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GENERAL DOUGLAS MACARTHUR AND THE PAPUAN CAMPAIGN

A STUDY OF HIS MENTAL STATE IN 1942

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE
HONOURS MASTER OF ARTS**

FROM

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

BY

CLIVE BAKER

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND POLITICS

1997

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis is entirely my own work except where I have given full documented references to the work of others and that the material contained in this thesis has not been submitted for assessment in any formal course at any other university or institution.

Clive Baker.

22.9.1997

SUMMARY/SYNOPSIS

With the loss of his army in the Philippines in 1942, General Douglas MacArthur had, in his own eyes at least, let down the family honour and disgraced the long and successful MacArthur military history. The case can be put that, because of that disgrace MacArthur was mentally stressed and that stress distorted his judgement during the conduct of the 1942 Papuan Campaign. It can consequently be argued that, because of his need to make amends and to save face in the eyes of his peers, his judgement was distorted, causing excessive casualties during the fighting in Papua. American and Australian officers suggested that the Japanese be sealed off, bombarded and starved into submission at Buna, to minimise further loss of life. However, MacArthur needed a quick victory.

MacArthur's erratic, contradictory behaviour and need for self-promotion had its origins in an emotionally complicated upbringing, as he developed in an atmosphere of military gallantry and leadership, influenced by his famous father General Arthur MacArthur. He was raised by a doting, smothering and powerful mother, who maintained an influence over MacArthur right up to her death in the mid-1930's. Douglas was part of a 'military caste', his life dedicated to the military and with a great sense of duty to his country, to military protocol and all that went with being a graduate of West Point Officers' College.

The need to live up to the expectations of his parents motivated him to become an outstanding student at military college, America's youngest general with a career of high achievement, culminating in the position of Chief of Staff of the Army. After retirement, he was appointed to raise an army for the Philippines, but through misconceived planning and negligence he failed to forge a strong force.

When the Japanese invaded the Philippines, the result was a quick routing of MacArthur's army and a long siege on the Bataan Peninsula. Defeat became inevitable when no relief force was forthcoming. Finally, President Roosevelt ordered MacArthur to Australia to become Supreme Commander of the South West Pacific Area. MacArthur demonstrated agitation at his loss of face, the disgrace of the family name and his personal failure. He was determined to fight his way back to Bataan and relieve the abandoned men, thereby justifying his reason for leaving them.

In Australia, he found few trained men and little equipment with which to carry out the reconquest of the Philippines and before he was ready to counter-attack, Papua was invaded. While clearing Papua of the Japanese, the conduct of his command was marred by an erratic behaviour pattern resulting in semi-hysterical and intemperate orders being given to his commanders. He did not listen to the opinions and explanations of experienced Australian officers and surrounded himself with cronies from the Philippines.

In the end, it was the Americans and Australians on the ground who paid the price for MacArthur's mental aberrations, manifested by his need to satisfy his ego, placate his feelings of guilt and regain his loss of face.

INTRODUCTION

The Australian Army had been at war for nearly two years when the Japanese entered the war in 1941. Within months, their forces had crossed South East Asia and seemed to threaten an invasion of Australia. With her most experienced troops in the Middle East, Australia was most vulnerable, with only a weak air force and under-trained and poorly armed militia available for defence.

As the British forces in Malaya and Singapore were crushed by the Japanese, only the Americans in the Philippines were holding on, in a forlorn hope that they might be saved by a rescue force from the United States of America.

The man who commanded the ill-fated American and Filipino force was General Douglas MacArthur, who was soon to have a major impact on Australia, its people and its armed forces. Of the numerous books that have been written about MacArthur, many are glowing but often tempered by the influence that his mother brought to bear in shaping his career. Francis Miller is at one extreme of opinion, talking of the Bataan siege as exhibiting 'extraordinary military skill' and of MacArthur's 'courage unsurpassed in the annals of warfare'.¹ Willoughby, one of his 'Bataan Gang' of senior officers, makes excuses for most of the mistakes that were made, even denying the high casualties at Buna and claiming MacArthur's 'painfully meticulous attention to the saving of lives...'²

On the other extreme, Michael Schaller summarises the General's life by saying 'ultimately, MacArthur's, legacy must be judged a failure...he distorted information and manipulated events to serve selfish, often political, ends'.³ Other writers'

¹ Miller. MACARTHUR. Piii & 6

² Willoughby & Chamberlain. VICTORY IN THE PACIFIC. P10

³ Schaller. DOUGLAS MACARTHUR. P252-253

opinions are spread between these two extremes with the British Liaison officer Colonel Wilkinson giving a valuable insight into MacArthur's thinking.⁴ Gavin Long, the Australian historian, gives a balanced view of the historical events in 'MacArthur as Military Commander' but is critical of his decisions and methods. He sums up MacArthur's eventual successes as being 'attributed to good fortune. He was a lucky general. In other countries the commander during a debacle such as the Philippines in 1942 would not have been given another active command.'⁵ Clayton James, in his three volume history probably sums up MacArthur when he says that MacArthur was, 'one of the most complex characters of modern times'.⁶

To support the contention that MacArthur's was in mental crisis, evidence came from the personal observations of a variety of people who knew MacArthur. General Dwight Eisenhower and General Robert Eichelberger were the most scathing in their remarks but were also two men who were directly affected by MacArthur's moods and methods.

MacArthur had been the American Chief of Staff in 1935 and after retirement had accepted an appointment to form and lead a Filipino army. It will be argued that he was grossly negligent in the planning and execution of his duty in the Philippines. Consequently, when the Japanese simultaneously attacked American, Dutch and British controlled colonies in December 1941, MacArthur's army in the Philippines was not adequately trained for the defence of the islands. He was also remiss in his interpretation of intelligence information regarding Japanese intentions.

In the ensuing campaign, his army was decisively beaten by the Japanese and forced back onto the Bataan Peninsula where they remained trapped for months

⁴ Thorne. 'MacArthur, Australia & British.' AUSTRALIAN OUTLOOK.

⁵ Long. MACARTHUR AS MILITARY COMMANDER P226

before finally surrendering. MacArthur appears to have been personally devastated by the swift Japanese success and the defeat of his force overshadowed the successes of his earlier life. No rescue was forthcoming but MacArthur's carefully managed media office created the impression that the defenders were masters of the situation and that MacArthur was personally leading the attacks against the Japanese.

Finally, President Roosevelt who appeared to bow to public pressure in America, decided to transfer MacArthur to Australia to command the force that would eventually fight its way back to the Philippines.

Throughout that period, MacArthur was already showing signs of instability and was irresolute on the day the Japanese entered the war, resulting in the loss of half of his air force. He was even more shaken when, after abandoning his men, he found no army awaiting him in Australia. It was many months before he could go on to the offensive and meanwhile, the Bataan defenders were forced to surrender.

The loss of his army in the Philippines in 1942 pushed General Douglas MacArthur to the edge of a mental break-down. After a long and distinguished career as a military officer, where he attained the highest appointment available, MacArthur then declined into second-rate decision making that culminated in the Philippine debacle. The sudden loss of face and subsequent disgrace to the family name, and with many pressures both external and internal bearing down on him, pushing this 60 year old man to breaking point. As the Philippine campaign began, Admiral Hart concluded that, 'Douglas is, I think, no longer altogether sane. He may not have been for a long time'.⁷

⁶ Clayton James. YEARS OF MACARTHUR. Vol 1 - P3

⁷ Schaller. op cit, P50

MacArthur's personal affect on Australians was electrifying, with public morale rising sharply at the thought that America was about to save the continent from invasion. Despite his insecurity MacArthur, with his theatrical manner, exuded a confidence that was infectious and the Curtin Government gave the General their full support.

General Brett, MacArthur's predecessor in Australia, had attempted to form a combined military structure of Australians and Americans, including combined air crews. MacArthur immediately reversed that idea, and formed a headquarters that did not include Australians in the decision making and separated the two forces. The exception was General Thomas Blamey, who commanded all land forces, only because most of them at that time were Australians; he was later given a diminishing role in the conduct of the war.

By mid-1942, the Americans had two divisions of under-trained troops in Australia and with the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) troops also returning, MacArthur was poised to begin his counter-attack against the Japanese. Unfortunately, the Japanese moved first and invaded Papua on the eastern end of the New Guinea land mass, triggering a six-month-long bloody struggle to evict them.

The campaign was notable for the way in which MacArthur chose to involve himself directly in the fighting. He sent orders from his headquarters in Brisbane and later Port Moresby, to officers on the fighting front, often by-passing the chain of command. His dissatisfaction with the speed of the advance resulted in pressure on the Australian senior commanders, who on more than one occasion replaced lower ranked generals and brigadiers in order to satisfy the need for a quick success.

American generals were also dismissed and replaced by men who were more willing or able to achieve a quick finish to the fighting. MacArthur attempted to gain victory in Papua before his rivals, the navy, could beat the Japanese on Guadalcanal in the Solomons Group.

In the end, MacArthur did finish the Papuan Campaign before Guadalcanal was won, thereby avoiding the risk that he might be replaced. The fighting in Papua had created disproportionate losses in dead and injured and the reason lay in MacArthur's private problems. He had suffered ignominy after his Philippines loss, had marred the proud military legacy of his father, had abandoned his men, had enemies in the American government and armed forces, and needed to prove that he was still worthy of commanding an army.

He had needed a victory to salve his personal doubts and guilt and he needed a ??? victory to prove his enemies were wrong. Papua was the place where he achieved that victory and the men who fought the battles, were the ones who paid with their lives to give it to him.

CHAPTER ONE
THE MOTIVATING FACTORS
IN MACARTHUR'S BEHAVIOUR

MacArthur's motivation and irrational behaviour in 1942 was the result of a long string of factors that began in his early life. His attitudes and personality traits can be clearly linked to his upbringing, his early military experiences and the influences of his parents. He was the son of Arthur MacArthur, a man who during the American Civil War had been promoted to the rank of Colonel at the age of 20. His mother was a strong woman who pushed her son's career through the network of contacts that were her husband's military contemporaries. Douglas' values, fears, strengths and weaknesses stemmed from his first years of family experience and the witnessing of his father's campaigns on the American frontiers and elsewhere. Others have noted that, 'no understanding of the man can be complete without a close investigation of the lives of his austere and upright father, [and] his determined mother...⁸' The MacArthur's claimed a lineage to King Arthur and the fighting clans of Scotland, and right from the earliest family migration to America, the MacArthur men had joined the military. By 1898 Douglas' father was a general and led the invasion of the Philippines, defeating the Spanish and the nationalist Filipinos. He was made Governor-General of the Philippines, a position that his son would almost mirror 30 years later.

Douglas graduated from West Point Military Academy as the highest ranked student,⁹ and was posted to the Philippines to become his father's 'aide-de-camp'. Although an outwardly confident and self-assured man, it was said of Douglas that, 'beneath this almost overconfident appearance lurked an insecurity from which he never escaped'. A close friend later said that MacArthur, 'far from epitomising

⁸ Petillo. DOUGLAS MACARTHUR. P1

certitude, was deeply unsure of himself. The goal instilled into him was to be Superman... the relationship [with his mother] represented possessiveness and dominance, with the son never free of an imposed destiny or from fear of failing it.¹⁰

In light of later world events, it was significant that his early career included visits to various military establishments around the world, including Japan. He also had a period in charge of the War Department's Bureau of Information as press censor and liaison officer with the media.¹¹ When America entered the First World War Douglas at the age of 38, saw extensive action on the Western Front in France where he was well decorated for his bravery in the front line. It was not unusual for him to be armed only with a riding crop for defence.¹²

Schaller theorises that his bravery stemmed from the need to emulate his father. 'Douglas sought recognition for conspicuous, if premeditated, acts of bravery.'¹³ As the war ended he was awarded a Distinguished Service Cross which he claimed, 'more than satisfied my martial vanity'.¹⁴ He was the most decorated man in the American army with ten medals.¹⁵ MacArthur later wrote that he was not sure that he deserved all the awards he received, 'General de Bazelaire pinned a Croix de Guerre on my tunic... The award seemed a bit too much for me, but I was, of course, glad to have it'.¹⁶ These awards and his conspicuous bravery were tangible proof of his living up to family expectations and the maintenance of family honour, particularly in the eyes of his mother, who was then still alive¹⁷.

⁹ Considine. GENERAL DOUGLAS MACARTHUR. P11

¹⁰ Petillo. op cit, P36-7

¹¹ Long. op cit, P12

¹² Miller. op cit, P102

¹³ Schaller. op cit, Pviii

¹⁴ Quoted in Long. op cit, P29

¹⁵ ibid, P31

¹⁶ MacArthur. REMINISCENCES P55

Not all of MacArthur's career advances were of his own doing, as his mother was still working behind the scenes. He admits that some of his promotions may have been too generously given and perhaps cronyism was involved. 'General Summerall cited me to General Pershing for promotion, which was favourably endorsed by Secretary Baker. His words, "the greatest front-line general of the war" were quite unrealistic and partial.'¹⁸ It is a fact that his promotion to Brigadier-General was assisted by a letter to General Pershing from his mother outlining his career and stating that he was, 'a most capable officer and a hard working man', and mentioning her close friendship with the Secretary of War, who she said was, 'very deeply attached to Colonel MacArthur'.¹⁹ When he returned home to become Superintendent of the West Point Military College, he was one of the few senior officers who retained the high rank of Brigadier-General in the peacetime army. His mother had ensured the rank was retained. 'Where Army politics was concerned, MacArthur's mother had antennae as sensitive as a humming bird moth...'²⁰

As part of his self-promotion and in an effort to boost his own image, and thereby elevate the family name to the public, MacArthur was already using the press to advance his image. 'He was undoubtedly a swaggerer and a boaster, but he boasted about his soldiers, too, and they loved him for it. He was a publicity hound, but what did they care if he posed and postured... as long as he praised the quality of his men.'²¹ Some officers 'positively cringed whenever another photograph of MacArthur appeared in the press'. When detrimental comments were made about him, 'MacArthur was not a man to forgive insults or mistakes, whether intended or not, nor did he forget those that inflicted them upon him'.²² This latter comment indicates

¹⁷ She died in 1935 aged in her eighties.

