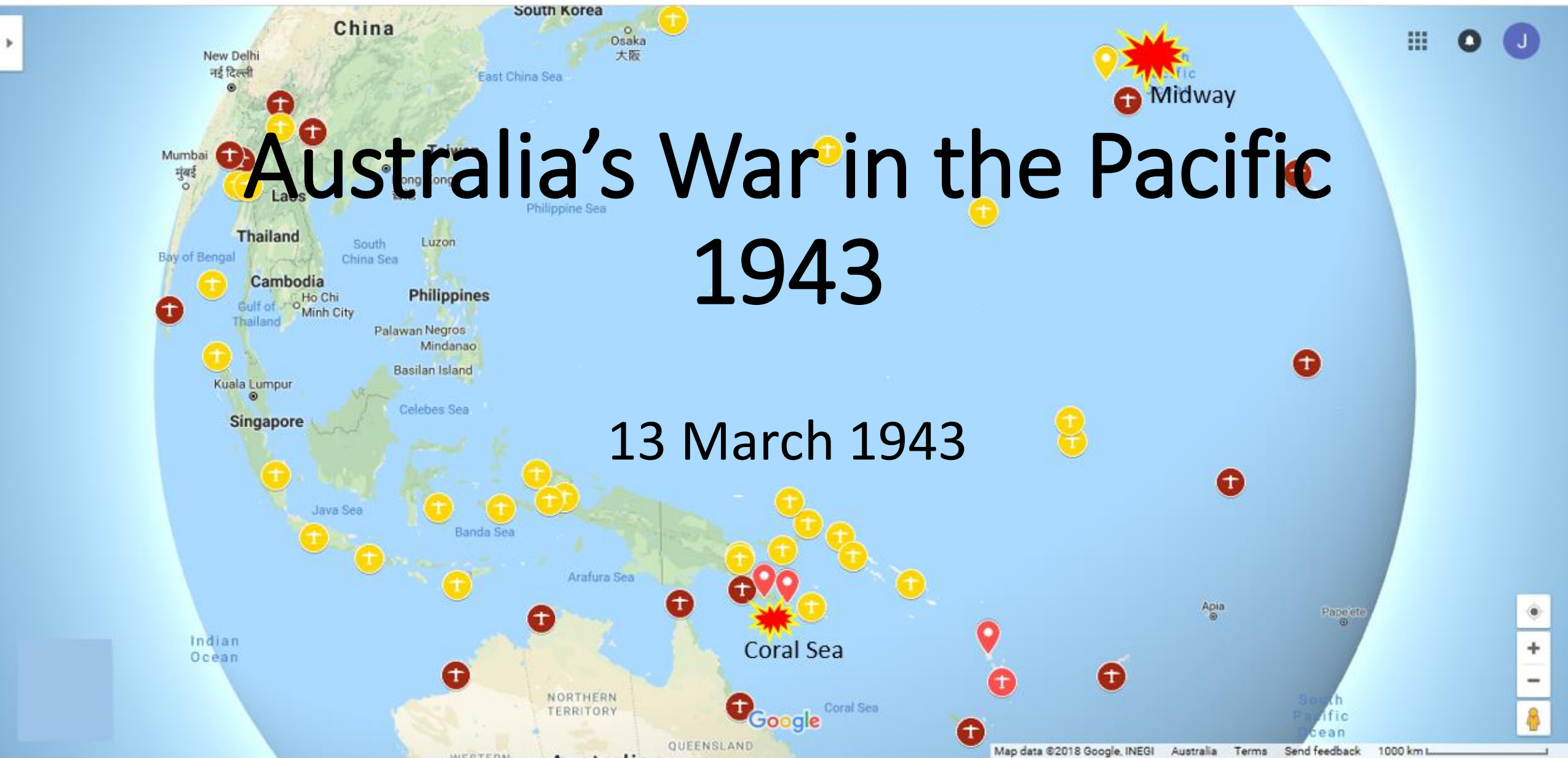


Australia's War in the Pacific 1943

13 March 1943



- Where did we get to?
- 13 March 1943.

Situation report – 13 March 1943

- The Allied Air Forces have won a decisive victory in the Bismark Sea and the US Navy in Blackett Strait have demonstrated that they can now confidently engage Japanese surface forces at night.
- The long and bloody battles for the Kokoda trail, Guadalcanal and the Japanese beach heads at Gona, Buna and Sanananda have been won.
- The Japanese attack on Wau has been repelled but the Japanese remain in force at Salamaua and Mubo.
- The British Indian army is mounting a campaign to capture Akyab in North West Burma and the Chindits have crossed the Chindwin on their raid into Northern Burma.
- The Allied air forces have achieved a good deal of freedom of action. They are able to supply allied ground troops and reconnoitre Japanese bases with very few losses but Japanese air forces are becoming more active once again.
- The American submarine force is becoming more effective after fixing some early technical problems but there are still too many torpedo failures. Japanese submarines also remain active off the Australian coast.
- The Casablanca Conference continued the beat Hitler first strategy decided by the UK and the US early in 1941. Operations in the Pacific were to continue with the object of maintaining pressure on Japan, retaining the initiative and attaining a position of readiness for a full-scale offensive by the United Nations as soon as Germany is defeated.

Situation – 13 March 1943



Situation report – 13 March 1943

- The war against Hitler also appears to have turned a corner.
- Russia has survived 21 months of German invasion and enormous losses of men, equipment and territory and in a 5 month long battle has defended the city of Stalingrad and completely destroyed the German armies attacking it.
- The last pocket of German troops surrendered on 2 February 1943. 91,000 prisoners were taken including 22 Generals. Total Axis casualties could have been over a million. Losses of weapons and equipment were also huge.



General Andrey Yeryomenko (right) with the Chief Commissar of the Stalingrad Front, Nikita Khrushchev (left), December 1942.

Situation report – 13 March 1943

- In Africa,
- after two years of demoralising disasters, a British Empire army, with the 2nd New Zealand Division in the van, has defeated the Afrika Korps at 2nd Alamein in October 1942 and pursued them into Tunisia.
- The Anglo-American landings (Operation Torch) in North-West Africa in November 1942, have compelled Vichy French forces to change sides, and completed the encirclement of quarter of a million Axis troops in Tunisia.



Admiral Darlan, General Eisenhower, Admiral Cunningham and General Giraud.

Situation report – 13 March 1943

- In the battle of the Atlantic, which had to be won before Hitler could be beaten, losses to U-Boats continued at horrific levels but American new construction had now overtaken the losses.
- In March 1943 the introduction of VLR aircraft, ASV Mark III radar and Huff Duff direction finding sets held out hopes that the U-Boats could be defeated.

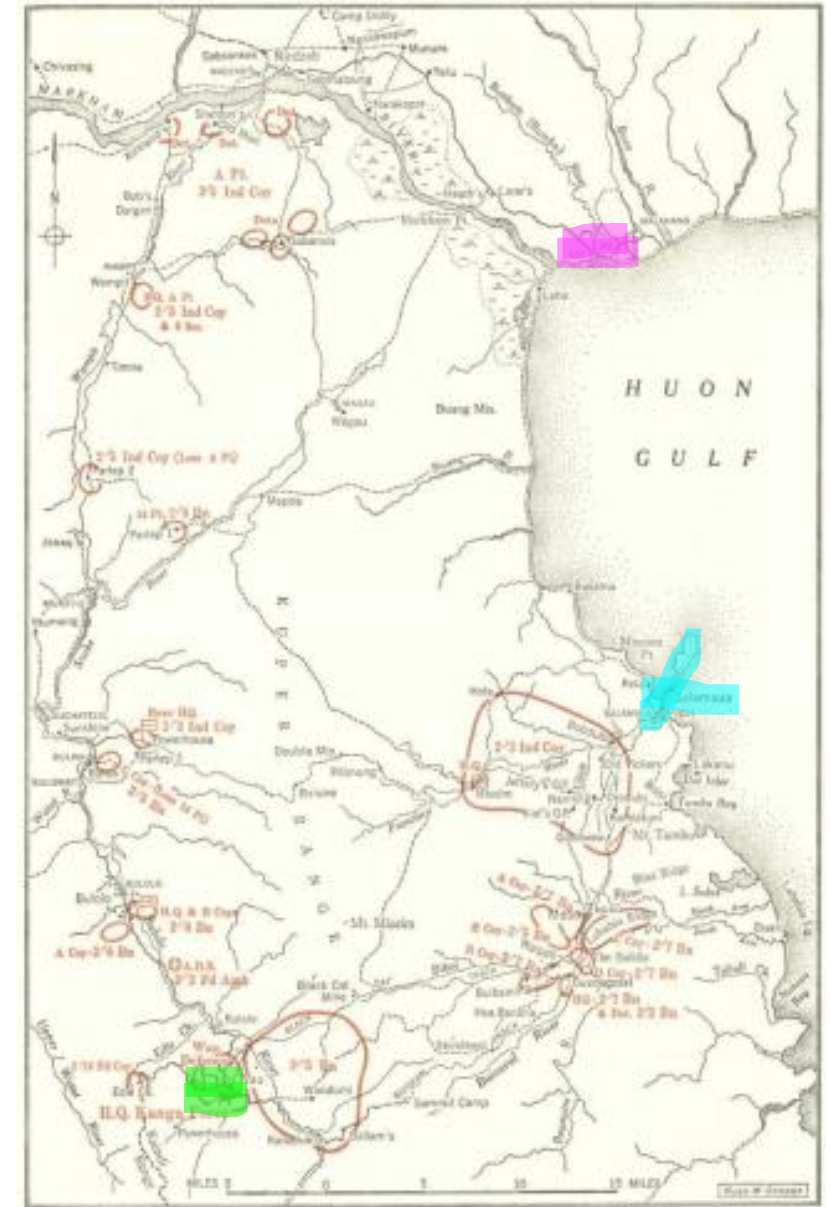
LOSSES FROM ALL CAUSES AND NEW CONSTRUCTION OF UNITED NATIONS AND NEUTRAL TANKERS AND OTHER TYPES OF CARGO (AND PASSENGER) VESSELS.

FIRST ELEVEN MONTHS OF 1942

| | Gross Tonnage in 1,000's of Register Tons | | | | | | |
|-----------|---|---------|--------|-----------------------|--------|--------------------------|--------|
| | Losses from All Causes | | | New Tonnage Completed | | Net Gain (G) or Loss (L) | |
| | All Types | Tankers | Others | Tankers | Others | Tankers | Others |
| January | 518 | 140 | 378 | 95 | 130 | 45 L | 248 L |
| February | 682 | 258 | 424 | 48 | 209 | 210 L | 216 L |
| March | 836 | 280 | 556 | 39 | 275 | 241 L | 281 L |
| April | 711 | 247 | 464 | 67 | 360 | 180 L | 104 L |
| May | 754 | 232 | 522 | 78 | 497 | 154 L | 25 L |
| June | 842 | 208 | 634 | 69 | 565 | 139 L | 69 L |
| July | 683 | 87 | 596 | 84 | 593 | 3 L | 3 L |
| August | 678 | 148 | 530 | 57 | 623 | 91 L | 93 G |
| September | 580 | 81 | 499 | 160 | 693 | 79 G | 194 G |
| October | 575 | 119 | 456 | 52 | 711 | 67 L | 255 G |
| November | 755 | 76 | 679 | 80 | 689 | 4 G | 10 G |
| Totals | 7,614 | 1,876 | 5,738 | 829 | 5,345 | 1,047 L | 393 L |

14 March - Wau

- The only place in the South and South West Pacific where ground forces remain in contact is the area between Wau and Salamaua. On the north coast of New Guinea.
- Notice the scale.
- The war had been going on between Wau and Salamau since the Japanese landed at Lae and Salamaua on 8th March 1942.



14 March - Wau

- Wau is a town in New Guinea, in the province of Morobe situated at one end of the Wau-Bulolo Valley. It was the site of a gold rush during the 1920s and 1930s.
- [Wau and Bulolo] were towns built solely by virtue of man's conquest of the air. Every nail, sheet of iron, weatherboard, spot of paint, pane of glass, crock, wire or sheet of paper was carried in by air at freight rates between 4d and 1/5d per pound. The wrecked trucks that now dotted the highways, rusted out and twisted by fire, were brought in by air. The billiard tables at the hotels were brought in by air. Easy chairs, refrigerators, bathtubs, stoves, dynamos, linoleum, carpets, garden statuary, even great mining dredges, bulldozers and power shovels—all were brought in by air, and this in a decade when most people in Australia were still thinking it adventurous to take a five-minute joy ride over an airfield.
- There was still no effective overland supply route to Wau and the Japanese at Salamaua and Lae cut off access by sea.
- Allied forces with their food, guns and ammunition still had to come by air, but now instead of the 40 mile hop from Lae that supplied the gold miners it was a 130 mile flight from Moresby over the high mountains and foul weather of the Owen Stanleys.

14 March - Wau

- Wau aerodrome was a rough Kunai grass airstrip 3,100 ft (940 m) in length with a 10 per cent slope heading directly for Mount Kaindi.
- Aircraft could approach from the north east only, landing uphill and taking off downhill. The mountain at the end of the runway prevented second attempts at landing and precluded extension of the strip.
- Pilots had to manoeuvre C47s under clouds and through dangerous passes, "dodging a peak here and cloud there", landing at high speeds. This required good visibility, but the weather over the Owen Stanley Range was characterised by frequent storms, vertical drafts, and mists which rose from the jungle floor.



