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The illustration on p. 146 is an Australian War Memorial photograph. All other illustrations in this volume are from the files of the Department of Defense.

CHAPTER I

The Strategic Background

In March 1944 the U. S. Joint Chiefs of Staff directed Allied forces in the Pacific to begin an offensive toward the Philippine Islands. Recapture of the Philippines would be a profoundly important step toward the defeat of Japan, for from those islands the Allies could cut Japanese lines of communication to the rich, conquered territory of the Netherlands East Indies, Indochina, Thailand, Burma, and Malaya. In the Philippines the Allies could also establish bases from which to support subsequent advances against Formosa, the China coast, or Japan itself. (*Map I*)

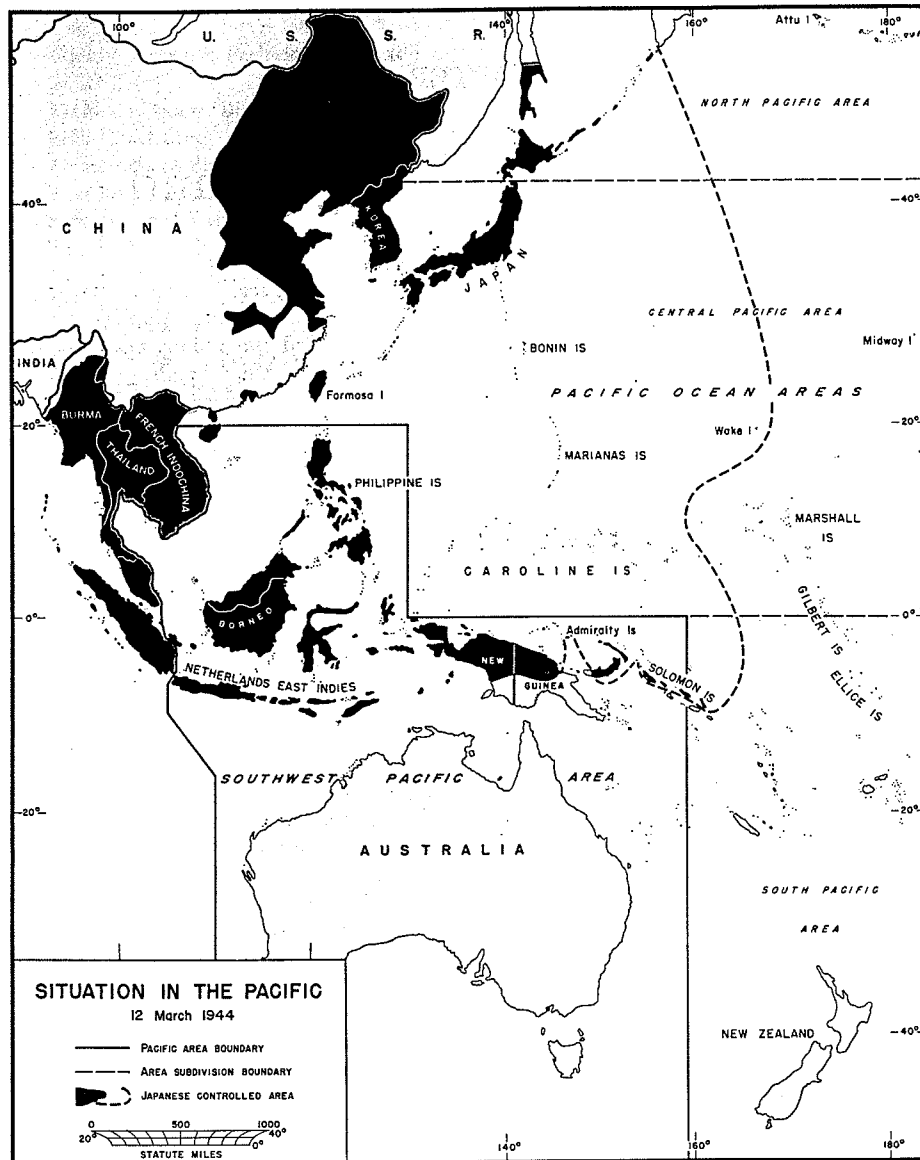
Before March 1944 the objectives of operations in the Pacific had been limited to securing the lines of communication from the United States to Australia, beginning an attack across the Central Pacific, and occupying bases from which to launch future operations. During these operations Allied forces of General Douglas MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Area had secured eastern New Guinea, western New Britain, and the Admiralty Islands, joining with the drive of Admiral William F. Halsey's South Pacific Area forces up the Solomon Islands in a campaign to neutralize the great Japanese base at Rabaul. Admiral Chester W. Nimitz had begun an offensive in his Central Pacific Area late in 1943; by March 1944 his forces had driven through the Gilbert Islands into the Marshalls. Now the war in the Pacific was ready to enter a more decisive stage, as

the various land, sea, and air forces under General MacArthur and Admiral Nimitz attacked toward the Philippines from the bases already in Allied hands.

The offensive toward the Philippines would have to be undertaken with relatively limited means. The U.S.-British Combined Chiefs of Staff, subject to whose approval the U. S. Joint Chiefs of Staff directed the war in the Pacific, had from the first assigned priority in the global war to the defeat of Germany.

