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THIRTEENTH AIR FORCE OPERATIONS

IN THE

WAR AGAINST JAPAN

PREPARED

BY

THE MILITARY ANALYSIS DIVISION

OF THE

U. S. STRATEGIC BOMBING SURVEY

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I. INTRODUCTION - MISSION OF THE THIRTEENTH AIR FORCE.

The war against the Japanese in the Pacific Area required perhaps a greater degree of coordination of land, sea and air forces than in any other area, for the war in the Pacific was essentially amphibious. Strong island bases had to be established from which air, sea and land offensives could be launched into enemy territory. To accomplish this required air and sea supremacy in the area.

The mission of the Thirteenth Air Force was to provide land based air power, in cooperation and coordination with the Fifth Air Force and Naval and Marine air units, in the air assault against the enemy from the Solomons through the Ryukus campaigns. Prior to its formation as an organized Air Force, as well as during its South Pacific days as the Thirteenth Air Force, operational control was vested in COMSOPAC, who was a Naval officer. During the SOPAC period, the Thirteenth was the air assault and supporting air force for the Navy, Naval and Marine air units, and Ground Forces.

After transfer to the SWPA, the Thirteenth came into its own and exercised operational control over its own units. In the initial part of this period its role was to support the Fifth Air Force as the Sixth Army drove up the New Guinea coast through Morotai and into Leyte. Air support was also furnished the Navy and Central Pacific Forces during this period. In the Visayan and Mindanao Campaigns, the Thirteenth was designated the Air Assault Force and worked in close coordination with the Eighth Army in securing the Central and Southern Philippines. During this period the Thirteenth continued to furnish support to the Fifth Air Force in the Luzon Campaign.

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The latter period of the war found the Thirteenth again in a supporting role, in this case the Australian Imperial Forces and the RAAF Command in the Borneo campaigns.

It also should be pointed out that throughout the entire war much effort was devoted to the continuing mission of sea search, sea blockade, and the destruction of enemy shipping within the air force area of responsibility.

The mission of the Thirteenth Air Force was to provide land-based air power in cooperation and coordination with the Fifth Air Force and Navy and Marine air units in the air war against the enemy from the Solomon through the Irian campaigns. Prior to the formation of the Thirteenth Air Force, a well-organized force was maintained in the Thirteenth Air Force, operational control was vested in COMTHIRTEENTH, who was a Naval officer. During the 1943 period, the Thirteenth was the air command and supervising air force for the Navy, Navy and Marine air units, and ground forces. After transfer to the AUSA, the Thirteenth came into its own and operational control was placed over the command. In the initial part of this period the role was to support the Fifth Air Force as the Sixth Army moved up the New Guinea coast through Morotai and into Leyte. Air support was also furnished the Navy and Marine forces during this period. In the Irian and Irian campaigns, the Thirteenth was assigned the air support force and worked in close coordination with the Fifth Army in securing the Central and Southern Irian. During this period the Thirteenth continued to furnish support to the Fifth Air Force in the Irian Campaign.

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II. ORIGINS OF THE THIRTEENTH AIR FORCE
(JANUARY, 1942 - JANUARY 1943)

A. ENEMY SITUATION IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC.

The initial success of the Japanese in the war had carried them well into the South Pacific before any Army Air Force units could be deployed in the area. The enemy had seized Rabaul in January 1942 and had begun developing it as a major base for operations in New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. By the end of March the Japanese had occupied the Shortland Islands off the southeastern tip of Bougainville. It was clear that unless the enemy advance to the southeast was halted, the Japanese would soon be in a position to isolate Australia from her American ally.

"As early as April 1942 the Combined Chiefs of Staff had agreed that American Forces should undertake a limited offensive in the South Pacific in order to prevent further Japanese encroachment upon vital supply lines to Australia. Mounting of the action had to await both the Navy's partial recovery from the blow at Pearl Harbor and the gradual assembly and organization of forces in the South Pacific".¹⁾ The scale of American effort until this time had been limited to establishing small garrisons on key islands along the supply route.

While the American striking force was being formed, the Japanese penetrated the lower Solomons with landings at Tulagi and Guadalcanal. "Finally, on 7 August, land, sea, and air forces launched the first American amphibious operation of the war by invading enemy-held territory in the lower Solomon Islands. Both initial operations and the more arduous task of holding the bases seized were largely the work of

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1.) "Army Air Forces in the War Against Japan 1941-1942", published by Hq AAF Wash. D.C. 1945, p.118.

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U.S. Navy and Marine Forces. But certain units of the Army Air Forces, though small in number and not organized as a separate air force, participated in the entire action and shared with the Marine and Navy forces the dangers and discomforts of Guadalcanal, the operational difficulties of the South Pacific, and the morale-corroding experience of fighting under primitive conditions." 2.)

B. U.S. ORGANIZATION - SOUTH PACIFIC AREA.

"All U.S. air, ground, and naval forces in the South Pacific Area and certain New Zealand units were placed under the command of Vice Adm. Robert L. Ghormley. One week before the opening of the Guadalcanal offensive, Maj. Gen. Millard F. Harmon arrived to assume command of U.S. Army Forces in the area. His chief of staff was Brig. Gen. Nathan F. Twining, also an airman. In line with the principle of unity of command, however, the area commander retained operational control of all forces, and a naval commander under Admiral Chormley controlled operations of all land-based aircraft. Procedures were established for coordination of effort among the widely scattered bases and between bases and task forces at sea. The outline for both organizational and operational procedures received the approval of Admiral Ghormley and General Harmon on 4 August." 3.)

C. ARMY AIR FORCE UNITS IN SOUTH PACIFIC.

Prior to the preparations for the campaign in the lower Solomons, the Army Air Forces had assigned two medium bombardment squadrons and three fighter squadrons to the South Pacific to assist small Army garrison forces in the defense of the island stepping-stones to Australia.

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2.) ibid - p.118

3.) ibid - p.122

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The 70th Fighter Squadron arrived in the Fiji Islands from the U.S. in late January 1942. The 67th Fighter Squadron reached New Caledonia two months later via Australia. The 68th Fighter Squadron did not arrive in Tongatabu until May after spending more than two months in Australia.

The ground echelons of the 69th and 70th Medium Bombardment Squadron left Australia in May 1942 for New Caledonia and the Fiji Islands respectively. The flying echelons had not completed their training in the United States at the time, and were further delayed in Hawaii by the Battle of Midway in June, not reaching the theater until June and July.

No heavy bombardment units were available for assignment to the South Pacific area during this period because of AAF commitments in other theaters. Because of the obvious need for long range reconnaissance and bombing, the 11th Bombardment Group in Hawaii and the 19th Bombardment Group in Australia were designated mobile units to be moved to any point in the South Pacific in case of an emergency. During the last week of July 1942, the 11th Bombardment Group arrived in the South Pacific to participate in the lower Solomons campaign.

Thus, at the time the American offensive was launched against the Japanese at Guadalcanal and Tulagi, the AAF had only one heavy bombardment group, two medium bombardment squadrons, and three fighter squadrons in the entire South Pacific. Because of the severity of the lower Solomons campaign, AAF South Pacific was authorized to divert temporarily bombers and crew enroute to the Southwest Pacific, pro-

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vided they could be used more efficiently in the South Pacific. At the same time, Admiral Nimitz was given authority to transfer units from the Seventh Air Force to the South Pacific. A slight increase in fighter strength was authorized.

No time was lost in utilizing the authority to augment AAF combat strength in the South Pacific. In the fall of 1942, the 347th Fighter Group was formed to include the three fighter squadrons in the theater, the 67th, 68th, and 70th, and the newly activated 339th. Before the end of the year, the 5th Bombardment Group and the 12th and 44th Fighter Squadrons of the Seventh Air Force had been assigned to AAF South Pacific and were actually operating in the area.

The following table shows the AAF tactical units operating in the South Pacific during 1942 which were assigned to the Thirteenth Air Force shortly after its activation:

UNIT	TYPE AIRCRAFT
11th Bombardment Group (H)	B - 17
26th Bombardment Sq.	"
42d "	"
98th "	"
431st "	"
5th Bombardment Group (H)	
23d Bombardment Sq.	"
31st "	"
72d "	"
394th "	"
69th Bombardment Sq. (M)	B - 26
70th Bombardment Sq. (M)	"
347th Fighter Group	
67th Fighter Sq.	P-400 (export model
68th " "	P-40 of P-39)
70th " "	P-39
339th " "	P-38
12th Fighter Sq.	P-39
44th Fighter Sq.	P-40
13th Troop Carrier Sq. 4.)	C-47

4.) Operated during Lower Solomons Campaign with two Marine Transport Squadrons.

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D. ARMY AIR FORCE OPERATIONS IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC.

