually entered Lae itself. While Phillips lay on a terrace on the western side of the strip, counted more than thirty aircraft arriving and watched where they were hidden, Clark circled the airfield and examined ammunition dumps. As proof of what he had done he brought back tags from some of the bombs which he had found. Acting on the reports of these two, Allied airmen were later able to destroy a number of the aircraft and several of the dumps.

While the men of the N.G.V.R. were thus settling to their lonely work General Morris, back in Port Moresby, could, at that time, do little to help them. Not only was he worried about the security of the Bulolo Valley and the threat of a Japanese approach to Moresby by the Bulldog Track but he was finding the maintenance of the N.G.V.R. most difficult. As soon as its existence was established he began to use the Bulldog Track for this purpose but his best efforts could keep only a trickle of supplies moving over it. Engineering improvements necessary to the track represented a Herculean task which he had not the men to attempt.

To increase the security of this troublesome but vital route, to form a base at Kudjeru for patrols and air observation, and to provide a link with the N.G.V.R., he decided to send forward a group of reinforcements who had been bound for the 1st Independent Company and who now could not join their parent unit. Even before he had left Australia Lieutenant Howard,⁷ in charge of these men, had been instructed

You will . . . take immediate steps to organise the reinforcements as one independent platoon of three sections with a view to its employment in 8 MD on tasks for

⁷ Capt N. R. Howard, NGX174. 1st and 2/4 Indep Coys; 2/1 Cdo Sqn. Gold miner; of Wau, TNG; b. Brisbane, 20 Mar 1910.

which the special training given to Independent Companies makes it particularly suitable.

He was ready, therefore, when Morris gave him his orders and the first of his men left by sea for the Lakekamu on 29th March.

By the time Howard himself arrived on the Markham about 25th April to get first-hand experience of what was happening, the Japanese were beginning to react in protest against the presence of the Australians both at Salamaua and at Lae.

From Salamaua a fighting patrol, about 65 strong, which had crossed from Lae on 23rd April accompanied by two Europeans dressed in white, set out along the track to Komiatum. One European seemed to be acting as a guide. But from their observation posts some of Umpheby's men had seen them coming and three of them lay waiting in ambush at Komiatum. They reported later that they killed five of the Japanese and wounded others before they themselves, unharmed, left Komiatum. As on the occasion of the previous visit the strangers did not linger unduly and soon returned to Salamaua.

From the Markham the N.G.V.R. men reported on 24th April that a Japanese outpost had been established at Heath's Plantation and, a little later, that a small gun had been sited there facing north-west along the road.

While this interesting situation had been building up in the Lae-Salamaua-Bulolo area during the period January to April, the Japanese had been on the move elsewhere throughout the Mandate and along the island arc from Vila to the Admiralties.

The New Hebrides positions remained comparatively unmolested but at Tulagi Captain Goode⁸ of the 1st Independent Company who had moved forward from Vila, was watching the rapid approach of the Japanese. Goode stood by while the Resident Commissioner of the Solomons Protectorate evacuated the north-west of his islands, retaining only a small staff in the south-east, and turned his civil administration into a military administration as the British Solomon Islands Protectorate Force. The A.I.F. and R.A.A.F. detachments—some 50 all told—remained on Tanambogo Island in Tulagi Harbour. Soon after the fall of Rabaul the Japanese began desultorily to bomb Tulagi. The bombing grew more purposeful towards the end of April when, on the 25th, eight bombers carried out a determined raid.

On Bougainville and Buka coastwatchers and soldiers had been having a rather more difficult time. When Rabaul was occupied it seemed that invasion of Bougainville was imminent. Kieta, the administrative centre of the District, was at once abandoned but Lieutenant Mackie,⁹ who commanded the section of the Independent Company at Buka Passage, did not allow that to move him to hasty action. He was working closely

⁸ Maj A. L. Goode, SX3711. 1st and 2/4 Indep Coys; "M" Special Unit; OC 2/10 Cdo Sqn. Agent; of Port Pirie, SA; b. Port Pirie, 17 Sep 1915.

⁹ Maj J. H. Mackie, VX39164. 1st Indep Coy; "M" Special Unit. Electrician; of Kyabram, Vic; b. Kyabram, 1 Feb 1919.

with Assistant District Officer Read¹ and the two were preparing to continue to operate on Bougainville after the arrival of the Japanese. Mackie moved to Bougainville and, on 24th January, a small rearguard and demolition party which he had left on the airfields at Buka engaged strafing Japanese aircraft (one of which they claimed to have shot down into the sea) and blew up the fuel supplies and bombs before they too left for the larger island.

The position at this time was an extremely complicated one for the young A.I.F. officer and for Read, who was still a civilian. The abandonment of Kieta had meant a serious breakdown in the civil administration and this had been followed by disorder among the natives and confusion among the civil European population, a number of whom, including some women, still remained on the island. Out of this Mackie, Read and Paul Mason² of Inus Plantation, a capable amateur wireless operator and engineer, who, as a civilian had been part of the coastwatching organisation since 1939, emerged as three determined figures who were to keep resistance alive on the island and maintain Bougainville as an invaluable reporting centre. They now set up coastwatching posts, each with a tele-radio, at Buin, Kieta, Numa Numa, Aravia, and near Kessa on the north coast of Buka. On the 8th March six Japanese cruisers and two destroyers anchored in Carola Haven near Kessa. Shore parties drove out the four soldiers manning the watching post near by and killed Percy Good, an Australian planter, who had been acting as one of the coastwatchers. After a short stay the ships left. On the 30th March more Japanese came, occupied Buka Passage and sent parties ranging over the north coast of Bougainville. Mackie himself, visiting his watching post which had been re-established near Carola Haven, was cut off by this occupation. Read sent him warning in a message bravely carried by a native policeman. Mackie's position was now extremely perilous. He reported the arrival of more Japanese warships in Carola Haven, however, before he led his men in darkness aided by the Reverend Usaia Sotutu, a Fijian missionary, from one small island to another until finally they reached Bougainville again.

The Japanese were now on the move all round that island. They had occupied Faisi in the Shortland Islands on the same day as they had settled at Buka Passage. About the same time they raided Kieta, drove out the few soldiers who were still there, and caused Mason, watching from a near-by lookout in the hills, to move farther south to a supply dump which he had established. He was joined later by the four hungry and tattered soldiers from the post at Buin for, about a week after their occupation of Faisi, the Japanese had moved against the Australians at Buin and destroyed their camp and equipment and the Administration buildings there. Soon afterwards Mason, with two soldiers who had been detached to him by Mackie, set up another post in the vicinity of Buin.

By May Mason was settled near Buin, Mackie had his main camp at

¹ Maj W. J. Read, DSC, VX95356. Lt-Cdr RANVR; Angau 1944-46. Assistant District Officer; of Buka Passage, Bougainville; b. Hobart, 18 Sep 1905.

² Lt P. E. Mason, DSC; RANVR. Plantation manager; of Bougainville.

Aravia, and Read was established overlooking Buka Passage. Japanese parties were searching the island more and more thoroughly and the Australians had placed their lives completely in the keeping of the natives who surrounded them, and they were living out lonely days of constant watchfulness; to the Allied forces as a whole they were merely voices speaking of the Japanese movements from the centre of Japanese-occupied territory.

On 8th April attacking forces arrived at Lorengau on Manus Island in a troop-carrying ship and a destroyer. Tupling,³ the coastwatcher in the Ninigo Group to the west, had warned Lieutenant Palmer⁴ of the Independent Company, and Assistant District Officer Vertigan,⁵ of the coming of the ships. Palmer and Vertigan had planned against such an eventuality, and, before they withdrew to the south coast, the commandos destroyed everything that might be of use to the Japanese and left booby-traps at the landing places. Off the south coast a schooner was ready and Palmer and his men, with Vertigan and the rest of the civilians, set sail for the mainland. They made their landfall at Bogadjim just south of Madang, then pushed inland through the mountains and bush to Bena Bena. Aircraft later picked them up and flew them to Port Moresby. Palmer and Vertigan had planned well and had been capable and unhurried in the execution of their plans.

By the end of April, having thus gathered into their net all the strategic points on the approaches through the Mandated islands, the Japanese seemed to be in a strong position to attack Port Moresby itself, possibly as a preliminary to attacks against the Australian east coast. In that town the early February air raids had been followed by widespread disorder and looting and Morris found it difficult to prevent his unseasoned soldiers from taking a leading part. He had insufficient provost troops and, of those he had, some were themselves unreliable.⁶ Two more raids followed before the month was out during the second of which (on 28th February) possibly 124 bombs were dropped in the vicinity of the Seven Mile airfield, and the air force hangar on the shores of the harbour, and two R.A.A.F. Catalinas were sunk and one damaged. The anti-aircraft gunners, however, got their first kill during this raid when they shot down a Japanese fighter, the pilot of which was taken prisoner by the 39th Battalion.

These gunners were keen and efficient though many were mere boys who had already sweated out many weeks of waiting and discomfort and suspense. A picture of their battery in action in a later raid has been given by two of them:

³ Petty Officer W. L. Tupling; RANVR (Coastwatcher). Plantation manager. Missing presumed dead 20 Mar 1943.

