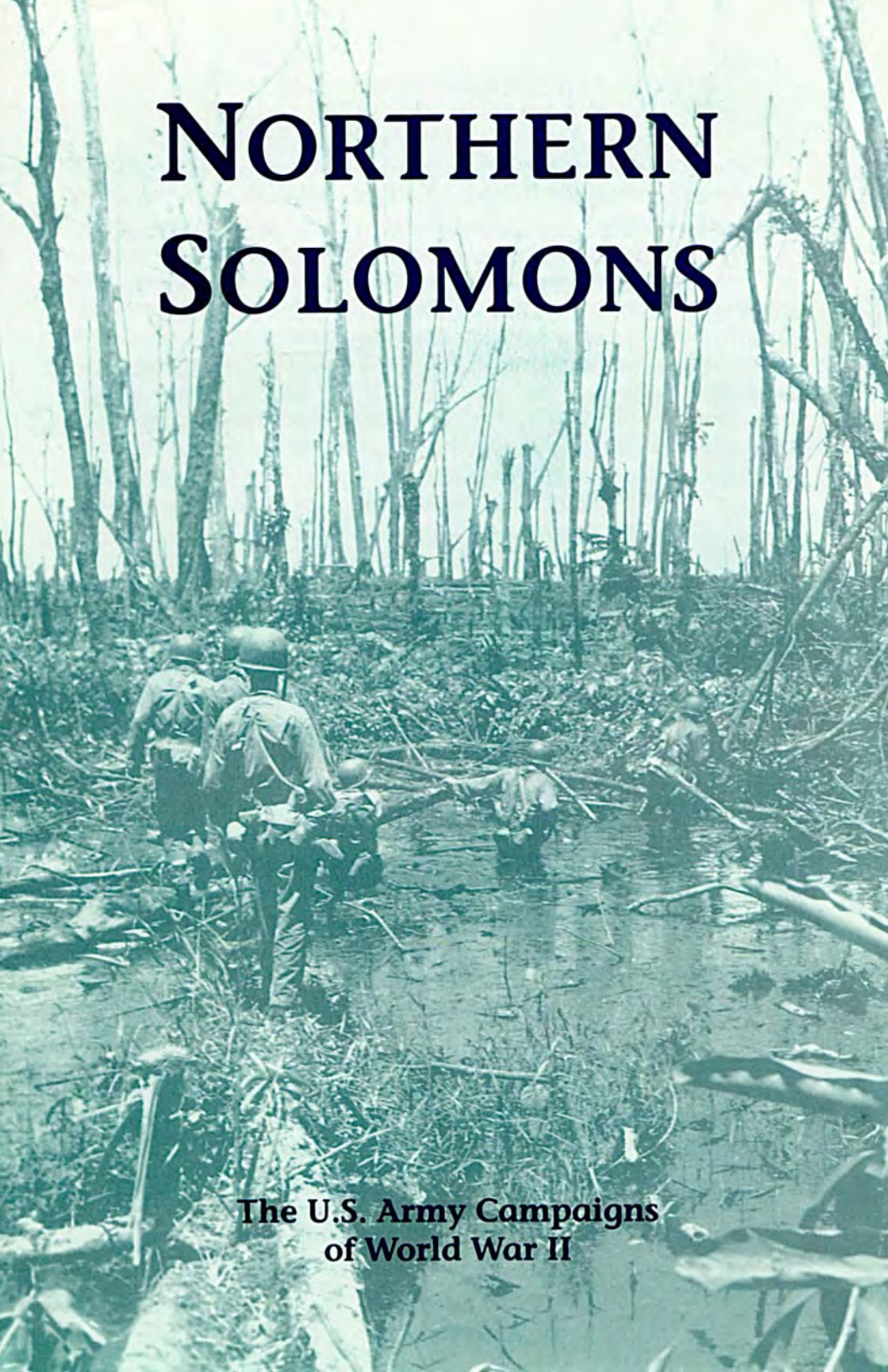
NORTHERN SOLOMONS



The U.S. Army Campaigns of World War II

Introduction

World War II was the largest and most violent armed conflict in the history of mankind. However, the half century that now separates us from that conflict has exacted its toll on our collective knowledge. While World War II continues to absorb the interest of military scholars and historians, as well as its veterans, a generation of Americans has grown to maturity largely unaware of the political, social, and military implications of a war that, more than any other, united us as a people with a common purpose.

Highly relevant today, World War II has much to teach us, not only about the profession of arms, but also about military preparedness, global strategy, and combined operations in the coalition war against fascism. During the next several years, the U.S. Army will participate in the nation's 50th anniversary commemoration of World War II. The commemoration will include the publication of various materials to help educate Americans about that war. The works produced will provide great opportunities to learn about and renew pride in an Army that fought so magnificently in what has been called "the mighty endeavor."

World War II was waged on land, on sea, and in the air over several diverse theaters of operation for approximately six years. The following essay is one of a series of campaign studies highlighting those struggles that, with their accompanying suggestions for further reading, are designed to introduce you to one of the Army's significant military feats from that war.

This brochure was prepared in the U.S. Army Center of Military History by Stephen J. Lofgren. I hope this absorbing account of that period will enhance your appreciation of American achievements during World War II.

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General, United States Army
Chief of Staff

Northern Solomons

22 February 1943–21 November 1944

From the Allied vantage point early in the spring of 1943, progress clearly had been made in the wars against Germany and Italy in Europe and the Mediterranean and Japan in the Pacific. During the winter an entire German army had been killed or captured deep within the Soviet Union at Stalingrad. In Africa, once-invincible Axis forces were in full-scale retreat, eventually to surrender in mid-May. The specter of continued Axis expansion in Europe was no longer the threat it had been a year before.

Halfway around the world, the Japanese offensive in the Pacific also had crested. The May 1942 Battle of the Coral Sea, followed quickly by the great American victory at Midway, had cost Japan the strategic initiative. By February 1943 American and Australian troops had thwarted a Japanese pincer movement in Papua New Guinea, defeating an overland drive on Port Moresby, evicting the Japanese from Buna, and beating back an attack against Wau. That same month, hundreds of miles to the east in the Solomon Islands, American troops had wrested Guadalcanal from the Japanese. Victory required seven months of torturous fighting, but it secured the Allied line of communications to Australia. The Allied High Command now could take advantage of its improved strategic position.

Strategic Setting

As early as 1941 the United States and the United Kingdom had agreed that the defeat of Germany would be their top priority in any war with the Axis Powers. Until the Allies had defeated Germany, operations against Japan would be primarily defensive in nature. This strategic judgment, popularly known as the "Germany-first" decision, was based on the belief that Germany was the more dangerous enemy and became the cornerstone of Allied war strategy.

Once the United States entered the war, American strategists discovered that implementing the Germany-first policy was more complicated than they had anticipated. After Pearl Harbor the American public clamored for retaliation against Japan. Further, the stunning series of Japanese victories throughout the Pacific in the six months following 7 December 1941 demanded some military response lest Japanese

power in the Pacific wax unchallenged. The ensuing counterstroke, the August 1942 invasion of Guadalcanal, grew into an unexpectedly large air-sea-land campaign that absorbed huge amounts of men and materiel. Meanwhile American and Australian Army units drove the enemy from easternmost New Guinea. Together the Guadalcanal and Papua Campaigns by early 1943 had committed more American troops to action against the Japanese than against the Germans, and American military strategists in the Pacific understandably wanted to follow their successes with additional operations to deny the Japanese any respite. Now, they argued, was the time to seize the initiative. Not only had Japanese momentum been halted, but the Japanese had not yet built elaborate defenses on their recently conquered islands. While the moment seemed propitious for an offensive, decisions of grand strategy constrained American operations against Japan.

The Allies faced logistic shortages worldwide. Virtually everything required for a Pacific offensive, from airplanes to riflemen to canned fruit, was also in demand for upcoming European operations. The most pressing shortage was in transport shipping, a primary requirement for any offensive in the vast Pacific Ocean. Thus, the Germany-first policy, with its priority on Allied resources, inhibited plans for operations in other theaters. Some American planners worried that unless offensive operations against Japan began soon, the inevitable Pacific offensive would become more difficult to launch and more costly to execute. Moreover, the U.S. Navy made little secret of its ambition to wage a climactic naval war in the Pacific. As early as March 1942 the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Ernest J. King, was recommending major offensive action in the South Pacific.

When American and British leaders met in January 1943 at Casablanca in French Morocco to establish their strategic objectives for the war's next phase, they agreed that the Germany-first policy would continue. After substantial debate, they also agreed that American forces should maintain the initiative in the Pacific while preparing for a full-scale offensive against Japan after Germany's defeat. Four months later, in a conference in Washington, D.C., the American and British military leaders (known collectively as the Combined Chiefs of Staff) sanctioned an acceleration in the war against Japan. The Allies were going on the strategic offensive.

While Allied grand strategy evolved, the American Joint Chiefs of Staff planned the Pacific campaigns. This was in accordance with a 1942 decision by the Combined Chiefs to vest primary strategic responsibility for the Pacific in the American Joint Chiefs. American planning, however, stumbled over Army-Navy disagreements concern-

ing overall command and strategy for the war against Japan. In March 1942 the Joint Chiefs of Staff achieved a workable solution by dividing the Pacific into two theaters. Each service received overall command in a theater. General Douglas MacArthur became commander of the Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA). Admiral Chester W. Nimitz commanded the second, the much larger Pacific Ocean Areas (which, in turn, was subdivided into the North, Central, and South Pacific Areas). Although the Solomon Islands west of Guadalcanal and the Russell Islands were in MacArthur's theater, Admiral King refused to divide his fleet or to put Halsey under MacArthur's direct control. This created an awkward command arrangement in which Halsey had operational control of all units involved in the Solomons, while MacArthur provided strategic direction.

The two services also disagreed over Pacific strategy. General MacArthur argued that Allied forces already deployed in the Southwest Pacific Area (notably Australia) should undertake an offensive toward the Philippine Islands. In turn, Navy strategists called for a major offensive through the island chains of the Central Pacific Area, as had been called for in prewar iterations of War Plan ORANGE. Perhaps inevitably, the question of Pacific strategy was resolved through a series of compromises as each theater undertook its own offensive.

In the South and Southwest Pacific Areas, the port of Rabaul on the island of New Britain in the Bismarck Archipelago blocked any American offensive toward the Philippines or Japan. The bulwark of Japanese defenses in the area, Rabaul was fortified with a large garrison and a network of air bases that protected Japanese warships and merchant vessels in its great natural harbor. The Joint Chiefs had issued orders on 2 July 1942 directing the forces of the South Pacific Area (SPA) and SWPA "to begin the advance toward Rabaul." The directive called for a three-task process. Task One had been completed with the American victory in Guadalcanal (carried out under the SPA commander). Task Two was the capture of portions of northeast New Guinea and the remainder of the Solomons. Task Three was the seizure of Rabaul. Tasks Two and Three were to be achieved by SPA and SWPA forces under MacArthur's overall command.

The ultimate fate of Rabaul became an issue of debate. General MacArthur insisted that this Japanese bastion be conquered. Other American strategists disagreed, arguing that capturing Rabaul would cost too many lives and would require troops and ships slated for the U.S. Navy's Central Pacific offensive, which was scheduled to begin in mid-November 1943.

In early January 1943 the Joint Chiefs ordered MacArthur to prepare and submit detailed plans for the carrying out of their 2 July 1942 directive. In response, representatives of MacArthur, Admiral Nimitz, and Admiral William F. Halsey (commander, SPA, and subordinate to Nimitz) flew to Washington in March 1943 to present their plans to the

Joint Chiefs. During this meeting, known as the Pacific Military Conference, discussion of operational constraints posed by manpower and shipping limitations convinced the Joint Chiefs to hold operations in 1943 to the achievement of Task Two. MacArthur and Halsey were to begin the initial advance toward Rabaul and capture various points

along the northern coast of New Guinea, New Georgia and the northern Solomons, and the Bismarcks. A direct assault on Rabaul was postponed. The matter of timing was left to MacArthur and Halsey.

Admiral Halsey flew to MacArthur's headquarters in Brisbane, Australia, where they discussed campaign strategy. MacArthur's headquarters issued plans on 26 April that laid out a two-pronged offensive, code-named CARTWHEEL, which would envelop and isolate the Japanese at Rabaul. One prong (MacArthur) would advance along the northern shores of New Guinea and into the Bismarck Archipelago. The second prong (Halsey) would drive northwest from Guadalcanal and seize the remainder of the Solomon Islands.

The lengthy operational sequence designed to achieve the "reduction of Rabaul" initially consisted of thirteen separate, short, and often simultaneous advances. MacArthur would take Woodlark and Kiriwina Islands; then Halsey would take the New Georgia group in the Solomons. Next, MacArthur would move along the New Guinea coast, seizing Salamaua, Lae, and Finschhafen. Halsey would follow by attacking the Shortland Islands and southern Bougainville, and then, farther up the New Guinea coast, MacArthur would capture Madang. CARTWHEEL would conclude with MacArthur's moving on to Cape Gloucester and Halsey's establishing himself on Bougainville's eastern coast. These phased advances were due to the need to build airstrips at each stage, so that Allied air forces could counter Japanese air power operating from Rabaul. CARTWHEEL'S success rested on the ability of air, ground, and naval forces to work together in joint operations of unprecedented scope.

The Japanese military also recognized the importance of air power and airfields in the vast Pacific region. In November 1942 they had built an airfield at Munda Point on New Georgia as an advance base to support the Guadalcanal fighting. The airstrip, less than 180 nautical miles from Guadalcanal, had become operational in December 1942. Another strip was started shortly thereafter at Vila, on the nearby island of Kolombangara. However, by late 1942, the Japanese realized that their forces probably could not hold Guadalcanal. They correctly surmised that the Allies would strike next against Rabaul, but did not know what form the attempt would take. They thus decided to attack aggressively in New Guinea to improve their position there, while mounting an active defense in the Solomons. Hurriedly they prepared defenses against anticipated Allied offensives in the central and northern Solomons. Ground troops were brought in to reinforce New Georgia, Kolombangara, and Santa Isabel.

Imperial Japanese Army commanders, arguing that holding the islands south of Bougainville would be costly and ultimately futile, wanted to wait for the Allies to attack Bougainville and the northern Solomons. The *Imperial Navy* disagreed. Naval planners wanted to delay the Allied advance for as long as possible, maintaining that New Georgia and Santa Isabel constituted a vital forward line of defense. With no one to arbitrate, each service did as it wished: the navy assumed responsibility for land defense of the central Solomons (although the army had to provide troops to cover naval commitments), the army for the northern islands.

Early 1943, therefore, found the Japanese holding the line in the Solomons while undertaking an offensive in New Guinea. Although the grueling struggle for Guadalcanal had worn down Japanese strength in the Solomons, the Japanese were still a tough foe. On New Georgia were approximately 10,500 troops, entrenched, determined, and waiting.

Operations

On 30 June 1943, the same day that MacArthur's forces began attacking in New Guinea, Admiral Halsey's forces were landing four hundred miles away at several sites in the group of islands collectively known as New Georgia. Code-named TOENAILS, the invasion of the New Georgia islands presented several obstacles to the Army and Navy planners who had spent six months preparing for the operation.

Located in the central Solomons, New Georgia comprises about a dozen large islands and numerous smaller ones, all surrounded by coral reefs, barrier islands, and shallow lagoons. With only a few narrow passages through the offshore obstacles, the seas surrounding New Georgia proper are hazardous. Because reefs made Munda Point inaccessible to large ships, Halsey and his commanders chose to seize the offshore island of Rendova as a preliminary to the main invasion. Close enough to Munda for supporting artillery, Rendova would serve as a forward base from which the main invasion could be launched and supported.

