

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

***STRATEGY AND GENERALSHIP:
STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL PLANNING
FOR THE 1943 OFFENSIVES
David Horner***

It is a truism that war is an intensely human activity. For many participants, and even innocent bystanders, it is a tragedy of misery and suffering. More positively, as we know, battles are usually won by the courage and initiative of individual combatants. But at the levels of strategy and operations the personalities, ambitions and values of the principal commanders exert an even greater influence on the final outcome. At these levels, human relationships are often decisive. For example, Australia's involvement in the 2003 Iraq War was largely determined by the personality of the Prime Minister, John Howard, and its conduct owed much to close involvement of the Chief of the Defence Force, General Peter Cosgrove.

The story of Australia's strategic and operational planning in 1943 is the story of six men—two American generals, two Australian generals and two Australian civilians. The American generals were General Douglas MacArthur and his air force chief, Lieutenant-General George Kenney. MacArthur was one of the towering figures of military history. Imperious, believing in his own destiny, he was a brilliant manipulator of the media and a clever political general. He was the Allied Commander-in-Chief of the Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA), which included both US and Australian forces.

He was not one to share the limelight with anyone else, and George Kenney knew it. Kenney was an innovative air strategist, but was prepared to present his ideas gently to MacArthur through MacArthur's headquarters staff. Soon MacArthur relied on Kenney for advice on matters of strategy as well as the conduct of the air war, and they talked long into the night about operational matters. More importantly, Kenney made him believe in the Air Force, whereas previously he had mistrusted it.

The Australian generals were General Sir Thomas Blamey and Lieutenant-General Edmund Herring. Blamey dominated the Australian Army almost as much as MacArthur dominated the Southwest Pacific Area. Tough, experienced and ruthless, Blamey also had a high opinion of his own worth. Although MacArthur was the principal military adviser to the Australian government, Blamey held tightly to his role as the government's principal Australian military adviser, believing that it was in Australia's best interest for him to do so. But Blamey was trying to do too much. He commanded both the Australian Army and the Allied Land Forces. Because he could not undertake all these tasks simultaneously, he delegated responsibility for planning to Herring, who deputised for him as Commander of New Guinea Force. Herring was a capable citizen soldier. An outstanding barrister, he could master a brief, but lacked Blamey's depth of military knowledge. Blamey also had a highly competent chief of staff, Major-General Frank Berryman, but as we will see, Blamey's desire to fill several positions was to cause problems at the operational level.

The Australian civilians were the Prime Minister, John Curtin, and the Secretary to the War Cabinet, Sir Frederick Shedden. Curtin was the leader of a Labor government that had come to power in October 1941 and was generally suspicious of the military. Curtin was also the Defence Minister, but although conscientious he had little knowledge of military affairs; he relied heavily on MacArthur for military advice and on Shedden for advice on strategic policy. Shedden was also the Secretary of the Defence Department and while apparently self-effacing, had assiduously gathered control of all the bureaucratic machinery for the conduct of Australia's war, and believed that he had a better grasp of strategic affairs than any of Australia's military leaders. He was the link between MacArthur and Curtin. Between them, Curtin and Shedden determined Australian strategic policy.

Australia's military operations in 1943-1944 were the largest and most complicated ever undertaken by its military forces. Between 22 January 1943, when the fall of Sanananda marked the end of the Papuan Campaign, and 24 March 1944, when Australian patrols entered Madang to signify the end of Australia's New Guinea offensives. Australia deployed five divisions in operations that included amphibious landings, parachute drops and air landings. Although the Australians were part of a coalition with the US, they had a large degree of autonomy in the conduct of their own campaigns. Nonetheless, General MacArthur's directives set the shape of the campaign and strongly influenced its conduct. The orchestration of the sea, land and air forces of the two nations was an outstanding achievement. Not everything, of course, ran smoothly, but in the big picture the victories of 1943 set the foundation for the larger victories of the following two years.

The size and complexity of the campaign required much detailed planning and coordination. At the theatre strategic level, MacArthur, with broad strategic direction from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had to plan, direct and conduct a series of military campaigns across a wide geographic area stretching from the Solomons to New Guinea. At the operational level, Blamey had to plan and conduct a series of subordinate campaigns in New Guinea. But the offensive also had implications for Australian strategic policy, and while it was still being fought, the Australian government had to make decisions about the balance of the Australian war effort to sustain future operations. This policy was determined by four of our key personalities—Curtin, MacArthur, Blamey and not least, Shedden.

The Australian campaigns in New Guinea in 1943 and 1944 can be divided into three phases. The first phase, from January to August 1943, was the planning and preparation phase. During this time there were actually quite a few operations, including the advance of the 3rd Division from Wau to Salamaua and the important battle of the Bismarck Sea, but generally the Australians planned and trained for the coming offensive. The second phase, from September 1943 to April 1944, consisted of offensive operations, and included the capture of Lae and Salamaua, the seizure of Finschhafen and Sattelberg, the thrust into the Ramu Valley, the storming of Shaggy Ridge, and the coastal advance to Madang. Of course there was also plenty of planning in this phase. In the third phase, from April to October 1944, the main Australian forces were withdrawn from operations, with the Americans taking over the prime offensive role.

This chapter focuses on the first phase and Lieutenant General Coates deals with the second and third phases in the following chapter. I have divided my chapter into four sections: MacArthur's strategic plans; the Southwest Pacific Area command structure; Blamey's operational plans, and the government's strategic plans.

MacArthur's Strategic Plans

From the time when he arrived in Australia in March 1942 and particularly from the time of his appointment as Commander-in-Chief Southwest Pacific Area the following month, General MacArthur had always intended to lead an offensive north to regain the Philippines. It was immaterial to him that the Allied Combined Chiefs of Staff meeting in Washington had agreed that the first priority was to 'beat Hitler first'. He was determined to win sufficient resources to enable him to mount an offensive, and he was at least partly successful. Hence on 2 July 1942, following the US victory at the Battle of Midway the previous month, the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, acting on behalf of the Combined Chiefs, issued a directive ordering MacArthur to conduct offensive operations with the ultimate object of seizing and occupying the New Britain-New Ireland-New Guinea area.

