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The New Guinea Campaign: A New Perspective Through the Use of Oral Histories



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Abstract

Over the past two decades, historians have begun using oral histories to reinterpret the history of World War II. Earlier historians have relied heavily on official documents, journalists' accounts and the letters, diaries, and memoirs of commanders and staff officers, leaving out the experiences of the common soldier. Oral histories have provided more detailed, personal, and emotional accounts of WWII than the written records. My research combines the oral histories of the 32nd Infantry Division, the Red Arrow Division, with written sources in order to gain new perspectives and insight into the soldiers' experiences in WWII during the New Guinea campaign.

The New Guinea Campaign: A New Perspective Through the Use of Oral Histories

As I was walking through the dense jungle, I hiked through the kunai grass; it was razor sharp grass that grew from two to twelve feet high. I was leading men on a mission to take a Japanese pillbox, and I saw a path that was cut through the kunai grass. I thought, "Why am I going through this tall grass? I'll go where I can see," so I went down the path. Then all of a sudden it dawned on me that this was a pre-cut fire lane and that a Japanese machine gun was training in on me from the other side. I instinctively dove for the other side and as I did they cut loose with their machine guns. A bullet hit me in my arm and leg and another ricocheted off the stock of my rifle that luckily lay across my chest. All I could think about was that I knew I was hit.¹

This is an account from an oral history with Sergeant Robert Hartmen of the 126th Infantry Regiment in the 32nd Infantry Division. He is recalling the Battle of Buna, which began in November of 1942 and was part of the New Guinea Campaign, one of the longest and most grueling campaigns fought by United States ground forces in World War II. It began on September 20, 1942 and lasted until November 10, 1944.² New Guinea's location off the northern coast of Australia and its status as the second largest island in the world made it an ideal location for Japanese attack, and the hard-won Allied victory there helped to make the final victory possible.³ Despite its importance, the New Guinea Campaign has become one of WWII's forgotten episodes. The use



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¹ Robert Hartmen, oral history, Michigan Military History Institute (MMHI).

² The 32nd Division Veteran Association, 32nd Infantry Division, *The Red Arrow in World War II*, <http://www.32nd-division.org/history/ww2/32ww2.html>.

³ Harry A. Gailey, *MacArthur Strikes Back: Decision at Buna, New Guinea 1942-1943* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 2000), 9.

of oral histories makes it possible to do justice to the New Guinea campaign and the efforts of the men who fought it.

Over the past two decades, historians have begun to utilize oral histories to reinterpret the events of World War II. The Veterans History Project (VHP), established in 2000 by the Library of Congress (LOC), has expanded these efforts by promoting the collection and preservation of the memories of America's wartime veterans. Oral histories provide personal details that are not found in written records. The oral histories of the 32nd Infantry Division, more commonly known as the Red Arrow Division, add a personal perspective to aspects of the campaign that have been typically ignored or overlooked in the existing written histories. These new details help to explain the course and outcome of the campaign. Above all, the oral histories shed light on the soldiers' training, their incessant struggles with the difficult terrain, their relationships with the Australian allies, and their sufferings from tropical diseases. They not only add detail to existing accounts, but also correct distortions and outright errors in those accounts, making it possible to produce a more complete and accurate picture of the campaign.

The Red Arrow Division, which fought in World War I and World War II, originally began as a blended National Guard unit with men from Michigan and Wisconsin. The Division had three regiments that fought during the New Guinea Campaign: the 126th, 127th, and 128th Infantry Regiments. According to an oral history with Sergeant Robert Hartmen of the 126th

