



## MacArthur Memorial Education Programs

### World War II Island Hopping Primary Resources



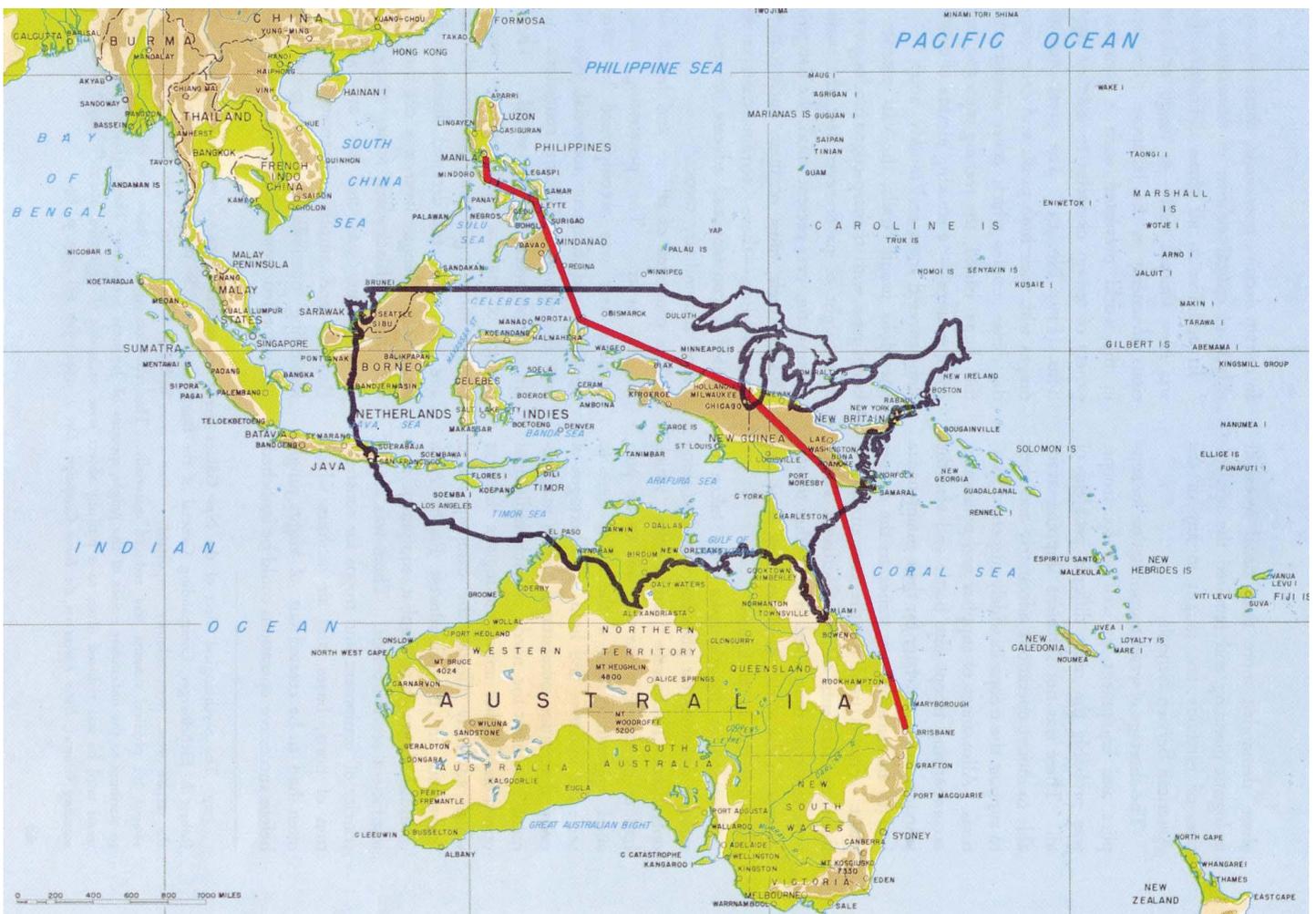
Following the Japanese attacks of December 7, 1941, the Japanese military made substantial gains in the Pacific. Their goal was to neutralize the U.S. fleet, seize territories rich in natural resources, and obtain military bases throughout the Pacific to defend their growing empire.