The Japanese beat the Joint Chiefs and MacArthur to the punch. The Japanese landed in Papua, and it took MacArthur's forces—mainly Australians—until January 1943 to drive the Japanese into the sea at Sanananda. The Japanese also thrust south through the Solomons to Guadalcanal, and it took a similar period before the predominantly US naval forces of South Pacific Command defeated the Japanese on Guadalcanal and obtained control over that island in February 1943.

The Papuan campaign was not the high point of MacArthur's military career. He underestimated both the strength of the Japanese offensive and the difficulty of operating in the difficult terrain and climate of New Guinea. Further, he believed that after his failure in the Philippines he was on the brink of being dismissed from his command. It was imperative to achieve victory in Papua before Admiral Bill Halsey won at Guadalcanal. For MacArthur, the US Navy was almost as much a foe as the Japanese. The irony was that in Washington, President Roosevelt and the Joint Chiefs were determined to pursue the beat Hitler first strategy, and it was only the urging of the hated Chief of US Naval Operations, Admiral Ernest King, that gave offensive operations in the Pacific some measure of priority.

Thus while Australian and American troops were conducting what MacArthur optimistically called 'mopping up' operations in Papua, he announced that his forces had annihilated the enemy there, and he turned his attention to planning the next offensive phase.¹ In the seven months since the Joint Chiefs had ordered the Pacific offensive, Allied forces had captured all of north Africa, and Allied leaders were gathering in Casablanca to plan the next stage of the war. MacArthur responded with urgent messages to Washington demanding additional forces for a renewed offensive. He enlisted Curtin's assistance and the Australian government sent pleading requests to London and Washington, but to little avail. On 29 January the Australian government was informed that at Casablanca the Combined Chiefs had reduced the Pacific war to fifth on the list of priorities, after the Atlantic, Russia, the Mediterranean and the United Kingdom. The good news was that the directive of 2 July 1942 to capture Rabaul remained unchanged.

MacArthur and his staff had been continually refining his offensive plans, and on 28 February he released a new plan, called Elkton II, that concluded that he needed an additional five divisions and almost 2,000 more aircraft. Meanwhile the Joint Chiefs had called a conference in Washington to coordinate the operations of the Southwest and South Pacific Areas. MacArthur sent his chief of staff, Lieutenant-General Richard Sutherland, and his air chief, Kenney, to Washington to plead his case.

On 28 March the Joint Chiefs issued their directive for offensive operations in the South and Southwest Pacific. The Joint Chiefs were unable to provide all the forces required by MacArthur if he were to take Rabaul, and the aim was modified to that of containing the Japanese forces by maintaining the initiative, and preparing for the ultimate seizure of the Bismarck Archipelago. This was to be achieved by establishing airfields on Kiriwina and Woodlark Islands, seizing both sides of the Vitiaz Straits, and advancing through the Solomons to southern Bougainville. The Joint Chiefs agreed to supply MacArthur with two more divisions of ground troops, 524 additional combat planes and 336 non-combat planes.

MacArthur did not easily accept this directive and persuaded the Australian government to send messages to Washington and London, asking for more forces. When Churchill and the British Chiefs arrived in Washington for a meeting with Roosevelt and the US Chiefs in May they agreed to provide sufficient resources to the Pacific and the Far East to enable commanders to apply 'unremitting pressure' against Japan, but the basic policy of defeating Germany first remained.²

In their directive of 28 March the Joint Chiefs had given MacArthur the following tasks:

1. The establishment of airfields on Kiriwina and Woodlark.
2. The seizure of Lae, Salamaua, Finschhafen, Madang and western New Britain (Cape Gloucester).
3. The seizure of the Solomon Islands to include the southern portion of Bougainville.³

The third task was given to the forces of Admiral Halsey's South Pacific Area operating under MacArthur's strategic direction.

MacArthur developed this directive into a campaign plan, known as Elkton III, which he issued on 26 April 1943.⁴ The scheme of manoeuvre was a series of amphibious operations, and to implement this plan he divided his force into four task forces, not counting the South Pacific forces. The first task force was New Guinea Force, under General Blamey. This was

composed mainly of Australian Army units, but included some Americans, and had the task of seizing Lae, Salamaua and the Huon Peninsula up to Madang. The second task force was New Britain Force under Lieutenant-General Walter Krueger. This was an American force based on the newly-formed Sixth Army, and had the task of seizing the islands of Kiriwina and Woodlark and the western end of New Britain. The third task force was the Allied Naval Forces, under Vice-Admiral Arthur Carpender. Its task was to support the operations of the preceding two task forces, defend forward bases, protect the lines of communication and transport the land forces for their amphibious landings. The fourth task force was the Allied Air Forces under Lieutenant-General Kenney. Its task was to destroy enemy aircraft and shipping, support the two land task forces, support the defence of the forward bases and provide air transport for the land forces.

Kenney's influence was clear. Back in October 1942 he had written to General Hap Arnold, the chief of the US Army Air Forces, to describe his concept of operations:

The artillery in this theatre flies, the light mortar and machine guns, the rifle, tommygun, grenade and knife are carried by men who fly to war, jump in parachutes, are carried in gliders and who land from air transports on ground which air engineers have prepared. These engineers have landed also by parachute and by glider, with airborne bulldozers, jeeps and light engineer tools ... the whole operation preceded and accompanied by bombers and fighters.

He continued that the Pacific consisted of islands that were merely aerodromes from which modern firepower was launched. Sometimes they were true islands like Wake or Midway, sometimes the 'islands' were localities on large land masses such as New Guinea. The only practicable way to get from one to the other was by air or water. He explained that each was 'garrisoned by a small force and each can be taken by a small force once local air control is secured. Every time one of these islands is taken, the rear is better secured and the emplacements for the flying artillery are advanced closer and closer to Japan itself.'⁵

Kenney had already appreciated that the most effective way to conduct the war was not by confronting the main Japanese land forces, but by seizing airfields, preferably in areas where the Japanese were weakest. MacArthur accepted this strategy. In essence, MacArthur's campaign for the advance from New Guinea to the Philippines became one based on a maritime strategy. However, MacArthur had only a relatively small navy. Instead, his main striking force was his air force, based on jungle airstrips rather than on aircraft carriers. The role of the army was to seize and hold the areas for the airstrips and for the naval anchorages and bases. We now know that in pursuing this strategy MacArthur was assisted by signals intelligence in selecting areas that were held lightly by the enemy. But this did not mean that the army had a lesser role; many divisions and much hard fighting would be needed.