⁴ Maj A. S. Palmer, MC, SX6543. 1 Indep Coy; LO NG Force 1942-43; 2/5, 2/6 Cdo Sqns; Directorate of Public Relations. Journalist; of Broken Hill, NSW; b. Adelaide, 9 Dec 1911.

⁵ Maj D. H. Vertigan, MBE, VX112276; Angau. Assistant District Officer; of Manus Is; b. Forth, Tas, 27 Aug 1906.

⁶ Although Morris was vehemently criticised for the disorders General Blamey was to judge later: "General Morris set about his impossible task with courage and determination. The responsibility lies less with the commander on the spot than with those responsible for providing him with inadequate and incompetent forces."

The terrific crash, crash of the guns shattered the quietness of the morning as sweating gunners, stripped to the waist, hurled shells at the invader. One of the shots which pitted the sky all around him apparently took effect as the plane dropped sharply to 11,000 feet causing the station to "Cease loading" as he turned homeward. The plane, a Mitsubishi-96, was destined never to reach home, however, as once again he met a terrific fire which this time effectively sealed his fate, one shell scoring a direct hit on the cabin. Men cheered wildly as the plane roared into its last dive towards the mountains.

It was of the men of this battery that a war correspondent later wrote:

Some of the youngest of them were inclined to be "windy" in the early days when they were almost the only anti-aircraft gunners on New Guinea and the Japanese planes came often and flew low. They will tell you now how one of the regular sergeants, who has been the backbone of this battery from the beginning, used to cuff the youngsters on the ears when some of them showed signs of taking shelter until they were more afraid of him than of the Japanese. After the first three or four raids, however, all of them were hardened soldiers, down to the 16-year-old boys who had falsified their ages to get into this militia battery and suddenly found themselves right in the firing line. . . . This is not an A.I.F. but a "chocko" battery although I know of only one A.I.F. "ack ack" battery that has fired so many rounds or scored so many hits, or been in action so long, and that is one that served at Tobruk during the siege.⁷

At the end of February the Australian defence leaders saw Port Moresby as a strong position on the flank of the Japanese movements from either the Mandate or the Netherlands Indies, and also as a threat to the Japanese base at Rabaul. Its security lay initially with the navy and the air force. In the air, they said, they would require for the effective defence of Moresby two fighter-interceptor squadrons, one long-range fighter squadron, one dive-bomber squadron, two general-reconnaissance flying-boat squadrons and one general-reconnaissance torpedo-bomber squadron; and an increase in airfields would be needed. With regard to the army they thought that:

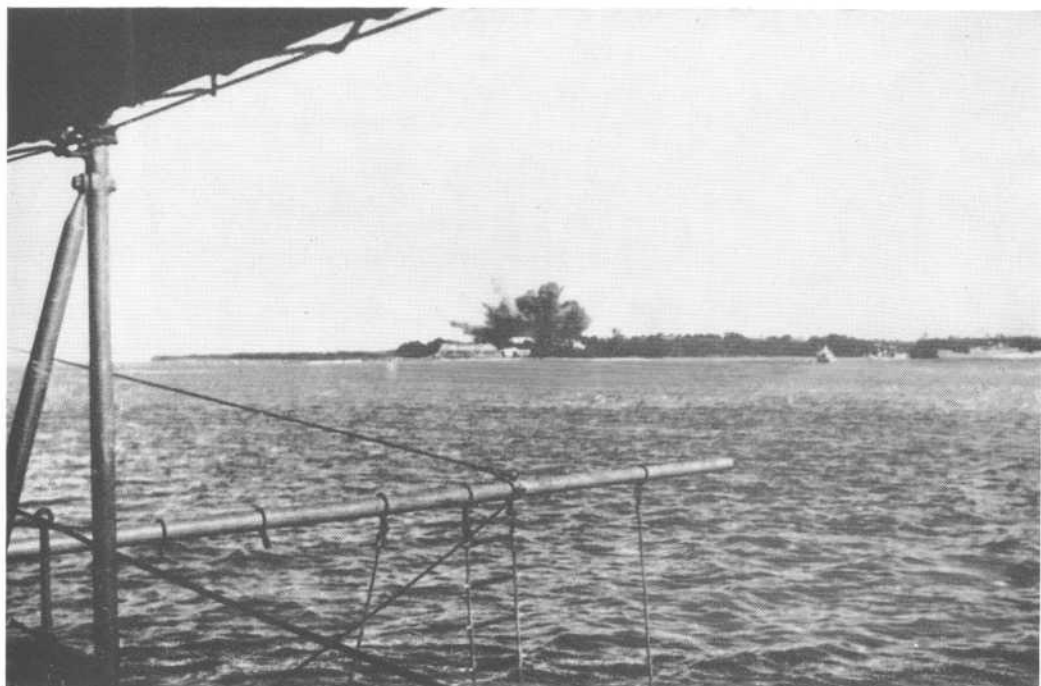
Given reasonable naval and air protection which would make the approach and landing of a combined expedition a very dangerous operation, we consider that the land forces at Moresby are an adequate garrison for the defence of this important base. The present situation is that while we possess suitable naval forces, their operations are restricted by a lack of suitable bases, and available air forces are much below the required strength. We must consider therefore:

- (a) Whether, if available, an increased army garrison would make for greater security.
- (b) Whether Moresby is to be regarded as indefensible and the present garrison withdrawn.

Reinforcement is at present out of the question since we have inadequate forces for the defence of the east coast, and this is the only area from which reinforcements can be drawn. In any event, unless we have adequate naval and air support, the enemy could always produce an attacking force superior to the garrison and covered by powerful air forces.

In our view withdrawal is equally out of the question. Quite apart from the potential effect on public morale of withdrawal before attack, we must hold on to this important base as long as possible, and exact a heavy toll from the enemy if he should attack it. The garrison is well provisioned and we see no reason to assume that we cannot continue to maintain it.

⁷ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 Aug 1942.



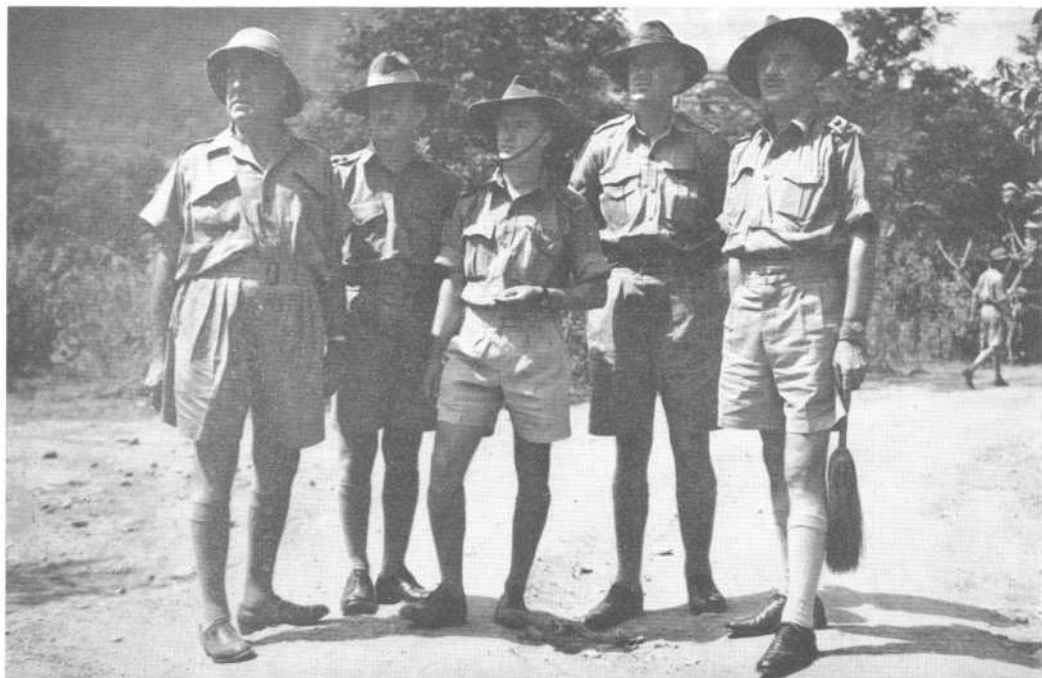
(Australian War Memorial)

Darwin, 19th February 1942. Bombs fall on the Post Office during the first Japanese air attack on the Australian mainland.



