

**THE FOUNDATIONS OF VICTORY:
THE PACIFIC WAR
1943-1944**

**ORGANISING FOR JUNGLE WARFARE
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Considering the relatively small size of the Australian Army, the Second World War proved a turbulent period for its senior officers. During the conflict the nation's political and military leaders faced a number of pressing and conflicting challenges that affected the army's organisation, and forced them to constantly monitor and modify its development. The war saw an unprecedented expansion of the army's size, as well as a great increase in its commitments and capabilities. The force's growth was also unsustainable, however, and overexpansion necessitated a painful, yet managed, correction in the conflict's final years.

The crisis year was mid-1942 to mid-1943 when the stresses of manpower overreach, strategic commitment and operational realities forced the army's leaders to address fundamental issues of organisation. To negotiate this crisis the army introduced a new structure for its combat divisions. This novel organisation, which was to be known as the 'jungle division', represented the first time in the Australian Army's history that it fielded a formation whose specific purpose was to meet Australian strategic, operational, and tactical requirements. The adoption of the jungle division was a marked departure from imperial models upon which the force had previously relied for the organisation of its units and formations. The jungle division standard was a success, and as a result of its adoption Australia was able to continue to project military force in New Guinea and the nearby regions, despite its declining manpower pool.

The Imperial Legacy

When the Second World War spread to New Guinea and Papua in 1942 the Australian Army had had limited experience with the peculiar requirements of tropical warfare. The breadth and cost of this ignorance was aptly demonstrated in Australia's first encounter with the Japanese in Malaya. Successes did follow in 1942, but the Australian Army that stopped the enemy at Milne Bay and Kokoda, and which forced it from Gona, Buna, and Sanananda, remained one that had been designed to fight in the open spaces of a European or North African theatre of operations, instead of the confined, rugged, oppressive tropics of the New Guinea jungle.

It would be tempting to allocate blame for the army's organisational unreadiness for the campaign in New Guinea. After all, in 1920 the army's senior officers had identified Japan as the Commonwealth's 'only potential and probable enemy'.¹ To these officers the Japanese threat appeared even more grave after the First World War than before. In the settlement of the First World War Japan retained control of the German Pacific island territories that it had occupied, under a League of Nations' mandate. Australia governed the former German colony of Papua under a similar arrangement, making the two future antagonists into neighbours with only 1,300km of ocean separating Truk and Rabaul. Throughout the interwar period the army's senior officers continued to highlight the threat of Japan in their relations with the government, although only in the context of continental security and invasion defence, not from the perspective of protecting the territories of New Guinea and Papua.

Interwar strategic policy also suggested the possibility of a future tropical role for the Australian Army. Australia's adherence to the Singapore strategy implied that the most likely destination for the expeditionary division, as called for by Plan 401, was Malaya.² However, in the face of this acknowledged threat, other aspects of interwar policy assured that Australian defence planners directed their efforts towards more traditional theatres of operation, even if they had been inclined to examine jungle warfare.

From this distance it is perhaps necessary to recall that in the era of the two World Wars the Australian Army was not an independent institution. Instead, it was one branch of an imperial association whose members subscribed to common military policies and principles. The cornerstone of the Commonwealth's interwar security policy was the Singapore strategy, an imperial policy that incorporated the Commonwealth's defence, within the broader defence requirements and responsibilities of the Empire.³

The Australian Army operated within this federation and, as such, conformed to imperial decisions and protocols in training, weapons and equipment, administrative and staff procedures, and officer education. The objective was to enable the British Army to incorporate readily contingents from the Empire into an imperial army. Another vital area in this interoperability was Australia's acceptance of British Army organisation and establishments for its units and formations. The Australian government accepted the concept of interoperability at the 1909 Imperial Conference in London, and reaffirmed it at subsequent meetings.⁴ At the start of the Second World War, the organisation of the Australian Army was based on an imperial model designed by British officers in London.

