

WE WENT TO WAR

Part X: Why We Were There

*The Background of Our Service,
Why We Were in the Southwest Pacific Area:
A Review*

380th Bomb Group - World War II



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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

Letter to Lt. General H.H. Arnold from Lt. General G.C. Kenney, 23 January 1943,
describing the situation existing in the Southwest Pacific Area.

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HEADQUARTERS
ALLIED AIR FORCES
SOUTHWEST PACIFIC AREA
OFFICE OF THE COMMANDING GENERAL

~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~

23rd January, 1943.

Dear General Arnold,

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While I know that you are doing what you can to keep this show out here alive, I am going to give you the picture as it is now, how it looks for the coming five months and a few recommendations.

I am getting a bit worried, as my strength is going down all the time while the indications are that the Jap not only replaces his losses but is capable of easily reinforcing his air strength to the point where I will meet serious trouble. During November, for example, I received thirty-four combat aircraft and lost fifty-five. In December I received thirty-seven and lost forty-eight. From January 1st to January 21st inclusive we have received sixteen fighters and lost twenty, received no light bombers and lost three, received no medium bombers and lost eight, received two heavy bombers and lost twelve. These are figures covering receipts and losses of the 5th Air Force only. R.A.A.F. figures are similar.

X 322 In looking over the records in this theatre I find some curious figures. Among others, in May last year there were in the U.S. Air Force in the Southwest Pacific Area:

363 fighters,
51 light bombers,
97 medium bombers,
48 heavy bombers
559 .. Total combat aircraft.

Today the figures are:

321 fighters,
23 light bombers,
85 medium bombers
108 heavy bombers
537 .. Total combat aircraft.

(1)

Lieut.General H. H. Arnold,
Chief of Army Air Forces,
WASHINGTON. D.C.

/On October 1st....

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On October 1st the total combat number was 536; on November 1st 606; on December 1st 589 and on January 1st 580.

Hence my alarm if this process keeps up.

I want to emphasize all over again that if the Air Force gets in trouble out here there is no estimate of the situation needed to tell you about the ground forces. They will simply fold up.

We have good reason to believe that the Japs have gotten the Borneo oil refineries at Tarakan going so that it is no longer necessary to make the long fuel haul from Japan to Kavieng, Rabaul and the Shortlands. To safeguard this shipping lane from Borneo, the Nip has put in and is building a string of aerodromes moving eastward across the north coast of New Guinea, from which his fighters will convoy the surface vessels. Efman Island, Manokwari, Moemi, Babo (now in active use and just extended to 5400 ft.), Seroei (on Japen Island in Geelvink Bay), Wakde Island (now under active construction), Hollandia, Wewak, Madang, Finschhafen and Cape Gloucester over on the western tip of New Britain, make up a chain which certainly means something. The big increase of Jap air and ground forces in Timor and the ousting of the last of the Allied forces there, the recent increase in air forces throughout the N.E.I., the occupation and establishment of seaplane bases in the Tenimber and Aroe Islands and a lot of attention to the west coast of New Guinea all point to a desire to safeguard the new supply routes eastward from the N.E.I. and their recently developed sources of raw materials to the New Britain/New Ireland/Solomons theatre. The recent arrival of the C.G. 5th Division, a special landing outfit of shock troops, at Fak-Fak (north west of New Guinea) presages a show in this area sometime in the near future.

To oppose this Jap ring, which stretches from Timor to Rabaul, and leaving the Solomons to South Pacific forces, I can muster from the R.A.A.F. and the 5th Air Force combined about 700 combat aircraft (counting everything that can be used legitimately in a shooting war), which must be spread from Darwin to Horn Island, to Port Moresby, to Milne Bay and around to Dobodura.

