

Remembering the war in New Guinea

Jungle, Japanese and the Australian Army: learning the lessons of New Guinea

(Symposium paper)

Panel name: Adapting to war

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The land war fought by the Australian Army in New Guinea during the Second World War was arguably amongst the most difficult fought by any of the armed forces of the British Commonwealth.[1] It involved extended fighting in an area that had hardly featured in pre-war planning. Following the Japanese invasion of Malaya and the initial landing in New Guinea, the character of the war changed vastly for the Australian forces. Attention now had to focus on fighting in an area of unprecedented physical difficulties - an appalling climate, rugged mountainous terrain and dense tropical vegetation - against an opponent now popularly regarded as a jungle fighter extraordinaire following earlier Japanese successes in south-east Asia and the south-west Pacific. The contrast could hardly have been greater between this new environment and the campaigns Australians had fought in the Western Desert, Greece and Syria. This paper looks at how the Australian military forces adapted to this new war in terms of doctrine and training - two vital keys to battlefield success. Apart from in two brief studies by John Moreman and Mark Welburn, neither subject has received the attention it deserves.[2] As Peter Stanley has recently remarked in his important study of the Tarakan campaign: "Despite its centrality to the Australian war effort in the South-West Pacific Area, jungle warfare has been inexplicably neglected." [3] John Coates has partly redressed this deficiency in his study of the 9th Australian Division following its return to Australia early in 1943, but much more work is needed on this important subject.[4] Perhaps the most significant reason for this omission has been identified by Raymond Callahan:

Training is a very dull subject - rather like the history of university organisation and structure, important but not pulse-quickenning. For that reason, military historians, professional and amateur, official and academic alike, get past it as quickly as they can.[5]

Before examining the development of doctrine in New Guinea, this paper discusses the pre-war sources of doctrine for the Australian Army and then looks at the impact of the Malayan campaign upon military thought. It then examines the development of doctrine and training regimes during and immediately after the bitter fighting during the 1942-1943 campaign before finally assessing the wider significance of the lessons learnt by the Australian military in New Guinea for the rest of the British Commonwealth armed forces.

The conduct of jungle warfare was largely alien territory to the officers and men of the pre-war regular Australian Army. Indeed, it was the same for all the Commonwealth armed forces - British, Indian and those drawn from other dominions and colonies - despite extensive areas of the far-flung British Empire being covered with tropical vegetation. Apart from briefly mentioning operations against poorly armed irregulars, its special characteristics were not considered in *Field service regulations* (FSR) - the tactical bible of all the British Commonwealth armies - at all. Instead, this manual stressed that the principles of war were unchanging and could be applied by trained officers and NCOs to all military situations.[6] In the absence of any meaningful threat potentially involving jungle fighting, orthodox war remained conventional European or "open warfare". This was closely studied in accordance with *FSR* and the training manuals of the various arms, with *Training regulations 1934* laying down a basic framework and suggesting methods of instruction for all Commonwealth troops throughout the British Empire.[7] The only tactical manuals that dealt with the subject known alternatively as bush, forest or jungle warfare were those produced for various paramilitaries serving within or on the periphery of British colonial possessions - the Burma Military Police, the Royal West African Frontier Force and the King's African Rifles.[8] The Burma Military Police, for example, published a small tactical manual of its own for British officers seconded for short tours of duty in order to familiarise them with jungle conditions and operations against the tribes inhabiting the border areas of Burma.[9] Since these formations were outside War Office control, however, no official attempt was made by the regular army to absorb basic useful lessons, such as living and moving in a jungle environment.[10]

