



War in the Pacific

Defending Australia

Campaigns in New Guinea and the Solomons 1943

17 December 1942

Situation - 17 December 1942

- In the Pacific the USN, at the cost of enormous losses in ships and men, has done just enough to strangle the Japanese November offensive on Guadalcanal but the Japanese are still trying to reinforce their position there. The 1st Marine Division has now been relieved and the US Army have taken command on the ground. At sea only the PT Boats are left to contest Japanese resupply missions
- In New Guinea the Japanese, aided by the terrain and very effectively fortified, continue to resist tenaciously in their beachheads. Australian and American forces have improved their logistics and supplies and more and heavier weapons are reaching the battlefield. Still the demand for transport is such that a special transport flight created by scouring training bases and the civil industry in Australia has been sent to New Guinea.
- Battle losses, tropical diseases, malnutrition and exhaustion continue to wear down the forces.
- After twenty days of heavy losses for no gain, on the 9th the 39th Battalion with the 2/16-2/17 composite Battalion had captured Gona. On the 14th two companies of the 127th Infantry captured Buna village after a thorough artillery bombardment the previous day and that morning.
- Sanananda and the eastern end of the Buna enclave continue to resist all the allied attacks without yielding any ground at all.
- General Eichelberger now has two troops of tanks and a fresh battalion of infantry to renew the attack at Buna.
- Intelligence is now forecasting a Japanese offensive against the north coast of New Guinea. Only continued Japanese infiltration is expected on Guadalcanal.
- In Australia the furious debate within the ALP, about requiring the Militia to serve outside Australia and its territories, continues.
- There are signs emerging that Australia's role is to be a supplier to armies as well as a provider of armies.

17 December - Government

- In December (17th) the War Cabinet approved the Defence Committee's recommendations that in the areas south of Port Macquarie in the eastern States, in South Australia and Tasmania generally, and in Western Australia both Government and private undertakings need not proceed with preparations to enable production to be maintained in a black-out, and
- where such preparations had been completed, they could be modified to permit work to be done by natural light and to ensure proper ventilation;
- ability to impose a black-out at short notice should be retained.



War Cabinet meeting in Melbourne. Left to right: John Curtin, Sir Frederick Sheddon, Ben Chifley, Norm Makin, Arthur Drakeford and John Dedman. Not pictured Frank Forde and Jack Beasley.

17 December - Sea

- Adm Darlan (photo) announces that French Fleet units at Alexandria, Dakar, and N African ports are joining Allied forces.
- 4 battleships, 9 cruisers and 11 destroyers joined the Allied forces.
- These ships together with the use of Dakar and North African ports by anti U boat forces and the scuttling of the rest of the French fleet in Toulon significantly eases the requirement for allied naval forces in the Mediterranean and Atlantic.



17 December - Sea

- A troopship was torpedoed and sunk in the Solomon Sea 15 nautical miles north west of Cape Henpan, Buka Island, Bougainville (4°54'S 154°17'E) by the submarine USS Grouper.
- She was on her third war patrol from 12 November – 31 December from Pearl to Brisbane.



Grouper was launched by the Electric Boat Co, Groton, Connecticut on 27 October 1941, and commissioned at New London on 12 February 1942, Lieutenant Commander C. E. Duke in command.

17 December - Guadalcanal

- Major General Lawton Collins' 25th Division, bound from Hawaii to New Caledonia, was diverted directly to Guadalcanal where, its 35th Infantry Regiment landed on 17 December.
- That day the 132d Infantry of the Americal Division began an offensive against Mount Austen, which overlooks Henderson Field.



Major General Collins, commander of the 25th Division (right) and Major Davis, commanding the 3rd Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment confer.

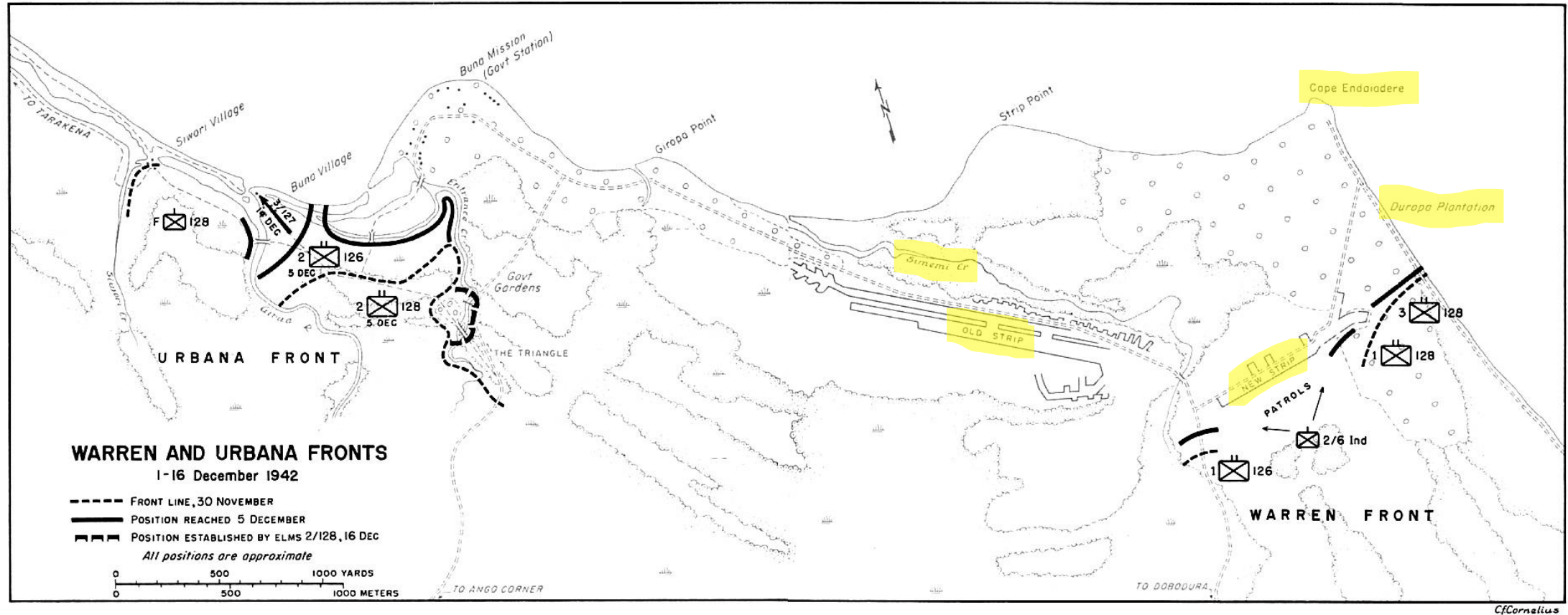
17 December – Buna E

- On 17 December, after consulting with General Eichelberger, Brigadier Wootten, commander of the 18th brigade of the AIF, took over command of the Warren front, and Buna Force set 18 December as D Day.
- General MacArthur had been urging General Eichelberger to speed his preparations, and Eichelberger had done his best to comply.
- Warren Force was to move out on the 18th with tanks; its successive objectives were Duropa Plantation and Cape Endaiadere (including a bridgehead across the mouth of Simemi Creek), the New Strip, and the Old Strip.



Brigadier Wootten (L) with General Herring
commander New Guinea Force.

17 December - Buna



17 December – Buna E

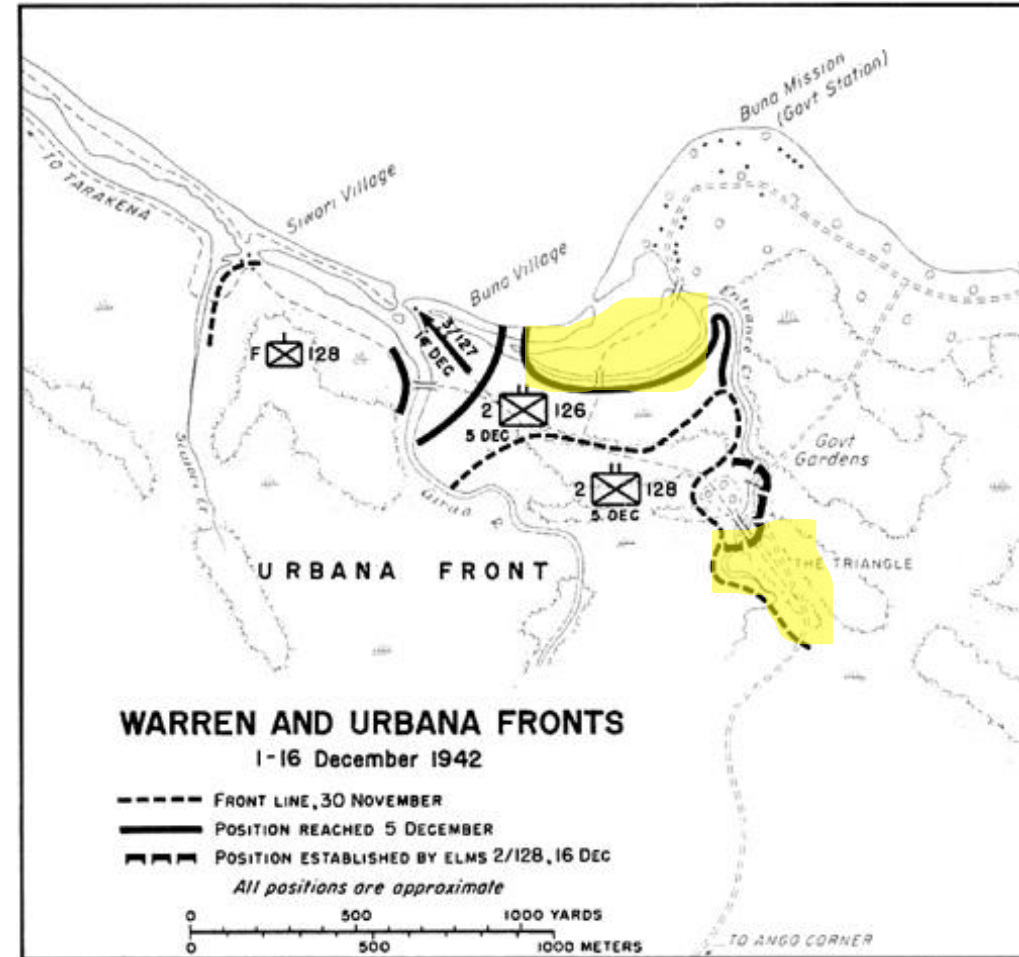
- At 1800 on the night of the 17th, X Squadron--seven tanks, less one tank in reserve--began moving up to the line of departure.
- The sound of aircraft was to have covered the rumble of the tanks as they moved up to the starting line, but the planes did not materialize.
- Instead, the 1st and 3d Battalions, 128th Infantry, laid down a mortar barrage to drown out the roar of the motors and the clank of the treads.



Standing on the first tank is Lt, Vic McCrohon, Trooper John Wilson is sitting by the gun. Corporal Evan Barnet is kneeling by the turret of the second tank.

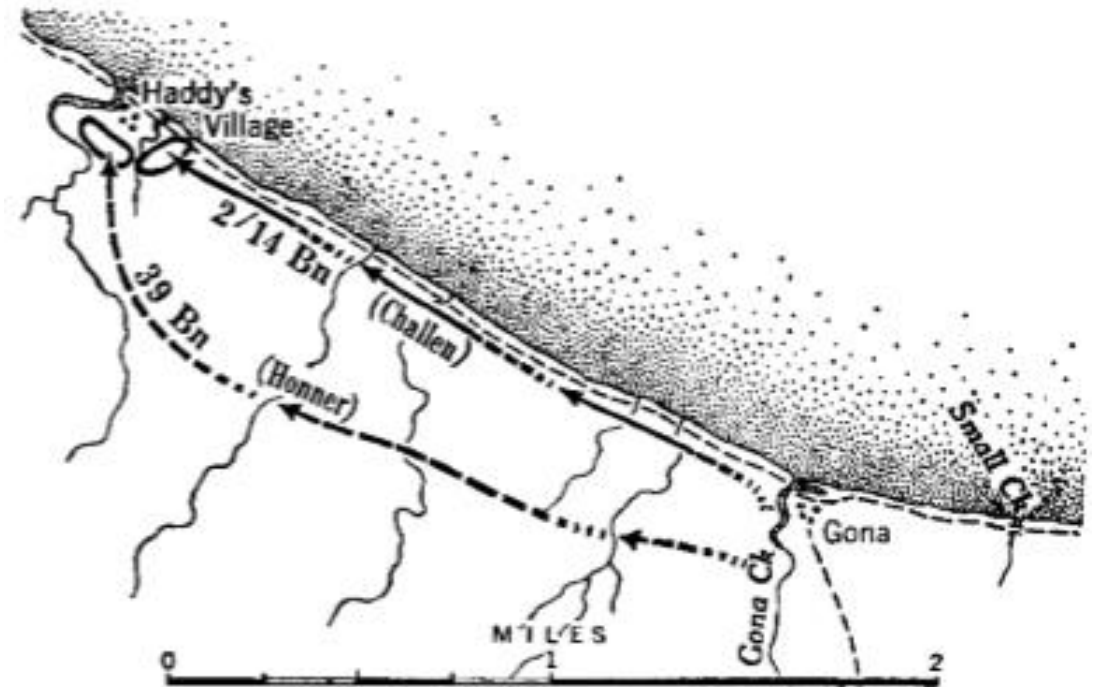
17 December – Buna W

- Buna Force issued orders the next day (17 December) for the capture of the island and Triangle.
- The island was to be taken on 18 December, the day of the tank attack on the Warren front; the Triangle, one day later.
- An element of the 127th Infantry would take the island;
- what was left of the 126th Infantry, the Triangle. It was to storm the Triangle, cut through to the coast, and seize the track junction between Buna Mission and Giropa Point.



