

QUICK OVERVIEW OF THE JAPANESE AIRFIELD ON YAP ISLAND AND THE AMERICAN ATTACKS TO DESTROY IT...



In early 1944 the Japanese began construction of a large airfield on Yap to create a transit point for Japanese air reinforcements as the allies rapidly advanced westward in New Guinea and toward the Philippines and the Japanese home islands. Due to its strategic location east of the Philippines between the Palau Islands and the Marianas, Yap was a key Japanese base for launching attacks against pending Allied invasion forces. This is a brief summary of the history of the Japanese airfield and the American attacks on Yap during WWII that resulted in the destruction of the airfield.

April 1944: The first American raid against Yap Island is launched. US carrier planes from Task Force 58 under the command of the Fifth Fleet (Admiral Raymond A. Spruance) raided Yap with no losses. The Yap airfield was found under construction with no planes yet present.

May 1944: Japanese order planes to Yap, designated as a dispersal base for many Japanese air units including fighters, night fighters, dive bombers and bombers. The Japanese were preparing for a decisive engagement with American carrier task forces and invasion fleets that were expected to follow up their success in attacking Japan's island bases and invasions in the Gilbert and Marshall Islands. The Japanese forces could no longer match the Americans carrier for carrier and began using Yap as an aircraft base, hoping it would help make up the difference in carrier strength. Yap was well-placed to play a significant role in upcoming engagements. Japanese planes begin to arrive on Yap in late May and early June 1944. The aircraft included Zero fighters, Suisei dive bombers, Gekko night fighters, Ginga fast twin-engine bombers and L2D2 Libby transport planes.

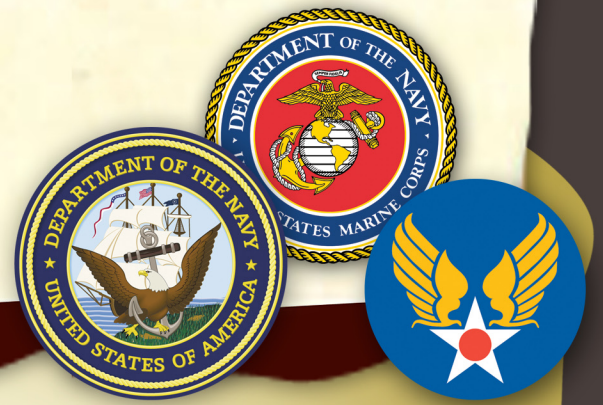
June 5, 1944: Three PB4Y-1Ps from the US Marine unit VMD-254 overfly Yap to take photographs from 18,000 feet. They observed about 30 fighters parked in rows and numerous other aircraft in revetment areas around the airfield. The American forces start preparing a campaign against Yap to attack and destroy the airfield and infrastructure. The campaign plans include US Army Air Force bomber attacks, Navy carrier attacks and a September 1944 planned invasion.

June 12-14, 1944: The first US Army Air Force B-24 bombers from bases in the Admiralty Islands begin launching raids against Yap Island. The B-24 raids take 13 hours to fly to Yap and return to base. The 13th Air Force initiated the Yap campaign on the night of June 12-13. Subsequent raids will be during the day for most of the Yap campaign. The B-24s of the 5th Air Force also began their attacks on Yap with a night raid. The first 5th Air Force strike was largely abortive and the first B-24 was lost on June 14th from enemy action near Yap.

June 17, 1944: On June 17, 1944 the largest of the Japanese raids from Yap was mounted when 31 Zeros, 17 Suiseis, and 2 Gingas attacked several American escort carriers near the island. Several American ships were damaged causing casualties.



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June 22, 1944: To stop Japanese attacks from Yap against the advancing American forces, the American 13th Air Force bombers starts a large-scale day bombing campaign against Yap on June 22nd with 33 B-24s from the 307th and 5th Bombardment Group. The Japanese were not expecting a strike by unescorted land-based bombers over so great a distance (over 1,000 statute miles). Forty-four Japanese fighters, four twin-engine bombers and a dive bomber were photographed on the Yap airfield and 12 were destroyed and eight badly damaged. One Japanese twin-engine bomber was observed engulfed in a bomb blast as it took off.