In 1942, U.S. General Douglas MacArthur was made commander of the Southwest Pacific Area. Admiral Chester Nimitz was made commander of the Central and South Pacific Areas. Both men were responsible for millions of square miles of ocean and islands. To push back against Japanese advances, MacArthur and Nimitz, with the benefits of codebreaking and opportunity, employed strategies called "Island Hopping" and "Bypassing." Essentially, they played "leapfrog" with the Japanese, landing their forces in areas where they could disrupt enemy supply lines and isolate thousands of Japanese. By establishing forward air bases, they extended their ability to attack deep into enemy territory and helped lay the groundwork for their next "hop."

In the Central Pacific, Nimitz island hopped from the Gilbert to the Marshall Islands, and then moved west to capture the Marianas Islands – moving towards the southern tip of Japan. In the Southwest Pacific Area, MacArthur captured Papua New Guinea, then moved through the Bismarck Archipelago and the Solomon Islands with Admiral William Halsey's South Pacific Forces. MacArthur's forces then moved across New Guinea bypassing tens of thousands of Japanese.

## MAP: South West Pacific Area Overlaid with Scale Representation of Continental USA

The continental United States occupies an area of approximately 3,119,884 square miles. This is roughly 1.58% of the total surface of the earth. The greatest distance east to west, (from Florida to Washington state) is 2,802 miles. The greatest distance from north to south is 1,650 miles. The size of the continental United States is impressive – but is dwarfed in relation to the Pacific Theater in World War II. This post-war U.S. Army map features an image of the United States overlaid on the South West Pacific Area. The map was created to help explain the nature of the campaigns that were fought in the Pacific. Unlike the European Theater, where infantry and tanks were massed to sweep through Europe, the geography and size of the Pacific Theater required a different approach. General MacArthur and Admiral Nimitz employed a strategy of “trihibious” warfare to advance through the Pacific. This strategy involved combing air, land, and sea forces to navigate the challenging geography and distances. Overtime, this strategy came to be known as Island Hopping.



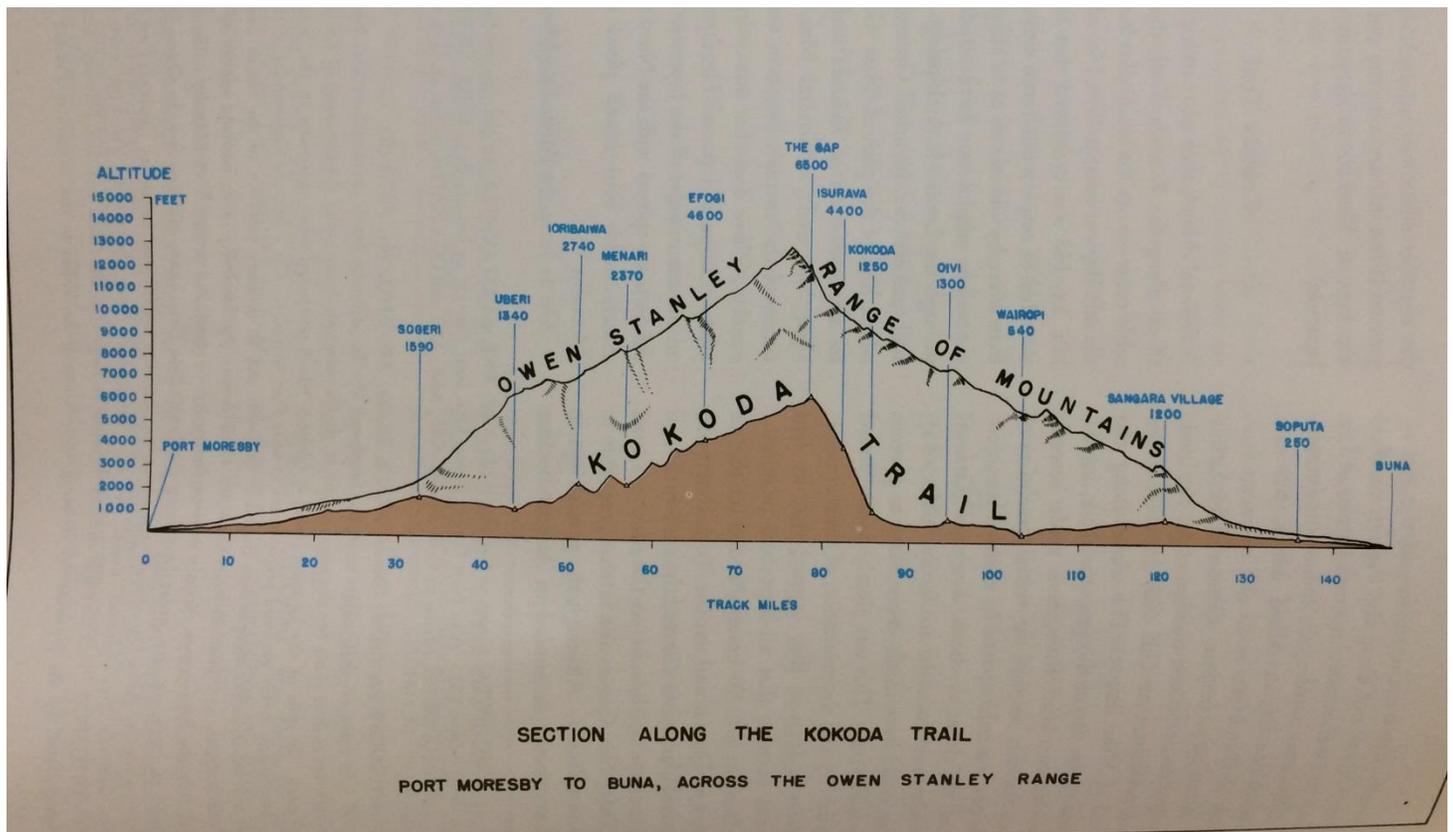
## **PHOTO: U.S. Marines Land at Guadalcanal, August 7, 1942**

