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BATTLE ANALYSIS: THE BATTLE FOR HOLLANDIA NEW GUINEA
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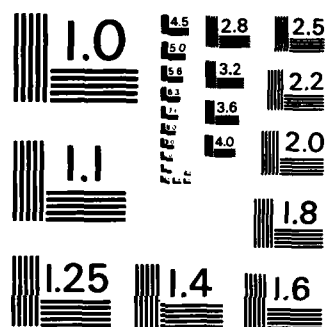
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BATTLE ANALYSIS

The Battle for Hollandia
New Guinea Campaign
World War II

by

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20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) During the spring of 1944, American forces landed at Hollandia, New Guinea and conducted a major operation intended to cut off and isolate Japanese forces in eastern New Guinea. The distances involved in the operation and the jungle terrain encountered caused the American forces to undergo severe hardships, but the leadership of small-unit leaders persevered in spite of these difficulties. The operation secured two excellent harbors and airfields for MacArthur's advance toward the		

1. DEFINE THE SUBJECT

The assault on Hollandia was a key point in the New Guinea Campaign during World War II. The battle for Hollandia began on 22 APR 1944 and continued officially until 6 JUN 1944 although, as in most battles fought in the Pacific theater, "mopping up" continued for quite some time afterwards. The town of Hollandia itself was of relatively minor importance; the major goals of the battle were to secure the excellent harbors in Humbolt and Tanahmerah Bays and the inner plain near Lake Sentani for potential airfields. The defending units were Japanese, primarily a rather unorganized collection of soldiers from the 6th Air Force, the 9th Fleet and other logistical support elements, nominally under control of the 18th Army but lacking any real plan or organization for establishing a defense. The Allied attackers were Americans from two Army divisions, organized under I CORPS with special reinforcements from the Marine Corps and a naval Task Force tailored to meet the support requirements of the amphibious assault.

The sources of information used in this battle analysis include operational histories, biographies, after-action reports and various types of personal histories or papers. The definitive source was The Approach to the Philippines (one volume in a comprehensive history of the US Army's operations in WW II) by Robert Ross Smith. Supplementing this was New Guinea and the Marianas March 1944-August 1944 by Samuel E. Morison. Other general sources include The War in the Far East by Basil Collier, The Pacific War by John Costello and World War II: A Compact History by Colonel R. Ernest Dupuy. On a less detached level were Volume I and Volume II, Part I of Reports of General McArthur, prepared by General McArthur's General Staff and published after McArthur's death in 1966. An interesting and

personal view of the operation was provided by General Eichelberger, commander of I CORPS, in letters to his wife published under the title of Dear Miss Em and edited by Jay Luvaas.

The most helpful source was The Approach to the Philippines by Robert Ross Smith. This book is one of a series published under the auspices of the Office of Military History, Department of the Army and designed to relate primarily the operation of US ground forces during the events preceeding the invasion of the Philippines. It is an in-depth treatment of all the phases of eight operations, seven in the Southwest Pacific Area and one in the Central Pacific Area, down to and including the operations of the Regimental Combat Team or lower. Since operations in the Southwest Pacific Area did not have historical coverage, it is written using official unit records and after-action reports, can be considered very objective and also contains a very good bibliography. New Guinea and the Marianas: March 1944-August 1944 by Samuel E. Morison is written primarily from the viewpoint of the US Navy and is dedicated to Admiral Mitscher. It covers in some detail the events of the amphibious landing and preparatory naval operations but provides very little information on the movements of ground forces. The Pacific War is also an objective account of operations in the Pacific Theater and has the advantage of using sources from previously classified documents so that some of the material related is new. Reports of General MacArthur is a history of operations in General MacArthur's command as prepared by his General Staff. MacArthur blocked publication during his lifetime because he felt that the Reports needed editing and correction of some inaccuracies. Because of this, the US Army does not call them "official" histories but they are

interesting for their detailed account of staff work and their collection (VOL II, Part I) of Japanese impressions and operational considerations. Dear Miss Em is a very personal look at the generalship and personalities of the senior Americans involved in the campaign. Although it is not an official publication it is worth reading for an intimate insight into the problems of one major commander in the operation.

II. THE STRATEGIC SETTING

The first open aggression in the Pacific Theater occurred in September 1931 when Japan used a relatively minor incident as a pretext for seizing Manchuria. Five months later this huge province was proclaimed the puppet nation of Manchuko. More of China was occupied by Japan in 1933 but advances were halted by stubborn Chinese resistance. Again in 1937 another major offensive was launched with the purpose of overrunning China proper, but the Japanese could not break the Chinese will to resist.(1) By 1939 the Japanese had seized all major Chinese coastal ports and began institution of a policy of economic strangulation. After Hitler overran Europe in the spring of 1940, Japan signed a Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy to obtain a free hand in the Orient.(2) In 1940, the Japanese via pressure on French-controlled governments in Indochina, obtained the right to station occupation troops in these countries. This move threatened the Burma Road, the last major supply route between China and the rest of the world. In April 1941, Japan signed a non-aggression pact with the Russians and in July completed the occupation of French Indochina.(3)

Japan was now prepared to complete a grand strategy of conquest of all Asia. First, the American fleet was to be crippled by a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. Then, while the