Following the outbreak of the Second World War, the Australian Army understandably focused its attention on fighting a conventionally organised opponent in Europe or North Africa. It was the deployment of large numbers of British, Indian and later Australian troops to Malaya between 1939-1942, however, that put operations in a jungle environment on the training agenda for the first time for Commonwealth officers and men. The large Malayan garrison did have some

guidance from British - not Australian as Moremon suggests - sources about fighting under local conditions, prepared before the outbreak of the war in the Far East. In 1940, a small pamphlet - *Tactical notes for Malaya*, - was prepared and published by Malaya Command, describing local conditions in Malaya, the characteristics of the Japanese army and minor tactics in densely forested terrain.[11] It was widely circulated between 1940-1942 to all incoming British, Indian and Australian units and in addition to *FSR* provided the basic source of tactical information about fighting in Malaya. The Indian military authorities also produced their own source of guidance about forest fighting for its units being sent to Malaya, although it is more difficult to find out how widely this source of information was used. *Military training pamphlet No. 9 (India) Extensive warfare: Notes on forest warfare* was prepared at Army Headquarters in October 1940 at the direction of Brigadier Francis Taker, the Director of Military Training.[12] Unfortunately, copies of this publication appear to have gone no further than the HQ of Malaya Command, whose training instructions reflected the needs of open warfare rather than that in the jungle.[13] Both were reprinted in Melbourne for use by the Australian Army in 1940, although it appears only the former reached units of the 8th Australian Division.[14] While simplistic in many respects, these volumes contained some useful practical advice for officers. It appears neither was widely read, however, or the methods they advocated put into by practice by COs more interested in building defences and carrying out badly needed basic military training in units that had been heavily "milked" to provide manpower for the expanding Indian Army. Without a strong Directorate of Military Training at Malaya Command, little was done to ensure that tactical methods were based on guidelines or that large-scale exercises were carried out in the jungle.[15] With the exception of units and formations whose commanders were more motivated and prepared to experiment, the garrison was ill-prepared for the war that broke out in December 1941.

The fall of Singapore in February 1942 focused attention on the perceived lessons of the disastrous Malayan campaign in terms of both jungle warfare and Japanese tactical methods. Two main sources of information were available to Australian officers about the campaign upon which training was based. After escaping from Singapore, Major General Henry Gordon Bennett, former GOC, 8th Australian Division, penned a series of reports based on his experiences dealing with Japanese tactical methods and, in less detail, operations in jungle.[16] These were widely circulated during the spring and summer of 1942 and were later incorporated in the May 1942 edition of *Army training memorandum (Australia)*, issued on a scale of one copy per officer in Australia and also serving at Port Moresby.[17] Perhaps more important were those lessons learnt and passed on by Brigadier Ian Stewart - one of the few British officers to emerge with credit from the campaign. This forceful former CO of the 2nd Battalion, Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders had devoted considerable time and effort to studying jungle warfare before war broke out and as a result his unit had performed remarkably well during the campaign.[18] After being evacuated from Singapore to pass on his ideas, Stewart was interviewed on 16 February by Major General A.S. Allen and Brigadier Frank Berryman, two members of the advance party of 1st Australian Corps. As Berryman recorded in his diary: "We learned much of value & got a copy of report on lessons etc from this Brig." [19] Two other officers accompanied Stewart on the sea voyage to Colombo, during which they compiled further notes about tactics and training for jungle operations.[20]

The defence of the Australia mainland was a more immediate and pressing problem, however, for the Australian military authorities. For the military authorities, improving the low military efficiency of the CMF and preparing it for a defensive campaign in open terrain in Australia occupied most attention. Only when a serious threat to Port Moresby in New Guinea emerged did attention shift to training for operations in enclosed terrain, with the dissemination of notes by various formation headquarters on such operations for information and study.[21] The 7th Australian Division, for example, underwent several months' instruction in the timbered country of southern Queensland, basing its training regime on a mixture of advice from Bennett, various notes on the Japanese army and information derived from Ian Stewart.[22] This information, however, was not accepted at face value. As a training instruction issued by the 7th Divisions HQ on 4 September 1942 directed:

A fool derives no profit from experience; a mediocrity profits only by his own experience, but a wise man profits by the experience of others. To derive profit from the experience of others it is vital to know and understand the basic reasons for what happens. To get at these basic reasons means a thorough search, and a scientific distrust of theories that cannot be proved. Actions based on precedent alone will almost invariably fail, as the real conditions to be met are always different. Jungle warfare, or warfare in thick country, against a well trained enemy, is new to practically the whole civilized world, The (training) manuals do not deal with it specifically. These notes are sent out to assist (commanders) to think for themselves the methods to be used and the reasons for them.[23]

The relevance of the training actually carried out, however, was quickly called into question when a Japanese landing force disembarked at Gona in July 1942 and then advanced southwards across the Owen Stanley Mountains towards Port Moresby in New Guinea.