17 December – West of Gona

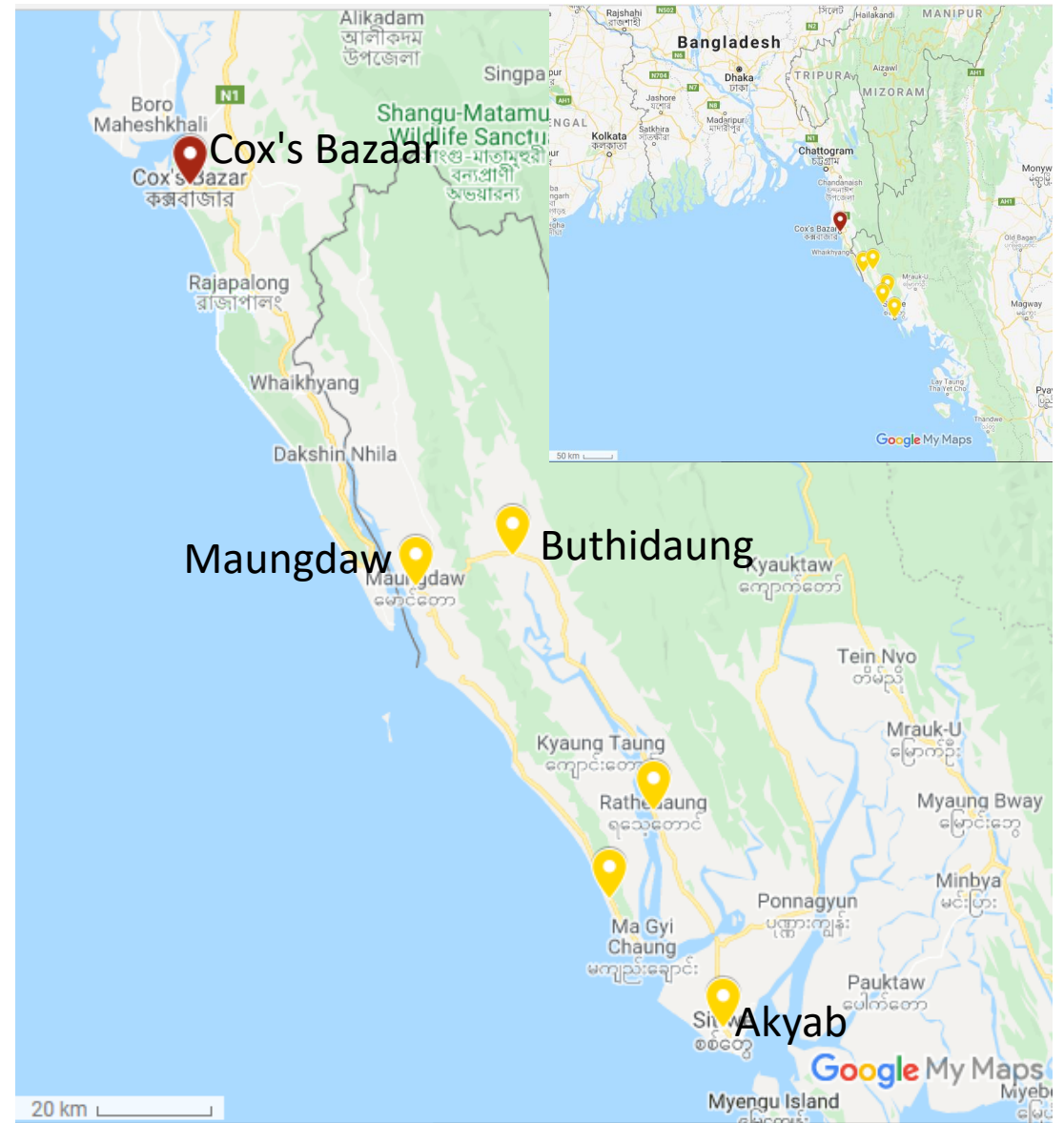
- On the 17th the Australians drew their ring closer still.
- On the extreme left, near the water's edge, Lieutenant McClean's platoon of the 39th nipped off another post.
- Then two more sections of the 2/14th crossed the stream in a brisk little engagement in which Shelden personally knocked out two posts.
- Shelden and Private Walters did deadly work with rifle grenades, scoring a direct hit on a machine-gun group, destroying at a blow one heavy and two light machine-guns and some twenty-five Japanese.



Nightfall, 15th December

17 December – Burma

- The 14th Indian Division, commanded by Major General Lloyd, began advancing south from Cox's Bazaar, near the India Burma frontier, down the Arakan Peninsula, on 17 December 1942.
- The limited goal of the British advance was Akyab Island. This held a strategically significant port and all-weather airfield. The island lay at the end of the Mayu Peninsula.
- The peninsula was marked by the narrow but precipitous and jungle-covered Mayu Range, which separated the coastal plain from the valley of the Kalapanzin and Mayu Rivers. The only established route across the range was a disused railway track, converted into a road, which linked Buthidaung with the port of Maungdaw on the west coast of the peninsula.
- The Japanese pulled back towards the tip of the Mayu peninsula.



17 December – Air

- On the 17th the Japanese landed at Cape Gloucester, on the western tip of New Britain, where they began preparing an airstrip.
- Three B-26's bomb Buna mission.
- Three light bombers strafe Mangrove island and the adjacent mainland.
- Eleven enemy bombers unsuccessfully attacked the Dobodura area.
- AAF aircraft, especially P-39's, and Marine SBD's, provide support for the Mount Austen offensive.
- US heavy bombers escorted by fighters attacked the airfield at Munda.
- Two attacks by 5 B-24's, 2 B25's, and 4 B-26's—the second attack escorted by 8 P-38's—take off for Kiska. Only the first mission, 4 B-24's, gets through and hits submarine base area, marine railway, buildings, and communication facilities. Second mission aborts due to weather.
- Five escorted B25s bombed Lungling and strafed enemy trucks entering the town.

17 December – Air

- The Catalinas of Nos. 11 and 20 Squadrons flew a nightly mission that became known as "the milk run". This was a regular reconnaissance of Japanese shipping and submarine routes to Lae and Finschhafen both from the north and along the south of New Britain.
- The patrolling aircraft left their base in time to reach the approaches to the area at dusk, and usually alighted at Milne Bay or Port Moresby next morning to refuel before returning to Cairns, where they were based.
- In December the "milk run" aircraft began making harassing attacks on enemy bases in the search area, particularly Gasmata.
- At this stage the Catalinas each carried about 440 pounds of small fragmentation and incendiary bombs. These had to be thrown out of the blisters by hand.

17 December – Air



The blisters made for excellent observation, opening them and tossing bombs out, even at the speed Catalinas flew must have been problematic.

17 December – Air



18 December - Sea

- A Tenryu class light cruiser was sunk in the Bismarck Sea off Madang, New Guinea (05°12'S 145°56'E) by USS Albacore.
- On 18th December Lithgow left Milne Bay escorting Japara to Oro Bay as the first flight of the LILLIPUT operation.
- JIC reports that all of the nine principal anchorages on Timor are now in Japanese hands. The Japanese are also consolidating their position on the Tanimbar, Aroe and Kei islands.



18 December – Buna E

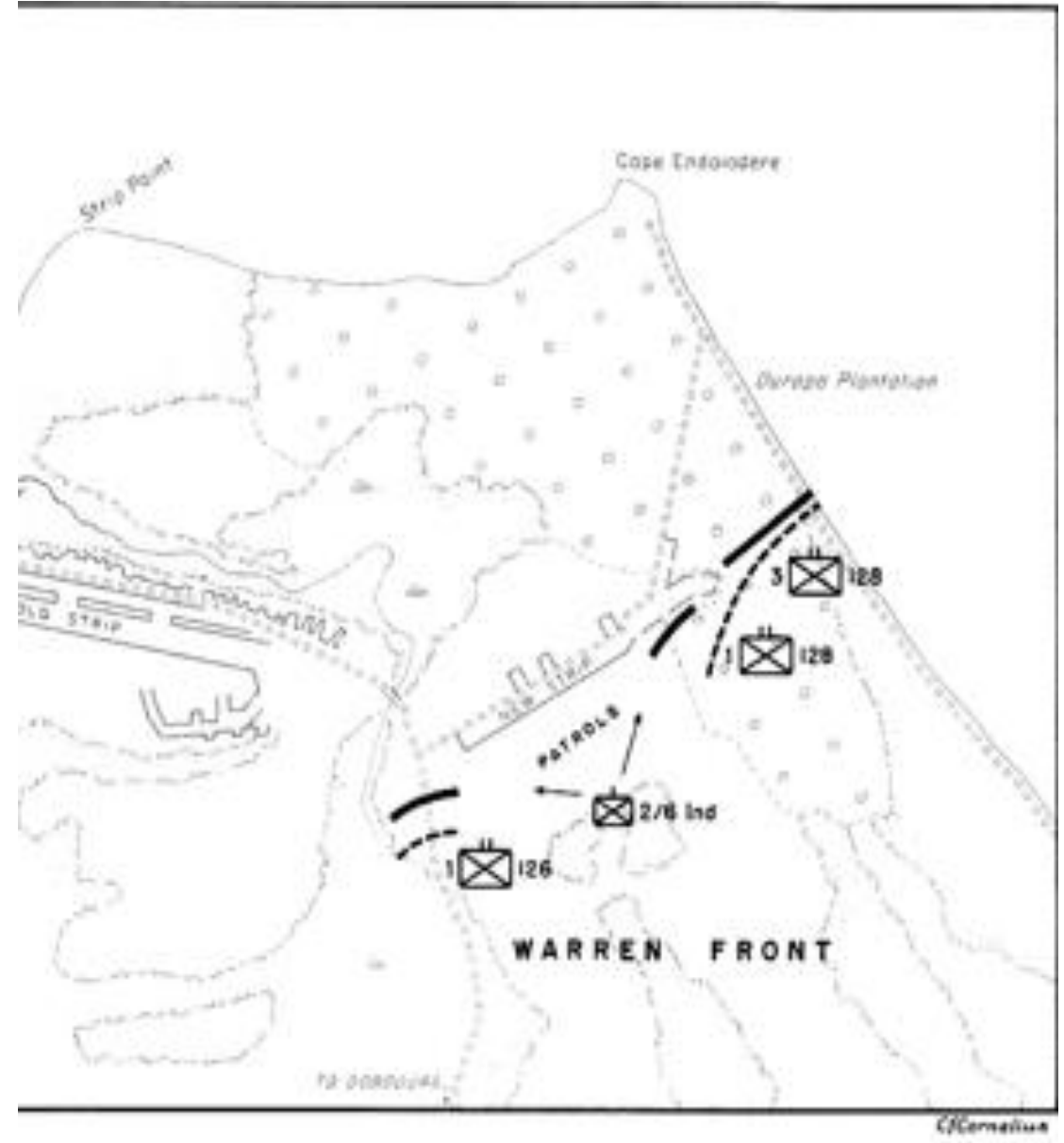
- The weather prevented aircraft from assisting the attack but at 6.50 a.m. the guns opened up on the enemy positions.
- During this ten-minute preparation the 2/9 Battalion under its commander, Lt. Col. Cummings, passed through Colonel MacNab's and Major Clarkson's troops and arrived at the taped-out line of departure just forward of the Americans.
- At 0700 the artillery and mortar barrage ceased and the attackers crossed their start-line, the tanks spaced out in line and throttled down to the deliberate pace of the infantry who moved beside or close behind them.