Determining the Strategy of the Approach

In May 1943 the Joint Chiefs of Staff secured approval from the Combined Chiefs for a course of action providing that the main offensive against Japan would be conducted across the Pacific, as opposed to advances from the Aleutians, Southeast Asia, or China. The Joint Chiefs decided that the seizure of a foothold in the Philippines would be necessary before any subsequent operations against Japan or her holdings could be launched. To the Joint Chiefs, there were two practicable routes of approach to the Philippines. One was across the Central Pacific via the Marshalls, Carolines, and Palau; the other in the Southwest Pacific along the north coast of New Guinea and into the islands between northwestern New Guinea and Mindanao, southernmost large island of the Philippine Archipelago. The choice of



MAP 1

routes and the direction and objectives of amphibious offensives in both the Central and Southwest Pacific Areas were not determined without a great deal of discussion at the highest levels of United States command.¹

General MacArthur's Concepts

General MacArthur, who upon orders from the President had left the Philippines in early 1942, had a burning determination to return to those islands as soon as possible. He favored the New Guinea–Mindanao axis of advance to the Philippines. Almost as soon as he assumed his new command in the Southwest Pacific Area he began thinking about moving back to the Philippines by means of a series of amphibious operations along the north coast of New Guinea.² He envisaged this campaign as entailing a steady advance of the Southwest Pacific's land-based bomber line northwestward to the Philippines by the successive seizure of

¹ JPS 67/4, 29 Apr 43; JPS 67/5, 26 May 43; JCS 287, 7 May 43; JCS 287/1, 8 May 43. All entitled Strategic Plan for the Defeat of Japan, and all in OPD file, ABC 381 Japan (8–27–42) Secs. 1 and 2. Min, JCS 76th and 80th Mtgs, 8 and 12 May 43; CCS 220, 14 May 43, Strategic Plan for the Defeat of Japan, and CCS 242/6, 25 May 43, Final Report to the President and Prime Minister, TRIDENT Conference, last two in OPD file, bound volume of TRIDENT [Washington, D. C.] Papers. Bound folders containing minutes of meetings of the CCS, JCS, and their subordinate committees are filed in the office of ACofS, G-3, GSUSA.

² Ltr, CofS GHQ SWPA to Comdrs Allied Land, Air, and Naval Forces SWPA (n. d., circa 13 May 42), sub: Preparations for the Counteroffensive, copy atcd as Incl 3 to Ltr, Maj Gen Charles A. Willoughby [ACofS G-2 GHQ FEC] to Maj Gen Orlando Ward [Chief of Military History, Dept of the Army] (n. d., circa 10 Mar 51), in OCMH files. For 1941–42 operations in the Philippines and General MacArthur's departure from those islands, see Louis Morton, *The Fall of the Philippines*, a forthcoming volume in the series, UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR II.

air-base sites along the 1,400-mile north coast of New Guinea. General MacArthur realized that once his forces began pushing on to the Philippines from the Vogelkop Peninsula of northwestern New Guinea they would present vulnerable flanks to Japanese air and sea power based in the Palau Islands to the right (north) and in the Netherlands East Indies to the left. He said, however, that the advance along the New Guinea coast as far as the Vogelkop could not be endangered by hostile air attacks from the Marshall or Caroline Islands to the north, that it would take “full advantage of land-based air power” and could be “fully protected by naval power.”

Beyond the Vogelkop the Allied left would be protected by land-based aircraft flying from fields which would be established on islands between New Guinea and the southern Philippines. The right flank could be safeguarded by the occupation of the Palau Islands or by operations of the U. S. Pacific Fleet, the strategic missions of which, General MacArthur averred, were to protect his right flank and destroy or contain the Japanese fleet. Finally, he said, the advance along the north coast of New Guinea could most quickly achieve one important strategic objective—cutting the Japanese lines of communication to the Indies.³

On the other hand, declared General MacArthur, an advance toward the Philippines through the Central Pacific, via the

³ GHQ SWPA, Estimate of the Situation and Rough Draft, RENO Plan, 25 Feb 43, photostat copy in OCMH files; Rad, CINCSWPA to CofS, C-3302, 20 Jun 43, CM-IN 13149; Rad, CINCSWPA to CofS, C-1217, 2 Feb 44, CM-IN 1443. The quotations are from the RENO plan, hereafter cited as RENO I. CM-IN and CM-OUT numbers used in the footnotes of this volume refer to numbers appearing on copies of those messages in Gen. George C. Marshall's In and Out Logs, filed in the Staff Communications Office, Office of the Chief of Staff, U. S. Army.