¹⁸ *ibid.* P67

¹⁹ Petillo. *op cit.* P264

²⁰ Mosley. *MARSHALL.* P82

²¹ *ibid.* P68

²² *ibid.* P69&73

another early sign of emerging attitudes and prejudices that became more pronounced during World War Two; a paranoia that most people were trying to put him down and destroy his career. He was partially correct in this as will be seen, but he extended his anger to anyone who disagreed with him.

He married Louise Cromwell Brooks, the girlfriend of General Pershing and the consequent dispute with his senior officer resulted in his transfer to duties in the Philippines²³. By 1922 he was Commander of the Manila district and again the link with the Philippines was renewed. Within three years he had returned to the USA to take a series of high-level commands. Following his divorce, he returned to the Manila in 1928 as commander of the American Army in the Philippines where his struggle against the colonial attitude of separating the white and Filipino troops enhanced his prestige with the Filipinos²⁴.

His ex-wife spread stories about his sexual problems which gave his critics ammunition. 'Partly because of Louise's revelations, gossip circulated thereafter concerning the general's alleged sexual inadequacies.'²⁵ There were other signs of his sexual attitudes, demonstrated by his sexual proclivities with prostitutes. He paid them to make admiring remarks about him without apparently indulging in any sexual activities. Historian Schaller feels that these sexual problems, 'may have affected his subsequent behaviour'.²⁶ The reasons for his behaviour are partly explored by another historian, Petillo, who studied MacArthur's psychological persona. He concluded that MacArthur, 'was as much a product of Victorian repressions and beliefs as was Freud himself... The General's personality development was, I believe,

²³ Schaller. *op cit*, P10

²⁴ *ibid*, P12

²⁵ *ibid*, P11

²⁶ *ibid*, P20

shaped very much by the physiological and culturally imposed sexual repressions'.²⁷ His wife's tales assisted those who were against MacArthur. 'His political enemies used these rumours to argue that lack of manliness accounted for either his excessive bravado or, alternatively, failure of leadership.'²⁸ When President Hoover ordered him home in 1929, and appointed him Chief of Staff of the US Army, the attitude of the then Secretary of War, Hurley, was that any 'man who couldn't hold his women shouldn't be Chief of Staff'.²⁹

For personal reasons, and justifiably thinking his career would end when his four year term was up, MacArthur at first prevaricated about the job.³⁰ However, his mother again intervened saying, 'my father would be ashamed if I showed timidity. That settled it'.³¹ By then his father had been dead for some years, but the influence of his mother and dead father still affected his decision making. He took the job, his mother moving into his quarters with him. In 1934 his statutory period as Chief of Staff concluded but his mother intervened and his term was extended for another year by President Roosevelt - assisted as always by the lobbying of Congress and his influential and 'doting' mother.³²

There were other early signs of his instability when, in the mid 1930's, he began a period of self doubt and according to one of his aides, threatened suicide because he could not live up to his mother's expectations. Following her death in 1935, the suicidal tendencies appeared to end.³³

²⁷ Petillo. op cit, Px

²⁸ Schaller. op cit, P11

²⁹ ibid, P13

³⁰ It was always difficult to find a position for an ex-Chief of Staff who could be accused of 'looking over the shoulder' of a subsequent appointee.

³¹ MacArthur. op cit, P89

³² Mosley. op cit, P126

³³ Schaller. op cit, P20

Until 1935, he had enjoyed a comfortable and successful career path culminating in the highest military position he could attain. In that year, with his extended term concluded, rather than take retirement, he accepted the position as commander of the proposed Philippine army under President Quezon. It was from that period that MacArthur's outstanding combat and administrative career was tarnished by the way in which he trained and deployed the Filipino Army during his period of command. Having told Quezon that he would 'forge you a weapon that will spell the safety of your nation from brutal aggression until the end of time,'³⁴ he found that the money for such a force was never forthcoming. MacArthur can be excused many of his shortcomings, because of the lack of money, but the then Major Dwight Eisenhower noted that he often ignored the problems hoping that something would happen to correct the situation.³⁵ Eisenhower was his second in command and wrote in his diary that most American officers [presumably in the American overseas army], 'believe that the attempt to create a Philippine army is somewhat ridiculous'.³⁶

An indication of MacArthur's egotistical and vain attitudes occurred in July 1936, when he arranged to have himself promoted to a Filipino Field-Marshal. When similar Philippine promotions were offered to Eisenhower and other staff, they declined, as they felt that such ranks would do nothing for their standing within the American army and that they might then become involved in Filipino political manoeuvrings.³⁷ It appears that Eisenhower was unaware that MacArthur had engineered his own promotion.³⁸

This posturing showed his tendency towards dramatic and theatrical displays. When discussing MacArthur in later years, General Eisenhower told a reporter, 'I have

³⁴ *ibid*, P33

³⁵ Ferrell (Ed) THE EISENHOWER DIARIES, P398

³⁶ *ibid*, P16

³⁷ *ibid*, P17 &21

studied dramatics under him for five years in Washington and four in the Philippines'.³⁹ When writing to his wife during the war, General Eichelberger used the code 'Sarah' in reference to MacArthur - meaning the actress Sarah Bernhardt.⁴⁰ Even Miller, with his sycophantic leanings towards MacArthur, said of him, 'to put it bluntly he seemed too much, like a movie type of officer, too handsome, almost too good to be true!'⁴¹ Australian Aide-de-Campe to Blamey, Norman Carlyon, met MacArthur in March 1942 and found that, 'everyone who met him seems to have felt that he was perpetually acting a highly dramatic role... He had probably been play-acting through most of his impressive military career'.⁴² Later, during the war, Admiral Nimitz had a picture on his desk, 'merely to remind himself not to make Jovian pronouncements complete with thunderbolts'. He also found MacArthur had, 'an unfortunate tendency to strike poses and to pontificate'.⁴³ The Admiral dismissed the theatrics and was amused when others were irritated by the performances.

It can be argued that his posing may have been intended to impress his Filipino employers and his troops, but what started as an act, seemed to take him over, 'the rhetoric, the military swagger, the remorseless gold braid were, in part, the response of a naturally histrionic personality to a situation where histrionics became almost a part of policy... the actor may begin to believe in his own role... Manila exposed MacArthur to fatal temptations while relieving him from the restraints once imposed by his contemporaries in the [US] Army'.⁴⁴

To casual acquaintances, he gave a different impression. Lord Mountbatten wrote in 1945, 'contrary to popular conception, he gives the impression of being a rather shy

³⁸ Schaller. op cit, P35

³⁹ Quoted in Long. op cit, P51

⁴⁰ ibid and Manchester. AMERICAN CAESAR. P162

⁴¹ Miller. op cit, Piii,4,5

⁴² Carlyon. I REMEMBER BLAMEY. P91

⁴³ Potter. NIMITZ. P222 & 291

and sensitive man... as soon as the photographers had finished he relaxed completely... and was his old charming self... I fully admit I am completely under his spell; he is one of the most charming and remarkable characters I have met...'⁴⁵ This side of his personality was noted by British liaison officer Colonel Gerald Wilkinson in 1942: 'I had become more and more of the opinion that MacA [sic] had real mental distinction, width of view... and exceptional political acumen... That any extravagance of speech was not accompanied by extravagance of decision and that in large matters he had in fact shown considerable conservatism'.⁴⁶ Wilkinson had reason to alter his opinion as the war continued.

Michael Schaller, in his book about MacArthur, is not so glowing in his estimate of the General. 'Although his admirers celebrated MacArthur's intelligence, he had little intellectual depth. An exceptionally good memory, a repertoire of quotes and anecdotes, a love of convoluted or even archaic language and a wealth of historical trivia formed the core of the General's wisdom... Even if he said little original or profound, the vivid style, cadence, and metaphor convinced many they had heard an oracle.'⁴⁷

Soon, 'MacArthur's life in the Philippines was one of aloofness, from both Americans and Filipinos, a life that was led almost in seclusion, in hotel suites in Manila or in carefully managed offices... Eisenhower and MacArthur shared little camaraderie'.⁴⁸ His need for recognition irritated other officers and in turn MacArthur was jealous if his subordinates gained public notice. Eisenhower wrote that MacArthur was fearful of his staff gaining any credit or getting any publicity at the expense of himself.⁴⁹ In

⁴⁴ Quoted in Long. *op cit*, P52

⁴⁵ Ziegler (Ed) *DIARY-MOUNTBATTEN*. P224,225

⁴⁶ Thorne. 'MacArthur, Australia & British.' *AUSTRALIAN OUTLOOK*. No29.Aug 1975. P55

⁴⁷ Schaller. *op cit*, P vii

⁴⁸ Ferrell (Ed). *op cit*, P37

⁴⁹ Schaller. *op cit*, P40

addition, as will be revealed later, MacArthur often failed to recognise the shortcomings of his Filipino army. That, combined with his propensity to blame his juniors when problems arose, terminally soured his relationship with Eisenhower, who had become desperate to return to the USA to take another appointment.

As war approached, Filipino leaders became concerned that their army would not be strong enough to defend the country but still large enough to alienate the Japanese. Quezon had said openly that the 'whole MacArthur defense⁵⁰ program [was] idiotic' and the Filipino government 'was sick of doling out funds to MacArthur'.⁵¹ There was talk of neutrality and Schaller conjectures that Quezon's 1938 trip to Japan may have been to seek a neutrality pact with the Japanese⁵².

The Filipino army was obviously not ready to fight and proper supervision of training by MacArthur would have revealed that situation. Historian Gavin Long sums up the situation, 'the training during the past years had been of little value... It was their [the Staff's] task to be constantly in the field overcoming inertia, giving guidance and assessing results. The optimism of MacArthur concerning the potentialities of the Filipino troops leads to the inescapable conclusion that neither he nor his staff knew what was going on, or that the staff knew and chose not to inform the commander'.⁵³ On the evidence of later events, it is likely that MacArthur did not listen to the concerns of his Staff.

Considering MacArthur's poor reputation with his military superiors and with President Roosevelt, it is surprising that in mid-1941 he was again given a commission in the US Army. One explanation may be that the American plan to not

⁵⁰ Where American spelling has been quoted it has been left unaltered.

⁵¹ Schaller. op cit, P40

⁵² ibid, P39

⁵³ Long. op cit, P60-61

reinforce the Philippines area but to give the appearance of strength, would be assisted by MacArthur's belief in his own ability and his public rhetoric. It is also true that MacArthur probably 'knew the region better than most of his senior colleagues [actually, there was little competition] and had spent the past few years boasting about the impregnable Philippines. Even if many in the War Department knew better, to the public and to the Japanese, his appointment would symbolize Washington's determination to resist Tokyo's pressure'.⁵⁴ Following MacArthur's reinstatement, Quezon and the Filipino leadership rallied to him, ignoring all their earlier criticism - they saw in him the conduit through which more resources might be provided for the defence of the Philippines.⁵⁵

MacArthur failed to heed the warning when the Japanese entered Indo-China in late 1940, a time when there should have been heightened defence activity. Time was running out and despite the fact that American intelligence correctly forecast that the Japanese would land 100,000 men to capture Manila, MacArthur still did not increase training and recruitment. His poor use of intelligence material is illustrated by his belief that by using the mountains and jungles his force could make an invasion prohibitive. He told a Filipino leader that, 'it would take the Japanese 500,000 men, three years, and five billion dollars to subdue the Philippines, and they wouldn't be willing to pay that price'.⁵⁶ He drew upon the abortive Gallipoli Campaign of 1915 as the likely outcome of a Japanese seaborne landing. It was pointed out to him that the Philippine islands had more than 250 miles of possible invasion beaches but he remained convinced of his own strategy. He also believed that if the Japanese held the Philippines it would, 'introduce an element of extraordinary weakness in the Japanese empire'. That theory ignored the security that the Japanese would gain, with the strategically placed Philippines in their own hands.