The speed, ferocity and effectiveness of the IJA and the mountainous operational environment in New Guinea came as a

powerful shock to the militia battalions that initially comprised New Guinea Force. Australian military authorities learned several important lessons during the opening rounds of the fighting in New Guinea. The futility of sending insufficiently trained, badly equipped and poorly led militia units into action against the IJA under jungle conditions quickly became clear as troops of 39th and 53rd Battalions fell back in disorder under heavy Japanese pressure. It was also evident that operational conditions in the jungle-covered Owen Stanley Mountains were far worse than in Malaya in terms of the rugged terrain, harsh climatic conditions and the endemic diseases that cut swathes through the ranks. Moreover, the almost total absence of land communications forced recourse to native carrier transport and aircraft to maintain forward units. A combination of these factors meant that the relevance of the lessons of Malaya were quickly called into question and possessed only limited value. Finally, following the commitment of reinforcements from the 7th Australian Division, even troops of the AIF needed specialised instruction and a period of acclimatisation and psychological adjustment to the almost completely alien, apparently hostile and bewildering environment in which they operated before being committed to battle.[24]

The availability of fully trained, battle-ried and tested and highly professional AIF units, confident in themselves and their leaders, however, gave the Australian Army an incalculable advantage when compared to other Commonwealth forces operating at that time in the Far East in first holding and then pushing back the Japanese offensive. Two brigades of the 6th Australian Division, moreover, had received some relevant experience in jungle tactics in Ceylon while en route home. With only limited training and often inappropriate initial guidance about both jungle fighting and Japanese tactical methods, improvisation and on the job training was the order of the day for all troops deployed. Australian troops were by no means natural jungle fighters; adapting to the jungle and Japanese was a gradual, painful process involving heavy fighting, with initially a steep "learning curve" for all officers and men deployed in New Guinea and particularly for the raw and untrained troops of the militia. Heavy losses from enemy action, the climate and disease was the price that had to be paid during the ordeal along the Kokoda Trail and later at Buna-Gona-Sanananda.

The Australian Army was justifiably proud of its success in mastering the IJA and overcoming the jungle in New Guinea between July 1942-January 1943. While the fighting was in progress, the early lessons of the 1942-1943 campaigns had been eagerly collated and analysed by the military authorities, aware that for the remainder of the war the Australian Army would be used entirely against the Japanese in the Pacific. As Frank Berryman, Deputy Chief of the General Staff, noted in September 1942

It is felt that immediate action is necessary to ensure that lessons learnt from operations in New Guinea should be made available to formations in Australia, in a manner which it can be most readily absorbed by them and introduced into their training.[25]

Two LHQ Training Teams were quickly formed to assist unit and formation commanders in jungle warfare training and preparing large-scale exercises in Australia. These were complemented by training notes that LHQ began disseminating from September 1942, based on scanty information and earlier lessons being learnt in New Guinea that were intended to form the basis of training in Australia.[26] Other early efforts to prepare and train Australian troops took the form of the establishment in November 1942 of the LHQ Training Centre (Jungle Warfare) at Canungra in southern Queensland, to provide urgently needed jungle-trained reinforcements to make good battle casualties and wastage from tropical disease in New Guinea Force. This new training establishment provided vitally needed specialised training to the large number of reinforcements urgently needed by units operating under tropical conditions. It quickly developed innovative new training methods for this purpose and later undertook training of cadres, complete sub-units and units as the war progressed.[27] Lastly, extensive training areas were selected and developed on the Atherton Tablelands in northern Queensland to provide units and formations with semi-realistic training under tropical conditions before being committed to battle in New Guinea.[28]