The Command Structure

To understand the Australian Army's role in the 1943 campaign it is necessary to appreciate the Allied command structure. MacArthur exercised command through General Headquarters (GHQ SWPA) that was initially located in Melbourne and later moved forward to Brisbane. GHQ was supposed to be both a joint and combined headquarters, but it was staffed primarily with US Army officers.

MacArthur had three principal subordinates—the commanders of the Allied Naval, Land and Air Forces. The commanders of the Allied Naval and Air Forces were US officers. MacArthur had not been satisfied with these initial appointments; he replaced the incumbents, appointing Vice-Admiral Arthur Carpender and Lieutenant-General George Kenney in their stead. General Blamey was Commander Allied Land Forces, although as noted, he was also Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Military Forces.

MacArthur was most reluctant to place US forces under an Australian Army commander, even though in mid-1942 the Australian Army had some 13 divisions in Australia and the Americans had two under-trained divisions. MacArthur preferred to operate through task forces; but General George C Marshall, Chief of Staff US Army in Washington, directed him to

appoint Blamey as Commander Allied Land Forces. Before long MacArthur began to institute arrangements to make Blamey a task force commander. Finally, in September 1942 during the Papuan campaign he arranged to have Blamey ordered to New Guinea to take command of New Guinea Force. After the campaign Blamey returned to Australia to resume his post as Commander Allied Land Forces and to attend to his many responsibilities as commander-in-chief of the Australian Army.

In preparation for the coming offensives MacArthur now began to restructure the command arrangements, and on 11 January 1943 he asked Marshall to send Lieutenant-General Walter Krueger from America 'to give the US Army the next ranking officer below General Blamey in the Allied Land Forces which is not now the case and is most necessary'. Soon after Krueger's arrival MacArthur formed Alamo Force to conduct the operations of the Sixth Army, which was to be commanded by Krueger. There were not yet enough troops to form a US army in Australia, but Krueger, who also commanded Alamo Force, 'realised that this arrangement would obviate placing Sixth Army under the operational control of the Allied Land Forces'. Krueger's deputy chief of staff commented later that Alamo Force was created 'to keep the control of Sixth Army units away from General Blamey'. This new command system was, in the words of the Australian official historian, Gavin Long, achieved 'by stealth and by the employment of subterfuges that were undignified, and at times absurd'.⁶

Headquarters Sixth Army was an administrative headquarters and did not come under Blamey's command. At this stage the Sixth Army consisted of the 1st US Corps, under Lieutenant-General Robert Eichelberger, and this included the 32nd and 41st US Divisions. The latter division was in New Guinea where it came under New Guinea Force. Krueger's command also included the 1st Marine Division, which, after service in Guadalcanal, had been sent to Australia for rest and retraining. The addition of the Marine Division gave MacArthur a formation that was trained and experienced in amphibious warfare. Under MacArthur's revised command arrangements, the only way that Blamey could command US units and formations would be if they were specifically placed under his command, as had happened with the 41st Division. Additional US army units would arrive during the year; by early 1944 there would be seven infantry divisions, three separate regimental combat teams and three engineer special brigades.

MacArthur also instituted significant changes to his naval command structure. The first of these took place in January 1943 when Rear-Admiral Daniel Barbey took command of the newly formed Seventh Amphibious Force. His task was to begin amphibious training, build up the naval amphibious force and help plan the forthcoming operations. The second change was the appointment of the Chief of the Australian Naval Staff, Admiral Sir Guy Royle, as Commander Southwest Pacific Sea Frontiers. Royle became responsible for the close naval defence of Australia including the conduct and protection of coastal convoys around Australia, thus releasing Admiral Carpenter to concentrate on naval support to MacArthur's offensive.⁷ Carpenter's force was now known as the US Seventh Fleet. The arrangement was analogous to the air forces, in which Air Vice-Marshal William Bostock, Air Officer Commanding RAAF Command, was responsible for the air defence of Australia, while Kenney concentrated on offensive operations in New Guinea. Australian Navy and the Air Force units deployed to the New Guinea area served under the American commanders there.

In planning these operations MacArthur, at his headquarters in Brisbane, worked closely with his Naval, Land and Air commanders—Carpenter, Blamey and Kenney—whose headquarters were also in Brisbane. The headquarters of New Guinea Force was in Port Moresby. As mentioned, Blamey was supposed to be Commander New Guinea Force for the offensive, but until he arrived, Lieutenant-General Herring filled this position. Also in Port Moresby was Brigadier-General Ennis Whitehead, the commander of Advanced Echelon Fifth Air Force, who commanded the actual air operations in New Guinea and worked closely with the staff of New Guinea Force in planning future operations.

The extent of Blamey's responsibilities as Commander-in-Chief Australian Military Forces can be appreciated by considering the organisation of the Australian Army. Blamey had two headquarters. His main headquarters, at Victoria Barracks, Melbourne (known as Land Headquarters or LHQ), looked after training, organisation and all aspects of administration.

His advanced headquarters (Advanced LHQ or Landops) at St Lucia in Brisbane kept in close touch with MacArthur's GHQ. It concentrated on operational matters. The main formations of the Australian Army in April 1943 were as follows:

- First Army (Lieutenant-General Lavarack)—Toowoomba, Queensland
 - 4th Division (four brigades)
 - 3rd Armoured Division (two brigades)
 - Torres Strait Force
- II Corps (Lieutenant-General Morshead)—Barrine, Queensland
 - 6th Division (two brigades)
 - 7th Division (three brigades)
 - 9th Division (three brigades)
- Second Army (Lieutenant-General Mackay)—Parramatta, New South Wales
 - 1st Division (three brigades)
 - 3rd Army Tank Brigade
- III Corps (Lieutenant-General Bennett)—Mount Lawley, Western Australia
 - 2nd Division (three brigades)
 - 1st Armoured Division (two brigades)
- Northern Territory Force (Major-General Allen)—Darwin
 - 12th Division (three brigades)
- New Guinea Force (Lieutenant-General Mackay, acting)—Port Moresby
 - 3rd Division (one brigade)
 - 5th Division (two brigades)
 - 11th Division (two brigades)
- LHQ Reserve
 - 3rd Brigade—Adelaide, South Australia
 - 4th Armoured Brigade—Singleton, New South Wales

