

AMERICAN, BRITISH, DUTCH, AND AUSTRALIAN COALITION:
UNSUCCESSFUL BAND OF BROTHERS

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MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE
Military History

by

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This thesis examines the American, British, Dutch, and Australian (ABDA) coalition from its beginning to its end. Following initial Japanese advances and victories in December 1941 and January 1942, Allied forces formed the ABDA coalition as one of the first methods to respond to the Japanese in the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) area. ABDA's existence was painful and short-lived, culminating in its demise as Japanese forces gained area military air and naval superiority and invaded Java in March 1942. Differing objectives and priorities by allied components influenced the ability of ABDA to fight effectively. Additional factors were poor Command and Control (C2) of tactical forces composed of different nations. Four major naval surface engagements and multiple land and air engagements did not stop the NEI from falling in March 1942. ABDA's political, military, and tactical dynamics merit further study for implications for future multinational operations in which the United States may be involved. The purpose of the research will be to answer the following three questions: Why did ABDA not work, what could have made ABDA succeed, and what implications can be learned for modern military forces fighting in the coalition arena.

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

AMERICAN, BRITISH, DUTCH, AUSTRALIAN COALITION: UNSUCCESSFUL BAND OF BROTHERS, by Steven B. Shepard, 71 pages.

This thesis examines the American, British, Dutch, and Australian (ABDA) coalition from its beginning to its end. Following initial Japanese advances and victories in December 1941 and January 1942, Allied forces formed the ABDA coalition as one of the first methods to respond to the Japanese in the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) area. ABDA's existence was painful and short-lived, culminating in its demise as Japanese forces gained area military air and naval superiority and invaded Java in March 1942. Differing objectives and priorities by allied components influenced the ability of ABDA to fight effectively. Additional factors were poor Command and Control (C2) of tactical forces composed of different nations. Four major naval surface engagements and multiple land and air engagements did not stop the NEI from falling in March 1942. ABDA's political, military, and tactical dynamics merit further study for implications for future multinational operations in which the United States may be involved. The purpose of the research will be to answer the following three questions: Why did ABDA not work, what could have made ABDA succeed, and what implications can be learned for modern military forces fighting in the coalition arena.

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ACRONYMS

ABDA	American, British, Dutch, Australian Coalition
ABDACOM	ABDA Command Headquarters
ABDAAIR	ABDA Air Component
ABDAARM	ABDA Ground component
ABDAFLOAT	ABDA Naval Component
ANZUS	Australia, New Zealand, United States
CCS	Combined Chiefs of Staff

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A man's enemies will be the members of his own household.

Matthew 10:36 (NIV)

The beginning of the war in the Pacific created multiple strategic and tactical issues for allied coalition leaders and their military units. Following initial Japanese advances and victories in December 1941 and January 1942, Allied forces formed the American, British, Dutch, and Australian (ABDA) coalition as one of the first methods to respond to Japanese advances in the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) area. The NEI was a lucrative objective for Japanese forces, due to its abundant natural resources, especially oil. The entire region's mineral resources were crucial for Japan to meet its political and strategic objectives.

Prior to World War II, the NEI produced rubber, kapok, and pepper. Additionally, Java's resources included mineral deposits such as tin, petroleum, coal, and bauxite. Its precious mineral wealth included gold, silver, and nickel.¹ The economic embargo imposed against Japan in 1941 by the U.S. and Netherlands on items such as oil made the NEI a logical and necessary target for Japanese war planners.

ABDA's existence was painful and short-lived. Its demise was assured when Japanese forces gained area military, air, and naval superiority, and prepared to land on Java in March 1942. Differing objectives and priorities by allied governments influenced the ability of ABDA to fight effectively and poor command and control (C2) of tactical forces doomed the efforts of forces fighting in theater. Following the fall of the NEI, Allied forces had to deal with not only the loss of critical natural resources to Japan, but

also the loss of regional facilities to wage offensive operations as it drove back across the Pacific to Japan.

ABDA and the NEI campaign have not been studied extensively. Its short life and more highly visible events elsewhere have tended to obscure the details of this alliance. For example, many believe the first major U.S. naval battle in the Pacific was the Battle of Coral Sea; however, the Battle of Java Sea occurred two months earlier. ABDA's political, military, and tactical dynamics merit further study not only because of the historical significance, but for what we can learn about future multinational operations in which the United States may be involved. A study of ABDA's failure raises three questions: why did ABDA not work; what could have made ABDA succeed; and what implications can be learned for modern military forces fighting in the coalition arena? Answers to these questions will put the NEI campaign in a clearer historical light and provide some guidelines for analysis of coalition operations.

Following the first month of the U.S. entry into World War II, America found itself fighting on two fronts in both Europe and the Pacific. The attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 crippled one of its main power projection instruments, the U.S. Pacific Fleet. Japanese forces invaded the Philippines, an American possession, on 10 December 1941. In the opening days of the war, the Japanese also seized several Pacific U.S. bases, such as Guam and Wake Island. Limited air and ground forces were available due to strategic priorities in Washington. U.S. power was limited to regional holding actions until time could permit rebuilding of forces in the Pacific. Until this could occur, the U.S. Asiatic Fleet was the main U.S. military force able to respond to Japanese attacks.

U.S. policy was a “Germany first.”² Britain, America’s main ally, was facing a German force directly across the English Channel and was in desperate need of supplies and support. Russia was also competing for the U.S. to establish a second front in Europe and for military equipment to stop the German blitzkrieg in its territory. Prewar strategy, the “Rainbow Plans,” was based on five different scenarios, with the fifth one reflecting the policy followed in the early Pacific war. The plan envisioned a joint British, French, and American offensive in Europe. The Pacific would primarily be a defensive strategy. Once the Allies obtained success in Europe, they would then focus on the Pacific.³

During January and February 1942, American leaders had to fight a defensive strategy. The immediate objective was to reinforce the Philippines and stem Japanese ambitions. Regionally, America had to contend with British, Dutch, and Australian requests for support in defending their possessions and territories. In the previous year, the U.S. had been hesitant to cooperate with the other three nations, only promising to assist once war started. These countries would be critical to U.S. military operations in the coming years in both theaters of war. As a result, U.S. planners needed to commit military resources for the defense of their Pacific allies’ assets, notably in the NEI area.

Britain’s main priority in the NEI area was the defense of Singapore. For over a hundred years, Singapore and Hong Kong had been symbols of British influence and power. Hong Kong fell to the Japanese on 25 December 1941, making Singapore both a military and psychological obligation to defend. Britain had always planned on American naval assistance in the region and became more vulnerable with the attack and crippling of the American fleet in 1941.

Towards the end of 1941, Britain dispatched the battleship HMS *Prince of Wales* and the battle cruiser HMS *Repulse* to assist in protecting Singapore. Unfortunately, the Japanese sunk both of these vessels on 10 December 1941 by land-based aircraft while they sailed without air cover and attempted to intercept enemy forces in the Gulf of Siam. The losses of these two vessels forebode a long and costly Pacific War. The news of the loss of Britain's premier battleship and the failure of naval forces to check Japanese movements shocked Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of Britain. Churchill, realizing the grave situation, later recalled: "In all the war I never received a more direct shock. As I turned over and twisted in bed, the full horror of the news sank upon me. Over this vast expanse of waters Japan was supreme, and we everywhere were weak and naked."⁴

Britain would have to rely on available forces in the region to defend its last remaining bastion. The naval base at Singapore was the most important in the region and had been built at considerable cost. The British also had considerable ground forces, although mainly indigenous and of inferior quality, in the Far East for its defense. Limited forces were available to provide air support for offensive and defensive operations. In addition, Britain would need the assistance of its allies to protect Singapore from Japanese forces.⁵

Britain sought Dutch, Australian, and American assistance. During a series of conferences in 1941, notably the Singapore Conference in February, the British, Australian, and Dutch governments established a doctrine for fighting in the NEI. The Americans would lend their power once hostilities broke out with its forces. For the Dutch, their responsibilities included reconnaissance duties in the South China Sea, Java Sea, and the Borneo-New Guinea area.⁶

The Dutch were extremely concerned about Japanese intentions and were ready to defend Java. The Dutch would declare war on Japan following Pearl Harbor.⁷ Britain did not deny Dutch requests for help; however, the British prioritized the requests. Britain sought Dutch assistance for defending Singapore first. Singapore, the British argued, would be the pivotal point for defense in the area. The British tied the NEI defense to Singapore's security. Once Allied forces assured Singapore's defense, Britain could support the Dutch and continue to rout Japanese forces in the region. The Dutch committed naval and other forces to assist the British and soon found these forces expended with little effect. Despite the commitment of forces to Britain, the Dutch found the British unable to adequately defend the NEI or provide the same level of forces as they had committed to Singapore.⁸ The fall of Singapore in February cleared the way for Japanese conquest of the NEI.

The Dutch and British were concerned about the objectives and support of American forces in the Pacific. One issue was the perception that the Americans felt the NEI campaign was "fighting to defend an outdated colonial empire which was none of their business."⁹ The Dutch and British also felt that the United States might try to seek help for forces fighting in the Philippines, and drain the limited resources available for what they perceived as a waste of forces.¹⁰ America did dispatch remaining remnants of the Asiatic Fleet, which had evacuated from its base in the Philippines in late December. These forces included three cruisers, fourteen destroyers, submarines, and other vessels. America also sent small numbers of bombers and other patrol craft to Java, but sent some to Australia to support forces in the Philippines.¹¹ Due to the critical situation and for the purpose of effectively integrating Allied forces and capabilities, military leaders

established a joint theater command in January 1942. The command consisted of American, British, Dutch, and Australian forces and was thus named ABDA (American-British-Dutch-Australian). A British commander, General Archibald Wavell, became Supreme Commander. Wavell's choice as commander was questionable. Wavell's earlier North Africa campaign led to his relief and left some coalition members to doubt his qualifications. Territorial responsibilities included the NEI, Burma, Malaya/Singapore, the Philippines, and Northwestern Australia.¹²

With the background set, an examination of this short-lived multinational force will help the reader understand complexities of integration among its components, need for common objectives, formulation of strategy, and the need to comprehend and respond to enemy strategy. A case study of ABDA's naval engagements, especially the Battle of Java Sea, will better demonstrate the need for clear military objectives, effective command and control, timely intelligence, and force integration if coalition operations are to be successful. This historical study will provide framework by which to judge and assess future coalition operations. A review of ABDA needs to examine the command's doctrine, component forces, military operations, coalition integration, and failures and successes. Additional elements to be considered are the Japanese strategies and their military operations against ABDA and coalition members. The opposing strategies and doctrines dictated the conduct of the war in the Pacific.

One major issue among ABDA members was their objectives. Guidance and objectives guide a military leader in conception of his strategy and its implementation. The British felt Singapore was the key to the NEI defense; therefore, operations needed to be geared to Singapore's defense. The Dutch felt the NEI needed substantial support,

and felt more allied forces should be directed to its defense. The Australians believed that if the NEI were to fall, Northwestern Australia would be next. The concern of Japanese advances in the Pacific prompted the Australians to withdraw two units from the Middle East to help participate in operations in the Southwest Pacific.¹³

GEN Douglas MacArthur was another factor in Allied strategy. Since Pearl Harbor, he had been fighting in the Philippines. MacArthur understandably believed the key to stopping Japanese advances was in the Philippines, not in the NEI. Admiral Thomas Hart, commander of the Asiatic Fleet, did not agree with MacArthur. Hart was operating in the NEI and felt operations in the Philippines area would not be successful in preventing the Japanese from seizing the NEI. MacArthur's requests resulted in competing strategies for Allied resources to stem the Japanese.

The United States was still trying to support the Philippines, but also needed a new base of operations. Thus, the NEI served as an American commitment to the area and coalition operations. In addition, the Americans believed that if the NEI were to fall, Australia would be next. Australia would serve as a military/logistical base for the liberation of the Philippines and the invasion of Japan. Defense in the NEI was a logical step in American operations, which ideally helped relieve pressure on the Philippines, and provided time for the rebuilding of American forces after Pearl Harbor.

A review needs to consider basic military tenets of operation. The Battle of Java Sea, an ABDA defeat, failed in several tenets of military operations. Command and control (C2) of forces is key to successful operations. Poor C2 affected the battle and caused confusion at several key moments. Intelligence had failed again to detect Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) fleet movements, sending the fleet into an uncertain situation for

which they were poorly prepared. Night tactics, in which the IJN excelled, were lacking in the American and British fleets. Technological advances in Japanese torpedoes also put the allies at a distinct disadvantage. The Japanese torpedoes enabled the IJN to engage ABDA forces at longer ranges and protect their delivery platforms.

One critical advantage held by the Japanese in the first six months of the war was airpower; their airpower would dictate many of the upcoming operations. The Japanese demonstrated this advantage in their operations establishing theater air supremacy, invasions, and fleet engagements. Allied strategy included airpower but not to the extent the Japanese relied upon it. Furthermore, the enemy destroyed the Far Eastern Air Force on the ground in the first hours of the war. From the beginning, Japanese planners included objectives that required the establishment of air bases to create air supremacy for follow-on operations. The Allies, however, saw airpower as a complement to existing naval and ground forces. Many of their early operations, such as sending the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* against Japanese invasion forces, did not include air support and had disastrous results. The need for air supremacy and air support became key in coming operations in the Pacific war.

Unlike ABDA, the Japanese forces excelled in combined operations. Combined operations would be critical to actions in the Pacific; ABDA fought combined operations piecemeal. This was not the way ABDA should fight the war. Invasion operations would necessitate the use of air, amphibious, and ground forces in the Pacific's topography. Lessons learned early in the war would have an impact not only on coming Pacific operations but also on multinational combined operations.

Coalition warfare is becoming the standard in today's geopolitical environment. From Desert Storm to the Global War on Terrorism, coalitions have been formed to establish international political and military support for nations in conflict. Coalitions often involve deconflicting a variety of interests, strategies, and objectives. Military and political leaders need to learn from previous coalition experiences to ensure future success. A number of past coalitions have provided case studies in integration of multiple competing interests of coalitions and their command and control. These coalitions often provide the formula for success or failure. ABDA reflects the elements of unsuccessful coalition integration and its resultant impact on military operations.

It is necessary to understand ABDA from Allied and Japanese perspectives. This framework helps provide the complete view of ABDA as a coalition force from internal and external players. Primary and secondary sources will set the framework for analysis and interpretation of the ABDA campaign. Secondary sources will assist in understanding the material from a historical perspective in a greater context of World War II.