(Australian War Memorial)

18 December – Buna E

- Cummings was using three companies forward, aiming to capture first a strip of ground approximately 500 yards from the water's edge as far as Cape Endaiadere and continue thence over approximately the same width until he held the line of Simemi Creek.
- On the right Captain Griffin's D company, making for the cape itself on a 250-yard front, Lt V.H. McCrohon's three tanks with them;
- in the centre Captain Taylor's, extending the front for a further 250 yards—with Curtiss' three tanks;
- turning about half left Captain Parbury, with orders to establish his men firmly at a point 200 yards north of the eastern end of New Strip, on a grassy space at the edge of the plantation, and protect the flank and rear of the main move.



Start line to the cape = 1,000 yards

18 December – Buna E

- Whitehead, the squadron commander, was in the centre of the tank formation and just behind the others. Captain Benson's B company and one tank were in reserve.
- To the watchers it was an unforgettable picture as the three companies walked upright with seeming nonchalance directly at a line of strongpoints which stretched like an unseen bar before them from the sea to the end of the strip.



*The thick trees and tall grass of the Buna area are clear in these images. The tanks are firing into bunkers, whilst the infantry are providing close protection for the tanks.
(Department of Information Photos 13938 and 13940)*

18 December – Buna E

- Captain Parbury's C Company at the eastern end of New Strip was being cut to pieces by both light and medium machine-gun fire from what seemed to be many immensely strong posts.
- They had begun to lose men even before leaving the start-line and, as soon as they crossed the line, came under terrific small arms fire.
- Without tanks, they had lost 46 out of 87 men in less than ten minutes in an advance of only about 100 yards.
- The commander of the right forward platoon, Lieutenant de Vantier, was killed with all his N.C.O.s, except one who was wounded. (Among the killed was Sergeant Gordon who had been conspicuous in the fighting at Milne Bay.)
- Parbury then lost touch with this platoon and feared that it had been completely wiped out. He ordered his remaining men to ground so that some at least might survive and then the grass, two feet high, hid them.
- When he phoned the news to his commanding officer, Cummings suggested that he try infiltration tactics with one of his sections to see if it perhaps might be able to get through the barrier of Japanese posts which larger groups could not breach.
- Parbury sent Lance-Sergeant Morey, from his reserve platoon, on this mission. But Morey, one of the rapidly dwindling band of the battalion's "originals", was killed with all his men before they had gone 20 yards.
- The balance of the company, some 60 yards in front of the most forward Japanese positions and about 100 yards from the main bunker line, then lay waiting for tanks to come to their aid.

18 December – Buna E

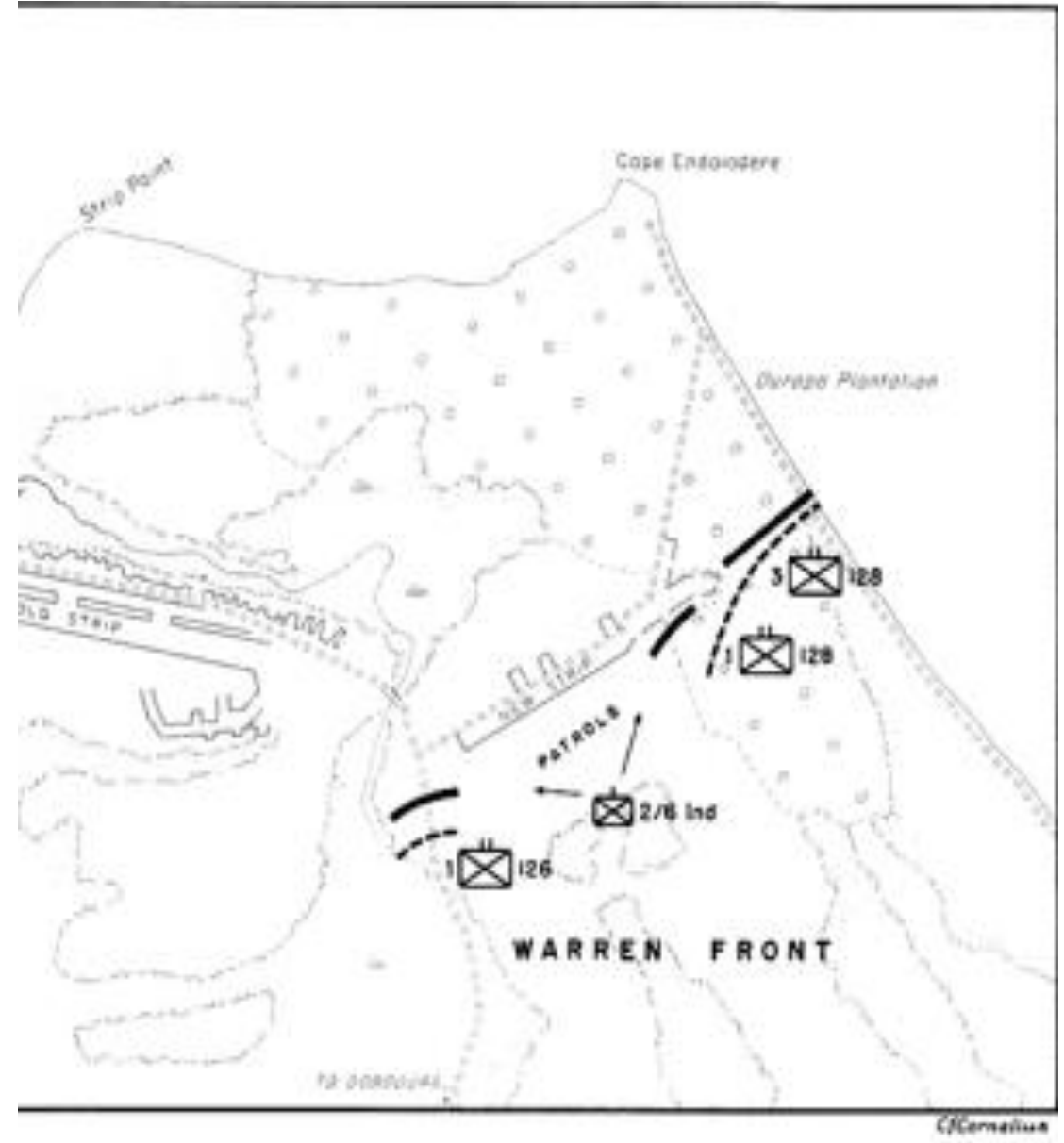
- Taylor's company in the centre were so badly mauled by 08.00 that they could make no further progress with at least 200 more yards to cover to the first objective.
- About this time Curtiss' tank, fighting with Captain Taylor in the centre, ran on to a stump, where it stuck.
- He and his crew narrowly escaped being cooked when their enemies lit a fire beneath them. But, under cover of fire from their infantry, they leaped unhurt through the hatch.
- By this time Sergeant Church was on the scene with his tank but all his determined efforts to move the stranded vehicle were in vain. It burnt out.



*Another view of Curtiss' tank burned out and bellied on a log.
(US Army)*

18 December – Buna E

- Griffin's left hand platoon, Lieutenant Sivyer's, were fighting their way through the long lines of coconuts and the kunai grass which grew between them.
- As they approached the cape, but still possibly 200 yards at least from it a concrete post stopped them with a well-aimed torrent of fire which took a heavy toll of them.
- Sivyer himself was killed there, his sergeant, Prentice, wounded.
- Griffin then sent Sergeant "Shorty" Walters to take command. But Walters, crawling forward, was shot through the head, and the command fell finally to one of the corporals.



Start line to the cape = 1,000 yards

18 December – Buna E

- Lieutenant MacIntosh was leading Griffin's other forward platoon along the edge of the coconuts and through the scrubby bush which fringed the sandy beach. When he crossed his start-line he had Corporal Barnett drive his supporting tank directly for a strongly-logged post on his right which MacIntosh and Barnett had found by crawling forward from the American positions the previous night.



18 December – Buna E

- There were two machine-guns there, five Japanese manning them. The tank blasted the post and MacIntosh's men closed in, grenading. Two of the defenders crawled out of the smoking wreckage into the two-foot-high grass which surrounded it. One wounded Lance-Corporal George Tyler in the arm but the corporal then shot him dead at five yards' range.
- Just to the left Corporal Thomas' section was hotly engaged from a post which MacIntosh had not seen the previous evening. Some of the defenders there were using a Bren gun presumably from Fergusson's carriers.
- A grenade burst almost in Thomas' face as he dashed for the post, but, blood pouring from his face, he plunged on and killed two of the Japanese. A third fired at him with a Bren which stuck out between two of the logs walling the post. Seizing the gun by the muzzle Thomas wrestled for its possession and then dragged it through the opening and killed its previous user with it.
- Then he fought on (only leaving the field on MacIntosh's orders). The platoon and the tank then beat down three more posts which disputed their way to the cape and were on the objective by 8.10 a.m.

18 December – Buna E

- Whitehead in the centre of the tank formation and just behind the others was scarcely over the line before he spotted a marksman high in a tall palm ahead of him.
- He said to Trooper Gordon Bray, his gunner, "Shoot him!" But Bray could not elevate his guns sufficiently.
- Whitehead then said "Shoot the tree down". So Bray aimed a solid 37-mm shot at the point where the thick butt narrowed to the tapering trunk. The first shot nicked the trunk, the second chopped it through like an axe.
- The sharpshooter tumbled headlong in a neck-breaking fall and Bray gave him a Browning burst for good measure as the tank passed on towards the main defences.



(Australian War Memorial)

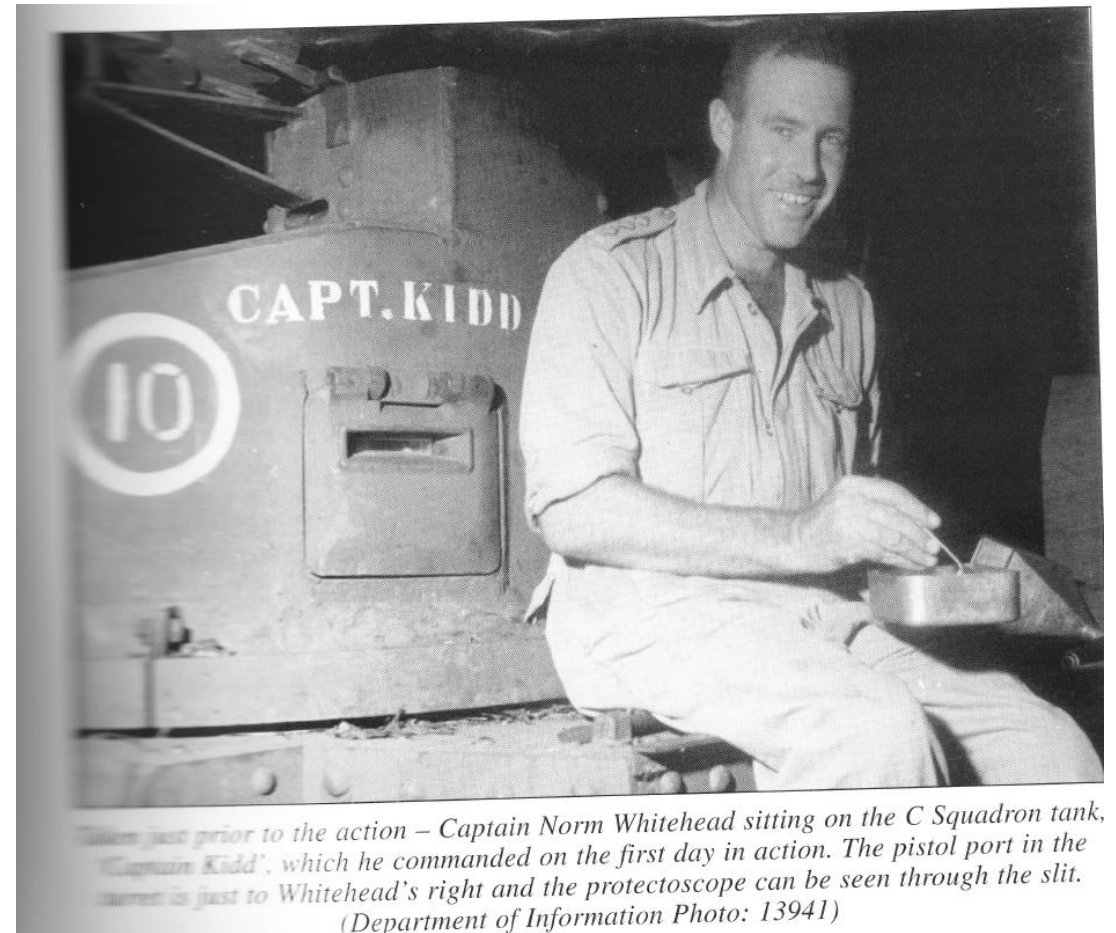
The sniper lies dead beside his smashed rifle and the tree-top.