Marshall and Caroline Islands, would have to be undertaken without any land-based air support. Such a course of action would "be time consuming and expensive in . . . naval power and shipping." It would "require a reorientation of front" from that already established in the South and Southwest Pacific Areas during operations aimed at the reduction of Rabaul. It could gain no important strategic objectives, in General MacArthur's opinion, until a series of amphibious frontal assaults on small, fortified islands brought Allied forces finally to Mindanao in the southern Philippines. Finally, he argued, the concept of an advance through the Central Pacific was a return to the prewar plans, which, he declared, had not been premised on the availability of Australia as a base for offensive operations.⁴

For a time General MacArthur's plans for the approach to the Philippines via the southern route called for the seizure of the Hansa Bay area of northeastern New Guinea as the first step of the drive to the Philippines and the last of the campaign for the reduction of Rabaul. Next, the forces of the Southwest Pacific would jump approximately 275 miles northwest to establish air and logistic bases at Hollandia, Dutch New Guinea, bypassing a Japanese stronghold at Wewak. Then General MacArthur intended to move on to the Geelvink Bay and Vogelkop Peninsula regions of western Dutch New Guinea. Following these operations, airfield sites on Halmahera or the Celebes, lying between the Vogelkop and Mindanao, would be seized. If necessary for additional left flank protection, air bases would also be established on the islands of the Arafura Sea (south of western New Guinea), simultaneously with

⁴ RENO I, 25 Feb 43; Rad, CINCSWPA to CofS, C-3302, 20 Jun 43, CM-IN 13149. The quotations are from RENO I.

the advance to Hollandia, and on Ambon Island (south of the Halmaheras).⁵

The Joint Chiefs' Strategic Plans

General MacArthur's concept of the best course of action in the Pacific did not coincide with that of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who had decided that an advance via the Central Pacific would be strategically more decisive. The Joint Chiefs concluded that pressure applied on the Central Pacific front would bear directly on Japan's most vulnerable flank—the east—and would, indeed, outflank the enemy's positions in New Guinea. But operations along the New Guinea coast could not threaten Japan's bases in the Central Pacific and would not impair free movement by the Japanese Navy.

The Joint Chiefs believed that the U. S. Pacific Fleet (commanded by Admiral Nimitz in addition to his area command) could be used to best advantage in the vast open reaches of the Central Pacific. Should naval operations in the Pacific precipitate an overwhelming defeat of the Japanese Navy, the Allies might be provided with an opportunity to bypass intermediate objectives and to strike directly against the Japanese home islands. Moreover, a drive through the Central Pacific would take advantage of rapidly growing American naval power, with which it might be found easier to move into the Philippines from the Central rather than the Southwest Pacific.

⁵ RENO I, 25 Feb 43; GHQ SWPA, RENO III, Outline Plan of Operations in the Southwest Pacific Area to Reoccupy the Southern Philippine Islands, 20 Oct 43, in OPD file, ABC 384 Pacific, Sec. 8-A; Rad, CofS to CINCSWPA, 3406, 24 Jan 44, CM-OUT 9451; GHQ SWPA, RENO IV, Outline Plan for Operations of the SWPA 1944, 6 Mar 44, in OPD file, ABC 384 Pacific (1-17-43) Sec. 3-A.

Logistically, the Joint Chiefs believed that the Central Pacific route of approach to the Philippines was preferable because it was shorter and more direct. In opposition to General MacArthur's views, the Joint Chiefs felt that the longer Southwest Pacific route would be more costly in terms of money, men, aircraft, time, and ships. The Central Pacific route was also better hygienically—it would entail far less jungle and swamp warfare with attendant tropical diseases than would operations in New Guinea. Finally, there was a practical limit to the Japanese air and ground strength which could be deployed on the small islands of the Central Pacific. On the other hand, the Japanese could place men and aircraft on New Guinea and the islands between the Vogelkop Peninsula and Mindanao in numbers limited only by the availability of troops, engineering equipment, ships, and planes.⁶

Another factor destined to influence the Joint Chiefs in placing emphasis on the Central Pacific offensive was the potential of the Army Air Forces' new offensive weapon, the huge B-29 bomber. Though the Joint Chiefs' plans for the defeat of Japan called for large-scale bombing of the Japanese home islands from China, as early as November 1943 there was some doubt that the Chinese armies under Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek could hold eastern China fields from which the B-29's would operate. Certainly the initiation of B-29 operations from those fields would prompt the Japanese to launch ground offensives to capture the air bases.

But, should the Allies secure air-base sites in the Mariana Islands, lying in the Central

⁶ JPS 67/4, 28 Apr 43; JPS 67/5, 26 May 43; JCS 287, 7 May 43; JCS 287/1; Rad, CofS (for JCS) to CINCSWPA, 8679, 2 Oct 43, CM-OUT 630.

Pacific less than 1,500 miles from Tokyo, the B-29's would be provided with bases which the Japanese could not retake. The Army Air Forces was therefore eager for the capture of the Marianas. The air planners found a strong advocate for the early seizure of the Marianas in Admiral Ernest J. King (Chief of Naval Operations and Commander in Chief of the U. S. Fleet), Navy representative on the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Admiral King repeatedly termed the occupation of the Marianas a key operation in the successful prosecution of the war against Japan, since an invasion of those islands, in his opinion, might well precipitate a showdown battle with the Japanese Fleet and would open a line of advance aimed directly at Japan.⁷

