

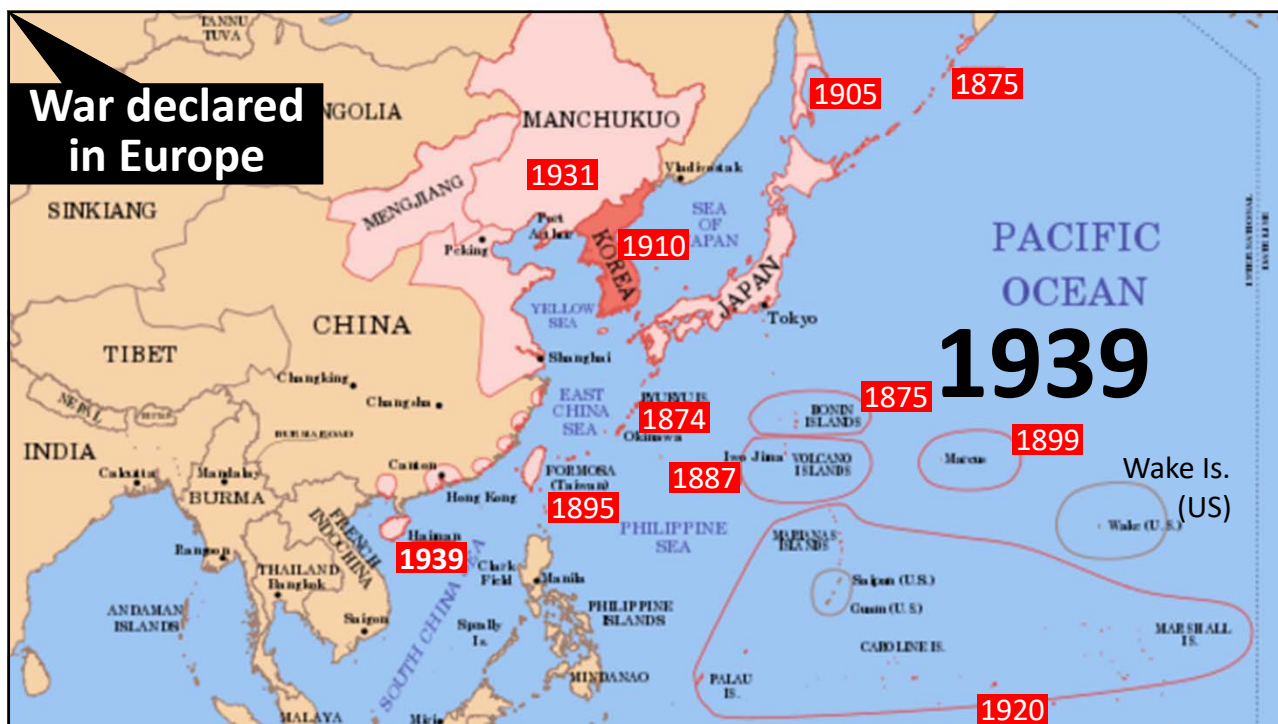


THE BATTLE OF MILNE BAY, P.N.G.









In May 1940, the President and Secretary of State relocated Pacific Fleet Headquarters from San Diego to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

Admiral Richardson, CinC, who had made study of Japanese warfare his life's work, vigorously objected, claiming the move had no benefit but left the fleet vulnerable to air and torpedo attack.

Admiral Richardson, arguably America's foremost Naval officer, was relieved of his command. He was replaced by Admiral Kimmel.

A Brief Aside

- After an abortive attempt to modernise US Naval Intelligence during the early Depression, personnel and equipment limits hampered development. A single officer was assigned in 1937 to establish a decrypting unit to find message keys in Japanese intercepts for 1935-1937; as he didn't speak Japanese, he sent solutions to DC for solution.
- When promised IBM tabulators and clerks arrived 16 months late (Feb 38), he was told to learn to use the gear, train the clerks and send "material assistance to Washington" ASAP, as they didn't have enough cryptoanalysts.
- In September 1939, the USA overturned most "Neutrality legislation", and an officer who was a Japanese linguist joined the team. Although regularly reading Japanese messages, it took weeks for the tiny team to convey their "triple-wrapped" results to Washington by mail for further distribution. Even via airmail, it would take days for the intelligence to arrive.
- There is no reason to believe that the British had any better Pacific system.



The Pacific War begins

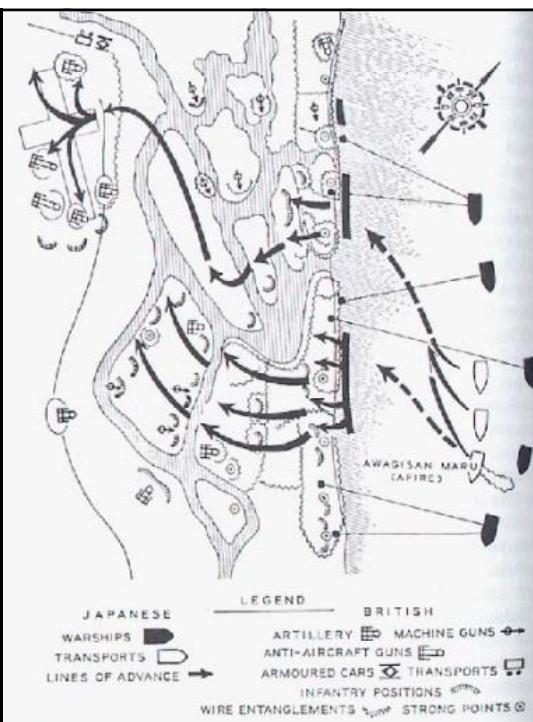
At midnight local time on 8 December 1941, 5,200 troops of LTG Yamashita's 25th Army landed at Kota Bharu, Malaya against heavy opposition from British and Indian forces.

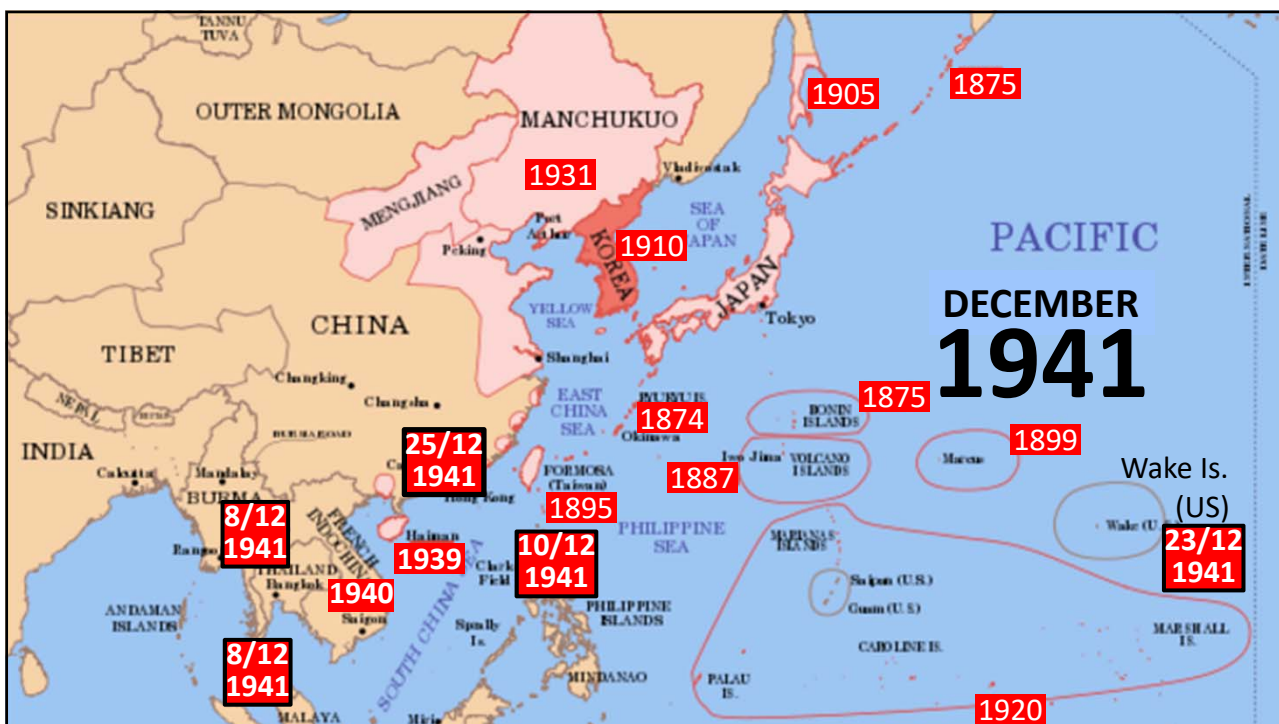


LTG Yamashita

By morning, MG Takumi (his plan at right) had three infantry battalions ashore and the British-Indian troops fell back.

Japanese officers later claimed that this was "one of the most violent actions of the Malaya Campaign" with 320-500 Japanese KIA and 538 WIA.