18 December – Buna E

- It was probably a little more than an hour later that Parbury's call for help first reached Whitehead. A soldier came knocking on his tank. He swung round and followed the man to the west until soon he found himself against three strongposts.
- He took on the most southerly of these first and silenced it with four or five shots. But, as the tank turned against the second, Bray's sights fogged over and, momentarily, a clutter of emptied shell cases blocked the swing of the gun.
- Whitehead himself was peering through the vision slit, his hands cushioning his forehead against the tank's wall, his face pressed to the slit, when a Japanese leapt on to the tank and thrust the muzzle of his rifle hard against the slit and fired. The bullet and splintered pieces of steel gouged through Whitehead's face and upraised arm from a range of only an inch or two.
- Blinded in one eye, dizzy and bleeding, he sat heavily on the floor of the tank, his good eye puzzled by flashing circles of light which went spinning crazily round his head. These were tracer bullets from a Japanese machine-gun which was set up a bare 10 feet away and firing directly into the vision slit.
- Two Australian infantrymen had been dogging the tank to protect it. They saw Whitehead's assailant only after he leaped back from the attack, flinging his arms wide in a gesture of exultation. In that moment of triumph they killed him. The tank turned to take the badly-wounded captain out.

18 December – Buna E

- The bleeding Whitehead was scarcely clear of his tank before his colonel took his place.
- As he plunged into the fight, Hodgson, true to his own teaching, was looking out of the open turret of his tank to get a full view of what lay ahead.
- A machine-gun burst spattered his vehicle. He slumped back into the turret badly wounded.
- It was scarcely 10 o'clock and both the senior tank officers were out of action.



18 December – Buna E

- From the right, Barnett had brought his tank into the vortex among the coconuts in the central positions, leaving his infantry on the objective.
- He saw Hodgson ride his tank in. He got a call from McCrohon, who had his hands full, to go to the assistance of Lattimore who was in trouble a little deeper in the coconuts.
- He saw Lattimore's tank bellied on a fallen coconut log. By this time, however, he was out of ammunition and wirelessly contacted the stranded crew that he would be back. These, though their wireless could transmit, could not pick up his message. But he filled up again quickly and was soon back.
- By that time the Japanese were lighting fires beneath the other tank in an attempt to roast the trapped crew who were squirting fire extinguishers through the apertures in a vain effort to scare their enemies off.
- To drive away the incendiaries Barnett then told his gunner to aim as close as possible to Lattimore's tank. "Take the paint off," he said. Soon afterwards he left the vehicle the better to direct his successful efforts to recover the other tank.

18 December – Buna E

- A second tank was lost later in the day. McCrohon, by that time helping Taylor's company in the central sector, saw it hurry past him streaming smoke after a magnetic mine had exploded against it, its commander making for a position farther back where he and his men might hope to bail out without getting shot.
- Benson had sent one of his B Company platoons to thicken Parbury's small remaining numbers.
- Clarkson's Americans were also trying to help in response to an appeal from Parbury to close in on his left flank. By crawling through the long grass they got some distance forward unscathed but then stopped some 30 to 40 yards in rear of the Australians whom they helped by passing wounded back.
- Curtiss appeared to a thankful Parbury about 1 p.m., having taken over Church's tank, and bringing two others with him.

18 December – Buna E

- Parbury pointed out the opposing positions to the tank commanders.
- His plan was to have WO Jesse take his men forward in line with one section on either side of the two forward tanks and one moving between them. Jesse himself would move with the centre section to indicate the targets for the tanks by firing Very lights into them.
- From 30 yards forward and 70 yards to his right the eleven remaining men of de Vantier's platoon would give supporting fire for the new move. This Parbury had arranged with Private Logan, a reinforcement who had joined the battalion only eight months before and now commanded what remained of the platoon.
- The third platoon, Lieutenant Pinwill's, would move behind Jesse's tank-infantry line. Bren gunners would spray snipers in the trees as the attack went in.
- As Parbury was putting the finishing touches to this plan three Japanese came sneaking forward through the long grass and attempted to set the right tank on fire with incendiary bombs. Parbury's men riddled them before they could close.

18 December – Buna E

- About 2 p.m. the attack began. Jesse's Very lights streaked into the Japanese redoubts and tank shells seemed to follow the paths they made. Brens clattered. Several posts blazed high as the dried coconut logs took fire. And then the Japanese cracked. Some of them leaped in panic out of their defences screaming.
- Then the Australian foot soldiers were dragging out the core of the resistance, grenading right and left behind and beside the tanks. Within half an hour they had cleaned out eleven of the bunkers and, from the remaining five, the defenders soon ran away.
- It was over by 3 p.m. with the panting Australians facing west just above the eastern tip of the strip. Americans packing round on the right and left.



*The thick trees and tall grass of the Buna area are clear in these images. The tanks are firing into bunkers, whilst the infantry are providing close protection for the tanks.
(Department of Information Photos 13938 and 13940)*

The Americans, mopping up behind the Australians, blew down the bunkers on any survivors who remained within.

18 December – Buna E

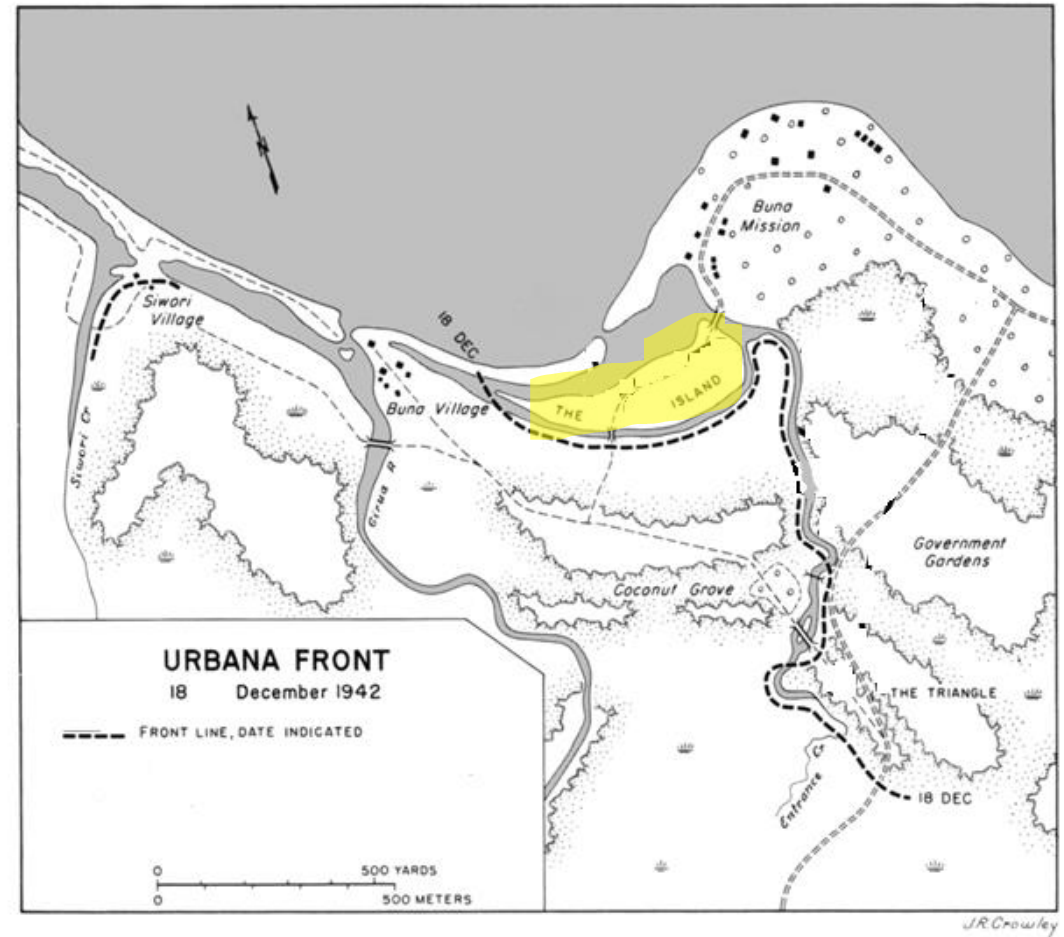
- By the time Parbury's men had broken free of the defences on the left, Benson was swinging round his right, fighting to fill a westward facing line. North of Benson, Taylor's men, lunging forward with some of the tanks in the late afternoon succeeded in pivoting westward, to bring themselves into line with Griffin and close his left flank.
- Night found the Australians facing westward on a front which ran from the sea south to the east end of New Strip.
- The 2/9 Battalion lost 49 killed and 111 wounded in the day's fighting (more than one third of its attacking strength)--and the tank squadron lost two of its seven tanks.



Start line to the cape = 1,000 yards

18 December – Buna W

- Company L, 127th Infantry, were ordered to take the island.
- The footbridge to the island had been destroyed and the creek was a tidal stream, unfordable even at low tide.
- The troops had no bridge-building equipment, and the distance from one bank to the other was too great to be bridged by felling trees.
- Swimmers dragged a cable across the stream and two platoons and a light machine gun section of the company, commanded by Capt. Wentland, got across just before noon on 18 December.

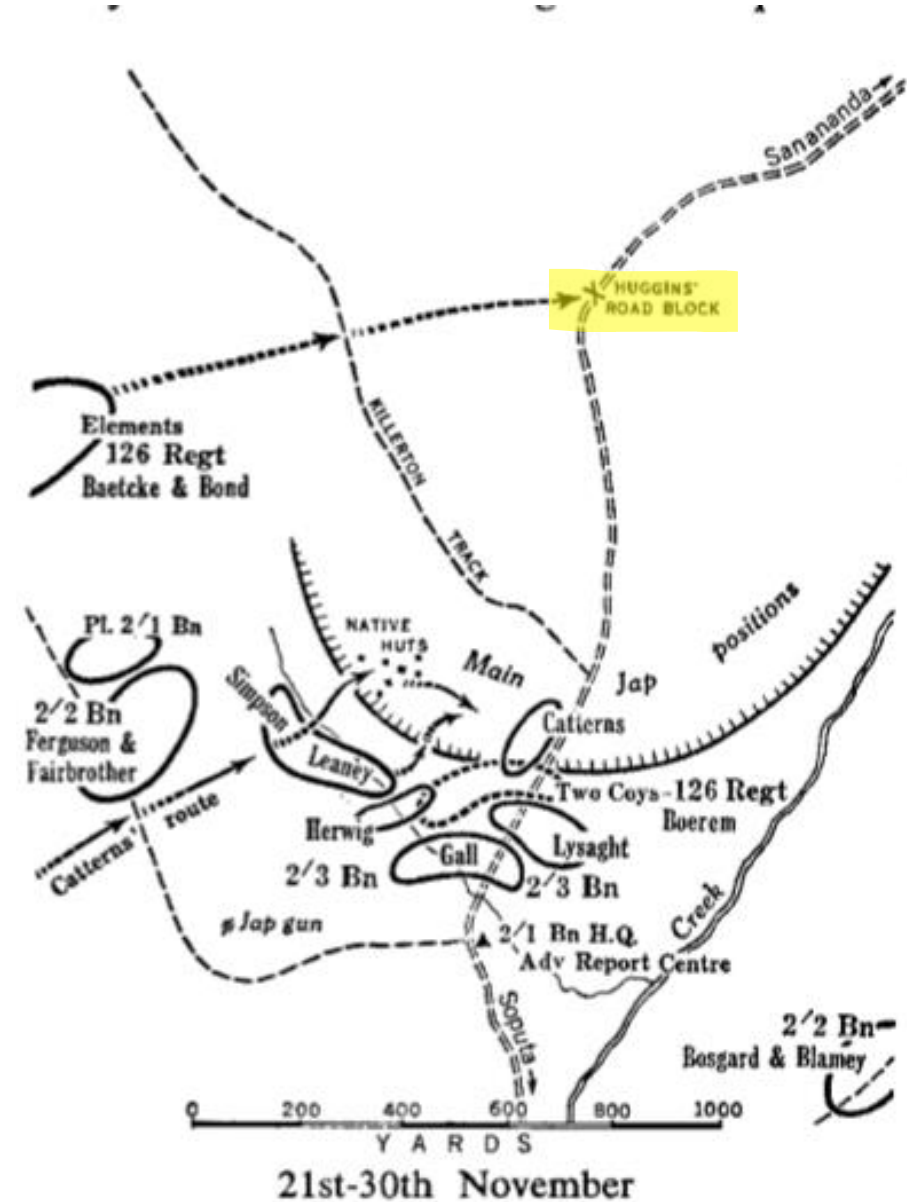


18 December – Buna W

- The two platoons, joined shortly thereafter by a third, moved cautiously forward along the eastern half of the island without meeting any opposition.
- However, when they started moving toward the bridge that connected the island with the mission, they ran into very heavy fire from concealed enemy positions.
- In the fire fight that followed, five men, including Captain Wentland, were killed and six were wounded.
- The heavy enemy fire continued, and the troops, under the impression that they were heavily outnumbered, pulled back to the mainland that night, leaving the island still in enemy hands.