Though the Joint Chiefs believed that the Central Pacific route of advance was strategically, logistically, and tactically better than the Southwest Pacific route, they also decided that it would be most wasteful of time and resources to move all the Allied forces from the Southwest and South Pacific Areas out of the firm contact with the Japanese established during the campaign for the reduction of Rabaul. The Joint Chiefs held that the employment of both routes would prevent the Japanese from knowing where and when the next blow was to fall. It was also believed that the Australian Government would react unfavorably to redirection of all Allied effort to the Central Pacific. If the Southwest Pacific offensive were curtailed, Australia might well let down in its war effort, an action which would result in

⁷ Min, JPS 109th Mtg, 27 Oct 43; Min, JCS 123d and 124th Mtgs, 15 and 17 Nov 43, respectively; General of the Air Force Henry H. Arnold, *Global Mission* (New York, 1949), pp. 476-80. For additional material upon the selection of the Marianas as an objective and for coverage of the fighting in those islands, see Philip A. Crowl, *Campaign in the Marianas*, another forthcoming volume in this series.

a drag on all operations throughout the Pacific.

In summary, the Joint Chiefs of Staff decided that the approach to the Philippines would be made through both the Central and Southwest Pacific Areas, with priority assigned to the Central Pacific since that approach appeared strategically more decisive. Central Pacific forces would move toward the Philippines via the Marshalls, Carolines, and Palaus, while Southwest Pacific forces would drive up the northern New Guinea coast and on into the islands between the Vogelkop Peninsula and Mindanao.⁸ In accordance with this concept Admiral Nimitz' forces, in November 1943, had taken the first step toward opening the drive across the Central Pacific by seizing air and naval base sites in the Gilbert Islands. This operation was a preliminary to the occupation of the Marshalls, to begin early in 1944.

Acceleration of Pacific Operations in Early 1944

The Marshalls, Truk, and the Admiralties

In January 1944 Admiral Nimitz was planning to move his Central Pacific forces into the eastern and central Marshalls by the end of the month. Late in March he would execute a much-desired carrier strike against Truk, a presumably strong Japanese base near the center of the Caroline chain. Whether Truk would be seized was still a moot question. Although the capture of that atoll might well precipitate a showdown battle with the Japanese Fleet, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had begun to wonder if the seizure of

⁸ JPS 67/5, 26 May 43; JCS 287/1, 8 May 43; Rad, CINCSWPA to CofS, C-6131, 28 Sep 43, CM-IN 19656; Rad, CofS to CINCSWPA, 8679, 2 Oct 43, CM-OUT 630.

Truk might not prove too costly for the results achieved. They agreed in late 1943 to postpone a decision concerning its capture until the U. S. Pacific Fleet could test the strength of the base in a carrier raid.⁹

In May, according to Admiral Nimitz' plans, the Central Pacific's amphibious assault forces would advance to the western Marshalls. On 1 August they would land at Mortlock and Truk in the Central Carolines. If, however, the invasion of Truk should prove either unnecessary or undesirable, then Admiral Nimitz would be prepared to bypass that atoll in favor of a direct move to the Palau Islands about 1 August. First landings in the Marianas were to take place by 1 November.¹⁰

At the time Admiral Nimitz prepared this plan, General MacArthur's planners were trying to find ways and means to accelerate the final phases of the campaign against Rabaul: the capture of Hansa Bay on the northeast coast of New Guinea, the occupation of the Admiralty Islands, and the seizure of Kavieng, on New Ireland north of Rabaul. To fit in with Admiral Nimitz' plans for the use of the Pacific Fleet's carriers during the invasion of the Marshalls and the strike against Truk, General MacArthur had had to schedule the attacks against Kavieng and the Admiralties for 1 April and the Hansa Bay operation for 26 April. For post-Hansa Bay operations, General MacArthur's current plans called for the advance to Hollandia and the Arafura Sea islands about 1 June; the Geelvink Bay area in mid-August; the Vogelkop Peninsula by 1 October; Halmahera and the Celebes on 1 December; and, finally, an entry into the southern Phil-

⁹ CINCPAC-CINCPOA, Campaign Plan GRANITE, 13 Jan 44, in files of the Navy Dept; Min, JCS 123d and 124th Mtgs, 15 and 17 Nov 43.

¹⁰ CINCPAC-CINCPOA, Campaign Plan GRANITE, 13 Jan 44.

ippines at Mindanao on 1 February 1945. This schedule was slower than one approved by the Combined Chiefs of Staff in late 1943; but if the Southwest Pacific could accelerate the last phases of the reduction of Rabaul, all subsequent operations could be considerably speeded.¹¹

Principally to settle details of fleet support for the Admiralties, Kavieng, and Hansa Bay operations, planners of the South, Southwest, and Central Pacific Areas met at Pearl Harbor on 27 and 28 January 1944.¹² The planners also discussed in a general way the question of bypassing Truk, the target dates for other operations in the Pacific, and

¹¹ Rad, CINCSWPA to CofS, C-164, 6 Jan 44, CM-IN 3366; Rad, CINCSWPA to CofS, C-172, 6 Jan 44, CM-IN 4188; Rad, CINCPOA to CINCSWPA, 7 Jan 44, CM-IN 8330; Rad, COMSOPAC-ADMIN to COMSOPAC [Admiral Halsey, then in Washington], 8 Jan 44, CM-IN 8331; Rad, CINCSWPA to CofS, C-1217, 2 Feb 44, CM-IN 1443; Reno III, 20 Oct 43. For earlier operations in the South and Southwest Pacific Areas see John Miller, jr., *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive* (Washington, 1949) and Samuel Milner, *Victory in Papua*, both in this series, the latter in preparation. These two volumes provide information concerning the establishment of the Allied commands in the Pacific and the assignment of the first mission to the Allied forces. The campaign against Rabaul is to be covered in John Miller, jr., *CARTWHEEL: The Reduction of Rabaul*, while operations in the Gilberts and Marshalls are to be described in Philip A. Crowl and Edmund G. Love, *The Seizure of the Gilberts and Marshalls*, both in this series.