Ironically, despite its commitment to Empire, the Australian Army had not kept current with organisational developments in Britain. In the late-1930s the British made significant modifications to their divisional structure, particularly in the infantry and artillery arms. This resulted in a British Army that emphasised material and firepower, whereas the Australian Army's variant remained manpower intensive. When the Australian Imperial Force (AIF)'s 6th Division arrived in Egypt it had to undergo a reorganisation to conform to the current British standard. The key changes were that the division reduced each brigade from four to three battalions and reconfigured the artillery from three brigades of four batteries, each with four guns, to three regiments of two batteries each of twelve guns. The two armies' battalion and company organisations also differed. Upon reorganisation in the Middle East the 6th Division shed soldiers but acquired vast quantities of motor vehicles, and new unit types such as a motorised reconnaissance regiment and an anti-tank regiment.⁵ This pattern of response to changes in the British divisional standard continued while the AIF remained in the Middle East. For example, in September 1941 the Australian Army increased the scale of its divisions to include a light anti-aircraft regiment.⁶ Although slower to adapt, and while missing some support arms, the Citizen Military Forces (CMF) of the Home Army in Australia also converted to the new British standard.

New Guinea

The Australian infantry brigades and divisions that met and defeated the Japanese in New Guinea in 1942 fought with the same organisation that the AIF had employed in the Middle East. Its unsuitability for tropical warfare was readily apparent, and before the year's end the Commander-in-Chief Australian Military Forces, General Thomas Blamey, had given consideration to a major reorganisation.⁷ This would lead to the creation of the Australian 'jungle infantry division'.

For the Australian Army there were three key considerations that made the British standard division organisation unsuitable for tropical warfare. They were:

1. The environmental nature of the area of operations;
2. The logistic challenges of the area of operations; and
3. Australia's growing manpower shortage.

Combat in the South West Pacific Area was fundamentally different from that which the AIF had experienced in the Middle East. Whereas European theatre commanders conceived operations on the scale of divisions or corps, with the full array of support arms, battle in the closed jungle of New Guinea took place largely at the lower end of the military spectrum. It was through the aggressive patrolling of small parties of infantrymen that Australia came to dominate and control the jungle. When set-piece battles did take place, they were almost always at the company or battalion level, with support provided by a unit's own mortars and machine guns or a handful of attached guns. Even on the rare occasions when a brigade conducted a coordinated attack, such as the 26th Brigade's assault on Sattelberg in

November 1943, its commander, Brigadier David Whitehead, assigned his battalions different lines of approach and communication. In effect, each battalion fought its own battle, isolated from the remainder of the brigade by dense jungle, steeply-sided ridges and ravines, and swollen rivers.⁸

The terrain of New Guinea limited operations in ways that were not applicable to a European-style theatre of operations. Even if the Australian Army had had the ability to bring forward a division's full establishment, such as its motorised reconnaissance regiment, it would have been unlikely that the additional strength could have been deployed and manoeuvred to advantage. For example, it was only the availability of easy coastal replenishment that permitted the 9th Division to deploy an entire field regiment during the Finschhafen campaign, and reinforce this with a further field regiment and a letter battery of 155mm howitzers. This was a condition not easily replicated elsewhere in New Guinea. The 3rd and 7th Divisions, for example, during their respective campaigns around Wau/Salamaua and the Markham/Ramu Valleys, relied upon tenuous lines of communication via the air. As a result of their isolation, and difficulty of moving of troops and supplies, these formations made do with far less firepower than that which the 9th Division enjoyed.

Related to the adverse environment of New Guinea was the difficulty the Australian Army faced in providing troops with an appropriate logistical system. Formations organised on imperial lines imposed a level of wastage that the Australian Army could not maintain. The British had expected to employ their infantry divisions in regions that possessed well-developed transport and distribution infrastructures, and terrain features with a high mobility potential. For a commander to apply the full combat power of a British standard division required an enormous logistic capacity, as well as an ability to manoeuvre and concentrate offensive power. Unlike the open vistas of the Libyan Desert, the rugged and closed nature of New Guinea's terrain, and the virtual absence of roads, rail and port facilities, placed severe limits on a force's logistic capacity, and a commander's ability to concentrate and shift a formation's combat power. These limitations made the jungle into an infantryman's battleground. The other arms were of some use and were indeed used, but they could be brought forward in limited numbers and manoeuvred and sustained only with the greatest difficulty. The reality was that in New Guinea much of the combat power of a division organised on the British standard was unemployable. As a result, instead of contributing to battle, large sections of Australian imperial-organised divisions languished in base areas, such as Port Moresby, where they consumed scarce logistic and administrative resources and clogged the line of communications.