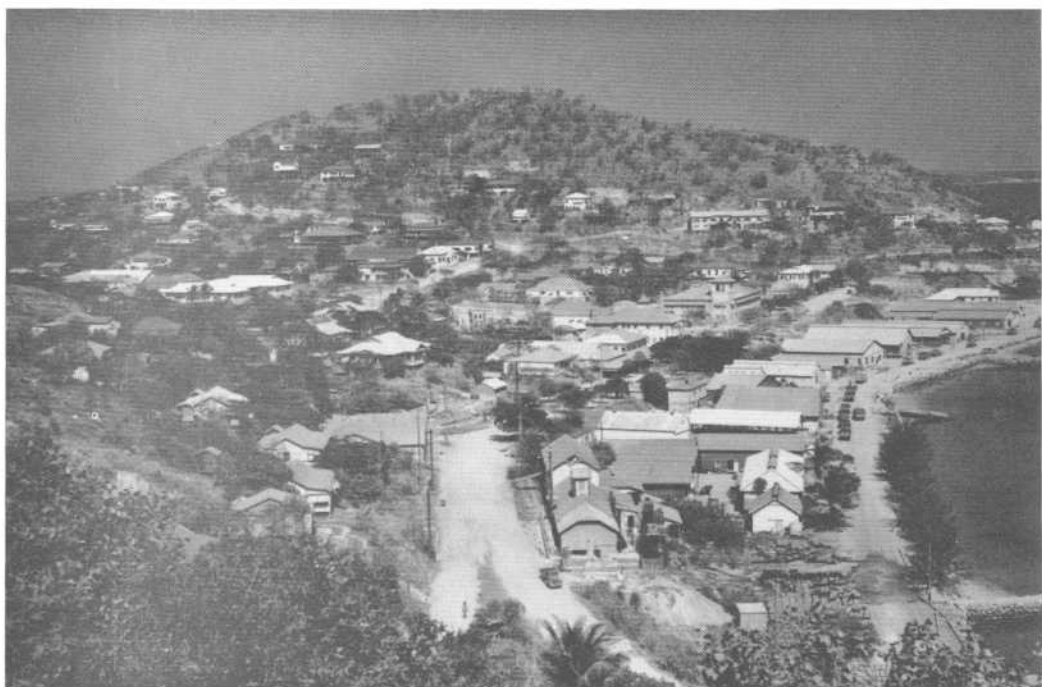
(Cdr J. C. B. McManus, R.A.N.)

The Darwin jetty during the raid. The Australian ships *Barossa* and *Neptuna* are alongside.



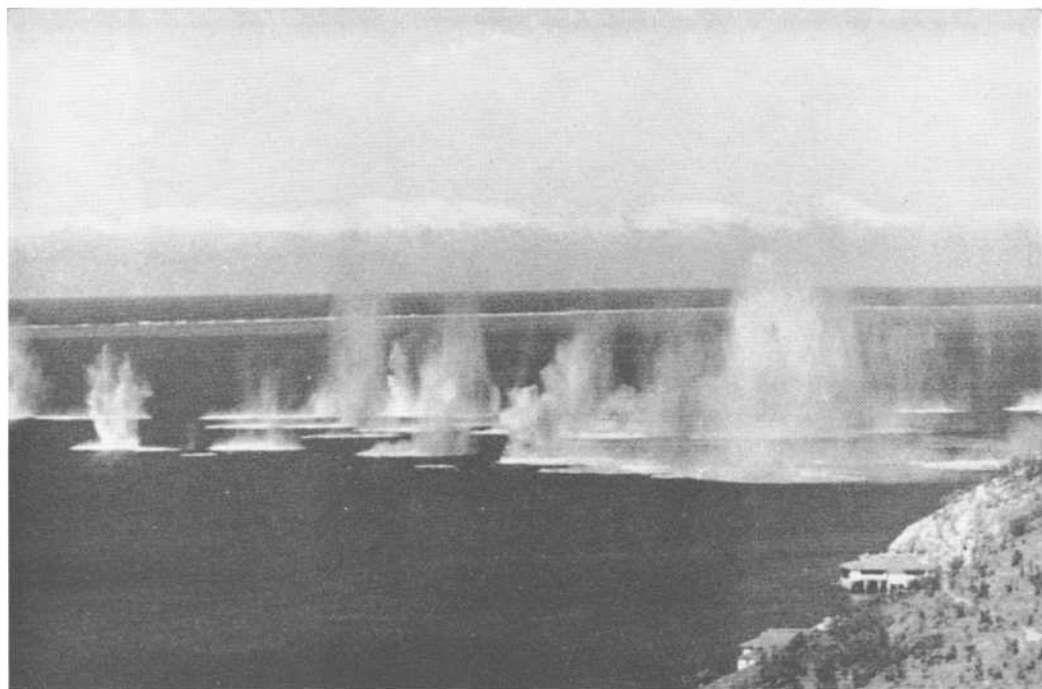
(Australian War Memorial)

Major-General B. M. Morris, G.O.C. New Guinea Force, and some of his staff, at Port Moresby, July 1942. *Left to right:* Lieut-Colonel E. T. Brennan, A.D.M.S.; Lieut-Colonel D. D. Pitt, G.S.O. 1; Lieutenant A. B. Luetchford, A.D.C. to General Morris; Lieut-Colonel E. B. Serisier, A.A. & Q.M.G.; and General Morris.



(Australian War Memorial)

Port Moresby, 1942.



(Australian War Memorial)

Japanese bombs burst along the Port Moresby waterfront.



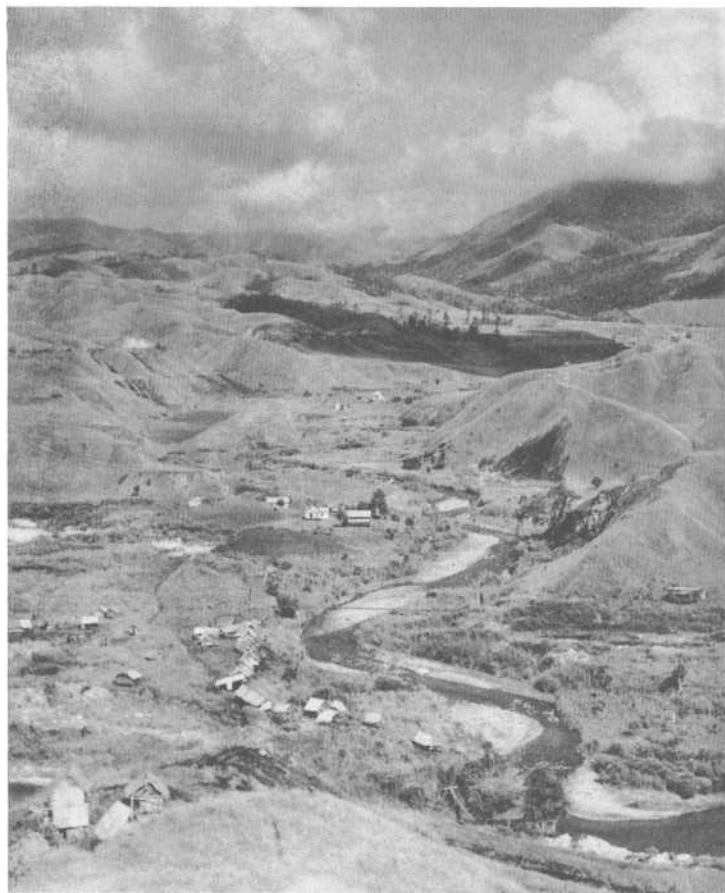
(Australian War Memorial)

The anti-aircraft defences of Port Moresby were strengthened from April onwards by the arrival of A.I.F. batteries, newly-returned from the Middle East. An anti-aircraft position at Port Moresby, July 1942.



(Australian War Memorial)

Salamaua, viewed from an observation point above Nuk Nuk. The airstrip is the cleared area in the centre of the picture, with the mouth of the Francisco River to the right. Salamaua itself was situated on the flat isthmus linking the promontory and the mainland.



(Australian War Memorial)

Kudjeru (looking north), where a section of the 1st Independent Company was established in April 1942 to guard against possible Japanese movement south of Wau along the Bulldog Track.

Though there was, therefore, no increase in Morris' field force during March, and though that month brought seventeen more heavy air raids on Port Moresby, there were improvements in the Allied naval and air position. The American Navy was recovering from the blow which had been dealt it at Pearl Harbour. At the end of January Vice-Admiral William F. Halsey had ventured with some success against the Marshall Islands (in the Japanese Mandate itself) and the Gilberts which lie south-east of the Marshalls. Vice-Admiral Wilson Brown was then detailed to try an air and surface attack on Rabaul which was rapidly becoming the main Japanese base in the South-West Pacific. Discovery by Japanese airmen of the aircraft carrier *Lexington*, round which the task force was mustered, caused the project to be abandoned. Later in February Halsey sailed against Wake Island and, at the beginning of March, aircraft from his carrier *Enterprise* bombed Marcus Island. Two days after the Japanese landings at Lae and Salamaua Brown sent aircraft from the carriers *Lexington* and *Yorktown* against the Japanese concentrations there. They sank a number of Japanese ships and did not lose heavily themselves.

Air strength at Port Moresby was increasing. On 21st March the first fighters of No. 75 Squadron R.A.A.F. arrived. They swept low over the trees without warning and the infantry machine-gunners, who had come to accept the fact that all the fighters they saw were hostile, fired at them and damaged three. It was an eventful day. Little more than two hours later an unsuspecting Japanese reconnaissance plane fell to the eager airmen's guns. The soldiers' spirits rose high.

With aircraft now actually arriving, work on the airfields went ahead with increased vigour. By the middle of April General Morris was able to report that airfields had been built or were nearing completion at the Seven Mile, Kila, Bomana, Rorona and Laloki. By May American engineers had begun to help with these undertakings. A company of the 43rd Engineer Regiment and two negro units—the 96th Engineer Battalion less two companies and a section of the 576th Engineer Company—were sent to Port Moresby.