Infantry Regiment, the division had twelve companies in it from across Michigan, from Coldwater to Grand Rapids and Grand Haven to Ionia.⁴ The Red Arrow Division was reactivated in October 1940, and the men were sent to train at Camp Beauregard, Louisiana. In February 1941, they were sent to Camp Livingston, Louisiana.⁵ The Red Arrow Division was one of the first National Guard units to be called up to active federal service. As a National Guard unit, they were not required to serve outside of the western hemisphere or for more than twelve months anywhere else. It took a congressional bill to relax the restrictions and extend the service dates of the Red Arrow Division. This bill was passed in August 1941, by a slim one-vote margin.⁶ After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States began preparations to send troops overseas to fight. The Red Arrow Division was shipped to Fort Devens, Massachusetts to prepare for an early departure to Northern Ireland, but shortly after arrival at Fort Devens, their orders changed. Instead, the Red Arrow Division was sent to California and on April 22, 1942, it set sail for Australia.⁷ The division landed in Adelaide, South Australia and was transported halfway across the continent to Camp Cable in Brisbane for more training before it was ordered to New Guinea on September 13, 1942.⁸ The Red Arrow Division ended World War II with a total of 654 days in combat, which rivaled any other combat unit in America's history.⁹

There are discrepancies between the written texts and Red Arrow veterans' oral histories when examining whether the men had training, and how much of

it they had. According to the majority of written histories, the men received little general training and no jungle warfare training before being sent to New Guinea. An official Army commentary stated,

It was largely an army of amateurs in which many officers were occupied chiefly in learning how to be officers, and the men were being trained with scant equipment, and without realization, on their part, of the dead seriousness of the task ahead.¹⁰

According to Harry Gailey, author of *MacArthur Strikes Back Decision at Buna: New Guinea 1942-1943*, the 32nd Division was unlucky to be selected to operate in New Guinea because none of their training prepared them for the environment.¹¹ The official division history notes, "The 32d Division's composition as it began its field training was basically the same as it had been during World War I."¹²

On the other hand, the oral histories from the Red Arrow veterans who served in the New Guinea Campaign reveal that the soldiers did receive jungle warfare training once they arrived in Australia and New Guinea. Red Arrow veteran Wellington Francis Homminga explains that the training was similar in both places, but the change in the terrain made a significant impact on their training. While in Brisbane, they were training at Sandy Creek, and they had general training with rifles, machine guns, grenades, terrain maneuvers, and jungle warfare. He explains that the jungle warfare training increased once they

⁴ Robert Hartmen.

⁵ Public Relations Office, 32nd Infantry Division, *13,000 Hours*, 4.

⁶ Major General H. W. Blakeley, *The 32nd Infantry Division in World War II* (Nashville: The Battery Press, 1957), 10-11.

⁷ Blakeley, 20.

⁸ Blakeley, 33.

⁹ Blakeley, inside cover.

¹⁰ Blakeley, 9.

¹¹ Gailey, 102.

¹² Blakeley, 10.

arrived in Brisbane, Australia. There they were sent out into the Blue Gum woods with a series of compass readings, and they had to find their way back. They used the compass to find a specific area or person that was designated as their goal. In his oral history, Homminga compares this training to the training the soldiers received immediately after arriving in New Guinea. He states, "You walked into the jungle and you immediately did not know where you were, the only thing you had to go by was the compass headings."¹³ He says that in Australia the soldiers at least had some sense of where they were going, but in New Guinea they could wander around for hours in the jungle without knowing where they were. Homminga's oral history reveals that the men did receive training that was related to jungle warfare and that they were trained on how to venture through the jungles of New Guinea. These insights, revealed through oral histories, at least partially contradict what the written histories, such as the official history, assert about the men's training.

The second issue that the text draws attention to is in the official written history of the 32nd Infantry Division where it examines General Eichelberger's (Commander of the Eighth Army of which the 32nd was a part) controversial book, *Our Jungle Road to Tokyo* where he writes:

In Washington I had read General MacArthur's estimates of his two infantry divisions, [32nd and 41st] and these reports and our own inspections had convinced my staff and me that the American troops were in no sense ready for jungle warfare.

