

War in the Pacific

Defending Australia

The First Six Months

Chapter 19

18 March 1942...

A Developing Air War

18th March 1942

- On 18th March 1942 President Roosevelt telegraphed to Churchill:
 - "There is no use giving a single further thought to Singapore or the Dutch East Indies. They are gone. Australia must be held, and we are willing to undertake that You must hold Egypt, the Canal, Syria, Iran and the route to the Caucasus."
- An announcement (of MacArthur's appointment) was made by the Prime Minister on the 18th, and on the same day he made public, what a great number of people had already seen with their own eyes, that "there are very substantial American forces in Australia".
- Australia had previously taken up (after the war cabinet meeting on 11th March) the unified control of all air operations in Australia. Curtin had proposed to Roosevelt that unified control should be established immediately to ensure the best possible use was made of all available aircraft in Australia "in view of the imminence of the Japanese threat". Australia was willing to place its air force under the control of General Brett at once to achieve these objectives.
- On the 18th Brett's appointment to the Allied Air Command was announced at the same time as MacArthur's appointment as Supreme Commander.

18th March 1942

- At the next meeting of the council, nearly a fortnight later (18th March), after the Chiefs of Staff had been given the opportunity to amplify and explain their appreciation to council members, the council summarised its views:
 - (a) It was affirmed that Darwin and Port Moresby should be defended to the fullest possible extent and that every endeavour should be made to provide the forces required to ensure adequate defence of these localities.
 - (b) The movement of military forces from southern parts of Australia (e.g. Victoria) to northern areas (e.g. southern Queensland) was affirmed.
 - (c) The forces and defences at Fremantle should be strengthened in view of its development as a naval base.
 - (d) Continuous pressure should be exerted to build up naval and air forces to provide the strengths laid down in the Chiefs of Staff appreciation on the defence of Australia—especially for northern Australia and New Caledonia.
 - (e) The Navy should provide sea communications to Darwin, to ensure the maintenance of adequate supplies

18th March - Air

- On the 18th Batchelor became an R.A.A.F. station with No. 12 Squadron based there with their Wirraways.
- All ground staff of 2 and 13 Squadrons but those essential for servicing and operations were moved from Darwin to Daly Waters.
 - The move to Daly Waters seriously affected the efficiency and morale of the force. It separated the commanders and aircrews from the ground staffs, since most of the aircrews remained in the Darwin area about 300 miles away.
 - The ground staff had to live in uncomfortable conditions, and had to carry out major servicing and repairs with the aircraft in the shade of gum trees.



All the comforts of home... The Officers Mess at Batchelor in early 1942

18th March - Air

- On 18th March 1942 American units in Australia had in commission only
- 39 bombers (12 heavy and 27 dive bombers).
- Nos. 7 and 19 Heavy Bombardment Groups, were reorganised as one—No. 19—with 14 Flying Fortresses that had been able to fly into Broome from Java, plus the ground echelons that had come by sea. This group also absorbed the 12 Fortresses from the former naval task force that had been operating from Townsville.
- A second heavy bombardment group, No. 43, had been allotted for service in Australia and its ground staff had already arrived, but delivery of their aircraft was uncertain.

18th March - Air

- No. 3 (Light) Bombardment Group—both aircrews and ground staff—had arrived in Australia and absorbed those members of No. 27 Group who had escaped from the Philippines.
 - Two of its four squadrons (Nos. 13 and 90) were allotted Mitchell medium bombers which had been intended for Dutch units.
 - No. 89 Squadron, while awaiting the arrival of A-20 (Boston) light bombers, were engaged in service and maintenance work on No. 19 Group's Fortresses at Charters Towers.
 - The group's fourth squadron (No. 8) was equipped with 27 Dauntless dive bombers which had been maintaining patrols in the Darwin area.
- Two medium bomber groups had also been assigned to Brett's command—Nos. 38 and 22.
 - The ground staff of No. 38 had arrived on 25th February but, since they had no aircraft they were assigned to aircraft assembly for other units and training in infantry tactics.
 - No. 22 received aircraft in March-48 Marauder medium bombers.

18th March - Air



Douglas Dauntless Dive Bomber



Martin B26 Marauder

18th March - Air

- On 18th March 9 Zeros were seen circling Horn and Thursday Islands. They made no attack. On the same day 11 more Zeros were sighted over the northern extremity of Cape York Peninsula.
- Although organized units considered ready for combat were as yet few, there had arrived in Australia by 18 March 1942 a total of 337 P40s more than 100 P400s and 90 P-39's. Of these planes, approximately 125 had been lost to enemy action during the Java campaign, others had been lost by accident, 75 had been turned over to the RAAF, 74 were under repair or awaiting repair, and approximately 100 awaited complete assembly.
- On 18 March there were 33 P-39s, 92 P40s, and 52 P-400s in commission with the USAAF.
- The R.A.A.F., still had operational squadrons—notably (early in March) Nos. 11, 20, with Catalinas, and 32, with Hudsons in the New Guinea area and Nos. 2 and 13, with Hudsons, in North-Western Area.

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AUSTRALIAN TO LEAD LAND FORCES U.S.A. General for Air Force MacARTHUR'S DASH ROUSES ALLIES

BORN TO WAR
GENERAL DOUGLAS MACARTHUR, who has flown to Australia to take command of the Allied forces east of Singapore, was born to war.
He was born in a military camp and has ever lived with Australia. His birthday, his birthday on the same day as the Commonwealth—January 26.
General MacArthur, who carried his 42 years as though he were 30, is the son of a gay boy of the American Civil War who became one of America's great soldiers, fighter and leader, with his eye always on a rebel eagle. He has demonstrated repeatedly his determination to die in the field of battle—he was wounded twice, and killed in the last war. (Herald 1) reports for gallery. (See Page 2.)



GENERAL DOUGLAS MACARTHUR'S dramatic air dash from the Philippines to Australia to take supreme command of all forces in the South-West Pacific is followed by these announcements:—

- 1: An Australian is to be appointed commander of the land forces in Australia under General MacArthur as Commander-in-Chief.
- 2: Lieutenant-General George Brett, the United States officer who was Deputy Supreme Commander to General Sir Archibald Wavell, and since then commander of the Americans in Australia, has been appointed Deputy Supreme Commander to General MacArthur, and chief of the Allied air forces. The Royal Australian Air Force, as well as the American air corps, will be under his control.
- 3: Admiral Leary, of the United States Navy, remains Allied Naval commander in waters of the new strategic area.

President Roosevelt made it clear yesterday that the new command includes the New Zealand area. He said that General MacArthur would command all the United Nations' land, air, and naval forces east of Singapore.
The new Allied strategic command area, which includes the whole of Australia, is the result of an agreement between the Australian and the United States Governments.
General MacArthur's appointment has fired the imagination of the democratic nations throughout the world.
World famous as the United States leader of the American and Filipino defenders of the Philippines, he has already taken over his command with headquarters in Australia.

STIRRING TRIP BY PLANES

General MacArthur made a stirring plane dash to Australia from the Philippines, where he has directed the heroic stand of American and Filipino troops since Japan first entered the war on December 7.

WE CAN HOLD AUSTRALIA, SAYS GENL. BRETT; KHARKOV'S

NEW LINK WITH U.S. EXPECTED

By Air Canberra
Correspondent
Major changes in the composition and location of the high direction of the Pacific War seem to be inevitable following the agreement by Australia, Britain, and the United States to create the new South-West Pacific command with an Australian General MacArthur, as its leader.

The Australian Government is expected to have proposed creation of the South-West Pacific command to American officials before the new command is established by which Australia would have direct and joint with Britain and America the broad direction of the war.
This kind of military and political re-organisation of the Pacific War Council is expected to include American representation, as the chief officers of the military command on the joint British-American staff committee in Washington.
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NEW COLLABORATION

There will be no surprise therefore if military representation is made with any collaboration in the

Trip From Philippines Secret Even From Curtin

ALTHOUGH General MacArthur's appointment as Supreme Commander in the South-West Pacific followed negotiations between the Australian and United States Governments, not even the Australian Prime Minister, Mr. Curtin, knew that General MacArthur was actually on his way to Australia.

News of his arrival in Australia was conveyed to Mr. Curtin in this dramatic manner from President Roosevelt, broadcast to Mr. Curtin by radio-General MacArthur's flight on Tuesday.—
"The President of the United States has directed that I should be permitted to see and advise you that General Douglas MacArthur, U.S. Army, has arrived in Australia today from the Philippines, where he was with the direction.
"General MacArthur has now assumed command of all United States land forces here.
"Should it be to accede to your wishes and those of the Australian people, the President suggests that it would be highly desirable to him and showing to the Australian people that the American Government is maintaining General MacArthur as Supreme Commander of all the Allied forces in the South-West Pacific.
"Such consultation should be obtained simultaneously to London and Washington.
"The President further has directed that I inform you that he is in general agreement with your suggestion regarding organization and command of the Australian area.
"The President regrets that he has been unable to inform you of General MacArthur's pending arrival, but does believe that you will appreciate that his efforts during the voyage from the Philippines have secured the highest order of respect.
"Mr. Curtin informed Lieutenant-General Brett of his complete and enthusiastic agreement with the President's suggestion, welcoming General MacArthur's designation as Supreme Commander and Lieutenant-General Brett's designation as Deputy Supreme Commander.

