A Division At War—Part I

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Abstract

Often forgotten in the discussions of the ground war in the Pacific during the Second World War are the contributions of several prominent US Army infantry divisions. The 32nd Infantry Division was one such unit. They spent more days in combat in the Pacific than any other US Army unit. The 32nd had its baptism of fire on the southeastern coast of New Guinea at Buna in November 1942. A brutal two-month campaign saw an unprepared, inexperienced 32nd victorious. The division returned to combat on New Guinea's northern coast in 1944 at Aitape before another grueling campaign along the Driniumor River. Although victorious, the 32nd Infantry Division left New Guinea in the fall of 1944 for the Philippines tired and depleted.

Keywords: 32nd Infantry Division, Buna, MacArthur, Eichelberger, Driniumor River, Krueger, Port Moresby, Japanese Eighteenth Army, US Sixth Army

Una división en guerra—Parte I

Resumen

A menudo se olvidan en las discusiones sobre la guerra terrestre en el Pacífico durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial las contribuciones de varias divisiones de infantería prominentes del ejército estadounidense. La 32ª División de Infantería fue una de esas unidades. Pasaron más días en combate en el Pacífico que cualquier otra unidad del ejército estadounidense. El 32 tuvo su bautismo de fuego en la costa sureste de Nueva Guinea en Buna en noviembre de 1942. Una brutal campaña de dos meses vio a un 32º sin preparación y sin experiencia victorioso. La división regresó a combatir en la costa norte de Nueva Guinea en 1944 en Aitape antes de otra campaña agotadora a lo largo del río Driniumor. Aunque victoriosa, la 32ª División de Infantería salió de Nueva Guinea en el otoño de 1944 hacia Filipinas cansada y agotada.

 doi: 10.18278/sshj.9.3.11

Palabras clave: 32a División de Infantería, Buna, MacArthur, Eichelberger, Driniumor River, Krueger, Port Moresby, Decimoctavo Ejército Japonés, Sexto Ejército de EE. UU.

战争中的一个师—第一部分

摘要

关于二战期间太平洋地区陆战的探讨经常忽略由几个杰出美国陆军步兵师所作的贡献。美国陆军第32步兵师就是其中一个。比起其他美军部队，第32步兵师在太平洋地区的战斗时间最长。1942年9月，第32步兵师在新几内亚东南海岸的布纳镇经历了战火洗礼。血腥的两个月战斗后，毫无准备的、经验不足的第32步兵师取得了胜利。该师于1944年返回到新几内亚北部海岸的艾塔佩参战，在这之后又在德林乌莫尔河上进行了另一场疲劳战。尽管取得了胜利，第32步兵师于1944年秋季离开新几内亚，精疲力竭地前往菲律宾。

关键词：美国陆军第32步兵师，布纳（Buna），麦克阿瑟，艾克尔伯格，德林乌莫尔河（Driniumor River），克鲁格，莫尔兹比港，日本第18军，美国第6集团军

The American Army and Marine Corps each had many famous divisions during the Second World War. In Europe, the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions, the 1st and 2nd Armored Divisions, and the 1st Infantry Division achieved legendary status. In the Pacific, most of the fame belongs to the Marine divisions that fought across the Central Pacific. The Army and its contribution are almost forgotten. In a part of the war known as the Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA), the Army did the fighting and though seemingly devoid of accolades, several of its divisions experienced this war from beginning to end and fought gallantly throughout, despite doing so in the most deplorable battlefield conditions possible. One such division was the 32nd Infantry Division. They fought in every major campaign of the SWPA, from Buna to Luzon and stood ready to join in the war's biggest operation, the invasion of Japan. It was not an easy war for the 32nd. Thrust into their first battle at Buna unprepared and ordered to the Driniumor River undermanned and to Luzon exhausted, they fought on and saw more combat than any American unit in the Pacific.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor started the Pacific War. General Douglas MacArthur's forced escape from the Philippines in April 1942 and subsequent vow of "I shall return" started the war in the SWPA and the World War II résumé of the 32nd Infantry Division.

Before returning to the Philippines, MacArthur first had to protect his new base of operations, Australia. Immediately to the north of Australia lies the world's second largest island, New Guinea. To protect Australia, New Guinea could not become a major Japanese base. To retake the Philippines, it must become a major US base. This early in the war, the former was the main concern. In May 1942, the Japanese also recognized this and planned a major operation to take Port Moresby, a port on New Guinea's southern coast. US code breakers penetrated the Japanese code and knew of the exact date and location of the operation. The famous naval battle of the Coral Sea happened on 4 May and resulted in an American strategic victory. The Japanese invasion force turned for home.

