

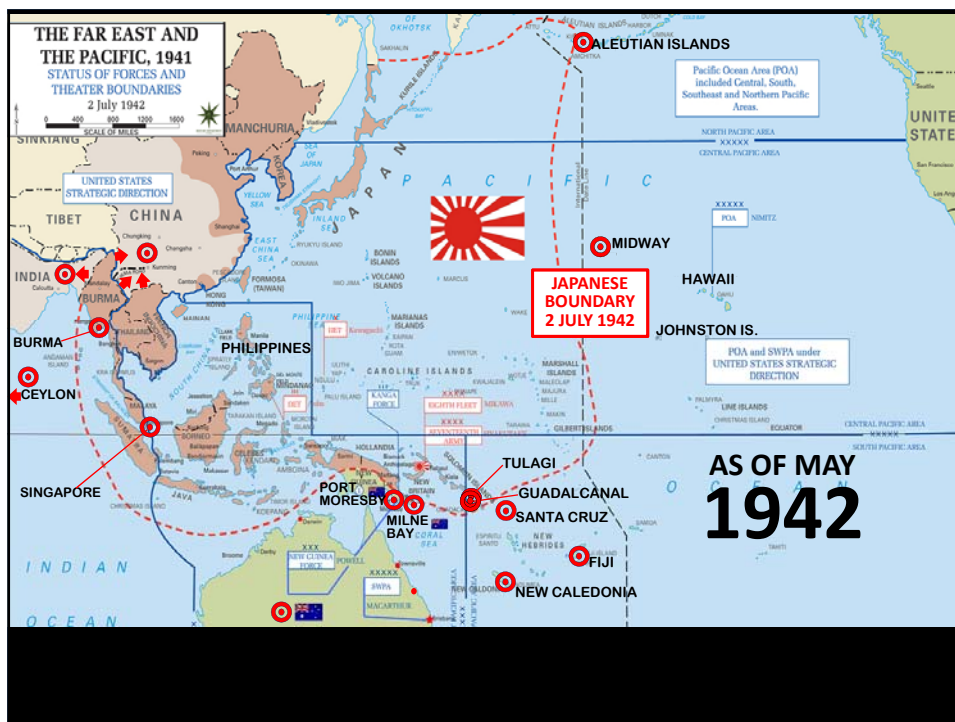
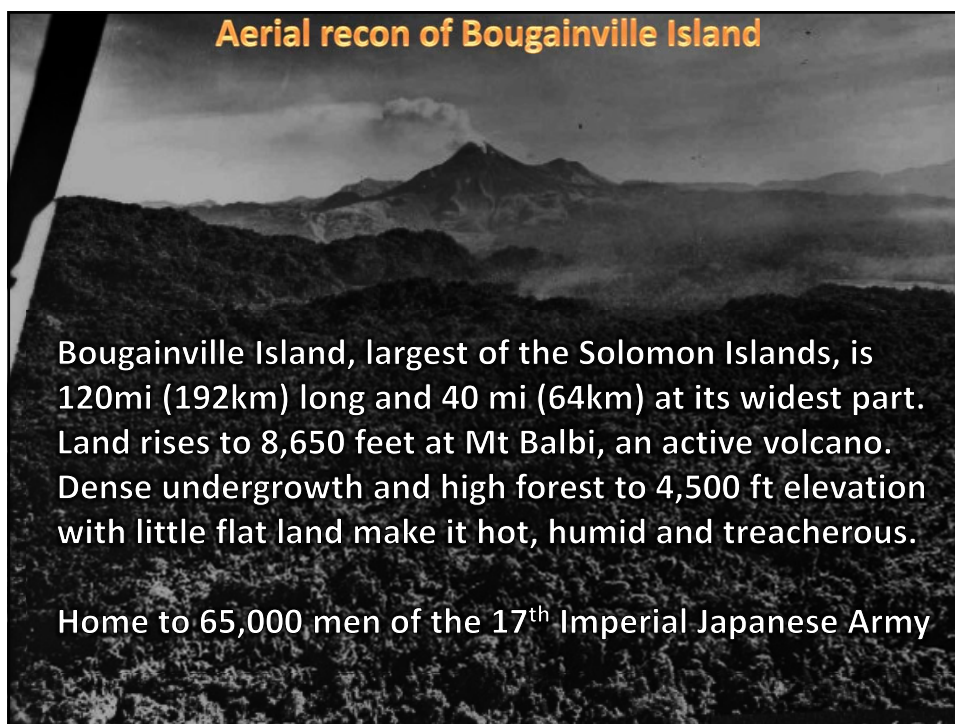
The graphic features a camouflage pattern background. The word "MILITARY" is written in a large, bold, green, distressed font with a metallic texture, positioned above a horizontal line. Below the line, the word "HISTORY" is written in a large, bold, black font with a white outline. Underneath "HISTORY", the text "Bougainville Aug 44-45+" and "The Australian Phase" is written in a white, sans-serif font.

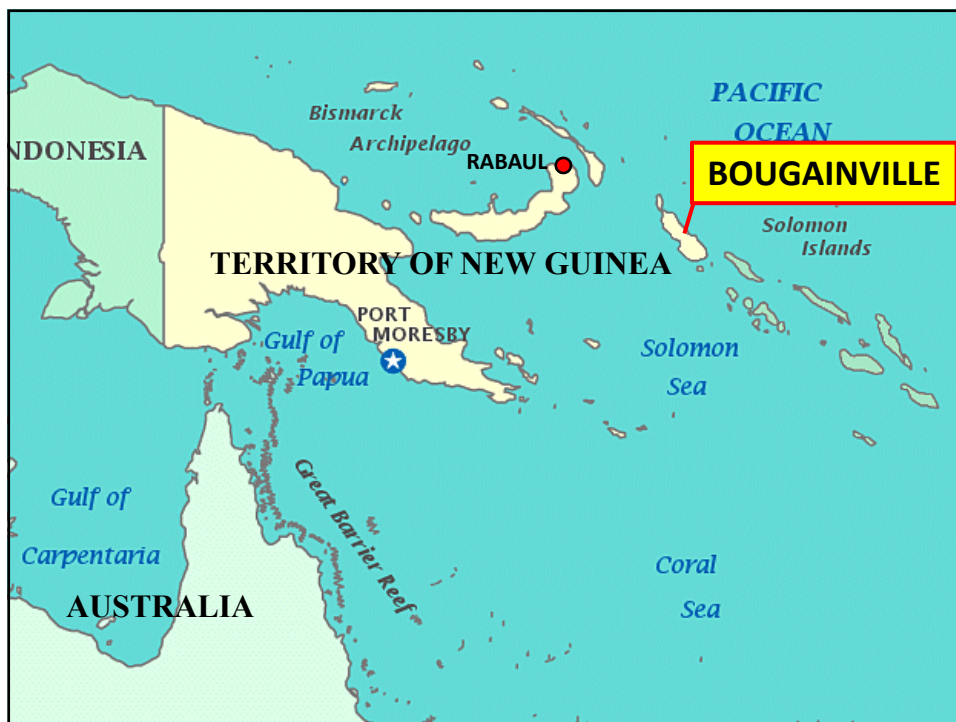
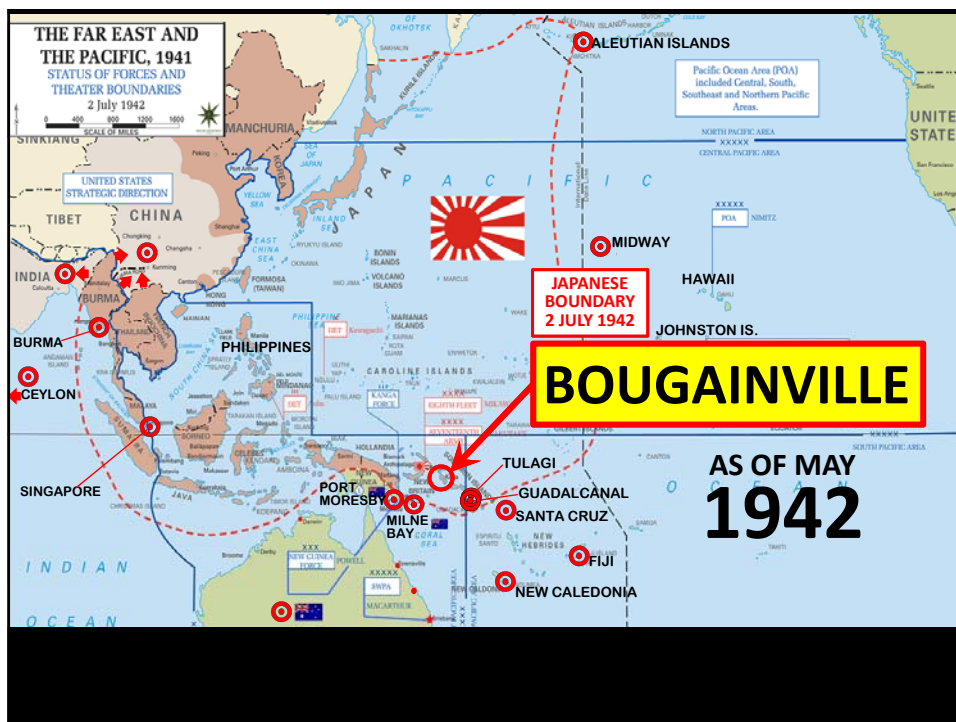
**MILITARY**