THREE JAP RAIDS ON SOLOMONS; TWO DARWIN ALERTS

THREE raids were made by Japanese planes on the Solomon Islands yesterday, two on Tulagi and one on Florida.

Darwin had two alerts on Tuesday, but no attacks developed, and one aircraft circled over Port Moresby, but dropped no bombs.

The Prime Minister, Mr. Curtin, was alerted on the radio on the outbreak, and the two raids on Tulagi and Florida in the early morning.

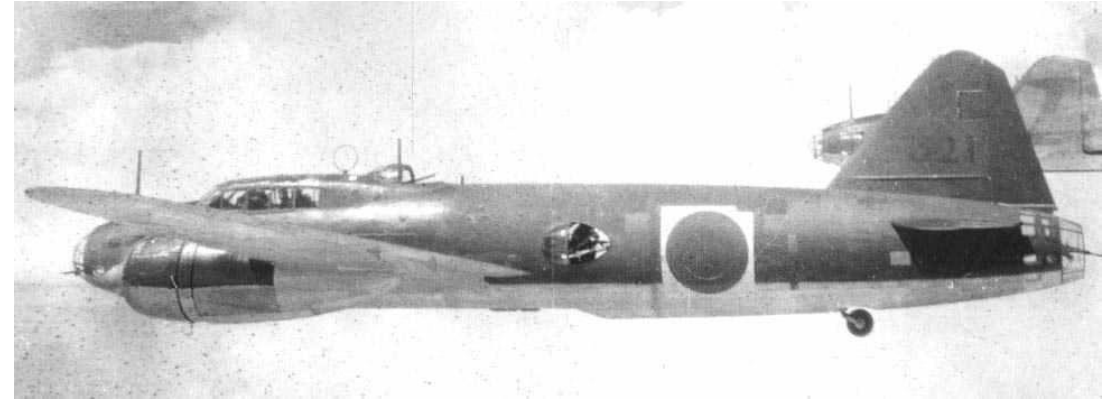
Flakless bombs were dropped from the sea from a height of 1000 feet, slightly damaged a ship on Florida was damaged.

19th March 1942 - Darwin

- Immediately after the first raids on Darwin an additional 385 trucks and 40 trailers had been 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.
- 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 Gibson) back from the Middle East, and the American 102nd Coast Artillery Battalion armed with heavy machine-guns.
- On 19th March a sum of £1,481,080 was allotted to increase the capacity of the Central and North Australian railways.
- In the fifth raid on Darwin by seven bombers on 19th March, two were killed and seven wounded and damage was done to houses in the town and to naval headquarters.
- On 19 March the 9th Squadron (of the 49th Pursuit Group reached Darwin).

19th March 1942 – New Guinea

- On 19th Flight Lieutenant J. F. Jackson, another pilot who had served with No. 3 Squadron in the Western Desert, was appointed to command the unit (No 75 Squadron).
 - On the same day 17 Kittyhawks were flown off on their way to Port Moresby, staging by way of Cooktown and Horn Island.
 - Jeffrey led the first flight of 4 and Jackson followed leading the main force of 13.
- Port Moresby March 19, 1942 (Raid #14)
- The Coastwatcher McCarthy learnt that the *Lakatoi* was at Vitu, and on 19th March sent a party to arrest her.



Mitsubishi G4M-49 Allied reporting name: Betty

On the 19th a photographic reconnaissance of Lae had shown 26 aircraft on the aerodrome—fighters and bombers lined up wing-tip to wingtip along the runway. The photographs also showed a type of bomber—the Betty—that was new to the area.

20th March - Refugees

- On the 20th, the *Lakatoi's* master and mate having agreed to cooperate, the main body of the troops moved to Vitu.
- At Alice Springs MacArthur and his family took a special train that Brett had borrowed from the Australians.
- At Terowie railway station in South Australia, where he changed trains he made a speech, in which he said, "I came through and I shall return".



General Douglas MacArthur with wife Jean Marie and son Arthur at the Terowie railway station in South Australia on March 20, 1942

20th March -

- On 20th March Broome had its second raid, when bombs were dropped on the runway at the aerodrome, a civil aircraft was burnt out, and one man was killed.
- On 20th March, Derby, a cattle port about 90 miles north of Broome, was raided without damage or casualties.
- March 20, 1942 Port Moresby (Raids #15 & #16) The Japs made two raids this morning, the first with four fighters who machine gunned the aerodrome and were driven off by AA MG fire, the second with a single bomber that dropped its load and dashed off. Reconnaissance planes are over all the time. The raids today resulted in no damage and no casualties but Tokyo Rose claimed that Moresby had been 'devastated'!

20th March - Washington

Minister for external affairs “Doc” Evatt arrives in Washington on a mission, which will include London, to attempt to obtain additional supplies of weapons, particularly aircraft.



Mr. Roosevelt To See Dr. Evatt

Australian Associated Press
NEW YORK, March 20.—
Officials say President Roosevelt will receive the Australian envoy (Dr. Evatt) within two hours of his arrival in Washington to-day.
At Los Angeles, Dr. Evatt told the Associated Press that he would discuss at the White House the best methods to knock out the Japanese.
He added: “With General MacArthur leading the Australians, we will lick the Japanese and the Nazis, but we must have supplies and arms, which I know we will get.”

Courier-Mail March 21, 1942

21st March 1942 – Command

- MacArthur's arrival at Spencer Street station, Melbourne, on 21st March was like a grand entry in opera.
- The Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Forde, and most of what was high in politics, administration and the fighting services, with a large crowd of the general public, had gathered to greet him.
- The general, who had been heralded throughout the land as the most decorated man in the United States Army, stepped into the range of flash bulbs in the drab battle dress of a fighting soldier to which the glory of uniforms, red tabs and ribbons around him were a perfect foil.



Australian War Memorial

General Douglas MacArthur arrived at Spencer Street Station, Melbourne, from Adelaide on 21st March 1942 with his second-in-command, Lieut-General George H. Brett. He was met by the Minister for the Army (and Deputy Prime Minister), Mr Forde, and leading representatives of politics, administration and the fighting services.

21st March 1942 – Command

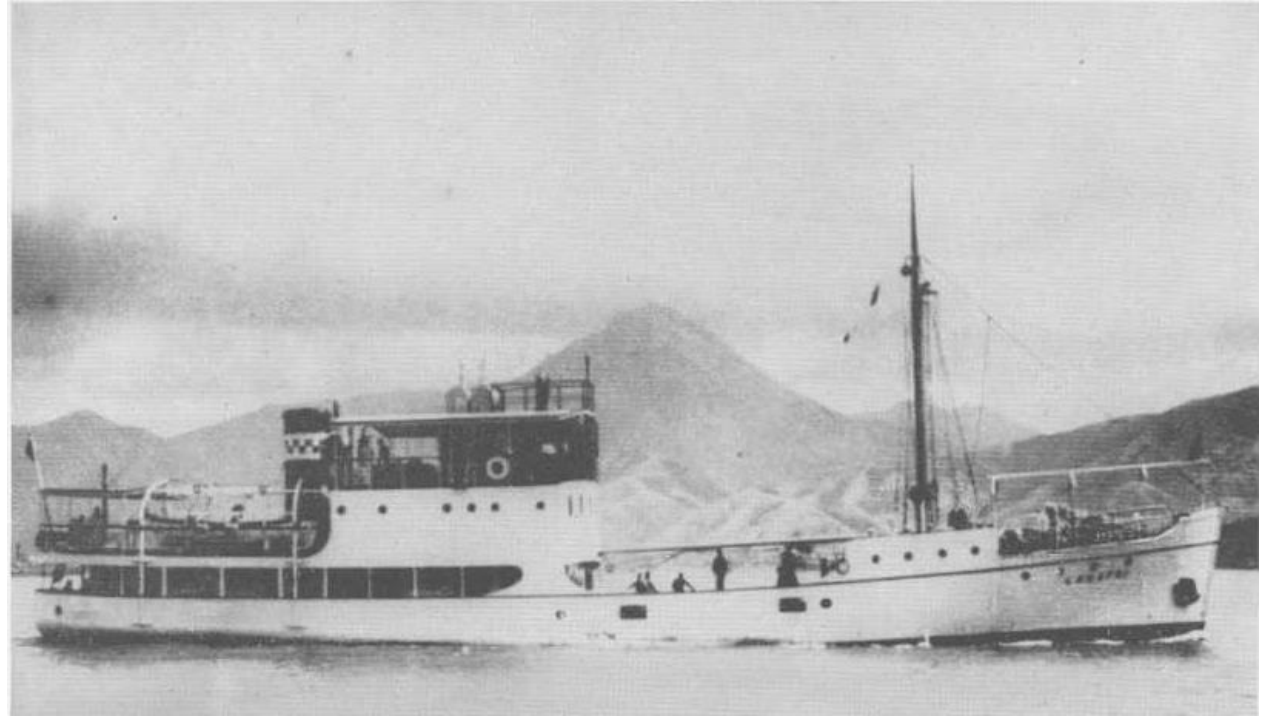
- General MacArthur had divided the forces in the Philippines into four commands, which he planned to control from Australia, and of which Major-General Wainwright was to command only one—the troops on Bataan and small pockets holding out in Luzon.
- President Roosevelt and General Marshall assumed that 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 then made it clear to MacArthur that Wainwright would remain in full command.
- Major-General King took over Luzon Force from Wainwright. The total strength was then 79,500 of whom 12,500 were Americans.