When the United States entered World War II, a "Europe First" strategy was put in place. The U.S. military planned to win the war in Europe first and then turn its attention to the Pacific. Until then, operations in the Pacific were to be defensive in nature. After the decisive victories at the Battle of Midway and Coral Sea in the summer of 1942, where codebreaking helped the U.S. Navy sink five Japanese aircraft carriers, the United States started a limited offensive in the Pacific. Japanese forces had reached Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands and were building an airbase there that threatened Allied shipping and communication between the U.S., Australia, and New Zealand. They had to be stopped. In August 1942, the U.S. Navy "hopped" to Guadalcanal and landed the First Marine Division. Months of bitter fighting on land, air and sea ensued. In February 1943, the U.S. captured the island. Japanese Major General Kiyotake Kawaguchi later pointed to Guadalcanal as the "graveyard of the Japanese army."



**DOCUMENT: "Section Along the Kokoda Trail," General MacArthur's Reports, 1950.**

As the Japanese advanced through the Solomon Islands in 1942, they also were active in Papua New Guinea. At the time the Dutch controlled most of New Guinea and the Australians controlled Papua in the south west quarter of the island. The Japanese quickly occupied the Dutch controlled territory and then began to move south. Their goal was to build bases in places like Port Moresby in Papua to isolate Australia from the United States and control vital shipping lanes in the region. A Japanese attempt to capture Port Moresby by amphibious assault resulted in their defeat at the Battle of Coral Sea in May 1942. After their defeat at Midway in June, the Japanese attempted to capture Port Moresby by an overland route – the Kokoda Trail – from Buna on the north coast to Port Moresby on the southern coast. The Kokoda trail was the only passable route across the Owen Stanley mountains. Landing in July, by September the Japanese were seventeen miles from Port Moresby, when a force of Australian and Papuan soldiers stopped their advance and in a series of ferocious engagements pushed them back over the Kokoda Trail. Establishing themselves on the north coast at Buna, Gona and Sanananda, the Japanese fought off Australian and American attacks before they were finally defeated in January 1943. MacArthur's forces quickly began building air bases.



## DOCUMENT: Japanese Propaganda Leaflet, 1942

Although the war began on December 7, 1941, it took considerable time for the United States to mobilize and send troops to the Pacific. Throughout 1942, General MacArthur mainly relied on Australian troops to shoulder the bulk of the fighting in Papua and New Guinea. Although MacArthur had little faith in some of the Australian commanders, the Australian soldiers and sailors distinguished themselves in combat. To erode the morale of the Australian soldiers, the Japanese military embarked on a propaganda campaign designed to drive a wedge between the Australian soldiers and the Americans. Through a number of propaganda leaflets, the Japanese tried to convince the Australians that they were fighting and dying while American troops and leaders were safe in the United States or Australia. By 1943 however, MacArthur's reliance on Australian manpower decreased as the number of U.S. troops and supplies in the region grew significantly.