The end of the fighting provided an opportunity to objectively collate, analyse and disseminate lessons learnt by different units and formations in New Guinea. As the HQ of New Guinea Force noted on 30 January 1943: "It is considered that conferences should be held of staffs and regimental commanders to consider the lessons of the campaign and to submit recommendations in regard to training, equipment and organization." [29] A considerable amount of information about fighting methods and training was available in reports prepared by formation commanders both during and after the campaign.[30] It was now widely recognised that essential qualification for any unit was, however, a high standard of basic individual and collective training in open warfare, upon which more specialised skills for jungle fighting could be added. Before being committed to battle Australian troops needed a period of progressive individual, sub-unit and unit-level jungle training, as well as a period of physical and psychological acclimatisation in actual jungle conditions. A new range of specific individual skills and knowledge were required - collectively dubbed "jungle craft" and "jungle lore" - for troops to live and move in the jungle with comparative ease. Instruction in anti-malaria/hygiene discipline also formed an essential part of preparation for jungle fighting, with tropical disease remaining once of the most intractable opponents faced by AMF units operating in New Guinea and the islands of the south-west Pacific. Finally, knowledge of Japanese military

characteristics and fighting methods was also badly needed to prepare troops before being committed to battle.

The withdrawal of AIF and militia units from New Guinea to the Atherton Tablelands to rest, re-equip and re-train provided an opportunity to develop new methods of instruction and disseminate the lessons learnt by trial and error about jungle fighting by different formations during the recent fighting. A combination of informal and formal channels of communication were used to pass on information about living and moving in the jungle and fighting the IJA in New Guinea during the spring of 1943. Within experienced units, word of mouth provided perhaps the most important means of introducing reinforcements to the conditions likely to be encountered in the jungle and familiarising them with Japanese tactics. The transfer/loan of experienced officers and NCOs as training cadres between units also assisted with training.

The more formal channels of communication used within formations to pass on new methods being learnt and local variations in tactical methods included the employment of training instructions/directives issued at battalion, brigade, and divisional levels. Training instructions issued by GOC and brigade commanders, for example, facilitated the modification of tactical methods to suit local requirements as well as means of laying down methods favoured by individual commanders. Some were quite substantial, laying down detailed guidelines for operations and the trend and focus of training with each formation.^[31] The HQ of the 6th Australian Division also issued in its *Training instruction No. 11* a detailed guide to tactics that amounted in most respects to a tactical training pamphlet in its own right, detailing the characteristics of tropical countries, individual training, Japanese tactics and tactics in attack and defence.^[32] Many formations also established and ran their own jungle warfare schools or cadres for officers, NCOs and replacements using experienced officers and NCOs as instructors.^[33]

The military authorities at LHQ also took steps to collate, analyse and in turn disseminate recent lessons learnt throughout the rest of the Australian Army. Divisional Training Teams and the further dissemination of periodic *Training notes* based on the latest operational experience by LHQ also acted as an important conduit for passing on the latest information about jungle fighting methods and new forms of training.^[34] The most important and authoritative means of "passing on" tactical guidance, however, took the form of a new, officially sanctioned specialised jungle warfare training pamphlet prepared by the Directorate of Military Training. It included lessons learnt from earlier jungle campaigns fought by British, Australian and US troops. Most important were those lessons derived from New Guinea. Early drafts were prepared at Melbourne in the spring of 1943 and were issued to the AIF divisions refitting on the Atherton Tableland in March 1943, with the DCGS directing that its "contents will be studied and applied in training where applicable".^[35] After further comments from experienced commanders were assimilated in its final form, this comprehensive publication was given a very wide circulation. Its preface began:

This pamphlet endeavours to collect all the available information which has been gained from the experience of fighting under jungle conditions. In a pamphlet of this nature written primarily for Company and Battalion Commanders, it is neither possible nor desirable to deal specifically with any particular area of operations and is a general appreciation of the experience which has been gained from fighting in MALAYA, PHILLIPINES, NEW GUINEA and the SOLOMONS..

The JAP is no match for our troops provided they are fully trained, bold and determined. This has been definitely proven in NEW GUINEA and the SOLOMONS.^[36]

It discussed the topography of likely operational areas before discussing general tactics, attack, defence, withdrawal, ambushes, patrolling, protection and other more detailed aspects of fighting under jungle conditions. It was supplemented by a far more detailed pamphlet intended for section and platoon commanders devoted to minor tactics in the jungle.^[37] By these written means, a highly effective standardised tactical doctrine for jungle warfare was developed and passed on throughout the Australian Army, and especially to the large number of replacements and militia units that had not yet seen battle.