In late 1942 Australian planners made several observations that affected the utility of formations assigned to New Guinea.

- There was a tendency for large numbers of units, or portions of units, to congregate in rear areas.
- The virtual absence of roads in New Guinea created major difficulties for the provision of logistic support. The lack of roads meant that the delivery of supplies had to depend on aerial and water-borne transport, local labour and a limited number of light vehicles, principally jeeps.
- The dependence on aircraft and small boats for troop and supply movement greatly limited the number of soldiers that the army could transport and support, and kept forward deployment to the bare minimum.
- The New Guinea environment severely constricted the number of supporting arms and units that could be brought forward and sustained to assist the infantry.⁹

The last major factor influencing the decision to change divisional organisations was the need to bring the army's size and the Commonwealth's manpower supply into balance. At its peak the Australian Army fielded a force of 11 infantry and three armour/motor divisions. This greatly exceeded prewar projections of the maximum strength that the army could maintain. The course of the war proved the prewar planners correct. In addition, casualty rates in New Guinea from combat and disease were higher than anticipated and exceeded the force's intake rate. Malaria, in particular, was a great scourge. By the end of 1942 Blamey had

accepted that the army had to contract if units were to avoid a downward spiral in their effectiveness from insufficient manpower.¹⁰ He recognised that the army would have to reduce its order of battle if it was to maintain a combat capable force, otherwise the force would consist only of hollow shells. The first formations to go were the 4th Division and the 14th Brigade.

Further exacerbating the army's manpower situation was the intention of the government of John Curtin to implement a program of deliberate withdrawal of soldiers from the ranks of the armed forces in order to rebalance the Australian economy. This was a part of the government's plan to provide for more civilian needs.¹¹ The first demand, on 1 October 1943, was for 20,000.¹² Additional requests followed, and by the war's end the army had released over 100,000 men.¹³

Blamey had little choice but to steer the army's contraction. Part of the balancing process was achieved through the periodic disbandment of formations, and the reallocation of their members to surviving units. However, another option besides disbandment existed, which could ease the contraction and permit the army to retain a larger overseas order of battle for offensive action. Since the army could send forward only a part of a division's strength, it could achieve economics in manpower by reorganising the division standard in order to eliminate waste. This would free up trained soldiers as replacements for battle-weakened units, or for reassignment to other tasks. The effect would be a more efficient utilisation of the army's increasingly scarce personnel resources and a better management of its logistic system.

Forming the Jungle Division

In February 1943 the Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant-General John Northcott, issued a directive outlining the army's divisional requirements for the rest of the war. There were to be three types of divisions: armoured, standard infantry and jungle infantry.¹⁴ Originally there were to be five jungle divisions, but this was subsequently raised to six. Those chosen were the 3rd, 5th, 6th, 7th, 9th, and 11th Divisions three AIF and three militia. These were to become the army's attack force, and only they served overseas and fought the Japanese. Blamey kept the army's other infantry divisions on the British standard, although they became increasingly irrelevant as the threat of invasion receded and their strength and combat capability declined. In the end, the home army reverted to a garrison role and was incapable of offensive action. The force's three armoured divisions, of little use in jungle warfare, suffered a similar fate. Before the war's end, Blamey had disbanded all of them and only small armour elements served overseas.

Three principles underlay the design of the jungle division's organisation. They were:

- The creation of a flexible organisation that was capable of various groupings.
- The elimination of all units, subunits, transport and equipment which were not essential for operations in jungle conditions.
- The centralisation of certain divisional, corps and line of communication units in a central New Guinea pool for allocation to jungle division headquarters to meet special requirements.¹⁵

Table 1 outlines the principal differences between the British standard infantry division and the new Australian jungle infantry division.