As can be seen, this force comprised 12 divisions, mostly deployed for the defence of Australia. In addition, in each state and territory there were lines of communications areas that included base logistic and administrative units. Further, a large number of schools and other training organisations reported directly to Land Headquarters. In April 1943 the army numbered almost 500,000 men and women. By contrast, the American Army in the Southwest Pacific Area numbered about 110,000.⁸

It can also be seen that in April 1943 Lieutenant-General Sir Iven Mackay, GOC 2nd Army, was acting GOC New Guinea Force as Herring was on leave. New Guinea Force was an army-level headquarters. The 3rd Division (with only one brigade at this stage) was at Bulolo, where it controlled operations between Wau and Salamaua. The 5th Division was at Milne Bay and the 11th at Port Moresby. Also under New Guinea Force was the 41st US Division at Oro Bay on the north Papuan coast, and another US regiment near Port Moresby. Later, as the time for the September offensive approached, the 7th and 9th Divisions would be deployed to New Guinea and would come under the reformed 1st Australian Corps. At this point, Herring would assume command of the corps and Blamey would take over New Guinea Force.

When Blamey moved forward to Port Moresby he would leave the Australian Army in the capable hands of the Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant-General John Northcott, located in Melbourne. But there was never any doubt that Blamey remained commander-in-chief, and important decisions were still referred to him. At the political level, however, Blamey's position was under challenge. When he had been commanding in Papua between September 1942 and January 1943 certain administrative glitches had appeared in Australia, and on his return Curtin had challenged him over these, pointing out that they had been caused by Blamey's dual role as commander-in-chief of the Australian Army and Commander Allied Land Forces. Already, MacArthur had advised Curtin that Blamey should command just the Australian home forces and that Lieutenant-General Sir Leslie Morshead—the hero of Tobruk and El Alamein and now about to take command of the 2nd Corps on the Atherton Tableland—should command the Australian expeditionary force. Indeed it is possible that Curtin was considering replacing Blamey with Morshead as commander-in-chief, but according to Morshead's widow, Morshead rejected the proposal because he did not want to become

involved in the political intrigue or heavy administration involved in the position.⁹ Blamey handled this crisis in typical fashion: he went fishing at Womboyne Lake for a week. But the implications of his dual position were not lost on him. He was determined to keep his time at Port Moresby to a minimum, and this was to have implications both in the planning and conduct of the offensives.

Blamey's Operational Plans

It was not until 6 May that GHQ issued a warning order to LHQ directing New Guinea Force to capture Lae and Salamaua, secure airfields in the Huon Peninsula-Markham Valley area for use by the Fifth Air Force, and seize the north coast of New Guinea as far west as Madang.¹⁰ Blamey's chief of staff, Major-General Berryman, immediately stepped up the planning at Landops. A model of the Lae-Salamaua area was constructed in a secure room at St Lucia, the windows were boarded up, and two guards were on duty day and night. On 10 May Herring arrived from Melbourne where he had been on leave. Herring was to be Blamey's deputy as GOC New Guinea Force and, in conjunction with Berryman, was to plan the operation.

Blamey arrived from Melbourne on 15 May and next day he had a long conference with Herring and Berryman around the Lae-Salamaua model. They agreed that Major-General George Wootten's 9th Division would conduct an amphibious landing near Lae. Meanwhile, Major-General George Vasey's 7th Division would march overland from Wau to Lae, and Major-General Stan Savige's 3rd Division, already located around Wau, would advance through the mountains towards Salamaua. It soon became apparent that a further operation would be needed. Since the maximum range of the landing craft carrying troops for the assault on Lae was 60 miles (100 km), it was necessary to establish a shore base within that distance, and Blamey suggested Nassau Bay. Further, its capture would ease the 3rd Division's supply difficulties in its advance towards Salamaua. MacArthur readily agreed to the use of an American regiment.¹¹ The landing was to take place on 30 June, the same date as not only the landings on Kiriwina and Woodlark, but also Halsey's landing on New Georgia in the Solomons.

The key to success was the 3rd Division's role. In February, Blamey had recommended that Salamaua not be captured before the fall of Lae, and Elkton II stated that Salamaua was to be captured six weeks after Lae. As Herring put it, Blamey 'wanted the operation against Salamaua to serve as a cloak for our operations against Lae, and to act as a magnet drawing reinforcements from Lae to that area'.¹²

On 17 May Blamey issued formal orders for Operation Postern, and next day both he and Herring flew north to inspect the troops on the Atherton Tableland. From North Queensland Herring continued on to Port Moresby, and took over from Mackay as GOC New Guinea Force on 23 May. Back in Melbourne, in mid June Blamey received a disquieting letter from Berryman, who was visiting Port Moresby, stating that Herring's plan seemed to indicate that Salamaua was to be captured. Blamey wrote to Herring stressing that Salamaua was not to be taken before Lae. Herring replied that he had no intention of diverting from the original plan and that Berryman's letter had given the wrong impression. Nonetheless, Berryman had detected that something was amiss, and indeed Savige wrote later that he 'knew nothing about the use of Salamaua as a magnet to draw Japanese forces from Lae'. On the contrary, Savige thought his mission was to attack Salamaua, or as Herring interpreted it, 'he rather went his own sweet way'.¹³

In fact, pressure was mounting on Blamey to authorise an early attack on Salamaua. On 10 June Major-General Whitehead, commanding the Advanced Echelon Fifth Air Force in Port Moresby, urged Kenney to persuade Blamey to capture Salamaua 'right away'. Kenney replied that he had discussed it with Blamey, but the Australian general feared that if he did so he would not have enough troops left to capture Lae later on. This task would then fall to Krueger's Americans. Blamey, however, wanted Australian troops to capture Salamaua, Lae and Finschhafen and land on New Britain.¹⁴ As Kenney noted in his diary:

Blamey is on the books as land-force commander and he wants to be in that position until we go into the Philippines. He hasn't too much faith in the fighting ability of our infantry and from the results to date I can't blame him ... Sutherland and the rest of the GHQ staff don't like the Aussies and would like to sidetrack Blamey and let Krueger or some American (Sutherland would like the job) run the show.

