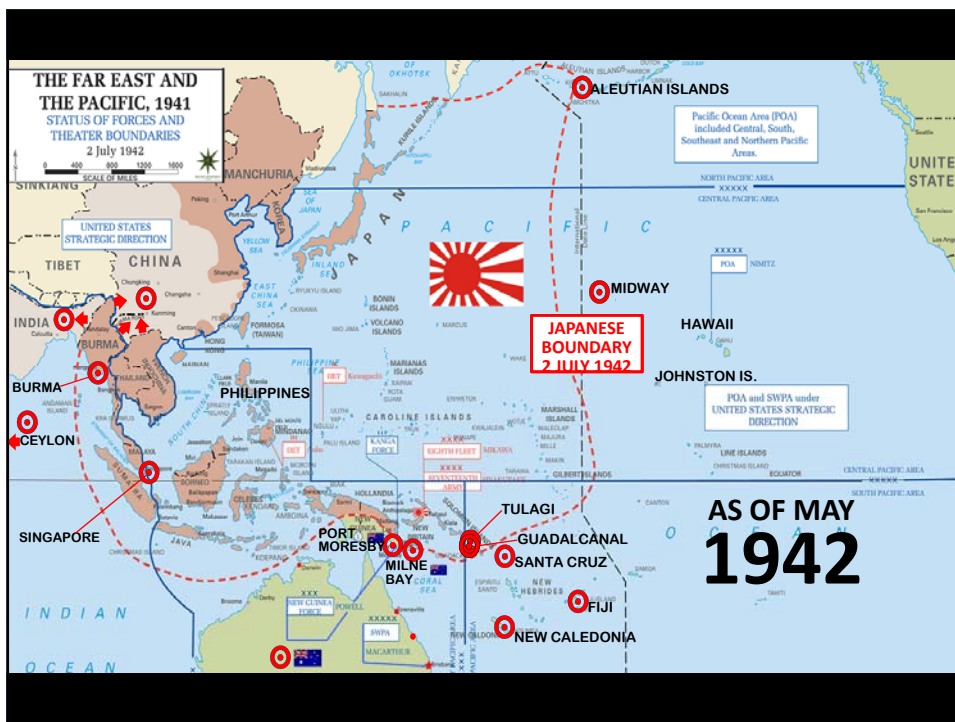
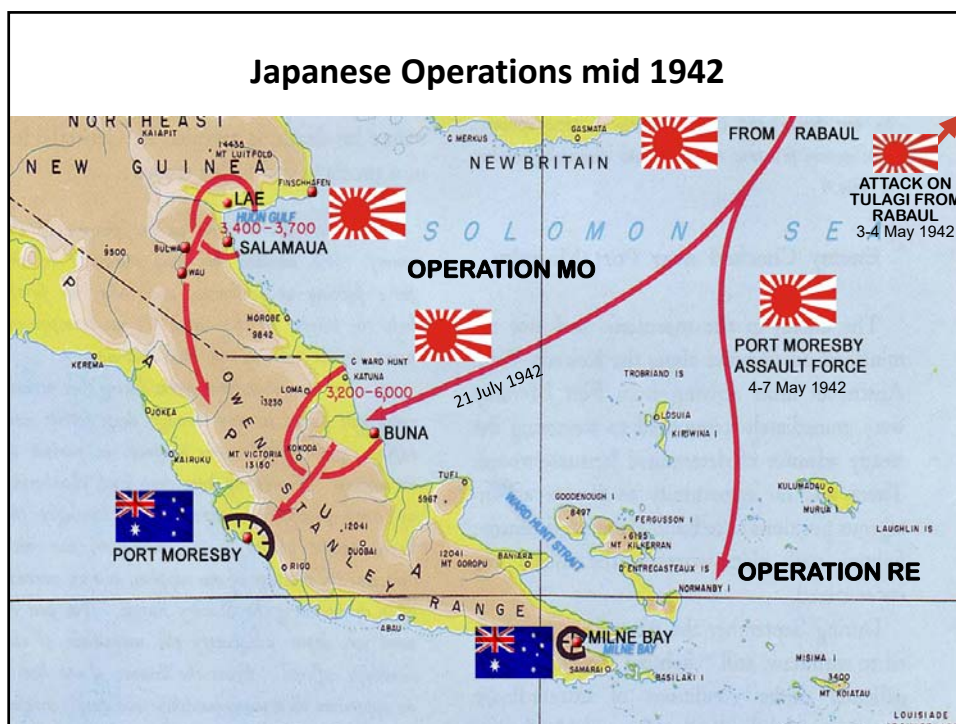


# MILITARY HISTORY











## THE BATTLE OF MILNE BAY, PNG



### 25/8-7/9 1942






### Order of Battle

<p> 18<sup>th</sup> 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-)</p> <p> 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade (CMF)                  9th Australian Infantry Battalion                  25th Australian Infantry Battalion                  61st Australian Infantry Battalion</p> <p> 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)</p> <p> 101st Anti-Tank Regiment</p> <p> 9 Battery, 2/3rd Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment</p> <p> 2/5th Field Regiment</p> <p> 46th Engineer Battalion (arr. late June)</p> <p> 709<sup>th</sup> Airborne AA Battery (arr. early August)</p>	<p> Kaigun Tokubetsu Rikusentai                  Special Naval Landing Force</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 3rd Kure SNLF</li> <li>● 5th Kure SNLF</li> <li>● 5th Sasebo SNLF</li> <li>● 5th Yokosuka SNLF</li> </ul> <p><i>Naval support from:</i></p> <p> 8th Fleet</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 18th Cruiser Division</li> <li>● 29th Destroyer Division</li> </ul>
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 <b>Strength</b> 				
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; width: 50%;">8,824</td> <td style="text-align: center; width: 50%;">1,943</td> </tr> </table>	8,824	1,943		
8,824	1,943			
<b>Casualties and losses</b>				
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; width: 50%;">Australia: 167 KIA/MIA, 206 WIA</td> <td style="text-align: center; width: 50%;">625 killed 1,311 WIA, sick</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">United States: 14 KIA</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Australia: 167 KIA/MIA, 206 WIA	625 killed 1,311 WIA, sick	United States: 14 KIA	
Australia: 167 KIA/MIA, 206 WIA	625 killed 1,311 WIA, sick			
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Know Your  
 Enemy And Know  
 Yourself And  
 You Will Always  
 Be Victorious.

“Sun Tzu”



軍海國帝本日大

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**SPECIAL NAVAL LANDING FORCE**