The anti-aircraft defences were also strengthened. On 11th April, less than four weeks after its disembarkation at Port Adelaide from the Middle East, the 2/3rd Light Anti-Aircraft Battery (Major Kelso⁸) began to arrive. On 23rd April it was in action against Japanese aircraft for the first time. In May the American 101st Coast Artillery Battalion, armed with .5-inch anti-aircraft machine-guns, reached Moresby.

By that time also a small but positive offensive movement by Australian land forces was being prepared. General Blamey had decided that Lae and Salamaua might be the scene of a profitable minor and local offensive. So, on 17th April, the 2/5th Independent Company (Major Kneen⁹) arrived at Port Moresby with the warning that they might expect instructions from Morris to cooperate with the N.G.V.R.

⁸ Lt-Col P. W. A. Kelso, NX391. 2/1 Lt AA Regt; CO 109 Lt AA Regt 1942-43, 54 Composite AA Regt 1943-45. Commercial traveller; of Mosman, NSW; b. Harrow, England, 29 Jul 1908.

⁹ Maj T. P. Kneen, NX65838; OC 2/5 Indep Coy. Officer of Colonial Administration Service; of Guadalcanal, Solomon Is; b. Douglas, Isle of Man, 18 Jun 1914. Killed in action 1 Jul 1942.

It was now clear, however, that the major crisis could not be long delayed. On 26th April Morris was warned that Japanese operations, intended to be decisive, were pending along the north-east axis.

At this time, also, there was an uneasy position along the north-west axis where Darwin had been under air attack since 19th February. Immediately after 8th December 1941, emphasis had been directed towards the north-west approaches to Australia by the vigour of the Japanese attack on Singapore and by the way the invaders crashed through the ABDA Area. On the Australian mainland Darwin rapidly became the key-point on these approaches.

It was the remote northern gateway to Australia, built on the shores of a busy harbour sheltered to the north by Melville and Bathurst Islands, and 2,000 miles or more by air from most of the State capitals. Immediately to the east and west of the town, in the 1,000 miles of coastline which lay between the Queensland and Western Australian borders, beaches alternated with mangrove swamps and, when the level of the sea dropped many feet at low tide, mud flats lay bare. To the south lay first the bush-covered and pleasant country of north Australia, watered by swamps and billabongs and rivers—notably the Roper and the Daly—flowing east and west. Then the tropical north merged into central Australia which was arid and thinly settled. Most of the country was given over to cattle runs some of which were up to 3,000,000 acres in extent.

There was a road travelling the 1,000 miles from Darwin south to Alice Springs, but when the rains came much of it became impassable. There was a railway running south from Darwin for about 300 miles to Birdum (its capacity then not more than 80 tons a day) and then a gap of about 600 miles to Alice Springs whence another line linked “the Centre” with Adelaide.

In the dry season the weather in the Darwin area was calm and shining. During “the Wet”, from October to March, the whole of north Australia was drenched by daily rains and steamed with an enervating heat. Vehicles could move only short distances off the main roads. Either the thick dust which accumulated during the dry months turned to impassable bogs or the deceptively hard-looking, gravelly surface of the roads and tracks broke through beneath a slight pressure to a grey morass beneath.

On 11th December 1941 the Chiefs of Staff had underlined their uneasiness about Darwin. Next day the War Cabinet decided that, in general, women and children should be forced to leave the area (although this decision was not then fully acted upon). At the end of December the 27th and 43rd Battalions joined the 23rd Brigade to replace the 2/21st and 2/40th which, as mentioned earlier, had gone to Ambon and Timor. The 19th Light Horse Machine Gun Regiment (dismounted) followed in January to replace the 2/4th Machine Gun Battalion which went to Malaya.¹ Early in the New Year the 147th and 148th U.S. Field Artillery

¹ The only front-line AIF units which then remained in the area were the 2/4th Pioneer Battalion and the 2/14th Field Artillery Regiment. The latter unit, resentful of being left in Australia, severed its colour patches down the centre and declared that it would wear them that way until re-united with the 8th Division.

Regiments (from the *Pensacola* convoy) arrived, although a battalion of the 148th went on to the Indies soon and was lost there. During February the 2/4th Independent Company prepared to move from Victoria to Katherine; the 808th U.S. Engineer Battalion arrived at Batchelor and brought the total of American forces in the Darwin area to 2,601; the 7th and 8th Battalions reached Darwin and the field force was then constituted as two brigades—the 23rd and 3rd.

On 17th February when Mr Curtin asked Mr Churchill for the diversion of the returning A.I.F. to Australia, he said that Darwin was the first place which should be reinforced; on the 18th, when the Chief of the Air Staff told the War Cabinet that the first six squadrons of American fighters to be assembled in Australia were to go to ABDA Command, the War Cabinet decided to ask General Wavell that some at least of these machines be retained in Australia for the defence of Darwin, as well as for the defence of the east coast areas and Port Moresby. The events of 19th February were to give a sharp point to their request.

At the end of January Wavell had asked for more troops for Koepang, Dutch Timor. This was at first refused on the grounds (*inter alia*) that Darwin itself still needed reinforcing and the forces required to protect Australia's other vital areas had already been reduced to a minimum. On 15th February, however, the 2/4th Pioneer Battalion, the II/148th U.S. Field Artillery Battalion and a troop of Australian anti-tank guns set out for Koepang in five transports, escorted by the American cruiser *Houston*, the American destroyer *Peary*, and the Australian sloops *Swan* and *Warrego*. No air cover for the convoy was available. Approaching Timor the ships were attacked by 35 bombers and 9 flying-boats. The warships fought back vigorously. An Australian army officer said later of the *Houston*:

She spun on her heel, every gun was blazing. She kept the Japs right up in the sky and they could not get down to bomb us.

The convoy, however, on Wavell's orders, turned back to Darwin where it arrived on the 18th.

At 9.35 on the morning of the 19th the Catholic Mission on Bathurst Island radioed that a large number of aircraft had just passed overhead travelling south at a great height. The mission wireless was then jammed. Within two minutes of its receipt the warning was passed to the R.A.A.F. Operations Centre, but the air force did not at once accept that these aircraft were hostile; they could be ten American Kittyhawks under Major Floyd J. Pell which had landed at Darwin unexpectedly on the 15th, had set out for Timor that morning, and were returning because of bad weather; or an American group retreating from the Indies—sometimes American ships and aircraft arrived without warning.

None of the Australians could know at that time that the aircraft were from a fleet of four carriers (supported by battleships, cruisers and destroyers) which Vice-Admiral Kondo had led in a night approach through the Banda Sea. At daylight on the 19th probably 54 bombers and 27 fighters were launched by this fleet against Darwin. In the Kendari area to the

north-west the *First Air Attack Force* prepared to send off 54 medium bombers.

Meanwhile Pell's ten machines were back over Darwin about the same time as the warning from Bathurst Island arrived. Pell dropped down to the airfield with four others to refuel and left the remaining five Kittyhawks aloft as air cover. As these were climbing to 15,000 feet nine Japanese fighters, which had been detached from the main flight in the vicinity of Bathurst Island to close the target directly, drove at them. Lieutenant R. G. Oestreicher (the most experienced of the five American pilots) shouted "Zeros! Zeros!" into his radio and, with his companions, dived away, dropping his bellytank as he did so. The others were shot down but Oestreicher got into cloud cover, from which he later shot down two bombers, and brought his bullet-marked machine home.

Still no warning was sounded at Darwin. Finally the alarm went at 9.58 a.m. just when the army's heavy anti-aircraft guns (sixteen of 3.7-inch and two of 3-inch) opened up as the main attacking force finished its sweep from the south-east down the sun at 14,000 feet and reached the bomb-release point. Columns of water leaped from the harbour as the bombs hit. The anti-aircraft fire was uncertain at first and then settled among some of the formations. Fighters, dive bombers and high-level bombers attacked the airfield, the harbour and the town.

From the airfield Pell and his four pilots raced to get the only available fighters into the air. One pilot was killed on the ground. Pell himself parachuted from 80 feet and was killed. The other three machines were picked off as they rose (but the pilots survived parachute or crash landings). Dive bombers and fighters then attacked the airfield systematically. Some of the strafing planes were so low as they raced up and down the airstrip that the faces of the pilots could be clearly seen from the ground. Soon many of the buildings were shattered or in flames. Machine-gunners and riflemen fired into the attackers from the ground.

There was great destruction in the harbour. One bomb hit the jetty near the shore end, shattered an entire span, hurled a locomotive into the sea, killed a number of wharf labourers and left some marooned on the jetty's seaward end. Many ships were soon hotly beset. Anti-aircraft fire from ships mingled with the army fire. Oil took fire on the water. At 10.15 the Chief Officer of the hospital ship *Manunda*

looked round and saw what had happened. . . . The wharf was burning near its inner end; *Barossa* and *Neptuna* at the wharf both appeared to have been hit and *Neptuna* appeared to be on fire. *Zealandia*, about 500 yards away, was on fire. *British Motorist* was sinking by the head. *Meigs* was on fire and sinking aft. *Mauna Loa* was down by the stern with her back broken. *Tulagi* was nowhere to be seen. *Portmar* was in trouble. . . . On the naval side a Catalina flying-boat was ablaze, an American destroyer [actually the tender *Preston*], ablaze aft, went dashing across our bows, missing us by inches and steering with her engines. Another American destroyer [*Peary*] was on our port side, a solid mass of flames with burning oil around her and what was left of the crew jumping into the burning oil.