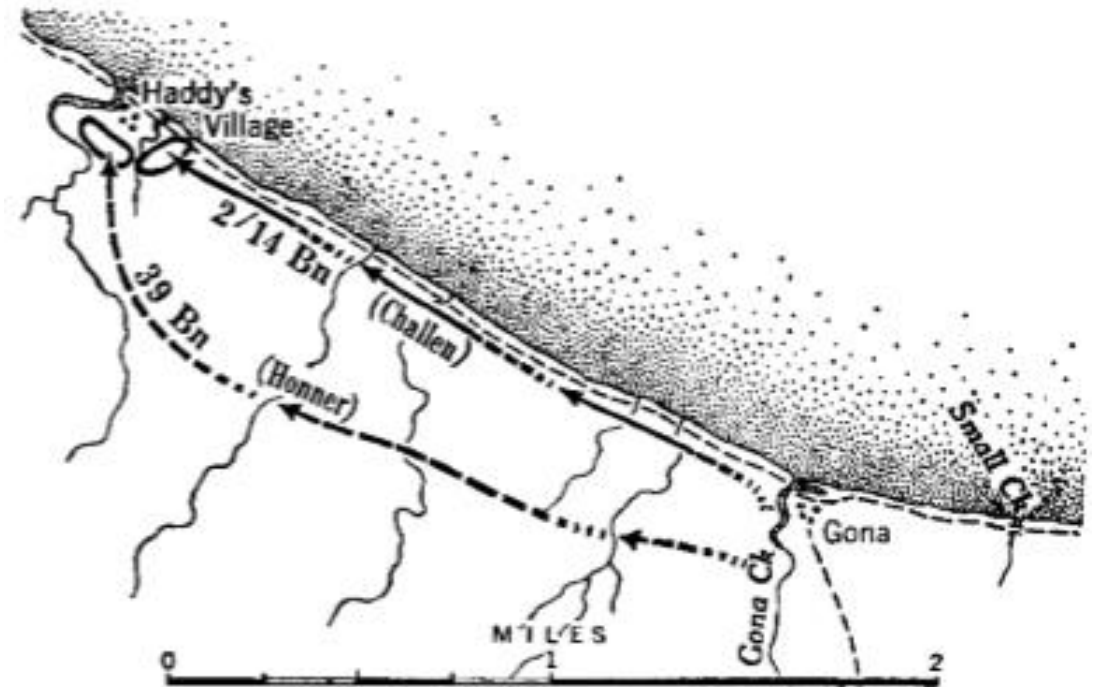
18 Dec – Sanananda

- On 15 December the 2/7 Australian Cavalry Regiment had arrived at Soputa.
- Three hundred and fifty men, the regiment's advance element, fought their way into the roadblock at 1530 on the 18th. Without loss.
- Led by their commander, Lt. Col. Logan, the cavalrymen dug themselves in at once beside Lieutenant Dal Ponte's troops.
- The 49 Battalion, operating southeast of the roadblock, was held up nearly all day, and the 36 and 55/53 Battalions, attacking frontally, made negligible progress.



18 December – West of Gona

- Soon after the 18th dawned Gilmore's and Seward's companies surged into the village, lashed by heavy fire, Lieutenant Dalby dashing ahead as he had done at Gona Mission, killing the gunner and six other defenders in a medium machine-gun position.
- The rest of the force then overran the defences.
- They buried 170 Japanese at Haddy's village.
- Captured documents revealed that the wounded, and those known to have been killed in the early days of the engagement, outnumbered those finally buried by the Australians. The wounded had been evacuated across the sand bar at the mouth of the creek to the west or taken off by barges at night.
- The composite 2/16th-2/27th took over in the Haddy's village area on the 19th, to face the Japanese on the Mambare.



Nightfall, 15th December

The operations west of Gona cost a further 129 casualties, of whom the 39th Battalion lost 107 bringing the battalion's total battle losses in the Gona area to 228 for the sixteen-day period from the 3rd to the 18th.

18 December – Air

- Flight Lieutenant Ifould, particularly between 14th and 18th December, repeatedly flew his Wirraway at low altitudes inviting enemy anti-aircraft batteries to open fire and so disclose their positions to which he then directed Allied artillery fire.
- On the 18th two Beaufighters sank a sailing vessel 25 miles north-east of Portuguese Timor.
- Enemy bombers attacked the airfield at Pongani, but caused no damage.
- Aerial reconnaissance found indications that the enemy has established shore batteries around Buin along the south shore of Bougainville island.
- General Eichelberger was keenly aware of the performance of No.4 Squadron's Wirraways and quoted their operations as exemplary. The work of Flight Lieutenant Ifould between 14th and 18th December, received his special commendation, as did that of Flying Officer Mowbray on the 15th.

18 December – Air

- Three A-20's hit positions at Cape Endaiadere.
- In the afternoon six B-17's attack convoy (one light cruiser, four destroyers and two large transports) in Astrolabe Bay off Madang.
- Five B-24's bomb Alexishafen airfield.
- Two B24's bomb A/F at Lae.
- In the evening five B24s attack a convoy off Madang and a transport NW of Lorengau. Several near misses were scored on the transports and four direct hits on the light cruiser, which was last seen in a sinking condition with a destroyer standing by. The remainder of the convoy was observed anchored off Madang at midnight.
- One cruiser and three destroyers were reported off Wewak and two destroyers were reported entering Finschafen.
- US heavy bombers escorted by fighters attacked the airfield at Munda.

19 December – Sea

- Between 16th and 19th December, Colac, Ballarat and Broome transported 298 A.M.F. troops from Milne Bay to Porlock Harbour, and
- carried between them 699 officers and men of the 2/10th Battalion from Porlock to Oro Bay, where they disembarked them during the night 18th-19th.
- The *Japara* came into Oro Bay the same night with U.S. troops and 750 tons of cargo.
- Also on board were additional port battalion troops and an advance echelon of the 43d U.S. Engineers, the unit which was to build the road between Oro Bay and Dobodura.
- Unloading was accomplished in record time, and the *Japara* was out of harm's way before daylight.



SS Japara

19 December – Sea

- Between 10th and 19th December she (Tjerk Hiddes) transported in three trips approximately 950 persons from Timor to Darwin "with great efficiency". She then left Darwin to return to Fremantle.



19 December – Buna E

- On the 19th two Australian 4.5-inch howitzers (the Stokes Troop), which had been flown in on the 18th, went into action south of the O'Hare Troop below the bridge, and several concentrations were fired during the morning on newly located bunkers in the bridge area.
- The 3d Battalion, 128th Infantry, faced west, and began moving on the left of the 2/9 toward Simemi Creek.
- Major Clarkson's troops moved forward along the northern edge of the strip to join Beaver's men in front of the bridge.



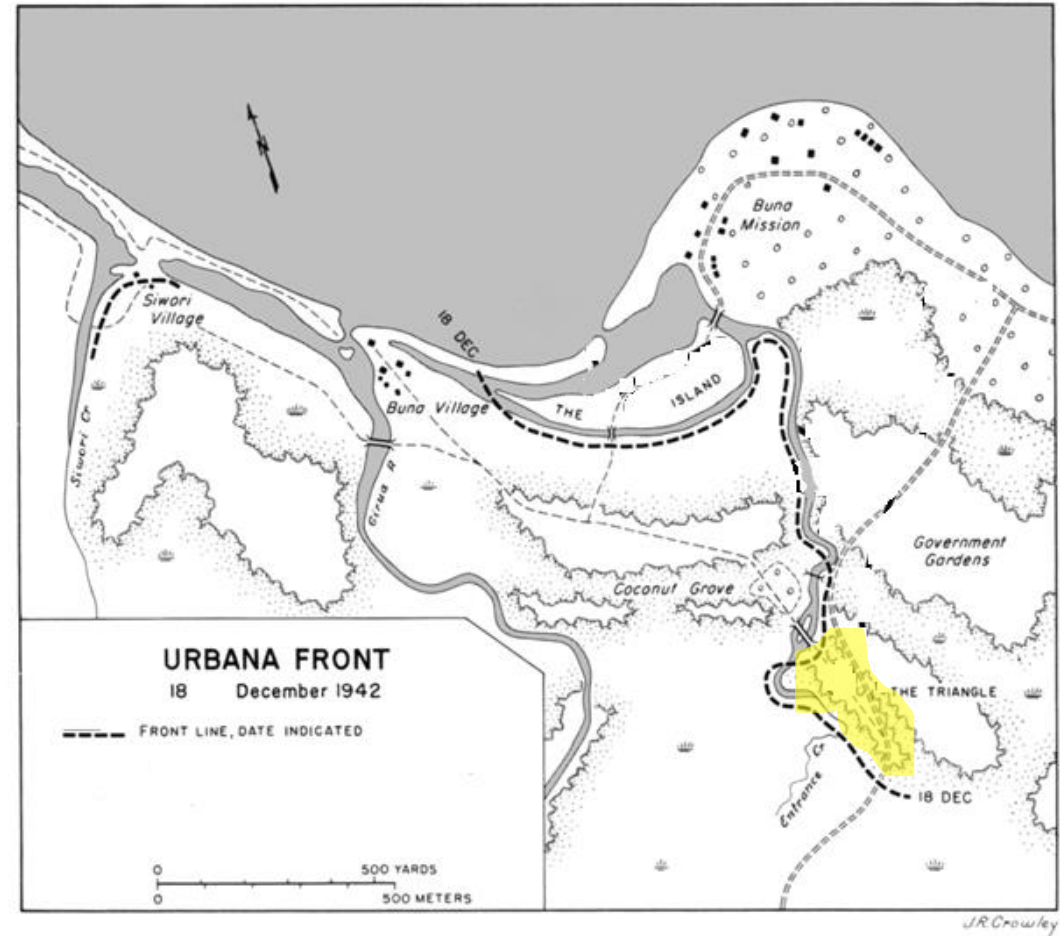
AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

027285

4.5inch howitzer

19 December – Buna W

- The attack on the Triangle was next. The plan called for two companies of the 126th Infantry to attack across the bridge from the Coconut Grove, and a third company to block the position from the south.



19 December – Buna W

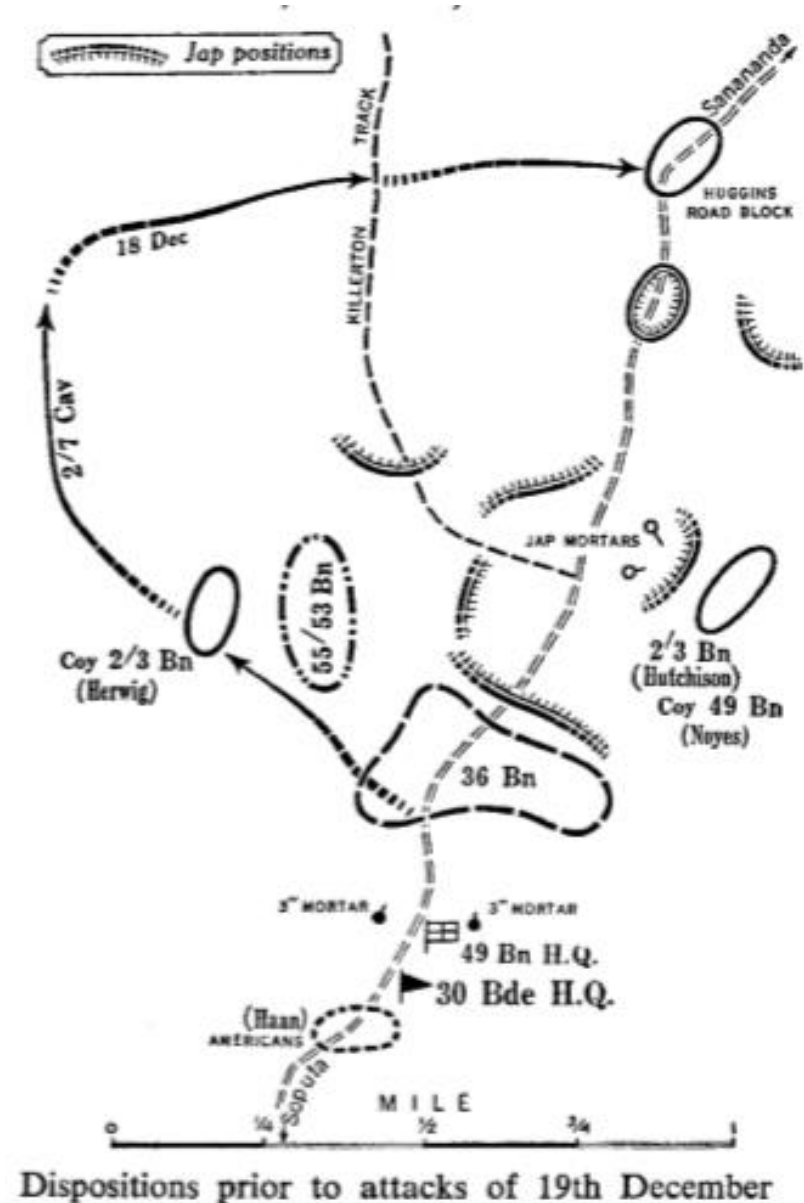
- Beginning at 0650 19 December, nine B-25's dropped 100-pound and 500 pound demolition bombs on the mission.
- They were followed at 0715 by thirteen A-20's which bombed and strafed the coastal track between the mission and Giropa Point. The A-20's dropped 475 twenty-pound parachute and cluster fragmentation bombs and fired more than 21,000 rounds of .30-caliber and .50-caliber ammunition.
- They probably did the enemy a great deal of damage, but their accuracy left much to be desired. A stick of four bombs was dropped within fifty yards of a bivouac area occupied by the 127th Infantry, and a chaplain visiting the troops at Buna Village was hit by bullets meant for the Japanese at Giropa Point.
- At 0730 Colonel McCreary's mortars, sited so they could drop their shells on any point in the Triangle, began firing their preparation.