Table 1: Comparison between British Standard Infantry Division and Australian Jungle Infantry Division¹⁶

Type	British Standard Infantry Division	Australian Jungle Infantry Division
Infantry	- 3 infantry brigade headquarters - 3 infantry brigades, each of 3 battalions	- 3 infantry brigade headquarters - 3 infantry brigades, each with 3 battalions - 1 division carrier company
Cavalry	- reconnaissance regiment	
Artillery	- HQ RAA - 3 field regiments, each of 3 batteries - 1 anti-tank regiment - 1 light anti-aircraft regiment - 1 survey battery	- 1 field regiment - 1 light anti-aircraft battery (airborne)
Engineers	- HQ RAE - 1 field park company - 3 field companies - camouflage training unit	- HQ RAE - 1 field park company - 3 field companies - camouflage training unit
Signals	- divisional signals	- divisional signals
Supply & Transport	- HQ AASC - 3 companies	HQ AASC - supply depot company - general transport company
Ordnance	- divisional ordnance field park	- independent brigade group ordnance field park
Medical	- 3 field ambulance companies - mobile bath unit	- 3 field ambulance companies
Repair	- 10 light aid detachments - divisional workshop	- 5 light aid detachments - independent brigade group workshop
Pay	- divisional field cash office	- divisional field cash office
Provost	- divisional provost company	- divisional provost company
Postal	- divisional postal unit	- divisional postal unit

Table 2 outlines the units eliminated from the British standard division organisation.

Table 2: Units Eliminated From British Standard Division ¹⁷

Arms Type	Unit Eliminated
Headquarters	- light aid detachment
Cavalry	- cavalry regiment - light aid detachment
Artillery	- headquarters RA - 2 field regiments - anti-tank regiment - 2 light aid detachments
Signals	- cavalry regiment signal troop - signal sections for 2 field regiments - signal section for anti-tank regiment - light aid detachment
Medical	- mobile bath unit
Ordnance	- division ordnance field park
AEME	- divisional workshop - 5 light aid detachments

Although the jungle division kept a nine battalion structure, the infantry underwent an internal reorganisation. The British standard infantry battalion contained numerous vehicles and support weapons that the division could not profitably employ in New Guinea. The jungle battalion establishment first eliminated the unit's anti-aircraft and carrier platoons. It then consolidated the redundant carrier platoons into a divisional carrier company that the formation's commander could allocate as required. In compensation for these reductions the battalion received a medium machine gun platoon. Overall, the modifications reduced the battalion's strength by 107 men, from 910 to 803.¹⁸

While the most obvious effect of the reorganisation was the elimination of two-thirds of the division's artillery, the changes also had a significant effect on the division's support arms. For example, the changes reduced the number of AASC personnel by nearly half, from 1,061 to 555.¹⁹ The consequent reduction of vehicles throughout the organisation also had a flow on effect on its repair and maintenance organisation. As a result the army disbanded the division workshop, replacing it with an independent brigade group workshop. The AOC's division ordnance field park became a brigade group formation.²⁰

Overall, an Australian jungle division had approximately 4,000 fewer soldiers than one organised on the British standard. Its logistic requirements were reduced even further by a proportionally greater reduction in vehicles.

Table 3 outlines the 6th Division's order of battle after its reorganisation in early 1943.

Table 3: Order of Battle—6th Division as a Jungle Formation²¹

Type	Unit
Headquarters	- Headquarters 6 Australian Division - 6 Division HQ Def & Emp Platoon
Artillery	- 2/1 Field Regiment - 2/43 Light Aid Detachment
Engineers	- Headquarters RAE 6 Division - 2/1, 2/2, 2/8 Field Companies - 2/22 Field Park Company - 2/80 Light Aid Detachment - 6 Australian Division Camouflage Training Unit
Signals	- Signals 6 Australian Division
Infantry	- Headquarters 16 Infantry Brigade: 2/1, 2/2, 2/3 Battalions; 2/45 Light Aid Detachment - Headquarters 17 Infantry Brigade: 2/5, 2/6, 2/7 Battalions; 2/46 Light Aid Detachment - Headquarters 30 Infantry Brigade: 2/22, 39, 49 Battalions; 306 Light Aid Detachment - 6 Australian Division Carrier Company
Pioneer	- 2/4 Pioneer Battalion
AASC	- Headquarters 6 Australian Division AASC - 2/155 Australian General Transport Company - 2/5 Australian Supply Depot Company
Medical	- 2/1, 2/2, 2/12 Field Ambulance Companies
Ordnance	- 2/119 Australian Independent Brigade Group Ordnance Field Park
AEME	- 2/119 Australian Independent Brigade Group Workshop
Pay	- 6 Australian Division Field Cash Office
Provost	- 6 Australian Division Provost Company
Postal	- 6 Australian Division Postal Unit