¹² The following information on the Pearl Harbor Conference and General MacArthur's views on the use of the B-29 is based principally upon: Rad, CINCPOA to CINCSWPA, 7 Jan 44, CM-IN 8330; Rad, CINCSWPA to CofS, C-1217, 2 Feb 44, CM-IN 1443; Memo, Col William L. Ritchie [Chief, SWP Theater Group, OPD GSUSA] to Maj Gen Thomas T. Handy [Chief, OPD], 4 Feb 44, sub: Brief of Pacific Conf, Pearl Harbor, 27-28 Jan 44, in OPD file, ABC 384 Pacific (1-17-43) Sec. 3-A; Min, JPS 125th Mtg, 2 Feb 44; Min, JCS 145th Mtg, 8 Feb 44; History of AFMIDPAC and Predecessor Commands, I, 90ff, in OCMH; General George C. Kenney, *General Kenney Reports* (New York, 1949), pp. 347-49.

the proposed B-29 bases in the Marianas. Admiral Nimitz presented revised plans calling for the invasion of the eastern and central Marshalls on 1 February and the western Marshalls on 15 April. He also suggested possible revisions in his schedule of operations against the Palaus, the Marianas, and Truk. Previously he had planned to take the Palaus before the Marianas, and he had believed it essential to seize Truk as an advanced fleet base. Now the Central Pacific commander thought that if the proposed carrier strike against Truk drove the Japanese fleet westward, it might be possible to bypass Truk, seize the Marianas about 15 June, and move to the Palaus early in October.

Most of the Army and Navy planners at the January conferences favored the idea of bypassing Truk. Apparently the majority of them also favored bypassing the Marianas, and the consensus at Pearl Harbor seemed to lean toward a sequence of operations which would place the emphasis of the drive to the Philippines in the Southwest Pacific Area. All the planners agreed that the Palaus would have to be taken to safeguard the right flank of the Southwest Pacific's advance beyond the Vogelkop Peninsula to Mindanao in the Philippines. Most of them approved a course of action which would take Central Pacific forces directly from the Marshalls to the Palaus and provide the Southwest Pacific Area with sufficient support to move up the north coast of New Guinea and into the Philippines well before the end of 1944.

As far as B-29 operations against the Japanese home islands from the Marianas were concerned, there seems to have been a lack of enthusiasm at the Pearl Harbor conferences. General MacArthur's planners, taking their cue from their commander, de-

sired that the B-29's be sent to the Southwest Pacific, whence they could strike lucrative targets in the Netherlands East Indies. General MacArthur's opinion was that B-29 operations against Japan from the Marianas would obtain negligible strategic and tactical effects, that operating hazards from the Mariana bases would be great, and that logistic support of the B-29's in the Marianas would be much more difficult than it would be in the Southwest Pacific.

While it is noteworthy that both Army and Navy planners of the Pacific commands were, in January 1944, inclined to take issue with the Combined and Joint Chiefs of Staff over the emphasis on lines of advance toward the Philippines and the seizure of the Marianas, the higher level planners had already decided that the Marianas would be seized, that B-29 operations from those islands would start in 1944, and that the priority of the advance to the Philippines would be given to the Central Pacific. Indeed, so important did the Joint Chiefs consider operations in the Central Pacific that they were willing to delay beyond 1 April 1944 General MacArthur's attacks against Kavieng and the Admiralties if such a delay would make it possible to accelerate Admiral Nimitz' advances in the Marshall Islands.¹³ Such a delay would, of course, probably mean the postponement of subsequent Southwest Pacific operations along the New Guinea coast.

As events turned out, the strength of Central Pacific forces used to invade the eastern and central Marshalls on 31 January proved so preponderant and Japanese resistance and reactions so weak that Admiral Nimitz'

¹³ Rad, COMINCH to CINCPOA, 2 Feb 44, CM-IN 1854.

reserves and garrison forces, already staging for the eastern Marshalls, did not have to be committed to that operation. The Central Pacific commander, urged on by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was therefore able to step up his attack into the western Marshalls to mid-February. The Joint Chiefs also instructed Admiral Nimitz to execute the scheduled March carrier strike against Truk as much earlier as possible.¹⁴

