THE NEW GUINEA CAMPAIGN

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The **New Guinea Campaign** was the **longest and in many ways the most arduous battleground in the Pacific.** Brutal warfare in this theatre **lasted over 3.5 years** from January 1942 all the way through to the end of the war. The New Guinea campaign played a vital role in **preventing the isolation and invasion of Australia**, and also contributed to the Allied effort to penetrate Japan's defensive southern barrier as a prelude to the major Allied counter-offensive through Micronesia (Gilberts --> Carolines --> Marshalls --> Marianas) en route to the Philippines and onto the doorstep of Japan's home islands. Over **12,000 Allied soldiers - mostly Australian - died in the conflict**, as did more than **200,000 Japanese** - most from **starvation and disease**. Over **50,000 civilians died.**

MAPS for REFERENCE

(Note: In ther 1940s, today's INDONESIAN PAPUA and PAPUA NEW GUINEA were controlled by the Dutch and the Australians, respectively.)





Notw: Much of the fighting was in the rugged and unforgiving New Guinea Highlands, including the Owen Stanley Range (the Kokoda Track Campaign.)



The major Japanese air base at **Rabaul** on the island of New Britain in the Bismarck Archipelago was a key target of **Operation Cartwheel** which was central to the **New Guinea Campaign** and the associated **Bougainville Campaign.**



TIMELINE OF THE NEW GUINEA CAMPAIGN

1942:

January 23: **Japan invades and captures Rabaul on New Britain** in the Bismarck Archiepelago off northeast New Guinea. Rabaul quickly becomes a **major air and naval base** for the Japanese.

March 1-31: **Japanese forces invade and occupy Lae and Salamua** on the eastern end of Australian New Guinea in Huon Bay and also **overrun parts of western (Dutch) New Guinea**.

May 4-8: The **Battle of the Coral Sea**. Although tactically inconclusive or slightly favoring the Japanese, it is a **major strategic victory for the Allies** by thwarting Japanese plans to capture Port Moresby by sea, inflicting heavy damage on Japanese carriers that would prevent them from taking part in operations at Midway a month later, and undermining Japanese plans to cut off and eventually overrun Australia. It is also a 'game-changer' battle in the annals of naval warfare: the first naval battle where opposing ships (aircraft carriers) never sighted each other.

Jul 1: The **Japanese execute 849 POWs and 208 civilians who had been captured on New Britain** after an American submarine sinks a Japanese merchant ship off the coast of the Philippines (tragically, the ship was carrying Australian POWs, over 1000 of whom perished.)

July 21: Japanese forces land at Buna and Gona in northeast New Guinea, initiating the **Kokoda Track Campaign** into and over the mosquito-infested dense jungle of the jagged Owen Stanley range, aiming to capture Port Moresby overland. Australian forces would initially fight side-by-side with American forces but eventually Australian forces would take over the lion's share of the fighting as U.S. troops were moved elsewhere in southeast Asia. The harsh terrain, disease, and starvation claimed more victims than bullets. A**ustralian troops would emerge victorious in holding off the Japanese** after 4 months of grueling warfare July-Nov.

August-Sept: Australian forces with American support are victorious in the **Battle of Milne Bay** on the east end of New Guinea, thwarting a Japanese invasion and again thwarting Japanese plans to take Port Moresby. This is a **landmark battle in WWII** in that it was the **first defeat of Japanese land forces**, shattering the myth of Japanese invincibility.

October - Allies and invade and capture a Japanese offshore garrison in the **Battle of Goodenough Island** (northernmost of the D'Entrecasteaux Islands off the east coast of New Guinea in the Solomon Sea).

Nov '42-Jan'43: In a grueling 3-month **Battle of Buna-Gona**, Australian forces with American support continue to push back the Japanese and re-take Buna-Gona, essentially concluding the Kokoda Track Campaign. The ferocity of Japanese resistance and the lessons learned in jungle warfare would set precedent for the rest of the Pacific War.

1943:

Jan- Feb: Australian forces successfully defend a base south of Lae in the **Battle of Wau.** Wau would be used as an Allied base to support the upcoming Allied Lae-Salamua Campaign.