With the increased Jap attention to the area between Timor and the west coast of New Guinea I have already found it necessary to station one squadron of B.24's in the Darwin area for reconnaissance and bombing of shipping and aerodromes. I cannot

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Lieut.General H. H. Arnold - 3 - 23rd January, 1943.

overlook the possibility of Jap attempts to put in a string of aerodromes along the New Guinea west coast and even the seizure of Merauke, where a good dry season aerodrome already exists. I believe such a move is contemplated by the Nips to forestall any attempt by us to work up the coast from Merauke, establish air bases and bomb his installations and shipping along the Tarakan-Wewak line, which are now out of range of a bomber with full load. I'd like to do it if I had the bombers to spare. Accordingly I have to constantly survey all likely spots from Merauke to the northwest and crack down on any construction that starts. If the Jap occupied Merauke he would be a constant thorn in my side, as he would be right on the Torres Strait shipping lane and could easily raid every aerodrome from Horn Island to Cooktown and around to Port Moresby itself. The place is weakly held by a volunteer Dutch company and the Australians do not seem to have any troops to spare to reinforce the garrison.

What is really needed is sufficient heavy bomber strength to keep pounding Jap bases and shipping in the Timor - Ambon - west coast of New Guinea area and at the same time hammer at the same targets in New Britain and New Ireland. One force to keep the enemy from the Darwin area; the other to help us forward in the New Guinea theatre and help Soupac in the Solomons. A seizure of Darwin by the Nip would be bad news. While it may not seem to be a vital point for the defence of Australia, its loss would deprive us of all our advanced bases for the eventual operations toward Timor as well as the area from which a lot of our essential reconnaissance flights are carried out. From Darwin the Jap would dominate the whole north coast of Australia. It would be the devil of a job to oust the Nips if they ever got a foothold there on account of the lack of communications to get at them. I need to maintain a heavy group in the Darwin area all the time with facilities available to throw a second group into the picture at any time from the Moresby area where three groups would be stationed permanently. As soon as we clean up the Lae/Madang/Cape Gloucester (New Britain) area, I want to develop Merauke as a bomber base. Then we would be set to go forward.

In the New Guinea/Bismark area the Jap has 250 aircraft, in the N.E.I. 288, in the mandated islands 321, in the Malaya/Siam/Indo-China area 332, in the Philippines 57, in the Solomons 89 and ship-borne near Truk 160. Total 1497. His factory output is believed to be around 1000 airplanes per month, including all types. A significant fact is that about two weeks ago we shot down over 100 airplanes in four days but the Nip replaced them all in a week and at the same time increased his air strength at

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almost every N.E.I. base. If I lost a hundred airplanes in that time, the only thing that would be replaced under six weeks would be the Allied Air Force Commander.

The Jap certainly has geography in his favour when it comes to replacing losses. Furthermore, he has only one theatre to worry about. Burma and China fronts are both static. Russia has her hands full and that Alaskan show of ours is merely chicken feed. The Jap can concentrate a real air, army and navy show in the Timor/Darwin area or the New Guinea area or in the Solomons any time he feels like it and give us a real run for our money. Everyone now agrees that air power is the one thing that can halt him. I can give him, and have been giving him, a real argument every time he moves but I have no reserve if he repeats on me. He can replace his losses in a day or two and start over again. I cannot. A series of attacks might wear me down to a point where I would lose the air control I now have over New Guinea and put me and the rest of the show definitely behind the eight ball.

Here is a rough analysis of how I stand today:-

HEAVY BOMBARDMENT

| | <u>On hand</u> | <u>In sqdns.</u> | <u>In depots</u> | <u>en route</u> |
|---------------------------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| 43rd Group Heavy Bombers (B.17) | 55 | 34 | 21 | 6 |

Due to the hard service the B.17's of this group have had over the past six months, we are maintaining about twenty constantly in depot overhaul to get all B.17's back in shape and reduce attrition through wear and tear to a minimum. The four squadrons of the 43rd Group will average at best nine planes each through February. Taking expected attrition into account and assuming that the six reported en route for the past two months finally do arrive, this Group will be reduced to about twenty-four planes in the squadrons, with ten in depot overhaul, by June 30th. At the present time, with fifty percent of the planes in daily combat commission and twenty-five percent of these on reconnaissance duty, this means a striking force from the 43rd Group of fourteen heavy bombers. By June 30th, unless the group is brought up to strength, the group striking force will be nine heavy bombers.

| | <u>On hand</u> | <u>In sqdns.</u> | <u>In depots</u> | <u>en route</u> |
|---------------------------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| 90th Group Heavy Bombers (B.24) | 60 | 37 | 23 | 12 |

This group is now progressively taking over the major proportion of the heavy duty of bombardment and reconnaissance in this theatre. Monthly losses through June, 1943, will probably average about eight, which is about the number you have promised me to take care of attrition.