⁵⁴ Schaller. op cit, P47

⁵⁵ ibid, P48

MacArthur's foresight and clarity of thinking are brought into question by his support for the attitudes of the American General Staff. They had 'a conviction that the Japanese were clowns... Even MacArthur was misled by racial chauvinism; when he saw the skill with which Japanese war planes were flown in the first days of the war, he concluded that the pilots must be white men. The Japanese, Americans agreed, were a comical race... The notion that they could shoot straight - not to mention lick red-blooded Americans - was regarded in Manila as preposterous'.⁵⁷ If MacArthur really did believe in Japanese racial inferiority, it further exemplifies his poor judgement, as it went against his experiences in Japan in the early 1900s. He had witnessed Japanese successes against the Russians at Port Arthur, 'the soldiers under the flag of the Rising Sun were ruthless fighters, brutal and relentless... This lesson Douglas MacArthur learned early in life - no man knows the Japanese better than he'.⁵⁸ He later wrote of that visit, 'It was here that I first encountered the boldness and courage of the Nipponese soldier. His almost fanatical belief in and reverence for his emperor impressed me indelibly'.⁵⁹ With that knowledge, MacArthur should have known that mountains and jungle were not enough to stop Japanese troops. On Bataan and in Papua, MacArthur was to be taught that lesson again. By March 1942, he was quoted as saying of his enemy, 'The Japanese were formidable fighters. Although a vast number of common soldiers were only one degree removed from savages, they were hard to beat as fighters...'⁶⁰ Considering his own experiences and apparent knowledge of matters Asian, why did MacArthur not counsel his superiors against their negative attitudes to the Japanese fighting

⁵⁶ Manchester. *op cit*, P148

⁵⁷ *ibid*, P149,150 & 151

⁵⁸ Miller. *op cit*, P76

⁵⁹ MacArthur. *op cit*, P31

⁶⁰ Interview at Advisory war Council Meeting. 26.3.1942

- reproduced in Robertson & McCarthy, WAR STRATEGY, P313

qualities? His failure to do so appears to be part of the general malaise that overtook him in the Philippines.

MacArthur's thinking on the possibility of the Japanese invading the Philippines is most contradictory. On the one hand he advised that they had no wish to take the Philippines as the islands were of no value and there was a 'lack of a plausible reason for attack'.⁶¹ Miller says 'the Philippines were always on his mind. He believed this was where Japan would strike - and the Philippines were vulnerable'.⁶² William Manchester wrote, 'On the one hand, he argued that Japan didn't need the Philippines; on the other, he maintained that the islands, because they were "on the flank of Japan's vital sea lanes," would, together with Singapore, form a barricade protecting the oil, rubber, quinine, teak, and tin in the Dutch East Indies to the south'.⁶³ Writing in 1964, MacArthur partly conceded that he was wrong, saying 'there was nothing in the Philippines they coveted except its strategic position'.⁶⁴ Manchester theorises that much of MacArthur's reckless rhetoric may have been for the benefit of the Japanese, but if not, he demonstrated a very poor understanding of the Japanese planners.

In fact, the Philippines had a valuable resource of minerals, food and natural assets, as well as its strategic location. It appears that privately MacArthur may well have conceded the fact that he would have to fight and realising his poor military situation adopted the proposal to fortify the Bataan Peninsula and the island of Corregidor. Both were to be defended, 'to the last extremity'.⁶⁵ Despite this new plan, he failed to have adequate supplies stored in the defence area with his main supply depots situated on the plains of northern Luzon. To support a defence of the northern

⁶¹ Manchester. *op cit*, P164

⁶² Miller. *op cit*, P129,183

⁶³ Manchester. *op cit*, P151

⁶⁴ MacArthur. *op cit*, P106

beaches, 'he had chosen to risk everything on the outcome of the first encounter. Should he fail there, Allied troops withdrawing into Bataan would lack provisions for a long siege'.⁶⁶

On the eve of battle, a man in early his 60s was about to commit an under-trained army to fight against an experienced Japanese force who were already then on their way to Luzon. With a multitude of personality problems influencing his decision making, and his poor preparations for war, his ability to properly conduct the coming campaign was already in doubt. Just a week before the Japanese attacked he told Admiral Hart that 'the existing alignment and movement of Japanese troops convinced him that there would be no attack before spring'.⁶⁷ That assumption was made after he had received a 'Final Alert' from the War Department in Washington.

When news was received of the surprise attack on Pearl Harbour, MacArthur was reported as looking, 'grey, ill, and exhausted' and suffering from 'input overload'.⁶⁸ That state of mind was reported by other historians and may give an indication that right from the start, MacArthur knew that his preparations and strength of his forces were inadequate to defend the Philippines.

Despite Frazier Hunt reporting that MacArthur 'went about his final preparation...every man and gun and plane was on the alert...' ⁶⁹ the opposite appears to be true, and by dawn in the Philippines, on the day of the Pearl Harbour attack, the neglect of war readiness was evident. With the Japanese invasion imminent, MacArthur and his staff allowed their own aircraft to sit side by side on the ground. When the aircraft had been ordered south to safer airfields, no one in

⁶⁵ Long. op cit, P57

⁶⁶ Manchester. op cit, P172

⁶⁷ Clayton James. op cit, Vol 1-P615

⁶⁸ Manchester. op cit, P184

authority ensured that they had actually gone. In addition, 'US warships swung at anchor; troops lacked instructions; the sod fields at Clark [air base], where fliers were nursing hangovers, lacked a single anti-aircraft shelter. Brereton [MacArthur's airforce commander], had ordered his B-17s readied for action, but there wasn't a single bomb in their bomb bays'.⁷⁰ In defence of Brereton, he had asked permission to load his bombs but Sutherland (MacArthur's 2IC), without consulting MacArthur, ordered that no bombs be loaded. Brereton also wanted permission for his aircraft to launch an immediate attack against the Japanese shipping but permission was delayed for nine hours.⁷¹ In Petillo's words, MacArthur was, 'Closeting himself in his office, [where] he conveyed his somewhat contradictory decisions through Sutherland. As a result, the hours before noon in Manila were spent indecisively'.⁷²

MacArthur had also refused permission for reconnaissance flights over Japanese bases. The enemy knew exactly where the American airfields were in the Philippines, but the Americans had no photographs of Formosa - the nearest Japanese air base. When the Japanese inevitably attacked Clark Field, American aircrew were at lunch and half the aircraft were destroyed, yet MacArthur claimed later that 'my staff was unsurpassed in excellence'.⁷³ At the same time he transferred the blame for failure to ensure the safety of the aircraft, 'I never learned why these orders [to move them] were not promptly implemented'.⁷⁴ With the loss of most of his air striking power and the sinking of the fleet at Pearl Harbour, the 'Rainbow' plan to support the Philippines by sea and air - the basis upon which the defence of the Philippines had been made - were dashed.

⁶⁹ Hunt. THE UNTOLD STORY. P221

⁷⁰ Manchester. op cit, P186

⁷¹ Schaller. op cit, P56

⁷² Petillo. op cit, P202

⁷³ MacArthur, op cit, P112

⁷⁴ ibid

One explanation for MacArthur's lack of aggressive action may have been a sudden unrealistic belief that the Philippines would be treated as a neutral country and not attacked. Quezon reported that MacArthur had suddenly and 'for some strange reason' thought that the Japanese might treat the Philippines as neutral. He believed that an air attack would give the Japanese a reason to counter-attack.⁷⁵ Another reason for the slow response was confusion about MacArthur's original orders from Washington that he was not to instigate aggressive action but to wait for the Japanese to act first.⁷⁶ Without explicit orders to the contrary, logic would have dictated that the Japanese had already 'acted first' by attacking Pearl Harbour. He had no need to await attacks in his own area before commencing his own actions. In earlier years he had been quite prepared to ignore orders, as in the 'Bonus Marches of the early 30's when he disobeyed instructions, 'twice that night Hoover ordered MacArthur not to cross into Anacostia [marchers' camp] but the General chose to ignore Presidential Authority... he sent his troops across the bridge...'77

General Wainwright had the task of defending northern Luzon and MacArthur issued one of his grandiose statements that there was to be - 'no withdrawal from the beach positions [they were to be held] at all costs'.⁷⁸ Belatedly, 80 artillery guns were issued to the Filipino troops and this late decision again demonstrates the incompetence of MacArthur or his staff. Before the war, they had been pleading to Washington for more guns to equip the Filipinos, while those they had were kept in store and not issued to the army⁷⁹.

On December 10 the Japanese started their first landing of troops where the pundits had always said they would - on the northern beaches of Luzon. If MacArthur's earlier

⁷⁵ Schaller. *op cit*, P56

⁷⁶ MacArthur. *op cit*, P112

⁷⁷ THE GREAT DEPRESSION - Television documentary.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Long. *op cit*, P60

rhetoric had been intended to bluff the Japanese, the ruse had not worked. The Japanese advance was swift, and the Philippine Army 'folded in about forty-eight hours, despite the fact that it outnumbered the invading force'.⁸⁰ The hopes that MacArthur had cherished about the Filipino Army proved illusory and 'the untrained and poorly equipped Philippine Army troops had broken at the first appearance of the enemy and fled to the rear in a disorganised stream'.⁸¹ Falk claims that, 'the defenders [were] hastily organised, poorly equipped, and ill-prepared... no match for the invaders'.⁸²

On December 12, with the campaign only two days old, MacArthur told Quezon that he now planned to move his army onto the Bataan Peninsula and Corregidor where he could 'pit my own intimate knowledge of the terrain against the Japanese superiority in air power, tanks, artillery, and men'.⁸³ With the main supply depots now in the path of the advancing Japanese, and with very few supplies held on the Bataan Peninsula, there was a rush to try and move what they could before the Japanese captured the stores.

The main Japanese invasion occurred on December 22, when 80,000 men landed close to Manila and after just 14 days of action, MacArthur implemented his plan and began transferring his force to the Bataan Peninsula. He made a tactical error by sending the best trained men into the area first, leaving the less experienced troops, without a reliable rear guard to hold back the Japanese. Most reached the Peninsula safely but, because of his tardiness in moving supplies, there was inadequate food for the defenders.⁸⁴ The Japanese pushed tens of thousands of civilians into the

⁷⁹ *ibid*, P66

⁸⁰ Schaller. *op cit*, P56

⁸¹ Long. *op cit*, P69

⁸² Falk. *THE MARCH OF DEATH*. P21

⁸³ MacArthur. *op cit*, P124

⁸⁴ Long. *op cit*, P72 & 128

defence area knowing that they would further deplete food stocks. One Japanese commander likened the move to, 'a cat entering a sack'.⁸⁵

The Washington leadership, both military and political, raised expectations of a relief force arriving. This caused MacArthur's troops and the Filipino people to take heart, expecting rescue by a counter-invasion force. No such force was available and no shipping could be risked to take them across the vulnerable Pacific.⁸⁶ After applying pressure for some time, the Japanese broke through the American defence line, using just 6000 men against the defender's 40,000. Despite their successes, the Japanese had sustained high losses. The Japanese commander later said that his force was so depleted by casualties and the transfer of men to Java, that MacArthur could have retaken Manila⁸⁷.

On Corregidor, MacArthur kept up his public appearances, 'a conspicuous figure, striding calmly about carrying a walking stick, smoking his corncob pipe, and dressed simply except for his gold-braided field-marshal's cap'. This image gave the impression of a calm man who was in complete control but only those on Corregidor saw him, as he rarely extended his appearances to the Bataan Peninsula. On the mainland, MacArthur's troops began to refer to him as 'Dugout Doug'.⁸⁸ In fact, being on Corregidor was no safety haven as it was constantly under attack from shelling and bombing but the troops on Bataan did not see his risks and only knew that he was not sharing theirs. Petillo writes, 'the General refused, with rare exception, to visit the front lines... this hesitancy resulted in increasing disenchantment among the

⁸⁵ Quoted in Falk. op cit, P23

⁸⁶ Ferrell (Ed). op cit, P53

⁸⁷ Long. op cit, P78

⁸⁸ Mayer. MACARTHUR. P87

men... Now, feeling unsupported by his men or his government, the General's frustration reached its limits'.⁸⁹

While under siege, MacArthur retained full control of the media and made frequent press announcements. There were dramatic reports about the resistance being made by the defenders and over 140 press releases were issued in 12 weeks - many written by MacArthur himself and often exclusively about MacArthur himself, 'it transformed Douglas MacArthur into the first American hero of the war... Single handedly, it seemed, he parried enemy thrusts and frustrated Tokyo's entire war plan'.⁹⁰ His staff and men received little credit and in some cases imaginary battles and victories were reported. Eisenhower was unimpressed by the rhetoric, writing, 'Bataan is made to order for him. It's in the public eye; it has made him a public hero; it has all the essentials of drama; and he is the acknowledged king on the spot'.⁹¹

When it became apparent that help was not going to arrive, MacArthur undertook a war of communications to force the sending of a relief force. He tried to influence Stalin to open a Pacific front and sent requests to Washington, demanding that armed convoys be sent. Eisenhower commented that MacArthur was 'refusing to face facts [and] was losing his nerve'.⁹² MacArthur was not thinking rationally when he talked of Stalin sending Russian forces to save him. Although the Communist leadership was favourably impressed by the compliment, with the threat from Hitler on one front and Japan on the other, no help was forthcoming.⁹³

MacArthur was ordered to arrange the evacuation of Quezon and other leading Filipinos to a safer country. MacArthur showed another odd side to his nature when

⁸⁹ Petillo. op cit, P204

⁹⁰ Schaller. op cit, P56,57

⁹¹ Ambrose. EISENHOWER, P140

⁹² Schaller. op cit, P58

he did not insist that his wife and son also leave. Instead he announced that they would, 'share the fate of the garrison'.⁹⁴ Quezon and his government left Corregidor in two submarines on 20 February and in due course, reached America⁹⁵.