**HISTORY**

Bougainville Aug 44-45+  
The Australian Phase









### The military situation in September 1944

- ◆ The Allies expected organised German resistance to collapse before the end of 1944, but after Arnhem it was evident that the German Army would survive into the summer of 1945.
- ◆ In the Far East, Japanese forces were suffering severe defeats despite a successful offensive against airfields in South China.
- ◆ Allied forces had reached Morotai, the Palaus and the Marianas leaving three Japanese armies behind:



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- one on the mainland of Australian New Guinea;



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













- one in New Britain, New Ireland and Bougainville;
- one on the mainland of Australian New Guinea;
- one in Dutch New Guinea.



### In the beginning

- Before the war, Bougainville and its associated smaller islands – although northern-most of the Solomon Islands chain – was administered within the Australian Territory of New Guinea.
- It was protected by 20 Australians from the 1<sup>st</sup> Independent Company and some coastwatchers.
- In April-May 1942, the Japanese invaded to help protect Rabaul.
- They built airfields in the north and south and at Kieta on the central eastern coast, as well as naval bases in the east, north and south. They avoided the west of the island.



North Solomons Campaign, 1943-45	
Belligerents	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> United States</li> <li> Australia</li> <li> New Zealand</li> <li> Colony of Fiji</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Japan</li> </ul>
Commanders and leaders	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Douglas MacArthur, Commander, SW Pacific Area</li> <li> William F. Halsey, Commander, South Pacific Area</li> <li> VADM Theodore S. Wilkinson, 3<sup>rd</sup> Amphibious Force</li> <li> MG Alexander A. Vandegrift, USMC, I Amphib Corps</li> <li> MG Allen H. Turnage, USMC, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division</li> <li> MG, Robert S. Beightler, 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division</li> <li> MG Roy S. Geiger, USMC, I Amphib Corps</li> <li> LTG Oscar W. Griswold, XIV Corps</li> <li> MG H. E. Barrowclough, 3<sup>rd</sup> NZ Division</li> <li> GEN Sir Thomas Blamey, CinC, Allied Land, SWPA</li> <li> LTG Sir Stanley Savige, II Corps</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> GEN Hitoshi Imamura, 8<sup>th</sup> Army</li> <li> LTG Harukichi Hyakutake, 17<sup>th</sup> Army</li> <li> MADM Mineichi Koga, CinC, Combined Fleet</li> <li> VADM Jinichi Kusaka, Southeast Area Fleet</li> <li> VADM Tomoshige Samejima, 8<sup>th</sup> Fleet</li> <li> VADM Sentaro Omori, 7th Fleet</li> <li> RADM Kiyoto Kagawa, DesDiv31, KIA on Onami †</li> <li> LTG Masatane Kanda, 6<sup>th</sup> Div, then 17th Army</li> </ul>
Strength	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>144,000 American troops</li> <li>30,000 Australian troops</li> <li>728 aircraft</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>45,000–65,000 troops</li> <li>154 aircraft</li> </ul>
Casualties and losses	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>USA:</b> 727 dead</li> <li> <b>Australia:</b> 516 dead</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> 16,700 combat deaths</li> <li> 26,400 died of other causes</li> <li> 21,000-23,571 surrendered when the war ended</li> </ul>

**Three battles**  
**were waged over**  
**Bougainville**

~~Three~~ battles  
were waged over  
Bougainville

~~Four~~  
~~Three~~ battles  
were waged over  
Bougainville



### The Big Picture – The Pacific War

1942	Central & East Asia	U.S. & The Pacific
January 10		Japanese land in Dutch Indonesia
January 11	Japanese occupy Kuala Lumpur	
January 20	Japanese invade Burma	
January 21		Japanese bomb New Guinea
February 14		Japanese land on Sumatra
February 15	Singapore surrenders.	
February 17		Japanese land on Bali
February 27		Battle of Java Sea; Japan victory
February 29		Japanese land on Java
<b>9 Mar-April 5</b>		<b>Japanese occupy Bougainville</b>
April 5/9	Japanese carriers raid Ceylon	
April 8		Bataan surrenders.
April 18		Doolittle raids Tokyo fm “Shangri-La”
May 4-8		Battle of Coral Sea, Japanese defeat.
May 5-6	Japanese enter China from Burma	Attack and surrender of Corregidor
June 4-5		Battle of Midway. Japanese defeat.
June 7		Japanese invades Aleutian Islands

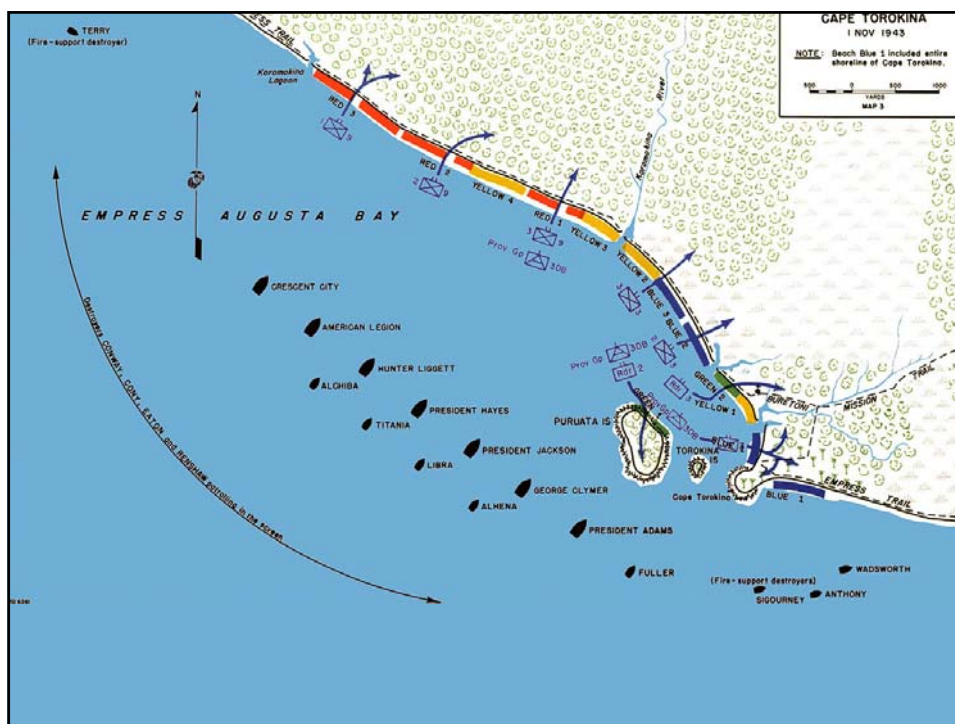
1942	Central & East Asia	U.S. & The Pacific
July 21		Japanese land at Buna, New Guinea; start of Kokoda battles
August 7		1st Marine Div invades Solomons.
August 8/9		Naval battle of Savo Island
August 20		US aircraft land on Guadalcanal
Aug 25-Sept. 7		Battle of Milne Bay, New Guinea
August 23		Naval 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 23/24		Japanese air raid on Darwin
November 30		Naval battle of Tassafaronga
December 21	British troops re-enter Burma	