Gen MacArthur senses all the jealousies and ambitions in the picture and is not shutting his eyes as to the relative combat ability of the Aussies and Yanks. Of course he would like to have Salamaua right now but he knows that the Aussies are better combat troops today and that he will need them all the way to the Vitiaz Straits¹⁵.

On 20 June, after discussing the capture of Salamaua with Herring, Kenney recorded that 'I offered to slug the place to death and lay a carpet of bombs all the way to the place'. He thought Salamaua could be taken in three days and Lae soon after. Kenney continued:

The GHQ gang all think that it will be September or October before we can start an amphibious expedition and Christmas before we capture Lae. At this rate we will all die of old age before the war is over. Herring grins and agrees but says he can't capture Salamaua unless Gen Blamey orders it ... Herring is OK. He realizes that saving time also saves lives by ending the war that much quicker, but Blamey is the stumbling block I'm afraid he is jealous of Herring.¹⁶

Kenney had jumped to false conclusions. Blamey knew how difficult it would be to dig the Japanese out of their defensive positions and he was wary of trusting the air force's claims that their bombers could destroy the Japanese defences. He also knew it would be some months before sufficient supplies could be built up to support an operation involving three divisions. Kenney's claim that Blamey was jealous of Herring is hard to accept; Blamey was never one to under-rate his own capabilities.

By 23 June Blamey was at Atherton for a conference with Morshead, Berryman and Herring, who flew across from Port Moresby. Blamey assured himself that Herring understood that Salamaua was not to be captured before Lae and that all was going smoothly for the landing at Nassau Bay. Visiting the 7th Division, Blamey learned that its commander, Vasey, was unhappy about his troops marching overland from Wau to the Markham Valley and he proposed that the 503rd US Parachute Regiment seize an abandoned airstrip at Nadzab with a parachute drop Vasey's division would then fly in and advance on Lae from the west. Blamey obtained MacArthur's approval for this change of plans. When the staff realised that the 9th Division's 'shore to shore' move was beyond the scope of the 2nd US Engineer Amphibious Brigade MacArthur approved the use of Barbey's 7th Amphibious Force, thus eliminating the need for many of the intermediate bases.¹⁷

Blamey was back in Melbourne by 30 June when the first troops of the 162nd US Regiment began to tumble from their landing craft in heavy seas at Nassau Bay. All was confusion, but there was little resistance and soon the beachhead was established. Meanwhile, the troops of Alamo Force stormed ashore on Woodlark and Kiriwina Islands where they were welcomed by the small force of Australians that had been there for some time.

If Blamey and the Australians could permit themselves some wry observations about the Woodlark-Kiriwina operation, their attention was on the Salamaua operation. On 5 July MacArthur visited Port Moresby and instructed Herring that he wanted Salamaua taken 'as early as possible', offering Herring the remainder of the 162nd US Regiment to assist with its capture. Herring accepted the extra troops, realising that in any event he could not capture Salamaua for some time, but wrote anxiously to Blamey asking him to speak to MacArthur. The first opportunity came at MacArthur's major planning conference in Brisbane on 15 July, where the assembled officers agreed that the target date for the major offensive, including the landing at Lae, would be 1 September. Blamey raised the issue of not taking Salamaua before Lae, but was not satisfied with the reply. Next day, Herring forwarded his operational plan to GHQ. Meanwhile, from Port Moresby Whitehead again wrote to Kenney, urging the early capture of Salamaua and claiming that he and Herring had prepared a plan.¹⁸

Herring returned to Port Moresby and a few days later Blamey joined him for a series of conferences from 21 to 25 July. Blamey was still not satisfied with MacArthur's views about the capture of Salamaua, and on return to Brisbane on 28 July he raised the matter again. This time MacArthur agreed that the attack should 'not be pressed to finality unless a favourable opportunity occurs to capture Salamaua but to be conducted so as not to prejudice, delay or divert troops' from the Lae operation. Despite this directive, as the 3rd Division closed in on Salamaua MacArthur, Kenney and Whitehead sensed the possibility of a quick victory. Afraid that things might get out of hand, Berryman, who had remained in Port Moresby, visited Savige on 19 August to ensure that Salamaua was not captured before the Lae operation. Berryman explained that Major-General Milford and the 5th Division headquarters would shortly be relieving Savige for the final advance to Salamaua. There had been considerable dispute between Savige and Herring over the handling of the campaign. Blamey had a soft spot for his friend, Savige, and probably thought that after several months on operations he needed a rest. Savige was bitterly critical of Herring and his staff for initiating his relief.¹⁹

As the date for the offensive approached, on 15 August Blamey flew north to Port Moresby to take personal control. It was agreed that the 9th Division would land at Lae on 4 September, and the 7th Division would begin its airdrop at Nadzab the following day. On 20 August, Blamey formally assumed command of New Guinea Force, and Herring took command of the 1st Corps. That same day, Milford took over the Salamaua campaign from Savige. Two days later Herring flew across the Owen Stanley Ranges to the 1st Corps advanced headquarters at Dobodura.

On 25 August Blamey went out to Jackson's aerodrome to welcome MacArthur who established an advanced headquarters in Port Moresby. MacArthur was adamant that the coordination of the operations of the naval and air forces and New Guinea Force could be carried out by no-one but himself: 'Any attempt to delegate this responsibility would, I am sure, result in ultimate confusion.'²⁰ Subsequent events, after MacArthur and Blamey had both returned to Australia, were to show that centralised coordination, with no delegation, could lead to possible disaster. But that was in the future. The planning phase for the September offensive was over.