General Wainwright and General MacArthur conferring during the Battle of Bataan. (Courtesy US Army Ft Polk Museum)

21st March 1942 –

- Next day, (21st) loaded with stores, water and fuel and carrying a total of 214, 162 of whom were soldiers, the *Lakatoi* set sail for Australia.



Motor Schooner Lakatoi

21st March 1942 – Ceylon

- 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.

21st March 1942 – New Guinea

- The garrison at Port Moresby had become increasingly sceptical of reports that a fighter squadron would be sent for their protection and none more so than the troops manning the machine-gun posts round the aerodromes.
- Having now endured 16 enemy raids, these gunners regarded with understandable cynicism the prospect of the arrival of the Kittyhawks they had so often been told to expect. They dubbed them "Tomorrowhawks", "Neverhawks" or "Mythhawks".
- On the 21st, as Flight Lieutenant Turnbull led his flight of four aircraft in the approach to the runway at the Seven Mile aerodrome, one of these gunners opened fire. Immediately other guns went into action and the firing continued until Turnbull had actually landed and the other three pilots had lowered their under-carriages.
- Three of the four aircraft were damaged, one of them so severely that it was never flown again, and Jeffrey escaped death by a margin of no more than an inch or two when a bullet ripped through the cushion behind his head.
- Of the squadron's twenty-one pilots only four had been in combat. Two—Jackson and Turnbull—had flown against German and Italian aircraft in the Middle East, Flight Lieutenant Anderson was a survivor from the interception of the Japanese attack on Rabaul by Wirraways of No. 24 Squadron, and the fourth, Flying Officer Woods, had served as second pilot of a Hudson operating from Port Moresby.

21st March 1942 – New Guinea

- Within an hour of the fighters landing a report was received that an enemy bomber was approaching Port Moresby on the routine daily reconnaissance.
- Flying Officers Cox and Wackett were ordered to intercept. Climbing through cloud they surprised the enemy aircraft at 10,000 feet.
- Cox made the first attack and put the bomber's port engine out of action. Wackett followed with a starboard attack and put a burst of gunfire into the other engine causing it to lose height rapidly until, at a height of about 500 feet, it exploded and crashed into the sea near the entrance to Port Moresby Harbour.
- It was a spectacular first "kill" and, achieved so soon after their arrival and in full view of the garrison, it did much to raise the defenders' and the squadron's spirits.
- Port Moresby radio "jammed" the bomber's operational frequency while the interception was made, to prevent the bomber's crew from giving away the secret of the arrival of fighters, and listeners had the satisfaction of hearing the enemy base operator calling in vain for some time after the aircraft had been destroyed.

21st March 1942 – Burma

- Burwing's first strike from Magwe was against their old base, Mingaladon where, on 20th March, a reconnaissance crew had detected more than 50 aircraft on the ground. On the morning of the 21st 9 Blenheims of No. 45 Squadron, supported by 10 Hurricanes, attacked from Magwe. Between them they wrecked 16 Japanese aircraft on the ground and claimed 11 shot down, two of which were claimed by the bomber crews who withstood attacks by 18 enemy fighters on the return flight. Though some of the Hurricanes were damaged by enemy fire only one crashed.
- As the crews were being briefed for a repeat attack that afternoon (21st), warning came of the approach of Japanese bomber formations. The warning was too short and the number of serviceable aircraft too few. By-passing the radar screen, which covered the south-eastern approaches to the aerodrome, the enemy aircraft swung in from the north-east. They came in such force that the belated attempts at interception by four Hurricanes and three Tomahawks were virtually futile.
- Six hurricanes and two P40s were damaged beyond repair on the ground and two hurricanes and two P40s were hit and damaged in the air, the hurricanes having to force land.

22nd March 1942 - Melbourne

- Thousands of refugees from the Netherlands Indies and survivors from Singapore, who had escaped immediately before or after the surrender brought the war close to Perth.
- A correspondent to the Melbourne Herald (22nd March), writing from Perth in mid-March, wrote:
- “The city is full of stories of escape and shipwreck; the Malayan campaign is still being taken to pieces and still producing sorry controversies.” adding:
- "The West is out on a limb and may be left there—such is the apprehension, deriving in part from the normal feeling of remoteness from the East and in part from undeniably strong considerations of geography, strategy and transport.”

22nd March 1942 – New Guinea

- At 6.30 a.m. on the 22nd 9 Kittyhawks took off, 5 of them, to make a strafing attack on Lae, and four more to provide top cover. The attacking aircraft dived through cloud and swept over the length of the runway so low that one wing of Piper's Kittyhawk was damaged through striking one of the enemy planes.
- Since it was clear that the enemy had been completely surprised, Jackson, contrary to accepted strafing tactics, led his flight in again for a second attack, this time through dense smoke rising from burning aircraft. 12 aircraft were left burning and 5 others had been damaged.
- The Kittyhawk pilots giving top cover had encountered three Zeros that had been flying a "standing" patrol at 10,000 feet.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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22nd March 1942 – New Guinea

- Wackett evaded these and dived to attack one of another formation of Zeros that were engaging the strafers.
 - As he made a beam attack one of Wackett's guns failed, and he broke away, but his engine had been hit by a burst of fire from the enemy aircraft.
 - He dived into cloud and, as he emerged, he saw two Zeros crash in flames into the sea.
 - When his engine failed completely, Wackett put his aircraft down on the sea about 10 miles from the shore and about midway between Lae and Salamaua.
- In the battle over Lae Flight Lieutenant Anderson, was seen turning in to attack a Zero, but was caught by the enemy's fire. He failed to return and was later posted as missing.
- The other Kittyhawk pilots returned safely. Their first attack on an enemy base had resulted in the destruction of 14 enemy aircraft—9 fighters and 3 bombers on the ground and 2 fighters in combat. Their losses were 2 of their aircraft.



Wilbur Wackett

22nd March 1942 – New Guinea

- Two Hudsons of No. 32 Squadron followed the Kittyhawks in to attack Lae but the bombs from one fell into the sea short of the target and those of the other could not be released owing to a mechanical fault. The first Hudson shot down a Zero after a combat in which two of the crew were wounded and their aircraft damaged by the Zero's gunfire. The second Hudson was also damaged in combat with a Zero which was seen going down with smoke pouring from its engine.
- Four Flying Fortresses from Townsville completed the day's attacks on Lae by blowing up an ammunition dump, destroying an aircraft on the ground with a direct bomb hit and setting fire to another.
- Later on the same day (22nd) 3 Kittyhawks were lost in a series of accidents—2 on take-off and one in landing.
- Flying Officer Wackett after freeing himself from the cockpit and inflating his "Mae West" life-jacket began to swim towards the shore.
 - He saw several sharks but avoided attracting their attention by lying quite still in the water.
 - After about nine hours he reached the beach near a native village.
 - Here he waited, almost exhausted, while the natives decided what they would do with him.
 - Two natives, one of whom could speak pidgin English, then undertook to guide him to safety, Wackett learning later through an interpreter that the tribe, to which these two natives did not belong, fearing reprisals, had intended to hand him over to the Japanese.

22nd March 1942 – Darwin

- The sixth raid on Darwin by 3 fighters on 22nd March was harmless. The fighters were seen as far south as Katherine.
- A Japanese reconnaissance aircraft over Darwin
 - was sighted by Coastwatchers on Bathurst Island,
 - tracked by the radar on Dripstone Cliffs and
 - shot down by a patrol of the recently arrived 9th Pursuit Squadron (part of 49th Group).
- 2nd Lts Harvey and Poleschuk were one of two patrols over Darwin at 20,000 feet in their P40s. After sighting the bandit they were able to climb towards it, close to 200 feet and open fire before the bandit reacted. The victory was awarded to Poleschuk after a coin toss.