大日本帝國海軍



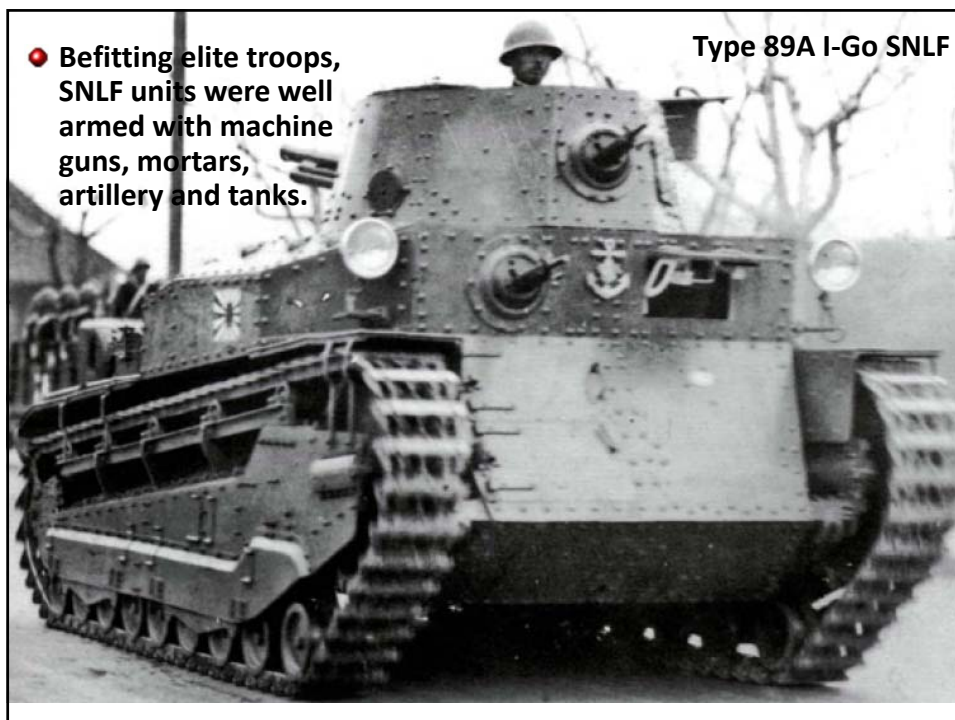
**SPECIAL NAVAL LANDING FORCE**

## ⚓ SNLF ⚓

- The SNLF were the **elite infantry force** of the **Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN)**.
- They were the navy's **assault force**, organised to take beaches by storm, conquer the island they have been set upon, and then occupy it.
- Formed in the late 1920s, their first major operation was the Shanghai Incident in 1932, executing operations along the Chinese coast and up the Yangtze River.
- Before the 1920s, landing forces were drawn from the ship's crews.



- A SNLF unit was established at each of the four IJN major ports: Kure, Maizuru, Sasebo, and Yokosuka. By 7 December 1941, there were 16 SNLF units and this was expanded to 21 during the war.
- The SNLF troops underwent intense training and were among the Emperor's most skilled and loyal troops. They were notably fierce in their determination, often to a fault when faced with impossible tasks.
- US intelligence placed SNLF as better trained and motivated than any Army unit, and noted they emphasized small unit operations.



• Befitting elite troops, SNLF units were well armed with machine guns, mortars, artillery and tanks.

Type 89A I-Go SNLF

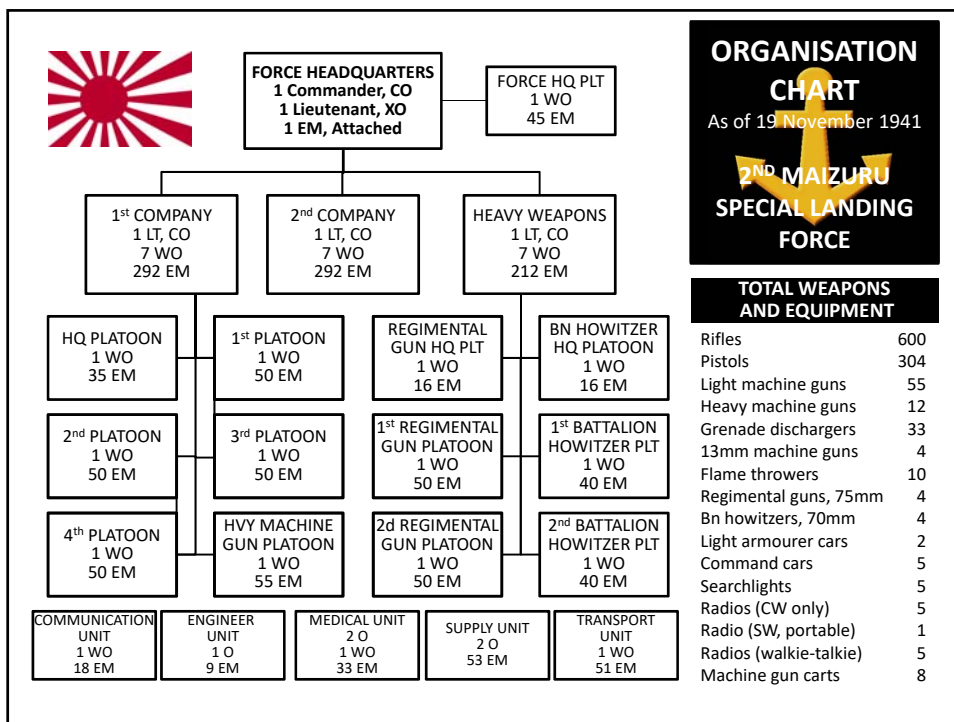
**SNLF Organisations as of 7 December 1941**

**軍海國帝本日大**

Unit	Size	Comments
1st Kure SNLF	1401 men	Landing at Legaspi, (Philippines)
2nd Kure SNLF	1401 men	Landing at Jolo Island (Philippines)
1st Maizuru SNLF	746 men	At Hainan Naval District, 3rd China Fleet
2nd Maizuru SNLF	1069 men	Landing on Wake Island
1st Sasebo SNLF	1622 men	Landing on Menado, Celebes
2nd Sasebo SNLF	1473 men	Under 32 Special Base Force, 3rd Fleet
8th Sasebo SNLF	746 men	At Hainan Naval District, 3rd China Fleet
Shanghai SNLF	746 men	Operated from port of Shanghai, China
1st Yokosuka SNLF	849 men	Parachutes onto Menado airfield, Celebes (naval parachute unit)
2nd Yokosuka SNLF	746 men	Landings at Miri, Seria, and Lutong, Sarawak
3rd Yokosuka SNLF	849 men	Landing on Koepang, Timor Island (naval parachute unit)
4th Yokosuka SNLF	746 men	At Hainan Naval District, 3rd China Fleet

Stre

Casualties



- The SNLF led the way as the Japanese empire expanded into the South Pacific. They then entrenched on conquered islands, and fought the closing battle for each island at the end of the war.

- After August 1942 the SNLF found themselves fighting almost exclusively on the defense, holding various island outposts against the growing US offensive.
- For example the next battle in the Solomons after Guadalcanal centred on New Georgia. The Japanese Navy in this area had the 6th Kure and 7th Yokosuka SNLF's joined together as the 8th Combined SNLF, under Rear-Admiral Minoru Ota.