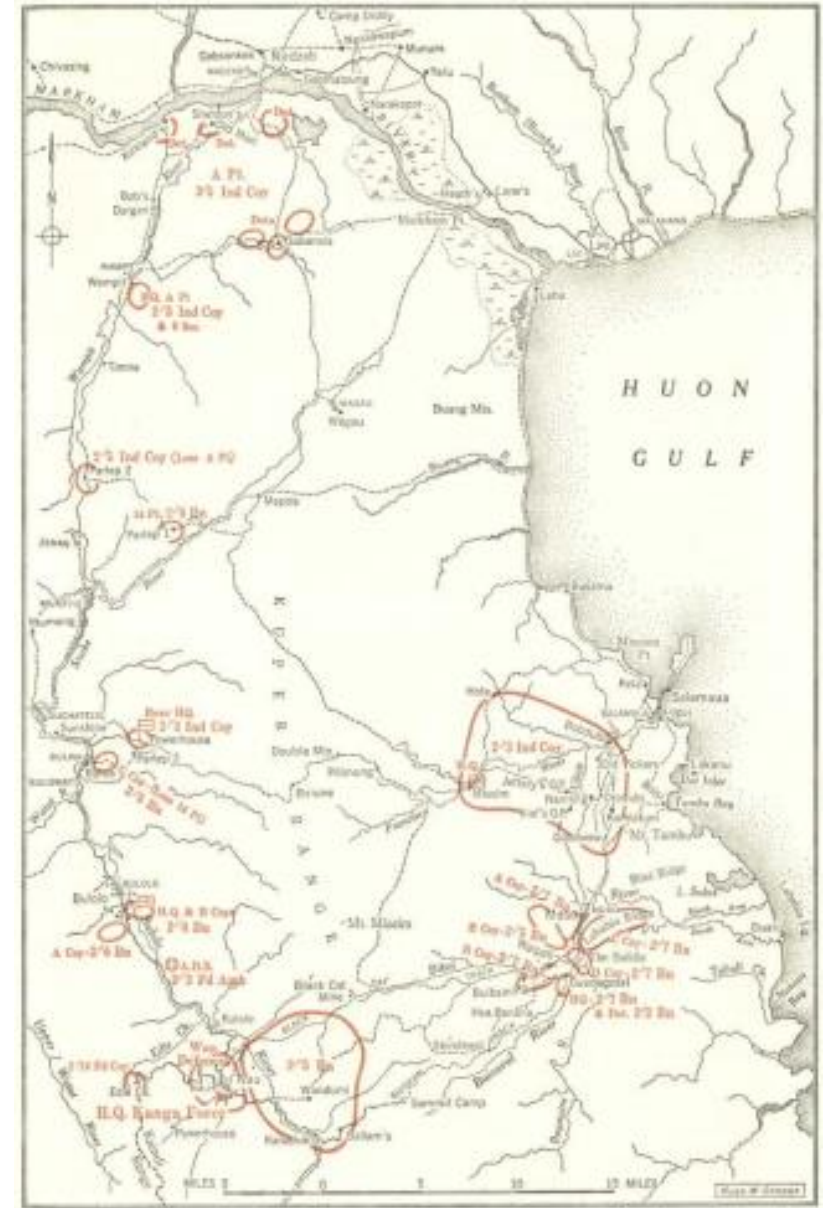
WU, NEW GUINEA. 1943-08-08. DOUGLAS C47 DAKOTA AIRCRAFT LANDING ON THE AIRFIELD.

14 March - Wau

- One of the most difficult and unpleasant areas ever to confront troops lay before the Australians.
- The country for the most part, consisted of rugged mountains clothed with dense, almost impenetrable jungle, and in the higher areas with moss forest.
- Occasionally hills covered with kunai grass, such as those in the Snake Valley, stood out against the jungle background.
- Clouds, which frequently descended upon the mountains, rain, towering trees and drooping vines all shut out the sunlight leaving gloom and eerie stillness. Sodden earth and rotting vegetation, all combined to add a touch of the primaeval to the battlegrounds of this part of New Guinea.
- Clothing was perpetually wet with rain and perspiration; the ravages of insect pests, notably mosquitoes and leeches, were enough to call out the blasphemous superlatives of the sorely-tried Australian soldier.
- The tropical rains of many centuries had cut deep ravines and, as a result, any movement entailed constant negotiation of watercourses and steep descents on tracks hardly meriting the name, with correspondingly steep ascents to follow.

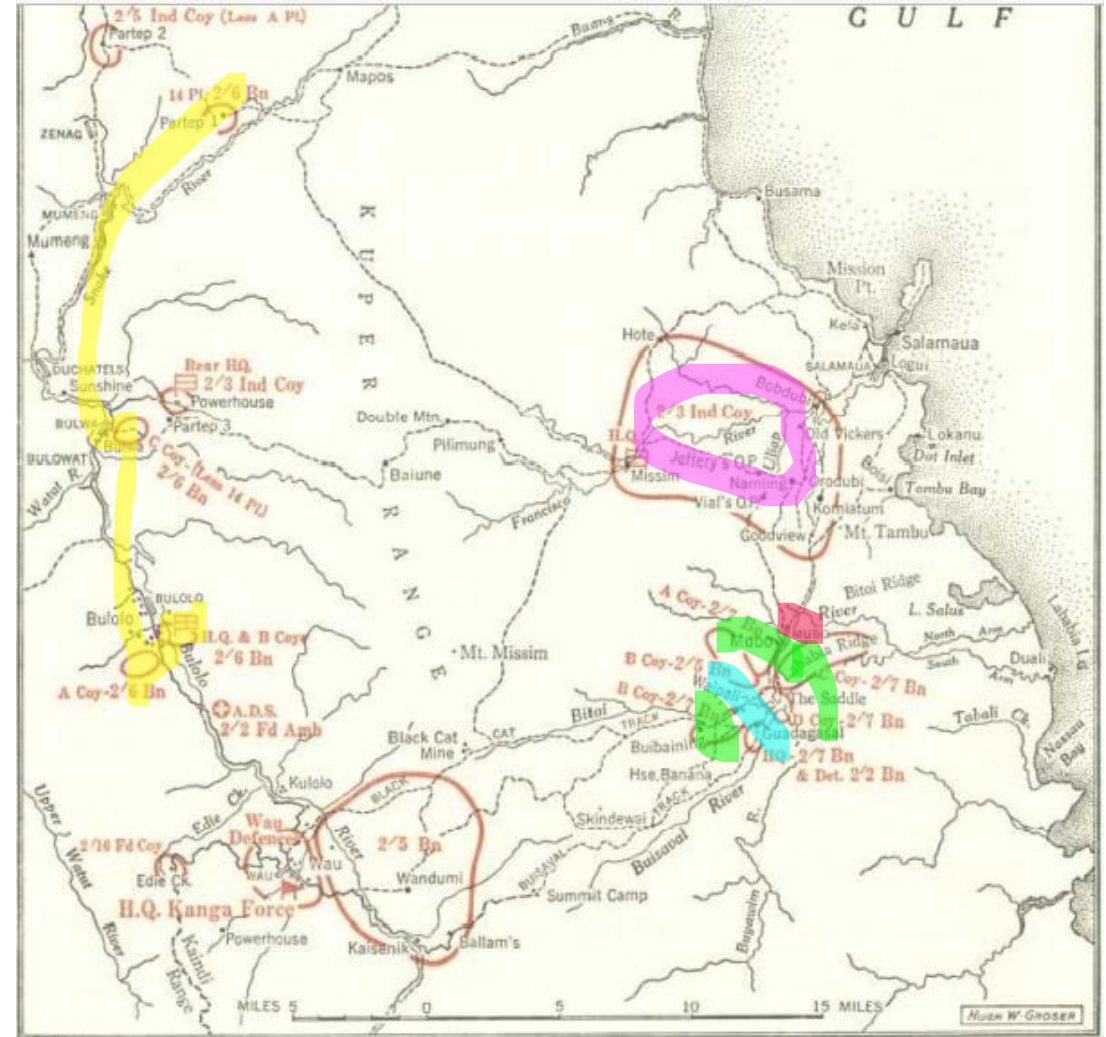
14 March - Wau

- After many bitter and exhausting experiences the troops learnt to measure distance in hours not miles. Time taken in one direction might be far different from time taken in another, depending on the lie of the land. The soldier's life was governed by the tracks around and along which all operations took place.
- As the track became worn the troops had to wallow along in mud up to the knees and perhaps over them, stumbling now and then over hidden rocks and roots, and for support clutching vines and branches which often broke off rotten in their hands.
- The report of the 3rd Australian Division said:
- “Such conditions of rain, mud, rottenness, stench, gloom, and, above all, the feeling of being shut in by everlasting jungle and ever ascending mountains, are sufficient to fray the strongest nerves. But add to them the tension of the constant expectancy of death from behind the impenetrable screen of green, and nerves must be of the strongest, and morale of the highest, to live down these conditions, accept them as a matter of course, and maintain a cheerful yet fighting spirit.”



14 March - Wau

- The Japanese withdrawal from Wau ceased when they reached the Mubo area. Moten had then decided not to drive them out of Mubo, but to control the area by offensive patrolling forward from a line running between Guadagasa and Waipali.
- His main force was the 17th Brigade, engaged recently in the defence of Wau. After the Japanese retreat Moten had decided that the danger of attack on the Wau-Bulolo valley had shifted from the Mubo to the Markham area.
- He had sent the 2/6th Battalion to cover the approaches from the Markham while the 2/5th Battalion faced the Mubo area, and the 2/3rd Independent Company, which had joined in the fight for Wau after having been part of the garrison of New Caledonia, went to the Missim area.



14 March - Wau

- In these conditions the human element played a big part for it was important to keep the fighting soldiers fit and cheerful. They were wet most of the time, and tended to become depressed and ill.
- Brigadier Moten had already decided that the main way to keep them interested and fit was to place rest camps where they could sleep dry, have a hot meal or two, and wash themselves and their clothing, close behind the forward positions.
- He established such a camp at Edie Creek, where it was cold enough at night for four blankets, and there the men gained appetite amazingly and even put a little weight on lean frames.
- The camp was at 6,666 feet, which made it extremely cold. This didn't go down well for those recovering from tropical illnesses especially malaria. Vitamin B injections supplemented the hot meals in treating dietary deficiency.

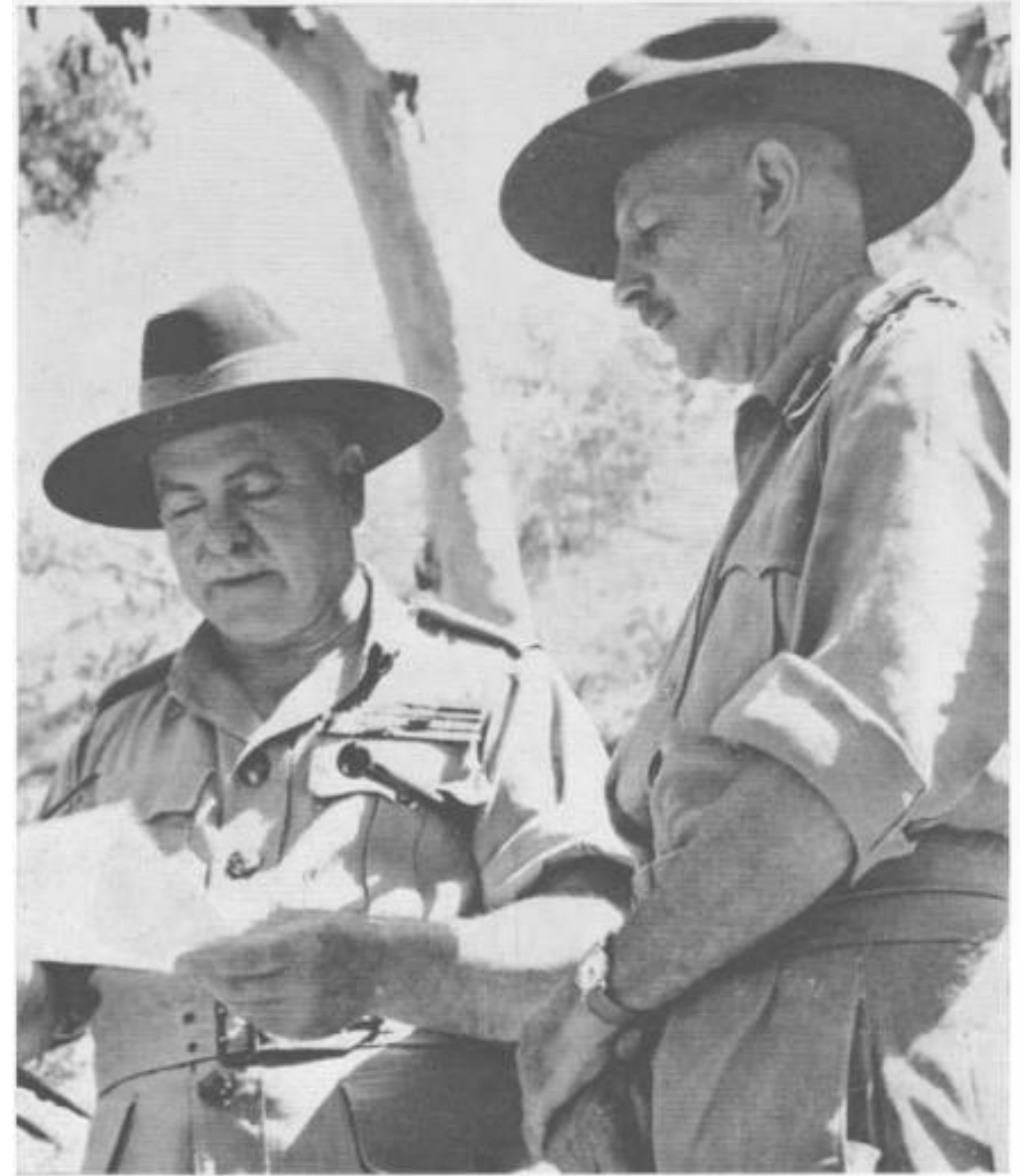


Brigadier M.J. Moten commander of Kanga Force

14 March - Wau

- Moten reported to General Mackay at New Guinea Force.