Prior to the Guadalcanal offensive AAF units in the South Pacific were employed in a purely defensive role. Their principal mission in this connection was sea search in order to prevent any surprise attacks against the key bases along the shipping route to Australia. No enemy bases were within range of the medium bombers and fighters then based in the area.

It was not until the 11th Bombardment Group arrived in the South Pacific in July 1942 that the AAF could engage in offensive operations. These were launched under the most trying conditions immediately after the arrival of the group. Even before the arrival of ground crews the group was flying 710 nautical miles from Efate on search and photographic missions over the Tulaga-Guadalcanal-Gavuta area.

Before the Marine landings at Guadalcanal and Tulagi, the 11th Group was designated a task force which was to hit the landing areas with maximum force from 31 July through 6 August and to continue its normal reconnaissance activity. During the period the group flew 56 bombing sorties and 22 reconnaissance missions. After 1 August the planes were able to return to base via the new field at Espiritu Santo. The group command post was moved to Espiritu Santo soon after the field became operational. Because of limited facilities at forward bases at Efate and Espiritu Santo, a considerable part of the aircraft strength had to be dispersed on fields in New Caledonia and in the Fiji Islands. Daily search missions were flown from all bases.

Between the pre-landing assault on Tulagi and Guadalcanal, in August, and mid-November 1942, when Henderson Field became available

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for heavy bomber operations, the group mission was primarily reconnaissance of sea areas. With the exception of occasional strikes against enemy bases, bombing missions were limited to enemy surface units that came within range. A notable target of this type presented itself on 24 August when a large Japanese task force, in an attempt to retake Guadalcanal, was defeated in the Battle of the Eastern Solomons. The 11th Group participated in this battle with Navy and Marine aircraft and with surface units.

After moving to Henderson Field the group range was extended to the northernmost Solomons, thus facilitating attacks against a number of important enemy bases, such as Munda, Shortland-Faisi, Kahili, and Buka. A further increase in our heavy bomber operations from Guadalcanal was subsequently made possible by the construction of two additional bomber strips near Koli Point about 10 miles east of Henderson Field.

Units of the 5th Bombardment Group had begun moving into the South Pacific in September 1942. Their operations followed the pattern of the 11th Group, being limited for the most part to sea-search until they were moved to Guadalcanal, within effective range of the enemy bases.

Only two AAF fighter squadrons participated in the Guadalcanal operation during 1942. On 22 August 1942, five P-400's of the 67th Fighter Squadron arrived at Henderson Field after a long over-water flight from New Caledonia via Efate and Espiritu Santo. After the arrival of the ground echelon and nine more P-400's, the squadron joined the Marines in the defense of the island. Because of the low ceiling

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of the P-400's, the mission of the squadron was soon changed from interception to close coordination in support of Marine troops, where its work proved invaluable. As in the case of the 11th Bombardment Group, the operational difficulties of the squadron during the early days were almost insurmountable.

In November 1942, the 339th Fighter Squadron began operating with P-38's from Fighter One, a new strip just east of Henderson Field. Its primary mission at that time, as well as that of all available aircraft, was to stop the "Tokyo Express", fast naval vessels which attempted to reinforce and supply Guadalcanal at night. Although the crisis in the Guadalcanal operation came toward the end of October when the enemy was driven back after his major land assault against Henderson Field and was forced to withdraw a battered naval force from the Battle of Santa Cruz Islands, the "Express" continued to run but never again was able to land enough forces to threaten our hold on the island.

The only other AAF unit to take an active part in the lower Solomons campaign during this period was the 13th Troop Carrier Squadron, which, with two Marine transport squadrons, began to haul aviation gasoline to Henderson Field during the critical period in October 1942. The operation enabled the few aircraft that had survived the shellfire from the "Express" to fight back against what appeared to be overwhelming odds.

E. PRINCIPAL OPERATIONAL PROBLEMS.

Before the end of 1942, enough experience and operational data had been gained to permit an assessment of AAF employment and achievements in the South Pacific. Since the heavy bombers composed the major

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portion of the striking force their record was of primary concern. The B-17 had been proved a remarkable plane, particularly successful in engagements with enemy aircraft. Our heavy bombers, usually escorted and out-numbered, had destroyed 124 and damaged 57 out of 610 planes of all types contacted. Only 6 B-17's were lost in combat. There were, however, 12 operational losses during the period.

Considerable problems concerning the employment of the B-17 were apparent. By far the major portion of the heavy bombardment effort had been devoted to reconnaissance, which reduced appreciably the effect of the striking force, as revealed in a study of results of attacks against surface ships. In October, General Harmon recommended that 25 percent of heavy-bomber effort be limited to reconnaissance, and that the major effort be devoted to important objectives lying beyond the range of other types of aircraft or to important surface targets in force at all ranges.

Originally it had been assumed that the PBY's would carry out search missions, but the vulnerability of the slow Catalina rendered it much less reliable than the B-17. They were frequently shot down in attempting to contact Japanese carrier forces or when flying near bases defended by fighters. Since the information brought back by the search planes was absolutely vital to the theater commander and could be obtained in no other way, the reconnaissance burden of the heavy bombardment units was not relieved until 1943 when the PB4Y's (Navy model of B-24) reached the theater.

Inadequate airdrome facilities at Espiritu Santo also limited the effectiveness of the heavy bombers. Primitive living conditions impaired our crew efficiency and the crowded, small airdromes not only

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limited the number of aircraft in forward areas, but, because of the time required to take-off from such fields, limited the number of planes that could participate in a mission. Rapid development of fields for heavy bombers at Guadalcanal was urged in order that more planes could be put in the air as well as to bring important enemy bases within range.

By December 1942 the airdrome situation was somewhat improved, with heavy bombers operating from Henderson Field and another bomber field under construction at Koli Point.

The P-38 was by far the best AAF fighter in the theater, but because of the low priority of the theater, only one squadron was equipped with them at the time.

A further operational problem during 1942 was one of many that arose from the command organization in the theater. The Navy Commander of all aircraft was based in Espiritu Santo, whereas General Harmon, as commander of all Army units in the theater, had to remain in Noumea with the theater commander, Admiral Halsey, who had succeeded Admiral Ghomley in October. In November 1942 General Harmon recommended the activation of an air force in the theater to the Chief of Staff, U.S. Army, saying in part, "It is impossible for me as Commander of all Army Forces to exercise directly the command responsibility of air units that is required and necessary to insure their preparedness, proper distribution and accomplishment of operations to the extent of which I am responsible." 5.)

It was his plan that the new air force commander should open a headquarters near COMAIRSOPAC where he would be in a position to ad-

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5.) Letter, Harmon to Marshall, 29 Nov 42.

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wise and coordinate plans of COMAIR for operational employment of AAF aircraft.

F. BIRTH OF THE THIRTEENTH AIR FORCE.

On 5 December 1942, Gen. Marshall advised Gen. Harmon by dispatch that AAF units in the South Pacific were designated the Thirteenth Air Force. A War Department letter, dated 14 December, authorized activation of the Thirteenth Air Force with a headquarters and headquarters squadron, as well as a bomber and fighter command. A subsequent letter, dated 4 January 1943, specified tables of organization to be used. Because of the wide dispersion of air units and the control exercised by local island commanders, command responsibilities of the bomber and fighter commands would be restricted. For this reason reduced tables of organization were recommended for them by Gen. Harmon. These were deleted entirely in the last letter, but were to be approved by the War Department, if warranted by a change in the tactical situation. All personnel had to come from sources already under control of COMGEN-SOPAC, and no replacements were authorized, a restriction which no doubt was for the purpose of holding down strength in the area to that already committed by the Combined Chiefs of Staff.

"It was not clear what the new air force could accomplish. Its establishment in no way altered the basic pattern of operational control of aircraft in the South Pacific, which remained as before with COMAIRSOPAC. For the present, ... the Thirteenth's control over operations must remain upon an advisory basis, dependent in a large part upon the relations between its Commanding General and COMAIRSOPAC." 6.)

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6.) "Guadalcanal and the Origins of the Thirteenth Air Force".
AAF Historical Studies; No. 35, p.90

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III. THIRTEENTH AIR FORCE IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC.
(JANUARY 1943 - JANUARY 1944).

A. ACTIVATION.

The Thirteenth Air Force was activated 13 January 1943. Brigadier General Nathan F. Twining, relieved as Gen. Harmon's Chief of Staff, assumed command the same day and immediately established headquarters at Espiritu Santo adjacent to the headquarters of Vice Admiral Aubrey W. Fitch, COMAIRSOPAC. Although both AAF tactical and service units in the theater were assigned to the Thirteenth Air Force, it had operational control of neither. COMAIRSOPAC had operational control of all land based aircraft and the island commanders retained control of service units in their areas. By mid-1943 the XIII Air Service Command was activated and all service units were assigned to it. The Thirteenth Air Force, however, did not gain operational control over its tactical units until a year later when it was moved to the Southwest Pacific as part of the Far East Air Forces.