大日本帝國海軍



SPECIAL NAVAL LANDING FORCE



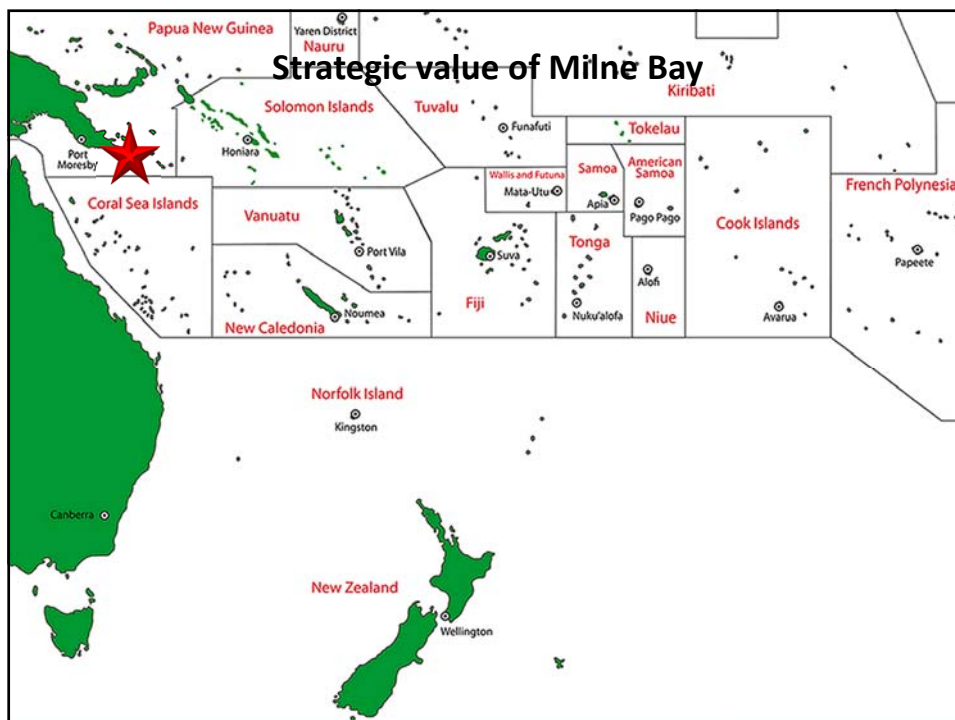


### Geography of Milne Bay and surrounds


- Milne Bay is a sheltered 97-square-mile (250 km<sup>2</sup>) bay at the eastern tip of the Territory of Papua (now part of PNG).
- The bay is 22 miles (35 km) long and 10 miles (16 km) wide, and is deep enough for large ships to enter.
- The coastal area is flat with good aerial approaches, and therefore suitable for airstrips, although it is intercut by many tributaries of rivers and mangrove swamps.
- The coastal flats are bounded by the rugged Stirling Ranges, which rise to 3,000–5,000 feet (910–1,520 m) and are covered in Kunai grass and dense scrubland.
- The swampy lands and high rainfall, about 200 inches (5,100 mm) per year, make the area is prone to malaria and flooding. After floods, the coastal plains become "virtually impassable quagmires of glutinous mud".

### Pre-1942 Rural Development

- The main area of firm ground suitable for construction and development is found directly at the head of the bay.
- In 1942 this area was occupied by plantations of palm oil, coconuts and cocoa, as well as a number of jetties and villages.
- The area was connected by what Major Sydney Elliott-Smith (Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit-ANGAU) called a "modest 'road' system" that was, in actuality, only a dirt track 10–12 metres (33–39 ft) wide.
- Although villages grew up along the track, the area was sparsely populated. Ahioima was situated the farthest east, and together with Gili Gili in the west, it bounded Lilihoa, Waga Waga, Goroni, KB Mission, Rabi and Kilarbo.



### Strategic value of Milne Bay



The Battle of the Coral Sea demonstrated Milne Bay's strategic importance:

- **NAVAL:** Milne Bay could provide air cover for any convoys rounding the southeastern tip of Papua.
- **LAND:** Milne Bay also provided a line of approach to Port Moresby along the coastal trails.
- **AIR:** Milne Bay was within air attack/support distance of Port Moresby (and Buna, Lae, etc.) in New Guinea as well as Townsville on the Australian Mainland.
- **LOGISTICS:** Milne Bay was an ideal location (away from but close to Australia) to provide major logistics support to military operations in the South West Pacific.

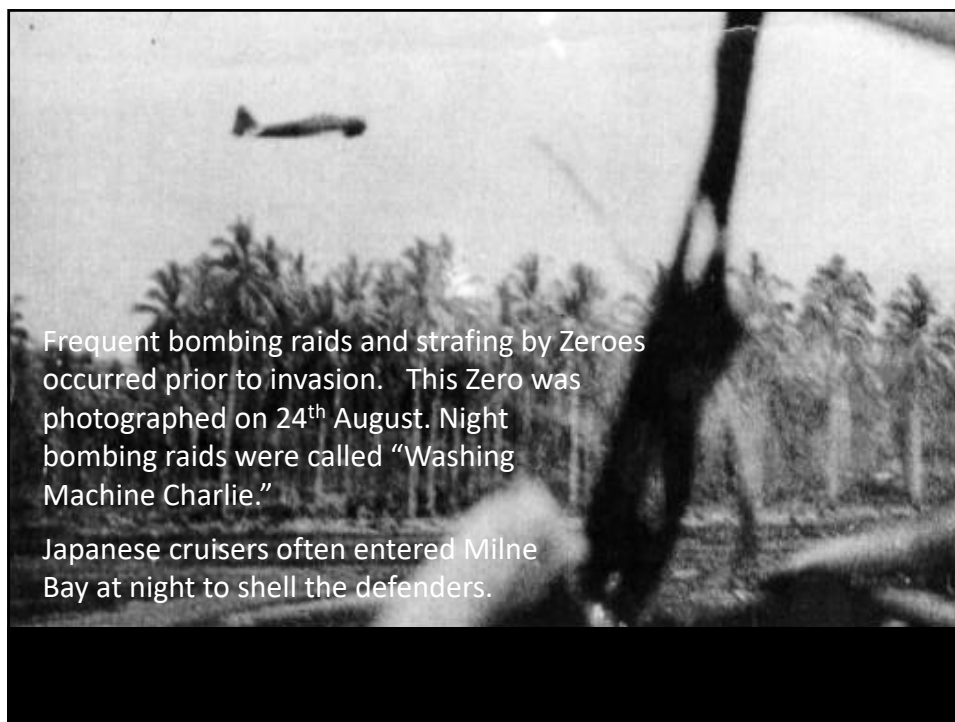


Arriving during the rainy season to set up the defence of Milne Bay, deep mud was an insipid enemy. Bypassing the main road (shown) would just result in vehicles getting stuck up above their wheels somewhere else harder to retrieve.

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 24<sup>th</sup> 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 18<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Brigade of the experienced 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division arrived in Milne Bay on 21 August.

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

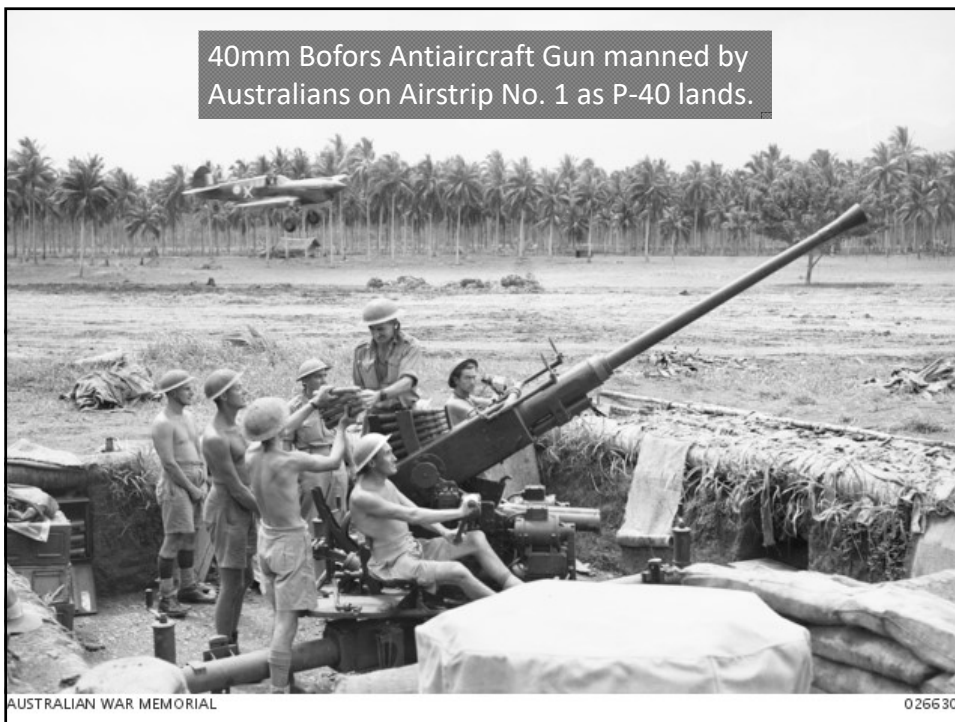
Maj. Gen. Cyril A. Clowes, an experienced officer who had commanded the ANZAC Corps artillery in Greece, took command of Milne Force on 22 August.



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.



