

MILITARY HISTORY THE BATTLE OF THE BEACHHEADS

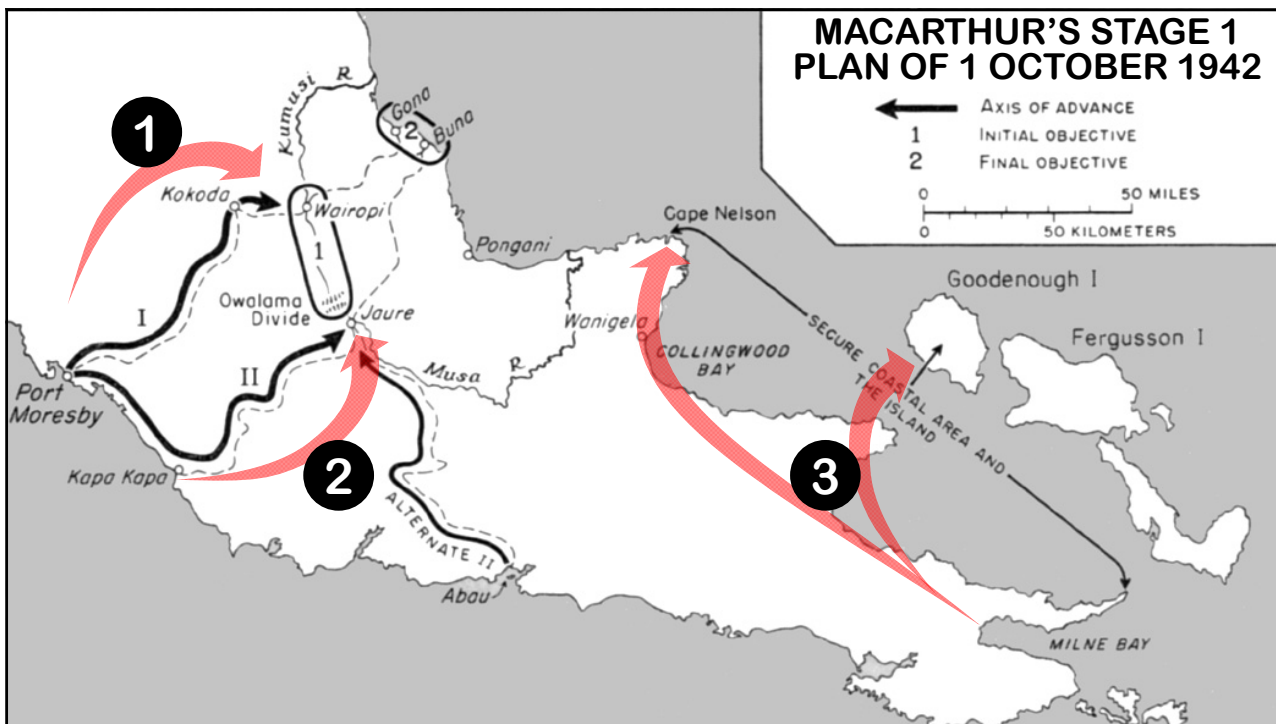


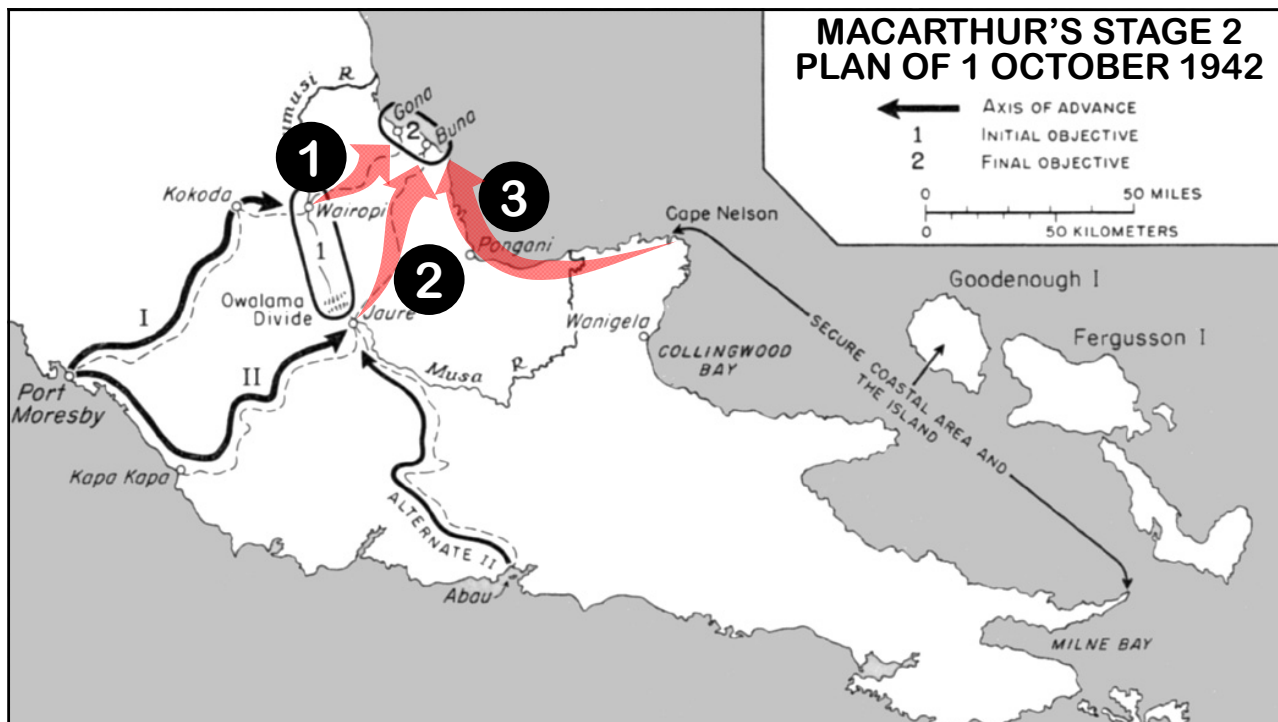


GENERAL HEADQUARTERS
SOUTHWEST PACIFIC AREA
OPERATION ORDER

No. 1

1 October 1942





1. 10 November 1942
2. 14 November 1942

OK, so the Japanese DID intend to capture Port Moresby. They shouldn't have because of... well, no matter. That worked out because they retreated when I didn't expect....

So, NOW you want to know about Japanese strength in Buna-Gona. Well, it should be a push-over! There are only two depleted regiments with a maximum of 4,000 exhausted troops.¹ The Japanese have no intention of holding Buna, but there will be a close perimeter defence of the airfield and beachhead before a general withdrawal. Our Air Corps will prevent any reinforcements.



Oh, wait! I checked with **The General** and now he, I mean I, think there are only 1,500 to 2,000 men overall, with purely defensive intentions.² These are mainly the small and pitiful remnant of the enemy force which fought on the trail... and they haven't had much time to dig in.

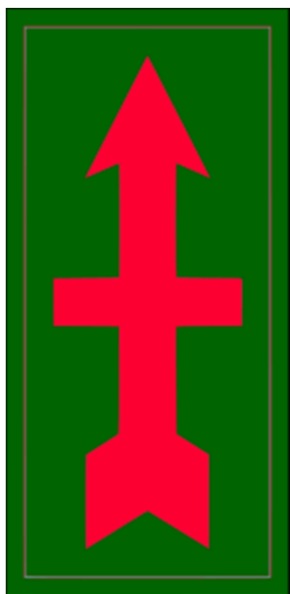
Brigadier General Charles A. Willoughby, G-2

MacArthur on “Time”

- MacArthur to LTG Eichelberger, 10/11/42, “**Time** is of the essence.”
- MacArthur to Eichelberger, 13/12/42, “**Time** is working desperately against us.”
- Eichelberger to MacArthur, 18/12/42, “I never forgot for a moment that we have not much **time**.”
- MacArthur to Eichelberger, 25/12/42, “If results are not achieved **shortly** the whole picture [might] radically change.”
- Eichelberger to Australian General Herring, 30/12/42, “**Time** is the essential element of the attack.”

Casualties

- With few replacements, unit strengths fell steadily. For example:
 -  The US 126th Infantry Regiment (32d Division) left POM in mid-Nov with 141 officers and 3,040 EM and returned 22 January with 32 officers (23%) and 579 EM (19%).
 -  From 27/7/42-5/9/42, the 39th AIM went from 1,500 to 185 men. It was reinforced with 400 men to fight at Buna. By 22 January 1943, it was down to 7 officers and 25 EM (1.6%).
- Eichelberger to MacArthur, 14/1/43, “Regiments here soon have the strength of battalions and a little later are not much more than companies.”



32nd Infantry Division “Les Terribles”

“Oui, Oui, Les soldats terrible, tres bien, tres bien!”
(General de Mondesir, the 38th French Corps Commander)

Mid-Nov 1942	Arrive Buna	10,825 total strength
22 Jan 1943	Buna captured	<u>9,688 casualties</u>
		1,137 duty (10.5%)
	Rtn Australia	
Sept. 1943	Medical status	<u>2,334 unfit*</u>
		110.8% casualties

* Primarily recurrent malaria had them dropped from the division as “unfit for combat”.

- Up to this time the campaign had cost Australia 2,127 casualties. Australian casualty figures for the period 22 July 1942 to 16 November 1942, for ground troops only, are:
 - 709 killed in action;
 - 132 died of wounds and other causes,
 - 1,286 wounded in action.
- Australians had 15,575 cases of infectious disease to the end of 1942, including:
 - 9,249 cases of malaria,
 - 3,643 cases of dysentery,
 - 1,186 cases of dengue fever, and
 - 186 cases of scrub typhus



Japanese losses

21 July 1942 Deployed
22 Jan 1943 Defeated



15,000 total committed strength*
1,000 wounded returned to Rabaul
7,000 KIA buried by Allies
5,000 KIA buried by Japs/Missing
350 CIA by Allies (POWs)
1,650 Escaped during final phase
1,414 KIA/MIA enroute to Rabaul
236 Mustered in Rabaul, April 1943
236 Sick, wounded at muster
0 Fit for duty (100% casualties)
Disbanded April (GAO No. 804, 17/6/43).

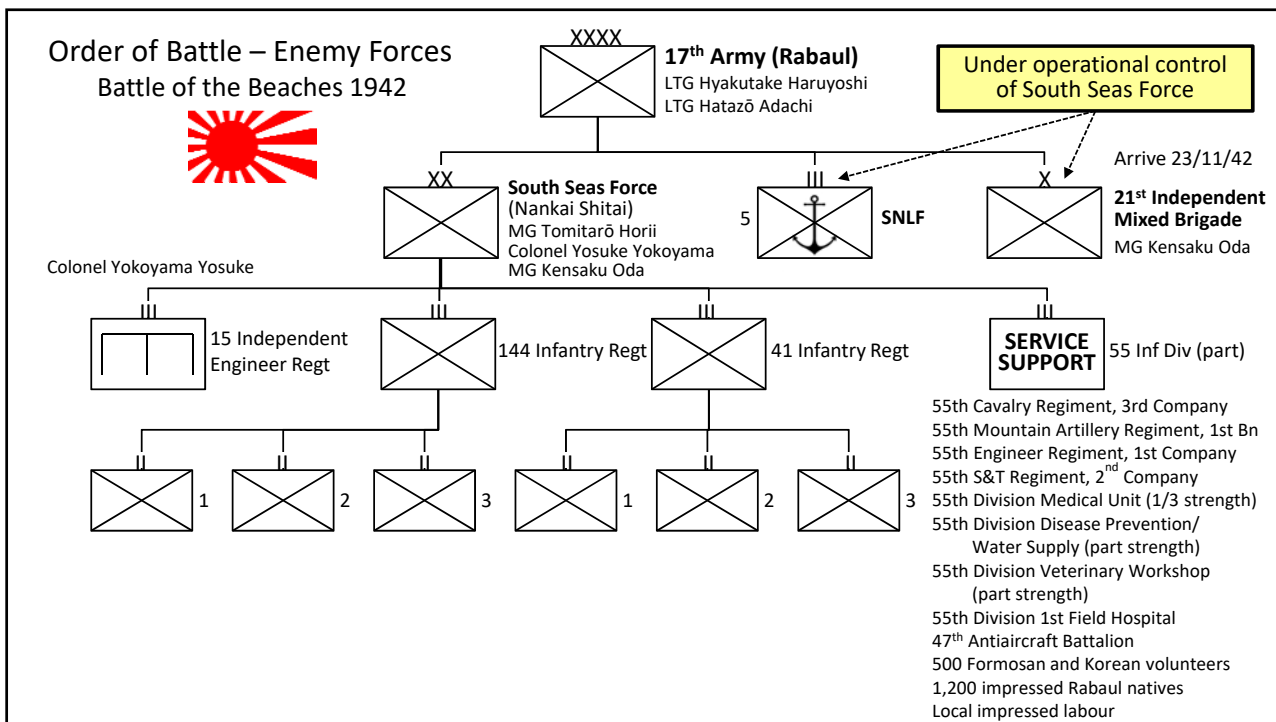
* Kokoda-Buna-Gona-Sanananda only. Excludes 2,000 committed to Invasion of Milne Bay. Horii's men suffered a near complete loss. A Japanese analysis of the Nankai Shitai's



Nankai Shitai

Unit	Mobilised in Japan	Reinforce-ments	KIA/MIA	Survivors
55th Infantry Group headquarters	180	155	253	82
144th Infantry Regiment	3,500	1,150	3,264	1,386
55th Cavalry Regiment, 3rd Company	130	30	130	30
55th Mountain Artillery Regiment, 1st Battalion	900	257	905	252
55th Engineer Regiment, 1st Company	300	50	310	40
55th Supply and Transport Regiment, 2nd Company	145	30	140	35
55th Division Medical Unit (one-third strength)	220	80	250	50
55th Division Disease Prevention/Water Supply (part strength)	50	10	45	15
55th Division Veterinary Workshop (part strength)	21	5	20	6
55th Division 1st Field Hospital	140	30	115	55
Total	5,586	1,797	5,432	1,951*
15th Independent Engineer Regiment				
41st Infantry Regiment				200
21st Independent Mixed Brigade				

* Only 140 Nankai Shitai veterans survived the war to return to Japan.