1943	Central & East Asia	U.S. & The Pacific
January 2		Allies take Buna
January 17-Feb 7		Japanese withdraw from Guadalcanal
January 22		Japanese defeat at Sanananda
February 2	Stalingrad liberated	Kokoda Trail fully in Australian hands
February 20	US defeat at Kasserine Pass	
May 10		US attacks Japanese in Aleutians
May 14		Aussie hospital ship Centaur sunk
June 21-Aug 25		Allies invade New Georgia, Solomons
July 10-Aug 17	Operation Husky - Sicily	
August 15		Japan defeated in the Aleutians
September 4		Lae-Salamaua captured
<b>November 1</b>		<b>US Marines invade Bougainville</b>
<b>November 2</b>		<b>Battle of Empress Augusta Bay</b>



### November 1, 1943 – US Marines invade Bougainville

In Operation Cartwheel, 14,321 men (Marines and Army) of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Amphibious Corps under MG Alexander Vandegrift went ashore into “wilder and more majestic scenery than anyone had yet witnessed in the South Pacific.”

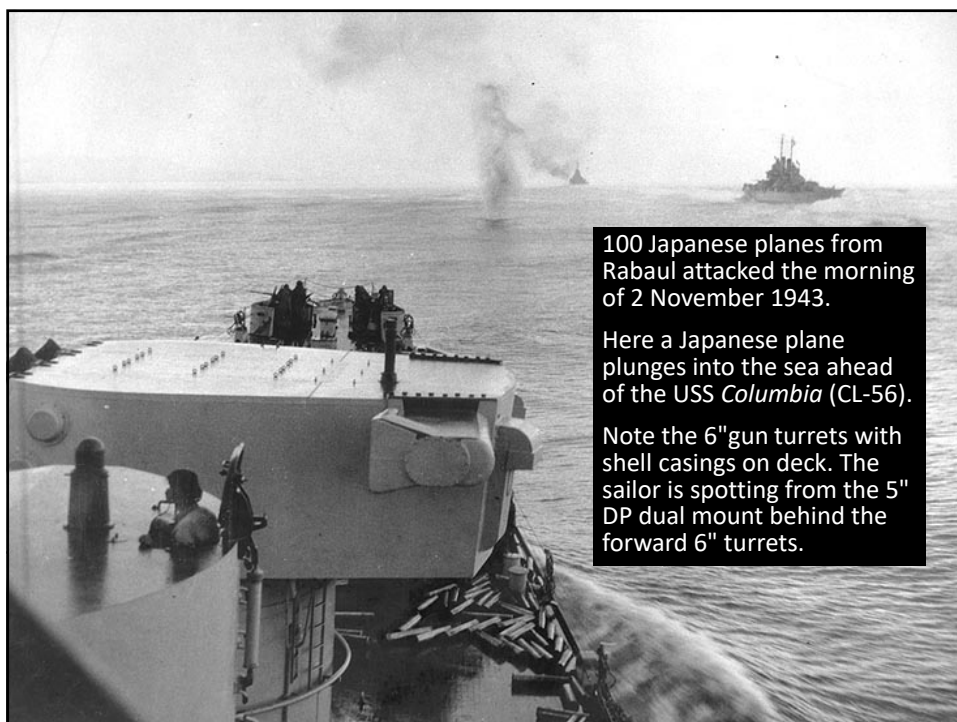
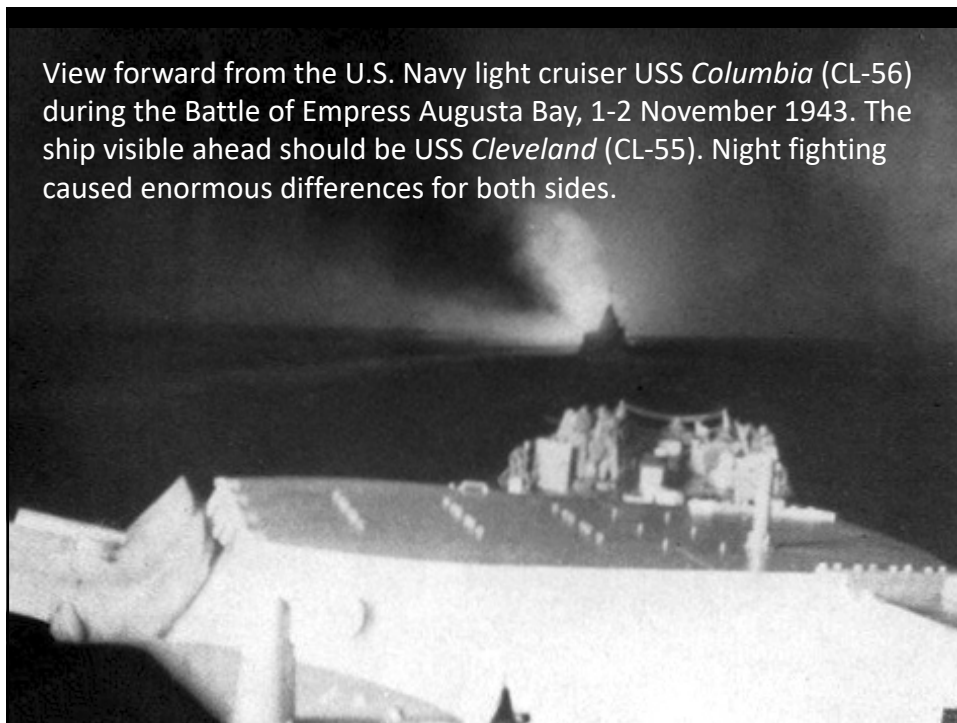




- Allies faced isolated Japanese patrols of platoon strength. Enemy had not expected a landing in the area and had no logistics system to service it.
- Two heavy cruisers, two light cruisers and six destroyers led by Vice Admiral Sentaro Omori as escorts for five destroyer transports carrying the 1,000 men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion 54 Infantry.
- The force was spotted by a U.S. submarine and a search plane. Admiral then Omari requested to send the troops back to Rabaul but to press the attack on the beachhead with his flotilla.
- The **Battle of Empress Bay** was fought between US Admiral Aaron Merrill's Task Force 39 and Japanese Admiral Omori's Cruiser Division 5:

