Chapter 1
Japan in the Pacific War and New Guinea
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Many Japanese view the Second World War as a conflict between Japan and the US that began at Pearl Harbor. There is a tendency to downplay the significance of the actual role of Australia in the war. However, the battles fought in New Guinea and surrounding areas were conducted between Japan and US–Australian allied forces. The role of Australian forces in these battles far exceeds the general Japanese understanding of the events.

Of the three battles in the Pacific War which resulted in the great loss of Japanese life, namely those in New Guinea, Burma and the Philippines, surprisingly it is New Guinea that is of least interest in Japan. This apathy suggests that there has been no steady research into the reasons for the campaigns in New Guinea, why it was so miserable, or how it related to the passage of the war in general. It is a fact that, aside from Professor Kondo Shinji, there has been no research in Japan into these issues. To the best of my knowledge, there has never been an academic conference held in Japan on the topic of the war in New Guinea. Consequently, the opening of the *Remembering the war in New Guinea* symposium, with Japanese researchers and their esteemed Australian colleagues, was perhaps a bold undertaking. It is to be hoped it will stimulate more interest in the war in New Guinea amongst the Japanese.

For all intents and purposes Japan began the war in 1937 against China and pursued Chiang Kai-shek’s Chinese army southward. Since the middle of the 19th century, the southern Chinese region surrounding Yanzi Jiang had been the centre of interest for foreign powers. There were concerns that conflict with the West would arise if Japan approached this region. At that time the US and England clearly indicated a position of aid for China and began to supply materiel to Chiang Kai-shek. In order to cut off these supply routes, the Japanese army gradually penetrated southward into French Indo-China, resulting in increased American opposition. US and Japanese trade relations, which were the lifeline of the Japanese economy, were severed, leaving in turmoil both the supply of iron and oil, essential for war preparations, and the importation of other raw materials.
Japan, isolated and cornered, plunged headlong into conflict with America, England, and the Netherlands in December 1941 as a means of procuring essential raw materials. The Malay Peninsula and Indonesia were rich in crude oil, bauxite, nickel, iron ore, tin and rubber, and for this reason were termed the “southern resource belt.” The initial policy was to secure these regions as colonies, then seek peace and an end to the war.

According to Japanese naval strategic planning from about 1930 a weakened US Navy would retreat to Hawaii after initial engagements. There they would regroup before mounting an offensive against the Philippines. The Japanese navy planned to mount repeated raids en route, thus provoking the weakened US fleet into a decisive battle in the vicinity of the Philippines. It would be a triumph as decisive as the victory in the Japan Sea during the Russo-Japanese War. Even after the emergence of the new plan to occupy the southern resource belt, there was little alteration to the existing strategic plan.

It is no exaggeration to say that the development of the war, apart from the main engagements in the Philippines, was unexpected for both Japan and the US. The main reason for this unexpected outcome was that General MacArthur escaped from the Philippines not to Hawaii, but to Brisbane in Australia, and used the region (including New Zealand) as a strategic base to wage his counter-offensive. Japan, expecting the American forces to return to Hawaii, had not considered facing an attack from a US–Australian allied force based in Australia.

The significance of this unexpected turn of events was that Japan lacked information on the geography, politics, economy and military strength of the region. This basic lack of vital information was illustrated in 1942 by the difficulties faced by Vice Admiral Nagumo’s task force attacking Darwin using nautical charts of the Arafura Sea without depth markings. The Japanese navy, which was based on Truk Island, held a deep interest in New Guinea and the Solomons. Surveys of water passages and the topography of New Guinea and the surrounding islands had been conducted by the Naval Hydrographic Office from 1933–38 using foreign publications and charts. They published numerous volumes outlining weather conditions, ocean currents, water depth and coastal terrain. These, however, did not comment on internal social or economic conditions. The army, on the other hand, had hastily conducted surveys just prior to the outbreak of war, on the ability of the southern resource belt to provide resources for military materiel. However, it appears that these surveys did not include New Guinea. In any case, maps captured