B. CHANGES IN AIR ORGANIZATION IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC.

Air organization in the South Pacific underwent a gradual change during late 1942 and 1943. In December 1942, the Senior Naval Aviator on Guadalcanal, Brig. Gen. Francis P. Mulcahy, USMC, exercised direct control over aircraft of all services bases on the island in addition to his normal function of Commander, Second Marine Aircraft Wing. He was responsible only to COMAIRSOPAC.

With the growth of air strength in the forward area, this organization apparently proved unsatisfactory. During February Rear Admiral Charles P. Mason, with a small staff, assumed command of all aircraft on the island. This headquarters was known as Air Command, Solomons, or by the abbreviated title of COMAIRSOLS. The new organization de-

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pended initially upon the staff of the Second Marine Air Wing in Texe-
cuting its mission, but later it developed a more independent struc-
ture which included representatives of the AAF, Navy and Marines.

By mid-1943 it was decided that the command should be rotated
among AAF, Navy and Marine officers. Thus, two commanding generals
of the Thirteenth became COMAIRSOLS and exercised operational control
of all land based aircraft in the Solomons, with the exception of those
engaged in sea search which remained under direct control of COMAIRSOPAC,
who remained the senior air commander in the area. Whenever COMAIRSOLS
changed hands, enough of the old staff was retained to insure contin-
uity of command.

The task of welding the conglomerate force of AAF, Navy, Marine
and Royal New Zealand Air Force into a smoothly functioning organiza-
tion was not an easy one. There were problems of supply, administra-
tion, and of combat technique. COMAIRSOLS was not the ideal type of
command but represented a compromise which was a vast improvement over
the initial organization, in which the staff was entirely Navy. The
important fact is that the command worked well, the spirit of cooper-
ation among the services improved markedly, and a more efficient em-
ployment of all types of aircraft was undoubtedly achieved.

C. THIRTEENTH AIR FORCE OPERATIONS PRIOR TO NEW GEORGIA CAMPAIGN.

Organized enemy resistance on Guadalcanal came to an end 9 Feb-
ruary 1943. Despite our maximum air effort, the Japanese managed to
evacuate a large part of their remaining forces on Guadalcanal during
the first week in February.

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The enemy reaction to the loss of Guadalcanal was the rapid development of new and heavy defenses in the Northern Solomons. It was evident from the Japanese air strength in the Solomons and Bismarcks that the enemy contemplated more than defensive warfare. While continuing to strengthen their positions in the middle and upper Solomons they did their best to retard our development of Guadalcanal. Large scale enemy air attacks against our installations on the island and shipping off-shore continued until the middle of the year.

One of the largest raids came on 7 April when 50 Japanese bombers escorted by 48 fighters made a night attack on shipping off Guadalcanal. The enemy lost 37 planes to Allied fighters in the attempt. The P-38's proved their worth as high altitude night fighters when four of them shot down seven of 11 zeros contacted at 35,000 feet.

In June the enemy brought his offensive against Guadalcanal to an end with three large scale raids. The enemy withdrew from each of these with heavy losses. On 7 June, he lost 23 planes, on 12 June 25, and in the climatic raid on 16 June when he sent over about 120 fighters and bombers, he lost 77 to Allied fighters and seven more to anti-aircraft fire. During the last raid the fighters of the Thirteenth Air Force gave a particularly good account of themselves, shooting down 39 enemy planes while losing only one of the 43 planes they had in the air.

While the war of attrition took place over Guadalcanal, COMAIRSOLS conducted an offensive against Japanese bases in the Solomons. The newest and southernmost of these were Munda airfield on New Georgia and Vila airdrome on nearby Kolombangara. Allied bombers spearheaded by the heavies of the Thirteenth Air Force concentrated on these fields in such force that by the end of March the Japanese discontinued basing aircraft there. Fortunately the enemy had been caught in the middle

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Solomons before he could build up important bases. His maximum air strength at Vila and Munda was estimated as 35 planes in February. It was necessary to continue surveillance and occasionally to bomb the New Georgia airfields, however, until their capture.

The major bombing effort after March was directed against upper Solomons fields at Kahili and Ballale and other installations in the Bougainville - Shortland area. Attacks on these objectives had begun in the latter part of 1942 with the 11th Bombardment Group strike on Kahili in November. The bombing effort was now intensified in preparation for the coming offensive thrust into New Georgia. In May and June, 182 tons of bombs were dropped on Bougainville-Shortland targets almost entirely by heavy bombers.

On 21 February 1943, our ground forces landed in the Russell Islands a short distance west of Guadalcanal. Work was immediately begun on two airfields, suitable for fighters and light bombers, both of which were in operation by the middle of the year.

During February 1943, the 11th Bombardment Group had been returned to Hawaii and replaced by two squadrons of the 307th Bombardment Group, equipped with B-24's. In June, two more squadrons of the 307th and two additional medium bombardment squadrons reached the theater. The latter, with two medium squadrons already present, formed the 42d Bombardment Group. During the first half of 1943, medium bombardment squadrons gradually were able to replace their B-26's with B-25's, a more suitable aircraft for the theater.

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D. NEW GEORGIA OPERATIONS

Obviously the goal of the South Pacific forces was a drive through the Solomons to Rabaul, the keystone of Japanese strength in the South and Southwest Pacific. Originally Allied war plans contemplated the taking of Rabaul in a combined operation of South and Southwest Pacific forces. It was not until later, after Rabaul had been neutralized from the air by South Pacific forces, that it was decided to by-pass it.

Each phase in the drive northwestward was dictated by the need for additional air bases in order to place our striking force within range of the enemy's gradually retreating air power. The first step after the completion of the Guadalcanal campaign and establishing air bases in the Russell Islands was the invasion of New Georgia.

The campaign began on 30 June 1943 with a landing on Rendova Island preparing the way for the seizure of the Jap airbase at Munda. The Thirteenth Air Force effort was greater than ever before in its history. The tonnage of bombs dropped in July was greater than that dropped during the entire four months proceeding. Its principal target was the important Japanese airbase at Kahili on Bougainville, where the enemy had managed to maintain an air strength of approximately 100 planes. Vila, Munda and Ballale were also hit during the period. The operation ended on 5 August 1943 with the capture of Munda airdrome. In addition to denying the enemy the use of its airdromes, the Thirteenth Air Force destroyed 66 Japanese planes, sank an enemy cruiser and destroyer, six cargo ships and two other vessels during the period.

E. EMPRESS AUGUSTA BAY OPERATION

Immediately after the capture of Munda all Allied aircraft in the South Pacific were employed in paving the way for the Empress Augusta Bay landing on 1 November 1943. Gen. Twining had become COMAIRSOLS on 25 July 1943, the first army officer to hold this important post. When his tour, an eventful one, ended on 19 November, we had established ourselves at Empress Augusta Bay.

The major air mission was the neutralization of enemy air strength in the northern Solomons, which was based principally at Buka, Kahili and Ballale. Gen. Harmer had believed in September that this could not be accomplished by the South and Southwest Pacific Air Forces from fields which they then occupied. The task was accomplished, however, because of the rapid development of airfields in the Munda area and the efforts of Gen. Twining. On the day of the landing all Japanese fields in the northern Solomons were unserviceable and enemy aircraft strength in the area had dwindled from 130 planes at the beginning of October to 31. By 13 November no enemy aircraft were sighted on enemy bases in the area.

By early October the 17th Fighter Squadron was based at Munda, the 70th at nearby Ondonga, the 69th, 75th and 390th Bombardment Squadrons (M) were in the Russell Islands, and the 44th Fighter Squadron at Guadalcanal. The strength of the 5th and 307th Bombardment Groups (H) was divided between Guadalcanal and Espiritu Santo. During September and October alone, aircraft of the Thirteenth Air Force dropped 1800 tons of bombs on targets in Bougainville.

The landings on Bougainville had been preceded by landings in the

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Treasury Islands, south of Bougainville, on 27 October. Airfields at both Stirling Island in the Treasury Group and Torokina on Bougainville would permit fighter cover for the projected campaign to reduce Rabaul. Torokina fighter strip was completed and ready for operations on 10 December 1943, while Stirling Field did not become operational until early in January the following year.

F. RABAUl OPERATION.

Rabaul had been hit repeatedly throughout the greater part of 1942 and 1943 by the Fifth Air Force. On Armistice Day 1943, the Thirteenth joined the Fifth Air Force and Navy carrier planes in an attack against shipping in Rabaul harbor. But for the Thirteenth and COMAIRSOIS, the Rabaul campaign did not begin in earnest until late in December 1943.

Rabaul was by far the strongest and most important Japanese base in the Southwest Pacific. According to Navy estimates, 400,000 tons of shipping went in and out of this harbor in December 1943. Throughout the Solomons Campaign it had served as the rear base for the Japanese air strength, which had reached a peak of 367 planes by the end of August 1943.