With help now unlikely and food running out, MacArthur declared that he would die in action on Corregidor.⁹⁶ However, due to public and congressional opinion, no doubt influenced by his own media reports, Washington had already made the first moves on 4 February to extract MacArthur (but not his army) from the Philippines. The siege had caught the public imagination and America had gone 'MacArthur crazy'. MacArthur's supporters in the press lorded him as the 'Lion of Luzon' and 'Hero of the Pacific' presenting him as 'single handedly frustrating the Japanese war machine'. The fact that they were the only Americans then in action anywhere, increased public interest in the siege. The propaganda value of Americans holding out against great odds can not be underestimated, particularly as America had been reluctant to join the war until the bombing of Pearl Harbour. Since then they had seen the Japanese conquer all before them, except for the Bataan defenders who according to MacArthur's press releases, seemed almost to have the upper hand in the conflict. Eisenhower felt that this was exactly the 'made to order' situation that MacArthur could handle and that he was not capable of commanding troops [elsewhere].⁹⁷ The press demanded almost daily that he be rescued and some members of Congress were also agitating for a rescue. There was talk of making him Supreme Commander of all American Forces.⁹⁸

⁹³ Manchester. op cit, P224

⁹⁴ Schaller. op cit, P60

⁹⁵ Romulo. FALL OF THE PHILIPPINES. P168

⁹⁶ Manchester. op cit, P226

⁹⁷ Schaller. op cit, P61

⁹⁸ Manchester. op cit, P226

On February 22, MacArthur was informed that arrangements had been made to transfer him to Australia to become Allied Commander in the South-West Pacific. When he received the news he 'looked old, ill, and drained of the confidence he had always shown'.⁹⁹ No doubt aware of the slur on the MacArthur name if he left his command, MacArthur still resisted the move, writing later, 'my first reaction was to try and avoid the... order, even to the extent of resigning my commission and joining the Bataan force as a simple volunteer'.¹⁰⁰ However, after discussion with his staff officers, who undoubtedly also saw their own possible escape route, he finally agreed to comply. It seems that if he were to leave, he wanted the President to give him a clear order to go, so that his motives would not be questioned. Eisenhower and Marshall felt that the order needed careful handling, 'because there was justifiable fear that MacArthur would refuse to leave his troops in the lurch'.¹⁰¹ In fact Eisenhower was against the move, feeling that MacArthur's high media profile was causing public pressure on the President, 'I've always been fearful of this plan. I think he's doing a better job in Bataan than he will anywhere else'.¹⁰² Roosevelt was not keen to see MacArthur 'strut another day' and is reported as saying, 'Why couldn't he be allowed to do what he wished and extinguish himself in a blaze of glory... a veritable American hero - but a dead one'.¹⁰³ Carlos Romulo later wrote that MacArthur would be, 'breaking in his own mind, his pledge to die with his men on the Rock [Corregidor]'.¹⁰⁴

The American High Command may have doubted whether MacArthur would leave Corregidor, and he may have been resolved to stay and fight, but he had known for nearly a month as he talked of dying on Corregidor and his family staying with the

⁹⁹ *ibid*, P229

¹⁰⁰ MacArthur. *op cit*, P140

¹⁰¹ Ambrose. *op cit*, P140

¹⁰² Norton. *op cit*, P49

¹⁰³ Mosley. *op cit*, P193

¹⁰⁴ Manchester. *op cit*, P230

garrison, that he had a probable escape route. It makes his bombast to fight to the end a rather hollow gesture.¹⁰⁵ It was only a few days before the announcement of his departure that he had accepted a payment from the Philippine government of US\$500,000. Although he had been a paid adviser to the Philippine government for part of the period covered by the 'reward', he had also been in the service of the United States Army. A few months later, Quezon then in Washington, offered Eisenhower US\$100,000 as part of the 'reward' allocation but he turned it down.¹⁰⁶ If MacArthur had not been considering leaving and was to die in action with his family, why would he accept the money? The optimism of such an acceptance gives a clue to his thinking - that he would be leaving and able to use that money.

He announced the departure date two weeks later on 11 March, telling his staff in typical dramatic rhetoric, 'we go with the fall of the moon; we go during the ides of March'.¹⁰⁷ On 12 March, the MacArthur family and most of the senior staff left Corregidor in fast patrol boats. MacArthur's 'face was dead white, and there was a twitch, a kind of tic, at the corner of his mouth... The anguish of his defeat, and the mortification at being sent away from his men...' ¹⁰⁸

Even at this late hour he made another military error. Before leaving, he divided the command in the Philippines into four distinct areas which he would command from Australia. Not only was that command structure unwieldy, but he did not advise his superiors in Washington about the arrangement. When Washington discovered this unworkable situation, they quickly over-rode MacArthur and gave Wainwright a promotion and complete control of all four sectors in the Philippines.

¹⁰⁵ Long. op cit, P78 - Marshall suggested to MacArthur that if the situation was hopeless, 'the need for your services there might be less pressing than at other points in the Far East'.

¹⁰⁶ Ambrose. op cit, P153

¹⁰⁷ Manchester. op cit, P230

With family pride in tatters and needing to prove himself to his Japanese and American enemies, he was on the way to Australia, to command the large army that he thought awaited him. For a man of MacArthur's pride and ego, leaving his men must have been a particularly difficult decision. On the way to Australia, he poured out his inner thoughts to his aide, Lieutenant Sidney Huff, 'his voice was, "slow and deliberate and barely distinguishable above the high wail of engines," Huff said. "I was soon wide awake, especially when his voice choked up as he expressed his chagrin at being ordered to leave Corregidor." He told Huff that sooner or later, one way or another, he would recapture the Philippines'. ¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ ibid, P233 & 235

¹⁰⁹ ibid, P238

CHAPTER TWO
THE MILNE BAY AND KOKODA CAMPAIGNS.

MacArthur's mental trauma was further exacerbated by what he found when his journey from Corregidor was completed. Upon arrival in Australia, he was keen to join the army that he believed awaited him and questioned an American officer about the location and numbers of troops in the country. The reply was, 'So far as I know, sir, there are very few troops here'.¹¹⁰ MacArthur was shocked but the officer was not wrong, as the only forces available were one under-trained American infantry division still en-route from America and a force of 200,000 inexperienced and under-trained Australian militia. The battle-hardened Australian AIF troops were still on their way back from the Middle East but had not yet arrived. There was no air force of any real attacking capability, and there were not the forces even to defend Australia. MacArthur later told his wife that with no army for him to command, 'he had been betrayed by Washington, and that he, in turn, had unknowingly deceived his soldiers in the Philippines... He sounded like a broken man, and his wife shared his torment... she later told a friend... the General was "a lonely, angry man" who needed her "as never before" '.¹¹¹ Although he accepted the opportunity to leave the Philippines, he appears to have been torn between the chance to lead some form of rescue force and the disgrace of leaving his command.

MacArthur cast around for someone to blame for his situation. As Manchester wrote, 'The General's paranoia never lay more than a fraction of a millimetre below the surface of his thoughts. "They" had conspired against his father, "they" had refused to decorate him after his Vera Cruz adventure [Mexican War], "they" had undercut him in France in 1918, "they" had forced him into retirement in 1937, "they" had

¹¹⁰ *ibid*, P243

¹¹¹ *ibid*, P248

refused to reinforce his defence of Corregidor and Bataan... and "they" were waiting even now for a chance to thwart him again'.¹¹² As discussed earlier, he had reason to blame "them" for some of his woes, but most of the blame lay with MacArthur and his officers. It is interesting to note that when writing to Frederick Sheddon in 1943, he commented, 'A year ago today, the dimming light of Bataan's forlorn hope fluttered and died... I was the leader of that lost cause...' ¹¹³

Shortly after his arrival he made his famous statement, 'I came through and I shall return' and his focus was on one target only - the Philippines. Petillo writes that 'he spent the next two and a half years in an attempt to remedy what he believed, at some level, to be his personal failure. It was a bloody and gruelling task, and one which often seemed impossible'.¹¹⁴ 'Bloody and gruelling', was very descriptive of the Papuan Campaign which started a few months later, with losses in deaths and injuries far above the casualty rates for other battles. When Admiral Nimitz later suggested that the Philippines should be bypassed, MacArthur, 'blew up and made an oration of some length on the impossibility of bypassing the Philippines, his sacred obligations there...blood on his soul... deserted by the American people etc...'¹¹⁵ That driving force was to colour his attitudes in the fighting that followed.

Roosevelt wrote to Prime Minister John Curtin through General Brett, who was at that time the commander of all American troops in Australia, saying, 'the President suggests that it would be highly acceptable to him and pleasing to the American people for the Australian Government to nominate General MacArthur as the Supreme Commander of all Allied Forces in the South-West Pacific'.¹¹⁶ The fact that Washington requested an 'invitation' from Curtin, appears to have been a way of

¹¹² ibid, P249

¹¹³ Teleprinter Message BXC 368 - 6.4.1943 - Reproduced Robertson & McCarthy, op cit, P331

¹¹⁴ Petillo. op cit, P214

¹¹⁵ Potter. op cit, P291

diverting blame from MacArthur for leaving the Philippines. However, Hasluck reports that it was, 'to forestall Axis propaganda which might make capital of General MacArthur's departure from the Philippines'.¹¹⁷

Problems of personality and jealousy arose almost immediately after MacArthur was appointed to command the area which became known as the South West Pacific Area (SWPA). There was a clear line of authority between his command and that of other commanders. Admiral Nimitz had jurisdiction for the eastern Pacific, including New Zealand and the Solomons and all the islands to the east of there. MacArthur competed with Nimitz for resources and for public acclaim and his ambitions became the source of much of the later pressure on the Buna commanders. He also worried about British General Mountbatten's Indian command encroaching on his western boundary.¹¹⁸

Shortly after his arrival, in another act of self-aggrandisement, MacArthur allowed himself to be awarded America's second highest bravery award. A Medal of Honour was presented 'For conspicuous leadership in preparing the Philippine Islands to resist conquest, for gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty in action against invading Japanese forces, and for the heroic conduct of defensive and offensive operations on the Bataan Peninsula...'¹¹⁹ The award was probably intended as a propaganda face-saving device and a boost to public morale but was hardly deserved following the events in previous months. Roosevelt was reported as saying that the retreat to Bataan Peninsula was 'more a rout than a military achievement'.

¹¹⁶ McCarthy. KOKODA TO WAU. P17

¹¹⁷ Hasluck. GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE. P110

¹¹⁸ Manchester. op cit, P259

¹¹⁹ Quoted in Long. op cit, P86

Costello described it as the 'the greatest military defeat ever inflicted on the United States forces in the field'.¹²⁰

Long before MacArthur could organise a rescue force for the Philippines, General Wainwright advised that he had decided to surrender his 76,000¹²¹ sick and starving Bataan survivors. MacArthur sent a message to Wainwright opposing his surrender and then in another strange turn of thinking, proposed that he (MacArthur) return to Bataan, 'to effect a proper withdrawal of U.S. forces'.¹²² Wainwright stuck to his decision and the men went into captivity. It is not surprising that when MacArthur was asked to recommend Wainwright for an award, his personal animosity to his subordinate precluded him so doing.¹²³ With the surrender, he became even more determined to make amends, 'Bataan was almost an obsession, a cult, with him... The dead of Bataan live in the hearts of many, and in the heart of MacArthur they live together with a brooding, eternal lust for vengeance',¹²⁴

When MacArthur formally took command of all Allied forces in Australia in April, he took no Australian or Dutch senior officers onto his staff. He had been advised by Washington to include Allied officers but that advice was ignored. He appointed not one Australian to his inner headquarters, choosing instead to surround himself with the 'Bataan Gang' - the same men who had participated in the ill-fated defence of the Philippines.¹²⁵ Air Vice Marshal Hewitt observed that MacArthur had, 'surrounded himself with an aura of majesty... his staff maintaining a remote attitude'.¹²⁶ On a personal level, however, he found MacArthur 'approachable, friendly and receptive'.

¹²⁰ Costello. DAYS OF INFAMY. P3

¹²¹ ibid

¹²² Moore. OVER SEXED, OVER PAID, AND OVER HERE. P72

¹²³ Long. op cit, P87

¹²⁴ Johnston. PACIFIC PARTNER. P83

¹²⁵ McCarthy. op cit, P29

Australian General Thomas Blamey was appointed commander of land forces [there then being far more Australian than American troops] and had much wider experience in WWII than MacArthur. Blamey had been at war for about two years, as had most of the generals in the Australian army. However, the two developed a reasonable relationship and 'throughout this period Blamey and MacArthur were working in harmony, despite their differences of temperament and personality... [Blamey] understood from the start the special circumstances which made MacArthur invaluable to Australia... [he was] the symbol of that American technological power that must finally win the war'.¹²⁷ Blamey was also aware that MacArthur was in a good position to attract more resources to the Australian-American Pacific war effort.