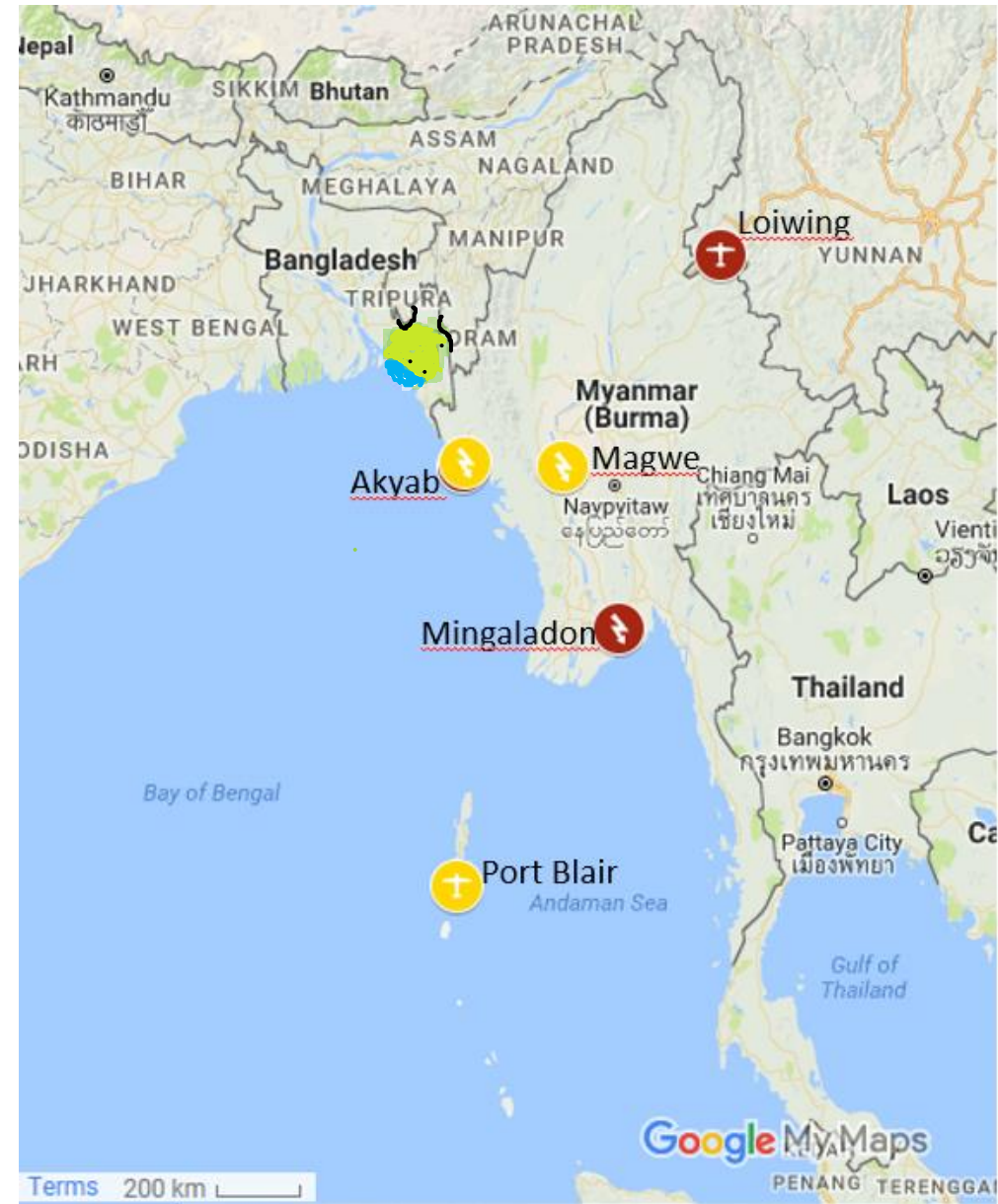
2nd Lt. Steven Poleschuk (Ozatwar)

A Developing Air War



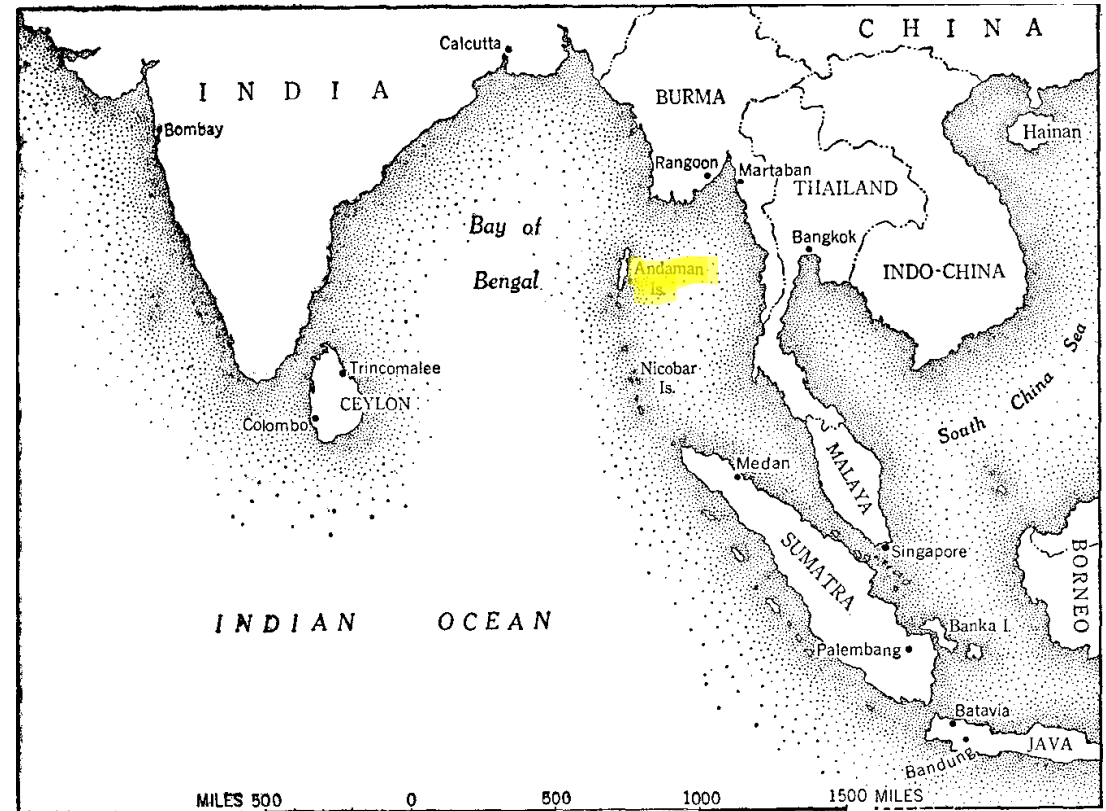
22 March 1942 – Burma

- The enemy attack (on Magwe) was sustained and 25 hours later (22nd) the Magwe base was stricken—the work of 230 enemy aircraft which had dropped more than 200 tons of bombs.
- Nine Blenheims and 3 Tomahawks had been destroyed on the ground with 5 Blenheims seriously damaged.
- Three of the 4 Hurricanes had been shot down.
- There remained 6 Blenheims, 11 Hurricanes and 3 Tomahawks.
- Vulnerable and useless for immediate combat, all these aircraft were withdrawn—the Tomahawks to Loiwing and the remainder to Akyab.



23rd March 1942

- **Air**
- **Port Moresby**
- Next day (23rd) the Japanese retaliated with their seventeenth raid on Port Moresby. About noon 19 bombers approached at high altitude and, though all available Kittyhawks were flown off to intercept, they were unable to gain sufficient altitude. The bombs fell near the runway causing little damage.
- Four Zeros then made a low-level attack destroying two Kittyhawks which had bogged near the runway as their pilots attempted to get them airborne. A third Kittyhawk was damaged.
- One of the Zeros, which dared a second run over the aerodrome, was caught by machine-gun fire from the ground and crashed into a low hill near the aerodrome.
- Another Zero was damaged by ground fire and probably failed to get back to its base.
- **Wyndham**
- On the 23rd the Wyndham aerodrome was bombed and pitted with about 30 craters.



Sea

The Japanese occupied Port Blair in the Andaman Islands on 23rd March and established a squadron of long range flying boats there.

24th March 1942 – New Guinea

- On the 24th Flying Officer Piper shot down a lone enemy bomber over the sea south of Port Moresby, and,
- later in the day, when four Kittyhawks intercepted a formation of 18 bombers approaching Moresby, Flight Lieutenant Jackson shot down one of 3 escorting Zeros.
- One of the bombers was hit by anti-aircraft fire and claimed as a probable.
- About 20 tons of bombs were dropped on the military hospital, the town and the drome.
 - At the hospital one bomb made a direct hit right in the middle of the red cross on the roof.
 - A couple of wards and other buildings were destroyed but all patients had been moved to slit trenches and were unharmed, although showered with dirt, debris and bomb fragments.
 - As usual the hospital was built right in the middle of a group of military targets - RAAF wireless station, store dumps, barracks and craters, but not a single casualty was reported. (Raid 18)



Flight Lieutenant Jackson (second from left) with fellow pilots of No. 75 Squadron in Port Moresby, 1942

24th March 1942 – New Guinea

- The No 75 squadron camp at the Seven Mile aerodrome was dispersed and camouflaged in a wide area of scrubby timber some distance from the runway.
- When not on operations the pilots remained close to their aircraft ready to "scramble" when enemy aircraft were reported.
- The raid warning system at this time consisted of a single radar direction-finding station (No. 29), which had been in operation since the middle of the month, and 20 observation posts in the Owen Stanley Mountains on the 100-miles radius from the airfield.
- The radar's value was extremely limited because the mountainous background to the base made detection to the north almost impossible and restricted its field to surveillance out to sea.
- Sometimes the warning came too late to give the fighters time to gain sufficient altitude for interception, and there was, as yet, no fighter sector control.
- On the aerodrome there was practically no "hard standing" for the aircraft, which frequently bogged in the rain-sodden ground.
- Unvaried service rations, no amenities, total blackout every night, and a tropical climate soon combined to affect the health of the unit.
- Almost immediately, serviceability became a problem, for after only three days of operations 7 of the original 17 Kittyhawks had been destroyed, and thereafter it was a continuing struggle, with few facilities, to maintain an effective force.
- When North-Eastern Area Headquarters proposed that the squadron should return to the Australian mainland, Squadron Leader Jackson, protested emphatically and the unit remained to fight on.