June-August 1944: US Army Air Force B-24 bombers from bases in the Admiralty Islands launch almost daily raids against Yap throughout the summer of 1944. Most days saw 20-35 American B-24s attacking Yap. The 307th Bomb Group and 5th Bomb Group flew joint missions against Yap until early July when they began attacking Yap on alternate days. The Japanese navy anti-aircraft (AA) units on Yap returned fire with several 12.7cm and 8cm anti-aircraft guns. The Japanese army also had four 75mm anti-aircraft guns on Yap. All these weapons could reach the B-24s normal attack altitude of 10,000 to 14,000 feet. Numerous B-24s suffered damage from AA fire during the campaign and a number of bombers are shot down. The Japanese sent Zeros and other fighters to intercept the B-24s during the early part of the campaign. Both sides suffered numerous losses. B-24s were lost on Yap raids on the following dates:

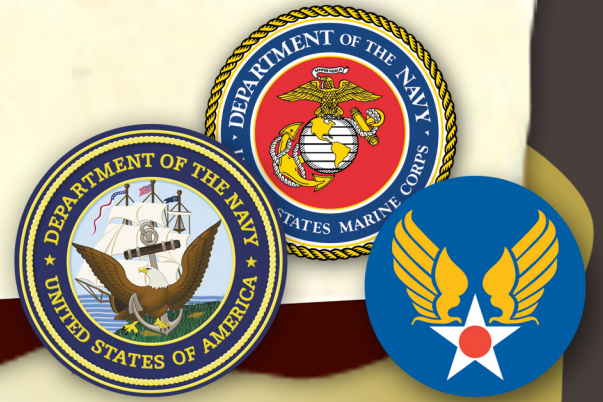
- June 13, 1944 (crashed in the sea)
- June 14, 1944 (crashed in the sea)
- June 23, 1944 (crashed in the sea)
- June 25, 1944 (showdown over airfield by a fighter and crashed near reef)
- July 5, 1944 (crashed in the sea)
- July 13, 1944 (crashed in the sea)
- July 15, 1944 (three B-24s crashed in the sea south of Yap)
- July 19, 1944 (crashed in the sea)
- August 9, 1944 (crashed in the sea)
- August 10, 1944 (shot down on Yap harbor and two American's captured)



July 1944: While the B-24 raids took a toll on the American planes, the Japanese lost numerous aircraft and pilots on the ground and in the air engagements. By early July 1944 the Japanese had only an assorted collection of fighters capable of opposing American bomber raids. The remnants of Japanese air groups were withdrawn by late July. Only a small group of survivors from various Japanese air groups remained to defend Yap. After the end of July, the B-24s never again encountered Japanese fighters over Yap. They still had to contend with the AA fire but the active Japanese fighter defense had been eliminated.

July 26-28, 1944: US carrier planes from Navy Task Force 58 return to raid Yap but find the Army Air Force B-24 heavy bombers had left few targets undamaged. The Yap airfield, port installations and Colonia (called Yap Town by the Americans) are all heavily damaged by tons of bombs dropped by the large bombers. There was no aerial opposition to these American carrier attacks; however, numerous American navy planes are lost due to AA fire and mechanical failures including two Hellcats, two Helldivers and an Avenger.

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August 10, 1944: The final B-24 is lost over Yap when it becomes lost on the way to the island and arrives 30 minutes after the rest of its 307th Bomb Group has already left the area. A gunner from another squadron reported hearing the following message: "Am going down in flames over the target." Two of the 11-member Anthony crew are captured by the Japanese near the mouth of the harbor. One of the men captured, Sgt. Hilary Gilbert, was shot down and rescued on July 17, 1944 after going down with the Kizer B-24 crew on a mission to Yap. He was shot down a second time in less than a month, both over Yap, with the Anthony crew.