The planning and conduct of the campaign was not without its difficulties. Blamey's plan to delay the capture of Salamaua is a case in point. After the success of the Lae operation MacArthur was quick to claim credit for the idea, but Berryman knew the truth.²¹ On 4 September he wrote in his diary:

The landing was a surprise and effected without opposition—a vindication of C-in-C [Blamey] and my judgment in adhering to plan to bypass Salamaua. Herring and [Fifth US Air Force] wanted to alter plan and take out Salamaua—that would have ruined surprise and spoilt the manoeuvre. I was surprised at Herring after having agreed to our plan, being so easily swayed from it by 5AF.²²

Blamey recalled: 'The greatest pressure was put on me to force the Salamaua position but I was lucky enough to stick to my plan to bypass Salamaua before' the capture of Lae.²³ Herring concluded that by reinforcing Salamaua, the Japanese commander played into the Allies' hands. 'By the time he realised his mistake it was too late.'²⁴

The Government's Strategic Plans

While MacArthur and Blamey were busy planning their New Guinea offensive, they could not ignore the fact that their plans relied heavily on men and materiel that were made available by the Australian government. As early as January 1943 it was clear that Australia could not continue to maintain the army at its present strength as well as providing MacArthur with the necessary food and other supplies to sustain his forces. The Australian government needed to make some careful judgements about the balance of the nation's war effort.

Anxious to prepare for the coming offensives, on 8 February the Prime Minister, John Curtin, asked MacArthur what forces he would require to fulfil his directive.²⁵ Possibly because he was still negotiating with Washington, MacArthur offered no reply, but whatever the outcome might be, Curtin knew that it would pose a heavy burden on Australia, and on 12 February he told Blamey that Australia had 'reached the maximum of her manpower, material and financial resources'. He asked Blamey to 'drop a few hints' to MacArthur about American extravagance. Blamey had little success, and eventually he suggested that Curtin approach MacArthur directly on the matter.²⁶

In the meantime, on 13 April, once MacArthur had told him what tasks were in store for the Australians, Blamey reported to the War Cabinet that to provide the offensive force of three divisions, which MacArthur envisaged, and to maintain home security, Australia would require nine infantry divisions, two armoured divisions, one armoured brigade and one army tank brigade. If further manpower could not be released from industry, 'then the force being prepared for offensive operations should be reduced by an infantry division'. In view of the improving strategic situation, Blamey considered that it was now 'a justifiable indeed an unavoidable risk' to reduce the forces in the areas remote from the enemy.²⁷

When the War Cabinet considered this report on 30 April it requested the Defence Committee to review the exact strengths of the three Services that could be maintained if 10,000 persons per month were available. It also recommended that Curtin ask MacArthur whether the offensive force could be reduced by one division. The Defence Committee reported on 6 May that it could only determine the size of the forces once it had 'an authoritative and comprehensive review of the existing strategical situation'.²⁸ This could only be provided by MacArthur. The military leaders were arguing that if Australia were to have a major role in the coming offensives then the Services needed the necessary manpower. Some politicians and bureaucrats, however, saw Australia's most important duty as the supply of food and war equipment. But whatever alternatives were followed, if Australia's overall contribution to the war were not reduced there would be a further decline in civilian living standards. It is clear that the War Cabinet did not know quite what to do. While it is possible to criticise the petty squabbles between various government departments, the heart of the problem was that MacArthur wanted as many combat troops as possible, as well as supplies and war materiel for his US forces.

In an effort to resolve the impasse, towards the end of May the Defence Secretary, Shedden, visited MacArthur in Brisbane, and explained that the manpower situation had 'reached saturation point'. MacArthur, however, still wanted an offensive force of three AIF divisions: 'Anything less would be incompatible with Australia's status and destiny as a Pacific power and would not guarantee her the same voice in the Peace Councils, to which she is entitled.' He promised to present Curtin with a strategic appreciation that might make it possible for the demands for local defence to be reduced. In the meantime Blamey told Curtin that if the situation continued it would 'virtually remove Australian forces from active operations and result in Australian personnel being employed to render service to the US Forces'. Shedden responded by reiterating his request to MacArthur to indicate in his strategic appreciation that the improvement in security of Australia might allow a 'relatively small reduction to be made to the great number of men in the land forces'. To do so would furnish 'Mr Curtin a remedy for some of his problems which at present otherwise appear insoluble'.²⁹

MacArthur took his cue and when he met the Prime Minister in Sydney on 7 June told him that 'the threat of invasion to Australia had been removed'. After outlining his plans for the offensive, MacArthur turned to the problem of balancing the war effort. He opposed Blamey's idea that the Americans should provide many of their own services, but he realised that Australia could not continue to provide troops, munitions, aircraft and food at the present level. He therefore suggested that Australia should maintain its military effort until Rabaul was captured. Then its military commitment could be reduced to a land and air expeditionary force, enabling resources to be devoted to food production. Three days after the conference Curtin released a statement that he did 'not think the enemy can now invade this country'. The way was now clear to determine the balance of the war effort.³⁰

Curtin set the process in train when, at a meeting of the War Cabinet on 13 July, he said that the time had come to review the war effort and that the adjustments had to 'be governed by operational considerations determined by the strategical policy' of General MacArthur and 'by the physical capacity of the Commonwealth to complete the programmes within the requisite time'. For a start he recommended that the navy be maintained at its existing strength. The army should provide three infantry divisions for offensive operations and 'adequate forces for defence of Australia and New Guinea and for relief of units in New Guinea'. The air force should be maintained 'at the strength authorised under the 72 squadron programme to the extent to which aircraft can be provided'. Manpower considerations were to govern the final size of the forces, and also the provision of munitions, other supplies, works and essential services. The War Cabinet adopted these recommendations as principles, and also decided that MacArthur should be asked to provide Americans to relieve Australians of some of the maintenance services and work projects they were carrying out on behalf of the US forces.³¹

By this time the government was in the midst of an election campaign, but the discussions over manpower issues continued. For example, on 5 August Curtin wrote to MacArthur to ask whether American personnel could take over some of their administrative tasks. MacArthur replied on 24 August, the day before he flew north to Port Moresby, that he would like to make his forces independent of civilian support, but this 'could be achieved only at considerable cost to the military effectiveness of my command'. If additional service and maintenance personnel were brought from America without an increase in shipping then fewer combat troops could be sent. The alternative would be for Australia to provide sufficient combat troops, but he understood that there was not sufficient surplus manpower in Australia to permit such an increase. Curtin merely commented that the provision of Australian resources was 'one of broad policy', to be considered 'on the basis of the principles governing the nature and extent of the Australian War Effort'.³²

The government now realised that, if the questions raised with MacArthur were to be carried further, it would have to gather the necessary manpower statistics. But it was not until 21 September, four weeks after MacArthur's reply, that Curtin forwarded a copy to Blamey. Blamey knew that it was time to put aside his operational responsibilities and return to the strategic arena, and on 23 September he flew back from New Guinea, leaving Mackay in charge there. On 27 September Blamey informed Curtin of the continuing difficulties being experienced in restricting American demands. Meanwhile, various government committees such as the Defence Committee (dominated by the Service chiefs) and the War Commitments Committee (consisting of munitions bureaucrats and the Service chiefs) had been trying to find a solution.³³ These two committees failed to agree, and Shedden put his own staff to work. On 30 September he presented a detailed review of the manpower situation. It was this review plus the reports of the various committees that formed the main topics when the War Cabinet met in Canberra on 1 October 1943.³⁴ General Blamey and Lieutenant-General Northcott were present to give their views.