Army machine-gunners from Stokes Hill (the site of the oil storage tanks near the jetty) fired steadily. They engaged one bomber which dived

straight at the tanks. The pilot missed his aim and inflicted only minor damage—on two tanks.

Damage to the town itself was caused mostly by fifteen large bombs. The hospital was hit and the Administration offices, police barracks and post office were shattered—the last named by a direct hit which disrupted all telephone communications and killed the postmaster, his family, and the girls at the switches.

The raiders broke away at about 10.30 a.m. and the “all clear” was sounded at 10.40 a.m. But just before midday the 54 bombers from the Ambon bases arrived, pattern-bombed the airfield and set a seal to the destruction the carrier aircraft had caused.

The raiders sank eight ships in the harbour and destroyed two near Bathurst Island (the *Florence D* and *Don Isidro* which were setting out to try to run the blockade into the Philippines); three ships were driven ashore but later salvaged; ten other ships were damaged. Twenty-four American and R.A.A.F. aircraft were destroyed and two were damaged. Probably about 250 people were killed and some 320 others received hospital treatment for wounds. The attackers were definitely known to have lost five aircraft and five “probables” were claimed by the defenders.

After the raids confusion developed among the townspeople and some sections of the R.A.A.F. By the middle of the afternoon of the 19th many of the civilians were seeking to leave the town by any available means and a long string of vehicles was already moving southwards down the main road to Adelaide River. Later some looting both by servicemen and civilians began and it continued sporadically for some time afterwards. Soon after the raids those women—except hospital nurses—who still remained in the area were sent to the south, but able-bodied male civilians of suitable age were drafted into the army. Indeed the disorders were not finally eliminated until Major Simpson² was brought to Darwin in April. He reorganised the provosts and did outstanding work in restoring order and discipline.

When Mr Justice Lowe completed the investigation which, soon after the raids, the Government appointed him to make into the circumstances at Darwin on the 19th February, he reported of the army:

The evidence before me was all to the effect that the anti-aircraft batteries operated efficiently and that the personnel of the A.M.F. performed very creditably in their baptism of fire. . . . The only part of the Military Forces required for action in the raid itself were anti-aircraft equipment and personnel; as I have already indicated . . . the conduct of the personnel is to be highly commended.

The 19th February 1942 will be remembered as the first time in the history of Australia that the blows of war actually fell on Australian soil. But, at the time, the historic importance of the occasion was of less moment than the interpretation of the intention behind these blows. It later became clear that the Japanese object in bombing Darwin was to take advantage of the opportunity target offered by the shipping in the harbour and to

² Lt-Col C. L. Simpson, VX66, 2/8 Bn; DAPM NT Force; APM Qld L of C Area. Police constable; of Box Hill, Vic; b. Leeds, England, 21 Apr 1909.

neutralise a base which might prove troublesome to them in their attacks on Timor and Java. But it was understandable that there should have been many who saw the raids as the beginning of a "softening up" process preliminary to Japanese landings, particularly as they were followed within two days by the invasion of Timor. Such swiftness would not have been out of keeping with the Japanese methods. The invaders had not waited for the fall of the Philippines before they pushed on to occupy Rabaul nor for the fall of Singapore before they struck into Burma. Then again some noted that the raiders had seemed to spare certain important installations, such as the oil tanks, and inferred that they wanted them for their own future use.

Before the end of the month National Security Regulations were invoked to vest the administration of the Northern Territory north of Birdum in the military commander (in the same terms as those by which General Morris in Port Moresby had been given similar authority). On the 9th March after noting Lowe's interim report the War Cabinet decided that the whole area north of Alice Springs should be placed under complete military control. On the 24th the appointment was approved of Major-General Herring,³ who had returned from the Middle East as commander of the 6th Division only a few days earlier, to command the forces in the Darwin area in place of Major-General D. V. J. Blake.

The air raids had highlighted Darwin's supply problem. Supply by sea by orthodox means was now hazardous and regular supply by air was not yet practicable, while the problems of overland supply were legion. But the army was forced to try to exploit both the overland and sea routes. Immediately after the first raids an additional 385 lorries and 40 trailers were hastily made available in an attempt to increase the road-carrying capacity to 250 tons a day. Previously the daily capacity of the road link had been 150 tons which provided only for the daily consumption by the force of rations, petrol, aviation spirit and road material. On 19th March a sum of £1,481,080 was allotted to increase the capacity of the Central and North Australian railways. To augment the road and rail overland routes, a service which it was hoped would consist ultimately of nine small vessels, each of a carrying capacity of 400-500 tons, on 9th March began to shuttle cargo from Cairns to Darwin.

At the same time steps were taken to build up actual strength in the Darwin area still further. Lowe had been rather diffidently critical of the density of the anti-aircraft guns at Darwin. The army, however, had believed that the eighteen guns in operation there at the time of the raids were the most which it could make available in the light of other commitments. But as March advanced plans were pushed ahead for a stronger concentration of anti-aircraft artillery, both American and Australian, including batteries of the 2/1st Anti-Aircraft Regiment (Lieut-Colonel Gib-

³ Lt-Gen Hon Sir Edmund Herring, KCMG, KBE, DSO, MC, ED, VX15. (1914-18: RFA in France and Macedonia.) CRA 6 Div 1939-41; GOC 6 Div 1941-42, NT Force 1942, II Corps 1942, I Corps and NG Force 1942-43, I Corps 1943-44. Chief Justice of Victoria since 1944, Lt-Gov since 1945. Of Melbourne; b. Maryborough, Vic, 2 Sep 1892.

son⁴) back from the Middle East, and the American 102nd Coast Artillery Battalion armed with heavy machine-guns. Soon after Gibson's arrival in the Territory as regimental commander, he was also appointed Anti-Aircraft Defence Commander, Northern Territory Force, and the regimental headquarters carried out this function until August 1943, when it left the Territory.⁵ By the 19th, too, an American Kittyhawk fighter squadron was on its way to Darwin and two more such squadrons were scheduled to move there. By 28th March the total strength of the forces in the area was: Australian Navy 1,002; Australian Army 14,082; R.A.A.F. 857; United States forces 3,200; and it was planned to increase the Australian Army figures by 10,000 and those of the United States Forces by 3,000.

This was the day on which General Herring virtually took over the Darwin command. Such was considered to be the urgency of the situation that Herring and some of his staff officers had left Adelaide for Darwin by air on the 27th March, little more than a week after they arrived back from the Middle East.⁶

Herring's strength at this time did not lie in the extent of his military experience, which in higher command had been limited. He had distinguished himself during long service in the British Army in the 1914-18 War, first as a trooper and then as an artillery officer. He had commanded the 6th Divisional Artillery in North Africa and Greece but his command of the 6th Division itself had dated only from the beginning of its period as part of the garrison of Syria. His strength was to be found in the depth of character of this small and quiet man, in his ideals of service which enabled him to give all about him something of his own quality.

And all the strength of his purpose was required in his new command. It had been clear for some time before that all was not well with the army in the 7th Military District. It was true that those sections from whom action was demanded in the 19th February raids had acquitted themselves well. It was equally true that in some other units there was high-spirited resolve, allied with efficiency in training, which augured well for their conduct in action. But well before 19th February, indeed during 1941, some troops in the Darwin area had become restless and discontented—a result of the general effects of tropical service; of a feeling among some officers and men that Darwin was being used as an Australian military Siberia; of a policy of placing two different classes of soldiers—A.I.F. and militia—side by side for a common task, in trying and monotonous circumstances, under different conditions of service, and of retaining in what they regarded as a backwater soldiers who had enlisted for service overseas; and of certain deficiencies in leadership. In addition it was likely that the raids of 19th February and their attendant circumstances

⁴ Lt-Col A. R. M. Gibson, ED, NX381. CO 2/1 Hvy AA Regt 1940-41, 2/1 Lt AA Regt 1941-43; Comd AA Defences NT Force 1942-43; Comd Brisbane AA Gp 1943-44, Fremantle AA Gp 1944-45. Solicitor; of Gordon, NSW; b. Lindfield, NSW, 25 Feb 1903.

⁵ During this period the 2/1st Lt AA Regt was responsible for the anti-aircraft defences of all Northern Territory areas, and particularly airfields, outside the area of the Darwin Fortress. Within the fortress area the anti-aircraft defences, including the defence of the RAAF aerodrome, were under the command from August 1942 of Major (later Lt-Col) R. M. Ford.

⁶ These were: Colonel R. B. Sutherland, Colonel R. Bierwirth, Major A. E. Bamford, Major A. W. Sheppard, Captain D. McCarthy.

had disturbed the minds of some of the men. So Herring found to some extent a dejected force.

The troops were deployed on the coast in the immediate vicinity of Darwin itself which, with its fixed defences of ten guns, was constituted a "fortress area". These deployment positions were tactically unsound and offered a chance of successful action only in the unlikely event of the enemy landing in the particular areas.