ABC, ABD and ABDACOM



RAdm Hart, USN

Dutch LTG ter Poorten

Col Kengen

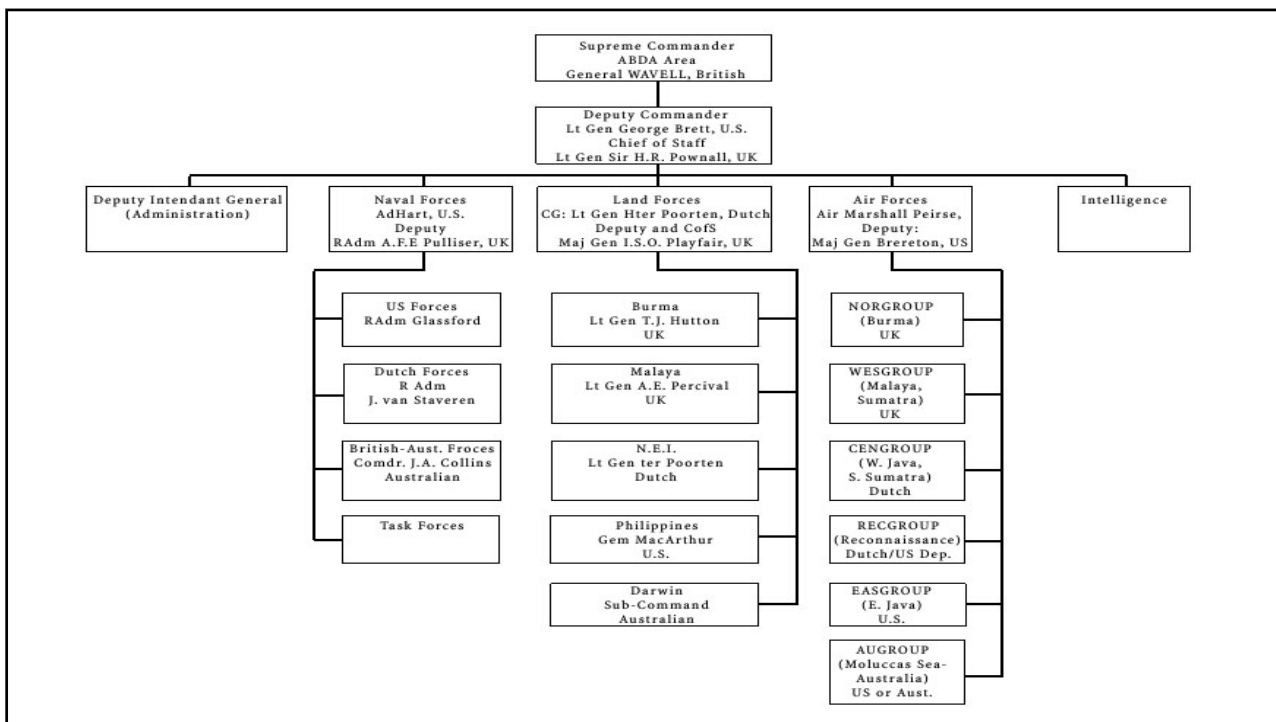
Gen Wavell, UK

VAdm Layton, RN

LTG Brett, USAF

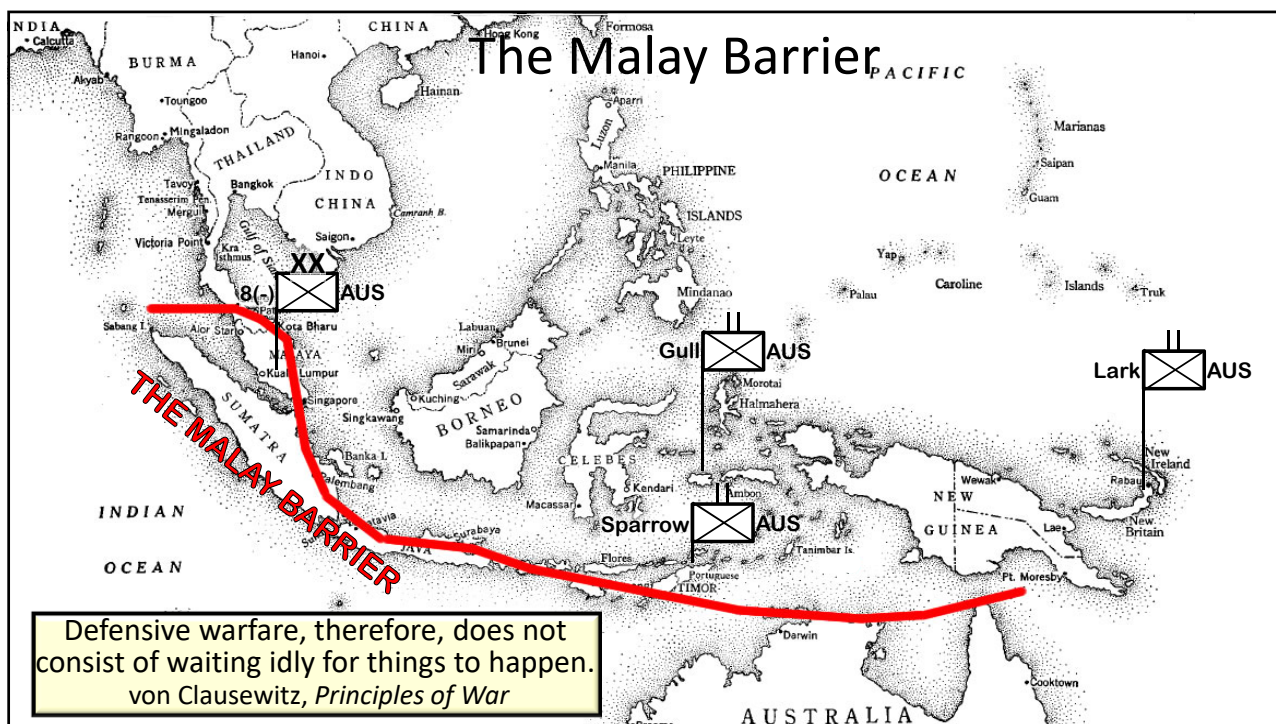
Dutch VAdm Helfrick

MG Brereton, USAF



Allied Asia-Pacific Strategy, February 1942

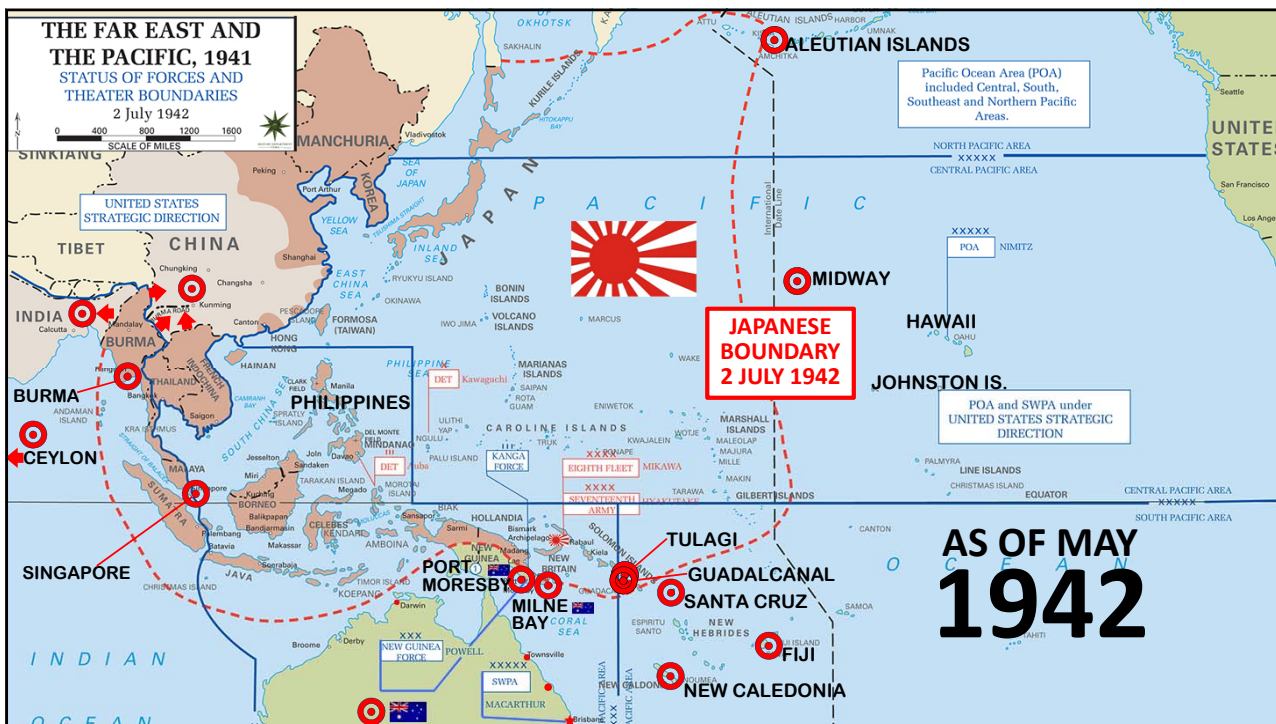
- The principals subscribed to a basic statement of war aims that served as the strategic objective for the year 1942 and the basis for the division of the resources. "(N)otwithstanding the entry of Japan into the War, our view remains that Germany is still the prime enemy, and her defeat is the key to victory. Once Germany is defeated the collapse of Italy and the defeat of Japan must follow." It was agreed therefore, as "a cardinal principle" of American and British strategy, "that only the minimum of force necessary for the safeguarding of vital interests in other theatres should be diverted from operations against Germany." (**Germany first.**)
- **Hold the Malay Barrier**, that is the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Java, and the islands stretching eastward to northwest Australia, "as the basic defensive position"; and Burma and Australia "as essential supporting positions."
- **Re-establish communications with the Philippines** and support the garrison there, while maintaining communications to Burma and Australia and within the Far East area.



1942	Central & East Asia	U.S. & The Pacific
January 7	British forces routed at Slim River crossing.	
January 10		Japanese begin landing in Northern Dutch Indonesia
January 11	Japanese occupy Kuala Lumpur, Malaya	
January 14	Australian Division ambushes Japanese at Gemas	
January 15	Battle for Muar River crossing, Australians withdraw	
January 20	Japanese Southern Army invades Burma	
January 21		Japanese bomb New Guinea
January 30	British withdraw to Singapore	
February 14		Japanese land on Sumatra
February 15	Singapore surrenders.	



1942	Central & East Asia	U.S. & The Pacific
February 17		Japanese land on Bali
February 27		Battle of Java Sea; Japan victory
February 29		Japanese land on Java
Jan-Feb		Ongoing attacks at Bataan
March 21	Japanese advance in Burma	
April 5/9	Japanese carrier fleet raids Ceylon	
April 8		Bataan surrenders.
April 18		Doolittle raids Tokyo fm "Shangri-La"
May 3-4		Japanese Op. Mo, Tulagi invasion
May 4-8		Japanese Op. Mo, Moresby invasion
May 4-8		Battle of Coral Sea
May 5/6	Japanese enter China from Burma	Attack and surrender of Corregidor
May 20	British withdraw from Burma	
June 4		Battle of Midway. Japanese defeat.
July 21		Japanese land at Buna, New Guinea; start of Kokoda battles