 Task Force 39	 Cruiser Division 5
4 light cruisers	2 heavy cruisers
8 destroyers	2 light cruisers
	6 destroyers
	100 aircraft
Casualties and losses	
2 destroyers and 1 cruiser damaged	1 light cruiser <i>Sendai</i> and 1 destroyer <i>Hatsukaze</i> sunk
19 KIA, 26 WIA	1 hvy cruiser, 1 Lt cruiser and 2 destroyers damaged
	25 aircraft shot down; 198–658 KIA

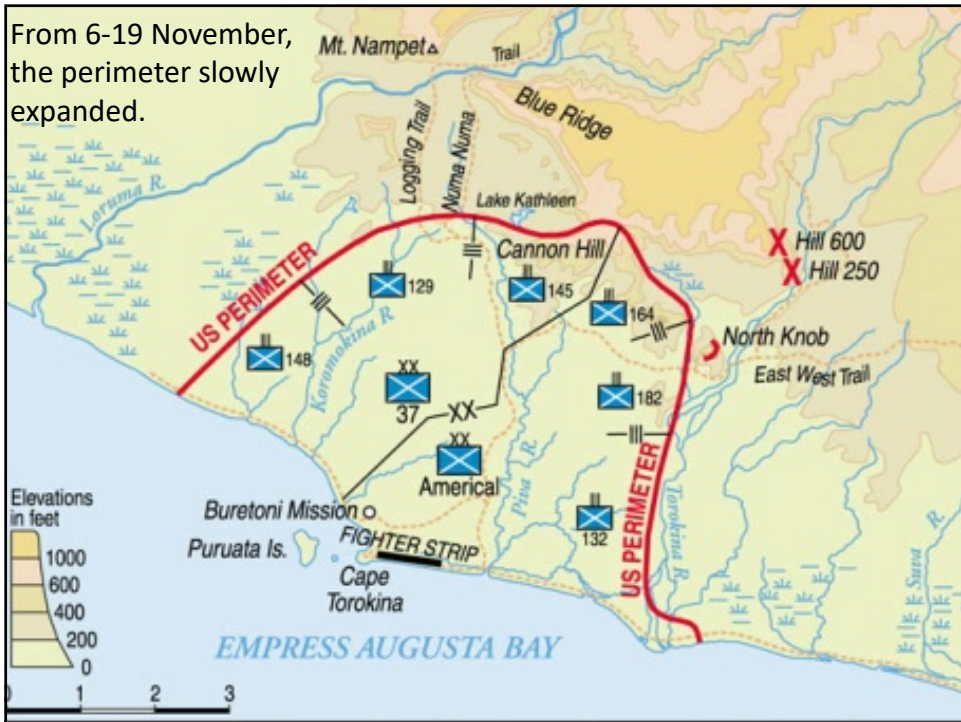
View forward from the U.S. Navy light cruiser USS *Columbia* (CL-56) during the Battle of Empress Augusta Bay, 1-2 November 1943. The ship visible ahead should be USS *Cleveland* (CL-55). Night fighting caused enormous differences for both sides.



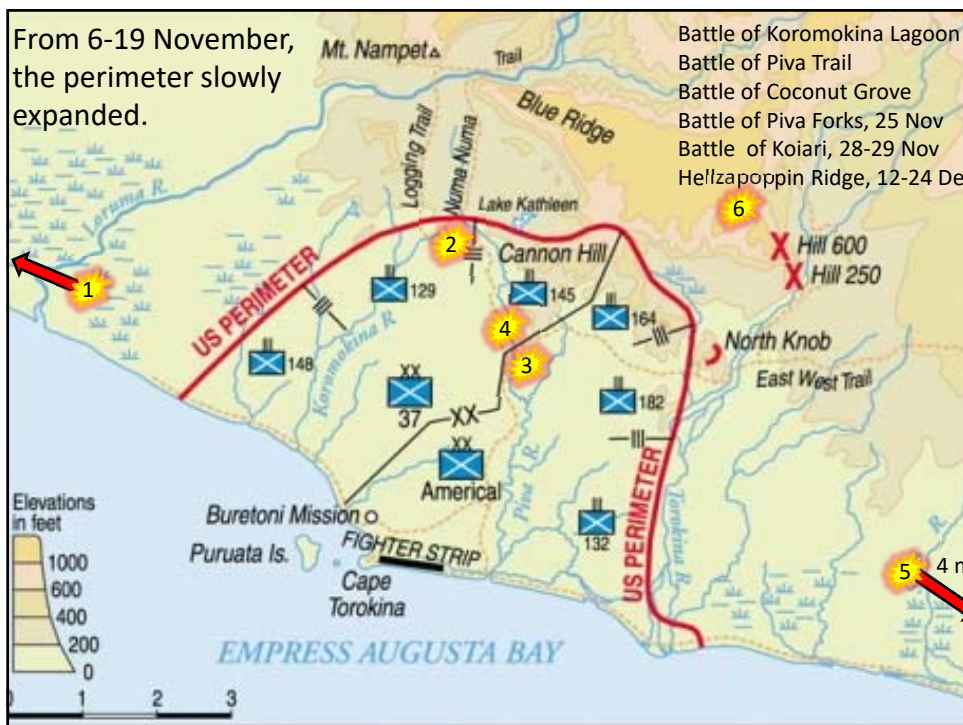
100 Japanese planes from Rabaul attacked the morning of 2 November 1943.

Here a Japanese plane plunges into the sea ahead of the USS *Columbia* (CL-56).

Note the 6" gun turrets with shell casings on deck. The sailor is spotting from the 5" DP dual mount behind the forward 6" turrets.









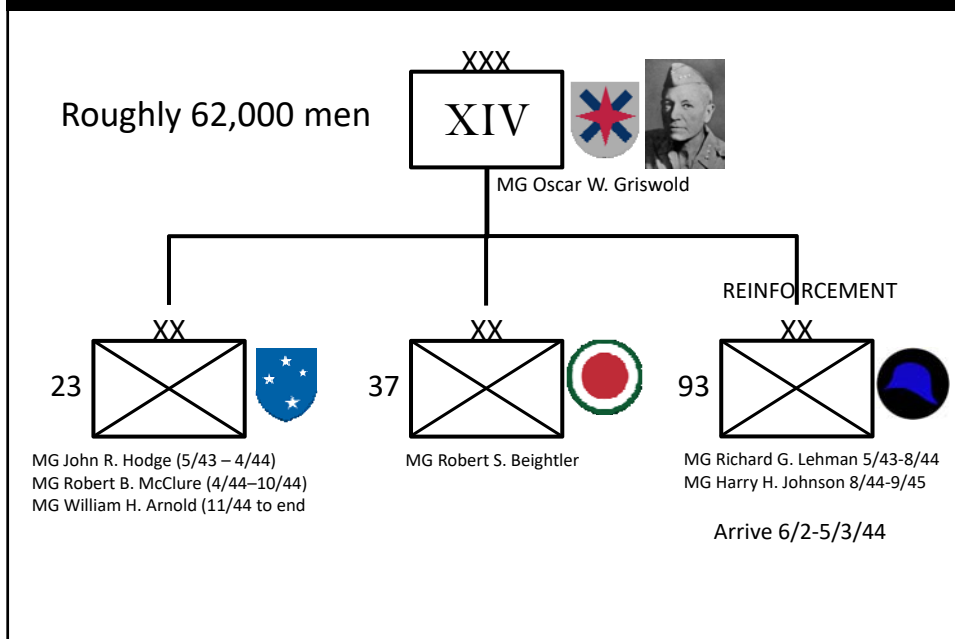






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<b>November 2</b>		<b>Battle of Empress Augusta Bay</b>
November 20-23		Tarawa Atoll, Gilberts, "Makin taken"
<b>December 15</b>		<b>Army XIV Corps replaces Marines</b>
December 26		Marines invade Cape Gloucester

