

PATHFINDER

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Pacific: Australia Nervous

JAP FLEET. Australians see Jap troop concentrations aimed at their Continent. Enemy seeks air supremacy.

Gen. Sir Thomas A. Blamey, Australian commander of Allied ground forces in the Southwest Pacific, declared the Japs have massed 200,000 first-line troops on the approaches to Australia and might be expected to launch an offensive at any time. Gen MacArthur added that Jap naval forces in great strength, mainly in the area of Truk, 1,100 miles north of Buna, were within easy striking distance of Australia, though beyond Allied bomber range. Air Chief Lt. Gen. Geo. C. Kenney deplored the fact that the Japs outnumbered the Allies in aircraft. But Secretary of Navy Knox at Washington gave out the opinion that the Japs lacked sufficient naval concentration to attack Australia. It appeared that leaders in the Pacific area were afraid of being neglected until Germany is beaten.

It was clear to all, however, that for the Japs to launch an invasion they would first have to establish air supremacy, and that, evidently, is what they have been trying to do. Showing unexpected new air power they first sent 45 raiders over Oro Bay, New Guinea, but Allied fighters shot down 23 of them. They next sent 98 planes toward Port Moresby, attacked a convoy, losing 37 planes but sinking a destroyer, a tanker, a New Zealand corvette, and damaging a "fuel oil boat." This success they quickly followed up by an attack on Milne Bay, at the tip of New Guinea, with 80 planes, losing 30. Another quick attack on Milne Bay cost the enemy at least 15 more planes. Allied plane losses were negligible, and only three small ships were hit, one of which was beached. Allied bombers were sent against Hansa Bay, on the north coast, where they sank a 6,000-ton ship, and they also bombed a convoy of six merchant ships and three warships approaching Wewak, a point in north-west New Guinea.