24th March 1942

- **Burma**
- The Japanese quickly followed their success at Magwe with a comparable assault on Akyab.
- They sent waves of attacking aircraft against this base on three days-23rd, 24th and 27th.
- The Hurricanes shot down 4 enemy aircraft and probably destroyed 3 for a loss of 6 of their own aircraft in combat, and 7 and a Valentia on the ground.
- Akwing was withdrawn to Chittagong, in India.



24th March 1942

- **Ceylon**
- HMS Formidable had sailed on 17 February to join the Eastern Fleet in the Indian Ocean, carrying Admiral Somerville, to take up his appointment as CinC of the Eastern Fleet.
- She arrived at Colombo, on 24 March and Somerville hoisted his flag aboard the battleship Warspite that same day.



An Albacore taxiing forward and another about to land on Formidable. The ship's strike force was two squadrons of Albacores, it had a squadron of Martlets for defence.

JIC – 24th March

Australia. The press reports that the Japanese bombed WYNDHAM, 275 miles southwest of DARWIN.

The Vichy radio announced that a large Japanese fleet was headed for PERTH. J.I.C. Comment: Although there is a fairly strong striking force in the NETHERLANDS EAST INDIES area there is no indication of its movement in this direction.

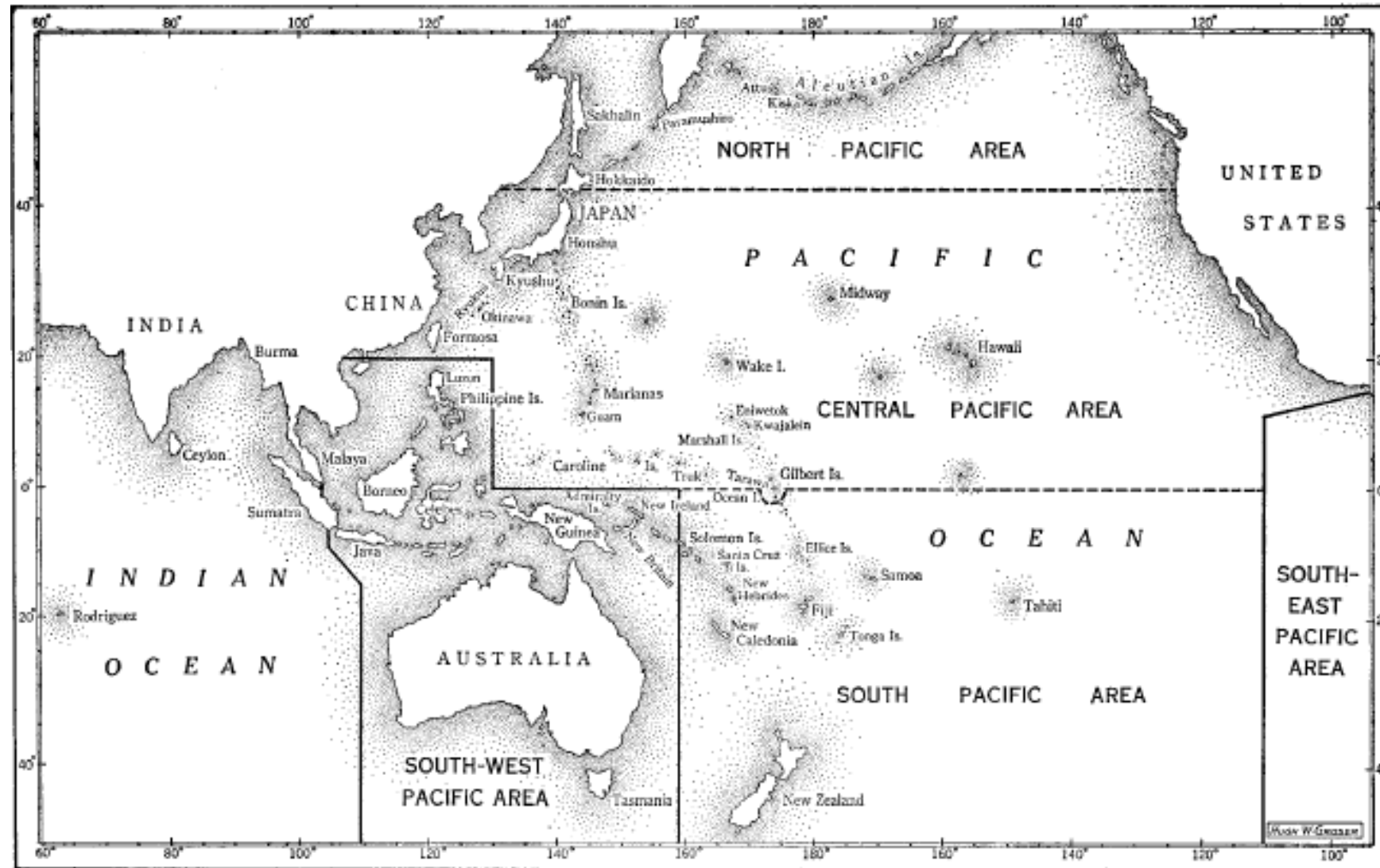
Melanesia. Additional information concerning the Allied air attack on the LAE airdrome on 22 March (Summary No. 103) reveals that 15 enemy planes were destroyed and 6 damaged in lieu of the 9 previously reported. An ammunition dump was also destroyed.

According to the press, PORT MORESBY sustained its heaviest enemy air raid of the war. The attacking planes bombed from a high altitude, followed by low altitude strafing attack. Damage is unknown.

25th March - Command

- A week after the announcement of the appointment of MacArthur and the division of the world into three main war theatres, the Australian Government learnt (on 25th March) from Washington that the Pacific theatre would be divided into a South-West Pacific Area under MacArthur and a South Pacific Area directly under Admiral King at Washington and that the boundary between these two areas, running down the 160th parallel , would place New Zealand, Fiji and New Caledonia in the Pacific Area, which was largely a naval area, and Australia in the South-West Pacific Area.
- Both Australia and New Zealand were strongly opposed to this division. The Australian Government was, however, reassured by reports from Evatt.
 - that the Australian view of an offensive naval strategy was likely to accord with the ideas of Admiral King,
 - that the division into two areas would not restrict the major naval forces of the United States from coming into the South-West Pacific and
 - that the "thorny question of relative jurisdiction of commanders " would gradually solve itself.

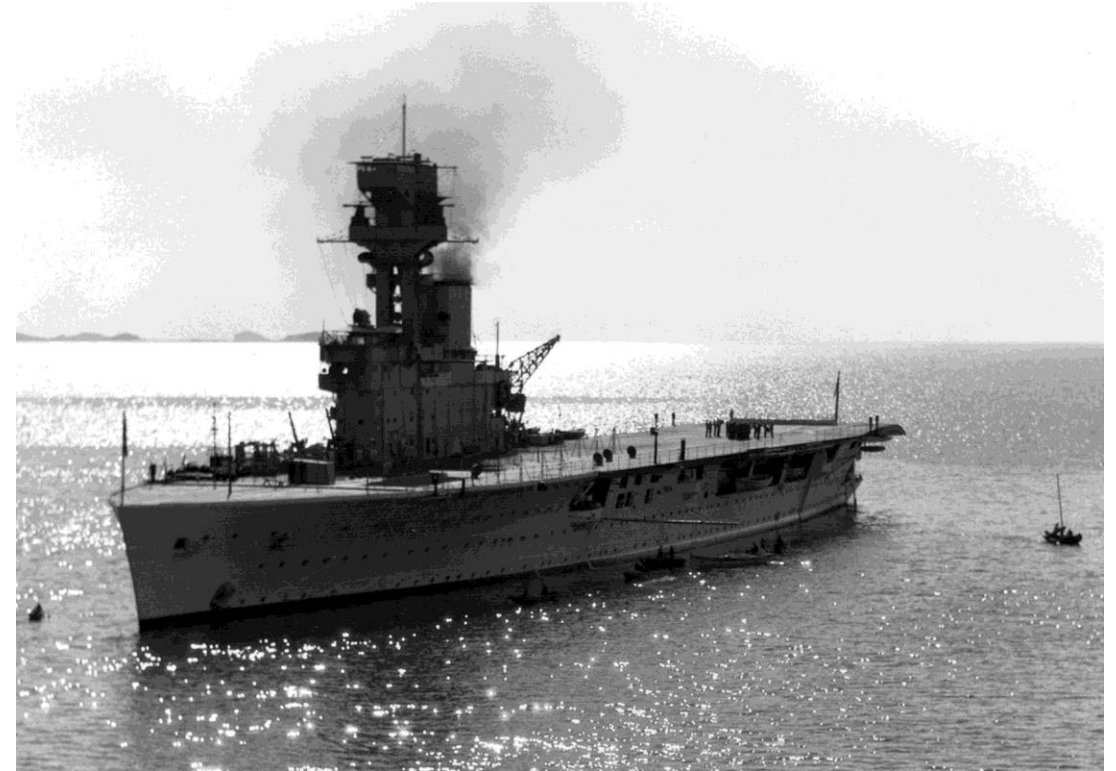
25th March - Command



The Pacific Theatre

25th March

- **Sea**
- On 25th March the Admiralty regretted a further delay in sending her (Hermes) "as she has to take part in a special operation".
 - Subsequently, after discussions between the Admiralty and Admirals Leary and Royle, it was agreed that she could be better employed with the Eastern Fleet and should remain in the Indian Ocean.
- Analysis of Japanese signals traffic suggested that MO was the designator for Port Moresby.
- **Air**
- **Port Moresby**
(Raid 19) Heavy cloud but small Japanese force of 3 bombers, 4 fighters came over at 9:30am at extreme height. Our fighters were in the air but could not find the Japs in the clouds. The bombers dropped their bombs hurriedly when the AA opened up and all bombs fell harmlessly in the harbor.
- Several B-26's belonging to the 22nd Group (M) flew the Pacific to land at Archerfield on 25 March, and within a month a total of forty-eight of the Marauders had come in from the United States.