U.S. was unable to react and China already subdued, Japanese forces would overrun southeast Asia and the entire western Pacific. Japanese motivation for the attempted Asian/Pacific conquest is clear. The homeland was becoming more and more crowded. All arable land was being farmed and the extra men and women from rural areas were forced to seek a living in workshops and factories. An attempt was underway to expand both old and new industries but capital was short and raw materials had to come from foreign countries. In the same time frame, Japan was intent on having an Army and Navy equal to those of more powerful and wealthy nations and smarted under the attempts of such countries as the United Kingdom and the U.S. to curtail these ideas. The realization of such large ambitions in such a small country was beyond the means of the Japanese people. The solution was evident to the Japanese: take the Chinese mainland to obtain a place for Japanese population expansion and take southeast Asia and the western Pacific to obtain needed raw materials.(4)

This aggressive policy was easily instituted in Japan. For centuries Japanese folklore stressed the code of the samurai warrior, called Bushido or honor. The Japanese were dominated by this code and under such circumstances, the military could easily seize control of the government and embark on an aggressive policy of conquest abroad. During the 1920's different political parties and commercial interests tried to assert themselves, but with the world in a deep economic depression, the military, by the use of terror and political pressure, took control of the government. Once conquest of southeast Asia and the western Pacific was complete, Japan planned on building a defensive perimeter around her conquests. Japan could then exploit these conquests at her leisure. The plan was overwhelmingly successful, as America and her Allies suffered defeat after defeat.

Japan was successful in the Dutch East Indies and in the western Pacific from the Aleutians south. It was not until the Battle of Midway, almost six months after the Japanese struck at Pearl Harbor, that the Japanese advance was checked and the balance began to change.

The Japanese people were totally devoted to their country and the Emperor. The Emperor was taught from childhood that Japan needed a father figure not an autocratic leader; therefore, he should assume full responsibility in all affairs of state yet never issue any positive order on his own initiative. In theory, the emperor held absolute power; in practice, once the Cabinet and military leaders decided on a course of action he could not withhold his approval. He remained above politics and transcended party considerations and feuds to represent the entire nation. Although restrictive, this position gave him great influence because he was in a position to warn, advise or approve without getting further involved. More importantly, every Japanese citizen was pledged to serve him to the death. His subjects regarded him as a God and children were warned that they would be struck blind if they looked at his face. If a public speaker mentioned the word "Emperor", the entire audience would sit at attention. In the same manner, but to a lesser degree, the mother, father and teachers of a Japanese child were also Gods and the child's feelings toward the Emperor were not only awe but also affection and obligation. No matter how low his position, each subject felt a family kinship to the Emperor who was the father of them all. From this developed the creed of Kudo, or the Imperial Way. Kudo taught that the basis for morality was obligation to the emperor and one's parents. When Kudo was meshed with the Japanese political system a vague situation arose

in which the Army and Navy Chiefs of Staff were in essence responsible only to themselves. In addition, almost every Japanese household had two shrines, one Buddhist and one Shinto. Shinto, or the Way of the Gods, was the national religion. It was based on any inspirational phenomenon of nature and was more a cult of ancestor worship and communion with the past than a religion. Buddhism on the other hand taught that everyone could become a Buddha, or blessed one, after death. Also, the individual was nothing and salvation lay only in the negation of self with no birth, no death, no beginning and no end. These influences made for a fighting man who was totally devoted to the military mission since this was service to the Emperor and absolutely unafraid to die since this would reunite him with his ancestors and open the way into the "blessed state".(5)

With the attack on Pearl harbor the Japanese were ready to complete their planned conquests and fortify against any attackers. By December 1941, Japan had amassed a huge army of 2.4 million trained men and three million partially trained reserves. The Air Force consisted of some three thousand planes with an additional 425 planes and 225 pilots each month. In addition, Japanese pilots had had many hours of combat experience in the China campaign. Japan's navy consisted of 230 major vessels including the world's two largest battleships, the Yamamoto and the Musashi. With her western flank protected by the conquered Chinese coast and Russia neutralized by a non-aggression pact, Japan could concentrate on protecting her vulnerable southern and eastern hemispheres. With the Army in place and the Navy "at the ready", the stage was set for an encounter with Japan's only real threat, the United States.(6)

Japan's biggest blunder in her aim at Asian conquest was the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Since the carriers were not in port at

the time, the nucleus of the American fleet was undamaged. With this attack, the war became a world war and before the week was out, nations representing half the world's population were at war. This attack also killed the spirit of American isolationism and replaced it with the desire to win the war in a decisive manner. (7)

American war aims were simple: Prevent Japan from conquering Asia and the islands of the Pacific. Friction between the US and Japan had been increasing since the invasion of China. America protested this action through the League of Nations. When Japan signed the Tripartite Treaty with Germany and Italy, President Roosevelt froze all Japanese assets in the US, and later a commercial blockade of Japan was put into effect. These actions served only to stiffen the Japanese resolve to build themselves into a world power and secure land and raw materials in other countries extending from Manchuria and China to Thailand and New Guinea.