### Dec. 15, 1943, US XIV Corps replaces USMC on Bougainville



### 93<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division – 1<sup>st</sup> WWII African-America division



### Activity, January-March 1944

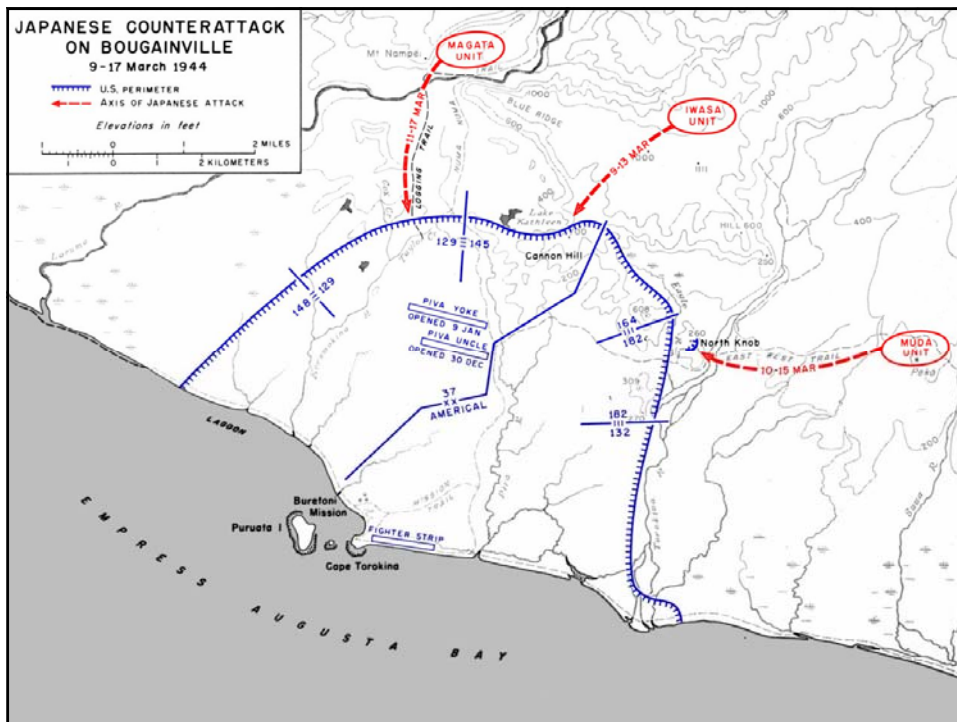
- With the USMC gone to continue the Island-hopping, priority for Bougainville went with them.
- The local strategy was to reduce Rabaul by air while encircling it by invading the Admiralty Islands and Kavieng in New Ireland.
- Admiral "Bull" Halsey, wanting to maintain momentum, inserted the 3<sup>rd</sup> NZ Division into the Green Islands about 115 miles from Rabaul, with little interference by Japanese planes.
- America's first African-American division, the 93<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, reinforced Bougainville from February 6 to March 5.
- MG Griswold, XIV Corps Commander, focused on maintaining the perimeter.

### Activity, January-March 1944

- MG Griswold had learned that waiting for the Japanese to attack was a much surer way to victory than undertaking his own offensive operations in a jungle.
- As far as the press and the American public were concerned, the war had moved on from Bougainville. When the Marines left, so too did most of the reporters and photographers. "Move along. Nothing to see here."
- The 23<sup>rd</sup> and 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry divisions manned the perimeter, while the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Defense Battalion and the US Army 49<sup>th</sup> Coast Artillery Battalion protected the beachhead.
- The 93<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division was getting itself organised, and were already receiving tasks more suitable for a labour contractor.



1944	Central & East Asia	U.S. & The Pacific
January 22, 1944	Allied landings at Anzio	
January 31-Feb 7		Kwajalein, Marshall Is captured
<b>March 9, 1944</b>	<b>Battle of the Perimeter, Bougainville</b>	<b>15,000 Japanese attack perimeter</b>
<b>March 27, 1944</b>		<b>Counterattacks against perimeter end</b>







### Lessons from the Counterattack

- The Japanese had learned a very important lesson. The Americans had no interest in Bougainville. All they wanted was a temporary base for air and naval forces against Rabaul.
- Just like it had been for the initial Japanese thrust southwards, when Japan occupied Bougainville in force to protect Rabaul.
- Rabaul was the target, not Bougainville.
- The Allies had ample resources to protect themselves, incl. 3 Infantry divisions, artillery, tanks, airplanes and the US Navy.
- After the failure of the Japanese counterattack, things returned to “normal” for the U.S. forces who, like the Japanese, were fighting mosquitos and other disease vectors.
- To the Japanese “normal” meant fighting the jungle to survive.



# Did anyone **Want** Bougainville?

## Battles over Bougainville

1. November 1-December 15 1943: The USMC battled the Japanese to **establish the perimeter**.
2. December 15-March 27 1944: US XIV Corps battled the Japanese to **hold the perimeter**, and then kept holding it, content to sit out the war.
3. Meanwhile, for the past year INTENSE **political** battles had been raging between Canberra and London, Churchill and his General Staff, and London and its other Allies. It seems that London - having thrown away its Empire - didn't want the USA to pick it up. They desperately wanted INTO the Pacific War! It was Curtin's job to help, but he didn't seem enthused . . . .

### Curtain's war

- Australian P.M. John Curtin was wholly committed to seeing Australia through the war in as decent a nick as possible.
- He was painfully aware of the Mandated Territory of New Guinea and wanted to take a **leading part** in ejecting the enemy and regaining Australia's lost territory.
- He had told the British in November 1943 that he hoped to see Britain in the Pacific, but knew having MacArthur as CinC SWPA gave him a seat at the table that they *currently didn't have*.
- He and Blamey were **completely opposed** to the British having a separate command in the Pacific, which they wanted.
- He needed to ensure that Australia wasn't committed beyond its capacity to contribute.
- Decisive battles in 1945 would be fought north of the equator.

### Strength and availability of major Australian ground combat units on 1st June 1944

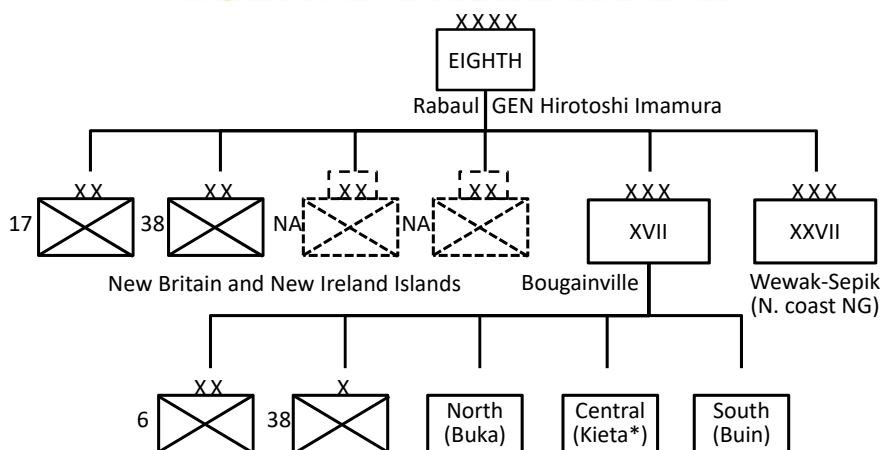
Unit	Strength	Availability
6 <sup>th</sup> Division AIF	16,951	At short notice
7 <sup>th</sup> Division AIF	14,947	In November 1944
9 <sup>th</sup> Division AIF	13,448	In October 1944
3 <sup>rd</sup> Division	7,341	Moving to New Guinea
5 <sup>th</sup> Division	11,693	In New Guinea
11 <sup>th</sup> Division	8,806	In New Guinea
12 <sup>th</sup> Division static	12,750	Northern Territory garrison
1st Armoured Brigade	5,338	Ready October 1944
4th Armoured Brigade	4,719	Ready October 1944
1st Division	4,915	Purely a training organisation
<b>Total (7 div plus 2 Arm Bde)</b>	<b>100,908</b>	