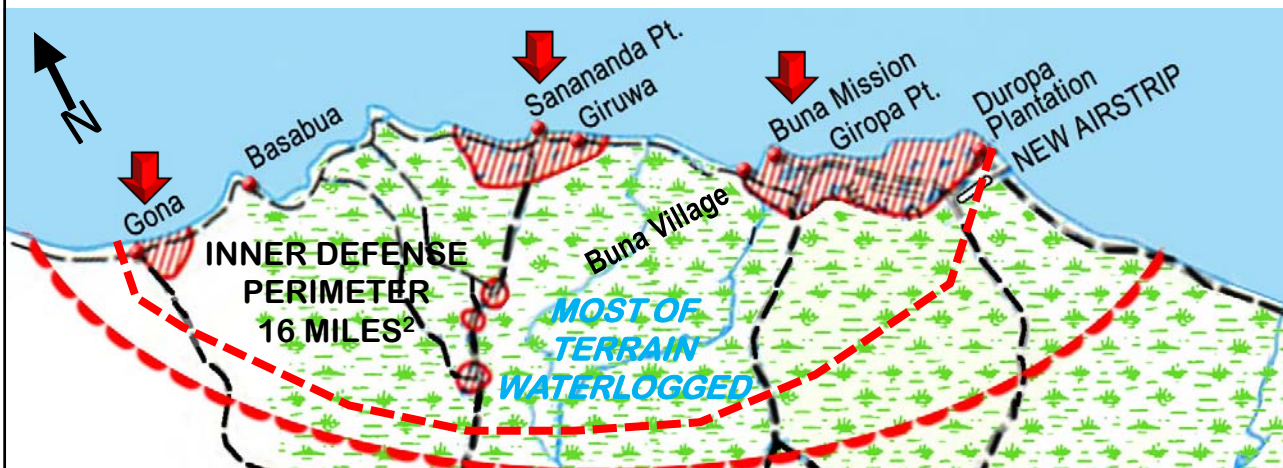
The South Seas Force's Marching Song

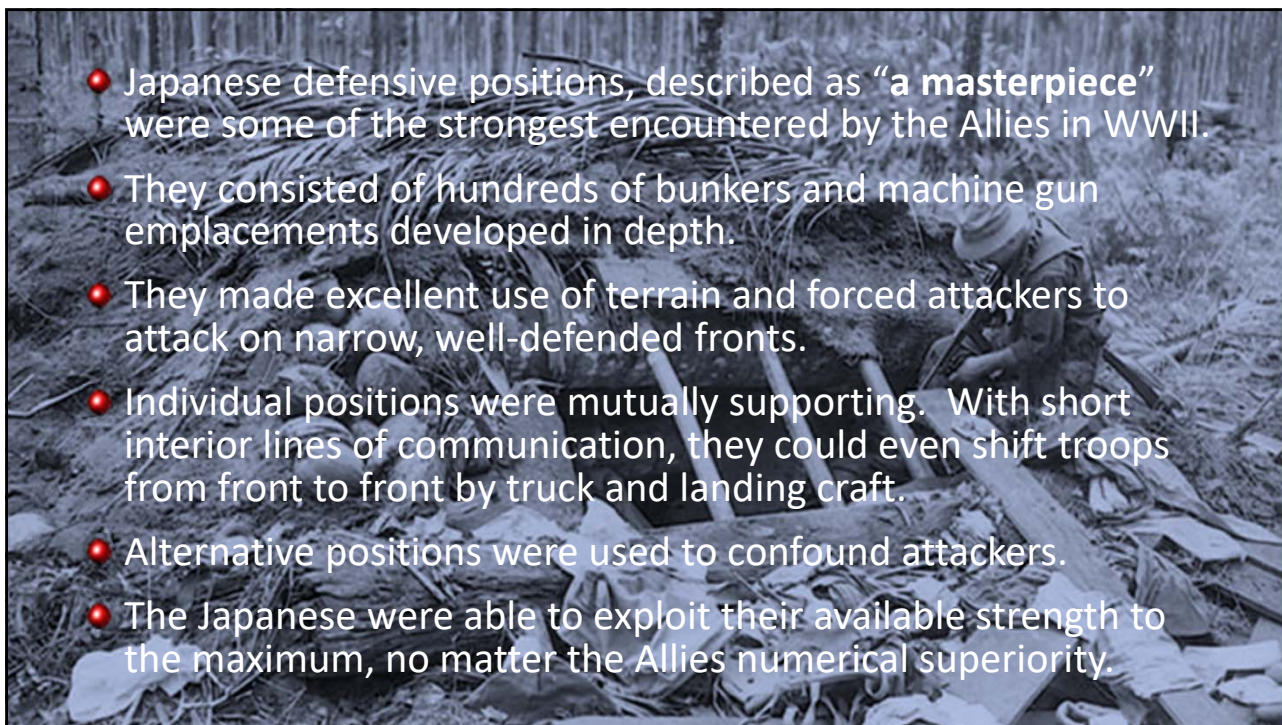
**A brisk divine wind blowing
 Towards Australia at the
 limits of the South.
 The ultimate place to reach.
 The dawn of a new world,
 Not quickly, but faintly.**

The kamikaze (Japanese: 神風) literally "divine wind" were two winds or storms that are said to have saved Japan from two Mongol fleets under Kublai Khan.

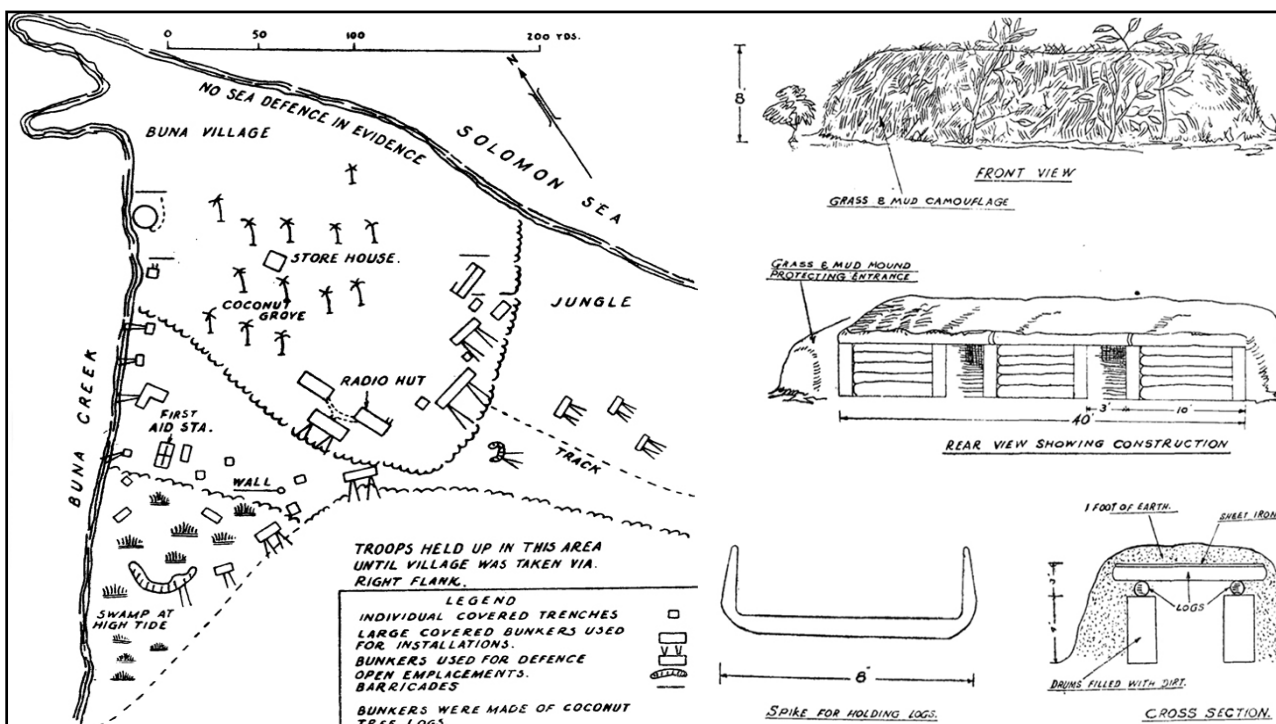
While SWPA HQ continued to believe that the Japanese had no intention to attack Port Moresby overland (even as MG Horii was leading 9,000 troops doing just that), 3,000 Japanese military engineers and thousands of labourers on the coast fortified the beachheads with a system of reinforced, cross-linked bunkers.

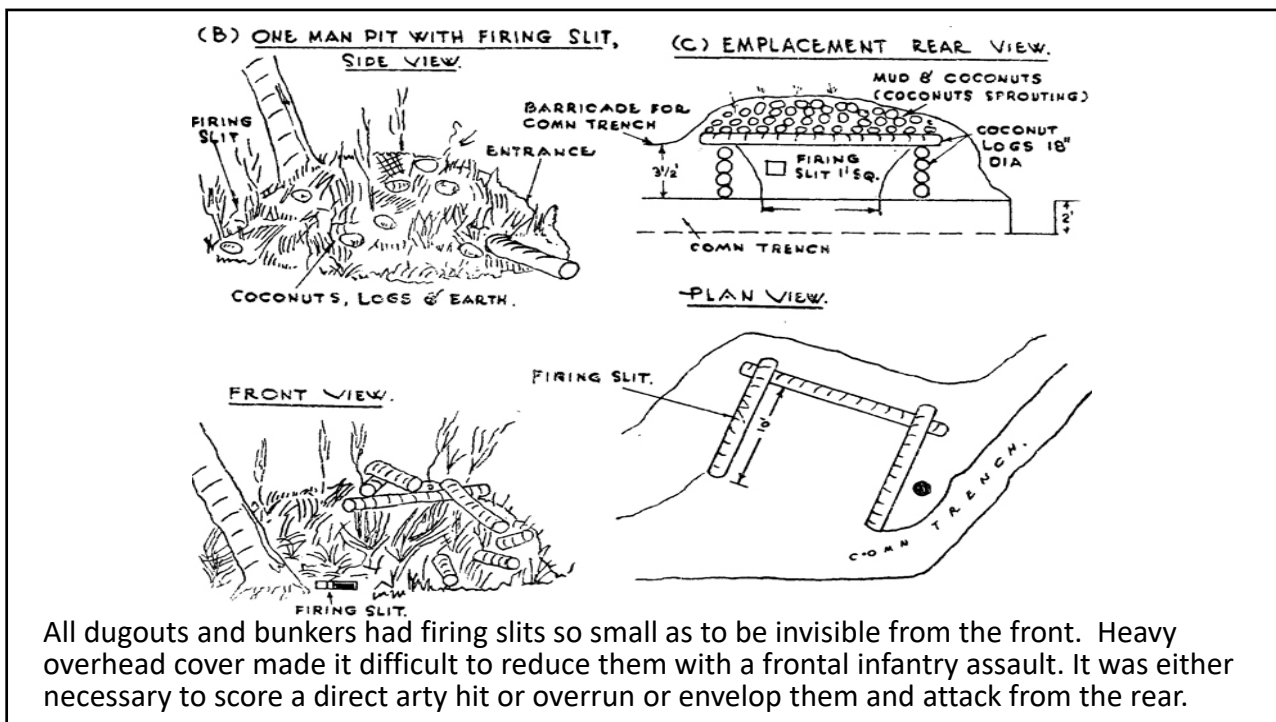
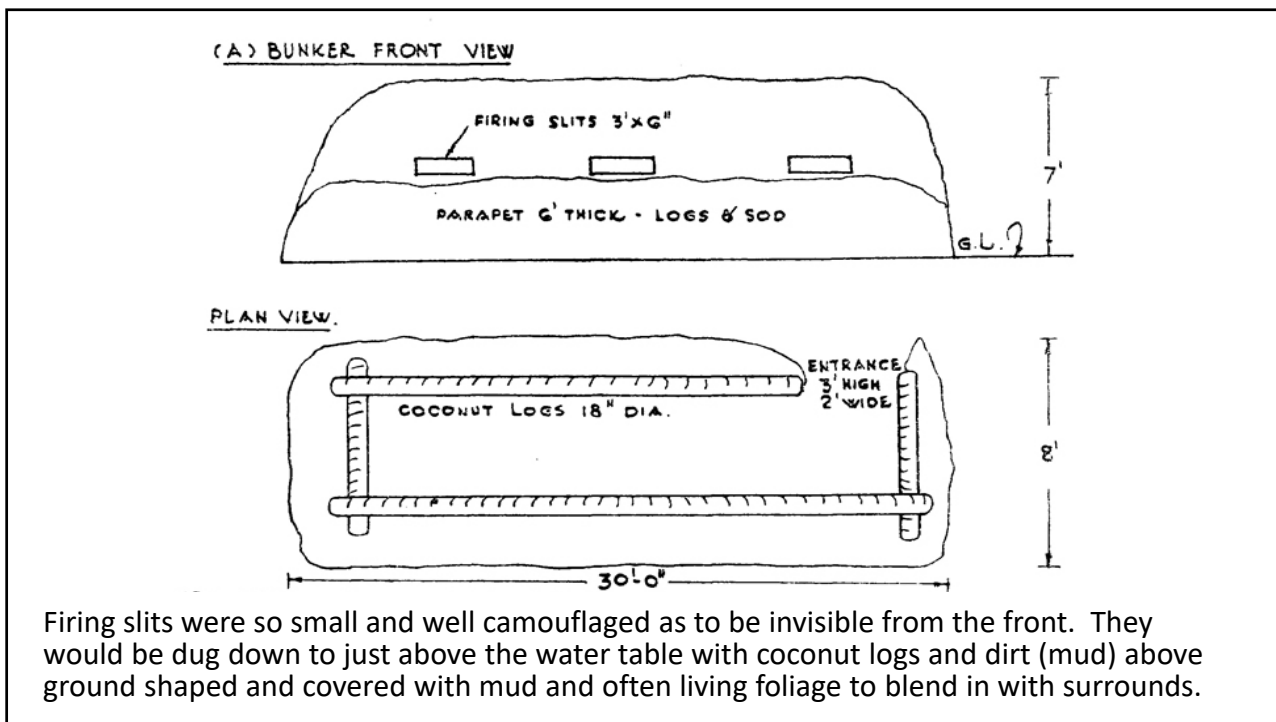
Three main defensive positions were developed covering some 11 miles in width.