While historians have studied and written about the Pacific campaign exhaustively, they have written little about ABDA specifically. The brief lifespan of ABDA lends credence to a belief that its existence was ineffective. Coalition lessons learned included unified objectives, planning, command and control, combined arms, intelligence, and coalition politics. For a house to be in unity, its members must agree. ABDA was never able to agree on strategy until it agreed the NEI was lost.

¹David A. Thomas, *The Battle of the Java Sea* (New York: Stein and Day, 1969), 102.

²Charles Anderson, *East Indies 1942* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History, Publication 72-22, 1992), 8.

³Louis Morton, "Germany First: The Basic Concept of Allied Strategy in World War II," in *Command Decisions*, ed. Kent Roberts Greenfield (Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History, 1960), 11.

⁴Arthur Zich, *The Rising Sun* (Alexandria, Virginia: Time Life Books, 1977), 121-122.

⁵Jack Ford, "The Forlorn Ally - The Netherlands's East Indies in 1942," *War and Society* Vol. 11, No. 1 (May 1993): 106-107.

⁶*Ibid.*, 106.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸*Ibid.*, 114.

⁹Thomas, 108.

¹⁰Maurice Matloff and Edwin M. Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History, 1980), 124.

¹¹Jack Ford, "The Forlorn Ally - The Netherlands's East Indies in 1942," *War and Society* Vol. 11, No. 1 (May 1993): 107.

¹²Charles Anderson, *East Indies 1942* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History, Publication 72-22, 10).

¹³*Ibid.*, 11.

CHAPTER 2

JAPANESE NEI STRATEGY

Objectives

The reduction of the primary foundations of American, British, and Dutch power in Eastern Asia; the occupation of the Southern Areas.

Scope of Occupation.

The Philippines, Guam, Hong Kong, British Malaya, Burma, the Bismarcks, Java, Sumatra, Borneo, Celebes, Timor¹⁴

Japanese Navy and Army plans for Pacific offensive in November 1941

Japan's strategy for seizing the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) was a critical part of its overall Pacific strategy. To meet its objectives, the NEI campaign would follow the Philippine and Malaya campaigns. Securing the flanks of those areas would allow them to seize the NEI. The NEI held critical resources, such as oil, that Japan required to operate its economy and military. The NEI invasion plans would be composed of two elements: the Eastern and Western Invasion forces. These invasion forces would eventually converge on Java, the main objective of the campaign. Subsequent chapters will compare the Japanese offensive strategy to ABDA defensive strategy. The purpose here is to set a framework to evaluate effectiveness of ABDA and its strategy as it responded to Japanese advances in the NEI region.

This chapter will focus on Japanese theater and regional strategy and its impact on the NEI campaign. The Japanese strategy exploited weaknesses of ABDA, which limited Allied ability to respond. One main element of Japanese planning was the use of airpower. This planning allowed the Japanese to not only control the air but also significantly impact sea-lanes of communication. It also allowed the Japanese rapid

mobility to move forces and overwhelm defenders before reinforcements could arrive from Australia or elsewhere.

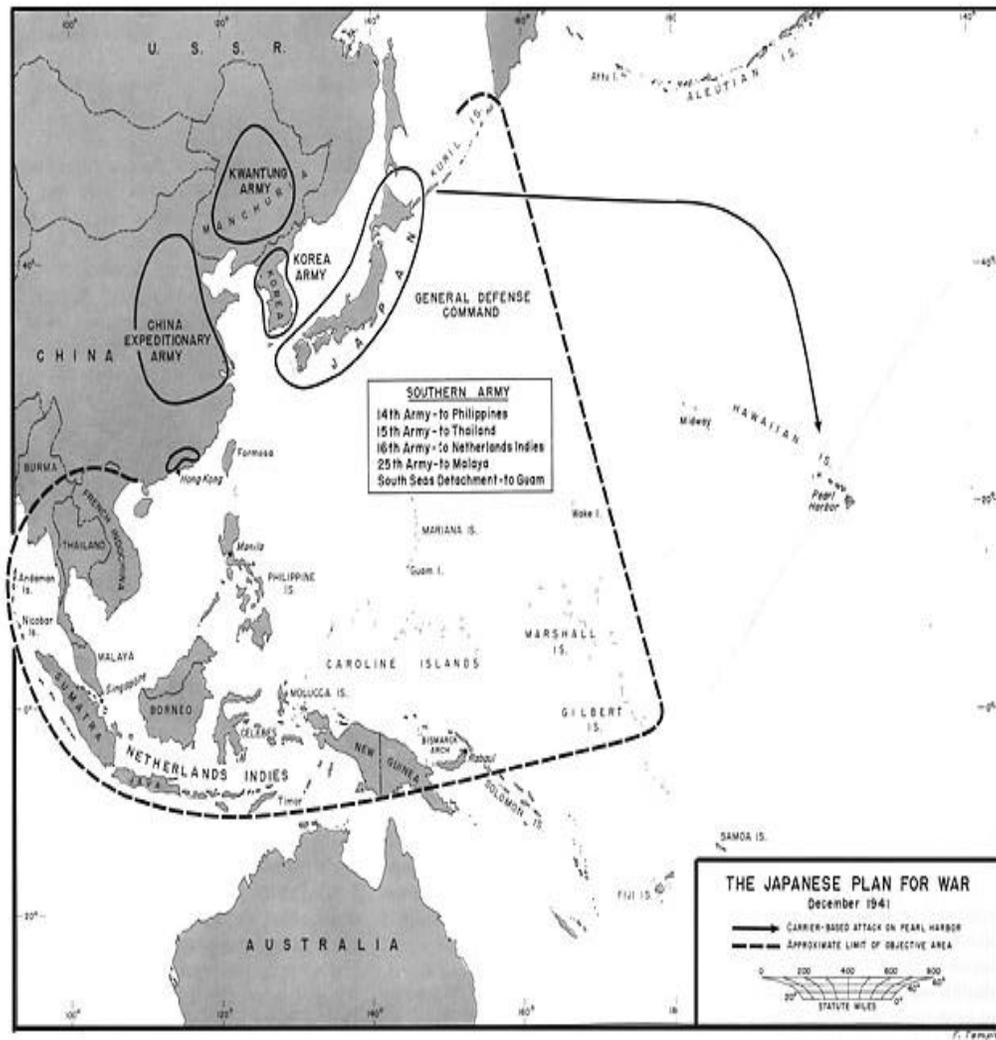


Figure 1. The Japanese Plan for War (December 1941). Source: Louis Morton, *U.S. Army in World War II: The War in the Pacific: Strategy and Command*, 106.

The Pacific War began for the Allies on 7 December 1941 with the Japanese strike at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, the base of the American Pacific Fleet. The attack left the American fleet in ruins. Significantly, the Japanese sunk or heavily damaged almost all U.S. battleships except for the aircraft carriers that were not in port. The result was the loss of one of the main tools the Allies had to counter Japanese moves in the Pacific. The aircraft carriers would be critical to future operations, but they would not be employed in the defense of the NEI. The American fleet required time to rebuild, which the Japanese would use to accomplish its military objectives in the NEI campaign.

Following the Second World War, Allied intelligence interviewed Japanese participants of campaigns and battles to learn their strategic and operational views on military operations. The Allies translated documents and conducted interviews under the Allied Translator and Interpreter Section (ATIS). ATIS documents help present the Japanese conception and execution of their plans. One critical ATIS product was the Japanese Monograph No 10: *Naval Operations in the Invasion of the Netherlands' East Indies*. This document provides an excellent review of the NEI operations from documents and participants.

The Japanese conquest of the Dutch East Indies was to follow the neutralization of the Philippines and Malay Areas. Once the Pacific Fleet was crippled for the time being, Japan could then isolate the remaining Pacific bases, which could affect Japan's ability to operate freely in obtaining its military objectives. The capture of the Philippines would deny America and her allies a base to stage offensive operations against Japan and its acquired territories. The next requirement would be the

neutralization and capture of the Malay Barrier, including Singapore. This would prevent the British from interfering with Japanese military strategy. Japan would therefore move south and protect its western and eastern flanks as it converged on the NEI. Japan would then have established its defensive perimeter with the resources necessary to defend it.

One of the critical reasons for the invasion was the seizure and utilization of the NEI's rich oil resources.¹⁵ The Japanese military required oil to fuel its war machine to continue offensive operations. The intact seizure of the oil fields was essential. The Japanese needed the oil to support the extended operations of the Army and Navy throughout the Pacific. If the fields and facilities were not intact, the NEI would require additional resources to maintain and support garrisoned and transiting military forces.

For Japanese planners, three main concerns guided their preparation. The first was the requirement to prevent destruction of the oil and petroleum resources. This necessitated the Japanese deployment of the "entire available air force and surface forces of both the army and navy over a vast area approximately 2,000 nautical miles from east to west and more than 1,000 nautical miles from north to south."¹⁶ The second was the concern of air reinforcements. Since Allied naval forces were not able to guarantee sea supremacy, Allied airpower would be the main concern for Japanese offensive operations. Since the war would be almost three months old by the time the invasions occurred, Allied forces potentially could have brought new air assets into theater.¹⁷

A third consideration was the timeframe for seizing Java. Following operations in the Philippines and the Malay Barrier, Java would be the last remaining Allied base.¹⁸ Since the Allied forces could send airpower and ground reinforcements from other

theaters, time was essential. The Japanese plans dictated that Java operations needed to “be substantially accomplished by March 1942.”¹⁹

The Japanese Army and Navy planners developed the Java plan as a combined arms operation. The US Strategic Bombing Survey (USSBS) for the Pacific summed up the planning:

Each operation was carefully coordinated with, and dependent upon the success of the other. By use of surprise attacks, spearheaded by air power, the Japanese expected to complete the invasions in a very short time and thus free all forces for defense against counterattacks or for offensive action in other theaters.²⁰

Naval forces would clear the sea-lanes of Allied sea power to allow the safe transit of Imperial Army forces. Japanese Naval and Army air forces would then set the conditions for follow-on operations against Allied air, naval, and ground forces and their bases in the region. The Japanese envisioned airpower to incorporate both services’ air assets, “The army invasion force undertook the air operations on the north Sumatra area, while it was planned to have both the army and navy cooperate in the air operations against southern Sumatra and western Java.”²¹ Once the Japanese softened up these Allied bases and defenses, amphibious ground forces would land and secure the islands or territories.

The execution of invasion operations centered on the Japanese Third Fleet. The Navy would be the offensive springboard. Due to its ability to move rapidly under land-based air umbrella and by sea, it could use mobility to overwhelm Allied defenses before they could respond. The removal or neutralization of Allied bases in the region provided Japanese speed and mobility to move from point to point. The USSBS summed up Japanese tactics with this analysis:

The tactics employed by the Japanese were ideal for the conditions encountered. In rapid succession they built up strength[,] provided air facilities at one base[,] and overcame weak opposition at the next point of attack and then, using amphibious forces strongly supported by cruisers and destroyers, easily landed and immediately commenced preparations for the next advance.²²

The two Japanese invasion forces, Eastern and Western, would converge at Java. The Eastern invasion force consisted of two components, the Eastern Invasion Force and Central Invasion Force. These forces were to provide mutual aid to each other as required.²³ Paul Dull, author of *The Imperial Japanese Navy*, translated several Japanese documents, which provide an excellent overview of the Japanese invasion plans:

The Eastern Force was to lock in Java on the east, taking: Bangka Roads (in Celebes . . .), Kema, Menado, and Kendari, Ambon Island, Makassar, Bali-Lombok, and Dutch and Portuguese Timor. To aid the Eastern Invasion Force, Admiral Nagumo used his carrier fleet, usually stationed south of Java, to knock out Port Darwin, Australia as a military staging base, and to present a constant threat to ABDA forces. The Central Invasion Force was to take Tarakan, Balikpapan, and Bandjarmasin (all in Dutch Borneo), and after the fall of Singapore, it was to launch an attack on west Java.²⁴

The Eastern and Central Forces would facilitate a critical element of Japanese plans: air supremacy. The Japanese planners knew air supremacy would require more than carrier-based planes. The establishment of land air bases in the NEI would support ongoing operations and would allow them to respond to ABDA counter attacks. Japanese planners established a time line to support and integrate land based air operations. ATIS translations went on to describe the desired conditions for airpower:

It was expected that by the end of February air supremacy would be obtained over the entire Dutch East Indies area from bases on Celebes, Borneo, and Sumatra. After attaining air superiority over Java in this manner, the main body of our invasion forces in the Dutch East Indies was to attack Java at the same time.²⁵

The Japanese western forces would converge on Java from the opposite direction. These forces would originate in French Indochina, now Vietnam, and support operations

in the NEI by assisting in the seizure of Malaya and Singapore. Japanese intelligence of ABDA was limited, but correctly surmised that few aircraft and vessels were available to stem their advance.²⁶ Following the fall of Singapore, the forces would then move on to southeast Sumatra. Following Sumatra's fall, the western forces would then invade Java from the west.²⁷

Allied efforts to hinder or stop Japanese advances were limited and ineffective. Following Pearl Harbor, the first attempt to stop Japanese landings by the British with HMS *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* failed when Japanese planes sank both. While the Japanese were victorious in this engagement, these operations did delay the Dutch East Indies invasion by ten days.²⁸ Per Japanese plans, the loss of the Malay barrier and Singapore limited the Allied response. MacArthur's forces in the Philippines could not offer assistance and awaited relief from the United States. Since limited bomber and fighter aircraft were available, ABDA naval forces were the remaining instruments of Allied power in the NEI.

A lack of air cover hampered the ABDA naval forces. The British battleship losses underscored the importance of airpower to controlling the sea-lanes. The converging invasion forces were enveloping Allied forces from the east and west and eliminating bases of resistance to their operations. The Japanese expected resistance, but felt airpower and the removal of Allied bases would result in control of the NEI. Airpower could locate and destroy naval forces in port or at sea. The removal of bases would force remaining naval units to flee to Australia or elsewhere for resupply and repairs.

Air supremacy also meant the Japanese could support amphibious forces with little resistance. Close air support would not have to plan for Allied fighters and thus free up more sorties for ground troops. Air supremacy meant that the remaining Allied facilities would be victim to Japanese air raids, reduce existing logistic supplies, and force the Allies to withdraw or surrender. Japanese air raids could also attack and damage Allied ground forces prior to engaging Japanese Army forces.

The Netherlands East Indies invasion plans formulated by the Japanese were effective in maximizing their strengths and exploiting ABDA weaknesses. The Japanese had set the conditions for their offensive operations by disabling the American Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor. Since the Japanese removed the main instrument of Allied power, the next step was to neutralize the two main Allied bases in the Pacific that could deny or delay Japanese military forces. Attacks on the Malay Barrier and Singapore followed the invasion of the Philippines. These Allied bases rapidly became unable to launch offensive operations and focused on defending their local area. The NEI, as the last main objective, would then have limited internal and external forces to respond to a Japanese invasion.