### Australia force issues, November 1944

- Australia Army strength was 423,536, including 5,852 women.
- SWPA RAAF strength was 163,618, including 7,287 women.
- Australia had six divisions, including 3 A.I.F. and 3 partly militia.
- Conscripts (militia) could not be deployed north of the equator. 20 of 33 militia battalions had at least 75% volunteers (A.I.F.), but still had a fair few conscripts. 13 were not usable as A.I.F.
- Blamey proposed to MacArthur posting 7 brigades to garrison New Guinea (Bougainville 2, New Britain 2, and NG mainland 3). MacArthur insisted on 12 brigades (B 4, islands 1, NB 3, main 4)\*

NOTE: \*Per Blamey, MacArthur was concerned that replacing 7 US divisions with 7 Australian brigades would look bad, but Blamey completely **underestimated** enemy strength.

### Japanese Forces, October 1944



NOTES: \*And Numa Numa

\*\*Including up to 20,000 Naval Infantry G2 weren't aware of.



### Allied estimates of Japanese vs. later experience

Combat Area	G2 Est.* Strength	POWs	Est. KIA, DOW	Revised Strength	Under-estimate
🔴 Bougainville	13,400	21,900**	43,100	65,000***	<b>79%</b>
🔴 New Britain/ New Ireland	38,000	68,000	30,000	98,000	<b>61%</b>
🔴 New Guinea	24,000	31,000	42,000	73,000	<b>67%</b>
🔴 Japanese civilian workers****		25,000	25,000	50,000	<b>100%</b>
Totals	75,401	145,900	140,100	286,000	<b>74%</b>

NOTES: \*Estimates per G2 figures Sept-Oct 1944.

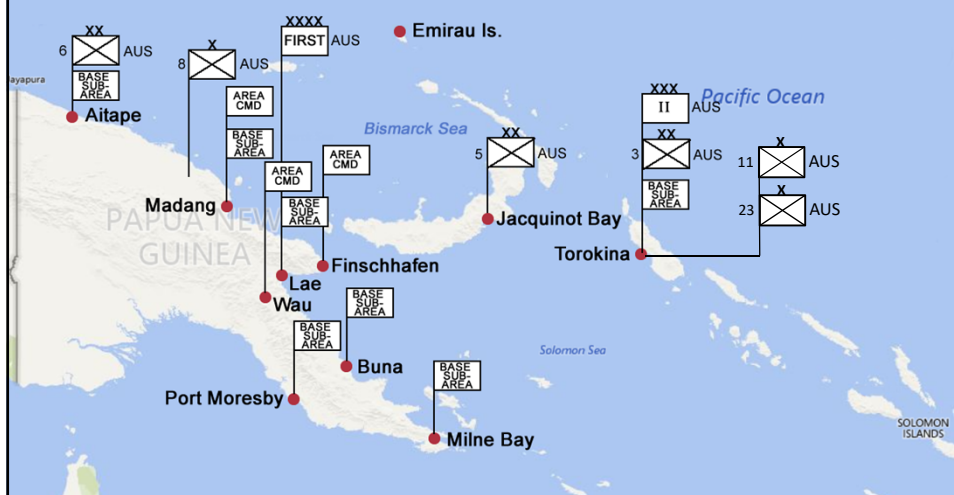
\*\*Australians counted 21,000-23,500 survivors on Bougainville.

\*\*\*Per Gailey & Long, 16,700 combat deaths and 26,400 other causes.

\*\*\*\*G2 estimates did not consider civilian workers; total numbers unknown.

AUSTRALIAN FIRST ARMY MISSION: Control of the whole of Australian New Guinea

- When suggesting 7 brigades, Blamey was not contemplating offensive operations in Bougainville and Aitape (mainland).
- The decision of MacArthur (who didn't think the Japanese should be attacked) to place 12 brigades (5-North Solomons) made it possible to undertake offensives there, if so desired.



GENERAL HEADQUARTERS  
SOUTHWEST PACIFIC AREA

Melbourne, Vic.,  
25 May, 1942.

**SECRET.**

Operation Instructions)  
No. 7.

All Australian and United States military forces, Army, Navy and Air, of the SOUTHWEST PACIFIC AREA, now or hereafter serving in the PORT MORESBY AREA, effective at once or when hereafter assigned, are placed under the operational control of the General Officer Commanding the NEW GUINEA FORCE.

In the exercise of this authority the General Officer Commanding the NEW GUINEA FORCE, while coordinating and perfecting the planning of all forces in preparation for defence, will not, except when attack is imminent or in progress, disturb the execution of the general plans of the local commanders of the Allied Air and Naval Forces and the Commanding General, United States Army Forces in Australia.

The General Officer Commanding the NEW GUINEA FORCE will continue to operate under the direct command of the Commander Allied Land Forces.

OFFICIAL: DOUGLAS MacARTHUR,  
General, United States Army  
Commander-in-Chief.

S.J. CHAMBERLAIN,  
Brig. Gen., U. S. Army,

### The political dust settles...

- Australia was now scheduled to assume full responsibility for Bougainville with five brigades, some 30,000 troops, replacing the US 23<sup>rd</sup>, 37<sup>th</sup> and 93<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Divisions (about 62,000).
- All of Prime Minister Curtin's objectives were met so he, MacArthur and Blamey were all satisfied with the outcome.
- Australia would now fulfil its international and national roles.



The role of Britain in the Pacific was **not yet agreed**, but Mr Curtin felt no longer obliged to play the midwife.

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January 22, 1944	Allied landings at Anzio	
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<b>March 9, 1944</b>	<b>Battle of the Perimeter, Bougainville</b>	<b>15,000 Japanese attack perimeter</b>
<b>March 27, 1944</b>		<b>Counterattacks against perimeter end</b>
April 22		Allies attack Aitape and Hollandia, NG
May 27		Allies attack Biak, New Guinea
June 15-Aug 8		Marines capture Mariana Islands
July 19-July 27		Marines liberate Guam
July 24		Marines invade Tinian
<b>October 6</b>		<b>HQ, 3<sup>rd</sup> Div (AUS) lands at Torokina</b>
October 20-26		Allies liberate Leyte, Philippines. First of 2,257 Kamikaze attacks.
November 4		6th Bde (AUS) land at Jacquinot Bay
November 8		HQ 6 <sup>th</sup> Div (AUS) opens at Aitape
November 14		Superfortresses from Marianas attack Japan
December 15		Allies invade Mindoro, Philippines
December 17		USAF forms 509 <sup>th</sup> Composite Group