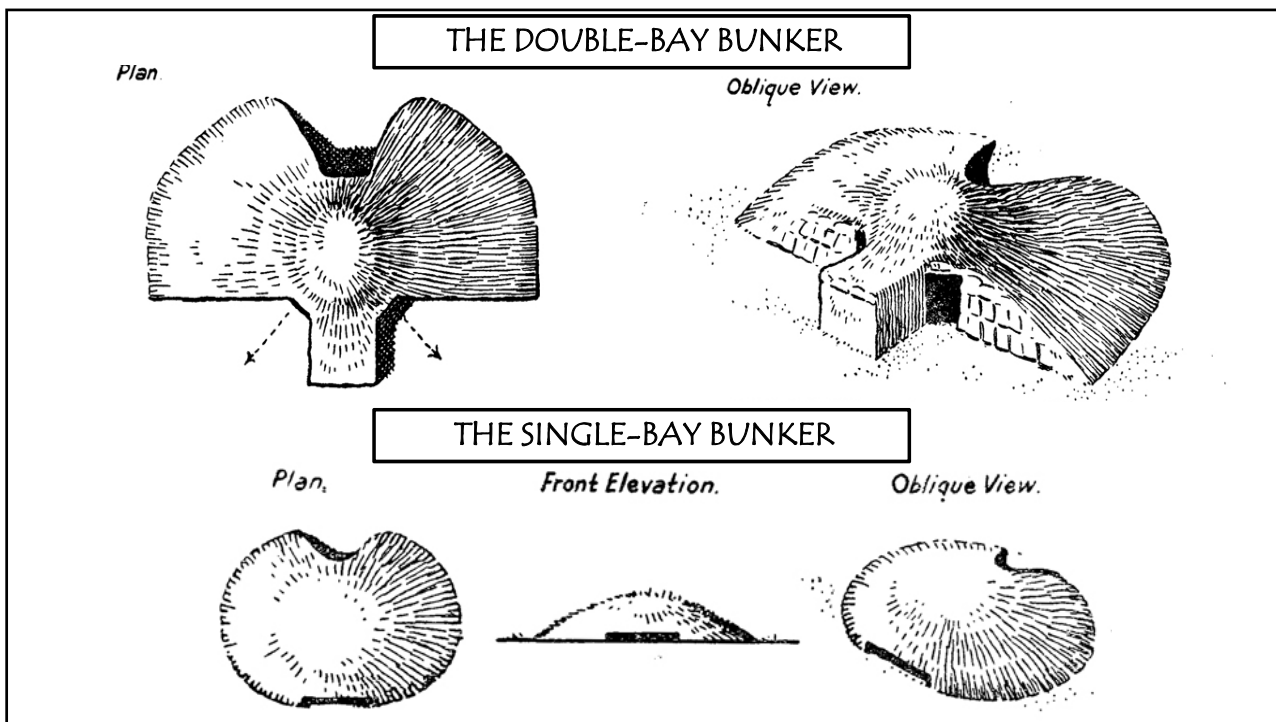
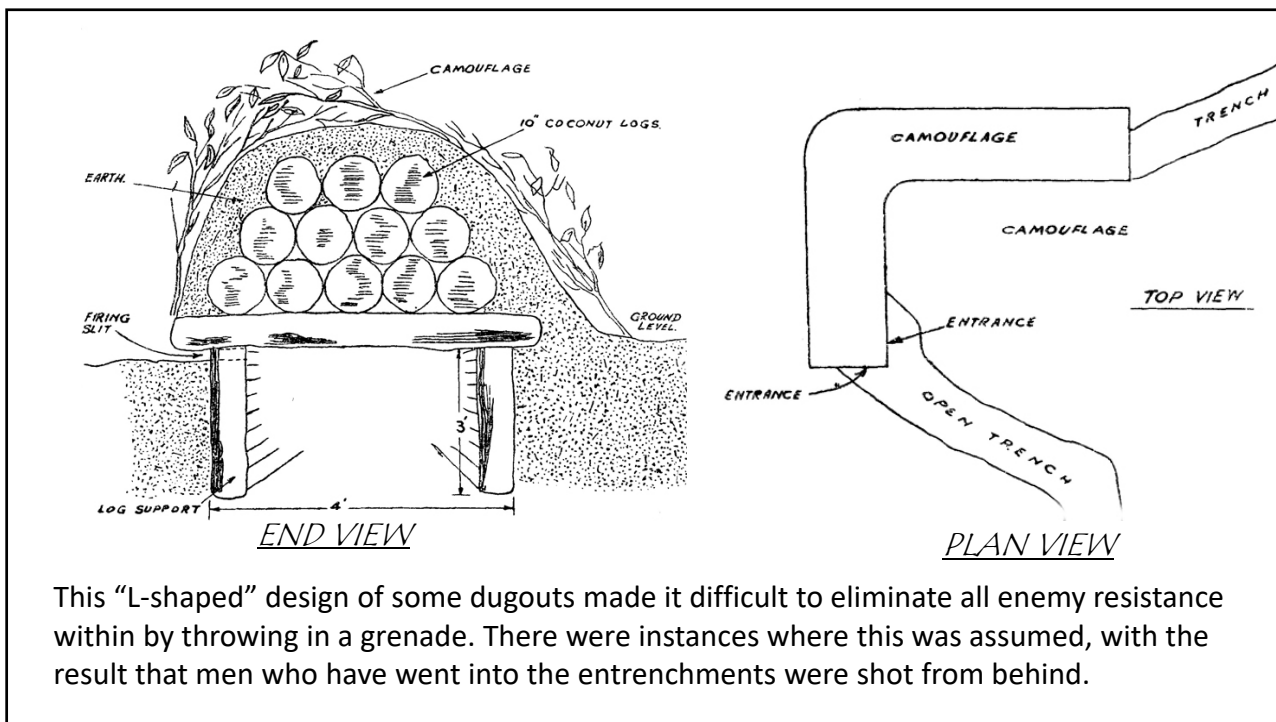


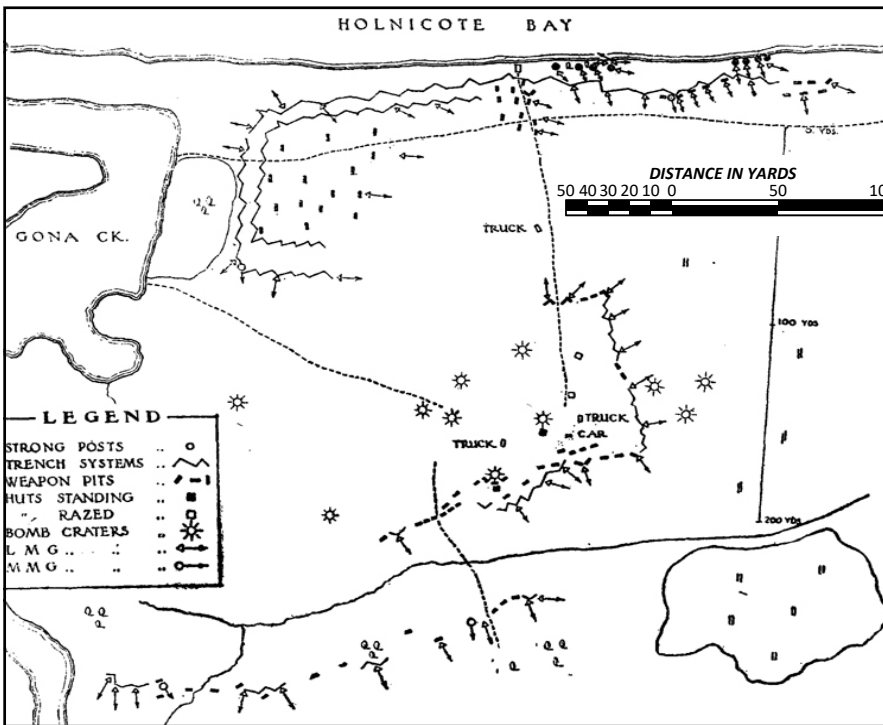


- Japanese defensive positions, described as “a masterpiece” were some of the strongest encountered by the Allies in WWII.
- They consisted of hundreds of bunkers and machine gun emplacements developed in depth.
- They made excellent use of terrain and forced attackers to attack on narrow, well-defended fronts.
- Individual positions were mutually supporting. With short interior lines of communication, they could even shift troops from front to front by truck and landing craft.
- Alternative positions were used to confound attackers.
- The Japanese were able to exploit their available strength to the maximum, no matter the Allies numerical superiority.

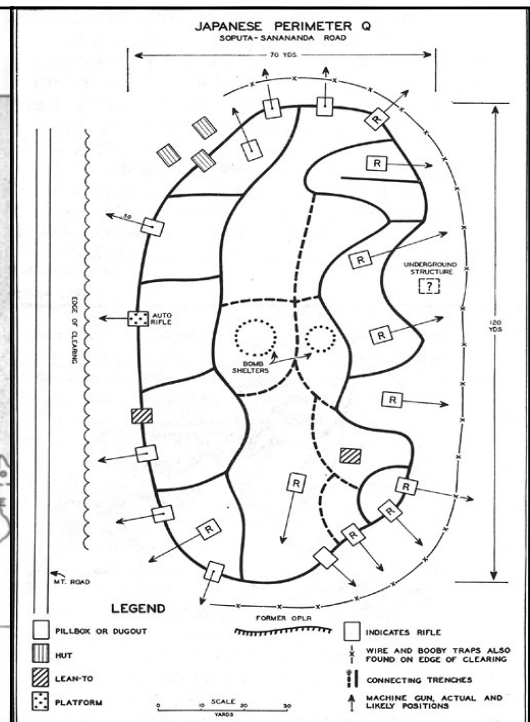
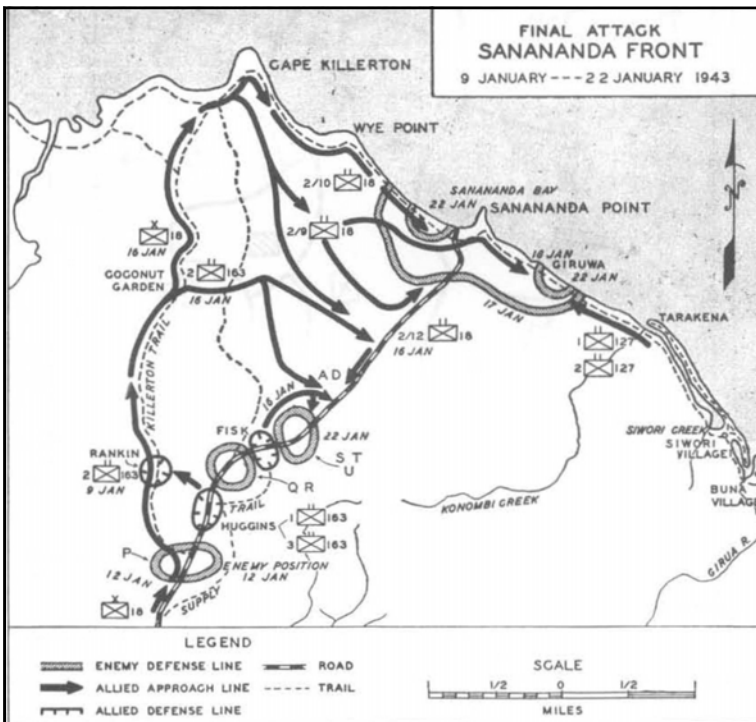


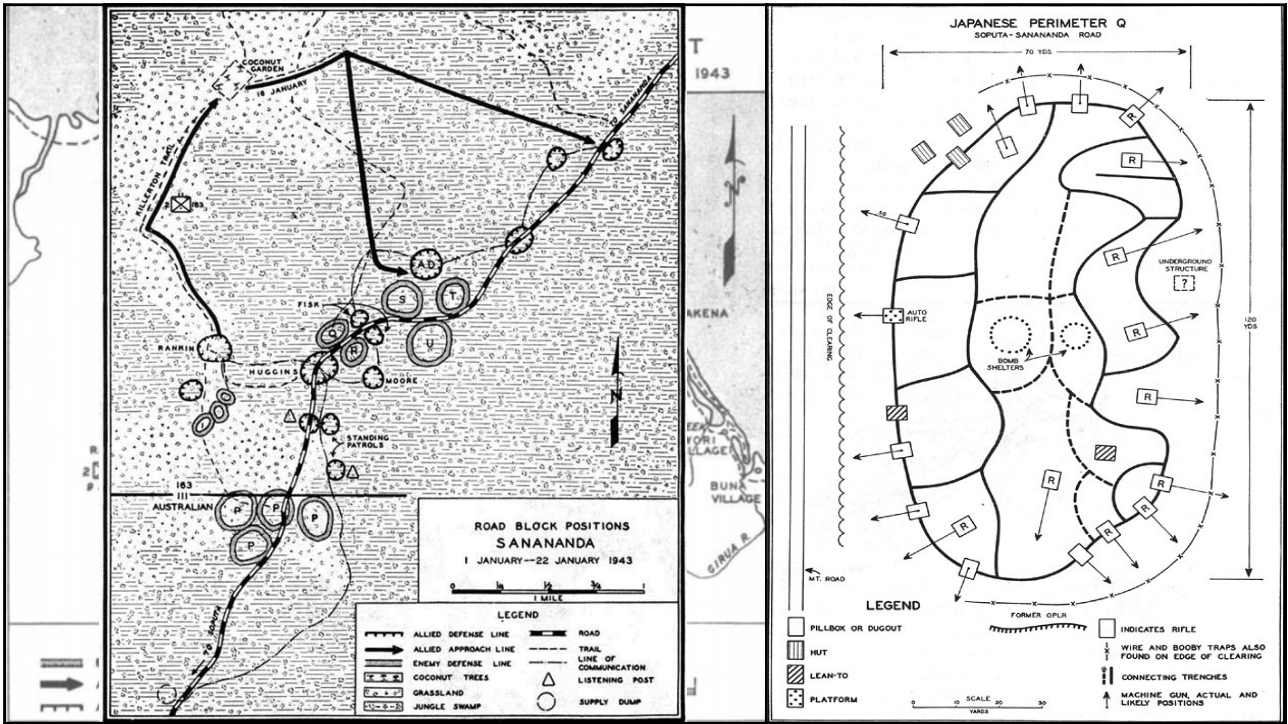




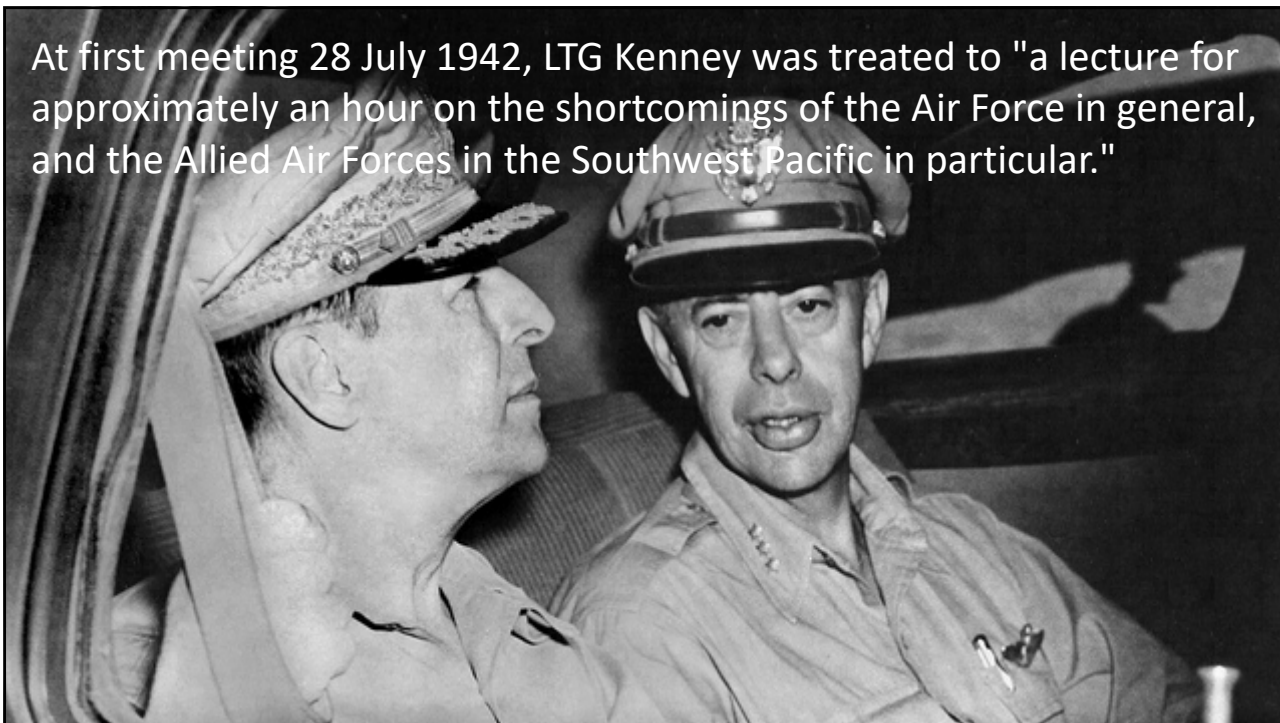


Enemy defences in Gona. The number of light MGs (57) suggest the fire power of approximately six rifle/LMG companies at full strength. The most southerly line suggests a company with two MMGs attached; it occupies a frontage of exactly 200 yards. It should be noticed that the right flank of this company rests on a creek and its left flank is anchored on a marsh.

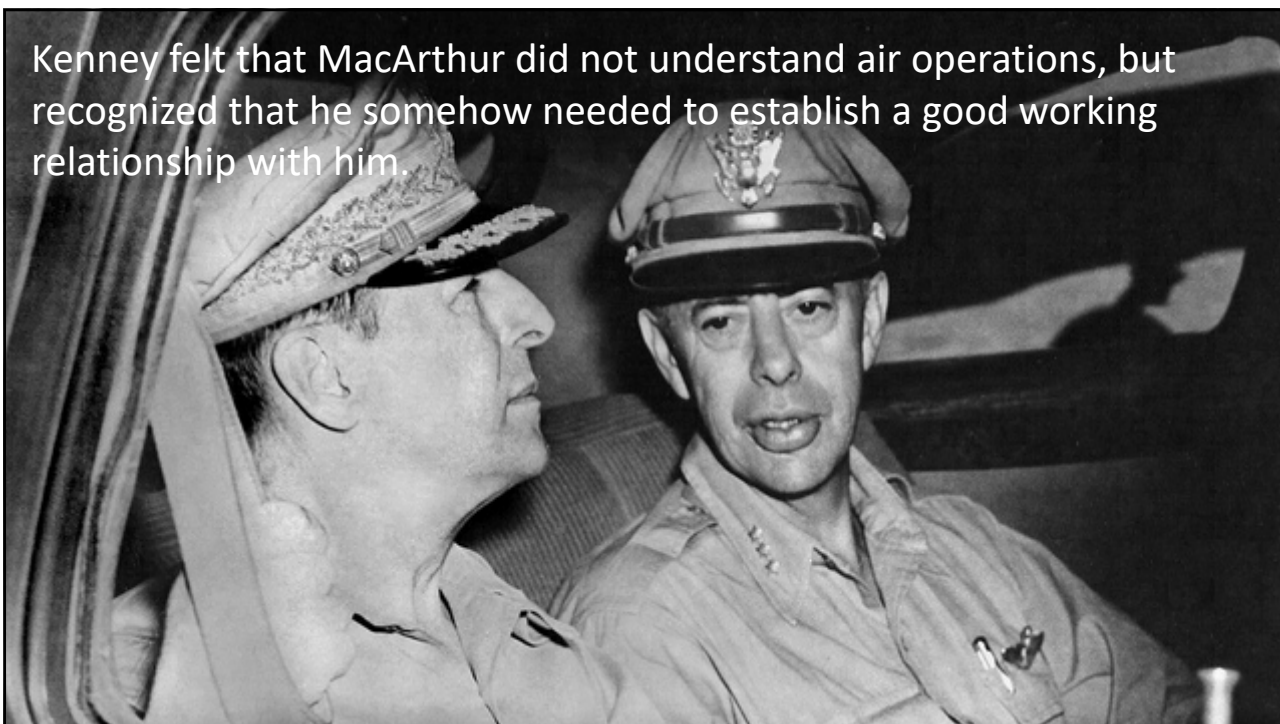




At first meeting 28 July 1942, LTG Kenney was treated to "a lecture for approximately an hour on the shortcomings of the Air Force in general, and the Allied Air Forces in the Southwest Pacific in particular."



Kenney felt that MacArthur did not understand air operations, but recognized that he somehow needed to establish a good working relationship with him.



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Will you give me authority to send people I consider "deadwood" home?

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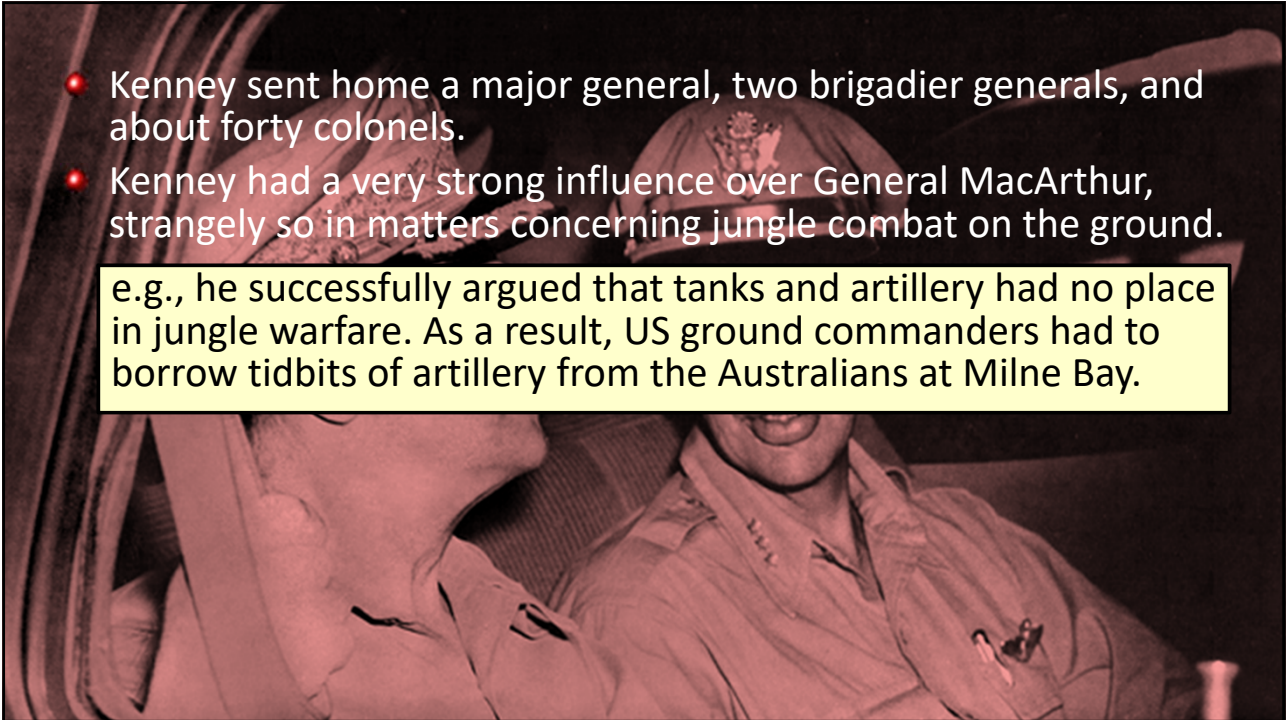


Will you give me authority to send people I consider "deadwood" home?

Now that's what I call leadership!!!

- Kenney sent home a major general, two brigadier generals, and about forty colonels.
- Kenney had a very strong influence over General MacArthur, strangely so in matters concerning jungle combat on the ground.

e.g., he successfully argued that tanks and artillery had no place in jungle warfare. As a result, US ground commanders had to borrow tidbits of artillery from the Australians at Milne Bay.



“Neither tanks nor heavy artillery have any place in jungle warfare.” (LTG George Kenney, CG, SWPA Allied Air)



THE ARTILLERY IN THIS THEATER FLIES.

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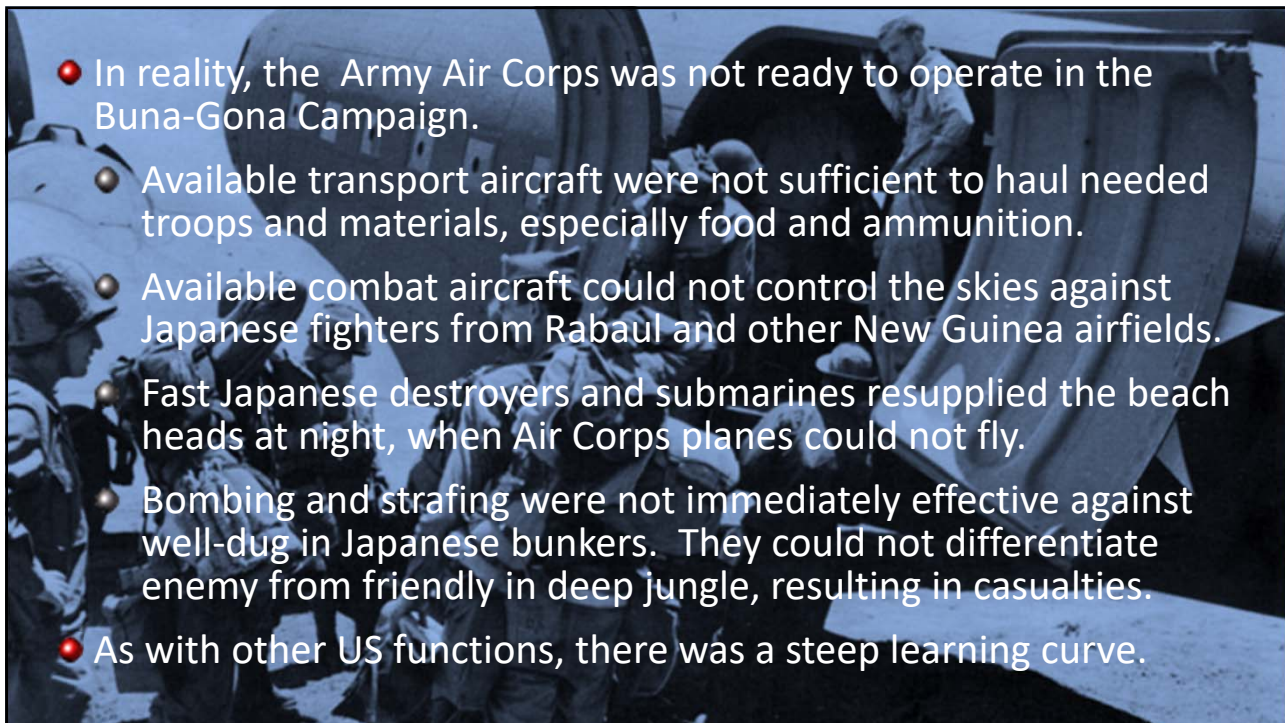
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- But Kenney was innovative, and SWAPA had some notable “firsts”.
 - Air transport: Sept 42 airlift of 32nd Division to Port Moresby
 - Airlift of Australian troops via C-47 Dakotas to Wanigela.
 - Aerial resupply of troops at Kokoda and Buna-Gona front.
 - Air drop of 503rd Airborne Regt to Nadzab to secure airfield for airlift of Australian troops to Nadzab (during Lae campaign).
 - Skip-bombing Japanese shipping.

- And, of course, aerial artillery.



B-25H with 4x.50 calibre machine guns and a 75mm cannon, as modified by MAJ Pappy Gunn for use as an attack aircraft by the US Army Air Corps of SWAPA in New Guinea.



- While commanders on the ground begged for artillery, there was a widespread belief at SWPA GHQ that the mortars, direct air support, and the few Australian pieces already available in the area would be enough to clear the way for the infantry.
- GHQ argued that artillery could not be used effectively or even be manhandled in the swampy terrain.
- In reality, GHQ did not have the means to bring the artillery forward or to keep it supplied when it got there.
- By persistence and a good relationship with Australian artillery commander Brig. Barker, the 32d Division was lent a two-gun section of 3.7-inch mountain artillery and four 25-pounders with crews – not nearly enough, but far better than nothing.

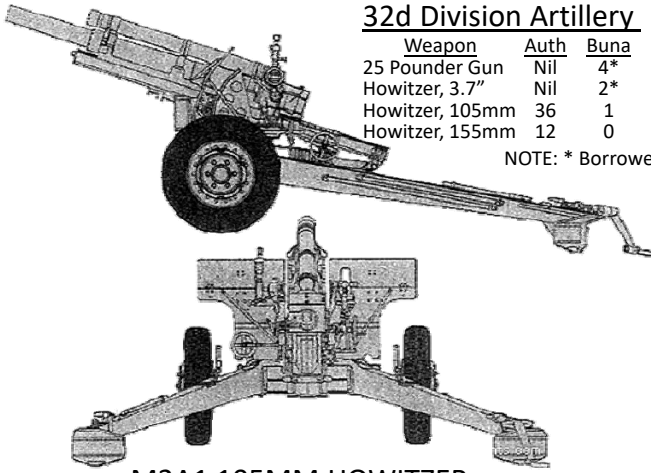


Australian 3.7-inch Pack Howitzer is dismantled before being loaded on a Japanese motor-driven barge which was captured at Milne Bay.

32d Division Artillery

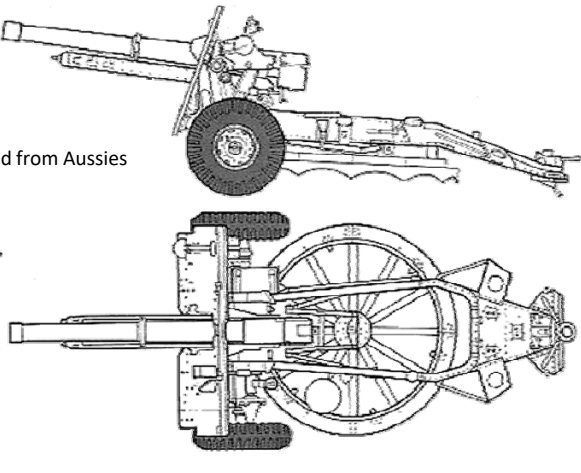
Weapon	Auth	Buna
25 Pounder Gun	Nil	4*
Howitzer, 3.7"	Nil	2*
Howitzer, 105mm	36	1
Howitzer, 155mm	12	0

NOTE: * Borrowed from Aussies



M2A1 105MM HOWITZER

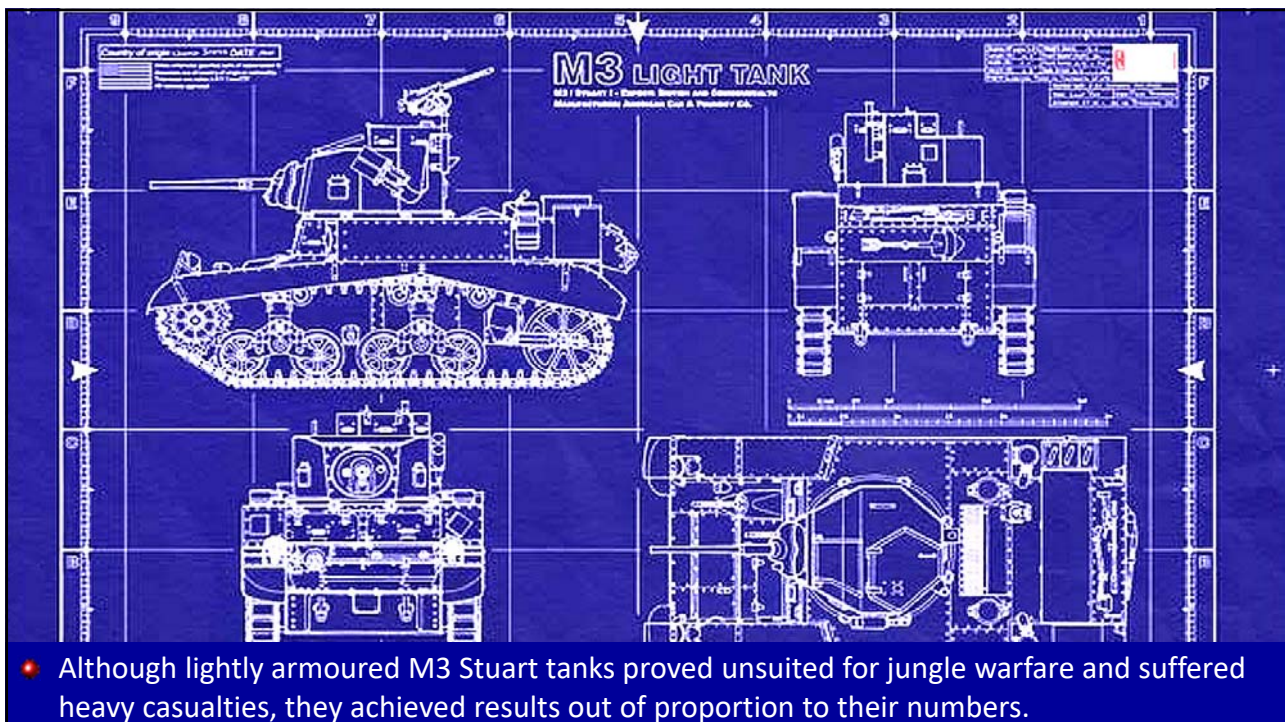
Standard projectile	Shell 105x372R, HE M1 Shell 19.08 kgs HE-AT M67 Shell 16.71 kgs
Calibre	105 mm (4.1 in)
Weight	2,260 kg (4,980 lb)
Length	5.94 m (19 ft 6 in)
Barrel length	2.31 m (7 ft 7 in) L/22
Width	2.21 m (7 ft 3 in)
Height	1.73 m (5 ft 8 in)