Contact between MacArthur's headquarters and the Australians was through liaison officers and this lack of direct interaction was to become the basis of problems over the next two years. Some Australians did have contact with MacArthur, and one, General George Vasey, told his wife, 'the more I see of him the more tiresome I think him. Pedantic school teacher or professor is an apt description'.¹²⁸ When at a later stage of the war, Blamey suggested exchanging American and Australian officers to improve the attitudes between them, MacArthur dismissed the idea, 'MacArthur and his staff had made it evident from the outset that they did not wish the two forces to be closely integrated... MacArthur may have seen in Blamey's proposal a suggestion that the Australians could teach the Americans their business'.¹²⁹ This attitude was to prevail throughout MacArthur's leadership. It seemed that he was intent on making his victories all-American affairs. Should the Australians be the victors, it might imply that it was not MacArthur's leadership that prevailed, but that of the Australian commanders.

¹²⁶ Hewitt. ADVERSITY IN SUCCESS. P54

¹²⁷ Carlyon. op cit, P100 & 116

¹²⁸ Horner. CRISIS OF COMMAND. P119

¹²⁹ McCarthy. op cit, P627

The constant paucity of war materials and manpower was to dominate much of MacArthur's time in Australia. As in the Philippines, he was again at the mercy of the supply allocations from America. Although he commanded 12 percent of the troops in action throughout the world, he only ever received 9 percent of the supplies available.¹³⁰ The 'Beat Hitler first' ¹³¹ policy was firmly in force. When his requests for supplies were not fully met, MacArthur's persecution complex seemed to amplify and he railed against Roosevelt and the Army commanders, stating that 'some people in Washington would rather see MacArthur lose a battle than America win a war'. He said that he was, 'handicapped by politics... even the most basic decisions are corrupt'.¹³² His mental state even led to a conspiracy theory that, 'Churchill alone was leading America to neglect her Pacific interests for the sake of the European theatre'.¹³³ The factories in Australia had enough resources to equip most AIF troops but the militia in 1942 often had to make do with First War weapons. As the war progressed, Australia was in a good position to feed and clothe Americans and Australians but shipping and aircraft mostly came from the factories of the U.S.A.

In early June, MacArthur presented an unrealistic plan to push the Japanese back to the island of Truk, via an assault on New Britain, the Japanese Rabaul base, and New Ireland. The proposal demonstrated poor analysis of the situation and immature military planning as his proposed campaign envisaged that Rabaul would be taken in just 18 days. In that short period, he would seize Buna, Lae and Salamaua, establish support air bases, and then invade Rabaul with ships he did not have, using paratroopers which he did not have and carried by aircraft that were not yet available. One writer noted, 'just how these places, as well as others, would be taken and

¹³⁰ Willoughby & Chamberlain. op cit, P11

¹³¹ McCarthy. op cit, P188

¹³² Schaller. op cit, P69

¹³³ Thorne. 'MacArthur, Australia & British.' AUSTRALIAN OUTLOOK. No29.Aug 1975. P53

developed into forward air bases in time to support the final attack on Rabaul - all in less than eighteen days - was not explained...'¹³⁴ The plan was rejected officially because of the vulnerability of any ships taking part. Despite his own contention that Rabaul should be the main target he later castigated the Navy for landing on Guadalcanal - an interim step in their plan to isolate the base - as a 'reckless gamble'.¹³⁵ MacArthur became depressed at the rejection of his plan and Arnold, a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, reported that he 'gives me the impression of a brilliant mind - obsessed by a plan he can't carry out - frustrated - dramatic to the extreme - much more nervous than when I formerly knew him. Hands twitch and tremble - shell shocked'.¹³⁶ MacArthur was ordered by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to first clear the north coast of New Guinea and only then would the attack on Rabaul and New Ireland begin. ¹³⁷

By mid-1942, MacArthur had a growing force of American and Australian divisions and was poised to strike back at the Japanese. Horner comments that, 'all that could hurt MacArthur now was a military reverse, which he believed the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington would use to discredit him'.¹³⁸ That 'military reverse' became a real possibility when in May 1942, the Japanese attempted to capture Port Moresby by an attack from the sea. The Battle of the Coral Sea turned back that invasion fleet and caused the Japanese to consider an alternative plan for the conquest of Port Moresby. At the same time, MacArthur was planning a 3000 man garrison and airfield at Buna as an important air base for the proposed attacks on the Japanese at Salamaua and Lae. One of the problems with Port Moresby as an air base, was the climb and consequent high fuel usage, as aircraft crossed the 7000 foot Kokoda Gap

¹³⁴ Morton. STRATEGY AND COMMAND. P298

¹³⁵ Thorne. 'MacArthur, Australia & British.' AUSTRALIAN OUTLOOK. No29.Aug 1975. P201

¹³⁶ Manchester. op cit, P274

¹³⁷ McCarthy. op cit, P119

¹³⁸ Horner. CRISIS OF COMMAND. P119

on their way north. Buna on the north coast plain would alleviate this problem as well as extending the bombers' range.

Unfortunately, MacArthur did not act quickly enough because following the Coral Sea battle, the Japanese had made alternative plans. They now intended to land in northern Papua and attack Port Moresby from that direction. They implemented their decision on 21 July 1942, landing at Gona and Buna, with little or no resistance. MacArthur and Blamey had been of the opinion that 'Nobody in their right senses would land there!'¹³⁹ and were therefore slow to react to the danger. Both men, 'had based the defence of Port Moresby on the belief that a garrison at Milne Bay and a picket on the crest of the Owen Stanleys, in addition to air and naval forces, would be sufficient...'¹⁴⁰ Their attitude ignored intelligence material from the code breakers, who as early as 18 May had reported the Japanese were examining an overland route to Port Moresby. Again on 15 June there were further intelligence warnings and Japanese aircraft were seen reconnoitring the Buna-Kokoda area.¹⁴¹

With growing evidence of a landing near Buna, MacArthur 'remained inactive'¹⁴² except to send a single company of 100 militia troops over the mountains as the initial garrison for a proposed base at Buna. The Japanese landed first, and it was not until Kokoda Village was easily captured, that the Japanese realised that there was little to prevent a thrust across the mountain range. When the Japanese had sufficient resources in men and supplies, they began a full scale attack along the Trail, on the same day that Milne Bay was invaded - the two actions intended as a 'pincer movement' on Port Moresby. Luckily for the Allies in Papua, on 7 August, American Marines had landed on Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands and that threat

¹³⁹ Horner. 'Defending Australia' in THE PACIFIC WAR 1942. P9

¹⁴⁰ ibid, P14

¹⁴¹ Drea. MACARTHUR'S ULTRA. P37-40

¹⁴² ibid, P41

to the Japanese left flank began to drain off their men and resources. Had this not happened, larger numbers of men and supplies would have been available to pour into Papua for the attacks there.

As the Australians withdrew towards Port Moresby, MacArthur ignored intelligence reports and repeatedly said that they faced an inferior force. Australian General Rowell noted the 'barely concealed criticism of the fighting ability of the Australian soldier' and put the total Japanese force available to cross the Trail as high as 13,500 against his own force of a possible 2000.¹⁴³ Carlyon was also close to the real figure when he wrote, 'it seemed that GHQ deliberately chose to ignore reports from Australian field commanders... According to GHQ., the Japanese force based on Buna numbered fewer than 4000. The actual number was above 13,000'.¹⁴⁴

It seemed to MacArthur that he was about to face another ignominious defeat and signs of panic began to emerge. General Vasey wrote, 'GHQ is like a bloody barometer in a cyclone - up and down every two minutes...'¹⁴⁵ In a report to Prime Minister Curtin, MacArthur was reported as saying, 'it is not a serious force that the Japanese have pushed across the mountains, but the fact that a small force can push us back fills him with concern... he has a feeling of uneasiness...'¹⁴⁶ As late as mid-November War Correspondent George Johnson was noting in his diary the 'tendency for many Americans to decry the Australian efforts and perpetrate rumours that the AIF is only opposed by a handful of Japanese - 90 or 250'.¹⁴⁷ As the Kokoda Campaign progressed, the Japanese pushed back the under-strength Australian force to within sight of Port Moresby and American General Kenney reported to GHQ

¹⁴³ Rowell. FULL CIRCLE. P116

¹⁴⁴ Carlyon. op cit, P101

¹⁴⁵ McCarthy. op cit, P225

¹⁴⁶ Secraphone message 17.9.1942 - AWM FILE 3,48/1942

¹⁴⁷ Notebook quoted in Kinnane. GEORGE JOHNSTON. P44

his 'increasing fear that the Australian ground defence would not hold'.¹⁴⁸ Kenney had not spoken to General Rowell, the Commander of operations in New Guinea before he reported to MacArthur.¹⁴⁹ Kenney's advice was contrary to that of Australian commanders, but MacArthur and Curtin believed Kenney. So did the Parliament, with Mr. Abbott, Member for New England raising the matter, 'optimistic statements by Australians...[are] similar to British prophecies in Malaya...The enemy was to be halted at Kokoda, in the "impassable" Owen Stanley Range, then in the mountain gap, then on the southern slopes. He has been halted nowhere...'¹⁵⁰

With another defeat appearing imminent, MacArthur 'almost pleaded' to an officer, 'Why must I always lead a forlorn hope?'¹⁵¹ This frustration resulted in a series of ill-considered directives from MacArthur that are illustrated in the following pages. He also began involving himself in battle decisions. It was normal protocol for an overall commander to give the general plan and leave the combat decisions to his subordinates. The conduct of the Papua campaigns was very heavily influenced by his direct intervention and specific operational messages were often sent to commanders in the field.¹⁵² This resulted in a break-down in the chain-of-command and as described later, Blamey was eventually forced to remonstrate with MacArthur to stop his intervention.

MacArthur and his staff issued orders that consistently ignored the conditions under which troops were operating. In one of Rowell's letters to Vasey he commented, 'I wish Chamberlain [MacArthur's Senior Operations Officer] & Co could visit the jungle to see what conditions are, instead of sitting back and criticising'.¹⁵³ In fact,

¹⁴⁸ Carlyon. *op cit*, P103

¹⁴⁹ Rowell. *Op cit*, P122

¹⁵⁰ PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES Vol 172. P 887

¹⁵¹ Hunt. *op cit*, P294

¹⁵² Baker & Knight. *op cit*, P195.

¹⁵³ Quoted in McCarthy. *op cit*, P176

Brigadiers Casey and George were sent and 'returned to Brisbane shaken... New Guinea was unbelievable. They told the General that they didn't see how human beings could live there...' ¹⁵⁴ However, MacArthur's orders consistently demanded actions that the terrain and conditions would not allow. One particularly semi-hysterical example was issued during the Milne Bay campaign when he ordered that a battalion be 'run along the beach' ¹⁵⁵ to attack the Japanese - most beaches being 50 metres long and the Japanese 10 kilometres away. General Eichelberger had a similar complaint when he took command, 'Sometimes I wondered whether the High Command... ever really understood our battle with weather'. ¹⁵⁶ MacArthur actually travelled to the beginning of the Kokoda Trail in October 1942 from where he could see the rainforest covered terrain for himself. Carlyon, who was Blamey's Aide, later wrote of MacArthur's tour, 'It was a brief visit... But I doubt if what he was told about the fighting up in the precipitous rain-forest did much to moderate his impatience'. ¹⁵⁷ Even when MacArthur later moved headquarters to Government House in Port Moresby he did nothing to familiarise himself with the on-ground situation. Contrary to Courtney Whitney's comment that 'from this close vantage point he could see at first hand what it was like to fight in New Guinea'. ¹⁵⁸ Australian correspondent Johnson found him, 'a recluse, a hermit seldom seen even by his troops, a man so remote that he is almost a mystical figure... he seldom emerged. He left it to his subordinate commanders to get around among the troops, to survey the terrain and investigate Japanese positions'. ¹⁵⁹

While the Kokoda campaign was in progress, the Japanese had invaded Milne Bay as the second part of their plan for a 'pincer' movement on Port Moresby. However,

¹⁵⁴ Manchester. *op cit*, P271-2

¹⁵⁵ Taped conversations between the Author and Brigadier Frederick Chilton. Circa. 1991.

¹⁵⁶ Eichelberger. *op cit*, P57

¹⁵⁷ Carlyon. *op cit*, P112

¹⁵⁸ Courtney Whitney. *MACARTHUR HIS RENDEZVOUS...* P 77

¹⁵⁹ Johnston. *op cit*, P81-82

they expected only a small garrison force to be defending the airstrip and consequently allocated a very inferior force for the task. They sent just 2000 attackers against an actual force of 6000-8000 defenders,¹⁶⁰ but General Clowes had the dilemma of not knowing how many troops had landed. It was usual for the Japanese to attack with overwhelming numbers and when Clowes found that this was a small landing force he suspected a feint attack to draw away the defenders. It was logical for him to suspect a Japanese ploy to draw most of the Australian troops into a narrow area of land on the north shore, then land a larger force elsewhere.¹⁶¹

Clowes had only recently been appointed to the rank of General and because of his apparent over-cautious methods, MacArthur became very agitated. He attempted to fight the battle from his office in Brisbane and through Sutherland, sent a directive to Blamey stating, 'The Commander-in-Chief requests that you instruct Major-General Clowes at once to clear the north shore of Milne Bay without delay...'¹⁶² Brigadier Chilton, General Clowes' 2IC recalls, 'We received quite a few panicky messages, direct from MacArthur's headquarters. How they thought they could fight the battle from Australia, I don't know...'.¹⁶³ Brigadier John Field also noted 'the absurd signals from GHQ, who thought fit to send, hundreds of miles from the battle scene, tactical directions to Milne Force'.¹⁶⁴

MacArthur had no faith in the Australian leadership and methods, and by the fourth day of the Milne Bay campaign, was making excuses, in case of a possible defeat. 'This is the first test of Australian troops under my command; the Australians claim the Commander is excellent and rate half his troops as good; the other half from the

¹⁶⁰ Baker & Knight. MILNE BAY - 1942. P103 & 108

¹⁶¹ ibid, P153

¹⁶² Quoted in McCarthy. op cit, P174

¹⁶³ Taped conversations between the Author and Brigadier Frederick Chilton. Circa. 1991.