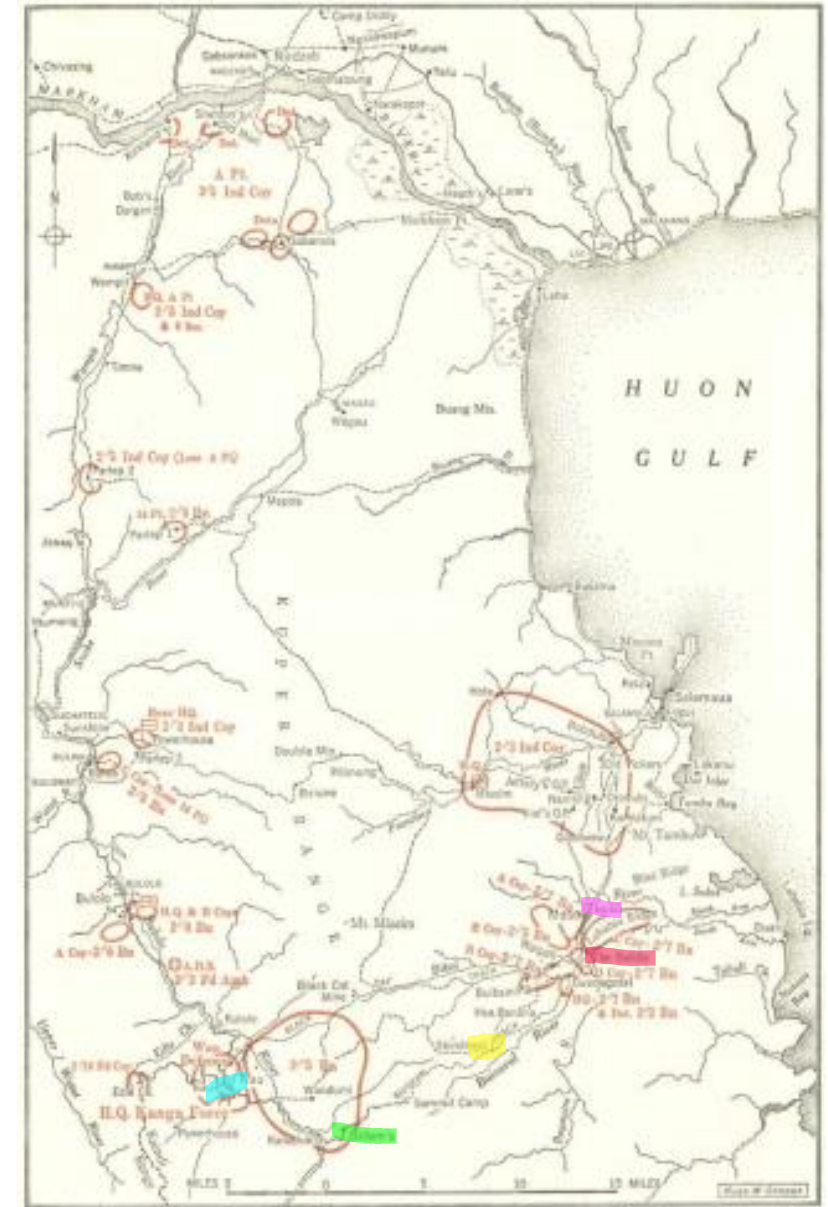
General Sir Thomas Blamey,
Commander Allied Land Forces, and
Lieut-General Sir Iven Mackay, acting
GOC New Guinea Force, at New Guinea
Force headquarters.



(Australian War Memorial)

14 March - Wau

- On the 9th (March) General Whitehead had written to General Mackay:
- “With two squadrons of 18 operating carrier planes available for movements to the Wau area, weather conditions have been such that only 14.1 loads per day have been carried into the area. Had twice as many aeroplanes been available the average carry would not have been proportionately larger because of the brief periods when operations into the Wau-Bulolo Valley have been possible. During the next six weeks (until approximately April 15th) there should be a slight increase in convective activity in the Wau area and over the ranges. This means that cumulus clouds will build up earlier in the day with moderate to heavy showers on the slopes of the ranges after 12 noon. On the best operating days there will not be more than four or five hours when operations into Wau are possible. It is probable that one or two hours will be the normal period when operations can be carried out. Ballam's dropping point will be even more difficult to supply. Skindewai will be closed most of the time since between Summit Station and Guadagasal Saddle the mountains are usually covered with mist during this season of year. . . . Operations into the Saddle and into Mubo would be more difficult than into Skindewai.



14 March - Wau

- Whitehead was concerned, too, about the strain of providing fighter cover for air transports into Wau.
- In the final analysis he was forced to recommend that all available troop carriers should be used to build up a reserve of supplies for the force then in the Wau-Bulolo area; that no more troops should be moved forward of Ballam's than could be supplied by ground; that no more troops should be moved to Wau until reserves were built up and that planning for offensive action against Mubo or Salamaua should be based upon the realisation that supply would have to be maintained by sea.



14 March - COIC

(2) S.W.Coast Dutch New Guinea - Reconnaissance a.m. 13/3 reported the following shipping -

Babo - 1 merchant vessel (8-10,000 tons)

Bentoni Bay - (across MacCluer Gulf from Babo) - 1 merchant vessel (4-6,000 tons)

Raaf Bay (3°45'S, 133°55'E) - 4 merchant vessels (approx 4,000 tons each)

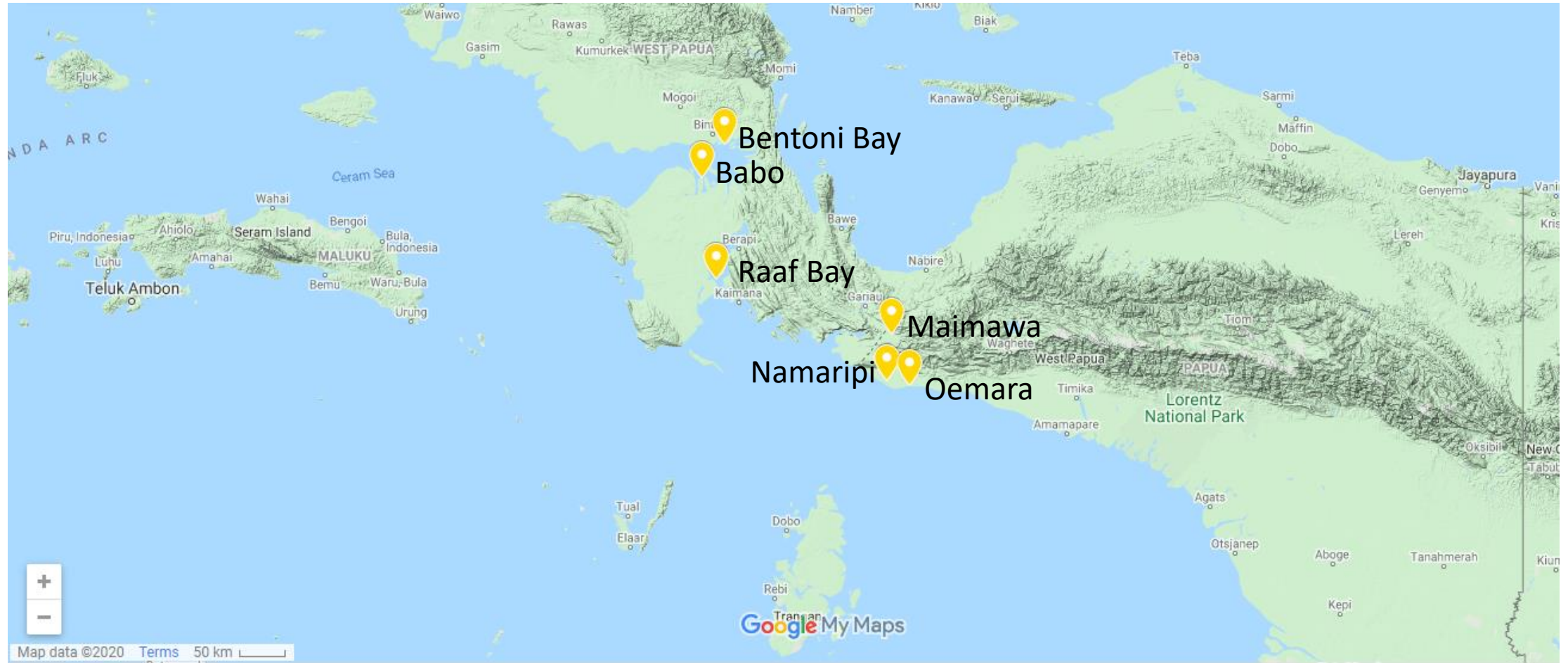
Namaripi (4°30'S, 135°15'E) - 5 small vessels

Oemara (15 miles E. of Namaripi) - 4 small cargo ships

Maimawa (4°02'S, 135°18'E) - a river ferry

The unusual shipping activity in this area together with the increased shipping at Ambon conforms with other recent intelligence indicating increased enemy activity generally in this area.

14 March – COIC



14 March - COIC

III. ENEMY'S PROBABLE NEXT MOVE

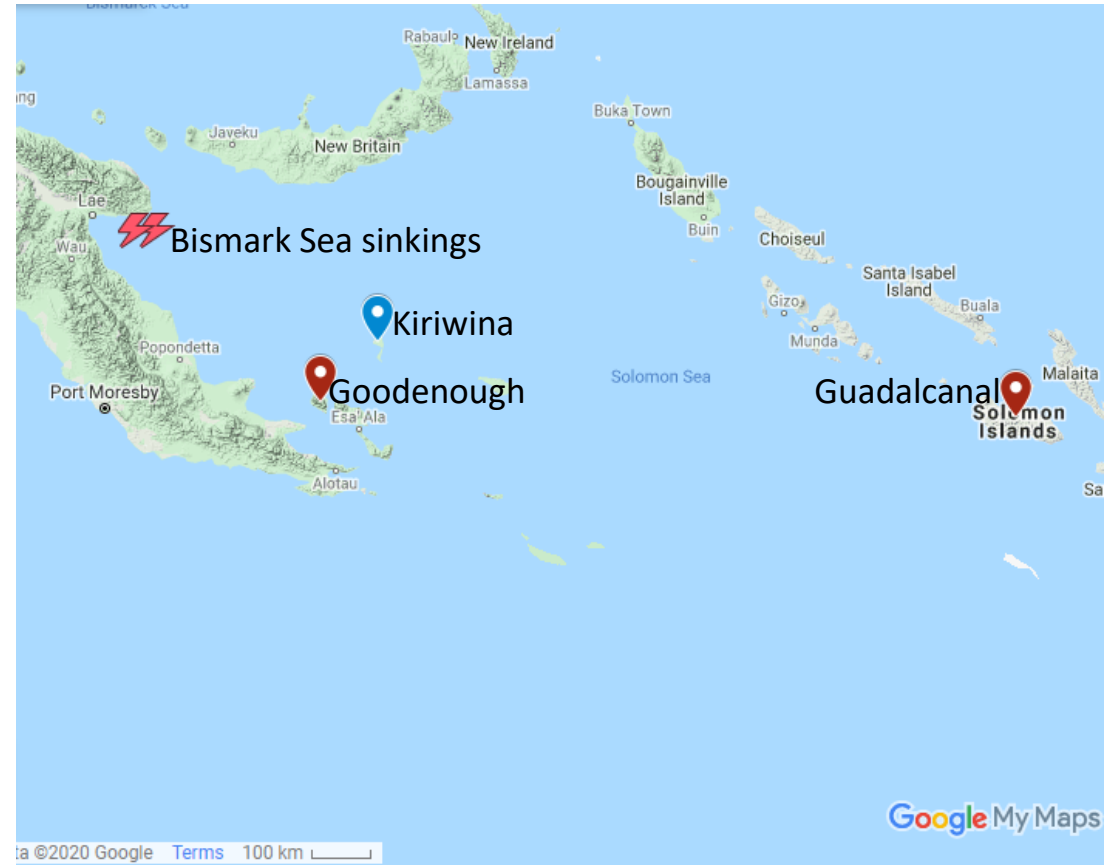
- (1) Strong consolidation advanced positions S.W.P.A. particularly Central & Northern Solomons - North coast New Guinea - S.W. coast Dutch New Guinea - Timor/Arafura Sea Islands.
- (2) Possible offensive activity from East Indies area including further infiltration to the eastward along south coast Dutch New Guinea.
- (3) Increased offensive submarine activity.


For DIRECTOR C.O.I.C.
G.H.Q., S.W.P.A.

14/3/43

14 March - Sea

- Between the 8th and the 14th Australian patrols of the 47th Battalion on Goodenough Island killed 72 Japanese, captured 42 and found 9 dead on a raft.
- Other survivors from the convoy were picked up on Kiriwina and even as far to the east as Guadalcanal.
- One patrol on Goodenough, under Captain Pascoe, stalked a group of eight Japanese, who had landed in two flat-bottomed boats, killed them all, and found that the boats contained large quantities of documents in sealed tins. These were hurried back to headquarters in Brisbane where the documents were found to include a complete Army List showing the names of all Japanese officers and their units. Examination and collation provided a complete and detailed picture of the Japanese Army.
- Soon afterwards a conference was held at Washington to disseminate this new information to intelligence staffs at all Allied headquarters.