From 23 December until the end of March Thirteenth Air Force B-24's, B-25's and P-28's with all other aircraft at the disposal of COMAIRSOIS, conducted an all-out offensive against the Rabaul area. The Japanese defended fiercely, pouring in fighter aircraft as the campaign progressed. It must have been soon apparent to the enemy that he was losing his aircraft and pilots at a faster rate than he could afford. Nevertheless, he refused to withdraw from the battle

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until the American carrier strike at Truk, during mid-February, forced him to reinforce against the threat there. Between 19 February and the end of the month, most of the remaining air strength was withdrawn to Truk. The few aircraft left at Rabaul rarely attempted an interception. Thus, it may be said that the aerial battle of Rabaul had come to an end by the last of February 1944. During the battle COMAIRSOLS aircraft destroyed 705 enemy planes, of which 266 were shot down by the Thirteenth Air Force. A larger proportion of the enemy planes were destroyed by Navy, Marine and Royal New Zealand Air Force planes, which provided most of the fighter cover.

The enemy used his best Navy pilots and aircraft in his attempt to stop the American advance through the Solomons. In the battle of attrition that followed the Japanese lost heavily. According to statements of Japanese Naval Officers after the war the high rate of loss of experienced pilots in the Solomons and over Rabaul weakened their Navy and Air Force more than any other operation of the war.

In the first 3 months of 1944, the Thirteenth Air Force, under the command of Major General Hubert R. Harmon since 7 January, dropped nearly 5,000 tons of high explosives on the Rabaul area. The five airfields bore the brunt of the attack, but supply areas, shipping installations and the town itself were also hard hit. More than 640 tons were dropped on targets in New Ireland, principally the airdrome at Berpop, and approximately 34 tons were dropped on shipping in New Britain and New Ireland waters.

The attacks on Rabaul and New Ireland during this period aided

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the Allied invasion of Green Island on 15 February and the Admiralty Islands on 29 February, both of which soon were to be built into important air bases.

With Rabaul neutralized, the Thirteenth's heavies turned their attention to targets in the Caroline Islands, leaving the medium bombers and fighters, together with other COMAIRSOIS planes to continue the neutralization of Rabaul.

In August 1943 the Thirteenth Air Force introduced a new weapon into the war. At that time the first LAB B-24 (low altitude bomber) flew an anti-shipping mission in the South Pacific. This aircraft was equipped with a new type radar which enabled accurate bombing of ships from low altitudes at night, even under instrument conditions. "The Snoopers", as these planes became known, were eminently successful. Prior to the introduction of the LAB B-24, the Japanese had been able to make fast shipping runs at night to their Solomon bases with relative safety. They lost a number of destroyers and other fast vessels to the "Snoopers" before they realized that night traffic had been closed to them also. Later the "Snoopers" played an important part in the isolation of Rabaul by preventing fast shipping runs into the harbor at night. Eventually enough LAB B-24's reached the theater to form the 868th Bombardment Squadron. Further achievements of the unit in the Southwest Pacific are covered in following sections of this report.

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IV. GAINING APPROACHES TO THE PHILIPPINES.

A. THE CAROLINES.

With the neutralization of the Rabaul and Kavieng area, the Thirteenth Air Force was prepared to enter upon a new phase of operations. It would help secure positions in New Guinea and the Netherland Indies from which Allied Forces could launch an attack directly against the Philippines. Before turning, however, to assault Japanese positions in New Guinea and the Netherland Indies, the Thirteenth took part in the Central Pacific campaign. Participation in the Central Pacific campaign served two main purposes: to aid the offensives in the Carolines and Marianas, and to neutralize the outer ring of islands protecting the western defenses of the Philippines.

Truk, Woleai, Yap and the Palau Islands, in the Carolines, were key bases in the outer ring flanking the approaches to Japan and the Philippines. All were vital shipping and supply centers. Still more significant, they formed links in an aerial chain connecting the Philippines, the Marianas and the Marshalls, a chain that gave Japanese airpower great flexibility and mobility in meeting Allied thrusts against the outer defenses of the Empire. Truk and Palau were perhaps the most important links in the vast Central Pacific.

The attacks on the Carolines were not uncoordinated blows in an aerial war of attrition, but part of a master plan of combined operations. They took place in a number of fairly well defined series, each of which had a different tactical purpose.

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Large scale attacks on the Carolines began in the closing days of March. The Thirteenth flew in support of Admiral Mitscher's "Task Force 58", which was steaming into position to hit Palau, while its carrier planes covered Yap, Woleai and Ulithi Islands. The job of the Thirteenth was to neutralize Truk, to prevent the Japanese from using air power to strike the Navy Task Force from the east. The Thirteenth worked with the Seventh, which hit Truk at night. Reconnaissance over the Truk Group on the 29th and 30th of March disclosed a total of 130 airplanes on Eton and Moen islands and in adjacent waters.

The first strike against Truk, on 29 March, was one of the most successful missions ever performed by the Thirteenth. It was the first land-based, daylight attack on this powerful enemy stronghold. It was the longest flight so far undertaken by the Air Force; the bombers flew, without fighter escort, nearly 1000 statute miles to the target, requiring 13½ hours for the round trip.

The Liberators of the 307th Bombardment Group (H), flying from Munda and from Guadalcanal, and staging through Green Island, delivered a heavy blow against the Japanese naval base. They scored 200 direct hits on the target area. Thirty-seven struck the concrete runway, rendering it unserviceable. Twenty-one hangars, shop buildings and warehouses were destroyed or severely damaged. The Japanese lost at least 80 planes: 49 enemy planes were destroyed on the ground; and in a bitter 45 minute fight with an estimated 75 enemy fighters, 31 were shot down in the air, 12 probably destroyed, and 10 damaged.

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The strikes against Truk continued over a period of 5 days, from 29 March to 2 April; the 307th and 5th Groups destroyed 130 planes in the Truk area, virtually the entire air garrison at this key base. While the 307th and a number of "Snoopers" from the 868th Bombardment Squadron hit Truk through the greater part of April, the 5th moved up to Momote airfield in Los Negros, in the Admiralties, to get within range of new targets in order to drive deeper into the enemy defensive ring. The 5th Group, which was later joined by the 307th, travelled approximately 1000 miles from its Solomon Island base to reach its new home.

No advance was more significant tactically than the move to the Admiralties. Not only did the new base afford almost complete control of the Bismarck Sea and the approach to Rabaul, Kavieng and the northeastern coast of New Guinea; it also brought the entire Caroline chain, Western New Guinea, and adjacent islands within range of heavy bombers. The Thirteenth Air Task Force was organized, under the command of Major General St. Clair Streett, to direct the heavies of the Thirteenth, which were to cooperate with Fifth Air Force, RAAF, and 7th Fleet Naval Air Units, that were permanently based at Cape Gloucester, New Britain, and the Admiralties, to strike blows in the new areas.

The 5th Group, at Los Negros, was now in position to aid General MacArthur's advance in New Guinea. Amphibious landings were scheduled at Hollandia and Aitape on the 22nd April. The 5th was assigned the task of knocking out Wabai, 690 miles northwest of Los Negros, in order to

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order to protect the northern flank of the Navy Task Force, which was supporting the landings. From Woleai Japanese search planes could watch the movements of the Task Force, and enemy fighters and bombers could harass it.

In a devastating series of bombings, from 18 April to 1 May, Woleai was leveled. 242 Liberators dropped 140 tons on the island. On two occasions the Fifth fought their way through 40-45 enemy interceptors, leaving a trail of 20 sure kills and 5 probables, while witnessing the destruction of 6 more planes on the ground. So complete was the reduction of Woleai that the Fifth Group received a presidential citation for the operation; thus the score was evened with their competitor, the 307th Group, which received a presidential citation for the attack on Truk. Concentrated attacks on the Carolines were discontinued until the end of May.

B. BIAK.

Although Hollandia was taken at almost no cost, and constituted a considerable advance along the coast of New Guinea, providing fighter cover for the next moves into enemy territory, there was insufficient space in the area for heavy bomber strips. It was necessary to seize advance operational bases of the enemy, in order to forward the drive to neutralize the southern approaches to the Philippines. Allied landings were made, in May, on Wakde and on Biak islands, off the northern coast of New Guinea.

Biak, in the Schouten Islands, was a key base in a chain of enemy airfields that extended from the Philippines through the Moluccas,

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Schoutens, and down the northern coast of New Guinea. After the neutralization of the strong Japanese air base at Wewak, and the capture of Hollandia, the enemy made every effort to hold Biak. In the spring, the bases were being rushed to completion and the garrison was strongly reinforced. By the time of the Allied invasion, one airstrip had been completed and two were nearing completion. With Biak in Allied hands, bomber and fighter coverage could be extended still further over the areas of Western New Guinea, the Moluccas, and the Celebes.