A successful invasion of the western Marshalls was carried out on 17 February 1944. To support and provide strategic cover for this operation, the long-awaited carrier strike on Truk was made on the 16th and 17th. During the ensuing week other targets in the Carolines were hit and a one-day carrier attack against the Marianas was also undertaken. Evaluation of the Truk strikes disclosed that the base was much weaker than had previously been supposed. The main body of the Japanese Fleet had already left the atoll and the threat of additional attacks by the U. S. Pacific Fleet kept it in the western Pacific. Truk and the eastern Carolines were eliminated as an effective section of the Japanese defense system.¹⁵

While the strikes against the Carolines and Marianas had been taking place in the Central Pacific, preparations for the scheduled Admiralties, Kavieng, and Hansa Bay operations had been going on apace in the Southwest Pacific. Troop units were designated and preliminary steps were taken to gather supplies, shipping, and personnel at

¹⁴ *Ibid.*; Rad, CINCPOA to COMINCH, 2 Feb 44, CM-IN 1855; Min, JCS 145th Mtg, 8 Feb 44; Rad, CINCPOA to COMINCH, 15 Feb 44, CM-IN 10592.

¹⁵ United States Strategic Bombing Survey [USSBS], *The Campaigns in the Pacific War* (Washington, 1946), pp. 194-95; Crowl and Love, *The Seizure of the Gilberts and Marshalls, passim*.

staging areas.¹⁶ These preparations were never completed.

From 300-mile distant airfields in New Guinea, Southwest Pacific land-based planes had for some time been flying bombing and reconnaissance missions against the Admiralty Islands. On 23 February planes on armed reconnaissance over the Admiralties failed to elicit any response from Japanese ground defenses. The next day General MacArthur ordered an immediate ground reconnaissance in force to be sent to the Admiralties aboard high speed destroyer-transport (APD's). The troops of the U. S. 1st Cavalry Division engaged in this risky undertaking were instructed to remain ashore and secure a beachhead upon which reinforcements could be landed. The initial landings were made on 29 February. The desired beachhead was taken and the assault units were reinforced beginning on 2 March by the rest of the 1st Cavalry Division.¹⁷

The landing in the Admiralties, taking place a month ahead of schedule, gave General MacArthur a welcome opportunity to speed the pace of operations within the Southwest Pacific Area and to keep abreast of developments in the Central Pacific Area. On 5 March he proposed a new plan of operations to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He suggested that the Kavieng operation be executed as planned on 1 April but, since aircraft from the Admiralties could support operations along the New Guinea coast, that the Hansa Bay operations be canceled in favor of a direct jump to Hollandia before the end of April.

¹⁶ GHQ SWPA, Operations Instructions (OI) 44, 13 Feb 44, in G-3 GHQ Jnl, 13 Feb 44.

¹⁷ Rad, GHQ SWPA to ALAMO Force, XC-1428, 24 Feb 44, in G-3 GHQ Jnl, 24 Feb 44; GHQ SWPA, OI 44/2, 19 Mar 44, in G-3 GHQ Jnl, 13 Feb 44. For details of operations in the Admiralties see Miller, *CARTWHEEL: The Reduction of Rabaul*.

The bypassing move to Hollandia would isolate Japanese ground troops in the Hansa Bay, Madang, and Wewak areas of eastern New Guinea. Moreover, the Hollandia area was considered capable of development into a major air base from which land-based planes could dominate western New Guinea where the Japanese were building up their own air strength. If Hollandia could be seized at an early date, General MacArthur reasoned, this Japanese air redeployment could be forestalled and the westward advance toward the Philippines could be hastened by several months.¹⁸

Washington Planning Conferences, February-March

The acceleration of the Marshall and Admiralty operations made it urgent that the Joint Chiefs of Staff issue a detailed directive for the conduct of the war in the Pacific during the rest of 1944. They now had General MacArthur's proposals to consider, as well as new plans being prepared by Admiral Nimitz, and they had yet to decide the question of bypassing Truk. Early in February General MacArthur had sent his chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Richard K. Sutherland, to Washington in an attempt to persuade the Joint Chiefs to direct the concentration of all forces in the Pacific along the New Guinea axis of advance, bypassing both Truk and the Marianas. Later in the same month Admiral Nimitz and members of his staff also arrived at Washington to discuss with the Joint Chiefs plans for future operations in the Central Pacific Area.

General Sutherland had not been in Washington long before he found it necessary to advise General MacArthur that the

¹⁸ Rad, CINCSWPA to CofS, C-2473, 5 Mar 44, CM-IN 3318.

Mariana operation was inevitable since both the Army Air Forces and the Navy were pressing for the undertaking.¹⁹ Accepting this, General MacArthur came to the conclusion that, assuming Truk would be bypassed, the invasion of the Marianas need not materially interfere with the schedule of Southwest Pacific operations along the New Guinea coast.²⁰ Admiral Nimitz, discussing the possibility of bypassing Truk, told the Joint Chiefs that his forces would be ready to undertake another major amphibious operation about mid-June. Either Truk or the Marianas, he said, would be acceptable targets, but if Truk were bypassed he thought it would still be necessary to take the southern Marianas and the Palaus to assure the neutralization of the central Caroline atoll. Since a good fleet base in the western Pacific would be needed before moving into the Philippines, Admiral Nimitz proposed seizing Ulithi Atoll, about midway between the Marianas and the Palaus. The capture of Ulithi would, he thought, probably require the occupation of Yap, 100 miles to the southwest, and the neutralization if not the capture of the Palaus. Woleai, in the Carolines 400-odd miles almost due south of the Marianas, should also be taken to assure the neutralization of Truk and the protection of the lines of communication from the Marianas to Yap and Ulithi.