Herring found also a disturbing supply position. The lines of communication were functioning only with difficulty, adequate daily maintenance of the force over a period was not assured, and reserves of all kinds were below the margin required for the present strength and the reinforcements which had been promised. Because of this he was forced to have the movement to Darwin of the veteran 19th Brigade deferred at this critical time.

The new commander was given very wide powers, even wider than those implied in the fact that the area north of Alice Springs had been placed under complete military control. On the grounds that Darwin was the most vulnerable area on the Australian mainland, that its retention was of great importance for future offensive operations and that its loss would give the enemy control of the whole north area of Australia, he was instructed to prevent its seizure and occupation. To this end he was ordered:

You will command all Australian Military Forces in the Northern Territory and such U.S. land forces as are assigned to your command. You will coordinate the defence plans of all three Services at all times. When a land attack on the Northern Territory has started, or in your judgment is clearly imminent, you will assume absolute control over Naval, Military and Air Forces.

His first step was to revise the tactical plans on the premise that he could not deny to the enemy the whole of the coastline within striking distance east and west of Darwin and that, therefore, he must deploy his field force in the locality from which he could move most readily and effectively toward any area where the enemy might land, and to the assistance of Darwin Fortress itself to which a separate force was necessarily allotted. Thus he disposed the 3rd and 23rd Brigades along the main road, south of Darwin and planned similarly to site the 19th Brigade on its arrival.

Then began a period of intense testing, training, indoctrination and reconnaissance, of rapid construction, and of detailed organisation in an endeavour to provide for the maintenance of the force. A number of officers were replaced by young veterans from the Middle East. Lieut-Colonel Dougherty,⁷ young, cool, practical, who had shown his worth in North Africa, Greece and Crete, was brought from the 2/4th Battalion to command the 23rd Brigade; King,⁸ quick-witted and ruthless, an experienced professional soldier, was given the 3rd Brigade; Major McCarty,⁹

⁷ Maj-Gen I. N. Dougherty, CBE, DSO, ED, NX148. CO 2/4 Bn 1940-42; Comd 23 Bde 1942, 21 Bde 1942-45. Schoolteacher; of Armidale, NSW; b. Leadville, NSW, 6 Apr 1907.

⁸ Maj-Gen R. King, CBE, DSO, VX20315. CO 2/5 Bn 1941-42; Comd 16 Bde 1943-45. Regular soldier; of Newcastle, NSW; b. Newcastle, 27 Aug 1897.

⁹ Lt-Col J. McCarty, MC, NX61. 2/4 Bn; CO 2/4 Pnr Bn 1942-45. Salesman; of Kensington, NSW; b. Tamworth, NSW, 31 May 1910.

of the 2/4th Infantry Battalion took over the 2/4th Pioneer Battalion; other A.I.F. officers were promoted to command the 7th, 8th and 19th Battalions. Although the wholesale replacement of officers represented by such appointments as these (which by no means exhausted the process) was ruthless, and certainly unduly harsh in some cases, the effect was electric, particularly as it was accompanied by corresponding staff changes. The 6th Divisional staff replaced the old "7 M.D." Headquarters almost completely and was rapidly augmented by more officers from the returning A.I.F.

The new commanders drove the units relentlessly, concentrating first on physical hardening, on revised minor tactics to meet a form of warfare not hitherto foreseen, and on the consolidation of their elementary training as a basis for later intensive exercises in swift movement, and deployment as battalions, brigades, and finally as a force. Lines of possible Japanese approach were explored and mapped and, in the light of this constantly increasing topographical knowledge, and as training became effective and as airfields developed south of Darwin, the general strategical plans for the area were revised. These tended to shift the centre of gravity of the force farther south and the units were ultimately sited to meet what was considered to be the most likely invading action—coordinated drives, or separate thrusts, from the Bynoe Bay and the Anson Bay-Daly River areas.

Meanwhile a watch was developing over the empty spaces of the hinterland and the extended coastline. Efforts had previously been made to coordinate the pedal wireless sets of north Australia into a reporting network; Squadron Leader Thomson¹ in his ketch *Aroetta* had, for some months, been operating among the natives of the Gulf country. The 2/4th Independent Company, based on Katherine, was to keep in touch with Thomson and fulfil a guerilla-reconnaissance role in the triangle Birdum-Groote Island-Anson Bay. To augment these plans the North Australia Observer Unit was formed under Major Stanner,² like Thomson an anthropologist.

The construction and maintenance program was speeded up. The arterial roads from the south and from Mount Isa were improved and tactical laterals developed; engineers worked on aerodrome construction both by day and, in the light of blazing flares, by night; air services were augmented; the small ships began to creep in with supplies and relieve the strain on the overland route.

The background to all this was one of constant watchfulness and almost hourly expectancy of sighting an invasion fleet. Air raids became common and, though they caused few casualties, and, in general, only minor material damage, provided the undertones of real war. As each developed it did so with the promise that it might be the beginning of the pre-

¹ W Cdr D. F. Thomson, OBE, 250194; RAAF. Anthropologist; of Melbourne; b. Melbourne, 26 Jun 1901.

² Lt-Col W. E. H. Stanner, VX89030. OC North Australia Observer Unit 1942-43; Assistant Director Research (Territories Admin) LHQ 1943-44; Civil Affairs Offr, Aust Army Staff UK 1944-45. Anthropologist; of Sydney; b. Sydney, 24 Nov 1905.

invasion "softening-up". But the Japanese air efforts were curiously spasmodic.

Soon after midday on 31st March seven heavy bombers, escorted by 12 to 15 fighters, attacked the R.A.A.F. aerodrome. At 10.30 p.m. the first night raid began. On 2nd April the town was further damaged by raiders and 60,000 gallons of aviation spirit were lost from a badly-holed storage tank. Seven bombers, escorted by fighters, were over again on the 4th; six of the bombers and two fighters were shot down, one bomber and two fighters were probably destroyed, for the loss of two American Kittyhawks and one pilot. After this flare-up came a lull, with only Japanese reconnaissance aircraft flying over, until the afternoon of 25th April when twenty-four heavy bombers with a fighter escort attacked the R.A.A.F. installations. Eight bombers and three fighters were destroyed and a number of others were badly damaged. On the 27th seventeen or eighteen bombers, with eighteen escorting fighters, appeared; three bombers and four fighters were shot down for the loss of four Kittyhawks. After this another period of quiet followed for some weeks.

By the beginning of May, the effort that had been put forth was beginning to show results. Operationally there was an increasingly efficient force, more alert, more confident and far readier to meet invasion. It had been learned with amazement that the Australian commando forces on Timor were fighting on; they were now being directed and assisted from Darwin.³ The veterans of the 19th Brigade and 2/6th Cavalry were preparing to move north to give a sharper edge to the field force. Engineer and ordnance units were also moving north. Supplies were beginning to flow in through a maintenance system which was working at a pitch of efficiency not considered possible previously.

Emptier and more vulnerable, however, than the Northern Territory was the adjacent country in the north of Western Australia. Dangerously open also were the more southern areas of Western Australia where Fremantle formed the Australian terminal of the Indian Ocean sea routes, the main sea lines of communication with the Middle East and Great Britain, and where American submarines were already based.

In January 1942, the Minister for the Army had announced that henceforth there would be two commanders of the Home Forces. Lieut-General Mackay would remain responsible for eastern and southern Australia, but Major-General Plant (who had just been appointed to Western Command) would be responsible for the remote force in Western Australia.

The Japanese soon showed that there might be cause for concern about the north-west. On the morning of 3rd March numerous small craft were lying at anchor in the harbour at Broome and fourteen flying-boats were moored there. Most of these aircraft had just arrived from the Indies carrying refugees who were still aboard them. There was no defence when Japanese aircraft arrived and proceeded systematically to attack the flying-

* See Appendix 2 for an account of the operations in Timor subsequent to March 1942.

boats and the land planes which were on the near-by aerodrome. All the flying-boats were destroyed and six large aircraft ashore (including two Flying Fortresses and two Liberators). Women and children were among those cast into the water dead or wounded, or uninjured but struggling to keep afloat. Captain Brain⁴ of Qantas Empire Airways, who was responsible for saving several lives, estimated that 35 to 40 people were killed and probably as many again wounded.

Wyndham was also attacked that day but there was little to be damaged there except the town itself. Broome was raided again on the 20th and Derby was raided on the same day. On the 23rd Wyndham was raided for the second time.

The Chiefs of Staff then decided that Broome was important only as an R.A.A.F. refuelling station and that Wyndham could not be linked effectively into any defence plans; that they would, therefore, concentrate their forces at Darwin and make it the centre for both the north and north-west of Australia. Broome and Wyndham were then left undefended except for about 80 and 30 members of the V.D.C. at each place, an overlap of the Northern Territory coastwatching services to Wyndham, and small detachments of engineers who were stationed at each place to carry out demolitions in the event of invasion. Australia would have to accept enemy occupation of the north-west if the Japanese decided on it.

However, despite the threat to the north of Australia that seemed to be developing at this time, the most vigorous Japanese activity in the sector north-west of Australia was being manifest in Burma.