/The maintenance.....

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The maintenance of the B.24 is proving a greater problem than the maintenance of the B.17 and the squadron strengths will probably average throughout that period about ten. With fifty percent in daily combat commission and twenty-five percent on reconnaissance, this gives the 90th Group a striking force of fifteen heavy bombers. In other words, as far as our heavy bomber strength is concerned, our maximum effort on a single mission is around twenty-nine bombers. A second mission could be performed about twelve hours later by sixteen aircraft and an emergency third mission in another twelve hours with about ten. My heavy bombardment punch would then be zero for twenty-four hours until the planes were put back in operating condition. To be in a position to deliver even this small effort, I have found it necessary to omit day bombing except in an emergency, due to the fact that daylight operations do put many more planes out of commission than the night operations.

To maintain the 90th Group and replace the B.17's of the 43rd Group, I recommend that there be sent this theatre thirty-five B.24's in February and twenty-five per month thereafter through June, 1943.

MEDIUM BOMBARDMENT

38th Group (less two squadrons in Poppy) Medium Bombers (B.25)

| | <u>On hand</u> | <u>In sqdns.</u> | <u>In depots</u> | <u>En route</u> |
|---|----------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| | 27 | 19 | 8 | 4 |
| 13th and 90th Squadrons of 3rd Group .. | 28 | 21 | 7 | - |
| TOTAL.. | 55 | 40 | 15 | 4 |

The 38th Group, less two squadrons, is short ten airplanes at present and the two squadrons of the 3rd Group which are equipped with B.25's modified to take eight forward fixed calibre fifty guns and six parachute fragmentation bombs or heavy bombs for skip bombing are short five planes. We are losing an average of eight B.25's a month, so that the situation in regard to this type is serious.

To completely equip the 38th Group less two squadrons and the two squadrons of the 3rd Group now equipped with B.25's, and allowing twenty-five percent excess for depot overhaul, fourteen B.25's will be needed in February with a replacement rate of fourteen per month thereafter.

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/22nd Group.....

Lieut.General H. H. Arnold - 6 - 23rd January, 1943.

22nd Group Medium Bombers (B.26):

| <u>On hand</u> | <u>In sqdns.</u> | <u>In depots</u> | <u>en route</u> |
|----------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| 28 | 22 | 6 | 2 |

All B.26's of this group have been withdrawn from combat and are being given complete overhaul, as they are in extremely bad shape after six to eight months' combat work. The striking force of this group is zero until some time in March at the very earliest.

Recommend that forty B.25's be sent out here immediately and that eight additional replacements per month be set up to equip the group less one squadron with B.25's, the remaining squadron to use the B.26's which should last until June 30th, 1943, when they will have to be replaced.

The total medium bombardment strength now available daily for a single mission is about twenty-four. This will be increased, when the B.26's come back from overhaul, to thirty-six - assuming that attrition rates on the B.25 have been met meanwhile.

LIGHT BOMBARDMENT

3rd Group less two sqdns. (A.20A):

| <u>On hand</u> | <u>In sqdns.</u> | <u>In depots</u> | <u>en route</u> |
|----------------|------------------|------------------|------------------------------------|
| 26 | 23 | 3 | 16 being prepared for shipment. |

The available A.20's have been reduced to the point where the 8th and 89th Squadrons of the 3rd Group have been combined to operate what amounts to one squadron. If the sixteen A.20A's now being prepared for shipment arrive in February it will be possible to maintain one squadron of A.20's until June 30th. In the meantime, my light bomber striking force is about fifteen planes.

Pending the re-equipment of the 3rd Group with A.25's, which will probably not be completed before September 1943, it is recommended that two squadrons of the 3rd Group be brought up to strength with A.20's. This will mean the shipment of a total of nineteen in February and ten per month through June.

FIGHTERS

8th, 35th and 49th Groups (P.39's, P.40's and P.38's):

| <u>On hand</u> | <u>In sqdns.</u> | <u>In depot</u> | <u>en route</u> |
|----------------|------------------|-----------------|--|
| 334 | 222 | 112 | P.38's - 15 per month P.39's - 15 March, 15 May, 15 June P.40's - 15 April, 15 May, 15 June. |

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Lieut.General H. H. Arnold - 7 - 23rd January, 1943.