When the Pacific conflict began in 1941, Japan held a noticeable lead in numbers of planes, ships and trained men. America, Japan's principal opponent, was not only unprepared but had relegated the war in the Pacific to secondary importance behind operations in the European Theater. In 1941 the US Army had reached a strength of 1.5 million men, two-thirds of which were incompletely trained and equipped. The Air Force had 1,157 operational combat aircraft, of which 159 were four-engine bombers. The Navy consisted of 347 warships. Once the American public was mobilized behind the war effort however, the balance began to shift. Japanese aircraft strength attained an approximate top level of four thousand, but by the end of 1944 the US had about 10,000 warplanes plus 8,000 transports at its

disposal in the Pacific. These included the fastest propellar plane ever flown, the Mustang, and in the end, the B-29 Superfortress. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor the US was united in its cause to defeat the Japanese. "Remember Pearl Harbor" was the national battle cry. No other political, social or religious motivations were needed or involved in America's determination to win. Citizens everywhere were eager to help win the war. The young men had their opportunity to help by joining the military. Older men and women filled jobs in the rapidly expanding war industries. Ships were needed to reach the Japanese. From January 1942 through the end of the war US shipyards produced 6,400 naval vessels, 64,500 landing craft and 5,400 cargo ships for a total of 28 million gross tons. All the military spirit and dedication in Japan could not overcome the American determination to win coupled with the vast resources of American industry.

The Americans had many allies in their fight against the Japanese. The Chinese had kept up some sort of resistances for over ten years on the Asian continent. In Burma, the British and Indians were fighting the Japanese, and in the Pacific the US had help from the Australians and British. All these efforts were organized under the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The overall strategic goal in the Pacific Theater was the defeat of Japan through the invasion and conquest of the Japanese islands. In order to keep the Japanese off balance and unable to effectively mass against Allied invasions, a two-pronged approach was envisioned through the Central Pacific and the Southeast Pacific until the Philippines were liberated.

Central to efforts in the Southeast Pacific was the conquest of New Guinea by driving north from Port Moresby, a small town on the southern end of New Guinea and the last place on the

island that remained in Allied hands. This offensive was to be directed by General Douglas MacArthur. General MacArthur began his campaign in September 1943 by ordering a counterattack against Japanese soldiers who were attacking Port Moresby. The counter-attack was successful, driving the Japanese back to Buna and Gona on the northern coast of New Guinea. By 22 January 1943 organized Japanese resistance had ceased. About 12,000 Japanese, 2,000 Australians and 850 Americans had died in the campaign. After this success, MacArthur's next goal was to neutralize the Japanese stronghold in Rabaul, located on the island of New Britain north of New Guinea. In order to do this, MacArthur needed an advance base and decided to take the Huon Peninsula located on New Guinea directly west of Rabaul. Consequently, a force landed at Nassau Bay and advanced on Salumana from the south. A force was also landed north of Salumana to take the town of Lae and cut the supply lines into Salumana, which fell on 11 September 1943. Next MacArthur moved further up the New Guinea coast and took Finschafen which put him into position to move against the western end of New Britain and establish air bases from which to strike Rabaul.(8) Because of dense jungles, large mountains and extensive fortifications, MacArthur elected not to try to take Rabaul but to neutralize it by round-the-clock bombardment. Typically, MacArthur avoided frontal attacks where the enemy was organized in strength and expecting an attack, and Rabaul was certainly such a case. Since the terrain and facilities of Rabaul itself were not vital to the approach to the Phillipines, MacArthur could bypass it, keep it contained and let it "die on the vine." This policy of "leap frog" became standard in the Pacific Theater with typical leaps of a few hundred miles at a time, limited by the tactical range of fighters.(9) In

accordance with this policy, McArthur's next move was to the Admiralty Islands which lie north of New Guinea and were at the junction of the two main air paths between Japan and Rabual. The Admiralty Islands fell on 29 February 1944 and with the loss of these islands plus the steady bombardment of Rabual and advance of the Allies along New Britain, the Japanese moved the headquarters of the 18th Army to New Guinea and placed the divisions of this Army along the coast of New Guinea from Salumana to Hansa Bay and Wewak. The predicted targets were Madang and Wewak, both located on the coast and both within a few hundred miles of Salumana. Accordingly, these two areas were fortified. This made the small Dutch trading center of Hollandia a very important supply base. Since Hollandia was over six hundred miles from Salumana and out of range for American planes the Japanese had no reason to expect that it would be the next target; although they did expect to have to defend it eventually.(10) Consequently, it was undefended to such a degree that the Americans experienced more resistance from the terrain and weather than from the Japanese.

III. TACTICAL SITUATION

The Hollandia region of New Guinea has a tropical climate that averages 100 inches of rain each year. In April, during which the major portion of the operations around Hollandia were conducted, the average rainfall is 8.5 inches and about 13 rainy days were to be expected. The year-round temperature in this area is 70-90 degrees F with a fluctuation of less than 5 degrees. Vegetation consists primarily of tropical rainforests. Winds are predominantly light year-round.(11) These climatic conditions are a natural combat multiplier for defensive forces. Although the environment acts on both the defender and the

attacker equally, the defense retains the advantage with previously prepared fortified positions, pre-stocked forward supply points, prior occupation of key terrain and pre-planned targets and obstacles.