近藤新治氏以来、これらの問題について本格的に研究してこなかったのが現実である。私が知る限り、日本国内でニューギニア戦に関する研究が行われたことはなく、したがって日本の研究者が、多くのすぐれた研究成果を上げてきたオーストラリアの研究者とともにシンポジウムを開催するのに冒険かもしれない。しかしこれを機会に、日本でもニューギニア戦に対する関心が高まることを大いに期待している。

1937年、日本は中国で本格的戦争を開始し、蒋介石が指揮する中国軍を追って南下した。揚子江を中心とする中国南部地域には、19世紀前半以来、イギリスをはじめとする欧米列強の影響が集中しており、日本軍がこの地域に接近すれば、欧米列強との衝突も懸念された。この際から米英両国は中国支援の態度を鮮明にし、軍需品の補給に乗乗出したので、日本軍は蒋介石援助ルートの阻断のためさらに南下し、結果的にフランスの植民地であるベトナムに進出させざるを得なくなった。このためとくにアメリカとの対立が深まり、日本経済の生命線であった日米通商関係が悪化し、戦争継続に不可欠な鉄鋼や石油をはじめとする重要資源の輸入が困難になった。

逆に強められた日本は、1941年12月、アメリカ、イギリス、オランダ等との新たな戦争に突入した。開戦の直後の動きは戦争に必要な資源の獲得にあり、目標とする地域は、石油、ボーキサイト、ニッケル、鉄鉱石、銅、ゴムなどの豊富なマレー半島及びインドネシア方面で、この方面は「南方資源地区」と呼べた。これらの方面を占領したのに、和平の余裕を見つけて、戦争の終結をはかるのが当初の方針だった。

1930年頃から日本軍が立てていた作戦計画では、初期の間間で劣勢に立たれた米軍がハワイまで後退し、そこで態勢を立て直して、フィリピン方面に向って進攻してくるであろう。そして日本軍は、途中で乗り返し米艦隊に攻撃を加えて弱体化させ、フィリピン近海にいたところで決戦を挑み、日露戦争における日本海戦のような決定的勝利を収める、というシナリオを描いていた。「南方資源地区」の占領という新しい計画が登場しても、従来の作戦計画に大きな変更はなかったものである。

戦争の展開は、フィリピンが主戦場となった以外、あとはすべて予想外のものであったといって過言ではない、たぶんアメリカにとあっても、予想外だったはずである。予想外になった最大の原因は、日本軍の攻撃を受けた MMPラジオが、フィリピンからハワイでなく、オーストラリアのブリスベンに脱出し、ニュージーランドを含むこの方面を反攻作戦の拠点にしたことにあった。日本にしてみれば、ハワイの方角から来襲するはずのアメリカ軍が、オーストラリアで態勢を立て直し、米軍連合軍を編成して反撃に出てくるのは考えてもみない展開であった。

予想外ということは、この方面の地誌に関する知識、政治経済や軍事に関する情報を
from the Dutch and Australian armies, and maps drawn from reconnaissance photographs provided some understanding of local conditions.

Local maps demonstrate that occupying New Guinea and the Solomons was necessary in order to enforce a blockade of military supply routes from the US to Australia and to prevent the expected Allied counter-attack from the south. The navy based on Truk, wanted to occupy and control New Guinea and the surrounding islands. Even the occupation of Rabaul, which was used as a base for the invasion of New Guinea and the Solomons, was pushed through by the navy, despite opposition from the army, for the purpose of preventing Allied air raids on Truk. The strategy to invade Port Moresby was also promoted by the navy to increase the defensive position at Rabaul.