40mm Bofors Antiaircraft Gun manned by Australians on Airstrip No. 1 as P-40 lands.






Flying officer D.E. Pank of No. 75 fighter squadron, RAAF, taxiing his Kittyhawk along the dispersal runway after a flight



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




**Japanese preparations**

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

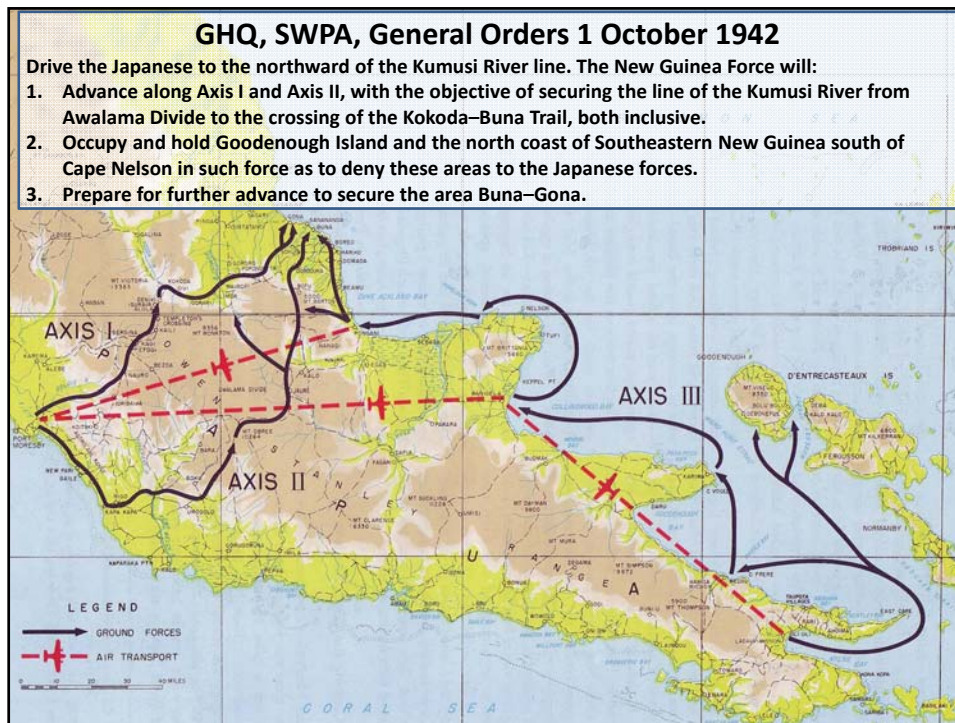
Assuming that Milne Bay was held by 2 or 3 infantry companies (one battalion) to protect 20-30 aircraft, Admiral Mikawa ordered 1,500 men to attack. Since the unit earmarked for Milne Bay was already engaged, the numbers were made up from units in Kavieng and Buna.

**The Japanese Assault plan**



**1** About 1,200 troops from the 5<sup>th</sup> Kure SNLF and 5<sup>th</sup> Sasebo SNLF Kavieng (incl. 362 pioneers from 16<sup>th</sup> Naval Construction) were to land at Rabi, about three miles from the Milne Bay wharf.

**2** 353 troops from 5<sup>th</sup> Sasebo SNLF at Buna were to land at Taupota on the north coast and march over the intervening Stirling mountain range to link up.



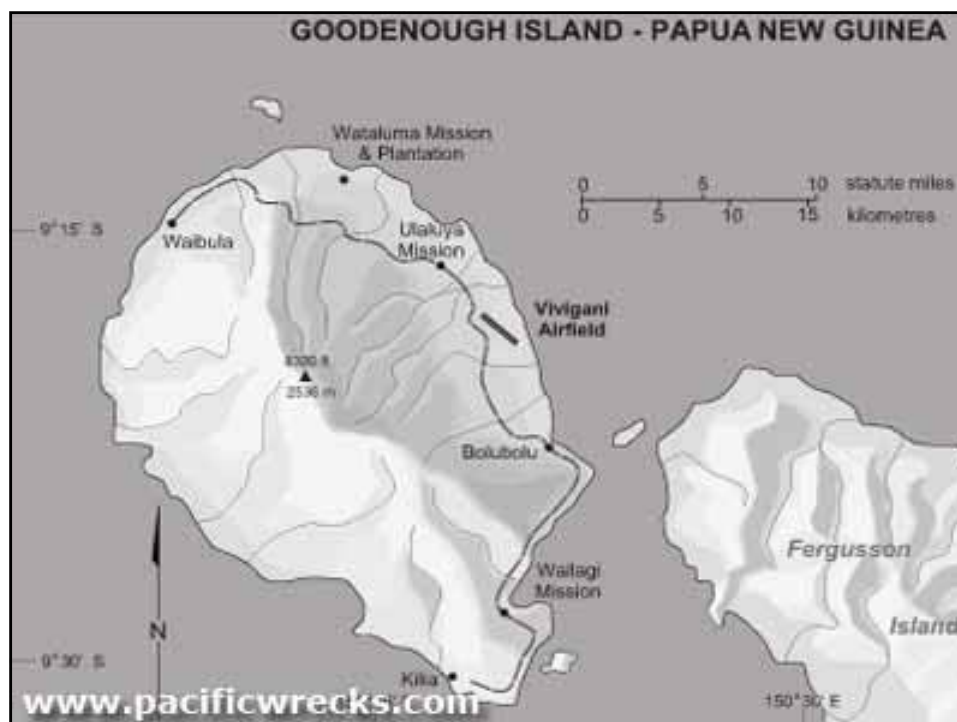
"Thenceforth, the Battle of Milne Bay became an infantry struggle in the sopping jungle carried on mostly at night under pouring rain. The Aussies were fighting mad, for they had found some of their captured fellows tied to trees and bayoneted to death, surmounted by the placard, 'It took them a long time to die'."

Samuel Eliot Morison, *Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier*



### Goodenough Island wasn't good enough

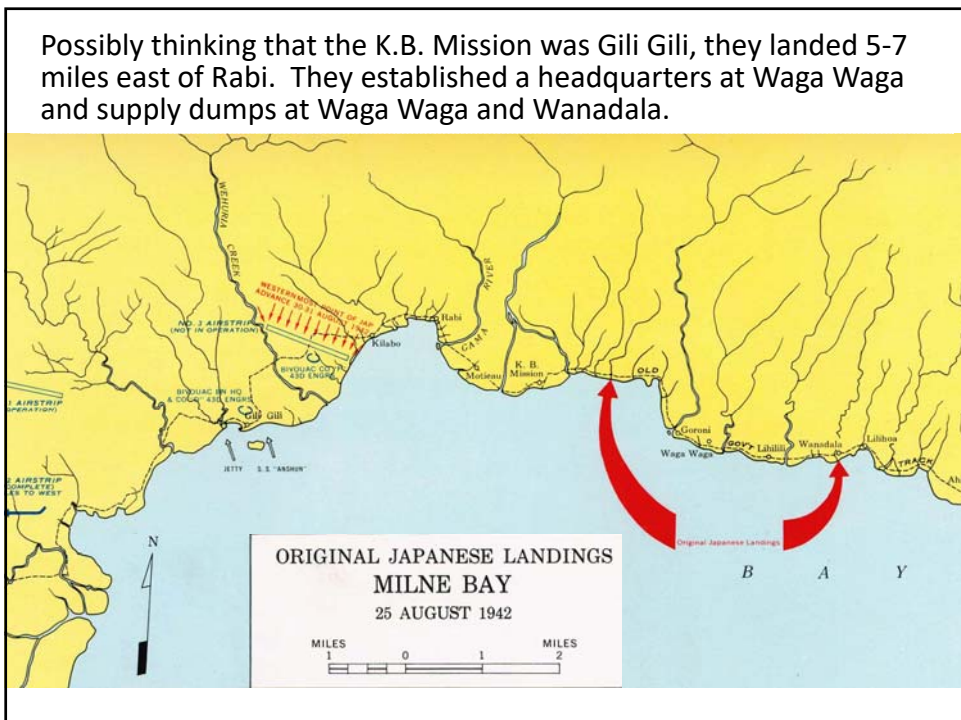
- The D'Entrecasteaux Islands lie directly off the northeast coast of the lower portion of the Papuan peninsula. The westernmost island of this group, Goodenough, had been occupied in August 1942 when by 353 Kure 5th Special Naval Landing Force troops aboard seven powered barges stopped at Goodenough Island for a break. stranded troops from bombed Japanese landing craft. Nine P-40s attacked and sank all seven barges, stranding the men
- The destroyer Yayoi, sent to recover these men, was itself bombed and sunk on 11 September.
- 800 Australian troops (2/14?) landed on 22 October on either side of the Japanese position. Beleaguered, the survivors of the Japanese garrison were evacuated by submarine on the night of 26 October. The Allies proceeded to turn the island into an air base.
- Japanese reinforcements (568 men of the Kure 3rd and 200 men of the Yokosuka 5th Special Naval Landing Force) arrived