Undeterred, the Japanese managed to land a force on New Guinea's northern coast, approximately two thousand men, that summer at Gona. Port Moresby was only 100 miles away. It may as well have been 1,000. Between Gona and Port Moresby stood the Owen Stanley Mountains, unmapped and impenetrable jungle, a small Australian ground force, and the US Fifth Air Force, commanded by General George Kenney. All these obstacles convinced Australian and US intelligence the Japanese could never reach Port Moresby. They were wrong. The small Australian force gradually gave ground, lengthening the Japanese supply lines to the breaking point. The jungle with its constant heat, hunger, thirst, and disease, and by mid-September, Kenney's planes whittled down Japanese strength. Moving back towards Gona in November, they eventually occupied defensive positions there and at nearby Buna. US and Australian intelligence believed that what was left of the Japanese was a force of skeletons. Buna had two airstrips, and Australia could be attacked from them. General MacArthur saw this as the perfect opportunity to send in US ground forces. He only had two divisions to choose from, the 32nd and 41st Infantry Divisions, both former National Guard units and completely unprepared to fight a war in the jungle. Buna became the 32nd Infantry Division's baptism of fire.[1]

The geography of the Buna battlefield was the last place an army would want to fight a battle:

> The principal swamp in the Buna area lies between Entrance Creek and Simemi Creek .... It is absolutely impenetrable, a fact of vital importance in the campaign. Between the closely spaced trees, which are 25 to 100 feet high, is a tangle of roots, creepers, and underbrush. Much of the other ground in the area, though not actually swamps, is thoroughly waterlogged. Much of the drier land is covered with a thick growth of kunai grass or plantations of coconut palms. This

> coarse grass grows to a height of more than 6 feet, but its height varies greatly, depending on how recently it has been, burned over or cut. Its leaves are broad and sharp-edged: its stems are about the thickness of a pencil. The coconut palms are usually planted about 18 feet apart and the growth under them is relatively clear of cover.[2]

General MacArthur was aware of Buna's difficulties, noting:

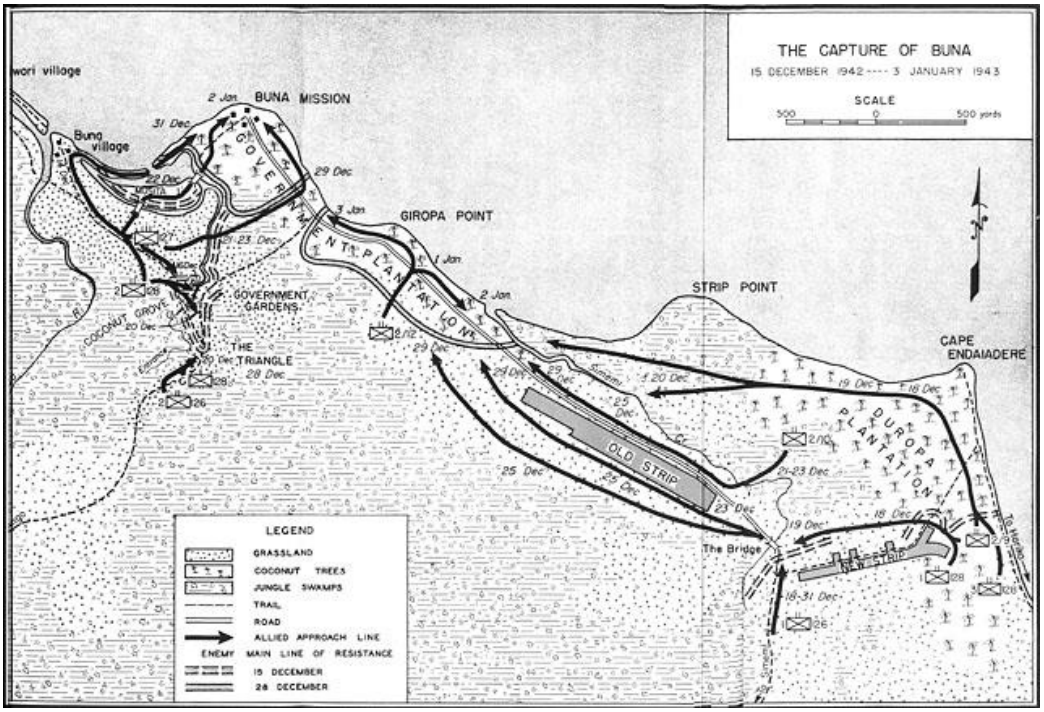
> In addition to all our other difficulties there was New Guinea itself, as tough and tenacious an enemy as the Japanese. Few areas in the world present so formidable an obstacle to military operations. The jagged mountains rear their tall peaks amid sudden plunging gorges, towering above the trackless jungle that covers nearly the entire surface of the sprawling island .... In the jungle itself, trails were a sea of mud, with little relief from the swollen rivers and the razor-edged kunai grass that grows in treacherous bunches higher than a man's head .... Nature did not stop with adverse terrain however .... Health conditions matched the world's worse.[3]

The Japanese enhanced the natural potential available in defending the airstrips. They constructed a series of bunkers impervious to all but heavy weapons. The 32nd Infantry Division had few such weapons. The bunkers were constructed in shallow trenches and reinforced with coconut logs; earth and sand protected the top of them from mortar and artillery fire. The walls were reinforced with logs, rocks, sand-filled ammunition boxes, and oil drums. Fast-growing vegetation camouflaged everything.[4]

The Japanese force defending Buna, even with all their defensive advantages, lacked the physical stamina to fight alone. Unbeknownst to US intelligence, the weakened enemy force of 1,250 received approximately fifteen hundred reinforcements only days before the attack.[5] These reinforcements were veterans, unlike their opponent, the 32nd Infantry Division.