The weather of April 1944 was no exception to the average. The offensive forces found that troop movements were slow and labored and vehicular movements were halted entirely by rain, floods and the ensuing mud which at times reached over thirty inches. According to one observer who witnessed the initial landing at Tanahmerah Bay, "the artillery mounts mired to their hubs in deep mud at the inner side of the beach".(12) Resupply of forward battalions also became a critical problem after the heavy rains on the 23rd and 24th which turned "the road (from Tanahmerah Bay to Sentani Lake) into a quagmire through which struggling men could scarcely carry their own equipment and food, to say nothing of extra supplies for the leading battalions".(9) Target acquisition and air support were not significantly limited by the weather for the first day of the operation, but by the 23rd rain and cloud cover effectively grounded all air operations until the 26th. After the Lake Sentani airfields were seized, once again weather prevented regular supply runs for awhile. All told, the leading battalions survived for over four days on what could be carried by soldiers over the impassibly muddy roads. The continually wet, hot and muddy environment also took its toll in both the health and morale of soldiers. Very few of the casualties sustained by Allied soldiers at Hollandia were due to injuries sustained in combat, and the majority of the Japanese lost were killed trying to move overland from Hollandia to northern Japanese outposts.(14)

The island of New Guinea is covered by tropical rain forests.

Along the entire coast near the eastern side of the islands run the Owen Stanley mountains which make movement from the coast to the interior a major undertaking. The interior (a dense rainforest with many large swamps,) was largely unexplored. Only a few narrow and unimproved roads lead from the interior and such roads as exist must cross and re-cross the innumerable streams that drain off the Owen Stanleys. Coral reefs ring the majority of the island and can be difficult to cross without the tide.

Analysis of terrain features during the Hollandia Operation must be divided into two areas: the beaches and immediate environs and the interior areas. The landing beaches used at Tanahmerah and Humbolt Bays could have posed major problems for the Allies. As is the case with almost any amphibious operation, there was no cover or concealment for the attacking forces and an abundant amount for the defender. The defender also holds key terrain and in this case clearly had the advantage in observation and fields of fire, being able to survey and bring fire on landing sites at both Humbolt Bay and Tanahmerah Bay from many key positions in the Cyclops mountains and surrounding foothills. Natural obstacles on the beaches included a coral reef at RED BEACH 1 which permitted easy passage only at high tide and a swamp which blocked the exit from RED BEACH 2. Man-made obstacles were limited to those created unintentionally by the Japanese such as the extensive supply dumps and disposal sites on WHITE BEACH 1 that had to be bulldozed out before Allied forces could begin to move off the beaches.(15) Although these obstacles slowed the Allies, their potentially fatal effect on operations was almost completely nullified by the failure of the Japanese to take advantage of them in any systematic fashion.

The interior trails leading to the desired landing strips at Lake Sentani provided favorable and unfavorable conditions for

both belligerents. Initially, terrain conditions favored the Japanese heavily because they held all key terrain and were familiar with the territory. The narrow trails leading to the interior slowed movement considerably and the many streams crossed by the trail further impeded traffic. According to one observer:

"At any one of the numerous hairpin turns and defiles over the first two or three miles of the track, a squad of Japanese riflemen could have delayed an entire division." (16)

Thick tropical vegetation provided excellent concealment for both sides but also, in conjunction with the steep grades of the Cyclops mountains, limited movement on the trails for any sort of rapid advance. Because the Japanese had not been expecting the attack at Hollandia, they were unprepared to exploit these advantages at other than a few locations. The Allies did encounter a few reinforced positions and, because of the narrow muddy trails and thick vegetation, experienced a great deal of trouble in eliminating relatively small strongpoints. (17) Other small obstacles and strongpoints occurred near the airfields but were easily bypassed or reduced.

Comparison of the opposing forces shows the Allies to be the superior force. The major factor leading to this overwhelming superiority was the complete failure of Japanese intelligence to predict the Hollandia landings. From this the Allies were able to bring overwhelming combat power against a numerically insignificant combat force, while the Japanese were unable to take advantage of the inherent advantages of the defender in logistics and command and control. The Allied leadership showed remarkable flexibility in strategy and tactics and allied command, control and communication systems were fully able to meet the challenges thus provided. The Japanese leadership seemed very infle-

xible and were terribly disorganized with the expected results in command, control and communication. Additionally, the Allied troops were combat divisions while the 500 Japanese combat troops were all antiaircraft gunners. Only in technology was there any approach to parity between the opponents.

Intelligence played the major role at Hollandia. The decision to attack in the Hollandia area was based on intelligence reports of greatly increased Japanese defensive activity in Hansa Bay and Wewak making assault in these two expected areas a formidable undertaking. Gen McArthur's G-2 began extensive deception operations aimed at convincing the Japanese commander that the next attack would be in the Wewak area. According to Mr. Morison

"Motor torpedo boats patrolled actively at night; dummy parachutists were dropped near Wewak; submarines left empty life-rafts to drift ashore, simulating the presence of recon teams." (18)

The effectiveness of the Allied deceptive measures is evidenced by the fact the "the Japanese, completely confident in the strength of their base at Wewak, failed utterly to organize their defenses at Hollandia".(19) The failure of the Japanese command to prepare for an assault at Hollandia, although it occurred before tactical operations even began, was the turning point of the entire assault.