August 13, 1944: Three US Navy UDT men from the submarine USS Burrfish are captured on Yap Island while performing reconnaissance on the island for the upcoming invasion.

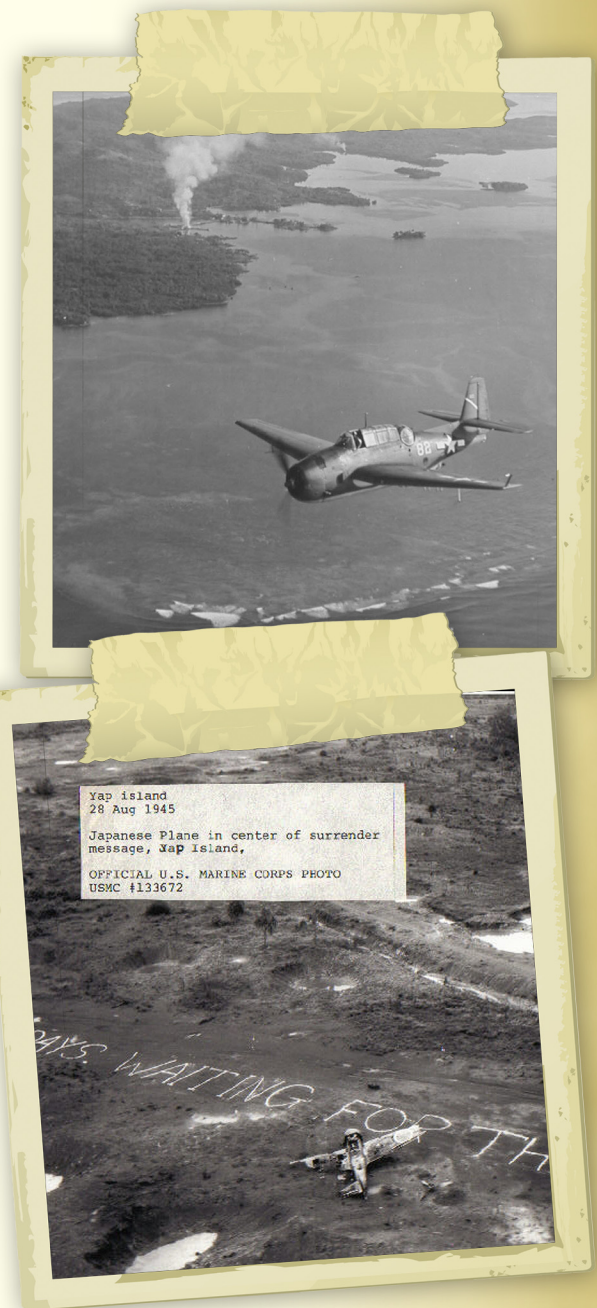
August 1944 to August 1945: As it became clear that the Marianas were irretrievably lost, the Japanese scaled back their remaining air power in the central Pacific to build up the Philippines. In allocating their remaining air strength, planes were assigned to Palau but none to Yap. The 20 or so Japanese aircraft dispersed around the Yap airfield were all unserviceable and were frequent targets of American attacks.

September 6-8, 1944: US carrier planes from Navy Task Force 58 return to raid Yap for the third time but once again find the American B-24 heavy bombers had left few targets undamaged. There was no Japanese aerial opposition to these attacks. The attacks are a prelude to a planned invasion of Yap on September 13, 1944. Although Yap is heavily battered, the Japanese continue to put up a fight using anti-aircraft guns. Three American F6F Hellcats are lost on the first pass of what is thought to be a milk run on September 6th. Over a three-day period, four Hellcats and a Helldiver are lost.