25 POUNDER GUN (HOWITZER)

Standard projectile	HE Shell Mk. ID S/L Fuse No. 117 or 119 Weight - 25 lbs.
Ordnance - Steel:	Weight with breech mechanism 444 kgs Length - 96.72 inches Calibre - 3.45 inches Chamber capacity - 151 cu. inches Polygroove rifling - 1 turn in 20 calibres (69 ins)

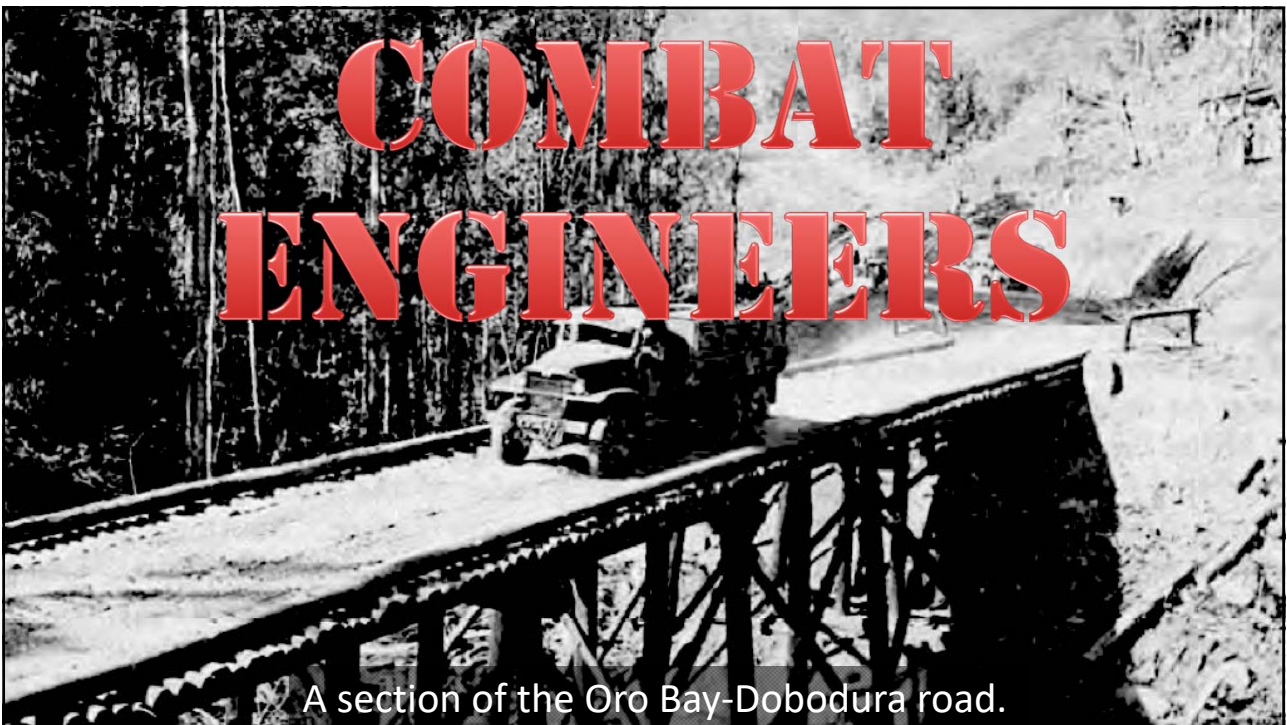






Australian 2/6th Armoured Regiment

- In September 1942, 'A' Squadron deployed to Port Moresby.
- Regimental HQ and 'C' Squadron deployed to Port Moresby.
- In November 1942, 'B' Squadron deployed to Milne Bay.
- December 1942, 'B' and 'C' Squadrons were shipped to Buna to help break the deadlock in the Battle of Buna–Gona.
- Seven tanks took part in the fighting around Cape Endaiadere:
- Three Stuarts were lost on 18 December.
- Four were lost 24 December when engaged by Japanese AAA at point blank range. Three were knocked out and one ran in a ditch.
- Eleven "B' Squadron tanks took part in an ill-conceived attack at Giropa Point on 29 December that failed link up with the infantry.
- Further attacks occurred 1 and 10 January 1943 around Sananada.

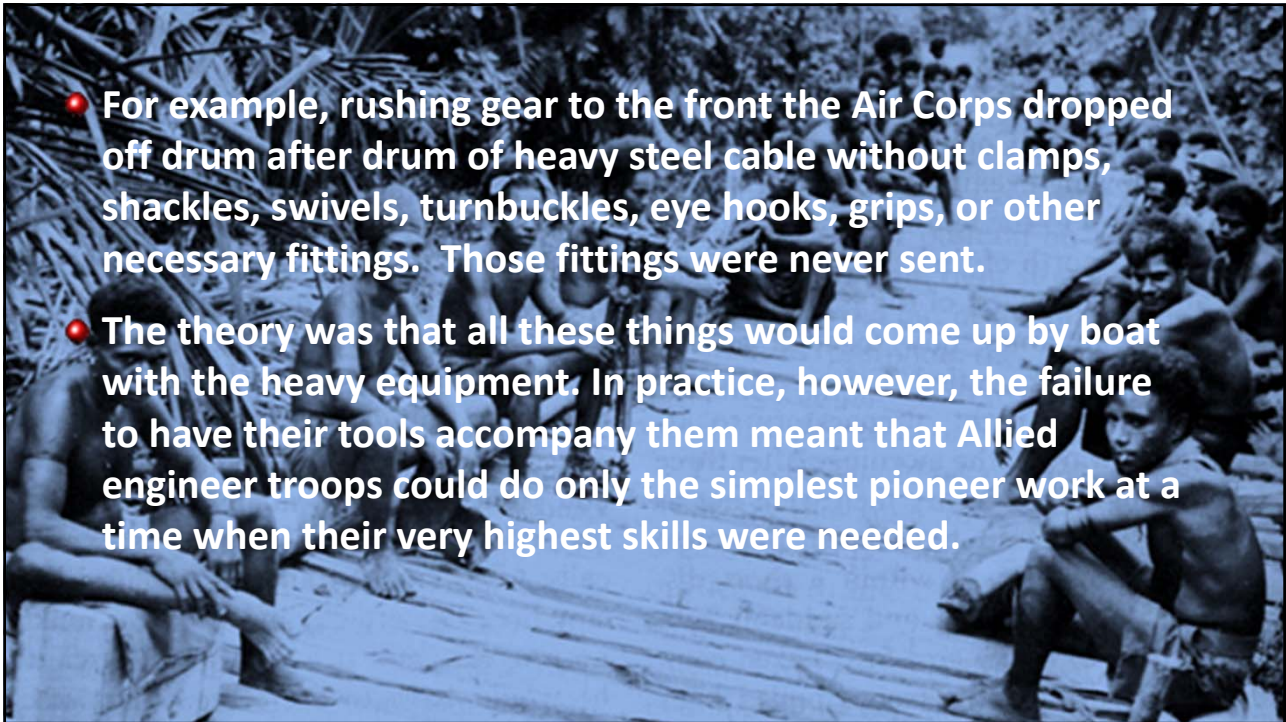


- Allied combat engineer support for Buna-Gona was scant.

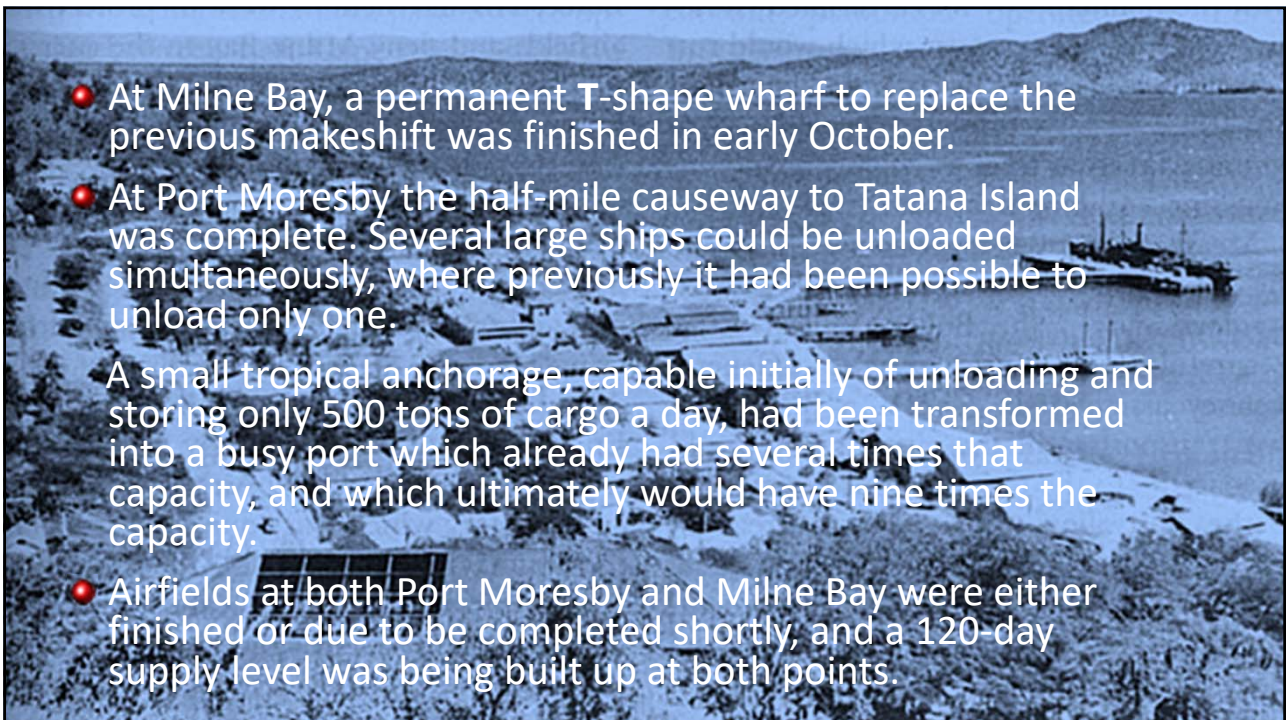
By contrast, almost half of General Horii's original force were either been combat engineers or Army and Navy construction troops. Over 3,000 with as many labourers developed and constructed the Japanese defenses at Buna-Sanananda-Gona.

- Yet with the rainy season at hand and a need for roads, bridges, and airfields to be built, 32d Div. had only a few platoons of the 114th Engineer Battalion attached to its two combat teams.
- Engineer troops reached the front almost empty handed. They had no axes, shovels, or picks, no assault boats, very little rope or cable, and not a single piece of block and tackle.





- For example, rushing gear to the front the Air Corps dropped off drum after drum of heavy steel cable without clamps, shackles, swivels, turnbuckles, eye hooks, grips, or other necessary fittings. Those fittings were never sent.
- The theory was that all these things would come up by boat with the heavy equipment. In practice, however, the failure to have their tools accompany them meant that Allied engineer troops could do only the simplest pioneer work at a time when their very highest skills were needed.



- At Milne Bay, a permanent T-shape wharf to replace the previous makeshift was finished in early October.
 - At Port Moresby the half-mile causeway to Tatana Island was complete. Several large ships could be unloaded simultaneously, where previously it had been possible to unload only one.
- A small tropical anchorage, capable initially of unloading and storing only 500 tons of cargo a day, had been transformed into a busy port which already had several times that capacity, and which ultimately would have nine times the capacity.
- Airfields at both Port Moresby and Milne Bay were either finished or due to be completed shortly, and a 120-day supply level was being built up at both points.

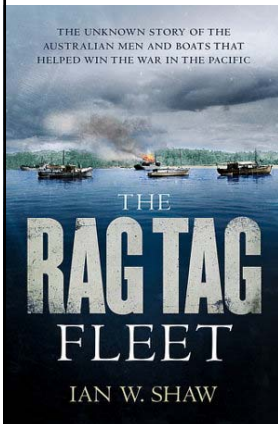


Never in American history would interservice rivalry exact such a heavy toll of American life. MacArthur feuded continually with the U.S. Navy. He demanded ships, planes, and men from Washington. The Navy would not send him a single destroyer or submarine to soften up Japanese positions nor a single landing barge to facilitate delivery of supplies and troops.



- Most Australians, indeed most Westerners, are aware of the courage shown by many ordinary mariners during the evacuation from Dunkirk in 1940.

- It even features in a current popular film.



- But are you aware of a handful of Australian men, most too young, old or unfit to serve in uniform, who risked all to keep soldiers, supplies and ammunition moving to WWII fronts in the Pacific Islands?
- The Japanese air, land and sea threats were too great and the island coasts and reefs too hazardous for the Allied navies to attempt in any but huge operations. Volunteers picked up the slack; many didn't survive.

- When war began, two wealthy, connected American brothers who knew Pacific waters realised troops in the Philippines needed supplies. They pitched family friend President Roosevelt and "Mission X" was formed. With adventurous friends they flew to Melbourne via B-26 to put together a fleet of small ships.
- With naval support unavailable to MacArthur, all types of watercraft found between Queensland, Tasmania, South Australia and New Zealand were rounded up. They included everything from yachts to fishing trawlers and coastal steamers.
- In all, 469 Australian small ships served in the Pacific.
- SWPA saw the benefit and set up a US Small Ships section (SSS).
- With medically fit men already serving in the war, Australian civilians that were too young, too old or medically unfit were invited to serve with the SSS. Over 3,000 did.

- SAPA consolidated Australian and U.S. supply services in New Guinea.
- On 5 October the Combined Operational Service Command (COSC) was established under New Guinea Force, with BG Dwight F. Johns, U.S.A., in command and Australian Brig. V. C. Secombe as deputy.
- All Australian and U.S. supply elements in the forward area were placed under COSC.
- In addition to carrying out routine service of supply functions, the new command took over control of a pool of small boats (luggers) which were being assembled at Milne Bay for use in operations against Buna.