The Japanese were using rapid offense to gain momentum and deny the Allies a chance to respond. The Japanese kept specific timetables and plans to ensure that Allied reinforcements would not be able to resupply the NEI. This strategy forced the ABDA forces to be on the defensive and focus on keeping sea-lanes open and preparing to respond to an invasion. The plan of converging from east to west to encircle the forces enabled the Japanese to mass their firepower in the culmination of the campaign against

the NEI. The strategy also provided security for the Japanese flanks as they proceeded towards the NEI.

The use of airpower enabled the Japanese to cover and support wide areas of military operations. The planners used both land and carrier-based operations that were mutually supporting. This provided freedom of maneuver for their forces in the NEI area. Japanese airpower protected sea forces as they transited to invasion areas and ground forces had aircraft available for Close Air Support (CAS). Significantly, this airpower also enabled the protection for their invasion forces from Australia-based aircraft. The establishment of Japanese airbases in the area also forced Australia to move to the defensive as opposed to the offensive.

Thus, Japanese strategy limited ABDA's ability to respond. The operations denied ABDA support and reinforcements from Singapore and the Philippines. The Japanese were able to protect their flanks from Allied attack and move rapidly through the area. The lack of air supremacy meant ABDA was vulnerable on the sea, ground, and air as it engaged the Japanese. The Japanese also had the advantage of having effective combined arms operations. The operations were mutually supporting building on the accomplishments of the other. The Japanese ease of mobility kept ABDA defenders off balance allowing the Japanese to reach their objectives in rapid fashion. From a logistics standpoint, tactical operations would culminate in the Japanese seizure of the petroleum reserves of the NEI. This meant the Japanese would have resources to defend its new territories and continue offensive operations against Australia or elsewhere as directed. From neutralizing Allied forces, to protecting the flanks, to mobility with airpower and

establishing freedom of maneuver, the Japanese strategy was highly effective in the invasion and subsequent seizure of the NEI.

¹⁴United States Strategic Bombing Survey (USSBS), *The Campaigns of the Pacific War* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), 43.

¹⁵Japanese Monograph No 10: *Naval Operations in the Invasion of the Netherlands's East Indies* (General Headquarters, Far East Command: Allied Translator and Interpreter Section (ATIS), 1948), 1.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰USSBS, 26.

²¹ATIS, Japanese Monograph No 10, 4.

²²USSBS, 29.

²³Paul Dull, *A Battle History of the Imperial Japanese Navy* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1978), 52.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 52.

²⁵ATIS, Japanese Monograph No. 10, 4.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 8-9.

²⁷Dull, 52.

²⁸ATIS, Japanese Monograph No. 10, 11.

CHAPTER 3

MACARTHUR AND HART

You must be prepared at any time to figure on the complete destruction of this command....Every one of them expected help and when it has not been forthcoming they believe they have been betrayed in favor of others.²⁹

MacArthur to Washington on situation in the Philippines in February 1942

The American perspective in the American-British-Dutch-Australian (ABDA) strategy had to include the role of General Douglas MacArthur. As the commander of U.S. Army Forces Far East (USAFFE), MacArthur had been fighting the Japanese since Pearl Harbor. From the beginning of the war, however, America's commitment to ABDA compounded his requests for supplies and reinforcements. ABDA served as the U.S.'s first demonstration of its commitment to its Allies in Asia. The United States made the decision to support ABDA operations in the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) with the limited resources it held in theater. While America attempted to assist MacArthur, the drain on resources made them limited or ineffectual. Consequently, the actions served to undermine the defense of the Philippines. The competing views on strategy between MacArthur and Adm. Thomas Hart, commander of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet in the Philippines, further affected the Philippines defense. In the end, the U.S. role in ABDA ensured both its commitment to the Philippines and ABDA would not succeed.

Prior to war, U.S. strategy had focused on the Orange Plan, which later was replaced by the Rainbow Plans. The first draft of Orange in 1924 stated that the U.S. offensive operations against Japan would entail "An offensive war, primarily naval, directed towards the isolation and harassment of Japan, through control of her vital sea

communications and through offensive sea and air operations against her naval forces and economic life; followed, if necessary, by such further action as required to win the war.”³⁰

The Joint Board studied American strategy prior to the American-British Conversations One (ABC-1) on war strategy in late 1940. Entitled “National Defense Policy of the United States,” the plan delineated the U.S. priorities when war began.³¹ During the ABC conferences in 1940, the British requested American support for their colonial possessions in the Far East. America believed that the British and Dutch could defend the Far East, except for the Philippines. A final outcome of ABC-1 represented the views as follows:

The United States does not intend to add to its present Military strength in the Far East but will employ the United States Pacific Fleet offensively in the manner best calculated to weaken Japanese economic power, and to support the defense of the Malay barrier by diverting Japanese strength away from Malaysia.³²

ABC-1 divided the world into strategic areas and explained American responsibilities in combined operations. For the Far East, the American forces command system was to be mutual coordination rather than unified control. Additionally, the conference identified a major issue of contention between the Americans and British. The British felt Singapore was key to the defense of the Far East and must be protected. The British also believed its loss “would be a disaster of the first magnitude, second only to the loss of the British Isles.” U.S. strategists, however, did not believe this to be the case. While recognizing its loss as a blow to British prestige, the U.S. felt it was not vital to Allied defense in the Far East.³³ American planners did not want Singapore to be the main consumer of defense resources in the Pacific.

The U.S. strategists felt that the Philippines would serve as the main means for the United States to protect its possessions and project power in the Pacific. A formal statement sent to the British in September 1941 best expressed these sentiments:

While the security of the base at Singapore is important, it ought to be accepted that the strategy of the Far East Area should be considered as a whole. It seems unlikely that Singapore could be held, were the major portion of the Dutch East Indies and the Philippines to fall to the Japanese.³⁴

Following this statement, the British admiral in charge of the British Pacific Naval forces, Admiral Tom Phillips, RN, met with his American counterpart, Admiral Thomas Hart, USN, in December 1941 in Manila. In meeting potential Japanese threats, they discussed several plans. Significantly, the British leadership had already considered basing capital ships in the Philippines and developing a plan for operations in the area. Further, Manila Bay was to be prepared as an advance base for the British battle fleet.³⁵ The attack on Hawaii changed these plans, and the sinking of the battleships HMS *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*, with the loss of Admiral Phillips, resulted in an immediate decision to employ defensive vice offensive operations. The U.S. Asiatic Fleet in the Philippines would be the only assets available to defend the area and support ABDA.

ADM Hart had already decided to split his forces into two task forces in early December if war came. Task Force One, based in Manila under Hart, would be composed of submarines and reconnaissance planes. Task Force Five, commanded by Rear Admiral William Glassford, was composed of the majority of surface vessels left in the Philippines, including the fleet's two cruisers and all of its destroyers. This force withdrew southward to the NEI after hostilities commenced.³⁶

In early September 1941, Hart discussed with MacArthur the coming war plans in relation to ABDA and his forces. Hart spoke about the plan of dispersal. "For surface

ships the deployment had to be defensive that the ships would have to move about, even disperse, and in general would be well southward. Also that whether or not the cruiser-destroyer detachment got back north would have to fit the situation as it developed.”

Hart noted the impact on Army operations and plans would be minimal “General MacArthur replied that the Navy had its plans, the Army had its plans and that we each had our fields. He had no questions whatsoever, made no suggestions, and offered no objections.”³⁷

Further damaging an already reduced Allied capability, Japanese attacks on Cavite Navy Yard in the Philippines on 10 December destroyed the only naval overhaul and resupply facilities of note in the Far East.³⁸ Additionally, Singapore soon came under attack, leaving the Dutch Navy base at Surabaya, Java the only remaining service facility.³⁹ Hart later recalled that with the loss of Cavite and the Pacific fleet in ruins, the Asiatic Fleet was “like a man with bare fists fighting a killer with a tommy gun.”⁴⁰

American and Allied planners were still reeling from the Japanese attacks and their consequences as they tried to develop plans to stem Japanese advances. While distance and limited assets worked against American forces in the Philippines, planners hoped that those forces could hold out until the fleet could bring relief across the Pacific.⁴¹ Since the Pacific Fleet lay crippled at Pearl Harbor, relief would take even longer to reach besieged American forces. MacArthur was concerned that these delays would prove fatal. The ability to conduct offensive operations would also be lost if the Japanese were not interdicted early in their campaign against the Philippines and the NEI.

The Japanese landed on Luzon on 10 December. Sensing the need for immediate action, MacArthur sent a note on the same day to General George Marshall Army Chief

of Staff at the War Department. The message stressed the need to attack the Japanese while they were overextended on their lines of communication. Striking them while in their main offensive push, MacArthur reasoned, would turn the tide:

The mass of enemy air and naval strength committed in the theatre from Singapore to the Philippines and eastward, established his weakness in Japan proper . . . Most favorable opportunity now exists, and immediate attack on Japan from north would not only inflict heavy punishment but would at once relieve pressure from objectives of Jap drive to southward. A golden opportunity now exists for a master stroke while the enemy is engaged in over-extended initial air effort.⁴²

MacArthur never received a reply to his request. The War Department sent a seven-ship convoy, led by the USS *Pensacola*, to the Philippines prior to Pearl Harbor to help MacArthur, but it never arrived. The War Department diverted the convoy to Brisbane, Australia after the attack. This force included 4,600 air corps and artillery forces.⁴³ In another radio message to Marshall, MacArthur relayed a discussion with Hart on the possibility of convoys coming from Brisbane to the Philippines:

I immediately conferred with Admiral Hart as to the possibility of reasonably safe convoy from Brisbane. I emphasized the imperative necessity of supplies and reinforcements arriving here explaining fully the very limited resources now at my disposal. I stated that the army estimate of the situation was that if the Philippines were to be saved, forces should be built up here at least as rapidly as the enemy could concentrate against us.⁴⁴

The convoy ultimately docked in Brisbane on 22 December 1941⁴⁵ and did not attempt to proceed to the Philippines. Further risk was deemed unwarranted. Hart felt his small forces were limited in their ability to perform convoy duty, except in covering merchant vessels leaving Manila.⁴⁶ The War Department could be satisfied that it had attempted to deliver supplies to the Philippines since mid-December, but was unsuccessful.⁴⁷

Washington also tempted to resupply MacArthur with a series of blockade runner operations. Led by Brigadier General Patrick Hurley, Washington based the effort in Australia and the NEI. Ultimately, only three blockade runners made it to the Philippines before it fell. Various other vessels tried, but were sunk or lost en-route.⁴⁸

As for naval reinforcements from Hawaii, Hart knew these would not be forthcoming, as “It had been apparent for some days that our Pacific Fleet could make no westward movement of force.”⁴⁹ Ultimately, resources doomed the garrison. The Joint Chiefs of Staff History of the Pacific War summed up the key issue:

With the limited means available and the demands of other theaters of war, it was impossible immediately to assemble a powerful naval force to attack Japanese lines of communication and to advance to the Philippines as General MacArthur continually urged.⁵⁰

Based on these facts, the military situation from Hart’s viewpoint was as follows:

Clearly the U.S. forces in the Far Eastern theater were on their own and the chance of getting reinforcements into the Philippines via the Torres Strait was not favorable. The mission of our naval forces remaining in or near the Philippines remained as before—to support the USAFFE’s defense while damaging the enemy as much as possible.⁵¹

With the departure of Task Force Five to the NEI, MacArthur was faced with having his naval support fighting in two areas. The first area was the Philippines, the second was the NEI. Significantly, the major striking forces, the surface ships, were in the NEI. Hart had retained submarines as his main offensive tool. A major concern of MacArthur was the employment strategy of those forces. While MacArthur recognized the need to protect Java, his concern was having effective forces to stem the Japanese in the Philippines and allow convoys and resupplies to arrive. The belief was that the current employment strategy would fail:

Action against his supply lines from the north would delay his operations but that if our supply lines to the south were not guaranteed by our naval forces it would only be a question of time until the enemy could transport a sufficient preponderance of force to crush our garrison as at present equipped and supplied.⁵²

MacArthur felt that the best way to engage the Japanese was in the Philippines, not the NEI. Failure to secure the Philippines, in his opinion, would lead to the loss of both areas. The shifting of supplies and personnel elsewhere was placing him in an increasingly precarious position that would affect all Allied forces. MacArthur said, "If the Western Pacific is to be saved it will have to be saved here. If the Philippines and NEI go, so will Singapore and the entire Asiatic Continent."⁵³

MacArthur needed immediate supplies, especially airpower. The Japanese had established air supremacy, and it was difficult for him to counter with his limited air forces. MacArthur requested additional bomber and fighter aircraft and personnel. He felt these supplies could provide support not only to his area operations but also to theater operations as a whole:

The ultimate requirement of three hundred pursuit [aircraft] including replacements and the necessary interceptor equipment and personnel are a vital requisite preliminary to the reinforcing of the heavy bomber command. The bomber reinforcements if adequate can prevent successful Japanese operations against the Philippines, against the NEI, and against Malaya.⁵⁴

MacArthur still hoped the *Pensacola* convoy would reinforce his garrison and tried to convince Hart to help. "I suggested that he endeavor with his own surface forces and with the assistance of the Australian and Dutch Naval and air forces to bring in the present convoy and keep the lines open."⁵⁵

Hart, as mentioned earlier, felt poor strength and isolation limited his forces. While sympathetic, commitment to ABDA as well as numbers constrained his resources.