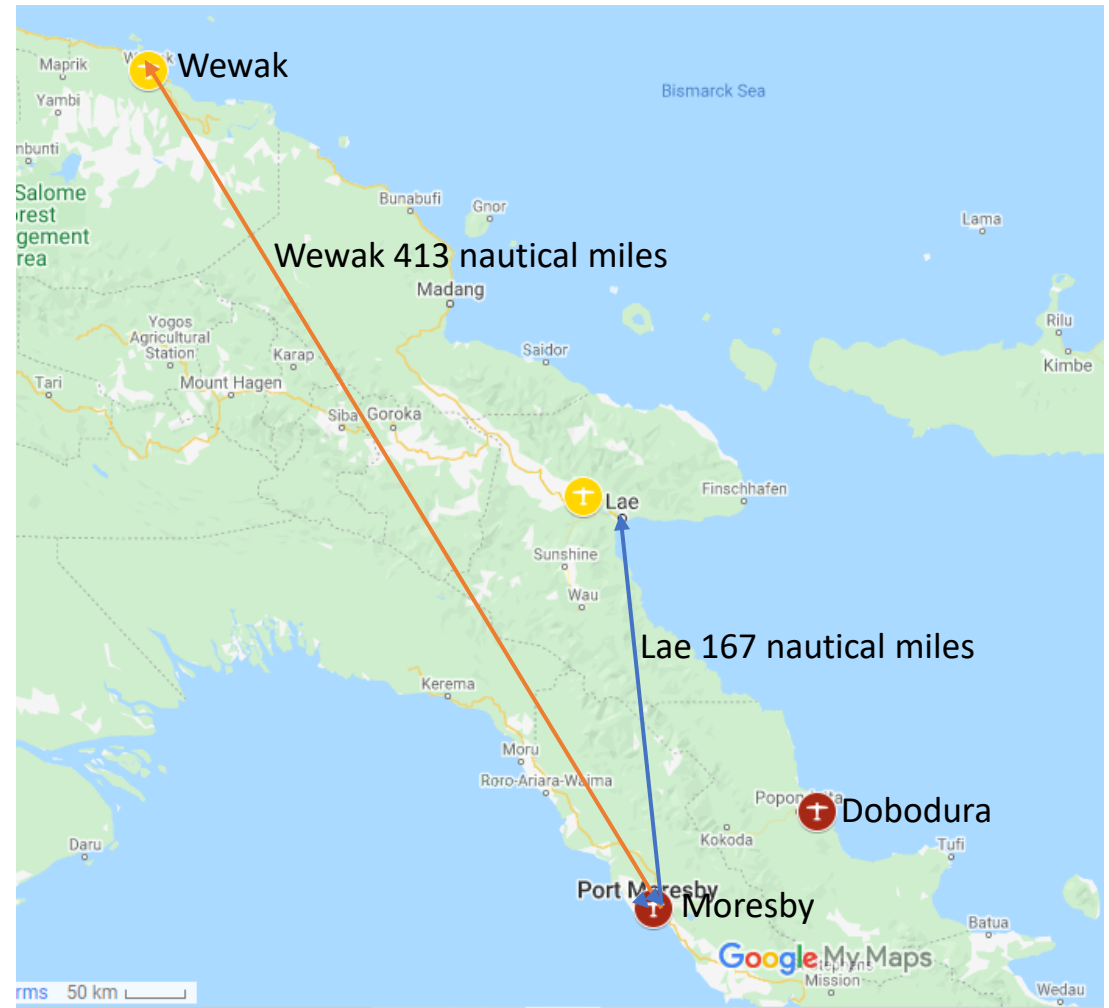


14 March - Sea

- The enemy convoy sighted approaching Wewak at 1230/13 was shadowed until the striking force of 6 Fortresses arrived.
- At 1800/13 in a position 25 miles N. by E. of Wewak, the shadowing aircraft reported the composition of the convoy to be -
 - 2 destroyers
 - 1 transport (8,000 tons)
 - 4 cargo vessels (3-4,000 tons)
 - 1 tanker (3-4,000 tons)
- At 2025/13, 6 Fortresses attacked the convoy. Three dropped demolition bombs on the aerodrome and township and a fourth bombed the convoy from 5500-7500 ft while the remaining 2 aircraft dropped 500-lb 5-second delay bombs from 200-250 ft.
- Both these two aircraft scored hits on 7-8000 ton vessels, possibly the same ship. One such ship exploded violently and was still burning fiercely 1.5 hours later. A large destroyer was hit with one bomb also a 4,000 ton tanker which could not be found when the aircraft circled back.

14 March - Sea

- On 3 March during the Battle of the Bismark Sea the Allied Air Forces had flown more than 120 sorties against the convoy as it approached Lae, sinking 4 destroyers and a transport.
- There were more than 20 B17 sorties as well as sorties by B25s, including some modified strafers, Beaufighters, Bostons, Beauforts and P38s.
- The Wewak convoy was beyond the range of all but the B17s and their effort was probably limited by availability after 4 days of maximum effort during the Bismark sea at the beginning of the month.



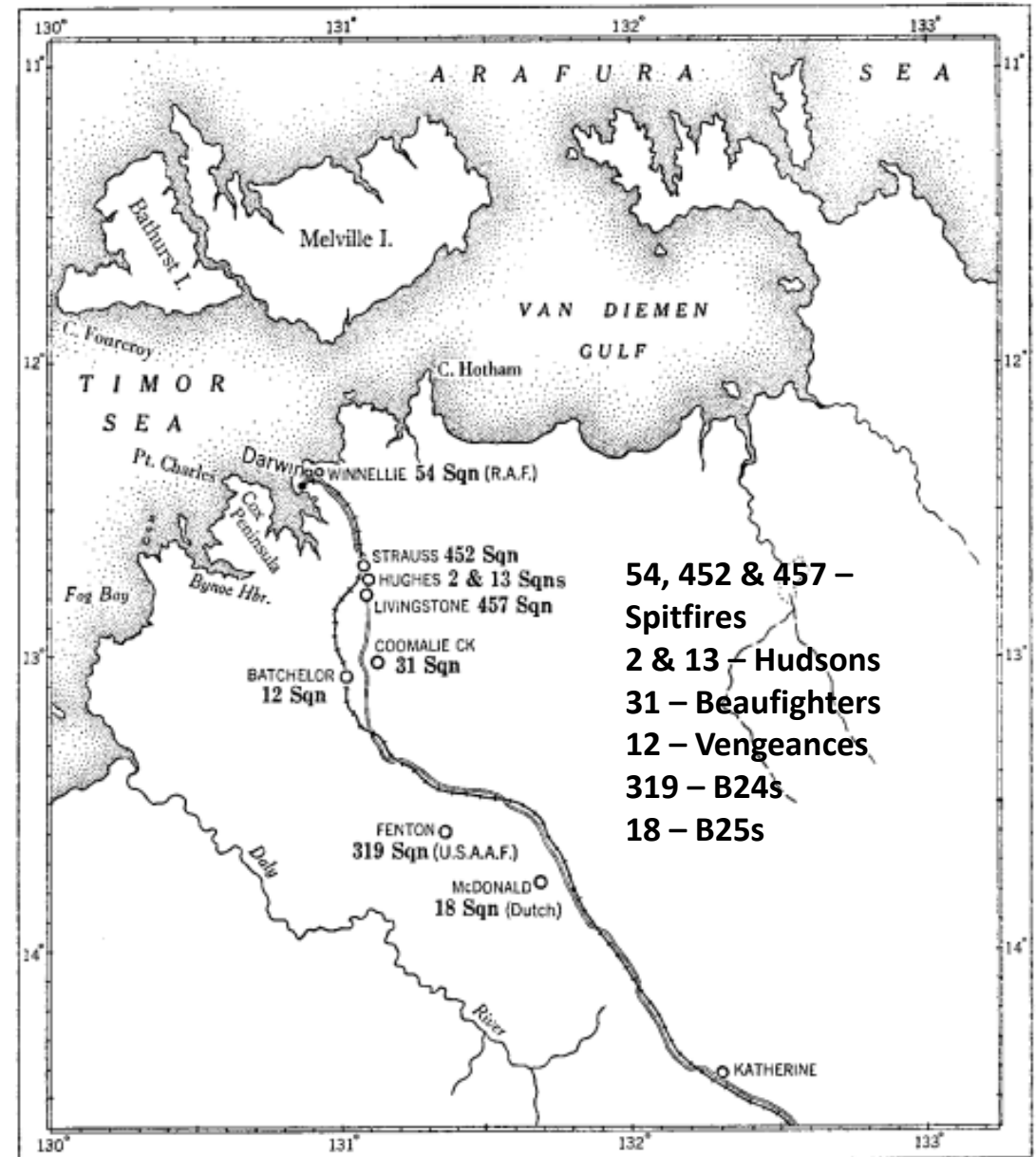
NB you cannot actually fly as the crow flies across New Guinea.

14 March - Air

- 15 Japanese bombers raided Oro Bay 1940/14 damaging wharves and dock Installations but causing no casualties.
- B-17's and B-24's bomb Wewak and Madang.
- Single B-17's bomb Gasmata, and strafe vessel off Talasea, AA position at Cape Gloucester, and Finschhafen A/F.
- A lone B-24 bombs Dili.
- By mid March the Fifth Airforce had a service group, aircraft warning units and two fighter squadrons based at Dobodura but there was still no road from the airfield to Oro Bay. The First Air Task Force was set up under Col Frederick Smith to command these units.
- Buka aerodrome was attacked by 3 Catalinas 2256/13-0400/14 .
- 4 B-24's bomb Moulmein docks. 8 B-25's hit the oft-bombed Gokteik Viaduct but the structure remains serviceable.

14 March - Air

- An Allied General Headquarters Intelligence report of 14th March 1943 estimated that a total of 334 Japanese aircraft could be deployed in the north-western area, but a vital factor limiting any aggressive moves by the enemy was a growing shortage of naval and merchant shipping which would probably compel the enemy to execute any projected operation with the troops in the immediate area.
- To counter an enemy attack the Allies had only nine squadrons, six of them Australian, all under the control of the R.A.A.F. in the Northern Territory, commanded by Air Commodore Bladin, but were capable of quickly reinforcing the area from the larger air forces in New Guinea and Queensland.
- two Catalina squadrons based on Cairns (Nos. 11 and 20) and another at Crawley, near Perth (a United States Navy squadron) were called on from time to time to make attacks against Japanese bases north of Darwin.
- In addition there were in the area No. 44 (Radar) Wing, with its twelve radar stations, and No. 61 (Works) Wing with its airfield construction units.
- Bladin reported to AVM Bostock at RAAF Command.



15 March 1943

- The Tambor-class submarine, USS Triton, was shelled and sunk off Kairiru Island, New Guinea at (3°20'10"S 143°33'0"E) by CH-24, Akikaze and Satsuki.



USS Triton (SS-201) at Dutch Harbor, Alaska, 16 July 1942

15 March - Sea

- A Japanese cargo ship was torpedoed and sunk in the Pacific Ocean (00°02'S 145°05'E) by USS Trigger.
- USS PT 67 & PT 119 were destroyed by fire in a refuelling accident at Tufi, New Guinea.
- On 15 March 1943, "by a stroke of Admiral King's pen," the Southwest Pacific Force became the Seventh Fleet and its Amphibious Force became the VII Amphibious Force.



15 March - Air

- A B-24 bombs shipping at Dobo.
- Two merchant vessels with one escort, possibly a destroyer, were sighted 37 miles N. by W. of Warilaoe on course 230° at 1245/15, The three merchant vessels were attacked by 3 Hudsons at 1800/15 22 miles north of Dobo. Two direct hits were scored. A further attack was made by 3 B25s 41 miles NW of Dobo, but no hits were scored.
- B-17's, on singleplane flights bomb Gasmata and Cape Gloucester.
- Single B-17's hit Munda and Vila A/Fs. P-38's strafe A/F at Viru.
- 12 Dauntless escorted by 25 Wildcats attacked Munda 1710/15.
- 12 Dauntless escorted by 4 Wildcats attacked Vila 1735/15.

15 March - Air

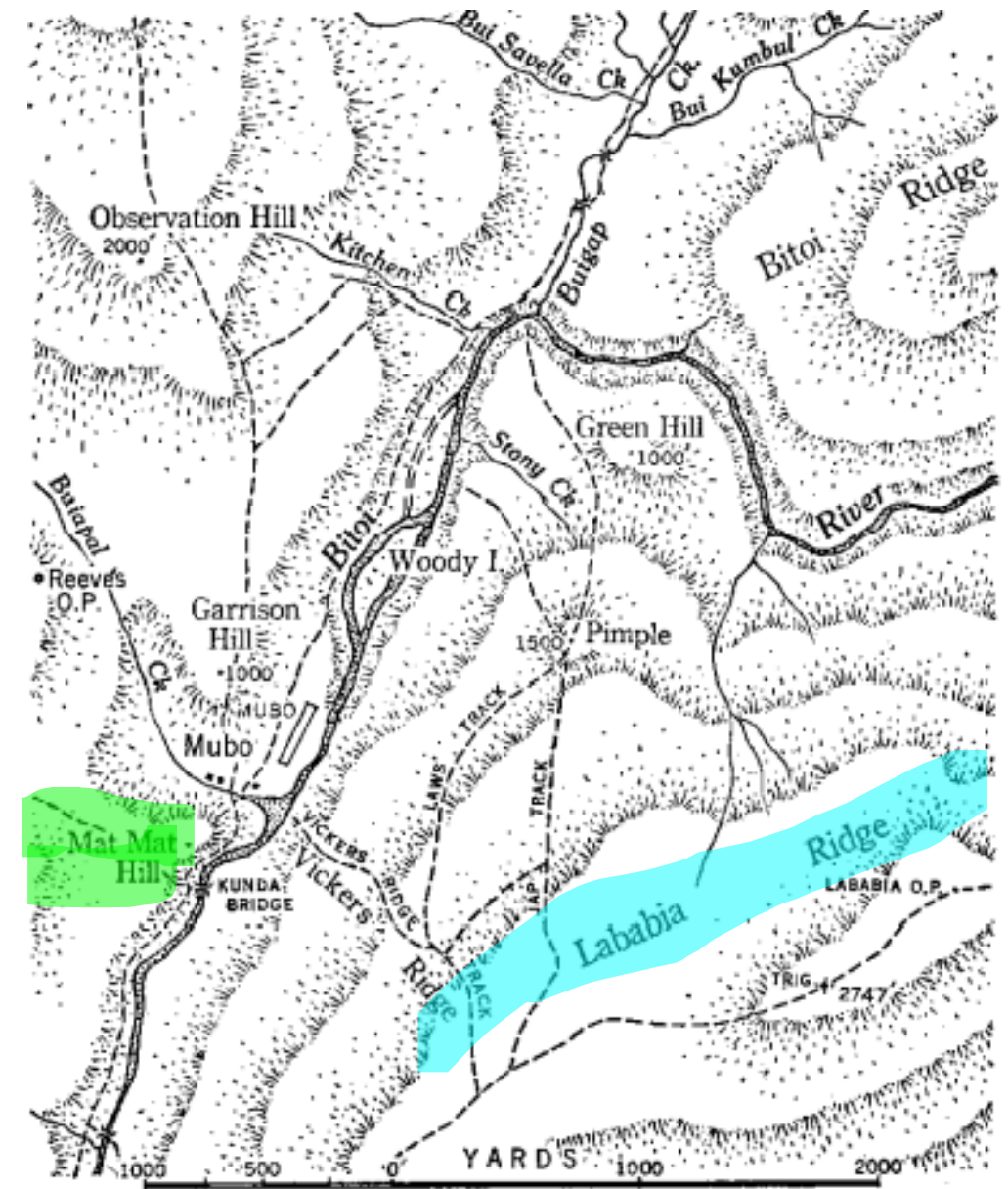
- 6 B-25's, with 4 P-38's flying top cover, bomb North Head, hitting Main Camp and gun emplacements.
- 6 B-24's with 4 P-38's for top cover then bomb Main Camp.
- Revetments and hangar area are strafed by the P-38's one of which is lost to AA.
- Next, 5 B-24's and 16 P-38's bomb and strafe Main Camp area and North Head.
- Main Camp is hit two more times, by 3 B-25's and by 8 P-38's.
- 8 B-25's bomb Gokteik Viaduct and 8 others attack Myitnge. Neither target suffers effective damage.
- 8 FBs damage bridge at Kadrangyang.