The 32nd Infantry Division was an upper Midwest (Michigan and Wisconsin) National Guard unit activated after the US originally entered World War II. They received their orders for Australia in March, yet did not arrive until the middle of May. From there it was move after move, one area to another. They never had their feet grounded; they were unable to set up a cohesive training program in an environment none had ever experienced. The division commander, General Edwin Harding, was clearly frustrated:

> Unfortunately we had no opportunity to work through a systematic program for correcting deficiencies. From February, when I took over until November when we went into battle we were always getting ready to move. No sooner would we get a systematic training program started then orders for a move came along to interrupt it.[6]



The very simple Buna battlefield. The airstrips dominate and were the main objectives. Of particular note is the jungle that surrounds everything.[7]

MacArthur also recognized this fretting: "none of the three elements of my command: naval, air, or ground, was adequate for the job .... The ground troops ... not only were they too few in number, but they lacked the equipment and strenuous training necessary for combat."[8] Yet, he still sent them to Buna because, given his intelligence section and their appraisal of Japanese strength, even the inexperienced 32nd should have had little trouble. Even after sending the soon to be famous General Robert Eichelberger to evaluate this unit, a unit he rated "barely satisfactory" and "high on itself, full of confidence, but quite unprepared for the miseries and terrors of jungle warfare so alien to the experience of boys from the clipped green lawns and serene streets of small-town Middle West," he still sent them into action.[9] This division, severely understrength before leaving for Australia, received a huge influx of basic trainees, bringing its three infantry regiments (126th, 127th, 128th) up to strength, although most of the division support units lacked men and equipment. Neither the veteran National Guardsmen nor the new basic trainees knew anything about fighting in the jungle. General Eichelberger instituted a rigorous conditioning and jungle warfare-training program that the 32nd did not reap the benefits of because they went to Buna in November.

The battlefield itself was barely two miles wide. The objectives were the two airstrips, the Old Strip and New Strip, and a small footbridge across Si-

memi Creek linking them. Other positions such as Buna Mission and Buna Village also saw major fighting. The first attack on 19 November would mirror all the attacks that followed for the next month. There was no air support and one, only one American artillery piece without ammunition. There were no tanks. Not expecting much of a fight, the 1st Battalion of the 128th Infantry Regiment advanced. No reconnaissance preceded the attack. While approaching the bridge, they were stopped cold by murderous small arms fire, fire they could not respond to because they could not see it, the Japanese used flashless weapons and their positions were brilliantly camouflaged. Major David Parker, an observer sent by the War Department, noted:

> It was impossible to see where the enemy fire was coming from; consequently, our own rifle and machine gun fire was ineffective during the early stages .... Grenades and mortars were difficult to use because, first, it was difficult to pick out a nest position to advance upon with grenades, second, the thick jungle growth and high grass made throwing and firing difficult, and third, because it was nearly impossible to fire.[10]

The Simemi Creek Bridge. This is clearly not much of a bridge and is meant for only foot traffic. It is also an easy point for Japanese fire to concentrate on and US infantry would be limited to that bridge as it is surrounded by jungle.[11]

Another observer emphatically stated: "We were stopped cold."[12] The next attack, hopefully, would be better. Scheduled for 21 November, the 32nd's 126th Infantry Regiment would make the main attack. They now had a general idea of the Japanese position's location. An air attack followed by a mortar and artillery preparation (with several Australian guns) preceded the infantry attack. The air attack was late and off target (even hitting some US troops). The mortars and artillery also had little effect. They all used ammunition with quick fuses (exploding on contact) because delayed action fuses were in short supply. All the bombardment did was blow the jungle camouflage around. The infantry still advanced, and once again machine gun fire stopped them. For the next several days, the 32nd continued to probe forward and continued to be thrown back. Many factors were in play here. Inexperience, the tenacity of the Japanese, and the lack of proper weapons to deal with bunkers all began to break the 32nd Infantry Division. The jungle also took its toll.

Imagining what it was like for the infantry in those first attacks is chilling. These green soldiers, already worn from their first few weeks in the jungle, are told of their first attack. Tired and uneasy, they are given confidence by all their officers repeatedly telling them there will not be much opposition and that the Japanese are already defeated. They advance. They can see their objective several hundred yards ahead. This is all too easy. There is an eerie silence that the men do not realize is dangerous; they are all experiencing a battle for the first time, including their leaders. Suddenly the noise of machine gun fire erupts. The lead rank is cut down; there are dozens of killed and wounded. Scared but resilient, they look for the Japanese so they can return fire. They cannot see them; they cannot see the fire from the enemy weapons. The easy fight is no longer easy. The lack of reconnaissance now rears its ugly head. The wounded from the lead ranks now have a general idea where the Japanese are so that the next attack should fare better. The men, still shocked but ready to move again, are told there will be an air attack and artillery barrage before the attack. The air attack is late, forcing the men to boil in the heat of their forward positions. When it does come, it is not all on target; some US positions are hit. The resulting chaos is alleviated a bit when the guns and mortars start firing. They see them hitting the area where the Japanese had stopped the previous attack. The men think this should now be OK. When they advance, the same enemy fire stops them again. What good was the artillery? Frustration sets in; exhaustion takes an even greater toll. Something has to change.