## **PHOTO: Bombing of Japanese airfields at Rabaul, 1943**

In early 1942, the Japanese captured Rabaul, a harbor town on the Australian Island Territory of New Britain in the Bismarck Archipelago. They turned it into a major base. Nestled right in the middle of the South West Pacific Area and the Central Pacific Area, Rabaul posed a significant threat to operations in both theatres. The Army and the Navy both proposed plans for capturing the base. Each service wanted to oversee the operation. In the end, a compromise was worked out. First, Admiral Nimitz and his South Pacific forces would take Guadalcanal and General MacArthur's Southwest Pacific forces Papua New Guinea. Once this was accomplished, the next phase of operations was a joint thrust at Rabaul across New Guinea and through the Solomon Islands by General MacArthur and Admiral Halsey. This phase was codenamed Operation CARTWHEEL. Air and naval operations of CARTWHEEL eventually isolated Rabaul and Allied leadership bypassed the Japanese base. MacArthur initially disagreed, but soon realized the advantage in bypassing and neutralizing a heavily entrenched enemy force. In doing so, a potentially costly land battle was avoided and tens of thousands of Japanese at Rabaul were left to die of starvation and disease.



## **PHOTO: Japanese Shipping at Rabaul Destroyed by U.S. Bombers, November 2, 1943**

Air power and codebreaking created the opportunity to isolate and bypass Rabaul. In August 1943, Allied codebreakers revealed a Japanese plan to reinforce New Guinea with hundreds of airplanes at Wewak, New Guinea. Armed with this intelligence, General MacArthur's 5<sup>th</sup> Air Force destroyed the Japanese planes on the ground shortly after they arrived. Now with unchallenged air supremacy, U.S. Army and Navy pilots destroyed Rabaul's five air fields and made Simpson Harbor a graveyard of Japanese ships. Subsequent bombing raids over Rabaul became known as "milk runs" because Japanese resistance was minimal. Accordingly, by 1945 missions over Rabaul primarily served as a training ground for new aircrews so that they would have some combat experience before participating in more challenging theatres. In the end, by bypassing Rabaul, the Allies trapped approximately 110,000 Japanese soldiers and airmen without having to engage them in conventional battle.



**MAP: "Westward Drive Along New Guinea," *Reports of General MacArthur, 1950.***

In January 1944, Australian minesweepers uncovered a Japanese trunk in the New Guinea village of Sio. It contained all the codebooks of the Japanese 20<sup>th</sup> Division. Overnight, MacArthur's codebreakers went from reading a few to a few hundred Japanese secret coded messages every day. Soon MacArthur knew the dispositions of all Japanese forces arrayed against him. Supported by brilliant air, sea and land commanders, MacArthur's campaign across New Guinea used air, land and sea forces to bypass Japanese strongholds and land at weak points to build new airfields to cover future landings. It had taken two years to move 300 miles from Papua to the Huon Peninsula. With the benefits of codebreaking and bypassing, Southwest Pacific forces moved across 1500 miles of New Guinea in five months and did not suffer a single major setback.