I told Generals MacArthur and Sutherland, MacArthur's Chief of Staff, that I thought the 32d Division was not sufficiently trained to meet the Japanese veterans on equal terms.¹⁴

According to an oral history with Red Arrow veteran Stephen Janicki, while the soldiers were not fully trained for jungle warfare, they were somewhat prepared for Japanese tactics because of the instructions they received from the Australians. While the soldiers were in Brisbane, Australian officers came to their camp and trained them on Japanese tactics and operations. Janicki recalls the Australian officers telling them to be on alert because the Japanese were cunning, ruthless, and that they were everywhere, including in the trees. The officers explained that the Japanese would tie themselves to trees, which meant that the soldiers had to watch both the ground and the jungle canopy in order to defend themselves from the cunning Japanese. Later in Janicki's oral history, he refers to his training and recalls that they realized that what the Australians had told them was true, that the Japanese were in the trees, so they began to fire upon the trees while in combat.¹⁵ Janicki's oral history adds new insight into the wartime experiences of the Red Arrow Division. While the written histories portray the troops as lacking and incapable because of insufficient training, the oral histories reveal that the training the men received helped them while they were involved in action. This shows that while the soldiers may have been undertrained, the limited jungle training that they did have was of value to them.

There are two main examples seen in the descriptions of the jungle terrain that lack detail, oversimplify, and do not draw conclusions about how it affected the soldiers while in battle. First, written histories tend to generalize the hardships of the terrain, glossing over the effects it had on the soldiers' fighting conditions. Authors like Samuel Milner in his book *Victory in Papua, The War in the Pacific* fail to recognize how the terrain affected the men. He writes, "The terrain, as varied as it is difficult, is a military nightmare. Towering saw-toothed mountains, densely covered by mountain forest and rain forest..."¹⁶ This statement draws attention to the problematic terrain, but it fails to recognize and make any connections to how it affected the soldiers who were fighting a war in the middle of it. Author Harry Gailey also uses such broad statements in his book, *MacArthur Strikes Back Decision at Buna: New Guinea 1942-1943* when he writes:

The area around Buna was dominated by the Girua River, which emptied into the bay through several channels. One of these, Entrance Creek, wound its way between the village and the government station. To the east was a huge swamp formed by the backup of the river over the low-lying ground. These natural obstacles alone would make it difficult for troops moving toward Buna from the interior.¹⁷

This written account observes that the terrain caused problems for the troops, but it does not explain how the terrain

¹³ Wellington Francis Homminga, oral history, MMHI.

¹⁴ Blakeley, 25.

¹⁵ Stephen Janicki, oral history, MMHI.

¹⁶ Samuel Milner, *Victory in Papua, The War in the Pacific*, (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1957), 56.

¹⁷ Gailey, 37.

affected the soldiers themselves. Milner also over generalizes why the terrain was a military nightmare. He writes,

It rained steadily during the preceding few weeks, and the heavy tropical downpour continued....Except for a few abandoned plantations and mission stations, the corridor was a sodden welter of jungle and swamp, an utter nightmare for any force operating in it.¹⁸

With details such as these, the reader is left questioning what sort of a nightmare was it for the actual common soldiers, and what were their experiences like in this nightmare? The written texts document that the terrain was so miserable that it could be explained as a military nightmare, but they do not examine how it directly affected the soldiers.

Through the use of the Red Arrow accounts the necessary details that are not seen in the written histories are used to help interpret how the hardships of the terrain affected the men while in battle. For example, according to the veterans, the rivers caused several problems. Hartmen explains that crossing the rivers in New Guinea could be easy, but was often quite difficult. He describes the river during flood season as being especially dangerous because it was easy to lose one's balance with a full pack and rifle. Hartmen also describes the troubles of being in a watery terrain in regards to their foxholes. His description is that it would rain two times a day, and they were between the mountains and the ocean in a spot where the land was low and the jungle was thick. There they would dig

their foxholes when the tide was out, and when it came back in their holes would fill up with six to seven inches of water.¹⁹ Homminga also tells about the trouble the soldiers incurred because of swampy conditions that they had to deal with, recalling that they were in swamps with water up to their knees for three to four days at a time and that they would sleep in them, eat in them, and relieve themselves in them because they had nowhere else to go. He also explains how at one point after spending days going through the swamps he stopped on dry land, and when he took his shoes off for the first time after being soaked through for days on end, his skin came off with them.²⁰ The oral histories thus reveal more detailed information than the written histories do, going beyond simply stating that the rivers and swamps caused difficulties to showing how they did.