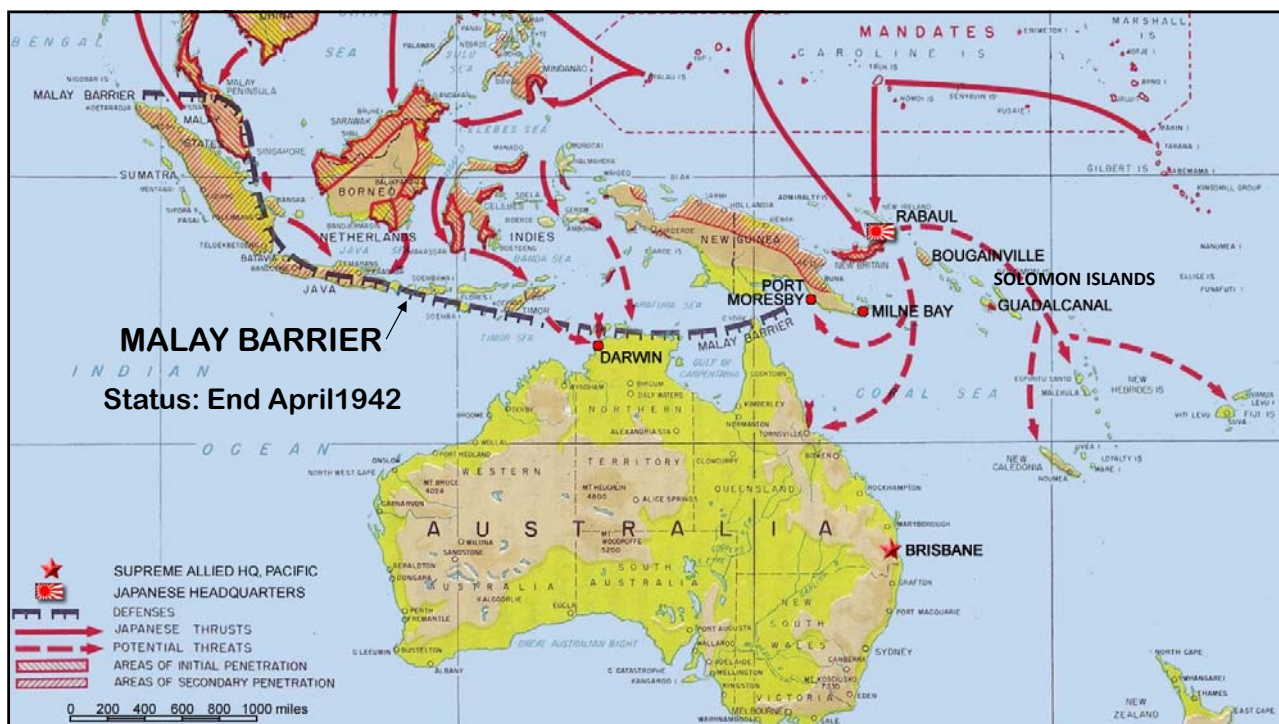


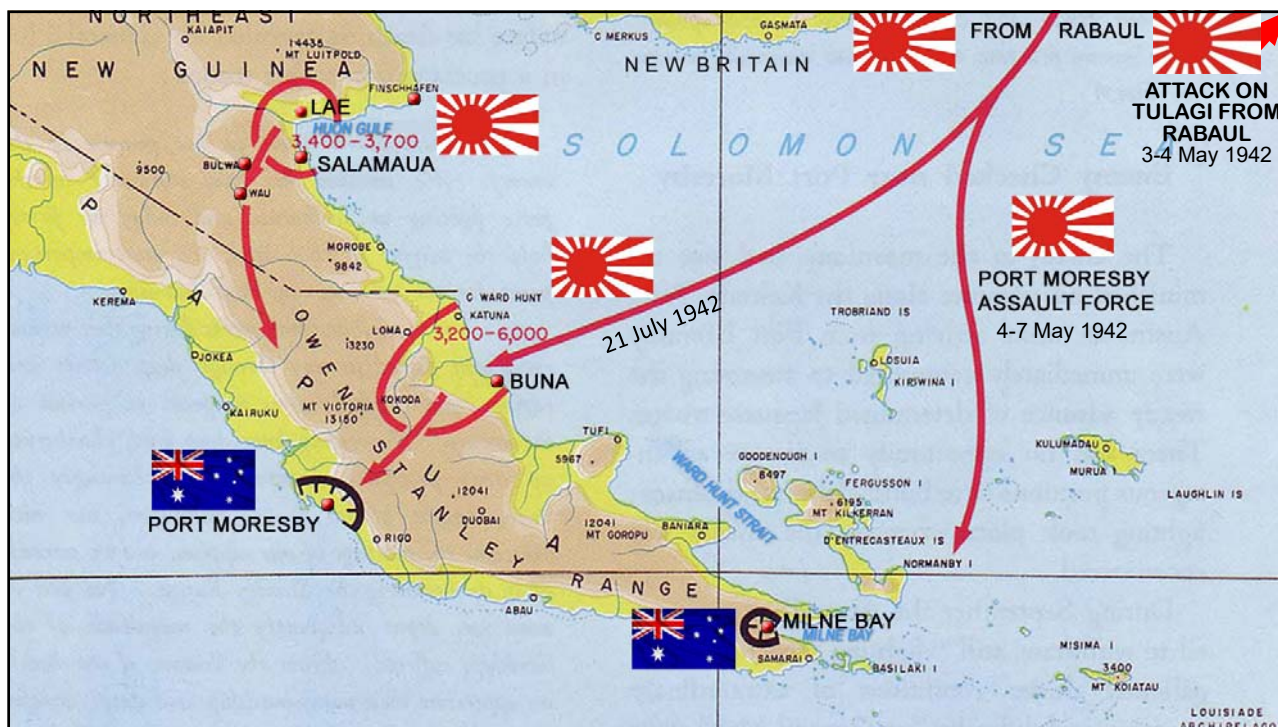


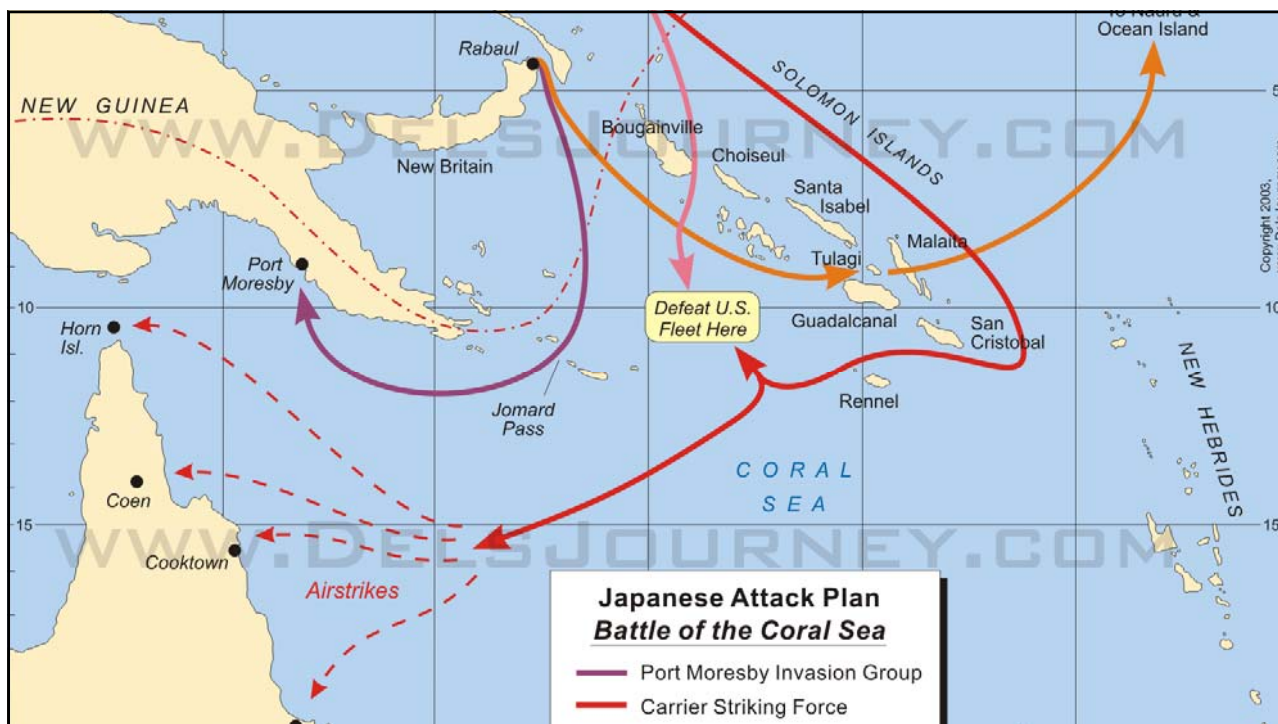
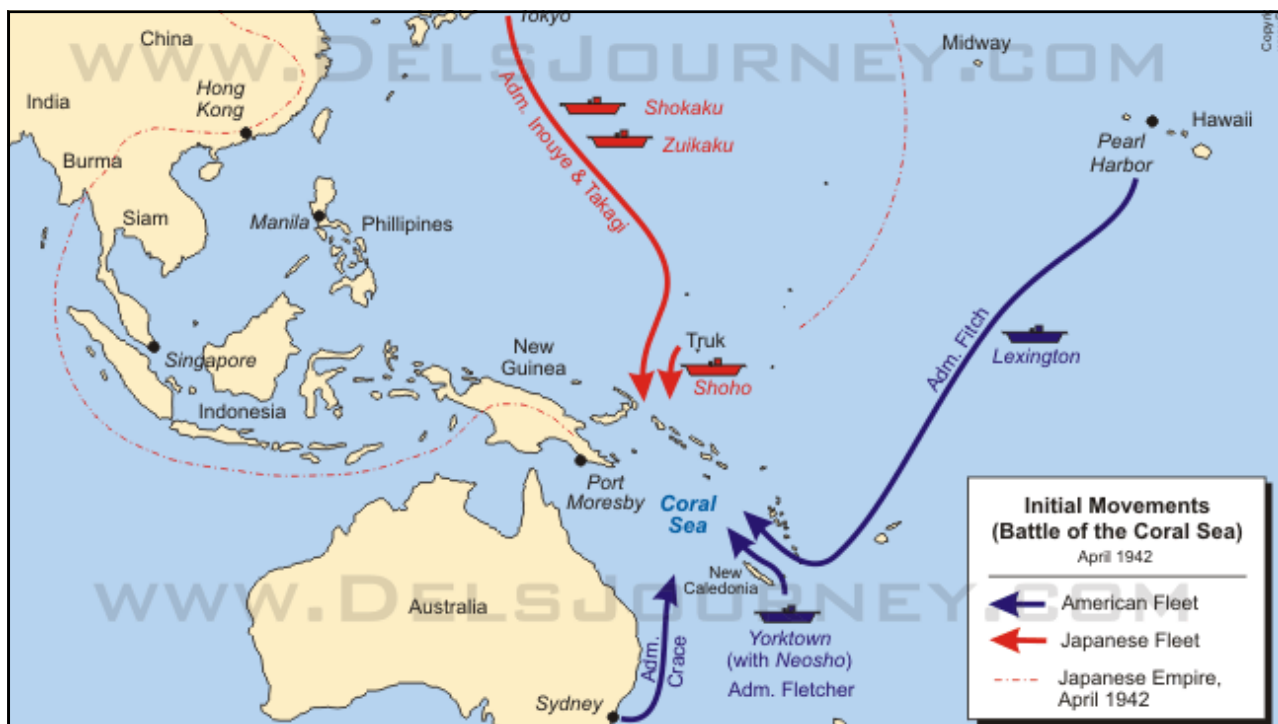
1942	Central & East Asia	U.S. & The Pacific
June 4		Battle of Midway. Japanese defeat.
July 21		Japanese land at Buna, New Guinea; start of Kokoda battles
August 7		1st Marine Div lands on Guadalcanal
August 8/9		Naval battle of Savo Island
August 20		US aircraft land on Guadalcanal
Aug 25-Sept. 7		Battle of Milne Bay, New Guinea
August 23		Naval battle of Eastern Solomons
September 11		Australians stop Japanese offensive against Port Moresby, New Guinea
October 11/12		Naval battle of Cape Esperance
October 24		Naval battle of Santa Cruz
November 12/13		1st Naval Battle for Guadalcanal
November 13/14		2nd Naval Battle for Guadalcanal
November 30		Naval battle of Tassafaronga
December 21	British troops re-enter Burma	

Some interesting asides

- Australian air reconnaissance spotted the massive Japanese invasion fleet as it left Saigon on 6 December and shadowed the ships on the 6th and 7th.
- The fleet consisted of three main transport ships sailed, at least another 25 transport ships, a heavy cruiser, five cruisers and seven destroyers.
- On December 7th local time, flying boat PBY Catalina of No. 205 Squadron RAF, captained by Flying Officer Bedell, was shot down by Japanese aircraft while monitoring the Japanese fleet. Bedell and his crew became the first casualties of the war in the Pacific.
- At 2030 hours, 7 December, at a Malaya command conference in Singapore, Air Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, GCVO, KCB, CMG, DSO, AFC decided not to activate the plan to bomb the enemy at sea before landing to "... avoid starting a war."
- Just over a hour and a half later, the landings on Malaya began.