¹⁶⁴ AWM FILE 419/33/9 - The incomplete manuscript of Brigadier John Field.

7th Australian Division they rate excellent... am not yet convinced of the efficiency of the Australian units and do not attempt to forecast results.'¹⁶⁵

However, Clowes' methodical battle plan soon won the first victory in Papua with MacArthur releasing a press story stating, 'General MacArthur in a special communique yesterday... praised the work of Australian combat troops, [and] the able leadership of their commanding officer...'¹⁶⁶ However, General Rowell was not impressed by MacArthur's words: 'some of the expressions of congratulation were as warm as cold tea... they failed to emphasize that this was almost entirely an Australian action...'¹⁶⁷ In private, MacArthur disparaged the result, in an attempt to gain the kudos himself and said: 'The enemy's defeat at Milne Bay must not be accepted as a measure of relative fighting capacity of the troops involved. The decisive factor was the complete surprise obtained over him by our preliminary concentration of superior forces'.¹⁶⁸ Although the overwhelming superiority of numbers was true, the statement gave no credit to the Australians. Rowell was aware of Clowes' situation and in writing to Vasey complained, 'I think it damned unfair to pillory any Commander without any knowledge of the conditions'.¹⁶⁹ In fact in a 1956 letter to the official historian, Clowes commented that MacArthur's instructions, 'served merely to hinder and hamper the development of our counter-attack which otherwise, I feel, would have reached its conclusion days earlier than it actually did'.¹⁷⁰

Despite the pressure from Brisbane, Clowes had not allowed himself to be panicked into precipitous actions. The result was comparatively low casualties. However, he

¹⁶⁵ Quoted in McCarthy. *op cit*, P176

¹⁶⁶ Sydney Morning Herald. 1-9-1942

¹⁶⁷ Rowell. *op cit*, P120

¹⁶⁸ McCarthy. *op cit*, P186

¹⁶⁹ Personal letter from Gen Rowell. 30.8.1942 -reproduced in Robertson & McCarthy. *op cit*, P365

¹⁷⁰ Reproduced in Brune. THE SPELL BROKEN. P144

paid the price for his caution at Milne Bay, and his reluctance in September to weaken the Milne Bay garrison by sending his troops up the coast towards Buna.¹⁷¹ MacArthur expressed a lack of confidence in Clowes, Blamey concurred, and before long Clowes was transferred to a new non-operational command.

After Milne Bay, and while the Kokoda Campaign was under way, MacArthur wrote to Curtin saying that, 'he considered that the real reason for the unsatisfactory position... was the lack of efficiency of the Australian troops'.¹⁷² He is also quoted as saying, 'they were not good in the field, they were not good in the jungle, and they came from the slums of the cities in Australia and they had no fighting spirit'.¹⁷³ General of the Air Force, Arnold noted in September that talk amongst the Navy staff in Admiral Ghormley's HQ, was that 'conditions in New Guinea were very, very bad. One [had] heard the Australians would not fight. They would give up without firing a shot... it looked to me as if everybody on that South Pacific front had a bad case of the jitters'.¹⁷⁴

MacArthur ignored the fact that the AIF troops he was denigrating were the same formations that Churchill had demanded as being essential to the war effort in Burma and the Middle East.¹⁷⁵ In fact American General Brett had written, 'there are no better fighting men in the world than the hard bitten soldiers of the island continent...'.¹⁷⁶ Eichelberger wrote, 'when the going is tough, in a brawl or a battle, there is no better fighting partner than the man from Down Under'.¹⁷⁷ Another officer, Major Fielding Eliot was quoted as saying, 'I and all others who have seen Australians in action can testify to their high character, individual fighting qualities,

¹⁷¹ Horner. CRISIS OF COMMAND. P178

¹⁷² McCarthy. op cit, P225,234

¹⁷³ Quoted in Baker & Knight. op cit, P345

¹⁷⁴ Arnold. GLOBAL MISSION. P342

¹⁷⁵ Churchill. SECOND WORLD WAR. Vol IV. P138

¹⁷⁶ Quoted in Willoughby & Chamberlain. op cit, P60

resourcefulness, adaptability, quickness to learn and offensive spirit'.¹⁷⁸ Blamey was constantly irritated by MacArthur's down-playing of the Australian war effort and thought that it was 'one MacArthur tactic that was hard to forgive... It was always his intention... to ensure that all publicity was concentrated on his own generalship'.¹⁷⁹ MacArthur was perhaps making amends when he wrote in his 1964 memoirs, 'the Australians, determined fighters as always, were forced to give way before superior forces [on the Kokoda Trail]'.¹⁸⁰ It appears that his denigration of the Australian contribution was to ensure that the Australians were not seen by Washington as being the victors otherwise MacArthur's own kudos would be diluted.

The dismissal of Clowes was not unique and a string of generals and brigadiers had a similar fate following pressure on Blamey. MacArthur's interference in the Australian Army leadership also resulted in the crisis between Generals Blamey and Rowell. MacArthur had the Curtin government send Blamey to Port Moresby, 'to energise the situation'.¹⁸¹ The 'energising' was in response to the bad news of Australian withdrawals to Imita Ridge - the last bastion on the Kokoda Trail. MacArthur was concerned that another defeat was about to occur and Blamey had little choice but to accept the Prime Minister's orders. Horner theorises that the sending of Blamey was to provide an excuse for MacArthur, should Papua fall to the Japanese, 'if there was a disaster, he could claim that he had done everything possible to avert it'.¹⁸²

Blamey's arrival caused Rowell to think there was a lack of confidence in his command. To add to the tension, there was also a pre-existing enmity between the

¹⁷⁷ Sayers. NED HERRING. P240

¹⁷⁸ Daily Telegraph. 15-9-1942

¹⁷⁹ Carlyon. op cit. P92 & 95

¹⁸⁰ MacArthur. op cit. P161

¹⁸¹ Carlyon. op cit. P104

¹⁸² Horner. CRISIS OF COMMAND. P 279

two men relating to their period in the Greece Campaign, and in the consequent argument, Rowell was dismissed. The irony of the situation was that the Australians were about to counter-attack the Japanese and consequently pushed them back towards Buna. Carlyon further explains, 'the Prime Minister and his advisory War Council were acting in complete ignorance of the military command structure... They were following without question the urgings of MacArthur, who knew the problems he was creating and was prepared to disregard them in order to protect himself from any criticism of his strategy...' ¹⁸³ When General Herring replaced Rowell, he was sent on his way with a gratuitous comment from MacArthur that 'a soldier's first duty is to get on with the man above him'. ¹⁸⁴

Brigadier Potts and later General Allen were in turn relieved of their commands on the Kokoda Trail. Allen was also employing methodical and cautious methods resulting in MacArthur becoming agitated at the slow progress. He ordered Blamey to 'press General Allen's advance. His light casualties indicate no serious effort yet made to displace enemy. It is essential that the Kokoda airfield be taken'.¹⁸⁵ On that same day, Allen reported that his men were not receiving the rations they required, due to poor recovery from air drops and if they did not improve, 'revision of plans will have to be made and large proportion of troops withdrawn...' ¹⁸⁶ Allen was aware of the need for speed in turning the Japanese back and advised Port Moresby, 'fully appreciate the major plan and therefore that time is most essential...' ¹⁸⁷

The Australians had been held up for a week by a well-entrenched Japanese force, in a deep valley at Templeton's Crossing. Allen's explanations only served to undermine confidence in his leadership, and Blamey, pressed for results by

¹⁸³ Carlyon. op cit. P110

¹⁸⁴ Quoted in Carlyon. I REMEMBER BLAMEY. P110

¹⁸⁵ Horner. CRISIS OF COMMAND. P206

¹⁸⁶ Brune. RAGGED BLOODY HEROS. P212

MacArthur, relieved Allen and replaced him with General Vasey. Horner wrote, 'MacArthur's lack of knowledge of the conditions on the Kokoda Trail and of the tenacity of the Japanese led directly to Blamey's and Herring's decision to replace Allen... The conclusion can only be that Blamey felt that he had to relieve Allen to placate MacArthur'.¹⁸⁸ Brigadier Cummings commented, 'I gave MacArthur away from the first time he got those blokes sacked on the Kokoda Trail... you can't move without your bloody tucker and your ammunition, and that was what Potts and Allen were told to do'.¹⁸⁹ The men of 2/27 Battalion felt a wrong had been done and the reason for both men's dismissals, 'was the result of the smallness of mind of the powers that be, who did not know, nor want to know, the situation as it really existed'.¹⁹⁰ However, the urgency must have been impressed on General George Vasey when he took over the leadership of the Kokoda Campaign. He signalled, 'Assure him [MacArthur] that both I and the fine troops under my command are imbued with the incentive to make all speed'.¹⁹¹

Although never dismissed, Blamey had his own problems. Despite differences in personality and temperament, Blamey and MacArthur 'superficially at least' maintained a reasonable working relationship during 1942. 'Blamey was not blind to MacArthur's human defects, nor did he ever surrender himself... to MacArthur's imperious will'.¹⁹² Stresses began to show, however, when Blamey finally realised that his command of all land forces, 'had a fairly limited reality... But when there was some major interference, affecting the men in the field or their leaders, Blamey would protest promptly and strongly'.¹⁹³ As Hetherington commented, 'Blamey's critics tend

¹⁸⁷ AMW File 419/10/2 Blamey Papers. Message Allen to Rowell. 22/10/42.

¹⁸⁸ Horner. CRISIS OF COMMAND. Pxx,213

¹⁸⁹ Taped conversations between the Author and Colonel Clem Cummings. Circa. 1990

¹⁹⁰ Burns. BROWN AND BLUE DIAMOND. P 138

¹⁹¹ AWM File 419/10/2. Letter Blamey to MacArthur 31.10.42

¹⁹² Hetherington. op cit, P134

¹⁹³ Carlyon. op cit, P117,118

to forget that all through the Pacific operations he had in MacArthur not a small but a large, flea on his back to bite him'.¹⁹⁴

By November 1942, Port Moresby was safe and the Japanese were on the retreat in Papua. However, the worst of the fighting and consequent casualties, were still to come as the Japanese bases were attacked. MacArthur saw the recent assault on Guadalcanal by naval marines as a possible victory that would eclipse his own efforts. Major-General Charles Willoughby was close to the truth when he wrote of the Buna fighting, 'it became a race between Eichelberger [at Buna] and the Marines [on Guadalcanal] under Admiral Ghormley's command to see who would turn in the first important "land" victory of the Pacific war'.¹⁹⁵ He ignores the fact that the Australians at Milne Bay, had already gained the first victory.

¹⁹⁴ Hetherington. op cit, P165

¹⁹⁵ Willoughby & Chamberlain. op cit, P88

CHAPTER THREE THE BUNA-GONA-SANANANDA CAMPAIGN

By November 1942 the Japanese had been driven off the Kokoda Trail, Milne Bay having already been cleared of the invaders. Despite what he had said privately about the poor Australian fighting qualities only weeks before, MacArthur sent a message to all troops with 'Very hearty congratulations to all ranks... these fine troops must feel a pride and satisfaction at this splendid accomplishment...'196

MacArthur's expected quick and decisive victory was again frustrated by the Japanese. For a week, they held the Australians near Kokoda before being dislodged from a defensive position in the Oivi area. After that defeat, the Japanese were finally driven back to the coast where American and Australian troops surrounded them for what many thought would be a quick end to the campaign.

However, it was at Gona, Buna and Sanananda, where the highly motivated and determined Japanese were well entrenched, that the price paid for MacArthur's quick victory became disproportionately high. Instead of an easy storming of the defences by the Allies, there began three months of desperate close quarter fighting with very high casualties. The question has been asked, then and now, why the Japanese were not left to die of starvation in their enclaves and there are arguments for and against this proposal. The conduct of the campaign was influenced by three major factors; the underrating of the Japanese numbers and defensive capacity at Buna, the over rating of the American troops' fighting ability and most importantly, MacArthur's desire to gain a quick victory before the Marines on Guadalcanal beat him to it. MacArthur was still trying to redeem his reputation when General Sutherland told General Kenney that, 'if anything went wrong, General MacArthur

would be sent home'.¹⁹⁷ If MacArthur's victory was not achieved first, his success might be overshadowed by the Marine's victory on Guadalcanal.