The Thirteenth Air Task Force, whose main striking power consisted of the 5th and 307th Bombardment Groups (H) and the 686th Bombardment Squadron (H), was assigned the task of softening up the defenses of Biak preparatory to invasion. Commencing 4 May and continuing until D-Day, the 27 May, the Task Force's Liberators, operating from their newly acquired bases on Los Negros in the Admiralties, some 800 statute miles away, began the systematic destruction of the islands defenses. Approximately 1500 tons were dropped on Japanese installations. Mokmer, the principal strip at Biak, was hit first, then bivouac and supply areas became the target. Finally, bombing was concentrated on Bosnek town and the beach defenses; on D-Day, the assault was pressed until 3 minutes before the first wave of the 41st Division struck the beach.

Fifth Air Force fighters, based at Hollandia, escorted the Thirteenth's Liberators for several days after they ran into enemy interceptors on the first two strikes, and the Fifth's bombers joined in the D-Day assault. But the Thirteenth was primarily the assault air

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force, with the Fifth playing a supporting role.

C. THE CAROLINES (CONT'D).

After the Biak landings, the heavies turned their attention back to the Carolines. This time their objective was to aid in the invasion of Saipan, which was to take place on 15 June. The Saipan operation was perhaps the most important yet undertaken in the Pacific. Air Bases on Saipan would bring Tokyo within range of the Superfortress for the first time.

The Thirteenth supported the Saipan operation by carrying out a series of strikes against Truk and Yap. From 28 May until 19 June, the main blows fell on Truk, principally on the Dublon supply and bivouac areas and on the air installations of Eten island. A large Japanese Task Force, estimated at 40 or more ships, was sighted some distance North of Yap on the 19th of the month. While a long range aerial duel took place between this task force and our "Task Force 58", which was also supporting the Saipan operation, the Thirteenth's Liberators were directed to attack any Japanese warships that might seek fuel or refuge in Yap Harbor.

Flying 1,023 miles, further than they had ever flown before, the heavies were over Yap on the 22nd of June in search of warships. Finding none, they cut loose their bombs over Yap airdrome with devastating effect. The Japanese, caught completely by surprise, lost 19 planes on the ground and the runway was thoroughly post-holed. The Liberators made the long haul back to Yap each day for the next 6 days to pound the airdrome and the town, and to round out the third series of attacks on the Carolines.

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In this series of strikes against Truk and Yap, from 28 May until 28 June, the Thirteenth Air Force dropped more than 1600 tons of high explosives. This third series cost the Japanese nearly as heavily in aircraft as did the first attacks on Truk. Liberator gunners claimed 90 enemy fighters destroyed, 1 probably destroyed, and 19 damaged in aerial combat, while bombardiers accounted for 21 aircraft of various types destroyed on the ground and 15 damaged. The Liberators did not escape unscathed. Thirteen were lost and 100 were damaged.

D. FROM THE SOUTH PACIFIC TO S.W.P.A.

While the third series of attacks against the Carolines was underway, the most far-reaching changes took place in the command relationships and organization of the Thirteenth Air Force since its activation. The Air Force was transferred, 15 June 1944, from the jurisdiction of the South Pacific Commander, Admiral Halsey, to that of the Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, General MacArthur. The Air Force was transferred from the United States Army Forces in the South Pacific Area, USAFISPA, to the United States Army Forces in the Far East, USAFFE. It was assigned to the newly created Far East Air Forces, and placed under the ultimate operational control of Allied Air Forces, SWPA.

The Thirteenth Air Task Force was dissolved on the same date, and Air Force Headquarters obtained immediate operational control of its heavy bombardment units stationed in the Admiralties. Thus,

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the Headquarters ceased to be purely administrative, and, for the first time in its history, became operational as well. Operational control of the Air Forces' medium bombers and fighters, however, did not come under the Thirteenth until 30 September 1944; at this time, 15 June, it passed from COMAIRSOLS TO COMAIRNORSOLS, who in turn was under the operational control of Allied Air Forces, SWPA. But these were not the only changes. The Air Force lost the 13th Air Depot Group, which was the only Depot Group it possessed, on 15 June 1944, to the Far East Air Service Command. No longer would the Thirteenth, through its XIII Air Service Command, requisition technical supplies.

These far-reaching changes brought with them a new Commanding General for the Air Force. Major General St. Clair Streett, replaced Major General Hubert R. Harmon, on 7 June 1944; General Harmon returned to the United States to become Commanding General of the Personnel Distribution Command.

E. NOENFOOR.

Combat operations continued smoothly throughout the period of transition. Following the third series of attacks on the Carolines, the Thirteenth turned its attention to Noenfoor for a brief interlude. With Noenfoor's 3 major airfields in Allied hands, a greater concentration of bombers could be used in support of the Philippine drive, and strategic Japanese oil resources in East Borneo could be brought within range of B-24s.

Softened up by a considerable number of bombings by the Fifth

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Air Force, the Thirteenth took part in a two day assault on 30 June and 1 July dropping 120 tons on Noemfoor, helping to prepare the way for invasion. Allied amphibious forces landed on the island 2 July to clear the way for the movement of Thirteenth Air Force bombers to Noemfoor in September.

F. THE CAROLINES (CONT'D).

Following the attack on Noemfoor, the heavies again concentrated effort on Yap. This fourth series of attacks on the Carolines was in support of the Allied return to Guam on 20 July, and the invasion of Tinian in the Marianas three days later. Beginning on 3 July and continuing daily, except for 3 days, until 23 July, 385 heavies hit Yap with 543 tons.

Yap lies within 525 statute miles of Guam and 300 of Palau. By successfully bombing the airstrip, while at the same time destroying supplies in Yap, the heavies could cut one of the normal routes of supplies and of aircraft between Guam and Palau that the Japanese needed to support their troops in the Marianas.

The Japanese made a determined effort to defend Yap. Between bombings they labored long and hard to smooth the cratered runways. Each day, until near the end of the series, 15 to 25 eager interceptors were in the air. During the 20 day period, the unescorted Liberators destroyed 45 enemy fighters, probably destroyed 12 and damaged 23. Four Liberators were lost to air and ground fire, while 77 suffered various degrees of damage. The Yap series ended when the Liberators yielded the target to a carrier task force.

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The heavies struck out again at Yap from 2 to 10 August, to carry out a fifth series in the Carolines, cascading 250 tons on the already battered island. Following the last strike on Yap, the flight echelons of both the 5th and 307th Bombardment Groups began leaving Los Negros for a new base at Wakde, off the North Central coast of New Guinea, to place them in a better position to support the invasions of the Palau Islands and Morotai, which were to take place in September.

Support of the Palau Islands operation was given priority. The Palaus were no longer the powerful base that they had been, nevertheless, the Palaus in enemy hands constituted a serious threat to Allied invasion of the Philippines. The Palau Islands in Allied hands could serve as a stepping stone to the Philippines, as a base for heavy bombers, and as a strong Allied naval base.

While the 5th and 307th were on the move, the 868th "Snoopers" reached out more than 1,100 miles from Los Negros to hit the Palaus in nightly 2-plane attacks. On 25 August, the Liberators at Wakde were ready for operations. From 25 August to 5 September, the Wakde-based Liberators dropped 725 tons on the Palau Island targets in daylight attacks.

Interception was encountered on the first day only, when 8 enemy fighters succeeded in downing 1 Liberator while losing 2 of their own number. Ack-ack damaged approximately 10% of the 371 Liberators making the attacks. Some were damaged by a new type of shell that exploded and shot out phosphorous streamers over a wide area.

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On 6 September a carrier task force moved in to do the final softening up for the invasion on 15 September, and the Thirteenth's Liberators were released for operations against other targets.

During the entire Carolines campaign, from the first raid on Truk, 29 March 1944, through the last raid on Palau, 5 September 1944, the Thirteenth Air Force rained more than 4,800 tons of high explosives on Truk, Woleai, Yap, the Palau Islands, and lesser targets in the Carolines, in more than 2600 sorties. Vital installations in Truk, Woleai, and Yap were left as little more than burned-out ruins, while the Palau Islands, which had been blasted by the Fifth Air Force as well were ripe for invasion.

These were not bases to be yielded without a struggle. Japanese anti-aircraft gunners sent up curtains of flak; more often than not skilled enemy pilots attacked the unescorted Liberators with machine gun-fire and with phosphorous bombs. In aerial combat, Thirteenth Air Force Liberator gunners shot more than 250 enemy fighters from the Carolines' skies. On the ground, 70 planes of all types were destroyed.

G. OPERATIONS OF UNITS REMAINING IN SOPAC.

Since late March when the heavies began to strike new targets in the Carolines, Thirteenth Air Force fighters and medium bombers, together with other Solomons-based Allied planes, had continued to hit virtually the same targets that they had been hitting in January, February and March.