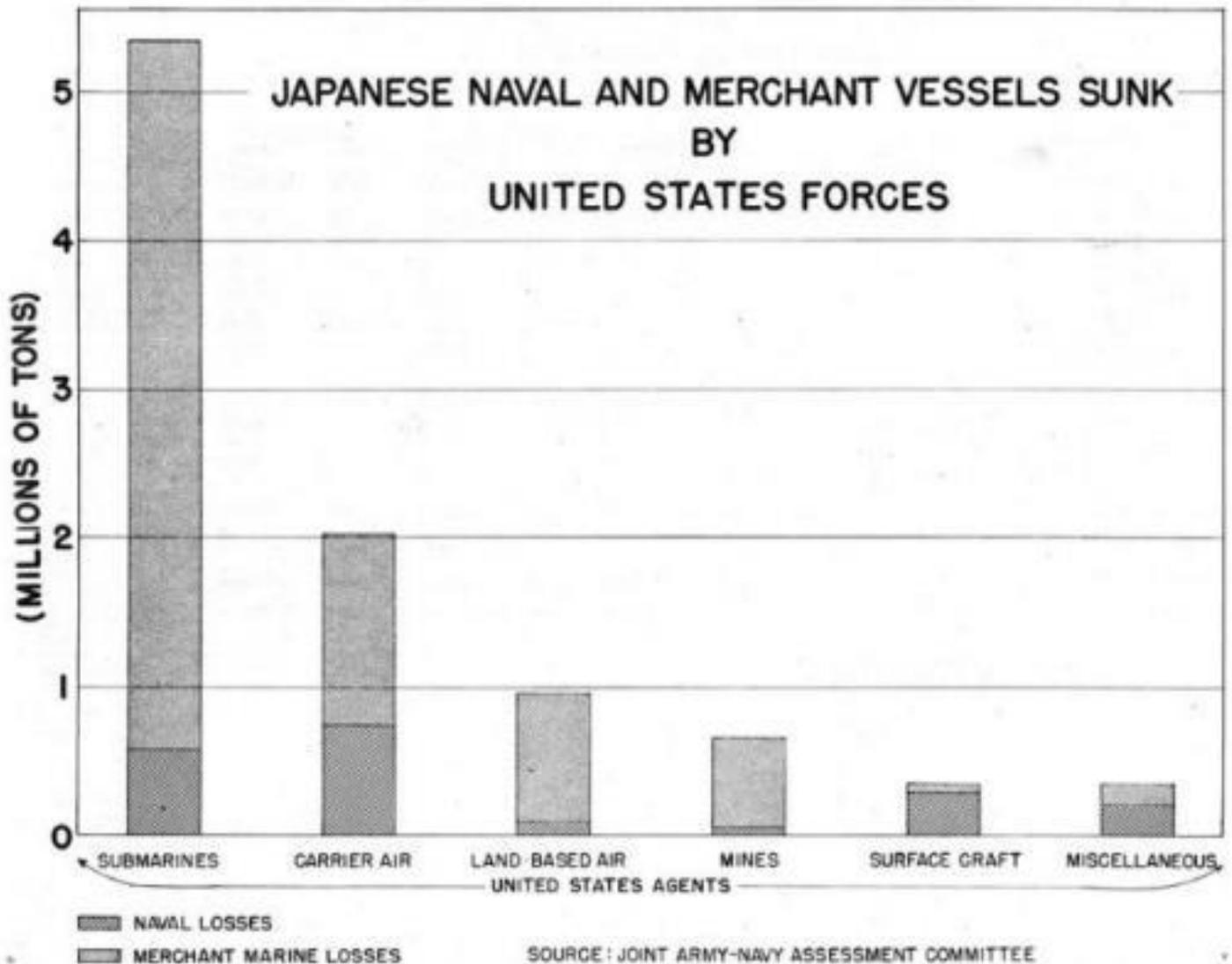
## PHOTO: Japanese Naval Base and Fleet at Truk, 1944

As General MacArthur quickly moved along the northern coast of New Guinea, in the Central Pacific Area, Admiral Nimitz's forces successfully attacked Japan's strategic bases in the Marshall Islands and island of Truk in the Caroline's. In 1939, Japanese forces occupied Truk and established what became the main operating base for the Imperial Japanese Combined Fleet. MacArthur's OPERATION CARTWHEEL and Nimitz's seizure of the Marshall Islands put the Japanese base within range of American air power. The proximity also meant that the Japanese base could potentially reinforce Rabaul or target Allied gains in the Marshall Islands. Although Allied leaders were concerned that Truk would be difficult to attack, they could not leave the base operational. Nimitz's forces attacked Truk February 17-18, 1944. OPERATION HAILSTONE, as the assault was codenamed, greatly damaged the base at Truk and effectively neutralized it for the rest of the war. Without Truk, the Imperial Japanese Navy lost its main staging base. This forced Japan to retreat, shrinking its outer ring of defense significantly and allowing the Allies to move closer to Japan.



**DOCUMENT: Japanese Vessels Sunk by United States Forces, *Joint Army/Navy Assessment Committee, 1947***

As American and Allied forces "Island Hopped" through the Pacific, one of their key objectives was to cut off Japanese bases from resupply or rescue. After the initial amphibious landings of the "hop," Allied land and sea forces would gain control of the areas around the bypassed Japanese bases. Through the creation or conquest of air bases, the Allies would then gradually gain control of the skies above the Japanese bases. In the words of General MacArthur, this total envelopment caused the bypassed bases to "wither on the vine." U.S. submarines played a key role in this process, sinking more than 5 million tons of Japanese shipping and naval vessels. World War II was also an industrial war, so any losses had to be compared to a nation's industrial capacity. Losses that *could not* be replaced made winning the war impossible, whereas losses that could be replaced typically did no harm to a combatant. By 1942, the U.S. was able to replace its losses in planes, tanks, ships, and other equipment on a daily basis. By 1942, Japan's industrial output was already falling behind. In many cases, Japanese losses incurred in 1942 had still not been replaced by 1945.