Initially, Admiral Nimitz recommended that the Marianas should be taken in mid-June, Woleai a month later, Yap and Ulithi at the beginning of September, and the

¹⁹ Tel conv, Gen Sutherland [in Washington] and Maj Gen Richard J. Marshall [Deputy CofS GHQ SWPA, in Brisbane, Australia], 15 Feb 44, CM-IN, WD-Telecon 192.

²⁰ Rad, CINGSWPA to CofS, C-1741, 16 Feb 44, CM-IN 10909.

Palau early in November.²¹ Reconsideration of this plan led Admiral Nimitz to the conclusion that the occupation of Ulithi should follow landings in the Palaus, a sequence which might permit the neutralization rather than the capture of Yap. This schedule would call for landings in the Marianas on 15 June, on Woleai 15 July, the seizure of the Palaus beginning 1 October, and the occupation of Ulithi at an opportune moment after the Palau operation began.²²

While Admiral Nimitz had been presenting his plans to the Joint Chiefs, General Sutherland had also been preparing new plans on the basis of General MacArthur's proposals of 5 March. The outline which General Sutherland gave to the Joint Chiefs called for the Southwest Pacific forces to move into the Hollandia area with two divisions on 15 April, supported by the Pacific Fleet. Air, naval, and logistic bases would be established at Hollandia to support subsequent Southwest Pacific advances northwest to the Geelvink Bay region of Dutch New Guinea. The Southwest Pacific forces would move to Geelvink Bay about 1 June.

In the middle of the next month, according to General Sutherland's presentation, three Southwest Pacific divisions would be sent against the Arafura Sea islands, southwest of Dutch New Guinea. There, air bases would be established from which to cover later advances to the Vogelkop Peninsula and Halmahera, both scheduled for mid-

²¹ JCS, Memo for Info 200, 7 Mar 44, sub: Sequence and Timing of Opns, Central Pacific Campaign, A Rpt by CINCPOA, in OPD file, ABC 384 Pacific (1-17-43) Sec. 3-A; Min, JCS 150th Mtg, 7 Mar 44.

²² Addendum to JCS Memo for Info 200, 8 Mar 44, sub: Sequence and Timing of Opns, Central Pacific Campaign, Further Rpt by CINCPOA, in OPD file, ABC 384 Pacific (1-17-43), Sec. 3-A.

September, when Central Pacific forces might be ready to move to the Palaus. If the Marianas were bypassed, however, the Southwest Pacific chief of staff pointed out, the Palaus might then be invaded as early as mid-July. Land-based aircraft of the Southwest Pacific Area could support a July invasion of the Palaus from air bases in the Hollandia and Geelvink Bay regions. If air bases on the Vogelkop, Halmahera, and the Arafura Sea islands proved inadequate to provide left flank protection for the move into the Philippines, then airdrome sites on Ambon Island might also be seized in September or October. The entry into the Philippines would be effected at southeastern Mindanao on 15 November 1944.²³

Studies of the outlines presented by General Sutherland and Admiral Nimitz were undertaken for the Joint Chiefs of Staff by subordinate, advisory committees, which found some fault with parts of both plans. The committees concluded that Admiral Nimitz' plan to seize Woleai had little merit, because the operation threatened to be too costly in comparison with the possible results. Woleai, they determined, should be bypassed and neutralized by air action. The committees also advised bypassing Truk. The capture of the Palaus they considered necessary to assure the neutralization of Truk, to protect the right flank of Southwest Pacific forces moving into the Philippines, or to support a move by Central Pacific forces directly to Formosa. Again the planners turned down the suggestion that all forces in the Pacific be concentrated on the drive up to the New Guinea coast.²⁴ The sequence of operations ultimately recom-

mended by the Joint Chiefs' subordinate committees provided for the invasion of Hollandia on 15 April, the Marianas on 15 June, the Palaus on 15 September, and Mindanao on 15 November.²⁵

The New Directive for 1944

On 12 March the Joint Chiefs of Staff completed consideration of the proposals submitted by their subordinate committees and the planners of the Central and Southwest Pacific Areas. On the same day the Joint Chiefs issued their new directive for action in the Pacific during the rest of 1944. Reaffirming their belief that Allied strength in the Pacific was sufficient to carry on two drives across the Pacific, the Joint Chiefs' directive was, in effect, a reconciliation among conflicting strategic and tactical concepts. The Joint Chiefs took into consideration the Army Air Forces' desire to begin B-29 operations against Japan from the Marianas as soon as possible; Admiral King's belief that the Marianas operation was a key undertaking which might well precipitate a fleet showdown; the knowledge concerning the weakness of Truk gained during the February carrier attacks; the proposals offered by various planner concerning the feasibility of bypassing Truk; Admiral Nimitz' belief that the occupation of the Palaus and Ulithi was necessary to assure the neutralization of Truk and to provide the Pacific Fleet with a base in the western Pacific; and, finally, General MacArthur's plans to return to the Philippines as early as possible via the New Guinea-Mindanao axis of advance.