As a result of the Japanese intelligence failure, the Allies were able to mass an overwhelming amount of combat power. Although the Japanese had 11,000 soldiers at Hollandia, only about 500 were combat troops and these were all anti-aircraft gunners. The remainder of Japanese forces were air force and rear area support personnel, completely untrained for any sort of combat role and lacking the willingness to "die in place" that characterized the majority of the Japanese combat troops.(20) The Allied forces, known as the RECKLESS Task Force were comprised of the

24th INF DIV less the 34th REGT and the 41st INF DIV less the 163rd REGT. Organized with these two divisions under the I CORPS staff were four engineer battalions, a Marine Corps tank company, an anti-armor battalion, three field artillery battalions, seven anti-aircraft battalions and a tank company from the 1st CAV DIV. The 34th REGT was in close reserve and, in the event that additional help was needed, the ALAMO FORCE was available. Ground forces were supported by Naval TASK FORCE 77 and air support was provided by TASK FORCE 58. Numerically, without including the ALAMO FORCE this totalled 50,000 men.(21) The Japanese defenders had only anti-aircraft weapons and the limited number of aircraft at the Lake Sentani airfields that had survived the Allied air raid of 4 April. The Allies had, in addition to the firepower organic to their unit, easy access to both Naval gunfire and close air support.

Another key point in the Hollandia landings that had a critical effect on the conduct of the battle was the leadership on each side and the command, control and communications structure that supported that leadership. The combat effectiveness of the Allied Forces was enhanced by the flexible leadership styles of the allied commanders. For instance, errors in the intelligence profiles of the terrain were discovered upon arrival at RED BEACH 2 when it was found that because of a large swamp there was no way off the beach except to get back onto the boats. General Irving was able to re-route these soldiers to RED BEACH 1 until it ultimately became too crowded and then was able to send the remainder to disembark on the WHITE BEACH landing sites in Humbolt Bay.(22) The landing sites at Humbolt Bay also had problems when a disastrous fire was started in an old Japanese ammo dump and spread to an Allied POL stockpile. General Eichelberger was able to shift both troops and supplies from

WHITE BEACH 1 to WHITE BEACH 3 and 4. The decisive reactions of the Allied commanders and the swift response of leaders throughout the command and control structures in dealing with these major changes in established plans did much to minimize the turmoil of the moves and were indicative of the high morale and training of the Allied soldiers.

The effectiveness of the Japanese leadership was hindered by changes in high level commands that took place immediately before and during the assault. The highly successful Allied raid on the Lake Sentani Airfields had cost the commander of the 6th Air Division his job and his replacement, General Imada, had just recently arrived in Hollandia. Admiral Endo, the 9th Fleet commander, had arrived in Hollandia only in late March and the senior Japanese commander in Hollandia, Major General Kitazono, arrived just ten days before the landing. None of these individuals had had time to effectively organize his staff and prepare any defense plan. The lack of plans was further complicated by the disappearance of Major General Kitazono during the actual date of the invasion.(23) General Imada attempted to organize defenses, but they were no match for the Allied attackers and were soon forced to withdraw. In addition to problems in command and control at Hollandia, there was the failure of General Adachi, commander of the Japanese 18th AFM, to send three divisions from Wewak to defend Dutch Harbor as he had been ordered to do. Although Adachi requested permission to transfer the the troops early in the morning of the invasion, it was denied because it was possibly bring severe repercussions if the request was denied at Wewak so that the Japanese would have to fight the battle alone and were likely to lose.

throughout the ranks, the Japanese soldiers mirrored their leader's confusion and dismay. Unlike the Allies, these were not combat troops and most had no experience to base their actions on. Consequently, the Allies saw very little of the common Japanese defensive measures of reinforced and camouflaged strongpoints on key terrain or the willingness of Japanese soldiers to die rather than face retreat or surrender. This point alone may have prevented a large number of Allied casualties.

Although the assault at Hollandia strained Allied logistical capabilities to the limit the Japanese were once again unable to take advantage of the situation. From the Allied viewpoint, this was the largest single operation ever undertaken. Fifty thousand combat troops and twenty-three thousand support troops with over 58,100 tons of supplies and equipment were to be moved over six hundred miles from their support base. This operation alone would require more shipping capability than existed in the entire Southeast Pacific Theater. Shipping assets belonging to both the South and Central Pacific theaters were borrowed for a limited amount of time, as were boats that were normally used for training missions in rear areas. Had the Japanese put up enough resistance to delay the Allied timetable, the entire movement across the Pacific toward Japan might have been slowed.(24)

Inland lines of communication between the beachheads and the Lake Sentani airfields were hindered by the the lack of improved roads. At one point, supplies could only be moved by hand and heavy equipment or weapons systems were at a standstill. The lead battalion was forced to halt for at least a day in order for logistical support to catch up. Even this did no more than slow the Allies as artillerymen and others whose weapon systems could not be brought up volunteered to walk supplies forward to the infantry units in front.

For the Japanese, Hollandia was a major supply center. It lacked the weapon systems however, to make use of the tremendous quantities of supplies and the soldiers to man the limited quantity of systems it did have. The Lake Sentani airfields had been thoroughly wrecked on the 4th of April so that once the Allies held the beaches, Hollandia was cut-off from air or naval reinforcement. The rain forests and steep grades of the New Guinea terrain made re-inforcement on overland routes an infeasible alternative. In one stroke the Allies logistically isolated both Hollandia and the 18th Japanese ARMY in the Wewak/Hansa Bay area from the rest of the Japanese forces.