**Photo: Airfield on Wakde, 1944**

Japanese forces occupied Wakde Island in April 1942 and constructed an airstrip on the small island. On May 18, 1944, U.S. troops landed on Wakde Island with the goal of capturing the Japanese airstrip. It took several days to secure the island and the airstrip with minimal casualties for U.S. forces – 40 killed and 107 wounded. In contrast, the Japanese suffered 759 killed and 4 captured. With the island secure, U.S. forces expanded the airbase to cover much of the island. A week after U.S. troops landed on the island, B-24 bombers were taking off from Wakde to attack other Japanese targets. Wakde was an extremely vital airbase through 1944. Its importance only declined as Allied forces moved farther to the north and east, hopping ever closer to Japan.



## DOCUMENT: Return to the Philippines Gets Greenlight, September 15, 1944

In the summer of 1944, Nimitz and MacArthur were poised to begin the next phase of the advance towards Japan. In late July 1944, President Franklin Roosevelt met with both commanders in Hawaii to determine the next phase of operations. For nearly two years, both commanders had successfully bypassed and island hopped through the South West and Central Pacific regions. Their movements had largely complimented each other, but now both had different ideas about how to proceed. Nimitz wanted to bypass the Philippines and "hop" to the island of Formosa and use it as a base to get within bombing range of Japan. MacArthur wanted to "hop" to the Philippines. Forced to flee the Philippines in the spring of 1942, MacArthur had repeatedly uttered his "I Shall Return" promise. He believed that the United States had a moral obligation to return to the Philippines because it had been responsible for the security of the Philippines prior to the Japanese occupation. He was also aware that Nimitz's plan would require more shipping than was currently present in the Pacific Theatre. Both men presented President Roosevelt with their arguments. About a month and a half later, President Roosevelt approved MacArthur's plan, paving the way for a return to the Philippines.

FROM : JCS  
TO : MACARTHUR; NIMITZ FOR ACTION  
INFO : HALSEY

15 September 1944

OCTAGON 31A

JCS authorize MacArthur to execute Leyte operation target date 20 October reference your teletype conference 16 September. MacArthur and Nimitz arrange necessary coordination. Inform JCS of your plans we are sending above as message to CINCPAC and COM 3RD FLT by urgent radio immediately.

## PHOTO: 7<sup>th</sup> Division Soldiers and Tanks at Leyte (Dulag), February 1944

Between January 31 and February 4, 1944, Admiral Nimitz's forces conducted OPERATION FLINTLOCK – a campaign to push the Japanese out of the Marshall Islands. The operation involved the invasions of Kwajalein, Eniwetok, and Majuro atolls. The U.S. Army's 7<sup>th</sup> Division landed on Kwajalein Atoll on February 1, 1944 and quickly seized the island. The 7<sup>th</sup> Division had been formed in California at the start of the war and prior to being sent to the Pacific Theatre, had trained in amphibious landings at Monterey Wharf and the Salinas River. After securing Kwajalein, the 7<sup>th</sup> Division was sent to Hawaii to rest and regroup for their next operation. While there, the division was reviewed by President Roosevelt, also in Hawaii to meet with Nimitz and MacArthur to discuss the next phase of the war. President Roosevelt ended up siding with MacArthur's plan to return to the Philippines. On October 20, 1944, MacArthur kept his promise and returned to the Philippines. The 7<sup>th</sup> Division was part of MacArthur's invasion force that landed at Leyte. Although the 7<sup>th</sup> Division's landing was relatively easy, they participated in fierce fighting as they moved to secure airfields and cities.