The Rabaul airfields remained a potential threat so long as the enemy retained the will to repair them. Day after day, through April

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May, June and into July, the fighters and mediums kept these fields under attack to assure their continued neutralization. Supply areas, anti-aircraft, and other installations in the Rabaul area were also hit. In the four months period, targets in the Rabaul area were hit with more than 2960 tons by the mediums and fighters. Liberator crews in training with the XIII Bomber Command Training Center added 302 tons to the destruction visited on the Rabaul area.

The Rabaul skies, once the scene of bitter aerial engagements, were clear of enemy fighters as our fighters, medium and heavy bombers went about their task of destruction. Concentrations of ack-ack, however, reduced numerically from the earlier period but still to be reckoned with, remained in the area.

In the Bougainville-Buka area, the fighters and mediums dropped more than 1,050 tons of bombs from April through July, with Liberator crews in training adding another 50 tons. Fighters accounted for more than 750 tons. Supply and personnel areas were hardest hit with Buka, Bonis and Kahili airfields receiving minor attention.

By July, the Rabaul and Bougainville-Buka targets had reached the point of diminishing returns. The fighting days of the mediums and fighters in the Solomons had come to an end. As amphibious forces went into Sansapor on 30 July, ground personnel of the medium and fighter groups were on their way out of the Solomons, bound for Sansapor. The fighters and mediums were not to see action again until the end of August.

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H. TYPHOON TASK FORCE. (WESTERN NEW GUINEA)

The final operation of the New Guinea Campaign was implemented on 30 July 1944, when the Sixth Army went ashore near Cape Sansapor in the Vogelkop and on Middleburg and Amsterdam Islands adjacent off shore. Brigadier General Earl W. Barnes, Commanding General of the XIII Fighter Command, was designated commander of a newly created XIII Air Task Force which was the Assault Air Force for this operation. This force was commonly known as the "Typhoon Task Force" and was comprised of the 18th and 347th Fighter Groups, a flight of the 419th Night Fighter Squadron, and the 42nd Medium Bombardment Group.

By the end of August, both fighters groups were operational at the new bases of Middleburg Island and another airdrome on the mainland, and by the 14 of September the medium bombers were in action. As soon as these units moved into action they assumed the mission of supporting the Fifth Air Force in the Morotai Operation, scheduled for 15 September, by neutralizing enemy airdromes in Western New Guinea, Ceram, Boeroe, Kai and Halmahera Islands to furnish protection to the left flank of the advance. In this task the Typhoon Task Force was aided by the 5th and 307th Heavy Bomb Groups based at Wakde and Noemfoor beginning 7 September and continuing until the 22nd when they commenced preparation to make a series of "all-out" strikes against strategic petroleum targets in East Borneo. The units of the Typhoon Task Force continued their mission against enemy airdromes, and as these targets became neutralized shifted their offensive to shipping in the Banda-Ceram-Moluccas-Halmahera Sea areas.

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I. BALIKPAPAN.

In a relatively small area near Balikpapan, Dutch Borneo, huge industrial installations for refining crude oil with a yearly capacity of 7,000,000 barrels were located. It was a chief source of Japanese aviation high octane gasoline and lubricants. Also as a direct result of the heavy toll exacted from enemy shipping during the past six months this area had become an important storage center for aviation gasoline and essential miscellaneous by-products. It was of great importance that this highly strategic target be reduced before the beginning of the Philippine campaign.

The Thirteenth Air Force was assigned the task of destruction of this target. Aided by Fifth Air Force heavies, the heavies of the 5th and 307th Bombardment Groups ran a series of five major strikes against this target during the period of 30 September to 18 October 1944.

Planning for these strikes posed a ticklish problem. The distance from the point of take-off (Noemfoor) to the target area is roughly 1080 nautical miles. Such a distance had never been flown by B-24s on a combat mission in this theater. Considered by itself the length of flight was not an obstacle, but it became one if a bomb load of 2500 pounds or more was to be carried. Furthermore, enemy interceptors were to be expected not only over the target but from some point near the Celebes, several hundred miles from the objective which involved the problem of weight of adequate gunnery ammunition. Decision was made to fuel each aircraft with 3590 gallons of gasoline, load with 2500

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pounds of bombs and 60% normal ammunition. This resulted in an average gross weight of 68,000 pounds.

The first two strikes on 30 September and 3 October were unescorted. Enemy resistance was aggressive and prolonged with from 35 to 70 enemy fighter rising to intercept the raids in running battles lasting 45 minutes to an hour. While bombing results were excellent, the strikes were costly, since four B-24's were lost on the first mission and seven on the second. Of these, five were lost due to enemy aircraft and three to heavy, intense and accurate antiaircraft fire, while three were lost due to a combination of E/A and A/A.

Such losses necessitated fighter escort which involved a flight of 2000 miles, but in spite of this problem, the remaining three strikes were covered by Thirteenth and Fifth Air Force fighters operating from Sansapor and Morotai, without further loss to the heavy bombers and with excellent bombing results. Thirteenth Air Force fighters accounted for two enemy fighters destroyed, one probably destroyed and one damaged. Thirteenth Air Force Bombers shot down 30 fighters, got five probables and damaged three. In the effective reduction of this important target, the Thirteenth put 209 heavy bombers over the target to drop a total of 262 tons of bombs.

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V. PHILIPPINE AND BORNEO CAMPAIGNS

A. SUPPORT OF LEYTE AND MINDORO CAMPAIGNS

On 20 October, General Krueger's Sixth Army landed on the sandy beaches of Leyte, and the campaign for the liberation of the Philippines began. The Thirteenth gave support to the Fifth Air Force with the primary mission of striking land targets in the Philippine Archipelago, reaching as far north as Manila. The familiar doctrine of denying the enemy his air power by destruction of hostile airfields was continued. Two days after the landings on Leyte, Thirteenth Liberators flew their first strike in support of ground action on Leyte, hitting Lahug Airdrome on Cebu Island. During the month of November, Thirteenth heavies pounded enemy airdromes in the Central Philippine islands hitting installation at Negros, Cebu, Mactan and Palawan.

The Liberators of the Thirteenth, which flew their early strikes into the Central Philippines, were based at Noemfoor, although they staged through Morotai to hit their distant objectives. Missions from Noemfoor and Morotai were long and arduous. With still longer ones in view, such as strikes to the Manila area, the entire Bomber Command moved, in early November, to Morotai where they were joined by the 18th Fighter Group from Sansapor.

Flying cover for the Liberators, as well as flying separate sweeps over the Philippines, the P-38 pilots of the 18th Group for the first time in months found Japanese fighter planes in the skies. The fighter pilots ran up an impressive score of victories. The Japanese were using Ormoc on Leyte's west coast as their main port of supply to reinforce their troops on Leyte. During November and December, the P-38's

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struck hard at Japanese shipping in Ormoc Bay and surrounding waters, sinking troop laden transports and escort warships by low-level bombing and strafing attacks. In the month of November alone, approximately 208,200 tons of Japanese shipping were either sunk or damaged by Thirteenth bombers and fighters in the Philippines and Dutch Indies waters.

The ground war in the Philippines quickened with the landing on Mindoro Island, 15 December. During December, Thirteenth Air Force Liberators met the pace by dropping the greatest tonnage of explosives to date, and by flying a record number of strike sorties. The most vital target hit in support of the Mindoro landing was Puerto Princess, Palawan, which was the connecting link between Japanese airpower in Borneo and Asia and in the Central Philippines. Strikes by Liberators and Lightnings of the Thirteenth against Palawan again made it impossible for enemy aircraft based in the Netherlands East Indies and southeastern Asia to reinforce the declining Japanese air strength in the Philippines.

B. REDUCTION OF ENEMY BASES CONSTITUTING THREAT TO MOROTAI

Preliminary blows, in September, by B-24's of the Fifth and Thirteenth had knocked out important targets in the Halmahera-Celebes area. The job of keeping airstrips in this area neutralized, while the heavies shifted to Philippine targets, was given to the 42nd Medium Bomb Group and the 18th and 347th Fighter Groups of the Thirteenth Air Task Force. Flying from their Sansapor bases, the B-25's and P-38's struck continually at enemy airdromes and installations in the Ceram, Ambon, Boerce, Halmahera, and Celebes Islands, fire-bombing supply

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areas, knocking out scores of enemy planes on the ground, and keeping runways unserviceable by continual bombings. By denying the Japanese use of their Netherlands Indies airstrips, they were prevented from replenishing their dwindling Philippine air power by ferrying planes through from the Indies and Asiatic bases.

The Sanspor force, however, was not sufficient to neutralize completely all of the Indies bases from which the enemy was staging night bombing raids on Morotai; therefore, the Nip forced the 13th to divert occasionally its heavy bombers from the Philippines to the Celebes and Moluccas in order to obviate the threat to the home base at Morotai. By the end of 1944, Japanese bases had been reduced to such an extent that the enemy could no longer launch effective raids against Morotai.