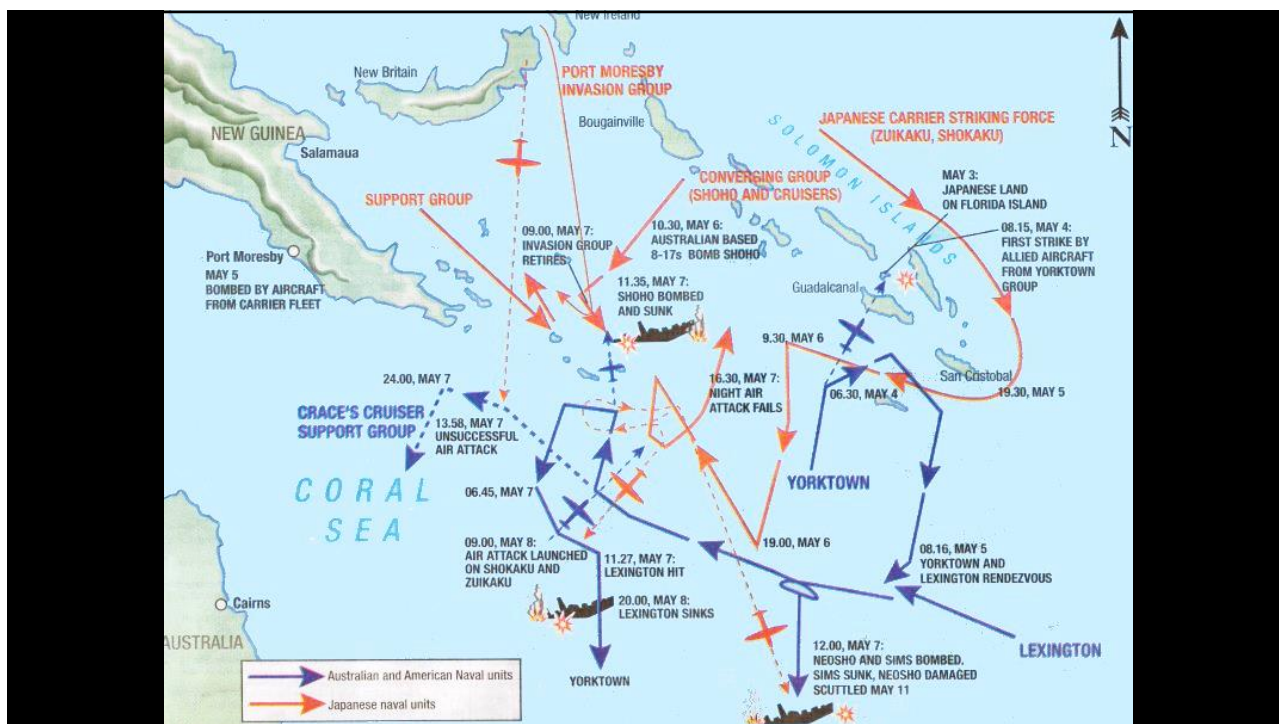
Order of Battle

Allies

- 2 fleet carriers
- 9 cruisers
- 13 destroyers
- 2 oilers
- 1 seaplane tender
- 128 carrier aircraft

Japanese

- 2 fleet carriers
- 1 light carrier
- 1 light cruiser
- 9 cruisers
- 15 destroyers
- 5 minesweepers
- 2 minelayers
- 2 submarine chasers
- 3 gunboats
- 1 oil tanker
- 1 seaplane tender
- 12 transports
- 127 carrier aircraft





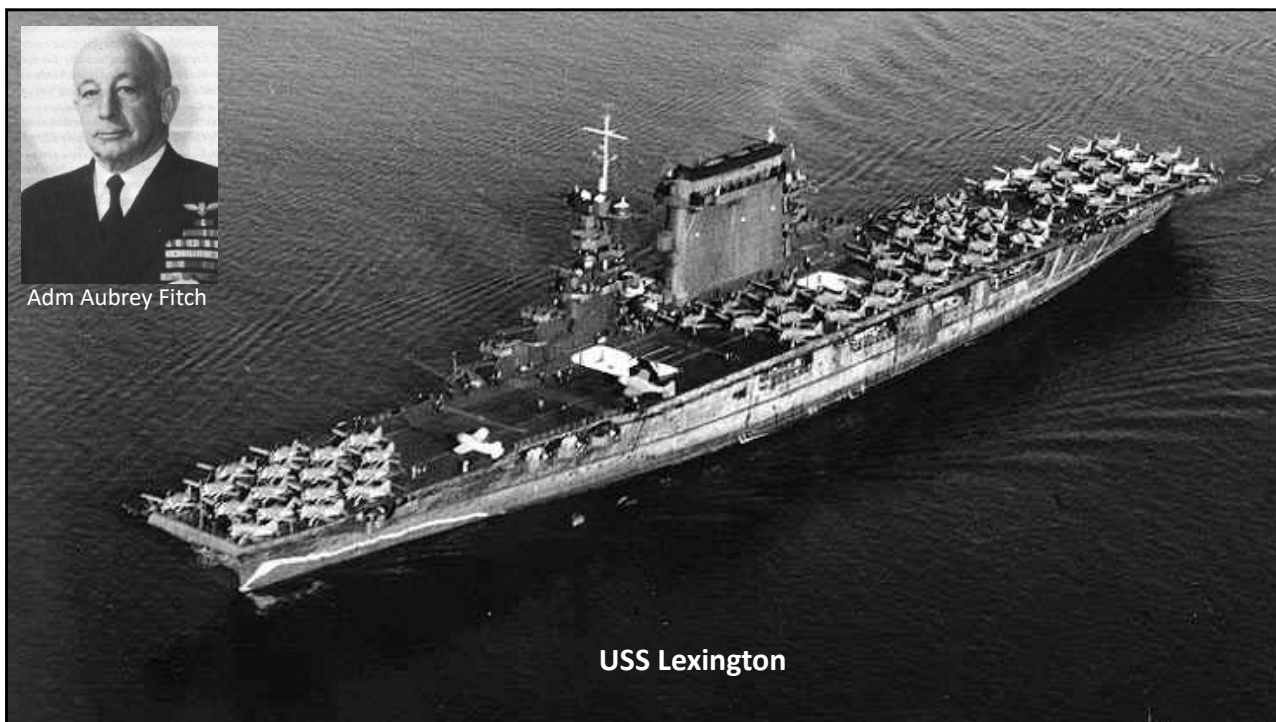
Adm Jack Fletcher



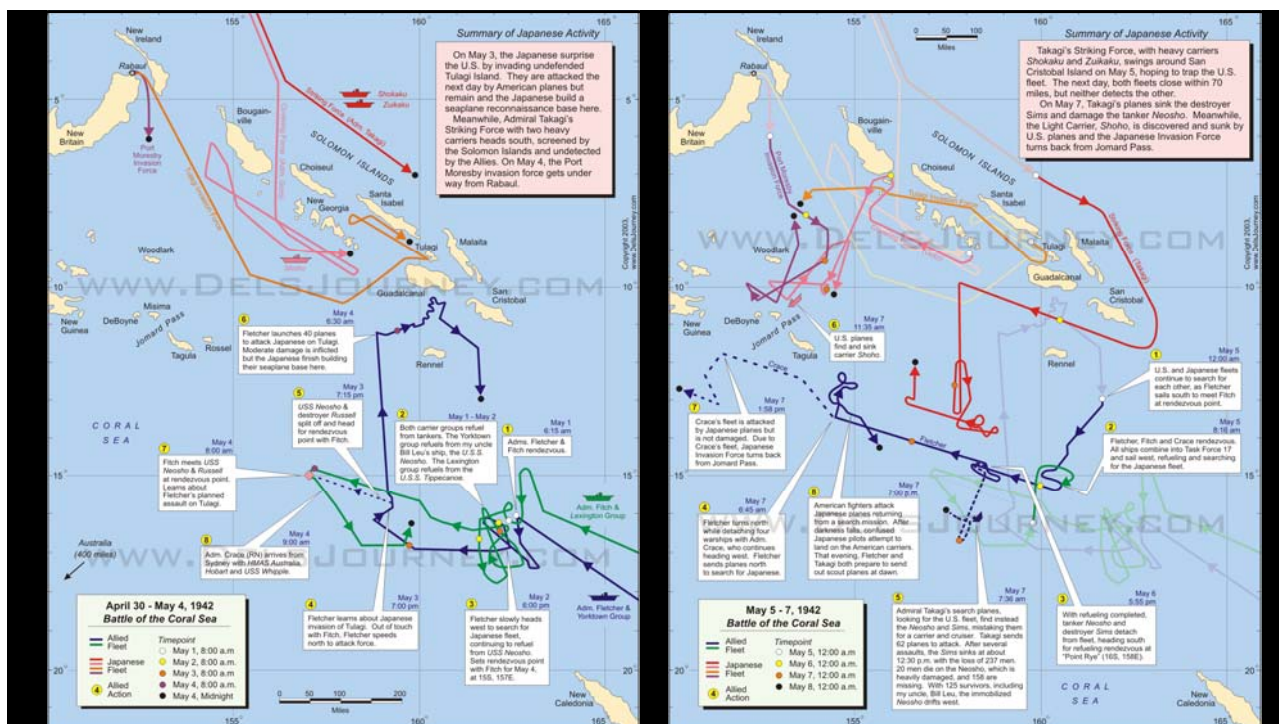
USS Yorktown



Adm Aubrey Fitch



USS Lexington



Admiral Crace's Squadron

Admiral John Crace was sent west to thwart the Japanese advance through Jomard Pass. This small fleet was an Allied effort, consisting of Australian and American ships while commanded by Crace, a British admiral. There were seven ships in his squadron:

- H.M.A.S. Australia (Australian battleship)
- H.M.A.S. Hobart (Australian cruiser)
- H.M.A.S. Canberra (Australian cruiser)
- U.S.S. Chicago (American cruiser)
- U.S.S. Perkins, Farragut, Walker (American destroyers)

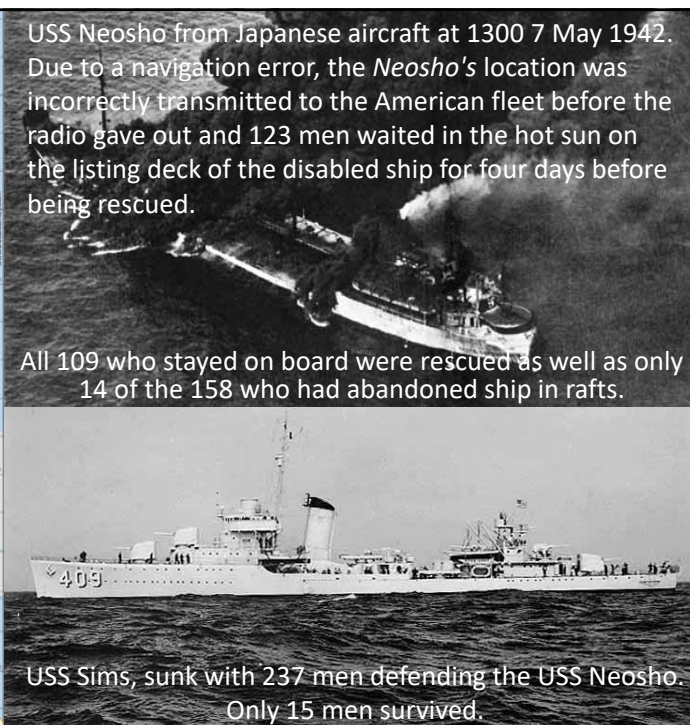
Finally, 1400 hrs 7 May, Japanese torpedo planes and high-level bombers appeared on the horizon and they viciously attacked Crace's small fleet. Despite near misses, the ships outmaneuvered torpedoes and bombs and remained largely unscathed.

Concerned about this force, the Japanese turned around the Port Moresby-bound invasion force.