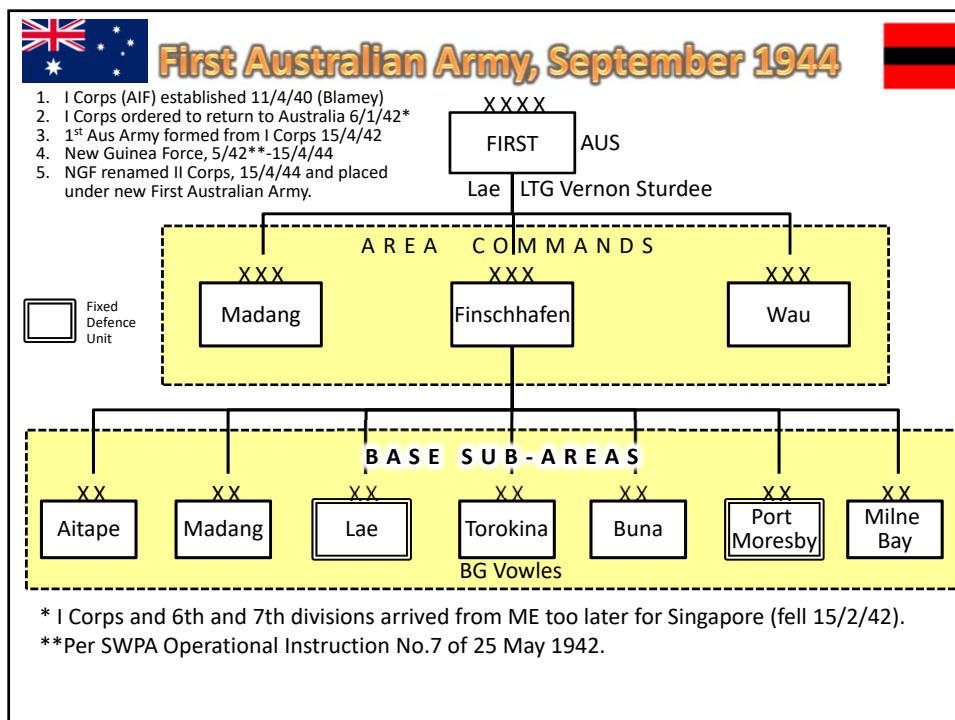
Australia now owned  
a 'war' of its own,  
and the fourth battle  
over Bougainville  
began in earnest.



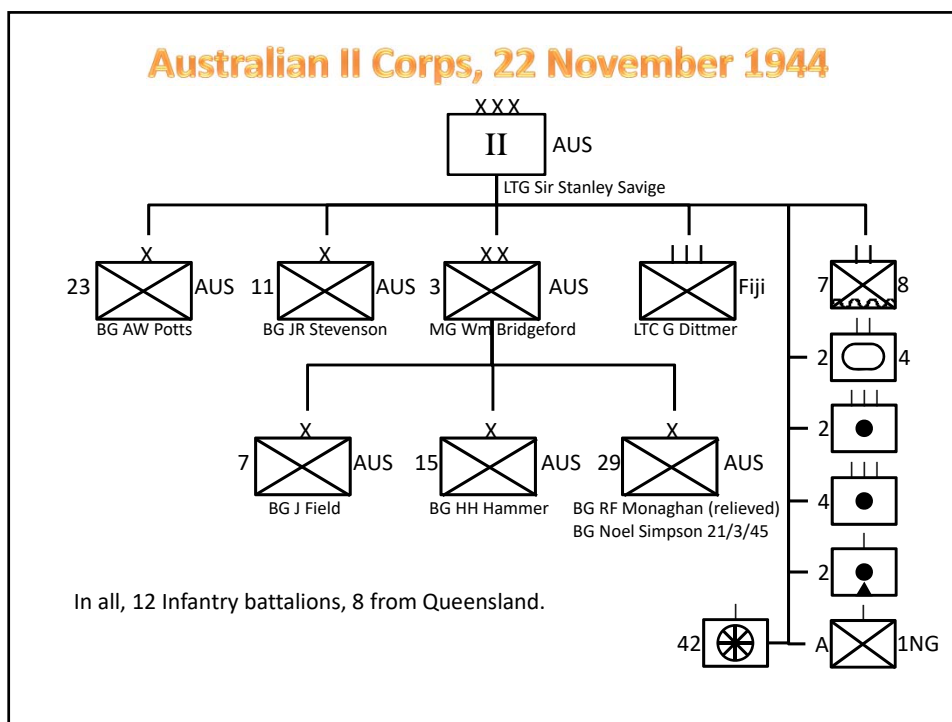
- The island of Bougainville in the South Pacific saw one of the largest and most gruelling campaigns fought by Australian forces during the Second World War.
- During the offensive against the Japanese from November 1944 to August 1945, 516 Australians were killed, 2142 wounded, and two Victoria Crosses awarded. A veteran later described Bougainville as '**one long bloody hard slog**'.

### Australian Phase, Nov 1944-Aug 1945 and beyond

Belligerents	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> United States</li> <li> Australia</li> <li> New Zealand</li> <li> Colony of Fiji</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Japan</li> </ul>
Commanders and leaders	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> GEN Sir Thomas Blamey, CinC, Allied Land, SWPA</li> <li> LTG Sir Stanley Savige, II Corps</li> <li> BG Ragnar Garrett, Chief of Staff, II Corps</li> <li> MG William Bridgeford, 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division</li> <li> BG JR Stevenson, 11<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade</li> <li> BG Arnold Potts, 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Brigade</li> <li> LTC George Dittmer, Fiji Military Force</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> GEN Hitoshi Imamura, 8<sup>th</sup> Army</li> <li> LTG Harukichi Hyakutake, 17<sup>th</sup> Army</li> <li> MADM Mineichi Koga, CinC, Combined Fleet</li> <li> VADM Jinichi Kusaka, Southeast Area Fleet</li> <li> VADM Tomoshige Samejima, 8<sup>th</sup> Fleet</li> <li> VADM Sentaro Omori, 7th Fleet</li> <li> RADM Kiyoto Kagawa, DesDiv31, KIA on Onami †</li> <li> LTG Masatane Kanda, 6<sup>th</sup> Div, then 17th Army</li> </ul>
Strength	
30,000 Australian troops	40,000-65,000 (includes remnants of 20,000 Navy)
Casualties and losses	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> 516 dead</li> <li> 2,142 wounded</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> 16,700 combat deaths</li> <li> 26,400 died of other causes</li> <li> 21,000-23,571 surrendered when the war ended</li> </ul>







Many dismiss Australia's  
Bougainville campaign  
as an unnecessary and  
costly operation.

### The soldier's perspective

"In the first place the campaign was futile and unnecessary. At Salamaua the men went for the Jap because every inch of ground won meant so much less distance to Tokyo. But what did an inch or a mile mean on Bougainville? Nothing! Whether Bougainville could be taken in a week or a year would make no difference to the war in general. Every man knew this.

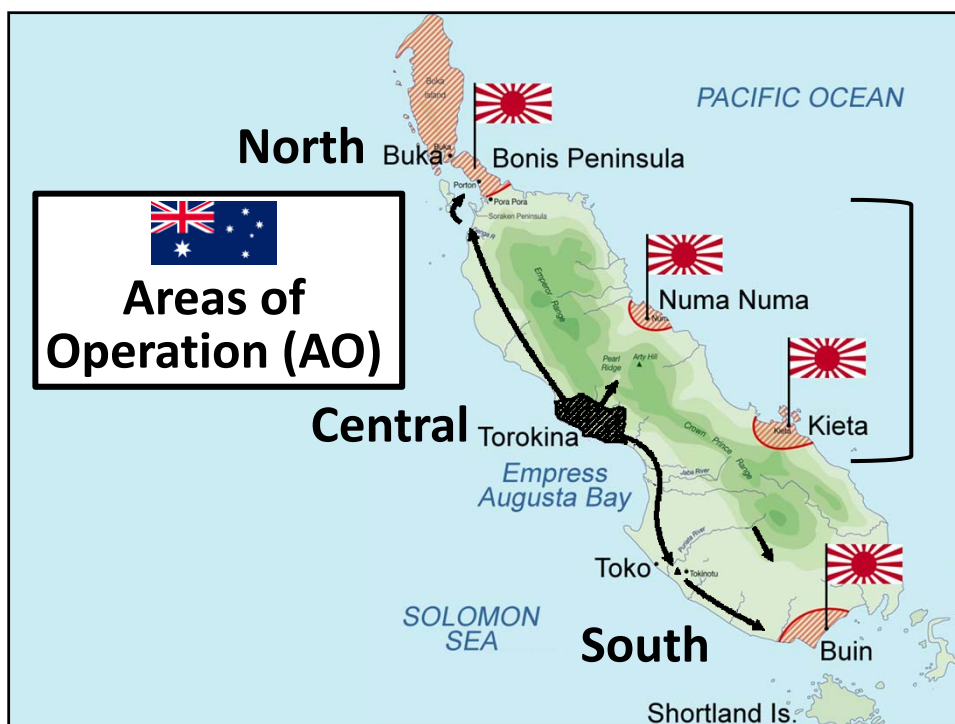
The Bougainville campaign was a politician's war and served no better purpose than to keep men in the fight.... Every risk taken on Bougainville was one that could not be avoided; every life was begrudged. Men fought because there was no alternative. None wanted to lose his life on Bougainville.... but despite all this the men did fight and fought well".