General Wavell, ABDA commander, sent a message to the Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS) on 24 January 1942 stating he was “doing what we can to send ammunition and supplies by blockade runner or air.”⁵⁶ Wavell, however, was not supportive of diverting resources and thought the resupply missions were undermining his position. Wavell later sent a message to the CCS complaining about submarine resupply missions to MacArthur: “Since using submarines for transportation to and from Philippines always directly reduces the opposition which can be brought against the enemy at sea in their theatre, I strongly urge such diversion of forces be kept at a minimum.”⁵⁷

From a naval operational standpoint, convoys were not feasible. The Japanese advances were too quick in seizing territory and controlling sea lanes. Hart felt the ability to operate convoys intra-theater from Australia was not practicable. In a message to Marshall, MacArthur reported his response:

He gave his estimate of the situation that before the ships could reach here a complete blockade would be established. He stated that the use of Torres Strait was forbidden him necessitating a voyage completely around Australia.⁵⁸

Hart had been thinking defensively in the Philippines and was attempting to maximize his strength against Japanese advances. Due to its abundant natural resources, Hart felt the NEI was the culminating point for Allied operations. As reported to Marshall, MacArthur felt that Hart was resigned to the loss of the Philippines and focusing his efforts elsewhere:

He seemed to be of the opinion that the islands were ultimately doomed. He thought it possible that before the final phase an attack might be made against the NEI because of the necessity of oil supply. The Philippines being contained until this had been accomplished.⁵⁹

The relationship between MacArthur and Hart had never been good. Postwar writings by both belied this fact. As a naval element, Asiatic Fleet was not subordinate to

MacArthur. Hart and MacArthur both followed the employment of forces as they saw fit, with little coordination. Hart, in his official report of his command, made little mention of MacArthur and their personal relationship. As mentioned earlier, postwar writings gave the impression that MacArthur had little interest in Hart's naval affairs and strategy. MacArthur made a more direct assessment of Hart after the war, concerning employment of his forces:

The crux of the problem lay in the different interpretation given to local problems by Admiral Thomas C. Hart, the naval commander and myself. He strongly advocated that all air missions be under his command when over water. His criticism of the air force was very sharp, especially after its defeat at Clark Field. Apparently, he was certain that the islands were doomed and made no effort to oppose the Japanese blockade. In addition to his refusal to risk his ships in resisting the landings made on Luzon, he made no effort to oppose the Japanese blockade.⁶⁰

The final blow to Navy presence in the Philippines came on 24 December 1941. The Japanese landings on Luzon continued until Manila itself was threatened. Due to the imminent arrival of Japanese forces, MacArthur declared Manila an open city. The result was enormous. The declaration caught Hart by surprise. While expected, MacArthur gave no notice. The result affected submarine forces significantly, since they had expected to use Manila as a base of operations.⁶¹

The quick withdrawal had several impacts. The main impact was the transfer of Admiral Hart, with no base to operate from, to the NEI. The other impacts included the loss of an operating base, the abandonment of nearly all of the spare parts for S-boat submarine class, and many Mark-14 torpedoes, resulting in a shortage for the next year and a half.⁶² For the U.S. Navy, this also meant the permanent end of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet. W. G. Winslow, an Asiatic Fleet veteran, recalled in his book, *The Fleet the Gods Forgot*: "Thus ended a legendary naval activity in the Orient for, since Admiral Hart's

departure, the flag of commander in chief, U.S. Asiatic Fleet has not flown on the old China station.”⁶³

The removal of ADM Hart from the Philippines to the NEI ended the naval component of MacArthur’s forces in the Philippines. In addition, Japanese air supremacy ensured no significant supplies or support would arrive from either air or naval assets. Except for blockade runners and occasional submarines, no support would arrive to MacArthur’s besieged garrison. Perhaps as a sign to Washington and the U.S. Navy that the Allied forces could run the blockade, MacArthur left the Philippines by PT boat as opposed to submarine on 11 March 1942.⁶⁴ There is however, a significant difference between a small, fast boat and a large slow freighter. Washington did not perceive the blockade as being able to be broken, and did not change its policy. MacArthur eventually reached Australia to organize the American counteroffensive against the Japanese.

MacArthur and Hart were never able to agree on a unified strategy to employ naval assets. MacArthur felt the allocation of resources to ABDA forces and Australia was setting the stage for his defeat. He wanted and needed Hart to engage the Japanese in the Philippines to stem their advances on Luzon. MacArthur felt the critical place to employ forces would be in the Philippines. Striking north of the islands would hit the enemy where he was most vulnerable, on his lines of communication. Engaging him in the NEI, to the south, would be too late. The enemy would be established, have access to oil and other resources, and bases to operate against an offensive.

The lack of airpower influenced both MacArthur and Hart’s abilities to operate on sea and land against the Japanese. Hart could not continue to operate his naval forces under threat of Japanese air strikes. Working under his wartime dispersal plan, Hart

separated his forces. He committed his main forces to the NEI, believing that existing coalition plans for combined naval forces in the NEI were the best means of checking Japanese advances.

After MacArthur declared Manila an open city, Hart no longer had a base to operate from and lost all ability to influence the fight there from a naval standpoint. Hart and MacArthur's command relationship was one of independent commands. Integration of U.S. Army and Naval plans did not occur until it was too late. The fault for this lies with both commanders. Planning was poorly coordinated and sought only after the invasion, and occurred too late to change the outcome. A prime example was MacArthur declaring Manila an open city without informing Hart until after the fact. This had an impact on not only the Philippine defense, but also the Pacific submarine strategy for the following year. An early need for joint operations was thus demonstrated, however not followed, during the Philippines campaign.

Hart did not follow MacArthur's advice and requests and sought a different strategy. His limited assets and overextended forces could do little to stop the Japanese. If Hart and MacArthur had agreed, one can speculate whether the Philippines would have held. Air supremacy rested with the Japanese. U.S. naval forces had established a blockade from Australia and elsewhere and the Pacific Fleet was rebuilding. Washington attempted to relieve the Philippine garrison with support, but to no avail. ABDA also required a material and personnel commitment, which drained even more of the Allied limited resources. To MacArthur, this symbolized a lack of commitment and resignation in Washington to the loss of the Philippines. His only hope to project offensive and defensive power rested with Hart and his small fleet.

In retrospect, the U.S. Asiatic Fleet was limited in its ability to respond to the Japanese onslaught. While engaged in the Philippines and NEI, the fleet put up a heroic fight, sacrificing many of their vessels. Those that survived battles in the NEI were either captured or escaped to Australia. Unfortunately, for the Philippines, it was a futile effort. Denied bases to operate from, having few capital ships, and lacking Allied air supremacy, the results were inevitable. Samuel Eliot Morison summed it up in his official history of the Navy's operations in the Second World War II:

The Philippines Campaign of 1941-1942 was primarily an Army show, and that the full story must be told by Army historians. We must candidly admit that the pitifully few ships and planes of the sadly inadequate Asiatic Fleet were unable to prevent the enemy from landing wherever he chose, or even delay his efficient timetable of conquest.⁶⁵

²⁹Grace Hayes, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in World War II: The War Against Japan* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1982), 91.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 4.

³¹*Ibid.*, 10.

³²*Ibid.*

⁵*Ibid.*, 10-11.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 15.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 18.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 9.

³⁷Admiral Thomas Hart, *Narrative of Events of Asiatic Fleet, 8 December 1941-15 February 1942* (Washington, D.C.: Navy Department, 1947), 87.

³⁸W. G. Winslow, *The Fleet the Gods Forgot: The U.S. Asiatic Fleet in World War II* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1994), 8.

³⁹Ibid., 18.

⁴⁰Theodore Roscoe, *United States Submarine Operations in World War II* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1949), 49.

⁴¹Hayes, 31.

⁴²Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences* (New York: Crest Books, 1965), 132.

⁴³Charles Anderson, *East Indies 1942* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History, Publication 72-22, 1992), 12.

⁴⁴Msg, Headquarters, U.S. Army Forces in the Far East (USAFFE) to Gen. George Marshall, War Department, 13 December 1941, sub: Personal for Marshall.

⁴⁵Anderson, 12.

⁴⁶Hart, 40.

⁴⁷Hayes, 33.

⁴⁸Stanley L. Falk, "Ships That Never Came In," *Military History Quarterly* 7, No. 2 (Winter 1995), 44.

⁴⁹Ibid., 40.

⁵⁰Ibid., 35.

⁵¹Ibid., 40.

⁵²Msg, Headquarters, U.S. Army Forces in the Far East (USAFFE) to Gen. George Marshall, War Department, 13 December 1941, sub: Personal for Marshall.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Msg, Headquarters, U.S. Army Forces in the Far East (USAFFE) to Gen. George Marshall, War Department, 14 December 1941, sub: Personal for Marshall.

⁵⁵Msg, Headquarters, U.S. Army Forces in the Far East (USAFFE) to Gen. George Marshall, War Department, 13 December 1941, sub: Personal for Marshall.

⁵⁶Msg, ABDACOM to BRITMAN Washington (for Combined Chiefs of Staff), 24 January 1942. Serial 00309, no subject.

⁵⁷Msg, ABDACOM to Combined Chiefs of Staff, serial 0820/24, no subject.

⁵⁸Msg, Headquarters, U.S. Army Forces in the Far East (USAFFE) to Gen. George Marshall, War Department, 13 December 1941, sub: Personal for Marshall.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰MacArthur, 139.

⁶¹Hart, 45.

⁶²Winslow, 27.

⁶³Ibid., 10.

⁶⁴MacArthur, 154.

⁶⁵Samuel Eliot Morrison, *The Rising Sun in the Pacific* (Boston, Massachusetts: Little, Brown, and Company, 1984), 181.

CHAPTER 4

ABDA STRATEGY

Unity of command obtains that *unity of effort* which is essential to the decisive application of full combat power of the available forces. Unity of effort is furthered by full *cooperation* between elements of the command.⁶⁶

FM 100-5, *War Department Operations*

The Pacific War started in December 1941 with a Japanese lightning advance that caught Allied nations off guard. Prior to the war, Allied conferences had discussed response options to counter Japanese aggression. The result, after hostilities began, was the creation of American-British-Dutch-Australia (ABDA) command. The purpose of the command was to foster cooperation and unity of effort among its participants. From the beginning, each nation was to bring its resources to the common goal of stopping and defeating the Japanese advances. The joining of forces would create the necessary unity of effort and massing of firepower to engage and defeat a single enemy. The goal, however, was lost in the differing military and political objectives of the four nations. The command strategy and structure would hinder ABDA effectiveness and set the stage for its failure. A study of ABDA's formation, command structures, and strategies demonstrates the need for unity of command and cooperation in coalition warfare.

A major strategy conference on the Pacific occurred in December 1941. The ARCADIA Conference, held in the United States, involved only America and Britain. The purpose of the conference was to develop a master strategy for both the European and Pacific theaters. During the course of this conference, both Hong Kong and Manila fell, illustrating the need for quick action on the Pacific front.⁶⁷ Despite the immediate need, ARCADIA determined that "the Atlantic and European theater was considered the

decisive theater...only a minimum of force necessary for the safeguarding of vital interests in other theaters should be diverted from operations against Germany.’⁶⁸ For the Pacific, the emphasis was:

The security of Australia, New Zealand, and India must be maintained, and that the Chinese war effort supported. Secondly, points of vantage from which an offensive against Japan can eventually be developed must be secured. Our immediate objective must therefore be to hold:

- a. Hawaii and Dutch Harbor (Alaska).
- b. Singapore, the East Indies Barrier, and the Philippines.
- c. Rangoon and the route to China.⁶⁹

The Americans and British established the intent for the Pacific, but the resources simply were not available. The decision to put priority on Germany further lessened the availability of resources. The dangerous situation in the Pacific, as one historian noted, was “that the Allied position was greatly overextended.”⁷⁰

Britain’s main priority in the NEI area was the defense of Singapore. For over a hundred years, Singapore and Hong Kong had been symbols of British influence and power. The British based their plans and strategies on Singapore. Since the American Pacific Fleet was crippled, a coalition of Allied forces was necessary to provide the essential resources for defense. This coalition, to the British, would need to focus on Singapore as the critical element. Discussed in detail in Chapter 3, the Americans felt Singapore was not the key element but part of a larger strategy. American concerns focused on relieving the Philippines and checking the Japanese advance. A unified effort, however, bridged the two strategies into a practical medium.



Figure 2. ABDACOM Area Map Source: Louis Morton, *U.S. Army in World War II: The War in the Pacific: Strategy and Command*, 162.

The ARCADIA Conference also established the British-American high command, known as the Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS), for the overall direction of the Allied war effort. The composition of the CCS included both the British and American military Chiefs of Staff.⁷¹ These individuals eventually established the ABDA command through ARCADIA. The CCS summed up their review and strategy for the Pacific as follows:

1. To hold the Malay Barrier;
2. To hold Burma and Australia;
3. To reestablish communications through the Dutch East Indies with Luzon and support the Philippines garrison;
4. To maintain essential communications within the theater.⁷²

The official history of ABDA describes its creation and purpose “To direct operations of all Allied forces in the general area of Burma, Malaya, the Netherlands East Indies, and the Philippines.”⁷³ The command had the responsibility for Burma, Malaya, the NEI, Western New Guinea, Northwest Australia, and to a lesser extent, the Philippines.⁷⁴ The next step was the designation of a commander to oversee operations.

None of the coalition’s components coveted the command of ABDA. The complexities as well as the deteriorating situation would make command difficult. During deliberations on a prospective commander, General George C. Marshall, who supported a unified command, recommended a British officer, Lieutenant General Archibald Wavell, for the post.⁷⁵

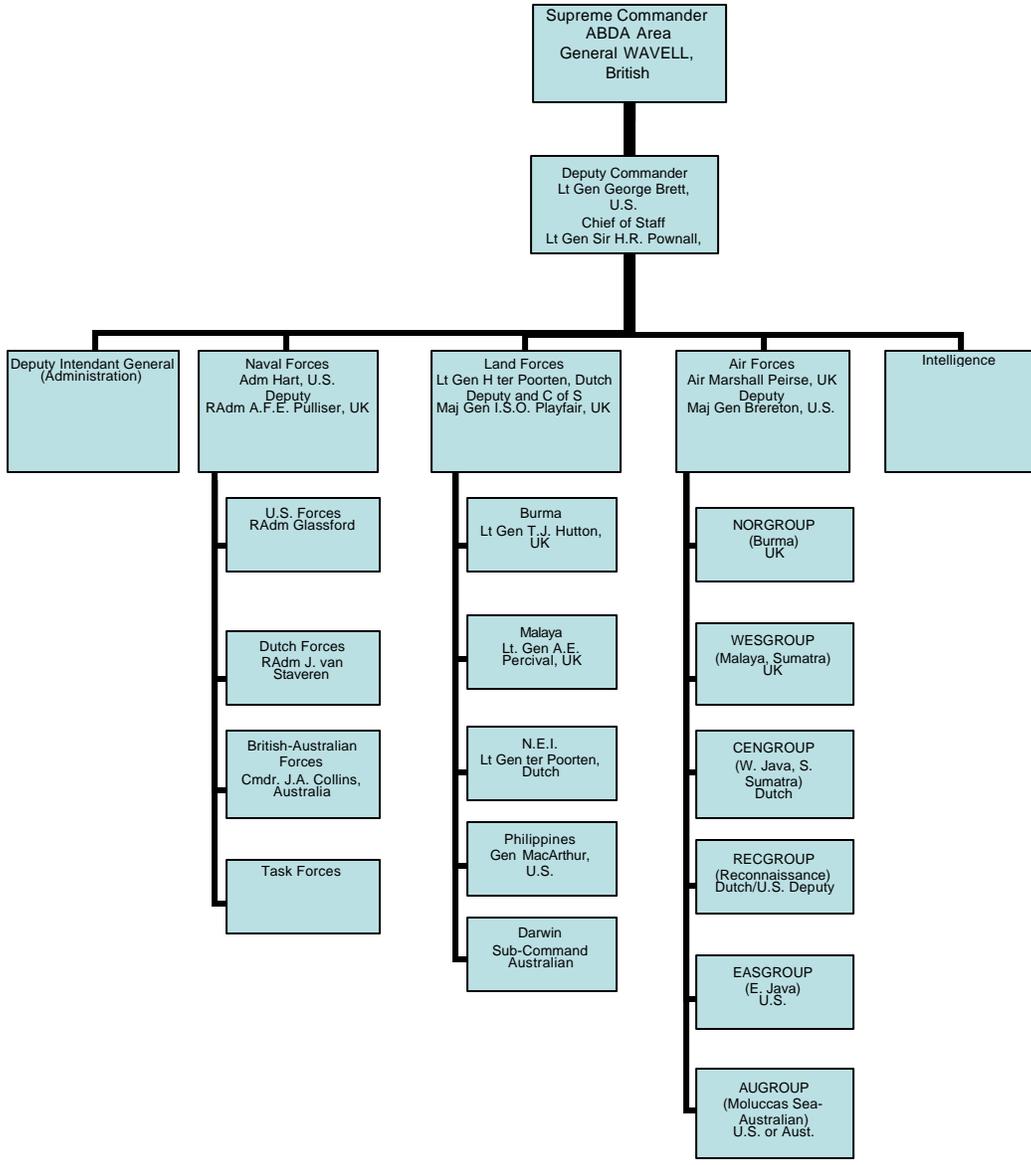


Figure 3. Organization of ABDACOM, January-February 1942 Source: Louis Morton, *U.S. Army in World War II: The War in the Pacific: Strategy and Command*, 169.