15 March - Air

- On the 15th March a Japanese formation of 20+ bombers escorted by 25+ Zeros were intercepted by the whole spitfire wing and a general dogfight followed over Darwin harbour.
- The Spitfires claimed seven aircraft shot down and seven probably damaged.
- Flying Officer Goldsmith of No. 452 destroyed a Betty and a Hap.
- Four Spitfires were lost, with three pilots including Squadron Leader Thorold-Smith, commander of No. 452, with which he had served with distinction in its first tour of duty in Fighter Command from July 1941 to March 1942.
- Command of the squadron was taken over, after a hasty conversion from Wirraways, by Squadron Leader MacDonald who had served with No. 67 Squadron R.A.F. at Singapore (Brewster Buffaloes), and who, before coming to No. 452, had commanded No. 12 Squadron at Batchelor.
- This had been the 53rd raid on Darwin.

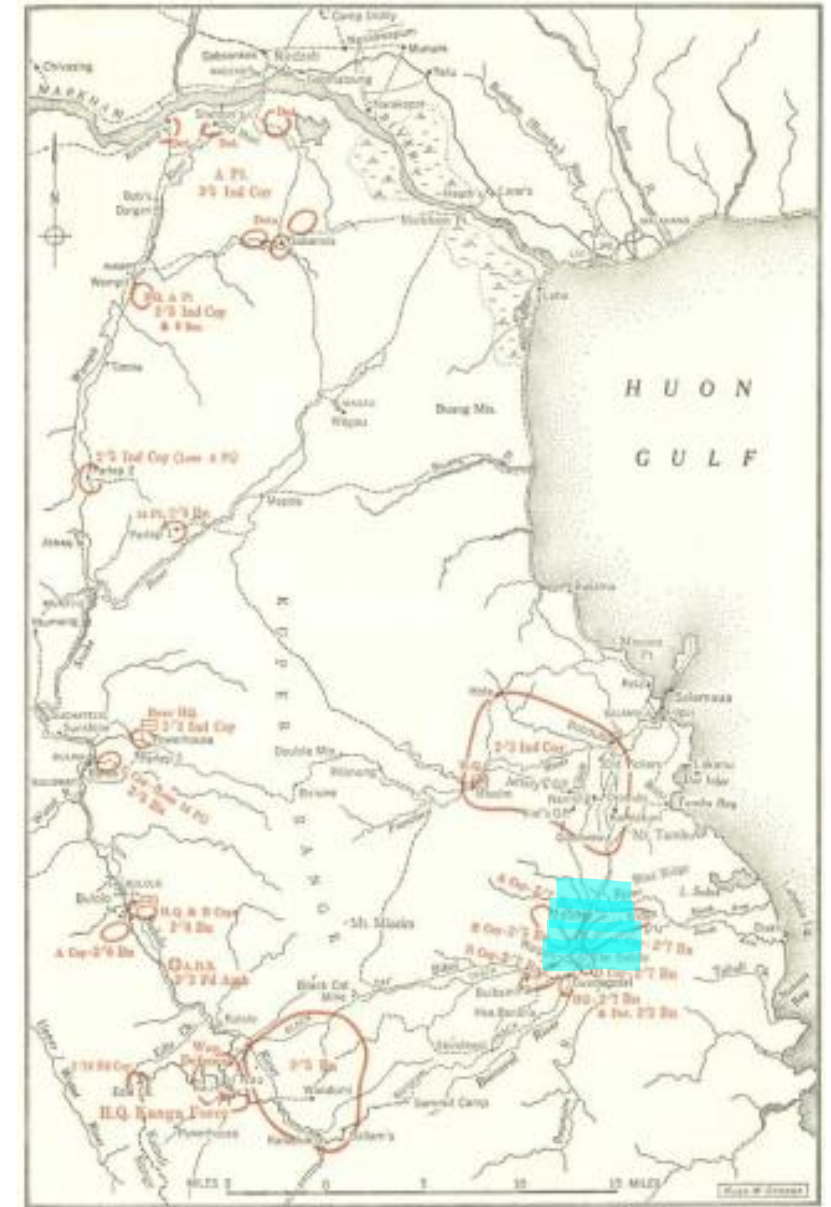
15 March - Wau

- By the 15th (March), it seemed clear that the Japanese were not disposed vigorously to dispute an edging forward and that day found the Australian forward elements on **Lababia Ridge** on the right and on **Mat Mat Hill** on the left.
- Notice the scale.



15 March - Wau

- The map on the previous page covers the area highlighted in blue on this page.



16 March - Government

- A discussion took place between Curtin and MacArthur on 16th March 1943 because the War Cabinet, when discussing a raid by 24 medium bombers and 20 fighters on Darwin on 15th March, had referred to the threat to Australia involved in the Japanese concentrations in the islands north of the mainland.
- Curtin left the meeting to consult MacArthur by "secraphone" and, on his return, quoted MacArthur as saying that there was clear evidence that the enemy was trying to infiltrate and shove his position nearer to Torres Strait.
- MacArthur did not possess sufficient strength to meet all the enemy moves in the north-east and eastern sector and at the same time to meet all probable enemy moves in the north-west.
- The north-west sector was in process of being built up by the enemy. MacArthur did not think the enemy had sufficient forces to launch a major attack now, but that he would require from two to four months to develop the requisite forces to make a serious attack.
- In the arc of islands outside the mainland of Australia the enemy was developing 67 airfields, and when these were completed he would be able to use them to operate air forces of 1,500 to 2,000 planes.

16 March - Sea

- Munda and Vila were again bombarded by destroyers during the night 15-16/3.
- All barges at Vila were reported set on fire.



16 March - Air

- The township of Lae was successfully attacked at about 0900/16 by 6 B25s with 18 Lightnings acting as cover.
- B-17's bomb Rapopo airstrip and attack Ubili, sub off Cape Turner, town of Marienberg, and Cape Gloucester area.
- B-24's unsuccessfully attack cargo ships between Bitsjaroe Bay and Fak.
- B-17's and B-24's on harassing raids bomb Kahili, Vila, and Ballale A/Fs.
- After dawn 16/3, 19 dive-bombers escorted by 20 fighters raided Vila. Reconnaissance a.m. 16/3 reported the airfields at Munda and Vila to be "In terrible shape".

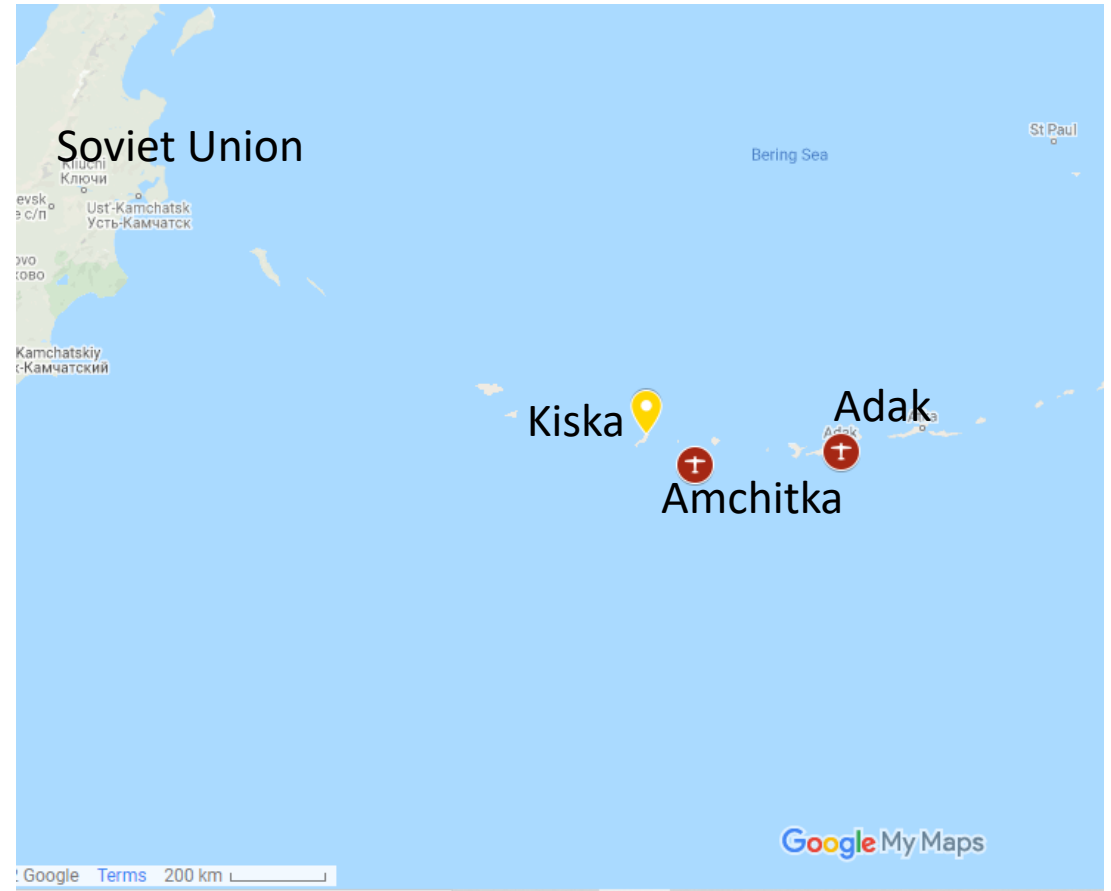
16 March - Air

- In a raid on 16th March on the isthmus of Salamaua by 7 Bostons, Flight Lieutenant Newton, dived in through intense anti-aircraft fire and bombed with devastating accuracy.
- A large fire followed the bomb explosions and this was increased by the bombs of the following aircraft.
- When Newton pulled out of the dive four direct hits had severely damaged both wings and one engine and punctured the fuel tanks.
- Despite the damage he succeeded in flying 180 miles back to base and landing the aircraft.