The overall mission of the Allies in attacking at Hollandia "was to develop a supply base and staging areas for the support of subsequent Allied operation farther to the west"(25). An implied mission within this statement was to accomplish it with the minimum loss of men, equipment and time. The immediate military objectives were to seize first the beaches at Humbolt and Tanahmerah Bays and ultimately the airfields near Lake Sentani. From these airfields, the Allies could dominate Japanese movements in western New Guinea and the nearer islands of the Indies and provide support for future landing along the New Guinea coast. Ultimately this fit into the Allies' strategic goals by forcing the Japanese to split their attention and resources between the Central and Southeastern Pacific areas until the two directions of attack could unite in an assault on the Phillipines. By the brilliant use of deception the Allies were also able to accomplish the implied portion of their mission and take the critical Hollandia assets with a minimum of Japanese resistance.

The Japanese mission was to protect and consolidate the

empire it had so recently gained in the Pacific. The Japanese expected to fight major battles all along the coast of New Guinea and to eventually reinforce and make a concentrated stand at Hollandia. Allied deception efforts supported the Japanese beliefs so fully that Hollandia was virtually defenseless at the time of the Allied assault.

The decisions which could have changed the course of action at Hollandia were made well before any fighting began. In view of McArthur's use of intercepted Japanese radio traffic, he definitely was in control of the situation while the Japanese were forced to react to his moves. It is quite probable that McArthur knew more about the situation at Hollandia and the pitiful state of the defenses than did many of the Japanese leaders. In view of this knowledge, it would have been quite foolish of the Americans to attack the strongly fortified position further south and east of New Guinea. The Japanese, on the other hand, appear to have completely discounted the possibility that McArthur might strike as far as Hollandia. This underestimation would have been quite reasonable in view of McArthur's long and careful preparations to subdue Rabaul. In any case, the courses of action finally chosen suited the American objective very well and minimized or destroyed any Japanese advantages that might have been possible. (26)

IV. DESCRIBE THE ACTION

On 22 April 1944 there were probably about 15,000 Japanese troops in the immediate vicinity of Hollandia and approximately another 20,000 in three badly mauled divisions under the 18th Army located in Wewak, Hansa Bay and Madang. Although General Adachi had been ordered to send one division, the 51st, to Hollandia, only a token effort had been made in this direction and had the Japanese been allowed to follow their own time sche-

dule the 51st would not have arrived before late May. As an interim measure until the 51st could be ready, MG Kitazono, commander of the 3rd Field Transport Unit at Hansa Bay had been sent to Hollandia in order to assume control of the effort to provide ground defenses by the assorted Army units already in Hollandia. Admiral Endo had also moved the 9th Fleet HQ from Wewak to Hollandia, and MG Imada had assumed command of what was left of the 6th Air Force. These three individuals had not yet reached an agreement for the coordinated use of their respective assets in a ground defense system by the time the Allies struck so that the 15,000 troops in the Hollandia area had no prepared positions, no combat organization, no unity of command. In short, they were entirely unprepared. (27)

Final loading of the RECKLESS Task Force began on the 10th of April. The three days prior to loading were dedicated to practicing the amphibious assault at Taupota Bay on the coast of New Guinea for the 24th Division and near Lae, New Guinea for the 41st Division. After a day of rest and recreation spent on the Admiralty Islands on 16 April, all convoys moved north around the eastern side of the Admiralties and at 0700 hrs 20 April assembled at a rendezvous point northwest of Manus Island. From the Admiralties the convoy steamed west all day and at dusk turned southwest toward Hollandia. At a point about twenty miles offshore and between Humbolt and Tanahmerah Bays, the convoy split; the Central Attack group carried the 41st Division southeast toward Humbolt Bay and the Western Attack Group carried the 24th Division toward Tanahmerah Bay.

The Western Attack Group anchored approximately 10km off RED BEACH 2, about 1 mile further out than originally planned because of bad weather. The transfer to landing craft was completed by

0535 in spite of rough seas. At 0600 the 8-inch guns of HMAS Australia and HMAS Shropshire opened fire and continued until 0645. The landing sites at Tanahmerah Bay were designated as RED BEACH 1 and RED BEACH 2. The first assault wave, composed of the 3rd Battalion, 19 INF and the 2nd Battalion, 21 INF landed at 0709 hrs, just 9 minutes late. Tactical surprise was complete and the beach was totally undefended. The 3rd Bn moved to secure the northern portion of the beach and the 1st Bn landed and became a reserve unit. The southern half of RED BEACH 2 was seized by the 2nd Bn with similar ease and I Company was sent out to look for the trail that was thought to connect RED BEACH 1 with RED BEACH 2. In the meantime, Company A, 21st INF REGT landed on RED BEACH 1 about 20 minutes behind schedule because it was found that the coral reef would permit only two landing craft to pass at one time. This landing was also unopposed. While Company A continued to secure the beachhead, the remainder of the 1st Bn landed and began searching the maze of trails leading off RED BEACH 1 for the trail that would lead to the Lake Sentani airfields. After about an hour this trail was located and reconnaissance began, but problems had developed at RED BEACH 2 when it was discovered that the beach was only about thirty yards deep. Beyond the beach itself was an impassable swamp and the predicted road between RED BEACH 1 and RED BEACH 2 did not exist. Since the landings were continuing at the scheduled rate, RED BEACH 2 was becoming very overcrowded. The problem reached such proportions that vehicles and artillery systems were lined up bumper to bumper and parked. Additionally, heavy equipment such as artillery mounts and tanks were mired in deep mud requiring the diversion of critical engineer assets to free them. Eventually vehicles carried on landing craft had their cargoes unloaded by hand onto the beach and then remained on the landing crafts. The