19 December – Buna W

- Fifteen minutes later Companies E and G attacked straight south under cover of a rolling mortar barrage. The barrage did the attacking troops little good. They were stopped by enemy crossfire just after they left the line of departure.
- In the forefront of the attack, Captain Boice did everything he could to get things moving again, but the crossfire proved impenetrable. Every attempt by the troops to slip through it only added to the toll of casualties.
- At 09.45 Boice was mortally wounded by mortar fire and died shortly afterward. He was succeeded as battalion commander by Capt. Sullivan, who had just come up from the rear with a handful of replacements.
- On General Eichelberger's orders the mortars laid down a concentration of white phosphorous smoke in the Triangle at 1415, and the attack was resumed. The troops gained a few yards with the help of the smoke but were again stopped by enemy crossfire.
- At 16.00 a third attack was mounted. This time the mortars fired a 700 round preparation--some forty rounds per mortar--but the result was the same; the men found it impossible to break through the murderous enemy crossfire. When night fell and the utterly spent troops dug in, they had lost forty killed and wounded out of the 107 men who had begun the attack.

19 Dec – Sanananda

- Col Logan's instructions were to attack northward the next morning, the 19th, in concert with attacks on the track junction by the 30th Brigade.
- The Dal Ponte force would be relieved as soon as the 39 Battalion, which had been mopping up east of the Amboga River, could reach the Soputa-Sanananda track.



19 Dec – Sanananda

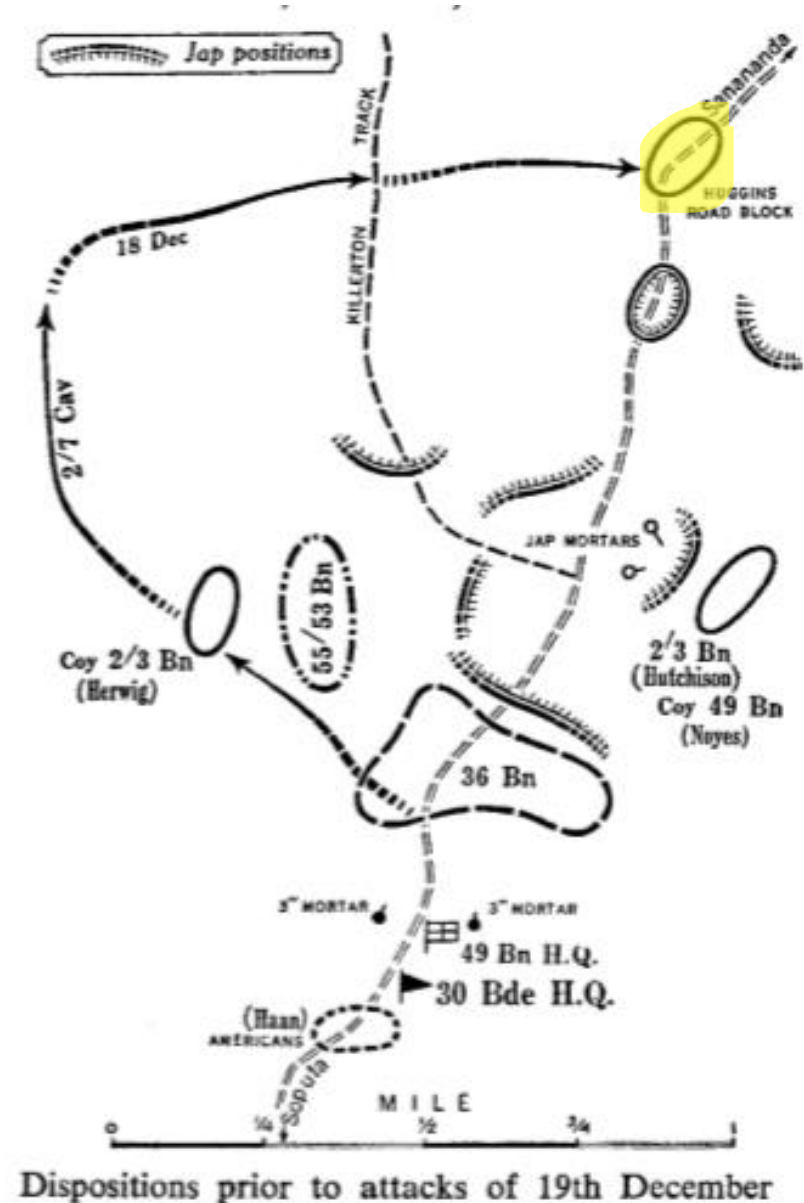
- Early in the morning of the 19th the main body of the cavalry unit moved out of the roadblock and attacked north.
- The 30th Brigade, joined by the newly arrived 36 Battalion, Lt. Col. Isaachsen commanding, mounted an attack on the Japanese positions in the track junction. The 36 and 55/53 Battalions attacked frontally, the 49 Battalion attacked east of the track, and Major Boerem's troops executed a holding attack by fire.
- Cutting to the left around heavy Japanese opposition immediately northeast of Huggins, the cavalry troops advanced several hundred yards and held their gains. There the cavalymen set up a new perimeter, commanded by Captain James, which they named Kano, about 400 yards forward of Huggins'. They had taken some casualties including their commander, Colonel Logan, killed in action and less than half the unit had got through to the Kano position, most of the remainder having fallen back to Huggins. Twenty odd men from Captain Cobb's squadron were still somewhere out along the track—probably about 100 yards south of Kano.
- The 49 Battalion pushed forward to a point just outside the roadblock and established a position in the bush a few hundred yards south-east of the roadblock. Reinforced by two companies of the 36th they were attacking south to clear the roadway to the track junction when night overtook them.

19 Dec – Sanananda

- On the left of the brigade movement the results of the attack by the 55th/53rd were disappointing.
- Captain Gilleland's company on the right flank of that battalion was in trouble early. They came against a strongly-held area from which two machine-guns and stubborn riflemen refused to be dislodged. Although they cleaned out one of the machinegun positions the other defied them, and the end of the day found them still struggling with it.
- On their left Captain Coote, his company heavily embroiled when it had gone little more than 100 yards, was mortally wounded, his second-in-command was shot nearby, communication with the company was substantially lost, and, though Sergeant Poiner stayed with his wounded commander and made brave efforts to maintain control, the company disintegrated into a number of small groups. The loss of two of the platoon commanders and a large proportion of N.C.O.s increased the confusion.
- As the morning went on Lt-Col Lovell sent in a third company with orders to go through close on Coote's right. They were slow.
- In the early afternoon Captain Henderson came forward to hurry them along. But some of the men were reluctant to advance and Porter wrote bitterly later:
- “Captain Henderson lost his life as he bombed an enemy LMG post. The remainder of his party left him to the task without aiding him.”

19 Dec – Sanananda

- Finally it became clear that confusion was general and the attack was called off.
- The battalion assessed its losses at 6 officers and 69 men (including 18 N.C.O's) and had achieved little.
- A strong Japanese attack on the Huggins roadblock was repulsed.



19 December – Air

- Eight days later, on 19th December, Flying Officer Dineen, the pilot of one of the No 4 Squadron's missing Wirraways, returned to the squadron at Port Moresby suffering acutely from privation and a wound in one foot.
- Lost over the mountains in heavy cloud, and low in fuel, Dineen and his observer, Sergeant Winter, had baled out. Dineen landed safely but saw nothing more of Winter.
- Entirely without food save what palatable berries and roots he could find, he struggled through dense rain forest, following a mountain torrent downstream.
- On the third day, weak from hunger and fatigue, he attempted to shoot a duck with his service revolver, but slipped and the bullet passed through his right instep. Despite the wound he continued his tortuous journey until, on the fifth day, he reached a village.
- The natives cared for him for two days before carrying him to Nauro, whence he was brought back to Port Moresby.

19 December – Air

- The Madang convoy from yesterday was seen returning toward Kavieng, less one cruiser and one destroyer. Air attacks were unsuccessful; some planes were unable to locate the target because of adverse weather. Three intercepting zeros were shot down.
- The destroyers which entered Finschafen departed before morning.
- A-20's and B-25's hit Buna Mission area in which Australian forces were again attacking.
- B-24's and B-17's attack warships, transports, and cargo vessels off Madang in Astrolabe Bay and NNW of Finschhafen off coast of Huon Peninsula.
- Four B24s and six B-25's bomb A/F at Lae.
- The airfield at Munda was attacked by both 8 heavy bombers and 12 dive bombers. Several fires were started.

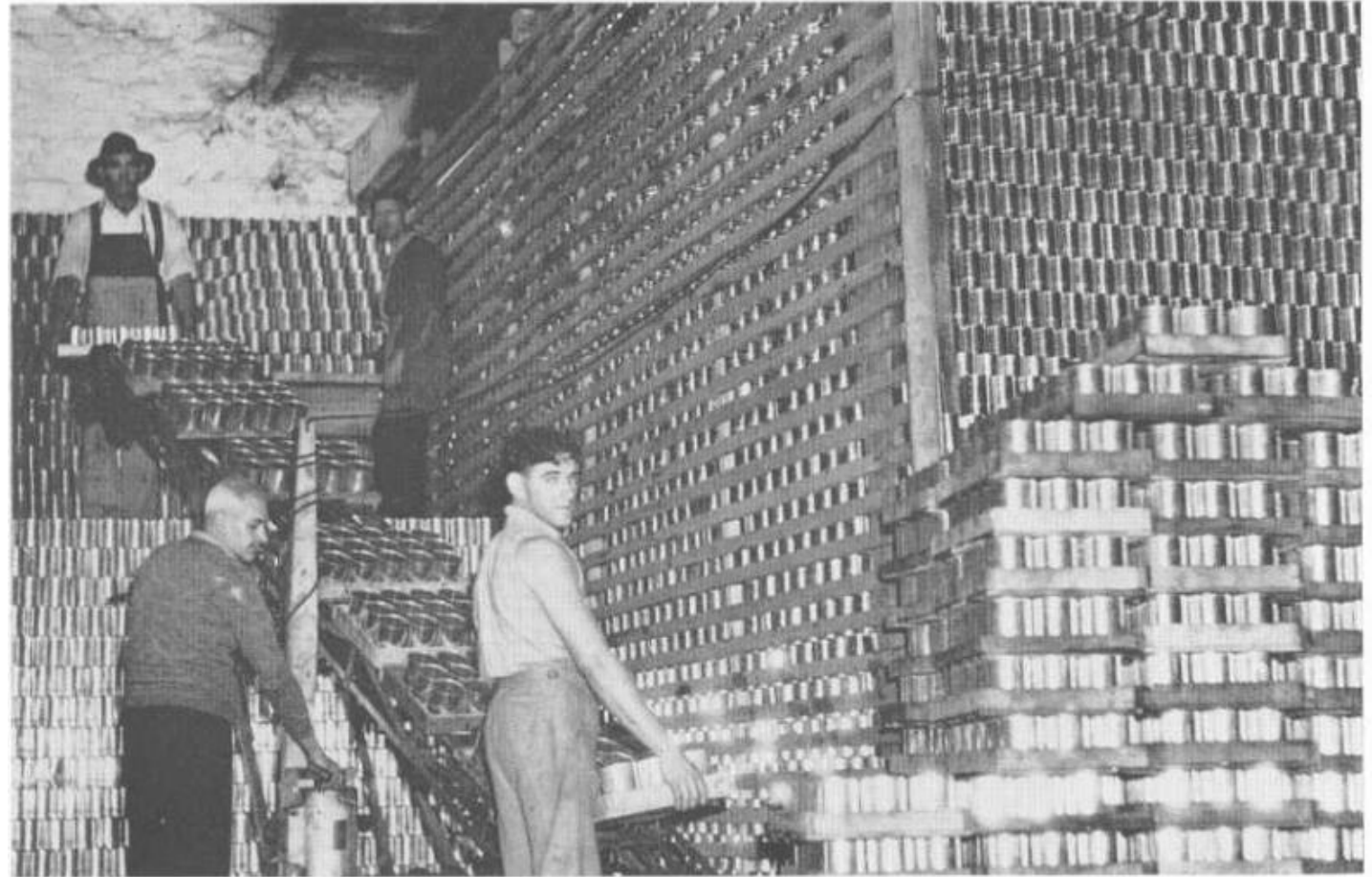
19 December – Air

- JIC estimates Japanese air strength in the
- Timor region as: Timor - 60; Amboina - 24; Celebes - 42; total - 126 and in
- Melanesia as: New Guinea - 11; Bismarks - 169; Solomons - 80; total - 260.
- Aerial reconnaissance of Shortland island revealed four flying boats and about twenty five float planes at Kulitulai bay.
- About twenty additional float planes attacked our aircraft. Three of these were claimed destroyed.