The second major discrepancy seen between the written and oral histories is an oversimplification on the hardships and negative effects of the jungle terrain and the soldiers' continuing ability to fight. Written histories typically oversimplify the problems of hiking through the terrain. In *MacArthur's Jungle War: The 1944 New Guinea Campaign* Stephen Taaffe states:

New Guinea's remote and hostile terrain challenged an American military establishment that emphasized firepower, technology, simplicity, mobility, and material superiority. In order to win the campaign, MacArthur had to overcome not only the Japanese but also the big island's horrendous topography and climate.²¹

This statement identifies general problems, but Taaffe does not explain these problems specifically. The oral histories again reveal what such problems meant to the soldiers and how they affected the course of the campaign. For example, when dealing with the issue of mobility, Red Arrow veteran Homminga explains that the jungle trails were extremely muddy and went up and down cliffs that were at seventy-five degree angles.²² Hartmen also describes the difficulties of these muddy cliffs. He states, "It was a nightmare. We would take three steps forward and we would slide two steps back."²³ Both men also describe the difficulties of sight in a dense jungle. Hartmen says that the troops could not see twenty to thirty feet in front of them and that this caused problems because they never knew who was shooting at them or whom they were shooting at. Veteran Stephen Janicki also goes into detail about how the lack of visibility because of the terrain affected their mobility. He describes the field of vision as being limited to two feet and that the jungle was overgrown. He said that the soldiers never knew which way the bullets were coming from, and they would holler out to each other, "It is coming from the right!" or "It is coming from the left!"²⁴ These oral history accounts provide richer descriptions of how the terrain affected the troops while in action. The written histories state that there were problems, but they do not explain how these problems arose, or how the men coped with them. Through the use of oral histories the reasoning and evidence for why the troop's mobility was hindered becomes clear.

¹⁸ Milner, 82.

¹⁹ Hartmen.

²⁰ Homminga.

²¹ Stephen Taaffe, *MacArthur's Jungle War: The 1944 New Guinea Campaign* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 5.

²² Homminga.

²³ Hartmen.

²⁴ Janicki.

While most written histories do not utilize oral history accounts, Gailey does effectively use a total of five oral histories in *MacArthur Strikes Back*. In an interview with First Sergeant Paul Lutjens describing how the effects of the terrain impeded the soldiers when they were hiking to Jaure, a location in New Guinea, Gailey writes:

It was one green hell to Jaure. We went up and down continuously; the company would be stretched over two to three miles. We'd start at six every morning by cooking rice or trying to. Two guys would work together. If they could start a fire, which was hard because the wood was wet even when you cut deep into the center of the log, they'd mix a little bully beef into a canteen cup with rice, to get the starchy taste out of it. Sometimes we'd take turns blowing on sparks trying to start a fire, and keep it up for two hours without success. I could hardly describe the country. It would take five or six hours to go a mile; edging along cliff walls, hanging on to vines, up and down, up and down. The men got weaker; guys began to lag back....An officer stayed at the end of the line to keep driving the stragglers. There wasn't any way of evacuating to the rear. Men with sprained ankles hobbled along as well as they could, driven on by fear of being left behind.²⁵