The rapid march of events there posed a threat to India and Ceylon, exposed British weaknesses and led to the retention in Ceylon of part of the returning A.I.F. Hitherto there had been only two brigades of an Indian division and one brigade of local troops, with detachments of supporting arms, in Ceylon. One brigade group of the 70th Division, the only British division in India, was marked as reinforcement for the garrison but, even after its arrival, the weakness of Ceylon's defences would remain a matter of concern. There was no other source of rapid reinforcement except the returning A.I.F. At length it was decided that the garrison would be reinforced with the 16th and 17th Brigade Groups of the 6th Division which were still at Suez.⁵ Orders at once went out for this to be done, and Brigadier Boase,⁶ then commanding the 16th Brigade, was promoted to the rank of major-general to take command of the A.I.F. in Ceylon, and Lieut-Colonel Lloyd⁷ of the 2/28th Battalion, was promoted to command the 16th Brigade.

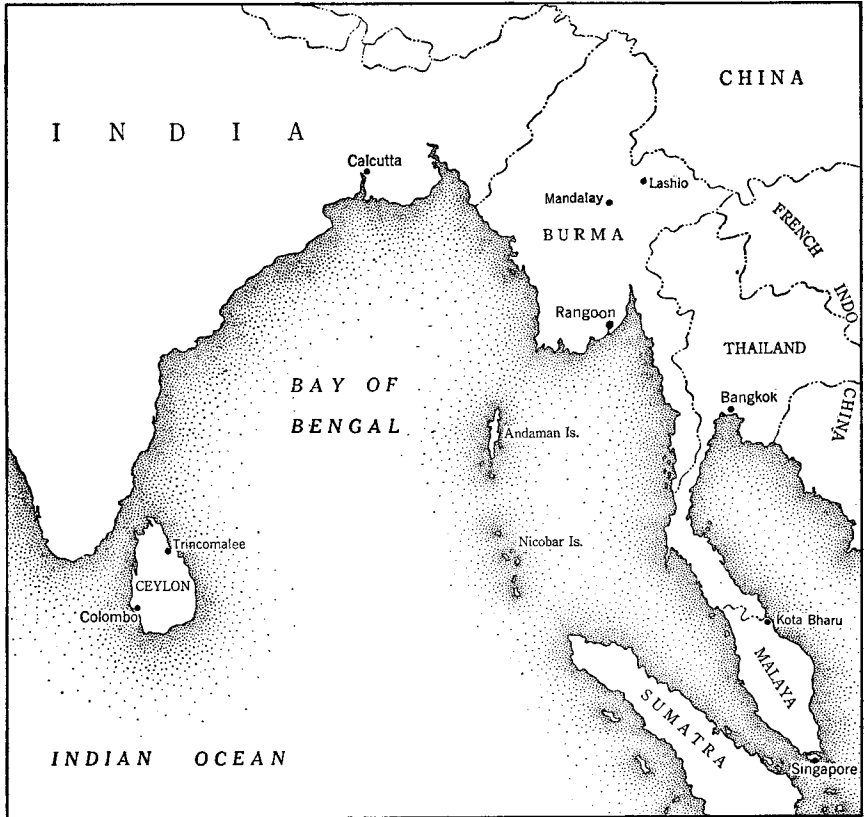
⁴ W Cdr L. J. Brain, AFC; RAAF. Airlines pilot and Operations Manager with Qantas 1924-46; General Manager TAA 1946-55; Managing Director de Havilland Aircraft Pty Ltd since 1955. Of Sydney; b. Forbes, NSW, 27 Feb 1903.

⁵ The discussions leading up to this decision are described in the previous volume of this series.

⁶ Lt-Gen A. J. Boase, CBE, NX366. (1st AIF: Maj 9 Bn.) AA&OMG 7 Div; Brig i/c Admin Base & L of C Units ME 1940-41; Comd 16 Bde 1941-42 and GOC AIF Ceylon 1942; MGGS First Army 1942-43; GOC 11 Div 1943-45, Western Command 1945. Regular soldier; of Brisbane and Sydney; b. Gympie, Qld, 19 Feb 1894.

⁷ Brig J. E. Lloyd, CBE, DSO, MC, ED; WX3346. (1st AIF: Lt 23 and 24 Bns. Indian Army 1918-22.) CO 2/28 Bn 1940-42; Comd 16 Bde 1942-43, 2 Aust PW Reception Gp 1945. Secretary; of Perth; b. Melbourne, 13 Apr 1894.

When Boase arrived on 18th March he found that few preparations had been made for the reception of his force, that there was a serious shortage of stores and equipment of all kinds and a lack of balance in the allotment of units to the garrison, and that defence plans were only just beginning to develop. On 21st March the *Otranto*, carrying most of the



17th Brigade Group, berthed at Colombo and the *Orontes* and *Westmoreland* arrived soon afterwards with the balance of the force. The Australians then found that they were responsible for the defence of the south-west corner of Ceylon which, until the south-west monsoon broke, was considered to be the sector in which the Japanese would be most likely to land.

It seemed that reinforcements for Ceylon had arrived only just in time when a strong Japanese naval force appeared in Indian waters, and Colombo and Trincomalee were heavily attacked by carrier-borne aircraft on 5th and 9th April respectively. Though little damage was done on land the defenders lost heavily in the air and at sea. Standing on to the north-west after raiding Colombo, the Japanese force sank the cruisers *Cornwall* and *Dorsetshire*. On 9th April, the aircraft carrier *Hermes* and the Australian destroyer *Vampire* were also sunk by dive bombers.

Though the Japanese sustained heavy aircraft losses that was not sufficient compensation to the British for their own losses. If the raiders had renewed their attacks these would have been difficult to meet. The position was gloomy as the Japanese were moving purposefully elsewhere in Indian waters. There was nothing much to hinder them since they had destroyed or driven out the combined ABDA fleet by the beginning of March, and the Commander-in-Chief of the British Eastern Fleet, as he told Wavell, could do nothing to prevent the invasion of southern India or Ceylon. Nor could he send naval forces into the Bay of Bengal to protect shipping or the east coast of India. So the Japanese ranged unchecked through the Bay of Bengal where, during this same period, with light naval forces and aircraft, they sank just on 100,000 tons of merchant shipping and caused panic on the east coast of India. "This was India's most dangerous hour," Wavell said later. "Our Eastern Fleet was powerless to protect Ceylon or eastern India; our air strength was negligible and it was becoming increasingly obvious that our small and tired force in Burma was unlikely to be able to hold the enemy."

By this time it was clear to the Australians that, if land fighting were going to take place in Ceylon, it would be a type different from that to which they were accustomed. The south-west area of the island was almost entirely covered with coconut, rubber and tea plantations and areas of thick bush. Generally the only open parts of the country were given over to rice-fields. The interior roads were not suitable for heavy military traffic. So the veteran campaigners began to discard those of the lessons of the Middle East which obviously would not apply in the Far East and to search for and apply the lessons of Malaya. Much of their time was taken up with engineering tasks—strengthening bridges, widening roads, and developing tracks—but from the beginning they were training in the new methods. They built up a supply of bicycles to enable them to move rapidly and silently on tracks where motor transport could not travel, modified the design of their Bren gun carriers to protect the crews from explosives which could be thrown into the vehicles from the thick scrub, and improvised weapons for bush warfare. They concentrated on moving through thickly-wooded country, physical hardening and developing the ability to live for long periods on simple and limited rations. The 17th Brigade established a "Jungle Warfare School" (along lines which were to become well defined in similar schools in Australia as the war with Japan developed) and the whole trend of training reflected a ready adaptability.

Thus the beginning of May found the Japanese vigorously on the move through the whole area north of Australia. At Corregidor the end was coming for Wainwright and his men; in Burma the British-Indian force was being pushed back to India. In the islands closer to Australia some sort of climax was obviously approaching; in the Solomons the Japanese air attacks on Tulagi were intensifying; behind Lae and Salamaua the men of the N.G.V.R. were hanging grimly to the edges of the Japanese

occupation; at Port Moresby General Morris had been warned that a "decisive" moment was at hand. On the mainland itself General Herring was still racing time at Darwin; north-west Australia was open for a series of progressive Japanese steps towards Fremantle. In the east the First Army had been told by the Australian leaders that probable moves by the Japanese would be the capture of Port Moresby followed by a progressive advance south under cover of land-based aircraft; that the whole coastline from Brisbane to Townsville could not then be held; that the First Army's tasks were to defend Thursday Island with the existing garrison, to defend Townsville with a garrison which would be built up to one division at an early date, to defend the Brisbane area.

In the Solomon Islands the Japanese attacks on Tulagi mounted vehemently until 2nd May when eight heavy raids took place between 6 a.m. and 5 p.m. That day coastwatchers reported the approach of Japanese ships, whereupon Captain Goode and the soldiers and airmen with him coolly carried out their demolition program and the glow of their fires rose high that night. Then they put off in their small boat for Vila in the New Hebrides. They could scarcely have timed their escape more finely, for the Japanese began the occupation of Tulagi next day.

By this time reports gathered by Australian and American Intelligence made a definite pattern. Japanese naval forces were on the move southward, Japanese aircraft concentrated in New Britain were ready to support this movement.