(Excerpt from 42<sup>nd</sup> Battalion History)



## The Mission

- As of Nov. 1944, the role of the **First Australian Army** was:
  - to protect the US naval and air installations in the Solomons, New Britain and New Guinea and
  - to 'maintain limited pressure on the enemy'.
- The role of **II Corps (Australia)** was:
  - to relieve the US Army's XIV Corps at Torokina,
  - to move on to active defence, and
  - to undertake future offensive operations.
- From the outset, Blamey and Savage were thinking aggressively.
- Bougainville was divided into 3 AOs:



### The Central Sector

- Extensive patrolling along the mountainous Numa Numa trail saw continuing contacts. For example, during one 6 week period, 27<sup>th</sup> Bn made 48 patrols and killed 122 Japanese for a loss of 4 KIA and 9 WIA.
- Australian knowledge of Japanese strength and disposition on Bougainville was poor, but the Japanese knowledge of the Australians was **woeful**.
- Japanese XVII Army military intelligence consisted of only four officers, who also controlled the Kenpei-tai (military police). They couldn't confirm who they were fighting until December MacArthur announced on the radio that Australians had relieved the Americans.

Questioned as POWs, LTC Miyakawa Kiyoshi, a XVII Army intelligence officer, and LTC Kanda Hachio, 6th Division, acknowledge no attempt to compile an Australian order of battle or even identify the Australian commanders. They estimated 50,000-60,000 Australians on the island.

Japanese **overestimated** Australian strength two-fold, while Australians **underestimated** Japanese by half.

### The Northern Sector

- The campaign in the Northern Sector saw heavy fighting to contain the Japanese to the narrow Bonis Peninsula and Buka Island until they could be destroyed.
- Things went smoothly until 8 June 1945 when an ambitious amphibious landing at Porton Plantation went horribly wrong, resulting in Australian defeat.
- Australians then struggled to regain the initiative in the north despite heavy fighting.
- Australian forces switched their focus to the southern sector.



### The Southern Sector

- When it became clear in early 1943 that Guadalcanal would be lost, most of the Japanese XVII Army was evacuated from Guadalcanal to Shortland and Fauro Islands with headquarters near Buin. Weapons, equipment and reinforcements were sent from Rabaul to wage a two-year campaign, although food reserves were only four months. They set up large gardens.
- From 28 December 1944, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Australian Division pushed southwards against stiff Japanese resistance towards Buin and Kahili where the Japanese maintained their gardens.
- Weeks turned into months as the Australians, constantly wet and regularly skirmishing with the Japanese, slowly advanced from Torokina through swamps and jungle tracks. Combat fatigue was a serious problem in two Australian battalions, and one Brigade commander was sacked.

### Battle at Slater's Knoll

- On March 4, 25<sup>th</sup> Bn crossed the Puriata River and met heavy resistance from Japanese dug in along the Buin Road. They established a base at Slater's Knoll where the river converged with Buin Road. Japanese fired some 600 artillery shells at Slater's Knoll.
- Two companies attacked on 19 March forcing a Japanese retreat to an extensive pillbox network at a road junction, which the 25<sup>th</sup> attacked on 22 March. Japanese activity stepped up and a major Japanese offensive was expected. The 25<sup>th</sup>'s positions on Slater's Knoll underwent frequent probing and attack from 27 March.
- The Japanese 13<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiments made a major assault on Slater's Knoll on April 5. The 25<sup>th</sup> saw them off, at a loss of 10 officers and 179 other ranks killed and wounded over the ten days. By contrast, the Japanese lost some 600 KIA and 1,000 WIA out of some 3,000 Japanese.
- Shocked at their unexpected loss, the Japanese sought to wear down the Australians as they continued towards Buin on a two-battalion front.
- Further inland, the Australian Infantry Battalion, native guerrillas with Australian leaders, terrorized the Japanese, killing an estimated 2,000 over eight months.



## To Buin

- After a 2-week lull when Australian tanks and artillery were brought forward, the Australian 15<sup>th</sup> Brigade advanced on the heavily defended Hongorai River in two columns. The river was reached on 7 May at a cost of 120 Australian KIA and WIA; 169 Japanese dead were counted. By the time the war ended on August 8 and active patrolling ceased on August 11, the 15<sup>th</sup> Brigade had suffered 32 officers and 493 other ranks killed or wounded in action.
- The Australian advance was not fast; it was not spectacular; but it was unrelenting. By May 1945 the war in this sector moved from a patrolling war to a combined arms battle. From June both the Australian and Japanese commanders began planning for what would be the final battle as the Australians made their way ever closer to Buin.
- As the Australian infantry, tanks and engineers slogged their way south, 2/8 Commando operated in the mountains on the fringe of their advance. Between 30 December and 22 August it had only two breaks, one three-days and one ten-days.
- Patrols collected and collated track information and terrain reports and located the enemy and were then free to strike at the Japanese. 2/8 Commando, whose rarely fielded over 175 men, had 282 confirmed kills and captured seven prisoners.



## Peace

- When Germany surrendered in May 1945, the news was received with indifference, even resentment, especially by the infantry.
- On 8 May the 57th/60th Battalion killed six Japanese in two ambushes around the Hari River. Corporal Harold Williams wrote in his diary: 'WAR OVER IN EUROPE. I suppose most people are happy now [but] what does it mean to us up here?...Today was supposed to be a holiday.'
- On 8 August men listened to radio broadcasts about the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima two days earlier. This saw a spate of betting on the date of Japan's surrender.
- The atomic bombing of Nagasaki and the Soviet invasion of Manchuria added to the anticipation that the war was almost over.
- The 9th Battalion in Torokina began celebrating prematurely on 11 August, after hearing that the Japanese high command had unofficially accepted the Allies' terms of surrender.





### Conclusion

- Bougainville was not 'unnecessary'; it was more than just 'mopping up'.
- The campaign would not change the outcome of the war nor end it sooner. But it released manpower for other operations against Japan and allowed the release of servicemen for employment on the home front.
- Australian commanders and politicians expected the war against Japan would continue at least until 1946. Had the Australian actions not been undertaken, II Corps could have remained on Bougainville indefinitely.
- The aggressive campaign fulfilled the government's political and strategic agenda of being actively involved in the liberation of Australian territory.
- The campaign itself was conducted with brutal skill and efficiency to destroy the Japanese. When the war came to an end, II Corps controlled about two-thirds of Bougainville, and were preparing to attack Buin.
- The cost between October 1944 and August 1945, was 516 Australian deaths and another 1,572 wounded. Most of these casualties were suffered by the infantry. About 25% of the indigenous population died.