Supply 1942

- From early 1942 the use of tinsplate was restricted to munitions production and to containers for a limited range of foodstuffs.
- Production of small cans even for approved foods was prohibited; the smallest permitted (for fish) was an 8-ounce tin; fruit required a minimum size of 16 ounces, jam 24 ounces.
- The Department estimated that by the end of 1942, over 80 per cent of tinsplate was used for direct war purposes, either in munitions or for packing food for the armed services (including American and British).



Australian War Memorial

Stacking tins of canned food in a factory as they came from the cookers.

Control began with the allocation of an annual quota for each Allied nation by the Combined Raw Materials Board in Washington; the Allied Supply Council allocated the quota to types of use; the Tinsplate Board was then responsible for ultimate distribution.

20 December – Sea

- A Japanese submarine was torpedoed and sunk by USS Seadragon in St George's Channel at 5-02S, 152-33E.
- LCDR Roy Benson in USS TRIGGER (SS 237) was in the process of planting a field of 19 magnetic mines on 20 December 1942 off Cape Inubo Saki when a freighter conveniently ran into one, blew up, jack knifed and sank. The cargo ship, Mitsuki Maru, sank off the Inubōsaki Lighthouse.
- A U.S. motor torpedo boat squadron, Task Force 50.1, was based at Tufi from 20 December, to range the coast west of Gona to intercept Japanese coastwise shipping.



20 December – Buna E

- Three bombers dropped fifteen 500-pound bombs over Giropa Point at 6.30 a.m. on the 20th.
- Artillery, mortars and Machine guns then bombarded the area until the infantry rose from their cover and walked steadily ahead at 7 a.m., with Lieutenants Gunn and McCrohon spacing four tanks among them.
- Griffin's company continued along the water's edge, Taylor's was on Griffin's left, Benson's to the left again and Parbury's survivors were in reserve with twelve men from the transport platoon added to make up some of their losses of the 18th.



20 December – Buna E

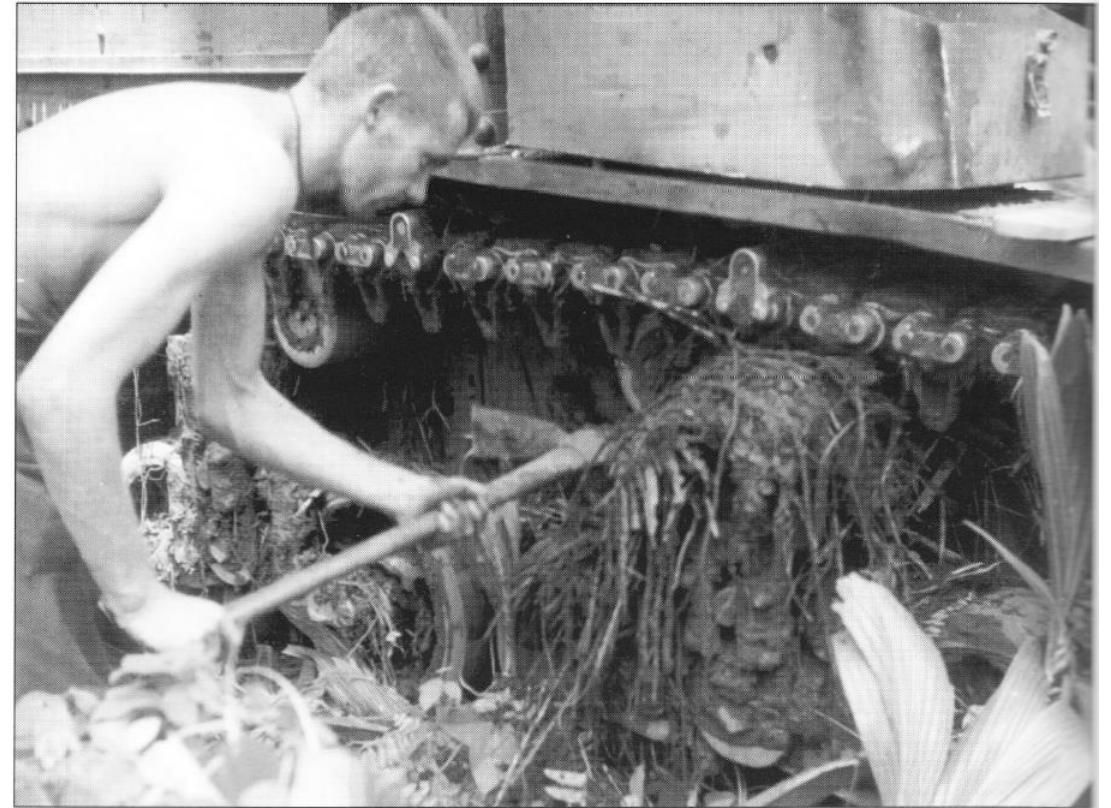
- There Parbury passed through Taylor's company (Taylor himself had just been wounded), which then fell back into reserve.
- Parbury and Benson now pushed across the 800 yards of the first of two clearly-marked patches of kunai, rooted only in quaking ooze, and their men spread out across the base of Strip Point.
- Griffin, skirting the water's edge, rounded the point itself and reported it free of Japanese.
- Parbury's men then, with Benson's close behind, tramped through the swampy bushland which led on to the second kunai patch. This treacherous country had proved too much for the tanks. Two of them were bogged so deep that they were held fast and only the beach now offered any chance of getting the tanks forward.



*A Stuart of 5 Troop bogged at Buna. Two soldiers wear sweat bands around their foreheads as they discuss possible recovery methods. Head 'bandannas' were quite common amongst the tank crews.
(RAAC Museum)*

20 December – Buna E

- So Parbury's company had no armour as they tried to cross the second kunai patch. Between 1 and 2 p.m. Pinwill's platoon, on the left, temporarily lost touch with the one on the right as they plunged into the kunai where they came unexpectedly against a Japanese defence line which seemed to run north from the creek to the coast.
- Although Sergeant MacCarthy knocked out one post with a grenade Pinwill's advance was blown back by short-range machine-gun fire.
- He himself was killed with two of his men, four of the others (MacCarthy among them) were wounded and the remainder fell back upon the other forward platoon near the water.



*Trooper Bob Anton, driver for Corporal Barnet, using a mattock to remove undergrowth from the bogie units and tracks of his tank.
(Department of Information Photo 13985)*

20 December – Buna E

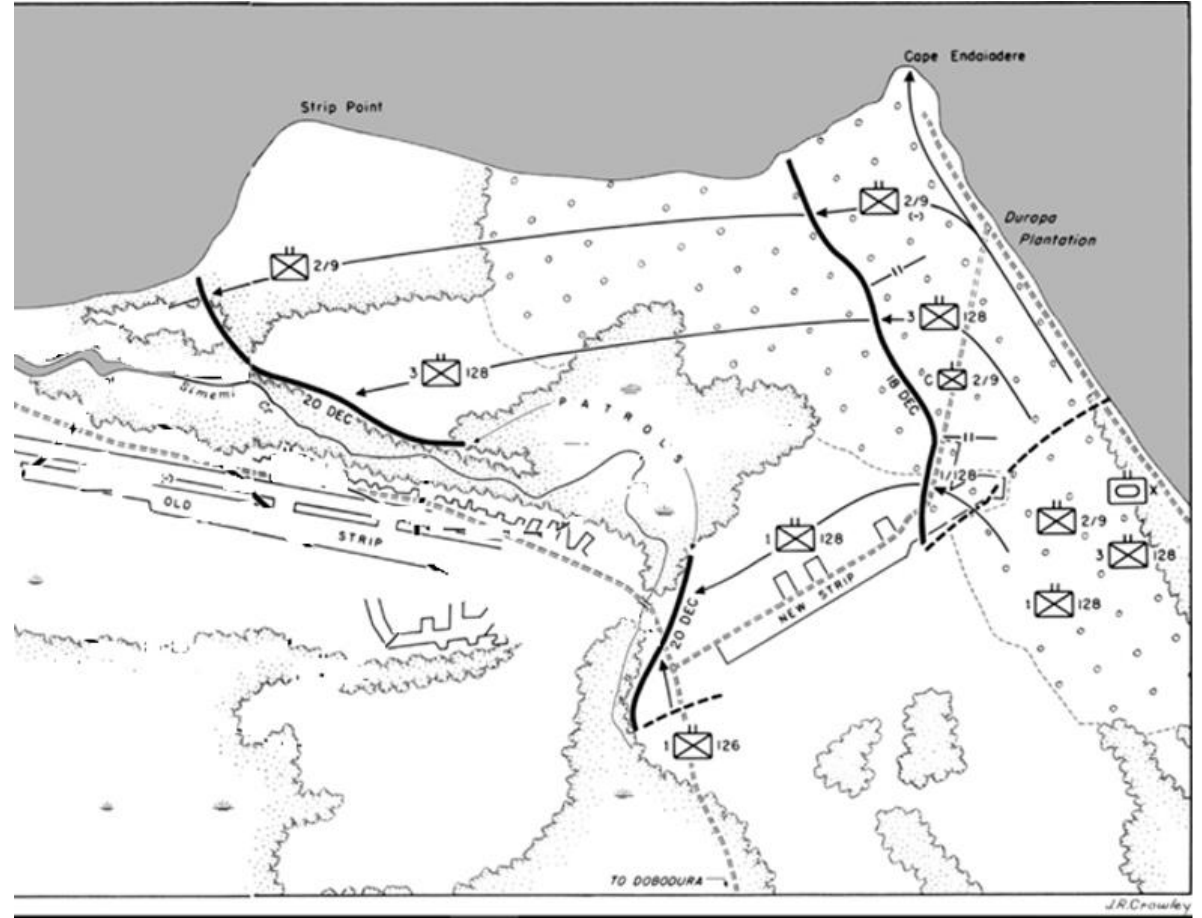
- Private "Jock" Milne of the Intelligence Section, trying to reach the platoon from battalion headquarters, was cut down by a sniper.
- Crawling on, he then missed the platoon perimeter and found himself among Japanese who bayoneted him.
- The dying Milne left messages which were later found. In a small notebook, crumpled and smudged with dirt, he had written unevenly, like the painful script of a small child:
- “Should I be dead when you find me search the surrounding bush carefully for wounded men. Jack Allen is somewhere on my left.”
- And on the opposite page:
- “Bombs are dropping all round me but somehow I feel quite happy about it.”

20 December – Buna E

- Within about half an hour of Pinwill's trouble Cummings himself arrived, and, while he and Parbury were talking over the situation, Griffin's company joined them. Almost immediately the Japanese began to drop mortar bombs on them from 300 yards ahead.
- As the Australians were not dug in they were fairly caught and soon a number of them were hit, Parbury himself among them.
- The two companies then united under Griffin and covered Benson's men with Vickers and mortar fire while they attacked the new defence line. But they fared no better than the others.
- The Australians (having lost another 25 of their rapidly shrinking number) and MacNab's Americans, who had been beating forward on the left of the Australians, then dug in for the night.

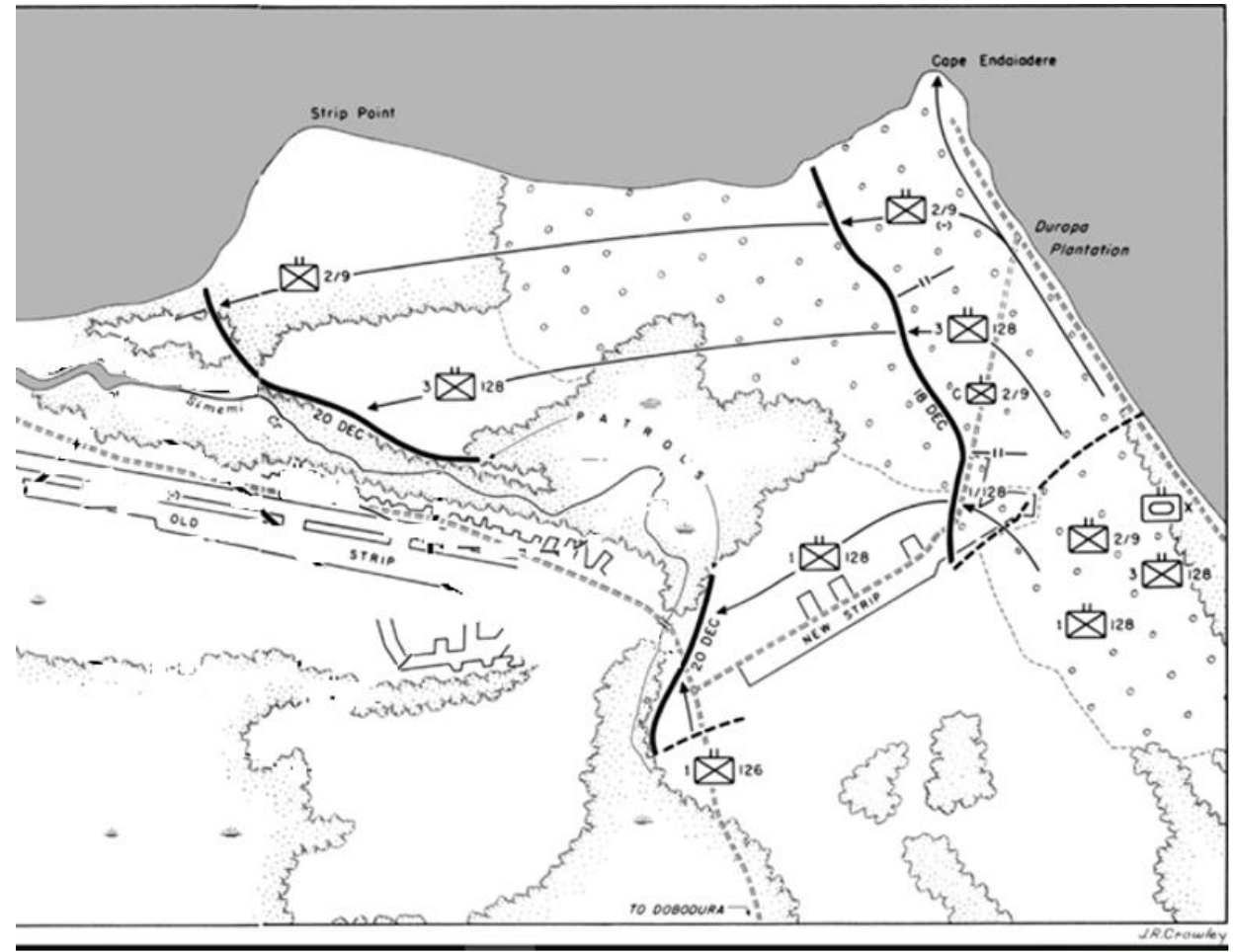
20 December – Buna E

- In the New Strip area the last pocket of Japanese resistance was mopped up on 20 December.
- The Clarkson and Beaver forces made contact early in the morning and by noon had succeeded in clearing out the last of the enemy bunkers in front of the bridge.



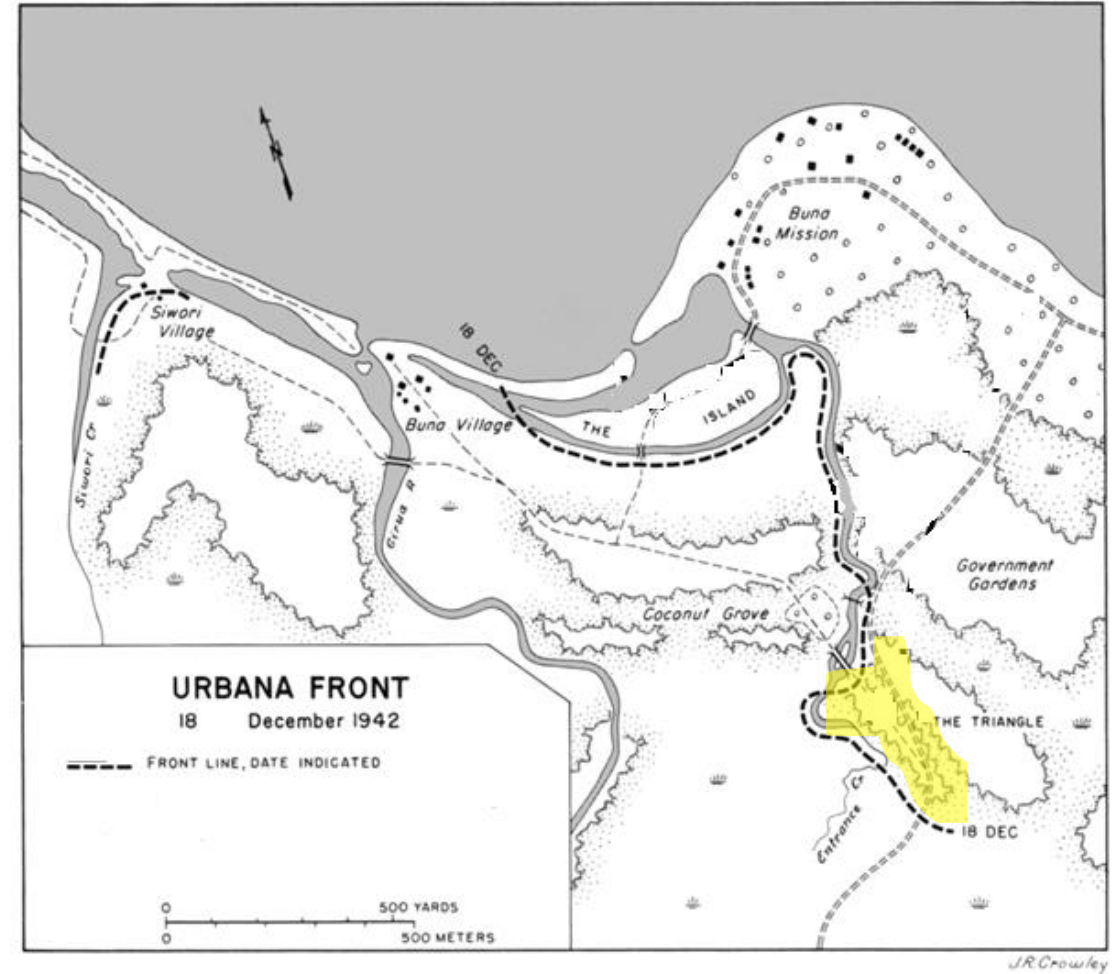
20 December – Buna E

- It was not immediately clear how the Allies were to cross the creek.
- Tanks could not negotiate the shallows, and an attempt to have troops attack in that area would cost many lives.
- An assault across the bridge, which was 125 feet long and spanned not only the creek but heavy swamp on either side of it, seemed the best solution. But this too presented difficulties since the Japanese had blown a large gap in the bridge and were covering it with several machine guns and forty or fifty riflemen.
- For the rest of the day the search for a crossing place defeated both Americans and Australians.



20 December – Buna W

- The attack on the Japanese positions in the Triangle was resumed on 20 December by Company E, of the recently arrived, 127th Infantry who had relieved the companies of 2/126, which had attacked on the 19th.
- A complex artillery and mortar preparation was planned for fifteen minutes from 08.45. The preparation was laid down accurately and on time and the troops had reached the start line on time.



20 December – Buna W

- Just as everything seemed to be going well, some "trigger-happy" machine gunners on the west bank of the creek, to the rear of the line of departure, spoiled everything by opening fire prematurely.
- This unauthorized firing from the rear threw the inexperienced troops along the line of departure into great confusion.
- When the troops finally attacked at 1000, they found the enemy alert and ready for them. In an hour and a half of action Company E was unable to get within even grenade distance of the enemy.
- The attack was called off at 1130. Capt. James Alford, the company commander, thereupon proposed a new attempt. Colonel Tomlinson sanctioned the plan, but General Eichelberger, who was present, vetoed it immediately as reckless and likely only to cause useless casualties.
- On Captain Alford's assurance that the two lieutenants and the men who were to make the attack were confident of its success, the general let the attack proceed.
- The platoon managed to get within grenade distance of the bunkers and charged. The Japanese had meanwhile pulled out of the bunkers apparently in anticipation of just such a move. They caught the platoon with enfilading fire and nearly wiped it out with a few bursts of their automatic weapons.
- Seven men were killed, and twenty were wounded. The two attacks had gained nothing, and they had cost Company E thirty-nine casualties--better than 40 percent of its strength--in its first day of combat.

20 Dec – Sanananda

- Herring visited Vasey on the 20th.
- The two generals agreed that further major offensive action on this front was not possible with the troops available.
- Herring said that he would try to bring tanks and fresh infantry into the fight, but that could not happen before the 29th at the earliest.



20 December – Order of Battle

- Of the three A.I.F. infantry divisions the 9th was still in the Middle East; the 7th had been wholly committed in New Guinea and depleted by battle losses and sickness; of the 6th
 - the 16th Brigade had been worn to a shadow in New Guinea,
 - the 17th was at Milne Bay, and
 - the 19th formed the core of the Northern Territory garrison.
- The militia infantry numbered 18 brigades at this time (two of them of only two battalions). Of these,
 - three brigades had been committed in New Guinea, and
 - three more were destined to arrive there early in 1943;
 - five were in Western Australia, and two in the Northern Territory, forming part of the sparse garrisons of the broad and empty areas from which threats of Japanese landings had not yet lifted.
 - Only five remained to meet military commitments from the islands north of Cape York to Tasmania.
- General Vasey was compelled to await the end of the Buna fighting so that he might get a transfusion of Australian and American strength from the Buna forces, or to look for help from American infantry not yet thrown into New Guinea.
- Two US divisions the 41st Division, and the 32nd had been sent to Australia. The 32nd had been worn to a shadow in New Guinea. Now the 163rd Infantry—a Montana regiment—of the 41st was on its way to New Guinea in December. The Americans rated the regiment "well-trained, and the men, fresh, ably led and in superb physical condition, were ready for combat".

20 December – Order of Battle

- Blamey was directed that the 163rd should go to the Buna front.
- He (Blamey) promptly told General MacArthur that it was a pity that he had interfered in a matter within Blamey's sphere; that he did not "for one moment question the right of the Commander-in-Chief to give such orders as he may think fit" but that
- he believed that nothing could be "more contrary to sound principles of command than that the Commander-in-Chief . . . should [personally] take over the direction of a portion of the battle".
- The 163rd went to the Sanananda front.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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20 December – Air

- One B17 attacked Buka a/f night of 19-20/12, one large fire reported.
- One B17 attacked Munda a/f night of 19-20/12.
- One B17 attacked Kahili early morning 20/12.
- 6 A-20's and 3 B-25's attack Giropa Pt and area around Buna Mission near which are located strong bunker positions morning of 20/12.
- Aerial reconnaissance of Wewak, Madang and Finschafen revealed no signs of shipping or landing barges.
- 4 B-26's, 5 B-24's, 4 B-25's, and 9 P-38's make a coordinated bombing, strafing, and incendiary attack on Kiska Harbor installations, submarine base and gun emplacements. A direct hit is scored on a probable ammo dump.
- CATF bmrs (7 B25s and 10 P40s) hit Lashio airfield starting several fires.
- Japanese airplanes bomb Calcutta and vicinity, hitting (3) docks, shipping, and (6) A/Fs in the area.
- Sixteen Blenheims made a successful attack on Magwe airfield.

- Thanks for your attention.
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- My ebook "War in the Pacific The First Six Months" is available from all good ebook stores.