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.





### **Tenryū (天龍) Tenryū-class light cruiser of the IJN.**

Launched 11 March 1918; sunk 19 December 1942 (by USS Albacore, Madang)

1. Essentially large destroyers intended to act as flagships for destroyer flotillas.
2. Service in Russia (1920) and China (1931-1938)
3. Based in Truk, part of Wake Island invasion forces (7(8)/12/41 and 23/12/41).
4. Assigned to Operation MO, cancelled following Battle of Coral Sea.
5. 6 July 1942, escorted engineers to Guadalcanal to build airstrip.
6. 14 July 1942, part of Operation RI invasion of Buna.
7. 9 August 1942, Battle of Savo Island. Sank USS Quincy and HMAS Canberra.
8. Operation RE (Milne Bay). Sank 3,199 ton British freighted Anshun at Gili Gili.
9. 13-16 Nov 1942. Battle of Guadalcanal. 18-19 Nov, landed troops at Madang.



### **Tatsuta (龍田) Tenryū-class light cruiser of the IJN.**

Launched 29 May 1918; sunk 13 March 1944 (by USS Sand Lance, Hashirijima)

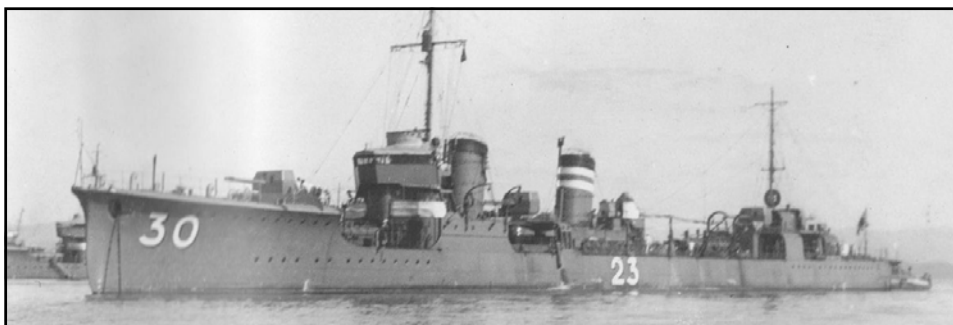
1. Service in Russia (1920) and China (1931-1938)
2. Based in Truk, part of Wake Island invasion forces (7(8)/12/41 and 23/12/41).
3. 20 Jan-9 Feb 1942. Operation R invasion of New Ireland and Rabaul.
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5. 6 July 1942, escorted engineers to Guadalcanal to build airstrip.
6. 14 July 1942, part of Operation RI invasion of Buna.
7. Operation RE (Milne Bay).
8. 13-16 Nov 1942. Battle of Guadalcanal (served on Tokyo Express missions).
9. Jan-Oct 1943. Refit, repairs, Japanese duties (e.g., training, etc.).
10. 20 Oct 1943. Based at Truk. Troop transport convoys. Sunk enroute to Saipan.



### **Arashi (嵐, "Storm") Kagero-class destroyer of the IJN.**

Launched 22 April 1940; sunk 7 August 1943 (Battle of Vella Gulf)

1. Midway. As escort to the carrier group, depth charged USS Nautilus and continued attack as task force changed course. Broke off attack and steamed north to rejoin carriers when spotted by 2 squadrons of dive bombers from Enterprise, who followed it to attack carriers Kaga and Akagi.
2. Midway. Picked up and interrogated TBD pilot Ensign W. Osmus of VT-3; executed him at stern with blow of fire axe to back of neck (war crime).
3. Solomons. Part of convoy that sank JFK's PT-109 (rammed by Amagiri).
4. Vella Gulf. Taking reinforcements to New Georgia in 4-destroyer fast convoy; Arashi, Hagikazi and Kawakazi sunk by US destroyers.



### **Yayoi (弥生, "March") Mutsuki-class destroyer of the IJN.**

Launched 11 July 1925; sunk 11 Sep 1942 (Battle of Goodenough Island)

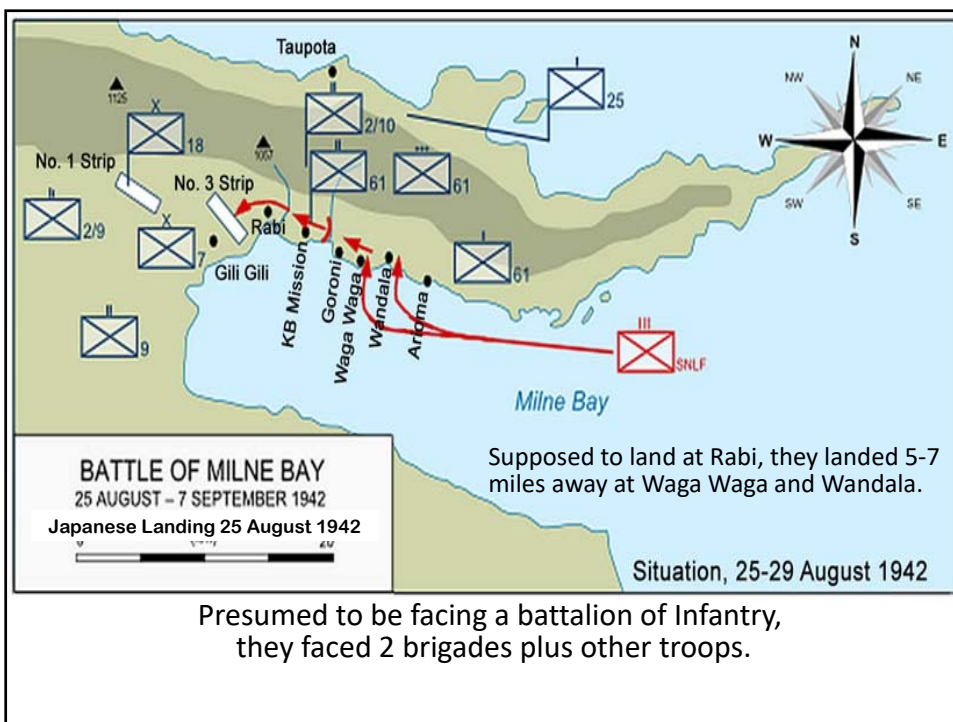
1. In the late 1930s, *Yayoi* participated in combat during the Second Sino-Japanese War and later in the Invasion of French Indochina in 1940.
2. 7/8-23 December 1941. Served with both Wake Island invasion forces.
3. 20 Jan-9 Feb 1942. Operation R invasion of New Ireland and Rabaul.
4. March 1942 Operation SR (the invasion of Lae and Salamaua on New Guinea)
5. 28/3-1/4/42 occupation of the Shortland Islands and Bougainville.
6. 7-8 May 1942, Operation MO at the Battle of the Coral Sea.
7. August 1942. Active in both Guadalcanal and Milne Bay operations.
8. 11 Sep enroute to rescue survivors on Goodenough Is. sunk by US bombers.