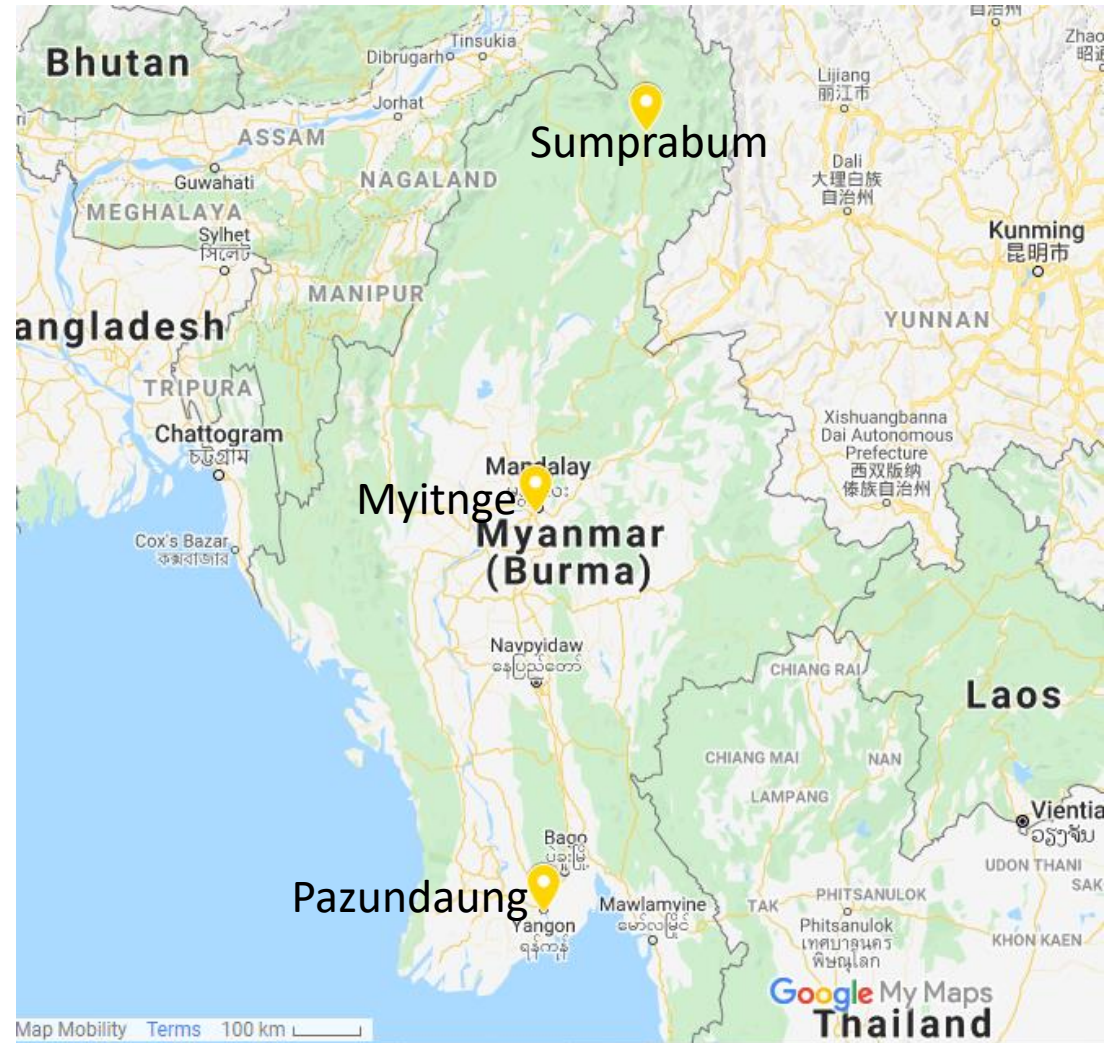
16 March - Air

- 16 B-25's, 13 B-24's, 8 P-40's and 32 P-38's (cover/escort) sorties are flown to Kiska in
- one weather rcn and 2 attack missions from Adak, and
- in 3 more missions from Amchitka.
- Targets hit are North Head, Main Camp area, radar sites and submarine base.
- On last Amchitka mission 1 enemy floatplane is shot down with 2 more probables.
- 4 HBs are hit and 1 B-25 does not return.



16 March - Air

- 6 B-24's damage approaches to Pazundaung bridge.
- 8 B-25's attack Myitnge bridge, scoring at least 2 hits, but the structure remains intact.
- P-40's hit positions N of Sumprabum.
- Fourteenth AF P-40's strafe Mong Yaw storage area and docks, warehouse area, and rail-river terminal (for phosphate mines) at Lao Kay.



17 March - Sea

- On 30th September 1942 Manoora had arrived at Sydney from escort work, and Admiral Royle recommended that she be reconverted for use as a cargo and troop carrier.
- (The British, he told the Council, had transferred 15 armed merchant cruisers back to trade.)
- The recommendation was adopted, and Manoora paid off and went into dockyard hands in Sydney.
- The other two former Australian A.M.C.'s were also put into dockyard hands for conversion to LSIs, Westralia in December 1942 and Kanimbla in April 1943.
- At the end of the year Rear-Admiral Barbey (photo) was appointed in command of VII Amphibious Force.



17 March - Sea



Manoora (photo), which recommissioned as a Landing Ship, Infantry (L.S.I.) on 2nd February 1943 was the first such ship to join the force. She carried American landing craft—20-22 L.C.V.Ps and 2-3 L.C.M's.

17 March - Sea

- In March 1943 the American attack transport (A.P.A.) Henry T. Allen (12,400 tons) reported at Sydney to join the force.
- On 17 March Allen was assigned as flagship, Commander Amphibious Force, Seventh Fleet.
- Barbey established his headquarters aboard the Allen on the Brisbane River.
- The VII Amphibious Force inherited the Royal Australian Navy amphibious training center HMAS Assault at Port Stephens, New South Wales and a Combined Training School at Bribie Island and nearby Toorbul Point in Queensland.



USS Henry T. Allen leaving Norfolk, Virginia on her way to Operation Torch, 1942

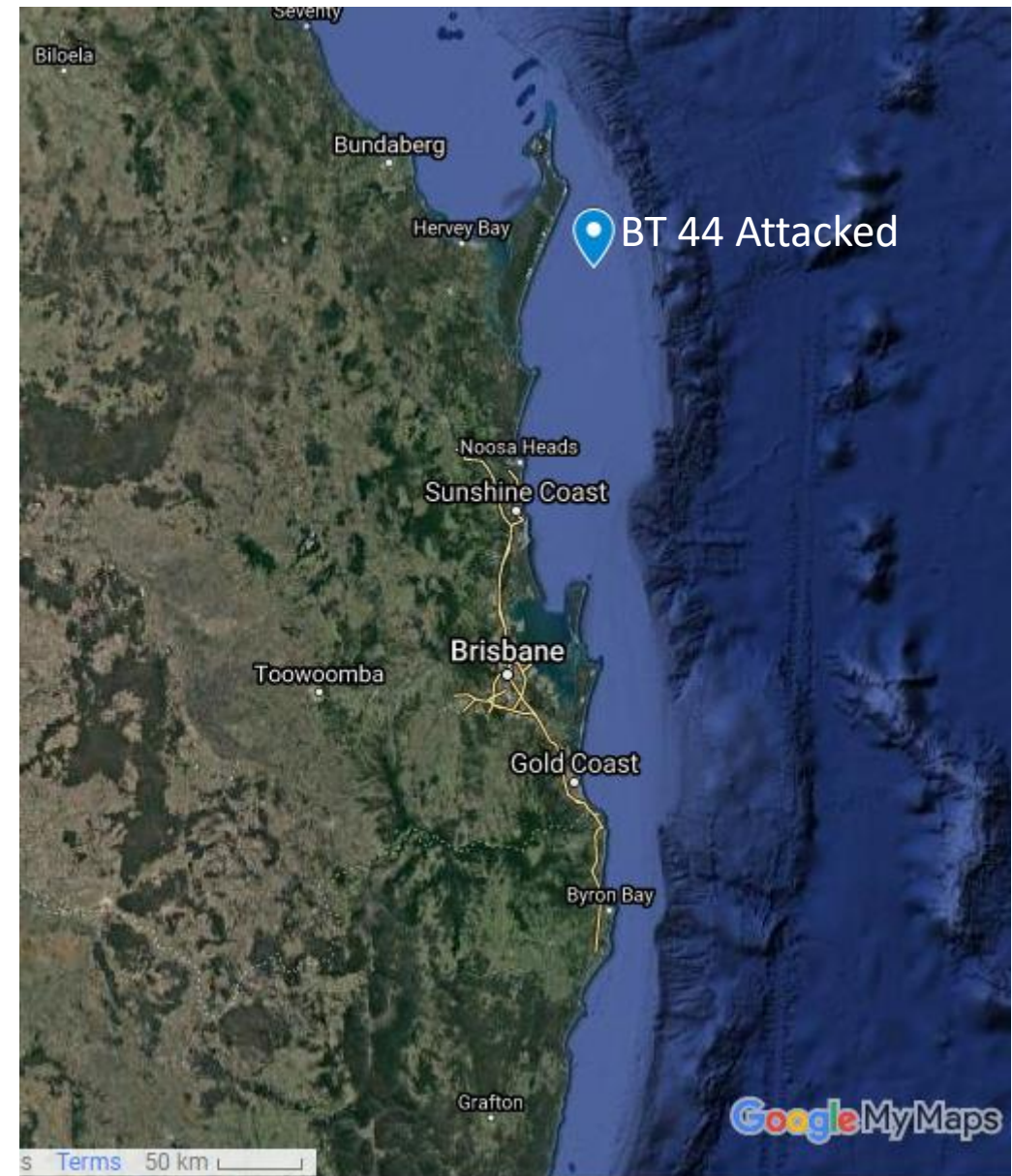
17 March - Sea

- Two of our motor torpedo boats on patrol outside Morobe Harbour encountered 6 enemy barges off Mageri Point, at mouth of Mai-ama River at 0100/17.
- The barges contained crews only and were apparently making rendezvous for supplies with an enemy submarine, for which they mistook the torpedo boats.
- The barges came right alongside and were all destroyed Including the crews.
- One member of the motor torpedo boats crew was seriously wounded.



17 March - Sea

- Convoy BT44 (HMAS GYMPIE escorting "CHARLES S. JONES" & "JOSEPH BOLT" - departed Brisbane 0015/17 for Townsville) was attacked by an enemy submarine at 1510/17 in position 25°41'S 153°51'E (approx 80 miles N. by E. of Cape Moreton). Two or three torpedoes were fired at "CHARLES S. JONES" but passed 20 yards astern.
- "GYMPIE" ran along the approximate torpedo track in the direction of the submarine but dropped no depth charges.
- Aircraft on a/s patrol noticed an oil patch and possible periscope feather and dropped one 250-lb a/s bomb with no apparent result.
- Further immediate search proved negative but sea markers were dropped.



17 March - Air

- On the 17th (March), 18 Japanese bombers with the unusually heavy escort of 32 fighters struck at Porlock Harbour at about midday causing some damage and escaping without loss.
- Vila and Munda were harassed as usual during the night 16-17/3 by Liberators.
- Kahili and Balale were harassed during the night 16-17/3 by Liberators.
- The aerodrome at Langgoer (on Klein Kai, approximately opposite Toeal) was attacked 0800/17 by 5 B25s and 3 Hudsons.
- Penfoei aerodrome was bombed by 3 Hudsons at 2200/17.



18 March - Government

- At MacArthur's direct suggestion, as well as on his own reading of the situation, described to him by MacArthur and Blamey, on 18th March Curtin in an identical message to Churchill and the President, paraphrased MacArthur's account of Japanese concentrations and asked to be told what air strength would be provided in the South-West Pacific Area to ensure that the initiative in the air was retained by the United Nations and that any heavy Japanese raids would be severely repulsed.
- He mentioned the risk of raids in the north-west and west.
- "... Of particular importance is the vital base of Fremantle where, owing to the depletion of the Eastern Fleet, a heavy attack of the tip and run variety might be carried out by naval bombardment and carrier-borne aircraft."
- Bruce was asked to give all possible support to the case.



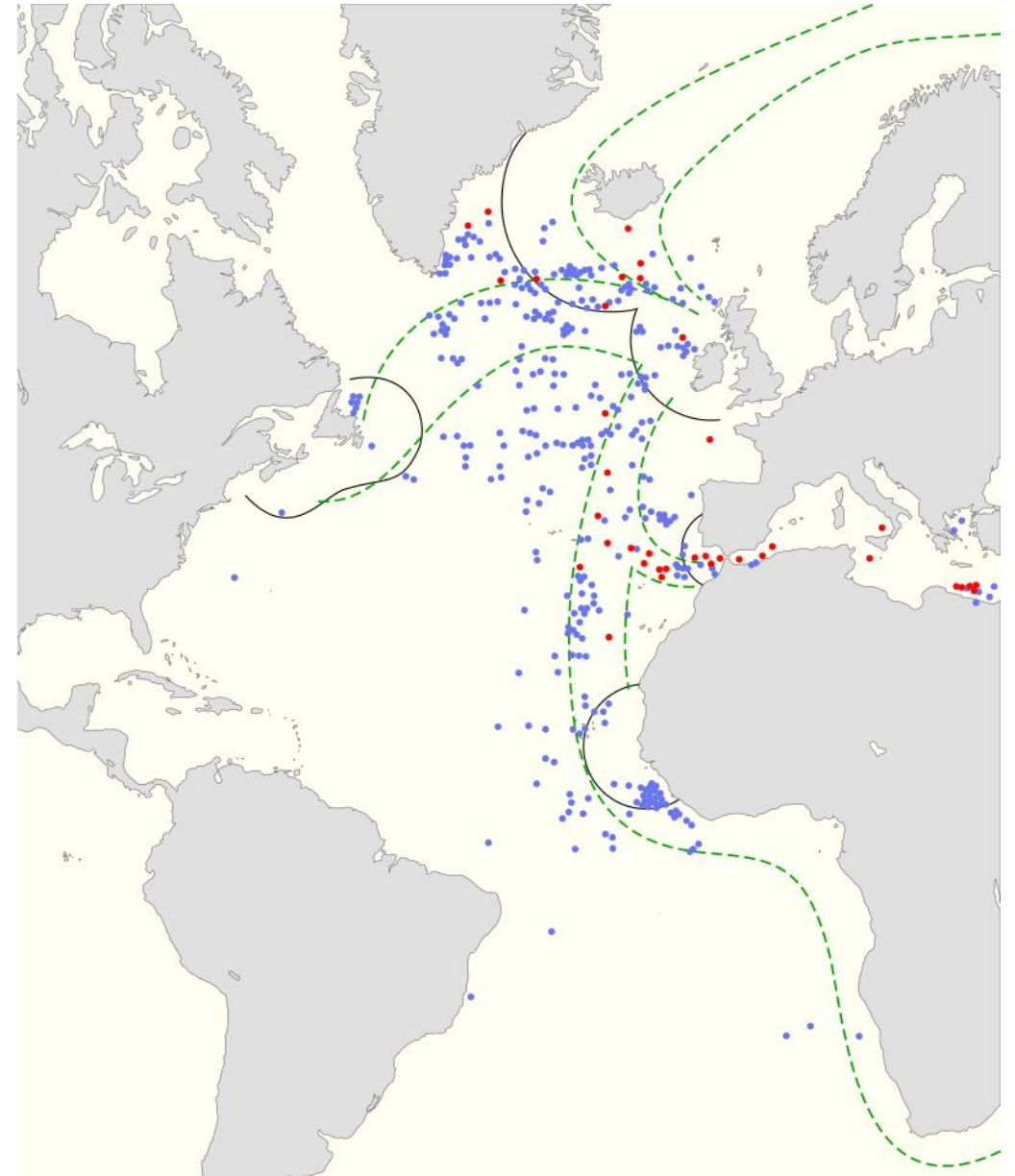
18 March - Shipping

- On 18th March President Roosevelt ordered Admiral King to transfer 60 Liberators from the Pacific theatre to the Atlantic to combat German U Boats.
- This was only the second direct order he had given his military commanders in the war. The other was regarding operation Torch.