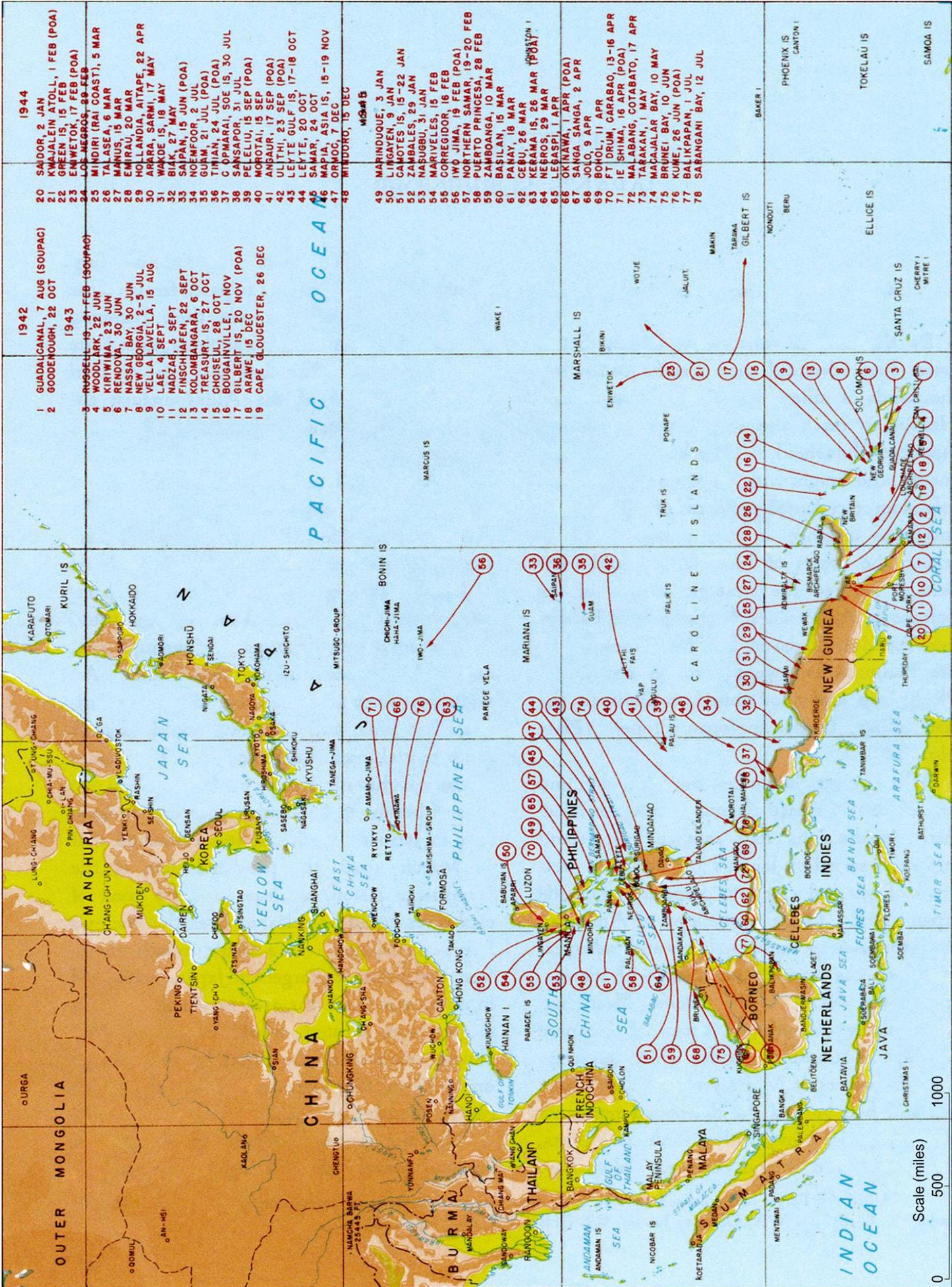
## MAP: Range of US Bombers, 1945

In the 1930s, the U.S. military embraced a philosophy that long range bombers would be the primary defense force of the United States. The plan was to have the bombers locate and sink an enemy fleet far from the coast. This defensive philosophy changed in World War II, with long range bombers being used to attack enemy targets and disrupt industrial production. In the Pacific, the B-17 bomber was initially used to great effect. By 1943 however, the longer-range B-24 dominated the Pacific. With a range of 2,400 miles, the B-24 bomber was able to take off from small island airstrips and attack deep into Japanese territory while extending a protective umbrella over advancing Allied forces. Every island hop brought the bombers closer and closer to Japan and victory. While they did not necessarily agree in all matters, MacArthur and Nimitz were both convinced that airpower was the key to victory in the Pacific.