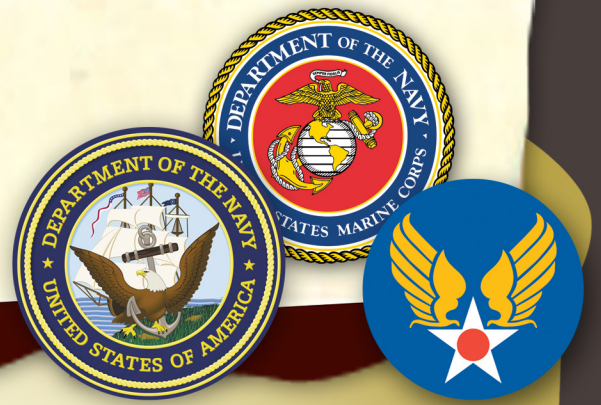
September 13, 1944: Admiral Halsey recommended that the proposed invasions of Yap be cancelled in favor of a direct strike on Leyte (closer to Manila, and to Tokyo). With General MacArthur's concurrence, Halsey's new plan is approved by President Roosevelt and other top Allied planners then in conference at Quebec. Yap is never invaded and left to rot on the vine through suppressive attacks until the end of the war.

October 1944: American Marine fighter squadrons flying Corsairs begin attacking Yap from the newly acquired air base on Peleliu Island. The battered Japanese units on Yap continue rebuilding efforts on the airfield and installations, but they are repeatedly attacked by Marine Corsairs. Over seven American Corsairs are shot down over Yap and numerous planes are forced to ditch off of Yap.

November 1944-August 1945: American Navy and Marine planes from Peleliu, Ulithi, Guam and Saipan attack Yap daily. The Yap airfield, port, lighthouse, Colonia and other Japanese-held areas of Yap are repeatedly pounded by bombs, bullets and torpedoes. The Americans continue to lose planes and men including Hellcats, Avengers and Corsairs. Passing US Navy ships repeatedly pound Yap with heavy guns as they pass offshore until the end of the war.



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March 25, 1945: The last Japanese offensive action that involved Yap was indirect and almost accidental. On March 11, 1945 twenty four Yokosuka P1Y Ginga "Frances" attack bombers took off on a one-way "tokko" (suicide) mission to Ulithi from Kanoya, Japan. As a result of a navigational error and unexpected head winds, they found themselves near Yap Island, not Ulithi. Three P1Ys of the Special Attack Unit arrived at Yap. One P1Y landed at the damaged airfield around the bomb craters. One P1Y failed in landing at the airfield and was damaged; and one P1Y ditched off of Rumung, Yap. Only two P1Ys, instead of the original 24 bombers, reached Ulithi, both well after dark. The American ships in the Ulithi harbor did not detect the approaching Japanese planes. Many of the ships' crews were relaxing watching movies on the flight decks of the carriers. A P1Y slammed into the starboard side of the American carrier, the USS Randolph, causing significant damage— killing 26 men and wounding another 105. As a result of the Ulithi raid, American attacks against Yap were increased.

August 15, 1945: The surrender of Japan in August 1945 brought World War II to a close. Although some isolated commands and personnel from Japan's far-flung forces throughout Asia and the Pacific islands refused to surrender for months and years after, the Japanese on Yap immediately wrote a message in English on the Yap airfield with painted stones stating that they were waiting for orders from their commanders in Palau to surrender.

September 5, 1945: Japanese surrender Yap Island in ceremony on board destroyer Tillman (DD-641). Although the Japanese surrendered Yap, the Americans allowed the Japanese to keep their arms and continue to rule Yap until December 7, 1945 when the first American flag was raised over Yap.

December 8, 1945: Japanese guards are relieved and replaced by Americans. The Americans take control of Yap and surrounding islands from the Japanese. American records show that 4408 Japanese remain on Yap as of December 1945. Arrangements were made for the Japanese to be evacuated from Yap via repatriation ships back to Japan.

December-January 1945: Remaining Japanese are evacuated from Yap. American engineers repair and begin using the former Japanese airfield on Yap. Japanese arms and equipment are gathered from the island and dumped into the ocean south of the harbor.



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