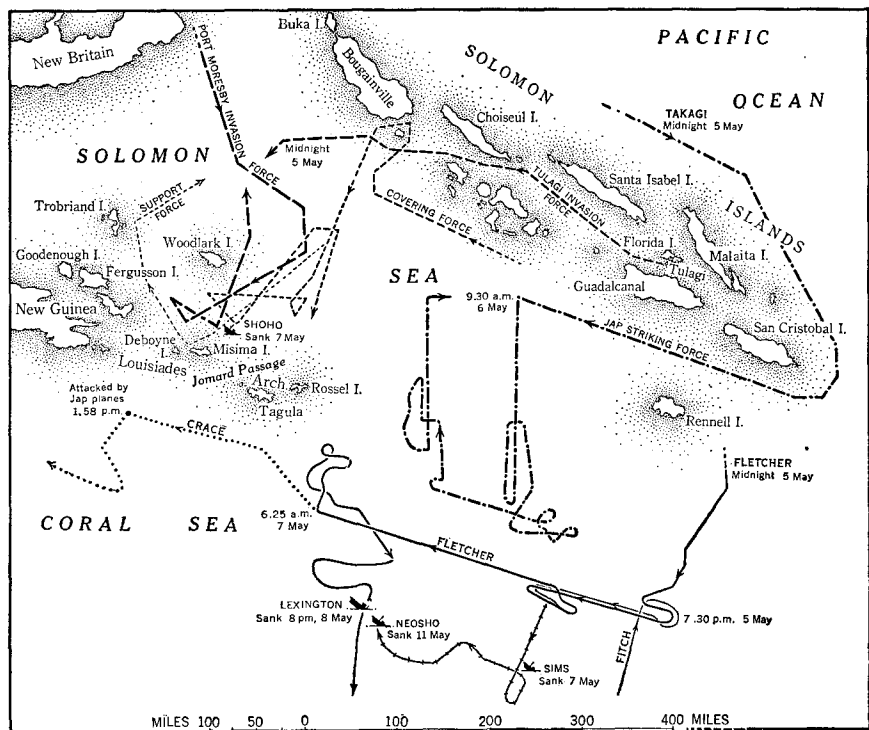
Warned well in advance Rear-Admiral F. J. Fletcher of the United States Navy, who had been cruising in these seas, on 1st May brought his force to a rendezvous south of the Solomons with Rear-Admiral A. W. Fitch, fresh from re-fitting at Pearl Harbour. Fletcher had with him the aircraft carrier *Yorktown*, the heavy cruisers *Astoria*, *Chester*, and *Portland*, six destroyers and the tanker *Neosho*. Fitch brought to the rendezvous the carrier *Lexington*, the heavy cruisers *Minneapolis* and *New Orleans*, and five destroyers. Fletcher took command of the combined force and Fitch's ships began to re-fuel at sea from an oiler, guarded by the heavy cruiser *Chicago* and the destroyer *Perkins*.

On the 2nd Admiral Fletcher received reports that the Japanese were preparing to move on Port Moresby. He himself at once set a course for the north-west, leaving Fitch to move to a meeting on the 4th with the Australian heavy and light cruisers *Australia* and *Hobart* (Rear-Admiral J. G. Crace).

Fletcher had news on the evening of the 3rd that the Japanese were landing at Tulagi. After a high-speed run he launched his attacking planes from the *Yorktown* early in three separate attacks on the Japanese in Tulagi Harbour. The target was disappointingly meagre but the Americans smashed a destroyer and a cargo ship, five seaplanes and a number of small craft, and damaged other ships. One American pilot was lost.

By the 5th Fletcher had rendezvoused again with Fitch. Soon he knew definitely that a strong Japanese force of troop-carrying ships was moving down from Rabaul to Port Moresby under naval cover which included

the aircraft carrier *Shoho*. It seemed likely that the force would make for Port Moresby by way of the Jomard Passage in the Louisiade Archipelago. A separate striking force, built round the carriers *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku*, was moving into the Coral Sea round San Cristobal in the southern Solomons.



Coral Sea Battle, 5th-8th May

On the morning of the 7th May each force knew where the other was. At 9 a.m., the transports were ordered to turn back and, for the time being, the threat to Moresby ceased. The *Shoho* was picked up by scouting aircraft near Misima. Aircraft from the *Lexington* and the *Yorktown* sank it. About the same time Japanese aircraft from the *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku* attacked and sank the *Neosho*, mistaking it for an aircraft carrier. It was a costly mistake for them.

Next morning the main action was joined off the Louisiades. Japanese aircraft from Rabaul flew down to take part in it. From their bases in the Cairns-Townsville-Cloncurry area Australian and American pilots hurried to join the battle. The opposing aircraft carriers manoeuvred strenuously to avoid the attacks levelled at them as they sent their own aircraft into the air. Not a single shot was exchanged by opposing surface craft. It was a fitting culmination to the first months of this new war of which sea-air movement had been the dominant feature.

But, from the Allied point of view, the destructive results of the aircraft attacks on the Japanese ships were disappointing. Other than the *Shoho* no Japanese ships were sunk although a number, including the other two carriers, were damaged. The Americans lost the *Lexington*, the destroyer *Sims* and the *Neosho*, and the *Yorktown* was badly damaged. Despite this the Japanese turned and went back the way they had come, postponing their attempt to take Port Moresby, where from 6th May until the 9th the garrison had been anxiously awaiting heavy bombing attacks followed by the landing of Japanese troops from transports and possibly the descent of paratroops, as on Timor ten weeks earlier.

Whether it was the sighting of Admiral Crace's squadron barring the way of the Japanese convoy or the sighting of the aircraft carriers, or both that caused Admiral Inouye, Commander of the *Fourth Fleet*, in overall command from Rabaul, to order the convoy to turn away remains in doubt. There can be no doubt, however, that it was most fortunate that the efficient American naval Intelligence enabled the Allied naval forces to be on the spot and that the convoy was turned back. So hesitant had General MacArthur and General Blamey been to send reinforcements to New Guinea that on 10th May, the day on which the Japanese planned to land round Port Moresby, the defending garrison was not materially stronger than the one which General Sturdee had established there early in January.

The Coral Sea battle caused keen anxiety both in Washington and in Australia. At a meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 11th May Admiral Ernest J. King pointed out that until the end of June there would be only two serviceable American aircraft carriers in the Pacific, whereas the Japanese had from seven to ten, and radio intercepts indicated that a large naval force was due to leave Japan on 20th May and could be at some point on the line joining Alaska, Hawaii and Australia between 1st and 5th June.

In Australia on 12th May MacArthur sent Curtin a gloomy appreciation in the course of which he said that he believed the enemy could strike "a new blow of the most dangerous potentialities against the S.W.P.A. or against India", and that a Japanese offensive against the S.W.P.A. should precede a movement against India. He urged haste in developing the Australian "defensive bastion". "We have . . . in this theatre at the present time all the elements that have produced disaster in the Western Pacific since the beginning of the war." He informed Curtin that he had cabled to General Marshall a request for two aircraft carriers, a corps of three divisions, and a first-line strength of 1,000 aircraft.

However, not only did the Battle of the Coral Sea stave off attack on Port Moresby (and air attacks on the Australian north-east coast, for both the *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku* had been detailed to press on to Townsville and destroy there the assemblage of Allied shipping and aircraft), but it helped to dislocate a wider and more ambitious plan.

The rapidity of the advance southward of the Japanese up to the end

of January made it necessary for them quickly to establish a firm perimeter in the New Guinea-Solomons area. They needed this to enable them to consolidate their gains and to build up their strength to seize key-points farther south and sever the Pacific lines of communication. Airfields were the vital links. Port Moresby, Salamaua, Lae and Tulagi were therefore obvious points at which to aim.

The invasion of Lae and Salamaua had been carried out by a combined navy-army group totalling about 3,000 men. These gathered in Rabaul, left there with a strong naval escort and, as they approached their destination on 7th March, divided into two groups. A strong battalion group of Major-General Tomitaro Horii's *South Seas Force* landed at Salamaua. Naval troops occupied Lae. As soon as it was clear that the land defence of the two points was secure Horii's men withdrew from Salamaua leaving about 1,500 naval troops in the whole Lae-Salamaua area to build up and defend the Lae air base which was their chief concern.

The Japanese Imperial General Headquarters discussed operations against Australia on 15th March. The army staff were opposed to an invasion of Australia which they said would require ten divisions or more. Both army and navy confirmed a plan formulated in February to take Port Moresby, and isolate Australia by occupying Fiji, Samoa and New Caledonia. The convoy turned back in the Coral Sea carried a force including the *114th Regiment* and the *3rd Kure Naval Landing Force*. The seizure of Port Moresby was to be followed by that of Midway Island in order to force a decisive engagement with the American fleet. The Japanese would also invade the western Aleutians to secure their defences in the north. Despite the setback in the Coral Sea General Hyakutake, commanding the *XVII Japanese Army*, was ordered from Tokyo on 18th May to press on towards New Caledonia, Fiji and Samoa, and to resume the advance on Port Moresby in July. The successful execution of these plans, the Japanese hoped, would prevent the concentration in Australia and New Zealand of forces sufficiently strong to wage an offensive war. From New Guinea, New Caledonia, Fiji and Samoa sustained neutralising attacks would be levelled at key-points of Australia and New Zealand. Sheltered within the outer rim of the defences thus established the development of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere was to proceed.