General Wavell was a veteran of the North African campaigns. He had extensive theater command experience and had achieved successes against numerically superior forces.⁷⁶ Wavell was relieved, however, by Churchill after a series of setbacks.⁷⁷ Marshall felt Wavell was a strong candidate because he “was used to moving troops . . . been engaged in active operations which included both a successful operation and a setback.”⁷⁸ The British, however, viewed his nomination and selection with suspicion. H. P. Willmont, author of *Empires in the Balance*, stated it this way: “the British were naturally somewhat alarmed by the prospect of American public opinion turning against them when, rather than if, American forces were involved in a disaster while under the command of a British officer. The British were under no illusions of what probably lay in store; they clearly anticipated defeat.”⁷⁹

The command structure imposed on Wavell limited his ability to control forces. The coalition was seeking unity of effort but was still allowing each component overall control. Component nations could, under ABDA directives, appeal directly to their government against employment of their forces. Further demonstrating the problem, “each national component of a task force will normally operate under its own commander and will not be sub-divided into small units for attachment to other national components of task forces except in cases of urgent necessity.”⁸⁰ The coalition sacrificed unity of effort to pacify component nations concerns over their forces employment. Wavell’s restrictions meant he could only deploy the forces made available through components. Willmont correctly notes, “Direction would have been a more suitable word than authority.” Sir John Dill, a senior British member of the CCS, observed, “The terms of reference were so restrictive that they were certain to prevent the effective command that

could be the only justification for creating a unified theater of operations in the first place.”⁸¹

America and Britain presented Wavell’s selection to the remaining ABDA countries for approval. Significantly, neither the Netherlands nor Australia was keen on the idea of allowing Wavell to command their forces since he was directly responsible to the CCS for ABDA. Neither of these countries had representation on the staff and thus was unable to influence its actions.⁸²

This lack of representation was not a mistake, the British intended to minimize the number of participants in policy deliberations. They felt the best means to engage the Netherlands and Australians were through their offices in London, not Washington, the location of the CCS.⁸³ The British conveyed the Dutch and Australian views through communication to the CCS. Britain wanted to have direct Anglo-American talks, which appeared to be easier than multinational ones.⁸⁴ Because of their lack of representation, both the Dutch and the Australians felt misunderstood with regard to their unique situation. In addition, the Australians probably already disliked and distrusted Wavell for his leadership of ANZAC forces in North Africa.

The establishment of the ABDA component commanders mirrored the strengths and capabilities of each component. The intent was to maximize the force potential of assigned components. Wavell, the British officer, was overall commander. This assignment was logical since ABDA was pinning a successful defense on Singapore. The deputy commander was Lieutenant General G. H. Brett, U.S. Army. Admiral Thomas Hart, U.S. Navy, who was also the commander of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet, headed naval forces (ABDA Float). The ground forces commander (ABDA Arm) was a Dutchman,

Lieutenant General H. ter Poorten. The air forces commander (ABDA Air) was Major General L. H. Brereton, U.S. Army, who was acting until Air Marshal Sir Richard Peirse, RAF arrived.⁸⁵

The main headquarters was at the Grand Hotel in Lembang, Java. Wavell felt the command establishment was good and remarkable considering the short amount of time it took to set it up.⁸⁶ The component forces' headquarters, however, did not achieve effective synchronization; there was a geographic separation of the headquarters. ABDA Air was located in Baedong, Java while ABDA Float was located in Lembang, Java.⁸⁷ These headquarters were at least 25 kilometers apart from each other. The naval staff at Surabaya, a main port for coalition naval operations, was over 400 miles from Wavell's headquarters.⁸⁸ Naval logistics also were inadequate to support naval operations.

The U.S. Navy had established their logistics base for ABDA naval operations at Port Darwin, Australia. Resupply and maintenance would be a long process, since Darwin was located almost 1,200 miles from the NEI.⁸⁹ Significantly, despite the large oil resources in Java, there was also a fuel shortage. Java's oil supplies were located inland, away from the ports. Following Japanese air raids, local workers refused to work in the facilities. The bombing further damaged Java's already inadequate repair facilities so that they could provide only limited services to damaged vessels.⁹⁰

The ABDA communications were poor among its components. Wavell noted that communications were deficient in "rapid and efficient signal communications."⁹¹ A coalition of forces from different, geographically separated nations required timely and efficient communications or it would be hindered in its effectiveness. U.S. Navy headquarters in Java were set up in a house outside Soerabaja, Java with its radio station

set up in a garage behind the home.⁹² Another problem was the separation of ABDA Air headquarters from the Royal Netherlands Navy Air Service. This resulted in ineffectual coordination of air forces of the army and navy. The single most disrupting obstacle to effective command and control was the lack of a single war room for all of the components.⁹³ This obstacle required the transmission of command and control through communications of various nations resulting in ineffective and incomplete communications. Commanders could not synchronize ABDA operations. Once again, ABDA had become an operational command with no effective command of its elements.

The Dutch were disappointed that only one of their officers was in a command position. This unfortunately is typical treatment of small states in coalitions. The NEI was a key strategic and resource area best known to the Dutch. This fact was significant when one considers no Dutch naval officers were in top command positions. The coalition leadership did not include Vice Admiral C. E. L. Helfrich, Royal Netherlands Navy, and senior Dutch officer in the NEI, in the command decisions.⁹⁴ Helfrich, a native of the NEI, was fighting for his home. The commanders ignored Helfrich's experience with the area until he forced himself into discussions with the Allied naval commanders. Helfrich also questioned the British policy of holding onto Singapore. Helfrich felt the Japanese were unopposed as they went through the center and that relief of Singapore was a waste of forces.⁹⁵ The Dutch view of defense differed from their allies, but they were willing to deviate in order to be a part of the ABDA coalition.

The protection of its Pacific empire concerned the Dutch. Following World War I, the Washington Naval Treaty in 1921 allowed the construction or upgrading of only the naval bases of Singapore and Hawaii close to Japan. To the Dutch, this provided Japan

with the ability to operate without immediate threats to its naval power in the Western Pacific. Limited assets increased the Dutch concerns about protection. Dutch pre-war planning was trying to fill the gap in defenses. In 1937, the Dutch decided to embark on a naval construction plan for 1940. They earmarked many of the resulting vessels for the NEI Fleet.⁹⁶ The center of these improvements was three cruisers armed with nine, 11-inch guns. These cruisers were being obtained to counter Japanese cruisers in the NEI.⁹⁷ The occupation of Holland in 1940 made the construction program obsolete.

To attempt to stem Japanese aggression, the Dutch joined with America and Britain in freezing all Japanese assets and placing economic sanctions on critical materials in July 1941. These sanctions denied the Japanese resources such as oil and rubber, which were so plentiful in the NEI.⁹⁸ Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, and realizing that their assets and security required alliances to survive, the Dutch declared war on Japan.

The Netherlands Naval Staff developed prewar strategy for the NEI. The focus of defense was the harbor of Tjilatjap, Java. This port lies on the Indian Ocean and permitted reinforcements in crisis. The infrastructure to support this facility, however, was not completed in December 1941.⁹⁹

Dutch military forces were limited in air, naval, and ground forces. The navy had a mix of cruisers, destroyers, and submarines.¹⁰⁰ There were only about 38,000 Army forces in the Royal Netherlands Army (KNIL).¹⁰¹ Air support was limited to a mixture of old miscellaneous bombers, fighters, and flying boats.¹⁰² These forces were inadequate for defense of a territory as large as the NEI. The northern coast of Java, center of defense efforts, was 700 miles long alone.¹⁰³ Total area of responsibility for ABDA was

approximately 2,000 miles.¹⁰⁴ The Dutch were also faced with the difficult problem of transforming an army designed for colonial control to defense against an outside invader. These factors and the wide expanse of the NEI made the Dutch more of a burden as opposed to an ally in the British mindset.

The Dutch were unable to bring power to the table in deliberations with the Americans and British. The Dutch and Australians had to accept CCS guidance in the hope their interests would be provided for. The British sought and received sizable military assistance from the Dutch for Singapore. The Dutch felt with Singapore defended the British and Americans could help maintain the NEI security. The British considered Singapore as the key, and that the NEI was secondary in importance. The fact that the NEI held sizable resources seems to have been lost on British and American planners. While the Japanese would have to deal with Singapore, the NEI would be the fruit of its conquest. Resources to assist it were minimal. The Americans were still concerned with the Philippines. One ABDA member, Australia, was concerned with its security and saw the NEI and Australia defense intertwined.

During the Singapore Conference in February 1941, Australia agreed to provide military forces to assist in the NEI defense. Australia knew defense of the NEI would help protect Northwest Australia and its flanks. As a result, Australia agreed to provide the NEI airplanes, troops, and coastal artillery for the NEI islands of Ambon and Timor.¹⁰⁵

Australia, however, was not entirely happy with the creation of ABDA. Australia was concerned about the creation of ABDA and the position Australia would play in the coalition. Australia, like the Dutch, held no seat on the CCS and had to rely on Britain

for representation. The Australian government was concerned that British policymakers were overlooking its security. John Curtin, Australia's Prime Minister, was bitter about his exclusion from British decision-making.¹⁰⁶ Curtin was also angry about the employment of Australian troops by British commanders.

During 1941, Australian forces sustained the heaviest losses in the Middle East campaign during questionable military operations. The critical situation in the Pacific made Australia rethink her defense situation, leading to a request from Australia to return her forces from the Middle East.¹⁰⁷ This return of forces was a slow process since the North African campaign battles around Tobruk were raging and the removal of Australian forces could only occur when forces were available to relieve them. The redeployment of forces played into a larger strategy issue. Australia was making itself a force to be reckoned with—one that was not of a subordinate ally. This action forced the senior partners of Britain and the U.S. to deal with her on an almost equal basis in discussions of strategy and force deployments.¹⁰⁸ Defense of Australia was the key strategy issue for Australia in the early part of the Pacific War. Curtin likely realized that Australia would be the next target for the Japanese advance, due to its position and ability to base Allied counter-offensives.

During the ARCADIA Conference, Winston Churchill was reportedly embarrassed by reports of Curtin's views on British support and skepticism.¹⁰⁹ As previously mentioned, Curtin felt he had little or no voice in the development of Allied strategy in the Pacific. Curtin had several concerns. The first concern was the rapid Japanese advance that had been very successful in dominating the Pacific. The second, the loss of British sea power, made Australia vulnerable to Japanese air and surface

forces.¹¹⁰ Third, Burma became another Australian issue in strategy. Following the ARCADIA conference in January 1942, Churchill was noted to believe that the “retention of Burma was more important than trying to reinforce Singapore.”¹¹¹ Fourth, the establishment of ABDA did not include Australia proper, only the Northwest section. The lack of Australia proper in ABDA placed it in the void between the British in the west and the Americans in the east.¹¹² Curtin protested this situation and gained a valuable Allied concession.

Curtin demanded that the U.S. and Britain clarify the status of Australia. The United States responded on 8 January 1942 with the proposal of an ANZAC (Australia/New Zealand) area.¹¹³ This proposal was ultimately accepted and provided Australia the answers and support it needed. ANZAC covered the territory in question and beyond. The ANZAC area encompassed Australia as far north as the equator and as far east as the meridian 175 West. This sea area, under a naval command, covered the approaches to Australia.¹¹⁴ Australia had its flanks and sea lines of communication established as an Allied responsibility, particularly for the U.S. Navy. This Allied responsibility had political benefits for Australia and the United States.

First, Curtin realized, based on past British actions, that America would be the only country to “guarantee Australian security.” The second benefit was for the United States. Admiral Ernest J. King, U.S. Navy, desired to get into the Southwest Pacific and establish a naval presence in the Pacific.¹¹⁵ The ANZAC area allowed King to meet his goal.

Each ABDA nation held different views and priorities of strategy, force employment, and command. Strategy issues affected the allocation of forces to the NEI.

Australia decided to remove her forces from the Middle East due to a fear of threatened security because of the lack of British support. Britain placed her emphasis on Singapore, which the Americans supported in name only. The Philippines were its main concern, and resources for both were limited.

The command creation and its limitations resulted in an ineffective command structure that maintained national command of component forces but failed to synchronize all of the elements of power. The establishment of geographically separated headquarters only served to lessen ABDA's effectiveness of control of forces. The stage was set for ABDA's demise based on poor command and control, inability to synchronize forces, and different strategic views among its components.