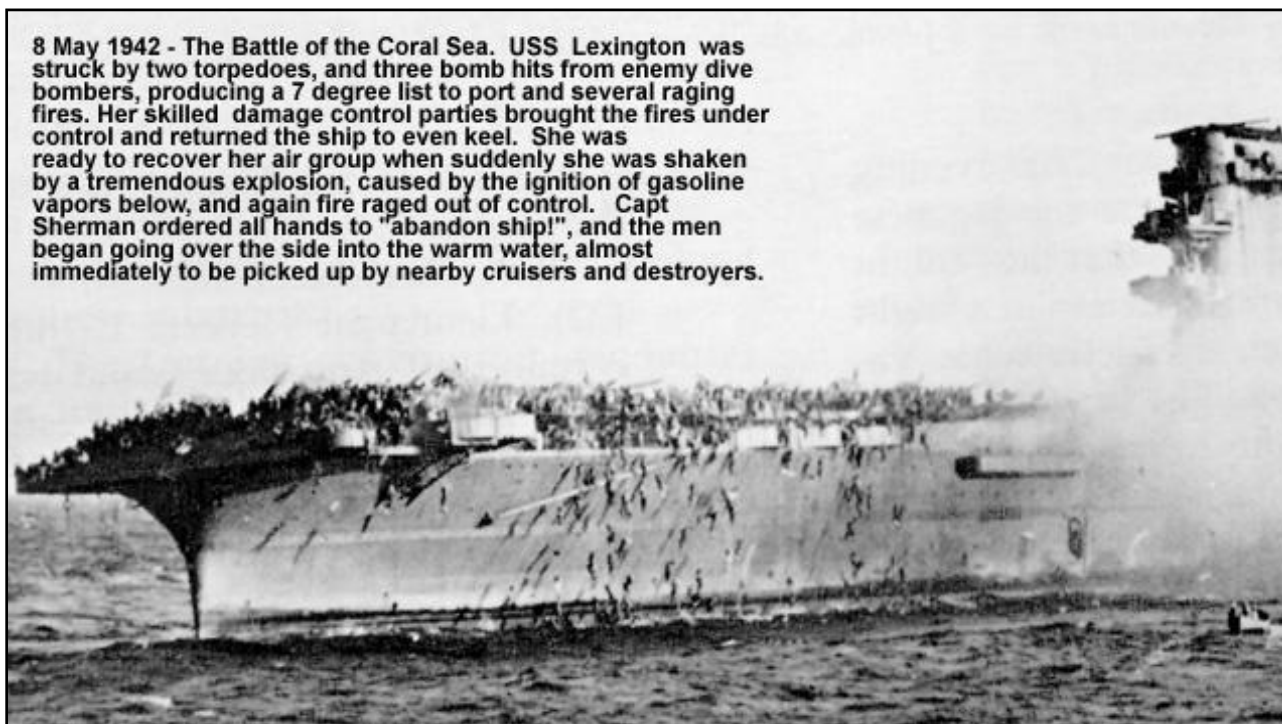
USS Neosho from Japanese aircraft at 1300 7 May 1942. Due to a navigation error, the *Neosho's* location was incorrectly transmitted to the American fleet before the radio gave out and 123 men waited in the hot sun on the listing deck of the disabled ship for four days before being rescued.

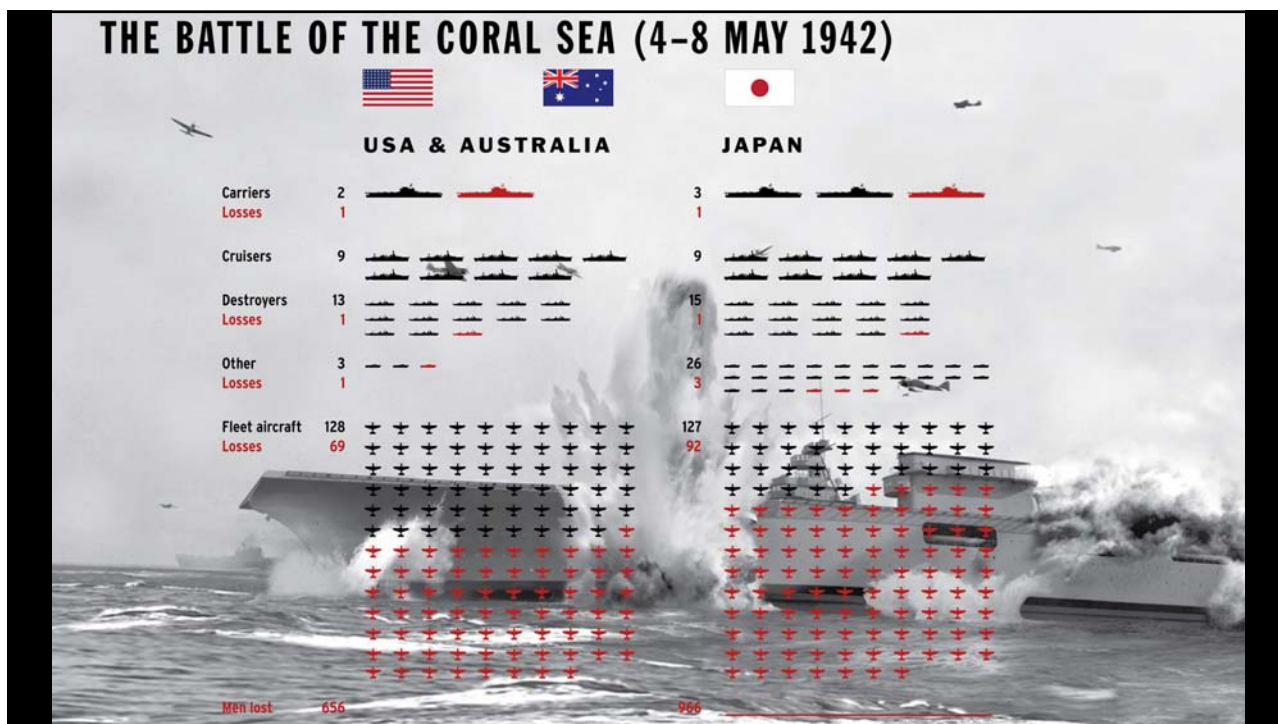
All 109 who stayed on board were rescued as well as only 14 of the 158 who had abandoned ship in rafts.



USS Sims, sunk with 237 men defending the USS Neosho. Only 15 men survived.

8 May 1942 - The Battle of the Coral Sea. USS Lexington was struck by two torpedoes, and three bomb hits from enemy dive bombers, producing a 7 degree list to port and several raging fires. Her skilled damage control parties brought the fires under control and returned the ship to even keel. She was ready to recover her air group when suddenly she was shaken by a tremendous explosion, caused by the ignition of gasoline vapors below, and again fire raged out of control. Capt Sherman ordered all hands to "abandon ship!", and the men began going over the side into the warm water, almost immediately to be picked up by nearby cruisers and destroyers.






Order of Battle


Australian and Allies




-  18th Infantry Brigade (AIF from Middle East)
 - 2/9th Australian Infantry Battalion (arrived 18 August)
 - 2/10th Australian Infantry Battalion (-ditto-)
 - 2/12th Australian Infantry Battalion (-ditto-)
-  7th Infantry Brigade (CMF)
 - 9th Australian Infantry Battalion
 - 25th Australian Infantry Battalion
 - 61st Australian Infantry Battalion
-  Royal Australian Air Force
 - No. 6 Squadron No. 77 Squadron (Darwin)
 - No. 75 Squadron No. 78 Squadron (Kiriwana Is.)
 - No. 76 Squadron (arr. early August)
-  101st Anti-Tank Regiment
-  9 Battery, 2/3rd Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment
-  2/5th Field Regiment
-  46th Engineer Battalion (arr. late June)
-  709th Airborne AA Battery (arr. early August)

Japanese

-  Special Naval Landing Force
 - 3rd Kure SNLF
 - 5th Kure SNLF
 - 5th Sasebo SNLF
 - 5th Yokosuka SNLF

Naval support from:

-  8th Fleet
 - 18th Cruiser Division
 - 29th Destroyer Division

 	Strength	
	8,824	1,943
Casualties and losses		
Australia: 167 KIA/MIA, 206 WIA United States: 14 KIA		625 killed 1,311 WIA, sick



Arriving during the rainy season to set up the defence of Milne Bay, deep mud was an insipid enemy. Bypassing the main road (shown) would just result in vehicles getting stuck up above their wheels somewhere else harder to retrieve.

Finally, a temporary lull in the downpours enabled the engineers to improve the unreliable road.

Living under primitive conditions weakened the soldiers and airmen physically, making them prey to such jungle illnesses as malaria, dengue, jungle rot, dysentery, and scrub typhus. Quinine was taken regularly.

One newly arrived American asked an Aussie what Milne Bay was like. "Mossies, death adders, and crocs," he replied cheerfully. "Blackwater fever. But don't worry, mate. You'll be too busy ducking bombs to worry about the rest!"



Frequent bombing raids and strafing by Zeroes occurred prior to invasion. This Zero was photographed on 24th August. Night bombing raids were called "Washing Machine Charlie."

Japanese cruisers often entered Milne Bay at night to shell the defenders.

Allied preparations

Unknown to the Japanese, the Allied forces at Milne Bay had been significantly beefed up to 7,429 troops (6,394 combat troops and 1,035 service troops). American troops numbered 1,365, mainly engineers and anti-aircraft personnel. Assigned RAAF personnel numbered 664, for a grand total of 9,458 men.

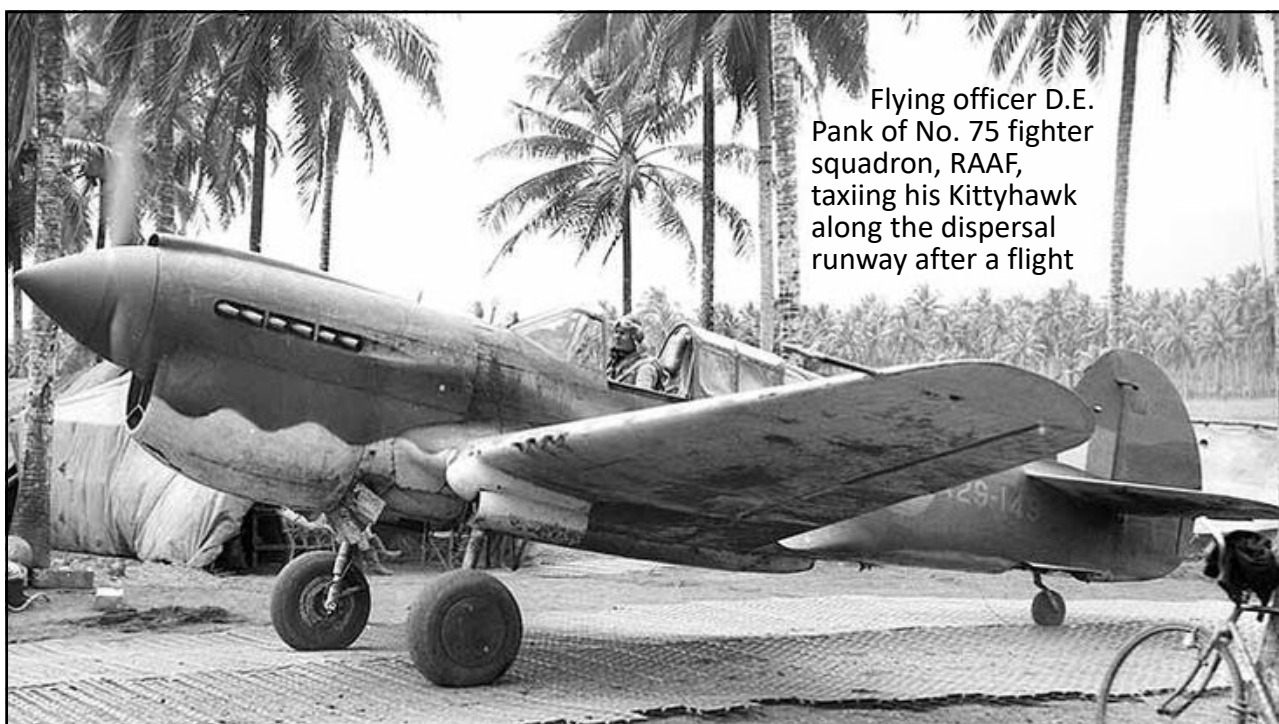
The 18th Australian Infantry Brigade of the experienced 7th Infantry Division arrived in Milne Bay on 21 August.