Besides the Rendova invasion, the first phase of operations involved three simultaneous landings to capture and hold tactically significant sites on or near New Georgia: Segi Point (the best site for an airfield on the island), Viru Harbor, and Wickham Anchorage (on the nearby island of Vangunu). Possession of the latter two sites would protect supply lines and provide staging areas for New Georgia operations. The second phase consisted of invading New Georgia proper to

"Landing Artillery at Rendova Island, Solomons Group," by Aaron Bohrod. (Army Art Collection)

seize Munda, while a supporting force invaded Enogai Inlet, several miles to the north, to cut Japanese communications running from Kolombangara through Enogai to Munda. The seizure of Munda and Enogai would be followed by operations against Vila airfield on Kolombangara and then by operations farther up the Solomons chain.

In the South Pacific Area, no individual had tactical command of the ground troops. Halsey had two principal ground commanders. Lt. Gen. Millard F. Harmon commanded all U.S. Army forces in the South Pacific Area, while the commander of the I Marine Amphibious Assault Corps, Maj. Gen. Clayton B. Vogel, led the marines. Afloat, Halsey's deputy was Rear Adm. Theodore S. Wilkinson, and his amphibious commander was Rear Adm. Richmond Kelly Turner.

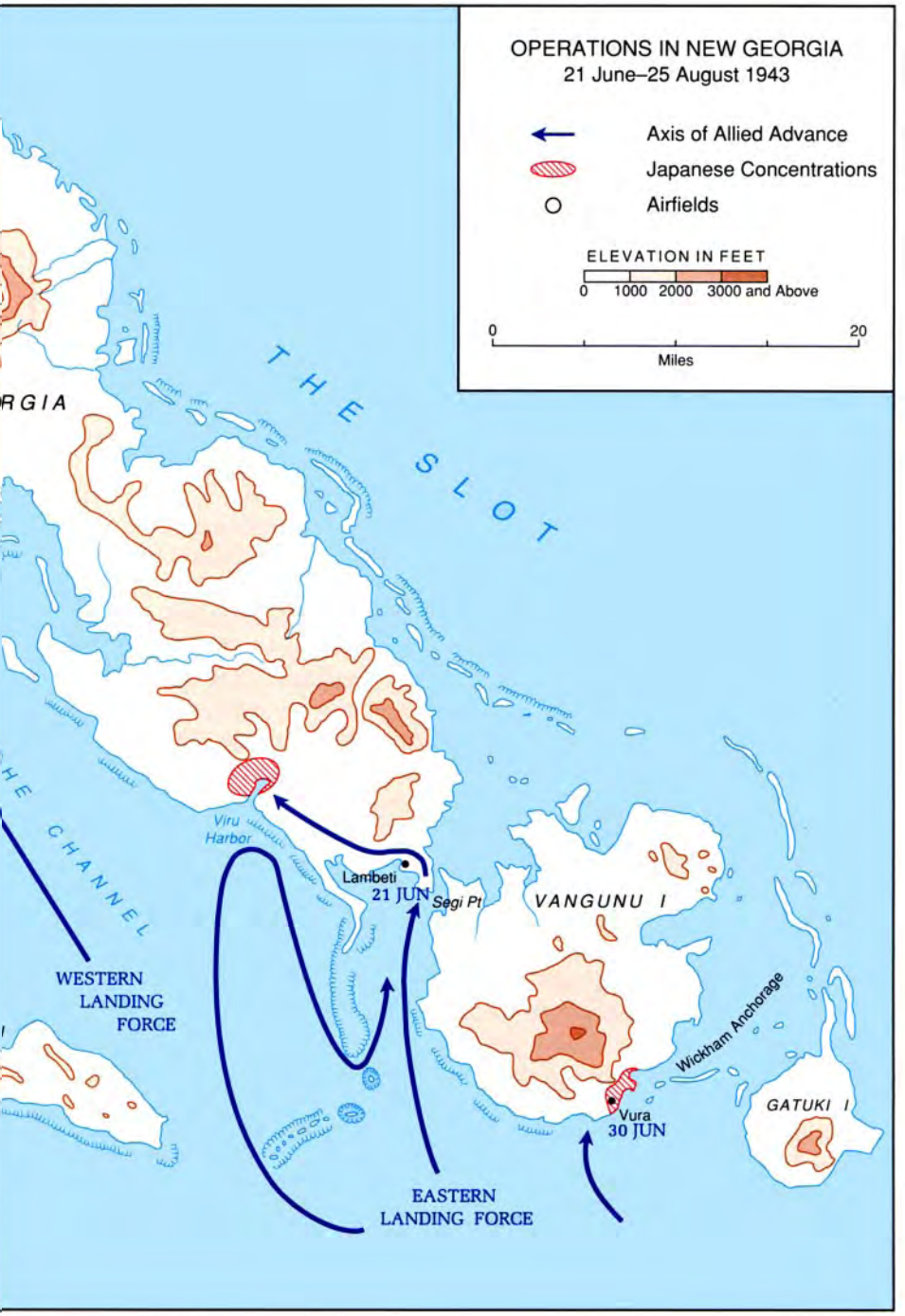
Admiral Turner commanded the TOENAILS attack force. He divided his ground forces into two groups: a Western Force, which would take Rendova, Munda, Enogai, and later Kolombangara; and an Eastern Force, which would seize Wickham, Segi, and Viru. Turner insisted on commanding the Western Force himself.

The ground troops for all TOENAILS attack forces were designated the New Georgia Occupation Force (NGOF). Since the 43d Division was the major ground unit slated for TOENAILS, Admiral Turner chose the division commander, Maj. Gen. John H. Hester, to be the NGOF commander. Turner declined to use the XIV Corps headquarters and staff available on Guadalcanal, instead requiring the 43d Division headquarters to perform double duty. Hester thus had to function as both division commander and NGOF commander and was responsible for all six ground operations. The 43d's staff section chiefs became the NGOF staff, while their assistants ran the division's staff sections. From the outset General Harmon was leery of this command arrangement. On 10 June he ordered the XIV Corps commander, Maj. Gen. Oscar W. Griswold, to keep himself informed and be ready to take command should the necessity arise.

As preparations for the invasion neared completion, coastwatcher Donald Kennedy reported on 20 June that the Japanese were moving against Segi Point and his coastwatcher organization. Although D-day was set for 30 June, Admiral Turner reacted immediately to this threat to the coveted airfield site, and by the following morning the 4th Marine Raider Battalion (less two companies) was ashore. Two companies from the 103d Infantry reinforced the marines the next day. Forestalled, the Japanese abandoned the effort. Airfield construction began on 30 June, and twelve days later an airfield was ready for limited use.

On D-day the 4th Marine Raider Battalion marched overland from Segi Point, wading through knee-deep mud and fighting Japanese during their trek, and seized Viru Harbor. At Wickham Anchorage, however, operations proved rougher. Reports that Japanese troops were occupying the landing site forced a hasty revision of plans. The assault force, a reinforced battalion from the 103d Infantry and two companies from the 4th Marine Raider Battalion, was ordered to land in the predawn morning, two and one-half miles from the targeted harbor, and march overland along a trail cut by Kennedy's men to attack the Japanese guarding the harbor. Heavy rains, however, reduced visibility almost to zero, and high winds and rough seas wreaked havoc with the landing operation. Amphibious vehicles had to follow the sound of breaking waves to find the shore. The operation, as the official Army history candidly recounts, "was exactly what might be expected from a night landing in bad weather," with the marines landing in "impressive disorganization." In the ensuing chaos, six landing craft became lodged on the coral reef, while others discharged troops at the wrong site and then had to reload. Over the next four days, marines and sol-


NORTHERN
LANDING GROUP
KOLOMBANGARA
GIZO I
Rice
Anchorage
4, 5 JUL
Enogai Pt
ARUNDEL I
Bairoko
NEW GEO
WANA WANA I
25 AUG
23 AUG
3 JUL
Zanana
4 AUG
Munda Pt
13 JUL
Laiana
RENDOVA I
SOLOMON
SEA
TETIPARI


OPERATIONS IN NEW GEORGIA
21 June–25 August 1943
Axis of Allied Advance
Japanese Concentrations
Airfields
ELEVATION IN FEET
0 1000 2000 3000 and Above
0 20
Miles
THE SLOT
RGIA
HE CHANNEL
Viru Harbor
Lambeti
21 JUN
Segi Pt
VANGUNU I
WESTERN LANDING FORCE
Wickham Anchorage
Vura
30 JUN
GATUKI I
EASTERN LANDING FORCE

diers, supported by 105-mm. howitzers from the 152d Field Artillery Battalion, rooted out the Japanese from Wickham Anchorage.

The Western Force's first landing on 30 June was the predawn insertion of two companies of the 169th Infantry on two small islands bracketing the passage through the coral reef to the future landing site on New Georgia Island. About 0700 the 172d Infantry began landing on Rendova. There was confusion and disorganization, but the regiment quickly overwhelmed a 120-man Japanese detachment and established a 1,000-yard-deep beachhead. All troops, including General Harmon, were ashore in half an hour. Moving supplies ashore and inland quickly became the main problem. As rain turned the ground into red clay mud, heavy traffic ruined the island's single mile-long road, making it so muddy that a bulldozer sank. Inadequately marked supplies, dumped on the beach by troops wading ashore, piled up and became intermixed. So many trucks became mired in the mud that Hester had to stop their shipment to the beachhead, and movement of supplies off the beach became slow and laborious.

The Rendova landing surprised the Japanese commanders on Munda and Rabaul, who had no counterattack force ready. Artillery fire from Japanese batteries on Munda, therefore, was the only Japanese response until late morning, when air attacks began. Three air attacks on 30 June damaged only Admiral Turner's flagship, the transport *McCawley* (which was accidentally torpedoed and sunk by American PT boats later that evening). A Japanese air strike against Rendova two days later killed 30 men, wounded more than 200, and exploded fuel dumps. An attempted encore performance on 4 July, however, provided the Americans with more gratifying fireworks. Sixteen Japanese bombers appeared unescorted. A mere eighty-eight rounds of antiaircraft fire brought down twelve, and waiting fighters shot down the rest.

Reinforcements, the majority splashing ashore on Rendova, continued to disembark at all four beachheads until 5 July, when virtually the entire New Georgia Occupation Force was assembled. The first phase of TOENAILS had succeeded.

Admiral Turner restructured the Western Force for the main invasion of New Georgia, renaming the ground forces the Munda-Bairoko Occupation Force (MBOF). Commanded by Hester, the force was subdivided into five parts, including two landing groups. The second was the Northern Landing Group, commanded by Col. Harry B. Liversedge, USMC, and consisting of one battalion each from the 145th and 148th Infantry, 37th Division, and the 1st Raider Battalion, 1st Marine Raider Regiment. Liversedge's mission was to invade New

Georgia's northwest shore at Rice Anchorage and defeat the Japanese in the area directly north of Munda between Enogai Inlet and Bairoko Harbor, called Dragons Peninsula. This would interdict the Japanese supply line to Munda and prevent Japanese troops on nearby Kolombangara from reinforcing Munda. The larger Southern Landing Group, under the command of assistant division commander Brig. Gen. Leonard F. Wing, consisted of the 43d Division (less one infantry battalion), the 1 36th Field Artillery Battalion, and elements of the 9th Marine Defense Battalion and the South Pacific Scouts. Wing's force would land some five air-miles east of Munda at Zanana beach, a site undefended by the Japanese, and attack westward.

To the north, Colonel Liversedge's forces landed after midnight on 5 July at Rice Anchorage, several miles northeast up the coast from the Bairoko-Enogai area. Shallow water and a narrow landing beach hindered the landing more than the inaccurate Japanese shelling. Liversedge planned for two companies from the 3d Battalion, 145th Infantry, to defend the landing site, while the rest of the battalion, the 1st Marine Raider Battalion, and the 3d Battalion, 148th Infantry, moved to Dragons Peninsula. There the 3d Battalion, 148th, would veer southwest and take up a blocking position along the Munda-Bairoko trail. Remaining forces would clear the peninsula and take Bairoko. Because speed was so important, Liversedge's force was lightly armed and provisioned, carrying only three days' worth of rations.

Moving out early on 5 July, the men soon learned that, contrary to earlier intelligence reports, following the rough trails, hacked out of the jungle by coastwatchers and native New Georgians, to Dragons Peninsula would be exceedingly tough. Constant rain plagued the first weeks of the campaign, making more dismal the task of struggling up and down jungle hills seemingly composed in equal parts of sharp coral and thick clinging vines. The rain also added unforeseen tasks; one stream soon became a nine-foot-deep river to ford. The men in the 148th's weapons company, laboring under the weight of their heavy machine guns and 81-mm. mortars, were soon far to the rear.

On 7 July the marines and the two companies of the 145th Infantry reached Enogai Inlet and, after heavy skirmishing, seized the village of Triri. There they spent the night and Liversedge established his command post. The next day, while the marines made an abortive effort to march to Enogai, several companies became involved in an extended firelight south of Triri along the trail to Bairoko, which left 120 Japanese dead. The next morning marines used an unguarded trail to approach Enogai. Although their afternoon assault was unsuccessful,

it provided enough information about the Japanese defenses to ensure a successful attack the following day.

Despite the capture of Enogai, Liversedge's tactical situation remained difficult. Already five days behind schedule and with many wounded, he was so short of supplies that he was receiving resupply by air. The marine battalion was at one-half of its effective strength. Liversedge needed to capture Bairoko to cut the Japanese line of communications to Munda.

Meanwhile the men of the 3d Battalion, 148th Infantry, had forced their way around the southern side of a series of hills, until they reached the Bairoko-Munda trail. On 8 July they established a camouflaged blocking position along the trail about eight miles north of Munda. There they remained for nine days. Although the battalion sustained eleven men killed and twenty-nine wounded in skirmishes, the Japanese did not make a determined attempt to eliminate the trail block. Willing to let an American battalion isolate itself deep in the jungle, they simply bypassed it by using more westerly trails to reinforce Munda. The unit's severest trial was its food shortage, and here, too, supplies had to be airdropped. Finally on 17 July Liversedge ordered the battalion to abandon the trail block and move north to assist with the attack on Bairoko.

Three days later, Colonel Liversedge's force, reinforced by the 4th Marine Raider Battalion, launched a prepared attack against Bairoko's fortified positions. Lacking artillery support and tactical intelligence, outgunned by Japanese 90-mm. mortars firing from across Bairoko Harbor, and unable to obtain timely close air support, the attack failed. Marine casualties alone totaled 46 killed and 161 wounded. With the forces available to him, Liversedge was unable to take Bairoko and retired to Enogai. Japanese supply lines would remain operating during the campaign against Munda.

The landing at Zanana began on 2 July, and both the 172d and 169th Infantry Regiments were fully ashore by 6 July. The 43d Division was ready to advance.

The plan for taking Munda was not complicated. General Hester envisioned the 169th and 172d marching from Zanana to the Barike River, a distance of no more than three miles. Using the river as a line of departure, his regiments would drive west (the 169th inland, the 172d along the coast), capture the high ground, and then take the airfield. The only passage through the jungle was a narrow footpath just north of Zanana that led west. Called Munda Trail, it wound through the middle of the high ground—a series of convoluted ridges that ran inland and northwest for 3,000 yards and concealed the main Japanese

defenses. On paper, the plan seemed simple. For the green troops, however, who would be using inadequate maps to find their way through a labyrinth of coral jottings, draws, and swamps, all so densely overgrown with exotic jungle flora that visibility was measured in yards and enemy positions were invisible, the reality proved quite different.

The 172d reached the line of departure with only minor trouble, but the 169th received a brutal introduction to jungle warfare. On 6 July the men spent an exhausting day following native guides along the narrow, vine-choked Munda Trail. That night the worn-out 3d Battalion failed to establish proper defenses and fell prey to Japanese harassment. The tired and nervous troops spent a sleepless night firing at imagined Japanese raiding parties. The next morning the battalion continued along Munda Trail, running into a well-camouflaged trail block established by a Japanese infantry platoon. Dug-in machine guns on high ground with supporting riflemen stopped the advance. Frontal assaults against hidden enemy positions resulted only in the loss of platoon leaders and a company commander. Finally, after the mortar platoon of the 3d Battalion, 169th, cut down trees to create fields of fire, observers crept to within thirty yards of the Japanese to direct 81-mm. mortar fire on enemy positions on what was now called Bloody Hill. The battalion spent another sleepless night as the target of Japanese harassment.

The 3d Battalion stormed the Japanese position the next day and eradicated it before advancing west with the remainder of the regiment and joining the 172d on the line of departure along the Barike River. That night the 3d Battalion, along with the rest of the regiment, endured yet another evening of Japanese torment. It was too much. Overwhelming fatigue and stress combined with imagination and anxiety to produce something resembling widespread panic. The official Army history recounts that

> when the Japanese made their presence known to the three battalions, or when the Americans thought there were Japanese within their bivouacs, there was a great deal of confusion, shooting, and stabbing. Some men knifed each other. Men threw grenades blindly in the dark. Some of the grenades hit trees, bounced back, and exploded among the Americans. Some soldiers fired round after round to little avail. In the morning no trace remained of the Japanese dead or wounded. But there were American casualties; some had been stabbed to death, some wounded by knives. Many suffered grenade wounds, and 50 percent of these were caused by fragments from American grenades.

Men of the 148th Infantry carry hot food forward. (DA photograph)

Ominously, there now appeared the first large number of shaken, hollow-eyed men suffering from a strange malady, later diagnosed as "combat neuroses." Before the end of July, the 169th would suffer seven hundred such cases of battle fatigue.

After an hour-long bombardment of suspected Japanese positions on 9 July, the offensive jumped off. Progress was slow. The difficult terrain, the absence of tactical intelligence regarding Japanese defenses, and the physical depletion of the troops all hindered the advance. Weighted down with equipment and ammunition, the men forded the rain-swollen river and its twisted tributaries. Between streams, they slogged through mangrove swamps, struggling to stay upright while trying to find their way without accurate maps. Soldiers in the lead platoons had to cut their way through the tangles of rattan vines that knotted the jungle. Narrow trails forced units to advance in single-file columns, churning the trails into mud and allowing a few hidden Japanese to slow the advance. By the late afternoon, the 172d had gained approximately 1,100 yards. Farther inland, the 169th made little progress, still shaken from the previous night. Advancing along Munda Trail the next day, the 169th struck the first line of the Japanese main defenses.

Despite the slow advance, both regiments soon had overextended

supply lines. The primeval jungles of New Georgia, and the Solomons in general, were thankless places to build roads. The 118th Engineer Battalion spared no effort to construct a road—more accurately, a jeep trail—from Zanana to the front, but even its indefatigable exertions could not speed road building in a jungle crisscrossed with streams. As the road's terminus gradually fell farther and farther behind the advancing troops, ammunition, food, water, and other supplies had to be hand-carried to the front and casualties carried to the rear. Half of the combat troops soon were performing such duties, and Allied cargo planes were pressed into service to parachute supplies to the troops.

General Hester recognized that logistical shortcomings were restraining his advance and decided to shorten his supply line. He ordered the 172d to push through the mangrove swamp behind Laiana, two miles east of Munda and establish a new beachhead. Concurrently, the 169th was involved in a savage fight to occupy the high ground north of Munda. The combat location was eerily reminiscent of World War I. More than once, infantrymen, following their artillery barrage, clambered over shattered trees and shell craters to attack Japanese machine gunners in pillboxes with only rifles and bayonets. Also evoking echoes of the Western Front were high casualties and progress that was measured in yards. After five days of attacks, the 169th's 3d Battalion had penetrated 500 yards into the Japanese defenses. The battalion paid for its achievement with 101 casualties in the first twenty-four hours after the penetration. There on Reincke Ridge, in the high ground south of Munda Trail, the regiment regrouped and prepared to assault the main defensive line on imposing Horseshoe Hill.

The offensive was sputtering, and Hester's superiors were upset with the lack of progress on New Georgia. General Harmon soon began pressing Admiral Halsey, over Admiral Turner's objections, to send part, if not all, of the XIV Corps headquarters to New Georgia. Recognizing that the workload of the 43d Division staff had to be reduced—it was conducting operations on New Georgia as well as preparing for the upcoming attack on Kolombangara—Harmon flew to Halsey's headquarters on New Caledonia to press the issue. Halsey agreed.

General Griswold arrived on Rendova with an advance section of his headquarters on 11 July and quickly assessed the situation. "Things are going badly," he radioed Harmon on the morning of 13 July. The 43d Division looked "about to fold up." He recommended that the remainder of the 37th Division, then in reserve, and the 25th Division on Guadalcanal be committed immediately to combat.

Harmon, whom Halsey recently had placed in charge of New Georgia ground operations, instructed Griswold to be prepared to assume command and promised reinforcements.

Griswold took command at midnight on 15–16 July. Earlier that day there had been another command change. Admiral Turner, who in Harmon's opinion had been "inclined more and more to take active control of land operations," left to assume a new command in the Central Pacific theater. His replacement was Halsey's deputy, Admiral Wilkinson, who quickly established better rapport with the Army commanders.

Ground operations were well behind schedule and the troops worn. Griswold decided not to renew the offensive until the supply situation improved and his troops were reorganized and reinforced. To improve logistics, he designated a specific offshore island to serve as a supply dump for each division. Griswold also accelerated expansion of the Laiana beachhead, as well as the engineers' furious road-building effort, which allowed supplies to be stockpiled nearer the front line.

Reinforcements were badly needed. By 17 July the 43d Division's casualties were 90 dead and 636 wounded. More than a thousand men had contracted diseases. Diarrhea was a common affliction, while dysentery cases and malaria relapses were prevalent. One-quarter of the men were suffering from varying degrees of skin fungus. Additionally, between fifty and one hundred men left the line each day as neuroses cases. In the opinion of the XIV Corps surgeon, who flew in on 14 July, there was no doubt that the major reason for these "nonbattle casualties" was combat fatigue—extreme exhaustion exacerbated by atrocious living conditions. Little could be done until rest camps could be built on the offshore islands; the high incidence of casualties due to disease and combat fatigue would continue throughout the campaign.

Griswold's corps offensive began on 25 July with five regiments attacking abreast. The 43d Division with two regiments in line (103d on the coast, 172d—later the 169th—on its right) moved along the coast. Farther inland, the 37th Division (north to south: 148th, 161st, and 145th Regiments) made the main attack, combining a frontal assault with a flanking movement designed to envelop the Japanese northern flank, take Bibilo Hill, and swoop down on Munda.

Achieving Munda would not be easy. In defense were approximately three Japanese infantry battalions in fortified positions. Also off the American right flank were survivors of a unit that had attacked the 169th Infantry during the night of 17–18 July. Driven off with heavy losses, they now lurked in the jungle awaiting an opportunity.

A typical Japanese pillbox. (DA photograph)

Most foreboding was information from the 172d Infantry, which, with the support of Marine tanks, had cleared the Laiana beachhead of Japanese during the logistic buildup. These operations revealed the nature of the main Japanese defenses: machine gunners and riflemen ensconced in sturdy pillboxes with interlocking fields of fire. The pillboxes were tough obstacles. Constructed with three or four layers of coconut logs and several feet of coral, they were largely subterranean. The few feet exposed above ground contained machine-gun and rifle firing slits, so well camouflaged that American soldiers often could not determine their location.

When the offensive resumed, therefore, so did the demanding, draining, and deadly task of assaulting hidden Japanese positions one by one—a style of warfare that chewed up rifle companies and became all too familiar to American ground troops in the Pacific. Because the enemy was virtually invisible in his pillboxes and rarely fired indiscriminately, reconnaissance squads and platoons frequently could not determine the extent of Japanese defenses; details of Japanese positions often remained unknown until the attack. Once infantrymen located an enemy position, they called in artillery fire

Flamethrowers in action at Munda. (DA photograph)

which made the position visible amidst the jungle growth, if not destroying it outright. Next 81-mm. mortars, using heavy shells with delay fuzes, would fire on visible positions. Finally, a platoon or company assaulted, supported by whatever heavy weapons were available. When full reconnaissance was not possible, troops had to attack the terrain—seize and occupy pieces of ground while calling in mortar fire on likely pillbox sites. A tactic of necessity, attacking the terrain could be risky against more than light opposition. The operations officer of the 145th Infantry noted, "Enemy strong points encountered in this fashion often times resulted in hasty withdrawals which were costly both in men and weapons."

Further, although they lacked antitank guns, the Japanese soon adopted measures to knock out tanks lacking infantry support. American troops quickly learned the importance of close infantry-armor coordination for successfully assaulting Japanese positions. Likewise, although flamethrowers proved useful in attacking pillboxes, the operator had to expose his head and torso and was likely to be shot unless supporting infantry provided suppressive fire. Just as in tank-

infantry operations, troops learned that mutual cooperation and support between riflemen and flamethrower operators were vital to success. Once integrated with the infantry, both tanks and flamethrowers were important infantry-support weapons on New Georgia, especially because the irregular shape of the front line and the poor quality of available maps often made artillery support impractical.

Over the next several days, the regiments clawed their way forward through the Japanese defenses. The gritty, vicious fighting continued as small groups of men eliminated pillboxes and their supporting foxholes, but hard-won experience now began to pay dividends, and the pace of the American advance quickened. On 29 July Harmon replaced an exhausted Hester with Maj. Gen. John R. Hodge, the Americal Division commander. Hodge had been the assistant division commander of the 25th Division during the fighting on Guadalcanal and was experienced in jungle warfare; Harmon told Griswold that Hodge was the "best Div Comdr I have in area for this particular job." Concurrent with the change in American command, the Japanese withdrew to a final defensive line in front of the airfield. They had suffered heavy casualties and, unbeknownst to the Americans, their main defenses had been shattered.

The Japanese withdrawal facilitated the XIV Corps advance, but did not make it any less dangerous. On 29 July the 172d was attacking the last high ground protecting Munda field, trying to break through the Japanese defensive line, when 1st Lt. Robert S. Scott almost singlehandedly blunted a Japanese counterattack. Although he was wounded in the head and had his rifle shot from his hand, Scott refused to retreat and inspired his company to seize the hill. Two days later, a medic in the 145th Infantry, Pfc. Frank J. Petrarca, who had repeatedly demonstrated his commitment to treating wounded soldiers without regard for his own safety, was killed when he went to the aid of a mortar victim lying in an area swept by enemy fire. Both were awarded the Medal of Honor.

To the north, at the far right of the American line, the 148th Infantry had not encountered prepared defenses. Moving far ahead of the regiment to its left, the 148th was attacked by the Japanese lurking off the American right flank. The Japanese were too few to destroy the Americans outright, but, divided into small groups, they managed to encircle and harass the American rear areas for several days. Slowed by the need to transport a growing number of wounded, the 148th stolidly worked back to the American line, fighting through innumerable ambushes and raids. It was in the midst of this withdrawal that a Japanese machine gun on higher ground fired on Pvt. Rodger W.

Young's platoon. Although wounded by the first bursts, Young attacked on his own initiative until he was killed, firing and throwing hand grenades and allowing his platoon to escape. Private Young was awarded the Medal of Honor.

The end came more quickly than any had foreseen. American troops reached the airfield's perimeter and encircled it on 3 August. On 4 August Bibilo Hill fell. The next day the Americans overran Munda, with 43d Division infantrymen killing or driving the remaining Japanese from their bunkers, tunnels, and pillboxes. From Bibilo Hill, General Wing informed General Hodge, "Munda is yours at 1410 today." Operational within two weeks, Munda's 6,000-foot runway soon made it the most-used airfield in the Solomons.

The capture of Munda airfield on 5 August was only one phase of the New Georgia campaign. There were still Japanese on New Georgia, as well as on the surrounding islands of Arundel, Baanga, Gizo, Kolombangara, and Vella Lavella. These islands had to be taken or neutralized before the Americans could continue up the Solomons chain. General Griswold had tried to prevent Japanese from escaping during the Munda operation by encircling the airfield to prevent withdrawals and trap Japanese troops, but this tactic proved only partially successful. After the airstrip was captured, Griswold sent the 27th and 161st Infantry Regiments of Maj. Gen. J. Lawton Collins' 25th Division in pursuit of the retreating Japanese north to Bairoko Harbor and northwest along the coast. Most Japanese moved to Arundel, Kolombangara, and Baanga, leaving behind only a small detachment to contest the American advance. U.S. troops spent two weeks eliminating these forces and finally occupied Bairoko on 25 August.

On 11 August the 169th Infantry moved onto Baanga, from where a pair of Japanese 120-mm. guns had been shelling Munda Point. When the Japanese resisted strongly, the 172d also was ordered onto the small island and into the fight. The two regiments spent ten days driving the Japanese from the southern part of Baanga, losing 52 killed, 110 wounded, and 486 nonbattle casualties. The remaining Japanese troops withdrew to Arundel.

Admiral Halsey also wanted Arundel taken because of its important position. But there, too, because of recent undetected reinforcements and because of the difficulty of its terrain—perhaps the worst in New Georgia—Japanese resistance proved stronger than expected. The 172d Infantry landed on 27 August, but additional troops were needed, and soon joining the 172d were the 169th Infantry, two battalions of the 27th Infantry, a 4.2-inch mortar company, and Marine

tankers. While combat on Arundel was viewed primarily as "mopping up small groups of Japanese," one 43d Division battalion commander later described the fighting on Arundel as "the most bitter combat of the New Georgia campaign." The fighting continued through the first three weeks of September, when, once again, remaining Japanese troops withdrew at night, this time to Kolombangara.

There were about 12,000 Japanese troops on Kolombangara, the next stronghold in the Solomons chain and site of another Japanese airfield. The difficulty, effort, and cost involved in ejecting the Japanese from fortified jungle defenses, as on Munda, however, were not lost on Admiral Halsey. Wary of Japanese strength on Kolombangara, he had no desire for "another slugging match." There was an option. In mid-July as the advance toward Munda floundered and the Japanese reinforced Kolombangara, Halsey's staff suggested a deviation from the original TOENAILS plan: seize, instead of Kolombangara, Vella Lavella, only fifteen miles northwest of Kolombangara and weakly held by the Japanese. Halsey endorsed the idea, recognizing that it exploited both American mobility and local air and sea superiority. He would gain his objective, a better airfield nearer to Bougainville, while avoiding a costly battle. Japanese forces on Kolombangara would be left to "die on the vine."

On 15 August the 35th Regimental Combat Team, 25th Division, rushed ashore on Vella Lavella as aircraft from Munda and Segi airfields provided support. Under Admiral Wilkinson's command, the amphibious assault was well organized and successful. American troops advanced steadily despite logistical hardships imposed by the environment. In mid-September Maj. Gen. H. E. Barrawclough, commander of the 3d New Zealand Division, took command of Vella Lavella, and his troops assumed the pursuit. The Japanese retreated to the northwest from where many were evacuated.

To the south, the bypassed Japanese troops on Kolombangara did not wither on the vine. During three nights between 28 September and 3 October, more than 9,000 troops escaped to southern Bougainville in a well-organized evacuation effort. The evacuation of Kolombangara largely ended the campaign for New Georgia and the surrounding islands, a joint campaign that had proved much more involved and costly in its ground operations than had been anticipated. American casualties were 1,094 dead and 3,873 wounded, excluding the even greater number of disease, combat fatigue, and neuropsychiatric casualties.

As the fighting raged in the central Solomons, Admiral Halsey and his staff were at SPA headquarters in Noumea busily revising their plan

to take Bougainville. Halsey had learned that, because of the Navy's Central Pacific offensive together with Washington's strategic decision to bypass Rabaul, he would not receive reinforcements for subsequent CARTWHEEL operations. In addition, extensive Japanese defenses in southern Bougainville augured that any ground operation there would be lengthy and costly. Halsey's solution was to neutralize the area without landing on Bougainville, but because MacArthur wanted Halsey's airplanes available to attack Rabaul and support his own advance to Cape Gloucester (scheduled for December), he directed Halsey to seize airfield sites on Bougainville around 1 November 1943.

In early October the Japanese had approximately 37,500 troops on Bougainville and nearby islands. There were 25,000 soldiers in southern Bougainville and the Shortland Islands, 5,000 on the east coast, 5,000 on Bougainville's northern end and on Buka Island, and a small number around Empress Augusta Bay on the west coast. After deliberation, Halsey targeted Torokina in the Empress Augusta Bay area. Despite the heavy surf at Empress Augusta Bay and its proximity to Japanese airfields on southern Bougainville (65 miles) and Rabaul (215 miles), Halsey surmised that the imposing mountain range surrounding the bay's coastal plain would delay the Japanese counterattack three to four months.

As invasion preparations proceeded, Lt. Gen. George C. Kenney's Fifth Air Force flying from New Guinea conducted major air attacks against Rabaul during October and November, while the Air Command, Solomons, kept the five Japanese fields on Bougainville under such pressure that they were useless by invasion day. Meanwhile, on 27 October, New Zealand and American troops captured the Treasury Islands, south of Bougainville. That same day the 2d Marine Parachute Battalion landed on Choiseul, a large island in the Solomons near Bougainville. As part of a deception plan to mislead the Japanese as to where the main invasion would occur, the marines harassed the Japanese on the northern half of the island for twelve days before withdrawing. Perceiving threats everywhere except in the west, the Japanese concentrated their defenses accordingly, largely ignoring the western shore.

The Empress Augusta Bay invasion on 1 November, under the command of Admiral Wilkinson, showcased the growth of American skill in conducting and supporting amphibious assaults. Despite a heavy surf that caused one transport to run aground and eighty-six landing craft to swamp and that rendered some beaches too dangerous to use, most supply ships were emptied within eight hours and 14,000 marines landed before nightfall. By the end of D-day, the marines had

established a shallow, 4,000-yard beachhead.

For the next two months, as the marines expanded their beachhead, the Japanese continued to believe that the main assault on Bougainville would come elsewhere. By March 1944 the Japanese had realized their error and assembled a counterattack force. This force, some 15,000 to 19,000 strong, moved across the mountains to attack what Japanese intelligence had reported to be 30,000 Americans and their airfields within the beachhead. The movement of Japanese troops and supplies from all over Bougainville toward Empress Augusta Bay had been detected, however, and attack plans learned from decrypted *Japanese Army* messages and captured documents. There would be no surprise.

By this time, however, General Griswold's XIV Corps manned the perimeter. With a strength of approximately 62,000 men, including the Americal (General Hodge) and 37th Divisions (Maj. Gen. Robert S. Beightler), XIV Corps was a powerful force. While Griswold did not have as many troops as he might have wished to defend his 23,000-yard perimeter, he refused to abandon tactically important pieces of high ground to shorten the line. Remembering the lessons learned at Munda, General Griswold was content to let the Japanese come to him.

American manpower, combined with extensive defensive preparations and strong fire support, made the Japanese task almost hopeless. Unlike at New Georgia, now the Japanese would be assaulting prepared defenses. Attacking units would confront booby traps, illumination devices, and minefields, then concertina wire shielding rifle pits and pillboxes. In the latter were rifle squads with more than the usual number of automatic rifles and probably extra machine guns. Fields of fire fifty or more yards deep had been cleared to prevent the enemy from sneaking within hand-grenade range. Searchlights as well as oil drums—each containing a bangalore torpedo surrounded with scrap metal—provided additional obstacles for an attacker. Perhaps most important, the line was manned by six veteran U.S. Army infantry regiments.

There was no shortage of firepower. The Japanese would also be on the receiving end of available American artillery, which consisted of 8 howitzer battalions (6 105-mm. and 2 155-mm.), 2 155-mm. gun batteries, and 8 90-mm. gun batteries, along with 6 cannon companies with 75-mm. pack howitzers that arrived in early March. Also available was the "Bougainville Navy," which included all destroyers assigned for fire support under Griswold's command, as well as plentiful air support.

The Japanese plan called for two simultaneous preliminary attacks followed three days later by a major thrust. The attacks along the horseshoe-shaped perimeter were aimed at the middle (Hill 700), and at both points where the horseshoe's legs began to curve (low-lying creeks in the west, Hill 260 on the east side). The Japanese enjoyed possession of high ground beyond the perimeter, which permitted them to see American positions, but their wildly optimistic plans (one document specified the location on which General Griswold would surrender to the Japanese) negated any advantage. Overall, the Japanese plan called for dispersed and unsupported attacks and was governed by an unrealistic timetable and operational plan.

Machine gun crew awaits the Japanese attack on Bougainville. (DA photograph)

Hill 700, the first Japanese target, was a commanding position with 65- to 75-degree slopes situated at the eastern end of the 145th Infantry's sector. The sector stretched 3,500 yards west past the southern shore of a lake and ended in low ground near the intersection of a major inland trail with the American perimeter. There, on its left, the 145th tied in with the 129th Infantry.

Near midnight during the night of 8–9 March, two Japanese companies attacked a platoon position on the northern slope of Hill 700. They were repulsed before they could reach the saddle between the hill's eastern and western high points. A few hours later an entire Japanese infantry regiment attacked the same position in columns of battalions. Artillery fire caught the third battalion in the open and decimated it, but the attackers seized the saddle, establishing mortar and machine-gun positions. From there the next day they were able to interdict the sector's major supply road, forcing the Americans to hand-carry supplies and hand-evacuate casualties.

For the next two days the 145th reduced the penetration, repelling a major exploitation attempt. On 11 March the 2d

Battalion, 148th, attacked and almost regained the top of Hill 700. Intense fighting raged all around the American perimeter on 12 March, as Companies E and F, 148th Infantry, resolutely and methodically laid waste to the Japanese positions, with sergeants leading after virtually all of the officers fell. Seventy-eight members of the 37th Division were killed fighting around and on Hill 700. Over three hundred Japanese lay dead around the top of the hill.

While the first Japanese attack was breaking on the defenses of the 37th Division, the second was threatening to overwhelm a 182d Infantry position on Hill 260 in the Americal Division's sector. Hill 260 was a geographically isolated outpost, garrisoned with eighty men and located 800 yards beyond the defensive perimeter. Just north of the hill a major jungle trail ran east-west, while to its rear a small river ran north-south. The hill ran northwest-southeast, and between two high points (called North Knob and South Knob) stretched a crest just wide enough for a trail. Hill 260 truly was, as the 182d Infantry commander said, "a sore thumb stuck out into the poison ivy."

During the night of 9–10 March, small numbers of enemy infiltrated between Hill 260 and the main line, while a larger force massed nearby. Shortly after 0600 a Japanese battalion stormed South Knob, capturing most positions and driving all but six of the garrison to North Knob. Those six, mortar and artillery observers, fortified themselves within two pillboxes and battled so fiercely that they held their position.

General Griswold ordered the hill held, and two companies promptly were dispatched from the perimeter. One company reinforced North Knob, and then pushed a platoon southward along the ridge while the second worked its way up from the southwest. Several flamethrower-supported assaults achieved partial success, but the Japanese strength on South Knob thwarted recapture.

Repeated American attacks over the next four days could not retake South Knob. Preceded by lavish artillery fire, and using flamethrowers, each attempt achieved some measure of success (one attack liberated the besieged artillery observers), but casualties from concealed Japanese machine guns, supply shortages, and the lack of additional troops all prevented the troops from consolidating a strong position. One company in the 182d was reduced from 150 to 25 men within a single day.

After another attempt failed on 14 March, the Americans changed tactics. Casualties already numbered 98 killed, 24 missing, and 581 wounded (including fatigue cases). Patrols had not detected any other Japanese troops in the area, and those on South Knob were

too few to attack elsewhere, so recapturing South Knob did not merit additional casualties. For the next several days, therefore, raids and artillery fire—including l0,000 rounds of 105-mm. fire—harassed South Knob. The Japanese survivors left behind 560 dead and retreated into the jungle, maneuvering to the north and west in a futile attempt to reinforce the third Japanese attack—the thrust against the 129th Infantry's position west of Hill 700 amidst the low-land creeks.

Four days before the Japanese abandoned South Knob, on the night of 11 March the major Japanese assault struck the 129th Infantry, 37th Division. Holding a frontage of 3,900 yards but lacking any major obstructions to fields of fire, the regiment's defenses were the most formidable of any sector. Although there had been little action in the sector previously, the third attack did not take the 129th Infantry unawares. General Beightler warned his troops late on 11 March to be ready, for captured documents suggested an impending attack. The assault was fierce, with the Japanese attempting to cut their way through the wire into the American positions. Daylight revealed that they had achieved minor success only in Company G's area. Concentrated fire held in check two small penetrations, and a counter-attack eliminated one. Another attack the following night netted the Japanese but one pillbox. Combined U.S. infantry-tank assaults during the day restored the line.

There was little action on the 14th, but as the 2d Battalion restored its defenses, patrols reported many Japanese beyond the perimeter. At 0400 the next morning, three Japanese battalions attacked, penetrating one hundred yards. After a counterattack partially restored the line, two consecutive American tank-infantry attacks, liberally supported with artillery and mortar fire, killed 190 of the enemy and drove off the remainder.

The Japanese regrouped in the jungle for several days, gathering the remnants of the three attacking forces for a last attempt against the 129th's position. By 23 March they were ready, but once again captured Japanese documents and decrypted communications allowed General Beightler to warn his troops of the attack.

Firing their remaining artillery, the Japanese attacked through the ravines and gullies. Although the 37th's artillery exacted a frightful toll, the Japanese again managed a minor penetration under cover of darkness. As before, the 129th mounted tank-infantry counterattacks while seven battalions of field artillery and twenty-four 4.2-inch mortars supported the effort, pounding Japanese troops in front of the American line. By midafternoon, it was over. The Japanese withdrew,

leaving behind their wounded and heavy equipment. They had suffered terribly, with over 5,000 men killed. In comparison, the veterans of XIV Corps, who had used their superior defenses and fought determinedly and shrewdly, lost 263 comrades killed.

The next few weeks brought sporadic fighting as XIV Corps pursued the beaten Japanese. During these operations the 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, became the first black American infantry unit to engage in combat during the war. The 25th Regimental Combat Team of the 93d Division also joined in the final operations. For several months after major combat operations had ended, American troops patrolled and hunted the remnants of Japanese units through Bougainville's vast jungles. In November 1944 command of all island operations passed from General Griswold to Lt. Gen. Sir Stanley Savige of the Australian Army, and by mid-December Australian forces had relieved all American units in line. Although for the U.S. Army the Northern Solomons Campaign was declared officially concluded only in November 1944 (the Australians would conduct major campaigns in 1945), for practical purposes the end had come with the destruction of the Japanese counterattack in March. Long before November, the Allies were looking ahead to the Philippines.

Analysis

The Northern Solomons is one of the more unheralded of the U.S. Army campaigns of World War II, largely overshadowed by its predecessor, Guadalcanal, and by its more publicized successor, Leyte. Furthermore, with hindsight the campaign for the northern Solomon Islands might be described simply as bringing to bear preponderant American strength on isolated Japanese positions. Such a summary does describe accurately what American strategy skillfully achieved through sustained joint operations: the isolation and subsequent defeat in detail of Japanese forces. Nevertheless, such brevity fails to convey either the complexity or the totality of the American effort in the Solomons. Throughout the campaign, and often under barely tolerable conditions, American soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines of all ranks exhibited the skill, determination, and endurance that ensured victory. American forces had advantages in the Northern Solomons Campaign, which they exploited for the greatest benefit.

There were several reasons for the American difficulties during the campaign's early stages. First, the drive through the Solomons was not a top Allied priority, so Halsey's forces competed with other Allied theaters for resources. Competition prodded commanders to undertake

operations as soon as was possible to show that they deserved more resources. More significantly, American planners underestimated the task they faced in conquering New Georgia, miscalculating both the strength of Japanese defenses and the severe hardships that jungle fighting would impose on American troops. This grave failure to identify, and prepare for, the two most important external influences on the American ground campaign can hardly be overemphasized in explaining the ground offensive's subsequent breakdown. Considering the earlier savage and lengthy fighting on Guadalcanal and at Buna, this seems an incomprehensible lapse. The eventual commitment of XIV Corps, with its additional combat power and administrative and logistical capabilities, underscored recognition that the original task assigned to the 43d Division simply had been too great for its resources to accomplish.

Also contributing to the offense's woes were the overburdening of General Hester's staff, the virtual absence of useful intelligence, and, not least, the inexperience of some units like the 43d Division. Even after these problems were surmounted, the Navy's inability to stop nighttime Japanese troop movements meant that some of the fruits of the New Georgia campaign were lost. In the Solomons, Japanese soldiers who escaped generally fought again another day.

But with hard-won experience came increased efficiency and effectiveness for American units, staffs, and commanders. Helping matters was the skill of important commanders. General Griswold inherited command at a critical moment and helped rescue a disintegrating tactical situation on New Georgia. Simultaneously, the replacement of Admiral Turner by Admiral Wilkinson brought to the fore an extremely talented amphibious commander, as evidenced by the Vella Lavella and Bougainville landings, who also could excel in a joint environment. Likewise, the decision to bypass Kolombangara was evidence of a mature theater headquarters staff at work, while the ever-increasing efficiency with which amphibious and ground operations were carried out illustrated the same high quality of subordinate staffs. Finally, the staunch and deadly repulse of the Japanese counterattack on Bougainville showed an experienced army corps functioning efficiently at all levels.

At the "sharp end," troops learned to counter enemy defenses as well as reduce the jungle environment's physical and emotional toll by swiftly applying lessons learned in combat. Among those strength-sapping hardships that all soldiers endured were utter physical and mental exhaustion, malnourishment, and poor sanitation, along with a host of debilitating diseases—dysentery, malaria, and jungle rot, to name

three—that flourished in the pernicious climate of the Solomons. Not for the last time, American soldiers learned that tough terrain and a determined foe make a potent combination. Words fail to convey the demands placed on the men who served at the front or to praise their efforts—men like Medal of Honor recipient S. Sgt. Jessie R. Drowley, 132d Infantry, who, in January 1944 during an action to expand the corps perimeter on Bougainville, rescued two wounded men under fire and then, despite being wounded horribly, led an assault on an enemy pillbox. Special mention, too, is deserved by the Army engineers and Navy Seabees. In extremely short periods of time, they constructed the numerous airfields that played a vital role in providing air cover for operations throughout the Southwest Pacific.

There are two requirements for defeating an enemy who occupies a strong defensive position: superior firepower and men willing to go forward and attack the enemy. On New Georgia in particular, the latter was often in greater supply than the former. Unlike the ground war in Europe, in which vast quantities of artillery often were employed at long range with devastating effect on visible targets, jungle fighting in the Solomons usually pitted small groups against a camouflaged enemy, occupying well-prepared defensive positions, at extremely close range. Irregular frontline positions often made artillery support equally dangerous to friend and foe. Only in a few cases, most notably the Bougainville counterattack, did the Americans have the advantage of fighting defensively in prepared positions, supported by artillery and without the need to navigate through the dense jungle foliage. Through experience, infantrymen learned to work closely with tanks and flamethrowers when attacking enemy positions. Allied superiority in men and materiel throughout the campaign never relieved the individual soldiers of the arduous and most dangerous job of moving forward and killing the enemy at close quarters.

Inexperienced troops, unfamiliar with the realities of Pacific island combat and the demands it placed on individual initiative and fortitude, did have difficulties. Such was the experience of the 43d Division on New Georgia, where the untested unit suffered one of the highest rates of neuroses casualties of any American division during the war. But the division's loss of 1,500 men in a three-month period reflected most of all the extreme hardship the troops endured. Poorly prepared, ill supplied, and surrounded by a fetid jungle that was almost as dangerous as the enemy, these men fought a grim war of attrition in the Pacific War's equivalent of World War I trenches. Acquiring their knowledge in combat, even men physically unscathed by combat paid dearly. Still, the 43d Division reconstituted after New Georgia and, as

a veteran unit, later fought well in the Philippines.

The risk that the United States incurred in the Pacific by dispersing its forces and conducting two strategic offensives brought substantial rewards. Especially at CARTWHEEL'S operational level, the Japanese could not counter the Allied agility. Japanese efforts to use their "interior lines" in the Pacific, by shifting forces to block alternately MacArthur's and Halsey's offensives, were insufficient. Never more than a hindrance to Allied campaign progress, tactically such Japanese efforts only provided the Allies with many opportunities to inflict considerable damage on their off-balance foe. Allied forces generally made the most of these opportunities. As attrition depleted Japanese air and naval forces and interdiction of supply lines isolated ground units, the Japanese lost the initiative. Confronted with increasingly strong and aggressive Allied forces in the South and Southwest Pacific, they would never regain it. Allied destruction of Japanese men, materiel, and mobility throughout the northern Solomons and New Guinea left the Japanese mired in a multifront war they could not win.

During the nineteen months of the Northern Solomons Campaign, the measure of the war with Japan changed dramatically. The invasion of New Georgia in June 1943 had signaled a new phase of the war, the beginning of a sustained American strategic offensive. Less than a year later, the failed Japanese counterattack on Bougainville and CARTWHEEL'S successful isolation of Rabaul heralded the beginning of the end—the eagerly awaited American return to the Philippines. The Northern Solomons Campaign constituted a major step toward that goal.

Further Readings

John Miller, jr., *CARTWHEEL: The Reduction of Rabaul,* from the official series U.S. Army in World War II (1959), on which this account has relied heavily, is the single best narrative of the ground operations in the central and northern Solomons. Ronald H. Spector, *Eagle Against the Sun* (1985), provides the best short account. Eric Hammel, *Munda Trail* (1989), tells the story of operations on New Georgia through the capture of Munda airfield. Harry A. Galley, *Bougainville, 1943–1945: The Forgotten Campaign* (1991), provides additional information on the battle for that island, including the post-November 1944 period when the island was under Australian command. Louis Morton, *Strategy and Command: The First Two Years,* U.S. Army in World War II (1962), places the Solomons in the context of evolving American strategy in the Pacific. For the Marine Corps, Maj. John N. Rentz's two official history volumes cover the events of this brochure: *Bougainville and the Northern Solomons* (1948) and *Marines in the Central Solomons* {1952). For naval operations see Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War 11,* vol. 6, *Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier: 22 July 1942–1 May 1944* (1950).

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Cover: *Soldiers of the 132d Infantry advance near the Torokina River, Bougainville..* (DA photograph)

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Bougainville

Bougainville is the largest island of the Solomon Islands chain, about 130 miles (210 km) long and 30 miles (50 km) wide, with an area of about 3800 square miles (9800 km^2). It is located near the northwestern end of the chain, 190 miles (300 km) east of Rabaul. It is a mountainous island, dominated by the Emperor and Crown Prince ranges, with two active volcanoes. The tallest of these (Mount Balbi) reaches to 10,171 feet (3100 meters) in height. The lower slopes and coastal plains are covered in dense jungle.

With an average annual precipitation of around 100 inches (250 cm) the island is wet year-round. However, during the winter months the southeast winds bring slightly drier conditions than during the northwest winds of the summer months. Malaria and other tropical diseases are prevalent.

In late 1941, there was a decent anchorage with a small landing for loading copra at Buin, near the southern end of the island, and a grass airstrip. A 1400' (430m) airstrip had been completed on Buka Island at Buka Passage, the narrow strip of water between Buka and Bougainville. There were several native trails, mostly along the coast, but only the trail around the northwest coast of the island was usable by motor vehicles. The population was about 54,000 natives speaking about 18 different languages, but only 100 Europeans and 100 Asians (mostly Chinese).

European women and children were ordered evacuated on 12 December 1941. However, many of the European residents refused evacuation, including a sizable fraction of the missionaries on the island, who felt bound to remain at their posts. Among those who remained were Jack Read and Paul Mason, who became part of the "Ferdinand" coast watcher organization and transmitted vital early warnings of *Japanese air raids against Henderson Field during the Guadalcanal campaign.*

Japanese troops landed in the area around Buka Passage on 30 March 1942, seizing the airfield as a useful satellite to the bases at Rabaul. The *Japanese* initially made little effort to hunt down the coast watchers, who operated almost unhindered during the most crucial part of the Guadalcanal campaign.

The natives on Bougainville were more cooperative with the *Japanese* than in other parts of the Solomons. *Japanese pressure* on the coast watchers eventually became unbearable, and they were evacuated from the northeast coast in March 1943 by submarines *Gato* and *Guardfish*. In addition to the coast watchers, nine women, 27 children, and three nuns were also evacuated.

The Buka field was rapidly improved by the *Japanese* following the Allied landings at Guadalcanal. By late 1943 the *Japanese had completed airfields* at Kahili, Ballale, Kara, and Bonis. Another was under construction at Kieta. The field at Kahili was plagued by rain and harassing air raids and was barely usable by late October 1943.

Battle of Bougainville

Planning and Preparations. During 1942, Allied operations in the Southwest and South Pacific were directed at encircling and, ultimately, capturing the *great Japanese base at Rabaul* (Operation CARTWHEEL). By early 1943 it was clear that this would require establishing a ring of air bases around Rabaul, and on 28 February 1943 the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved a plan (ELKTON) that included the invasion of Bougainville. This would neutralize the Japanese airbases on the island and allow the Allies to establish their own airbases to provide fighter cover for Allied bombing raids on Rabaul. ELKTON went forward even after the decision was made not to invade Rabaul itself, since it was still necessary to encircle and neutralize the *Japanese base*.

However, by mid-1943, Bougainville was defended by over 25,000 troops of *17th Army (Hyakutake),* plus 12,000 Navy personnel. This concentration of Japanese strength in heavily fortified positions caused the Allies to reevaluate their plans. Instead, they proposed landings in the Treasury Islands and at Choiseul Bay. Depending on the *Japanese reaction*, the Allies could then advance either from Choiseul Bay to Kieta, on the east coast of Bougainville, or from the Treasury Islands to Empress Augusta Bay, on the west coast of Bougainville. However, the rapid success of the Vella Lavella operation; pressure from MacArthur to land on Bougainville itself as soon as possible; and lack of available shipping led Halsey to adopt yet another plan. The landing on Choiseul would be reduced to a diversionary raid and the invasion of the Treasury Islands would be followed almost immediately by the landing of 3rd Marine Division at Cape Torokina at the northern end of Empress Augusta Bay.

This final plan, issued on 15 October 1943, was highly unorthodox. The terrain along most of the coast was coastal swamp, with virtually no road net. However, it was far from the *Japanese concentrations in the south*, and there were believed to be no more than a *thousand Japanese defenders* in the area. Allied planners estimated that it would take three months for the *Japanese in the south* to organize an effective counterattack. By then, the Allies planned to have established a secure perimeter and operational airfields. The other promising landing site was Kieta, but though it appeared to have a better anchorage, it was further from Rabaul, had better communications with the Japanese garrisons to the south, and would have required first securing Choiseul. A reconnaissance in late September by teams landed by submarine found that Kieta was a poorer harbor than originally thought and that the Japanese had all but given up on the airstrip. By contrast, it was found that Cape Torokina had no swamps immediately behind the beach, and soil tests at a coconut plantation east of Cape Torokina indicated that the soil was capable of supporting an airfield.

To alleviate the shipping shortage, a depot was established on Vella Lavella, within range of LCTs of Cape Torokina. An unprecedented level of reconnaissance was also carried out, including aerial reconnaissance, hydrographic surveys by submarine, and reconnaissance patrols landed from submarines. To help conceal the Allied intentions, reconnaissance patrols were landed by submarine on Santa Isabel, Choiseul, and the Shortlands, as well as Kieta, the Treasury Islands, and Cape Torokina. The assault force carried out rehearsals in mid-October at Efate and in the Guadalcanal area.

Landings. Beginning on 27 October 1943, elements of 8th New Zealand Brigade Group landed in three waves commanded by George H. Fort. Resistance was light and the main objective, the anchorage at Blanche Bay, was secured by nightfall. The Treasury Island landings were

followed the next day by the raid on Choiseul, which was carried out by 725 men of 2 Marine Parachute Battalion.

The landings on Bougainville were commanded by "Ping" Wilkinson at sea and by Roy Geiger once ashore. The landing force itself consisted of I Marine Amphibious Corps under Vandegrift. Resources were limited because Nimitz was about to open the Central Pacific offensive.

The approaches to the landing beaches were poorly charted, but the designated transport area was found to be free of shoals. The landings were extremely well organized and the first assault waves, from 3rd Marine Division (Turnage), hit the shore at 0726, just 41 minutes after the transports anchored. Almost eight thousand troops were ashore within a couple of hours. However, heavy surf took a toll of the landing craft, of which over thirty were wrecked during the landings.

Terrain was a greater obstacle than *Japanese resistance* on the northern beaches. The beach was essentially a large sand bar between the ocean and nearly impenetrable swamp, with only isolated islets of higher ground.

There were only about *270 Japanese from 2nd Company, 2nd Battalion, 23rd Regiment, 6th Division* in the landing area, but they were concentrated around Cape Torokina itself and gave the southern landings significant difficulty. There were about *25 Japanese pillboxes* in this area, and their single 75mm gun, concealed in a coconut log and sand bunker, managed to sink four landing craft and damage several others. The LCP containing the wave commander was one of those hit, and this threw the landing of 1/3rd Marine Regiment into serious confusion. Sergeant Robert A. Owens led an attack that neutralized the gun at cost him his own life; he was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor. The 1st Battalion commander, Major Leonard M. Mason, though wounded, was able to restore order before being evacuated.

3rd Marine Raider Battalion was assigned to land on Puruata Island, just off Cape Torokina, where there was a platoon of Japanese defenders. These resisted fiercely in spite of being heavily outnumbered, but by 1530 on 2 November the island had been cleared. Some 29 Japanese were killed at a cost of 5 Marines killed and 32 wounded.

Unloading was interrupted by a *Japanese air raid* at 0735, followed by a second raid at 1300. The worst consequence of the raids was that unloading of supplies was delayed by four hours.

Only 68 of the *Japanese* defenders escaped the initial Marine advance. Marine casualties were 78 killed and 104 wounded. The dead included the commander of 2nd Raider Battalion.

The cargo ships were lightly loaded, not more than 550 tons apiece, to ensure quick discharge of their supplies. By 1730 eight of the ships were fully unloaded, putting 14,000 men and 6200 tons of supplies ashore. All transports withdrew at 1800, but the four with vital cargos still aboard were detached to return and finish unloading.

On 4 November the Seabees of 71st Naval Construction Battalion began work on a 5150' by 200' (1570m by 60m) fighter airstrip near the coast just southeast of Cape Torokina. Elements of 53rd Naval Construction Battalion and Marine labor parties also provided assistance.

Expanding the Beachhead. Meanwhile, by 5 November, the landings had secured a beachhead 2000 yards inland at the cost of less than two hundred casualties. A second echelon of troops arrived that same day.

The initial *Japanese Army* response to the landings was sluggish and ineffective. The Army was convinced that the landings were diversionary, and the real assault would take place at Buka, and most reinforcements were sent there rather than against the Allied beachhead.

The Marines recovered documents indicating that *Imamura*, commanding *8 Area Army* at Rabaul, planned to land 3000 men in three echelons close to the Marine perimeter. These men would infiltrate the perimeter while two battalions of *23rd Regiment* assembled just east of the Piva River and attacked the eastern Marine perimeter. However, the destruction of the first landing echelon dissuaded *Imamura* from any further attempts at counter-landing close to the Marine perimeter.

Meanwhile, *23rd Regiment* made probing attacks on the Marine perimeter on 5 November, encountering a roadblock manned by elements of 2nd Raider Battalion on Mission Trail, the main trail from the Cape Torokina area to the east. *23rd Regiment* launched an attack the roadblock on 7 November but was repulsed by the Raiders supported by heavy mortar fire. A second attack by the Japanese occurred on 8 November, but the Raiders again held, then counterattacked in the early afternoon. By afternoon the next day, Japanese resistance had crumbled.

While the Marines were securing their perimeter, Seabees accompanied by an infantry patrol had identified good ground for airstrips near a coconut grove well north of the Marine perimeter. The Seabees cleared two 5000' (1520m) strips before returning to the perimeter. Turnage ordered 2/21st Marine Regiment to move out on 13 November and set up an outpost at a trail junction near the airfield site, where the battalion was to hold until the perimeter could be expanded. However, the battalion was ambushed by the *Japanese rearguard* just as it reached the coconut grove, and by nightfall the forward elements had taken heavy casualties and were forced to pull back. The next morning, the Marines called in air strikes and brought up a platoon of tanks to support their advance, and by late afternoon the Marines had secured the coconut grove.

With the coconut grove secured, the Marines rapidly expanded their perimeter, reaching Line DOG on 15 November. At this point there were 33,861 men and 23,137 tons of supplies in the perimeter, and the Seabees were working furiously to build a road network within the perimeter. On 16 November the first road was completed across the perimeter, and completion of the airfield could begin in earnest.

Piva Forks. The initial ground campaign came to an end on 25 November 1943, when the Marines pulverized *23rd Regiment (Iwasa)* at Piva Forks. The encounter began on 17 November, when a Marine patrol discovered and occupied an unoccupied roadblock on the Numa Numa Trail, which led north from the Piva area. The *Japanese* attempted to reoccupy to the roadblock on 18 November and were ambushed by the Marines, suffering heavy casualties, including an officer carrying documents of considerable intelligence value.

On 21 November, 3rd Raider Battalion spearheaded an advance along the East-West Trail from where it joined the Numa Numa Trail. The battalion crossed the crest of the trail to discover that they were looking down on the main *Japanese* positions east of the Piva River and astride the

East-West Trail. The position also cut the *Japanese supply line* to the west. The next day 2nd Raider Battalion relieved 3rd Raider Battalion on the trail crest, and the rest of 3rd Marine Division moved up to Line EASY while 37th Division took over much of the northern perimeter.

Meanwhile, on 20 November, 2/3rd Marine Regiment had spotted Cibik Ridge and, recognizing its importance as high ground, promptly ordered a platoon to occupy the ridge. When the *Japanese* attempted to move back into their positions, they were met by a hail of American fire. Over the next two days, the *Japanese* engaged in mortar duels with the Marines while attempting to storm the ridge, but their attacks were repulsed.

2/3rd Marine Regiment now made a reconnaissance-in-force to the east, only to discover that the *Japanese* had constructed a formidable defense line of about 20 pillboxes and that *23rd Regiment* was massing for a counterattack. On 21 November, the *Japanese* attempted to double envelop the positions of 1/3rd Marine Regiment but were repulsed by machine gun fire that inflicted heavy casualties.

The next two days were spent preparing for an attack on *23rd Regiment*, estimated to number 1200 to 1500 men. 37th Division reached its final planned defensive line, Line HOW, while 3rd Marine Regiment assembled its assault force and registered artillery on known *Japanese positions*.

The attack began on 24 November with the heaviest Marine artillery bombardment so far in the war. Some 5760 rounds were expended over 23 minutes. The Marines were able to move forward about 500 yards (460 m) before the *Japanese* rallied and counterattacked the Marine flank. The Marines met the counterattack head on and destroyed the *Japanese flanking force*. By the time the Marines reached their objective, 1150 yards (1050 m) in front of their line of departure, all enemy resistance to their front had ceased.

On 24 November, 1/9th Marine Regiment attacked northeast, soon coming under heavy fire from a parallel ridge the Marines dubbed "Grenade Hill." However, on the morning of 26 November, the Marines found that the *Japanese* had abandoned Grenade Hill. *23rd Regiment* had been shattered, with casualties of at least 1196 dead. Marine casualties were 115 dead and wounded. There would be no further serious *Japanese* attacks on the perimeter until March 1944. Meanwhile the perimeter was wired and roadblocks established on all routes into the perimeter.

Securing the Heights. In early December, Turnage decided to strengthen 3rd Marine Division's front by occupying the high ground just west of the Torokina River. The southernmost feature of the high ground, Hill 600 was occupied without any particular difficulty, but the Marines moving onto Hill 1000 discovered abandoned *Japanese* fortifications on the eastern spur of the hill, dubbed "Hellzapoppin Ridge".

Hellzapoppin Ridge proved to be a strong natural fortress, with almost vertical slopes on two sides and heavy forest cover that foiled observation for artillery or air strikes. The *Japanese* were deeply dug in among the tree roots and had their entire perimeter covered by automatic weapons, leaving no flank open. Repeated frontal attacks by the Marines were driven back, but on 18 December, the Marines finally cracked the defenses. The Marines lost 12 killed and 23 wounded, while counting over 50 Japanese bodies in the area.

On 22 December, the Marines moved out to occupy Hill 600A, east of Hellzapoppin Ridge on the west bank of the Torokina River. This was the highest terrain for a considerable distance to the south and east. The Marines soon came under fire from Japanese troops who had moved onto the hill during the night and dug in on the reverse slope. The next morning, patrols discovered that the Japanese had pulled out.

On 15 December 1943 Griswold (commander, XIV Corps) had relieved Geiger and Americal Division (Hodge) had begun to replace 3rd Marine Division on the perimeter. On 27 December 1943, the Americans bombarded Kieta severely enough to put an end to its use as a supply base.

Construction of the coastal fighter strip was completed by 10 December 1943. That day also marked the arrival of 77th Naval Construction Battalion to begin work on a second fighter strip, Piva Yoke, that was to be laid out parallel to the inland bomber strip, Piva Uncle. The bomber strip was completed on Christmas Day, 25 December 1943.

Battle of the Perimeter. By the end of the year, with the perimeter secured and the bomber and fighter strips completed, the initial phase of the Bougainville campaign was over. The Americal Division had taken over the eastern perimeter from 3rd Marine Division, and VMF-216 and 70th Fighter Squadron were operating out of the airfield. Allied intelligence reported that the *Japanese* in north Bougainville were digging in around Buka and Bonis airfields and were unlikely to move against the Marine perimeter. The chief threat was thought to be from the south, where the bulk of *6th Division*, some 11,000 troops, could move against the perimeter using trails that were well concealed by the jungle canopy.

The Americans carefully prepared the perimeter, building extensive chains of pillboxes and other fortifications, laying out barbed wire and boobytraps, clearing extensive fields of fire, and installing searchlights. Meanwhile they aggressively patrolled outside the perimeter, where enemy activity was clearly increasing by February 1944.

Hyakutake had finally awakened to the reality of his situation. He sent his main ground forces (primarily *6th Division*) slogging through the jungle to attack the Cape Torokina perimeter. These were not able to finish assembling outside the American perimeter and launch their attack (*Operation "TA"*) until 7 March 1944. By then 37th Division was well dug in and alerted to the coming attack through prisoner interrogations.

As was so often the case during the Pacific War, the *Japanese* plan was overly complex. This was unfortunate for the *Japanese*, whose superiority in numbers, ability to move under jungle cover, and possession of high ground overlooking the American perimeter suggests that a concentrated attack at the right point could have seriously threatened the American position. But *Hyakutake* assumed he was up against a single division, rather than two. He was so confident that the 15,000 combat troops he committed to the attack could crack the perimeter that he had already planned the surrender ceremony, to take place on 17 March. The men were accordingly issued with just two weeks' rations for the attack.

Overall command of the attack was given to *Kanda Masatane*, commander of *6th Division*, who was also given *two battalions from 53rd Regiment and part of 81st Regiment. Kanda* divided his force into three columns. The first column, under *Iwasa Shun* (the *6th Division* infantry group commander), consisted of *23rd Regiment*, a battalion from *13th Regiment*, and supporting elements, totaling about 4150 men. Its objective was Hill 700 on the right flank of 37th Division.

From this position the *Japanese* hoped to drive down onto the Piva airfields. The second column was built around *45th Regiment* (4300 men) and led by its commander, *Colonel Magata Isashi*, and it was to strike across the low ground west of Hill 700 and join the assault on the airfields. The third column, consisted of two battalions of *13th Regiment* plus a company of engineers (1350 men), led by *Colonel Muda Toyhorei*, was to take Hill 260 and Hill 309 and then move on to take Hill 608 and secure *Iwasa's flank.*

The attack, originally scheduled for 6 March, was postponed to 8 March due to delays in getting the troops in place. It finally opened with an artillery duel in which the *Japanese* forced the aircraft on the Piva strips to evacuate to Guadalcanal, but otherwise did little damage, while the American guns were joined by 56 SBDs and 36 TBFs that struck the Japanese at Hill 1111. The Americans were thoroughly alerted, while the *Japanese infantry* had not yet arrived at the American perimeter in force.

Hill 700 consisted of two high points separated by a saddle, with the approaches from almost every direction having a slope of 65 to 70 degrees. Beightler did not anticipate an attack on so commanding a position, and the hill was held by just two infantry companies and a heavy weapons company from 2/145th Regiment, albeit well dug in. Shortly after midnight on 9 March, in a pouring rain, *2/23rd Regiment* attacked the hill and the area to its west but were driven off. Two hours later, *Iwasa* launched his main attack, throwing *2/23rd Regiment* and *3/23rd Regiment* against the saddle. The follow-up wave by *3/23rd Regiment* was blown to pieces by American artillery, but the leading wave by *2/23rd Regiment* reached the American lines, blew apart the barbed wire barriers with bangalore torpedoes, destroyed a pillbox, and secured a lodgment. By dawn the *Japanese* had a penetration 70 yards (64m) wide and 50 yards (46m) deep, which they continued to expand until noon, capturing seven pillboxes and bringing up heavy weapons to interdict the American supply route south of the hill. Beightler committed 1/145th Regiment to help contain the *Japanese*, but it took another three days and massive artillery support for the Americans to drive the *Japanese off the hill* and restore the position. By then Beightler had been forced to commit a second battalion, 2/148th Regiment, while the commander of 145th Regiment had succumbed to combat fatigue. The battle cost the Americans 78 men killed, while at least *309 Japanese corpses* were found in the area.

Meanwhile, at dawn on 10 March, the *Muda* column struck against Hill 260, which held a small observation post of 2/182th Regiment well outside the main American perimeter. By then the *Japanese* had already overrun most of the American positions, which were concentrated on the south peak of the hill ("South Knob") The Americans occupied the north peak of the hill ("North Knob") but could not dislodge the *Japanese*. The Americans gave up their attempts to recapture South Knob on 20 March, leaving the position to be battered by artillery and contained by patrols, and on 28 March a patrol discovered that the *Japanese* had withdrawn. The struggle cost Americal Division 98 dead and 581 wounded, while some *560 Japanese corpses* were counted around the position.

Magata's column was slow to attack, which was unfortunate for the Japanese, since the terrain in his sector was flat ground favoring the attackers. The Americans had captured documents revealing *Magata's* intentions, and the defending 129th Regiment had spent the previous two months building a formidable defensive line, with mutually supporting pillboxes protected by double apron barbed wire barriers and minefields and equipped with numerous machine guns, 75mm pack howitzers, and 37mm antitank guns supplied with canister. At 1600 on 11 March, the commander of 129th Regiment ordered his outposts back to the line of pillboxes, and the divisional artillery pounded the area in front of 2/129 Regiment for ten minutes. After dusk a

firefight broke out in which the Americans, careful not to reveal their pillbox positions, were unable to prevent *Japanese infiltrators* from cutting gaps in the barbed wire. *Magata* attacked at dawn with two battalions and by sheer weight of numbers captured seven pillboxes. 1/129th was moved up from the reserve and recaptured two pillboxes, and that evening, searchlights illuminated the low cloud cover while automatic fire was poured into the *Japanese positions*. The next day, the 754th Tank Battalion was committed to the fight, and by 14 March the position was restored. Another attack by *Magata* in the predawn hours of 15 March took a single pillbox before being contained and driven back with the aid of tanks and a strike by 36 aircraft. Yet a third attack on 16 March made little headway. This final attack cost the *Japanese* 194 dead and one man taken prisoner in exchange for American casualties of 2 dead and 63 wounded.

Kanda now withdrew to regroup, assembling what was left of his force to make a final attempt to break through the 129th Regiment. During the five days that followed, the Americans rebuilt damaged positions and buried the Japanese dead. Meanwhile the Allied code breakers had intercepted and decoded a message from *Hyakutake* to *Imperial General Headquarters* of his plan to attack on 23 March. The *Japanese penetration* was driven back by tanks and infantry on 24 March, and shortly after noon the *Japanese assembly areas* opposite the 129th Regiment were hit by the most massive artillery barrage of the Pacific War to that point, a counter-preparation concentration of 14,882 shells. Seven battalions of heavy and medium artillery, plus the mortars of the 37th Division, participated. Two days later the *Japanese* began to retreat to their base at Buin. Casualties in the Battle of the Perimeter included 263 Americans killed and about *5500 Japanese dead*.

Part of the reason for the crushing defeat suffered by the *Japanese* was the poor condition of their troops. American medical personnel who examined *Japanese prisoners of war and Japanese dead* concluded that 90% of the *Japanese troops* were already suffering from malnutrition, malaria, beri-beri, or other debilitating illnesses. *Kanda* had promised his men that they would feast on the American supply dumps once they had broken the American line. It was not to be.

Following the end of the battle, Griswold took the view that the *Japanese* on Bougainville could no longer have any influence on the outcome of the war, and he ordered his division commanders to engage in nothing more than aggressive patrolling. The *Japanese* were completely cut off from resupply, and by April 1944 their rice ration was cut to 250 grams per day. The rice supply ran out completely in September, and most of *Hyakutake's* men were put to work on garden plots. Allied pilots took to dropping napalm on the *Japanese gardens*, and *Japanese* morale plummeted to the point where desertion was common.

With *Japanese morale* at rock bottom, and the Americans disinclined to stir up trouble pointlessly, a sort of unspoken truce settled over the perimeter (quoted by Gailey 1995):

“One night some captured Japanese film of the sinking of the USS *Lexington*, an aircraft carrier, was being shown along with the regular Hollywood movie at the 37th division theater, possibly at "Loewe's Bougainville." As the Jap planes laid bomb after bomb and torpedo after torpedo into the listing *Lexington*, there suddenly came shouts of "Banzai! Banzai!" from the tangled but huge branches of a banyan tree on a near side of the rows of seats. A Jap had hidden himself to watch the movie but was overcome with patriotism at the sight of his comrades in the airforce [*sic*] sending an enemy ship to the bottom! He was pulled from the tree with no trouble and entered the POW compound, perhaps the last victim of the carrier *Lexington*!”

The Australians Take Over. Beginning in October 1944, XIV Corps began to be withdrawn to participate in the Philippines campaign, and the perimeter was taken over by Australian II Corps (Savige). This was composed of 3rd Division (Bridgeford; 7th, 15th, and 29th Brigades) and two independent brigades (11th and 23rd Brigades). Savige assumed command of the perimeter on 22 November, and by 12 December all American units had been pulled off the front line.

Blamey and Savige elected to carry out active operations against the *Japanese* rather than sit idly in the perimeter. Savige knew that *6th Division*, the heart of the *Japanese garrison*, was at Buin to the south, and he concentrated most of 3rd Division on his southern flank. 23rd Brigade was ordered to patrol aggressively to find the *Japanese* defenses, and by the time Savige ordered a general offensive on 23 December, the Australians had already made several strong probes into *Japanese-held territory*. Savige knew his force was probably outnumbered, but he was counting on the poor morale and dismal physical condition of the *Japanese* to tip the balance. In fact, the *Japanese were dying of illness and starvation* at the rate of 3000 per month.

The offensive opened with an attack on Pearl Ridge by 25th Battalion on 30 December, which drove five hundred defenders off a strong position in just two days. From here the Australians could observe both coasts of the island. The Australians then installed a 3000' (900m) cable to the ridge and used it to pull a bulldozer to the top to begin construction of a road. The ridge became a major patrol base commanding the central part of the island.

On 31 December, 11th Brigade stepped off for Soraken Point on the northwest coast, with the ultimate objective of driving the Japanese in the northern part of the island into the Bonis Peninsula and destroying them there. The brigade advanced rapidly until 19 January, when advance patrols discovered that the *Japanese* were dug in on Tsimba Ridge. Savige was reluctant to commit his tanks and took until 6 February to finally dislodge the *Japanese*. On 26 March a combined ground attack and amphibious landing forced the *Japanese* out of Soraken Point and into the Bonis Peninsula.

The main effort in the south kicked off on 28 December and was spearheaded by 29th Brigade. The first serious resistance was encountered on the Hupai River on 10 January, where the Australians were forced to bring up antitank guns to clear a line of pillboxes. The Australians then rapidly advanced to more open terrain and on 11 February seized Mosigetta. Anticipating more serious resistance further south, Savige committed his tanks on 17 March, and on 19 March, 25th Battalion cleared a system of pillboxes on its line of advance. Warned by intelligence that *Kanda* was about to launch a major counteroffensive, the Australians dug in around a terrain feature dubbed Slater's Knoll. A pair of probing attacks by the *Japanese* on 27 March were followed by the main assault on 30 March, which struck a single Australian company south of the knoll. Four bayonet charges were beaten off, but only 16 Australians in the position were left unwounded, and the line was pulled back to the knoll. The counteroffensive ended on 5 April, when waves of *Japanese* charged into massed automatic weapons fire and artillery barrages. Out of a force consisting of 2400 of *Kanda's freshest troops*, at least 620 were killed and another 1000 wounded. Thereafter *Kanda* reverted to a purely defensive strategy and began moving troops from the Shortlands to Biak.

Meanwhile 11th Brigade in the north was almost a spent force. An attempt to flank the *Japanese lines* with an amphibious landing on 8 June nearly ended in disaster, and the Australians made no further attempt to clear the Bonis Peninsula during the remaining weeks of the war.

Savige took another two weeks to regroup his forces in the south, then resumed a slow advance toward Buin, supported by massive air strikes by New Zealand Corsairs. By 3 July Savige was ready to launch the final drive towards Buin, but drenching rains repeatedly forced him to postpone the offensive, which was finally called off on 11 August when word arrived of the imminent *Japanese capitulation*. The Australians had suffered casualties of 516 killed and 1572 wounded without driving the *Japanese* out of Buin. The *Japanese* in turn surrendered just 21,090 soldiers and sailors out of a force that had started with perhaps 65,000 men.

Diamond, Jon. “Battling for Bougainville.”
https://warfarehistorynetwork.com/2019/01/13/battling-for-bougainville/

The six-month-long, grueling Japanese defense and ultimate conquest of Guadalcanal by American land, sea, and air forces—after the initial Marine amphibious invasion of that southern Solomon Island on August 7, 1942—halted the Japanese southeastward strategic advance to sever the sea lanes to the Antipodes.

What has been ignored, however, is the backbreaking series of defeats that the Japanese suffered in their attempts to defend New Georgia, Kolombangara, and Bougainville in the Central and Northern Solomons. The losses of Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) units, IJN ships, and aircraft and crews could never be replaced after the defeats suffered on these hellacious jungle islands, especially given the requisite presence of Imperial forces on the Central Pacific and New Guinea fronts.

Major General Allen H. Turnage, commanding the 3rd Marine Division, which had invaded Bougainville in November 1943, wrote, “Never had men in the Marine Corps had to fight and maintain themselves over such difficult terrain as was encountered on Bougainville.”

Major General Alexander A. Vandegrift, who commanded the 1st Marine Division on Guadalcanal and then the I Marine Amphibious Corps (IMAC) for the Bougainville landings, commented that the Bougainville “jungle [was] worse than we had found on Guadalcanal.”

Another Marine veteran of Guam and Iwo Jima recounted, “Of all the 28 months I spent overseas, nothing compared to Bougainville for miserable living conditions…. Bougainville had to be the closest thing to a living hell that I ever saw in my life.”

Operation Cartwheel: Numerous Japanese airfields on Bougainville made it a strategically important objective for the United States, which landed two Army and Marine divisions at Empress Augusta Bay in November 1943.

When MacArthur persisted with his urging that Rabaul be directly invaded, Allied planners at the Quebec Conference of the Combined Chiefs of Staff in August 1943 were adamant and formalized the strategy codenamed Operation Cartwheel to neutralize Rabaul.

Rabaul was the headquarters and main supply base for both the Japanese Southeastern Army and the Southeastern Fleet and lay directly northwest of Bougainville. Air units based at Rabaul were the responsibility of the Eleventh Air Fleet. Despite extensive losses, the IJN continued to reinforce its air units with approximately 50 planes a month flown in from Truk in the Caroline Islands.

The Solomon Island chain is more than 500 miles long. Bougainville is one of the most northern islands in the chain, as well as the largest, 130 miles long and 30 miles wide. Bougainville's strategic importance lay with its location just over 200 air miles from Rabaul.

Topographically, Bougainville possessed two central mountain ranges, the Emperor Range in the north and the lower, less rugged one to the south, the Crown Prince Range, with the former having two active volcanoes—Mount Balbi at over 10,000 feet and Mount Bagana. Except for some roads in the south that could accommodate wheeled transport, overland movement was limited to primitive trails through the dense jungle interior.

Most important of the island routes were the Numa Numa Trail, which extended southwest from Numa Numa on the northeast coast to Empress Augusta Bay, and the East-West Trail running northwest from Buin on the southern tip to Gazelle Harbor below Empress Augusta Bay.

The invasion of Bougainville, along with construction of airfields there, would be a major part of Operation Cartwheel. Bougainville was to be assaulted in the final phase of the bloody campaign up the Solomon Island chain. However, due to Bougainville's proximity to Rabaul, it was heavily garrisoned by the Japanese.

Bougainville was headquarters for the Japanese Northern Solomons Defense Force with its main base at Buin located on the southeastern tip of the island, across from which were the Shortland Islands, Faisi, and Ballale. The IJA 17th Army Headquarters and the IJA 6th Division, the latter having achieved notoriety for atrocities committed in China, had 15,000 men around Buin airfield on the island's southern tip.

There were other airfields in the south, including Kahili, Kieta, and Kara. The IJN's Eighth Fleet had several hundred more men on Bougainville, and there were more than 10,000 Japanese troops and naval coast artillery in the Shortland Islands and nearby Ballale Island, with its airfield being an IJN operation. In the extreme northwest of the island abutting Buka passage was an airfield at Bonis.

Additionally, at the Buka airbase just to the north of Bougainville the IJA had garrisoned 5,000 men while the IJN stationed 1,000 sailors at a seaplane base. At Empress Augusta Bay on the island's western side the IJA had stationed only a small infantry garrison.

The Japanese knew that a battle for Bougainville was going to be more crucial than the previous losing struggle for Guadalcanal. Also, the Japanese still retained a distinct advantage in the

Solomons. Even though they had lost Guadalcanal their fighter aircraft had longer range than American planes.

Additionally, Combined Fleet Admiral Isoruku Yamamoto had been continually building up his airfields in the Northern Solomons as staging areas, as well as at Vila on Kolombangara and at Munda on New Georgia. Japanese planes could be dispatched from Rabaul to New Georgia, where they could refuel and then go on to attack the American bases at Tulagi and Guadalcanal and return the same way with emergency airfields available for damaged planes to conserve the diminishing number of skilled pilots, many of whom had been lost in air combat over Guadalcanal.

The American planes, especially the fighters, did not have the range to reach Rabaul and return to U.S. bases. Recognizing this logistical advantage, Yamamoto intended to reinvigorate his air attacks on Guadalcanal from bases on Rabaul after the Japanese evacuation from Guadalcanal in early February 1943.

Halsey continued his Central Solomons campaign with a landing on New Georgia on June 30, 1943, but the capture of Munda airfield took until August 5 and precipitated the evacuation of many Japanese units to Kolombangara three days later. The final cleanup of New Georgia lasted until August 27.

Originally Halsey's plan called for the attack against Munda to be followed by the seizure of Vila airfield on Kolombangara, but the Japanese were correctly believed to be established on that island in considerable strength, with estimates of a garrison of nearly 10,000 troops. Halsey did not want another protracted campaign to capture Vila.

The loss of New Georgia and the bypassing of Kolombangara somehow produced a reversal of the defeatism the Japanese suffered after the loss of Guadalcanal and Papua during the early winter months of 1943. On September 30, 1943, Imperial Headquarters instructed local Japanese commanders to hold the southeastern front as long as possible. Orders came from Tokyo that indicated that Rabaul had to remain the center of this defense line.

Bougainville was to become the staging area for renewed attacks to the south and east. As the troops from Kolombangara and the other Central Solomon islands were brought back to safer Japanese areas, they were concentrated on Bougainville. After the loss of Guadalcanal and New Georgia and the evacuation of Kolombangara, Bougainville was deemed the best option to accomplish the two goals of protecting Rabaul and serving as an eventual springboard to strike southeastward again.

American tactical planning for the Bougainville assault began in July 1943, when Halsey assigned the I Amphibious Corps Headquarters, under U.S. Marine Maj. Gen. Alexander Vandegrift to command the ground forces.

MacArthur wanted Halsey's aircraft established within fighter range of Rabaul in time to assist with the neutralization of that major Japanese base as well as to cover the SWPA's invasion of Cape Gloucester on the southern end of New Britain, which was planned between December 25, 1943, and January 1, 1944.

MacArthur deemed it strategically necessary for Halsey's South Pacific forces to establish themselves on the mainland of Bougainville on November 1, 1943. MacArthur placed the tactical location for Bougainville's invasion squarely in Halsey's hands. The Americans realized

that the IJA forces on Bougainville were far more formidable than on Guadalcanal, and this produced a change in Halsey's plans for the move northward, even as the fighting was continuing on New Georgia in the Central Solomons.

Admiral Halsey and his South Pacific Force staff's strategic outlook and tactical planning had to evolve to establish a beachhead on Bougainville without a bloodbath. Largely due to the combat exhaustion of the U.S. Army's 25th Infantry Division on New Georgia and the commitment of the 2nd Marine Division to Nimitz's Central Pacific offensive, Halsey's South Pacific Force was left with only the unblooded 3rd Marine Division and the Army's 37th Infantry Division, the latter largely an Ohio National Guard unit that had also seen action on New Georgia.

Halsey's requirement for a beachhead was to assault a lightly defended area to avoid heavy casualties. Then he needed to possess enough territory to quickly establish a strong perimeter to protect the construction of a coastal fighter airfield since continuous carrier-based air cover would not be available indefinitely to maintain an umbrella over the invasion site. As soon as possible a fighter and medium bomber strip would be built farther inland within a well-defended American perimeter for aircraft there to participate in Operation Cartwheel. The Kieta area on Bougainville's east coast had the requisite flat plains for airfields as well as good harbors for Allied transports.

However, this locale was near Japanese-occupied Choiseul, which meant that this large Solomon Island, too, would have to be secured in advance. Disadvantages to other beaches on Bougainville's east coast were their proximity to strong Japanese garrisons concentrated on the island's southern tip at Buin and the poor soil composition for airfield construction.

An alternative site was Cape Torokina in Empress Augusta Bay on Bougainville's west coast. It was closer to Rabaul than Kieta, and its approach was unimpeded by adjacent enemy-held islands or strong garrisons. A five-mile strip of beach there was deemed suitable for a landing with nearby soil conditions favorable for building airfields.

Given the primitive jungle trails and the harsh mountainous terrain of the Emperor and Crown Prince mountain ranges, the Cape Torokina area was almost isolated from the strong Japanese garrisons in northern and southern Bougainville. Halsey's staff calculated that it would take the Japanese three to four months to bring enough heavy artillery over the mountains to launch counterattacks once the American invasion force was ashore at Empress Augusta Bay.

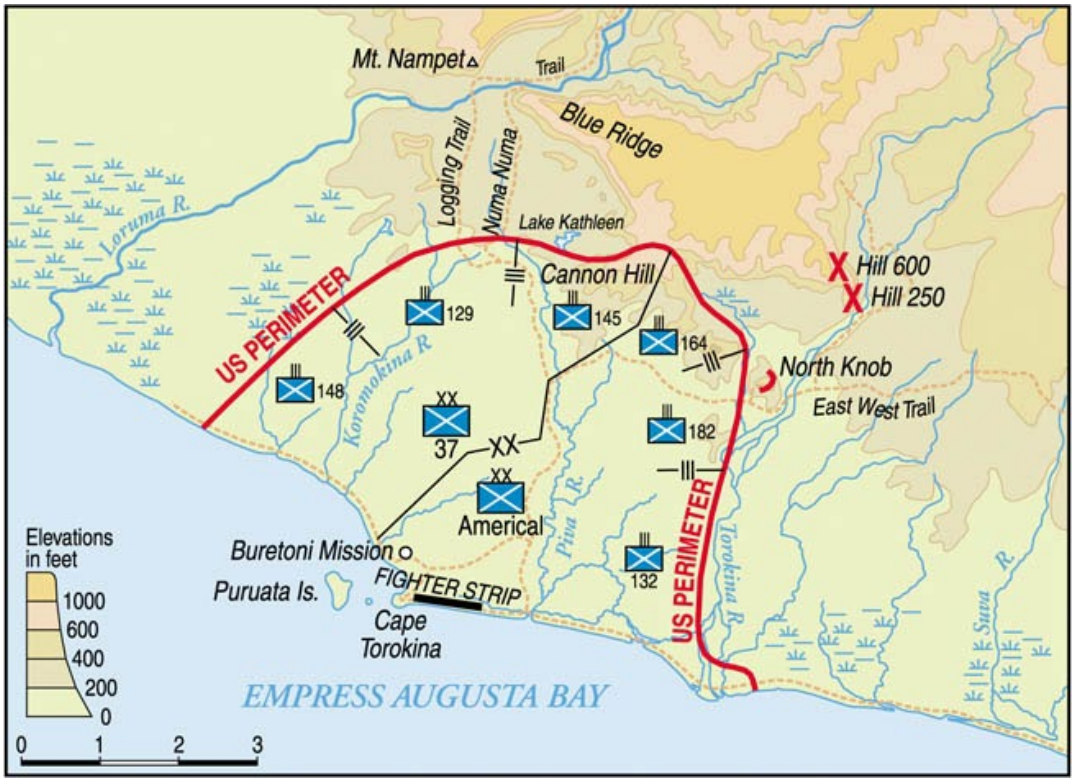
On the downside, the bay's inshore waters were poorly charted and treacherous, with the five-mile strip of beach largely unprotected from monsoons. Also, the coastline was swampy while the anchorage was unsuitable for large vessels. Finally, the Torokina area was no farther than 65 miles from any of the Japanese air bases on Bougainville and only 215 miles from Rabaul's airdromes to the northwest.

The staff of the IJA's 17th Army had evaluated the beach areas on Bougainville as potential landing sites for an Allied amphibious invasion and regarded the Cape Torokina locale at Empress Augusta Bay as most unlikely.

Japanese commanders stationed only one company of 270 men from the 2nd Battalion, 23rd IJA Infantry Regiment (Colonel Hamanoue, regimental commander) with a single 75mm artillery piece there as an outpost.

Lieutenant General Masatane Kanda, commander of the IJA 6th Infantry Division on Bougainville, believed that the Allies would land southeast of Cape Torokina where he had about 2,500 troops. General Hitoshi Imamura, stationed at Rabaul, believed that if Halsey were to land at Cape Torokina it would be only a short-lived amphibious assault.

Imamura believed that the Buka Island area, just north of Bougainville, was the main invasion site for Halsey's South Pacific Force and reinforced Bougainville's northern tip rather than committing his substantial number of troops to the western coast. Later, despite the South Pacific Force's continued presence at Cape Torokina after Halsey's invasion there, Imamura inexplicably continued to build up the defenses at Buin.



After the 3rd Marine Division was pulled out in preparation for the invasion of Guam, the U.S. Army's 23rd (Americal) Division arrived to bolster the 37th Infantry Division.

On September 22, 1943, Halsey canceled all his earlier invasion plans and assigned the units to constitute Bougainville's invasion force. The 14,000 men of the newly formed 3rd Marine Division, reinforced by the 2nd and 3rd Raider Battalions and the 3rd Defense Battalion, would lead the assault at Empress Augusta Bay.

On October 27, 1943, Choiseul, southeast of Bougainville and north of Vella Lavella, was attacked by the 2nd Parachute Battalion of the 1st Marine Parachute Regiment, commanded by Lt. Col. Victor H. Krulak, as a feint to confuse the Japanese about Halsey's real intention.

The Treasury Islands, lying directly south of both Bougainville and the Shortland Islands, would also need to be occupied by Halsey's South Pacific Force to serve as advance bases for small craft, including PT boats.

The Treasuries were defended by only a few hundred Japanese, and they were invaded by roughly 4,000 men of the 8th New Zealand Brigade Group on October 27. However, the Allied commanders knew that the Japanese had about 25,000 troops stationed in the Buin-Shortland Islands area at the southern end of Bougainville with the necessary barges to transport reinforcements to the Treasuries, so surprise and the coincident raid on Choiseul would be vital to keeping the Japanese defenders confused as to where to commit their reserves.

The Treasury Islands were successfully occupied by the Allies by the end of the invasion's first day, with the small Japanese garrison being pushed into the jungle. By now having the Treasury Islands along with previously occupied Vella Lavella, Halsey would have the advance bases to support his Bougainville invasion and airfield construction, avoiding the supply crisis that he had experienced on Guadalcanal.

According to Marine General Roy Geiger, who would take over the IMAC leadership from Vandegrift on Bougainville on November 9, the Treasury Islands occupation and the Choiseul raid were important preliminary operations to landing on Bougainville's western coast, serving as "a series of short right jabs to throw the enemy off balance and to conceal the real power of our left hook to his belly at Empress Augusta Bay."

Rear Admiral Theodore S. Wilkinson was named Commander, Bougainville Amphibious Force, Task Force 31. Along with Vandegrift—and then Geiger—serving as Commanding General, IMAC, these experienced leaders would help overcome the intelligence deficiencies that faced the 3rd Marine Division (Reinforced), under Maj. Gen. Allen Turnage.

Although Vandegrift had obtained the requisite transport to land his 14,000 Marines, he was still anxious that there might be more than the 300 Japanese troops that were suspected to be in the area.

Follow-up convoys, after the initial landings at Torokina on November 1, 1943, would deliver additional supplies as well as the 21st Marines, the 1st Marine Parachute Regiment, and the 37th Infantry Division, the latter under the command of Maj. Gen. Robert S. Beightler, comprising the 129th, 145th, and 148th Infantry Regiments.

Vandegrift's anxiety was soon dispelled as his earlier intelligence estimates were confirmed that only one company of the IJA 23rd Infantry Regiment of Maj. Gen. Masatane Kanda's 6th Division would be defending the landing site. However, imbued with Tokyo's wishes to defend every spot tenaciously now, the opposition, although light, would mount a strong defense at Torokina.

A preliminary naval bombardment of Cape Torokina and strafing of the landing beaches by Navy dive bombers from Munda, New Georgia, began at 6 am on November 1, but drew no Japanese response.

Then, assault waves of 3rd Division Marines—the 9th Marines on the left and the 3rd Marines on the right—crossed their narrow beaches of only 30-50 yards in depth to enter Bougainville's adjacent dense jungle. The 2nd Raider Battalion was situated between battalions of the 3rd Marine Regiment close to Cape Torokina.

Elements of the 3rd Raider Battalion seized Puruata Island, which was situated in Empress Augusta Bay to the northwest of Cape Torokina and adjacent to tiny Torokina Island in the bay

to the east. The landing beaches were roughly 8,000 yards long and extended from Cape Torokina to just west of the Koromokina Lagoon.

Although the Marines did not encounter strong Japanese forces, heavy surf as well as a high beach mitigated proper anchoring of many of the 9th Marines' landing craft on the western, or left flank, beaches, forcing many Marines to wade ashore in deep water to the far left of their assigned assault beaches.

With more than 80 LCVPs (Landing Craft Vehicle, Personnel) and LCMs (Landing Craft, Mechanized) disabled, Vandegrift, the IMAC commander, halted further landings along the 9th Marine beaches.

However, to the far right of the assault beaches the 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines ran into at least 25 entrenched Japanese positions on Cape Torokina, which were only minimally damaged by the preceding naval bombardment.

A 75mm artillery piece, protected by pillboxes and infantry rifle pits on the northern face of the cape enfiladed the amphibious assault of the 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines and the 2nd Raider Battalion at a range of only 500 yards.

This entrenched 75mm gun hit 14 landing craft, of which four sank, and disrupted the proper landing sites of the battalions' companies and headquarters. The 2nd and 3rd Battalions, 3rd Marines made easier landings on their beaches since there were no Japanese fortifications; the few enemy troops there fled into the jungle after only token resistance.

Sergeant Robert A. Owens, observing the devastating effect that the 75mm gun was having on the beach and approaching landing craft, along with his squad from A Company, 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines, attacked the gun position situated in a palm log bunker reinforced with sand-filled fuel drums. After reaching the bunker's gun port, Owens crawled through the aperture firing his Thompson submachine gun, killing several of the artillery crew. Escaping enemy troops exiting through the rear of the bunker were killed by other Marines.

When Owens, too, emerged from the bunker, he collapsed and died from his wounds. The bunker had an abundance of high-explosive ammunition that would have been fired at the beach and landing craft had Owens not wiped out most of the crew. Owens received the Medal of Honor posthumously for his bravery and sacrifice.

More than half the 270 Japanese infantrymen from this regiment eventually fled into the jungle. The Marines suffered 180 killed and wounded. Puruata and Torokina Islands were taken by the 3rd Raider Battalion with minimal casualties. A few additional days were needed to root out snipers.

The battle for the narrow beachhead had ended, but combat along the jungle perimeter now began with G Company, 9th Marines situated well to the south of the Laruma River to oppose an enemy movement from the north while M Company, 3rd Raider Battalion, attached to the 2nd Raider Battalion for the main landing, took up positions on the Mission Trail should the Japanese approach from the south.

By the time November 1 ended, the 75mm and 105mm howitzers of the 12th Marines were hauled through Bougainville's muck into the perimeter, while the 90mm antiaircraft guns of the 3rd Marine Defense Battalion dug in and gave the 14,000 Marines ashore some added

firepower. Within days, U.S. Navy “Seabees” began constructing rudimentary roadways and started work on a fighter strip at Cape Torokina. The shooting stopped.

Elements of the 21st Marines arrived in the perimeter on November 6, while the 148th Infantry Regiment, 37th Division landed on November 9. Within two weeks, the 37th Division’s artillery along with its 129th and 145th Regiments would also land.

The Japanese had been confused about the site of Bougainville’s invasion and also underestimated the strength of the lodgment, as they had previously done at Guadalcanal. The IJA 17th Army Headquarters, led by bespectacled Lt. Gen. Harukichi Hyakutake, had given up the defensive initiative at Torokina, believing that the major American landing would still occur at Buka in the north or Buin on the island’s southern tip.

A Japanese thrust had also been anticipated from the south in the vicinity of the Piva Trail, where elements of the 2nd Raider Battalion blocked the track.

Battalion-sized formations of the IJA 23rd Infantry Regiment, 6th Division from Buin attacked on November 7-8. Led by Maj. Gen. Shun Iwasa, a Japanese frontal attack was launched but was halted by the Marine Raiders supported by the mortarmen of the 9th Marines.

General Turnage, still in need of expanding his perimeter to the south, sent in the 3rd Raider Battalion along both the Piva and Numa Numa Trails on the morning of November 9. A stalemate developed for several hours until, after a failed Japanese envelopment, the enemy retreated through Piva Village, which was eventually taken that day by the 1st and 2nd Battalions, 9th Marines.

In addition, the Marines were now at the junctions of the Piva and Numa Numa Trails as well as the East-West and Numa Numa Trails. Control of these crossroads would enable the Marines to begin building airfields while keeping the Japanese outside the perimeter. This combat cost the Marines just over 50 killed and wounded, while more than 500 dead Japanese were found.

On November 13, 1943, the 2nd Battalion, 21st Marines moved beyond the crossroads to set up an outpost. Proper reconnaissance was not performed by the advancing Marines, who ran into a well-armed, reinforced, company-sized enemy detachment in a coconut grove with strong defensive fortifications. Due to the terrain, the Marine battalion’s companies lost contact with one another and with battalion headquarters.

By the end of the day, the Japanese retreated eastward on the East-West Trail. More than 40 Japanese bodies were found among some shattered fortifications; however, the Marines suffered about 60 casualties.

The 3rd Battalion, 21st Marines, along with the 148th and 129th Infantry Regiments, 37th Division, expanded the perimeter by about 1,000 to 1,500 yards along the center and left while the swamp at the right side was maintained by the 9th Marines.

Marine General Geiger, now in command of IMAC, wanted to expand the perimeter further by clearing enemy roadblocks on the Numa Numa Trail paralleling the Piva River’s West Branch and the East-West Trail where it comes into proximity with the former trail and a tributary of the Piva River’s East Branch. Geiger also wanted to seize some of the high ground northeast of the Torokina beaches. These attacks on the trails’ roadblocks were successfully launched by the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, 3rd Marines on November 19-20.

Fierce fighting ensued when a 2nd Battalion company was ordered to seize a 400-to-500-foot ridge just north of the East-West Trail overlooking the Piva River branches on November 21, with the Japanese trying to retake the ridge. After three days of Japanese suicide charges, the ridge remained in the 3rd Marines' hands, extending the perimeter to the northeast.

Also on November 21, other Marine units crossed the Piva River and headed east for roughly 1,000 yards until they ran into an impenetrable swamp. The 129th Regiment, moving on the far left of the perimeter, was able to advance 1,000 yards to the northwest with no opposition.

Three days later, an extensive preliminary Marine and Army artillery and mortar barrage was unleashed to allow the 3rd Marines to advance in the direction of Eagle Creek and the Torokina River to the east of the Piva River branches. Here the 3rd Marines overcame determined Japanese opposition in defensive fortifications.

The mission to seize Torokina gained momentum on November 26 when construction began on a bomber airfield, known as Piva Uncle, and a second fighter strip, Piva Yoke, both of which enabled aircraft flying from the Central Solomon airfields to stage their missions to neutralize Rabaul. The coastal fighter airstrip, which the Seabees began constructing on November 10, was finished on December 10.

After 11 days of savage struggle for what would become known as "Hellzapoppin Ridge," elements of the 21st Marines finally took this slope. On December 21, other elements of the 21st Marines drove the enemy off Hill 600A, which was also near the Torokina River. But the foe doggedly counterattacked, necessitating three more days of hard combat before the Japanese were finally pushed off the hill and into the jungle.

The Americans' actions to secure the limited heights above Bougainville's jungle floor ended the combat mission for the Marines on Bougainville, which, with the support of the 37th Infantry Division, had penetrated this northern Solomon island's jungle more than 22,000 yards from the narrow beaches stormed more than seven weeks earlier.

General Geiger's IMAC command was replaced by Maj. Gen. Oscar W. Griswold, now commanding the U.S. Army's XIVth Corps. The Americal (23rd) Division, under the command of Maj. Gen. John R. Hodge, replaced most of the 3rd Marine Division, the latter unit departing Bougainville on Christmas Day after having suffered more than 400 killed and 1,400 wounded.

The 9th and 21st Marines left the island on December 28, 1943, and January 9, 1944, respectively.

Hyakutake's forces had 2,500 dead accounted for on the battlefield; only 25 of the Japanese enemy had been captured—a testament to the suicidal tenacity of the Japanese Bushido code.

General Hyakutake underestimated the strength of the opposing American forces, believing that there were only 20,000 U.S. Army troops at Torokina. Before his defeat, he had planned to unleash an all-out counterattack on the U.S. Army XIVth Corps in early March 1944—primarily with the IJA 6th Division and other elements of the 17th Army.

Hyakutake did amass some 15,000-19,000 infantrymen with supporting artillery; the latter included 75mm pack howitzers and 105mm and 150mm guns, which were hauled onto ridges dominating the perimeter. However, he chose to retain the remaining 18,000 troops of the 17th Army to defend his bases at Buka and Buin.

The term “perimeter” for the XIV Corps’ 23,000-yard defensive zone underestimates how it bristled with mortar pits, pillboxes, trenches, and rifle pits with clear fields of fire and reserve positions in depth. The XIV Corps’ array of artillery was also impressive, with preregistered 75mm pack howitzer companies along with 105mm and 155mm howitzer battalions and 150mm “Long Tom” cannons and 90mm antiaircraft batteries to rain high-explosive shells on Japanese areas.

From the perimeter’s left, south of the Laruma River, to its right, just astride the Torokina River, the XIV Corps’ regiments were arrayed as follows: 148th, 129th, and 145th of the 37th Division moving onto the 164th, 182nd, and 132nd of the Americal Division. The fighter strip was on the beach at Cape Torokina within the Americal Division’s zone, while Piva Yoke and Piva Uncle were in the 37th Division’s half.

For his March 7 counterattack, Maj. Gen. Kanda, commander of the 12,000-man 6th Division, decided to organize his troops into three separate units, each one named for its commander—Iwasa, Muda, and Magata. The Japanese infantrymen took into battle with them just two weeks of rations since it was believed that the Americans would be defeated within that time frame.

After Japanese infiltrators began cutting the bands of American concertina wire on March 7, 1944, a massive enemy artillery bombardment erupted at dawn the following day targeting the Piva airfields and necessitating evacuation of the Allied aircraft to Munda on New Georgia. The Americans responded with intense and accurate counter battery fire on the Japanese howitzer positions.

Japanese infantry under Maj. Gen. Shun Iwasa (the Iwasa Unit) began the attack first after midnight on March 9, heading southward toward the center of the perimeter to scale the steep slopes of Hill 700. This force numbered more than 4,000 troops, elements of the 23rd and 13th Infantry Regiments. Its mission, after penetrating the 145th Infantry Regiment’s area, was to seize the two airfields, Piva Yoke and Piva Uncle. Small units of Japanese infantry were able to blast through the wire with bangalore torpedoes, seizing several American pillboxes during the early morning hours and creating a 150-yard wide penetration to which the 37th Division’s commanding general, Beightler, rapidly responded.

Companies from the division’s reserve, the 1st Battalion, 145th Infantry Regiment, eventually reoccupied most of the pillboxes. On March 10, after bitter combat, further American counterattacks by the 1st and 2nd Battalions, 145th Infantry Regiment reduced the enemy salient considerably.

As dawn broke on March 11, Iwasa launched a futile, hour-long, battalion-sized banzai charge up Hill 700’s steep slope. It suffered horrific casualties largely due to 37mm canister fire into their massed formation. Iwasa withdrew his battered force two miles from the battlefield on March 12, after the 2nd Battalion, 148th Infantry Regiment eliminated the entire enemy salient and recovered information on Japanese troop dispositions and plans for the entire counteroffensive from the corpse of a Japanese officer.

On March 10, Colonel Toyoharei Muda’s unit of more than 1,300 infantrymen from the remainder of the 13th Infantry Regiment, plus engineers, was assigned to attack Hill 260 in front of the American 182nd Infantry Regiment. The Japanese commanders had planned that once the XIV Corps perimeter was penetrated the Muda Unit was to serve as the larger Iwasa Unit’s left flank protection.

The Japanese sent two companies of their 13th Infantry Regiment onto the South Knob of the hill from 80 Americans of an artillery observation unit. The GIs fled to the North Knob.

For two days, elements of the 182nd Infantry Regiment tried to regain the South Knob, but to no avail. On March 12, called “Bloody Sunday” by the Americal Division, elements of the 182nd Infantry unsuccessfully assaulted the Japanese positions on the South Knob from the west and northwest. Three days later, Griswold, realizing that the enemy could not threaten his perimeter in their current strength, broke off the attacks.

Hyakutake’s complex plan envisioned that XIV Corps would commit its reserves to perimeter penetrations by both the Iwasa and Muda Units on March 9 and 10, respectively. However, with foreknowledge of the Japanese plan, Beightler avoided depletion of his troop strength from the next intended Japanese attack point on the American perimeter. Awareness of the Japanese artillery dispositions from the captured documents greatly aided the accuracy of XIV Corps’ own artillery fire.

At dawn on March 12, the 4,300-man Magata Unit, named after its commander Colonel Isashi Magata, would attack. Composed mostly of infantrymen from the reinforced IJA 45th Infantry Regiment and supported by artillery and mortar barrages, the Magata Unit would be hurled down a logging trail that paralleled the Numa Numa Trail. It would hit the low ground in the 129th Infantry Regiment’s sector of the perimeter west of Hill 700.

Hyakutake’s plan then called for the convergence of the Iwasa and Magata Units, after their respective breakthroughs, to capture the two Piva airfields. Then, all three units were to combine and drive south to the coastal fighter strip.

The Magata Unit attacked along a 100-yard front against the 2nd Battalion, 129th Infantry Regiment. The Japanese broke through an initial defense line and took some American pillboxes before a counterattack by C and G Companies of the 1st Battalion, 129th, acting as a reserve, reclaimed a few of the positions and stopped another enemy assault later that day.

At dawn on March 13, the Japanese struck again, but Beightler personally responded with Sherman tanks from XIV Corps reserve and, along with his infantry, restored his original lines. Predawn Japanese attacks on both March 15 and March 17 made modest inroads into the 37th Division’s perimeter but were inconclusive.

After a four-day lull in Japanese assaults from March 18-22, Magata put together a force of almost 5,000 infantrymen by amalgamating elements of the Iwasa and Muda Units to replace his own 45th Regiment’s casualties.

Magata then mounted an attack late on March 23 against the 129th Infantry Regiment’s perimeter sector where Cox Creek abuts it. The Americans were again forewarned after intercepting a wireless communication from 17th Army Headquarters to Tokyo pinpointing the time and place of the attack.

After a small Japanese penetration near the 2nd Battalion, 129th Infantry Regiment’s command post, Beightler counterattacked on the morning of March 24 with infantry, tanks, and antitank guns. By noon, the enemy salient was reduced. As the Japanese retreated, XIV Corps artillery rained down almost 15,000 rounds on enemy troop concentrations.

The Japanese counteroffensive was defeated. Hyakutake received permission from General Hitoshi Imamura, commanding general, IJA 8th Area Army, to withdraw, and so the remnants of his army began their retreat on March 28, 1944. The Iwasa and Muda Units withdrew south to Buin, while Magata's 1,500 survivors went north via the Numa Numa Trail.

Battlefield estimates listed the Japanese casualties at more than 8,500 killed and wounded during the 19-day enemy counteroffensive.

As a testimony to the Americans' fortified positions, interior lines, and skilled direction of reserves, tanks, and artillery, the dead (263) among the XIV Corps casualties were much fewer than the enemy's.

The once mighty 17th Army would be isolated and have to resort to planting crops and gardens for subsistence, while the American forces, within a slightly enlarged perimeter, simply patrolled aggressively and contained them in a "vast jungle prison camp."

Additionally, three airfields were constructed within the perimeter, and these bases eventually contributed mightily to Operation Cartwheel's removal of Rabaul as a strategic factor in future operations in the South Pacific.