Gailey's use of this oral history gives personal details about why the men had troubles with mobility. It shows how the watery conditions made it difficult on

the men, not only physically, but with the tasks of cooking as well. This oral history gives the necessary narrative for the reader to understand why the terrain was difficult for the troops to maneuver. Gailey's use of oral histories and interviews are exceptional, and they help provide richer context in regards to how events or obstacles such as the terrain affected the troops while in combat. While Gailey does not cite oral histories often in his account of the New Guinea Campaign, the small number of examples he does cite clearly demonstrate the value of oral histories. The oral histories offer evidence on why the terrain caused problems in mobility. They describe why the obstacles in the terrain such as steep cliffs, mud, water, swamps, and overgrown jungle slowed the men down, which affected their fighting conditions. The oral history excerpt that Gailey used provides evidence that these personal accounts add new perspectives and insight into why the terrain affected the troops and how it affected them.

Through the use of first-hand oral history accounts a new perspective is also given in regards to the American and Australian soldiers' relationships. The oral histories of the Red Arrow veterans provide a more accurate, clearer picture when examining the complex nature of the American and Australian soldiers' interactions. Written histories like Gailey's *MacArthur Strikes Back* tend to focus on the friction between the Australian and American soldiers. Gailey writes that the relation between off-duty American and Australian servicemen was vexing.²⁶ His book focuses on such incidents as one which occurred on November 26,

1942 when U.S. Military Police and Australian soldiers clashed outside of Brisbane, Australia. The result was that one Australian soldier was killed and nine were wounded. The following day, Australian troops randomly attacked American soldiers, which ended with twenty-one injured. This written text emphasizes, "The blending together of U.S. and Australian systems did not work well."²⁷ When Gailey examines the American and Australian officers' and soldiers' attitudes toward each other, he uses secondary sources to conclude that the antipathy felt by individual soldiers extended to the officers as well.²⁸ In addition Gailey writes, "Contrary to the myths that developed in the years after the war, they [off-duty American and Australian servicemen] did not like one another."²⁹ On the other hand, oral histories expose a different primary perspective. They reveal that the relationships were positive, rather than the vexing relationships that the written texts portray.

The Red Arrow veteran's oral histories have provided a more accurate, clearer picture when examining the complex nature of the American and Australian soldiers' relationships. The oral histories reveal that the common everyday soldiers did get along well with each other and were even helpful to one another. Hartmen's oral history examines their interactions, and he concludes that the Auzzies were good people, they were terrific fighters, and they got along well with the soldiers, especially in New Guinea. He states, "They were darn good men."³⁰ He also goes into depth about how the Australians and Americans worked well together, unlike

²⁵ Gailey, 108-109.

²⁶ Gailey, 155.

²⁷ Gailey, 156.

²⁸ Gailey, 156.

²⁹ Gailey, 155.

³⁰ Hartmen.

what the written texts document. Hartmen tells how the Australians gave the Americans advice on how to fight. They told them to keep their heads down and to follow their common sense. Red Arrow veteran Erwin Veneklase also goes into depth on the Australian soldiers. Veneklase describes how the Australians gave them helpful advice. At one point in New Guinea, an Australian soldier told him, "Don't shoot the Japanese, let him go by and then you hit them in the back of the head with a gun...take your knife and cut their throat, that don't make a sound."³¹ This may sound like gruesome advice, but it was something that could save the American soldiers' lives. The oral histories show that the relation between the Americans and their Australian allies was amiable and helpful. Janicki says, "We went into Brisbane and the Australian officers came in and told us how the Japanese operated."³² Janicki also explains how the Australian's advice helped save their lives. He says that while they were training in Australia, the Australians had given them life saving advice about the necessity of watching both ahead of them and above them. After active combat in New Guinea he recalls, "They realized what the Australians had told them was true about the Japanese tying themselves in the trees."³³ Many of the Red Arrow veterans respected the Australians because they recognized the hardships they were going through without receiving much repayment. Veneklase states, "I would say I have the highest regards for the Australian people. I was making more in the service than the guys in Australia were making working seven days a week."³⁴ This also shows

that the two systems, as Gailey refers to them, got along well, were helpful to one another, respected one another, and saved each other's lives by sharing information. By utilizing oral histories, new perspectives and new insights have been added to what the written texts document. The written texts look at legitimate points during which the soldiers may not have gotten along, but they fail to recognize the whole story. They do not show that the two groups did get along the majority of the time. The oral histories do recognize that while the Australians and Americans had reasons not to get along together, they still did. These first-hand accounts show that they were friendly and even helpful to one another, which is something that the written texts fail to document.