Weapons had been significantly upgraded as well, including .50 cal heavy machine guns, 37mm anti-tank guns, mortars and 25 pound howitzers, not to mention an additional squadron of combat aircraft.

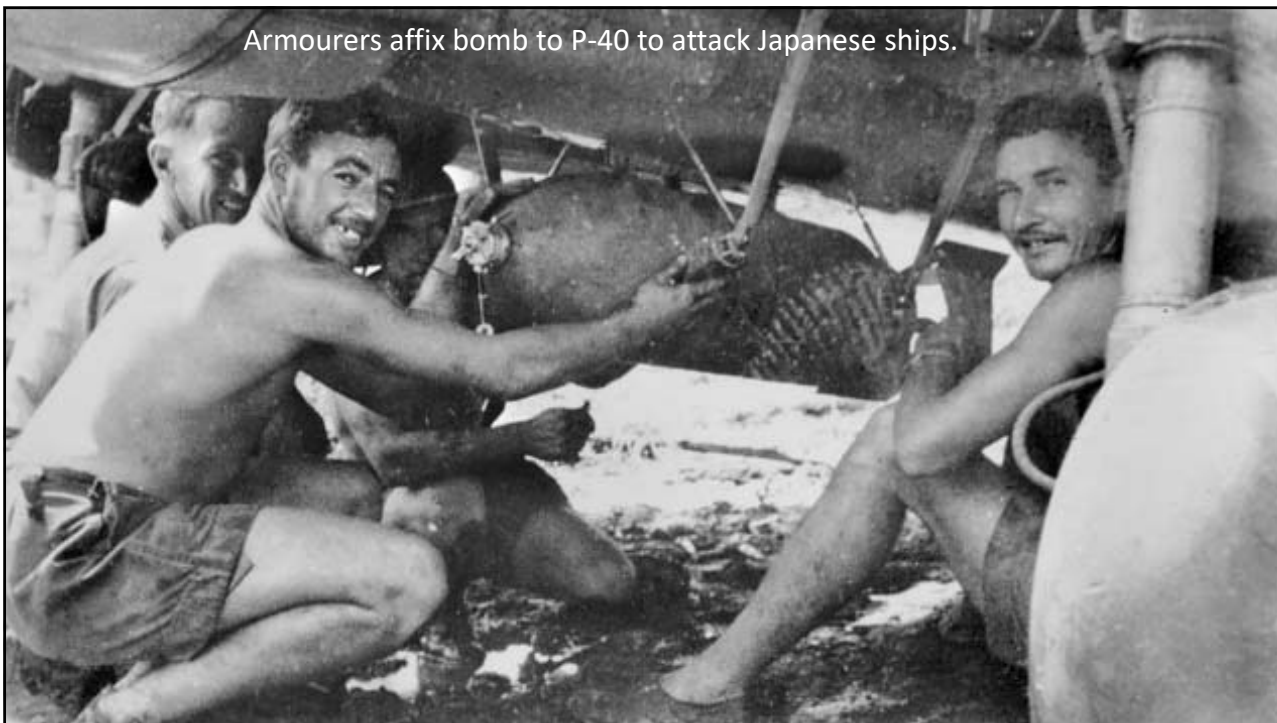
Maj. Gen. Cyril A. Clowes, an experienced officer who had commanded the ANZAC Corps artillery in Greece, took command of Milne Force on 22 August.



When he arrived, No. 1 airstrip was completed and in use by P-40s and Hudsons, and heavily-armed American Engineers were working on No. 2 and No. 3 airstrips.



Armourers affix bomb to P-40 to attack Japanese ships.



Japanese preparations



Perhaps their victories had made them complacent, but the enemy invaded with scant knowledge of Milne Bay or its defences.

Assuming that Milne Bay was held by 2 or 3 infantry companies (one battalion) to protect 20-30 aircraft, Admiral Mikawa ordered 1,500 men to attack.

Since the unit earmarked for Milne Bay was already engaged, the numbers were made of from units in Kavieng and Buna.

About 1,200 troops from Kavieng were to land at Rabi, about three miles from the Milne Bay wharf. An additional 353 from Buna were to land at Taupota on the north coast and march over the intervening Stirling mountain range to link up.

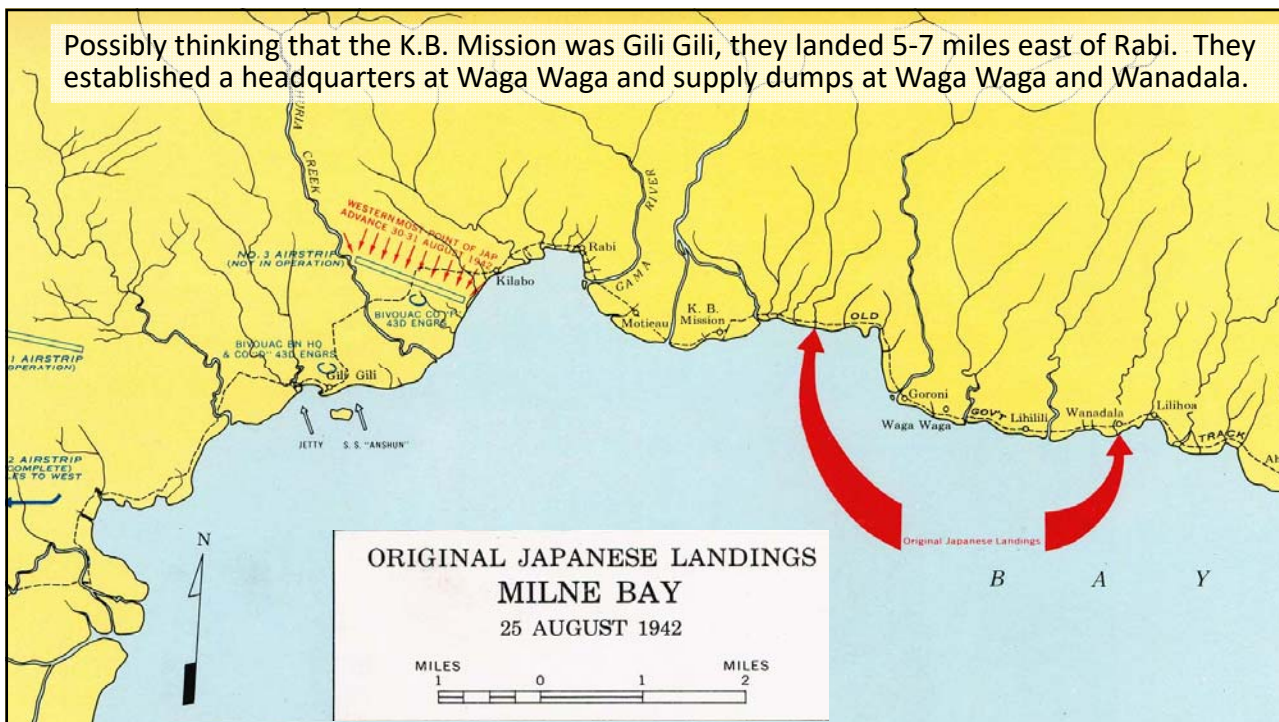
The Buna troops departed on 24 August in seven motorised launches. They put in at Goodenough Island to prepare for the upcoming assault. However, they had been spotted by a Coast Watcher enroute to Goodenough and on the 15th a reconnaissance aircraft vectored in 12 P-40s from Milne Bay. The beached barges and materiel were thoroughly strafed and destroyed, leaving the survivors stranded without any means to leave the island or even radio for help.

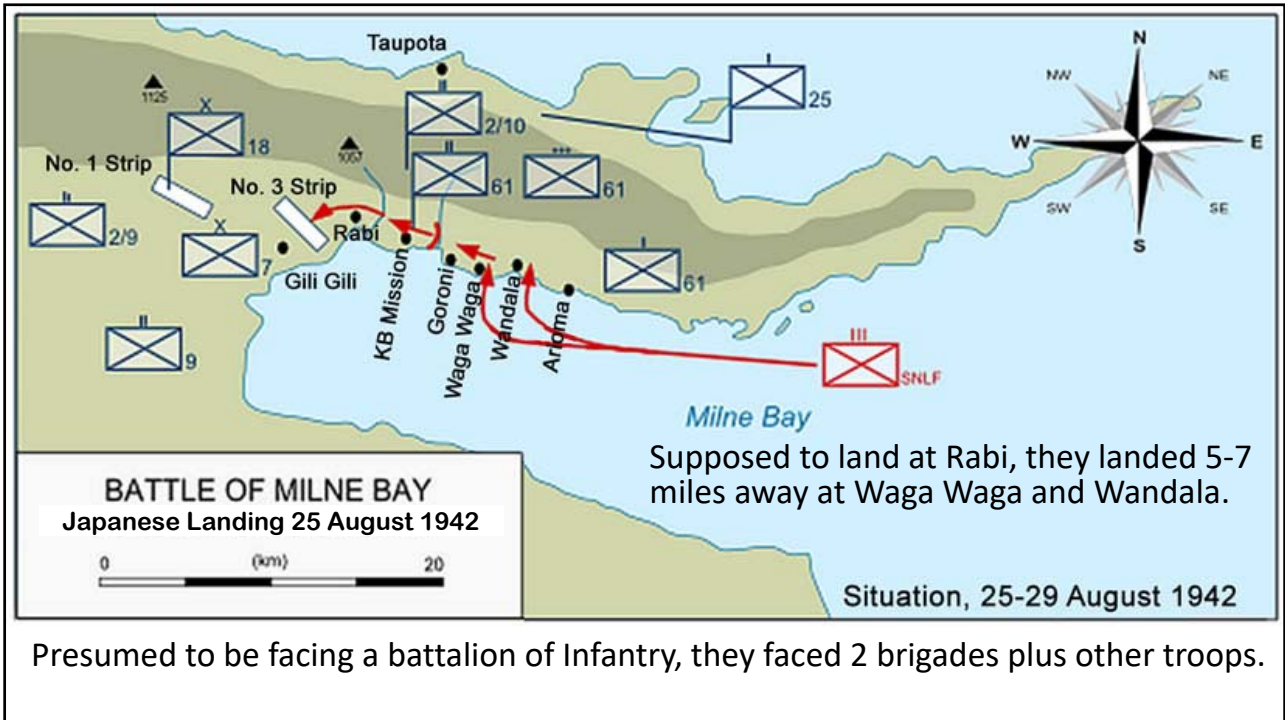
Although the Kavieng transports were heavily escorted by cruisers and destroyers, they were spotted 140 miles out from Milne Bay. General McArthur ordered all available B-25's and B26's craft from Townsville and nine B-17's from Mareeba to attack in concert with the Milne Bay aircraft, but they were thwarted by the weather. Heavy rain squalls and overcast lowered visibility to zero, so the Japanese force began landing at 2200 hrs 25 August.