Present attrition rates indicate that the replacement schedule will result in the following numbers on hand each month until June, 1943:

| | | | |
|----------|----|-----|---------------------------|
| February | .. | 315 | } Mar 2 Status report 356 |
| March | .. | 315 | |
| April | .. | 330 | |
| May | .. | 345 | |
| June | .. | 360 | |

The fighter picture from the standpoint of present allotted organizations is satisfactory. In this connection, however, beginning February 1st, the 8th Group has to be pulled back to the mainland from Milne Bay to get rid of malaria. The medicos tell me that at least eighty percent of the Group and about the same percentage of the 403rd Heavy Bombardment B.17 Squadron (also at Milne Bay) have malaria and should be given treatment. Some of these men will be found to have the malignant type and cannot be safely returned to malarial country. Those I cannot absorb in the Air Service Command will have to be sent home. When the 8th Fighter Group is cured (which will take about six weeks) I will have to send the 35th Group back to the mainland and then follow them later with the 49th. In other words, I cannot depend on more than two-thirds of my fighters being available for combat. In a few weeks we are moving fighters over the range to Dobodura. What the malaria rate will be there I don't know but from all I can learn it is likely to be as high as the rest of New Guinea. Five or six months is the limit of continuous field duty in this section of the world, regardless of the quantity of quinine you take. Quinine does not prevent malaria; all it does is prevent you from knowing you have it.

CARGO

Present figures are as follows:

| | | |
|---------------------------|----|--|
| 374th Troop Carrier Group | .. | 52 C.47's |
| 317th Troop Carrier Group | .. | 19 C.47's, 7 C.49's, 3 C.39's, 10 C.60's, 2 LB.30's, 1 B.17C, 1 B.17E. |

One DC.2, two C.50's and three C.53's have been loaned to the R.A.A.F. Transport Command in order to utilize their trained crews. In addition, we have contracted with various Australian civil

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Lieut. General H. H. Arnold - 8 - 23rd ^{January} February, 1943.

air lines to maintain and operate for the 5th Air Force one DC.3, one DC.5, five C.56's and two Lockheed 14's hauling our air freight and passengers. These two batches of equipment, like some of the miscellaneous planes of the 317th Group, are all pretty old and maintenance is extremely difficult on account of the number of non-standard parts, non-standard engines and equipment, much of which it is impossible to procure any longer.

I would like to get both groups of the 5th Air Force equipped with the C.47 as soon as possible, with a replacement rate of fifteen per month in order to have one type to maintain.

I would like to hire crews from the air lines to fly the remaining cats and dogs now in the 317th Group, or lend them to the R.A.A.F. to operate. The R.A.A.F. has a tough problem in air supply of the Darwin sector that I constantly have to help out on.

As I told you when you were out here last fall, cargo planes are essential to the maintenance of any real effort in this theatre. As we advance in New Guinea, we will need them more and more. Another group of fifty-two ought to be on the way to me now for the next phase and still another group should follow it early this summer.

SUMMARY

To summarize, here is what I need in February and the replacement rate per month thereafter to keep the present 5th Air Force organization going:-

B.24's .. 35 in February - 25 per month through June, 1943.
B.25's .. 54 in February - 22 per month through June, 1943.
A.20's .. 19 in February - 10 per month through June, 1943.
C.47's .. 33 in February - 15 per month through June, 1943.

To take care of the military problem confronting me, however, the notes I gave you out here last fall (with minor additions) still hold true. They were as follows:-

4 Heavy Groups of four squadrons each, with twelve planes to the squadron, requiring 250 heavy bombers in Australia with a monthly replacement rate of 50.

4 Medium Groups of four squadrons each, with thirteen planes to the squadron, requiring 275 medium bombers in Australia with a monthly replacement rate of 55.

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3 Light Groups of four squadrons each with eighteen planes to the squadron, requiring 269 light bombers in Australia with a monthly replacement rate of 54.

6 Fighter Groups of four squadrons each with twenty-five planes to the squadron, requiring 788 fighters in Australia with a monthly replacement rate of 157.