The 9th Australian Division, newly-returned from the Middle East, was perhaps the first formation to profit fully from the hard-won experience of others by these means after it reformed on the Atherton Tablelands in April 1943. Its training was based on information derived from transferred personnel, small training teams from units that had fought on the Kokoda Trail and at Buna-Gona-Sanananda and written sources of information discussed above.^[38] The division also had time to learn and adapt to jungle warfare. As John Coates has observed: "The measured program accorded the 9th represented a luxury that previous groups of Australians who had been rushed to New Guinea to stem the tide could not afford."^[39] The successes achieved as the Australian forces took the offensive at Wau, Salamua and later on during the autumn and winter of 1943 quickly bore out the training given to AMF formations. As General Thomas Blamey proudly observed in August 1943: "Our divisions have established definitely their superiority over JAPANESE in offensive jungle fighting. Our training is very hard and toughening."^[40] By the summer of 1943, Australian forces in New Guinea were backed by a highly effective training establishment geared to the needs of jungle warfare and a tactical doctrine that had stood the test

of battle. Following a visit to New Guinea in October, Brigadier Ronnie Irving, the Director of Military Training at LHQ, noted with obvious satisfaction: "In general terms it appears that training carried out prior to the recent operations was satisfactory and no commander had any major changes in method or policy to suggest."^[41] A report submitted by the HQ of the 7th Australian Division a month later added further weight to this view: "The operations toward LAE proved that the training of the division on the TABLELANDS was a proper preparation. It showed that aggressive infantry, lightly equipped and capable of relatively quick movement through the jungle can defeat the JAP."^[42]

Throughout the rest of the war, the study and further development of jungle fighting methods was a continuous process as new lessons were learnt and further experience was assimilated by Australian troops. Until new editions of manuals appeared, divisional and other training instructions and observer reports provided the most readily available means of passing on the latest lessons learnt in the jungle. With the agreement of forward HQs, observers periodically sent back reports to LHQ on operations for inclusion in successive editions of *Army training memoranda (War) (Australia)* that were circulated on a scale of one copy to each officer. The December 1943 edition of *ATM*, for example, included notes on operations in New Guinea between 4-16 September 1943, notes on Japanese tactical methods and also training guidelines based on recent combat experience.^[43] Later during the war, these sources were complemented by an Operational Report Section at Advanced LHQ that also collected and collated reports on operations to ensure commanders were provided with the latest lessons learnt in New Guinea.^[44]

Although the belief that jungle fighting represented a very specialised form of warfare, requiring detailed tactical guidelines and methods, was quickly entrenched in some military circles in Australia, it was not completely accepted. Early in 1943, Major General George Vasey, for example, warned against the "tendency of clouding 'Jungle Warfare' with too much 'Hoodoo'," when asked to comment on the first draft of the Australian training pamphlet.^[45] Many other pre-war regulars, educated in the British school of military thought, were sceptical about what they regarded as the growing over-specialisation of jungle warfare and of it being treated as virtually "a new art of war". This view was emphasised in reports and training instructions stressing the universal application of the principles of war to all forms of military operations in an attempt to improve flexibility and of preventing Australian units becoming unduly "jungle bound" when operating in more open terrain. In many ways the Australians were being far more orthodox than the British Army, which had largely abandoned *FSR* after its expansion into a conscript force whose officers and NCOs were judged incapable of applying abstract principles in practice on the battlefield. As one British observer who had studied Australian training methods in 1943-1944 later noted: "The Australians go so far as to say that *Field service regulations* is the 'Bible' and contains 'all the answers'."^[46] A training precis issued to students at the LHQ Tactical School dealing with fighting in tropical countries early in March 1944 stressed:

It cannot be over emphasised that ops in the Jungle are governed by the same Principles of War as apply to warfare in all other types of terrain. ... In particular it is no more possible to reduce [tactics] in Jungle Warfare to a standardised set of rules or manoeuvres, than in any other type of warfare. Every situation will be different, and must be solved on its merits and in accordance with the principles of war.^[47]