As November came to a close, the men of the 32nd were drained, their lack of preparation and acclimation to a jungle environment making its mark. General Eichelberger sent an officer to observe the frontline infantry. He was appalled at what he saw: "The troops were deplorable. They wore long, dirty beards. Their shoes were uncared for or worn out. They were receiving far less than adequate rations and there was little discipline or military courtesy."[13]

Physical deterioration also led to a deteriorating state of mind. The realization that they had no weapons capable of destroying the Japanese bunkers created a sense of hopelessness, the worst state of mind a soldier can have. What they had did not work. What they needed (tanks, flamethrowers, bazookas) was unavailable. Yet, the division commander, General Harding, ordered another major attack for 26 November.

Harding had little choice but to order another attack. General MacArthur consistently prodded him and was growing impatient. Harding put together everything he had to support the new attack. Six Australian guns, a dozen 81-mm mortars, heavy machine guns, and thirty-five aircraft would play a role. None of it mattered. The air attack was inaccurate (precise bombing in the jungle is nearly impossible), the artillery and mortars did little damage, and the infantry was once again driven back. Defending against these attacks was not difficult; they were all frontal attacks. The terrain gave US commanders little choice. To break the stalemate and to drive the Japanese from their bunkers, tanks and better artillery were needed. General Harding pleaded for tanks. They would come. Harding was gone when they arrived.[14]

General MacArthur was not a patient man. He never visited the battlefield; he never saw the conditions his men were fighting and dying in. He also had Australian officers in his headquarters chirping in his ear about the "inadequate" fighting abilities of US soldiers.[15] He wanted Harding out and looked to Robert Eichelberger to replace him. Eichelberger received one of the more famous sendoffs in American military history:

> I want you to go to Buna and capture it. If you do not do so I don't want you to come out alive and that applies to your Chief of Staff also. Do you understand Bob? Time is of the essence! I want you to relieve Harding Bob. Send him back to America. If you don't do it I will. Relieve every regimental and battalion commander. Put corporals in command if necessary. Get somebody who will fight. When do you want to start Bob?[16]

Eichelberger left for Buna the next morning. He did not launch an immediate attack, a decision that no doubt infuriated MacArthur. After inspecting the front he noticed several major deficiencies:

1. The state of mind of the troops must improve. They above all needed a sense of aggressiveness, a desire to close with and defeat the enemy.

2. All indirect fires would be placed under the control of a Fire Direction Center and the location of all Japanese positions would be registered. Vigorous scouting and patrolling would begin immediately to pinpoint those positions.

3. Commanders would operate from the front, not rear command posts.

4. They needed change of tactics: no more frontal attacks unless absolutely unavoidable.[17]

Eichelberger also wanted tanks, the same tanks Harding wanted, and the right ammunition for his one US gun before launching another attack. MacArthur would not wait, and Eichelberger ordered an attack on 5 December.

The Buna battlefield had essentially become two separate fights: the first at the airstrips and the other at Buna Village. Each had a force dedicated to it named after the senior commander at each location. The airstrips were the responsibility of the Warren Force, Buna itself the Urbana Force. Tanks had yet to arrive, so Eichelberger received five Bren Gun Carriers, lightly armored, open at the top vehicles, with little armament and very unreliable in jungle terrain. Attached to the Warren Force, they moved with the infantry after another ineffective preliminary air and artillery attack. All five Bren Gun Carriers were quickly knocked out. Unlike previous battles the infantry did not wait to attack.

The first so-called armored vehicles to arrive at Buna, Bren Gun Carriers. They were useless since they could not engage bunkers, did not offer much protection, and were prone to mechanical failure in the jungle.[18]

They followed right behind the exploding shells and managed to advance within 150 yards of the Simemi Creek Bridge, destroying several bunkers in the process. The attack against Buna Village was more successful. The village was now isolated and its bunkers could be systematically destroyed. By 15 December Buna Village was totally secure, but the airstrips remained under Japa-

nese control. Eichelberger would not attack again until the tanks arrived.

At this point, although their month in combat had been a constant struggle, the 32nd Infantry Division had grown as a fighting unit. Although most attacks did not succeed, the men continued to drive on without the weapons they needed. If only the tanks and the proper ammunition for the one gun existed for the first attack on 18 November. Would the Buna campaign have already ended? It is a relevant question since all took place in the attack of 18 December.