The effects of various tropical diseases in the New Guinea Campaign are also characterized more accurately and in more detail in the oral histories than in the written histories, which tend to be vague and inaccurate. These discrepancies between the written and oral histories can be seen in the descriptions of the tropical diseases, dysentery, the physical effects of malaria, and in the number of cases of malaria. The pamphlet *New Guinea*, issued by the U.S. Army shortly after the war, is a prime example of how the written texts are too vague when describing tropical diseases in the New Guinea Campaign. It says:

Disease thrived on New Guinea. Malaria was the greatest debilitator, but dengue fever, dysentery, scrub, typhus, and a host of other tropical sickness awaited unwary soldiers in the jungle. Scattered tiny coastal

settlements dotted the flat malarial north coastline, but inland the lush tropical jungle swallowed men and equipment.³⁵

After this statement, which is lacking in detail, the text goes on to describe aspects of the terrain. It does not examine the details of the various diseases or the effects of the disease on the soldiers and their abilities to fight while in combat.

Dysentery is also vaguely addressed in *MacArthur Strikes Back*. Gailey inadequately addresses the issue of the many tropical diseases. He writes, "Intestinal disorders and skin diseases were epidemic. Severe diarrheas and dysentery could not be treated adequately given the conditions along the trail..."³⁶ Milner also explains the problem of dysentery with insufficient detail. Milner writes, "Dysentery was the most widespread affliction."³⁷ Gailey and Milner refer to the vastness of the various diseases, but neither one examines in depth the effects that these tropical diseases had on the men.

The Red Arrow veterans' oral histories provide the dramatic descriptions and necessary information on the effects of the various diseases on the soldiers' ability to fight, and they provide the necessary context to understanding the written records. In Hartmen's oral history, he says that there were flies all over the food, and the men were getting dysentery because of it. He explains that they were all passing blood, and the medics did not know what to do about it because it was not a couple of men, but the whole regiment of two to three thousand men.³⁸ Janicki also describes the effects of dysentery on him. He says

³¹ Erwin Veneklase.

³² Janicki, oral history.

³³ Janicki, oral history.

³⁴ Veneklase, oral history.

³⁵ U.S. Army *Campaigns of World War II*, "New Guinea," 1.

³⁶ Gailey, 51-52.

³⁷ Milner, 197.

³⁸ Hartmen.

that he entered the war weighing one hundred and eighty pounds and he left the hospital weighing one hundred and twenty pounds because of dysentery.³⁹ Descriptive details such as these add new insight into what the effects of dysentery were on the men. Rather than plainly stating that it was a large problem, these oral histories show that the men who were suffering from these tropical diseases, especially dysentery, were impeded by the effects while fighting a war. They were physically exhausted, they were passing blood, and they were losing an extensive amount of weight, which crippled them while trying to march through a dense, mountainous jungle, fighting a war.

Malaria is another example of a tropical disease that is not adequately described by the written histories in terms of its physical effects. Malaria is generally addressed, but not with the sufficient details of what it is, or how it affected the troops. On the other hand, the Red Arrow veterans' oral histories provide these necessary details, which the written histories tend to gloss over. In *MacArthur Strikes Back*, Gailey states, "Malaria was a scourge, and the hard pressed officers, faced with an increasing number of battle casualties, could do little to aid those who had the debilitating disease."⁴⁰ This statement raises the questions: what are the symptoms of malaria and how did they affect the men? Author Samuel Milner also uses vague descriptions when describing malaria. He writes, "Some of the men picked up malaria in the mosquito-infested swamps along the Musa, and the weakening effects of the march were apparent in the subsequent operations of the battalion."⁴¹ This

written statement does not describe what the weakening effects were or what malaria did to the men who were trying to fight a war in the dense New Guinea jungle while being infected with this horrific tropical disease.