The preparation of two new and far more comprehensive training manuals dealing with operations in the South-West Pacific Area (SWPA), significantly referred to tropical warfare rather than just jungle warfare, driving home this point to a wider audience. Distributed in draft form to units and formations in SWPA for review and comment in mid-1944, these provided the basis of Australian tactical doctrine in New Guinea and the islands for the rest of the war. In the introduction to the first manual, intended for battalion and company commanders, Australian officers were quickly reminded that:

The principles of war apply equally as in any other theatre of operations. A commander is faced with the same problems in reconciling the different principles; he is likely to suffer equally from any flagrant violations. The conditions peculiar to tropical areas will only affect the methods he must use to apply these principles.^[48]

This view was also regularly reflected in reports on operations submitted by Australian commanders. Perhaps its clearest expression appeared in a report by the 17th Australian Brigade on operations in the Aitape-Wewak area between November-August 1945. It noted:

It was found, as in our previous campaign, that the well tried principles of war and the accepted tactical teachings for open warfare apply equally with the operations in dense jungle mountainous country. There are certain restrictions in the jungle as regards reconnaissance and actions generally are fought at close ranges but otherwise there is no "black magic" in jungle fighting^[49]

The lessons being learnt so successfully by the Australian Army about organisation, equipment, doctrine and training for jungle warfare also had much wider significance for the British Commonwealth war effort in South-east Asia. Indeed, the progress of the war in New Guinea was eagerly watched, especially after the Australian Army so effectively demolished the myth of the Japanese "jungle superman" at Milne Bay in August 1942. As Field Marshal Sir William Slim, GOC Fourteenth Army in Burma in 1943-1945, later wrote in his memoirs, "If the Australians, in conditions very like ours, had done it, so could we. Some of us may forget that of all the Allies it was Australian Soldiers who first broke the spell of the invincibility of the Japanese Army."^[50] News of the successful fighting at Milne Bay, along the Kokoda Trail and at Buna-Gona-Sanananda acted as a beacon in the pall of gloom surrounding India Command following the loss of Malaya and the retreat from Burma in 1942. On 28 November 1942, Field Marshal Sir Archibald Wavell, Commander-in-Chief in India, wrote to Blamey:

All my best congratulations on the successes in New Guinea. I shall be very interested to hear the story of them, as the country seems to be much the same as many parts of Burma. I should be very grateful of you could send me as much detailed information as possible of the operation and of Japanese tactics and methods.^[51]

Blamey replied on 23 January 1943 by offering to host a party of British officers, observing: "They could learn all we had to teach them in about a month or so which would spread the methods we have found so successful more quickly through the Army."^[52] Nothing was done, however, to implement this generous proposal. Early in 1943, the need for such knowledge became even clearer when similar tactical problems to those faced in New Guinea were encountered in Burma. As General Sir Noel Irwin, GOC Eastern Army, wrote in February 1943 as the First Arakan offensive stalled in front of Japanese bunkers at Donbaik: "It seems quite clear that we are facing a form of 'BUNA and GONA'."^[53] Shortly before being recalled to London in May 1943, Wavell had in fact proposed to visit Australia to see the progress of the war against the Japanese in the south-west Pacific, to learn about tactical methods and training, and co-ordinating operations between India and the south-west Pacific.^[54]

