

In December, the Thirteenth as part of an offensive force combining aircraft of the Army, Navy, Marine, and Royal New Zealand Air Force, began the campaign to knock out Rabaul, the enemy's principal base in the South and Southwest Pacific. Throughout the greater part of 1942 and 1943, Rabaul had been hit by the Fifth Air Force. It remained, however, the main center of enemy activity in the theater. Allied bases had now been established close enough to Rabaul to permit fighter escort; the Fifth had transferred its operations to the west. The Thirteenth and other members of the South Pacific air team were left to administer the knock-out punch.

In January 1944, the Air Force headquarters was moved to Guadalcanal and Major General Hubert R. Harmon assumed command. Throughout January and February and a part of March, the heavies concentrated on Rabaul, and at the same time aided amphibious forces in their invasion of Green Island and the Admiralties in February. With the occupation of Green Island and the Admiralties, the Allies gained control of the Bismarck Sea. Rabaul was effectively cut off and rendered strategically impotent.

In late March, with the neutralization of Rabaul completed and the acquisition of a forward staging base at Green Island, the heavy bombers turned their attention to the Caroline Islands. On March 29th our Liberators made the first land-based attack on Truk, key point of enemy defenses in the Central Pacific.

The first attack on Truk was part of a series of strikes designed to protect the flank of a powerful naval task force which was striking at Palau, Yap and Woleai at the same time. It proved to be perhaps the most successful mission of the year. When the day's score was tallied, 21 hangars, shop buildings and warehouses had been destroyed or severely damaged and 37 direct hits were made on the concrete runway rendering it unserviceable; 49 enemy planes were destroyed on the ground, and in a bitter 45 minute fight with an estimated 75 enemy fighters, 31 were shot down, 12 probably destroyed and 10 damaged.

As the reduction of Truk continued, several squadrons of Liberators moved up to the newly acquired base in the Admiralty Islands. Commencing 18 April, in support of the amphibious landings which were to take place at Hollandia and Aitape on the northern coast of New Guinea on 22 April, they began a series of devastating strikes against Woleai which continued until 1 May.

The last of the heavies arrived in the Admiralties in May, becoming as did the earlier units, part of the Thirteenth Air Task Force, commanded by Major General St. Clair Streett.

During May the primary objective of the Task Force was to soften up Biak Island in the Schouten group, preparatory to invasion on 27 May by Allied amphibious forces. On D-Day the Thirteenth was joined by the Fifth Air Force to blast the beach defenses just before the first wave of the invading forces swept in.

Immediately after the Biak landings the heavies redirected their attention to the Carolines, hitting Truk, Woleai and other targets as part of coordinated plan of combined operations for the invasion of Saipan on 15 June. When our Saipan operation was threatened by a Japanese naval task force operating North of Yap, the heavies were called upon to hit any Japanese warships which sought refuge or fuel in Yap Harbor. Finding none,