The M3 Stuart Light Tank. While small in size and armament its armor allowed it to advance to effective distance of the Japanese bunkers where its 37-mm gun could engage.[19]

These tanks were not the monsters often cited when discussing World War II. Eichelberger received eight M3 Stuart light tanks. With a 37-mm main gun, a machine gun, and light armor, they did not seem like much. Against the Japanese, they were plenty. The Japanese had few anti-tank weapons and once approaching the bunkers, they seemed to forget the infantry even existed. Five tanks and two veteran Australian infantry companies attacked toward the Duropa Plantation, followed by the 3rd Battalion, 128th Infantry Regiment. They reached Simemi Creek, allowing the 1st Battalion, 126th Infantry Regiment and the 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry Regiment to reach the Bridge at the Creek. The airstrips were now in sight.[20]

The tanks allowed this advance. Colonel MacNab, one of the battalion commanders, described their effects:

> The tanks really did that job. They apparently completely demoralized the Japs ... who fought like cornered rats when they were forced into the open as a result of having their fires masked when the tanks broke through their final protective line .... There were few holes knocked in the bunkers except where the tanks stood off and blasted them at short range with their 37-mm guns.[21]

The Stuarts ran right through the heavy small arms fire. Two were lost: one to a Molotov cocktail and the other to mechanical failure. The remaining three tanks advanced to within 500 yards of Cape Endaiadere, destroyed a strongpoint, and then moved to the New Strip, where another attack with three more tanks took place. A system of twenty bunkers, a system that had held up a month of repeated attacks, was engaged and destroyed.[22]

The Old Strip still remained. All of the Japanese heavy weapons (two 75-mm guns, two 37-mm guns, several 25-mm dual and triple pom-poms, three 3-inch dug in naval guns) defended the Old Strip. Getting there meant crossing the bridge, which the Japanese had blown a hole in. It was repaired and on Christmas Eve, Eichelberger launched his next attack.[23]

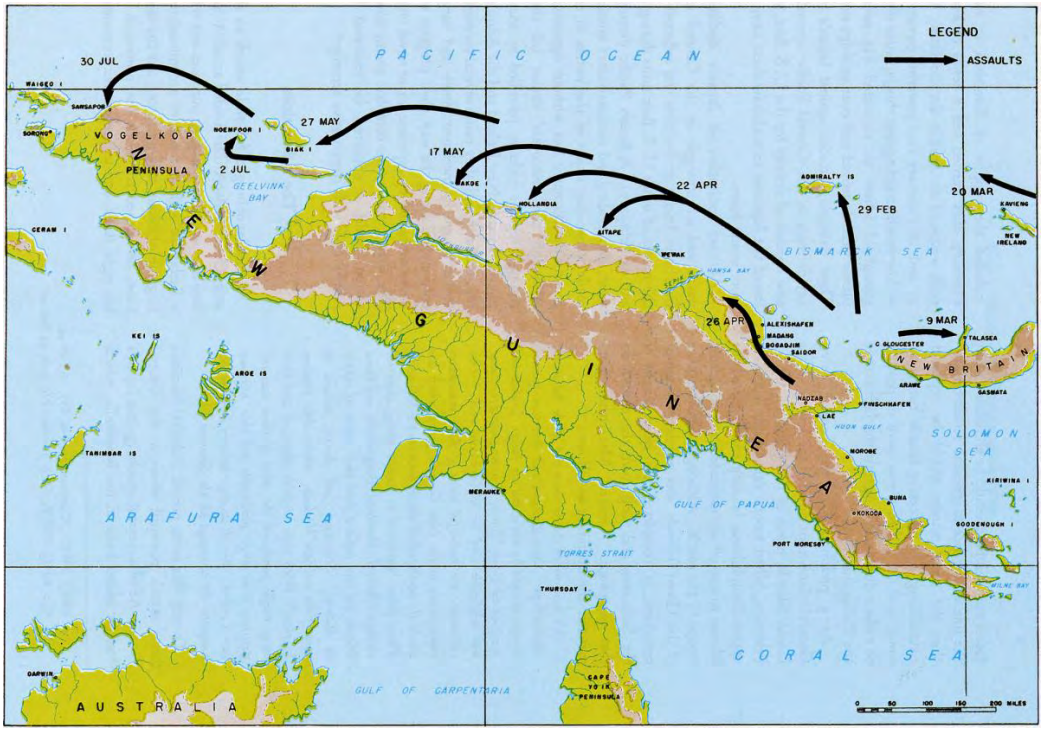
The attack, preceded by the fire of the lone US gun, went well, at first. The Japanese then knocked out three more tanks. The infantry advance stalled. The US gun destroyed one of the 3-inch enemy naval guns but could not locate the others. The infantry resumed their advance and seized all the big Japanese guns, finding them out of ammunition. Any remaining Japanese bunkers were eliminated over the next week. By 3 January 1943, the battle finally ended.

Six weeks of combat in the jungle had taken its toll: 707 killed in action and 1,680 wounded in action. Those numbers were compounded by 7,125 non-battle casualties (sickness, heat exhaustion, battle fatigue). The 32nd Infantry Division entered this battle with 10,825 men. Ninety percent at some point were not effective. It is remarkable they fought as well as they did. New Guinea was their wartime home for the next two years. The next major battle along the Driniumor River saw the 32nd Infantry Division once again in an avoidable, precarious situation.

After Buna, the 32nd needed rest. They also needed intense training, both for replacements and veterans, and plenty of heavy weapons and equipment. Never again would they enter battle with only one artillery piece and no tanks. The year 1943 would be a year of training, integration of new weapons and equipment, and assimilation of a new command structure. General Eichelberger moved on. The new division commander was General William Gill (leading the division through the end of the war). The 32nd Infantry Division became part of the US Sixth Army, General Walter Krueger commanding. Krueger was responsible for the tactical part of the New Guinea campaign. Strategically, MacArthur and

his headquarters determined objectives and timetables.