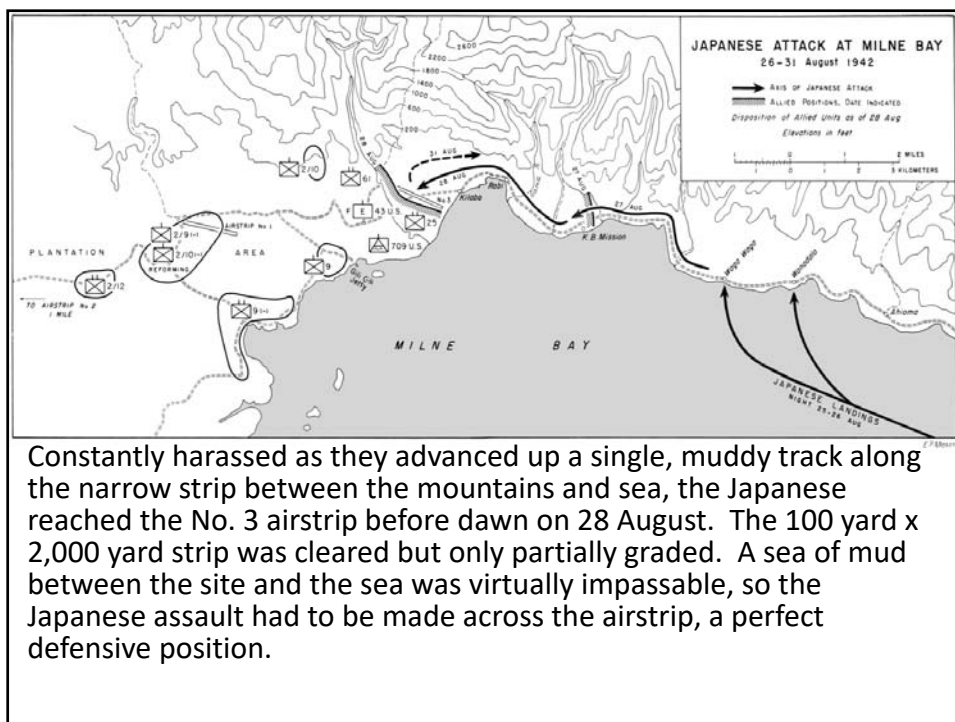
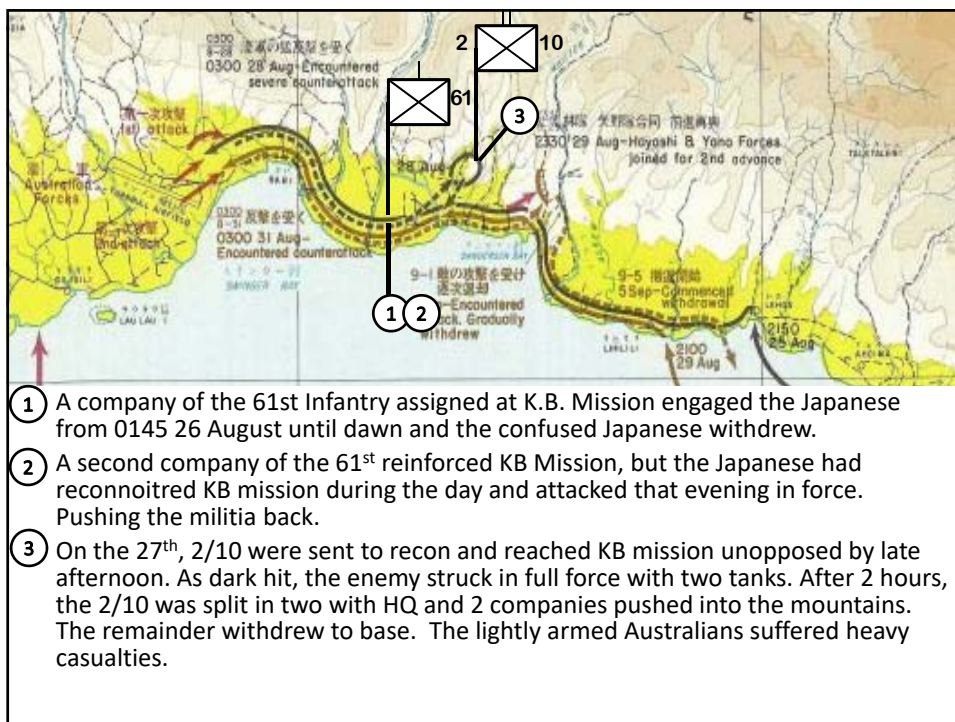


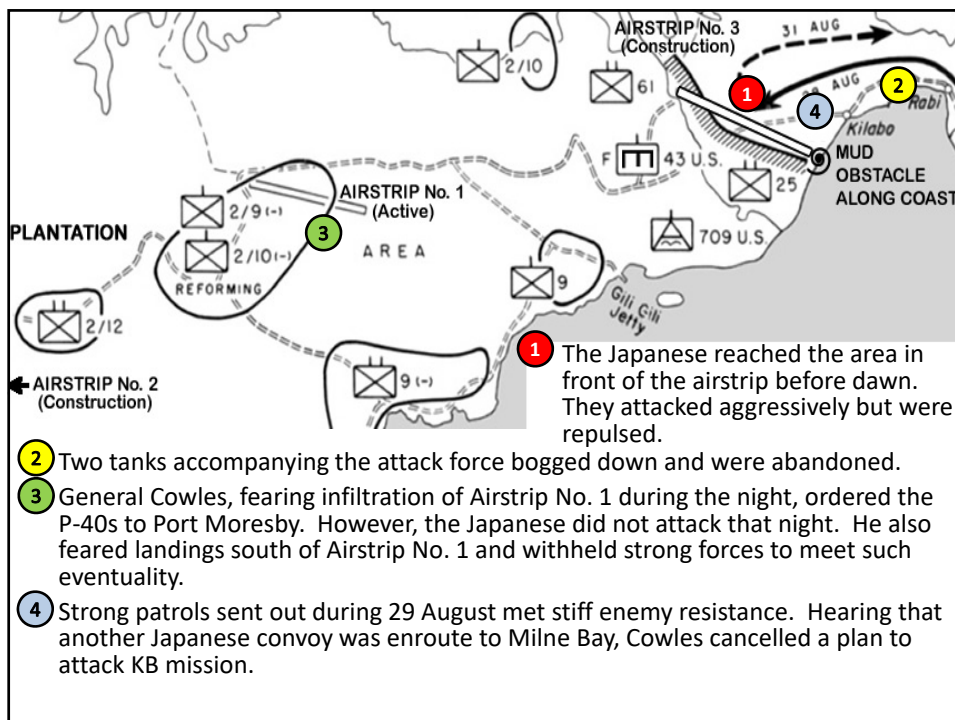
**Type A (大発) Daihatsu-class 14m landing craft**

(abbreviation for “大型発動機艇”, which means “large motorized boat”)

1. Used by the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy from 1937 to 1945.
2. 49'4" x 11'5" x 3'-4'; speed 7.5 knot loaded, 8.7 kt light; 9.5 hours endurance.
3. Cap.: 70-90 troops; 10 horses; 11 tons supplies; 1 truck; **OR** 1 Type 89 tank.
4. Metal hull construction; powered by a 60-80 h.p. 6-cylinder diesel engine.
5. Could be modified to carry weapons of up to 37 mm (1.46 inch) calibre as armament and could be up-armored to withstand 40 mm fire.
6. Design adopted by American designer Andrew Higgins for Landing Craft, Personnel (Large) (LCP(L)); Landing Craft, Personnel (Ramped) (LCP(R)); and later the Landing Craft, Vehicle and Personnel (LCVP).