The debacle in Arakan and the virtual collapse of morale in India Command that ensued in the summer of 1943 prompted considerable interest in the Australian example and the fighting methods being employed in the south-west Pacific. In May 1942, LHQ sent two officers for attachment to the Army in India to provide further detailed information sought by GHQ at New Delhi. Major W. Parry-Okeden of the 2/9th Australian Infantry Battalion and Major A.A. Buckley from the 2/2nd Australian Infantry Battalion toured India Command between July-October 1943 to pass on lessons they had learnt on the Kokoda Trail and at Buna-Gona-Sanananda. They lectured on minor tactics and operations in SWPA at GHQ India and formations elsewhere in India, as well as preparing detailed reports for the Director of Military Training (DMT) dealing with destroying Japanese bunkers and other tactical problems.^[55] In the autumn of 1943, Brigadier "Jack" Lloyd, former commander of 16th Australian Infantry Brigade in New Guinea 1942-1943 and later Commandant of the Tactical School at Beenleigh, followed in their footsteps and was posted to India as a liaison officer and jungle warfare advisor. During his six-month attachment, Lloyd carried out an extensive lecture tour, visiting units, formations and training establishments both in India and Burma, with the aim of bolstering Anglo-Indian morale and spreading the Australian gospel of jungle warfare.^[56] Based on lectures such as these and on reports from SWPA, *Army in India training memoranda* and other training literature produced during 1943-1944 were increasingly filled with accounts of operations in New Guinea and Australian jungle fighting methods, as well as photographs of Australian troops in action.^[57]

The flow of information sent to India by the newly-arrived United Kingdom Liaison Staff, or the practical advice proffered by the Australian officers serving in the subcontinent, did not completely meet requirements of the massively expanded Army in India. When Blamey repeated his earlier offer to host a group of regimental officers and attaching them to Australian units in New Guinea to learn about Australian jungle fighting methods, it was eagerly accepted by Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck, the newly appointed Commander-in-Chief in India. A party of fifty British and Indian service officers, selected from units throughout India and commanded by Major E. Chauvel, arrived in Australia in October 1943. Before being sent to New Guinea they underwent the rigorous training course at Canungra to get fit, learn jungle craft and see jungle training methods at first hand. As Colonel Malcolm Stephenson, a member of this party, recently recalled, "This was one of the toughest experience of my entire military career, being beasted throughout by uncompromising Aussies intent to showing us soft 'poms' a thing or two."

On 4 December, 47 officers completed the course and toured various training establishments in Australia.^[58] Divided into two parties, these officers were attached to the 7th and 9th Australian Divisions in New Guinea between December 1943-January 1944. Several held platoon and company 2/ic appointments in units that had suffered heavy casualties. Unfortunately, the fighting tailed off before they could see much of the AMF in action. In the process, however, one died from friendly Australian shellfire, one drowned and three were wounded.^[59] They quickly assimilated Australian attitudes

towards the Japanese Army. As one wrote in a letter later reprinted in an India Command training publication:

The stuff we have been [generally] putting over .. agrees well with the sort of thing they are doing here (in New Guinea) - but I am sure that we have tried too hard because the local rating of the Jap lies somewhere between a scared animal of dirty habits and a wop who can run backwards a trifle faster than our new co-belligerents.[60]

Following a tour of Australian training establishments, the British officers returned to India. They were used as lecturers, instructors at GHQ schools and also assigned to units to pass on what they had learnt about Australian jungle fighting methods.[61]

The War Office in London also took considerable interest in the organisation, equipment and fighting methods being devised by the Australia Army for service in New Guinea, with a view to preparing the British Army for its eventual redeployment to the Far East when the war with Germany ended. The United Kingdom Liaison Staff, under the command of Major General Dick Dewing, initially provided the main conduit for information about the war in New Guinea following its establishment early in 1943. A far more thorough investigation was put into effect in June 1943 when the British Chiefs of Staff authorised the formation of a tri-service No. 220 Military Mission - commanded by Major General John "Tubby" Lethbridge - to investigate types of organisation and equipment needed to prosecute the war against Japan.[62] Between October-December 1943, the mission visited Australia - after touring the US, New Zealand and SWPA - to study at first hand organisation, equipment and fighting methods being employed by the AMF in the jungle. Lethbridge quickly formed a highly favourable impression of the AMF after he arrived early in October 1943, repeatedly singing its praises. Writing to Major General J.F. Evetts, the assistant Chief of the Imperial General Staff, on 31 October 1943 he noted:

The Australians have seen more fighting against the Japanese than anybody else, and care morally absolutely on top. They are confident, man for man, they can beat the Japanese anywhere, and at any time. Their ideas on training are eminently sound, and they have all facilities for training large numbers. I am convinced that very serious consideration should be given to using existing Australian experiences and facilities for training British instructors for British troops in jungle warfare.[63]