The Red Arrow personal narratives thoroughly examine the physical effects of malaria, giving a different perspective on the "debilitating disease" and its "weakening effects."

Red Arrow veteran Robert Hartmen goes into more detail about how malaria physically affected him while fighting in New Guinea. In his oral history he states:

[I] had a 103-degree/104 degree fever, and I went to the medics. There they gave me twenty-five grams of quinine, and they lay me down on the ground. They put a cover over me and twenty-four hours later my fever broke, and they sent me back to the front lines.⁴²

This description gives a different perspective on how it directly affected the common soldier. It shows how severe their fevers were and what little medical help was available to aid them. Red Arrow veteran Homminga also describes malaria in a more detailed way that gives a new perspective on the disease. He states,

Malaria is a disease that is transmitted by the mosquito and it enters your system in your liver and kidneys. You get an extremely high fever and you get the chills. You could shake a bed across the floor...It takes days to get over an episode, but you always have the bug in your system.⁴³

Veteran Stephen Janicki also explains the symptoms of malaria. In his oral history he says, "you got a high fever, and you became soaking wet with sweat, and then you would suddenly be absolutely freezing."⁴⁴ He explains that you would go from hot to cold, and that you became delirious and eventually passed out.⁴⁵ These descriptions also give a different look into the disease malaria than the written histories do. They describe how malaria infected the men, and they explain the symptoms of the disease. By utilizing oral histories, a detailed description of the disease is given rather than the simple vague statements in the written histories such as, "Malaria and exhaustion were taking a toll on the men inside and outside the block."⁴⁶ Oral histories give a more vivid description and definition of malaria than the written texts. By utilizing these oral histories, malaria can be understood in a more detailed manner, and through the use of oral histories, many aspects of malaria that are in the written histories and are wrong can be corrected.

The written histories also give inaccurate information in terms of the number of cases of malaria in the New Guinea Campaign. Had the authors utilized oral histories, these false descriptions would not have occurred. Stephen Taaffe writes in *MacArthur's Jungle War*,

Malaria initially caused SWPA [South Pacific Area] problems. In February 1943, for example, 23 out of every 1000 SWPA personnel were in hospital with malaria at any given time, and the average stay the following month was twenty-eight days per afflicted patient."⁴⁷

³⁹ Janicki.

⁴⁰ Gailey, 52.

⁴¹ Milner, 107.

⁴² Hartmen.

⁴³ Homminga.

⁴⁴ Janicki.

⁴⁵ Janicki.

⁴⁶ Gailey, 185.

⁴⁷ Taaffe, 117.

He then adds:

MacArthur appointed Colonel Howard Smith, a former public health officer who had been the Philippines' chief of quarantine service, to bring malaria under control. Smith and other SWPA health officers introduced DDT, repellent cream, atabrine (a synthetic quinine), mosquito netting, and other suppressant and prevention measures to the theatre....Such stringent measures worked. In March 1944, only 2 per 1000 SWPA personnel were in the hospital for malaria at any given time, and the average stay was nine days. In fact, as of 1 April 1944, there were only 751 malaria cases throughout the entire theatre.⁴⁸

Taaffe researches the malaria problem by utilizing medical records from the U.S. Army forces in the Southwest Pacific Area. He does not utilize oral histories or examine first-person accounts. This leads to problems because the common soldiers, those who were infected with malaria, are not being consulted. Only second-hand written medical reports are used, and, in this case, they tend to be inaccurate, portraying malaria as an improving problem with fewer men contracting malaria after 1944 because of new medical improvements and preventions. By utilizing the soldiers' oral histories, a different story is told.