Possibly thinking that the K.B. Mission was Gili Gili, they landed 5-7 miles east of Rabi. They established a headquarters at Waga Waga and supply dumps at Waga Waga and Wanadala.

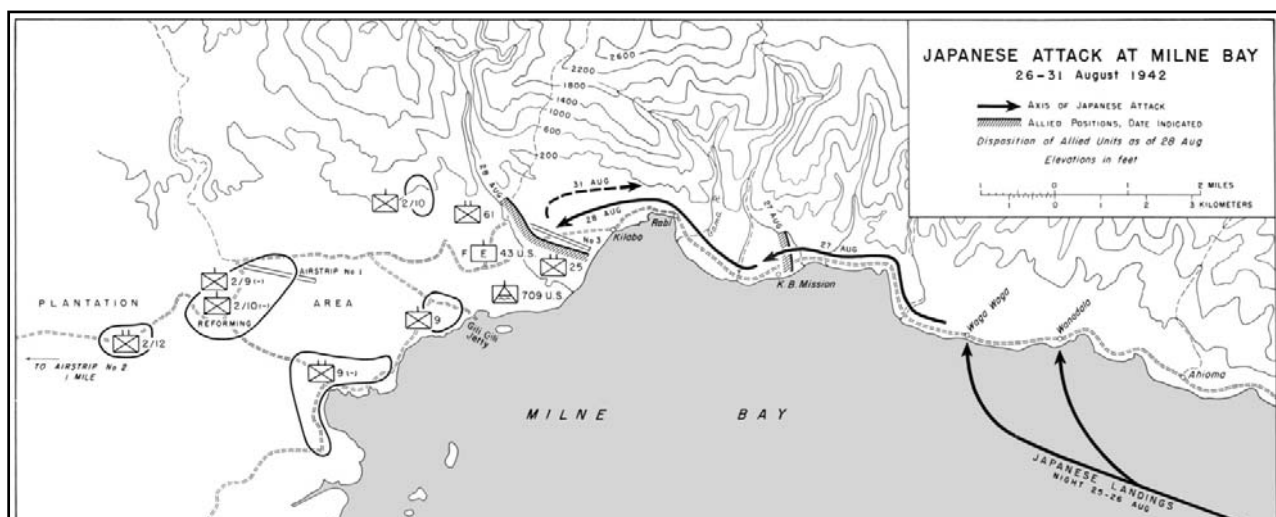




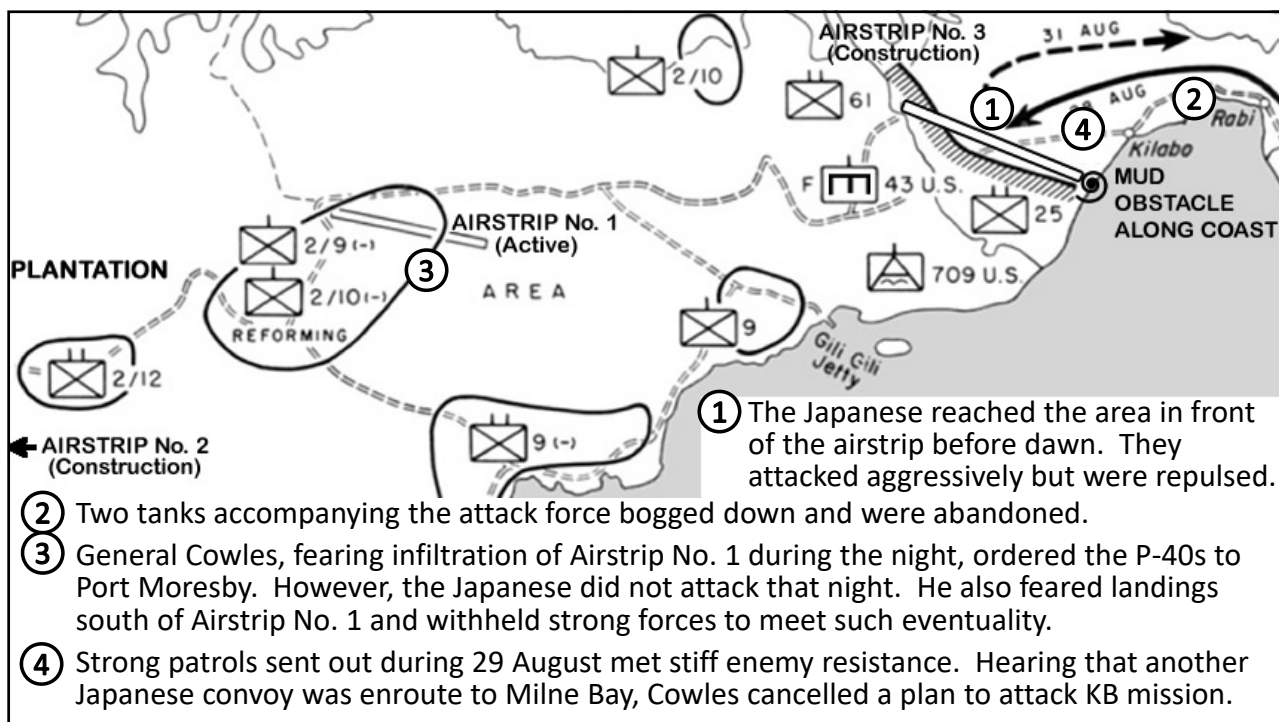
Presumed to be facing a battalion of Infantry, they faced 2 brigades plus other troops.



- ① A company of the 61st Infantry assigned at K.B. Mission engaged the Japanese from 0145 26 August until dawn and the confused Japanese withdrew.
- ② A second company of the 61st reinforced KB Mission, but the Japanese had reconnoitred KB mission during the day and attacked that evening in force. Pushing the militia back.
- ③ On the 27th, 2/10 were sent to recon and reached KB mission unopposed by late afternoon. As dark hit, the enemy struck in full force with two tanks. After 2 hours, the 2/10 was split in two with HQ and 2 companies pushed into the mountains. The remainder withdrew to base. The lightly armed Australians suffered heavy casualties.



Constantly harassed as they advanced up a single, muddy track along the narrow strip between the mountains and sea, the Japanese reached the No. 3 airstrip before dawn on 28 August. The 100 yard x 2,000 yard strip was cleared but only partially graded. A sea of mud between the site and the sea was virtually impassable, so the Japanese assault had to be made across the airstrip, a perfect defensive position.



One of the two bogged Japanese Type 95 *Ha-Go* tanks abandoned near Rabi village (photographed well after weather had improved).





“Every night the Japs stabbed and hacked their way toward the edge of the air strip, and each day the Aussies flung them back.”

(MSG Jules Archer, 697th Aircraft Warning Company, 5th US Air Force, Milne Force)

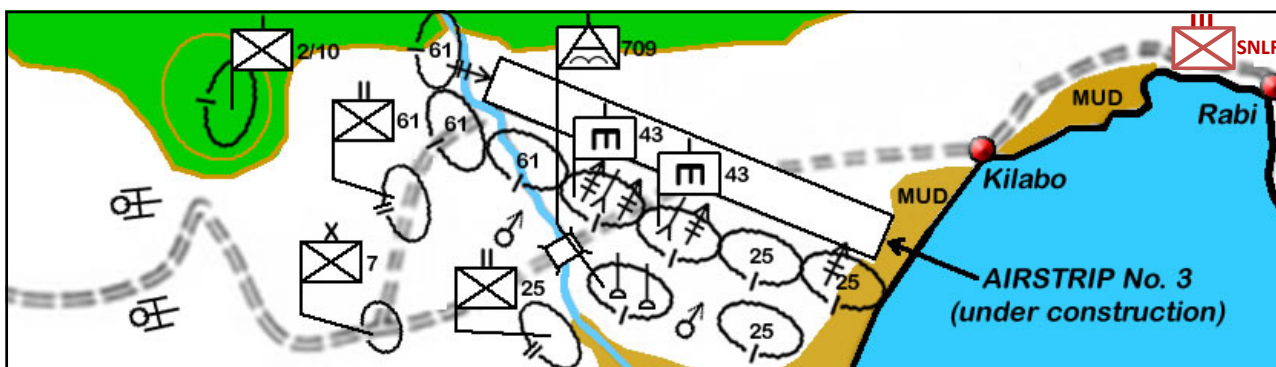
As the enemy advanced in the night they fortified position as they passed. They hid machine gun pits and placed snipers in coconut trees to cut down counterattacking Aussies. English-speaking Japanese would shout “Cooey” to tempt Aussies to look up into a sniper’s sights, or yell “Forward, Men!” to trick them to charge into an ambush. One night a Jap answered the challenge “Who goes there?” with an unfortunate, “Friend! Good morning!” Others carrying only knife or sword would attempt to swim around the Aussie defensive positions to attack from the rear.



The P-40 Kittyhawks returned from Port Moresby to Airstrip No. 1 early on 30th August.

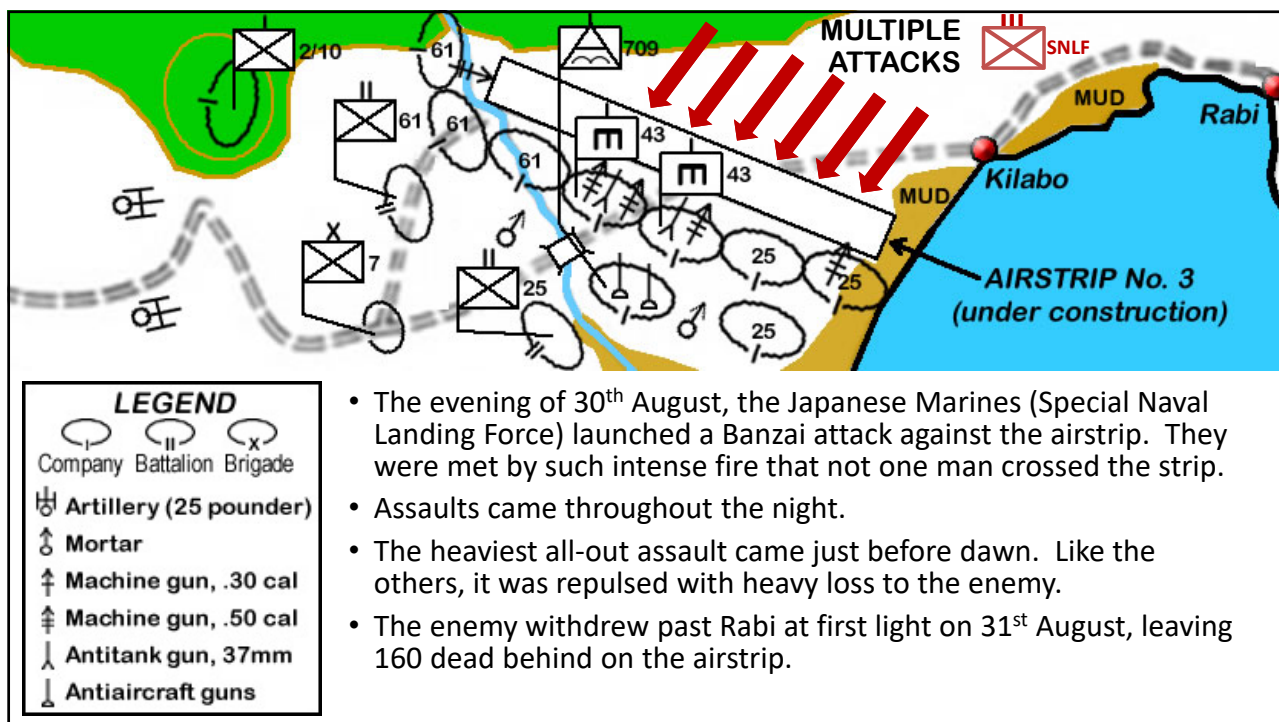


- ① A Japanese convoy escorted by a cruiser and nine destroyers landed safely during a heavy mist at 2100 on 29 August and unloaded some 770 Japanese SNLF reinforcements.
- ② During the daylight on 30th August, the Japanese consolidated for another attack on Airstrip No. 3.
- ③ The daylight hours were quiet for the defenders of Milne Bay.
- ④ Brigadier John Field CBE, DSO, Commander of the 7th Brigade Australian Militia, commanded the defense of Airstrip No. 3.