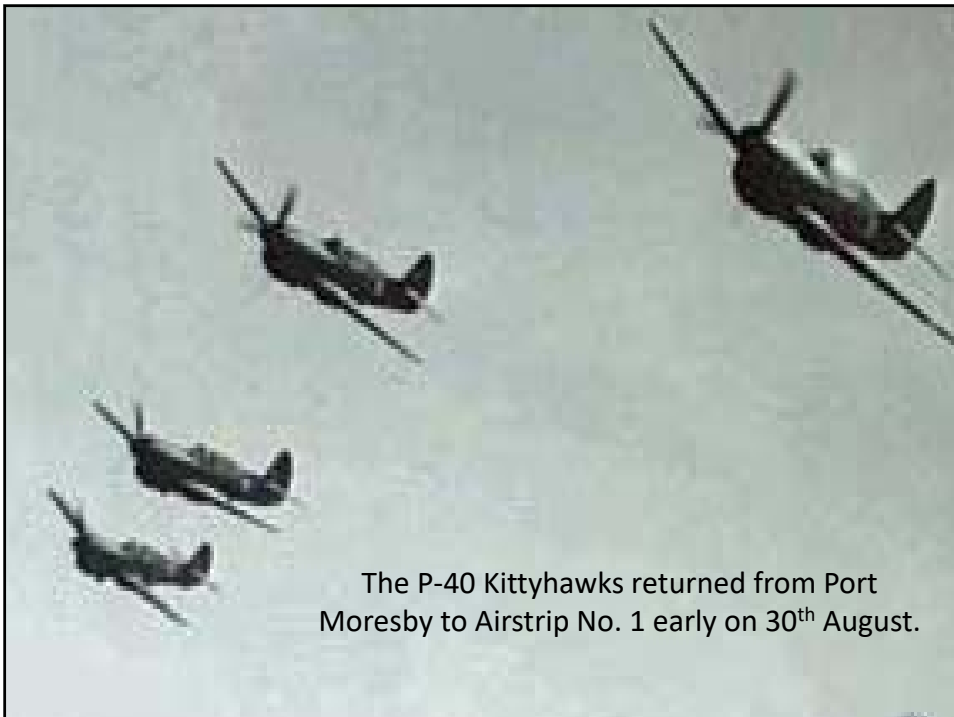




**“Every night the Japs stabbed and hacked their way toward the edge of the air strip, and each day the Aussies flung them back.”**

(MSG Jules Archer, 697<sup>th</sup> Aircraft Warning Company, 5<sup>th</sup> 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 “Cooley” 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 30<sup>th</sup> 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 30<sup>th</sup> August, the Japanese consolidated for another attack on Airstrip No. 3.

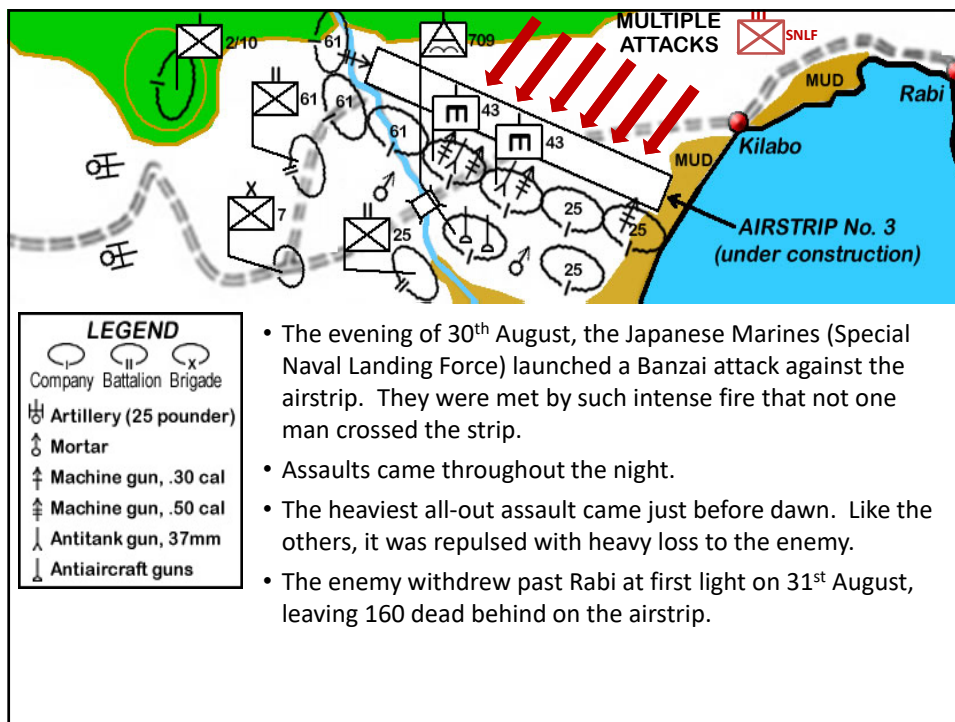
③ The daylight hours were quiet for the defenders of Milne Bay.

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 25<sup>th</sup> 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.



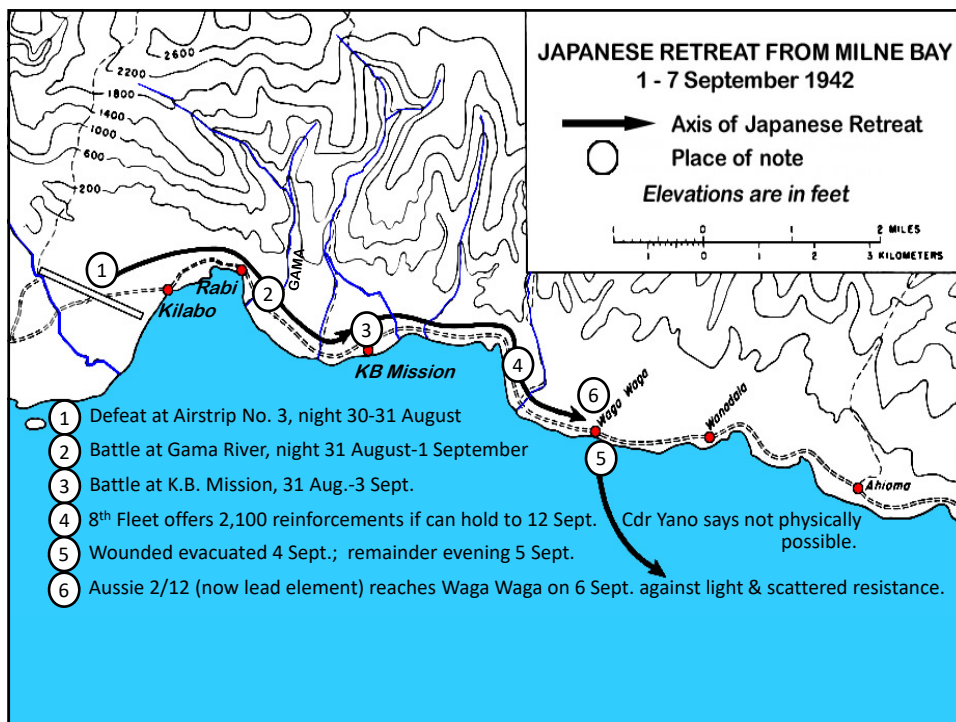
At the height of the fighting, the CO of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Engineers (US) received an urgent message from Port Moresby, asking about the progress on the bomber strip. It noted that the High Command (McArthur) was anxious to fly in heavy bombers to carry the air war to the Japanese. The Engineering 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.