Units surplus to the 6th Division after its conversion to the jungle standard were:

- 331, 2/40, 2/49, 2/42, Light Aid Detachments
- Headquarters RAA 6 Division
- 2/2 Field Regiment including signal section
- 2/1 Anti-Tank Regiment
- 2/6 Survey Battery
- 6 Division Mobile Bath Unit
- 6 Division Ordnance Field Park
- 6 Division Mobile Laundry
- 6 Division Workshop.²²

The designers of the jungle division organisation understood that the new design produced a lightly armed formation whose dominant arm was the infantry. This was a shift in combat capability and represented the creation of a new dimension in Australian force-of-arms. Unable to maintain a heavy force, the Australian fighting troops became essentially a light infantry force, not dissimilar to the approach to war employed in future conflicts in Malaya, Borneo and Vietnam.²³

Northcott accepted that even in the jungle there would be occasions when a division could employ additional assets. To this end, the jungle reorganisation assigned a variety of support arms to corps or line of communication areas. Corps commanders could assign these units to divisions or brigades whenever the situation permitted their employment. The corps level units included assets such as armoured regiments, commando squadrons, additional field regiments, survey batteries, anti-tank regiments, airborne anti-aircraft batteries and machine-gun battalions. The available line of communication units included light and heavy anti-aircraft batteries, general transport companies, mobile bath units, independent workshops and independent ordnance field parks.²⁴

The availability of this pool of units meant that Australian formations had to be highly flexible. Brigade and division headquarters had to have the ability to command and employ a wide variety of units. For example, when the 7th Division began the valley campaign in 1943 it first employed the 2/6 Independent Company to seize the airstrip at Kaiapit. It was only after this point that the division's commander, Major-General George Vasey, sent forward the 21st Brigade.²⁵

Another target of the jungle division's planners were the formation's vehicle establishment. Vehicles were a particular target because the environmental conditions of New Guinea made their employment difficult. Keeping them on a division's establishment placed strain on a formation's supply and repair organisations, and also increased pressure on the overall line of communication. Consequently, planners ruthlessly culled vehicles from unit establishments. Individual units had to justify every vehicle, and the divisional AASC element was reduced to a single transport company.

So extensive were the reductions that units no longer had the ability to move all of their personnel and equipment with integral transport. Most units faced a discrepancy between the weight of the equipment and supplies on their establishment and the lift capacity of their remaining vehicles. An infantry brigade group, for example, had a lift requirement of 387 tons (consisting of war equipment, stores and first line ammunition but not including the weight of vehicles, trailers and artillery guns) but a lift capacity of just 162 tons. Instead of moving all of its first line kit on its own, the plan was that a unit would receive an allocation of additional vehicles from the division's transport pool when required.

While the effect on the infantry, for example, was severe, the new arrangement accepted the operational reality of the New Guinea jungle. The infantry were the division's forward edge, and where the transport and distribution infrastructure was at its most primitive. The jungle organisation left battalions with almost no transport because in most cases they would not be able to employ any. Now more than ever, the infantry depended upon their own backs, or that of native labour, for their mobility.²⁶ Table 4 outlines the personnel and vehicle establishments for some jungle division units as of 1944. It also highlights the difference between a unit's lift requirement and capacity.