problem was initially solved when it was discovered that additional flat dry space existed behind RED BEACH 1 and shuttle runs were started to ferry supplies between the landing sites. This process was further speeded when naval demolition personnel blasted a larger hole in the surrounding reef allowing more than two landing craft to beach at once. Although this relieved the immediate pressure, eventually a large part of the supplies and rear elements/reserves that were to have landed in Tanahmerah Bay were actually landed in Humbolt Bay.(28)

At 0837 hrs elements of the 1st Bn, 21st INF started up the road to Lake Sentani. Unfortunately, this road was little more than an unimproved trail and the division engineers estimated that it would take at least two weeks to upgrade it to a point that would sustain vehicular movements. This forced the 1st Bn to proceed without the aid of either their own artillery or the Marine Corps armored company attached to them for the operation. Fortunately, they continued to be unopposed as they moved up deserted fire lanes formed by half finished pillboxes and strongpoints. When the 1st Bn reached it's first intermediate objective at the village of Mariboe the scattered Japanese equipment and supplies indicated not only the proximity of the enemy but also the extent of his surprise and disorganization. By nightfall the 1st Bn had moved over eight miles inland and had discovered many signs of the retreating enemy but no organized resistance. At this point a critical decision was made to pull the battalion back for the night to prevent the Japanese from coming between the 1st Bn and the rest of the division. This proved to be a wise move because at about midnight the Japanese organized a small counterattack but were unable to penetrate the defensive perimeter. In the meantime, the 2nd Bn re-grouped and

prepared to follow the 1st Bn up the trail at dawn. (29)

At first light the 1st Bn resumed the advance and by 1045 hrs had regained the forward positions of the previous day. About 1,500 meters beyond the village of Dazai a small stream crossed the main trail. Two platoons of Company B who were leading the advance crossed safely but stumbled into the middle of a well-concealed Japanese ambush on the far bank. Fire from both rifles and heavy machine guns made fording the stream impossible and four Americans were killed when the two platoons withdrew. Close air support and organic mortar and heavy machine gun fire were called for but proved ineffective. At dusk 1st Bn pulled back to allow mortars and artillery to fire freely on the stream crossing area. The Japanese continued to harass American positions with mortars, grenades and small arms fire and the 2nd and 3rd Battalion which had moved along the trail behind the 1st Bn also caught some rounds from a .90mm anti-aircraft gun located near the Lake Sentai airfields. (30)

By this time the 21st REGT and particularly the 1st Bn were in serious logistical trouble. The 1st Bn had not been resupplied since it landed and had only enough rations for one more meal and very little ammunition. The 21st REGT had planned for a contingency of resupply that would be accomplished by hand. Unfortunately, they did not plan for hand-carried supplies in conjunction with heavy rains that began on D-Day+1 and turned the trail into mud. To handle the problem the beach areas were stripped of all non-essential combat troops such as artillerymen, anti-tank companies and reserve infantry battalions. These soldiers began to hand-carry supplies forward through conditions that challenged the movement of even a normally loaded soldier. Air supply was also ruled out because of the weather. Late on D-Day+2 the 1st Bn was halted and ordered to prepare defensive

positions until the supply situation could be straightened out. (31)

On D-Day+3 the 1st Bn was re-supplied by air-drop and was able to begin moving again. A small enemy defensive position was discovered at one stream crossing and artillery was called in to bombard both known and suspected enemy positions. The Japanese had used the time lost due to American logistical problems to organize and the advances of the 1st Bn were slowed considerably by the need to continually patrol to flush out small parties of Japanese soldiers and ward off ambush. By the morning of D-Day+4 the weather had closed down again and three infantry battalions, two anti-tank companies and two cannon companies were carrying supplies forward by hand. On D-Day+4 the 1st Bn resumed movement. There was no resistance until 1130 hrs when four Japanese riflemen were flushed from a bunker. By noon advance elements of the battalion were able to see the Lake Sentai airfields and shortly thereafter the first patrols reached their outskirts. (32)

At this point the order of battle was changed and the 1st Bn was sent to clear out a Japanese encampment while the 3rd Bn pushed directly to the airfields and secured them. By 1530hrs the airfields were secured and by dark the 2nd Bn had also closed in on the landing strips. (33)

The landings on Humbolt Bay, designated as WHITE BEACH 1-4 proceeded with even less trouble than those at Tanahmerah Bay. So rapid were the advances of the 3rd Bn, 162nd INF that by 0800 hrs the commanding terrain feature of Pancake Hill was captured and an anti-aircraft gun taken with the canvas cover still in place. On D-Day +1 Hollandia itself was occupied with no resistance. In the meantime the task of driving into the airfields fell to the 186th INF REGT. (34)