In addition to men and material, the SWPA received another major tool: *ULTRA*. *ULTRA* was the information gleamed from enemy military codes, both Japanese and German. It enabled Allied cryptologists to secure information as specific as exact times, locations, and attacks. It was why commanders at the corps level (this information did not go below army commanders) and below often received orders from army commanders that may have seemed nonsensical yet always seemed to work. General Walter Krueger received a continuous flow of *ULTRA* information throughout the 1944 New Guinea campaign, and that information determined the majority of the 32nd Infantry Division's deployments throughout that year.



The march across the coast on northern New Guinea, 1944.[24]

As the spring of 1944 approached, the Sixth Army was ready to bound across the northern coast of New Guinea as they moved closer to the Philippines. *ULTRA* provided the locations and numbers of Japanese forces throughout the island. Enemy forces were scattered, although still strong in isolated positions. The main Japanese force, the fifty-five-thousand-strong Eighteenth Army, occupied Wewak. Generals MacArthur and Krueger of course knew this, so they decided to land the 24th and 31st Infantry Divisions at Aitape and Hollandia in April, 300 miles further west. Only scant enemy forces defended the proposed landing sites and the operation was easy and

losses small. Not only had MacArthur set up a great anchorage and base for future operations, he had also bypassed and isolated an entire Japanese army. Half of the 32nd garrisoned Aitape and Hollandia, while the rest essentially became a theater reserve. A few months later, they reentered the fight.

The Japanese Eighteenth Army found itself in a precarious position after the US landings. Cut off, they had no hope for reinforcement or resupply. US naval dominance prevented any hope of rescue. They could remain at Wewak, move west to try and link up with another Japanese force, or surrender. Surrender was not an option. Staying in place meant starvation as supplies whittled away. So, the Japanese army commander, General Hatazo Adachi, decided to take approximately thirty-five thousand men west. Their ultimate objective: Aitape and Hollandia. To get there, they had to cross the nearby Driniumor River. Only fifteen thousand of that force ever reached the vicinity of the Driniumor, the jungle savaging their ranks, and only five thousand were combat troops. *ULTRA* told General Krueger all of this.[25]

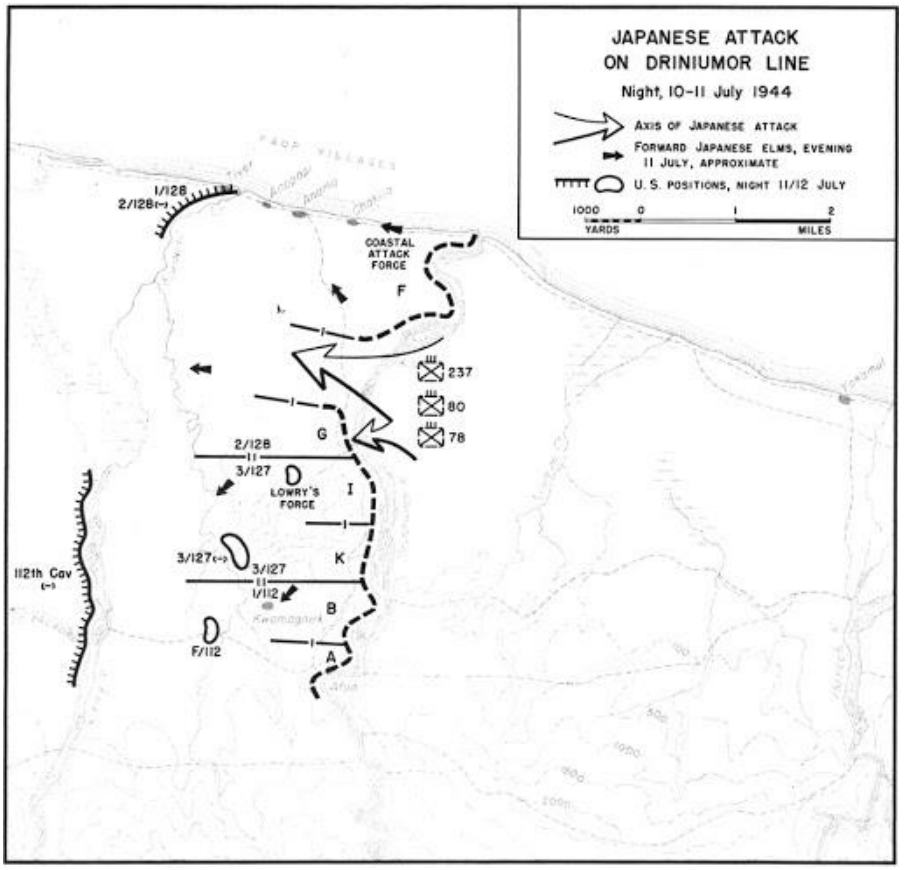
The Japanese were expected to reach the Driniumor in early July. At that time, in addition to garrisoning Aitape and Hollandia, Sixth Army units were conducting operations further west at Sarmi and Biak and other operations were imminent. Suddenly, a substantial enemy force could appear in Sixth Army's rear, threatening everything else. Krueger received two vital *ULTRA* messages in late June. The first quoted General Adachi, stating: "we are staking all on an encounter with the enemy in the vicinity of Aitape about 10 July. At present we are preparing to attack."[26] The second was very specific as to troop and equipment strength, intentions, and dispositions.