C. SEA SEARCH AND ANTI-SHIPING OPERATIONS

In addition to hitting land targets in the Netherlands Indies, fighters, mediums, and heavies swept the waters of Makassar Strait and the Banda, Ceram, Molucca, and Sulu Seas on shipping searches, from September 1944 through February 1945. The landings on Leyte and later on Mindoro sliced the Japanese Philippine Empire in two. Communications, however, between the by-passed troops in the Netherlands Indies were still possible. It was found that the enemy was attempting both to supply the Indies by small ships and to evacuate high ranking personnel and specialist troops with the scores of luggers, barges, sailboats and occasionally small freighters.

Planes of the Thirteenth Air Task Force concentrated their attacks on these small Japanese ships during October and November, and blasted

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them from the seas. Prior to December, 1944, the "Snoopers" of the 868th Bombardment Squadron (H) had been assigned the task of carrying out shipping searches along the Borneo coasts. The B-24's operated as single search raiders, ferreting out enemy radar stations, searching for shipping, and bombing targets at night by special radar bombsights. When searches were negative, the "Snoopers" dropped their bombs on northeast Borneo oil targets. By the end of the year, enemy shipping in the Ambon-Ceram-Celebes area had disappeared.

D. NEUTRALIZATION OF LUTONG

The "Snoopers" shifted their sights in December; they turned from shipping targets to concentrate on the Lutong Oil installations in Borneo. With Balikpapan neutralized, the Japanese routed their shipping around Brunei Bay in northwestern Borneo, to load oil from the Lutong Refineries at Sarawak, which were second only to Balikpapan as a source of petroleum. The task of sealing off Lutong was assigned to the "Snoopers" of the 868th Bomb Squadron. In a series of daring raids, Lutong was so effectively neutralized that thereafter little enemy shipping was found carrying oil north from Borneo.

E. SEA BLOCKADE

During the Philippine campaign, blockade of the Sulu Sea by squadrons of the Thirteenth was second in importance only to hitting land targets in the Philippines. In the war against Japanese naval power, Thirteenth Liberators were able on two different occasions to bring major units of the Japanese fleet under attack. On October 26, six days after the landing on Leyte, 27 heavies of the 307th Bomb Group took off from New Moor to strike at a Japanese naval task force in the Sulu

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Sea. Twelve ships were sighted; all were naval vessels, three of which were battleships. The Liberators chose a battleship of the Kongo Class and a battleship of the Yamato Class as their targets. Swinging into a wall of intense anti-aircraft fire, the B-24's made their runs on the targets. Bombs bracketed both battleships while the ships engaged in violent evasive maneuvers. Direct hits were scored on both heavy vessels. This was the first time in the Southwest Pacific theatre that heavy bombardment squadrons had taken under attack major units of the enemy battle fleet deployed in battle formation. On the same day, 19 Liberators of the 5th Group attacked a Kuma-Natori Class cruiser in the Sulu Sea. Four direct hits were scored, sinking the enemy ship.

The 5th and 307th Groups teamed up again, on 16 November, to attack another major Japanese task force at Brunei Bay, Borneo. This force consisted of fourteen naval ships including three battleships and two heavy cruisers. In spite of heavy damage done to the Liberators by the intense anti-aircraft barrage sent up by the ships, a heavy cruiser was sunk, and a heavy cruiser was damaged, while direct hits were made on a battleship.

F. SUPPORT OF LUZON CAMPAIGN

By the end of 1944, Japanese air power in the Central Philippines had been crushed. In January 1945, a huge American task force steamed toward Lingayen Gulf to establish the first beach-head on Luzon. Heavies of the Thirteenth greeted the new year by striking into the heart of the Manila defensive ring. Nichols and Nielson fields were heavily blasted, during the first week of January, with fragmentation bombs to knock out

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grounded enemy planes and to destroy maintenance facilities. After the Lingayen landing on 9 January, Thirteenth Liberators shifted their targets to Japanese troop bivouac areas near Manila. Strikes of the Thirteenth in the Manila area effectively aided in paralyzing the movement of enemy reinforcements, which were to be sent against American ground forces speeding toward the city from the north.

Lightnings of the 18th Group landed at Lingayen, on 16th January. The 18th was the first American fighter group to land on Luzon since the fall of Bataan. Operating temporarily under the control of the Fifth Air Force, the 18th Group struck hammer-like blows against the enemy by dive bombing and strafing his bivouac and supply areas, his transportation facilities, and his barges which were endeavoring to reinforce southern Luzon by sea.

Toward the end of January the heavies bombed the Cavite Naval Base and historic Corregidor in Manila Bay. It was necessary to neutralize these installations, which had been destroyed in December 1941 and January 1942 and rebuilt by the Japanese in the months that followed, before Manila Bay could serve as a useful harbor for Allied shipping. American ground troops entered Manila on 4 February to take the city that American troops had been forced to evacuate three years before. The liberation of Manila, however, did not mark the end of the Philippine Campaign; it was merely the completion of a phase.

G. AIR ASSAULT FORCE - VISAYAN AND MINDANAO CAMPAIGNS

The Thirteenth was now ready to support the Eighth Army in its campaigns to liberate the by-passed islands of the Central and Southern Philippines. To lead the Thirteenth in its new role, as Assault Air Force for the Eighth Army, a new commander was appointed in Feb-

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ruary 1945. Brigadier (now Major) General Paul B. Wurtsmith replaced Major General St. Clair Streett, who returned to the United States.

The next objective in the Philippines was Palawan. After a heavy pounding by Thirteenth Air Force planes, Palawan was quickly secured by troops of the Eighth Army on 28 February. The Thirteenth then turned to furnish air support for the liberation of Zamboanga on the southwestern tip of Mindanao. Enemy fortifications, gun emplacements, barracks, and supply and ammunition dumps were destroyed. Elements of the Eighth Army landed on Mindanao on 10th of March and quickly captured Zamboanga. The island of Sanga Sanga in the Tawi Tawi group was seized soon after for the purpose of establishing an airstrip there to protect our southern flank, and in order to provide an advance base from which to strike Borneo.

With the center of activity shifting to the Southern Philippines and Borneo, the Fighter Command and the 347th Fighter Group, together with the medium bombers of the 42nd, shifted the hub of their activities to Palawan immediately following the landing at the end of February. The 18th Group returned to the operational control of the Thirteenth Air Force, and after a brief period of activity at Mindoro moved to Zamboanga, Mindanao. From these strategically commanding positions at Zamboanga and Palawan, the fighters and mediums were prepared to strike as necessary at targets in the central and southern islands of the Philippine Archipelago in support of the Eighth Army.

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With the passing of peak operations and with the decline in the air war in the Philippines, changes in the deployment of heavy groups took place within the Thirteenth Air Force. The 5th Group moved from Morotai in the Moluccas to Samar in the Philippines in March, while the 307th Group remained at Morotai. Both heavy groups, however, flew against targets on Mindanao in March. With its mission in Mindanao completed by the end of March, the 307th Group turned to its next assignment; to soften up targets in Borneo prior to invasion by the Australian Imperial Forces.

The Thirteenth provided Air support for the Eighth Army landings which took place in quick succession on Panay, Negros, Cebu and on many smaller islands in the Visayan group. By the 17th of April, the only major centers of Japanese resistance remaining in the Philippines within

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range of the Thirteenth Air Force were on Mindanao. Initial landings on Mindanao were made in the Cotobato-Malabang-Parang area. With the close of May, the Eighth Army had taken the key town of Davao and landed at vital points on Mindanao's north and west coasts. Marine air units consisting of two fighter groups and one dive bomb group operated under the Thirteenth from bases at Zamboanga and Malabang and provided a large share of close air support in the Mindanao campaign.

During the entire Visayan-Mindanao Campaign, the Thirteenth served as Air Assault Force in support of fifteen amphibious landings. The Thirteenth provided the pre-assault softening up, cover for Naval convoys, close support for the ground forces on the beachheads and as they fought their way inland, and battle area fighter cover.

H. BORNEO

As the requirement for strong air power in the Philippines diminished toward the close of the Mindanao Campaign, the Thirteenth turned to its next major task; support of the Australian Imperial Forces and the Royal Australian Air Force in the Borneo Campaign. In the period April-July 1945, major amphibious landings were made at Tarakan in NE Borneo, Brunei Bay in NW Borneo, and Balikpapan in East Borneo. Since the objective area lay largely beyond the range of aircraft of the RAAF, the task of furnishing air support fell to the Thirteenth. Utilizing fighters based at Palawan, Zamboanga, and Sanga Sanga, mediums at Palawan, and heavier at Samar and Morotai, the Thirteenth flew pre-assault softening-up strikes, covered numerous convoys in the South China, Sulu and Celebes Seas and battle area fighter cover at the objective areas,

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and provided close support for the ground forces.