After a discussion lasting five and a half hours the War Cabinet largely approved the proposals that had been written by Shedden and presented by Curtin. The War Cabinet agreed that by June 1944 20,000 men should be released from the Services, 10,000 men should be released from munitions and aircraft industries, and that the monthly intake into the Services should be fixed at 5,000 men and women. But apart from stabilising the RAAF at its 'present strength' in Australia at 48 squadrons, there was no commitment to reducing substantially the forces fighting in the Southwest Pacific Area.³⁵

The War Cabinet affirmed two key principles:

- (1) It is of vital importance to the future of Australia and her status at the peace table in regard to the settlement in the Pacific that her military effort should be concentrated as far as possible in the Pacific and that it should be on a scale to guarantee her an effective voice in the peace settlement.

(2) If necessary, the extent of this effort should be maintained at the expense of commitments in other theatres. In the interests of Australia and the British Empire in the Pacific, it is imperative that this view should be accepted by the United Kingdom and the other Dominions especially New Zealand and Canada.

The official historian, Paul Hasluck, described the War Cabinet's claim that Australia needed to maintain forces as a guarantee of an effective voice in the peace settlement as 'a new and opportunistic principle', pointing out that till now, the security of Australia and limits on manpower had governed the Australian war effort.³⁶

While this criticism has some validity, it fails to link the government's prevarication to the advice tendered by MacArthur to Shedden in May and to Curtin in June. MacArthur had used terms almost identical to those now enunciated as government policy, and in July Curtin had stated that the Australian war effort would be 'governed by operational considerations determined by the strategical policy' of General MacArthur.³⁷ Although MacArthur had claimed that it was in Australia's interests to provide a substantial striking force, by October he was already making plans to reduce the Australian offensive role.

Blamey knew that this was the case, but nevertheless believed that Australia should continue to provide a substantial military commitment, warning Curtin on 12 July that 'any reduction in the strength of the striking force below three divisions [would] greatly weaken Australia's place in determining the future' and that such a reduction was 'most undesirable in the national interest'. On 27 September Blamey told Curtin that the operations in New Britain would be by American forces 'to strengthen a claim to retain New Britain in the post war settlement'.³⁸

Blamey's views had been expressed by the Defence Committee in its report to the War Cabinet, and as a result the government's policy statement of 1 October included the sentence that MacArthur was to be informed of:

limits to which commitments can be accepted by the Commonwealth Government for United States Service requirements and of the alternative choices which such limits impose.

Further, while Blamey agreed with MacArthur's assertion that Australia could not provide additional combat forces, he reminded Curtin on 5 October that if the Americans continued to send combat forces without maintenance personnel then Australia would have to disband further combat formations. He continued:

The issue which has arisen is that General MacArthur has been asked to relieve us of a burden which is causing a reduction in our force, and in reply takes the view that not only should the burden continue to be borne but that it should be increased.

Blamey advised that since MacArthur was disinclined to respond to Curtin's request, the Prime Minister should take up the matter with the US government.³⁹

Having decided on a course of action it remained for the government to obtain the concurrence of the British and US governments and cooperation from MacArthur. Eventually MacArthur accepted, as inevitably he had to, 'that it was for the Australian Government to decide the nature and extent of its war effort'.⁴⁰ It was not until Curtin, Blamey and Shedden visited Washington and London in April and May 1944 that the US and British governments gave their concurrence to the new shape of the Australian war effort.

The decisions of the War Cabinet on 1 October were fundamental to the balance of Australia's war effort for the remainder of the war. While the War Cabinet had not displayed a complete grasp of the problem and had not performed particularly well, it was nevertheless frustrated by the arrangement established the previous year whereby strategic matters were in the hands of General MacArthur.

On 1 October, the day that the government determined its future war policy, Lieutenant-General Sir Iven Mackay, accompanied by Morshead (who was to take over from Herring) flew to the recently captured town of Lae to meet with Generals Herring, Milford, Vasey and Wootten. There, Mackay confirmed the shape of the remaining campaign. The campaign still had more than six months to run. But MacArthur was already making sure that the Australians would never again play the central role in his offensive operations. The War Cabinet decision of 1 October ensured, however, that Australia's forces would continue to contribute to the Allied war effort. Australia would not only have a voice in the peace settlement, but also gain recognition as a valued Allied partner. The echoes of this policy can be found in the reasons for committing Australian forces to overseas military operations over the following 60 years. The first nine months of 1943 had seen the intermeshing of Australia's national policies, Allied grand strategy, theatre military strategy, operational concepts and campaign planning. Decisions in all these spheres laid the foundation of victory in the next two years.