Table 4: Jungle Division Personnel and Vehicle Establishments, Including Lift Requirement and Capacity—1944 ²⁷

Unit Type	Personnel	Jeeps	Trucks	Lift Need (in tons)	Lift Met (in tons)
Brigade Headquarters	85	3	Nil	11	4
Commando Squadron	280	3	Nil	31	3
Infantry Battalion	835	8	Nil	61	7
Brigade Workshop	132	6	22	65	39
Light Aid Detachment	31	5	Nil	5	3
Field Ambulance Company	234	8	2	20	2

Once implemented the jungle division organisation did not remain static, and periodically the army reexamined the issue. In most cases the existing decisions remained in place. Representatives of the artillery and the engineers, for example, argued fruitlessly for additional resources within the division for their arms.²⁸ More successful were the advocates of a divisional dental unit. Northcott had eliminated dental staff from the jungle division's medical services. Instead, dentistry became a corps responsibility, and the scheme allocated four dental units to a jungle corps. The intention was that a corps commander would attach these to a division headquarters on an as-needed basis. The army initially reconsidered this arrangement in December 1943, but decided to continue with it. However, the ad hoc nature of dental support forced a further review. In April 1944 the Land Headquarters reversed its previous decision and added a dental unit to a jungle division's organisation.²⁹

Overall, the general trend was downwards with every revision, however, as higher command eliminated additional troops and vehicles from the jungle division's organisation. In October 1944 the infantry battalion establishment, for example, was just 738 soldiers on the jungle assault scale.³⁰

By the end of 1944 the army had introduced a further refinement by developing a second scale for its jungle divisions. They were now to operate on two establishments, light and assault. Light was the normal organisation but for deployment onto active operations a jungle division divested itself further of personnel and vehicles in preparation for battle. The rationale for this distinction is not entirely clear, but it probably recognises that even in a jungle division there were soldiers and equipment that, while useful for periods of rest, refit and training, could be removed for operations without any loss of combat effectiveness. Tables 5 and 6 outline the two types of jungle division structures for some unit types.

Table 5: Jungle Division Organisation—Light Scale³¹

Unit Type	Personnel	Jeeps	Trailors	Trucks
Field Battery	195	9	9	6
Field Company	239	11	11	26
Infantry Battalion	774	8	8	nil
Field Ambulance Company	239	8	8	2
Military History Section	4	2	2	nil

Table 6: Jungle Division Organisation—Assault Scale³²

Unit Type	Personnel	Jeeps	Trailors	Trucks
Field Battery	164	6	6	6
Field Company	231	10	10	21
Infantry Battalion	738	8	8	nil
Field Ambulance Company	232	8	8	2
Military History Section	2	nil	nil	nil

The new organisation also required some tinkering in order to balance establishment and capabilities. In June 1944 the army concluded a study into the supply of ammunition in the field. The report observed that the division's existing transport capacity could not lift all of its first line scale. Instead of adding more transport, the report recommended a reduction in the allocation of ammunition. It called for an approximate 25% reduction in small arms and mortar ammunition, kept 25-pounder ammunition at the same rate, and recommended a 50% increase in grenades.³³

New Capabilities

This chapter has concentrated its attention on the jungle division's organisation, but while this was the major reform of the war, it was not the only modification in the force's field organisation. Changes in the strategic situation, following the spread of the war to the Pacific, forced the Australian Army to develop new capabilities if it was to wage battle effectively against the Japanese. The area most affected was that of logistics. As this is the specific subject of another chapter, this essay will only touch lightly on the topic. However, it is appropriate to mention here briefly some of the modifications the army made to its logistic organisation.

Traditionally, Australian forces have gone to war with a limited logistic capability. In colonial era conflicts and in the First World War, Australian troops depended on the British Army for much of their support. This was also the case in the Second World War, especially in North Africa. However, when the war spread to the Pacific, Australia had to provide for a greater proportion of its support requirements from its own resources.

In the Southwest Pacific Area the United States did—in part—fulfil Britain's role as logistic big brother. Yet, from the perspective of Washington the region was a distant, minor theatre of a global conflict. In addition, in 1942 and 1943 Australian troops bore the principal burden of the allied war effort in the Southwest Pacific Area, awaiting the American build-up. However, even after the South West Pacific Area's commander, General Douglas MacArthur, had acquired

great American strength, Australia continued to receive limited access to allied logistic support. For MacArthur, New Guinea was merely a stepping stone in his return to the Philippines, which was his true objective. He did not see a need to devote more than the bare minimum of resources to what was always in his mind a backwater. The campaign, therefore, was fought on the cheap— both in manpower and supply.