> The attack planned against Aitape is scheduled to begin about 10 July and to be made by approximately 20,000 troops ... the 20th and 41st Divisions are to participate in the attack and enumerates the following additional troops to be attached to the 41st Division: the 66th Infantry Regiment of the 51st Division, 1 mortar company, and a provisional Army artillery unit composed of Army and Navy Anti-Aircraft troops .... The 20th Division is believed to be located on the right bank of the Driniumor River (about 20 miles east of Aitape). The 41st Division and the attached troops are scheduled to be concentrated in the Yakamul-Ulau area about 5 July. The plan calls for the 20th Division to attack west across the Driniumor River, while the 41st Division moves around to the south and attacks north and northwest towards the Aitape and Tadji airfields. The 18th Army has made a number of urgent requests for submarine shipment of materials (principally wire-cutters and signal equipment) necessary for the Aitape operation. An indication that it has been having serious local supply difficulties as well appears

in a 21 June message in which the Army reported that it had only 60 usable trucks.[27]

Given this wealth of information, the destruction of the Japanese Eighteenth Army should have been easy. It may have been if adequate forces engaged them as they reached the Driniumor River. Those forces were employed elsewhere.

The fighting along the Driniumor River is not even referred to as a defensive battle but a covering force operation. The standard operational manual of the time, FM 100-5, defines a covering force operation as "providing time for the main force to prepare itself for combat, to deceive the enemy as to the actual location of the main battle position, to force the enemy to deploy early, and to provide a deeper view of the terrain over which the attacker would advance."[28] Delay, delay, delay. What units received this mission? Three battalions of the 32nd Infantry Division and the 112th Cavalry Regiment.



This map displays the hopeless situation presented to the US covering force. The 128th Infantry Regiment, specifically two companies of its 2nd Battalion, had 2 miles of front to cover. The Japanese poured through that line, often outnumbering the American defenders ten to one. The 128th Infantry's 1st Battalion could have helped, some, but was sent on a reconnaissance to find the Japanese.[29]

At Buna, the 32nd was sent to attack without experience or proper weapons. At the Driniumor, the elements of the division employed had an impossible task. They were given far too much front to cover with too few troops. Only three of the division's nine infantry battalions participated and only two of them were actually defending the river. Each battalion at full strength only had 871 men and none of the battalions were at full strength.[30] Further, not all of that 871 were infantry. The one cavalry squadron deployed forward had but five hundred men: roughly two thousand men for five miles of front.[31] It broke down as follows:

1. 1st Squadron, 112th Cavalry Regiment – Afua to the right flank of the 3rd Battalion, 127th Infantry Regiment (1 mile)

2. 3rd Battalion, 127th Infantry Regiment – 1.5 miles to the 2nd Battalion, 128th Infantry Regiment

3. 2nd Battalion, 128th Infantry Regiment – 2.5 miles to the end of the line

They would have plenty of fire support: forty-eight 105-mm howitzers (the entire 32nd Infantry Division artillery regiment) and sixteen 155-mm guns. Thanks to *ULTRA,* the US units knew where the Japanese attack would take place, so the artillery could register and deliver accurate fire almost immediately. Given that the Japanese were expected to attack at night, this became even more vital. There was plentiful air support, but darkness and the jungle made it of little use. There were two other units available, the 32nd's 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry Regiment and the 2nd Squadron of the 112th Cavalry. They were held back, not as a reserve for a counterattack but to conduct a long-range reconnaissance. As July came and the Japanese had yet to attack, Krueger became frustrated. Despite the line desperately needing these men and above the vocal protests of the commanders, on 8 July the two battalions moved out along the flanks of the line, approximately five miles apart.[32] It accomplished nothing.

The jungle was as thick and unbearable along this route as it was everywhere else in New Guinea. The heat was debilitating. There was an enormous gap between the two units and it should have surprised nobody they did not find the Japanese. During the night of 10-11 July, they heard the Japanese several miles in their rear as the enemy stormed across the Driniumor River.

