

Hawaii via Fiji and New Caledonia before arriving in New Zealand where he established his initial headquarters. In June he assumed control of all land, sea and air forces within the South Pacific Area Command (SOPAC), except for the local defences of New Zealand. Subsequently from 1 August the boundary with the SWPA was moved westwards to the 159<sup>th</sup> meridian, which placed Tulagi and the entirety of Guadalcanal within SOPAC.

Following the resounding US victory at the Battle of Midway in early June, the US Joint Chiefs of Staff recognised a window of opportunity to initiate offensive action in the South Pacific. The only amphibious force in the area was the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division, which had been largely concentrated in New Zealand. Further, any offensive action would require a large USN force including carriers. For this reason, the offensive would take place within the USN-controlled SOPAC, with forces in MacArthur's neighbouring SWPA playing a supporting role. It was to be the first phase in a broader advance towards Rabaul through both New Guinea and the Solomons.

The initial plan was crystalised with the discovery of Japanese airfield construction activity on the island of Guadalcanal in the Solomons. Named Operation *Watchtower*, the plan included the capture of the Santa Cruz Islands, Tulagi and Guadalcanal. The Santa Cruz Islands lay at the extreme south-eastern end of the Solomons chain and were not occupied by the Japanese. While the occupation in strength of these islands as part of *Watchtower* was subsequently dropped, their forward location gave them much significance as a flying boat base during the August-September period that is often overlooked.

The date for *Watchtower* was originally set for 1 August, the same day that Ghormley moved his headquarters to Noumea where his flag was raised in the newly arrived base ship USS *Argonne*. However, 1 August proved too logistically ambitious for the operation which required the co-ordination of over 80 ships and hundreds of aircraft. The operation was pushed back almost a week, with the new "D-Day" set for 7 August.

As will be seen, the invasion of Guadalcanal triggered a sudden and furious response from the Japanese, forcing them to fight on the two fronts of New Guinea and the Solomons while postponing wider territorial expansion. Despite the loss of four of their carriers at Midway, the Japanese still exercised local naval superiority in the South Pacific. While the American intervention at Guadalcanal was intrepid, the initiative left their forces dangerously exposed to counterattack. The ferocity and scale of the subsequent air war in the Solomons ended any thoughts of shadowboxing by both sides. In the coming weeks neither would flinch as increasing resources were committed to the area. Soon the exotic-sounding "Guadalcanal" became a household word in the US, known as "Guadukanaru" to the Japanese in Rabaul.

We hope that our even matching of the records from both sides brings new light and understanding to a truly complex air campaign fought so many years ago.

Michael Claringbould  
Peter Ingman

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