Prewar picture of Hermes

26th March

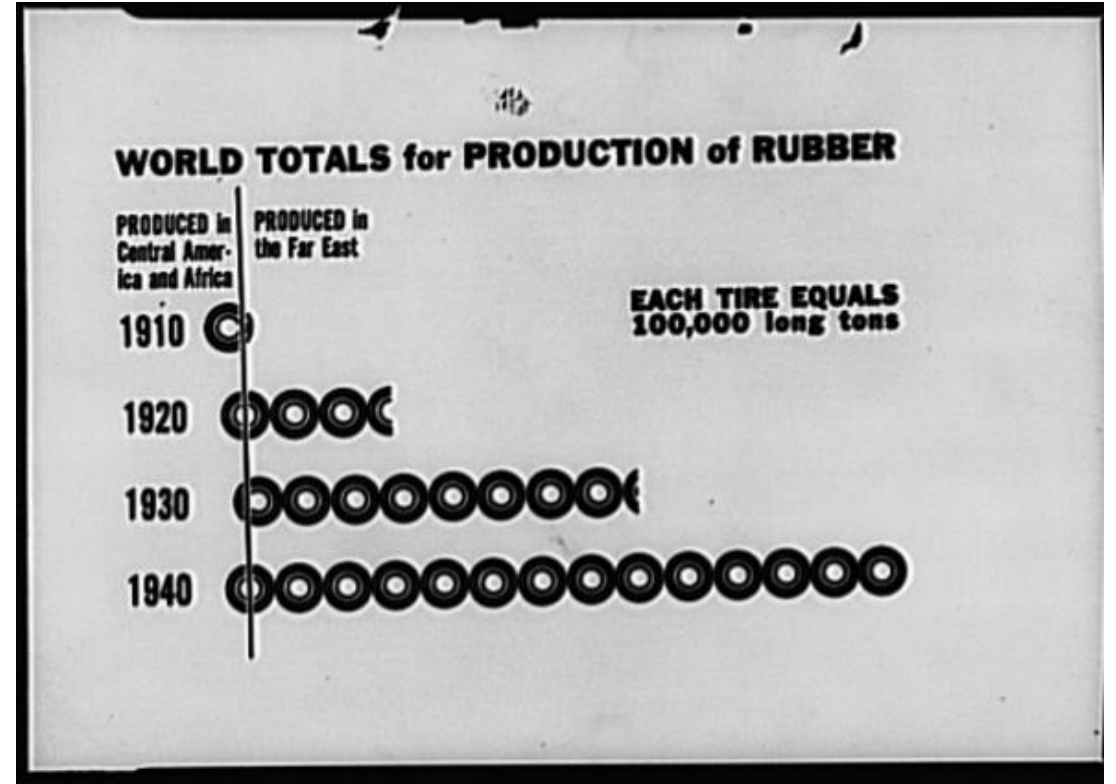
- **Sea**
- After the air attack on Lae the Lexington taskforce returned to Pearl Harbour, where it arrived on 26th March.
- **Air**
- Bare-footed, Wacket tramped through jungle and swamps, waded up streams, and climbed steep hillsides. After four days (on the 26th) he reached Bulwa where members of the New Guinea Volunteer Rifles cared for him until he had recuperated sufficiently to continue his journey.
- The US War Department reported to the White House that General Brett had turned over an additional 25 P40s to the RAAF, making a total of 75 that had been delivered.



Australian War Memorial
General MacArthur and Mr Curtin at the Advisory War Council meeting in Canberra on 26th March 1942. They had met for the first time that day.

Rubber

- 95% of the world's natural rubber production in 1940 was produced in areas just overrun by the Japanese.
- Military trucks needed rubber for tires, and rubber was used in almost every other war machine.
- The seizure of the rubber plantations by Japan was entirely foreseeable, yet during 1940 and 1941, a time when the United States government was urging private industry to begin retooling for defence production, rubber was oddly neglected.
- Some effort was made to revive the Brazilian rubber industry, but with a seven-year period for a rubber tree to come into production, this gave little hope.
- The United States had stockpiles of just 533,000 tons of rubber in 1941, barely a year's peacetime consumption, and it was some time before new synthetic plants could be developed.



Source. United States Office for Emergency Management. May 1942.

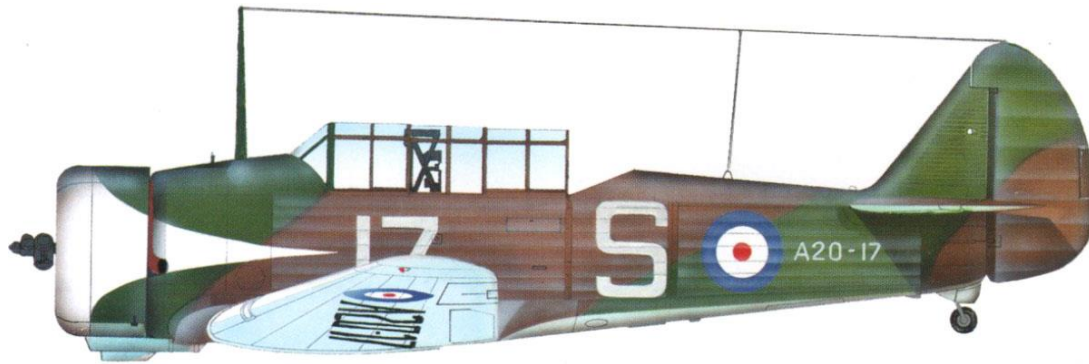
March 26, 1942

- President Roosevelt was well aware of U.S. vulnerability because of its dependence on threatened supplies of natural rubber, and in June 1940, he had formed the Rubber Reserve Company (RRC). The RRC set objectives for stockpiling rubber, conserving the use of rubber in tires by setting speed limits, and collecting scrap rubber for reclamation.
- But conserving, reclaiming, and stockpiling activities could not fill the gap in rubber consumption.
- After the loss of the natural rubber supply, the RRC called for an annual production of 400,000 tons of general purpose synthetic rubber to be manufactured by the four large rubber companies.
- On March 26, 1942, the four big rubber companies and the U.S. government agreed on a "mutual recipe" to produce GR-S rubber. The recipe consisted of monomers butadiene (75%) and styrene (25%), potassium persulfate as a catalyst, soap as an emulsifier, water, and a modifier, dodecyl mercaptan.
- The government had been reluctant to consider a \$30 million pilot program in 1940.
- The synthetic rubber program then stalled, in part because of the Clayton Memorandum of 20 February 1941 which made the completely unrealistic claim that U.S. reserves would last for at least three years in wartime.
- The tire manufacturers pressed their case, and the Office of Production Management finally awoke to the need. U.S. Rubber had broken ground for the first of four pilot plants subsidized by OPM in September 1941, but a great deal of time had been lost.
- The government approved a \$700 million program in early 1942.

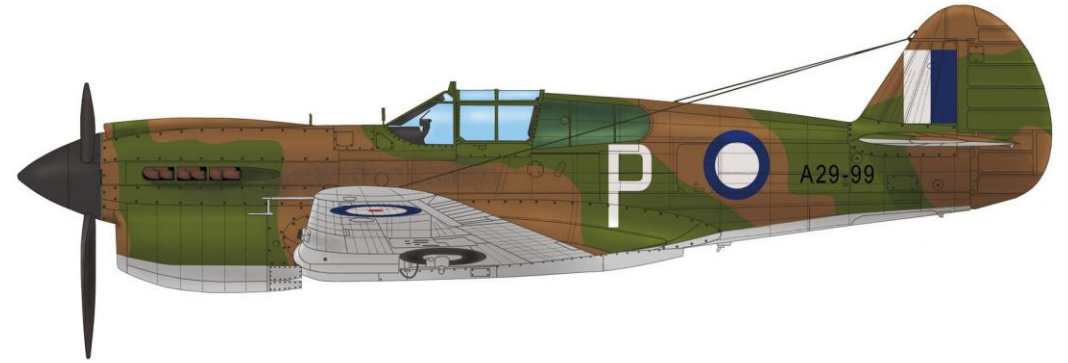
27th March

- **Government**
- The Commissioner, Mr Justice Lowe, presented a first report on the Darwin raid on 27th March
- **Land**
- The US Army had a signals intercept unit at Coregidor in the Philippines named Station 6, which intercepted transmissions for decoding in Washington. The army began an air evacuation of Station 6 personnel on March 27.
- Station 6 survivors reassembled in Australia and formed the nucleus of the Central Bureau signals intelligence organisation.
- **Port Moresby**
- 75 Squadron P-40s patrol over Port Moresby and Woods, Piper, Bailey and O'Connor intercept a formation of fighters and bombers at 1:30.
 - Woods and O'Connor attacked the fighters.
 - Lost is P-40E A29-19 (O'Connor, MIA).
 - Woods' P-40 sustained some damage.
 - Piper and Bailey attacked a Betty and claimed hits on the engines of one.
 - Bailey was also hit by friendly AA fire.
- After a number of other cases of mistaken identity, the Allies changed their roundels/insignia to remove the red circles in the centre, on or after 27 March 1942.