LEGEND	
	Company
	Battalion
	Brigade
	Artillery (25 pounder)
	Mortar
	Machine gun, .30 cal
	Machine gun, .50 cal
	Antitank gun, 37mm
	Antiaircraft guns

- Expecting an all-out assault, BG Field modified his defence by placing .50 cal machine guns at both ends of the airstrip to have overlapping fire pretty much the length of the strip.
- The .50 cal MGs and antitank guns of Companies D & F, 43d Engineers, were again in the centre of the line, pulled back from the strip but with clear fields of fire over it.
- They were flanked on either side by the rifles, submachine guns, .30 calibre MGs and mortars of the 61st and 25th Battalions.
- The line was supported by the 25 pounders about a half mile to the rear, and by the P-40s from No. 1. Strip.



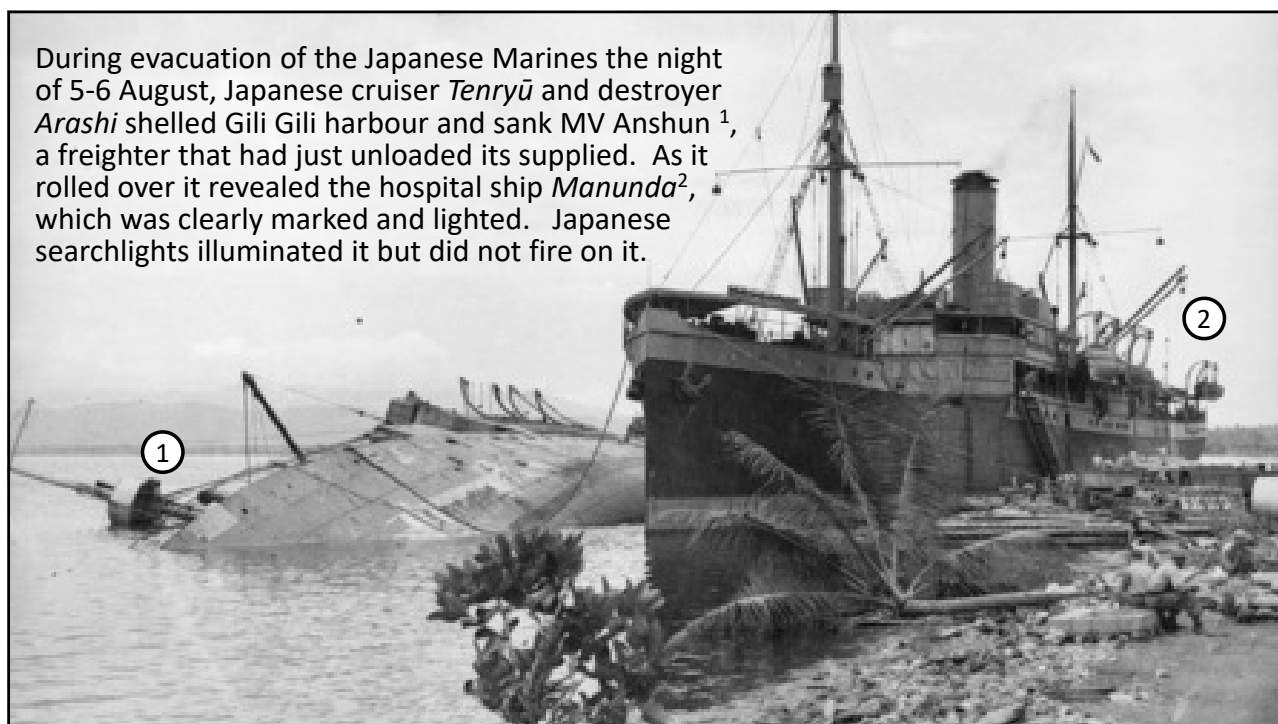
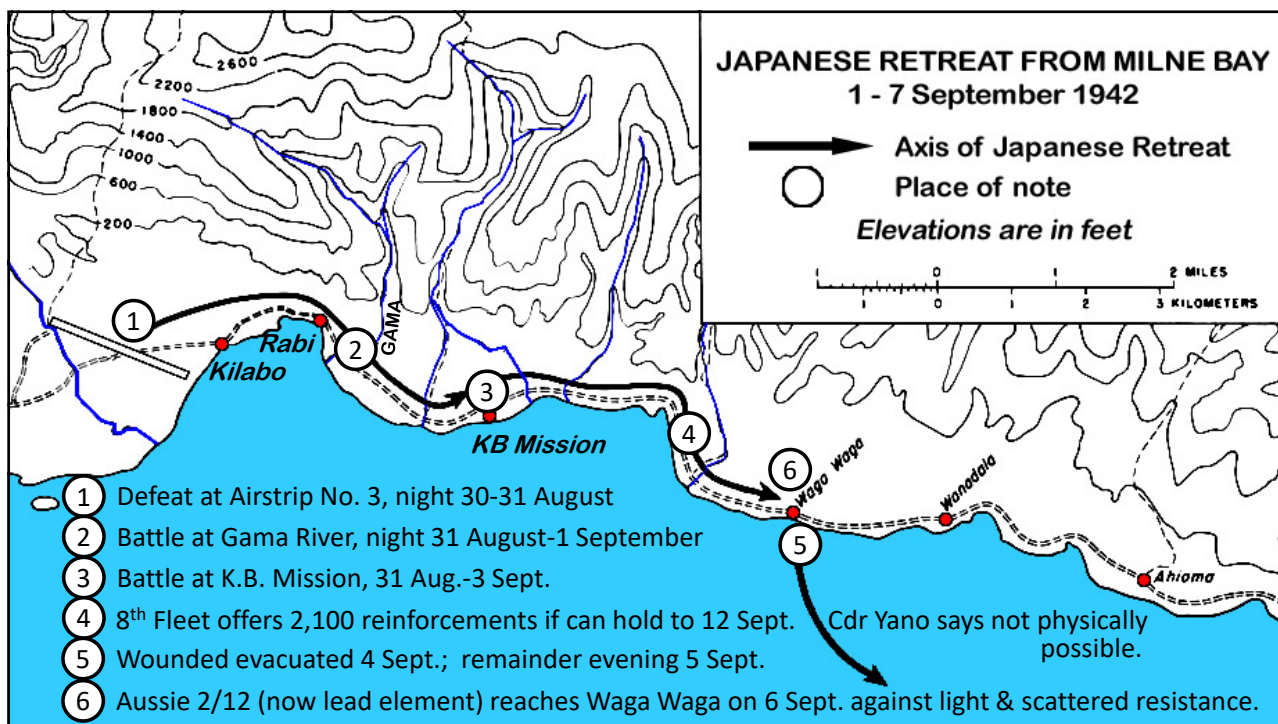
At the height of the fighting, the CO of the 43rd Engineers (US) received an urgent message from Port Moresby, asking about the progress on the bomber strip. It noted that the High Command (McArthur) was anxious to fly in heavy bombers to carry the air war to the Japanese. The Engineering Officer replied, "We are rushing to complete dispersal areas for bombers on No. 1 strip. We are having difficulty, however, getting steel matting that was unloaded on No. 3. strip. The Japs have control of the north side of this strip and will not cooperate with us on the southern side."

The attacks the night of 30-31 August ended the Japanese Marine's offensive. Their focus turned now to a fighting withdrawal to their landing areas for withdrawal by sea. Their jungle fighting experience made this a hazardous undertaking for the pursuing Australians.

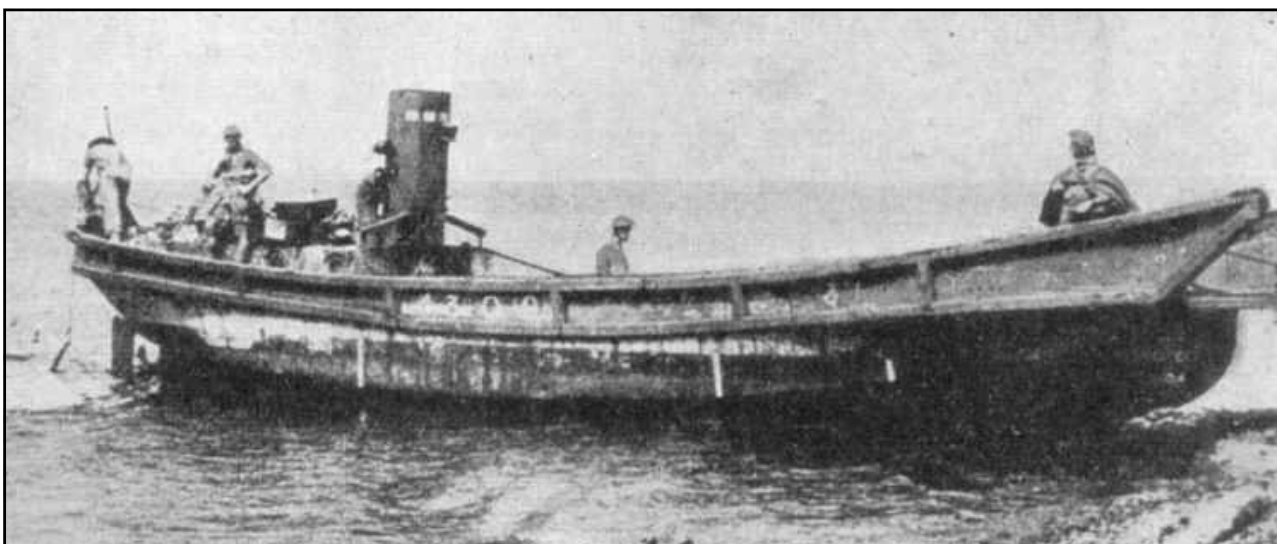


Brigadier George Wootten's desert-experienced 18th Brigade began the long-delayed task of clearing Japanese from Milne Bay's north shore. The 2/12 Battalion led the operation and reached Japanese-held KM Mission late on 31 August. Following 2/12, 9th Battalion held positions cleared (e.g., Gama River).

That evening (31 August) a force of 300 Japanese who had gone to the hills after the failed airstrip attacks, were surprised as they attempted to cross the Gama River, and lost some 100 KIA in heavy fighting.



During six days of heavy fighting from 1 to 5 September, the Australians lost 45 killed and 147 wounded. Japanese losses were much heavier. The Japanese lost at least 90 killed along the Gama River, at least 80 in the counterattack at KB Mission, more as mop up progressed over the next several weeks. Few prisoners were taken.



Japanese losses were some 625 killed and virtually all of the 1,311 survivors were wounded or otherwise not combat effective due to injury or disease.

Allies lost 167 Australian KIA/MIA (ground and air) and 14 Americans KIA; 206 Allies were WIA.



The battle was the first in the Pacific campaign in which Allied troops decisively defeated Japanese land forces, forcing them to withdraw and completely abandon their strategic objective.