The Japanese were initially well armed and supplied, and were told to hold out as long as possible. Since landing at Buna and Gona in July, they had prepared a large defended enclave, circled by very strong fortifications. With their rear to the sea, attacks from that direction were virtually ruled out because of shallow off-shore waters. As a result of poor intelligence, the Allies had dramatically under-estimated the Japanese numbers facing them. The Australians believed they faced 1500-2000, the Americans thought about 1000 and the General Headquarters estimated about 4000. MacArthur's Intelligence Officer predicted that all three enclaves, would be 'easy pickings' because 'only a shell of sacrifice troops' had been left to defend them...'¹⁹⁸ On the eve of the battle, reports were received of an additional 1000 Japanese having landed at Buna, clearly illustrating the potential, at that time, for the defenders to increase their numbers. Horner has put the Japanese strength at a Division of about 9000 -12000 men.¹⁹⁹ Blamey was also expecting a quick victory when he requested that a ship be sent to New Guinea waters by 25 October, ready to resupply Buna when it fell.²⁰⁰ With Vasey's men still 30 miles from Gona, Blamey also wrote to the head of the War Cabinet, stating that, 'we should therefore expect that the Americans will accomplish their task and Buna will be captured by them a day before Vasey gets to Gona'.²⁰¹ Early in November, General Herring had anticipated a quick campaign, writing to his wife that 'perhaps when you get this we may have Buna'.²⁰²

¹⁹⁶ AWM File 8/3/2 - Nov 1942.

¹⁹⁷ Horner. CRISIS OF COMMAND. P260

¹⁹⁸ Manchester. op cit. P295

¹⁹⁹ Horner. GENERAL VASEY'S WAR. P216 & 340

²⁰⁰ AWM FILE 54-581/7/28 - Message Blamey to MacArthur.

²⁰¹ AWM FILE 419/10/2 2/136.2. Letter from Blamey to Shedden. 14.11.42

Although Japanese troop numbers in the enclave were much higher than expected, they could have been even higher had the Americans on Guadalcanal not diverted Japanese troops to that front. In all previous battles, except Milne Bay, the Japanese had fought with overwhelming numbers but now they were reluctant to commit further reinforcements. They concentrated on retaking Guadalcanal where an American air base would become a major threat to Rabaul, and left Buna to stand alone except for small reinforcements.

Blamey, as Commander Land Forces, had the task of destroying the enclave with MacArthur's instruction that it was to be seized 'regardless of loss'. MacArthur had heroic ideas for the battle: 'The order assumed that Australian and American units could attack the Japanese defences in massed, overwhelming waves'.²⁰³ When Eichelberger was in the thick of the fighting at Buna, he commented that MacArthur's orders 'spoke of attacking "by regiments, not companies, by thousands, not hundreds" indicating that he knew nothing of the jungle and how one fights there - and that he had no detailed knowledge of how our forces were divided into many corridors by swamps'.²⁰⁴ MacArthur had experienced fighting in tropical conditions and should have been aware of restrictions imposed by thick vegetation. With confidence, Blamey reported on 14 November that 'We expect to begin our advance on Monday morning and in a few days to sweep through to Buna and Gona'.²⁰⁵

The Australian troops that now approached the coast were already tired and debilitated by the fighting in the Owen Stanley Ranges and were still poorly fed due to the supply situation. Most Americans were in good health and fresh, many having been flown to the north coast, rather than walking there. The Australians were to

²⁰² Sayers. *op cit*, P228

²⁰³ Carlyon. *op cit*, P117

²⁰⁴ Manchester. *op cit*, P296

²⁰⁵ Gen Blamey to Frederick Sheddon. 14.11.1942 -reproduced in Robertson & McCarthy. *op cit*, P372

engage the Japanese on the Gona to Sanananda front, leaving the under-trained and untried Americans to concentrate on Buna.

The American troops did not perform well in the early weeks of the campaign, due to their lack of preparation and experience. The 32nd and 41st Divisions were National Guard units - the equivalent of Australia's militia - and most of their officers were as inexperienced as the men, 'the American troops were in no sense ready for jungle warfare...'²⁰⁶ However, even the battle-hardened Australians were having difficulty in breaking into the Japanese defences.

With progress slow, MacArthur again became agitated that no victory was forthcoming and that his much-vaunted American troops could not match the previously maligned Australians. A visiting British officer, reporting on the two armies, observed 'that the American soldiers he saw were "very poor indeed" and that the Australians were "first-class fighting men" '.²⁰⁷ However, in discussions with the British liaison officer, Colonel Wilkinson, MacArthur had told him, 'Gerry, I tell you, these Australians won't fight'.²⁰⁸ When General Kenney arrived in Australia he was told by General Sutherland that Australian troops were, 'undisciplined, untrained, over advertised, and generally useless...'²⁰⁹ With that attitude prevailing, Blamey, when reporting to Curtin in December 1942, was no doubt taking his revenge on MacArthur when he said, 'American troops cannot be classified as attack troops. They are definitely not equal to the Australian militia, and from the moment they met opposition sat down and have hardly gone forward a yard...'²¹⁰ To make matters worse when sending the Americans to Papua, MacArthur had despatched them with

²⁰⁶ Eichelberger. *op cit*, P33

²⁰⁷ Thorne. 'MacArthur, Australia & British.' AUSTRALIAN OUTLOOK, No29.Aug 1975. P199

²⁰⁸ *ibid*, P199

²⁰⁹ Kenney. GENERAL KENNEY REPORTS. P28

²¹⁰ Letter from Blamey to Curtin. 4.12.1942-
reproduced in Robertson & McCarthy. *op cit*, P374

the message that they were going the New Guinea to, 'show the Aussies how to fight'.²¹¹ The denigration of Australians even reached Roosevelt, who confided that MacArthur was concealing, 'that the work was really rescued by the Americans and let the credit go to the Australians so as to bolster up their morale'.²¹²

MacArthur began to show increasing signs of hysteria, illustrated by an erratic pre-dawn message sent to a sleeping Blamey in Port Moresby. Without any earlier warning to be ready for an attack the message instructed that, 'Gona will be captured at dawn'. Blamey read the message and told Carlyon his Aide, 'the man's a fool. Doesn't he know how long it takes to mount a battle?'.²¹³ For 30 years, MacArthur had commanded at all levels, and should have known the reality of conducting such an attack at a few hour's notice. It can be assumed that if the battle-experienced local commanders had been able to so easily mount a successful attack they would have already taken Gona. Carlyon commented that, 'it was hardly credible that a man with MacArthur's experience should send such a message. Blamey immediately resumed his sleep and ignored the message'.²¹⁴ This was not the only case of MacArthur giving orders that disregarded the lessons of his long military career. He was not a drinker so intoxication is not an excuse for the orders he gave, but the explanation may have been revealed by Wilkinson, the British liaison officer, who at that time found him, 'remote [and] highly strung'.²¹⁵

In another example of irrational thinking, Macarthur again interfered in the conduct of the fighting when during the Buna operations, he gave direct orders to an American commander in the field. The particular regiment was under Australian command when MacArthur allocated it to another sector of the front. Blamey immediately

²¹¹ Carlyon. op cit, P117

²¹² Thorne. ALLIES OF A KIND. P263

²¹³ Carlyon. op cit, P120

²¹⁴ ibid

moved to stop such interference, sending a message, 'I believe nothing is more contrary to sound principles of command... [if the Commander in Chief] ...should take over the personal direction of portion of the battle'.²¹⁶ MacArthur claimed he had been misunderstood and withdrew his order. He had demonstrated a failure to follow the normal channels of command and leave the fighting to his officers in the field.

Growing signs of MacArthur's anxiety were demonstrated in the extravagant language he used in late November when he sent General Harding, commander of the American troops, orders to 'Take Buna today at all costs'.²¹⁷ Still there was little advance, so MacArthur ordered Lieutenant-General Eichelberger to Port Moresby and told him to take command of the Buna Campaign. He was ordered to sack anyone he thought inadequate to the task, and was sent on his way with one of MacArthur's famous but extraordinary lines, 'Bob get me Buna - or don't come back alive'.²¹⁸ This grandiose order, given from the comparative safety of Port Moresby was softened the following day, when he put his arm around Eichelberger and told him, 'if you capture Buna, I'll give you a Distinguished Service Cross [and]... I'll release your name for newspaper publication'.²¹⁹ When General Herring later asked MacArthur to order Eichelberger to stop taking risks in the front-line, MacArthur replied, 'I want him to die if he doesn't get into Buna'.²²⁰

Under Eichelberger's leadership, the Americans began to have more success, but their poor showing took some time to rectify. Eichelberger's first task was 'to inspire a little fighting spirit in American officers and men. His [eventual] success proved again

²¹⁵ Thorne. 'MacArthur, Australia & British.' AUSTRALIAN OUTLOOK. No29.Aug 1975. P206.

²¹⁶ AWM FILE 419/10/2 - 2/43.631. Blamey to MacArthur 27.12.42

²¹⁷ Eichelberger. op cit, P43

²¹⁸ Hunt. op cit, P294

²¹⁹ Quoted in McCarthy. op cit, P372

²²⁰ Luvaas. DEAR MISS EM. P64.

that there are no bad troops, only bad officers'.²²¹ One of the 'bad' officers probably included General Harding, whose compassion seemed to have got the better of him. Back in Port Moresby he is reported to have broken down, saying 'I just couldn't stand to see those boys die'.²²²

MacArthur had his excuse to claim success, when on 14 December, the Americans managed to break through the Japanese line and capture the Buna Village area. Despite the fact that the most difficult fortifications at Buna and Sanananda remained intact, MacArthur took the opportunity to claim victory. He had beaten the Marines at Guadalcanal on the publicity front, but weeks of heavy fighting lay ahead. MacArthur classified this as a 'mopping-up operation'.²²³ It was in fact one of the worst phases of the fighting, 'a completely savage and expensive battle'.²²⁴

In fact, it was the Australian 18th Brigade that made the major break-through and enabled the final destruction of the Japanese defences. With the fall of Buna and Gona, Sanananda became the objective but it was almost unapproachable due to swamps. The lack of progress stirred Vasey to write to Herring, saying, 'the Jap is like a boxer whom we cannot knock out and the referee will not stop the fight'.²²⁵ He also commented to Blamey, 'I did not realize just how much knocking out this Jap takes'.²²⁶ Had MacArthur not been pushing the Allies for swift results, the alternative might have been to maintain a perimeter around the Japanese and shell, bomb and starve them into submission.

²²¹ Hetherington. op cit, P171

²²² Rogers. THE GOOD YEARS. P337

²²³ Eichelberger. JUNGLE ROAD TO TOKYO. P76

²²⁴ ibid

²²⁵ Sayers. op cit, P236

²²⁶ AWM FILE 3 DRL 6643 - 2/171.1 & 2.Vasey letter to Blamey. 25.11.42

As more and more men were being lost to death, injury and disease, some Australian and American officers began to question the need for senseless onslaughts against the fixed positions. Before Gona fell, Colonel Cooper, commanding the 2/27th Battalion, had queried the need for the costly frontal attacks. He 'did his utmost to impress on his superiors the futility of pressing these [suicidal] tactics... he had also pointed out that as the enemy was contained in such a small area and therefore powerless to take the initiative, it was a proper case for reducing him by harassing and starvation tactics... [his] request was refused, for reasons the words of a memo from the divisional commander [Vasey] so adequately portray..., "Canberra must have news of a clean up and have it quick or we will both go by the boot" '.²²⁷ Eichelberger wrote of his own officers who thought the same way, 'There were subordinates of mine - understandably torn by the sufferings of their troops - who suggested we abandon attempts to advance and settle down to "starve out the Japanese". But my orders were to advance; General MacArthur continued to advise me that "time was of the essence" '.²²⁸ He added elsewhere, 'I had a victory to gain and if necessary, losses had to be taken'.²²⁹ He also raised the other problems regarding a prolonged campaign, 'One great danger was that the malaria mosquito would lick us if the Japs didn't, since our men were living in the swamps. There was also some danger of Jap reinforcement by water...'²³⁰ Vasey was also concerned at his growing casualties and the sickness rate in his men. In a report he wrote, 'to attack with infantry using [just] their own weapons is repeating the costly mistakes of 1915-17 and... such attacks seem unlikely to succeed'.²³¹ A year later, Sir Earle Page raised the matter in Parliament saying, 'I was given to understand... the military tactics were to follow the medical suggestion [regarding the affects of illness on the Japanese] and cause the Japanese to rot to pieces from malaria, dysentery and

²²⁷ Burns. op cit, P146

²²⁸ Eichelberger. op cit, P62

²²⁹ Luvaas. op cit, P61- Letter to Major General Peterson. 19.1.1943

²³⁰ ibid, P63- Letter to Emmalina Eichelberger.

starvation... our men were sent in as though the matter was one of desperate urgency, against a force which could not get away... attacked with strong artillery, after a long air bombardment, it [enemy force] must have been vanquished without heavy loss'.²³² In responding to the criticism Curtin put the counter-argument in a press release, pointing out the urgent need to capture the north coast of Papua and its strategic airfield sites. Page was correct about starvation as some Japanese did resort to cannibalism to survive but 'How greatly their resistance was undermined by starvation... was another matter not so easily determined'.²³³ Curtin was also correct as it was essential to build an air base at Buna and it was unsafe to do so until the area was secure.