RAAF Markings



CAC CA-1 „Wirraway” Mk. I A20-17 z 12. Dywizjonu RAAF, Darwin, 1941 rok. CAC CA-1 "Wirraway" Mk. I A20-17 of the 12. Squadron RAAF, Darwin, 1941



US Army Aircraft Markings



28th March

- **Army**
- On the 28th the survivors were disembarked from the Lakatoi at Cairns. Of all on board, only six were fit men . . . the rest were sick, debilitated by poor and insufficient food . . . weakened by malaria and exposure. Most had sores, the beginnings of tropical ulcers, covered by dirty bandages. Their faces were the dirty grey . . . which betokens malaria; their clothes were in rags and stank of stale sweat. They were wrecks, but they were safe.
- At Mr Churchill's suggestion, early in March the United States had offered to send a second division to Australia if the Australian Government would agree to leave the 9th Division temporarily where it was. The offer was accepted and on 28th March the 32nd Division, then preparing to move to northern Ireland, was ordered to prepare for movement to Australia.
- **Air**
- **Port Moresby**
- (Raid 21) 14.30 All available Kittyhawks took off to intercept three Japanese bombers escorted by seven A6M2 Zeros. Sgt Bailey was observed by F/O Piper to be diving steeply followed by a Zero well astern over an area 20-30 miles north of Keken Rocks. Sgt Baily listed as Missing. One Zero was probably shot down; some damage caused to Kittyhawks.
- **Darwin**
- (Raid 7) 7 unescorted bombers attack the RAAF airfield. One is claimed destroyed by the defenders, 9th pursuit, who had been on CAP with 5 planes.

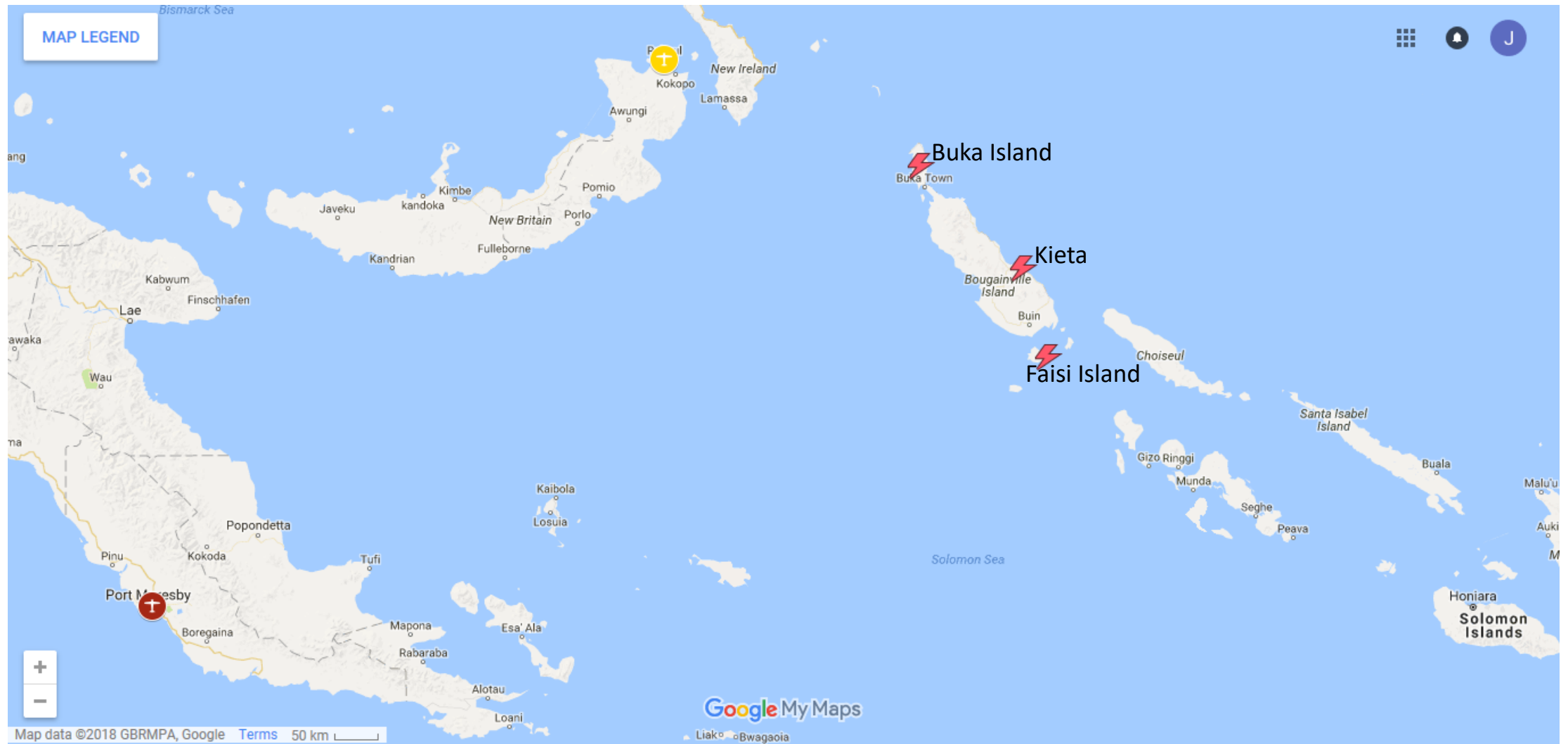
30th March - Government

- The censor's report, dated 30th March, said:
 - "A cynical attitude towards the sincerity of effort behind the Allies' war plans and operations is frequently encountered in recent letters of the public". The same report spoke of bewilderment, bitterness and indignation."
- Curtin was left with what gloomy comfort he could draw from a further promise made by Churchill on 30th March:
 - "During the latter part of April and the beginning of May one of our armoured divisions will be rounding the Cape. If, by that time, Australia is being heavily invaded, I should certainly divert it to your aid. This would not apply in the case of localised attacks in the north or of mere raids elsewhere. But I wish to let you know that you could count on this help should invasion by, say, eight or ten Japanese divisions occur. This would also apply to other troops of which we have a continuous stream passing to the East. I am still by no means sure that the need will arise especially in view of the energetic measures you are taking and the United States help."

30th March

- **Bougainville**
 - On 30th March a Japanese landing force went ashore at Buka, the nearest island in the Solomons group, 170 miles from Rabaul, and sent parties ranging over the north coast of Bougainville.
 - Also, on 30th March an occupation force seized Kieta on the east coast of Bougainville, then Faisi in the Shortland Islands to the south.
 - Mackie with his party from the independent company withdrew to a camp inland and cooperated with the Coastwatchers, Read and Mason.
- **Air**
- **Port Moresby**
 - On 30th March the first replacement aircraft arrived at Port Moresby—five Kittyhawks, one of which crashed on landing and was seriously damaged.
 - (Raid #22) One bomber made two runs across AA positions but was driven off by gunfire and unable to drop bombs. Three Zero fighters attempted to intercept a US Flying Fortress that was about to land, but they were driven off by RAAF Kittyhawks and the AA guns.
- **Darwin**
 - (Raid 8) 7 bombers and 5 fighters attack the RAAF airfield. One of the defending P40s is destroyed.

Bougainville



JIC 30 March 1942

The Japanese have recovered (probably at WAKE) a U.S. Navy torpedo manufactured in 1941. It is a foregone conclusion that the Japanese will incorporate in their future models any of the technical features of this torpedo which meet with their approval.

31 March 1942

- **Australia**
- The AIF divisions from the Middle East had begun to arrive in Australia in the first half of March and by the end of the month the 7th Division was concentrated in South Australia. One brigade of the 6th was also there, the other two brigades being temporarily held back for the defence of Colombo.
- In the meantime further American forces had arrived. On 31st March there were 33,500, concentrated chiefly in Melbourne and Brisbane, but with nearly 5,000 at Townsville and a similar number at Darwin.
- Including AIF, AMF and Americans there were about 400,000 men under arms, although only half of these would be in operational units.
- **Shipping**
- In March worldwide allied shipping losses increased from 521,000 in January and 706,000 in February to 841,640 tons or an annual rate of 10.1 million tons, exceeding even the very optimistic estimate of the construction rate to be achieved in 1943.
- 384,000 tonnes were lost to submarines along the America east coast and in the Caribbean.
- The other major losses were 169,000 tonnes scuttled, captured or sunk in circumstances unknown, mainly in the far east.
- American forces and armaments cannot be moved to active theatres in anything like the numbers required until these shipping losses can be got under control.