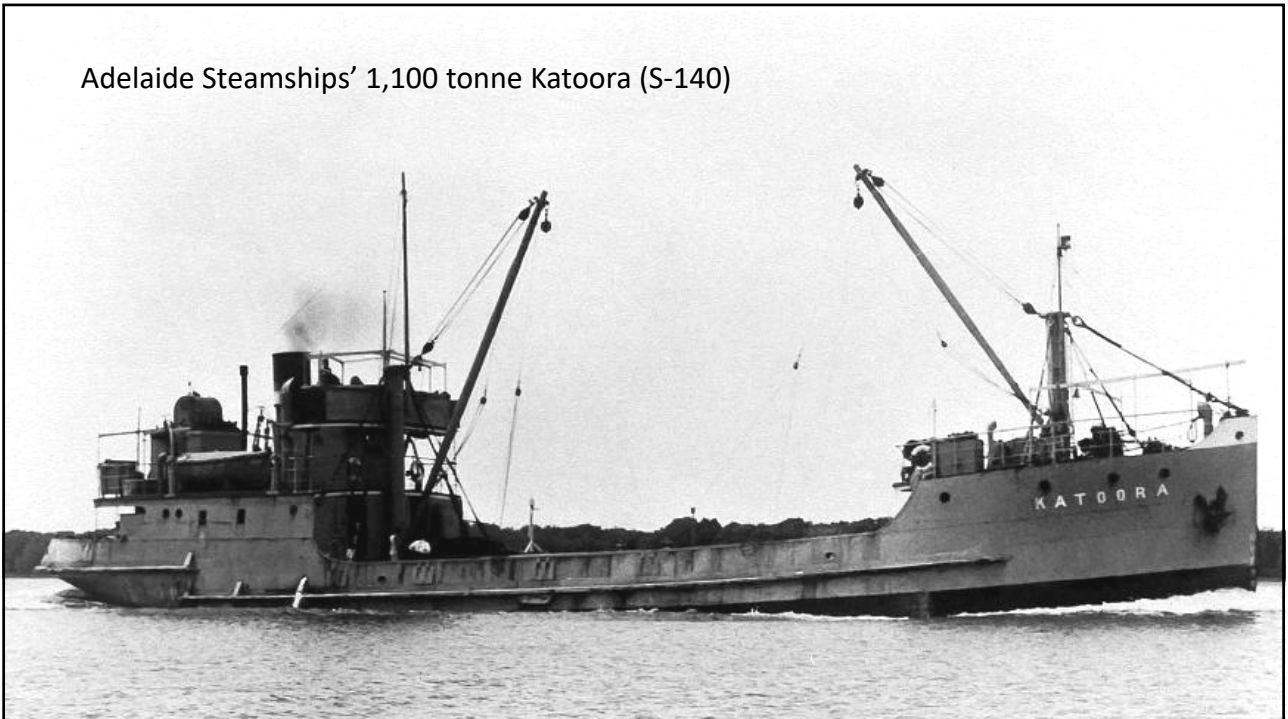


The Minnow (S-107)





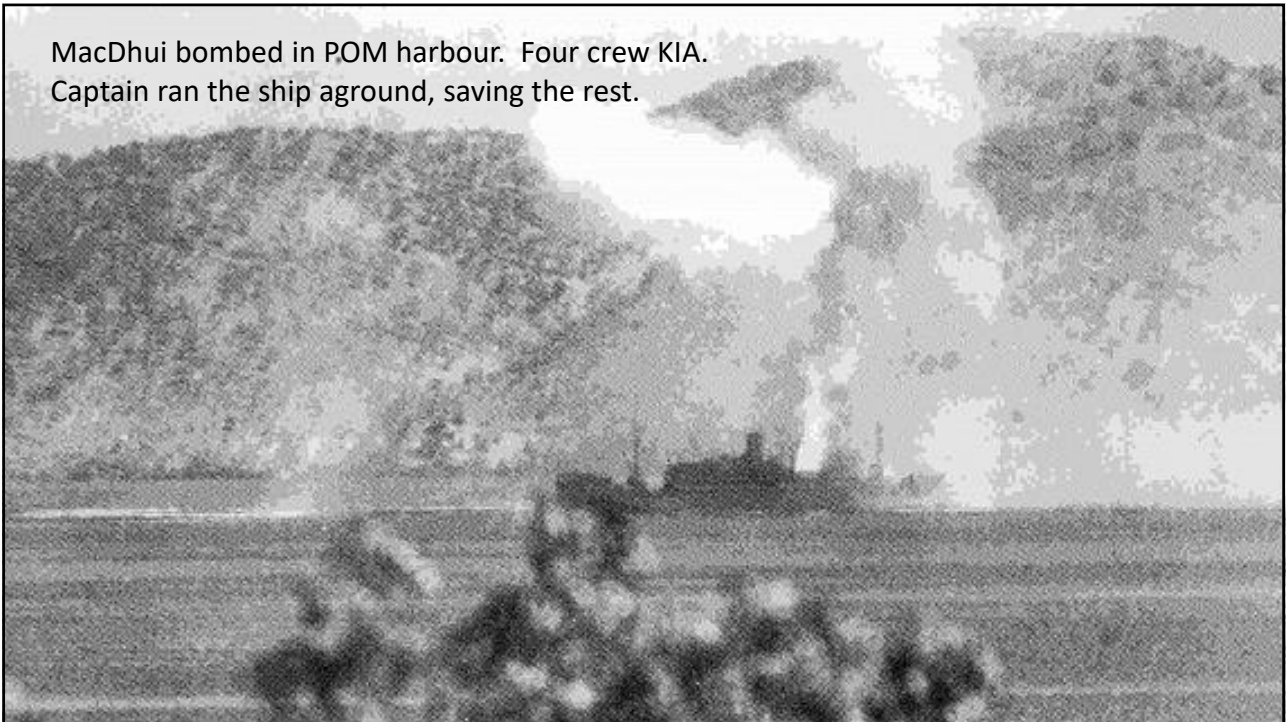
Adelaide Steamships' 1,100 tonne Katoora (S-140)







MacDhui bombed in POM harbour. Four crew KIA.
Captain ran the ship aground, saving the rest.

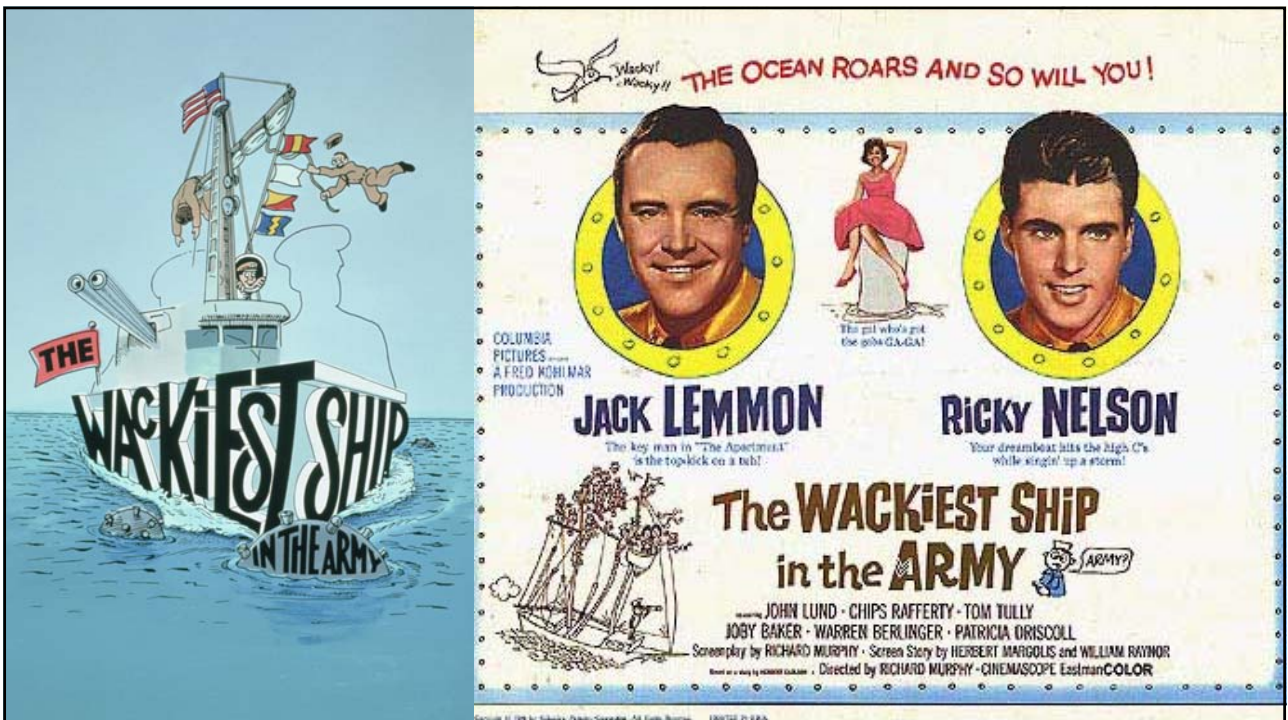






If the Navy
can't help, it
doesn't mean
you have to
stay home.

The Australian crew of the *Esther Johnson* (S-216).



Without Mission X, aka the US Small Ships Section, The Allies would have been unable to supply our forces in New Guinea and the war's outcome could have been entirely different .

Reckless courage and a great disregard for the odds and hardships played a great part in the success of the US Army Small Ships, plus a complete lack of knowledge of all the dangers and difficulties that lay ahead for them.

Unfortunately, it wasn't until a few years ago that the Australian Government recognised the service that these Australians gave.

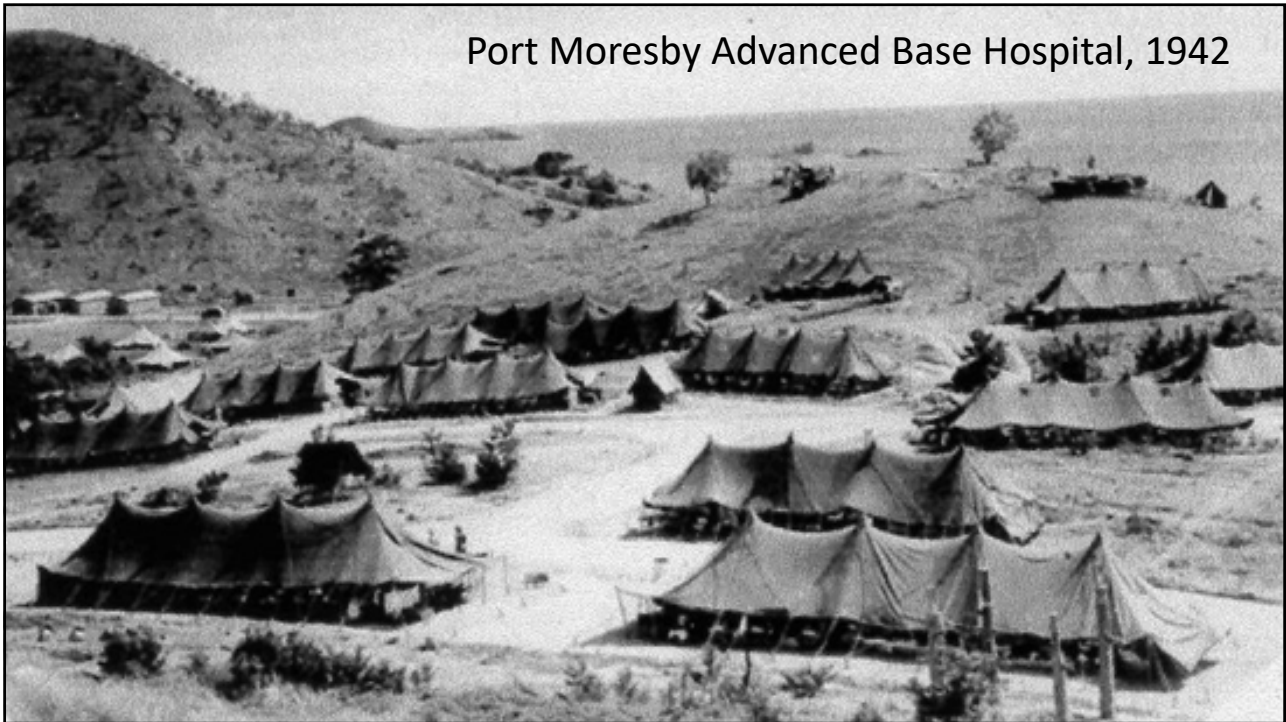




- Medical supplies at the front were critically short as troops marched out for the attack. Bismuth for gastrointestinal disturbances was unprocurable. There was insufficient quinine sulphate for regular distribution, and no atabrine at all.
- 32nd CG arranged for medical supplies by boat, only to find at the last minute that the boats were booked. He asked POM to fly in the most urgently needed items.
- Most of the troops were hungry; some nearly starved during the approach march, and food was in short supply. Rations built up in the rearward dumps, with only a few days' supply at the front.
- Sickness and exhaustion had claimed many victims before battles and would claim many more once fighting began.

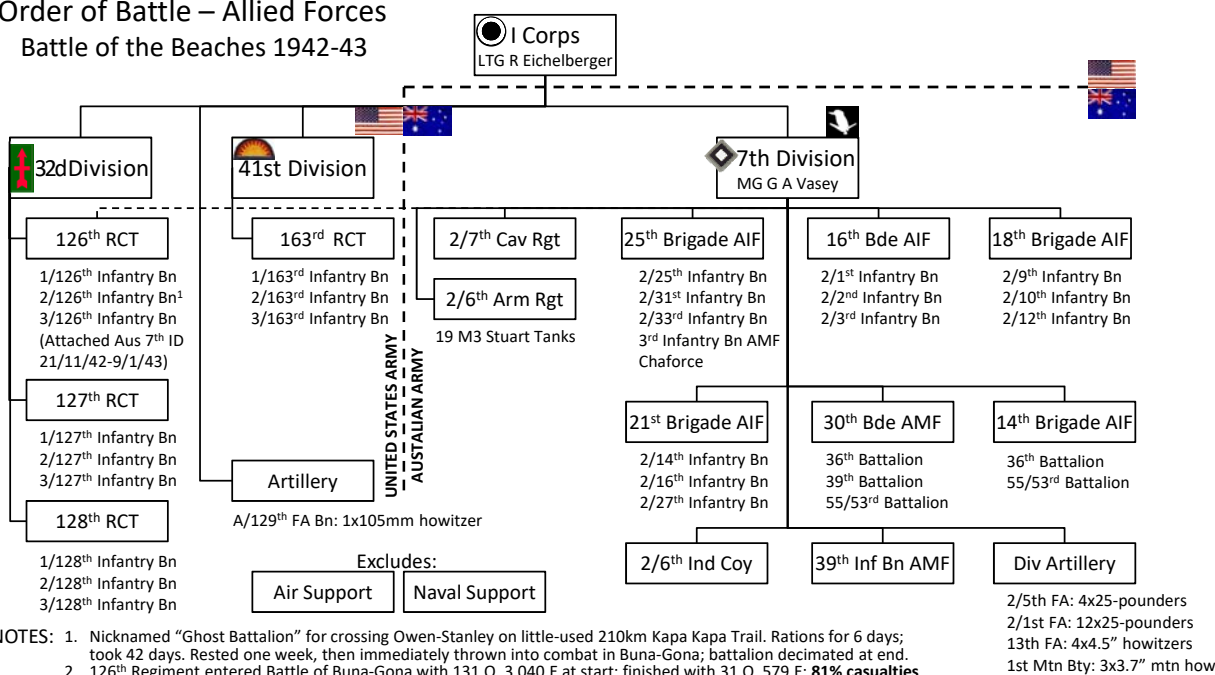
- Except for the latest arrivals (the 1/126 and 3/126) troops wore tattered uniforms, few had underwear or socks, and footwear was worn out or in the process of disintegration.
- Most were bearded and unkempt, all were hungry, and many were sick.
- 2/126th Infantry and others who came over the Kapa Kapa track were severely affected by the ordeal.
- The 128th Infantry had been on short rations since mid-October; they had made exhausting marches through the jungle "on a diet of one-third of a C-ration and a few spoonful of rice a day"; and many already had "fever, dysentery, and jungle rot."