The need to keep pressing forward was frequently conveyed to the commanders in Papua. Eichelberger received a letter from MacArthur in mid-December stating, 'however splendid and electrical your presence has proven; remember that your mission is to take Buna... as I have said, time is working desperately against us'.²³⁴ Eichelberger repeated this comment when writing to Sutherland 'time was the essential element of the attack' which brought a comment from Milner that, 'whether GHQ realized it or not, hurrying the attack had become the leitmotiv of the campaign'.²³⁵ Blamey received a message in early January stating that, 'for strategical and logistical reasons it is essential that there be no delay in initiating the attack on Sanananda... every day lost... prevents the establishment of airdromes at Dobodura which is the basic strategic objective of the campaign'.²³⁶ He had also instructed Blamey that, 'I am not in favour of attempting any negotiations with the Japs in Sanananda area. If they wish to surrender they are at liberty to initiate such

²³¹ Horner. GENERAL VASEY'S WAR. P233

²³² PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES Vol 144. P 303-304

²³³ Milner. VICTORY IN PAPUA. P374

²³⁴ Eichelberger. op cit. P63

²³⁵ Milner. op cit. P370

²³⁶ AWM FILE. 419/10/2 Item 2/43.631 - Radiogram MacArthur to Blamey. 5/1/43

procedure...'²³⁷ The problem was unlikely to arise as are no reports of the Japanese seeking negotiations. On another occasion General Herring was told by MacArthur, 'this situation is becoming very serious. If we can't clear this up quickly I'll be finished and so will your General Blamey'.²³⁸

Even if MacArthur had not been pressing so hard, the counter-argument to the siege concept was the possibility of Japanese reinforcements. Had they been able to put 1000 fresh troops ashore, the debilitated and depleted Allies may have been hard pressed to contain them. There were attempted landings on 27 November and 1 and 8 December, that were driven off by air attacks. However, on 14 December about 500 Japanese troops were landed at the mouth of the Kumusi River, threatening the Australian left flank at Gona.²³⁹ They were contained and later eliminated, but as long as any Japanese positions existed, the reinforcement threat continued.

As the Sanananda campaign drew towards finality, the commanders were again trying to find ways to cut the casualties, 'in discussions with Eichelberger and senior Australian Staff member, Berryman, the various alternatives were discussed. Berryman proposed that the Japanese be surrounded and pounded into submission by artillery fire until they were starved into abandoning their positions. When Eichelberger suggested that they attack again, Vasey walked out of the discussion claiming, 'that he would not be a party to further murder'.²⁴⁰ However, when they consulted the Australian commander at the front, Brigadier Wootten said that he would attack if ordered but, 'he did not believe that any results would be achieved commensurate with the losses'. Eichelberger supported the siege proposal at that time, saying to his superiors that the 'best plan would seem to be to surround the

²³⁷ AWM FILE, 419/10/2 Item 2/43.631 - Letter MacArthur to Blamey. 1/1/43

²³⁸ Horner. GENERAL VASEY'S WAR. P228

²³⁹ ibid, P222

²⁴⁰ ibid, P233

area and cut off all supplies, accompanied by plenty of mortar fire and constant harassing'.²⁴¹ It was about then that MacArthur issued a press release, announcing that the Sanananda actions were, 'limited to routine safety precautions'.²⁴²

Fortunately, the decision was made for the Allied commanders, because within a day or so, the Japanese suddenly abandoned all their positions at Sanananda. Except for mopping up minor pockets of resistance, the battle for the north coast was over and Eichelberger commented, 'we had our victory...'²⁴³, while 'MacArthur was glad that the terrible year of 1942 was ended.. [but] the bitter memory of Bataan and Corregidor still haunted him'.²⁴⁴

More importantly, it had been a terrible year for the Australian and American combat troops who had paid with death, injury and illness to gain MacArthur's victory in Papua.

²⁴¹ ibid, P233-4

²⁴² Shortal. FORGED BY FIRE. P64

²⁴³ Eichelberger. op cit, P81

²⁴⁴ Hunt. op cit, P295

CHAPTER FOUR
CONCLUSIONS AND THE FINAL OUTCOME

MacArthur, in his rush to gain a quick victory, had pushed his Australian and American commanders in Papua harder than prudence would have dictated. Schaller argues that, 'during the last few months of 1942 and into early 1943, MacArthur felt trapped in Australia and [Port Moresby] awaiting the outcome of the first offensive in New Guinea'.²⁴⁵ Willoughby excused the race for a quick result on the grounds that there was need for a victory to prevent some of the Allies from capitulating, 'the Allied world was starving for victory... morale was at its lowest ebb... the world needed a symbol of victory'.²⁴⁶ His only example is the contention that the Chinese were negotiating with the Japanese and the Germans were pushing to the Volga but those examples do not fit reality. By 23 November the Germans were surrounded at Stalingrad; Montgomery had won the battle of El Alamein on 4 November and on 8 November Americans had landed in North Africa; hardly scenarios for low morale.

As most attacks at Buna were made using only small arms, the consequent casualties for the attackers in near suicidal assaults were very high. Had there been sufficient time, artillery and bombing attacks could have been more extensively used to wear down the Japanese, as their food and ammunition stocks diminished. One veteran of the campaign suggested that 44 gallon drums of petrol could have been dropped and ignited, to breach bunkers and burn off the ground cover.²⁴⁷

After Buna fell, MacArthur moved his headquarters from Port Moresby back to Brisbane, with Carlyon theorising that 'he had no more need for the publicity of

²⁴⁵ Schaller. *op cit*, P74

²⁴⁶ Willoughby & Chamberlain. *op cit*, P88

²⁴⁷ Sgt Frank Rolleston (2/9 Bn) in conversation with the writer - 1996.

personal appearances in Papua-New Guinea'.²⁴⁸ Horner felt that the move was also to demonstrate, 'that the fighting was no longer a cause for concern and to ensure that the Joint Chiefs of Staff realised that he had obtained his victory while the troops on Guadalcanal were still preparing for their final offensive.'²⁴⁹ Eichelberger was scathing at the departure of his superior, 'the great hero went home without seeing Buna before, during or after the fight...'²⁵⁰ MacArthur claimed Buna as his victory, without mentioning the work of Eichelberger and his release of such announcements was noted by Wilkinson when he wrote that MacArthur has 'no regard for truth and is unaware of these defects'.²⁵¹ It is perhaps understandable that a commander might tell lies to deceive the enemy, as illustrated by his bombast in the Philippines but lies such as these, after a victory, can have no generous interpretations.

When Eichelberger returned to Australia, and the press finally had a chance to interview him, he received wide publicity and accolades. However, MacArthur was not pleased and Eichelberger later said, 'because of the publicity that came out about me after Buna... I paid through the nose for every line of it... he [MacArthur] didn't intend to have any figures rise up between him and his place in history'.²⁵²

The price of victory was very high casualties. A measure of the figures in Papua can be made by comparing them with Guadalcanal where 60,000 Americans suffered 1600 dead (3%) and total casualties of 5845 (10%).²⁵³ In Papua the Allies, whose front line troops numbered about 36,000, had deaths of 3095 (9%) and total casualties of 8546 (24%).²⁵⁴

²⁴⁸ Carlyon. *op cit*, P122

²⁴⁹ Horner *CRISIS OF COMMAND*. P257

²⁵⁰ Luvaas. *op cit*, P64 - Letter to Emmalina Eichelberger.

²⁵¹ Thorne. 'MacArthur, Australia & British.' *AUSTRALIAN OUTLOOK*. No29.Aug 1975. P206

²⁵² Luvaas. *op cit*, P65- Letter to Emmalina Eichelberger.

²⁵³ McCarthy. *op cit*, P529

²⁵⁴ Milner. *op cit*, P371-372

Eichelberger commenting on the losses in his command, said, 'the fatalities closely approach, by percentage, the heaviest losses in our own Civil War battles'.²⁵⁵ Sir Earle Page reported American and Australian losses at Buna-Gona as 'heavier in known dead than were those of the whole of the [Allied] Fifth Army in Italy [where they had] two months of incessant action against an entrenched and thoroughly armed and battle tested enemy'.²⁵⁶ However, despite the heavy losses at Buna, Willoughby was able to write later, 'the incomparable virtue of the MacArthur strategy is that it resulted in large territorial conquests... without involving any butchery of American troops... there is irrefutable evidence of the most careful husbanding of means, of a painfully meticulous attention to the saving of lives, which spelled immeasurable comfort to the mothers of...[the USA]... whose sons had a unique wartime chance to return home in one piece'.²⁵⁷

Recalling MacArthur's instructions to Harding to 'take Buna today at all costs', and similar orders, Willoughby's writing is shown to be revisionist in the extreme and he goes on, 'MacArthur did not want losses as a humanitarian... He protected his men to the utmost within the scope of human ingenuity...and appreciated the value of human lives...'.²⁵⁸ General Kenney wrote that 'every American life - Private to General, soldier or civilian - was something precious to be hoarded at all costs'.²⁵⁹ As Schaller points out, 'It is impossible to reconcile this description with the General's "win-or-die" order to Eichelberger'.²⁶⁰ MacArthur's personal pilot also wrote that, 'if those same detractors had had a less capable and casualty-sensitive commander, many of them would have been sacrificed needlessly in the war'.²⁶¹

²⁵⁵ Eichelberger. op cit, P71

²⁵⁶ PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES. Vol 177. P304-305

²⁵⁷ Willoughby & Chamberlain. op cit, P10

²⁵⁸ ibid, P10-11

²⁵⁹ Kenney. THE MACARTHUR I KNOW. P 263

²⁶⁰ Schaller. op cit, P72

The battle for Papua was a vital campaign as it denied the Japanese a base at Port Moresby from where they could raid northern Australia. The capture of Buna, provided MacArthur with a northern base from where his assaults on the Japanese could be launched. It was also a vital campaign for the Americans,' it was the battle test of a large hitherto-inexperienced U.S. Army force and its commanders, under the conditions which were to attend much of the fighting in the Pacific. Costly in casualties and suffering, it taught lessons that the Army had to learn if it was to cope with the Japanese under conditions of tropical warfare'.²⁶²

When Sanananda finally fell at the end of January 1943, MacArthur could be sure that he would not face defeat in Papua and his command of the SWPA was vindicated. Despite the victory, there were American troops who held MacArthur in contempt, and when months later, his face appeared on the screen in Rockhampton the image was loudly booed. ²⁶³

After the success at Buna, MacArthur also seems to have placated the need for hasty results and when War Correspondent George Johnson again saw him, 'he looked younger... his hair was black, his eyes alert, his step springy...There was no sign of early bitterness. He looked happy, he joked with correspondents, he answered every question they asked with frankness and, for him, a complete absence of theatricals'.²⁶⁴ One great benefit came out of the campaign - MacArthur never again incited such suicidal tactics. Mayo commented that, 'in retrospect, a great deal of the bloodshed appears to have been unnecessary. [but] If it served any purpose, it was an object lesson. General MacArthur... resolved never again to force

²⁶¹ Rhoades. FLYING MACARTHUR.P526

²⁶² Milner. op cit, Pix

²⁶³ Potts. YANKS. P76-77

²⁶⁴ Johnson. op cit, P90-91

"a head-on collision of the bloody grinding type" '.²⁶⁵ Willoughby wrote, 'MacArthur came up after the Buna victory with the decision that we need fight no more Bunas'.²⁶⁶ MacArthur added, 'it was the practical application of this system of warfare - to avoid the frontal attack with its terrible loss of life; to by-pass Japanese strong points and neutralize them by cutting their lines of supply; to thus isolate their armies and starve them on the battlefield... that from this time forward guided my movements and operations'.²⁶⁷

There is little doubt that MacArthur learned from the horror casualty rate in Papua. After Buna MacArthur conducted more than 80 landings from the sea, with far lower casualties. American military historian, Mark Watson, called them, 'ingenious and dazzling thrusts which never stopped until Japan was beaten down'.²⁶⁸ John Gunter wrote, 'MacArthur took more territory, with less loss of life, than any military commander since Darius the Great'.²⁶⁹ Schaller balances that accolade, saying of MacArthur, 'his wartime accomplishments were as much a testament to his public relations abilities as to his military skill'.²⁷⁰ And Milner, 'on the strategic level the victory in Papua had been a bitter anticlimax, partaking more of tragedy than of triumph... after six months of bitter fighting... the Southwest [sic] Pacific Area was exactly where it would have been the previous July had... [MacArthur] been able to secure the [Buna] beachhead before the Japanese got there'.²⁷¹

The figure of MacArthur remains a contradiction in military history. He was obviously a man of talent and bravery but lacking, in his later life, a proper capacity to understand the position of his commanders and men on the battle field. He was too

²⁶⁵ Mayo. BLOODY BUNA. P173

²⁶⁶ Willoughby & Chamberlain. op cit, P96

²⁶⁷ MacArthur. op cit, P166

²⁶⁸ Manchester. op cit, P255

²⁶⁹ ibid

²⁷⁰ Schaller. op cit, P6

absorbed in his own mental crisis of face-saving, maintenance of image and purging the 'Bataan guilt' to take advice, except from a select few. In consequence he did not lead his men properly and his mental stress resulted in irrational orders and decisions for which many Americans and Australians unnecessarily paid with their lives.

²⁷¹ Milner. op cit, P378

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