The beaches and roads in the Humbolt Bay area were much more obliquing than those on RED BEACH 1 and 2. The drive of the 186th was supported by both the 205th and 218th Artillery Battalions. Companies A and C, patrolling in the lead, met some uncoordinated attacks about 4 km along the road and were forced to remain in place for the rest of the night. The remainder of the 1st Bn continued forward against very little opposition but halted to allow air strikes against known and suspected enemy positions. By this time it was late afternoon and according to General Fuller's directions, the battalion halted at 1500 hrs and began preparing defensive positions. Heavy rain also began to fall and the supply problems that were plaguing the 21st REGT seemed likely to also bother the 186th. (35)

On D-Day + 2 the 3rd Bn passed through the 1st Bn and assumed the lead in order to allow Companies A and C to rejoin the 1st Bn. The initial objective was a jetty on Lake Sentani at the point where the road first reached the lake. Since a lone Japanese plane had managed to set an ammo dump and a FOL storage site afire during the night, the 186th was on half rations and the soldiers were required to conserve their ammunition. Opposition was extremely light and by noon the lead elements had secured the jetty. At this point the battalions had to be reorganized again to protect the 3rd Battalion flank against small groups of Japanese who were continually found wandering about on the right flank. By nightfall a defensive perimeter had been established around the jetty. (36)

As D-Day+3 dawned the 3rd Bn began an overland movement to Nefaar and the engineers came forward to organize an amphibious movement across the lake. By nightfall both the 2nd and 3rd Battalions were in Nefaar and reconnaissance had been made of the south end of the Lake Sentani air fields. Further advances were

prohibited by the need to dig in and the artillery fire (some friendly and some enemy) that was falling all around the airfield. On D-Day+5 the southern end of the airfields was taken without incidence and at 1645 hrs the two divisions had met again.(37)

Fighting actually continued much longer in the area as stray Japanese stragglers were rounded up or killed. American losses in the first day were only six men killed and sixteen wounded. By the sixth of June losses were only 124 killed, 1,057 wounded and 28 missing. During this same period 611 Japanese were captured, and over 3,300 were killed. Most of these casualties occurred after the 26th of April. The pace of these "mopping up" operations is also illustrated by the fact that 800 Japanese were killed the week ending 6 June. Although records are not complete it appears that following the Japanese retreat from Hollandia only about 1,000 men of the original 15,000 survived. Material losses by both the Japanese and Allies were significant. The Japanese lost the contents of the entire supply base. The Allies lost very little in tactical operations but suffered enormously from the fire that erupted on WHITE BEACH 1, losing 60% of the supplies unloaded up to D-Day+1.(37)

The Allies clearly enjoyed a decisive tactical victory. Throughout the operation the Allies were consistently able to mass superior firepower. On the rare occasions that the Japanese did achieve superior combat power it was neither coordinated or sustained. Although maneuver was limited by terrain and vegetation these same factors also provided some security and allowed the Allies to use minimal flank protection during their movements. The Allies also enjoyed a high degree of unity of command while the Japanese were clearly weak in this area due to

recent changes in high level leadership and the strengths and weaknesses of the leadership were clearly reflected throughout the remainder of the unit. The key element in the victory however was undoubtedly the element of surprise. It is clear that had the Japanese known that the Allies were going to land at Hollandia the operation would have been a bloody, costly and lengthy operation.

V. ASSESS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ACTION

The battle for Hollandia was a decisive victory for the Allied forces. The Allies gained excellent airfields and harbors from which to continue their drive up New Guinea and into the Phillipines. Most importantly, the Allied timetable for movements toward the Japanese islands was speeded considerably because the Allies had moved their front forward over 600 hundred miles in one move with very light losses, allowing the 24th and 41st Division to be employed again with little pause.

The Japanese position suffered considerably. At the conclusion the Japanese 18th Army was cut off completely from Japan, the Dutch East Indies or the Chinese mainland, and the Japanese were again off-balance as they tried to defend their new empire. On a larger scale, the Japanese were forced to reconsider their entire defensive position since their latest defensive line from the Caroline Islands to Timor and on down to New Guinea could no longer be held. On May 9th the 2nd Area Army was ordered to pull back and maintain a defensive line through Sorong and Halmahera, holding Biak island and Manokwari as outposts only. Although this did not prove a fatal blow to the Japanese, it did place them in a very bad position to continue their defenses in the Southeast Pacific.

The overwhelming lesson of the battle of Hollandia is the value of intelligence. First, the Allies had the Japanese

battle code which enabled them to eavesdrop and learn of relative strengths and weaknesses without alerting the Japanese to possible intentions. Second, the use of deception to confuse or mislead the enemy did much of the work of attack for the Allies. These two factors combined yielded the advantage of surprise which allowed the Allies to not only win decisively but to conserve many American lives in doing so. There can be no question that this is still an extremely valuable lesson to current military leaders.

ENDNOTES

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(5) McArthur's General Staff, Reports of General McArthur, Washington D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1966, p.144.

(6) Costello, p.128.

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- (8) Collier, p.359.
- (9) McArthur's General Staff, p. 142.
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- (11) Atlas, p.12-15.
- (12) Robert Ross Smith, The Approach to the Philippines, Washington D.C.: US Governemnt Printing Office, 1953, p. 56.
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- (26) McArthur's General Staff, p.263 (Vol II).
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- (29) ibid.
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- (34) ibid.
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