The need to provide for greater support from its own resources led to the Australian Army's development of two new capabilities. These were air dispatch and water transport. Both would play major roles in overcoming New Guinea's poor transport infrastructure and allowed the army to wage battle in remote and inaccessible reaches of New Guinea.

Australia conducted its first air supply drops in July 1942 during the Kokoda campaign. Throughout the Wau-Salamaua campaign of 1943, Kanga force, and then 3rd Division were dependent on aerial drops for much of their supply. Over the course of the war the army raised three air maintenance companies. Similarly, since the Royal Australian Navy was unable to provide for the army's riverine and blue water supply needs the army assumed the task itself. In late 1942 the army formed a Directorate of Water Transport (Small Craft) under the control of the Royal Australian Engineers. At its peak the engineers operated a fleet of 1,900 watercraft varying in size from small launches to ocean-going vessels.³⁴

Conclusion

By the end of 1942 the leaders of the Australian Army knew that they faced major problems which if not corrected would reduce the force's future effectiveness. Manpower limitations, a harsh operational environment, and severe logistic deficiencies imperilled the army's ability to wage battle against the Japanese. Among Blamey and Northcott's responses was the decision to recast radically the organisation of the force's combat troops. The result was the jungle infantry division, Australia's only home-grown combat formation.

The new organisation eliminated wastage which the army could not afford to bear. It streamlined rear areas, freed troops for reassignment and reduced logistic overheads, while also allowing commanders to project and sustain their division's critical combat elements. For the nation, it meant the army would be able to field the required six divisions to the war's end. By contrast, the United States Army never embraced the need to create special formations for war in the tropics, and used the same division design in New Guinea and France. The Americans did raise a light jungle division—the 71st Infantry Division—but it served in Europe and only after reorganisation on to a heavier scale. The critical difference between the two nations' approaches to war was that the United States could bear a level of wastage which Australia could not.

The Australian Army would have faced an interesting organisational dilemma if the Allies had had to assault the Japanese home islands. The Australian Jungle Division was too light for the intensity of resistance that would have greeted the invaders. Instead, the allies would have required the full weight of combat assets available to the armies of the Second World War era. If the Australian Army had been called upon to join in the conquest of Japan it would have first had to reorganise its contribution onto a heavier scale.

The jungle division did not long survive the war's end. The reorganisation of the Citizen Military Forces saw the Australian Army readopt a British-style model for its infantry divisions. The Cold War and the threat of the Soviet Union assured a continued focus on heavy formations. Though forgotten, the jungle division organisation showed that Australia's military leaders had the ability to design novel solutions to unexpected problems. In 1943, the growing dominance of the Australian soldier over his Japanese opponent showed that the army had learned and inculcated the tactical lessons of 1942. The development of the jungle division and the reorganisation of the army demonstrated that the army had also learned and responded to the organisational lessons.

Endnotes

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26. 'Staff and Logistic Table, Units of Infantry Brigade Group—Jungle Division' (1944), AWM54, item 422/7/8.
27. Ibid.
28. 'Field Artillery Jungle Division—Artillery Organisation, 1944', AWM54, item 75/7/5, and 'Employment of MT with Division RAE Units for Jungle Warfare', 22 April 1943, AWM54, item 422/7/8.
29. 'Composition of a Jungle Corps', 29 March 1944, and 'Proposed Inclusion of a Dental Unit in OOB of a Jungle Div', 24 April 1944, NAA, Melbourne, MP742/I, item 240/2/378.
30. 'Light and Assault Scales, I Australian Corps (Jungle Division)', 21 October 1944, AWM54, item 917/6/12.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. 'Supply of Ammunition in the Field', 2 June 1944, AWM54, item 21/14/5.
34. Ronald McNicoll, *The Royal Australian Engineers 1919 to 1945: Teeth and Tail* (Canberra: Corps Committee of the Royal Australian Engineers, 1982), 299-303.