The army had dominated the war in China, so the advance south into the resource belt of the Pacific was approached like a campaign on a giant land mass. New Guinea and the Solomons were a distant unknown quantity. Consequently, the army adopted a passive stance concerning operations promoted by the navy in that area. In 1942, the navy made preparations for the Mo Operation, the occupation of Port Moresby, and the FS Operation, an invasion of Samoa, Fiji and New Caledonia which aimed to block the supply route between the US and the Australian mainland. However, the naval defeats in the Coral Sea and at Midway left the Japanese extremely weakened in the region. The direct Allied counter-offensive began with the landings at Guadalcanal and Tulagi. In addition, the Allied forces, under the command of MacArthur, were advancing north along the "MacArthur axis", which ran from Bougainville, the northern coastline of New Guinea, the Philippines, Okinawa and then on to mainland Japan. Meanwhile, the US navy and naval units were approaching Japan by the "Nimitz axis" which ran from the Gilbert Islands, the Marshall Islands and the Caroline Islands.

The Second World War in east Asia and the western Pacific consisted of three campaigns of differing motives and locations, namely the war in China, the war to procure primary resources in the south, and the war in the western Pacific. The opponents in each of these theatres were also different: the Chinese in China, the English, Australian and Dutch primarily in the southern resource belt and the Americans in the western Pacific.

Japan had become bogged down in the war in China at a time when national resources were weakening. It then began both the campaign to secure natural resources in the south and the unexpected war in the western Pacific. Japan had to distribute its military
capability and resources, which were inferior to the Allies, over three expansive theatres of operation. The Allied forces had no reason to become involved in China and had no need to secure resources and so concentrated their superior numbers and matériel in the western Pacific. Consequently, there was a significant difference in actual strength between the two sides.

The battles from Guadalcanal to New Guinea developed into a war of attrition that the Japanese had hoped to avoid due to their limited military strength and manufacturing capacity. It cannot be overstated that the relative merits of conducting a similar war of attrition in the western Pacific were not determined by manufacturing capacity but by the ability to transport supplies by sea over such long distances. The limits of the Japanese army's supply capabilities had been reached in the Guadalcanal campaign, though there were sufficient resources to evacuate surviving units. In 1943, however, it was determined that even if an Allied land campaign towards Rabaul was imminent, there was no possibility of a Japanese withdrawal and units in Rabaul would therefore be abandoned. Although postwar Western commentators often say that the Japanese military glorified the destruction of its army, the fact is that withdrawal in such a situation, if possible, was the army's preferred course of action. The Japanese army's choice of annihilation over withdrawal during the war occurred where units were stranded on islands without either transport or room to withdraw.

It is possible to divide the war in New Guinea into two stages. The first concerns the defensive and offensive operations centred on Port Moresby on the southern coastline, and the second concerns the repeated land operations and movements of Allied and Japanese troops from 1943–44 on the northern coastline of New Guinea. The navy occupied Rabaul in order to protect its base on Truk, and then planned to invade Port Moresby in order to strengthen its position at Rabaul. The Japanese army sought to prevent Allied counter-offensives from Australia, and to expel any Allied forces from New Guinea in preparation for a possible advance on Australia. The failure of the overland and seaborne campaigns to capture Port Moresby signalled the end of these operations and the end of the first stage of the war.

In January 1943 Imperial HQ decided to change focus by retreating from Guadalcanal and undertaking offensive operations in eastern New Guinea, thus ushering in the second stage of the New Guinea war. This change was not determined by a Japanese reading of Allied strategy based on an attack on Rabaul from the direction of both Guadalcanal
and eastern New Guinea. Rather, the decision was politically motivated to hide the defeat at Guadalcanal from the Japanese people. So the leaders of the war effort described the retreat from Guadalcanal as a “change of direction” rather than a withdrawal. Consequently, New Guinea became the objective of the new operations. In short, the New Guinea operations did not result from a new policy based on the overall direction of the war. It emerged from Japan’s domestic political and social situation, and is considered to have been largely influenced by proposals from Hirohito, the Showa emperor.