4 Troop Carrier Groups of four squadrons each and thirteen planes to the squadron, requiring 260 cargo planes in Australia with a monthly replacement rate of 39.

These figures are all based on twenty-five percent of the combat planes in Australia being continually in depot work or overhaul.

A depot group is needed for each three tactical groups and one service group for each tactical group. The four squadron group is sound and saves overhead. The twelve plane heavy bombardment squadron is not only sound administratively but tactically also. It gives you a nine plane formation for the first mission and six or more for the immediate follow-up. I don't like to send out less than a six-plane formation, as that is the minimum for a good defence against fighters and carries the minimum punch necessary to take out most of our targets. When we have to mingle two squadrons to get a six to nine plane formation it is not good. The squadron techniques vary, the show is not under its regular flight and squadron leaders and results are generally painful. We have had some bad experiences from mixing squadrons in the same formations and just don't do it any more.

By the way, Stratemeyer recently wrote a letter to Don Wilson in which he said that he thought we were being done well by because with two heavy bombardment groups we had one hundred and twenty heavy bombers in Australia, whereas the number at eight per squadron should only allow us seventy and so it looked like there was a lot of gravy there. I hope that some new table of allotment is not going to be used to shut me up. I have built all my tactics, training of squadrons, operations, construction of aerodromes and everything else on the twelve plane heavy bombardment squadron and right in the middle of a war is no time to revise all this. I told Don not to worry, for I was quite sure you were not going to let us drop to any seventy heavy bombers because of some table of allotment.

Now that the Papuan campaign is over, we are busy planning the next phase. The next jump should be easier as we are much smarter than the first time. This, of course, is assuming that

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/you are.....

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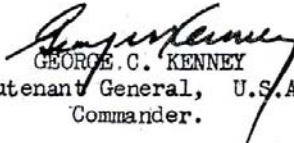
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Lieut. General H. H. Arnold - 10 - 23rd January, 1943

you are going to keep on giving me some airplanes. In the meantime, Rabaul shipping and aerodromes in that vicinity are the major daily targets, and these, together with an occasional convoy or an attempt by the Nip to replace planes at Lae, keep us on our toes.

The boys are doing quite well by themselves, as you can see from the enclosed charts, which I have posted each month for my own amusement. If you are interested, I will keep on sending them.

Sincerely,


GEORGE C. KENNEY
Lieutenant General, U.S.A.,
Commander.

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POSTSCRIPT

In your higher staff revision of ideas from time to time, has anyone brought up the possibility that the quickest way to beat Hitler is to lick Japan right away before she gets too tough and then go along with the Russians through the back door into Germany? That front seems to be the only vulnerable one Hitler has.

After North Africa is cleared out, an invasion of the European continent looks to me like doing it the hard way. It would seem like a good thing then, with Suez safeguarded and with Iraq, Iran and India out of danger, to put some extra push on Japan now, clear that opponent out of the way and free us to really help Russia. As it is, while Russia seems to be doing a marvellous job, the difficulty of helping her in a big way is throwing most of the burden on the Russians, and I doubt whether they can ever turn the trick alone. On the other hand, if Japan is allowed 1943 to develop the resources of the territory she now holds and harness the millions of hands under her control to produce what she needs to fight this war, she is going to be really tough. Suppose that it takes through 1944 before we are ready to go after Japan. By that time it is a sure thing that we will do it all alone. Our allies will be so exhausted by that time that they will be able to contribute little or nothing to the effort.

A big combined show launched as soon as possible, smashing west from New Guinea and the Solomons and east through Burma, would separate Japan from her vital materials and especially oil, clear the Burma Road, put China back into the war, get back the Philippines, give us bases from which to bomb Japan and ensure cleansing the Pacific Ocean in the shortest possible time. Maybe Russia would come in against Japan and help in the fairly early stages.

Hitler may be skidding, but I cannot help but remember that we conquered Germany the last time only by starving her out. She won't starve this time. If we wait for the blood toll to bring her to her knees, we are talking in terms of years. In the meantime we and our Allies will take a terrible blood-letting in Europe that will count heavily against us when we finally get around to licking the Jap - who will be getting stronger every day that we allow him to hold the rich empire he has already seized.

This may be heresy, but it is the way it looks from where I sit.

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AMC
G.C.K.