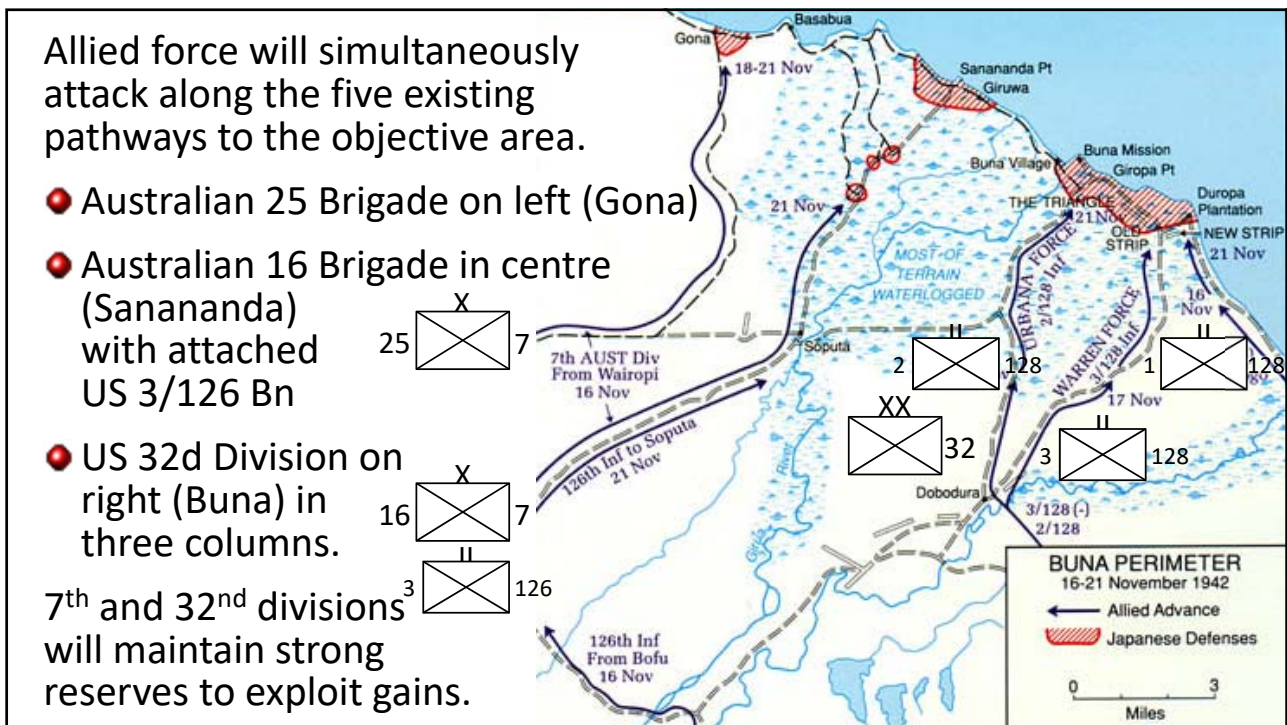
- General Eichelberger put the whole matter in a sentence when he wrote that, even before the 32d Division had its baptism of fire, the troops were covered with jungle ulcers and "riddled with malaria, dengue fever, and tropical dysentery."
- Still, as field medical facilities set up, they evolved the M.A.S.H. concept that would become standard throughout the US military.
- Medical personnel did all they could (and more), but one of the biggest priorities was evacuating seriously wounded to well established and stocked medical facilities in Milne Bay, POM, and Australia.

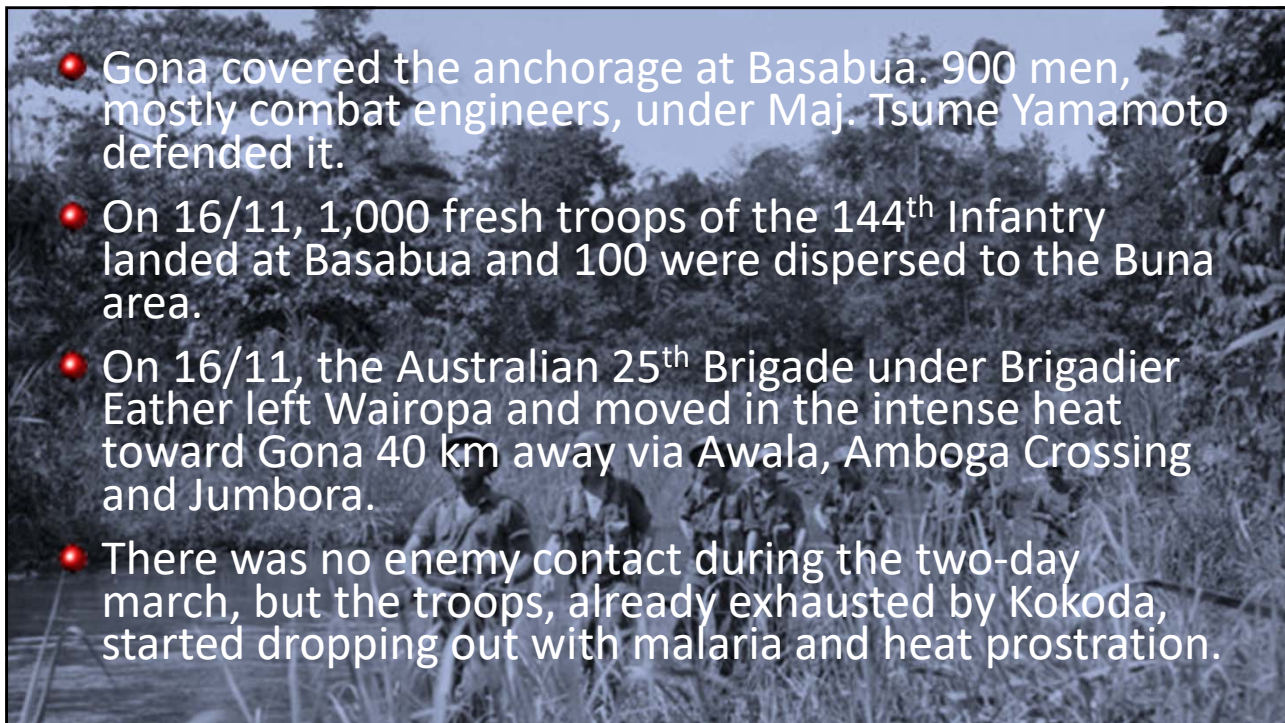


CONCEPT OF THE OPERATION

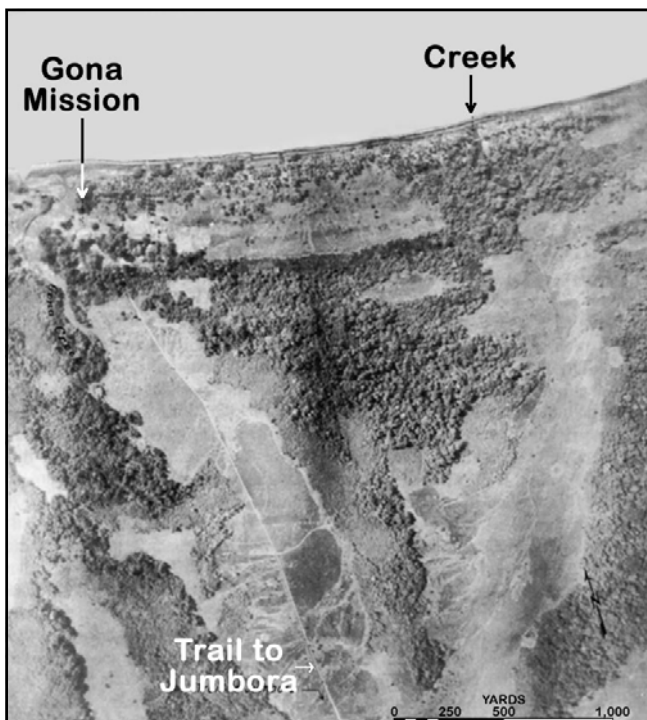
Order of Battle – Allied Forces Battle of the Beaches 1942-43







- Gona covered the anchorage at Basabua. 900 men, mostly combat engineers, under Maj. Tsume Yamamoto defended it.
- On 16/11, 1,000 fresh troops of the 144th Infantry landed at Basabua and 100 were dispersed to the Buna area.
- On 16/11, the Australian 25th Brigade under Brigadier Eather left Wairopa and moved in the intense heat toward Gona 40 km away via Awala, Amboga Crossing and Jumbora.
- There was no enemy contact during the two-day march, but the troops, already exhausted by Kokoda, started dropping out with malaria and heat prostration.



Arriving at Jumbora on 18/11, a company of the 2/33 was sent forward to see if Gona was defended. About 1 km south of the mission they came under intense fire.

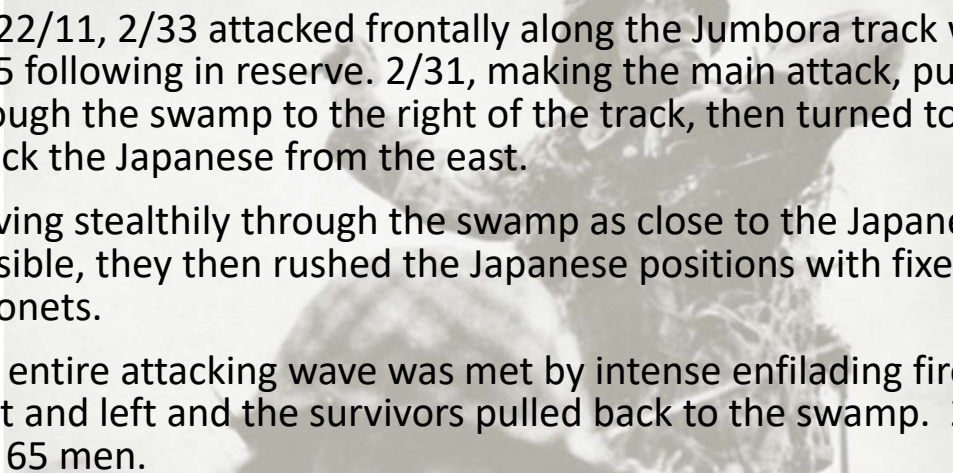
The next morning, 2/31 Bn under LTC Miller advanced to find the company pinned down in a intense fire fight.

Attacking vigorously, 2/31 couldn't penetrate the enemy positions and was ordered to disengage at nightfall. It had lost 36 men.

By now, 25 Brigade was low on ammunition and out of food. Troops were hungry and racked with fever.

Resupplied by air 21/11, the 25th made ready.

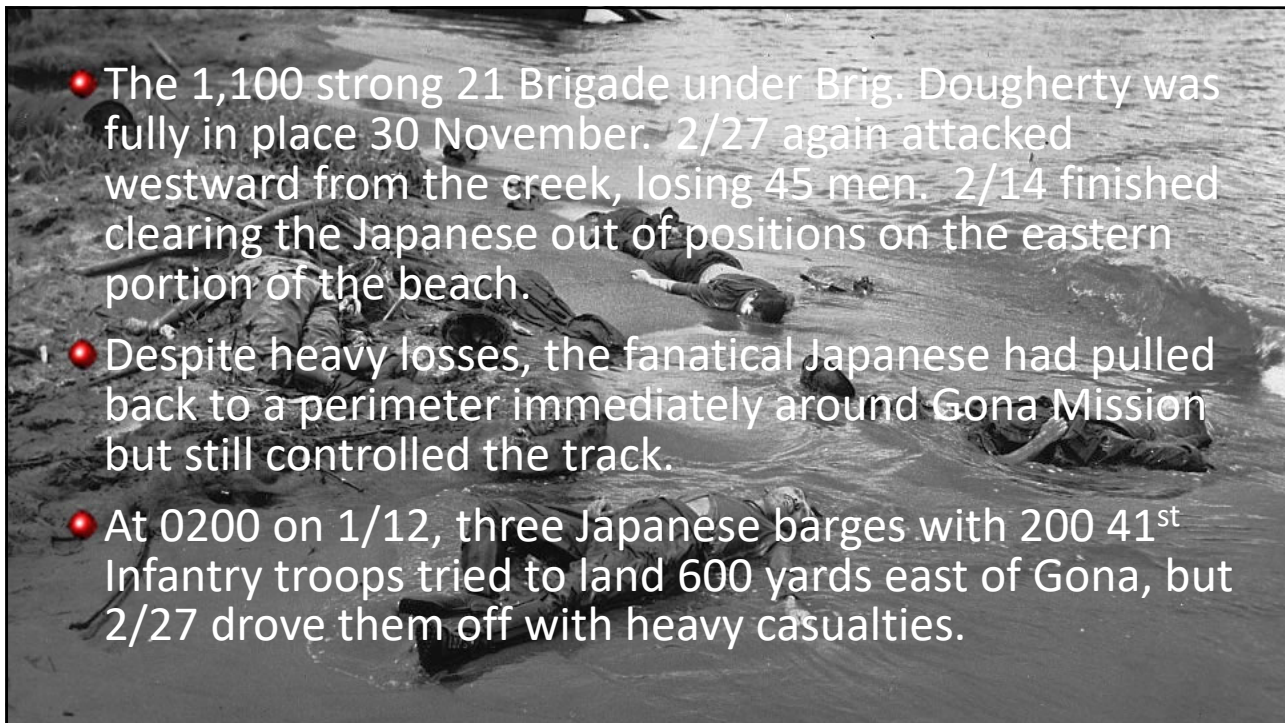
Brig Eather now had 1,000 men (Bn size). The enemy had 1,000 in prepared positions.

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- On 22/11, 2/33 attacked frontally along the Jumbora track with 2/25 following in reserve. 2/31, making the main attack, pushed through the swamp to the right of the track, then turned to attack the Japanese from the east.
 - Moving stealthily through the swamp as close to the Japanese as possible, they then rushed the Japanese positions with fixed bayonets.
 - The entire attacking wave was met by intense enfilading fire from right and left and the survivors pulled back to the swamp. 2/31 lost 65 men.

- On 23/11, 25 Brigade tried again. 2/25 was to attack through the swamp supported by fire from 2/31.
- The result was the same, except 2/25 only suffered 64 casualties.
- In three days of fighting, 25 Brigade had lost 204 men, about 20% of its fighting strength, with little to show for it. The Japanese, however, pulled closer to Gona to other prepared positions.
- Brigadier Eather called for air strikes on the positions, and the air force gave Gona a thorough bombing and strafing on 24/11.
- Reinforced by the 200 man 3rd Infantry Battalion (Militia), Brigadier Eather carefully planned and prepared for the next attack.

- On 25/11, the 3rd Battalion attacked Gona positions from the south west, supported by fires from the 2/25 and 2/31 battalions and 250 rounds of prep fires from four 25 pounder guns newly arrived at Soputa.
- Under LTC Cameron, the 3rd Bn got about 50 yards past the first Japanese positions before intense fire forced their withdrawal. Unlike the previous attacks, casualties were relatively light.
- By now, the 25th Brigade was no longer in a position to fight, with total strength of the three battalions below 750. 2/31 had fewer than 200 men. Exhaustion, malaria and other diseases increased.
- 7th Division CO MG Vasey committed his reserve, 21 Brigade, to Gona. Fit and rested in POM, they started arriving 28 November.

- The 1,100 strong 21 Brigade under Brig. Dougherty was fully in place 30 November.
- On 28/11, a patrol of 2/14 reported a small creek on the beach to the east of the mission clear. 2/14 moved into position. When it broke out 200 yards east of the creek, Japanese inflicted 32 casualties before 2/14 could disengage.
- After a 29/11 air strike on known positions east of Gona, 2/27 moved into position west of the beach while 2/14 went onto the beach several hundred yard east of the creek. When 2/27 attacked, it suffered 55 casualties and 2/14 sustained 38.
- In two days, 21 Brigade had lost 138 men, with little to show.