**Map: "Allied Landings August 1942-August 1945," *Reports of General MacArthur*, 1950**

Between August 1942 and August 1945, Allied forces successfully island-hopped thousands of miles. An unparalleled logistical achievement, it was the largest joint Army/Navy operation of the war. By the time the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan in August of 1945, approximately 67 Japanese cities had already been destroyed or rendered more than 50% uninhabitable by long range bombers based at airfields that had been captured or created as part of the island-hopping campaign. [See next page]



1942

- 1 GUADALCANAL, 7 AUG (SOUPAC)
- 2 GOODENOUGH, 22 OCT

1943

- 3 ROSSSELL, 19-21 FEB (SOUPAC)
- 4 WOODLARK, 22 JUN
- 5 KIRIWINA, 23 JUN
- 6 RENDOVA, 30 JUN
- 7 NASSAU BAY, 30 JUN
- 8 NEW GEORGIA, 2-5 JUL
- 9 VELLA LAVELLA, 15 AUG
- 10 LAE, 4 SEPT
- 11 NADZAB, 5 SEPT
- 12 FINSCHHAFEN, 22 SEPT
- 13 KOLOMBANGARA, 6 OCT
- 14 TREASURY IS, 27 OCT
- 15 CHOISEUL, 28 OCT
- 16 BOUGAINVILLE, 1 NOV
- 17 GILBERT IS, 20 NOV (POA)
- 18 ARAWA, 15 DEC
- 19 CAPE GLOUCESTER, 26 DEC

1944

- 20 SAIDOR, 2 JAN
- 21 KWAJALEIN ATOLL, 1 FEB (POA)
- 22 GREEN IS, 15 FEB
- 23 ENIWETOK, 17 FEB (POA)
- 24 LOS NEGROS, 25 FEB
- 25 MINDIRI (RAI COAST), 5 MAR
- 26 TALASEA, 6 MAR
- 27 MANUS, 15 MAR
- 28 EMIRAU, 20 MAR
- 29 HOLLANDIA, AITAPE, 22 APR
- 30 ANARA, SARMI, 17 MAY
- 31 WAKDE IS, 18 MAY
- 32 BIAK, 27 MAY
- 33 SAIPAN, 15 JUN (POA)
- 34 NOEMFOOR, 2 JUL
- 35 GURAM, 21 JUL (POA)
- 36 TINIAN, 24 JUL (POA)
- 37 C DPMARAI, SOE IS, 30 JUL
- 38 SANSAPOR, 31 JUL
- 39 PELELIU, 15 SEP (POA)
- 40 MOROTAI, 15 SEP
- 41 ANSAUR, 17 SEP (POA)
- 42 ULTHI, 23 SEP (POA)
- 43 LEYTE GULF IS, 17-18 OCT
- 44 LEYTE, 20 OCT
- 45 SAMAR, 24 OCT
- 46 MAPIA, ASIA IS, 15-19 NOV
- 47 ORMOG, 7 DEC
- 48 MIYUDORO, 15 DEC

1945

- 49 MARINOUQUE, 3 JAN
- 50 LINGAYEN, 9 JAN
- 51 CAMOTES IS, 15-22 JAN
- 52 ZAMBALES, 29 JAN
- 53 NABUBU, 31 JAN
- 54 MARIVELES, 15 FEB
- 55 CORREGIDOR, 16 FEB
- 56 IWO JIMA, 19 FEB (POA)
- 57 NORTHERN SAMAR, 19-20 FEB
- 58 PUERTO PRINCESA, 28 FEB
- 59 ZAMBOANGA, 10 MAR
- 60 BASILAN, 15 MAR
- 61 PANAY, 18 MAR
- 62 CEBU, 26 MAR
- 63 KERAMA IS, 26 MAR (POA)
- 64 NEBROS, 29 MAR
- 65 LESASPI, 1 APR
- 66 OKINAWA, 1 APR (POA)
- 67 SANGA SANGA, 2 APR
- 68 JOLO, 9 APR
- 69 BOHOL, 11 APR
- 70 DRUM, CARABAO, 13-16 APR
- 71 IE SHIMA, 16 APR (POA)
- 72 MALABANG, COTABATO, 17 APR
- 73 TARAKAN, 1 MAY
- 74 MADAJARAL BAY, 10 MAY
- 75 BRUNEI BAY, 10 JUN
- 76 KUME, 26 JUN (POA)
- 77 BALIKPAPAN, 1 JUL
- 78 SARANGANI BAY, 12 JUL

PACIFIC OCEAN

Scale (miles)  
0 500 1000