Endnotes

1. David Horner, *High Command: Australia and Allied Strategy, 1939-1945* (Canberra and Sydney: Australian War Memorial and George Allen & Unwin, 1982), 247.
2. Louis Morton, *Strategy and Command: The First Two Years* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1962), 458.
3. *Ibid*, 398.
4. GHQ SWPA Elkton III Plan, *ibid*, 677.
5. WF Craven and JL Cate (eds), *The Army Air Forces in World War II, Volume Four, The Pacific: Guadalcanal to Saipan, August 1942 to July 1944* (Reprint, Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1983), 119.
6. MacArthur to Marshall, 11 January 1943, RG4, MacArthur Memorial Military Archives, Norfolk, Virginia; Walter Krueger, *From Down Under to Nippon* (Washington, DC: Combat Forces Press, 1953), 10; interview tapes, Papers of General George H Decker, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, Pennsylvania; Gavin Long, *The Final Campaigns* (Canberra Australian War Memorial, 1963), 599.
7. Remarkably, Royle's appointment is barely mentioned in the naval official history. For a description of the appointment see National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA), Melbourne, MP1587, IT296B.
8. David Dexter, *The New Guinea Offensives* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1961), 15-16.
9. David Horner, *Blamey: The Commander-in-Chief* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1998), 304.
10. GHW Warning Instruction No 2, 6 May 1943, A[ustralian] W[ar] M[emorial] 54, 589/3/11.
11. Commander Allied Land Forces Report on New Guinea Operations, 23 January 1943-13 September 1943, 16 March 1944, AWM54, 519/6/58.
12. Report on Operations, New Guinea, 22 Jan-8 Oct 43, 17 January 1944, AWM54, 589/7/1.
13. Blamey to Herring, 15 June 1943, AWM54, 591/7/21; Herring to Blamey, 18 June 1943 AWM, 3DRL6643, 2/170.2; Comments on Official History, Savige Papers, AWM 3DRL2529; Dexter, *The New Guinea Offensives*, 73, 137; Herring to Dexter, 21 January 1952, AWM67, 3/167.
14. George C Kenney, *General Kenney Reports, A Personal History of the Pacific War* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1949), 256.
15. Kenney Diary, 10 June 1943, Papers of General George C Kenney, Office of the Air Force Historian, Bolling Air Force Base, Washington, DC. Lieutenant-General Richard Sutherland was MacArthur's chief of staff.
16. Kenney Diary, 20 June 1943.
17. Memorandum, '1 Aust Corps Report on Operations in New Guinea 22 Jan-8 Oct 43', by Maj-Gen Berryman, 22 March 1944, AWM54, 589/7/].
18. Herring to Dexter, 21 January 1952, AWM67, 3/167 part 3, and Herring to Blamey, 6 July 1943, AWM, 3DRL6643, 2/170 2; Notes of Conference, GHQ, 1700, 15 July 1943, AWM, 3DRL6643, 2/43.632; Whitehead to Kenney, 18 July 1943, Kenney Papers.
19. Notes of Conference, GHQ, 28 July 1943, AWM, 3DRL6643, 2/43.632; Berryman Diary, 28 July 1943; Papers of Lt-Gen Sir Frank Berryman, AWM, PR84/370; Blamey to Herring, 30 July 1943, AWM, 3DRL6643, item 2/170.2; Comments on Official History, Savige Papers; GM Keating, "'The Right Man for the Right Job": An Assessment of Savige as a Senior Commander', BA (Hons) thesis, UNSW/ADFA, 1995.
20. New Guinea Force Operation Instruction No 2, 5 August, AWM54, 589/3/11; MacArthur to Blamey, 30 August 1943 AWM54, 423/11/209, and AWM, 3DRL6M3, 2/43.612; Blamey to MacArthur, 31 August 1943, AWM54, 599/3/3.
21. CA Willoughby et al (comp), Reports of General MacArthur, Vol I, *The Campaigns of MacArthur in the Pacific* (Washington, DC: US Army, 1966), 121.
22. Berryman Diary, 4 September 1943.
23. Blamey to Sturdee, 16 September 1943, AWM, 3DRL6643, 2/6.1.
24. Report on Operations, New Guinea, 22 Jan-8 Oct 43, 17 January 1944, AWM54, 589/7/1.
25. Curtin to MacArthur, 8 February 1943, NAA, A5954, 575/2.
26. Minutes of Prime Minister's War Conference, Canberra, 12 February 1943, NAA, A5954, 4/6, Blamey to Forde, 10 May 1943, NAA, A5954, 291/6.
27. War Cabinet Agendum 106/1943, Supplement 1, 13 April 1943, NAA, A2671, 106/1943.
28. War Cabinet Minute 2810, 30 April 1943, NAA, A5954/46, 809/1. Recommendations of Defence Committee, 6 May 1943, NAA, A2671, 106/1943.
29. Notes of Discussions [by Shedden] with Commander-in-Chief Southwest Pacific Area, Brisbane 25 to 31st May 1943, and attached memorandum dated 30 May 1943, NAA, A5954, 2/3, Blamey to Curtin, 2 June 1943, NAA, A5954, 306/3; Shedden to MacArthur, 4 June 1943, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC, KG 316, box 71.
30. Minutes of Prime Minister's War Conference, Sydney, 7 June 1943, NAA, A5954, 2/5; Strategical Situation in Southwest Pacific Area—Prime Minister's Statement of 10th June, Advisory War Council Minute 1204, 16 June 1943, NAA, A5954/46, 815/1.
31. War Cabinet Agendum 311/1943, The Australian War Effort, 10 July 1943, and War Cabinet Minute 2968, 13 July 1943, NAA, A5954, 311/1943.

32. Curtin to MacArthur, 5 August 1943; MacArthur to Curtin, 24 August 1943; Curtin to MacArthur, 3 September 1943, NAA, A5954, 306/3.
33. Curtin to Blamey, 21 September 1943, NAA, A5954, 306/3; Minutes of Prime Minister's War Conference, Canberra, 27 September 1943, NAA, A5954, 4/2; Minute by Defence Committee, 9, 11, 13 September 1943, NAA, A2670/1, 359/1943; War Commitments Committee Report on Man Power Situation, 14 September 1943, NAA A2670/1, 379/1943.
34. 'A Review of the Nature, Extent, and Balance of the War Effort in the Light of the Manpower Position', signed by Curtin on 30 September 1943, NAA A2670/1, 35/1943.
35. Minutes of War Cabinet Meeting, Canberra, 1 October 1943, NAA, A5954, 809/2.
36. Paul Hasluck, *The Government and the People 1942-1945* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1970), 301-2.
37. War Cabinet Agendum 311/1943, 13 July 1943, NAA, A2671, 311/1943.
38. Blamey to Forde and Curtin, 12 July 1943, NAA, A816, 31/301/274. Minutes of Prime Minister's War Conference, Canberra, 27 September 1943, NAA, A5954, 4/2.
39. War Cabinet Minute 3065, 1 October 1943, NAA, A5954, 809/2; Blamey to Curtin, 5 October 1943, NAA, A5954, 306/3.
40. Notes of Discussion with the Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, Brisbane, 29th November to 1st December 1943, NAA, A5954, 2/6.