31 March 1942 – Air, Port Moresby

- On the last day of March No. 32 Squadron had only one Hudson available at Port Moresby when a reconnaissance over Salamaua was called for.
 - The aircraft was reported as unserviceable and, when told that the need for the flight was imperative, Kingwell insisted on flying it himself.
 - The pilot originally selected, Flying Officer Green, insisted on accompanying him.
 - As they completed their photographic run over the target three Zeros attacked almost simultaneously.
 - The Hudson's gunner shot one of the Zeros down, possibly shot down a second and Kingwell possibly shot down the third with the front guns.
 - When the attack ended 12 minutes later Kingwell had been injured by splinters of glass in his eyes, Green had bullet wounds in the left wrist and both thighs, and one of the air gunners, Sergeant Townshend, had been wounded in one foot.
 - The Hudson returned and made a safe landing.
- Six A-24's of the 8th Bombardment Squadron led a movement of AAF dive bombers into Port Moresby on 31 March.
- An extraordinary incident this afternoon. "A big Japanese bomber was overhead on reconnaissance in cloudy weather - the same plane that tried unsuccessfully to drop bombs yesterday. None of our fighters went up and the AA never fired a shot, but suddenly the bomber was seen to be falling after losing part of a wing or tail plane. It crashed into the hills in a big cloud of smoke. The bodies of the crew were found in the wreckage, including the body of a high ranking Japanese officer in full uniform and wearing his sword!"

31 March 1942 - Air

- **Darwin**
- (Raid 9) 7 bombers escorted by 12 or 15 fighters attacked the RAAF airfield at 13.20. P 40s took off to intercept and claimed one fighter destroyed and one bomber possible.
- 9th Pursuit were on CAP with 5 planes when vectored to intercept. One Japanese was claimed destroyed but two P40s lost, both pilots surviving.
- (Raid 10) 3 bombers attacked the RAAF airfield at 22.19.
- **North East Australia**
- By the end of March planes and crews of the 19th Group (H) was in process of reorganization and preparation for combat near Townsville. The second heavy bombardment group committed to Australia was the 43d Group, and its ground echelon had now arrived. But it had no planes yet. AAF plans had called for dispatch of two B-17's a day to Australia after 20 March, to build up and maintain a minimum of forty heavy bombers for each of the two groups.
- The War Department subsequently decided, however, to reconsider allocations to all theatres, and by the end of March only nine of the bombers had reached Australia.
- The new decision at the combined staff level did not alter the earlier commitment to the Southwest Pacific. There would eventually be eighty operational aircraft and forty in reserve, but delivery plans called for the dispatch of only thirty in April and the remainder as soon thereafter as was possible.
- **South East Australia**
- By 31st March 1942 483 Voluntary Air Observers Corps observer posts were in operation on a 24-hour basis. The V.A.O.C. was also established in the Darwin and Port Moresby areas.

31 March 1942 - Sea

- **Christmas Island**
- On 31st March an enemy force of seven warships and two transports made an unopposed landing on Christmas Island at Flying Fish Cove.
- Christmas Island, then a British possession, was defended by a detachment of the Hong Kong and Singapore Royal Artillery consisting of a British officer, 4 British NCOs and 27 Punjabi gunners.
- After two bombing raids and a naval bombardment early in March, on the night of 10–11 March, the Indian troops had mutinied, murdered their commander and the four British NCOs and imprisoned the remaining 21 Europeans.
- The mutineers offered no resistance to the landing.



31 March 1942 – Sea, Ceylon

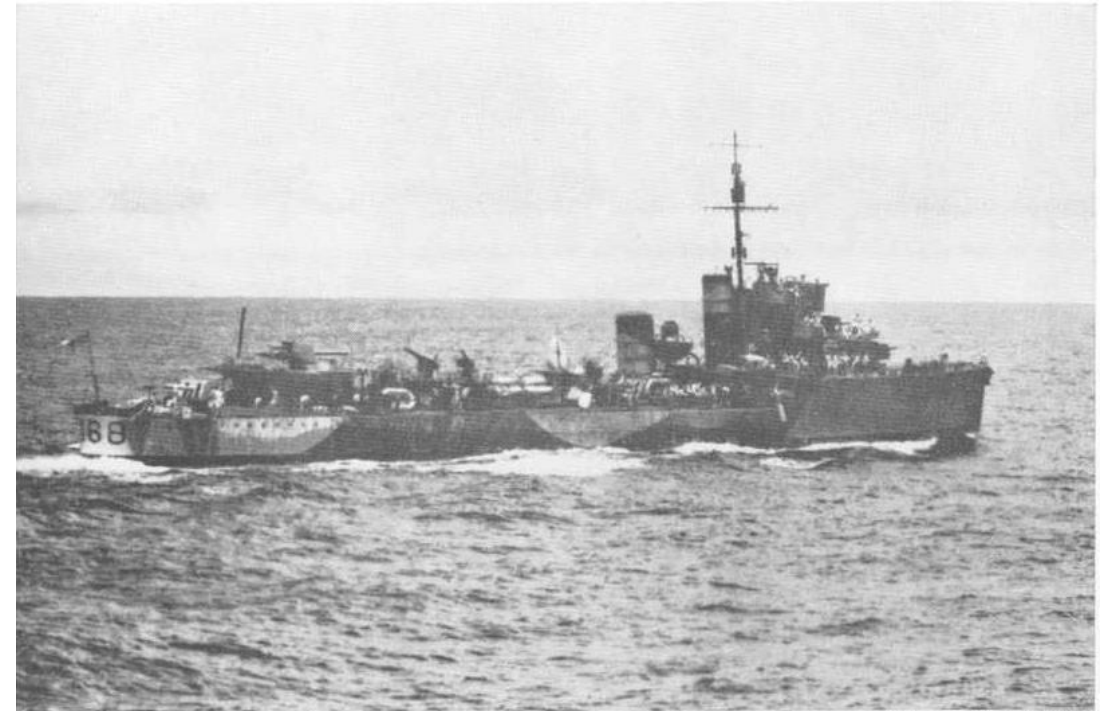
- When Admiral Somerville received a report of an impending Japanese attack on Ceylon, his fleet was dispersed.
 - He himself, with Warspite, Formidable, cruisers Cornwall, Enterprise, Dragon, Caledon, and six destroyers, was in Colombo, where also was the heavy cruiser Dorsetshire, undergoing refit.



HMS WARSPITE Flagship of Admiral Sommerville,
underway in the Indian Ocean.

31 March 1942 – Sea, Ceylon

- Vice-Admiral Willis' 3rd Battle Squadron, Resolution (flag), Revenge, Ramillies and Royal Sovereign, with Indomitable, and the destroyers of the 7th Flotilla, HMA Ships Napier, Nizam, Norman, HM Ships Fortune, Foxhound, Griffin, Decoy, and the Dutch Isaac Sweers, was based on Addu Atoll and exercising in that vicinity.
- The small aircraft carrier Hermes, with the destroyer HMAS Vampire, was in Trincomalee.



H.M.A.S. Vampire, 4th March 1942.

(R.A.N. Historical Section)

31 March 1942 – Sea, Ceylon

- Somerville estimated that the Japanese approach to Ceylon would be from the south-east, and he accordingly sailed his scattered forces to concentrate on the evening of 31st March 80 miles S.S.E. from the southern point of Ceylon.



31 March 1942 – Intelligence Assessment

3. ENEMY'S PROBABLE NEXT MOVE

- (i) Move against Allied territory in the Calcutta - Akyab area from Malaya with a view to isolating Allied forces in Burma.
- (ii) Possible attack on Ceylon.
- (iii) Continued air attacks on the Darwin and N.W. coast areas from both shore-based and ship-borne aircraft as a prelude to a direct attack on that area.
- (iv) Increased submarine and surface raider activity in the Bay of Bengal, West Indian Ocean and S.W. Pacific areas with a view to cutting supply lines to Australia and Burma.
- (v) Carrier-borne air raids against Fremantle and against N.E. Australian air bases including Horn Is. and Townsville, possibly from the Gulf of Carpentaria.
- (vi) Attack on Port Moresby from the Lae - Salamaua area and also possibly from Torres Strait area in conjunction with a move against the N.W. Coast.

JIC – 31st March

There are strong indications of future enemy advance into north-west NEW GUINEA. The advance will probably come from CERAM and will land at or near SORONG (northwest tip of NEW GUINEA). J.I.C. Comment: All enemy activity up until the present has been on the east coast of NEW GUINEA.

It is estimated that the Japanese are able to initiate a sea borne landing attack against PORT MORESBY with one division of troops. They are also capable of executing an attack on TULAGI, southern part

of the SOLOMON ISLANDS, concurrent with their initial move in operations against the northeast coast of AUSTRALIA:

New Caledonia. The Japanese made an air reconnaissance over NOUMEA, NEW CALEDONIA, on 29 March. J.I.C. Comment: This is the first enemy reconnaissance of this important base.

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