- The 1,100 strong 21 Brigade under Brig. Dougherty was fully in place 30 November. 2/27 again attacked westward from the creek, losing 45 men. 2/14 finished clearing the Japanese out of positions on the eastern portion of the beach.
- Despite heavy losses, the fanatical Japanese had pulled back to a perimeter immediately around Gona Mission but still controlled the track.
- At 0200 on 1/12, three Japanese barges with 200 41st Infantry troops tried to land 600 yards east of Gona, but 2/27 drove them off with heavy casualties.

- 1/12, at 0545, artillery and mortars hit enemy positions and at 0600 the 2/27 with a company of the newly arrived 2/16 attacked Gona with bayonets fixed. The attack started well.
- The 3rd Battalion was sent to link up with the 2/16, but missed their RP and failed to move far enough north. Swinging to cover the front that the 3rd was to have attacked, the 2/16 and part of the 2/17 broke into the village but were driven out with heavy casualties. The 2/16th company alone lost 58 men in the attack.
- On 2 December, MG Tsuyuo Yamagata's 21st Independent Mixed Brigade touched down at Basabua, but the ships had to leave before debarking them due to allied planes. They went ashore with most of their supplies at the mouth of the Kumusi River. There survivors of the 41st Infantry from Kokoda joined up.

- 3 December, LTC Honner's 39th Battalion, leading Brig. Porter's 30th Brigade, reached the front to reinforce Sanananda. Instead, the 39th were assigned to Gona due to the heavy casualties there. 21 Brigade had lost 430 men in the five days it was in action.
- 4 December, 15 Brigade and 3rd Battalion were recalled to POM.
- 6 December, 2/16 and 2/27 grouped as a composite battalion, attacked Gona straight west across the beach. 39th Battalion moved up from the south and attacked the village to the northwest. The results were the same as before.
- Only a few hundred utterly worn out Japanese remained alive. They fought so hard that they hadn't even buried their dead. Instead, wearing gas masks, they fired over the corpses, used them to stand on, or placed them to form fortifications.

- The final blow was delivered on 8 December. At 1245, after a 15 minute artillery and mortar preparation, 39 Bn attacked from the southeast and broke into Gona Village, systematically clearing the enemy out. An hour later, 2/27 attacked east along the beach with 2/16 on line 200 yards south. By evening, the village was compressed by pincers into a 200 yard final perimeter.
- That night Major Yamato tried to evacuate by stealth eastward to link up at Sanananda with everyone he could muster, about 100 men. The Australians in positions east of Gona massacred them.
- Early on 9 December, patrols of the 2/16, 2/27, and 39 Battalions mopped up Gona in a full day of bunker reduction and hand-to-hand fighting.

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- Little food or ammunition was found. The Australians took 16 prisoners, ten of them stretcher cases.
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- After the battle, Australians buried 638 Japanese dead. The Australian had lost 750 killed, wounded or missing.

- Australian patrols began clashing with Yamagata's force on 4/12 when it crosses the Amboga River two miles west of Gona. In coming days, clashes increased in violence. On 9/12, Dougherty ordered the 39th Battalion westward to deal with the enemy.
- Under pressure from bombing and the 39th, Yamagata had his troops establish a defensive line a few miles north west of Gona.
- 14/12, protected by bad weather, MG Oda, Horii's replacement and 800 men of the 1/170th Infantry came ashore 40 miles north of Gona. They had supplies and launches to move by sea. Alas, LT Lyndon Noakes, Australian Coastwatcher, was camped in the area and signalled the exact location of the enemy camp and launches in relation to an easily seen sandy beach. Bombers 15/7 scored direct hits. Oda hid what was left; it was bombed on 16/7.

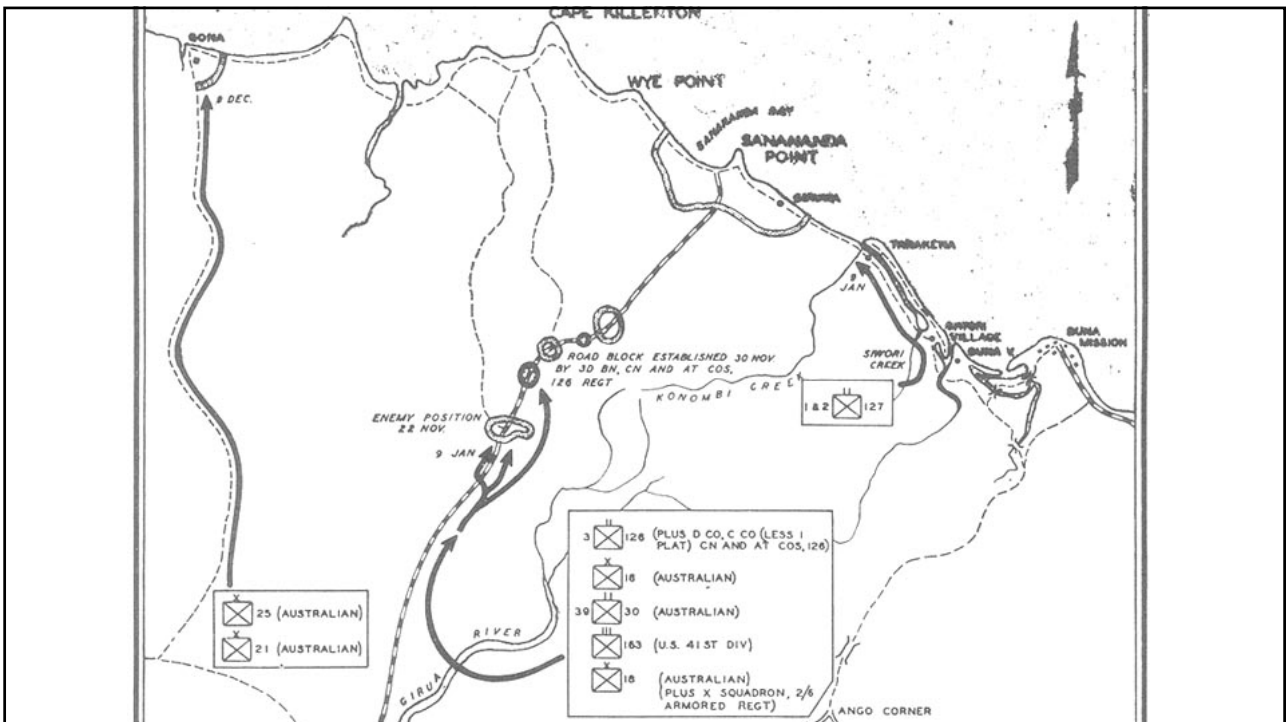
- Hugging the coast and moving only at night, Oda reached the Amboga River and linked with Yamagata 5 miles NW of Gona.
- By this time, the 39th Battalion was reinforced with 2/14. The 39th had so decimated Yamagata's troops that Oda's troops were immediately ordered into the defensive perimeter. That night Oda and staff went by launch to assume command in Sanananda.
- Looking to set up a supply base at the mouth of the Mambare R. to relieve the beachheads, Rabaul sent supplies by submarine to the Mambare base where they were to be forwarded by barge to the battlefields. No sooner than the submarines would unload than LT Noakes would pinpoint their location and radio POM.
- From 20/12 US PT boats from Tufi patrolled the coast west of Gona. On 24/12, sinking I-18 (pictured) at the Mambare R. mouth.

- On 19/12, 2/16 and 2/27 Battalions began relieving the 39 Battalion to bring it to Sanananda. The 39th reached Sopotu on 22/12.
- On 26/12, Rabaul ordered Yamagata to get his troops to Giruwa (Sanananda). A 430-man advance party left by barge the following night and arrived safely. Yamagata brought 300-400 men on the 29th. 1st and 3rd battalions 170th Infantry were as rear guard.



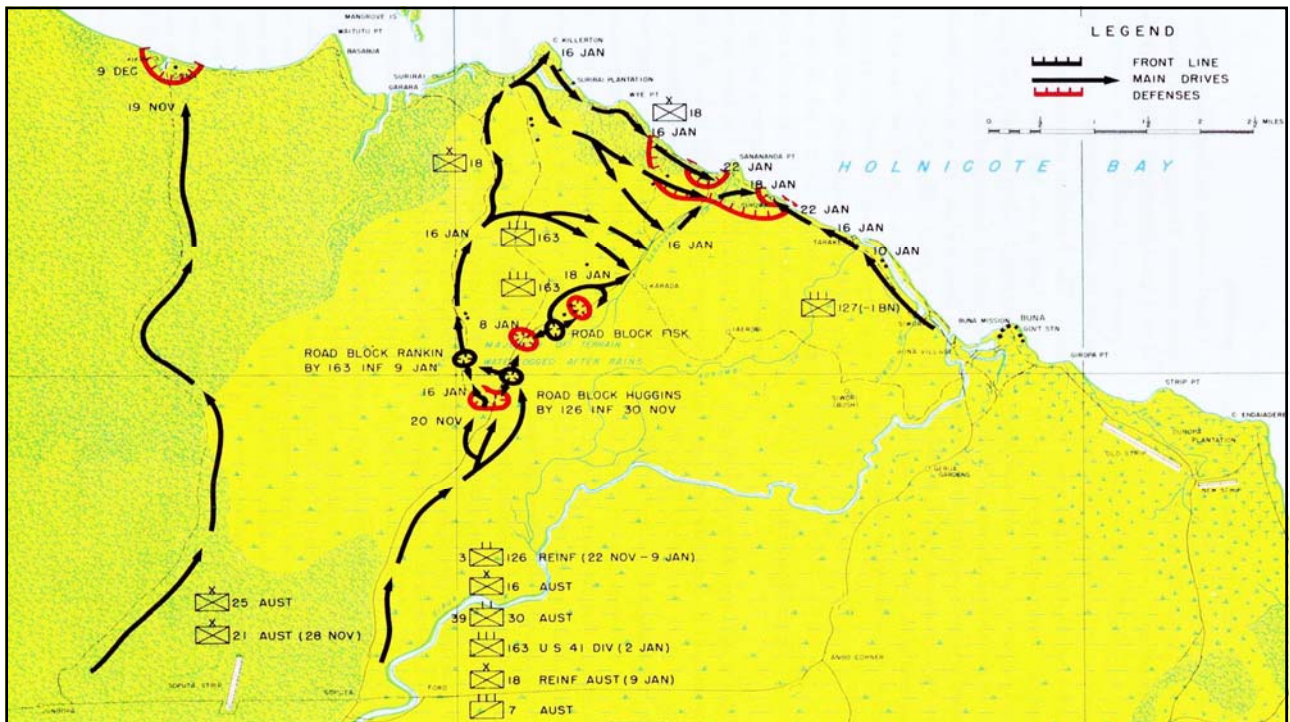


Bringing ammuniton to the front lines at Sanananda

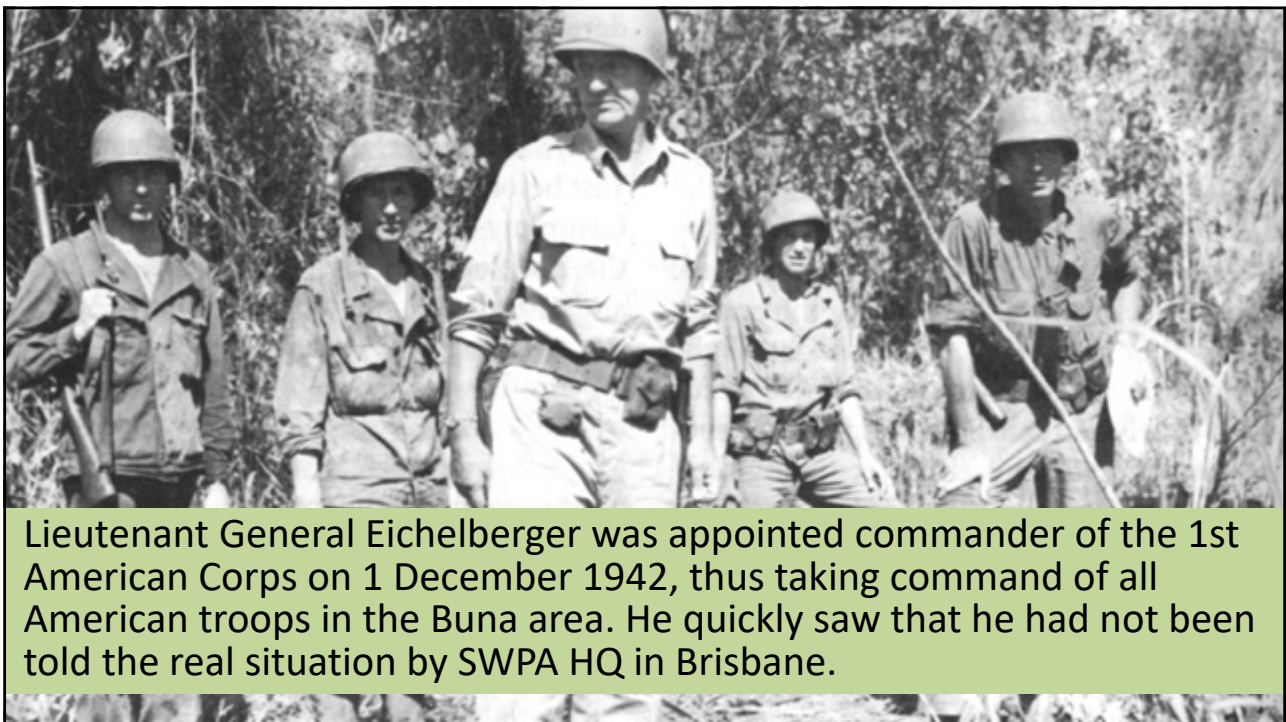




Australian troops push through mosquito infested swamps of Sanananda.







In January 1943 the Allied and the Japanese forces facing each other on New Guinea were like two battered heavyweights. Round one had gone to the Americans and Australians who had ejected the Japanese from Papua, New Guinea.

After three months of unimaginative frontal attacks had overcome a well-entrenched foe, General Douglas MacArthur, the Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA) commander, had his airstrip and staging base at Buna on the north coast.

Drea, Edward J. New Guinea - The U.S. Army Campaigns of World War II. U. S. Army Center of Military History, n.d.

It was expensive real estate. About 13,000 enemy troops perished during the terrible fighting, but Allied casualties were also heavy; 8,500 men fell in battle (5,698 of them Australians) and 27,000 cases of malaria were reported, mainly due to shortage of medical supplies.

Besides ruining the Australian 7th and US 32d Infantry Divisions, the campaign severely taxed the Australian 5th and US 41st Infantry Divisions. The exhausted Americans needed six months to reconstitute before their next operation. Australian ground forces, despite heavier losses, became the front line of defense against the Japanese who, though bloodied, were ready for round two.

Drea, Edward J. New Guinea - The U.S. Army Campaigns of World War II. U. S. Army Center of Military History, n.d.

The Japanese had seized the Buna-Gona beachhead on the night of 21-22 July 1942 before Allied troops could fortify it. A bloody and drawn out campaign had ensued.

When it finally ended on 22 January 1943, the only result, strategically speaking, was that after six months of bitter fighting and some 8,500 Allied casualties, including 3,000 dead, the Southwest Pacific Area was exactly where it would have been the previous July had it been able to secure the beachhead before the Japanese got there.