March 2-4: In the **Battle of the Bismarck Sea**, Allied air forces devastate a Japanese convoy attempting to reinforce Lae, striking a blow to Japanese morale and naval power in the region.

April- The Japanese launch **Operation I-Go**, an air offensive against Allied bases in New Guinea and the Solomons. Thanks to US codebreakers, **Admiral Ishoroku Yamamoto is shot down** over Bougainville Island en route to congratulate his troops after Operation I-Go. Allies begin the grueling 6-month **Lae-Salamua Campaign** to take back eastern New Guinea.

June: **Allies capture the eastern D'Entrecasteaux islands of Woodlark and Kiriwina** and begin operations in the **New Georgia Islands** of the Solomons, both as part of the broader **Operation Cartwheel** strategy to isolate Rabaul in the Bismarcks.

August 1-2 - A convoy of 15 U.S. PT-boats attempts to block Japanese convoys south of Kolombangra Island in the **Solomons**. **PT-109, commanded by Lt. John F. Kennedy, is rammed and sunk** by the Japanese Cruiser *AMAGIRI*, killing two and badly injuring others. The crew survives as Kennedy famously aids one badly injured man by swimming/towing him to a nearby atoll.

September: **Australian forces with American support land at Lae and Salamaua** on the Huon Peninsula- they extirpate the Japanese in 2 weeks of brutal warfare. The Allied campaigns in **Markham Valley, Ramu Valley** and **Finisterre Range force the** Japanese to retreat to Wewak on the north coast

November: U.S. forces invade Bougainville Island in the Bismarcks, again as part of Operation Cartwheel to surround Rabaul. The 4-month **Battle of Bougainville Island** ensues, with New Zealand forces taking over much of the fighting from Americans after several months. The Allies are victorious.

December : Operation Cartwheel targeting Rabaul moves into **New Britain** with landings at Arawe (as a diversion) and **Cape Gloucester** at the west end of the island. Australian forces with American support are victorious in taking the western half of the island, beginning the isolation of Rabaul.

1944:

Jan- March: Operation Cartwheel continues on New Britain and Bougainville Island and on the **Admiralty Islands** of Manus and Los Negros northwest of Rabaul. **Naval blockade and air raids** along with Allied control of most of New Britain cut off supply lines - **Rabaul is now isolated** and reduced to 'a virtual POW camp' with >60,000 trapped Japanese. The Allies now focus on the Philippines Campaign.

April: The **Allies are victorious in the Battle of Hollandia** (now Jayapura) in Dutch New Guinea, beginning the **Western New Guinea Campaign.** Nearby **Aitape** is also invaded & occupied, pushing the fleeing Japanese further west. **U.S. subs attack Japan's *Take Ichi* convoy** north of Luzon en route to the Philippines, killing 4000 Japanese troops in transit.

May-July: **U.S is victorious in the Admiralty Islands Campaign** off North New Guinea's northern coast. Air and naval bases are establishedon Manus and Los Negros. **Allies take Biak, Owi, and the Noemfoor and Wakde islands** off the coast of Dutch New Guinea, establishing key **air bases for operations towards the Marianas and the Philippines**.

Sept: Japan is effeectively neutralzied in New Guinea, except on Bougainville Island where resistance persists until the end of the war. MacArthur moves his offices from Brisbane to Hollandia (present-day Jayapura) in Dutch New Guinea,
October: **Allies capture Morotai** in the Dutch Malukus west of New Guinea, providing another key air base for invasion and re-capture of the Philippines in the Philippines Campaign (Oct '44 -Aug '45).

1945:

Jan-August: Continued **mopping up operations in New Guinea**, with significant **Japanese resistance in Wewak** on the northeast coast and other areas. **Manila is re-captured** by Allied forces in March. Warfare continues on Bougainville Island until the very ebd of the war.

August 15: The war ends with the **surrender of Japan**, 9 days after Hiroshima and 6 days after Nagasaki, but **isolated Japanese forces in New Guinea continue to hold out** or surrender later. **New Guinea returns to Dutch** (western half of the island) **and Australian** (eastern half of the island) control.