Several thousand Japanese soldiers initially attacked the weakest part of the 32nd front, 1.5 miles held by a mere two rifle companies (E and G) of the 2nd Battalion, 128th Infantry Regiment. The enemy announced their attack, screaming as they emerged from the jungle. Artillery wreaked havoc, in one case killing 370 of a four-hundred-man Japanese battalion. As the Japanese hit the barbed wire, the infantry fired. Bodies of enemy soldiers began piling up, but dwindling ammunition and overheated machine gun barrels allowed the enemy through sheer numbers to achieve a breakthrough. River

X, some 4,500 yards west of the Driniumor, was the fallback position. It took the 2nd Battalion, 128th Infantry Regiment three days to reach the river. The 127th Infantry Regiment and 1st Squadron, 112th Cavalry also withdrew. It was necessary, although some disagreed.[33]

General Charles Hall commanded the entire front. His superior, General Krueger, believed the withdrawal unnecessary.[34] He believed this despite the defenders being outnumbered ten to one and the Japanese pouring through huge gaps in the line. He ordered Hall to drive the Japanese back and sent him three more battalions to do so, two from the 31st Infantry Division, the other from the 32nd's 127th Infantry Regiment. Before any attack could be launched, units had to consolidate and cut off groups brought back into friendly lines and eliminating scattered pockets of Japanese. By 15 July, only five days after the initial attack, General Hall was already pushing General Gill to get the 32nd Infantry Division and other units moving again:

> Careful analysis of your situation discloses at your disposal 127, 128(-), 124 (-), 112th, some tank-destroyers and engineers. Confronting you west of Driniumor is an undetermined number of Japs but certainly not your equal in either numbers or firepower. It appears to me with the forces at your disposal if the proper offensive action is instituted at once you should be able to clear the area west of the Driniumor within 48 hours. Troop movements have been delayed and I cannot promise you any reinforcement. I don not attempt to tell you what measures to take to counter an offensive from the east and at the same time clean up the situation west of the Driniumor. It cannot be done by defensive action. I expect you to take all offensive measures not only to clarify the situation but to eradicate the enemy west of the Driniumor. You must do it with your own forces which are considered adequate for the purpose. We cannot waste time by dilatory tactics. While I appreciate that some of your troops are tired I know of no battle which was entered into with fresh troops. Please give this your personal attention and push it to a conclusion in order that incoming troops may be used to finish up this situation outside of your area.[35]

This message, while worded differently, parallels that which MacArthur gave Eichelberger before dispatching him to Buna. Hall said the Japanese were not Gill's equal in numbers. Wrong. He could not give him any more men or support. The use of the word "dilatory" was insulting to all who absorbed that attack and prepared to launch their own. Yet, in New Guinea, such was the life of the 32nd Infantry Division. The situation was never ideal, even this late in the war. By the end of August, all had returned to normal. The line was restored and the Eighteenth Japanese Army was shattered. The entire Amer-

ican force, mostly the 32nd, lost 440 men KIA, 2,550 WIA, and ten MIA.[36] Japanese losses, mostly dead, were between twelve and fourteen thousand.[37] The 32nd soon left New Guinea for the Philippines, tired but ready for an entirely new set of challenges.

It was nearly two years earlier that the 32nd Infantry Division first entered combat at Buna. A vicious campaign made worse by their unpreparedness, inadequate weapons, and poor leadership at the highest level still resulted in a victory, although at high cost. The division trained and prepared for their next campaign that started in the spring of 1944 at Hollandia and ended in another bitter struggle along the Driniumor River, against superior numbers and once again with poor direction from top leadership. The 32nd seemed to always find itself in the worst possible situation. Buna, the Driniumor: there never seemed to be a positive scenario that the Division faced. Yet, they persevered. Throughout their two years on New Guinea, they operated under the massive shadow of MacArthur and his unrealistic expectations. At Buna, they were supposed to take airfields and defeat Japanese positions with one piece of artillery, a few tanks that came a month after the campaign started, and no support from higher headquarters. Buna cost the Division its commander. Along the Driniumor River, only part of the Division was expected to hold a line several full strength divisions would find challenging and again with little support, in this case from their Army commander, General Walter Krueger. They persevered once again. After the Driniumor, the 32nd was placed in reserve for the upcoming Leyte operation. MacArthur was returning to the Philippines.

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Notes

1 Robert Young, *They Too Fought the Japanese*, 5–10.

2 Military Intelligence Division, *The Buna-Sananda Operation*, 10.

3 Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 155.

4 Young, *They Too Fought the Japanese*, 22.

5 *Ibid*.

6 Samuel Milner, *Victory In Papua*, 133.

7 Ibiblio.org.

8 MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 153.

9 Robert Eichelberger, *Our Jungle Road To Tokyo*, 22.

10 Milner, *Victory In Papua*, 175.

11 Milner, 269.

12 *Ibid.,* 176.

13 Eichelberger, *Our Jungle Road To Tokyo*, 25.

14 Young, 32.

15 George Kenney, *George Kenney Reports*, 153.

16 *Introduction To The Eichelberger Papers*.

17 Young, 33–34.

18 Milner 239

19 Milner, 265.

20 Young, 37.

21 Milner, 263.

22 Young, 37–39.

23 *Ibid.,* 39.

24 Edward Drea, *Defending the Driniumor*, 17.

25 *Ibid.,* 62.

26 *Ibid.,* 156.

27 Young, 124–25.

28 FM 100-5, *Field Service Regulations (Operations)*, para. 597.

29 Robert Ross Smith, *The Approach To The Philippines*, 141.

30 Drea, *Defending the Driniumor*, 141.

31 Smith, *The Approach To The Philippines*, 135.

32 *Ibid.,* 136.

33 Young, 133–36.

34 Smith, 158.

35 Drea, 95–96.

36 Smith, 204.

37 *Ibid.,* 205.