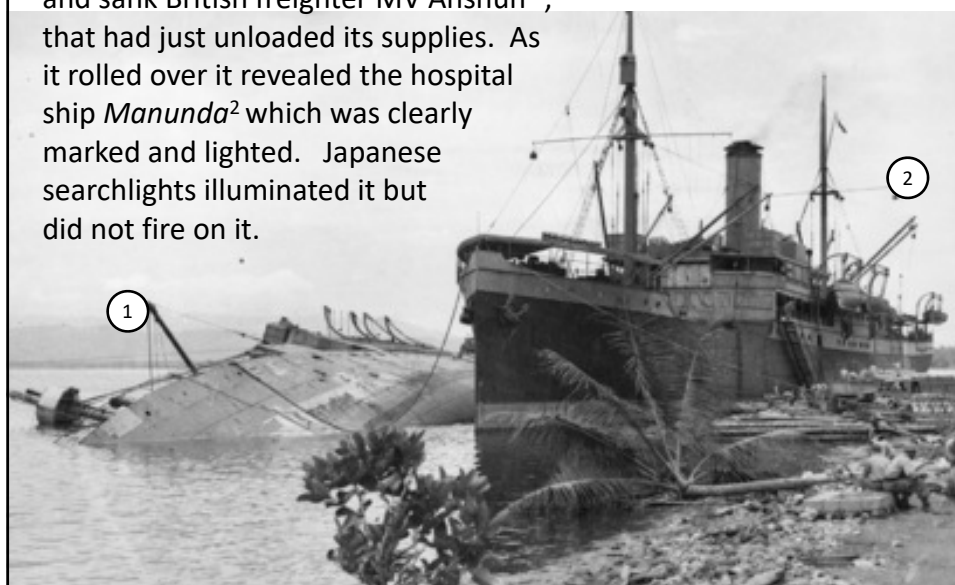


Brigadier George Wootten's desert-experienced 18<sup>th</sup> Brigade began the long-delayed task of clearing Japanese from Milne Bay's north shore. The 2/12 Battalion led the operation and reached Japanese-held KM Mission late on 31 August. Following 2/12, 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion held positions cleared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

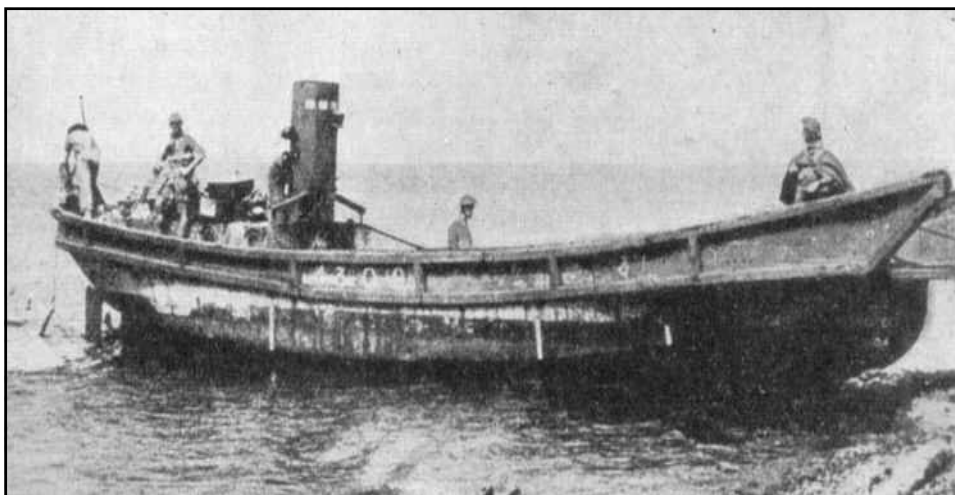
That evening (31 August) a force of 300 Japanese who had gone to the hills after the failed airstrip attacks, were surprised as they attempted to cross the Gama River, and lost some 100 KIA in heavy fighting.



During evacuation of the Japanese Marines the night of 5-6 August, Japanese cruiser *Tenryū* and destroyer *Arashi* shelled Gili Gili harbour and sank British freighter MV *Anshun*<sup>1</sup>, that had just unloaded its supplies. As it rolled over it revealed the hospital ship *Manunda*<sup>2</sup> which was clearly marked and lighted. Japanese searchlights illuminated it but did not fire on it.



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.



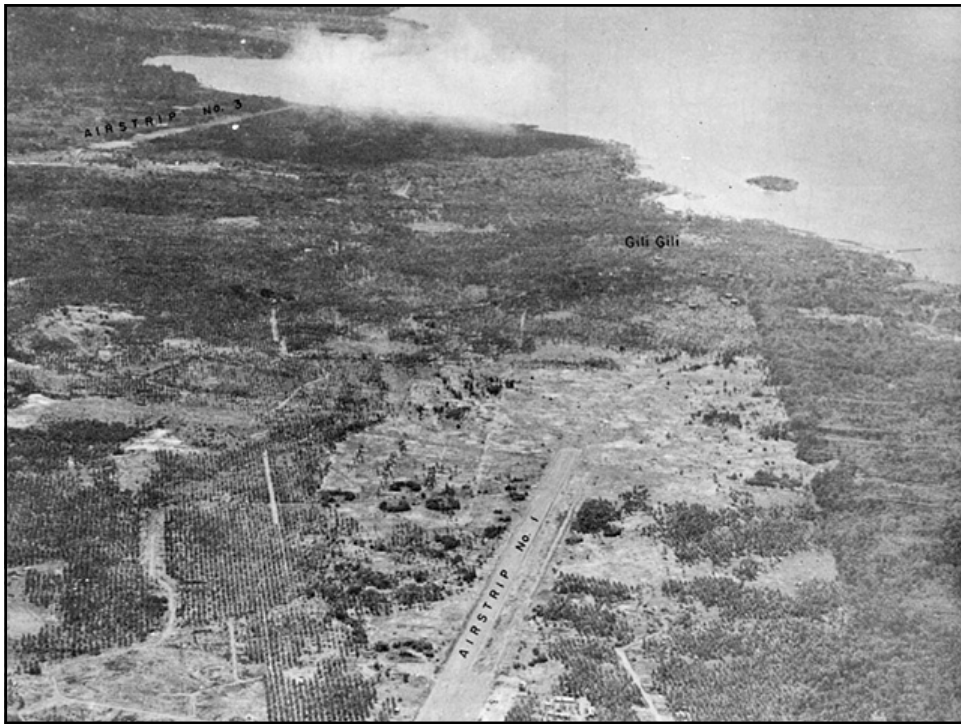
Japanese losses were some 625 killed and virtually all of the 1,311 survivors were wounded or otherwise not combat effective due to injury or disease.

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.





AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

026647











"We were helped, too, by a very cheering piece of news that now reached us, and of which, as a morale raiser, I made great use. Australian troops had, at Milne Bay in New Guinea, inflicted on the Japanese their first undoubted defeat on land. If the Australians, in conditions very like ours, had done it, so could we. Some of us may forget that of all the Allies it was the Australian soldiers who first broke the spell of the invincibility of the Japanese Army; those of us who were in Burma have cause to remember."

British Field Marshal Sir William Slim

...the enemy had shot his bolt; he never showed up again in these waters. The Battle for Milne Bay was a small one as World War II engagements went, but very important. Except for the initial assault on Wake Island, this was the first time that a Japanese amphibious operation had been thrown for a loss ... Furthermore, (it)demonstrated once again that an amphibious assault without air protection, and with an assault force inferior to that of the defenders, could not succeed.

Samuel Eliot Morison, *Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier*