

Australian 1945 Campaigns

Late in 1944 Australian forces began relieving American garrisons in Australian New Guinea, New Britain and Bougainville (all of which now form part of Papua New Guinea). General Headquarters moved from Brisbane, and the Commander-in-Chief Australian Military Forces (General Sir Thomas Blamey) moved his Advanced Land Headquarters to Hollandia, and later to Morotai, to control the operations of all Australian forces in the South West Pacific Area.

General Blamey directed that all operations by Australian forces in Papua New Guinea would be under command of HQ First Australian Army, commanded by Lt-General V A H Sturdee, located at Lae. First Army comprised the 6th Division in the Aitape-Wewak area, 8th Brigade in the Madang area which later moved to Wewak, 5th Division (later replaced by 11th Division) in New Britain, and II Corps (including 3rd Division and 11th and 23rd Brigades) in Bougainville and adjacent islands. Under direct command of GHQ was Lt-General Sir L Morshead's I Corps (7th and 9th Divisions) which was to be involved in operations in Borneo from May 1945.

Bougainville

The American forces which landed at Torokina, in Empress Augusta Bay, on 1 November 1943 established a shallow beachhead inside which three airstrips were constructed. This provided air bases only 200 miles from Rabaul which at that time was the principal Japanese base in the South-west Pacific area. Relieving troops pushed out the perimeter a little more, and at certain points outposts were manned beyond the boundaries to deny vital ground to the Japanese. The island had not been an objective in itself; it was merely a stepping stone for the northward advance of the Allies. The American operational role was therefore strictly limited. After the crushing repulses of two large-scale counterattacks the Japanese commander withdrew his forces and concentrated them in three main areas--Buka Passage in the north, Numa Numa and Kieta in the east, and the Buin-Mosigetta plains in the south.

The two American divisions were gradually withdrawn for operations in the Philippines; and by the time the first of them--the 37th --had quitted Bougainville the Australian campaign was under way.

When the Australians, under Lt General S G Savige, Commander of the II Corps, assumed responsibility in November/December 1944, the main Japanese force was known to be concentrated in the south. From there the Japanese 17th Army Group controlled all Japanese forces on Bougainville and the outer islands.

With the relief of the Americans the campaign developed into three separate drives, controlled and co-ordinated by II Corps. In the north it was planned that the Japanese should be forced into the narrow Bonis Peninsula and contained there. In the centre the seizure of Pearl Ridge would give command of the east-west trails and protection against any repetition of the vicious counter-attacks launched against the Americans in March 1944. At the same time it would open the way for a future drive to the east coast. The decisive battle, however, would occur in the south where the bulk of the Japanese force was located.

Under the command of General Savige were five Australian infantry brigades--the 7th, 15th and 29th (comprising the 3rd Division) and the 11th and 23rd, the last named brigade being disposed as garrison troops on the islands of Emirau, Green and Treasury and at Munda in New Georgia. The 3rd Division was commanded by Major-General W Bridgeford. Air support came from the American First Marine Air Wing, the RAAF and the RNZAF.

The first operational role undertaken by the Australians fell to the 2/8th Cavalry Commando Squadron which, took over the routine weekly patrol to Cape Moltke on 7 November 1944. On 23 November, the 9th Battalion (7th Brigade) took over from the Americans in the Doiabie area, some eight to eleven miles inland along the Numa Numa trail. This placed the Australian troops in typical ridge country. The role of the battalion was to exert continual pressure on the Japanese and to make local advances towards Pearl Ridge, the commanding high ground in the area. Possession of this feature, with a force at Sisivie on the left flank, would give the Australians control of the only inland approach to Torokina.

The Australian force at Sisivie remained static except for the usual patrolling. The advance to Pearl Ridge stemmed from the important Piaterapaia Ridge which rose out of the Doiabie River valley. This was the logical point for any forward movement as along it ran part of the Numa Numa trail leading from Torokina to the Japanese base at Numa Numa on the east coast. It was on Piaterapaia that the 9th Battalion struck the first blow of the Australian campaign. On 29 November a platoon of D Company moved across the fifty yards between their position on George Hill to attack the Japanese on the next knoll, Little George. In an hour's sharp fighting they took the position.

This success was followed by another on 18 December when "C" Company of the battalion, in a company attack, stormed the important Artillery Ridge--the next high feature before Pearl Ridge. The Japanese were present in considerable strength. The once dense tree and secondary growth had been blasted away over a long period by the concentrated fire of American 155 mm. guns back in the Laruma River valley. With the binding vegetation gone, the shelling started landslides which made the already precarious slopes more difficult to traverse.

The only line of approach was along a single track on either side of which the ridge fell sheer away. The start line, where the ridge splayed out, was reached without opposition owing to the effective neutralising fire of the

artillery, mortars, and medium machine guns. As the ascent proceeded, the support lifted. The loose soil on the slopes gave scant foothold on the flanks and the attackers floundered and scrambled, rather than climbed. Three Vickers on neighbouring ridges kept firing until the last minute.

With the Australians only ten yards away the Japanese jumped from their pillboxes to man open weapon pits running along the entire rim of the knoll. Because of the steepness of the slope the attacking force could not bring fire to bear; north of could the Japanese to any extent, without exposing themselves. The action quickly developed into a grenade battle. A hail of grenades rained down as the two platoons clambered to the summit. The attackers worked in twos and threes, with Owen guns and grenades. Selecting a weapon pit the Owen gunners heaved themselves over the rim and poured in fire while the other man moved in and threw grenades. It was intense, bitter fighting. The new phosphorus grenades were used, their smoke blanketing the pillboxes while the infantry closed in for the kill. After nearly an hour's fighting the position was Australian. Japanese killed during the attack numbered thirty-five; and about twenty unburied and partly buried bodies were found. Australian losses were five killed and ten wounded.

In the southern sector it was planned to make an early advance from Australian forward positions at the Jaba River against the main Japanese concentrations in the south. But it was necessary first to find out where the Japanese were located and in what strength they were. To do this it was decided to push down the coast towards the Japanese roadhead at Mawaraka and at the same time extend inland to test the Japanese strength along the few existing tracks leading to the south. Troops of the 15th Battalion (29th Brigade) had taken over the Jaba River line from the American division. On the northern bank of the river they faced the Japanese on the other side.

On 19 December the 29th Brigade commander (Brigadier R. F. Monaghan) pushed his troops across the Jaba without opposition and made a landing from three barges some 4000 yards down the coast. It was the first move of the campaign proper. The coastal drive to Mawaraka was on. At the end of 1944, the Australians began to meet well equipped infantry who had evidently moved up from the south. The spearhead of Australian advance was provided by the 15th Battalion with the 42nd and 47th Battalions pushing inland to establish firm bases on the south bank of the Jaba.

The country there was flat, with thick jungle, swamps, and a multitude of small streams criss-crossed by native pads. In the New Year the characteristic Japanese tactics of infiltration, ambush and attack came to the fore and the fighting began in earnest. Twenty-five-pounders came in as support but the flat nature of the country prevented the setting up of observation posts, and most of the shooting was done by forward observation officers working with infantry patrols.

On 7 January the 61st Battalion (7th Brigade) relieved the 47th Battalion on the Jaba so that it could take the lead in the brigade advance. At the Adele River Australian troops came within range of Japanese artillery for the first time. On 12 January, preceded by an air strike, the 47th Battalion seized the mouth of the Hupai River and a log-crossing 800 yards inland. The brigade now began patrolling and consolidating, and patrols pushed forward to a sunken barge a few hundred yards north of Mawaraka. The 42nd Battalion took over and by 18 January Mawaraka was occupied without opposition but heavy fighting took place before the Japanese were cleared from the Pallisade area along the road towards Mosigetta. The following day the 1st New Guinea Infantry Battalion pushed round Gazelle Harbour, turned Motupena Point, and overcame a Japanese observation and listening post. The door was open for the drive inland.

While the resistance in the southern sector was increasing daily, although without sign of the formation of any general defensive line, the Australians turned once more to the inland sector about Doiabie. On the 30 December 1944, all four rifle companies of the 25th Battalion (7th Brigade) which had taken over from the 9th Battalion converged on Pearl Ridge, the focal point. Two companies attacked from Artillery Ridge on the right flank, one in the centre, and the fourth to the rear to sit astride the Japanese line of communication with Numa Numa.

Japanese fire pinned down the forward company advancing along Artillery Ridge. The men dug in and reorganised. The following day the main attack developed from the left and by mid-afternoon the Japanese had been cleared. Five days later the 11th Brigade (under Brigadier Stevenson) took over the central and northern sectors and 26th Battalion took over the line.

With the fall of Mawaraka the next step was to clear the way to the Puriata. The task fell to 7th Brigade (under Brigadier J Field) and on 23 January the 29th Brigade was relieved. The first move was an inland thrust to secure Mosigetta and drive the Japanese from the area. On 25 January Twen Force, comprising "C" and "D" Companies of 61st Battalion, pushed inland along the Pagana River in the direction of Kupon. Farther inland the commandos were denying the Japanese the track system running through Mosina, Nigitan, and Sisiruai. The 9th Battalion left Mawaraka next day and struck east towards Mosigetta along the south bank of the Hupai.

Within a fortnight 61st Battalion had penetrated Nigitan and Mosina, and turned south towards the 9th Battalion objective. Seven days down the track from Mosina saw the 61st poised near Mievo, a few hundred yards north of Mosigetta. Meanwhile along the Mawaraka-Mosigetta Road the going had not been easy for the 9th Battalion. Feeling a way through jungle swamps often shoulder-deep, pinned down in the mud, sleeping in water, and hampered by a supply line kept open only by the sweat of the native carriers and by the tractor towed jeep trains, they broke into Mosigetta on 16 January, half an hour ahead of the force moving down from Kupon.

On 24 January, the 25th Battalion relieved the 47th on the Tavera River. The same day a platoon from "D" Company landed at Motupena Point and set off down the coast towards Toko. By 3 February the platoon had closed to within half a mile of Toko and established itself on a lagoon. That day another platoon landed from a barge and the force, carrying the sandbar at the point of the bayonet, swept into the area which was to become the base for divisional operations in southern Bougainville.

From Toko a reputedly "jeepable" track ran inland a few hundred yards above the Puriata in the direction of Darara on the No. 1 Government Road to Buin. This road was a continuation of the track south from Kupon through Mosigetta to Darara and on to the main Puriata ford. An eastward move from Toko towards Darara would close the river crossing, cutting the escape route of the Japanese retreating before the two battalions reorganising at Mosigetta for the Darara drive.

On the 10 February "D" Company was ordered to take Darara. At first the push was one of platoon strength; two others remaining at Toko to assist unloading through the heavy surf. It was not until the arrival of "A" Company and a platoon of the New Guinea Infantry Battalion that the position improved and the whole company got under way. It was a nerve-racking job. Twice the force was ambushed and attacked, and once while split into groups the Japanese swept in between. All the way the men had had to cut their own jeep track and on 23 February "A" Company pushed through and drove the Japanese from Darara. Patrols reached the Puriata and sealed the southern fords. The Japanese moved inland to escape across the northern fords, falling to the commandos in twos and threes. The way had been cleared for a shortened line of communication. Within a fortnight 7th Brigade established headquarters at Toko.

More and more air dropping came to the fore. At Piva strip, Torokina, the men of the Air Maintenance Platoon worked late into the night stowing the para-packs and free-drop rations. To maintain the road between Torokina and Toko engineers struggled against floods and a pounding surf which gnawed away at the coastline, washing out the road and breaking through the swamps. With Toko-Darara in Australian hands Brigadier Field prepared to cross the Puriata. On 25 February 9th Battalion was withdrawn for a well-earned rest at Motupena Point. From Mosigetta the 61st Battalion fought its way south-east, crossed the Puriata, and by 15 March was established in the Horinui region, threatening the approaches to No. 2 Government Road.

Early in January, 11th Brigade in the northern sector established a base at Amun and moved on towards Puto. The capture of Pearl Ridge in the central sector, the appearance of bulldozers, and the progress of Australian supply road led the Japanese to expect an eastern drive to Numa Numa. Natives from Teop on the Japanese-held north-east coast reported the evacuation of troops from the important northern bases of Ratsua and Pora Pora down the coast to Numa Numa. These reports and the fact that 11th Brigade had reached Puto without opposition suggested that the Japanese intended to evacuate the north entirely. However, by the middle of the month, the 31st/51st Battalion, between Puto and the Genga River, struck a hard crust of Japanese resistance.

In a series of sharp engagements the Japanese were driven north on to Tsimba Ridge to, the Amphitheatre, a curved knoll where the mountains pushed the coastal track into a narrow bottleneck against the sea. Here the ground, rising some sixty feet, runs inland over two hundred yards to a feature known as the Pimple. Before the ridge lay a native garden, behind was swampland. The Japanese had constructed 300 yards of defensive positions with fire lanes covering every approach. Despite artillery concentrations from guns of the 4th Field Regiment, the Japanese delayed the Australian advance for three grim weeks. On 23 January the Australians brought up a mountain gun and ripped away at the ridge. The Japanese replied by shelling Australian forward troops. The fighting was intensified and two days later, after a wide flank move, we succeeded in establishing a force on the northern bank of the Genga River. For nearly two weeks this force held out in the face of repeated counter-attacks. On the 6 February, under an artillery barrage and vicious fire from Japanese guns, the Amphitheatre was forced and the way opened to Matchin Bay.

In the last week of February the 31st/51st Battalion was relieved by the 26th Battalion, fresh from the central sector, and the next day contact was resumed. By 1 March forward elements were on the Compton River. The primary objective of the battalion was to clear the Japanese from Soraken Peninsula which protruded northward some two miles into Matchin Bay.

On 3 March an urgent message from a Corsair pilot patrolling the Ruri Bay area brought eight more planes roaring north from the Piva strip. After fifteen months of concealment, Japanese medium tanks had appeared! Heading across the Bonis Peninsula they were spotted on the road to Soraken plantation. By accurate bombing with thousand-pounders three tanks were destroyed and there were twenty Japanese killed in the strafing. In a matter of hours the tanks would have menaced Australian forward troops. A potential threat to the Australian flank was posed by Japanese artillery from the offshore islands of Saposia and Taiof.

On the night of 5 March "A" Company of the 26th Battalion embarked on the first of a series of amphibious operations which were to culminate in the crushing of Japanese resistance on the Soraken Peninsula. Troops went ashore on Saposia Island and within two days it was cleared. On 10 March they withdrew, leaving behind an infantry protected artillery observation post. The same night, farther to the north, native police cleared the Japanese from Taiof. The threat to the flank disappeared.

In the meantime the 31st/51st Battalion attacking up the coast had squeezed the main force into the defensive positions between the sea and where the Compton River turned parallel to it. Under a withering fire "D" Company attacked the centre, gained some ground and dug in. The 25-pounders of 4th Field Regiment settled

down to blast the Japanese who withdrew on the night of 16/17 March. Meanwhile "A" Company again went ashore unopposed, this time near the base of the plantation. The following day contact was made with "C" Company which had pushed in from the south. The Compton River was crossed and the Japanese line of communication cut.

Slater's Knoll

On 4 March in the southern sector fire from mortars and medium machine guns supported "A" Company of the 25th Battalion to breach the Puriata at Galvin's Crossing and to establish themselves two hundred yards south along the main road to Buin. At noon the following day the Japanese shelled the area and the battalion suffered its first artillery casualty Pte Slater, after whom the knoll was named. For several days "A" Company attempted to move down the road without success. It was decided to send "B" and "C" Companies across the river on the right flank to establish firm bases in gardens around Old Tokinot. Such a move would cut the Buin Road in the rear of the Japanese and secure the Hatai track junction for a possible move up the track to link with the 61st Battalion in the Horinui region. At the same time, "A" Company would, within two days, clear the road and contact the outflanking companies near the junction. "B" and "C" Companies crossed the river and gained their objectives on the second day.

Experience at Tavera River, and along the track from Toko, had shown the Japanese policy to be comprised of sporadic small-party attacks, evacuation under artillery pressure, and a general attitude of "a live soldier is better than a dead one". With this in mind "A" Company struck out for the Hatai track to receive the first indication that the Japanese 6th Division, under Major-General Kanda, had swung over to the attack.

While in the north in the first two weeks of March the Japanese were being forced back on the Compton River, he seized the initiative in the south and gathered momentum for the drive which culminated in the attacks of Easter week.

North of Galvin's Crossing a patrol reported a four-days-old bivouac area estimated to have held eighty Japanese troops. A jeep was ambushed. The Japanese refused to budge under shelling. This had not happened before. On 15 March "A" Company fought its way across Kero Creek and with "D" Company in the rear held off three counter-attacks and a fourth the following day. It was now apparent that the road was solidly blocked. Though patrols from "B" Company at Tokinot had reached "A" Company a permanent line of communication could not be maintained. The time had come to make a determined thrust down the road. "A" Company on the east and "D" Company on the west were to move down the axis and contact a force moving up from "B" Company. After fierce fighting contact was made on the 19th. "A" Company went into a perimeter defence and "B" Company, turning about, made back for its firm base.

Within sight of the junction the force bumped into Japanese of unknown strength on the east of the road. The company commander went in to attack. The force, in patrol formation, was without bayonets, but they were borrowed from "D" Company platoons which were brought in behind. The Japanese were in a deep defensive position, crescent-shaped. Attacking with bayonet, rifle, Bren and grenade, the first row was cleared and the Japanese were forced to retire from the second to the third before halting the Australians. It was then too late in the afternoon to increase the scale of attack, and although skirmishing continued for the next two days it was not until the 22 March, after an Auster pilot had dropped an area sketch and the position had been plastered by artillery and air, that "A" Company cleared the position. In this attack Corporal Rattey won the Victoria Cross. The citation states:

'In the South-West Pacific, on 22 March 1945 a company of the 25th Australian Infantry Battalion was ordered to capture a strongly held enemy position astride Buin Road, South Bougainville. The attack was met by extremely heavy fire from advanced enemy bunkers, slit trenches and foxholes sited on strong ground and all forward movement was stopped with casualties mounting rapidly among our troops. Corporal Rattey quickly appreciated that the serious situation delaying the advance could only be averted by silencing enemy fire from automatic weapons in bunkers, which dominated all the lines of approach by our troops. He calculated that a forward move by his section would be halted by fire with heavy casualties and he determined that a bold rush by himself alone would surprise the enemy and offered the best chance for success. With amazing courage he rushed forward firing his Bren gun from the hip into the openings under the head cover of three forward bunkers. This completely neutralised enemy fire from these positions. On gaining the nearest bunker he hurled a grenade among the garrison, which completely silenced further enemy aggressive action. Corporal Rattey was now without grenades but without hesitation he raced back to his section under extremely heavy fire and obtained grenades with which he again rushed the remaining bunkers and effectively silenced all opposition by killing seven of the enemy garrison. This led to the flight of the remaining enemy troops, which enabled his Company to continue its advance.

A little later the advance of his Company was again held up by a heavy machine-gun firing across the front. Without hesitation Corporal Rattey rushed the gun and silenced it with fire from his Bren gun used from his hip. When one had been killed and another wounded, the remainder of the enemy gun-crew broke and fled. The machine-gun and 2,000 rounds of ammunition were captured and the Company again continued its advance, and gained its objective, which was consolidated. The serious situation was turned into a brilliant success, entirely by the courage, cool planning and stern determination of Corporal Rattey. His bravery was an incentive to the entire Company, who fought with inspiration

derived from the gallantry of Corporal Rattey, despite the stubborn opposition to which they were subjected.' (London Gazette: 26 July 1945.)

The following week the Japanese began to reconnoitre all the approaches to the Puriata. Jeeps were ambushed. Rear echelons and a gun position were raided. After diversionary attacks on Australian positions along the Puriata the first blow fell on "B" Company of 25th Battalion, dug in hard against Anderson's Junction, the corner of the Buin Road and the track to Hatai. The night before Good Friday booby-traps were exploded about the "A" Company perimeter, some two hundred yards in the rear. The next morning the water patrol south to Dawe Creek was fired on and a patrol of twelve went out to investigate. This patrol was still away when the attack broke, and after several attempts to regain its perimeter was eventually ordered to "A" Company. Thirty-one remained in the "B" Company pits.

Towards the middle of the morning sixteen Japanese approached up the Buin Road. The first three were killed by the corner Bren-gunner. The remainder jumped into old Japanese pits on the south-west side of the road. Half an hour later a shower of grenades poured in from both sides of the junction. The Japanese opened up with everything. There were four attacks that morning; each one was pepped up in intensity. For the fourth the Japanese fixed bayonets and made an abortive banzai charge.

Reduced to twenty-eight and with ammunition low the defenders fell back on the "A" Company perimeter with the Japanese hard on their heels. The Vickers stopped the rush and the men, piling into the communication trenches, began to dig in furiously. That afternoon the Japanese again staged four attacks but all were repulsed. At night the Japanese set up the abandoned "B" Company mortars, and by tapping Australian wires managed to range on "D" Company which they plastered until morning. Night attacks continued on the encircled companies whose combined strength totalled eighty-three. Later estimates placed the attacking force at 550. All lines to battalion headquarters were cut.

At 9 am on Thursday and again on Good Friday advance tanks of "B" Squadron 2/4th Armoured Regiment went ashore at Toko from LCTs. On Thursday night Brigadier Field ordered the tanks to the Puriata. The following morning engineers of the 15th Field Company closed the three-ton truck bridge at Combes Crossing to traffic, and by 2.30 pm had a "tankable" bridge across the ditch. The tanks were delayed fifteen minutes. But the Puriata had flooded and although the level had fallen on Friday it was too high to ford the Matildas. The crews got to work and in half the time prescribed had waterproofed their vehicles. By 4.45 pm they were ready to cross. The first tank bogged and had to be abandoned. The other three crossed with the aid of a bulldozer, and moved on to 25th Battalion behind Slater's Knoll.

Next morning the tanks, escorted by infantry, engineers, and a bulldozer, set off for the invested companies. After surmounting all kinds of heart-breaking difficulties the track began to improve and the force pushed forward. In the perimeter the hard-pressed troops heard the engines roaring above the firing. Churning down the road the Matildas went in. Near the road the Japanese broke, and sweeping into the open, were mown down by the infantry. Moving closer in, the tanks' guns blew open the fox-holes and flayed the area with automatic fire while the infantry moved their wounded to the road. Here the force split, one tank escorting the wounded back towards Slater's Knoll, the others advancing with "B" Company to its old position to recover the heavy equipment. The force turned back and reached the other tank in time to beat off an attack on the wounded at a point where, earlier that afternoon, a jeep train had been ambushed. Too late to move farther, the men sheltered in the gutter along the road with the tanks drawn into the centre. The night passed quietly. The following day the weary companies returned to settle about the knoll, "C" Company withdrawing across the river from Old Tokinot to the Darara track.

The Japanese had shown his hand. Barbed wire was rushed from Toko and a further supply air-dropped. Above battalion headquarters "B" Company set about digging in on the knoll. Down the west bank to the south "D" Company went into the perimeter with "A". They did not have long to wait. At 5 am on 5 April the Japanese struck in force. Slater's Knoll, split left of centre by the Buin Road, is hard against the west bank of the Puriata bend. Approaching from the south, or Japanese side, the terrain descends to gully and rises quickly some thirty feet to a plateau approximately the size of two tennis courts. At the rear of the knoll the country drops abruptly to almost water-level; here battalion headquarters was established.

Striking in from the west a diversionary force hit battalion headquarters behind the knoll. It was quickly hurled back as the main attack developed. For an hour and twenty minutes the Japanese swept up in waves. Forcing the centre, he came within four yards of the forward pits. The company held firm. The troops, determined not to let the Japanese come any closer, fired standing upright in their pits. A small party attempting to cross the river were shot climbing the bank. Twenty-five-pounders joined in and by first light the sting had gone from the assault. The Japanese, pinned down along the wire, could be heard digging in the gully. An Japanese mortar opened close in, to be silenced by a Pita. All morning mortar bombs and grenades crossed and criss-crossed the wire. Sporadic attacks were broken up and the wounded were cleared away.

Below at headquarters the Japanese had long broken contact. A little after midday two Matildas moved through the cutting and the men of "B" Company came out to mop up. Small Japanese parties broke cover and were cut down. Japanese dead lay in heaps along the wire; they were found in an area two hundred yards square. The Puriata line was held. Farther inland after wide patrolling, the 9th Battalion (which had relieved 61st Battalion in the Horinui area) moved towards Rumiki and by 27 April was established on the next water barrier, the Hongorai, near the northern ford. After four months of fighting the weary 7th Brigade was relieved, and from 13 April the 15th Brigade, under the command of Brigadier H H Hammer, was set the task of clearing

to the Hari. The initial step was to secure Anderson's Junction. With Matildas in support the 24th Battalion pushed down the road to Dawe Creek, and by 17 May the junction was in Australian hands. The advance moved on towards Shindou River and the 58th/59th Battalion sent patrols along the Hatai track to contact the 9th Battalion in the Rumiki area.

Fresh to Bougainville, the 2/11th Field Regiment came in with "U" Heavy Battery to strengthen the artillery support already being given by the 2nd Field Regiment. The 24th Battalion then began a series of tank-supported company leaps down the Buin Road and by the 7 May was established on the west bank of the Hongorai River at the Buin Road ford. The advance was forced against positions which had to be blasted by artillery, tanks and Corsairs of the RNZAF. Japanese 75 mm. guns appeared as anti-tank weapons, usually manned by suicide crews. Land mines, booby-traps and shells buried nose-uppermost were also planted along the tracks. When these proved ineffective an unsuccessful banzai attack was made on "D" Company of the 24th Battalion.

Meanwhile in the Rumiki area 57th/60th Battalion had relieved the 9th Battalion and was deploying west of the Hongorai on the axis of Commando Road. All battalions had been most active in their patrols and the area between Commando Road in the north and for several miles south of the Buin Road had been made untenable by the Japanese. Thus he was forced to concentrate his troops along the two main tracks. This was greatly to Australian advantage for they now became excellent targets for Australian planes and artillery.

Towards the end of May the 15th Brigade prepared to strike for the Hari River down the axis of the Buin Road and down Commando Road simultaneously. The Japanese had every intention of holding the Hari, but threatened with a bold wide outflanking movement on the northern axis by 57th/60th Battalion, continually battered by Australian artillery and planes, and unbalanced by a series of outflanking moves along the main road, by the 24th and 58th/59th Battalions, his defences collapsed and a spectacular advance took Australian forces across the Hari to the Ogorata to within striking distance of the Mobiai.

Hongorai River

On 13 May a company from the 24th Battalion crossed to the east bank of the Hongorai and dug in near the ford. The 15th Brigade decided to hold the Japanese at the ford and create a diversion north of the junction of the Hongorai and Pororei rivers while at the same time the 24th and 58th/59th Battalions were to cross the river south of the Buin Road and attempt to come in behind the main Japanese defences which dominated the ford. Meanwhile, the 57th/60th Battalion would continue the advance down Commando Road and link up with the battalions advancing along the Buin Road. On 17 May the 57th/60th Battalion began its advance after an air attack by thirty-two aircraft and preceded by successive artillery concentrations. After some resistance the Japanese withdrew to the south.

The forward company settled down and the rear advanced through it to Huda River. Another force, completing a wide outflanking move, came in from the north to attack a strong position astride the road about half a mile south-east of the Huda. The Japanese resisted fiercely and the position was occupied only after a fierce fight. A third force moving to cut the line of retreat broke through to the Torobiru, completing an advance of 3700 yards in one day. Two days later, the battalion, entrenched along the river, threw out a company to within 500 yards of the Uso-Oso junction and Winchester junction. Another patrol moving back cleared Tiger track to the Hongorai.

In the meantime, on the Buin Road, the company of 24th Battalion across the Hongorai on the main road was confronted with a strong force dug in on Egan's Ridge. Against the ridge Corsairs of the RNZAF. mounted an eight-day attack which put 381 aircraft over the area. The Japanese were led to expect a frontal assault down the road and an outflanking move to the north via Martin's crossing, but under cover of the intense air and artillery attacks on Egan's Ridge, a bulldozer cleared a secret track to Mayberry's crossing south of the river junction. The Japanese failed to discover the presence of the track, the noise of the 'dozer working being covered by the air and artillery bombardments. On the 20th the 24th Battalion with a troop of tanks crossed the river north of Mayberry's crossing and advanced north-east to cut the Buin Road on either side of the Pororei ford. Next day the 58th/59th Battalion with two troops of tanks crossed the river at Mayberry's crossing, and, advancing over difficult country against determined opposition, reached Aitara track to cut the road on the Japanese side of the Pororei. "B" Company settled down at the Aitara junction and an armoured force moved back along the Buin Road to contact "A" Company of 24th Battalion at the Pororei ford. En route the point tank opened up on the Japanese position and when the infantry went in they found a 75-mm. gun sighted in the direction of Egan's Ridge. The Japanese had been taken in the rear. In the meantime, another armoured force in the 24th Battalion area cleared back towards the Hongorai, and after a preliminary bombardment "C" Company, which had crossed at the ford, moved up to the ridge. In a two-days' sweep the Hongorai and Pororei had been crossed, the track cleared to Rusei, and the southern end of Hammer Road secured.

In the north the 57th/60th Battalion had cleared the Uso-Oso track junction and the lateral link was opened when patrols from 24th and 58th/59th Battalions contacted 57th/60th Battalion near Winchester junction. The opening of this lateral link increased the effectiveness of the force pushing along the Commando Road. Medical evacuation was reduced by eight hours and it was now possible to supply the 57th/60th Battalion from the main artery. Further, it enabled tanks to move up in support for the drive on the Tai Tai gardens.

Around Tai Tai the Japanese had some 3000 acres under cultivation. On 2 June the 57th/60th Battalion took the first step in its capture. Employing the same tactics of direct approach and flank attack the force swept

down on the Tai Tai track junction and on 10 June came out below Amio.

On the Buin Road the 58th/59th was jabbing for the Mamagota junction. Subject to daily attacks and a host of obstacles including mines, booby-traps, tank ditches, and rough terrain, the troops gained a position west of the Tomoi. For the first time in the campaign the bridge-laying Scissors tank was employed. On the 3 June the Tomoi was crossed and the battalion moved to within 1500 yards of Mamagota junction. Two days later it was in Australian hands, and by the end of the week the northern and southern forces had made contact. The brigade poised before the Hari.

With prisoners reporting 1500 Japanese dug in east of the Han, supporting arms began plastering known positions. As at the Hongorai River another encircling move was planned with a frontal assault along the road by 58th/59th Battalion. From the north the 57th/60th was to go through the jungle to the east and south in a wide arc to cut the Japanese line of retreat on the east of the Ogorata River near Rusei. Farther still to the north, an armoured patrol known as Scott Force was to thrust along Commando Road in the direction of Kingori as north flank protection.

The frontal assault met tenacious resistance from strong Japanese rearguards and the advance was halted. "A" Company, after clearing many mines and booby-traps, crossed the Peperu, but struck the Japanese on an escarpment and came under heavy fire. A 'dozer, trying to clear a path, might have had to be abandoned if it were not for the covering artillery support during which a tank retrieved it. Towards dusk the company pushed up and occupied the ridge temporarily evacuated by the Japanese. Both "B" and "D" Companies struck trouble. Although "B" Company broke through on the following day to the main Hari ford no further progress could be made. So, on the 7 June the 58th/59th Battalion was occupying the west bank of the Hari river from the ford northwards to Hari No. 3, and was opposed by the Japanese in strong positions along the east bank.

The companies settled down to patrolling and a new plan was evolved. This aimed at pushing Pike Force ("A" and "C" Companies) across the river near Pepib with the object of descending on the road at Hari No. 1. "B" Company would then move through and open the road. Finally "D" Company, with tanks, would cut the axis between Pike Force and the ford. The attack fell as planned. The fords were subjected to bombardment from artillery, mortars and planes, while the 24th Battalion and tanks were sent south across the river--a move calculated to delude the Japanese into thinking that the Hongorai crossing was about to be repeated. Pike force cut the road without sighting a single Japanese. "D" Company forced the steep bank at Hari No. 3, and, cutting the road, moved back to trap the Japanese at the main ford. "B" Company crossed the river, linked with "D" and the battalion moved through to consolidate on the Ogorata. The entire operation lasted three days. The Hari had been crossed.

Simultaneously in the north 57th/60th Battalion cut a path through unmapped territory east towards the Ogorata. At 8 am on the second day the force struck Barret's track and a two-hour fight with the Japanese ensued. Troops were deployed to hold the lateral tracks and while the fighting was hottest the main body crossed into the jungle on the far side, moved 500 yards farther east and wheeled to the south. Farther to the north Scott Force had been ordered to slow down in order not to warn the Japanese of the move. The force turned down Barret's track with orders to find the 57th/60th communication wires and rejoin.

Brushes with the Japanese continued and on the night of 13 June the weary battalion settled down to sleep in the water, the ground being too boggy for digging in. In thirteen days the force had moved 13000 yards, and the next day the road was cut without opposition east of Rusei.

By 16 June the two battalions had linked on the road, with the 24th Battalion moving up in rear. Stores came down the road and the 57th/60th, supported by tanks and 2/11th Field Regiment, prepared to thrust for the Mobiai.

Late in the afternoon "B" Company set off. Four hundred yards from the start point the leading tank, tracking round a corner, received three direct hits from a 150-mm. gun. The Japanese then began shelling the road. The company reorganised and struck at the high ground on the left, only to be forced back. All night artillery and mortars pounded the defences across the depression. Next day the bulldozer broke down, and while it was being repaired patrols combed the area. A two company right flank encirclement got under way after the usual air bombardment. Without much opposition it cut the road behind the defence position. The following day the advance continued under heavy Japanese mortar fire. On the 23 June "A" Company of the 57th/60th dug in on the Mobiai.

Meanwhile, far to the north above Musakaka, and near the commandos at Morokia-mori, a self-contained force known as Atkinson Force had been patrolling across the Mobiai and Mivo. Operating since 7 June, in country thick with Japanese, the force continued to supply valuable information of Japanese movement on the outer flank. "C" Company of the 24th Battalion (Grahame Force) was five days late relieving them, due to continual Japanese attacks. In the last prolonged attack "C" Company, down to its last grenades, was ready to retire when the "sky train" came over and dropped ammunition into the perimeter.

The 58th/59th Battalion relieved the 57th/60th which returned to Rusei. The following day engineers threw a tank crossing over the Mobiai and cut a path to Killen's track. On 28 June the force moved forward to an assembly area, and the next day under a lifting barrage, the road was cut and cleared east and west. By the last day of the month the troops were on the Mivo River, and the relief of the 15th Brigade by the 29th Brigade began.

As soon as the relief had taken place the Japanese made several determined attacks across the river. In the

north, on Killen's track, the 47th Battalion repulsed four vigorous attacks, and, on the Buin track just west of the Mivo ford, the 15th Battalion defeated three more.

From the time the 29th Brigade under Brigadier Simpson took over, the story of south Bougainville was one of constant struggle against waterlogged tracks and supply difficulty. From 11 July until early August very heavy rains restricted activities. By the 22nd all rivers were in flood, the Mivo rising to seven feet at the ford and flowing between twelve and fourteen knots. During July twenty-six days were wet and 2193 points of rain fell. Both sides settled down to deep offensive patrolling, with the Japanese pushing a strong force back into the Tai Tai garden area to harass Australian lines of communication.

North Bougainville

Meanwhile in the northern Bougainville, the 26th Battalion, following the Compton River defeat of the Japanese, quickly cleared the Soraken Peninsula. In April the 23rd Brigade, which had been in the outer islands, took over on the central sector, enabling the 11th Brigade to move a second battalion forward in the north. The 55th/53rd Battalion sent one company over a rough track along the mountains to close in on Pora Pora while the rest of the battalion pushed along the axis of the coastal track, encountering strong Japanese opposition at first. Finally the Japanese withdrew and Pora Pora was occupied on 3 May. One company then moved west and seized Ratsua jetty. By 11 May the road junction at Ruri Bay was secured and the Japanese were contained within the Bonis Peninsula by a line of defended localities between Ratsua and Ruri Bay. On 19 May 55th/53rd Battalion was relieved by the 26th Battalion and on the 3 June the 31st/51st Battalion came forward from Torokina to assist in strengthening the line across the base of the peninsula.

The Japanese were holding Buoi plantation in strength and in an attempt to outflank it by movement from the sea one company from the 31st/51st Battalion landed at Porton plantation at 4 am on the 8 June. Unfortunately the second wave of landing craft stuck fast on the reef about seventy-five yards offshore. The landing party penetrated into the plantation but immediately met withering fire from Japanese machine guns fired at close range. At the same time machine-gun fire was directed from the northern foreshores on to the stranded landing craft, preventing the unloading of stores and ammunition. Patrols inland were unable to make head way against the heavy fire of the now reinforced Japanese who next surrounded the perimeter and heavily attacked it from the north and east simultaneously. Forward observation officers brought down heavy supporting fire from Australian artillery, many of the shells falling as close as twenty-five yards in front of the defending troops. During the night further attempts were made to land ammunition and supplies on the beach, but all night long the shore was swept with murderous Japanese fire and the stranded barges were continuously the target for intensive bursts from machine guns. The troops manning the small perimeter were attacked many times, but they gallantly resisted all Japanese attempts to break their line. Ammunition was quickly running out and it was decided to withdraw the force the next night but, after a night spent in repulsing counter-attacks, a very heavy attack early in the morning penetrated the perimeter and forced a withdrawal to near the beach. The withdrawal was now more urgent and the vessels of the 42nd Landing Craft Company were sent in to run the gauntlet in daylight of increased Japanese fire. They succeeded in withdrawing sixty of the garrison. During the night further attempts were made to take off the remainder but only partial success was achieved. On 10 June under cover of a heavy bombing attack and a continuous artillery barrage, craft made the beach in the late afternoon and during that night the withdrawal was completed. The Japanese strength had been greater than was anticipated, and they were able to reinforce the threatened area quickly. In the many vicious attacks on the perimeter the Japanese suffered heavily from the fire of Australians fighting one of the toughest defensive actions of the campaign. The 23rd Brigade, under Brigadier A. W. Potts) began the relief of 11th Brigade on 23 June and 11th Brigade moved back to Torokina for a well-earned rest. Following the Porton operation the Japanese became very aggressive and ambushed the Australian supply routes. In southern Bougainville the time was fast approaching when the Japanese would be forced to fight the decisive battle and every opportunity was being taken to build up supplies and to rest troops in preparation for this. Little help could therefore be given to reinforce our troops in the north to protect their supply lines and it was decided to withdraw the 8th and 27th Battalions to an area near Ratsua, where supply problems would be more easily met and where patrols, operating from these bases, would effectively prevent the free movement of Japanese troops in or out of the Bonis Peninsula. The last series of actions in which Australians were engaged on Bougainville were fought by the 8th Battalion, operating in the northern section with the object of sealing off the enemy in the Bonis Peninsula area. On the afternoon of 24 July two platoons attacked Base 5 after a bombardment in which 900 shells and mortar bombs were fired. The advancing troops reached the first ridge without difficulty, but then ran into heavy fire from well-camouflaged bunkers. At this point Private Frank John Partridge of the 8th Battalion on his own initiative single handedly assaulted the Japanese positions. The citation for the Victoria Cross awarded to Private Partridge states:

'On 24 July 1945 two fighting patrols, 8th Australian Infantry Battalion, were given the task of eliminating an enemy outpost in Bougainville which denied any forward movement by our troops. The preliminary artillery concentration caused the enemy bunkers to be screened by a litter of felled banana plants, and from these well concealed positions to their front and left the patrols came under extremely fierce machine-gun, grenade and rifle fire. The forward section at once suffered casualties and was pinned down together with two other sections. Private Partridge was a rifleman in a section which, in carrying out an encircling movement immediately came under heavy medium machine-gun fire. He was hit twice in the left arm and again in the left thigh, while the Bren gunner was killed and two others seriously

wounded, leaving only the section leader unwounded, but ~ another soldier began to move up from another position.

Private Partridge quickly appreciated the extreme gravity of the situation and decided that the only possible solution was personal action by himself. Despite wounds and with complete disregard to his own safety, Private Partridge rushed forward under a terrific burst of enemy fire and retrieved the Bren gun from alongside the dead gunner, when he challenged the enemy to come out and fight. He handed the Bren gun to the newly arrived man to provide covering fire while he rushed this bunker, into which he threw a grenade and silenced the medium machine-gun. Under cover of the grenade burst, he dived into the bunker and, in a fierce hand-to-hand fight, he killed the only living occupant with his knife. Private Partridge then cleared the enemy dead from the entrance to the bunker and attacked another bunker in the rear; but weakness from loss of blood compelled him to halt, when he shouted to his section commander that he was unable to continue. With the way clear by the silencing of the enemy medium machine-gun by Private Partridge, the Platoon moved forward and established a defensive perimeter in the vicinity of the spot where Private Partridge lay wounded. Heavy enemy medium machine-gun and rifle fire both direct and enfilade from other bunkers soon created an untenable situation for the Platoon, which withdrew under its own covering fire. Despite his wounds and weakness due to loss of blood Private Partridge joined in this fight and remained in action until the Platoon had withdrawn after recovering their casualties. The information gained by both patrols, and particularly from Private Partridge, enabled an attack to be mounted later. This led to the capture of a vital position sited on strong defensive ground and strengthened by 43 bunkers and other dug-in positions from which the enemy fired in panic. The serious situation during the fight of the two patrols was retrieved only by the outstanding gallantry and devotion to duty displayed by Private Partridge, which inspired his comrades to heroic action, leading to a successful withdrawal which saved the small force from complete annihilation. The subsequent successful capture of the position was due entirely to the incentive derived by his comrades from the outstanding heroism and fortitude displayed by Private Partridge.' (London Gazette: 22 January 1946.)

The 8th Battalion attack evidently shook the Japanese, and after cautious patrolling Base 5, which was renamed "Part Ridge", was occupied on 5 August after only slight opposition. There were more than sixty bunkers in the area. On 11 August active patrolling ceased in this and other sectors, and four days later the war ended.

At the same time, however, offensive patrolling continued, always with the object of collecting information which would ultimately enable the 23rd Brigade to come to grips with the determined Japanese in the peninsula. The end of hostilities came before this could be put into effect.

Numa Numa

The 23rd Brigade along the Numa Numa trail had continued the aggressive patrolling policy of previous brigades.

This continued offensive harassing reduced the morale of the Japanese troops. When it was known that many of the Japanese from the Bonis Peninsula were withdrawing along the eastern coast to Numa Numa, the time seemed opportune to increase the pressure along the Numa Numa trail and to attempt to reach the coast. The 7th Battalion entered into the operation with a will and, ably supported by mountain guns, captured Smith's Hill on 12 May and by 18 July had driven the Japanese from Berry's Hill, Wearne's Hill and Tiernan's Spur and had established a company locality on the rolling ground on the far side of the dividing range from which patrols frequently reached the east coast to annoy and harass the surprised Japanese.

New Britain

As part of a plan to advance Allied air bases closer to Rabaul, Americans had seized and established bases at Arawe and Cape Gloucester on the west end of New Britain and at Hoskins on the north coast. By July 1944 parties of Allied Intelligence Bureau, using natives, had cleared the Japanese from the north coast to Ulamona and from the south coast to the western shores of Wide Bay. No roads existed along either coast and, if the Australians were to maintain contact with the Japanese by operating from American bases, the only way would be by water. But there were few vessels available and it was therefore necessary to establish a base closer to the Japanese. Jacquinet Bay, a wide deep harbour on the south coast, abandoned by the Japanese, was selected as the future base. The 36th Battalion Group from the 6th Brigade, commanded by Brigadier R L Sandover) was sent to relieve the American regiment at Hoskins, landing on the 8 October 1944. This was the first step of the left foot in an advance which was to move along both sides of the island until the Australians stood astride the entrance to Gazelle Peninsula--one foot in Open Bay on the north coast and the other in Wide Bay on the south. Across the narrow neck of land separating the two bays the Australians were to establish a holding line to prevent the Japanese moving west. A month later the rest of the 6th Brigade landed at Jacquinet Bay. The march had begun.

Building of the base at Jacquinet began under hampering rain. Base and divisional areas were spread out around the bay. The only means of moving from one point to another was by barge, and these were fully employed unloading the larger ships. Company "B" of the US 594 Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment, the only American unit in the operation, was doing invaluable work.

While work on the base progressed, preliminary operations had begun. Patrols were busy on both sides of the island. On the north coast a patrol of the Allied Intelligence Bureau moved east to Panda River and discovered a large number of Japanese concentrated on the east bank. Australian patrol withdrew after inflicting casualties. Japanese activity seemed to be more marked on the north coast than on the south. Submarines were sighted several times in Open Bay.

On the south coast the Australians continued to move east, still without contacting the Japanese. A patrol from the 1st New Guinea Infantry Battalion moved along to Baien, a small native village. Other patrols had gone inland from Jacquinot but all reported "No movement seen".

By the end of November 1944, advanced headquarters of the Fifth Division, under the command of Major-General A H Ramsay, had been set up at Jacquinot, and 6th Brigade had handed over the defence of the area to 13th Brigade, recently arrived from the Northern Territory. The 6th Brigade, less the 36th Battalion, which was on the north coast, moved east to Cutarp, the first step in its strike up the coast to Wide Bay.

Air strikes were being carried out against Rabaul and other targets by RAAF and RNZAF planes. There was no attempt at interception by the Japanese whose known number of serviceable aircraft was thirteen. There were reports that indicated that near Rabaul the Japanese had sixty aircraft which they were feverishly attempting to make air worthy. Intelligence established that the Rabaul garrison was the Eighth Area Army commanded by Lt-General Imamura consisting of about 38,000 troops. RAN Fairmile launches were patrolling east as far as Wide Bay, but the Japanese confined its submarine activity to the north coast.

On the evening of 27 December two companies of the 14th/32nd Battalion piled into barges at Cutarp in drizzling rain and next morning landed at Sampun. The troops were met ashore by a platoon of the 1st New Guinea Infantry Battalion which had come overland from Baien. Next day "C" Company of the 14th/32nd Battalion advanced as far as Gnet River. On New Year's Eve a party from the battalion moved on to Lampun and held Australian most forward approach to Rabaul.

In the first week of the New Year the Australians' first offensive operation instruction was issued. Up to that period Australian forces had been limited to patrols and, because of numerical inferiority, had instructions to avoid heavy clashes. The new instruction allowed for concentration of the 14th/32nd Battalion and a troop of artillery at Sampun in the Wide Bay area, and for patrols to contact the Japanese. On the north coast the 36th Battalion was to move to Nantambu, with orders to contact the Japanese by patrolling. By the end of January 1945 movement of the whole of the Fifth Division to New Britain was practically complete. The 6th Brigade was at Cutarp, the 13th Brigade, commanded by Brigadier E G H McKenzie) was settled in at Jacquinot, and advanced elements of 4th Brigade, commanded by Brigadier C R V Edgar) had arrived from Australia after a spell following its part in the 1944 New Guinea campaigns.

The Australians pushed forward on both sides of the island. The 14th/32nd Battalion had moved from Sampun to Kiep, and the 19th Battalion was preparing to leave Cutarp to take over the small base which had been established at Sampun. Patrols from the 14th/32nd reached Ip River in Wide Bay and on the north coast a company of the 36th Battalion went on from Nantambu to Baia, on the shores of Open Bay.

The first notable clash occurred on 3 February when a platoon from "D" Company of the 1st New Guinea Infantry Battalion was moving along the north coast towards Mavelo plantation, about a mile south of Watu Point, was attacked by 200 to 300 Japanese troops. They came in behind a screen of rebel natives, yelling and shouting in an attempt to demoralise the natives of the New Guinea Infantry Battalion platoon. But their noise had no effect. The platoon killed twenty of the Japanese before it withdrew without a casualty.

On 9 February a platoon from "C" Company of the 36th Battalion and a platoon from "D" Company of the 1st New Guinea Infantry Battalion were attacked by about eighty Japanese. The ensuing battle lasted for half an hour until the Australians withdrew to avoid being encircled. On the morning of 15 February RAAF Beauforts, led in by a Boomerang, bombed and strafed Japanese positions on the north edge of Kalai plantation. They attacked for half an hour and, as they pulled out and headed home across the bay, Australian artillery opened up for the first time in the campaign. The 2/14th Field Regiment pumped a thousand rounds into the plantation and, when the 14th/32nd Battalion moved into occupy, the Japanese had withdrawn. From Kalai the battalion moved on and consolidated positions around Kamandram, a peace-time trading station with a fairly good anchorage. They stayed there only two days and then moved inland along the Japanese tracks. On the 17 February, "B" Company of the 1st New Guinea Infantry Battalion, moving along one of these tracks, clashed with an Japanese party sixty strong. A running fight developed; two NGIB soldiers were lost but the battalion accounted for twenty-five Japanese.

On 18 February the 14th/32nd Battalion, which had been forward battalion since the landing in November, was relieved by the 19th. On the same day the 6th Brigade headquarters were set up in Kamandram. On the north coast Australian troops were exploring and patrolling the hundreds of tracks which branched and disappeared in all directions from the main paths. "A" Company of the 36th Battalion had moved forward to the Sai River on the east side of Open Bay and on 18 February repulsed three attacks by a strong Japanese party. The rest of the battalion group had moved up from Baia and was concentrating at Watu Point.

The stiffening Japanese resistance gave an indication of the determination to defend the narrow neck between Open and Wide Bays to prevent penetration into Gazelle Peninsula. In view of the comparatively low strength of Australian forces in the area, it became necessary to define the limit to which the advance would proceed. In the Wide Bay area this was fixed as the mouth of Bulus River. It involved first the seizure of Japanese

positions in the Waitavalo-Tol plantation area.

Waitavalo

On 5 March, the Australians attacked the Waitavalo defences. The Japanese positions were on a long low narrow mountain ridge running as a natural fortress wall around the area. At 9 am "A" Company of the 19th Battalion made two attempts to cross the Henry Reid River near the mouth. Sustained fire drove them back. Moving upriver about 300 yards, the crossing was made unopposed. The company then moved downstream in an attempt to outflank the Japanese, but they had withdrawn.

In the afternoon the Japanese began to use heavy mortars to effect. The Australians, who had discarded entrenching tools to lighten their loads for the attack, had to dig fox-holes with their hands and bayonets. There was a lull during the night, but at first light on 6 March the Australian gunners opened up again and the infantry followed for the attack proper. "A" Company of the 19th Battalion passed through "C" Company and, meeting only slight opposition, advanced towards the first objective, a feature known as Cake Hill. At 11 am the company met its first serious opposition. From positions on a companion feature in the south known as Lone Tree Hill the Japanese pinned the company down with machine-gun and rifle fire. The advance was halted for an hour there; then the troops began moving forward again. The Japanese had evidently fallen back to further prepared defences and "A" Company occupied Cake Hill. "C" Company of the 19th then came up and consolidated the area while "A" Company moved into a less exposed position. Throughout the day the Japanese had concentrated on battalion headquarters with mortars, and Australian guns were still trying to silence them.

During the next three days the Australians continued to attack but they met only slight opposition. They were, however, suffering casualties from Japanese mortars and their artillery was constantly engaged in harassing tasks. On the north coast the lull was broken early on the morning of the 8 March, when a party of seventy Japanese attacked a platoon of "C" Company of the 36th Battalion on Mavelo River. The attack was repulsed and the Japanese dug in fifty yards outside the Australian perimeter. Shortly after 7 am they attacked again, this time supported by a 70-mm. gun. When they withdrew they left fifteen dead.

On the south coast, moving on from Lone Tree Hill Australian troops occupied a higher feature above the Waitavalo ridge known as Moose Hill. There they came under harassing fire from Japanese mortars, and suffered casualties. Rain now set in. On the north coast operations were at a standstill, and in the Wide Bay area there was a lull while the troops were regrouped and supply lines were organised. This was no easy task. Heavy rain had made the steep tracks to the tops of ridges as treacherous as ice, and the tracks themselves were subject to mortar fire. On the flat jeep tracks were mud streams, and the bridge over Mavelo River had been washed away. During this period the 19th Battalion was relieved by the 14th/32nd Battalion.

On the morning of the 16 March the Australians attacked again. RAAF Beauforts went in on low-level bombing runs and as they drew out, artillery began shelling the Japanese positions. As the artillery closed down "B" Company of the 14th/32nd Battalion, which had relieved a forward company of the 19th Battalion, advanced northwards to the high ground of Bacon's Hill. Two platoons were held up by machine-gun and mortar fire, so a third platoon moved around the left flank and took up a position only fifty yards from the Japanese perimeter. The Japanese were well dug in, and his cross-fire was well planned. Next day the attack was renewed. During the night, however, the Japanese had moved out, though his mortars still plugged away, this time from new positions. It was during this attack only that made use of planes against Australian ground troops. Two came in over the bridge crossing the Walnut River, dropped two heavy bombs and a number of anti-personnel bombs. They caused a few casualties. From then on the Japanese began to withdraw and Waitavalo was occupied without further opposition.

The first task had been completed. The Australians were firmly planted on each side of the island, straddling the completed neck of the peninsula, and patrols were going inland from both coasts trying to find a potential track across the neck.

On the 4 April, Major-General H C H Robertson took over command of the Fifth Division from Major-General Ramsay who transferred to the Eleventh Division.

The situation was generally quiet throughout June. The battalions established their perimeters at Wide and Open Bays, and engineers widened and surfaced the roads around Tol and Waitavalo. The relief of 36th Battalion from Open Bay, which had been going on since 10 May, was completed on the 6 June after the 37th/52nd Battalion had marched across Gazelle Peninsula. The 36th had been at Open Bay for eight and a half months.

On 5 June, the 2/2nd Commando Squadron arrived at Wide Bay and established headquarters at Lamarien near Henry Reid River. This squadron had previously fought in Timor and the Ramu Valley. By this time a section of the RNZAF was established at Jacquinet Bay. It consisted of two squadrons of Corsairs and one of Ventures. The main advance party of headquarters of the Eleventh Division, which was to relieve the Fifth of command in New Britain, arrived by flying boat from Cairns on the 23 June. The following day the plane returned to Australia with the advance party of the Fifth, which was to establish a camp on the Atherton Tableland. In the last week of June, the monsoon rains began. During the last two days of the month about twenty inches of rain fell. The sea was too rough for barge traffic and planes could not find their way in or out of the bay. Despite the weather, forward battalions continued patrolling, although most of their work was

reconnaissance. On the Open Bay side of the island the 1st New Guinea Infantry Battalion patrolled forward to the north-east side of Cooper's Clearing.

The RNZAF was most active. On every fine day the New Zealanders bombed and strafed Japanese positions on each coast. Towards the end of the month land patrols became more active, but there was still no attempt to contact the Japanese in strength. Australian forces were pinning the Japanese down and that was the task which they had been allotted. Refugee natives, coming in from the top of the island, moved into Wide and Open Bays where they were recruited into ANGAU camps for work.

On the 10 July the Japanese made a half-hearted harassing attack for the first time in the month. They were forced to withdraw when Australian artillery pin-pointed them on the Moondei River. Back at Jacquinot Bay Major-General K. W. Eather, promoted from the command of 2nd Brigade, 7th Division) had arrived to take over the division from Major-General H. C. H. Robertson who had been given command of the 6th Division on the New Guinea mainland. Another important administrative change was also in progress--the change-over of the headquarters staff from Fifth Division to Eleventh Division. The greater part of the Eleventh's staff had arrived from Australia on the 11 August, a few days before the Japanese surrendered.

Aitape-Wewak

In April 1944 United States forces landed without opposition in the Aitape area, in conjunction with a landing at the main Japanese air base at Hollandia. The object of this operation was to secure and hold the Tadjji airfield and to establish light naval facilities at Aitape to support further operations against the Japanese. The primary task of the ground forces was the defence of the airfield and harbour, and ground operations were limited to those necessary for the adequate protection of the area.

Only minor actions took place up to July 1944, but the US garrison was then reinforced and a strong defensive position was organised on the Driniumor River to meet an expected Japanese attack. This came in mid-July and the US troops were forced to withdraw. However, repeated counter-attacks restored the position and the Japanese sustained heavy casualties. In further attacks during August the Japanese forces around Aitape were thoroughly defeated, and the scattered remnants fled to the east and south to join the main Japanese force between the mouth of the Sepik River and Wewak. From August to October 1944, when Australian forces began to take over, activity was confined to patrolling.

The 6th Division, commanded by Maj-General J E S Stevens) was to take over the American role of airfield and harbour defence and to carry out active patrolling. The advance unit of the division arrived late in October 1944. This was the 2/6th Cavalry Commando Regiment comprising the 2/7th, 2/9th and 2/10th Commando Squadrons. It took over from the Americans at Babiang and occupied outpost positions at Aiterap, Kanti and Palauru. The Americans in the Driniumor River area were relieved by the 2/4th Battalion towards the end of November.

On the 3 November the Australians accounted for their first Japanese in the Aitape area. It was found that the Japanese were in poor condition and that he was carrying out foraging patrols near the coast. Other parties had left the coastal area and had moved up into the foothills of the Torricelli mountains. Patrols extended to the Suain plantation, Luain and as far east as the Danmap River. Continuous contact quickly brought Japanese casualties to sixty-four killed and seven captured at a loss of one killed and one wounded. The Japanese were not anxious to stay and fight, and when he did was hopelessly outclassed.

RAAF bombers of 71 Wing were flying long hours on army co-operation strikes. Daily raids were made on the main supply bases of Wewak, Kairiru and Dagua, and soon the Japanese were unable to use transport in daylight. With increased activity on the coastal area, the Japanese began to move into the foothills, and it was obvious that an offensive would have to be launched to drive him out. In the middle of November the arrival in the coastal area of the 2/4th Battalion of the 19th Brigade, commanded by Brigadier J E G Martin) released the 2/7th Commando Squadron to move up the newly established line of communication from Nialu to Tong. The natives in this area were friendly and provided the long supply trains needed to get equipment and food to the troops. With a base established at Tong, the 2/7th Commando patrols moved into the villages and soon cleared a large area of the Japanese who were then forced to move farther into the mountains. The villages of Yambes were captured, and the patrol base moved forward. The Japanese launched a number of unsuccessful day and night attacks on Middle Yambes in an attempt to regain the village, which was one of the vital outposts of the main Japanese force in the Maprik area.

Having cleared the Danmap area on the coast, and as far as Idakaibul, the 2/4th Battalion crossed the Danmap River on 17 December and began to drive the Japanese towards the main positions on the Anumb River. The battalion pushed down the coast as far as Rocky Point, but a large party of the Japanese were found in the rear. They occupied a position on high ground about 800 yards from the east bank of the Danmap River, menacing Australian supply line. An air strike was made and the Japanese, vacating the positions, ran into a standing patrol and were annihilated.

As the supply position presented difficulties in the central sector, so it did on the coastal strip. The only road in the area was an old German one in a bad state of disrepair. The divisional engineers were faced with the difficult task of establishing an efficient line of communication down the coast. The monsoon rains had started and the creeks and rivers were rising rapidly, making bridge-building a hazardous business. A road had to be made and widened to carry the heavy vehicles of the supply units. In a very short time a useable road was

constructed. Temporary bridges to be replaced by permanent ones when time and opportunity permitted were built. Extensive damage was done to these temporary structures when the rivers and creeks rose after heavy rain in the mountains. The sappers were often working in floodwaters up to their necks repairing the damage. The remainder of the 19th Brigade had arrived in the Aitape area while 2/4th Battalion was pushing down the coast to the Danmap River and had reached the Driniumor River. Patrols of the 2/8th Battalion moved up the coast as far as Afua. Owing to bad weather the activity on the coast was limited to patrolling but, in the central sector, the 2/7th Commando Squadron was increasing its tally of Japanese killed. Two companies with support detachments from the 2/5th Battalion, known as Piperforce) moved up from the coast on the 16 November and established a headquarters in the Yambes villages. They relieved the 2/7th on 21 December.

In the latter half of December, the relief of 2/4th Battalion by the 2/11th was begun and the 2/8th moved forward from its base on the Driniumor River to Suain plantation. From its headquarters at Rocky Point the 2/11th Battalion sent strong fighting patrols as far as Matapau and on 1 January this feature was secured. A squadron of the 2/4th Armoured Regiment had moved up the coast from the Aitape area and was in reserve at Rocky Point. The country was not well suited for tanks but they proved useful for clearing small bodies of Japanese snipers from the escarpment overlooking the beach.

The 25 pounders of 2/3rd Field Regiment were in position to give covering fire from the Rocky Point area. In the early hours of 2 January they were called on to support the infantry at Matapau. A small party of Japanese had attempted to infiltrate the positions held by the 2/11th Battalion, and, when this had been proved impossible, launched a full-scale attack. Artillery and concentrated small-arms fire broke up the Japanese attack. The Australians, quickly following up their advantage, pursued the fleeing Japanese and drove them from their positions.

In the Yambes area Piperforce was carrying out long-range patrols and, assisted by Beauforts of 71 Wing, had cleared a number of villages, driving the main body of the Japanese to the Perembil group, where heavy bombing and strafing attacks were being made daily. The remainder of the 2/5th Battalion had moved up and the force was able to carry out a larger patrol programme. Clearing of the villages continued, but the farther the Japanese were driven into the Torricellis, the harder the terrain and the more tenuous the lines of supply became. The Douglas transports carrying out the air dropping were working overtime, making five or six flights a day. Large parties of refugee natives as well as troops and the natives working on the supply lines had to be provided with food.

To have easier access to the native gardens the Japanese were keeping to the villages, which were mostly situated on the ridge-tops. This made the task of the infantry a little easier, for while there were passable tracks on the ridges, the tangled undergrowth of the valleys was almost impenetrable.

On the coast patrols had penetrated as far as Niap, Malin and Walum, some miles inland on the Danmap River. These patrols were forming a link-up between the 19th Brigade troops on the coast, the 2/7th Commando Squadron which had moved to Lambuain and had begun patrolling east to Walum, and the 2/5th Battalion of the 17th Brigade, under the command of Brigadier M J Moten) in the Yambes area.

In that area the Japanese were holding the Perembil villages in strength. The RAAF continued their softening up and on the 3 January, following a heavy air strike and mortaring, the infantry moved into Perembil. The Japanese fled after a brief encounter. The equipment left in the village was in excellent order, and the dead Japanese were found to be in good physical condition--a contrast to the troops on the coast. The Australians were consolidating when the Japanese launched the first of a number of heavy counter-attacks. This was successfully beaten off and the Japanese withdrew leaving a number of dead. During the night three more counter-attacks were repulsed and the Japanese finally withdrew from the vicinity of Perembil having lost another of the outpost villages.

The 2/11th Battalion captured Cape Djueran on the 6 January and, supported by accurate artillery fire and Matilda tanks of "C" Squadron, 2/4th Armoured Regiment, pushed on to attack a strongly defended position forward of the cape. Again the Japanese were driven back. Patrolling continued from the bases at Walum and Idakaibul and a strong line of communication was established between these points and the Yambes area. Captured documents revealed that this line was to be denied to the 6th Division, but the Japanese were not sufficiently strong to fulfil his intention.

In the mountains the 2/5th Battalion had pushed forward their patrols. Two more of the Japanese strong points had been overcome and the garrisons forced to withdraw from positions at Asiling and Selni to Selnaua, where they were digging in. The evacuation of wounded from the Walum area was proving more difficult than expected. The main patrol route was a two-day march over steep mountains and the alternative route was a four-day carry.

Tanks and artillery fire aided the 2/11th Battalion in the capture of Niap on the western extremity of Dogreto Bay. This bay was later to play a big part in the push down the coast towards Wewak. Although the Japanese were contesting the ground fiercely they were gradually being forced back to bases on the Anumb River. These bases were receiving constant attention from the Beauforts, and their store dumps were being systematically destroyed. In the Torricellis the 2/5th Battalion captured Samisa. The battalion, based on Perembil, now had its companies and platoons disposed in a number of the villages surrounding the headquarters, and in this manner a large area was subjected to daily patrolling. The villages were yielding a considerable amount of food to the Japanese, but the natives, being deprived of their food, were seeking the protection of the

Australians.

By 16 January the division had killed more than a thousand Japanese, while a large number of others had wandered off into the jungle to die. Australian casualties had been remarkably light, and the rate of sickness from tropical diseases was low. On the coast the 2/11th Battalion pushed on and the Japanese strong point of Abau fell after heavy fighting. In the Malin area patrols of the 2/9th Commando Squadron pushed east to cut the Japanese lines of communication from the Anumb River through Mipel to Maprik, the main base in the Torricelli mountains.

Units of the 16th Brigade, commanded by Brigadier R King) were now moving down the coast to relieve the 19th Brigade, which had been fighting for nearly ten weeks. The battalions were moving into position when heavy rain set in, and on 26 January, when the relief was almost completed, the Danmap River rose to an alarming degree and changed its course. The river was running at twenty knots and a wall of water about two feet high swept through a defended area of the 2/3rd Battalion leaving men struggling for life in the water. This was the worst blow the elements had inflicted and the loss of life and equipment was heavy. Great damage had been done to the bridges and roads and the lines of communication down the coast were completely disrupted.

The supply problem was acute. The two Douglas transports allotted could not be expected to keep the supplies up to the brigades, as they were already fully occupied in dropping to the 2/5th Battalion and the commando squadrons as well as to scattered standing patrols. Consequently the LCTs which were being used to off load shipping at Aitape were called on to do the job. These craft could carry 100 tons on each trip and made two or three trips weekly. This interfered considerably with the port working and they were withdrawn and the smaller LCMs were called forward, with the LCTs running only emergency supplies.

In view of the uncertainty of the supply position, the coastal campaign was restricted to patrol activity and no further advances were made until the engineers opened a road. On 29 January the 16th Brigade relieved the 19th in the coastal area; 2/3rd Battalion took over the patrol bases of the 2/8th; and 2/1st from the 2/11th.

As the 2/1st Battalion moved down the coast resistance stiffened and they were held down on the west side of Nimbun Creek by Japanese in positions on the forward slopes of Nambut Hill, or Hill 800. The Japanese launched a number of unsuccessful attacks, but finally withdrew to the hill. Attacks failed to dislodge the Japanese, and it was decided to take the ridge with two companies. One was to move along Nimbun Creek taking the Japanese in the rear, and the other to move up the slopes of the feature in a frontal attack. Unfortunately the company moving along the creek was held up by heavy fire and forced to withdraw. More air strikes were made, and artillery and mortar fire brought down. Following the heavy barrage the infantry moved forward and drove the Japanese back on to his second line of defence on the feature. Australian troops consolidated their gains. A fierce counter-attack was repulsed with losses to the Japanese. Australian casualties were negligible.

The Japanese withdrew down a gully and up another steep feature which became known as Japanese Knoll. It was slightly lower than Nambut Hill, but was covered with heavy scrub. It was subjected to a number of air strikes, and again the infantry drove the Japanese out. He withdrew again, this time to a feature known as Bunker Hill. One side was fairly steep with a track which could be covered easily by fire from the Japanese positions which overlooked it. The other side was considered by the Japanese to be unassailable, as it was a fifty to sixty foot rock-face dropping away sheer. The Japanese did not even worry to site weapons to cover it, but concentrated on the only logical line of approach - the track. A platoon of the 2/1st Battalion was sent around the base of the hill to the foot of the cliff and then began a perilous climb up the cliff-face using trailing vines as assault ladders. Reaching the top they attacked the Japanese from the rear and completely wiped out the holding force. To distract attention during the ascent, covering fire was brought to bear from in front of the position. The clearing of Nambut Ridge and satellite features had taken three weeks. With this important feature clear, the 2/2nd Battalion pushed forward on to the high ground around the Anumb River.

After the fall of Samisa the headquarters of 2/5th Battalion moved to this village and long-range patrols to the outlying villages continued. The advance was slow in the thick country, mainly because supplies could not be kept up to the forward troops in sufficient quantity. It was impossible to provide sufficient native carriers to bring the supplies up from the coast, and the two transport planes were insufficient to meet the requirements of the units working away from the coastal roads. As the Japanese were forced back resistance became stiffer and better organised. The smaller bodies of troops were amalgamating into one command, and new troops had arrived, contesting Australian advance to a much greater extent than previously. The general trend of Japanese movement was towards Luwaite and Selnaua. Much information was being received from the natives who were coming to the Australians for food and help. There were other factors which contributed to this swing to Australian side.

Reports from patrols and natives stated that the Japanese had withdrawn in the direction of Balif and preparing defences there. On the 15 January a party of between eighty and one hundred Japanese had been forced out of the village of Maharinga by heavy air attacks and mortaring, and one platoon of 2/5th Battalion occupied the village. It was only on rare occasions that forces larger than one platoon were used to take a village.

A detachment of Far Eastern Liaison Office, which had been operating in the area for some time, prepared surrender leaflets and these were dropped on the Japanese around Balif. These told the Japanese that they had been deserted by their commanders and that it was useless to continue the resistance. Surrender and

propaganda leaflets were also fired from mortars. The 2/7th Commando Squadron which had been operating in the Walum area for some time moved to Amam and contact patrols were sent out to link up with the 2/5th Battalion. More villages were cleared of the Japanese, Bullamita, Alumi and Hambini, and again the Japanese line of withdrawal was in the direction of the Balif group of villages.

Tactical reconnaissance by aircraft revealed Japanese in almost every village as far as Maprik. It was estimated that there were about 2000 in the Balif-Maprik area. Heavy air strikes were carried out on these villages daily, and in many cases the Japanese evacuated them afterwards, leaving numbers of dead. The RAAF bombers of 71 Wing were receiving help from the Combat Replacement Training Centre, (American) at Nadzab, whose aircraft were bombing targets daily along the coast from Wewak and in the Balif area.

On the 10 February a platoon of 2/5th Battalion occupied the village of Balaga. Malahum, to the south-east of Balif, was also captured and held despite heavy counterattacks. The Japanese employed about fifty troops in this series of counter-attacks. After Balif had fallen the main pocket of resistance moved in an easterly direction towards Maprik, but small parties were still to be found in almost every village. With Nambut Hill clear of the Japanese, the Australians began a drive along the coast towards the Anumb River. On the 26 February the 2/2nd Battalion crossed the river without opposition and, after patrolling the area, reported the west bank clear for some 1500 yards from the coast. Shortly after the crossing a Japanese 75-mm. opened up on the patrols at point-blank range from near the Sowom villages. With this exception Japanese opposition was negligible. A large ammunition dump was captured on the east bank of the river. It appeared that the Japanese had withdrawn to the Sowom villages to reorganise his defences.

Patrols of 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion, which had been operating for some time as infantry, reported that the Japanese -named village of Arohemi, former headquarters of Major-General Aozu, the infantry group commander of 41st Division) was clear of the Japanese. Its evacuation indicated the intention of the Japanese to fall back on his defences to the east of the Anumb River. On the 25 February HMAS Swan bombarded Japanese positions in the Sowom area, and on the night of 26/27 February shelled targets around But. During the latter shoot Swan moved in close to the shoreline and used her secondary armament, and the Japanese replied with 75-mm. fire without effect. On the morning of the 27 February Swan engaged targets in the Kauk area, and Beauports of 71 Wing dealt with the 75-mm. gun.

In the period 3 November 1944 to 27 February 1945, the 6th Division had killed 1776 Japanese and captured thirty-seven. Allowing for wounded, total Japanese casualties could be set down at about 2500.

On 21 February the 2/5th Battalion was relieved by the 2/7th Battalion which immediately took over the extensive patrolling programme, and within a few days cleared out a large pocket in the Malahum-Ilahop area, where between two and three hundred obstinate and well-armed Japanese had been holding up Australian advance. Natives stated that the Japanese were occupying and fortifying villages to the west of Maprik. This indicated an intention to oppose the Australian advance to the south where there were a number of well-stocked native gardens. Food had become the chief Japanese consideration as it was now impossible for supplies to be brought into the area owing to the patrolling of the infantry and the 2/7th Commando Squadron. These patrols were rapidly raising the total number of Japanese casualties. In four patrol clashes in two days, fifty-three Japanese were killed of seventy-three encountered.

The advance down the coast from the Anumb River continued. The 2/2nd Battalion captured the Sowom villages and moved forward to Simbi Creek, where some opposition was encountered. The clearing of this obstacle left only one large waterway--the Ninahau River--before But. A patrol moving towards the coast from the south passed through the But-Ninahau River area and encountered only a few small parties of Japanese. It appeared that the Japanese were evacuating the But positions and was retiring towards Dagua.

The main body of the 2/2nd Battalion moved forward and concentrated in the Sowom villages; patrols pushed across the Ninahau River and as far east as Gilagmar Creek. Crossing the flooded river was hazardous. After a number of heavy patrol clashes over the river the battalion fought its way through to But, captured the jetty, the airstrip and the mission. The position was secured on the 17 March. The capture of this important area yielded a large amount of equipment, artillery pieces, arms and stores, and a large dump of oil and petrol. With the capture of the But jetty LCMs came ashore and unloaded stores. The beach at But was ideal for landing barges, and the supply dump grew rapidly.

In the inland sector the 2/7th Commando Squadron which had moved back into the hills after a brief spell on the coast, was in position at House Copp, against which the Japanese launched a number of counter-attacks. One company of the 2/6th Battalion took over on 16 March. The 2/10th Commando Squadron had arrived in the Milak villages and ran into heavy opposition. Strong attacks were thrown against them and, although these were repulsed, they sustained a number of casualties. This squadron was also relieved towards the end of March by a company of 2/6th Battalion. Heavy fighting continued in the area for some time before the Japanese were driven back into the Kuminibus group due north of Maprik.

The 2/7th Battalion continued its patrolling in the Balif-Suanambe-Ami area. Tactical reconnaissance planes of the RAAF reported large bodies of Japanese troops on the Sepik River. The RAAF carried out a successful attack on an unusual target on the Sepik: a canoe-building yard. The Maprik area was still the scene of intense patrol activity and a number of heavy clashes occurred, but the Japanese still held many closely linked villages in the Kuminibus group and around Maprik itself. Activity around Milak increased and the Japanese threw fresh troops into his fierce counterattacks with no result except the whittling down of his strength. By 20 March the number of Japanese killed had reached 2200 with forty-two prisoners.

Dagua

On 21 March the 2/2nd Battalion on the coastal strip pushed through and captured the Dagua airstrip which was littered with wrecked planes. This rapid advance bypassed a number of Japanese positions in the coastal ranges between But and Dagua. As this ground was vital to the Japanese defence opposition was expected. Reports came in from natives to confirm that there were large broken parties of Japanese troops in the area and an important headquarters at the Wonginara Mission, the last named protected by about 200 troops. Captured documents had stressed the importance of this area and the bulk of the 2/3rd Battalion was dispatched into the hills to deal with the opposition.

The defence of the mission was well planned. The Japanese were dug in on five knolls commanding the Dagua-Wonginara Mission track and had artillery which continually harassed Australian troops. The track led through Tokoku pass, and all tracks leading into it were defended with fixed positions and ambushes. After heavy artillery fire and raids by Beauforts, four of the five positions were captured by 2/2nd Battalion. In the battle for one of these positions, a Victoria Cross was won posthumously awarded to Lieutenant Albert Chowne MM. The citation stated that the award was for:

'For most conspicuous bravery, brilliant leadership and devotion to duty during an attack on an enemy position on a narrow ridge near Dagua, New Guinea, on 25th March 1945. After the capture of Dagua, the main enemy force withdrew southwards from the beach to previously prepared positions on the flank of the Division. Further movement towards Wewak was impossible while this threat to the flank existed and the Battalion was ordered to destroy the enemy force. "A" Company, after making contact with the enemy on a narrow ridge, was ordered to attack the position. The leading Platoon in the attack came under heavy fire from concealed enemy machine-guns sited on a small rise dominating the approach. In the initial approach one member of this Platoon was killed and nine wounded, including the Platoon Commander, and the enemy continued to inflict casualties on our troops. Without awaiting orders, Lieutenant Chowne, whose Platoon was in reserve, instantly appreciated the plight of the leading Platoon and rushed the enemy's position. Running up a steep, narrow track, he hurled grenades which knocked out two enemy Light machine-guns. Then, calling on his men to follow him, and firing his sub-machine-gun from the hip, he charged the enemy's position. Although he sustained two serious wounds in the chest, the impetus of his charge carried him 50 yards forward under the most intense machine-gun and rifle fire. Lieutenant Chowne accounted for two more Japanese before he was killed standing over three foxholes occupied by the enemy.

The superb heroism and self-sacrifice of this officer culminating in his death, resulted in the capture of this strongly-held enemy position, ensured the further immediate success of his Company in this area and paved the way directly for the continuance of the Division's advance to Wewak.' (London Gazette: 6 September 1945.)

Patrols of 2/3rd Battalion penetrated to the west and rear of Tokoku pass and cleared the Wonginara Mission area, forcing the Japanese to withdraw in the direction of Liwo, where he had a large number of reserve troops. By 6 April the pass had been cleared.

In the Maprik area the Japanese continued strongly to resist the division's advance and progress was slow. The patrols had cleared the Japanese from the villages of Iaheta, Suanambu and Lahinga 2 and held off heavy counterattacks. On 26 March, moving in after a heavy mortaring of the village, the Australians drove the Japanese the strong point Aupik 2. The Japanese continued to fall back on Maprik taking care not to be outflanked. The Japanese appeared to be concentrating west of Maprik, but a rapid advance by Australian troops through Abungai forced them to withdraw and take up positions only 2000 yards from the Maprik Government Mission.

In the Dagua area Australian troops had consolidated and were mopping up stragglers of the force which had defended the Tokoku pass and Wonginara Mission, before continuing the drive down the coast to the main Japanese stronghold of Wewak. The 2/1st Battalion, which had taken over as the forward battalion, now began to push down the coast. After some opposition Cape Karawop and the village itself were captured on 13 April; a couple of days later Wisling and Old Kumudu. Wisling had at one stage been the headquarters of General Adachi, commander of the 18th Japanese Army. Patrols from the 2/1st Battalion pushed forward as far as Boiken, the site of an old German mission. Wewak's days were numbered. In the hinterland mountains security patrols continued to account for stragglers in the rear areas and they recovered ten escaped Indian prisoners.

Meanwhile in the Maprik area Australian patrols were closing in on the mission from three sides. Wora had been reoccupied by the Japanese, but was again cleared, and the Japanese were driven from Gwanginan, Kulkuil and Chiginambu. Finally, on 22 April, patrols moved into Maprik, encountering little opposition. The RAAF had softened up the villages and the area was pitted with bomb craters; the emergency landing ground was overgrown with heavy kuni grass. The Japanese were still gradually withdrawing towards the Sepik River, where large concentrations of troops and numerous camps had been reported. Aircraft from the Combat Replacement Training Centre at Nadzab were devoting much attention to this area.

By 19 April Japanese casualties had risen to more than 3000 killed and fifty-nine prisoners. Intelligence estimated his strength then as 9650 combat and 6000 base troops, of which 11,000 were "effectives".

Wewak

A number of islands off the coast near Wewak were occupied by the Japanese. Some sheltered heavy artillery, including a battery of naval guns on Kairiru Island. These were sited within range of the mainland and it was important that as many as possible should be silenced before the main advance on the fortress of Wewak was undertaken. Royal Australian Navy sloops, corvettes and motor launches, in conjunction with the RAAF, were used to neutralise these guns. At a later date 155-mm. "Long Toms" were brought up on the mainland and they added their heavy fire. An effort had been made earlier to estimate the strength of the Japanese on Muschu Island, and a small party of special troops was landed by night. Unfortunately, they were intercepted and forced to fight it out. They were unable to get back to their boats and all but one were captured or killed. The survivor brought back information of considerable value.

The area near Wewak has a number of important topographical features. The coastline is irregular, with capes jutting out from the shoreline, and the Japanese had prepared extensive defensive positions on these headlands. Bunkers had been constructed and the natural caves reinforced to provide strong fire positions. Artillery had been brought up and sited to cover the limited approaches. Large quantities of stores were being poured into the supply dumps at But and Karawop, and a large assortment of supporting arms was brought forward, including tanks, flame-throwers and heavy artillery. The 16th Brigade still provided the forward troops, but the 19th was moving up to take over the offensive in the Hawain River area for the final advance into Wewak itself. The 2/6th Commando Regiment had been brought up from Aitape and was training around But for an amphibious attack on Dove Bay, to the east of Wewak.

On 27 April the infantry crossed the Hawain River, where the 2/4th Battalion passed through the bridgehead which the 2/2nd Battalion had established. This brought them within twelve miles of Wewak in an advance supported by Matilda tanks. Around Maprik the 17th Brigade battalions were driving the Japanese to the east and south. Reliable native information indicated that the main body of the 41st Division was concentrating in the villages to the east.

The advance on Wewak began on the 3 May. By 1 pm the troops had moved from the Hawain River to Cape Pus and captured it with little opposition. About a mile farther on the first real contact was made. The Japanese fled. On 4 May Cape Wom fell. In the advance from Cape Pus to Cape Wom about a hundred graves had been found, and also the bodies of fifty recently killed Japanese : evidence of the accuracy of Australian artillery, bombing and naval fire.

The advance of the coastal force had reached the Minga Creek crossing by the 8 May. The bridge had been destroyed and was under fire from Japanese guns on Wewak Point. There was also considerable small-arms fire. Despite this the sappers carried on with the job of erecting a temporary bridge to enable the tanks to get through.

A patrol of the 2/4th Battalion moved out on the night of the 8th/g May to reconnoitre approaches to Wewak Point. The patrol report stated that the only possible line of approach was up a sand spit twenty yards wide, bordered on one side by sea and on the other by an impassable swamp. This spit was under direct fire from a 20-mm. gun sited on the side of Wewak Point. If the attack was to be carried out with few casualties it was imperative that this position should be captured as soon as possible after the lifting of the preliminary barrage. On the night of 9/10 May bridging of the creek was completed and the tanks moved into position.

The attack on Wewak Point was timed for first light, but heavy rain and bad light put the start time back to 6.10 am. Under a barrage by tanks and artillery the infantry moved up, crossed the narrow spit and over-ran the 20-mm. gun before it had time to open fire. By 7 am the first objective had been gained and rapid exploitation quickly secured a strong platoon position at the south-eastern base of the headland.

The Japanese were well dug in and was resisting strongly. But the infantry, supported by tanks and flame-throwers, wiped out the pockets. Snipers were very active. Positions which could not be reached from the land were dealt with by the naval force. In some cases the cliff-face was collapsed on the defenders, sealing them in the vaults they themselves had constructed. By nightfall the greater part of the headland had been seized. The attack was renewed at first light on 11 May, and by noon the headland had been cleared.

Of the Japanese garrison which had been defending this stronghold only three escaped. Resistance had been fierce and fanatical. The men of the 2/4th Battalion who had carried out the final assault were justly proud when they hoisted the Union Jack on a shell-scarred observation tower over-looking what had once been a strong Japanese base.

After the fall of Wewak and its airstrip infantry patrols pushed forward as far as Wirui Creek. From here an attack was to be launched on the second strongpost, Wirui Mission, from which the Japanese had been shelling Australian troops during the advance on Wewak Point and the capture of the airstrip. The 2/4th Battalion attacked towards Wirui Mission on 15 May. When the attack was held up Private Edward Kenna took the initiative and was awarded the Victoria Cross for his gallantry. The citation for his award states:

'In the South West Pacific at Wewak on 15 May 1945 during the attack near the Wirui Mission features, Private Kenna's Company had the task of capturing certain enemy positions. The only position from which observation for supporting fire could be obtained was continuously swept .by enemy heavy machine-gun fire and it was not possible to bring Artillery or Mortars into action. Private Kenna's platoon was ordered forward to deal with the enemy machine-gun post, so that the Company operation could

proceed. His section moved as close as possible to the bunker in order to harass any enemy seen, so that the remainder of the platoon could attack from the flank. When the attacking sections came into view of the enemy they were immediately engaged at very close range by heavy automatic fire from a position not previously disclosed. Casualties were suffered and the attackers could not move further forward. Private Kenna endeavoured to put his Bren gun into a position where he could engage the bunker, but was unable to do so because of the nature of the ground. On his own initiative and without orders Private Kenna stood up in full view of the enemy less than 50 yards away and engaged the bunker, firing his Bren gun from the hip. The enemy machine-gun immediately returned Private Kenna's fire and with such accuracy that bullets actually passed between his arms and his body. Undeterred, he remained completely exposed and continued to fire at the enemy until his magazine was exhausted. Still making a target of himself, Private Kenna discarded his Bren gun and called for a rifle. Despite the intense machine-gun fire, he seized the rifle and, with amazing coolness killed the gunner with his first round. A second automatic opened fire on Private Kenna from a different position and another of the enemy immediately tried to move into position behind the first machine-gun, but Private Kenna remained standing and killed him with his next round.

The result of Kenna's magnificent bravery in the face of concentrated fire, was that the bunker was captured without further loss. The company attack proceeded to a successful conclusion, many enemy being killed and numerous automatic weapons captured. There is no doubt that the success of the company attack would have been seriously endangered and many casualties sustained, but for Private Kenna's magnificent courage and complete disregard for his own safety. His action was an outstanding example of the highest degree of bravery.' (London Gazette 6 September 1945)

On 11 May, at the same time as the battle for Wewak Point was in progress, "Farida Force", comprising commandos, artillery, medium machine guns and mortars, made a seaborne landing in Dove Bay, some miles to the east of Wewak, with the intention of seizing the coast road, thereby cutting one of the possible lines of withdrawal of the Japanese from the Wewak area. The landing was supported by units of the Royal Australian Navy including HMAS Hobart, Warramunga, Arunta, Swan, and Colac; five motor launches and HMS Newfoundland from the Royal Navy; Beaufort air support was provided. Heavy bombers and strafing planes from Combat Replacement Training Centre at Nadzab had also been an important factor in the preliminary bombardment. H-hour was fixed at 8.30 am on the 11 May. Before the first wave went ashore the shoreline was heavily bombarded, and during the actual operation the small craft closed in to the shore subjecting the Japanese defences to a hail of fire. The first wave grounded on time, a bridgehead was rapidly seized and the second and third waves set off for the shore.

Patrols immediately pushed out from the beachhead and cut the road. Simultaneously another patrol pushing west along the coast encountered a force of about fifty Japanese in the vicinity of Forok Point. With supporting fire from the Navy, the Australians attacked and drove the Japanese from the position.

On 14 May, Farida Force, moving west along the coast to link up with the 19th Brigade, captured Mandi village and patrolled as far as the Forok village. The advance continued in the direction of the Brandi River, where the link-up was to take place.

Before the attack on Wewak Point a force was sent inland to cut the main road from Wewak to Sauri--another line of withdrawal. The units which carried out this task were the 2/11th Battalion and the 2/7th Commando Squadron. This force had been successful in cutting Big Road one mile north-east of the Sauri villages, which were strongly defended.

The troops which had advanced down the coast from Wewak Point moved into position to attack the Japanese in Wirui Mission on 13 May, and next day a successful attack was launched on Mission Hill, which commanded the whole of the Wewak plantation, the airstrip and the ground to the foot of Wewak Point. Resistance here was also particularly stubborn, but fortunately the ground permitted the use of tanks. When the summit of Mission Hill was captured, it was found that the Japanese were even more strongly dug in on a spur running north-west on the main feature, and it was not until the 15 May that the whole area was reported clear. The Japanese garrison was annihilated. Australian casualties were light.

Forces moving east between Wirui and Sauri encountered stubborn resistance on a feature known as 710. After a heavy artillery barrage an attack was launched. The Japanese repulsed it, but was unable to cope with another later in the day. He counter-attacked fiercely but unsuccessfully.

Kreer was captured on the 16 May, but casualties were suffered when an electrically controlled minefield of aerial bombs was exploded by the Japanese. A further attack on the Sauri villages was made with the support of flame-throwers, and the Japanese were driven from the area. On the 17 May, the 2/8th Battalion, which had taken over the coastal strip from the 2/4th, moved in with the support of tanks and artillery and captured Cape Boram. The Boram 'drome and mission were captured by the 20 May, after meeting strong opposition from the high ground south of the 'drome.

The area in and around Wewak now came to life. Engineers toiled at bridges and pushed roads through the tangled undergrowth. Bulldozers scraped great loads of coral for road surfacing into lines of waiting trucks, camp sites were surveyed and buildings begun. The hard beach back to Cape Wom became a busy highway. On Boram strip the Japanese soon began harassing tactics from nearby bunker positions on high ground to the south and it was not until a heavy mortar and artillery concentration had been loosed on the position that an attack could be made. This was successful. On 22 May patrols from the main force and Farida Force linked

up at the mouth of the Brandi River.

The Australians now concentrated on Koigin and, although reports indicated that the village was strongly held, it was captured on the 2s May by the 2/4th Battalion. The Japanese left behind another radio station and much signal equipment. More shells fell among Australian troops near Wewak strip; later in the day the Japanese shelled the strip itself and Brandi plantation. Barges unloading at the newly established Wewak beachhead also came under fire.

In clashes on the 710 feature a force of seventy Japanese withstood assaults, but a final attack resulted in twenty being killed and the capture of more machine guns. In the Mandi area a patrol was ambushed, but a later Japanese attack was repulsed with losses. The Japanese were extremely aggressive. Back in the Koigin area further Japanese positions were attacked and cleared after Australian guns had blasted them. At Mandi, however two heavy assaults were needed to clear another strong point, thirty-two Japanese were left dead. The summit of a feature known to the Japanese as South-west Mountain was the next position to be captured.

In this phase of operations--covering two weeks--the Japanese consistently harassed Australian positions by small raiding parties and patrols. The Japanese gave no thought to surrendering, although a few sick and wounded stragglers wandered into Australian positions. An important event in the inland war was the building of Hayfield airstrip. This had long been one of the main objects of Australian operations because Douglas transports could then land supplies and fly out in less than an hour the sick and wounded across the mountains to 2/11th General Hospital at Aitape. The march out took about nine days. The strip was built with picks, shovels and entrenching tools. Some improvised rollers were put into service, dragged by manpower. Australian troops and native men and women toiled on day after sweltering day. The first plane landed on the almost completed strip early on the morning of 7 June.

Meanwhile the Australian advance continued eastward across the back-breaking razor-backs of the Torricelli mountains to within 1000 yards of the important Yamil group of villages. The war here was another battle of the ridges; each ridge formed a natural defensive position for the Japanese. Australian troops had to fight for every inch of ground. As each position became untenable the Japanese withdrew to the next spur, where he took up similar positions.

The drive on the Yamil-Ulupu area was also strongly opposed by the Japanese. It was necessary to drive them from numerous well prepared and well-sited positions and the advance was slowed down. 2/7th Battalion, relieved by 2/5th Battalion towards the end of May, advanced eastwards from Maprik towards Yamil and Ulupu, while 2/6th moved on Yamil from the north.

Dogged fighting continued. The most important objective was the Yamil group of villages with its potential landing ground. On 20 May after continual harassing by patrols, the Australians attacked Jamei 2 and gained a footing on the ridge. However, the defending Japanese pinned them down and it was not until five days later that intensive patrolling to the flanks and rear of the position made possible another attack which resulted in the capture of the cliff-top and enabled the troops to exploit north-east along the ridge to within 1000 yards of Jamei 1.

Mendamen and the Kalabo group were cleared in quick succession, but further advances were resisted by the Japanese holding positions to the north-east. Troops of 2/1st Tank Attack Regiment, acting as infantry, attacked sixty Japanese in the Mirau area on 24 May. They met with determined resistance, but thirty-two Japanese were killed by the gunners and the position occupied. North of Kalabo a large village was cleared, followed by the remainder of this group.

Patrols probing towards Yamil reported that every line of advance was guarded. On 31 May some high ground overlooking Yamil was, however, occupied without opposition, although the Japanese made two attacks on discovering the Australian move. On 4 June the main track to Yamil was cut.

Infantry of 17th Brigade, advancing from the north-west and south-west, closed in on Yamil 1. Early in the morning of the 9 June "A" Company of 2/6th Battalion, less two platoons, moved in suddenly and occupied a position on a spur which commanded Yamil 1. Next day, after an attack by Beauforts, the assault began. Australian troops attacked with heavy mortar and Vickers gun support, eventually capturing the village and ground overlooking Yamil 2 and other Japanese -held areas in the vicinity.

Yamil 3 was the objective on the 12 June when troops of 2/5th Battalion closed in. By nightfall the operation had been successful and a patrol operating to the north reported that the northern end of the emergency landing ground was clear. This strip was important. Its capture meant a sorely needed air link with Hayfield.

Main drives in the coastal sector were in the first few days of June directed towards the Japanese principal positions patrolling on Mount Tazaki and Mount Shiburangu. Aggressive patrolling resulted in the capture of an extensive position 1000 yards south-west of Koigin by troops of 2/4th Battalion, which on 6 June stormed and captured another elaborately constructed strong point.

Patrols kept up pressure on the Japanese on the rugged slopes of Tazaki and Shiburangu, and with air strikes and accurate bombardment destroyed many isolated strong points. On 14 June 2/4th Battalion attacked and occupied a strongly held position; Hill 2, an important feature 1000 yards north of Shiburangu, was attacked by a company of 2/8th Battalion. Heavy fighting continued during the morning, but the position was finally taken. Five days later 2/4th Battalion captured another Japanese hill position 1200 yards south-east of Koigin.

At Yamil the Hayfield airstrip link with Aitape had enabled artillery to be brought in by plane. The Japanese first

felt its presence when his positions around Yamil 2 and 4 were shelled. On 15 June the 2/5th Battalion attacked Yamil 2. The defenders resisted stubbornly but finally withdrew to new positions on high ground south of the village, from which they were driven. Village after village fell in the path of the Australian advance; bitter patrol clashes took place over a wide area.

The way was now open for the assault on Mount Tazaki and Mount Shiburangu and the attack was opened in the early hours of 22 June by two companies of 2/4th Battalion. The Japanese offered fierce and determined resistance as the Australians advanced after the bombardment by artillery and RAAF Beauforts. The first objective, a crest 300 yards north-west of the main feature, was taken by "B" Company. From this point the Japanese were engaged to screen a flanking movement by "D" Company which developed into the final phase of the attack. After some hours of close fighting the Japanese were driven from the position. Tazaki was completely in Australian hands at 6 pm.

The 2/8th Battalion then began preparing to move against Shiburangu, the highest feature in the Prince Alexander Ranges south of Wewak. It not only commanded the whole area but included strong positions west of Big Road, thus depriving the Australians of the use of the road to any extent farther south than Wirui Mission. Shiburangu was the key position for the Australian drive inland to link up with the inland force. On 19 June Middle Knoll, south-east of Sauri, was captured and patrolling towards the main feature became aggressive. In the Yamil area Australian operations continued with the capture of Yamil 4. The emergency landing ground was also completed and light aircraft began using the strip.

On the morning of 26 June thirty-six Beauforts attacked Mount Shiburangu. At 7.30 am next morning the Beauforts again roared in, but this time when the bombing had finished the Japanese received no respite. Artillery at Wewak opened fire, and in thirty minutes more than 5000 shells from forty-eight guns screamed into the positions. Then "C" Company of 2/8th Battalion moved to the foot of the feature. The first opposition was encountered shortly after the climb began, when heavy fire from bunker positions atop the mountain pinned down the whole company. To counter this a platoon was ordered to work around to the right flank, climb the cliff-face and storm the position. As the platoon set off heavy fire was directed at the Japanese from the temporary company position. While simultaneously "C" Company of 2/2nd Battalion made a diversionary move south along Big Road. The men of the platoon climbed 700 yards in a circling movement up the tangled mountainside-a grade of about one in three. Without losing a man they reached the top and bore down on the surprised Japanese with machine guns and grenades. This was the signal for a general advance by the remainder of "C" Company.

By 12.30 pm the top of the feature was finally occupied. The remaining Japanese hurriedly withdrew to another lower hill feature which was named The Blot. From the top of Shiburangu it was possible to see as far north as Aitape and southwards to the Sepik River-a distance of about 200 miles.

The inland force was reinforced at this stage by 2nd New Guinea Infantry Battalion, a native unit led by Australian officers and NCOs. On 2 July Kunvingi Mission, twelve miles south of Maprik, was attacked and occupied by these troops. The battle in the coastal sector continued. The 2/8th Battalion paused for the night on The Blot before pushing on down Big Road. On the morning of 15 July they left The Blot, crossed Big Road and by nightfall were atop a new height dubbed Snow Knoll. In the Maprik area 2/5th and 2/6th Battalions, supported by Beauforts, were converging on the Ilipem villages. On the afternoon of 16 July the 2/5th Battalion moved in on Ilipem 2. At nightfall the action was still locked, the Japanese resisting stubbornly from strong defensive positions. Next morning more ground was slowly gained but the Japanese were clinging tenaciously to his positions. North-east of Ilipem the 2/6th Battalion was also meeting an Japanese determined to stand and fight. Air support was called in and Australian troops moved in to take an important knoll.

Meanwhile in the coastal sector Australian troops had come to the main Japanese positions barring progress along Big Road. The 2/8th Battalion had occupied Ambrauri I and the following morning-17 July-patrols pushed a thousand yards down the road towards Ambrauri 2. At a feature known as St Patrick's they received their first setback for the last few days. The Japanese were well dug in and had the road taped with well-directed fire. The patrols withdrew. In the afternoon they again went forward but were repulsed. On the morning of 21 July artillery and mortars saturated the Japanese positions. The infantry moved through St Patrick's and pushed on for another 600 yards. Some 400 yards away across a deep ravine, perched on a razor-back ridge, was the main Ambrauri village. It was the next stop.

Back inland the battle for Ilipem was still being bitterly fought, but on the morning of 18 July the village was finally cleared. Farther to the south of Ilipem, 2/5th Battalion was probing the defences of the Ulupu villages. In both sectors the Australians were encountering stiff opposition, but the Japanese determination not to give ground was proving costly. In two days' fighting, on 21 and 22 July, they lost ninety-seven killed and two prisoners, for one Australian killed and twelve wounded.

On the drive in from the coastal area along Big Road, 19th Brigade handed over to the 16th and returned to the beaches for a well earned rest. The 2/2nd Battalion moved into the Ambrauri area, sending out patrols to clear the approaches. Inland 17th Brigade was still on the heels of the retreating Japanese. By the end of July the 16th were in complete control of its area, and were ready to begin the advance to meet the 17th. There had been a fortnight of fine weather during which the engineers pushed the roads into the mountains back of Wewak. A well-surfaced road stretched to the crest of the Prince Alexanders, only a few thousand yards behind the main forward troops. Three weeks before, the infantry had fought their way up steep slopes to take this crest. Now three-ton trucks drove up the same slopes to keep the infantry supplied.

Beyond the roadhead, well down the southern slopes of the Prince Alexanders, 2/2nd Battalion was in fast pursuit of the Japanese. On 4 August they came up against the first organised resistance at a feature known as Rindogim, meeting fire from a heavy machine gun and mortars. The infantry spread out and, having located the machine gun, knocked it out with accurate Bren fire. The Japanese withdrew. During the night they came back in nuisance raids sneaking close to the perimeter and hurling grenades.

The advance now lay parallel with the Prince Alexanders, rising steeply on the right, and headed due west to link up with 17th Brigade moving east from Maprik. 2/2nd Battalion crossed Tambafain Creek, and came under heavy fire from two positions on the eastern slopes of the Numoikum feature. On the 6 August artillery poured shells into the Numoikum group, and following the barrage "A" Company, using flame-throwers, attacked and cleared four villages. Next day the remaining two villages of the group were occupied.

Farther to the east, on the front of the 8th Brigade, commanded by Brigadier M A Fergusson), covering the MandiBrandi-Mount Tazaki area, Australian troops were in-almost constant contact with small parties of the Japanese. In the Mandi sector the Japanese were still using a 105-mm gun, but their shelling was ineffective.

Moving east from Maprik, 17th Brigade was making steady progress against determined opposition. 2/5th Battalion came up against strong defences on Gwenik Hill, just before the Kaboibus village group. Air support was called in and on 31 July, following a strike by thirteen Beauforts, the Battalion attacked and took the feature. From here the advance continued westward and on 2 August, after driving the Japanese from a well-sited line of up to 150 fox-holes, Australian troops captured the Kaboibus group. North of this group 2/6th Battalion was making steady progress through difficult country and against stubborn pockets of resistance. In the first week of August 2/7th Battalion moved south-east from the Ulebilum villages to Sigora. Keeping clear of Japanese occupied villages, and preceded a day's march by a company of 2nd New Guinea Infantry Battalion, which had control of the area, the force passed through Gwalip, maintaining a steady rate of progress. Boomerangs roved ahead watching for Japanese movement, giving warning by dropped messages so that it could be bypassed.

The third night out heavy rains fell, and all the next day the journey was across flooded creeks. But there was no slackening in the speed, and on the 8-August-five days after leaving Ulebilum-the Battalion had reached and captured the landing strip and village at Kairivu. They were astride the Japanese main line of communication, and watching him being pushed from the east and the west. The link-up of the brigades was almost complete when the Japanese ' surrender talks began.

Tarakan

Late in March 1945, planning elements of the 9th Australian Division, commanded by Major-General G F Wootten left the Atherton Tableland in advance of the rest of the division, and emplaned for Morotai. They were followed by 26th Brigade Group, which moved from Australia prepared for an immediate operation-the capture of Tarakan, a small island off the east coast of Borneo. The principal object was to capture the airfield for development and use in future operations on the mainland.

Tarakan Island is situated off the delta of Sesa River in north-eastern Borneo. Before the war its oil fields produced yearly 6,000,000 barrels of what was reputed to be the world's purest oil. Fringed with mangrove swamps and a few sandy beaches, it has an interior of rolling wooded hills. The town of Tarakan has for its port Lingkas, on the south-west coast, with docking facilities and a safe harbour. Japanese strength at Tarakan was estimated at between 1500 and 4000 troops including 1000 naval personnel. Subsequent to the landing it was considered that the Japanese force on Tarakan consisted of 1750 combat troops plus 350 Japanese civilians who were impressed for military duty at the time of the landing. The plan envisaged a landing on Tarakan Island by 26th Brigade Group, commanded by Brigadier D A Whitehead. Included under his command were two RAAF Airfield Construction Squadrons, one boat company of US 593 Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment, and one company of US 727 Amphibian Tractor Battalion and one company of a Netherlands East Indies infantry Battalion. Transport was supplied by ships of Amphibious Group Six and support by units of Task Group 781 and RAAF Command, with 13th US Army Air Force in support.

It was decided to make the landing at Lingkas beach. This would enable heavy mechanical equipment to be hurried up to the airfield along an existing surfaced road linking the port and field. There were several difficulties to be overcome. In addition to offshore obstacles, the gentle slope of the beach and the depth of mud would not permit the landing of heavy vehicles and guns until pontoon causeways had been placed and extensive beach exits constructed. In order to provide artillery support for the actual landing, the brigade commander decided to land one field battery at Sadau Island the day before the main landing, with a protective force made up of 2/4th Commando Squadron. Sadau Island lies some 6000 yards to the north-west of Lingkas beach. As the island had a good landing beach, no known obstacles and was believed to be very lightly held, little difficulty was expected in landing the battery. In fact, the island was found to be bare of Japanese troops.

In outline the brigade commander's plan was as follows: On P-day minus one day, the landing of the field battery on Sadau Island and the breaching of the beach obstacles by the engineers; on P-day, the name given to the day of the landing) an assault landing by two Battalions, 2/23rd and 2/48th); 2/24th Battalion and the remainder of the force to be on call. Mine sweeping was to be undertaken during the four days before the operation. It was anticipated that the Japanese would endeavour to use burning oil in his defence of the

beaches, but systematic bombing destroyed or breached every oil tank on the island.

P-day was originally fixed for 2g-April but was postponed to the 1 May because of more favourable tides. Rehearsals for the operation were held at Morotai and on Kokoja Island off the coast. On 26-April the force allotted for the Sadau Island landing and the breaching of the obstacles sailed from Morotai followed the next day by the main assault convoy. It was not troubled by Japanese aircraft, and the only attempted naval interference was one submarine, which was believed to have been sunk on the night before the main landing) and shore-based torpedoes fired into the transport area early on P-day. One of these torpedoes grazed a ship but did not explode.

The landing at Sadau Island went according to plan, and in three hours the guns of a battery of 2/7th Field Regiment were firing in support of the engineers at Lingkas.

The breaching of the obstacles at Lingkas was a triumph for the sappers. Demolition parties drawn from 2/13th Field Company were given the task of making eight 30-foot gaps in four rows of underwater obstacles on Red and Green beaches, to let the assault troops through; and four 60-foot gaps on Yellow Beach for the passage of LSTs. Two breaching operations were made on the morning and afternoon of the day before the landings. The sappers moved to the beaches in L.C.V.Ps and LVTs and struggled waist-deep through mud to place their charges. Detachments from 2/3rd Pioneer Battalion acted as gun crews on the LVTs, and covering fire was also given by 25 pounders from Sadau Island and warships. Smoke-laying aircraft were also used. Despite the heavy mud and sporadic sniping and mortar fire from the shore, the task was successfully carried out and the thoroughly exhausted sappers were evacuated without casualty. This achievement was one of the most vital contributing factors to the success of the whole operation.

On P-day, for an hour and a half, from first light, cruisers and destroyers poured shells into the beach area. From the land came flashes as rocket-firing gunboats ran close inshore to cover the assault craft, while four flights of heavy bombers dropped their bombs along the foreshore. On both beaches the leading waves of the assault Battalions moved through the gaps in the obstacles to land practically dry-shod. There was no opposition from the beach itself or within the limits of the first objective. It was apparent that the Japanese had withdrawn inland, although he could obviously have put up a very effective resistance to the landing on the beach itself from strongly built concrete pillboxes dug into the embankment.

Within an hour of landing 2/48th Battalion struck some slight opposition on the feature immediately north-east of Lingkas tank farm, but continued to advance and secured its portion of the covering position later in the day. Stiff resistance held up 2/23rd Battalion on a ridge north-west of Milko, which was captured the next day. This enabled the Battalion to advance northward and eastward, one company overcoming Japanese resistance in the King's Goss area. By nightfall on the second day, apart from isolated pockets, the only part of the covering position not held was Hospital Ridge, where the Japanese were strongly entrenched in bunkers and tunnels. This hold-up seriously affected the development of the beach maintenance area, as the road to the north of the contested feature was needed to complete a traffic circuit. The same day 2/48th Battalion occupied Lyons. Against some opposition 2/24th Battalion advanced rapidly through Sturt, Wills, Frank and Essex, making successful use of tanks and flame-throwers. Many mines and booby-traps were encountered-on a far greater scale than previously encountered by Australian troops in the Pacific theatre-and in addition to a bomb-disposal platoon, sappers and RAAF engineers were kept busy clearing mined areas.

In the airfield area the going was hard owing to the terrain, stiff resistance, and the great number of mines and booby traps. One company overcame these difficulties and occupied Airstrip Ridge. Another company cleared Anzac Highway, where the Japanese ineffectively fired oil in a ditch as a defensive measure. In the Peningki-Baroe area two tanks silenced a troublesome nest of heavy and light machine guns which had menaced vehicles moving along a section of Anzac Highway. The Japanese fought desperately and the position was not finally cleared out until the next day. The 2/48th Battalion had patrols advancing on Peter, Sykes and Butch. It was at Sykes that the Japanese made one of his strongest counterattacks, but "C" Company held the ridge. The main feature in the centre of Tarakan township was strongly attacked by 2/4th Commando Squadron and occupied after two days' heavy fighting. Hospital Ridge was finally cleared on the third day, tanks assisting the infantry. This completed the occupation of the covering position, and opened up Collins Highway as a traffic circuit. On the same day, Brigadier Whitehead obtained approval to withdraw 2/3rd Pioneer Battalion from 2nd Beach Group to relieve 2/23rd Battalion, which then moved to the airfield area and came in contact with the Japanese to the east and north-east.

In the afternoon a patrol of 2/24th Battalion worked round to the west of Rippon, the dominating feature north of the airfield, and reported that the Japanese had apparently abandoned it after two days of heavy artillery fire, giving the Australian control of the airfield. Work began immediately to clear the field of bombs and mines in preparation for the use of mechanical equipment. This ended the first phase of the operation, after four days of hard fighting. The next phase began with 2/4th Commando Squadron and 2/48th Battalion advancing in conjunction to clear the features Jones, Peter and Otway, and the low ground between Otway and the Tarakan feature. A simultaneous attack was then made on the high ground, the commandos moving along Snags Track to reach the objective without opposition; but 2/48th's northward thrust was stopped at a difficult point along the ridge leading to the objective. After patrolling the area for some days, the Battalion outflanked the Japanese positions and in the subsequent attack occupied the ridge.

At the same time 2/3rd Pioneer Battalion advanced with two companies eastward along John's Track and found Japanese positions in depth on each side. Persistent attacks by the pioneers, supported by heavy

artillery and naval concentrations and Napalm bomb air strikes, had their reward on 14-May when the features Helen and Sadie were occupied. At the same time elements of the pioneers reached the coast and seized the Japanese defences. In the fight for the Helen feature the Victoria Cross was posthumously won by Corporal John Bernard Mackey. The citation for his award states that:

'Corporal Mackey was in charge of a section of the 2/3rd Australian Pioneer Battalion in the attack on the feature known as Helen, East of Tarakan town. Led by Corporal Mackey the section moved along a narrow spur with scarcely width for more than one man when it came under fire from three well-sited positions near the top of a very steep, razor-backed ridge. The ground fell away almost sheer on each side of the track making it almost impossible to move to a flank so Corporal Mackey led his men forward. He charged the first Light machine-gun position but slipped and after wrestling with one enemy, bayoneted him, and charged straight on to the Heavy Machine-Gun which was firing from a bunker position six yards to his right. He rushed this post and killed the crew with grenades.

He then jumped back and changing his rifle for a sub-machine-gun he attacked further up the steep slope another Light Machine-Gun position which was firing on his platoon. Whilst charging, he fired his gun and reached within a few feet of the enemy position when he was killed by Light Machine-Gun fire but not before he had killed two more enemy. By his exceptional bravery and complete disregard for his own life, Corporal Mackey was largely responsible for the killing of seven Japanese and the elimination of two machine-gun posts, which enabled his platoon to gain its objective, from which the Company continued to engage the enemy. His fearless action and outstanding courage were an inspiration to the whole battalion.' (London Gazette: 8 November 1945.)

Patrols of 2/24th Battalion fanned out over a wide area to the west, north and east. Within four days one platoon had penetrated along the Anzac Highway as far as Djoeata, where they encountered Japanese troops but cleared the village without much trouble. The Netherlands infantry company had advanced southward along the road from Peningki area to Karoengan and by 10 May had reached the sawmills at Karoengan without seeing the Japanese. This meant that the right flank was clear from District IV to Karoengan. On 13-May the company landed at Cape Pasir jetty without opposition and cleared the features Spike, Spear and Peach. Sixteen days after the landing the Australian forces had cut through to the east coast, the Netherlands East Indies troops occupied the southern peninsula, and two-thirds of the island, including the Pamoesian and Djoeata oil fields, was in Australian hands.

At this stage a policy of extensive patrolling and ambushes coupled with harassing fire had the effect of confining Japanese activities to very definite and limited areas, and threatening his freedom of movement above ground. A feature of the attacks on Japanese strongholds was the co-operation and accuracy of supporting aircraft and artillery, and naval bombardment. In particular the dropping of inflammable belly tanks on Japanese positions proved very effective as large burnt-out patches in vacated areas testified. At night the Japanese employed infiltration attacks extensively. Small parties, usually armed with explosives, endeavoured to pierce Australian lines with the intention of damaging installations, but they had very little success. Japanese positions were steadily and progressively overcome, and by the end of May the Japanese had been beaten back to the Fukukaku positions. On 30-May the brigade came under direct command of First Corps, as the 9th Division was about to undertake the invasion of the Brunei Bay area on the north-west coast.

After a period of softening up a general advance began in all sectors on 14-June. The main drive from the south-west by 2/23rd Battalion penetrated the area, while co-ordinated attacks from the north-west by 2/24th Battalion and from the south-east by 2/48th Battalion cleaned out remaining Japanese positions. By the evening of the 15-June the Fukukaku area was completely over-run and mopping up was almost complete. Organised resistance by the Japanese as a force was ended and survivors retreated in independent groups to the north and the north-east. The remaining Japanese were hunted by patrols, and many were captured attempting to leave by improvised rafts.

On the morning of 27-June a colourful religious ceremony was held in the Pamoesian oil fields at the first pump to be restored. In accordance with the native practice a cow was slaughtered and its head buried near the pump house, the object of this being to bury all the evil spirits and ensure that no bad accidents occurred in the field. Shortly after 10 am on 29-June, the first plane-excluding the tiny Auster reconnaissance aircraft-landed on the Croydon strip, to be followed during the day by twenty Kittyhawks. Next day twelve Spitfires arrived, while two Lightnings, which had been providing air cover for the great 7th Division convoy en route to Balikpapan came in to refuel. In two months of unrelenting fighting 26th Brigade had achieved its main objects, and by 31 July, 1499 Japanese dead had been counted, with an estimated additional dead of 235. Guerrilla forces dispatched thirty-nine and 314 had been taken prisoner, a total of 2087.

The cost to Australian forces, however, had been considerable. The killed, (including Lt T C Derrick, VC, DCM of 2/48th Battalion) totalled 233, wounded 644, while 1434 had been evacuated through sickness.

North Borneo

The next task of the 9th Division was to capture and hold the Brunei Bay-Miri-Seria area of North Borneo to permit the establishment of an advanced fleet base in Brunei Bay, to recover and protect the oil and rubber resources there and re-establish British Government control in the occupied areas. The operation was to be carried out by the division, less the 26th Brigade. Placed under command were certain corps, British and US troops, and units of the RAAF and US Air Force and Navy. The landing in the Muara-Brooketon area was to be

made by 20th Brigade, commanded by Brigadier W J V Windeyer) with 24th Brigade, Brigadier S H W C Porter) making a simultaneous landing on Labuan Island, prior to operations on the nearby mainland.

Brunei Bay

The embarkation of the force called for considerable organisation. In all, five convoys left ports in the Philippines and Halmaheras to converge on Brunei Bay. The main assault convoy sailed from Morotai on the 4 June 1945 and completed the voyage without incident. First light on Z- 10 June) saw two striking forces standing off the shores of Brunei Bay-long lines of ships stretching beyond the horizon, poised for an amphibious landing against Japanese -held British possessions.

For the landing on Brunei Peninsula the beach at Brooketon, designated Yellow Beach) was the best available. However, to reach it assault craft would have to pass through a narrow channel in Muara harbour, which meant that Muara Island would first have to be cleared of the Japanese. It was finally decided to land near Brunei Bluff, Green Beach), and to take Yellow Beach by movement overland; also to make a simultaneous assault landing on the south-east end of Muara Island, White Beach), moving overland immediately to capture Red Beach, the most suitable for unloading stores.

The next phase of the brigade commander's plan called for the capture of Brooketon and the rest of Muara Island, followed by a drive along the road from Brooketon to Brunei. After the landing of heavy equipment and bulk stores on Yellow Beach, a detachment in small craft was to seize a suitable position on the banks of Brunei River to enable artillery to be landed to support a land advance from Brooketon to capture Brunei town. 2/17th Battalion was selected to land on Green Beach, 2/15th on White Beach, and 2/13th was to be held in reserve. The Muara-Brooketon area is sandy and flat, with casuarina trees and some rain forest, but to the west are steep slopes covered with vegetation. Between these hills there is considerable cultivation including coconut and rubber plantations. Native villages are numerous, but there are few towns of any size or importance. Brunei, the capital of the State and seat of the Sultan, had a pre-war population of 1200, of whom only fourteen were Europeans. It was difficult to estimate Japanese strength, but the maximum was reckoned to be 2000 to 2500. In fact, it was found to consist of two depleted independent infantry Battalions, amounting to about 450 men, with service units bringing the total to about 800. Japanese air and naval activity was negligible.

Naval and air support for the operation was on a comparatively large scale. The naval force included one light cruiser, four destroyers, gunboats and rocket-boats. Following the usual pattern there was to be a heavy bombardment of both assault beaches for one hour before the landing, followed by close support fire from the smaller craft just before the assault troops hit the shore. Air support was the responsibility of RAAF Command with elements of 13th US Air Force.

Both landings were unopposed. At 9.15 am on 10-June, 2/15th Battalion landed on White Beach at the south-east end of Muara Island and found the Japanese defences abandoned. The Battalion pushed west and by last light was established at Ledong Point. At Green Beach, Brunei Bluff) 2/17th Battalion also met no organised opposition. Brooketon was captured, and at the end of the day the Battalion had cleared all the area east of the general line Brunei-Yellow Beach. 2/13th Battalion, the brigade reserve, had also landed at Green Beach and was established in the area Foochow-Derby.

The first night a truck containing eight Japanese drove straight into 2/17th Battalion's forward company positions on the Brunei-Brooketon road. After Australian machine guns had dispatched seven of the occupants, the survivor informed his captors that the men in the truck had been ignorant of the landing. They had apparently regarded the naval and air bombardment as normal. The advance of 2/17th Battalion proceeded rapidly down the road towards Brunei, with two platoons of 2/2nd Machine Gun Battalion and a troop of tanks in support. The tanks did not get far, being too heavy for the culverts. The marching infantry found the weather more troublesome than the Japanese.

A water patrol of three barges manned by detachments of 2/15th Battalion, engineer and artillery reconnaissance parties, and detachments of signals, medical and British Borneo Civil Affairs Unit moved up the Brunei River and landed three and a half miles east of Brunei. The next day a troop of 25 pounders was landed there and by noon the guns were in action. Continuing its advance 2/17th Battalion occupied the Brunei airfield. By the afternoon of the 13-June 2/17th had captured the town of Brunei, mopping up small parties. The town had suffered severe damage from Allied air raids and Japanese demolition. Patrols released several natives found chained to stakes; eight others had died.

On the 16-June a platoon of 2/15th Battalion moving southward along the Limbang road ran into an ambush and suffered two casualties. The Japanese position was shelled and the patrol continued until it reached Limbang River. A waterborne patrol then moved up the Pandaruan River accompanied by two American gunboats with orders to raid Limbang. It reached Terumi without contact and at 9.30 am on 17-June it landed unopposed at a village, which for this operation was named Gyro. "A" Company, advancing along Limbang road, had sent a patrol forward to a village designated Gasolene. The next day the remainder of "B" Company moved by landing craft to Gyro. Late in the afternoon Limbang was occupied without contacting the Japanese.

On 15 June a new phase of the Brunei operations had begun with the advance southward along the coast. Under orders to exploit along the road Brunei-Tutong, two companies of 2/17th Battalion moved out of Brunei. Brigade headquarters was established in the residency at Brunei.

A rapid advance on foot was made towards Tutong. With "B" Company leading, and no opposition met with, eight miles along the road was covered on the 1st-June. Next day this company in trucks and jeeps advanced about twenty miles in less than six hours. By night Tutong was occupied.

The advance was resumed on 17-June. Next day "C" Company passed through "B" Company and with a platoon of 2/2nd Machine Gun Battalion, raced on towards Seria, where natives had reported the presence of Japanese troops. During the day the company caught up with rear elements of the Japanese, who fled on the appearance of Australian troops.

On 16-June "C" Company reached the mouth of the Lumut River without opposition. They continued the advance and made contact with the Japanese late in the afternoon. By 8 pm the bridges over the Bira River on the outskirts of Seria had been secured, and on 21 June Seria was occupied again, without opposition. Seria presented an amazing sight. The Japanese had fired the oil fields shortly after the landing at Brooketon, and columns of black smoke could be seen from twenty miles away. In the town area the air was filled with smoke and a fine spray of oil, and there was a continuous hissing and rumbling from the fires, which burned like great blow-torches. At one stage thirty-one fires were counted. On 24-June "A" Company resumed the advance and occupied Kuala Belait without opposition.

Back at Brooketon 2/13th Battalion and two companies of 2/15th had been held in preparation for a coastal operation to outflank the Japanese retreating from Brunei. At 9.30 am on 20-June they made an unopposed landing at Lutong and by 3 pm had occupied the town and the peninsula to a point 3000 yards south of the airstrip. For two days patrols searched the area without making contact with the Japanese. They found the bodies of Javanese who had been bayoneted, and three Japanese killed by natives. On 23 June Miri was occupied without opposition by troops moving down from Lutong. As extensive patrolling around Miri yielded nothing it was clear that the Japanese had evacuated before the landing, moving along the old Riam road. This marked the limit of 20th Brigade's southward thrust. The advance had been so rapid that at this stage, a fortnight after the landing, the brigade held ninety miles of coast and had moved round Brunei Bay as far as Limbang. Nowhere had the Japanese made any attempt to put up a determined resistance. A feature of the campaign was the co-operation of the natives, who appeared to have a fervent hatred of the Japanese. The Dyaks, a primitive people living in the hills, were enthusiastic and successful guerrillas. Another feature of the operation was the unexpected number of Japanese prisoners taken-at this stage totalling fifty. Counted dead were 122, while natives were reported to have killed between 75 and 100 in the Limbang area. Despite the low casualty rate, medical units were kept busy owing to the numbers of natives requiring attention. At Brunei, within five days of the landing, a detachment of 2/13th Field Ambulance was treating 500 patients a day.

The rapid advance of 2/17th Battalion and the wide dispersal of the brigade was a heavy strain on Signals resources, and introduced many supply problems. By putting a number of captured vehicles into running order, workshop units were able to assist in getting supplies to the troops. Some of the recaptured vehicles bore the emu sign of the 8th Australian Division. The operation now entered into a phase of extensive patrol activity in all sectors. Parties moved by land and water along the coast and inland seeking the Japanese, but in most cases the challenge remained unanswered. On the 5-July, however, a mobile patrol in sandbagged jeeps with artillery support left Miri on a long-range reconnaissance of Riam road and was held up at a point 7000 yards south-east of Miri by a force of nearly 100 Japanese. Heavily armed, the Japanese were very aggressive, leaving their dug-in position and attacking several times over open ground in attempts to outflank the patrol. After killing an estimated twenty-five Japanese Australian troops withdrew, and the position was heavily shelled. When later examined by Australian troops it was found to have been occupied by approximately one company.

By the end of July patrols of 2/13th Battalion had penetrated twelve miles along the Riam road, and had moved down to Dalam and Liku pumping stations and along Miri River without seeing any movement. In 2/17th Battalion's area patrols pushed inland along the Belait River to Balai, where a patrol base was established. From this point Australian troops penetrated eight miles up the Menderam River without making contact, and along the Telingan River as far as Simpang. From here a patrol reached Menderam and moved on to Ridan on the 12-July. On the Belait River Australians travelling in native canoes had reached Usong and found it deserted. On 15 July a strong patrol, with HMAS Tigersnake and aircraft in support, pushed up the Barroom River and landed unopposed at Ridan. The force then advanced to Marudi to find that the Japanese had again decamped. A river patrol supported by a gunboat moved from Marudi and occupied Bakoeng without opposition. The patrols based on Marudi and Ridan were very active, and there were minor clashes with the Japanese at points along the river.

In the Brunei-Limbang sector 2/15th Battalion at Limbang quickly spread long tentacles inland along river and tracks covering a wide area. Patrols penetrated south-west along the winding Limbang River as far as Ukong. Farther west troops moving overland reached Abang and proceeded up Tutong River by native prahu to reach Rambai on 13-July. To the south-east, troops moved to Bangar on the Temburong River and patrols were sent east to Labu Estate. East of Limbang patrols ranged the Trusan and Lawas rivers from the two villages bearing those names. Company patrol bases were established at Bangar and Lawas, and parties scoured, I the surrounding tracks and waterways.

By the end of July patrols from 2/15th Battalion had reached up the Temburong River as far south as Anggun, and to the north-east one of the patrols based on Lawas had made contact with troops of 2/3rd Tank Attack Regiment at Sindumin, thirty-five miles across the map from Limbang and on the boundary of the two brigade

areas. Despite the continuous and vigorous long-range patrolling which had been maintained throughout the whole brigade area during this period, there had been little contact with the Japanese, and it was evident that the Japanese had decided on a policy of evacuation of their areas as they came within the range of Australian patrols.

Labuan

Simultaneously with 20th Brigade landing, 24th Brigade went ashore on Labuan Island, strategically important because of its dominating position in the bay and the presence of an airfield built by the Japanese.

The island is roughly triangular, with the apex to the north and two large inlets in the base. The eastern inlet is Victoria Harbour, a sheltered deep-water port suitable for flying boats. The area of about thirty-five square miles is made up of hilly forest land to the west, grasslands and scrub to the east, and swamps to the south. Japanese land forces were estimated at 650, but information after the landing suggested 550 as being nearer the mark. Japanese air strength in the area was known to be limited, and it was expected that activity would be restricted to possible nuisance raids.

The Australian forces consisted of two Battalions of the 24th Brigade, the third being in reserve), a commando squadron, an armoured squadron, a field regiment including one troop of 4.2inch mortars, a light anti-aircraft troop, a field company, a machine-gun company and service troops. Also under command was a detachment of the US 727 Amphibian Tractor Battalion, and, for the landing only, a number of corps, divisional, base, RAAF and US units, and 1st Beach Group less a detachment with 20th Brigade.

The brigade commander planned a landing on a beach on the south coast, designated Brown Beach with a direct approach to the airfield up the peninsula. Two assault Battalions were to be used, 2/43rd Battalion on the right and 2/28th Battalion on the left, supported by tanks and with the commando squadron in brigade reserve. Sappers from 2/7th Field Company were to be included in the first assault wave to make a mine reconnaissance of the landing beach and beachhead. Intensified air attacks began some weeks before the operation on an increasing scale. Naval bombardment began two days before Z-day and went on to culminate in a fierce barrage on Z-day itself with concentrated fire from rockets and mortars immediately before the landing.

Soon after dawn the bombardment began, first an hour's barrage from cruisers and destroyers, then rocket and mortar ships raced inshore ahead of the assault waves, firing on a fixed range so that their fire swept inland from the beach as the craft neared the shore. Escorted by fighters, medium and heavy bombers blanketed the target area. The first waves beached at 9.15 am on time. The landing was unopposed and the infantry quickly pushed inland against slight opposition, and by 10.30 am the battered town of Victoria was in Australian hands. Shortly after 11.30 am the Commander-in-Chief South-west Pacific Area, General MacArthur) went ashore from a US cruiser, accompanied by the GOC First Corps, Lt-General Sir Leslie Morshead) and high-ranking officers of the three services.

The advance was maintained by both Battalions, and by last light the airfield and Government House area had been secured, with the reservoir and pumping station intact. One troop of 2/11th Commando Squadron had landed unopposed on Hamilton Peninsula after naval bombardment and occupied the Ardie and Horel localities. 2/12th Field Regiment had all its guns ashore and three troops were in action at points within 1000 yards of the beach. On the second day 2/28th Battalion attacked on the left to clear the Japanese from an area west of Flagstaff to MacArthur Road, while the 2/43rd Battalion moved to clear the area east of Labuan airfield. No opposition was encountered and forward elements of the Battalion pushed north along Coal Point Road, two miles beyond the airfield. Although the Japanese resisted stubbornly throughout the day, 2/28th Battalion advanced and prepared to attack a Japanese position between MacArthur Road and the airfield. Darkness delayed the attack until first light on the following day, when the Battalion moved in with Matilda tanks to capture the position and continue the advance through to MacArthur Road.

Tanks were also used by 2/43rd Battalion in a successful attack on a Japanese position several hundred yards north-west of the airfield. After consolidating, the Battalion spread to the west, one company capturing the junction of Hamilton and MacArthur roads. By last light the airfield was secured to east and west and the divisional covering position was held, with the Japanese contained in a small area between the airfield and the mangrove swamps to the west. It was apparent that the bulk of Japanese forces on the island had withdrawn to prepared positions along a ridge in this area in readiness for a last stand. During the day RAAF Beaufighters gave close support to the attack.

On the fourth day 2/28th Battalion cleared the area through to the mangrove swamp, two companies containing the Japanese position on the ridge while two more advanced north beyond the divisional covering position. The 2/43rd Battalion moved west to take Timbalai airstrip, capturing three features on the way, and finally patrolling to the coast. At one point elements of the Battalion linked up with the commandos who had moved north after clearing Hamilton Peninsula. From this day onwards extensive patrolling of the whole island was carried out while the Japanese pocket north of the town was subjected to several attacks.

On 15-June "A" Company of 2/28th Battalion in a determined attack succeeded in driving the Japanese off the ridge, killing thirty, but the Japanese still held a knoll dominating the ridge. "A" Company was later relieved by "C". On 16-June heavy air, naval and artillery bombardment was brought down on the position but the Japanese clung tenaciously to well-prepared defences and only small advances were made. The infantry was

handicapped by the exposed nature of the approaches to the ridge, and the fact that the surrounding swamps and heavy jungle prevented the use of tanks. For the next two days the pounding from the air and ground continued, but the Japanese fought back stubbornly.

On the night of 17/18 June several Japanese attempts at infiltration were frustrated. Five Japanese attacked a platoon of "C" Company and three who were killed had 30-pound aerial bombs strapped to their backs. The Japanese also made use of aerial bombs as booby-traps suspended in the trees. Pressure on the pocket was intensified, and on 19 June eighty 8-inch shells from HMAS Shropshire rained down on the position, with another forty-eight rounds the following day. This was followed by low-lying Mitchells dropping Napalm and 500 pound high-explosive bombs. Little change took place during the day, but that night the Japanese commander apparently realised that the situation was hopeless and decided on a desperate attempt to break out with the idea of inflicting a maximum of damage before the inevitable end.

At 10 pm on the night of 20/21 June two suicide parties, each about fifty strong, crept out of the pocket down to the town area, one party moving along the edge of the Swamp and down North Road, the other across to the airfield and then south. At 4 am an attack was made on the beach maintenance area. The Japanese achieved surprise and managed to inflict some casualties but the Australian troops quickly recovered and wiped them out before much damage could be done. At daylight the beach area was littered with the bodies of forty-nine Japanese. Other Japanese troops were killed near the airfield.

The day after the suicide attack the pocket was entirely reduced in an attack by the infantry with flame-throwing tanks and artillery support. A total of ninety Japanese dead was counted, and there was hardly a tree or square yard of ground which was not scarred from the terrific weight of fire power which had been concentrated on this last Japanese strong. Apart from isolated and disorganised parties of Japanese which were later quickly mopped up, the capture of the island was complete. Preparations were immediately made for further operations on the mainland. Landings were to be made next at two points along the northern reaches of Brunei Bay for a drive on Beaufort-terminus of the railway lines from Weston and Jesselton.

On 17 June a force made up of 2/32nd Battalion Group, the division reserve which had remained afloat for some days after Z-day, moved from Labuan to land unopposed at Weston. Moving inland Australian troops found signs of recent occupation, but no Japanese were seen up to a point 2000 yards south-west of Weston. A patrol to Lingkungan reported the village clear of Japanese and natives. During the next week water craft patrols reached along the Bukau River and up the Padas River to a point beyond Karang, while land patrols reached as far north as Naparan without contacting the Japanese. Two days after the Weston landing a force went ashore unopposed on Mempakul beach at the northern tip of Brunei Bay, preceded by an artillery bombardment of a troop of 3.7 anti-aircraft guns and one battery of 25 pounders firing from Labuan.

This force, which was to form the northern arm of the drive on Beaufort, consisted of the 2/43rd Battalion less two companies, 2/11th Commando Squadron, one troop of 2/12th Field Regiment and a detachment of 2/16th Field Company. A covering position was quickly obtained from Menumbok through to the coast, and the commandos moved ahead to contact the Japanese about a mile beyond. The Japanese withdrew overnight. Portion of Australian force moved by barge up the Klias River to land at a point near Menumbok. Other troops pushed forward overland, the commandos reaching Malikai in two days.

On 23 June a further landing was made, this time by a patrol from "D" Company of 2/43rd Battalion at Sabang on the west coast of Klias Peninsula, to establish a base for exploitation farther north. They moved inland to link up at Karakan with 2/11th Commando Squadron which had reached the village by an overland route. An amphibious patrol travelling north from Sabang landed near Cape Nosong, and one section moved east to Kuala Penyu, the other north to Tidong, without sighting the Japanese. On the night of 23/24 June part of the force moved up the Klias River to Kota Klias and overland to Kandu, in a direct line north-west of Beaufort. Only a few Japanese were encountered. On 25-June patrols of 2/43rd Battalion moved unopposed to reach Woodford Estate, to the west of Beaufort, and also a point on the railway line three miles to the south-west of the town.

The stage was now reached for a regrouping of Australian forces for the attack on Beaufort. A beachhead was established on the Padas River at a point a few miles west of Beaufort to which Brigade Tactical Headquarters had advanced, and the Padas River became the line of communication for the brigade. On 27 June Japanese resistance, not co-ordinated, nevertheless stubborn, was encountered north-west of the ferry across the Padas River, and on the railway line south of Bingkul. Troops moved north of Beaufort in a wide outflanking movement, and others struck bitter resistance from the Taps in positions north-east of the town. For his gallantry during this fighting Private Leslie Thomas Starceвич was awarded the Victoria Cross. His citation stated:

'Private L Starceвич was a member of 2/43rd Australian Infantry Battalion during the capture of Beaufort, North Borneo. During the approach along a thickly wooded spur, the enemy was encountered at a position where movement of the single track leading into the enemy defences was difficult and hazardous. When the leading section came under fire from two enemy machine-gun posts and suffered casualties, Private Starceвич, who was Bren gunner, moved forward and assaulted each post in turn. He rushed each post, firing his Bren gun from the hip, killed five enemy and put the remaining occupants of the posts to flight. The advance progressed until the section came under fire from two more machine-gun posts which halted the section temporarily. Private Starceвич again advanced fearlessly firing his Bren gun from the hip and ignoring the hostile fire captured both posts

single-handed, disposing of seven enemy. These daring efforts enabled the Company to increase the momentum of its attack and so relieve pressure on another Company which was attacking from another direction. The outstanding gallantry of Private Starceвич in carrying out these attacks single-handed with complete disregard of his own personal safety resulted in the decisive success of the action.' (London Gazette: 8 November 1945.)

Before midday on 28-June all organised resistance in Beaufort ceased, and 2/43rd Battalion fought into the town, capturing much Japanese equipment. While mopping up was still going on Australian forces began to spread along the railway lines, 2/28th Battalion pushing north and 2/32nd Battalion patrolling southward on the Weston line.

Our forces regrouped on the 5 July and advances continued along the three railway lines. The following day, elements of 2/32nd Battalion reached Membakut and patrolled along the Damit River to the mouth, thence along the coast to the Bongawan River. On the 9 July a landing was made on the coast a few miles north of Kimanis, and two days later they were joined by troops who had followed the railway without contacting the Japanese. At the same stage, the troops advancing east along the Beaufort-Tenom line had reached the southern bend of the line, where they killed a small party of Japanese. To the south Australian troops had been attacked in the Lumadan area, but the Japanese were driven off.

The Japanese opposed Australian advance all the way from Beaufort to the east, and in many encounters he suffered heavy losses. Reserve forces in the Beaufort area had a few minor clashes with the Japanese. Very few Japanese were now reported to be in the Klias and Weston areas. In the north, at the same time that Australian forces linked at Kimanis, a company landing from LCMs brought the advance to within five miles of Papar. Two days later this coastal force reached the mouth of the Papar River while troops advancing overland from the south occupied the deserted village of Papar, where opposition was negligible. This area was consolidated and before long standing patrols were established in the north and east of the village. Papar marked the limit of the brigade's exploitation to the north.

By the end of July the brigade was in a static position in control of a coastal strip seventy miles long, with continuous patrolling going on in several sectors. The Japanese had been forced inland into difficult country and denied access to supplies. At the cessation of hostilities the division had begun the next task of moving inland to regain control of all productive areas such as rice fields and rubber plantations, and to consolidate these areas so that the native population could be returned to their villages to assist in food production. With the division was the British Borneo Civil Affairs Unit, which had detachments operating with units to organise local resources and to help rehabilitate the native population.

Balikpapan

During May and June 1945, Australian bombing -which had begun in October 1944-was intensified to become the softening up for a seaborne assault by the Seventh Australian Division under the command of Maj-General E J Milford. The object of the operation was to capture and hold the Balikpapan-Manggar area of eastern Borneo for the establishment of air and naval facilities in the area and to conserve the petroleum producing and processing installations. The Japanese had had plenty of time to fortify Balikpapan-they had held it since January 1942. The 9th Division landings at Tarakan, Brunei and Labuan had warned them of the type of assault to expect. Aerial photographs and information through intelligence channels showed powerful defences. An offshore underwater obstacle of coconut logs laced together, three deep, starting north of Manggar, had been extended westward along the coast to include Klandasan. Extensive anti-tank ditches had been constructed. Trench networks on the ridges north of the beaches had been extended and improved. In the Klandasan area alone fifty tunnel entrances had been detected. Extensive land mines and booby-traps were expected. Several heavy coast defence guns had been located. Japanese anti-aircraft defences-described by Australian Air Force as the heaviest yet encountered in the South-west Pacific area-had already taken toll of Australian bombers. The majority of the weapons were of a dual-purpose type, capable also of being used for coastal defence.

There was a strong possibility of the Japanese using a burning-oil defence on the beaches. The pipeline from Sambodja to Balikpapan runs parallel to and within 300 yards of the beach. Flows of oil from points along this pipeline, and from the refineries themselves, could be ignited and directed to the beaches with devastating effect. To counter this Australian bombers were directed to destroy large sections of the pipeline before the landing. A triple minefield protected the harbour and sea approaches. The latest Allied acoustic mines had been dropped from the air to complicate the existing Dutch and Japanese fields. It meant a long and hazardous job for the mine sweepers because Australian mines are particularly difficult to sweep. Japanese strength in the Balikpapan area was estimated to be 3900 with reinforcements of another 1500 at Samarinda, sixty miles to the north-east. In addition to these troops 4500 civilian labourers, made up of Japanese, Formosans and Indonesians, were thought to be in the Balikpapan-Samarinda localities.

The initial planning for the operations was carried out at Kairi on the Atherton Tableland. Here, during April and May 1945, a small team, under the direction of Major General Milford, made plans for the initial assault. Four possible landing beaches were in the area. Of these Manggar and Klandasan were the most suitable.

There were two ideas about how Balikpapan should be taken. One was to land on the coast at Manggar and advance along twelve miles of narrow coastal plain to the main objective, the other to land right in the thick of the Japanese defences at Klandasan, two miles from Balikpapan. Less resistance was expected in the first

stages at Manggar, but the Japanese would then adjust his defences against a threat from a known direction, thus prolonging the campaign. The more daring alternative-to land in the heart of the Japanese defences at Klandasan-was chosen, while an alternative plan allowed for a landing at Manggar should Klandasan prove to be too powerfully defended. At Klandasan it was hoped to achieve quick results by seizing the key point of the Japanese defences in the initial assault, thus disorganising his force, shortening the campaign and saving lives.

Three brigade groups of the 7th Division were to be committed-the first time in its history that the complete division had fought as one force. 18th Brigade, Brigadier F O Chilton) and 21st Brigade, Brigadier I N Dougherty) were to land side by side in the initial beach assault, while 25th Brigade, Brigadier K W Eather) was to remain offshore as a floating reserve. These Brigades were commanded by, and respectively. The target date for the landing was fixed for the 1 July-F-day.

The 7th Division staged at Morotai during June where the planning for the invasion was finalised. Almost on arrival, troops began to re-embark on ships of the assault convoy. Day by day thousands of soldiers went on to diesel-driven barges which scurried across the bay to the three LSIs, HMAS *Manoora*, *Kanimbla* and *Westralia*, or to LSTs or the many other types of craft. Heavy field guns, flame-thrower tanks, Matilda tanks, motor vehicles, heavy engineering equipment all went the same way. On 24 June, two days before setting off for Borneo, the assault convoy steamed a short way up the coast from Morotai to rehearse on a smaller scale the amphibious landing. About midday on 26 June the largest convoy to carry an Australian invasion force left Morotai and sailed due west for the coast of Borneo. There were more than 200 ships sailing in battle formation.

The troops were told about the strength and weight of Australian assault, armour, support, even the number of rounds of shellfire to be laid down on the objectives before the landing. They were kept informed of the progress made by the mine sweepers and the underwater demolition teams. Sixteen days before the target date mine sweepers had begun the hazardous task of sweeping a passage through the triple minefield off Balikpapan. They came under constant fire from the Japanese heavy guns. Australian destroyers engaged the Japanese shore guns and the mine sweepers carried out their task successfully, but not without loss.

Although Australian sappers had been trained in underwater demolition tasks, the Navy had taken over responsibility for all obstacles below high-water mark. Two days before F-day specially trained US underwater demolition teams blasted a gap 800 yards wide and another 600 yards to 650 yards in the three rows of the offshore timber obstacle. This was accomplished by approaching in a landing craft, transferring to rubber boats and then swimming the last 300 yards to the obstacle, taking explosives and other equipment with them. The explosives were attached to the timber barricade and detonated electrically. The same day Australian engineer parties ensured that the beach was free of mines. At 3 am on the 1 July a dull red glow on the horizon a few points to starboard could be seen. from the armada-it was Balikpapan on fire-a result of the rapidly increasing tempo of Australian air and naval bombardment. A few miles to go and "action stations" sounded-day was breaking. Before dawn the thunder of guns from combined Australian, American and Dutch warships and the drone of heavy bombers overhead told of the opening of Australian assault.

Dawn unveiled a terrifying scene. The whole shoreline was blanketed in smoke patterned with tongues of flame shooting hundreds of feet upwards. The beachhead and rolling inland hills were erupting and rocking under the impact of hundreds of tons of high explosive shells and aerial bombs. H-hour for the beach assault was set for 9 am At 7 am the assault troops descended to the landing craft by rope nets. They were eight and a half miles from the shore at the entrance to a 500-yard-wide channel through the minefields. For two hours the sea was a congested mass of small craft manoeuvring into their respective assault waves. Then rocket ships went into action. In two sweeps along the waterfront they plastered 2000 yards of landing beach. As H-hour drew closer Australian barrage increased. To every 230 square yards of the actual landing beach the Navy hurled an average of one shell or rocket. Never before in the Pacific had Australians seen such a tremendous and spectacular display. There was some ineffectual reply to Australian shellfire. Flak from Japanese anti-aircraft fire patterned the smoke shrouded sky.

Five minutes before 9 am the first assault wave of three infantry Battalions hit the beach, 2/10th and 2/12th Battalions of the 18th Brigade on the left, and beside them 2/27th Battalion of 21st Brigade. Ramps of the assault craft banged down on a bewildering scene of desolation. Against a background of black smoke and burning oil stood shell-splintered coconut Palms and the rubble of brick buildings, while native huts were burning fiercely. A few scattered shots harassed the beachhead but the landing was practically unopposed. The Japanese had withdrawn to his tunnels, pillboxes and entrenchments which pockmarked the dominating features some hundreds of yards inland. Troops and heavy mechanical equipment poured on to the narrow beachhead. Every man knew his job, every vehicle and piece of heavy equipment had its allotted place. Engineers were looking for and delousing mines; signallers were running telephone wire; wireless sets were in operation. Matildas and flame-thrower tanks ploughed across the beach and inland to support the infantry.

Bridge laying tanks and bridging equipment capable of spanning 160-foot gaps were brought ashore in early waves. Bulldozers cleared passages from the beach to the main highway which runs parallel to the beach from the town proper to the airstrips, and on to the oil fields of Sambodja. The late Maj-General George Alan Vasey, loved by every man who had fought with him, was remembered here. The highway was given his name -Vasey Highway. For the first time Australian short 25-pounders complete with ammunition and gun crews were landed in DUKWs (amphibious craft) which rapidly moved to the areas already selected for gun positions. AD

hour after landing, shells from eight 25-pounders were whistling over the heads of Australian advancing infantry to thicken up the naval fire. In direct wireless communication with the warships were Naval Bombardment Shore Fire (Control Parties). From vantage points with Australian forward troops these parties accurately directed broadsides from cruisers and destroyers on to the Japanese defensive positions.

Six-pounder tank attack guns and 4.2-inch mortars, manned by gunners of 2/2na Tank Attack Regiment, were brought ashore in LVTs which hit the beach with the assaulting infantry. They were in action forty minutes later. The 4.2-inch mortars blasted the Japanese on dominating features farther inland while the 6-pounders closely supported the infantry in knocking out bunker positions at a few hundred yards' range. To protect the rapidly expanding mass of equipment in this confined area the infantry. The advance was advancing faster against opposition which was lighter than expected. Only fifteen minutes after landing the three assaulting infantry Battalions had penetrated 800 yards across the beach plain to the pipeline running parallel to the beach. This marked the first phase of the operation: the beachhead had been secured. On the left flank nearer the town proper and the oil refineries, 2/10th Battalion swung to the west, advancing through the rubble of houses on the outskirts of the residential area, Klandasan. The objective was an abrupt feature named Parramatta-a ridge 300 feet high, running IS00 yards due north, on which the Japanese defences commanded the entire Klandasan beach.

Parramatta Ridge was a Japanese fortress. At the top was a cunning trench system, while a hundred feet below were vast intercommunicating honeycomb tunnels. On the seaward side, sheltered in concrete and armoured emplacements, were two 1 20-mm. naval guns. Australian shells had shaken the Japanese out of this fortress, razed every vestige of forest, pitted it from top to bottom with craters, and made the way easy for the infantry. At the southernmost point of Parramatta Ridge was Hill 87. "C" Company of the 2/10th Battalion launched an attack against the Japanese on this feature. With tank support the advance would have been difficult enough, but the tanks of 2/1st Armoured Regiment had bogged down near the beach and could not be brought forward in time. With heavy support of 25 pounders and 4.2-inch mortars, "C" Company captured Hill 87 by 1 pm The Japanese had been strongly emplaced in tunnels on this hill and their sniper fire was accurate. By this time the tanks had passed the boggy ground near the coast by moving along Vasey Highway through Petersham Junction, reaching Hill 87 in time to support "C" Company's further advance north along Parramatta Ridge. While the infantry were mopping up around Japanese bunker positions and native huts, two tanks-a Matilda and a flame-thrower-moved forward 100 yards in front of a platoon of "C" Company. The Matilda blasted open bunker positions with its 2-pounder gun and through the openings the second tank shot jets of flame. Infantry cleaned up what was left. Japanese opposition was determined, but by 2.20 pm Parramatta Ridge was completely in Australian hands.

During the afternoon 2/9th Battalion progressively relieved the remainder of 2/10th in the initial beachhead area, allowing them to concentrate on Parramatta Ridge with "C" Company. Meanwhile, in the centre between 2/10th and 2/27th Battalions, 2/12th Battalion had cleared the firmly entrenched Japanese from prominent features to a depth of 1500 yards. On the right flank the 2/27th Battalion had advanced forward of the pipeline to capture features Romilly and Rottnest, which menaced the beachhead. One company then swung to the east dealing with isolated bunker positions, while patrols cleared the area to the Klandasan Besar River. 2/16th Battalion landed on the heels of 2/27th Battalion and passing through the captured Romilly feature occupied ridges to the north and east of Rottnest against mortar and machine-gun fire. Stray Japanese with rifles scattered throughout the area had to be dug out before the advance could continue. From these captured features 2/16th launched attacks against firmly entrenched Japanese on Malang feature, 2000 yards north of the beachhead. Malang was in Australian hands by 4 pm.

During this time 2/14th Battalion and 2/7th Cavalry Commando Regiment had landed and passed through 2/27th Battalion, swinging east to cross the Klandasan Besar River. A high feature on the far bank was captured by 2/14th against light opposition, while 2/7th Commando Regiment advanced to the north-east occupying the same ridge 1000 yards farther inland. Sappers moved with the attacking infantry, marking minefields to allow the infantry to advance freely. Behind the advancing troops more engineers were finding and delousing numerous heavy mines and booby-traps. So thorough was their work that these Japanese defences caused few casualties among Australian troops. When night fell on the battlefields at Balikpapan after that first day's fighting the 7th Division had over-run numerous heavily defended localities, captured many Japanese anti-aircraft and machine guns, denied him the high ground from which serious interference could have been caused to the unloading of stores, and split open the crust of defences protecting the town itself and the docks area. Only spasmodic shells and mortar bombs harassed the beachhead and few found their mark. The bold strategy had been eminently successful, and careful planning had saved casualties during that vital first day. Australian casualties were twenty-two killed and seventy-four wounded. The Japanese had suffered ten times that number, and more.

Then followed a thunderous night of naval and artillery shelling, night bombing, mortar and machine-gun fire to which the Japanese sporadically replied. The whole northern half of the sky was bright, then brilliant red. Star shells illuminated the battle areas, revealing infiltrating parties of Japanese which clashed with Australian patrols. As dawn broke more than 300 Japanese dead lay scattered about Parramatta Ridge many as the result of the night's patrol clashes. Beside some of the bodies were long wooden spears with sharp points of metal-a primitive weapon, but efficient in the dark. Below Parramatta nestles the former lovely Dutch suburb, Klandasan, with street upon street of neat brick villas, now shell-splintered ruins. It was thought that the

Japanese would fight house-to-house and street-to-street, but less than a dozen remained with a few natives in ruined Klandasan that morning. The natives, pitifully emaciated from starvation, lay exhausted among their own dead, too weak to move. The few stray Japanese were mopped up by 2/9th Battalion, which had advanced through the Santosa barracks area. Many tunnel entrances led into the hills near Santosa barracks and Klandasan. Some of these tunnels, particularly those of the Japanese commanders, were comfortably furnished. The bypassing of these tunnels would have left Australian rear open to attack. Matildas and a flame-throwing frog, supporting 2/9th's advance, supplied the answer: fierce jets of flame from the frog roared into the dark openings, while the Matildas demolished the entrances with 2-pounder shells, bottling up the occupants. Silhouetted on a ridge against an oil-blackened sky to the west of Parramatta were the blasted and tangled installations of the oil-cracking plant. Along this ridge to the right, large squat oil storage tanks were set on a tabletop feature: Tank Plateau. Not one of these tanks had escaped Australian bombardment.

During the second morning's fighting a large storage tank burst. A great sea of blazing oil roared down the valley between Tank Plateau and Parramatta Ridge, where Australian patrols were active. The whole valley became an inferno. So terrific was the heat that Australian men on the ridge threw themselves on the ground, pressing their faces against the earth and escaping the fire. Following a heavy artillery and mortar concentration that afternoon a company of 2/10th Battalion skirted the valley and mounted the southern slopes of the cracking-plant feature. A 6-pounder tank-attack gun supporting this attack accurately sniped four machine-gun posts, destroying them with direct hits. North of Parramatta two companies of 2/10th Battalion had pushed the Japanese from a high feature overlooking the town and harbour: Newcastle feature. The division was now well placed to launch an attack on Balikpapan itself.

Morning of 2 July had seen the reserve infantry brigade 25th-beaching and moving inland to relieve units of the two assault brigades in the central sector. This enabled 18th to concentrate its entire force for an attack on the town, and 21st to make a successful thrust east along Vasey Highway. With 2/7th Commando Regiment protecting its left flank, 2/14th Sepmnggang Battalion rapidly advanced along Vasey Highway against scattered opposition. On the left flank Australian dismounted cavalry was held up by strongly entrenched Japanese in the foothills about 1000 yards north of the highway, but 2/14h continued to advance, enveloping Sepinggang airstrip by 11 am on 2 July. The airstrip was soon secured. It was badly cratered, but work began immediately and it was serviceable for Auster scout planes by midday the following day. Back on the Klandasan beach and for some distance inland huge ordnance and engineer dumps were rapidly expanding. Vehicles of all descriptions-bulldozers, Alligators, graders, heavy trucks and jeeps-cluttered the roads awaiting movement to the dispersal areas.