The defeat at Guadalcanal stretched Japan’s supply capacity beyond its limit. The distinguishing feature of the New Guinea war, conducted immediately after this defeat, was that the Japanese forces could not expect any direct supplies from Japan from the very beginning. Consequently, the Japanese forces, having previously advanced into the south for natural resources, decided to procure supplies locally. However, agricultural development in New Guinea at that time was more primitive than that of Malaya and Indonesia. It was still in the phase of hunting and gathering, so it was nearly impossible to obtain food supplies locally. The operation was executed in haste, and the Japanese forces entering New Guinea with such ignorance began to suffer from starvation as the food they carried with them ran out. Fierce attacks by the Allied forces further increased the number of deaths from starvation and illness.

The area of eastern New Guinea alone is as large as the Japanese archipelago without Kyushu Island, and that of eastern and western New Guinea together is more than twice as large as the whole of Japan. Some would argue that, given the size of New Guinea, it would have been possible for the side invading from the sea to freely choose a landing point and to avoid the type of battle characteristic of island campaigns, where the side on land is cornered. In other words, it could be possible to shift the main battlefield and war-front inland, and start a battle between land forces alone. However, large areas of inland New Guinea were covered with steep mountains and unexplored jungles. These circumstances made it impossible for groups of people to move about in inland areas. This meant that warfare was conducted in the narrow coastal area and that the nature of the war inevitably became similar to campaigns on small islands.

In the natural environment of New Guinea, this appears to have been the only choice available. However, the Japanese in New Guinea chose a third option of advancing into the inland areas. More than 10,000 Japanese soldiers repeatedly climbed over mountains as high as 4,000 metres. Napoleon himself, who led his forces over the Alps, would...
perhaps have been impressed by this feat. General MacArthur had said that “the jungle will finish them for us”, after being informed of the Japanese inland retreat. As this remark indicates, the jungle and steep terrain took a heavy toll on the Japanese forces and numerous soldiers perished on the way. Despite a substantial reduction in numbers, some soldiers survived after crossing several mountain ranges and large swamps along the Sepik River. Although they no longer had the ability to fight back, their tenacious survival perhaps delayed subsequent actions by the Allied forces.

The Japanese could neither understand why the Allied forces were advancing northwest along the north coast of New Guinea, nor predict where or when they might land. It is not clear when the Japanese realised that the repeated campaigns of the Allies were not aimed at Rabaul, but advanced operations for an offensive to the Philippines. In September 1943, Japanese command changed its existing operations policies and instituted a “vital national line of defence”. This was intended to strengthen the domestic defence mechanism. The mission of the Japanese troops outside the line in eastern New Guinea was to check the progress of the Allies and to try and prevent the establishment of advance bases in western New Guinea for an invasion of the Philippines. The Japanese army in eastern New Guinea continued to prosecute a hopeless campaign against the Allied forces.

Finally, I would like to address the significance of the New Guinea war. In the Pacific
War it was not uncommon for the front line to move hundreds of kilometres in one
stroke. The Allied advance north began in earnest in 1944 after a year of little movement
on the front line. The vital national line of defence was also established after an interval
of relative inactivity. Even during this time the front in New Guinea was central. It could
be said that the gradual westward movements of the Japanese and Allied forces bought
valuable time for the Japanese army to reorganise. However, Japanese command placed
no significance on New Guinea within the overall context of the war. The army was the
main force in the second stage of the New Guinea campaign, but its actions were conser-
ervative from the beginning. With the sudden realisation that the Allied goal was the Phil-
ippines and not Rabaul, there was still no regard or understanding of the significance of
New Guinea. And so the Japanese were slow to adapt to the changing situation.

The main reasons for this, lie in the fact that the war in New Guinea resulted from
necessities that arose out of the course of the conflict. Japanese strategic planning lacked
a clear policy of war leadership and military strategy, and was based on reactions to
Allied movements. It is natural that an army which has no strategic flexibility or reserve
strength in its war effort will be defeated. However, Japanese command paid no heed to
the changing conditions of the war and from the beginning lacked a strategy. It must also
be said that they suffered greatly from their inability to read the tactics of the Allies once
the battle had begun.

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