The Joint Chiefs instructed General MacArthur to cancel the Kavieng operation, to complete the neutralization of Rabaul and

²⁵ JCS 713/1, 10 Mar 44.

²³ RENO IV, 6 Mar 44.

²⁴ JCS 713, 16 Feb 44, Strategy in the Pacific [a Rpt by JSSC] and JCS 713/1, 10 Mar 44, Future Opns in Pacific [a Rpt by JPS], both in OPD file, ABC 384 Pacific (1-17-43) Sec. 3-A.

Kavieng with minimum forces, and to speed the development of an air and naval base in the Admiralties. The Southwest Pacific's forces were to jump from eastern New Guinea to Hollandia on 15 April, bypassing Wewak and Hansa Bay. The Joint Chiefs stated that the principal purpose of seizing Hollandia was to develop there an air center from which heavy bombers could start striking the Palaus and Japanese air bases in western New Guinea and Halmahera. After the occupation and development of the Hollandia area, General MacArthur was to conduct operations northwest along the northern New Guinea coast and "such other operations as may be feasible" with available forces in preparation for the invasion of the Palaus and Mindanao. The target date for the Southwest Pacific's landing in the Philippines was set for 15 November.

Admiral Nimitz, in turn, was ordered to cancel the Truk operation and to speed the aerial neutralization of Truk, Woleai, and other Japanese bases in the central and eastern Carolines. He was also directed to conduct heavy carrier strikes against the Marianas, the Carolines (including the Palaus), and "other profitable targets," and to provide carrier support and amphibious means for the Southwest Pacific's landings in the

Hollandia area. The Mariana Islands were to be occupied by Central Pacific forces beginning 15 June and the Palaus starting 15 September. The Palaus, said the Joint Chiefs, were to be occupied for the purposes of extending Allied control over the eastern approaches to the Philippines and Formosa and to secure air and naval bases from which to support operations against Mindanao, Formosa, and the China coast.²⁶

The Joint Chiefs of Staff had decreed that Pacific strategy would entail a reinvasion of the Philippines, but for operations after Mindanao no decision was made in March 1944. The strategy for the approach to the Philippines was clearly delineated—the forces of the Southwest Pacific were to move northwest along the coast of New Guinea and via the islands northwest of the Vogelkop Peninsula into the Philippines; Central Pacific forces were to continue operations in two directions, the first toward Japan through the Marianas and the other west toward the Philippines via the Palaus. The stage was set for the acceleration of the drive to the Philippines.

²⁶ Rad, CofS (for JCS) to CINCSWPA, 5171, and to COMGENCEPAC (to CINCPAC), 989, 12 Mar 44, CM-OUT 5137. This message is also JCS 713/4, 12 Mar 44, Future Opns in Pacific, in OPD file, ABC 384 Pacific (1-17-43) Sec. 3-A.

CHAPTER II

Planning and Preparation for the Hollandia-Aitape Operation

The first step in the Southwest Pacific Area's drive to the Philippines—the seizure of the Hollandia region of Dutch New Guinea—could have far-reaching consequences. (*Map II*) Anchorages at Hollandia were known to be capable of basing many of the largest combat vessels, cargo ships, and troop transports. Inland plains in the area were thought to provide almost unlimited potentialities for airdrome development. Aircraft operating from fields at Hollandia could dominate most Japanese airdromes in western New Guinea and nearer islands of the Indies, could fly reconnaissance and bombing missions against the western Carolines, including the Palaus, and could provide support for subsequent landing operations along the north coast of New Guinea. Small naval vessels, such as motor torpedo boats (PT's), operating from Hollandia area bases, could interdict Japanese barge traffic for miles both east and west of that region. Finally, the Hollandia region was capable of development into a major supply base and staging¹ area for the support of subsequent Allied operations farther to the west.

General Headquarters, Southwest Pacific Area, and its subordinate commands were

¹ The term "staging" used in the Pacific theaters during World War II had a broader meaning than

to have no easy task in planning the advance to Hollandia; but by March 1944 these headquarters had accumulated two years' experience with the complex air, sea, and ground operations that characterized the war in the Pacific. Indeed, the planning for Hollandia provides an excellent case study for most amphibious undertakings in the Southwest Pacific. For this reason a detailed discussion of the work undertaken by the various theater commands, the problems they faced, and the means by which these problems were solved is included here. The planning for subsequent operations within the Southwest Pacific is treated in less detail with emphasis placed principally on the differences from the Hollandia planning.

Solving the many problems faced by the Southwest Pacific commands in planning the advance to Hollandia was made more difficult by the interrelationship of many of those problems. A direct move to Hollandia from eastern New Guinea, bypassing Wewak and Hansa Bay, could not be undertaken unless carrier-based air support were made

that usually applied in Europe or the zone of interior. In the Pacific a staging base was the point of departure for an amphibious operation. At such a base not only would troop units be assembled, but supplies and equipment of all types would also be gathered to be loaded for either immediate or future use at objective areas.