Unity of Command implies unity of effort among its elements. The ABDA Coalition was unable to achieve successful unity of effort due to differing objectives and strategies. The four partners each held different priorities. For the British, Singapore and Malaya were the focus. America's emphasis was on the Philippines and stopping the Japanese advance in the Pacific. The Dutch were concerned with the protection of the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) and its rich natural resources. Finally, Australia was concerned not only with its territorial defense, but also with committing its limited resources to British possessions and strategies. The evolution of the command, its commander, command structure, strategies, and operations all created the elements to defeat unity of effort.

⁶⁶FM 100-5, *War Department Operations* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1941), 22.

⁶⁷Maurice Matloff and Edwin M. Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History, 1980), 120.

⁶⁸Ronald H. Spector, *Eagle Against the Sun* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 123.

⁶⁹Matloff and Snell, 120-121.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 120.

⁷¹Spector, 125.

⁷²Matloff and Snell, 122.

⁷³Archibald Wavell, *Despatch by the Supreme Commander of the ABDA Area to the Combined Chiefs of Staff on Operations in the South-West Pacific* (London, England: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1948), inside book leaf.

⁷⁴Spector, 127.

⁷⁵H. P. Willmont, *Empires in the Balance* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1982), 259.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 259.

⁷⁷Winston S. Churchill, *The Grand Alliance* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1950), 344.

⁷⁸Matloff and Snell, 123.

⁷⁹Willmont, *Empires in the Balance*, 259-260.

⁸⁰Wavell, 15-21.

⁸¹Willmont, *Empires in the Balance*, 260

⁸²Matloff and Snell, 126.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 125.

⁸⁴Willmont, *Empires in the Balance*, 261.

⁸⁵F. C. van Oosten, *The Battle of the Java Sea* (Annapolis, Maryland: U.S. Naval Institute, 1976), 15.

⁸⁶Wavell, 6.

⁸⁷van Oosten, 16.

⁸⁸John Costello, *The Pacific War* (New York: Quill, 1982), 189.

⁸⁹David A. Thomas, *The Battle of the Java Sea* (New York: Stein and Day, 1969), 109.

⁹⁰Paul Dull, *A Battle History of the Imperial Japanese Navy* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1978), 75.

⁹¹Wavell, 6.

⁹²Theodore Roscoe, *United States Submarine Operations in World War II* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1949), 63.

⁹³van Oosten, 16.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 15.

⁹⁵Willmont, *Empires in the Balance*, 274-5.

⁹⁶Lt. Commander A. Kroese, Royal Netherlands Navy. *The Dutch Navy at War* (London, England: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1945), 17-20.

⁹⁷Willmont, *Empires in the Balance*, 264.

⁹⁸Kroese, 24.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁰¹Willmont, *Empires in the Balance*, 265-7.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, 265.

¹⁰³Willmont, *Empires in the Balance*, 265-7.

¹⁰⁴Wavell, 8.

¹⁰⁵Kroese, 33.

¹⁰⁶H. P. Willmont, *The Barrier and the Javelin* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1989.), 145.

¹⁰⁷Willmont, *Empires in the Balance*, 261-2.

¹⁰⁸Willmont, *The Barrier and the Javelin*, 144-5.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 145.

¹¹⁰Willmont, *Empires in the Balance*, 262.

¹¹¹Willmont, *The Barrier and Javelin*, 155.

¹¹²Willmont, *Empires in the Balance*, 262.

¹¹³Willmont, *The Barrier and the Javelin*, 146.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*

CHAPTER 5

COALITION OPERATIONS

The Navies of the four united powers fought as one band of brothers and gentlemen during the whole ABDA campaign.¹¹⁶

The Dutch Navy at War

The first and only ABDA campaign occurred from January to February 1942. This short-lived command tried to stem the Japanese advance by air, land, and sea. While ABDA forces made several attempts in combined operations, the Japanese were still able to secure the Malay Barrier, Singapore, and the entire Netherlands East Indies (NEI) in less than three months. ABDA operations and command structure reveal key deficiencies in coalition operations. The deficiencies include poor integration of military forces, no joint doctrine, inadequate command and control (C2), and little or no intelligence. This chapter will discuss these factors as they affected ABDA during its brief existence. The factors, combined with a significant lack of airpower, ensured ABDA could only hold defensive and offensive operations for a limited timeframe, and rendered it incapable of fighting as a combined force.

The Japanese first invaded the Netherlands East Indies on 11 January 1942. The first objective of the invasion forces was to acquire an oil facility in Borneo, with combined airborne and naval operations in the Celebes. Allied efforts to respond with naval and army elements were unsuccessful due to poor coordination and communications.¹¹⁷ Four days after the invasion, ABDA officially came into existence.

General Archibold Wavell assumed command of ABDA on 15 January 1942. Prior to his assumption of command, Wavell asked the Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS) what resources were available. The CCS replied that the Allied representatives on the ABDA staff could inform him of his assets. Wavell entered into this uncertain situation with a strategy of an offensive nature. With limited resources at his disposal, Wavell believed his priorities to check the Japanese advance were: (1) attack enemy shipping by air and submarine; (2) use air attacks on enemy air bases; and (3) secure the line of naval and air bases extending along the lines of Port Darwin-Timor-Java-Southern Sumatra-Singapore. Previously, Wavell had been the commander of the effort to defend Johore and the Malay Barrier against the Japanese advance.¹¹⁸ He maintained this responsibility under the new ABDA coalition, complicating his ability to command with multiple and sometimes differing priorities for defense and resources.

In January, while directing the Malay defense, Wavell repositioned his forces with the assumption of Royal Air Force (RAF) airpower. During this time, he hoped that reinforced RAF forces would provide ground forces with close air support. Additionally, he hoped that naval forces would prevent enemy landings on the coast. He later recalled, "Both of these hopes were unfulfilled."¹¹⁹ This was the first of many times during his command of ABDA that Wavell would base his hopes of defense on limited or non-existent forces.

The successful defense of Singapore, a British priority, was beginning to be in doubt in early January. American naval observers stationed in London reported estimates that Singapore would fall by Mid-March.¹²⁰ Wavell realized that, despite the extensive fortifications, "no defenses had been made or even planned in the north side of Singapore

Island, although it was obvious by now that we might be driven back into the island and have to defend it.”¹²¹ The Japanese advance down the Malay Barrier would soon prove this assumption correct.

ABDA staff conferences, composed of component commanders from all of the Allied nations, met while Japanese advances from the north threatened Singapore. The first staff meetings discussed the lack of resources as well as the “urgent need for reinforcements.” The discussion also centered on holding and reinforcing air bases in the NEI, such as in Celebes, Borneo, Timor, and Sumatra. The Japanese would later use these bases with great efficiency against Allied forces during and after the NEI campaign. The Americans and Dutch argued that these bases were vital and must be held. Wavell, however, felt his resources were inadequate to defend or reinforce the airfields and declined to order additional forces for their defense.¹²²

General Wavell’s strategic assessment for ABDA was composed of these six elements:

1. Philippines: No prospect of sending support to MacArthur due to limited resources.
2. Burma was satisfactory.
3. Malaya hoped to hold Johore and Singapore and later stage counteroffensive against Japanese.
4. Sumatra and Java needed reinforcements of troops and anti-aircraft.
5. Japanese advances would occur against Borneo and Celebes, with the objective of “establishing air bases.”
6. Japanese would try to “cut the supply route between Australia and the NEI.”¹²³

The command, according to Wavell, had “immediate objectives . . . to secure Singapore and to check or hamper Japanese advance into Borneo and eastwards.” Singapore was still the driving element in ABDA strategy, despite the fact that Japanese objectives would have to focus on invading and establishing airbases in the NEI. Wavell also felt that additional naval forces were necessary to ensure the Japanese Navy did not place itself between the NEI and Singapore.¹²⁴ Wavell needed an accurate picture to understand how to deploy his forces to protect Singapore and track and monitor the Japanese Navy

From an intelligence perspective, ABDA needed effective air reconnaissance to “watch and report enemy movements.”¹²⁵ The ability to track a mobile and fast-moving enemy would be critical for ABDA forces to respond. Japanese aerial reconnaissance was able to report on ABDA movements and use intelligence for their military movements.¹²⁶ Likewise, air reconnaissance would be the best means of tracking Japanese forces throughout the NEI area. Timely intelligence could be derived from reconnaissance prior to invasion units landing or provide direction of naval surface ships to alert the coalition. Lack of intelligence would hamper Wavell and affect his understanding of the Japanese larger campaign.

A week after ABDA’s establishment, Wavell reviewed his strategic position in a message to the CCS. Wavell realized ABDA had to “check the enemy’s intense offensive effort as far forward as possible by hard fighting, taking offensive action ourselves whenever possible.” Burma was also threatened, and Singapore was still in danger. Furthermore, Singapore could be held if reinforcements arrived by

26 January 1942. In the message to the CCS, Wavell “hoped that we might be able to build up air superiority and drive the enemy back.”¹²⁷

To counter a fast-moving mobile force over a wide geographical area, air power would be necessary. Wavell had underestimated Japanese air forces in the NEI campaign. He felt ABDA could easily deal with the air forces if he had enough resources. Following the campaign, he wrote, “I have always maintained, and still do, that the Japanese air force is comparatively weak and can be overcome whenever the Allies manage to concentrate a sufficient air force under favourable conditions.”¹²⁸ This statement is disconcerting, considering the air supremacy the Japanese enjoyed in the first few months of the campaign. Japanese air power enabled Pearl Harbor, the sinking of two British battleships in December (*Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*), and the Philippines campaign. To assess the Japanese air force as comparatively weak is misleading; it was a threat that ABDA had to deal with in theater strategy until resources arrived.

Wavell later estimated that of all of the aircraft promised to his command, forty to fifty percent never arrived. Australian requests for aircraft further reduced resources. Australian defense concerns had resulted in the Allies providing resources to them at ABDA’s detriment. During the deployment of aircraft to theater, Australia obtained some planes originally destined for ABDA.¹²⁹ The lack of airpower was another indication of ABDA weakness. The problem was not in aircraft only. Infrastructure to support airfields was wanting throughout the region.

The earlier requests for antiaircraft defenses were indicative of the most basic needs for airfields. Wavell even admitted that “aerodromes in southern Sumatra and Java were limited and required considerable development; there was little or no material

available for an adequate warning system.” Dutch Air Force efforts to assist the British in Malaya and Singapore had reduced their numbers and effectiveness following the fall of both of those areas. U.S. Army Air Corps ground force personnel were always limited in numbers and abilities to perform maintenance. These factors led Wavell to conclude, “The result of all of the factors set out above was that the Allied air force, instead of increasing in strength and obtaining superiority over the Japanese, wasted with increasing rapidity and finally was completely destroyed.”¹³⁰ The lack of airpower and the inability to interdict successfully Japanese air, ground, and naval forces invading and enroute to the area helped set the stage of defeat for ABDA. These factors also hampered the ability to provide time-sensitive intelligence.

Aerial reconnaissance was the primary means of providing intelligence against the Japanese fast-moving forces. Unfortunately, the information received was often incomplete and contradictory. The inability to provide reliable intelligence affected the employment of forces against Japanese forces. U.S. submarines, with the ability to respond quickly with stealth and surprise, were unable to interdict one Japanese landing or affect their operations due to lack of critical intelligence. These vessels often arrived on scene after major events had occurred because of the slowness or incompleteness of intelligence.¹³¹

Coalition naval forces were limited in their ability to respond to Japanese attacks. The whole area of responsibility for ABDA was approximately 2,000 miles. The limited naval forces at Wavell’s disposal were insufficient to establish effective control of the sea lines of communication in the NEI area. Consequently, Japanese forces could move from

point to point in the NEI with little fear of interdiction. Air superiority, held by the Japanese, also allowed freedom of movement in the waters of the NEI.¹³²

The Japanese were meeting with success after success in the NEI in the first few weeks of January and February 1942. The official ABDA history noted that the Japanese were “methodical” in their advances. “They secured a line of air bases; then with aircraft established on their bases they attacked our air forces on the next bases to the south; when they judged that the air strength on these bases was sufficiently reduced, they sent a sea-borne expedition to seize them.”¹³³ ABDA was unable to slow the advance due to limited air and naval forces. The navy, however, made several valiant efforts to stem invasion forces. The first naval engagement was at Balikpapan, where both air and naval forces engaged Japanese landing forces.

Balikpapan was the first major surface naval engagement for ABDA forces. Allied submarines reported the Japanese convoy heading toward the Borneo oil port of Balikpapan, resulting in the launch of two American cruisers and four destroyers to intercept. Unfortunately, one cruiser ran aground and another developed engine trouble, leaving the destroyers to proceed alone.¹³⁴

The American destroyers engaged twelve troop transports in two separate attacks on the night of 23-24 January 1942. The battle marked the first time since 1898 that the American navy had fought a surface action.¹³⁵ Using torpedoes and gunfire, the destroyers were able to destroy four transports, with no losses.¹³⁶ While a successful surface engagement, the action was unable to stop the Japanese invasion of Borneo. The real casualty to ABDA followed this battle at the end of January when Admiral Helfrich relieved Admiral Hart. The Dutch had always been concerned about another nation

overseeing their naval defense and sought a change.¹³⁷ Hart expressed surprise at his relief, as the Dutch explained the purpose of his replacement was for “reasons of health.” Hart confronted Wavell for an explanation, only receiving a statement that the Dutch were dissatisfied with his leadership.¹³⁸ Hart left before seeing the destruction of his command the following month.

The end of January, only two weeks into ABDA’s existence, brought few hopes for the coming month. The British aircraft carrier *Indomitable* brought forty-eight Hurricane fighters, not enough to match attrition from Japanese forces. Additionally, Singapore was under siege from the north, few reinforcements had arrived, and Burma was threatened.¹³⁹

The beginning of February brought more losses to ABDA naval forces. Denied air power for cover, naval forces were coming increasingly under attack from Japanese air forces. The Japanese damaged the U.S. naval cruisers USS *Marblehead* and *Houston* by air. They also sank a merchant ship with anti-aircraft guns in the Banka Strait, and air attacks against Malang, Surabaya, and Bali airfields. A relief force of American fighters from Australia also was destroyed at the airfields as they refueled. Offensive operations were rapidly becoming more and more difficult. Wavell felt that the above losses combined caused “a serious effect on our ability to resist the various Japanese advances.”¹⁴⁰

Wavell sent a message to the Combined Chiefs of Staff on 29 January 1942 that outlined his strategy. Wavell stated, “With limited resources can do NO more than try to defend most essential objectives which I conceive to be Singapore Island, air bases in Southern and Central Sumatra, naval base at Surabaya.”¹⁴¹ Wavell’s priorities were also

Japanese campaign plan objectives, but his defense of these areas would prove to be insufficient. The prioritization of the defense of Singapore drained resources from Sumatra and Java, allowing their fall to occur quickly after Singapore surrendered. The defense of the NEI would require additional resources or it could not succeed.