The oral histories from Red Arrow veterans like Janicki, Homminga, and Hartmen demonstrate that malaria was a much larger problem than Taaffe's sources indicated. Homminga explains,

"It was a one hundred percent killer, everyone had malaria."⁴⁹ He also goes on to describe the severity of the problem, which also explains how inaccurate the numbers in written texts were. Homminga describes the conditions in regards to malaria:

After being in combat for a little bit they had too many people getting malaria so they wouldn't let you go to the medics, hospital, whatever unless you had a one hundred and five degree fever or passed out.... They were pretty picky about whether you had a one hundred and five degree fever or not.⁵⁰

This evidence, revealed through an oral history, contradicts the written texts. By utilizing oral histories, the inaccuracies in the written texts can be corrected. While improvements may have been made by 1944, the problem was not solved. Many men had previously contracted malaria, and once it entered their systems, they always had it. Also, despite medical improvements, Taaffe fails to recognize the severe conditions the men had to be in, before they could leave the front lines to see a medic, which explains why the U.S. medical records showed such a small number of cases, which in turn made the malaria problem look like it had undergone vast improvements between 1943 and 1944. Had the medical records recognized that men on the front lines were suffering from malaria, or had Taaffe utilized oral histories, his analysis would not have been so far off.

By only utilizing the medical records, Taaffe is not only getting inaccurate numbers, he is failing to get the full picture on why the men had to have one hundred and five degree fevers in order to be sent to the hospital. Oral histories reveal this perspective. Sergeant Hartmen explains, "We were getting to the point where we couldn't afford to lose another man to malaria. We were outfitted by the Japanese as it was."⁵¹ Red Arrow veteran Janicki also offers further insight into the number of malaria-infected soldiers. In his oral history, he explains that there were nearly fifty to one hundred men on the front lines at any given time, all of whom were suffering from malaria, yet they were still forced to fight unless their fevers reached one hundred and five degrees or they fainted.⁵² Through these oral histories a new perspective on the high number of soldiers infected with malaria is seen. The Red Arrow veterans' oral histories divulge the truth about the campaign. They correct the written text, revealing that the number of infected men was not down, rather the troop's fevers had to reach one hundred and five degrees or they had to faint in order to be sent to a medical facility. This is one aspect of the problem that the written texts have failed to recognize making those texts inaccurate. By only researching malaria through the medical records, Taaffe is failing to understand the full problem that the Red Arrow veterans' oral histories divulge.

⁴⁸ Taaffe, 117.

⁴⁹ Homminga.

⁵⁰ Homminga.

⁵¹ Hartmen.

⁵² Janicki.

In conclusion, personal narratives clearly play an important part in understanding the history of the New Guinea Campaign. Oral histories provide personal accounts from the viewpoints of both the officers and common soldiers. This adds a new perspective to what the written histories have documented in terms of training, terrain, allies' relationships, and tropical diseases. They question the accuracy of some written texts, and they clarify other areas of the campaigns that the written texts have only vaguely examined. By utilizing oral histories, the story of the everyday individual soldier is told, which gives a different perspective and new insights into the New Guinea Campaign that cannot be seen in the written records. They collect and preserve the recorded memories of our veterans, which is a valuable and irreplaceable resource.

In the words of one soldier, Wellington Francis Homminga, "The entire story comes together when oral histories are a part of it."⁵³ He also offers valuable insight into the positive effects of using oral histories. He remarks, "When we are gone history is gone with us, unless it is recorded, so I am glad you did this."⁵⁴ The Red Arrow veterans' oral histories are a valuable resource that offers a different view than the written texts. They preserve our past, and in doing so, they clarify, correct, and increase the necessary descriptions in the New Guinea Campaign.

⁵³ Homminga.

⁵⁴ Homminga.

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