Large floating docks which had been brought 800 miles in the assault convoy, now spanned the shallow water between the beach and the landing ships. All day and most of the night landing craft ferried equipment ashore, while LSTs and LCTs disgorged hundreds of tons of cargo. On the 18th Brigade front, 2/12th Battalion had relieved 2/10th's companies on Newcastle feature-our foremost point to Balikpapan township. From this 300-foot eminence, through gaps in the smoke on the morning of that third day's fighting, one could look down on the devastated thoroughfares and built-up areas less than half a mile away. In the left foreground was the thousand-yard-long Tank Plateau, smoking after its terrific pounding. Across the town the harbour front with its many broken piers; rising above the outrunning tide were the funnels and masts of a Japanese warship and the broken hulls of many small craft. To the right, beside a muddy inner harbour, was old Kerosene Tank Farm. On the far right, two miles away, the old Dutch Barracks, and on the far left, Cape Toekoeng and Signal Hill.

At 9 am the 18th Brigade launched a three pronged attack on Balikpapan. On the left, supported by a troop of Matildas and a flame throwing frog, 2/9th Battalion captured a Japanese radar station on Signal Hill, and advancing around Cape Toekoeng, cleared the harbour front north to the old oil refinery. Advancing through the twisted, white-hot refining installations, and across Tank Plateau, 2/10th Battalion occupied the town area at the power-house, north of 2/9th. To complete the occupation of Balikpapan 2/12th Battalion had pushed north-west from Newcastle to clear the industrial area, Pandansari. Heavy mortaring and shelling from dual-purpose anti-aircraft guns on two nearby features, Nail and Nurse, delayed 2/12th's advance to Pandansari. The Japanese fire was quickly silenced by naval fire and the 25 pounders of 2/4th Field Regiment. A company of 2/12th Battalion with tank support then attacked Nail feature, securing it during the late afternoon.

Except for a few scattered Japanese snipers in bunker positions, who were routed by flame-throwers and mopped up by the infantry, Balikpapan had been evacuated by the Japanese. All that remained was an eerie, deserted mass of crumbling mortar and the charred skeletons of power plants, factories and business houses. Huge storage tanks had collapsed centrally and lay flattened. Telephone posts and broken wires drunkenly lined the main highway along the waterfront and there were many damaged motor cars; locomotives used for hauling long lines of coal to the wharves had been brought to a standstill. Beside the road were shattered oil-pipes from which oil still dribbled to feed the diminishing flames.

With Auster scout planes using the Sepinggang strip, 21st Brigade's next objective lay six miles to the north-east Advance to Manggar airfield, the second largest in Borneo. Relieved by 2/27th Battalion at Sepinggang on 3 July, 2/14th Battalion advanced farther along Vasey Highway. The bitumen surface of this coastal road was badly cratered and bridges over the many small streams had been blown. The area between the road and the coast had been heavily mined and booby-trapped. As the infantry advanced these were

deloused by engineers, who immediately began to repair the bridges and road. On the far bank of Batakan-ketjil 2/14th Battalion encountered a small Japanese force in two pillboxes. With naval-fire support "C" Company of 2/14th quickly drove the Japanese from their pillboxes, and the following morning Australian advance continued. Based at Sepinggang with 2/27th Battalion, 2/7th Cavalry Commando Regiment was patrolling vigorously inland to a depth of 2000 yards giving left flank protection to 2/14th. The 2/14th Battalion met little opposition approaching the Manggar Besar River during late afternoon of the 4 July. On the northern bank of this river the airstrip runs parallel to the coast and beside the Vasey Highway. The bridge spanning Manggar Besar had been demolished at both ends, but two companies of 2/14th Battalion pushed across the river. "B" Company secured the bridgehead on the northern bank while "A" Company advanced to the far end of the airstrip, quickly setting up a road block.

Then the Japanese staged his first determined stand in this sector. From many gun emplacements, set in a group of ridges overlooking the northern end of the airstrip, he opened fire on the Australians. "A" Company had established a perimeter at the northern end of the for strip, and held it despite the shrapnel bursting low over their heads, fired from an Japanese anti-aircraft gun only 800 yards away. "B" Company moved back across the Manggar Besar and established a firm block on the southern side of the river. The guns of a small naval unit, standing offshore, quickly countered the Japanese artillery. A naval bombardment officer, in direct wireless communication with the warships, had climbed a rickety 100foot control tower on the airstrip and, from this vantage point, accurately directed the gunfire. Meantime 25-pounders of 2/5th Field Regiment had been hauled forward and joined in the fierce duel between the Navy and the Japanese heavy shore guns.

At nightfall "B" Company of 2/14th was able to move forward again to occupy the western side of the strip, protecting Australian left flank. For five days the battle raged-five days of heavy shelling and counter-shelling, both the Japanese and Australian guns firing over open sights. Three Matilda tanks, put ashore from LCMs on the beach east of the Manggar Besar, during the second day of the battle, were hit by the Japanese heaviest gun, a 155-mm, at point-blank range. One Matilda was badly damaged while the other two were destroyed in flames. This 155-mm coastal defence gun was set into the hillside and protected by heavy steel doors, against which Australian shells were at first ineffective. But Australian artillery were not to be beaten. During the night they moved a 25-pounder forward to within 800 yards of the Japanese gun. At first light they opened fire, placing direct hits through the steel doors of the emplacement and destroying the gun and crew.

Then "D" Company of 2/14th Battalion, relieving "A" Company at the far edge of the airstrip, assaulted and captured the gun emplacement. Twice during the night that followed the Japanese counter-attacked the newly won gun position, one attack lasting an hour and a half. Twice he was repulsed by the Australians. Five minutes after midnight the Japanese vainly counter-attacked Australian other forward company, "C" Company, which had advanced 1000 yards along Vasey Highway to the end of the strip during the day. Even more formidable were the Japanese counter-attacks during the following night between 8 pm and 1 am. Torrential rain had filled the fox-holes and shell-holes. Australian infantry beat off these attacks although many Japanese got to within a few yards of Australian fox-holes. The Japanese heavy shelling had prevented repair work on the bridge over the Manggar Besar. With some ingenuity the sappers had partly solved the problem by building a wire-mesh foot-bridge underneath the actual bridge, slung from girders between the pylons.

On 9 July the Navy and artillery continued to hammer the Japanese positions. Then, guided by mortar smoke bombs, Liberators blasted their defences with 1000-pound bombs. The planes were scarcely off the area when Australian mortars and artillery opened up again, quickly followed by fire from a cruiser and two destroyers. After a brief lull six Lightnings flashed over the ridge in a trial run, circled and then returned, diving steeply. Belly tanks of Napalm tumbled down. There was a vivid flash and a deluge of fire enveloped the Japanese held area. The Lightnings came back at treetop level in a strafing run. The Japanese resistance at Manggar had been overcome and a patrol of 2/14th Battalion went in without firing a shot.

While the battle for Manggar strip had raged, the other two Battalions of 21st Brigade-2/16th and 2/27th-made further advances to the north-east of Sepinggang, and with 2/7th Cavalry Commando Regiment had patrolled vigorously north of Vasey Highway.

A mile and a half across the harbour from Balikpapan lies Cape Penadjam, a swampy area with a ruined sawmill, forty to fifty houses, and an oriental theatre. Penadjam was not important commercially, but it posed a threat to shipping in Balikpapan Bay. It 's strategic value to the Japanese as an antiaircraft centre to protect Balikpapan was lost when the Australians captured the oil refineries. Although it was reported that the Japanese had evacuated Penadjam two days previously no chances were taken, and it was subjected to a terrific pounding before the landing. Seaplanes strafed the township and the Navy bombarded the beach. Artillery from Balikpapan laid down a heavy creeping barrage as 2/9th Battalion and men of 2/7th Cavalry Commando Regiment in Alligators streamed across the bay in single file a mile long. About 200 yards from the shore the Alligators wheeled and sped towards the beach in waves at two to three minute intervals. Tank support had been given to 2/9th Battalion, but two Matildas bogged down in twelve feet of mud in the swampy beach area. The troops landed at 1 pm and the town was occupied without loss. Within an hour the infantry had fanned out, securing all initial objectives. The Japanese had not been sighted, but a 5-inch coastal gun opened up on Australian forces. This gun was knocked out by naval fire and captured by "C" Company of 2/9th Battalion that afternoon. Patrols pushed a mile to the north and south without contacting the Japanese.

Patrols south of the Sesoempoe River during the following day located deserted machine guns, while patrols to the west captured a single Japanese. In this area the Japanese were withdrawing by launch and barge

along the Riko River. By now the Japanese had been ousted from all positions menacing the harbour. He had been pushed out of the town and had lost the two airstrips. In action it was apparent that he was trying to withdraw the remnants of his force to the Batochambar area on the road to Samarinda-Milford Highway.

Milford Highway was a road of craters and shattered houses, lined with burnt-out cars and trucks. On the features beside the road were knocked-out heavy guns and searchlights. Cultivation frequently lined the sides of the low hills and spurs of this terrain but many were bald from mortaring, bombing and shellfire. The Japanese were strongly entrenched on these hills and spurs. Here 25th Brigade struck and kept on striking, day after day. Australian tactics were hit and probe, hit hard with the full weight of Australian artillery and air strength, then probe with infantry and dismounted cavalry patrols to ascertain Japanese strength and positions. Australian artillery fired at the rate of 5000 shells a day, while 2/25th, 2/31st and 2/33rd Battalions of 25th Brigade were closely supported by 6-pounder tank attack guns and heavy mortars.

The Japanese stayed in their bunker positions during the day, but at night small parties infiltrated through Australian lines. During the night of 17/18 July a party of Japanese approached the headquarters of 2/33rd Battalion by creeping down Milford Highway. As they entered the area they fired a flare to give them visibility. A sharp hand-to-hand skirmish developed. Here again the Japanese used their long spears, but to no effect. Dawn disclosed thirteen Japanese bodies. Japanese infiltration in another Battalion area met a similar fate that night.

For three days the Japanese stood in his strong positions running across Milford Highway. Then they cracked and 9 July saw one of the biggest advances since first Australian assault. Probing slowly forward in the morning the advance gathered momentum and by 4 pm 3000 yards had been covered on a 2000-yard front, placing Australian forward troops some five and a half miles north of Balikpapan. Faster than the advance was the Japanese retreat. By nightfall they were moving so fast that contact had been lost. Large quantities of food and equipment were captured in the day's advance. Two heavy anti-aircraft guns which had been hurling shells at Australian forces were captured. They had been knocked out by direct hits in a duel with 25 pounders of 2/4th Field Regiment. Results of the accuracy and weight of the artillery barrage were borne out by the number of Japanese dead throughout the captured area.

Milford Highway was extensively mined and booby-trapped. On the evening of 9 July three 1000 pound bombs were exploded simultaneously in the middle of the road as an infantry platoon of 2/31st Battalion was advancing. Many other heavy bombs lay beside the road but the Japanese did not get a chance to use them against us. The engineers hastily repaired the section of Milford Highway captured and their tireless work sappers kept the road open to jeeps and tracked vehicles at all times. Not once were the rations and stores held up.

On the left flank a squadron of 2/7th Cavalry Commando Regiment patrolled east to harass the Japanese's lines of communication. Farther to the left Netherlands East Indies troops were unopposed in a 3000-yard advance to a position four miles north of Pandansari. 25th Brigade pressed its advantage the following morning. Set on a jungle-clad hill, to the left of the road, were the Cello barracks. Supported by Matilda tanks and a flame-throwing frog, "D" Company of the 2/31st Battalion stormed this hill killing fifty Japanese without suffering a fatality. Right of Milford Highway "C" Company of the same battalion occupied another high feature. That afternoon artillery, mortars and tanks paved the way for a further half-mile advance by "D" Company. In the day's advances two tanks had knocked out three gun positions, and Japanese in six bunkers had been ousted by the flame-throwing frog.

Later in the afternoon "A" Company was to attack another dominating feature, Coke Spur. A two and a half hours' barrage by 25 pounders and a close supporting 6-pounder tank attack gun, combined with 4.2 and 3 inch mortars, opened the attack. On a lower explosive key crackled the 2-pounders and machine guns of two Matilda tanks, lined up on the highway with the flame-thrower. The barrage cut out and the three tanks crawled forward. Bunched close behind them were three infantry sections. A short distance ahead the road turned to the left, went down through a small cutting and on to a level at the bottom of Coke Spur. From both sides of the jungle and from Coke Spur itself the road was swept by Japanese machine-gun fire. The infantry could not advance. To retreat meant being caught and hemmed in by the cutting, through which the Japanese had allowed them to advance. The artillery re-opened and the tanks blazed away at close range, but the Japanese were strongly emplaced. The battle continued for an hour and a half. Practically the whole infantry platoon was wiped out in that confined ambush area. One tank stood by giving covering fire, while one Matilda, and then the other, crawled back, each carrying three wounded men on the deck. Back on the other side of the cutting the tank commander had been killed. The Australian attack was brought to a standstill and the dead were left where they lay on the road. Lives were not wasted in another assault against Coke Spur and the artillery were given the job to blast the Japanese from his bunkers.

On Milford Highway The Australian northerly advance was held up. For twelve days the Japanese clung tenaciously to his strong pillbox and bunker positions strategically placed between the commanding features Chair and Coke, on either side of the highway. It was twelve days of heavy shelling, constant patrolling and nerve-racking infiltration at night. A slow grinding-down process was involved. The infantry could have pushed the Japanese from his pillboxes and bunkers days before they eventually over-ran them, but were not prepared to waste lives in doing it. While the artillery and mortars pounded the Japanese defences and lines of communication, the infantry began to outflank him in preparation for a general squeeze. On 14 July the 2/25th Battalion, after relieving the 2/31st as point battalion astride Milford Highway, pushed two companies around

the Japanese flanks on both sides of the road. The envelopment continued during the following day with the two companies firmly established on Cart and Calm features, to the outside and slightly in rear of the Japanese on Chair and Coke.

The 2/33rd Battalion moved forward on 16 July taking over responsibility for the east side of the highway, allowing the 2/25th to concentrate on its outflanking movement to the west. To the rear of the Japanese defences the Australian commandos were active. Pushing through the thick rain forest and tangled vegetation on the 13 July a commando patrol had skirted the Japanese right flank and reached a point overlooking his line of communication on Milford Highway. Late that afternoon a Japanese patrol twenty strong approached the position. The Australians withdrew and ambushed the Japanese, killing nine without loss. Day after day the Australian ambush parties took toll of the Japanese along his lines of communication. Farther west and nine miles north of Balikpapan, Netherlands East Indies troops were steadily moving along a water pipeline to a pumping station on the Wain Besar River. No Japanese had been contacted in this area.

The Japanese reacted violently to the Australian encircling pressure on his positions astride Milford Highway. By day he sent out strong fighting patrols; by night suicide parties charged the forward companies with swords and spears. All attacks were repulsed with heavy casualties to the Japanese. The night of 17/18 July saw the fiercest night attack. Two 2/25th Battalion company fronts and the headquarters of the 2/33rd Battalion were scenes of bloody hand-to-hand clashes. The Japanese succeeded in knocking out one 4.2-inch mortar and inflicted some casualties, but the count of Japanese dead the following morning showed no fewer than fifty-three, with an estimated additional sixteen.

The Australian pressure on the Japanese gradually increased. Slowly an encircling movement squeezed them from their bunkers and pillboxes astride the highway. Pockets of resistance were cleared. One of these pockets on the left flank contained ten Japanese in a cave. Infantry of the 2/25th Battalion quickly cleared this with a flame-thrower. Then on the 22 July after a twelve day stand, the Japanese broke contact. Patrols from the 2/25th and 2/33rd Battalions found their positions unoccupied and the 2/31st Battalion advanced 2000 yards north along Milford Highway. This placed the battalion outside the perimeter which had been laid down in the original order: "to capture and hold Balikpapan area". Though no further advances were ordered, the only means of securing this perimeter was by constant offensive patrolling. The Japanese had not evacuated the area. Every day there were patrol clashes, and at night continued their infiltration tactics.

North of Manggar the 21st Brigade had pushed farther along Vasey Highway on the way to Sambodja, the third largest oil field in Borneo. Covered by a smoke screen, three more Matilda tanks had been landed at Manggar to support the advance. When the Japanese guns had been silenced, engineers quickly repaired the demolished portions of the Manggar Bridge and supplies were brought forward by jeeps.

In the area north-west of the Sepinggang airstrip the 2/16th Battalion had advanced 1000 yards against heavy opposition. An interesting series of moves and counter-moves preceded this advance. Two miles from the airstrip in a maze of steep hills the Japanese had held a feature called Gate. After a heavy concentration of mortars and machine guns the Japanese had withdrawn on the evening of 8 July.

An Japanese counter-attack forced the 2/16th to retire, but soon after the Australian artillery brought down heavy fire on the feature, ousting the Japanese. The battalion again occupied Gate the following morning and probed forward.

The Japanese were encountered on many other features in this area, but artillery was directed on his positions and infantry cleared the remaining Japanese. The Australian advance in this area had forced back the left flank of the Japanese retreating on Batochampar.

On Vasey Highway the 2/27th Battalion had relieved the 2/14th as point battalion and had advanced beyond the Adjiraden River. Only native refugees flocking to the Australian lines were met by the 2/27th. Many had come from Sambodja, fifteen miles from Manggar. A number of them were suffering from gunshot wounds and burnt feet—a Japanese method of preventing them from being of use to us.

The 2/27th continued their unopposed advance during the following days, reaching the village of Bangsal and patrolling forward to Amborawang, eleven miles along the coast from Manggar and twenty-three miles from Balikpapan. Patrols inland from Vasey Highway failed to find the Japanese.

A special reconnaissance party penetrated the heart of Sambodja on the 14 July and observed a party of Japanese supervising the burning of the village by pro-Japanese police-boys.

Four days later a patrol in strength occupied Sambodja, while another strong patrol cut their way through the jungle west of Amborawang to build a road block on a track leading from Sambodja to the Batochampar area.

Long-range patrols secured the Australian perimeter in the Sambodja area and parties of Japanese were mopped up behind the Australian lines in the vicinity of Manggar. The Japanese continued to infiltrate at night and harass the Australian lines of communication, but caused little damage and invariably suffered losses.

Based on Penadjam, across the bay from Balikpapan, the 2/9th Battalion and elements of the 2/7th Commando Regiment were patrolling extensively to secure the harbour for shipping. Overland patrols probed south to the Bandjermasin Road, while water patrols scoured the Riko River and upper reaches of Balikpapan Bay.

Supplied by barge along the river and waterways leading into it, scattered parties of Japanese still resisted in the Riko area. LCM gunboats carrying out river patrols were successful in sinking many Japanese barges, and

his water activities were confined to the hours of darkness.

One river patrol set an unusual ambush for the Japanese river movement by night. The patrol had captured a 300-ton ship, laden with a cargo of coal and oil, where it had run aground some six miles up the Riko River. An armed party was left aboard the captured vessel that night. The ruse worked—a large Japanese barge carrying about forty Japanese and towing five prahus approached the stranded vessel, and at close range the Australian patrol opened up. Bombs from a Pita gun gutted the barge and the Japanese craft was swept by small-arms fire.

On the northern point of the Riko River mouth elements of the 2/8th Battalion landed a Djinabora during 8 July. Some 600 natives and Chinese were reported in this area but no Japanese. This force was withdrawn to Penadjam on the 14 July.

Opposite Djinabora, on the Balikpapan side of the bay, a company of the 2/8th Battalion made another unopposed landing at a small settlement about 1500 yards north of Cape Teloktebang. One platoon was left to occupy the area and the remainder of the company returned to Penadjam. From these positions, eight and a half miles north of the harbour entrance, any Japanese attempt to penetrate Balikpapan Bay by launch or barge from the rivers to the north could be forestalled.

Upper Balikpapan Bay is a network of waterways, which the Japanese were using as evacuation and supply routes for his scattered force in the Penadjam and Riko area. He had also appreciated their value to us as a potential line of advance to outflank his force astride Milford Highway. To prevent the Australian use of the area the Japanese had established a block near Tempadoeng at the mouth of the Balikpapan River where it flows into the upper reaches of the bay.

A force known as Buckforce, which consisted of a tactical headquarters and two companies from the 2/1st Pioneer Battalion, and elements of supporting arms, occupied Djinabora on the 20 July. This force moved to Tempadoeng the next day. From this forward base? patrols operated throughout the area, particularly to the east towards Milford Highway, to harass the Japanese lines of communication in front of the 25th Brigade.

In an area called Tandjoeng Batoe a scout plane checking a report about Indian prisoners saw a white sheet stretched on the ground bearing the inscription: `Indian PW'. A patrol of the Pioneers was sent out. Guided by the plane they found sixty-three Indian prisoners, who had suffered badly in Japanese hands for three and a half years.

It became increasingly evident that the Japanese were withdrawing its entire force north from the Balikpapan-Manggar area to a concentration area in the vicinity of Sepakoe. The Japanese had fallen back on the Manggar and Batochampar fronts and were evacuating the remnants of its Penadjam force via the Sepakoe and Semai rivers. An evacuation route to Samarinda, farther north, had been prepared, and under pressure he would, perhaps, have made full use of it. The Australian long-range patrols throughout the area constantly clashed with delaying parties of the Japanese which were covering the main withdrawal. It was not the Australians' intention to advance farther or to extend their perimeter. Long-range patrols operated to gain information and to maintain offensive action against the Japanese so that the perimeter would be secure. This was the situation when hostilities ceased.