

Expeditionary Airfields of New Guinea
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“The movement forward of air power by successive bounds in order to gain local air superiority, provide adequate cover for the advance of surface elements, and isolate each successive enemy position prior to the final assault by all arms.” General Douglas MacArthur, Commander in Chief of the Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA) in World War II, devised this methodology to defeat the Empire of Japan. Thus, the United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) began establishing bases in strategic positions in New Guinea in September 1943 to expedite victory.¹

The island of New Guinea was a significant part of this crucial plan in the SWPA. USAAF long-range bombers needed to be within 1500 nautical miles from mainland Japan to successfully execute missions against the enemy. Specifically, the USAAF could interdict Japanese supply shipping and attack the Japanese mainland from this range. Furthermore, the United States (U.S.) was planning to invade mainland Japan to end the war.²

Thus, the U.S. wanted to acquire bases close enough to the enemy to support and achieve this ambitious goal. Therefore, New Guinea provided exceptionally compatible

¹ Major Timothy D. Gann, Fifth Air Force Light and Medium Bomber Operations During 1942 and 1943, P. 2, May 1992; Center for Aerospace Doctrine and Research and Education, THE UNITED STATES STRATEGIC BOMBING SURVEYS, P. 62-65, 1987.

² Center for Aerospace Doctrine and Research and Education, THE UNITED STATES STRATEGIC BOMBING SURVEYS, P. 62-65, 1987.

resources to enhance this capacity. The expeditionary airfields of New Guinea enabled the U.S. to project offensively to regain control of the Philippines from the Japanese. This bounding strategy would provide the USAAF the capacity to bomb the Japanese war material factories and enemy infrastructure.³

General MacArthur focused on seizing areas the enemy had weakly fortified. Usually, the Japanese left the coastlines vulnerable to U.S. forces by securing them with very few resources. Hence, the American military encountered little resistance and suffered minimal casualties by pursuing this policy. Additionally, the air component commander, General George C. Kenny (Fifth Air Force Commander at the time) emphasized attaining air superiority first in order to overwhelm the Japanese.⁴



In July 1942, Gen. George C. Kenney was the Allied Air Forces commanding general in the Southwest Pacific and Fifth Air Force commanding general, joining Gen. Douglas MacArthur as his top air officer.
U.S. Air Force File Photo.

³ Center for Aerospace Doctrine and Research and Education, THE UNITED STATES STRATEGIC BOMBING SURVEYS, p. 62-65, 1987; Major Richard L. Watson, Jr., The Fifth Air Force in the Huon Peninsula Campaign, January to October 1943, p.1, Jan 1946.

⁴ Air War College, The Nature of War Volume II, pp. 392-393; Major James A Barr, "AIR EMPLOYMENT OF THE FIFTH AIR FORCE IN THE WORLD WAR II SOUTHWEST PACIFIC THEATER," pp. 20-22, March 1997.

General Kenney simultaneously directed the destruction of enemy airfields and aircraft while rapidly commanding the construction of friendly airfields and efficient infrastructure. He incredibly boosted the sortie rate twofold of the amount of missions previously flown with no increase in the number of available aircraft. USAAF established New Guinea bases in the Port Moresby area which included Jackson Field and Wards Strip. Additionally, Dobodura and Nadzab hosted expeditionary airfields in New Guinea.⁵



Map from the U.S. Army Center of Military History

⁵ Major James A Barr, “AIR EMPLOYMENT OF THE FIFTH AIR FORCE IN THE WORLD WAR II SOUTHWEST PACIFIC THEATER,” pp. 20-22, March 1997; Major Richard L. Watson, Jr., *The Fifth Air Force in the Huon Peninsula Campaign, October 1943 to February 1944*, p. 265, April 1947.

General Kenney did not stop with just domination of the skies. He capitalized on this advantage by attacking Japanese shipping. Therefore, the U.S. was able to isolate the enemy from their sea supply chain. Moreover, General Kenney eventually separated the enemy from effective reinforcement and additional supplies with these tactics. Thus, the general accomplished his mission of providing the U.S. with the means to conquer Japan when the enemy surrendered on 2 September 1945.⁶

⁶ Air War College, *The Nature of War* Volume II, pp. 392-393; Major James A Barr, "AIR EMPLOYMENT OF THE FIFTH AIR FORCE IN THE WORLD WAR II SOUTHWEST PACIFIC THEATER," pp. 20-22, March 1997.