18 March - Shipping

- In July 1942 Donitz had ordered the last U-Boats to withdraw from the United States Atlantic coast; by the end of July he had shifted his attention back to the North Atlantic, where allied aircraft could not provide cover. There were enough U-boats spread across the Atlantic to allow several wolf packs to attack many different convoy routes. Often as many as 10 to 15 boats would attack in one or two waves, following convoys by day and attacking at night.
- Convoy losses quickly increased and in October 1942, 56 ships of over 258,000 tonnes were sunk in the "air gap" between Greenland and Iceland.
- The shipping losses to U-boats in January 1943 dropped to only 35 ships of 203,000 gross tons, less than in any month of 1942. But bad weather was the main cause of this reduction.
- Convoy TM1 from Trinidad to Gibraltar gave a truer indication of the danger of U-boat packs operating in favorable conditions. The convoy, made up of nine tankers and four escorts, lost seven tankers to U-boat attacks, all well outside the range of shore-based aircraft.



18 March - Shipping

- In the spring, convoy battles started up again with the same ferocity. There were so many U-boats on patrol in the North Atlantic, it was difficult for convoys to evade detection, resulting in a succession of vicious battles.
- The first half of March saw the battles of convoys UGS 6, HX 228, SC 121, SC 122 and HX 229. One hundred and twenty ships were sunk worldwide, 82 ships of 476,000 tons in the Atlantic.
- On March 10, 1943, the Germans added a refinement to the U-boat Enigma key, which blinded the Allied codebreakers at Bletchley Park. The British lost the ability to read the orders to and reports from U boats and so to route convoys to evade them.
- On March 17 North Atlantic convoys SC122 and HX229 lost fifteen ships.



An Allied convoy heads eastward across the Atlantic

18 March - Shipping

- Coastal Command's prize was the Consolidated Aircraft Liberator GR.I, commonly called the VLR Liberator or just VLR.
- The Liberator B.I had excellent range and payload, ideal for A/S patrol. Top priority for these was the U.S. Navy for reconnaissance operations in the Pacific, where their long legs were equally valuable, but where they generally carried out missions of lower priority than Coastal Command's.
- After Convoy SC 118, Professor Patrick Blackett, Director of the Admiralty's Operations Research section, made several proposals, including diverting VLRs from Bomber Command to Coastal Command. "Despite the strength of Blackett's case, the Admiralty (not to mention the Air Ministry, Bomber Command, and the Americans) believed for some time yet that it could not afford to reduce the heavy air offensive in the Bay of Biscay or to abandon the bombing of German bases by the RAF.
- The number of VLR aircraft operating in the North Atlantic in February [1943] was only 18, and no substantial increase was made until after the crisis of March.



18 March - COIC

(1) Enemy Aircraft - Photographs 17 & 18/3 show aircraft on the main enemy aerodromes in the New Guinea - Bismarcks - Solomons as set out hereunder:-

(F - Fighters; F/P - Floatplanes; L/B - light bombers; M/B - medium bombers; F/B - flying boats.)

| <u>17/3</u> | <u>F</u> | <u>F/P</u> | <u>L/B</u> | <u>M/B</u> | <u>F/B</u> |
|----------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Kahili | 48 | 2 | - | 4 | - |
| Ballale | 4 | - | - | - | - |
| Vila | 1 | - | - | - | - |
| Faisi (25% coverage) | | 5 + | | | |
| Munda ? | | | | | |
| Buka ? | | | | | |
| <u>18/3</u> | | | | | |
| Kavieng | 13 | - | - | 26 | - |
| Lakunai | 73 | - | 32 | 4 | - |
| Vunakanau | 28 | - | 20 | 23 | - |
| Rapopo | - | - | - | 53 | - |
| Malaguna | - | 4 | - | - | - |
| Wewak (incomplete) | 3 + | - | - | - | - |
| <u>TOTAL</u> | <u>170</u> | <u>11</u> | <u>52</u> | <u>110</u> | <u>-</u> |

18 March - COIC

(3) Shortlands - Two reconnaissances reported on shipping at Buin-Faisi a.m. 18/3. The combined reports show probably 4 cargo vessels only (one large, one medium, 2 small), although one aircraft reported a possible heavy cruiser or large cargo vessel.

(6) Kavieng - Reconnaissance 1000/18 sighted 6 vessels in the Harbour area including a heavy cruiser, a destroyer and a large cargo vessel. Photographs show oil surfacing in progress on the runway. Aircraft visible are shown in the summary above.

(7) Rabaul - Reconnaissance 1100/18 reported the usual shipping in Rabaul Harbour. Photographs covering the northern half of Simpsons Harbour reveal -

3 destroyers

4 submarines

2 subchasers

5 tankers (1 medium, 4 small)

19 merchant vessels (totalling 90,000 tons)

Total 33 vessels

In addition, 2 merchant vessels of approximately 5,000 tons each are visible off Kokopo.

18 March - COIC

- (9) Cape Gloucester - Reconnaissance a.m. 18/3 reported nothing on Cape Gloucester runway which appeared in good shape: patrol or oil ~~drum~~ revetments were observed.
Reconnaissance 1300/18 sighted one serviceable fighter and 2 trucks on the side of the runway.
Reconnaissance 1740/18 sighted 2 large and well camouflaged barges tied together and loaded with drums along the shore 5 miles N.E. of Cape Gloucester aerodrome.
- (10) Dampier Strait - At 0940/18 a small 500 ton vessel was seen in a position approximately 15 miles SE of Rooke Island headed thereto.
- (11) Aitape (75 miles NW Wewak) - Reconnaissance 1340/18 sighted 3 small and one larger aircraft on an unnamed island N.E. of Aitape.
- (12) Wewak - Photographs of Wewak 1412/18 show -
1 probable destroyer) poss. same 3 as observed
2 small cargo vessels) prior to recent Wewak convoy.
2 merchant vessels (1 large, 1 medium)
1 large tanker-type vessel
In addition a large cargo vessel was seen half submerged at Kairiru Island.

18 March - COIC

- (1) Kaukenau - Photographs 18/3 of the new airfield at Timika (East of Kaukenau) show that the runway has been levelled for over 1000 yards
- (2) Kai Islands - Photographs 18/3 of the airfield at Langgoer show that the runway has been cleared to at least 600 yards.
- (3) Ambon - Reconnaissance a.m. 18/3 reported twelve cargo vessels in Ambon Bay and another small 200 ton vessel ten miles South of Ambon Island.

Photographs of Ambon Bay, at the above time, show only eleven vessel as follows:-

- 1 vessel 6-8,000 tons
- 4 vessels 4-7,000 tons
- 2 vessels 2-4,000 tons
- 4 vessels below 1,000 tons.

- (8) Southern Caroline Waters - At 1600/20 an unescorted convoy of 4 ships ~~fx~~ was seen approximately midway between Palau and Kavieng heading SE at 10 knots.

- (2) Sourabaya - Photographs taken on long range reconnaissance 13/3 covered the whole harbour area and show a total of 85,000 tons of merchant shipping comprising 23 vessels of which 8 are of 5,000 tons and over. Five floating docks are visible in use or serviceable.

18 March - Shipping

- Bomber Command did not refuse entirely to offer assistance against U-Boats. From 14 January 1943 through May, they flew seven thousand sorties against the U-boat pens in Lorient, Brest, and St. Nazaire, at a cost of 266 aircraft and their crews.
- They accomplished no damage to the pens or to the submarines within them.



German submarine pens in Lorient, Brittany

18 March - Burma

- For the next assault on Donbaik, Lloyd, the Division Commander, planned to use the 71st Indian Brigade in a flanking move along the spine of the Mayu Range, but by this time, Irwin, the Army Commander, had lost confidence in Lloyd and his brigadiers, and laid down the plan of attack himself.
- He diverted the 71st Brigade to the Mayu Valley and ordered the British 6th Brigade, reinforced to a strength of six battalions, to make a fourth attack on a narrow front.
- The Brigade attacked on 18 March, advancing straight in the open over the dead of previous attacks, they got among and even on top of the bunkers but, in spite of heavy artillery support, they could not break in.
- They were then caught by the Japanese counter barrage and were bloodily driven back and suffered 300 casualties.
- After this repulse, Wavell and Irwin ordered the ground already taken to be held.



18 March - Air

- The attack on the isthmus of Salamaua on the 16th (March) had been so successful that it was repeated two days later (18 March).
- Newton again dived his aircraft low to blast a building adjacent to an anti-aircraft battery.
- As the Boston cleared the target it was seen to be severely damaged and on fire. Newton had no alternative but to ditch the aircraft in the sea close to the isthmus.
- Other Boston crews saw his aircraft go down and reported having seen two crew members swimming towards the beach. There was some hope that, having reached the shore, they might escape the attention of the enemy and perhaps be picked up by one of the A.I.F. patrols that were known to be making daring sorties along the coast.
- This hope proved vain and Newton and his crew were posted missing.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

AC0031

DOUGLAS BOSTON (A-20) AIRCRAFT OF NO. 22 SQUADRON RAAF IN SOUTH WEST PACIFIC AREA.

18 March - Air

- Buka – 2210/17-0350/18 Buka Passage aerodrome was bombed by 3 Catalinas. Blast bays and A.A. positions were also strafed.
- New Georgia - Vila Bivouac area was attacked 1645/18 by ten dive bombers with fighter escort.
- Madang - Madang township, aerodrome and harbour area were heavily attacked 0915-0940/18 by 12 Liberators and 9 Beaufighters covered by 16 Lightnings. The entire town was left a mass of black smoke while the Beaufighters worked over the aerodrome area thoroughly.
- Koepang - Penfoei aerodrome was attacked at about 2230/18 by three Hudsons.



| Type | Bomb load lbs | Max speed knots | Guns |
|-------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Liberator | 8,000 | 258 | 10 * .5 |
| Catalina | 4,000 | 170 | 2 * .5 & 2 * .3 |
| SBD | 2,250 | 222 | 2 * .5 & 2 * .3 |
| Hudson | 1,400 | 214 | 4 * .303 |
| Beaufighter | 0 | 280 | 4 * 20mm |

19 March - Government

- The day after the dispatch of his message to Roosevelt and Churchill (19 March), Curtin (photo) learnt from MacArthur that 524 additional combat planes and 336 non-combat types had been made available to the South-West Pacific Area, together with two divisions of ground troops.
- No proposal was made to increase the allocation to the R.A.A.F. as it was thought that it would be difficult enough for Australia to man the 45 squadrons planned for 1943.



19 March - Sea

- The Takachiho Maru-class transport, Takachiho Maru, was torpedoed and sunk in the Formosa Strait off North Keelung, Formosa at (25°50'N 122°30'E) by USS Kingfish with the loss of 844 lives.
- The cargo ship, Zogen Maru, was torpedoed and sunk in the Yellow Sea by USS Wahoo with the loss of all hands.



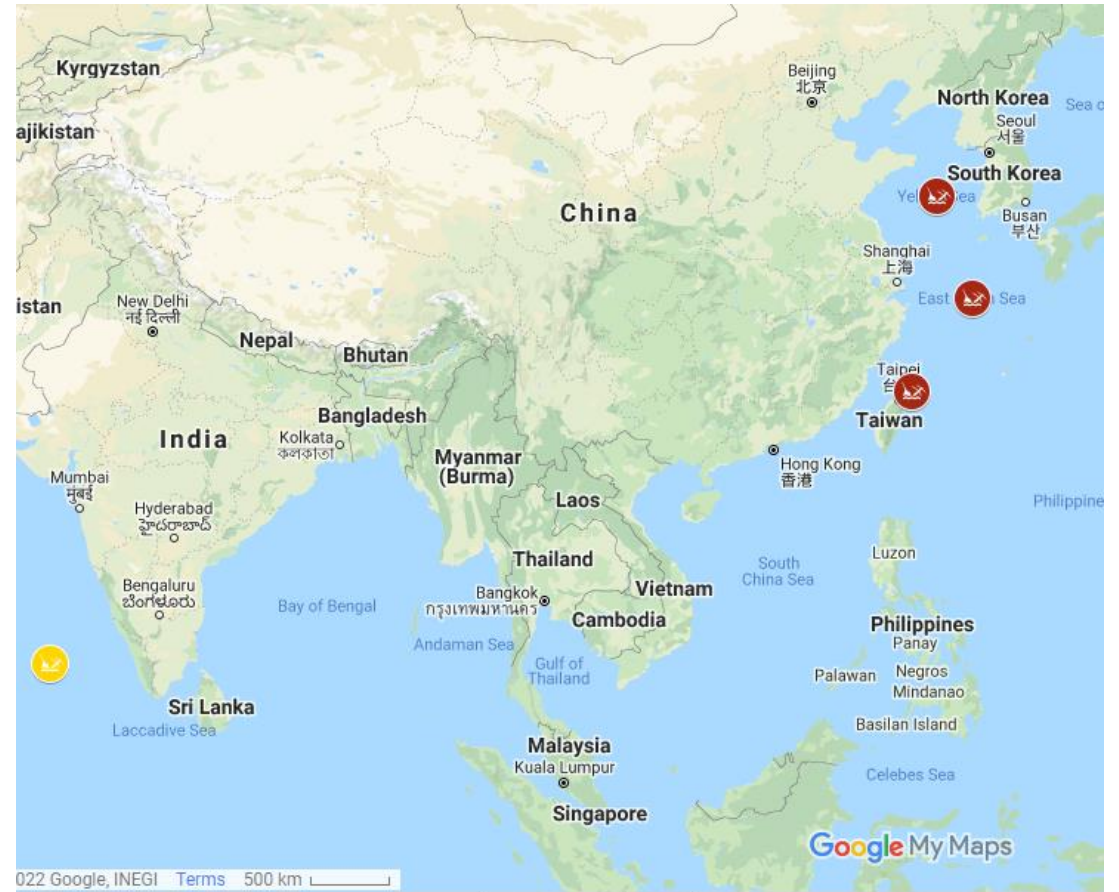
19 March - Air

- Vila was attacked at 1650/19 by 6 dive-bombers escorted by 16 fighters.
- Mubo - Our forward elements are in contact with the enemy between Garrison Hill and Observation Hill, North West of Mubo, Enemy troops were seen moving 18/3 in a dry creek bed 4 miles North East of the Mubo strip. This area was attacked 1145/19 by three Bostons.
- Ambon - Ambon township was attacked 2230/19 by 5 Liberators. Priority target was shipping but despite use of flares and search around island for dispersal, no shipping could be located.
- Porlock Harbour - Eighteen enemy bombers, escorted by 32 Zeros, attacked Porlock Harbour at 1300/19. The wharf was cut in half, and a launch was badly damaged.