In the Balikpapan operation, two things were noteworthy: one, the B-25's of the 42nd Bombardment group operated over the objective area for a period of a month from Puerto Princessa, Palawan, 740 nautical miles distant from Balikpapan carrying an average bomb load of 2,000 pounds; two, Morotai based B-24's were used as air alert close support-- an innovation for heavy bombardment. This was necessitated by the fact that the Tarakan strip was not operational as planned and the nearest available medium bomber operational strip was too distant to permit B-25 aircraft to remain over the target area as required.

In support of the Australians in these three operations, the Thirteenth flew a total of 5052 sorties and dropped 7225 tons of bombs.

I. LONG RANGE FLYING

In the period of the Borneo Campaign during times of light operations, the Thirteenth extended its striking power to include distant targets in Malaya, Indo-China, the China coast and Java. These flights eclipsed even the earlier record-breaking Balikpapan flights from Noemfoor. Three particularly noteworthy flights are cited as examples.

Ten B-24 "Snoopers" of the 868th Bomb Squadron struck Soerabaja, Java, on 7 May, flying a total distance of 2660 statute miles, one of the longest flights ever made by B-24 aircraft in combat formation. This flight broke the previous record of the Thirteenth, which had been made in the strikes against Balikpapan, Borneo. Seven "Snoopers" shattered their own record soon after by flying a strike against Batavia, Java; on 3 June 1945, they flew 18 hours 40 minutes from Palawan to Batavia and return to cover a distance of over 3000 statute miles. A

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measure of success was achieved in both strikes against Java; in each case, the Japanese were taken by surprise and shipping in the harbors was left either sunk or damaged.

P-38's of the 347th Fighter Group on 25 July performed one of the longest flights ever flown by fighter aircraft. Escorting photo reconnaissance planes to Singapore, eight p-38's flew from Palawan to Singapore to Labuan in northwest Borneo, traveling a distance of approximately 2100 statute miles.

J. THE CLOSE OF THE WAR

By the end of July 1945, the Thirteenth Air Force was beginning to move to Okinawa; indeed, one of its bombardment squadrons was establishing its position in the Japanese island to initiate the next major phase. The 868th Bomb Squadron spearheaded the movement to Okinawa; by 8 August, the "Snoopers" were flying strikes from Yontan airfield, Okinawa. From this base, the Thirteenth Air Force made its most northerly penetration of the disintegrating Japanese Empire. "Snoopers" on armed shipping searches, harassing missions, and weather reconnaissance flights flew as far as Genzan in Korea and carried out a heckling mission over Japan's Kyushu Island.

The close ground support given the Eighth Army by the Air Force in the Philippines was excellent training for the types of missions that the Thirteenth expected to fly in the final stages of the war. In August 1945, at the time the Japanese agreed to surrender under the Potsdam terms, plans had been formed for a great amphibious operation which would land the Sixth and Tenth Armies on the Japanese home island of

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Kyushu sometime in November. Thirteenth bombers and fighters were to operate from Kyushu as soon after D-Day as airfields could be built by the engineers.

The Thirteenth was to be reorganized as a Tactical Air Force with two Tactical Air Commands operating under it and was to be increased in size almost four-fold by June of 1946. Units were to be equipped with the latest fighters, strafers (medium bombers) and heavies which were to spearhead attacks against the Japanese from bases on their own homeland. The Thirteenth was preparing to aid in the final death-dealing blows against the Nips when the atom bomb and Russian entry into the war precipitated Japanese surrender.

APPENDICES
(Charts)

Chart I Area of Operations During World War II - Air Bases of the Thirteenth A. F. and of the Enemy.

Chart II Tonnage of Bombs Dropped, Principal Target Areas - plus route travelled by Air Force Headquarters.

Chart III Destruction of Enemy Shipping - Sunk, Probably Sunk, and Damaged.

Chart IV U. S. and Enemy Aircraft Combat Losses - U. S. Losses due to Enemy Action and Enemy Losses "In the Air".

Chart V U. S. Aircraft Losses, Combat and Operational.

Note:

The Tabulating Service Section of the U. S. Strategic Bombing Survey compiled the greater part of the data presented in the charts and tables. In order to complete some of the statistical series, however, it was necessary to supplement reports of the Tabulating Service Section with data compiled by the 25th Statistical Control Unit of the Thirteenth Air Force.

APPENDICES
(Tables)

Table I Operational Statistics - by month for Fighter, Heavy and Medium Bomber Aircraft showing successful sorties flown, bomb tonnage dropped and ammo expended.

Table II U. S. Aircraft Statistics - by months for Fighter, Heavy and Medium Bomber Aircraft showing:

Aver No Aircraft Assigned
Aver No Aircraft Operational
Hours per Aircraft Assigned
Hours per Aircraft Operational

Table III Combat Crew Statistics - by month for Fighters, Heavy and Medium Bomber Aircraft showing:

Aver No Crews Assigned
Hours per Crews Assigned
Combat Crew Losses

Table IV Distribution of Bomb Tonnage by Type Target.

Table V Bomb Tonnage by Type Target by Type Bomb.

Table VI Special L A B Statistics - Complete insofar as possible showing:

Aver No Crews Assigned
Aver No Aircraft Assigned
Bomb Tonnage Dropped
Hours per Crews Assigned
Hours per Aircraft Assigned
U. S. Aircraft Losses
Destruction of Enemy Shipping

APPENDICES (Continued)

(Tables)

Table VII Photo Recon Statistics - Complete insofar as possible showing:

Aver No Aircraft Assigned
Aver No Aircraft Operational
Hours per Aircraft Assigned
Hours per Aircraft Operational
U. S. Aircraft Losses
Aver No Crews Assigned
Hours per Crews Assigned
Crew Losses
Successful Sorties Flown

Table VIII 403rd Troop Carrier Statistics - Complete insofar as possible showing:

Aver No Aircraft Assigned
Aver No Aircraft Operational
Hours per Aircraft Assigned
Hours per Aircraft Operational
U. S. Aircraft Losses
Aver No Crews Assigned
Hours per crews Assigned
Crew Losses
Sorties Flown
Tons of Freight Flown
Personnel Carried

Table I

(DRAFT) THIRTEENTH AIR FORCE
OPERATIONAL STATISTICS

(13 Jan 43 thru 31 Aug 45)

Year & Month	Successful Sorties Flown by Type A/C		Bomb Tonnage Dropped on Targets	Ammo Expended	
	Ftrs	Hvy Bombers		Mach Gun	Cannon & Rockets
<u>1943</u>					
Jan	257	87	78	184	-
Feb	2	16	29	126	-
Mar	291	65	15	39	66 50
Apr	1865	80	19	59	749 1000
May	1701	188	56	149	271 290
June	1564	254	174	190	843 190
July	2697	549	295	778	2772 50
Aug	1593	428	436	531	1940 60
Sept	1662	425	323	567	2758 80
Oct	1659	475	209	1237	2972 550
Nov	2694	625	426	1782	6799 1370
Dec	1919	494	607	1614	4166 1500
<u>1944</u>					
Jan	1683	436	337	1062	3350 830
Feb	1627	578	476	2604	2321 900
Mar	1754	670	734	2909	4655 1350
Apr	1146	468	729	1986	3665 840
May	2382	976	670	3571	5350 1650
June	1508	818	637	2976	8383 960
July	278	702	386	1575	6986 90
Aug	451	482	2	834	789 220
Sept	1954	697	599	2502	3450 2030
Oct	1809	435	823	1568	5565 1930
Nov	1482	970	1098	3461	6345 2070
Dec	1438	1175	1154	3857	13485 2250
<u>1945</u>					
Jan	1689	1361	651	3328	14388 2540
Feb	1491	1159	254	3122	6799 1390
Mar	1777	1487	544	4530	11441 2760
Apr	2054	1395	414	4399	12272 4900
May	2074	1196	802	3679	21199 6150
June	2180	1461	722	4014	20786 3073
July	1364	808	559	2278	13470 2785
Aug	440	402	142	1106	4765 2321

Source: U.S.S.B.S. Tabulating Service Section.

THIRTEENTH AIR FORCE
 DISTRIBUTION OF BOMB TONNAGE
by Type Target

Table IV

<u>Targets</u>	<u>Bomb Tonnage</u>
Cities Urban Areas	6846
Public Utilities	168
Government Buildings	35
Misc. Mfg. Plants	145
Mines, Coal, etc.	17
Oil Refineries	278
Oil Storage	446
Communication Facilities	473
Airfields	25916
Tactical Targets	15587
Unidentified	10395
Not Classified	<u>348</u>
Total.....	62617

Source: U.S.S.B.S. Tabulating Service Section