Portugal became a new ally in the ABDA area in late January. Timor, a Portuguese colony, had limited forces for its defense. Allied diplomats were finally able to gain troops from Portugal in concession for a secret commitment of Allied forces to assist in Timor's defense if attacked. Portugal was determined to maintain its neutrality, but realized the Japanese would seize its territory in short order. The forces were to come from Portuguese West Africa and a Portuguese liaison officer, Major S. A. Nogueiro, arrived in the NEI in early February to prepare for the arrival of 700 Portuguese troops. Portugal also agreed to assist in the improvement of lines of communication in the Timor area likely to aid movement of forces.¹⁴² The NEI fell before these troops could arrive to assist the undermanned ABDA ground forces.

The middle of February brought the news that Britain had dreaded: Singapore and the whole Malay Barrier had fallen to the Japanese. Despite substantial resources in troops and material, the poorly defended north end eventually led to its demise. Wavell knew that the NEI was next for conquest. He also knew that he had sacrificed reinforcement for Sumatra to bolster Singapore's defenses.¹⁴³ Attempts to reinforce the garrison resulted in limited success because of Japanese interdiction. There was little to stop Japanese forces from seizing Sumatra. Ironically, Wavell's priorities of defense were the Japanese objectives for seizing the NEI.

Wavell felt that the continued resistance in the NEI was becoming futile. He informed the CCS on 16 February 1942 that he believed Burma and Australia “were the most vital requirements in the war against Japan and that efforts should not be made to reinforce Java which might compromise the defense of Burma and Australia.” According to Wavell, the Australian Corps, recalled from the Middle East enroute to Java, would not be in place until late March.¹⁴⁴ Wavell advised the CCS to surrender Java without a major fight.

The Japanese invaded Bali on 18 February. ABDA naval forces attempted to stop the invasion, but met with limited success. Japanese forces had seized airfields in southern Sumatra and Bali and were using them to support their advance on the rest of Java.¹⁴⁵ Airpower allowed the Japanese to maneuver freely in the area. The narrow seas in the NEI region were excellent for shore-based aircraft attacks.¹⁴⁶ Wavell sent another message to the CCS stating, “that our fighter force would not remain effective for more than two weeks longer.”¹⁴⁷ Significantly, Japanese carriers struck Darwin, Australia the next day.

The raid on Darwin destroyed almost all of the ships in the harbor. In addition, evacuation of the town became necessary because of damage to the airfields and shore facilities. The raid destroyed American and Australian aircraft in Darwin leaving the area vulnerable to continued attacks.¹⁴⁸

The Japanese held both aircraft carriers and battleships near the NEI campaign.¹⁴⁹ These forces would have been difficult to counter, even with additional ABDA air power. There were no Allied carriers or battleships available, only a few cruisers and destroyers

The carriers and battleships provided mobility for Japanese naval forces and allowed them to act as maneuver forces in support of the NEI invasion.

Logistics was another limiting factor to ABDA naval operations. The limited resources and facilities in Java made the supply situation critical to operations. During the final days of the NEI campaign, nations still restricted fuel resources to their own naval vessels. The USS *Houston* and the HMAS *Perth* arrived in Tandjungpriok, Java on 28 February 1942. Tandjungpriok was designated an ABDA fleet rendezvous point for vessels to refuel and regroup. Vessels were to proceed to Tandjungpriok to resupply and regroup in between operations. The port, however, held only 1,000 tons of fuel for supplying the Netherlands naval units. The facility was insufficient to support naval operations and could have been a serious impediment for naval operations if more units had arrived the same time as the two cruisers. The port authorities eventually released fuel to the *Perth* after being informed of the sinking of most, if not all, Dutch naval units.¹⁵⁰ Sustained operations were rapidly becoming difficult or impossible to maintain.

On the 21 February, the Combined Chiefs of Staff responded: "Java should be defended to the last by all combatant troops then in the island." Naval forces could still be of use in supporting the NEI, but CCS diverted land reinforcements elsewhere. Finally, the CCS ordered ABDA headquarters to withdraw from Java.¹⁵¹ Burma would revert to the India region for military operations. General Wavell, however, recommended the dissolution of ABDA as opposed to withdrawal. The loss of Malaya, Singapore, and now the impending fall of the NEI left Wavell to feel that the "return of Burma to India leaves ABDA command without command except local Java defense."¹⁵² The command had lasted less than seven weeks.

The Dutch were not at all happy about the dissolution of ABDA. The Dutch commander in the NEI, Admiral Helfrich, sent a message to the Netherlands Government-in-exile in London on 24 February 1942. The text was an appeal to the Government to plea for continued assistance. Helfrich starts the message with “I cannot help feeling British and American view is much too gloomy. Sunda Strait and Bali still open . . . I am convinced when ANZAC force west of Torres Strait and available Force for Eastern Fleet now at Colombo poke their noses into Java Sea Japan will get an unpleasant surprise and pressure on Java will be very much relieved.” Helfrich was placing his forces in a sea engagement to stem the advance. There was limited air support available, and thus the utilization of combined operations was not possible. The combat capability of the ABDA fleet was reduced, and to continue placing them in harm’s way involved great risk. Helfrich went on to predict the military action of the ABDA naval Strike Force at Java Sea. “I am concentrating everything in Java Sea and vicinity . . . It is still not too late but with great speed, grim determination, and taking all risks is necessary.”¹⁵³

Prior to dissolving ABDA, Wavell ordered a naval seaplane tender, the USS *Langley*, to Java with a cargo of P-40 Warhawks. The Japanese sunk the *Langley* prior to arrival, but another naval vessel, the USS *Seawitch*, delivered twenty-seven P-40s. Unfortunately, it was necessary to destroy these aircraft due to danger of the enemy seizing them. Wavell later recalled that these losses “destroyed the last chance of prolonging fighter resistance to the Japanese air force.”¹⁵⁴

While ABDA ceased to exist in late February, the naval component remained as an active force. Dutch Admiral Karel Doorman headed the naval units. The vessels

remaining in late February included 2 heavy cruisers, including the HMS *Electra* and the USS *Houston*, 3 light cruisers, and 11 British, American, and Dutch destroyers.¹⁵⁵ These naval units engaged a numerically superior Japanese force on 27 February 1942 in the Java Sea. This battle of the coalition naval forces was illustrative of the problems facing ABDA joint command: integration and command and control of its multinational forces.

The Japanese forces operating in the NEI included 7 aircraft carriers, 1 battleship, 13 heavy cruisers, 6 light cruisers, and 57 destroyers.¹⁵⁶ The battle began at 1700 local time and lasted until after midnight.¹⁵⁷ The ABDA naval units were going to engage an enemy landing forces on Java. The task force set out to sea with very little information and intelligence. Rear Admiral Doorman sent only a vague message to his units as they went towards the Java Sea: “Am proceeding to intercept enemy units. Follow me. Details later.” The overall ABDA naval commander, Vice Admiral Helfrich, sent a message, which failed to clarify the situation: “Continue attacks until enemy destroyed.”¹⁵⁸

The naval ships proceeding to Java included one U.S. naval officer, W.G. Winslow. Winslow, a naval aviator attached to the heavy cruiser USS *Houston*, made observations of the battle from beginning to end. Coalition forces composed of different nations will ultimately produce critics of its leadership from among its components. This force was no different. Nations tend to have different priorities in employing naval forces due to different security environments and concerns. ABDA forces were composed of four different navies, which practiced tactics and operations as single navies, not as unified forces. This factor affected the ability of ABDA forces to maximize its power against the Japanese successively.

Winslow, who lost his plane prior to the battle, watched the task force from the signal bridge as it went to engage the enemy. The composition of the formation was unusual. Naval doctrine of the time stressed the positioning of naval units by type, allowing each to seek suitable ranges for weapons and mutually supporting each other. Instead, the formation of the vessels consisted of the heavy cruisers up front, followed by the light cruisers, and the destroyers in the rear or to the port side of the main column. This formation denied the destroyers the ability to use their torpedoes at longer ranges.¹⁵⁹ New technology unknown to the Allies, however, had given Japanese torpedoes extended range. These Long Lance torpedoes put the Allies at increased risk in surface engagements.¹⁶⁰ Additionally, the Japanese escorts exposed the heavy cruisers to fire and damage prior to the cruisers engaging the main elements of the Japanese strike force. The light cruisers were unable to provide a supporting role to the heavy cruisers because of the unusual formation. Winslow noted the “unorthodox deployment of forces suggested that Doorman knew little about proven naval tactics, or chose to ignore them.

While the fleet steamed to the enemy landing areas, Doorman did not take time to practice integration. The ABDA vessels lacked a tactical communication system and varied in their armament and capabilities. Doorman did not take action to practice tactics and communications, nor was any strategy passed to the vessels prior to engagement.¹⁶¹

Communications hampered the naval units. As mentioned, there was no common tactical circuit. Delivery of communications among units occurred as follows: a shortwave radio transmitter on Doorman’s flagship, the *De Ruyter*, passed orders in Dutch to a Dutch liaison officer onboard *Houston*. The Dutch officer translated the orders and then relayed them to the other American, Australian, and British units. The

officers passed the orders by light or voice radio. A further complication was the British use of flag signals, which no one else in the task force could understand.¹⁶² The factors delayed effective and timely communications, and only acted to undermine command and control.

The battle raged for several hours, resulting in the Japanese tactical victory that enabled their landings on Java. Losses in the battle included the destroyer HMS *Jupiter*, lost to a Dutch minefield. The Dutch Navy forces had laid the minefield the day of the battle but did not inform Doorman.¹⁶³ Additional losses included one of the heavy cruisers which was later sunk (*Exeter*), two light cruisers, including Rear Admiral Doorman and his flagship (*De Ruyter* and *Java*) and two destroyers. ABDA had ceased to exist as a tactical force at the same time it was about to cease to exist as a coalition.

One of the destroyer after action reports summed up the basic problems of the ABDA naval units during the Battle for Java Sea. Commander Henry E. Eccles, commander of the USS *John D. Edwards*, stated it as follows:

The battle was a tragic commentary on the futility of attempting to oppose a powerful, determined, well-equipped and organized enemy by makeshift improvisation. It was evident that the Dutch had little tactical experience: their knowledge of communications was rudimentary; and they went under the assumption that a hastily organized, uncoordinated force of ships, from three navies, could be assembled and taken into a major fleet action after a one-hour conference. It is impossible for anyone who did not go to sea in the Striking Force to comprehend the utter lack, in the Dutch, of any knowledge of tactical organization and employment of forces as a unit. They were 'individual ship' men and went to their deaths with grim foreknowledge.¹⁶⁴

Among the several factors that led to defeat was communications. The ability to command and control of even basic forces was almost impossible. Following the battle of Java Sea, the *Houston* pulled into Tandjungpriok, Java. While pulling into the harbor,

a Japanese seaplane was repeatedly strafing a Dutch naval patrol boat outside the range of *Houston's* anti-aircraft guns. Two British fighter planes, unaware of the strafing and flying overhead, could not be contacted and thus were unable to help.¹⁶⁵ Coordinating air and naval forces is a basic requirement to command and control combined operations. The mix of components from different nations and different services was complex. U.S. Naval forces had difficulty communicating with the U.S. Army, let alone the British RAF. These problems, compounded by the lack of a common war room, only led to more confusion and lack of direction during the campaign.

Poor intelligence was another contributing problem. Following the Java Sea battle, the *Houston* departed from Tandjungpriok, Java. Its orders were to engage the forces invading Java. Dutch reconnaissance aircraft reported the Sunda Strait clear of enemy ships and the *Houston*, with the HMAS *Perth*, sailed that night into a major Japanese task force of over 80 vessels, including eight major surface combatants and additional destroyers, resulting in the sinking of both allied ships.¹⁶⁶

From a military perspective, one can deduce the following from the Java Sea Battle, which provides a case study of ABDA integration. Command communications failure due to infrastructure and multinational requirements led to poor command and control. Intelligence prevented timely and accurate reporting of enemy forces and intentions. F. C. Oosten, in his book *The Battle of Java Sea*, lists two additional elements that led to failure: the first element was lack of combined exercises; the second element was the fact that no joint doctrine existed. The tactical situation and short existence of ABDA, Oosten states, prevented the opportunity for these to occur. Oosten points out “as for communications and fire control the differences between the allied fleets were too

great. There had been no opportunity to come into one doctrine through conferences on those points which are so essential to naval warfare.”¹⁶⁷

General Wavell failed as a commander by placing such emphasis on one fixed geographical point—Singapore. The dispersion of those critical resources for the regions defense allowed them to be easy objectives for the Japanese. The key to ABDA was time. The ability to hold out until more resources arrived, such as airpower, was lost by placing the emphasis on Singapore. Within two weeks of Singapore’s fall, ABDA dissolved due to the lack of an area to defend outside of Java. Wavell also failed to fight as a coalition partner, by trying to meet their needs for defense. The emphasis on his command was on British priorities, at the expense of the Dutch and Australian concerns. Wavell’s focusing on his county’s needs alone failed to appreciate the overall strategic picture, and helped blind him to the potential results of focusing resources on one point for defense (Singapore) as opposed to the entire NEI area.

The ABDA forces were unable to achieve effective force integration. The first means to direct and control forces was poor at best. There was no war room or command center, rather each component fought as individual units with little integration. If the forces had been able to integrate, communications were still inadequate to direct military units. Communications went through multiple mediums and sometimes translation took time. The communications were inadequate for coalition forces engaged in battle against an enemy with excellent command and control.

The coalition lacked a joint doctrine. There were no established methods or processes to guide combat operations. The after action report of Java Sea identified the Dutch as “individual ship” men. The ABDA units and forces were individual units, not a

combined arms force. The Japanese, using combined arms tactics, were able to achieve their objectives rapidly. The inability to train as a force meant that the discovery of deficiencies in their operations could only occur during combat operations. The doctrine was of four nations and four services and meant there was never a coordinated position on tactics.

Finally, logistics were limited. The replacement of aircraft and ships was slow in coming, if they arrived at all. The attrition inflicted on ABDA could not be replaced fast enough to keep pace with the Japanese advance. The supplies were limited and a critical center of gravity for U.S. naval supply and repair operations was located in Darwin, Australia, over 1,200 miles away.