No. 220 Military Mission carried out an extensive tour of Australian training establishments before visiting the 7th and 9th Australian Divisions in action near Finschaffien and Sattelberg in November 1943. It gathered particularly important information during this period. As its final report noted:

It is hard to over-estimate the benefit derived from these visits. ...- They afforded an opportunity to see weapons and equipment, methods of supply to front line troops, living feeding and medical conditions, and the tactical handling of units, all under actual battle conditions in jungle country of the most severe style from the point of view of disease, climate, mountainous and broken terrain, and thickness of vegetation. In addition, both the staff and regimental officers of these two Divisions, from the Divisional Commanders downwards, possessed a wealth of experience in close country fighting against the Japanese, which they were more than ready to pass on to visiting officers of the Mission even in the midst of battle, and which was of untold value.[64]

It also received detailed notes from the HQ of New Guinea Force detailing various lessons learnt about jungle fighting.[65] Shortly before departing for India Command and onwards to Fourteenth Army in Burma, Lethbridge informed Lieutenant General Frank Berryman that:

I cannot conclude ...- without letting you know of the enormous impression made upon all of us by the absolute excellence of the Australian troops now fighting in New Guinea. I have never seen better and it was most heartening to meet them and talk to them.[66]

This report later formed the basis of British planning for the war in the Far East. Lethbridge also went on to serve as BS on Slim's staff in Burma in 1944-1945 and he later claimed to have put into practice lessons learnt during his visit to New Guinea.[67]

The process of gathering information from the Australian Army by India Command and the War Office did not end here. In

1944, further officers from training teams, members of No. 10 Operational Research Section and various other senior medical officers from India Command toured training establishments and visited front-line units, eager to study and to learn all they could from the Australian Army.[68] The latter gathered vitally needed information about the war against tropical disease. As the Australian High Commissioner in New Delhi reported:

Brig. Covell, a British officer who controls the institute of Malaria in Delhi, recently visited Australia and on his return gave a talk to GHQ India officers in which he eulogized most enthusiastically the measures taken to combat malaria in the Pacific.[69]

The value placed on the Australian experiences in New Guinea was finally reflected in repeated requests made for Australian officers, other assorted personnel and even whole units for Fourteenth Army in Burma. In 1944-1945, this resulted in doctors, engineers and a jungle warfare instructor being sent to the Tactical Training Centre at Dehra Dun. Early in 1945, India Command also requested 150-200 jungle warfare instructors, who were urgently needed when forces from Europe were despatched to the Far East, in addition to regimental officers for both British and Indian units freed by reductions in the strength of the AMF. The end of the Second World War, however, meant few Australian officers actually saw active service with British or Indian units in Burma.[70]

The Australian Army paid a heavy price during 1942-1943 in adapting itself to jungle warfare in New Guinea. Despite efforts to learn from the Malayan campaign, this difficult campaign showed that it still lacked an effective doctrine and system of training for jungle warfare. After a hesitant beginning, however, it responded far faster in terms of developing an appropriate doctrine and system of training tailored to jungle fighting against the IJA than any other Commonwealth army. By means of a series of specialised jungle warfare pamphlets, training teams and periodic *Army training memoranda* a standardised doctrine for jungle warfare was disseminated to the rest of the Australian Army upon which training and later operations were based. The promulgation of training instructions and directives by formation commanders provided further means of passing on the latest lessons learnt in battle, as well giving commanders means of some varying tactical methods to suit local circumstances.

The effectiveness of this doctrine and training was demonstrated during further fighting in 1943-1944, during which Australian troops quickly asserted their ascendancy on the battlefield over the IJA. It was by no means perfect, however, and throughout the rest of the war the military authorities devoted considerable time and effort to further developing and refining its doctrine and training for jungle warfare. Not only the Australian Army profited from the lessons being learnt in New Guinea. The victories achieved and lessons learnt by the AMF provided an important example of success to the rest of the Commonwealth armies, currently overlooked in the literature, and whose jungle fighting methods and organisation, equipment and training methods were closely studied and to an extent copied in other theatres of war.

Notes

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