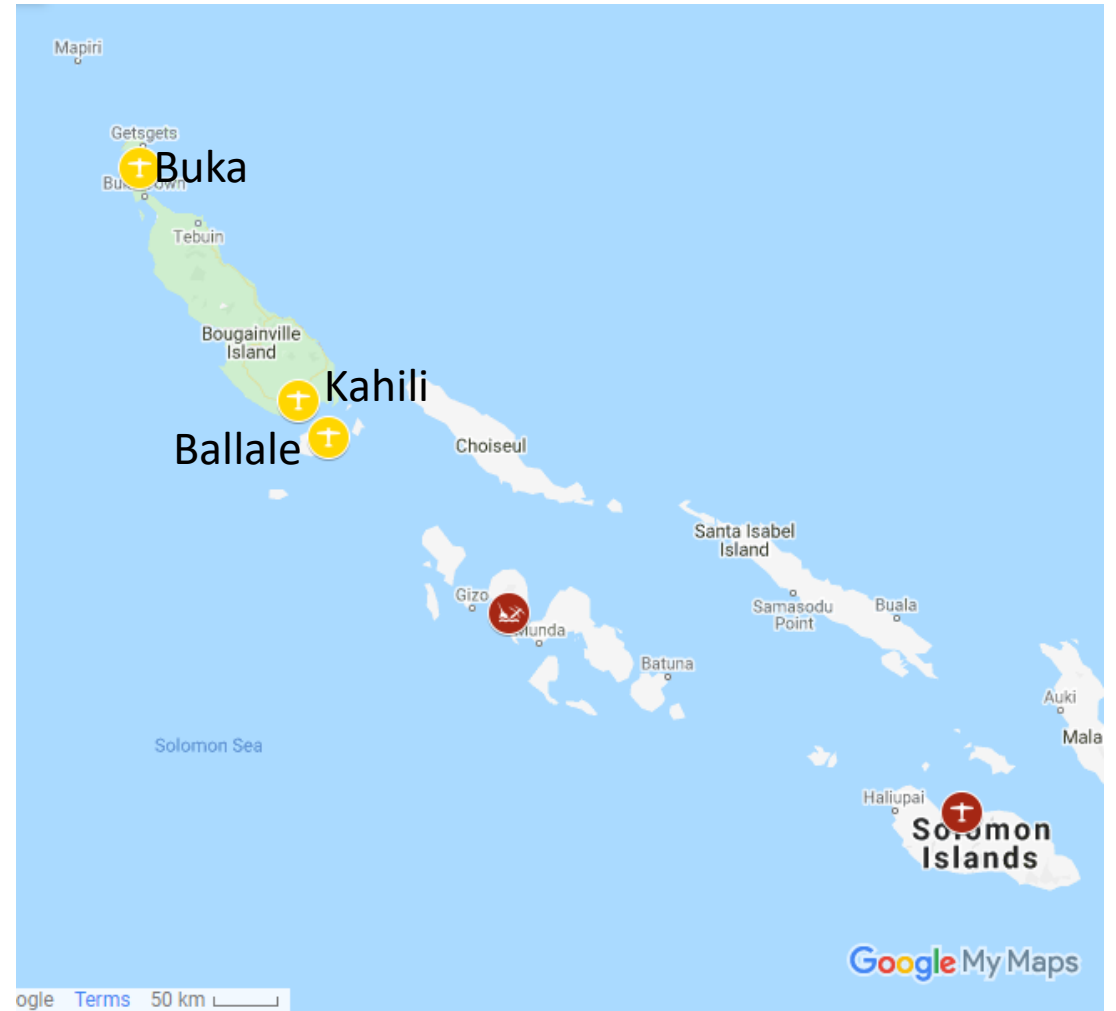
20 March - Sea

- The Fort ship, Fort Mumford (UK), was torpedoed and sunk in the Indian Ocean 400 nautical miles (740 km) north west of Ceylon (10°00'N 71°00'E) by a Japanese submarine. The crew survive the sinking, but all but one gunner are machine gunned and killed in their lifeboats. The gunner is rescued by an Arab dhow.
- The Japanese patrol boat, Shinsei Maru, was sunk by shellfire in the East China Sea by USS Sawfish.



20 March - Air

- Shortlands - Kahili and Ballale were harassed during the night 19-20/3 by 2 Fortresses.
- Vila was attacked at about 1700/20 by 6 dive-bombers escorted by 16 fighters.
- Munda was attacked at 1700/20 by another 6 dive-bombers with 14 fighters as escort.
- Ground observers reported a submarine in Lae Harbour at dusk 20/3 with 8 barges plying between ship and shore. An air strike of 5 B25s was despatched and the submarine was sighted at about 1950/20 approx 250 yards S.W. of Voco Point. Four direct hits with another four near misses were claimed with 500-lb 5 second delay bombs from 75 feet. A terrific explosion occurred, much heavier than the explosion of the bombs, and the submarine appeared to be blown to pieces.
- Kai Islands - Langgoer township was attacked by 2 B25s a.m. 20/3.



21 March – Washington

- Although the Joint Chiefs had accepted the delegates' proposals for action in the South and South West Pacific in principle, they were concerned about the timing of operations. They brought the Pacific representatives and some of the Joint Planners into their meeting on Sunday morning, 21 March, to help settle matters.
- The Southwest Pacific delegates argued that lack of adequate forces would keep the South Pacific from beginning operations against New Georgia and southern Bougainville until after the Southwest Pacific had seized the Huon Peninsula in New Guinea, an operation that would take place about August. This sequence was approximately that set forth in the ELKTON plan.
- The South Pacific delegates, especially Harmon, felt that it would be better to move against New Georgia before the capture of the Huon Peninsula. A reasonable margin of safety would require that enough strength be mustered for a drive right through to Bougainville after Munda's capture.
- Admiral King was disturbed by the idea of postponing action in the Solomons, for the Japanese fleet was no longer pinned down by the Guadalcanal Campaign.
- If the Solomon operations were to be postponed, he suggested, the American fleet units assigned to the South Pacific might be more profitably employed elsewhere, perhaps in the Central Pacific.
- The Joint Chiefs directed the Joint Planners to draft a plan, but did not immediately attempt to decide on the timing of operations.



Joint Chiefs of Staff (circa 1943). l to r Gen. Arnold, Chief of the Army Air Forces; Adm. Leahy, Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy; Adm. King, Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet; and Gen. Marshall, Chief of Staff of the United States Army.

21 March - Sea

- USS Wahoo torpedoed and sank two cargo ships in the Yellow Sea. Hozen Maru, about 30 survivors, and Nittsu Maru, 4 survivors.
- At 2215/21 a vessel described as a large destroyer was sighted and attacked by a Catalina on armed night reconnaissance south of Gasmata course east. Heavy accurate A.A. fire was encountered from the vessel which was, however, damaged by 2 bombs and was last seen at 2326/21 20 miles S. of Gasmata on course 10°, speed 10 knots and trailing a large oil slick.



21 March - Air

- Munda-Vila - Six and five Dauntless dive-bombers respectively escorted by 15 Wildcats attacked Munda and Vila afternoon 21/3. Explosions observed in dump area at Munda.



A U.S. Navy Douglas SBD Dauntless dropping a bomb, circa in 1942.

22 March - Sea

- The cargo ship, Kenyo Maru, was torpedoed and sunk in the Philippine Sea off Tanapag Harbor ($17^{\circ}16'N$ $144^{\circ}56'E$) by USS Whale. 130 engineer passengers, 30 comfort women and four crewmen died.
- The cargo ship, Meigen Maru, was torpedoed and sunk north of Surabaya, Java ($6^{\circ}31'S$ $112^{\circ}47'E$) by USS Gudgeon. Eight crew were killed.



22 March - Pacific

- The heavy cruiser, Salt Lake City, with destroyers, Dale and Monaghan, joined the light cruiser, Richmond, and destroyers, Bailey and Coghlan, on the 22nd to form Task Group Mike.
- Admiral McMorris set course to the north west of Attu to intercept any enemy ships which might approach the Japanese bases in the Aleutians.



22 March - Air

- Gasmata - photos taken after the air attacks a.m. 22/3 by 4 Liberators, 9 Beaufighters and one Fortress showed many bomb craters in the runway and the aerodrome area, also one wrecked bomber set on fire.
- Milne Bay - An unknown number of enemy aircraft attacked Turnbull Strip early hours 22/3. Two army officers killed, damage not assessed. One enemy bomber believed damaged.



23 March - Sea

- Katyosan Maru, a collier, was torpedoed and sunk in the Laotiehshan Channel by USS Wahoo.



23 March - Government

- On 23 March Curtin holds a press conference in which he states he is:
- ‘profoundly disappointed at the number of subscriptions so far lodged for the Third Liberty Loan’.
- He also expresses disappointment at a speech by Churchill in which he ‘disposed of the Far East in a few sentences.’ ... As a direct intimation to the Australian people that there was a long struggle ahead of them.
- That day he also announces the safe arrival in Australia of the Ninth Division of the AIF.



23 March - Government

- On 23rd March the War Cabinet had before it a series of reports showing the effect of the wastage of men by disease on the Australian capacity to maintain the strength and organisation of the forces.
- The conclusion of the reports was that if Australia wished to maintain a striking force of 95,000 for offensive operations it would probably have to eliminate two or three formations from the Order of Battle.
- The actual position was that there was already a deficiency of 79,000 on the war establishment and the monthly intake of men was only expected to be half of the 12,500 required.



War Cabinet meeting in Melbourne in 1943. Left to right: John Curtin, Sir Frederick Sheddon, Ben Chifley, Norm Makin, Arthur Drakeford, John Dedman.

23 March - Government

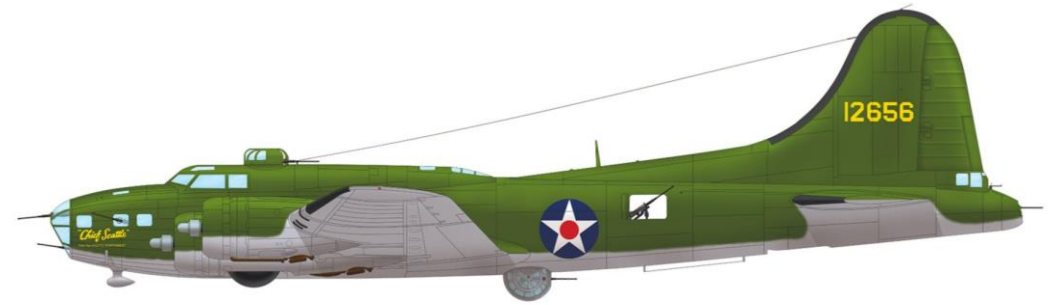
- Bruce in a frank telegram of 23rd March reporting on the examination of the request by the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff, he reviewed the arguments with which Australia was confronted.
- The Chiefs argued that a request for 2,000 aircraft was
 - out of all relation to the increases being given to other theatres of operations and would give the South-West Pacific more than was required to give effect to the agreed strategy of "beat-Hitler-first";
 - the provision and maintenance of these aircraft, including petrol and oils, would impose extensive demands on shipping resources;
 - that while Japan might be creating bases from which 1,500 to 2,000 air craft could be operated Japan's total first-line strength was only 1,800 aircraft, of which 850 would have to be retained in Japan and the northern areas and 500 to cover Malaya, Burma, Siam and Indo-China.



High Commissioner Bruce drinking tea with Australian troops in London during World War II. Bruce had previously been Australia's 8th Prime Minister from 1923 to 1929.

23 March - Air

- Gasmata - the aerodrome was bombed before dawn 23/3 by a Catalina.
- At dawn 23/3 buildings on Salamaua Isthmus were attacked by 3 Bostons. Photographs taken 1110/23 show 8 buildings destroyed and others damaged.
- Mubo - Enemy positions in the Mubo area were bombed and strafed in 2 waves at 1025 and 1100/23 by 6 Bostons and 4 Beaufighters respectively.
- Tanimbar - Saumlaki was bombed 0900/23 by 2 Hudsons.
- Rabaul - Aerodromes at Rabaul, Lakunai, Vunakanau and Rapopo, were attacked in the early hours of 23/3 by 27 Fortresses. They dropped approximately 48 tons of bombs including delayed action, instantaneous demolition and advanced fuse bombs up to 2,000-lbs.



Boeing B-17E Flying Fortress of the 19th Bombardment Group USAAF, summer 1942.



B-17F over Schweinfurt, Germany, 17 August 1943

- Thanks for your attention.