Airpower proved to be the decisive factor that led to ABDA's defeat. The establishment of air superiority in the region gave the Japanese freedom of maneuver against allied forces. Airpower also meant that the ABDA forces lost their ability to maneuver and had to adjust their strategy continually to more defensive operations. The lack of defenses for Allied airbases in the NEI made them vulnerable to attack and seizure. Each area lost to ABDA meant more areas for Japanese airfields to attrite ABDA forces.

The Japanese were able to attain their objectives, while the ABDA coalition lost the NEI. The forces at the end of the campaign had ceased to exist as a fighting force, leaving the Dutch and a few selected allied units to fight to the end. While the forces failed to integrate as an effective force, its failure was not in bravery or courage. All four nations lost heavily in the campaign, shedding blood together to stop the Japanese conquest, becoming a "band of brothers" in their defeat.

¹¹⁶Lt. Commander A. Kroese, Royal Netherlands Navy, *The Dutch Navy at War* (London, England: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1945), 34.

¹¹⁷John Costello, *The Pacific War* (New York: Quill, 1982), 189.

¹¹⁸Archibald Wavell. *Despatch by the Supreme Commander of the ABDA Area to the Combined Chiefs of Staff on Operations in the South-West Pacific* (London, England: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1948), 1-4.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, 3.

¹²⁰Msg, SPENAVO London to OPNAV, 3 January 1942.

¹²¹Wavell, 3.

¹²²*Ibid.*, 4.

¹²³*Ibid.*, 5.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*

¹²⁵*Ibid.*

¹²⁶Kroese, 30.

¹²⁷Wavell, 6-7.

¹²⁸*Ibid.*, 7.

¹²⁹*Ibid.*

¹³⁰*Ibid.*, 7-8.

¹³¹W. G. Winslow, *The Fleet the Gods Forgot* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1994), 32.

¹³²Wavell, 8.

¹³³*Ibid.*, 9.

¹³⁴Costello, 190-1.

¹³⁵*Ibid.*, 191.

¹³⁶United States Strategic Bombing Survey (USSBS), *The Campaigns of the Pacific War* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), 29.

¹³⁷Ronald H. Spector, *Eagle Against the Sun* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 132.

¹³⁸Admiral Thomas Hart, *Narrative of Events of Asiatic Fleet, 8 December 1941-15 February 1942* (Washington, D.C., 1947), Appendix.

¹³⁹Wavell, 12.

¹⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁴¹Msg, ABDACOM to Washington for Combined Chiefs of Staff, 29 January 1942. Serial 00488, no subject.

¹⁴²Msg, Combined Chiefs of Staff to ABDACOM, 30 January 1942. Reference ABDA serial 0058, no subject.

¹⁴³Wavell, 13.

¹⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁴⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶Kroese, 28.

¹⁴⁷USSBS, 15.

¹⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁵⁰W. G. Winslow, *The Ghost That Died at Sunda Strait* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1994), 130.

¹⁵¹Wavell, 15.

¹⁵²Msg, ABDACOM to BRITMAN (for Combined Chiefs of Staff), 22 February 1942. Serial 00155, no subject.

¹⁵³Msg, Chiefs of Staff to Joint Staff Mission, 24 February 1942, Serial 0127A, no subject.

¹⁵⁴Wavell, 16.

¹⁵⁵J. C. Reilly, Jr., "Battle of the Java Sea," in *The Simon and Schuster Encyclopedia of World War II* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 321.

¹⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 321.

¹⁵⁷Winslow, 124.

¹⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 112-3.

¹⁶⁰F. C. van Oosten, *The Battle of the Java Sea* (Annapolis, Maryland: U.S. Naval Institute, 1976), 73.

¹⁶¹Winslow, 113.

¹⁶²*Ibid.*

¹⁶³*Ibid.*, 122.

¹⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 131-132.

¹⁶⁷van Oosten, 72.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The American, British, Dutch, and Australian (ABDA) coalition lasted less than two months. From its inception, ABDA set the stage for its own ultimate failure. The coalition members held different strategies, limited resources, and conflicting interests. The military arm of ABDA was unable to coordinate even basic operations, preventing a successful offense or defense. From command and control to force integration, it never obtained unity of effort. An analysis of this coalition's history is relevant today. The basic questions that set the framework for understanding this short-lived coalition are why ABDA did not work, what could have made it work, and what are future implications for coalition commanders?

The first reason ABDA did not work was different strategic priorities. While a collective defense, each of the nations held different views on what the priorities should be. For the British, Singapore was the center of gravity. The few critical resources in the region, or enroute to the region, were being sent to defend Singapore. ABDA, under British command, pulled resources from its Dutch and Australian allies to the island fortress. General Wavell based his decisions on the defense of Singapore, believing that the NEI's and Australia's defenses were tied to the island. The main fallacy of this strategy is to define a geographic point as a center of gravity.

Centers of gravity, according to U.S. Army Field Manual 3.0 (2001), are "those characteristics, capabilities, or localities as centers from which a military force derives its freedom of action, physical strength, or will to fight." Decisive points, however, are "a

geographic place...that allows commanders to gain a marked advantage over an enemy and greatly influence the outcome of an attack.”¹⁶⁸ Singapore was a decisive point for defense in the NEI, but became a center of gravity as the coalition focused critical resources and pulled from other areas to defend it. The fall of Singapore really meant the eventual fall of the NEI. Once Singapore fell in mid-February, few forces were left to defend the NEI. The NEI fell in early March, for it was unable to defend itself adequately from the Japanese onslaught.

The four component nations all supported the British strategy, with the belief that their priorities and strategies would be supported. The Dutch felt the NEI needed substantial support and that more allied forces should be directed to its defense. The Australians believed that if the NEI were to fall, Northwestern Australia would be next. The Americans were still trying to support the Philippines, but also needed a new base of operations. The NEI served as American commitment to the area and coalition operations. In addition, the Americans also believed that if the NEI were to fall, Australia would be next. Australia would later serve as a military/logistical base for the liberation of the Philippines and the invasion of Japan. Defense in the NEI was a logical step in American operations, which ideally helped relieve pressure on the Philippines, and provided time for the rebuilding of American forces after Pearl Harbor.

General Wavell, ABDA commander, later produced the official report of the command. Wavell indicated his view of NEI defense in his summary of operations: “It might possibly be more prudent here to let the NEI go and concentrate on making Burma and Australia secure . . . from the political point of view it would have been as unthinkable to abandon our stout-hearted Dutch allies without the utmost effort to help

them.” Wavell later also stated his belief that it was the right decision, but that it “cost Burma” and “placed India and Ceylon in danger.”¹⁶⁹ Wavell seemed to be so preoccupied with Singapore and Burma that the NEI was an added burden as opposed to a critical element to allied defense. The rich resources of the NEI made them vulnerable to attack, and a prize for Japan’s war industry. The failure to defend the NEI adequately resulted in their quick capitulation and the end of ABDA.

The second question, what could have made it work, is more difficult to determine. Limited resources made offensive operations extremely difficult and defense of allied forces limited. Strategy issues affected the allocation of forces to the NEI. Australia decided to remove her forces from the Middle East due to a fear of threatened security because of the lack of British support. Britain placed her emphasis on Singapore, which the Americans supported in name only. The Philippines were the Americans main concern, and resources for both were limited. Not only was the coalition divided, the services within the coalition members were at odds. MacArthur and Hart were never able to agree on a unified strategy to employ naval assets. MacArthur felt the allocation of resources to ABDA forces and Australia was setting the stage for his defeat. He wanted and needed Hart to engage the Japanese in the Philippines to stem their advances on Luzon. MacArthur felt the critical place to employ forces would be in the Philippines. Hart, commander of ABDA naval forces, had to utilize his meager forces and was unable to support both, with the exception of submarine resupply. Hart eventually chose ABDA over MacArthur, which resulted in the loss of his fleet and the Philippines.

The replacements of aircraft and ships were slow in coming, if they arrived at all. The attrition inflicted on ABDA occurred too fast to keep pace with the Japanese advance. The supplies were limited and a critical center of gravity for U.S. naval supply and repair operations was located in Darwin, Australia, over 1,200 miles away. Logistics among the host nations was not interchangeable among its forces. The lack of materials and the plethora of coalition requirements for resupply made sustained combat operations difficult if not impossible to maintain.

The Japanese used rapid offense to gain momentum and to deny the Allies a chance to respond. They kept specific timetables and plans to ensure that Allied reinforcements would not be able to resupply the NEI. This strategy forced the ABDA forces to be on the defensive, to focus on keeping sea-lanes open, and to prepare for a response to an invasion. The Japanese plan of converging from east to west on Java encircled the ABDA forces enabling the Japanese to mass their firepower in the culmination of the campaign against the NEI. The strategy also provided security for the Japanese flanks as they proceeded towards the NEI.

The use of airpower enabled the Japanese to cover and support wide areas of military operations. The planners used both land and carrier-based operations that were mutually supporting. This provided the Japanese forces freedom to maneuver in the NEI area. Japan protected its sea forces as they transited to invasion areas and its ground forces had aircraft available for Close Air Support (CAS). Significantly, this airpower also enabled the protection of their invasion forces from Australia-based aircraft. The establishment of Japanese airbases in the area forced Australia to move defensively as opposed to offensively.

The Japanese strategy limited ABDA's ability to respond. The Japanese operations denied ABDA support and reinforcements from Singapore and the Philippines. The Japanese protected their flanks from Allied attack and moved rapidly through the area. The lack of air supremacy meant ABDA was vulnerable on the sea, ground, and air as it engaged the Japanese. The Japanese also had the advantage of having effective combined arms operations. The operations were mutually supporting building on the accomplishments of the other. The mobility of moving from point to point with these forces kept ABDA defenders off balance allowing the Japanese to reach their objectives in rapid fashion. From a logistics standpoint, the operations would culminate in the seizure of the petroleum reserves of the NEI. This meant the Japanese would have resources to defend its new territories and continue offensive operations against Australia or elsewhere as directed. From neutralizing Allied forces, to protecting the flanks, to mobility with airpower and establishing freedom of maneuver, the strategy was highly effective in the invasion and subsequent seizure of the NEI.

Japanese strategy forced ABDA strategy to react to its operations, removed any chance of initiative, and allowed the Japanese to set the conditions for conquest. The United States Strategic Bombing Survey summed up the Japanese strategy and its impact on ABDA:

The campaign once again demonstrated the military advantage of the initiative and mobility. Utilizing surprise attacks made according to a well-conceived plan the Japanese succeeded in bringing superior forces to bear on every objective. By contrast, the Allies were forced to withdraw from one base to another and to reorganize and reestablish communication after every move. This, coupled with the initial lack of coordination between the Allies, prevented a firm and unified stand at any time.¹⁷⁰

Airpower was a limiting factor in ABDA's ability to stem the Japanese advance. If sufficient airpower had been available, the ABDA coalition could have inflicted more damage and would have potentially affected landings. The Japanese air superiority, however, still would have made this a difficult task. Wavell estimated that of all the aircraft promised to his command, forty to fifty percent never arrived.¹⁷¹ The problem was not in aircraft only. Infrastructure to support airfields was wanting throughout the region. Dutch neglect of the infrastructure during the preceding decades of peace now came back to haunt them. The earlier requests for antiaircraft defenses were indicative of the most basic needs of airfields. Wavell even admitted that "aerodromes in southern Sumatra and Java were limited and required considerable development; there was little or no material available for an adequate warning system."¹⁷² Dutch Air Force efforts to assist the British in Malaya and Singapore had reduced their numbers and effectiveness following the fall of both areas. The lack of airpower and the inability to interdict successfully Japanese air, ground, and naval forces invading and enroute to the area helped set the stage of defeat for ABDA. ABDA simply did not have the resources available for victory, and if it had, its command structure likely would have impeded its success.

ABDA operations and command structure reveal key deficiencies in coalition operations. The deficiencies include poor integration of military forces, no joint doctrine, no coalition training, inadequate command and control (C2), and little or no intelligence. First, no doctrine existed among the ABDA forces. Each nation operated in accordance with its own military doctrine. The doctrine was of four nations and four services and meant there was never a coordinated position on tactics. Second, the Allies never

conducted joint training, although they were concerned prior to war about the Japanese threat and agreed to support one another once conflict began. The inability to train as a force meant that the discovery of deficiencies in their operations could only occur during combat operations.

Third, the coalition creation and its limitations resulted in an ineffective command structure that maintained national command of component forces but failed to synchronize all of the elements of power. The establishment of geographically separated headquarters only served to lessen ABDA's effectiveness of control of forces. The ABDA forces were unable to achieve effective force integration. The first means to direct and control forces was poor at best. There was no war room or command center, rather each component fought as individual units with little integration. Even if the forces had integrated, communications were still inadequate to direct military units. Communications went through multiple mediums and sometimes translation took time. The communications were inadequate for forces comprised of multiple nations engaged in battle against an enemy of one nation with excellent command and control.

The Allied forces never achieved a basic principle of command. They never obtained Unity of Command. Unity of Command implies unity of effort among its elements. The ABDA Coalition was unable to achieve successful unity of effort due to differing objectives and strategies of component members. The coalition established a framework for command in separate components as opposed to a unified force, resulting in ineffective control of Allied forces and hindered its ability to operate as a military force. As a result, combined arms operations did not occur among the ABDA components, allowing the Japanese to excel in their use of combined forces.

The implications for future coalitions include unity of command, common strategy, force integration, training, and doctrine. Unity of command needs to occur among components. Strategy has to be one of a common purpose or goal. Conflicting goals and strategies affect the ability of a coalition to operate as a unified command. The nations involved in coalitions need a common command structure. Separate coalition forces do not maximize combat power. Combined arms require integration of military components from air, ground, and sea, to complement their power on the battlefield or sea. Command structure requires an effective communications system among components. A unified communications system enables the commander to direct component forces and provide appropriate combined arms support as needed, allowing him to maximize the power under his command. Training among coalition nations identifies problems of integration and allows time for improvement. Training also helps in coordinating tactics among separate nations with different capabilities and doctrine.

For a coalition to be unified, its members must agree. Elements of a successful coalition include unified objectives, planning, command and control, and combined arms operations. These elements create unity of purpose, for which a coalition is formed. ABDA was never able to agree on strategy until it agreed the NEI was lost. Future coalitions must have their house unified before they can meet the threat at the door.

¹⁶⁸FM-3.0, *Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army, June 2001), 5-7.

¹⁶⁹Archibald Wavell. *Despatch by the Supreme Commander of the ABDA Area to the Combined Chiefs of Staff on Operations in the South-West Pacific*. (London, England: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1948), 17-9.

¹⁷⁰United States Strategic Bombing Survey (USSBS), *The Campaigns of the Pacific War* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), 32.

¹⁷¹Wavell, 7.

¹⁷²Ibid., 7-8.

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